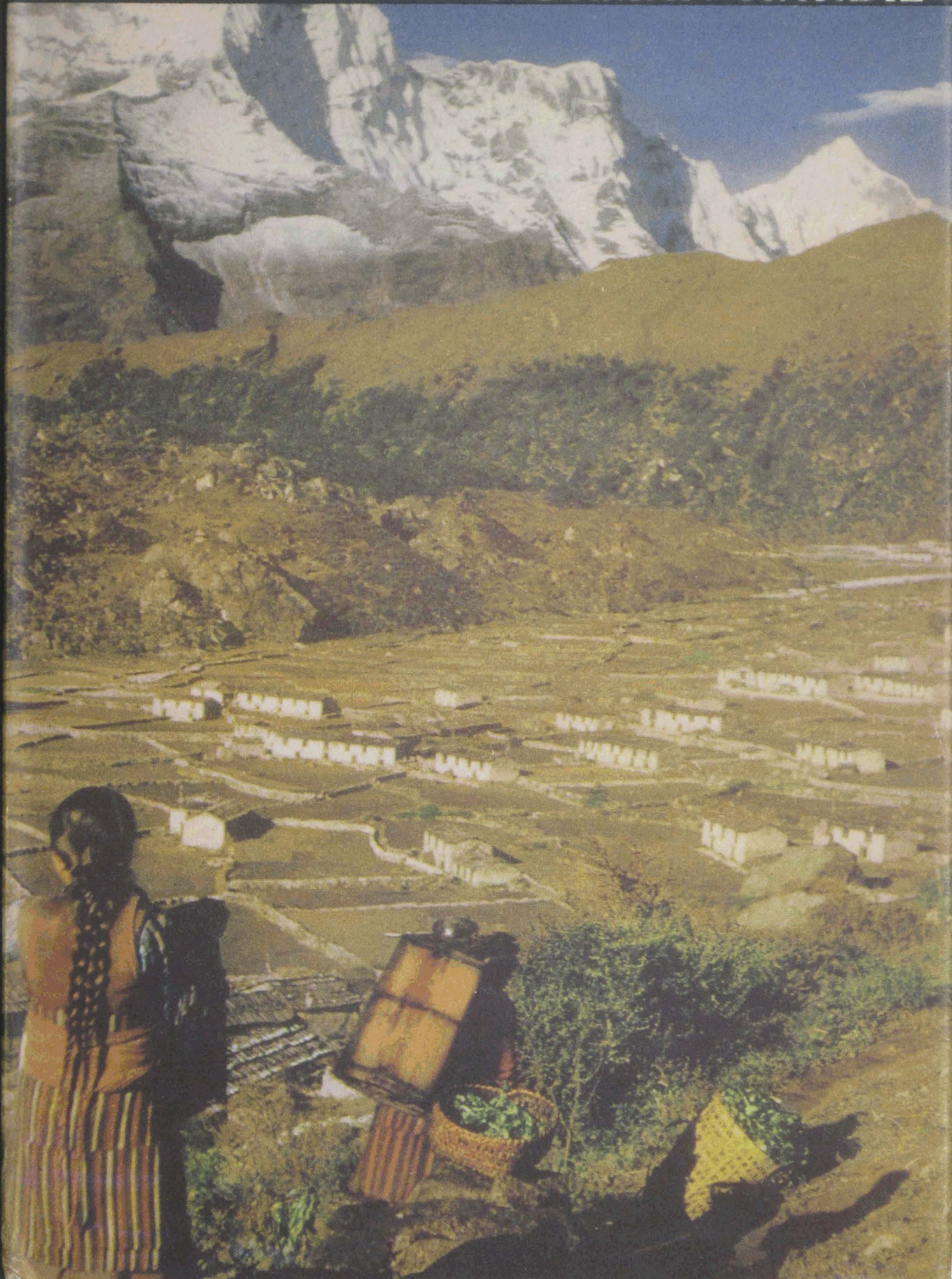
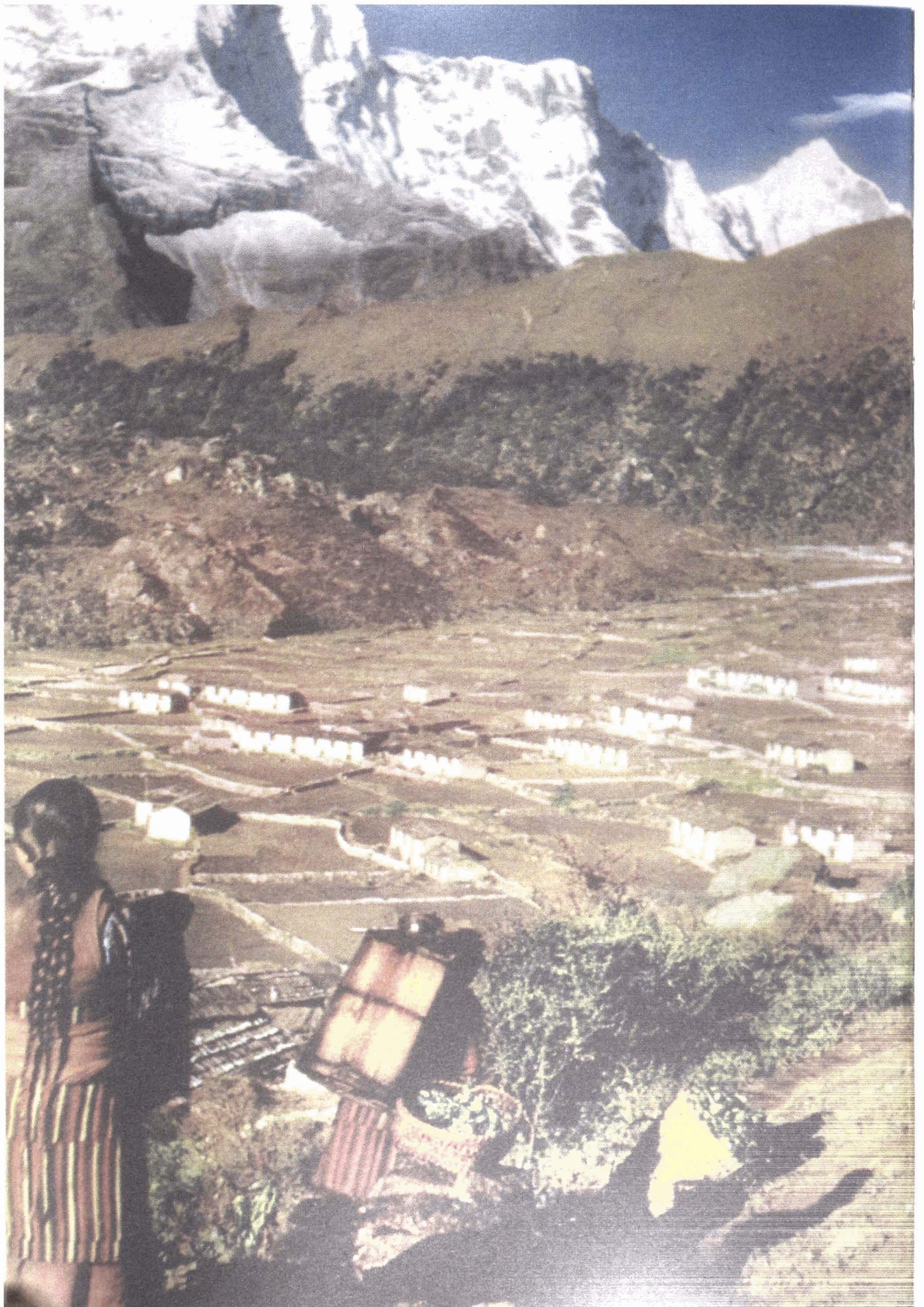


In Highest Nepal

NORMAN HARDIE





*IN HIGHEST
NEPAL*

Our Life Among the Sherpas



NORMAN HARDIE

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

Ruskin House

MUSEUM STREET LONDON

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PREFACE

On reading through the countless pages of worthy Himalayan literature published in recent years I accumulated a series of questions which remained unanswered. I was not concerned with the mountains climbed, the oxygen statistics, or the activities of the sahibs; for my curiosity focused on the Sherpa people who have contributed so much to the success of the greatest mountaineering expeditions. Exactly where do the Sherpas live? What is the explanation of their adaptability to climbing at very high altitudes? How can they build houses to withstand the severity of the Himalayan climate? What do they eat? Why do the photographs of Sherpa families invariably reveal solid dependability and abundant good humour?

For years I sought a way of taking up residence in a Sherpa village but no such village came my way. At last in 1955 I had my opportunity in the form of an invitation to join the British Kangchenjunga Expedition. By devious means I was able to arrange to stay in the Himalayas for the remainder of the year after the mountain was climbed and find the answers to many of my questions.

This book does not attempt to give an anthropologist's account of a complete race, but it is rather the description of the heterogeneous succession of Sherpas whom I had the good fortune to meet during almost a year's travelling in the remote mountain valleys of Nepal.

Although the party described in the second half of the book went under the name of 'Mount Chamlang Survey Expedition', and we received financial assistance for surveying purposes, the technicalities of that science, and the statistics of an anthropologist have been suppressed in this book. My theme is Sherpas, unsullied by science and as yet unspoiled by western civilisation.

A small expedition intentionally avoiding publicity and remaining in the field for a long time benefits greatly from many friends in India and Nepal. For handling mail, for hospitality and helpful advice I thank the staff of the British Embassy, Kathmandu, the New Zealand Trade Commissioner, Bombay, the Indian Army Check Post, Namche Bazar, Robert Hotz of Delhi, and the Doctors Strong at Raxaul.

To the Kangchenjunga Expedition as a whole I owe the fact that I was adequately equipped for my private venture, but to Charles Evans, the leader, I owe far more than that. His advice and example on his many journeys in

Nepal have been an inspiration to me. I am greatly indebted to many individuals and organisations in the United Kingdom for material assistance, especially to the Himalayan Foundation for their financial help.

To my wife Enid, Joe Macdonald and Urkien I owe my appreciation of their patient tolerance of a driving leader, and for their pleasant company at all times. In addition I owe my thanks to Enid for the use of her photographs and diary, and above all for remoulding my fragmentary notes into a readable book form.*

NORMAN HARDIE

* and for writing this preface.

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CHAPTER I

After Kangchenjunga

IT was the 26th May 1955. All over Britain men and women were making their way to the polling booths to record their votes in the General Election—the conscientious walked and the coaxed were driven. In a remote corner of Southern Asia two men stood at the summit of a great mountain and looked in silence at the world below them. The screaming winds held their peace, and in the tranquil sunshine the gleaming peak of Kangchenjunga was as sacred as Olympus itself—a true dwelling place of the gods.

I spoke—somewhat sheepishly—and the spell was broken, ‘We made it, Tony.’ Streater’s only reply was a flashing grin above the black rubber of his discarded oxygen mask. That day I told my companion, who was always ready to insist he was no mountaineer, that he had become the first man in the world to have climbed two peaks of over 25,000 feet.

The view far into Tibet to the north, with Everest and Makalu eighty miles to the west, fulfilled my earlier hopes, and gave further impetus to the plans of my next venture into the Sherpa country. Even as I felt an irrepressible sense of satisfaction, my eyes wandered inadvertently to the brown hills of Tibet, a reminder of political differences more insurmountable than geographical barriers. All the physical discomforts and mental irritations of the previous weeks were forgotten. We ate some food, changed oxygen bottles and took photographs, and I pointed out the peaks beside Chamlang where I would be conducting a private survey expedition later in the year. Fifty-five minutes passed all too rapidly, and we remembered Charles Evans our leader, who would be waiting anxiously at Camp V in his chosen reserve capacity.

We descended by our upward route, taking great care with the ice steps which had to be scraped clean of new wind-blown debris. At five o'clock we reached our top camp, VI, but as on the previous night, we had little sleep in that tiny haven, pitched on a ledge hacked from the steep ice of the Gangway.

We were greeted at Camp V by Charles Evans and Dawa Tensing, both looking grey and lean from their long sojourn at above 25,000 feet. Charles asked, 'Did you get to the top, you so-and-sos?'

'Who won the Election?' was the retaliation.

At Camp IV Urkien and Changjup, two of the very cream of Sherpas, came out to meet us, and seeing their broad grins we were reminded of their unstinted efforts in building up the vital supplies which had enabled us to make the final push. More than ever we felt part of a great team.

Urkien's initiation had been with Sir Edmund Hillary's New Zealand Alpine Club Expedition, attempting peaks in the Barun valley, and there he reached more summits than any other Sherpa. He was a brilliant success as a medical orderly, linguist and servant, and he showed signs of being a leader. Later he was with a small party which circled the Annapurna range. From this he returned with a glowing testimonial and some English. As he did not fully understand the meaning of his new knowledge, he asked me to translate into his own tongue, 'Oh my darling,' and 'Thank you lovely.' On Kangchenjunga his accomplishments in every aspect of Sherpa work were so outstanding that he was universally ranked second or third in a party whose success was probably due more than anything else to the high quality of its Sherpas. But even if Urkien were useless as a climber, he is worth attaching to a party for his cheerfulness and his musical appreciation and singing voice.

The senior Sherpa in a party has the rank of Sirdar, and in my private expedition Urkien would be in that position for the first time. The Kangchenjunga Sirdar was the highly respected Dawa Tensing—a tower of strength and understanding, and a very great leader. He is a Khumjung Sherpa, and nearly all of his team came from that village or its neighbour, Khundi. These villages are only

sixteen miles in a straight line from Mount Everest, and in them I wished to live later in the year.

Changjup has for many years been one of the most devoted of Evans's admirers. On another morning, when Charles had eaten almost no breakfast and the Sherpas had sore eyes from the smoke in their tents, we passed a miserable Changjup seated on the ice with his eyes buried in his sleeve. The glare of the ice was already adding to the pain in his eyes. Charles asked, 'Can I help you, Changjup?'

The reply was, 'Will you have a biscuit? You had no breakfast to-day.'

On the memorable carry up to Camp V Changjup had dropped half of his load down a crevasse. He unroped, told his Sherpa companions to go on, and cut his way down to the fallen box. A lonely figure on the ice, he plodded upwards behind the others with characteristic purposefulness. He is not a great climber or acclimatiser, but he is a model of faithfulness and determination.

The return to Base Camp seemed to drag on for weeks, although it took only two days. The climax had passed and the delays on the crumbling ice bridge above Camp I, trifling at any other time, were maddening on this last descent.

We all assembled at Base, and only then did I realise the strain that had been imposed on the whole party since we began work on the mountain. Charles suggested a descent to the first camp where grass could be found, and a rest there in more pleasant surroundings until all the haggard faces and lean thighs resumed their normal colour and proportions. We agreed, and in an atmosphere of complete relaxation, we drifted down to earth, aided by the arrival of mail and the more rapid contacts of a radio receiver.

The most common complaint which a Himalayan mountaineer has about a full scale expedition is that he cannot arrange to spend enough time in the field afterwards. Most parties go out with a mountain as their objective, and on it they must concentrate until their slender allocation of time or money comes to a premature end. Whether their summit has yielded to the violator, or hides its secrets for another year, the exhausted party returns to Base Camp and leaves the area when the regular bad weather intervals

of summer monsoon and dreary winter put an end to their expedition. It is generally too expensive for a large party to remain in the field for one of the four-month bad weather periods to await the next fine season, but remaining in the Himalayas during the monsoon would probably bring to a party some lesser mountaineering successes, and certainly provide ideal opportunities of studying people, plants, animals, birds and solving the endless mysteries of unexplored country.

At the end of the New Zealand expedition led by Hillary to the Barun in 1954, I had spent five weeks exploring in Sherpa country with Charles Evans. I was so impressed by my taste of village life, and so fascinated by the customs and beliefs of the local people, that I determined to return leading a private expedition with the dual purpose of surveying the intricate network of valleys in the vicinity, and making a study of the inhabitants.

The invitation to go on the Kangchenjunga Expedition gave me the opportunity, and my plans had soon crystallised. I decided to spend the monsoon period between the two expeditions with only Sherpas as my companions, thus providing myself with an opportunity of living as they do. I had arranged for two people to join me in September when we would begin the private expedition, during the brief period of fine weather before the winter snows made their appearance. These reinforcements would be my wife and our friend A. J. Macdonald. Together we had arranged a further series of exploratory journeys and talked about the possibility of living in Sherpa houses, making notes on their buildings and community life and animals, and perhaps even contributing to solving the identity of the elusive 'abominable snowman.' While making our long treks into uncharted country, accompanied by small mobile parties, there was always a chance of encountering the 'snowman'—or his lady. When our time ran out, we would return to civilisation through Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal.

To finance the venture was no easy matter. Press support is difficult to obtain unless one is attempting one of the ten highest peaks in the world, or searching for the 'snowman', known to the Sherpas as the yeti. Most of the ten highest peaks have now been

climbed, and it is doubtful if a newspaper would finance any second ascents. Besides, we did not want to become involved in the organisation and expenditure necessitated by attempting a major peak. If one publicly admitted having an interest in the yeti, it is certain that this part of one's objectives would be emphasised by the press, and a failure to bring home the poor beast's hide would mean the expedition had failed from the newspapers' point of view, regardless of other achievements. We had kept silent about our interest in the yeti.

In any case, newspaper support can have other undesirable features—the obligations to keep up a mail runner service and the need to have a story being written at regular intervals, regardless of the news value of current activities. In order that we might see deeper into the Sherpas' village, and take part in their festivals, it seemed that our party, including all climbers, coolies and union secretaries, should never total more than twelve. With few participants we would be able to sleep in one house or yak shelter, so that we could make friends with our hosts far sooner than a big party, which would be forced to pitch camp beyond the village limits. Without mail runners, a reporter and his coolies, we could keep our numbers to a minimum.

Our greatest financial assistance, nearly a third of our budget, was a generous grant from the Mount Everest Foundation. As a result of the Foundation's grant we soon became committed to sorting out and recording, with the assistance of a theodolite, an interesting set of valleys in the neighbourhood of the unclimbed and fearsome Mount Chamlang, which is 24,012 feet high and about fifteen miles south of Mount Everest. These valleys are difficult of access, and my experience with the New Zealand Expedition the previous year, had proved them to be wrongly shown on all existing maps. The extent of the inaccuracies in the Chamlang area were for us to ascertain. Access and transport would be difficult enough problems in themselves.

Charles had agreed to lend tents, ropes, instruments, and cooking utensils from Kangchenjunga supplies, so many of our supply problems were already solved.

In 1954 I had developed strong ideas about the advisability of

carrying food all the way to a Himalayan base camp. At existing coolie wages, where one must pay them from a rail head in India to a high base in Nepal, supply their food, and pay them half wages for their journey back, carrying nothing, I calculated that it would cost three shillings to have one pound of food carried to a depot in the vicinity of Chamlang. There would also be packing, shipping and rail expenses, as well as customs complications. Thus, when a benefactor donates food, it is frequently not worth accepting it because of the transport expense involved—so long as there is a likelihood of purchasing similar food from the villages of Nepal. If a European can eat local food, no coolie is required to carry imported food, and a second coolie is not then needed to carry the additional food of the first man, and his own. It is very easy to lose sight of the 'small mobile party', and to have coolie numbers reaching to astronomical figures.

Much local food is available, if one does not buy on too large a scale. In the Sherpa villages, usually at altitudes of above 10,000 feet, potatoes and tsampa (a flour) are normally available, while chang (beer) and arak (spirit) provide a constant source of good cheer and hospitality. At various times of the year it is easy to buy atta (another flour), turnips, onions, a type of spinach, butter, milk and occasionally yak meat. At lower altitudes are eggs, maize, rice, bananas and a large selection of vegetables. During the monsoon, in and above the higher forests, a number of wild edible plants are available. Young bamboo shoots, after treatment in a pressure cooker, are delicious. There are some very good ferns, mushrooms, varieties of turnips, and a plant which seems to be a cross between garlic and onion. This latter has the great advantage that if it has been eaten with one's breakfast, the mild eruptions it causes throughout the long day are a continual reminder that one has had something to eat.

I arranged to have no European food other than coffee for my journey after the Kangchenjunga Expedition, for I knew that wild vegetables would be available during the monsoon. When my wife and Macdonald came later, they would bring a few supplies, in case they found a diet of tsampa, bamboo and yak's milk difficult to digest.

With the Kangchenjunga party I sailed from England early in February 1955. I left behind me lists of food, equipment and objectives, knowing that most of the detailed organising for our small party had yet to be done. I had hopes of being away for ten months, and all too soon my programme was filled. In that time I would take part in a major mountaineering expedition, and then with a small party of my own choosing, complete all I had for a long time dreamed of doing—exploration, experimenting with food, and studying Sherpas and animals. Knowing the slow ways of the East, I was aware that even ten months could easily pass with little to show for them, if I did not keep myself and my Sherpas under continual pressure.

CHAPTER II

Private Expedition

MY private Expedition was about to begin. I planned to accompany the returning Kangchenjunga party as far as the Acclimatisation Base used on the way in, and then spend a month with three Sherpas crossing eastern Nepal, until I reached their home village of Khumjung. The adjoining provinces of Solu and Khumbu contain the main Sherpa population, and two of the best known villages in these districts are Namche Bazar and Khumjung. On reaching the latter village, I would base myself there for the various summer festivals, and carry out surveying, yeti-seeking and yak-following excursions. In August I would go out to the Indian frontier to meet my wife and Macdonald, who would accompany me back into Solu Khumbu to continue our research.

Owing to the anticipated difficulties on my route to Khumjung, I arranged that two boxes which I needed later should go out to Darjeeling and then come to me in Solu Khumbu along the normal trade route. In the boxes were spare clothing, surveying and recording instruments, books, stationery, and spare films.

At the rest camp, one day below Base, all my personal equipment had to be sorted out, and the Kangchenjunga radio, oxygen and surveying equipment had to be packed away. Some was bound for England, some for New Zealand, several boxes for Bombay, but the most complicated were the two boxes mentioned above.

I wished to take a direct route to Solu Khumbu, remaining close to the Tibetan border as far as possible, and my aim towards the end of the journey, was to solve the first problems south of Mount Chamlang, which is on the eastern boundary of Khumbu prov-

ince. I expected great difficulties with the tracks and rivers. So far as I know no one had done the complete crossing which I intended to attempt, and one can be sure that in Nepal during the monsoon, many bridges will have been washed away by floods. The main rivers of eastern Nepal flow from north to south, and my route from east to west would involve me in major river crossings every second or third day. Between each pair of rivers was a pass to cross—perhaps two or three—and at least one of these would be higher than 18,000 feet, although at times my route would be as low as 4,000 feet. Evans, after the 1952 Mount Cho Oyu Expedition, had been over a portion of the route, and Jackson after the 1954 Daily Mail Expedition had traversed another section. Both men gave invaluable advice regarding the tracks and people to be met on the way. The one thing certain about the part they omitted was that it will have its contours very close together when it is eventually plotted.

As the time for parting inevitably drew nearer I felt a strong reluctance to be the first to break away from the companions whose friendship had withstood the tests of Kangchenjunga. There are few whose society I would welcome after three months' association continued throughout twenty four hours of each day, yet their company had become a pleasant and habitual necessity. They were bound for England and I would sail for New Zealand in the autumn. When would I see them again?

We separated at Acclimatisation Base on June 6th. A light monsoon rain was falling and the bearded faces of my friends were soon enveloped in a thick mist. Urkien brightened our quartet with a song about Hillary and Tensing Norkay on Everest. My sense of loneliness was replaced by the hope that a new and interesting relationship was in the making. The consciousness of racial and cultural differences was lost in a determination to appreciate and absorb the many desirable attributes of the Sherpa—his stoic acceptance of difficulties, and his abandonment to gaiety at the slightest provocation.

Urkien's true value was known to me. I looked at the other two Sherpas. Aila (or sometimes Ela) Tensing has a longer climbing record than Urkien, but although possessing fine qualities in most

fields of expedition work, he has shown no sign of emerging as a leader of Sherpas. He is generally quiet and reserved, with an uncanny ability to locate chang and arak in the most unexpected places; yet he is seldom incapacitated under their influence. In fact, the more he drinks, the faster he travels. On one occasion, after the four of us had disposed of a gallon of strong brew in one midday session, Aila went so fast that I suspected him of having transferred some of his load to the others. The trio was stopped, the scales came out, and Aila's load proved to be the heaviest. His home, Lukla, is the nearest town to our proposed survey area. Later his local knowledge of tracks and food were to prove invaluable.

The third Sherpa was Gyalgen, also from Khumjung. He was for the first time in a responsible position on an expedition, and as there had been many Sherpas on Kangchenjunga with previous experience, Gyalgen was initially engaged on work at low altitudes. However, he performed so well that when some vacancies occurred in the high altitude team, he was promoted and eventually climbed as high as anyone who was not using oxygen. Small and pigtailed, he still possesses most of the finer points of Sherpa etiquette, so rapidly lost by those who have gone to live in the lower country to the south.

I was very fortunate in having such company. With a mixture of Hindustani and a little English we were able to converse—slowly at first, but after a week of much closer proximity, all difficulties of conversation between us rapidly disappeared. The Sherpas' own language is closely related to Tibetan, and they can usually speak Ghurkali, which is closer to the main language of northern India than to the Tibeto-Burman roots of the Sherpa vocabulary. Hindustani is a foreign language, familiar only to those who have been out to India. As only a few of their women are regular travellers, they seldom know any Hindustani.

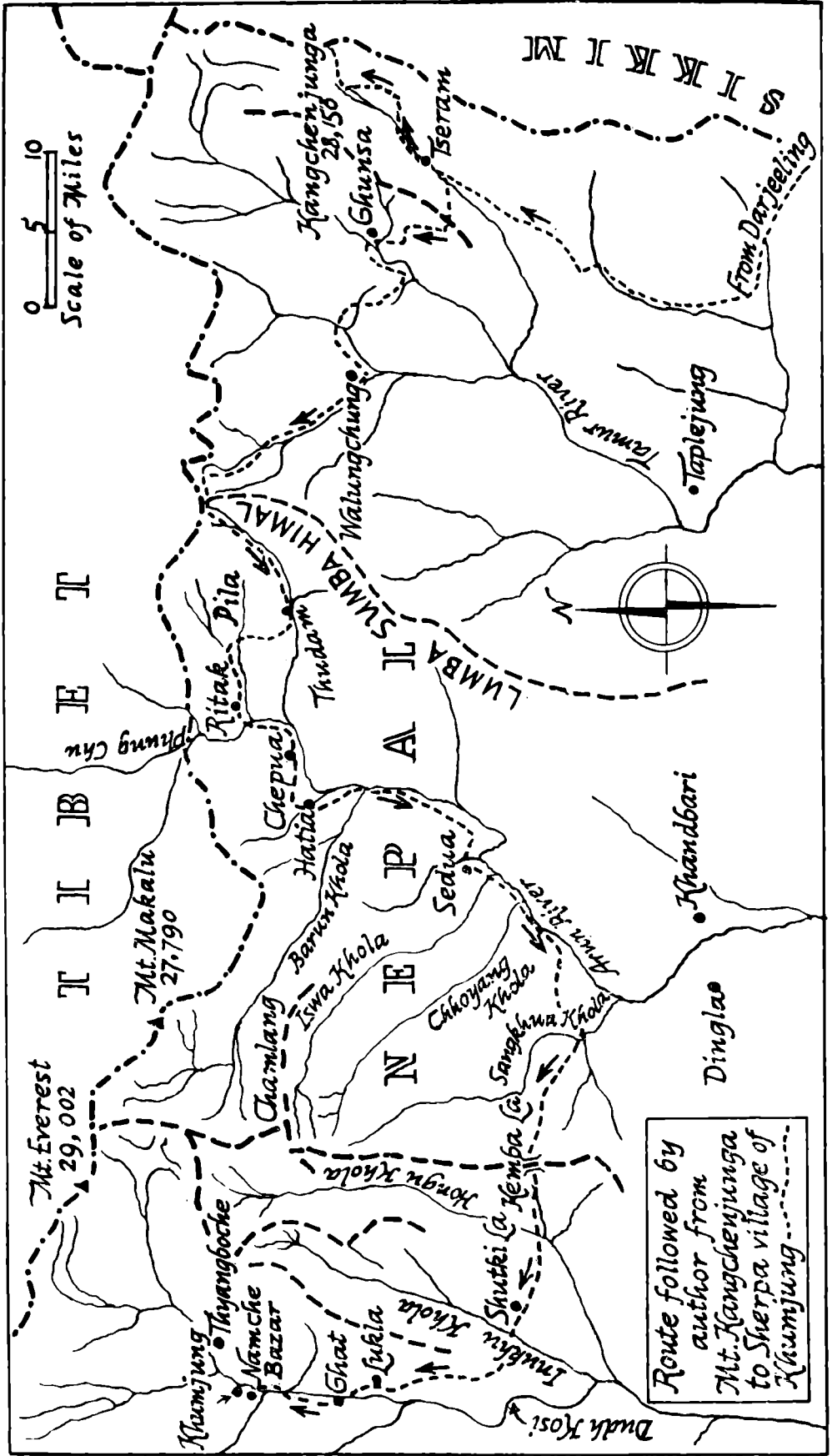
The loyalty of the Solu Khumbu Sherpas was one of the most pleasant surprises I found in the Himalayas. My trio were typical in that respect. I could feel certain that there would be no labour troubles, at least until September, when our carrying team would have to increase in numbers.

For two days we would follow the track to Ghunsa. The approach march for Professor Dyrenfurth's 1930 Expedition followed this track. Their attempt on Kangchenjunga from the north-west is described in the late F. S. Smythe's book, *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*. Freshfield had been this way, and so had Sir Joseph Hooker. In more recent years there had been a visit by a small Swiss party of climbers and surveyors, who did much valuable work, especially in the little known northern tributaries of the Kangchenjunga glacier.

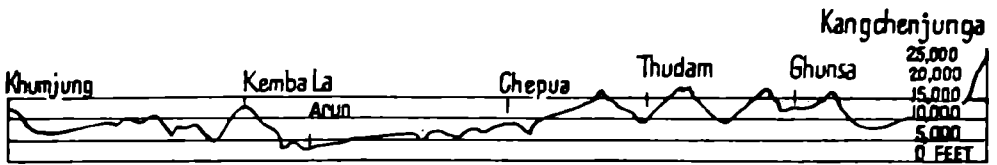
On the first day we climbed this track, well worn by sheep and yaks, to our first pass at 15,400 feet. As we rose, rhododendron trees gave way to their dwarfed sister species. Buttercups, tall yellow primulae, and a relative of the violet greeted us at the higher levels. Better than all of these was the wild garlic, whose leaves for several days made large contributions to our diet. To taste something green made eating a pleasure for the first time in three months. Our diet on Kangchenjunga had been satisfactory, but limited by the lack of such food as eggs, fresh vegetables and milk, unobtainable in bulk at high altitudes.

Before reaching Ghunsa there were three passes to cross. At the first it was obvious that we were rather heavily laden. The scales showed three eighty-pound loads and one of sixty. On inspection an astonishing number of Kangchenjunga trophies came to light. Besides the personal kit issued to each Sherpa, there were screwdrivers, useless pieces of oxygen tubing, odd assortments from many food boxes and many empty tins. My move towards the tins was stopped by Urkien who reminded me that a tin with a good lid can be exchanged for three pounds of potatoes in Ghunsa. There had been a considerable food surplus at the end of the Kangchenjunga expedition. As it appeared we had some thirty pounds of it with us, I gave orders to consume all but the coffee as soon as possible. When these stores were eaten we could then buy a day-to-day supply of local produce, resulting in lighter loads on our backs.

I had not carried sixty pounds at such an altitude for some time, and it was hard work. Much of the weight was supported on a head band, and for the first time I found an advantage in possessing



an outsize in heads. As one part became tender with the weight it was supporting, there was always another large area of head surface to try. One criticism of the head band is that it forces the wearer to spend his day peering at the track immediately ahead. I found that when I reached a place where I wanted to inspect the scenery, I could move the strap to my forehead, thus bringing my eyes into the horizontal plane. This was all very well, but before very long my neck muscles began to bulge. This would mean a new set of shirts on returning to civilisation.



For once I was lucky with the rhododendrons. When climbing from Darjeeling to the Kangchenjunga Base Camp we had been too early to see the best rhododendrons in flower, and normally the finest blooms are finished when an expedition goes home in the monsoon. We found this Ghunsa area to be an exception, as at least three separate species were in full bloom, and the monsoon had reached the district a week previously. I found some lovely specimens, but as the light was too weak to photograph them in colour, I picked a large bouquet, intending to record them on film if the clouds cleared away. This happened on the second day on the march, and Ghunsa was fast approaching. When I overtook the Sherpas I remarked that their speed was because all the Ghunsa men were away from their wives. The men were with the larger Expedition on the way to Darjeeling. A little later they stopped. Urkien pointing to my arms full of flowers, asked, 'For the Ghunsa girls?' Later the clouds dispersed and I took my photographs.

Ghunsa, nestling deep in a pleasant valley, was a joy to eyes weary of snow and ice. The steep valley walls were adorned with rhododendron trees, with occasional pines towering far above all lesser competitors. Peaks of up to 22,000 feet were visible, mostly

appearing to be hopelessly unclimbable. The village itself was typical of the better Bhotia settlements.

Bhotias are close relatives of the Sherpas. Both are of Mongolian origin, and have crossed from Tibet and settled in Nepal and Sikkim. Each has brought with him the clothing styles, religion (Buddhism), animals and social customs of the Tibetan peasant. The rough highlands which they industriously farm in Nepal are too severe in climate for people of Indian origin, and these tough immigrants, by a high standard of craftsmanship and village organisation, build substantial houses, make warm clothes, and are able to live, apparently happily, under very severe climatic conditions. It is to Tibet that both groups look for the higher education of their religious leaders, the purer strains of their animal herds, their salt supply, and their finer jewellery and artistic inspiration. At present Tibetans occasionally cross to Nepal, and after they have become domiciled there they are known as Sherpas. Other Sherpa families might have been in Nepal for five generations, or possibly longer, but to trace back beyond that time, and search for earlier occupants of their raw country, requires serious archaeological digging, as the Sherpas have made few efforts to record their history. Few men can give an indication of anything earlier than what his grandfather saw, and too often he gives fifty years as the answer to all questions regarding events that happened before he was born.

After our tent and a shelter for the fire had been erected in a spacious yak pasture on the outskirts of the village, I wandered away to gather wood, and on my return I found about twenty women and children gathered round the camp, inspecting the pressure cooker, clothing materials, nylon ropes and cords, and other articles which were completely foreign to them. Pigtailed and ear and neck ornaments were universally worn. The most characteristic garment of the women was the striped apron made from home spun wool, locally dyed and woven into a tough and durable cloth. Goitres and eye infections were extremely common. The latter gave me a chance to distribute some of my eye ointment. They were in need of treatment and my over-abundant medical supplies had been weighing me down all day. I ap-

proached a small boy with a badly swollen eyelid, but when I was three yards away he screamed and ran. This blue-eyed bearded giant must surely be a yeti. My seventy-two inches always made me seem a giant beside the short but sturdy Sherpas and Bhotias. I handed the ointment to Urkien, and he had much more success. He did not look so strange to them, and he knew the right kind of thing to say in their own language. A babe in arms offered much resistance, but when his mother's breast was bared for him, the eyelid was easily treated.

Negotiations began for purchasing eggs, potatoes and beer. An objection was raised to potato prices somewhat dearer than the Kangchenjunga expedition had paid. I proceeded to the Headman's house, and possibly owing to the medical assistance we had given, food was produced and offered at half the expedition's prices. In the house I was led to a mat beneath one of the windows. Here I sat with legs folded, and when my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I inspected my surroundings. Although the one-roomed house was spacious, strongly built, and clean, it was very badly lit. The two small windows were on one wall, while the other three walls were of adzed pine planks sealed at their joints, permitting no air or light to pass. The headman's wife was squatting beside a fire. When not stirring something in a large blackened copper bowl, she was blowing at the log fire. The fireplace was not inset into a wall, nor was it placed near one of the windows. As there was no chimney, the smoke simply drifted upwards, gradually blackening everything above human reach. Bhotia and Sherpa houses present curious sights from the outside when food is being prepared. Smoke clouds hang over every roof, and smoke seems to seep from each crack and junction in the roof planks. It is this smoke which probably causes the majority of the eye complaints.

Opposite where I sat was a box marked 'Kangchenjunga Expedition 1955—No. 501'. It had arrived here among the loot at an amazing speed. All box numbers beginning with 5 were instruments and my responsibility. Number 501 was a wireless box which I had discarded twenty miles away, only three days previously. More copper bowls were arranged on a substantial shelf,

and very prominent were several chang bottles, which are turned from a solid wooden log on an hydraulically powered lathe, and attractively bound with hand beaten brass. Stacked at one end of the house, above some wooden chests, were sacks full of flour and grain. The sacks, too, are locally manufactured, made from the coarse and strong hairs of the yak.

A bowl of chang, this variety brewed from millet, was placed in my hands. The headman's wife was following the rules of etiquette which I had observed the previous year in Sherpa houses. The bowl was filled to the top, and while I drank some from it, my hostess stood in front of me with the bottle poised, ready to fill it to the brim again as soon as I put the bowl on the table. For the second time I lowered the level of chang a little, and in spite of my mild resistance, it was again filled to the top. After my third drink I resisted more strongly, but it was not until I had signed a flat refusal with my hand over the bowl that my hostess released the pressure and enabled me to drink the beer at a more leisurely speed. One of the first lessons taught to a Sherpa or Bhotia child is a series of methods of pressing chang on to a guest. One is invited into a house, and seated on a mat on the floor. Chang is offered, 'Just a little'. The uninitiated guest soon learns that 'A little' is invariably interpreted as a brimming cup.

When anyone for business, social, or other purposes enters a house, he must be offered the customary three drinks. On such occasions Urkien frequently brought with us an expedition mug, so that I could drink from it and not have to use the one bowl which passed from mouth to mouth of all the others present. I soon stopped using the mug as it was twice the size of the bowl, and, as no hostess would ever fail to pour to the vessel's brim, I would be unsteady too early in the day. I was also trying to get much closer to these people, and Urkien's explanation of the use of the mug always brought a series of questions from the other participants.

More chang appeared and time was advancing. I thanked my hostess and moved towards the door. She rushed ahead to hold back an enormous mastiff which was on guard outside. Back at the tent Urkien was directing the cooking while the other two were

occupied with the more menial tasks of bringing water and wood, and peeling potatoes. A woman approached, carrying something in her apron. In front of me the apron was opened, and I was given a large quantity of young turnip leaves. She indicated her swollen eyelids. I applied some more eye ointment, and before long another group of patients arrived with donations of chang, potatoes, eggs and yak's milk. We were to leave Ghunsa in the morning—with our gifts of food. If the eye treatment helped them, we would not know.

With a stomach full of fresh food, and a smell of pines and yaks in the air, I went off to sleep. Having smelled nothing but kerosene and humans for three months, and having had to sleep with all my clothes on during that time, it was a relief to descend to the milder climate of 11,000 feet, to a world of vegetation and hospitality.

In the morning I woke to the sound of Sherpa talking. Urkien entered the tent to say that he had intercepted four men going over to seek employment from Evans, to help carry the Kangchenjunga baggage to Darjeeling. He had explained that they were too late. Now two of them were about to return home, and for two days they would be on our route. Urkien wanted to know if I would employ one of them to carry some of our equipment, if he could be persuaded to work for two Indian rupees a day (a rupee is 1/6). I agreed and soon heard that we had a new man in our team for two days, and his name was Mingma. I had not wanted to employ any extras at this stage. It would be essential later on portions of the track that were relatively unknown, when we would recruit a local yak expert who knew the passes. Expedition Sherpas at present receive four or five rupees a day in addition to their clothing and equipment, which they are permitted to keep, but one coolie at two rupees, employed for two days, was a negligible expense.

When I saw Mingma I was very pleased. He was a fine pig-tailed muscular type, and so unspoiled that he still wore his earrings. His friend was similar. Mingma gave his personal kit to 'Friend' for him to carry, and paid him one rupee. Thus Mingma was free to take the load I would give him, but his profit for two days' work would be only three rupees.

With lighter loads and many thanks to the inhabitants, we left Ghunsa. Smythe in *Kangchenjunga Adventure*, had praised the situation of the village, but he did not admire the inhabitants. The 1930 Expedition had given them many large orders for food and coolies, and these seldom appeared to time. Like most occupants of Nepal, the people of Ghunsa could never understand why some Europeans wanted to climb mountains, or travel to a planned schedule of dates and times. Many Europeans, too, cannot understand why their fellows want to climb a mountain.

For a short time we descended a narrow gorge, a reminder of the oppressive heat lower down towards India, during the monsoon. Before long we were climbing again towards another high pass, through vegetation similar to what we had seen the day before, with oaks, raspberries, and a wild rose in addition. After four hours of climbing Gyalgen was dropping behind—then Aila, too. My enquiries revealed that there were several loose stomachs in the party. I said the cause was too much chang, but Urkien claimed it was too many potatoes in stomachs that had not received potatoes for a long time. He prescribed tsampa, and mixed several cups of this coarse flour with a gallon of water. We all drank some and were soon cured. Among my medical equipment was nothing for this complaint, as one seldom suffers from dysentery above 10,000 feet, and our intended route was mostly well above this level.

Over the pass was a spacious valley, the bed of which was a carpet of enormous blue poppies. Some of the plants stood three feet high, and the flowers were often four inches across. I stopped to take some photographs while the others went ahead; later I followed. After an hour I realised there were no footprints on the track. I descended further to the next patch of sand, and confirmed that no one had passed that day. I crossed the river to see if a track was to be found on that side, but by the time I had returned and ascended the first track for some time, it was dark and raining. I carried some wood to an overhanging rock, and had just lit a fire in preparation for a night out, when I heard a shout far up the track. I climbed up to find Gyalgen, who said that camp was not far away. For an hour we climbed, almost to the poppies.

The others were comfortably settled in an enormous cave. 'Friend', who had slept there before, had taken the Sherpas through the rhododendrons, and no one had placed a mark on the track to show me where I should have left it to find the cave. Before I made my comments I drank a cup of tsampa and tea, which warmed the stomach and cooled my fury.

In the eastern Himalayas, early in the monsoon, the best weather is usually at sunrise, with occasionally a fine break at sunset. To benefit by the sunrise I formed the habit of taking a brief walk at five each morning, and in the evening I was in bed by eight. In this way we were awake during the more pleasant morning hours, while at the other end of the day our candle consumption rate would be lowered. We considered ourselves lucky if we were not in a thick mist by nine each morning, and the cameras were rarely unpacked after that hour. The mist is a disadvantage from many points of view, but the monsoon is the time of the greatest speed of plant growth. During most of the day, when the mountains are out of sight, one's eyes are kept at short focus to admire the beauty at one's feet.

Our second day from Ghunsa was a rare exception, as it remained fine until eleven, and we were given a brilliant view of startling rock peaks of Dolomite steepness. We descended through heavy forest to the Yangma Khola (*Khola* means river), and followed its right bank downstream to its junction with the Tamur River. At the corner 'Friend' led us into a house and requested chang. Mingma, who had been dragging throughout the morning, arrived twenty minutes later. We all squatted on the floor and talked to another group, also there for chang, while the lady of the house prepared the drinks. The leader of the other party was a Ghurka who, with his three sons, was carrying cloth up to a house near the Tibetan border, only twelve miles away. There they would exchange the cloth for salt. Two weeks later the salt would be sold lower down in Nepal, and they would set out again with another load of cloth. The father was proud that his earnings would now increase—his third son had joined the party for the first time. Like the others the son wore one brief cloth round his hips and a shepherd's cloak. He claimed to be

twelve years old, but my guess was that he was nearer ten years. I lifted his load of cloth and it weighed at least seventy pounds.

Our lady of the 'corner house' washed her hands in front of her customers—a habit which is fortunately universal before making chang. Then she brought out a large container full of fermented millet seeds. After cold water had been poured over them she squeezed them with her hands, forcing the fermented fluid from the seeds into the water. Next the liquid was strained through a crude basket made from bamboo strips, but it appears inevitable that a few seeds pass into the chang. Almost any vegetable matter which will ferment can be used as a basis for this beverage. Beers from potatoes, maize, barley, rice and millet are all common in various parts of Nepal, but the potato variety is not popular; potato liquor is usually distilled to make arak. Fermented honey is frequently distilled to make a sweet spirit. I told the Sherpas about mead, a spirit distilled in England from honey, and how legend stated that mead promoted fertility, which was disputed at once. 'The English are all wrong. A little spirit makes the neck and shoulders strong for carrying loads. It is meat that assists fertile sexual performance.' A Sherpa poem was quoted which stated the case quite clearly.

I drank about a quart of reasonably palatable chang, and soon found myself far behind the others, when through the window I saw some sheep coming down the track. This was a good excuse to leave the drinking circle. Each sheep carried two yak-hair bags of coarse salt, mined in Tibet, and I was told that each bag weighed twenty pounds. The sheep showed no signs of the revolt that one sometimes sees in a laden yak, which usually carries two bags of eighty pounds. These, combined with the weight of a wooden saddle and the driver's personal kit, usually total more than two hundred pounds. Sir Joseph Hooker wrote in his *Himalayan Journal* that the standard yak load in 1848 was two hundred and sixty pounds.

A frisky yak, being encouraged to start, might suddenly bound down hill with great speed, kicking its heels high into the air. If the load is not well secured, it will slip forward, which is just what the yak is trying to make it do. I once saw this happen when the

girth caught behind the yak's front legs, and the wooden saddle, with all the weight behind it, struck the poor beast on the back of the head. It lay unconscious to a long recital of fervent prayers, but after about twenty minutes it suddenly rose to its feet, apparently none the worse for its mishap. I proceeded on my journey and met a lama hurrying down the track. He had been summoned to pray for the yak.

At last the Sherpas emerged. I was in no great hurry to do the journey to Solu Khumbu, but I decided that if the others slackened their speed too much owing to alcohol, I would ration their visits to the chang houses where drinks would be bought. Refreshments given as a mark of hospitality were another matter, and were quite unavoidable. Deep down there was tolerance and sympathy, knowing that it was consumed daily in their homes, and they had had none on Kangchenjunga. On this occasion the chang improved their speed; or perhaps it was the rest they had had while drinking. Gyalgen, our expert on wild edible foods, disappeared into the jungle and could be heard crashing along on a parallel course, to emerge eventually with an armful of ferns and garlic leaves, almost large enough to hide his constant grin. Mingma took a new lease of life, and was far ahead with Aila, not to be caught until we climbed up the winding track to our destination for the day, Walungchung.

CHAPTER III

Pastures New

IN Walungchung a shelter was arranged for the night, and while the food was being prepared, I reported to the major commanding the Indian Army Check Post. Several of these posts have been established astride the main trade routes with Tibet. They have radio transmitters and receivers, and reports are sent daily to headquarters in Kathmandu. The officers all speak English as no method has yet been invented for transmitting radio signals in Hindustani. Their visits to India are rare, and so far life on the Tibetan frontier has not been very exciting. I have always looked forward to these posts—mainly for some bright conversation in a more familiar language, and for news of the outer world. This post was no exception.

I was, of course, asked where I had come from, and where I was going. On a previous occasion two of the men had met Jackson and one knew Evans very well. I was asked a difficult and embarrassing question, 'We heard your Expedition had been successful on Kangchenjunga. Did Jackson or Evans go to the top?'

'I am sorry, I can't really say. To avoid the wrong kind of publicity which would concentrate on individuals, we agreed to mention no names until *The Times* has the information and Evans is in Darjeeling. Evans won't be out until the day after to-morrow.'

'How does *The Times* come into the picture?'

'They supported us to a certain extent. But in return for that we agreed to give away no information which had not previously been made available to *The Times*,' I replied.

'Well, that is fair enough. We'll listen to the radio for the next few days.'

I found an excuse to go out for a minute. I rushed round to the Sherpas and instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone who got to the top of Kangchenjunga.' Much information relating to expeditions appears in the Indian and occasionally the English press, where the original source is a Check Post wireless message. These men, who might spend a year without anything of interest to report, could send out information without intending to do any damage, but could easily involve an expedition in a series of arguments with its supporting paper. Difficulties have occurred in these remote corners of the Himalayas, when expeditions have had news to send by runner for the exclusive use of their newspaper. While hoping that its runner is making all possible speed, the expedition attempts to draw a screen of secrecy over its Sherpas, resulting (unless the greatest of care is taken on both sides) in an Indian accusation of non co-operation.

Back in the Check Post a general discussion began. After finding out the latest details of events in Delhi and the transport strike in Britain, I was asked, 'Do you know Doctor Pug?'

'Pug?' I thought, making many mental pictures.

'He was on an Everest Expedition.'

'Oh yes, Pugh.'

The commanding officer insisted on escorting me to my quarters, and he was horrified to see my bedding unrolled between the Sherpas in a smoky room which was leaking in two places. I said, 'This is my way of seeing all aspects of Sherpa life.'

'I refuse to permit it. I'll arrange other accommodation for you. I see you have only three Sherpas with you. Does it mean that the *Daily Mail* is a better paper than *The Times*? Jackson came through here with eleven Sherpas to assist him, when he was part of the *Daily Mail* yeti party.'

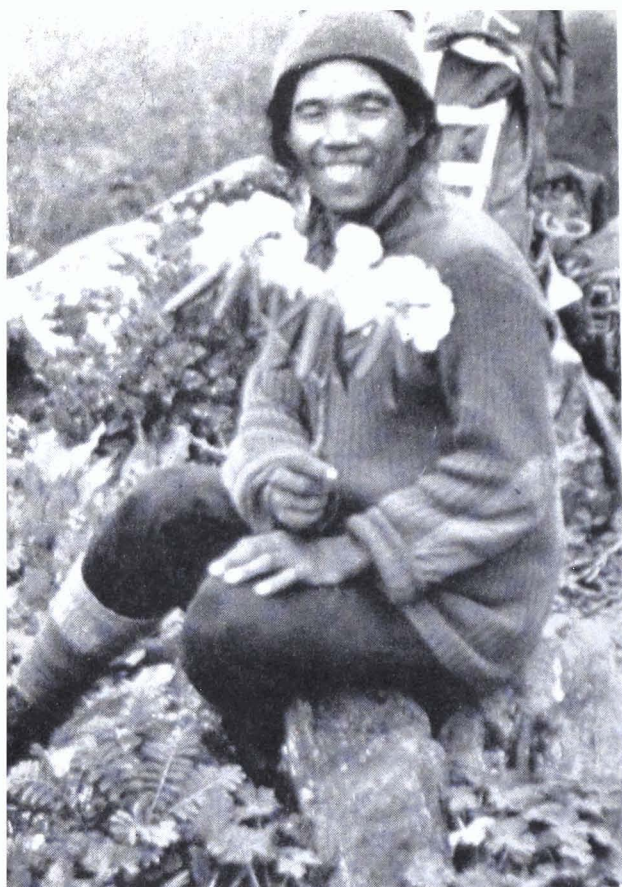
'All it means is that I am no longer on a newspaper-supported expedition. That finished when I left Evans at the Yalung glacier.'

I was moved to a private room in the house of the village headman. For a while I sat outside writing, and then entered my lodgings. Seated at one end of my room was a bald-headed man of considerable dimensions, looking remarkably like the figure of Buddha painted on the wall above his head. A mat for me was

placed on the floor at the opposite end of the room. Next my host's daughter brought each of us a large bottle of warm chang, which we placed on the floor beside our mats, and every time my companion took a drink, I did likewise, by leaning forward and sipping the liquid through a hollow bamboo.

Our common language was a limited amount of Hindustani. After a considerable effort by both of us, it appeared that my host wanted to know why Europeans who prefer cleanliness and comfortable living, should want to climb mountains and visit the remote corners of Nepal. 'There is no gold on top of Everest,' he added. On the few occasions that I have thought about a reason for these things, my answer has been, because I like mountains, and most of all because I like Sherpas. Mallory's answer about climbing a mountain, 'because it is there' made no sense to my host, and I must admit I shared his mystification. I invented a tale of escapism and a curiosity about Nepal, all explained in bad Hindustani. My patient audience, like me, was not convinced, but he asked no further questions, and indicated I could proceed with my writing if I wished. I was anxious to do this, as the Check Post's fortnightly mail runner would take out to India any correspondence which I left there.

From time to time my host's daughter came in to replenish the chang, while the Buddha-like figure kept looking across at me. I could hear the girl giggling behind a crack in the door after each visit with the bottle. Urkien peered through the door and took in the situation at a glance. He vanished and soon my food came up, rice, eggs and Gyalgen's vegetables, wisely accompanied by some sweet biscuits for the headman. The biscuits which had been one of the Kangchenjunga perquisites, had been deep down in Urkien's rucksack, and I had no idea they were there. Later my host gave some unintelligible instructions to his daughter, who soon came back with a plate of eggs for me, in return for the biscuits. He did not know that I had had eggs at the Check Post, which meant that I had eaten twelve in two hours. However, I excused myself with the thought that members of the Mount Everest Party in 1935 had eaten more than that number in one meal.



Gyalgen appreciates a rhododendron bloom after seven weeks on the snows of Kangchenjunga



Samdi makes running repairs to his 'sole' means of transport with a darning needle and a piece of string

The author and his friends are welcomed back to Solu Khumbu by a Sherpa and his wife. His headgear, a baby's bonnet, provoked much laughter





Urkien

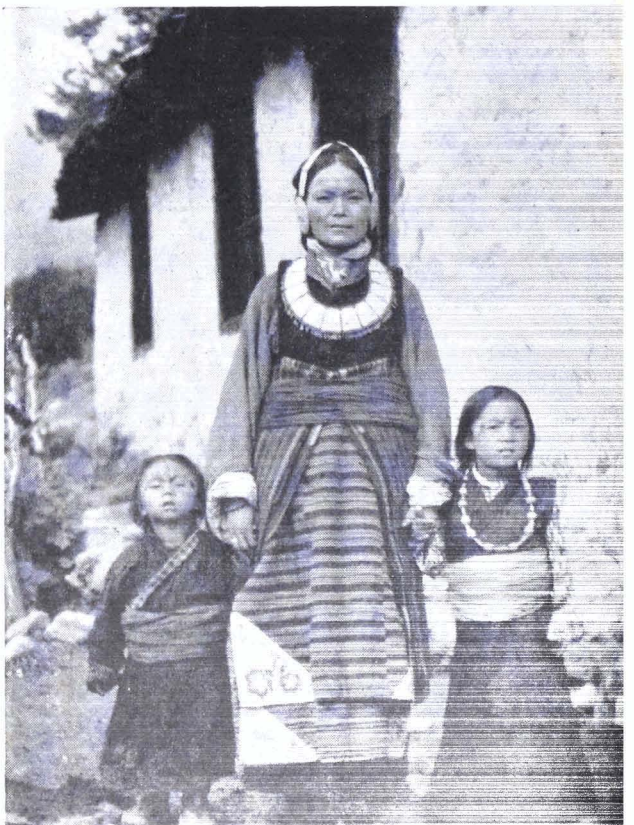
A Sherpa boy is intrigued with the author's binoculars. He was disgusted when he could not see over the hill into the next valley



Urkien with his eldest son, Gaon Jemba

PLATE 2

Changjup's Tibetan wife with her son and daughter



As the light began to fade I was left alone. Soon the house was silent. The internal pressure of a large amount of liquid began to tell. I opened one door, but I found all the doors in the passage which I had entered were firmly locked. Back in my room, I worked at the window and eventually removed it—the only piece of glass in the village. It was a first floor window. I dropped to the ground in the dark, to terrify a yak and myself, when I landed a yard from its head. To get back to bed again, I was glad to have had some mountaineering experience. In this house the lavatory was on the ground floor, and it was nothing more than a large heap of dry leaves which were periodically changed. As this room was the nightly abode of the headman's goats and calves, a nocturnal visit would probably mean a major mutual disturbance.

Next morning I walked round Walungchung with one of the officers from the Check Post. Hooker's description of 1848 still applies. He found the paths narrow and made filthy by pigs. The village is situated on a small ledge between a steep cliff and a roaring river. The houses on this platform are so cramped that most of their waste matter is thrown out on to the so-called 'streets'. In the better Sherpa villages further west, each house is surrounded by a potato field, large enough to absorb all that is discarded, and what adds to their cleanliness is the fact that pigs cannot live at that altitude, and many species of fowls and flies are unhappy there. I do not know whether it is actually altitude or its associated cold winter which affects them.

My guide said he had several times ordered the headman to clean the village. I wondered about the extent of the power and authority of an Indian Check Post in Nepal, as the officers were foreigners in an independent state. He also told me that some of his staff had seen yeti tracks in the snow above the village, some two months previously, but owing to the depth of the snow they had not been followed. The tracks were some nine inches long and three feet apart.

'That sounds like a bear to me,' I said.

'No, I have seen bear tracks in the Punjab. These were different.'

I replied, 'There are many types of bears in the Himalayas.'

This might have been one which you had not previously seen. How deep was the snow?’

‘About eight inches, and it was very soft.’

‘Were there marks on the snow which would indicate that it had a tail?’

‘None, and we examined them very carefully.’

Many authorities claim that the yeti is the langur ape. From my knowledge of these animals, I have found them to be fond of a warm climate, and they tend to migrate from areas where snow falls in the winter long before the autumn frosts begin. The langur’s legs are not very long, so that if he did happen to be in a great depth of snow and in an upright posture, there must be an occasional sign of his very long tail.

The next part of the journey westwards involved the crossing of a high pass. This pass is not recorded on any map, and I know of no previous crossing by a European. As my Sherpas had not been that way, another man had to be employed to keep us on the correct route. Mingma had been paid off, quite happy with his three rupees profit for two days’ work. I took pity on him and gave him a bonus. ‘Friend’ came forward, saying that he knew the way over the next pass. He was engaged, so again we had four on the payroll. I would now be beyond where Hooker had penetrated and in three hours leave the track followed by Jackson.

While we were preparing to leave Walungchung, the headman’s daughter came to me with a glass of arak, which, after a little resistance, I accepted. Ten minutes later she returned with another glass. I refused, but eventually under considerable pressure from the Sherpas and the spectators, I took the glass, drank about half, and pressed the Sherpas to drink the remainder. Soon we were on our way, with the track proving most difficult for the first hour—rising up at us, or swinging away to the side. As soon as we were well clear of the village, Urkien roared with laughter, and explained that if I had accepted a third glass of arak from a marriageable woman, I would have been morally bound to a closer attachment. To me it sounded like being immorally attached.

Among the people of the remote parts of Asia there is a common

belief that the traveller wishes to be cheered on his way by glowing accounts of the path ahead. These might be entirely fictitious. The intention is kindly, but its result may be disastrous for the wayfarer. I was told in Walungchung that the first day's journey would take about four hours, and that on the second day we would reach the village of Thudam.

We began walking at 9.30 a.m. and soon left the junction where the Tipta La track branches northwards to Tibet, now only three miles away. Three hours later we had our first rest. Gyalgen went off picking vegetables, and Urkien, out of the rucksack which I carried and he had packed for me, produced my water bottle. To my astonishment it was full of arak. 'I bought it to celebrate Kangchenjunga.' We all celebrated immediately. I comforted myself with the thought that alcohol has calories, and who could resist their warmth at ninepence a bottle? Gyalgen ran back for his share, in his haste dropping a trail of strange vegetables. The track ahead rolled and pitched, but we maintained a good pace.

At 5.30 we found a convenient overhanging rock to shelter us for the night. It was far short of where our supposed 'easy' day should have taken us. In fact we did not reach our destination until ten the next morning, when the valley we had followed suddenly opened out into a large pasture—possibly once a glacial terminal lake, and now filled with debris. In the middle of the plain stood a massive dark tent. Two boys and an enormous mastiff occupied the tent, and they were there to tend a herd of yak which could be seen grazing on the flat and on the hills on each side of the valley.

In the higher parts of Nepal there is no universal word or phrase of greeting—no 'Hello' or 'Good Morning'. On meeting someone on the track, both travellers ask, 'Where are you going?' followed by, 'Where are you from?' If further conversation is desired, or one wishes to make a purchase, six or seven other standard questions would have to be put and answered before getting down to business. Replying to the same set of questions ten or twelve times each day tried my patience, but not that of the Sherpas who gave their answers with a smile, not always keeping strictly to the truth. When the two boys in the tent came out to inspect us, they made the usual enquiries, 'Where are you going?'

'To Nepal,' Urkien replied. Nepal is the old name for Kathmandu,* and to the hillmen there has been no change.

'Where are you from?'

'Darjeeling.' This standard answer of Urkien's seemed reasonably sensible to most listeners. The Kangchenjunga party had in fact started from Darjeeling, but to say our small expedition had started from the foot of Kangchenjunga would only bring a new set of questions.

This time Urkien's answer was accepted, so the next question came as anticipated, 'When will you reach Nepal?'

'In five months.' That was easy.

'What are you carrying?'

'The Sahib's clothes and equipment.' This was always false, as I carried my own, and from Kangchenjunga the Sherpas had come away with more equipment than I had. However, no one was going to inspect our bulging rucksacks.

'Where is the Sahib from?'

'England.' Also not strictly correct, for though I have lived in England, having based myself there for the past five years, I am a New Zealand citizen. Urkien was aware of this, and he would only answer 'New Zealand' if the questioner were a particularly attractive woman, and we had time to spare to give a lengthy explanation of New Zealand. The 'England' answer was the easy way out, as the people who had had no contact with expeditions had heard of no countries but China, Tibet, India and England.

'What is the Sahib doing here?'

'He wants to climb mountains.'

'How old is he?'

'Thirty.' As no one believed that, owing to the beard which made me look ancient, Urkien would sometimes say forty-seven or forty-nine. What did it matter, so long as everyone was happy?

At about this stage Urkien could begin talking business. Sometimes the questions would continue, and very soon would come, 'How many children have you?' or more frequently, 'How many

* The new name Kathmandu came with the Gurka invasion in the late eighteenth century. When the high country Nepali is asked to say this word, which is foreign to him, he places an 'a' between the 'th' and the 'm', as his vocabulary has no contiguous consonants. Similarly Calcutta becomes, Calicutta.

sons have you?' They just assume that every able bodied man is married, and never think to ask if one has a wife.

My answer was, 'I have no children at present.'

'What, is your wife no good?'

When my knowledge of the language first became good enough to understand this, I was at a loss for an answer. Since then, on hearing it, I have always replied with a white lie, which usually served to satisfy the questioner and change the subject. In India one is asked, 'How many issues has your wife had?' I gained the impression that the value of a wife is measured by her capacity to bear children, and the number who actually survive the childhood years is not important.

When the boys were satisfied as to our identity, we had a chance to examine their livestock. In their herd were seventy yak including many young calves. The male of the species is known as the yak and the female a nack. The nack are crossed with bulls of European origin to give animals which are capable of further propagation. The male of the half-breed is called a dzubjock, and the female a dzum. These are very popular at levels which are too high for a cow and too low for a nack. With this herd, mainly dzum and nack, were two shorthorn bulls and a yak. At lower levels, where cross bred are required, an equivalent herd of cows would be escorted by two or three yak.

The two bulls of the herd seldom went far from the tent, and their weak condition showed incomplete acclimatisation. However, although they had travelled all the way from India on tracks where most animals would lose their footing, to reach this pasture at 14,500 feet, they were still able to breed. While we sat by the tent the yak came bounding past, aiming his lowered horns at one of the bulls. There was a dull thud of crashing heads and soon the bull was giving ground to a far more agile opponent. The bull so far forgot his tactics that he turned round to gallop off. The faster yak caught him with a powerful drive from the rear, which he was about to repeat when one of the boys, in hot pursuit, swung his sling round his head and shouted. There was a sharp crack as the sling opened, and another crack as the yak was stung by a stone the size of a golf ball. The yak galloped off and the bull

stood still. A hundred yards away the yak stopped, snorted and pawed the ground. The sling cracked again, but before the missile reached its target the yak was off. Just as the yak was about to go up-hill another stone was despatched to seal the bargain, and to my astonishment the animal was hit again. Astonishment became admiration when I paced the distance—one hundred and sixty yards.

With the exception of potatoes and salt, all the food eaten at this camp was a product of the dzum and nack. The tent, and the ropes to support it and tie up the calves at night, were made from woven yak hair. The bags on which the occupants slept were made of the same material, and ironically enough, so were the slings. Sometimes yak hair and sheep's wool are spun and woven together to make a very strong and durable thread, without the coarseness of a plain yak material. The dzum grows about as much hair as does the nack, and the qualities are very similar.

We prepared to move again, and were startled by vicious snarls from the mastiff, whose owners made no effort to check him. These dogs are often kept in a camp where there are dzum calves, goats or sheep, not to drive or retrieve them, but to give warning of the approach of any other animals, especially leopards. In Tibet they have to give warning of a larger variety of dangers to the flocks and herds—brigands, bears, and wolves as well as snow leopards. If one is being threatened by a mastiff, it takes an enormous and well-directed stone to turn him, but in Tibet, where everything is bigger and better (according to the Sherpas), no stone will stop an attacking mastiff unless it knocks him unconscious. It is a pity to have to stone a dog, but when the master does not call him off, one must use stones first, and if these fail, boots or ice axe. It frequently happened to me that the owner of a dog was so astonished at his first sight of a European, that he was unable to observe the trouble that the dog caused me.

'Friend' led us further up the valley, until the frontier was obviously just ahead. I asked him: 'Are you certain the track you are showing us does not enter Tibet?'

'I don't know where Tibet begins, and what does it matter?'

'It is not an open frontier for Europeans as it is for you Nepalese.'

‘There is no one to guard these passes, and the nearest communist soldiers are forty miles away.’

I had frequently heard the same information from others, but I refused to take any risks. ‘If the valley beyond “Friend’s” pass runs northwards, I refuse to cross it. I’ll go west for a pass of my own.’

Round a slight corner we found a meagre track leading upwards and westwards. At the foot of the climb the Sherpas stopped for a rest, while I went on alone, intending to spend some time at the top of the pass, where I could take photographs and note the most important compass bearings. Soon I climbed to the crest visible from below, to find it was only the lip of a hanging valley. I pressed upwards for an hour, and was soon enveloped in mist. Large drifts of cold, damp monsoon snow hid all signs of the route, so as there was a considerable danger of losing myself, I waited for the others. Still, we were a long way from the top of the pass, which was not reached until one o’clock, too late to get to Thudam that day.

From the top of the pass the next valley flowed in a southerly direction, so we could not have crossed the watershed into Tibet. As we sidled round the head of the valley, the Sherpas and I took turns at breaking the trail through the soft snow. ‘Friend’, who wore yak hide boots and had no ice axe, could not travel as safely as we could, so followed behind us, attached to a short rope tied round my waist. Then, just ahead in the mist, another pass was unveiled. The slopes below it ran to the north-west, but the mist prevented me from observing in which direction the next river actually flowed. Again I conferred with ‘Friend’, and naming various Tibetan towns to the north, I asked was he certain that his track did not pass through any of these. He was certain. The map was of no assistance. On again, and in twenty minutes we stood on a third pass, its crest lined with cairns and prayer flags. We were in a land of snow and rocks, far above all signs of vegetation—probably above 18,000 feet. The valley beyond the third pass descended in a west-north-westerly direction, and we followed it. At 2.30 p.m. we reached the end of the snow, but I was still uncertain as to the whereabouts of the badly defined frontier.

Suddenly, through the mist, a figure in a European-styled coat

appeared, and behind him another. I anxiously asked Urkien in front of me, 'Is he Chinese?'

'No.'

'An Indian?'

'No, a Ghurka. It looks like an Indian army coat he is wearing.'

We approached. It was a member of one of the Check Post staffs, on his way to another Post. Our new acquaintance wore light smooth-soled brown shoes, with laces undone, and he sheltered under an umbrella. He carried an elegant cane and no rucksack, while behind him came a heavily laden Thudam coolie. I thought of the pass crossings they had to do in the next two hours. Luckily they would have our knee-deep tracks to follow through the snow. The situation reminded me of a winter's day when Fort William lay snugly under a mantle of snow, and an earnest young English couple, clad in tweeds and plimsoles, strode briskly by at noon. 'Where are you going?' I anxiously enquired.

'To climb Ben Nevis,' came the hardy reply.

I was pleased to see at the first vegetation that the large blue poppies were still with us. This variety does not occur in Solu Khumbu, so somewhere ahead there must be a barrier which stops their westward movement. At 5 p.m. we stopped and pitched our tent in the rain. Our small fly was tied to the side of a rock, and the cooking was done under it. As we had been too high during the day to purchase eggs or pick wild vegetables, the evening meal was rice followed by tsampa tea.

That night Urkien, who had observed my refusal to cross into Tibet, and my wish to avoid Chinese patrols, asked, 'Why don't you like the Chinese?' At present the Chinese have only about four check points between Nepal and Tibet, and by crossing at some unguarded pass one could possibly penetrate for one hundred miles without being stopped. The possibility of spending several months in a Chinese prison is not a great deterrent to me, but much worse than that could happen. The Government of Nepal might refuse to give me a visa on a future occasion, and my rash action might forfeit the chances of other climbers seeking entry into Nepal. Through Peking it might be possible to arrange for permission to enter Tibet, but if one did so, there is a danger

of being branded for life as a political extremist, regardless of one's views.

Urkien said it was similar in some ways to the situation where anyone who enters Kashmir from Pakistan is then not permitted to enter India from Kashmir. What a crazy world! And hiding in the Himalayas does not keep one away from it all.

I decided it was time I gave Urkien some information about New Zealand, as he did at times go too far off the mark when telling his attractive listeners about my country of origin. To begin I asked him how near New Zealand is to England.

'England, Austria and New Zealand are all on the same side of the world, and all very close together.'

'Who told you that, Urkien?'

'Your letters from England, Austria and New Zealand all have the same Mem-sahib rahni on the stamps. If she rules them all, they must be close together.'

'I have no letters from Austria.' I thought for a moment. 'You mean Australia.'

The only outside countries other than Russia and China, which are even familiar names to the better-informed Sherpa, are those which send expeditions to the Himalayas. Urkien had met Austrians, but not Australians.

I took an hour to straighten out this misconception, and to give an answer to the next question, 'Why should big men like Hunt and Hillary be ruled by a woman?'

I fell asleep with Carlyle's *French Revolution* open on my chest. This and *War and Peace* were the two books I carried.

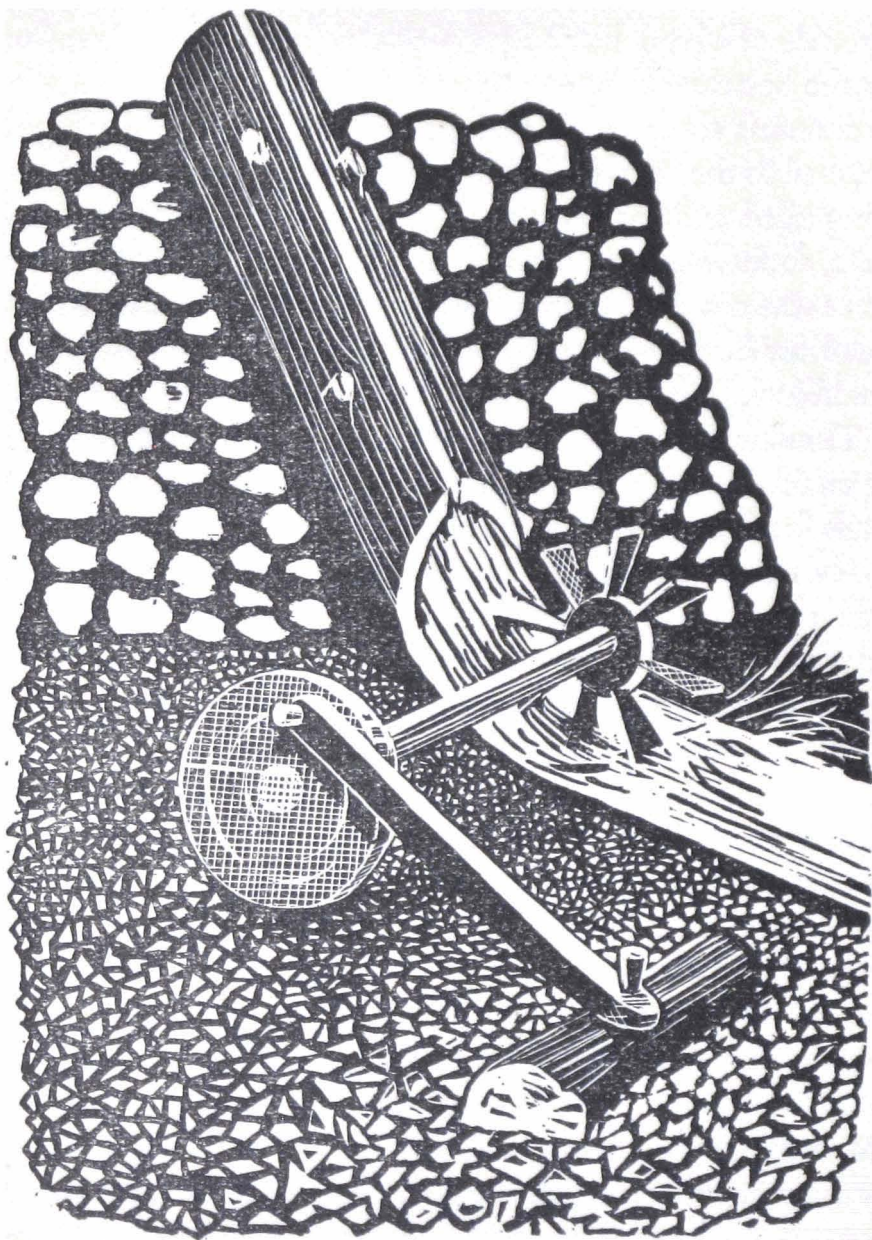
In the morning, June 12th, I was awakened by the cry at the tent door, 'Makalu top.' The question which immediately came to my lips was, 'Have the French climbed it?' If not, there might be a New Zealand attempt next year, and that might include an invitation for me. I emerged from the tent to look up at the first cloudless sky I had seen for two weeks, and dominating the western horizon was a lofty ice summit which could only be Mount Makalu, the fifth highest mountain in the world. As Everest and Lhotse were hidden behind it, Makalu towered far above all her visible neighbours. I took a photo and climbed a

spur which would command a wider view. Soon Chamlang was visible too, from this angle like a steep white wedge viewed in section, standing far above a dark green foreground. With the rising sun giving a golden glow to the icy peak that pierced a clear blue sky, it was a dawn to remember.

With such visibility I wished to take many observations, so the others left before I did, with instructions to wait for me in Thudam. I wandered along, making many stops for photographs. A stream coming in from my right, having a well-defined track on its bank, reassured me when I identified it. I felt we had not been on the wrong side of the Tibetan frontier. The track I followed descended into a steep heavily wooded valley, and sooner than I had expected I was in Thudam. For a few days from this village we would be on a track previously used by one European, Evans, who came this way in 1952. There are few interesting tracks in eastern and central Nepal which have not felt the tread of an Evans party, usually after the conclusion of a major expedition. This year, duties of Kangchenjunga leadership forced him to return immediately to Britain.

Urkien was away trying to buy food, so I removed my rucksack and began a tour of the village. Thudam is an unusual place for Nepal, as it has almost no grazing grounds attached to it. Because it has a flourishing wood pulp industry, an elaborate trading system has its centre there. Except in the south-east corner of Tibet and in one or two almost isolated pockets, no trees suitable for the manufacture of paper thrive in that country. Many Tibetans can read and write and there is a considerable general demand for writing paper, but the biggest paper consumers are the monasteries and temples, where whole libraries of books, mostly of a religious nature, are copied out by hand in neat Tibetan script. Nepalese villages like Thudam meet this demand for paper by pulping their local pine and juniper trees, and either export the pulp rolled into balls of about eight inches diameter, or sell the actual finished product, which is light and strong, and slightly transparent, frequently containing small wooden chips.

The simple but ingenious pulping machine is driven by water power, and every part of it, bearings, pins, axles and pipework is



*Simplified sketch of wood pulping machine at Thudam
(in actual fact there were bearings to hold the main shaft, anchors for
the hollow log, and boards round the pulping log).*

made entirely from local wood. Water is the only available lubricant for the moving parts. The source of power is a swift flowing stream which has been diverted into a hollow log, placed steeply on the side of a bank like a hydro-electric penstock. A jet of water from the bottom of the log turns a simple water wheel, which in turn connects to a crankshaft mechanism. The log being pulped is attached to the crankshaft, and when the power is turned on, the log is pulled and pushed across a rock at about thirty times a minute, soon wearing down the wood fibres. From the wet pulp which soon covers the rock, the balls described above are made. When they have been partly dried, they are ready for export by the dzubjock train.

In Thudam we could buy plenty of pulp balls, but no food. As their main industry is concerned with paper, they grow only enough food for their own use. I had intended to give the Sherpas a day of rest, but owing to the food shortages they suggested we should move on. Aila, an expert at locating alcohol, found a woman who would sell both chang and arak.

Again we had to climb to a pass, not so high this time, and then descend the Pila tributary of the Arun. On the climb up from Thudam we found an abundance of garlic to fortify the dwindling rations, then rain began to fall. We endured this for an hour, and eventually retired to a convenient overhanging rock where we spent the night. Although 'Friend' would not admit it, we were obviously past the place where his knowledge of the country ended. I asked him how long it would take us to reach the first village in the Arun. He gave no answer. Urkien came to my assistance, and under pressure from both of us a reply was given; '*Jaega, jaega, jaega, deckaega* (Will go, go, go, and will see).' During the next five months, whenever a doubtful question arose, someone would say '*Jaega, jaega, jaega, deckaega.*'

Under the rock we spent a comfortable night—the last of its kind for several days, because the next part of the route descended to the hot gorge of the Arun.

The Humid Arun

ON the western watershed of the Arun there are no passes of less than 20,000 feet in altitude within twenty miles of the Tibetan frontier. As I was not wanting to repeat the previous year's visits to the high passes in this region near Tibet, I decided to make a crossing south of Mount Chamlang, as part of our later exploration. Crossings of passes above 20,000 feet give very little pleasure during the monsoon, because at this time the snow is soft, cold and treacherous, and one is seldom able to see one's surroundings. To reach the country south of Chamlang would mean a change of direction to the south, following the gorge of the Arun for several days, before again travelling west. The only unpleasant feature of this programme was that the gorge was below 4,000 feet in altitude which meant difficulties presented by food shortages, humidity and mosquitoes. Before reaching the Arun I issued paludrine anti-malaria pills to the party.

The pass above Thudam was easy to cross, but as usual there was nothing to see from the top but fog. We descended quickly to the Pila Khola and for five hours raced along well-trodden tracks. The air became humid and the vegetation was rapidly changing to a more tropical variety. An hour before the track plunges down to the sweltering depths of the Arun, it passes through a Bhotia village called Ritak. We stopped here, rather early in the day, to avoid having to sleep in the unaccustomed Turkish bath temperatures of the gorge beyond the village.

Ritak is situated high on a cultivated spur, commanding an outstanding view towards the river valley which winds its way through a heat haze out towards the plains of India. Here 'Friend' was paid off, and from the look on his face one could see that he

had never before seen so much money. We had enjoyed his company, his carrying capacity, and his knowledge of the earlier part of the route. I unrolled my sleeping bag on the verandah of the house which the Sherpas had occupied. I sat down and began recording my diary for the last three days, soon to be joined by our hostess who called her small daughter to her, and began plaiting her newly washed hair. First some butter was rubbed into the hair and one large plait was formed. The longer the pigtail the better, and as the daughter's hair was no more than a foot in length, her mother produced some eighteen-inch strands of her own hair and grafted them on to the plait. Finally I saw the addition of a large cluster of red cotton threads, which made the whole 'tail' about three feet long. This appears to be quite a common practice in Nepal. When the hair is washed, the added portion is removed separately, washed, dried and buttered. When it was returned to its grafted position, I could not tell where this dead hair began.

In the morning we left early to avoid the hottest part of the day, but within half an hour we all complained of the heat generated through our rucksacks, heavy with the extra weight of 'Friend's' divided load. Across the valley from our rapidly descending track, was an enormous scar on the hillside—a relic of the slip which had dammed the river for a few hours some years ago, and when breached, had caused great havoc downstream. The Arun rises in Tibet, where it is known as the Phung Chu. It drains an extensive area south of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra River), and cuts through the main Himalayan divide at an altitude of about 5,000 feet above sea level. As we now approached this river I was surprised and overawed by its noise and speed when in full flow. The colour of the roaring torrent indicated that the glaciers in Tibet were contributing a great volume to the frightening flood.

When the bridge came in sight, our worries began. Many Sherpas have difficulties on a bad bridge, and I already knew this to be Gyalgen's main weakness. The structure, about one hundred and fifty feet long, was of suspension design and the ropes supporting all the weight were made from green bamboo sticks, which had been split and twisted together to form a rope of about

one inch in diameter. At intervals of four to six feet, very flimsy bamboo or creeper strands were attached to the main ropes, and these strands in turn supported one round wooden pole, on which the traveller must walk. The disturbing feature of all these bridges is the method of anchoring the main ropes. They are normally tied with only one simple looped knot. Occasional gaps in the walking log are far from comforting, and bamboo bridges have much more deflection and sway than those of steel rope suspension bridges. At each end there are prayer flags. These are usually prayers and Buddhist symbols in Tibetan script stencilled on to cheap cotton cloth, attached to vertical bamboo poles.

I hopefully shook a prayer flag, and with umbrella and ice-axe strapped vertically to my rucksack to keep my hands free, I began the crossing. There were obstacles all the way, and in the middle the sway and general slackness were so bad that I feared the whole structure might turn upside down. However, as the uphill part began, the swaying decreased, and before long I was safely across. The Sherpas behind me were leaving half their loads, intending to make two crossings each, with only one person on the bridge at a time. Soon Urkien approached and his face showed he was having the same difficulties as I had experienced. Then Gyalgen followed, and at mid-span his confidence failed him, and he clamped himself to the ropes, unable to move, gazing fearfully at the swirling mass of water scarcely three feet below him. Urkien, nearer to him than I was, rushed to the bridge, reached over Gyalgen to remove his rucksack, and together they slowly advanced to my side. Aila Tensing required no assistance. Three people had to return for the remaining half-loads, and Gyalgen was in no condition to move. I took his headband and returned with the others. This time we managed it with few delays, but the complete operation had taken two hours. Had the foot-logs been wet with rain, and had we kept to the rule of one on the bridge at a time in wet conditions, it could have delayed us four hours.

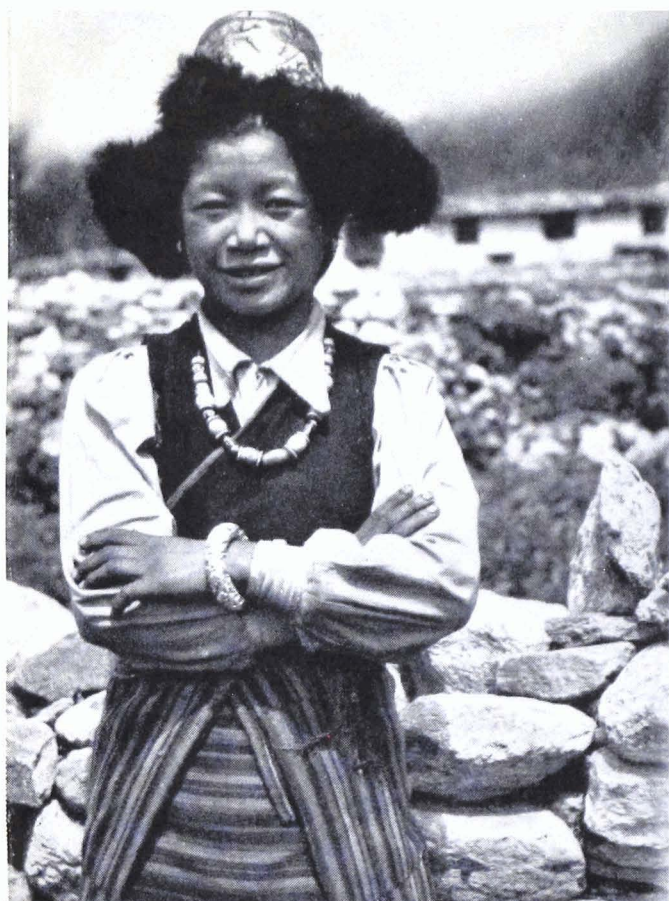
In sweltering heat we climbed to the next village. At the first house Gyalgen made a request for chang, and for the first time he showed reluctance to follow the customary preliminary questions.

We sat outside while the woman mixed the chang, again a millet brew. Most residents of the upper Arun have handsome faces and fine physiques, and those in this village were no exception. Several spectators joined us, and the majority of the men and women wore small caps of the normal Bhotia style, frequently with some Indian silver rupees attached to the sides. Necklaces made from rupees were also common, and the beads as worn by Sherpas were universal. Several of the women, especially the older ones, wore chastity belts of hand-beaten silver. Until a few generations ago they were in actual use, but these had been partly dismantled and were worn for ornamental purposes over the striped apron.

Most of the able-bodied men and women had been out harvesting their wheat. Each person had two baskets, one large and one small. A handful of stalks were cut at ground level with a sickle, then they were placed upside down in the small basket so that all the ears were at one end of the bunch. The stalks were then held over the large basket and all the ears cut off in one sweep of the sickle. Afterwards the baskets full of ears would be carried away and their contents spread out on bamboo mats or yak hair blankets for the sun and wind to do their work. Finally, with man-powered beating, the grain would be separated from the husks. The husks and straw would be fed to the pigs which are kept in small fields of grass or enclosed in sheds.

We watched these operations for a while and then moved on to Chepua, which is in the centre of a rich grain-growing area and a junction of tracks leading to Tibet, Hatia, and Khandbari. Here we decided to have our overdue rest-day. We replenished our stocks of flour while we waited, baking the barley and grinding it ourselves on the local water-driven mill. This consisted of a vertical shaft with a water wheel at its lower end, and at the top a heavy stone wheel with a hole through its centre. Water pouring down a hollow log turned the water wheel, and the grain was dropped through the hole in the stone wheel. The lower face of this rotating wheel ground against a stationary stone, and from between the two, emerged our beloved tsampa.

There were reports of food shortages lower down the Arun, so



Kami Doma, elder daughter of Sherap Lama, dressed for the Dumji



Leaders of 'the younger set' in Khumjung. The lady's sister married a Chinese merchant from Tibet



Copper and wooden vessels fill the shelves of Urkien's house. To the right is the wooden, brass-bound tea churn and in the centre, a water container complete with head-band



Tashi with his wife (third from right) and their five children

PLATE 4



Gyalgen and his wife (Urkien's sister) with their two daughters. Note the hand forged lock from Those on the door and the yak dung plaster on the wall

in Chepua we bought potatoes and eggs in addition to the flour. In order that we could avoid the humid gorge as long as possible, I made a minor change of plans, and decided to follow the longer high route on the right bank of the river, instead of the shorter alternative which descends rapidly and necessitates two further bridge crossings. Again we enlisted a new man who knew the tracks ahead and would lighten our burdens. Immediately south of Chepua is the steepest section of the Arun gorge. Our track wound round impressive cliffs, far above the roaring river, and further south a horizon familiar from last year was making its first appearance from this direction. The next village, Hatia, became visible across a tributary ravine. An eagle, with wing tips slightly uplifted, glided over our heads and, without moving its wings, soared to a rock wall beside Hatia. It looked too easy.

We went to the bottom of the ravine and worked our way up the other side under the glare of a merciless sun. Two large groups of women were transplanting millet seeds into extensive fields which were evidently worked on a communal basis. Communal grazing grounds are also frequently seen in the highlands of Nepal. The women were stripped to the waist, with the exception of their necklaces, bracelets and ear-rings which stood out in bright contrast to the sun tanned skins of their wearers. Our new recruit called out a phrase frequently heard in male company, '*Likpa sirki dorji.*' I waited to hear the women's retaliation, as I knew the meaning of the phrase, 'adorned with a thunderbolt penis', applied as a nickname to a sahib on a previous expedition. A stronger remark came back from one of the women. There was general laughter.

Urkien searched for more eggs, while I looked round the village. The houses were solidly constructed and spacious, but some of the men were particularly wild-looking. I watched a game like marbles being played by some small boys—or was it more like billiards? A hole was made in the ground, and a potato placed in front of it. The boys took turns at rolling potatoes at the stationary one, trying to pot it. If the one to be potted rolled past the hole, all the competitors would walk round to a new base line, and roll their missiles from there.

I found the Sherpas, by this time dealing with a gallon of chang. They kept some for me, and when the Chepua coolie thought I was suitably mellow, he suggested we should stay in Hatia for the night as there were no villages ahead. I reminded them that it was only one o'clock, and said that even if the tent had to be pitched in the jungle, we would go on that day. In three minutes we were out of town. Soon it was raining, and as we entered our first heavy jungle of the journey, we encountered our first leeches—greatly over-rated Himalayan hazards. If one takes reasonable precautions, very few climb to the top of boots and puttees to a place where they can draw blood. Their bite is relatively painless, but the most objectionable aspect of the leech is seeing it expanded to three times its normal size with one's own blood. Infection seldom occurs from the wounds if they are washed each day. Leeches are never seen on a dry track, or within a hundred yards of a house where fowls can find them. Thus if we chose resting places under overhanging dry rocks, or near houses, we were seldom molested by leeches. However we were occasionally attacked by these slug like creatures when they attached themselves to our clothing as we pushed through waist high grass.

The track lost height rapidly, and in spite of a delay at a river crossing we reached a village at 4.30 p.m. As the Chepua man had said no villages existed, my hostility towards him increased. I was noticing his remarks to all the people we passed, far more offensive than the entertaining salutations of the subtle Sherpas, when he came to me and demanded more pay. I fired him without consulting Urkien. In five minutes my Sirdar came running to me, to report that there were no men under sixty years of age in the village, and no women who could work for us. We had now entered the paddy fields area, and every able-bodied person was away planting rice. After a further search for a coolie, we had to go back to the Chepua, who was still standing nearby, wearing a silly grin, and re-employ him at his price, promising to replace him at the first opportunity. My humiliation was complete.

The village was filthy. Pigs roamed the 'streets', the house we occupied was full of fleas and inquisitive visitors, and I was not in the best of tempers. The only advantages of low altitudes are

bananas and chickens. The former were not ripe, and the latter were too dear or sitting on eggs. In any case I did not like the appearance of the food the chickens ate, picked from the refuse shared with the pigs. To cap all this, where there are rice paddies there are usually mosquitoes. These always called at night.

For two days we followed the west bank of the Arun, seldom seeing anyone on the way, and beginning to have worries about our food supply. Late on the first day we came to a tiny terrace where there was one house. The owner wore an army hat and the badge of the Eighth Gurkhas. I know eleven men who have been officers in Gurkha Regiments, but through encounters such as this, the names of twenty or so have become familiar. This man had seen service in Malaya, and now, having left the army, had hacked his terrace out of the hillside and was somehow supporting his wife, two children and a dog from his half acre plot, at present full of ripening maize. In this hot damp climate he would get two crops in one monsoon season. He could not sell us any food, nor could he join us as a coolie, because his precious unfenced maturing maize had to be guarded from man and beast.

Only one hundred yards from his house was a leopard trap, and the owner told me it had claimed three victims in the last year. It consisted of a substantial framework of roughly hewn logs driven firmly into the ground to make a covered enclosure. Inside the trap was a post to which a goat or a dog could be tied for bait. A dog seems to be regarded by the leopard as a great delicacy. There is one small entrance to this wooden structure and while the leopard works his way through it attracted by the bait, he touches a trip beam and releases a heavy log and a ton of stones which fall on him and pin him to the ground.

I heard that a European living on the outskirts of Kathmandu decided to erect a trap to catch the leopards which came into his property. A structure was built and several animals were caught alive behind a trap door, and were later sold to a zoo. On one occasion a visitor enquired about the trap. So that he could inspect the mechanism of the door, it was raised for him, and to everyone's astonishment, out jumped a leopard, bound for the freedom of the jungle.

Late on the second day a track was reached, which Urkien and I knew from the year before, and this would be followed for one day. We sat down for a rest, and, as was quite normal, Gyalgen vanished without saying where he was going. The Chepua man took advantage of the stop to clean himself. He removed his shirt, drew his nineteen inch kukri from its sheath, and with a delicate touch removed the dirt from his back and stomach, using the sharp blade as a scraping edge. Later I was to see that he could clean his whole body with this blade. When our rest, cleaning and amusements had concluded, I told the others to go ahead and prepare our camp at a village two miles further on, while I watched Gyalgen's rucksack. I waited and waited. At last Gyalgen returned, accompanied by two women carrying bottles of chang. Our containers had gone ahead to the village, carried by our chief drinkers, and the women refused to buy back the chang. Gyalgen, a master at improvisation, unpacked his only container, the tea kettle, stuffed its spout full of grass so nothing would spill, and then filled it, and tied its lid as securely as possible.

'But Gyalgen, you still have a gallon to get rid of.'

Gyalgen uttered the magic words, so often heard before, 'We'll celebrate Kangchenjunga.' And so with the two women we sat on the track and consumed the surplus. When the bottles were empty, we ran like mad things, all the way to the village.

For a change we were to sleep in the tent. The local women stood well away, very timid, but compelled by curiosity to watch the bearded monster, a little the worse for chang, who had invaded the village. The men, however, crowded round the tent, inspected the equipment and me, and generally kept everyone amused—unlike the silent staring hordes one sees near the Indian frontier. Suddenly a roar of laughter rang through the camp. Gyalgen had looked at my watch and then he asked the Chepua man to guess the time.

'About half past eighteen o'clock.'

The Sherpas and locals had never before heard of a time beyond twelve. For days after, Aila could always raise a laugh by his own piece of exaggeration, 'A quarter past thirty-two.'

Sedua we should reach on the next day, and knowing there

were many capable men there, I decided to retain our Chepua failure for one more day. Before Sedua there is a considerable river, the Kasuwa Khola. This had provided crossing troubles for Shipton's party in 1952 and Hillary's in 1954. We made enquiries and found that the French party, returning from Mount Makalu some ten days earlier, had paid the locals to build a bridge, but this had already been washed away. We learned also that they had climbed Makalu. In heavy rain we now approached this river, a truly fearsome sight. A man across the river called to one who had followed us. They offered to make a bridge for us, at an exorbitant price, which I declined. Armed with kukris we went off, cut three poles from the forest, and pushed them across the narrowest span we could find. With the climbing rope we lashed the poles together, and I went across to assist the others as they came. The Chepua man shouted out to me that when we went on and took the rope with us, the bridge would collapse, and he would have no way of getting home. I returned to him, paid his wages, and carried his load over the bridge. Reduced again to a total party of four, we divided the extra burden between us.

On the way up the hill, a Sedua man joined us. 'Why did you make a bridge?' he asked.

'We had to cross the river somehow.'

'If you walk upstream for twenty minutes, there are two rocks so close together that one can jump from one to the other, and cross the river as it passes through a cavern below.'

'Why haven't we heard of this before?' we wanted to know.

'Anyone who can afford to pay for coolies, has enough money to give us a day's wages to build him a bridge. On one occasion we heard that an expedition was coming, and the old bridge was still there, so we cut it loose.'

While I made myself comfortable in Sedua, Urkien went to buy some food. He returned with the village headman, who had donated his last potatoes as an advance payment for treatment I would give him for his diarrhoea.

I asked, 'What have you been eating?'

'Bananas and maize.'

'And any flour or potatoes?'

'No. There will be no more until the next harvest.'

He had sold his flour to the coolies employed by the French Expedition, and now he had to live for at least a month on unripe maize and bananas. As there was no permanent assistance I could give him, I bought some of his green maize and returned his gift of potatoes.

At the lower levels in Nepal early in the monsoon, although all plants grow vigorously, if last year's stocks are low there can be a food shortage until half-way through the monsoon, when the first crops ripen. Invariably the population is so heavy that the wild vegetables are consumed by only a few families, leaving none for the traveller. At this time chickens are hatching, which means that few hens are laying eggs, and all fowls of an edible size are taking care of a brood. The situation at about 6,000 feet is somewhat better, as there the wheat ripens early, and at least there is flour for all. Higher still, in the land of yak and abundant wild vegetables, there are few food problems at this time, and the people at these altitudes, closer akin to the Sherpas, are more willing to part with their stocks to parties which include Sherpas.

In Sedua we, too, had to eat green corn, a few potatoes, and the flour we were carrying. In the evening, perhaps to remind me of home, one of the villagers sat beside my sleeping bag, and for forty minutes he blew into a mouth organ—a relic of a past expedition. He knew no European tunes, nor anything that would fit a C major scale. He tried to make his own attractive music fit the limited notes of this monster, but with disastrous results.

Again we enlisted a new man, and the most polite of the names he received from the Sherpas was Samdi. He did not in any way deserve an impolite name. We had put on our loads and walked two hundred yards, when Samdi, in front, stopped our column and asked. 'When will you reach Solu Khumbu?'

'In about twelve days.'

'Can I stay with your party all the way?' he asked.

'We'll see. You don't know the tracks for more than three days ahead, so we might have to replace you with a local man when we get into trouble with the route.'

'I'll always run ahead to find out which is the right way.' I appreciated such enthusiasm, and Samdi did in fact accompany us to Solu Khumbu.

On the west bank of the Arun there were two large tributary rivers to cross before reaching the Sangkhua, which we would ascend for our next pass. The first of these, the Iswa, was bridged by a double-spanned structure of bamboo poles, insecurely tied. A cataract just upstream drenched it with spray, and made the smooth bamboo particularly treacherous. When we saw the bridge from a distance of a hundred yards, Samdi said he was going home. Nearer the bridge, the roar of the torrent prevented such remarks being heard, but from the looks on other faces, I gathered that Samdi was not alone in his troubles. Only Urkien would follow me on to the bridge, but before he did so, he tied the worst of the bamboo junctions with yak hide thongs. We used the mountaineering rope, tied high under our armpits, as a safeguard. In water, as in crevasses, there is a danger, in the event of a slip, of a man being held upside down if his support is at waist level and he has a heavy rucksack on his back. We two ferried the five loads across, and by this time we were cold, soaked and dirty from the glacial water which caught us at the most critical part of the main span. Samdi had never before seen a crossing like this one. He tied himself to the middle of the rope, and, not very willingly, crossed the bridge between the two of us. On seeing Samdi on the other side, Aila and Gyalgen had to do something about their diminishing courage and follow the man who was regarded as inferior in river and mountain technique. Urkien, to recover his yak hide thongs, made two more crossings.

We slept that night in a storehouse, perched Polynesian style several feet above the ground. On the outer wall of a neighbouring house was a beehive. This was a hollow log, sixteen inches in diameter and about four feet long, with a small entrance at one side. It had been split down the middle to facilitate the first hollowing process, and so that it could be opened for removing the honey. The split was sealed on the outside with cow dung, and no doubt, if there were gaps visible from the inside, the bees would have sealed them with wax. The bees themselves were a light

colour, of apparently Italian strain, so unlike their large and darker wild brothers.

In the evening I read some more of Carlyle. The women were marching on Versailles. I closed the door and put an ice-axe against it.

Next day the Chhoyang bridge passed easily, and the journey down the west bank continued in the same damp heat. The further we went, the riper became the maize, but the bananas and the occasional lemons and oranges were far from ready. Eventually we began climbing to a spur which would give us access to the Sangkhua Khola. During a rest at a village where even Aila could find no refreshments, I saw three photographs on the verandah of a mud-walled house. One photograph was of a young Ghurka lance-corporal, the second showed a Ghurka Regiment, and the third was unmistakably Field-Marshal Slim. The man of the house was away working as a coolie, and his lady could identify the lance-corporal as her husband, but knew no others. The Field-Marshal's photograph was comparatively recent, and it was on recognisable photographic paper, not cut from a newspaper or a magazine. I expressed so much interest in this photograph appearing in such a remote corner of the world, that Gyalgen, standing nearby and understanding little of what I had said, asked, 'Is he your father?'

South of Chamlang

THE Survey of India maps show five roughly parallel rivers in the vicinity of Mount Chamlang. The Hongu appears with its headwaters north-west of that mountain, and two others, the Iswa and the Barun, are shown with their sources to the north-east. The remaining two, the Sangkhua and the Chhoyang have headwaters immediately south of Chamlang. The Sangkhua, Chhoyang, Iswa, and Barun are all tributaries of the Arun. In 1954, as part of the New Zealand Alpine Club's Expedition, Evans and Harrow went to the head of the Chhoyang and crossed a new pass there and entered the upper Iswa. At the same time, as part of the same Expedition, I was a member of a group which followed the Iswa to its head. We found that this was also south of Chamlang, not north-east as shown on the map, and the pass at its head actually saddled with what appeared to be a tributary of the Hongu to the west. This meant that the Sangkhua, rising between these two, and shown on the map as rising at Chamlang's summit, must in fact have its headwaters further south. None of these parties reached a point where it could look into the Sangkhua, and Evans was not completely satisfied with his Chhoyang survey.

One of the biggest objectives later, with my wife and Macdonald, would be to reach a point from which the whole of the upper Sangkhua could be recorded, and I wanted to examine the Hongu tributaries to confirm the suggestion that the Iswa saddled with the Hongu. Now that I was entering the lower Sangkhua below its gorge, I wanted to find what knowledge of it the local people had. Was the gorge negotiable, and were there yak or sheep tracks to its headwaters? Were there passes from the

Sangkhua to its neighbours, the Hongu and the Chhoyang? There were also many unanswered questions concerning the bird, plant and especially the animal life.

Very soon I heard that there was a track up the west side of the Chhoyang, to a pass with a tarn on its crest. This pass evidently gave access to the Sangkhua. Some shepherds had recently driven a flock of sheep to the pass, and the journey up and back to the Arun had taken nine days. I was not anxious to follow this route during the monsoon, when we might have to wait on the pass for many days for the clouds to disperse, and then perhaps see into only a part of the valley. The later visit with a stronger party, after the monsoon, would be more likely to bring success.

Everyone we questioned agreed it was not possible to go up the Sangkhua gorge. I inspected it, and I could only agree with them that it was impossible. Great rocky bluffs were hanging from gloomy clouds and the interlocking toes of adjacent bluffs were obscured by waterfalls in the main stream. Yet this river, even in the monsoon, was a clear blue colour, indicating that there could be no glaciers of any size in its headwaters. Mount Chamlang, seen from any angle, even from the plains of India sixty miles away, is obviously a major ice peak which must have enormous glaciers on its flanks. Surely a surveyor, on seeing the discoloured outlet of the Iswa and the clear water of the Sangkhua, must have had doubts in his mind when he placed the head of the Sangkhua at the highest summit of Chamlang?

We were informed of a Bhotia village at an altitude of 11,000 feet above the right bank of the lower Sangkhua Khola. Also, rumour had it that they owned yak. If so, they would have high altitude grazing grounds for them somewhere, and that might mean they had a track towards the Sangkhua, entering it at a high level, above the gorge. We would proceed to the Bhotia village. The river was crossed and the climb began.

Several small villages lay on our route, and in them we found many unusual contrasts in wealth and social structure. Two and three-storied well-constructed houses were owned by relatively few landlords, and all the other houses were small single-roomed buildings with mud floors. We entered one of the latter for

chang. It was Aila's turn to pay, and he produced an Indian rupee. The woman had never before seen one, and she was scarcely familiar with Nepalese coinage. In order to explain the Indian money, the Sherpas called it by the English name 'Company', the name by which the Indian rupee is still known in most of Nepal. The Indian rupee was first issued by the East India Company, and 'Company' is still the word used to distinguish it from Nepalese currency.

I said, 'You must have money for buying your rice and cotton materials?'

'No, I have two crops of maize and millet each year. Rice is grown down in the gorge, and every month I carry down some of my millet and exchange it for rice and cotton.'

'Do you need wool in the winter?'

'That comes from the Bhotias up the hill. They like millet chang, and for a drink give away wool and yak hair.'

She owned two goats and some hens and two terraces of about a quarter-acre each. The goats were taken away each day to communal grazing grounds, and her son, who watched the goats, also tended those of a neighbour who made another plot of land available for my informant. I was convinced. For her simple existence she needed no money. Urkien, who had been absorbed by this conversation, asked, 'Are there any empty houses here for the Sahib?'

As the day was drawing to a close we reached the first Bhotia house. These people were very like Sherpas, and Urkien would refer to them as Bhotia, and a minute later as Sherpa. They were a fine-looking people, not so timid as those lower down in the Arun gorge, and there was obviously much more equality between man and woman.

What a relief it was to be cooled to a reasonable temperature once more, and find again the other benefits of higher altitude. We were invited inside. After Urkien had led the way in, I followed, lightly whistling some Beethoven to myself. There was a sudden hush inside. Urkien, trying to educate me correctly, said rather crossly, 'You must never whistle inside a Sherpa house.' I sat down very humbly on the mat placed for me on the floor,

not daring to ask about the whistling until the normal household noises were again smoothly humming. While I sat by the fire, a woman handed me two brass bowls, one containing potatoes boiled in their skins, and the other bright red chillies. The others were removing the skins with their finger nails, but at this I was hopeless, as most of my nails had recently fallen out, as a result of mild frostbite on Kangchenjunga. Urkien, aware of this ailment, was occasionally passing me a peeled potato. Someone noticed, and asked what was wrong with my fingers, and why were they such a strange colour. For the first time I heard the Sherpas really 'shooting a line'. I could not understand it all, but I lowered my head, busy with a potato, pretending to understand nothing. Story after story came out, about the cold, the summit, the lifts to the top camps, and as I was the only climber present among the listeners, it all sounded as if I had been involved in everything on Kangchenjunga. The comments of the audience were frank and frequent. Had they realised that I understood some of them, it would have been embarrassing to everyone, instead of only to me.

Urkien recounted the story about the yeti on Kangchenjunga. Band and I had descended to old Camp I after a hard day's work on the mountain. Urkien and a companion came up to the same camp from below. I remarked when we met, 'You climbed very fast. We could see you from above.'

Without a smile Urkien replied, 'Yes, we were worried. We followed the tracks of two yeti going towards your camp. They are both females, and their tracks lead into your tent. Their breasts are so large they had to throw them over their shoulders before they bent down to the tent door.'

Later I had a quiet word in a corner with Urkien. Apparently whistling is associated with the aggressive whistle made to drive yak, and to do it inside a Sherpa house means you want to drive away all the occupants and their portable property! I apologised. The whole yak culture is deeply embedded in the Sherpa. Before the potatoes and grains reached Nepal, the Sherpas and Bhotias were much more nomadic than they are now, and their principal source of livelihood was the yak, living from him and migrating with him with the seasons, much as the Lapps do with their

reindeer. Now every yak owner has potato crops, and possibly grains to harvest. These limit his time away with his yak, and ensure that he returns each season to the same area. Associated with the definite areas for the crops, similar limits have been defined for the seasonal movements of each yak herd.

I was later to observe another reason against whistling inside a house. A Sherpa woman wishing her baby to pass urine will whistle to it on one high-pitched soft note. In Khumjung I gave Urkien a pressure cooker, only to find that when it emitted steam, the noise it made had disastrous effects on the bedding of his infant son.

My sleeping bag was unrolled, and I climbed into it. There, adorning the walls above my feet, was a chastity belt, carelessly dangling from a shelf. At the fashion parades this summer belts will not be worn. My attention was diverted by Urkien explaining what he had learned about the Sangkhua. On the ridge to the west, the watershed between the Hongu and the Sangkhua, there was a track which led over a 14,000 feet peak, and then into our area to be explored. Dzums are grazed in the peak area, and sheep are taken into the upper Sangkhua. The best way for us to reach Solu Khumbu would be to go up to this Hongu watershed to a pass called the Kemba La, at which point the northward yak route left our westerly track, going to the lower Hongu. From the Hongu Aila knew the route for the last stages of the journey, taking us towards the Dudh Kosi, which is the largest river in this area and has Mount Everest on its watershed.

I readily agreed to taking this Kemba La route, as we might see some more of the Sangkhua on the way, and since the tracks sounded reasonably easy to follow, we could try them without another change of labour. Thus we were able to retain our greatly appreciated Samdi. The alternative to the Kemba La track was a well-known route further south, through country which has been accurately recorded on maps.

On the next day, the 24th of June, little progress was made. After walking for two hours in the rain, we came to another Sherpa-Bhotia settlement where some of the previous year's maize was bought. A fire was lit, and Gyalgen converted the maize into 'pop corn'. There were no water-driven mills here, but

each house possessed a hand-driven pair of stones which ground a rather inconsistent flour. Samdi and I, with a bag of baked corn, and Urkien and Aila with another, went to separate houses, sat on the floors and made our flour. The whole operation of answering questions, purchasing, baking the corn, and grinding it, took three hours. Then, on again, glad to observe that the Sherpas were singing their own songs and talking their own language. At lower levels, even without a Ghurka audience, they tend to speak Ghurkali, and sing the harsher and less rhythmical Nepali songs.

In the evening we reached a clearing with an animal shelter on it, and many goats and dzum grazing in its vicinity. A kid had its neck covered in blood. I looked more closely and found a great cluster of leeches attached to it. After informing the owner, who was not in the least perturbed, I caught the kid myself, and killed eight leeches from its neck, and four more which had been up its nostrils.

The Sherpas meanwhile, were making the shelter fit for human habitation, sweeping the mud floor clean by using bunches of twigs and straw. I went inside, followed shortly by thirty goats and a dog. I raised objections to the dog being inside as it carried many small travellers on its back, and it kept sniffing our food, whereas the goats soon settled in a corner, in no one's way. Soon several cows and dzum decided to join us. I chased them out, as they are rather heavy and inclined to indiscretions.

The morning was as fine as any we had had so far. The Sherpas departed for the Kemba La at 7.30, but I waited for another hour, taking photographs and compass bearings of all that part of the upper Sangkhua which was then visible. I travelled alone, through a rhododendron forest, this time not in flower. In a clearing two girls, one perhaps seven and the other five, spied and followed me. Round a corner was a yakherd's shelter, and two great barking mastiffs came running out of it, heading for me—a fearsome sight. Each of my two escorts chose a dog and bore down on it, throwing tiny arms round the thick shaggy necks. The smaller girl was dragged to the ground, but the dogs knew them and stood still, offering an occasional defiant bark as I passed. The owner of the

mastiffs tied them to a post, called me back, and gave me some curdled dzum's milk, reminiscent of yoghurt.

We climbed higher and again found ourselves beyond all permanent habitation. Our route passed through more rhododendrons, and on the higher grazing grounds, covering hundreds of acres, was one great carpet of anenomes, poppies and buttercups. In one such pasture I overtook my companions. Gyalgen was chewing something. He asked with complete simplicity, 'Is this plant poisonous? It tastes like onions.' It looked very like a lily of the valley, but as its bud was just forming I could not be certain. We decided not to eat it, but we picked more of the wild garlic, which was almost as common as the flowers.

Many spurs passed by, and then the Kemba La itself. Our path continued to a spur which would eventually take us to the Hongu Khola, and on reaching a yak shelter at five o'clock we occupied it, pleased that we would not have to share it with any animals. Here I had to reprimand Samdi for the first time. I had asked him to bring in some wood, and he returned so soon that I became suspicious. The wood he brought consisted of neat stakes trimmed with a kukri, and they had been the posts placed in the ground by the owner of the shelter for tying his animals at night. Samdi had to go into the forest and cut a new set of posts.

The lower Hongu Khola is separated from the upper by another impenetrable gorge. Access to the upper Hongu is by one of five passes, three of which are over 19,000 feet high. After the monsoon we hoped to place a well provisioned camp in the upper Hongu and carry out our Sangkhua and Iswa investigations from there.

The drop to the lower valley from the Kemba La was a very considerable one, and again we were taken away from the Bhotia country, to descend to a climate where bananas grow, and where the small man with his acre of terrace lives at a slender subsistence level on maize and millet. On the way down, Samdi, who was barefooted, showed me two nasty cracks across the soles of his feet. I expressed sympathy, and made a mental note that I would lend him my gym shoes that night, but as they were deep down in my rucksack I would not unpack them at present. Down we

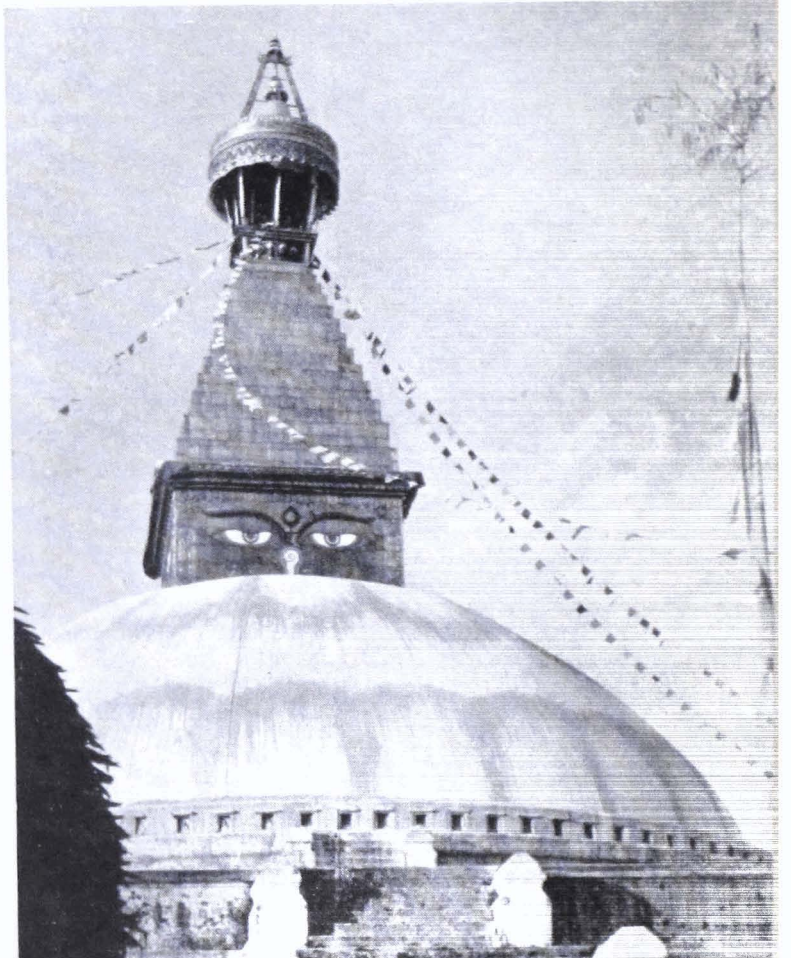
went through the jungle, past eleven langur apes, none looking like my idea of a yeti, and then to the village of Chheskam, where we stopped for the night. I arrived twenty minutes behind the others, to find Samdi, with a darning needle and a heavy linen thread, sewing rough stitches into the sole of his foot. The gym shoes hastily appeared (see plate 1).

Urkien was away searching for food, and he returned with the same low-altitude story. 'Everything is growing, but nothing is ripe.' Our stocks were low and our tsampa was finished. Urkien, like a professional magician, dropped his hands into his pockets, and casually withdrew two eggs, a green tomato and some small potatoes. He had met a British Army Ghurka on leave from Malaya. The only Europeans the man had ever seen were British Officers and he expected me to be the same. He asked Urkien my name and rank, and inquired if I were English. He was not impressed by my name and lack of military rank, but as I had lived in England for five years, he said I must be all right. He went into his house, and from a chest he withdrew two eggs and a tomato. I was grateful to both Urkien and the unknown Ghurka. If I should ever enter the British Army I shall apply for a Ghurka Regiment. If successful, I would note all the names of those who live above 5,000 feet in Nepal, and when my term of duty ended I would gradually visit the homes of them all.

Our party moved west again, and another day ended beyond yet another pass, in a gompa which was in the charge of a Tibetan-trained lama and four young monks. The temple was in a delightful situation, perched on a hill, surrounded by a sturdy wall of stones forming a circle eighty yards across. A close examination of the stones revealed repeated inscriptions of Tibetan prayers. Inside the wall was a row of well established yew, fir and cedar trees, whose seeds had been brought from Darjeeling many years previously. While our food was cooking, an attractive and obviously pregnant woman joined the spectators. She carried a load of wood on her back, and on the wood was her small son, who screamed when he saw me. The wood was given to us, and after the boy had fallen asleep, the woman explained that her husband, in the nearby village, had malaria. She asked me to cure



Contrast in the skylines of Hindu and Buddhist temples in the Durbar Square, Patan, Kathmandu

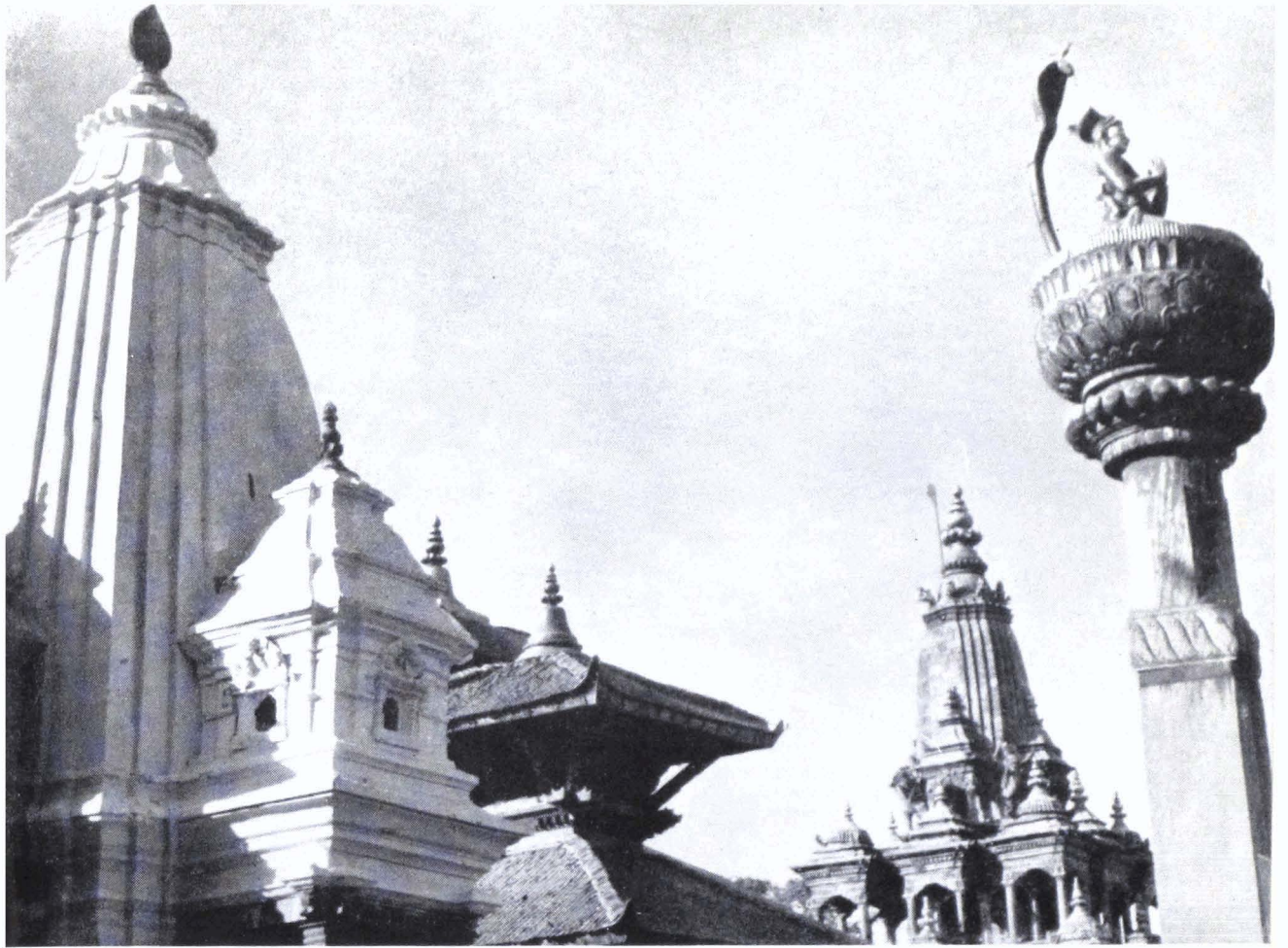


Many Tibetans and Sherpas visit this Buddhist Shrine near Kathmandu. The all-seeing eyes gaze beyond the colourful flags donated by the devout pilgrims

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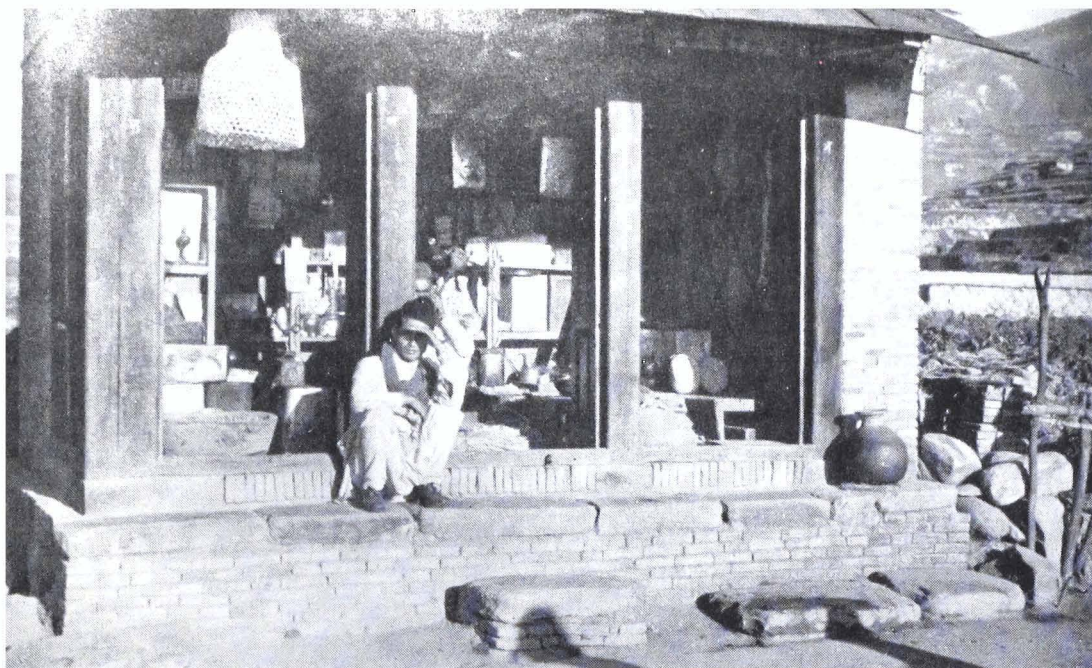
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Contrast in the skylines of Hindu and Buddhist temples in the Durbar Square, Patan, Kathmandu





A Nepalese waits for customers at his shop near Banepa



An easy track in the lower foothills passes by an old Newari rest house in the shade of a Banyan tree



One of the safer bridges on the route from Kathmandu. The stout chains were forged at Those

him. I gave away all the paludrine and quinine that could be spared, enough to give some relief from the fever for possibly thirty days. I impressed on the woman that in her condition she must not take the quinine. She was full of gratitude, and afterwards asked Urkien if there was anything I wanted. He knew I wanted a woollen shepherd's cloak, and she wore a fine one. She came and gave it to me, but I could not accept it, knowing that my treatment of her husband was unlikely to be permanent. Instead she agreed to sell us some rice, a precious commodity in this village, far above the rice-growing districts.

We camped in the gompa basement, and the lama and friends held a ceremony above our heads. Aila and Gyalgen had gone away at 4 p.m. to obtain food, and returned at 10.30 without food, but full of chang and high spirits. At 2 a.m. there was a rolling of a drum above us. Until 6 a.m. we had a session of Tibetan prayers and chants delivered with great gusto to the accompaniment of a drum, a bell and the sounding of a plaintive horn. At breakfast, when the lama joined us, I thought of my sleepless night, and my religious tolerance was at its lowest ebb. He inspected my beard, a little long about the chin in lama fashion, and asked if I were an important English lama.

Patients arrived for treatment from all directions. For most I could do nothing. A man approached, carrying a young dog with a fearful gash in its neck—apparently caused by a leopard. I told him to keep the wound clean, and I gave him some disinfectant.

'Will it die?' he asked.

'I don't know. You'll have to nurse him carefully.'

'He cost me six rupees, and I can't go out to earn more money until the harvest is over.'

Six Nepalese rupees are worth five shillings. I pressed the man to accept three towards a new dog should it become necessary, and I instructed the Sherpas to pack up.

There was always a pass to cross. In fact the only horizontal tracks in Nepal are all beside the Indian border or within ten miles of Kathmandu. The pass for that day was the Shutki La, crossed during heavy rain; but had there been no rain, there would have been nothing to see, as the track was never above the limit of the

dense forest. Across the pass we heard the unwelcome news that the Innukhu bridge had collapsed in a flood. This was unfortunate as it would entail a diversion downstream of three additional days to the next bridge. Had the crossing been possible we would have been able to reach Aila Tensing's home in only two more days, without crossing any other big rivers.

A house was found where we could stay the night, then Urkien and I descended to the river to inspect the remains of the bridge. The fierce flood showed at a glance that there would be no crossing without a bridge. Although no remnant of the structure remained on the far bank, some cantilevered portions poked out from our side. Their foundations had moved and the sorry-looking wreck pointed too far downstream of the only possible foundation rock on the far bank. We returned to the house, regretting that nothing could be done without an active person operating from the other side of the river.

Our hostess for the night was a widow with ten children—an unusually large family for Nepal. One boy was old enough to be working as a coolie, and two girls were at a high altitude pasture with the family's dzum. The Sherpas invariably think that all Europeans are equipped with infinite medical knowledge, and our hostess had gained the same impression about me, although I had not uttered a word in her hearing. She brought me her five-year-old daughter, who had fallen over a cliff a week ago and now complained of chest pains. I looked carefully but could see no breaks, but she was obviously very weak and her breathing sounded strained. I asked, 'Does she spit blood?'

'Sometimes, but it isn't really blood. It is a paler red than blood, and frothy.'

My amateur diagnosis indicated a pierced lung, so I enquired about the chances of getting the patient to Dhankuta or Okhaldunga, where there are hospitals. It would take twelve days to reach one of these small outposts—possibly longer in the monsoon, and Urkien said the woman had not enough money to change the five rupee note he had offered for maize he bought. I gave away some aspirins and paid more rent than was necessary, but that was all I could do.

At dawn, now the 29th of June, six people were observed descending the far side of the valley. Through the binoculars they were recognised to be Nepalese coolies who regularly went on trading trips to the lower Hongu. Obviously they would want to cross the river, and they could assist us by doing some building from the other side. Hopes ran high and our plans were changed. I rushed down to the river to keep them there, otherwise they might have turned back when they saw the bridge had gone. After several attempts I eventually threw them an end of our hundred feet of nylon climbing rope. Then, with my end tied to the freely swinging half span, those on the other side tried by pulling the rope, to realign the bridge. The wrongly directed cantilever would not move.

By this time Urkien had appeared, having enlisted three local men who had built bridges here on other occasions. I was suspicious and took Urkien aside, 'Are you sure this is not the same racket as at Sedua, where men remove a bridge so as to be paid a day's wages for rebuilding it?'

'No,' Urkien assured me. 'If they were like that, they would have demanded a price before starting. And it is the far side of the bridge which has gone, so no one on this side could have made it collapse.'

It seemed to be a genuine case, but I weighed the merits of employing these additional builders against the option of our smaller group doing the three days diversion downstream. The experts informed me that the bridge would have to be dismantled, and rebuilt in the correct direction. How long would it take? I decided to employ them, dismantle the structure and build another. Besides wanting to watch how they did it, I had a sense of civic duty that day. The district needed the bridge, and I more than any other traveller who comes that way, could afford to pay men to build it, although I felt poor enough by European standards.

My civil engineering knowledge was temporarily buried while I assumed a position convenient for my cameras and for me to operate the rope. The law was laid down that anyone who climbed out on to the cantilever to dismantle it must be tied to me. For a

welcome change the light was good enough to use the slow colour film in addition to the black and white.

One of the locals became foreman on the bridge while Urkien controlled the land and supply forces. Those across the river were washing clothes, or simply watching us. The supply chief threw over a small boulder which splashed them all, and told them that three beams, each the length of five men, would be required to join our cantilever to their side. All but the woman in their party, unsheathed their kukris and disappeared into the jungle. Meanwhile those on our side were bringing in logs, and the remains of the old bridge came back to dry land with only two poles washed away. Someone noticed Samdi's absence. He is not one for water in any form, whether walking in or over it, drinking it, or washing in it. He was located under a boulder, sound asleep, and he suffered such an oral lashing from Urkien that he was still running when I had a last glimpse of him, 300 feet up the side of the valley. He returned with a supply of green bamboo sticks which were promptly split and then used for tying the logs together on the rapidly advancing structure.

The new and realigned cantilever proceeded with great speed. Gyalgen, not a believer in the safety of the rope, erected for our protection a bamboo pole with a prayer flag. Although it happened to be red in colour, it did not necessarily reflect the political tendencies of anyone present. The only cloth available was the cheap red cotton I used for marking survey stations. Then came the great moment when the first long beam joined the cantilever to the rock on the far side. The two other poles ordered for this purpose were put into position and lashed down with bamboo. When a handrail had been added on the upstream side, the bridge was complete, and the total time for the operation was two and a half hours.

Samdi, our slowest member, was sent across the river and up the next hillside, while Urkien and I remained at the bridge site to pay the local men for coming to our assistance. Those on the other side rushed across to put in their claims for wages and expenses for the work done from their side. Urkien dismissed them, 'If we had not built most of the bridge,' he said, 'you would

have had three extra days' walk to the lower track. You should pay us for getting you to the Hongu three days faster.'

Ascending the other side, I complimented Urkien on his part in directing the job. He said he would be my foreman for no wages, anywhere in the world, if I would send two of his sons to an English or a New Zealand school. In his own village there is no school, and practically every woman is illiterate, so they cannot teach their children to read or write. Most of the men are away for eight or more months each year, seeing little of their families and giving only infrequent instruction.

Yet another pass was crossed, and late in the day we entered a Sherpa village, to find ourselves truly inside the Solu Khumbu district. Tsampa again made its welcome appearance, and chang too came forward, on the house. Most welcome of all, in a Bhotia or Sherpa town the whole village does not enter the house where we arranged our lodgings and then silently stand and stare at every move we make. After a satisfying meal, we talked far into the night of the forthcoming Dumji festival, in which we all hoped to participate.

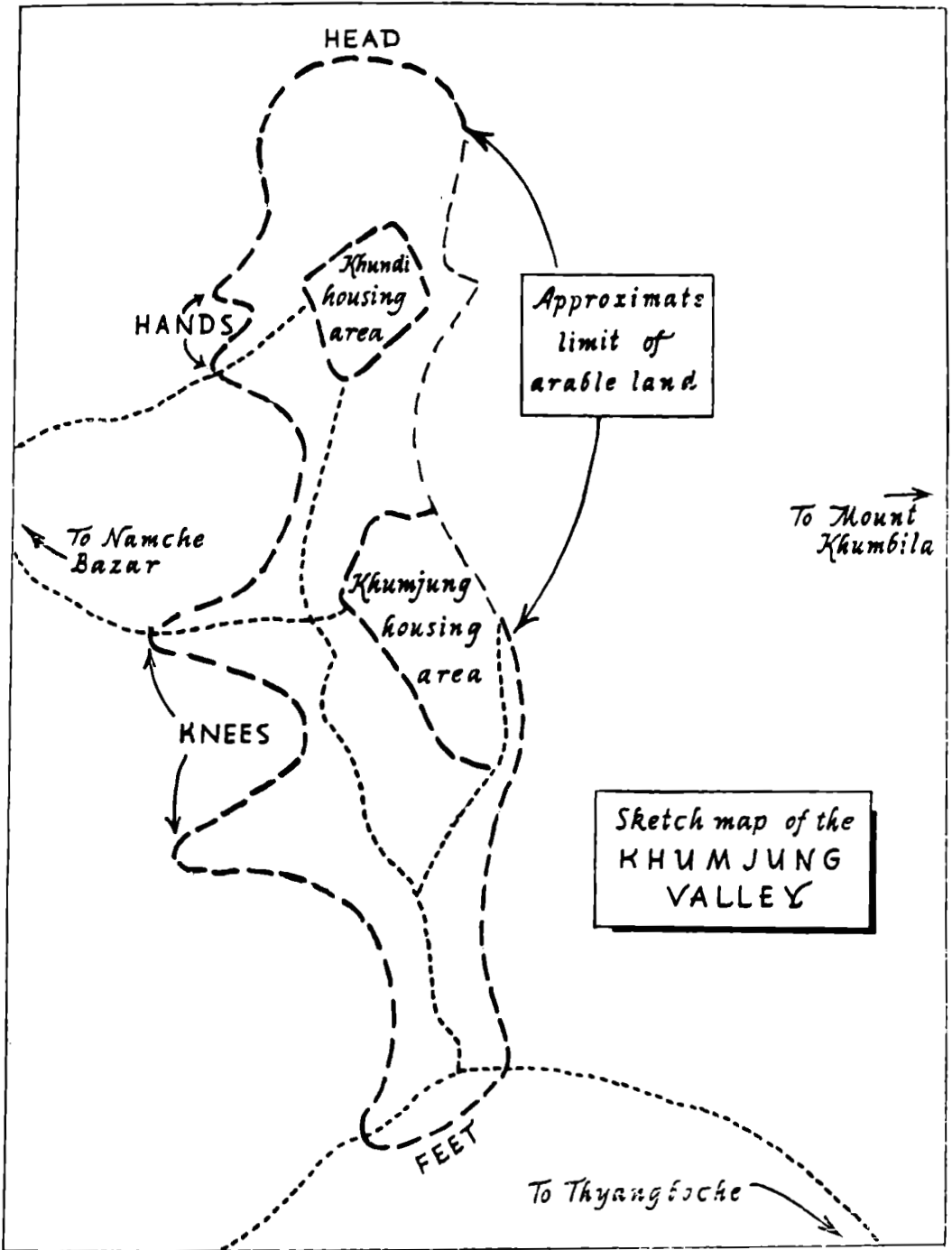
CHAPTER VI

Dumji

EACH year early in the monsoon, a five days festival is held at all gompas in the Solu and Khumbu districts. It is to mark, celebrate and accelerate the growth of crops, which at that time are beginning to respond to the damp warm weather of the summer. This festival is known in all villages as the Dumji. Barley, potatoes, onions, turnips and buckwheat are all planted before the monsoon begins, so that sprouting has begun by the time the weather changes. All festivals throughout the summer are dated from the end of the Dumji celebrations, and the compulsory movements of livestock to different grazing grounds depend on this date.

The previous year, Dumji had been celebrated in the second week of June, and we expected it to be the same this year. However, many of the local residents had considered this to be too early, as when the compulsory migration of animals began at a set time after Dumji, the snow had so recently disappeared from the high pastures that the grass had scarcely begun to grow. Unknown to us, at a meeting of all village headmen and senior lamas, it was decided to experiment by delaying the 1955 Dumji and all festivals and animal movements dating from it.

Most households take turns at catering for a Dumji, supplying chang, atta, tsampa, butter, cooking fuel and tea, and they are expected to play a prominent part in the ceremonies as well. In Khumjung, the home village of Urkien, Gyalgen and the majority of the Kangchenjunga Sherpas, eight householders share the catering each year, and in Khumjung and Khundi, which share the same gompa, there are so many households that each is required to provide for a Dumji at the conclusion of every fourteen years. Although it is not essential for all families to contribute towards



This sketch shows how the Sherpas explained the formation of the land. Their god, Khumbila, as shown by the head, hands, knees and feet. Later he moved to the mountain which overlooks the villages, and now he lives on its summit

a Dumji, most of them consider it an honour to do so. However, many cannot afford it, and there is a committee which looks into the circumstances of those who wish to be exempt. The Khumjung-Khundi committee, who also kept a watchful eye on all the ceremonies, consisted of a Thyangboche lama and two village laymen, excluding the headman.

This year Urkien was to be included among the chosen eight. From his father he had inherited one house, which was then occupied by his mother and two younger sisters. His eldest sister is taken care of by her husband, Gyalgen. Urkien told me how he had worked for four years as a coolie between Calcutta and Tingri in Tibet to save enough money to buy a second house. Then he married, bought a house from his father-in-law, and installed his wife in it. Urkien, because he owns two houses, shares the responsibility for a Dumji twice every fourteen years.

Urkien informed me of the decision to delay the festivals, and suggested that if we hurried we could be at Khumjung on the second of July, in time for the fifth and final day of Dumji. I most willingly agreed with this proposal. Thus our caravan advanced with considerable haste up the east bank of the Dudh Kosi. Our Ghurka coolie, Samdi, was becoming unhappy in this land of Buddhism, pigtails, striped aprons, roaring laughter and colder temperatures. At midday a man passed, paused and returned, and after a brief exchange of words, he offered to carry Samdi's load. Samdi had agreed to be paid three rupees (4/6) a day, and supply his own food. I had been silently watching, and I saw that he frequently had to pay more than a rupee a day for his food, yet he never complained about the unusually high prices along the route by which we had come. Besides a fat bonus, I gave him enough to buy food on the way home. Soon he was a small solitary figure disappearing down a long lonely track. I had to become resigned to losing the friendship of the many entertaining and versatile companions who shared only a part of my ten months' journeying in Nepal.

In the late afternoon the Sherpas stopped in a village and entered the largest house. When I found no one at home, I questioned their action. 'It's all right. We are in Solu Khumbu

now.' When the family returned, it was 'all right'. The house had a private chapel attached to it, and my sleeping bag was unrolled beside a drum and a small library of prayer books. The faint light from my candle showed that I was not alone. The staring eyes of three images at one end of the room scrutinised my every movement, undoubtedly frowning on my reading another thirty pages of *The French Revolution* within their sacred precincts.

We were not far from Aila Tensing's home. When he had asked if he could go home for the night, someone bellowed out, 'To count how many children he has this year.' He left us and news soon came back that his brother, the headman of Lukla, had recently died. The obvious grief of everyone who knew him was pitiful to see. Aila was told not to come to where I would live until all the ceremonies for his brother's departure had concluded.

For another day we advanced up the steep walled valley, passing relations of Kangchenjunga men, who told us we were the first party to return. Many people knew Urkien and Gyalgen, so there were many invitations for 'just a little chang'. After our third stop we emerged on to the track again, and someone suggested we play soldiers instead of the more common game of lamas. Sergeant Urkien, who had once seen a parade where orders were given in English to Ghurka soldiers, put me between his two privates and the coolie. We numbered to four in Sherpa language, and then, ignorant of the meaning of his words, Urkien bellowed out, 'Upside down, quick march.' In fear of collapsing with laughter, the second private had to sit down after the next order, 'Honk! One—two!'

Early on July 2nd we arrived at Namche Bazar, the important Sherpa village, perched on the side of a hill astride a trade route to Tibet. My trio hardly stopped, but rushed ahead to reach their own village of Khumjung, one hour's climb away. In Namche Bazar is another Check Post, and among the staff were many friends remembered from the year before. We talked of expeditions, the radio news, and the inflation in prices caused by an expedition in the area in 1954. We were joined by Professor Dyrenfurth, who was to lead an attempt on Lhotse, then the highest unclimbed peak in the world. He told us that official

permission had not yet been granted for his climb, and he was in Namche, hoping to receive the news that he could proceed. Our conversation was centred on Kangchenjunga. It was Dyrenfurth's father who led the 1930 attempt on that mountain, and Schneider, one of the present Lhotse team, had been a member of that party. I was invited to join the Lhotse expedition, but owing to my surveying obligations and my two reinforcements coming from England to join me, I had to decline. Later I was to make two pleasant visits to their headquarters at Dingboche.

I visited some Sherpa friends who thought I must be thirsty, and all too soon it was time to leave. I promised to make many more excursions to Namche in the next four months. Climbing up the hill to Khumjung my feet felt unusually light, and suddenly, as I mounted the top of a small pass, there was the village nestling in the valley below. The first of my long journeys had come to an end, and, as I looked down at the squat little houses and the familiar green fields dotted with grazing yak, I remembered the happiness I had known there the previous year and I felt I had come home. The hill was descended in a few minutes, and soon I was returning broad grins and dodging hospitable invitations in an attempt to reach Urkien's house.

At last I spied my destination, and entering the door was my future host's mother. She is a deeply religious woman with a fine strong face. I remembered her best as she stood every morning when the first grey light of dawn brought life to the village, lighting a juniper offering on the diminutive altar of her own shrine outside the door, and murmuring a prayer for the safety of her only son.

I peeped in to see a large gathering of Sherpa women questioning Urkien as to their husbands' whereabouts, health, and prowess on Kangchenjunga. With a feeling of relief I realised that Pemba Dorji's widow was not there. We must soon inform her that her husband was the only Kangchenjunga casualty. I was seated by the window and forced to take arak, with the customary refills—each time a bevy of wives held the container and tipped it towards my mouth.

Urkien's wife proudly uncovered the face of her third child, a

boy only three weeks old. His eyes screwed up at the unaccustomed brightness of daylight. A Sherpa baby spends most of its time in a cradle which is completely covered by a yak hair blanket. Somehow, adequate oxygen, scarce enough at that altitude, manages to filter through to the tiny lungs. When the boy's faint cries were heard through the covering, his mother picked up the cradle, placed it on her back, supporting it by means of the customary headband, and while she served drinks the baby was soon rocked back to sleep.

Urkien's eldest son, Gaon Jemba, remembered me from the previous year. He ran about getting in the way of the many elders congregated in the house. Between sips of arak they were cross-examining Urkien regarding the all important matter of the Sherpa achievements on Kangchenjunga. I was pleased to note the significance the next of kin placed on the identity of the men who carried the loads to the highest camps. These people are aware, more than most Europeans, how much the ascent of a high mountain is the result of team work. Here the men who did the spade work and opened the routes to the highest camps received as much glamour as those chosen for the summit, and it was a proud mother who knew her son had been as high as Camp VI at 26,900 feet.

Urkien's second son, who was two and a half years old, was sitting silently on the floor. Suddenly he propelled himself across the room, sitting in an upright position, and moving forwards with wriggling motions of his backside. I remarked on this curious gait.

Urkien explained, 'He won't walk till he is four. Sherpa children are often like him, especially boys. If they can't walk when they are eighteen months, they won't until they are four.'

'That must be difficult for everyone.'

'It hardly matters. If Noru can't walk, he won't be able to get out in the cold, or get his feet cut on the rough tracks.'

I inspected Noru. His leg muscles and feet were still like those of a babe in arms, and his stomach had an oversized bulge—probably because the waist muscles which develop when a child

uses his legs had not yet come into action. His bottom was covered with thick skin like the sole of a foot. This was easy to inspect as all small Sherpa children have expedient six inch gaps in the stitching at the seats of their trousers. The children are not encouraged to learn to walk, and there are few convenient railings in their houses which they can grip to teach themselves. Those who don't learn to walk until they are four seem to catch up the lost ground very rapidly and develop into quite normal boys.

Gyalgen, never one for his own personal tidiness, told me I looked far too rough to attend the Dumji. My shirt had holes in the shoulders, through the wear of the rucksack, and my trousers had holes in the knees. These must be changed, my hair combed and my shabby tweed hat thrown away. All was soon rectified with the exception of the shirt—a department wherein no spares were carried. From a large chest in a dark corner Urkien's wife unwrapped a new shirt for me, given to him on a previous expedition.

My first duty was to call on the family of the Kangchenjunga Sirdar. As I stumbled along the track between the houses, I kept repeating to myself the name of Dawa Tensing's eldest daughter. The name was so similar to an improper Sherpa expression that I might disgrace myself and those who had been teaching me their language. Into the house I went, feeling my way up the stairs, which are always a problem, even to a sober man. Sherpa houses never have windows in the ground floor, so one must blindly grope for the steps. With the correct name on my lips I greeted the eldest daughter first, in case the worst happened. All was well. More arak and many questions. When would Dawa Tensing be coming home? I knew that he was to be taken to England by the Kangchenjunga expedition if the money could be found, but as I was expecting mail soon to clarify this and other matters, I merely stated I did not know when he would come.

Dawa's wife was more proud of her son's carry to Camp V on his first expedition as a high altitude worker, than that of her husband who had led all the Sherpas and coolies and had carried a

load to Camp VI. She expected this of him and his astonishing success was taken for granted.

My repeated refusal of arak was of no avail. Instead I was complimented on my good manners and the speed with which I had grasped Sherpa customs; for a polite Sherpa does not accept any food or drink at the first offering. My resistance was taken for politeness, and my arak bowl was always filled. How much could I stand? Then came two boiled eggs—something solid and settling, and a luxury in a village at over 13,000 feet, where fowls can live only if they are tended with considerable care. We adjourned to the gompa for the Dumji.

Outside each gompa in the Khumbu area is a courtyard, in the middle of which a large prayer flag is erected. The main dancing by monks and local inhabitants takes place in this courtyard, which is covered for the ceremony by enormous canvas sheets. These serve the dual purpose of keeping off the monsoon rain and obscuring the already dim light, making conditions hopeless for photography. A flash unit attracts too much attention, and I felt that it would interfere with the ceremony. The more important prayers, chants, and the distribution of food and chang are performed inside the gompa itself, which is even gloomier than the courtyard.

In 1954 I was fortunate enough to be a spectator at all five days of Dumji, but for the one day in 1955 I found I was something of a participant, being placed for a time beside the headman, and later between two monks. I was given a horn to blow and a drum to beat. These are played during the chanting, and as the horn is meant to be blown on one note only, it is easy enough to play. The majority of monks run their fingers along the script while they chant, and the one next to me gave me a nudge in the ribs each time a note was required from the horn. All the small boys gathered around, whispering and pointing. They were a fine sight, dressed for the occasion in a deep purple homespun, with their pigtails recently buttered.

The whole atmosphere is always one of carefree chaos, with much shouting, and even in the most solemn moments there is always someone talking. Several dogs are invariably running

round in the middle of the gompa, and it was a great moment when I saw a solemn-faced lama, wearing an eye shade in spite of the gloom, lower an arm behind his table and suddenly throw a piece of granite to strike an offending dog in the ribs. There were no further canine intruders for half an hour. The lama resumed his praying, undoubtedly for his own redemption, as the dog was probably a reincarnation of someone who had not lived an exemplary life. A Khumbu lama should never kill, and is permitted to eat meat only when the animal is slaughtered by another person, or meets with a fatal accident. Even so, the lama must not cook the meat himself. When the lama who drove the dog from the gompa died a few months later, the Sherpas agreed that it was because he gave away too much information about the yeti to a recent expedition.

During the Dumji a large altar-like table is placed below the principal image. On the table are many models of chortens, saints and animals, made from atta and butter. A chorten is a stone monument of somewhat grand dimensions, which is usually situated on the main entrance track to every village. Between and around the models are numerous brass lamps which burn butter. Occasionally incense or juniper will be burned and the pungent smell of these, combined with the reek of the rancid butter and the mustiness of old books and cloth, make an unforgettable impression on a European nose.

In the gompa people are always coming and going, seldom paying attention to the monks who continue their chanting for hours on end. The main activity for the layman centres round the distribution of chang and the balls of cooked rice which have been prepared by the family whose responsibility it is for that year. The whole emphasis is very much on food, relating directly to the fact that it is the beginning of the season for the growing of crops. Each lama and monk has a handful of uncooked rice in front of him, and he periodically throws a few grains into the air; the time to throw the rice is indicated by the prayer book, which also contains the musical directions. I have not been able to find a satisfactory explanation of the significance of the rice, which is a food imported from the south, whereas the Khumjung religion

came from the Tibetan plateau to the north. Barley or buckwheat would be more appropriate, as they are local foods, and the Tibetan lamas as a rule use local grains in their ceremonies. The fact that the rice at its planting and harvesting is blessed by someone else's god does not worry the Sherpa. This tolerance is not reciprocal at the ceremonies of the people further south.

At various times outside in the courtyard, the musical instruments are played, and there is much dancing or prancing round the central prayer flag, the participants performing a primitive morality play portraying the enlightenment of Buddhism in the darkened world. Some sort of time is kept to the music, but none of it has the easy and captivating charm of the lay Sherpa dance. The principal Dumji dancers have hideous over-sized masks tied to their heads, and these with the larger trumpets, which seldom sound more than a disappointing groan, are remarkably similar to those seen at festivals in some of the more remote elevated villages in Europe. But the Sherpa has his characteristic contribution in the shape of two men who run about inside a yak skin, and the half-wit who wears a pig skin over his head in imitation of the local conception of the yeti. There were howls of delight when the 'yeti' jumped on the back of a man dressed as a woman for the dance.

This yeti 'mask' or 'scalp' has been much publicised in England. I took hairs from the one in Khumjung, and on an earlier occasion Evans took samples from a similar 'mask' at Pangboche. They were identified by experts at the Natural History Museum, London, as pig. A lama, on being confronted with this, admitted they were imitations, but he said there was a real yeti scalp at Rongbuk in inaccessible Tibet.

Regarding the hair of another 'scalp', this one at Thyangboche, the following is an extract from a news item in *'The Daily Telegraph'* of December 21st, 1954.

'In a laboratory at New Jersey State University's Women's College in New Brunswick efforts are being made to identify some strands of hair which may have come from a Himalayan 'abominable snowman'. They are being analysed by Dr. Leon

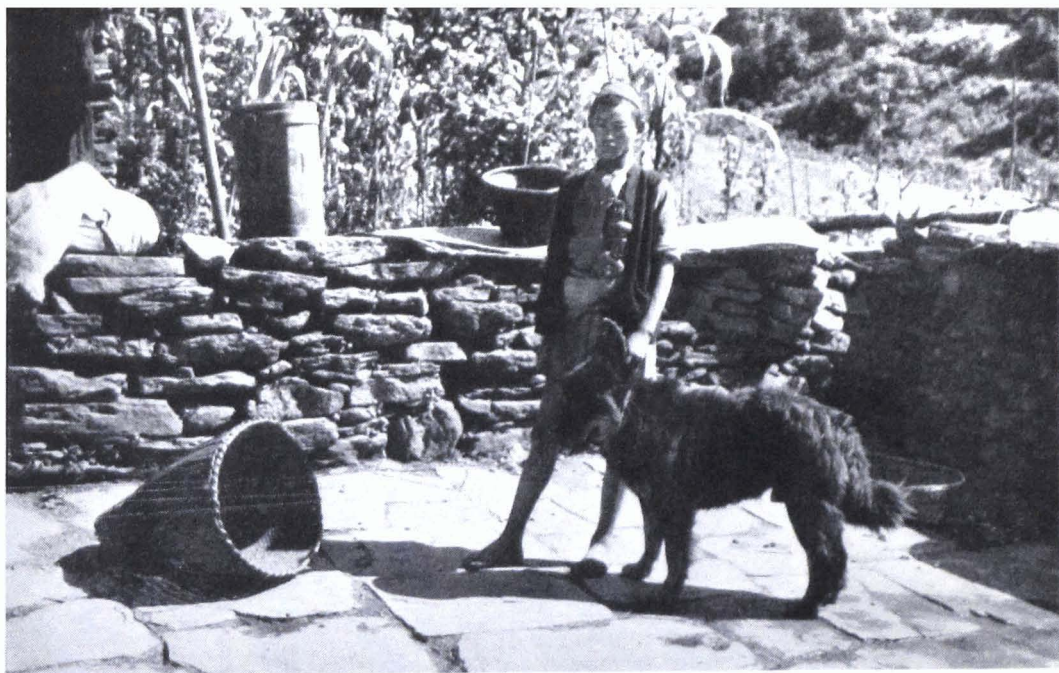
Hausman, Professor of Sociology and Ornithology. . . . Dr. Hausman's preliminary conclusions are:

1. The 'scalp' is actually a kind of cap made from fur taken from the back of a large animal.
2. The age of the hair may be very great, possibly several centuries.
3. It was not taken from a bear or a langur, which many scientists believe the 'Abominable Snowman' to be.
4. The animal from which it was taken may not have been a native of Tibet.'

The evidence that two of the yeti 'scalps', and possibly a third, are from pig skins does not make me think the yeti itself is in any way connected with the porcine family, nor is the shape of the 'scalp' meant to be similar to any part of the mysterious animal. In my opinion they were made several generations ago for festive mask purposes only—long before anyone other than Sherpas cared about the yeti, and as time went by a few of the Sherpas began to believe they were a part of the real animal. As it seems the hairs from the 'scalp' have nothing to do with the actual animal other than in name, the above statement of Dr. Hausman's must not be taken as proving that the yeti cannot be a bear or an ape.

A great climax in the outdoor Dumji performances was when all the devils of the district and all the enemies of a good harvest were suddenly despatched. The names, Flood, Drought, Human Sickness and various 'devils' were each written on a piece of paper. The birds, which probably do most damage to the crops, could not be wished any harm, as the higher authorities on Tibetan Buddhism will condone no killing of any kind. The paper was put near a bowl of butter which was boiling over a fire, then an important personage approached uttering appropriate words for the destruction of devils, and threw a cup of fine arak on to the boiling butter. The enormous sheet of flame from this performance effectively caused the paper and devils to vanish, brought gasps of admiration from all the small boys and girls, and added considerably to the fumes in the covered courtyard.

In the courtyard of a house at Junbesi, a mastiff is restrained by his master



Shearing sheep at Junbesi, the lowest of the Sherpa villages



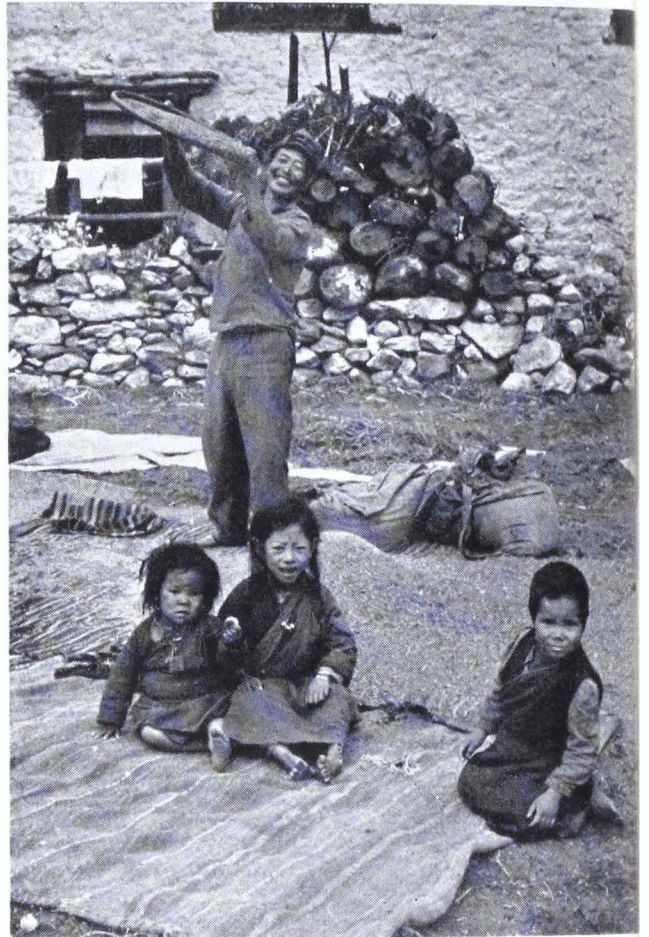
A caravan of grunting yak arriving from Tibet, laden with bags of salt





PLATE 8

Kami Doma, the Lama's daughter, carefully sweeps the ground for a tent site



Sherap Lama enjoys winnowing buckwheat before the threshold of his house. The children sit on a woven yak-hair mat



House-building in Khumjung. Here a draught-proof plaster of mud and yak dung is applied to the rough granite walls. The ladder on the right is adze cut from local pine, while that on the left is from duralium. It was left behind on the ice-fall by the 1953 Everest Expedition

Each villager was dressed to the limit of his resources from the poorest child in oversized hand-me-downs to the headman's wife in her full ceremonial clothes, which after their annual airing would be reverently folded and stored away in a solid wooden trunk. The men wore the customary Tibetan coat of deep purple hand-woven cloth with the right sleeve empty and dangling behind to brush against the tops of their Sherpa boots. These boots are worn by everyone in Khumjung, with the exception of an odd expedition veteran who sports his double-layered cold-resistant high-altitude footwear on the hottest day of the year. The sole of the native boot is of yak hide, drawn round the edge of the foot like a moccasin and stitched to the brightly-coloured woollen uppers. I noticed Kami Doma, a fine and handsome example of sturdy Sherpa womanhood. Her long pigtail, shining with its butter dressing, hung well below the broad red sash at her waist. She had chosen the two best of her woollen striped aprons, and these were worn back and front secured by a silver clasp. She was seated next to Dawa Tensing's wife, Chorten, who, in common with many others of her sex, wore the fur-lined, gold-embroidered Tibetan hat usually affected by the men. Most of the women wore heavy necklaces of red and green beads, but the necks of those whose husbands owned large herds of yak or were successful merchants, bore collars of heavy gold-coloured sections linked by fine chains. The central section was usually an amulet enclosing the sacred relic of some long dead lama.

The lamas and monks, distinguished by close cut hair, were in their plain red clothes; they wore no jewellery apart from a slender string of sacred beads used as a rosary. When the first villagers slipped out of the smoky gloom to tend their yak, the fifth and last day of the biggest annual festival had come to an end.

I roused a heavy headed Sherpa next morning, 'Urkien, Pemba Dorji's widow.' I had reminded him of our obligation to inform Pemba Dorji's wife of his death. We had agreed to postpone the announcement one day after our arrival so as to avoid the coincidence of mourning with the festivities still in progress.

Pemba Dorji (Saturday Thunderbolt), a very capable man, had

died at the Kangchenjunga Base Camp shortly after he, with ten others, had carried supplies to a camp at over 25,000 feet. As we considered that this very gallant climb had possibly contributed towards Pemba's death, the expedition agreed to pay some compensation money to his relatives. Before leaving Kangchenjunga I had discussed the compensation with Evans, but we were unable to fix a sum, as it would have to come from the Kangchenjunga Committee in London.

Urkien made the first announcement and two hours later I was guided to the house by female wailing, audible three hundred yards away. The grief of all the relatives was pitiful to see. I was given chang, and when I had finished, a great outflow of wrath was poured in my direction at all expeditions and everyone who climbs mountains. The dead man's mother asked how a man good enough to climb to 25,000 feet could die among the comforts and medical assistance available at Base Camp? How could I explain cerebral thrombosis? I tried. I was grateful to a family friend for quietly indicating when I could leave without causing offence. I held the widow's hands as others had done, and then departed. A woman followed me out. She wanted to know if her husband was safe. Some soothsayer had apparently said that there were in fact two expedition deaths and that I would announce the other one next day. I returned to the house of mourning, explained my position of responsibility on the expedition, and told them that I had been the last to abandon all camps. 'Everyone came down safely. Soon all but Pemba Dorji will come home.'

Outside again, I walked to the track which the returning men must take, and made several circuits of the long mani wall of prayer stones. I recalled that when I had left the Kangchenjunga party they were still ten days' walk from Darjeeling. What could I say and do if someone had been drowned in an angry river during the monsoon floods, proving the truth of the soothsayer's warning of two deaths? Malaria, a falling boulder, or a robber might have claimed a victim.

In the morning I noticed that practically everyone in the village was taking a bottle of chang to Pemba Dorji's house, remaining there for ten or fifteen minutes. I obtained two bottles, explaining

that one was from me and the other was from Evans, the Kangchenjunga leader, who is a well-known figure in Khumjung. Had Evans not been tied by duties of leadership which required him to face the press, and report to the Committee in London, he would have been with me. We had been free to remain together for five superb weeks in 1954, after the conclusion of the main expedition.

A seat was indicated for me. I knew it to be the senior position, and if Pemba were alive it would have been his. His widow sat in front of me, and a little lower down, wringing her hands, utterly shaken by the tragedy that had befallen her. While I sat there, almost as unhappy as my companion, I thought of the moment at Base Camp when the expedition leader, his deputy and the sirdar, just before the summit push, chose four Sherpas for promotion, to fill vacancies in the big lift to 25,000 feet. The two I had supported most strongly were Gyalgen and Pemba Dorji. How can an officer decide men's fates every day of a war, and then go back home to face the look of mute reproach in the widows' eyes?

At that time I had few words in common with the tragic figure before me. She described her two children and had them brought to me. Then, by uncovering a breast and making various signs, the widow asked me how she could feed them. I promised her an enormous amount of compensation money, not defining the exact amount without the authority of the Committee or Evans. Someone behind me said, 'Yes, Evans Sahib is the best friend the Sherpas ever had. He will pay plenty of money.' If only the others would come home, then we would know for certain if there had been another death, although I kept swearing there was only one. The returning party would bring news of the compensation.

Every day I walked up to the prayer stones and sat by the main entrance to the village, reading *War and Peace* and watching the track, but still there was no sound of Sherpa laughter or the sight of the large green New Zealand rucksacks, easily recognisable from a distance. The rumour of two deaths had spread too far. Not a daylight hour would go by without some worried mother enquiring about her Nima or her Ang Norbu. She would go into

her house and two minutes later her daughter would emerge to ask the same question, to hear the answer directly from my mouth. Was my word stronger than that of the soothsayer?

After a death it is usual for a number of lamas and monks to be hired from the neighbouring monasteries. In three days' praying and chanting for about eleven hours a day, and proceeding at a considerable speed, the appropriate prayer for a departed person is repeated the correct number of times. A person who can afford to keep the holy men for a longer period might engage them for six or even nine days. This is very expensive, as a normal chanting team has more than twenty men in it, each being paid five rupees a day and receiving his food and a continuous supply of Tibetan tea.

On this occasion the lamas and monks were hired for six days. On the fifth, seven days after the announcement of death, I heard Annalu's cheery voice heralding the long-awaited arrival of the main party of Kangchenjunga Sherpas. His heartening grin and the healthy appearance of his companions relieved my anxiety. The soothsayer was wrong, and I rejoiced in his error. Before reading my mail, the first received for seven weeks, I confirmed that the compensation money was more than anyone else in the area had ever been paid. The new arrivals confirmed that Dawa Tensing and Changjup had left for England with Evans.

Taking Pemba Dorji's clothing, mountaineering equipment, wages and compensation, and accompanied by the sirdar's wife and three expedition members, I went once more to the house of mourning. At one end of the only room a table draped with red and white cloth had been set up. On it were seven brass bowls of holy water, and seven brass lamps with small burning wicks, fed by rancid butter. In front of the table was a chair in which were some silk transparent clothes, arranged round a framework so they resembled the shape of a man. The faint light of the butter lamps shed an eerie light through this insubstantial and ghostly frame. Twenty-five lamas and monks sat on the floor ranged in four rows. In front of each row was a low bench on which were books of chants, cups of tea, and a variety of musical instruments. These latter consisted of cymbals, drums, conch shells and horns.

The smallest horn was carved from a human femur, hollowed out and shaped to a mouthpiece at one end, and the largest was the nine feet brass instrument, common to most Sherpa and Tibetan gompas. From the door I had mistaken a black intermediate-sized horn for a clarinet, but during the last five days of chanting with accompaniment, from almost dawn to dusk, I had never heard the sound of a reeded instrument. A closer inspection showed that it was a kind of horn, as it had a bugle type of mouthpiece. Unfortunately, from each of the whole range of instruments the monks could play only one frequently repeated and toneless note.

I was seated by the window and given chang. For a welcome change I was not the centre of attention; it was all diverted to the man who was producing more and more money, clothing and equipment from a collection of bags. The chanting stopped and everyone crowded round. I settled beside the producer of money, checked the amount and issued receipts to the carrier, the expedition, the Himalayan Club, and as the sirdar's wife also wanted one another copy was made. Then after the appropriate chang once more, I was able to disappear discreetly.

When a further two days had passed, forty-six days in all since Pemba Dorji's death, everyone in residence at the twin villages of Khumjung and Khudi assembled beside the gompa. Large barrels of chang were brought along and generous quantities given to those who made the appropriate request. All the villagers sat on the ground, and gradually a small group of close friends of the deceased began to distribute balls of cooked rice, about eight inches in diameter, to every person, young or old, in the assembly of over six hundred. Behind this group came the widow, giving a single rupee note to everyone. The man with me at the time, whispered, 'You live in Khumjung, but as you employ Sherpas, you are regarded as a senior lama in this ceremony. You should not accept rice or money. Take a pinch of rice from one ball, eat it and thank the widow.'

I did as I was instructed. Knowing the current costs of food, I calculated that the total amount paid for rice, butter for lamps, lama and monk hire, and money gifts, must have totalled more

than half of the Kangchenjunga compensation money. Presumably the chang brought to the widow's house on the day after the death was announced would have been sufficient for necessary entertainment and for the further distribution accompanying the donation of rice later. The widow's obligations were not yet fulfilled. For three more days some monks were employed to take small rice balls and a taste of chang to people in neighbouring villages who were in any way connected with the deceased, whether through family, business or expedition associations.

The usual time-lapse between death and the food distribution is about forty days. This gives plenty of time for the vast quantities of gifts to be assembled. Rice is grown about eight days' walk away from the Khumbu area, and a good chang takes twenty days to brew, although one does at times confront the rawness of an eight or ten days' vintage. Two days before we arrived in Khumjung a man died when the Dumji festival was at its height. Very few people were told that the funeral pyre would be lit, so that the all important Dumji should not suffer. The family of the dead man owned many yak and dzum, and their high pastures were further away than those of any other herd. To enable the family to carry out their annual migration to the upper pastures within the allotted time, the donating of gifts to the village was arranged twelve days after the death instead of the normal forty—and what a rushed casual ceremony it was! The rice was mixed with buckwheat, the customary rupees were not distributed, and worst of all, the chang was a very raw brew. That night there were many murmurings and whisperings—the deceased and his family would be reincarnated as much lower forms of life, and their eventual embarkation for Heaven would be sadly delayed.

CHAPTER VII

Living High

I wished to accompany a yakherd to the high pastures and compare his living there with what I had experienced of Sherpa life in Khumjung. However, I had no desire to miss any of the important events which might take place in my absence. I found out their dates far in advance, so that each coming festival would curtail my activities and bring me back with Urkien to his home village.

Dumji comes with the beginning of the rainy season, when the first impetus to growth is given. On the eleventh day after Dumji there is an unwritten law that all grazing animals should be in the high altitude pastures, where they remain for three months, leaving the home fields unmolested. In this way winter food for man and beast is grown and harvested in the home pastures with a minimum of fencing and transport problems. Therefore any animal found in the vicinity of the village after the tenth day following Dumji imposes on its owner a fine of two rupees and a bottle of chang.

I agreed to accompany Lakpa Sona, one of the newly returned Kangchenjunga Sherpas, to his highest house in the village of Gokyo at the head of the Dudh Kosi. We wasted no time as my host was anxious to relieve his wife, who had left earlier with the animals. We reached Lakpa's house late on the second day and were given a warm welcome by his wife, Ang Doma, and their children. As they exchanged news I looked at my new surroundings.

The house, like most at the higher altitudes of 16,000 to 17,000 feet, was single-storied, and we occupied the only room. I noticed a partition at one end of the room and heard the young calves

shuffling on the other side. This house had one window, one door and a wooden floor. The equipment was of the usual standard bowls for cooking and for storing water, milk and butter, sacks of grain and potatoes, skins and sacks for sitting and sleeping on, a cylinder and plunger for mixing tea with butter, salt and hot water in Tibetan style, a churn for making butter, and the inevitable bottles of chang. On the wall there were wooden yak saddles and a few dried sheeps' bladders, which I knew contained butter.

Later I tried to sleep, but the young calves' bawling prevented me. A baa-ing calf was complaining to its mother outside the door. Neither nack, nor dzum the half-breed, bellows like a cow, but grunts, more like a pig.

Next morning I examined the exterior of Lakpa's property. It was surrounded by three small fields that were fenced in by stone walls. Although the walls have no mortar or binding, and yak are very strong, they seldom bother to push down a fence. The nacks were brought into these enclosures every evening, milked, and their calves taken into the house. The calves, which are cross breeds, are too delicate to survive many wet nights in the open during the monsoon; moreover, there are carnivorous animals which might kill them. Usually the breeding is planned so that the calves are born a week or two after the nack and dzum are driven to their higher grazing. If they were born earlier there would not be enough food for an adequate milk supply from the mother, and the calves would have great difficulty in completing the long upward journey after the Dumji. Every evening during the weeks that the calves are expected to be born, each member of the owner's family goes out to assist the new calves to the house for the first time.

Lakpa Sona lost four calves because of the late date of his return. His wife had not been well after driving the nack to the summer grounds, and on two nights she was unable to bring in the calves. Death was due to exposure and not to beasts of prey. Based on the selling prices at the end of the season, his loss was three times his total Kangchenjunga wages.

Although calves spend the daylight hours with their mothers, after the first two weeks, with the lush grass that is available,

there is often more milk than the calf can drink. Every morning Ang Doma would take the surplus milk, and she would also milk any animals whose calves had died. If a greedy calf tended to drink all of its mother's milk, the calf would be left inside the house in the mornings until Ang Doma's quota had been taken. I frequently milked the nack and dzum, and for some days this attracted all the Sherpas to where I sat in full view of the critics.

It was relatively easy to become on good terms with the animals. Little or no salt is available in the ground, so the person about to do the milking chooses an animal, hobbles its front legs and rubs some powdered Tibetan salt onto its snout. While being milked it stands contentedly licking its snout and nostrils and the ground where some salt might have dropped. Soon some dzum recognised my salt bag, and they would follow me every time I carried it. After a few days the novelty wore off for the Sherpa spectators and they pointed out that I was doing a woman's job. Unabashed I looked for other ways of helping the household without attracting attention.

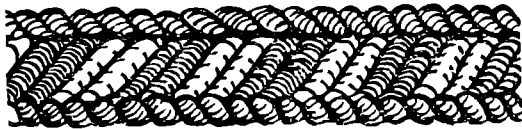
When I took up the water bucket, Lakpa Sona stopped me and answered my questioning look by explaining that when the villagers saw me doing Ang Doma's work she would be branded as lazy. Normally the husband does no manual work for his wife unless she is within a month of confinement.

As a last resort I decided to go foraging for mushrooms. Since these are the particular favourite of the yak and his family, I kept well away from the tracks taken by the outgoing herds that morning, where besides each blade of grass and anenome every mushroom would have been eaten. I avoided one species of mushroom which I knew to be unsuitable for humans, with seeds which survive the passage through the yak. For this reason it is usually associated with yak dung, and has a name to that effect.

As I returned to Gokyo, carrying a bamboo basket of mushrooms, and as I approached Lakpa's house, I saw that he was bleeding one of his yak. To facilitate the delicate operation this entailed, the four legs and the horns of the animal were securely tied, and to maintain pressure on the blood vessel, a rope was passed round the beast's neck, with a knot above the carotid

artery. Thus the blood was dammed below the point at which Lakpa made a neat incision. He held the artery open with the fine blade of his knife until sufficient had drained into the wooden bowl below. When the instrument was withdrawn, the tiny incision was soon blocked with clotted blood.

I had heard how owners of caribou and reindeer bleed their animals to provide food, but how could raw blood be made into a palatable form? The very thought repelled me as I watched Ang Doma's preparations. She added a little salt and water to the contents of the bowl and poured the whole into an iron pan, which was soon simmering gently over a yak dung fire.



Yak-hair Rope

One later evening, when the meal was served and I praised the 'liver' I was eating, Ang Doma carefully explained how she had fried segments of the solidified yak's blood. So I learned yet another use to which the Sherpas put their versatile animal.

Yak hair provides the basis for most of their clothing. When the animal is to be shorn, he is tied to a strong stake, or two animals of similar size have their horns tied together and their front legs hobbled. A man takes in his hand the hair to be cut, and with a rapid movement of a sharp knife severs the tuft. Both animals jump violently and the process is repeated. The hair is spread on a mat, beaten with a bowstring, and then spun into long threads. Sometimes it is mixed with wool from Tibet and subsequently dyed. The men make strong ropes from the yak-hair threads, and I assisted Lakpa in the manufacture of one which consisted of nine cords. Two of the four central cords were from the white parts of a yak, and the other two from black, and these formed a pattern in the rope. Two black cords were next put on each side of the central rope, giving it a flat appearance, and finally, all were threaded together with a third white cord, making a tidy-looking

rope of great strength. Slings, blankets, sacks, tents and many garments also originate from the yak.

As most of the milk is used for butter, the Sherpani does not mind if it immediately becomes sour. For this reason the wooden milking bucket is seldom washed and the milk curdles when only a few hours old. Knowing I was in the village, a kind woman would often bring me milk to drink, with the assurance of, 'Quite fresh, to-day's milk,' but it could still be sour. After a time I could drink milk of any age, preferring the older varieties to be mixed with a little tsampa. When the Sherpani stores her milk inside she seldom bothers to keep it covered, so it is often dotted with lumps of soot which have fallen from the black stalactites formed on the ceiling by the smoke of countless fires. If the women remained to watch me drink their gifts I was assured of an ordeal. When that trial was spared, I could strain the milk through my bright red survey marking cloth, preferring the pink of the dye to the black of the soot.

The housewife soon converts part of the milk to butter in her brass-bound wooden churn. The remaining skim milk is boiled for a time, and all the white curds separated out and partly dried on a rack high above the fire. These dried curds make a somewhat tasteless and brittle cheese and the watery by-product is fed to any motherless calves.

Some Sherpas, like those in the Rolwaling, will not kill their yak for religious reasons, but they are not above selling them to others who will slaughter them. Those who approve of taking life despatch the older animals at the end of the rich grazing season, so that they should not eat the limited hay resources stored for the winter. If the food shortage is critical for the animals, or if the market is bad for the sale of young beasts, some of these might also be killed. The young castrated dzubjock, when the higher pastures have ended their brief season, are sold to people owning property at about the 10,000 feet level. When fully grown, they, and occasionally dzum, are driven over the 19,000 feet Nangpa La to Tibet, and are there sold as plough animals. Owing to the difficulties of importing and maintaining healthy bulls in the Tibetan highlands, dzubjock are difficult to breed there, and if

they are born they take much longer to grow to full size than those in the warmer Khumbu area. From Tibet come young nack and a few yak to maintain the balance of half-breeds in the Solu Khumbu district. When any mixed breeding is to be done, cow with yak, bull with nack, or a half-breed dzum with either full breed males, the female has to be tied with its head to a post and its front legs hobbled.

While I was in the area a difficulty arose owing to the large drifts of snow which still closed the Nangpa La, even in August. The owners of dzubjock destined for Tibet had no grazing grounds to which their animals could be taken while they awaited the melting of the snow. The grounds vacated when leaving for the pass had been occupied by cows from further south, and the property near the pass was the summer pasture of dzum owners from a different area. Thus almost two hundred dzubjock had to spend much of the summer on the almost bare rocks high above Khumjung.

When the animals are killed their hair is used for making threads, and the hides are cured to make straps, thongs, carrying headbands, footwear and other articles. Curing is usually done by spreading old butter on the hide, and stamping it in with bare feet, preferably on a warm day when the butter is soft. I once saw a man strip off his shirt, tie his pigtail over his head, rub butter on his shoulders, and then pull a rather old and strong-smelling skin back and forwards across his shoulders with as much zest as if he were drying himself after a Turkish bath.

Some of the meat is eaten in the days after the killing, but a large proportion of it is cut in strips, sun dried, and then smoked over a yak-dung fire for further use. The sun, weak at such altitudes, dries the outer skin, and does not affect the inner portions which slowly decay. Flies are rarely seen at high altitudes, so the meat hangs unharmed for many weeks. With patience and persistence I have eaten most Sherpa foods and developed a liking for everything except the dried meat, which they regard as something of a delicacy. I have usually had to face it during the monsoon, when it is some ten months old, and the better portions have already been eaten. One is confronted by evil-smelling lumps which are

little more than gristle. I can enjoy sausages made from sheep's intestines cleaned and filled with a mixture of tsampa, fat and blood, and even dried blood itself, but sun dried yak meat—no, thank you!

In the Khumbu district there is little forest above 12,000 feet. Juniper and dwarf rhododendron, seldom over a foot high, grow to 14,000 or 15,000 feet. The highest yakherds' huts are above the juniper level, but downward excursions are made to procure it for use as a fuel. Stacks of dried yak-dung are made outside the houses to mix with the juniper, and the two together make quite a good fuel so long as a draught is provided. This is frequently done by using a simple bellows made from goat skin. On an expedition one might hear a mountaineer, after months living in the ice level, tired of kerosene and humans as the only smells available, say, 'Oh for a cup of tea on a juniper and yak-dung fire.' I was amused on one occasion when I was invited to call on a yak owner. I found it was a formal occasion. We sat together outside his house, and his wife brought us tea contained in a large copper pot kept warm on a tray of smouldering yak-dung. When ready for more tea, we merely blew the smouldering embers to life and soon the pot would be hot.

Fuel supplies were running low, so I spent a morning replenishing the stacks outside Lakpa Sona's house. In the afternoon, with the help of the sharp-edged kukri and the few children who had accompanied their parents to the high village, I cut and carried two loads of the twisted juniper branches up to Gokyo and felt that this time I had been of some real use to the household.

Next day an eager youth brought me news of yeti tracks he had seen in the vast basin north-west of the temporarily occupied yakherds' village. With my rifle I set off immediately. He had said they were old tracks, so I did not creep along expecting to meet the beast round each rock that I passed. I hurried to the basin, rapidly outdistancing all the boys who followed me, attracted by the novelty of the rifle. It was a long way up, but the Sherpa's description had been a good one—I merely followed the crest of the central spur, watching for tracks in the valley on my left. From a distance I saw the marks in the snow through my binocu-

lars, and in spite of their reported age I could not resist scanning the nearby rocks for signs of a large animal. I came to the foot-prints, which were saucer shaped depressions in the snow. Their size was about that of a small elephant, but I was not deceived by that aspect, well aware that when new snow falls on a deep foot-print a large circle round it collapses with the melting snow, making a mark far bigger than the original foot. I followed them for fifty yards, and dug down into some steps looking for signs of toe marks, but the snow structure had collapsed too far to retain any significant information. Then two steps further on was a stain in the snow. I dug. It was unmistakably yak dung.

On another occasion when I was travelling with the same boy, Ang Tsering, I came upon curious tracks in the snow. Each print was about ten inches long, and they were again identified by my companion as yeti tracks. They were close together and sometimes the prints were about eight inches wide and at other times narrow like that of a man. I followed the tracks to a spur where they vanished. This time a tiny feather in the snow gave me the clue. It was the feather of an eagle.

Eagles are common in the Himalayas and for a month I saw a pair of the largest species flying daily up the Dudh Kosi valley. One circled me for an hour on a 21,000 feet mountain, far above the upper limits of any four-legged prey at that season and locality. They generally patrolled the high passes leading to Tibet, to intercept any migrating bird which could not maintain the speed and altitude of its fellows. In March thousands of kites fly north from India, soaring upwards towards the frontier passes. Early in April countless honking geese can be seen in V-formation, flying north in the warm weather, bound for Mongolia and Siberia. The thrushes, crows, larks, pheasants and choughs of Nepal all move upwards as the snow retreats before the advance of spring. Few of these cross, but the weaker birds often provide meals for the ever vigilant eagle. In the autumn they all return southwards.

From the same village on another occasion I was searching for the yeti when I came upon tracks in the snow in a very remote valley. I called to the Sherpa walking a hundred yards behind me,

and he identified the prints as those of a yeti. I followed the pad marks until they left the snow, and found on the adjacent square yard of convenient sand a clearer footprint which had the toes of a bear.

We had been told that the potato-blessing ceremonies were due to begin at ten in the morning twenty-two days after the Dumji, but at this time we were still bargaining for fresh milk with a Tesinga woman whom we met on the track. At last she agreed to our offer of half a rupee, so Urkien poured it into his bottle and we put on the pace to reach Khumjung at 10.30 a.m. There was no sign of any unusual activity and Urkien laughed when I looked at my watch. 'They have no clocks Sahib. You are the only one who knows the time.'

At last we saw a man in ceremonial dress approaching with his gaily-coloured prayer flags, heralding the festival to promote the growth of the main crop and the general welfare of the people. By this time the potato leaves were at full size and their roots were increasing at a rapid speed. From this day, for three further lunar months, all wood cut from the neighbouring forest would be stored outside the limits of the village. According to Sherpa belief, loads of firewood carried past fields of potatoes limit their growth, so for days before the potato-growing ceremonies all people not looking after their animals in high pastures were bringing in great loads of wood. To stockpile firewood for three months is not such a hardship as it may sound at a 13,000 feet village, as the weather in that period is mild, requiring no wood for heating purposes, and since many people are absent with their animals, great quantities are not necessary for cooking in the home village. Urkien's case and that of Changjup's wife were the only ones which came to my notice where difficulties arose. Both have families too young to gather wood, and neither owns animals, which means they seldom leave the home village in the summer. They therefore consume much wood. Urkien's earnings are from expeditions and trading trips to Tibet, and this year, as usual, he was away when people were building their stocks of wood. Changjup in England was probably walking up and down the Strand wondering where these people kept their yak, and where

the chang came from when the barman pulled the handle. Both Urkien and Changjup's wife solved the problem by employing orphan boys to bring in their fuel, although neither could afford this extravagance.

The potato-encouraging ceremony was performed by the owner of each potato field, while an overall blessing for the whole community was chanted by the local lama without reinforcement from the nearby monasteries. Each householder approached his private shrine with a crucible of smoking juniper in one hand and a pole with five prayer flags in the other. Mumbling prayers he solemnly placed the bamboo pole on the shrine and stepped back to watch the fresh-coloured flags flutter in the breeze. In the village were several wooden or rock stencils with prayers carved on them in Tibetan script, and these were made for making prayer flags. An ink was mixed from water and black pine soot, and after a time I was using this ink for my letters. For the flags, the ink is spread on the stencil and printed on to squares of cheap coloured cotton.

Urkien made forty-five such flags, which, at five to a pole, made nine complete units. Two were to be placed on the roof of his mother's house, and two on that of his wife's, and one on the potato shrine of each property. On the ground floor of his wife's house was a monument which received its flag, and one was kept for the community shrine. Finally a shrine on the hill above the village had to have a flag as it was made by Urkien's grandfather. I witnessed each of these performances for the betterment of the potato crop and Urkien's family.

Urkien, a small cousin and I congregated at one house, changed into Tibetan dress, drank chang, and made chortens from atta and butter. Carrying these on a tray with some rice, flags, and a bottle of chang, we started upwards towards grandfather's mark on the landscape. When Urkien, who had been to 26,900 feet on Kangchenjunga, said it was a long way up the hill, I settled to a rhythmical pace, for if he said it was high, he should know. Scarcely 250 feet above the village, we stopped before a square-sectioned stone structure, still displaying the faded flags of many previous ceremonies. For twenty minutes Urkien recited various set prayers, occasionally tossing rice into the air, while the small cousin blew

on the juniper fire to reinforce the heavily scented smoke screen enveloping us. An *atta* and butter image was put on the shrine and was immediately stolen by a crow which had been sitting and watching hopefully from a strategic position. All the crows for miles about had come to the village that day, and every time juniper smoke was seen, a score of crows would fly towards it, knowing that with the smoke there would be food. It was obvious to the Sherpas that all the offerings would be consumed by the crows, but as all live creatures are someone's reincarnation, it did not matter.

Next Urkien put a few drops of *chang* on the fire, and more *atta*, which was promptly stolen. We three then stood in line and drank the bottle of *chang*, and I forgot to enquire if this happened to be an orthodox part of the ceremony. 'Cousin' said a prayer, and then both looked at me. At that time I knew one brief Sherpa prayer, the one which, when said devoutly enough, makes an approaching avalanche turn back and descend the other side of the mountain. I said the prayer twice and no avalanches came our way.

We went back to give performances with eight more flags, but Urkien unwisely left the flags for his roof top until last. The top layer of his roof was made from relatively smooth planks, without nails, held in position by large stones. Urkien, by now rather full of *chang*, was walking along the wet planked roof with a tray of offerings in one hand and a flag in the other. Overhead circled the noisy crows and on the ground were many uncles and aunts, cousins, and small boys. Suddenly he slipped on a wet plank, and a great expanse of planking and stone hit the ground beside the loudly applauding spectators. Urkien, with characteristic composure, picked himself up, planted his flag, said the prayers as if nothing had happened, returned, repaired the roof and descended. He had a bad bruise, which delayed our next trip to the upper Dudh Kosi.

A tent had been erected on the hill beside the biggest and best shrine, and inside the tent the village lama was busily chanting. When I heard about this tent I expected to see a fine dark structure made from woven yak hair; but no, it was an outmoded canvas

model, pitched in its shabby splendour, bearing the name of a long forgotten owner, 'Lt. R. Jack'. A representative of each house went up to the tent, gave a bottle of chang and put a flag on the community shrine. I went up with Urkien and his mother. It was late in the day and the lama was hoarse from his chanting—but not through lack of lubrication. When we reached the tent we drank the chang of the people before us, and those behind finished ours, so that when the day ended there was one bottle of chang remaining for the lama. We sang and danced in the rain, assured of a prosperous harvest, and confident that all the residents would continue in good health.

As I mentioned previously, the arrival of the potato in Solu Khumbu brought big changes to the community, and changed a predominantly pastoral people to one of an even mixture of agricultural and pastoral. This is similar in some respect to the arrival of the sweet potato in Polynesia when a fishing and seafaring race suddenly found they could support a greater population and arable land became as valuable as a strip of sea coast. Now life became less nomadic and there were new sources of wealth.

The date of the arrival of the potato in Solu Khumbu, and the dates of the less important grains, are hard to fix. The only anthropologist to have done any work in this area found evidence of the potato's arrival shortly after the year 1900. When I made enquiries about any early events in the Sherpas' history the date of the incident was too often given as fifty years ago. They seldom have knowledge of any event (apart from religious matters) if it occurred before the days of their grandfathers. By pressing the point further and approaching the older men, I occasionally received more probable answers. Regarding the potato, I was told by a man of seventy-three, that they were there long before he was born. The potato shrines were mostly built by the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the present diggers, also indicating an earlier arrival. One would have expected the potatoes to have been well established before the shrines were erected. A reliable Sherpa told me that the first small white potatoes came to Khumjung about 115 years ago, and that the large red variety arrived from Darjeeling in 1942. This would fit in very well with the

description of their arrival further east, in Sir Joseph Hooker's *Himalayan Journal*. He reported potatoes in the Yangma area in 1848 which, 'have only recently been introduced . . . from the English garden at the Nepalese capital, I believe.' The direct path from Kathmandu to Yangma passes near Solu, so it is possible that they reached Khumbu also at about that time.

On the eleventh and twelfth days after the blessings of potatoes and people, the villagers gathered in six different houses for eating, singing, drinking and dancing. This time the atmosphere was gay with no religious activity apart from the grandparents sitting in the background, turning their prayer wheels, as they do every day of the year. One could scarcely describe the lama's performance as a 'religious activity'. With his upper teeth in his pocket, he danced and pranced with great vigour, and his bellowing laughter could be heard 300 yards away. Sherap, the lama, had been to Darjeeling and there he had purchased dentures from a secondhand dealer.

The beginning of the harvest was the reason for these festivities. No Khumjung crops were ripe, but some of the potatoes at the nearby village of Tesinga were ready for digging. Most Sherpas own houses at three or four different levels, and sometimes a man might possess seven or eight. Besides the house in the home village, he might own a second in another potato area, a third a little higher where barley grows, and a fourth or more where cows, goats, dzum or yak have their respective summer pastures. Tesinga is a second village at the potato level and it is owned entirely by Khumjung and Khundi residents. Urkien inherited a house and its associated hay fields in one of the best areas for dzum, but as he received no animals, the house and fields are leased for four months each year to a man whose herds have increased beyond the capacity of his own property.

I was invited to one of the harvest festival houses. This time I was not with Urkien or Gyalgen, but there were many familiar faces. Perhaps the man I knew best was Annalu, a popular and skilful contributor to many recent British expeditions. He has strength and intelligence and a disarming clownish manner. At the festivals, Annalu is at his best. Soon after I arrived Annalu and

the host disappeared into an adjoining room which was a chapel. They emerged dressed as lamas and mumbling prayers. The genuine lama in the audience roared the loudest approval. The best part of this act for me was the fact that the host had still not changed his normal headgear, which consisted of his pigtail curled neatly round the top of his head, surmounted by a black Homberg, just a little too small.

The chang flowed freely, food was consumed in great quantities, the singing and dancing was continual from noon to midnight, and the atmosphere thickened with seventy people present. At one stage I found myself near the host. I had discovered that most of the male guests had contributed food or chang, so I quietly gave him some money. He jumped to his feet, stopped all other activities, and announced, to my embarrassment, 'Hardie Sahib has given me four rupees.'

A chorus of shouts approved the gift, as it was apparently a good omen. But then he asked, 'Is it for chang or food?'

By a fierce nudge in the ribs Annalu indicated it was an important question. I remembered Urkien giving a chang contribution on a previous occasion, so I said, 'Chang.'

I hit the jackpot, having brought good luck to everyone, and I immediately became someone's brother, while I weakly resisted another quart of chang, pressed to my lips by firm female fingers.

On the second day Annalu was still masquerading as a lama, and to add to the deception he chanted monotonously and tried playing several of the holy man's musical instruments. The chang quantities were trebled, apparently through my contribution, and that day Annalu asked his friends to a dance at his house in the evening.

Daily Life in Khumjung

THE Sherpa dancing, distinguished from the grotesque performances of the monks on religious occasions, has a tremendous fascination in both sound and rhythm. To provide an adequate description is impossible. After becoming moderately proficient at it, I tried to note down some of the steps, but I never made progress. When I was dancing the next step seemed to follow the last automatically. Never before have I known music so captivating, and only in a Madrid night club and at a presentation of Spanish ballet in the Stoll Theatre, have I been so conscious of rhythm.

The dancers form a large semi-circle, frequently round a fire. Each has his arms round his neighbour's back, the men are together on the right and all the women form the left of the curved line. The only musical accompaniment comes from the voices of the dancers. Every song has a different dance to it, but the dances all form a recognisable pattern. They always start with a slow rhythm with paces no more than two steps forward and back, and I have seen four different steps used in this slow stage. The next part is usually at twice the speed of the first, with complications of step and tempo. Between the singing of the words of a Sherpa lyric are pauses where the dancers simply count from one to ten, grouping their words to fit the rhythm of their swaying bodies and shuffling feet. One song includes the following:

'Chick a nyi a sum sum sum, shi ka nya a tuk tuk tuk,' etc., which translated into English is:

'One a two a three three three, four a five a six six six.'

The type of song originated in Tibet, and similar styles can be found throughout most of the length of the Himalayas. Many

songs and dances are composed in the Sherpa villages, but they keep very much to Tibetan tradition in both subject and dialect. For example, the words for the numbers one to nine are the same in both languages, but the Tibetan ten is *chu*, with only a slight vowel difference from the word for water, and the Sherpa word is *chitumber*. A Sherpa composing a song always uses the Tibetan *chu*. The songs include a variety of subjects such as love, yak, passes, flowers, parents, tsampa, and perhaps the most charming one I heard was about a lama's bell. So closely does the Sherpa adhere to the Tibetan origins of his music that he leaves the potato out when he sings contemporary songs about all the other foods, as he knows there are no potatoes in Tibet.

Dancing, drinking and general rejoicing always accompany the festivals. One night the whole population gathered for a big celebration, but I retired early to Urkien's house, before the proceedings came to an end. I was aroused at two o'clock by loud shouting, and the noise of Urkien and Gyalgen stamping up the stairs. They went out again to return in half an hour, even more noisily than before. Urkien came to me to explain what had happened, and announced that he expected to be arrested in the morning by the Nepalese police.

Next day the policeman from Namche Bazar came to take both Urkien and Gyalgen to a temporary prison, where they would await his pleasure to be escorted on the long journey to Okhaldhunga for trial. By this time everyone in the village knew the story, and the whole populace gathered in a noisy demonstration to object to a trial which was to be conducted so far from witnesses and experts on Sherpa procedure. Three strong men had to keep a firm hold on one Khumjung man who was outraged by the thought of Sherpas being tried in a Nepalese court, but this was the only sign of violence in the whole demonstration. Among the crowd I saw Gyalgen's wife, whose son was only nine days old. Still weak from her recent confinement, she was distracted by the sight of her husband and her brother both under arrest.

Fortunately the policeman relented under the popular pressure, and the principal witnesses accompanied all those concerned to

the headman's house. As the employer and 'relative' of the two accused, I also attended. We took up positions on the floor, and listened politely while the policeman read out a statement accusing my two men of assaulting Lakpa Tensing and his friend Pasang the previous night. A third man had also received a beating but he had made no charge. The assault was admitted amidst the general applause of the 'court'. Evidence, mostly shouted, with two or three testimonies delivered simultaneously, came forward to the effect that Lakpa Tensing, a Sherpa living in Darjeeling, had come to Khumbu three years previously. He had gone through the four necessary chang ceremonies for the hand of a local girl, and with her he had returned to Darjeeling. Before long, through the riotous living of her husband, the wife had contracted a venereal disease and her child was stillborn. As the woman had given birth to a child she was regarded by all Sherpas as fully married. Her husband had been observed recently with an expedition in the Khumbu area. However, dismissed by his employers for his philandering and lazy habits, he had set off on his way home to Darjeeling. He must have taken a long time over the journey, for later the mother of his legal wife saw him with another woman and tried to force from him the 500 rupees and chang which would have brought about a legal divorce and paid his wife's medical expenses in Darjeeling. Lakpa refused, claiming that as Darjeeling was in Indian territory he was unaffected by Sherpa law concerning divorce.

Lakpa Tensing was still in the area for a week after his dismissal, and he unwisely chose to spend a night at Khumjung. His wife's mother, hearing of this, had primed her male relatives with hate and chang, and sent them out into the night to do something towards balancing the account in accordance with Sherpa custom. Urkien, as the wronged wife's cousin, and a true Khumbu Sherpa, proceeded to the house accompanied by Gyalgen, who would willingly follow Urkien anywhere in the world, although he has not a third of Urkien's strength or dash. From Urkien Lakpa received a very considerable beating, and it was unfortunate that in the process Pasang, who knew nothing of the circumstances, defended Lakpa, only to receive the same treatment. The new

lady friend's brother jumped on Urkien from behind and paid the price of his onslaught by lying unconscious for an hour, with everyone saying he was dead.

While the evidence was coming forward, Lakpa disappeared from the house and managed to leave the village. His mother-in-law was not present, but her sister gave some colourful evidence. Among the women only two others spoke, each giving a dissertation on morals, disease, religion and divorce. They were the wives of Dawa Tensing and Changjup, who, at the time of the trial, were in England. After hearing the whole story, the policeman dismissed the assault charges. The Sherpa next to him took the document recording the accusations made by Lakpa and Pasang, glanced scornfully at it, folded it neatly, and suddenly tore it into shreds, with a shout of 'So! So! So!' with typical Sherpa lung-power.

Then the inevitable chang came forward. Urkien, Gyalgen and Pasang held hands together and drank to seal the peace. Then came all the relatives, and anyone who gave evidence, to drink from the circulating bowl. For some time I have had the honour of being regarded as Urkien's father, although I am his senior by only two years. His real father died in Darjeeling in 1946. I too was invited to join the chang group, if only to take a paternal interest in the proceedings. The policeman remained in his seat, absorbing smoke from the many cigarettes he had been given.

We divided, and while Urkien and Gyalgen were taken on a hero's tour, I adjourned to the dance at Annalu's house. For a long time I sat in a silence induced by a surfeit of food and chang and thoughts of the sick woman in Darjeeling, who was still no nearer her 500 rupees and divorce. At about ten o'clock a young woman dragged me to my feet with a request to dance. The captivating rhythm and charming music brought an end to my worries, and eventually I was among the remaining six who were still singing and dancing when someone pulled back a shutter for some air, and we saw it was daylight.

Early one morning I was called to the house of a close friend, to find his wife's mother and two other women in attendance, and

I was informed that the birth of a child would take place within the next hour. Some mats were on the floor, and the patient was lying there showing few signs of distress. I remember when I had been a witness to a similar scene in Europe when a doctor was in attendance with his competent air and his sterilised instruments. There was a tightening and relaxing of muscles, but still everything seemed so easy that I expected no infant's cry for several hours.

A great three-gallon copper bowl was on the fire: the only evidence of special preparation in the house, so far as I could see. There was no lid on the bowl, and the ceiling above it was lined with soot and dust, which might easily fall and pollute the water. I stoked the fire a little. Suddenly I was aware that the child was emerging, with surprising ease and speed. The attendants moved quietly and swiftly and the baby was born. Then the first child of the family, a six years old daughter, came into the room. I took her out for a walk, and we went to where my kit was stored. From it I slipped a tube of disinfectant into my pocket, and on the way back we went slowly, throwing stones at the pigeons eating buckwheat.

Inside the house the slight tension had eased, and life went on as usual. My position by the fire was resumed, and I stealthily dropped some disinfectant into the bowl of water. A pleased father told me it was an *angyi* (baby boy). Sherpas do not have a genderless word like the English 'baby', but there is a separate word, *angya*, for baby girl.

I stayed long enough to partake of the customary chang. The mother, too, had a token sip, while I remembered something in first aid to the effect that a bleeding patient should have no stimulating drinks. I enquired and found all the bleeding had stopped. The remainder of the day I spent in wandering through the rhododendron forests—thinking. What has happened to Europeans that makes a confinement such an anxiety?

Another *angyi* at the age of seven days was to have his name chosen. He was the son of Urkien's sister and Gyalgen. Nine guests arrived, mostly close relatives, each with a gift of chang and two or three rupees. They enquired about the mother, who

was to remain in bed throughout the proceedings, sitting in a position where she could see and hear everything and give occasional comments. No lama, unless he is a very close friend, is present at a naming ceremony. His official presence in a house is usually connected with a death or illness, and this would be a bad omen for the child. When a lama has been invited as a close friend, he may attend in lay clothes, but he must give no prayers or religious signs.

Everyone sat down, drank chang, and the three closest of the male relatives were asked to write down their suggestions for names on slips of paper. Urkien had previously consulted his mother about a suitable name. Gyalgen had asked the child's mother, and the third, Gyalgen's father, had probably discussed it with his family. The three slips of paper bearing the names, Lakpa Sona, Lakpa Noru, and Lakpa Tsering were all put into a bowl. Gyalgen was taken outside while the papers were stirred. He came back, picked one, and grinning widely read out, 'Lakpa Noru'. There were shouts of joy, and of course more chang. When I was told that Noru is a particularly lucky name, I too joined the festivities.

Later I had a chance of a quiet discussion with Urkien: 'Noru is a very lucky name, but what would have happened if the paper had come up as Sona or Tsering?' 'They are lucky too,' was the reply.

The name Lakpa was inevitable in this case, as the son was born on a Wednesday. A knowledge of the days of the week gives many clues to the names of Sherpas. When asked to name the days of the week, a Sherpa generally points to parts of his head in descending order, so that Sunday, to begin the week, is associated with the cranium. For a time I had thought that the days must have the same names as parts of the head, but I was soon to learn that Lakpa (Wednesday) means arm or foreleg. Nima (Sunday) is also the sun, and Dawa (Monday) is the moon. The following list shows the days of the week and the parts of the head which a Sherpa might indicate, apparently as a memory aid, similar to the method some Europeans use for remembering the number of days in the month by counting on their knuckles.

| | | |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| Sunday | Nima | Cranium |
| Monday | Dawa | Forehead |
| Tuesday | Mingma | Eyes |
| Wednesday | Lakpa | Nose |
| Thursday | Porbu | Mouth |
| Friday | Pasang | Chin |
| Saturday | Pemba | Neck. |

Changjup's wife, who was educated in Tibet, gave different parts of the head for the last four. She used ears, nose, mouth and chin, in that order.

The meanings of *angyi* and *angya* have already been explained. *Ang*, an abbreviation of both of these, means young, and it is frequently prefixed to a person's name. For instance Dawa Tensing (often shortened to Da Tensing) is known in Khumjung as Ang Dawa. Kuncha is a common name among Sherpas, and it means 'the youngest boy in the family'. I could not find out what happened to the naming system of a family when another boy was born after one had been called Kuncha.

Names falling outside this category often owe their origin to some important lama of the past or present. After Lakpa Noru's naming I asked Urkien about his own name, and those of his three sons. It appeared that Urkien was named after a lama of that name, who lived at the Rongbuk monastery, just over the Tibetan border and immediately north of Everest. My friend's eldest son was called Pemba Tsering, but when Urkien later visited Rongbuk, the new lama there prophesied that his son would one day be identified as the reincarnation of a great lama. He advised Urkien to change the son's name to that of a lama, so it was altered to Gaon Jemba. Gaon was the name of the lama who advised the change, and Jemba, like the common Temba, is another variation of Pemba, which simply means that he was born on a Saturday.

Urkien's second son had a straightforward name. I asked the name of the third, and to my surprise he had to ask his wife to tell him. I couldn't help laughing, and fortunately his wife laughed too. The son was born when we were on Kangchenjunga, and

although we had by this time been based in the village for thirty-three days, Urkien had not yet learned the details of the naming ceremony, seven days after the son's birth.

A Sherpa occasionally uses an additional name, according to the group to which his family belongs. This group could almost be described as a clan, and there are about twelve of them in Solu Khumbu. The clans indicate ill-defined social levels in Sherpa society, not nearly as marked as among Hindus. The only obvious evidence of clan activity occurs at the potato blessing and animal dedication ceremonies, and the tendency for herdsmen to graze their animals in restricted areas, although with marriage outside the accepted clans the grazing areas have become confused.

Many of the daylight hours of children over the age of seven are spent in searching for wood, and in the appropriate season, for wild vegetables. The forests are mainly of birch, oak, yew, ash, juniper and rhododendron. Boys and girls, armed with enormous kukris or axes, go out in the morning and return later with great baskets full of wood supported from the usual headband. During the monsoon many excursions are made for mushrooms, garlic, and the edible leaves of a lily, quantities of which are dried in the sun for later use. In the autumn, leaves are collected for the house, as well as the normal loads of wood.

A child whose parents own animals will spend most of his years of education watching the animals, bringing them in at night and seeing that they do not trespass beyond the ground allocated to them—besides keeping off the wild animals. When I asked how a small boy could keep a marauding leopard away from his charges, I was told that a leopard never attacks in daylight and keeps well away from the smell of humans. The problem of the man-eater does not arise at these altitudes. The Sherpas know of no such animal and do not hesitate to leave an unarmed eight-year-old child in leopard country.

The late Colonel Jim Corbett, in his book, *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, was of the opinion that tigers and leopards became man-eaters only when they had been wounded and were unable to kill their normal game, or when an epidemic occurred and people did not burn their dead or bury them deeply. Epidemics in Solu Khumbu are

rare, and only occasionally on a high pass is a body left unburned or unburied for any length of time. In fact, if so much as a single twig of a funeral pyre is not consumed by the fire, the Sherpas believe that this will be the cause of another death. The whole Khumbu area is a game sanctuary, and the only shooting of any magnitude was done in 1954, when fortunately, so far as I know, no leopard was wounded. This explains why there is no occurrence of man-eaters in Solu Khumbu.

Sometimes goats are kept for the night in the downstairs room of the Sherpa house, but more frequently they have a small hut of their own, often several hundred yards from the owner's house. These huts are very substantial structures, with large numbers of heavy rocks on the roofs to stop leopards lifting the planks.

Young children eligible for goat-watching are seldom given sole responsibility for yak, because they lack the experience and strength necessary for such tasks as carrying a calf unable to keep up with the home-coming herd, shearing the hair, castrating the young dzubjock and tying the females for mating.

I made frequent visits to the nearby hills with the children who took up their flocks of goats. Almost every day during the summer Urkien's sister, aged eleven, was responsible for twenty goats belonging to her mother. She would take them up the hill to join three other flocks, and the children from each would share the common task of preventing the goats from straying, and moving the whole group from time to time. If they are not forced to move, goats distinguish themselves from other grazing animals by their persistence in eating each plant down to its roots. Although most of the children show a keen vigilance and a readiness to use their yak-hair slings at the slightest provocation, they find time to sing and play games. Among these the most common is a kind of 'knuckle bones', where groups of pebbles are thrown into the air and the contestant who catches the greatest number on the back of his hand in one throw is the winner. They make houses about four feet high with small boulders as walls, but I most enjoyed their full-throated carefree songs, surprisingly similar to those of the small Spanish shepherds. With the end of

the day, to the accompaniment of whistles and shouts, goats and guardians descend, and each animal automatically turns off for its own hut or house as it reaches its appropriate junction of tracks.

During a spell of particularly wet weather which restricted the scope of my excursions from Khumjung, I found myself at leisure to study the houses of the home village.

Sherpa houses are very similar to those described in the Bhotia village of Ghunsa. The walls are of roughly cut large stones, and the mortar of clay, yak dung, sand and water is forced into the gaps between the stones from the outside, after the wall has been constructed. The pine planks on the roof cover a layer of juniper branches which assist the insulation, and these are supported by a layer of rough-hewn pine stakes and planks. Heavy rafters and a massive ridge-pole transfer this load to a stout central column and the end stone walls. No nails are used, which means that the methods of jointing are often of a very high order. Occasionally, large bolts are brought up from Thosé, six days' walk away, for the main ridge-pole.

The result is a strong and resistant building, made to withstand the severity of winter conditions at 13,000 feet. When I had examined several old houses which had collapsed, I found a wall movement had usually resulted when the foundations had sunk in wet conditions. In some cases a leaky roof had caused timber rot, and then a collapse from above. During the monsoon frequent adjustments have to be made to the roof planks to keep the rain out. A family, away for four months in the upper grazing grounds, might return to find considerable damage to the main home, if no one had been appointed to make an occasional inspection of the roof. Owing to their distance from the forests, the high altitude houses usually have layers of rock slabs instead of the upper roof planking, and they of course require no additional weight to hold them down on a windy day. Because of the irregular shapes the rocks do not always form a waterproof outer roof.

The most common single-storied house consists of one room of about thirty-five feet by twenty feet in floor space, with a ten feet partition at one end where grains, potatoes, wool and other

commodities might be stored. At the other end of the room are shelves for eating utensils and smaller supplies like salt and butter. Along one main wall are shelves supporting large copper water containers and the biggest cooking vessels. Nearby will be the wooden chang bottles and a wooden cylinder which contains a brewing chang. As with the Bhotia houses the two or three tiny windows are in one wall only and there is no chimney for the smoke to make its exit. When I asked Urkien why all the windows were on one wall, he said air does not circulate so much in the freezing winter in a house made this way. He added that he had seen chimneys in Darjeeling and Kathmandu, but disliked them for the same reason—too much inward draught. Besides, without limestone the Sherpas cannot make the fireproof mortar necessary for such a structure. Their yak dung waterproofing plaster cracks and falls away when exposed to naked flame. Next to the main room is another with leaves on the floor. Calves and sometimes goats sleep there, and this room serves as a wood storehouse and a nocturnal lavatory. (See sketch p. 174 and Plate 8).

The two-storied house has a main room similar to that of the single unit, but sometimes adjoining it will be a private chapel, equipped with all the paraphernalia of a gompa, but on a smaller scale. The animal shelter is downstairs, as are the wood supplies and a great quantity of dry leaves. These leaves are placed below a hole in the upper floor in another partitioned corner, to serve as a lavatory. The soiled leaves are regularly taken out and dug into the cultivated fields.

Windows have no glass, and like the doors the wooden shutters have wooden hinges. There is never a piped water supply, so each house has a wooden vessel with head band attached, and it is a woman's duty to make the necessary regular excursions to the nearest stream or water race. Earlier I wrongly estimated the weight of one of these cylinders when full of water to be 70 pounds. This year I put the scales on one, with the surprising result of 92 pounds. The greatest distance any Khumjung woman has to go for water is 900 yards each way, so the strength of their muscles is not surprising.

As I found by direct experience, women who carry 90 pounds

of water each day are very strong. Sherpas are relatively hairless on legs, chest and chin. When I appeared in shorts it was usually to have my leg hairs pulled, and remarks made about my similarity to the yeti. One day I was sleeping in the sun beside a track when suddenly three aproned demons literally descended on me—one on my chest, one on my stomach and one on my legs. They proceeded to pull all available hairs. Feats of strength, so far as I can perform them, did no good. I had to retaliate on pigtails to regain my freedom, and then join in the screams of laughter.

A painstaking housewife slicing cooked potatoes preparatory to drying for export to Tibet



A Sherpani excavating a potato clamp



Before a herdsman's hut, Khumjung people harvest the hay for winter yak fodder





A previously unmapped tributary of the Hongu valley

PLATE 10



A view of the monastery across the Thyangboche meadow. The god of Mt. Khumbila protects all the villages within his sight from the peak to the right

Marriage and Medicine

WHEN the weather put on a more friendly aspect, Urkien and I set off again for the high pastures in the Dudh Kosi valley. The route took us past seven small villages that were temporarily occupied by Khumjung people while their cattle were grazing in the valley. Practically every householder invited us in for potatoes, a talk or refreshments, and all of these meant chang. Although many invitations were refused, we did not get as far up the valley that day as we had intended. We stopped for the first night in a house owned by Dawa Tensing, and occupied during his absence by his son and daughter. Next morning the hospitality was so generous in all the houses that we felt guilty when we staggered away at ten o'clock to begin the day's walk.

On the way out of the village, there were two more houses to pass, and from the first came a strong appeal for us to call. The owner of this house was the widow of the Pemba Dorji who had died on Kangchenjunga. Two young women were helping her with her small children and the herd of nack and dzum, and I was relieved to find a far brighter atmosphere than on the previous occasion on which we had met. The last house was owned by Urkien's 'in-laws', and again it was impossible to decline the invitation. When the host greeted us I declared that my drinking capacity had long been filled, and I pleaded that as I was unwell I could drink no more.

Our host, like all Sherpas, regarded chang and tsampa as the cure for all ills, so he advised me to drink some chang—the very thing I was trying to avoid by my little white lie. Inside the house the good lady produced a bottle of the distilled arak. She understood no Hindustani, and neither of the men would tell her that I

wanted nothing. I knew I was being rather rude, as a Sherpa hostess must exert great pressure on her guests to accept the customary three drinks. I accepted a sip of arak, and in something of a haze I went outside, where I located three boys to whom I showed my binoculars. Here I found an adequate excuse for keeping out of the drinking activities: I must wait until the boys had finished with the binoculars. We eventually left the village at eleven-thirty, but had only been walking fifteen minutes when another group of houses loomed ahead. Urkien's resistance had become stronger, but when one of Hillary's 1954 Sherpas asked us to try some fresh yak's milk, we accepted.

Outside once again, and there was an invitation from a Sherpa who had just returned from the French Makalu Expedition. We followed him to his house, where there were several guests and the atmosphere was moderately festive. Our host was arranging a proposal of marriage, and those deputised to perform it would travel up the valley with us, and if all went well we would see the first stage of the four events which comprise the proposal and marriage ceremonies. I sat down to another cup of yak's milk, followed by fresh yak steaks fried in butter—greatly appreciated, as it was the first meat I had eaten in seven weeks.

Two men were to make the proposal to the girl's parents, well aware that the prospective fiancée had gone down the valley that day and would not be present. The men were close friends, but not near relatives, of the man seeking a bride. If the bridegroom's deputies are friends rather than relatives, they are less likely to take offence should anything displeasing arise from the frank discussions with the girl's parents regarding prospects and dowry.

At this first stage the proposers take a bottle of chang to the parents. The bottle we saw was very big and clean, filled to the brim, with a sprinkling of butter and tsampa round the top to indicate its purity. A vessel without such embellishment is likely to contain waste liquid. A Sherpa must give no indication of a lack of generosity, so the proposer's bottle must be about to overflow. On this occasion when the bottle was half way to its destination, the proposers had decided to ensure that they carried

high-quality chang. Each dipped in a finger and licked it, with favourable comments; but although Urkien and I accompanied the two, we were not permitted to do likewise, in case the slight drop in liquid level could be detected.

We all entered the summer residence of the girl's parents. Each was invited to take up a position on a mat on the floor. The host treated us as normal visitors by offering chang to each of us in turn. I looked about the one-roomed house, typical of the better yakherd's huts. A churn, bowls of butter, curds and milk were along one wall, yak saddles and ropes hung from a rafter, and there was the usual partition behind which the calves must remain when they are brought in for the night. As we drank, the hostess cast an occasional fleeting glance at the mysterious new chang bottle.

After we had drunk what is required of a caller before any business is approached, the senior proposer began to discuss the daughter's future and handed over the bottle, stating the name of the donor. The bottle remained between the two parties, and a discussion began of the numbers of dzum owned by the young man, the houses he would inherit, and other material matters. Here I thought it better to excuse myself and adjourn to the house where I was to stay. Half an hour later a request came for me to return. The messenger told me that the parents had accepted the chang gift, so all was well so far. Inside the house this time there were several people in addition to the parents. I joined the circle and took my share from the significant bottle. It was of very high quality, and I was interested to observe that the proposers also partook of it.

The parents usually accept the chang on the first visit, without saying yes or no; the acceptance is a favourable indication to the proposers. Only if the parents are actively hostile will the first gift be refused. Sherpa bridegrooms regard the second chang gift, sixteen days later, as far more critical. By then the parents and the girl will have been in deep consultations and will most probably have reached a definite decision. The proposers feel that if the second gift of chang is accepted, they can be sufficiently confident to proceed to the third and fourth stages.

With the third chang gift, a further sixteen days later, the

bridegroom and some relatives appear. Everyone is dressed in his best, and the bride and groom meet officially for the first time. On this occasion the groom must provide enough chang to entertain the additional guests, and he does not expect to be closely cross-examined about his prospects. If the bride's parents have accepted the chang, there is singing and dancing for most of the day.

After three months, the final ceremony takes place in one of the larger houses in the main village. If the fourth offer of chang is accepted, the couple is regarded as married. Even more people are present and again the singing, dancing and drinking go on for most of the day and well into the night. It is not essential for a holy man to be present, but on one occasion I saw a lama among the guests, as a close friend of the groom.

Although this is the general pattern of events, there are occasional deviations. One occurred while I was in Khumjung, involving a man who was a widower, then employed by the Mount Lhotse International Expedition, based some two days' walk away. As his leave periods from the expedition were naturally few and far between, the sixteen days and three months intervals for the ceremonies in his second marriage were altered, and the second proposal became a major social event for all relatives and friends. Urkien, a close friend of the groom, and a cousin of the bride, made the first proposal.

Sexual intercourse is not approved before the fourth chang gift, but sometimes it occurs before anyone has thought of gifts of chang. The state of marriage entered after the fourth gift, is in effect, a trial, because a man can leave his wife by paying her 50 rupees should she fail to become pregnant within three years. If, after that time, a man pays the money and gives chang to his wife and her parents, he has local sympathy if he leaves her and marries another woman. Five years is in fact a more common trial period. When a wife becomes pregnant she is regarded as fully married, and if a divorce is sought by such a person, a sum of 500 rupees must be paid.

Failure to conceive is never attributed to the man, and my suggestion that a man could be at fault was greeted by laughter. However, I did hear of a case where a man left his childless wife

after four years. The wife, very distressed and unlikely to be sought by another man, joined a monastery for women, and a year later became pregnant. The parents and relatives were so hostile to the ex-husband that he sold his property and fled to the Sherpa community in Darjeeling.

The minimum of three years as a trial period appeared to me to be particularly unfair, especially as there has been no readjustment in that time to allow for the long periods of absence which have always been a feature of the Sherpa domestic scene, and have been increased in recent years by large expeditions which take young men away from their homes for four or five months at a time. A Sherpa who is a good climber might be in great demand from expeditions and be away for eight or more months in a year. On the other hand, an expedition leader, when engaging his men, can hardly enquire into the domestic situation of all his numerous employees. There has always been a brisk trade with Tibet and India, which again involve long periods of absence of a man from his wife. To Tibet there is an almost continuous flow of cloth, paper, grain, sugar and in certain seasons dried vegetables, flour and dzubjock. From Tibet come salt, porcelain, silver, coral, wool and yak, some destined for India, and all vital to the Sherpas' existence. I admire many of the Sherpa laws and customs, but I feel they require some enlightenment where their divorce arrangements are concerned.

Divorced persons who have had children frequently marry other partners, but as previously stated, if no children have been born, the woman is not likely to marry again. A widower marrying a second time frequently chooses his deceased wife's sister as his bride. The reason given to me for this is that such a new wife is more likely than any other to be interested in caring for her young nieces and nephews.

Although polygamy is rare in Khumjung, polyandry is fairly common, occurring usually when a man's younger brother attaches himself to his sister-in-law. Sometimes three brothers are married to one woman, and from Tibet come reports of four or five. Since men are often away from home for many months of the year, a polyandrous marriage is likely to

ensure that there is a man to help work in the home fields and crops. As frequently happens, two brothers might be at home for some months at a time, and in all cases I observed complete harmony seemed to exist. Few Sherpas show any sign of selfishness or jealousy, and a woman would not marry a second husband unless she particularly desired it. The polyandrous system ensures that a small property, or a small herd of yak or dzum, inherited from a father, does not have to be divided into yet smaller uneconomical groups. As a rule the youngest son inherits his parents' house, but with it goes the responsibility of keeping his parents during their old age. Thus a youngest son, joining his brother's marriage, will often bring with him a house, its attached ground and animals, as well as the grazing rights in various high altitude pastures. The children of such a marriage are a joint responsibility, and in that respect there seems to be no difficulty. A child of a polyandrous marriage refers to both men as his father, and in this long accepted part of Sherpa society, there is no social stigma attached to anyone concerned.

Each man has his own pattern for his long elaborately decorated garters. It is said that in a polyandrous marriage, when one husband seeks his wife's caresses for a night, he hangs his garter in a certain position where it will be observed by his brother.

There is no recognised authority to look after marriage disputes which have not been settled inside the family domestic circle, so if relatives have not reached a satisfactory solution with the help of the local headman or the lama, the persons in dispute might cross the Tibetan frontier to consult the judgment of a group of learned lamas. In spite of the change of power in Tibet, the Sherpas still prefer to abide by Tibetan rather than Nepalese law. The Sherpas live within the borders of Nepal, and a policeman is stationed in Namche Bazar; but the Nepalese police have a different religion and are seldom familiar with the complicated background of Sherpa law, custom and language, all of which have close affinities with those of Tibet. It is seldom that anything concerning Sherpas north of Namche Bazar is referred to the Nepalese police, but Urkien's assault on Lakpa Tensing (described in the last chapter) was one of the unfortunate exceptions.

One day news reached us that five people, returning from an expedition, had died on the track. These Sherpas had begun walking with nine others, from the railway terminus of Jaynagar in India, early in the monsoon, the worst time for dysentery, malaria and many other complaints. At a flooded stream, where in the dry season one can walk across with no difficulty, some Hindus wanted to charge them 15 rupees each for a safe passage on a ferry, instead of the normal four annas. The Sherpas gave the Hindus a beating, and then rowed themselves across the flooded stream. Three days later one of the Sherpas died, and on the fourth day a woman met the same fate. During the next five days, three more died. The Sherpas were convinced that the ferry owners had gone to their temple and prayed to their gods to kill them as a retaliation for the rough treatment received at their hands. To appease the avenging gods, the survivors handed most of their expedition earnings to the priests of a Hindu temple, and during the rest of the journey home there were no more casualties. Two days down the valley from Khumjung they came in sight of Khumbila, the mountain on which their own god lives, so they believed they were beyond the reach of foreign powers.

A month later Urkien was called out at three o'clock one morning. Six hours later he returned. As he had been the doctor's orderly on his first expedition, he is regarded as something of a wizard, and I found that he had been giving 'medical' attention to one of the Jaynagar party for the last five days. She was very ill with sharp pains in her head and the hollow of her back, and as her husband explained, there would be no one to dig the potatoes when they were ready. In order to save her, the husband, feeling that his wife was still out of favour with the Hindu gods, had spent all his available money to buy food, cloth and various gifts to donate to the nearest Hindu shrine. He wished to obtain samples of every known food to seal the peace, and he asked me if I had any paper-covered sweets. Unfortunately I had none, but I gave him some coffee instead. By this time it was the only remaining European food in my possession, and I was living on an entirely Sherpa diet.

I rebuked Urkien for remaining silent about the case: 'You

should have told me. Something from my medical kit might have helped her.'

'You said your pills must not be given to a pregnant woman, so I didn't mention it.' As I had previously refused to give five-grain quinine pills for malaria to a woman advanced in pregnancy, Urkien had assumed that there was no assistance of any kind which could be given to a woman in her condition.

I called on the patient to learn that seven months of her pregnancy had passed, which meant she had been carrying seventy-pound loads for a European expedition in her sixth month. Her liquid intake and output sounded absurdly small, so as a morale booster I gave her a few aspirins, but I specified that with each she must drink a large cup of water. I told her she must not dig potatoes or carry the water bucket. Her violent symptoms could have had a variety of causes, but I was not in a position to investigate any further.

I learned later that the child was born, but died shortly afterwards, and the mother, although very ill, slowly recovered. The foreign gods were taking it out on the next generation.

Sherpas are particularly susceptible to the fevers of the plains of India, all unknown in their high altitude villages. I feel that expeditions have a responsibility to their employees when their contracts are terminated in the lower levels of India, especially during the monsoon. Another group of expedition Sherpas, returning at the same time on a different route, had no troubles other than two minor dysentery attacks. When they had been paid off, every man had been given anti-malaria paludrine tablets, and one of their senior men had other supplies to cover a number of ills. The Sherpas are well aware of the value of paludrine, and they always ask for their ration if someone has forgotten to issue it. Although they frequently go out to Darjeeling to sell equipment given to them by expeditions, I have never heard of a man selling his precious paludrines. Probably the best way to help the Sherpas returning home would be to choose the expedition medical assistant from the best of the Solu Khumbu men, and not from the Darjeeling Sherpas. A Darjeeling man would not be returning home with the Solu Khumbu party.

This assistant could be taught the uses of the appropriate pills for the treatment of the major fevers, dysentery and high altitude headaches. Besides assisting the party going home, it would slowly diminish the deep-rooted superstitions that exist in the home villages, where cures are usually attempted with chang, tsampa or the advice of a human medium in a trance. Once when my finger was swollen with a bee sting, Gyalgen tried to cure the swelling by rubbing chang into the tender skin.

Superstition and ignorance are the chief enemies of the expedition doctor, but in some cases a stubborn refusal to co-operate can result in frustration for the medical man and disaster for his patient. When a woman coolie was ill at one of the lower camps on Kangchenjunga, the doctor, Clegg, questioned her about the only symptom she would disclose—a headache. Finally, after suspecting a deeper cause of her weakness, he called on the fluent Hindi and medical knowledge of Evans. After many more questions, lasting for hours, they found that a miscarriage was the source of the illness. Can an expedition doctor, who has the responsibility of three hundred lives, be expected to make a thorough examination of each man or woman? There would be universal complaints if a doctor attempted to make even a cursory inspection of any Sherpani. In any case, these women regard pregnancy so lightly that they do not consider it an obstacle to be earning good money by carrying loads, and they are unlikely to disclose their condition to an inquisitive sahib.

I have heard of an amazing cure brought about in Namche Bazar by a medium in a trance. A goatherd's sister was suffering from the unusual affliction of having her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth for a whole day; perhaps this was a punishment for being too garrulous. She was unable to eat and had to be fed on liquids. A 'ghost charmer' was called in and was soon observed to be deep in a trance, during which his tongue also adhered to his palate. Finally he came back to normal and with him came his patient with her tongue in its correct position, after suffering in this way for thirty hours. The father was ordered to turn a goat loose from his herd as a thanksgiving offering. This story made me anxious to witness such a strange incident.

In this land of no doctors or veterinary surgeons, a human or animal illness or malformity receive similar treatment. I was asked one day to Gyalgen's house without knowing the purpose of my visit. Inside was a small altar which had not been there four hours previously, and there was also a man I had never seen before. I was seated on a mat quite close to the stranger.

Gyalgen went to the door and put several planks against it from the inside. That was unusual; something was about to happen. There were four women present, three babies, Urkien, Gyalgen and the stranger beside me. For a while the conversation was general, and then the altar bowls were filled with water, and grain gifts as well as a bowl of milk were donated by Urkien. A smouldering butter lamp was lit. What was going to happen? Could it be a further ceremony in connection with Gyalgen's son, now a month old?

The windows were closed, and the air was pungent with juniper smoke. Through the thick atmosphere I could see the stranger's profile in front of the guttering lamp, and although it was obviously a solemn occasion, I could see he was neither lama nor monk, because he had a bobbed pigtail. He picked up a lama's bell, and we heard its characteristic tone in a regular rapid rhythm. The bellringer was cross-legged on the floor, bouncing up and down in time with the bell, and soon he added drum beats to his performance. The speed was increased and I was delighted at the realisation that I was about to witness a trance, common in Tibet, but seldom seen in Solu Khumbu. Nevertheless the Sherpas still chatted to each other and one woman was whistling to her baby to make it urinate. The medium meanwhile was working himself into the trance, beseeching a long dead lama to speak through his lips. The whole process took about forty minutes, and I could only wonder if the man would collapse from his physical efforts with his continual vibrating up and down.

Suddenly there was a silence, and the man leaned forward in the gloom. When his profile appeared through the juniper smoke before the faint flame of one butter candle, I saw he was wearing an unusual headdress surmounted by five feather-shaped pieces of wood. The drum resumed its beating, but the bell was silent, and

now our medium began a simple chant. The Sherpas moved closer.

Urkien asked the name of the spirit, and in the chant came the name of one of the earliest and most illustrious Tibetan lamas. Then Urkien asked, 'Why will Gyalgen's cow give no milk?' At last I knew what it was all about. The medium, still in a chant, asked for the details. A year ago, when the cow was two years old, its first calf was born. The calf died almost immediately, and the cow gave no milk for the remainder of the year, in spite of all the food it was given. This year another calf was born, and again it died and the mother gave no milk. On many occasions I had seen the cow, and I knew it to be a miserable creature, like most of its species forced to live at these altitudes. I knew that the state of Gyalgen's purse had forced him to buy a young cow, as it is half the price of a nack calf.

Although the medium never stopped his drum beating and his murmuring, his utterances were seldom intelligible even to the Sherpas, but after a time we heard clearly the instructions to be carried out by the owner in order to produce milk from the cow. Gyalgen was to obtain some milk from a red cow and some from a white goat, and give it to Urkien who was to place the milk with a prayer flag on his grandfather's shrine. Then, with the assistance of the local lama, a service was to be held on Urkien's first floor, when more milk offerings were to be made. Part of the dead calf's body must be found, and the mother allowed to smell it, and only then would the milk flow. This latter instruction reminded me of a similar reference in Sir Joseph Hooker's *Himalayan Journal*. It seemed that in 1848 the Bhotia people, 70 miles to the east, usually kept part of a dead calf, believing that its mother would give no milk until she had smelled the calf.

The drum beats slowed their tempo, and the medium, now silent, fell forward and remained in a collapsed state on the floor. So that he would not come out of his trance, the women were sent to back of the room. After a brief silence the drum beats began again, with their tempo slowly increasing until the medium had resumed his feverish vibrating. He was now inspired with the spirit of another famous lama. The watching Sherpa faces drew

in closer to the centre of the circle. Their shining eyes and rounded cheekbones were all that could be seen in the light of one weak lamp.

We heard shouts below, so Gyalgen went down and let a man come in. I heard expedition boots on the stairs, and the next minute I recognised Annalu's booming voice. He told the medium he had a sore knee and thigh. After an interval an answer came, in a different chant from the new lama, and Annalu was told he would be cured if he took flags of four different colours and placed them on his grandfather's shrine, and burned juniper while uttering certain prayers.

By now it was dark outside; the trance had been in progress for two and a quarter hours. There was a pause, the bell and drum resumed their first rhythm, the headgear fell to the floor after no perceptible releasing of strings, and our medium became Pasang again. We all discussed the various instructions, and Pasang was most eager to find out what had been said through his mouth. Gyalgen explained what had happened, and Pasang, once more an ordinary yakherd like most of his race, seemed to be genuinely impressed with what he was hearing.

Then Gyalgen's wife remembered the cow had not been brought home for the night. We armed ourselves with torches and, after an hour and a half found it lying in grass reserved for hay. Special permission had been obtained for it to remain in the home grounds until a week after the birth of its calf.

I wondered about the attitudes of Annalu, Gyalgen and Urkien, all of whom willingly accept the advice of doctors on expeditions; when I questioned them they said that on an expedition they are under the influence of the leader's and doctor's gods, but in their own village they have to revert to their old methods of approaching the earliest Tibetan lamas.

I asked: 'If the cow still gives no milk, what will you think?'

'Then Pasang is no good. But we know he is good, as the lamas in Thyangboche consult him with successful results. Of course the cow will give milk. If not it will probably mean we did not obey the instructions carefully.'

The Western mind tends to be impatient with such credulity

and superstition, but the Oriental approach goes deeper. A distinguished lama, on being questioned about the apparent approval of superstitious practices by the leaders of Tibet, is reported to have said: 'The mind of man is prone to superstition. If left to themselves ignorant people will invent their own superstitions, and it is better that they should find their superstitions prepared for them with a definite object in view. The deeper teachings are beyond the capacity of the majority, and if superstition helps the common people to a better life, why remove it?'

I anxiously awaited news of the cow, but Urkien and I had to leave immediately for Kathmandu. The first part of my survey, search and research had been completed, and next I must go to India to meet my wife and Macdonald. Gyalgen would follow later to Kathmandu, and we would get news of the cow in the city.

* From *The Religion of Tibet* by J. E. Ellam.

CHAPTER X

Indian Interlude

IN Khumjung preparations began for my journey out to India to meet my wife and Macdonald. One evening two Sherpanis called on me at Urkien's house. They were Kami Doma and Pasang Lamu, two young married women of the village, popular for their industry in the fields and their lively spirits at a social gathering. They each carried a chang bottle which was placed beside me as a gift. I wondered at this, but knowing my curiosity would be satisfied in Sherpa time, I accepted a drink with no questions. When everyone had finished his third cup the purpose of the visit was disclosed. The ladies wanted me to employ them as coolies for the journey out to the Indian frontier. After some discussion I agreed to employ them for the upward journey only, as no one other than Urkien would be required for the downward trek. I had already arranged for Gyalgen and Aila Tensing to go out to civilisation carrying nothing and meet me when I was on the way back. The two new recruits could join them and help in bringing the additional baggage up. This new arrangement should provide a good opportunity of studying more of Sherpa women, and lend more interest to the party as a whole.

Slowly the time for this downward journey approached. My soap had long since finished except for a cubic inch hidden in the rafters, to help make me more presentable as the first signs of western life came in sight. I patched up my clothes and Urkien trimmed my hair and beard into a more civilised shape.

So one day Urkien and I left the green fields of Khumjung. Although this was only a temporary farewell, Dawa Tensing's wife draped white scarves around our necks and we consumed the inevitable chang. We had intended to proceed to Jaynagar in

India, but owing to visa difficulties which had just arisen, our ultimate destination was changed to Raxaul so that we could call on the relevant Government officials at Kathmandu, two days short of the Indian frontier town. I hoped to make our downward journey an experiment in load carrying and food consumption. Apart from a pound of coffee we had no European food as we started for Kathmandu. Urkien's sixty pounds and my fifty-five consisted of local flours, cooking utensils, personal effects and some articles of Sherpa clothing and jewellery which I had purchased for making a Sherpa room somewhere in the future. We would supplement our supplies from local sources as we went along.

After a day we called on Aila Tensing's house at Lukla, to tell him when to meet us in Kathmandu. We were seated by the fire talking, while Aila casually broke a dozen eggs into a bowl. Eggs were plentiful at Lukla, which is only 11,500 feet up, but they had been scarce in Khumjung. There were stirrings in a pot, followed by delicious smells emerging and then one enormous omelette—all for me. As custom demanded, I refused a few times, then accepted it all and cut off some pieces for the others. They, too, declined, but finally accepted. Although I had parted with most of the omelette, I still purposely left a little on my plate. Soon another guest came, and I noticed she was given the portion I had left.

One day later, on a precipitous jungle track in the Lumding Khola, I was almost treading on Urkien's hurrying heels when he suddenly stopped, side-stepped and pushed me backwards. Between our two pairs of feet were the shining coils of a deadly cobra. Urkien was on the uphill side, past the reptile, while I hesitated to step over it and join him. When I retreated, Urkien explained that its hood was down, so it would be safe to pass. I did so, in a hurry. Then further up the track we collected some large stones and sent a shower of missiles at the offending snake. A rock pinned its tail to the track, and as the flexible body thrashed about I could see it was fully ten feet long. More stones brought blood from the cobra, but its head remained undamaged. Then, suddenly freeing itself, the snake disappeared into a bamboo thicket. This made a major impression and we were very cautious

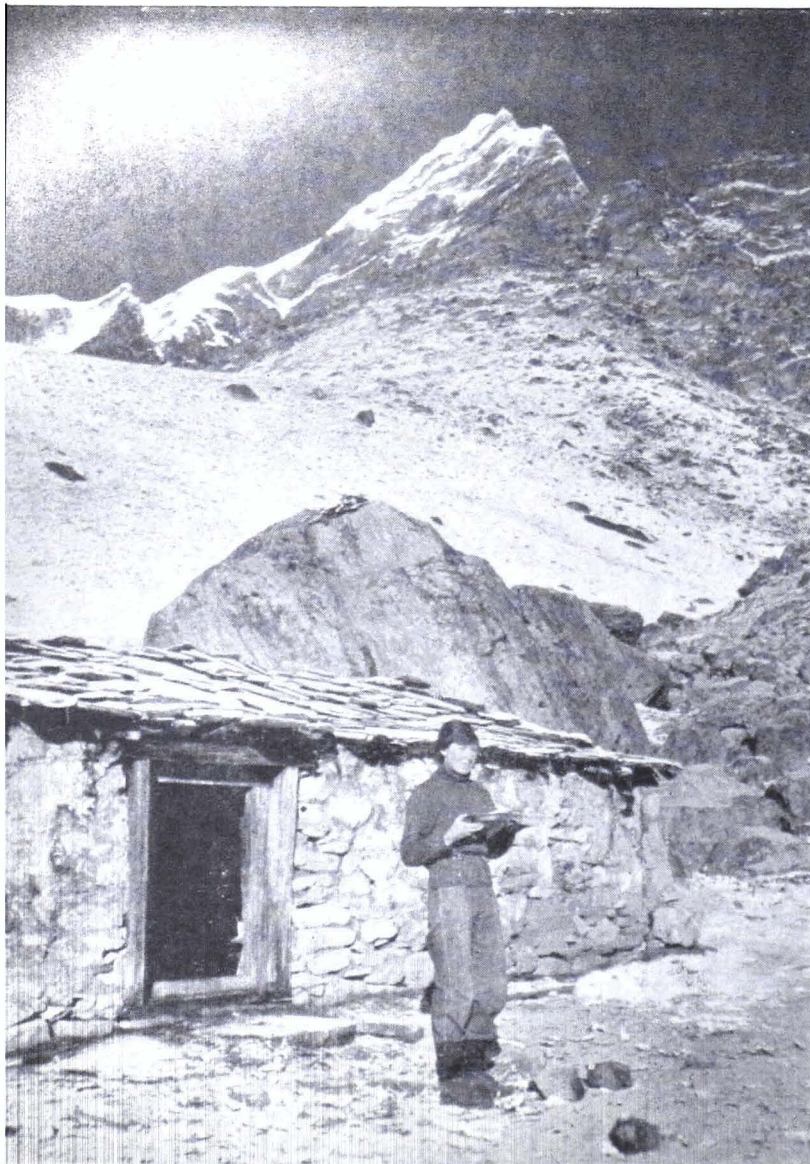
for many days. When we spoke of our escape later we called the scene of the incident 'Snake Gully'. Snakes are seldom seen so high up, and few expedition parties carry anti-snake bite serum. I had none with me. A few days after this incident, I witnessed the neat disposal of a smaller snake. A black eagle was soaring over a paddy field. Suddenly it shortened its wing-spread and dived among the corn cobs to rise in an instant with a writhing snake in its claws. In five seconds both dropped to the track and the eagle promptly dispatched the snake.

The route to Kathmandu has been trodden by many parties and a writer with a recent group visited three gompas on the way. His remarks about each invariably described the 'pornographic drawings' he saw at every turn. I felt he was far wide of the mark, so now I welcomed the opportunity of inspecting the drawings to confirm my own suspicions. All I could find to support his contention were representations of one of the principal Buddhist gods in a position of sexual union with one of his female creations, who represents the people of the world. The artist was, in his way, attempting to show the sympathy and compassion of the god for his people.*

I came to the conclusion that the 'pornography' was in the eye of the beholder.

In spite of all the constant delays with monsoon weather, Urkien and I made good time. To my coffee I added one pound of sugar which I bought in Thosa, a major Nepalese village on our route. Our diet became more varied as we lost altitude. Eggs, pumpkins, maize, potatoes and onions were always cheap and plentiful at the lower altitudes. Owing to the floods of the year before, rice was scarce, and sometimes even dearer than it is in England. As we dropped below 7,000 ft. we approached the land of bananas, limes, pears and melons, all available in abundance and at a reasonable price. Now the diet was so good that I put on most of the weight lost on Kangchenjunga. I can see no reason for small

* 'These coupled figures signify "The Penetration of the Material by the Spiritual",' says Heron-Allen, 'which thus become inseparable. In and for purposes of worship, Wisdom is regarded as female, and Power and Method as Male, and they are depicted as being in sexual union, touching at all points of contact, denoting that Wisdom and Method, Power and the Mind that guides and uses it are ever in union.' Heron-Allen: *Gods of the Fourth World*.



Enid enjoys breakfast outside the yakherd hut at Lobuje

PLATE II

The author carrying wood to a high camp in the Chola Khola valley. Mt. Taweche (21,390) dominates the skyline

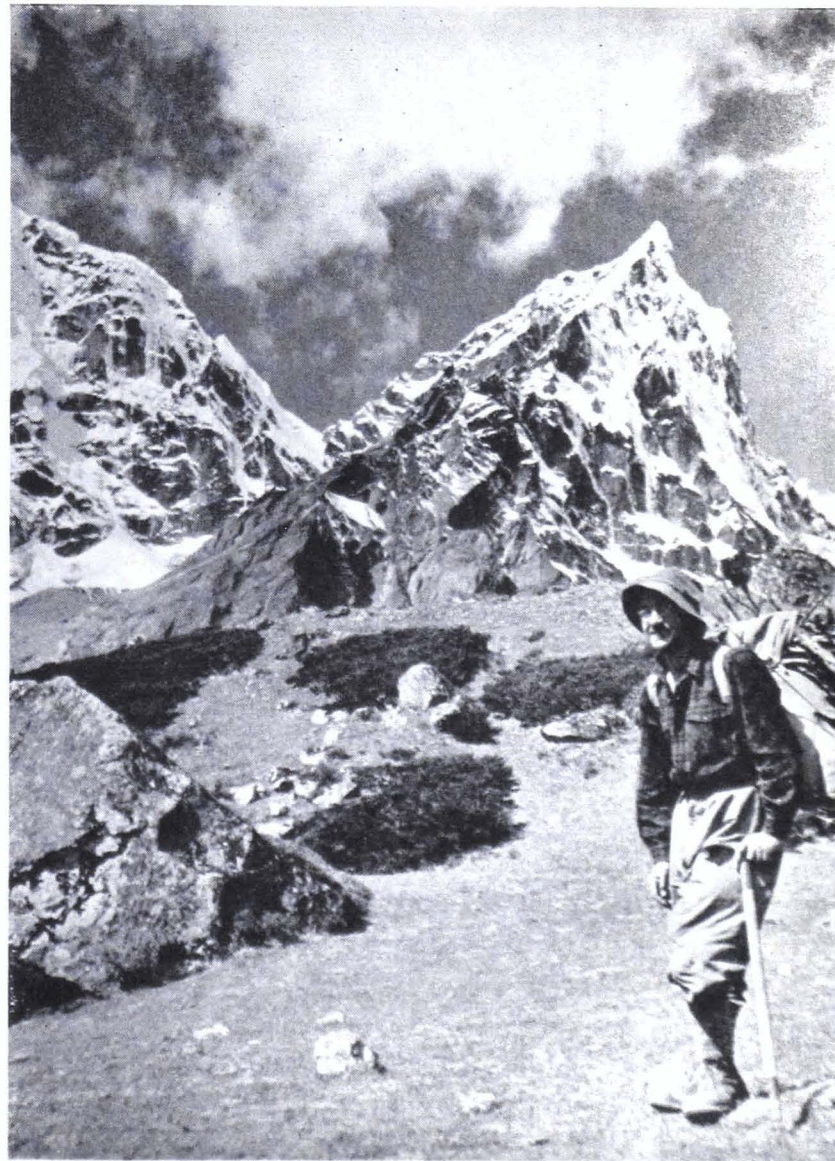
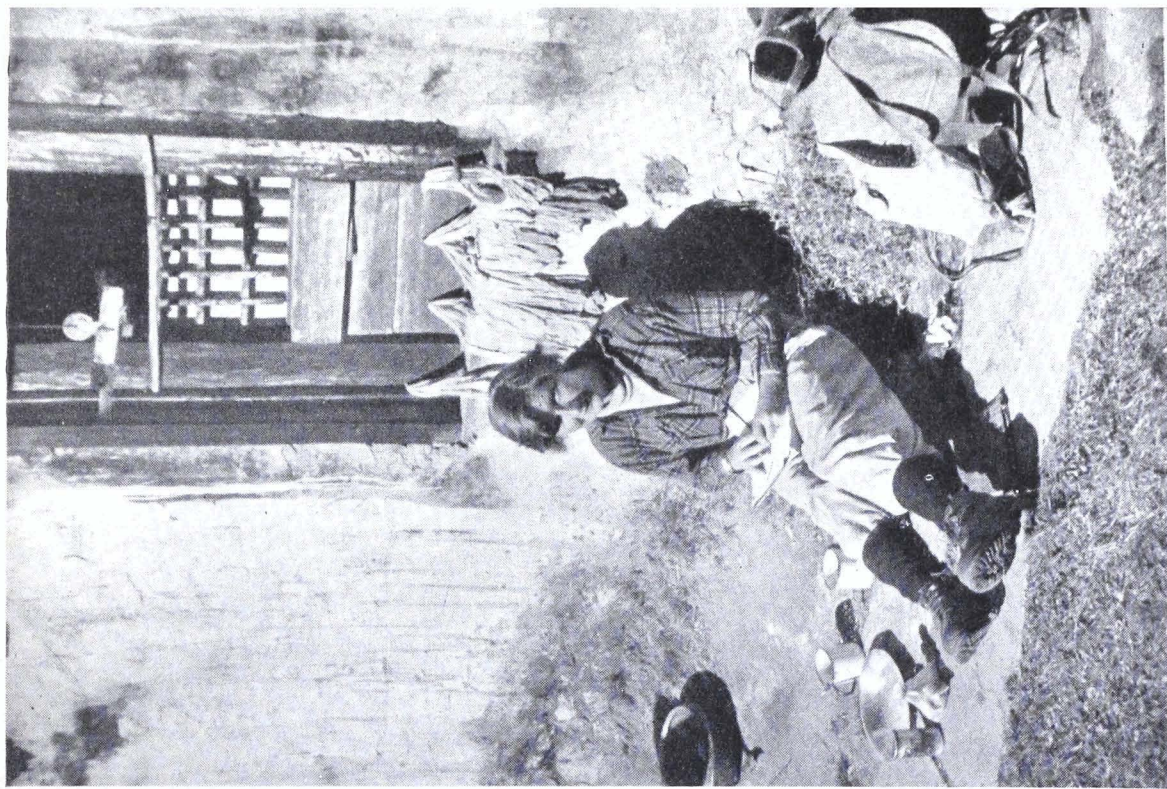


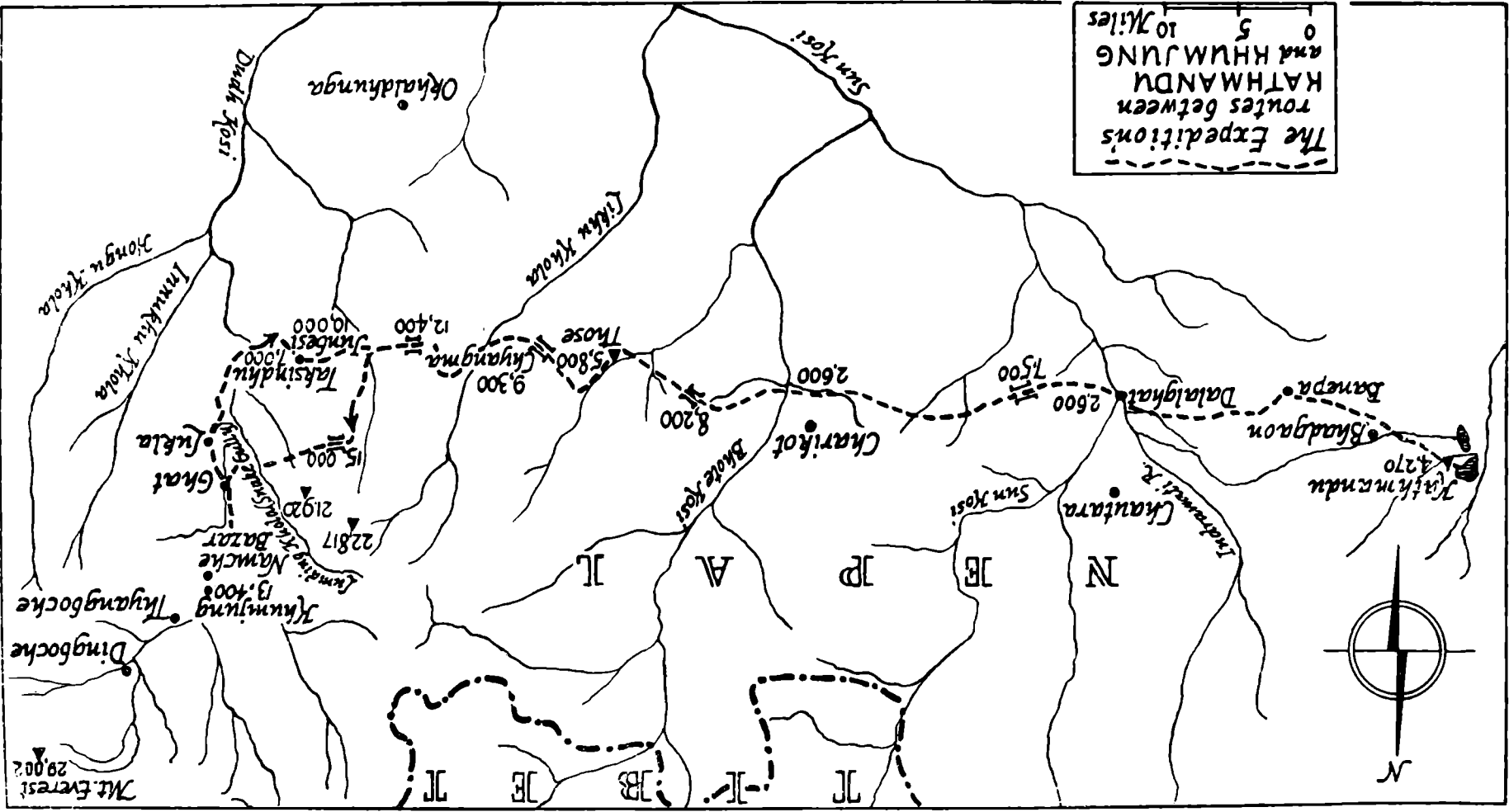


PLATE I 2

The memsahib writing her diary outside a house of Thyangboche. Above, a bird scarer protects vegetables drying on the window sills



The Expeditions' routes between KATHMANDU and HHUMJUNG



parties travelling at the end of the monsoon with large food supplies brought into Nepal.

The days rolled by rapidly and so did countless passes and valleys. Then on the 1st of September we reached Bhadgaon on the outskirts of Kathmandu. On the rough brick surfaced road was the first vehicle I had seen for six months—a model 'A' Ford sedan, laden with people. For the modest sum of two rupees we added ourselves to the weight of its load. Once our rucksacks were tied on to the mudguards, we climbed on to find there were already nine adult occupants. The frame bent so far in the middle that the doors would not close, so the driver, evidently an experienced fellow, asked five of us to get out. We did so. The doors were shut, and we all climbed back through the windows.

Kathmandu was a frantic series of social calls and Government interviews in appalling heat, and all I had to wear were my woollen mountaineering clothes. My more presentable clothing would arrive with the other two of the party. There was no sight-seeing this time. That could wait until the end of our Nepal programme. In my spare moments I merely reclined under a fan and attempted to make headway with three months of letter-writing and a pile of newspapers.

Soon we were heading for Raxaul in India, the meeting place of our party. The two passes south of Kathmandu were crossed without incident, but on the road beyond we had trouble. We accepted a lift on an old Chevrolet, and to avoid the engine heat and smells, I chose to ride on the back. When the ancient truck was descending a steep hill the brakes failed and so did the driver's attempt to reach a lower gear. He did the next best thing and crashed into a bank. A baby in the cab was killed when his mother fell forward and pushed him into the windscreen. The driver sprained his wrist and there was a scene of general chaos. It was a narrow escape for us. We might easily have dropped 100 ft. down the other side into a river. Urkien and I could only be thankful that we had remained in the security of the back—away from the fatal cab. I issued first aid to those who needed it, and, as a result of the delay, missed the only train to Raxaul.

We were forced to spend the night in an Indian Army camp. I

was entertained in the officers' mess and Urkien was with the sergeants. He was so impressed by the guard-changing that I knew there would be another game of soldiers after his next bottle of chang. I wanted to speak on the telephone to the doctor at Raxaul at whose bungalow we would meet. It seemed that a telegram had to precede the 'phone call, and the operator said he would make it easy for me. He sent the following message, 'Doctor Estrong Hospital Raxaul. Want talking Doctor Estrong just now Hardy.' Fortunately Dr. Strong understood and he arranged for my call to be answered. To speak English again was almost as pleasurable as the bath I took on my arrival at the hospital bungalow, where I rested until my wife and Macdonald arrived.

After an apparent age two figures and many boxes emerged from a smoky train. At last we were all together and I would retrace the long track to Khumjung with very different company.

A new world opened to my companions as we began the two days of truck-riding and walking to Kathmandu, and I was freshly aware of the joys and horrors of travel inside Nepal. In spite of the good air service from India to Kathmandu, we were walking to avoid large freight expenses on our baggage, and to promote the fitness of my two new companions. From a narrow-gauge railway terminus we began apparently endless arguments with truck drivers trying to induce them to carry our modest cargo to the end of the road. The heat was stifling and was only relieved by occasional visits to a tea-house—a low-roofed, mud-floored hut where over-sweetened tea and hot puris were served for a modest price. The puris are very thin pancakes of flour and water, without any rising material, fried and served with chillies or curried potatoes and onions. When I received no complaints about this introduction to Nepalese refreshments, I was able to sigh with relief; wayside nourishment would cause no troubles for at least two days, as there are such tea houses at frequent intervals all the way to Kathmandu.

At last we were on a truck, and not a quarter of a mile from the station an enormous snake hurried across the road in front of us. The climb into the hill country should have reduced our temperatures, but that was almost impossible without a change of

drivers. For all downhill portions of badly surfaced zig-zags we were perilously steered with the clutch pedal down and the engine switched off. For the upgrades we were always in too high a gear, so there was general relief when we came to the end of the road. We peered through the darkness at Bhimphedi, a dirty squalid village. Our baggage was placed on the roadside, and while the others guarded it, I searched for a roof for the night. There were no houses where we would not have to share our room with parties of passing coolies, and there was no space where we could pitch our tents. Luckily a well-dressed Indian saw our predicament and saved the situation by offering us a room in his bungalow. During a discussion on the health problems of backward areas our host told us that he was an authority on malaria recently posted to Bhimphedi by the World Health Organisation. He had issued informative pamphlets to the villagers, and was now hoping they would overcome local prejudices and submit to scientific treatment for their most prevalent disease.

Next morning, with four newly hired coolies carrying our surplus baggage, we began the one and a half days' walk to Kathmandu. The Customs were kindly, but the track gave rough treatment to Enid and Joe, softened by boat and rail travel from England. At first they suffered from blisters and stiff muscles, but these vanished in time. All the way there were comments on a new fruit, or an observation on local styles of jewellery. There were gasps of pity and admiration for the small men struggling under giant loads, sometimes 200 lbs. in weight. The men who carry these loads complete the journey in three and a half to four days, and most who carry 80 lbs. do it in one and a half to two days. To those of us fresh from the sanitation of a western civilisation, the filth of the lowland Nepalese village appeared disgusting and unnecessary. Enid's diary records her reactions thus:

"There is nothing more revolting than the early morning sounds of a lowland Nepalese village—one wakes to hear everyone within ear-shot performing a dry gargle, the preliminary to a hearty spit into the main thoroughfare. Other human by-products also adorn the stones of the track, but their arrival is unheralded

by any sound. As a result of all this, one's olfactory senses discern the locality of a village before the optic, and one is well advised to walk with care. The curiosity of the villagers is a constant source of embarrassment to me when it comes to dressing and undressing. I am sure before long I shall have lost all sense of modesty.'

Such filth is invariably accompanied by stench, flies, and hens which pick out the partly digested maize. In Patan and other suburbs of Kathmandu one sees many mangy dogs waiting at the rear of the squatting child to gulp all that is dropped and snatch at anything still hanging from the anus.

The Sherpa living conditions are of a much higher standard, and Urkien would wrinkle up his nose at the heaps of human dung on the track outside the entrance to each group of houses. On each such occasion Gyalgen made a noise signifying complete and final disapproval—a genuine Tibetan gesture.

Two of our coolies suddenly became very ill with stomach complaints. Pills were issued, and one new man was recruited, but as there was no one else available the second load was divided between Joe, Urkien and me. This was unfair to Joe, already carrying 40 lbs. of his own kit, when he had not been submitted to any exercise for some time. Urkien and I, broken in long ago, and wearing head bands, managed our 70 lbs. quite comfortably. The sight of Europeans under loads brought many stares and comments, especially from the wealthier travellers who were carried past us, seated in rough baskets supported by the head bands of their bearers. In Nepal all people of importance employ anything from one to four coolies to carry them on all journeys. The highest man in the social scale is carried by a coolie team, the middle men might walk and have their baggage carried, while at the bottom of the scale the traveller carries his few belongings or is employed to carry someone else's.

Before long we were in Kathmandu. While I gathered the Sherpas and Sherpanis who had come down to be our porters, Enid and Joe worked in the hotel arranging all our supplies and equipment into coolie loads, and discarding all that was not required for the journey. I sought out Gyalgen and whispered to him in a quiet corner, 'How is your cow?'

'No good. Perhaps we did not obey all the instructions. We will try again.'

My appearance in the packing room upset the delicate calculations. The problem was how to fit everything into boxes of a fixed size so that their final weight was 70 lbs., with no 'rattle space' allowed. All was almost finished when I announced that there was too much coffee to ensure a fast carrying party, and that the Sherpanis should carry only 60 lbs. I was most unpopular.

It took only one morning to sort out and weigh our nine coolie loads of expedition gear, and I compared our meagre supplies with the Kangchenjunga counterpart which had taken five days of intensive organisation to distribute into over three hundred equal loads. This first stage of time-saving emphasised for me one of the major advantages of a small private expedition with a modest programme.

After a surprisingly short time on these preparations, we drove 16 miles to Banepa, where the road ended. At the issuing of loads it was found that the three senior Sherpas, Urkien, Aila and Gyalgen, had collected so much loot in Kathmandu that they could not carry the quotas I allocated to them. After I had reprimanded them we began a search for another coolie, while a Press representative who had come to photograph our start sheltered from the rain. Enid kept some eighty of the spectators at bay by calmly writing a letter, but because of the crush of damp bodies on all sides, and the cover of the umbrella above, she saw little of the writing paper.

We started. The Press man took the photo of a dampened party. It was a false start, as Urkien and I had yet to buy the stocks of chillies and garlic, so vital to the future progress of the Sherpas. Later, as the day lengthened, I overhauled the stragglers, examined the new faces and tried to assess the wages bill for our junior sirdar Urkien, two élite Sherpas, Aila and Gyalgen, two Sherpanis, and four local Nepalese coolies, all on different rates of pay. The answer was that in wages alone it would cost us £3 a day until we reached our first base of Khumjung—or until we ate 70 lbs. of food and could send a coolie home. After considering the limited assets of our trio, I looked at Joe's broad back, wondering when it would be fit enough to take a coolie load. I told him that I believed

people acclimatised faster if they carried loads during the approach march, so that they used their lungs to their full capacity at an early stage. This I firmly believe so long as it is not overdone. Joe was soon increasing his share of the party's burden. And Enid? She had a rucksack carrying spare clothing, books, camera, films, meter, and toilet and writing gear. She would be exempt from real pressure, but still encouraged to carry. I carried something more than 50 lbs. as a rule, except when another emergency arose and I had 70 lbs. in my rucksack.

The further we travelled from Kathmandu the cleaner became the villages; and as altitude increased the monsoon heatbath gradually diminished, inversely proportional to the spirits of the party. Soon we settled into a very happy group, with Urkien doing far more of his normal share of carrying, cooking, buying and chasing the coolies. I tried to share these duties with him as far as possible. The Sherpanis were as interested in Enid as she was in them and soon a mutual friendship was established. My two pupils at the daily lessons absorbed Hindustani at a rate which promised well for the future.

On the approach march the food we ate was similar to my earlier diet in the monsoon, but there were a few imported additions, such as chocolate, coffee, tea, sugar and dried meat and fruits. The typical day's menu began with two mugs of tsampa tea at six o'clock. The addition of a generous spoonful of this pre-cooked barley flour to a mug of sweetened tea provided bulk and further calories to sustain us on the march until about nine, when there would be a halt while breakfast was prepared. In this way we were able to cover much of the day's journey before the monsoon heat overtook us and slowed the coolies' steps.

Breakfast was always a substantial meal, and while it was being prepared we found time to bring our diaries up to date, and if there was a handy stream we washed ourselves and our clothes. The meal would consist of eggs and potatoes with vegetables 'in season'—maize and pumpkin were the commonest, and occasionally there would be the addition of rice or a pancake. We always finished breakfast with a mug of black coffee.

The party inevitably separated during the day. While I bought

food and encouraged straggling coolies, the others took photos or tried to keep the leading Sherpas moving forwards. At about one o'clock the person in front would slacken his speed until the others had made up the lost ground, then together we would have a brief stop for lunch. This was a simple meal which involved no fire lighting—a cake of chocolate, a drink of chlorinated water, and sometimes maize or local fruit, such as pears or bananas.

The evening meal began with a further round of tsampa and tea while the main course was on the cooking fire. Sometimes there would be soup, or more often a pause for a Hindi lesson while the dinner cooked. As well as dried meat or eggs there would be potatoes, beans, rice, pumpkins, turnips or onions. A sweet of rice or steamed pudding, or dried fruit and custard preceded another cup of coffee. The steamed puddings we made to our own recipe, from local atta and imported baking powder.

Macdonald and I found this diet to be perfectly adequate in all respects and would have no hesitation in eating the same food on a subsequent visit. The dryness and heaviness of the food did not appeal to Enid, but she absorbed enough calories and vitamins to maintain both good speed and health. Had she been on major New Zealand or British Himalayan expeditions she would have fared far worse, having virtually no fresh foods, and living exclusively on tinned or dehydrated supplies.

We had many encounters with leeches, some with swollen streams and slippery tracks, but fortunately none with the few snakes we saw. The bridges, structurally unsound, slippery and narrow, and inclined to sway under our weight, provided another hazard. We were a source of amazement and curiosity to all the people we passed on the track, particularly as we had a memsahib with us. Staring eyes were accompanied by the usual string of questions; 'Where to?' 'Where from?' etc. If we camped near a village, one of us had to keep back the onlookers while the others hastily erected the tents. Once inside our shelter we were glad of the privacy afforded by the sleeve entrances to our tents until the relentless call of nature forced us out to search for yet another haven of seclusion. I longed to be up in Sherpa land once more, away from the prying eyes and dirty habits of the Nepalese.

One morning while breakfast was cooking, the ladies of the party went off to a stream nearby, and I have since envied Enid's opportunity of recording this scene in her diary:

'I was entertained by watching Pasang Lamu and Kami Doma as they washed. How those girls could carry their loads over such rough country with so many clothes on defeats me. First Pasang Lamu removed her bright red sash to reveal a plain sash beneath. When this was unwound two hand woven aprons fell to the ground and she stood in an ankle length sleeveless blue garment which opened down the front. This was her protection against the inquisitive eyes of people such as I. From beneath this robe a pair of long green trousers appeared tied with neat bows above the calf, and the final garment was an off white 'T' shirt which came off to be washed. When the nether regions had been dealt with attention turned to the long jet plait of hair which was unwound and perfunctorily washed. The dressing process was even more lengthy than the undressing, but by the final cheerful smile of self-satisfaction the onlooker knew that it had been a worthwhile effort.'

Kami Doma, an unusually handsome Sherpani, was justifiably proud of her appearance, and she never lost an opportunity of revealing the bows tied beneath the knees of her bright green trousers. The day after the washing episode Gyalgen appeared in the same trousers, complete with bows, and Kami Doma was wearing his socks. There were no comments. The next day Gyalgen was back in his ancient army Khakis issued for the Kangchenjunga expedition.

On the seventh day out from Kathmandu we came to Those, the last of the Hindu villages on our route. High on the hillside, above the mud-walled houses, we could see the shafts which gave access to the small resources of iron ore. On either side of the main track we passed tiny one-roomed forges, where the bellows to fan the furnace was often operated by a child who perched on the free lever of the instrument, working it with her weight as a seesaw. The intricate locks on the Sherpa houses (see plate of Gyalgen's family No. 4) come from Those, and the eight-inch chainlinks supporting some of the better swing bridges (see plate No. 6).

Back to Khumjung

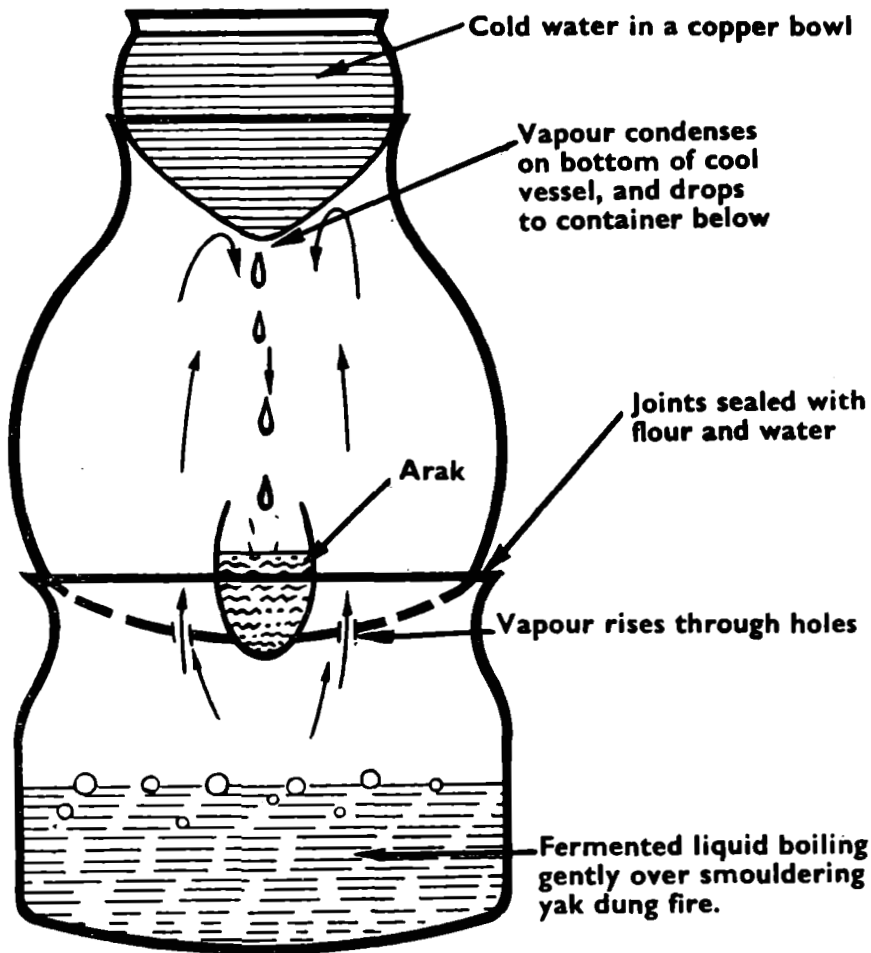
AT Junbesi we entered the first Sherpa country. Here we learned that the main Dudh Kosi bridge had still not been rebuilt. The only thing to do was to repeat the route taken by Urkien and me on the way out, and cross two 15,000 ft. passes to arrive at the Dudh Kosi opposite a bridge further upstream. How would an unacclimatised party, only eight days from Kathmandu, go at these heights?

We started badly. Our four Kathmandu coolies, who would not be able to climb to such heights, dressed as they were in meagre clothing, asked for their pay. They reminded us of the two deaths on one of these passes during the approach march of the Swiss Everest Expedition of 1952. I had to search the town for four coolies willing to make the crossing, then change loads and pay off the others.

Here is Enid's description of the night we spent at Junbesi and the unwelcome pay-off.

'We were shown to the private chapel of the house on the first floor, and that is where I am now writing, stretched out on my sleeping bag and lilo, carefully arranged by Aila Tensing. On the right side of the room are five wooden alcoves each containing a carved figure of a god; the central figure is a representation of Buddha. Below the statuettes are shelves bearing various religious vessels and bric-à-brac. There are seven hand-beaten copper bowls containing holy water, several brass butter lamps, a tiny hand drum and bell, and a whole set of shelves bears books in Tibetan script. In the centre of the room are three huge bins of ripened corn, and on the left a partitioned section of the floor is devoted to a heap of tiny potatoes. The area of the floor must be

24 ft. by 20 ft. yet the whole is lit and ventilated by a single window 1 ft. by 1½ ft. Our host and hostess have showered gifts upon us. First came mugs of chang, the white-coloured beer brewed from fermented grain (barley, millet, maize or rice) and



Still for the making of Arak

then a huge plate of hot potatoes cooked in their skins. We had just finished our potatoes when our friends came in with a tiny silver dish for both of us, containing a sweet toffee made from honey mixed with tampa and water and stirred over a low fire. Next came glasses of arak poured from a wooden bottle. This is a powerful liquid distilled from potatoes and we now have a pleasant glow. As a tumbler full of arak can produce the same

effect as an equivalent amount of neat gin, I tried to press some of mine on to Kami Doma but she bashfully refused. After another chicken dinner Urkien told us that the bridge over the Dudh Kosi had been washed away. This means going on a higher diversion over a pass of 15,000 ft. so our scantily clad coolies will not be able to go further and we must engage new ones here at Junbesi. I wish I had a flash bulb to make a photograph of Norman sitting up in his sleeping bag surrounded by the eager and interested faces of the coolies and villagers as they watched the pay-off. Each coolie received 40 Nepalese rupees (approximately £1 15s.) for his nine days' carry, and an extra seventeen rupees for the return journey. We were just settling down to sleep when I looked up to see a man carrying a blazing pine torch approach the butter lamps on the altar. He lit two of them, then placed his torch on the stones while he blew three ear splitting notes on the small conch shell. Cuffing his dog away from under his feet, he made deep obeisance, three times touching his forehead on the flag stones. Before he left us he beat the drum with a broken staccatto rhythm. I wasn't sure whether I was awake or asleep.'

After all this I had next morning to wait three hours while flour was ground to provide the new men with food. Meanwhile the others in the party went ahead to spend all day climbing up a steep hillside in mist and light rain. Occasional snow behind a sheltering rock confirmed that the temperatures were now very low.

Having at last started the coolies, I had to work hard to overhaul those who had left early. Enid and Joe, with mouths open wide to get as much air as possible, were making steady but slow progress, and were now clad in most of their high-altitude clothing. Here we were far above all forest levels and sometimes a grunting yak would loom up through the mist. Pale blue gentians were at our feet, refusing to open without the magic rays of sunlight. The first high day was a long one. Enid and I reached the overhanging rock at about 14,000 ft. chosen as a shelter by the Sherpas. The three new coolies had still not arrived.

I thought of all the strange places where we had found shelter on the nights of our journey from Raxaul—the flea-ridden

Nepalese houses, a rearranged school-room, a private chapel, and this unusual building described here in my wife's diary.

'Our shelter to-night is a most unusual building and seems to have been constructed solely for the purpose of housing an enormous prayer wheel eight feet high and five feet in diameter. Its surface and that of the surrounding walls is covered by gaily painted Buddhist symbols in red, blue, yellow and green. The whole thing is supported on an axis two feet from the ground and when the Sherpas come in with our food they take a turn at the prayer wheel. Each revolution is marked by a tinkle of a bell. Apart from a muttered curse from Joe when he sat up and hit his head on the prayer wheel we passed an uneventful night.'

Now at 14,000 ft. we were to sleep beneath an overhanging rock. A secure but chilly night was followed by a brilliant dawn revealing unclimbed ice peaks of 21,000 ft., towering not four miles away, above a foreground of tiny blue flowers.

While we were attempting to record the view on films the three coolies arrived, saying the youngest had an altitude headache so they had camped in a yak shelter. Then they unrolled a dirty piece of homespun cloth from the dismembered leg of a yak which had died some time ago. After consuming a partly cooked stew, with the addition of aspirins for the headache, they were ready for another day's work.

For a day we walked (still above forest level) along a track joining many high altitude pastures. Again, mist hid all the surrounding country until we reached the brink of 'Snake Gully', the tremendous valley where Urkien and I had almost stumbled on the cobra. Joe by this time had regained his normal fitness and was travelling well, but Enid was finding the pressure of continual travel, with no days of rest, about as much as she could manage, with the additional altitude problems introduced so early. 'Snake Gully' was almost the final straw. Looking down the 3,000 ft. of seemingly vertical wall, one could only wonder how the track held on to the face, and the top of the 2,500 ft. wall across the valley seemed only a few hundred yards away. Several streams, which on my previous visit had been narrow white ribbons

descending to a dark chasm, had now become great waterfalls with vertical steps of 200 ft. or more.

On the inward march our biggest day involved an hour of walking in the rain along a high pasture track, then the descent and ascent on the other side of 'Snake Gully', and late in the day the long downhill stagger to Ghat.

Ghat is a village near a bridge over the Dudh Kosi, and at last that great river could be crossed and followed. A day's journey up the river from Ghat would take us to Khumjung, and for further acclimatisation we would base ourselves there for a brief period.

It was a joy to see Khumjung again, but how it had changed in my five weeks of absence. The buckwheat had been harvested and the black overturned soil had replaced the green of the fields I had last seen. Here and there patches of vivid red marked the last ripened stalks yet to be uprooted. In other fields rows of women were digging potatoes while their children ran about tramping down the newly turned soil. Each able-bodied woman must assist with the harvest for a certain number of days, not necessarily working in the fields belonging to her husband. The digging gangs go to whichever field is considered to be the most urgently in need of harvest. Potatoes are sorted into three sizes. The biggest will be eaten by the owner's family and some may be sold to Tibet or lower in Nepal. The middle grade will be kept for seed, and all minute and damaged potatoes are allowed to ferment and used for making the arak, which is in abundance during the harvest period. The bigger potatoes, to be stored for the winter, are tipped into deep earth pits and covered with top soil. These 'clamps' are about five feet deep and five feet wide, so when a woman has almost finished digging her circular hole only the top of her head is visible above ground level. (See plate No. 9.).

Turnips, onions and a type of spinach are grown in small quantities in the tiny kitchen gardens adjacent to the houses. Turnips and potatoes are cut in strips, dried and sold to Tibetans. (See plate No. 9). At this time many Tibetans cross the frontier to assist in the harvest and to buy supplies of food, and talking to

them gave me many opportunities of learning something of the present conditions in their country.

I gained the impression that the Chinese are at present treating the Tibetans very gently. Food for the occupation troops is imported from Calcutta, or now more frequently over the motor road from China to Lhasa, which means little is taken or purchased from the local population, who have enough difficulties in growing their own supplies. One report said that trucks travelling night and day did this journey from China in eight days. Chinese silver money has become a popular currency. Their religion, the factor of paramount importance in Tibetan life, has been untouched by the Communists. There are promises of hydro-electric schemes, while a Lhasa airport and further road-building is actually in progress. Schools, banks and post offices have been set up, as well as a kind of experimental farm. Many Tibetans have attended a cinema and they reported the beginning of a power plant and small steel works at Shigatse. Some of the largest feudal estates have been broken up and serfdom seems to be departing at last. This is confirmed by the fewer numbers of refugees who are now crossing into Nepal. Most of the refugees I met were monks who had left their monasteries because of a difference of opinion with a lama, or because they were unsuited to the religious way of life. The latter case is common in a land where one in seven dwell in monasteries and many are put in them at an early age, before they have developed ideas of their own. If a monk of a strict order wishes to marry, he has to leave the district of his monastery, and it is common for such a refugee couple to settle among the Sherpas. Changjup and his wife came to Nepal for this reason.

The Times' Leader of May 30th, 1955 illustrates this policy of easy treatment of the Tibetans in order to gain their confidence, and reports a statement of Mr. Chou En Lai in Bandung 'that it will take 50 or 100 years to introduce Communism into Tibet, and that at the present no progress is possible in that political direction'.

The story was told to me of an early Chinese party which established itself in Tingri, much nearer to India than to China.

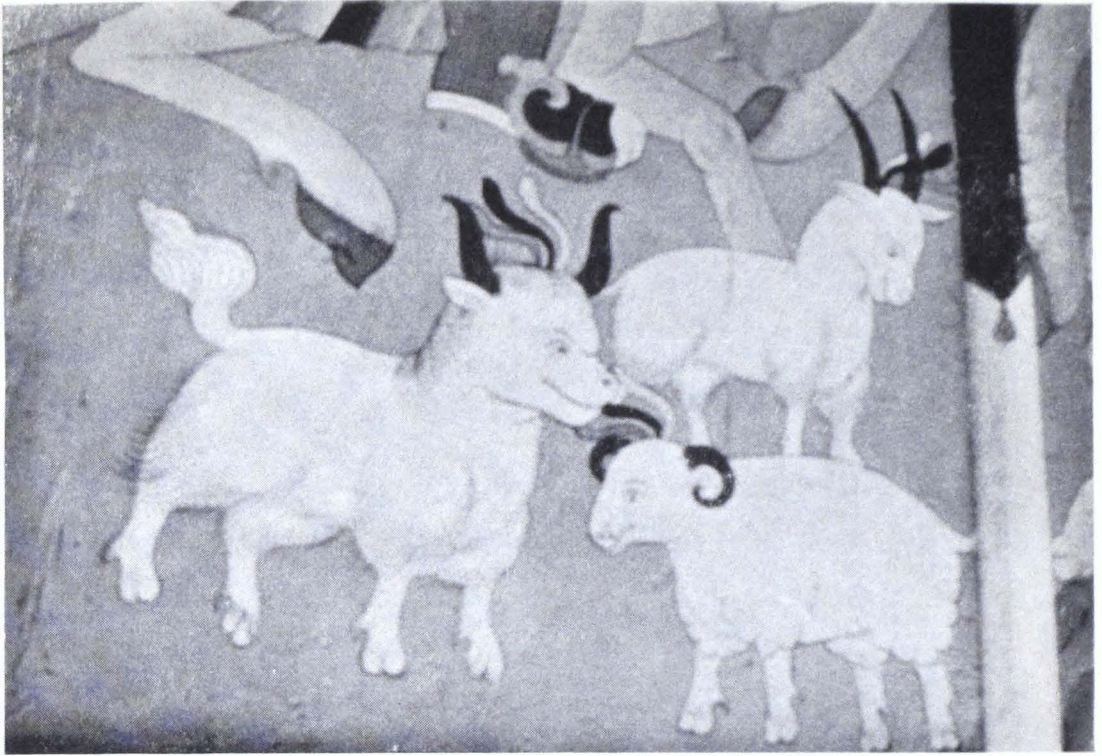
At that time no roads went to Tingri, but the party required petrol for vehicles carried into the area by man-power, and for their generator in a wireless transmission set. Petrol was purchased from an Indian firm, and for some days Ghurka and Sherpa coolies carried drums past the Indian Army Check Post towards the frontier, reporting to the post that they were carrying arak.

There are still very important links of trade, religion and blood between the Sherpas and the Tibetans. There is much inter-marriage between them and they are of the same original stock. In 1954 a Sherpa woman married a Chinese from Shigatse. The ceremonies were completed according to Sherpa custom but the groom did not appear in Khumjung; instead he sent notes, money, and gifts of chang to each of the ceremonies. Many Sherpas still prefer to cross to Tibet for the few civil or religious court cases in which they become involved, instead of facing the long journey to an Okhaldunga or Kathmandu court, where their prosecutors and judges are Nepalese of Indian stock. Without a sound knowledge of the marriage customs, yak grazing rights and religion of the Sherpas it is unlikely that a balanced judgment could be given in any such law court.

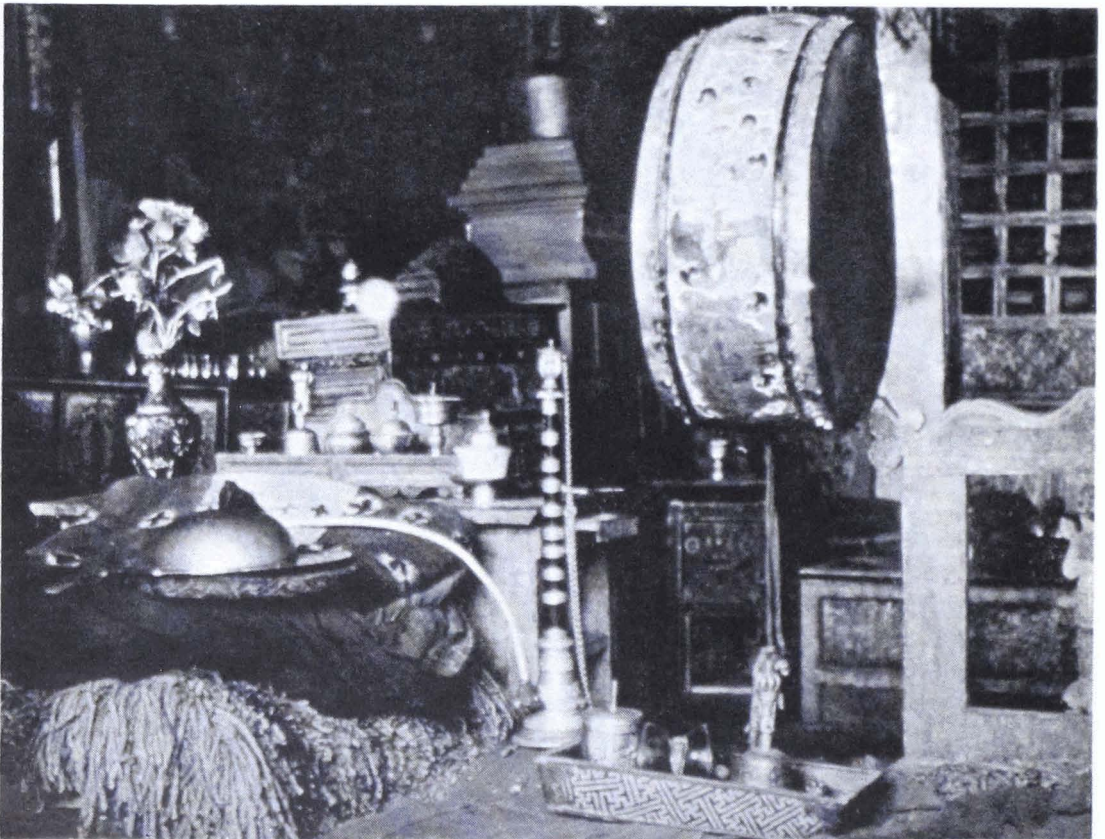
In Khumjung we paid off our Junbesi coolies, permitted our permanent trio of Sherpas to rest, and hired a Sherpani who speaks some English to accompany us on a visit to Thyangboche. This Sherpani was also named Kami Doma and she had lived in Lhasa, Darjeeling, and Calcutta. She was to accompany Enid while Macdonald and I were away surveying or climbing.

Thyangboche is built round the senior monastery of the area, and from it one can see outstanding views of Everest and Lhotse, as well as a number of lesser mountains which can hardly be surpassed for steepness of ice precipices and their impression of grandeur. From the monastery, perched on a rhododendron-covered spur at about 14,000 ft., the view downwards is almost as impressive as the upward one. The Dudh Kosi, hundreds of feet below, here cuts through a granite gorge of enormous dimensions, its depth rivalling the height of the peaks above. There is far too much height for all but the widest angle camera lens.

We set off for Thyangboche. Although it was the last day of



A Sherpa artist's conception of a yak, a goat and a sheep painted on a mural at Thyangboche monastery



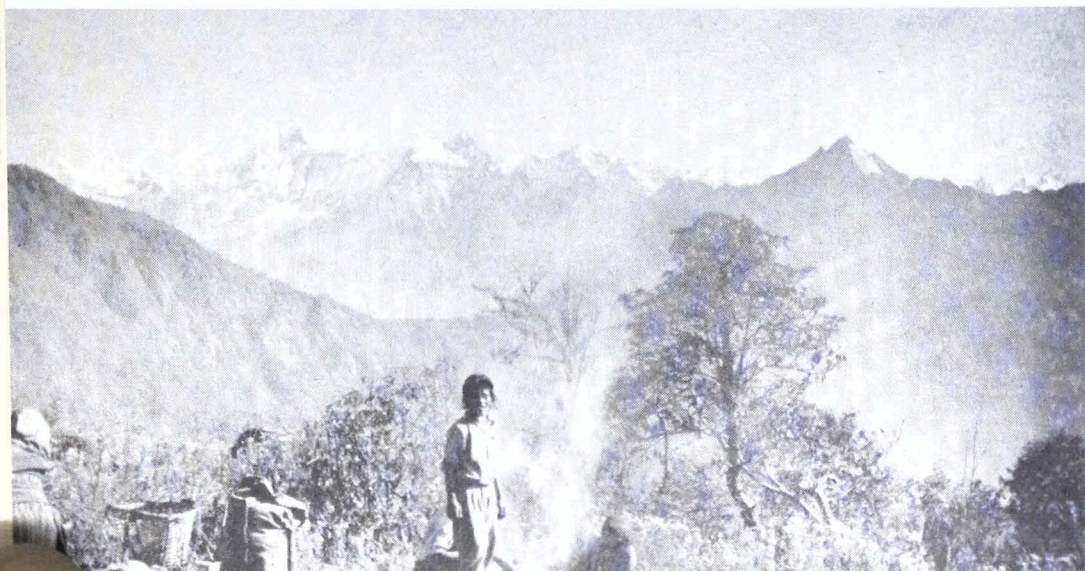
Holy vessels and musical instruments inside Thyangboche monastery. To the right is a set of bookshelves



Thirsty Sherpas wait eagerly while chang is poured at a wayside stop. Macdonald approaches in the background



The author crossing a precarious bridge over the raging waters of the Dudh Khosi



A view from Taksindu to the range separating the Innukhu from Lukla. Gosang Kang Karpo is to the right, and Macdonald climbed the peak above Gyalgen's head

September, by some miscalculation the monsoon had not ended, and my promises of a sight to surpass everything Enid and Joe had seen before were hurled back at me as more and more thick fog shrouded the golden tips of the gompa roof.

We settled down to sleep in the courtyard of the temple when there came a sudden gasp of admiration. There was a break in the clouds, and through it we could see the towering ice flutings of Thyamserku gleaming high above us in the moonlight. The moment was short lived.

Next morning we awoke to find all the monks were working in the endowed fields further up the valley, where the potatoes were ready for digging and the barley was being harvested. The monastery yaks and dzum were still in their high altitude pastures, so there was long grass in all the surrounding fields and even in the narrow pathways separating each small dwelling. Thyangboche was the oriental version of Goldsmith's deserted village. No smoke seeped through the roofs. There was no one to turn the prayer wheels, and even the gompa gong was never rung. This gong is an oxygen bottle from a Mt. Everest expedition of more than thirty years ago. When the bottle, suspended from a yak hair rope, is struck it gives forth the appropriate deep-noted summons to prayer.

Still in fog, we were entertained by the sole occupant of the village, a monk left to guard the monastery and its valuable contents, and we were permitted to take some photographs, and inspect the main drawings, ornaments and the festival masks. With a secretive and confiding air our friend pointed out the shape of a strange beast with a long ape-like tail coloured blue. 'Yeti, Sahib!' I should have felt grateful for his information, but he was not to know that his discovery was the third 'yeti' I have been shown, each vastly different from the others. The first of these drawings was of a creature with a near human face and a stumpy tail, and the second was more like a lion than any other animal.

Enid's diary recounts the next stage of our visit: 'The monk invited us to take tea in his house. We passed through the usual cooking-living room and into his own private chapel where we sat cross-legged on hand woven mats of lotus pattern watching

him prepare the food through the doorway. Before the Tibetan butter tea our host brought us delicate china bowls of a dark red steaming substance which proved to be yak steak. Having heard that this meat is locally considered a delicacy only when 'high' I was rather dubious, but after the first mouthful I fell to and polished off the lot. Joe and Norman were not so enamoured of the dish and surreptitiously threw most of theirs out of the window.'

We returned to Khumjung without having seen the complete background to Thyangboche. Three weeks later we were to have better luck.

Arrangements were made for Enid's stay in Khumjung. Outside Kami Doma's house a tiny tent was pitched to give Enid some relief from the smoke and gloom of the Sherpa house where she would live as one of the family. Kami Doma's father is the village Lama and he had been a coolie on the British 1953 Mt. Everest Expedition. Born and educated in Tibet, his knowledge of that country was of great interest to us. He had many fine curios in his tiny chapel, as well as an excellent collection of silver cups, spoons and prayer wheels, and the customary lama's horn of human thigh bone. Sherap Lama and his family were very kind and generous and I knew that Enid would be in good hands.

Joe and I with the Sherpa team were to descend the Dudh Kosi for a day to the village of Lukla, carry supplies to the next valley eastwards, the Innukhu, and begin a survey of its head-waters. When that survey had been well started I would return to Lukla for more supplies, to enable us to proceed yet further east to the Hongu and Sangkhua in the vicinity of the giant Chamlang. I arranged that my wife should come to Lukla on the day I returned for supplies, and at the conclusion of all surveys meet me again near the pass separating the Imja from the Hongu. This meant that she would have to face altitudes of 17,000 to 18,000 feet and I would have to keep to a definite schedule of dates, to enable these meetings to take place.

The Innukhu Khola rises very near Ama Dablam, the remarkable 22,300 ft. peak, six miles from Everest. The Innukhu gorge has no track through it, but there are four known high altitude

passes giving access to the main river valley. The river flows in a southerly direction, parallel to the Dudh Kosi and Hongu Khola, between which it runs.

With our three permanent Sherpas and three local coolies we began our first lift to the Innukhu. The start was painfully slow. Gyalgen and two coolies were first away, but after ten minutes they were found seated beside the track. I chased them on. When we had been going only three hours, one coolie out in front stopped at a cave saying we had to stay there the night, as there were no shelters further up. By refusing to stop, and murmuring something about tents, we kept the small train moving. However, five minutes later the coolie stopped again and called out that we had to stay the night, back in the last cave.

‘Why?’

‘I have no food and my mother is bringing it to this cave tonight!’

‘Why didn’t you bring it in the first place?’

‘You hurried me on.’

‘You can eat from the food I brought for the three Sherpas.’

The pace was resumed until two minutes later.

‘We have to stay in the cave.’

‘Why?’

‘I have no boots and tomorrow will be in the snow.’

‘Then why stay in the cave?’

‘My mother is making boots and tonight she will bring them to the cave.’

Furious at this possible loss of half a day, I insisted on going further up the hill, and sure enough, later in the day we did find another and better cave. Although rain was falling, we established ourselves in the spacious shelter. A satisfying meal softened our anger with the coolie, but we worried about what would happen in his bootless state, and how much of our Sherpas’ food he would eat. The only solution seemed to me to send the man home to Lukla, hide his load, and arrange to bring it through when I went out later for more supplies. We decided to adopt this plan and fell asleep.

During the night there was movement on the track—a voice,

and then a woman appeared. The coolie's mother had come with food and yak-hide boots, climbing the three thousand feet from her home below. The cooking seemed to go on all night. The following morning, having fed and equipped her son to her own satisfaction, the woman departed. In the next two days this man and another coolie exchanged footwear perhaps ten times, and they never went so fast as when they had been barefooted.

One European had previously visited the Innukhu, Major J. O. M. Roberts who controlled the second lift of oxygen equipment for the 1953 Mt. Everest Expedition. When the job was done he went down the Dudh Kosi to Lukla, crossed the pass we used later, climbed Mera, the most prominent peak on the east side of the river, and left the area by way of the Hongu Khola and the Ambu Lapcha, the pass at its head. Roberts had done no surveying en route but the sketch map he made gave us a hint at the true lie of the land.

Our small train climbed to the first pass used by Roberts and then took a high level track to the head of the valley. The yak track drops far down to rhododendron, then stately pine forests, to follow a fairly easy valley floor to the river's headwaters. Our track, having too many smooth rocky slabs for the safe passage of a yak wound along above all heavy vegetation, and it promised to have good survey stations along it, owing to its altitude. However, in our two days on this track we did not see one view which warranted the setting up of the theodolite. In fact, visibility was so poor that we were unable to identify the few icy summits which loomed through the clouds.

Once well inside the Innukhu, intending to set up a temporary base camp soon, we were anxious to shoot some meat to prove our case of living off the country, and to give variety to our basic diet of potatoes and tsampa. Macdonald familiarised himself with my rifle, set up a rectangle of toilet paper at 100 yards, and managed with one bullet to demolish any hope of its appropriate usage. An admiring Urkien wished to have a shot. He had never previously used a rifle, and the bullet was at least a yard off the target.

Early one morning, only four hours from our intended base,

Urkien spotted six zharan, a wild animal of the sheep family which has the speed and dimensions of the red deer. Macdonald cleaned the rifle and moved towards the small flock, while I worked hard trying to keep the Sherpas and coolies quiet and still. I had trouble with 'No Boots', who had so much faith in Joe's hunting skill that he was already cursing his mother for loading him with food.

We all watched, and were disappointed when a ram chikhor, frightened by the stalker, gave a warning call, and our 'meat-on-the-hoof' moved about two hundred yards. Soon a shot rang out, followed by excited talk from the Sherpas and my order for silence. Another shot, but still no animal fell. There were mutterings from the Sherpas. All the animals went beyond a bluff, still in sight to us, but invisible to Macdonald. He crept to the bluff. There was a third report and suddenly we saw an animal falling through the air, slowly rolling over, until it dropped far down out of our sight. The Sherpas all jumped high into the air and roared mighty shouts of approval. The departure of the zharan to another stage in the wheel of life did not offend the more devout Buddhists in the party, for they knew the hunter was not of their faith. I was pleased that Macdonald had had some success, but I felt certain that the carcass would be of little use for eating as it had dropped several hundred feet.

Urkien suggested that he would cook breakfast and we should send the coolies down to bring up the beast. I agreed, but I thought the animal would be difficult to find and so badly pulped that it would not be worth carrying. Fearing that our breakfast time would be interrupted by too many looks of curiosity in the direction of the meat seeking party, I stayed behind to keep things going. Our beans were pressure-cooked and the potatoes fried, but I noticed Urkien had not mixed his usual omelette. Obviously he was counting on fresh meat.

At last the butchers appeared with a dismembered zharan, having discarded only the bladder, spleen, dung and womb—the horns had been knocked off in the fall, but the beast was not too badly bruised. There were many complaints that the bladder had been thrown away as it would have made a good butter

container. Macdonald and I claimed two legs, back steaks, heart and liver, the Sherpas took the other two legs, neck, lungs and some intestines while the coolies took flank, all other internal parts and the shin bones. While the heart and liver were being prepared in the pressure cooker, a coolie stew of flank and windpipe was boiling over a fire. Before the pressure cooker had done its job, the coolies were eating almost raw windpipe and the Sherpas were enjoying the lungs.

That sheep provided a most welcome change and reinforcement to our rations and it gave us the chance to observe some unusual methods of food preparation. The stomach was of course made into tripe, but the cleaned intestines were filled with a mixture of blood, tsampa, fat and salt to make a sausage very like a home-made black pudding. When these were fried in butter they were quite palatable, but I got into difficulties when I followed the Sherpa's precedent of eating them cold. The same mixture, with the blood reduced, makes a good chicken stuffing. The lower legs, just bone and little else, were hacked into short pieces with the assistance of a kukri and boiled into a rich soup.

In due course we reached Tangnuk, a tiny temporary settlement far up the Innukhu, where our first base camp was pitched. When we arrived there it was late in the day and 'No boots' and another coolie had not yet come. The following dawn showed the first cloudless sky in five weeks, so Macdonald and I rushed out to begin the survey work before the clouds returned, only to find that the theodolite was with the two missing coolies. A Sherpa ran three miles down the valley, while we impatiently watched the clouds approaching the few points which were essential to us for fixing our position. Before we could fix new points we must have our observation station located accurately.

A puffing man returned and our first two theodolite stations were established, but the scope of the survey was limited by the rapidly advancing clouds. Not very pleased with our efforts, we returned to base for breakfast at 1 p.m. to find the two coolies had arrived. Now that the group would not change its camp for some days, I paid off these two extra men, retaining the third coolie. They were given their normal cigarette ration but as an addition

to the contract, 'No Boots' exchanged 15 lbs. of potatoes for five of our cigarettes. Macdonald and I did not smoke, but we carried a few cigarettes for our men. Three days later I was to find these two coolies living in a shelter three miles away, having idled the days in smoking and eating until all that was left of our sheep was the smell. Only then did they think of going home.

The weather improved a little—enough for us to fill in the gaps of our first day's work and we could see just how the whole Innukhu river system ran. In the cloudy afternoons there were opportunities to look at the immense glaciers terminating only half a mile from our camp. A giant ice-fall, broken and impossible to climb, swept down in many steps from an unnamed ice summit of 22,200 ft., overshadowing our temporary base. The theodolite telescope could only be read if it pointed upwards at an angle of less than 50°. From base this towering ice peak was viewed from such a steep angle that we were never able to look at its summit through the instrument.

Tangnuk has six rectangular stone shelters covered for the five warm months of the year by sloping roofs of thatched bamboo strips. During the remaining seven months there are no occupants in the valley, and no yak, so the bamboo roofs are taken out for the long winter when the occupants leave. Two generations earlier, several families had settled permanently in the valley, but after three consecutive years of heavy yak losses owing to lack of winter fodder, the settlement was abandoned. A sorry-looking gompa and several untended mani walls were proof of the Sherpa stories of an earlier occupation. Besides these, the only other evidence of human habitation was the unmortared walls of the six crude temporary shelters.

Inside these shelters, when they have their roofs and their occupants, one can find stores of potatoes, turnips, rather coarse yak-hair mats for bedding, a few sacks of flour, and all the buckets, churns and strainers used by the tenders of yak. There are stakes in the mud floor and to these the calves are tied at nights, while their mothers remain outside in the monsoon rain.

We occupied one such shelter and exchanged some of our chocolate for the milk curds of a neighbour's yak. With our supply

of meat from Macdonald's sheep and the many milk products obtainable, we ate very well. The tastelessness of the dried curds was improved by lightly frying in butter, and the fresh curds mixed with tsampa and sugar were always a delight. Gradually the weather improved and our surveys advanced.

Slowly our food supplies were diminishing. The time for my rendezvous with Enid at Lukla drew near, so the trip over would serve a dual purpose by replenishing our food supplies and relieving my anxiety about my wife, who had then spent two weeks alone in a Sherpa village among strange people.

Aila Tensing and I, carrying almost nothing, left Macdonald to continue the survey work and rushed out to Lukla over the highest of the four routes in one long day. At one stage our progress was so fast that I thought that we might reach Lukla by four o'clock in the afternoon. Half an hour from our objective we reached the first habitation, where we were invited in for potatoes, but no potatoes appeared. We ate corncobs and drank chang in such copious quantities that I found myself joining a competition of dzum catching and tossing. My first two attempts at getting one of these beasts on the ground were dismal failures to the accompaniment of hilarious laughter. But when I had learned some of the finer points of the game from the owner of the hapless dzum, I had some successes, based more on my weight and length of limb than on any real skill.

Darkness brought an end to dzum tossing, and an empty cask to the drinking. To Lukla we cantered, bellowing songs of many sources and vintages.

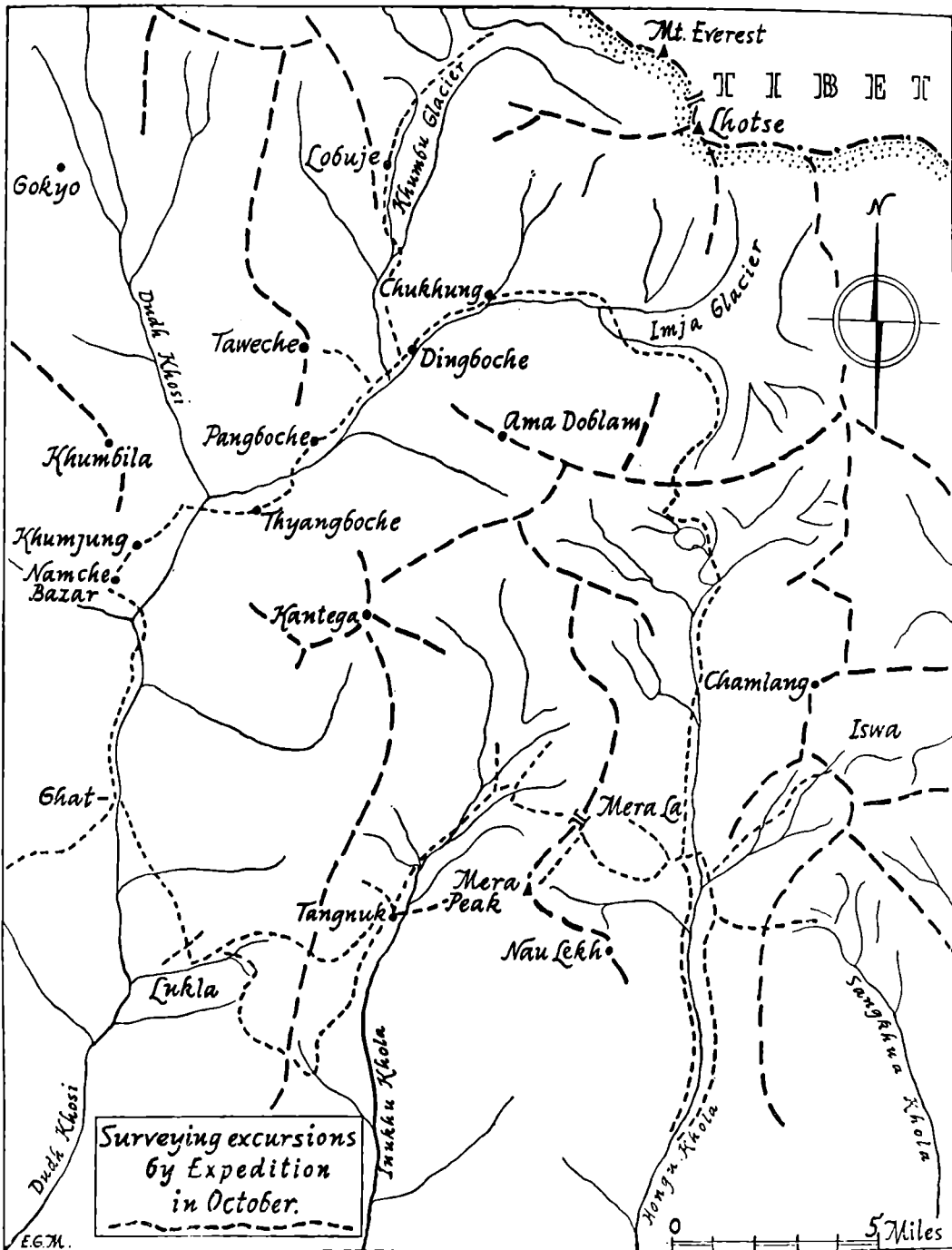
The Hongu

MY wife soon came up the track with Kami Doma, and I was relieved to find her in good spirits and full of enthusiasm for her new environment. Life alone in a Sherpa village had been just as entertaining for Enid as it had been for me. The following extracts from her diary summarise her experiences recounted to me:

‘I was off back to Khumjung, and as it was clear I would not get there before dark, Norman and Mr. Mishra of the Indian Check Post found a Sherpa with a torch to take me back. Mr. Mishra said the escort was necessary because of ‘leopards and panthers’. Actually, the footfalls of the strange Sherpa padding behind me in the dark, filled me with all kinds of visions. I wondered how long it would be before I heard his kukri slide from its sheath, and turn to see the gleam of the blade. What an imagination I was cursed with! At the top of the pass I turned to send him back, and the newly risen moon revealed the essential honesty of his face. I was ashamed. Although I indicated that the moon had risen and I could see the track, the good man insisted on taking me all the way to the very door of the lama’s house. I thanked him, and he set off cheerfully on the return journey to Namche Bazar.’

Although Enid enjoyed most of the culinary preparations this case was an exception:

‘Because I believe in the hackneyed proverb, ‘When in Rome—’ I did not refuse a potato chapati when Kami Doma offered it to me this morning. I had eaten about half when I suddenly felt extremely hot, with a prickly sensation. I made for the doorway, but the next thing I knew was Kami Doma’s anxious face peering down at me where I lay in a heap on the floor. I don’t know what gave me the presence of mind to speak in Hindi at such a time, but



Surveying excursions
 by Expedition
 in October.

I called 'pani', and Kami Doma obliged by pouring a ladel full of water on to my head! After a little drink I felt better and stood up while the lama was furiously inflating my lilo—but I executed a repeat performance and soon I came round in a horizontal position on the lilo, to find Sherap waving over me a censer of burning incense.'

Most of the money allocated to Enid for food had been spent already, and to find out who was the rogue charging the exorbitant prices, I audited Enid's books. In eight days she had spent only seven shillings on food, but almost ten pounds had gone to a Tibetan carpet weaver and a Nepali silversmith. Typically male, I groaned at these extravagances, the coolie cost for carrying them to the Indian railways, sixteen days away, and all the additional customs complications at the Indian frontier. When I later saw the finished articles, I could only approve. There was a silver cup, complete with lid, beaten from Chinese coins into exquisite articles of Tibetan pattern. The thick rug, made from Tibetan wool and coloured with Indian dyes, was exceptionally well designed and closely woven.

Enid's absurdly low food bill had its origin in the generosity and curiosity of the neighbours of her host, the Khumjung lama. For an excuse to look at a European woman it was worth while giving away some potatoes, spinach or onions, which were most acceptable to the object of the visit. Others had called to sell, or attempt to sell, yak meat, eggs or milk, frequently asking twice the price which I had always considered exorbitant, and the Sherpas knew it. However, they thought it was worth the visit. There was always the remote possibility of making a sale, and a certainty of a front row view of the visitor to the village.

With a small amount of reinforcing food in our rucksacks Aila and I left Enid and Kami Doma, and again climbed to the pass giving access to the Innukhu. The weather was bad and new snow had fallen down to 16,000 feet. Clouds still obscured the furthest reaches of the lower valley, and rain, even on the 10th October, was still keeping the tracks in a water-logged condition, and the streams aggressively swollen; but to travel for a few days with only one Sherpa is one of the greatest joys of this life. In such

circumstances he seldom wants a rest, and from his conversation many vital points of local history, legend and custom emerge. On this occasion I was told of the complicated movements of dzum, yak and sheep over the four main Innukhu tracks which are used in time of flood, the possible combinations of routes when there are deep snow-drifts, and the great natural bridge which can be crossed by men and animals in any weather. There two enormous boulders completely span the furious river channel. Aila took me to a clump of wild red currants, ripe at that time, and we saw that many had been eaten. He explained that they were a popular food of the Himalayan black bear, which is one of the most dangerous creatures in Asia. Of enormous proportions, he is rapid in movement and his eyesight is weak. If he suddenly confronts something suspicious in the forest, without waiting to confirm its identity by smell, he is quite likely to rush it down, and then look at his victim.

It was the fresh spoor of a black bear which Enid saw when she was on the track above Ghat, coming down to meet me at Lukla. On two other occasions she saw a snake at the same place. The last time we crossed the same track, Enid and I were alone, travelling fast on a warm evening, hoping to reach shelter before the rapidly fading light gave way to darkness. Suddenly Enid in front saw a movement on the track ahead. I passed her. We both picked up large stones and moved forwards as swiftly and silently as we could. Beyond two corners we saw an inoffensive sheep being led on a thin rope by a man.

In the Innukhu we found that Macdonald and the Sherpas had left Tangnuk and had wisely spent the days of bad weather in relaying all our gear to a camp near the Mera La, the pass by which we would cross to the Hongu. My night at Tangnuk was spent in a yakherd's shelter, discussing the earlier generations of Sherpas who had occupied the valley, and filling myself to capacity with boiled potatoes and curds. Most of the animals in the valley were nack, or dzum with a strong nack tendency. To keep their calves as near to half-breeds as possible, there were miserable shorthorn bulls with the herds, and these found living beyond their acclimatised altitude far from easy. The yak bullied them at every

opportunity, and their only defence was to live almost in the yakherds' houses. I was trying to sleep just inside the door—or where the door should have been and three times in the night the bulls made determined efforts to come in too, being pressed from behind by an angry yak. On each occasion I chased them off with a wildly swinging ice-axe, and dealt with the yak at the same time. These disturbances were so annoying that I eventually moved my sleeping bag outside to a clean patch of ground near the neck and their calves. I was not disturbed again.

As the bulls are not as sure footed as the yak for foraging among the rocks, they find the food at these altitudes something of a problem. The Sherpas kept the thin peelings from their boiled potatoes, soaked them in water, added salt and any low quality flour or chang available, and fed these to the unhappy creatures. Unfortunately I have not yet seen what happens to a bull when he has an overdose of chang.

Near the Mera La we found the others, rejoicing in the fact that the partial clearance of weather conditions in the past two days had enabled them to press forward with the survey, and now they were ready to cross to the Hongu. Good news indeed. Macdonald had not shot any more beasties, but Aila Tensing assured me there were many wild herds in the Hongu, and that the Lukla men with eighty yak there would have plenty of cheese, milk and butter for us.

On another gloomy morning we loaded up and climbed towards the pass.

We were now one coolie, the three permanent Sherpas, Macdonald and myself. Without moving in relays, we were carrying the complete camps, instruments and supplies for seven days between the six of us, the lightest load weighing 59 lbs., and the heaviest, Urkien's, 80 lbs. The Sherpas still could not understand Europeans carrying loads, and all came to look at the scales when our weights were tested. It was our intention to remain in the Hongu for ten days and do this by supplementing the seven days' food we carried with buying yak products from the Hongu temporary residents.

An hour away from the pass a cold damp mist covered us. Then,

suddenly emerging on to a large ice plateau, we could see a great herd of black animals looming ahead. The yak were coming out of the Hongu. An anxious inquiry of their owners confirmed our worst suspicions. The early frosts had already brought an end to the brief season when grass grows at that height. All the animals were on the way out, so we would be able to purchase no food in the Hongu. The yakherds further reported that all the wild animals had already descended to the forest level, and our hopes of shooting meat suddenly disappeared. In the mist, with a cold wind blowing and spirits at a low ebb, we bartered for all the butter and partially dried curds the men were carrying. They had almost none of these foods, which was surprising considering they had a herd of eighty nacks and calves, but we were told that as the monsoon approaches its end and the first frosts begin, the nacks living at the highest pastures go dry, and the calves are automatically weaned. We could see that some of the calves' birthdays must have been miscalculated, as they were still too young to build up sufficient resistance to the severity of the oncoming winter.

The sight of these large grunting animals moving along a major glacier would bring admiration from any mountaineer. A man with a group of four old animals was out in front, shouting and whistling to them, and getting steady progress at about two miles an hour. The yak always held their heads low, inspecting the ice with nose and eyes. The four in front kept no strict pattern, but wandered about as cows in a meadow. Those coming behind merely followed the tracks of the leaders, and only five stragglers at the rear had to be encouraged by the drovers.

As planned, at the top of the pass Joe and I left the Sherpas, who continued down the other side to make a camp in the Hongu. We added a tent and the theodolite to our fuel and food loads and climbed up the spur of Mera Peak, hoping to attempt its summit the following day. Mera, one of the two previously climbed peaks in the area, had relented in 1953, to Major Roberts who used this route, which follows a broad and crevassed icy spur, having several ice-falls breaking off it into both the Hongu and Innukhu sides of the spur. As we were climbing in the mist, it was very difficult to find an upward route, but we persevered for one and a

half hours, and then, knowing we were within 1,000 feet of the 21,200 ft. summit, we pitched camp in preparation for the next day's summit attempt. If unsuccessful we must retreat, as we had food for one day only and we could not be certain how long our survey problems further east would take to solve.

Urkien, to make the Mera climb sound impressive, had told us in the morning that the camp Macdonald and I would carry would be number four. He called the Tangnuk camp, Base, and the places where Macdonald had camped for survey stations were the intermediate camps, one to three. Urkien's suggestions for turning our excursion on Mera Peak into a high-sounding full-scale attack, illustrate the point that one should not judge the merits of a Himalayan expedition on its camp numbers: some begin their enumerations at the nearest village to their objective, while others (for example, Kangchenjunga, 1955) place their Base three days' march above the acclimatisation level.

We made ourselves comfortable, camped on a platform cut out of the snow slope. In the evening the clouds temporarily cleared, revealing tremendous problems of mapping among the unclimbed Hongu peaks. Luck was still not with us. The clouds came in again, and snow fell all night, but not enough to empty the heavens; the mist was still there in the morning. Emerging from our tent after a leisurely breakfast, we had no option but to pack up our camp and retreat. With visibility often down to twenty feet, a foot of new bitterly cold snow, and not enough food or time to wait for better weather, we folded the tent, now made heavier by moisture. Laden almost to capacity we descended, unable to locate our upward tracks in the enshrouding mist. Each of us made several wrong leads in winding down the ill-defined spur, only to climb up again and find a better way down. The complicated crevasse pattern could hardly be recognised from the previous day's brief glimpses of gaping chasms and towering seracs. Without the hazards of mist and crevasse, the avalanching condition of the new snow alone was a big enough problem. By using a compass and a shouting system, we located the Mera La and descended to it. Beyond the pass we knew there was a rock wall, and we found that when we shouted an echo resounded

from the wall, so we kept on shouting and followed the line of echoes. However, for all this sly cunning, it took us three hours to get down to the pass, although we had come up from it the previous day in an hour and a half.

On the pass itself the snow was so thick that no sign remained of the highway made twenty hours earlier by the hoofs of eighty yak. Still in a thick fog, we descended the Hongu slopes below the pass, occasionally seeing our yak track confirmed by the slightly coloured depressions in an otherwise smooth snowslope. The depressions were caused by patches of yak dung which had retained their heat long enough to make the surrounding snow melt or compress a few inches. Two thousand feet lower snow gave way to wet shingle, and then the first frozen plants came in sight. Sherpas were seen through the mist, and then our camp. Our large tent had been pitched and the fly was over a ridge-pole conveniently left by the owners of the departed yak.

We guessed that this first Hongu camp was too far from the passes we intended to visit, and although we knew we must move on we could not do so on the afternoon of our arrival as we had no idea where to go until the weather cleared.

Confined to the cramped conditions of our tent by the bad weather, I admired the antics of the Sherpas as they distributed food. Their code of etiquette forbids stepping over the extended legs of a seated person, and rather than break this rule they performed the feats of a contortionist without spilling a drop of liquid from precariously balanced plates.

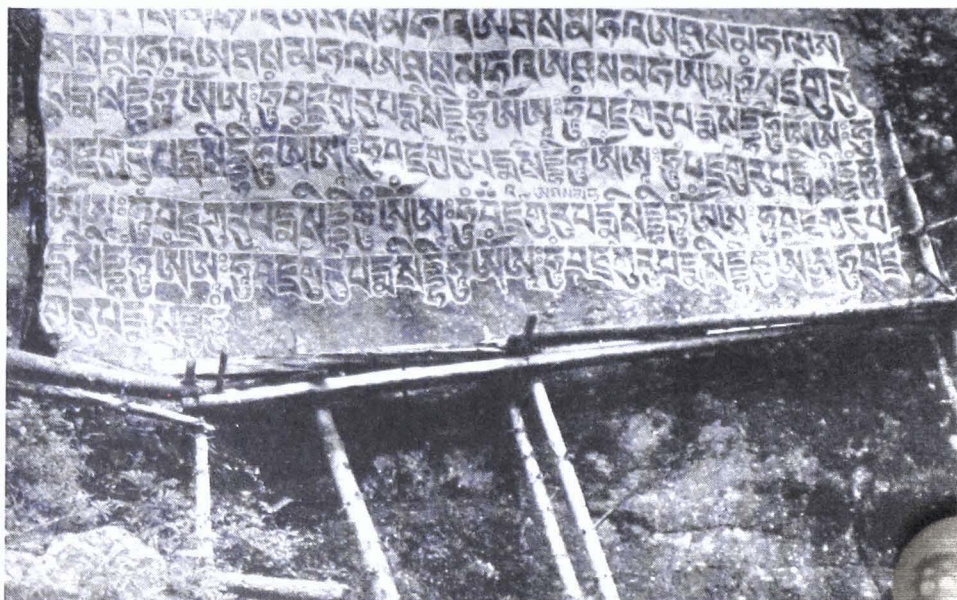
Just when we became convinced that the monsoon would continue into winter without a clear break, the long overdue improvement began. Our first Hongu morning started with a sharp frost under a cloudless sky. Before the sun tipped the highest peaks, I rushed up a hill near the camp and began a theodolite station. I had been working there for perhaps half an hour before the slowly rising temperature enabled my limbs to thaw and allowed my brain to appreciate the unique quality of the panorama I was recording. To the west was the pass crossed the previous day in a featureless fog. South-west was the easy-graded Mera Peak, and near it Nau Lekh, climbed in 1954 by the New

A silver tea cup with lid and stand. The Tibetan motif was beaten out of Chinese silver coins by a goat-herd from Namche Ba zar



A village meeting in Khumjung. The holy man to the left has a silver prayer wheel and a rosary of 108 beads. On the 'table' are a silver Tibetan tea cup (with stand) and a copper ink stand

Scaffolding erected by Buddhist monks for the carving of a mani stone



Descending on
the route into
Kathmandu
through the
Nepalese foot-
hills

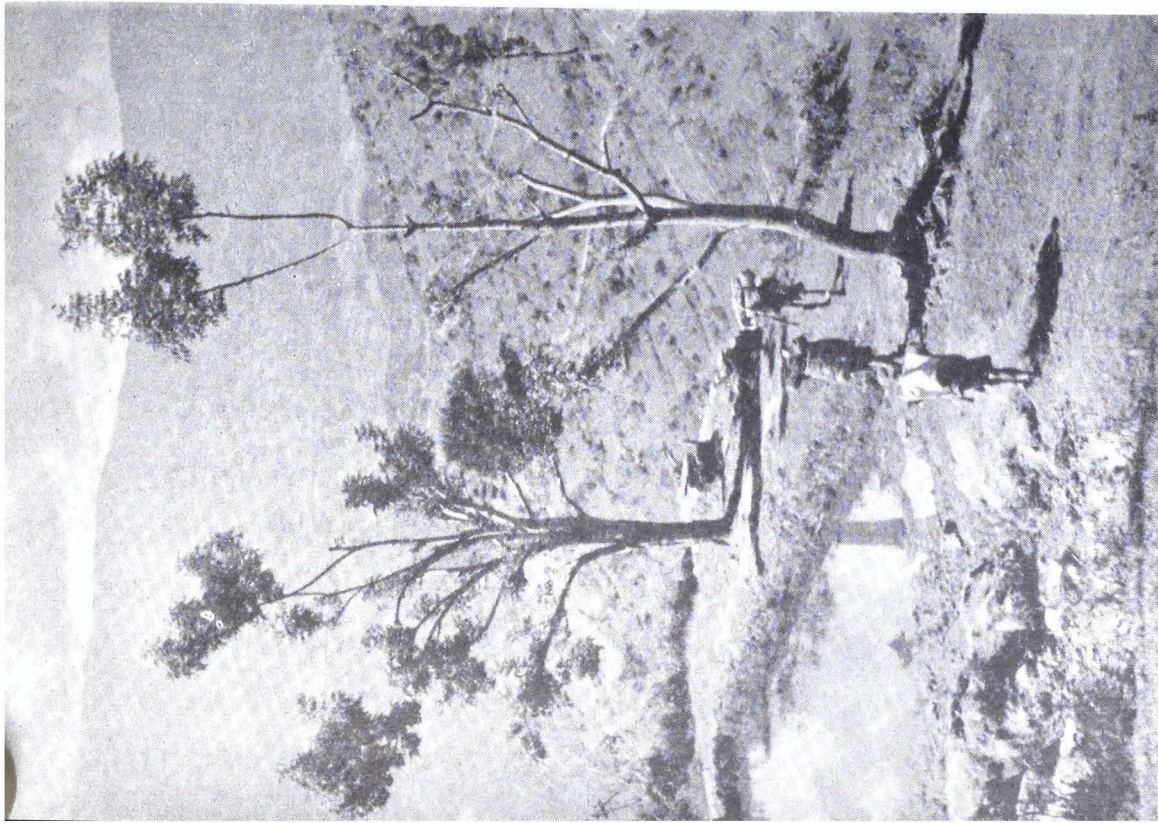
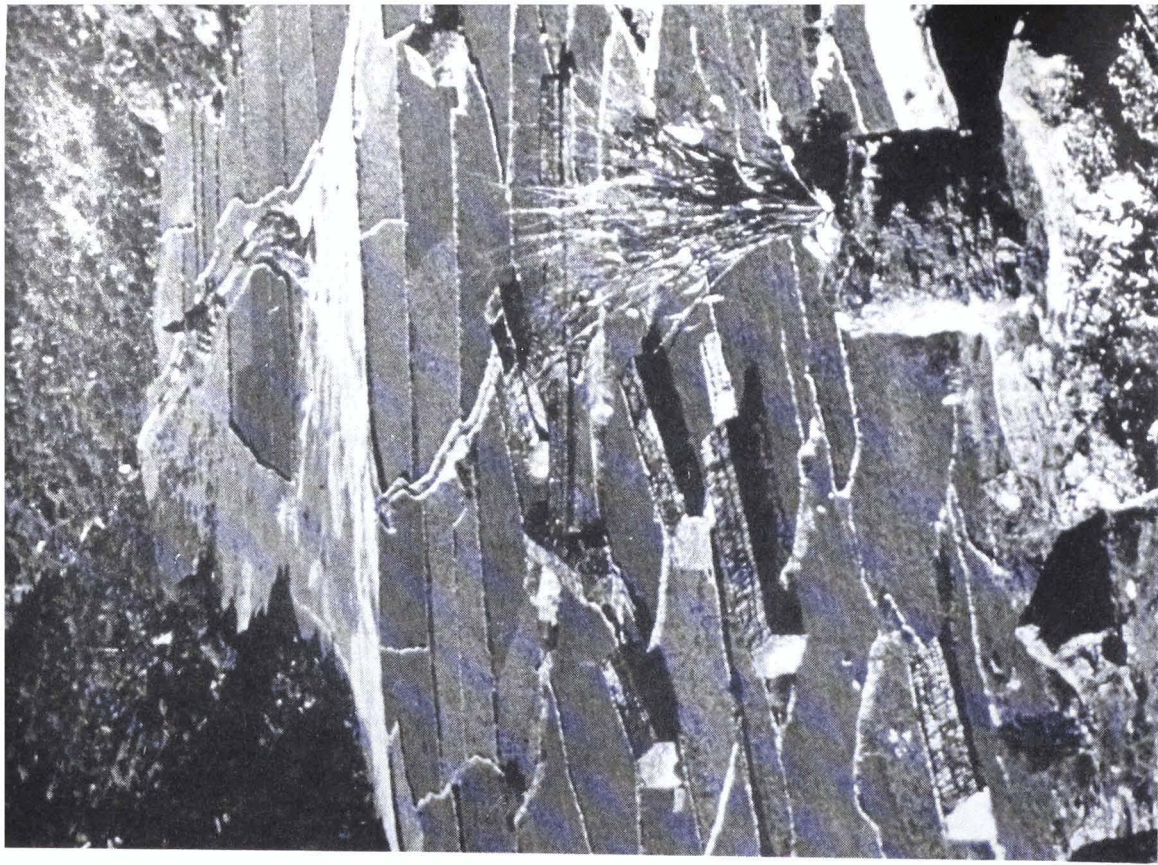


PLATE 16

A view of
Khumjung, the
home village of
the Sherpas, be-
fore the harvest.
The number of
prayer flags on
the communal
shrine should
ensure a good
crop



Zealanders, Beaven and Todd, during monsoon conditions. Nau Lekh, with its steep precipice on one side, separated from a gentle ice slope by the great sweeping curve of an avalanching ice-wall, was a mountain of unusual form. Across the Hongu, 9,000 ft. above, apparently vertical ice flutings pointed upwards to the ridge of Chamlang itself. The many unnamed summits of its neighbours provided a lure and a challenge to any mountaineer. But to the north, beyond the head of the Hongu, were the greatest giants of all. The black vertical rock couloirs of Lhotse, fourth highest peak in the world, were in vivid contrast to the dawn pink of the ice spurs descending from the second peak of this formidable mountain—the summit which would attract me particularly because of its extremely long but climbable ice route. Beyond the higher peak of Lhotse stood a white mass with a plume of snow. This was Everest—its importance and magnitude forgotten for a moment in the realisation that its infant snow plume was moving southwards—the first indication of a wind different from the monotonous, rain-bringing monsoon, coming from the south.

With the solving of more topographical mysteries we crossed the Hongu to an enormous rock which was slightly overhanging, and here we made a supply dump and divided into two parties to explore the east side of the Hongu. In 1954 some of the New Zealand Alpine Club's party had reached a pass at the head of the Iswa and suspected that the valley they looked down was a Hongu tributary, and that the head of the Sangkhua was some miles south of the position shown on the map. To be certain of this Macdonald and Urkien would carry a camp up the only eastern tributary of the Hongu, make some compass observations on the way, locate the pass and perhaps make the first ascent of it from the west, or better still climb a new mountain near it.

Meanwhile Aila Tensing and I would try to look into the true Sangkhua at the point where I suspected its headwaters would be. As I expected to be able to see far more country on my route than Macdonald could from his tributary valley, I took the theodolite. As Macdonald had the kerosene stove, the strongest Sherpa, and no theodolite to carry, he required no additional man-power to establish his camp; but Aila and I, needing to carry wood for fuel

and heavier instruments, took Gyalgen and the coolie with us to place our high camp and then descend. Our hopes mounted. To find myself perched on a high spur in fine weather, on the brink of a further discovery, would be one of the greatest joys of my Himalayan adventures.

Aila had made enquiries about the col towards which we were heading. The Arun Valley Bhotias whose sheep graze the upper Sangkhua sometimes crossed this way to the Hongu, and after a discussion with one of these men, some four years previously, Aila had estimated that our present high camp was four hours from the col. Extensive cross-examination would draw from Aila no sensible answer regarding the Sangkhua headwaters, and had I seen the Bhotia who had spoken to him four years previously, I have no doubt I would still have been no wiser. Although these people have an astonishing memory for tracks, they have little sense of direction and have no idea how to put their topographical knowledge down on paper. At times I have tried to show a Sherpa where he is travelling in relation to his home village by moulding a rough relief map in sand, but I have never been successful.

I rushed through another survey station while Aila cooked breakfast. I returned just as he shouted the food was ready. It was an enormous bowl of rice of oriental proportions with no flavouring of any kind. Having no time to make something better out of it, I ate my share and hurried off. A small cloud on a peak near our pass gave me many misgivings. Would another viewpoint be spoilt by clouds? We moved at top speed up some scree slopes, rocky spurs, moraine and finally a small ice-field, with no rests and without stopping to put on the rope. Clouds were gathering immediately above the pass as I reached it—in one hour and twenty minutes, much less than Aila's friend's estimate of four hours.

The theodolite was unpacked, vital bearings observed, and photographs taken before I really looked about me. Still, the full panorama to the east was not unveiled, and the weather closed down completely, preventing the repeated bearings being observed for a check. However, I had seen the awful ice-wall which formed the northern limits of the Sangkhua, and beyond to the east I had

glimpses of the Sangkhua. Far below I could see an area of flat open grassland dotted with man-made shelters and animal tracks leading to them. It seemed a remote paradise hidden from all prying eyes. I moved fifty yards to get a view of the far corner of the flat, as it plunged into jungle and gorge. No European had previously seen this lonely spot. Perhaps I was on the brink of discovering my own Shangri-La. I fought the temptation to spend two hungry days and visit the new found pastures. Instead I climbed a small ice summit above the pass. The climb required no great technical exertions, and the ever-thickening clouds spoilt what is to me the greatest reward for a mountaineer—the view from the top. Waiting for a clearing was evidently futile. Back at the pass, I woke my companion, and we descended to camp, slowly this time. The tent and its contents were added to our loads and before the day's light eventually faded, we were back at the big rock dump with Gyalgen and the coolie. With a glow of satisfaction I worked far into the night recording all I had seen. If Macdonald could give details of the Hongu tributary he was visiting, we would now have all the answers to the biggest mysteries on the map.

The next part of the scheme was to join our surveys to those Evans had done in the head of the Hongu in 1954, but I could not move away to do these until Macdonald and Urkien returned. Meanwhile I took stock of the food supply. It was miserably low. The unforeseen departure of the yak was beginning to tell. I placed a ration on the remaining food. Our last precious pound of honey and some chocolate went to the Sherpas, who were left only a few potatoes, half a pound of tsampa and a pinch of salt per day. Now we all had the same food selection, apart from the coffee which I kept for Macdonald and myself. Even as unappetising a meal as dried yak's blood, sour milk and garlic is edible if it can be followed by black coffee, but we had no yak foods or garlic.

In an attempt to solve the food troubles I cleaned the rifle and talked to the Sherpas about the animal migrations. They said everything would have descended to the shelter of the jungle. Aila claimed that the tahr and the zharan had gone down the west bank, and he offered to accompany me there, so we started.

Within an hour all tracks gave out, and the tussock country of the steep valley which had contours too close together for comfort began to support wild roses, red currants, and other bear food. Aila now said the animals had not migrated and we would find some at the head of the valley. Whether it was the roughness of the ground or the frequency of the bear signs which caused his decision to retreat, I could not ascertain. I told him to return to camp while I continued downstream, happy to be alone to inspect a gorge where no man had been for many long years.

The autumn colours of the burberry, rowans, currants, oaks and birches were a joy to see. Below these were the rhododendrons and next the abrupt line where the majestic pines and larches began. Through these trackless stretches I clambered, seeing no animals and only an occasional footprint of a wild goat. After a fruitless search well into the pine area I worked my weary way back to the rock camp, calculating rations all the way. I realised we must leave the Hongu in two days.

In camp I vented my wrath on the absence of wild animals, to be told I should have gone towards the Mera La.

‘But you told me to go downstream to find them.’

With a shrug of shoulders Aila told me: ‘The Mera La is better.’

Eastern logic is sometimes hard to follow. I had examined the ground on both sides of that pass, and I was certain there were no wild animals in the vicinity. I missed the solid reliability of Urkien. It is my belief that Sherpas have no expert knowledge of any animal other than the yak. They have no means of capturing wild animals such as the goat, sheep and bear, and they do not depend on them for food or hides. The leopards keep the numbers of other creatures under control, and the few excess leopards are killed in traps by the Ghurkas at lower levels. If the Sherpas were regular hunters of any of these animals, or if they in turn hunted the Sherpas, each would have a better knowledge of the other. In my opinion, their inexpert knowledge has been the cause of many of the yeti tales.

Combined with this lack of knowledge is their ability to tell a good story. Realising now that Europeans are always curious about the yeti, they oblige by saying that most large unidentified

tracks are made by the Abominable Snowman or his Lady. On one occasion, described earlier, some deep tracks almost covered by snow were classified as yeti, but when I found yak dung near them, and showed it to my informer, he said yeti dung was similar to yak and cow dung. Five weeks later the same man told me that another dung specimen was from a yeti, but this sample was shaped like that of a dog and had in it the hairs of an animal it had eaten, which was probably the wild Tibetan rat. Surely both specimens could not have come from the same animal.

Late in the day Macdonald and Urkien returned with the required answers to some of our survey problems. They had climbed the pass at the head of the Hongu tributary, and although they had also found clouds obscuring part of the view, they had been able to confirm that the valley on the other side was the Iswa. They had arrived on top of their pass later than had Aila and I on ours, but for a few minutes they had a clear view through a cloud gap to the east. Eighty miles away the icy summits of Kangchenjunga were recognised by Urkien towering far above her neighbours. Five months had rushed by since I had stood on that icy mass and looked at the complicated peaks south of Chamlang, and I had been in the mountains for eight months.

All too soon Macdonald and Urkien were enveloped in a snow-storm and hopes of attempting a neighbouring peak had to be abandoned. They returned to their high camp and next morning climbed a peak of about 20,000 ft., taking a round of compass bearings and photographs from the top. Macdonald was full of praise for his valley, its reasonable access and its fine array of climbable peaks in the 21,000–22,000 ft. class. For an expedition attempting Chamlang not two miles away, here is the ideal valley for acclimatising the party, with a guarantee of some climbing rewards.

Together we moved camp to a strategic position for Macdonald to have another attempt at Mera Peak—this time with Urkien—while Gyalgen and I visited the Hongu. The other two would cross Mera La as soon as they could and wait for Macdonald at Tangnuk, which was the nearest place for purchasing potatoes and yak products.

Gyalgen and I, carrying our meagre food ration, theodolite, tent and firewood, left for the head of the Hongu. We had a long day of perfect visibility, satisfactory mapping, and very hard work. Our route was flanked by peaks of fantastic shapes, glistening in the burning sun. All day we could see Everest and Lhotse beyond the head of the valley. Hillary's photograph, looking down the Hongu from Everest's summit, indicated a long straight valley, walled in by snowy ranges both formidable and complicated. Now, ascending this valley, the enclosed feeling from these mighty walls emphasised the vivid impression of our own remoteness and insignificance. The second peak of Lhotse was always attractive. Two mysterious western tributaries of the Hongu parted with their secrets, and the small lakes at the head of the main valley added an unusual enchantment. Lakes are rare in the Himalaya. These were called Pānch Pokri. They are usually regarded as sacred by the groups of Hindus who know them, and some pilgrimages lead to their shores. A man died two years ago at the head of the Hongu, and as his relatives were not present and there was no fuel at that high level to give him a proper cremation, he was buried on the shore of the largest lake. To appease the gods, his relatives carried in 160 lbs. of small brass bells, tiny shrines and food offerings. Some of the bells and the cairns made at the time can still be seen on the lake shore.

Gyalgen and I slept in an isolated spot at about 17,000 ft., more reminiscent of 70° latitude than our 28°. An ice-capped summit sent down a glacier to a partly frozen lake, icebergs broke off from the glacier and floated to the opposite shore, driven by an icy wind. The only vegetation was small lichens, already frozen and limp with the approaching winter. Nothing moved but the wind—except when we really exerted ourselves under our loads and put another half-mile behind us.

The Ambu Lapcha (*Lapcha* means 'snow pass'), separating the Hongu from the Imja, is relatively easy to cross in good conditions, and in 1954 it had been so easy that I had made two solo crossings. With this in mind I had told Enid to climb the pass from the Imja and meet me on top, but now that we were approaching it, I could see there was far more snow about than when I had last

seen it. The snow, not completely consolidated, was extremely dangerous and liable to avalanche. Now I was relieved that our lack of food had forced us out a day early. If Enid were travelling to schedule, I would meet her beyond the pass, before she reached difficult country.

Gyalgen and I began the climb to the pass, and soon we had to resort to crampons. The ice pattern had changed since the previous year, so I chose a slightly different route. The couloir I followed became steeper, and before long I suspected we were near the pass, but from inside the couloir our objective was invisible. I told Gyalgen to stop where he was while I reconnoitred the route ahead. Round an icy spur I cut steps, up one couloir and then round another spur, and I could see the pass not far ahead with a screaming gale blowing the powdered snow away in a graceful plume. I returned towards Gyalgen and called to him to unroll the rope, as it would be a necessary safeguard on the slopes above. I rounded the last spur, and where the rucksacks had been left I could see the marks of a sliding body. With a feeling of horror, I ran down the couloir and round a corner met Gyalgen, behind a silly grin, climbing upwards saying 'Sorry.' His vocabulary had only one other English word, and that was not very polite. Pleased to see him still in one piece and able to grin, I merely tied him to the rope without a reprimand. He had tried to follow my tracks above the rucksacks, but had slipped out of the steps.

Next, laden and roped, wearing gloves and windproofs, we advanced into the raw, icy wind and reached the pass. The view down the other side was depressing and almost frightening. Soft snow covered all the slopes for two thousand feet down, and at the bottom were hundreds of acres of debris where recent avalanches had come to rest. Under the changed conditions I could not recognise the route that I had taken the first time I had been on the Ambu Lapcha. I had never before faced such a problem without having Urkien on the other end of the rope. Gyalgen, relatively inexperienced and slow in his reactions, was far from happy.

I had hoped to have a theodolite station on top of the pass, but the force of the wind was too great for that instrument to remain

on its legs. Instead, I took compass bearings, and we both ate our last chocolate. My companion suggested we should return to the Hongu and retreat on the Mera La to Lukla route by which we had entered. I had two strong reasons for refusing this. By now we had no food, and on that route it would be two long days before we could find more; whereas, if we completed our crossing to the Imja, we should have food in Dingboche on the same night. Secondly I did want to intercept Enid and her two Sherpas before they came to the Pass from the Imja side. If I went out to Lukla I could not catch her for a week, and for all that time she would be worrying about my movements. I had told her that in the event of very bad weather I would not see her on the Ambu Lapcha route, but as she had been living at 13,000 ft., I guessed she would not have been aware that heavy snow had fallen at 19,000 ft. in a remote valley.

So Gyalgen had to follow me down, rather against his will. I kicked large steps in the snow, sinking in to my knees and at times up to my thighs. To encourage Gyalgen, I was carrying all my personal equipment, the tent and the theodolite, while he had nothing but his personal gear. The top six inches of snow were continually sliding away, gathering a sheet of snow for perhaps an acre below our tracks and then avalanching far below with an ominous hissing sound, unlike the familiar roar of an ice avalanche. At the worst part of the descent, the rocks were too steep for snow to adhere to them. Every rock crack was full of glassy ice. I cut these clear and descended, but Gyalgen was so unhappy that I had to tie my load to a convenient rock bollard, climb up to him and lower him on the rope. For two more hours our cautious descent continued, and our arrival on the level rocks at the bottom was just in time. Both of us had lost the circulation in our toes and our fingers were partially frozen. With vigorous rubbing, and talks about drinks of arak at Dingboche, we soon became whole again.

All my previous journeys in the vicinity of the Imja had been when the summits were hidden by monsoon clouds. Now for the first time I looked at the scene of a previous pass crossing I had done, and was forced to concede to my critics that I had exposed

my Sherpas to danger. Lhotse now was only five miles away and its awful precipices dominated the northern sky-line. The International Party attempting to climb Lhotse at that time, was working on the face nearest to Everest, away from the inhospitable rock walls visible to us.

We descended the Imja valley, past its main glacier, through the deserted alpine village of Chukhung, and so on to Dingboche, the large village at the junction of the Chola Khola and Imja. The Khumbu glacier from the south face of Everest flows into the Chola Khola. The only food available in Dingboche was potatoes with chang and arak, so we did the obvious thing—we threw a party.

Finish Hogia

IN the morning I climbed a neighbouring spur, carrying the theodolite. With continuing clear weather it was a joy to have the surveying excuse for doing a gentle climb by myself. I climbed high enough to obtain a good view, from a new angle, towards the head of the Innukhu. In the afternoon a familiar voice from down the track told me that Enid was coming—intercepted before approaching the snow-bound pass.

When the tents were pitched and Gyalgen and Phurchita, who had accompanied my wife to Dingboche, had food preparations well in hand, Enid and I spent the evening in watching the people threshing their barley. As Dingboche is as high as 15,000 ft., there is no permanent settlement. The climate is particularly suitable for the cultivation of barley, so many of the well-to-do people of the lower villages (such as Pangboche, Thyangboche and Khumjung) have built their summer houses there. These are also used by the men when they travel high with their yak herds during the monsoon period. At the time of our arrival the small potato crop—to serve the needs of the temporary population—had been harvested and the barley occupied most of the working hours.

Frequently in areas of strong wind, or where barley is close to a track, it is put into sheaves before the plants are pulled from the ground. A piece of grass or a strong barley stalk is tied round fifty or more growing stalks, and these are later pulled up by the roots, in one complete sheaf. When the grain has ripened and hardened, and the husks have dried out, the ears of grain are all sliced off with a sickle. The straw provides yak fodder during the approaching winter, or is dug into the earth, while the ears of corn accumu-

late in a large heap on a clean piece of ground. When the pile of ears is about eight feet in diameter the threshing begins. We watched the Sherpas at work, two pairs moving slowly about the pile to the easy rhythm of their own singing. Yet for all the apparent ease, the healthy 'thwack' of the heavy flails denoted perfect muscular control and split-second timing, the opposing pairs working simultaneously and threshing while their partners raised the seven feet pole of their flails high in the air.

From Dingboche we climbed to Lobuje, where we spent a night and cooked our food over a yak-dung fire, as we were far above scrub level. Next day we continued up the ablation valley beside the Khumbu glacier, searching for the Base Camp of Dyrenfurth's Lhotse Expedition. Again the weather was bad, keeping visibility to a minimum, and we failed to locate their camp. On we went beyond the Everest 1953 Base site and far out among the ice pinnacles below the icefall, seeing little and feeling the bite of the keen wind. We turned back at about 19,000 ft. and rested as soon as we left the ice. A sudden clearing showed the north peak of Everest, totally in Tibet, staring boldly over the pass known as the Lho La. (It is a pity that this name was given by an expedition to a pass west of Mount Everest, as its meaning is 'South Pass' or 'South Col', and it would be more appropriate on Everest's South Col, where it would be nearer Lhotse, which means 'South Peak'.) Later we were granted glimpses of Lingtren and Pumori, the ice peaks on the frontier and further west. For five minutes the sun shone and we were too hot. Then a cloud hid the source of warmth, and the freezing wind bit through our clothing—a reminder that at these heights life exists on a very narrow margin. We sympathised with the Lhotse attempt, probably then at its greatest crisis, surely neither advancing nor retreating in weather so bad.

As we were snowbound at Lobuje for most of an afternoon, I took the opportunity of reading my wife's diary and was gratified to find that in my absence she had been accepted by the people of Khumjung as an honoured guest and invited to take part in all the local activities. Enid's impressions so closely coincided with my own that I was glad to avail myself of the chance of recording many

of her experiences and reactions to them. The following is a description of a meeting of tremendous importance concerning a complaint to be forwarded to the residents of the senior village, Namche Bazar. (See plate No. 15.)

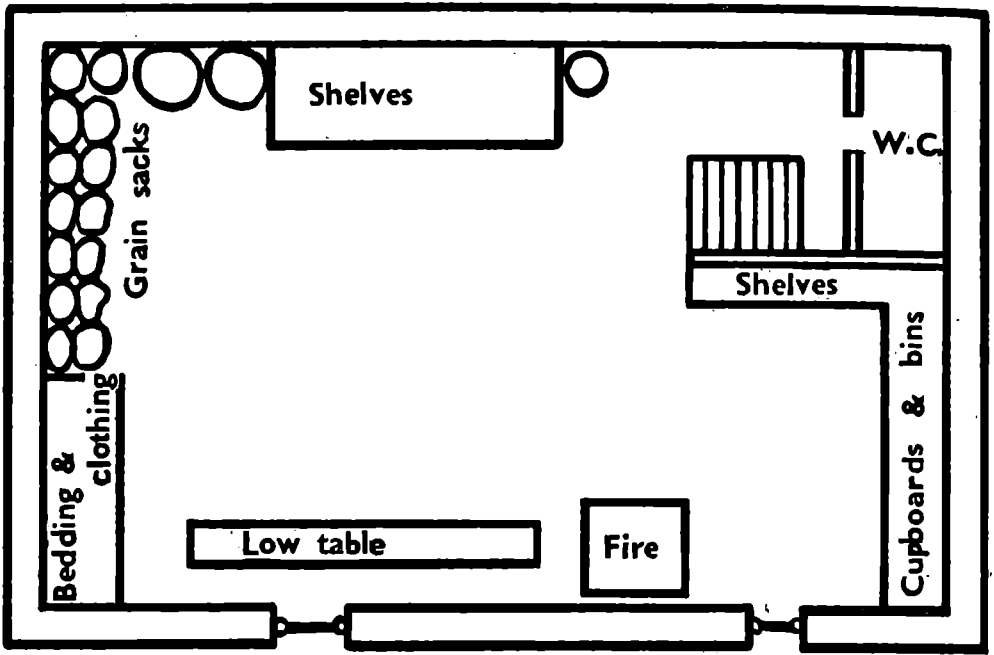
'The men of the village had assembled on a high piece of central ground, and a few of their womenfolk were onlookers from the fringe. Seated cross-legged at either side of a board which served as a table were the headman, decidedly the worse for arak, and his advisers. To the rear squatted a long-haired holy man, interminably spinning a silver prayer wheel. The remaining men formed a standing circle from which pertinent suggestions and ribald remarks were directed at those seated on the ground—democracy in the raw. The letter was finally written, the scribe using Sherap Lama's porcupine quill pen, inkstand and Tibetan paper. Then came the ceremony of signing, with the few who could write their names first. I noticed they asked why Urkien was not present, for he is a prominent member of the community. Someone said he was away with Hardie Sahib. Last came those who had to sign the letter with an inked thumb-print. The document was ready for delivery to the Namche Bazar headman. All at once a murmur of dissention came from the standing villagers, and by angry words they showed their resentment that a letter of such importance should be delivered by a man who was intoxicated, even if he was their chief representative.'

This great document was delivered. What was it all about? Some Namche goats had strayed on to Khumjung grazing grounds and this was the way to stop it happening again. By long-established custom the grounds have very definite limits, as do all the forested areas from which firewood or building timber is available. Some parts are never grazed, and on others the timber is left untouched. The usual reason given is that these protected areas are sacred, and a god has residence there, but it seems more than a coincidence that these sacred portions invariably coincide with the steepest ground and the loosest soil. Perhaps some wise lama of a previous generation might have seen these slopes wasting, and in trying to think of a forceful means of checking the condition of the soil, he decided that the surest way of inducing a response

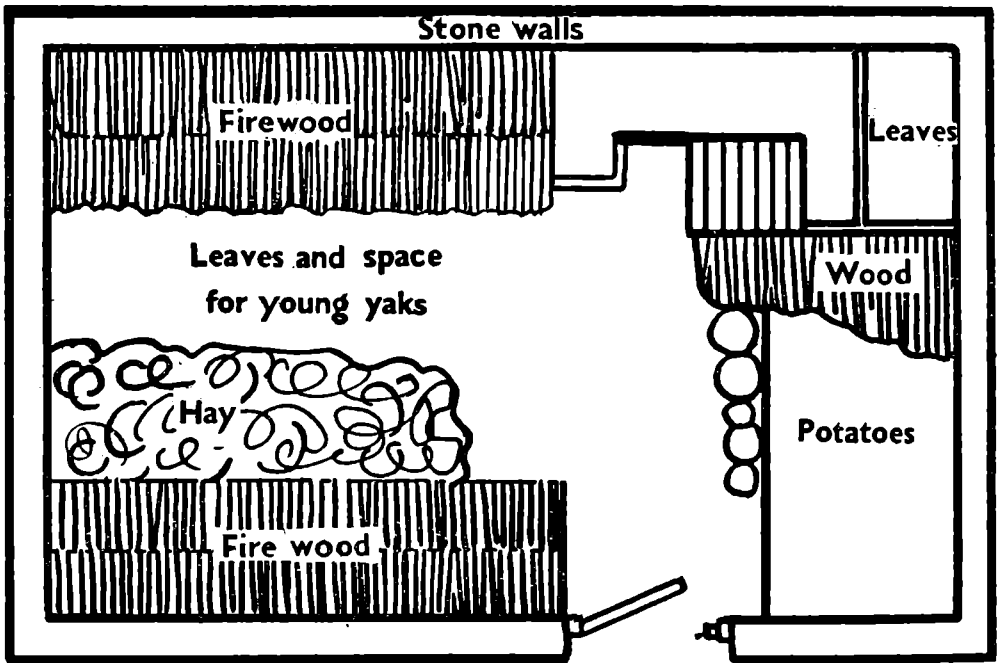
from the peasantry was to declare the land a dwelling place of gods; but although grazing and felling are not allowed they use the hay and dead wood to add to their winter storage. In the Karakoram various peoples have a deep rooted anti-erosion tradition which preserves great forest belts from destruction.

Enid took a keen interest in the group activities of the Sherpa children. One morning they were intrigued to see her sitting outside in the sunlight busy with mending. Their interest was sharpened by the fact that the men do all the sewing in the Sherpa household, stitching together the pieces of a garment which may have been woven or knitted by their women, and renewing the yak-hide soles of the family's footwear from time to time. At the end of the sewing session each child was given a brightly coloured piece of cotton to add to their treasures. Then they retaliated. 'With self-conscious eagerness they entertained me in their turn by playing all the games they knew. Of course the cries were all different, but I was amazed at the similarity of these and many European games such as "Blind Man's Buff", "Oranges and Lemons", "Tug o' War" and "Hide and Seek".' I enjoyed, too, the whole-hearted enthusiasm with which they tackled each new enterprise and greeted each new situation. There were the inevitable minor injuries, but the sufferer was always helped to his feet and greeted his friends with a smile. There seemed little of the petty jealousies and ostentation one associates with young European children. I had also noticed the same unselfish co-operation among the Oriental children aboard the ship which brought us to Bombay—I think this must be the result of the lack of fuss on the part of the parents who tend to leave their offspring to their own devices with the minimum of interference.'

To the last sentence I would like to add—after the children can walk. When a Sherpa infant cries it is generally picked up and suckled, regardless of time, company or place. Yet somehow, once able to walk, the child's independence increases in leaps and bounds. Then the mother spends very little time with it and one gains the impression that some children of about two years of age have their upbringing from a brother or sister, only eighteen months their senior.



First Floor.



Ground Floor.

Plan of two-floor Sherpa House.

Enid's host, Sherap Lama, was the subject of many informative diary notes. 'Sherap's family assembled for the evening meal at about 7.30 p.m. When all were seated cross-legged round the fire, the lama on the right and his wife on the left, with their children in descending order of age between them, Kami Doma, the eldest daughter, brought a bowl of water to her father. He washed his hands while the youngest daughter poured the water over them. This ceremony over, the whole family followed suit. Mother was by this time seated in the midst of eight shining brass plates and eight china bowls. Into each of the plates she dolloped a pile of finely creamed potatoes, and into each bowl she poured a soup made chiefly from sour goat's milk. The family ate with their fingers, forming balls of potatoes which they dipped into the soup before popping them into their mouths. I forgot to mention that the lama found it necessary to remove his false teeth for this soft food.' The family referred to in this case consisted of the lama's two daughters, four cousins and a nephew. It is unusual for a Sherpa family to consist of more than four.

In my wife's opinion the standard of housewifery in the village of Ghat, at a much lower altitude, compared most unfavourably with its counterpart in Khumjung. 'We are staying in a very small house in Ghat (below 11,000 ft.) and our hostess's manner lacks the cordiality of the Khumjung Sherpa. Her apparel is distinctly absent in the region of her withered left breast, which I find continually disconcerting. The house does not appear to be equipped with any sort of bowl (apart from the huge copper water vessels and the cooking pots) so when the time came for me to wash, Kami Doma suggested the expedient of using my mug, which I did while she acted as a mobile bathroom, holding soap, towel and all accessories. The place is hopping with fleas, but my D.D.T. container is at the moment serving as a candle stand, so they will have to wait. To the left of the foot of my lilo is a basket of pet rats—I hope we all fall asleep simultaneously.'

The sketch opposite of the first floor of a Khumjung house shows an arrangement typical of most lay Sherpa houses. Those of the well-to-do merchants and the lama have a small private chapel attached to them. The circles on the ground floor represent in-

verted baskets, under which the hens are kept at night by the few who own such rarities. The sheep and young yak space is for night use only, except during the worst weeks of winter when snow stops all movement outside.

Enid admired the unselfishness which is an essential characteristic in the Sherpa way of life, 'This morning I woke to the thuds and scrapes of someone working with a hoe in the immediate neighbourhood of my tent. I looked out to see the lama beaming proudly at his handiwork—three square yards of neatly laid turf blocks (one complete with a tiny blue flower) which would prevent me from getting my feet wet. The previous evening he had noticed that my canvas shoes were damp, and this was the result. The consideration of these people is a repeated source of joy to me. On reading *The Teachings of Buddha* I think I begin to understand this and many other common traits in the Sherpa character, especially their natural gentleness, arising from an aversion to violence of any kind, and the independent spirit in which each individual justifies his own existence.

'Kami Doma's cousin came in unexpectedly late just as the mother had put the last of the breadcakes on to her own plate. Although she had not yet eaten and there was no more mixture in the bowl, she insisted on giving her share to her nephew. How much these people could teach the "civilised" inhabitants of the earth; I finished Orwell's *1984*. I'm sure if Orwell had lived in Khumjung for a time he would have more hope for the future of mankind.

'These two quotations from *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* are particularly pertinent to the life of the Sherpa community. "Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea, not if we enter into the clefts of the mountains, is there known a spot in the whole world where a man might be freed from an evil deed"; and again, "He who has tasted the sweetness of solitude and tranquillity becomes free from fear and free from sin." These statements may at first seem contradictory, but I found them complementary.'

Early on our second morning in the Chola Khola we began the return journey to Khumjung. The light snow covering was broken by tiny pale blue specks, which on closer examination

proved to be gentians. As our track descended and the snow diminished, the specks of blue became clusters which provided the main colour to a brilliant scene. The startling precipices of Everest's neighbours, now seen under a clear sky, towered far above the flowery pastures. We travelled slowly to appreciate the unusual beauty of our surroundings, and talked to our Sherpa companion about the yak grazing grounds, the cultivation of hay and barley, and the house-building which keep the people fully occupied in the high valleys during the summer months.

Enid and I left the shortest downward track to visit the three houses occupied by a lama and his monks, perched high on a rocky ledge above Dingboche. The cold bareness of the houses of these devout Buddhists could almost be forgotten, for the brilliance of the view to the north and east compensated for the miserable physical conditions of life at such an altitude. Sparkling familiar ice summits in the Imja were wearing their coating of new snow, and beyond them to the east, the lofty Makalu, fifth highest mountain in the world, still pointed boldly upwards, undaunted by the recent successful ascent by the French climbing party.

Back on the track to Khumjung we walked to Pangboche, enchanted by the variety of the autumn colours. While Phurchita was trying to buy milk for our cuisine, Enid and I examined the mural paintings outside Pangboche monastery. An elderly Sherpa approached, dressed in an ancient string singlet and a pair of bright red nylon windproof trousers for which he must have exchanged many sacks of grain. He produced a fair-sized pelt of long grey fur, and waving it excitedly before our faces he proclaimed: 'Yeti, Sahib, Yeti!'

We were amazed until closer inspection revealed the markings of a marmot skin, and we sent the old rascal on his way.

An hour further on, at Thyangboche, we made arrangements for staying the night. A kind monk asked us to cook in his house, and he indicated a place outside where we could unroll our bags to sleep under the sky. While the meal was on its way the stars disappeared and rain began to fall, but Enid's attempt to bring the sleeping bags inside was firmly stopped by the monk. No stretching of the laws of his sect would permit him to allow a

woman to sleep under his roof. A woman could talk, cook, eat or pray in his house, but she must not sleep there. My observations of other lamas and monks of the same village and its neighbours had not revealed such strict adherence to this principle, especially applied to Sherpa women, but to make a protest would have offended this man.

Enid and I went to the gompa where we knew a large shelter existed in the form of a verandah which surrounded the square courtyard like the top storey of a cloister. No sooner were we comfortably in our beds than we heard the courtyard door unbolted, and then came the sound of yak hooves on the stone paving. Under the light of a crisp new moon we saw two giggling monks escorting the animal. They made some comments, unworthy of monks, in their own Sherpa language, happily oblivious of my understanding of this tongue. Then one approached and said in Hindustani. 'There is one cow here for the night, and the doors are shut.'

Although the nack was put inside the courtyard for protection against leopards, it decided to explore its protecting walls to find an exit, and the snorting, grunting and clatter of hooves went on far into the night. Eventually I dropped to sleep to be woken violently by Enid. The nack had climbed the ten feet of steps to our verandah and was joyfully trotting round it towards us. More asleep than awake, I jumped up to frighten it as it was almost upon us. The poor beast fled in astonishment. Again we dozed, but the nack, her curiosity aroused, began to stalk us warily, walking along the wooden platform as quietly as a heavy-hoofed animal can tread. Again I chased her away. This time I erected two barricades on the verandah to keep our intruder at bay. She persistently pushed at them, but made no progress, and at three o'clock she despondently lay down to rest.

The dawn was perfect. Under a clear blue sky the peaks of the surrounding mountains glistened in the light of the newly risen sun. There was already much early winter snow about and Lhotse held more than its usual share. As Lhotse was still being attempted at this time it was more under observation than its gentler looking neighbour, Everest.

In the morning we spoke to a woman who told us she had left her home village, Namche Bazar, seventeen years earlier to be near her son in Thyangboche, where he was being trained as the senior lama. When only three years old her son had been identified as the reincarnation of the deceased senior lama of Thyangboche. The child had the appropriate markings on his head, and as he frequently played games imitating a lama the monks of the monastery soon became interested in him. They visited his home to question him, but the boy told them, 'This is not my home.'

'Where is it?'

The little boy pointed to the direction of Thyangboche.

'Well, what is your name?'

'My parents gave me the wrong name. It is "Lama".'

On this evidence the monks took him back with them to Thyangboche, where he was put to the test by being shown a collection of personal effects of various lamas. He immediately identified those of the deceased senior lama. This test confirmed his identity as the new reincarnation, so he took up residence at the monastery until he was sixteen years old. Then, to finish his education, he went to Lhasa for four years, in spite of the Chinese occupation of that city.

It is the wish of all parents that one of their sons will be a reincarnation of an important lama, and the way monk or layman can compliment a parent is by remarking on their child's similarity to a certain lama. It is believed that most lamas have a double 'cowlick' on the front of their hair. In Khumjung alone I know of fifteen small boys who had not begun to grow their pigtails, and on each important occasion their mothers would give their hair a most complicated combing to keep up the appearance of holiness. My own 'cowlicks' and tapered beard were contributions to the rank I was given on all occasions of religious importance. A dying lama often gives an indication of where to search when he will return as a new small boy. Great significance is attached to his last words and the direction he is facing as his last breath fades away. A Sherpa parent seldom knows when a group of monks might enter a district indicated by a departed

lama, but every time the approach of monks is rumoured, there is much rounding up and brushing of the youngest sons.

After our talk the young lama's mother went about her domestic duties, and our attention turned to two new arrivals whom we had watched as they ascended the spur from the Dudh Kosi. By the saffron robe of one and the red homespun of the other I identified them as a lama and a monk. They were making a collection from all Sherpas to establish a gompa some sixteen days' march away—in fact 'somewhere north of Kathmandu', like Kipling's 'little yellow idol'. They were seeking funds from far beyond their own area, but once the gompa was established further collections would not be necessary.

After large initial collections monasteries and gompas cost the local residents very little. The Thyangboche monastery, for instance, collected enough at its founding to obtain three fields at Dingboche where potatoes and barley are grown, as well as grazing rights in the Chola Khola in summer, and the large slopes above the monastery for the rest of the year. Their own monks provide the labour force, so they seldom have to seek labour or food from the lay population. However, when travelling away from the monastery they are fed on their journeys by local residents, and the men who live in isolated caves or huts as hermits will have their food brought up to them by people from the nearest village. The small financial needs of an established monastery are often met by bequests from a deceased merchant.

In due course we left for Khumjung, and Macdonald and Urkien soon arrived in the Sherpa village. They had made another attempt on Mera Peak, and not far from the top gave up the uneven struggle in thigh-deep soft snow. Better luck accompanied them on the way out. Macdonald and Aila Tensing made two new ascents of unnamed ice peaks. Joe had to overcome problems of distance and step-cutting to reach his summits. In addition to these difficulties was the problem of Aila, who by this time was rather jaded after eight months of expedition life. The climbs did not contribute greatly towards the advancement of our survey, but they gave Macdonald the satisfaction which mountaineers can

understand, and he gained his personal answer to the question, 'What is it like to look down a fluted Himalayan ice face?'

On our last night in Khumjung a dance was held in our honour, and the magic of its rhythm put a strain on the floor-boards of Urkien's house for most of the night.

Next morning the wives of Dawa Tensing and Changjup joined forces to entertain us. We were told how they appreciated the kindness being shown to their husbands in the United Kingdom, and they regretted that they had no way of returning this hospitality in a far-off land.

'Please tell their hosts to come to Khumjung so we can entertain them . . . write to Evans Sahib asking our husbands to come home fast.'

This time the arak flowed as never before, and when the time of our leave-taking came, white scarves were placed round our necks as a symbol of eternal friendship. We made our way through a village of sad-smiling faces to the last mani wall which marks the entrance to the valley—this time our exit.

The pass above Khumjung was enshrouded in mist. Before the view was obliterated I glanced backwards at the sturdy houses nestling in their peaceful valley, with the black forms of the yak now grazing in their home pastures. I was not quite sure why I was leaving Khumjung, and wondered if anywhere else in the world could ever be to me so much a home.

In Namche Bazar, between visits to our friends' houses, we gathered the rugs, silver and porcelain cups we had purchased. Then we departed (see plate 16).

Near Lukla we had a domestic crisis and Aila Tensing was replaced by Tashi, a man of extensive expedition experience, great personal charm and exceptional strength. He had been invited to join a small expedition which was unfortunately cancelled, but from the grape-vine extending over twenty-five days' march from Darjeeling he had picked up a rumour that there had been no cancellation. Now he intended to go to Kathmandu, and thence to Darjeeling to join his party. By accompanying our group he had the protection which most Sherpas prefer when travelling outside their own district. There have been many violent robberies

committed in the lower regions of Nepal. Added to this advantage was the welcome knowledge that he would be travelling with a fast party which would pay him wages if he carried a load.

At Chaunrikarka we gathered all the equipment used when operating from Lukla. To have our surplus supplies carried to Kathmandu would cost two shillings per pound weight in wages, so I gave away most of the contents of our boxes. In no time the population of several villages had gathered in one quarter-acre to see what I would discard. Empty tins and old socks were given away, and then I went through the medical kit. Those men who had been on expeditions received the most simple of our first aid items—anyone else would not know what to do with them. I gave Tashi a tin of codeines.

When we were ready to leave I received an invitation to a nearby house. On entering perhaps the last of many hundreds of Sherpa houses I hit my head on a roof beam and lay dazed on the floor for a few minutes, returning to my full senses with the chang being poured into my mouth and overflowing down my neck. After a few minutes I asked Tashi for a codeine for my headache. He handed me his tin.

'This was a full tin. At least thirty have gone in five minutes.'

'Everyone has a headache.'

'How many have you had, Tashi?'

'Only four.'

The journey out to Kathmandu was fast and full of interest. The advanced changes had brought autumn to Solu Khumbu, and besides the new colour of the leaves and the crisp clearness of the horizon, we were cheered by the knowledge that with the decline of the monsoon floods the bridges on the shorter track to Kathmandu would probably have been repaired.

One day below Chaunrikarka, Urkien had a second encounter with a cobra slithering across our track. This time he was more fortunate. With a carefully aimed stone he broke its neck and brought an end to its earthly existence. The Sherpanis were not convinced by the lifeless appearance of the reptile, and even when I crushed its skull to a bloody pulp they hung back in fear.

'It is not the end, Sahib. The snake will return to life in some other form.'

As we approached Junbesi I recalled the story of Urkien's wife on her only approach to the bright lights of the outer world. She once descended as far as Junbesi and she never wants to come that far again. I understand her feelings.

As the Dudh Kosi bridge had been restored, we were able to avoid the days of high passes and gorges that had been necessary on the inward journey between Junbesi and Ghat. Our main concern was to reach India as soon as possible and to have four days there as tourists before our ship sailed from Bombay. The days and miles rolled by under the superb calm of a placid autumn. From every high point on the track an array of sparkling ice summits stood out on the clear horizon.

The party suffered mildly from the continuous pressure of high speed. When we were five days from Kathmandu a mail runner for the Lhotse Expedition told us that Dawa Tensing and Changjup were not far behind him. At five o'clock we pitched camp on a spur which was covered with stately pines. A quarter of an hour later there was a boisterous call from up the track, and there were our two friends, unmistakably returned from a visit to Britain. Both wore the clothes typical of Sherpas who have been on many expeditions—rubber-soled boots, windproof trousers, flannel shirts and string singlets, but in addition each head was topped with a beautiful new trilby from Scotland. Dawa's hat was particularly fetching. His long pigtail was tied round his head and the hat perched high on top of it. The last time Dawa and Changjup had seen Enid was at a banquet held in London 'to celebrate Kangchenjunga'. Now they greeted her with, 'Memsahib, you are much thinner!'

In the congenial atmosphere of a mild evening and a glowing fire we sat and talked of the countless things which had happened since we separated below Kangchenjunga. Changjup had been a monk in Tibet, and chose to leave his career after meeting a young lady (see plate No. 2.) who crossed into Sherpa country with him, as his sect would not permit its monks to marry. Being one of the newer and poorer residents of Khumjung he had not been able to

build up stock or property. His small single-storied house was always open to the numerous Tibetan traders who crossed into Nepal. Changjup's devoted services to many expeditions had earned him his visit to the United Kingdom.

He told me how my wife had driven them swiftly through crowded traffic, of the noise of the London tubes, the wonders of a motor car factory, of the speed of flying and the expanse of sea which he had never seen before. The Mersey tunnel, the hotels in North Wales and a quiet corner in Scotland all received special mention. I was glad that he had not been too rushed and had absorbed enough to keep him talking for a year. I asked Changjup if he had helped Evans to build a house. His negative reply was a disappointment to me. A year earlier, Charles and I had had ideas of building a Sherpa house in a remote corner of Wales. It would have rock walls and the nearest we could get to the correct yak-dung plaster. A chimney would not be allowed and a chang brew would be fermenting continuously in a dark corner. The house was still only a dream.

Dawa Tensing, described by the Swiss 1952 Everest Expedition as the 'King of Sherpas', is an older man whose wise counsel and wide experience have been a guide to many men, both Sherpa and European. He, like Evans, has still not set foot on the summit of a major Himalayan peak, but these two have probably done more than any others to open the way for summit parties which have been held in reserve to pass through.

Dawa listened quietly to Changjup and then in his own way he told me of the tidiness of England, the well-kept parks, the ducks floating on the lakes, the orderliness of the main highways, the colourful traffic lights, the neatly trimmed hedges and the efficient disposal of all waste matter. He mentioned only two features he had seen of the mechanical age—the wonder of pressure cookers stamped out from flat plate (he knew the cookers from climbing expeditions) and the machine which milked the cows.

From Enid and from many letters received I learned of other impressions they had had on their tour. Dawa had described London as 'the village where nobody talks to you'. When asked

what he would like to take back to Khumjung, Dawa replied: 'a good English cow'.

Changjup commented, 'Don't be silly. How would you get it in the plane?'

In the morning, as I watched our friends depart northwards towards Khumjung, I wondered what improvements they would take to the village and how they would adjust themselves to the darkness and smoke of their own homes. They made me wonder how I would return to Western civilisation. Dawa and Changjup had been specially chosen for the flight to England. They seemed to be the more educated and mature of the Kangchenjunga Sherpas. We guessed that they, more than any others, would return impressed by all they saw, but would then be able to bring some enlightenment into their own homes, unhampered by dissatisfaction with their own lot.

In order to arrange accommodation, transport and customs in Kathmandu I left the party and completed the last three days' journey in two, thus doing the whole trip in eleven days. The weather was perfect and I slept in the open under a canopy of stars, with the moonlit summits to the north glistening and beckoning. While travelling alone I had time to think of our surveying results. A vast expanse of country had been covered, and the material on our films and field books would be enough to make a very extensive and detailed map which unfortunately has little immediate value. The most difficult task, plotting the work from the photographs, still had to be done and it could go on for an indefinite period.

The tracks seethed with coolies and the heavily cultivated country supported thousands of people. The filth, disease and poverty in the Kathmandu valley were prevalent enough to occupy an army of willing and qualified workers. Who at the seat of Government has the opportunity to care about the vigorous minority race living beside the Tibetan frontier? The Sherpas need schools, medical assistance and a voice in the land, but all those who dwell in the Kathmandu valley have not yet obtained these. Will the Sherpas look over their northern frontier for these things?

The rush of business in Kathmandu left us only one day for sight-seeing in that city of contrasts. Our friends at the British Embassy assisted us through many difficulties and eased our transition to another world. Tashi learned that his expedition was not coming and that the grape-vine from Darjeeling had been false. We arranged for his further employment with a small party which would be in the area for two weeks. The sadness of departure was softened by giving Urkien and Gyalgen rides in a Dakota out to India, and thence by train to Raxaul. Gyalgen had the treat of his life. He had never seen a plane or a train before, and in one day he went through all the emotions of a small boy seeing his first engine. Then, amid the incredible noises and smells of an Indian railway station, we parted company with the best of companions.

GLOSSARY

- angya* baby girl.
angyi baby boy.
arak liquor distilled from potatoes.
atta flour from millet, buckwheat and maize, in varying proportions.
chang beer brewed from barley, maize, millet or rice.
chorten Buddhist shrine.
Dumji ceremony at beginning of main growing season.
dzubjock (dzopkio) male of half-breed of yak and cow.
dzum female of half-breed of yak and cow.
gompa Sherpa temple.
khola river.
la pass.
lama Buddhist priest.
mani wall low wall of prayer stones invariably passed on one's right.
nack female of yak species.
tsampa flour made from roasted ground barley.
yak a sturdy small breed of cattle.
yeti 'abominable snowman'.

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