# HIRED TO KILL

*Some Chapters of Autobiography*

JOHN MORRIS

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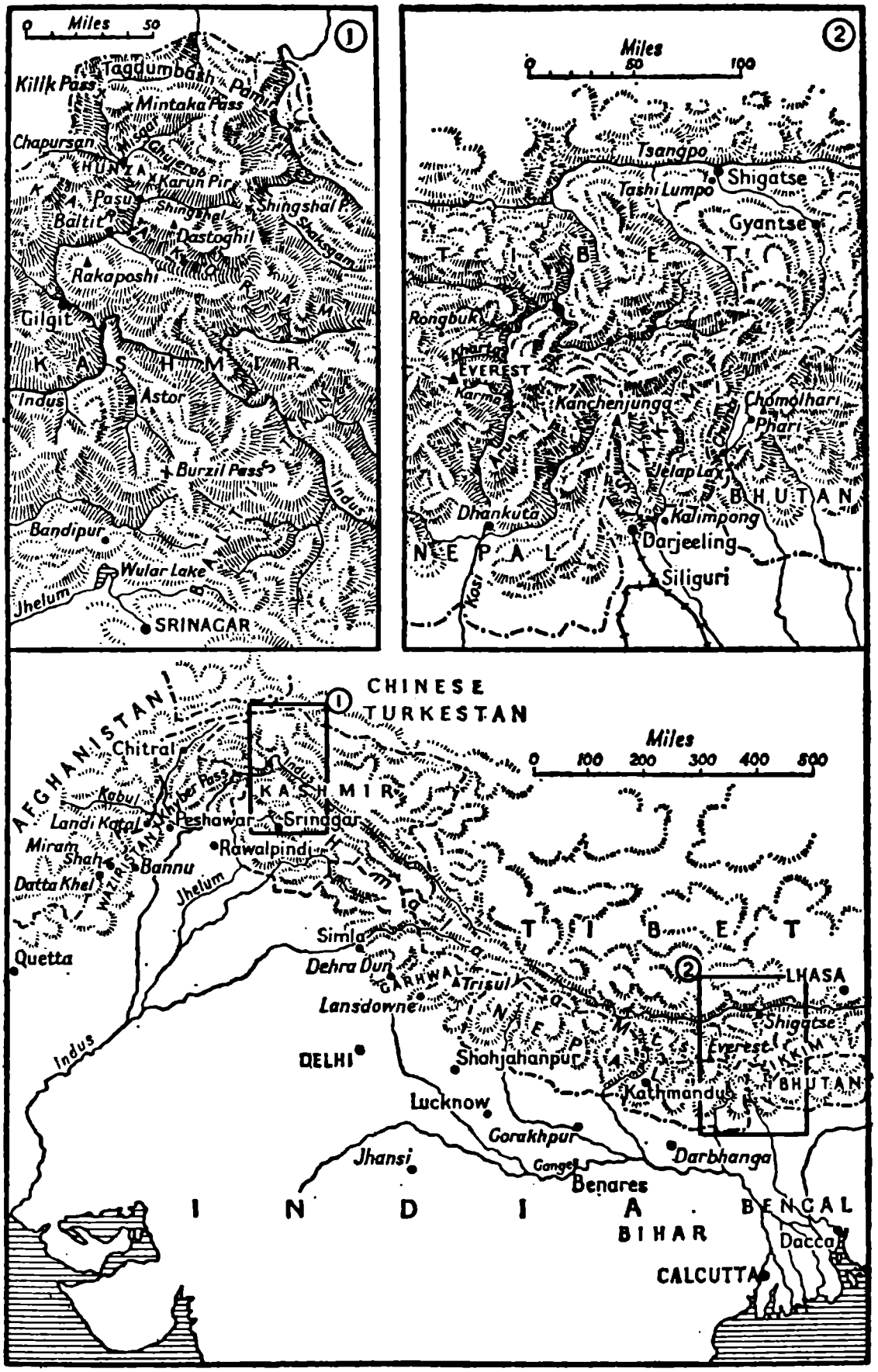
*Poor* nations are *hungrey*, and *rich* nations are *proud*; and Pride and Hunger will ever be at Variance. For these reasons, the Trade of a *Soldier* is held the most honourable of others: Because a *Soldier* is a *Yahoo* hired to kill in cold Blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can.

Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*)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Everest
SIKKIM
BHUTAN
Kathmandu
DELHI
Shahjahanpur
Lucknow
Gorakhpur
Darbhanga
Jhansi
Ganges
Benares
INDIA
BENGAL
BIHAR
Dacca
CALCUTTA

# *Part One*

# CHAPTER ONE

In October 1919 I was living alone in a remote part of India. I was in my early twenties and trying, without much success, to mould my disorganised life into some sort of pattern.

The steady rhythm of the cool season had set in, the last of the clouds dispersed. There was now a succession of clear blue days, windless and beautiful. A faint green blush lay over all the plains, but now that the monsoon rains were ended this was quickly fading. The trees, too, had begun to dry, and the fallen leaves, when one trod upon them, crackled like a fire of thorn. The land had settled into its winter sleep, but for the peasants it was a season of toil; from earliest dawn they were out in the fields, reaping the last of the crops and making ready for the next sowing.

Our camp was pitched in a clearing and surrounded with groves of mango. It was a mile or so from the old cantonment of Darbhanga, which had been unoccupied since the turn of the century. It was the first time I had been alone in a foreign land, and at first I hated it. I did not realise it then, but that year I spent by myself in the plains of Bihar was to settle the later pattern of my life. Since those days I have felt true contentment only when surrounded by people of an alien culture. I suppose there is some psychological reason for this state of mind, perhaps some secret fear. Whatever it may be, it is no longer of importance because it has long since been accepted. There are times when I regret it, and I know that it will make old age uncomfortable; nevertheless I need to feel detached from life, to look at it from the outside and not to become involved; never to become a member of a community. There is also a restlessness which age does nothing to decrease. Always I must keep moving on, seeking for some vague and

unattainable happiness; observing it sometimes in others but never finding it for myself.

I had come to Darbhanga in this way. Towards the end of 1918 I had returned to India with the regiment to which I had been attached during the closing months of the Palestine campaign. This regiment, the second battalion of the Third Gurkhas, had been continuously on active service since 1914, and now that the war was over it was natural that most of the regular officers should go home on leave. Only a handful of us remained, so that when a telegram came from Delhi ordering us to send someone to join the staff of the Gurkha recruiting depot I asked if I might go. It was thought of as a backwater, nobody else wanted the job, and although I, too, was now a regular officer I had no military ambitions of any kind. Besides, I hated what little I had already seen of the social life of Indian military stations. The years of war had bred in me a distaste for the close company of my fellow-men. I felt an urgent need to get away from the community. It was this that led me to apply for the recruiting job, and the interests I acquired there made me decide to stay on in the army much longer than I would otherwise have done.

Darbhanga itself was a curious place. It had once been a centre of British life, but that was long ago, in the days when the world still had need of indigo. Most of the sprawling many-roomed bungalows now stood empty, exuding a melancholy odour of rotting wood. The gardens had reverted to jungle, but here and there a rosebush still bloomed splendidly among the lush coarse weeds. In contrast with this desolation was the polo-ground, its turf cropped close and ready for a game. But nobody came to play while I was there, and the villagers told me that the ground was never used. Perhaps it was some whim of the local Maharaja to keep it in repair. He was reputed to be a man of fabulous wealth, and owned a huge ungainly palace on the other side of the cantonment. I never met him. All the land for miles around belonged to him, and his money was said to come mostly from the sale of mangoes, for which this corner of India is famous. He seldom visited

his heritage of decaying buildings, and then only for a day or so.

On one side of the polo-ground was the British club, in the care of an aged servant. Through long disuse it had acquired the damp smell of a tomb. The cloth of the billiard-table, much damaged by moths, had faded to a shade of sickly yellow. In the library the spines of the books (mostly Victorian novels) were thick with mildew. I took one down from its shelf. The pages felt damp and had stuck together. The whole place stank of death. It was quite different from an old disused house in England, where generally one can sense the atmosphere of a past age. Here nothing of the sort was possible; there was no feeling that once this place had been used by friendly humans. I think it was the leprous condition of the books that made the atmosphere so peculiarly depressing. It was a relief to stand in the rackets-court behind the club. Here, too, all was ruin. Grass grew through the cracks in the cement floor and creepers clung to the walls; but at least the place was open to the sun and did not smell of decay.

The old servant told me that when he was a boy the club was crowded every day, and the gentlemen would sit drinking far into the night. Now nobody ever came, but if I wished I could write my name in the book and become a member. I thanked him and said I would think it over.

My orders had told me to report at the central Gurkha recruiting depot at Gorakhpur, which is not far from the frontier of Nepal and a hundred or so miles north of Lucknow. When I got there I found, as so often happens in the army, that I was not expected. Moreover, not having any experience of the work, I was not particularly welcome. But the small branch-office at Darbhanga was about to be reopened, and the officer who, much against his will, had been detailed to take charge of it saw in my otherwise untimely arrival an excuse for him to remain at Gorakhpur, which was still something of a social centre. The difficulty was that I should be alone, and I had only the most elementary knowledge of the Gurkha language,

in which all my work would have to be conducted. Fortunately the commanding officer was as little conventional and military as I; and when I told him that my chief object in asking for the recruiting job was to learn the language, which I could best do by cutting myself off from English society, he at once agreed to take a chance and let me go.

I left Gorakhpur next day; and although it was a place of which I was to see a good deal in later years, for the next twelve months I remained alone in Darbhanga, seldom speaking my own language.

I could have lived like a white raja in one of the vast decaying bungalows, and indeed the head clerk suggested that I had no choice; my exalted rank (I was still only a lieutenant) demanded it. Instead I decided to occupy a tent in the camp. The first result of this decision was the resignation of my Indian servant, who made it clear that he had no intention of working for a *sahib* with so little regard for the importance of his position. He did not put it quite so bluntly; I think the excuse was an ailing wife or some other trouble in his home. Anyhow I was glad to see the last of him. He had served in our regiment for many long years and he was, in his own peculiar way, as snobbish to those of us who had only recently joined the service as were many of the pre-war officers. He was considerably older than my own father, which in itself was embarrassing enough, but what I particularly disliked was his wispy beard. This was naturally a greyish-white, but once a month he dyed it a flaming red, and I could not for much longer have supported the daily shock of waking to the sight of this repellent object as its owner, breathing heavily and bending forward, informed me that the morning tea was already cold. I replaced him by a handsome boy a few years younger than myself. He was quite untrained, but he had one supreme advantage; the Gurkha language was his mother-tongue and he knew no other. He was to stay with me throughout my service in India. I picked him for his good looks and his easy almost animal way of moving. Subconsciously I suppose I wanted to sleep with him. Years later, after he was married, he told me

that he had always imagined I had chosen him for this purpose, and at the time he was chagrined that I appeared not to respond to his youthful charm, of which he himself was well aware. But in those days my sexual predilections had not become manifest.

My experience of sex was slight and unsatisfactory, largely because of ignorance. Although I developed rather late I suffered constantly from the gnawing desire to ease my body. Like most young men I lay awake at night unable to compose myself. The routine of masturbation into which I had fallen brought little relief; it was no more than a temporary anodyne, but at least it seemed less degrading than coupling with a prostitute. My few experiences of this kind, undertaken only in a spirit of bravado, had left me with so great a feeling of disgust that I had felt unclean for days after each attempt. No more civilised approach to sex would, I now realise, have made much difference. The fact is I had been from my earliest years a true invert, but I did not yet know it. It was some years before I faced the truth, and if asked I would in those days have denied it; I could not admit it even to myself. I suppose most homosexuals go through a phase in which they imagine themselves to be unique. The feeling passes as one grows older, but with me it persisted for a long time and is probably one reason for my inability to manage human relationships. In India I was an alien in a double sense. I could never be more than a stranger in the Gurkha world, which I was to find increasingly attractive: nor with my brother-officers, who would at the least have despised me if they had known the truth, was I ever quite at ease. I learnt to dissemble with skill, but my inner life was something that I could share with nobody.

I soon found, as I had hoped, that the work at Darbhanga demanded none of the ordinary military virtues; and being alone I fell into the habit of wearing civilian clothes, so that after a time I ceased to think of myself as a soldier. The first few months passed in a haze of misunderstanding because of my ignorance of the language. I made a great many mistakes; sanctioned pensions for the alleged dependents of soldiers who

had never existed, and enlisted recruits of dubious antecedents, some of them not even of proper Gurkha origin.

The average Gurkha is a few inches above five feet in height and, like most mountain peoples, stockily built, with very strongly developed legs. It is reasonably certain that even before the Christian era Indians of one sort and another were finding their way into the remote valleys of Nepal and intermarrying with the tribesmen. Nevertheless the aboriginal Mongoloid strain has persisted in the form of a comparatively fair skin, absence of hair on the face and body and, most characteristic of all, the so-called epicanthic fold, which results in what are popularly known as almond-shaped eyes.

Gurkhas are proud and extremely independent, and because they live in country which is cool and bracing they are physically superior to the languid dwellers in the Indian plains, whom they affect to despise. But they, too, are Hindus; and while they observe the substance of that religion, they reject much of its shadow and retain many of the primitive animistic beliefs of their forebears from beyond the Himalayas. The thought of death sits easy on the Gurkha. His bravery is proverbial; and while his temper is easily provoked he does not harbour resentment. A smile is his most usual expression.

It has often been remarked that all Gurkhas look alike, and while this is a generalisation that can be applied to many peoples who have preserved their racial purity, one has to live among them for some years before one can immediately distinguish the several and quite distinct ethnic types. It is partly a matter of intuition based upon subconscious observation. Most Englishmen learn to recognise an American without hearing him speak; and in the same way one comes to distinguish one kind of Gurkha from another. There are marked differences of vocabulary in the language spoken in the different parts of Nepal, but it was many years before I was able with fair accuracy to tell which part a man came from almost as soon as I heard him speak.

Many people can learn a foreign language only through the medium of their own; they must have its intricacies explained

in terms of their own grammar, to commit to memory long lists of irregular verbs, and so on. I have so little aptitude for learning in this way that as a boy I was always at the bottom of the French and German classes and had become resigned to knowing no language other than my own. But after a few months alone at Darbhanga, hearing nothing spoken but Nepali, I found myself beginning to understand nearly everything that was said. Later on I began to speak with ease, and after a year I had acquired what for me is the ultimate proficiency in a foreign language; I could understand nearly every word of a rapid conversation between three or four people.

Since those early days I have acquired a modest proficiency in a number of languages, always in the same way. The disadvantages of the method are that languages, unless in constant use, are forgotten as quickly as they are learnt, and because one acquires automatically the correct pronunciation and rhythm the natives of the country too often assume that one knows a great deal more of their language than one actually does.

There was another thing that this year of solitude did for me; it revived my earlier interest in books, and often I would sit reading far into the night, mine the only light in the sleeping camp. It was here that I first came upon *War and Peace*, after which I worked through the whole of Tolstoy. Strangely, *The Kreutzer Sonata* made no impression upon me at this period, although in later years I was to be greatly influenced by the views expressed in it. The one book that really affected me was *The Brothers Karamazov*, which I still think is the greatest novel ever written; and for any sensitive person who comes to it at the right age, probably in the early twenties but not before, life can never be quite the same. There is a morbid introspection in all Dostoyevsky's work and in those early days it satisfied some inner and unhealthy craving of my own. To a certain extent this feeling persists.

Before long my tent was overflowing with books of every kind, particularly Indian history. I began to wonder what we British were doing in India, but it never occurred to me to

question the ethics of the situation. This was a time of great political disturbance; the independence movement was growing rapidly and many of the nationalist leaders were in prison.

As for me, I had no political views of any kind; and since the backwater in which I was living was unaffected by the situation that was developing in the cities, I disregarded it. The Calcutta daily paper to which I subscribed by post generally arrived two days late, and more often than not I merely skimmed the headlines. This attitude was deplorable. Nevertheless I was not less informed about world affairs than the average army-officer of that period. I suppose I was a parasite, since for far too many years I unthinkingly accepted the false standards of my class. And certainly I was a moral coward, for when I came to know that these standards were wrong I lacked the courage to deny them.

But it is not easy to throw away security. My army pay was enough to keep me in comfort, and the work was not demanding. Moreover it gave me the leisure to indulge in what had developed into a passion for reading. I was totally unfitted for life in the regular army but in course of time it formed my character in a way that perhaps nothing else could have done, and I am grateful for the experience.

# CHAPTER TWO

My memories of early childhood are a little dimmed, but I still remember that always on Sundays my father wore a black frock-coat to church. I think of him on one particular day as he knelt by the drawing-room hearth. We were sorting out flags and bunting which had apparently to be displayed because a town named Mafeking had been relieved (whatever that meant). Later there was the return of Lord Roberts, whom I dimly remember seeing as he rode through the streets of Folkestone.

When I was still quite young I was sent to a kindergarten school, and since this was some distance from our house I was taken there and fetched by my nurse. After this arrangement had been going on for some time the birth of a brother made it necessary for me to go to school alone. It soon transpired that I was a hopeless daydreamer. Sometimes I never went to school; at others I took several hours over a journey which could easily have been done in fifteen minutes. I was never able to say where I had been or how I had frittered the hours away, and although I was punished by being made to go without a meal, it never made the slightest difference. Even when I was later given a little card on which was entered the time I had left home or school matters did not improve. Already I was beginning to build a shell round my private world into which I did not want others to enter. I have never entirely lost this early daydreaming habit; I still pass an occasional day in a haze of idleness, with only a dim recollection of how the time has been spent.

I was an ugly child and a weakling. It so happened that my brother had everything I lacked; handsome regular features, a well-shaped body and a mass of golden curls. Now that it is no

longer of consequence, nature has redressed the balance; he is bald, while I still have all my hair.

It was natural that as the younger he should have received more attention than was given to me. My parents were unaware that I believed myself to be neglected, but from about this time I began to feel unwanted. I was five years older than my brother and it was easy to pull his lovely fair curls and make him cry. Only a few years ago my mother, in a reminiscent mood, told me that she had longed passionately for a daughter. Her first child, who had died before I was born, had been a girl, and this loss was never quite made good by the subsequent birth of two sons. She told me that, realising she could never bear another child, she had delayed dressing my brother in clothes suitable to his sex until this became a subject of comment. It seems odd that he survived this treatment. He was always aggressively masculine, so that her behaviour did not have the effect it would certainly have produced on a child whose nature was less determinate.

My mother was devoted to her cats, two sleek and overfed pedigree Persians. One day, in a fit of dejection and wishing I suppose to call attention to myself, I cut off their whiskers with a pair of scissors. On another occasion I gouged a large square out of the drawing-room carpet, for which I was soundly beaten. And I seem to have obtained considerable satisfaction from the habit of throwing things out of the nursery windows; I liked to see them smash on the path below. In one way and another I gained the reputation of being a wayward and destructive child.

My brother and I slept in separate nurseries, and I cannot remember a time when I was not afraid of darkness. At first I was allowed to have a nightlight on the bedside table, but when, for some reason or other, this was discontinued I could not fall asleep unless someone sat by my side and told me a story. By these tales I was both fascinated and terrified; they always had to do with ogres and the terrible punishments they inflicted upon little boys who refused to go to sleep. Often I would wake up suddenly, find myself alone, and in a matter of

seconds the room was peopled in my imagination with monsters of every kind. I would clutch at the sides of my cot, feeling them approach nearer and nearer. Then, when I could stand it no longer, I would rush screaming out of bed and barefoot down the stairs. For this my father used to beat me. He was not an unkind man, but he was not going to stand any nonsense from a neurotic child. After one of these outbursts I would lie in bed crying in sheer terror, my face buried in the pillow, until sleep came from exhaustion.

It was from this time, I think, that I began to realise that any form of intimacy with my father was impossible. He was an easy-going and most likeable man, but the idea of a friendly companionship with either of his children was foreign to the stern early-Victorian tradition in which he had been bred. I never once had an intimate talk with him; and not even when his life was nearly over did he take me into his confidence.

Mother was more understanding, but she, too, was of her time; and although she was the dominant partner it would never have occurred to her to oppose my father's wishes about the upbringing of her children.

Both of them were the youngest members of prosperous yeoman families whose names are recorded among the Kentish hundreds; Mother was the last of thirteen, Father of twelve. My grandparents had all died before I was born, but I have a dim memory of several maiden aunts in mob-caps and rustling silk dresses. I still think of them as incredibly old, but in fact they cannot have been more than in their forties. And there were cousins so old that I thought of them as uncles and aunts. But after a time it seemed as though we had no relations; they would be mentioned occasionally in conversation, but the families had drifted apart.

Mother's family were nearly all successful; they were rising in the social scale and some of them had made a great deal of money, receiving in due course the honours and rank with which wealth was rewarded in Victorian times. But Father's family seemed to have lacked ambition; they had none of the drive and efficiency which were so marked in Mother's

relatives. She herself possessed these qualities to a high degree, and if she had not been born in an age when it was unusual to give girls more than a minimum of polite education she might, I believe, have risen to some position of importance.

There was another matter which caused a certain coolness between the two families. Father's ancestors were Plymouth Brethren of extreme earnestness, and were looked down upon by Mother's equally pious Anglican relatives. And although Father himself had rebelled against his puritanical upbringing, he never became more than a sort of honorary member of the Established Church. In point of fact I do not think either of my parents had any religious belief. They attended church merely as a social custom; because not to do so in those days was to invite criticism.

I suppose my parents were happy when they first married, but I now realise that their temperaments were incompatible, though neither was willing to accept the fact. Mother was by far the stronger character and in her old age she told me that it irked her to stand by while Father became involved in one financial muddle after another. He had used his money in buying and selling small businesses of one kind and another; but since he had neither the aptitude nor the desire to take an active part in running them it is not strange that all these undertakings, of which I knew nothing, ended in disaster.

Eventually Mother took charge, but at the cost of poisoning relations between the two of them. By the time I was of an age to understand, any affection there may originally have been had given place to constant bickering and even open quarrels. They ought to have separated, but there was no sufficient reason so far as I know. Neither was unfaithful to the other and both of them regarded divorce as shameful. Mother never lost this belief and was unable to reconcile herself to the fact that my brother had married a divorced woman.

I do not wish to give the impression that my brother and I were neglected; still less that I was a sensitive and misunderstood child who hated his parents, for that was not so. Every care was lavished upon us. But in accordance with the custom

of the time we were mainly brought up by nurses, and later a governess, and did not see a great deal of our parents. What I wanted was affectionate understanding, but that I never had. It was this lack that eventually resulted in my determination to get away from the family at all costs, no matter where, and is the main reason why I have spent most of my life abroad, although naturally I have long since freed myself from what I came to conceive as parental tyranny.

I hardly know my brother, since he was a schoolboy when I went off to take part in the First World War, and he had left for America by the time I returned. We meet only infrequently on rare visits to each other's country, and then have little to say to one another. But the last time I saw him he told me that he had never wanted to leave England; he became an American citizen only because he, too, had felt an urgent need to remove himself permanently from the family.

When I was a few days old I contracted double pneumonia, so that for many years I was puny and more subject than most to the ordinary complaints of childhood. Sometimes I was ill for weeks at a time and I suffered a good deal from frequent bilious attacks. How far these were genuine I do not know, but certainly I took full advantage of them, for I was a lazy child and averse from learning, although from an early age I was fond of reading. The one thing that really interested me was music. Both my parents were fond of it, but their taste was unformed, and Mother's skill on the pianoforte did not rise above an ability to play the accompaniments of the popular sentimental ballads which Father was fond of singing in his untrained but not unpleasing baritone voice.

Unfortunately music, which might have been a great bond between us, soon became a subject of contention. Our governess, who was an unusually good amateur musician, early introduced me to the works of Claude Debussy, which in those days were thought to be strange and discordant. I responded to them at once; the delicate tapestry of sounds evoked in me some sympathetic chord; it was like an explanation in musical terms of the daydreams to which I was in those days subject.

I practised the easier pieces assiduously, sometimes for hours at a stretch, until Father would send up one of the maids with orders to "stop that infernal noise." I can understand his irritation now, for there is much modern music that to my old ears sounds as harsh and disquieting as no doubt Debussy sounded to his. In later years my tastes widened, but I have retained for the music of Debussy a special kind of affection.

I think I might have become a tolerably good pianist, and certainly in my own mind there was never any question of adopting another profession. I never went through the phase of wanting to be an engine-driver or a policeman; and as for the army, in which I was eventually to spend so many years, it never entered my head. When, as sometimes happened at Christmas, I was given boxes of lead soldiers I handed them over unopened to my brother.

I used to chatter a good deal about the profession which, even at that early age, I had already decided upon, and I remember being bitterly humiliated when my father, who was perplexed at my preoccupation, once retorted that when the time came he himself would decide what I should do. Meanwhile I could put music out of my mind; it was all right as a drawing-room accomplishment, but not a thing to be taken seriously. In Father's view a professional musician was someone who played the piano in a third-rate cinema; either that or what he called "a long-haired foreigner." It is odd that despite this attitude I was allowed and indeed encouraged to go to concerts, and accompanied either by Mother or our governess I heard most of the great pianists of the day. I dare say the motive was not altogether altruistic; it gave Father some respite from the ceaseless tinkling on the schoolroom Broadwood. In any case I am grateful, since I acquired at an early and impressionable age a touchstone of lasting value. But it was dear Nelly Wright, our governess, who formed my tastes. I lost touch with her when I went out into the world and she must have long since died. I think of her with great affection.

I had one serious musical defect which could have been but never was eradicated; I could play almost anything by ear. I should have been forced to read the notes, but always I managed to wheedle my teacher into letting me take the easy way. I could play music of considerable difficulty, but only if it was first played over to me. Later on, when I was better taught, it was too late, and I never learned to read with ease.

In the years to come I was to be deprived of music for long periods at a stretch, but strangely I did not feel the lack, perhaps because I had a great reservoir of it stored in my subconscious mind; I could hear it inwardly and almost at will when I was alone and quiet. I ceased altogether to play when I realised that I could never become a professional pianist, and in giving it up I probably deprived myself of much pleasure. This has in no way affected my love of music, which remains for me the most important of all the arts, the only one to which I can emotionally respond. We all of us, I suppose, have some sort of fantasy life and mine has always been concerned with music; even today I cannot go to a concert without identifying myself with the soloist.

My general education was a vague and spasmodic affair; subject to constant interruption because of frequent bouts of sickness. Besides, my father could never make up his mind on the subject; at one time he favoured boarding schools, at another he was all against them, so that I was constantly being taken away from one school and sent to another, and for long periods I was taught by local clergymen and others at home. I used to worry about this, but in the event I do not think that it made much difference. Luckily I grew up in a home that was full of books and I developed so late that no school could have taught me much; I was a boy who had either to educate himself in his own way or remain largely illiterate. The one disadvantage of this irregular education was that I never formed any boyhood friendships. Also, I never learned the game of cricket; I never spent long enough in any one school to receive regular instruction. In later years I have often been accused

by friends of feigning ignorance of our national sport. The fact is I have never attended a cricket match and do not even understand the rules of the game.

What at one time I thought of as my lack of education was no disadvantage in the regular army. It soon became apparent that most of my brother-officers were far more ignorant than I, and that I was much better read than the average public schoolboy.

When I was a little more than sixteen my father suffered one of the several financial reverses which occurred at intervals throughout his life. It had become obvious that I should never be much use at anything, so the sooner I began to earn my living the better. My own wishes were never consulted, and since I could not be a musician I did not much care what I did. Arrangements were made for me to enter one of the smaller private banks. It was a profession for which I was totally unfitted. I had no difficulty in passing the preliminary examination, and having satisfied the board in their modest educational requirements I was summoned to an interview. I found myself confronted by an assembly of soberly-clad elders who looked, and were, very like my own father. In answer to their question about my aptitude for mathematics I somehow managed to conceal the fact that I could do little more than add and subtract. But the interview became more difficult when, towards the end, I was asked what had decided me to enter the banking profession. I could hardly plead an entire lack of interest in this undoubtedly necessary section of the business world, but evidently my halting excuses were considered satisfactory. A few days later I was informed that I had been selected and ordered to report at one of the bank's branches at a small town in Surrey. The letter also enjoined me to provide myself with clothing "of a decently sombre hue."

The work was very light; so much so that I spent a good part of the day reading novels in my corner. It was the period when H. G. Wells was interesting himself in social problems. He had just published *Marriage*, a novel which was causing a considerable stir in the narrow-minded and extremely parochial

society of which I now found myself a member. It was a book that "decent people" did not read (or at any rate pretended they did not), and my superior, a dour middle-aged man with a walrus moustache and a passion for evangelism, when he saw me engrossed in it, read me a homily, the only result of which was to make me a staunch supporter of everything Mr Wells wrote or said.

It was the custom of my chief to spend his Sundays tramping to neighbouring villages with a small portable harmonium strapped to his back, and he would often urge me to go with him. I never did, partly from a dislike of making myself conspicuous, but also because I was not convinced of the truth of revealed religion. I believed, with Swift, that "every man, as a member of the commonwealth, ought to be content with the possession of his own ideas in private, without perplexing his neighbours or disturbing the public."

Life continued in this manner for about a year. I was thought to have mastered the rudiments of my profession and to be ready to take my place in one of the bigger offices. Work in Croydon was a very different matter. I had now to toil all day at the wearisome and soul-destroying routine which, so far as I was concerned, constituted the profession of banking. I was never able to add up the seemingly endless columns of figures correctly and often balanced the books at the end of each day only with the kindly assistance of a colleague. I was utterly miserable; not only did I loathe the work but I now began to feel that I was a failure, as indeed I was. I could never have made a success of anything connected with commerce and I begged my father to let me resign. I knew that he could not now afford, even had he been willing, to give me a musical education, but I pleaded with him to let me try something in which my natural bents would have some sort of outlet. Anything even remotely connected with the arts would do for a beginning, but I felt I could no longer go on doing a job in which success depended upon adding up pages and pages of figures. He only laughed at me; in truth he had as little feeling for the arts as I had for trade, although he himself had

obviously no business aptitude and should have been a farmer. To the end of his life he remained at heart a countryman.

My only relaxations were long solitary walks in the country and as many visits to concerts in London as I could afford. It was now 1914; and although I did not know it, escape was drawing near.

# CHAPTER THREE

I WAS unaffected by the hysteria which spread over England when war was declared in August. It never occurred to me to offer my services; nor did I feel that Lord Kitchener, whose wooden face began to glare from every hoarding, had his basilisk eye particularly upon me. He looked, with his pointing finger, like a fanatical Old Testament prophet who had grown a moustache and put on fancy dress. "Your country needs you," the posters proclaimed, but I felt no urge to answer the summons.

And then, one evening in September, when I was on my way home from a concert in the old Queen's Hall, something prompted me to stop and listen to a street-corner orator. An elderly man was talking about the war and the need for all young people to join the army. Before I had given the subject much thought I found myself confronted by a recruiting sergeant, a burly Scot who asked me what I was going to do about it. Was not I, he asked, a fine upstanding young fellow, ashamed to be seen about in mufti when thousands of my generation had already given their lives? I did not think I really was; but when an assistant joined him I seemed unable to resist their invitation, and with several others allowed myself to be escorted to a nearby recruiting office where, even at that late hour, a doctor was still waiting to examine the victims. My body was found to be acceptable, but when it came to the eyesight test I was a hopeless failure; I had been short-sighted since early youth, and without glasses I could read only the first line of the test-card. "Bad luck," said the sergeant; "you'd have looked bonny in a kilt."

I told nobody of this escapade, and instead of being glad, as I might so easily have been, began to suffer intensely from

injured pride. I suddenly became extremely military-minded; bought a map of France and Belgium, and spent the evenings marking up the retreats which were being reported in the newspapers with depressing regularity. I now felt that I must at all costs play some part in the war; I even dreamed of returning with some decoration, although my brief career in the Officers' Training Corps at my various schools, where my awkwardness in the ranks caused me to be transferred first to the band, thence to the bugles, and finally to become an inefficient drummer, should have reminded me that I was not cut out for glory.

I remembered the sergeant's gibe about the kilt and decided to offer myself to the London Scottish. I had a cousin who was an officer in this famous Territorial regiment and I wrote to ask him to give me an introduction. He was not hopeful; the standard had been recently raised, but he did what I asked. I presented myself at headquarters, pleading a family connection with the regiment. This was considered all to the good, but what about my eyesight? It was soon proved once again that I could see nothing without glasses, and it seemed that my services were unwanted.

I made several more attempts, always with the same result. I was now considerably dispirited, but I thought I would make one final effort. If this, too, proved unsuccessful, then the war would have to be won without any help from me, and I would put it out of mind.

A new battalion of the London Rifle Brigade was being formed, and in due course I presented myself for inspection. I was by this time very familiar with the routine of recruiting offices and I needed no order to strip. I thought the medical orderly's face was vaguely familiar and he, too, seemed to half-recognise me. Anyhow he looked friendly. I quickly told him about my eyes. "It's all right," he said. "Tonight there's a big crowd and the doctor's pushing them through. Keep your glasses on until you get to the head of the queue and try to memorise as much of the card as you can."

I did as he told me, and when my turn came I found that

with only a little prompting I was able to read enough of the smaller letters. Now that we have become accustomed to the sight of soldiers and even sailors wearing glasses, all the fuss and bother I had to undergo to get myself accepted seem strange and exaggerated. But in 1914 defective eyesight was considered an insuperable handicap. In the regular army this odd prejudice did not finally disappear until the introduction of national military service. I never found my slight myopia the least handicap in carrying out my duties, but it was often held against me by some of the more old-fashioned senior officers under whom I served. One of them, in composing his annual report, was moved to comment that although he had no cause for complaint, the fact that I habitually wore glasses prevented me from becoming fully efficient. I had by that time acquired such a feeling of inferiority about my sight that when the report was read out to me, as the regulations required, I never even questioned it and accepted the rebuke as just.

After the medical examination I took the usual oath and was told to report for duty on the following day. I went back to my lodgings and composed a letter to the bank in which I tendered my resignation. I had not the slightest idea what I should do when the war was over, but that could wait; the important thing was that I had freed myself from a form of drudgery to which I never intended to return.

Before we left the depot the sergeant in charge had told us to get our hair cut, and in an excess of military zeal I had ordered the barber to shave my head. I was appalled at the result when I looked at myself in the mirror. But the next day, when I reported for duty, the correctness of my haircut was the subject of official commendation. It was, I think, the only occasion during the whole of my military service when I was congratulated on my smart and soldierly appearance.

We spent the next few days in London and were then sent off to Epsom Downs, where the new battalion was being formed. Although I disliked the discomfort and lack of privacy, there was a strange attraction about a life so completely ordered. After a few weeks of this somewhat animal

existence it appeared that I was not quite the physical weakling I had always been assumed to be. I made no friends in the ranks; nor was this possible. For one thing, I was naturally shy and introspective. Also I did not speak with the accent of most of my fellow-riflemen, many of whom came from what used in those days to be known as the working classes. I might have done better had I known more about sex, but my knowledge was academic and scanty and I could contribute nothing to the tales of conquest, actual and hoped-for, which were the usual subject of conversation as we lay exhausted on our pallets.

I did my best to carry out my routine duties but I never became more than an extremely inefficient rifleman. I was never able to overcome the feeling that my rifle weighed a ton; besides, it bruised my fingers, so that my arms-drill was always bad. And although the open-air life soon improved my physique I was not strong enough to make light of the heavier menial jobs, digging trenches, moving loads, and so on, which all private soldiers have at some time or other to perform.

I was only once convicted of crime when, without a word to anyone, I absented myself from the camp and went one Sunday afternoon to a concert at the Albert Hall. Rachmaninoff was giving a recital. I think it was his first appearance in England and I was not going to let anything prevent me from going to hear him. In subsequent years I was to hear him play on many occasions and I still think of him as the greatest pianist I have ever heard.

My absence, needless to say, was soon discovered and I was punished by being "confined to barracks" for fourteen days; but since our camp was a considerable distance from any human habitation, and after working hours there was nowhere to go, this was no hardship. During this period I was detailed for the first time to appear on guard duty, and in the small hours, while acting as a sentry, I fell asleep. But this serious military crime was not detected.

I was anxious to be sent to France as soon as possible. I knew that when I got there I should hate it and that probably

I should be afraid. But I had begun to feel as we all do in a dentist's waiting-room; we expect to be hurt, but having accepted the fact we wish to get it over as quickly as possible.

Drafts were constantly leaving for the front, and now that my basic training had been completed the platoon of which I was a member was paraded for inspection. To my chagrin I was excluded, not once but several times. It was true that I looked somewhat younger than I was, but my physique was no longer markedly inferior.

Since the day of my enlistment Father had constantly urged me to apply for a commission. The family thought it derogatory to have a son serving in the ranks. Not that this worried me in the least; indeed, as a private soldier I was considerably relieved that I had no responsibility for the conduct or safety of other people's lives, a matter I felt to be beyond my competence. But in 1915 there was already a grave shortage of officers, and the authorities had begun to search the ranks for suitable candidates. I had been approached several times, but I did not feel obliged to respond. It was only when my company commander suggested that as I was of so little use in the ranks I should become an officer's servant I ceased to protest. I was sent at once to a training establishment and a few weeks later emerged as a Second Lieutenant.

Although I now found myself among men whose upbringing, even if more orthodox, was more or less the same as my own, I still felt far from happy. Music remained my only real interest, and the mild bouts of drinking with which Saturday nights in the mess were generally celebrated left me not only bewildered but slightly contemptuous of my brother-officers. I fear I was a bit of a prig, and I did not have the saving grace of an aptitude for games. What worried me most was my ignorance of sex. It appeared that my contemporaries all had a liaison of some sort, or else paid regular visits to prostitutes, and I began to feel ashamed that I had as yet no practical experience of these matters. I took one of the others into my confidence and told him that I had never slept with a woman. He laughed; and while obviously he thought me a

fool, said he would put me in the way of a suitable experience. He was going into Nottingham on the following Saturday to spend the night with a girl he had picked up some weeks before. I could dine with the two of them and make arrangements to sleep with this girl on some night during the following week. It would cost me, he said, ten shillings, but she would expect to be given dinner at the Victoria Hotel, and there would have to be a tip for the people who kept the house where she carried on her business.

I waited nervously in the lounge of the hotel and presently she came in, wearing a cheap fur coat. She told me at once that she had bought it out of her spare-time earnings. During the day she worked in a lace-factory, but she thought of giving it up since she found that she could earn more money on the streets. She called me "love" and told me her name was Edie; it appeared that she was twelve years older than I.

After dinner we went to her room, which was in a small house, one of a row in a rather sordid back street. The front door opened straight into the parlour, through which we had to pass to get to the bedroom. Several men in shirtsleeves were having supper, but they did not look up as we passed. I was already feeling very unhappy, as though I had been caught in a trap. While Edie was lighting the gas-fire I heard the men downstairs laughing, and this made me feel even more frightened.

The room was tiny, and in one corner was a large brass bedstead with the clothes unmade. I remember a hideous rug on the linoleum-covered floor and two huge and ugly glazed vases standing on the mantelpiece. There was a text of hand-made lace pinned above the bed: GOD IS LOVE it said, and whenever since I have chanced to sleep in a room similarly decorated I have always been surprised not to find a woman lurking in the bed.

I was feeling very ill at ease, and the erotic interest with which I had begun this adventure was now quite stifled by the sight of Edie starting to undress. She had taken off most of her clothes and now lay on the bed in a suit of thick brown

woollen underclothes. "I always keep them on," she said, "till we turn out the light."

I myself was still fully dressed except for my Sam Browne belt. Without quite knowing what I was doing I picked it up from the chair and started to buckle it round my waist. This involuntary gesture broke the tension and Edie began to laugh. I was at first nonplussed and perhaps a little humiliated at my inability to respond; but I was now sufficiently in control of myself to realise that this absurd escapade had gone far enough. Neither of us spoke; but when Edie, in an attempt to still her paroxysm of laughter, turned her head away and buried it in the pillow I got up quickly, and after leaving a pound-note on the dressing-table rushed headlong down the stairs and out into the street. I almost ran to the station, feeling as though I were being pursued.

I felt remorseful for many days, and was at first convinced that I had contracted some horrible disease. This feeling grew so strong that at last I felt compelled to see a doctor. I was ashamed to confess to our own medical officer, so I made an appointment with one of the local practitioners. I was too shy to tell him exactly what had happened and allowed him to examine me in the belief that I had actually exposed myself to infection. It was some time before I recovered my normal composure.

# CHAPTER FOUR

I SOON joined the active battalion of the regiment in France. It was during one of those periods of stagnant trench-warfare when nothing much was happening. There were occasional exchanges of rifle-fire and on most days a short artillery bombardment, during which we took shelter in the dugouts, but there were seldom any casualties.

Unexpectedly I was not afraid; indeed at first I rather enjoyed this carefree existence with its freedom from the restrictions of normal military life. One day our company-commander ordered me to go to battalion headquarters with a personal message for the Colonel, and although I had by this time a fair knowledge of the complicated system of trenches, I lost my way. Fortunately I came across a signaller, with his earphones over his head, standing in the bay of a small side-trench, and I went up to him to ask the way. He was standing very still, apparently engrossed in something or other, and did not reply to my question. I thought that perhaps the earphones prevented him from hearing, and went nearer and repeated my question. He still did not answer. I discovered that he was dead, but so far as I could see there was no wound on his body. I had never before seen a corpse and at first I was terrified and unable to move away. After I had pulled myself together I became convulsed with laughter. It is, I believe, a very normal reaction, but at the time I felt deeply ashamed.

This routine trench-warfare continued for some months; a man would occasionally be killed, another took his place. I became accustomed to the sight of death, but it never occurred to me that I myself might be killed. I became, I fear, a little callous.

Once we were ordered to carry out a raid. The technique of

this particular kind of attack had not been perfected and ours was something of an experiment. We had first to familiarise ourselves with the ground in front of our trenches, and during the next few weeks I spent an hour or so every night, usually with one or two others, crawling about in no-man's-land. It was pleasant to lie absolutely still in the tall rank grass and see the landscape, blasted and desolate, suddenly lit up when an enemy flare went soaring into the sky. Sometimes we would worm our way right up to the German barbed-wire, to see if it had been cut or strengthened. One night, when I was lying out in the open, I heard a trumpet-call sound from somewhere behind the German lines. It was hauntingly beautiful and made me want to cry. Sometimes we could hear the rumbling of horse-drawn waggons, presumably bringing up food and ammunition, just as our own transport was doing. Such trivial happenings as this sometimes made me doubt the purpose of the slaughter.

The night of the raid was very hot, and a slight mist lay over the land. We crawled silently out of the trenches and were in position a little before midnight. At three minutes before the hour, exactly according to plan, our artillery opened a heavy bombardment on the German position. We had been repeatedly assured that we would be in no danger while this was going on, but almost at once several men were hit. It was vital for the moment to ignore their cries. I tried to keep control of myself by staring fixedly at my synchronised stopwatch, but I began to feel that when the time came some unknown force would prevent me from getting up and leading my platoon forward. Involuntarily I urinated in my trousers, and in some odd way this relieved the tension. The bombardment ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and when I blew my whistle, the signal for us to advance, I no longer felt any fear.

We had not far to go. The German wire had been scarcely damaged by our gunfire, so we hurriedly cut a lane through it to get into the trench. We worked our way anxiously along it, but there was no sign of any enemy. The platoon on our right were hardly more successful, but they did manage to bring

back a German helmet which had presumably belonged to a soldier who had been blown to pieces. It was half-filled with glutinous blood and brains. We took no prisoners and obtained no useful information, although some twenty of our men had been killed and as many wounded.

The next day I was offered leave to go home for a week and left for Calais the same afternoon. While our train was ascending a little incline outside Doullens, a goods-train in front of us broke its couplings and most of it came rushing down the hill and cannoned into us. The front part of our train was at once derailed and almost immediately caught fire. The carriages were overcrowded and escape was not possible. I was fortunately in one of the rear carriages and suffered only a few bruises. We did not at first know what had happened; but when it had become clear that there was some sort of breakdown, we got out and went to investigate. By this time the whole front part of the train was well alight and we could not approach near enough to be of any assistance. The screams of those trapped in the burning wreckage horrified me in a way that the sudden trench-death never did. There was something obscene about this drawn-out agony, so unlike the quick death in battle.

I had sent a telegram to my mother from the boat and she was waiting for me at Victoria. That night we went together to see George Robey in *The Bing Boys*, but my thoughts were still concentrated on the burning train, and half way through the performance I could stand it no longer and we left. We went to several other theatres and also to the Queen's Hall, but even music seemed for the moment to have lost its appeal.

I was ill at ease with both my parents; there seemed to be nothing to talk about. I had grown up suddenly in the few months since I had last seen them; besides, I had entered into a world where they could not follow. My experiences in the raid had made me begin to wonder whether there was really any purpose in this war. Nevertheless I longed for my leave to end. It seemed essential to get back to France immediately—paradoxically, as though life depended upon it. Somehow I

stuck it out. On the last day I was stopped in Regent Street by a Major of the Provost-Marshal's department. He reprimanded me for wearing turned-up trousers, a breach of regulations which had been generally condoned up to the time I had left for France.

While I was at home on leave the battalion had been taken out of the trenches and moved to Marseilles. The war in Palestine was going badly and the authorities had decided to transfer the whole of our Division to Egypt.

The camp outside Marseilles was a pleasant place set in the midst of vineyards. There was little work and I spent many hours lying in the sun, content merely to gaze at the blue Mediterranean; there could hardly have been a greater contrast to the sinister life in the trenches.

It was here that I heard for the first time a performance of Debussy's only opera, but although I was familiar with his idiom I found *Pelléas et Mélisande* difficult. It was many years before I was able to recognise it as the composer's greatest work.

There was also a big old-fashioned music-hall, the Palais Cristal I think it was called, where it was amusing to spend an hour or so. There was a large promenade at the back of the stalls, and one night a friend and I were approached by a couple of girls with whom we afterwards went home.

They seemed to be laundresses. Their front room was hung with washing and smelt of steam. The bedroom behind contained two double beds, both unmade. I was half-inclined to make another experiment; but when I noticed a *capote anglaise* lying on the stone floor, which one of the girls hastily swept into a corner, my curiosity vanished, and I decided to wait outside for my friend. I sat among the drying sheets chatting with the other girl, who made me a cup of coffee. I have often thought how civilised she was, for she never reproached me, and later, when we were leaving, refused to accept the francs I tried to press into her hand.

The day before we were due to embark for Egypt our orders were suddenly cancelled and we returned once more to the

north. It was now the late spring of 1916 and preparations were beginning for the big Somme battle which was expected to take place some time during the summer.

We had formerly spent many months in the trenches in front of Gommecourt Wood, and it was to this sector that we now returned. Up to this time the Division had been commanded by General Sir Montague Stuart-Wortley. He had spent his early years as a Guards officer and before the war was a personal friend of the Kaiser. Because of this, so it was rumoured, our Division, although composed entirely of Territorial regiments, nearly always found itself opposed by one or other of the more famous German formations. I saw the General only once, at a village miles behind the lines. He was accompanied by several staff-officers and three Pekingese dogs. Shortly before the Somme battle he was relieved by Sir William Thwaites, an officer of a very different kind. He belonged to the now defunct school of loud-mouthed generals who will stand no nonsense. His speciality was short hair; a unit which made its men crop their heads was efficient; otherwise it was not.

The new General introduced himself to us soon after he had assumed command, when he inspected the battalion in a ploughed field not far behind the front-line trenches. We were told that it was to be a ceremonial occasion and that officers were therefore required to be mounted. None of us knew much about the requisite drill, and most, myself included, were indifferent horsemen.

In due course the General tittuped on to the field mounted on a somewhat restive charger which from time to time he hit on the head. He had a very red face and a white moustache; his appearance, but not his manner, suggested Father Christmas. I began to feel a little nervous, since in those days I regarded even majors and colonels with awe. I was, too, immensely impressed by rows of medal-ribbons, crimson tabs and the other odds and ends that go with senior rank. I did not then realise the false suggestion of importance which these external trappings can impart to even the meanest character.

The realisation came much later when, for the first time, I was confronted by a very famous general. He was wearing civilian clothes and to my intense disillusionment turned out to be an insignificant and indeed rather pathetic little figure.

General Thwaites rode slowly along the lines and then shouted for all officers. This was the signal for us to gallop up to him, and we went as fast as the glutinous mud of the field allowed, but it was not quick enough for him. "Can't your bloody officers gallop, Colonel?" he roared, but by the time we had gathered round his choler had abated. He seemed to be sufficiently satisfied with our appearance; but the object of his visit was to give us some advance information about the forthcoming battle. The whole Division was about to be taken out of the line; lectures would be given and some weeks were to be passed in practising the attack in an area in which an exact replica of the German trench-system had already been prepared.

I well remember one of these lectures. It was called "The Spirit of the Bayonet" and was given by a Highland officer who had earned a considerable reputation for the fervour with which he preached his gospel. He told us a great deal about the aesthetic satisfaction to be obtained from plunging the bayonet into the entrails of a German, emphasising the importance of the slight twist at the end of the operation; for sometimes it was difficult to extract the bayonet, but then one need only fire the rifle and all would be well. This method of dealing with the enemy was demonstrated, with the aid of dummies, by several non-commissioned officers whose services had been lent by the School of Physical Training at Aldershot; we gathered that neither they nor the lecturer would take an active part in the forthcoming battle.

Our training continued thus for some weeks, and it was pleasant, after the day's work was done, to take a horse and amble quietly through the forest near the camp. One never met anybody and there was a particular pleasure in just gazing at the trees, so different from the pathetic blasted stumps with which the areas nearer the line were littered.

We were within riding distance of Amiens, where, at the Salon Godbert, it was still possible to eat in luxury. These French towns, although many of them were in constant danger of falling into enemy hands, never seemed so depressing as wartime England; perhaps it was because the people realised their situation and lived only for each day as it came.

Towards the end of June 1916 we began to move nearer to the front line. We slept during the day, and the nights were spent in carrying up stores and ammunition. The artillery had been greatly reinforced, and in some parts the guns now stood almost wheel to wheel. During one of these night-time expeditions I was slightly wounded and sent down to Rouen for treatment.

The British Red Cross Hospital, where I now found myself, was in the Bishop's Palace. It was run entirely by civilians and was reputed to be the best hospital in France. It was not only luxurious but extremely efficient. I was given a room to myself and plenty of books to read, but I felt too unsettled to enjoy the comfort.

One morning I found myself in an embarrassing situation. There was a knock on the door and the Chaplain, dressed in his canonicals, entered quietly. He had understood, wrongly as it happened, that I wished to communicate, and seemed to be deeply offended when I somewhat haltingly refused his ministrations. When I was a boy I had in the usual way been prepared for confirmation; but I was unable to resolve my doubts and had refused to attend the subsequent ceremony. It was, I think, my first act of open rebellion and was considered rather revolutionary. My parents were greatly shocked, but it is much to their credit that they made no attempt to persuade me to change my views.

During the war members of the armed forces on active service were given a dispensation to communicate without having been previously confirmed, and this did not make it easier for me to explain my refusal to the Chaplain when, later on, he returned to plead with me.

I soon recovered from my wound, and because every

officer was now needed I was sent straight back to the regiment, which I rejoined a few days before the battle was planned to begin. By the middle of 1916 officers with fighting experience were both scarce and valuable, and it had become customary to keep some out of each attack; there was no sense in sacrificing them in an operation in which every man had carefully rehearsed his own particular job. Besides, they were needed for the reorganisation which inevitably followed each major battle.

This time Donald Petch, the company second-in-command, and I were excluded, and although I was still a bit shaky from the effects of my wound I felt somewhat guilty that my own platoon was about to be placed in a situation in which I could do nothing to help.

We took leave of the company on the night of June 30 and settled down in our support-trench a few hundred yards behind the front line. The whole area was blocked with troops moving up to the assault, and working parties were still bringing up reserve stocks of ammunition. It looked as though nothing would be ready for the morrow. The artillery bombardment, which had begun a few days before, was now incessant; it sounded rhythmical, like African drumming enormously amplified.

Neither of us felt inclined to sleep and the noise prevented conversation; not that we had anything to say to one another. At intervals throughout the night our orderlies brought us tea, and once I wandered into a nearby empty dugout. There was a book lying on the floor and I picked it up and read a page or two. It was by Gene Stratton Porter, an author of whom I had never heard. I wondered how anyone could enjoy such sentimental trash.

At about three o'clock in the morning I decided to lie down for a bit, and soon after four Sullivan brought me a mug of strong, sweet tea. This splendid man had joined the regular army before the war but he had been content to remain a private soldier. He had been my orderly from the day I joined the battalion and looked after me like an old and faithful nurse. The guns were still pounding away, and the great attack was

about to begin. In the half-light we could not see much; only a few men climbing wearily out of the support-trenches immediately in front of us.

The noise was now more deafening than ever, for the German artillery had started to reply. A number of shells, some of them our own, fell round us, and a man beside me was hit in the thigh by a large splinter. It all but severed his leg, but curiously he did not bleed and he told me he felt no pain.

Soon the slightly wounded began to trickle back towards us, among them my own platoon-sergeant. "You don't recognise me, sir," he shouted hysterically, and indeed at first I did not. His face was ashen-grey and stained with blood, as were his clothes, and he looked twenty years older than when I had last seen him only a few hours before. His account of the battle was incoherent, but it appeared that most of the battalion had been mown down as soon as they climbed out of the forward trenches. A few had apparently succeeded in advancing some yards towards the German position, but it was clear that in our particular sector the attack had been a total failure.

Our own little party of reserves stayed in confused apprehension, waiting for the orders without which we had been told we must not move forward. Shell-fire had cut the telephone wire and we were no longer in touch with battalion headquarters. Other regiments moved forward through our position to continue the attack, but still there was no news. Once troops had been committed to battle it always seemed to be like this; only the Higher Command, far away in the rear, could really know what was happening—was able to take what in military language was called "a detached view of the situation."

When dusk fell Donald and I, still without any orders, decided to go forward. An acrid pall of smoke had settled low over all the land. Many of the trenches had collapsed in the bombardment and those that still remained were choked with corpses. Small parties of men were to be seen wandering about trying to find their own units. Nobody talked; the men moved in a sort of trance, like sleep-walkers. All noise had

ceased; a stunned hush had fallen over the blasted moon-like landscape. We wondered if the attack would be continued.

The next day was very hot, and already the dead had begun to stink. A number of badly wounded men could be seen trying to crawl back towards our trenches. It was still very peaceful; only an occasional rifle-shot disturbed the quiet. As soon as night fell we took our small party out into no-man's-land to see what we could do. We made no attempt to conceal our movements, and although it would have been easy to shoot us down, nothing happened. We worked on through the night, carrying our burdens back as far as our old front line, where emergency dressing-stations had by this time been set up. When dawn broke and we felt we could do no more, we carried our last casualty right back to an emergency hospital. I needed some food; also I was tired and dirty. The man we were carrying seemed to be terribly mutilated, but he only moaned quietly. We carried him into the post, and the doctor, in a weary voice, told us to lay him on the rough deal table, which was all he had for his operations.

There was a sickening smell of gangrene and ether. It fascinated me, and I sat down on a bench, exhausted and unable to drag myself away. I was almost at the end of my tether and could hardly keep my eyes open. The doctor's voice came to me out of a haze. "You'd better get out of this," he said; "it's not going to be pleasant." I stumbled outside and an orderly gave me a mug of tea.

# CHAPTER FIVE

AFTER the Somme battle the regiment was re-formed and we were sent back to the trenches in front of Gommecourt Wood. Gradually we managed to bring in a number of corpses, but after a week it was impossible to work out in front; the whole area stank like a cesspool. Because of the continuing heat many of the bodies had swollen grotesquely and their faces had taken on a peculiar greenish pallor. They haunt me still, especially if I am alone at night in a forest.

Much later on, when the Germans moved back trying to contract their position, we were able to bury the remaining bodies where they lay, and a mass burial service was held. I felt angered when I heard the priest mouthing the beautiful and moving words of committal; they seemed grotesquely inappropriate when pronounced over the bodies of these young men whose death had been so violent and so useless.

The routine trench-life continued. One never thought of the war coming to an end; or if it did that we could possibly lose. But I did not think about it much. Most of my contemporaries were by this time either dead or badly wounded; I could only wait my turn.

I was now acting as Adjutant of the battalion and sometimes, when we were out of the line, the Colonel and I would drop into Brigade headquarters. There was comparative comfort there and everything seemed so clean in comparison with the trenches or the ruined houses in which from time to time we were billeted. But in that war the fighting troops and the staff, whom one seldom saw, were so utterly divorced that it seemed wrong to sit at table with a Brigadier-General—rather as I imagine those unaccustomed to the honour must feel when they find themselves suddenly on speaking terms with royalty.

General officers have to preserve a measure of aloofness, otherwise they would become involved in unimportant detail. But more human relations between the staff and the troops would have made things much better during the First World War.

When it was over, General J. F. C. Fuller published a book in which he pointed out that regular army training was unimaginative and out of date because too many general officers had survived. His unorthodox views were scorned and he came to be regarded as a crank. But time proved him right, for in the last war it was soon realised that the old-fashioned type of General, aloof and out of touch with his troops, had no place in modern war. The change was so great that younger generations can hardly realise how very much more efficiently our armed forces are now commanded than they were in 1914 and the following years.

If one felt out of place at Brigade headquarters, one felt even more so as one retired further from the front. I only once had occasion to visit a Corps commander, and when I was ushered into the château in which he had his headquarters I felt as though I had entered another world. The atmosphere and furnishings were those of a London club in peacetime. Some of the staff had been in the trenches, but none of those to whom I talked seemed to have the slightest idea of what a disaster the Somme battle had been. They were completely out of touch with the true situation, and coming mud-stained and dirty into this roomful of beribboned men, their field-boots carefully polished, I could not help feeling resentful.

Towards the end of 1916 a curious pamphlet began to be circulated. Junior officers of British regiments were invited to apply for regular commissions in the Indian Army, which was apparently in desperate need of young officers. The brochure was designed like an advertisement for foreign travel, and it gave the impression that life in India was one long holiday. There were facilities for every kind of game; even polo cost next to nothing, and it was apparently possible to shoot a tiger from the bungalow veranda as one lay sipping one's

morning tea. Strangely, there was no mention of the Indian peoples; so far as the pamphlet was concerned they did not exist.

I had now been in France for more than eighteen months; not continuously in action, but never far from the front, and I felt I could do with a change. I had been offered a transfer to the home battalion in England, but I had been long enough in the army to know that I was expected to refuse; it would have been regarded as a form of desertion.

I talked the matter over with the Colonel, who in peacetime was a schoolmaster. He had often told me he hoped that when the war was over I would go up to Cambridge, and he now tried to dissuade me from joining the regular army. But at this time the end of the war seemed far too problematical; besides, I did not fancy the idea of returning to what I thought of as school. In the event I did graduate at Cambridge, but not until much later. Meanwhile I was attracted by the idea of going to India. If the life there did not please me I could resign my commission when the war was over and try something else.

I sent in an application and a few days later was summoned to Brigade headquarters for the preliminary interview. The Brigade Commander listened politely to my answers to his questions, but he seemed uninterested. He was glad, he said, that I wished to join the regular army, but what was wrong with the British service? He himself had served for many years in India; the country had already gone to the dogs; and—damn it all!—the natives no longer treated the white man with proper respect. I told him I wanted to see for myself; besides I had no private means and could not afford to stay in a good British regiment in peacetime. He thought for a bit, called me a bloody young fool, and endorsed my application. A fortnight later I was summoned by telegram to appear before the selection board at the India Office in London.

During my time I have had cause to visit a good many government offices, but the old India Office (it now houses the department of Commonwealth Relations) was unique. The

dark and rambling corridors contained a large collection of inferior statues of eighteenth and nineteenth century administrators, all of them wearing Roman togas. Warren Hastings particularly caught my eye, and when recently I had to go to the building I was sorry to notice that he had been shoved away into a dark and unfrequented corner; there was a thick layer of dust all over him.

On the top floor there was a fine library which contained many rare books and manuscripts. In later years, when I was doing some research there, piles of books lay unsorted on the floor and it was difficult to find what one wanted. Anyone who had worked in India would have felt instantly at home, for the library, like the Government of India itself, was organised on lines of frustrating inefficiency.

About thirty of us were assembled for interview. We waited together in an immense room furnished in a heavy Victorian style. Not all of us were candidates; there were also a few who already belonged to the Indian Army and were awaiting medical examination before being returned to their regiments. A uniformed attendant called them in one by one, apparently in alphabetical order. Some of them had obviously been badly wounded and several were accompanied by relatives or friends. Among them was a middle-aged man in civilian clothes. He was with a woman of a type I had hitherto not come across, the Anglo-Indian *memsahib*. She had already antagonised the attendant by trying to get her husband examined before his turn, and now exacerbated him further by refusing to regard the notice which enjoined us not to smoke. She was one of those women who used to be peculiar to British India and looked like a well-bred horse. Probably she made an excellent job of commanding her husband's regiment, as many of them did; but at the time I did not realise the power of these sinister Amazons. She shot a glance round the room, obviously with intent to wither the lot of us. "I don't think they realise your rank, Torquil," she drawled, and galloped out into the passage to see what could be done about it. Before she returned I had been summoned to the board.

The interview was a repetition of the one to which I had been subjected before joining the bank; the only difference was that this time the members, all of whom seemed incredibly old, were dressed as generals. Only one thing seemed to interest them. My record of service showed that I had been wounded, and they wished to know why I was not wearing the customary gold stripe on my sleeve. I explained that my injury had been slight; moreover it was the custom in my regiment to ignore the regulation about wound-stripes; indeed we regarded it with disdain. The general nodded sagely; but orders were orders and could not be so lightly disregarded. The chairman scribbled a note on his pad; this was something which the Secretary of State for War himself would have to look into. They beamed upon me in a fatherly way, as though they had saved me from being the victim of some serious deception.

Before I left France the Brigade Commander had given me a sealed letter addressed to the chairman of the board. I now learned its contents. Since I was Adjutant of the battalion the Brigade Commander would be much obliged if the India Office would permit me to remain with my present unit until the end of the war, after which I could take up my duties in India. This request, of which I had previously known nothing, was immediately granted, and two days later I was back again in front of Gommecourt Wood. But not for long. Two weeks later a telegram came direct from the War Office. It was short and categorical: it ordered me to report at Southampton in three days' time, and an acknowledgment was demanded.

# CHAPTER SIX

I REMEMBER little of this, my first long voyage, except that the ship was overcrowded. We sailed in convoy and none of us had been told the route. It was therefore an unexpected delight one morning after breakfast to observe the coast of Africa looming up on the horizon, and as the landscape came gradually into focus it was obvious to even the most untravelled that we were fast approaching Cape Town harbour; the flat top of Table Mountain was unmistakable.

I did not visit South Africa again for nearly twenty-five years; and curiously it was in similar circumstances, when I was repatriated from Japan in 1942. There was a satisfaction in ending a long life of travel in the way in which it had begun; in going twice to Cape Town without intent.

On this first occasion we spent a month in Durban, waiting for another ship. Besides the lavish hospitality of the townspeople all I now remember of this pleasant interlude is my one and only visit to a race-meeting. I was persuaded to put a little money on a filly that nobody else fancied. I won twenty-five pounds and was thereby enabled to enjoy all that Durban had to offer.

I arrived in India with few preconceived ideas other than those I had acquired from the India Office pamphlet. Nobody had warned me that Bombay looked like the shabbier parts of Kensington, only worse. Most of its public buildings had been built at a time when British architectural design had reached its nadir and were both ugly and pretentious. Bombay, as Aldous Huxley has rightly observed, is "a city of architectural cads and bounders."

One of the chief diversions was to take a ride through the straggling prostitutes' quarter; Grant Road it was called. If

you hailed a taxi late at night it was hardly necessary to give the driver any instructions; unless you told him otherwise he assumed this destination. To me, an innocent from Europe, the whole business seemed to be shamefully open. Girls of all nationalities, from Japanese to English, sat on the pavement in front of their houses, and if you stopped the car an itinerant vendor of rubber goods would immediately approach. There was no sign of disorderly behaviour in Grant Road; it was merely a business quarter like any other. I believe its activities were suspended when the British departed from India.

After a few days of waiting, orders came for me to join the Ninth Gurkhas at Dehra Dun. A friendly corporal of the Railway Transport staff helped me to arrange my kit in the train. As soon as he left me alone in the carriage I felt a hopeless fool; it seemed absurd not even to know enough of the language to be able to ask for a glass of water.

The next morning I had to change, and as soon as the train drew into Jhansi station coolies crowded round. An aged man, all skin and bones, took up my bags and began slowly to transfer them to the waiting mail on the other track. I feared that the train would leave without me, not knowing that no Indian stationmaster would dare to give the starting signal before the *sahibs* had taken their places. I did not know what to give the coolie; indeed I had not yet fathomed the value of the strange Indian coins in my pocket. I presented him with one rupee, about four times the authorised payment. He began to expostulate in speech so rapid that I was sure I could never learn to understand it. I gathered, however, that I had not given him his due, and handed over yet another rupee. He was apparently still demanding more as the train began to pull out of the station.

The scenery seemed terribly dull; flat, open plains stretched for mile upon mile, without even a hummock to break the monotony. The entire landscape was a shimmering green and many of the fields were under water. It was the middle of the monsoon season, when the great Indian plains look their

best, but on this first occasion the sight did not give me any pleasure.

Every time the train stopped, as it frequently did at a way-side station, many passengers got out and squatted down by the track to relieve themselves. My western standards of modesty were outraged; it did not occur to me, as I lolled in my first-class carriage with its private lavatory, that the part of the train reserved for Indian passengers was not similarly equipped.

At one halting-place a lot of monkeys clambered chattering on to the roof, and a legless beggar, propelling himself on a little wooden carriage, like a child's toy, came and wailed outside my carriage. He had the impersonal face of an idiot and his grimacing induced in me a feeling of nausea.

Dehra Dun is a terminus, and when the train stopped I thought a riot had broken out. Bundles were being thrown out on to the platform and everybody seemed to be trying to get out of his carriage at the same time. Soon the whole station was a confused mass of shouting people. Later I learned this behaviour was normal.

The platform was very dirty and much stained with blood-red spittle, the result of betel-chewing. I noticed two tanks of drinking-water, each in its own little trellis enclosure. One was marked "Hindu Drinking-water," the other, so the notice said, was to be used only by Moslems; it was as though in an English railway station separate drinking-places were provided for Protestants and Roman Catholics. I was thirsty and decided to try the Hindu water; it tasted all right and nobody seemed to mind.

I had my belongings carried out to one of several ancient phaetons that stood outside the station. It looked like a box on wheels; there were no springs and the unglazed window-openings were closed by wooden shutters. This battered contraption was drawn by two sorry hacks, so thin and scraggy that even a French provincial butcher would have turned up his nose at them. So many coolies crowded round the door that I wondered if I had been mistaken for some travelling celebrity.

All they wanted was a tip, but a station official, seeing my plight, came to the rescue and drove them away.

We rumbled through the bazaar and out of the town towards the military cantonment. Before reaching the Orderly Room, where I had to report my arrival, we passed by the parade-ground. It was early morning, and the troops, naked except for their shorts, were engaged in physical training. I thought I had never seen such splendid bodies; besides, the men's copper-coloured skins attracted me and at once I liked the look of their laughing Mongoloid faces. They seemed so different from the ashen and dead-looking Indians I had seen on the journey from Bombay. I thought how pleasant it was going to be to serve with these people.

I was not at first much use to my new regiment. Although I had seen more active service than any of the others except the Colonel, who had spent a few months in France, I could make no practical use of the experience, since I was unable to converse with the troops. Only words of command were given in English, exactly as in the British Army, but this was a poor substitute for conversation. I soon found that most of my brother-officers were as ignorant of the language as I; they could ask in the mess for a whisky-and-soda, and seemed to know a few words of abuse. We spent long hours every day standing about on the parade-ground and contributing nothing. We should obviously have been better employed in learning the language, but no official arrangements were made for this.

Gurkhas speak a language of their own, and although Hindustani was the official *lingua franca* of the whole Indian Army, it was a tradition in Gurkha regiments not to use it. Regulations required the subject to be taught in the regimental school; but they were never taken seriously, indeed often actively disregarded. The custom arose, I imagine, from a desire to emphasise the racial difference between Gurkhas and Indians. The Gurkhas, unlike the rest of the Indian Army, were not British subjects, but hired mercenaries from Nepal. Moreover the Gurkha Brigade was unquestionably a *corps*

*d'élite*, and its officers could hardly be blamed for taking every opportunity to emphasise the difference between their men and those of ordinary Indian regiments.

The Adjutant had procured a servant to look after me. He spoke a few words of English and always addressed me as "Your Honour." He never left me alone for long and would come sidling into the room almost before I had summoned him; he gave me a sense of being spied on. At the end of the first month he produced a bill, written in odd and childlike English. It was almost entirely for boot-polish and dusters and came to the equivalent of five pounds in English money. I had not yet learned that these monthly bills were customarily the subject of a protracted haggle, and I paid this first one in full.

One hot afternoon my servant announced a caller—a relative of sorts, I gathered, who had come to pay his respects. This gentleman, who claimed to have spent some time in England, was wearing a creased and very dirty European suit and a battered straw hat. I was taken aback to observe that although he kept his hat firmly on his head, he removed his shoes before entering my room. He carried a large bunch of tired-looking flowers, screwed tightly together and wrapped in silver paper, like a Victorian posy, and a cotton handkerchief heavily impregnated with pungent scent. He slapped both these offerings down on the table and said that he wished to instruct me in Hindustani. It appeared that he was not a *munshi*, or qualified teacher of languages, but a clerk in a firm in Calcutta. For some reason which he never disclosed, he had been dismissed and he wanted other work until the passage of time made it possible for him to return to the world of commerce. His terms, he now told me, were two pounds a month, and he would also be glad, for an extra fee, to provide me with women. I said I would take the lessons.

Every afternoon, from two until four, we sat in my barely furnished room, an electric fan whizzing overhead. I was not yet accustomed to the intense heat and could keep awake only by consuming large quantities of cheap Japanese beer.

This caused such internal discomfort that sleep was impossible.

After three months I entered for and passed the special simplified examination which had recently been introduced. I was now qualified for service in the field with Indian troops. In point of fact I still knew very little of the language, and of the manners and customs of the Indian peoples nothing whatever. There seemed to be no contact with them; they were all around us, but merely figures in the landscape. If one spoke to them at all it was to order them out of the way.

One evening some of us had been playing tennis when a heavy shower of rain drove us into the mess. Some sort of party was in progress and we ourselves got drawn into it. I have never been a teetotaller; on the other hand serious drinking has never appealed to me as a hobby. But this time, without realising what was happening, I became completely drunk; so much so that I had to be helped back to my quarters and could not appear at the dinner-table. It was a salutary experience, for I suffered such nauseating distress that since that day I have never drunk more than an occasional glass of wine and never touched spirits.

The next morning I was summoned to the Orderly Room and rated for my ungentlemanly behaviour. The Adjutant told me that a man who could not hold his drink was not well regarded by the regiment. I saluted and went out like a whipped dog. I felt disgusted with India and decided that I could never settle down to a life of this sort.

Meanwhile the war dragged on, although it hardly affected the routine military life in India, which was still carried on more or less as in times of peace. After some months we were asked to provide reinforcements for Palestine, and since I was one of the few who had passed the language examination my name headed the list. I sailed from Bombay in the early summer of 1918.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

I WAS kept idling about for some weeks at Kantara, the base camp on the banks of the Suez Canal. Eventually orders came for me to join the second battalion of the Third Gurkhas, the regiment with which I was to spend the rest of my military service.

I had been given charge of a draft of some two hundred men, and for the first part of the journey, as far as Ludd, we went by train. Thenceforward we were to march, but by this time the big advance, which was to end the war, had started and nobody knew exactly where the battalion was.

When we got out of the train everything was in confusion. The attack had been so unexpectedly rapid and successful that the various transit-camps were completely disorganised, and there was consequently a scarcity of rations. There was plenty of food at the base, but not enough trains to bring it forward.

We marched steadily on. Sometimes we slept in tents, but more often we bivouacked under the stars. We lived mainly on hard biscuits and bully beef, and because of the heat the meat had melted to the consistency of butter; it was unpalatable, but there was nothing else. During the last few stages I fell ill but managed to struggle on. When eventually we caught up with the regiment I was very coldly received. This, I subsequently learned, was because the jaundice, from which I was unknowingly suffering, had given the impression that I was some sort of oriental; and, as the friend who later told me said, "We didn't want any bloody Chinese in the mess." I remained a peculiar colour for several months, but was able eventually to live it down.

Compared with France, Palestine seemed like a picnic,

although by the time I got there the war was virtually over. The cavalry had swept on far away to the north, leaving the infantry high and dry with nothing to do. It soon became a holiday, with opportunities to visit the many historic sites by which we were surrounded.

The regular mess-staff of Indian servants had long since disappeared. Some had gone back to their homeland because of genuine sickness; others saw no profit in this gypsy life. So we were waited upon by Gurkhas from the ranks. They were an endless source of amusement; it was never certain what would happen next.

I remember once calling for some butter. A smiling oaf immediately appeared, walking carefully as though on a tight-rope, his hands cupped. He had emptied the whole contents of a tin of butter into them, and the heat was already making it run through his fingers. Slowly he approached, slapped the melting lump on to the bare table, saluted smartly and turned away.

On another occasion there was fish for dinner, and an absent-minded officer did not notice that he had helped himself to more than his fair share. The Gurkha who was handing round the dish made a rapid calculation. He pointed to each of us in turn, added up the number and compared it with the number of fish on the plate. "One *sahib*, one fish," he announced with the utmost gravity, and removed the excess from the offender's plate. He decided to take no further chances and dealt out the remaining fish with his bare hands, as though they were playing-cards.

It was at this time, too, that a slight problem of deportment arose. Early one morning the commanding officer was communing with nature when a gust of wind blew away the sacking which alone concealed him from the world at large. A working party happened at this moment to be passing. The non-commissioned-officer in charge had long since learnt that failure to salute an officer was a grave offence, and he was taking no chances. He immediately gave the command "Eyes right," and the entire party turned their gaze upon the out-

raged Colonel. There was some discussion during luncheon as to the correct method of acknowledging a salute when caught with one's trousers down, but the matter was finally settled by a notice in battalion orders that night. "When paying compliments to officers," it read, "the Commandant orders that in future all ranks will use discretion."

The battalion Adjutant was not then a regular officer, but a youngish man who, until the war, as a member of the Indian Educational Service, had been head of the Sanskrit College at Benares. Ralph Turner (now Professor Sir Ralph Turner, and until his retirement Director of the School of African and Oriental Studies in London University) was a man unlike any I had met before, and although there have been times when we have been unable to see anything of one another for years he remains one of my oldest friends. His peacetime occupation had naturally brought him in touch with Indian thought and he now told me a great deal about the customs of the country. He had taken advantage of his military service to study the Gurkha language, and it was due to his encouragement that I, too, made up my mind to learn it. In course of time I came to speak it much better than he, but naturally I lacked the knowledge of Sanskrit and other etymology which enabled him eventually to compile the standard dictionary of Nepali. I doubt if he realises how much I owe to him; if he had not given me the initial impetus my life in India might have been very different.

As the Palestine campaign drew to an end prisoners began to be sent back in large numbers and it became almost impossible to deal with them. Eventually there were so many that we found it difficult to provide even escorts to accompany them to the base. But it did not matter. Most of the poor wretches were near starvation and in rags; there was no question of their wishing to escape. Often they would try to exchange little trinkets, such as rings, for a few cigarettes or a tin of jam. Thus I was one day offered a shining Turkish order, the nearest I ever got to being decorated.

And then the news came through that an armistice had been negotiated. We were in Haifa, lying on the shore and lazily

watching the ships in the bay. After dinner that night somebody thought it a good idea to blacken our faces with the burnt corks of empty bottles. The troops thought it a huge joke as they gathered round to watch the fun; after all it was not every day that one had the chance to see the Colonel with a black face and a Turkish field-cap crammed on the back of his head. Soon the mess tent was crowded; everyone knew that normal discipline seemed to have been relaxed. The Brigade Commander came round to have a drink with us, and his face, too, was blackened before we speeded him on his way. There was no further use for our large supply of flares and rockets, so we fired them off into the night. The Bay of Haifa began to look like the old Crystal Palace on a Brock's benefit night, since other regiments soon followed our example. It was not until the small hours, when somebody across the bay thought to enliven the proceedings still further with bursts of live machine-gun fire, that a peremptory message from Brigade Headquarters ordered us to stop. Providentially nobody was hit.

The world seemed very good that night, and for once I loved my fellow-creatures. I wondered what the monks on darkened Carmel, which rose bleakly behind us, thought of it all. It is significant of my attitude in those days that I never even considered visiting the monastery; nor, I believe, did any of the others.

A week or so before we embarked for India we were joined by one of the regiment's pre-war officers who had spent the war on the staff, and he now assumed command. He was our only staff-college graduate and obviously it would have been a waste of his specialised training if he had been allowed to spend the war-years in regimental service. He was in any case an unlikeable character, and the fact that he had taken his profession seriously had not greatly endeared him to his brother-officers. He had accepted a staff appointment at the very moment in 1914 when the battalion had been ordered to France, and this coincidence was a perpetual subject of adverse comment in the mess.

He complained at once of the untidy appearance of the camp and ordered the bivouacs to be struck and repitched in regular lines; they had to look like a regiment on parade.

And then he addressed us. The battalion, he said, had done well in the war; in fact it had done very well indeed, when one considered that for the last few years it had been commanded by "makeshift" officers. Despite this handicap two of the men and one officer had been awarded the Victoria Cross, but Colonel Goodbody made no reference to this. He went on to say that if some of our pre-war officers (God rest their souls) could see the regiment now they would turn in their graves; its appearance was despicable, and so far as he could see discipline no longer existed. It was not, however, entirely our fault; we had not had his opportunity of a proper peacetime training.

The cheerful family atmosphere, the feeling in a well-commanded regiment which is efficient and knows it, immediately evaporated. We seemed to be at cross-purposes and somehow subdued. Many of our best officers left, among them Ralph Turner, who was recalled to resume his more important duties in the Educational Service. The rest of us carried on, and the possibility of getting a transfer to some other regiment became the main topic of conversation. Fortunately our new Colonel did not long remain. His departure, a few months later, to take up another staff appointment coincided with the battalion's dispatch to Waziristan.

We never saw him again. He was not entirely typical, but the pre-war Indian Army did contain many of his kind. Despite their experiences in the war, some of these older officers were able to think of their regiments only in terms of lines of men standing rigidly at attention, so steady and beaten into submission that they were ready to die in that position whenever God and the Commanding Officer willed. Their commission was all-sufficient. There was something sacred and magical about it; like the Divine Right of Kings, it made them infallible. This attitude did eventually disappear, but it lingered on until the last of the elders had finished his command and departed to Cheltenham or higher honours.

Many of us who had joined during the war had avoided the deadening effect of two years at Sandhurst, which was the necessary prelude to a regular commission in peacetime. It was some years before we ceased to be reminded that we had come in through the back door. This offence was slightly condoned in those who had been educated at Eton or one of the few better schools, but it was impressed upon all of us that, unqualified as we were, we should consider ourselves lucky to be allowed to remain in the army.

We spent some weeks in Suez and then embarked for India. Bombay was all a-flutter when, for the second time, I saw the bogus minarets of the Taj Mahal Hotel appearing self-consciously on the horizon. This time the arrival was an official occasion; we were to be welcomed by a committee of local ladies.

As we filed down the gangway each of us was presented with a metal matchbox, bronze for the troops, nickel for the officers. They were stamped with an outline map of India and, rather inappropriately, the word "Farewell!" Apparently they were the remains of a consignment that had been ordered as gifts for the troops departing for the front in 1914, but they had only just been received and it was a pity to waste them.

The inside of the disembarkation-shed was decorated with flags and a strange assortment of fruit and flowers, as though for a harvest festival. But the floor was as usual; its scratchy concrete surface was stained with the inevitable blood-red betel-juice that makes so many public places in India look as if most of the inhabitants are suffering from advanced tuberculosis.

Meanwhile a second troopship had come alongside, and the band, which had been playing a waltz, broke off abruptly and turned again to its rendering of "See the Conquering Hero Comes," with which we ourselves had been received. The woodwind seemed to be playing a bar behind the rest, but the conductor, a large bearded Sikh, did not notice.

The "hostess" who had attached herself to me elbowed us towards the bar. I do not like drinking at seven o'clock in

the morning, so I asked for a cup of tea while my companion swallowed three large gins in quick succession, after which she left me to deal with the new arrivals.

Our train was waiting beside the docks and we were seen off by a Russian General who had travelled with us from Egypt, but who he was or where he was bound nobody ever discovered. Someone had given him an enormous bouquet, which he now flourished towards us as the train steamed slowly away.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

We had naturally assumed that on our return to India we should be sent to Lansdowne, the small hill-station in the United Provinces which was the regiment's permanent home. The depot, which held all our records and accounts, had remained there throughout the war and was thus the most convenient place in which to carry out our demobilisation and reorganise for peace.

We were disappointed, therefore, to learn that for the time being we were to be stationed at Shahjehanpur. This was a decaying and remote little town where British life could already be seen to be running down. It had not been a military station since the Mutiny, and although the Army Clothing Factory was there, it was now a purely civil headquarters.

The officials had taken small part in the war, and since there was little else to do, a great deal of time and energy had been spent in the battle for social precedence. In this we now became involved, but in a purely negative way. Having so recently returned from service in the field, we had not yet had time to provide ourselves with visiting-cards; and since we could not therefore call upon the local dignitaries in the accustomed manner, they could not officially acknowledge our existence.

I shall have more to say about the ramifications of this quaint Anglo-Indian custom later on. Meanwhile our unacknowledged presence in Shahjehanpur caused a local armistice to be declared; our failure to comply with the demands of etiquette was a topic, perhaps the first, on which there could be only one opinion. The local *memsahibs* all agreed and for the moment all lesser scores were forgotten.

In Shahjehanpur we lived in mud-and-wattle huts which

had been hastily built during the war as a temporary hospital. They had never been occupied and were now beginning to disintegrate. The walls were infested with white ants. Coming back one hot afternoon to lie down after luncheon I took off my shirt and hung it on a nail on the wall. At teatime, when I got up to dress, I found that it had been practically destroyed; in a couple of hours the ants had eaten enough of it to make it useless. Books, too, if left on the floor, were soon reduced to dust. But we had for so long been accustomed to far worse conditions that we made no attempt to clean the place up.

We had been some weeks in Shahjehanpur but we had not received any orders, and it was only when the Commanding Officer wrote privately to a friend at Army Headquarters in Delhi that instructions came for us to begin demobilisation.

We were soon reduced to half our normal strength and most of the senior officers went off on furlough. Although I had only four years' service I now found myself in temporary command of the battalion, and after I had occupied this exalted position for little more than a week we were ordered to provide a junior officer for service with the Gurkha Scouts, a new unit that was being hastily formed for special duties in the Afghan War which had just broken out.

I thought that if Shahjehanpur was typical of life in peace-time India I should not for long be able to support it; better therefore to see as much as possible before I resigned. I selected myself for the appointment and left for Peshawar the following night.

The Afghan War of 1919, into which the Indian Government was drawn against its will, was a failure in every way. Indian nationalism had been on the increase and there was already a good deal of civil disturbance. Small bodies of troops had been posted all over India to preserve internal security, and the normal custom of concentrating a large striking-force in one area had had to be abandoned. It was for this reason, although we did not know it at the time, that we had been posted to Shahjehanpur.

The North-West Frontier had been garrisoned more or less as in peacetime, but its defending troops, mostly British Territorial regiments, were only partially trained and certainly no match for the warlike tribesmen. The Afghans, surmising correctly that the Government of India had its hands full trying to deal with the civil unrest, judged the time ripe for an invasion. There was no question of an attack upon India itself, but this seemed an opportunity to make a bid for all the trans-border country which, while forming no part of India proper, was always regarded as a sphere of British influence.

At that time the Indo-Afghan frontier had not been clearly defined, largely because the British authorities considered it useful to leave a tract of unadministered territory as a buffer between the two countries. This barren tract, which runs roughly from the Persian border to Kashmir, had long been a storm-centre, and was the scene of most of the campaigns in which the Indian Army had been regularly engaged. It was always difficult to control because there were only the most primitive means of communication. Not until the nineteen-twenties did anybody realise that the solution of the problem was to build roads. When they were built, after a series of campaigns in which many lives were lost, the North-West Frontier ceased to be a major problem.

To deal with the situation in 1919 it was decided to make use of a number of temporary British regiments which happened to be in India on their way home from Mesopotamia. They were returned unwillingly to the slaughter, and when I arrived at Peshawar it was a common sight to see senior officers being jeered at in the streets. Troops in this state of mind were naturally little use, but their mere presence served some purpose in deceiving the Afghan agents, of whom there were known to be many in the city, as to our effective strength.

Ordinarily the journey from Peshawar to Landi Kotal, at the head of the Khyber Pass, takes no more than a couple of hours. In 1919 there was already an excellent motor-road, and I imagined there would be no difficulty in getting a seat in

one of the numerous convoys which plied daily between the two places. But just before I was due to leave an absurd situation arose which could occur only in India; there was a strike of sweepers in Landi Kotal and most of them had deserted.

Outside the few big cities there is no drainage system in India, and the disposal of refuse, human and otherwise, is carried out by members of the so-called sweeper caste, the lowest of all menial grades. The sweepers of Landi Kotal were not finding this new war to their liking; but since their special duties could not even in an emergency be carried out by any other caste, the health of the garrison was in danger, and something had to be done about it. Thus I found myself ordered to take charge of a contingent of fifty scavengers and march them up to Landi Kotal. It would have been a simple matter to pack them into a lorry, but apparently there was nothing in the outmoded army regulations to sanction this more sensible arrangement.

It is an easy matter to shift a body of trained men from one place to another; one merely gives the necessary word of command and the machine moves off. But these creatures had never before been subjected to any form of discipline; moreover most of them were wearing boots for the first time in their lives. Before long the party was spread out over several miles of country and there was nothing I could do about it. We continued thus for three days, and by some fortunate chance every one of the party completed the journey, although the road was so unsafe for solitary travellers. I handed the party over gratefully at Landi Kotal and went in search of my new unit.

The original Gurkha Scouts had come into being during the course of the Tirah campaign of 1897, and their formation was largely due to the ideas of a young subaltern named Bruce who was serving with the Fifth Gurkhas. Later on, when he was leader of the 1922 Mount Everest Expedition, I came to know him well and we remained intimate friends until his death in 1939.

The training of these special scouts was based on a very

simple idea; to search out the enemy while remaining as far as possible unseen and unheard. These were the tactics employed by the frontier tribesmen themselves with success, largely because regular troops, who were invariably hampered by their cumbrous equipment, were unable to move quickly in this tangled and mountainous border country.

The Gurkha Scouts had proved so useful in this earlier campaign that it is difficult to understand why they were not retained as a permanent corps. Their success was due almost entirely to freedom from orthodox military methods and depended largely upon individual enterprise, neither of which appealed to the higher command.

The contingent formed for service in the Afghan campaign of 1919 was a scratch lot; and although the men were all picked shots and young, most of them were unknown to one another and few of them had seen any frontier service. We had therefore to carry out our job while learning to do it, and the difficulty was increased because it was obviously inadvisable for us to be seen prowling about on such of the surrounding hills as remained in our hands. We carried no equipment other than a rifle, wore a combination, according to individual taste, of uniform and mufti without badges of rank, and our casual appearance was the subject of amused comment by our more regular brethren. And since we were irregular in every sense of the word it was difficult to place us in the military hierarchy. We operated therefore under the direct orders of the Divisional Commander.

One of the chief annoyances of frontier warfare is the constant sniping at night. It does not do much harm, but it prevents the troops from sleeping. Our first duty, in our still untrained state, was to deal with this nuisance, and we spent the nights wandering about on the hills, but without success.

We moved gradually forward into Afghan territory and soon the entire expedition was concentrated at Dacca, a grim and scorching little place on the banks of the Kabul river. It was as far as we ever got.

We had now to operate with more circumspection. Success

still eluded us and the General told us that he was sceptical of our usefulness. We told the troops of his doubts and asked them what we should do, for we ran the show as if it were a family, and anybody was free to make suggestions. Apparently they had already marked down a particularly active sniper. He had hitherto been carefully protected by comrades who guarded the approaches to the various spots from which he operated. But during the past few days they had noticed a certain relaxation of vigilance and they asked us to be patient for a little longer.

A few days later, very early in the morning, I was awakened suddenly by my orderly. He was convulsed with laughter and urged me to get up at once. I pulled on my boots and wriggled out of the shelter, still only half-awake. As I emerged a lance-corporal saluted me. In his other hand he held the trophy, a grizzled Afghan head which had been neatly severed at the neck with a Gurkha *khukri*. He carried it by its mangy beard, and when he placed it at my feet, like a well-trained retriever, I noticed that it was already covered with flies. I thought how inhuman and altogether impersonal it looked; I could not believe that an hour or so ago it had formed an integral part of a thinking man.

I told the corporal to take the object at once to Divisional headquarters and crawled back into my bivouac. The General sent word of his pleasure, but he would be glad if in future we refrained from sending him further exhibits until after he had dealt with his breakfast. Later that day the head was impaled outside the camp, a warning to all who cared to heed it.

It was at this time that an Army Order was issued to the effect that Simla, the summer headquarters of both the Government of India and the Army, had been officially designated as a part of the "war area." Since this hill station was some hundreds of miles away, even from Peshawar, we assumed, rightly so it later seemed, that the only purpose of this order was to enable the staff to qualify for the campaign medal without the bother of a personal visit to the field of battle. Anyhow it caused so much dissatisfaction among the fighting troops

that a few days later it was rescinded. This futile little war was now nearly over, but shortly before the armistice was ratified we were visited and inspected by large numbers of betabbed officers who thus became entitled to sport another ribbon.

The Gurkha Scouts were soon disbanded and I rejoined my own regiment, which was still at Shahjehanpur. I left almost at once for Gorakhpur and Darbhanga, which is where I began this story.

# *Part Two*

# CHAPTER NINE

I KNEW from the beginning that the recruiting job at Darbhanga could not last for long. Nevertheless I hoped that by some miracle I might be forgotten and allowed to remain in this pleasant backwater. But towards the end of 1920 it was decided to close the depot and I was ordered to rejoin my regiment, to which, however, I had not yet been permanently appointed.

Since I had been away, the civil disturbances, which had been such a problem when we came back to India, had been brought under control. It was no longer necessary for troops to be dispersed all over the country, the Third Gurkhas had returned to Lansdowne, and there I was now ordered to report, to begin my first period of normal peacetime soldiering.

Lansdowne, which had been the permanent home of the second battalion since its formation in 1891, was extremely remote; and although as the crow flies it was no more than a few hundred miles from Darbhanga, the journey via Lucknow took several days. The place was thirty or so miles beyond the nearest railway station, itself the terminus of a small branch line at which there was only one daily arrival and departure. Before the war the journey from Lansdowne down to the railway station at Kotdwara had to be done either on foot or horseback, but now there was a motor-road of sorts and a regular service of lorries.

I had often heard the older riflemen and officers talk nostalgically of their former life at Lansdowne, but the picture I had formed in my mind's eye was vastly different from the reality with which I was now confronted.

When the battalion had first gone there Kaladanda (the local name was soon changed to Lansdowne, in honour of the

Viceroy) was sparsely inhabited by Garhwali peasants. It was a remote spur, about five thousand feet above sea-level. As in most similar Indian hill-stations, the ground was undulating and rocky, and for the first year the men of the regiment had been almost entirely occupied in clearing the site. Because the place lacked proper accommodation and other amenities it was extremely cold in winter, so that Indian labourers could not be induced to stay there. A garrison engineer was in charge of operations, but he had no staff. Thus it came about that the troops not only quarried stone, cut and carried timber from the nearby forests, but actually built their own barracks, as well as the officers' mess and bungalows.

It is hardly surprising then that, architecturally, the place looked amateurish. The gloomy stone barracks, considered a model of their kind when they were completed in 1894, were by this time hopelessly out of date; and because of their inexpert construction they had required frequent buttressing and now bulged grotesquely. Moreover they were unhealthily damp and very cold in winter, for no one had thought it necessary to provide them with any kind of heating.

Most of the officers had designed their own homes; and since certain basic requirements had been understood only after the building was well under way, the final results were often extremely odd. Thus, in several of the bungalows the dining-room could be approached only through a bedroom, and there were other anomalies, such as doors which had had to be hacked through the walls after the building had been completed. These bungalows were originally the private property of the officers who had built them. They had since been acquired by the regiment, to which we now paid a monthly rental. Married officers each had one to themselves, but we bachelors shared.

As in most of the smaller cantonments, there were no proper shops in Lansdowne. There were the usual Indian traders in whose shacks one could buy cigarettes, tinned food and other simple necessities. But there was nothing that afforded the time-wasting facilities of even an English village general shop.

Thus one of the minor pleasures of feminine life could not be enjoyed on our hilltop. Nevertheless there was a good substitute for it in the arrangement known as V.P.P. or, to give it its full title, Value Payable Post. This made it possible to order goods from the big stores in Bombay or Calcutta and to pay the postman for them when he delivered the parcel.

The large shops in the cities used annually to publish bulky illustrated catalogues and these were sent, as a matter of course, to everybody whose name appeared in the numerous official civil and military lists. These tomes, I often noticed, generally occupied an honoured place in Lansdowne drawing-rooms, so that one could not help suspecting that they were regarded as an important part of the occupant's reading matter. Anyhow, there is no doubt that our ladies spent many hours thumbing through their pages, especially during the monsoon months, when all outside activities were at a standstill. It was a common sight at this season to see the postman approaching one's bungalow staggering under a heavy load of parcels.

More often than not the contents would turn out to be quite other than they had been described; what had appeared from the catalogue to be exactly the right kind of cretonne for re-covering the drawing-room chairs was now discovered to be so hideous that it could not possibly be used.

Every bungalow, even the bachelors' quarters, became cluttered up with expensive and unuseable junk: petrol-lamps that no longer worked, fancy pipes in buckskin cases, dress-materials of the wrong colour, and so on. There were times when indulgence in V.P.P. broke out like an infectious disease. We were all at times affected by it, but with some of our womenfolk it was a chronic condition; nothing, not even their husbands' impending bankruptcy, could curb their craving to buy.

Life in Europe, even more in the United States, has become so comparatively easy and straightforward, despite the disappearance of servants, that I doubt if the reader will credit the primitive conditions in which we lived at Lansdowne. We must have been an exceptionally healthy crowd; otherwise

there would have been more cases of fatal illness. There was a so-called hospital for the troops, but it was little different from the barracks in which they normally lived. There was not a single nurse; nor was there any arrangement for looking after sick officers or their wives and children. A routine visit to a dentist entailed at least a week-end visit to one of the cities in the plains; a sudden attack of toothache had to be treated as best it could by the regimental doctor. I once developed an abscess in the lower jaw which was so painful that I felt I could not support the necessary train-journey in search of relief. Our doctor found an ancient pair of forceps; but since he admitted that he was unskilled in their use and in any case had no suitable anaesthetic I had to wait some weeks before the tooth could be extracted.

The Indian Medical Service has in its time produced a number of physicians and surgeons of international reputation, especially in the field of tropical disease. Most of them were naturally employed in one or other of the big general hospitals in places such as Delhi or Calcutta. It would have been absurd to post a man of talent to a place like Lansdowne; there would normally have been nothing for him to do and probably he would quickly have deteriorated. But the place was ideal for a lazy and unambitious doctor who was fond of sport and social life. Naturally this was generally the type we got.

I well remember a young wife who visited the doctor regularly complaining of a general feeling of nausea. It was only after he had treated her for some weeks as a case of suspected malaria that her rapidly increasing girth caused him to change his diagnosis. There was no provision for maternity cases in Lansdowne, and at the appropriate moment it was usual for the husband to take his wife down to the plains, where she could receive proper attention. There was one famous occasion in the history of the regiment when calculations went a little wrong and the baby made its appearance, without damage either to itself or its mother, during the course of the train-journey from Kotdwara.

Life in Lansdowne centred round the mess. It was here that

the unmarried officers fed and spent most of their time. Nobody, unless he has been a peacetime member of one, can properly understand the veneration in which the officers' mess used to be held in the regular army. It was a sanctuary, a sort of holy place, and must on no account be made the subject of a joke. It was particularly a refuge for the married officer; the one place to which he could not be pursued by his wife. Once an officer had entered he was safe from all interruption, and it used to rile me when orderlies were sometimes kept waiting for long periods because he for whom they had brought some message must on no account be disturbed The message was generally something of no importance which could well wait until the next day. Nevertheless, the officer was more often than not only snoozing in a chair or, if feeling in an intellectual mood, browsing through the pages of the *Sketch*.

Our mess was comfortable enough in a museum-like way. Its prototype was a somewhat conservative and stuffy London club; but since it had been built by amateurs and most of the furniture had been made by unskilled Indian carpenters, everything about it was slightly wrong. It looked like the kind of gentlemen's club you might find on the stage of a provincial theatre whose scene-designer has had to make do with limited funds.

The walls were hung with spears, captured rifles, flags and other dust-collecting trophies brought back from the fields of battle. In the entrance hall were a number of huge brass Buddhas. They had been looted during the course of the so-called Younghusband Mission to Tibet in 1903, and, until successive generations of zealous mess-orderlies had by means of daily polishing gradually dissolved their features, were probably worth a good deal of money. The billiard-room walls were almost entirely covered with the stuffed heads of various animals. Many of them were badly moth-eaten, so that their china eyes stared at one out of a face from which most of the hair had long since disappeared.

And then there was the dining-room. At the far end was a large oil-painting of the Colonel of the Regiment in the

full-dress uniform of a general officer. It had been painted by a fashionable artist of the period, and although it was meant to impress, the figure that presided silently at our nightly gatherings seemed to me no more than a portrayal of bucolic senility. Ranged along the other walls were framed photographs of every Colonel who had commanded the battalion since it was first raised. These varied considerably. The earlier ones were of elderly gentlemen with long drooping moustaches, posed in front of a scenic background, generally a fanciful version of the North-West Frontier. The later ones were more modern in style, but I always felt that the proper place for all of them was outside some London theatre; they looked, in their uncomfortable full-dress uniforms, like actors impersonating colonels rather than the real thing.

I often noticed that when we came into the room at breakfast-time each of us would subconsciously sit with his back to the photograph he particularly disliked. In fact we all disliked the entire collection and even our seniors spoke of their intention to abolish it when their turn to command came round.

We were commanded at one time by a man who had come from another regiment He was disliked by everybody in the regiment and because of his offensive behaviour we had determined, when he left, to hang his portrait not with the others but in the lavatory. In this decision we were supported by the Colonel's designated successor, but when the time came to take action he lost his nerve and ordered the photograph to be hung in its rightful place. He himself would be with us for only four more years and was doubtless unwilling to create a precedent.

The chairs in the ante-room, where we foregathered before dinner, were ranged uncomfortably against the walls. Some of the younger among us, whose spirit had not yet been completely broken, thought it would be a good idea to rearrange them and so make the room look less formal. The Colonel, when he saw what we had done, was horrified; not, as he was careful to tell us, because the new arrangement was less pleasing, but because he felt that our predecessors (most of

them long since dead) would not have approved. We replaced the furniture in its original position, and having learnt our lesson refrained from suggesting further innovations. During the whole of my service in Lansdowne nothing was ever changed in the mess; it remained, a museum piece, exactly as it had been when it was built and furnished some thirty years before.

The motor-road came to an abrupt end at the bazaar, a huddle of small general shops kept by Indian traders. It was about half a mile from the mess, so while my servant arranged for coolies to bring the baggage I went ahead to report my arrival at the Orderly Room. During my absence at Darbhanga I had been promoted to the rank of Captain and was now told to take over the command of A Company. There was however no hurry about this; there were other and more important social obligations which must first be carried out: it was necessary to pay a number of formal calls.

This curious survival of English country life was taken so seriously in the Anglo-Indian society of my army days that it is worth describing in some detail.

First the calling-card itself. This must in no circumstances be printed, but engraved in copper-plate lettering. It indicated the caller's name, rank and regiment, but not his address. Instead, the name of his club was inscribed in the bottom left-hand corner. It was desirable, but not obligatory, to belong to one or other of the several Services clubs in London and a subtle prestige attached to membership by a junior officer of what was generally considered to be a society of seniors.

I had already reported my arrival to the Adjutant. Nevertheless before my existence could be officially recognised I had first to call upon my own mess. I was instructed to leave two cards upon the hall table, one inscribed with the full name, rank and decorations of the commanding officer, the other addressed to "The Officers."

Cards similarly inscribed had also to be left upon the officers of the Garhwal Rifles, whose mess was at the other end of our hilltop. A day or two later the respective colonels returned my

call by leaving their own cards upon me; so far as the regiments themselves were concerned my arrival at Lansdowne was now officially recognised. But this was merely the beginning of the farce.

I was now required to make a personal call upon each of the married officers of my own and the other regiment, and upon the one or two civilian officials who had their headquarters with the garrison. In theory these calls were intended to be a means of making the personal acquaintance of the local ladies, but all over India the custom had now taken a different form. On the gate of each bungalow there was a small box with a slit in it. The occupant's name was painted on the box and, beneath it, the somewhat forbidding legend NOT AT HOME. In the hope of remaining unobserved, one tiptoed up to the bungalow, deposited two cards in the box and furtively crept away. This sanctioned evasion of an actual meeting did not however absolve one from certain niceties of polite conduct. Thus calls should properly be paid only between the afternoon hours of four and six, and it was necessary to be correctly dressed for the occasion; that is to say wearing a formal suit and carrying a stick and gloves.

There must have been the larger part of a hundred families in Lansdowne on whom it was obligatory to call; and since their bungalows were scattered over an area of rustic paths which differed in altitude by as much as a thousand feet, this routine of calling occupied me for several weeks. It had to be repeated whenever one went away for any length of time. On such occasions the card had to be superscribed with the letters *p.p.c.* (*pour prendre conger*) to indicate departure. When one came back the entire process had to be repeated.

The regiment sometimes did a winter tour of duty in large garrisons such as Delhi, and when this happened the custom of calling assumed absurd proportions. It would have been physically impossible to call personally upon the many hundreds of wives, whom we had in any case no desire to meet, so it was usual to sally forth each afternoon with a batch of one another's cards and thus divide the job. Occasionally one

carelessly left the wrong number—four of one, for instance, and none of another—and when this happened it would sometimes be taken as a deliberate insult. In these big stations the calls of temporary residents were not generally returned unless the recipient had a daughter of marriageable age, and then only if the caller was a member of what was considered to be "a good regiment."

Meanwhile I began to take my appointed place in the battalion. It would be untrue to say that I "settled down;" the period of active service, followed by a crucial year alone at Darbhanga, during which I had been free from the snubbing discipline with which all young officers were treated, made this impossible. Moreover, since I had come into the army through the back door I had never acquired that unreasoning respect for my seniors which is the requisite of a good regimental officer. But I was not bumptious. I kept my views to myself and accepted the situation, albeit somewhat uneasily.

Our routine day began soon after dawn with tea and a slice or two of soggy toast brought to the bedside. Physical training, in which we juniors were expected to participate, was the first parade. I have always disliked the early morning hours and I took part in these doubtless health-giving exercises without enthusiasm. They were followed, after a short break, by drill or musketry, during which we wandered round the squads correcting a stance or looking for minor faults. They were often hard to detect, but a keen officer could always manifest his authority by finding an undone button or a speck of dust where none should be. Because I had a good servant I myself was always well enough turned out, but the companies which at one or another time I commanded were never commended for their smart appearance.

When the morning parade ended, generally at about half past eight, we all repaired to the mess for a leisurely breakfast. By common consent it was a silent meal, and to emphasise the fact each place at table was provided with a wire book-rest. But these were seldom used, since the papers did not arrive until the afternoon.

Most of us had minor duties connected with the running of the mess: looking after the garden, writing out the menu for dinner, checking the accounts and so on. These were, however, of no more than a supervisory nature and the battalion clerks or servants did the actual work. But they served as a fiction that we were seriously occupied and must not be disturbed.

The early parades were more or less informal affairs for which we officers dressed accordingly; an open-necked bush-shirt, shorts, khaki stockings and plain black shoes. We were allowed to breakfast in this easy attire, but before attending the commanding officer's daily meeting, which took place at half-past eleven, we had to be properly dressed in service uniform.

Before attending upon the Colonel each of us four company commanders disposed of the affairs of his own little unit. Men were paraded for minor breaches of discipline, begged for leave or made other requests. These were often purely personal and had nothing to do with the individual's military service. This feature of the old Indian Army largely accounted for the unique relationship between officers and men. The company commander was looked upon as the father of a family and so must be ready to give advice and help on any problem, however trivial.

I well remember when one of my men was paraded to air some private grievance. Like most primitive people he took some time to come to the point; and when he did I failed to recognise it. After a long preamble about his childhood in the wilds of Nepal he came to the subject of marriage. His own conduct, it appeared, had been impeccable, but not so that of his wife, who, during her husband's absence in Lansdowne, had gone off with a rifleman in one of the other Gurkha regiments. What, he asked, did I propose to do about it?

The solution seemed to be easy. I told him I would write at once to the regiment and demand the return of his wife. It was the sort of thing that constantly happened, but my suggestion did not seem to meet with the man's approval. I

asked him why, but for some moments he remained standing rigidly at attention, saying nothing but obviously trying hard to think. Finally the real nature of the problem was made manifest. "It's not my wife I am worrying about," he said, "but when she left she went off with my umbrella and I should be glad if you could get it back for me."

We company commanders were empowered to award only minor punishments, such as confinement to barracks or fines for loss of kit, and the cases with which we could not deal were now paraded before the Colonel. These were generally quickly disposed of, after which he turned his attention to routine matters of daily administration, writing reports and so on. Except the Adjutant, who was the commanding officer's personal staff officer, the rest of us had nothing to do, but we were not permitted to leave before the Colonel, in case he might wish to see us. It was a time-wasting procedure, but in theory we were supposed to occupy ourselves in furthering our military knowledge. I found the *Manual of Indian Military Law* unsatisfying for daily reading and soon fell into the habit of bringing a book more to my taste.

After the Colonel left his office, usually between midday and one o'clock, we were free for the rest of the day. There was no obligation to attend the afternoon parades, but if we did it was an unwritten law that we did not appear in uniform. Most of us spent the time playing tennis or squash; sometimes we would go down to the parade-ground and play football with our men. It was a game of which I knew nothing, but I learned enough to act as an occasional referee.

Dinner in mess was at eight; it was regarded as a parade, a ritual rather than a meal. In the early evening while we were passing the time in our various ways each of our personal servants would be making ready for this big event of the day; preparing the bath and laying out the requisite clothes. But this laconic statement gives no idea of what was involved.

In the first place, water was not laid on in any of the bungalows and had to be brought by hand, in some cases from as far as half a mile, by a *bhisti*, or member of the caste of water-

carriers. It had then to be heated over a charcoal fire out in the garden and thence carried into the bathroom, which was an evil-smelling little cubicle opening off the bedroom, with another door giving access to the garden. It contained, besides an oval-shaped zinc tub, an old-fashioned commode, or "thunder box" as these objects were called in India. There was no drainage system in Lansdowne, so besides the *bhisti* each of us had also to employ the services of a *mehtar*, or sweeper, who squatted outside the door at stated intervals, an arrangement that in the interests of sanitation encouraged a certain regularity in one's habits. The bath-water, after it had been used, was removed again by hand and used to irrigate the garden.

As one emerged from the bathroom the bearer stood ready with a set of clean underclothes. In the economic conditions of today, when one has to pretend that a dirty shirt will appear clean enough to wear once more, I find it odd to remember that in India it was customary to change even one's underclothing several times a day. It was a hygienic necessity in the humid plains, but in places such as Lansdowne, which had a European climate for much of the year, it was an affectation. Looking through an old trunk the other day I was surprised to discover that I still possess no fewer than twenty evening shirts.

Mess uniform consisted of so-called overalls, skin-tight braided black trousers strapped down under patent-leather Wellington boots. With these were worn a heavily braided and embroidered bottle-green cloth waistcoat and a short Eton jacket. This last was frogged, like a Hussar's jacket, and had a high, stiffened collar which was kept in place by a loop which fastened under the necktie. This outfit was worn with a starched shirt, a stiff linen collar without turned-down points and a special kind of black satin bow-tie. I well remember when I went to the regimental tailors in London to be fitted with this finery and complained to the tailor that it felt uncomfortable when I sat down. "You may not be aware, sir," the fitter said, "that mess dress is not meant to be sat down in."

It was, at any rate in theory, a very smart and fetching

costume. Unfortunately, to achieve the right effect one needed the slim hips and long, straight legs of a ballet-dancer. When worn by steatopygous field-officers, or even by captains spreading into middle age, its effect was grotesque.

Thus encased we made our way to the mess each night, there to await the arrival of the senior dining member. It would have been an absurd costume even in more civilised conditions. But in Lansdowne many of the bungalows were some way from the mess building, to reach which entailed a scramble of anything up to twenty minutes along a rough and hilly path, often in pitch darkness and, because there was no street-lighting, carrying a hurricane lantern. Officers in uniform are not permitted to carry umbrellas, but during the monsoon, when it sometimes rained for days without stopping, this prohibition was tacitly disregarded unless some visiting general happened to be dining that night.

There is a superstition that tobacco-smoke impairs the taste of wine. Because of this no smoking was permitted in the ante-room during the thirty minutes before dinner was served. Although it was assumed that sherry was the only possible aperitif a gentleman would care to drink, there was already, even in our conservative society, a certain relaxation in this respect. In any case our sherry, necessarily fortified and further impaired by its long journey through the Red Sea and across the hot plains of India, had long since lost its original bouquet; a few whiffs of smoke could hardly have affected it. Nevertheless the custom persisted.

We stood about uneasily waiting for the senior officer to arrive. As soon as he had finished his drink or indicated that he did not want one, the Goanese butler advanced towards him and announced that dinner was served, and we trooped into the other room in order of seniority.

We dined at a long mahogany table, decorated with a selection of the regimental plate, Victorian objects of some value but for the most part of hideous design. The president and his vice, offices which we took it in turns to fill for a week at a time, sat at opposite ends. Somebody once thought it would

be more conducive to a family atmosphere if instead of having the joint carved in the kitchen the president himself did the job. By ill luck this duty first devolved upon me. I had never carved a joint in my life and had no idea how to begin, but determined not to be defeated I attacked the tough lump of meat with such vigour that it slid from the dish on to the floor. Next night we resumed the former custom.

Dinner itself consisted of six courses; neither more nor less. The food was seldom good but it was always pretentious, prepared according to a formula laid down when the regiment was first formed and never since varied. It began with *hors d'œuvres;* either one sardine, one slice of tomato or half a hard-boiled egg arranged on a piece of soggy toast. The soup was generally thin and lacking in all flavour; it tasted like, and generally was, a mixture of hot water and Worcester sauce, but on guest-nights and other festive occasions it came out of a tin. If we were lucky the fish also was tinned; otherwise it was some nameless variety brought up from the plains and tasted like wet blotting-paper. It was generally served floating in a pool of glutinous anchovy sauce. After this the usual joint, garnished with tasteless Indian vegetables, a pudding (trifle or pink blancmange) and finally a savoury. The composition of this last depended upon the *hors d'œuvres.* If we had started with a slice of tomato we finished with a sardine and *vice versa.*

In contrast with this formality a stranger would have found our dinner-table conversation unexpectedly casual. In Rifle regiments, as opposed to those of the Line, it is customary, except on parade, for officers to address one another by their Christian names; even the commanding officer, if one had known him before his promotion to the rank of colonel, was so addressed in the mess. In practice the degree of permitted familiarity depended upon one's own seniority and position in the regiment, and we soon learned how far to go with each individual. Conversation became like a game with extremely elaborate rules, of which the ramifications were almost endless. It was possible, for instance, to manifest one's dislike of

an unpopular senior either by treating him with an icy and formal politeness or with exaggerated friendliness.

Serious topics were tacitly debarred from dinner-table conversation; it was not permissible to discuss religion, politics, or anything to do with our profession, and the inadvertent mention of a lady's name was punished by a round of drinks at the culprit's expense. But even in our unintellectual circle many of us were bored by the nightly small-talk about missed pheasants, fish caught, and how the latest recruit to the football team was coming along at inside-right.

At one time, for a period of about a year, we had a battery commander as an honorary member of the mess. Geoff Hill was a charming man and we all grew very fond of him. He had one weakness: a passion for telling extremely long-winded anecdotes, all of which were concerned with his prowess as a sportsman. There were only some six of them and during the first month of his stay we went through the repertoire several times, since he invariably took advantage of a lull in the conversation to embark upon one or other of them. We decided that somehow he must be curbed, and from the moment we put the plan into operation our table-talk acquired an abnormal hilarity. Each of us selected one of the stories and the game was to get him to tell it. There was never any difficulty about this, but the real problem was to wean Geoff away, by means of suitable interruption, from the story on which he had begun and make him turn to that in which, so to speak, one held the rights. On a really successful evening he was prevented from telling any one story in its entirety, but if he did get to the end of it each of us stood the winner a drink. I believe he never discovered the reason for his popularity as a raconteur.

As soon as the last course was finished the table-cloth was removed and the mess sergeant brought in the wine, a decanter each of port, madeira and marsala, which he put down in front of the president. The latter solemnly removed the stoppers, sniffed the wine to make sure that it was still drinkable and then pushed the decanters to his left. In this way they continued clockwise round the table, after which a lump of burning

charcoal in a silver holder would be placed at the side of the senior officer present. When he had lighted his cigarette the rest of us could do likewise and were free to leave the table.

On Saturday, which was guest-night and attended by most of the married officers, who did not normally dine in mess, it was obligatory to drink the Sovereign's health in wine. Moreover, it was not permissible to leave the dinner-table until the senior member, usually the Colonel, himself got up. If he happened to be a man who liked several glasses of port, it would often be as late as eleven o'clock before we adjourned to the ante-room. As soon as the port had been circulated the regimental pipers were called in, to play as they walked round and round the table. I have never at any time been able to appreciate the mournful squeals of the bagpipe, and when this instrument is played in a small closed room the effect is almost intolerable. But somehow I learned to support it.

The only break in this nightly routine occurred on Sundays, when, instead of dining, we had supper. The meal itself was exactly the same as on other nights, but it was permissible to go into the dining-room without waiting for anyone else. Instead of mess-dress we wore civilian clothes, but since this meant putting on a dinner-jacket and starched shirt we might just as well have dined in uniform. In those days it was generally considered that no gentleman would wear a soft shirt with a turned-down collar, but some years later all criticism was silenced when the Prince of Wales adopted this sensible custom, which had formerly been restricted to cads, bounders and Americans.

There was also a club in Lansdowne, where most of the married officers and their wives spent the evenings, playing tennis, gossiping and drinking. Few of us bachelors went there, and those who did were slightingly referred to as "poodle-fakers," men who could not do without female society. The club was situated some fifteen hundred feet below my bungalow, so I seldom went there, although membership was obligatory. During my service I suppose I paid in subscriptions rather more than a hundred pounds.

The long, bony ridge on which Lansdowne was situated was in itself a place of great natural beauty, and although it had so long been a military cantonment it still retained much of its pristine condition. Ilex trees grew everywhere, and the undergrowth was so thick that during the rainy season it had constantly to be cut away lest the paths should disappear. I always felt that, like the British community who lived there, Lansdowne itself was fighting a losing battle; a slight relaxation and the whole place would have reverted to jungle.

Sometimes, for weeks at a stretch, we were enveloped in clouds and the atmosphere was damp and heavy. It was particularly hard on books, which soon acquired a musty smell, and anything made of leather became mildewed overnight. But when the seasonal rains came to an end, towards the latter part of September, the place was transformed. The dampness disappeared and all the world, or so it seemed, was visible; it was all the more startling because it happened suddenly, without warning, like a miracle. To the north there was now an uninterrupted view of the tangled hills and valleys of Garhwal, all blue and purple in their autumn clarity, and beyond, in the ultimate distance, the gleaming line of the Himalayas looking slightly unreal, as though painted on a backdrop. They were in fact about a hundred-and-fifty miles away, but the atmosphere was now so clear that they appeared to be within a couple of days' easy walking distance. At sunset they sometimes glowed long after the intervening valleys had been deserted by the sun, and then they took on an appearance of theatrical unreality. The country between us and the snows was one of the most beautiful districts in all India, primitive and hardly changed during all the years of British rule. But because it was on our doorstep few of us troubled to go there, preferring to spend our holidays in more distant parts.

To the south we had an equally uninterrupted view of the great plains. Looking down upon them from our hilltop served to remind us that we were apart from India; in it, but not of it, detached from what went on there.

It is understandable that the exile should wish to surround

himself with familiar things, but there was something pathetic about our feeble efforts to grow English flowers. In Lansdowne the soil was almost entirely composed of mica-schist, and any sort of garden could be made only by carting many tons of leaf-mould from distant forests. The result was hardly worth the trouble, since we never produced anything better than a few rather stunted sweet peas and some sickly roses which had no scent. Cosmos grew like a weed, although it is not, I believe, indigenous; some of the gardens were completely filled with it and there were clumps growing wild on the hillsides. Had we confined ourselves to the local flora we could have made gardens of fantastic beauty. Orchids and rhododendrons flourished and there was a great variety of ferns and flowering mosses. But we spurned them; they were Indian and therefore out of place in this artificial little home from home.

Soon after I rejoined the regiment I was summoned to attend a mess-meeting. We used to meet periodically to examine the accounts, decide on the wines and spirits to be ordered from England and deal with other routine matters. But this was a special meeting, the controversial nature of which could not be sensed from the agenda. There was only one item on it: "To consider and if necessary revise the list of newspapers and periodicals provided for the use of members of the mess." The Colonel himself would be in the chair.

We subscribed to most of the illustrated weeklies, of which the most popular were the *Sketch* and the *Tatler*. It was often jocularly said that if a photograph of any of us appeared in either of these papers it would be pasted up in the mess lavatory. In point of fact it would have been a severe blow to the pride of any Lansdowne resident if, at the time of marriage, his picture did not appear among the smiling nitwit faces, male and female, which are still printed with depressing regularity in both these papers. The transgressor would of course be twitted when he returned from leave, and I remember with amusement that the excuse was always the same; it gave pleasure to his wife and her relations.

We also took in the *Field*, *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *New Statesman and Nation*. The *Field* is without doubt an excellent paper of its kind and a mine of information about country pursuits. Most of us, however, came from middle-class professional families and had little or no experience of the matters described; and certainly none of us lived in the kind of semi-stately homes, illustrated descriptions of which were a feature of the paper. But the *Field* was regarded as an earnest of the sort of life we should like to lead if ever we came into money, and to be seen reading it by one's seniors was an excellent method of acquiring merit; it proved conclusively that one had the right ideas.

The *New Statesman* was the cause of this special meeting. How we came to subscribe to it I never discovered, but I imagine it must have been ordered by one of our temporary wartime colleagues; and since nobody ever bothered to read it the subscription had been allowed to continue. The Colonel, it now appeared, had happened to look through a copy and discovered to his horror that it was subversive; it was in fact so bloody red that it was the most bloody paper he had ever seen, and how the hell did it come to be in our mess? Hence this meeting to decide what should take its place.

During the next few days it might have been thought that the *New Statesman* was pornographic, so marked was the eagerness with which we now read it. Opinion became divided almost equally between those who unhesitatingly felt that the filthy rag should be banished from the mess, and those who thought its political ideas so ludicrous that they amounted to humour; they were unlikely to influence any reasonable person, but they were extremely funny, and for this reason our subscription ought to be continued. I have never at any time been the least interested in politics, so I was in no way offended by what appeared to be the mildly left-wing attitude of the paper, but I discovered to my surprise that its book-reviews and criticisms of the arts were good; and when we discontinued our subscription I took out one of my own. It was at this time that I acquired a habit I have never lost:

of turning first to the back pages of the weeklies, where the literary material is to be found, and working forward until brought to a stop by the boredom of the political articles in the front of the paper.

We had now to consider a substitute for the *New Statesman*, but on this opinion was divided. In the end it fell to the Colonel to use his casting vote, with the result that an order was sent off to our newsagent in London requesting *La Vie Parisienne*. It was a paper the Colonel remembered to have enjoyed in his youth. Besides, so he said, in our position we ought to keep ourselves in touch with what was going on in Europe. After the first few weeks it was as little read as its predecessor; the slang in which many of its jokes were written was beyond the understanding of most of us.

# CHAPTER TEN

WHILE the regiment was still in Palestine I had often heard references to a certain mysterious Mrs Fizzer; indeed it seemed impossible to talk of Lansdowne without bringing her name into the conversation.

When eventually we returned she was, I suppose, not more than sixty, but in our youthful and active community she seemed already like a museum-piece. Her husband, Major Bateman-Champain (a member, I believe, of a famous cricketing family), had joined the regiment in 1891, and after he died in 1907 his widow had stayed on in Lansdowne. By virtue of her long connection with the Third Gurkhas she had gradually become a sort of self-appointed guardian of ancient custom; and although, as the widow of a former officer, she was not entitled to any particular consideration, nobody questioned her position as the leader of local society. A few of the more senior wives resented her usurpation of their own supremacy, but none openly challenged her prerogative always to be escorted into dinner by the senior officer present. According to one's point of view she was either the salt of the earth (a brave little woman struggling to keep up her standards) or one of its greater menaces (an interfering old bitch).

In any case it was upon her that one's first call had to be made. Only the Colonel, who had known her husband, addressed her as Nell: by the few remaining pre-war officers she was called Mrs Fizzer to her face, but to the rest of us this familiarity was not permitted.

She would have been horrified if anyone had described her as a marriage-broker, but in a sense that is what she was. In the old days it was a common custom for the wives of British officials to invite such of their female relatives as had not

succeeded in finding a husband to spend a cold-weather season in India. Doubtless the invitation was not couched in these exact terms, but everybody was well aware that in India, where there was always a scarcity of female society and a preponderance of lusty young men, a girl, however unattractive, could be almost certain of receiving a proposal. It depended upon her private income and her looks (in that order) whether or not she married into a "good" regiment; but if towards the end of the season it seemed that she was aiming too high, it was nearly always possible to fall back upon either the Ordnance or the Indian Army Service Corps. These two most necessary branches of the establishment were in my time officered almost entirely either by men who were considered socially undesirable by the regiments to which they had been first posted, or could not afford the accepted standard of expenditure on sport and entertainment. In fact both corps contained some of the most professionally competent officers in the entire Indian Army, but by the regiments they were despised and snubbed; we regarded them as tradesmen.

But to return to Mrs Fizzer. She was, to use a now outmoded phrase, by birth a lady, and while she possessed the virtues (and they were many) of her class, long residence in India had turned her into a snob; she was far more conscious of her birthright than the most caste-ridden Brahman. She was the type who would have behaved magnificently in the Mutiny; indeed I used often to imagine her defending the Lucknow Residency singlehanded, shooting down all comers. When she approved of a man she would describe him as "full of spunk." She was an admirable if unsympathetic character; and while she belonged to a society that even in the Twenties was already long outmoded there was nothing bogus about her. Her life was largely devoted to the keeping up of standards which to her were still real. In this she differed from most army wives, whose devotion was to standards they had never known.

I think she had no private income other than her pension, but she owned her bungalow, and in those days living in

Lansdowne was very cheap. To help her out she generally had one or two paying-guests staying with her. The fiction was that these young ladies, mostly the daughters of various relatives, were finishing off their education by seeing a little of India before settling down to a life of country pursuits at home. Mrs Fizzer was however so skilled that, at any rate in my time, none of these maidens failed to catch her man; nor did she ever find it necessary to have recourse to either of the Service corps. Many of the girls married into the regiment, so that even before the war the Third Gurkhas was already a little inbred.

It was her custom, after the necessary call had been paid, to invite one to afternoon tea. On this first occasion no other guest was present and the conversation invariably took the form of a searching interrogation into the visitor's antecedents, upbringing, school and so on. It was generally believed that retention in the regiment depended largely upon Mrs Fizzer's recommendation. My own first meeting with her was disastrous. I had been warned of its implications and in due course I set off wearing my best blue suit, carrying gloves and cane.

While I was still at Darbhanga I had acquired a bull-terrier pup whose manners, since it had been brought up in a tented camp, were not of the best. It was now almost fully grown and was moreover somewhat ferocious. Naturally I had not brought it with me on this occasion and had instructed my servant not to let it out of his sight until I returned.

I arrived at the bungalow a little early, but after I had paced about outside, waiting for four o'clock to strike, I strolled towards the porch and coughed, the usual signal to denote the arrival of a guest not yet on familiar terms with the household. I was shown immediately into the drawing-room. It was overcrowded with bric-à-brac and contained a great many photographs, some of them of royalty. One, in an elaborate silver frame, portrayed my hostess wearing the dress in which she had been presented to Queen Victoria.

She was already seated by the tea-table, and by her side I noticed one of those tiered wicker stands, piled with a variety

of sandwiches and fancy cakes. After shaking hands she said that tea would be ready in a minute. Meanwhile we would have a look at the garden. We were not out of the room for more than ten minutes, but the moment we returned it was obvious that a major disaster had occurred. The cake-stand had been knocked over and except for a few crumbs its contents had disappeared. In the middle of the room was my bull-terrier looking bloated and guilty. He sat there wagging his tail, much to the danger of the surrounding objects.

I was already sufficiently discomfited and wondering how best to apologise when the situation suddenly worsened. My faithful dog, excited at having tracked down his master, now saw fit to vomit the entire contents of his gobbled feast on to the carpet. From that moment I conceived a real admiration for Mrs Fizzer, for angry though she undoubtedly was, she not only dismissed the incident with a smile but made me feel as though she had actually wanted it to happen. We became good friends, but I was never, I think, thought of as a possible suitor for one of her young ladies; indeed I do not remember ever being asked to her home specifically to meet one of them.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the Third Gurkhas, and I think in most regiments, it was customary to ask the commanding officer's permission to marry. In theory the request was little more than a polite avowal of intention, but with junior officers it was taken seriously.

Marriage is obviously the concern only of the two people involved. Nevertheless it was felt desirable, and it is not difficult to concede the point, that in a small and closed community such as ours a wife should be socially acceptable. It was a snobbish attitude. On the other hand it protected a young wife from the more cruel type of social onslaught to which, after a few years in the country, so many Anglo-Indian wives devoted a disproportionate part of their days. It was always possible to disregard the sanction, but this was seldom satisfactory; either the regimental ladies succeeded in breaking up the marriage, or the husband's position became so uncomfortable that he was obliged to apply for a transfer.

It is not, I think, an exaggeration to say that the decline of human relations between Indians and British dates from the arrival of the Englishwoman in the country. Anyone who has made even a cursory study of early Anglo-Indian memoirs cannot but be struck by this fact. The Darbhanga district, whence I had recently returned, was one of the earliest parts to be occupied by the British and its derelict bungalows offered much evidence of the social life of those days. In the corner of nearly every compound is a small building standing apart from the main bungalow and still known locally as the *bibi khana* or wife's apartment. These Indian mistresses of indigo-planters and government officials were often women of good family, and their influence, which seems in many cases

to have been considerable, was nearly always good. And while the custom presumably arose for reasons of expediency it seems often to have resulted in a relationship of sincere affection; of this there is ample evidence in some of the quaintly-worded but touching inscriptions on the overgrown tombstones of deserted cemeteries scattered throughout the province of Bihar and doubtless also in other parts. It is from these unions that the best Eurasian families trace their descent.

Even in my time the custom had not entirely disappeared; but there is a great difference between a practice which has social sanction and one that has to be carried on in secret. The furtive relationships with Indian women, which were the only kind possible in later days, were I should say positively harmful; either they were conducted with prostitutes or with girls who wished to further the interests of their menfolk and did not hesitate to descend to blackmail for this purpose.

To the best of my knowledge nothing of this kind went on in Lansdowne; not because we were unnaturally continent, but because on our remote hilltop it would have been almost impossible to make a suitable arrangement. Besides, many of us genuinely believed that the regular punishment of the body by means of excessive exercise in games and other manly sports was a sufficient antidote to sex. Some sort of uneasy sublimation was achieved, but nearly always at the expense of mental stability. Many of these muscular puritans were excellent regimental officers but most of them, probably because of their unnatural continence, developed sadistic tendencies which subsequent marriage was too late to eliminate.

Our own regimental wives were fairly typical of their class. Most of them came from decent professional or near-upper-class families, and if they had remained in their proper environment would have led moderately useful if undistinguished lives. Some of them had been expensively brought up, but I can think of only one, a Cambridge graduate, who was in any sense educated. Nearly all of them possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of *Debrett* (in whose pages few of them were listed) and could recite the Order of Precedence by heart. That they

developed into peevish termagants was not entirely their fault; it was due to the absurd conventions of Anglo-Indian society.

I often wondered how they managed to get through the days. Each one had a full staff of servants: cook, pantry-boy, personal maid, water-carrier, sweeper and gardener. The husband, too, had his personal body-servant, who besides looking after his master acted as major domo of the establishment. The arrival of children was the occasion of further additions to the staff.

In theory the wife was responsible for running the household, but only an exceptional one had the strength of character to wrest this power from her husband's bearer, who had generally been in a commanding situation before she appeared on the scene. Manoeuvring for position was the usual cause of the first domestic friction. The best Indian servants do not submit gracefully to taking orders from a woman, especially when she is new to the country and has not bothered to learn the language. Generally the wife capitulated and settled down to a life of frustrating idleness.

There were many things in which these women might have interested themselves: improving the standards of Anglo-Indian cooking, for example. The meals to which one was treated in private homes were replicas of those we ate in the mess; and although it would have been unthinkable for a *memsahib* actually to prepare a meal, she might at least have instructed her cook. This however would have necessitated some knowledge of the language, which few of them troubled to acquire. Even Mrs Fizzer, who had spent the greater part of her life in the country, knew only enough to give simple orders. Like every other Englishwoman I met in India she was convinced that Hindustani was a language composed entirely of imperatives; it had never occurred to her that some millions of people habitually used it for the purpose of carrying on a rational conversation.

Gurkhas, as I have already noted, do not normally talk Hindustani but during the years of their military service they naturally acquire a slight knowledge of it. This does not

apply to their wives, of whom several hundred were normally resident in Lansdowne. These simple women from the mountains of Nepal could have been greatly helped by instruction on such matters as elementary hygiene and child welfare, but nothing of the sort was ever attempted by our regimental ladies.

Dinner-parties in private houses, especially when the hostess was the wife of a junior officer, were conducted with a formality that made our entertainments in the mess seem like a bear-garden. One always dressed, but that was a nightly routine to which we were in any case accustomed. Each place at the dinner-table was provided with a card on which the guest's name was inscribed, and it was considered of paramount importance to seat the company in strict order of seniority. In peacetime the date of every officer's first commission was common knowledge; it could always be confirmed by reference to the *Army List*, a copy of which was to be found in most homes. When I first arrived in Lansdowne conditions had not yet returned to normal; many officers had still not been permanently posted, so that their exact status was in doubt. Thus it was that on the day following a dinner-party I received a note of apology from my hostess of the night before. It appeared that an officer junior to me by several months had been given the place of honour on the lady's right hand; moreover it had also been discovered that I was senior to her own husband. She realised, she wrote, the gravity of her social misdemeanour but begged me to take no action. I should of course have been justified in complaining to the Colonel of her husband's regiment. But since her husband himself was still on probation she asked me to forget the matter.

Another form of entertainment in which we were all expected to play a part was the Lansdowne Ladies Rifle Club. This had originally been started by the Third Gurkhas with the double object of giving the women something to do and at the same time teaching them to shoot. Meetings were held every Wednesday afternoon and were made the excuse for an elaborate picnic tea at which the bachelors of the regiment were

expected to do the honours and to give instruction in the use of the small-bore rifle.

Mrs Fizzer was a great supporter of the club. She herself did not get down on the firing-point but she was adept at seeing that each of her various protégées was instructed by the particular young officer she had marked down as a potential husband.

Sometimes we had shooting matches; a team of officers would compete against one of ladies. The standard of marksmanship was not high, but the preliminaries were much enjoyed by some of our elders; it was obvious that the permitted bottom-pattings, smoothing of skirts and so on, necessary prelude to settling the amazons down on the firing-point, gave a great deal of pleasure.

I do not believe anyone ever took advantage of the situation. Social life in the Third Gurkhas was odd in many respects, but our morals were never lax. During the whole of my time there was never even a suspicion of scandal; and while it was obvious enough that some of my colleagues were neither happily nor suitably married, the question of divorce never arose. It certainly gave us a cohesion, a solidarity rare in Anglo-Indian society. And in some indefinable way it contributed to the undoubted efficiency of our regiment.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

THIS, then, was the way of life to which I appeared to have committed myself, and I began increasingly to wonder how long I could sustain it. My unorthodox education and the fact that I had not come into the army through Sandhurst made it impossible for me unhesitatingly to accept either the disciplinary or the social standards upon which regimental life depended. I never openly rebelled, but I felt a constant need to guard against being forced into the conventional mould. It was not easy to resist a certain subtle pressure; the herd viewpoint of my brother-officers. I was by this time on intimate terms with most of them; but it was the intimacy that comes not from community of interests but merely from propinquity. With few of them should I have been likely to strike up a friendship in other circumstances, and with all but one or two I have long since lost touch.

My problem was really very simple: should I remain and succumb to these various pressures, or should I send in my papers and thus retain my independence? The decision would have been easier had I been possessed of adequate private means or been trained for any profession. Meanwhile I was being sufficiently well paid for doing very little; it seemed absurd to forfeit these solid advantages for some shadowy better existence.

In the event I decided to postpone my decision. We had recently been told that we were to spend the coming cold-weather season at Delhi and I thought it would at least be amusing to pass a few months in the capital before I retired from the Indian scene.

Before the war the regiment had seldom left Lansdowne except for periodic winter manoeuvres in the plains. I had

gathered from the more truthful of our older officers that these so-called manoeuvres were in effect little more than a series of shooting-camps (I am using the word in its sporting sense) organised on a gigantic scale. Certain military exercises were undertaken, but they seem to have been subsidiary to the social activities. Now that peace had returned it was assumed, not altogether hopefully, that this happy state of affairs would be resumed.

We marched down from Lansdowne by easy stages, spending the days in mimic warfare of a kind that bore no resemblance to my own experiences in the war.

New Delhi, as the official part of the city is called, was still in the early stages of its construction and gave little indication of its later magnificence. In those days there used to be a general exodus of government officials to the temperate climate of Simla as soon as the hot weather began. Most of the buildings in New Delhi had accordingly been designed only for winter comfort. The Viceroy's House had been intended to dominate the scene, but as this gigantic piece of town-planning neared completion it became clear that it would not do so. The surrounding dwellings, designed to be occupied by mere senior officers of the Indian Civil Service and Army Headquarters, dwarfed it; instead of a brooding giant it was no more than a slightly bigger and more pretentious brother. There was only one solution and it was immediately adopted: to lower the roofs of the nearby houses, much to the discomfort of those who, now that Simla has been given up, must occupy them throughout the year.

We were camped at Kingsway, some miles from the centre of the city. Motors could not be used in Lansdowne, so we now found ourselves isolated, without means of transport. We happened however to see an advertisement in the local newspaper to the effect that a number of Ford trucks, surplus war stores, were being sold for practically nothing, and we telegraphed for one. It turned out to be an aged crock and we had to spend a considerable sum on it before it could be driven away from the railway station where it had arrived on a float.

All four tyres had been worn down to the treads and there were no tools, not even a simple jack.

It was a temperamental machine and always difficult to start. Nevertheless it carried us for several thousand miles before we finally abandoned it by the side of a road, there quietly to die. There were no seats at the back, so to make it more comfortable we padded it with a couple of mattresses. These took up very little room and it was easily possible to cram six or seven people into the contraption. In this manner, dressed in our best party suits, we made our way one afternoon to the finals of the polo tournament, the biggest social event of the entire Delhi season. One of our number, by dint of carefully planned calling upon the right people, had begun to make his mark and had reached the stage when he could afford to refuse all invitations other than those from the high and mighty. As we approached the ground and observed the packed rows of luxury cars he became decidedly uneasy and begged us to stop so that he could get down and make his own way to the stands; he was in a panic lest his grand friends should see him arriving in our humble vehicle.

During the winter in Delhi it used to be possible to see the most astonishing collection of motor-cars in the world. Most of them belonged to the maharajas and other potentates who generally made a point of coming in for the polo and horse-show weeks. Most of them were Rolls Royces, but of a kind seldom seen elsewhere. Some had solid gold or silver fittings and to accord with their owners' peculiar tastes were painted in the most garish colours, electric green or brilliant puce. The most extraordinary car I ever saw had a plain aluminium body which had been entirely covered in transfer pictures of the kind children stick into books. From a distance it seemed to be suffering from measles.

Our military duties in Delhi were not onerous. We had been selected to provide the internal guards at Viceregal Lodge, and beyond practising the men in their duties we had little to do. Each of the numerous sentry-points had, however, to be visited at irregular intervals throughout the day and

night by the Company Commander whose men provided the guards.

Although conditions were entirely peaceful, there was an unspoken fear that civil disturbance might flare up again at any moment. Because of this it was felt necessary to post an armed sentry outside each of the principal bedrooms in Viceregal Lodge. It was considered a great honour to have been chosen to guard the Viceroy's person and every man, before coming on duty, used to spend hours cleaning and polishing his equipment. Unfortunately the intended effect of ultimate military smartness was ruined, for so as not to disturb the occupants sentries were required to wear, instead of boots, a pair of shapeless bedroom slippers.

Once, when I was on my rounds, I noticed a pair of polished field boots together with a pair of lady's evening shoes outside one of the doors. I asked the sentry to tell me his duties. "To see that nobody takes these boots away," he said, "and if they do, to shoot them at sight."

In the evenings we generally went to the club, where one could play tennis and bridge, get comfortably tight or discuss the happenings described in the *Tatler* or the *Sketch*. There was also a small library where, on the shelf allotted to recent books, I found a copy of *Henry Esmond*, its pages still uncut. In the lavatory there was a large printed notice, the implications of which have puzzled me ever since; "Gentlemen," it read, "are requested not to remove the moth-balls from the urinals."

At this time there used to be a place known as the Turkish Baths, but I am told it no longer exists. Although it was possible to have a bath there, the place was in fact a brothel and much frequented by junior officers. I went there only once, late at night, after a particularly rowdy guest-night in the mess. When we got there the place was closed, but the proprietor, an amiable bearded Moslem, said that he would soon prepare some entertainment.

He showed us into a large dimly-lit room, bare except for some plain wooden benches ranged round the walls. Paraffin bracket-lamps hung from the ceiling, and at one end of the

room there was a large oleograph of the King. The place smelt of steam.

A bottle of cheap bazaar-whisky and some thick kitchen glasses were produced, and very soon the girls began to arrive. Most of them seemed to be about fifteen. They came in stark-naked and looked as though they had just been dragged from their sleep, as indeed they probably had. They were very dirty and smelt strongly of scent. I was surprised to notice that their pubic hair had been shaved.

I have seldom seen such joyless faces as those of these sadly under-developed and ricketty children. The arrangement for overcoming their physical deficiencies was grotesque: each girl carried in her hand a bright pink brassière, padded so thickly that when it was put on it gave the appearance of swelling breasts. It was too much even for the more lascivious members of our party and we left in a sober mood.

Most of my brother-officers were keenly interested in sport and went off whenever they could for a week-end of shooting. To most normal healthy young Englishmen of the type who used to go into the army, life in India would have been intolerable but for the opportunity it offered for slaughter. For my part I had already seen more than enough to last me a lifetime, even though the victims were now to be only animals and birds. As a small child I lacked entirely the normal desire to kill things; now I found it utterly repugnant. But my attitude was inconsistent; I always found every kind of game delicious to eat. Nevertheless I can well understand that many people genuinely enjoy the thrill to be got from shooting. What I have always found incomprehensible is the snobbish attitude towards it: that to be disinterested in sport was, at any rate in the army, to be branded as no gentleman. It is to my discredit that I was at first weak enough to bow to the convention. Until I went to India I had neither handled a shot-gun nor cast a fly, but I now acquired the necessary battery. After a few fruitless week-ends I came to the conclusion that to stand waist-deep in muddy water, firing at wretched little birds the size of sparrows, was a poor way to spend one's leisure;

also it quickly transpired that I was a very bad shot and seldom hit anything unless, like a peacock for instance, it happened to be sitting in a tree. This was a practice frowned upon by all true sportsmen, but much encouraged by the Gurkha orderlies who were my usual companions on these expeditions. Their interest lay entirely in the ensuing meal and not in the means by which it was obtained.

On one occasion I shot a number of what, in my ignorance, I assumed to be duck, and I was delighted that at last I could make a contribution to the game-register that was kept in the mess. The birds flew very slowly and hovered from time to time, so that it was easy even for me to bring them down. They were coots and quite uneatable. I was not hauled before the commanding officer for this breach of sportsmanship, but the Adjutant did see fit to tell me that he took a dim view of a man who did not recognise the difference between game-birds and carrion.

Later on I tried my luck with bigger game. Blackbuck were plentiful all round Delhi and it was easy to bag one at any time. But once was enough; I could not stomach the sight of its slowly glazing eyes, and its final spasms sickened me.

This was the end of my sporting adventures, although I always kept the necessary weapons by me. Their known possession was a means of saving face. However, I often went away on what were ostensibly shooting trips, since this was the one reason for which leave was invariably granted without question. What I actually did on these occasions was to let my orderlies go off shooting while I myself remained in camp, pottering about, enjoying the scenery or, more often, spending the day with a book.

But fishing I always enjoyed, largely because it took one to pleasant places. I gave it up only when I retired from India, and then for the most ridiculous reason: I could not bring myself to handle a fish, the touch of which made me almost physically sick. It was all right when there was always an orderly at hand to remove the fish from the hook, but I was unable to perform this service for myself. No doubt a

psychoanalyst could explain this absurd inhibition, but it never worried me. The sum total of every human personality contains many absurdities, although I do seem to have more than most.

Before leaving the subject of sport I must briefly recount my one and only attempt at pigsticking. I cannot for the life of me recall what induced me to try my hand at it, since I was always an indifferent and timid horseman; and pigsticking, unless the participant is absolutely fearless, can be a very dangerous sport.

I had borrowed for the occasion a flea-bitten grey stallion which, so its owner informed me, was experienced and easy to handle. At the beginning all went well. We started off at a leisurely walk and after penetrating into the scrub jungle, which abounds near Delhi, were ordered to wait while the army of beaters began their advance. The Master was a somewhat irascible cavalry colonel with whom I was previously unacquainted. From the general remarks which he now addressed to the waiting company I gathered that I had committed a breach of custom by appearing on a stallion. To give point to what he was saying my horse chose that very moment to give a loud whinny as it tried, unsuccessfully I am glad to record, to cover a nearby mare. "Get that bloody stallion under control," the Master roared; "and who the devil gave you permission to come out on a grey? Keep under cover, and don't let me see you again."

I have a confused memory of what happened next, for a few seconds later a pig broke cover and the chase was on. Although for the sake of appearances I carried a spear, I had not intended to do more than watch operations from a respectful distance. The friend who had lent me the horse had not disclosed that among its other peculiarities was a mouth with the consistency of iron, and before I realised what had happened I found myself well in the van. In an effort to control the brute I cast away my spear. The horse was already bolting and the combined pulling of both arms made not the slightest effect upon it. I was by this time level with the pair

who were on to the pig, and just as I passed them my mount chose suddenly to alter its course by swerving diagonally across their path, thus depriving them of their quarry. I was unable to heed their shouted abuse, but in any case I was by this time interested only in retaining my seat. We bolted on through the jungle for several more miles before it occurred to me that we had in fact described a vast semicircle and were now approaching the cantonments whence we had started. I should have liked to return in a more orderly manner, but the horse was still out of control and showed no signs of flagging. It took me straight to its stable, and to my final humiliation. The lintel of the door was on a level with my head, but fortunately I was wearing the customary thickly-padded helmet, which took the force of the crash. My knees had long since lost their power to grip, and as we collided with the stable-entrance I remained suspended for the fraction of a second and then, as the horse went on into its stall, landed neatly on my feet with a grace that would not have shamed a professional circus-rider. That day confirmed my belief, which I have never had any reason to change, that the horse is no more than a rather inefficient form of transport, only to be used when all else fails. Some years later I discovered that no less a person than Major-General Ironside, who at one time commanded our Division, shared my opinion, but in the India of those days the public admission of such a belief was looked upon as hardly less than treason.

It was in Delhi, too, that another youthful illusion was shattered. I suppose that most people are to some extent impressed by rank, and certainly the spectacle of a senior officer in uniform, his record of brave deeds and hard-fought campaigns displayed in patchwork lines across his chest, is an awe-inspiring sight, at any rate to the young.

We had spent the whole day carrying out a Divisional exercise which, for my own regiment, consisted in plodding aimlessly forward over fields of stubble with occasional halts in the pitiless sun. At the end of the day it was usual for the commanding general to summon all officers to some suitable

spot and address them on the success or otherwise of the manoeuvres.

We were tired and hot when the "Cease fire" bugle-call rang out over the countryside to announce the end of these mock hostilities. We still had about a mile to walk to get to the rallying point, and by the time we arrived there most of the other officers were already assembled. The Divisional Commander was a peppery little cavalryman who made no attempt to hide his contempt for other branches of the service. But he, too, was tired and hot and angry at having been kept waiting. As we crowded round in a nervous bunch to receive his exhortation he suddenly exploded. "Don't settle on me," he barked, "like flies on a lump of shit!" We retreated to a suitable distance, and while doing so I was delighted to hear an anonymous voice ask, with a fine touch of rhetoric, "Who's the lump of shit?"

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

At the end of the winter I had still not made up my mind whether to stay in the army. Despite the absurdities of some aspects of our time at Delhi, I had to admit to myself that much of it was pure enjoyment. All my life I have been affected more than most by the vagaries of weather, and it was a new and satisfying experience to savour the unbroken succession of sun-filled, cloudless days, followed inevitably by cold, dry, starlit nights. Besides, there was so much social life going on in the capital, so many people jockeying for positions on the Imperial dunghill, so many boring parties, that my absence from these scenes of gaiety was scarcely noticed. Far from arousing comment, it resulted in a certain popularity, since I was generally willing to take over guard-duty for anyone who would otherwise have had to refuse a coveted invitation. Nobody bothered me out of parade hours and I spent a great deal of time wandering about among the many historic sites near Delhi.

But it was urgent now to come to a decision. The Colonel had told us he had been informed privately that after the forthcoming summer the regiment would move to the North-West Frontier for a two-year spell of duty; and the few months I had previously spent there, during the closing stages of the Afghan campaign, had not left me with any desire to return.

I am by nature somewhat introspective and physically lazy, and although until middle age my life was almost entirely concerned with action, much of it violent, this was due to circumstance rather than choice. It must at any rate be obvious to anyone who has read this far that I had none of the qualities necessary for a successful military career. Why, then, did I decide to remain in the army?

To answer this question I must digress, and return once more to Lansdowne.

It was a lonely place at night, and in winter people had been known to come across a leopard prowling along the path. These creatures, if left alone, are not dangerous; generally they would bolt into the scrub long before one got near them. When darkness fell there was an eerie feeling about Lansdowne which even those with the strongest nerves admitted. There was also a well-authenticated ghost.

Our Gurkha soldiers, whose religion was little more than a nominal adherence to the Hindu faith which their Nepalese rulers had espoused, were by nature animistic. In their minds Lansdowne was peopled by spirits of every kind; each tree and rock was inhabited by one or other of them. None of us officers ever saw the ghost, but in my own time there was one occasion when, mounted upon a snow-white charger, it appeared to have inspected the regimental quarter-guard, a visitation duly entered in the guard-commander's log. The men believed absolutely in the existence of this apparition; and while we tried to explain it away as the effect of the swirling monsoon mists upon a primitive imagination, we were in fact considerably shaken. In any case nobody, if he could possibly avoid it, liked to walk about alone at night.

Part of our routine duties, which we undertook in turn, consisted in visiting the regimental sentries who were posted on the Ammunition Store, the Treasury and other points of importance. These places were some distance apart and the duty-officer was usually accompanied on his rounds by an orderly carrying a hurricane lantern.

Each officer, besides his staff of household servants, had a batman who polished his master's belts and other accoutrements, looked after his personal needs on parade and manoeuvres, and was available to take messages, chits as they were called, round the cantonment. It was from their batmen, too, that most young officers learned to speak the language. It was a coveted job, since its holder was excused from afternoon parades; moreover he not only had direct and informal

access to his company commander but accompanied him whenever he went on leave.

The choice of an orderly was entirely a personal affair, but it was generally felt right to select a married man of fairly long service; one of impeccable character who would be glad of the extra pay that went with the job. But even in those days I found the staid and worthy boring, and I was therefore in the habit of appointing to my service orderlies who were young and comely. The Gurkha fresh from the mountains is no respecter of persons, and I had already discovered, while I was still at the Recruiting Depot, that the free-and-easy conversation of such youngsters was not only much more amusing, but also more useful to one trying to master the language, than the respectful responses of the older men whose natural vivacity had been dulled by years of military discipline. They had a tendency to remain standing at attention and never tc speak except in answer to a question. They were regarded, as indeed they were, as the backbone of the regiment; but as companions they were crashing bores.

It was my week of duty and I had told Umar Sing to call for me at the mess, but since it was a Saturday and a guest-night it was after midnight before I could escape and start on my round of inspection. He had been waiting some time, and I supposed from his garrulity that he had been having a drink with the mess-orderlies, which was an accepted custom. It was in the middle of the monsoon and a continuous sheet of rain blotted out the landscape; only the steady drumming on a corrugated-iron roof warned us that we were passing near a bungalow. It took us more than an hour to squelch our way round the sodden paths, and by the time we got back to my bungalow I was tired and out of humour. I was wearing mess uniform, complete with sword and spurs, and I wondered what Messrs Hawkes would think if they could see my overalls now; from the knees downward they looked as though I had been swimming in them. My patent-leather Wellington boots, which even in those days cost ten guineas a pair, were ruined.

My servant had left an oil-lamp burning by the bedside

and as soon as we entered the room I turned it up. Umar Sing helped me out of my sodden clothes and I flung them over a chair. I put on pyjamas and a dressing-gown and then lit a cigarette and offered one to my orderly. He seemed to want to stay and chat, but I had had enough and soon dismissed him.

I went into the bathroom to brush my teeth, came back and took a book from the shelf and got into the unwelcoming bed. We always took elaborate precautions to keep our bedding dry at this season, but there was not much one could do about it; as usual, the sheets felt clammy. I read, as I always did, for half an hour or so, then turned out the lamp and composed myself for sleep.

I could not have been dozing for more than a few minutes when I was awakened by the sound of something being knocked over. I called out, but no voice answered. It was probably a cat, I thought, that had strayed into the room, but I struck a match to reassure myself. Umar Sing was standing beside the bed. "It's only me," he whispered as the match spluttered and died. I lay there in the darkness, fearful and incapable of speech. My body began to tremble with an unfamiliar terror, but before I could control it Umar Sing lay down and embraced me. I made no attempt to resist, and it was thus that I became aware of my true nature; an illiterate peasant boy from the mountains of Nepal had made manifest what to me, with my very different upbringing, had hitherto remained hidden. Thereafter I knew that my pleasure lay in the East.

It is odd that as a boy I never had a homosexual relationship, perhaps because I was not long enough at any school to form an intimate friendship. It was strange, too, that after this first experience I felt neither shame nor remorse; only relief at having discovered myself. I suppose that in those days I should, if asked, have denied my proclivities, especially since homosexuality was a subject that in the mess was sometimes referred to either with ribaldry or disgust. It was known to be common in India but was genuinely believed not to exist in

Nepal; indeed, its absence was felt to be one of the main differences between Gurkhas and other soldiers of the Indian Army. It gave them a manly superiority, like the British themselves, such as no mere Indian could hope to possess. In fact it was as common as in any other predominantly male society; nevertheless the myth persisted.

Many years later, at a time when we were serving in Waziristan, there were several courts-martial in the Brigade. They were a matter of pained surprise to some of the senior officers of the garrison, and I remember it being said with pride that this was something about which we Gurkha officers had no need to worry ourselves.

In Waziristan most officers, if they so wished, were able to get away at week-ends to visit their wives. This however did not prevent them from expressing their astonishment that in a remote and fortified camp, garrisoned by more than five thousand young and healthy men denied all female society, there should come to their notice a few instances of homosexuality. They still maintained that hard work, followed by a game of football, should be enough to keep anyone quiet.

Since I have seen fit to expose my nature I may as well, before dropping the subject, explain my own attitude towards homosexuality. It may be helpful to those many others who have at some time or other tried to grapple with the problem, concerning which there is, at any rate in this country, still so much ignorance and ill-founded opinion.

I neither defend nor condemn it, but the cult of homosexuality is extremely abhorrent to me. It is however important to distinguish between those, and they are many, to whom it is a fashionable if vicious perversion, in some cases a means of material advancement, and those others, among whom I include myself, normal in every other respect, who are congenitally incapable of sexual intercourse with the opposite sex.

Most of the second category, if they are intelligent and mentally stable, learn to accept their condition. They realise that even with medical help they can no more change it than they can cure a grave physical deformity. In fact medical

opinion is at present divided upon the matter, and it may be that in course of time some effective form of therapy may be discovered.

Those familiar with the works of André Gide may recollect that as a young man, much troubled by his abnormality, he was advised by his family doctor to marry. He did so with tragic results; not for him so much as for the wretched and sensitive woman who married him in ignorance. That was sixty years ago, and before the discoveries of Freud, but even today there are doctors who still advise this cruel and cowardly expedient. The one or two cases known to me have inevitably resulted in frustration for the unfortunate woman.

The alternative is absolute continence. It is in theory possible to sublimate the sexual urge into some other form of creative activity, and indeed certain exceptional and gifted people have succeeded in doing so. But the average human being, at any rate when young, is incapable of this discipline and cannot exist for long periods without some sort of sexual easement.

I have known a very small number of men who have been able to lead happy and useful lives in partnership with another of their own age. This possibility is however rare, for in my experience most homosexuals are unfortunately not attracted by men of their own generation. These latter, of which I myself am one, are not necessarily paederasts (I am here using the word in its correct Greek sense meaning lovers of boys), but they can find pleasure only in the company of those considerably younger than themselves. Such a relationship cannot be other than unsatisfactory and I have never known one to last for any length of time. I have always deplored the spectacle of a middle-aged man trying desperately, and generally unsuccessfully, to belie his age so as to retain the affections of a much young companion, and I early determined that come what might I would never become one of them.

And there was another difficulty. When I was younger I was lustful but unsatisfied; what I wanted, but never achieved, was love, although when I thought about it I was forced to the

conclusion that there was little difference between love and lust; both were consummated in the same way.

I was also greatly influenced by a chance re-reading of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which, when I had first come across it, had not had any particular effect upon me. I was by this time no longer a youth, and while the need for sexual enjoyment had become less urgent, it had by no means withered. Nevertheless I became obsessed with Tolstoy's views on sex, repugnant though they are to many people. They seemed to accord with vague ideas and doubts that had for long been smouldering in my mind. I came to believe that sexual passion was disruptive of civilised human relationships; the only successful and lasting love affair was one that was never consummated.

It was in these circumstances that I deliberately ceased all sexual activity. I was then in my early forties, and while I have always been possessed of a certain streak of masochism, inherited perhaps from my puritan forebears, I can say with complete honesty that I have never regretted this decision; it has resulted in neither frustration nor unhappiness. My subsequent life became calm and untroubled by petty jealousies or heart-searching, although many doubtless would describe it as dull. I take no credit for having been thus able to bring my emotions under control. It was not necessarily a mastery of self but, as I have often thought, may have been due to a certain superficiality of character. In any case it was achieved.

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EVERY autumn we celebrated the Hindu festival of Dassehra. Junketing went on for ten whole days, during which all normal work was suspended. It was primarily a religious celebration but it was accompanied by a great deal of drinking; indeed it would be fair to say that during these ten days few Gurkha members of the regiment were entirely sober.

The religious element of the proceedings was provided by Brahman priests imported for the occasion. They carried out their sacerdotal mutterings in a small tent pitched at one corner of the parade-ground where few, other than one or two religious fanatics, ventured to disturb them.

In the middle of the parade-ground a long canopy, formed from a line of tents laced together, was erected. It was furnished with a row of chairs and tables, decorated with vases filled with paper flowers. Here the Viceroy's commissioned officers (so called to distinguish them from the British officers, who held the Sovereign's commission), the Subadars and Jemadars, sat in varying degrees of stupor throughout most of the ten days. Few absented themselves for more than an hour or so of sleep and the hardier ones stayed on throughout the nights, slumped in their chairs, getting up only when nature demanded. It was an occasion when they were thought to be on trial, not by us, but by the other ranks of the regiment; it was a time of testing, an exhibition of manly ability to consume enormous quantities of rum and if necessary to do without sleep for long periods.

Those of us who had not taken the opportunity to escape on leave were expected to pay an occasional visit to the orgies, but even the warmest Gurkha-admirers among us had to admit

that Dassehra was an occasion when the regiment was best left alone; it was desirable not to know what went on.

In front of the Gurkha officers' enclosure the whole regiment—men, women and children—gathered in a semicircle. A party of drummers squatted at one side, beating with the flat of their hands a complicated and continuous rhythm. Sometimes the noise rose to a frenzied crescendo, at others it fell to a quiet pulsating, but it never entirely ceased. For much of the time the onlookers chanted uneasily, like infrequent visitors to a Christian church who have half-forgotten the hymns they learned as children. This maudlin droning had an almost hypnotic effect and there was something strangely barbaric about it. Whatever its origin, and nobody was able to enlighten me, it was obviously the survival of some ancient Hindu ritual, but much modified by the Lamaist observances which still lingered in many of the remote valleys of Nepal.

The music however, although it was thought to have religious significance, was primarily an accompaniment to the dance. In India dancing is probably the most important element in the cultural life of the people. There are many different schools, and the art, which is both esoteric and extremely sophisticated, requires dedication from an early age. So far as I know this is not so in Nepal, where dancing is regarded merely as a social accomplishment. The situation is similar to that in the Highlands of Scotland, with whose inhabitants the Gurkhas have more than a little in common. But whereas in the Highlands, and indeed also in India, both men and women dance, in Nepal it is regarded as an exclusively male activity. Sometimes a soldier's drunken wife would attempt to join in the dancing, but she would immediately be driven away by the shocked and outspoken comments of those watching; from a Gurkha point of view a woman who danced was regarded as a prostitute.

In the regiment a great deal of time was devoted to selecting and training our dancers. Ordinarily the men would perform in whatever clothes they happened to be wearing, but for the big festivals, such as Dassehra or Diwali, they appeared in

female costume. Most of them were selected for their youth and feminine appearance, but some of the most accomplished dancers were older men. Many years later, when I was living in Japan, I noticed the same thing in the *Kabuki* theatre. The comparison with such a highly professional form of entertainment is hardly valid; nevertheless it was interesting to observe that the most famous interpreters of female roles in the *Kabuki* were nearly always elderly men.

The dances, which seemed to me to demand little talent, were of the simplest kind: endless gyrations carried out in time to the drumming. There was nothing erotic about them, but the performers themselves were often the subject of ribald comment. In my experience the proportion of inverts in Gurkha society is neither higher nor lower than in any other, but it was inevitable that such men should be selected to dance. Their proclivities, which were well known, were sometimes remarked by those whose appetites were more orthodox, but never in a spirit of condemnation.

From time to time a hush would fall upon the assembled company and I would notice a knot of men crowding round one of their number, just as people do in Europe when they are present at a street-accident. Suddenly a man would gasp that a god had entered his body and his companions would propel him, staggering with a peculiarly jerking gait, into the centre of the arena. I noticed that the men who were thus affected were never drunk and that the happening occurred only at night, generally very late. I also observed that the state seldom occurred in isolation. There was something infectious about it; one possession was quickly followed by several others.

The drummers now took charge. At first they played softly and rather slowly, but as soon as the men in the arena began to lose control of their movements they started to increase the pace, beating it eventually into a frenzy. What now followed was an extremely realistic simulation of the sexual act, but carried out in a standing posture and by only one of the partners. Even when there was more than one performer each carried on in isolation.

It was obvious from his glazed expression that the man was unaware of what he was doing; his actions seemed to be impelled by some outside force. As the drummers increased their pace runnels of sweat could be seen pouring down the performer's face, until finally he appeared to be nearing exhaustion. Suddenly the drummers changed to a slower rhythm, now taking the time from the man himself. His movements became more and more spasmodic, like the final moments of sexual ecstasy, each one punctuated by a single drum-beat. And then all movement ceased and the performer staggered wearily out of the ring. It was generally about half an hour before he recovered his normal composure, when he woke as though out of an anaesthetic.

Until this happened the man must on no account be touched, since until it was obvious that the god or spirit was no longer in possession of his body anyone who interfered with him would be liable to the most terrible vengeance. These so-called possessions were not very common, but the men to whom they happened were regarded as the recipients of supernatural favours. The dozen or so whom I knew well were otherwise quite normal and certainly not neurotic. But none of them liked to discuss their experiences and denied all knowledge of what happened to them while the god was in possession of their bodies.

On the final day of Dassehra all officers who had not gone on leave were expected to attend the closing ceremony, when sacrificial offerings were made to the goddess Kali. These, depending upon the state of the regimental finances, consisted of at least one fully-grown buffalo and a flock of assorted goats. It was now that the Brahmans, hitherto somewhat ignored in their corner, took the centre of the stage. For the past nine days the patient buffalo had been tethered outside their tent, to receive their bounty and their prayers. They now led it slowly forward, its head grotesquely crowned with a wreath of marigold-heads. A large vermilion caste-mark had been painted above its docile eyes. Meanwhile the goats could be observed approaching from another corner.

In the middle of the open space round which the entire regiment was now gathered a stout wooden post had been fixed in the ground. It, too, was crowned with marigolds and smeared with vermilion. Earlier in the morning the Brahmans had sanctified the spot, and only those who had been ritually purified might now approach it. An expectant hush fell upon the assembly, for the next few minutes were ominous; the regiment's fortune during the ensuing twelve months was thought to depend upon the buffalo's behaviour. If it offered no resistance all would be well; but the ultimate augury was concerned with the act of decapitation. Provided its head was severed with a single stroke there would be nothing to fear; otherwise anything might happen.

The executioner was chosen for his known skill in the use of the *khukri*, the Gurkha's national weapon. Since the beginning of Dassehra he had been ritually segregated, assisting the Brahmans in their preliminary observances. He now walked slowly behind them, looking, except for his Mongoloid features, strangely unlike a Gurkha, naked from the waist and wearing only an Indian loincloth. In his right hand he carried an outsize *khukri*, its blade unsheathed.

It was at this moment that the hypnotic and doleful chanting began again, and for the first time the helpless buffalo showed signs that it realised what was about to happen. Willing helpers rushed into the ring in an effort to stop its now frantic efforts to escape and propelled it towards the post. Its head was soon roped into position, but it continued to lash out with its legs. I found myself staring at its eyes. They had lost their normal docility; now they expressed only terror.

I was feeling a little queasy, for there was none of the grace of movement, the skill that alone makes bullfighting tolerable. It was several minutes before the animal's neck was wrenched into the exact position which offered the least resistance to the blade. All this time Ranjit Sing was standing erect, his *khukri* poised, both hands clasped round the handle. He alone could decide when to strike. Suddenly he raised himself on his heels and with one powerful downward stroke tore through the

buffalo's neck. The head remained where it had been lashed, still wearing its marigold crown, but the body collapsed in a quivering heap while blood gushed in a pulsating stream. It continued to twitch until the heart was stopped. This was the signal for a salute, a *feu-de-joie* fired with blank cartridges. It was also the signal for the flock of goats to be shepherded into the arena. These hapless creatures were now slaughtered without further ceremony, by anybody who cared to step into the ring and chop off a head. It was thought meritorious for all young officers, the first time they were present at the festival, to take a hand in this final sacrifice, but I was incapable of thus displaying my manly qualities. Nobody seemed to mind.

On the day following this orgy it was a tradition that the entire regiment went for a route-march, and on this one occasion no officer, not even the Colonel, was allowed to ride. For fifteen weary miles we plodded up and down the steep hill-tracks, gradually shedding, in rivers of sweat, the excesses of the past ten days. Dassehra was over for another year and we resumed our quiet routine.

# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It was now the autumn of 1921 and soon after we had celebrated Dassehra the expected orders came for us to move to the North-West Frontier. We were to be stationed at Dardoni, in Waziristan. The railhead for this dreary outpost was at Bannu, a wretched little cantonment surrounded by barbed wire and closed after dark to the outside world. Its huddle of bungalows, depots and government offices were of a uniform mud-colour, as was the surrounding plain. Not a blade of grass was visible, and the flower-gardens, which flourished surprisingly in the brief autumn, served only to emphasise the general dinginess of the landscape.

During the summer Bannu was one of the hottest places in the whole of India, and between half-past eight in the morning and six in the evening the inhabitants had of necessity to remain indoors. During these hours doors and windows had to be firmly closed to keep out the frequent dust-storms and the searing hot wind. But in winter the temperature seldom rose much above freezing-point and generally an icy blast blew from the rugged hills beyond. Nevertheless Bannu was the headquarters of a Brigade and an important administrative centre, so the usual conventions were observed: one called upon the permanent residents and dressed each night for dinner.

Most of the regimental ladies had come with us. But no women were allowed beyond Bannu, so there they remained, two or three to a bungalow, to carry on their internecine feuds in conditions so cramped that after a few weeks they were hardly on speaking terms with one another. It was generally possible for their husbands to visit them at the week-end, but from these excursions all but the most uxorious seemed glad

to return to the undisturbed peace of our makeshift mess at Dardoni.

It was a long time since the battalion had done any Frontier service. Unlike most units of the Indian Army we had been continuously abroad since the outbreak of war in 1914, and although our record, even for a Gurkha regiment, was outstanding, we were completely inexperienced in the very different technique of irregular warfare; even our most senior officers had only a theoretical knowledge of it.

In peacetime Frontier service is a kind of police job. From Quetta in the south, to Chitral in the north, the whole area was guarded by a string of forts. These were garrisoned, not by the army but by the various so-called Levies, such as the Tochi Scouts, which were commanded by officers seconded to them for a period of years from regular Indian Army regiments. The Levies themselves were recruited from among the frontier tribes, but no man was ever permitted to serve in his own district.

The system worked well enough when things were quiet, but it was inadequate when conditions became unsettled. Because of this a high proportion of the regular army, both British and Indian, was always stationed in easy reach of the Frontier, so that it could move quickly whenever trouble arose.

One of the characteristics of the old Indian Army was the paternal relationship between officers and men. But it had its defects. It was liable to manifest itself in a pathetic tendency to believe in a loyalty that sometimes did not exist, as in the opening stages of the Mutiny in 1857, when certain regiments had plainly shown that they could not be relied upon. This tendency no longer existed in my time, but it could still be observed, and in an acute form, among officers who had chosen to serve with the Levies. Some of them managed to spend their entire service in these outposts. They became enamoured of the barbaric frontier life, unqualified admirers of the virile but untrustworthy hooligans under their command. Even when, as sometimes happened, one of their

number was brutally murdered, their belief remained unshaken. These irregular Levies were a recognised training-ground for appointment to the Political Service, which was recruited partly from the army and partly from the Indian Civil Service. This much-coveted department of government, which was not easy to get into, provided Residents and Advisers to all the so-called Native States, but the larger part of its officers were stationed permanently on the Frontier; it was the one sure road that led to high office and a knighthood. There were some men of outstanding ability among them, but the fanatical views of others sometimes prevented the military from taking action until a situation had got completely out of hand, and unnecessary bloodshed resulted.

The tribesmen, who lived in strongly fortified houses, not only resented strangers but were themselves often involved in a blood-feud with one of their neighbours. And since their land was unproductive they used to have a habit of raiding adjacent Indian territory. Occasionally their truculence would become excessive and a small punitive force would be sent to teach them a lesson. These minor frontier campaigns never merited more than a line or two, if that, in the London press, but over the years a number of lives were regularly lost in them.

The theory of frontier-warfare is very simple. Before a column can advance in safety it must first picquet every hill on the route from which it may be shot at. When the troops have advanced beyond this danger-area the picquets are withdrawn and the process is repeated. In any case movement is slow, but safety depends upon the speed with which the picquets occupy and in due course retire from their positions. Disasters nearly always occur as a result of troops not retiring quickly enough. The tribesmen, whose habit is to lie unseen in wait, will occupy a hilltop the moment it has been vacated, and unless the picquet has been trained to get down at break-neck speed it is liable to be shot up before it reaches the bottom of the hill. British regiments were the natural prey of the tribesmen. Good though some of them became at these

irregular tactics, their men could never acquire the necessary turn of speed and eye for the peculiarities of hilly and broken country such as are second nature to Gurkhas and others who have been bred among mountains.

Dardoni itself was a mud-hutted camp, surrounded by barbed-wire defences, in the middle of a stony plain which contained not a single village. Away to the north the hills of Waziristan stood out in the clear thin air, as though cut out of cardboard. A mile or so to the south was the fort of Miranshah, the permanent headquarters of the Tochi Scouts, a small oasis surrounded by high stone walls inside which life was conducted as comfortably as in a London club. We were on friendly terms with the officers of this Levy corps, but we could not entertain each other because we had to retire within our respective barricades as soon as darkness fell.

At this time the army was only beginning to be equipped with motor-transport and the type of vehicle designed to operate in the roughest country had not then been perfected. This meant that all the supplies for the garrison had to be brought up by pack-transport from railhead at Bannu, a journey which took several days. These convoys of animals had to be protected throughout their journey, and it was on this work that we were mostly employed for the first few months. There was nothing difficult about it, but it was tedious and exhausting.

Once a week there was a Brigade exercise, when everybody, including the Tochi Scouts, moved out towards the foothills. We had constantly been told that the tribesmen's tactics were largely a matter of taking advantage of our mistakes; that is to say our comparative lack of speed or failure to secure every vantage-point along the route. But the difficulty was to make our troops believe that the tribesmen did in fact exist. Although we were stationed in the middle of extremely hostile territory it appeared to be uninhabited. We never saw a soul and the occasional rifle-shot fired into camp at night did not impress anybody.

We became confident and convinced that the difficulties

and dangers of this kind of warfare had been exaggerated. What we could not understand, although the Scouts did their best to convince us, was that our every movement was under observation. The tribesmen were ever present, but because they dressed in dun-coloured garments of the same hue as the stones and rocks among which they lived, it was impossible to discern them.

Two days' journey away, at a place named Datta Khel, there was a small fort which in normal times was garrisoned by a detachment of the Tochi Scouts. It lay beyond the Dardoni plain and could be approached only through a defile which was guarded on both sides by a tangle of rocky and scrub-covered hills. Datta Khel had been abandoned during the war, but there were now plans to re-occupy it. It was in the middle of the country of the Mahsud, perhaps the most truculent of all the frontier peoples. They had been left alone for so long that they had begun to get out of hand and the political authorities wished to bring them under better control.

We carried out a number of exercises in the direction of Datta Khel. We never once entered the defile, but we went close enough to it for everyone to get an idea of what would have to be done when the time came for it to be picquetted. Meanwhile Dardoni was alive with rumours of every sort. The visit of a large group of senior staff officers from Army Headquarters at Delhi had given rise to the belief that we were about to embark upon a full-scale Frontier campaign; on the other hand the Tochi Scouts, who were in close touch with the political authorities, had been told that even the re-occupation of Datta Khel was now unlikely. Nevertheless we remained under orders to make an immediate move, and although we were several times commanded to parade with everything necessary for a protracted operation, we always returned to camp in the evening.

There came a day when we did not return, and it so happened that on this occasion things did not work smoothly; in fact our performance was rather like that of a theatrical company which has been too long rehearsed. We had been so

often called out on what was obviously no more than a training exercise that to save ourselves the bother of frequent packing and unpacking we no longer troubled about tents, food and the other necessary odds and ends. The Brigade Commander, a very old hand at this game, had, unknown to us, observed our lapse, but he had his own original method of teaching us not to disregard his orders. He had arranged on this first night that we should camp no more than four or so miles from Dardoni, so that although we should be punished by having to do without a roof over our heads our deficiencies could easily be made good before we set off again on the following morning.

Datta Khel was occupied without incident; all had gone like a peacetime manoeuvre. But during the war years the tribesmen had gutted the fort; all that remained was an empty shell. It would take some weeks to put the place in reasonable order, and while the repairs were being carried out we should have to remain.

We had been prepared for a stay of not more than a few days, so we now had to organise regular convoys to bring up food and stores from Dardoni. This meant that twice a week the entire route between the two places had to be picquetted to protect the slowly moving train of baggage-animals. For the sake of convenience a small staging-post had been organised midway between Dardoni and Datta Khel. It was out on the plain a couple of miles before the defile. We took it in turn to garrison this post and on convoy days we became responsible for safeguarding the track as far as the top of the pass. The Datta Khel contingent looked after the other half of the route and it was our habit to meet on the hilltop and have a picnic meal together while the convoy was passing by, after which we retired to our respective camps. One leads a restricted life in these frontier outposts and we greatly enjoyed these occasional days out on the hills. Nobody bothered us, and although we were always prepared for instant action nothing ever happened; the whole area, like that round Dardoni, appeared to be uninhabited and unvisited by the tribesmen.

One day my company was the last to be called forward for

picquetting duty. This meant that we occupied the hills on either side of the pass itself, so that when the time came to withdraw we should be the first to retire. It was an awkward bit of country and the troops had to be strung out over a wide front; once the company commander had committed his men to their pre-arranged positions, he had little control over their subsequent movements. There was no danger in this, since each sub-unit had been trained to act on its own initiative. Or so we thought until the day of which I write.

It was one of those splendid sun-filled winter mornings that for a few hours almost reconciled one to the utter drabness of the landscape. The sky was unbroken by cloud, and away in the distance the snow-sprinkled mountains of Afghanistan were clearly visible. We had had an exceptionally good meal on the pass and I was feeling almost happy when I gave the signal for the retirement to begin. As usual I had gone on a few minutes earlier, so as to observe the withdrawal down on to the plain. I took with me a signaller and an orderly.

The first picquets began to retire with their usual speed, and as soon as I saw that all was going according to plan I moved back another few hundred yards. It was then that a single shot rang out, but we did not pay it any attention; probably one of the men had forgotten to adjust his safety-catch and had loosed off his rifle by mistake. We continued our retirement until suddenly a fusillade broke out and it was immediately apparent that we were being shot at from all directions, including the rear, although the enemy, whoever they were, were completely invisible.

I did not know it at the time, but another regiment, whose duty it was to remain in position until my company was safely down in the plain, had begun by mistake to retire before receiving my signal. This meant that between us there was now an area of unoccupied and unprotected ground. It was exactly the sort of opportunity for which the tribesmen had been waiting, and as soon as they saw what had happened they moved rapidly into position and cut us off from the rest of the column. To make matters worse, the supporting battalion

continued to retire, although it seemed hardly possible that they had not heard the shooting.

Meanwhile the intensity of the fire increased. My own company was firing back, but so far as I was able to see there was still no visible target. Nor was there anything I could do; the company was widely spread out, and the ground in front of and behind us was apparently in enemy hands. In any case there would have been no point, even had it been possible, in concentrating my command. I was however relieved to observe that there was as yet no panic; small parties of men continued to retire in good order, although I noticed that a few were getting hit in the process.

One of the first laws in frontier warfare is that, because of the known barbarity of the tribesmen, no wounded man shall ever be left on the field. I remembered this, but I was not unduly worried because it never occurred to me that the battalion in the rear would not come to our aid at any moment.

We continued in some fashion to retire and then, quite suddenly, the tribesmen rose from their hiding-places and began to close in around us. Not only were we now completely isolated, but it was also obvious that we were considerably outnumbered. There was no longer any question of giving orders; the best we could do was to fight our way out with as few casualties as possible.

I tried desperately to think what I ought to do, but there seemed to be no solution. At one stage, together with my two companions, I sought cover in a small stone-filled *nala*, to one side of which a string of camels, loaded with boxes of ammunition, had couched. They soon became a target, and although I could see them being peppered with bullets they made no attempt to move. One of them, presumably a male, was blowing out repulsive balloons of saliva and grunting with amorous desire. They had been deserted by their drivers, and although I realised that their cargo was a valuable prize for the enemy there was nothing I could do to prevent its falling into their hands.

It was at this moment that I observed a small party of Mahsuds rushing towards us, the first time I had seen our enemy at close quarters. I had taken my loaded revolver out of its holster and now thought to use it. But all the strength seemed to have drained out of my body, and although I pointed the weapon I was incapable of pulling the trigger. Also I was immotile. After what seemed an eternity but could not have been more than a few seconds my orderly grabbed me by the arm and together with the signaller we turned and ran. I have often since wondered why we were not killed, but perhaps the Mahsuds' reaction was the same as mine. Later on I realised that I had defecated in my trousers.

We took up a position out in the plain and after some time it seemed that the battle was over. The din of rifle-fire stopped as suddenly as it had begun and a silence, startling in its intensity, fell over the scene. There were only about thirty of us left out of a hundred or so, and together we straggled into camp. I noticed that every post on the perimeter was manned, though normally they were held only at night. Also the heavy barbed-wire obstacles with which the entrances were closed had already been dragged into position. We had to wait for them to be moved before we could enter.

I went at once to report to the Colonel who was in charge of the staging-post. I presumed that now he knew what had happened he would take his battalion out again to bring back our wounded. To my consternation he refused, on the grounds that his strength was insufficient to ensure against a second disaster. Probably his decision was correct, but I was in no mood to accept it. I pleaded with him on humanitarian grounds until finally he reminded me gently that I was being insubordinate and told me to go and lie down.

There was nothing more I could do. Somebody brought me a strong cup of tea laced with whisky, and after changing my clothes I went out and stood beside one of the sentries whose post looked out over the plain. There was no sign of any human being and everything was as quiet as on a normal day. But in the far distance I could just discern a cloud of vultures

hovering in the sky; they were waiting for the moment of death.

I stood there a long time watching the shadows lengthen; thinking and yet not thinking, physically numbed and unable to move away. As dusk was falling I noticed a solitary figure, moving very slowly and apparently with great difficulty. As he came near I recognised one of my own men. He was stark naked. He had been knifed in the belly and his testicles slashed. They now hung by bleeding threads of sinew. He was unable to speak and collapsed as soon as we carried him into the camp.

I knew that this would be the fate of all the others and I went once more to see the Colonel, although even I knew that night was now too near for anything to be done. He spoke to me with great kindness. "I know only too well what will happen to your men," he said; "you do not have to remind me. But we must wait. There is nothing we can do until tomorrow."

Later that night, as I lay awake in my bivouac trying to work out what I might have done to prevent this disaster, Umar Sing crept in and snuggled down beside me. He did not speak, but began quietly to massage my tired and aching body. I was no longer able to keep back the tears which I had been trying desperately to control.

Early next morning we went back. The dead lay scattered in small groups, and it was obvious from their postures that except for the fortunate few who had been killed instantly every man had been subjected to the most barbarous treatment while he was still alive. The bodies had been stripped and in every case the genitals had been roughly severed and stuffed into the victim's mouth. This act, the greatest insult a Moslem can offer to a Hindu or other so-called infidel, is believed by the tribesmen to deny the rewards of Paradise.

The string of camels had died where their drivers had abandoned them, but the boxes of ammunition had been prised open and the contents removed.

Now that the Mahsuds had shown their hand there was no

question of an early return to Dardoni and we began to prepare for a lengthy stay. There were no further incidents.

One day I was summoned by the Adjutant to his office. It appeared that a telegram had come from Delhi asking that I be immediately released for service with an expedition which was soon to leave for Tibet, the first of the many attempts to climb Mount Everest. I had known for some time that this was a possibility, but I had told nobody about it because General Bruce, in his letters to me, had thought it unlikely that he would be given permission for my attachment. The Adjutant made it clear that as the regiment was on active service I should naturally refuse this invitation; but since I had acquired an obsession about Tibet and had studied every available book and report about it I had no intention of refusing this heaven-sent chance to go there, even if on my return it meant being transferred to the Indian Army Service Corps.

We went in at once to see the Colonel. He was clearly displeased by my attitude, particularly because he knew very well that it would be impolitic for him to refuse what was in effect a personal request from the Commander-in-Chief. He grudgingly gave his permission and then stated his terms. I could join the expedition, but the months I spent with it would be counted as home leave. This meant that I should probably have to wait another three or four years before I could return to England, from which I had been absent almost continuously since the end of 1915. There was nothing more to be said, so I saluted and left the tent.

On the day when I left Datta Khel it so happened that the Army Commander, Sir Andrew Skeen, was on his way up on a tour of inspection, and during one of the convoy's halts I received a message that he wished to see me. At last, I thought, I am to be reprimanded for my inglorious conduct, and as I hurried to the rear of the column I wondered what I could say. To my astonishment the General merely held out his hand and said that he wished to congratulate me personally on my luck. He himself had always wanted to see Tibet. And then he

asked me if I would do him a personal service. I could not imagine what was coming next, but he went on to explain that he was a keen entomologist. He had been trying for years to obtain specimens of a rare butterfly which was believed to exist only in the particular district of Tibet through which I should before long be travelling. Rather shyly he took out of his pocket a small packet of cellophane envelopes and then showed me how to fold a butterfly so that it would not be damaged in the post. In due course I was able to enlarge his collection with a number of the coveted specimens, the only occasion during my military career when my services were rewarded with the personal thanks of a General.

# *Part Three*

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE long train-journey from Bannu to Darjeeling took several days, and I passed the time mostly staring out of the carriage window. I was too excited to read; also I was still tired and distressed by the recent happenings and I dozed a good deal. By the time we reached Calcutta, where I had to change, I had recovered enough to realise that in deserting the regiment at such a moment I had probably acted badly, but when one is still in one's twenties such pangs of conscience do not last. It was enough that the sky was blue and cloudless. Besides, I had cast off my uniform for the next few months and a whole new world lay open. My one fear was that I might turn out to be no more than a passenger on the Everest expedition; although as a boy I had been several times to Switzerland and my recent life had accustomed me to shinning about the hills, I was not a trained mountaineer. I knew that I had not been chosen as a climber; my duties would be those of transport officer and general helper, and I was not expected to go to great heights on the mountain. Nevertheless this would be the first time I had travelled in the real Himalayas, and I did not know exactly what was in store for me.

I left Calcutta by the night-mail and early next morning changed on to the narrow-gauge railway that runs from Siliguri, in the plains of northern Bengal, to Darjeeling. Nearly every tourist to India makes this journey and throughout the summer the trains used to be crowded with British officials and their families escaping from the humid plains. The Government of Bengal, the headquarters of which was in Calcutta, always went up to Darjeeling for the several monsoon months, and as soon as it was installed there the social life of the provincial capital was reconstructed. There was clearly a

wide social gulf between those who were senior or otherwise distinguished enough to be invited regularly to Government House and those who were not, and much energy and ingenuity were spent in attempting to move out of one class into the other. This was easier in the small and comparatively compact British community of Darjeeling than in the sprawling society of Calcutta, where it was much more difficult to make a suitable impression.

But on this day in early spring the train was almost empty. The annual migration had not begun, and I had one of the tiny carriages to myself. The journey from Siliguri to Darjeeling has been many times described, and although in the ensuing years it was my good fortune to make it often I never ceased to find it exciting; it was always the beginning of a new if temporary life, an escape into a world of happy experiences. There was nothing remarkable about the scenery, which differed little from the approaches to any of the other hill-stations. The attraction was the people one saw by the way, the crowds that got on to the train at the wayside stations with their smiling mongoloid features and bantering chatter. They seemed so happy in comparison with the cringing and downtrodden peasants of the Indian plains.

Darjeeling is politically a part of India, but in every other way the district is a mixture of Nepalese and Tibetan. The Indians, traders and others, who live there are as much foreigners as the British themselves.

As the diminutive train began to wind its way into the forested hills the atmosphere became perceptibly colder. A couple of boys squatted on the front of the engine, ladling out handfuls of grit to give the wheels a better purchase on the rails at the steeper parts of the track. Our progress became increasingly slower, but at last we reached the half-way stage where there was traditionally a thirty-minute halt for tea-drinking.

I got out stiff and cold and made my way to the station restaurant, but without any particular enthusiasm, since I have no great fondness for tea. I was however astonished by the taste of the delicious beverage that was now put before me.

The best Darjeeling tea, made with the local water, is an epicurean drink and in no way to be confused with that brownish liquid of which the British daily consume large quantities. To that it bears about as much resemblance as does a bottle of the finest vintage claret to grocer's wine. But for some strange reason only in the Darjeeling district itself can one savour its subtler qualities.

As we passed the highest point in the journey and began to drop down towards Darjeeling a thick mist enveloped us, blotting out the landscape. The passengers quickly dispersed, and after engaging a burly Tibetan to carry my bags I set off in search of the hotel where General Bruce had been staying for the past few days. I had been corresponding with him for several years, but this was our first meeting.

He had long been known to the men of his own regiment as *Bhalu*, the bear, and as he lumbered into the room, almost breaking down the door as he did so, I realised that no description could be more apt. It was typical of him that, even before shaking hands, he should address me in a stream of fluent Nepali, much of it abusive and obscene, after which he broke into roars of schoolboyish laughter. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to enter into the spirit of the occasion and answered him in the same language. It was lucky that I did so; many years later, after we had become intimate friends, he told me that he was horrified when he first set eyes upon my bespectacled and unmilitary features; he realised he had made a mistake and wondered how he could decently arrange to get rid of me. It was only my knowledge of Nepali that saved the situation.

In the evening I was introduced to the other members of the expedition. The conversation at dinner was restrained and somewhat formal. Most of us were meeting for the first time and, in that peculiarly British way, attempting to elucidate the details of one another's upbringing and background without asking direct questions. It was very like the informal but detailed examination to which aspiring candidates who wished to join a good regiment were subjected.

There was no hint of the friendly atmosphere which we later enjoyed. Indeed, for the first few weeks we seemed inevitably to divide into two factions: those who had considerable experience of climbing in the Alps before the war and those who, like myself, had been selected for their knowledge of the local language and conditions. Only General Bruce was fully at home in both worlds, and he soon made it clear that he would recognise no distinction between those who regarded themselves as expert climbers and the rest of us whose main job was to see that the caravan reached the mountain in good order and with its equipment intact. At first the climbers tended to regard those few of us who were not climbers rather as their predecessors did their Swiss porters, that is as slightly superior servants, but this attitude disappeared as soon as the climbers realised that they were dependent on us for their every need; between them they had no word of any useful language.

The popularity of mountaineering has increased so much since then that many people do not realise that before the First World War its devotees, at any rate in England, were almost confined to the comparatively wealthy. It was in those days an expensive sport. Guideless climbing was unusual, and the services of a professional guide and several porters, sometimes for weeks on end, were very costly. And even among the rich and leisured only few had both the means and inclination to venture as far afield as the Himalayas.

But mountain travel has always appealed to aesthetes and intellectuals, perhaps because it lacks the element of competition. Few of them had private means but many of them were schoolmasters and the like, with long periods of leisure. They were the vanguard of the true mountaineers of today, for although most of them acquired their skill from professional Swiss guides, they were the first to take up climbing without such aid. They were among the pioneers of the modern British school of guideless climbing. Some of the senior and more orthodox members of the Alpine Club, which before the second war was an extremely exclusive and indeed snobbish

institution, did not look upon their activities altogether with favour; there was a distinct feeling that there was something ungentlemanly about climbing without a guide, rather like shooting pheasants out of season. One or two however had gained considerable reputations for their guideless ascents of mountains officially classified as "severe," and even the conservative Alpine Club (which with the Royal Geographical Society was concerned with the selection of Everest climbers) could not continue to ignore them. Moreover, since it had been decided that this expedition was to be regarded purely as a sporting and therefore amateur event, the inclusion of professional guides in the party was more or less precluded.

Our most experienced climber was a youngish man named George Mallory. He was thirty-six, but looked much younger; partly because his body was perfectly proportioned and he moved with effortless grace, but more because of his exceptional good looks, of which he appeared to be totally unaware. Even before the war he had acquired a reputation for his exploits on our own British rocks. He had also led a number of successful ascents of difficult Swiss peaks. He was already a member of the Alpine Club and therefore acceptable even to that august body. During the war he had been a gunner. At one time, before he became a master at Charterhouse, he had considered joining the regular army, but his wartime experiences had convinced him that this would have been a mistake. He was as unfitted as I to be a soldier and had moreover no sense of discipline. This lack probably prevented him from being an efficient schoolmaster, for although he had an infectious enthusiasm for his chosen profession he was incapable of keeping order. Robert Graves, who was his pupil at Charterhouse, has told me that although Mallory was much beloved, his classes were a riot of disorder; it was too easy for high-spirited schoolboys to take advantage of his natural and unfailing good humour.

Mallory was the most absent-minded man I have ever known. Each of us had been allotted as personal servant a

Sherpa porter whose duty it was to see that his master's belongings were kept intact during the march across Tibet. None of them had any experience of this kind of work, and although most were scrupulously honest they could not understand the need for such articles as toothbrushes, pyjamas and the like. If these articles were constantly left lying about on the floor, as George's were, it meant that their owner had no further use for them, and there they remained, to be thrown away. After the first few days we took it in turn to see that none of his kit was left behind.

I have often wondered what the future would have held for George Mallory if he had not been killed during the course of the next Everest expedition. He had already severed his connection with Charterhouse and might, I think, have become a writer of some distinction. He never suggested that he had any particular urge to write, but his letters to his wife (published in the account of the 1924 expedition) contain by far the best account of life on Everest.

He was by nature an idealist; he believed passionately in the good life and wanted to see it brought within the reach of everybody. We never discussed politics, but it was obvious that, like so many who were educated at Winchester, his views were decidedly Socialist. Yet he was too intelligent ever to have become what is nowadays known as a left-wing intellectual. He might have found a niche in the United Nations Organisation; unlike some who labour in the cause of international understanding, he was incapable of cynicism and did not seem to know the meaning of frustration. At any rate that is how he seemed to me when he was thirty-six. If he were alive today he would be approaching seventy-five, and it is idle to speculate on what he might have done with his life. I suppose it is normal for those who die young to remain youthful in the memories of their friends. Certainly I am incapable of visualising George as an elderly man and shall always remember him as a young athlete, striding up the Rongbuk glacier and leaving trails of untidiness everywhere he went.

A few days after I reached Darjeeling the weekly parcel of English papers arrived, and among them was one of which the two middle pages were entirely devoted to a series of photographs of one G. I. Finch in action on various Alpine peaks. He was due to join us shortly and I gathered that his inclusion in the party was not altogether welcomed, especially by Colonel E. L. Strutt, our deputy-leader and a power in the Alpine Club. Strutt's objections were based upon George Finch's unusual background. He had been educated in Switzerland and had acquired a considerable reputation for the enterprise and skill of his numerous guideless ascents. Besides, he was by profession a research chemist and therefore doubly suspect, since in Strutt's old-fashioned view the sciences were not a respectable occupation for anyone who regarded himself as a gentleman. One of the photographs which particularly irritated him depicted Finch repairing his own boots. It confirmed Strutt's belief that a scientist was a sort of mechanic. I can still see his rigid expression as he looked at the picture. "I always knew the fellow was a shit," he said, and the sneer remained on his face while the rest of us sat in frozen silence.

I must be careful not to give the wrong impression of Strutt. He was a kind and generous man, but even in 1922 he was a survival of an age that had passed. He was the greatest snob I have ever known. An aristocrat by birth and possessed of considerable private means, he was incapable of understanding that large numbers of acceptable members of society found it necessary to work for their living. He had had a distinguished career as a soldier-diplómat, but he regarded his army service not as a profession but as a duty such as those in his position had an obligation to give the State. He was always immaculately dressed and during the expedition generally wore a splendidly cut knickerbocker suit the material of which had been specially handwoven in Switzerland by the wife of his permanent guide. I warmed to him only a year or so later, when I dined for the first time at his home in London. The meal began with oysters, a delicacy that I have never been

able to regard without nausea. I was still staring at my plate when Strutt turned to me with a cross between a sneer and a smile. "I don't eat this filth," he said, "do you?" and motioned to the butler to remove our plates.

Finch was the last of the party to arrive from England. He seemed at first ill at ease, probably knowing that his presence was not particularly welcome. But it was at once clear that his whole approach to the problem with which during the next few months we should be confronted was different from that of the rest. His attitude was thoroughly professional, and although this was his first visit to the Himalayas, his scientific training had led him to consider a number of matters the importance of which was barely sensed by some of the others. It was his misfortune to be of the right age to attempt Everest in 1922. His ideas of how such expeditions should be conducted were in advance of his time. He would have been more at home in one of the highly-planned expeditions of later years, especially if he had been the leader. Even so, his contribution was considerable. He was an advocate of climbing with the aid of oxygen, which at that time was considered by the old guard to be unsporting. Indeed, Strutt was firmly of the opinion that if we reached the summit of Everest only with the help of oxygen we could not claim to have climbed the mountain. His dislike of Finch continued throughout the expedition, and if he were still alive he would have been scandalised by Finch's election, in 1959, to the Presidency of the Alpine Club in succession to Sir John Hunt.

Our official doctor was Tom Longstaff. He probably had more experience of practical exploration than any of the rest of our party. He had climbed in many parts of the world and his ascent of Trisul (23,360 feet) in the Garhwal Himalayas remained a record until 1930. Greater heights had been reached, but this was the highest mountain that up to then had been climbed to the top. He was already forty-seven and beyond the age of high-altitude effort. But he was determined to have a look at Everest, since, like General Bruce, he had been fascinated by this unknown giant for most of his life. Before we

set off from Darjeeling he called us together. "I want to make one thing clear," he said. "I am the expedition's official medical officer. I am, as a matter of fact, a qualified doctor, but I feel it my duty now to remind you that I have never practised in my life. I beg you in no circumstances to seek my professional advice, since it would almost certainly turn out to be wrong. I am however willing if necessary to sign a certificate of death."

Fortunately we had among our number a very experienced general practitioner and a distinguished Harley Street surgeon and between them they dealt with our various ailments.

We owed a great deal to Longstaff, for although most of us regarded him as elderly he had lost none of the gaiety and resilience of youth. Besides, he was humorous and shrewd and, unlike Strutt, entirely lacking in self-importance. His greatly varied experience saved us from a number of stupidities. After we had been on the march for a week or so he began to sprout a carrot-coloured beard, which gave his pointed features a strong resemblance to Captain Cuttle. He was so pleased with the effect that he has ever since retained his beard. It is now snow-white, but at the age of eighty-four he still seems almost as full of fun and as active as he was nearly forty years ago.

Of General Bruce himself it is difficult to write. His somewhat juvenile sense of humour and boisterous high spirits were at times a source of irritation, but it was impossible not to love him. He had the reputation of knowing more about Gurkhas than anybody living, but although he spoke the language with great fluency it was with an almost total disregard for the niceties of grammar and polite speech. He was the very finest type of paternal Indian Army officer. He knew the name of every man in his regiment, together with the intimate details of most of their private lives, and it was upon men such as he that the high reputation of the old Indian Army had been built. They were splendid regimental officers, but most of them were temperamentally unfitted for higher command.

Bruce himself had been promoted to Brigadier while serving at Gallipoli, but he often told me that he felt frustrated when he had to leave the battalion with which he had spent the best years of his life. He was never at any time a skilled climber. For one thing he was too big and heavy; also he had no natural grace of movement. He was however immensely strong, and one of his party-tricks was to tear a pack of cards in half. His reputation was based on an ability to cover great distances without tiring, often carrying a heavy load, and he was as much at home in rough mountain country as any of his own Gurkhas. He was a great mountain-traveller, but never at any time a great climber. He was now fifty-six, and he knew there could be no question of his going higher than the base camp. But in those early days a leader was regarded more as an expedition-manager; his function was to get the party to the scene of action in good order, after which the climbers, under their own leader, assumed responsibility. Nevertheless in 1922 he was without question the right man for the job. His greatest contribution to Himalayan exploration, and it was considerable, was the formation of the special corps of Sherpa porters on whose shoulders every subsequent expedition has climbed. Previously every party had depended for its transport on such casual labour as could be obtained in the villages through which it passed; an unsatisfactory arrangement which meant that when an expedition reached its base it had to depend on its own labours at the very time when the climbers' energies needed to be conserved. It is entirely due to General Bruce that there now exists in the Himalayas a body of professional high-altitude porters in no way inferior to their counterparts in the Alps. It was my job to deal with these men and generally to supervise the transport of our many tons of baggage through Sikkim and across Tibet.

The various Everest expeditions have received so much publicity that most people are familiar with the details of their organisation; at least they realise that a large Himalayan expedition which plans to be in operation for several months cannot live entirely on the country. It must carry a quantity of

assorted food, besides tents, bedding and a lot of miscellaneous impedimenta. During the past twenty years a great deal of thought has been devoted to these matters. Each succeeding expedition has taken advantage of the experiences of its predecessor, but the successful one of 1953 was the first to be organised on fully scientific lines. During the Second World War British forces had been required to operate in a great variety of climates. Much ingenuity had been devoted to their physical well-being and comfort, and in planning the 1953 expedition John Hunt was able to profit by this vast amount of service experience. Moreover in the intervening years increased knowledge of the body's dietetic needs, besides improved methods of preserving food by means of dehydration, made it possible to do away with many things that had previously been regarded as essential. This was not the sole reason for eventual success, but it played an important part.

I am not suggesting that in 1922 no thought was given to these matters, but there was no experience on which to build. We were provided with the best of everything that money could buy, but we had not then learned what was essential and what was not.

The 1922 expedition, which was the first major sporting event since the end of the war, inevitably received a lot of publicity. It was financed largely by means of private subscriptions, and although these were considerable we needed all the additional help we could get. We were therefore glad to accept the numerous offers received from manufacturers of food and other stores, without pausing to think, as we should have done, whether we had any use for them. In the event we started off for Tibet with a great deal of stuff that by the more efficient standards of later expeditions was ludicrously unnecessary. Our solicitous committee in London had also provided us with an assortment of delicacies, notably large quantities of tinned quails in aspic, in the hope that they would stimulate the appetite, which is known to become jaded at high altitudes. Finch, who never lost the capacity

to enjoy his food, was almost the only one who thrived upon this Lucullan dish. Above the base camp it was too rich and indigestible for any but the most exceptional stomach.

Our stores were splendidly packed in light plywood cases of such a weight that a porter could carry either one or two according to the altitude or difficulty of the ground. Unfortunately it had not occurred to the packers to vary the contents of the boxes, such as was subsequently the usual and sensible custom. Each contained only a single kind of article, and the practical effect of this, until we got to the base camp, was somewhat unfortunate. During the march across Tibet it was often nightfall before much of the transport caught up with us. Besides, the weather was generally bad and it was always bitterly cold if not actually snowing. In these uncomfortable conditions nobody felt inclined to make a selection from the miscellaneous pile of boxes which lay strewn among our tents. One or other of our alleged cooks would grab the nearest available case, and the nature of our next meal or two would depend on its contents. Sometimes we were fortunate, when the luck of the draw disclosed some particular delicacy, but it was quite otherwise when several successive meals, including breakfast, appeared to have been constructed on a basis of strawberry jam and tomato sauce. There was one occasion when everything had been garnished with Sanatogen, no doubt an excellent and health-preserving substance, but of limited use in the kitchen.

Bread was always a difficulty. None of our cooks was sufficiently skilled to make it, and most of the party spurned the excellent Indian *chapatti*, which they could have made in unlimited quantities. We had however been provided with an enormous store of what are known as ship's biscuits. I had become accustomed, during my service in France, to the British Army ration biscuit, but these were of an altogether different quality. Small and square, they had the consistency of tiles and could be broken only with a hammer; even then one needed the jaws of Neanderthal man to masticate them.

We soon discovered that they could be consumed only if they were first soaked for a long time in water and served as a kind of porridge.

Our clothing, compared with that supplied to later expeditions, seems in retrospect to have been absurdly inadequate. In those days little was known of wind-proofed garments; nor had anybody considered the possibility of constructing a climbing-boot insulated in such a way that its wearer would not be subject to frostbite. We had each been issued with a pair of sheepskin thigh-length flying-boots of the kind used by pilots of the old Royal Flying Corps; and while they were comfortable to wear in camp at night there was no question of walking in them. They reduced all movement to a clumsy waddle. Most of us wore ordinary knickerbocker suits, but the climbers had been provided with cotton clothes padded thickly with eiderdown. These were both light and warm, but certainly not windproof. Also they were bulky and hindered movement. I myself, since I had been so long away from England and had therefore been unable to replenish my civilian wardrobe, wore a suit that had been hastily run up when I passed through Calcutta. No suitable material was available, and it had had to be made of shoddy Kashmir tweed. It looked all right, but afforded little protection from the howling Tibetan gales.

The rest of our clothing was left to individual choice. Some wore several sets of finespun woollen underclothing; others fancied flannel pyjamas worn under their suits. Everybody habitually put on several pairs of socks, and most of us had provided ourselves with a selection of Shetland pullovers which were warm and light. It was usual to wear two or three on top of one another, discarding or adding to them according to the temperature. So much attention is nowadays rightly paid to this matter of proper clothing at high altitudes that it is worth emphasising that in 1922 we were equipped in more or less the same way as would have been thought appropriate for a winter trip in the Welsh mountains. Nevertheless we succeeded in reaching a height of nearly 27,000 feet. This was

then by far the highest altitude attained by man, and some of the latter expeditions were unable to get so high. It is however true that one of our party was so badly frostbitten that he later lost most of his fingers, and another lost a large portion of an ear.

A few days after my arrival at Darjeeling I was sent off to Kalimpong, to which, since it lay on the direct route to Sikkim and Tibet, all our heavy stores and baggage had been directly consigned. Geoffrey Bruce (a cousin of the General and like myself a Captain in one of the Gurkha regiments), C. G. Crawford (a member of the Indian Civil Service who had served with Gurkhas during the war) and I now spent a busy fortnight equipping the porters, making lists of stores and packing them into loads for the onward journey, which, for the first few stages, would be by means of mule-train. Much of the heavier stuff had been packed in enormous crates. These had served admirably for the sea-voyage out from England, but they were too large and bulky to be carried along the narrow and precipitous mountain-paths and had to be repacked.

We were soon joined by Finch. He was not concerned with these quartermastering matters, but he had been largely responsible for the design of the oxygen equipment and, as our only scientist, he had to check the pressure in the cylinders and satisfy himself that the rest of the complicated gear was in proper working order.

In those days Kalimpong was a sleepy little Himalayan backwater not much frequented by visitors: it was a collecting centre for Tibetan wool on its way down to be sold in Calcutta. This once considerable trade has now declined to a trickle because the Tibetan wool-market has been transferred to China. Kalimpong was, and still is, also the site of the famous institution founded by Dr J. A. Graham for the education of Anglo-Indian children. Many of these were the natural offspring of tea-planters in the Darjeeling district and would otherwise have had little chance of a decent start in life. Dr Graham was a great and good man and although he was a

missionary of the old school he always seemed to me to be more interested in improving the welfare of unfortunate human beings than in saving their souls. Later he became Moderator of the Church of Scotland, but in 1922 he was still active at Kalimpong.

He was assisted by his several daughters, with one of whom, Bunty, and her husband Norman Odling, we stayed. Norman had lost a leg in the war and after trying his hand at commerce, which he found uncongenial, had at Dr Graham's suggestion settled at Kalimpong. He was now in charge of the arts-and-crafts department of the Homes and had built it up into a highly efficient and profitable activity. He had specialised in manufacturing carpets, for which there was soon a world-wide demand. They were designed entirely by Tibetan and Bhutanese craftsmen and made from the finest wool coloured with vegetable dyes, so that they never lost their brilliance.

Norman Odling had also discovered a latent talent for architecture. He never had any professional training, but he nevertheless built a number of houses in Kalimpong, which were far in advance, both in design and standard of comfort, of anything normally seen in India.

From 1922 the Odling home became the unofficial headquarters of every Everest expedition that approached the mountain by way of Tibet, and there were few of us who did not stay there, sometimes for weeks on end, to recuperate on our return. The Odlings left India at the time of independence and have now settled in Gloucestershire, where their comfortable Cotswold farmhouse, with its distinctly Tibetan interior, has become the inevitable port of call for visitors of every kind from all parts of the Eastern Himalayas.

Towards the end of March everything was at last ready. The rest of the party joined us from Darjeeling and we started off in two separate detachments. This was necessary because the government staging-bungalows in which we were to spend the nights were small. They had been built for the

convenience of touring officials and could not accommodate so large a party as ours; as it was, several of us had to camp on the verandas.

Of all the countries I have visited, Sikkim is the most delectable, since, apart from sea and desert, it contains every known variety of scenery. It is famed for the luxuriance of its tropical vegetation in the lower valleys and the astonishing variety and brilliance of its butterflies. Its northern frontier is formed by the main chain of the Himalayas and includes Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. It was Sir Joseph Hooker, the great nineteenth-century naturalist, who first made Sikkim known to the outside world. Its accessibility soon made it the most popular of all Indian holiday playgrounds, and it was annually visited by those many who did not demand the artificial pleasures of the ordinary hill-stations. Because of the political situation in Tibet, visitors are no longer welcome and only in exceptional circumstances is permission now granted to travel in Sikkim.

Clumps of orchids, of which the most common is *Dendrobium*, hang from many of the trees, and in the higher parts of the country whole hillsides are covered with rhododendrons, not only the red variety but also mauve and yellow. One day, ambling along behind the mule-train, I turned a corner and emerged into a water-meadow which was entirely filled with pale cream *Primula Sikkimensis*. The contrast with the stony aridity of the North-West Frontier I had only recently left was so staggering that I have never forgotten the sight. On one of the later marches, when we were approaching the Tibetan border, I had stopped to eat my packed lunch. I was looking for a suitable stone with which to crack a ration biscuit when I suddenly saw, nestling behind a rock, a solitary Himalayan blue poppy in full bloom, the first time I had set eyes upon this then rare flower. It was growing alone in aristocratic splendour, cerulean and yellow. *Meconopsis Baileyii* is no longer a rarity in English gardens and a few years ago I even saw a whole bed in Hyde Park. But somehow the effect was wrong.

This poppy does not naturally grow in clumps. It is a shy flower and does not flaunt its beauty.

The one disadvantage of Sikkim is that its lower valleys are extremely malarious. This is no great hindrance to passing travellers, since the stages are so arranged that nights are invariably spent on high ground, generally at an altitude of not less than 5000 feet above sea-level.

Hardly a day passed when we did not have to make several steep descents followed by equally stiff climbs up again. Sometimes the daily march, as the crow flies, did not amount to more than a very few miles. It was a frustrating form of progress, but it had its compensations; it got us gradually into the right physical condition for what was to follow.

Despite the switchback nature of the route we were gradually gaining altitude; each night we were a few hundred feet higher than the day before. At last we came to the Jelap La and descended into the Chumbi valley, which, although it does not differ much geographically from Sikkim, is Tibetan territory. The Jelap pass has been luridly described in several sensational books of travel. In fact it is not difficult to cross; indeed it is seldom impassable even in the depth of winter. It is a little more than 14,000 feet high and not by Himalayan standards anything of a problem. When we crossed it in early April it was deep under snow, but when we came back towards the end of July it was grass-grown and sprinkled with flowers. It was, and still is, the main entrance from Tibet into India, and in the days of which I am writing was annually crossed by thousands of mules bringing down loads of wool. In 1922 its roughly cobbled track was in a state of chronic disrepair. Now that the trade between the two countries has withered away the road has probably not been repaired for years and it may be as hard to pass as some travellers' descriptions imply.

Tibet, despite Chinese contentions, had long been considered an independent country, but its relations with the Government of India were close. We never had a permanent diplomatic representative in the country, but the Political

Officer in Sikkim, in my time Sir Charles Bell, was also in charge of Tibetan and Bhutanese affairs. Bell had spent almost his entire service in various parts of the North-East Frontier; he was one of the very few Europeans who spoke and read Tibetan, and he was on intimate terms with most of the higher officials in Lhasa, including the Dalai Lama, the priestly ruler of the country. He was the old-fashioned type of diplomat who, alas, no longer exists. His influence among the Tibetans had not arisen because he represented a great and powerful neighbour, but because he was loved and trusted as a man. It was entirely due to Sir Charles Bell that permission was obtained for successive Everest expeditions to enter Tibet, which has never welcomed foreign visitors.

In the early years of the present century relations had become strained because of the difficulties of trading between India and Tibet. The Government in Lhasa had little control over the outlying districts and many of the local officials, without whose help it was impossible to obtain transport and supplies, did not wish to trade with the outside world. They became at last so intransigent that communications were at a standstill and the Indian Government felt that the time had come for action. This was the origin of the so-called Younghusband Mission, which was dispatched in 1903 with orders to make its way to the capital and attempt to bring the Tibetans to their senses. It was never publicly described as a military expedition, but in fact Sir Francis Younghusband, one of the most humane of men, was accompanied by several thousand troops armed with modern weapons. His advance was hotly opposed, but the odds were heavily against the Tibetans, who had no protection except a few antiquated muzzle-loaders and the faith they put in their charms and amulets. Naturally their casualties were considerable, and although the Mission succeeded in its object this seems to have been one of the less creditable episodes in our history.

The subsequent treaty which Younghusband negotiated laid the foundations of our later relations with Tibet. Lhasa agreed to recognise the British protectorate over neighbouring

Sikkim, to promote trade between Tibet and India, and to prevent other foreign governments from exercising influence. The practical effect of this was that Tibet's foreign relations, such as they were, were controlled by the Government of India. Sir Charles Bell himself had been a member of the Younghusband expedition and his friendship with the Tibetans began at that time.

One clause in the Younghusband treaty permitted a small body of troops to be stationed in each of the main centres which lay on the trade-route between the two countries. These duties were carried out for six months at a time by a small contingent of the Indian Army. It was an unimportant assignment and not therefore allotted to regiments of known efficiency. Most of them hated it; they were at home only in the sweltering plains and felt miserable on the cold, clear plateau. Besides, since the Tibetans were Buddhists, shooting was prohibited. The headquarters were at Gyantse, and the other post at Yatung, the largest village in the Chumbi valley. Both posts have now been surrendered. In 1922 the arrival of our expedition was an event in the dull routine of garrison life, and as our miscellaneous caravan straggled into Yatung the entire force turned out and presented arms, as though greeting an inspecting General.

So far our journey had been pure pleasure; none of the marches was overlong and each night we dined and slept in comfort. We left Yatung on the fifth of April, and very soon there was a dramatic change in the scenery. The route now lay through a dark and gloomy forest. Long, trailing lichens hung from the trees and a cold, damp mist was everywhere. It was the sort of landscape that I have always associated with the music of Sibelius and whenever I hear one of his symphonies I am reminded of the upper reaches of the Chumbi valley.

We continued to rise steeply, and after a few more days we emerged on to the great Tibetan plateau. In front of us lay the Phari plain, dominated in the background by the isolated peak of Chomolhari, 23,800 feet high. It stands completely

alone and looks, like the Queen's tent in the opera *Coq d'Or*, as though it has risen suddenly out of the surrounding ground. In the clear air of these harsh uplands every ridge and pinnacle glittered with diamond brilliance. Chomolhari has since been climbed several times, but now it seemed to offer nothing but disaster. It was a sobering thought that if we were to succeed in getting to the top of Everest our essential camp on the North Col, from which the real climb began, would be only a few hundred feet lower than the summit of Chomolhari. For the first time I began to wonder what I had let myself in for.

Phari, or Pig Hill, was aptly named and in winter and early spring it must surely be one of the most dreary places in the world. The seemingly endless plain was frozen hard and throughout the day we were exposed to the onslaughts of a vicious wind. It was filled with swirling grit, and its scarifying coldness bit through our inadequate clothing. The Dzong, or fort, stood alone on the top of a small hill, a cluster of miserable stone buildings, and its narrow alleys were infested with snuffling pigs. The prayer-flags on the roofs blew taut in the howling gale.

Fortunately we had not yet left the trade-route, so there was no need to pitch tents. We battled our way towards the rest-house, which, because of the clear atmosphere, never seemed to be getting nearer. We had hoped for a comfortable and even joyful evening, for until we returned this was to be the last time we should have a proper roof over our heads. It was a bitter disappointment. The bungalow was dirty and ill-equipped, and the courtyard lay deep in the accumulated frozen filth of months. Besides, we were beyond the regions where firewood was available. From now on we should have to make do with yak-dung. This is no doubt a most useful by-product, but unfortunately it impregnates and flavours everything that is cooked on it and it exudes a pungent thick blue smoke. That night we huddled round the dining-table, coughing in the ever-thickening murk. Nobody felt like talking and most of us were a bit irritable. Although we did not

realise it, some of us were already suffering from a lack of acclimatisation. Its most common symptom, a tendency to find fault and snap at one's fellow-creatures, was beginning to appear.

During the few days we had to spend in Phari, waiting for a new lot of transport, it snowed continuously. Our baggage lay in disordered frozen piles around the rest-house. Henceforth we should have to depend on yaks to shift it, and this meant repacking most of the loads.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* the yak is "the long-haired humped grunting wild or domesticated ox of Tibet." This, however, is something of an understatement, as I was soon to learn. The creature does not look very different from its European counterpart, except that its hair is longer and more shaggy and it has a very long bushy tail. The noise it makes is not accurately described as a grunt, but is more like the creaking of a ship's timbers in a storm. I thought at first that this was an animal entirely without intelligence, but I soon learned that the yak has definite views on what it considers a suitable load; in this respect it is as intransigent as a dedicated trade unionist when asked to work after normal hours. If it is given what it considers to be an excessive burden nothing will induce it to move. It will stand immobile until patience is exhausted and then, with one tremendous buck, hurl its load to the ground.

The advantages of the yak are that it is self-supporting and does not require to be looked after in any way. For half the year the Tibetan plateau is frozen as stiff as a board, but this does not seem to worry the yak. Even in the depth of winter it can find all its needs in the way of food by nosing about among the frozen rock and stones. It grazes, if so lapidary a diet can be thus described, on the march, so that its normal cruising-speed is not much more than a mile an hour. Also it is not gregarious; each individual likes to follow its own nose. We started off each morning with a brave array of several hundred in a compact herd, but after the first hour or so the convoy became spread out over several miles of country. We soon

realised that it was a waste of time to attempt any control over our baggage-train and accustomed ourselves to a large part of it not arriving until well after dark. At the end of each stage the yaks would be unloaded by their own Tibetan herdsmen, after which the creatures, of their own accord, shambled out into the night. The following morning they could be observed in ones and twos all round the camp, sometimes with a sprinkling of snow on their backs. They seem to be unaffected by cold, but if the yak is taken down to what most people would regard as a reasonable altitude it sickens and soon dies. It is also used as a riding animal, but the average European, unless he has been trained as a contortionist and is able to sit for hours with his legs spread out almost laterally, finds it less painful to walk.

Our long journey across Tibet would have been much easier had it been possible to retain the yaks and drivers with which we started out from Phari. We were, however, dependent on the local officials for the provision of our transport, and this meant frequent changes. They did all they could to help us, but it was obvious that the passage of so large a party presented great difficulty in a country that not only regarded foreigners with suspicion but was also ill organised to deal with their wants. This was one good reason why it was always difficult to get permission to enter Tibet; the needs of visitors disrupted the normal life of the country.

The Dzongpöns, or local governors, of the districts through which we passed had been warned of our coming by the Government in Lhasa, and it was their duty to collect such transport-animals as we required. But we had so much baggage that we needed all the yaks available in any particular place. This meant that they had to be rounded up from distant villages, sometimes two or three days' journey from the place where we were camped. Besides, Tibet is a country in which time, as we of the West regard it, has no meaning. Neither the clock nor the calendar is in general use, so that every few days our journey was brought to a standstill while we waited for the new lot of transport to arrive.

We knew that the possibility of climbing Everest depended largely on our being in position to take advantage of the brief spell of calm weather before the arrival of the monsoon, so that these enforced waits were extremely frustrating, especially to those who were unused to the normal procrastinations of oriental travel. I myself enjoyed them hugely and welcomed the chance they gave to see something of Tibetan life.

Tibet has been often described as a land of mystery; many of its people are thought to be possessed of supernatural powers such as are found in no other country. It may perhaps be so, but on my several visits I never once came across the least evidence of the peculiar manifestations so convincingly described in the works of that intrepid Frenchwoman, Madame Alexandra David-Neel, and others. Certainly the Tibetans are unworldly, even naïve, but their needs are few and simple; they have not been contaminated by contact with the materialism of the outside world. It would perhaps be more correct to say that this was so in 1922. Now that the country has come under the domination of Communist China there have apparently been revolutionary changes.

Most travellers have remarked on the extreme dirtiness of the Tibetan people, but I have often wondered how the English (a nation not noticeable for cleanliness) would behave if they lived in a climate where the temperature seldom rises above freezing-point, and yak-dung, the only available fuel, must be carefully hoarded for essential cooking. Certainly in the remote parts of the country through which we travelled it was obvious that the people never washed. Wherever we stopped for the night our camp next morning would be surrounded by a group of gaping yokels entranced by the sight of us performing our perfunctory ablutions; hot water was not, in their view, a substance to be wasted by rubbing it on the face. This daily rite must therefore be some form of religious observance, the merit of which was not apparent to the puzzled onlookers.

In the cold and completely dry atmosphere of Tibet the body does not sweat, so that the more unpleasant results of

uncleanliness do not assail one. Dirt collects in the form of dust. I once saw a particularly grubby young lama engage another in rough horse-play. Showers of grime and flakes of congealed smoke fell from them both, and when they had finished their gambol they looked almost clean.

At each of our periodical halts we had to pay a ceremonial call on the local Dzongpön. It had often to be followed by several others, until the promised transport began to arrive. The procedure was always the same. No business was discussed at the first visit, the main purpose of which was to report our arrival (which must have been obvious) and make a small presentation. This was invariably a Homburg hat, from a store which we had accumulated before leaving India. I have never discovered why this particular form of headgear is so popular, but there is no doubt that all over Tibet it gives its wearer a special cachet.

The Dzongpön would generally send three or four of his henchmen to escort us to the fort, and on the way the party would be swollen by any bystanders who had nothing better to do; this usually meant most of the local population. When we arrived the whole gathering would crowd into one of the upper rooms, generally a smoke-filled, windowless attic, deep in dust, but carpeted with old and sometimes very beautiful Chinese rugs. These rooms were usually furnished with one or two low tables. Tea, served in small porcelain or silver-lined wooden bowls, would be brought in at once. Every Tibetan invariably carries a tea-bowl hidden in the folds of his loose robe, and produces it as soon as his host's servant enters with the pot.

The tea in common use throughout Tibet is Chinese and in bricks. If it were made in the usual way, by merely infusing it with boiling water, it would presumably be a palatable drink. Unfortunately this is not the local custom. The tea is made in a churn, mixed with salt, nitre and large quantities of rancid butter. It is served boiling, and if it is not immediately gulped down the butter settles on the top in the form of a thick scum in which there is usually a certain amount of yak-hair. How to

drink this revolting substance is a considerable social problem for most Europeans. It is good manners to empty the cup at a draught, whereupon it is immediately refilled. Thus the problem recurs in ever-acuter form. After the first few experiences most of us elaborated excuses for avoiding these ceremonies, but I found that with a little practice I could get down a few cups without actually vomiting. If one came to regard the stuff not as tea, but as what it actually was, a kind of soup, it seemed to take on a less objectionable flavour.

At every camp we were under close observation all through the day; not from any sinister motive but out of sheer curiosity. Our situation was like that of the denizens of those so-called native villages who are often a popular feature of international exhibitions. If a tent was left unguarded for more than a few minutes one or two of the bolder Tibetans would immediately go in and begin a chattering examination of its contents. Hair-brushes and tooth-brushes seemed to be particularly interesting, presumably because the locals could not conceive of their use. Nothing was ever stolen.

This prying into our personal possessions was no more than a minor irritation and most of us learned in time to accept it with fairly good grace. Unfortunately it was not the Tibetans' only interest in us. It was almost impossible to perform the major function of nature in private, and in the early morning as we wandered out into the countryside for this purpose, each of us would be followed by a knot of expectant villagers; it was like a game of hide-and-seek. Strutt was once observed striding towards the horizon closely followed by a herd of snuffling pigs. The attitude of different members of the party was very revealing; the extraverts squatted down behind the nearest convenient rock and paid no heed to the audience, while the others would saunter on until their pursuers lost interest.

Our attitude towards shaving was another indication of character. A beard was a sensible protection against the rigours of the climate; also it saved a lot of time and bother. But I noticed that one or two natural exhibitionists among us

began to take an unnecessary pride in their sprouting tufts, which they would carefully preen and fondle. After a time they looked like Old Testament prophets, and my unreasoning dislike of beards, especially when worn by the young, dates from this time. I cannot claim that I shaved every day during the course of the expedition, but General Bruce and I were the only ones who made regular and determined efforts.

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

At long last we came to the Rongbuk monastery. The upper part of the valley in which it lies was entirely filled with the great bulk of Everest, apparently so near that its base was no more than a morning's easy walk away. In fact the mountain was some sixteen miles away as the crow flies and we still had before us a long and arduous journey before we could set foot upon it.

It takes a long time for those accustomed only to the atmospheric conditions of Europe to realise that in Tibet the impression of distance is almost annihilated. This is because the air is completely dry, and atmosphere, as it is generally understood, does not exist, so that peaks and ridges thirty or even forty miles away appear to be almost in the same visual plane as the foreground of a landscape. At first it is impossible to estimate even approximately how far one is from a distant landmark, and a faithful painting of the Tibetan scene would look like an architect's projection. But all this is changed when the damp air caused by the monsoon begins to arrive. The whole colour-scheme changes as though by magic; shadows take on a blue and purple brilliance such as I have never seen elsewhere. Harshness dissolves from the landscape and distant mountains assume something of that air of mystery which, despite their familiarity, is still apparent in the Alps.

The morning after we arrived at Rongbuk the entire expedition made a pilgrimage to the monastery, the head lama of which (he has since died) was revered throughout the district. He was already very old and had spent most of his life in this remote and desolate valley. I suppose the world would have called him illiterate, but he was a man who radiated a sort of positive goodness, a true man of God, and it was impossible

to conceive of his having an evil thought. He told us that great harm would come if we killed any of the animals or birds which wandered tamely in the lower reaches of the Rongbuk. Everest itself, the lama said, was the home of demons, but he did not fear that our activities would disturb them; they were sufficiently powerful to be able to look after themselves. For his part, he would intercede with them not to harm us. He smiled benevolently as he said this and asked us to approach him one by one. To each of us he gave a ceremonial scarf and then blessed us by lightly touching our heads with what looked like an ornate silver pepper-pot. This harmless act of benediction, when it was later described in one of our dispatches, was thought by a few ignorant and narrow-minded people in Britain to have been in some sense a betrayal of the Christian beliefs to which, however half-heartedly, most of us subscribed.

For our porters it was one of the great occasions of their lives. Sherpas cannot be held to take their religion, such as it is, very seriously, but like most primitive peoples they are extremely superstitious; their world is filled with evil spirits, and it would be foolish to miss an opportunity to propitiate them. And to be blessed by a lama famed for his holiness was a great occasion; it afforded a degree of protection that in the ordinary course of events was hard to come by.

Like the Tibetans themselves, Sherpas do not take kindly to water, but this was the one time during the expedition when they saw fit to appear with the visible portions of their bodies scrubbed and glowing ruddy. Over their ordinary workaday clothes they had put on the padded high-altitude smocks and trousers which had just been issued. Most of them also wore their thick woollen helmets and heavy boots, and one or two, so as to display the whole of their unaccustomed finery, appeared wearing sun-glasses, although the day was dull and overcast. They looked like visitors from another planet, but if their strange appearance astonished the lama he gave no hint of his surprise. As they entered the presence each man prostrated himself and wormed his way forward to receive

the blessing. So far as I could see not one man even raised his head from the ground to look at the lama. "It is not good," one of them afterwards told me, "for mortal man to look upon God."

It was a moving little ceremony and the porters were visibly affected by it. But the lama had also a practical side to his nature. "If you have trouble with any of these men," he said, "send him to me and I will deal with him."

Beyond the monastery there was nothing that could be called a path. The valley seemed to be entirely filled with stones and at this season contained no water. High above it were one or two hermit's cells. The Rongbuk lama had told us that it was customary for some of the more austere monks among his flock to spend a year alone in these retreats. For most of them it was more than enough, but there were a few who spent their entire lives thus in solitary contemplation. Their food was brought from the monastery below and they were alleged to exist on a handful of grain each day. It appeared, judging by the remains with which the ground outside the cells was fouled, that this was a pious exaggeration. Tibetans regard these ascetic monks with the utmost veneration, but their vacuous faces, looking as though they had lost the power of thought, gave me nothing but a feeling of disgust. It seemed horrible thus deliberately to deny the purpose of life.

Our path took us to the snout of the main Rongbuk glacier, the end of which appeared in front like a great wall barring further progress. At this point it was almost completely covered with stones and rocks; the ice was barely visible. We still had the whole of our transport; some three hundred yaks, twenty or so mules and riding-ponies, and a miscellaneous assortment of Tibetans, men and women, nearly a hundred in all, who had come with us as temporary porters and representatives of the Dzongpön who was in administrative charge of the region. We had hoped to take at least some of the yaks still further up the valley, but it was now made clear that this was the end of the journey. The Tibetan drivers

unloaded their animals and vociferously demanded their wages. Soon we were left alone, a party of thirteen Europeans and the small corps of Sherpa porters who had come with us from Darjeeling. All around us lay disordered piles of stores and baggage, some of it already looking weatherworn.

This place was henceforth to be our permanent Base Camp. It was not an ideal spot, since it was three hard days from the foot of the North Col, where the real climbing began. However its position was the result of circumstances and to move it higher would have been not only a waste of time but a wrong use of the manpower on which we were now entirely dependent. It was the first of May, and we reckoned we had about five weeks in which to climb the mountain. After that avalanches would begin and operations would have to be suspended until the following year.

By Himalayan standards the Base Camp was not high. It was 16,500 feet above sea-level, nearly a thousand feet higher than the summit of Mont Blanc, but there was no feeling of being at other than a fairly normal altitude. We had been gradually rising ever since we set out from Darjeeling, and the daily marches had acclimatised us.

It is possible to reproduce the effects of altitude in a pressure-chamber, and some of the climbers had been tested in this way before leaving England. But it turned out to be an unreliable guide to a man's performance on the actual mountain. Some acclimatise more slowly than others, and among those who went highest on Everest were one or two whose performances in the pressure-chamber had been lamentable; they lost consciousness in the equivalent atmospheric conditions of altitudes far below the summit of Everest. But in a pressure-chamber it is not possible to make allowance for the beneficial effects of gradual acclimatisation.

There was a great deal of work to be done in sorting out the stores. Besides, since this desolate place would be our headquarters for the next few weeks we must make the Base Camp as comfortable as possible; it was here that the climbing parties would return for a rest between their several attempts. Most

of us were fully occupied in building up the camp, but already we were haunted by the spectre of the approaching monsoon and there was little time to waste. Bruce therefore decided to send out a small party at once; they were to examine the approach to the mountain and select the most suitable places for the intervening camps which we knew would be necessary. Strutt was in charge, and Longstaff and Norton went with him. Longstaff was a very experienced climber, but he soon returned to the Base in poor condition. Like several others of the party he was too old to be able to exert himself at these comparatively moderate altitudes. I have seen it suggested that we might have been more successful if, as became the custom on subsequent expeditions, every member of the party had been potentially capable of reaching the summit. It should however be remembered that the world war was only recently ended. For more than four years it had not been possible to go to the Alps, and the new generation of younger climbers did not yet exist. It was inevitable that our party should be largely composed of those whose reputations had been gained before the war.

We already knew from George Mallory's explorations during the preliminary reconnaissance of 1921 that the approach to Everest did not lie up the main Rongbuk glacier. He had discovered by chance another and smaller valley, the entrance to which was so insignificant that no one at first realised that this was the key to the problem. He had not had time to explore this valley, but it was the East Rongbuk Glacier, as it came to be known, that Strutt's party was now to examine. George had already satisfied himself that it was not a difficult route, but we did not yet know how many camps we should have to establish along its length nor where they should be situated. Strutt decided that there would have to be three, the last of them on a broad snow-and-ice-covered plateau immediately below the long and dangerous slopes which led up to the North Col.

As soon as Strutt returned, Geoffrey Bruce and I, with most of the porters, set off to establish and provision these

camps. We began by dumping everything at the first and then moving gradually forward until each of the three camps was fully stocked and ready for occupation. This process had to be constantly repeated, and for the next month it was my continuing concern.

One of the few photographs taken by Hillary from the summit of Everest in 1953 shows the East Rongbuk Glacier looking like a carriage-drive, sweeping in a great curve up to the mountain. No detail is visible, and looking down from 7000 feet above it appears as smooth and polished as a Swiss toboggan-run. In fact it is for most of its length covered with a maze of seracs, or ice-pinnacles, many of them a hundred feet or more high. The route wandered in and out among them, and until we marked it with flags was difficult to follow. At first we escorted the porters roped in small parties, but once they had learned to recognise and avoid the numerous crevasses which were a permanent feature of the glacier this was no longer necessary. On an overcast day each of the three stages could be negotiated in three or four hours without distress, but when the sun shone it was another matter. A feeling of utter lassitude overcame most of us, so that it needed a great effort to drag oneself forward. It is strange that at heights such as this one should feel the heat, but on sunny days it was almost intolerable. Once I found myself incapable of movement, and I told the porters to go on alone. As soon as they were out of sight I began to vomit so continuously that I thought I was going to die. It was my first experience of mountain sickness, an extremely unpleasant form of nausea which disappears immediately the sufferer descends to a slightly lower altitude.

I made my headquarters at the second camp, and for the next few weeks I saw my companions only for a brief chat when they passed through. I lived in a tent which was just big enough to accommodate my sleeping-bag. It was pitched on a slab of ice which as soon as the temperature dropped at night would begin to contract with an alarming cracking noise. It was not in the least dangerous, and after a time I scarcely noticed it.

Once the day's work was done there was nothing to occupy the long evening hours. It was too cold to hold a book for more than about a quarter of an hour, so I was generally tucked up in my sleeping-bag by five o'clock. Dinner, almost always a tin of stew followed by innumerable cups of tea, was over by six, and after that I used to sleep by fits and starts until the following dawn. Many people are troubled by insomnia at high altitudes, but I never had any difficulty in sleeping. In these glacier camps most of us spent from fourteen to sixteen hours a day in bed; not because we needed the rest, but because it was the only way of keeping warm. There were long periods when one simply lay in the tent neither fully awake nor yet asleep. I should like to be able to say that on these occasions my thoughts were concerned with the nature of the universe, but they were not; the only thing I thought about was food.

I several times went up to the North Col, but I never got beyond it. The tiny camp, at an altitude of 23,000 feet, was perched on an ice-covered shelf. The approach to it from the last of the glacier camps did not present any great difficulty, but it was the most dangerous section of the journey. The exposed open slopes, which had continually to be traversed, were always liable to avalanche, and it was here that our one fatal accident occurred.

We had already made two attempts to reach the summit and the weather seemed good enough for a third. In those early days none of us was sufficiently experienced in judging Himalayan snow-conditions, which are markedly different from those in the Alps. The mountain appeared still to be in good climbing condition, but, although we did not realise it, the almost imperceptibly warmer air from the south had already begun to affect the texture of the snow.

After a frozen night at Camp Three the climbers had started off on the morning of June 7. They soon found that a good deal of new snow had fallen, obliterating much of the usual track. Their pace was slowed by the need to clear the way and make a new path for the porters. Nevertheless they

decided to go on. It was already too late in the season and the North Col slopes were in a highly dangerous condition. Before long the party, which fortunately was climbing on several separate ropes, was carried down by an avalanche and seven of the porters were swept over a precipice and killed. I was still at Camp Three when the survivors returned. I had thought they looked tired when they passed through on the way up, but now they were not only shaken and completely exhausted, but seemed to have aged considerably. It was obvious that we could make no further attempts that year.

Even before the accident we realised that we could not stay much longer on the mountain, and I had already begun to empty the three glacier camps while the last climbing attempt was taking place. General Bruce had sent up to help me all the spare porters besides a number of Tibetans, who, now that the wintry conditions were almost over, had drifted to the Base Camp to see if they could earn a little money. After helping the survivors of the last attempt on their way down I remained alone for a few days at Camp Three, and was thus the last member of the party to spend a night on the glacier. It was extraordinary how rapidly conditions deteriorated now that the monsoon had arrived. The weather was still fairly good, but the whole face of the mountain began to change; under the influence of the soft winds from the south it seemed to be disintegrating. On my final journey down the glacier the huge seracs, which earlier had seemed as solid as marble blocks, were starting to crumble and some had already toppled over. The trough of ice up the middle of the glacier was no longer safe. It now looked like a vast ice-cream that had been left out in the sun. Obviously I must get off the glacier quickly. There was not time to salvage all the valuable equipment stacked in the several camps, and I had to abandon much of it.

When I got back to the Base Camp, which I had not seen for several weeks, there was a startling change in its appearance. There was no longer much trace of ice or snow except in one or two places which were permanently in shadow, and a

few stunted plants had begun to poke their heads through the frozen ground. A sizeable volume of water was gushing from the snout of the Rongbuk glacier, and a few days later, when we descended to the monastery, I was astonished to find that it had become a raging torrent filled with melting snow and small blocks of ice. This was the first time I had seen the birth of a river, and I had expected its waters to be calm and limpid; it was the colour of a battleship and looked evil.

By midday it was hot enough to discard most of one's clothing, and some of us took to sun-bathing. But at these altitudes the sun's rays have an actinic quality very different from that at sea-level, and after only a few minutes of exposure to them the body quickly reddens; the next day it is badly blistered.

The whole expedition was now together again for the first time since we had set out from the Base Camp. During the intervening weeks we had got to know each other intimately, but although we had been united in a common effort we never became a fully integrated party. Reading the accounts of later expeditions one gets the impression that nothing ever happened to disturb their equanimity, but judging by our own experiences I have often wondered if this was true.

At great altitudes most people become irritable and absurdly intolerant of each other's idiosyncrasies. It was not long before we began to find fault with such petty details as another's method of using a knife and fork or a tendency to whistle. And a companion's obvious enjoyment of a solid meal at a time when one had lost all appetite invariably resulted in an exchange of words. Finch, who was a man of most equable temperament, was an almost permanent subject of sarcastic comment, since he alone was capable of eating anything at any time. Most of us learned in time to control our feelings, but there were several occasions when Strutt, who was naturally intolerant even in normal circumstances, was unable to keep his thoughts to himself. He always apologised for these outbursts but they nevertheless had a dampening effect. There was no disguising the fact that by the time we reassembled at the Base

Camp we were getting badly on one another's nerves. The situation was probably exacerbated by the difference in our ages. Unlike later parties we did not all belong to the same generation, so that towards the end of the expedition we tended to divide into groups. We remained mutually appreciative of each other's capabilities, but were no longer a really homogeneous gathering.

As soon as the necessary yaks and local porters arrived we set off down the valley. We had already informed the Rongbuk lama by messenger of the tragedy which had put an end to our activities, but we did not know how he would receive us. He was kind and sympathetic and never suggested that we were in any way responsible for the death of seven of our men. He asked us to attend a service in the monastery to honour the spirits of those we had left behind, and this gesture had a most reassuring effect upon our porters. They became convinced that the loss of their companions had been ordained. There was no longer any question of whether they would agree to go to Everest again; they had become partners in the enterprise.

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

We all needed a rest, and General Bruce decided that it would be sensible to spend a week or so in more comfortable conditions before we began the long journey back to India. Besides, for the last six weeks it had hardly been possible to wash either our bodies or our clothes. By Tibetan standards we were certainly not dirty, but we were beginning to look a bit grubby.

The area chosen for our little holiday was Kharta, a district twenty miles or so as the crow flies to the east of Everest. It had been briefly visited by the reconnaissance party of the year before, and they had been struck by the exceptional beauty of the scenery. Its immediate attraction however was its comparatively low altitude, a little less than 11,000 feet above sea-level.

It was astonishing how quickly the scenery changed as soon as we got out of the Rongbuk valley. When we had gone up into the mountains the Tibetan plateau was still in the grip of winter, but now that the monsoon clouds had come differences had taken place with an almost magical rapidity. What had formerly appeared to be barren hillsides were now, only six weeks later, grass-covered and all over the place were clumps of Alpine flowers. It was a great delight to see trees again, but the biggest pleasure was to be caught in a sudden shower of rain. For what had seemed a very long time we had been constantly exposed to storms of snow and hail and sleet. They had cracked and seared the skin on our faces, so that we had come to look upon the elements as permanently unfriendly. We had almost forgotten the existence of rain, and this sudden reminder, as the warm drops coursed down our grimy faces, was wholly comforting.

We recovered quickly at Kharta, and the soft, damp air proved so beneficial that we decided to move on and see more of the country. We would go south to the Kama valley. It was in the direction of the Tibeto-Nepalese frontier, and we hoped it might be possible to go up to the Popti Pass and thus have a view right down the Arun valley into the heart of Eastern Nepal.

At that time Nepal was still a closed country, and this possibility of having even a distant glimpse of it was naturally a particular attraction to those of us who had past or present connections with Gurkha regiments. But there is in any case a magnetic quality about all countries in which permission to travel is almost impossible to obtain. This has always applied particularly to Tibet, which is now more inaccessible than ever before, and I have seldom met anybody without a desire to visit the country. Most people, when they got there, would probably be disappointed and certainly extremely uncomfortable. Nevertheless there is a satisfaction in going where no one else has been; it satisfies a secret vanity that most of us possess. It is at all events a harmless foible, and in the pursuit of it many people have added much to our knowledge of the physical world. But there is really no such thing as an unexplored country, though Europeans have long adopted the quaint conceit that what is unknown to them cannot possibly be known to anyone else.

The weather deteriorated suddenly, and although we were now camped in the midst of some of the most spectacular scenery in the world, surrounded by immense mountains, we saw almost nothing. All day long a continuous procession of enormous clouds came streaming up the valleys, blotting out the landscape. Very occasionally the tip of some unknown peak would be visible above the cloud-bank, looking like a primeval rocky island thrusting up out of the sea. Once, unable to sleep, I looked outside my tent in the middle of the night. The clouds had disappeared and the entire countryside was lit with the silver brilliance of a moon that was almost full. We were in the middle of an immense cirque of mountains, every detail

of which was now clearly visible, like the lines of a steel-engraving. Quickly I called the others to look upon this wonder, and protestingly they came. Nobody spoke; it was one of those rare occasions when everybody sensed that speech would break the spell. It did not last long. While we stood there tiny wisps of cloud began to gather in the bottom of the valley, and by dawn we were again enveloped in swirling mists.

We had hoped to do a little mild exploration in the Kama valley, but it soon became obvious that we were too late in the season. There was still a chance that the weather might improve, but meanwhile stores were getting short. It would however take a few days to collect the transport for our homeward journey, and while this was being done there was one small geographical puzzle which we were anxious to try and solve.

The Arun river is one of the principal tributaries of the Kosi, which, before it eventually joins the Ganges, flows through the heart of Eastern Nepal. It rises in the plains of Tibet (where it is known as the Bhong Chu) and then, turning due south, forces its way through the main chain of the Himalayas directly between the mountain passes of Everest and Kanchenjunga. Between the place where we were camped and the Nepalese frontier, a distance of some twenty miles, the river was known to drop a vertical height of 4000 feet. It was not known whether this tremendous drop consisted of a series of great rapids and falls or a steady descent in the bed of the river, and this was what we wanted to find out. Also we realised from the moonlit glimpse we had had a few nights before that the gorge itself must be of the utmost grandeur. We came to the conclusion that it might just be possible for a very small party to work its way through the gorge. Noel, our official photographer, and I were invited to make the attempt.

With four porters and our two personal servants we set off on June 27 in heavy rain. We had hoped by evening to reach a hamlet called Kyimateng, but after plodding along for three and a half hours we met Noel's servant, who had gone forward the night before in the hope of buying a few supplies.

He told us that we had not yet covered even half the distance, so we decided to camp at the first suitable spot. A little further on we came to a bridge across a small river and leading to the Popti La, a pass on the formerly much-frequented trade-route between Nepal and Tibet, now discarded in favour of the more direct path up the Arun valley. Near this bridge was a small clearing dotted with stone huts that appeared not to have been occupied for a considerable time. These deserted encampments were a feature of the whole journey, and when I later discussed them with Sir Charles Bell he suggested that their abandonment was probably due to the opening of the British trade-route through the Chumbi valley. This route was yearly attracting more and more of the Tibetan trade, and Sir Charles said that he had often been told by Gurkhas that its establishment was gradually destroying their trade. The Tibetans had begun to desert the rough mountain-tracks through Nepal in favour of the good new road through the Chumbi, and although it entailed a much longer journey it was easier and more comfortable. In the changed conditions of the present day the situation has probably reverted.

The rain had now ceased, and we hurried to pitch our tent before it should begin again. A little later a pale and watery sun appeared. As soon as it had set thousands of tiny midges emerged, making any kind of rest impossible. We lit a small fire of juniper-twigs at the tent-entrance and took turns to sit up and keep it going.

It was fine when we started at dawn the next morning, but thick clouds were drifting slowly up the valley. We were soon level with the Popti La. Despite the humid atmosphere a little snow still lay in the shadows on the pass. As we descended on the far side the trees increased in size, and when we got down to the river-bed we came across glades carpeted with moss and dotted with clumps of purple iris. The path, such as it was, became invisible at times because of the thick under-growth and for two miles was four inches under water. The local Tibetans had cut down trees and laid them end to end along the path. This was some help, but our boots were

already water-logged and we walked clumsily, frequently stumbling into the mire.

It was exhausting work, and after some hours of it I was barely conscious of the scenery. At the end of a long ascent the forest ended abruptly and we emerged on to a grassy slope high above the river. Here we came across a party of Gurkhas, the first Nepalese we had so far met. They had come up from Dhankuta, the headquarters of government in Eastern Nepal, and were grazing their flocks for a few days before they moved on to the rich grasslands above the Arun gorge. Once again we descended, crossed the river by a rickety bridge and clambered up again steeply to the village of Kyimateng. It was perched on high cliffs overlooking the junction of the Kama and Arun rivers. Looking up the Arun from our camp outside the village we could faintly discern the hamlet of Tsanga, while downstream we had a clear view into Nepal. Probably no other Europeans had ever seen this vista. It was of no great beauty, but for me it was a portent. I felt like a real explorer.

Kyimateng, although in Tibetan territory, was a typical Nepalese village. Each small neat house was surrounded by well-kept fields of maize, wheat and barley. Most were bounded by rough stone walls, and in one or two of the fields a light bamboo structure had been erected from which a watch was kept at night for bears. The village and its dependent hamlets are so inaccessible that the people do not appear to come under the jurisdiction of either Tibet or Nepal, but lead a completely free life. There were no less than five headmen, and all came to pay their respects the morning after we arrived. Village administration by *panchayat*, or five elders, is usual in most parts of the Indian sub-continent, including Nepal, but whereas one of the five is normally appointed village headman, in Kyimateng all were regarded as of equal rank.

The elders were extremely interested in our tent and cameras and after a thorough examination of our few possessions left to carry out their daily labours. Strangely, they could tell us nothing about the route ahead through the Arun gorge. They

said however that they would find out and also promised to supply us with another relay of porters. Those with whom we had started out were unwilling to go any further.

In the afternoon, while Noel was busy with his ciné-camera, I went to return the headmen's visit. What appeared to be the entire village population was drawn up outside one of the houses. Bamboo matting had been laid on the ground in front, and after the usual exchange of greetings we sat down to numerous cups of tea, fortunately served without butter or salt. There was not much to talk about, since we had exhausted our stock of polite inquiries the day before, but after we had rehearsed them yet again I thought it prudent to find out what arrangements were being made for our onward journey. I was now told that there was no path through the gorge and in any case nobody was willing to carry for us, since all the men were busy in their fields. I knew that there was a track, because the Gurkhas we had met had told us that they themselves would travel along it. After some further discussion the headmen admitted that a route through the gorge was known, but I had to agree to pay twice the normal rates before they promised to find us porters for the following morning.

We had to pay them in advance, and in doing so I had an insight into the local method of accounting. One of the headmen produced a large wooden board and a bag of beans, which he laid out in rows; one row for each porter and one bean for each anna of the sum I had agreed to pay. After several false counts a total was arrived at, and then the board, with the beans still in place, was carefully removed inside the house.

Soon after leaving Kyimateng we recrossed the river and plunged once more into the forest. We then mounted over some cliffs, beyond which was a splendid waterfall with a drop of about a thousand feet. We trudged on for a further three hours and emerged at last on to a tiny alp high above the river. Here there was a small matting hut. It was unoccupied, but guarded by two savage mongrels chained up inside. We decided to camp for the night. There was no sign of water, and we had to wait for the owners of the hut to return, which,

alarmed by the barking of their dogs, they soon did. They turned out to be another party of Gurkhas and, like those we had met before, also from Dhankuta. One old man (he looked about seventy but was probably much less) had served in the army and soon began to question me about regimental life. His talk was all of officers long since dead and weapons obsolete before my time. He knew a lot about this country and was able to guide us on our way. The whole of the district, so he said, was neglected by Tibetans, but it was annually visited by large numbers of Gurkhas who grazed their flocks there. Before we left he sold us a sheep and two chickens for two rupees, the equivalent of about three shillings.

We discovered in due course that the Arun has no great waterfall, but does pass through three deep gorges. For the rest it is a raging torrent running through forested defiles, and the remarkable drop of 4000 feet is caused by a steady fall in the river-bed. At several points the valley becomes so narrow that the river is no more than thirty or forty yards wide.

The passage of the three main gorges entailed a climb up and down of several thousand feet. Looking down from the precipices we got occasional glimpses of the torrent below. In one or two places the cliffs rose as much as 10,000 feet above the river and ended in snow-capped crags. For most of the time we were blanketed deep in cloud and had often to wait for several hours before it was clear enough to take a photograph. Nevertheless these enforced waits were sometimes rewarding; the splendid panorama that eventually emerged was well worth the exertions of the climb. But since these alternate ascents and descents were not single occurrences, we soon ceased to revel in the scenery and would willingly have forgone its beauties in return for a few miles of flat ground.

At the end of the second day the path seemed to come to a dead end. We could find no suitable spot for a camp, so we hacked away the undergrowth. While we were thus engaged a swarm of bees descended upon us, scattering the porters in all directions. They quickly wrapped their faces and hands in their blankets, and it was some time before we were able to

persuade them back. We spent the rest of the evening looking for an onward path, but clearly there was none. Noel and I both decided that anything would be better than a return by the way we had come, and since there was no further track we would make one for ourselves. We did this by hacking straight through the jungle. Fortunately it was mostly bamboo and therefore not difficult to slash away. It was unquestionably a foolhardy decision, but we were both young and strong. Also we lacked the wisdom of experience which might have made us hesitate. Our luck held, and after working our way across the great central gorge and dropping down to the river-bed we found a strip of sand just big enough to accommodate our tiny camp.

We had been continuously on the move for sixteen hours, and at the end of the day our legs were covered with leeches. During the monsoon in jungle country it is impossible to avoid the onslaught of those odious creatures, which lurk on every leaf and twig. If they are not immediately dealt with they adhere to any piece of exposed skin with such tenacity that only a lighted cigarette-end will dislodge them. Their most unpleasant trick, which nothing will prevent, is to work their way through the eyelets of one's boots and fasten on to the feet. Fortunately their blood-sucking is painless, but if they are pulled off they leave a sore which is liable to turn septic. On this evening we were both too tired to bother about them.

Our camp-site was one of the most spectacular I have ever seen. There was a profusion of wild flowers all round us, of which the most striking was a gigantic white lily, about six feet high, its strongly scented trumpets growing two-and-two right down the stalk. Late that evening the rain, which had been falling for most of the day, cleared, and the rising clouds revealed the lush green walls of the valley. They seemed to rise almost vertically above us, with black caverns below where the trees trailed and projected over the water's edge.

During the fourth march we struck a path of sorts. It was apparently a track used by Tibetans who come down here to

gather wood. When it too petered out we camped for the night, and the next day, towards evening, we came to a village. Here we found it possible to hire a couple of ponies, and thus we rejoined our companions who had been awaiting us at Kharta.

Although I did not know it at the time, we had traversed a piece of country of considerable historical interest. It was in this very Arun district that the Chinese conducted a military expedition in 1792. In the previous year the Gurkhas, who had newly come into power in Nepal, made their way into Tibet and raided the greatly venerated monastery of Tashi Lumpo, near the town of Shigatse, and the seat of the Tashi Lama, second in rank only to the Dalai Lama himself. The Chinese decided to retaliate. In contemporary accounts the numbers engaged in the expedition have obviously been much exaggerated, for it was clear from what we ourselves had seen of the country that no large military force could possibly have operated in it. Nevertheless considerable numbers of both Tibetan and Chinese troops seem to have been engaged. The latter are alleged to have marched from the frontier, some 2000 miles away, and they defeated the Gurkhas in several battles, finally dictating an ignominious peace within sight of Kathmandu. In Lhasa there still stands a monolith commemorating the campaign. It is written in the flowery language of the period and proclaims, in the translation given me by Sir Charles Bell, that "the glorious Chinese Army crossed the mountains, so difficult to travel through, as if they were traversing a level plain; they crossed rivers with great waves and narrow gorges as though they were mere streams; they fought seven battles and gained seven victories."

It was because of these events that until comparatively recently the Nepalese Government used to send an annual tribute to Peking. The Chinese considered that they held suzerain rights over Nepal, although they were never at any time officially recognised; largely, I imagine, because of the immense distance and lack of communications between the two countries. For similar reasons the Chinese never exerted

much authority in Tibet, which has long been regarded, at any rate by the outside world, as an independent sovereign state. The Chinese however have always claimed that Tibet is part of China, have so drawn it on their maps, and their present activities in that country are largely based upon this assumption.

# CHAPTER NINETEEN

OUR journey back to India was uneventful. The one slight difficulty we had was with the porters. Sherpas are not naturally given to austerity, but on the mountain there was no opportunity for indulgence, except for the occasional tot of rum with which we used to reward them after a particularly gruelling day. Now that the job was done they saw no reason for further self-denial. Tibetan villages have not much to offer in the way of entertainment, but *chang*, the local spirit made from fermented millet, was generally available in almost unlimited quantities. Our men were not subject to military discipline, so that we had little control over them. Nevertheless we had to keep some semblance of order if we were not to return as a disorganised rabble and with half our baggage missing. We decided that a man was not drunk so long as he could lie down on the ground without actually holding on. It was, we felt, a generous interpretation, but there was one porter who was consistently unable to comply even with this simple test. After he had been more or less unconscious for three days in succession we determined on an exemplary punishment. After any mild carousal we used to make the culprit carry a load, but to this particular man we allotted a truly enormous burden. We loaded him with a sack weighing well over 100 lb., and on the first day he carried it for some twenty miles, which included the ascent of a 17,000-foot pass. At the end of it he was still grinning, as though the whole affair was some splendid joke, and although he had been subjected to the continuous chaffing of his fellows, nothing ruffled his temper. We condemned him to carry this load for a week, until we got to Phari, but he never bore the least ill-will. His behaviour was characteristic of the Sherpas. They will not

tolerate sarcasm, but provided they are treated with what they consider justice they will accept the consequences with good grace.

On one of our last marches we came across a religious devotee, a man whose home was near Urga in Northern Mongolia. He was travelling from Lhasa to Kathmandu, where there is a Buddhist *stupa* of great sanctity. He was advancing by the extremely laborious method of measuring his length on the ground. He was quite young and looked well fed, as indeed he needed to be to indulge in this strangely masochistic progress. He had only the rags in which he stood and depended on the hospitality of the villages through which he passed for his daily food. He had already been a year on the journey and told us that it would be another twelve months before he reached Kathmandu, if indeed he survived the passage over the snow-covered passes. It seemed to me not only a futile waste of time but a terrible denial of life, but when I came to consider it later I could not think it any more repugnant than the austerities practised by some Christian orders.

We reached Darjeeling early in August, and after a couple of weeks spent in clearing up the administrative details of the expedition I rejoined my regiment, which was still stationed on the North-West Frontier. I remained in Dardoni only a couple of months. We had been told that the battalion would take part in the forthcoming campaign into the heart of Waziristan, but before this I was to return to Lansdowne and take charge of the regimental depot. The Colonel made it clear that this was a punishment. He had been unable to stop me from joining the Everest expedition, but now that I was once more in his power he adopted this means to remind me of his authority. Our relationship was not improved when I thanked him, since it was obvious that I did not regard his decision as a reprimand, but welcomed it. I looked forward to a few months alone at Lansdowne; there would be little work and I felt in need of a rest. Also I wanted to think things out. Everest had broadened my horizon, and I was by no means

certain that I could any longer support the boredom of military life.

I left Dardoni without regret and hoping that I should never again be required to set foot on the North-West Frontier of India, for the tribesmen of which I had understandably acquired a passionate hatred.

# *Part Four*

# CHAPTER TWENTY

THE regiment returned to Lansdowne in the spring of 1923, and as soon as it had settled in I was given eight months' leave to go home. Except for two brief periods of a week or so, while I was serving in France, I had not been in England since I had left it in the immaturity of youth. My feelings now were ambivalent. I naturally wanted to see my parents, but at the same time I dreaded the meeting. Like many another, I had acquired a feeling that I had been born into the wrong family and suspected that I should now find I had even less in common with my mother and father. There was nobody else I particularly wanted to see, since the somewhat haphazard way in which I had been educated had denied me any close boyhood friendships. In any case mine was the generation that had suffered most in the war, and the few friends I had acquired during the course of it were dead. There were times when I wished that I, too, had been killed, for there seemed in those days to be an unbridgeable gulf between those who had been actively involved in the war and those who had not. I envied the ones who could take the easy way, but I disliked the taste and still more the effects of alcohol; and no love affair came my way. Probably I needed the help of a psychoanalyst, but at that time such treatment was unusual. Fortunately I had inherited my mother's iron determination, so that in time I managed to overcome this period of depression.

The old British Army was officered for the most part by men of private means, or at least with long-established county connections and firm roots in the country. It was natural that apart from military duties life for such people should consist in the seasonal round of hunting, shooting and fishing. It was a world in which the arts hardly existed.

The Indian Army, on the other hand, was commanded by men of a somewhat different type. Some had long family connections with the country, and it was natural for them to continue the tradition, but most of us came from undistinguished middle-class professional families whose means were insufficient to provide even the small private income without which it was impossible to exist in a British regiment. Nevertheless it was tacitly assumed that none of us had chosen to serve in India for purely economic reasons, but simply because it offered better opportunities, as indeed it did, for indulging one's sporting instincts and leading the gentlemanly life. When every three years or so we went home on leave it was supposed that we spent the time exercising the family hunters, dry-fly fishing or stalking in Scotland. Nobody really believed this, but the fiction was upheld.

The Indian Government did not provide its officials with passages home, so that the individual was free to make his own arrangements. Nevertheless it was thought distinctly odd to travel by any steamship line other than the Peninsular and Oriental, the P. and O. as it was popularly known. This company held the contract for carrying the mails between Britain and India, and it was customary for its officers to hold commissions in the Royal Naval Reserve. It was a completely independent commercial organisation, but because of its long and close association with the Government of India its ships on this route were run on hierarchical lines; a Major-General and a humble Captain paid identical fares, but the accommodation allotted to them, and the way in which they were treated on board were strictly in accordance with their respective ranks. To travel by P. and O. was exactly the same as living in an Indian cantonment, except that one was on the sea.

The passengers were a mixture of soldiers and members of the Civil Service, but in practice the senior military officer on board was regarded as a sort of unofficial commander, although he did not normally perform any function.

I travelled only once by P. and O., and then because I was going home at short notice and could not get a passage on any

other line. It was the year of the General Strike in England. None of us knew much about the ethics of the affair, since the only news we had was that contained in the brief bulletins posted on the ship's notice-board. It was therefore with considerable astonishment that on going down to dinner one night I saw that a copy of a telegram had been pinned up at the entrance to the saloon. It was signed by a Lieutenant-General and was headed "For the information of all ranks." "All officers travelling on leave to the United Kingdom," it read, "will volunteer their services for breaking strike. Expect detailed orders at port of debarkation."

Some of the more junior among us decided to organise a protest, and I was a member of the small deputation which the General summoned to his cabin. He received us with extreme anger and indicated that he considered our behaviour disloyal, if not indeed mutinous. It was probably the first time that one of his orders had been questioned. He was not prepared to rescind it, although he must have realised that it could never have been implemented. I did not discover whether this alleged breach of discipline was reported to our regiments, since I heard no more about it; nor on arrival were our services invoked.

In 1923 I was in no hurry to reach England, and I booked a passage on a Lloyd–Triestino ship sailing to Venice. I had never been to Italy, and as it was still early in the year I thought to spend a month or so in that country before submitting myself to the chills of Britain.

Day was breaking when we steamed into the Lagoon and a slight mist was rising from the water, so that the city appeared all pearly grey. Not even the most insensitive can resist the impact of Venice, but on this first visit I did not succumb to its charm. Many of the buildings seemed to me to be too ornate and ostentatious, like the temples of India I had so recently left behind. Naturally there were compensations. The city had not then been turned into the commercialised tourist attraction it has since become, and it was still possible for an impecunious Englishman to travel about in comfort. I stayed

at the Danielli and went everywhere by gondola, a simple pleasure that has now become an extravagance.

Venice was in some ways such a disappointment that I avoided going there again for nearly thirty years. I happened however to be attending a conference at Rimini in 1956, and having a few days to spare at the end of it thought I would revisit the city before going back to England. I arrived by bus on a Sunday evening, and the moment we got down in the Piazzale Roma I knew I had made a mistake. The square was a seething mass of tourists and seemed to portend everything I most dislike. It was impossible to find a porter, and I battled my way through the crowds as best I could. The *vaporetto* was packed like a London bus in the rush-hour, and when it landed me at the end of the Grand Canal I felt out of humour and exhausted.

I wondered what madness had brought me and decided to leave the next morning. I dined alone on the terrace of the hotel. It was a splendid warm night and the meal was good, but the occasion was made intolerable by the incessant hooting of motor-boats and the muffled clamour of the milling crowd in the nearby square. To add to the discomfort towards nine o'clock there appeared a gigantic illuminated barge in the middle of the Grand Canal. It carried a small orchestra and a bevy of singers and was followed by a fleet of gondolas, the tourist occupants of which joined raucously in the choruses of what they imagined to be Venetian popular songs. Fortunately the convoy soon disappeared upstream and we were left in comparative peace. I was irritated not so much by the vulgarity of the proceedings, but by my priggish inability to enjoy what was obviously giving pleasure to so many people.

The next morning, after I had spent some hours wandering in the byways, I began to feel strangely contented, but it was not for some days that I suddenly realised why despite the hordes of tourists Venice remains unique; it is the one remaining great city where the prevailing sound is still that of human footfalls.

I was there again in the autumn of 1958. A few days after I

arrived it was announced that Pope Pius was gravely ill and it seemed unlikely that he would long survive. Although the news of his death was expected, the manner in which it was made known to the people of Venice was one of the most dramatic experiences of my life. It was at about four o'clock in the morning, and I was awakened suddenly by the tolling of the great bell in St Mark's Cathedral. After perhaps a minute the sound was joined by others and soon the bells of every church in the city were tolling in a strange cacophony that reverberated over the water. They stopped suddenly, as though directed by some great conductor, and the complete and utter silence that followed produced an overwhelming feeling of desolation. I had never before felt so totally alone.

That night I dined with my friend Ernst Schnabel, the German writer and one-time merchant sailor. We had wandered far from the centre and had eaten at a modest *trattoria* on one of the side-canals. It is never easy for Italians to suppress their natural gaiety or to remain long silent, but that evening the talk in the restaurant was hushed, and we became affected by the mood. On the way back we decided to stop for a glass of wine in the *piazzetta*. It was late, and although the cafés were still open most of them were empty except for a few hovering and disconsolate waiters. We became absorbed in whatever we were discussing, and it was after one o'clock when we got up. As we turned into St Mark's Square we stopped suddenly, struck speechless by the fantastic spectacle with which we were confronted. A great bank of mist was rolling into the *piazza* as though propelled by a stage machine. All but the topmost storeys of the buildings had disappeared from view, and after a few seconds nothing remained except the pediments and the cupolas of the Basilica, looking as though they had risen out of a lake. This vision dissolved as suddenly as it had appeared and was followed by another effect almost as striking. The fog was withdrawn by a swift current; as though an unseen force was chasing it out of the square. Not a single lamp was alight and except for the two of us the place was deserted. It now looked, in the shadowless

gloom, like an etching; all grey and black and infinitely impressive. We both felt instinctively that this was how its creator had meant it to be seen, and whenever I return to Venice this is the impression of which I shall ever be reminded.

But in 1923 I did not linger and soon went on to Milan. It is fashionable to decry its great Gothic cathedral, but it has always seemed to me to have an ethereal quality. Seen from below its innumerable decorated spires reaching up into the sky have an effect of delicate insubstantiality and look like a fanciful confection made of spun sugar. And the interior has a splendid gloom.

Milan is not however a place in which one would normally choose to spend a holiday, and I had gone there only because I had long wanted to go to the opera. It is worth noting how even in my lifetime conditions have changed. To be sure of getting a seat at La Scala nowadays is a major undertaking and entails making arrangements months in advance. But in 1923, although the Scala was world-famous, opera had not attained its present almost universal popularity. In Milan one could be practically certain of getting even a cheap seat at short notice and without the slightest trouble.

I had not bothered to find out what work was being performed, not that it would have made any difference. It turned out to be the sort of performance that today would have been sold out in any opera-house in the world on the morning it was first announced. Toscanini himself was conducting. The work was *Lucia di Lammermoor* and the title-rôle was sung by Toti dal Monte, then at the height of her powers. She was supported by Pertile and Pinza. At that time little attention was paid to stage production, which in opera is a comparatively modern innovation. Nevertheless after the first few bars I ceased to be distracted by the decidedly peculiar Italian conception of Highland costume and gesture.

The elderly, among whom I must now include myself, have an irritating habit of harking back to the past. This is particularly so with musical performances; we compare those of today unfavourably with those we heard in our youth. In fact

I do not believe it is possible to retain for long an accurate memory of a great performance; it is as evanescent as the flavour of a nectarine and just as delightful. And of course we exaggerate; younger generations of balletomanes, for instance, must be tired of hearing about Nijinsky's famous leap towards the end of *Spectre de la Rose*, which gets higher and higher as the years pass. The truth is, I believe, that, with the one exception of singing, the general standard of musical performance is far higher today than it was fifty years ago. In every generation there appear a few great virtuoso performers, but when I was young the standard below this was not high; nowadays there are dozens of really good pianists and violinists. But it is not the same with opera. Even on the Continent it seems no longer possible to hear a work in which every part is sung by a performer of quality. I have heard, over the years, a number of performances of *Lucia*, some of them with great singers, including our own Joan Sutherland, in the title-part, but nothing to compare as a whole with my first experience at Milan.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MOTHER met me at Victoria station. She seemed a little ill at ease, and although I was anxious to get home as soon as possible she suggested that we should first have tea in the adjoining Grosvenor Hotel. I should explain that neither of my parents was a good or consistent letter-writer. In all the years I was away I received no more than three or four letters from my father. Like many Victorians he considered the communication of family news to be a wifely duty, and although Mother wrote from time to time her letters were always brief and told me little beyond the fact that she and my father were well.

It was at once obvious that I was still regarded as a child; one moreover somewhat lacking in worldly knowledge and ability to look after myself. There were certain matters which had now to be explained, but first I must be put in my place. I was badly dressed, said Mother; my hair needed cutting and my suit looked as though it had not been pressed for weeks. She was critical by nature, of herself and of others. Unfortunately this, in many ways good, quality had developed over the years into a nagging insistence. Father was the obvious target for her strictures. He was easy-going, indeed lethargic, and but for his dominating and strong-willed wife would undoubtedly have drifted through life even more aimlessly than he did. He never had the strength of character to exert himself. Nevertheless he retained the largely fictional privileges of a Victorian head of family (Mother, for instance, had never signed a cheque of her own until after his death in his seventies), but he was in every other way a cipher. I now think he may well have been a sensitive and interesting man, but I too was so dominated by Mother that by the time I grew

up he had already retired into himself and I never got to know him.

I must be careful not to give a false impression of my mother. She was in many ways a woman of outstanding quality. Her tragedy was that she had been born in the wrong period and the only outlet for her abundant vitality lay in crushing her unfortunate husband.

I do not believe that Father, as many men would have done, looked elsewhere for his pleasure; nor did he take to drink. This may have been due to a poverty of temperament, a characteristic which I have perhaps inherited from him.

Even before I had left home the relationship between my parents had degenerated into an uneasy neutrality. Now they had long ceased to go about together. They ought to have separated, but both of them, with their ingrained Victorian outlook, continued to regard the marriage-bond as indissoluble, although neither had any deep religious convictions. To the end of her days Mother continued to regard divorce with repugnance and would often disparage such of my friends and acquaintances as had reasonably taken this step. It was a bitter blow that her favourite son had departed from her conception of correct behaviour.

Mother now explained our present situation. I had never been informed of our financial circumstances and indeed had never given them a thought, since there always seemed to be enough to live in comfort. It transpired that we had for some years been living on capital, a common practice in these days of excessive death-duties but not usual at the time of which I am writing. It seemed that there was not a great deal left; so little in fact that even Father realised something must be done about it.

We had always been used to living in large houses, and neither of my parents relished the idea of spending the remainder of their life in more modest but cramped comfort. Father had therefore used his remaining capital in furnishing an immense suburban mansion which he had turned into a private hotel. This arrangement was in many ways an

admirable solution to the family difficulties. It kept Mother fully occupied, and incidentally gave her scope for the exercise of her considerable organising ability, for which hitherto she had had no outlet. She was now too busy to bother much with Father, who had relapsed into a state of happy indolence. He took no part in running the establishment and remained for the rest of his life an amiable figurehead, content to spend his days in reading innumerable novels and chatting to his guests, most of whom were of the type euphemistically known as decayed gentlefolk. If they did not seem to conform to this standard they were politely turned away.

This, then, was the situation to which I returned in 1923. It was not lacking in comfort, but it was in no sense a home. Whenever I returned on subsequent occasions it was nearly always to a different house. The original venture had prospered, but as soon as it was functioning efficiently Mother began to lose interest and hankered after something else. The first house was sold at a profit and the money reinvested in another, and so it continued. Sometimes these schemes were successful, sometimes not, but somehow my parents managed. What I missed and badly needed was some sort of permanent home; to be able to come back to some familiar scene that I had known since childhood. The regiment was in some ways a substitute, but I never ceased to feel something of an impostor in the military world; it was necessary to subscribe, however uneasily, to so many attitudes in which I did not believe. All this contributed to a feeling of rootlessness, of belonging nowhere in particular. It is a feeling that I have never lost, and although I have now been living in England on and off for the greater part of twenty years I still cannot bring myself to think of it as home. When I last returned from living abroad I could not make up my mind completely to unpack; it was inconceivable that I should not before long be moving on again. Increasing age has done nothing to weaken this feeling and I shall, I suppose, always remain a man without roots.

I had not known London well before the war, and I was

now faced with the prospect of spending some months within easy daily reach of it. I soon found the home atmosphere uncongenial and after the first week spent as much time away from it as possible. My parents began to complain that I never invited anyone home to dinner. They conceived the idea that I had become ashamed of them. Perhaps I was, but for quite other reasons; I was unwilling to expose a guest to the embarrassment of our strained and bickering table-talk. I tried desperately to establish some sort of intimate relationship with my parents, but it seemed impossible to achieve; we could never get beyond superficialities. They were psychologically incapable of understanding that since I had left them I had acquired all sorts of new interests. They were not interested in my life, but only in moulding me into the pattern of their own, and the more they made this obvious the more stubbornly did I resist. Gradually we achieved an uneasy relationship of sorts, but it was entirely without intimacy. It was only when my mother had reached extreme old age (she was ninety-one when she died) that I really got to know and love her, but by that time she had come to realise that I had inherited much of her own dominating character and that she could not nag me in the way she had nagged my father.

I spent the first few days in replenishing my wardrobe. When I had gone out to India I had taken the few civilian suits I had possessed before the war, but they were now shabby and I had grown out of them. I was fitted for a complete outfit by our regimental tailors: tails and dinner-jacket, mess dress, other uniform of one kind and another and half a dozen suits of mufti. I wondered where the money was coming from, but in those days conditions were so different from the present that they are worth recalling.

It was unusual to pay cash for anything and a "gentleman" did not normally inquire the price of what he was buying. This was particularly so with tailors, whose profits came largely from the higher charges they imposed in return for extended credit. It was indeed quite difficult to pay cash, since this meant giving the customer a considerable discount. Most

young officers were permanently indebted to their tailor to the tune of a hundred or so pounds, but nobody seemed to worry.

While I was thus engaged in shopping I received one day, at the Service club of which I had become a member, a telephone message from General Dunsterville asking if he could come round and see me urgently. I had never met him, but he was well known to be the original of Kipling's Stalky, and I wondered what on earth he could want with me. He had long been retired and it transpired that he was in some way connected with the management of the Polytechnic Cinema, where the Everest film was being shown. This was long before the perfection of the talking film, and to make the record of the Everest expedition more publicly attractive one or other of the party would accompany the film with a running commentary. George Mallory was doing this at the time, but he had been taken suddenly ill with suspected food-poisoning and was unable to appear. None of the others was available at short notice, and General Dunsterville told me that I should have to take on the job. I protested that I had never spoken in public and moreover had not yet even seen the film. The General realised this, he said, and to make things easier had already installed a large mirror in front of the circle, so that without turning to the screen I could observe what was passing across it. He demolished my every objection, and against my better judgment I was forced to agree to his demands. I still think of it as the most terrifying experience of my life. I walked on to the platform sweating with fright and appalled by the sight of rows of expectant and staring faces. Somehow I mumbled my way through the ordeal, and when the lights came up at the end the first thing I noticed was a clergyman fast asleep in the middle of the front row of seats. I had to repeat the performance twice more in the evening, and after a few more experiences of these thrice-daily lectures I found I could take them in my stride. It was a brutal introduction to the art of public speaking, but since that day it has had no terror for me. My parents came to one of these talks and at the end of it my father was moved, for the only occasion in his life, to offer me

some words of advice. They were not at the time very welcome, but they were sound and I have subsequently tried to heed them. "Whenever you are called upon to speak in public and feel you have nothing to say," he said, "it is desirable merely to express your thanks and sit down."

When my stint of lecturing ended I began to get bored with the emptiness of life at home. I had acquired a few new friends, but with none of them was I on intimate terms. The difficulty was that without being fully aware of it I had moved into a world of action which was entirely foreign to my nature. My real interest was still in the arts, but I was now living in a society which took no interest in them, indeed regarded anyone who did so with suspicion. It was thus that I began to lead a sort of double life.

I became a student at the Guildhall School of Music, where I spent the days, and on most evenings went either to Covent Garden or the Queen's Hall. It was obvious that in the future my opportunities for concert-going would be limited, and it was at this time that I acquired the habit of storing quantities of music in my memory, much as a camel takes in water before a desert journey.

I had long since realised that I could never have become more than a competent amateur pianist; other things apart, I lacked the necessary application to become a professional. Nevertheless I still harboured romantic illusions and occasionally this fantasy intrudes into my subconscious life. I seldom dream, but when I do the form is nearly always the same. I find myself walking on to a concert platform, sitting down at the piano to the accompaniment of immense applause. I nod to the conductor that I am ready to begin and then, to my horror, the orchestra plays the opening bars of some concerto I have never heard. I am petrified with fear, and as the conductor gives me the cue for the piano to enter I crash out a deafening chord in the wrong key, and at this point wake up drenched with sweat.

Father was moved once or twice to tell me that I had become a prig, and perhaps I was. But knowing that my interests were

alien to most of those among whom I moved, I could not bear to talk about them. People were always striking wrong notes, and when one has anything of an ear wrong notes are extremely jarring. It was many years before I landed up in a profession in which I was able to behave naturally, but I do not regret my time in the army. It gave me a sense of discipline which I should otherwise never have acquired and, more important, taught me to take decisions and accept responsibility. In later years I never ceased to be astonished at the reluctance of people in important positions to make up their minds; problems were considered from so many angles that often nothing was done until it was too late. That I never suffered from dithering hesitation was due entirely to my army training. If suddenly attacked by a horde of savages you cannot call a conference; you must take an immediate decision, even though it may turn out to have been a wrong one.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I WAS not sorry when this first long leave came to an end. For the time being I was sated with concerts and opera. Besides, I had spent most of my money; was in fact in debt if I counted the sum owing to my tailor. At the same time I did not look forward with any enthusiasm to returning to the humdrum life at Lansdowne.

My arrival at Bombay was very different from my first one. I was no longer tongue-tied and I let fly at the wretched half-starved coolies as though I owned the country. I had already reserved a place on the train, but when I discovered that the other berth was occupied by an Indian gentleman I am ashamed to record that I sent for the station-master to complain. I had become infected with the mentality of the master race and I was still too gauche to appreciate the irony with which my travelling companion, in impeccable English, apologised for his intrusion. During the three-day journey he might have taught me something about India, but in those days there was no intimate social intercourse between army officers and the educated people of the country.

It was different in the regiment. We treated our men with a sort of paternal consideration; but since they were mostly uneducated peasants the question of their social status never arose. I do not think it occurred to any of us that we were in India on sufferance, and we should have felt scandalised if it had been suggested that the army in India was in fact one of occupation.

We were still living in a closed and artificial world and we affected to ignore Indian political aspirations, which, when we thought about them at all, we regarded as subversive. I suppose it is now generally recognised that Mahatma Gandhi was

a great world statesman, one whose influence has certainly not been less than that of Lenin, for instance. This was the period of Gandhi's greatest activity, but so far as we were concerned he might never have existed. When his name was occasionally mentioned it was invariably in derogatory terms, as though he were a criminal and a traitor. It is no wonder that as a class we were loathed and despised by thinking Indians.

The attitude of the Indian Civil Service, to which the country owes so much, was different. Nevertheless the "Heaven-born," as they were facetiously called, had weaknesses of their own. This Service was the most difficult of all to enter. It was recruited almost entirely from the top graduates of their year at Oxford and Cambridge, and a man who failed to win first-class honours had little chance of being accepted. They were probably the best-educated men of their generation and for this reason were considered the most fitted to govern the Indian Empire. Unfortunately many of them did not fulfil their early promise. Most discovered that the performance of their daily duties did not demand a high intellectual standard. Those who reached the top were specialists in rules and regulations. Naturally there were exceptions, but the real contribution was made by men without much ambition who spent their entire working life in running a remote District. Many of them became considerable scholars and it was they who laid the foundation of Indian studies.

I only once heard the Indian Civil Service spoken of with contempt. We were engaged in quelling some minor disturbance and, as was customary, were guided by the advice of the local Commissioner. Our Brigade Commander had formerly been a Guards officer and made no secret of the fact that he had accepted an Indian command only because nothing more congenial had been offered to him. He disliked the country and the people, and this he emphasised by a studied disregard of local custom. Whenever he appeared in mufti he dressed as though in London, in a formal suit, starched collar and bowler hat. He was all for shooting down the mob without discussion, but when his staff officer reminded him that it

would be appropriate first to consult the civil authority he became almost apoplectic. "The Indian Civil Service," he growled. "Who the hell do they think they are? Snivelling little intellectuals who, when they retire from this God-forsaken country, try to pass themselves off as gentlemen. A lot of them settle in hideous little villas on the outskirts of my place in Surrey."

I arrived back at Lansdowne with a set of new clothes but very little money. Orders had come for us to spend the forthcoming winter down in the plains. The army was judged to have recovered from its war-weariness, and to emphasise the complete return to conditions of peace there were to be manoeuvres on a grand scale, such as had not been held since before the war. Preliminary training had already begun and there was in one way and another a great deal to do. Nevertheless, dressed in one of my stylish new suits, I had first to spend a good many afternoons tramping round the cantonment leaving cards on all and sundry.

Army Headquarters had recently reminded commanding officers that it was an important part of their duty to instruct their juniors in the higher art of the military profession. It was pointed out that while we had done splendidly in the war, the conditions in which we had fought were unlikely to be repeated, and we must now be trained for the battles of the future. It was suggested that this could best be done by means of the so-called Sand-Table, a method of teaching that had become popular. An Army Order was regarded as holy writ, and before long Lansdowne was littered with sand-tables. There was a huge one outside the regimental offices, slightly smaller ones at the headquarters of each company and miniatures dotted about the barracks. A visiting General could not fail to be impressed by the zeal with which we had responded to the orders from above.

The Sand-Table was a very simple invention, being no more than an ordinary deal table with raised edges to prevent the sand with which it was covered from falling off. The sand itself could be arranged at will to represent a landscape and

was thus an easy means of imparting elementary instruction in tactics. It was not long however before its legitimate use became perverted. Our Gurkha soldiers saw in it a means to indulge their fancy, there was soon keen rivalry to produce the most fantastic construction, and before long the barracks were cluttered up with tables that bore a strong resemblance to the most elaborate miniature Japanese gardens.

Meanwhile we officers assembled each morning outside the Colonel's office to be instructed. It was impressed upon us that the art of war was constant and unchanging. Things had gone a bit wrong during the holocaust in which some of us had taken part, but that was an exception which we would now do well to forget. We would go back therefore to first principles and begin with the Battle of Waterloo. To be fair, I must add that the Colonel had an intimate knowledge of Wellington's classic battle, and although this was an interesting exercise it did not, to my unmilitary mind, appear to have the slightest connection with present-day conditions. I was perplexed at the emphasis placed on the importance of cavalry, a branch of the service which in my experience had played practically no part in the recent war. In France they seemed to be always in reserve; well dressed and groomed, hanging about in comfortable billets miles behind the trenches.

It is, however, common knowledge that before the First World War the British Army was largely dominated by the cavalry. There were various reasons for this, of which an important one was the peculiar reverence with which the horse has always been regarded by the British upper classes; almost as though the creature was an honorary member of the Trinity. Besides, it was impossible to live in a cavalry regiment without a sizeable private income. This meant that most officers had no need to earn their living and often retired after serving for a few years, so that those who remained obtained early promotion, and it was not difficult to reach the higher ranks. It needed considerable application and a single-minded devotion to his profession for an infantry officer to become a General, but almost any cavalryman, unless he was totally devoid of

brains, could be fairly sure at least of commanding his regiment. It must be said that the best of them were very good indeed; their training in the hunting-field undoubtedly engendered a natural flair for the tactical use of country and the ability to take a quick decision. But even in 1914 the conditions of war no longer bore the least resemblance to those of chasing the fox, yet, at any rate at first, the war in France was conducted as though they did; at least so it seemed to those of us who had served in the trenches.

Life in India had always been a microcosm of life in the English counties, but because India was so far away it was not immediately affected by the changes that had imperceptibly begun to appear in the homeland. In Britain it was soon realised that the days of cavalry supremacy had ended, but it was many years before this self-evident fact was recognised in India. The horse, which had always been regarded with even higher esteem than in England, was soon restored to its high place as an object of worship.

It must be admitted that India was, and probably still is, the most wonderful country in the world for those whose chief interest lay in the field of sport. It did not need much money to keep a string of ponies, and in any case to do so was considered a worthy reason for running into debt. Even infantry regiments generally had a polo team, and their efficiency was often judged by their prowess at the game. It is extremely exciting to play and even to watch, but I could never stomach the fervent attitude with which it was regarded. In India it was a religion rather than a game. I used to play occasionally when we were stationed in the plains, but I was always a poor horseman and my inability to see without glasses was a handicap and a danger. The Third Gurkhas was not a polo-playing regiment, largely because the hilly nature of our home at Lansdowne precluded the construction of a suitable ground. Had we been I should probably have been moved on elsewhere, since I was never able to conceal my lack of reverence for what I have always regarded as fundamentally a stupid animal. But most of us paid lip-service to the religion of

equine worship, and I well remember the raised eyebrows in mess one night when we were entertaining General Sir Edmund Ironside. I had been placed on his left, since he was interested in exploration and wanted to question me about Everest. We had become so absorbed that the Colonel, as a good host, judged it proper to change the topic to something more general. The horse was an obvious subject, particularly since the General himself had spent his earlier years as a Gunner. His response was prompt and unexpected. "So far as I am concerned," he said, "the horse is a somewhat unreliable means of transport from one place to another and only to be used when all else fails." I laughed out loud, but was quickly frozen into silence when I saw the commanding officer staring at me.

I had not been in Delhi for several years. We were again encamped at Kingsway, but this time tents had constantly to be pitched and then dismantled because somebody had noticed that the alignment was not perfect. Eventually we got things straight and applied the finishing touches; every rope was carefully pipeclayed and each tent embellished with a border of whitewashed bricks. The camp, from whatever angle it was approached, now looked as mathematically correct as an architect's plan; we were ready to be inspected by the most meticulous of visiting Generals.

All the regiments took it in turn to provide guards on the residences of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, and as the week approached we devoted ourselves to what can only be described as an orgy of preparation. During the daytime we normally dressed in neutral-coloured bush-skirts and khaki shorts, a sensible kind of uniform that allowed the utmost freedom of movement. For these special guard-duties the shirt was replaced by a high-necked tunic, and the Colonel decreed that the complete outfit should be starched. The effect, although extremely smart, was absurdly unpractical; it forced the men to move like automatons, for their uniforms, starched to the consistency of cardboard, entirely prevented easy movement. The commanding officer, to give him his due, was well

aware of the absurdities of this showmanship, but he had a long experience of peacetime soldiering and well knew that a good annual report (on which of course his own future depended) would be based not so much upon our showing in the forthcoming manoeuvres as on the smartness of our general appearance. This method of attracting praise, common to all armies, was known as bullshit. General Ironside was one of the very few senior officers who would have none of it; he used to appear unannounced to inspect a regiment at its daily work, a practice which was felt to be extremely unsporting.

So far as we were concerned, the grand manoeuvres consisted in plodding daily over the endless plains of stubble, of which the country round Delhi mostly consists. We were never told what was happening, and after the first day we advanced at a bored shamble. There was however one memorable incident. Gurkhas, like the Brigade of Guards, are not blessed with much intelligence, but they are world-famous for their steadfastness on parade and the battlefield. It was unknown for a Gurkha regiment to break its ranks but I nevertheless once saw it happen. As we were advancing across a field, a few hundred yards away a pair of camels were observed. In the grotesque clumsiness of their nature they were attempting to couple. This was a rare and ludicrous spectacle and our men were not to be denied. Shouting with laughter and ribald encouragement, they gathered round the performers, and it was some minutes before we were able to restore order and carry on with our appointed task.

When we got back to Kingsway normal military duties were relaxed. There was week-end leave for those who wanted to go shooting, and for the others a continuous round of social activity. The regimental ladies joined us from Lansdowne, so that once the morning parade was over we saw little of our married companions. Unlike British regiments, which have a large complement of officers, an Indian battalion seldom had more than a dozen or so, and there was more scope for the cultivation of individual interests; there was not the same compulsion to conform to the herd. Eccentricities, though

felt to be odd, were not frowned upon, except in very junior officers. Indeed, in some cases, such as the study of languages, they were almost encouraged. I had already acquired a good knowledge of Nepali, and it was at about this time that I began to learn several other languages, for which I had discovered I possessed a natural facility. In due course I qualified as an Army Interpreter in three or four, and was later appointed to be an official examiner. It provided me with some welcome extra funds, and in the regiment atoned for my lack of more obvious military virtues.

Before leaving Delhi I had my first experience of flying. The Royal Air Force had issued a general invitation to show infantry officers the ground over which they had recently been operating. Flying was still in its infancy and there were not many applicants, but I decided to see for myself what it was like. It was first necessary to obtain the permission of one's commanding officer in writing, since the Air Force had stipulated that they would not be held responsible if anything went wrong. The Colonel said that if I wanted to break my neck it was my own affair, so, armed with the appropriate certificate, I set off one afternoon for the landing-ground, a grass-covered field some miles outside the city.

I had often been warned that in buying a horse it was bad policy, unless one was in the cavalry, to pretend to a knowledge one did not possess; horse-copers were apt to indulge in sharp practice, and it was better to admit ignorance and ask for advice, which was then generally given. This, I decided, was also the way to deal with the airmen. I told the pilot that it was my first flight and begged him to treat me gently. He told me not to worry, and doing my best to look composed I climbed into the seat behind him.

As soon as we were off the ground I discovered, as does everybody who has ever flown in an open aircraft, that the experience was wholly exhilarating, and I began to recognise many of the well-known landmarks below us. Compared with the aeroplanes of the present day the Bristol Fighter was a somewhat flimsy affair. It was made mostly of wood and

canvas, and although the pilot was protected by his instrument-panel the single passenger had only a tiny windscreen, so that whenever he leaned to the side he was exposed to a tremendous rush of air. There was no danger in this, since both occupants were permanently belted to their seats.

I was thinking that this was the most wonderful experience I had ever had. But from the pilot's point of view it was merely dull routine, and before we turned back to land he was overcome by his natural high spirits. I was gazing down at the Kutb Minar, that curious building like a lighthouse familiar to everybody who has ever been to Delhi. It suddenly appeared at a strange angle, and before I realised what was happening we had skimmed the top of it and shot steeply up. The world seemed to have turned upside down. After we had completed the loop the pilot, with a quick backward glance to see if I was still in my place, embarked upon what at that time was the most sensational of all flying tricks, known as the falling leaf, but I was no longer capable of minding what happened. We soon made a routine landing, but it was several minutes before I gained enough composure to unfasten my belt and clamber out of the machine. Much later my work required me to do a great deal of flying, but by that time it had become no more exciting than a ride in a London bus. After my initial experience it was some years before anything would induce me to go near an aeroplane, but now I try to avoid travelling in any other way.

I had been thinking a lot about my future while I was alone at Lansdowne, and after this winter in Delhi I came to a decision and decided to apply for appointment to the Political Department. I knew that it was the hardest of all to get into, but I felt I possessed at least some of the requisite qualifications, notably an ability to learn languages, the importance of which was stressed.

In those days India was roughly divided into two parts: that which was directly administered on behalf of the Crown by the Government of India, and the so-called Native States, the various territories owned and ruled over by Rajas, great and

small, to whose courts one or more British officials, according to the size and importance of the State, were attached in an advisory capacity. In well-run and progressive States these advisers (they were variously known as Ministers, Residents, Agents or Political Officers) were little more than friendly counsellors who acted as liaison officers between their ruler and the Government at Delhi, but in some of the backward territories they had considerable power and were for all practical purposes the actual rulers. The whole of the North-West Frontier was administered by the Political Department, and the numerous States situated to the North-East were also in its charge. The latter, which included such delectable places as Sikkim, were regarded as unimportant backwaters in which no ambitious officer would wish to serve for more than a year or two while waiting for something better, preferably on the North-West Frontier. In the light of what happened during the Second World War this policy proved to be nearly disastrous, but that is a later story with which I am not here concerned.

The Political Department was recruited jointly from the Civil Service and the Indian Army and administered directly from Delhi by a senior member of the Government known as the Political Secretary. This post could in theory be held by anyone in the department, but in practice it was almost invariably given to one who had long served on the North-West Frontier. All appointments to the Political Department were in his gift.

I filled in a form of application, and after a delay of several months was summoned to Delhi for an interview. The Political Secretary at the time was Sir Denys Bray, a former member of the Indian Civil Service who was known to have acquired a fanatical love for the North-West Frontier and its peoples to the exclusion of all else.

Sir Denys noted with evident approval that I had already taken part in one or two campaigns on the Frontier and assumed that like many another before me I had succumbed to the attractions of this splendidly virile life, to which I

naturally wished to return. He embarked on a long and enthusiastic account of his own early happiness in these brigand lands and told me how lucky I was to have it all in front of me; not, like himself, to be condemned to an office chair.

So far I had hardly spoken, but I felt I was already accepted. "We will send you first," Sir Denys said, "for a year or two to one of the bigger Agencies, where you can learn the job and work at the language. After that you can do a spell by yourself at one of the smaller posts, one of the quieter places where nothing much happens. But there's good shooting nearly everywhere and all the time you'll be getting to know the people. I'm not sure when we shall have a vacancy, but I take it your regiment will release you as soon as we're ready?"

I could not at first find anything to say, but when Sir Denys pressed me I told him what was in my mind. I explained that far from wishing to dedicate the rest of my life to cosseting barbarian tribesmen, I hoped never again to set foot on the North-West Frontier. My interests, I told him, lay entirely on the other side of India: in Nepal, Sikkim and Tibet. I felt at home with the Mongoloid peoples, already knew one or two of their languages and was convinced I could do a useful job if I was given the chance to become a specialist on the problems of the North-East Frontier.

I could sense that Sir Denys was losing interest, but he was too polite to cut me short. After I had finished there was silence for a few moments, and when he dismissed me the enthusiasm had gone out of his voice. "Your application will be considered," he said, "and in due course we will let you know our decision." A few weeks later I received an official letter from the Government of India. It was brief and to the point; it merely informed me that I had not been selected for transfer to the Political Department.

Only recently Colonel F. M. Bailey, the famous traveller (and discoverer of the blue poppy that bears his name), who was himself a member of the Political Department, asked me why I had never thought of joining his Service. I told him what had happened. "But how stupid!" he said; "you should

have played up to Bray and gone to the Frontier for a few months and then wangled a transfer. That's what I did myself!"

Plans were now announced for another attempt on Everest and I was again invited to take part. The invitation came, as before, in the form of an official request from the Commander-in-Chief. I was in a somewhat precarious situation. There had been no permanent appointments to the regiment since the war, and those of us who had joined later were still in a state of probation; we might easily be transferred elsewhere. If, as now seemed likely, I was to spend the rest of my service as a regimental officer, I was determined to stay with Gurkhas. Not only had I acquired a great liking for them but I had become infected with the distinctly superior attitude that officers of Gurkha regiments adopted towards the rest of the army, and I had no intention of being transferred willy-nilly to one of those Indian regiments which were so often the subject of disparaging remarks at the dinner-table. Besides, while the bulk of the army sweltered through the long, hot summers down in the plains, we Gurkhas normally remained in the pleasant coolness of our mountain homes. I was unwilling to throw away all chance of further enjoying these very solid advantages, and when the Colonel suggested that it would be inconvenient to spare me, I decided not to question his wish. Soon after the permanent appointments were announced and I was delighted to find that I was confirmed as a company commander. Whatever happened I was now officially a member of a family, with a home to which I could always return.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

NOTHING much happened during the next few years, and looking back upon them it seems strange, not so much that I should have been satisfied to endure the boredom, as that the regiment should have suffered me for all that time. Although I was not inefficient, by no stretch of imagination could I have been described as an enthusiastic regimental officer. Apart from a moderate skill at lawn-tennis, a game of which I have always been fond, I had neither interest in nor prowess at any of the games and field-sports to which the leisure of my brother-officers was dedicated. I remained a voracious reader and my bungalow was permanently cluttered with books of every kind. The mess library consisted only of a small collection of obsolete works of military history, so long unopened that they were gradually decomposing into mildewed pulp. Lending libraries did not exist in India outside the few big cities, so that anyone who took an interest in what was going on in the literary world had no option but to buy the books he wanted to read. It is a habit I have never lost. But it does not fit in well with a fondness for travel, and large parts of my library, such as it is, have had to be abandoned in various parts of the world.

A man of normal sporting instincts and little ambition could drift pleasantly through his army life without ever leaving his regiment. With no more than ordinary luck he could hope to retire with the rank and pension of a Lieutenant-Colonel in his early fifties, the age by which most people would have come into their patrimony in the days when such still existed. But even before the Second World War conditions had begun to change; only those comparatively few with private means could afford to retire at the normal age unless they found some

other occupation. This was not as easy as it is nowadays, since the old type of officer, by reason of his narrow outlook and absolute insistence upon social position, was not welcomed in the market-place unless he had family connections or was otherwise exceptionally qualified. Nevertheless to a young man in his twenties, fifty seems a long way off, and none of us gave much thought to what we then regarded as old age. We all looked forward however to commanding the battalion in due course. Before the war this was not an impossible ambition. Officers joined at about the rate of one in four-years. They were thus spaced out in seniority, so that it was usual for each to spend his last four years in command. But this peacetime routine had been upset; in every regiment there were now at least half a dozen or so officers who had been commissioned within a few months of each other, and it was obvious that of this age-group only one could eventually succeed to the command of his battalion. Competition was inevitable, and the only way to avoid premature retirement was to qualify at one of the Staff Colleges, either Camberley or Quetta. A Staff College graduate could not be certain of rising to the rank of General, but it was certain that he would at least obtain command of his battalion.

In most good regiments, and certainly in my own, it was understood that while an officer ought in every way to be efficient at his job and good at games and sport, any undue display of personal ambition was out of place. The right kind of officer did not seek outside employment, and to do so was felt to be distinctly disloyal. In no other profession was a desire to reach the top felt to be peculiar, but in the old Indian Army, although it cannot be said that it was actually discouraged, it was not regarded with favour; a good officer should be content to devote himself to furthering the interests of his regiment, and to look beyond this was rather like feeling ashamed of one's family and wanting to get away from it. The war had naturally done something to modify this absurd outlook, but even in my time it was by no means dead. Nobody ever mentioned it openly, but it was obvious how our seniors felt.

Entry to the Staff Colleges was by means of a competitive examination which was held in various centres at home and in India once each year. There were a dozen or so papers in various subjects, not exclusively professional, but all having some relevance to the art of war. A certain proportion of marks in each of the papers gained a candidate outright entry to the College. Few however reached this standard, and the remaining students were selected from among those who had obtained a minimum qualification and appeared likely to become useful members of the General Staff. Invariably more candidates reached this qualifying standard than there were places available, so that selection then depended upon the officer's record and general background.

I did not fancy myself as a staff officer. In certain limited fields—Intelligence, for instance—I might have done well enough, but my time in France had bred the fighting soldier's usual contempt for those who were never seen anywhere near the trenches. It was very largely a matter of sour grapes. Nevertheless the spirit of a regiment was something very real, and to deny it in those brutal days of slaughter was not easy for a man of decent feeling. To seek some minor staff job (and they were not difficult to obtain) seemed to most of us to be a form of treachery. However, now that the war was over there could be no reasonable objection to a spell of duty on the staff, and since one or two of my contemporaries had begun to work for the examination I too decided to have a shot at it, but without much enthusiasm.

Most men spent two or three years in preparation, but my temperament is such that I find it difficult to work regularly at one subject over a long period. I decided therefore to take three months' leave and try my luck in the examination at the end of it. I bought a cheap American car, loaded it with the requisite text-books, added a few more for pleasure and together with my servant and personal orderly set off for the Vale of Kashmir. It was my first visit to that delectable playground, and I had thought to combine work with a little sightseeing.

We went by train to Rawalpindi, where the car was awaiting me. Rawalpindi, which is now in Pakistan, was in those days one of the biggest military stations in North-West India and the starting-point of the main road to Kashmir. In the early summer it was generally as crowded as the London–Brighton road on a summer Sunday, so I decided to travel by night.

The last stretch of the road is fairly sensational and winds up and down a series of precipices, something like the Corniche route between Nice and Monte Carlo. There is nothing particularly dangerous about it, but like any other tortuous road it needs to be negotiated with care. I was not a dangerous driver, but that night I nearly ended my Indian career.

I should explain that Kashmir was one of the so-called Native States and was therefore administered under its own rules and regulations. These were peculiar, since, although most of the population was Moslem, the Maharaja himself was an orthodox Hindu, and the laws of his State were based on the tenets of that religion. The most heinous of all crimes was cow-killing, for which the punishment was life-imprisonment. It was unlikely that a European would have been required to pay this extreme penalty, but he would certainly have been refused further entry to the State and might easily have been advised to resign. I killed a cow when I was hardly over the frontier.

The road was clear and I was driving fast, but as I swung round one of the numerous bends I suddenly observed a hump-backed animal about to cross the road. We were too close to stop, and before I realised what had happened I had knocked the creature down. It was not dead, but its front legs were broken. I imagined this would be the end of my holiday, but fortunately the cowherd turned out to be a Moslem and therefore a lover of beef. He agreed, for a consideration, to slit the beast's throat, so as to put it out of its agony, and to remove the evidence of my crime before daybreak. I have never so willingly parted with the equivalent of a few English pounds, and lest the amiable peasant should try to engage me in a further haggle I paid up at once and drove off at speed.

I presume that he kept his part of the bargain, for I heard no more of the incident.

Srinagar, the capital city of Kashmir, lies on the Jhelum river, which is here a dirty and somewhat sluggish stream. When I knew it both banks were lined by jerry-built house-boats in various states of disrepair which could be hired for a week, a month or the entire season. They were always in great demand, so I had taken the precaution of reserving one before leaving Lansdowne. In theory it was a pleasant experience to fall asleep to the gentle sound of lapping water, knowing that no raging storm would disturb one's rest; that one could walk ashore at any time of day or night. But in practice there were disadvantages. Most of the boats leaked and stank of bilge-water. Besides, they creaked with every slightest movement. Worst of all was the four-foot-square hovel in the bows which was euphemistically called a bathroom, so low that a man of average height was unable to stand upright. It contained a zinc tub of a size suitable for a six-months-old baby. The windows of the living-quarters were no more than a few inches above the level of the river, so that unless they were kept permanently closed and the curtains drawn, the occupant was always exposed to the wiles of a stream of itinerant merchants who paddled the waterfront from dawn until long after night had fallen. They were impervious to polite refusal and encouraged by abuse.

I was tired after the long journey and had told my servant not to disturb me. A gentle tapping at the window suddenly awakened me. I looked at my watch and saw that it was not yet six o'clock, so I turned over and composed myself for further sleep. The tapping began again, and as I started into full wakefulness I saw a large brown hand, on which lay an immense and sticky chocolate cake, being thrust through the open window. With a politeness I did not feel, I requested the owner to remove it, but he was not so easily deterred. "Only look sir," he whined, "looking costs nothing," and leaning forward into my bedroom he deposited the cake gently on my chest. To secure some rest I mistakenly gave in to the vendor's

importunities. No sooner had I paid him off and pitched his repellent confection into the river than a seller of papier-maché candlesticks appeared. I decided that I would not again be bullied into buying something I did not want, but by the time I had got rid of the man irritation had overcome me and I vented my feelings on my blameless servant.

I generally spent the mornings reading, and after a late luncheon walked to the Srinagar club for a game of tennis and a look at the papers. It was the meeting-place of all the English visitors, and in the evening the lawns, which sloped down to the river, were crowded, mostly with women whose husbands were sweltering down in the plains. They had even less to do than usual, so that the place was a hotbed of scandalous gossip and rumour; a continuous buzz of tittle-tattle rose from the lawns, drowning the three-piece band which scraped away in the lounge behind. The Maharaja's palace was a little upstream; it was in process of being modernised, and streams of barges laden with furniture and other household goods were constantly passing the club. Many Indian potentates had a fondness for doing things in the grand style; if anything took their fancy they would order it in large quantities, irrespective of any possible use. In another part of India I once saw, for instance, a salon furnished with no less than six grand pianos, incidentally all of them out of tune.

The Srinagar palace was no bigger than a medium-sized country house, and there was a great deal of speculation concerning the use of the enormous numbers of assorted objects we daily observed passing. Early one evening a large barge was seen approaching. It was bigger than any craft normally in use on the river, and the crew were having some difficulty in poling it upstream. It got into an eddy and drifted on to a mud-bank immediately in front of the club, the lawns of which were as usual crowded. The buzz of chatter was suddenly stilled, like a radio being switched off, for it was seen that the boat was entirely filled with china water-closets; there must have been several hundreds of them. After a few seconds of embarrassed silence there was a stampede from the lawns.

"It's disgusting," I heard a strident female voice exclaim; "aren't any of you men going to do anything about it?"

Some months later I sat for the Staff College examination, but it was not until the end of the year that I heard the result. I had obtained more marks than were necessary to be eligible for nomination. Qualification depended however upon reaching a certain minimum standard in every one of the papers, and in the four most important, those designed to assess the candidate's knowledge of tactics, I had been awarded what can only be described as an ignominious marking. I was not surprised. A successful soldier must look at nature only from the viewpoint of necessity, and this I could never do. A map has always been to me a key to the beauty of a landscape; never a guide to avoidable dangers. I was incapable of seeing that a gentle fold in the earth was nothing more than protection from gunfire; a stretch of emerald downland merely a death-trap to be negotiated at the double. Inevitably, in marking up the maps, I had placed my troops in the obviously wrong positions.

An honest man, faced with this evidence of his incompetence, would have resigned his commission. I had always known that I was no natural soldier, but I had also observed that many others, no more efficient than myself, had managed to muddle their way through to honourable retirement. This I too could do; I might with luck even succeed in time to the command of the regiment. Meanwhile, now that my flirtation with the higher art of war was ended, I decided to concentrate on learning languages and to further my taste for minor exploration. Thus I was left alone and indeed encouraged to cultivate my specialised pursuits.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

WHEN I was in Kashmir I had made the acquaintance of Sir Aurel Stein, one of the greatest of all Himalayan explorers. He had spent a lifetime travelling in Central Asia and knew more than anybody then living about Chinese Turkestan, a country in which I had for some time been interested. There was a great blank on the map, he told me, to the north-east of Hunza, the little mountain State in the Karakoram bordering on Turkestan. He had been intending for years to explore it, but he was getting on in years and now realised that he was no longer active enough to undertake the hazards of travel in unexplored and difficult mountain country. He urged me to go there. Nothing would have pleased me better, but when I considered it seriously I came to the conclusion that it was not a practicable proposition. There would probably be no difficulty in obtaining leave for such a worthy purpose, but the cost would be considerable and certainly far beyond my modest means. But a few months later there occurred one of those strokes of luck such as do not often happen in the lifetime of most people.

During my leave in 1923 I had spent a few weeks scrambling about in Switzerland with General Bruce, and for part of the time we had been joined by an American friend, Henry F. Montagnier, who had made his home at Champéry. Montagnier was a comparatively wealthy man and occupied himself in the study of early Alpine history, to which he made a number of important contributions. He was a competent climber by the standard of his time but, as was usual, had never tackled a peak without the help of professional guides and porters. He was addicted to comfortable living; his chief pleasure, I soon noticed, was not in the climb itself, but in the service of

the luxurious hotels, to which we invariably descended after each of our expeditions. I, too, enjoyed the contrast between hard physical exertion and pampered ease, the more so as it was something new in my experience. Montagnier often talked of his desire to see the Himalayas; but he had never travelled in Asia and from what I had seen of him I could not imagine him putting up with the rough-and-ready conditions. I was therefore surprised now to receive a letter from him in which he invited me to organise an expedition for the following year. He wished if possible to see something of Chinese Turkestan; apart from that we could go anywhere I liked. He would pay the entire expenses of the trip, provided I undertook the responsibility of organising it and generally looked after his comfort. I accepted at once and applied for permission to carry out the piece of exploration which had been suggested by Sir Aurel Stein. At the same time I wrote to Army Headquarters for a permit to travel in Turkestan. This was Chinese territory, and it took months to get a visa, the application for which was more often than not refused.

I met Montagnier at Rawalpindi in March 1927. He had already been there for some days and had spent the time buying large quantities of fancy foods for which I foresaw no possible use. Tactlessly I countermanded his orders, substituting in place of these useless delicacies what appeared to me to be our basic requirements—rice, flour, tinned meats and so on. I had already explained to Montagnier by letter that the sort of cook who would be willing to come with us would be untrained to provide other than the simplest dishes, but after so short a time he had begun to complain about even the hotel meals. He now appeared to be unwilling to recognise the simple fact that certain luxuries would have to be forgone, and kept reminding me that money was no consideration.

We started off in a spirit of slight mutual misunderstanding, but when, two days later, we arrived in Kashmir I was glad to observe that Montagnier's spleen had somewhat abated in the cool air of the valley. We spent the better part of a month at Srinagar, and I was glad of the time it gave me to organise our

onward journey in proper detail. There was still a great deal to do. We had ordered tents and cooking equipment, and I was experienced enough to know that none but a greenhorn would accept them without first making sure that the tents were complete and did not leak. Besides, I wanted to give the two Gurkha orderlies, whom I had brought from the regiment, some practice in pitching and striking the tents, so that we could settle down quickly at the end of each day's march. Also we still needed quantities of stores and, most important of all, the services of a cook. It was still early in the holiday season, and we were besieged by applicants. Unfortunately the best cooks, and some very good ones were available, do not necessarily make the best travellers. There was one whose testimonials alleged that his soufflés were unsurpassed. His physique however was such that I foresaw the possibility of having to cook for him, but it needed all my powers of argument to persuade Montagnier not to take him on. He only agreed when I pointed out that in the country we were about to visit it would be impossible to obtain the eggs which the cook required for the preparation of his speciality. At last we found what appeared to be the most suitable candidate. Abdulla was certainly not an expert chef, but he was young and eager to travel and seemed to understand the rudiments of cleanliness. He was a fortunate choice, for although poor Montagnier found it hard to stomach the succession of plain and homely meals which he put before us, he never once fell by the wayside, and cheerfully remained with us until we got back.

We left Srinagar by houseboat on May 12, and as the coolies poled us slowly up the sluggish river they kept up a monotonous chanting. Montagnier and I sat on deck enjoying the scenery and making a half-hearted attempt to read. But the rhythmical song of our boatmen was conducive only to sleep, and when, some hours later, we were awakened by hoarse shouts and the rattle of chains I saw that the Takht-i-Suleiman, the ancient fort of Srinagar whose hill dominates the city, was no more than a pimple on the horizon. We had arrived at Sumbal, where we were to spend the night.

We left again at dawn, floating slowly across the Wular Lake, a tangled mass of reeds and lily-beds, beautiful to look at, but otherwise an insanitary stretch of stagnant and germ-filled water. Shortly before noon we disembarked at Bandipur. The transport agent was waiting on the bank and quickly had the whole of our kit carried up to a small almond-grove. The weather was gloomy and threatening. When we awoke soon after dawn the next day it was raining heavily and the string of porters seemed disinclined to start until the weather cleared; it presaged fresh snow on the passes, they said, for which their rope shoes were ill suited. But I knew that if in these early stages we allowed ourselves to be delayed by the weather it would be too late, by the time we got into the mountains, to get anything done, and I managed to chivvy the caravan into action. The path was ankle-deep in sticky mud. It was too slippery to ride, and Montagnier, who was not yet in good physical condition, was feeling exhausted at the end of this first day's march. Nor had I the heart to tell him that it was nothing compared with what was to follow.

After several days of uneventful plodding we came to the first of the passes. We had walked away from the spring into a region where all was still snow and ice. But winter's grip was beginning to loosen, and once the sun was well risen the snow soon melted to the consistency of wet sugar; at every step one sank into it above the knees, so that it was sensible to move by night, when the surface was frozen hard. We started up the Burzil at two o'clock in the morning in full moonlight. There was neither cloud nor wind and the temperature had dropped to below zero, leaving the snow in perfect condition. We were on the summit, which is a little less than 14,000 feet, just as dawn was breaking. It was too cold to linger, and we hurried on down, anxious to cover as much ground as possible before the rising sun should begin to melt the snow. It was past mid-day when we reached the rest-house, but we were too tired to wait for a meal to be prepared and went to bed until the even-ing. When we returned a few months later the Burzil was almost unrecognisable. It had become a grass-covered alp,

dotted with flowers, over which it was possible to ride without dismounting.

For this long and exhausting march, seventeen and a half miles as the crow flies, the official wage for a coolie was fifteen annas, the equivalent of about one shilling and sixpence. Reading through my diary I am ashamed to note that I appear to have been quite unmoved by the iniquity of this sweated labour; work so exhausting that I doubt if a European, no matter what the remuneration, would be physically capable of undertaking it. It was a common belief that the Kashmiri coolie was by far the worst of his kind; dirty, slothful and complaining. But these men had now carried our loads for six long dreary marches and we had heard no word of complaint. I suppose that those who carried for us, thirty years ago, are most of them long since dead; underfed and with none of the amenities which we Europeans take for granted, they, like millions of others all over Asia, had little chance of surviving even into early middle age. It may well be that in those days the problem was insoluble, but most of us were so insensitive that we did not even acknowledge its existence.

Now that we were over the Burzil the scenery changed with dramatic suddenness. We had left the region of snow-covered alps behind and moved into a country of great arid hills and deep valleys, the approach to the Karakoram. The weather too was different; although the nights were pleasantly cool and bright, by day the sun blazed out of a cloudless sky. We toiled like ants, making our way slowly over the immense landscape, dun-coloured and so huge in scale that we never seemed to be getting any nearer to the beckoning mountains on the horizon. Looking down into the valleys from above, the sparse trees appeared like a sprinkle of dark green dots. The sight was too harsh and awesome to be beautiful, but to a geologist these bare bones of the world are a scene of wonder.

We halted for a day or two at Astor, and no sooner had we settled into the bungalow than the local Raja was announced. He turned out to be a pleasant-mannered man of about thirty,

and since he spoke fluent Hindustani there was no difficulty in conversing with him. Although he was conscious of his ancient lineage he lived in a very unpretentious way, his so-called palace being little different from the rude stone houses occupied by his erstwhile peasants. His only income, he told us, was a monthly allowance from the Kashmir State of eighty rupees, about six pounds, but it was enough for him to keep a brace of wives. In former times the Rajas of Astor must have occupied a position of some importance. Their ancient castle, now a ruin, is magnificently situated on the edge of a precipice. Like all the buildings in these parts it was made of undressed stone, reinforced horizontally with rough wooden planks, but constructed entirely without the use of cement or other binding material. For many years it had been used as a prison, but nothing was ever done to keep it in repair.

Later in the afternoon we received another visitor, the official in charge of the local dispensary. He was known to the villagers as doctor, but in fact was what in the curious hierarchy of the Indian Medical Service was called a Sub-Assistant Surgeon, a high-flown title accorded to those who failed to obtain a full qualification; the medical equivalent in fact of that Indian literary anomaly the Failed Bachelor of Arts. But I do not mean to despise them. Their contribution was considerable, especially in the many remote districts where it would have been wasteful to station a fully-qualified doctor. This particular one was not however a good representative of his noble profession. He was an Indian from the plains and he detested and despised the people of Astor, whom he described as savages. He was particularly hurt by the Raja's failure to acknowledge other than his professional existence, but even in these remote places protocol is observed as strictly as in Cheltenham or Camberley and upstarts are not welcomed. "The people here are very dirty," he told me, "and have no knowledge of modern sanitation." Nevertheless when late that night I went for a stroll before turning in I surprised him squatting on the ground in front of his dispensary and voiding his bowels on to the village street.

On May 30 we reached Gilgit. It had taken us eighteen days of hard going to get there from Srinagar. Nowadays the journey can be done in a few hours from Rawalpindi. There is no regular air service, but the Pakistan Air Force is nearly always willing to fly accredited travellers to Gilgit, so that it is now possible to reach the threshold of the Karakoram in a matter of two or three days from leaving London. The flight up the Indus valley, which is not without danger, is said to be spectacular. Nevertheless it has not for me the romantic associations of the land-approach, the path over which generations of famous Central Asian explorers have at one time and another made their way.

Gilgit is the most northerly and indeed the last outpost between Pakistan and Central Asia, although in the days of British administration we used to have a consulate at Kashgar. Gilgit is an oasis in the midst of bare brown country. There were trees everywhere, mostly willow and chenar, and quantities of the most splendid apricots and mulberries were available for the asking. The whole of this area, despite its apparent aridity, is potentially fertile. Almost anything can be grown where water is available, but it is difficult to harness the few rivers. They are fed from the great Karakoram glaciers, and as soon as summer arrives become swollen with vast quantities of melting snow, which turns them into raging torrents. Even in warm weather the glaciers freeze up at night, so that in the early morning the flow of water is reduced; by midday it rises as much as several feet.

We had been warned that in Gilgit, despite its remoteness, the usual proprieties were strictly observed and that we should be expected to dress for dinner. The Political Agent was away on tour, but we left cards on his assistant and on the wives of the handful of officers who were serving with the Gilgit Scouts, the irregular corps of which the garrison was composed. The next few days passed in being entertained and while we both found the absurd formality irksome and out of place in these wild surroundings the respite from Abdulla's rough cooking, of which we had by this time sampled the repertoire, was not

unwelcome. I spent the daytime completing our arrangements for the onward journey.

Within a mile or two of Gilgit we left the fertile lands behind. The valley narrowed, and soon we entered a precipitous gorge with great crags on both sides of the river. It was a dull and cloudy morning, and the reddish haze seemed only to accentuate the grimness of the scene. It was close, too, and oppressive, and the general feeling of gloom and foreboding was enhanced by the sight of the Hunza river forcing its way through the gorge. It was a dull olive green, and so choked with soil and melting snow that it looked in its quieter reaches like a stream of oily slime. I half-expected to see a corpse come floating by. The only sign of life was a solitary kestrel and a few flowers that looked like pinks struggling for existence in the interstices of the rock.

When at last we emerged from the gorge it was into another small oasis, and we camped pleasantly in the shade of a fine mulberry tree. It was here that the so-called Hunza Campaign was fought in 1891. It attracted little attention at the time and was in fact no more than a minor border-incident. It is worth mentioning only because it gives me the opportunity to call attention to a little classic of nineteenth-century travel literature. *Where Three Empires Meet* by E. F. Knight, who was present as a newspaper correspondent, has long been out of print, but it is one of the best books ever written about this unfamiliar country.

Imperceptibly the scenery began to change. The valley widened gradually. It was filled with crops and fruit-trees, and we found ourselves on a path bordered with wild roses and aromatic shrubs with a scent like that of orange-blossom; it was reminiscent of Switzerland in early summer. Almost regretfully we reached Aliabad, where we found a representative of the Mir, the ruler of Hunza, waiting to escort us on the morrow to his tiny capital. He had brought a gift of apricots. The Mir wished us to be his guests, he said, and would we please arrange to arrive at midday.

The view from Aliabad, which is some 7000 feet above sea-level, is astonishing, and in all my travels I have seen no panorama to compare with it. The village is dominated by Rakaposhi, which rises to a height of nearly 26,000 feet, of which some 17,000 or 18,000 are visible, a shimmering mass of hanging glaciers, pinnacles and cliffs of ice rising vertically above the emerald fields. In the cloudless sky the whole mountain glowed and quivered, and as the sun went down it turned to orange-pink and then, just before darkness blotted it out, to a cold and frozen green. But even at night one could sense its unseen presence. The whole scene was positively Wagnerian, the perfect conception of Valhalla. I have never discovered how the mountain came to be known as Rakaposhi. The local people call it Dumani, which in the Hunza language means Mother of the Clouds.

The Mir was awaiting us on the outskirts of Baltit. His domain is built round the sides of a rocky knoll, on the top of which is an ancient castle. It is no longer used as a residence, but it dominates the entire valley and is still regarded as the symbol of government. It was in the castle that the Mir held his daily court.

We approached it through a maze of alleys and finally climbed the rickety stairs, their wooden handrail polished by the rubbing of countless hands. Here the Mir kept his treasures. I noticed a number of clocks, some of them disembowelled, with their vital parts spread about them, a quantity of rusty swords and a complete set of Russian tableware, crudely coloured. The floor was covered by a magnificent Bokhara carpet and on the walls were hung a strange assortment of pictures: photographs of former Political Officers, an oleograph of the Emperor Franz Josef of Austria and a highly-coloured advertisement of the very baby food on which I myself had been reared. The pride of the collection was a portrait in oils of the Mir's father, who was portrayed with a huge bulbous nose and the complexion of an old-time comedian. From the ceiling hung balls of coloured glass. The entire room was arranged with a sort of studied oriental

disorder, and reminded me of the property-room in a theatre during the run of a pantomime.

The Mir himself lived in an unpretentious little stone house below the village and he had pitched tents for us in a garden beyond. It was a pleasant enough spot although somewhat public, but we soon became inured to the watching villagers who squatted in rows in front of our camp through most of the daylight hours.

On the following evening we were bidden to dinner with the Mir, and before we made our way up to the fort, where it was to take place, I spent some time instructing Montagnier in the rudiments of oriental table-manners. I warned him that while we should probably be expected to eat with our fingers, he should be careful to use only those of the right hand, since the left is associated with cleansing the body after eliminating its waste products. In the event I need not have bothered. We were confronted with a table set with starched napery, polished silver and the usual selection of glass. It appeared that one of the Court retainers had been for many years in the employ of a former Political Officer and on the rare occasions when his present master entertained European visitors he was given *carte blanche*.

An old man squatted in a corner of the room and sang ancient Persian songs which he accompanied on the *rabab*, an instrument with a sweet tone something like that of a guitar, an enchanting mixture of gaiety and melancholy. In most parts of the East etiquette does not demand a flow of senseless chatter during dinner, and we were thus able to listen to these beguiling sounds without undue interruption. There was none of the unfamiliar cadence of most oriental music; this fell upon the ear as lightly as a French *chanson*.

When dinner was over the table was removed and we re-seated ourselves on chairs placed round the walls. The Mir's orchestra now appeared, bowed low as they entered and squatted down on the floor to one side. There were five performers: two *serenais*, a wind-instrument something like a clarinet, two tenor drums, played with the flat of the hand, and

another tiny drum which was played with slender sticks. The noise was overpowering, since the percussion, at any rate to European ears, was out of proportion to the rest; whatever melody there may have been was lost in the incessant beating of the drums. After a deafening overture the doors were thrown open and the Court dancers entered, a troop of boys clad in long red robes and wearing wigs the better to accentuate their naturally feminine appearance. At first they gyrated slowly in a series of somewhat stereotyped motions, the rhythm of which appeared to be at variance with that of the band. But this, said the Mir, was the first public performance of a dance which one of his friends had brought from Kashgar, where, so it appeared, it is danced only by women. After an orchestral interlude the boys gave us a spirited Hunza dance. This was of an altogether different nature, and the six little creatures now jumped and pirouetted with the utmost abandon. The music increased in frenzy, and after a final crash of drums and a deep bow to the assembled company orchestra and dancers rushed out of the room.

It was after midnight before we got to bed, and we slept late. It must have been at about eight in the morning when, still wearing pyjamas, I came out of the tent to brush my teeth. A stream of villagers was passing, returning from attending upon their lord. Each day the Mir, like generations of his ancestors before him, was accessible to his subjects during the dawn hours. He knew most of them by name, and although he owned more land than they, his way of life was little different; he too worked with his hands.

The State of Hunza had neither police force nor civil service and the Mir's powers were autocratic. Fortunately Ghazan Khan (he died in 1939) had a strongly developed sense of obligation and under him the system worked well; it was obvious that the ruler was loved by his people, and they seemed to be happy and contented. There were times when food was short and the people suffered from what in a more advanced society would nowadays be regarded as avoidable disease. Nevertheless it is by no means certain that the people of Hunza

would be better off if they were provided with some more advanced system of education. Nor would an increase in population, the inevitable result of a proper medical service, be an unmixed blessing in a country which can only with difficulty, and not always then, grow enough food for itself. We have seen the result of this in other parts of Asia, although it is hard to defend the continuance of a society that differs little from the Bronze Age. But in practice there is a lot to be said for leaving Hunza as it is; progress, unless it is introduced with the utmost circumspection, is unlikely to add to the happiness of the people.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I DO not intend to describe the life of the Hunza people in detail, but it may be of interest if I briefly sketch the customs of those among whom we were to spend the next few months.

The State of Hunza has a population of about 25,000. The people are Moslems and belong to the Maulai sect, of which the Aga Khan is the head. Like his followers in other parts of the world they pay him tribute in the form of a small annual subscription, according to their means, which is collected by the Mir. A few families, probably the descendants of immigrants, adhere to the Shiah faith, but they are not in any way ostracised. The communal riots between the followers of these two main branches of the Moslem religion, which were endemic in most parts of India, were unknown in Hunza.

The Mir, whose title is hereditary, was subject to the orders of the Government of India, but for all practical purposes he alone ran the State. This form of benevolent autocracy is nowadays frowned upon, particularly by left-wing political theorists, but it seems to me to be admirably suited to small under-developed countries, particularly when they are situated in remote parts of the world.

The Mir, who is himself a practical working landlord, is accessible to anybody who wishes to seek his advice, but most of the State business is conducted at a daily informal court. This takes place in the veranda of the Mir's house soon after dawn, and anyone who likes is welcome to attend. There are no appointed officials, but some half a dozen of the village elders are regularly present. These old men are deeply versed in local custom, and while they have no official standing they are in practice the Mir's advisers and guardians of the people's rights. The Mir is not obliged to consult them, but he seldom

makes a decision which is not in accordance with their views. Their influence is great.

I attended a number of these early morning sessions, at the end of which a meal was served to all who cared to stay. I was unable to follow the conversation, which was carried on in Burushaski, the extremely difficult local language, but the Mir himself, who spoke Hindustani well, translated for me.

Most of the business was concerned with petitions and the redress of minor grievances, nearly all of them concerned with land or water rights. The Mir had power to inflict corporal punishment, but a sentence of death had to be confirmed by the Central Government. There had been no case of murder during the last thirty years and indeed very little crime of any sort. This patriarchal form of government, so similar to that described in the Old Testament, appears to have existed almost unchanged in Hunza for many centuries.

In each village there is a Headman appointed by the Mir and changed from time to time if his work is unsatisfactory. He receives no pay, but is occasionally rewarded with gifts in kind, generally in the form of food. He collects the taxes, arranges transport for passing travellers and keeps the roads in repair. He has the right to flog his villagers for disobedience, but this seems seldom necessary.

Mostly the land belongs to the people. The Mir himself owns a great deal, much of it in outlying districts, which he lets. In Baltit, the capital, two crops are raised annually. Wheat is sown in November and millet in July. Ploughing takes place in November. Crops may not be reaped until a date appointed by the Mir, and the day is celebrated with a feast and dancing and generally a game of polo. The ponies, which at this time of year are up in the grazing-grounds above the villages, are brought down specially for the occasion.

Polo, as played in Hunza, is very different from the game as it is known in India and England. It takes place in a gravelled and walled enclosure rather smaller than a hockey-field. Any number of people may play at a time, and the game generally results in a free-for-all scramble to hit the ball.

There appear to be no rules. I imagine this is the original form of the game. It is still played in this way in many remote parts of Central Asia and is exactly as portrayed in early Persian paintings.

Baltit could hardly be described as a metropolitan centre. Nevertheless those who live in and around the tiny capital affect to despise their brethren in the distant valleys and regard them as uncouth bumpkins; their attitude is very similar to that adopted by certain Londoners towards those who live in the outer suburbs. It is an unspoken contempt, but shown in many subtle ways, such as the method of greeting. Men generally shake hands when they meet, after which the hand is conveyed to the mouth and kissed, either with fervour or perfunction, as the occasion demands. The normal headgear is a homespun tweed cap with a tightly rolled brim, but no peak. In Baltit it is the fashion to have this cap carefully fitted to the shape of the wearer's head; elsewhere it is loose and looks more like an outsize beret. The men in these parts usually wear their hair bobbed and oiled, but in Baltit it is either clipped short or the head completely shaved.

Moslems are forbidden by their religion to drink alcohol, but this ban is disregarded in Hunza. Wild grapes are plentiful in the lower valleys, and most households make a little wine, sufficient for their own needs. I found it quite drinkable and very similar to the cheaper kinds of French table-wine. It is said to be at its best after four years, after which it quickly deteriorates. There is also a spirit distilled from mulberries, coarse and fiery, but doubtless comforting on winter nights. There appears to be no drunkenness and the Mir told me that he had never had a case brought to his notice.

The staple diet is flour, coarsely ground and made into cakes two inches thick. Meat is too expensive for most people, but fruit, generally dried apricots, is available throughout the year. There is also a sufficient supply of goat's milk. The people in general look extremely healthy, but I suspect that in winter they are undernourished. Deficiency-diseases are certainly not unknown, but we saw no signs of that horrible

grinding poverty which is so distressing in India and other over-populated countries in Asia.

Women are not kept in purdah and go about unveiled. They may in theory converse with any man, but in practice do not normally do so unless the man is a relation or a friend of the family.

The usual age for marriages is sixteen for boys and nine for girls, although naturally they are not consummated until later. When he wishes to arrange a marriage the boy's father looks about for a suitable partner. If the boy is of a sufficient age and intelligence his feelings are consulted; otherwise he has no say in the matter. When a suitable girl is available, the boy's father or some near relative will ascertain the feelings of the girl's parents. If they approve of the proposed match there will be an exchange of presents, generally food. It is worth noting that a girl's parents may never take the initiative in arranging a marriage; this would be thought utterly shameless and the family would be ostracised. Marriages can take place at any time, but usually they are celebrated only during the month of December, and the actual day is selected by the Mir. This is simply a matter of convenience, since in the winter there is little work to be done in the fields.

The marriage festivities last most of three months and would be a considerable physical strain if they took place at busier times of the year. The nightly dancing, which goes on throughout December, January and February, was originally a continuation of the wedding festivities, but nowadays it is merely the period of seasonal jollity.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

In travelling to remote parts of Asia it used to be customary to give the local chieftain some present in return for his services, without which it would be impossible to move. I knew that a gift of money could not be offered, but I was anxious that we should not add to the Mir's store of useless objects, and before we left India I found out, through the Political Officer at Gilgit, what he would like. Apparently he wanted a sporting rifle, and when I handed it over he fell into a reminiscent mood. "When I was a boy," he said, "my father sent me to look after a young Englishman named Curzon who was passing through our country. He had with him a fine pair of field-glasses, an instrument I had not before seen and which I greatly coveted. I was very young and perhaps ill-mannered, for I did not conceal my desire. But I was disappointed. When I parted from this Curzon Sahib he gave me only words. 'I am not giving you a present,' he said, 'because I have already made a sufficient gift to your father. But one day I shall become famous, and when you grow up you will be proud to have known me.' "

I explained our intentions to the Mir, and while he was willing to help us in every way, he was doubtful if we should succeed in our plan. In June the snow on the great ranges begins to melt, and the main Hunza river, together with its numerous tributaries, rises, so that communication is difficult and in some parts impossible. Most of the side-streams are unbridged, and since the cliffs and crags with which the whole of this country abounds are often impassable, progress is possible only by wading the rivers; it may be necessary to do this as many as twenty times in the course of a single day. A traveller might easily enter a valley and be unable to get

out again for several months. However, the Mir agreed to let us take a chance.

We were now joined by Torabaz Khan, a trained surveyor whose services had been lent by the Government of India. He had been unable to travel with us from Srinagar, but by means of double marches had now caught us up. We left Baltit on June 11, intending to work our way into the Shingshal valley as quickly as possible.

Three days later we reached Pasu. The river was already swollen with snow-water, and while we ourselves could doubtless have found a way over the cliffs it would have been impossible for our laden porters. When, as now, Hunza and Shingshal are cut off from one another there is practically no communication between the two districts for several months. But in case of emergency there is an alternative route. It is still possible to get into the Shingshal by crossing the Karun Pir, an arduous and little-used pass 16,000 feet above sea-level, and by this route we had perforce now to travel.

We pitched camp about four hours' march below the summit. It was bitterly cold, and snow fell during the night. A strong wind was blowing when we got to the top and dry powdery snow was being whirled in all directions, making it look as if steam was rising from the surrounding crags. The Shingshal side of the pass lay deep in cloud, but looking back towards Pasu we could see a couple of dirt-covered glaciers obtruding into the valley. From this distance they looked like enormous slugs. The temperature was well below freezing-point, and we stayed on the pass only long enough to take a few photographs.

I hurried on, hoping to find some sort of path, but there was none. As soon as we got below the snow-line we were confronted with vast shale slopes, lying at such an angle that they were only just stationary. We slithered our way down for several hours and, tired out, reached what seemed to be a possible camping-place towards evening.

We had at last arrived in unmapped territory. This must surely be one of the most drab regions on the whole surface of

the earth. There was no sign of vegetation; and of life only a solitary eagle and a few choughs. Dun-coloured precipices surrounded us, and even the glaciers were uniformly dirty and covered with debris. Desolation was everywhere.

The valleys themselves are on such a gigantic scale that it is difficult to realise to what enormous heights the surrounding mountains rise. Only after looking long does one pick out the tangle of ice-falls and hanging glaciers which proclaim these to be peaks of the first magnitude. They seem, these giants of the Karakoram, to have heaved themselves up out of the surrounding grim rubble, as though disdainful of it.

We toiled slowly forward for a week. It is not a pleasant country to travel in, for there are no paths of any kind and the daily journey consists in the traverse of endless stony slopes alternating with scrambles among the boulders in the beds of streams. A march ends when the traveller has had enough of it and feels too weary to continue.

Before reaching the little settlement of Shingshal (it is too small to be called a village) we camped one night on the edge of the Malangutti glacier. It was a relief to find a spring of clear water and a few stunted willows. Unlike the other glaciers, the Malangutti was sparkling white, and except for some erratic blocks of granite free from debris. It is about eighteen miles long and appeared to be in retreat. At its head is a steep ice-fall and, rising above, the beautiful peak of Dasto Ghil, which means Sheepfold in the local language. Crossing this glacier presented no difficulty, but I was much amused when our Hunza porters took off their sandals. It was easier, they said, to go barefoot over the ice.

We had always intended to spend a few days at Shingshal, since we should have to leave some of our supplies there and send back for them as necessary. This would enable us to travel light in the ever-more-difficult country that lay ahead. Everything was arranged and there appeared to be no reason why we should not complete the task we had set ourselves. Montagnier and I were sitting outside our tent discussing the final details when a messenger arrived from Hunza. He had

brought an urgent telegram from Delhi. It cancelled our permit and said that in no circumstances were we to move beyond the Shingshal pass. There was no possibility of questioning this order, for which I could see no reasonable explanation. Many months later however I discovered that some junior official had concluded that our proposed journey would take us into disputed territory and that it would be prudent to stop us. In fact we should never have been within several hundred miles of Russian territory, but doubtless a small-scale atlas can be misleading. The telegram also informed us that while I was permitted to enter Chinese Turkestan, Montagnier's application for a visa had been refused.

We were both unwilling to admit defeat, and after much discussion with the local people evolved another plan. The only other piece of unexplored country was the Ghujerab valley. A few years previously another party had tried to penetrate into it, but had come to the conclusion that it was impassable and had been forced to retreat. It did not seem a hopeful project, but we nevertheless decided to have a go at it. If we too were defeated we could always return by the way we had come.

There is no bridge at Shingshal, but the villagers made one for us. Stout poles were planted on both banks of the river and a thick rope of plaited yak-hair stretched between them. Over this they placed a wooden runner, an inverted U-shaped piece of wood, and after a man had swum across with the draw-rope we were pulled across, hanging like trussed fowls. The passage of a river in this fashion is more sensational to the onlookers than to the performer, and I found it less terrifying than crossing the birch-twig bridges common in other parts of the Himalayas. This way one simply grasps the runner and hopes for the best, the rope breaking or not as the case may be, whereas a birch bridge, which sways horribly with every movement, must be crossed by one's own unaided efforts. The passage of ourselves, porters and baggage took the whole of one day, and we camped not far from the opposite bank, at the entrance to the Zardigarban valley.

It was steep and narrow, and half way up we came to a small *pamir*, or grass-covered plateau. Away to the right was the forbidden pass leading into the Shaksgam. The Zardigarban itself turned sharply to the left and began to open out. Its upper reaches were filled with stones and boulders, but there was no sign of water, despite the enormous ice-field which we could see in front of us.

We plodded on, at one time mounting over an enormous moraine whose glacier, long since withered away, must at some earlier period have blocked the valley. Beyond it we came upon a welcome trickle of water. The sun was blazing from a cloudless sky and the radiation from the rocks was blinding. Although we were now at an altitude of well over 15,000 feet I have never, not even on Everest, experienced such lassitude; the desire to lie down and sleep was almost overwhelming. Our entire caravan was feeling the same, and it was hard work persuading the porters to struggle on to what seemed a possible camping-place. Here I saw two white-capped redstarts and a solitary chough, the only signs of life we had come across since entering the valley.

Our camp at Jachfarbask was pitched below the snout of a glacier from which small stones were continually dropping. We spent two nights in this place, and the temperature never rose above freezing-point. Just before sunset I saw, silhouetted against the skyline, a large herd of *burhel*, wild Himalayan sheep, but they scented us at once and made off with a clatter of dislodged stones.

It was my idea to climb one of the higher ridges so that we could see into the Ghujerab and thus fix some points for our map. The next morning Torabaz and I set off. For two hours we clambered over rocks and shale and then came to a snow-filled gully. It looked as though this was the best approach, but after testing the snow I decided that it was too soft and steep for safety; there was a danger that we might start an avalanche. We skirted the snow-field and made our way on to a ridge, the rocks of which were in some places glazed with ice. It was not dangerous, but needed to be negotiated with

care. After three hours it began to snow and the wind was biting through our clothes. When at last we gained what we had imagined would be a suitable vantage-point we found ourselves confronted with yet another field of snow, far more dangerous than the first, at the top of which was a cornice some twenty feet thick, evil-looking and in any case impassable. This alone would have prevented us from getting higher, and since the afternoon was by this time well advanced I judged it prudent to return. On the way down it stopped snowing and the sun came out, dispelling the clouds which had been gathering all the morning. The panorama which was suddenly unfolded made the day's efforts worth while. To the south-east a magnificent vista of snow-peaks was visible. It included most of the Karakoram. The entire horizon was a great barrier of snow and ice with glaciers tumbling down from it in every direction. But this vision did not last, and I was almost glad when the clouds closed over this scene of wonder, for it would have been hard to turn one's back on such a sight.

When we struck camp at Jachfarbask it took us only a couple of hours to reach the pass which leads towards the Ghujerab. It was easy going, but a little dangerous in one place, where we had to pass beneath a line of huge rocks balanced precariously on top of a wall of ice. The height of the pass, which we were able to measure, was 15,700 feet. On the far side we descended on to an enormous moraine which entirely blocked the valley for several miles. Some small glaciers flowed down from the lateral valleys, but the whole place was so torn and tumbled that it was impossible to trace their course. When we got to the snout of the moraine we were astonished and delighted to find that the river which issued from it was no more than a few inches deep. It was here that our predecessors had been turned back.

I should mention that we had now had a succession of cloudy days. This meant that for the time being the melting snow had been arrested. The Shingshali men who were guiding us said that if this weather continued we should be able to get into the Ghujerab without difficulty. There was the possibility that if

the weather changed we might not be able to get out again for several months. We decided to take the risk.

We found a camping-place on a small *pamir* that went by the name of Shakshagin. In front was a small but very steep glacier which had not quite reached the main valley. The ways of glaciers are unpredictable. Some grow to a great size; others for no apparent reason wither away while they are still quite small. The result of this is that most of these high Central Asian valleys contain a tangled mass of old moraines, stones and rubble left behind when a glacier retreats. They have the effect of dividing the valleys into a series of terraces, one above the other, between which are small grass-covered plateaus. These are known as *pamirs* and they are used by the Shingshal people for grazing their few yaks and sheep. They are not inhabited, but each of them has a name, generally that of some prominent object by which it can be identified, such as The Lonely Willow, The Solitary Rock and so on. We marked them on our map by the names the porters gave us, but future travellers, if any there should be, are likely to find that many of them are now unknown. An avalanche may have moved the solitary rock, and the lonely willow may have been swept away by the flooding river.

We toiled onwards, making the map as we went. Sometimes we covered no more than a mile, since it was necessary frequently to climb some peak so that we could check our intersection-points. We had lost all count of time, but day and date no longer seemed to have any significance.

At last we wormed our way into the Ghujerab and mounted a great moraine, from the top of which we were able to see right down into the valley. It looked uninviting; the usual bare hills with an occasional snow-peak on either side, a geological scrapheap which nature had not yet had time to make tidy.

A few miles down, the Ghujerab is joined by a small tributary. We decided to camp at the junction and to climb one of the nearby peaks. It looked the most suitable place from which to fix our further triangulation.

We left camp at five the next morning, waded the ice-cold river, and were on top of our mountain by eleven. The sky was cloudless and we had an uninterrupted view of the mountains to the south of the Ghujerab. Karun Koh, because of its nearness, loomed in front. A little to the west we observed that another valley joined the Ghujerab, and it was at once obvious that if we could force our way up it we should be rewarded with a magnificent view of Karun Koh at close quarters.

The next day we ordered the camp to be moved a few miles downsteam, and while this was being done Torabaz and I set off to investigate what turned out to be known as the Spe Syngo valley. Its lower reach was narrow and precipitous and the river-bed contained many enormous boulders, some of them twenty to thirty feet high. By climbing over them we managed several times to cross the torrent; otherwise we should have had to traverse some difficult rock-faces. Our progress was slow and tedious. About four miles above the junction with the Ghujerab the Spe Syngo forks. The two branches were almost choked with glacier-ice, but between them was a small grass-covered plateau and the remains of a rough stone hut. In early spring, when there is little water in the rivers, the way to this *pamir* presents no difficulty to man or beast, but now the place was deserted.

We examined first the eastern branch. The glacier was fairly level. It did not appear to be crevassed and showed no signs of advancing. The unnamed peak at its head was studded with small hanging glaciers which shimmered like diamonds. They looked so gently poised that the least puff of wind would bring them crashing down.

Retracing our steps we made our way up the western valley. For some hours we saw nothing but the rocks immediately in front of us, but we could see that ahead of us the defile along which we were toiling made a sharp turn to the left. Once we had turned the corner we expected to get an uninterrupted view of Karun Koh, the main object of our expedition.

I was prepared for a sight of some splendour, but not for

that with which we were now confronted. In the foreground was a little emerald-coloured plain studded with gentians, clumps of primula and a white star-shaped flower with a splash of brilliant red in its centre. Beyond this was the glacier, sparsely covered with rocks and debris, and towering above it the north-eastern face of Karun Koh itself. From where we stood some 8000 feet of this face was visible, and so still was the day that every pinnacle, knife-edged ridge and cornice scintillated in the hard, clear sunlight, as though sculpted in crystal. Only the torrent gushing out of the glacier broke the frozen silence. Slowly a small cloud came sailing up from the west, its shadow travelling gently over the mountain, causing deep cobalt-blue shadows. It rested on an isolated peak, rose slightly and dissolved in the faint breeze which was now just discernible. The spell was broken by the hoarse cry of a chough and we realised that we must not linger; we had a long return journey in front of us. Days like this are the rewards of travel in a harsh country; they do not often occur, but nothing can destroy the memory of them.

It took us some days to make our way down the Ghujerab, but except for the ceaseless toil they were without event. We came at last to a possible camping-place which our porters said was known as Weir Wunak. Immediately below it the river entered what looked like an impenetrable gorge, the rocks on both sides falling sheer to the water. We had succeeded in getting into the Ghujerab, but the real problem was not yet solved. We could return by the way we had come, but that would mean failure. Our object was to get back to the Hunza valley through this gorge. Nobody had hitherto been able to do it. Besides, all this country was unmapped, and we wanted if possible to make some small contribution to geographical knowledge; it would make the journey worthwhile.

I made a careful study of what lay ahead, and although at first I said nothing I gradually became convinced that we were about to be defeated. I thought that while Montagnier and I alone could probably work our way across the cliffs unladen, there was no possibility of taking porters with us. But I

misjudged these splendid men, who now proved themselves to be mountaineers of the highest class. I was apprehensive for their safety. It is necessary to take certain risks in this kind of rough travel, and the leader must accept responsibility if anything goes wrong. We decided to take a chance, and in doing so we were influenced by the porters' obvious willingness to accompany us.

We set off over a huge shale slope, the most tiring of all surfaces, since every step dislodges the loose top-layer of stones and one is constantly slipping backwards. At the top of it we traversed on to an easy pitch of rock and found ourselves 1000 feet or so above the river. We could now see the confluence of the Ghujerab and Khunjerab valleys and were relieved to observe that a small trickle of water was flowing down the latter. From our vantage-point it looked as though there was a possible camping-place on what appeared to be a minute stony plateau about a mile below the junction. But we did not yet know how to get there. Separating us was a series of formidable cliffs which looked impassable and were in any case extremely dangerous. Neither of us could make up his mind whether or not to proceed, but while we were still discussing the problem one of the Shingshalis asked for the loan of my ice-axe. He began to cut steps in the hard rock as though it was formed of ice, and without further thought of the difficulties we carried on and followed. At some of the worst places Montagnier and I stopped to give the porters a helping hand, but they disdained our proffered assistance and came over climbing like cats. After more than twelve hours of continuous exertion we were able to glissade down the last shale slope, glad to refresh ourselves with the muddy glacier-water in the river. Montagnier told me later that this was the most extraordinary day's climbing in the whole of his long experience.

We were all feeling rather exhausted, and despite the discomfort of our camp inclined to rest for a day or two. But we had only a limited supply of food; also I was worried about the weather. Luckily the last few days had been cloudy. I

knew however that these conditions might not last and that as soon as the sun came out the river, which we should have to cross a number of times, would quickly become a torrent.

We halted only for the night and then continued onwards down the valley. The cloudy weather still held; even so it was now obvious that when we reached the bottom there would be too much water to make fording possible. We had brought with us some hundreds of feet of rope for use in just such an emergency, and with the help of some drift-timber we made a bridge of the sort the Shingshali villagers had constructed on our outward journey. It sagged horribly in the middle, and we tried to strengthen it with the guy-ropes of our tent, but they did not seem to make much difference. Nevertheless in the course of a few hours we got the whole party across, and a few days later we emerged at Misgar, a sizeable village in the main Hunza valley. We now learned that soon after we had set out from Shingshal one of the glacier-lakes above that place had burst its bounds and flooded the valley. Had we been a few days later we might have been trapped for weeks, but this kind of hazard is, at any rate for me, one of the attractions of travelling in unknown country.

We spent some days recovering at Misgar, and during this time I developed all the photographs we had so far taken. We thought now to go and have a quick look at the Kilik and Mintaka passes. Both lay in British-administered territory and were therefore within the area in which Montagnier was permitted to travel. It would not be a very exciting trip, since both passes were well known and had been explored and mapped in detail. But they lay on the Central Asian frontier, and from their summits we could at least get some idea of the appearance of the great Pamirs. Meanwhile I sent a porter back to Baltit with a telegram to the Survey of India. We still had time in hand, and I thought that if there was any other remaining unexplored country hereabouts we might profitably spend our remaining weeks in mapping it.

We set off on July 17, but at the end of the first march Montagnier began to feel ill. He was too old for this sort of

thing and now that we were out of danger his spirit no longer sustained him. Also we had begun inevitably to get on each other's nerves. Neither could be wholly blamed for this, but doubtless I, who had become fitter with the weeks of strenuous exercise, should have had more consideration for my much older companion. In my youthful enthusiasm it never occurred to me that from Montagnier's point of view each day's advance was a penance. We had gradually discovered that beyond a love of mountains we had no interests in common, so that our conversation was reduced to the minimum. I had hoped that Montagnier would by this time have picked up a few words of one or other of the local languages understood by our party, but he was still dependent upon my translation for such simple needs as a glass of water. Even Torabaz, our surveyor, spoke no word of English, so that I was the only one with whom the unfortunate Montagnier could directly communicate. There were times when he accused me of deliberately keeping him out of the conversation, but it was too exhausting to translate everything that was said. This is something that arises sooner or later during the course of most expeditions, but in a big party, such as we had on Everest, it is easier to cope with.

Montagnier decided that, at any rate for the time being, he would go no further and would return to Misgar, there to rest in comparative comfort. I was loth to leave him, but it was obvious that my company had become uncongenial. At his insistence I therefore decided to take advantage of the Chinese permit I alone had obtained and to carry out a quick trip into Turkestan. I hoped that during the ten days or so I was away Montagnier would recover his health and his humour; after that we could continue our mapping. I made what arrangements I could for his comfort and then set off with a minimum of baggage and one of the Gurkha orderlies to act as a general factotum. It turned out to be one of the most enjoyable journeys I have ever made.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Soon after Misgar the valley opened out and there was a complete change of scenery; we found a carpet of fresh green grass dotted with clumps of *Primula Rosea* in full bloom. I also noted a number of blue-fronted redstarts and a few choughs. By midday we had got as far as Ghulkhwaja and decided to push on towards the Mintaka pass.

Ghulkhwaja itself was no more than a little boulder-strewn plateau near the glacier after which it is named. There were a few stone huts, but uninhabited. We went on up the rough path which runs along the right bank of the glacier, and although we were in the midst of splendid mountains we were too near to sense their grandeur.

I was expecting a Pisgah glimpse into Central Asia from the top of the pass, but there was nothing of the kind; only a track descending gently through grass-covered folds in the hills. We stayed for some time, and while we sat there I saw a tailless mouse-hare come out of its burrow in the cairn that marked the summit. These strange and attractive little animals are common in Tibet, but this was the first time on this trip that I had seen one. He peeped out at us several times, but when we threw him a few crumbs he disappeared and was seen no more.

The name Mintaka is a combination of two Turki words: *ming*, meaning a thousand, and *taka*, an ibex. Hence this is The Pass of a Thousand Ibex, but although the creatures are said to abound hereabouts we never saw one. The summit of the pass is flat, its surface broken with huge boulders, some standing isolated and others in disordered clumps. Presumably they were deposited by a glacier in some earlier geological age. There were numerous small and shallow pools

in which the water was so still and transparent that on this windless day it appeared to have the solidity of crystal. Each was bordered with a flowering mass of *Primula Stuartii*, with here and there a tiny purple aster-like flower with an orange centre which I was unable to identify. But the most striking feature of the country was the dramatic suddenness with which its nature had changed. The arid rocks and frowning crags of the Hunza valley were little more than a long day's march behind us, and here we were in a landscape that despite its altitude was reminiscent of the wilder parts of the Sussex Downs. We had reached the true watershed that divides the Indian sub-continent from that of Central Asia.

We went joyfully on our way. Greenness was all around us, and after we had descended for 1000 feet or so we came upon great patches of forget-me-nots and gentians just coming into flower. We came at last to the encampment of one Mohammed Beg Karauli and his son Qurban Bey. They were Sarikolis and, like most of the Kirghiz peoples, nomadic. I had long been familiar, by means of pictures, with the curious-dome-like tents in which most of these Central-Asian tribesmen live, but this was the first time I had actually seen one. More than anything it impressed upon me the great distance we had come, and I suddenly realised that we had moved into a completely different civilisation.

These nomads' tents are known as *kirghas*. From a short distance they look like bee-hives, but seen from afar they are easily mistaken for weather-stained boulders, which they somewhat resemble in colour. They are circular and about twenty feet in diameter. The framework, which is formed of latticed willow-branches, is mostly manufactured in Kashgar, where it is an important local industry. So as to bend the willows to the required shape they are first immersed in water for several months. The various sections are fastened with thongs of plaited yak-hair, and when the entire framework has been erected it is covered with pieces of thick Yarkandi felt, which is both warm and waterproof. A small circular hole is left in the top, so that smoke from the fire inside may

escape. A rough fireplace, made from stones and mud, is built in the middle of the *kirgha*, and round it are carried out the various dairy operations by which the Sarikolis earn their living. The sides of the tent are piled with cushions, rugs and bolsters, since the *kirgha* is kitchen, living-room and bedroom. Its one great disadvantage, which seems not to worry these nomads, is that it is permanently filled with smoke.

As we approached the settlement, Qurban Bey came galloping to meet us, and without so much as asking us who we were bade us welcome to his father's tents. We were soon squatting inside the biggest of them and China tea was immediately served. It was a new and delightful experience to find that although these people are good Moslems their women are allowed great freedom; purdah seemed to be unknown and none of them was veiled. It was they who now waited upon us.

These friendly and hospitable people begged us to pass the night in their tents, but I was tired and did not fancy the idea of having to spend the small hours in conversation. Besides, the smoke-laden atmosphere was a deterrent, so we erected our own bivouac close by. It was a glorious night: cold and dry, and so clear that the stars seemed to be only just above us. For some time I lay awake, utterly contented and soothed by the gentle bleating of the goats and sheep which were tethered round about. Presently the moon came up and I could just distinguish the archaic forms of some yaks still grazing in the distance. A light in a neighbouring *kirgha* was extinguished and for a few minutes a bold and manly voice could be heard singing a snatch from some Sarikoli folk-song. Suddenly the singing ceased and all was quiet. Even the faint breeze had died away, as though it had lost itself in this vast open space.

We were up at dawn, intending to make as long a march as possible. We kept to the side of the Lup Goz valley, wading the river from time to time. After we had been going for several hours our one yak, which was burdened with our few but entire possessions, thought to immerse itself in the cooling stream and I saw the whole of my photographic equipment disappearing slowly beneath the water. Fortunately the box in

which it was packed was wrapped in a waterproof groundsheet, and suffered little damage. We came at last to the junction of the Lup Goz with the Kara Chukar, the Long Black River as the name implies. We were making for Beik, on the Tagdumbash Pamir. It was marked on the map in biggish letters, but whether it was a town, a village or merely one of the many recognised camping-grounds there was as yet no means of knowing. It was now well past midday, and the long hours in the warm, languorous sunshine made me feel extremely sleepy. In these high places the nights are cold but in the daytime it is often unpleasantly hot. On several days the temperature reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

I could make out from the map where Beik was supposed to be, but in the intense clarity of the Central Asian atmosphere it is impossible to judge distances with accuracy. We never seemed to get any nearer. Also, so hard is man to please, I was beginning to tire of the endless miles of uniform greenness. The surrounding hills, although a considerable height above sea-level, do not rise much above the valleys and are of a dull shape. And the absence of trees gives the country a monotonous appearance. It is beautiful, but for my taste too consistently lush; like some delicious pudding marred by an excess of cream.

We passed a number of sand-covered patches, the homes of marmots. As we neared them four or five or these odd little creatures would appear, sitting up on their hind legs and watching our approach. At the last moment they disappeared into their burrows with a curious noise between a squeak and a whistle. As soon as we had passed they came out again. They are about the size of a cat, a reddish-brown in colour, and they hibernate during the winter. They are fairly common all over the higher parts of the Himalayas, but I have never seen them in such quantities as on the Tagdumbash Pamir.

Beik turned out to be no more than a collection of rude mud-huts, most of which appeared to have been abandoned. Nevertheless it is a site of some importance, since it lies at the junction of the Kara Chukor with another valley leading

directly into Russian Turkestan. A few wandering Kirghiz were encamped, but the only permanent resident was a solitary and melancholy Chinese, his country's local representative. As soon as we had pitched our tent he came to call. He was accompanied by a servant carrying a huge samovar. He was dressed in a tight-fitting black nankeen jacket and trousers, a round plush cap and velvet slippers. Tea was served at once and with it astonishingly good Russian cigarettes. We had no common language, but luckily one of the nomads had joined the party. He knew a little Hindustani and was able to translate my remarks into Khatai, the Chinese dialect which is spoken in most parts of Turkestan. Even so it was only with great difficulty that the Kirghiz and I could communicate with one another.

It soon became apparent however that the Chinese official suspected that I had no business to be in Beik. Obviously he was not impressed by my dishevelled appearance and the smallness of our caravan, since no foreigner of substance would choose to travel in such poverty-stricken fashion. I decided that this was the moment to produce my trump card, the splendid Chinese passport with which I had been supplied before setting out. It was written with bold red brush-strokes on a piece of hand-made paper the size of a London daily. I had no idea of what it said, since I could not read a single word of the Chinese language. Neither, it now transpired, could my interlocutor, but he was sufficiently impressed by the size of the document to decide that I might proceed. He told me that he hated Beik. It was hot in summer and desperately cold in winter. Besides, there was no one of his own race to keep him company and he had no work. He had thought, he said, to pass the time in learning to read and write, but he had long since given up in despair. The only thing that supported him was racial pride; he felt in every way vastly superior to the nomads, whom he described as untutored barbarians.

I had intended to spend only one night at Beik, returning the next day over the Killik pass to Hunza. When we were getting ready to move however the Chinese reappeared and said that

his superior, the Amban of Tashkurgan, when he heard of my arrival in the district, would naturally expect me to visit him at his headquarters. I said that nothing would have pleased me more; unfortunately I had a friend awaiting me in Hunza and could not therefore prolong my travels. I realised that this show of politeness was merely a means to delay me while my credentials were being investigated, and as soon as I showed my impatience to get away the Chinese minion showed his hand. "Unfortunately," he said, "Your Excellency will be forced to remain with me for a few days. I have at the moment no transport available and it will take some time to collect the necessary animals for your onward journey." Luckily he had forgotten to drive away the yak we ourselves had brought, and it still stood tethered near the tent. He saw his mistake at once, but since he had not been able to check my passport and was not sure enough of himself to forbid me to leave, there was nothing more to say, and after a final cup of tea, which seemed to restore his temporary loss of face, he agreed that there was no reason to detain us. I had a feeling, however, that we were still under suspicion, and so it turned out.

After we had been travelling for some miles a solitary horseman, mounted on a fine Badakshani stallion, came galloping towards us. He was a Sarikoli, by name Daud Beg, who was acting as guide to some official who was making a periodical inspection of the district. He said that his master's retinue was approaching, and hearing that I was on my way to the Killik he had sent this henchman forward to suggest that since he was bound for the same direction it would be pleasant for us to travel in company. I refrained from asking how he had obtained this information and prepared myself for the meeting.

The official was riding a spirited black mare. He was dressed in a light grey silk robe lined with astrakhan, patent-leather slippers and a soft felt hat of European pattern. With him were three soldiers. They wore dingy and travel-stained grey uniform with red patches on the collars and each had what looked like a home-made bandolier filled with ammunition

slung round his waist. All three were mounted on diminutive donkeys, and their bare feet almost reached to the ground. Behind this ragged escort was a gorgeous person dressed in a splendid robe of mauve and green and wearing a fur hat with upturned brim. His robe was unbuttoned to the waist, and under it he too was wearing a grey uniform. He carried a rifle slung across his back. He appeared to be acquainted with the various local languages and was, he now told me, the interpreter of the party. The remaining member of this impressive caravan was a gaily dressed young woman. She wore a printed frock, long Russian riding-boots and had a scarf tied over her head. Perched on top of a pile of brightly-coloured blankets and rugs, she seemed to be at ease on horseback.

The *Doring*, or "Chinese Military Man," as the official turned out to be, now dismounted, and we shook hands in silence. I noticed that he eyed my khaki shorts and torn dirty shirt with a puzzled expression. I at once produced my passport, and after reading through it he told me, through the interpreter, that it was in order. It was obvious though that he considered it odd for an officer in an army of a great Power to be wandering in these parts without a proper company of servants, travelling like any humble trader.

However he made no comment, and we soon remounted and continued the journey. The interpreter now informed me that we should spend the night together at the Sarikoli encampment of Jalan Jilga. I had always intended to turn back from this place and return over the Killik to Hunza, and since I had not expected to meet anyone of importance during the course of this rapid survey the only clothes I had were the ones I stood up in. The *Doring* had already invited me to take tea with him at Jalan Jilga, and I realised that I must do something to eliminate the unfortunate impression of poverty that I had so obviously created.

I used in those days to have a fondness for rather expensive silk pyjamas; they were the one luxury I allowed myself. I had with me a pair of turquoise-blue ones, and I now put them on. Over them I wore the detachable leather lining of my

waterproof and completed the outfit with a woollen balaclava cap and a pair of leather bedroom slippers. Thus attired I set out for the *Doring*'s tent.

The effect was electrifying; I saw at once that I had begun to regain face. The Chinese officer had fortunately not hitherto met any Europeans, so that my somewhat unorthodox costume did not occasion any surprise. It is usual on these occasions to make some ceremonial gift. I had nothing appropriate to offer and had to make do with a pot of jam and a packet of chocolate, both of which were eagerly accepted. In return for these meagre offerings the *Doring* presented me with a sheep's head reposing on a dirty towel. After thirty minutes or so of somewhat one-sided conversation, consisting mostly of question and answer, I took my leave and went back to my own tent, there to read until the evening meal was ready.

Later on, after I had gone to bed, one of the *Doring*'s retainers came to ask if I had any medicines; it seemed that the lady of the party had been suffering for some days from sore eyes, so I handed over a little of my small stock of boracic tablets and explained their use.

After I had been asleep for some time I was suddenly awakened by shouts and loud laughter. I felt disinclined to get out of my warm sleeping-bag, but my orderly called me to come and see the fun. The three Chinese soldiers, completely drunk, were dancing with the officer's mistress. Her face, I observed, was a deathly white; she had plastered it with a powder made from my precious tablets. Her master lay huddled in a shapeless mass at the back of the tent and was taking no part in the proceedings. He was deep in an opium dream.

We rose early the next morning, but it was nearly ten o'clock before the *Doring* recovered from his stupor, and midday by the time he was ready to leave. We rode on together until we came to the frontier. Before we parted he asked me if I intended to do any shooting on the Killik and, wrongly as it turned out, I assumed that he would imagine this to be the only reason for my travels, and since I could think of no better

answer I agreed that this was indeed my purpose. I asked him the same question, and the moment I put it saw that I had once again lost face, "Does the English officer not understand," he said, "that I am a person of rank? It is for my subordinates to stock my larder."

After a final handshake the party galloped away, the three soldiers on their donkeys doing their best to keep up with their dashing commander. The lady was the last to leave. The remains of my white powder were still visible in patches on her face.

The Killik, the Place of Many Brown Goats, is a wide and open *pamir*, scarcely recognisable as a pass. After we had descended for a mile or so we came upon the finest display of *Primula Stuartii* I have ever seen. The whole hillside gave off a mauve sheen, like a Scottish highland in late summer. Lower down the primulas gave place to deep-blue gentians, and soon we were back again among the arid rocks of Hunza.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

We got back to Misgar on July 29 and I found a letter from the Survey of India awaiting me. It asked if we would explore and map the Chapursan valley and the Yashkuk and Beskiyenj glaciers from which it flows. If we were able to do this it would complete the detailed survey of Hunza territory. Montagnier had recovered during my absence, but he felt disinclined to take any further punishment and decided to go back and wait for me at Baltit.

The Chapursan does not differ in appearance from the other valleys of Hunza, except that it is wider. It is the main source of the Hunza river itself. Some five miles upstream we came to what was marked on the existing map as the Rishipjerab, but we now discovered that this was merely the name given to a small pasturage and that the valley itself was known as the Kundil. We found the remains of an ancient fort and some stone emplacements, built at the time of the Hunza campaign in 1891 to withstand a possible advance down the Chapursan valley.

The Chapursan produces the best crops in the whole of Hunza. At the time of our visit much of the available land was uncultivated, but the Mir was trying to establish a number of new villages with the object of bringing this valuable land under the plough. The valley is probably now well populated, but so far as I know nobody from the outside world has been there since we visited the district in 1927.

As we neared the head of the valley, a little below the snout of the Yashkuk glacier, I was surprised to find it filled with curious earth-mounds, some of them fifteen to twenty feet high. Most were encrusted with small rocks and other debris and looked as though they had been plastered over with a

layer of thick grey mud. This curious formation extended for several miles and is accounted for by the following legend.

About a hundred years ago Yashkuk, of which no trace now remains, was the largest and most important village in Hunza. The people, although prosperous, were under the influence of a malignant demon who lived in the mountains at the head of the valley. This creature could be appeased only by the sacrifice of a human being, and accordingly one or other of the villagers was daily selected for this purpose. At this time, so it is said, the inhabitants of Yashkuk were much given to evil living.

One day an elderly prophet, Baba Ghundi by name, appeared. He remonstrated with the villagers and offered to protect them from the demon if they would reform their way of life. He did not stay, but said he would come back if the people were ever in trouble and called upon him by name. It would make no difference if he happened to be far away; he would know intuitively that his services were required. For some time all went well, until the villagers tired of virtuous life and resumed their traffic with the demon. Baba Ghundi, although he had not been summoned, reappeared and solemnly warned the locals that unless they gave up their evil practices he himself would cause the village and its entire population to be destroyed.

For some years all went well, but gradually the teaching of Baba Ghundi was again forgotten. Nevertheless his prophecy was fulfilled. One day a huge wave came sweeping down from the Yashkuk glacier. It eliminated all trace of the village and everybody was drowned except one old woman who had always refused to participate in the local orgies. She is now thought to be the original ancestor of the present inhabitants of the Chapursan valley.

There is no longer a village of Yashkuk, but a grass-covered plateau at the head of the valley is still known by this name. It was obvious that the disaster had been caused by some glacier-lake bursting its bounds. We decided to try to find some evidence of what exactly had happened.

About three miles above the junction the Yashkuk valley divides into two. We explored the eastern branch first. It is known as the Kuk-ki-jerab, and we found it choked by a huge glacier. After we had worked our way up it for several miles the reason for the mud-covered humps and indeed the destruction of Yashkuk became at once apparent. There were signs that the glacier had formerly been much bigger and that it had probably extended below the entrance to the Kuk-ki-jerab. This meant that the ice, when it melted, was unable to escape down the Chapursan, so that in the course of years a large lake was formed. As it gradually increased in size so also did the pressure, until finally the barrier, formed by the glacier which completely blocks the valley, gave way. It seemed pretty certain that when the waters of this lake were suddenly released they swept down the valley in the form of an enormous wave which destroyed everything in its path. This kind of thing is common in heavily glaciated country and can cause considerable changes in local topography, so that maps need to be constantly revised. When we got back I told the people of Chapursan what we had discovered, but they would have none of our prosaic explanation. It may be as you say, they agreed, but it was Baba Ghundi who caused it to happen.

Towards the head of the Kuk-ki-jerab an easy pass leads into the Lupghar valley, where there is a grazing-ground in regular use during the summer. A shepherd came part of the way with us, and it was a novel sight to see him driving his flock of sheep and goats up the ice-covered glacier.

We retraced our steps, crossed below the snout of the glacier and re-entered the Yashkuk. We kept to the hillside, since it was easier walking than on the tumbled moraine. The Yashkuk glacier is covered with debris and boulders, mostly of grey granite, and we found it everywhere possible to cross, although tiring to pick our way among the accumulated rubbish. Besides, the rocks tended to move as soon as any weight was placed on them. The glacier was no more than one-and-a-half miles wide, but it took us a good three hours to cross it. On the far side we found a little-used track running

back to the Chapursan. We followed it, and thus reached a camping-place at Ziarat.

Ziarat (the word denotes a shrine) was formerly known as Baba Ghundi, and it is one of the holiest spots in the whole of Hunza. It is believed that the saint is buried here. Ghundi is the name of a village in Bokhara, whence he is believed originally to have come. It too claims to be his last resting-place, and this has led to friction between the two villages, greatly distant though they are from one another. The Hunzakuts themselves have no doubt that theirs is the authentic shrine, and their belief is based on a legend which the Mir told me when we returned to Baltit.

Baba Ghundi, he said, died and was buried at Ziarat, and the shrine which we had seen was erected by a former Mir. The people of Ghundi wished to remove his remains and bury them at his birthplace, but the ruler of Hunza would not agree. In due course a party set out from Ghundi intending to steal at least some part of the saint's remains. They removed the head from the grave, but soon after they had started on their homeward journey the whole party was stricken with a strange lameness. This enabled the people of Ziarat to catch up with them, and as soon as the head had been reburied in its rightful place the lameness disappeared as suddenly as it had come. The tomb is now credited with miraculous powers, and we noticed that it was covered with votive offerings, to which our porters added.

A few miles above Ziarat the big Besk-i-yenj glacier completely fills the valley, a tumbled mass of snow and ice. In 1927 it was about nine miles long and appeared to be advancing fairly rapidly. It was joined by a number of small tributaries. From one of these, which led into Afghan territory, the Buattar river had forced itself between the hillside and the northern edge of the glacier, thus providing the rare spectacle of a river and a glacier running side by side. Towards the snout of the glacier the ice had become too thick for the river to dislodge, and here it disappeared.

The Besk-i-yenj is the true source of the Chapursan river.

Before it enters the main valley it makes a sharp turn to the east, forming a barrier right across the valley. We saw in this place a number of unattended ponies and cows for which their owners apparently felt no anxiety. Escape was impossible, and they could be left to graze in perfect safety.

While I was examining these various glaciers Torabaz worked away at the map. We had now got the main structure of the country down on paper, but we still needed to fill in a certain amount of detail. Our rations were beginning to run short, so we decided that I should return and send back enough food to enable Torabaz to finish the job.

I got back to Baltit within a week. Montagnier had had a rather uncomfortable time on account of the heat, which despite the altitude of Baltit is intense in August. He and the Mir, since they were unable to communicate with each other, had begun to get upon each other's nerves, and it took me a few days to restore our former friendly relationship. Montagnier had become obsessed with the discomforts and now grumbled openly at what he considered my lack of consideration for his needs. His one thought was to get back to the comparative luxury of his Swiss home with the least possible delay, so as soon as we decently could we paid our farewell respects to the Mir, without whose good offices it would have been impossible to carry out these journeys.

When we got back to Gilgit, work in the fields was in full swing, and it was impossible at once to find porters for our return journey to Kashmir. So as not to take too many men away from their work at one time we were asked to travel in two parties. It was a perfectly reasonable request, but it led to a complete break in my friendship with Montagnier.

I explained to him that my period of army leave was nearly over and that in order not to overstay it I should have to return by double stages. This meant that in the circumstances I must leave before he did. He flatly refused to agree to this arrangement. I explained that I was subject to army orders and had to be back by a specified date, whereas he was a completely free agent and could suit himself when he returned. He

was unwilling to concede the point and now accused me of deserting him in the wilderness.

The road between Gilgit and Srinagar, along every stage of which there was a government bungalow with a resident servant, was to all intents and purposes a well-trodden highway, and presented no difficulty even to an inexperienced traveller. Moreover the officers of the Gilgit garrison had offered to look after Montagnier when I had left and to provide him with the necessary transport and everything else he needed for the journey. Nevertheless he continued to be unreasonable. We parted on a note of hostility, and I never saw him again. I hoped that after a few months in the comfort of his home his rancour might evaporate, but he never answered my several letters and a few years later he died.

We had been in the field for a little more than four months, and during this time Torabaz and I had mapped an area of some nine hundred square miles, most of it in previously unexplored territory.

My journey back was tiring but uneventful, and contained only one incident that is worth recalling. When we had gone up to Hunza in the spring the Political Agent at Gilgit was away. He had now returned, and was in camp in one of the side-valleys running down from Nanga Parbat. When I got to Astor, where I intended to spend the night, I found a letter from him awaiting me. It said that he was particularly anxious to have a first-hand report of our wanderings and asked me to dine that night. The Political Agent had thoughtfully sent a riding-mule with his letter, since his camp was some seven miles off my road. There was an ominous postscript to the note; "Black tie," it said.

I had already done about twenty-five miles and was tired and dirty. All I now wanted was a bath and bed, but I could not tactfully refuse this most unwelcome invitation. I changed hurriedly and set off up the valley, glad that there was nobody to witness the absurd spectacle of myself dressed in evening clothes and mounted on a mule.

The Political Agent had heard the clatter of my arrival and

came out of his tent to greet me. After the usual glass of sherry we sat down to dinner (five courses, all out of tins), which was served with great formality by two servants, both of whom wore white cotton gloves. I was so sleepy that I could hardly collect my thoughts, but it did not matter. It was soon obvious that my host was uninterested in our travels. He was a fanatical lover of the wilder parts of the North-West Frontier. Also he was lonely, and all he wanted was an audience to whom he could expound his views.

During the course of a long life spent in wandering about in what used to be known as the British Empire this was the only occasion on which I actually witnessed one of my countrymen behaving exactly like a character in one of Somerset Maugham's stories. But the evening had its reward. The camp was pitched at the very edge of a glacier, and while we were dining the full moon had risen in a cloudless sky. When we came out of the tent it was absolutely still, and in front of us rose the great east face of Nanga Parbat, all blue and silver in the frosty night air. It was the Political Agent who broke the spell. "It's uninhabited territory, you know," he said as he held out his hand in parting.

A week or so later I was back at Lansdowne.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THREE years passed in routine garrison duty. I was promoted to the rank of Major, and although I had long since been accepted as a member of the family that constituted the regiment, inwardly I still felt something of an impostor; I was an actor playing the part of an army officer rather than a serious professional soldier.

A man of higher moral principles would by this time, as I have already suggested, come to terms with the situation and resigned, but I have always lacked both ambition and initiative; a negative attitude that I probably inherited from my father. He was the more complete Micawber, but I too have waited for things to turn up; and generally they have.

Looking back on my life, I now see that it falls into a number of distinct phases, not one of which is connected with the others. I have tried my hand at many different things, but never at any time have I even rough-hewed my own life; the changes in it have never come about as a result of my own seeking, but because of circumstances. I became a soldier by chance; it was purely accidental that I later became a university lecturer in Japan, and certainly I never thought to end my career as Controller of the B.B.C. Third Programme. I realise that I have been lucky, for some force outside myself, some destiny, call it what you will, has unquestionably shaped my ends, and these unsought changes have always been for the better.

One was now to occur. For no apparent reason I began to feel consistently listless; even the nightly walk to the Mess became an effort. I went to the doctor, but he could find nothing wrong and suggested that I should perhaps take more exercise. A few months later I began to develop a slight but

persistent cough; it got no worse, neither did it disappear. In Lansdowne there were no facilities for more than the simplest medical treatment, and anyone who became really ill had either to be looked after by friends in his own bungalow or sent away to the army hospital at Meerut. Neither appeared to be necessary in my case, although after a time I became convinced that there was something radically wrong with me, despite the medical officer's repeated assurances to the contrary. Eventually he decided to take a specimen from my throat and send it to Meerut for analysis. The result was received a few days later. I was suffering from tuberculosis and according to the report the disease had probably reached an advanced stage.

In those days tuberculosis was difficult to arrest. It was not necessarily fatal, but usually it meant that the patient was never again able to lead a fully active life. Strangely, I was unaffected by this news; it never even occurred to me that I might not recover.

Our regimental doctor told me that I should immediately be granted an indefinite period of sick-leave and that he had already telegraphed for an emergency passage on the next available ship to England. Meanwhile I was suspended from all duties and ordered to remain in my own bungalow. The Colonel had been informed, but nobody else was to know the reason for my incarceration. For some extraordinary reason the contraction of this disease used to be regarded as some sort of social stigma, especially in a community such as ours, in which tuberculosis was thought to be confined to the underprivileged classes.

After a fortnight of restless inactivity I was ordered to embark at Bombay. I crept away from Lansdowne like a criminal, but at least I was spared the futility of leaving cards before I left.

Mother met me at Victoria Station. She was naturally glad to see me, but her welcome soon turned to admonition. "It's your own fault," she said; "going to live among all those dirty people."

A few days later I was ordered to appear before a Medical Board at the India Office. It was the first time I had been there since my original interview during the war. This time I was treated like an honoured guest. The president of the Board was Sir Leonard Rogers, one of the most distinguished of a famous generation of physicians and surgeons, whose working life had been spent in the Indian Medical Service. He was, I believe, the first to discover a cure for leprosy and, like all great doctors, he was extremely modest. "There is no point in my examining you," he said. "I know nothing about tuberculosis and my opinion would be worthless." He went on to explain that I could, if I wished, be admitted to the army hospital at Millbank, and then added, with the suspicion of a twinkle in his eye, that he could not honestly recommend it. He suggested that I should go at once to Switzerland, and that if I agreed he would make inquiries and tell me where to go.

Everything was soon arranged, and a couple of weeks later I arrived at Montana, above the Rhône valley. After the numerous tests and X-ray photographs had been completed Dr Ducrey came to my room one morning to tell me the result. I had a cavity in one lung the size of a pigeon's egg. It was extraordinary, he said, that I had not already had a hæmorrhage. I asked him if he could cure me. "There is always hope," he said, "but we must wait. After a year perhaps I shall be able to tell you."

# INDEX