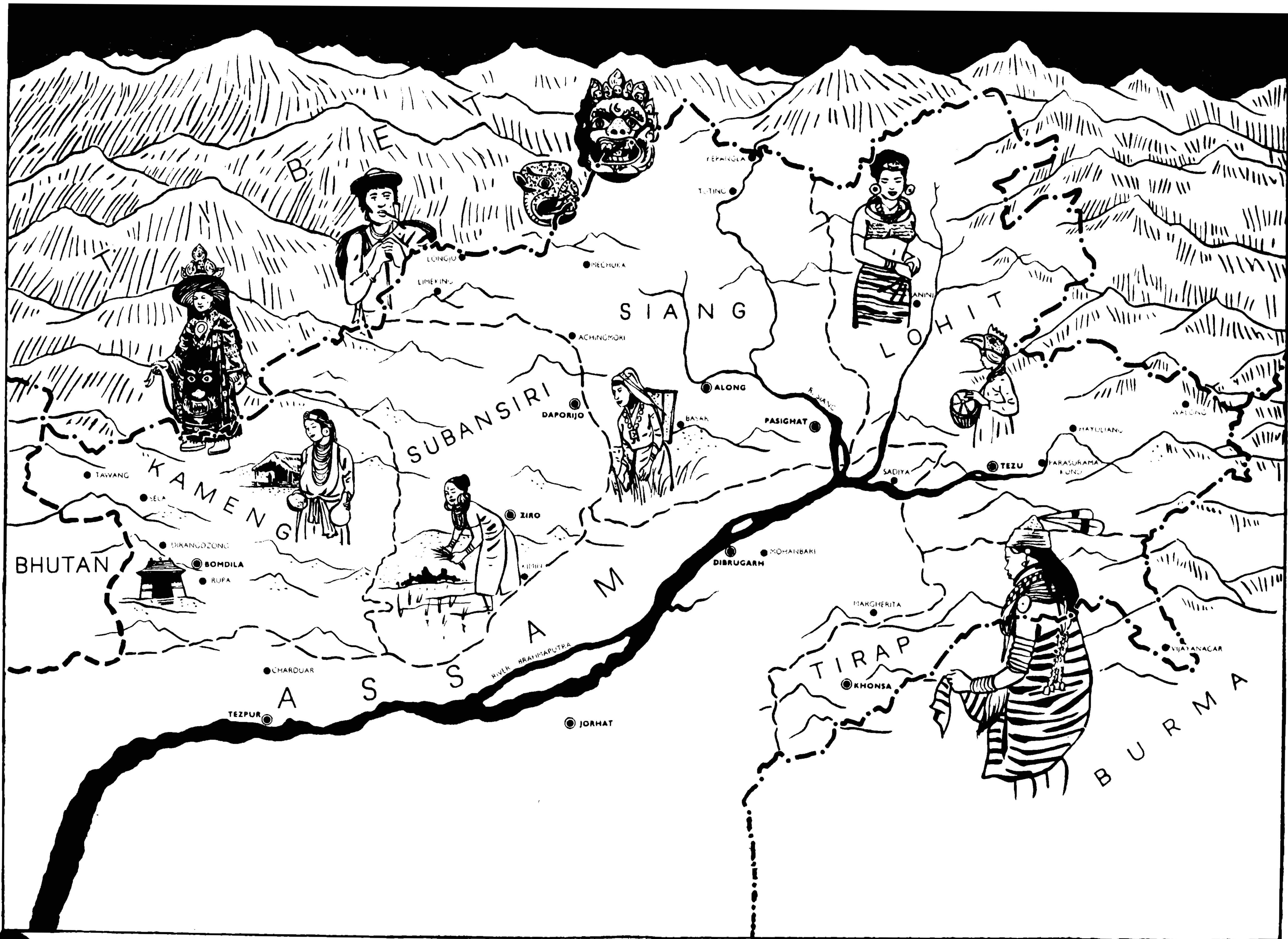


INDIA'S NORTH-EASTERN BORDERLANDS

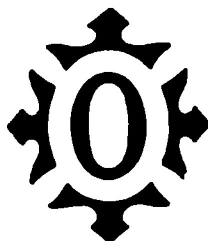
NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

Tseten Tashi

ENCHANTED FRONTIERS

SIKKIM, BHUTAN AND INDIA'S NORTH-EASTERN BORDERLANDS

NARI RUSTOMJI



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TO MY MOTHER

On the heights is peace—peace to serve.

Beethoven

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Prologue

MANY years ago, during Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's historic trek to Bhutan, somebody referred to the fascinating, sometimes even scholarly, narratives by frontier officers of former days, and deplored the lack of initiative of their successors in office of more recent times. I felt, suddenly, the eyes of the entire company, and more particularly Nehru's, focus sharply on myself. For six years my field of work, as the Assam Governor's Adviser for Tribal Areas, had been the Naga hills and the colourful people of India's north-east frontier. And, as if that were not enough, it was now in Sikkim and Bhutan. Nothing more was said, but the Prime Minister's reproving look clearly signalled that, if, with such a wealth of opportunity, I had not been inspired to creative effort, something must be seriously wrong! And that was how I was first provoked to write this book.

I have been slow in making a start, as I do not write easily and have no shining message for the world. But it has been my happy lot to have found myself, through most of my service, in exciting places and exciting situations, meeting exciting people. People have always interested me, even more than places. I like people, all sorts of people. In my friendships I am quite incorrigible, which can be embarrassing for the aspiring Civil Servant! I have enjoyed the trappings of high office, but, thankfully, am no longer attached to them. If I am saluted in the streets, well and good. If not, still well and good. But I cannot shake off old allegiances and my friends are, as a consequence, a widely-assorted, motley crew.

Everybody today has heard of Assam, with her capital at Shillong. Yet it was not so long ago that a young police officer, on reaching Bombay from England and receiving

his posting orders to Shillong, was merrily shunted off to Ceylon! Everybody today knows of Sikkim and her capital at Gangtok, but it was only a few years back that the postal authorities were in a state of perpetual confusion over letters intended for Gangtok being addressed to Bangkok. Thimphu is, of course, Bhutan's capital, but, for the man in the street, it is still Punakha, as shown in the maps — if, indeed, he knows anything of Bhutan at all. And so it goes on. My work has taken me to little-known places and little-known people. And I have been happiest in little places, away from the crowded, clanging city. But much of the magic and mystery of the places I have known is fast vanishing. If an echo of it can be recaptured in these pages, I shall feel more than repaid.

Of exciting situations I have had my ample share — the civil disobedience movement of the Mizos in 1948; the Chinese entry into Tibet in 1950, with its repercussions on India's north-east frontier; the massacre of an Assam Rifles column by NEFA tribesmen in 1953; the Naga rebellion; the visit of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas to Sikkim in 1956; the Chinese incursion into Longju in NEFA in 1959, followed by their full-scale attack in 1962; and the tragic assassination, in 1964, of Bhutan's Prime Minister and my very dear friend, Jigmie Dorji. My difficulty in writing is that my relations with the actors in the drama have, more often than not, been on a personal as much as on an official basis. We have shared confidences which we hold as sacrosanct. My embarrassment is that I know too much! And I value my friendships too dearly to be prepared to abuse them.

This is to be no compendium of facts and figures, and the reader who is looking for population statistics and geographical information must seek elsewhere. It is not possible, within the compass of a single volume, to give even a summary description of the numerous and fascinating varieties of people inhabiting the Himalayan and

Indo-Burmese borderlands. My interest, in writing this book, has been not so much in the collection and presentation of factual data as in the study of situations, in evolving, from my years of experience among the tribal people, not only a personal philosophy of life, but a practical philosophy of work. If I have contributed at all to the shaping of the future of the tribal people of the frontier, I have myself been shaped and re-shaped in the process. My influences in early life had been Plato and Beethoven. My ideal, in those fresh and exciting days, was of the Philosopher-King, manifesting, in the exercise of his sovereignty, the identity, the indivisibility, of 'the good' and 'the beautiful'. The Adagio of Beethoven's Choral was my strength and consolation when, alone in a distant corner of Assam, I received news of my father's death. And as, with life's joys and sorrows, my experience widened, I won entry into the hallowed world of the last quartets.

It was through Beethoven, I think, that I was prepared, made ripe, for receiving the Compassionate Buddha's message. And my years in the Buddhist milieu of Sikkim and Bhutan affected and influenced me as profoundly in my later years as had the study of Plato in my youth. It was a traumatic experience during the Chinese invasion in 1962 that created a dividing-line in my life, and it is at this point of time, therefore, that I have thought fit to bring my present story to a close. For there has been a change, since then, in the quality of my life, in the direction of my purposes, with which I have yet to come to terms, and, until this is accomplished, I feel I have little more that is worthwhile to offer.

The problem that faces every administrator in tribal areas is that of 'acculturation'. Much of the confusion and frustration that troubles tribal people today stems from the difficulties of adjustment that follow their contacts with a more materially advanced culture. I have found in myself much of this same confusion and frustration, but by a

reverse process. Mine has had to be a process of adjustment to people of, materially, more backward patterns of culture. Here too, the problem of acculturation arises and the solution is not always easy. We are rightly concerned that the tribal, in adopting an alien dress, language and code of behaviour, does not lose his identity, his ' soul '. We do not often realize that the administrator who identifies himself in thought, spirit and action with the tribal people can be faced equally with this same problem of 'losing himself', with all its consequential conflicts and frustrations. If my story has to have meaning, therefore, and come to life, something must be told of the origins and shapings of its most constantly recurring player.

I

Lahore, Bedford, Cambridge

My memories of Lahore, where I was born around the end of the First World War, are few but vivid. I have no clear recollection of my maternal grandparents, but I *do* remember that there was always lemonade for the children when we visited my mother's home. My mother's maiden name was Cooper, and her father's business, as implied by the name, was wines, spirits and aerated waters. He was evidently prosperous, as he could afford to send five of his sons to England for their education and furnished a substantial dowry to each of his many daughters. On the death of his first wife, my grandfather married again, and my mother was an offspring of this second union. Those were spacious times, with no nonsense about loops and family planning. To this day, my dear mother has to do a little calculation before she can remember the names and tot up the number of her many brothers and sisters. Life in her home was a ceaseless round of parties and picnics — scrumptious eats and gallons of fizz. But for all his happy-go-lucky ways, my grandfather was also, it seems, a God-fearing man and left a considerable endowment at his death for establishing an *agiari*[1] for followers of the Zoroastrian faith.

I have very clear memories indeed of my paternal grandfather, who was a self-made man of enormous energy and initiative. He started business as a lone dealer in bicycles and sewing machines and ended up by amassing a considerable fortune through his daring enterprise in a variety of industrial ventures. He too, like my maternal grandfather,

[1] Place of worship for Parsees.

sent his sons to England for their education. His eldest son, my father, was one of the most brilliant law students of his year in London and a special prizeman of the Middle Temple. By temperament, however, he was shy and retiring, and not cut out for the hurly-burly of day-to-day practice in the Courts. His bent was study and research, and he surprised the legal profession by the publication, at a very early age, of his scholarly treatise on the Law of Limitation. This came to be recognised almost at once as the definitive work on the subject and has remained as such ever since, the seventh edition having been brought out over twenty years after his death.

My father was a strong-willed person, of great independence of mind. His life was devoted to the writing of legal treatises, which left him master of himself and of his time. When he was in the mood for work, the rest of the world just did not exist. We would often see a thin streak of light still showing through under his office door in the early hours of the morning, hear the tap-tap of his typewriter, and know that he had worked solidly through the night without thought of sleep or food. His physical discipline was abnormally rigorous. When well past middle age, he thought nothing of bicycling the fifty miles from London to Bedford, where our family had moved as evacuees during the early years of the war. If his mind was disturbed, he would suddenly leave the house, often without informing any of us, walk out into the country and not return until the following day. He was friendly and kindly by nature, but his shyness and absorption in his work precluded friendships, and apart from his family he was a lonely man, who found companionship in books more than in people.

If my father was something of an introvert, my mother is as opposite as opposite can be. She reminds one of the ancient Athenians in her irrepressible and uninhibited enjoyment of everything around her. She, more than my father, has been the architect of her children's lives. She was

determined that we should excel in all things, and, through her sheer determination, excel we did! She is the sun of our lives, and we revolve round her still, as in childhood, for warmth, comfort, strength — and fun.

A few years after their marriage, my parents set off for a prolonged holiday in Europe. My father had always admired the British, and it was during this trip abroad, I believe, that my parents first thought about taking their children to England one day for their education. I do not think they realized then, or wanted to realize, the full implications of this decision. My mother tells me that she envisaged a stay of six or seven years abroad, after which she could return home with her perfectly educated little chicks! We must have disappointed her as very slow children, as it took the English over fifteen years before I could be dispatched back to India, the finished article.

And so, according to plan, we left India in 1927, my parents, elder brother and elder sister, by P. & O. for England. My most vivid memories of Lahore are of Jehangir Manor — my grandfather's large yellow house in Lawrence Road, where I was born and where we lived; the zoo; picnics in the Shalimar Gardens; the great cannon immortalized by Kipling; ice-cream treats at Stiffle's Hotel; and the Cathedral School, where I learnt, fascinated, about the metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly. The zoo, in particular, always provided excitement, as it was quite near Jehangir Manor and the animals had a habit of escaping and seeking refuge in our family home. There was much consternation, for instance, when a bear unceremoniously broke into the bathroom where my sister was peacefully seated performing certain natural functions. We also gave asylum to a wolf. And one of my two 'foreign-returned' uncles had the signal distinction of having his hand mauled while feeding the lions.

We seemed surrounded those days by our several 'foreign-returned' uncles. It was obvious that they had

been over-lavishly financed and had acquired extravagant habits during their stay abroad. They took a very avuncular interest however in their nephews and nieces, to the extent of getting us all nearly drowned in the enthusiasm of a picnic excursion on the river Ravi!

But of all my childhood memories, I remember most the smell of rain on a dusty road. And even today, forty years on, rain on a dusty road will transport me as by a magic wand to my childhood and Lahore.

My father's two younger brothers, Homi and Saros, had been sent as boarders to Bedford School, after which they graduated at Oxford, ate dinners and returned to India as barristers-at-law. My brother Minoo and I were admitted as day-boys to the Prep. section of Bedford School and my sister Thrity to the Bedford High School for Girls. We spent our first few weeks in Bedford at the Cavendish Hotel, which became the base for our daily house-hunting expeditions. We eventually settled down in a double-storied house in Warwick Avenue, where we remained for the next ten years. A car, bicycles, radio, our little mongrel spaniel Bonzo, and our home was complete.

My mother is a great planner. She had already decided in Lahore that her elder boy, who wore spectacles and looked clever, should join the I.C.S.[1], and that the younger (myself), who looked pretty in his golden curls (I am reliably informed that I had golden locks when I was little), but had otherwise shown no evidence of brain-power, should grind his way to be a Chartered Accountant. My brother was undoubtedly clever and quickly started winning prizes. But he was always out for adventure and tended to be wayward in his studies. I, on the other hand, was the perfect little gentleman (I can hardly bear to think of my prim little self!), always ahead of time for everything, earnestly profiting from each golden hour. My only misdemeanours were

[1] Indian Civil Service, a *corps d'élite*, whose members are popularly referred to as 'the Heaven-born'!

when I was from time to time led astray by my wicked brother, who was then administered a double ration of punishment, my share in the crime as well as his, on the logical assumption that I had been, after all, merely a sleeping partner. By the time I left the Prep. school and joined the 'Big School' my diligence and virtue were already paying off and it was I who was winning the prizes.

I have written of my mother's zest for life. I still remember her playing the piano in our family home in Lahore; no soft and sentimental nonsense for mama, with the single exception of the 'Mother's Prayer', which she played with touching expression. But for preference she would choose a stomping bravura piece, all lightning and thunder, with complicated octave-runs and crashing chords like the opening of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto, while we petrified little children shivered with fear lest the piano, house and all should suddenly disintegrate. My mother also sang, played the violin, harmonium and sitar, and took lessons in the mandolin during our stay in England. Of her two mandolins, one was a beautiful instrument she had acquired during a visit to Italy, exquisitely inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Though her formal education stopped at school, my mother has always been insatiably curious, with the result that she has a wide range of knowledge on a variety of subjects extending from the kitchen garden to the Stock Exchange.

While my brother inherited my father's brains, my mother's artistic temperament is shared to some degree between my sister and myself. I remember playing little tunes by ear on my mother's harmonium in Lahore, and, when I was a very good boy, she allowed me to try my hand at her violin. Soon after joining school at Bedford, I was given regular violin lessons by Alfred de Reyghere and made rapid progress. Alfred was a top-flight musician and often used to play with the Isolde Menges Quartet, one of the finest chamber-music ensembles of the time. He was a

strict task-master, and woe to me if I didn't practise. At the annual Eisteddfod held at Bedford, I was regularly entered by my proud teacher as his star pupil and almost invariably carried off the first prize. My sister played the piano and there was always music in the house.

Amongst the most treasured experiences of my life was a concert performance, during my final year at Bedford, of Mozart's D major Violin Concerto (K 218). I have played the work often since, but never again with the verve and rapture of that far away schoolday outburst. And although my musical horizons have extended widely with the passage of time, I achieved that evening my musical summit as a performer — and the concert review that I have preserved these thirty years since, perhaps through some premonition that I would not again scale such heights, reads today as the epitaph of a part of myself that has vanished, so that I feel no sense of conceit in its resurrection, although I recollect as though it were yesterday the boyish pride with which I read it first:

'The most remarkable performance of the evening was appropriately enough given by Rustomji. Perhaps there were not enough people in the audience familiar with the conventions of the eighteenth century Concerto to realise quite how remarkable this performance was. The essence of these Concertos was an attempt to compromise between two things: charming music and brilliant musical effects — in other words to "de-vulgarise" musical fireworks. Rustomji took the more lyrical part of the movement in his stride, and when the cadenza came, just settled down and gave us a remarkably finished performance of one of the most difficult cadenzas ever written for this Concerto — not by Mozart, by the way. Our enjoyment of this effort was much increased by the evident relish with which it was given.'

A few years after my entering Bedford School, Humphrey Grose-Hodge joined as the new headmaster. Grose-Hodge

was undoubtedly one of the important influences in my life. Himself a Classical Scholar of Pembroke, he had joined the I.C.S., but retired prematurely on account of his wife's ill-health. Earlier in the century, Bedford was known mainly as a rugger school, with little claim to scholarship. Grose-Hodge soon changed all that, setting to work with true reforming zeal. The supposedly bright boys were hand-picked, and, from the age of twelve, put on to Latin and Greek, to the exclusion of everything else, in preparation for winning Classical Scholarships to Oxford and Cambridge. I must, by now, have been showing signs of illumination, for I was picked as one of the chosen few and rose in due course to the Classical Sixth from where, under the firm but affectionate discipline of Charles Seaman, I took a Classical Scholarship to Cambridge. One of the results, however, of Grose-Hodge's methods was that the so-called bright ones were taught nothing of physics, chemistry or the most elementary facts of science. A car carburettor still remains for me, alas, one of the great mysteries of the universe.

But Grose-Hodge did not stop at Latin and Greek. His was the Platonic ideal in its entirety, including especially music and gymnastics. As it happened, gymnastics came to me as easily as breathing and I felt completely at home swinging grand-circles on the horizontal bar. I have had to perspire to be a Classical Scholar and to play the fiddle, but gymnastics, for me, was no effort at all and, from the age of thirteen until I left Cambridge, I remained undefeated in the annual School and University Gymnastics contests.

Left to myself, I think I would have chosen to teach as my life's vocation. I was deeply attracted and influenced by Plato and pictured myself as a little Socrates (but handsomer), encircled by a band of doting Alcibiadeses. But Grose-Hodge, no doubt aided and abetted by my fond parents, decided otherwise. I was obviously cut out for the I.C.S. The very idea of wasting a good classical education

on school-mastering after all the pains he had taken to prepare me for proconsular responsibilities in the Indian Empire! Stuff and nonsense! If I was interested in education, it must be in the direction of framing 'higher policy' for the millions on the Indian subcontinent, and this could only be by entering the I.C.S., not by school-mastering.

My father was a fair-minded man, and, though he was fond of me, felt that, as he could not afford to send all three of his children to Oxford or Cambridge, we should all graduate at London. Grose-Hodge, however, and my mother were set on my going to one of the older Universities. Grose-Hodge felt sure I should be able to win scholarships, and my mother, who had some money of her own, planned to make up the balance. As I had quite a pleasing singing voice, I thought I might also compete for the Choral Exhibition offered by Christ's College. In the event, I went up to Cambridge on a Classical Scholarship and Choral Exhibition, lived frugally and was not too much of a burden on my family.

I lived quietly in Cambridge, confining myself mostly to College rather than University activities. I was elected Secretary of the College Musical Society and President of the Milton Society for debating. Frankly, I disliked debating. I am highly-strung and get in a state of nerves over public performances of any kind, including concertizing. But my dear mother insisted I must do everything, and, much against my will, I joined the Milton Society, was voted the best speaker and elected as its President. I played the violin frequently as soloist both at University concerts and the more informal Smoking concerts held in the College Hall. We had a brilliant pianist at Christ's, Derek Kidner, who was soloist in the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto performed by the CUMS[1] orchestra under Boris Ord. Kidner and I also played the Franck sonata for violin and piano at a CUMS concert to a not unappreciative audience.

[1] Cambridge University Musical Society.

My rooms at Christ's were in the first Court, directly over C. P. Snow's. Snow must be a man of boundless patience and charity. I used, in those days, to practise the violin at the most unorthodox hours — usually well past midnight. Never once did Snow manifest the slightest symptom of irritation. A saint indeed!

S. W. Grose was Senior Tutor at Christ's and in overall charge both of my studies and my personal affairs. Though a Classics man, his main interest was in coins, and my Classics tutor was A. L. Peck. Peck was rather a severe looking bird, but would usually open up after a sherry or two. He was the solid sort, who kept his oak sported while translating the more abstruse works of Aristotle for the Loeb Library. The Classical lights of Christ's in my time were both octogenarians — dear old Rackham and Rouse. Rackham was one of the friendliest souls on earth, with an unrivalled facility for translating English poetry into Latin and Greek. He was not really of this world, and we loved him for it. We also used to invite the great Rouse to read papers to our Classical Association. Rouse lived in the country and it was always rather a business organizing a taxi to take him back and forth. His talks were, of course, Homer, and nothing but Homer, when, for a brief hour, he would translate us to the battle-fields of Troy, to fight the good fight. My last recollection is of seeing him to his taxi outside the College gate after a latish meeting of the Classical Association — a little old man, shielding his brief-case from the cold drizzle as he waited patiently in the starless night, solitary and celibate.

The star in the Classical firmament was, of course, Sheppard, Provost of Kings. With his pulsating energy and great mane of white hair, he captivated every heart. I rather think he enjoyed looking older and more venerable than he actually was — the girls adored him and he was all the more at liberty to cuddle them fondly! Sophocles' *Antigone* was being produced under his direction during

my freshman's year, and the rehearsals were, of course, no more than Sheppard playing every part himself. The music for the play was composed by Patrick Hadley of Caius, and I was cast as a leading elder of the chorus. My great moment was my solo aria, 'Eros anikate makhan'[1] —into which I burst forth to this day in moments of high ecstasy.

I put in very hard work during my first two years, and took a comfortable first both in the Preliminary and Part One examination of the Classical Tripos. My scholarship award was enhanced, my choral exhibition renewed, and the College nominated me for numerous prizes. I was on top of the world and it felt good. My last year in Cambridge was rather bleak. Most of my friends had been called up for war service and it seemed all wrong to be toying with ancient Greece and Rome when the whole of civilization was on the verge of collapse. With black-outs and air-raid sirens, the charm of Cambridge soon vanished away, and, with it, the zest for study. I was not surprised that I missed a double first and was awarded only an upper second in Part Two of the Classical Tripos. But it was typical of the old world courtesy of Cambridge that the Examiner in Classics, Professor Anderson of John's, should send me a personal note of explanation, almost an apology, for the examiners' inability to award me a higher ranking! I cannot say I was not disappointed. Up to now, everything had been roses, roses all the way. This was my first knock in life and doubtless did me good.

As planned, I was duly appointed to the I.C.S. Most memorable was the final interview, when I was summoned to face a formidable array of hoary ex-India hands, K.C.S.I.s and the like, seated in a row along one side of a long, highly-polished table in a stately, ornate hall of the India House of pre-Independence days. I had put on my best Sunday suit and sat shivering with fear in the vestibule until I was called up at last for the grim ordeal. I was

[1] Love, unconquered in the fight.

serving those days as a volunteer in the Home Guards and the Royal Observer Corps, and had very smartly affixed the little badge of office of the latter organization in my buttonhole. Sir John Woodhead was, if I remember right, the Chairman, and, after asking me what the badge was about, inquired how many enemy planes I had spotted during the previous week. 'I'm sorry, Sir, that's a top secret,' I solemnly and promptly replied. There was an amused murmur of approval among the grey beards, and I knew I had made it. There were no more questions and I received my letter of appointment, subject to physical fitness.

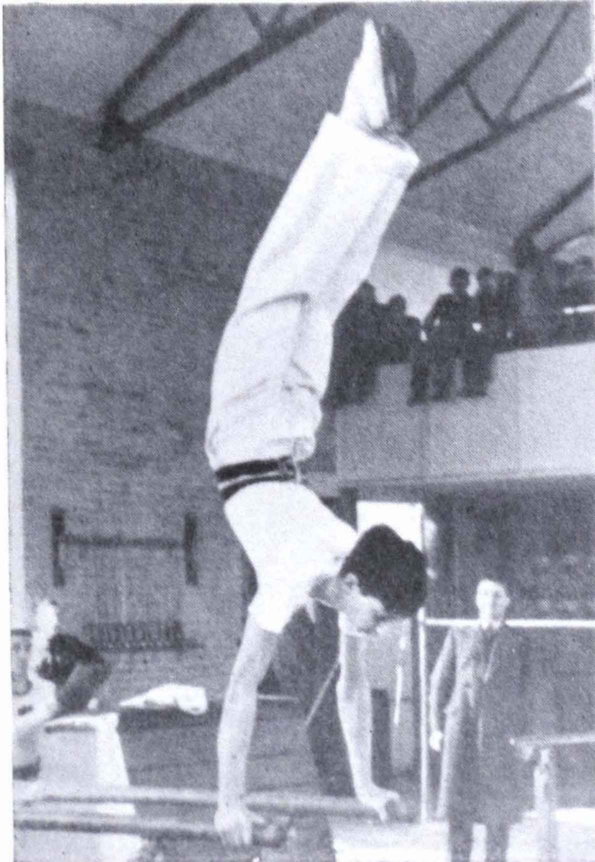
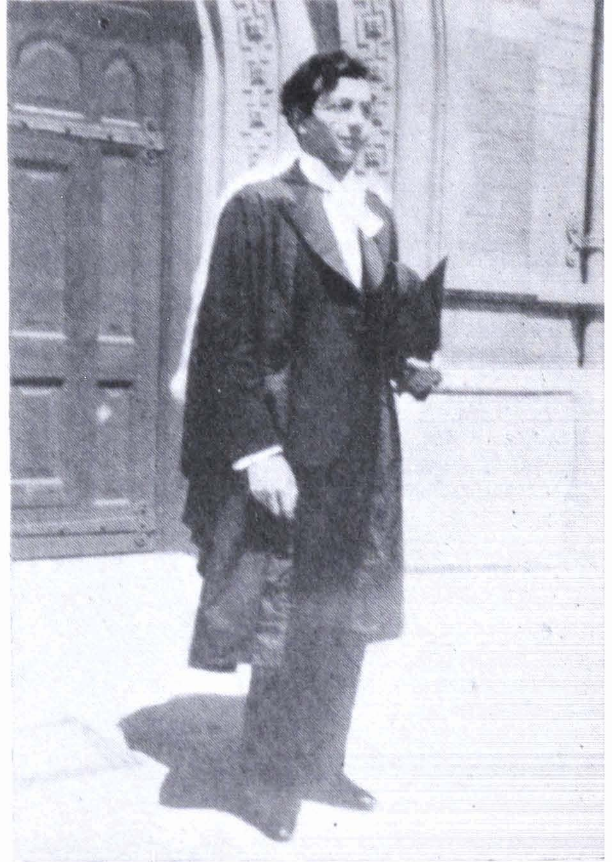
At this crucial stage, I contracted mumps and found in my enforced seclusion the opportunity I had always been looking for of growing a beard. God has been good to me in manifold ways, but has not endowed me with unusual beauty of countenance. It seemed to me that my beard brought symmetry to my features, it made the rough edges smooth. In fine, I began rather to fancy myself in my beard and when my illness was over, decided, against violent opposition from all quarters, to retain it. My mother who, in Dr Johnson's words, has a bottom of good sense, warned that the examiners would have second thoughts if I presented myself before the medical board like Bernard Shaw. But I was young and headstrong and, as my mother had prophesied, was summarily rejected! I was instructed to appear before the Board again after six weeks. Chastened and beardless, I appeared and was finally passed. Understandably, I have never since ventured on a beard, though I have stooped on occasions to a moustache.

The India Office lost no time in flooding me with circulars on how to survive in the tropics. This was my first initiation into the world of cobras and cummerbunds. What with war-time rationing, shopping was no picnic, but I managed to get myself fitted out with breeches, riding-boots and a handsome Harris tweed overcoat, which I wear to this day in the high mountains. The India Office also advised that,

as my departure had been delayed by my illness and I would be several months late in attending the training course for I.C.S. probationers at Dehra Dun, I should procure for myself the prescribed books on Indian law and history and put in some private study during the nine-weeks' sea journey round the Cape.

I can see my mother and father as I tearfully waved good-bye to them on a cold winter's morning from a train puffing its way out of Bedford railway station. I never saw my father again, but I feel comforted that, as he said good-bye, he seemed proud of me.

Sir Tashi Namgyal, Chogyal of Sikkim

Our family, Lahore

My mother

Inter-school Gymnastics, Bedford

Graduation, Cambridge

2

First contacts with Sikkim and Bhutan

My brother saw me off to Glasgow, from where, on the miserably foggy, drizzly morning of New Year's day, 1942, I embarked on an ancient cargo steamer of the Anchor Line. Within minutes, I unpacked my Hugo's *Learn to speak Hindustani*, and, fortified by beef tea, set to work with a vengeance. There were some Indian students on board who were returning home after completing various technical courses in England under the Bevan Scheme. I soon started prattling with them in broken Hindustani and could manage to understand and make myself understood in Hindustani quite competently by the time we reached Bombay.

Looking back, I am myself amazed at the extent to which I had become 'de-tribalized' during my sixteen years' stay abroad. In the course of my twelve years at Bedford, I had had no opportunity of meeting Indians, except for our Parsee relations who visited us from time to time. There were, of course, a considerable number of Indian students at Cambridge, but apart from the two in my own College, I saw practically nothing of them. Not that I deliberately avoided them — our paths just did not cross. There is a Zoroastrian House in London, where Parsees used to congregate on Sundays and the more important Parsee festivals. We were not very regular attendants, as a sixty-mile drive from Bedford was required, but we generally tried to make it on Pateti, our Parsee New Year. My brother and sister, who graduated from London, were very much more in touch with students from India, and our house in Ealing was quite a gathering place for homesick young

Indians, tired of boarding-house routine and pining for the warmth of family life. I, on the other hand, was abysmally ignorant of things Indian. *Swaraj* and issues so vital to India's future remained as remote and obscure to me as relativity.

My main preoccupation on board ship was learning Hindustani and studying Ratanlal's commentaries on the fundamental substructure of India's legal system, the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Evidence Act. In my spare time, I collaborated with a charming young lady bound for Baghdad in getting up a performance of some of the more well-known choruses of the Messiah. I had a miniature score of my own, and from this we copied out the various vocal parts. It was a laborious affair, but since it was a labour of love we enjoyed every bit of it. There was also a competent pianist on board (male and very elderly!), who was always ready to accompany me through the violinist's repertoire of concertos, sonatas and concert pieces. And so our nine weeks passed quickly and happily, in spite of the war news that became more and more dismal each day. We heard, as we were approaching the Cape, of the fall of Singapore and the movement of Japanese submarines in the Indian Ocean. We were soon provided with a convoy, were put through practice exercises in the event of our ship being torpedoed, and, of course, completely blacked-out after sunset, when we took it in turns to sit or patrol as night-watchers.

On reaching Bombay, I became at once an object of curiosity to the shoals of relations who had not seen me since I was a little boy of seven. I was swept hither and thither, from uncle to aunt and cousin to step-cousin, completely bewildered and confused. It was on landing in Bombay that I first received my posting orders to Assam. I knew nothing of India, and took it in my stride. Not so the fond parents whom I had left behind in England. My father proceeded to the Bedford County Library to look

up Assam in a rather out-dated encyclopaedia. Assam, he learnt, was the place you went to if you had a partiality for earthquakes, floods, malaria, cholera, dysentery, rogue elephants and man-eating tigers. It was a wonder that anyone survived in the place. My dear mother was petrified. I soon received a letter from her that I should not hesitate to resign from the I.C.S. if Assam was really such. There were plenty of avocations apart from the I.C.S., and she insisted that I must, at all costs, survive!

Speaking of avocations, I should mention that the Chaplain at Christ's had frequently called in at my rooms to speak to me of the merits of the Christian faith. He was of the view that I was ripe for formal conversion and should set out to India as a missionary, as a Servant of Christ. As a Choral Scholar, I attended chapel every alternate evening and twice on Sundays. I was comparatively sober, and if I had vices, I had evidently been discreet about them. The Church, I was assured, offered openings no less splendid than the I.C.S. Just think how nice it would be to be a Bishop! All this was no doubt well meant, but I was put off rather by this dangling of enticements. I enjoyed singing in the choir and the poetry of the Bible, but felt no irresistible call. And so I returned to India as I had left her, a Parsee and a Zoroastrian.

My relations in Bombay helped to get me fitted out with tropical clothing, topees and mosquito-nets, after which I found my way to one of the main music stores, Rhythm House, to provide myself with spiritual sustenance — a portable H.M.V. gramophone and two cases of records of western classical music. Armed with these, my violin, my viola, an enormous family leather trunk for my clothes and a shiny black tin trunk for my books, I proceeded by train to Dehra Dun to attend the training course for I.C.S. probationers. My shopping-spree in Bombay had left me with very little cash in hand, and on arrival at Dehra Dun station I piled my worldly possessions into a *tonga* (being

cheaper than a cab) and cloppety-clopped to the training-camp some miles away. My entry into the camp area was not exactly impressive. Gypsies might have done better. But it was a cordial reception all the same. I was shown to my tent by the entire troop of bustling, budding young officers, each more curious than the other to have a look at this latest accretion to the mighty steel frame of bureaucracy.

After the dust and smut of two days' travel across the Rajputana deserts had been scraped off, I was escorted to the mess for lunch. And here a strange thing happened. I sat down, quite by chance, at the very end of the table where the young Maharajkumar of Sikkim and his cousin, Kumar Jigmie Dorji of Bhutan, were seated. During the course of that first lunch in Dehra Dun was laid the foundation of two life-long friendships and also, in a sense, of my career. We discussed each other's ages and discovered that I was the eldest, but only just. And so, from that first day of our meeting, they decided to call me 'Uncle', and we became inseparables.

With Jigmie Dorji, or 'Jigs' as he was affectionately called, it was a case, I think, of attraction of opposites. Jigs was an out-and-out extrovert and was infinitely amused by this strange fish from foreign waters and its mysterious ways and habits. If I had time off from work, I would retire to my tent, instead of dawdling in the mess, and regale myself with Beethoven and Mozart. This was too much for Jigs. 'Come off it, Uncle,' he would call, and physically drag me out. But, with all our differences, there was one thing we had in common. Although before coming to Dehra Dun, I had never ridden anything more dignified than a donkey at the seaside, within a few days our riding-master was embarrassing me with his repeated, 'Shabash, Rustum saheb, Shabash!' Jigs loved horses and anything connected with horses,—and I clearly came within the latter category. Neither of us ever quite outgrew the careless abandon of youth, and when he was cruelly assassinated,

twenty years later, he was the same unaffected, generous and full-blooded Jigs of our Dehra Dun adolescence.

The Maharajkumar of Sikkim was a more complex personality and we were temperamentally more akin to each other. He had recently lost his elder brother, a gallant young officer in the R.A.F., and had thus become the heir-apparent. The Maharajkumars of Rewa and Tehri-Garhwal were also attending the I.C.S. Administrative Course, but I was never drawn to them as I was to the two young cousins from Sikkim and Bhutan. The former were men of the world, of crowded cities and extravagant living. Young Sikkim was a shy, timorous fawn, lonely and lost in the vast Indian subcontinent. In me he found, I think, a kindred soul, someone even more friendless than himself, and quickly he took me under his tender, protecting care. We felt happy and at peace in each other's company, and he took pleasure listening as I played my gramophone or my violin, often until the early hours of the morning. He was quickly infected by my passion for music and it was not long before he asked me to help him select a nucleus for a collection of classical records of his own. He had his little extravagances and I confess it used to give me quite a thrill to smoke his gold-tipped State Express 999's. (We have both of us since given up smoking, alas!). He was curious to know about my family, and as I have always been such a delinquent correspondent, was soon writing letters for me to my own home.

He liked talking too of Sikkim and his boyhood days. As the reincarnation of his late uncle, Maharaja Sidkeong Tulku,[1] he was known in his country as Gyese Rimpoche, the Prince Reincarnate (literally, 'Precious Jewel'), and had had his early religious training in a monastery in Tibet. His uncle had been a person of exceptional talent, who had studied at Oxford, travelled round the world, and *almost* married a Japanese Princess. Public opinion in those days,

[1] Tulku: Incarnate Lama.

however, was reactionary in the extreme, and the Kazis (landed aristocracy) strongly opposed the match. His brief reign was cut short by his death under mysterious circumstances. There can be no doubt that the vested interests were opposed to his reforming zeal and would be glad to see him go. The Maharajkumar however suspected that it was the British who feared he would be a thorn in their side and deliberately contrived his end. Rumour has it that the Civil Surgeon prescribed for the sick Tulku an unusually heavy dose of brandy, after administration of which a red-hot brazier was placed under his bed. The Tulku passed away almost immediately after this novel experiment in doctoring. I am not a credulous person and am generally sceptical about things supernatural. But during the twenty-five years I have known the Prince, I have been reminded repeatedly of the accounts I had heard and read of his late uncle's life and activities, and become increasingly aware of strange and subtle resemblances in temperament and character that would lend support to a belief in reincarnation.

This was the year of the Cripps mission and the most momentous political developments. For all I knew of it all, I might have been in another world. The issues were argued heatedly in the mess, but for myself, I felt no emotional stir. All I can remember at this distance of time is that the young princes who were our colleagues in the training course were highly distrustful of the Congress party and harboured the gravest apprehensions regarding the future of their States with the departure of the British from India. I had never before realized how fanatically politically-minded was the youth of our country. In Cambridge, we were certainly interested in politics, but it was only one of a dozen equally absorbing topics. There we talked music, literature, philosophy, food, sex, but here it was politics, politics, and more politics. I just couldn't keep pace, and, were it not for my two Himalayan friends, should have felt utterly isolated.

As I had been posted to Assam, I was required, under the rules of the time, to learn and pass an examination in Bengali. I had already picked up a smattering of Hindustani and was soon prattling away in Bengali as well. Since I had arrived long after the course had started, I naturally had to put in extra work to catch up, but, as a whole, we did not take our studies very seriously. Nor, for that matter, did our tutors, except for my Bengali munshi, who was an earnest, serious-minded sort who stood no nonsense. What I enjoyed most was our riding-classes, though they were at six in the morning and I have never been an early riser. I would drop in at young Sikkim's tent at a quarter to six, to find him either asleep or sitting in state on his bathroom throne. After much hustling and bustling and grumbling, we would fetch up at the riding-school, panting and breathless, and fall in with the others as unobtrusively as possible. In the evenings, we went out riding on our own, and mercilessly galloped our horses along the several disused river-beds in the neighbourhood.

We were allowed two months' vacation during May and June, most of which I spent as young Sikkim's guest in his Himalayan kingdom. We trained it to Siliguri, from where he proudly drove me up to Gangtok in his sleek new Sunbeam Talbot. I knew nothing then of protocol, of the offering of a silk scarf as a mark of respect to the ruler and the other sundry niceties. But my hosts were indulgent and understanding, and it was not long before I was accepted as one of the family. The Palace was run on European lines — morning tea in bed, with breakfast, lunch and dinner as family meals in the dining-room. The Maharaja was punctual almost to a fault and there was usually a scramble to get to the dining-table on the dot. During my visit, the Maharani was in residence at her own Palace a few miles out of Gangtok, and only Princess Kula[1], the Maharaja's second daughter, was

[1] Princess Kula's official name was Pema Choki and Princess Coocoola's, Pema Tsedeun. They are generally known, however, by the briefer, more convenient appellations.

with us at Gangtok. A lovely young girl of sixteen, she was assisting the teaching staff at the Girls' High School — besides capturing every heart, mine included. Her elder sister, Princess Coocoola, was married to a nobleman of high rank in Tibet and we were anxiously awaiting news of the first addition to their family.

I think back with nostalgia to those happy, carefree days. Treks to the mountains in old-style leisure — gaily decorated mules with tinkling bells, a roughly constructed bamboo hut for refreshment by the wayside, and cooling millet-beer as the villagers' simple but grateful offering to their Prince. But amidst all this idyllic charm, I shall remember to the end of my life the terrible experience of being lost at night in the snow-covered mountains near the Nathu La. Our camp was 13,000 feet high, a stone's throw from the Tibetan border, and I had set off for a spot of private exploration, never dreaming for a moment that I would have difficulty in finding my way back to base. Towards evening, the landscape seemed to assume a different shape altogether — I had obviously taken the wrong path back, and hadn't the remotest idea where I had got to.

I imagined the most awful things — brigands slicing me into little pieces, or, having collapsed with fatigue, being recovered, by my tearful companions, a cold, cold block of frozen ice. And then at last, after what seemed an eternity of circumambulation, I spotted, in the remote distance, a light. Had I not been so frightened, I should have shouted for joy. Shivering and stumbling, for it was night and I had no torch, I hurried toward the little glow, which seemed now to be mysteriously moving away. The Maharaja had told me of strange lights that could sometimes be seen floating over the mountains. He had taken me out after dinner one evening and pointed them out in the distance — they were spirits, he had explained, sometimes for good and sometimes for evil, and one had therefore to be cautious

in approaching them. I was, needless to say, caution personified — and was repaid by discovering the light to be the advance-guard of the search party dispatched by the Prince to rescue me, complete with dogs, brandy, and piping-hot tea. Never had brandy and tea tasted so good, and I was so hungry, I could have eaten the dogs.

In Gangtok we lived quietly, rarely leaving the Palace. When we did, it was usually for a visit to the Political Officer, Sir Basil Gould, in the Residency. Sir Basil had spent most of his service in the North-West Frontier. He had suffered deeply from a family loss during the Quetta earthquake and seemed glad for a change of environment. He quickly made friends amongst the Sikkimese and Bhutanese, and won their confidence to such an extent that they leaned heavily on him for advice on all major issues. He took personal interest in the education of the young princes and princesses of both countries and they looked to him as to a father with respect and affection. Sir Basil was also no mean scholar and took the initiative in bringing out books, grammars and dictionaries in Tibetan, as well as a set of gramophone records to illustrate the pronunciation of Tibetan words. Many of his works have not yet been superseded and are still in general use.

The Residency in those days was a corner of Old England, with its fine great timber-beams, panelled walls, period furniture and lovely garden stocked with the homely flowers of England. The climate of Gangtok, now crisp and fresh, at other times misty and drizzly, added to the illusion. Hot scones, strawberries and cream, Cheddar cheese, apple-sauce, and the illusion was complete. With all this as their background, the Princes were often more English than the English themselves. They had had little opportunity of learning about and appreciating things Indian, and had, as a result, understandable fears of being engulfed in the great ocean of India and losing their identity with the departure of the British. But for all this,

I cannot recollect talking politics on a single occasion during my entire visit. We talked about everything else on earth, but hardly a word of Sikkim's future after India's independence. This was in contrast to my future visits, when the young Prince was in the saddle of power and the centre of political controversy. I never imagined then that, one day, in the not too distant future, I too would be drawn into the vortex of Sikkim politics to play my part.

Before returning to Dehra Dun, we visited and stayed with Raja Dorji and his family at Bhutan House in Kalimpong. Raja Dorji was the Agent to the Government of Bhutan, his main function being to handle, on behalf of the Maharaja, the country's relations with India. He was also responsible for the administration of the districts on Bhutan's southern frontier with India. His marriage to the sister of the Maharaja of Sikkim (Rani Chuni) had been, at one time, the cause of much heart-burning, as it had been the normal convention for Sikkim princesses to be found bridegrooms from the aristocracy of Tibet. Rani Chuni, however, was a strong-willed young woman with a mind of her own, who, despite pressures from various quarters, went through with the marriage. The Sikkim royal family takes great pride in its long and illustrious ancestry, reaching back to the early seventeenth century. The Bhutan ruling house, on the other hand, is of comparatively recent origin, as it was only in 1907 that the Penlop (Governor) of Tongsa dzong, who happened to be the most powerful and influential of the Penlops at the time, was formally installed as the ruler of the entire country. What Raja Dorji's family lacked in ancestry, however, it more than made up for in wealth and property. Things were thus nicely balanced between the two families and, if there was rivalry, it was of a healthy, good-humoured variety. Raja Dorji's second daughter, Kesang, subsequently married the Crown Prince of Bhutan and is now the Queen of the Dragon-Kingdom.

Raja Dorji was a lovable man, with a passion for horses and mah-jong. He kept a fine stable and was a regular landmark at the Darjeeling races. He owned one particularly stubborn horse, with an impossibly hard mouth, which he allowed no one to ride except on the race-course. Samdup, for such was his name, was fleet as the wind, but highly temperamental. Jigmie, who loved me dearly, begged me to leave well alone and choose another mount for our morning trot to the bazaar. I was young and headstrong and reminded him of Alexander and Bucephalus. Jigmie, who had never heard of Bucephalus, couldn't argue the point further, which was exactly what I had intended. With gay bravado, I jumped on to Samdup, without bothering to use the stirrups or hold the reins. At the precise moment of my leap, Samdup stepped one foot forward, so that I landed not in the saddle but on his glossy, bare rump. It was now Samdup's turn to leap, and he leapt like lightning, charging down the tarmac highway at full gallop. There was no question at all of holding him back. I clutched at his mane, seized the reins and sawed away with all my might. A kindly spirit must have been watching over us, for by all the normal laws Samdup should have slipped within seconds on the smooth, shiny tarmac. But I managed to retain my seat and Samdup his foothold until, after a mile of terrifying stampede, we reached the bazaar and Samdup condescended to slacken his pace. Jigmie told me later that he had given me up for lost, and, justifiably wrathful as he was at my foolhardiness, was overflowing in his gratitude to me for surviving and sparing him the complications of having to make explanations.

At Bhutan House, I first came to know the various members of the Dorji family who were to become so much a part of my life in later years — Raja and Rani Dorji, Tashi, Kesang, Ugyen Rimpoche and Lumpy (Lhendup). Jigmie also took me to see his many friends in Kalimpong, and there was the usual round of tea-parties, musical

evenings, picnics and jaunts to Darjeeling. Everyone was kind to me and I felt as though I was leaving home when the time came to return to Dehra Dun. No one would have believed that the happiness of this home could ever be shattered and that for most of its members Kalimpong would, in a few years, be little more than a dream of the past. Rani Chuni presides alone at Bhutan House today, in quiet dignity, in quiet resignation, immovable amidst the many tragic changes that have overcome her country and her family — her eldest son, whom she loved most dearly, cruelly assassinated, her remaining children scattered in Bhutan, Nepal, and Hong Kong.

After the vacation, we moved out of tents and were quartered in the premises of the Doon School. The routine, however, was identical, and the course was duly concluded with the holding of examinations. As far as I remember, everybody was passed in every subject, with one solitary exception. Aftab Khan was an estimable officer, but elephantine in proportions. For him to ride would have been as fatal to his mount as to himself — even Bucephalus would have crumbled beneath his rotundity. He was, I was later given to understand, granted special exemption from passing the riding-test, his inability being attributed to 'reasons beyond human control'.

It had been decided that, as there was a war on, we should be attached for about a month to various army units so that we should have an opportunity of getting to learn something about army procedures and organization. I opted for attachment to an army formation in the Lahore cantonment, as this would enable me to visit the place of my birth and renew old contacts, and young Sikkim readily followed suit.

Seeing relations in Lahore was a repetition of the Bombay routine, except that here I received moral support from my young friend, who accompanied me on all my rounds. In those days, an unattached young I.C.S. officer

was considered, in the matrimonial market, to be quite a catch. Objects of delight were put in his way, with studied casualness, and he had to tread warily to steer clear of entanglement. The Prince was the most perfect chaperon and I emerged unscathed.

Until now, women had not come very much into my life, and such friendships as I had contracted had been largely Platonic. I have mentioned how, at school, I had been pushed, at a very early age, to specialize in the Classics to the exclusion of practically every other subject. We were administered some general lectures, it is true, on the 'facts of life', but I confess I never got the hang of it all properly, and it was quite casually that I learnt, to my astonishment, of the intricacies of procreation. My family held traditional views on the subject of sex — from our earliest years, we grew up in the belief that exposure of the body was a matter of shame and talk of sex was taboo. As a result, I never completely got over my shyness at being seen naked while undressing or taking a shower in a gymnasium. I was highly strung and fearful of sexual excitement at the slightest suggestion. In India, this would not perhaps have been so, as children of both sexes can be seen everywhere naked in the streets. Even if there is fuss over 'shameful' exposure in the home, the child can see all that he needs to at his back-door. The fact that I had never had any opportunity of seeing the opposite sex in its state of nature gave rise in my mind to a quite unnecessary sense of mystery, if not fear, and I was as much discomfited as attracted by the girls that came my way.

I felt a greater sense of confidence and security amongst friends of my own sex, and my attachments to them were, as a result, strong and deep. I can recollect only one occasion in my early youth when I felt sexually stirred to any marked extent by feminine allure. She was a girl I had known from childhood and we had, for years, played together in each other's homes. We saw less of each other when I left Bedford

for Cambridge, but I vividly remember how once, on a return visit to Bedford, I met her unexpectedly in the street, wearing a bright-red, close-fitting, polo-collar jumper which accentuated the sensual lines of her burgeoning figure. I saw her, for the first time, with a different eye, with an eye of longing. And with the passing of the years, the impression of that fleeting moment has not faded. The other girls I knew were drawn to me, mainly, through a common interest in music. I was shy and awkward with them, and they awakened in me no sensual desires.

My friendships were few, but deep and lasting. While, however, there were no physical or erotic manifestations, some of them were not without a certain romantic colour. But I never spoke my love and I doubt whether it was ever sensed by the object that had roused it. That twilight-flash of youth, brief and indefinable, stirring and heightening the sensibilities, has always been for me a dangerous corner. And the swift flight of the moment of youth leaves me with an emptiness and a sense of loss — as when the bloom is gone from the fruit, leaving nothing behind of its freshness and fragrance.

At Lahore I parted from the Prince. I remember seeing him off at the railway-station and wondering sadly whether we should ever meet again. Assam and Sikkim were two different worlds, we would both be caught up soon in our own separate lives. The parting was, for me, a little death.

Keith Wynne was a colleague in our training course who had originally been posted to Burma. With the fall of Burma to the Japanese, he was temporarily posted to Assam as the next nearest place to keep him employed. We had arranged to travel together from Lahore to Shillong and met as planned at the railway-station. The only complication was that Keith had no ticket nor any money to buy one. He had been out on a grand, last-minute shopping excursion to equip himself for the fastnesses of remotest Assam and had counted on me to lend him whatever might

be required for his ticket and other expenses to Shillong. I never like carrying much cash about me and had myself kept only two hundred rupees for meals and casual expenditure on the journey. The greater part of this was now swallowed up in buying the extra, unforeseen, railway ticket, and I had only a few odd rupees left for meals. There was no question therefore of eating comfortably in the dining-car, and we lived, for the next five days, on bananas, nuts, and, as a rare special luxury, platform pakoras.[1] When we arrived at Calcutta, the porters, seeing we were travelling first-class with I.C.S. embossed in large letters on our trunks, naturally assumed we wanted taxis to take us to the four-star Great Eastern Hotel. With difficulty, we managed to elude them and find a rickshaw to carry us to a dubious board-and-lodging in the cheapest quarter of the city. My companion was a born optimist and irritated me beyond measure by his extravagances, which were, of course, at my expense and discomfort. He would thoughtlessly put down two bananas, whilst I would frugally make do with one, and lived in the fond hope that, once we touched the borders of Assam, the benign Government would forthwith come to our rescue and the shekels would flow like rivers of gold. When, in fact, we did reach Gauhati in Assam, it was our luck to strike upon a District Magistrate who was a Scotsman in every sense of the word. He was taking no risks distributing largesse to two nondescript probationers and passed us on to the local general store with a note to cash our cheques.

[1] A fried Indian savoury.

3

Wartime Assam

THE Chief Secretary to the Assam Government, Sir Harold Dennehy, had invited me to spend some time with him in Shillong before proceeding to my first place of posting in Sylhet. On arrival at the bus station at Shillong, I engaged two porters to carry my bedding and trunks, and proceeded with them on foot to find my way to the Chief Secretary's residence. On arrival at the veranda, with violin in one hand, viola in the other, and my stout bodyguard of porters in train, I pressed the door-bell, nervously rehearsing to myself my first little speech. I heard soon a stir within and footsteps along the corridor. The door was opened by the lady of the house herself, who looked me up and down as I stood rather sheepishly with violin and viola in hand, and promptly announced, with a second look in the direction of my bodyguard and their wares, 'Thank you very much, but nothing today. Good evening, and thank you again.'

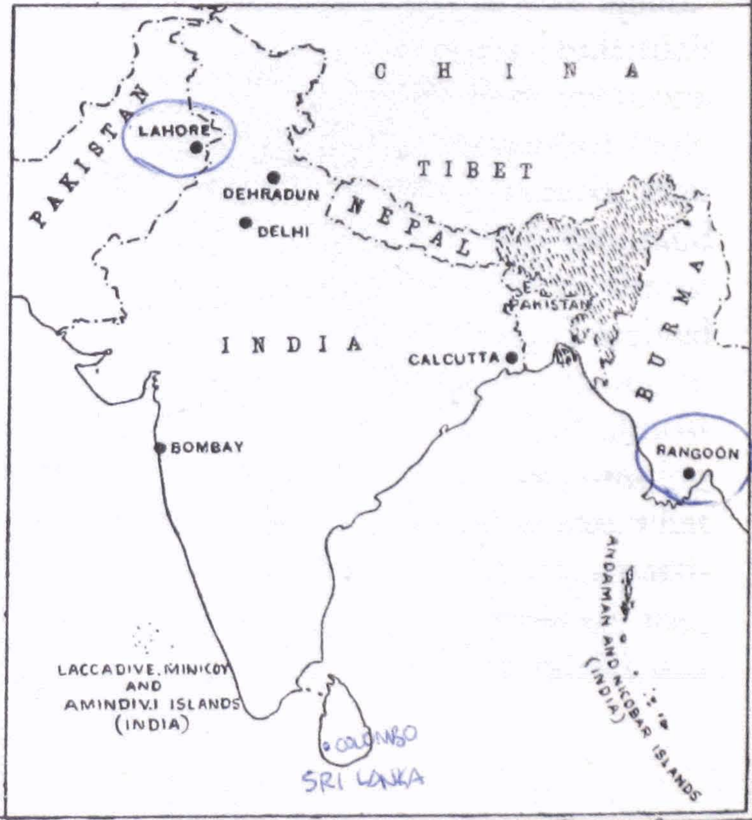
Lady Dennehy was a dear, *dear* soul, and, my credentials established, was kindness itself. She showed me to my room, had a great, blazing fire soon alight, a steaming-hot bath, followed by tea and waffles. This was heaven indeed, after five days of bananas and nuts. Shillong is five thousand feet above sea level and the temperature drops to almost freezing point in the winter months. The evening I arrived in November might easily have been a winter's evening in England — crispy cold, with a light mist. We had almost finished tea when Sir Harold arrived, but I had been running my eye over his bookshelves and already had some idea what to expect. There were books on the history of Assam, particularly the tribes, on Indian architecture and painting, and, to my joy, the classics of Greece and Rome. Sir Harold was

LHASA
RIVER TSANGPO
TIBET
NEPAL
SIKKIM
GANGTOK
CHUMBI VALLEY
THIMPHU
BHUTAN
DARJEELING
WEST BENGAL
BIHAR
COOCH BEHAR
NORTH EAST FRONTIER AGENCY
RIVER SIANG
SADIYA
DIGBOI
DIBRUGARH
MARGHERITA
CHARDUAR
JORHAT
RIVER BRAHMAPUTRA
GAUHATI
ASSAM
KHASI & JAINTIA HILLS
GARO HILLS
SHILLONG
CHERRAPUNJI
SHELLA
MIKIR & NORTH CACHAR HILLS
MOKOKCHUNG
TSAWLAW
TUENSANG
WOKHA
NAGA LAND
KOHIMA
PHEK
BURMA
MANIPUR
IMPHAL
EAST PAKISTAN
SYLHET
MAULVI BAZAR
AGARTALA
TRIPURA
MIZO HILLS
AIJAL

ASSAM, NEFA, BHUTAN AND SIKKIM

2000 METRES AND ABOVE

1000—2000 METRES



no less happy to find a fellow classicist, and so a bond was established between us at the very outset, both of us looking forward to the time we would be slinging Latin quips at each other on office files to tease and baffle the Establishment.

I have often felt sorry for the young I.A.S.[1] recruit of today for the cold and impersonal reception awaiting him on joining his State of posting. Keith Wynne and I were both invited to stay as guests of the two seniormost officers of the service. This gave us at once a sense of being part of a team, almost of a family. Keith Wynne was the guest of Sir Keith Cantlie, Member of the Revenue Tribunal. Sir Keith had spent the greater part of his service working among the hill people, whom he loved and who loved him in return. He had taken a scholarly interest in the laws and customs of the tribal people, particularly the Khasis[2], and had volunteered, during the war years, to organize a Porter Corps to support Army units operating against the Japanese on the Assam-Burma border.

His passion was butterflies. When I met him again in London a few years ago, while serving as Adviser to the Bhutan Government, his main interest in me was on account of a rare species of butterfly that had been spotted and reported on in the last century as inhabiting the heights of the Black Range in Bhutan. 'You must investigate the fly immediately you return', insisted Sir Keith. As it happened, Bhutan was just then passing through one of the most critical phases of her history, with the Prime Minister fleeing the country and suspicions of plots to assassinate the King. Sir Keith knew nothing of all this and showed wisdom, in a world of turmoil, to think of the butterfly—to remind us busy beavers that beauty had not fled altogether from the earth. We all loved Sir Keith and his eccentricities. I remember once gently pointing out to him, at a Government House tea-party,

[1] Indian Administrative Service, successor to the Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.) of pre-Independence days.

[2] *Notes on Khasi Law*, K. Cantlie 1934.

that he was wearing an odd pair of socks, one grey and the other maroon. 'Nonsense, my dear boy, nonsense,' he replied, looking down at his feet, 'I have an identical pair at home.'

During my first ten days in Assam, I called on most of the senior officers, some of whom invited me to their homes. The mere fact that I was staying with the Chief Secretary gave me a sense of importance — and I felt I must justify the expectations of my good host. Nowadays, six or seven I.A.S. officers are allotted to Assam each year. In a body, they call on the Chief Secretary and other officers in the Secretariat. They no longer feel themselves as individuals, each with his own personality, making his own particular contribution to a live team. They are ciphers in a machine and no one has time to care much whether they are interested in music or photography or have any personal problems of their own.

Keith Wynne and I were both enchanted with Shillong. For me, it was a case of love at first sight. After the heat and dust of the plains, it felt good just to be alive and roam in the fresh pine-forests in the hills. We both prayed that the Gods would be good and grant us, one blessed day, the boon of a posting in Shillong. I have been a constant lover and am as happy in Shillong today as I was twenty-five years ago. My colleagues in service have preferred the dizzier heights of Delhi, nearer the thrones of ultimate power. For the career officer, Assam is a dead-end and he therefore contrives, while there's life in him yet, to get entrenched in the Great Capital where the prizes are more splendid. But for me, Shillong is still heaven.

After my brief, happy indoctrination in Shillong, I proceeded to Sylhet[1] for training under that Mogul of District Magistrates, Mohammed Khurshid, later Defence Secretary of Pakistan. I had never seen anyone quite so enormous in my life. Aftab Khan of Dehra Dun days was,

[1] Since 1947 in East Pakistan.

by comparison, a shrimp. Mohammed Khurshid lived and functioned in the grand manner. Sylhet had the reputation, those days, of being the toughest of all the districts of India. Litigation is the life-blood of the Sylheti, and my first three years of service were a round of litigation and land-disputes, dacoities and devilry. But Mohammed Khurshid ruled over it all with his great big *lathi*, unperturbed and imperturbable. I never saw him work in anything so pedestrian as an office. My first sight of him, which remains stamped unforgettably in my memory, was of a great bulk of a man ensconced comfortably in a cane chair on his front veranda, with a towel over his not inconsiderable tum. In front of him was a square cane table, on which were lying two or three rather tattered files, a big silver-plated box filled with ingredients for preparing *pan*, and innumerable bottles of soda-water and gin.

I received my first lesson in disposing of files the moment I was ushered in to the Presence. Mohammed Khurshid had a terrifying temper and brave men were known to quake when it was roused. His bench-clerk had evidently roused it, for just as I entered, out sped that functionary amid a whirl of files which Mohammed Khurshid had hurled to assist his exit. I understood now why the files were tattered. It takes all sorts to make a world, I reflected, as I thought of the kind and gentle Sir Harold and the friendly warmth of his home. But I was soon to discover that beneath Mohammed Khurshid's fierce exterior lay a generous heart. He adopted me at once as a member of his household and I began to learn, at the feet of the master, the administrator's art.

Mohammed Khurshid was a law unto himself. He was perpetually at war with the Commissioner of Divisions, his immediate higher authority, as he could well afford to be since he was so well 'in' with the ultimate authority, Sir Mohammed Saadulla, then Prime Minister of Assam. The Commissioner, C. S. Gunning, was I.C.S. steel-frame

to the finger-tips. By a happy coincidence, we discovered that we had been to the same school, where we had both been awarded, in our final year, the prize for the best all-rounder. So we felt very pleased with ourselves and passed the time of day paying each other mutual compliments at our first meeting. He was also a Classics man (like all the best people in those blissful days!), and, like myself, went up to Cambridge on a Classical scholarship. In a flush of enthusiasm, I once dashed off for him a Latin sonnet in Catullan hendecasyllables. He never referred to it, so I inferred he was either baffled or simply 'not amused'.

My old headmaster, Grose-Hodge, used from time to time to send me his little Latin jottings (I still have his 'Ode to a Pekinese'), but otherwise, the utility of my Classical equipment has been limited to the translating of inscriptions on tombstones and public monuments. That is not to say that I regret my Classical education. It has its limitations, it is true, in a technological age, but then, life is not all cabbages and carburettors. The Classics have taught me discipline and clear thinking. The exercise of translating prose and verse into equivalent forms in Latin and Greek affords a sharp insight into the basic structure of language, and, with this insight, it has become easier to pick up a working knowledge of other languages also. My work has necessitated the learning of a variety of languages. Apart from French, which I studied up to quite a high level in school and university, I have a smattering of Bengali, Assamese, Hindi, Nepali, Gujarati, Tibetan, Sikkimese, Bhutanese and Khasi. I feel sure that I owe my facility in learning languages to my intensive study of Greek and Latin syntax. And Plato and Aristotle have taught me not to accept things at their face value but to penetrate deeper beyond the surface in search of ultimate values.

Apart from trying petty cases and miscellaneous jobs such as counting the treasury and inspecting the record-room,

I was appointed District Publicity Organizer, my responsibility being to maintain the morale of the civil population at a time of perpetual war-time scares. Early every morning, I would tune into the news on the radio and make a summary for translation into Bengali. I would then set off to a crowded part of the town, in an ancient, capacious Dodge, long since discarded by Government House and fitted up with amplifier and loudspeakers, and play some popular cinema tunes to attract attention. As soon as we had succeeded in trapping a sufficient number of victims, we would promptly switch off the gramophone and pump the bewildered gathering with the manoeuvrings of massive armies on the northern, southern, eastern and western fronts. Our armies were, of course, always winning, and, if the enemy occasionally advanced, I saw to it that he was quickly repulsed. My announcer soon got into the spirit of the thing and eventually preferred to dispense with my script altogether. He took some liberties with geography, but then the taking of liberties has been the privilege of every genius. Our armies performed the most miraculous leaps, today in Tobruk, tomorrow in Rome; Rommel on the run, Monty in hot pursuit; today the African desert, tomorrow the Russian steppes. In the evenings, we visited the village bazaars (held on different days of the week in different areas) and continued the bombardment.

Assam's Director of Publicity was a brilliant young officer of our service, who fed us weekly with slogans and directive principles. I received from him one day a strange parcel, twelve feet square and six inches broad. Avidly we opened it, and found within a bright orange octagonal kite, tangles of string, and an assortment of long, fluffy, detachable tails exhorting us, when we were not Growing More Food, to Save for Victory or, if that did not please, to Join the Navy. Director Thomas Steiger Hayley was nothing if not thorough and did not fail to

instruct us in elaborate detail how to launch the machine. But try as we did, it simply wouldn't rise and, fearfully, we were constrained to report failure. Back to us shot a telegram that every kite had been personally tested by the Director himself and proved airworthy, and that he had already set off for Sylhet to dispel all doubts on the subject. The launching-pad was to be the Police football field, and we mustered up a number of chaprasis, in splendid livery, to race about with the giant flying-machine at the Director's command. We prayed, of course, that it would never rise, and our prayers were answered, for the breezes of Sylhet are not such as the breezes of Shillong.

Another little misfire was the inauguration of our Blood Bank. This was the first experiment of its kind in the district and people were understandably terrified at the idea of having their blood drained out of them. This was the occasion, I sensed, for a dramatic gesture, and it was duly broadcast to the populace that I, the young Assistant Commissioner in person, would offer myself as the first to be bled in the good cause. And to show what a trifling thing it was, a date and time were announced for the demonstration. It was one of those stiflingly hot days and the crowds streamed in their swarms to the Civil Hospital, the more resourceful managing to squeeze into the tightly packed room where I was laid out in state, as near suffocation as could be. For the less fortunate remaining outside, the loudspeakers gave a minute-to-minute commentary. 'The doctor has taken up his needle and pricks the young Assistant Commissioner Saheb in the arm. Does he flinch, does he fear? No, not he, he smiles a sweet, brave smile. We see the glass being filled, drop by drop, with his precious life-saving blood. The people surge forward to behold him more closely, for he is truly a hero. The glass is a quarter full. We fear for him, but he has no fears. He only smiles. The glass is now half-full and the doctor says "Enough". But our Assistant Commissioner Saheb says

"No, no, it is nothing, fill it to the brim."' After this, I heard no more, for I quietly passed out.

Quite shortly after my joining at Sylhet, Mohammed Khurshid announced that we would spend Christmas slaying tigers. My idea of Christmas was plum-pudding, crackers and carols, but he was determined to make a man of me. A month before Christmas the preparations were set afoot and an officer deputed on special duty to ensure the success of the proceedings. Needless to say, there was a war on and the Japanese, who had already invaded Manipur, were fast closing in on Assam. But the preparations went on, and the leading zamindars of the district received notice to present themselves at the chosen camping site, complete with elephants and other paraphernalia for the shoot. From a fortnight before Christmas, messages were daily relayed to a control-room plotting the movements of any roving tiger. From all accounts, the place was infested with the beasts, all Royal Bengal, and I began to feel even a little sorry at the thought of so much slaughter at such a festive season.

On Christmas eve we sailed in, by the District Magistrate's luxurious river-launch, to the camp-site. Tigers were reported to be roaring all the way and one could hardly walk in the forest, we were informed, for tripping over their droppings. Christmas was ushered in by the light of blazing camp-fires and to the hooting of thirty elephants. Mohammed Khurshid liked his liquor and was generous with it. It was cold out in the open and we needed internal warmth. On Christmas morning, we were each allotted an elephant and mahout, and instructed to line up, in strict order of protocol, for the formal inauguration. This was performed by the thirty elephants, all trumpeting fortissimo in full chorus. After this impressive prelude, we proceeded in majestic solemnity to the forest. After all I had heard, I was afraid of treading on a tiger at every step. The slightest rustle in the forest, and I imagined a man-eater springing

into the air. And so we continued for seven days and seven nights, with brief intervals for food and sleep. From time to time, the officer on special duty drew attention to droppings, which he assured us were authentic — and that was as close as we got to our tiger.

Although I am no born shikari, elephants have played quite a part in my life. Phulmoni, for instance, a shapely female, was the cause of many sleepless nights. Amongst my several miscellaneous duties was that of Bakijai Officer, which involves the realizing of monetary arrears due to Government by attachment of the property of the defaulter. I heard, one afternoon, a thunderous trumpeting at the veranda of my Court. An underling of the department had evidently visited the home of a defaulter, and, finding nothing else handy to attach, had attached an elephant that happened to be feeding in a bamboo-clump nearby. Phulmoni was used to a free and easy life in the wide open spaces, and her manners were not those of the city. She was as uninhibited as a bird and trumpeted from dawn to dusk — and when she felt the urge, by the light of the moon as well. All this we would have gladly borne, had it not been for her insatiable appetite. Within five days, Government had spent more on feeding her than the amount for which she had been attached. Worse still, half the village came swarming to my Court claiming that Phulmoni did not belong to the defaulter at all. Each gave moving accounts of how they had reared Phulmoni from a babe, and how empty their lives had become without her. It was quite beyond my powers to decide what to do with Phulmoni, and, meanwhile, she ate ceaselessly, at enormous cost to the Government. I would wake up at night to hear her trumpeting and shudder at the thought of her consuming with gusto another clump of banana and sugarcane. To my great relief, Phulmoni was quietly abducted one night by one of her fond claimants, and I never heard any more of her as I was shortly after transferred to Maulvibazaar.

It was at Sylhet that I received my first lessons in the social graces of the service. Ahmed Kidwai, later Chief Secretary to the Assam Government, had joined as Assistant Commissioner of Sylhet a year before myself and was an ace at cards, as indeed he was at anything to which he put his mind. K. Balachandran, who has since moved on to Delhi, joined us a year later, and Ahmed Kidwai, being the most senior, took it upon himself to be our *guru* in bridge. In the absence of a fourth, we passed the evenings playing cut-throat. This left Mohammed Khurshid, who knew everything in the world but bridge, out in the cold, and Mohammed Khurshid was not the man to be left out of anything. He insisted on being taught so that he could share our company, and was soon the most enthusiastic of us all. He kept open house, and life soon became a round of cards and feasting and feasting and cards. I would be anxious to return to Court after lunch, but Mohammed Khurshid would have none of it. *Just* one rubber, he would plead, and every bridge-player knows *just* what that can mean. Fortunately for us earnest toilers, Mohammed Khurshid tended to nod pretty soon after gin and a heavy Punjabi meal. In the middle of a hand, we would suddenly find him with chin on chest, snoring peacefully in the land of the blessed. We would then silently slip away to the daily task, leaving the Great Mogul to his dreams.

It was at Sylhet, too, that I first learned to put down Scotch. In our own family, we do not drink much, and when we do, only on festive occasions such as Christmas or birthdays. Beer or cider for picnics, port or sherry for celebrations, and brandy for illness was just about all I knew of alcohol. I picked up the usual patter on wines and vintages at Cambridge — as a Scholar of my College, I was privileged to sit with the Fellows at high table on commemorative occasions and one had to know the basic facts. Sylhet was, in more senses than one, my finishing school. The Station Club was next door to the District

Magistrate's bungalow. It was mainly a club for tea-planters, but a few of the élite of the district were also members. I was soon taken in hand and found it quite fun. The planters seemed to like me — I was something of a novelty, if nothing else — and it flattered my vanity. But I fell into the trap of opining that my faculties were sharpened by Scotch and that the best time for penning judgments was after a carouse at the bar. This opinion was not, however, shared by the Higher Judiciary when my judgments came up on appeal. Even Mohammed Khurshid frowned. So I restricted my visits to the club to once a week and a couple of pegs. And that has been my rule of life since.

I have never quite outgrown my student habits, and at Sylhet too I studied hard to pass my departmental examinations in Law, Revenue, Accounts, Bengali and Hindustani. I passed them all in what was, I believe, record time, partly through sheer hard work, and partly, I am sure, by the charity of Shankar Maitra, who was then Additional District Magistrate of Sylhet and chief examiner. Shankar, who was later appointed as our Ambassador to the Philippines and is now growing coffee in South India in comfortable retirement, was an old-school, I.C.S. type, disciplined and primly punctilious in all matters affecting service etiquette. In temperament he was diametrically opposed to Mohammed Khurshid, but they managed, razor-edge, to co-exist. He was succeeded in office by Timmy Sharpe, who had spent many years as President of the Durbar in the 'Native State' of Manipur.

Timmy was a lovable young man, a bachelor like myself, and we at once took to each other. I remember a week-end we passed together in the Jaintia hills, swimming in the icy, crystal-clear waters of the Umgnat and basking in the sun. Life could not have been more delicious. But just as we were dozing off one night, happy but weary of limb, we found ourselves rudely hoisted out of bed by one of Assam's periodical earthquakes. The rest of the night

we spent wandering about, cold and terror-stricken, in our pyjamas, awaiting the next fatal shock. It didn't come, but Timmy's stars were against him, for within a month he was dead. On our return to Sylhet, Timmy received an urgent telephone call from Shillong. In view of his experience of Manipur and knowledge of the language, would he volunteer to proceed on deputation to Manipur for special military intelligence duties? Timmy didn't think twice. I helped him pack his things and saw him off the following day. He left behind some pyjamas and a few odds and ends in the expectation of returning to us for the occasional week-end, but he never came back. He was flown to Imphal, the capital of Manipur, from where he set out with scouts for a camp in the interior. What happened next has remained a mystery to this day. He was evidently intercepted by the Japanese, and rumours trickled back of the most horrible tortures inflicted on him. Years later, a reference was made to me to identify a ring discovered alongside a skeleton in the area where Timmy was moving that tragic day.

It was in Sylhet that I first came to know of death in all its cruel suddenness. Abdul Bari was the driver of our publicity-van and we carried out our rounds one morning as in the usual course. In the evening, I heard he was ill and went to his home with a doctor. When I arrived, I could see death already written in his eyes. We buried him next day, the self-same Abdul Bari, who, two days back, was in splits of laughter as he watched me clumsily showing off that I could jack a car as well as he. It was in Sylhet that I heard of young Donaldson's death in an air-raid in Chittagong, the same 'Danny' from whom I had received, only a couple of days back, a long, rambling letter, half in English, half in Bengali, all bursting with the fullness of life. Danny had been under training with us in Dehra Dun and was too boyishly artless to have an enemy in the world. His last letter to me, frothing with cheer and

humour, was all football, friends and fun, with never so much as a hint of the grumbles and wailings of so many of our young men today. It was in Sylhet that we were once woken in the early hours of the morning to be informed that four hundred men and women who were being dispatched to work as porters for the Army in Manipur and had been temporarily housed in a shed for drying tea-leaves, had been crushed to death when the entire shed, together with the rows of frail shelves reaching up to the ceiling on which the occupants had been sleeping, had suddenly collapsed.

And it was in Sylhet that I received the brief, stark telegram that told me of my father's death. I understand now something of the purpose of the elaborate ritual prescribed by religion for the survivors of the dead. I wished there was something I could do, anything, to keep myself occupied at such a time. It was drizzling — a typical, miserable, monsoon day — and all I could do was to put on my macintosh and walk out into the rain. In this, I was following, though subconsciously, my father's own pattern of behaviour. He, too, was inconsolable in his grief at his father's death and found release in marathon walks — as though to exhaust his capacity to feel the hurt of his loss.

Before proceeding to Maulvibazaar[1], where I was transferred after about a year, to take over my first independent charge as Subdivisional Officer, it was necessary to equip myself with a motor-car. I purchased, for a modest nine hundred rupees, a distinguished model-T Ford of 1927 vintage. Most of its components were held together with pieces of string, but the great thing was that, with occasional external aid, it moved. I had her painted bright red, the Russians being by then our firm allies, and she was in due course christened 'The Scarlet Rocket'. With her, I made my ceremonial entry into Maulvibazaar. As it

[1] One of the four subdivisions of the Sylhet district.

happened, my predecessor in office was himself a much respected Maulvi, Maulvi Sirajul Islam, and I felt a little delicacy displacing him from a parish so suited to his title. He was a pious, bearded officer of the Provincial Civil Service, who had 'engaged himself in multifarious good works throughout the length, breadth and width of the Subdivision' as the farewell address presented by his grateful parishioners so aptly put it.

My next in command was Birendra Lal Sen, as fine an officer as one could ever hope for, whose sound commonsense and loyalty were a great support. After Sen came Sati Jiban Das, a much younger man, who had graduated in London where he acquired a Swedish wife. Mrs Das was, and is, truly a phenomenon, and I have not come across another case of a European absorbing and becoming so completely identified with an alien culture. Mrs Das spoke Bengali, including the racy dialect of Sylhet, with incredible fluency. She was equally at home in Bengali music and literature, wore Indian dress, and was a model Indian daughter-in-law. I could see little of her in Maulvibazaar, as she was always so busy with her domestic chores, including care of and devotion to the family cow. My work in later years was largely concerned with the problems arising from tribal people coming into contact with a materially more advanced culture. Here was the process in reverse, but Mrs Das seemed to find it no problem at all and has made the most perfect and natural adjustment to her adopted homeland.

One of my responsibilities as Subdivisional Officer was liaising with the American Army and Air Force authorities. There were considerable concentrations of troops throughout the subdivision and we were required to requisition vast areas of land from the villagers for construction of air-strips and military camps. An important American Air Force base for flying supplies over the hump to China was at Shamshernagar, in my subdivision. And until I visited

Shamshernagar, I never realized how comfortable life in the forces could be! Certainly more comfortable than in the Subdivisional Officer's bungalow, where I had no electricity, sanitation, telephone — or the delights of feminine ministrations. But the Americans seemed to think of everything to keep their men happy and sedated. They broke loose, of course, from time to time and that was where I came in. I would have deputations of terrified villagers crowding to my bungalow and bewailing that their mothers, wives and daughters were no longer safe from the depredations of these barbarous hordes. But whatever the circumstance, I found the American Military Police admirably co-operative, and certainly speedier in dispatching justice than our own Civil Courts. Within a matter of days, the offenders would be brought to book and summarily punished. They saw to it too that the punishment fitted the crime, and considering the large number of troops around, we got along very peaceably.

The advantage of war was that it gave us young officers opportunities to get experience in unusual fields. The troops needed unlimited quantities of fresh vegetables and the sensible thing was obviously to grow it all ourselves instead of aggravating the transport bottleneck by importing from outside. This would also bring money to the cultivator and make him more amiably disposed towards the armed forces. Within a year of our announcing that we would be offering attractive rates for vegetables supplied to the Armed Forces, the subdivision was fast converted to one great kitchen-garden. The secret of our success was that we procured direct from the cultivator and made direct payment in cash and on the spot. I would periodically visit Sylhet, draw an advance of a lakh of rupees or more from the Army, and return with the treasure to Maulvibazaar in the Scarlet Rocket. I cannot say I wasn't scared. I was scared to pieces, as Sylhet was renowned for dacoities of every description. My single armed escort was no match

for a determined gang and the Scarlet Rocket was as conspicuous a target by day as when she flamed her way through the night. But all went well — the Armed Forces got their calories, and the cultivator prospered.

The high-light of my posting at Maulvibazaar was the visit of the Governor, Sir Andrew Clow, whom we had invited to inaugurate an Agriculture and Industries Exhibition at Kulaura, about twenty miles from the subdivisional headquarters. Assam's Governors in the past had been generally of the hunting, shooting and fishing variety. The accent in tribal administration had not hitherto been much on the social services. The administrative apparatus was light, but strong, and the image of the Governor projected to the hill people was essentially imperial. Times were changing, however, and I suppose the powers that be felt it would do no harm to try out, for a change, an officer of a more academic frame of mind.

Sir Andrew was not cast in the traditional imperial mould. He would relish a peg of Scotch of an evening, but it would be a minute 'medicinal dose', as he called it. He was something of a specialist on labour problems and felt deeply for the weak and underprivileged. Organizing the stay of a Governor in a backwater like Kulaura was no matter of joke, but we set to the task and everything was arranged to the smallest detail — save one. An hour before the Governor was due to arrive in Kulaura, a message was received that, by some unexplainable mischance, his bathroom was lacking in the one most necessary item of convenience. Sanitary fittings were unheard of in those days, it was the era of the solid, square 'thunder-box' as it was picturesquely and most appropriately called. It was a race against time and I did not hesitate a moment. At great personal sacrifice and risk, I loaded my only two thunder-boxes, one for the Governor and the other for his lady, on to the Scarlet Rocket and raced to Kulaura with my unusual cargo. Needless to say, the thunder-boxes were

installed in due time and neither the Governor nor his lady were in the slightest incommoded.

Sir Andrew was a very understanding man, sympathetic, unpretentious and of easy manner. He did a great deal of independent thinking on the problems of Assam's future. The accepted, official view, sponsored by his predecessor, Sir Robert Reid, and J. P. Mills, Governor's Adviser, was that the hills and plains of Assam could never co-exist as a single entity. Sir Andrew carried out much deep research and took a more objective view. He felt that the hills and plains were so interdependent in their economy that it would be harmful to the interests of both to carve them into two separate entities. In theory, Sir Andrew was absolutely right. But there were forces at work whose full impact at a future date he could hardly have been expected to anticipate.

Much of an officer's time was taken up those days in ensuring equitable rationing of essential commodities such as salt, kerosene, cloth and corrugated iron sheets for roofing houses. I had never before realized what an important part salt plays in the villager's diet. We are used to eating countless varieties of meat and vegetables and tend to forget that the poor villager often has nothing but rice to satiate his appetite and that his only means of giving it a savour and helping it down is by adding a pinch of salt. As salt was in short supply there was widespread blackmarketing and I used myself to pursue suspects from one end of the subdivision to the other in my Scarlet Rocket.

There are, throughout Sylhet district, extensive expanses of water known locally as *bheels*. Information was received one day that a gang of smugglers had hoarded huge quantities of salt in boats which they kept moving about in a *bheel* to escape detection. Taking with me a Sub-Inspector, I timed my arrival at the *bheel* around about midnight and then proceeded to canoe silently, by moonlight, towards the large boats outlined against the horizon.

At two in the morning, we reached the boats and took the smugglers completely by surprise. I was accompanied by only the Sub-Inspector and my personal orderly, and I remember it occurred to me, as we carried out the arrests, that it would have been the simplest thing in the world for the culprits to push the three of us overboard and make a clean getaway. It was well past midnight and we were miles away from human habitation. Our bodies would no doubt have come to surface at some later date, but by that time it would be a matter of purely academic interest. Luckily, however, the public, even the criminal element, entertained in those days a salutary fear of the law, and the presence of my lone Sub-Inspector was the equivalent of a platoon of armed force today.

It was on my return from this salt-smuggling episode that I found, waiting for me on my bungalow veranda, one of our seniormost officers in a state of unutterable panic. I soothed him with one of Sir Andrew's 'medicinal doses', after which he proceeded with his tale. He had apparently been trying a criminal case in which one of our most nefarious goondas, a hot-blooded young Muslim popularly known as the Casanova of Maulvibazaar, was accused of abducting, in the picturesque parlance of the Maulvibazaar Courts, a 'pure virgin' of the highest Brahmin extraction. This was Maulvibazaar's *cause célèbre*. 'What a shocking affair', agreed all, and rushed to the Courts to hear the details.

During the evening of the second hearing of the case, the trying Magistrate found in his post an envelope addressed to him in red, as in letters of blood. His suspicions were aroused, as there was already strong communal feeling over the case, and he opened the envelope with care, making sure that the postmark was kept intact. Inside was a single sheet, conveying the simple, timely warning: 'Unless you forthwith acquit the accused, we shall enter your house by night, abduct your wife and rape

her, all of us, one after the other. You have been warned. *Signed* Your well-wishers.' After deploying an ample police-guard around the good lady, he had proceeded to my bungalow to await my arrival. He had his suspicions regarding the perpetrator of the deed, a clerk in the office, another notorious Casanova, and suggested checking the handwriting of the letter with the handwriting of the clerk in our office files. Though the letter was in block capitals to disguise the hand, we found certain subtle resemblances and decided to send both specimens to the Government hand-writing expert in Calcutta. The expert gave it as his definite opinion that the hand was identical, which disposed of the clerk. Protective measures, however, continued to be maintained to safeguard the good wife's virtue until passions were finally allayed and the accused convicted and sentenced to enjoy His Majesty's hospitality.

I have mentioned earlier that women had not come much into my life. I had been sought after rather than sought myself and the pattern repeated itself in novel shape in Maulvibazaar. I was trying an elopement case in Sylhet (before my transfer to Maulvibazaar), where the complainant, who was three-score years and ten if a day, protested that his young wife of sixteen had been secretly abducted by the accused, a young gallant of twenty. I, the Magistrate, was a young not-so-gallant of twenty-three, but it seems that, at an unguarded moment during the trial, I had inadvertently winked at the pretty young thing — perhaps a fly had got in my eye. Anyway, the evidence was strong and I felt I had no alternative but to sentence the accused to a year's incarceration and restore the girl to her rightful owner.

That, I thought, was the end of the matter and never for a moment did I imagine I would hear or see any more of the case or the parties concerned. What was my surprise and embarrassment when, six months later, the young lady in question made an appearance, in the solitude

and quiet of evening, at my official residence in Maulvibazaar. Bereft of her ardent young lover, who was husking rice within the impenetrable confines of Sylhet jail, she had tracked me down to Maulvibazaar in quest of fresh romance. It was a novel and awkward situation, as she was so obviously in search of something rather more stimulating than Sir Andrew's 'medicinal dose', and I felt so hopelessly incompetent. Others would have leapt at such an opportunity, as she was really a very sweet and demure young thing. Chivalry demanded that I too should oblige, and, in the circumstances, it was hard indeed to be anything but chivalrous.

A few months before my transfer from Maulvibazaar, we decided to collect funds for starting a College. There was plenty of loose money floating around, what with the extravagances of the American 'occupation', and we thought this was the best time to mop it up for a useful cause. So the last few months of my raj saw me darting by the Scarlet Rocket from one extreme of the subdivision to the other in my mission of extortion. The merchants soon began to run in terror at the merest approach of the Scarlet Rocket and her rattle, but we sought them here and we sought them there until we succeeded in gathering quite a goodly sum in culture's cause. Few things have touched me so much as when, fifteen years later, during my tenure as Dewan in remote and distant Sikkim, I received an invitation 'to honour with your presence the Inauguration of Maulvibazaar College', together with a neatly-mounted photograph of the new institution. It was a graceful gesture from old friends who, in spite of Indo-Pakistan tensions,[1] still remembered.

[1] With the subsequent Partition of India in 1947, Sylhet had been included in East Pakistan.

4

Introduction to the Frontier

NEXT change, 1945, Under-Secretary in the Home and Political Departments, Shillong. It felt good just to breathe again the cool fresh air of the hills. The Under-Secretary, in those days, was a Jack of all trades, having to deal also with the Judicial and General Administration Departments, printing of forms, stationery, and other such miscellanea. I worked directly under Sir Harold and could not have wished for a more considerate master. Sir Harold was indefatigable. He made it a point always to walk to office, escorted by three chaprasis in red and gold livery, each carrying on his back, like Santa Claus, a sack of the bulging bundles of files that Sir Harold had polished off the preceding night. Late in the evening, an identical procession, but in reverse — Sir Harold taking back his homework. Day in and day out, this unalterable routine, except for a week during the Puja holidays, when Sir Harold sneaked away from Shillong to fish.

Officers of today, of course, also work, but it is usually to 'get places'. I am quite sure Sir Harold had no further career ambitions. He had reached the highest position open to a civil servant in Assam and was content to stay put. But he gave of his best to the very end, and would never shirk a knotty file or pass the baby, whether the matter was of importance or not. He was, I suppose, a perfectionist and believed, with Aristotle, that a man was happiest when functioning to his fullest potentiality. To work under him was an inspiration and an education, and our relations were as between guru and disciple. If he pulled me up, it was with gentleness and affection and I never knew him raise his voice in irritation or anger.

Shillong, in those days, was May-time all the year. And the girls seemed prettier—rosebuds on every bush, all ready for plucking. It seems strange to think back to it now, but there was still a measure of social distinction then between European and Indian officers. The latter patronized their own separate club, while Europeans kept very much to themselves. My next-door neighbour was Mr Patton, the Finance Secretary. His bearer came to us one morning to ask if he could have some arum lilies from our garden. We wondered what he wanted them for until we learnt that Mrs Patton had died during the night and flowers were wanted for the funeral. The golden exception to such apartheid was Lady Dennehy, or Constance as she preferred in her unaffected way to be called even by us youngsters. For Constance there was no Indian or European circle. She was genuinely interested in and had a deep feeling for all things Indian and I used to pull her leg mercilessly over her pre-occupation with the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Upanishads* and other, for me at that time, equally unpronounceable mysteries. Sir Harold was also a great sport, but he kept himself so late in the office that he would arrive at a party only just in time for soup.

Of the politicians, Sir Mohammed Saadulla,[1] Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Baidyanath Mukherjee were social birds, who entertained and were entertained in turn. Sir Mohammed loved his rubber of bridge, but, as in public life, liked laying down the law, right or wrong, on the bridge-table as well. When things were going really badly, he had no hesitation to resort, as in politics, to desperate if devious courses. 'A peep is as good as two finesses,' he would say. Sir Mohammed was also an excellent cook and would himself preside at the kitchen when inviting particular friends. His special, individual technique was to cook his food in curds. This resulted, so he would tell us, in

[1] Prime Minister of Assam. Fakhruddin and Baidyanath were senior Cabinet Ministers in the successive Congress governments of Assam.

everything becoming predigested even before passing one's lips. It all sounded rather unpleasant, but we took his word for it. Miss Mavis Dunn, a charming Khasi lady, was another politician ever ready for a gamble at the card table. She was Minister for Health in Sir Mohammed's Cabinet, and widely loved and respected.

It seems odd, in retrospect, that we led so gay and carefree lives when the country was on the eve of the most terrible operation of partition. The reason was, I think, the immense sense of relief to the people of Assam that the war was at last over and the threat of Japanese invasion removed. We had, for years, been living under daily strain: the war had come closer to Assam than to any other part of India, and we were determined to make the best of what we feared might be only a passing respite. With the end of the war, it became possible for my mother, brother and sister to return to India and we had a joyful family reunion. My mother is a fanatic in her enthusiasm for bridge and quickly became an institution in the social life of Shillong. Picnics in the pine-forests, parties where the liquor flowed in the club, the Army Mess and in each other's houses, flirtations mild and not so mild — such was our life in that brief and carefree post-war spell.

The homes particularly dear to us were those of the Desai family and the family of the late Kanak Lal Barua. 'Daddy' Desai[1] was one of the most senior members of the service, but he was known better as the husband of 'Bai', the fairy godmother of all of us young officers. We knew we were always welcome to her home, and that there would be coffee and cake for us. An additional, not negligible, attraction were her beautiful, sprightly daughters, and we buzzed around her home like bees about a honeycomb. 'Ma' Barua was another institution, for she also stored honey. Her late husband, Kanak Lal Barua, had been one

[1] S. P. Desai, Member of the Revenue Tribunal and later Chief Secretary to the Assam Government.

of the two Executive Councillors in the days of diarchy and was also renowned for his classic *Early History of Kamarupa*. 'Ma' was a keen bridge enthusiast, for all her old-world ways, and was always game for a rubber, whether at home or in the Club — and she had a houseful of captivating daughters and grand-daughters. Yes, there is no doubt about it, the girls were prettier in those days!

My mother felt, very rightly, that it was time I found a wife, and so I took two months' leave and set off with her for the lush pastures of Bombay. My mother is a thorough person, who leaves no stone unturned, and girls seemed to be dropping into our home in Bombay as the gentle rain from heaven. I felt like a one-man Public Service Commission interviewing candidates. Nothing, of course, came of it all, as I was as stubborn as the horse that was led to water. But I came to gather, through the process, a pretty canny notion of the fair sex and its wondrously devious workings.

It was while I was in Bombay that I received telegraphic orders that my next posting would be at Dibrugarh as Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur District.[1] The faces of my family members, one and all, suddenly dropped. To have to leave the charms and mountain heights of Shillong for some place called Dibrugarh which nobody had even heard of! My stock on the marriage market depreciated proportionately. I myself was rather pleased. I did not feel at all ready for domestication and I did not think the girls I had met, with their sophistication and, for me, rather dull, conventional values, would easily fit in with my unorthodox pattern of thinking and quite, quite unpredictable pattern of living. Besides, I knew that Sir Harold had my own interests at heart in sending me out to a district, where alone I could gain, the hard way and the best way, first-hand experience of administration. Lakhimpur had been considered, in the days before labour unrest, a plum district. It comprised

[1] In Upper Assam, along her north-eastern borders.

some of the finest tea-gardens of Assam, the oil-fields and refinery at Digboi, coal-mines and an extensive plywood factory at Margherita, and a saw-mill at Murkongselek. The District had been, industrially and otherwise, more or less a European preserve, with European officers at the helm.

In those days, the mail rolled into Dibrugarh Railway station round about midnight and it was nearly two in the morning by the time my luggage was brought to the Circuit house and I could get into bed. I had planned to take over charge of the district after a couple of days, which would give me time to move into my official residence and get settled down. I am not normally an early riser, and was looking forward, after an exhausting railway journey, to a long and leisurely lie-in. Mr Gunning, currently Commissioner, had been a former District Magistrate of Lakhimpur. He had a bee about the maintenance of Circuit houses and had evidently determined to set up the Dibrugarh Circuit house as a shining example — even the thunder-boxes were made to measure. The linen was clean and crisp, the bed sprung *just so*; and I could have slept to eternity.

At six in the morning, I was woken by a shuffling of steps on the veranda outside. It might have been just another traveller moving in, but an administrator soon develops a sixth sense that tells him when there's trouble afoot. Mournfully, I drew myself out of bed, went to the door in my pyjamas and peeped out. I had heard of 'Blue-nose' Warren, but never before actually seen *it*. This was evidently *IT*, there could be no doubt about the matter. It stood out with a magnificence all of its own, aglow under the first rays of sunrise. Nobody quite knew when 'Blue-nose' first came out to India to plant tea, except that it was a very, very long time ago. His views on the fundamental rights of labour were, therefore, a trifle archaic. On the strength of his historical association with the growth of the tea-bush, he had been appointed by the Indian Tea

Association as a sort of Supreme Commander to watch over the interests of the industry in the Assam valley.

With octogenarian Blue-nose that early morning came J. R. Wilson, Secretary of the Assam Branch of the Tea Association, and L. F. Paget, Superintendent of Maijan tea-estate, both juveniles, well below their sixties. Maijan was evidently in the throes of trouble, and unless the labour leaders, all established goondas, were at once expelled from the garden and dispatched to some distant penal settlement, preferably the Andamans, the whole district, I was warned, would be aflame with the infection; it would spread to the rest of the province, to the rest of India — I must nip it in the bud, yes, this very moment, if catastrophe was to be averted. All this was rather much at six in the morning, when I had not yet taken over charge and was still only half awake. But I listened patiently, as my callers were clearly in a state of agitation, and promised to give the matter my immediate attention after I had had a shave and a bite of breakfast.

The officer holding charge of the district pending my arrival was the Additional District Magistrate, my friend Sirajul Islam, the dear old Maulvi of Maulvibazaar. I quickly took counsel with him and we decided on immediate action. First we summoned the Superintendent of Police, Edward Essex Hughes-Hughes, bastion of law and order. If Edward Essex had had his way, he would have sent the entire labour force of Maijan off packing, but we eventually compromised by recommending to the Chief Secretary that the four ring-leaders should be forthwith externed. As this was my first communication to Government as District Magistrate, I took particular care in its drafting and had it typed and retyped until it was as perfect as I could make it. I felt so proud of the result that I decided I should send a copy to the Commissioner as well. After dispatching the documents, I sat back and relaxed, feeling very pleased with myself. I rehearsed in anticipation the turns of phrase of the

reply to come: 'Government commend the promptness with which you have handled a situation pregnant with dangerous potentialities'; or preferably, 'We feel justified in our selection of an officer of your calibre to handle situations whose solution calls for tact, judgement and courage'.

I received from the Chief Secretary a nice, brief letter approving my recommendations, and I had hardly finished reading it when a Top Secret heavily-sealed envelope, addressed to me by name as from the Commissioner by name, caught my eye. I eagerly tore open the envelope, to find another envelope inside, equally heavily sealed and endorsed 'To be opened by the addressee only'. The letter was not quite what I had been expecting. How dare I address Government direct without first consulting the Commissioner? And that too within less than seven days of taking over charge of a district which the Commissioner had ruled for as many years. The Commissioner presumed I had acted from ignorance and want of experience, or he would have been constrained to convey to me his 'grave displeasure'. I shot off a wordy defence, argumentative and unrepentant, and back like a boomerang came another heavily sealed envelope. The Commissioner was now 'constrained to note with displeasure' the tone of my letter, and 'desired there should be no further correspondence on the subject'. I didn't provoke him further, as I was really quite fond of him, as I knew he was of me. It was a case of wounded vanity on both sides and neither of us gave it any further importance. Gunning had the reputation of being a very prim and proper officer. His ways however were too rigid for the new dispensation after India's independence and there would have been perpetual friction had he stayed on. I received a touching letter from him when he finally left Assam. His wife had been away in England during most of his thirty-five years in Assam and he was looking forward to a home at last to spend his

hard-earned retirement. But things don't always work out the way we plan. Absence can make the heart grow fonder, but it can also play unkind tricks. Gunning found he had not a home to return to, but only the empty shell of a house. He never recovered from the shock.

Lakhimpur District had been, during the war, an important base for operations in northern Burma. In their impatience to get home on conclusion of the war, the Americans had left behind valuable dumps of military stores, with no proper arrangements for their disposal. Some of this equipment was auctioned off at ridiculously low rates. But a considerable portion was left hidden in the forest or buried underground in the hope that it would remain unnoticed and, in course of time, become unserviceable. No sooner had the Americans turned their back than this hidden treasure was unearthed and quickly found its way to the black market. Fortunes were made in a day and the district became all of a sudden a smuggler's paradise. The smuggler did not take long to extend the field of his operations from military stores to articles essential to the life of the community such as sugar and cloth. The poor were horribly exploited and it was obvious that, unless drastic measures were taken, this exploitation would never end. I decided therefore to issue a warning notice that, in future, all cases of black-marketing would be punished with the utmost severity. The offenders would not be allowed to get away with a mere fine, they would be imprisoned, whatever their status, and their business licences summarily cancelled.

The merchants did not at first take the warning seriously. They were confident they could 'manipulate' the enforcement staff and so prevent cases from reaching the Courts. They did not expect that the District Magistrate would himself be inspecting their godowns and checking whether they contained controlled goods in excess of declared stocks. They did not expect that he would

summarily dispatch them to the lock-up when they were caught red-handed. I shall never forget the degrading spectacle of the greasy up-country merchant who, when I discovered his hidden hoards, literally threw himself at my feet and writhed miserably on his shop-floor, wailing and rubbing his parts in his uncontrollable despair. I carried out surprise checks in the more important bazaars in the interior also and the trading community soon saw that we meant business. There was a decided check on black-marketing and I could sense that the public were whole-heartedly behind me in my action.

My main problem, however, was in the field of labour relations. Communist and Socialist leaders were stirring up trouble in the tea-gardens, in the oil-fields, in the collieries, everywhere. 'Blue-nose', vigilant champion of the rights of tea-garden management, badgered me for deployment of armed police at the slightest provocation. My Superintendent of Police, Hughes-Hughes, was an excellent fellow, disciplined and conscientious, but *quite* eccentric. He was for ever strutting about like a fussy hen around her chicks, for which he was appropriately dubbed as 'Mother' by the force. Up by five in the morning, he would be cycling about the town in quest of crime. No half-measures for Mother. Everything must be 'nipped in the bud', and with a sledgehammer. If I counselled restraint, he would thump my table with his great fist and divest himself of all responsibility. I found the Additional Superintendent of Police, young Ataur Rahman, much more amenable to reason, and we got on famously together.

A tea-garden near Naharkatia in the interior of the district was experiencing so much trouble with its labour that the manager, a European old-timer, was soon on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Every morning, a procession of the entire labour force proceeded to the manager's bungalow, shouting '*Zulumwallah ko halal karo*', 'Slit the throat of the oppressor'. This was not a kindly salutation to begin

the day with, particularly when accompanied with the brandishing of knives and waving of blood-red flags, each neatly ornamented with skull and cross-bone. I decided to visit the garden myself, taking with me, for moral support, the dear Maulvi. We travelled to the garden by one of those little railway inspection trolleys, and as we were nearing the garden, I saw my Maulvi friend extract from his pocket a hard, flat object. With slow deliberation, but without saying a word, he proceeded to load it, took aim at a passing goat, and put it back in his pocket. He was a seasoned old officer and was taking no risks.

On arrival at the garden, we talked with the labour, but it soon became clear that they were being deliberately misled and that if order was to be restored, the ring-leaders must be quickly removed. Ataur Rahman managed, with combination of skill and guile, to arrest the ring-leaders and get them into the police-truck; but at this point, the workers of the world united and stood firm in front of the vehicle, barring further passage. We had a section of Armed Police standing by, but all they seemed capable of doing was getting themselves into a variety of complicated formations, square, oblong, circular and octagonal, a performance which ceased after a time even to amuse. The Maulvi, I observed, kept one hand fixed irremovably in his capacious pocket. It was one of those ridiculous situations where everybody was wondering who would make the next move. I am not a martinet by temperament, but I saw that this was the time to put on a bit of dog. What the hell did the Police think they were here for? Square-dancing? Hadn't they been trained to use the butts of their rifles? Then get on with it and no more nonsense. It worked. A few slashes at the legs of the obstructors, and they ran helter-skelter, letting the truck pass through. So all was well in the end—but the Maulvi was wise in coming forearmed.

Labour unrest is infectious, and no sooner had we returned to Dibrugarh than we received a message that the

manager of Doom Dooma tea estate, about sixty miles away, had been brutally murdered in the garden factory. Ataur and I dashed off at once to Doom Dooma in my station-wagon, to find, on arrival, that the garden was completely deserted. There was a deathly stillness as we made our way towards the factory. It was empty, as we had expected, but as we walked to the further end, we found, stretched out below one of the machines, the remains of what had obviously been a tall, finely built man, with deep, ugly gashes from head to foot. We learnt later that the manager had had a quarrel with some of his labourers, and that, in the ensuing excitement, they suddenly rushed to attack him. He tried to get away, dodging behind the crates and machines, but they were too many for him and he was at last trapped and hacked to death with the knives used for pruning tea-bushes. Apart from the labourers, there were no witnesses and it would have been impossible to bring the culprits to book had they not of their own volition surrendered themselves after the incident at the local police-station. They had acted, like children, in the heat of the moment, and were stunned and contrite as soon as they realized the enormity of their crime. As a confession before the police carries little weight in a court of law, we moved them off to Dibrugarh by truck to have their confessions recorded the very same evening by a magistrate before they could be got at by lawyers to concoct a tale and deny complicity.

I was frequently called upon to visit Digboi and Margherita to assist in settling disputes between the management and labour employed in the oil-fields, collieries and plywood industries. I was startled to receive a telephone message one morning from the general manager of the Margherita collieries to say that his entire labour force had struck work and boarded the train to Dibrugarh to ventilate their grievances *en masse* before the District Magistrate. He warned me to be prepared for a deputation of some

thousands of labourers and to think up ways and means of pacifying them. My bungalow was next door to the Court, with a meadow the size of a football field in between. Here they congregated from the railway station, and proceeded to hold a mammoth meeting, breathing fire and thunder. They had been shrewd and resourceful enough to arrange amplifiers and loud-speakers so that the District Magistrate should not miss a syllable of their fiery oratory. All this was shortly after the Doom Dooma tragedy, and I felt increasingly uncomfortable as the meeting continued into the night, the tempo of excitement rising from hour to hour. When, however, the labourers met me next morning, I was sweet reason itself and they returned to Margherita by the next train, convinced that the world was not such a bad place after all. It was a simple case of catharsis. They had been purged of their ill humours by the hustle and bustle of the journey and the dramatics of the public meeting, and were returning home cleansed and light of heart. Things might have turned out very differently if we had tried to ban or break up the meeting. But I remembered Aristotle!

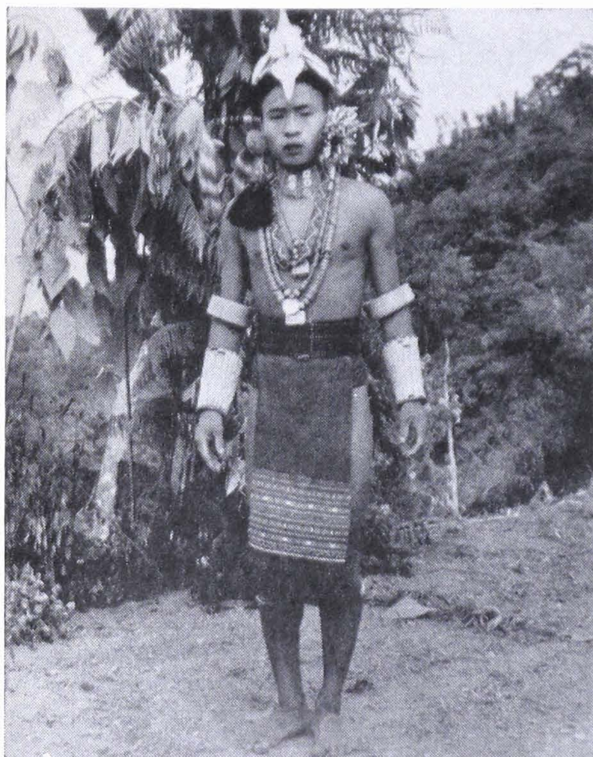
Apart from labour, the student community was also beginning to show its fangs. It was my practice, after the day's work was done, to take a stroll around the town or along the riverside, dropping in at a friend's or not as the spirit moved. I had spent a happy hour one evening with my talented young friend, Tarun Duara, admiring and discussing his paintings, and was walking home, without a care in the world, when a police-truck swooped down on me, out leapt Ataur and bundled me in before I could ask questions. There had been, apparently, one of those sumptuous Marwari marriage celebrations, with crackers and bangs to ward off the evil eye. A live cartridge had, in the general confusion, got mixed up with the blanks, with the result that a student was shot and seriously injured. The students were up in arms and demanding retribution on the spot, failing which they threatened to

attack and burn down the property of the entire Marwari community. It was at this stage that the police, apprehending serious trouble, felt the need to fortify themselves with the presence of the District Magistrate in case there should be need to resort to firing. Not finding me in my bungalow, they rushed about the streets to catch me at my evening perambulation — while I, blissfully ignorant and unconcerned, was happily chatting about colours, curves and perspective with the charming Tarun. When they finally succeeded in retrieving me and rushing me to the spot, we found a state of complete pandemonium. The police were repeating their square-dance performance of Naharkatia and the students were athirst for blood.

Ataur and I decided without much hesitation on a *lathi* charge. The constables were promptly lined up, with Ataur at the head and myself at his side. He gave the word of command and leapt to the charge, swinging his *lathi* with fierce gusto. It was lucky I had been a gymnast in younger days, and could dodge nimbly, or else I should undoubtedly have been the first victim of the impetuous Ataur. However, the mob was dispersed, and that, we hoped, was the end of that. But not a bit of it. The telegrams flew to Shillong about 'innocent students being butchered' and 'the collapse of the administration'. The students thought fit to take a holiday next day, which they spent parading the streets, to finish up with a mass demonstration before my bungalow. In the midst of all the hullabaloo, I was further vexed by a telegram from Government inquiring what I was doing to stop the butchery. My temper was up. I wired back, curtly, that I was the District Magistrate and was acting as I considered best in my judgement. When all the ferment was over, I received a kindly letter from the Chief Secretary, almost an apology, explaining that, as Ministers were responsible to the Legislature, they had necessarily to call for reports from the District Magistrate and would I *please* in future oblige.

Idu Mishmi, Lohit

Aka Rani, Kameng



Wanchoo Naga, Tirap

With Pailibos in Siang

Tribal People of NEFA

With Lushai Chiefs' Council, Superintendent and Mrs Peters, Aijal

Angami Naga dance

But all was not trouble and tribulation. Much of the labour and student unrest was, I think, a sort of anticipation of the 'freedom' that everybody was fondly looking forward to with the exit of the British. Once the fetters were shaken off, everything would be right again with the world. Away with the old values, the rubble of the past, for from August 15th, 1947, a bright new era would dawn. And so we made our preparations for the great event. The ceremonial, flag-hoisting, march-past — all this was routine and presented no problem. My main anxiety was over dress. I had never before worn anything but suit and tie, and felt I was parading at a fancy-dress party as, buttoned to the neck in a hastily improvised *achkan*, I strode to the saluting-base to usher in India's Independence. My head-gear, in particular, had been a matter of heated controversy. I was very proud of my splendid, white ceremonial topee, but there was a school of thought that opined I should discard this colonial vestige and don the humbler cap of *khadi*. Shillong was lamentably silent on the sartorial front and left us to make our own decisions. It was all wrong, I am sure, but I stuck to my topee and I still think it made the occasion.

I took great pains to learn Assamese, as I was anxious to be able to speak with the people of the villages directly instead of through an interpreter. My teacher, Pandit Misra, was no less enthusiastic than myself. Religiously he would come to my bungalow every morning and stir me to higher endeavour. I soon felt sufficient confidence in myself to make my maiden speech in Assamese on the next public occasion. This happened to be the inauguration of the Dibrugarh Medical College by Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi, the Chief Minister, an occasion of importance to which the leading lights of Assam had all been invited. My teacher helped me with my speech, but allowed himself to be rather carried away by his enthusiasm. It was a speech heavy in its grandiloquent rhetoric, and it was no small effort for me to get it off by heart. In the secret hours of

the night, when there was no one to see or hear, I would roll the lofty phrases off my tongue, relishing each syllable, until at last I had the thing word perfect. The Chief Minister spoke with his customary dignity, to be followed by the Minister of Health, who read from an English text prepared by the Education Secretary, S. L. Mehta, who also attended the inauguration. S. L. Mehta, a very senior member of the Service, was *Dada*[1] to his friends. He and his wife, *Bhabi*, were friendly and kind to us youngsters, and there was always a warm welcome for us at their home. Bhabi was an Amazon for energy and enterprise. She had had only nominal schooling when she first married and came to Assam, but it was not long before she was studying privately to sit for the Matriculation examination and a University degree. In later years, she became interested in politics and stood for election to the State Assembly.

Dada had prepared for his Minister a speech bristling with statistics. Everything seemed to be on the up — the birth-rate, the death-rate, disease, doctors — and we in the audience were all dizzily soaring aloft with the speaker until, at page thirteen of his text, in the middle of a sentence, he came to a sudden halt. He counted through the sheets he had already delivered, checked the balance, but no, page fourteen was definitely missing. He searched through his pockets, looked under the table, but to no avail. Dada, summoned to the platform, also searched through his pockets and looked under the table, but the elusive page fourteen was nowhere to be traced. After this, no one seemed much interested in page fifteen and the Minister wisely closed by saying that he was very happy to be present at such an auspicious ceremony and that the memory of the occasion would for ever remain indelibly imprinted upon the tablets of his heart. It was now my turn to speak and this was my splendid hour. 'Mananiya Sabhapati',[2] my

[1] 'Elder brother'. *Bhabi* — 'brother's wife'.
[2] Honourable Chairman.

voice rang out in chastest Assamese. There was a roar of applause, and I continued fearless to the end of my piece, to the accompaniment of cheers and clapping at each successive sonorous phrase.

Sir Akbar Hydari was now Governor of Assam and paid his first official visit to Dibrugarh, together with Lady Hydari and their two charming daughters. He was friendly and informal, and suggested that I might take the ladies for outings during engagements at which my presence with the Governor was not essentially necessary. This suited me perfectly, and a good time was had by all as we merrily canoed about the Brahmaputra, free from gubernatorial restraint. Lady Hydari was interested in cottage industries and so we took her to a weaving-centre where she suggested she might address the ladies and put before them her ideas on the value of home crafts. We found a bright young lad to interpret for her and the audience applauded enthusiastically as each sentence was interpreted to them. Lady Hydari, who was Swedish by birth, was very pleased at the time, but not quite so pleased when I told her later, half in jest, that the interpreter had not understood a word of what she had been saying, what with her pronounced Swedish accent and airy-fairy ideas, and had resourcefully decided that the only way out was to make up a speech of his own. As Lady Hydari knew no Assamese and the audience knew no English, no one, except myself, was any the wiser.

Sir Akbar unexpectedly dropped in at my bungalow one evening to put through a trunk call to the Chief Minister in Shillong. He then told me that he was worried over the situation in the Naga hills. Sir Charles Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner, who enjoyed the confidence of the Nagas, was shortly to retire, and Sir Akbar wanted to know how I would feel about being appointed as his successor. The way he put it, I was given to understand it was a compliment to be offered the assignment. I replied without a second thought — and I meant it — that I would most

readily serve wherever Government might consider fit to place me. In retrospect, I think the telephone call to the Chief Minister was a blind and that Sir Akbar's purpose in dropping in that evening was to have a better opportunity of sizing me up. It was not long before I was to learn the result of his assessment.

It was during my posting at Dibrugarh that I was first brought into touch with the problem of the tribes. I had been attracted and impressed, at Sylhet, by the fine physique and clean, clear-cut features of the Lushais[1] in the Armed Police. One of my drivers had also been a Lushai, and his carefree whimsical ways were an eternal source of merriment. But even in Shillong, apart from Mavis Dunn, I had few tribal friends. Lolit Hazarika was at that time Secretary of the Dibrugarh District Congress, the ruling political party. He was a friendly young plains Assamese, and we came quite to like each other. It was he who first introduced me to the 'Abors' on the northern boundary of my district. The term 'Abor' is most probably derived from the Assamese word meaning 'untamed' or 'unsubdued'. It gradually took on the connotation of 'savage' or 'barbarous' and has since been replaced by the term 'Adi', signifying 'hill' or 'son of the hills'. The Adis, according to Lolit, had been grossly neglected by the British. They were being denied education and deliberately segregated so that they should not be infected by the freedom movement but remain, in perpetuity, a British preserve. The administration of the tribal areas was a special responsibility of the Governor, who acted, not on the advice of the popularly elected Ministry, but, in constitutional parlance, 'in his discretion'. It was impossible, therefore, for anybody from outside to do much to help the tribal people. It was illegal for outsiders to enter the tribal areas without an 'Inner-Line permit', and such permits were issued only to persons connected with the bureaucratic Political Department.

[1] Nowadays more generally known as 'Mizos' — see Chapter 6 (p. 94).

There were, however, some Adi settlements along the border of Lakhimpur district and the least that could be done by us was to give assistance, advice and guidance to such elements of the tribal population as were accessible. A school had already been opened for them through private effort, and we should now proceed to organize medical and other social services also in the area.

We should have to move cautiously, warned Lolit, as the officers of the Political Department were a highly suspicious lot and were quite capable of removing the tribal settlements from the border areas altogether rather than risk having them infected by progressive ideas. Lolit pressed that I should visit the area and see things for myself. I was at that exciting, impressionable age when one leaps at the merest mention of a good cause, and instantly agreed. I left it to Lolit to make the arrangements, as I thought it best to keep the visit as informal as possible. It would hardly have been correct for me, in my capacity as District Magistrate, to conspire openly against a colleague in service, the Political Officer of the Abor hills! Lolit hired a rather leaky old boat for our journey up the Brahmaputra. We soon found ourselves wading in the boat and quickly set to baling out the unwanted flood. But we reached our destination at last and were given a truly joyful welcome. This was my first taste of rice-beer, cool and refreshing, of which I have downed every conceivable variety in the twenty odd years since. But what was more important, it was my first experience of meeting and coming into contact with tribal people in their natural environment. And this I found more intoxicating by far than even their beer.

I like all people, but the people of the hills have had for me a special pull. Throughout my life, my centre of gravity has, unknowingly, shifted their way. Of my colleagues in Dehra Dun, I was drawn most closely to the cousins from Sikkim and Bhutan. And now here again, in the remote wilderness along the banks of the Brahmaputra,

I felt utterly and completely at home with my Adi hosts. I have often wondered why this should be so and the answer perhaps is that I am, at heart, very much of a tribal myself and my own personal problem is the problem of every tribal at this crucial time of change. Removed from my roots in the Punjab at the tender age of seven, reared during my formative years in an alien soil, returning, at the threshold of manhood, to yet another amalgam of cultures — I share much of the bewilderment and loss of identity of the tribal of today. We do not belong or feel our roots in the great cultures, Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist, that are the heart and life-blood of the land, and we draw together for strength and security in our shared isolation. These, I believe, are some of the subconscious processes that have operated in attracting me to the tribal people. We feel, in our loss of moorings, a mutual desolation and reach out to each other as to a common anchor.

My first visit to NEFA was soon after Gandhiji's death when we carried his ashes for immersion in the sacred waters of Parasuram Kund[1] in the Sadiya Frontier Tract[2]. Omeo Kumar Das, then Minister for tribal affairs, had brought our share of the ashes to Dibrugarh from Shillong and we set off for the hills at six on a cold January morning in a long, ceremonial procession of cars, trucks and jeeps. The Superintendent of Police and I travelled in the first car, piloting the entire cavalcade, while the Minister followed, with the ashes, to our immediate rear. By eight o'clock, the Superintendent and I were both feeling the need for a brief 'halt of convenience', but it seemed indecorous to mar the solemnity of the occasion over such earthly trivia and we braced ourselves to hold out until ten, when we would have, in any case,

[1]A much-frequented place of pilgrimage in the lower reaches of the Lohit river, where Parasurama of ancient legend was reputed to have opened a passage through the hills with a single blow of his axe.

[2]Since redesignated as the Lohit Frontier Division.

to halt for the ferry-crossing over the Brahmaputra. By nine, I felt sure I was going to burst, and there was no alternative but to stop the car, decorum or no decorum. No sooner had we stopped than there was a mad stampede from every jeep, truck and car to the roadside hedge. The Charge of the Light Brigade was nothing to it. Before I could as much as step out of my station-wagon, every man, woman and child, starting from the Minister, had rushed for cover and was sheltering behind a bush in blissful ease.

When we reached our camp at the Kund, it was night and bitterly cold. The Political Officer of Sadiya, who was in charge of commissariat, managed to keep himself warm by liberal doses of his favourite beverage, which was not, in this case, the Mahatma's goat-milk, leaving it to his guests to keep alive by will-power. There was almost a catastrophe on the return journey next morning, when arrangements for controlling the crowd at the river-crossing completely failed. This was not strictly my jurisdiction, but I felt I must assert myself in the interests of public safety and did so. The Political Officer was a good man, but his thirst was his undoing and he was shortly afterwards transferred to a district in the plains.

Lakhimpur district was one of the last strongholds of a fast-vanishing way of life and my tenure as District Magistrate was as a dividing-line between old and new. The Brahmaputra had, for years, been eroding into Dibrugarh town and was threatening now the Station Club, once the nerve-centre and pivot of the European community. Soon this too was engulfed in its relentless course, as though to symbolize the passing of an era.

My exit from Dibrugarh was, to say the least of it, dramatic. My bearer brought in to me one morning, with my bedside tea, a Most Immediate Top Priority telegram. It was from the Governor, to tell me that he had selected me for appointment as his Adviser and that I should join my new post as early as possible, and in any case within

seven days at the latest. The post of Adviser is equivalent in status to that of Chief Secretary and is normally held only by very senior officers in the final years of their service. The post was of particular importance at this juncture, as the Adviser's jurisdiction was to cover not only the tribal areas (NEFA) as in the past, but also the Excluded Areas (the Naga, Lushai and Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts as they were then called), Manipur, the Khasi States, Tripura and Cooch Behar. Within a couple of days, I received a detailed letter from the Governor, explaining that, with the retirement of European officers with experience of tribal areas, he had with difficulty persuaded the Chief Minister to release me from Dibrugarh for higher responsibilities. He anticipated that my transfer might be construed in certain quarters as motivated by pressure from powerful vested interests, but he assured me this was not the case. I at the same time received a personal letter from the Chief Minister congratulating me on my efforts to root out corruption in my district.

The public and the Press were at once up in arms. It happened that I had, some few weeks previously, arrested on a charge of black-marketing one of the wealthiest and most influential members of the business community in Assam, also an ex-Member of the Assam Legislative Council. I refused him bail and sent him to the lock-up exactly as any other under-trial prisoner. I had already issued warnings without number that no mercy would be shown to persons involved in deliberate black-marketing and I could see no reason for making an exception in this case. The reaction of the public was electric. It seemed unbelievable that a millionaire could be jailed. His secretary, yes, his shop-keeper, his accountant or his cook, but surely not the monarch himself! But so it was, and there was a widespread feeling of excitement and relief that, where the law was concerned, there was to be no discrimination between rich and poor. All this was suddenly reversed with

the news of my transfer. The vested interests, protested the public and the Press, had got me out.

The Governor and the Chief Minister's efforts to mollify made matters only worse, for the more they explained, the longer the controversy dragged on. Mr Bardoloi was a good and saintly man, and I never for a moment suspected that there could be any ulterior motive behind my transfer. I hope I was right, but I have seen more of politics and politicians since, and sometimes wonder!

On paper, I had no qualification to justify my selection to a post for which, in the past, specialized knowledge and long experience of work in the tribal areas were considered a *sine qua non*. But what I did have was inexhaustible enthusiasm, supreme self-confidence, and a spontaneous liking for tribal people. I had not seen very much of them, but wherever I had, whether in Sadiya or along the borders of the Abor hills district with my friend Lolit Hazarika, I had always felt a sense of exhilaration, of heightened experience. Shortly before my new appointment, the Governor and Chief Minister had decided to hold a Hills and Plains Festival in Shillong. The plains Assamese had for some time been agitating for a common administration of the two areas. They blamed the British for dividing up Assam and excluding the hill areas from the jurisdiction of the elected ministry. The hill people, on the other hand, were growing increasingly apprehensive of this sudden demonstration of benevolent interest on the part of the plains people, and with this apprehension went also suspicion. Sir Akbar Hydari was a diplomat *par excellence*. With his unassuming but magnetic personality, he could win hearts easily. He was on the happiest of terms with Mr Bardoloi and his Cabinet, and they allowed him a free hand in the administration of the hill areas, on the understanding that he would work for their closer integration with the plains districts. The Hills and Plains Festival was a move in this direction. The idea was that representatives

from all the districts, hills and plains, should meet in Shillong and have an opportunity of getting to know and understand each other. There would be a grand spiritual synthesis, a meeting together of artists, poets and public men from every corner of Assam, with the song and dance of the hills mingling with the song and dance of the plains, so that a feeling of pride might be generated in the rich and variegated cultural heritage of Assam's hills and plains.

As District Magistrate of Lakhimpur, I took with me to Shillong a party of Phakials, a Buddhist community that had migrated to Assam from Upper Burma some two hundred years back and a small group of which had settled in my District. There were the usual complications of transport and accommodation, and, in the end, about twelve of us had to squeeze into my station-wagon, everybody sitting on each other's lap. At Nowgong, half-way to Shillong, the vehicle very understandably broke down and we managed, with difficulty, to secure a small single room in the Circuit house to spend the night. We drew lots for sleeping on the solitary bed, the rest of us sprawling out on the floor. I suppose it was against all the rules for the District Magistrate to rub shoulders with the populace in this fashion, but that's how it was. The Phakials weave a particularly beautiful scroll on Assamese raw silk—delicate embroidery depicting pagodas, elephants, peacocks and other religious symbols. I wanted to buy a piece, it was in such exquisite taste, but as they are used in connexion with ritual ceremonies they were not for sale and I was disappointed. Some weeks later, I was invited to Namphakial, a Phakial settlement in my district, and spent the day visiting its institutions and mingling with the people. This small Buddhist pocket had, through the centuries, succeeded in maintaining its identity. The central institution was the monastery-cum-school, where boys from the age of five or six were given religious instruction in their ancestral scriptures. Several of the boys were shaven and wore saffron robes as a symbol

of their initiation as monks. The Phakials still speak their original mother-tongue, and there is a section among them who are keenly interested in developing their ancient script, which has affinities with Thai. One of their most serious problems is their low birth-rate and infant mortality. It would seem that protracted inbreeding has weakened the original stock and there is need for an infusion of fresh blood in the community.

As I left their village after a delightful day in another world, they presented me with a little parcel wrapped up in newspaper. The religious scroll which had captivated my heart could not be bought for money, but they were happy to give it to me for love. I could not have had a better object-lesson as I started off on my work among the tribal people.

5
The Naga Hills

OMINOUSLY, on April Fool's day, 1948, I took over charge of the office of Adviser to the Governor. I held this office for ten years, serving in all eight Governors — two politicians, two Civil servants, one General and three Chief Justices. The most colourful and brilliant was undoubtedly Sir Akbar Hydari. Sir Akbar visibly enjoyed every moment of governing, and we, who worked closely with him, were infected by his enjoyment. Sir Akbar invited me to stay at Government House until I could find a place of my own, which gave us fuller opportunity of getting to know each other at the personal level. Sir Akbar warned me, at the outset, that he was allergic to office files, and that if I *had* to put up a file to him, the most I should expect from him by way of response would be the monosyllable 'Yes' or 'No', or, if he was in spacious mood, 'Approved' or 'Please discuss'. I was to call on him first thing every morning, when we would plan the day's work, and it was open to me to drop in again at night for a chat, official or otherwise, over a glass of sherry. It was a happy arrangement and worked splendidly. Government House became soon a second home, where I was accepted as a family member.

With all his friendly informality, Sir Akbar rigorously upheld the dignity of his office. He was fond of pageantry and took a special pride in the Assam Rifles, a semi-military force under the Governor's control for the security of the frontier. If, as once happened, his friendliness was taken advantage of, he did not hesitate to get the record straightened. He had been invited to an evening function in the Army mess and found, on arrival, that there was no senior officer to receive Lady Hydari and himself at

the entrance. He instructed his driver to turn back to Government House and declined to return. When I met him next morning, he was not his usual, cheerful self. He had not intended to give offence, he explained, but his hosts had shown disrespect to the office of Governor and *that* he could not let pass. Sir Akbar also considered it vital that the Army should know its place and not get inflated ideas about its position *vis-à-vis* the civil authorities.

My first few months were work, work, work round the clock. The problems affecting the tribal areas and States (Manipur, Tripura, Cooch Behar and the Khasi States) were new to me and I stayed up late every night studying the old files and familiarizing myself with the historical background of the frontier areas. The more I read and came to know of the tribal people, the more fascinated I became with my subject and thanked my stars that I was placed in a job that gave so much joy and satisfaction.

A few months before my taking over charge, Sir Akbar had concluded the controversial Nine-Point Agreement with the Naga leaders. According to the last Article of the agreement, it was open to the Nagas, after expiry of the ten-year period of the agreement, to ask either for its extension or for a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people. There was a section of Nagas, with Phizo as their spokesman, who wanted to interpret this as implying that they might, if they chose, opt out of India altogether after ten years. Sir Akbar's intention was clearly to win some breathing-time within which a final settlement might be reached, but within the Indian Union. Had he lived, this might more speedily have been achieved, as Sir Akbar had a way with people and could bring them round where others failed. However, he agreed that I should visit the Naga hills and make my own assessment of how things were shaping.

T. Haralu, or Yao as we called him, was a young Naga officer recently appointed to a post in the Community

Development Department by the Assam Government. He accompanied me throughout my trip, which enabled me to gain an insight into how the mind of the younger generation of Nagas was moving — quite apart from the fact that he was delightful company. We could talk to each other freely, and by the time we reached Kohima, I felt well briefed and had a fair idea of what to expect. From the reception I received on my entry into Kohima, it would have been difficult to believe there was any problem at all. The streets were lined with representatives from the numerous sub-tribes, with their offering of eggs, chickens, spears and shawls. As we walked through the crowded lines, we were escorted by different groups of dancers in turn, each in their own distinctive dress, with their distinctive war-cries and dance-movements. We paused from time to time to hear the leaders of the groups, who harangued at length, sometimes in Assamese, sometimes in their own tribal language. Most of them expressed their loyalty to the Government, but there were some who warned that the Nagas were a people with a culture of their own and should be left to manage their own affairs. They spoke with vigour, gesticulating when they wished to stress a point, and time for them was a matter of no consequence. It was late, therefore, when we eventually arrived at the residence of the Deputy Commissioner where I was to stay.

The Deputy Commissioner was Imdad Ali, an officer of the Indian Police, who had had some previous experience of service in the tribal areas during his posting as Political Officer of the Balipara Frontier Tract[1] in NEFA. Imdad was a first-class officer, but I am not sure that he ever felt quite at home in the tense and unpredictable atmosphere of the Naga hills. I have heard him speak with affection and feeling of the gentle Monpas and Sherdukpens of Balipara, but he rarely reminisced about Kohima and the Naga hills. He told me of a Naga

[1] Later designated as the Kameng Frontier Division.

who made a point of brandishing a dagger at him every morning in his office and Imdad evidently apprehended that he would put it to more constructive use at night, as our house was surrounded after sunset by sentries sporting fixed bayonets, who shouted 'Who goes there?' if as much as a chicken crossed the road. My first few days in Kohima I spent meeting people, visiting institutions and carrying out brief tours in the surrounding area — to Viswema and Kigwema, where I met my friends Visar and John Angami and saw Nagaland's first micro-hydel project supplying electricity to the villages, and to the proud village of Khonoma, where I was significantly shown the spot where a British force under Mr Damant, the first Deputy Commissioner of the Naga hills, had been assassinated in 1879.

From Kohima, I passed on, with Yao, to Wokha, a small administrative centre set among the Lhotas. It was here that I met, for the first time, Kevichusa, an Angami officer posted as Subdivisional Officer, Mokokchung, within whose jurisdiction Wokha then lay. The jeep-track from Kohima had disintegrated in several places, with the result that we were delayed and it was almost dark when we arrived. But it was not too dark to make out the vast circle of tribal representatives, with their offerings of eggs and chickens, who had come with Kevichusa to welcome me. By the time the introductions were over, it was late and completely dark, but our day was by no means over. A group of Lhotas had gathered together to sing for us, and I do not think I have ever been so enchanted by music. The song of the Nagas and Lushais has been influenced, through hymns and psalms taught by Christian missionaries, by western melodies and rhythms, and the blend, that moonlit evening, was of ineffable beauty. In a split second, the aches and dust of the journey were forgotten and we were transported to a world of loveliness and soft dreams. But we were quickly brought to earth again by the arrival of a group of bustling young leaders, avid to discuss

the eternal Naga problem. The Lhotas happily continued their singing, a tantalizing, heavenly background to our arguings into the night.

From Wokha we proceeded to Mokokchung, centre of the Aos, one of the most populous and advanced of the many Naga sub-tribes. I stayed at the dak bungalow, but was for all practical purposes the guest of the Kevichusa household. The afternoon we arrived, Mrs Kevichusa had spread out for us an enormous high tea — sandwiches, scones, fruit-cake, salad, pudding, all prepared by herself. Mrs Kevichusa is a Lushai, buxom and ever-smiling, a complete contrast to her quiet, reserved husband. As far back as I can remember, she was bringing forth children for her husband, every one a winner, with unfailing regularity. Both the Kevichusas are fond of music and one of their sons, Khrielie, is a violinist of exceptional talent. Kevichusa himself also played the violin and we spent many a happy evening at his home, playing and singing together. To be noted too, his lovely teenage daughters, Lhusileu and Nitomeu, the former of whom had already captured Yao's heart and is now his wife. I, alas, was a laggard in affairs of the heart!

I received from Kevichusa much of my schooling in tribal problems. An Angami himself, he had succeeded, through his sincerity and unremitting hard work, in winning the confidence of all the sub-tribes — Ao, Sema, Sangtam and Chang to mention but a few — of his subdivision. He was an earnest, practising Christian, and a man of principle. As long as I have known him, he has never deviated from his principles for reasons of self-interest. He could, had he chosen, have achieved high office in Nagaland but preferred to remain in the background, making himself available for advice when called upon. With him I visited the important villages in the interior, meeting Nagas in every walk of life. I remember in particular my visit to Ungma, where man, woman and child joined hands in an immense circle to

participate in the ceremonial dance. It was at Ungma that the former Governor, Sir Andrew Clow, had addressed a meeting of Nagas some years previously, counselling restraint and co-operation with the new Government after the departure of the British. And I remember my visit to the proud Ao village of Changki, with its shining record of matriculate and graduate Nagas.

In Mokokchung town, our favourite resort was the home of Imlang Chang. Imlang had, since his youth, been assisting officers of the Naga hills in settling disputes and organizing expeditions to punish villages which had indulged in head-hunting. The walls of his home were cluttered with photographs of relations and high dignitaries. But the photograph he most treasured, and showed only to intimate friends, was the photograph of himself standing with pride beside a pyramid of freshly cut human heads. It should be explained here that the taking of a human head was not held, among the older generation of Nagas, to be an act of savagery. The vital life-force of the community was supposed by the Nagas to reside in the human skull. When, therefore, the crops failed or their wives were slow in conceiving, they assumed that the vital life-force of the village was ebbing and needed replenishment.

It was at this juncture that the village elders would take counsel and decide on the scale and manner of replenishment. If the crop failures and other misfortunes were considered grave enough, there would be no alternative but to carry out a surprise raid on a neighbouring village and capture as many heads as possible, for preservation as their 'life-force reserve'. If the misfortunes had been only sporadic, a mere handful of heads would suffice to restore the equilibrium. The taking of heads, therefore, was an act of patriotism and honoured as such. A village's store of skulls was its most treasured possession, and, in times of war, every device was employed that it should not fall into enemy hands. I have seen the skulls placed on a platform

at the rear of a house overhanging a precipice, so that, in the last resort, the skulls might be rolled over the precipice, in the hope of being recovered later, rather than fall to the enemy. In Imlang's house, the old and new co-existed with delightful charm, mementoes of his head-hunting triumphs suspended side by side with the cross of Jesus, pictures of the British royal family and coloured reproductions of the Madonna and Child. And for twenty years I have been receiving from this head-hunter of more heroic days a message of love and greetings on the festival of Christ's birth.

It was at Mokokchung that I received a distress message by wireless from our Assistant Deputy Commissioner at Tuensang, thirty miles to our east, that a group of villages were plotting to attack and destroy Tuensang village as punishment for co-operating with Government. Until recent years, head-hunting was being practised extensively in the remoter regions along the Indo-Burma border, mainly because there was so little check from Government. It was partly to put a brake on head-hunting that it had been decided to establish an administrative centre at Tuensang, and the more turbulent and powerful villages resented what they regarded as an intrusion on their preserve. Our Assistant Deputy Commissioner at Tuensang was Zopianga, a young Naga officer, and, after all I had read during my research into old files about calamities that had befallen British officers like Butler and Damant when the administration was first extended to the Naga hills, I already feared the worst.

We made hasty preparations to send out reinforcements, but the difficulty was in finding porters to carry supplies for the troops. This in fact was one of the major problems facing the administration in those days. It was comparatively easy opening a new outpost or administrative centre, but quite a different matter maintaining it, particularly during the monsoon months when the

hill tracks became all but impassable. Roads were non-existent and every article had to be carried on the backs of porters. It was not practical to engage porters from outside, as such porters would have to carry supplies for their own maintenance and the amount they could carry, over and above their personal requirements, would be negligible. The only resort, therefore, was to engage local tribal porters. At certain seasons, however, such as harvest and sowing, the tribal was too busy with his own cultivation to be available for portering supplies. Unless he was compelled, there were no means of sending supplies to the outposts, which had often to be abandoned. Rather than abandon outposts, labour was sometimes impressed; but such forced labour was deeply resented (and rightly so) by the tribal people and had been the root cause of a number of tribal rebellions in pre-independence days. If the tribal people were impressed as porters and prevented from cultivating their fields, they suffered loss in their crops and were deprived of the wherewithal to feed their own families. We were determined, therefore, to abolish the practice of forced labour, and decided eventually that, until roads could be constructed to carry in supplies by truck, supplies to inaccessible areas should be dropped by air. In 1948, however, air-dropping of supplies was not yet in operation, and we had to do our best to cajole porters to volunteer their services. There was indeed a certain category of Nagas who welcomed the opportunity of accompanying an expedition. There were possibilities of picking up loot, perhaps even a head. But the majority had to be persuaded, if not pressurized, before Zopianga got his reinforcements. It was with relief that we received Zopianga's next message reassuring us that the threat to Tuensang was past.

We hear a great deal about Community Development and the complex organization set up by Government to secure the people's participation in Governmental projects. Kevichusa

told me one morning about a road he was building on a 'self-help' basis and asked whether I should like to have a look at it. We were both of us keen on road development, as, with a network of roads, the other services — medical, educational, postal and the rest — could follow more quickly. Kevichusa had persuaded a group of villages to agree to build, by voluntary labour, a forty-mile stretch of road which would be for their mutual benefit. The village elders allocated among themselves the portion of the road for which they would be responsible and set target-dates for the completion of each sector. As we approached the area, there was such a ferment of activity that we could hardly hear ourselves speak. 'Ho! Ho!', the rhythmic chant that is heard wherever Nagas dance or work together on a strenuous task, echoed all along the hill-side as we moved from sector to sector. It was a hot day and the Nagas were dripping with sweat as they hacked away at the unyielding rock, each trying to outdo his neighbour in vigour and speed. The only assistance offered by Government was in the shape of tools, the villages themselves providing rations for the workers. What was most striking, however, was the verve and enthusiasm with which they were setting about their task. There was no question here of complaint or grumbling that they were being kept away from their cultivation and their homes. This, they knew, was to be their own road, for their own benefit, and they were happy and proud to be able to make their contribution.

Today there is a good, wide highway from Mokokchung to Assam via Amguri. In 1948, there was only a narrow, precarious jeep track via Nakachari, and it was by this that, on conclusion of our tour, we wended our way back to the plains. We stopped at frequent intervals to speak to the villagers and discuss their problems and it was night before we reached even half-way to our first intended stop. And then, as always happens at *just* such a time, our jeep-lights failed. Yao tinkered with wires and fuses, but with no

success. We hadn't a torch between us, and even the moon had gone into hiding. We managed somehow to string up a kerosene lamp to the bonnet and proceeded, heart in mouth, along the pitch-black winding track towards the traveller's bungalow eight miles down the hill. It was well after midnight when we arrived, and it was with difficulty that we could rouse the sleepy, drunken chowkidar and coax him to let us in. And when we got in, we didn't waste time in changing or eating. We were so tired, we lay ourselves down on the hard plank bed and instantly dropped off to sleep.

Kevichusa had seen to it that I should have opportunities during my tour to meet Nagas of every shade of opinion. He took me also to an American missionary centre so that I should be able to make my own assessment of the work and objectives of foreign missionaries. I met countless village elders, proudly draped in the red shawls presented to them by Government as their badge of office. I met the younger generation of school and college-educated Nagas, eager, vital and argumentative. I met the Nagas in their villages, untouched by our so-called civilization, honouring still their age-old institutions such as the *morung*, or bachelors' house, where boys were boarded, away from their families, to be schooled in civic sense, loyalty to the community and military discipline. Here there was no talk of 'independence', as they felt no shackles. Their only contact with the wide, wide world was when they visited the bazaars in the plains for salt, or for iron to forge their daggers. And I met the Nagas returned from the wars, frustrated, many of them, and at a loss to know what to do with themselves.

If one thing was clear to me, it was that a radical change in the administrative pattern was necessary if discontent in these hills was to be averted. A Sub-committee had been set up by the Constituent Assembly, with Gopinath Bardoloi, Assam's Chief Minister, as its Chairman, to formulate the constitutional arrangements under which the

hill areas should be administered. The Sub-committee's recommendations were embodied in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, under which the hill districts would elect District Councils having wide powers of taxation and legislation, including the power to veto the application to their districts of bills passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly in respect of certain reserved subjects.

From my discussions with leaders of the *other* hill districts, I gathered the impression that, provided Government was serious in acting according to the spirit as well as the letter of the Sixth Schedule, it would be accepted by them, with a modification here and there. At the very outset, however, I had grave doubts about the Nagas accepting the proposed arrangements. The Japanese invasion of Manipur and the Naga hills had had an unsettling effect on the Naga hillman. It gave him ideas. He saw, for one thing, that the armies of the Government were not always invincible. The Nagas had also played a conspicuous part in assisting the British army to repel the Japanese invader. They were beginning to feel their strength and to think in terms, now, of helping themselves for a change. They had not made sacrifices, in life and properties, for the British, to be lorded over by anybody else. For preference, they would wish to run their own affairs, and if there *had* to be a link with India, they would prefer it should be with Delhi. Delhi was far away and there was less likelihood of interference in their internal affairs from the remoter rule of Delhi than from irredentist Assam. So ran the thinking in the Naga mind.

Sir Akbar was in agreement with my assessment, but was also fully alive to the wider implications of a major reorganization. It was, in his view, a question of timing and he would watch for the appropriate moment to make a move. Within a few months he died, and it was not until ten years later that the Naga hills were granted

Central Administration, after the embitterment of prolonged military operations. By then, the gift had lost its grace, and the feeling among the Nagas was that they had won their new status through their own doggedness in the field rather than from any sympathetic or enlightened approach on the part of the Government and people of India. Sir Akbar was succeeded as Governor by Sri Prakasa, and, within little over a year, Sri Prakasa was succeeded by Jairamdas Daulatram. My own jurisdiction over the Naga Hills District ceased with the appointment by the Assam Government of a separate Secretary for the hill districts, henceforth designated as the Autonomous Hill Districts. It was unfortunate that, during the crucial period when far-reaching decisions were to be taken regarding the future of the hill areas, there were as many as five changes in the office of Governor and almost as many in the office of the Secretary responsible to the Assam Government for the administration of the hill districts. There could thus be little continuity or consistency of policy, and there was a tendency to allow things to drift in the fond hope that they would solve themselves rather than risk taking any radical decision.

It should be explained that the Naga tribes were not confined to the Naga Hills District of Assam. There were also extensive settlements of Nagas in Burma, Manipur and NEFA. With the appointment of a separate Secretary for the tribal districts of Assam, my jurisdiction was henceforth limited to the Nagas of the remoter frontier areas of NEFA, a Central Government responsibility. The Nagas themselves had been demanding at the outset that *all* the Naga tribes, whether in Assam, NEFA, Manipur or Burma, should be constituted as a separate single unit, and this demand of theirs still stands.

I have known Phizo and his family for over twenty years. I first met him when he called in at my office one afternoon and wanted me to confirm that the Nine-Point

Agreement entered into by Sir Akbar still held good. He also wanted confirmation that the agreement had the approval of Assam's Chief Minister, Gopinath Bardoloi, and would be honoured by him. I consulted Sir Akbar, and it was decided that Phizo should meet Sir Akbar and Bardoloi at Government House for a personal discussion. What struck me about Phizo at my first meeting was his extraordinary thoroughness and pertinacity. He was armed with neatly typed, systematically serialized copies of all documents relevant to the Naga problem and he gave the impression of carrying, single-handed, in his little brief case, the destinies of the entire Naga people. Everything had to be documented, nothing left to chance, and as soon as the discussions were concluded, he insisted on having the minutes drawn up while the proceedings were still fresh in mind, and taking copies certified personally by the Governor and Chief Minister. He was, even in those days, immaculately dressed in western-style clothes. We knew him then by his full name, Zapu Phizo, but he later dropped the Zapu as sounding too oriental, and styled himself simply 'A. Z. Phizo'. He had no small talk, and when his business was done, I saw no more of him. The next I heard of him was when I received copies of monumental letters addressed by him from a jail in Calcutta to the Governor-General, Rajagopalachari. But more of that later.

In his dealings with the States of Manipur, Tripura and Cooch Behar, Sir Akbar took pains to cultivate their rulers and quickly won their confidence. Our view was that, while Cooch Behar had close affinities, both cultural and geographical, with West Bengal, and should logically merge with that State, Manipur and Tripura were clearly *sui generis* and should better remain as separate identities. There were evidences of pro-Pakistani elements at work in Tripura, Cooch Behar and some of the twenty-five little Khasi States on the Pakistan border, particularly Nongstoin, but we were fully alert and quickly pounced on potential trouble-makers.

The Khasi States, though small, presented a delicate problem. Of the two major political parties, the one led by the competent and generous-hearted Miss Mavis Dunn, former Minister in Sir Mohammad Saadulla's Cabinet, was backing the Syiems (rulers) and sponsoring a scheme for a Federation of Khasi Statelets. The rival party, under the leadership of the Reverend Nichols-Roy, was working for the progressive democratization of the States and their ultimate integration with the remainder of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. The Reverend Nichols-Roy, widely-read, widely-travelled and married to an American missionary who shared his feeling of deep dedication to the cause of the tribal people, had come to be regarded as the 'Grand Old Man' in the politics of the Assam hills. And as democratic forces gathered momentum, his party, not unexpectedly, gained increasing ascendancy and finally won the day.

I have mentioned that Sir Akbar enjoyed governing. It came to him naturally and he was at ease in it. It was only once, and that too over the little frontier State of Manipur, on the border between Assam and Burma, that he nearly lost his balance. Debeswar Sarma, a senior Congressman of great abilities and high ambitions, was temporarily removed from the hotly-contested arena of Assam politics by his appointment as Dominion Agent[1] at Manipur. But Sir Akbar soon came to suspect that, in helping to remove a thorn from his Chief Minister's side, he had gratuitously scarred himself. The post of Dominion Agent was successor to that of Political Agent, held in the past by very senior members of the I.C.S. It was to render the post palatable to Debeswar Sarma that its designation was elevated and other concessions agreed upon by Sir Akbar to accommodate his wishes.

[1] India was constituted as a Dominion by an Act of the British Parliament of 1947. Her representative in the State of Manipur was therefore designated as Dominion Agent.

Sir Akbar had expected that the Dominion Agent would function in consultation with him in matters of higher policy, but was soon receiving reports which led him to surmise that the Agent was playing politics in Manipur with the aim, or so it seemed to Sir Akbar, of merging the State with Assam. Whatever the accuracy of these reports, Sir Akbar felt that he was not being kept sufficiently in touch with affairs by the Dominion Agent and decided to establish a direct link with the State by taking into confidence and working through its Chief Minister, Maharajkumar Priya Brata Singh, brother of the Maharaja. The Maharaja himself was a person of weak character, encircled by a coterie of flatterers and pimps. The most stable force in the State appeared to be the young Maharajkumar, quiet, conscientious and hard-working, who carried the confidence also of the numerous hill-tribes, Naga and Kuki, surrounding the main central valley. 'P.B.', as we knew him, was ably assisted by Major Khathing,[1] Minister for Hill Administration, who had won an M.C. while serving in the Assam Regiment and is now Chief Secretary to the Nagaland Government. On my first visit to Imphal, Manipur's capital, I was received and entertained as the guest of the Manipur Durbar. I had already met P.B. in Shillong and now met for the first time Bob Khathing who shortly after resigned his Ministership in Manipur to join the Indian Frontier Service. I also paid my official call on the Dominion Agent and was duly invited to dine. Debeswar Sarma has a magnificent presence and a charm that can be irresistible. With his white silk shawl draped over his shoulders, and his fine, silvery hair, he called to mind the ancient Roman aristocrat, robed in toga. And when he talked, he could have been Cicero himself, for he had the most perfect command of language, embracing the serpent's invective with the sweetness of honey.

Debeswar's gifts were wasted in the solitary splendours of the Residency. He yearned, in his exile, for the cut and

[1] A Tangkhul Naga, one of the Naga tribes of Manipur.

thrust of politics. P.B. and the Manipuris thought him rather too clever to be fully trusted. And Sir Akbar, in his inability to control him, had decided that he must go. It is to the credit of Bardoloi that, in this tussle of two stubborn irreconcilables, he was prepared to come to the rescue of his erstwhile political colleague and potential rival to the extent even of threatening resignation as a protest against Sir Akbar's decision. But Debeswar too, by now, had had enough of Manipur and was ready to quit. The issue was placed before the great Sardar[1], who poured healing oil, and a political crisis was averted with Debeswar's voluntary return to Assam.

It was during Sir Akbar's governorship that my dear friend Jigmie Dorji visited Shillong with his brother Lhendup and the young Maharajkumar — the present King of Bhutan. They stayed at Government House as Sir Akbar's guests and we spent a gay week introducing them to our friends and picnicking in the pine-forests. I had never before met the Maharajkumar, a handsome lad, boyish and cheerful, but with a mind of his own. After the departure of the Bhutan party, we set off for Manipur, where we planned to spend Christmas and to see in the New Year. Sir Akbar had acquired a small Dove plane for the use of the Assam Governor, and in this we flew comfortably to Imphal, where we were the guests of the Manipur Durbar, the Dominion Agent having already left. The Maharaja was kind enough to stage for us the traditional boat-race in the Palace moat. As the time came for the race to begin, however, the Maharaja was nowhere to be found, and Sir Akbar was on the verge of giving vent to his impatience, when the Maharaja made his appearance at the helm of one of the two splendidly ornate racing-boats, laden with glittering ornaments and in fluttering, brightly-coloured silks, his great bulk supported by

[1] Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was then Deputy Prime Minister of India, and presided also over the Ministry of States (now defunct).

four pretty minions. There was great excitement and cheering as the boats started off, though it had, of course, been tactfully arranged that the Maharaja's boat should finally take the lead.

We set off the following day for our camp by the Logtak lake, about fifty miles from the capital. The Logtak lake is a shikari's paradise, abounding in duck at practically all seasons. Our camp had been picturesquely laid out on a lightly forested slope overlooking the lake, and we turned in early at night as we planned to set out for the lake at crack of dawn next morning. But it was colder in the morning than we expected, and by the time we felt brave enough to pull ourselves out of the snug warmth of our beds, the sun was up and the duck had already sped. It was firmly resolved that, on the following morning, however arctic the cold, the party would set off for the lake an hour before sunrise, while the mist was still on the waters. The shikaris could thus get into position without attracting notice, and let off their guns as soon as the mist lifted and the birds started rising from the lake. If there is one thing I dislike, it is rising early, and, Governor or no Governor, I was on holiday and planned to stay in bed and leave the others to deal with the ducks.

I rose comfortably at eight and was enjoying a quiet cup of tea in my pyjamas when I saw Sir Akbar emerge, alone, from the direction of the lake. He had had two hours with the ducks, he told me, and decided to call it a day. Lady Hydari, his daughter Amina and son Akbar would go on potting away for another hour, and they were welcome to it. But Sir Akbar preferred a hot cup of tea and a gossip, and was going to have it. I had rarely seen him in more cheerful spirits. His one regret was that his elder daughter, who was in London, could not be with him during this happy family gathering. He was thinking of asking the Prime Minister for a month's leave to visit her in England and wondered who would best hold the

fort in his absence. K. P. S. Menon, perhaps ? No, Girja Shankar Bajpai — and he chuckled at the thought of tubby Sir Girja strutting among the 'naked Nagas'. After an hour or so of chatter, we retired to our tents to shave and change. I had scarcely finished dressing when Sir Akbar's personal attendant came to tell me that Sir Akbar had, after shaving, fallen into a deep sleep. I hurried to his tent and found Sir Akbar asleep and breathing irregularly. He was evidently in a coma, as we could not wake him. Within a few minutes, Lady Hydari and the other members of the party returned from the lake and we did what we could by way of medication until a doctor could be found. A doctor from the nearest dispensary was located, and I also dispatched my driver to Imphal with a message to send all available medical help. But Sir Akbar never revived and we buried him next morning at Imphal, with his beloved force, the fourth battalion of the Assam Rifles, doing the honours.

I have thought fit to write of Sir Akbar's death, as the rumour soon spread that he had died under mysterious circumstances, possibly killed by tribal frontiersmen resentful of Indian interference. People with long memories were no doubt recalling the days of the Manipur rebellion in 1891, when Quinton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, and the entire Residency establishment were tragically done to death by the Manipur raj. Sir Akbar, on the other hand, was on terms of close personal friendship with the Manipur ruler's family members, who deeply mourned his loss. Although warned by his doctors that his blood-pressure was unusually high, he enjoyed the good things of life too dearly to be prepared to renounce them. He loved his cigars, he loved his liquor, he loved to have a fling, and, for him, life under an austere, medical regime would simply not have been worth living. He was supremely happy on the morning of his death, and it was a painless, lovely ending to a full and useful life.

6

Mizo Ferment

SIR AKBAR's death came at a time of crisis in the affairs of the Lushai hills. According to one interpretation[1], the name Lushai connotes 'head-cutter', and the modern Lushai generally prefers to be called a 'Mizo', or 'denizen of the hills'. The Lushais had lived for generations under the rule of their local Chiefs, belonging mainly to the Sailo clan. These Chiefs enjoyed considerable powers and privileges, and were utilized by the British as their agents for holding and administering the Lushai hills district. The administrative apparatus under the British was light in the extreme, and it was only in cases of murder or very serious matters that the Government would intervene in the internal affairs of a village. The fact, however, that the Chiefs were recognized and their authority upheld by Government tended to render them negligent of the need to worry much about the support of the people. According to current practice, it was the Chiefs who had the major say in allotting lands each year to the villagers for cultivation. If the Chief wished to rebuild his house, he could call upon his villagers to assist him and they were bound to obey. The villagers were expected to surrender the forelegs of every animal they had shot or trapped to the Chiefs as a tax and to pay them every year certain specified quantities of rice. While most of these practices had their origin in ancient custom, there were some Chiefs who grossly abused their privileges and treated the villagers as personal servants who could be

[1] Colonel Lewin (*c.* 1870), an authority on the Lushais, derived the name from *lu*, 'head', and *sha* 'to cut'. The correct clan name, however, is not Lushai, but Lushei.

sent at will to distant bazaars for carrying loads and making purchases.

The Mizo Union was originally constituted as a party to check illegal exactions by the Chiefs and protect the villagers from exploitation. The Chiefs' Council, consisting of representatives of the Chiefs, set in process measures to counter the activities of the Mizo Union. The Mizo Union retaliated by launching a movement to boycott the Chiefs altogether. It all started, as usual, as a peaceful, non-violent movement, the villagers being instructed not to carry out the orders of the Chiefs or pay them any taxes. But very soon violence broke out and Government was also made a party on the ground that it was supporting the authority of the Chiefs. The people were urged to defy the authority of the Government as well as of the Chiefs and join together in a full-scale Civil Disobedience movement. A party that was opposing the Mizo Union and championing the cause of the Chiefs was the United Mizo Freedom Organization, but it was not looked upon with much favour by the Government, as there were indications that it was working for the breakaway of the Mizo district from India and a link-up with the Chins on the Burma side of the border.

The Mizo district, bordering both Burma and Pakistan, is of strategic importance and it was imperative that a solution should be found to avert a breakdown of law and order. The Superintendent of the Lushai hills, as the district head was then designated, was Mr Peters, a good officer with long experience of work in the hill areas but quite out of tune with the new generation of hill leaders that was now emerging. His prescription was, 'Bring out the troops, shoot to kill, and lock up the Mizo Union leaders'. His wife, however, was a very human and understanding woman, greatly liked by the people.

With Sir Akbar's death, I was left entirely on my own to handle the situation and bring about a settlement. Sir Ronald Lodge, Chief Justice of Assam, had been,

according to convention, sworn in to act as Governor until a permanent incumbent could be found, but he was new to Assam's administrative and political problems and thought it wisest to give me a free hand. I informed the Chief Minister that I proposed visiting Aijal, the Mizo district headquarters, and talking to the leaders. Peters was not at all happy at the idea of my visit. He took it as a reflection on himself and his competence to bring the situation under control. He was also strongly opposed to the idea of any talks at Government level with the Mizo Union leaders. I proceeded nevertheless to Aijal, taking with me my very efficient and loyal stenographer, Feegrade, and my Manipuri bearer, Monkiba. The latter had hitherto obstinately refused to divulge his name, insisting that I should call him simply 'bearer'. It was only at the Inner Line check-post[1], where we all had to be registered, that he could be prevailed upon to declare his name. He then confessed, rather sheepishly, that its similarity in pronunciation to the word 'monkey' had been the reason for his not wanting to be called by it. As his features were also somewhat simian, we could sympathize with his predicament, and continued to call him 'bearer'.

On arrival at Aijal, I found the atmosphere disturbingly tense. My staying as the Superintendent's guest did not make things easier for me, as it gave the impression that I would be biased at the very outset against the Mizo Union. There was some justification in this apprehension, as the first interviews arranged by the Superintendent were with members of the Lushai Chiefs' Council. It was then that I met for the first time Pu Lalsailova, Chief of Kelsih and President of the Chiefs' Council. He was a charming man, ever-smiling and kindly, the epitome of old-world courtesy, and we soon became friends. The Chiefs of course urged the most drastic measures against the Mizo Union

[1] Under the Inner Line Regulation of 1873, entry into the frontier areas beyond a prescribed point was prohibited save under authority of a special permit.

leaders, a considerable number of whom had already been put in the lock-up by the over-zealous Superintendent. The public, complained the Chiefs, were being misled by the Mizo Union. They were stoning the houses of the Chiefs and threatening murder. The administration was on the verge of collapse and the authorities must at once intervene to protect the lives and properties of the Chiefs who had served, for generations, as the bulwarks of the Government.

I met, in due course, the Mizo Union leaders and held protracted discussions with them, both singly and as a body, to thrash out a formula to resolve their grievances against the Chiefs. The Mizo Union leaders were poles apart from the Chiefs and their old-world ways. They stormed and ranted from morning to evening, threatening devastation if their demands were not fulfilled. I remember, in particular, the fire and thunder of Pu Vanthuama, now a docile Potato Expert under the Agriculture Department of the Assam Government, and the more restrained but no less prolixly argumentative Pu Thanlira, who now graces the Assam Public Service Commission. But the wonder of it was that, when the day's work was done, we would again gather together in the evening, and sing, dance and drink as if there wasn't a problem in the world. Lushai songs have a delightful lilt and I found no difficulty in picking out the tunes on my violin and accompanying while the others sang in chorus. But the arguments would be resumed the following morning, interminable as before. The Superintendent received intelligence, during the progress of my discussions, that serious disturbances were threatened in the Tachhip area, about fifteen miles by foot-track from Aijal. He argued that my talking with the leaders was giving encouragement to Mizo Union agitators and that, in view of the reports of further threatened trouble, I should forthwith call off the talks. I decided to visit the Tachhip area myself, but a difficulty arose, as the Mizo Union had dissuaded the

people from serving as porters for any Government party and we were virtually immobilized. It was at this juncture that a body of young men constituting the Chiefs' Sons' Council volunteered to accompany us and carry our baggage. The Superintendent thought the whole idea fantastic and found a reason for staying behind in Aijal.

I set off valiantly with my novel escort, a gay band of young men with guitars slung across their shoulders and lustily singing all the way as only Lushais know. We met, as we proceeded, parties of political prisoners, firmly hand-cuffed, who had been called up by the Superintendent from Lungleh, the southern subdivision, to meet me at Aijal. Dengthuama, among them, I remember especially, as we have often reminisced, in later days, of our first strange meeting on a jungle track. When we reached our destination, it was night and we camped in the house of the finely preserved old Chief. It was rumoured that many of the villagers had left their homes and fled to the forest for fear that we had come to arrest them. I soon had messengers sent out to reassure the villagers that I had come to hear their grievances and not to punish them, and that I should be happy to meet them at their convenience next morning. In my party was young Pu Lallianzuala, an earnest Seventh Day Adventist evangelist. He had brought with him a caseful of missionary literature, and no sooner had we reached camp than he sped to the village in the night and set about enrolling new entrants to the faith. Also accompanying me was Rina Sailo, son of Pu Lalsailova, President of the Chiefs' Council. Rina had been recently appointed to the newly formed frontier-service and I had called him up from the Naga hills, where he was posted, to lend me a helping hand. We spent the evening chatting with the Chief and hearing from him of the heroic exploits of his grandfather, who, after years of bitter fighting, had come to an honourable settlement with the British, in token of which they had presented

him with a giant silver cup, shaped like a sports trophy and handsomely inscribed, which the present Chief displayed before us with ancestral pride.

The next morning, we held meetings among the villagers and explained that Government was determined to take all steps to ensure that the people were not exploited. Their problems could best be settled by peaceful discussions and nothing was to be gained by demonstrations and acts of violence directed against the Chiefs. By the time we returned to Aijal, the tension had already considerably lessened, to the extent that even the fire-eating Superintendent agreed to my proposal to release the Mizo Union leaders from jail and start off again on a clean slate. Everybody was happy and the sundry rival parties organized a grand joint farewell for me as I left Aijal for Shillong.

Among the institutions visited by me in the Mizo district, I should mention the Durtlang hospital, a few miles distant from Aijal, where I had an opportunity of seeing and hearing about the dedicated work of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission. When the hospital was first constructed, there was no road to Durtlang, merely a cart-track which became impassable during the heavy monsoon months. It took several days to reach the hospital from the nearest rail-head in the plains, and the arranging of medical supplies and food for the patients and hospital staff was in itself a major problem. Some of the mission doctors had been women, accustomed to conditions of ease and comfort in their homes in England, who had devoted their entire lives, at tremendous personal sacrifice, to service among the tribal people. It should not cause surprise, therefore, if the tribal people are found, even today, to look to the missionaries for advice and guidance. The missionaries have, through generations of dedicated service, earned their confidence. There is no reason why others should not enjoy their confidence in equal measure, but they will have to earn it too, and in the same way, by dedicated service. The

financing of development plans, however grandiose, a show of military strength, however impressive, does not earn a people's confidence. It is often the imponderables that count the more.

My visit to the Mizo district gave me confidence in myself, as this was the first occasion on which I had been called upon to bear sole responsibility in a situation of extreme crisis in the tribal areas. I had broken all the rules, I had taken decisions against the advice of the experts in hill administration — and the experts themselves were surprised at the successful outcome. The Civil Disobedience movement was called off, and a climate had been created for a happy settlement.

It was a delight working with Sir Ronald during the few months he acted as Governor. He was keenly interested in all that was going on, but was careful not to get involved. He was a person of great charm and modesty. Unlike Sir Akbar, who enjoyed governing, he enjoyed more the spectacle of governing. His successor, Sri Prakasa, was quite a different kettle of fish.

7

Manipur and the Khasi Hills

'I'M NOT SUCH a clown as I look,' Sri Prakasa was known to say of himself with his boisterous sense of fun. Sri Prakasa was no clown, but he undoubtedly enjoyed a bit of clowning. Politicians, I knew, could talk, but surely not *that much*! And he couldn't resist a story, risqué for preference!

As India's High Commissioner at Karachi, Sri Prakasa had evidently had a brush or two with his I.C.S. aides, as he looked upon the entire breed with a vicious eye. It was not long before he let me know, in his jocular way, that he knew all about his constitutional rights as a Governor — that he was expected to accept the advice of his Ministers but could do what he damned well liked with the advice of his Adviser! He somewhat resented, I think, my idolization of Sir Akbar, as though it was a reflection on himself, an untitled public man.

It might be thought, from the above, that we did not get on with each other. But once the ice was broken and we discovered each other's real selves beneath the surface façade of I.C.S. and Congress politician, all was changed and we have remained good friends to this day. I have visited him in his home at Dehra Dun, where he settled for some years after retiring from the Governorship of Bombay, and we write to each other often, recalling old times.

Sri Prakasa is a person of wide culture and reading. His father, Dr Bhagwan Das, was a scholar of the highest renown, who was profoundly influenced in his early years by Annie Besant and the Theosophical movement. I met him once in Benares, where the Governor and I were stopping over on our way to Delhi. We called at his home at six in

the morning and found him deeply immersed in his studies. He was nearing ninety, but he was tall and erect, his brilliant intellect capable as ever of mastering the abstrusest metaphysical problems. With his long white beard and gentle expression, he resembled one of the saints of old in an El Greco painting. His son Sri Prakasa too had a rich Sanskrit foundation, but he proceeded later to Cambridge and entered the world of politics. I remember, with amusement, once asking Sri Prakasa which college he had read at in Cambridge, to receive the ready retort, 'Trinity, *of course*!'

Not long after my first meeting with Phizo, he was detained in jail in Calcutta under an archaic Regulation of 1818 for dealing with sedition. He did not waste much time in jail. We soon started receiving copies of lengthy representations written by Phizo in his neat, meticulous hand and addressed to the Governor-General, setting out in detail the Naga case for independence. It was during this period that his wife and children met with a tragic accident while travelling by jeep from Khonoma to Kohima in the Naga hills. Their little boy was killed and Mrs Phizo so grievously injured that the doctors were doubtful whether, in the event of her survival, she would ever regain the use of her legs. Phizo appealed that he might be allowed facilities to look after his wife and family, and it was decided, after consultations between the Governor and Chief Minister, that he should be released on compassionate grounds. His wife was brought to Shillong for treatment in the Welsh Mission hospital and a small house arranged near the hospital for Phizo and other members of his family to stay in during the period of her treatment. As it happened, I myself fell seriously ill about this time and was admitted to the same hospital. As fellow-patients, we soon became friends.

There are people who have argued that it was a mistake to release Phizo and that much of the subsequent trouble

might have been averted had Phizo been kept permanently under detention. I do not think this is true, as the seeds of unrest were already deeply laid. The movement might have taken a different shape in the absence of Phizo's personal leadership, but it would be a foolish oversimplification to suppose that it would have fizzled out. The tribal people are not insensitive, and would have been angered and embittered the more if Government had not shown humanity and decency to Phizo's family at the time of their distress.

Another case which exercised and caused us much anxiety was that of the famous 'Rani' Gaidilieu. Gaidilieu, as a young girl of seventeen, had become high-priestess of a mysterious cult involved with human sacrifice. It was a cult founded and presided over by one Jadonang, and its followers belonged mainly to the Kabui and Kacha Naga tribes of Manipur. All this was in the 1930s, but the cult had spread widely and, with it, the fame of Jadonang and Gaidilieu. Jadonang had prophesied that a day would come when a 'Naga raj' would be established and the foreigner expelled from the hills. Jadonang was duly arrested and sentenced to death, but it was only after a prolonged and full-scale military operation that the British succeeded in capturing Gaidilieu, as she was given protection by the villagers, never remained for long at the same place and moved only by night. An elaborate saga had meanwhile grown around her name to the extent that she could elude her captors through her magical powers, appearing in several places at the same moment. The troops were baffled, as she was rumoured always to be in a dozen places at once. When eventually Gaidilieu was captured, she was tried and sentenced to transportation for life.

For twenty years, the years of her loveliest youth, Gaidilieu wilted in the jails of Assam. Jawaharlal Nehru had heard of Gaidilieu's story during a visit to Assam before Independence and wrote with feeling of her in his autobiography.

Lady Astor and Members of Parliament in Britain also became interested in Gaidilieu and moved for her release. The Assam authorities, however, were firm. The local officers in Manipur and the Naga hills were convinced that Jadonang's cult would be revived with the return of Gaidilieu, that her old followers would rally round her and that there would be widespread trouble again throughout the hills. And so, until Independence, Gaidilieu remained imprisoned. I had not heard of her until, one morning, we received a letter from the Prime Minister inquiring what we proposed to do about her — with more than a hint that it was high time she was set at liberty. It was then that I began my researches into the strange legend of this remarkable woman. It was a romantic but gruesome story. The murder for which Jadonang and Gaidilieu were convicted was deliberate and brutal. They had waylaid some innocent travellers who were stopping the night at a dak bungalow, cut off their heads and broken the skulls into tiny fragments for ritual distribution among their followers. The great constitutionalist, B. N. Rau, was then Legal Adviser to the Assam Government, and, when Gaidilieu's case came up to the Governor for review, advised that the sentence should be upheld, adding that, but for the leniency shown in deference to her sex, she too should deservedly have swung. (Sir B. N., of course, put it more elegantly!)

On receiving the Prime Minister's letter, we consulted our local officers in Manipur and the Naga hills, who expressed their strong opposition to her release. Our own view, on receiving their reports, was that we had trouble enough on our hands already without fortuitously inviting more. If the general situation in the hill areas took a turn for the better, we could review the case after a year or so and set her at liberty.

The Prime Minister, however, was emotionally charged and clearly petulant at our cautious approach. So we agreed, reluctantly, to release her, on the condition that, until further

notice, she should live outside Manipur and the arena of her former exploits. Gaidilieu chose to live with her brother at Anangba, a village in the Tuensang District of the Naga hills where I met her some months after her release. She had heard I was on tour and sent a message that she would like to see me. After having read and heard so much of her, I looked forward with excitement to meeting her, and I imagined her still, in my mind's eye, as the wild young thing of far-off days, fearless and passionate. But alas, twenty years of life in jail had left their ineffaceable stamp. The passion, the romance, the fire were gone. Her suffering had taught her resignation, and there was a gentleness and humility in her manner that moved me deeply. She brought me, according to tribal custom, an embroidered cloth woven by herself. She felt shy to present me with such a tiny piece, she explained, but she had been unwell and could find little time to weave. She expressed no bitterness over her twenty lost years. But jail had been especially hard for her, a tribal from Manipur, as she could enjoy no companionship, no common language even, with her fellow-convicts of Assam. The twenty years had formed an iron curtain between her and the past. I mentioned the name of Jadonang and expected to revive at least a flicker of the old flame. But it was dead.

The residential restrictions on Gaidilieu were in due course lifted, she was granted a small sum of money to build a house and a nominal pension for her maintenance. I met her again, some years later, quite unexpectedly, in Delhi. I was visiting Delhi as Dewan of Sikkim with a delegation from Gangtok, and we were being entertained as guests of the Government of India in Hyderabad House. I was pleasantly surprised to receive a telephone call one morning to tell me that Gaidilieu had heard I was in Delhi and wished to see me. When she arrived, she told me she had come from her remote village in Manipur to see the Prime Minister and place before him her difficulties. She

had heard a rumour that her pension might be discontinued or reduced, and wished to lodge a protest with the Prime Minister if this was true. She also proposed asking the Prime Minister for some further financial assistance to rebuild her house. Needless to say, she got her interview with the Prime Minister, as well as all she asked for. Whatever might have died within her, her courage and determination were still very much alive. There are not many women who would venture to set out alone, a thousand miles from their village, to seek out the Prime Minister in the busy metropolis.

Gaidilieu is now once more on the move. But she, too, has changed with the times, for her cult is no longer the mystic cult of Jadonang. She has been drawn to a cult of a different sort, to the more earthy cult of Naga politics, where, with her followers, she plays her not insignificant part. But for all that, we did right, I have no doubt, in setting her free, in giving a last opportunity to that wild untamed spirit, so tragically curbed at its passionate height, to pick up the threads again of what was left of a broken life.

Sri Prakasa's Governorship saw, in 1950, the formal constitution of Manipur and Tripura as Union territories and the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. Tripura and Cooch Behar presented little difficulty. The rulers of these States saw clearly the writing on the wall and gracefully accepted integration. All that remained to be tackled was the fixing of the Privy Purse of the rulers, and after a bout of good-humoured bargaining, we could soon arrive at a satisfactory settlement. But Manipur presented a complexity of problems. The hill areas of Manipur, inhabited by tribals who were either Christians or animists, were apprehensive of domination by the more populous Hindu *Meitheis* of the central Imphal valley. They were agitating, therefore, for merger with the contiguous hill areas of Assam and separation from the

Imphal valley. The attitude of the Manipuri hill tribals to the Meitheis of the valley was somewhat similar to that of the hill tribals of Assam to the Assamese plainsmen. The hill tribals of Manipur had felt, in pre-independence days, that their rights were safeguarded by the British Political Agent, who was vested with certain special responsibilities in respect of their administration. The hill tribes of Assam had been, similarly, the special responsibility of the Governor, who administered them not on the advice of his Ministry but 'in his discretion'. With the coming to the fore of popular democratic forces, the hill-tribals of both areas tended to feel that there was safety in numbers and that they should therefore join together for self-preservation.

The Maharaja himself was surrounded by self-seeking advisers, and, in his inability to make up his mind on any of the various conflicting courses presented to him, decided to adhere to the *status quo*. The Maharaja is regarded by the Manipuris as a divine reincarnation and enjoys a very special position in the religious rituals of the State. More was at stake for him, therefore, than for other rulers, for in losing his State he was in danger of losing also his Godhead. Amid the conflicting alternatives, the logical course seemed to be to constitute the State as a Union Territory, with special safeguards for the Ruler respecting his religious rights and privileges. With the Maharaja's constant state of indecision, however, and quite unpredictable attitudes, we considered it advisable to feel the pulse of the States Ministry before processing matters further. And so we proceeded to Delhi and met the great V. P. For V. P. Menon, arch-manoeuvrer of integration, Manipur was very small fry indeed, but when we explained the full implications of trouble in a border State where the tribal population was already growing restive, he agreed that we should consult the ailing Sardar at Bombay and seek his counsel.

We took off by air from Delhi in our little Dove on a morning of brilliant sunshine and were due to touch down at Ahmedabad for refuelling at midday before concluding the second and final hop of our journey. Midday passed, and we saw no signs of Ahmedabad. But the sky was clear and cloudless, and we saw no reason in the world to worry. It was after an hour that we noticed the plane's rapid descent and the co-pilot came in to announce to us that they had lost their bearings, had run short of petrol in trying to find their way and had no alternative now but to make a forced landing. Clutching my beloved violin, which accompanied me on all my missions, I quickly said a prayer as we bumped to earth with a crash and staggered to a halt. We scrambled out of the plane without wasting unnecessary time, relieved that we had got off so lightly, and found ourselves in what appeared at first to be an uninhabited desert. I did not desist from casting rather an evil look upon the pilots, who could not have been granted a clearer, more cloudless day to lose their bearings. After settling the Governor under the shade of a coconut tree, the A.D.C. and I proceeded towards a village on the horizon, where we requisitioned a camel to aid us in our further explorations. We discovered that we were only a few miles from the Princely State of Palanpur, and it was not long before we were rescued and comfortably lodged for the night at the Prince's Guest-house. When we arrived by another plane next morning at Bombay airport, we were greeted by an anxious Press, breathless for news of our 'providential escape'. Sri Prakasa could not, of course, resist the occasion and gave a brilliantly imaginative account of our forced landing, with a dramatic peroration about 'our heroic pilots, whose courage, skill and daring saved us from certain disaster'. The Director-General of Civil Aviation was meanwhile calling for an explanation from them why their licences should not be cancelled for gross negligence.

In Bombay, we were accommodated at Birla house, where Sardar Patel was waiting to die. We were taken to his bedroom, where we found him lying in bed. There was a second bed placed parallel to the Sardar's, with a space of about four feet between. Sri Prakasa and I sat along the edge of the second bed, both in a state of nervous tension. The Sardar alone was completely relaxed, quietly listening and watching us. When Sri Prakasa had said his piece and voiced his apprehension that the Maharaja might not comply with his advice, the Sardar simply inquired whether we had not a Brigadier in Shillong — and it was clear from the tone of his voice what he meant. That was all, and his daughter Maniben signalled that the interview was over.

On our return to Shillong, it fell upon me to proceed to Imphal and convey to the Maharaja the bitter tidings. There are few tasks I have found more distasteful to perform. The Manipuris are a sensitive and excitable people and rumours were already afloat of the state of things to be. The Maharaja was beside himself with emotion, now bursting into tears, now wrapped in sullen melancholy. It was eventually settled that he should proceed to Shillong to meet the Governor. The Maharaja has a house in Shillong, where he preferred to stay during this time of crisis for himself and for his State than as the Governor's guest at Raj Bhavan. But he was honoured with a strong 'protective guard' to ensure that all should be well. Sri Prakasa and I called on him on his arrival and did our best to put him at his ease. We visited him a second time and a third—and the 'protective guard' was significantly strengthened. At last, at a private meeting with the Governor, the Maharaja placed himself, without reserve, in the Governor's hands to do as he considered best in the interests of India, Manipur and the ruler. And he made a personal request to the Governor to release me to serve as Manipur's first Chief Commissioner.

I declined the honour, as I had declined when similar requests were made by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar and

the Maharani of Tripura. My main interest was in the tribal people of NEFA, and my responsibilities as Adviser to the Governor offered opportunities of gathering experience over a much wider field. Now that the future of the States of Manipur, Tripura and Cooch Behar was decided and the responsibility for their administration passed from the purview of the Governor of Assam to their own respective Chief Commissioners, it became possible for me to devote more time to NEFA, her people and her problems. But before that, a word or two on the Khasi States before they too fell away from the range of our responsibility.

The most important cash crops over extensive areas of the Khasi hills are the orange and the betel-nut. In pre-partition days, the main market for the produce of the Khasi hills was in the district of Sylhet skirting their southern border. With partition, Pakistan embarked on a virtual economic blockade of the Khasi hills. Movement of goods between the Khasi hills and Sylhet was discouraged and the Khasis found themselves without a market for their produce. The object of the exercise was no doubt to put pressure on the Khasis and create among them a feeling that they would be better off in Pakistan. The hill people on the extreme southern borders of the Khasi hills were driven to a state of near panic. As oranges and betel-nut are a perishable crop and road communications were non-existent in the area, the only means of disposing of their produce would be if it could be air-lifted directly from the locality to the Calcutta market. They came streaming to me in deputations, pleading that I should visit the area *at once* and authorize the construction of an air-strip at a place they had located at Shella.

My problem was that I was down with 'flu, but I was at an age when things like that didn't bother one and I readily set off with them, heavily fortified by sulpha drugs. We drove to Cherrapunji, from where we proceeded on

foot. After several hours of descending almost vertically down the sheer cliff-side, I felt as near collapse as I had ever been in my life. With difficulty I struggled to our destination at Shella, shivering and feverish, but still hoping that, after a good night's sleep, I would be well again the next morning. It was December and a sharp, cold wind penetrated, throughout the night, the flimsy shack in which I was housed. I had little with me in the shape of blankets and bedding, and shuddered through the night, feeling worse than ever next morning. But the crowds had already gathered round my hut, eager to take me off on my round of inspection, and there was nothing for it but to stick it out and go. We tramped through fields, got in and out of boats, tramped through more fields, until we came at last to a large flat area. I readily agreed that this was the most ideal site for an air-strip, having no spirit to argue and my one concern now being to get home alive. But the damage was already done and by the time we returned to my shack, I found I had no strength left to walk or even stand. I was bundled into a basket, hoisted on a man's back, and carried like a sack of potatoes up the rugged ten-mile track to Cherrapunji.

The Khasis got their air-strip, but I had to pay with six weeks in the Welsh Mission hospital. I had strained my heart through over-exertion while sick, and was ordered to lie flat in bed until the heart began to stabilize. The psychological shock of learning that anything could go wrong with my heart at the age of thirty was overwhelming. I decided I was going to die and a telegram was sent to my mother in Bombay to make haste while yet there was life. By the time my mother arrived, I had changed my mind and decided I'd prefer to live. My stenographers were summoned to the hospital and I resumed work at my customary tempo — only lying flat on my back. I began soon to enjoy the hospital regime so much that I dreaded the day I would be asked to leave. It must have been the

season, for all the best people were in residence during my stay. There was Mrs Phizo, next door to me, whom I visited often as soon as I was permitted to walk. And Sudhin Dutt, the Police Intelligence Chief, also a heart case, who bore a lasting grudge against the hospital for treating him as a high-caste, vegetable-eating Brahmin and denying him meat. The nurses were like aproned angels, flitting in and out at my slightest behest—if there was heaven on earth, it was this, it was this, it was this. The Presiding Deity over this celestial establishment was Dr Arthur Hughes, a man of God if ever there was one, and loved to the point of worship in the Khasi and Jaintia hills.

NEFA had, up to now, claimed little of our attention. The Chinese had not yet started their *putsch* into Tibet and our hands were more than full manoeuvring the integration of the border States. We did, however, carry out a tour of some of the foothill areas of NEFA with Dr Keskar, Deputy Minister for External Affairs, and drew up a limited Five-Year Plan. We did not consider it politic, at this juncture, to deviate from the British pattern of indirect rule. In the absence of road communications, it would have been impractical to assume direct control over a virtually unknown area of over 25,000 square miles. We had very few officers with experience of work in the tribal areas, and it would have been inadvisable to undertake responsibilities for the discharge of which the requisite personnel was not yet available. The administration had concentrated hitherto on the foothill regions skirting the plains. Every year, however, it was the practice for the Political Officers to carry out tours along the main valleys as far north as the McMahon Line as a demonstration of the Government of India's jurisdiction upto the international frontier. They would meet the tribal leaders during the course of these tours and have parleys with the people, but they were careful not to get the administration involved in petty internal disputes. Their main purpose was to ensure that Tibetan

officials should not violate the frontier or attempt to realize taxes from tribal people on the Indian side of the McMahon Line. As long as there was no design on the part of the Tibetans or any other foreign power to violate the frontier or lay claims to Indian territory, the pre-independence policy of limited control served well enough. It was when the Chinese showed their fangs in Tibet and cast hungry eyes on NEFA that we decided we must reshape our policy and ensure a firmer grip on the tribal areas of NEFA lest they should be wrested away by an unscrupulous neighbour.

I enjoyed working with Sri Prakasa and was sorry when he left Assam to join the Central Cabinet. He had a wide range of interests and a great sense of fun. What was my surprise, therefore, to receive from him, some years later, a wordy letter that '*he* had heard that *I* had heard that *he* thought that *I* thought that *he* did not like me!' It was all so complicated that I needed all my faculties to make out *who* had thought *what*! But it was typical of him to have wanted to clear any possible misunderstanding. He was kind and generous to me in my illness and, the highest compliment of all, was appreciative enough of my services to forgive me for being 'an I.C.S.'

8

North-East Frontier Agency

WHEN the history of NEFA is written, Jairamdas Daulatram will stand out as the Governor under whose regime its foundations were laid. Jairamdas was not a very companionable man. He was heavy both in physique and in temperament, and was rarely amused. Life, for him, was earnest, life was serious, there was no time for laughter or frivolity. On the rare occasions that he attempted a joke, one never quite knew when to laugh. If he smiled, it was for effect, as when posing for a photograph. In the four years that I worked with him, I never once saw him burst into laughter. This was a change indeed from Sri Prakasa, the eternal joker.

Most people found difficulty in coping with Jairamdas and his ponderous ways. It was a penchant for seeing the funny side of things that enabled me to survive my four years' servitude as his Adviser. One thing at least we both had in common, the capacity for infinite labour. If Jairamdas could have had his way, he would have been glad to see and pass orders on every file moving in NEFA. None of Sir Akbar's monosyllabic 'Yes's' or 'No's' for Jairamdas. Each note of his, neatly penned in green ink, carried a pious moral for the edification of the Establishment. Jairamdas was not merely the Governor of NEFA, he was its High Priest.

In spite of his idiosyncrasies, I had great admiration for Jairamdas. He may have lacked a sense of proportion, but he was conscientious and upright, disciplined and painstaking. He had determination and staying-power, and it was mainly due to his inexhaustible drive that the new 'forward policy' for NEFA could be so speedily and effectively set in motion.

The Chinese invasion, in 1950, of eastern Tibet was the signal that NEFA could no longer remain as a forgotten frontier. The Russian threat had, since the last century, focussed attention on the North-West frontier, and few people were even aware that a North-East frontier existed. The desirability of establishing outposts upto the McMahon Line[1] as a symbol of our sovereignty had indeed been recognized, and a move in this direction was, in fact, made in the 1930s. But with the outbreak of the war, priorities were re-adjusted and troops could not be spared for what was then considered a comparatively low-priority frontier tract. Some outposts were nevertheless posted during the winter months, when the hill-tracks were negotiable and it was possible to send up supplies for their maintenance. Such outposts had, however, often to be withdrawn during the monsoon when torrential rainfall rendered the tracks impassable.

With a Chinese presence in Tibet, it became necessary to strengthen further our ties with the hill-people of NEFA and to make known our own presence, in unmistakable terms, up to the international frontier. Road-building in the Himalayan mountains is a slow and laborious operation. The mere surveying of an alignment is a time-consuming process and scarcity of labour in the hill areas comes in the way of speedy construction. Even after construction is completed, it requires several years for a road to stabilize in the heavy monsoon conditions obtaining in the Himalayan hills. It was clear, therefore, that we would not be able to count on road communications in the initial stages of extending our administrative apparatus up to the frontier.

It is ironical that the major steps in Assam's development owe their origin to a situation of crisis. When I first went to Assam twenty-five years ago, it took nearly three

[1] i.e. the international frontier between India and Tibet. This was defined by the Simla Convention of 1914 after negotiations between representatives of the British, Chinese and Tibetan Governments.

days to reach Shillong from Calcutta, a fatiguing journey involving two train changes, a major ferry-crossing and a final journey up the hill by a road so narrow and winding that only single-way traffic was permissible. Assam was known as the Cinderella of the provinces, and was so remote and neglected by the Centre that many people did not even realize that it was a part of India — it was thought of more often as an adjunct of Burma or Siam! It was when the Japanese threatened to invade India through Assam that our Cinderella began at last to receive the attention due to her. Money, of a sudden, was of no consideration, roads and bridges started springing up out of nowhere, and, a new but significant development, a crop of air-strips emerged in practically every district. We owe it to the Japanese invasion that civil air-lines could start operating in Assam, in Manipur and in Tripura almost immediately on conclusion of the war, as it is doubtful whether Government would, under normal peace-time conditions, have ventured for many, many years to come, to incur the heavy expenditure involved in air-field construction.

It was similarly a major crisis that forced the pace in the introduction of air-communications in NEFA. There occurred, in 1950, the most serious earthquake ever experienced in the NEFA region, with its epicentre near Rima in Tibet, a few miles to the north of the Lohit Frontier Division. For months after the earthquake, communications in NEFA remained completely disrupted. Villages were brought to the verge of starvation as there were no longer any tracks by which food could be dispatched to them, and our only hope of rendering relief lay in dropping supplies by air. When we first mooted the idea, there was much scoffing and ridicule. The air-currents in NEFA were much too risky to permit of air-dropping — visibility in the mountains was poor — even if supplies could be dropped, they would be damaged or irrecoverable — and the cost of the operation would in any case be

prohibitive. As happens whenever a novel idea is broached, every conceivable objection was put forward to stifle it at birth. But precious lives were at stake and we were not to be put off lightly. The I.A.F. were prevailed upon to carry out trial air-drops, the objections were overruled, and the seed was sown of what was to become, in ten years, the most extensive and elaborate civil air-supply operation in the world, involving the dropping by air, annually, of twenty-five thousand tons of supplies.

It was the earthquake of 1950 that first brought NEFA to the notice of the country. There was spontaneous sympathy from all parts of India, and we had to start declining the services of volunteers on account of our inability to find accommodation, rations and transport for so many workers. Heavy floods followed the earthquake, putting the normal ferries out of operation. We therefore commissioned a small Bonanza aeroplane to fly us across the Brahmaputra and hopped from district to district carrying milk-powder and other foodstuff donated by relief organizations for distribution among the tribal people. I remember in particular the anxious days we spent in rescuing a party of sixty Adis and Mishmis who had become marooned on a small island created along the river Dibang by a sudden change in the main course of the stream. The island was being daily eroded by the uncontrollable fury of the river and our efforts to help the villagers by air-dropping collapsible rubber boats, ropes and pulleys were of little avail, as the current was much too savage for navigation. Two European tea-planters, who operated their own little three-seater L5 aeroplanes, gallantly volunteered to land on the island and air-lift the villagers, two by two, to the bank. When they made the attempt, they found that the landing-space available was insufficient and it was at extreme peril that they were able to get airborne again to safety. It was on their advice, however, that we requisitioned two Piper Cub aeroplanes from the

Lucknow flying-club and had them flown out to us to assist in our rescue operations. The Piper Cub requires less space for landing and take off than the L5, and we succeeded at last in air-lifting the villagers from the island before it was entirely eroded away.

It was our experience of the use of aircraft for earthquake relief that led us on to their utilization for supporting the administration in far-flung areas of NEFA, where it would take years to build up regular road communications. A number of tea-planters had planes of their own, and I knew one who thought nothing of flying over to a fellow-planter's for a game of tennis of an afternoon. It seems odd, in retrospect, but it was through the good offices of two European planters that I first flew to Ziro, on the Apatani plateau of the Subansiri district of NEFA, to recce a site for a Dakota air-strip. The Apatanis are fine cultivators and it is a joy to see their neatly irrigated fields. The wide plateau on which their villages are sited, encircled by hills, is a singular phenomenon. The plateau was once, according to legend, a deep lake inhabited by strange monsters. One such monster, known by the tribal people as the *buru*, was reported to be still inhabiting a lake some days' march east of the Apatani plateau, and an expedition was once dispatched, under the auspices of the then Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, and the *Daily Mail*, to track it down.[1] But the monster did not oblige and continues to live in the shadowy world of legend.

The Apatanis, through hard work and skill in cultivation, became more prosperous than the Daflas of the area surrounding the plateau, who found reward and profit in raiding Apatani villages. The main objects of pursuit, however, were the beautiful Apatani girls, and the raids became so insistent that the Apatanis were eventually driven to disfigure their girls, by mutilating

[1] For an account of the expedition, see *The Hunt for the Buru* by Ralph Izzard (1951).

their noses, so that they should cease to attract the lustful Dafla!

Until Independence, the administrative base for the Subansiri district was at Kimin in the southern foot-hills. It was impractical, however, to control the thickly populated villages of the Apatani plateau from such a distance and there was need also to keep a watchful eye over marauding Daflas. The track from Kimin to Ziro involved a march of seven days across pestilential forest — and it was during a tour to Ziro that the daughter of J. P. Mills, a former Adviser to the Governor, was struck to death by a deadly virus infection. It was apparent that if we were serious about administering the district, we must shift its base from Kimin in the foot-hills to a more central point in the interior. I was convinced, after the flying visit with my planter friends, that Ziro was the most suitable place to be constituted as our new base. The main consideration for my selection of Ziro was that a Dakota air-strip could be developed in the plateau without much difficulty and we should no longer have to depend on porters for carrying up supplies. The Political Officer, R. G. Menzies, was also happy to have his headquarters up in the mountain instead of in the malarious foot-hills, and Ziro soon became a flourishing little township.

Of the Political Officers I found in position when I took charge as Adviser, three were Europeans. Bob Menzies, Peter James and Geoffrey Allen were, each in his own way, remarkable officers. Bob Menzies had married a Lushai girl, the vivacious Siami, and was, for a time, quite at home in the wilderness of the mountains. A tall, lanky officer of Australian stock, he enjoyed playing the white raja and holding the balance between the warring Apatanis and Daflas. After a while, however, came domestic difficulties which tragically undermined his health and his efficiency. He ended by losing his job and his wife as well, and the last I heard of him, he was eking out a living in an obscure,

mofussil workshop. Siami I sometimes meet in Shillong, still vivacious but a much saddened woman.

Peter James will live long in the annals of NEFA. A policeman by profession, he was deputed to the Political Service, where he fell madly in love — with the Abors. The Abors, or Adis as they prefer now to be called, inhabit the Siang Frontier Division of NEFA, previously known as the Abor Hills District. It was during Jairamdas's regime that we decided to standardize the terminology of the various units of NEFA. These had previously been indiscriminately designated as Areas (Subansiri and Tuensang Area), Tracts (Balipara, Sadiya and Tirap Frontier Tracts), Districts (Abor Hills District) and Sub-Agencies (Mishmi Sub-Agency), and we notified them all henceforward as 'Frontier Divisions'. Except in the case of the Tuensang Frontier Division, we designated the remaining five Divisions of NEFA after the main rivers flowing through them, that is, from west to east, Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap.

I met Peter James during my first visit to Pasighat, the then headquarters of the Siang Frontier Division, soon after taking charge of NEFA. I stayed with Peter in his official bungalow — or rather, it would be more correct to say I stayed with Peter and half the population of Pasighat. For there were swarms of Abors, male and female, streaming in and out of my room at all times of the day and most times of the night. As I was new to the Abor hills, I did not then realize that the young men who kept passing through my bedroom as I dressed or undressed were, in fact, not young men at all, but young ladies. It was the custom for Abor girls of the Padam and Minyong sub-tribes to keep their hair closely cropped, which gave them a boyish look, particularly as they are rather stocky and stumpy in stature. Peter could speak Adi fluently, was fully conversant with their social customs, and lived with and like them when on tour. The Adi dance, known as *ponung*, consists of

a group of people dancing together in a circle, with the leader, or *miri* as he is called, singing in the centre and giving the beat by jangling a sword in time with the movements of the dance. The *ponung* is performed on all festive occasions, and particularly when welcoming guests. Peter was an expert *miri* and improvized with ease as the dance proceeded. Soon after the *ponung* begins, the girls take hold of the guests and insist they join the dance. I have danced, in younger days, until two to three in the morning, but the girls are tireless and will generally continue long, long after the last guest has departed.

Peter was a bachelor and it was difficult to imagine him anywhere but among his Abors, as indeed it was difficult to imagine the Abor hills without Peter. But, with the progressive replacement of Europeans by Indian officers, Peter too had at last to make his bow, and took refuge in the staid routine of planting tea. But he must often be tantalized at heart as he looks out from his tea-garden bungalow in Doom Dooma to the distant hills that had become all but part of his flesh and blood.

Geoffrey Allen never 'went native' quite in the way of Peter James. Geoffrey descends from the Cooper-Allens[1] of U.P., with connexions in India since the days of John Company. Schooled at Eton, he was commissioned in the army, won an M.C. in the African desert campaign and was appointed, after the war, to the Political Service in the north-east frontier of India. Peter James, like myself, was interested in people and in human nature. Geoffrey Allen was more interested in places and nature in its other manifold manifestations. There was something very personal and affectionate in Peter's approach to his Abors. He loved them even when they vexed him. Geoffrey was more detached. He served in three districts, the Sadiya,

[1]Originally suppliers to Government of harness and saddlery. It was Geoffrey's grandfather who first enlisted Kipling as a young journalist to his newspaper, the *Pioneer*.

Tirap and Balipara Frontier Tracts. He will remember them not, I think, so much for his empathy with the people as the opportunities they afforded for exploration and the discovery of nature in its more exotic forms — the rare *takin*, the gawky hornbill, the orchid 'lost' and found again.

I remember reading with delight and wonder Geoffrey's notes on a tour in the Aka country of the Kameng Frontier Division. There was some misunderstanding, as often happens, about the location of his camp, and when he arrived at his destination at night after a killing day's trek in drenching rain through leech-infested forest, he was greeted not with shelter and food but with the cheerful announcement that his porters had already run ahead, with food, bag and baggage, to the next staging-camp eleven miles further up the hill. (The distance between each stage in the hills is, on an average, about ten miles.) Geoffrey pressed on through the night, to catch up with his porters, bedding and food at two in the morning. But the extraordinary thing was that it appeared from his notes that Geoffrey had never before enjoyed such a tour in his life. I still recollect the glow of pride with which he described the hazards of the march, the satisfaction of accomplishing two days' trek in one, and that too, unlike Napoleon's armies, on an empty stomach. Nothing could get him down or dampen his zest, not even the blood-sucking leech that trespassed within the recesses of his pants.

Geoffrey later took up a post as Labour Officer with the Indian Tea Association. The I.T.A. look after their employees' comforts — a handsome salary, a luxuriously-appointed bungalow and plenty of perks. I met Geoffrey not long after he had joined his new post. He was ready, he told me sadly, to throw up his job, with all the luring perks, if he could only get back into his old weather-beaten trekking boots and explore once more the beckoning hills. 'You can get the man out of the forest,' they say, 'but you

cannot get the forest out of the man.' So too with the hills: on some they cast an ineluctable spell.

Apart from Peter, Geoffrey and Bob Menzies, our other officers were drawn mainly from existing services under the Assam Government. Sir Akbar and Gopinath Bardoloi had envisaged the ultimate 'integration' of the hills and plains of Assam, and the policy pursued, therefore, was of posting Assamese plains officers to the hills and hill tribal officers to the plains. As the hill-people of NEFA had had little experience of Assamese administrators, it was vital that really good officers should be selected so that the first impact of Assam plains officers on the tribal mind should be favourable. Sir Akbar left it largely to his Chief Minister, Bardoloi, to recommend the officers he considered most suitable, and, in the result, three Assamese plains officers, Lakheswar Sharma, Bipin Burogohain and Bharat Bhuyan, were appointed as Political Officers, and Indira Miri, an exceptionally able lady from the Assam plains-tribal community of Miris, as NEFA's Education Officer. A few bright young men from respected and educated families of tribals in the hill districts in and adjoining Assam were also recruited, partly in the interests of ultimate integration, partly as it was expected that tribal officers from the hills would find less difficulty in adjusting themselves to the hard life involved in frontier service. Bob Khathing, a Tangkhul Naga and Minister for Hill Administration in Manipur, approached me soon after my visit to Manipur. A straight man with a background of army discipline, he had had enough of politics and politicians, and we were glad to enlist his services. Rina Sailo, son of Pu Lalsailova, President of the Lushai Chiefs' Council, also joined our team, and Khawtim Khuma, an erstwhile Mizo leader. Aliba Imti, not so long before a firebrand in the Naga National Council, the gentle but forthright Zopianga, the slow but deep-thinking Lalbiak Thanga, 'Yao' Haralu, Hranga, Hipson Roy — with these, to mention but a few who immediately

come to mind, we embarked on our adventure of penetrating into NEFA and establishing the foundations of an administrative structure. They were quiet workers, not given to talking or writing much, but it was they who were mainly responsible for the building up of the tribal people's confidence in the Government.

The history of British penetration into the hill districts of Assam since the last century does not always make for happy reading. Time and again we come upon cases of good and experienced officers — Butler, Holcombe, Williamson — being done to death by tribals who were suspicious of their ultimate motives. It was no mean achievement, therefore, that, within the course of only five or six years, it was possible for our officers, many of them young and inexperienced, to establish, with the co-operation of the tribal people and without incurring their hostility or suspicion, a network of administrative centres up to the international frontier over an area of nearly thirty thousand square miles. Some measure of suspicion and apprehension was bound to rise in the tribal mind when so many officers were operating over so wide a field, and such suspicion and apprehension manifested itself in sporadic cases, as when an Assam Rifles column at Achingmori was massacred in 1953 by Tagin tribals of the Siang Frontier Division. It is a tribute to the sympathetic approach of our officers that such instances of hostility were rare and that no officer of senior rank was at any stage involved. If there were indiscretions, they were at the lower levels and inevitable in an operation on so vast a scale. It was largely due to Jairamdas's watchful supervision that the operation could go through with such a minimum of incident. Jairamdas was insatiable in his zeal to devour the tour-diaries of even minor officials, and his neat, methodical notes, though often bordering on the obvious, were duly passed down to the officer concerned. This involved enormous work in the Secretariat, as the officer would feel

it incumbent on him to send his 'respectful comments' on the Governor's minute and an endless correspondence would ensue. But it also had its value, as officers felt they were under perpetual watch and were kept on their toes.

The major achievement of Jairamdas's regime was the shifting of the headquarters of the Divisions of NEFA from the foothills to more central sites in the interior, and the building up of a systematic air-communications organization. Jairamdas was nothing if not thorough, and it was not long before we had set up a chain of check-posts along the main passes crossing the McMahon Line. The region that caused us special anxiety was the region of Tawang in the extreme north-west of the Kameng Frontier Division and across the 14,000 foot Se La pass. Although Tawang was undoubtedly south of the McMahon Line and therefore within the territory of India, the Tibetans had, for generations, felt a strong sentimental attachment to the area, partly as the birth-place of the sixth Dalai Lama.[1] The office-bearers of the great Buddhist monastery at Tawang were sometimes selected from among Tibetan lamas of the famous Drepung monastery near Lhasa and the culture of the region had affinities with Tibet as much as with India. Tibetan officers moreover found ample avenues for exploiting the Monpa villagers of Tawang, whom they used to pressurize into disposing of their rice and other produce at ridiculously low prices. The Tibetans were opposed, therefore, to an Indian presence in Tawang which would be a brake on their exploitation of the people. To put an end to any possible misunderstanding regarding jurisdiction, the British had sent expeditions in the 1930s to the Tawang area with a view to establishing permanent outposts, but with the outbreak of the war, there were practical difficulties in continuing the manning and maintaining of such outposts. As the Tibetan authorities

[1] Tsangyang-Gyatso (1682–1705), notorious for his addiction to earthly rather than spiritual pleasures and as author of a series of passionate love-poems.

were found to be evidently bent on continuing their exploitation, we decided the time had come to take a firm stand and establish a permanent administrative centre in the region. We selected Bob Khathing for the task — and could not have made a better choice.

Our main problem in those days was communications and supplies. It is possible now to jeep to Tawang in a day. Bob Khathing and his force had to slog it on their feet for almost a fortnight before they could reach their destination. Their wireless equipment was badly shaken over the rough track and we were often out of touch with each other for long periods until it could be repaired. The Tibetan officers were visibly shaken at Bob's sudden appearance in their midst, the first they had ever seen of a real, live, Tangkhul Naga. They promptly reported to their higher authorities, who reported to India's Consul-General in Lhasa, who reported to the Political Officer in Sikkim, who reported to the External Affairs Ministry in Delhi, who reported to the Adviser to the Governor in Shillong, who reported back to Bob in Tawang. We were naturally concerned not to wound Tibetan susceptibilities, and, as international issues were involved, thought fit to consult Delhi while advising Bob how to proceed. Delhi in turn consulted Gangtok, who consulted Lhasa, and so it went on while the unfortunate Bob was left holding the baby on the hill-top.

After a round or two of this futile exercise in musical chairs, Bob very understandably shot us a wireless message that, unless he received clear instructions by return, he proposed packing his bags and would we please send someone at once to relieve him. As though we had not trouble enough on our hands already! By stratagem and guile, we managed to mollify the much-ruffled Bob, who eventually stayed on to complete his mission.

The villagers of the Tawang area are mainly Monpas. They are Buddhists, but softer and more docile than their Tibetan neighbours across the northern border, who took

advantage of their mild, submissive nature. Bob's entry into Tawang was, for them, a true liberation, as they could no longer be bossed about and pressurized to sell off their produce at anybody's dictation. Bob looked into their grievances personally and his sense of justice and fair play soon won their hearts. When the administrative centre was firmly established, we were in a position to withdraw Bob from Tawang and appointed him as the Political Officer of the Kameng Frontier Division, with the mandate to shift the Divisional headquarters from Charduar in the foot-hills to Bomdi La, 9,000 feet in elevation and mid-way between Tawang and the plains. Here there was not, as at Ziro, the convenience of an air-strip for bringing up supplies. Thick forest was to be hacked away to clear the site, the slopes levelled, offices constructed, supplies portered up from the plains. And we did not think twice before deciding that Bob was the man for the job. In Nagaland, Tawang, Bomdi La, in the face of the Chinese aggression in 1962, wherever there was trouble afoot, the heavens might fall, but Bob, we knew, we could always depend on. If any officer deserved his Padma Shri, it was this tough, redoubtable Tangkhul Naga from Manipur.

It was a delightfully sunny October afternoon in Shillong and I was making the most of the Puja holidays blissfully sipping beer, when I was rudely shaken by a message that an Assam Rifles column moving in the Achingmori region of the Siang Frontier Division had been massacred by Tagin tribals. It was an obscure, disjointed message, carried back by the sole survivor and transmitted to us by wireless. The column was under the command of a Sikh officer, Major Ripudhaman Singh, and accompanied by a brave young Assamese lad, Pradip Barua, an officer of distinct promise, who had been deputed by the Political Officer to act as liaison for the column with the local population. The Inspector-General of the Assam Rifles was then Brigadier Bhagwati Singh, and we both hurried off at once to Along,

the new headquarters of the Siang Frontier Division, from where the ill-fated party had originally set out.

A Mizo officer, Khawtim Khuma, had been responsible for constructing the air-strip at Along and for building up contacts with the tribal people of the area to gain their co-operation in establishing the new Divisional headquarters. Like Zopianga in Tuensang, Khuma was one of those quiet, reserved officers who do not shine outwardly, but can be depended upon to deliver the goods. Along is situated among the Gallong Abors, who can be most easily distinguished from their Padam and Minyong fellow-tribesmen around Pasighat by their womenfolk, who allow their hair to grow long instead of cropping it close. Some Gallongs also practice polyandry and marriages are decided upon by parents as between children yet to be born: I shall not forget the quaint spectacle of a teenage Gallong girl carrying, in a basket on her back, her infant husband-to-be, born, alas, ten years later than the calculations of their fondly contracting parents.

We tried, on our arrival at Along, to ascertain the reason for the tragedy, but the intelligence was still meagre and it was not until the sole survivor could be contacted and interrogated that we could gather any idea of what had taken place. The Assam Rifles column had apparently reached Achingmori in the afternoon, when everything seemed quite normal. The villagers gave a happy welcome to the jawans, who proceeded in due course to distribute salt to them as a gesture of goodwill. The atmosphere appeared so friendly that the jawans stacked their weapons some distance away from where they were distributing salt and were completely unarmed. All of a sudden, at a given signal, they were attacked with *daos* and cut down to a man. Rumour had it that the tribal porters accompanying the column were partly responsible for the incident. These porters were of another Abor sub-tribe, whose members had, while accompanying a previous column, caused

much harassment to the villagers. The main intention was to take revenge on the porters, but, in the process, it was found necessary to dispatch our men as well. While there may have been some truth in this rumour, the more probable explanation is that success had made our officers over-confident. It has always been the practice, when taking a column to unfamiliar areas, to send messengers in advance to pave the way. The first reaction of a tribal villager to the approach of armed force is to sense danger and prepare for retaliation. This would be all the more so in the remoter regions where the tribal people would know less of the administration and its purposes. There is little evidence to show that much effort was made in advance to contact the villagers of the Achingmori area and explain that the column had not come to attack or punish them, as they might have apprehended, at the instigation of the accompanying porters. In the absence of the normal processes of consultation with the elders when approaching a village for the first time, the tribal people were bound to harbour suspicions and can hardly be held entirely at fault for the consequences, however awful, flowing from such suspicions.

The Assam Rifles were out for blood. An innocent column had been treacherously massacred and the tribals of the entire surrounding area must be made to pay the price. It was assumed that everybody was involved, that the crime could not have been committed without the connivance, if not the active co-operation, of all the surrounding villages. It was time the Administration showed its strength, we had been too soft in our approach, the only argument the tribal understood was the bullet. If bombing and strafing from the air had been permissible in the North-West Frontier, there was no reason why it should not be resorted to in NEFA, particularly at a time such as this when our men had, without the slightest provocation, been brutally murdered.

Jairamdas alone remained unmoved by the mad hysteria. The guilty, no question, must be tracked down and punished, but he very properly and firmly insisted that there must be no indiscriminate vendetta against the innocent. The Army and the Air Force rallied to the Assam Rifles' support, as the prestige of the armed forces as a whole was held to be at stake. But we refused to resile. We ordered the immediate encirclement of the Achingmori area by a thrust of heavy force from three directions, we authorized the use of fire in self-defence, but we made it clear by detailed, written instructions delivered personally to every unit commander involved in the operation that random burning of villages and destruction of property were strictly forbidden and that there was to be no bombing or strafing by air. As tempers had run high and the spirit of revenge was still fierce, Jairamdas and I moved our headquarters temporarily from Shillong to Jorhat, the base of the proposed operation, so that we could personally ensure by our presence that our directives were faithfully implemented.

The operations were concluded according to plan and the culprits tried and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. The Assam Rifles were throughout impatient of Jairamdas' restraint, and relations between the Governor and the force were, for a time, severely strained. But there can be no doubt at all that Jairamdas's stand was correct and that indiscriminate lashing out at innocent tribals would have done incalculable harm to our relations with the hill people not only in NEFA but throughout the hill districts of the north-eastern region. It was through adhering strictly to a policy of restraint and correct conduct that it was possible to maintain conditions of comparative peace in NEFA during those critical years when the foundations of the present administrative structure were first laid.

As long as no external threat was involved, Delhi had evinced little interest in NEFA and allowed the local authorities to function much on their own. With the

emergence of a Chinese presence in Tibet, Delhi could no longer afford to remain apathetic and became, for a change, almost over-zealous. The repository of this superabundance of zeal was T. N. Kaul, one of the most brilliant and original officers of the Ministry of External Affairs. Though only a Joint Secretary at the time, Tikki Kaul enjoyed the confidence of the Prime Minister to such an extent that he virtually ran the areas allotted to his desk, which included NEFA, the Naga hills, Sikkim and Bhutan. Tikki had carried out some comparative research on the techniques applied by the U.S.S.R. and other countries in dealing with the minorities and found in these what he thought might be an answer, or at least a partial answer, to NEFA's problems. His main initiative was directed to the constitution of a special cadre of frontier officers, to be drawn mainly from the Defence Services, who would specialize in tribal administration and devote their lives to work among the hill people. The services of Dr Verrier Elwin, the eminent social anthropologist, were also enlisted to assist in training the new cadre of officers and giving general counsel to the administration. I had by now completed nearly six years as Adviser to the Governor and was more than overdue for a change. K. L. Mehta, Chief Commissioner, Ajmer, an officer of great charm and ability, was appointed as my successor, but I was requested to assist in the selection of officers for the new cadre and in putting them through a six weeks' course of training prior to their taking up their new appointments. I gladly complied, although I was personally opposed to the idea of a separate cadre on the lines proposed and had my doubts regarding its effective working. The new cadre served the immediate purpose of supplying a body of disciplined officers to man the numerous posts required for the rapidly-expanding NEFA administration, but there were inherent weaknesses in its constitution and a decision had eventually to be taken for its dissolution.

It would be unjust to find fault with the personnel of the I.F.A.S. (Indian Frontier Administrative Service), most of whom were efficient and conscientious officers. The root of the trouble lies deeper, in the defects of our educational system itself. It was far-fetched to imagine that a six weeks' course of lectures could transform a soldier, sailor or airman, however competent, into a tribal administrator. Geoffrey Allen and Peter James were put through no course in tribal administration, but their entire training and background rendered it easier for them to project themselves into the lives and manners of unusual people in unusual places. An educational system that is hide-bound and unimaginative will churn out products that are hide-bound and unimaginative. I did not get the impression that many of the officers of the new cadre ever developed a real *feel* for the tribal people — they looked forward, on the contrary, to an early get-away to a Secretariat posting, preferably in the hub of New Delhi. The officers of NEFA prior to the constitution of the I.F.A.S. were, many of them, rough diamonds, lacking in the graces, but they fitted in with the landscape and were content to remain part of it until the end of their service. They came to be known to the tribal people more intimately than the birds of passage of the new cadre — and the tribal people like to deal with a man they know.

When Governor Sri Prakasa once visited me during my illness, he found me sleeping in bed with a file in my arms. This was too much for the eternal jester, who promptly quipped that files were exciting enough in office, but *surely* I could do better in bed. The penny must have dropped, for, two years later, I proceeded once more to Bombay to find myself a wife. Hilla was a lovely girl, gentle, kind and unaffected. Her father, Jal Master, had retired as Chief Conservator of Madras and had settled down with his family in Ootacamund in the Nilgiri hills. Hilla was a thing apart from the sophisticated girls of Bombay and it

did not take us long to decide that we were intended for each other. We thought it best, however, that she should visit Shillong and have an idea of her home-to-be before taking the plunge. I returned to Assam and Hilla came following after. She was thrilled with Shillong — and Shillong was thrilled with her. The hills, the homeliness of a country station, the friendly informality of our way of life, all this reminded Hilla of her beloved Ooty, and she was overjoyed at the thought of our building up a home together in such a charmed setting. We returned to Bombay and were married in December 1951. My friend Jigmie Dorji of Bhutan flew over with his family to attend our wedding (more particularly to kiss the bride!), and all was heaven. In September next year, a daughter was born to us in the Welsh Mission hospital, Shillong, with the good Dr Hughes presiding as Master of Ceremonies. We consulted the astrologers and named her Tusna.

A few weeks after Tusna's birth, I led a delegation to Rangoon to hold discussions with the Burma Government regarding problems on the Indo-Burma frontier. Our Naga villages had, for some time, been pestering us with complaints against the powerful Naga village of Tsalaw on the Burma side of the frontier. Tsalaw had been making a practice of crossing the frontier, attacking our villages, taking heads and quickly making off with their treasure to Burmese territory before our patrols could catch up with them. Our villages very rightly represented that if neither the Burmese nor the Indian authorities felt able to control Tsalaw, they would take the onus of doing so upon themselves and wipe Tsalaw once and for all from the face of the earth. We warned the Burmese Government that the villages, whether Indian or Burmese, must not, at any cost, be allowed to take the law into their own hands, as that would lead to chaos throughout the frontier areas. We proposed that the district officers on both sides of the frontier should periodically meet to sort

out their problems at the personal level and that regular patrolling should be carried out on both sides of the frontier to keep a check on villages hungering for heads. Our discussions in Rangoon were successfully concluded and we were royally entertained by our friendly hosts, Ministers all and mostly under thirty. At thirty-three myself, I felt ancient for once amid this gay and youthful congregation. I was assured that the culprit villages would in future be kept under control and restrained from trespassing into Indian territory. But when I was advised not to wander far out of the capital, Rangoon, for fear of elimination by rebels, I wondered a little what control they expected to exercise over rebellious Naga villages in the far-flung fastnesses of the remote frontier.

Shortly after my return from Burma, Hilla fell suddenly ill. On Dr Hughes's advice, we flew her for treatment to Bombay, where she passed away, just thirteen months after our marriage. To her broken-hearted parents I entrusted the care of my little daughter Tusna, that she might be a consolation and comfort to them in the evening of their lives. For myself, there was nothing left of our short-lived joy but a tragic memory — so searing that, for ten years, I could not bear to visit Bombay.

My last few months in Shillong were spent partly in briefing my successor, Kan Mehta, and partly in indoctrinating the first batch of recruits to the I.F.A.S. We drew up a course of talks to be delivered to the officers, but my own contribution was much more in the direction of giving them opportunities of getting the feel of the tribal people and understanding our approach to them. As it happened, we had organized another Hills and Plains Festival in Shillong, much on the lines of Sir Akbar's in 1947, and there were large gatherings of tribal people, both from NEFA and the Autonomous hill districts under the Assam Government, to whom I could introduce our new officers. We visited their camps in the evenings to have

informal chats with them, to compare notes on the day's happenings, to sing, perchance to dance with them, to settle their little quarrels. Or else they visited me in my own home, where we would spread ourselves before a roaring fire upon the drawing-room carpet, nodding off from time to time in the intervals between the gossiping and the revelling.

A brief cloud was cast, during the latter half of the Festival, by the sudden death, in camp, of a young Idu Mishmi from the Lohit Frontier Division. A rebellion had broken out in the last century when the Akas, a small tribe of Balipara (now Kameng), suspected there was a proposal by Government to abduct them to the plains of Bengal, at risk of death from disease and heat, for display in the Calcutta Exhibition.[1] The hill-tribal has not yet developed immunity against the diseases of the plains, and is reluctant to leave his home except when he must. The main purpose of the Festival was to create a feeling of oneness between the plains and hills, and the death of a tribal at just such a time could spark off a hundred strange notions in a superstitious mind. We took infinite care, therefore, to ensure that the last rites should be performed with appropriate ceremony and in strictest conformity with tribal custom. It was fortunate that our newly-recruited I.F.A.S. officers were in Shillong at the time to see how, in tribal administration, matters that may appear unimportant or trivial have a significance all of their own. We spent the better part of a day discussing with the Idus the minutest details of the ceremony. Would it be better to perform the ceremony in Shillong or fly the body to Sadiya and then carry it to his home in the hills? And if in Shillong, was there a Mishmi priest to discharge the essential rites? His Idu companions decided that, on balance, it would be more auspicious to

[1]According to the Akas, they had been instructed to send down a 'Raja and a Rani with all their ornaments' for display in the Calcutta Exhibition of 1875. Early accounts make mention of frequent raids by Akas on the Assam plains.

perform the last rites in Shillong, and so we spent the following day in arranging the ritual sacrifices and incantations, to be followed by the customary feasting and drinking. For two entire days, all other work had to be set aside, as there was not a moment that I was free from Idu visitors, each with their own ideas on how best the requirements of Idu custom could be fulfilled and the departed spirit released from the entanglements of evil forces.

Tragic as was the death of the young Idu, our scrupulous care in ensuring that everything humanly possible should be done to satisfy the requirements of tribal custom had its value in impressing on the tribal mind that the administration was not a hard, unfeeling bureaucracy, that it had a heart and soul, that it was sensitive and responsive to tribal sentiment. I was hoping that our young officers too, on the threshold of their exciting mission, would draw the moral.

I did not see so much of Verrier Elwin during my first tenure as Adviser to the Governor as when I returned from Sikkim in 1959, five years later, for a second term of office. Verrier was busy looking for a house and setting up home, but we saw enough of each other to discover our identity of attitude to tribal problems. I was, in those days, a much more involved person, and it is only since my long stay in the Buddhist milieu of Sikkim and Bhutan that I have come to know something of the meaning of detachment. For six years, NEFA had been mine. Governors were birds of passage, only I was eternal. I was more possessive of the tribal than a tigress of her cubs, and did not look too kindly on Verrier and my successor, Kan Mehta, who seemed to be dispossessing me of my heritage. I was yet to learn that everything passes. As I grew older and wiser, I came to grow very fond of Verrier and when, in 1964, he died, we were as close to each other as any two human beings can be. He has written, in his autobiography,[1] something of the way our minds were working in those

[1] *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin*, Oxford University Press.

early years when we were searching for a policy, and our identity of approach is well brought out in its concluding chapters:

In most of tribal India the problems were comparatively simple. The people needed protection, development and social justice. But in a few places the problems were more complex. In the Saora hills and among the Murias, for example, there was still a strong, vigorous and very happy tribal life, and when I came to NEFA I found that here and in other parts of the frontier the tribes had retained their ancient culture and were developing their arts in a way that was rare elsewhere in India. Tribal life was still vigorous. It still meant something. It was not a question of reviving anything: it was more a problem of introducing change without being destructive of the best values of the old life.

Nari Rustomji had been thinking about these problems for a number of years and his ideas were already being put into practice on the frontier, though unfortunately I did not get copies of his notes until much later, and as a result did not do him justice when I wrote *A Philosophy for* NEFA.[1]

As long ago as 1948, for example, we find him advocating very sound policies which would apply to the advance of civilization anywhere in the world. He condemns 'reckless' talk of 'uplifting and civilizing' the tribes. Officials or social workers must go to the people not as 'masters who dictate but as elder brothers who have suffered themselves and wish through their experience to spare others the pains they have had to endure'. They must not try to impose a uniform machinery of administration everywhere and certainly not try to bring the traditional judicial system of the hills into line with that elsewhere. They should not dream of 'imposing a system, notorious for its abuses and its delays, over areas where a sense of justice is one might almost say inherent amongst the people, and where the law operates both speedily and effectively'.

And a later note, which Rustomji wrote in 1953, anticipated so exactly what I was to think and say later that I will quote it in full.

'Much of the beauty of living still survives in these remote and distant hills, where dance and song are a vital part of everyday living, where people speak and think freely, without fear or restraint. Our workers must ensure, therefore, that the good that is inherent in the institutions of the hill people is not tainted or substituted by practices that may be "modern" and "advanced", but are totally unsuited to their economy and way of thinking. The hillman has, essentially, a clean, direct and healthy outlook; he is free, happily, from the morbid complexes induced by the unnatural life of city folk.

'The greatest disservice will be done, therefore, if in an excess of missionary zeal, our workers destroy the fresh creative urge that lives,

[1] Published by the NEFA Administration, 1957.

strong and vital, within the denizens of the hills. For if we wish to serve, we must show that we have respect for the hillmen and their institutions, their language and their song: and, in showing such respect, we shall secure their confidence in the work that lies ahead.' For this reason, everyone should make it his first task to familiarize himself with the local language, 'take an interest and come to understand the customs and usages of the people and share fully in their life, not as a stranger from without, but as one of themselves'.

9

Land of the Snow-Lion

'METOK-CHHARP, blossom-rain, how lucky for you! In Tibet, when there's rain and sunshine at the same time, we call it "blossom-rain" and think it extremely auspicious. How lucky for you to have blossom-rain just as you are entering Gangtok. It means you are going to be very happy in Sikkim.' Tessla Dorji, wife of Bhutan's Prime Minister, Jigmie Dorji, had come down from her home in Kalimpong to receive my mother and myself at Bagdogra airport near the foothills overlooking West Bengal and accompany us on the last lap of our journey to Gangtok, an eighty-mile hill-road winding up the luscious, luxuriant Teesta valley. It was a sultry, grey day, but just as we were approaching Gangtok, the sun unexpectedly broke through the clouds and we were refreshed by a light, delicate, spray of rain. Tessla was right in her prophecy. I was very happy in Sikkim.

The little Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim had passed through troubled times. The several mushroom political parties were continually at war with each other and had brought the country to a state of near crisis. The Sikkim State Congress[1] pressed for full responsible government by the people's representatives and for divesting the ruler of all effective power. The National Party favoured the *status quo*. The Praja Socialist Party agitated for merger of the country with India. The ruler himself lived in a world of his own, dividing his time between his prayers and his painting. Gentle and sensitive, he was above the machinations of party politics. He found fulfilment, during the day, in capturing on his canvas the soul of the mighty

[1] Patterned on the Congress Party (i.e. the ruling party) of India.

mountain-ranges. The evenings he spent in prayer and meditation. Sir Tashi Namgyal was universally loved by his subjects. The honorific in use for the ruler was 'Shung-Kiang' or 'Supreme and Sole Ruler'. The traditional Sikkimese title of the ruler, now once more in general usage, was 'Chogyal', or 'King who rules according to the Divine Law'. This would correspond to the title 'Dharma (Divine Law) Raja (King)' used, until the early years of the present century, to describe the Supreme Head of Bhutan, known in Bhutanese as the 'Shabdrung'[1]. The essential difference, however, between the Shabdrung of Bhutan and the Chogyal of Sikkim is that, whereas the former was, like the Dalai Lama of Tibet, a reincarnation, the latter is a hereditary office, the present Chogyal being the sixteenth in the line of direct succession and the twelfth formally consecrated ruler. Sir Tashi was, as a man, modest, retiring and unpretentious, but, as Chogyal and representing the Godhead, he was deeply venerated by his people.

Sir Tashi had entrusted the administration of his country to his son, the 'Gyese Rimpoche', my friend of Dehra Dun days. The Prince, as was to be expected of a high reincarnation, was mature much beyond his years. The political parties, on the other hand, seemed bent on precipitating a crisis and were spoiling for a fight. It was decided, in the event, that the Government of India should be approached to loan the services of an officer to assist in restoring stability. It was in these not very happy circumstances that J. S. Lall (of the I.C.S.) was appointed in 1948 as the first Dewan (Prime Minister) of Sikkim. John Lall was a talented officer of unusual executive ability. Sikkim's major problem was the easing of tensions as between the main racial components of the country. The Lepchas are popularly

[1] The first 'Shabdrung' is popularly believed to have entered Bhutan from Tibet and established himself as Supreme Ruler of the country in the early part of the seventeenth century.

held to be the indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim. The early waves of immigration, in the thirteenth century, were of people of Tibetan stock from across the northern border. They were Buddhists and converted the indigenous Lepchas, who seemed to be practising a form of animism, to Buddhism, at the same time influencing their language. The Sikkimese language of today, however, is basically the language of the original Tibetan immigrants and has in many respects closer affinities to early classical Tibetan than the form of Tibetan that has come to be spoken in Tibet today. The Lepchas and Tibetan immigrants[1] became assimilated, with the passage of time, in culture and social customs, and freely intermarried.

By far the heavier wave of immigration, however, was of Nepalese from the Darjeeling district of Bengal and from the eastern districts of Nepal. This immigration of Nepalese, which appears to have been connived at by the British, was of comparatively recent origin, starting from the last century, and had an essential difference with the immigration from the north. There was very little assimilation between the Nepalese immigrants and the Bhutia-Lepcha population they found in Sikkim on their arrival. The Nepalese retained their language, dress, religion and social customs, and there was practically no intermarriage between them and the Bhutia-Lepcha community. The Nepalese, moreover, are a phenomenally fertile people, and it is not unusual to find among them families where there are four or five wives and twenty to thirty children. The result is that, in the course of a single century, the original Bhutia-Lepchas of Sikkim became a minority in their own country, and about two-thirds of Sikkim's present population is now found to be of Nepalese origin.[2]

[1] Tibetans who have left their country and settled elsewhere, whether in Sikkim, India, Bhutan or Nepal, are known as 'Bhutias' — not to be confused with 'Bhutanese', the inhabitants of Bhutan.

[2] It has to be borne in mind, on the other hand, that some of the areas from which these immigrants came (e.g. eastern Nepal) had, in historical times, been

The Bhutia-Lepchas began, very understandably, to apprehend there was danger of their ultimate extinction — that their culture and language would be swamped and submerged in the swelling Nepalese flood. The ruling family was of Bhutia-Lepcha stock, and it had been the general practice, though there have been instances of alliances contracted within Sikkim itself, for Princes and Princesses of the Palace to be found brides and bridegrooms from the highest aristocracy of Tibet. The Bhutia-Lepchas looked to the Palace to safeguard their interests, and an impression arose, which was encouraged by political motivators, that the Palace did not look kindly upon the Nepalese and felt chary of accepting them as first class citizens. After much agitation and debate, a formula was hammered out and agreed upon as between the main political leaders which provided for parity of Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese seats in the Sikkim Council, although the Nepalese claimed they were entitled to a much larger proportion of seats by virtue of their greater numbers. Under the constitutional arrangements at the same time settled upon, the Dewan, who was loaned to the country by the Government of India but functioned as an officer of the Sikkim Durbar, was President both of the Council (corresponding to Parliament) and of the Executive Council (corresponding to the Cabinet). The Council was a body elected by adult franchise, with a few members nominated by the ruler. The Executive Councillors were the leaders of the two major parties in the Council, the State Congress and the National Party, and were entrusted with the 'transferred' subjects, such as Education, Health Services and Forests. The more vital subjects, such as Police and Finance, were retained by the ruler as 'reserved' subjects, which he administered exclusively through the Dewan.

part of Sikkim itself. These areas comprised tribal groups which were distinct in culture and language from the fore-runners of the present ruling dynasty of Nepal, who were Rajputs from India.

As President of the two Councils and administrator of the reserved subjects, the Dewan was placed in a position of commanding power. John Lall's was a delicate task. The reforms he envisaged necessitated the exercise of the Dewan's authority over a wide field of the administration. There was every likelihood that the exercise of such authority would excite suspicions and give rise to apprehension of the ruler's own authority being undermined. The Prince was a strong-minded young man, acutely sensitive to interference in what he considered to be his private domain. He had seen five hundred of the 'Native States' of pre-independence India liquidated and merged into the new 'India that is Bharat', and was determined not to let Sikkim swell the list of casualties. Although he shared many common interests with John Lall as in mountaineering and photography, he bitterly resented even the hint of any suggestion, albeit unintended, that ultimate authority derived not from the ruler but from the Government of India through the India-loaned Dewan. The Prince's relations with India's representative, the Political Officer in Sikkim, were also undergoing change. He had been willing, as a boy, to accept the elderly and fatherly Sir Basil as friend, philosopher and guide, but he was now grown up, with views and ideas of his own, and considered it highly improper if the political parties sought the intervention of the Political Officer whenever they reached an impasse with the ruler.

Balraj Kapur was Political Officer when I took charge as Dewan in 1954. A product of the old Political Service, he had served in the North-West Frontier and been schooled in the correctest British traditions — polish, old-world manners, gracious living. My mother and I were invited to stay at the Residency until John Lall left and we could move into the Dewan's residence, picturesquely named 'Metokgang', which is Sikkimese for 'blossom-crowned hill-top'. I had been able to visit Sikkim only once

since our Dehra Dun days, and the Prince had not paid a visit to me in Shillong since 1946. We had not seen each other for eight years and I looked forward almost passionately to our meeting. It seemed all wrong to me that I should formally drive to the Residency and wait until the Secretaries could fix a time for us to call on each other. I knew nothing of protocol, and, left to myself, would have driven straight to the Palace and embraced him as in days of old. We had been boys together, exchanged our innermost thoughts, shared bedrooms, and here we were being stiffly regimented on the renewal of our companionship.

It was seven in the evening when he arrived, with a white silk scarf as traditional, ceremonial welcome. I was taken aback at first, and sadly—his youthful boyishness had vanished, he had put on weight, and there were already lines on his forehead. And as though to symbolize our new relationship, he no longer called me 'Uncle' as of old, but 'Rusti', the name I went by in school in England. To me too, it seemed somehow out of place to continue to call him by the affectionate 'Namu' or 'Num' (short for the ruler's family-name 'Namgyal') of our younger, carefree days, and I called him, from now on, simply by his first name, Thondup.

I soon saw that there was wisdom in his seeming reserve. The political parties would be closely watching his relationship with the new Dewan. If he was seen to be over-friendly and intimate with the Dewan, the Nepalese might smell a rat. And if he showed himself to be depending and leaning overmuch on the Dewan as a respected elder of the family, there might be criticism that he was yielding to pressures brought to bear on him by India through a loaned officer. He was correct in exhibiting a due measure of restraint.

Both Balraj Kapur and John Lall enjoyed ballroom dancing and there was plenty of fun in the round of farewell parties in John's honour. Chinese activity in Tibet had

prompted some of the aristocratic and more prosperous Tibetan families to seek refuge in India and Sikkim before it was too late, and these Tibetans certainly added to the gaiety of our lives. Their women were attractive, uninhibited and madly fond of western dancing, and it was a trial for us males to keep pace with them. There was no question as to which was the weaker sex in polyandrous Tibet! The Chogyal was also happy to take time off from his meditations and painting to participate in the festivities, and the champagne flowed as the revellers from distant Lhasa swirled to the Viennese waltz in their dazzling, flowing brocades, the turquoise of their long, pendant ear-rings swinging and glittering with the lilt.

The farewells over, I settled down to work. The Nepali language is closely related to Hindi and I had no difficulty in picking up a working knowledge of the language within two or three months. Tibetan and Sikkimese, however, have entirely different roots from the Sanskrit-based languages of India and I had to work hard at them. I happened to drop in at the hostel of the High School one evening and inquired, casually, whether any of the lads would teach me Tibetan. One of them, a Sikkimese from Yatung in the Chumbi valley, readily volunteered to come to my house after school every evening and lend me a hand. I did not take him seriously, but there he was, sure enough, patiently waiting for me as I returned home from office next day. He was a conscientious lad and would not miss a day. There were times when I myself felt like a break, but no, Pemba Tsering would be there, mercilessly driving me on. During week-ends, he accompanied me on my tours to give me practice in conversation, and it was not long before I had a fair idea of the language, with its elaborate range of honorifics. Poor Pemba devoted so much time to me that he neglected his own studies and, to nobody's surprise, failed in the Matriculation examination. He returned,

shortly after, to his home in the Chumbi valley and was appointed by the Chinese to a minor post in the Forest Department. I tried to keep in touch with him, as he had been helpful to me and I had grown fond of him, but I received no reply to my letters. He perhaps apprehended that the suspicions of the Chinese would be aroused if he was found corresponding with a high Indian official in Sikkim. I later heard that he had been sent on an indoctrination course to Peking.

The Chumbi valley, now in Tibet, had in historical times formed part of Sikkim. Its inhabitants had close affinities, in language, dress and social customs, with the people comprised within Sikkim's present day boundaries, and the valley had for many generations been the headquarters of the ruler during the summer months, when the climate was more pleasant than in the lower ranges further south. The Chinese took care, after their entry into Tibet, to occupy the Chumbi valley in strength lest the Sikkimese should harbour dreams of reviving old claims, and accelerated the processes of 'de-Tibetanizing' by deputing leading people of the area and the brighter lights of the younger generation to China for 'cultural integration'. And so I lost my Pemba.

The Sikkim Durbar had approached Nehru for aid for the financing of a Seven-Year Plan for economic development. The plan, which had been prepared by the Durbar, at Nehru's instance, with the assistance of experts of the Planning Commission of the Government of India, was accepted by the Government of India, save in respect of one important project, the project for an aerial ropeway from Gangtok to the Tibetan border. The main trade between Tibet and India had hitherto been transacted by mule-caravans travelling through Sikkim. The major import from Tibet had, in the past, been wool, and now, with the Chinese establishing themselves in Tibet, there was a rapidly expanding export market for vegetable-oils,

petrol, spare parts for vehicles, transistors, in fact everything needed in a fast-developing economy. The Prince was convinced that it would be more economical for this swelling flow of trade to be carried by rope-way and that, with transport as a State monopoly, the rope-way would prove to be one of the most lucrative avenues of revenue for the country.

Sikkim's Seven-Year Plan provided for the expansion of educational and medical facilities, the construction and improvement of roads and bridges, and all the other social services expected of a modern welfare state. What worried the Prince was the problem of financing the maintenance in the future of the numerous projects established under the plan. Sikkim's sources of revenue were as yet meagre, and unless some large-scale revenue-earning projects could be initiated, Sikkim would remain perpetually dependent for finances on her neighbours. The experts of India's Planning Commission, on the other hand, were sceptical of the economics of the rope-way project and found themselves unable to recommend its inclusion in the plan. The Prince was deeply dejected. His heart was set on the rope-way and he was convinced it would pay. The Plan without the rope-way had, for him, lost all its savour, and he went off in dudgeon into the mountains to catch trout and nurse his disappointment in quiet solitude.

I have no head for economics and really had no business — or grounds — to challenge the experts of India's Planning Commission. But I was saddened by the Prince's dejection and determined to do what I could to vindicate his stand. I set about my task with Germanic thoroughness. Statistics were collected afresh, the economics of existing rope-ways in and out of India compared with costs of carriage by road and the Planning Commission's assumptions disproved — I succeeded in convincing myself that the rope-way project was financially feasible and must

not on any account be omitted from the plan. I proceeded next to Delhi with my brief, argued, pleaded and ranted with officials of the Planning, Commerce and Foreign Ministries, and approached, in ultimate desperation, the Prime Minister as final Court of Appeal. Nehru, I knew, had a soft corner for the people of the hills and would be responsive to considerations of sentiment, if not to statistics. What on earth, I asked, was the use of a plan if it did not inspire enthusiasm? With the Prince in a state of dudgeon, it would be still-born at the start. Even if the rope-way did not pay, it would at least break even. There was nothing to lose, therefore, in including the project and everything to be gained. Nehru was sympathetic, and the Prince got his rope-way. By the time the construction of the rope-way was completed, however, China and India were no longer friends and trade between the two countries had come to a halt. But if the rope-way does not carry trade to Tibet as originally envisaged, it serves the no less vital purpose of carrying rations, stores, petrol and equipment to the troops that guard Sikkim's frontiers.

Within a few weeks of my taking office in Sikkim, the Prince planned a visit to Lhasa. He had, according to the time-honoured practice of the Palace, married into the Tibetan aristocracy. His wife, Sangey Deki, was of the Yapshi[1] family of Samdu Phodrang, and custom prescribed that he should visit his wife's family within a reasonable period of time after the marriage. A deeper reason for the visit was the Prince's concern to make his own appreciation of how things were shaping in Tibet under increasing Chinese control. The Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan had, for some time, been feeling a sense of uncertainty and uneasiness with pressures from China and India mounting on either side. There had been some thinking at one juncture that these outlying areas should combine together as a Federation so as to be able to put up

[1] Yapshi, family that has sired a Dalai Lama.

stronger resistance to any possible threat to their independence. The young Prince and his cousin, Jigmie Dorji, had also taken the opportunity of a visit to Kathmandu to have consultations with Nepalese leaders, when the idea of a Federation was broadly, though only informally, considered.

From the short term point of view, there seemed much to commend the idea — the three countries combined would be more difficult for any neighbour to swallow at a single swoop than one at a time. From the long term there were dangerous implications. The Nepalese had already flooded into Sikkim and overwhelmed the land with their language and their culture. The same processes were beginning to manifest themselves in Bhutan. The southern districts of Bhutan are inhabited mainly by Nepalese immigrants. With the prolific increase in their population, the pressures have been building up for their infiltration further north. The Bhutan authorities, learning from Sikkim's experience, have hitherto succeeded in confining the Nepalese to the southern districts. With Nepal as senior partner in a Federation, there might be embarrassment in taking measures that would appear discriminatory against Nepalese settlers. And in the absence of restrictory measures, the Nepalese cultural stream would in time supervene over the entire Himalayan region. With the various reservations and apprehensions implicit in the idea, the proposal for Federation was eventually dropped, and the pattern of relationship as now subsisting emerged as a consequence of treaties entered into successively between India, China, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Under Sikkim's Treaty with India[1] after Independence, internal affairs were the exclusive concern of the Sikkim Durbar, while the Government of India undertook responsibility for the country's defence, external affairs and strategic communications. The Prince did not interpret this to imply that the Sikkim Durbar was debarred from

[1] Of 1950. Her earlier treaties with the British were of 1817 and 1861.

applying itself to the latter subjects. The Prince was himself deeply interested in foreign affairs and it was for this reason in part that he undertook the arduous journey to Lhasa. He had heard stories of the Chinese and their ways from Tibetans who had left their country to settle in Sikkim and India, and was anxious to see things for himself. The Treaty gave India the right to handle Sikkim's foreign affairs, but the Prince assumed that, in the discharge of this responsibility, India would consult Sikkim so as to ensure that the country's interests were fully safeguarded. He felt it necessary, therefore, to keep himself fully posted of developments on his northern frontier.

The Prince was entitled to expect that the Chinese would accord the customary courtesies to the heir-apparent to the Sikkimese throne. It could not, therefore, have been a pleasant experience for him to find himself kept waiting about by Chinese frontier-guards while his credentials were being examined at border check-posts. And in Lhasa, the Prince, who had been driving automobiles ever since his feet could reach the accelerator, was required to undergo a rigorous driving test before being permitted to take the wheel on a public thoroughfare. Part of the test included reversing across a complicated pattern of squares and circles marked out on an extensive, open yard, and it was not until after a second attempt that the Prince was declared to have passed the test and to be eligible for a driver's licence. But pinpricks apart, his visit enabled him to make his own assessment of the Chinese and their methods. There was a powerful group in Tibet that disapproved of India's policy *vis-à-vis* Tibet as defeatist and weak-kneed. Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and NEFA were held, according to Chinese ideology, to be the five fingers of the hand that stretched out hungrily at the extremities of the Chinese empire. Tibetan critics of Indian policy felt convinced that, after absorbing the palm that is Tibet, China would proceed, without much further ado, to have a nibble at the

fingers. The Prince and Princesses were conversant with this group and harboured apprehensions for the future. They had little faith in the popular slogans of co-existence, the *Panchshila* (five principles), and 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai' (brotherhood of India and China). They were closer to the scene and could feel the pulse of the times more sharply than the dreamers and schemers in faraway Delhi.

My predecessor in office, John Lall, had worked hard to improve the administrative structure and draw up the outline of Sikkim's first Seven-Year Plan for economic development. If he had a failing, it was in letting his good works take on the appearance of flowing from himself and from himself alone. Everything and everybody existed, or so it appeared, by sufferance of the Dewan Omnipotent. The senior officers of the Secretariat were called 'Officers-in-Charge', a designation more generally associated in India with officers of the rank of sub-inspectors of a police station. They had the highest admiration for John Lall's drive, brilliance and executive ability, but were not prepared to masquerade as his shadow. I was soon made aware of this feeling and did what I could to restore the balance. We redesignated the highest officer of the Secretariat, T. D. Densappa, a scholar of wide culture and respected patriarch of a family with traditions of long and distinguished service to Sikkim, as Chief Secretary and the remaining senior officers as Secretaries to Government. We abolished the derogatory 'Officer-in-Charge'. The Secretariat we renamed as 'Tashiling' in honour of the ruler, Sir Tashi. For myself, I made it a point to wear Sikkimese dress and speak in the languages of Sikkim wherever possible and as far as was within my capacity.

With the initiation of Sikkim's plan for economic development, it became necessary to recruit a number of technical officers as experts in the various departments. As technical officers were not available in Sikkim, the officers recruited were mostly Indians employed on contract or

obtained on deputation from services under the Indian Government. Their employment was temporary, until such time as Sikkimese could be trained up for their replacement, and there was no alternative but to offer them rather higher salaries as compensation for insecurity of service, and also to provide an incentive to them to uproot themselves from their existing billets to take up work in a remote country on an uncertain frontier. This soon gave rise to complaints of unfair discrimination from Sikkimese officers, who viewed with suspicion and jealousy the growing influx of Indian officers. This trend was further accelerated by the progressive expansion of the office of the Political Officer, or Indian Resident, in Sikkim. Within a year or two, there grew up quite a colony of Indian officers, many of whom kept very much to themselves and had neither the temperament nor flexibility of approach to identify with the people among whom they were placed. They were conscientious and efficient officers, to whom credit is due for giving shape to the Plan, and it was no fault of theirs that they were regarded by the Sikkimese with a certain aloofness. The art of human relations does not come easily to all — it is a science that has its laws no less than engineering and medicine and they cannot be learnt in a moment.

The Prince and I were determined that, in implementing the Plan, we should do nothing that might offend against Sikkim's cultural traditions. We decided, therefore, to set the tone in the design of the new Development Office, which was to be the centre and hub of all our planning activity. We drew up a plan for a modern, concrete building, with light, airy rooms and every up-to-date convenience, but designed in traditional style. The windows were large and oblong, each with its wide border of brightly-painted floral or dragon motifs, the pillars elaborately carved, the façade gaily decked with the eight lucky symbols of Buddhism, and, to crown all, a pagoda roof of

turquoise blue. This was to be the symbol of our objectives and aspirations in our task of developing Sikkim — we wanted modernity, we welcomed the advances of science, but not at the cost of sacrificing the past and the beauty of Sikkim's cultural heritage. The weight of Nepalese settlement had already had its impact on the ancient Bhutia-Lepcha pattern of culture. With the influx of Indian experts for implementation of Sikkim's Plan, there was apprehension of yet another phase of cultural erosion. If anything was to survive of the old Sikkim, this was the time to take the initiative. Dress, language, architecture, religion, social customs, music, painting — in these were centred the heart of Sikkim's culture. Much had been lost to Sikkim from a series of external cultural onslaughts, and it was time to call a halt to the processes of decay. The hour had struck for Sikkim's cultural renaissance, with the young Prince as its shining inspiration.

Soon after my arrival in Gangtok, I took to wearing the long Sikkimese gown, the *ko*[1], as my normal dress. I cannot say it is a particularly comfortable form of attire. I have always found the sash, wound tight round the waist, constricting, particularly after a heavy meal. But it helped to make me feel I 'belonged', as did my little smattering of Tibetan, Sikkimese and Nepali. I would not, however, advocate that every outsider in Sikkim should necessarily wear either a *ko* or Nepalese dress. The mere wearing of a dress has little meaning unless there is complete commitment, unless there is a genuine inner urge to belong — without which it is of no more relevance than getting made up for a fancy-dress party. I found, after a time, that I felt 'foreign' in the western-style clothes to which I had been accustomed all my life, that I could not 'carry' people so effectively in a 'foreign' garb. On the occasion of the Prince, the Princesses and their

[1] More generally known as *bokku* (Nepali).

families being invited to Delhi as guests of the Government of India, I did not think twice about accompanying the party robed in my usual Sikkimese dress. To my surprise I came to learn later that the Foreign Secretary of India, a member of my own service, while conceding that the Dewan might wear Sikkimese dress in Sikkim, 'failed to see the point of his wearing Sikkimese dress in Delhi'. The point was, of course, that the dress had become part of the Dewan's personality and could not be shaken off at will. When, after my five years in Sikkim, I returned to India and shed my Sikkimese dress, I felt I was shedding a part of my essential self, and for months I seemed as a stranger to myself.

I have my dresses still, but they seem no longer to belong to myself, but to someone from the past who has vanished out of this world. I have visited Sikkim many times since, but never again worn Sikkimese dress. These are, however, matters of feeling regarding which the hardened bureaucrat may well 'fail to see the point'. But to do justice to my tribe, there was also R. K. Nehru, who provided a truly refreshing contrast. As Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs, R.K. and his wife arrived on a goodwill mission to Gangtok, with Tikki Kaul in attendance. There was nothing of the stuffy bureaucrat about R.K. While paying his courtesy call on Sir Tashi and his family at the Palace, R.K. came prepared, according to custom, with special gifts for each family member. When presents had been offered to the royal family, R.K. turned towards me with a little package, and, as he gracefully handed it to me, added light-heartedly to Sir Tashi, 'And we have not forgotten your Dewan, Your Highness.' It was a light touch, but with a telling significance. When John Lall took office as Dewan, the idea gained ground that although, theoretically, he was appointed by the ruler, he was, in fact, 'India's man'. His apparently rather arbitrary manner of functioning, inevitable under the then very critical conditions, encouraged the public in this belief, and was a source

of understandable irritation to the Prince. By referring to me as 'your' Dewan, R.K. made it clear that, whatever might have been the position in the past, the Government of India regarded the Dewan as an officer of the Sikkim Durbar, functioning on behalf not of New Delhi but of the ruler. Although I was a comparatively junior officer in the service, R.K. was scrupulously correct in matters of protocol and was careful, in his relations, to treat with me not as an officer much subordinate in service, but as an equal, the Prime Minister of India's Protectorate.

R.K.'s visit to Sikkim, followed by the Prince's visit to Delhi, helped greatly in bringing closer understanding between the two countries. The Prince was offered the opportunity of renewing his contacts with Pandit Nehru, and the association of other family members helped in creating an atmosphere of informality and friendliness in which all could air their thoughts freely and without reserve. If there was error in judgement, it was in arranging too tight a schedule for the Prince's programme, for from morning to night, it was a breathless race against time. The Foreign Ministry were anxious that the Prince and the members of his family should see as much as possible of the progress achieved by India in various fields—hydro-electric projects, agricultural research centres, cottage industries—apart from tourist attractions in and around Delhi, such as the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal.

For the Prince and his party, used to a leisurely pace in the cool of the mountains, the hurry and scurry of being shepherded hither and thither in the heat of the plains was soon too much. And I, the principal shepherd, was heading rapidly for nervous collapse. It was my business to ensure that the Prince, his wife, the three Princesses, their husbands, and the Prince's younger brother, were punctual in attending their multifarious engagements. We were staying as the Government of India's guests at Hyderabad House, the New Delhi palace of the fabulous Nizam, and would have

been happiest if only we could have been left alone to fend for ourselves. But no, it would be ordained that, at precisely zero nine hundred hours (9 a.m. in civilized parlance), the party must be ready to visit All-India Radio. Until half-past eight, I find everybody still peacefully asleep, except for the Prince who is saying his prayers. After much cajoling, I manage to have them out of bed, cursing the world in general and the Government of India and myself in particular. At half-past nine comes a telephone-call from All-India Radio, making gentle inquiries regarding the Prince's well-being. The inquiries are repeated at a quarter to ten, but on a rather less gentle note. We arrive in a flurry at ten, but minus half the party, whose absence has to be explained by stories of mythical ailments. After three days playing the shepherd, I abandoned my flock in despair. We went on strike and spent the rest of our stay in comfortable retirement in Hyderabad House, oblivious of temples old and new, refreshing ourselves in His Exalted Highness the Nizam's wondrous shower-bath of a hundred sprays, each jet playing lasciviously upon the remotest recesses of the human anatomy, with angle, temperature and thrust shifting marvellously at the lightest touch of the sensitive controls.

About a year after my joining in Sikkim, Charles Evans suddenly turned up in Gangtok, much worried. He had finalized his plans for climbing Kanchenjunga,[1] had flown out the most elaborate equipment to India for the purpose, sought and obtained the permission of the Nepal Government — only to be informed, shortly before leaving England, that the Government of Sikkim objected to any attempt to climb the mountain, whose eastern side is in Sikkim. The Sikkimese consider Kanchenjunga a sacred mountain and the abode of their Protecting Deity. The most important festival of Sikkim is the 'Worship of the Snowy Range', a dance-festival celebrated every year in the fore-court of the Palace Chapel and widely attended by

[1] Spelt Khang-chen-dzo-nga in Sikkimese.

every section of the public. The very idea of desecrating the peak by heavily-booted, heathen mountaineers was appalling to the Sikkimese. Anyone who has visited Sikkim will feel in an instant the awe and sense of veneration that the mountain inspires. The five gleaming peaks are the treasuries (dzo, treasury, nga, five) of the Great Snowy Range (Khang, snow-range, chen, great). These comprise the wealth, prosperity and destiny of Sikkim, and are watched over eternally by the Snow-lion with his emerald-green mane. To climb the Snowy Range was no less than a challenge to the Gods, a profanity that the Gods would not lightly condone.

Charles Evans had been made aware in New Delhi of Sikkim's strong feelings and advised to proceed to Gangtok himself to explore the chances, slender though they appeared, of arriving at a working arrangement that would be acceptable to the Sikkim Durbar. He requested me, as a person close to the Sikkim royal family, to intercede on his behalf, explaining that the expedition was a purely scientific venture, with no idea of violating sacred territory. I agreed, and remember still the tone of wrath and indignant scorn with which the Prince and Princesses reacted as, hesitantly, I first broached the subject. Evans was the guest of the Political Officer and staying in the Residency, about a mile from the Palace. After endless shuttling back and forth between the Palace and the Residency, carrying proposals, counter-proposals and counter-counter-proposals, we succeeded in reaching an acceptable formula. On Evans's personal assurance that his expedition was a purely scientific venture for ascertaining the existence (if any) of an approach to the peak and that there was no intention of actually ascending the peak or 'conquering' the sacred mountain, the permission sought for was ultimately granted. It was distinctly understood, however, that the expedition should proceed only as far as was necessary to ascertain whether or not there was an approach to the peak, and, on reaching

such point, advance no further. A formal undertaking was given by Evans that the party 'would not under any circumstances ascend the peak or its immediate environments'.

Everyone was happy that a solution had been found, myself in particular as the hapless intermediary torn between the two contending parties. What was our surprise and shock to read in the newspapers some weeks later that the expedition had reached 'within a few feet of the peak'. The Prince was enraged, convinced that this was a deliberate breach, in spirit at least, of the solemn undertaking given by Evans. We lodged our protest, and Evans paid, post-haste, a second visit to Gangtok, to substantiate his defence. Armed with a battery of photographs, he explained that the peak was in fact invisible to the climbers until they ascended the final, vertical wall and that it was only when they had reached the top of this sheer, straight precipice that they suddenly found themselves, unexpectedly, within a few feet of the mountain's summit. The Prince was never, I think, completely satisfied with Evans's explanation, though he felt no purpose would be served by pressing the matter further.

10

Invitation to the Dragon-Kingdom

WHILE considerable headway had been made in the establishing of good relations, on the official and personal level, between India and Sikkim, Bhutan had remained hitherto very much aloof and India's contacts with the country were few and tenuous. This had been so even in pre-independence days, mainly because of the country's inaccessibility. The conduct of India's relations with Bhutan was the responsibility of the Political Officer in Sikkim, who maintained contact with the kingdom through the Agent to the Bhutan Government, who had his headquarters at Kalimpong in Bengal. Kalimpong was the centre of the Indo-Tibetan wool trade, as indeed of all trade flowing between the two countries, and, in the absence of internal communications within Bhutan, was the most easily accessible point at which India and Bhutan could maintain liaison on a day-to-day basis. It was an arrangement that suited the Bhutanese, who were by temperament suspicious of foreigners and preferred to deal with them at a distance rather than have them prying around their country.

A convention had been established that every new incumbent to the office of Political Officer should call on the King to present his credentials. But even this courtesy call was generally arranged to take place not at Bhutan's capital at Thimphu but at Paro, some distance away. If the King and the Political Officer happened to hit it off, the King might invite the Political Officer to visit the capital and tour the country. It was rarely that a really close relationship

developed between the King and the Political Officer, with the result, doubtless intended by Bhutan, that the country was left very much to its own devices, neither interfering with nor interfered with by the outside world.

The Bhutan Agent at Kalimpong, on the other hand, was of easy access to the Political Officer in Gangtok and there were frequent opportunities for exchanging hospitality. The first holder of this office, Ugyen Dorji, grandfather of my friend Jigmie of Dehra Dun days, had been of assistance to the British at the time of the Younghusband expedition to Lhasa in 1904. He had served as liaison officer between Col. Younghusband and the Dalai Lama, and it was through his good offices that the British could depend on the support and co-operation of the Bhutan authorities. Ugyen Dorji had little English, but he was farsighted enough to have his son, the future Raja Tobgay Dorji, educated in English schools in the Darjeeling district and brought up in western ways. Even so, there was the strongest opposition from the Sikkimese to the idea of a 'Drukpa' (inhabitant of the Dragon Kingdom, Bhutanese) seeking the hand of a Princess of Denjong (Valley of Rice, Sikkim).

Raja Dorji and his Sikkimese bride, Rani Chuni, were married nevertheless, and raised a family of three boys and two girls in their lovely home in Kalimpong, known as Bhutan House. The eldest son was my friend Jigmie, who, on the death of his father in 1952, succeeded to his father's office. The second son, Ugyen, was considered a reincarnation of a high lama in Tibet and was known as 'Rimpoche', 'Precious Jewel'. Lhendup, the third son, was sent to Cornell University in the States, but his researches were in fields not included in the academic curriculum and he returned home minus a degree. The elder daughter, Tashi, was a girl of quick intelligence, generous heart and inexhaustible drive, who, in the absence of her brother Jigmie, sometimes deputized for him in the office of Bhutan

Agent. The younger daughter, Kesang, essence of sweetness and loveliness, was to marry the Prince of Bhutan and reign as Queen of the Dragon Kingdom.

Apart from holding office as Bhutan Agent in Kalimpong, Raja Dorji functioned also as Prime Minister, though not in the sense that is ordinarily understood. The King of Bhutan was an absolute monarch, and, except for the southern frontier districts inhabited mostly by Nepalese, whose administration he entrusted to the Bhutan Agent, held tight the reigns of power. Raja Dorji, in his capacity as Prime Minister, carried the old Bhutanese designation of Deb Zimpon, or Chief of the King's Household. As chief executive officer of the extensive Ha district in western Bhutan, he was designated as Ha Trungpa, or Chief of Ha. On the death of Raja Dorji, his eldest son, Jigmie, was recognized as succeeding to the offices of Bhutan Agent and Ha Trungpa, but there was no immediate or clear indication that he succeeded to his father's responsibilities in other fields. Much importance is attached, in Bhutan, to protocol. Shawls of varying colours and designs are prescribed for varying ranks of dignitaries. Although Raja Dorji's son, Jigmie, exercised no less influence with the King than his late father, the shawl he carried was no different from the standard red shawl worn by District Commissioners and high-ranking officers of the King's Secretariat. And this is a matter of some significance in the light of later events.

Bhutan House was the social centre of Kalimpong, with Raja Dorji and his wife giving the lead in all matters of public concern. The administration of the southern districts of Bhutan was somewhat on the old Tibetan pattern, under which the chief administrative officer, in this case the Bhutan Agent, was responsible for paying in a fixed amount annually to the central exchequer, with no questions asked as to how much was actually realized from the people. He received no regular salary and was expected to maintain himself out of the proceeds of his charge. The

Dorji family had, in the course of years, acquired a considerable fortune and extensive landed property in the Kalimpong area, apart from their assets in land, buildings and yaks in Bhutan. But they lived well and were free with their money for charitable causes. If funds were to be raised for a public purpose, whether hospital, school or monastery, it was the Dorjis who were approached to set the pace and they contributed generously without fail. Raja Dorji was an extrovert and found other channels also for dispersing his fortune. He entertained lavishly, and played with zest, regardless of the stakes, whether at the race-course or the mah-jong table — but only when he could elude his Rani's watchful eye. For Rani Chuni was a woman of religion and rigorous discipline, and, love him as she did, regarded it as her wifely duty to restrain her fond partner's wilder extravagances.

Jigmie inherited his father's wilder appetites, plus a heart of gold. His wife Tsering-Yangzam, or Tessla as we called her, was a daughter of the prolific Tsarong, trusted and powerful favourite of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who spent a long and colourful life scattering his abundant seed. Tessla's father was not, however, the original high-born Tsarong, an aristocrat of enormous wealth who died under circumstances smacking strongly of palace intrigue. Tessla's father was a commoner, but a commoner of uncommon ability, to whom his grateful lord, the thirteenth Dalai Lama, entrusted the ill-fated Tsarong's entire estate, including the noble name of Tsarong and, more particularly, his treasury of winsome daughters. Tessla was the gayest, cleverest and wittiest of his creations, a jewel of depth and fire that no human could long resist. Jigmie too was no mean charmer, and did not let opportunity slip by when Tessla arrived from Lhasa for schooling in the Indian hill-station of Darjeeling.

The Bhutan King was nearly ten years younger than Jigmie, and in the earlier years of his reign leant heavily on

Jigmie for advice in all fields of the administration. Jigmie's sister, the Queen, was also a person of wide culture and unusual intelligence, through whom Jigmie could have ready access to his monarch in times of crisis. As Jigmie stayed most of the year in Kalimpong, was more easily accessible to the world at large, and had the ear of the King, he came progressively to be identified as the voice of Bhutan and it was through him that negotiations with the Government of India, even on major issues, were generally transacted.

For India, Bhutan stood out as a wide gaping vacuum on a frontier of vital strategic importance. The country was devoid of communications, and, should an emergency have necessitated the sending of troops, at Bhutan's request, for protection against an aggressor, sheer ignorance of the country alone would have stood in the way of effective action. The Government of India felt the time had come for strengthening India's ties with Bhutan. Some misunderstanding had arisen regarding questions of protocol during the young King's coronation which required to be cleared. And, with development projects under way in the countries encircling her, there was the risk of Bhutan lagging behind. The Bhutanese, however, were highly suspicious of the idea of any foreigner moving about freely in their country and advising them regarding their own affairs. The Government of India had but recently, under the aegis of Sardar Patel, eliminated, in the interests of the unity of the country, the five-hundred odd Native States of pre-independence days. What guarantee was there that Bhutan would not also come under the axe? Better to steer clear and take no chances.

Jigmie agreed with the Government of India that Bhutan must move with the times, but had also his young King to convince. I had met the King only once, during his brief visit to Shillong, and we had not had the opportunity of getting to know each other closely. Jigmie hoped that, if we

could see more of each other, confidence might be built up and there might be some rethinking in the King's mind regarding the whole question of opening up his country with India's assistance. The problem was the mechanics of my visiting Bhutan. As Dewan of Sikkim, I had no *locus standi* with either the Government of India or Bhutan and could scarcely visit Bhutan in an official capacity. Jigmie solved the problem by suggesting to the King that I should be invited to visit Bhutan as a private guest to the marriage of Jigmie's brother, Ugyen Rimpoche, with the King's half-sister, Aji Choki.

Though I had seen little of the King personally, he had his own sources of information and had, I have no doubt, managed to learn a lot more about me than I had about him. His agents brought him intelligence of every conceivable description, and, apart from the Dorji family at Kalimpong, there were numerous Bhutanese traders passing through Sikkim by way of the Nathu La pass en route to the trade-mart of Kalimpong who used to approach me for assistance. These Bhutanese traders had been permitted, according to time-honoured practice, to graze their mules by the wayside at a nominal charge and rest for the night at certain specified camps along the route. The minor officials of the Sikkim Forest Department tended, in an excess of zeal for increasing their departmental revenues, to overcharge these traders and subject them to various forms of petty harassment. The Bhutanese had approached me in deputation and I investigated their difficulties personally to set things right. They had evidently reported on me in appreciative terms to higher authorities in Bhutan, for when I later fetched up in Bhutan, I was welcomed as a sort of deliverer from Sikkimese oppression! Anyway, I was not in the category of *persona non grata*, and the King readily agreed to Jigmie's suggestion that I should attend the marriage celebrations.

When Jigmie first broached the idea of my attending the wedding, I had thought in terms of taking a week off from

Sikkim, or at most a fortnight, and envisaged little complication. It was only later, when the time came to finalize the programme, that I realized that everything in Bhutan, including marriage ceremonies, is *sui generis*. The venue of the marriage was at Bumthang, which we would reach after three weeks' hard trekking across mountain passes ranging up to 13,000 feet in elevation. It would be considered discourteous to remain at Bumthang for less than two weeks; and we would be expected to wait on the King at his capital at Thimphu both on our way up to Bumthang and on our return. I would be required, therefore, to set apart a minimum of two to three months to fulfil my engagement to attend the royal wedding.

The circumstances of the wedding are of interest and require explanation. The bride, Aji Choki, was the eldest daughter of Aji Pemadecchen, step-mother of the King. ('Aji' is the honorific prefixed to the names of Bhutanese ladies of high family, more particularly the royal family.) The late King married two sisters, the elder of whom, Aji Choden, bore him a son, the present King. The younger, Aji Pemadecchen, bore him one son, Namgyal Wangchuk, and three daughters, Choki, Dikki and Pema. After the late King's death, Aji Pemadecchen became a nun and occupied herself in religious devotions. Aji Choden was also of a religious bent of mind, but her special interest was in weaving. She had a team of weaving-girls deployed throughout Bhutan, distributed yarn to them from a central headquarters at Thimphu, and bought it back as cloth of variegated Bhutanese designs, for sale both inside and outside Bhutan. It should be understood that in Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim, holders of the highest offices engaged in trade. Some of the most respected monasteries were maintained on the proceeds of trade transactions, and high lamas were often most adept and shrewd in the conduct of commerce. There was nothing unusual or derogatory, therefore, in the Queen-Mother engaging in trade.

Ugyen Rimpoche was the second son of Raja Dorji. When he was quite a boy, a group of lamas waited on his parents at Bhutan House in Kalimpong, and represented that their son, Ugyen, was the reincarnation of a high lama of Tibet who had, in recent years, passed away from earthly existence. The late lama had been the spiritual guide of the monks of their monastery and they pleaded that young Ugyen should be released by his family so that he might be brought up under monastic discipline and take the late lama's place as the monastery's head. The parents, as devout Buddhists, agreed to their urgent pleadings, and escorted the boy over the month-long journey, by mule and pony, to the monastery he was destined to rule. It was a sad parting, as parents and child could not expect to see each other again, except at rare intervals; for with the initiation of the boy as a celibate monk, he was virtually lost to his family.

Rimpoche, like his mother Rani Chuni, had a mind of his own, and it did not take him long to decide that the life of religious abstinence was not for him. To the inconsolable sorrow of the monastic authorities, he packed his bags and hurried back to hearth and home. He was a lovable young lad, handsome, vital, generous and abounding in healthy animal spirits. It was too much to expect that such a boy, brought up in a western background and accustomed to the lavish style of living of Bhutan House, could adjust himself to the austerities of life among lamas in a remote and unknown monastery. It was creditable to him that he even made the attempt. On his return from Tibet, he was sent to St Joseph's School in Darjeeling, but retained the honorific title Rimpoche, as the lamas insisted that, however the boy might choose to act, he was still a 'Precious Jewel'. It was after he had left school and was out at camp one spring in Bhutan with the royal family that he met Aji Choki, and there was quickly a meeting of hearts. It was decided that the two should be married and

the ceremonies were arranged to take place in the family home of the King at Bumthang in central Bhutan.

When first I met Aji Choki as a bride at Bumthang in 1955, she knew little English, but was fluent both in speaking and writing Hindi. She was fond of music and would regale us in the evenings with Bhutanese and Hindi songs. No glamour girl, she was of stocky build, verging on plumpness, but with kindly, pleasing features. She was every inch a country girl, shrewd, capable and fully conversant in the management of her vast family estates. Aji Choki and Rimpoche did not share many common interests and I was not at all certain how the marriage would eventually turn out. Rimpoche, after the first hot flush, showed little of the ardour of a lover. But he had committed himself to the marriage — and one cannot play cat-and-mouse with a Bhutanese Princess. The marriage may well have been regarded by both families as a useful political alliance. The sister of Jigmie Dorji, the Prime Minister, was married to the King. The marriage of Jigmie's brother with the King's sister would further cement the bonds between the two families. In the event, the result was quite opposite. On my return to Gangtok from Bhutan after the marriage, I received a sad letter from Rimpoche. It was a case, it seemed, of incompatibility of temperament — the young couple had already parted company and the whole episode had resulted in estrangement between the two families.

Though the marriage proved unsuccessful, my mission was not without fruit. I had enjoyed the rare privilege of being one of the few foreigners to be permitted to move freely throughout Bhutan over a period of nearly three months. As the personal guest of the King, I had had the opportunity of getting to know him in his own home, of learning from him directly about his kingdom and its problems, and sharing with him my thoughts regarding its future development in political, economic and other fields.

I do not claim to have made much contribution by way of advice on technical subjects such as agriculture or poultry. The King and his Ministers knew more about such matters than I could teach them in a lifetime. My contribution was in the direction of highlighting the need for quickly training up a nucleus of young Bhutanese officers to act as the spearhead for the country's development. Primary schools had already been established in Bhutan and a few of the older boys had been sent for higher education to schools in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. It was clear, however, that if Bhutan was serious about development, her young men would have to be trained up on a far larger scale for manning the educational, medical, forestry, agricultural and other allied services. As we toured the country and visited the primary schools, Jigmie and I picked out the boys who looked bright and intelligent, and practically abducted them from their homes for admission to selected schools in India. Of the thirty boys we took back with us to India after our tour in 1955, the majority are now holding responsible posts in the various departments under the Bhutan Government. They constitute the nucleus and foundation of Bhutan's first Five-Year Plan.

It is possible today to drive from India to Thimphu within a matter of hours. It seems incredible that, until only a few years ago, it took us nearly two weeks of hard trekking and riding to reach the country's capital. I had never dreamt that I should have to ride or tramp on foot for nearly five hundred miles, crossing twenty-three passes ranging up to 13,000 feet in elevation, to fulfil a wedding engagement. For the better part of two months, Jigmie and I, Prime Ministers of two sister countries, ran the governments over which we presided from mountain camps whose only contact with the outer world was by runners. I sometimes wonder at the informality with which we functioned in those times — no stenographers, no typists, no telephones,

and yet we seemed to manage well enough. We wrote dispatches and recorded notes in our own hand, usually at the end of a hard day's trek, with pad on knee and by the light of a kerosene lamp. Such scribblings reflect, therefore, something of the spirit of the times, and present a more vivid picture of events than what may later be recollected in tranquillity. The notes are, most of them, too personal to be quoted in entirety. But even stray extracts, however inadequate, give some idea of our main preoccupations, interests and problems.

Jigmie stayed with me, my mother and sister for a few days in Gangtok before pushing on ahead to Ha[1] Dzong in Bhutan to finalize preparations for our trip. We had hoped that he would be able to proceed by jeep from Gangtok for at least fifteen miles of the old mule-track to the Nathu La pass on the Sikkim-Tibet border, but it was apparent from his letter to me on his arrival at Ha that our plans had very soon gone awry. In spite, however, of the discomforts of the journey, his eye for horse-flesh was evidently as alert as ever:—

Ha Dzong
12th May 1955.

My dear Uncle,

This is first of all to thank you, Mummy and Thrity for your kindnesses to us all. I will not try to say more for words would be too inadequate to express our gratitude. The jeep could not get past 8th mile so we walked carrying our saddle bags and odds and ends; just below Karponang we met a muleteer with 5 mules — and we paid him Rs. 7 per mule and rode in style to 15th mile where our own ponies were waiting! We gobbled up Mummy's sandwiches; we got to Rinchengong at 8.15 p.m. Aaa — Dead tired! We got to Ha yesterday at about 4 p.m. none the worse for wear!

. . . .

Uncle, do me a favour. I enclose herewith Rs. 3,000. I saw an iron-grey horse at Tsongu — it may be there, 15th mile or 10th mile — it was being ridden by an engineer or overseer babu — I hear — please inquire and buy it for anything up to Rs. 3,000 IF it is NOT older than

[1] Jigmie was Trungpa, or Chief, of the Ha district in western Bhutan, see p. 161.

5 years old; it is about 13 hands — iron-grey and well fed horse. Now Dewan Sahib let us see how great an influence you wield in Sikkim — the cheaper you can get it the better — send a man to see it — Barmiak Kazi[1] is a good judge of horse-flesh. If you buy it you can ride it up when you come.

Thanks again. Love.

Jigmie.

Although Jigmie did not drink, he always took great pains to keep his guests in supply of the best liquor available. We had recently opened a distillery in Sikkim under the management of an enterprising Parsee by the name of Jimmy Contractor, and Jigmie wanted to be sure that, in my enthusiasm for things Sikkimese, I should not bring up with me the Sikkim *ersatz* in preference to the genuine article:

Ha Dzong
14th May 1955.

I have to worry you some more! We have forgotten to bring up any decent whisky; could you please send me per bearer six bottles of *NOT Jimmy's* but imported whisky? I am instructing my man in Kp[2] to replenish your stock of whisky in return.

. . . .

May I suggest — that you try and bring up a GEIGER COUNTER or SCINTILLOMETRE and you and I can go prospecting on our tour!

I have asked my man in Kp to send up 50 maunds of peas for our ponies — if there is any difficulty please help him to get it through.

How's the bridge getting on you robber — wait till you get to Bhutan! I'll fix a few 'Bridges'!!

Love to Mummy, Thrity and yourself.

Yours gratefully,
Jigs.

The reference to 'Bridges' requires explanation. Quite apart from Culbertson and cards, Jigmie had often

[1] i.e. T. D. Densappa, Chief Secretary to the Sikkim Government.
[2] Kalimpong.

warned us, half in jest, that the Bhutanese had many ingenious ways of eliminating unwelcome and awkward visitors. A few loose, rotten planks, casually laid in the central portion of a bridge over a roaring torrent, had served excellent purpose in the past and could with ease be repeated should occasion demand. There would, of course, be a fitting funeral afterwards, with ample shedding of tears, and fresh planks fixed to avoid any future similar *accident*. It just so happened that, on my return journey from Bhutan, a bridge *did* collapse beneath me —a *real* accident! —, but I was nimble enough to jump off my horse and survive!

The main burden of commissariat for the trip fell upon Tessla Dorji, the Prime Minister's wife, and I never before realized that Tibetan ladies could be such systematic organizers. Had it not been for the devoted and efficient Tessla, we should surely have starved, shivered and fallen by the wayside long before reaching the happy scene of nuptials. I had thought the India Office in London was pretty thorough when they notified a list of items that I should take with me when sailing to the Orient on my first appointment to the I.C.S. Tessla was certainly no less thorough when she briefed me for Bhutan:

Ha Dzong
7th June 1955.

My dear Nari,

A very short note to you. I hope Mummy gives you the messages I have written to her/you. I hope she has not already left; if so, please read her letter, and pass it on. Thanks.

Nari, please come up as soon as possible. I am just waiting for you. Please try and make it soon. You have a big responsibility bringing up the sacred bridegroom. Now when you come Nari, bring your shaving set: Not the electric worked one! Bring your special cream, enough for 3 months, and your eats from Gangtok to Charithang, which will be three days ration. I have enough tinned stuff to see you all through to Bumthang and back, so don't bring anything else.

Bring three *bokhus* (2 good, and 1 everyday wear)
2 suits, 3 Tibetan shirts
4 European shirts

6 under-pants
6 vests
3 pull-overs
1 overcoat
2 or 3 sashes for Tibet-dress
2 prs shoes
1 pr for walking
6 prs woollen stockings
1 warm hat, gloves, rain-coat, scarf, 1 warm and 1 silk
4 ties
1 jacket
2 packs of cards. We have 4 here!
3 *warm* night suits
4 bed sheets
2 pillow cases
4 warm blankets
2 large bath towels
2 face towels
1 foot towel
1 pillow!

I think these are necessary things you need.

Oh, don't forget a small wedding present and four scarves (white). I only have second-hand ones.

Fond love,

Tessla

Tessla had wisely reminded me about taking 'a small wedding present'. This was no problem. Rimpoche was a close personal friend, with a western background, and I managed to find for him a small but handsome silver cigarette-box, which I was sure he would welcome. But it was also necessary to take presents for the several kind people who would be my hosts during the trip. The problem was that, according to custom, a present should not only be of some value but also of some bulk. The presentation was something of a ceremony and one could not call on the King attended by a procession of brightly-arrayed retainers carrying a tie-pin, diamond-studded though it might be.

Gangtok was no place for buying gifts and so I proceeded, for this highly necessary purpose, to Darjeeling, a tourist resort and a fertile centre for eager shoppers. I was

lucky enough to find a shop with some very beautiful carved Kashmiri furniture, specially designed so that it could be taken to pieces for facility of carrying. This was just what I was looking for, and I ordered at once a walnut bridge-table for Tessla and a number of exquisitely carved tables of various sizes and shapes for the King and other members of the royal family who were to be my hosts. It was only much later that I came to know that the cost (for the unfortunate Jigmie!) of carrying all this to the extremities of Bhutan would amount to as much as their cash value. The tie-pin might not have been such a bad idea after all! I also bought a few gadgets which I thought might be appreciated—irons, for instance, for pressing clothes, worked on kerosene on the principle of a Primus stove and very handy in places like Bhutan where no electricity was available.

Armed with my presents, I proceeded with Rimpoche to our first camp near Tsongu lake, a few miles this side of Sikkim's frontier with Tibet. It was here that Rimpoche received a last appeal from his erstwhile monastery in Tibet to remember his sacred calling. A deputation of lamas came to him bearing a letter from the monastery authorities to remind him that, however he might act, they would continue to regard and respect him, always, as their Rimpoche. It was a touching gesture. They must have known that, having once decided to leave the monastery, he was unlikely to change his mind. His decision to marry was yet another pointer that he had chosen to abandon what, in their conviction, was his destined calling. But they had abiding faith, and made this last endeavour, on the very eve of his marriage, to dissuade him from taking an irrevocable step.

11

Bhutan

We reached Ha, Jigmie's personal domain, after a trek of five days which took us over three 14,000 foot passes. The Chinese on the Tibetan border were, not surprisingly, suspicious when they suddenly found in their midst a Parsee Indian in Sikkimese robes prattling in Tibetan, but our papers were in order and they reluctantly let us through. At Ha, I received my first schooling in things Bhutanese, as I wandered about the old dzong (castle), visited the surrounding villages, practised archery with the schoolchildren and drilled with the newly formed militia. Schools in Bhutan were in those days few and far between, and the Ha School was amongst the best of them, through the patronage, encouragement and financial assistance received by it from the Dorji family.

I was surprised to find there were no Nepalese in the units of the militia under training at Ha, and jumped to the conclusion that Nepalese were being deliberately excluded. Jigmie soon explained that the militia was not a voluntary body but a conscript force. Villagers were not eager to volunteer their services and were opposed to conscription for the reason that their cultivation would have to be left unattended. The Nepalese already harboured resentment against the Government for not being permitted to settle in the interior regions of Bhutan. Jigmie did not wish to risk fanning their discontent further by forcibly conscripting them in the militia, but was willing to accept their services if offered voluntarily.

My routine at Ha was to visit the military lines in the early morning and assist the instructors in taking classes in physical training. As a past member of the Officers' Training

Corps in school and a near-professional gymnast, I was in my element and became so enthusiastic that I felt I could go on at the job for ever. Later in the day, I would give a helping hand in the school or else accompany Jigmie on his unending chores, hearing complaints and trying to settle disputes. The evenings we spent putting my handsome card-table to use, Rimpoche and myself partnering against Jigmie and Tessla. Rimpoche was a complete novice at bridge, and the wily Jigmie saw that this was the only stratagem by which he could ever hope to recover the fortune he had spent transporting my presents.

After a week's dilly-dallying at Ha, we moved on to the wide and beautiful valley of Paro, crossing a 13,000 foot pass *en route*. The Penlop (Governor) of Paro had, in past times, been a personage of considerable influence and power, rivalling the Penlop of Tongsa for supremacy in the governance of the country. Dynastic rivalries were to some extent allayed by the recognition in 1907 of the Tongsa Penlop as the sole hereditary ruler of the whole of Bhutan. The Paro Penlop continued however to maintain a certain state, and built for himself a quaint but charming little palace in the Paro valley, modelled on the celestial mansions of the Gods as depicted in Buddhist paintings. With the progressive diminution of the power of the Paro Penlop and his line, his palace came to be utilized by the Maharaja as a guest-house for V.I.P.s of special importance. Jigmie had his own family house in Paro, but it was rarely used and was, as a result, practically devoid of furniture. As mine was a private visit, I felt I should stay with Jigmie, only to be informed, on arrival at Paro, that orders had arrived from the Maharaja that I was to be accommodated in the V.I.P. room of the Penlop's palace. Jigmie and Rimpoche were considerate enough to move in to some quarters nearby, also within the palace compound, so that we might all remain close together.

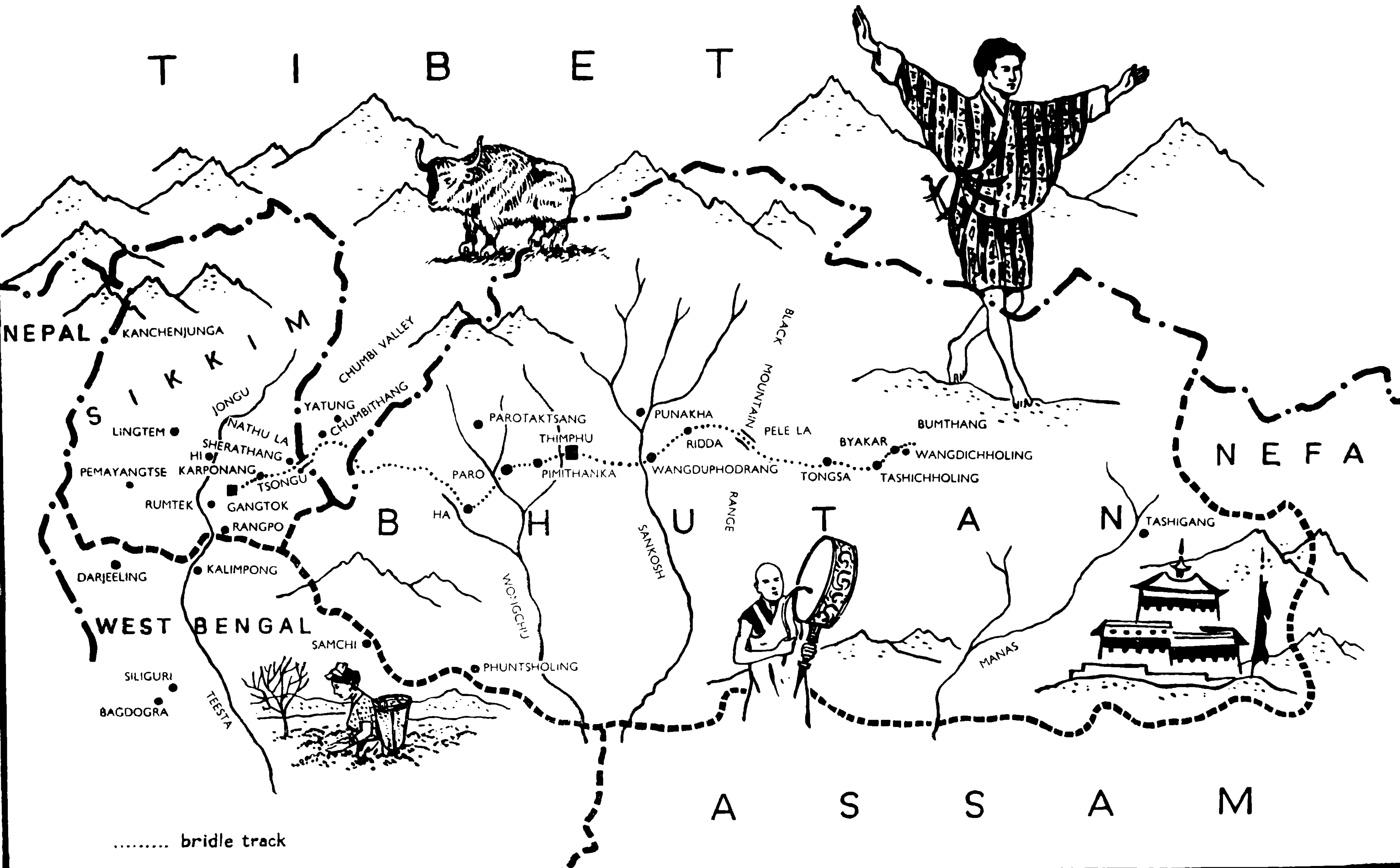
We spent four days at Paro before moving on to the capital. I have come to know a great deal more about Bhutan since those early innocent years, but the notes I then recorded, hurriedly and by wayside camps, have their interest as the first and immediate impression of events as they presented themselves to a fresh and unprejudiced mind at a significant time in Bhutan's history.

PARO DZONG — July 6th-July 10th, 1955.

On arrival at Paro, Jigmie took me first to his own house. It is a well-sited, commodious residence, but completely unfurnished, as he only rarely stays at Paro. We then proceeded to the Guest House, where we were received by the local officials and students of the Paro primary school. It was interesting to see that Jigmie claimed no special precedence for himself over the Dzongtsap (Deputy Magistrate) and Nyerchen (Revenue Collector), both of whom were officers of the second rank (nyi-ken). With the disappearance of the Penlops (Governors), there are now no first-rank officers in Bhutan, as Jigmie has not yet officially assumed the post of Deb Zimpon (Chief Minister). His younger brother, Rimpoche, gave precedence to the second-rank officers, as he enjoys no official rank. Both Jigmie and his brother showed the greatest courtesy and respect in their dealings with their brother-officers, whether equal in status or subordinate. There was no bossing or ordering about. I was allotted the best room in the main Guest House, Jigmie and his brother occupying the less comfortable outer houses. We had tea together with the Dzongtsap and Nyerchen, the Zimpon[1] being away on pilgrimage at Paro Taktsang monastery. The Dzongtsap understands and speaks Hindi. He has travelled fairly widely in India, both on pilgrimage and for trade, and is shrewd and knowledgeable. The Nyerchen is of quieter temperament. His is not an enviable post, as he has to collect taxes. As we had had a tiring march (we had heavy rain on the way and the track down to Paro from the top of the pass became treacherously slippery), we retired early to bed.

We spent the next morning visiting the dzong. Both the construction and conception of the building brought home to me vividly the distinctness of the Bhutanese people and their way of administration from what I had been familiar with in Sikkim. The officers reside in the dzong, but not so their family-members, who have to stay outside. The dzong is the centre not only of the official administrative machinery, but also of the religious life of the community. The main part of the building comprises a series of chapels, profusely illuminated with mural paintings. The Bhutanese are a tough and

[1] The Secretary, Paro Dzong, as distinct from the title 'Deb Zimpon'.



BHUTAN AND SIKKIM

austere people. The monks sit at their devotions on the bare floor or on wooden planks. No carpets, cushions or divans were in evidence. Discipline is maintained by the prefect with a hand of iron. The lash is still occasionally applied upon those who have deviated from the injunctions of the faith.

I found the dzong clean and well-maintained. Although many of the murals were old, they had evidently been touched up from time to time and had the appearance of freshness. The control of the monasteries seems to be more centralized than in Sikkim and also freer from extraneous influence. The residential monasteries are subordinate to the central monastery at Thimphu. The appointment of office-bearers has to be approved by the centre, which also issues general directives regarding monastic administration. Although monks from Bhutan frequently visit monasteries and holy places in India, Nepal and Tibet, no foreign monks of any denomination are permitted to reside in Government monasteries in Bhutan. Influences from outside can thus make themselves felt only indirectly, and the form of Buddhism assumes a pattern that is individual to Bhutan. There is evidence of a feeling of respect for Sikkim as a holy country.

On our return from the dzong, we visited the General Store of Paro. As with the Co-operative shop which I visited at Ha, business was dull and there did not appear to be much demand from the people for foreign goods. The reason seems to be the heavy transport charges, which amount to approximately Rs. 50 per maund. I suggested to Jigmie that he might consider air-dropping supplies and we later discussed the question informally with the Zimpon, Dzongtsap and Nyerchen. They were in agreement that air-dropping would be the best solution and proposed placing the matter before His Highness for decision. Air-dropping would also relieve the people of the burden of carrying loads and so forestall against future possible discontent on this account.

On the 8th, Rimpoche offered to take me to Paro Taktsang (tiger's nest), the most celebrated place of pilgrimage in Bhutan and also a marvel of architectural design and execution. The monastery is built on a sheer precipitous rock's edge of extremely difficult access. The site is held to have been the retreat (for meditation and prayer) of Padma Sambhava, who, as in Sikkim, is regarded as the patron saint of the land. A number of monks from Thimphu were also at Paro Taktsang during the time of our visit. They had come on a routine 21-day pilgrimage and were helpful in supplying information to us regarding the history of Paro Taktsang in particular and of Bhutan monasteries in general. The Head Lopon (the four Lopons [abbots] are the most important monastic office-bearers after the Jekhenpo [Archbishop] and take precedence above all second-rank officers) received me and I offered a scarf to him by way of respect. I was interested to see a picture of the first Shabdrung of Bhutan[1] on the wall of the main chapel and was informed that it was he who originally

[1] See p. 140 n.

inspired this remarkable edifice. I had also noticed a picture of the first Shabdrung (whose features and proportions are now strictly stylized) at the porch of the bridge leading to Paro Dzong.

On our return journey, we visited Kichu Lhakang, renowned as the oldest monastery in the Paro valley.

We spent much of our time on the 8th evening and the 9th with the Paro Zimpon, Dzongtsap and Nyerchen. Whereas, on the previous days, it was I who had been doing the asking, they now retaliated in real earnest and fired a volley of questions at me, mostly regarding conditions in India and Sikkim. Their primary interest was in taxation. What was the amount of house-tax, if any, in Sikkim? What were the main sources of revenue in India and Sikkim? Was Sikkim's revenue sufficient to meet all her expenditure? How many officers did Sikkim employ for collecting taxes and for general administration, and on what basis? They then inquired about service conditions of officers in India, after cross-examining me about my own service career. How much income-tax was I required to pay in India? How much travelling allowance are officers in India entitled to? Next, a series of questions of a general nature. Amongst all Indians (Punjabis, Bengalis etc.), who are the ones generally held to be the best? What are the punishments in India for various categories of offences? Are women also liable to be punished equally for such offences? When informed about recent legislation regarding women's right to divorce, they were amused and commented archly, 'Oh, so India is catching up with Bhutan!'

I was surprised at the shrewdness with which they put their questions and followed them up during the resultant discussions. They were obviously keen to learn as much as possible about conditions in India and Sikkim and to take the fullest advantage of my presence amongst them. In the evening, we danced and sang together, and then sat down to dinner, when the questioning was resumed. They seemed indefatigable in their curiosity, suggesting more than once that, as we would be together for only a short time, we might cut out sleep that night and continue talking until we set off on our march next day. But I felt physically and mentally exhausted (we had been caught in a heavy shower while returning from a village that same afternoon and had had to hurry back at a fast canter to arrive in time for our evening's engagement), and we broke up at last at about midnight.

I tried to ascertain indirectly, during our discussions, their respective attitudes towards India and China. While they may not have been effusive regarding India, they showed a feeling of almost contempt towards the Tibetans. They were a cowardly race who, time and again during their history, had been overrun and conquered by the Chinese. Their monks were greedy and corrupt. Begging in Tibet was a widely practised profession, which showed that the people had no self-respect. The Bhutanese had often, in the past, been called in as mediators to help in the settlement of Tibet's involvements with her neighbours. I asked whether the Tibetans were happier since the Chinese occupation. 'How can they possibly be, when there are so many more

Chinese mouths to feed?' I inquired whether they thought the Sikkimese were better off under the changed constitutional arrangements. 'We hear that they are, and they must be, as they are receiving so much help for welfare activities and are being treated with respect; but we sometimes wonder whether this is only a stratagem to win them over or whether this will all continue.' What do you think of Pandit Nehru? 'He is the one thing in India that really counts. He must be a great and good man, or else he would not be universally respected, both within and outside India.' What do you think of Mao Tse-tung and Chou En Lai? 'We do not know so much about the Chinese, but our general impression is that they want to change everything too quickly and have insufficient regard for the older order of things.'

THIMPHU DZONG — July 11th-July 22nd.

We left Paro on the 10th morning and proceeded to our next camp at Pimithanka, where we found tents ready pitched for us on our arrival and all other arrangements made for our comfort by His Highness. I asked Jigmie at Paro to make it clear to His Highness that, as mine was a purely private visit, His Highness should not inconvenience himself on my account nor make any special arrangements for my stay. I should feel embarrassed by formalities and should be far happier if I could be treated simply as Jigmie's personal friend rather than an official of the Indian or Sikkim Government.

As the regular monsoon had already broken, we met with heavy rain on the march from Paro to Pimithanka and from Pimithanka to Thimphu. It was unpleasant walking downhill, as the track was slippery and one was bound to trip up sooner or later. I was lucky to get away with only two falls and a slight injury to my knee. Jigmie comforted me by remarking that this was child's play compared with the track to Bumthang. We should have to cross nine passes (there are only two passes between Paro and Thimphu) and rain was likely to be much heavier. There would also be leeches innumerable to add to our joys. Rimpoche and I were of one mind that a more hospitable season might have been chosen for the nuptials!

His Highness had sent members of his staff to meet us at various points of the route with liquid and solid refreshment. This was welcome to all and served as a happy break between the rigours of the journey. A few miles this side of Thimphu, Jigmie proceeded ahead of us. On reaching the dzong, I found him waiting to introduce me to the officials, who were lined up to receive us, and we then moved on towards the Palace, about three miles away, Jigmie again preceding us by about twenty minutes. As we approached the outer wall of the Palace, we could see Jigmie's mother, Rani Chuni, waving to us from the main gate. As soon as we reached the compound, Jigmie appeared, followed by Their Highnesses, the Maharaja and the Maharani. I had not met His Highness since 1948, when he came, as Maharajkumar, to Shillong. I could remember him

well since those Assam days — quiet, gentle, and with his boyish sense of fun. Both he and Her Highness had taken more trouble than we could have desired to ensure that we should be comfortable and happy. We stayed in the main Palace, Jigmie and I sharing the same room. The atmosphere was one of complete informality, everyone doing exactly as they wished.

After a day's rest, which we spent mostly in the Palace compound, being shown round the vegetable garden, carpentry school, weaving factory and silversmith's workshop, His Highness was kind enough to take me with him personally to see the dzong. Thimphu Dzong is older than Paro Dzong, but it has been recently renovated, painted and extended and has the appearance of being a more modern structure. We were met at the steps of the entrance by the Lopons, while one of the prefects preceded His Highness and announced his presence as we moved by clapping his hands. As soon as we entered, we were welcomed by the Jekhenpo. His Highness and the Jekhenpo bowed to each other, after which His Highness formally introduced me to the Jekhenpo, to whom I offered a scarf. We then walked through all the rooms of the dzong, His Highness explaining in detail wherever explanation was necessary. After completing our round of the dzong, we visited the hospital that was under construction, and then returned home.

There can be no doubt that His Highness is an enlightened ruler, who takes a close and personal interest in his country and his people. He is remarkably mature for his years, and not in the slightest unbalanced by power. He avoids overmuch ceremony, preferring to be natural, simple and human in his relations with his people, of whatever status. He has no inhibitions and it seems astonishing to me that he can take such a broad and liberal view of things, although he moves out from Bhutan so seldom. (He has not left Bhutan for eighteen months and is completely adjusted, together with his charming wife, to his rather lone and solitary existence.) About half of the revenue of the State has to be allotted to the monasteries, leaving little for administrative and developmental activities. This is a source of worry to him, as he genuinely feels the need for extending welfare activities more widely than at present. On my inquiring whether it would be possible to reduce the State grants to the monasteries, I was informed that these grants were prescribed by law and that there was likelihood of serious discontent arising if monastic procedure was interfered with overmuch. The Maharaja though theoretically absolute, could not arbitrarily override the Jekhenpo, Lopons and other high office-bearers of the monastic order. The Jekhenpo was not appointed by the Maharaja, but selected by the Lopons (usually from amongst one of their own number). The difference in status between the Maharaja and the Jekhenpo was not considerable and neither used the honorific in addressing each other.

As reduction of monastic grants might have undesirable repercussions, His Highness felt that the sounder course at the present

juncture would be to put pressure in the direction of reforming the monastic order so that it may perform a more useful part in the life of the community. The range of activities of the monasteries is being gradually enlarged. His Highness showed me, with keen enthusiasm, the school-rooms being built in the dzong for the various new classes to be introduced. We spent some time with the students of the drawing class. They had been receiving instruction for only four months and had, to my mind, made remarkable progress. There is talent here of a high order and it is to the credit of the Bhutan Government that it is being encouraged and cultivated. I suggested to His Highness that instruction might also be imparted in the monasteries in subjects such as health, general knowledge and physical training, and that the monks, young and old, might be guided to interest themselves in agriculture and crafts. The monasteries could thus form the base or centre from which welfare activity could be radiated more widely amongst the people.

His Highness is fully alive to the need for extending hospital facilities in Bhutan, and has made a start by building a 50-bedded hospital at Thimphu. The hospital is in the Bhutanese style of architecture and has been designed by His Highness himself. I was surprised to learn from His Highness that the Thimphu hospital construction had been started only a month ago and that it was expected to be completed within the next six months. 140 labourers were being employed at the rate of Rs. 2 per day plus free rations (value of rations approximately Rs. 1·80). The two main diseases with which the medical authorities have to deal are Venereal Diseases and Worms. Jigmie informs me that they are at present giving penicillin injections for V.D., five injections being the usual course and the cost to Government amounting to about Rs. 4. His Government had been contemplating giving palm oil injections, which required only a single administration, but had dropped the proposal on account of the much heavier cost involved.

His Highness inquired of the budgetary position of Sikkim, and when I informed him we had registered a surplus last year, he at once asked 'Then where was the need for taking aid?' I explained that, as the Development Plan had not been initiated until the latter part of the year, it had not been possible to make much progress, but that the expenditure under the plan during the current year was expected to be fairly considerable. My impression is that while the Bhutan authorities would welcome aid for the implementation of their development projects, they are apprehensive of the implications and are reluctant to embark on any step that might have the effect of rendering them dependent on or under a sense of obligation to any external power. I made it clear to Jigmie that the Government of India have given Sikkim a completely free hand in the matter of administering the grant under the Five-Year Plan and that there cannot be grounds for criticism from any quarter that the grant is being used as a tool to effect any sort of control over the State or to influence its functioning in any direction.

Both His Highness and Jigmie stressed that they have no intention of discriminating against genuine Nepalese settlers of long standing. Their Nationality Law (the draft of which was shown to me) will offer full rights to practically all *existing* Nepalese in the State, its objective being to safeguard against *future immigration.* There is not the same feeling of bitterness against the Nepalese element that I have found in some quarters in Sikkim. His Highness considers that the Nepalese in the frontier districts are as loyal and law-abiding as the rest of the Bhutanese population, and my impression is that he has no intention of discriminating against them. Fairly substantial monetary loans (to the extent of about 2 lakhs) have been granted to Nepalese of the frontier districts, they are permitted to trade freely throughout Bhutan, and a Nepalese candidate has only recently been selected for training at State expense at the Dehra Dun Military Academy. His Highness has impressed me as essentially a just man and I believe he is interested in meting out fair treatment to all sections of his people.

His Highness mentioned to me his difficulties in manipulating the taking over by Government of some extensive private estates (mostly belonging to his close relatives) in central and eastern Bhutan. The tenants of these estates, who had up to now been paying tribute in kind to their landlords, were apprehensive at the idea of having to pay taxes in cash to the Government. His Highness hoped to be able to visit these areas personally later in the year with a view to effecting a settlement. The fact that his sister-in-law Tashi Dorji[1] is shortly to be posted as Dzongpon (Commissioner) at Tashigang in eastern Bhutan will be of help to His Highness in maintaining more effective control, but it will clearly be necessary for him to visit these regions more frequently than in the past and keep himself constantly in touch with developments. He has not visited Bumthang, the old capital and his own original home, for over three years.

While the need for a permanent capital is recognized, there is difficulty in finding a site which would be suitable, climatically, during both the summer and winter months. Jigmie seems to favour Thimphu, in spite of the extreme cold during winter. A tentative town plan has already been drawn up for Thimphu as the State capital.

The ruler takes a direct and personal interest in the administration, and has no statutory Chief Adviser or Chief Minister, through whom all matters must necessarily pass. Although Jigmie is consulted on most important matters, his specific portfolio is Foreign Affairs and the Frontier, and there are several internal matters of even policy bearing upon which his advice is not taken. For instance, the codification and reformation of the laws of Bhutan is at present under

[1] Sister of Jigmie and the Queen. Tashi Dorji had volunteered to undertake the responsibility of administering the Shachups, the inhabitants of eastern Bhutan. While the people of western Bhutan have closer ethnic affinities with Tibet, the Shachups have closer affinities with the hill people of NEFA contiguous to the eastern border of Bhutan.

progress. This matter is being handled by His Highness personally and I understand that Jigmie has not yet seen the draft proposed to be sent to the Dzongpons to elicit their comments. He is not sure whether, even in his capacity as Ha Trungpa, his comments will be invited.

Villagers who wish to appeal to His Highness can have direct access to him while he is moving on tour or otherwise. I was amused to hear His Highness tell the story of the impatient villager who insisted on entering his tent and presenting a petition to him while he was easing himself on arrival at a new camp! The number of such appeals are not, as far as I could ascertain, very many — perhaps one or two each week. There seems to be generally less ceremony attached to the movements of the ruler than in Sikkim. I have moved together with His Highness on several occasions, and have found nothing of fuss or unnecessary ceremonial.

I was interested to learn from the Tongsa Zimpon of a rumour reaching Bhutan that the I.A.F. had carried out heavy bombing and strafing as a retaliatory measure against the tribal people after the Achingmori incident[1] in the Siang Frontier Division. It was alleged that supplies of food and cloth were air-dropped in the jungle to lure the tribal people out of their hide-outs and that they were machine-gunned as soon as they made an appearance to collect the bait. This was held out against India as indicating the manner in which she was handling the more backward and helpless elements of her population. I explained that, as I was myself associated at the highest level with the Achingmori operations, I was in a position to assure them that the rumours were completely without foundation. Particular care had been taken to ensure that there should be no bombing or strafing, and the Indian Government had even banned the burning of villages, the accepted punitive measure of pre-independence days. All of which only goes to show how mischievous rumour can be.

His Highness was anxious that I should visit some houses at random and have an idea of the general economy of Bhutanese villages. The average Bhutanese house is more spacious than that of the Sikkimese or average Indian villager. This may be because of the community system of building which prevails in many parts; that is to say, co-villagers will build the house, their only payment being food and drink during the days they offer their labour. What particularly impressed me was the insistence on light and air through the provision of large and numerous windows in practically every room. This is in direct contrast to the style of construction in most of the hill areas of the North-East Frontier Agency, where the eaves of the roofs extend almost down to the floor-level and permit of neither light nor air entering inside. The Bhutanese house is usually double-storied: livestock is kept in the basement, the middle portion is for residence, while the top floor is an attic for keeping stores. The rooms are neither more nor less clean than those of hill-people generally. Quite a number of utensils are in evidence, mostly of local manufacture.

[1] See p. 127.

The Bhutanese eats well and likes his meat. I was surprised to find them generally temperate in respect of spirits. Rice-beer seems to be offered and drunk far more in the other hill areas I have known. I have so far come across no cases of drunkenness, although I have attended several festive functions. While the average villager does not seem to be in want for meat, rice and vegetables, it is a pity that weaving as a *home* industry is not more widely practised. Claude White[1] had noted, fifty years ago, on the Bhutanese skill in manipulating irrigation channels. It was a delight to see such well terraced and skilfully irrigated fields in so many of the areas I visited. I do not think the Bhutanese have much to learn in the matter of agricultural irrigation. The Bhutan Government do not appear, on the other hand, to have experimented much with improved varieties of seed. I have suggested to Jigmie that he might try out different varieties at different elevations with a view to ascertaining which varieties produce the best yield.

Rani Dorji took me round some village homes one afternoon to show how water-power was being harnessed by cultivators to operate paddy-husking and flour-grinding machines. The paddy-husking machines were purchased from Calcutta at a cost of only Rs. 100 each and there are now about forty in operation in the different valleys of Bhutan. One machine can husk about 50 maunds of paddy a day. This is a tremendous saving of labour which, on account of the high rate of infant mortality, is extremely scarce. The flour-grinding unit is of entirely local manufacture and has been in use for many generations. There are distinct possibilities for the extended use of water-power in Bhutan, and it was gratifying to see that Bhutan had already shown more initiative in this respect than some of her neighbouring areas, where elaborate and costly development schemes have been in operation for several years.

I was interested to learn of the steps being taken by the Bhutan Government to improve their livestock. Jigmie has been distributing Jersey cattle in the Nepalese areas and His Highness has imported a number of *mithuns*[2] directly from Tawang. I informed Jigmie of our plans to improve livestock in Sikkim by importing Australian cattle and promised to let him know how the animals fare in our Sikkim hills. If they prove to be suitable, the Bhutan Government might also like to have some animals and we should be glad to give necessary assistance for their purchase, import etc. Meanwhile, good results have already been achieved by crossing local Bhutanese cows with *mithuns* from the Assam hills, and the distribution of these in the different valleys is a step in the right direction. (I was shown these imported *mithuns* at one of our camps. They are fine-looking animals, but apparently delicate. Five of a herd of seventeen imported by His Highness from Tawang died within a few months of their arrival in Bhutan.)

[1] Political Officer in Sikkim (appointed 1889).
[2] Local name for the gaur, commonly found in the hills of N. E. India and N. Burma and resembling the bison.

His Highness was kind enough to arrange an archery-contest, bear-shoot and lama dances at Thimphu Dzong and folk-dances at the palace especially for my benefit. He personally participated in all these functions (except the lama dances), and it was a pleasure to see how freely and unaffectedly he moved amongst his people. They show great respect for him, in spite of his youth, and it is evident, by their manner, that they have deep affection for him also. His Highness invited me to stay a few days with him again on my return from Bumthang. I felt sorry to part from him and his wife, as I had come to grow very fond of them in spite of the briefness of my stay.

I am surprised, in retrospect, that I should not have alluded in my notes to the more intimate mysteries of the Bhutanese scene. I had written of the high state of preservation of the mural paintings of Paro Dzong, but was too modest, it seems, to mention one of their most constantly recurring themes, the 'Yap-Yum' or depiction of male and female deities in sexual embrace. It is a theme that forms also the subject of some of the most splendid sculptured pieces in the chapels of Paro and Thimphu Dzongs. I recall the feeling of childish guilt with which I returned to pay a second visit, unaccompanied, to Paro Dzong so that I might experience again, in uninterrupted leisure and unembarrassed by the presence of others, the sensual excitement aroused by these strange artistic manifestations. With deeper understanding of Buddhism and the Tantric concept of ultimate reality as union of male (Shiva, matter) and female (Shakti, energy), the sensuality of these representations has ceased to excite the imagination, and I can now look upon them, without the slightest sexual stirrings, as symbolizing the union of the individual with the world soul through realization within oneself or, with the help of a partner, of the resolution of duality into one. In monasteries specially frequented by tourists, the more sensitive regions of the deities are now sometimes furnished, alas!, with pants and skirts so that they may be shielded from the prying eyes of the prurient and unenlightened. But in the generality of

monasteries, the deities continue, to this day, to discharge their creative chores in blissful, naked abandon.

It was while I was watching the lama dances in Thimphu and interrogating the monks that I came to understand some of the major differences in Buddhist practice as observed in Bhutan and Sikkim. Residential monasteries, in Sikkim, are few. The monks are permitted to marry, rear a family and carry on business, provided that they attend their monastery for community prayers during the main feast-days of the Buddhist calendar. Celibacy is rare, and should a celibate lama (or Gellong in Tibetan parlance) make an appearance in Sikkim, he is held in almost awesome reverence. Bhutan, on the other hand, was, until the early years of the century, a purely theocratic State, with its supreme head, as in Tibet, a Reincarnate Lama, known as the Dharma Raja,[1] or Shabdrung, whose primary responsibility was to ensure that the role and discipline of the monasteries were strictly maintained. The more important monasteries of Bhutan remain still, therefore, as residential institutions from which women are strictly excluded. The influence of religion has been so powerful that even today, women are not permitted to stay within the precincts of the dzong after a certain hour of the day.

While congress with the opposite sex is forbidden to the celibate Gellong, it does not appear to be barred to him to explore other avenues to satisfy his carnal urges. For every monastery harbours a multitude of aspiring young lamas from the age of six upwards, who provide a fertile field for the solace of their seniors. Such relationships were not frowned upon or looked upon as a matter of disgrace, and many of my young Gellong friends used to speak to me without embarrassment of the lamas whom they 'served'. I did not get the impression that these were 'romantic' relationships, in the manner of those of ancient Greece. It

[1] See p. 140.

was a subject of some delicacy that was not easy for me to probe, with my limited command of the Bhutanese language, but, as I could understand, such relationships had little emotional content, their object being limited to providing celibate lamas with a convenient outlet for their normal animal lust. At all events, I came across none of the outward marks of homosexuality — painted cheeks and effeminate mannerisms — that are sometimes found in more sophisticated societies. The lamas, whether active or passive partner, retained their manly bearing, and seemed to find no difficulty, when freed from monastic constraints, in fulfilling their lust along more conventional and orthodox channels.

His Highness insisted one afternoon, in spite of my earnest protestations, that I should accompany him to the forest to shoot bears. Shortly after my arrival in Thimphu, he had taken me to see three of his servants, as tough and hefty as they are made, who had recently been mauled by bears. It was a gruesome spectacle, and, as I have never been much of a shot, I did not relish the idea of giving gratuitous provocation to the beasts. After the usual hustling and bustling of the chase, I found myself stationed up a tree, with the rest of the party dispersed in various directions, and quite alone. I was fully aware that bears could climb, and the vision of those three mauled Bhutanese haunted me as I crouched to conceal myself, camouflaged as a branch. Never was I so relieved as when the hunt was declared closed and we returned to the peace and security of the Palace. Nor was I much comforted when Rani Chuni informed me that bears were really very friendly animals and only attacked when startled. 'Just lie flat on your stomach, Uncle, if ever you meet a bear, and hold your breath. He will nuzzle your spine a bit and lick your face, but, provided you keep *quite* still, he'll soon tire and walk away.'

But apart from bear-hunts, we lived quietly at Thimphu with little formality or ceremony. Our stay was slightly

prolonged, as the lamas had advised that the marriage should be postponed to a more auspicious date, but this was all to the good as it gave us more time to be with our generous hosts and have the benefit of learning more from them of the ways and manners of Bhutan. But all good things come to an end, and we set off eventually, in pouring rain, on the last leg of our strange and unusual journey. It was not until we reached the elder Dowager-Maharani's[1] delightful palace in Tashi Chholing, a week's march from Thimphu, that I could find time — and summon up the energy — to once more put thoughts to paper:

Camp Tashi Chholing,
29th July, 1955

We have almost reached journey's end. We arrived here yesterday afternoon after six days' slogging through rain and slush. Life seems to be just one long series of ascending and descending passes. What strikes one particularly as one proceeds from Thimphu to Bumthang is the remarkable change of scene that presents itself almost every few hours; thick tropical forest giving place to gentle slopes of pasture-land: steep slopes, where only *jhuming* (shifting-cultivation) can be practised, flattening out to endless expanses of finely-terraced and skilfully irrigated rice-fields. There can be no question that the Bhutanese cultivator knows his job and does it well.

The more I move, the more impressed I am by the qualities of this virile people. Their policy of isolation may have stood in the way of the country's development according to the commonly understood standards of today, but it has also enabled their culture to retain its vitality. The architecture of their dzongs and chortens (stupas) is the expression of an essentially practical people, with a clean sense of design. It is bold and solid; its effect is achieved not from fanciful frills or sensuous ornamentation, but from its square, massive and well-proportioned symmetry. While, therefore, the Bhutan authorities are anxious to develop their country, they would be well advised to move with caution so as to ensure that such development is consonant with the true needs of their people and not a mere importation or imposition of ideas suited to countries where conditions are entirely and fundamentally different.

I had not myself fully realized, until this tour, the psychological basis for Bhutan's aloofness and suspicion of foreigners. It is not merely a suspicion of *Indian* foreigners. The Bhutanese had,

[1] Aji Choden, mother of the King.

in fact, been prepared, during the last century, to allow *Indians* passage through Bhutan for trade and had banned only *European* visitors. What the Bhutanese fear, most of all, is the disruption of their way of life and of their religious and social values that might result from over-rapid modernization and foreign contacts. They feel that foreign influences, starting with the British, have brought about a degeneration of values in Sikkim, the indigenous culture of the Sikkimese has been contaminated by ill-advised contacts during the past half-century, and lost its power for good: the present development programme is also being guided, mainly, by Indians, who, for all their good intentions, cannot always be expected to appreciate the basic needs of the people and find difficulty in adjusting themselves to conditions in the hill areas. The Bhutanese are determined, therefore, to train up their own people, and feel it would be wiser, in the long view, to accept a few years of delay rather than risk a break-up of their social fabric. This is an understandable attitude which should cause no surprise.

12

The Royal Wedding

FROM Tashi Chholing, we proceeded to the younger Dowager's residence at Wangdi Chholing where, at our journey's end, we were happy to relax in comfort at last and enter into the spirit of the marriage celebrations. Neat huts had been put up in the compound of the Dowager's Palace to serve as our camp, and we wandered freely about the premises as members of the family. The wedding ceremony concluded, Rimpoche moved over to the home of his bride, and we felt not a little sentimental at the thought of separation after such close intimacy during the six weeks since we had set off from Gangtok on his matrimonial mission. But it was when we finally parted and bade good-bye to him that I felt an immense sadness for Rimpoche and his loneliness. Jigmie and I would be travelling back together, within a matter of weeks we would be home again among friends and old familiar faces. For Rimpoche, life in Wangdi Chholing would be as unlike what he had been used to as life in another planet. The Dowager Maharanis and Aji Choki were generous and good-hearted folk, but of a different mental background and a different range of interests. I had seen a great deal of Rimpoche in Kalimpong and knew the things that, for him, made life worth living — a late-show cinema, an afternoon of football, a jaunt to Calcutta, supper at the Chinese, a fling with the girls, a tête-à-tête with his Uncle (adopted) in Gangtok, races in Darjeeling and terylene suits of the latest cut. I could not imagine how this lovable young man-about-town could settle down to the quiet routine of old-world country life in the remotest depths of Bhutan. I prayed that

I might be proved wrong and that he and his young bride would find happiness in each other.

It was only after re-crossing the Pele La pass, over the range dividing central from western Bhutan, on our homeward journey that I found time again to attend to my notes. It was a miserable crossing, as we were afflicted with heavy rain on the way. I was sad at the thought of having left Rimpoche behind, and hoped it might relieve my melancholy if I could occupy myself by recording, for remembrance in future years, the impressions of my journey.

Camp Ridda,
Bhutan.
August 15, 1955.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN BHUTAN

Throughout the journey between Thimphu and Wangdi Chholing, we were welcomed, every mile or two, by villagers of the locality with offerings of eggs, rice and other produce of their fields. The practice is to burn juniper twigs by the wayside, the scented smoke being regarded as an auspicious token of welcome. Some villagers have come from distant places, and Jigmie usually stops with each group for a few minutes to talk to them about their village affairs. We are also met, of course, by the local officers of each dzong area.

Parties representing the bride's family began meeting us with food, drink, presents and greetings from a point about four days' march from our final destination. Food flows in liberally wherever Jigmie moves, as the dzongs feel a sense of responsibility in the matter of entertaining high officials of the Government. The wedding was to take place at Wangdi Chholing, the residence of the younger Dowager Maharani, Aji Pemadecchen, mother of the bride. It was decided that we should halt for two days prior to the marriage at Tashi Chholing, the residence of the elder Dowager, where an archery contest was arranged between the visiting party (i.e. our party) and the local people. Jigmie pushed on ahead of us to Wangdi Chholing to discuss details of the marriage with the two Dowagers and to ascertain the auspicious time at which we should proceed in procession with the groom on the final date. Rimpoche and I followed a little later, and camped near Byakar Dzong, about half a mile from Wangdi Chholing (the junior Dowager's Palace). The next morning, the bride's party, led by Shamgang Dzongpon, came to our camp

to escort us in procession and to the accompaniment of brightly-attired dancers to the Palace. The route was lined with villagers from distant areas, and we were welcomed a little way outside the Palace compound by the elder Dowager. We then entered the Palace compound, and, after a brief ceremony in the courtyard, were taken upstairs, where we were introduced to the younger Dowager Maharani and the bride.

Apart from the lamas, there were very few persons present during the actual ceremony. The bride and bridegroom were seated on a simple throne, and the four of us (the two Dowager Maharanis, Jigmie and I) sat together beside them at a slightly lower elevation. At frequent intervals between the prayers, tea, rice, cereals and sweetmeats were served to us, as well as to the bride and bridegroom, lamas and other guests. At the conclusion of the main religious ceremony, the Tongsa Dronyer[1], as His Highness's representative, delivered a message from His Highness to the bride and bridegroom, together with His Highness's gifts. These consisted mostly of fine Bhutanese weaves and Chinese brocades. The guests then offered scarves to the wedded couple, and presented their gifts, which, again, consisted mostly of cloth. I was much amused by the quaint custom whereby the massive rolls of cloth were hurled with utmost force onto the wooden planked floor — so that the entire assembly might be able to judge, from the resounding crash, the relative weight and value of the proffered gifts! There followed lama dances, archery, folk-dances and the other festivities usually associated with such functions. The first three days were occupied mostly with archery contests. On the subsequent days, Jigmie, Rimpoche and I generally went out riding. We had a course marked out for us by the side of the river and spent the mornings racing at full gallop. Jigmie usually won, Rimpoche and I following close behind. The evenings were spent with the two Dowagers and the bride.

The Dowagers were extremely attentive to our comforts and treated us with the greatest kindness and courtesy. The elder Dowager takes a keen interest in weaving and has organized weaving centres at Thimphu, Tashi Chholing and in the Tashigang area further east. The younger Dowager has taken to holy orders and proposes, after the wedding celebrations, to retire to a small private monastery which she has recently built for herself. She understands and speaks Hindi fluently. Both the Dowagers have visited the centres of religious pilgrimage in India, and the younger Dowager has also paid two visits to Lhasa. The bride speaks and writes Hindi well, and they all enjoy listening to Indian music. I was surprised that none of them had ever paid a visit to Sikkim, although they had often stayed at Kalimpong, which is only a stone's-throw away. The elder Dowager and the bride have never visited Tibet. The cultural pull seems to be, in this area, more towards India than towards Tibet. Although the Dowagers live simply, they each have a substantial staff of retainers. These do not

[1] Secretary, Tongsa Dzong.

With the King of Bhutan, Rimpoche, the Queen and Rani Chuni

Panchen Lama's arrival in Sikkim, with Chinese escort

Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal of Sikkim and Princess Sangey Deki

Prime Minister Jigmie Dorji of Bhutan and Tessla Dorji

necessarily remain with them during the twelve months of the year, but render service as and when required. Some of these retainers appear to be relations of the family. I did not get the impression that the Dowagers are interested much in influencing His Highness in the administration. They are modest ladies, and scarcely ever mentioned their connexion with the ruler. They showed no interest at all in politics, but agreed that it would be of benefit to Bhutan if their lines of communication with India could be improved.

There seem to be more Tibetan settlers in the Wangdi Chholing area than in other parts of Bhutan. They are mostly traders and get along quite peacefully with the local Bhutanese. The latter are not much influenced by them, either in the matter of language or general culture. There was, naturally, much dancing and singing during the marriage celebrations. The Tibetans invariably performed separately from the Bhutanese. They did not join in with the Bhutanese dancers and singers, nor did the latter with the former. I have mentioned elsewhere the contempt in which the Tibetans are held by the Bhutanese. This, apart from the intense national feeling of the Bhutanese, would partly account for the Bhutanese reluctance to be drawn by Tibetan culture in the same way as are the Sikkimese.

There have also been economic reasons for which the two peoples have drifted apart from each other. Until recent times, rice was regularly exported from Bhutan to Tibet and salt imported from Tibet into Bhutan by way of exchange. An order was issued by the Bhutan Government some months back banning the export of rice from eastern Bhutan, the grounds being that it was required to meet internal demands. The Tibetans have retaliated by banning the export of salt to Bhutan. This has created something of a crisis, as salt is an absolute essential in Bhutanese diet and would cost the people nearly Rs 40 per maund if transported into the interior by road from India. The only solution is to airdrop supplies and this is what the Bhutan Government are now contemplating. Jigmie proposes air-dropping about 5,000 maunds of salt in the Bumthang area in October to meet the emergency. As far as I could sense, the Bhutanese Government's ban on rice export originates from considerations other than of merely local demand. The Tibetans have never, in the Bhutanese view, played fair in the matter of Bhutanese trade. Bhutanese traders are permitted to take their goods only to certain prescribed marts in Tibet, where the greater portion has to be sold at Tibetan Government depots much below the normal market rates. The Bhutan Government have decided, in desperation, to break this practice and to ban export of their rice until the Tibetans agree to the lifting of the present very unfair restrictions.

It is clear that the taxation reforms, the primary purpose of which is the collection of taxes in cash instead of in kind, will require time to implement and the Bhutan Government will have to move with caution. Almost all the representations received by Jigmie during our tour related, in some way or other, to the question of taxation.

The present system is manifestly unequal. A fresh survey is required for the fixing of a fair assessment, and the Bhutan Government are considering in what manner such a survey may best be carried out.

The main difficulty lies in the Bumthang area, where about three-quarters of the cultivable land is owned by His Highness's step-sister, Aji Choki, and his grand-uncle, Pintso Wangdi. (His Highness and the elder Dowager Maharani have already surrendered a considerable portion of their lands to the Government.) As far as I could understand, His Highness will be able to persuade his relations to take a reasonable view. The late Maharaja had amply endowed the younger Dowager Maharani and each of her children including Aji Choki, and the latter should have no reason to raise objections to the resumption of her lands. Pintso Wangdi is likely to prove the greater obstacle; but he is getting on in years and crippled, and it is doubtful whether he too would be able to hold out for long; his only son (a boy of twelve years) resides, as a Rimpoche, in a monastery in Tibet, and the father would have few supporters should he choose to resist the Government's orders. While the Bhutan Government may be able to resume these extensive estates of central Bhutan without undue difficulty, there are likely to be serious repercussions if taxes are raised all of a sudden to two or three times the amount paid to the former landlords, as appears to be contemplated. The Bhutanese have full knowledge of the light system of taxation prevailing in the adjoining Tawang area in India and would resent imposition by their own Government of a disproportionately higher rate. I suggested to Jigmie that if the rate of taxation was to be raised at all, it should be by gradual instalments spread over a number of years.

Although the Government maintains only a very slender Forest Department, Bhutan has succeeded remarkably in preserving her forest wealth. There has been some serious deforestation in the Paro area, but, on the whole, the Bhutanese villager shows a sense of responsibility in the matter of protecting his country's forest resources. Where trees have to be cut down for pasture-land or cultivation, care is taken that the slopes alongside rivers and streams are not utterly denuded. This is in marked contrast to the Nepalese practice of wide and indiscriminate felling. I was told that, in southern Bhutan, the Nepalese have been responsible for widespread deforestation, but I found that, in most of the areas through which I passed, the slopes of the hills were covered with thick forest growth. It is not likely, therefore, that the annual floods in the plains of Bengal below can be reasonably attributed to deforestation in central or eastern Bhutan, as has been sometimes alleged. The Bhutanese are well-skilled in the practice of terraced cultivation and I saw less *jhuming* (shifting cultivation) in Bhutan than in any of the hill areas of India's north-east frontier with which I am familiar.

Yesterday, we made a detailed round of Tongsa Dzong, one of the largest in Bhutan. It is a remarkable edifice, four storeys high, and strategically sited on a commanding height. Byakar

Dzong, near Wangdi Chholing, is also of architectural interest, but has fallen into a sad state of disrepair. The Bhutan Government are concerned about the renovation of their dzongs and Jigmie's mother, Rani Chuni, has undertaken to bear expenditure to the extent of nearly two lakhs of rupees for the repair of Punakha and Thimphu dzongs in memory of her late husband. The dzong symbolizes the life of the community. Its function as a fortress is a thing of the past, but it is still the centre for the worship of the community's protecting deities. There is usually one chapel set aside exclusively for the deities of war. Here also are preserved the trophies of battle — a varied assortment of Indian and Tibetan shields and swords. At Byakar Dzong, I was amazed to find, in the topmost chapel, amidst the crude trophies of battle, some of the finest mural paintings I have seen in Bhutan. It is encouraging to know that both the Bhutan Government and the people themselves are taking an interest and pride in maintaining their country's dzongs. The practice is for the more well-to-do members of the community to undertake the renovation of individual chapels, or parts of chapels, in the dzong. The secular portions of the building are kept in repair by the State. The Government and the people thus participate jointly in the maintenance of the most important national institutions of the country.

The officers I met in central Bhutan did not impress me. I had expected the Dzongpons (District Magistrates) and officers of equal rank to move with a greater sense of independence. They struck me as inferior in status to District Officers in settled areas of India. There is, of course, only a very light Governmental administration in central Bhutan, where the greater portion of the land has, until recent times, been in the hands of a handful of landlords, related closely to the Maharaja. The three Dzongpons who attended the wedding celebrations at Wangdi Chholing (Byakar, Lhuntse and Shamgang Dzongpons) are all related to His Highness. They are courteous and likeable officers, with an inborn dignity of bearing.

As far as I could ascertain, the late Maharaja (the present Maharaja's father) kept, as a matter of policy, a rigid control over his District Officers. Bhutan has only within the last three or four score years emerged free from the rivalries between the ruler, Shabdrung and Penlops. The ruler would probably not risk, until his own position was unquestionably established, any of his subordinate officers growing too powerful. The ruler's main aim, during the last half-century, has been to weld the State into a single unit owing undivided allegiance to the central authority vested in the Maharaja. The first ruler was only one of several Penlops. Jealousies were bound to persist, and the late Paro Penlop seemed never completely reconciled to playing second fiddle. It is not a matter of surprise that the late Maharaja should have thought fit, in the early years of the dynasty, to retain power in his own hands and to appoint to posts of responsibility his own relatives on whom he could depend more fully for their loyalty.

The present Maharaja, I understand, is prepared to accord a higher status to his subordinate officers. There can no longer be any question of the central authority being challenged. The Penlops are dead and gone, and also the institution of Shabdrung. The Maharaja stands, therefore, on a firmer footing than either of his predecessors. The shifting of his capital to the Thimphu area is also a wise move. His position in central Bhutan, the home of his fathers, is secure enough, and periodical visits will be sufficient to maintain his authority. It is of far greater importance that the ruler should build up his contacts and make his presence felt in western Bhutan, where, until recently, he has been a comparative stranger, and where the late Paro Penlop wielded a not inconsiderable influence. My impression is that the weight of the central authority is felt more sensibly in the areas of central Bhutan visited by me than at either Ha or Paro. The fact that Thimphu, the Maharaja's summer headquarters, is only two days' march from Paro will enable the ruler to consolidate his position further in the western Bhutan area and to extend his authority with greater effect.

Whilst I could sense no trace of any move for the revival of the institution of Shabdrung, there can be no question that the first Shabdrung must have been a personality of outstanding ability. I found his portraits accorded a high place of precedence in all the monasteries I visited. Some of the chapels in the dzongs are devoted exclusively to his worship. I have even seen his image given the central place of honour at the altar of some of the chapels, with the patron saint of Bhutan, Padma Sambhava, to his right. It is amazing that, within a period of 300 years since his passing away, the Shabdrung should have come to be practically deified. The first Shabdrung was held in very high esteem indeed by the people, and it is only within the last generation or two that the institution has ceased to command the same respect.

The notes have alluded more than once to the ancient institution of the Shabdrung. It should be explained that, during Bhutan's early history, the Supreme Head of State was the Shabdrung (known in Hindi as the Dharma Raja), whose main responsibilities were in the field of religion and who delegated his secular responsibilities to the Deb Zimpon (known more usually as the Deb Raja). The Deb Zimpon was appointed by the Shabdrung, but on the recommendation of a council consisting of the Penlops (Governors) and other State dignitaries of the highest rank. As a matter of practice, the appointment was generally stage-managed by one or other of the two most powerful

Penlops (i.e. of Paro or Tongsa), who, after having installed his nominee, virtually ruled in his name. Should the Deb Zimpon show over-much independence of spirit, he was likely to forfeit the support of his backers and be replaced. The history of Bhutan is a catalogue of long-drawn-out intrigues in jockeying for power. Though the Deb Zimpon was the nominal secular head, the extent to which he could exercise authority depended on a plethora of imponderables, the main being the temperament of the Shabdrung (there were Shabdrungs who were jealous of worldly power and not content to restrict themselves to the religious field) and the support he commanded in the recommendatory council.

While this was a state of affairs confusing enough in the conduct of the internal affairs of the country, it created impossible complications in her dealings with foreign powers. It had been customary, from ancient times, for Bhutanese along the southern frontier of the country to raid the contiguous plains areas of Bengal and Assam and carry off men, women and children for keeping as slaves or serfs. The objective of the several British missions to Bhutan was to hammer out a settlement with the Bhutanese authorities regarding the alignment of their southern frontier and the control of their rapacious subjects. The failure of these missions was due to the impossibility of getting agreements executed that would be honoured not only by the signatories but, what was more important, by the more powerful operators behind the scene on whom the signatories depended for their continuance in office. The British were driven to desperation by the evasive tactics of Bhutanese officials and their refusal to accept responsibility. If they approached the Deb Zimpon, they were referred to the Shabdrung. By the Shabdrung, they might — or might not — be passed on to the Penlops. And the Penlops, quite correctly, represented that they were mere executives and

that matters of higher policy affecting relations with foreign powers could be handled only by the Central Government at Thimphu or Punakha. The passing away of a Shabdrung caused further complications, as it might well take fifteen to twenty years before his reincarnated successor would be mature enough to function effectively — within which period his guardians, tutors and officials of high ambition would be vying for power and influence.

It was to put a brake on intrigue and lessen the risks and ineffectiveness of dual, if not triple, control that it was decided, during the first decade of the present century, that there should in future be a single, hereditary ruler for the entire country, and the Tongsa Penlop, the most powerful of the Governors of the time, was formally installed as Bhutan's first hereditary chief. It has to be remembered, however, that, though it might have been decided that the Shabdrung should no longer exercise power and authority, the Shabdrung himself could never be extinguished, as, on the perishing of his body, he must inevitably re-appear on earth, reincarnated as an infant child. None, however, of the Shabdrungs of recent times has succeeded in reaching the age of adulthood, with the result that it has become possible for the monarchy, during the sixty years since the establishing of the present dynasty, to be firmly consolidated in the country, without challenge to its authority.

Having performed our mission, which was to install the bridegroom, Jigmie and I were anxious to return home without further dallying on the way. The rains had set in and camping was no longer fun. We had, besides, a troop of thirty odd children whom we had collected on our travels to take back with us for admission to schools and technical institutions in India. We felt more now like a couple of fussy governesses and forgot we were also Prime Ministers. It was not possible to arrange horses and mules for all the children and they had to take it in

turns to ride. Jigmie and I helped out by carrying with us a boy apiece, who shared our saddle. It was after we had left Thimphu and I was carelessly cantering along with my charge that Jigmie came racing from behind to overtake me. It was a narrow track and, determined to stay ahead, I whipped my mule to further endeavour. The response was instantaneous, but my poor Bhutanese lad was so terrified that he threw himself back on me for fear of being tossed over the animal's head. That was the end, and, within seconds, down we slid on to hard mother earth, to be trampled upon in most unfriendly fashion by the animal's hind legs.

To my surprise and unbelief, I emerged from the affair quite whole — but with the most horrible aches and pains by evening, which the Dzongtsap's well-intentioned endeavours at massaging only served to aggravate. I swallowed four aspirins and prayed for sleep, but it was not to be. Our tent was pitched in a depression and during the middle of the night, the school-children rose in an uproar as the entire ground had become flooded with rain. Jigmie and I took the lads into our own cots, which, being raised above the ground, were comparatively dry. This was when I first discovered that children kick so in their sleep — I would almost have preferred my mule.

One night in such intimate proximity with the boys was sufficient to convince us they were ripe for a bath, and so, on reaching Ha, we bathed them in traditional Bhutanese style. A great square hole was excavated in the ground, lined with wooden planks and filled with water. A fire was then lit nearby, into which numerous boulders, about a foot each in diameter, were deposited for heating. As soon as the boulders were scorching hot, they were levered into the hole and the water became quickly heated. The Bhutanese believe that the boulders harbour mineral properties that are health-giving and therefore prefer this means of heating their bath water to any other. Be that as it may, o ıc

immediate concern was to purge the boys of the accumulated dirt, sweat and smells of their days of trekking through monsoon mire, and in this we largely succeeded, mineral properties aside, by liberal application of scrubbing-brush and soap. Boys will, of course, be boys, and they did not remain clean for long—but it could not be said we did not try.

Our journey from Paro to Ha was colourful beyond description, in spite of the torrential downpour as we crossed the 13,000 foot Chele La pass. We were a procession nearly half a mile long, what with the school-children we had collected from Wangduphodrang, Thimphu and Paro, the young men we had selected for training in wireless communications and reading rain-gauges for flood-control operations, our mule-caravan carrying stores and the straggling train of attendants. There was something romantic, almost incredible, in the idea of these youngsters from the remote interior leaving their homes, parents and country for what must have appeared to them a stupendous adventure. We had been trekking together, eating together, riding together and sleeping together, day in and day out, for nearly three weeks, and I knew I was going to miss them when we parted at Ha, where they were to remain behind until the opening of the regular school session in India. For a seven-year-old from Wangduphodrang to be sent to school in India, in those days a trek of over two weeks, was the equivalent of a child from a remote village in Orissa being dispatched to New York. It was a heavy responsibility we had taken upon ourselves and, for Jigmie, it meant being father, mother, friend, philosopher and guide to them throughout their period of education in India until they were ready to return to Bhutan, equipped to serve their country.

The final lap of our journey from Ha to Gangtok was an amalgam of horror and comedy. As there is no track leading directly from Bhutan to Sikkim, the traveller

from Bhutan has necessarily to take the route via Tibet, or, as the Chinese prefer to call it, 'the Tibetan region of China'. As we crossed the Bhutan border into the Chumbi valley in Tibet, the Chinese officials, after checking our papers, directed us to proceed to Yatung for further formalities. I pressed that, as our papers were in order and a visit to Yatung would involve a diversion of about two hours out of our way and a ride by night to reach our next camp, the formality of proceeding to Yatung might please be dispensed with. I was naive enough to suppose that, if I was firm and showed a bit of dog, they would yield. Jigmie, who knew rather more about the Chinese and was in every way of more practical bent of mind, whispered to me not to be silly and that it would save time in the end if we complied with their request and proceeded to Yatung. I whispered back that it was a question of principle and prestige and we must not budge. The officials eventually informed us that we need not proceed to Yatung — I cast a smug, sidelong smirk in Jigmie's direction — and that they had requested the Yatung check-post officers to come to us instead.

After waiting a while, Jigmie and I had an odd feeling, both of us, that there was something rotten in the Kingdom of Chumbi, and, despite all the pother about principle and prestige, we mounted our horses and started trotting to Yatung. We had not proceeded far before we met the Chinese party that had evidently been dispatched from Yatung to provide us with fitting escort — fittingly armed with sten-guns. On arrival at the Yatung check-post, we were agreeably surprised at what appeared to be a very welcome reception. We were offered tea, biscuits and cigarettes and chatted affably about the weather. It was just as I was feeling happily at ease with the Chinese and about to thank them for their hospitality that they suddenly changed their tone. The tea, biscuits and cigarettes were first put away. Why had we not proceeded *at once* to Yatung,

they barked, instead of arguing with the frontier officials? As India and China were like brothers, should they not respect each other's rules? Is it not the practice in every country to impose punishment on people who break rules?

As Jigmie and I were only two against ten (including three with sten-guns), we decided that discretion was the better part of valour and readily agreed with every one of their propositions. It was dark before we could extricate ourselves from their badgering and it was at no small risk that we rode through the night, along the rough and precipitous mountain-track, to reach our camp at Chumbithang. Jigmie and I were of one mind that we did not like the 'Tibetan region of China' and would not wish to remain there one moment longer than was necessary. We left Chumbithang at three next morning, in the hope that this would be too early an hour for the Chinese frontier-officials to harass us further, crossed the 14,000 foot Nathu La pass in the grey half-light before dawn, and shouted for joy to tread again the friendly and familiar soil of Sikkim.

It was Jigmie's bitter experience during this Chumbi episode that influenced him in the direction of building roads that would give access to Bhutan not from Tibet to her north but from India to her south. I remember him telling me that, if he could help it, he would never again touch the Chumbi route to Bhutan. And, after 1958, he never did.

Shortly after reaching Gangtok, I received a letter from Jigmie's mother, beautiful in its wisdom and philosophic calm, a perfect and lovely close to a chapter of so much adventure and hope for the future.

Dechen Chholing
Thimphu
Bhutan

My dear Uncle,

Many thanks for your letter. It was good of you to write. We were sorry to hear the unpleasant experience that you met at Yatung. As

you say we live and learn. Perhaps that was why we stopped making roads. Rimp is quite alright. He is a bad correspondent. Tashi[1] is arriving here tomorrow and we are looking forward to see her. She has been very successful with her work. It was not at all easy to do new land settlement in such a big area and to deal with people who were not used to change. I still do not know when I am leaving here. As it is beginning to get cold I shall be returning via Buxa; that will save me crossing four high passes. For the moment I am gathering tobacco leaves as they mature. It is sure to be a success as it grows so well here and the curing is very simple. I am enclosing a leaf for luck! The scent and flavour will not come till it is cured for two months. My love to your mother and to all at the Palace please. You must be quite tough now after all the rough trekking in Bhutan. Wishing you all the best.

Sincerely — Amala[2]

[1] Jigmie's sister, who had been recently appointed Dzongpon (Commissioner) at Tashigang in eastern Bhutan.

[2] We addressed her, affectionately, as Amala, Sikkimese for 'mother'.

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The Living Gods

THOUGH important files had been sent on to me in Bhutan for orders, there were countless matters of routine nature which were awaiting attention after an absence of nearly three months. We had embarked on our Seven-Year Plan for economic development, and were busy recruiting personnel, preparing project-reports, approving plans and estimates and, generally, trying to enthuse the people. The Prince's younger brother, Jigdal Tsewang, had recently returned from England. He had taken a good degree at St. Stephen's College in Delhi, studied law in Bombay, and then proceeded to the U.K. to read English literature at Oxford. But he had been given little to occupy himself usefully with on his return to Sikkim. He was, by temperament, a modest and sensitive young man, and was developing something of a complex through being constantly overshadowed by the strong and masterful personality of his elder brother. I suggested, therefore, that he might like to take over the supervision of Sikkim's Seven-Year Plan as Development Commissioner. He was diffident at first, as he had had no administrative experience and felt unqualified for such a heavy responsibility; but on my promising to give him the support and assistance he might need, he finally agreed. Every morning at half-past nine, I would drop in at the Palace, have a brief session with the elder brother, and take Georgela, as we called his younger brother, with me to the Secretariat, to deposit him back again in the Palace by evening. I also knew how concerned the elder Prince was about augmenting the revenue of the country and that he had been largely

instrumental in setting up, many years ago, the Sikkim State Transport Service. Among his many special interests, again, were agriculture and forests. He gladly agreed, therefore, to my suggestion that he should take over the administration of the Transport, Agriculture and Forest Departments. My intention in re-distributing portfolios was that the two Princes should have a live sense of participation in the administration of their country and that the public should also not be under any illusion that they were under an alien rule. We had our little tiffs — sometimes quite big ones ! — but we were, on the whole, a very happy team.

Georgela accompanied me on all my tours in Sikkim, and I could not have wished for a friendlier companion. He was, if anything, too self-effacing and gentle to be an effective administrator. In this he resembled his father, the fragile, modest Sir Tashi, wrapped up in his paints and pujas, remote from the madding crowd. There could be no question from whom the elder Prince inherited *his* gifts. His mother, the Maharani, came of one of the most distinguished families of Tibet, the house of Rakashar, and was as strong-willed as only Tibetan women can be. I had not been in Sikkim for more than a few days before I came to sense her deeply-pervading influence in wide and varied fields. I had been brought up, like most people, in the belief that mules were the most obstinate of God's creations. But I have never in my experience — and I say it with affection and respect — known Her Highness to yield a point or budge an inch. And so it was with the elder Prince. Apart from physical resemblance, he inherited his mother's doggedness, the resolution, however irrational, to go it alone, if need be, when once he had made up his mind.

His stubbornness exasperated the political parties, and it was my unenviable lot to find a meeting ground. He used to refer to me, jocularly, as 'Sikkim's master of compromise', but there were times, I know, when his tone

was by no means jocular and any suggestion to compromise would provoke him to contempt. And I sometimes reflect, in retrospect, that perhaps he was right after all. He had a tremendous sense of mission, a feeling that, as the heir of the eleventh consecrated ruler of Sikkim,[1] he was entrusted with a sacred duty to his country. He was genuinely convinced that the politicians were exploiting the people for their own ends and that it was his solemn responsibility to keep them under check. The irony of it was that, as a politician, he was the cleverest of the lot and has succeeded to this day, despite my ' masterly compromise ', in keeping to himself the reins of power.

My work in Sikkim, and particularly my tours, brought me closely in touch with Buddhism and I soon found myself deeply affected. In the less frequented areas in the interior, the lamas were hospitable enough to accommodate me in their monasteries. The monasteries are generally sited on top of the highest hill in the locality and it would be considered discourteous, if not improper, for the Dewan to pass them by without making a call. A single day's tour might involve an unending succession of ascents and descents, depending on the number of monasteries on the way. The fatigue of the ascent would be compensated, however, by the colourful reception at the summit, when the lamas, attired in their splendid regalia and to the accompaniment of their orchestra of drums, cymbals and horns, would lead us in stately procession to circumambulate the precincts of their monastery.

My most memorable tour was in the Jongu area of northern Sikkim, a region as yet untouched by modern civilization and the homeland of the shy Lepchas, popularly held to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim. The entire area, which falls west of the river Teesta, was then administered as the private estate of the Maharani, and the purpose of the visit was to inaugurate, near the monastery

[1] Phuntsog Namgyal, born 1604, was the first consecrated ruler of Sikkim.

of Lingtem in the remote interior, the first dispensary and primary school to be established for the Lepchas under Sikkim's Seven-Year Plan. The younger Prince accompanied me during my tour and we nicely shared the honours, the inauguration of the dispensary being performed by the Prince and the school by myself.

The inauguration over, our next halt was to be at a monastery carrying the picturesque name of Hi, but, as no officer had previously toured the region, the only indication we could gather of its distance was that we would reach it by afternoon, provided there was no dallying on the way. As it happened, we had not the slightest inclination to dally, as the track, if it could be called such, was perpendicular most of the way and ran precariously along the edge of a cliff overhanging a bottomless gorge. By six in the evening, we were assured by our shy Lepcha guides that the next corner would lead us into Hi. This same assurance they dutifully repeated at seven, eight and nine. At half past nine, they triumphantly announced that we had arrived — at the foot of *positively* the final ascent! And at ten, we flopped into the monastery, not sure whether we were dead or alive. We had just sufficient strength to call for brandy and a pot of tea. I had never before drunk tea laced with brandy, or, for that matter, brandy laced with tea, but whichever it was, it tasted good and brought us back to life. And we offered a silent prayer that we might be forgiven the lapse of imbibing the fiery, forbidden spirit in the hallowed precincts of a monastery.

My first lesson in detachment, the focal tenet of Buddhism, was from a lama of Rumtek monastery, not many miles from Gangtok. I was on tour with Georgela and we were enjoying our evening meal by a camp-fire in the monastery compound, chatting with the lamas seated around us. There was a young lama who particularly attracted my notice. He could not have been more than twenty, but there was a serenity and spirituality in his

expression that seemed strange in one so youthful. He had visited Gangtok frequently, I learnt, but his ignorance of his country's affairs amazed me, and I wondered whether such lamas were not an anachronism, after all, in the twentieth century. We retired early to bed, as we had planned to start at dawn next morning to resume our journey. It is the custom of villagers to accompany their guests for about a mile of their onward journey before bidding their final good-byes. When I saw my lama friend among the accompanying crowd, I assumed he was coming with the others to say good-bye. But at the point of parting, he approached me not with the traditional scarf of farewell, but with a gentle request that he might be permitted to accompany me on my way. I inquired whether he had made arrangements for clothes and bedding, as we would be ten days on the march. ' Oh yes, ' he smiled, and pointed to the cloth bag dangling, like a school-boy's satchel, from his shoulder. I could not help being struck by the contrast as our untidy train of mules jostled past, loaded with mountains of bedding and stores, to be followed by the elaborate assortment of attendants to wait upon our most trifling needs. I was transported in a flash to my youth-hostelling days in France, when I hitch-hiked my way across the country with just such a satchel as my lama friend. For a moment I envied my lama's freedom of the pomp and paraphernalia that make life complicated and burdensome. My joy, at the end of a strenuous day's march in rain and slush, was to get into clean, crisp clothes after a hot bath. How did my lama friend, with his little satchel of spares, manage to keep himself clean, spruce and cheerful? Yet at the end of our ten days' trek, he was as fresh and neatly turned out as myself, and none the worse for wear. This set me thinking — and searching.

I was abetted in my searchings by the new Political Officer[1] Apa Saheb Pant, a brilliant diplomat who

[1] Indian representative in Sikkim.

reflected the best in eastern and western culture. Apa's father had been the Raja of Aundh, a small principality that ultimately lost its separate identity and was merged in the surrounding state of Maharashtra. Apa was essentially a man of enthusiasms, with the capacity of absorbing his environment like a sponge. As India's Commissioner-General in Nairobi, he emerged as an enthusiast of all things African, including, or so it was alarmingly alleged, the Mau Mau! As India's Resident in Sikkim, he shed his African skin and was reincarnated as a Tibetan. His special interest was in Mahayana Buddhism, with its abundant manifestations of extra-sensory perception, and he was soon out-Tibetanizing the Tibetans in his insatiable avidity to believe the unbelievable. His wife, Nalini, an F.R.C.S. of Edinburgh, was a woman of no nonsense, with both feet firmly planted on the ground, who bore with infinite patience her husband's soaring into dizzy, incredible heights. The Pants were a hospitable family, and the Residency was rarely without a guest. But the guests were usually of a peculiar stamp — off-beat, to put it charitably, and searchers all.

It was one of Apa's guests, Maurice Frydman, who administered my next lesson in detachment. Maurice, a Pole by origin, had started his career in India as an engineer and rose quickly to be recognized as a leading consultant. It was at this stage that he chanced to meet Mahatma Gandhi, and the course of his life took a dramatic turn. Maurice became a confirmed convert to the idea of small-scale village industries as India's hope for the future. He wears now only homespun cloth tailored in Indian style, and his thought and philosophy too follow the pattern set by the great thinkers of the East. It was through Maurice that I was introduced to the teachings of J. Krishnamurti and came to understand what was meant by 'unconditioning' the mind, if truth was to be realized, of past and present experience and of fears or hopes for the future.

Maurice and Apa had decided between themselves that I was fertile soil for spiritual seed and bombarded me with tracts by and on Krishnamurti, Aurobindo and diverse yogic mystics.

It was in Sikkim that I first practised meditation, maybe not as ' transcendental ' as the Beatles ', but sufficiently deep to evoke a change in my scheme of values. It was in Sikkim that I discovered the significance of the term ' realization '. Not that I reached the higher levels of realization, but I became increasingly aware that there were levels of reality that could be apprehended not by the more ordinarily recognized rational processes but by an inward experience. My idols in school and Cambridge had been Plato and Socrates, and while I had read some of the philosophical classics of India such as the Bhagavad Gita, it was not so much to widen my experience as out of a sense of literary curiosity, and their impact on me had been little more than peripheral. It was in Sikkim that eastern and western currents of philosophic thought found a meeting-place, that the imagery of Plato's allegory of the cave no longer revealed itself as an exclusively western concept. And it was Maurice who was my Socratic gad-fly.

I shall remember the evening I was showing Maurice my garden, when I remarked, with a touch of pride, how thankful I was for such a lovely retreat after a hard day's work in the office. He looked at me with incredulity, ' But *this* is *my* garden, Nari,' he remonstrated, quietly and simply, sweeping his hand in the direction of the stately pinnacles of Kanchenjunga's snows, wondrously tipped with red and gold under the last rays of the setting sun. '*My* garden is much too large to be fenced around with a hedge. And see how beautiful it is. ' What he said was obvious enough, but it was his manner and the moment that gave it a power and significance that are, for me, ineffaceable. I had never before realized so poignantly that beauty cannot be enhanced by possession, that the most precious treasures

are free for all who have the power to see, hear and feel, for all who, in Krishnamurti's language, are ' choicelessly aware '.

All our visitors were not like Maurice. Gangtok was like a magnet for research-scholars in Buddhism and Tibetan studies, and some were queer and some were not. There was the French nun, who had shaved her head and dressed in lama robes of maroon and saffron. Bent on learning about Mahayana Buddhism at first hand, she had extracted permission from us to reside in the historic monastery of Pemiongchi in western Sikkim, whose lamas have been especially privileged, from ancient times, to offer prayers for the prosperity of His Highness and the Palace. Another reason for her choice of Pemiongchi monastery was that it was presided over by a learned and highly respected Rimpoche, at whose feet, she had decided, she would sit and seek guidance in unravelling the mysteries of Mahayana Buddhism. But the Rimpoche evidently knew not what he did when he accepted her as his disciple, for a woman of Paris, even though a nun, can be a distracting influence in an exclusive society of full-blooded males.

The first distress letter to reach me was from the nun. She was being strangely disturbed during her slumbers at night and would I please see to it that the monks were kept under control. This was followed, soon, by a tirade against the entire monastic order of Sikkim and their alleged iniquities. She would abandon Pemiongchi, she averred, where she had been denied the spiritual guidance for which she was searching, and seek for purification and enlightenment in the high mountains and the pure, virgin snows. I received next an urgent representation from the monastic council of Pemiongchi, pleading that I should forthwith take over the nun lest a blot should be cast on the good name of their monastery. She had threatened, they protested, to leap over a cliff should they fail to 'accede to her every desire' (*sic*).

Within two days of receipt of this ultimatum and before I had had time to act, I arrived at my bungalow one evening to find the nun impatiently and excitedly awaiting my return from the office. She was clearly in a state of nervous tension and it was with difficulty that I could calm her to coherent utterance. Relations with her *guru*, the Rimpoche, had reached breaking point, she bewailed, and when she had approached him last evening to interpret the holy doctrine, he summarily dismissed her from his presence, seized the book of holy words and hurled it out after her through the door. For disciple to be so rejected by *guru* was to be cast to the depths of unsufferable humiliation and she pleaded that I should intercede on her behalf. I agreed to have a word with the Rimpoche, a friend whom I dearly respected, but quickly sensed, when I met him, that he too had had his share of troubles. He had tried his best to give her guidance, but her demands on him had become so increasingly persistent that he was left with no time to attend to his own devotions. It was clear to me that, between the two of them, the path of no return had been reached, and it was my delicate duty to advise the nun to retrace her steps from the holy land of Sikkim and seek fresh woods and pastures new to sate her spiritual appetite.

Amid the flittings to and fro of saints and charlatans, the word got round that there was something big ahead for Sikkim in the spiritual firmament. The year 1956 was to be celebrated throughout the world as the 2,500th anniversary of the Lord Buddha's enlightenment, and rumour had it that the two Living Gods in person, Their Holinesses the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, were to be invited to India through Sikkim to grace with their Divine Presence the land of the Buddha's first enlightenment. The elder Prince had mysteriously set off for Lhasa once more, and speculation was rife as to the purpose of his visit. As a high Rimpoche, his word would surely carry weight with the

Living Gods, and the Sikkimese waited in breathless anticipation for the signal from Lhasa that would bring them the glad tidings that their prayers had been answered. The message came, and swept like a current through the country. It seemed unbelievable that the people of the land would be blessed with the miracle of having the Lamas in their midst. We had heard tales of the devout who had spent their life's savings to make a trip to Tibet and have the Lamas' blessings. There were others who made the pilgrimage, but had been kept waiting so long and indefinitely for audience that they returned in despair to their homes, unblessed.

For the Sikkimese now, only one thing mattered in life, to obtain a glimpse, if not the blessing, of the 'Precious Jewels'. The Seven-Year Plan was nothing compared to this. Plans might come and plans might go, but never again would their country be honoured thus, by the visitation of two Living Gods. Our entire efforts were directed from now onwards to arranging a befitting reception and ensuring that no cause might arise for giving the Gods offence. Our task was not made easier by the fact that the Lamas' followers were explosively sensitive to the smallest niceties of protocol and were ready to draw daggers at the merest suspicion of a slight. For though the Dalai Lama was popularly held to be the supreme authority in Tibet, the Panchen's followers wished it to be understood that, in the earlier incarnations, it was the Panchen who was the Guru, or Spiritual Teacher, of the Dalai, and that, whatever the position might be regarding secular authority, the Panchen's status in the celestial hierarchy was no lower than that of the Dalai himself.

We decided it would be wiser, in this view, to house the Lamas separately, at a safe distance from each other, so that the risk of their followers drawing comparisons and getting embroiled in disputes might be reduced and bloodshed averted. Our most worrying anxiety was the Lamas'

personal safety. With the Lamas out of Tibet, the main obstacle in the way of the Chinese consolidating their position in the country would be removed. An 'accident' on a journey of so many perils would be easy to engineer, and the blame could conveniently be placed on the Indian Government at whose invitation the Lamas had been prevailed upon to leave their land. The minutest detail of their movements had therefore to be rehearsed and yet again rehearsed and nothing left to chance.

The Lamas were received by the Prince and Apa Pant at the Nathu La pass, from where they continued on horseback along the old Sikkim-Tibet bridle-track to Karponang camp, ten miles short of Gangtok. From Karponang, the Prince and I escorted them onward, in a jeep station-wagon, to a point at the outskirts of Gangtok, where His Highness the Maharaja was waiting to welcome his guests. The last lap of the journey was completed in the Maharaja's sky-blue Buick, with His Highness seated between the Living Gods. It must have been during the scurry when the Buick was brought to a halt and the crowds were being cleared for its further progress that the Tibetan flag, which the Prince had taken pains to affix on the Buick and which had been bravely and picturesquely fluttering in the breeze, was surreptitiously spirited away through the ingenuity of one of the Chinese staff deputed to attend on the Lamas. As though the soul of Tibet, too, could as easily be spirited away !

The Prince, it was arranged, would tend to the needs of the Dalai Lama, while the care of the Panchen was entrusted to myself. A Guard of Honour was drawn up at the Palace entrance to welcome the Lamas on their arrival, and with precisely measured steps they together mounted the saluting base, in nicest equality of precedence. After the ceremonial exchange of scarves and offering of tea at the Palace, the Prince and I took over our respective charges and escorted them to their quarters for rest and quiet after the

trials of the way. I had never before escorted a Living God, and this once, I soon decided, was more than enough. We had hardly passed the Palace gates before a crowd that seemed like the entire population of Sikkim lunged madly forward, man, woman and child, with arms vainly outstretched for a touch of the vehicle that carried the Panchen Lama. I seriously feared our station-wagon would be overturned, but there was no remedy as the police, themselves devout Buddhists, were too overawed by the Presence to dream of controlling the crowds. Coins, currency notes, ceremonial scarves, amulets came whirring through the windows of our station-wagon until we were compelled at last to close them in self-defence. Our security arrangements might have served well enough for common or garden mortals, but certainly not for the Living God, whose only protection now was his own divinity.

We had arranged to accommodate the Panchen at the White Memorial Hall, the station club named after Claude White, the first Political Officer in Sikkim. Three months' hard labour had transformed the premises to *almost* a monastery, and it was difficult to believe that the ornate prayer-room, with its richly-carved altar and sculptural representations of the Lord Buddha in meditation, had but recently resounded to the din and clatter of nocturnal revellers. The Panchen and his party were well satisfied with our endeavours, and I was glad to leave them for a while, as I was in need of a break myself. The prayer-meetings of the two Lamas, held outdoors — and separately, that there might be no complications over protocol — passed smoothly, despite threats of showers and storm. And it was considered a miracle by all that the light drizzle of rain that preceded the meetings should have ceased the moment the Lamas intoned their prayers.

With the departure of the Lamas for Delhi, Gangtok seemed as a city dead. His Highness, the Princes, Princesses, Apa Pant, everybody of consequence, followed fast on the

Lamas' trail. The Government of India had dispatched a special plane to fly the cavalcade to the capital and I was relieved to be able to relax awhile after the weeks of strain in preparing for the Lamas' passage. I have often been asked whether I was ever aware of supernatural forces emanating from the Lamas' presence. I have to confess that, for all the eager and excited anticipation of their divine immanence, they remained, for me, two very charming and sensible young men, of gentle and considerate manner, inquiring and vigorous mind and irresistably attractive personality. Staying with me at Gangtok during the Lamas' visit were Jigmie's wife, Tessla, and her charming sister Nancy, and it was evident from their homely talk that there were many in Lhasa who were carried away as much by the youthful charm of the Lamas as by their divinity, and they told us tales of some of their passionate young friends whose secret purpose in seeking the Dalai Lama's blessing was that they might be nearer the object of desire. It was a case of forbidden fruit tasting sweeter. Could it really be, wondered the belles of Lhasa, that the Dalai could be utterly immune to feminine allure? It was a challenge to Venus, which provoked them to higher endeavours. The Panchen, too, was not without his admirers. And wicked gossip whispered that the chinks in his armour were already showing through. But God-head or not, I too succumbed to the Lamas' spell. They were vastly amused as I prattled to them in my quaint Tibetan, and the Dalai, I soon discovered, had a delightful sense of fun. The Panchen was the more handsome of the two, but there was something not of this world, ethereal and ageless, in the Dalai's expression that moved me the more deeply. I found myself strangely longing for his return.

The Dalai had hinted that he would make his way back to Lhasa via Sikkim, but when we heard of Chou En Lai's visit to Delhi, we feared a change of plan. The Chinese could not have been overjoyed at the Lamas' widely-extended

fraternizing in the land of the Buddha, and the snowing-up of the Himalayan passes with the approach of winter would be as good a reason as any for advising the Lamas to curtail their perambulations and return to Tibet by air. But the Dalai stood firm and, to the unbounded joy and gratitude of the Sikkimese, fulfilled his promise to halt for some days in Gangtok before returning to Tibet. It was during this return visit that we had the opportunity of appreciating more fully the complexities of his position. A Living God to the followers of the faith, he assumed no airs, expected no adoration, in his relations with persons of other beliefs and religion. He seemed, on the contrary, amused at my demonstrations of respectful humility, and welcomed my intrusions into the privacy of his chamber. Sikkim's Seven-Year Plan was, by now, well off to its start, and the Lama was insatiable in his curiosity to see for himself what it was all about. Seed-farms, roads, canning-factories, weaving-centres, cows, pigs—everything interested him and he was tireless in his questioning. And when, in playful retaliation, I too put him a question now and then, his answer revealed, invariably, a shrewd and penetrating mind. I asked him once, with some hesitation as I did not wish to embarrass him, his opinion of the Chinese people. 'The *people*', he replied without a thought, 'are always good, whatever may be the country. But if their *Government* is not good, that's where the rot sets in.'

Winter was already on us now and the passes were heavy with snow. Day after day, the people of Sikkim had streamed into the Palace gardens, where the Lama sat enthroned beneath a canopy of rich embroidery, to receive his blessing. But the time had come for the Lama to take his leave. It was clear that he was troubled and uncertain in mind, for twice the date had been fixed for his departure, and twice postponed—and news was reaching us meanwhile that the passes would soon be blocked with snow. On the Prince's suggestion, we called on him together one

afternoon to convey to him what a privilege it was for Sikkim to have him as her guest and that he should never harbour any thought that he was overstaying his welcome. He was deeply touched, and the Prince and I both sensed that he had some presentiment already of the troublous events ahead. The date of departure was finally fixed, and we escorted him back, by station-wagon, along the old bridle-track to Karponang, from where he rode away from us, a sad, solitary figure, to cross the Nathu La pass to his unhappy, ill-fated land.

If the Dalai Lama was a person of gentleness and sensibility, the same could not be said of his aides. There were some amongst them who regarded Sikkim and the Sikkimese as of a culturally lower level, ignorant in the etiquette and high manners of the Lhasa aristocracy, and who were out to queer the pitch at the very outset of the Lamas' visit. The kindly, courteous Sir Tashi had accorded the Lamas the high honour of receiving them at the outskirts of his capital and escorting them personally to his Palace. The word was nevertheless spread abroad that it was presumptuous on the part of the Sikkim ruler to sit in a position of equal precedence with the Living Gods, on the self-same seat of the self-same car. It was an attitude of arrogance that the Sikkimese justly resented — and could not easily forgive when, not many years later, the Tibetans fled their land and sought refuge in Sikkim.

I was relieved when the news came that the Lama had safely crossed the Nathu La pass and our responsibilities were at an end. The months of strain, mental as much as physical, had been telling on my nerves, and while it was a joy to share the Lama's company, the proliferation of his motley retinue of civil and monastic officials was beginning to weigh heavily on us and we longed for the day when we could once more have our homes to ourselves. For there were a host of reincarnates who availed of Sikkim's hospitality during their visits to India for the Buddha Jayanti

celebrations. There were the two Sakya Rimpoches, teen-agers, but highly venerated, who, in the days of their glory and Kublai Khan, had won over the Mongol emperors to their cause and were invested by them with power over the whole of Tibet. There was the Karmapa Lama, who, as spiritual head of the Karma Kagyupa sect, is held in the highest veneration in Sikkim, where the followers of the older sects[1] outnumber by far the later 'yellow' sect of Gelukpas, founded in the fifteenth century by the reformer Tsongkhapa and headed today by the Panchen and Dalai Lamas. And then there were the multitude of lesser 'Jewels', including my little namesake, Nari Rimpoche, youngest brother of the Dalai himself, perpetually abubble with mischief and pranks. The Palace and the Palace compound were astir, day and night, with the comings and goings of lamas and officials of varying rank, and privacy and quiet were words that had lost their meaning.

It was to escape from the maddening bustle of strangers everywhere around that the sensitive Georgela came to my house one afternoon in a state of acute emotional distress. It was apparent he was in need of rest and quiet to restore him to health and peace of mind. According to custom, the lamas were consulted and advised, amongst other remedies, that he should circumambulate the State Chorten (stupa) several hundred times a day, reciting the sacred mantra 'Om Mane Pema Hum' (Oh! The Jewel in the Lotus). His indisposition was attributed to the impact on a highly sensitive mind of the accumulation of forces, or thought-currents, emanating from the unprecedented number of reincarnate lamas that had gathered together at Gangtok during the period of the Dalai Lama's visit — as a bulb is fused by an excess of electric charge. Since his complaint was attributed to an excess of spiritual current, the remedy prescribed by the lamas had also to be in the shape of a spiritual exercise — and Georgela agreed

[1] i.e. Nyingmapa and Kagyupa sects.

to circumambulate. His physical condition, however, did not permit of circumambulation over a protracted period, and he eventually proceeded abroad for treatment on more conventional lines.

While I have not myself had any direct experience of extra-sensory perception, my friend Apa Pant was a regular addict, ready at the drop of a hat to pick up 'thought waves' from any object and from whatever distance. He had once a narrow escape, when he was violently thrown off his horse while crossing a bridge on his return from Lhasa to Sikkim. Apa promptly tracked down the cause to a black *thanka* (religious scroll) which, against advice, he had procured from a Tibetan monastery and was carrying back with him as part of his luggage. Apa was convinced that the *thanka* was discharging mischievous 'thought-waves' which had upset his horse and caused the accident. On another occasion, Apa rang me up on a Sunday afternoon to say that, while he was peacefully enjoying his after-lunch siesta, he had been bodily lifted out of bed by some unknown, invisible force and thrown upon the floor. His wife, Nalini, was at the time in Gwalior, where she had proceeded for her confinement. Apa was afraid she must be in trouble and that her urgent 'thought-waves' had swept him off his bed in their rush to give him warning. I had never seen him so shaken and did what I could to restore his nerves. But it was to little effect until the evening, when I managed to put in a long-distance call to Nalini at Gwalior and hear from her that she had never felt fitter in her life. I passed on the message to Apa, who, while pacified, was more than ever perplexed, as he felt sure that someone very dear and close had been trying to get into communication with him. A telegram reached him the following day, bringing news of his sister's death.

The Prince's wife, Sangey Deki, was a girl of ineffable loveliness and charm. Chosen for him from the house of Samdu Phodrang, one of the noblest families of Tibet,

she moved with an inborn sense of dignity, gentle and patient, queenly in every sense. She knew little English at the time of her marriage, but she was eager to learn and we found a tutor to give her lessons. It could be lonely for her when the Prince was away on tour, and it was my routine at such times to drop in at the Palace after office to see that everything was well. It was on just such a visit that I was informed by her maid that Lhacham Kusho ('Her Ladyship', in Tibetan) was ill in bed and in severe pain. I summoned our doctors, but they could give her little relief. I knew that the Sikkim family had been attended in the past by Dr Craig of the Scottish Mission hospital at Kalimpong about fifty miles away, and urged him by phone to proceed at once to Gangtok to attend on the Lhacham Kusho.

Dr Craig arrived at midnight and, after examination, prescribed treatment which he expected should bring relief to the Princess after a good night's rest. But there was no improvement in her condition next morning, and I decided that the best course was to fly up from Calcutta the specialist who had been treating her since her last confinement. It was Sunday and the chances of being able to get a trunk-call through, locate the specialist and charter an aeroplane were not bright. It was fortunate that the Governor of Bengal, Kumari Padmaja Naidu, had recently visited Sikkim. She had been captivated by the country and its people, as we, equally, were captivated by her. Not a beauty by popular film-star standards, there was beauty in her compassion for people in need, her vivacious humour, her graceful manners. And so I had no hesitation in phoning direct to Government House and appealing for her assistance.

By evening, the specialist, with supporting nursing staff, was delivered to the Palace, after a two hours' flight and four hours' drive along the precarious hill-road from the plains of India to Gangtok. The Princess's condition was critical. There had been serious internal haemorrhage, and

the only chance of saving her life — and that, too, minimal — was by operating. I had sent a message to the Prince the previous evening to return at once from his tour, but he was moving in a region unconnected by road or telegraphic communications, and it would take the better part of a day for the runner to reach him with my letter. He arrived at last, physically spent by the forced marches of the journey, his expression pale and deadly. To my relief, his wife was still conscious and smiled gently as he entered her room. Within an hour, while preparations were in progress for the operation, she quietly passed away, in peace and calm, her expression as gentle in death as in life.

While the Prince remained with her, broken in grief, I proceeded to his father's room to break the awful news. His Highness received me in his usual kindly and courteous manner, and called for tea as is the custom when receiving visitors. I had heard of Buddhist detachment, but rarely experienced it as I did that night in His Highness's private chamber. 'It was her critical year, Dewan Saheb. You know, in our belief, every eleventh year is a critical year. She was twenty-two, and I had prepared myself already to hear the news you have brought me. It was my own critical year last year — and you remember how careful I was not to leave the State or exert myself overmuch until the year had passed. Let us be sure now that all the proper prayers are recited by the lamas so that her soul may remain in peace and be helped to find its way to the next rebirth. You will be busy with the arrangements, Dewan Saheb, I must not keep you. Thank you again for your kindness.'

I knew how fond His Highness had been of the late Lhacham Kusho, and that it was not for lack of feeling that he had received the news so calmly. Here was spiritual acceptance manifested as I had never seen before.

The Prince too, after the initial shock, found comfort and consolation in his faith. The lamas had revealed that the Lhacham Kusho had reached a rare level of spiritual

realization at the time of her passing away, and that the more routine prayers required for unenlightened souls could be dispensed with in her case. And as I think of her as she lay that night uncomplaining in her pain, with only compassion in her gentle, madonna-like expression, I feel she was indeed released in the end from the baser passions that vitiate our earthly existence, the hate, the greed, the lust that are the centre of Buddhism's Wheel of Life.

Some months after the funeral, I revisited the cremation ground to offer a prayer. It was a dismal drizzly day, and I took Tobgay, the son of one of my staff members, to accompany me over the rugged track winding through the forest to the hill-top. On reaching the place of cremation, I offered a scarf and bowed my head in prayer. When I had finished and was preparing to return, Tobgay pointed excitedly to the sky, where the sun had succeeded in piercing the clouds. 'Metokchharp, Sir, blossom-rain. What a wonderful sign that the sun has brightened the rain-drops! Lhacham Kusho has surely heard your prayer, and this is her sweet answer. You must be very close in heart to her — and she is happy that you have troubled to come through the forests, in the damp and the rain, to pay respect to her departed soul.' Tobgay was only fifteen and he spoke in simple Sikkimese, spontaneously and without affectation. I was touched by his words, and wished for a moment I could believe in miracles.

14

Nehru and Indira: By Yak to Bhutan

WITH the departure of the Dalai Lama from Sikkim, we could attend once more to our Seven-Year Plan. Roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, — there was not a week when *something* new was not to be inaugurated. Our products were also beginning to find a market outside Sikkim and, amateurs though we were, we set ourselves to exploring the tricks of salesmanship. The slogan, 'SIKKIM SUPREME', with a picture of Kanchenjunga's pinnacles rising 'supremely' aloft, was adopted as the trade-name for the products of the new fruit-canning factory, and Sikkim's squashes were soon in high demand. Our distillery was also establishing a name for itself, and I have regarded it as one of my more splendid, if more secret, personal triumphs to have designed the label for its fierce and fiery potions — a miniature of Sikkim's legendary Snow-lion, with mane of emerald green, roaring forth to the world its universal message, 'Snow-lion for Quality'.

I could never have dreamt of such a rewarding field of work as was my lot during those unforgettable years in Sikkim. Free and unfettered, I could indulge my wayward fancies, wherever the spirit moved — and it moved, most often, in strange and enchanted regions. It is true, we had an elected Council and responsible Executive Councillors, but they were new to the art of government, and glad of my guidance and support. In the Prince, I could not have wished for a more inspiring collaborator. We dreamt each other's dreams — we should have public institutions that would gladden the eye of the beholder, that would enhance

Nehru and Indira Gandhi in Bhutan

Flight of the Dalai Lama (through NEFA)

the beauty of the landscape. We would wipe away the shabby and tawdry from the face of Sikkim. We would build up a generation of young men and women with clean ideals and a love for the good and beautiful things of life. Time was on the wing. Another year or two was the most I could hope for in Sikkim before reverting, according to the conventions of our service, to more routine fields of administration in India. Nehru had agreed, in response to His Highness's personal appeals, to extend my term of deputation twice, and it would have been unbecoming to press him further. With two years at the most to go, I was determined to put all I had into inculcating a feeling for beauty, compassion and right conduct in our officers and their functioning. The routine projects under the Seven-Year Plan could now look after themselves. Popular pressures would ensure that progress in road construction, extension of medical facilities and the rest would be maintained. Popular pressures were not always so effective in safeguarding against the intrusion of ugliness and slipshod habits of mind, and it was in this region that I felt I could make my most useful and lasting contribution to a country I had come to regard with as much affection as my own.

It was to symbolize the ideal of a government based on righteousness and the *dharma* (Religious Path) that we planned to dedicate a shrine at Tashiling, our Secretariat hill, having as its central piece a replica of the time-hallowed Sarnath Buddha delivering in the deer park his first sermon after enlightenment. And to bring the event nearer home, we laid out a miniature deer park all around, with various species of deer assembled from the forests of Sikkim and her neighbouring countries to serve as an example to the world of peaceful co-existence. I had reared the barking-deer in my own garden — they had been brought to me by villagers as baby fawns and I missed them when they left me for the park. The shy spotted chital, the stately sambhar, the wind-swift black-buck, the diminutive mouse,

the giant nilgai, the elusive musk — here there was to be no bar of colour or creed, the strong would sleep with the weak, and, under the watchful eye of the Buddha, all would be bliss. The musk were my proudest catch. For they had been sent from the high mountains by the King of Bhutan, with a letter, in floridly archaic Bhutanese, which I treasure for its picturesque, fulsome expression:

To

The Dewan Saheb, the Incomparable Life-Tree of the Blessed Land, the Embodiment of All-Embracing Knowledge.

It is hoped that you may be keeping yourself well and discharging your heavy responsibilities and bestowing benefit upon all alike, even as the effulgent rays of the sun radiating in all quarters. Here, too, I am maintaining excellent health and ceaselessly engaged in promoting the cause of the Holy Doctrine.

Regarding the musk deer asked for by you, it was not possible to obtain any during the winter season due to snowfall and unseasonable weather. Those that were secured from the higher hills also died as soon as they were brought to us here. There has been, therefore, delay in complying with your request. This year, however, we have managed to send for you one pair of deer with kid. Kindly let me know in advance if more are required hereafter so that I may be able to obtain them during summer and send them before the winter sets in.

It has been given to understand that you will soon be laying aside your responsibilities in Sikkim and leaving for a different sphere of activity. I pray and hope that we may meet again and again, even though you proceed to another country.

Thus offered, with a pure white scarf, from the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Valley of Medicine.

The deer were on their best behaviour for the ceremony of dedication on the Buddhist festival of Saga Dawa, and there was peace and goodwill all round. It was not long, however, before Pema, the barking-deer I had so tenderly nurtured as a wee, shy fawn, grew fangs and gored the sambhar. The nilgai, more bull than deer and accustomed to the wide, open spaces, thought nothing of charging his way out to freedom through the frail, sanctified enclosure. The sambhar, recovered from the goring, tired soon of monastic celibacy — and in the absence of a consort of his

kind, found only frustration in his clumsy endeavours. The musk pined for their beloved snows and mountain-tops — the summer of Gangtok, a mole-hill of 5,000 feet, was not for them. The guardian spirit of the park was the aged Tsering, whose prayer, on reluctant retirement after fifty years of loyal service to the Sikkim Durbar, was that he should be permitted to earn merit towards his next rebirth by tending the shrine and feeding the sacred deer. It was upon the devout and dutiful Tsering that Pema, my erstwhile fawn, having tasted sambhar's blood, next turned his ungrateful attentions. By now my deer had forfeited all public sympathy — and Sikkimese *love* venison!

But though the deer park did not materialize as the paradise I had pictured in my wishful imagination, it is still a lovely retreat in a world that can so often be hard, while from the shrine that is its centre-piece, there shine forth, in letters of gold, the *shlokas* of the renowned scholar-saint of Buddhism, Shantideva, as eternal inspiration to righteous rule:

> Shower forth, Ye Heavens, sweet rains in season due,
> That Earth's rich harvest swell in ample stream,
> Hold fast, O King, the path of righteousness,
> That world on world may rise to bliss supreme.

A venture to which we attached importance was the establishing of a centre for the promotion of Tibetan studies. I have mentioned earlier the heavy influx of Nepalese into Sikkim since the last century, and the impact it had had on the country's culture. The Nepali language had become virtually the *lingua franca* of Sikkim, with a consequential decline of interest in Bhutia and Lepcha culture. The soft, catching lilt of Nepali songs and their graceful, rustic dance were more in evidence than the dance and song of the Lepchas and Bhutias, which tended to sound raucous to the untrained, unfamiliar ear. The monastic order, too, was in need of overhaul. The lamas had

become lax in the performance of their religious duties, and there were many who were ignorant of the basic tenets of their faith. As for the higher spiritual exercises, there were few Sikkimese lamas with any conception of their practice. The Prince's mother, who had been brought up in the cultured circles of the Tibetan aristocracy and at the heart-centre of Mahayana Buddhism, was as critical of Sikkim's monastic orders as the French nun. With memories still fresh of the far renowned Tibetan monasteries, she was shocked at the ignorance and indiscipline of the lamas of her adopted country, and, being a strong-willed woman, was determined to set things right. It was through her influence and endeavours that, as a first step, reincarnate lamas who had reached a high level of spiritual realization could be persuaded to leave their parish in Tibet and take up residence in Sikkim. It was her hope that, through their example and under their spiritual guidance, the lamas and people of Sikkim might be helped to taste of the faith in its purest essence. The presence of such Rimpoches would be held as auspicious for Sikkim through the emanation from them of high, spiritual forces. Their blessings would count as merit earned towards a future rebirth and would be keenly sought by lamas and laymen alike. The reincarnate lama held in special reverence by the Palace during my stay in Sikkim was the simple, often untidily clad 'Thulshi Rimpoche' from the Tibetan province of Kham. Thulshi Rimpoche had no resplendent train of retainers, maintained no state. There were reincarnates I had met who lived like kings, who exploited their spiritual eminence and whose attention was attracted as much to the gifts their devotees offered as to their souls. When I first met Thulshi Rimpoche, I was not impressed. He wore a coarse gown, which could have done with a wash and smelled of the rancid butter used for burning religious lamps. He spoke no language but Tibetan, and knew nothing of our commonly accepted social graces.

It was on his advice that the great chorten (stupa) was built on the outskirts of Gangtok for the safeguard of the Palace and the people of Sikkim against evil forces. Thulshi Rimpoche lived in a ramshackle shed by the side of the chorten, and it was here that the Prince would resort, in times of crisis, for communion and solace. His simple needs were attended to by his *sang-yum*, or 'sacred wife', a stout-hearted, cheery woman, but devoid, alas!, of sensual charms. For while celibacy is strictly enjoined upon a Precious Jewel, there are circumstances in which a *sang-yum* has necessarily to be admitted to his household. It may happen that a Rimpoche falls mortally ill and is advised, in his meditations, to accept a *sang-yum* as the only recourse for survival. Guide-lines would be indicated by him to aid his followers to identify the *sang-yum*, who, once traced and secured, must remain his companion until his passing away from earthly life. The institution of *sang-yum* is, of course, liable to abuse, and it cannot be a coincidence that the guide-lines lead so often to the loveliest flowers of maidenhood. But a single look at Thulshi Rimpoche's *sang-yum*, estimable woman though she was, would be sufficient to convince that here, at least, the relationship could be no other than strictly 'sacred'. It was after I had met Thulshi Rimpoche on several occasions that I came to sense that he was indeed a 'realized being'. The material things of this world were of little consequence to him, be it his shabby gown with its rancid smell, his ramshackle hutment, — even his gawky *sang-yum*. He was as completely 'detached' as I have ever known anybody to be. An instance of his utter unconcern with worldly things came to light during the dedication ceremony of the State chorten, when, according to custom, books of prayers and precious objects were deposited in the stupa. The Maharani had recently presented him with a handsome gold watch which she had, at considerable trouble and cost, arranged to have imported from Switzerland. It was without a moment's thought that,

for want of anything else at hand, Thulsi Rimpoche unstrapped the precious gift from his wrist and hurriedly inserted it in the chorten, amid the sheaves of prayers, before it was finally sealed. The Maharani, needless to say, was not amused!

It was the Prince's view that his mother's laudable objectives should be secured by more systematic and organized processes. There should be, according to his idea, a centre for research into Tibetan literature and Mahayana Buddhism, where scholars and lamas of Sikkim would give and receive guidance in their avocations. The centre should include a library of Tibetan books, religious and secular, which could be availed of for study at the centre itself and mimeographed for the use of research scholars in other parts of the world. There was apprehension that, with the growing tide of Chinese infiltration into Tibet, the ancient books and historical records in the monasteries might be pillaged or destroyed. The idea thus emerged of establishing an institute which would serve as a refuge and repository of Tibetan culture, where the old values could be kept alive.

Nehru was infected by the Prince's enthusiasm and unhesitatingly pledged his support. The Dalai Lama too gave his blessing to the venture and promised to assist with books and to encourage learned scholars and lamas to give the benefit of their scholarship to the centre. The cornerstone of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, as the centre was named[1], was laid by the Dalai Lama during his return from India through Sikkim and we invited Jawaharlal Nehru to perform the formal opening during the following year, by when we hoped to complete the main central building. The Institute was the Prince's own, beloved brainchild. The siting, the lay-out, the architectural features to the smallest detail, were personally worked out by the

[1] After the family name, Namgyal, of the ruler.

Prince and seen through by him to the stage of completion. The result is a building that symbolizes the rich and variegated culture whose study the Institute has been designed to foster. It recalls, in its exterior, the massiveness and strength of a Bhutanese dzong, but the distinctive carvings and breath-taking murals by Lharipa Rinzing, Sikkim's Court artist, and his talented band of young apprentices prove that the traditional arts have by no means vanished from Sikkim and that only encouragement is needed to revive their ancient splendours.

Nehru had a very special corner in his heart for Sikkim and it needed little persuasion to lure him to her capital. He was programmed to preside, at Darjeeling nearby, over a meeting of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, and he welcomed the Prince's suggestion to motor up to Sikkim to see for himself, at site, the progress achieved in the construction of the Institute building. It was during this brief visit, in 1957, that Nehru first dreamed of passing the twilight of his life in a quiet retreat in Sikkim, within view of her lofty, snow-capped mountains, where, in peace and solitude, he could contemplate and record the essence of his life's experience. An idle dream, for he was not the man to quit the field of action. But that he could dream such a dream at all was measure of his affection for Sikkim and her people.

For Sikkim and Bhutan in their relations with India, it was Nehru who was the solitary light and hope. They had had little contact with other leaders of India, but in Nehru there was complete and implicit trust. They might have their differences with the lesser minions of Government, but Nehru was, for them, the embodiment of all that was fair and just, and they could be sure that, in *his* hands, the future of their kingdoms would remain safe and secure. As far back as in 1955, Jigmie Dorji had arranged for R. K. Nehru, the Foreign Secretary, to visit Bhutan and meet the King. R. K.'s friendly manner went far towards

drawing the two countries together and dispelling unwarranted suspicions. Jigmie now felt that the time had come for India's Prime Minister himself to visit Bhutan and have an opportunity of coming to know, at first hand, more of her people and her problems. The King too was beginning to feel his feet. He was nearing thirty and was no longer as dependent on Jigmie as when he ascended the throne as a very young man. He welcomed an opportunity of establishing direct and personal relations with India's Prime Minister.

Nehru's visit to Bhutan was fixed to take place in September 1958. His daughter, Indira, would be accompanying him, and a limited staff, consisting of Apa Pant and a couple of Foreign and Home Ministry officials. As Dewan of Sikkim, I had no *locus standi*, but Jigmie wanted someone to hold his hand — and help break the ice in the awkwardness of formal gatherings.

There were few people at that time who were in a position to realize the tremendous significance of Nehru's visit. Until recent years, Tibet had been thought of by the world as the land of magic and mystery, despite the series of explorers who had penetrated her innermost recesses and written at length the story of their adventures. The Bhutanese had in fact been stricter by far in their exclusion of foreigners, and apart from a handful of Political Officers from Gangtok, scarcely any person of rank or importance from any country had ever in the history of Bhutan been invited to enjoy the hospitality of the State. It was a triumph and a tribute to Nehru's prestige that, at a time when the Himalayan kingdoms were apprehensive of any commitment that might involve them in the politics of the rival powers that hemmed them in on either side, Bhutan should have accorded him such a warm and friendly welcome. And it was proof of Nehru's unbounding energy and vitality that, at an age when others would have balked, he thought nothing of crossing by foot, horse and yak the

several high passes of 13,000 feet and more, to reach the venue of his meeting with the King.

The first day's journey to Gangtok was a day of unhappy omen. A heavy downpour had washed away a section of the precipitous hill-road to the capital, and we had to leave our cars and hurry on foot along the narrow remnant of the track, trusting to luck not to be struck by the boulders that were rolling down the hillside. On reaching Gangtok, I received the distressing news that, soon after we had crossed the track, a falling boulder had caused grievous injury to one of the road-labourers who was following a short way behind our party. He was brought to the Gangtok hospital, where I visited him that night, but it was plain the end was near. We mentioned nothing of the matter to the Prime Minister — it was a disheartening start to our Bhutan adventure — but the Press, ever-vigilant, was not to be eluded and it was news for the world to hear how narrowly the Prime Minister had escaped disaster.

We set off next morning for the border, with Sir Tashi leading the way, and camped the night in the bitter cold of Sherathang, on the Sikkim side of the Nathu La pass. The Prime Minister and party were lodged in the comparative stability of the rest-house, while the Prince and I shared a flimsy tent outside, expecting at any moment of the night to be swept aloft to heaven by the roaring icy gale. Nehru's programme was to proceed the following day, at a leisurely pace, to Yatung in Tibet, from where, after spending the night at the residence of the Indian Trade Agent, he would set off the next morning for Bhutan. Jigmie was anxious that I should reach Bhutan in advance of the Prime Minister so that I might assist in the arrangements for his welcome. This would necessitate my leaving Sherathang camp at four in the morning, crossing the Nathu La pass before dawn, and carrying out a double march to reach Bhutan by the same evening. I had already had a nightmare experience with Chinese frontier officials during my last

trip to Bhutan, and did not relish the prospect of another while crossing the Nathu La pass in the dank, chilly darkness. What made things more complicated was that my papers had been sent on ahead to Yatung with those of the Prime Minister's party so that I had no documents on my person to establish my identity. I decided to take counsel with Apa Pant, who was responsible for safeguarding the interests of Sikkim's officials.

At four in the morning, I found Apa in spiritual meditation, emanating and doubtless absorbing 'thought-currents' of varying intensity from sundry directions. I explained my predicament and sought his guidance as to how I might reduce the risks of being bayoneted by Chinese guards while crossing the border into Tibet. 'My dear Nari,' he retorted, 'I really don't see what you are worrying about. Don't you understand, India is a great country with influence and prestige throughout the world. If the Chinese shoot or bayonet you, never you fear, we shall take up the matter at the *highest* international level and see that justice is done.' After which he took some deep breaths and repeated 'Om' several times in measured succession. It was clearly no use pursuing the matter further with Apa. I took my courage in both hands and proceeded up the pass. I was lucky to find the Indian Trade Agent at the border to process me past the Chinese, and I moved on quickly to Bhutan. I was duly received by Jigmie at the Bhutan border, and together we put the final touches on arrangements for the morrow's reception.

I do not think any of us realized, at the time, what good fortune it was to be able to accompany Nehru on this trip. Nehru moved with such informality that it appeared strange to think of him as India's Prime Minister. For once, he seemed happier without his teeming, adoring crowds, and was glad to roam at will, lingering meditatively by the way to pluck an unfamiliar flower or speeding off at a gallop for the sheer joy of being alive. Jigmie, the perfect host,

had arranged a yak as Nehru's mount. The yak, for all its clumsy bulk, is the most comfortable mount for a journey, and has never been known to stumble. And, most important, it may be ridden, without dishonour, down-hill. To ride a horse down-hill is considered, by Tibetans, as bad form at its bottomest bottom. 'A horse that cannot carry its rider up-hill is no horse. A man that cannot carry himself down-hill is no man.' But where yaks are concerned, all is fair and honourable, and we took it in turns to ride the shaggy beast down every pass without the slightest scruple of conscience.

Nehru could not have felt freer or more relaxed at any time than during his historic trip in Bhutan. Our brief halt at the summit of the Chele La pass before the final descent to our destination in the Paro valley was comedy itself. The talk had drifted to yoga, and dear Apa started off on his 'Oms'. Standing erect the full length of his six-foot plus, with hands folded as in prayer and eyes closed in beatific meditation, he suddenly uttered a deep-throated 'Om' and prostrated himself on the ground. Not to be outdone, I dashed off a hand-spring, head-spring, head-stand, hand-stand, all in rapid succession in my most professional, acrobatic style. Before we knew where we were, what should we see but Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of the world's biggest democracy, wrong side up with toes twiddling to high heaven. Our performances must have been impressive, as we were soon encircled by a bevy of Bhutanese muleteers, who had never seen such a thing in their life. Their memories, no doubt, were of Political Officers of the vintage of the prim and proper Claude White,[1] ever decorous, ever conscious of the onerous weight of empire.

As we approached Paro, we quickly forgot our pranks. To the beating of drums and solemn drone of trumpets,

[1] Claude White, C.I.E., appointed as the first Political Officer in Sikkim on conclusion of the Sikkim-Tibet hostilities in 1889.

we moved in colourful procession to the valley, with the King's personal dancers hopping, twirling and leaping on either side of our slowly-winding cavalcade. We were carried away in a trice to a different world, to a different age. The men and women around us must be actors, arrayed in all their finery for a masquerade in fairyland. At last we touch the valley and are greeted by the Prince Charming with his consort — the King with cheerful, boyish smile, the Queen, the picture of youth and beauty. In spite of the long day's trek, Nehru and Indira look fresh and radiant, intoxicated by the dazzling pageantry. They enter the Penlop's Palace, the gaily painted doll's house that is to be their home, where they are served, in traditional style, with buttered tea and sundry varieties of Bhutanese sweetmeats. And so the pageantry continued throughout our stay — the ceremonial procession to the dzong, archery contests, religious and folk dances, with performers picked from every corner of Bhutan so that we might have a complete and unforgettable panorama of the country's cultural heritage.

The high-light of the visit was the mammoth public meeting where, perhaps for the first time in Bhutan's history, some thousands of villagers were gathered together to hear of the future of their country, of India's friendship for Bhutan, of the dark clouds that threatened from the north. The King and Jigmie were used to holding informal meetings when they toured the villages ; but such meetings were of small groups of villagers, who represented their personal grievances and came to seek redress. The problems discussed were of local concern — a dispute over land boundaries, scarcity of salt, the need for a bridge. The idea of the villagers being called in their thousands to hear of the larger issues affecting their country was novel to Bhutan, and there was an excitement in the air that none could miss. Nehru spoke in Hindi, not so much for the benefit of the audience, most of whom would in any case

understand only Bhutanese, as for the benefit of his Bhutanese interpreter, whose Hindi was just a shade less weak than his English. After the first few sentences, we could sense there was trouble afoot. The interpreter was unable to cope. For at the conclusion of every sentence, he would look appealingly to Nehru for elucidation, and a dialogue would ensue between the two while the audience impatiently waited for more. The atmosphere became progressively charged, with Nehru glaring in irritation at the interpreter, as we in the wings looked helplessly on. It was the King who saved the situation by summarily dispatching the interpreter and offering to deputize himself. Nehru was touched by the gesture. There were prolonged cheers from the audience as Nehru and the King stood together on the platform, visible symbol of the friendship and closeness of their countries. It was a perfect combination, as the King had a sound knowledge of Hindi and found no difficulty in converting into Bhutanese the passion and poetry of Nehru's oratory. After the show was over, they jocularly congratulated each other on each other's performance and there were renewed cheers from the audience as, arm in arm, they informally strolled away.

Nehru did a good deal of 'loud-thinking' during the trip and we were fortunate to be able to listen in. It was usually after lunch or dinner that he would slip into his ruminations on the international scene or regale us with reminiscences of his hot young days. One entire evening he devoted to talking with the Bhutanese gentry who had been invited to see some documentary films in his rooms. It was not so much a talk as a discussion group, and they were fascinated by his answers, clear and touched with humour. Jigmie arranged that we should ride out from Paro one day, to relax from the press of official engagements and picnic in the countryside. It was after our picnic lunch that, squatting on the ground, we crowded around Nehru, while he embarked on one of his rambling

voyages of loud-thinking and self-revelation. After he had steered us through the troubled waters of the international scene, we landed upon the ever-popular subject of food. I was indiscreet enough to ask how he had reacted to the sparse jail diet during his long years of imprisonment during British rule. 'Food, food?' he ejaculated petulantly. 'My dear man, you don't imagine we could give a thought to things like *food* at such a time? Apart from getting the British out of India, nothing mattered to us, *nothing, nothing.* We were much too carried away to care a hoot about our lives, what with lathi charges and police-firings — and you think we would be worrying about *food*!' I passed him a peach as a peace-offering, which he accepted with relish and a twinkle in his eye.

It was during this same excursion that I succeeded again in quickening his volatile ire. We had feasted sumptuously and were preparing ourselves for the journey back when my doting, ever-fussing Jeeves came hurrying up, as was his wont, to help me lace my boots. 'What the hell has come over our people if they can't even tie their bootlaces?' He didn't *say* it, but he *looked* it, from head to foot, aquiver with disapproval. I murmured something about the 'holiness of service,' which didn't improve matters one bit, and it was only when we mounted our horses and shot off together at full gallop that his irritation passed — and he beamed like a boy.

Few of us could have dreamt at the time that, in Indira too, we had a future Prime Minister in our midst. A devoted daughter, yes, to whom the country owed an irredeemable debt for tending and preserving the Prime Minister for us with such utter dedication. But beyond that, well, an intelligent and attractive young woman, with the talent, poise and vision that was to be expected of a Nehru. It was as we saw more of her that we began to discover her for what she really was. It was during our stay at Paro that she received news of her husband's critical illness, but she

continued to play her part, never betraying the anxiety that was weighing on her heart. She inherited, too, her father's unbounded stamina. When younger members of the party were aching (literally) to retire to bed after the rigours of the march, father and daughter remained fresh and vital, all set to dispose of the dispatches from Delhi that reached them by runner at night. But what endeared Indira to me was her charming compliment on our last day in Bhutan. The Prime Minister's party, who were spending their final night as Jigmie's guests at Ha, had decided to relax and pass an idle hour 'guessing ages'. My age, said Indira as we rode out together next morning, had been the subject of wildest controversy, the guesses ranging from age-group 20-30 to 50-60. The Prime Minister had, it seemed, correctly placed me in age-group 30-40 (I was thirty-nine at the time), but my vanity was grievously wounded to hear from Indira that *she* had put me down for age-group fifty — until she added, with disarming sweetness, 'But *only* because of your wisdom!'

Back at Gangtok, we put them through the usual V.I.P. rounds — schools, hospitals, farms, cottage-industry centres and the rest. My big moment was the lighting of the lamps at the shrine in our deer park. I had taken infinite pains over the minutest details of the design and thought it would be a happy symbol of the spiritual ties between the two countries if the inauguration could be performed by His Highness and the Prime Minister together. The designing of the lamps had caused us endless worry. It was our idea that the lamps should remain perpetually alight, by night as well as by day, as token of celestial blessings flowing perpetually upon the land. But this was easier said than done. The shrine was sited on a commanding position at the end of a spur, exposed to the slightest wisp of wind. It was necessary to contrive a cover for the lamps that would afford protection to the flame, but at the same time not obscure it from public vision. The modernists jibed

that I was wasting my time and that the powers above would be as well satisfied with an electric bulb as a butter-fed flame. Sikkim was fortunate in her Chief Engineer, an officer of the old school who insisted on high standards and was as much concerned with the aesthetics of engineering as with mundane principles of stresses and strains. I have always felt that Faquir Chand Jali and I must have derived from our work something of the satisfaction and sense of fulfilment of the master-builders of the Italian Renaissance. No 'type-plans' for Sikkim, thank you. Every institution, be it school, hospital, library, was worked upon as an artist works on a picture, and we preferred to risk the delay of waiting for inspiration rather than rush up a building that would be an everlasting blot on Sikkim's lovely landscape. And so, for days, Jali and I moved back and forth between the deer park and the silversmith's, experimenting with different cover-designs for our lamps, until we succeeded in evolving a conical lid that admitted *just* as much air as was needed to feed the flame, but with the minute, delicately-engraved openings so spaced that the flame should be ever-visible. Our lamps could now brave the fiercest storms — and Jali and I felt as pleased with ourselves as Einstein on discovering relativity.

It was with a rare sense of satisfaction that I watched the Prime Minister and His Highness ascend the steps leading up to the shrine and light the lamps. The air was thick with incense and the heavy droning of the lama band, and, as His Highness and the Prime Minister laid the silk scarves of custom upon the lap of the Lord Buddha, there was a crescendo in the lamas' intonation of prayers as though to signify that, from this moment, the spirit of the Lord Buddha was indeed incarnate in the calm repose of the bronze image. Nehru stood for a while before the shrine, taking in the *shlokas* of Shantideva that we had inscribed in gold-leaf lettering on the four plaques around the base, with their translation in the several languages of Sikkim. He

was obviously moved, for he lingered, in spite of the drizzle, pausing to scan each plaque. We had laid out a rock-garden in front of the shrine, where we planned to have a collection of the innumerable varieties of orchids that are Sikkim's pride. There were some that were already in bloom that attracted Nehru's eye. And he suddenly lighted up from his mood of contemplative meditation as he spotted the deer sporting on the slopes. He seemed enchanted by the setting — the maroon and saffron of the lamas' robes, the deep intoning of their prayers, the incense, the singsong drone of the lama band, the orchids, the deer, the coloured prayer-flags fluttering in the breeze, and with the gentle Sir Tashi, eleventh consecrated ruler of Sikkim, presiding over all as an ethereal god-father descended from heaven.

Nehru's passage through Sikkim concluded with a public meeting held in the Palace gardens. The Press had converged upon Sikkim from all directions, eager to have first-hand news of the Prime Minister's impressions after his visit to the two Himalayan kingdoms. I found myself soon besieged, for while the Prime Minister gave them meat, they needed spice to deck it out. They could not go on perpetually reporting on the 'strengthening of bonds between friendly neighbours' and 'India's readiness to give aid to the Himalayan kingdoms'. They wanted data for a story, and I seemed to be the obvious person to supply it as I strutted about the crowd in my glamorous robes. I told them all I knew — of our rich forest wealth, our copper mines, our election, our constitution, our judiciary, our revenue system, our distillery, our canning factory, our sacred mountain Kanchenjunga. I knew how anxious the Prince was that a worthy image of his country should be projected before the world, and this was my most splendid opportunity, as we had never before been invaded by such an army of foreign correspondents, not even during the Dalai Lama's visit. What was my surprise, when I opened

my paper next morning, fully expecting to read of the dazzling progress achieved by Sikkim in various fields of activity, to see, on the front page, the single, startling headline, 'Sikkim to make Scotch'. It is true, I had informed the Press that our experts had given it as their view that the water of Sikkim, after seeping through the granite formation of the mountains, would be much like the water in the Highlands of Scotland and they had hopes that the whisky produced from the waters of Sikkim's mountain-springs would come nearer to genuine Scotch than any other whisky in the world. This, apparently, was news, and of more moment to the general reading public than the 'growing bonds of friendship' and fine phrases about Sikkim 'marching ahead to progress' — which received their mention all right, but in an obscure column somewhere in the middle of the paper. This was not quite the image I had intended to project of our progressive Buddhist kingdom, whose Prince was a 'Precious Jewel' and President of the august Mahabodhi Society[1]. Nor did I expect that I would be flooded with letters from all over the world congratulating me on my initiative in taking up the challenge where others had failed, the challenge to produce Scotch in Sikkim.

I had never seen such a sudden change come over a person as the change that came over Nehru as he left Sikkim and resumed the routine of parading before his cheering millions. In Bhutan and Sikkim, he was relaxed, in repose. In Gangtok, his fame had carried, and the crowds surged to cheer and have a glimpse of him, as they would in India. But once he had left the capital, he was just another traveller on the way, who was cheerfully hailed and jostled by the passing muleteer without a thought of 'Who is Who'. I could sense a feeling of weariness descend upon him as he re-crossed the Sikkim border and approached the noisome town of Siliguri, India's nearest rail-head to

[1] The main organ in India for the study and propagation of Buddhism.

Sikkim, with its seething, heaving crowds pressing on either side of the road. He took up his customary stance in the car and smiled as he waved to the cheering masses. The button-hole, the garlands that he tossed back to the children, the smile — he was caught up again in his unending web, the changeless pattern, and I could not but recollect the laughing, buoyant Nehru that a few days back was scampering down the Ha La pass on a shuffling, shaggy yak, aglow with smiles that flowed from a heart overjoyed with nature's beauty and the freedom to be let alone.

We reached in a few minutes the airport of Bagdogra from where he was to fly back to New Delhi. Officials and local notables surged around the car for the opportunity of a 'meeting' with the Prime Minister which they would talk about for the rest of their lives. There is khaki, khaki everywhere, with police and army vying to do him honour. A final shaking of sweaty hands, and the Prime Minister ascends the steps. A wave, a smile, and the plane screams into space. I thought of his parting from Paro only six days back. Brightly coloured *bokhus*, processions of dancers, incense of sweet-scented juniper, the neighing of horses impatient to be away — and the myriad white silk scarves, floating lightly back and forth as tokens of mutual regard and affection. We sighed as the plane soared into the clouds, carrying back Nehru to be entrapped once more in the inexorable round of existence from which — or so we liked to think — we had offered him an all too brief respite.

I later sent Indira, as a memento, some photographs we had taken during the trip — not the usual, formal V.I.P. photographs of tape-cutting, but the little incidentals that are so endearing to recollect in after years — the swallowing of a hot potato, being caught off-guard, a quizzical look. I cannot say I was not elated — I was thrilled to high heaven! — to receive her reply, not a bread-and-butter 'Thank you' affair from the Prime Minister's office, but a

letter in her own hand which expressed so nearly my own imaginings of the trials of her existence. That she found it possible, and considered it worth while, to write at all amid her tremendous preoccupations set off a train of thought. Here too, I felt, was a greatness of a sort, not the giant powers of the phenomenon that was her father, but a still, deep reserve of strength, a gentleness and humility that are rarely found in places of such exalted eminence. I was stirred, perhaps, by some premonition of her higher destiny—and I have her letter still.

15

Farewell to Sikkim

THE storm clouds were fast gathering over Tibet, and it was not to be long before the Chinese showed their hand. It had been the Dalai Lama's last, flickering hope that Nehru's great influence would weigh with Chou En Lai, and that the assurances on the strength of which he had returned to Tibet after his Indian pilgrimage would be honoured by the Chinese leader. It was with horror that we received one night the news of the terrible happenings in Lhasa culminating in the Dalai Lama's decision to leave Tibet and seek asylum in India. It seemed only yesterday that he was in our midst, so fresh and young, smiling and innocent. And then I remembered him again, a sad, solitary figure, wending his lonely way over the Nathu La pass to make a final bid to save his people from spiritual extinction.

With relief we heard of his safe entry into Tawang in the mountains of Assam, and we hurried to India on receiving news that he would be halting for a brief hour at Siliguri railway-station en route to his home of exile in the hills of Mussouree. A God turned refugee, hunted in his own country, his kingdom lost, a suppliant in a foreign land, the Dalai Lama seemed unbroken in spirit and greeted us with a smile. But in his heart within, I could sense a seriousness and a sadness that had deepened since the Gangtok days. To the thousands of Tibetans who had gathered at the station from Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim to pay him homage he addressed a few words of encouragement and cheer. Tibet must live, her light could not so easily be extinguished. 'Hold fast to the Dharma, the Faith, and, in the end, though the road may be long and arduous, truth and the right will prevail.' He smiled to us again as the

train moved off, the boyish smile of old. But for all his spirit of cheer, an overwhelming sadness came over us as the train slowly disappeared in the distance, bearing away with it the soul of the Tibetan people.

Meanwhile I too had received my marching orders. Sir Saiyid Fazl Ali, who had succeeded Jairamdas Doulatram as Governor of Assam, had sent out feelers whether I would be willing, on expiry of my tenure of office in Sikkim, to return to Shillong as his Adviser for the tribal areas on India's north-east frontier. The formalities were settled and I packed my bags.

My last few months in Sikkim were spent in attending to the needs and problems of the stream of refugees who had come pouring into Sikkim in the wake of the Dalai Lama's flight. Memories are short, but can also be long. There were many in Sikkim who had not forgotten the air of cultural arrogance assumed by the Tibetans in the past towards their remote and 'backward' brethren, and decided it was now their turn to swing the lead. It was thanks to Her Highness the Maharani, herself a Tibetan of high birth, and the Princesses, who had married into Lhasa families and had spent years of their lives in Tibet, that the refugees were found land and employment in Sikkim and enabled gradually to stand on their own feet.

Among the many lama refugees, Sikkim offered asylum also to the Karmapa Lama, head of the red-hat Kagyupa sect, who was offered land and facilities at Rumtek monastery, ten miles from Gangtok, for his community of followers to settle and re-establish themselves under his spiritual guidance. The Karmapa Lama had fled from Tibet through Bhutan, where he enjoys a considerable spiritual following. The Bhutanese authorities, who have had problem enough already in edging out the institution of Shabdrung, were not likely to favour the emergence in their country of yet another potential challenge to authority in the shape of the head of the Kagyupa sect.

It has been in comparatively recent years that Bhutan has shed the trappings of a religious state, and it would not require much encouragement for a high reincarnate lama with ambitious designs to fire the imagination of the people and influence their allegiance. The Karmapa Lama and his followers were accorded all the courtesies by the Bhutan authorities, but soon sensed that, unless they moved on, they would be overstaying their welcome. In Gangtok too, there was not a little uneasiness at the prospect of the Kagyupa chief establishing his headquarters, with all the paraphernalia and protocol attaching to the institution of the Karmapa order, in Sikkim itself. But the hold of Buddhism on the minds of the people had weakened in Sikkim under the impact of new ideas, apart from the fact that a considerable proportion of the population were Nepalese Hindus. The risk of a reincatnate lama, however elevated in the religious hierarchy, assuming influence to the extent of embarrassing the secular authority, was less therefore in Sikkim than it might have been in Bhutan. It is doubtful whether the Karmapa Lama entertained worldly aspirations, though he was a cheerful and broad-minded cleric, who enjoyed the good things of life. He showed keen and shrewd interest in the projects initiated under Sikkim's plan for economic development, but he preferred, on the whole, to remain in the background in his monastic retreat of Rumtek and gave little cause for complaint or apprehension to his Sikkimese hosts.

I do not expect I shall ever again be honoured with such a send-off as I received on leaving my post in Sikkim. Sikkim had been for me as one great family, the members of which were as dear to me as my own near ones. I was a bachelor and could give of myself freely, wherever and whenever I was needed. It was not long before I came to recognize, and became friends with, most of the people I met in the streets during my evening walks in the town. Unlike the lotus that, in the simile illustrating detachment,

is described as being 'in' the water but not 'of' the water, I soon found myself not merely 'in' Sikkim but 'of' Sikkim. But in a way, this made the parting easier, as I felt I was carrying away with me something of Sikkim — and at the same time leaving behind something of myself. The parting was, in effect, no parting at all, and when I return to Sikkim, as I do whenever opportunity offers, I feel I am returning to a home I have never entirely left.

The population of Gangtok turned out *en masse* to line the streets as we drove slowly off from Gangtok for the sweltering plains. Much of this affection, I knew, was for my mother, who had been the light and life of my home throughout my years in Sikkim. 'Mummy', as she is known by great and small alike, has an extraordinary flair for friendship and an inexhaustible interest in everything upon earth. And, whether physically or in spirit, she is indomitable. To the amazement of Nehru, he spotted her among the few and brave who had left Gangtok before dawn to see him off over the Nathu La pass during his passage to Bhutan. And when they met again, some years later, at Government House in Shillong, she was thrilled as a teenager as he recalled their last meeting, 12,000 feet up in the snows. With the Prince at the wheel, we were escorted by a formidable army of Councillors, officers and friends to the Indo-Sikkim frontier at Rangpo, where we stopped for a picnic lunch — and to taste of the latest delights of the Sikkim Distilleries of Snow-lion fame. Refreshed and pleasantly elated, we proceeded onward to Siliguri station, to discover that our train to Assam would leave at some unspecified hour after midnight instead of at seven in the evening as normally scheduled.

Our efforts to persuade the Prince to return home and relax instead of stomping about on the dreary platform until the early hours of the morning were of no avail, and when at last we shunted off from the station, we were so weighed down with fatigue that we almost forgot to say

our farewells. I slept deeply that night, but not so deeply as not to dream. And I dreamt of that first drive up to Gangtok, just five years back, and of Tessla's happy prophecy: 'Metok-chharp, blossom-rain, how lucky for you! In Tibet, when there's rain and sunshine at the same time, we call it "blossom-rain" and think it extremely auspicious. How lucky for you to have blossom-rain just as you are entering Gangtok. It means you are going to be very happy in Sikkim.'

I could not have been happier.

16

Stirrings in NEFA and Nagaland

Assam's Governor, Sir Fazl Ali, had invited my mother and myself to stay at Government House until we could arrange to settle down in a house of our own. We were however met at Gauhati railway-station by Col. Yusuf Ali, Deputy Adviser to the Governor, who broke to us the sad news of Sir Fazl's sudden stroke. Sir Fazl had been appointed Assam's Governor as the culmination of a record of sterling service to the country. A former Chief Justice, he was by temperament a person of scholarly, intellectual interests. Quiet and kindly in manner, he was gifted with a mind of incisive penetration that could grasp a problem in its whole as well as its many parts with dispassionate clarity and objectivity. But he was a sick man, and it was by a superhuman effort of will that he succeeded, despite his ill-health, in maintaining, as Assam's Governor, the high standards that had been the hallmark of his distinguished career.

I had never met Sir Fazl, but he had evidently formed from his own sources a not too unfavourable opinion, as it was on his personal initiative that Nehru was moved to approve my appointment as Governor's Adviser for a second tenure. The situation on the northern frontier was warming up. There was trouble ahead and there was need for an officer who carried the confidence of the tribal people at a time when they were likely to be subjected to strains and pressures from our northern neighbours.

Sir Fazl was too ill to receive visitors when I arrived at Shillong to take over charge, and I could meet him only once, in his bedroom, during the two brief months that I

was privileged to serve as his Adviser. I found him lying stretched in bed with scarcely strength to move, but from the few words he spoke, with such sympathy and gentleness, I was filled with emotion. Our talk was not of the Chinese or the logistics of frontier defence, but of a humble office-employee who had appealed to the Governor for redress in the matter of a service injustice. I had seen from the records that Sir Fazl had taken interest in the case and I thought it would bring him happiness and comfort to know that the wrong was being righted. For a moment it seemed that his strength had returned to him, for his face lit up and he smiled as he looked towards me and said, ' I had heard about you and seen your notes. It seems you care for people. I was anxious to have you back and I am glad you have come. ' Simple words, but coming from the lips of a dying man they moved me deeply and I felt I owed it to him to justify his faith in me. In a few days, he quietly passed away. I had seen him for no more than fifteen minutes, but I remember him still, with feelings of affection and profound respect, as a person of extraordinary humanity, who had transcended the self and was sensitive only to the hurt and wrong of others.

Within a month of my return to Assam, in August 1959, the border sprang quickly to life. The Chinese had crossed the McMahon Line, the international frontier between Tibet and India, and ejected a section of Assam Rifles from the outpost of Longju in the Subansiri Frontier Division, just south of the frontier. Longju was several weeks' march from the nearest road-head and there appeared to be no possibility of sending reinforcements except by air-dropping paratroops. The result of air surveys, however, was disappointing, and while we managed to paradrop Col. Nambiar, the dogged Officer Commanding the local Assam Rifles battalion, at Limeking, some three days' march south of Longju, it would have been suicidal attempting to para-drop troops in the narrow gorges further north.

The public reaction to the Chinese aggression at Longju was instantaneous and uproarious. There could be no question now that the Chinese protestations of friendship with India were worthless and that the motives inspiring their policies had been of sheer political expediency. The rushing of troops to Limeking for the recapture of Longju was no easy task in the absence of road or air communications, and the problems of commissariat were enormous. The only means of reaching Limeking quickly was by one of the two single-seater Bell helicopters which the I.A.F. had kept based at their headquarters at Jorhat in the Assam plains. I signalled to our outpost at Limeking that they should clear a small flat for our Bell to alight upon and proceeded to Jorhat, to be informed on arrival that the Bell's limited fuel capacity would not allow of our flying to Limeking in a single hop. There was no alternative therefore but to fly aviation spirit by Dakota to the makeshift air-strip at Daporijo in between the Subansiri and Siang Frontier Divisions, refuel and get to Limeking in two stages.

I had never travelled by helicopter and one look at the Bell was sufficient to tell me I was not going to enjoy the experience. It was more like a toy than a flying-machine, a flimsy, transparent 'bubble', with only a quarter-inch of plastic-glass — or so it seemed to my timid, untechnical eye — to divide us from the rocky crags 6,000 feet below. I was joined at Daporijo by Air Vice-Marshal Arjan Singh,[1] and together we set off, a Bell apiece, for the little garrison at Limeking. We were soon warned by a signal from the post-commander that the flat they had cleared might suffice, at a pinch, for a single helicopter, but not for two. Arjan was good enough to suggest that he would land first and take off again in a few minutes, without stopping the rotors, so that I might have a longer break to meet and give encouragement to our civil and Assam Rifles personnel at

[1] Later Air Chief Marshal.

a time when they might reasonably be apprehending a further Chinese advance.

The pilot of my bubble was evidently only a shade less timid than myself. He disapproved of the machine, with its limited air-ceiling, for flight over the high Himalayan ranges. 'Believe me, the slightest breath of a storm, and it'll crumple up like a match-box', he comfortingly assured as he steered through a patch of black cloud over the gaping chasm of a gorge. Having deposited me at Lime-king, he warned that a storm was in the offing, and that I should finish my work within half an hour if I wanted to get back to base. After twenty minutes, he renewed the warning, pointing gloomily to the sky, and we set off on our homeward journey. The storm laid off, but the rain came on and thoughts of crumpling match-boxes recurred. The day happened to be the most festive of the Parsee calendar, Khordad Sal, the prophet Zoroaster's birthday, and I could not help envying my kinsmen, cele-brating as only Parsees know how to celebrate, while here I was tossing in the clouds in a plastic bubble. It felt good when we set foot again on *terra firma*.

With Sir Fazl's death, Mr Justice Sinha, Chief Justice of Assam, temporarily took charge as Governor, according to the established convention, pending the appointment by the President of the permanent incumbent. It was during this brief interregnum that Jigmie Dorji paid us one of his visits from Bhutan, and I took him to call at Government House. Jigmie was suffering at the time from the rather indelicate ailment of piles, and the subject cropped up, oddly enough, quite soon after the formalities of intro-duction were over. By a happy coincidence, it transpired that His Excellency the Governor too had 'enjoyed' the malady — 'enjoyed', as he spoke of its symptoms and sundry manifestations with a zestful verve and enthusiasm. The climax was reached with the Governor producing a strange rubber contraption which he felt was *just* the

thing for the Bhutan Prime Minister to be enthroned upon to be relieved of his ills. Jigmie was touched by the Governor's solicitude, but also somewhat overwhelmed, as he had not expected that his malady would be taken cognizance of at such august levels as Government House, more so during his first meeting with the Head of State!

Nobody was surprised when General Shrinagesh was announced as the permanent Governor. Assam was beset with problems of law and order. There was tension all along her sinuous borders with Pakistan, China and the Naga hills, and after the flagrant violation of territory by the Chinese at Longju, the appointment of a former Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army as Governor was welcomed as a warning both to our neighbours and also to dissident elements among our own people that Government was fully alive to the external threat and would not hesitate to take the firmest action to put down lawlessness of any kind.

General Shrinagesh was far removed from the popular conception of the 'Army type', with bristling moustache and raucous temper. He was short, clean-shaven and soft-spoken — he might almost have been a civilian! But I had not met him five minutes before he asked me, soldier-like, to draw up a programme for a lightning tour to some of the more important outposts in NEFA. Within a week of his installation as Governor, we set off together for Ziro, the headquarters of the Subansiri Frontier Division, at whose northern border the Chinese had committed their recent aggression against Longju. Ziro is the centre of a broad plateau, inhabited by the Apatani tribe. The Apatanis are great cultivators, and their perfectly irrigated rice-fields are a phenomenon in a terrain where *jhuming*, or shifting cultivation, is the general pattern. But a more settled habit of life has also had a softening effect on the people, and I could see that the General, accustomed to think of frontiersmen in terms of the tall, finely-built and disciplined Pathan of

the old north-west frontier, was rather taken aback by the Apatanis who seized him by the hand as he alighted from the plane and practically took charge of the entire proceedings. That was the end of the Political Officer's meticulously-timed programme, for we were quickly whisked away to the homes of the village-headmen to partake until the night of their limitless hospitality.

I confess I was not a little apprehensive of the General's reactions to the jostling and gay banter of tribal people in their cups. He had sought my advice before we set off from Shillong whether he should make his debut among the tribal people in the pomp and glitter of a General's uniform. I advised against, as the image we were trying to project among the people was of a Government based on right principles rather than strength of arms. He could take with him, as part of his entourage, the Inspector-General of the Assam Rifles and as many other splendidly uniformed officers as he wished, as a reminder that the Government was backed by arms, but the Governor himself should appear to the people as their Ma-Bap, their Mother and Father, as a person very much like themselves, whom they could approach without fear for redress, and with whom they could talk freely about their problems. General Shrinagesh's manner was exactly right. He moved about informally, without fuss or undue ceremony, but he had, with it all, a natural dignity of bearing that commanded respect and attention.

Everything was going as well as could be expected until, on the second day of the tour, a message was received from the Chief Minister of Assam that the Governor was required back at Shillong for urgent consultations. This was a heavy disappointment to the tribal people, who had made elaborate preparations for the Governor's reception at the various places he was scheduled to visit. But there was nothing that could be done and it was my happy privilege to continue the tour on his behalf and fill the void as best I could.

It was to the credit of General Shrinagesh that Shillong was linked to the rest of the country by air communications. There had been talk of an air-strip for Shillong as long ago as 1947-8, during Sir Akbar Hydari's Governorship. A number of sites had been reconnoitred, but that was as far as the matter had proceeded. My own jurisdiction was mainly confined to the frontier districts of NEFA and not the areas around Shillong for whose administration the Assam Government was primarily responsible. With the developments flowing from the Chinese aggression on Longju, however, I suggested to the Governor that an air-strip at Shillong was a *must*, so that in times of emergency we could fly direct to NEFA instead of having to motor seventy miles along a tortuous hill-road to the nearest airport at Borjhar. The decision taken, we chose the site, went ahead with construction at full speed, and within two months the air-strip was formally inaugurated, with General Shrinagesh and myself taking off in an Otter for Borjhar, which we reached in fifteen minutes instead of the usual three to four hours by road. I should add that, as in the case of any original idea, there was criticism all round at the initial stages of the proposal, on the grounds that money was being needlessly thrown away as the air-strip would never be put to regular use. In the actual result, the air-strip has enabled the I.A.F. to establish their headquarters at the capital, and has become a vital link, both for the civil administration and the defence authorities, in maintaining contact with the several widely-scattered and troubled regions on Assam's remote periphery.

Shrinagesh experimented with some of his Army procedures in the civil administration, as for instance in the holding of a staff meeting every Monday attended by the Chief Secretary to the Government and the Heads of the Police, Intelligence, Army and Air Force formations in Assam. The idea was good, but the reaction among some of our civilian officers was that an Army General could not be

expected to appreciate the implications and niceties of problems which were more often than not of a political complexion, and that, in any case, as the Governor was a constitutional head, he should not get himself too closely involved. The local Army Chiefs were also highly sensitive to any hint of interference — the General had had his run of the Armed Forces as their Commander-in-Chief and should now confine himself to his role of head of the civil administration. It was a delicate situation for the General, who felt it was precisely because of his distinguished Army record that he had been selected as Governor of a State that was being progressively built up as a military base, and that it was expected of him, as a former Commander-in-Chief, to hold a watching brief on behalf of the Central Government over the operation of military formations throughout the frontier regions.

The first problem into which the General was plunged, almost immediately after taking charge, was the eternal problem of the Nagas. At a mammoth meeting held by the Nagas at Mokokchung in October 1959, known as the Third Naga People's Convention, a demand was formulated for the constitution of the Naga hills as a new State within the Indian Union, to be named Nagaland. The leaders of the underground Nagas, however, who were still thinking in terms of independence, could not be prevailed upon to accept the Convention's recommendations and continued to withhold their cooperation. They took the stand that it was through *their* efforts and the privations suffered by the underground Nagas in fighting against the security forces that Government was considering the conceding of a higher constitutional status to the Naga hills. They therefore resented any idea of the representatives of the N.P.C. (Naga People's Convention) reaping the fruits of what they claimed to be the endeavours of the underground leaders. Phizo meanwhile was suddenly reported to have found his way to England in an effort

to rouse world opinion in favour of the cause of Naga independence.

It was a delicate choice for the Government of India. While the leaders of the N.P.C. undoubtedly represented a considerable proportion of the Naga population, the underground Nagas had made it amply clear that they were not prepared to fall in line with the N.P.C.'s recommendations, but would, on the contrary, offer resistance to their implementation. My own efforts were in the direction of making further approaches to associate the underground leaders in whatever future arrangements might be decided upon, and I was, indeed, in contact with them with a view to trying to bring about a rapprochement between them and the N.P.C. through some of their over-ground sympathizers. Nehru himself had agreed, during a visit to Shillong, that I should continue in my endeavours to bring about a meeting with the underground leaders. But within a few days of his return to Delhi, he was prevailed upon by his more senior advisers to revert to the former line of having nothing to do with the hostiles or sympathizers, which meant an end to my efforts at trying to bring about a reconciliation.

While most of the N.P.C. leaders had been, for years, my personal friends, they did not look with favour on my efforts to approach and prevail upon the underground to cooperate with the Government. Dr Imkongliba Ao, who was President of the N.P.C., did not take kindly to my statement at a Press conference that the Naga problem was a political problem that could not be settled by the sword but would require time and patient handling for its ultimate solution. Within a month or two of my statement, the N.P.C. led a delegation to meet the Prime Minister in Delhi, and on August 1st, 1960, the Prime Minister announced in Parliament the Government's decision to constitute a new State, to be known as Nagaland, within the Indian Union. It was provided that there should be a transitional

period before full powers were made over to an elected Naga Government, and that during this period the Governor would exercise special responsibilities in respect of law and order and finance.

It was during the months following the Government's decision, while we were setting into motion the machinery for giving it effect, that we were shocked to receive the news of Dr Imkongliba's cruel assassination. Whatever may have been our differences in approach or policy, I had had the highest regard for Dr Ao. He was a good and humane man, kind, compassionate and God-fearing. I shall not soon forget my visit to his room one late evening in Shillong, at the end of a tiring and frustrating day of discussions in Government House. He had already changed into his pyjamas and was lying reading in bed, Bible in hand. Most people would have sought lighter relaxation after what had been a trying day. But Dr Ao and his Bible were inseparable, and, while others among us were elevating the spirit along more conventional channels, Dr Ao was seeking guidance from his Maker and in communion with his soul. My instinct was to slip quietly away and leave him at peace in his sanctum, but with characteristic courtesy he drew me in by the hand and insisted I should stay. I could feel I was in the presence of a man of God, who would not hesitate to lay down his life to restore peace to his unhappy land. We could not know his martyrdom would come so soon and so tragically.

Very few of us were aware of the extreme strain under which the Governor was functioning during all this time. It was in the course of one of my routine, morning visits to him that he led me to the lawn in front of Government House and, as we paced back and forth, unburdened himself of what had obviously been weighing on his mind over a considerable period. 'I have decided,' he began, crisp and businesslike, 'to take you into confidence over a matter which has been causing great anxiety to my wife and myself.

You may have noticed my foot has been giving me trouble lately? You haven't? Well, it started some weeks ago, like a sort of nervous twitch. I could not understand what was the matter and had myself examined by the army specialist at the military hospital and by Dr Hughes at the Welsh Mission. They have diagnosed it as Parkinson's disease. The doctors say there is no danger to life, but unless I am operated on, the disease will gradually spread all over the system. It is not a disease that incapacitates a person. Our Home Minister, Pantji, has it and has been carrying on his work with it for years. You must have seen how his hands and body shake all over, but his mind is as sharp as a needle. There is an operation by which the disease can be stopped from spreading — a very delicate brain operation that can only be performed by specialists abroad. If the operation goes wrong, there is risk of paralysis. It is a difficult choice. Either one takes medicines and tries to delay the spread of the disease or you take your chance on the operation, with the risk of paralysis if it fails. My wife and I have very carefully thought over the matter and decided on the operation. The Prime Minister has been most considerate. He is allowing me to take two or three months' leave for having the operation done in the U.K. After that, I hope to be back at work again, fighting fit. All this will, of course, mean an extra burden for you. But I know I can depend on you.'

He spoke calmly and dispassionately, in short staccato sentences, with not a trace of complaint or self-pity. It was a performance of astonishing courage, and I could hardly believe, as we walked in the warm sunshine on the freshly-mown lawns, that he was talking of a matter where the future, for himself and his family, was so dangerously in the balance. He was fortunate that he was supported, in his wife, by a woman of quite exceptional capabilities and strength of will. They set off for London as planned, and within months the General was back at his work in Assam,

with the operation and the possibilities of its fearful consequences behind him.

Vishnu Sahay, Secretary to the Central Cabinet and a member of the Indian Civil Service, was appointed to hold charge as Governor during the General's absence. An officer with an outstanding record of service, he had for years, as he himself confided to us later, been harbouring ambitions of capping his career by being appointed Governor of Assam. The short interregnum provided him with a foretaste of the office—and it clearly tasted to his liking, for he was back again within a couple of years, and good for a further six. Vishnu Sahay was an extrovert, who enjoyed life to the full and was not unduly bothered by the soul. One of the attractions that Shillong held for him was its delightful golf course, set like a jewel amid sweet-scented pine-forests. Golf in the morning, a rubber or two of bridge in the evening, with a spot of work thrown in during the day, and life could not be more pleasing. Shrewd, of an incredible memory, an encyclopaedic knowledge, with plenty of experience of men and affairs, he came to his office in the confidence that nobody could do it better. But we shall hear more of him later, when he was appointed as the permanent Governor.

Although my responsibilities in NEFA and Nagaland kept me more than busy, I was never out of touch for long with my friends in Sikkim and Bhutan. It was during a visit to Shillong by the Sikkim Prince that I received one early morning a telephone message from General Shrinagesh to report at once to Government House. The Governor's tone was dark and mysterious, and I wondered what it was all about. On my arrival, the Governor introduced me to General Kaul, of whom I had heard much but never before met.[1] The General had, it seemed, hurried to

[1] General Kaul, Chief of the General Staff, had been in recent years the centre of heated controversy both in political and service circles. An officer of exceptional drive and a phenomenal capacity for work, his excess of ego resulted, unfortunately, in his unnecessarily upsetting many of those with whom he came into contact.

Shillong on a mission of the highest importance and urgency, and had *just* arrived, still breathless from the exertions of the journey. The honour of the entire Defence forces, explained the General, was at stake, and he had come to retrieve it. The Nagas had shot down one of the Indian Air Force Dakotas engaged in air-dropping supplies for the security forces, and captured the air-crew. It was unthinkable that any member of the Indian Armed Forces should remain prisoner in the hands of the Nagas, and Kaul's mission was to vindicate the honour of the Indian Air Force by ensuring that the Nagas surrender the men *forthwith*. He would meet the hostiles himself and impress upon them that the men must be immediately handed over, whatever the cost.

It was generally known that my contacts in Nagaland extended over a wide range, and Kaul insisted that I should accompany him straightaway to the I.A.F. air-base at Jorhat and arrange to get him into touch with Nagas who might be helpful in negotiating recovery of the captured personnel. As the Prince had come from Gangtok on a two-day visit especially to see me, it was embarrassing to abandon him so summarily, but the Governor explained to him that he was deputing me on a mission of special importance, and so reluctantly we parted.

The next two days were a ferment of feverish activity. Kaul's idea, to start with, was to carry out an air-strafing demonstration on such a scale that the Nagas would quickly see wisdom in surrendering their prisoners. This idea was promptly dropped when it was explained that, in case there was error in aim, there might be no prisoners left to surrender. The next plan was to carry out a series of surprise helicopter landings in the jungles to bolster up the morale of our troops. Unluckily, the solitary helicopter available at Jorhat air-base was out of commission and could not be put into operation in the absence of certain essential spare-parts. Kaul was convinced that, if only a little intelligence

and resource were applied, there was no reason at all why the helicopter should not rise. I confessed to him that, with my handicap of an outdated classical education, I would not be of much use dealing with rotors and, as it was already night, I took my leave and retired to bed. The General spent the better part of the night issuing instructions to pilots and mechanics on the repair and maintenance of helicopter aircraft and was back to the task in the early morning. I had meanwhile discharged my share of responsibility, which was to put Kaul in touch with overground Nagas who had contacts with Nagas underground.

My task done, I took to my jeep and speeded off on my own to Nagaland to see how our boys were faring. After conferring with our very able and exuberant Commissioner, M. Ramunny, at Kohima, I continued to Chakabama and then on to Phek, homeland of the handsome Chakesangs. We spent an uneasy night at Phek, where rumour was afloat of a threatened attack by Nagas on the military outpost where we were camped. But everything passed off without incident — except for a torrent of rainfall which made a bog of the rough dirt-track by which we were to return to Kohima next morning. It was a wonder that we managed to plough our way back through the sloshy pudding of mire that went by the name of a road, but we jogged and seesawed along in our indomitable jeep and arrived unscathed.

I was not a little put out that, in my zeal to accommodate the General, I had had to rush off into the wilderness of Nagaland and abandon my guest. But such are the trials of public service and I had stoically resigned myself to the disappointment, blissfully unaware of the bomb-shell that awaited me on my return to Shillong. It had evidently come to the ears of the Prime Minister, through one or other of the manifold channels of intelligence that are maintained for purposes of checking and cross-checking on events, that certain officers of the Government, including

the Commissioner of Nagaland, were ' negotiating ' with hostile Nagas for surrender of the I.A.F. prisoners. The merest suggestion of Government officers having dealings of any sort with underground Nagas had created a storm, and it was not long before the Governor was in receipt of one of Prime Minister Nehru's more expressive, not to say emotive, communications. The Prime Minister ' was amazed ' at the reports he had received, and it was beyond his comprehension that ' officers expected to act with a sense of responsibility could so far forget themselves as to descend to conduct derogatory to the honour and prestige of the country '. The Prime Minister had no doubt in his mind that the Commissioner had acted ' in utter disregard of the proprieties and must be forthwith replaced '. I cannot of course recollect the exact language at this distance of time, but I do remember the bomb-shell effect of the Prime Minister's fury and thunder on the Governor and myself as we nervously ingested the pages of closely-typed invective. It was like waiting for execution, and as we looked at each other in mutual sympathy, we wondered whose head would be the first to roll. Came the inevitable summons to Delhi. I was to report to the Prime Minister's office at nine in the morning, but in the strong, brave company of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army and Air Force, and the Defence and Foreign Secretaries. (There was only one conspicuous absentee!) We shuffled into the P.M.'s room, and stood in respectful silence before his desk, waiting, hopefully, to be asked to be seated.

The P.M. was glowing with anger, and suddenly rapped out, in uncontrolled irritation and impatience, 'For heaven's sake, don't just stand there like that, sit down.' Like puppets worked by a lever, we snapped into our seats in a single motion and waited for the next word of command. 'I am amazed that, between the lot of you, you couldn't have done better. These people have shot down our aircraft and captured a few of our men. A trifling little affair, and all

you can think of doing is to go down on your knees and beg for their release. Is *that* how we expect our Army and Air Force to act? Now get on with it and show me your plans.'

The interview over, I called on the Foreign Secretary to represent against the injustice of the strictures passed against the Nagaland Commissioner. If the Commissioner had erred, so had we all, and we must *all* share the consequences. 'Rustomji, you obviously don't understand how strongly the Prime Minister feels in this matter and it is not the slightest use my even trying to get him to change his mind. He is leaving for the U.S.A. tomorrow. All I can tell you is that if the Commissioner is not removed from Nagaland by the time he returns, God help you, *God help you.*' We did *not* remove the Commissioner, and God helped us. Nehru was essentially a just man, but his violent anger could frighten people, even his closest advisers, from presenting facts to him in the right perspective. With the cooling of tempers, an inquiry was instituted, and we heard no more of the matter thereafter.

My next encounter with General Kaul was over the maintenance of our expanding network of Assam Rifles outposts in the remote mountains along our border with Tibet. These outposts were situated, often, in areas three or four weeks' march from the nearest motorable road, and there were no means of keeping them in supply except by air-dropping food on a regular weekly basis. With the progressive increase in the number of outposts, it was becoming a problem to ensure maintenance by Dakota aircraft, with their limited load capacity, and I was urging that we must quickly acquire a flight of Caribous which, from the data available with us, would be ideally suited for the specialized type of air-dropping operations we were carrying out in the Himalayan mountains. I stressed that it would be damaging to the morale of our jawans if outposts were established in areas which we were

not in a position to maintain in essential supplies. The General was sympathetic, but undeterred. 'Times are changing, Rustomji, and we can't go on thinking along the old conventional lines. I quite see that we may not be able to supply our outposts with full rations — we haven't the number or type of aircraft needed, as you rightly say. In that case, they will just have to do with less. And, if the worst comes to the worst, they can live off the land, like the tribal people. But supplies or no supplies, please understand that the outposts *must* move up to their positions according to the time-table we have fixed. This is a *decision* and it is up to you people to carry it out. We will try to arrange some more aircraft, possibly even Caribous, to help out with air-dropping supplies, but we just cannot afford to lose time. You ask about accommodation? How do the tribal people manage? There's plenty of bamboo in the jungle, and with a few canvas sheets the men can easily put up a shelter for themselves. Later, as we get organized, we can air-drop pre-fabricated houses. I see no problem at all.'

The outposts were established all right, but soon came the distress signals, as we had anticipated, clamouring for supplies. It was not at all easy to tell our troops, perched upon snow-covered heights at fifteen thousand feet, with little shelter against wind and rain, to go and dig for roots. The thought of our young jawans going without their barest minimum rations under such inhospitable conditions gave me sleepless nights — literally sleepless, as I was chained to my telephone for hours at a stretch, liaising with our air-dropping base at Jorhat in a desperate effort to save our posts from hunger and the hazards of the weather. The air-dropping of pre-fabricated houses, again, was easier said. For even after the parts could be fabricated, they were either too large and unwieldy to be loaded onto the aircraft or else were twisted out of shape on being dropped. I remember Sir Akbar Hydari, who first selected me as

Adviser to the Governor, once warning me that anyone who wanted to be a good administrator must quickly learn to develop a thick hide. I had obviously been a slow learner, as I was haunted day and night by visions of our soldiers marooned on the bare and desolate mountain-tops, dispirited and disillusioned.

When the Indian Frontier Administrative Service was constituted in 1953, it was for manning posts in the border districts of NEFA. The original intention had been to recruit a nucleus of officers who would specialize in tribal administration and devote the better part of their service to life in the tribal areas. In pre-independence days, it was not unusual for British officers of the Indian Civil Service to be stationed for five to ten years in a single district, and it was with reluctance that they accepted transfer to a different area. They came to regard the tribal people in their charge as their special, almost personal, responsibility, and grew attached to them to the extent that they often became over-possessive and over-sensitive to criticism or advice from any quarter. Their dedication deservedly won them the affection and confidence of the hill people, who looked to them as persons whom they could rely upon for the safeguarding of their interests. The officers of the I.F.A.S. were conscientious, earnest and competent, but there were not many among them who would happily reconcile themselves to a protracted tenure of five or more years in a single district. There was the risk that they might be forgotten in their remote assignments on the frontier and miss opportunities for advancement in their service career. New and alluring openings were in the offing all over the country, and they felt entitled to have their share of the spoils. Within less than ten years, therefore, the officers of the I.F.A.S. had spread out from their original heartland in NEFA to Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Shillong, Sikkim, Nepal, Kashmir, Delhi, Bihar, Himachal, Afghanistan, Tibet — even to the Laccadive Islands in the Indian Ocean!

I was worried that the Service was losing its *esprit de corps* as a team of frontier officers and began exploring ways of setting in motion processes to bring to it a more vital feeling of fellowship and 'belonging'. It was with this in view that we initiated a programme of weekly radio broadcasts, which offered opportunities to our officers to talk about their work, their problems, their interests, and compare notes with their colleagues in widely separated parts of the country. I myself spoke frequently over this frontier radio network, more especially after my tours, and did what I could to give encouragement, keep up morale, and promote a sense of dedication. Another gimmick was the publication of a frontier magazine, *Hornbill*, which I edited in my spare time, to bring our officers closer together in spirit and generate a feeling of participation in a common and exciting venture, that of serving and giving a lead to the tribal people at the most critical period of their history. I tried, in the broadcasts and in *Hornbill*, to avoid appearing pontifical — the touch was kept light and humorous, and the emphasis was on the joy and excitement of life in the hills, with a ban on tiresome moralizing about 'uplifting our backward brethren'. I thought the radio might also be helpful in reaching the underground Nagas and bringing them to an understanding of Government's policies. Much misleading propaganda had been put out to the effect that the Government of India was averse to Christianity and had sinister designs to 'Hinduize' the tribal people by preventing them from eating beef and persecuting their pastors. We made it a point to broadcast special services on Sundays, in English and in the many Naga languages, with hymns, psalms and readings from the Bible, so that there should be no doubt in anybody's mind about India being in reality a secular State, as enjoined in her Constitution, with freedom for all to practise the religion they chose.

I have to confess that, where Naga policy was concerned, I was fighting a lone and losing battle. The impression in the minds of the public was that Government had been too 'soft' in its handling of the Naga situation. A little more action by the Army and Air Force, and a little less talk by 'sympathizers', and everything would quickly come right. Soon after General Shrinagesh took over as Governor, he handed me a book that he thought might throw up useful ideas for the conduct of army operations against the Naga underground. It was entitled *Shoot to kill*[1] and gave a vivid description of the all-out drive by the British army authorities to eliminate communist guerillas in the Malay peninsula. Shrinagesh had no doubt come to the conclusion that I required to be toughened up. But he later came round to my view that mere army operations and a show of strength in itself would yield no ultimate solution. Firmness was, of course, necessary. But what mattered as much was the psychological approach.

It was the responsibility of the security police to check on the correspondence of political prisoners to ensure they were not carrying on anti-State activities from within the jails in which they were confined. Most of the letters were dull and routine, a bald description of prison food and the vexations of prison existence. But one letter caught my eye which was of a different sort. It described, almost poetically, some of the subtler, more human shades of a prisoner's inner thoughts. Amid the prevailing dullness of his environment, he wrote with tender emotion of his solitary companion, the prison cat, with whom he shared his sparse and simple diet. The animal had become the sole focus of his existence, and he wrote feelingly of the eager expectation with which he awaited his comings-in, the sad emptiness that descended upon his world at his exits, and the mutual sympathy and joy in the sharing of their lonely lives. It happened that the writer was released soon after

[1] By Richard Miers (Faber and Faber).

I had seen his letter (though through none of my doing !) and I met him by chance at a tea-party a few days later. I mischievously asked what had become of his feline room-mate, and he was naturally taken aback and wondered that I should know so much. I came to see more of my new friend and to gain, through him, a clearer insight into the inner workings of the Naga mind. He showed me the type-script of a book he had written describing his involvement in the Naga movement. For all the bias, bitterness and exaggeration, it was a moving document, indicative of a highly sensitive, if emotionally overcharged nature, but its value to me was in the light it threw on the deeper motivations underlying the Naga troubles. It seemed clear to me that we were faced here with a psychological problem, whose solution lay not in the surgeon's knife, but in an approach to the mind and to the heart. General Shrinagesh was sympathetic and supported my approach, but there were more powerful advocates for the conventional view that what was wanted was a tough line and that this was no time for sentimental nonsense.

In service, as in life, we have our ups and downs. The office-bearers of the Naga People's Convention had been my personal friends, and it was not an agreeable jolt to find myself discounted. It had been my firm belief that misunderstandings might be cleared if we could get the opposing parties together to talk and thrash out their differences. I was convinced that continued fighting would, in itself, result not in 'softening up' the recalcitrant elements, as the hard-hitters assumed, but in embittering them the more against both the N.P.C. and the Government and so putting off yet further any chances of a settlement. It was not until four years later that it was decided, after much suffering on both sides, to hold talks with the underground and work out with them the so-called 'Cease-fire arrangements'. It would be presumptuous to suggest that my views were proved, in the event, to have been vindicated, and I have

not the slightest doubt that wiser persons than myself knew exactly what they were about. The stand of Government may well have been the most logical and most practical under the circumstances, but as far as I was concerned it was a case of temperamental incompatability, and so sadly I bowed my way out of the Naga scene[1] — sadly, for I had great affection for the Naga people, felt deeply for them in their troubles, and, in spite of the rebuffs I had suffered, was still convinced in my mind that there was a part I could play in setting into motion the processes of reconciliation.

In August 1962, General Shrinagesh moved on, as Governor, to Andhra Pradesh, his home State, to be succeeded again, but this time in a permanent capacity, by Vishnu Sahay. I met Vishnu Sahay for the first time in Delhi, where he was serving as Member for Planning after a distinguished term as Cabinet Secretary. He had held a varied assortment of posts, both in his home State of Uttar Pradesh and in Delhi, and was for several years Secretary for Kashmir Affairs. With his wide background of experience, shrewd intellect, capacity to manoeuvre situations and gregarious affability, he was the obvious choice for a problem State—and was not so ingenuous as not to know it. My first impression of him was of a man of supreme self-confidence. His pipe added to this impression, for in times of high tension he would continue puffing away as though nothing else mattered in the world. When eventually he took charge at Shillong, he felt restless in the comfortable ease of Government House. He complained to me, during one of our early interviews, that he had been used all his life to a full day's work and wondered how he was to pass the day after his morning round of

[1]With the constitution of Nagaland as a separate State, a separate officer was appointed as Secretary to the Governor for Nagaland, a function that had been discharged as a *pro tem.* measure by the Adviser to the Governor of Assam for NEFA, in addition to his normal duties, during the Governorship of General Shrinagesh.

golf. The Chinese very soon settled Vishnu Sahay's problem, for within a month of his installation as Governor, they showed their hand and moved across the frontier.

It was during the quiet peace of a Sunday morning, as I was listening to one of the later Beethoven quartets, that I received the fateful news from the Inspector-General of the Assam Rifles that the Chinese were once again challenging our positions along the McMahon Line and that armed conflict was imminent. The precise area of tension was in the region of the trijunction of the Bhutan, Indian and Tibetan frontiers at NEFA's extreme north-western corner. As has been mentioned earlier, Tibetans from across the northern frontier had for generations made a business of exploiting the docile Monpas of Tawang by exacting free labour and forcing them to dispose of their produce at ridiculously low prices. The British had dispatched expeditions from time to time as a demonstration of their sovereignty in the Tawang region, but it was not until we established a permanent administrative centre at Tawang in 1950 that a final stop could be put to the illegalities of Tibetan officialdom operating from across the northern frontier. Since the first advance of the Chinese into Tibet in 1950, we had set about establishing a string of outposts, manned by our valiant frontier force, the Assam Rifles, along the main passes leading from Tibet into our territory in the northern districts of NEFA. In the absence of adequate communications it was not practicable to maintain a strength of more than thirty to forty men in such isolated mountain regions, and the object of the exercise was not so much to ward off invasion in the event of a full-scale enemy attack as to demonstrate our rights over the area and enable us to give advance warning of aggression to our military headquarters further south. I had, soon after the Chinese entry into Tibet in 1950, ventured, as a raw civilian, on some random reflections on the defence of the northern border, and they may be of interest today, in the light of

subsequent events, as an indication of how our minds were working at that distant time :

It is necessary to make a clear distinction between a line which forms a political frontier and a line that may be decided to be held against an invader for considerations of strategy. The two do not always coincide, though, if that were practical, that would certainly be desirable. There can be no question that the McMahon Line must never be surrendered as India's political frontier. The 1914 Convention stands, and there is no reason to budge from it an inch. The line has, also, a certain strategic value, allowing as it does for depth of defence and a certain time of warning for concentration of troops to meet an enemy crossing the border.

From the strategic point of view, it would probably not be advisable to disperse our resources in an attempt to hold an enemy entering *in real strength* at the border itself. The problems of supply and maintenance would be immense and not commensurate with the gain to be derived. It is doubtful, again, whether, for some time to come, sufficient resources would be available in man-power and material to station forces in strength at every point of the frontier. Our policy should be, therefore, to select only those focal points to station forces which we would be in a position, with our likely resources, to hold effectively in the event of a large-scale invasion. Certain such points have already been selected, and the Assam Rifles posted to man them. It should be clearly understood, however, that dispositions of the Assam Rifles as at present ordered would be of no more effect than to hold an enemy *for a short period* until such time as the Regular Army can concentrate troops at the point or points of attack and take over the real business of defence. The stationing of a few platoons half-way or three-quarters of the way up to the border will be of immense value for the purposes of holding a force and supplying intelligence, so that our real striking strength (which must be provided by the Regular Army) may have sufficient time to position itself to meet the enemy when they eventually break through or circumvent the forward screen put up by the Assam Rifles. It is necessary, therefore, from the point of view of effective defence, that Regular troops should be stationed in sufficient strength at some point in the foothills from where they can be shifted at short notice to meet an attack from whatever direction it may eventually come. It would be for the Defence authorities to decide what that strength should be.

The Defence authorities might, in this connexion, consider whether the time has not come to establish a forward I.A.F. base in the Brahmaputra valley. There are two main considerations. In the first place, effective defence of the northern hills must be largely dependent on supply by air. Road communications cannot be built in a day, and even for the maintaining of the Assam Rifles screen in the interior hills as at present envisaged, supply-dropping by air is essential. In the event of

regular operations, air-dropping of supplies would be even more necessary, and it would be well that the I.A.F. should be kept in constant practice in these difficult regions where they may be required to give covering support to the Army at a time of crisis.

The establishing of a regular I.A.F. unit in the Brahmaputra valley would, moreover, enable us to concentrate attention on the whole question of speeding up communications in the northern hills. Advice would be readily available as to the points in the hills at which air-strips might with advantage be constructed, and, with the opening up of air-communications, there would be a decided gearing up of the entire administrative and military machinery. One of the major draw-backs at present is that persons who are to assist in the shaping of policy cannot, for lack of adequate communications, move quickly in the areas where such policy is eventually to be implemented and so keep sufficiently closely in touch with the actual facts of the situation. There is a grave danger of plans being formulated that may be unrealistic and not possible to implement effectively.

An added reason for the establishing of an I.A.F. unit in the Brahmaputra valley is the constant breakdown in Assam of the normal means of communications, such as road, steamer and rail. Not a year passes in which floods do not take place in some region or the other, dislocating the main arteries of the communications system. The danger will be even greater after the earthquake, as so much of the foliage on the face of the hills has fallen away that it will be impossible for the hills, for some years to come, to hold the waters as before and so check their onrush. It is more than likely that the main trunk road from Gauhati to Sadiya will be regularly breached at some point or other every year, with the result that, unless effective air communication is established, the speedy movement of troops so essential to the success of any plan of operation would not be possible and we should find our troops marooned at points where they can be put to no effective use.

With the establishing of an I.A.F. unit in the Brahmaputra valley must necessarily follow the construction of all-weather air-strips at strategic points north of the Brahmaputra. There is already a good air-strip at Tezpur, which should serve the needs of the Se La and Subansiri regions in the event of an incursion from the western sector of the hills. There are no all-weather air-strips, however, north of the Brahmaputra at the points where the two main eastern routes along the Siang and Lohit rivers issue into the Brahmaputra valley. Recent experience has shown that the entire Abor and Mishmi hills[1] region can be cut off for weeks on end from the rest of India and the only means of contact being maintained is by air. Even now, more than four months after the earthquake, contact with the Abor hills is uncertain and dependent on the vagaries of the Brahmaputra. It is more than likely that, with the coming rains, river communications will once again be dislocated and we shall be entirely dependent on air

[1] i.e. Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions.

support for our contacts with the Abor hills. The importance of constructing all-weather strips at Sadiya and Pasighat has therefore assumed, for strategic no less than administrative considerations, a particular urgency, and we should be ill-advised to underrate the need for establishing communications upon which we can depend *all the year round* with an area where it may be necessary to concentrate troops in strength in the event of an incursion through the Lohit or the Siang valleys. Sites for landing strips have already been prepared at Sadiya and at Pasighat, and the immediate need is for the laying of perforated steel-plate sheets so that the strips may be usable during the rains for the traffic that future developments may necessitate.

The advisability of constructing air-strips for light aircraft at points in the heart of the hills, such as at Walong, Along, Ziro and Dirangdzong should also be examined. *Prima facie*, I consider immediate steps should be taken for the construction of strips at the four points mentioned above, which will result in our being able to keep in close contact with all the regions through which infiltration or incursion may be expected. The establishing of air-communications in the hill areas will also add immensely to the possibility of obtaining effective intelligence at a higher level than is at present practicable. Intelligence in these hill areas is at present filtered down through low-paid subordinates, who are unlikely to have the background to discriminate between what is and is not significant or reliable. Officers at a higher level are unable to find the time to make a trek of two to three months into the hill areas for the purposes of obtaining intelligence regarding a single particular region. The effective defence of this vast frontier region, at every point of which it is obviously impossible to station troops, must depend largely on the collection and communication of reliable intelligence with as little delay as possible. We cannot plant soldiers along the entire international frontier, but we must have an *infallible organization* whereby we may receive ample warning of the imminence of an attack, the point and direction of the threat and the strength, arms and equipment of the aggressors.

A distinction has been made earlier between a line to be maintained as a political boundary and a line to be held by the Regular Forces in the event of a full-scale attack. It should be clearly understood that the Assam Rifles outposts established at or in the region of the McMahon Line are intended to serve the former purpose — i.e. to maintain the political line during normal peace-time conditions. If no armed forces were stationed at the frontier, a foreign power, be it Chinese or Tibetan, might march in without a shot being fired, and it would be for us, then, forcibly to dislodge them and appear in the light of aggressors disturbing their *de facto* possession. That is a state of affairs we must never allow to arise. If China or Tibet propose crossing the frontier into Indian territory, they must know that it is at the risk of war and that we shall resist insofar as our resources will permit. In other words, a situation must not be allowed to develop whereby a foreign

power is in a position to establish itself in our areas necessitating our dislodging it rather than it dislodging us.

As will be apparent from what has been stated above, the Assam Rifles have a dual role to perform relating to the political and the strategic line. With respect to the former, the outposts at the border will carry out intensive patrolling, assist in the collecting and communicating of intelligence, and demonstrate by their presence that the territory south of the McMahon Line is Indian territory and that any trespasser from the north will be resisted. But the Assam Rifles have also a secondary role in furnishing a forward screen at focal points (which we may term as forward defended bases), where they will hold an attacking force which has entered our territory in strength until the Regular Army and Air Force are positioned for the real fight.

It has to be borne in mind that the above observations are the observations of a civilian and must be judged as such. The problem, however, is of such importance as to warrant the most careful examination by our military experts, whose appreciation of the situation and its needs may prove to be entirely different from mine. Such an appreciation is, however, necessary and should not be long delayed.

In 1950, there was not a single jeepable road leading from the Assam foothills into the interior regions of NEFA's northern districts. Mine was no more than a layman's view that, in the absence of road and air communications, it would be impracticable to hold for long an enemy attack at the border itself. The immediate answer, pending the building up of an adequate road communications network, seemed to be to establish bases at strategic points further south to which reinforcements and supplies could be more easily dispatched in the event of an emergency. By 1962, the communications network had radically changed. Jeepable, even truckable roads had been constructed up to each of the district headquarters, in some cases even beyond, as well as air-strips for Dakota landing. With all the improvement in communications, however, the maintenance of any sizeable body of troops beyond about the middle line of NEFA, up to which road communications had reached, was a risky proposition. There are limits up to which air-supply can be depended upon in the hazardous flying-conditions of NEFA, particularly during

the monsoon months when visibility is practically nil for weeks on end. In the absence of adequate maintenance arrangements, it is a point for consideration whether it might not have been advisable to concentrate our main defences against the Chinese in 1962 along a line further south which could be effectively maintained and reinforced, instead of hurriedly dispatching troops to forward positions in the high snow-ranges without the means of adequately keeping them in food-supply, clothing or shelter. It is easy to be wise after the event and there were political considerations also that weighed heavily in the taking of military decisions. General Kaul has told already his *Untold Story*.[1] Others will follow. And the verdict will lie with history.

Among the most memorable tours I carried out in the period before the Chinese invasion were to Tawang in the Kameng Frontier Division and to our Assam Rifles outpost at Kepang La, on the McMahon Line, in Siang. Memorable, as they were among the last tours in these regions when we still had to trek or ride in old-world style. It is possible today to jeep to Tawang, and even, if one is luxury minded, to hop over in a helicopter from the Assam plains and return home the same afternoon. My first visit to Kameng was in 1949, and I remember, vividly, sweating up the old hill-track with Geoffrey Allen, Political Officer of what was then known as the Balipara Frontier Tract. Times had changed, and it was possible now to jeep as far as Senge, a few miles short of the 13,000 foot Se La pass. But from Senge onward to Tawang, we still moved, on foot or by pony, along the centuries-old bridle-track, in an enchanted world of saffron-robed lamas and glorious rhododendrons, and to the music of gently-tinkling mule-bells. Little did we know how soon this dreamland of ours was to be shattered — how soon everything passes.[2]

[1]Allied Publishers, New Delhi.

[2] The tour-notes in the Appendix, hastily jotted during brief halts by the way-side, may be of interest to the professional civil servant.

My tour to our Assam Rifles outpost at Kepang La was equally memorable, but in a very different way. The bridle-track to Tawang, a well-worn trade-route, was, except for the passage over the Se La pass, comparatively broad and comfortable and we could ride by pony for the greater part of the journey. The track to Kepang La was not more than a foot wide and heavily overgrown with foliage. The agile hill-man does not believe in wasting time skirting round the edge of a mountain if he can find a shorter, vertical route straight over the top. The last ten miles to the frontier were a killing climb, and it was a relief to be welcomed with tea and rum by the Assam Rifles jawans when at last we reached their camp. It was an event for them to have guests from distant Shillong when they had not yet had a visit from the Commanding Officer of their own Battalion, and I was touched by their appreciation of the trouble we had taken to look them up. But what surprised me more was to learn that Verrier Elwin too had, not so many years back, climbed up — and survived — this selfsame track. For a person of Verrier's plum-pudding build and advancing years, it was an incredible feat, and what sustained him, I feel sure, during his wanderings was his passionate feeling for the Siang river, rising as the Tsangpo, far away in Tibet, to debouch finally into the plains of Assam and merge in the mighty Brahmaputra. He was captivated by its beauty and its mystery, and wrote, in his autobiography, that he 'would be happy one day to lay his body beside its waters'. In his last testament, he expressed the wish that his ashes might be scattered from the air to float into the valley of his beloved Siang and merge in her sacred waters. His wishes were respected, and I like to think that, in uniting with his great love, my dear friend found release from the eternal round of existence, from the Buddhist's 'Wheel of Life'. But Verrier, bless him, had such an abounding zest for life that I should not be at all surprised if, on second thoughts, he would not prefer

to step down from his pure, celestial heaven to taste once more of the ruder joys of earth!

The opening of air-communications has always excited me, particularly in the hill regions where the building of roads is such an endlessly time-consuming process. The construction of air-strips at Ziro, Daporijo, Pasighat, Tuting and Tezu enabled us to advance by ten years at least our progress of work in the northern Divisions of NEFA, for that was the time it took our engineers to set up a rudimentary road communications network to our Divisional headquarters. We were continually putting pressure on our officers to explore sites for constructing rough and ready air-strips in the remote hills so that a beginning might be made in the processes of development instead of waiting for the construction of regular roads. Two of the regions of NEFA where we had made least progress in the absence of road communications were the Dibang valley in the Lohit Frontier Division and the north-eastern tracts of Tirap along the Burma border. We succeeded eventually in constructing air-strips in both these regions, at Anini in the Dibang valley and Vijaynagar in Tirap, and I remember the experience of boyish thrill at being the first to land by Otter and inaugurate the linking up of these distant and isolated islands of NEFA with the mainland of the country.

Much of the credit of opening up Vijaynagar must go to our gallant Inspector-General of Assam Rifles, Ajit Guraya, who, with his tough band of Gurkhali jawans, trekked for two weeks through thick, pestilential jungle to reach the broad and lovely valley that bears today the name of his son Vijay. Although it was our policy to adopt, as a rule, the place-names in use by the tribal people, the General was fortunate enough to have discovered a population-less, name-less tract, and felt justified in seeking for his son a small immortality. For myself, I am not aware of any *place* in NEFA that bears my name, for all the twenty years I have roamed on Assam's frontiers. But I confess I was

not a little startled to be introduced one day to a namesake of mine, a smart and handsome young Adi lad — but, happily, *quite unmistakably* Mongoloid ! I came to learn that his parents had been married for a number of years without being blessed with offspring, and that this, their only child, was born, at long last, on the day that I met his father for the first time during a tour in the Mishmi hills. On returning home, he named his long-awaited first-born 'Rustomji'!

17

The Chinese aggression

CAME October 23rd, 1962, and the shattering news of the Chinese advance on Tawang. From hour to hour, the reports became more and more distressing, with military and civilians evacuating by jeep, pony, foot, helicopter, any way possible, while the Chinese progressively took up their positions in the abandoned areas. It was necessary for us to know the Army's plans in the light of the latest developments, and I hurried to the Corps headquarters at Tezpur, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, to ascertain what was expected by the Army of our civilian staff. The Chief of the Army Staff's immediate need was for the civil administration to make available jeeps and trucks for the movement of troops, and this we duly arranged. The Army Commander, General Sen, was an old friend, and we had performed together on the stage, in happier days when he had been stationed as Sub-Area Commander in Shillong, in a blood-curdling drama at the Shillong club, with himself as the villain and myself — of course! — as the hero. If I had been depressed over events in Tawang, there was no depression where Sen was concerned. ' We've got those bastards where we want them now. Just let them move one step forward, and they'll get such a thrashing they'll never forget. Our boys are now in positions where they can fight and show what they're worth. They're just itching for a chance to have a real good crack at the Chinks. But where's your glass? Have another drink, you have a long way to go.'

I do not know to this day whether Sen really meant what he said or was putting on an act to boost up morale. If the latter, as I rather think, he did it well, and I was certainly

taken in. The next day, I moved on to Bomdi La and assured our staff that there was no need for panic, as the Army had now taken up positions that were tactically defensible, and the Chinese would, at all costs, be held at the Se La pass.

But for all my assurance, our staff were understandably jittery. They had seen the streams of refugees flowing in from Tawang, and were fearfully wondering whether it would not be their turn next. I thought it might reassure them somewhat if I myself moved up further towards the forward areas, and so proceeded to Dirang the following day. At Dirang, we spent an uneasy night, as a rumour was afloat, happily unfounded, that the Chinese had circumvented our defences at the Se La and were advancing to intercept us from the rear. But our main concern at Dirang was to try to locate and make contact with the Abbot and other high lamas of Tawang monastery, who were reported to have joined in the mass evacuation. I had received a message in Shillong that Jigmie Dorji, Bhutan's Prime Minister, was making anxious inquiries regarding the whereabouts of the infant Shabdrung, the reputed reincarnation of Bhutan's Dharma Raja of old. This little lama had been residing in the Tawang area under the guardianship of the venerable Gompatse Rimpoche, and there was apprehension that the Chinese might endeavour to abduct him and use him, as they had the Panchen Lama in Tibet, as a puppet in the furtherance of their expansionist designs.

After dispatching scouts from Dirang to gather intelligence regarding the lamas' movements, we proceeded to the Se La pass. At Se La, and in General Pathania, the local Commander, I found the same spirit of confidence as in General Sen at Tezpur. Everything was orderly and business-like, with not a hint of apprehension that the Chinese could ever breach our newly-positioned defences. Though it was less than a week since the evacuation of Tawang, there was such an atmosphere of normalcy that I

carried out my rounds of inspection as during any other routine tour. I was relieved to learn, on my return to Dirang, that the Gompatse Rimpoche and his precious ward were safe, and lost no time in taking them with me in my station-wagon to Bomdi La, the infant Shabdrung snugly perched upon my lap. Our staff at Bomdi La were encouraged to have from me a first-hand account of the situation at the Se La, and there were some of our officers who even thought of calling back their families who had been evacuated to the plains during the Chinese advance on Tawang of a few days back.

Before returning to Shillong, I decided to visit again the Corp headquarters at Tezpur, as there were some matters affecting civil-military relations that yet remained to be sorted out. It was not until after seven in the evening that I reached Tezpur and met General Kaul in his dim, solitary hutment. Just back from Delhi to resume command after his illness[1], he had not fully recovered and our discussions were interrupted frequently by his spasmodic bouts of coughing. It was clear he was suffering still from the effects of extreme strain, and the old buoyancy was missing. I flew next morning to Darranga on the Bhutan border, as close liaison with the Bhutan authorities was essential at such a time, and, my business done, returned to Shillong.

Shortly after my tour to the Se La, I paid a flying (literally flying) visit to Ziro and Daporijo, two of our most important administrative centres in the Subansiri Frontier Division. I was relieved to find that our staff, as also the tribal people of the area, were in good spirits, and proceeded to carry out my routine chores as though everything was well with the world. I find from my notes that I paid a visit to the Daporijo farm and issued instructions for fencing it to forestall against damage by stray cattle. 'I understand

[1] General Kaul, who had some weeks previously been appointed as Corps Commander for personal direction of the NEFA operations, had fallen seriously ill and been sent for hospitalization to Delhi.

that papaya and pineapple do well in this area', I had noted, 'we might consider stepping up their production, as there will probably be a large demand for fresh fruit and vegetables throughout NEFA, particularly in places such as Daporijo where there are Army concentrations.' The Chinese, however, were never very far from my mind, and I was careful to draw the attention of the Army authorities to the need for safeguarding the Ziro air-strip. 'There are no air-strips or good road communications north of Ziro in the Subansiri Frontier Division, and the Ziro air-strip would therefore be a special target in the event of a major attack from the north.' Of the tribal people, I noted that 'they spoke at length (as is the Apatani custom!) of their determination to assist the Army in whatever way was possible and were anxious to be trained for defending the frontiers.'

It was just six days after these notes were recorded, in a spirit of dispassionate calm and confidence, that we received, in the early morning of November 20th, the stunning news of the Chinese circumventing our defences at Se La, storming Bomdi La and swarming south towards Tezpur and the Assam plains. Our forces had suffered reverses also at Walong in the Lohit Frontier Division and Tuting in Siang, and from the speed that the enemy were advancing south, it seemed only a matter of days, if not hours, before our beloved NEFA would be entirely overrun. As civilians, all that was left for us to do was to render assistance, as far as was possible within the desperate limitations of road and air transport, to persons wishing to be evacuated, and to prevent the spread of panic. It was a godsend that my stalwart colleague, Bob Khathing, was in Shillong, and we set off at once for NEFA, prepared for the worst. We had worked together for fifteen years, given of our best in building up NEFA from its earliest beginnings — and now everything was tottering around us. My mother was with me in Shillong, and, as I left her for

NEFA, I hinted to her that we had had our fair share, and more, of the good things that life has to offer, and must be prepared for adversity, adversity in the extreme, should things go badly. I did not intend to alarm her, but the way events were moving, the prospect of my returning to Shillong seemed dim at the time, and I wished her to know that, should the worst happen, I had lived a full and happy life and was reconciled to whatever might be. As I drove down the hill road from Shillong, perhaps for the last time, its beauty struck me strangely. With such loveliness all around, I wondered that it had not moved me so before. Now that everything seemed to be slipping away, I became aware for the first time how much we take for granted in life, what little gratitude we feel and show to our Maker for all His abundant gifts.

On our arrival at Borjhar airfield, rumours were already afloat of the Corps headquarters at Tezpur preparing to withdraw to Gauhati, and as we flew to Along, the headquarters of the Siang Division, we could see smoke rising from the encampments alongside the newly-constructed access-road from the plains, where, as we came to know later, dumps of stores had been blown up during the withdrawal of our engineering units. From Along, where we assisted in arrangements for the evacuation of women and children, I moved on to Tezu, the headquarters of the Lohit Frontier Division, where there was risk of panic following upon the retreat of our troops after the Walong reverses. I met *en route* Hmingliana, the Political Officer of the Siang Division, who was returning to his base at Along in a state of utter and understandable bewilderment. He had been touring in the interior of his Division, and what was his surprise to find, all of a sudden, that the engineers were fast slipping away. Worse still, there was talk of blowing up the newly-constructed bridges, a course intended to halt the further progress of the Chinese but which would have presented equal obstacles to us in evacuating our own

people. At Tezu, in spite of the distressing news from Walong, I found everything under control, with a minimum of panic. As example of the brave spirit and morale of our staff, they asked nothing for themselves, but were worried more over an S.O.S. received from our distant outpost at Anini that the wife of our young Mizo officer, Thangseia, had developed serious complications after delivery and required to be urgently flown by helicopter to the plains if her life was to be saved. Though helicopters were scarce and more than fully occupied in supporting our troops on the front, the I.A.F. were generous enough to yield to my appeal and airlifted her quickly to safety.

From Tezu, I returned to Along, and the notes I jotted on conclusion of my tour are an interesting record of the extraordinary succession of events during one of the most crucial periods of NEFA's history:

Wednesday 21st November:

The Adis and Gallongs of Siang are the most politically conscious of our tribal people in NEFA, and I was anxious, therefore, to be with them as much as possible at their two main centres, Along and Pasighat, during this critical time. On my return to Along from Tezu, I held a meeting lasting several hours with our Political Interpreters and tribal leaders. They had handed me a letter as I stepped out of the plane, which expressed their disillusion and resentment that they should be left unprotected and abandoned in the hour of danger, and hinted that the best course would be for them to live, henceforward, according to their own primitive ways, and leave it to Doni-Polo [God] to decide, at some later time, their future course of action. I explained to them that the Army had put up a strong fight at Walong, Tawang and other places in NEFA, that our jawans had shed blood for their defence and that India was determined to drive out the Chinese from the areas into which they had trespassed. They urged, on their part, that troops should at once be sent to Along, and that the tribal people should be associated with our regular Army in the defence of the land. I informed them that, while military matters were not within my province, I would at once consult the local Brigade Commander and also communicate their views to the authorities concerned. After my meeting with the leaders, I called on the local Commander, who confirmed that his orders were to pull back from Tuting, Mechuka and Along. He stated, however, that as the troops from Mechuka would be coming out through Along, there was likely to be some fighting and

the tribal people would see that an effort was being made for their defence, even though, for strategic reasons, the troops had temporarily to be withdrawn.

At 1.30 in the night, there was a banging at the door of our bungalow and we found that the Political Interpreters and tribal leaders had come back to see us. They had held a meeting after my discussions with them, and decided that, in view of the circumstances as explained to them, they should throw in their lot with us completely and asked that their family members should also be evacuated with the rest of our staff. I assured them that whatever action Government took would apply equally to our tribal and non-tribal staff, and whatever difficulties there might be would be shared equally by us all together. And so we went to bed, happy in the feeling that their bitterness was somewhat assuaged. We were suddenly awakened an hour later by cries of 'fire'. A huge conflagration had lit up the sky some hundred yards away, and we were worried that disturbances had broken out as a result of the general state of uncertainty and tension. But it turned out to be a purely accidental fire, and, as the rain soon started coming down in torrents, quickly died away.

Thursday 22nd November:

8 a.m. The Brigade Commander came in to give us the welcome news that, at 3 a.m. in the morning, he had received fresh orders — to hold fast at Along, Tuting and Mechuka.[1] As he was out of touch with his troops at Tuting and Mechuka, he requested me to arrange runners swift as the wind to carry messages to the retreating columns to stand fast. The tribal people were overjoyed at this sudden turn of events, and, for myself, I felt like the Messiah, bringing to them tidings of glad joy.

Left Along at midday, accompanied by the wives and children of our tribal staff, for Mohanbari, our air-base in the Assam plains. I was informed, on reaching Mohanbari, that there had been considerable tension at Pasighat and that the tribal people there had been threatening to cut up their leaders in case they deserted the district. From Mohanbari, I proceeded straight to Pasighat, where I was glad to find our Legal Adviser, Brigadier Sen[2], calm and collected as ever, continuing, amidst the general confusion, his trial of a rather knotty criminal case. His presence and unflappable bearing in Pasighat contributed greatly to the maintenance of some semblance of order at a difficult time.

I held a meeting in the evening, as at Along, with our tribal leaders, after which we listened in together to Indira Gandhi's broadcast on the radio.

[1] Evidently resultant upon the unilateral declaration of cease-fire by the Chinese, to take effect from midnight of November 21st.

[2] Now judge of the High Court of Assam and Nagaland who, prior to his appointment as legal adviser to NEFA and Nagaland, had been judge Advocate-General in the Army.

Friday 23rd November:

The largest and most important village in the region of Pasighat is Balek, where there had been considerable panic and the people had started making camps in the jungle to hide their women and children in the event of fighting breaking out. After breakfast, I jeeped to Balek, where we held a mammoth meeting. Here again, I explained that, in the event of danger, Government would do everything possible to assist the tribal people. Arrangements had already been made for the safe evacuation of tribal patients from the leper hospital and the care of women and children would be our first concern. There was no need, just now, for the villagers to send their families to the jungle, and I assured them that our officers would be instructed to keep in very close touch with the people so as to be able to advise them, in the event of an emergency, how best they should act.

2 p.m. Left Pasighat for Mohanbari and proceeded to Dinjan to meet General Pathania and let him know the result of my visits to Along, Pasighat and Tezu. I took Bob Khathing with me and we discussed in some detail the necessity and mechanics of building up quickly an organization on the lines of 'V Force'[1] to obtain intelligence from enemy-occupied areas, harass their lines of communication etc.

On return to Dibrugarh, we visited the reception camps set up for refugees from NEFA by the district authorities. The Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Bhuyan, his officers and the several voluntary organizations had carried out excellent work at very short notice in arranging food and shelter for our evacuees, numbering approximately 3000.

Saturday 24th November:

Informed that Indira Gandhi would be visiting the camps at Dibrugarh and later proceeding by air to Nowgong, Jorhat and Tezpur. I suggested to her that she might also drop down for a brief moment at Pasighat, as this would give confidence to the people of NEFA that they were not being forgotten at this time of trouble. It was not possible to send advance notice of the visit, as the air-control installations at Pasighat had already been removed under instructions of the Director-General, Civil Aviation, but we found a few of our officers at the landing-strip, and the Assistant Political Officer, who lives nearby, soon turned up and took us for a round of the town. We visited the bazaar area, where Mrs Gandhi met the merchants, mostly Marwari and Bihari, and assured them that the interests of Pasighat would be looked after by Government. Kutik Moyong, our former Head Interpreter and now Base Superintendent, addressed a gathering of tribal and non-tribal people at the landing-strip, when he

[1] A special force, largely composed of tribal frontiersmen, set up during World War II to collect intelligence from behind the Japanese lines along the Indo-Burma border.

spoke of the tribal people's determination to stand by Government in resisting Chinese aggression. Indira Gandhi then took off for Misa in Nowgong District to visit the camps of evacuees, almost all Tibetans and Monpas, from the Kameng Frontier Division. On learning that the Abbot of Tawang monastery, the Gompatse Rimpoche, the Bhutan Shabdrung and other high reincarnate lamas were being accommodated at a camp near Silighat, I took leave of Mrs Gandhi and proceeded by jeep to Silighat, where I met the Rimpoche, his followers and a number of Tibetans and Monpas who were having their evening meal. What struck me during my visits to the reception camps at Dibrugarh, Nowgong and Silighat was the cheerfulness and sense of gratitude of the evacuees for the little that we had been able to do for them. I did not hear a single complaint, and there were smiles on their faces when I talked to them where, with lesser people, one might have expected tears. I left Silighat at 6 p.m. in a ramshackle old jeep, which started roaring like thunder just as we reached the trunk-road to Jorhat. The exhaust pipe had disintegrated and could not be put right in spite of our earnest endeavours underneath the jeep in the dark, moonless night. We stormed into Jorhat at 8.30 p.m., just in time for the very welcome dinner that was being served out to Mrs Gandhi and her party at our NEFA rest house. We had a good refill, saw Mrs Gandhi off at the airport and packed in to bed.

Sunday 25th November:

I was anxious to visit Daporijo and Ziro before returning to Shillong, and our Director of Supply & Transport managed to arrange an air-sortie to Daporijo at 11 a.m. Just as we were moving towards the aircraft we were summarily hurried back, as the powers-that-be had decided to hold an air-raid exercise. We were ordered to jump into a muddy trench near the Director's office, and, after sitting crouched in a puddle for the half-hour that seemed eternity, were thankfully told that the air-strip had 'turned from red to green', and, much relieved, we made our way to Daporijo.

At Daporijo we found everything calm and peaceful. Very few air-sorties could be flown, as visibility was so poor, and our Political Officer, Chakma, had taken the initiative to send down some of his staff on foot with seven days' rations by the Basar-Majorbari road. I was impressed by our Political Officer's quiet courage, as his is one of the most difficult areas to evacuate in an emergency.

I held discussions, as in other places, with our Political Interpreters and tribal leaders. On their inquiring of me, I advised that, in the event of an actual threat to Daporijo, it might not be wise for all the tribal people to evacuate *en masse*, as this would give an opportunity to the enemy to settle their own nationals from China on land belonging to the people of NEFA. It might be wiser for the main population to remain behind, sending down only such elements as would be helpful to the Army and the Government in the business of pushing

back the aggressors. I also assured them that such persons as might decide to come down to the plains would be looked after by Government and cared for as our own brothers and sisters.

1 p.m.: Left Daporijo for Ziro, where the situation was well in hand, with no signs of panic. After discussions with our officers, I held one of the most interesting meetings of my whole tour with our Political Interpreters and tribal leaders of the nine Apatani villages of the Ziro plateau. The Apatanis are great orators and their speeches abound in picturesque expressions. The following were amongst the more important — and delightful — of their observations:

(*a*) The Army must quickly position tanks and artillery on all the little hillocks surrounding the Ziro air-strip.

(*b*) We committed a great mistake in letting China get 'puffed up' and we should have taken much stronger measures for our defence. When a man goes out on a long journey, he takes his umbrella with him in case of rain. He does not wait for the rain to come and then go home to fetch his umbrella. We should similarly have made proper preparations instead of waiting for the danger to fall upon us before looking round for better arms.

(*c*) In case the Chinese suddenly enter Ziro and kill off all the Government staff and tribal people, we should hide a WT set,[1] with two operators and rations, in a nearby jungle to send information of the treacherous deed so that it may be quickly avenged.

(*d*) Indians of the plains and Apatanis are like wife and husband and must never be parted, whether in good times or in bad.

(*e*) We have not stolen cattle from the Chinese or cut their crops, and yet they are harassing us. We should therefore trap them like monkeys who steal our crops. The Sun and Moon are witnesses to every crime that is committed on earth, however stealthily, and we may be sure that the crimes of the Chinese will not escape the notice of God and that He will duly punish them.

(*f*) If India has not got enough good guns, she must quickly ask other countries to help her with weapons.

(*g*) Government have always been helpful to the Apatanis and Daflas whenever they were in need of medical or other care. Now was the opportunity for the tribal people to show their gratitude to Government by helping them in every way possible in the war effort.

(*h*) Government should drop bombs on all Chinese concentrations along the northern border.

(*i*) We should continue to maintain our administrative staff in the interior and strengthen our intelligence organization so that we may obtain advance information of a Chinese invasion.

(*j*) Even if there is regular war and the rest of the administrative staff have to leave Ziro, Government must insist on the doctors remaining behind as otherwise the people will have no one to take care of them in time of illness.

[1] Wireless transmission.

(*k*) All the tribal leaders of NEFA should be periodically called to Shillong for joint consultation regarding matters affecting the common interest of NEFA at this time of crisis.

(*l*) The Apatani people have always had very great regard and affection for 'our Nehru', but cannot understand what has happened to him of late. He seems to have become *dubla* (weak-kneed) and is not hitting back at the Chinese as hard as they had expected. It is very necessary that he should be personally apprised of the strong feelings of the Apatanis regarding the necessity of punching the Chinese wherever they enter our land instead of allowing the Chinese to get bigger and bigger all the time.

I explained at length Government's policy, especially the Chinese betrayal of our faith in their friendship, and assured them of the Prime Minister's determination to drive them out of our territory. I also informed them about the talks to the nation that the Prime Minister would be periodically broadcasting on the radio to keep the people closely in touch with Government's plans for countering the aggression. I advised the Political Officer to arrange for the people to hear such broadcasts whenever possible so that they should have no wrong impression regarding the country's leaders.

The remainder of my note was concerned with measures to be taken to rehabilitate the several thousand refugees who had left NEFA on the approach of the Chinese to seek safety and shelter in the Assam plains. The hill leaders of the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam (the Khasi and Jaintia, Garo, North Cachar and Mikir hills) responded generously to our appeal to allot land for tribal refugees from NEFA, and our officers were kept busy providing medical relief to the sick and distributing rations of food and cloth to refugees until they might be in a position to stand on their own feet.

It is amusing to recall in retrospect how dangerously ridiculous were the effects of some of our amateur attempts at publicity during those catastrophic months. The artists of the NEFA Publicity Department had thought themselves very clever in preparing some startling posters depicting the Chinese as wicked-looking dragons, swine and giants, little realizing that the tribal people would interpret all this as conveying that the enemy at the gate was a powerful, magical spirit, capable of transforming itself at will into whatever

shape it wished, and certainly not to be resisted or defeated by common or garden mortals like ourselves! Another of our smart posters showed Mother India clasping the tribal people affectionately to her bosom, with two bright stars shining radiantly overhead. These two bright stars the tribals interpreted as deadly bombs suspended over India by the Chinese in pursuance of their nefarious designs. Our Political Officers were wise enough to quickly withdraw the posters from circulation before they could render further damage to tribal morale!

There can be little doubt that, had the Chinese wished it, they could have continued their advance on November 22nd and, within a matter of days, threatened the entire Assam valley by a series of thrusts through the four northern Divisions of NEFA. Their unilateral declaration of cease-fire with effect from midnight of November 21st was as surprising in its suddenness as their lightning *putsch* on November 19th and will remain one of the unsolved riddles of history. The answer may be that they calculated it was wiser to appear gracious when they were at the peak of their success than to have to yield to pressures at some later time when the brilliance of their achievements might be dimmed. Better to back out of their own volition, while the impact of their superiority on the battlefield was still fresh upon the minds of the tribal people, than to be pushed out or to have to retreat during the approaching winter months, when the passes over the Himalayas would be snowed up and the maintenance of forward elements would pose embarrassing problems of commissariat. They had been offered, moreover, the opportunity they were looking for, during their brief sojourn, to demonstrate their 'way of life' to the tribal people. They made a blatant display of roughing it whenever they came to public view, carrying their own kit and fraternizing on equal terms with the tribal people — unlike the 'colonial Indian' with his legacy of British imperialist domineering!

My main task, during the weeks following the cease-fire, was to try to restore a sense of confidence among the tribal people in the civil and military administration. The refugees were understandably reluctant to leave their camps, in the comparative safety of the Assam plains, to return to NEFA and face the risks of another Chinese assault. Their faith in our Army's ability to defend them had been shattered and it was not easy for us to convince them that history does not always repeat itself. The best way, I felt, of reassuring the tribal people that they could now safely return to their homes would be for me to set up my headquarters temporarily in NEFA and move about in the areas that had been subjected to heaviest strain. My dear mother, despite her advancing years, was gallant enough to accompany me, and together we set off to make our temporary home in Along in the centre of Siang.

If the tribal people had been frank in voicing their feeling of disenchantment, they were equally responsive in recovering their confidence in us, and the refugees quite soon returned to their homes and reverted to their routine chores. I assured them, during my visits to their camps, that there was nothing more to fear — and the fact that my mother and I had ourselves settled at Along and that an unwarlike person like myself was moving about, apparently without fear, in the forward areas, must have satisfied them that the danger was over, for within a few weeks the camps in the plains were practically emptied.

The mechanics of getting the administrative machinery into gear again was no easy task. Our reserves of salt, kerosene oil and other essential supplies had completely run out and it was only by a very special effort, mainly through air-dropping, that we succeeded in rebuilding our depleted stocks. There was stationery to be arranged for offices, blankets for hospitals, books for schools — for, in the pandemonium of evacuation, everything had been left

helter-skelter — and it required all our energies to set our institutions into motion again.

It was during this period of rehabilitation that I suffered, yes *suffered*, one of my less happy experiences of travel in the uncertain air-currents of NEFA. General Manekshaw, who had succeeded Kaul as Corps Commander, happened to be traversing the frontier at the time with an American television-team, no doubt to prove to the boys back home that the Chinese had actually withdrawn and everything was now 'O.K.' We had taken off one morning by Dakota for Tuting in northern Siang, but it was not long before one of the members of the television party, a former pilot himself, drew me aside and appealed, in desperation, 'For God's sake let's turn back, we can't possibly fly in this.' We were bumping along in a blanket of mist, but I had flown so much in the deadly weather conditions of NEFA that I did not attach much importance to his warning; besides which, it was not for me, I thought, to tell our pilot his job.

It was during our return from Tuting that I saw our friend was right. We had evidently struck an impenetrable patch of cloud, for visibility was nil, and there was no alternative but to circle, laboriously, to a height of 15,000 feet to avoid crashing into the mountain peaks skirting either side of the narrow gorge of the Siang river. What we could not understand at the time was that, as soon as we had gained a little height, we seemed to drop as much again, a seesaw motion that was, to say the least of it, disconcerting. The headway we were making seemed negligible, and since our ultimate destination was not, presumably, upward to heaven but forward to our base at Along, we wondered rather fearfully what it was all about. There must have been some method in the apparent madness, for we *did* eventually manage to land at Along — to be informed by our cool cat of a pilot that aeroplanes are also human and cannot be blamed for developing aches

once in a way — and if, on top of it all, his instruments had failed, what were we to expect? We should thank our stars we were alive instead of badgering him with silly questions.

From Along, we moved on to Tezu, Daporijo and Ziro in the Lohit and Subansiri Frontier Divisions. I was glad of an opportunity to fly to our outpost at Hayuliang in the Lohit valley, although here too I was warned that there was generally air-turbulence in the Hayuliang gorge, and was not much encouraged, as we approached the runway, to see the wreckage of two Otter aircraft ominously decking either side of the hastily-improvised dirt-track strip. 'Nothing to worry, just occupational hazards,' remarked our pilot comfortingly.

While the Chinese duly withdrew from the positions they had occupied in the Lohit, Siang and Subansiri Divisions, it was not until January that they started withdrawing from the prestigious area of Tawang. With the Chinese withdrawal from Tawang, it seemed that a nightmare chapter in NEFA's history was coming at last to a close. As I stepped out of the helicopter that carried me to Tawang, I missed the customary gathering of tribal leaders waiting to clasp my hands in affectionate welcome. My first reaction was that they could hardly be blamed for not showing enthusiasm at such a time — until I learnt that they had, in fact, gathered to welcome me, but at the wrong helipad! When we met together eventually, there were tears in their eyes, as also, I confess, in mine. They could hardly believe, after all our troops had been through, that we would come back so soon and risk a further challenge. As news of our arrival spread, Monpa tribals from the surrounding areas came streaming in to Tawang, overjoyed that we had kept faith and had not, in the despondency of defeat, forgotten our responsibilities to the Monpa people. The ceremony of hoisting the national flag was simple but solemn — with a brief moment of comedy that relieved

the prevailing tension. As I pulled at the cord to unfurl the flag, the little cloth bundle plopped promptly to the ground, leaving the assembled gathering to stare blankly at the bare, stark pole! Like lightning, a lithe young Monpa gathered up the bundle, streaked up the pole, and after securely attaching bundle to cord, slid down to earth again with a thud. With nervous apprehension, I gently tugged again at the cord — and to my unbounded relief, the flag obliged and fluttered proudly in the breeze. It had taken a Monpa of NEFA to help unfurl the national flag. And for all the comedy of the scene, his spontaneous act appeared to me as a symbol of the tribal people's contribution to the liberation of Tawang.

With our flag flying bravely once more over Tawang, I felt free to go my way. For ten years I had served NEFA as the Governor's Adviser, and it was time to make room for others. I took a fortnight's leave to attend the Navjote[1] ceremony of my sister's children at Jamshedpur in Bihar, with a hint that, should the situation remain stabilized in NEFA, I would apply for more. From Jamshedpur, I proceeded to Bombay, where I had a small business of my own to dispatch — to seek the hand of a little lady who, for all the pother of the Chinese aggression, had been much on my mind in recent months.

Avi and I had known each other for several years. It was the Chinese, however, that ignited me to marriage, for had it not been for the traumatic November 20th, I might never have found release from the ceaseless round that had become the pattern of my life. My little world of the Himalayan frontiers, I had almost come to believe, revolved only around myself. It was I, like the Almighty in heaven, who had started it all, it was I who was the Beginning and the End. I saw, on November 20th, that while I might cease to be, my world of the Himalayan frontiers would go on as it had for aeons past. I had grown wise at last in

[1] Initiation into the Zoroastrian faith.

understanding that it is God, not man, who is indispensable for the world's continuance. My life had been a breathless race, in which my work had absorbed me totally, to the exclusion of the more quiet, if less spectacular, joys of family life. Perhaps, deep within, there is an urge among all of us to revert to type, to conform. Whatever the hidden processes, I felt, as I had never felt before, that however much my work might mean to me, there should also be a place in my life for wife and home. And if I was to marry at all, Avi was the only girl in the world.

Avi had been teaching in a nursery school in Bombay for nearly fourteen years before we were married, and was as much a devotee of the city as I was of the hills and forests. But unlike so many of the city girls I had known, her sensibilities were not blunted and she had a deep feeling for nature and beauty. We were married on March 14th, just a week before the marriage of the Prince of Sikkim with his charming American bride. More than preoccupied with his own wedding arrangements, he wired that he was sending his Private Secretary, Yap Tseten Tashi, to Bombay to attend our marriage and carry his good wishes — a graceful gesture, but one that made our marriage-night comically, almost pathetically, memorable. Yap Tseten missed the marriage celebrations, as his plane had been delayed *en route*, but his instructions had been that, come what may, he must call on bride and bridegroom *positively* on the marriage day. It was after we had changed and were getting into bed at one in the morning, fatigued by the long-drawn ritual of the celebrations, that my bedside telephone rang in the hotel we had chosen by the sea-side at Juhu to be away from the dinning crowd. 'Ah, Dewanla? Kusu Sangpo?' It was the dear familiar voice of Tseten, breaking out in dear familiar Sikkimese 'Ah, is that our respected Dewan speaking? I trust the Honourable Body is well?' The Honourable Body was, as a matter of fact, in a state of collapse, and after replying how delighted

I was to hear his voice, I gently hinted that it would be a pleasure indeed to meet him next morning. 'Oh no, Dewanla, I must see you *at once*. The Prince's orders to me were that I must present a silk scarf to you both on your wedding day. I am already late and he would *never* forgive me if I delayed still further. I won't be a minute. See your Honourable Body soon.' And before I could remonstrate, he had put the receiver down. As Juhu is some ten miles distance from Bombay, Tseten's 'one minute' was something of an understatement, and it was two in the morning before he appeared, magnificent in his ceremonial robes, and, with a grand, sweeping gesture, presented the silken scarves and gifts the Prince had sent for us. 'And now, Dewanla, that I have performed my duty, I know you will be wanting to have news of all your many friends in Sikkim. Now let me see, where shall I start?' And he settled himself in the most comfortable chair in the room.

As all was quiet on the NEFA front, we decided to spend a few days with my daughter Tusna in Ootacamund and then join in the aftermath of the Sikkim wedding before returning to Assam.

Our return set off a chain of celebrations to welcome Avi to her newly adopted homeland. The induction of anyone of the fair sex is always something of an event in a small social circle, but I think the wily Vishnu Sahay aptly summarized the general consensus when I asked him, flippantly, whether, in his view, I had chosen wisely. '*You* have certainly chosen wisely, Nari, — but I can't for the life of me make out what it was that *she* could have seen in you!' Which only goes to show that even Governors can be short of sight!

I have mentioned already that my tenure as Adviser was over and that the time had come for moving on. We had scarcely unpacked our bags when I was informed that my next posting was to be with the Government of India at Delhi and that I must soon prepare to leave. I cannot say

I was overjoyed, as I had come to love the hills and their people too dearly to be seduced by the allurements of power and opportunity that a posting in the capital offered. It was just at this time that we were surprised one afternoon to find at our door-step an officer from Bhutan with a heavily-sealed letter. It was from my friend, Jigmie Dorji, Prime Minister of Bhutan, and read —

Dechencholing,
Thimphu, Bhutan.
30th March, 1963.

Dear Uncle,

I hope you and Avi had a wonderful honeymoon.

You may have heard by now that I was unable to attend the Sikkim wedding, as my boss[1] had a severe heart attack and is still not out of danger. Doctors have said that he will not be able to do any work for the next six months to a year. Boss has ordered me to take over the administration and as you know how I hate work and responsibilities, I am now saddled with this job. We are all going through rather anxious times praying that God will make our H.H. well again in time.

How about coming up here and helping me out. Do you think Mummy and Avi can take it? It may be a little difficult for them as life here is still pretty raw. I know you had made me an offer but my conscience will prick me about the hardships and discomfort Mummy and Avi might have to face. As you know, where you are concerned, I have no conscience.

His Highness had been improving daily until today, but today he is feeling a little breathless as he has a cough which is causing anxiety to Dr Craig and to us.

Lots of love to you and Avi.

Yours sincerely,
Jigs.

There followed a further letter from Jigmie that he had taken the liberty of broaching the matter with India's Ministry of External Affairs, who had confirmed that they would release me for service in Bhutan, provided I was prepared to accept. It did not take me long to make up

[1] His Majesty the King of Bhutan, whom Jigmie always referred to, affectionately, as 'boss'.

my mind. I wired acceptance, and we proceeded to repack our bags.

In a farewell broadcast on the eve of my handing over charge, I recalled our early, pioneering days in NEFA and the spirit that had moved us through the years. It seems to my mind a fitting summing-up:

As I passed, during my farewell visit to NEFA, the numerous little townships that had sprung up since Independence, I could not but think back to the NEFA which I first came to know 15 years ago, when our Divisional Headquarters were at Charduar, North Lakhimpur, Pasighat, Sadiya and Margherita, all way back in the plains. It was a time when air-transport was unheard of, as were electricity, telephone and tape, touring was entirely on foot and every ounce of food and supplies had to be carried into the hills by human porterage. Our administrative set-up consisted, then, of a small handful of schools and dispensaries, a few outposts of Assam Rifles. There are not many officers left who will remember those early pioneering days, and you will, I am sure, forgive me when I tell you of the pride I felt, during my recent visit, to see the numerous hospitals, schools, air-strips and roads that have since come up to transform the life of NEFA and her people. It is not my intention to parade before you today statistics of achievement during my tenures as Adviser. For the pride I feel is not in the number of schools, hospitals and roads that we have constructed, it is in the remarkable spirit in which all this work has been carried out. The basic problem of administration in NEFA has been the problem of change. When we decided, in 1950, to shift our Divisional Headquarters into the interior of NEFA, to build roads, and to embark on our first Five-Year Plan, it was the symbol of a new conception in the administration of the hill areas, the recognition of the necessity for change. Change, we realized, was inevitable, and indeed necessary, with the introduction of new ideas on medicine, agriculture and education, and there was not a single facet of the life of the people that would not be touched in some degree by the impact of our work. Our greatest and most difficult problem was to bring about these changes in a manner that would not be destructive to all that was best in the life of the community, that would not create tensions and frustrations, but would on the contrary be welcomed as giving new life to the people and opening up horizons of a wider and richer world.

It was our good fortune, when we embarked upon our work, to have as a guide the experience of other regions where similar problems of change had been tackled and we could avoid therefore many of the usual pitfalls. We know of tribal communities elsewhere that have rejected hospitals and schools, roads and bridges, that have been positively hostile to any suggestion of change. The measure of our success in NEFA can best be judged by the eagerness with which our development programme is everywhere welcomed, even in the remotest

villages. Tribal people, village people as a whole, are generally conservative and suspicious of change. How is it, then, that this revolution has of a sudden come about in the minds of the people, that within the space of only 15 years, a mere flash in time, they have become so awakened to participate in the greater life of the country, of which they knew so little but a few years ago? The foremost reason is, I believe, that we have not forced our wares, we have not imposed ourselves as superior beings, we have tried to work amongst the people as friends and, what is no less important, as equal partners. We have respected their institutions, their values, their feeling for their own language and way of life, we have held their hand during the critical period of their coming into closer contact with the wider and often harsher world without, and we have tried, conscientiously, to help them in their adjustment to new and unfamiliar ideas. That they stood by the country so bravely during the Chinese invasion has been their unspoken acknowledgement of our work amongst them since Independence. It is the finest, truest and most heartfelt memorial of our achievement.

Epilogue

It was shortly after the tragic assassination of the dearly respected Naga leader, Dr Imkongliba Ao. The times were troubled and I was touring the Naga hills. Military encampments, armed convoys, barbed wire — I thought, nostalgically, of my first visit to Mokokchung, over ten years back, when, though there were stirrings of unrest, the pervading note was of friendliness, peace and good cheer. I was glad to be done with the noise and dust of the convoy and break journey for a while in the house of our District Officer. Hmingliana was a tall, chubby Mizo, and it was not long before his equally chubby helpmeet had spread out for us a sumptuous high tea. We were lustily doing it justice, when I happened to notice, neatly embroidered and framed over the mantlepiece, St Francis's beautiful prayer:

'Lord make me an instrument of Thy Peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love'.

Two years later, at the height of the Chinese aggression, I visited Hmingliana again, but this time at Along in NEFA, where he was posted as our Political Officer. There was no high tea, no sumptuous feasting, everywhere there was only confusion and disorder, but the lovely prayer was in its place over the hearth, with its message of strength, hope and love.

And it has been pursuing me ever since.

Appendix—NEFA Diary

(Vide Chapter 16, page 277)

13th April

5.00 a.m. — Left Shillong by car accompanied by Brigadier Sen, Legal Adviser, and Mr Raisinghani, Director of Agriculture, for Borjhar and proceeded by Indian Airlines Corporation flight to Tezpur. Received at Tezpur airport by Mr Johorey, Political Officer, Brigadier Mani, Chief Engineer, Border Roads, Col. Karandhikar, Deputy Inspector General, Assam Rifles and Major Gautam, Officiating Commandant, 5th Battalion Assam Rifles. Proceeded to Foothills by jeep.

1.15 p.m. — Lunch at Foothills in the office of the Base Superintendent. After lunch, inspected the nucleus workshop being established for repair of Government vehicles. Equipment is already beginning to arrive, but no buildings have yet been constructed. Construction of buildings for the workshop should be expedited, as there is otherwise risk of theft or damage.

As it has now been finally decided to have the HQ of the Base Superintendent at Foothills and not at Khelong, as was originally proposed, the necessary office buildings, quarters etc. should be constructed quickly according to the plan which, I understand, has already been prepared by our architect. Special care should be taken to site the buildings on high land, well away from the river, so that there should be no danger from flood or erosion.

2.30 p.m. — Left Foothills for Khelong, where we arrived at 3.30 p.m.

Visited the coffee and cardamom plantation at Khelong. Coffee appears to be doing fairly well, but we shall know the results finally only after a year, when the crop is harvested. My impression is that cardamom has not been successful, and I am doubtful whether the soil conditions here are favourable for its growth. The soil seemed to be extremely hard and dry, whereas cardamom generally grows in damp, soggy soil. The bushes did not appear to be healthy. I should like our Director of Forests to discuss this whole question of growing cardamom in NEFA with me on my return from tour.

I have constantly stressed that our officers should analyse what particular crop is best suited to the climatic, soil and other conditions of each area and that they should concentrate on growing such crops

instead of dissipating their resources haphazardly in too many directions. We have had over ten years of experimenting in NEFA and we should know by now which of our experiments have been fruitful. From my discussion with the local officers at Khelong, I did not get the impression that any serious attempt has yet been made to assess the results of our experiments. I have advised that this should be done as quickly as possible and that we should be informed, very broadly, on what we should concentrate in the three main sectors of this Division, i.e.,

(*i*) Tawang area
(*ii*) Eastern Kameng
(*iii*) Dirang, Bomdi La and Kalaktong area (west Kameng)

The Divisional Forest Officer informs me that spruce grows fairly abundantly in the Tawang area, but the difficulty will be to transport it down to the rail-head. It may be possible, however, to set up a small plywood plant in Tawang. It would be more economic to transport finished products than to transport whole trees or sawn timber. The Director of Forests will kindly discuss on my return.

I had noted, during my tour in Tirap, that we should avoid putting up large notice-boards all over the place proclaiming the opening of roads etc. by high dignitaries. There is one such sign-board at Khelong which obstructs a very lovely view. I have suggested that it may either be beautified by growing some creepers around it, or else the board may be taken down and substituted by a small, less obtrusive, stone tablet. I find the military are also putting up notice-boards in increasing numbers to mark the location of their units. It would be helpful if the number of such boards could be reduced to the minimum necessary, as the general scene of these lovely hills is becoming terribly marred.

14th April

6.00 a.m. — Left Khelong for Dirang, halting at Chakoo and Bomdi La for breakfast and lunch.

I was glad to find that the Government rest-house has been completed at Bomdi La since my last visit. It has been attractively furnished and will be a useful amenity for touring officers. There were no pictures on the walls, but I have no doubt this will soon be remedied. Mrs Johorey, I understand, proposes to paint the panels of the screen dividing the dining and the drawing-room with pictures depicting the tribal people of Kameng Division. This should be attractive, and

I shall be looking forward to seeing the results during my next tour. I have suggested to the Political Officer that our Tibetan artist, Sonam Pintso, might also be asked to make his contribution on some of the higher panels of the drawing-room walls.

We were given a reception at Bomdi La at the Kakaling (decorative gate-way), which has been freshly painted since my last visit. Bomdi La presented a gay and cheerful appearance, and I was glad to find a real spirit of *camaraderie* amongst our officers, most of whom turned out dressed in the Monpa coat, which has become virtually the official uniform of this Division.

6.00 p.m. — Arrived at Dirang and proceeded, after the usual reception in the village, to the administrative area, where I was asked to open a bridge constructed under our Community Development programme through the cooperation of the village people. This new bridge has been constructed for carrying jeep traffic, and my impression is that it will be mainly for the convenience of our own administrative staff. There is a perfectly good bridge built by the villagers only a few yards away which, I think, would serve their usual requirements. We should be very careful that we do not take free labour from villagers for projects that are primarily intended for our own administrative convenience. This will give a wrong impression of the intentions of the administration. If the villagers are to give their labour free, it must be in connection with projects that they feel are *entirely for their own benefit*. There are complaints that villagers are being diverted from their cultivation under pressure of our officers, and this is causing resentment in many places. I found distinct signs of this during my tour in Tirap and this was the one matter that was raised repeatedly by the villagers with whom I had discussions in the Dirang area.

7.30 p.m. — I was asked to open a Community Hall, also constructed under the Community Development programme with the cooperation of the village people. After the formal welcome by village representatives, I asked them to place before me their difficulties. At first, they were reluctant, as they are polite and modest people and have not yet become quite adjusted to the idea that the Government is here to help the people and not to exploit them as used to be the case in the bad old days, when they were harassed by Tibetans from across the frontier. They eventually opened up and represented the following difficulties:

(1) They appealed that they should be exempted from being asked to work any further on road construction. They fully realized the benefits of having a good road passing through their area, but they complained that, if they were to work on the roads, it would be

impossible for them to attend to their own fields and that there would be serious economic repercussions if their cultivation continued to be neglected. Whilst they wished to give all cooperation to Government, they found it no longer possible to remain away from their villages and neglect their cultivation.

I informed them that there could be no question of putting pressure on them to provide labour against their wishes and it was never our intention that they should neglect their cultivation. We were grateful for their cooperation in helping to expedite road construction, and would make it clear to our officers that no pressure should be applied that might result in detriment to the interests of the tribal people.

(2) They represented their difficulties in obtaining salt. Salt is one of the most important requirements for the tribal people and I was very surprised indeed to learn that there have been practically no stocks of salt in Dirang during the last few months. Although the road between Bomdi La and Dirang has been opened, there is still restriction on the plying of vehicles, with the result that full use of the new road cannot be availed of. It creates a poor impression of the administration if we cannot make available to the people even their most essential requirement of salt. The villagers reminded me that, after my visit to Bomdi La in 1959, they had represented this same difficulty and were grateful for the supplies of salt that were air-dropped immediately after my tour. I have similarly ordered three sorties of salt to be air-dropped in Dirang during my present visit. But I am surprised that such a routine matter should not have been attended to by our local officers and that it should require a visit from Shillong to ensure regular supply of such a simple item. Our resources for air-dropping are now easier than during previous years, and if there is any difficulty in sending essential supplies by the land route, it should be possible to arrange air-drop without much difficulty.

(3) The villagers complained of the poor condition of the hospital at Dirang.

I visited the hospital next morning and was shocked to find it in such a dilapidated condition. The same applied to the quarters for the hospital staff. One quarter had practically fallen to the ground, and I was surprised that anyone could still be occupying it. A new hospital has been sanctioned, but there are difficulties regarding rates, labour, carriage of materials etc. and it is unlikely that the project will be completed within the next two years. I found, on enquiry, that the Engineering Department have been unable to construct hardly any buildings at Dirang during the last four or five years. The result is that

our settlement presents a miserable appearance and it is to the credit of our staff that, in spite of the very little that we have been able to do for them, their morale still remains high. I have authorized the Executive Engineer to construct some temporary accommodation immediately to meet the emergent requirements of our staff. The particulars are as follows:—

(*i*) Hospital block — Rs. 7,000
(*ii*) Four units for lower-paid hospital staff — Rs. 4,000
(*iii*) Medical Officer's quarter — Rs. 3,000
(*iv*) Pharmacist's quarter — Rs. 2,000

The amounts shown are only approximate and exclusive of departmental charges. The Executive Engineer will prepare estimates and obtain formal sanction, but the work should be taken up immediately.

(4) It was represented that, though we have assisted the Tawang monastery with corrugated-galvanized-iron sheets, we have not yet given any help for the monastery at Dirang. The Political Officer is prepared to assist and the Base Superintendent will work out the requirements in consultation with the Section Officer. The villagers will contribute half the cost themselves, half being borne by the Government.

(5) Whilst there are over 50 students in the school at Dirang, there is only one Tibetan teacher. I visited the school on the following day, when I found that there are eight classes, but that Tibetan is taught in only six of these classes, as it would not be possible for a single teacher to take one period a day for all the eight classes. This is a matter that should be discussed by the Political Officer with his Inspector of Schools and if the PO is satisfied that there is need for an additional teacher, the matter may be referred to the Director of Education for necessary action.

A brief cultural show was arranged after the meeting.

15*th April*

8.15 a.m. — Visited the hospital, regarding the buildings of which I have already noted above. I find there are no nurses, *dais*[1] or female attendants. The Doctor informed me that tribal girls have not been coming forward for training. There are no facilities in the Division for giving elementary training in nursing. The Department arranges training at Pasighat in the Siang Frontier Division, but this is for girls with a minimum educational qualification, who would not be

[1] Midwives (Hindi).

available in this Division. Tribal girls would also be reluctant to go out for training away from their own Divisions to Pasighat, which for them would appear to be a very distant and strange place. We might, therefore, consider arranging a simple course in nursing and elementary public health at each of our Divisional HQs. We can start by training six to ten girls from different parts of the Division for a period of three to four months, after which they would return to their villages, which would have the benefit of their training and knowledge. Or they may be employed as female attendants at the Government dispensary nearest their village. They would have to be given a small stipend to maintain themselves during the period of their training. I should be grateful if the Commissioner/Director of Health Services would kindly examine the suggestion. We should progressively take more vigorous steps to train up our tribal people so that they may themselves man the institutions we are establishing in their areas.

We visited the dzong and the monastery, both of which appeared to be rather neglected. Our officers do not appear to be taking a very active interest in these institutions. They could not tell me much about their history and I was surprised that the Base Superintendent, himself a Buddhist, who informs me that he has visited the monastery at least a dozen times, could not identify the main deities. I have noted separately that our officers should cultivate an interest in research. I was disappointed to find little evidence of any feeling for research during my visit to Dirang, one of the places in the Agency which offers an abundance of opportunities for study of history, custom and cultural contacts.

I was very impressed by Shri Rahman, the Headmaster of the Dirang School. Both he and his wife have identified themselves with the people, have produced excellent results and are obviously happy in their work. I saw in the school inspection book that the Director of Education had suggested, some years ago, moving the school to the administrative area, where there are many more villages, but no action has been taken. This is another instance of decisions being taken without any follow-up. The Political Officer will please examine this matter further in consultation with his Inspector of Schools and take necessary action quickly. I asked whether the school-children were taught any songs, and was informed that, every morning, they chant a prayer. The teacher asked them to chant this prayer, which they did very well indeed, but standing upright on their feet. Buddhist prayers are generally chanted in the sitting posture, and I think this might be adopted when prayers are chanted by our school-children.

11.00 a.m. — Left Dirang for Senge, where we arrived at 4 p.m. The road, in parts, is positively dangerous, but it is nevertheless remarkable that the Army Engineers have been able to progress so far in so short a time. We had tea at one of their camps about three miles before reaching Senge and I was impressed by the spirit of cheerfulness which I found everywhere.

The hut for travellers at Senge is a miserable affair, particularly after one has seen the rest-house that has just been completed at Bomdi La. In many ways, it is as important that our rest-houses in the interior should be comfortable as our rest-houses in Divisional headquarters. At Divisional Headquarters, officers can enjoy the hospitality of their colleagues, whereas in an isolated place like Senge, an officer has nowhere to go but to the travellers' hut. All he finds is four bare walls and a cot. Even a small bookshelf with a dozen books or magazines would provide something of interest and excitement after a long and weary journey. One or two pictures or photographs on the ugly, stained walls would also enliven the traveller. The contrast between what has been done to beautify the Bomdi La rest-house and what has *not* been done at Senge is beyond imagination. I hope the Political Officer and Executive Engineer will set this right quickly.

Nobody seemed to be able to tell me definitely the derivation of the name Senge. The Base Superintendent thought it was derived from 'Singh' — lion —, but there are others who think it may be derived from 'Sang'—purity. I should be grateful if the Political Officer would please have the matter inquired into and let me know. If the derivation is from Sang, we should in future spell the name correctly as Sange and not Senge.

16th April

6.00 a.m. — Left Senge for Jang. As the road was not fit for jeep traffic, we covered the journey partly by foot and partly by pony. The snow was still thick over the Se La and there was a cold wind blowing as we neared the top. We lunched at Nuranang and reached Jang at about 6 p.m.

The clothing that is issued to muleteers and porters who have to travel at such high altitudes is not at all adequate. Most of our party were so cold that we were wearing three or four layers of clothes — thick underwear, sweaters, coats and overcoats. My own muleteer had not been issued with even a sweater. I understand that the muleteers posted at Senge are given some extra clothing, whereas those posted at Dirang are given no extra issue, as the elevation of Dirang

is only about 6,000 feet. The muleteers and porters from Dirang, however, have to cross the Se La pass, over 13,000 feet high, so that if they are not given warm clothing as part of their normal issue, they should at least be provided with sweaters and extra clothing for those days that they are travelling at high altitudes. Our journey was carried out during April, when the weather was comparatively warm. It must be a terrible trial for our lower staff when they have to cross the pass during the winter months. It is essential that we authorize extra issue of warm clothing, boots, glare-glasses and hats for muleteers and porters who are required to cross the Se La pass.

We stayed the night at the camp of the Army Engineers at Jang. One could not help noticing the difference in the buildings constructed by the Army Engineers at Jang and our own shabby hutment at Senge. Theirs was simple, but comfortable. There were curtains for the windows and all the necessary furniture required for a brief stay. There is no reason why our civil Public Works Department should not construct equally good houses for our touring officers in the interior.

I met our young Army Engineers based at Jang and it was refreshing to see their enthusiasm. It is necessary that they should know something of the culture and history of the areas in which they are working and I promised to send them a few books from our Research Department on my return. We should send such books to all the main Army and Army Engineer camps, as this will help our officers to understand our policy and approach to tribal people and tribal problems.

17th April

7.00 a.m. — Left Jang for Tawang. Visited the Community Hall in Jang village and had discussions with the Chorgens (village headmen) and public regarding their difficulties.

My impression is that the Tawang area is well suited for vegetable cultivation. As there is now such a large concentration of Army and Assam Rifles in this region, there is likely to be a heavy demand for fresh vegetables, and the local people will be greatly benefited if they can be encouraged and helped in providing supplies. This will also be a considerable saving on our airlift and road-transport arrangements, apart from being more economical. I have suggested to the Director of Agriculture and Political Officer that we should institute a vigorous ' Grow More Vegetables ' drive in the Tawang area. The pace of other developmental activity may even be temporarily slackened so that our staff, both developmental and administrative, may concentrate during the next two months on putting in as much vegetable seed as possible. There may not be much in the way of results during

the present season, but if the villagers once find that there is a good market for their vegetable produce, they will themselves take the initiative in putting more of their land under vegetable cultivation. This was certainly my experience during the war in Sylhet District,[1] where there was an almost unlimited demand for fresh vegetables from the Americans. Every available square-yard of land was put under cultivation by the villagers, who derived enormous profits. I see no reason why we should not be able to help our Monpas similarly in the Tawang area. I should be grateful if the Director of Agriculture would please let me know after one month how much progress he has been able to achieve — e.g. amount of seed distributed, number of recipients, approximate acreage expected to be put under cultivation, estimated yield and approximate value of yield.

We were given a stately and colourful welcome near Lohu village by Gompatse Rimpoche. He is a reincarnate lama of great dignity, who has clearly reached a very elevated stage of spiritual development. He had taken great pains in connection with the arrangements for our welcome and informed me that he had performed special religious ceremonies so that we should have good weather for our journey.

Throughout the journey from Jang to Tawang, we were met by groups of Monpas engaged by the Political Officer to work on the road under construction by Army Engineers. They were smiling and cheerful, as Monpas always are, but everywhere I went, the villagers appealed that they might be relieved from having to work on the roads during the cultivation season.

1.30 p.m. — Reached Tawang, where we were given a wonderful and unforgettable welcome by the staff, lamas, Chorgens and local people. Mr Murty, Political Officer, Tawang, who had received us, according to custom, a few miles before we reached Tawang, had arranged a lunch-party on our arrival at Tawang, at which he had invited all the Chorgens present. This was a good idea, as it enabled me immediately on my arrival to make my contacts with the leading people.

After lunch, the Abbot of Tawang monastery, accompanied by the office-bearers of the monastery, paid their ceremonial call. I had an hour's private talk with the Abbot and was glad to know that the relations of the monastery and the administration are happy and there was no complaint against either our officers or our policies. The only request of the Abbot was for some help in rebuilding parts of the

[1] Vide p. 46.

monastery. I promised I would look into this after visiting the monastery and discussing the matter with the Political Officer. The Abbot appeared to me to be a good man, and I understand from the Political Officer that he is generally helpful and cooperative.

5.00 p.m. — Members of the staff, including Army and Assam Rifles Officers, were invited by the Political Officer to a party at his bungalow. I was glad to find the relations of our staff to be so happy at all levels and it was good to see Monpa, Hindi, Nepali and English songs and dances being performed with such vigour — and all simultaneously. There was general pandemonium of course, but everybody enjoyed themselves.

7.30 p.m. — Dinner at the Army mess.

Although outwardly the relations between the Civil, the Military and Army Engineers in Kameng seem undisturbed, there is underlying tension that might develop into serious proportions unless it is quickly allayed. There is some controversy in Tawang about allotment of land to the Army, whilst the trouble with the Army Engineers is regarding control of traffic along the roads under construction or being maintained by Army Engineers. I shall be dealing with both these matters separately as there are far-reaching implications and, unless a solution is found, there will be serious deterioration in public relations.

18th April

9.00 a.m. — Visited the Assam Rifles lines:

1. Some of the newly constructed barracks have not been mud-plastered, with the result that the wind penetrates through the walls and they become extremely cold. The original intention of the Engineering Department was that the Assam Rifles should themselves carry out this mud plastering. The Deputy Inspector General informed me, however, that the training programme is at present so heavy that it will not be possible to spare the men for this work. There is no alternative, therefore, but for our Engineering Department to carry it out and I have issued instructions to the Executive Engineer accordingly.

2. There were three suspects in the Assam Rifles lock-up, two of them having been under detention for five or six months. Their cases are still under inquiry. These inquiries should be completed without further delay, as it is very wrong to keep persons under detention for such long periods without being brought before the courts for trial.

The lock-up has no window. It is a small, dark room, practically airless. I have asked the Executive Engineer to provide an opening in the door through which a little light and air may penetrate. If this is

found to be insufficient, the Political Officer will see whether a window cannot also be constructed.

3. We held a meeting to discuss the question of the functioning of the Assam Rifles in the Tawang area. It seems that there is not sufficient liaison between the Political Officer, Army and Assam Rifles. The Political Officer is required to construct accommodation for Assam Rifles or Army outposts in the interior. Unless he is given sufficient advance information, it is not possible for him to arrange materials, labour etc. Where, again, Assam Rifles or Army patrols are to be carried out, the Political Officer should be given information in case he is required to provide porters. I have suggested that the Political Officer should hold a regular Coordination Meeting on the first of every month, to be attended by representatives of the Army, Assam Rifles and Army Engineers. There are a number of misunderstandings that are likely to crop up when so many different organizations have to work at high pressure in a single area, and such a meeting would help in the smoother solution of problems at the personal level.

10.00 a.m. — Visited the Civil hospital. There is authorization for only 12 beds, whilst the average of indoor patients is over double this number and patients are having to be refused admission. I understand there is provision in the Third Five-Year Plan for a permanent hospital with over 50 beds. The Executive Engineer and Political Officer inform me that, under the present conditions of shortage of labour, there is little hope of having the new hospital ready within the next three years. We must, therefore, carry on with the existing buildings, but should increase the authorized strength so that there may at least be adequate provision of rations and medical supplies for the extra patients.

The buildings are leaking badly and in very poor condition. I have asked the Executive Engineer to prepare an estimate for roofing the buildings with corrugated-iron sheets and applying a coat of paint. The estimate amounts to about Rs. 25,000, but this is an unavoidable necessity if the hospital is to continue to function. The Executive Engineer estimates that the buildings should give at least another six years' life after this improvement, and that, in any case, the cost of C.I. sheets, including their porterage, which forms a fair proportion of the estimate, will not be wasted as the sheets can later be used on other buildings. I have instructed him to proceed with the improvement, pending the formal sanction from the Superintending Engineer. The formal sanction raising the authorized strength from 12 to 20 beds should also quickly issue.

10.45 a.m. — Visited Veterinary dispensary.

1. There is no place for tying up the animals nor any shelter for giving treatment. I have asked the Director of Agriculture to issue necessary instructions to set this right.

2. I doubt whether the present practice of issuing eggs to villagers for hatching will prove satisfactory. On my enquiry, I was informed that only 6 eggs out of the 35 so far issued actually hatched. It would be better to hatch the chickens at our own centre and issue them to villagers as soon as they are strong enough to stand on their own feet.

11.00 a.m. — Visited the Sanatorium for leprosy patients.

Dr Banik is doing excellent work and regards his patients almost as his own family-members. I was glad to find a little Buddhist chapel and a recreation centre, and the patients are also taking interest in poultry and vegetable cultivation. I have suggested that elementary adult education may be introduced. We have not provided much in the way of amenities (musical instruments, games equipment etc.) for this very deserving institute and I have therefore asked Dr Banik to prepare a list of useful articles which may be supplied.

2. Some of the quarters of the patients are in a deplorable condition and a disgrace to any Government institution. I have authorized the Executive Engineer to have them replaced *immediately* and to start construction pending receipt of formal sanction of the estimates.

3. As in the case of the Civil hospital, the number of patients is far in excess of the authorized strength of 20. There is provision in the Third Five-Year Plan for a new hospital, but, as in the case of the Civil hospital, this will take some years to complete. The authorized strength of patients may meanwhile be increased from 20 to 40.

11.30 a.m. — Visited Craft Centre.

1. The Weaving Section is disappointing and I doubt whether it is at all economic to continue it. The Centre is purchasing wool at over Rs. 250 per maund, whereas the normal rate is not more than Rs. 80 per maund. Until wool can be made available at an economic rate, it is unlikely that the villagers will take much interest in weaving. I am informed that only a *very small* percentage of the girls passing out from the Weaving Section have, up to now, continued weaving in their own homes. One reason is that, on account of the non-availability of wool at a reasonable rate, the Department has not considered it worthwhile supplying looms. I shall be dealing with the question of wool separately. I would suggest we need not give high priority to this section of our Craft Centre. It would be better to divert our resources to sections that are likely to have a brighter future.

2. I was happy to see the wood-carving Section and to learn that there is such a good demand for our products. I am not

surprised, as these products are beautifully finished and moderately priced. I am doubtful, however, whether all factors have been fully taken into account while fixing the prices, as they seem to be on the low side. Here is a craft that has definite possibilities for development. Not only will it enable the villagers to earn cash, but, more important, it will keep alive their old and very rich traditional art. We should consider whether the number of stipendiaries in this section should not be *doubled or even trebled.* We should at the same time ensure that there is proper follow-up by the trainees on completion of their course and that ready marketing-facilities are provided. This is one of the most interesting and important of the cottage industries in NEFA and I should be glad to have a report by the end of June as to what is proposed for its further development.

3. I understand that the trainees of the Carpentry Section have no difficulty in finding employment as carpenters on completion of their course. With the large-scale construction that is likely to come up with the increase of Army and Assam Rifles troops in the Tawang area, there will be a much larger demand for carpenters in the years to come. As with the wood-carving section, I would suggest we increase the number of stipendiaries in the Carpentry Section so that the local people may be equipped to take up contracts in the Tawang area and we need not import large numbers of contractors from outside.

12.30 p.m. — Visited the Middle English school. I am surprised that anything can be taught in this institution. We have a small, dark and airless building, with such tenuous partitions between the classes that anything said at one end of the building by a teacher or pupil can be heard at the other extreme. There is not a single window in the whole building! The Political Officer has asked for some glass panes and has undertaken to have the windows made on a no-cost basis. This is such an unescapable necessity that it is extraordinary that action could not be taken out of the Political Officer's own local resources. I have authorized the Political Officer to purchase the glass panes and have the work completed forthwith. The Commissioner may like to examine whether our procedures should not be streamlined so as to permit of such essential works being authorized by our local officers without the need for reference to higher authorities.

It is necessary to provide a proper building for the school. But this is linked up with the larger question of accommodation in the whole of the Tawang area. There is shortage of local labour and it does not seem that we shall be able to make much progress in buildings under the present methods and techniques. The Commissioner and

Superintending Engineer are examining the possibilities of putting up pre-fabricated houses. Whilst these may serve well enough in the other Divisions of NEFA, particularly along the southern belt, we shall have to consider carefully whether they would be desirable in these northern areas, just near the frontier, where the local tradition has been to build houses of stone. A *via media* might be, perhaps, to have one or two solid stone buildings in Tawang in the traditional style — buildings that would compare favourably, for instance, with the Tawang monastery — the remaining buildings being of pre-fabricated structure. The Political Officer's Court and the school might be selected as the two buildings to be constructed of stone on the traditional pattern.

I was glad to find Shri Gupta, the Headmaster, taking such a keen interest in encouraging Monpa singing and dancing amongst the students. I hope this interest will be maintained. I have promised to make funds available for the purchase of traditional musical instruments and dance-costumes as soon as the requirements are intimated to me.

2.30 p.m. — We spent a happy afternoon seeing Tibetan and Monpa sports — archery and javelin-throwing on horse-back, wrestling etc. I felt only frustrated that the Political Officer would not permit me to have a gallop myself!

5.00 p.m. — Club reception — Visited the club, where I addressed the staff. I particularly commended the courage of the wives of our staff in the Tawang area, who are prepared to brave the crossing of the Se La and the other hardships of this remote region to look after their men-folk. There is an air of cheer and goodwill amongst our staff in Tawang and it was good to find personnel of all categories mixing together so spontaneously.

7.30 p.m. — Assam Rifles Variety Show — I am glad the 5th Battalion is maintaining the time-honoured Assam Rifles tradition of putting up Variety Shows in even our most isolated outposts and during critical times when the attention of everybody is concentrated on defence and security. These shows are helpful in relieving tensions and engendering an atmosphere of happiness and humour. I have noted elsewhere that, apart from the original five Battalions, the hard core of the Assam Rifles, the newer battalions have not yet come to regard these entertainments as part of their normal drill. I fully realize how preoccupied they are with active operations, particularly in Nagaland, but should like to stress again that this is a form of activity that will be greatly helpful in maintaining their morale and efficiency.

After the conclusion of the show, I briefly addressed the officers and jawans and impressed upon them that, although they were in such a distant area, the country was fully aware, and proud, of their devotion to duty in manning our difficult, often snow-bound, outposts on the border.

9.00 p.m. —Dinner with Major Gurung, OC Assam Rifles, Tawang Wing.

19th April

8.30 a.m. — Rode in procession to the Tawang monastery, Brigadier Wilshaw accompanying. The Abbot received us at the entrance of the monastery and personally showed us round, explaining the significance of the various paintings and deities. The visit was concluded with a meal in the library and the offering of presents to the Abbot and the monastery.

As during my visit to the monastery in Dirang, I was disappointed at the ignorance and seeming lack of interest of our officers in these monastic institutions. These institutions are, in a sense, the embodiment of the culture, art and history of the people and constitute an inherent part of the life of the community. The officer who was provided to me as an interpreter had so little knowledge of the Monpa language that he could not properly follow the explanations of the Abbot. There is a wealth of material in Tawang monastery for fruitful study. The Political Officer informs me that some sort of a history of the monastery has been prepared and sent to Shillong. I should like to see it on my return. I have suggested that one of our officers in Tawang should prepare a brief guide to the monastery, of not more than eight to ten pages, giving

(*a*) the historical background of the institution
(*b*) a description of the main deities, *thankas*[1] and mural paintings with approximate dates when these works were executed
(*c*) a description of the present functioning of the monastery, including the part played by it in the life of the community.

I informed the Abbot that we should be glad to provide facilities to the lamas of Tawang monastery for study in other Buddhist institutions in India, and also in the newly established Research Institute for Tibetology at Gangtok. I have also suggested to the Political Officer the desirability of arranging a teacher to give instruction to the younger lamas in some secular subjects, such as general knowledge, elementary

[1] Religious scrolls.

principles of hygiene and simple Hindi. With the opening of an all-weather vehicular road to Tawang, it will be neither possible nor desirable for the monastery to maintain an entirely isolated existence. We must help prepare it to co-exist with the nuclear age!

There are valuable books in the library, which are being damaged by insects and for lack of attention. I have instructed the Political Officer to write to Mr Sinha, Director of the Research Institute at Gangtok, for advice regarding the proper care and preservation of manuscripts.

The Abbot showed me some old structures that had been damaged by the 1950 earthquake and asked whether it would be possible to supply some corrugated-iron sheeting for their roofing. We have some provision for aid to Buddhist institutions and I have asked the Political Officer to send details of what is required. It is now nearly ten years since we assisted the monastery with sheeting for the main building, and it would be desirable to give some further help.

2.30 p.m. — Tribal Durbar, at which I was presented with an address of welcome. In my reply, I laid particular stress on the following points:

1. Government's concern is that all the people of our country, however remotely situated, should enjoy freedom and be treated equally, as enjoined by our Constitution. It was for this reason that we had taken steps to relieve the people of Tawang from oppressive and unequal taxation and from the injustices of forced labour.

2. Government desires that the culture and religion of the people should be respected.

3. Government would ensure that, although Tawang was in such a distant corner of the country, it should not be forgotten, neglected or deprived of the benefits that are being made available to our citizens in the rest of the country under our successive Five-Year Plans.

4. All necessary steps have been taken by Government to ensure that our frontiers should be safeguarded and secured against external threat.

After my address, we presented the people with the agricultural implements and seeds I had brought with me from Shillong.

4.00 p.m. — We rode round the township area and proceeded to the top of 'Gurung Hill', the area earmarked by the Army for building up the defences of Tawang. Studied at site the town plan prepared by our architect. It was clear that there would not be sufficient land for both the normal civil development of Tawang and for a regular military cantonment in the immediate vicinity of Tawang. As the civil

administration has already been established in the area for the last 10 years and has also close links with the monastery, it would not be possible to shift it at this stage to any other area. The better course would be to find some suitable land for the Army within a few miles radius of Tawang, but not in the Tawang township itself, as this would come in the way of the healthy development of both the civil and military elements.

5.30 p.m. — Met a delegation of Chorgens, who asked for

(*a*) CGI sheets for Tawang monastery
(*b*) Increased quota of salt for the Tawang area
(*c*) Supply of wool by Government, as the customary import of wool from Tibet has been stopped by the Chinese.

(*a*) has already been dealt with, and I have requested the Political Officer to intimate his requirements. As for (*b*), I understand that, before the Tawang area was brought under full administration, Tibetan officers used to supply as much as 4,000 maunds of salt per year from across the frontier, although at exorbitant rates. We are supplying only 2,000 maunds, but at heavily subsidized rate, i.e. about Rs. 10 per maund. The Chorgens assured me that they supported the Political Officer's proposal to double the sale price of salt in order to cover the extra cost of airlift involved in increasing the salt quota from 2,000 maunds per year to 3,000 maunds per year. Whilst it may be necessary eventually to raise the quota to 4,000 maunds, we might start by increasing it from 2,000 to 3,000 maunds, the extra cost involved on airlift being met by increasing the price to Rs. 25 per maund. Our Supply Section will please take *immediate* action in consultation with the Director of Supply and Transport. As no extra cost is involved, there should be no objection from the Finance branch. This is, in any case, only a short-term measure, as we expect road communications to Tawang to be completed very shortly, when salt can be sent by trucks at much reduced rates.

As for (*c*), I enquired of the Chorgens whether they could not rear more sheep and so produce wool locally instead of having to import it at heavy cost from places like Kalimpong. They represented that it was no longer possible to take their sheep during the summer months to the higher pasture-lands in Tibet and that their sheep would not survive in the comparatively lower region of Tawang during the warm weather. A solution might be to import a variety of sheep that would be adjusted to the climatic conditions of Tawang and I have spoken about this to the Director of Agriculture. We have recently started a small sheep-farm near Bomdi La, and we should now see whether

these imported sheep will be suited to conditions in Tawang. If so, we should supply rams to sheep-farmers in the Tawang area so that, within a few years, we may develop a breed of sheep that will be able to pasture in Tawang throughout the year. This is particularly important, as so much of the cottage industries of Tawang depend on the regular supply of wool. The Director of Agriculture will please let me know by the end of June his specific proposals for extending sheep-farming in the Tawang area in particular and in western Kameng generally.

8.00 p.m. — Farewell dinner at the Political Officer's bungalow, followed by some very attractive folk dances, including the Peacock dance and the Lion dance.

20th April

8.00 a.m. — Left Tawang for Nurunang. Reception at Trimo village was arranged at the road-side by Nyerperla, one of our most trusted tribal officers in the Tawang area, after which we bade a sad farewell and proceeded to Jang. I have noted separately that we must have a travellers' hut at Jang, which is an essential halting place on the road between Senge and Tawang.

2.30 p.m. — Left Jang to make the long gruelling ascent to Nurunang. We met the Corps Commander, General Umrao Singh and the GOC 4th Div, General Amrik Singh, at about 4.30 p.m. as they were proceeding to Jang with their rambling trail of mules. We passed through some glorious rhododendron country, but with darkness came rain as well, which made the remainder of our journey uncomfortable and not a little precarious. We reached Nurunang at 7.00 p.m. and it was good to get into warm, comfortable tents and sleep off the fatigue of the journey. The Base Superintendent, Brahm Prakash, and our Accountant, Pillai, are to be congratulated on the excellent arrangements for our camp at Nurunang. I slept better at Nurunang than anywhere throughout our tour.

21st April

6.30 a.m. — Left Nurunang for Bomdi La, crossing the Se La in fine weather at 9.00 a.m. We had a short break for tea at the Engineers' camp at Himmat Nagar and then proceeded to Senge for lunch. It was as we were hurrying down the other side of the Se La pass that Brigadier Sen had an unfortunate fall, fracturing his right arm. After lunch at Senge, we proceeded to Dirang and then on to Bomdi La, where we arrived at 8.00 p.m. The journey from Dirang to Bomdi La

was hazardous, as boulders kept falling from the hill-side around and in front of our vehicles. It was with some difficulty that the road could be cleared and we reached our destination. Electricity and our excellently equipped rest-house at Bomdi La were a change indeed from our camp of the previous night at Nurunang.

Near Nyekmadong, between Senge and Dirang, where there was the usual road-side reception, we met Dr Schmidt, a Swiss Entomologist, who invited us to visit his camp by the river-side some 100 yards below the road. It was an inspiration to see this lone scientist at work in a strange country, with only his Sherpas as company and living on rice and dal. There is a tendency nowadays for some of us to become too 'comfort-minded', and it takes a foreigner often to set us an example of Gandhian austerity!

At Santosh camp just south of the Se La, we met Lt. Rao of Tuskers[1], who had just broken a record by reaching Dirang from Tawang by foot in 14½ hours. Here again is an example for our officers to follow. We too often tend to regard the difficulties and dangers of our work as a nuisance to be avoided rather than a challenge and an opportunity to show our mettle. There is so much adventure in these hills and our officers should not let opportunity slip by.

22nd April

11.00 a.m. — Visited the Assam Rifles lines and saw the new barracks under construction. I have mentioned to the Executive Engineer that we might consider strengthening the foundations of our new buildings so that, in case of future congestion, it may be possible to add an extra storey to our buildings. As Bomdi La grows, there may well be shortage of land, as in most hill stations, and the only means of meeting the situation may be by having double-storeyed quarters. This is a problem that will affect all our Divisional headquarters and the Superintending Engineer will please examine whether, in the long view, it would not be wiser to plan for the future and incur the small extra expenditure that would be involved.

11.30 a.m. — Visited the hospital. I should like to discuss with the Director of Health Services on my return from tour the practicability of having a mobile X-ray unit in each of our Divisions. I understand that as many as 20 cases had to be sent down to Tezpur during 1960 from Bomdi La hospital for X-ray examination. Brigadier Sen's accident on the Se La high-lighted the risks of touring in these hill areas. It was found necessary to make special arrangements to have him

[1] Unit of the Border Roads Organization, a semi-military engineering force.

sent to the Military hospital at Tezpur for X-ray examination. This would not be possible in the case of all officers or tribal patients. X-ray equipment is an essential requirement for each of our Divisional hospitals.

I understand that, although there is provision for an ambulance, this has not yet been supplied by our Medical Department. The Director of Health Services will please confirm that he has taken necessary action.

12.00 a.m. — Visited the Craft Centre. I am not satisfied that the economics of some sections of this Centre have been carefully examined. The price of the carpets, for instance, appeared to me to be much too low and I doubt whether all the charges have been taken into account. I also find that there is inordinate delay in providing equipment to trainees who have finished their courses. Last year's trainees have still not been supplied with looms. I am surprised that the arrangements are so haphazard. I should have thought that, at the conclusion of each course, there would be some sort of a function at which the trainees would be presented with certificates by the Political Officer as also with a set of equipment to enable them to practise the craft they have learnt after leaving the Centre. This is a matter that keeps cropping up and very serious notice should be taken if there is any further slackness in implementing Government's policy. It has time and again been pointed out that the 'follow up' of the trainees is no less important than the training period itself, but I find very little evidence that our officers take much interest to ensure that the trainees are helped to practise the craft they have learnt on leaving the Centre. We must also be much more firm in the matter of discontinuing crafts that are completely uneconomic, as their continuance may be even harmful to the trainees who are taken away from their village homes to learn something that is useless to them, and they find difficulty, subsequently, in returning to their villages and settling down to their former way of life. It was decided at the last Senior Officers' Conference that this whole question would be examined by a Committee. I should be glad to have the report of the Committee by August positively, as I feel sure that much of the expenditure incurred on these Craft Centres is not yielding useful return.

12.30 p.m. — Visited the site selected by the Committee set up for building a monastery at Bomdi La. They have planned a double-storeyed building costing about Rs. 40,000. The site selected is rather congested, and I have suggested that it might be utilized for a small single-storeyed shrine, and that a larger double-storeyed monastery could be thought of at a later stage, for which a better location should

be found, preferably on a higher area a little away from the main town, with sufficient space for lamas' quarters, dance-festivals etc. The Committee agreed that this would be the better course. They have already collected over Rs. 6,000 and have asked for Government aid. I have requested the Political Officer to suggest what amount may be made available.

1.00 p.m. — Visited the school. I find there is no clear-cut policy regarding the teaching of Tibetan. Whereas in Dirang school Tibetan is taught from Class A to Class 5, in Bomdi La school the teaching of Tibetan is started from Class 4. The Headmaster informs me that all students (including Mijis, Akas and Khowas) are taught Tibetan as a subject from Class 4 onwards, but the non-Monpa students of the upper classes whom I questioned had no knowledge of Tibetan. It is also not clear why non-Monpas should be taught Tibetan as a subject. All this illustrates the lack of a clear-cut and consistent educational policy. The Political Officer himself did not seem to know the intention of the Department regarding this very important matter. He will consult the Inspector of Schools and submit his recommendations to the Director of Education.

6.00 p.m. — Reception at Bomdi La Club, followed by dinner at the Political Officer's residence.

23rd April

8.30 a.m. — Visited the Bomdi La weekly bazaar. This has only recently been started by the Political Officer and a brisk trade has already begun to develop. Villagers from within about 8 or 9 miles radius of Bomdi La come in with their vegetables etc. which they barter amongst each other or else sell to our Bomdi La Government staff. Tibetans and Bhutanese have been accustomed to trade in Kameng since some time past and I was not therefore surprised to see so many of their road-side stalls. I *was* however surprised to find that a Bhutia family from Gayzing in *Sikkim* has recently set up a shop in Bomdi La. There are implications, which I shall be noting upon separately.

After visiting the bazaar, we took a walk round the Bomdi La township and visited the Political Officer's Court. Under the present arrangements, the Political Officer has to go down to the Post and Telegraph Office if he wishes to make a long-distance telephone call. I hope there will be no further delay in finalizing arrangements whereby he can put in trunk calls direct from his office or bungalow.

The garden in front of the PO's Office is coming up very nicely, but with the widening of the road, the little wayside shrine is almost

falling over the edge and might be shifted back by about 10 feet, if not to some other place altogether. I have also suggested that the very steep slope of the roof (which badly needs a fresh coat of paint. Might I suggest blue for a change?) should be reduced and that curtains of the beautiful, local Sherdukpen weave might be preferable to the gaudy mill-made curtains at present in use. I also do not like at all the idea of keeping the shrine locked up. The Political Officer might consider removing the doors so that people may have free access at all times.

With the rapid growth of Bomdi La, it is necessary to review the town-plan and provide for expansion towards the outskirts of the town area. There are already indications of congestion and this must at once be checked. Both the Assam Rifles Battalion headquarters and also our Army concentration should be sited *at least* four or five miles away from the town area. Our Architect should plan an early visit to Bomdi La and Tawang for necessary adjustment of the town-plans for these areas.

3.00 p.m. — Left Bomdi La for Khelong. A Nepali forest labourer died during the night after eating some poisonous vegetation. I have asked the Director of Agriculture to obtain particulars of this plant so that a warning may be issued to all Divisions.

24th April

9.00 a.m. — Left Khelong for Missamari. After discussions with Brigadier Mani, Chief Engineer, Border Roads, took off (11.00 a.m.) by Otter for Shillong. As it was not possible to land at Shillong on account of strong winds, landed at Borjhar and proceeded by road to Shillong, reaching destination at 7.00 p.m.

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