# THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY

## *TRAVELS IN NEPAL*

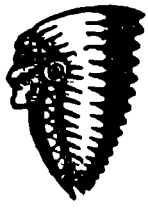
KARL ESKELUND

# THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY

*A Journey into Nepal*

by

KARL ESKELUND



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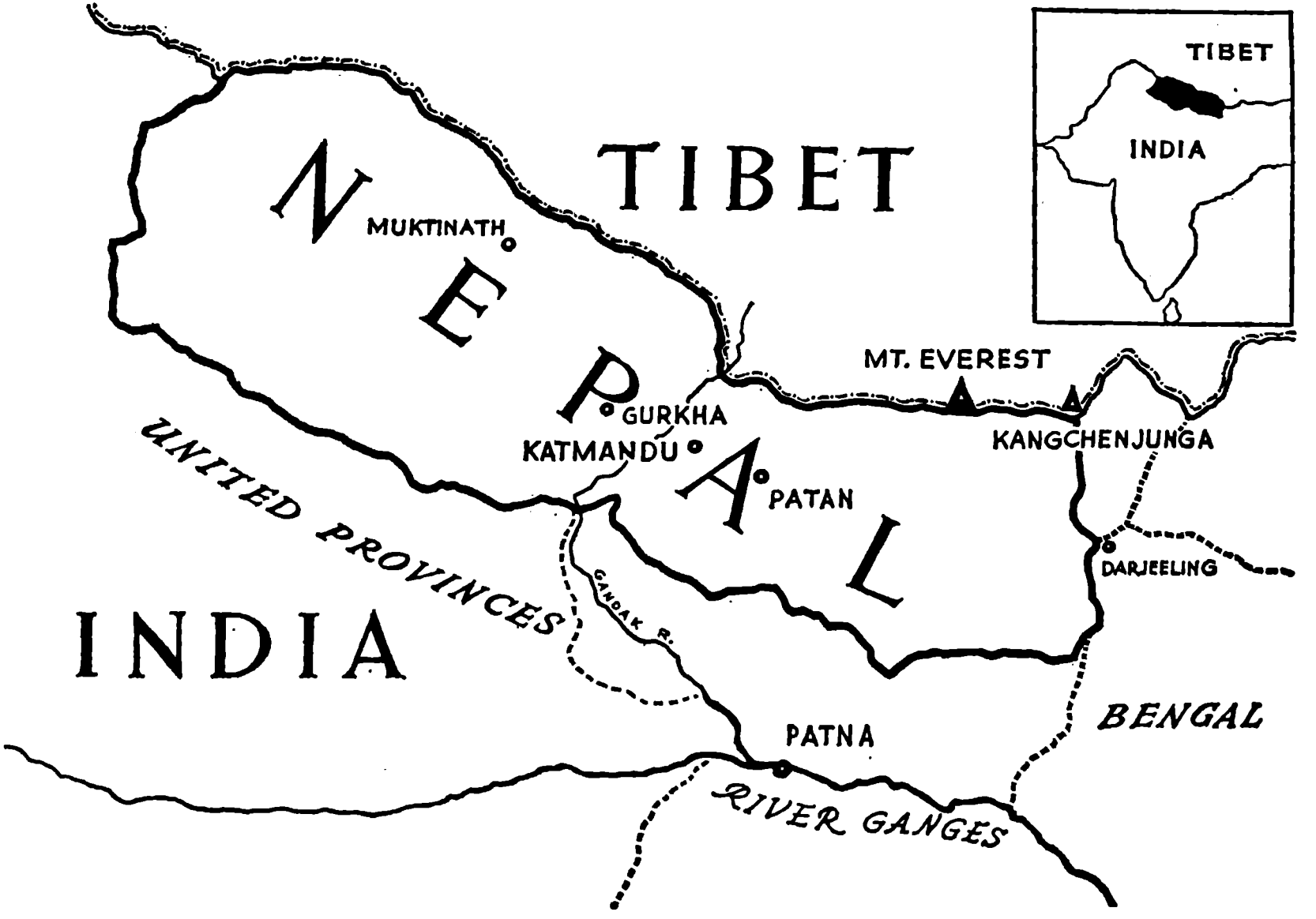
TIBET
INDIA
TIBET
NEPAL
MUKTINATH
GURKHA
KATMANDU
PATAN
MT. EVEREST
KANGCHENJUNGA
DARJEELING
UNITED PROVINCES
GANDAK R.
INDIA
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RIVER GANGES

# CHAPTER ONE

WHEN DID IT really begin—this enchanted feeling that we were on our way into the past?

It cannot have been at the border, for there is no border between India and Nepal. One country just flows into the other without so much as a hedge or a ditch to separate them. Not even a guard was in sight that morning when we came clattering in a horsecart which we had hired at the terminus of the Indian railway. We had to hold on with both hands, for the clumsy vehicle swayed and bounced on the miserable dirt road.

"Where do we get our passports stamped?" I shouted into the ear of the driver, a young Indian who sat perched on the shaft with his thin legs dangling down. He knew a little English, but now he looked questioningly at me. Passports?

"Yes—and we have to get through the customs, too."

"No customs."

"But there must be! We're going to Nepal . . ."

"This Nepal."

A naked boy on the roadside stared at us as he turned over cakes of cowdung he was drying in the sun. Some huts lay cluttered under a gnarled old tree which stood like a giant parasol in the flat, dusty landscape. In the distance we could see the vague outlines of mountains whose peaks were lost in clouds. Somewhere up there, nearly a mile above sea level, was

Katmandu, capital of Nepal. That was our destination—but how were we going to get there?

Before leaving Copenhagen, we had made enquiries at all the large travel bureaux. They had brochures from just about every country in the world, but not a single one from Nepal. Anyway, they asked, why were we so keen on going to an unknown country, which probably had no accommodation whatever for tourists?

We explained that we wanted to go to Nepal just because it was so remote and unknown. Finally we found out that there was a railway—the only one in the country—which ran from a point near the Indian border to the foothills of the Himalayas. Some years ago, construction had been started on a road which was to go from the terminus of this railway to Katmandu, but no one knew whether it had been completed. If not, we would have to walk.

Though we searched high and low for reading material about Nepal, we had been able to find only four books. One of them described the harrowing experiences of a man who walked to Katmandu in the 16th century. He was the leader of a caravan which brought a load of amber and tortoiseshell to the king of Nepal. Every night he had bonfires lit around the camp to keep wild animals at bay, but even so most of their rice was stolen by elephants. Leopards ate two members of the party, a third was gored by a rhinoceros. When the poor merchant finally reached his goal sick and starving, the journey had lasted nearly three months . . .

Good thing we are not in a hurry, I thought—but the next moment I looked at my watch. I knew it was a couple of miles from the terminus of the Indian railway to the place where the narrow-gauge Nepalese railway began.

" We won't make the train today," I exclaimed, for it was supposed to leave at 8 a.m. and the time was already 8.15. The driver told me not to worry, as the train never left until the station-master had finished his breakfast. Some houses appeared ahead, and a few minutes later we drove into a

village and stopped on a square in front of the tiniest train we had ever seen. It looked as if there would have been ample space for it in the window of a toyshop.

We had evidently arrived in the nick of time, for the stationmaster was picking his teeth. He was an elderly gentleman in pyjamas, but at the sight of us he put on his cap. Now he was in uniform.

We were not to sit with the common passengers, he told us in a queer, sing-song English. Bowing gallantly, he led us to a Lilliput coach which had pink leather upholstery. This was a kind of royal carriage, he told us when it had been coupled to the train. It used to belong to the Rana Prime Minister, once the mightiest man in Nepal . . .

An ear-splitting whistle made us jump in our seats. Small though it was, the locomotive knew how to assert itself. The engine driver stuck his grimy head out and shouted that he was ready to go, but the stationmaster ignored him completely. He pointed past the crowded third-class coaches. Could we see the tall stone building which rose above the surrounding huts? It was also pink and had formerly belonged to another Rana, a relative of the prime minister. That was *before democracy* . . .

*Before democracy,* I repeated. What did he mean by that? And who were these Ranas who were so addicted to pink?

My ignorance amazed him. Were there really any people who had not heard of the Ranas? They were a large family who had held sway in Nepal for more than a hundred years. During this time, the various kings had been their prisoners and all power had been concentrated in the hands of the prime minister who had always been a Rana. All important posts in the country had been reserved for his relatives. To prevent the people from getting dangerous ideas from the outside world, the Ranas had prohibited foreigners from entering the country and had closed the ancient trade routes connecting Tibet with India. In those days the borders had been strictly guarded.

The station-master had also held his job under the Ranas. He told us how once a week the local Rana official had held court and handed down judgment from a brick throne in front of his palace. He had kept a harem of more than fifty girls—less would not do for a Rana.

But that was all " before democracy ". Seven years ago, the Ranas had lost power through a revolution. The king was freed, the frontier re-opened—that was why we could come to Nepal, why the stationmaster now and again got a chance to chat with foreign travellers . . .

Again the locomotive whistled, and we heard impatient shouts from the other carriages. The stationmaster shrugged regretfully. It might be all right with a certain amount of democracy, but too much of it could be dangerous. The old respect for a public official was gone. He saluted us, descended with dignity to the platform, and blew his whistle. The train started with a jerk.

We leaned back in the soft seats, ready to watch the landscape sweep by—but then a tray with glasses of tea was thrust in through the window. We protested in sign language that there was no time for tea drinking, the train had already started, but the vendor just smiled and handed us a glass each. He strolled alongside the train while we sipped the tea.

Though the locomotive groaned and panted, I doubt whether we did much over five miles per hour. At the first stop it had to have a drink of water. Soon after the train had stopped, a slender man with high cheekbones came to our coach. He was not as dark as the others, and while they were wrapped in white, gauze-like cotton material, Indian fashion, he wore a collarless shirt which hung loosely over his hips. Around his waist was a broad leather belt, his long trousers were shaped somewhat like riding pants, and on his head was a black cap, worn high on one side. It was the first time we saw a Nepalese costume, and we both thought it very handsome.

He was sorry to be the bearer of an unpleasant message, he

said in slow, scholarly English, with the same sing-song accent as the stationmaster. The engine driver had asked him to tell us that the locomotive was over-burdened. Like the proverbial camel, it refused to carry an extra straw. From now on we were going uphill, so our coach had to be left behind.

Together with the English-speaking Nepalese we moved into a third class coach. He was a merchant by name of Joshi and was also on his way to Katmandu. Just now he was coming from a town situated about fifty miles east of the capital. There was no road between the two cities, however, and to walk over the mountains would have taken him a couple of weeks. It was much faster to go south to India, travel westward by the Indian railway, cross back into Nepal, and continue northward by train and bus to the capital.

Bus—then the highway to the capital had been completed, I exclaimed happily. Oh yes, that was more than a year ago. Only a couple of cars had managed to get through after the grand opening ceremony, he continued. Then there were some landslides, and several months passed before the damage had been repaired. Naturally, after that there had been a new opening ceremony . . .

" It is our only highway, so we are very proud of it," Mr. Joshi said with a faint smile. He explained that if you put together all the stretches of jeepable road in Nepal it would not add up to much more than three hundred miles.

The locomotive seemed to have pulled itself together after we moved on. The swaying coach creaked and groaned; I suppose it was never oiled. We noticed that in some places, ditches had been dug across the embankment on both sides of the track. Was that for drainage purposes?

No, those were car traps, Mr. Joshi replied. The highway to Katmandu does not begin at the border, but only where the Nepalese railway ends. Automobiles coming from India are supposed to be transported on flatcars over this stretch, but to save money the chauffeurs drive on dirt tracks along the railway. In some places these tracks are so poor that the

drivers prefer to drive on the railway embankment. This infuriates the director of the railway. The cars ruin the roadbed, he charges, so the maintenance crews are put to work digging trenches—which the drivers soon fill up again.

This war has been going on ever since the road to Katmandu was completed, Mr. Joshi said with a gleam in his eyes. He not only looked different from the Indians, I thought —he also seemed to lack their inferiority complex. Most Indians resent any critical remark about their country, but he spoke openly about the backwardness of Nepal. It even seemed to amuse him, and I later found this true of most Nepalese I met. Was this due to the fact that Nepal, unlike India, had never been ruled by a foreign power?

While we chatted, it suddenly turned dark and branches whipped against the train. We had reached the humid jungle belt where the heavy clouds from the Bay of Bengal unburden themselves as they ascend the Himalayas. Monkeys swung themselves from branch to branch, screeching angrily because they were being disturbed, and stork-like birds flapped into the thicket.

This is one of the richest big-game reserves in the world. Most of the Indian maharajas, and even the Duke of Windsor, have been here as hunting guests of the Ranas—but they were never allowed to visit the capital. The game was driven together by armies of beaters and shot from the backs of some four hundred tame elephants.

But that was all "before democracy". After the revolutions, these hunts have become a mere shadow of themselves. Today, there are only about fifty tame elephants left.

With the aid of the United States, the Nepalese Government is now trying to clear a part of the jungle for agriculture. Although it is larger than England and has only about eight million inhabitants, Nepal is over-populated. With the exception of the lowland along the Indian border, the country consists almost entirely of rugged mountains.

Some weeks later we met an American who was teaching

the settlers in this jungle area to drive tractors. His face was covered with fresh scars; souvenirs from a clash with a leopard. He told us that his bungalow was on the edge of the jungle, and one evening he had seen the animal prowling outside his bedroom. He fired at it from a window and at daybreak went out to see if he had hit it. His servant went with him. Each of them carried a gun.

Suddenly the wounded leopard pounced upon him from a tree. The servant screamed and fled. The American fell on his back with the leopard on top of him. It tried to get at his throat, but he managed to push it away with the gun which he held with both hands.

The animal leaped back at him, clawing his face and shoulders—a doctor later had to sew about thirty stitches in him. He could not get the gun in position to shoot. He had a pistol behind him in his belt, but could not get at it.

A couple of minutes of struggling exhausted him completely. He was about to give up, when he felt something hard against his side. It was the pistol which had slipped out of his belt. With a final effort he grabbed it and fired into the mouth of the leopard. Then he fainted.

When he recovered consciousness the animal was dead. He managed to crawl back to the bungalow and sent for the nearest doctor who lived about thirty miles away. Some hours later, a Nepalese policeman came to arrest him. The authorities had heard of his encounter with the leopard and charged him with having shot it without a licence. At first they threatened him with jail, but he was let off with a fine . . .

As the train rattled through the jungle, Mr. Joshi leaned over and chased a mosquito away from my wife. Be careful, he warned her—this was one of the most dangerous malaria districts in India . . .

In India, we exclaimed. But weren't we in Nepal? Of course, he replied, but somehow he never thought of the lowland as a part of Nepal. It used to belong to India, but about

a hundred years ago the British had given it to the Nepalese as a reward for having helped them to put down the Great Mutiny.

"Only after we have crossed the mountains do we get to the real Nepal," Mr. Joshi said. Down here the people were Indians and spoke Hindi, an Indian language.

Early in the afternoon we arrived at the terminus of the thirty-odd-mile long railway line. The travellers who were going on to Katmandu boarded an open truck. Chi-yun and I were permitted to sit in front together with the driver, Mr. Joshi and a woman passenger.

The view from the road is said to be magnificent, but I sat with my heart in my mouth and had eyes only for the next curve. The road went up and down like a switchback railway. A straight stretch of forty or fifty feet was enough to cheer me up. Chi-yun had quickly swallowed a seasick pill and also given one to the other woman, but even so they both turned green in the face.

It was almost dark when we pulled up in front of a mountain hut. On this road no one dares to drive at night. We must have been high up, for the air was thin and cold. The only light in the hut came from a stove with some pots steaming over it. Dinner was ready for the travellers.

My wife is cautious by nature and wanted to have a taste first, so they gave her a ladleful in a clay bowl. Even the teaspoonful which she ate made her gasp, for it was as peppery as fire. She was about to pour the contents of the bowl back into the pot, when the cook gave a yell. He pointed angrily at the bowl and began to jabber away.

Mr. Joshi at once came to our aid. He explained to Chi-yun that she had nearly contaminated all the food in the pot.

"But I didn't even touch the food in the bowl, I used a teaspoon," she protested unhappily. That made no difference, he said. She had held the bowl in her hand, that was enough, for foreigners were considered untouchable. He added apologetically that he did not take such things seriously, but most

Nepalese did—especially those who lived close to India.

We had plain rice for supper and then crawled into our sleeping bags. All night long I was driving in my dreams, and once when I woke up I heard Chi-yun whimpering. At daybreak we ate a bowl of rice and drove on. Craggy mountain peaks appeared in the mist, barren and forbidding in the chilly air. When the car had finally crawled to the top of a range, the road would immediately start going down again. Nepal consists of an endless number of valleys, each one an isolated little world of its own. Wandering traders bring salt and tea, but otherwise the inhabitants are self-sufficient. They even make the crescent-shaped knives which all the mountain people of Nepal wear in their belts—*kukris,* they are called.

The fog became so thick that we could hardly see the bonnet of the car. For hours we fumbled our way ahead in first or second gear. When the driver finally stopped for a rest, Chi-yun and I hurried out. It was a relief to stretch our legs.

I had just remarked that it was getting lighter, the sun would soon break through. The next moment we gasped and took a step backward. A gust of wind had chased the fog away, and suddenly the earth seemed to dissolve in front of us. We discovered that we were standing on the edge of a rock jutting out above a tremendous valley. It was circular in shape, and later we learned that it was about fifteen miles across. Behind the valley towered the Himalayas, crowned by blinding white snowpeaks. A couple of hundred feet below us began the terraces; like endless steps that led all the way down to the bottom of the valley where rivers wound like silver ribbons between the towns.

"But those are pagodas!" Chi-yun pointed towards the town that was closest to us. "And the buildings have slanting roofs, just like in China!"

The driver tooted to call us back to the car, but on the rest of the trip we hardly noticed even the steepest curves. We

chattered like excited children—look, a man came trotting along the road, a basket swinging rhythmically from either end of a pole which rested on his shoulders. A while later we passed two perspiring men who carried an old woman in a sedan chair. Then we saw a mountain of faggots which seemed to be moving by itself. No, two brown legs appeared underneath it, and as we swept by in a cloud of dust we saw that the huge load was hanging on a man's back by a broad leather strap around his forehead. He stepped aside and stood still, bent forward to counter-balance the weight of the load. We both thought of the Maya Indian who had been our neighbour in Guatemala. He had the same broad cheek-bones and stiff black hair, and when he brought in the harvest from his fields he had also carried it by a strap over his forehead.

In a field next to the road stood a man with something that looked like a small, shiny shield. All he wore was a loincloth. Again and again he raised the shield above his head and drove it into the ground with all his might.

He was digging, Mr. Joshi explained. The spade is unknown in Nepal, and in most parts of the valley it is prohibited to use bullocks for ploughing, as they are considered sacred like in India. There are no other beasts of burden, so the farmers turn the soil with a hoe-like iron plate. They can do it by the hour. Later I tried it myself, but after five minutes I was exhausted.

From a hilltop, a four-faced Buddha looked down on us. A flock of monkeys scampered across the road. A while later we passed a Hindu temple with pyramid-shaped towers. I asked Mr. Joshi whether the Nepalese were Buddhists or Hindus.

"That is a difficult question to answer," he replied. "I would say that we are both at the same time."

After driving across the valley for half an hour we came to the capital, Katmandu. We found it hard to believe that here lived a fourth of the valley's five hundred thousand in-

habitants. It looked like an overgrown village. After driving past some large palaces on the outskirts we entered a labyrinth of narrow, filthy alleys. Our northern European villages of the Middle Ages must have looked and smelled like this, I thought. I remember that I felt like tearing the driver's hand away from the horn. His continued tooting spoiled the atmosphere of the place, but I realized that he had to do it. The streets were crowded with people; sometimes they had to jump into doorways to make room for us. If we had met another car, one of us would have had to back out.

The tall, leaning buildings were mostly three-storied and had tiled roofs. The door and window frames were carved into exquisite patterns and figures. Merchants sat cross-legged on the floor inside their stalls, surrounded by their wares. I saw one take handfuls of salt from a grey pile in front of him and weigh it, using stones for weights.

A Tibetan with a long queue hanging down his back turned around to gape at us; it looked as if he had never seen a car before. From one of his earlobes dangled a turquoise as large as a walnut. A moment later the driver had to jam on his brakes because some cows were lying in the middle of the street, chewing the cud. They did not move until our wheels practically nudged them.

We stopped on a little square in front of a four-storied pagoda. Under the eaves we could discern painted wooden figures, half man, half beast. Some women were selling vegetables on the stone steps leading up to the building. Bare legs stuck out under their voluminous blue skirts, heavy silver necklaces hung down over their colourful blouses. They had Mongolian features and smiled and nodded to my Chinese wife as if they recognized her. Everybody looked happy in this valley—what a contrast to India, where the bitter, age-old struggle for life seems to have made people weary and disheartened.

From the pagoda came the tinkling of a bell. The sun was setting. A woman walked slowly up the steps carrying a brass

tray with flowers, fruits and butter for the gods. A big bird took off from the top of the pagoda and disappeared with heavy wingbeats in the direction of the snow-capped mountains.

We heard a voice behind us. It was Mr. Joshi. " Now," he said with a smile, " we are in Nepal."

## CHAPTER TWO

A COUPLE OF weeks after our arrival in Katmandu we received our first mail from home. There were quite a few letters to answer, and for more than an hour I pecked away at my portable. When I was through I went up to the kitchen to look for my wife.

Yes, *up*, for we live in a palace which has living quarters on the first and second floors, kitchen on the third. All the houses here in town are arranged like that. The foreigners find it most impractical, but not so the Nepalese. The kitchen is the most sacred place in their home, so of course it should be closest to heaven . . .

My wife and the cook were standing by the stove, talking. Good thing they have become friends again, I thought. A few days earlier he had suddenly threatened to resign. Quite unintentionally, Chi-yun had hurt his pride by asking him to do the dishes on his assistant's day off. He did as he was told, but afterwards he made it clear to us that he was of high caste—his friends and relatives would despise him if they found out he did such menial work.

Chi-yun had promised him that it would never happen again. She was relieved when he agreed to stay on, for he is an excellent cook. In a way this is surprising, since he never tasted the food he makes. For several years he has been working for foreigners who taught him to use all sorts

of ingredients which are unknown to him, or tabu according to his religion. That is why he refuses to taste any of the food which he cooks for us.

I now asked Chi-yun if she wanted to go to the post office with me. She did, so we told the cook to have the food ready for us in half an hour. On the way down the stairs I asked her what we were going to have for lunch.

" Meatballs."

" Ugh!"

This may sound as if I am fastidious, but I am really quite fond of meatball, only they must be made the Danish way, half beef, half pork. Here in Katmandu you can't get either. Until six years ago there was capital punishment for killing a cow. " After democracy " the laws have been made more humane: now you get only fifteen years' imprisonment. No pigs are raised, as they are considered unclean, so only the poor water buffalos become victims of the butcher's axe. They are neither sacred nor unclean—but their meat remains dry and stringy no matter how many times you put it through the meat grinder . . .

" Karl!" shouted Chi-yun who had gone ahead of me and was already out in the garden. " Hurry up—here they are again!" Shouting and waving our arms, we chased four cows out of the garden. Then I took a deep breath and walked over to the gardener. Time and again we had told him to keep the gate closed. We got practically nothing out of the garden, for all day long those damned sacred cows came wandering in and ate every sprout that appeared. Now I would give him a scolding he could remember!

The gardener was down on his knees, weeding. When I approached he rose and put his palms together in salutation, simultaneously tilting his head to one side and smiling gently.

Cursing under my breath, I turned abruptly and walked over to my bicycle. You just can't scold a man because he earns himself a little merit in heaven by helping some cows

to a meal—especially not if the garden in question belongs to a heathen foreigner.

We have rented the bicycles for a couple of shillings a day. Now, Danish bicycles have foot brakes. These were English and we had not yet become used to the handbrakes, so we pushed the bicycles down the winding garden path. As I closed the gate I looked up at the palace. You big monster, I thought. We had lived there ever since our arrival, but somehow we still did not feel at home in the house. All attempts to create a little cosiness were lost in the cavernous, hall-like rooms. And no wonder, for they are more than twenty feet high.

The palace belongs to a young man of the Rana family. He used to live here with his wife, but when they had a baby they found the place too small and moved to a larger one. The palace was then rented out to three foreign families who got eleven rooms each. We had taken over our flat, with servants and all, from an English couple who had gone home on leave . . .

Some children stopped their game of tag to watch us mount our bicycles. Only five or six years ago, a bicycle would draw a crowd in Katmandu, I have been told. This is not surprising, for even in the beginning of the century, the wheel was virtually unknown in Nepal. What would have been the use of it in a country where there were only mountain paths?

The first motor car, which appeared here in the 'twenties, was carried over the mountains by coolies. Of course it belonged to the Rana Prime Minister. Great crowds looked on when the shiny contraption for the first time came roaring down the road which he had built solely for his own use; it connected his palace with Government headquarters.

During the next few years all leading members of the Rana family acquired motor cars, but the common people were not even allowed to walk on the asphalt road which by now had been extended to about five miles. A merchant

who dared to import a rickshaw for his own use was jailed. To ride on wheels was a Rana monopoly. Only after the revolution did the bicycle begin to make inroads in Katmandu . . .

I rode up alongside Chi-yun. Imagine that it was snowing in Denmark now, I shouted—all the letters from home had told of snowbound roads and the first influenza epidemic. My wife was wearing a thin summer dress and I was in shirt sleeves and shorts, but even so we perspired. The climate is just about perfect here in the valley. The sun shines about three hundred and forty days a year and the temperature seldom goes below fifty or above eighty—it is too cold for malaria, too warm for snow, as the Nepalese say.

We live on the outskirts of Katmandu, surrounded by gardens and patches of rice fields. Today a light haze made it seem as if the pagodas and temples of the city were floating in the air. Of the mountains we could see only the snow-covered peaks.

The neighbourhood bull was lying in the middle of the road, sleepily chewing the cud. In the beginning we had made a wide circle around him, but then we discovered that the old fellow is so good-natured that he even permits the kids to pull his tail. Every morning he goes begging from door to door. In front of every house he stops and snorts. It may sound menacing, but that is his way of saying that he is hungry. If the people don't bring him some garbage, he goes in and looks for it himself.

We crossed a wide, green parade ground; the Nepalese claim it is the largest one in the world, and they may be right for all that I know. No lawn mower is needed to keep the grass short, for this is done very efficiently by large flocks of sheep. The animals are driven down here by Tibetan shepherds who come every autumn and stay for the winter. They live by selling their sheep; slowly the flocks dwindle, and by spring, when they return to the highlands, none are left.

When Chi-yun and I are on foot we are often stopped by

these Tibetans: big, crude-looking people who laugh like children and seem to have no inhibitions whatever. They finger the cloth of our coats, making loud comments in their own language. My wife's nylon stockings make them shake their heads in wonder—it is cloth, yet one can hardly see it.

Many of them walk around with a little prayer wheel which looks like a kind of toy rattle and contains only Buddhist scriptures. Once I heard a foreigner ask a Tibetan if he really thought it did any good to turn the prayer wheel.

"Who knows?" the Tibetan replied with a smile, adding that it surely could do no harm.

From the parade ground we entered a dusty alley which was one of the main thoroughfares of Katmandu. Crowds of people were moving along in either direction, but it was impossible to tell whether the traffic was supposed to go on the right or on the left. The pedestrians jumped aside when an open jeep—one of the only two taxis in the capital—came roaring from a side alley. Apart from the jeeps, the entire fleet of public conveyances for the city consists of six bicycle-rickshaws . . .

I have often wondered why Nepalese drivers always go full speed around the corners! They also do this in the mountains: the sharper the curve, the faster they seem to go. Some say it is because they want to get the danger over with as quickly as possible.

Fruit and vegetable vendors displayed their wares on the steps leading up to the temples. Some farmers were selling rice from sacks, holding the scales in their hands. On one of the many squares was a group of hill people with loads of firewood on their backs. They stood motionless, bending forward slightly, while prospective customers walked about among them and fingered the wood appraisingly.

Chi-yun rode rickshaws in her childhood and has never really felt safe on a bicycle. The many people frightened her, so she jumped off and walked through the throng. I

rode on, shouting to her that I would meet her at the post office.

Suddenly a boy darted out in front of me, forcing me to turn so sharply that I nearly fell. He grinned and ran on, happy in the thought that he had got rid of any evil spirits which might have been following him. Some Nepalese take even more drastic steps to escape invisible pursuers; they cross the path of speeding motor cars. Shortly after our arrival a man had lost his life in this way. I wonder whether the evil spirit shared his fate.

Hardly had I recovered my balance before a woman stepped out in the middle of the lane and came straight towards me. I rang my bell vigorously and stepped on the brake—but my feet merely kept turning the wrong way, for in my excitement I had forgotten that this bicycle only had handbrakes. I yelled a last warning, the rooster crowed, but the woman walked on steadfastly. She just did not understand that anything could move faster than a pair of legs.

I swung desperately to one side—and the next moment everything turned upside down. My front wheel had landed in a hole that was more than two feet deep and I had made a somersault. Now a skinny little dog jumped out of the hole, yelping with fright. It had been disturbed in its midday meal, for down the bottom of the hole was a red-painted stone to which people sacrificed rice, butter and other edibles. There are more than a dozen of such stones in the capital, all of them hidden in holes. Many years ago they must have been level with the streets, but the deposits of the old city have slowly heaped up around them.

People could not help smiling at the sight of a foreigner rolling in the dust. As I scrambled to my feet, a woman appeared in the window above me and emptied her dust-pan. Garbage pails are not used in Katmandu; all refuse is thrown into the street.

Like most Orientals, the Nepalese are born with a certain tact, but this was too much for the bystanders. They burst

out laughing. When Chi-yun caught up with me I was cursing the stupid Nepalese who had no notion of traffic rules. She smiled. A couple of months ago I had cursed the noise and the rushing cars in Copenhagen and longed to get away from it all. Had I forgotten that?

I gave her a furious glance and rode on without saying a word. A moment later I reached the post office which was housed in a one-storied building next to the old royal palace. Two ragged soldiers were asleep on the floor just inside the door. A man rose from a rickety table in a corner and said in halting English that he was the postmaster, at my service.

I handed him the letters. After weighing them casually in his hand, he said it would cost fifteen pais each to send them. Fifteen pais is the equivalent of about twopence.

No, that just couldn't be, I protested. All the letters were going to Europe, by air mail, so the stamps must cost a good deal more.

"All right, sixty pais one piece," he declared with an eloquent gesture; he did not do things by halves. While I was sticking on the stamps, a barefooted man came in and fetched a canvas bag. The postmaster helped him to hoist it upon his back. He carried it by a strap over his forehead; it must have been heavy, for he had to bend forward to keep his balance.

This was the mail for a valley in eastern Nepal, the postmaster said, adding that it took a week to walk there. How much did a mailman earn? The sum which he mentioned was equivalent to about thirty shillings a month, and there was no pension.

"Say, I hope you won't send *my* letters off by runner!" I remarked jokingly. The postmaster laughed heartily and saw me to the door, where Chi-yun was waiting for me. We had better hurry home, she said: lunch must be ready by now.

Hardly had we got on our bicycles again before we were hailed by an American acquaintance, a friendly fellow who

worked for one of the foreign-aid programmes. He was in a talkative mood. How were we, why did we never come to see him, and hadn't the weather been wonderful lately?

I cut him short by telling him that we had just been to the post office and were on our way home for lunch.

"Not this post office, I hope," he exclaimed.

"Of course! Why not?"

He burst out laughing. Had we really not been told that the Nepalese post office could not send letters abroad? Nepal had joined the World Postal Union some time ago, but the Government had not paid its first yearly instalment yet, so Nepalese stamps were not recognized outside the country. If we wanted to send letters abroad we had to mail them from the Indian Embassy which had its own post office.

The Indian Embassy was in the other end of town. I rushed back to the post office and banged the postmaster's table. What was the big idea? He knew very well that he could not send my letters out of the country! I wanted them back, right away.

Looking as if he were on the verge of tears, the postmaster opened a cupboard full of letters. Mine were on top. Please don't be angry, he said as he handed them back to me. He did indeed know that Nepalese stamps were not recognized abroad, but how could he say no to foreign visitors who came to mail their letters? To do so would be unthinkably rude, he concluded with a disarming smile—and anyhow, Nepal might pay up any day now, in which case he could send off all the letters . . .

Chi-yung and I were completely out of breath when we finally came home. The water buffalo meatballs were scorched, but that did not make them much worse than usual—and it was comforting to know that the letters were really off, with Indian stamps on top of the Nepalese ones.

## CHAPTER THREE

"HERE COMES THE KING!" someone shouted. All conversation stopped; people hurried over and formed a lane which reached all the way from the entrance to the golden throne at the end of the hall.

Practically all the members of Katmandu's upper class were here, for this was one of the grandest receptions of the season. The Russian Ambassador from New Delhi played host. India and England are the only nations which have permanent diplomatic representation in the Nepalese capital, but once a year the Russians send an aeroplane full of diplomats and vodka to show that they are also in the game. They had borrowed the royal throne room for the occasion.

Closest to the entrance stood the Soviet Ambassador in evening dress. He towered above the Nepalese Prime Minister, a dumpling with a walrus moustache. Next to him was a row of Nepalese officers in flashy black and red uniforms. Their long sabres scraped the floor and they seemed top-heavy with medals and orders. Then came some high Nepalese officials with their sari-clad wives, more Soviet diplomats, and a selection from the foreign colony. I was standing at the very end of the line, half hidden behind a tall English journalist who had just arrived in the capital.

The expectant silence was suddenly broken by a deafening noise. The royal band, which was standing on the lawn in

front of the palace, had started playing the National Anthem. A car drove into the spotlight which illuminated the entrance and stopped.

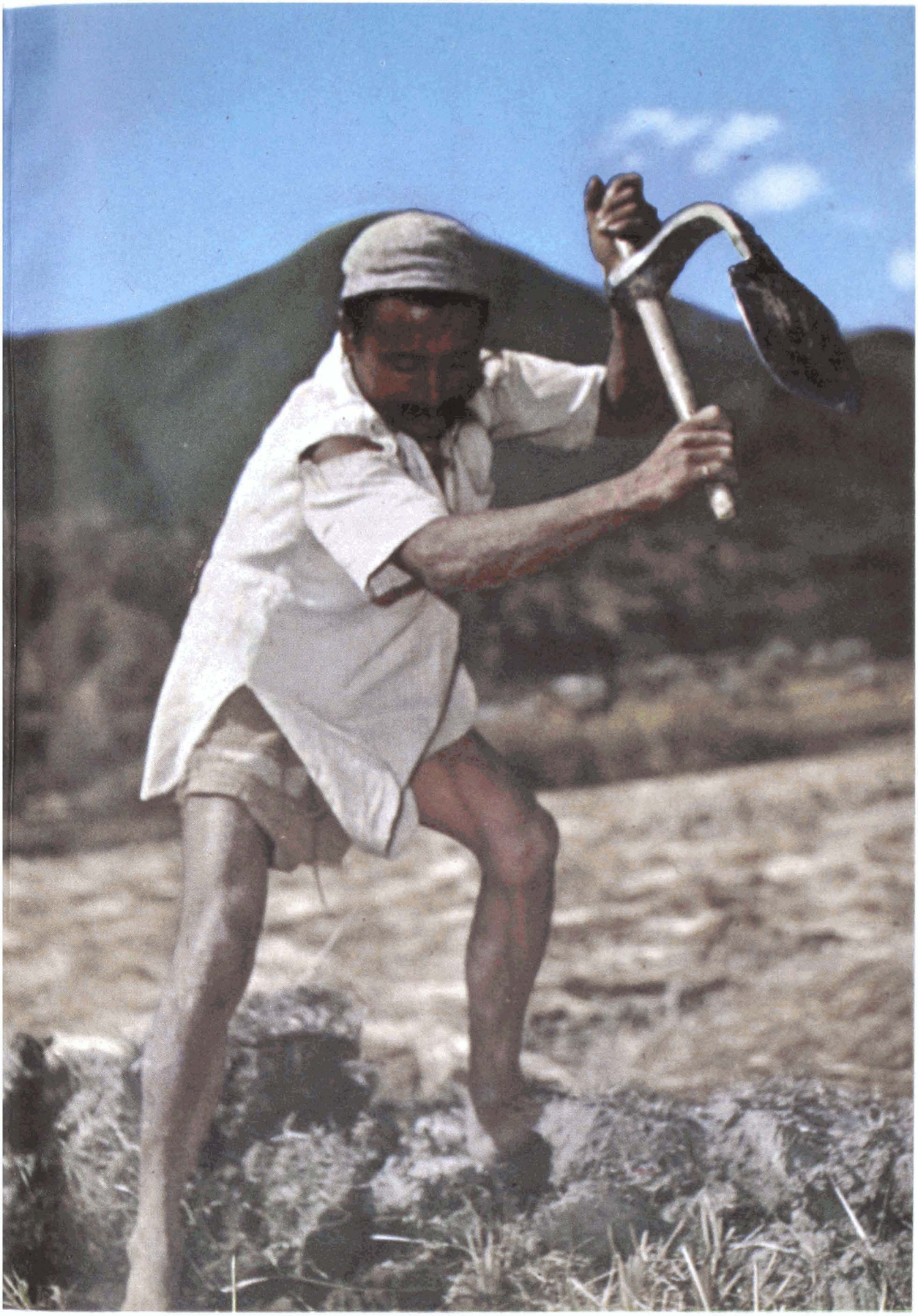
I stood up on my toes and strained my neck. At first I thought that a royal aide had stepped out of the car, but no one else came. The slight, nondescript man who slowly mounted the steps was the King of Nepal.

"I say, why do you suppose the chap is wearing dark glasses in the evening?" the English journalist whispered. "And look at his clothes—rather unsuitable for the occasion, if you ask me."

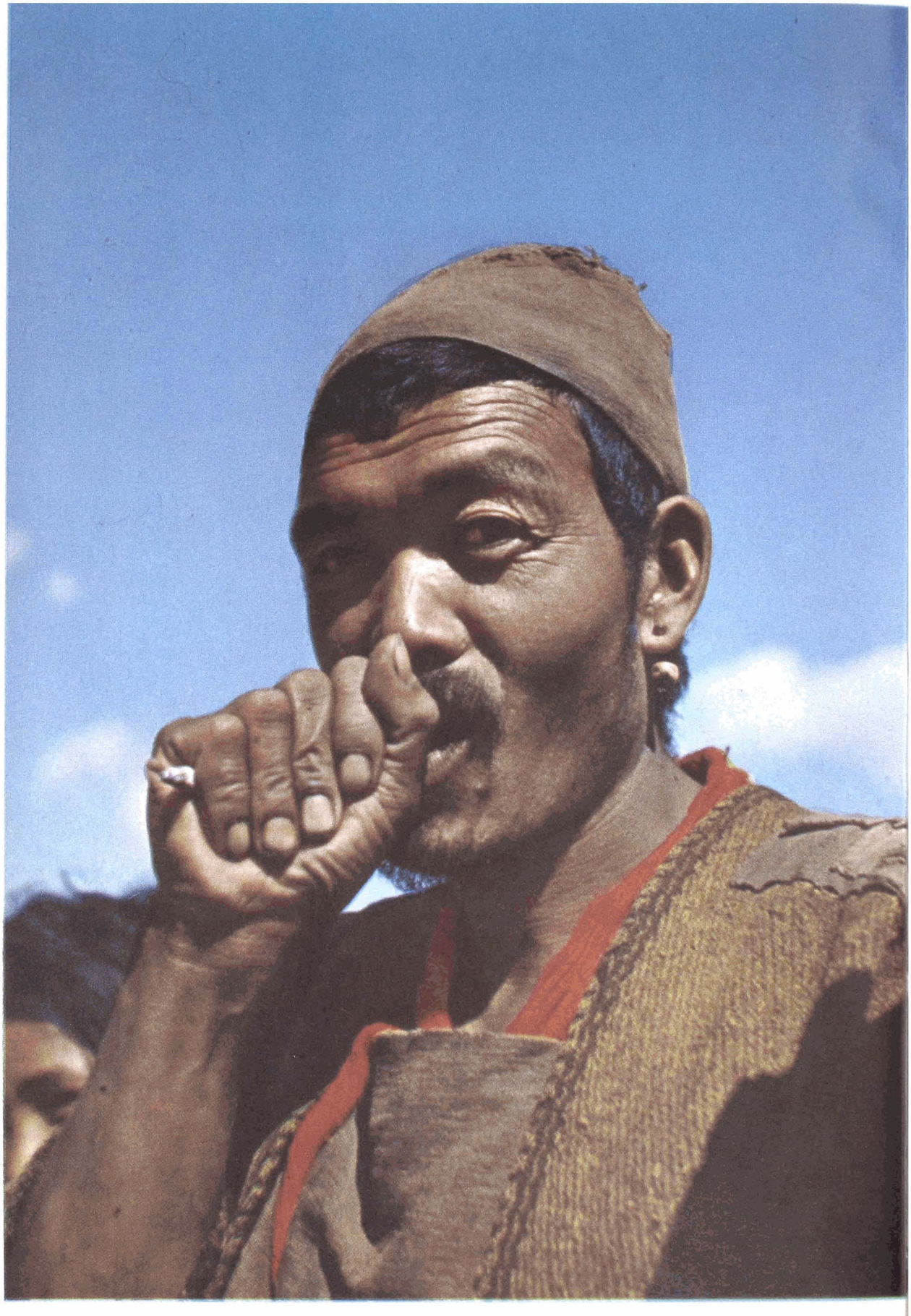
The young King looked as if he was wearing Dior's latest trapeze style. His brown sports jacket flared out over his long, white Nepalese shirt which again stuck out like a ballet skirt over the tight-fitting trousers. He nodded right and left as he advanced between the two rows of people, but his face was like a mask. It seems to have affected King Mahendra that he grew up as a prisoner of the Ranas and never learned to deal with people. One has a feeling that it is still a trial for him to be under public scrutiny; perhaps that is why he usually hides behind a pair of dark glasses.

To my disappointment he did not seat himself on the throne, but sank down into an easy chair which stood next to it. The band switched over to a blaring march. The two rows of people dissolved and the conversation started again, floating up towards the ceiling from where two Hindu gods in stucco looked angrily down upon us. The walls were decorated with intricate patterns and fantastic figures in many colours. Behind the King hung a collection of ancient Nepalese weapons and the stuffed heads of tigers and rhinoceros, but the most striking of all were two large, snarling brass animals which stood on guard near the throne. Their eyes were as big as saucers, and in the centre of each pupil glowed a red electric bulb.

"I'm about ready for a drink," the English journalist said. He looked about him with growing consternation. "I



1. In many parts of the valley it is prohibited to make the oxen pull a plough, so the peasants turn their soil in this manner.



2. When a Nepalese smokes he sucks the smoke through his fist – to avoid wetting the cigarette, which is always shared by several mouths.

say, they do serve alcoholic drinks here, don't they, or have we been trapped?"

His face brightened at the sight of some servants who entered through a side door, carrying large trays full of glasses. I walked determinedly towards a long table which groaned under the weight of great platters full of fried chickens, pheasants, cold cuts and curry-rice. On the way I was intercepted by a fellow from the Foreign Office who said he was very sorry, but no one was allowed to begin eating before his Majesty.

Fortunately, someone soon afterwards brought the King a tray of food. At once there was a race for the table. I got there first. Judging by the speed with which some of the Nepalese ate, they had also skipped dinner that evening in order to preserve their appetites. Many of them followed their native custom of eating with their fingers. Gnawed-off bones they threw on the floor, and when they were through eating they put their plates under the table and hurried over to get something to drink.

The English journalist came by with a glass in his hand. Neat vodka was being served, he told me. "In beer glasses," he added, visibly impressed. "Some of the Nepalese pour it down like water!" He took a huge swallow from his glass and walked on.

When I could eat no more, I looked up and saw a thin, middle-aged Nepalese who was standing by himself, leaning against a pillar. He neither ate nor drank, just watched the other guests. One usually meets the same people over and over again at cocktail parties and receptions in Katmandu, but I could not remember having seen him before. I liked his sensitive face with the kind, sad eyes, so I went over and introduced myself.

He spoke English quite well and told me that he was a poet—but that was not how he earned a living, he added with a shy smile. He owned a piece of land which he leased to some tenant farmers. Without it he would have starved,

for no book of poetry had ever been published in Nepal, and the local papers could not afford to pay a penny for contributions.

I had already told him that I was a journalist. Now he asked me which country I came from. He gave a start at my answer. For years he had been hoping to meet someone from Denmark, he said excitedly. "Now I finally have a chance to learn something about that great countryman of yours, Hans Jorgensen . . ."

His face fell when I told him that there were thousands of Danes with that name. "But this Hans Jorgensen is the only man in the world who has written a book about my language," he continued. "He is famous among my people —that is, among those of us who have gone to school . . ."

*My people,* he had said—presumably he meant the Nepalese people? No, he replied. "There are two kinds of Nepalese. If you include the whole country there are many more, but here in the valley there are two main groups. My people is the larger one. Once we were the rulers of the valley, but we have been oppressed for hundreds of years . . ."

A burst of laughter came from some Nepalese officers who had raised their glasses. A man walked past us with a handful of Russian cigarettes which he was stuffing into his pockets. The band played a cowboy melody.

"And then there are the others," the poet added with a sweeping gesture which seemed to take in all those present. "Our oppressors . . ."

I was completely at a loss and begged him to excuse my ignorance. I had been in Nepal only a few weeks, I explained, so there were many things I did not know about the country, but I was eager to learn.

"I thought that journalists only came here to learn about the abominable snowman," he said with a twinkle in his eye. Then he began to tell me about the first people who thousands of years ago came wandering through the mountain passes and settled down in this valley. From the north

came primitive, almost savage nomads with broad, flat faces, coarse hair and rather light skin. The people from the south were smaller, darker and more civilized. They knew how to cultivate the soil and brought the rice plant to Nepal.

At first these two widely different groups probably fought each other, but later on they inter-married. Thus the Newar people came into being—" my people," the poet said. " When you have been here longer you will be able to tell the difference between us and the others. We have our own customs and architecture, our own language."

Now that he had told me I could see that he himself was a mixture. His high cheekbones and yellowish skin came from the Mongol; his gentle, rather deep-set eyes and high nose were Indian . . .

When the first people arrived, most of the valley was under water. All the handed-down legends tell how the gods cut through the southern mountain range with a gigantic sword so that the masses of water rushed down over northern India.

A new culture almost invariably comes into being when two races are mixed, and the valley was an ideal place for such a development. The climate could hardly have been better. There was virtually no danger of floods and droughts, and the mountains protected against invasions. The soil was inexhaustibly fertile. Even today, the farmers only have to dig further down when the fields begin to yield less. Instead of clay, they came to a rich, black layer of mud—the deposits of milleniums at the bottom of the former lake. This they spread out on the surface of the land the same way we do fertilizer, and the next harvest will be bountiful.

It is believed that various Newar dynasties ruled in the valley from around 2000 B.C. The first historical account of Nepal comes from a Chinese who, some time in the fifth century, went to India via Tibet and " Ne-pu-erh ", as he called Nepal. The Chinese had suffered much hardship on his journey across the Tibetan highlands where the people were still living in the stone age. He was happily surprised

to find a highly civilized community in the remote valley. In a report to his Emperor he told admiringly of the Newar goldsmiths and architects—adding, however, that he found the Nepalese tricky and unreliable.

Today the towns of the valley are among the most primitive in the world, so it is hard to believe that in bygone ages there were paved streets with fountains and sewers and that many houses had running water. A Chinese pilgrim who came some years later was very much impressed by a palace which, he said, could house ten thousand people (travellers from China seem to have been addicted to this round figure). Close to Katmandu was also a famous nine-storied pagoda with gold-plated roofs . . .

Here the poet interrupted his story to point out that perhaps the pagoda did not, as it is generally believed, come from China. One finds the pagoda depicted in the oldest Nepalese reliefs and stone carvings. He thought it quite possible that this style of building originated in the valley and only became known in China with the spread of Buddhism to the north and east.

" I like to believe that my people have made a small contribution to the culture of the world," he said shyly.

The architects of old Nepal must have been good, for in 1246 a Newar by name of Aruibo was called to China to build temples and palaces for Kublai Khan, and for many years he went on plying his craft in the Middle Kingdom.

" Today we don't have a single university in the valley," the poet said. " But in the fourteenth century there were three. In addition, the temples and monasteries were gathering places for learned men not only from Nepal, but also from India and Tibet. The valley must have been a wonderful sight in those days—there were seven large towns, and in each town were more than a thousand temples."

In Europe religious wars were raging, in Indian, Buddhism had been suppressed, but in the little valley in the Himalayas there was complete religious freedom. Here, Buddhists and

Hindus worshipped in the same temples and celebrated each others' religious festivals.

Some Christian monks who came to the valley were also allowed to preach their religion. For many years there was a Catholic church close to Katmandu. Perhaps it was the intolerance of the Christians which prevented their religion from taking roots in the country. When the monks finally were expelled, only seven Christian natives accompanied them; they don't seem to have made any more converts in the valley.

"But we have burned more than three thousand pagan books and manuscripts, all the work of the devil," one of the monks declared proudly.

"Those were ancient Newar writings," the poet said, shaking his head sadly. "My people had great respect for learning; they must have been shocked by such conduct."

Prior to the expulsion of the Christians, many Brahmin priests came to Nepal from India. In those days the valley was divided into three kingdoms. From ancient times the rulers had fawned on Indian culture, just as the courts of northern Europe once imitated everything French. The Brahmins soon succeeded in convincing the kings that the gods looked with disfavour upon a caste-less society . . .

A crash made me turn round. Two men were quarrelling, and one of them had broken his glass in anger. The guests were standing about in groups, talking loudly. An official stood respectfully behind the chair of the King who was looking thoughtfully into space, or perhaps he was dozing behind his dark glasses.

"Do you want to hear more?" the poet asked. I nodded eagerly. "We came to the caste system," he continued. "It became the curse of my people. It split us up at a time when we needed unity more than anything else."

The Newars were divided into sixty-four professional groups or castes, with the Brahmin priests on top of the social strata and shoemakers, butchers, blacksmiths, and sweepers down

at the bottom as untouchables. Members of the royal family came under the warrior caste which was the second highest, but it was again divided into several sub-castes. This division caused suspicion and enmity among the rulers and led to civil war. A few generations after the arrival of the Brahmins the valley was divided into twenty-two little kingdoms which were constantly fighting each other.

As long as the Newars had been united, the primitive tribes outside the valley had not been a serious menace. Now they began to encroach from all sides. At first they came only as marauding bands, for the barbarians also lacked unity among themselves, but towards the end of the eighteenth century they found a strong leader.

Prithwi Narayan was a hardy, ruthless military man who knew how to exploit the weaknesses of the refined and rather degenerate Newars. "I will just tell you about one of his deeds," the poet said. "That will give you an idea of what he was like. Do you know Kirtipur?"

"Yes!" I replied, happy that for once I did not have to appear ignorant. Some days ago, Chi-yun and I had bicycled to this little town which lies on top of a hill a few kilometres from the capital. The place had disappointed us; there were only about a hundred ramshackle houses and the remnants of a city wall.

When Prithwi Narayan began his career, Kirtipur was one of the largest and richest towns in the valley. Its inhabitants were renowned for their bravery on the battlefield. At this time, Prithwi Narayan had made himself master of an area near Kirtipur. He made alliances with a couple of the neighbouring kings who had a grudge against the ruler of Kirtipur.

Prithwi Narayan used his allies to keep the other kings of the valley in check while he concentrated his forces against Kirtipur. First he sent the city an ultimatum. If it did not surrender he would raze it to the ground, and not only that. He would also mark every man in Kirtipur for life.

Kirtipur chose to fight, and all Prithwi Narayan's attacks were repelled. He decided to lay siege to the town, for he realized that until it had been subdued he could not hope to make himself master of the rest of the valley.

The siege took longer than he had expected. Twelve years passed before the starved defenders finally laid down their arms. After they had been forced to tear down their temples and palaces, they were led one by one to the executioner. He did not cut off their heads, however—only their noses . . .

" Is that really true?" I exclaimed.

" Certainly—he even had the noses weighed afterwards." One can imagine the consternation of the people of the unconquered kingdoms when they heard that the resistance of the Kirtipurians had cost them eighty-six pounds of sliced-off noses. At the same time, Prithwi Narayan changed the city's name to Naskatipur—The City of the Noseless Ones. It is said that one can still find old people in the valley who use this name. And nearly half a century later, when an Englishman visited Nepal, one of his bearers was a noseless man from Naskatipur.

Prithwi Narayan did not meet much resistance after the fall of Kirtipur. Each time his warriors came to a new town he sent the defenders an ultimatum, adding ominously that this time he would not be content with noses only.

Katmandu, the present capital, was taken in 1768. Prithwi Narayan and his soldiers sneaked into the city on a dark night when the defenders were asleep after celebrating the most important Newar festival of the year. They felt quite safe, for an unwritten law banned fighting on this particular night. But Prithwi Narayan did not care a fig for laws, whether written or unwritten.

Although it all happened so long ago, the poet's voice trembled with emotion. " When the last of the kingdoms fell to Prithwi Narayan, all culture in the valley was smothered. The pagodas, the temples and palaces are only the last vestiges of our glorious past. The new ruler dismissed

all Newars from public positions. Our schools and universities were closed. The conquerors wanted to change us into peasants and petty traders, and they succeeded . . ."

He was interrupted by the band which again played the National Anthem. I caught a glimpse of the King as he walked down the steps and disappeared into his car. The party at once began to break up. Some of the guests were so unsteady on their feet that they had to be helped to the door by servants.

"Good night." The poet bowed to me. "Excuse me for having talked so much. I hope I have not bored you."

On the contrary, I assured him—"and say, you must not cheat me of the ending."

He shook his head slowly. "There is no real ending. Prithwi Narayan's successors followed in his footsteps. A little more than a hundred years ago, the King was made a prisoner of the Rana Prime Ministers, but that did not in any way improve our position, for the Ranas were also barbarians . . ."

He glanced quickly about him, as if afraid of being overheard. "I have heard that some people gain strength from being oppressed," he continued in a lower voice. "But this has not been true of us—we have only stagnated. Our stone cutters and wood carvers forgot how to use their tools, for the new masters cared little for art. No new buildings have been erected except the Rana palaces—by the way, what do you think of them?"

"I live in one myself. I wouldn't call it beautiful."

He nodded. "I am probably the only Nepalese here tonight who agrees with you. There are no other Newars present—we are practically never invited to official parties and receptions. All the others here belong to the new upper class—most of them are Ranas, and they are very proud of their palaces . . ."

We walked slowly towards the entrance. "But we have forgotten Hans Jorgensen!" the poet exclaimed. "I learned about him shortly after I came out of prison—yes, I was

imprisoned for six years before the revolution. The reason was that I had used the word freedom several times in a poem which I read to some friends. Somehow, the Ranas found out about it."

He raised his hands as if to push away an unpleasant thought. " When I was released, a friend showed me Hans Jorgensen's book. Though it was a scientific study of our language, it had had to be smuggled in from India. In those days it was prohibited to possess foreign books with the exception of a few which had been approved by the Government.

" You can't imagine how encouraging it was to see it. For two centuries, virtually nothing had been written in the Newar language. Only fragments were left of our old literature, my people had become illiterate. And there was suddenly a Newari-English grammar—somehow, it seemed like a link with the outside world, it showed that we had not been entirely forgotten . . ."

When my wife and I had returned to Denmark I tried to find out a little more about Hans Jorgensen. I learned that he had been a lonely, unhappy scholar who, for reasons which even his closest friends failed to understand, had devoted his life to the study of Oriental languages, especially Newari. When he died four years ago at the age of sixty-eight he was completely unknown in his own country . . .

When the poet and I had reached the steps, the band suddenly stopped playing and the spotlight was switched off. As we stood there in the moonlight, we could clearly see the mountains which towered around the valley.

" That is Kirtipur over there," the poet said, pointing southward. We looked at each other, and then we both smiled, for without realizing it I had put my hand to my nose.

## CHAPTER FOUR

SHORTLY BEFORE EIGHT o'clock one evening there was a knock at our door. Our servants had already gone home, so I went down and opened it myself and was greeted by a small, but well-built Nepalese in western clothes. It seemed to me that there was something familiar about his thin face with the strong, black eyebrows.

"I hope that you have not forgotten me," he began in slow, precise English. "I am Ishwar—it was I who had a toothache . . ."

"Oh, sure—now I remember . . ." He was a student at the Katmandu College; we had met at a small temple which people in the capital go to when they have toothache. They hammer a nail into an ancient wooden god which is already full of rusty spikes. Some think they transfer their pains to the god in this way, others believe it arouses his pity, but most people agree that it helps.

"You were wearing Nepalese clothes that day at the temple," I continued. "That was why I couldn't recognize you right away. Come on in."

No thanks, he replied, explaining that this was a holy evening. "There will be a big feast at my home. You told me that you want to learn something about Nepalese customs. I have been permitted to invite you to attend the feast. Can you come right away?"

I hurried upstairs to Chi-yun who was changing her

clothes. We had been asked to the home of some American friends, but now I told her that she would have to go without me. Ever since our arrival at Katmandu I had been trying in vain to get an invitation to a Nepalese home. This was too good a chance to be missed.

A while later Ishwar and I were walking through the city. The streets of Katmandu are usually dark and deserted at this hour, but tonight the air seemed to be alive with fireflies. They were tiny oil lamps, held by people whose faces we could not see, for after darkness the Nepalese like to wrap a cloth around the head to protect themselves against the cold. They don't mind having bare feet as long as their heads are covered.

Many windows were also illuminated by oil lamps, for tonight was a kind of New Year's Eve. Ishwar explained that according to the official Nepalese calendar we were in the year 2014, but the Newar people, to whom he belonged, have their own calendar. To them, this was the last evening of the year 1078.

"Excuse me a moment . . ." Ishwar went over to a small temple which seemed to be made of pure gold, but it was actually brass. Outside the entrance hung a bell which he rang by pulling a rope. Everybody who came by stopped to ring the bell.

"The god in this temple is the most popular one in Katmandu," Ishwar explained as we walked on. "It is said that when you ring the bell, your wishes are heard in heaven."

He told me that there was a double celebration this evening, as the Newar New Year's Eve fell on the same day as the conclusion of the most important religious festival of the year. This festival lasted for five days, and on each day people worshipped a different object. On the first day they had worshipped crows . . .

"Crows!" I repeated. "What a strange idea—why crows?"

He did not know exactly, but it was an ancient custom. How did one go about worshipping crows? Well—you thought of them with kindness in your heart, you prayed for them in the temple, and some people also fed them. That was not so easy, however, for bitter experience had taught the crows to keep a safe distance from human beings, so most of the food was eaten by other animals. The day after the crows, it had been the turn of the dogs to be worshipped.

"That explains why some dogs had garlands of flowers around their necks the other day," I broke in. "My wife and I wondered about it."

Ishwar smiled. "So did the dogs, I think. They cannot understand why people suddenly feed them instead of kicking them as they usually do. On the next day, cows were worshipped, and yesterday people worshipped themselves."

"How does one do that?"

Ishwar thought for a moment. "It is a kind of self-purification. You try to think of yourself as a minute and unimportant part of the whole universe. You tell yourself that God is everywhere and that all living things have the same right to exist as you do. This makes you less vain and self-contained—do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so."

We walked past another temple; in Katmandu there is one in every block. The flickering light from hundreds of oil lamps fell upon the statue of a god who stood above a large altar. His face expressed a strange mixture of peace and sensual desire. Children ran about and played among the grown-ups, some of whom were kneeling in prayer while others placed offerings of fruits and flowers before the god.

"And tonight, all women are going to worship their brothers," Ishwar continued. "One does that by—but no need for me to explain, you will see for yourself in a little while."

A moment later he grasped my arm and quickly pulled me past the entrance of a narrow alley. Then he drew a breath of relief. Why the sudden hurry? I asked.

" You would only laugh at me if I told you," he said shyly. " No Europeans believe in such things."

I solemnly promised not to laugh. " This is the Valley of the Lonely Ram," he began. " The ram is a stone down at the bottom of a hole, but it comes out every night. Many people have heard it. This is not so bad, but if you see it you will die within a few days. You don't believe in such things, do you? I didn't before—modern people are not supposed to be superstitious—but then something happened a few months ago. I saw a ghost."

He came closer to me and lowered his voice. " I saw it quite clearly. One of our neighbours had just died, perhaps it was he who reappeared. My little brother was with me, we were on our way up the stairs. First there was a frightening sound, almost like the hooting of an owl. Then I saw something round, like a big ball, which came rushing down towards us. My little brother saw only a dark, twisting line . . ."

" Well, but then it was only your imagination playing a trick on you," I said, relieved, for the story had had an eerie effect on me here in the dark street. " Otherwise you would both have seen the same thing."

" No—you must remember that my brother is much smaller than I. He saw only the lower part of the ghost, I saw the head. We both screamed, and then it was gone . . ."

Again he took my arm and we went through a low, tunnel-like corridor under a house. I held my breath as we entered a pitch-dark backyard; without my flashlight I could not have avoided stepping in excrements which were lying all over the place. Ishwar led the way up a steep, ladder-like staircase. On the first floor was a hatch which he closed after us. Without knocking he opened a door and we entered a small, bare room, illuminated by a dozen or so oil lamps. Two men and a boy sat cross-legged on the clay floor. They wore white

Nepalese clothes and a kind of fool's cap which hung down to one side. One of the men rose and came towards me. He looked like Ishwar, but was taller, more serious, and had a fine net of wrinkles around his mouth and eyes.

" This is my eldest brother," Ishwar said.

He took a quick step forward. " No—do not shake hands with him!"

I had held out my right hand, but quickly withdrew it. The brother pressed his palms together under his chin and bowed slightly. The two others, who were also Ishwar's brothers, greeted me in the same way. Ishwar smiled nervously.

" My eldest brother has just gone through a cleansing ceremony," he explained. " I am modern, such things do not matter to me, but if you had touched him he would have had to do it all over again."

He glanced hesitantly at his brother who had re-seated himself. " I have to ask you to take your shoes off," he continued without looking at me. " It is a silly custom, but my brother has never gone to school, he is old-fashioned—don't worry, nobody else here understands English."

He asked me if I could manage without a chair; otherwise he would borrow one from their neighbour. When I assured him that it was quite unnecessary he fetched a pillow for me. For a moment he stood with his head bowed. I could see that there was something he wanted to say.

" I—I know that you want to see a Nepalese home. You told me so that day in the temple. I would like to show you the whole house, and if my father had lived I don't think he would have minded. He was broad-minded, but now my brother is the head of the family. He does not dare to go against any of the old customs, so I could only get permission to take you into this room. I am very sorry . . ."

He went upstairs to change his clothes. I sat down, crossing my legs. Out of a corner of my eye I glanced at the elder brother who was staring fixedly at an oil lamp in front of him.

He looked as if he were in his early thirties. The responsibility for the family seemed to rest heavily on him.

The other brother had a kind round face, but he too avoided looking at me. I hope my presence won't spoil the evening for them, I thought, but then I glanced at the boy. He was watching me with wide-awake eyes; we both smiled and winked at each other. There was at least one more who was amused by the situation.

We heard creaking steps outside. The door was opened and three young women entered, followed by Ishwar. An intoxicating fragrance arose from the flower-filled brass trays which they were holding in front of them. Their colourful saris rustled as they bowed to me, but they carefully avoided looking at me.

" These two are my sisters," said Ishwar who was now wearing white clothes like the others. " And this one . . ." He pointed at the third girl, a mere child whose soft, feminine curves were barely discernible under the silk, " Is my wife, Sumitra."

At the sound of her name she bowed her head and two dimples appeared in her cheeks.

" How old is Sumitra?" I asked.

" Sixteen." Ishwar sat down next to the boy. " I am twenty-one. Many Newars marry much earlier, but I would have preferred to complete my studies first. I would also have preferred to choose my own wife . . ."

The three girls knelt down, each in front of one of the brothers, and began to draw circular patterns on the floor with coloured chalk.

" But my brother does not look at it like that," Ishwar continued. " He has been married before, his first wife died. When he was going to get married for the second time—that was about a year ago—he said to my brother and me that he had also found a wife for each of us."

" Then it was he who chose Sumitra?"

Ishwar nodded.

" Did you know her already?"

" I had seen her at the temple, but I had never talked to her."

He explained that young Newars seldom know the one they are going to marry. The girls, who had finished drawing the patterns and were now decorating them with flowers, kept stealing glances at us while we talked. Ishwar's wife must have made a mistake; she winced under a sharp reprimand from the eldest brother.

" Why did your brother want you to get married?"

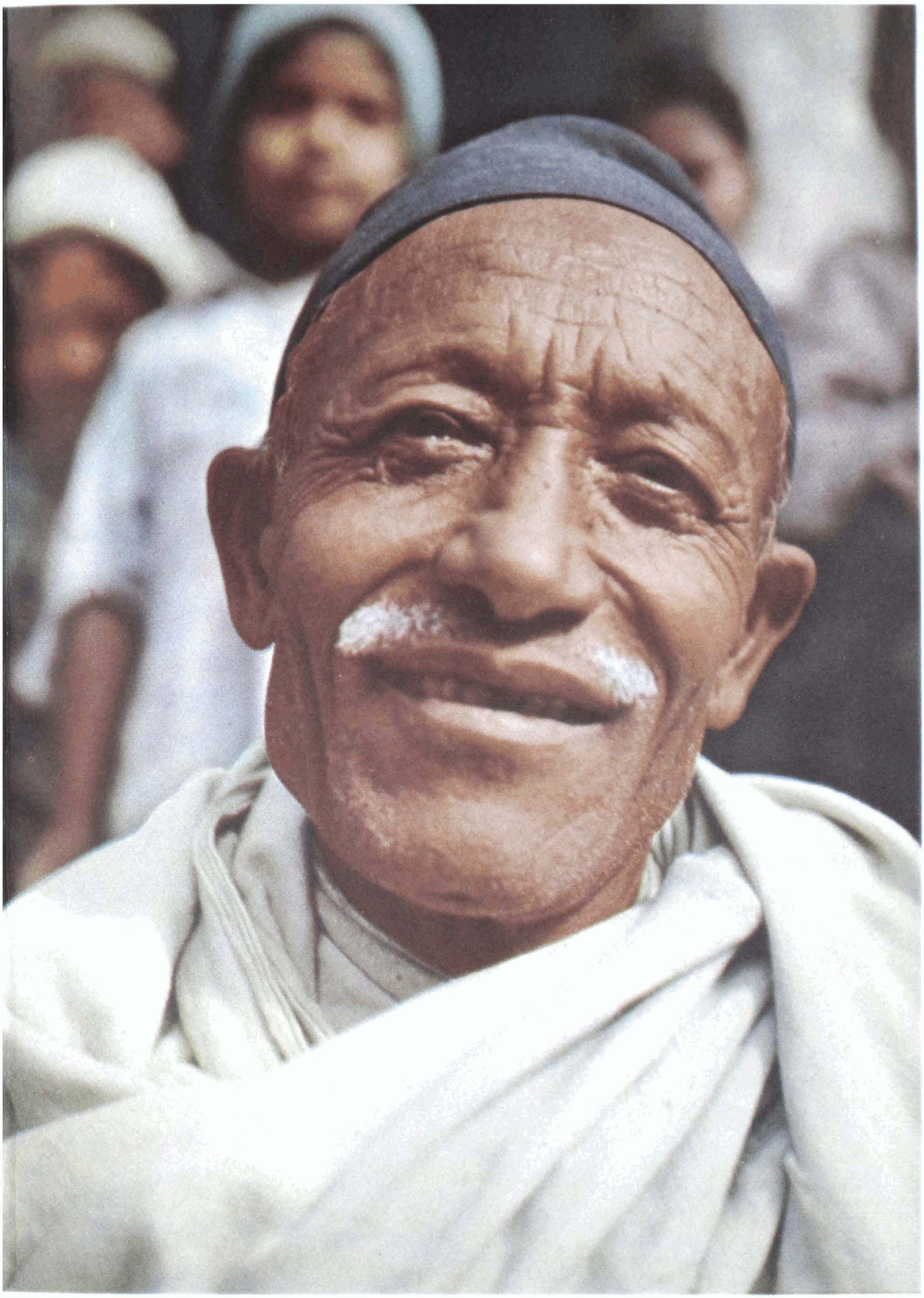
Ishwar smiled, a little bitterly I thought. " He said that sooner or later my brother and I would have to get married anyway. A wedding is a costly affair, you cannot manage for less than a couple of thousand rupees. He thought it would be senseless to waste money on three different feasts when we might as well get it over with at one time."

The designs in front of the three brothers were done and the girls began making one for the little boy. He began to protest because the circle was not as large as those drawn in front of the others, but was silenced by a glance from the eldest brother.

I asked what the designs symbolized. Ishwar replied that he would have to ask his brothers, but when they had talked it over for a while they had to admit that they did not know. They excused their ignorance by saying that the Newars followed so many old customs which they did not understand any more.

Perhaps the woman knew, I suggested. Ishwar replied that he would ask his wife, but some other time. " I could not very well do it now. She would be very embarrassed, and my brother would also find it unsuitable."

He said that a Newar woman should keep completely in the background during the first few years in her husband's home, and in the presence of others the husband should treat her like a servant. He must not show any signs of affection; it would be considered bad taste if he as much as spoke



3. An old Newar – of a people once distinguished by high culture. They have now for centuries been oppressed by the primitive and warlike mountain-tribes.

4. Peasants of the Katmandu Valley threshing rice – the methods of cultivation are the same as a thousand years ago.

to her in a kindly tone. In many homes the new wife is not even permitted to sleep on her husband's mattress—the Nepalese do not use beds—but has to lie outside his door.

"But I do not follow such feudal customs," Ishwar said. Without looking at me he added that he even kissed his wife—on the mouth, like in the American movies. Otherwise, Newars kiss only on the forehead.

"My brother would be very angry if he knew about it," Ishwar concluded with a mischievous smile.

He told me that for a long time his brother had not wanted him to get a European suit. The brother was of course in charge of the family finances, but Ishwar had finally succeeded in convincing him that it was absolutely necessary for a modern young man to have western clothes—it was almost like a uniform for the students from the college.

On another occasion Ishwar had rebelled against his brother. I knew that the Nepalese washed the floors and walls of their houses with cowdung dissolved in water, didn't I? I nodded.

"If the cows lived on vegetable food, it would probably have a cleansing effect," Ishwar continued. "But the cows here in Katmandu never get grass or hay, only garbage, so their droppings are very dirty. I did not want my room to be washed with such things, and my brother let me have my way."

While we were talking, his wife made a fifth design and decorated it with flowers. It was for the family servant who had just entered: a small, squat fellow with a low forehead. I learned that they paid him eight shillings a month, plus board and lodging. His only sister lived in a village which was so far away that she could not come here, but to console him Sumitra, who had no brothers, would worship him instead. Ishwar's mother was not present because she had gone away to worship her two brothers.

"Now the worshipping will soon begin," Ishwar said when

the last design had been completed and the servant had seated himself in front of it. He had told me that it would be all right for me to take pictures, so I got ready with my flashlight. The women now hung garlands of flowers around the necks of the men. Ishwar told me that this custom goes back to an ancient legend which is known to all Newars.

Once upon a time, Death came to fetch a young Newar whose sister interceded so movingly for him that Death agreed to give him a small respite. They decided that she should gather a bouquet of flowers, and only when they had withered should her brother leave this world.

"She cheated Death," Ishwar said with a smile as he stroked his garland. "They are everlasting flowers."

The women poured a little oil into the hair of each of the men and then kneeled down in front of them. This was the actual worshipping ceremony. When the turn came to the servant I went over to take a picture of him and Sumitra. The outbursts that followed took me completely by surprise. At first the little man was paralyzed by the blinding flash. Then he jumped up with a yell and made for the door. Ishwar almost had to drag him back, and it took a lot of talking to convince him that I had not produced a streak of lightning. He was afraid of thunder, and during the rest of the evening he kept glancing suspiciously at me.

Even the eldest brother could not help laughing at the incident. The women went out of the room and returned with five large palm leaves covered with food—rice, hard-boiled eggs, curd, beans and a goat's head with the eyes still in their sockets.

"We usually take our meals on the second floor, but we cannot invite guests up there," Ishwar said with his mouth full. Like most Easterners they ate noisily, smacking their lips. "That is why we have the feast down here tonight."

When they had finished eating they used the palm leaves to wipe out the designs on the floor—the last meal of the year was over. Each one of them got a small portion of betelnut,

lime and spices wrapped in a green leaf. Ishwar made a face as he stuffed it into his mouth.

" I dislike betel, but I have to eat it after a feast. That is another one of those customs which bind us to the past."

He told me that he and his family came from the country. Another brother, who was slightly older than Ishwar, looked after the family farm which was on the outskirts of the valley.

" We came here to make it possible for me to get an education," Ishwar said. They had lived in the capital for five years now, and during this time his eldest brother had worked up a small business as a rice dealer. It was difficult for them to make both ends meet, though, for the cost of living was high here in Katmandu. But things would undoubtedly improve for them next year when Ishwar graduated from the college. He hoped to get a job in a government office, preferably as secretary to a minister. Even Newars had a chance to get ahead " after democracy ".

" And what then when you get a job?" I asked. " Are you going to stay on here?"

He looked as if he did not understand my question.

" I mean, won't you and Sumitra get a home of your own?"

" Oh, no!" he exclaimed. " How could we do that? We share everything in my family, the good and the bad. Now the others are making it possible for me to study—naturally I want to repay them when I begin to make money. And we would be very unhappy if we had to live by ourselves—whom would we talk to, what would we do when we were sick or in difficulties? No, I would not even think of that!"

His elder brother rose. I had a feeling that this was a hint for me to leave. When I thanked them for their hospitality, Ishwar begged me to excuse them because they had not given me anything to eat. Unfortunately, their customs did not permit them to take their meals together with people not of their own caste. But if I cared to I could get something to eat now, before the women began their meal . . .

I declined with thanks, for I suddenly felt tired after the long ceremony. The whole family accompanied me to the hatch. When the boy saw Ishwar shake hands with me he wanted to do the same; the others bade me farewell in the Nepalese fashion. As soon as I had gone down the stairs they closed the hatch.

The street was dark and silent. Somewhere far off a dog barked. I shone the flashlight on my watch. It was a few minutes after midnight. The year 1079 had just begun.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE MINISTER OF TRADE yawned discreetly behind his hand; he too probably expected it to be a boring interview. We were sitting in his private office on the second floor of the huge government building which the Ranas had erected on the outskirts of Katmandu. There are said to be more than 1,200 rooms, but no one seems to know for sure. Perhaps they have never been counted.

" What is the main export product of Nepal?" I began.

" People."

The Minister seemed amused by my incredulous expression. Soldiers, he continued in explanation—surely I had heard of the famous Gurkhas, the only mercenaries left except the Foreign Legion and the Swiss Guard at the Vatican. Formerly, the Gurkhas only enlisted in the British Army, but now they also fight for India. These troops are Nepal's most important source of foreign exchange . . .

How many mercenaries were there, I asked, how much money did they send home every month, and how large a percentage was this of the national income?

The Minister did not know the answers to these questions, but referred me to the Department of Statistics. This term seemed a bit extravagant for the small, dark room which I entered a few minutes later. The only furniture was a table and two chairs, in one of which sat a bespectacled American

who was trying in vain to rub some warmth into his hands. He was a statistical expert, lent to the Nepalese government by the United Nations. It seemed that statistical experts were not very highly esteemed in Nepal, for he had been given an office in one of the Rana Prime Minister's former stables.

When I had explained my errand the statistician pointed to a complicated instrument on the table. That was an electrical adding machine—but there was no electric current in this part of the building, and he wouldn't have had much use for it even if there had been. The Nepalese authorities kept asking him for statistics, but never gave him any figures or information to work with. Not that they were unfriendly, he quickly added. They were extremely nice, but no scientific surveys of any kind had ever been conducted in Nepal.

"And I just can't conjure up figures," the expert said, idly pushing a button in his adding machine. Before I left he gave me an introduction to one of his Nepalese acquaintances, an old Rana general. He would undoubtedly be able to give me information about the Gurkhas, for he had formerly been Commander-in-Chief of the Nepalese army and had also once been Minister of War. In addition to this he was probably the best-read member of the former Nepalese ruling class.

There was a sentry on guard outside the general's palace which was surrounded by a high wall. A servant showed me into a large hall that reminded me of a zoological museum, only the camphor-smell was missing. Three or four stuffed tigers crouched among the shiny mahogany furniture, and some crocodiles played hide-and-seek with the heads of two rhinoceros. For a second I thought that the proud, erect figure in a dark corner was the general, but it turned out to be a mounted coat of mail from Europe. On the walls were antlers of all sizes and a large number of faded hunting photographs.

"Are you interested in hunting?" a voice inquired in English. I twirled around to face a little, bald man in dressing-gown and slippers. At first glance the general struck me as being rather fragile and unwar-like, but I later learned that

despite his seventy-four years he had fourteen wives who bore him children regularly. He had originally picked the youngest wife, who was only seventeen, for one of his sons, but had found her so captivating that he had kept her for himself.

No, hunting was not one of my hobbies, I replied. The general shrugged and seemed to lose interest in me, but perked up when I told him that I was very interested in Nepal's famed Gurkha soldiers. He shuffled over to a cupboard and took an old dagger, the broad, murderous blade of which was slightly curved.

This, he explained, was a *kukri*: the weapon worn by all the mountain tribes of Nepal—not by the soft Newars of the valley. These mountain people have a military tradition which goes all the way back to the Mohammedan conquest of Northern India in the ninth century . . .

The bitterest adversaries of the Mohammedans were the proud Rajputs, a war-like Hindu clan of high caste. The Rajputs slowly retreated to the foothills of the Himalayas where they built a fortress city which they defended for many years, but it was finally taken by storm. More than a thousand Rajput women committed suicide by jumping into vats of boiling oil, and the remnants of the beaten army fled to Nepal.

These warriors were his forefathers, the general said, adding that it was they who had organized the primitive mountain people into fighting units. I later discovered that most Nepalese with social pretensions—with the exception of the Newars—claim descent from the Rajputs.

At that time the mountain people of Nepal were probably animists, but the Rajputs converted them to Hinduism. It is doubtful whether the tribesmen were interested in the higher philosophy of the new religion, but they went in for cow-worshipping with heart and soul. For many years, bloody battles were fought between the converts and a people called the Kiratis. The latter lived mainly on beef and were eventually exterminated because they refused to change their diet.

It was Prithwi Narayan, the great conqueror, who finally

united the mountain people. He came from a district called Gurkha. When he had made himself master of the valley he knighted all the members of his army—even the sweepers—by raising them to the rank of the warrior caste and permitting them to call themselves Gurkhas. Ever since, this has been an honorary title among the mountain people of Nepal.

"*I* am a Gurkha," the general said, straightening himself.

After the conquest of the valley the Gurkha King found it unwise to keep his large army inactive, so he kept adding new territories to his domain. His descendants followed in his footsteps, and thus it became a tradition that young men from the mountains joined the colours.

One of the military adventures of the Gurkhas led them through the narrow mountain passes of the Himalayas into Tibet. "We would undoubtedly have defeated the Tibetans," the general said, "but then the Chinese entered into the picture. They were too much for us."

The religion of the Gurkhas forbade them to eat beef, so it was difficult for them to get anything to eat on the Tibetan plateau where the people practically lived on yak meat. For a while the attackers starved, but then the Brahmin priest who accompanied the army declared that the hairy yaks really weren't cows, but a kind of deer, so even the most orthodox Hindu could eat them with a clear conscience.

When the Chinese had chased them out of Tibet, the Gurkhas turned to the south. They had to have an outlet for their war-like energies, and before long they got into trouble with the British in India . . .

"And I suppose that even the Gurkhas were no match for them?" I put in.

"We most certainly were," the general replied sharply. "That is, at first."

When the war broke out in 1814, the Gurkha King commanded an army of twelve thousand men, some of whom were armed with bows and arrows. Of heavier weapons they had only a few leather cannon. These guns, which had been cap-

tured from the Tibetans, were made of yak hides rolled tightly together. One can still see them at the little museum of arms in Katmandu.

The British suffered many setbacks and had to mobilize an army of thirty thousand men before they finally defeated the Gurkhas after two years of heavy fighting. The peace terms were rather mild, perhaps because the British realized that so brave an enemy could become a valuable ally. They had use for soldiers of the Gurkha calibre.

The Gurkha King ceded some territories along his southern border and agreed to the stationing of a British " agent " in Katmandu. He also permitted the enrolment of three Gurkha regiments into the British Army.

" Since then, Nepal has been Great Britain's most faithful ally," the general said. " During the Great Mutiny we sent an army to the aid of the British when they needed it most, and for nearly a century our soldiers have fought in all of Britain's wars. The three regiments have become many . . ."

" How many?" I broke in. I should not have done so. The general was probably not used to being interrupted; he rose and declared that all journalists were the same—they expected him to know all sorts of things by heart, to have his head full of figures.

" Figures bore me," he said, and I had a feeling that I did too, so I thanked him for his kindness and beat a hasty retreat—so hasty that I stumbled over one of the crocodiles. The old man helped me back on my feet.

" You could talk to the military attaché at the British Embassy," he said in a milder tone. " He used to command a Gurkha regiment in India, I think—he can probably give you all the figures you need."

In the afternoon of the same day I went to the British Embassy which lies on the outskirts of Katmandu. It used to be a whole town by itself, but after India became independent the diplomatic representatives of Nehru took over most of the buildings. All the British have left is a few bungalows.

I did not feel very hopeful when I faced the military attaché. His civilian clothes looked like a disguise. The haughty way he held his head, the downward twist of the mouth, the bushy moustache—here is a Colonel Blimp if I ever saw one, I thought.

"So you want to know something about the Gurkhas?" began the military attaché, who was a major. Of course he spoke with an irritating Oxford accent. "Mmh." He eyed me critically, twisting the corners of his moustache. "Afraid you've come to the wrong man. I'm chock full of prejudices as far as the Gurkhas are concerned . . ."

I did not doubt that. Now he would probably start lecturing me on the white man's burden . . .

"In fact, I'm convinced that the Gurkhas are the best bloody soldiers you find anywhere in the world!" almost shouted the major. The sudden outburst terminated in a series of hoarse noises, somewhat like a donkey's braying. Tears rose to his eyes, it amused him so much that I had taken him seriously. A few minutes later we were calling each other by our first names, and I promised myself never again to be so hasty in my judgment of people.

The major knew the history of the British Gurkha regiments by heart. He almost became poetic when he talked about it—you could hear the rumbling of the guns, the bugle calls to battle. North Africa, Italy, Turkey, Palestine, Burma, Malaya—wherever the British colours have flown, the Gurkhas have fought.

The English were a little worried when they sent the Gurkhas against the Japanese during the last world war. Could one expect the Nepalese mercenaries to lay down their lives for the white man in a struggle against a people of their own race?

"They fought like lions," the major said. "The Japanese were no cowards, but they turned tail when the Gurkhas attacked with drawn *kukris*. Sometimes I almost think that they fight for the love of it. But they prefer a good adversary.

Once I heard some Gurkha soldiers talk among themselves—yes, I know their language rather well. They agreed that it had been fun to fight the Germans and the Japanese—but not the Italians, that was too easy . . ."

When Tobruk was surrounded during the last war, the British sent out an eight-man Gurkha patrol one night. When the Gurkhas returned they were asked if they had killed any enemy soldiers. They nodded. How many? Around twenty.

" But we did not hear any shooting," a British officer remarked. Silently the Gurkhas pointed to their *kukris,* but the Englishman smiled. He thought they were boasting.

Next evening the same Gurkhas went out on patrol. Returning, they handed the sceptical Englishman a string with twenty-three left ears. Now perhaps he would believe them . . .

A Gurkha soldier usually attaches himself to an English officer whom he will follow through thick and thin. This can be dangerous, the major said, for if the officer is killed the battle is over so far as the soldier is concerned.

" Don't misunderstand me," he added quickly. " The soldier won't run away—I have never heard of a Gurkha who did that. Then he would lose caste, even his wife would refuse to have anything to do with him. But many Gurkhas only feel loyal to their officer, and when he dies they simply lose interest . . ."

It is not unusual for a Gurkha soldier to have two wives, one of whom stays at home and looks after the children while the other follows him from camp to camp. Many soldiers never return to their own country. Once they have seen some of the world it is difficult for them to readjust themselves to the primitive conditions in Nepal. There are now around three million Nepalese living in India, most of them descendants of soldiers who did not go home.

Practically all the major's Nepalese friends here in Katmandu were Gurkhas. I had met mostly Newars, so our impressions of the Nepalese were quite different.

" The Gurkhas are almost like children," the major said.

"They flare up easily, but forget their anger right away. They are extremely straightforward and natural."

No one would say that of the shy, reserved Newars who seem to make a point of hiding their feelings.

The major knew all the figures which I had been unable to get from the statistical expert of the Rana general. He told me that fifty thousand Gurka soldiers fought in the First World War, a quarter of a million in the second. These figures are especially impressive when one considers that the soldiers who enlist in the British Army come from one, not very large, mountain area in the central part of the country. There have been many cases of father and son fighting in the same regiment.

Today there are ten thousand Gurkha soldiers in the British Army, eight thousand in the Indian. The money which these soldiers send home or get in pension amounts to more than two hundred thousand pounds sterling a year, or considerably more than the value of Nepal's other exports.

"In a way, the arrangement has been as advantageous to the Nepalese as it has to us," the major said. "If all these youngsters had stayed at home instead of joining our army, Nepal would surely have stirred up some kind of international trouble. They would probably have fought against us again, and then we would have been forced to occupy the country."

Perhaps he was right, I said, but it seemed to me that Nepal had paid dearly for her independence. But for the alliance between the British and the Ranas, the country would not have stagnated so long. The British left Nepal alone because they wanted a buffer between India and Tibet. It was in their interest to keep Nepal as primitive as possible, for then it was easier for them to recruit soldiers. Had Nepal been a well-developed and prosperous country, the Gurkhas would not have been so eager to fight for England.

"It was mainly the support of the British which made it possible for the Ranas to stay in power as long as they did," I

said. " The fact that the revolution occurred shortly after the British left India goes to prove this . . ."

" I say, isn't that rather ancient history?" the major interrupted me with a laugh. " I know that we British have been horrid Imperialists and all that, but so were all the Great Powers. It was the thing to do in those days, don't you know. And now we're meek as lambs—almost, that is!"

When I was about to leave, the major wanted to tell me just one more Gurkha story. In India during the last war, a Gurkha regiment was taught parachute jumping. On the day when the training began, the soldiers were grouped on a field and some planes flew overhead. An English officer explained to the soldiers that this was the altitude they would have to jump from. He thought he noticed signs of nervousness among the troops and asked whether anything was the matter.

" Yes, Sir," a non-commissioned Gurkha officer replied. " We would like to know if the planes could not fly a little closer to the ground."

The officer began to explain that this was impossible, for then the parachutes would not have time to unfold.

" Oh, so we are going to have parachutes!" the Gurkha exclaimed. " Then it is quite all right . . ."

## CHAPTER SIX

"DON'T YOU THINK we had better give it up?" Mohan asked. I had met him a few days ago at the Katmandu College where he was studying English literature. He was a likeable young fellow, a little effeminate and very shy. We had agreed that he should be my interpreter during his spare time, and this was the first "story" we were covering together.

"I doubt whether they will even talk to us," he continued. He spoke English with a sing-song intonation, but had a surprisingly large vocabulary and his sentences were usually gramatically correct. "They are in a hostile mood, I can feel it," he added.

He looked around uneasily. The houses in the alley which we had just entered were lower than elsewhere in the city and lacked the usual carved door and window frames. In many places the walls were cracked and there were holes in the straw roofs. Ragged people squatted in front of the houses, following our every move with watchful eyes. Even the children had stopped playing and were looking suspiciously at us.

"But why should they have anything against us?" I asked, stepping around a dead rat that was black with flies. A little girl was relieving herself in the middle of the road, surrounded by waiting dogs. They did not dare come too close, for she had a stick in her hand.

" Because only untouchables live here," Mohan replied. " They are suspicious of all strangers."

He was born and raised in Katmandu, his home was only a quarter of an hour's walk away, yet he had never before been in this section of the town. If I had not decided to write about the untouchables he would probably never have come here.

Was there no contact whatever between " caste " people and the untouchables? Yes, there was, he replied—it was all right to do business with tailors, butchers, shoemakers and so on who belonged to the untouchables, and the sweepers came daily to clean people's houses. One did not see much of them, however, for they did their work early in the morning.

As a boy, Mohan had played with an untouchable Newar boy of the same age. " We never came to each other's homes, we just met in the street. My parents knew about it, but the caste rules are not enforced so strictly with children. But when I became thirteen I was not allowed to see him any more."

Did young people of different castes never fall in love? It sometimes happened that a man of higher caste had an affair with an untouchable girl, Mohan replied, blushing, for he did not like to talk about such things. If people found out about it, the members of the man's caste would refuse to eat with him. That was the only form of punishment, but if an untouchable man had anything to do with a caste-girl, he would be sentenced to four years' imprisonment . . .

A woman came towards us with tiny steps, holding a water jar which she supported on her hip. She had pulled one end of her faded sari over her head, but I could see that she had large, pretty eyes.

" We might just as well ask her," I said to Mohan. He winced. I had already told him what to say, but now he seemed to have forgotten. I had to tell him all over again while he translated sentence by sentence—I had come here from a far-away country to write a book about Nepal, I was eager to meet as many different people as possible, and would

she permit us to accompany her to her home and ask her a few questions?

The woman hesitated a moment. The children of the alley had overcome their shyness and came rushing from all directions, and some of the grown-ups also took courage and came closer. They listened eagerly to Mohan.

" The foreigner wants to learn about us," exclaimed an old man who had cupped one hand behind his ear. People stared at me as if amazed that anyone could be interested in them.

" I think it will be all right for you to do as they wish, Krishnamaya," the old man continued, looking at the woman with the water jar. She drew the sari in front of her face, embarrassed suddenly to be the centre of attention. She would not mind that we came to her home, she muttered, but she would have to ask her husband first . . .

With a row of children upon our heels we walked to a hut which was not quite as ramshackle as the others. The woman asked us to wait and disappeared through the door. We heard voices from the first floor, and a moment later a cloud of dust billowed from the window. Then Krishnamaya stuck her head out and nodded to us to come up.

We went through a dark, cellar-like room where an old man sat on the floor, plaiting mats of straw. I wondered how he could see to work, but when he turned his face towards us I realized that he was blind.

Climbing up a ladder, we entered a low room where we were greeted by two little girls and a thin, sallow man. His name was Babulal and he was Krishnamaya's husband. With a movement of his hand he asked us to sit down on a brand new mat near the window. Krishnamaya had just finished sweeping and put the broom away in a corner; I think she had taken out the new mat in honour of our visit.

" Ask them to sit next to us," I said to Mohan, for there was plenty of room on the mat, but they preferred to sit on the earthen floor a few feet away from us. I glanced about me. In a corner was a heap of blankets; it was probably the

family's bedding. The walls were of mud, and underneath the rough ceiling beams hung rows of dried corn cobs.

When I offered them cigarettes, Babulal refused twice before he accepted one which he shared with his wife. What a contrast to some of the upper-class Nepalese we knew—at parties I had seen them fill their pockets when American cigarettes were put on the table.

" I think I will have a cigarette too," Mohan said. I looked at him in surprise while he lit it with unpractised hands, for he had told me that he did not smoke.

" The air is terrible in here," he continued, choking and coughing. " Haven't you noticed? Perhaps it will not be so bad when I smoke."

The air seemed no worse to me than in the district where he lived, but I did not say anything.

In the beginning Babulal stared stiffly at his feet while he answered my questions. The children sat motionless, and Krishnamaya, who had pushed the sari away from her head, did not say a word. Her hair was plaited in a thick braid which came to her waist.

Both she and her husband were sweepers. They went to work before dawn and did not come home until late in the afternoon. I wondered how they could manage to wake up so early—did they have an alarm clock?

" No, and we have no need for one." For the first time since we came, Babulal smiled. " The rats wake us up—the place is full of them."

She swept in private homes, he at some military barracks outside the city. Together they earned fourteen Nepalese rupees a week, or about fifteen shillings. The house belonged to them, but even so it was hard to make both ends meet. They had three children to support, as well as the old man downstairs who was Babulal's father. Their daily fare consisted of vegetables, curry and rice of the cheapest quality.

" There is not much money left for clothes," Babulal said. His wife had only the sari which she had on, the children

were in rags. "But we are much better off than before the strike," he added. "Then, the two of us earned only about five rupees a week . . ."

I looked up from my notebook. Had there been a strike?

"Oh, yes!" He no longer seemed listless. "That was our first united action." Somehow, the term sounded out of place in these surroundings. "Most of us were afraid, we thought we would lose our jobs, but our leader told us not to worry . . ."

"Yes, it was in the summer," Krishnamaya broke in. "After four days you could not stay in the city, the smell was so bad. Then they came to our leader and agreed to his demands . . ."

"Who is your leader?"

"Ganesh Kushel!" they replied in one breath. I would like to meet him, I said. That could easily be arranged, for every afternoon he taught just around the corner at a school which he himself had founded for untouchable children. He was probably still there . . .

Mohan and I rose and said goodbye. Several seconds before we reached the school we could hear a loud humming, as if from a swarm of bees. The sound came from some thirty children who were sitting on the ground under a lean-to. In front of them stood a young man with a book in his hand, and the children were repeating in chorus after him.

Ganesh Kushel had shoes on—that was one of the first things I noticed about him, for most people in the district of the untouchables were barefooted. On top of his Nepalese suit he wore a dark European jacket. He had already seen us, but read to the end of the page before he came over to greet us.

Babulal, who had brought us there, explained whom we were, and the young teacher introduced himself in halting English. Many Orientals are too shy to look a stranger straight in the eye, but his eyes met mine without wavering. He was darker than most Nepalese and there was a heavy, serious air about him.

He told the children that they could go home, but they

wanted to stay and were permitted to do so on the condition that they were quiet. We seated ourselves on a mat under the lean-to and they formed a circle around us. Their hair stuck out wildly and they were very dirty. Nearly half of them had pock-marks. A couple of them were so ragged that they might almost as well have been naked.

Kushel's English was not very good, so we agreed to talk through Mohan. I began by asking when he had started the school. About two years ago, he replied. Did he get any salary? No—the people who lived here were so poor that they could not afford to pay tuition, not even a few pennies a month.

"At first it was difficult even to get them to send their children to school," he said. "Not because they don't want their children to get an education, but they need them at home. In most families both parents go to work, and someone must look after the very small children and collect wood for the kitchen stove."

The children giggled at the strange sounds which Mohan made when he translated into English. Some of them kept scratching themselves; they undoubtedly had lice. Mohan usually liked to sit cross-legged, but now he only squatted, carefully avoiding to touch the ground. Every once in a while he would scratch himself nervously.

"Are the children good at learning?" I asked.

"No," Kushel replied without hesitation. "And one could not expect them to be. Their parents are completely ignorant, they cannot even write their own names. They have not taught their children a thing, nor have they disciplined them. I don't think the children here are more stupid than others, but they have never learned to concentrate."

When he first started the school fifty-four pupils had joined, eight of them girls, but usually no more than thirty children attended. The rest were sick or had to help their parents, or they would rather play. You could not force them to go to school.

"Is there no other place where—eh . . ." I could not get myself to use the word *untouchable.* " . . . where the caste-less children can go to school?" I continued.

Now something strange happened.

Kushel shook his head, but Mohan nodded. They eyed each other coldly.

"After democracy, caste-less children have the same right as others to go to school," Mohan declared. "The law say so."

"I know it does," Kushel replied, "but how many caste-less children are actually admitted to the schools?"

"I don't know for sure, but there were some in middle school . . ."

"Yes, ten or twelve—but they are not allowed to study together with the other children, they have to attend a special evening class. Two lower schools also have started separate education for caste-less children, but it is only a matter of about two dozen pupils, and there are no caste-less students at the college—I suppose you know that?"

Mohan nodded reluctantly.

"There are more than two hundred thousand untouchables in the valley," Kushel continued. "Only about a hundred of them know how to read and write. I know many caste-less who have tried to get their children into a school. They always get the same answer—there is not even enough room for caste-children, the authorities say, so the caste-less must wait."

Mohan translated without looking at either of us; he seemed upset by what Kushel had just said. The smaller children had gone home, but half a dozen of the bigger ones stayed on, listening eagerly.

"Do you yourself belong to the caste-less?" I asked Kushel.

"Yes. My father is a tailor."

"But how come you went to school?"

"I did not go to school until I was twelve," Kushel

replied. "At first I was supposed to become a tailor too—every caste has its own profession, and one has to remain in it. That was under the Ranas, and in those days casteless children had even less chance of going to school than they do now."

He told us that one day when he was busy sewing, his father had sat down next to him and begun to talk about the future. I could tell by Kushel's tone that his father meant a great deal to him.

"He told me that we untouchables could improve our lot only through education," Kushel said. "He himself had wanted very much to go to school in his youth, and now he wanted me to get the chance which he had missed. He suggested that I go to India where it would be possible for me to get an education."

The Ranas did not permit people to travel abroad, but the boy managed to get across the border and went to Calcutta where his father's brother lived. During the first few months he had a private tutor to help him catch up; then he entered a school where there was no caste distinction. He studied during the daytime; at night he worked for his father's brother who had a tailor's shop.

When the revolution broke out in Nepal at the end of 1950, Ganesh was twenty years of age. His uncle advised him to stay on and complete his studies, but the young man wanted to go home. He knew that there would be a great deal for him to do in Nepal.

While in India he had joined an organization for the untouchables and participated in their struggle for recognition as human beings. He intended to organize the untouchables of his own country according to the Indian pattern.

Back in Katmandu he found that one of the newly-organized political parties had already started an organization for the outcasts, so Kushel joined it and became one of the leaders. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, and

he did not like to tell him that he preferred to do social work, which is unpaid in a country like Nepal.

"But my father was very happy when he heard about my plans. He had always hoped that I would take up the struggle for our people, he said. He told me not to worry about earning a living—the family would help me. He is a wonderful man. Without his help I could not have accomplished anything . . ."

At first the caste-less would hardly listen to the young man who exhorted them to join the new organization. It was difficult to make them see that they could improve conditions for themselves if they would only stick together. Their own community was divided into many groups which had nothing to do with each other.

"These prejudices are almost as strong as the caste-people's prejudices against us," Kushel said. "The son of a tailor would never marry the daughter of a shoemaker, nor would a butcher dream of marrying a sweeper. Even if the young people felt like doing it they would not dare, for they know that their families would turn against them."

Most of the leaders of the new organization for the untouchables were of high caste. This was one of the reasons why the membership increased so slowly. The untouchables did not trust the caste-people. "Sooner or later they will cheat you," they warned Kushel. "It is always like that."

I looked at Mohan. He belonged to one of the highest castes, but I must say that he took the situation well. He translated slowly and steadily as if it did not concern him.

When the number of members had increased to about a thousand, Kushel suggested that they start a civil disobedience movement for the purpose of getting higher wages and more rights for the caste-less. He told the other leaders how well such campaigns had worked in India, but they thought it would be sufficient to ask the Government to do something for the untouchables.

"So we sent requests and delegations to the Ministers. They promised to do many things for us, but they never kept any of their promises."

At one time it had looked as if something would finally be done. The King had just appointed a new Prime Minister who really seemed to have the problems of the untouchables at heart. He wanted to make Ganesh Kushel Vice-Minister of Social Affairs.

"But nothing came of it," Kushel said. "I later found out that it was the leaders of my own party who had objected to my getting the post. They said I was too young —but the truth was that they did not want an untouchable to get the job, they wanted it for someone of their own caste.

"Then I realized that we cannot expect others to do anything for us. The caste-people will only use us as a pawn in their political game. We must fight for ourselves."

Since then he had kept away from politics. He left the organization, whose membership soon dropped to almost nothing, and started another one of his own. "The Depressed Classes' League", he called it.

He realized that he would have to do something to arouse the caste-less from their apathy, and finally he succeeded in persuading the sweepers to start a union. There was no membership fee—otherwise no one would have joined. At first they held meetings in his father's tailoring shop, but it soon became too small, so they met in a street on the outskirts of the city. Every time a car passed by, the speaker had to wait for the dust to settle.

When he urged the sweepers to strike, most of them were against it. They were bound to lose, they said. If they refused to work they would get no pay, they would starve.

Kushel explained that sweepers were indispensable in a large city. He suggested that they start a collection so they had something to fall back on during a strike. The collection went very slowly, for the very idea was entirely new—

no Nepalese had ever contributed money to anything except religious purposes. The sweepers were already living on the verge of starvation, so few families could give more than a few cents.

Tailors, butchers, metal workers and shoemakers were also asked to make contributions. Some of them were relatively well off—" but the more money they had, the less they gave," Kushel said.

When the union had collected around a thousand rupees, Kushel went before the city council. He had previously asked the council to pass a law which would guarantee the sweepers a minimum wage, but without result. Now he declared that if the council did not promise to take immediate action, the sweepers would go on strike.

The members of the council looked incredulously at him. Some began to laugh. " Don't let his threats fool you," someone shouted. " The sweepers could not possibly organize a strike, they are too ignorant."

They refused to consider Kushel's request. Throughout that afternoon and evening he held meetings with small groups of sweepers. Before daybreak the next morning he went for a walk in the city. He met only one sweeper who was on his way to work—he had not quite understood what it was all about. When Kushel explained it to him he immediately went home.

Kushel was nervous during the first couple of days of the strike. The authorities merely let the garbage heap up in the streets. The population was already hardened as far as bad odours were concerned: a little more or less did not make much difference to them. On the third day the union ran out of money, for practically all the sweepers had had to ask for help. Most of them were in favour of calling off the strike.

" But the gods seemed to be on our side," Kushel said. It was summer, and almost simultaneously with the strike began the worst heat wave in many years. The stench became

so bad that one could hardly breathe. The city council tried to persuade the police to remove the rotting garbage, but the policemen refused—they were caste-people.

On the fourth day the city council capitulated. The sweepers hardly dared to believe the news. They lit bonfires in their section of the city and stayed up until the early hours, discussing their victory. During the next few days, hundreds joined the Depressed Classes' League, which by now has more than six thousand members. This is a high figure for Nepal where most political parties can count their members in hundreds.

" About a year later, the League was put to a real test," Kushel continued. " Do you know Pashupatinath ?"

Yes, I replied. Pashupatinath, the most sacred of all Hindu temples in Nepal, lies in a hill a few kilometres outside of Katmandu. In the centre of the main temple courtyard is a gigantic, gilded statue of a bull.

" But I was not permitted to enter the temple," I added.

" Neither are we," Kushel said with a sad smile. " We are allowed to go inside most temples as long as we do not touch the images, but the Brahmin priests have always refused us admission to Pashupatinath."

Personally, he had not felt any desire to worship the golden bull. He was not an atheist, but had little respect for a religion based on caste distinction. For him it was entirely a matter of principle.

" Pashupatinath is the stronghold of the Brahmin priests, who are our bitterest enemies in our struggle for equal rights," he explained.

Early one morning about two years ago, Kushel had walked to Pashupatinath at the head of three hundred and sixty-five outcasts representing every class within the world of the untouchables. Most of them had immediately supported the idea of a march to Pashupatinath, but it had been difficult to persuade them to go together, tailors and shoe-

makers side by side with butchers, sweepers and nightmen.

"We too are learning from our struggle against unequality," Kushel said. "We are learning to overcome our own prejudices."

He had informed the authorities that representatives of the League intended to enter the temple. On their way, the marchers were overtaken by four trucks loaded with policemen who were armed with long sticks.

When they approached the temple they were met by a huge crowd of people who had painted sacred Hindu symbols on their foreheads and shouted religious slogans. They were led by Brahmin priests who spat on the untouchables and shouted curses. When this failed to stop the marchers the mob began throwing stones. Several of the untouchables were badly hurt. Kushel had told them that whatever happened they must not strike back. He was proud that they obeyed him.

At first the policemen merely looked on, but when even the stones failed to stop the untouchables they raised their sticks and charged. Several of the caste-less were knocked unconscious and many fled. Kushel and four others of the leaders were arrested. At the police station they were beaten, charged with disorderly conduct, and sentenced to a week in jail.

But the campaign continued. Every morning, forty untouchables would march to the temple where the Brahmins spat on them and the police beat them. As soon as Kushel was released he went to Pashupatinath with the others. He was arrested again, beaten, and sentenced to another week in jail. This happened five times. Then the campaign was over, for it had been decided beforehand that it was to last only forty days.

"Did any of the caste-less manage to get inside the temple?" I asked.

"No."

The sun had set. I could hardly see what I was writing

any more, so I rose. The five untouchable boys who had been listening to the interview were shivering in their thin clothes. I asked Kushel if he had any children. No, he replied, patting one of the boys on the head; he had not had time to get married yet.

He accompanied us back to the alley where we had met Krishnamaya—was it really only a few hours ago? Here our ways parted.

"Just one more question," I said. "Has the League conducted any other campaigns?"

"Not any important ones," he replied. "But this summer we are going to march on Pashupatinath again. Sooner or later they must let us enter the temple. Then we go on to the next point on our programme—we have a long road ahead."

He pressed his palms together under his chin. "Good night," he said. Then he turned and walked quickly down the alley.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

A SOLDIER OPENED the gate for us. I was a little annoyed that he did not salute us, but Chi-yun found it quite natural.

"He is used to the guests arriving by motor car," she said. "When you come by bicycle you can't expect him to make a fuss over you."

We rode past a fountain and stopped in front of a long, two-storied house. It looked as if the architect had intended to build a railway station, but at the last moment had been told to make it a palace instead, so he added some colmuns and had placed a statue of a snarling lion on either side of the entrance.

A white-gowned servant conducted us up the marble staircase and through a hall with enough furniture for three or four Victorian homes. The afternoon sun sparkled on the crystal chandeliers and on rows of fragile, perfume-filled glass animals which stood on a grand piano. In passing, I struck one of the yellowed ivory keys. The tune hung for a moment in the stillness, brittle and jarringly false.

In the adjoining hall we were received by our hosts, a young Rana couple. She was a slender, graceful creature with jet-black hair that hung loose down over her light blue chiffon sari. Her husband, a small, very erect man with a bored expression, was a major. They did not live on his

pay from the Nepalese Army, though. His uncle had been Minister of Finance in the good old days when the treasury was the private purse of the Ranas.

Both the major and his wife had gone to school in India and spoke English fluently. We drank tea and talked about the latest cocktail party. I was on tenterhooks. There were so many things I wanted to know about the Ranas, but Chi-yun had given me strict orders to wait at least half an hour before I began to bombard them with questions. Every few minutes I glanced impatiently at a clock which ticked away in the background.

So did the major, but for quite another reason. He was a bridge enthusiast. I knew very well that this was the reason why he had invited us, for it was not easy to find partners in Katmandu. Just before the half hour had passed he got up.

"What about a couple of rubbers?" he asked, rubbing his hands expectantly. I became desperate, for I had heard that once the cards were on the table you could not get a word out of him beyond the bidding.

"I would like another cup of tea," I said. Chi-yun gave me a surprised glance, for I drink the stuff only to be sociable and one cup is usually my limit.

"How many servants do you have," I continued rapidly. The major sat down again, dejected.

"Forty," his wife replied. "Before the revolution we had over eighty, but . . ." She hesitated and added with a smile: "But times have changed, haven't they?"

I learned that she and her husband were the only two people who lived in the huge building. Their two sons attended a boarding school in India. The major had received the palace from his father on his fourteenth birthday.

"My husband was only nine years old when he shot his first tiger," she told me proudly. "His father was a great hunter. How many tigers did he shoot, dear?"

She looked questioningly at the major, who brightened

perceptibly. If the bridge had to be postponed, a hunting discussion was better than nothing.

"Two hundred and twenty-eight," he replied. "And a hundred and twenty rhinoceros. But that was nothing compared to his brother, one of the former Prime Ministers . . ."

He turned and looked towards a row of large pictures in ornate golden frames. I had taken them for paintings, but now I saw that they were life-size coloured photographs. Each one showed an officer in an heroic posture. They wore different uniforms, each one more gaudy and fantastic than the other, but all of them wore the same golden crown with large gems which hung down like a fringe over the forehead.

"Those are all the Rana Prime Ministers," the major said. "There were nine altogether. My uncle is number two from the right. He shot three hundred and eighty-eight tigers and two hundred and twelve rhinoceros . . ."

"Which one was the first Prime Minister?" I broke in.

"The one on the far left . . ."

I rose and went over to the picture. A tall, bearded man stood with his white-gloved hands resting on the hilt of a long sabre. He held his head high and seemed to be looking disdainfully down at me. So this was Jang Bahadur, the founder of the Rana dynasty . . .

A hundred and ten years have passed since he carried out his daring coup which made him master of Nepal. At that time, a half-mad drunkard—a descendant of Prithwi Narayan, the first Gurkha King—was on the throne. The Queen, a scheming, ambitious woman, was always at odds with the Royal Council which was composed of the leading Gurkha noblemen. Despite their objections, she succeeded in having a man who was her lover appointed head of the council.

One evening shortly afterwards, a messenger came rushing to the old royal palace which lies in the centre of Katmandu. It is one of the most beautiful buildings in the

country. The walls are dark red beneath slanting tile roofs, and a slender pagoda towers over the four main wings which face a tiled courtyard.

The messenger asked to see the Queen and informed her that the head of the Royal Council had just been shot in his palace. The assassin had escaped.

At first the Queen raged over the loss of her lover. Then she became frightened. The murder had undoubtedly been engineered by her enemies in the Royal Council. Perhaps they would also try to get her out of the way so the King would be completely in their power. She must try to forestall them, but whom could she trust to help her? She did not have many friends in the court. After a moment of hesitation she sent for a young Gurkha officer—Jang Bahadur. He promised to help her, provided she could persuade the King to grant him supreme power until the crisis was over. This she succeeded in doing, whereupon Jan Bahadur immediately summoned the Royal Council.

Throughout the evening, flaming torches moved through the narrow streets of the sleeping city. The noblemen arrived in sedan chairs, and shortly after midnight some five hundred of them were gathered in the courtyard of the royal castle.

Jang Bahadur now stepped forward and told them of the murder. The purpose of the meeting was to find out who had instigated the crime, he continued, adding that he knew the murderer was among them.

Just then the heavy palace gate was shut. The noblemen looked uneasily about them. Without noticing it, they had been surrounded by royal guardsmen. As was customary, they had left their own bodyguards outside the palace.

It is told that at this point an old nobleman rose and pointed at Jang Bahadur. "But it was you who planned the murder!" he shouted. "You even tried to persuade me to help you!"

The Queen gasped. She suddenly realized the full extent of Jang Bahadur's treachery, but it was too late. At an order

from him, the soldiers drew their *kukris* and began mowing down the unarmed noblemen. Not a single one escaped the bloodbath. At daybreak when the first farmers passed the palace on their way to the market, blood was still streaming into the street from under the gate.

With one stroke, Jang Bahadur had exterminated practically all those who could have opposed him in his new role. From now on he let himself be called "His Highness the Maharaja", a title that was inherited by the later Rana Prime Ministers. He exiled the Queen to India and forced the King to abdicate in favour of a young son.

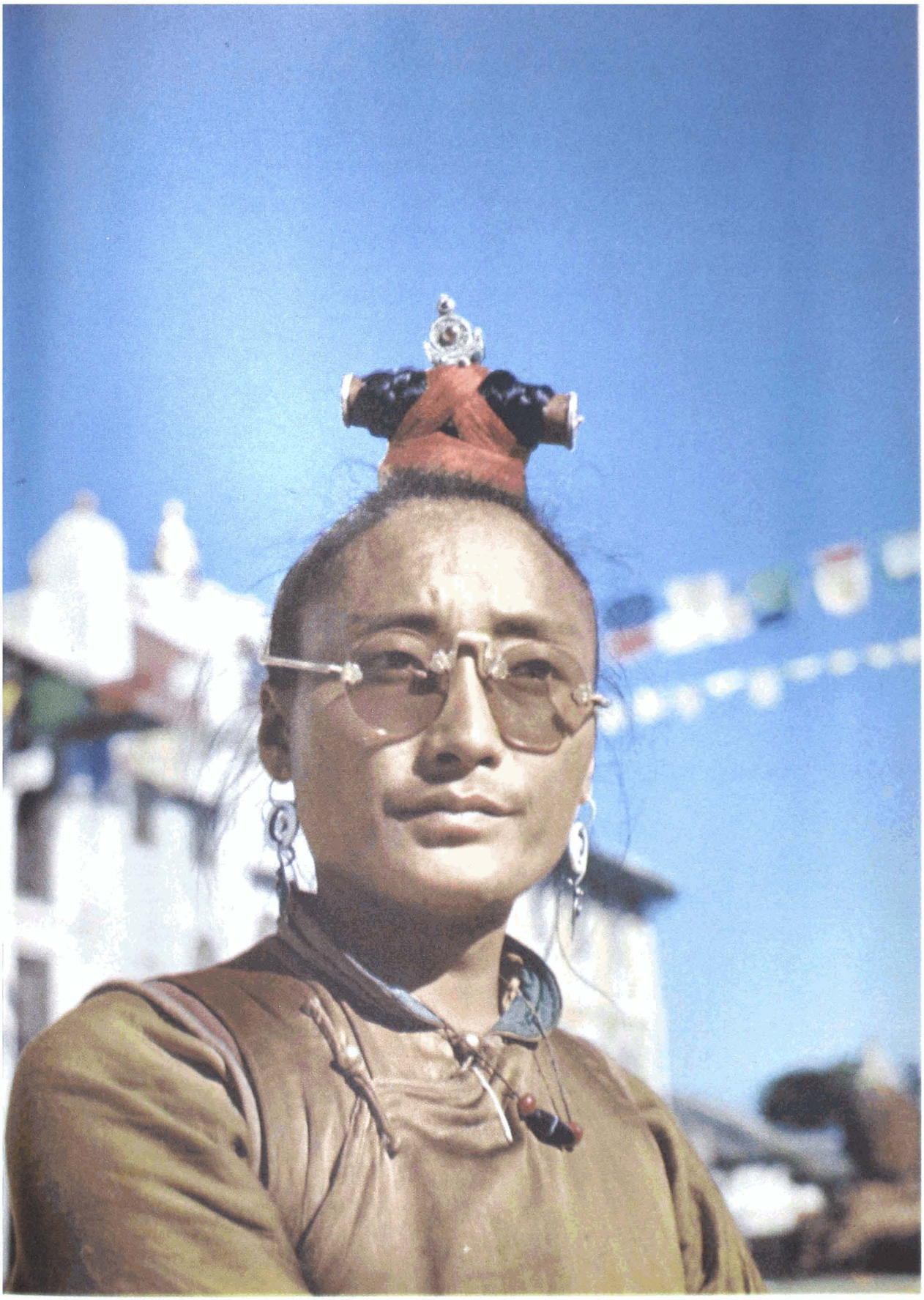
The new dictator must have felt tempted to proclaim himself king, but he knew that by doing so he might have aroused the wrath of both the gods and the people. It might even have caused a rebellion, for in Nepal the king is supposed to be a reincarnation of Vishnu. It does not matter if a king abdicates, for the spirit of Vishnu will immediately move into his successor—provided he is of the royal line. Only once a year did the Ranas permit the King to show himself before the people who believed—as they still do—that they would get forgiveness for all their sins merely by looking at him . . .

"Your tea is getting cold," I suddenly heard our host say. I was still standing in front of Jang Bahadur's picture, lost in thought, but now I returned to my chair. If I wanted any more information about the Ranas I would have to hurry, for the major was ordering a servant to set up the bridge table.

"How many Ranas are there altogether?" I asked.

"If you include all the B's and C's there must be at least a couple of thousand," the major replied.

The B's and the C's—what did he mean by that? He explained that during the century that had passed since Jang Bahadur came to power, the Rana family had been divided into three main branches. For the sake of convenience they were called A, B and C. The Class A Ranas were



5. An erudite Tibetan has come to Nepal to study the holy scripture of Buddhism.

6. Tibetan mendicant friars who have wandered down to Nepal to pray at the Buddhist places of pilgrimage.

those who had been in the direct line of descent for the premiership. There had never been more than about a hundred of them. Both of their parents had to be pure-blooded Ranas. The highest posts in the realm had always been reserved for them.

The Class B people were the descendants of Rana men who had married beneath themselves. They were also given important civilian and miltary posts, but had no hope of becoming Prime Ministers. The C-Ranas were the offspring of the harem girls. They were of course in the majority, as every self-respecting Rana had at least fifty women in his harem. Formerly, all higher army posts were reserved for C-Ranas, but they could not become generals.

Would it be indiscreet to ask which class of Ranas the major belonged to? Not at all, he replied, explaining that most Nepalese could tell this merely by looking at a Rana's palace. The Class A Ranas all lived in palaces of more than a hundred rooms each. The B-Ranas had around seventy rooms, the C's only forty. During the last couple of decades, some C-Ranas had become so reduced in means that they had to live in large villas instead of palaces.

"I am a C-Rana," the major said. It seemed to me that there was a trace of vexation in his voice. He repeated that before the revolution, all the highest posts had gone to the A's. When a premier or a Cabinet Minister died, the other A-Ranas had automatically advanced one step. In some cases, boys of eight or nine had become colonels, and once the Minister of Education was only fourteen years of age.

"Not that it mattered much," the major remarked, for in those days there were only a couple of schools in all Nepal. Practically all the Rana children had received their education in India.

In the major's opinion, the A-Ranas had only themselves to blame for having lost power. They dug their own graves by monopolizing the best posts, for as a result of this policy,

power had often come into the hands of incompetent people and a split had been created within the ranks of the Ranas.

"Otherwise, the revolution would probably not have been successful," he said.

But had not the rule of the Ranas been doomed from the moment the British left India? I asked. The major admitted that the support of the British had been very important to the Ranas. "But even after they left India, the Prime Minister who was then in power sat firmly in the saddle," he added. He now gave me a short résumé of the events leading up to the revolution.

At the time when India became independent, Nepal had the most liberal Prime Minister in the history of the Ranas. He was convinced that the days of autocracy were counted, and to gain a march on events he introduced a few mild reforms. Thus the better-class people of Katmandu were allowed to elect a city council which was to function in an advisory capacity. But when the Prime Minister also proposed introducing an independent judiciary system, the other A-Ranas balked. The liberal Prime Minister was forced by his own relatives to resign in favour of a more conservative man.

Around this time, Nepalese political refugees in North India announced the formation of a "liberation army". This did not bother the Ranas much, however, for they knew it consisted of only a few hundred poorly trained and poorly armed men.

Ever since Jang Bahadur seized power, the Ranas had kept the King under guard. But towards the end of 1950, the father of the present King succeeded in fleeing to the Indian Embassy in Katmandu and escaped to New Delhi by plane.

As a counter-measure, the Ranas had a child prince proclaimed King. When the liberation troops advanced into the lowlands along the southern border, they were quickly chased back into India by the regular Nepalese Army. In Katmandu,

the police split up and arrested groups of demonstrators who demanded a constitution and urged the people to go on strike.

Many believed that the revolution had already received its death blow, but now something unforeseen happened. A hundred and forty of the Army's leading Class C Rana officers announced in a joint declaration that they would no longer support a government which excluded them from the order of succession.

"Were you one of them?" I asked. The major nodded. "We had requested the Prime Minister to make it possible for us to advance further, but he would not listen. Without us he could not rely on the Army, so he was forced to start negotiating with the revolutionaries . . ."

As a result of these negotiations, Nepal for the first time in more than a hundred years got a Government that was not composed exclusively of Ranas. The Prime Minister stayed on, but half the cabinet posts went to revolutionary leaders who had returned from India together with the King. The jewel-studded crown of the Rana Prime Ministers was sold to the King of Saudi Arabia for one million pounds sterling.

Now began the period which the Nepalese call "after democracy". The Ranas continued to dominate Nepal economically—since the time of Jang Bahadur, they had laid their hands on more than half the land of the nation—but their political star was setting rapidly. During a political crisis a couple of years after the revolution, the Prime Minister had to resign in favour of a non-Rana. Since then Nepal has had six different governments, none of them under Rana leadership.

I asked the young couple if "democracy" had caused much change in their lives. The major's wife nodded eagerly.

"Oh yes! Before democracy, Nepal was like a prison. We women were not allowed to do anything. The Prime Minister decided whom we were to see. He prohibited private parties—he was afraid that if people got together they would

conspire against the Government. I hardly ever saw anyone. When I went to town I had to sit in the back of the car with all the blinds drawn. You can't imagine how bored I was!"

She waved her little white hands. "Now everything is different. We have lots of foreign friends. I play tennis and bridge and drive my own car. And I was one of the founders of our Women's Club—we do all kinds of social work, it is very interesting . . ."

Here the major broke in with an example of how despotic the Rana Prime Minister had been. "The British Ambassador who was here just before the revolution was very fond of bridge. There were only two others at the Embassy who knew how to play. When they wanted a fourth they had to send a message to the Prime Minister. He decided who was to play with them! It was strictly forbidden to have anything to do with foreigners without his permission, and afterwards you had to report to him and repeat every word that had been said during the evening."

The major rose. "But let's get started," he said and walked over to the table. "Do you use a strong no trump opening?"

# CHAPTER EIGHT

EVER SINCE WE met Mohan he had talked about inviting us to his home for a Nepalese meal. We had a feeling that his family was not too keen on the idea. That was quite natural, since the Newars are very particular as to whom they eat with. But one day he told us happily that he had finally been permitted to invite us.

"Please come for lunch tomorrow," he said, adding mysteriously that he had a surprise for us. I became curious and wanted to know right away what it was, so he told us that the next day was the birthday of a popular god. After lunch the whole family was going to the temple with offerings for the god, but he had a good reason for staying home —after all, he had to entertain his guests.

"And when the others are gone, I will show you the sword," he concluded. Chi-yun looked bewildered, but I knew right away what he meant. He had told me that in every Newar home there is a small shrine on the roof above the kitchen. Here the most sacred family heirloom is kept: a rusty sword from the time when the Newars had not yet been conquered by the Gurkhas. Of course I was eager to see such a sword, but Mohan had said that there was very little chance of it.

"Now you will get your wish fulfilled after all," he told me with a smile; he was always happy when he could do

something for me. We agreed to meet outside his home at eleven o'clock the following morning.

But in the middle of the night Chi-yun woke up with a violent pain in her stomach. We knew right away that she had an attack of " Katmandu tummy ", as it is called. Everybody in the valley, natives as well as foreigners, suffers regularly from this illness. As far as is known, it is caused by all the mica in the water and the soil—when the sun rays fall at a certain angle, it looks as if the fields are powdered with diamond dust. Even the finest filter cannot keep the tiny, sharp particles out of the drinking water. My poor wife had cramp and was sick. I could only comfort her by telling her that an attack seldom lasts more than three days—nor less, unfortunately.

Next morning I set out alone. I had never visited Mohan before, but he had made a drawing for me so I could easily find his home which was located in an alley not far from the main street. " The Place where the Elephants Graze ", it was called. Once there had been a bamboo grove which had been the haunt of wild elephants. It must have been very long ago, for as far as I could find out there had not been any wild elephants in the valley for nearly a thousand years.

The foreigners in Katmandu maintain that the Nepalese are the most unpunctual people in the world. This may be true, since hardly anybody has a watch in this country, but Mohan was an exception. When I came to the entrance of the alley at the stroke of eleven he was already there waiting for me. As usual he wore European clothes. I did not think they suited him nearly as well as Nepalese clothes, and he agreed with me, but he wanted to be modern.

His face showed his disappointment when I told him that Chi-yun could not come. It was mainly because of her that he had been permitted to invite me, he explained. " She is a Chinese, we do not feel that she is really a foreigner."

We walked past a new building, a square cement box.

How ugly it was compared to the old wooden houses, I remarked.

"But do you expect us to build old houses?" Mohan asked, shaking his head. "Sometimes you foreigners criticize us because we are so backward, but you also criticize us when we try to be modern by imitating you."

We went through a courtyard and entered a three-storied house. "Watch out!" Mohan said, for in the semi-darkness I had nearly stepped on some excrement. He apologized for the mess. It had probably been left by some children, he said; when he had discovered it in the morning the sweeper was already gone. It seemed not to have occurred to him that he could remove it himself.

On the way up the steep staircase I caught a glimpse of several faces watching me from above, but no one came to greet me. We entered Mohan's room which was on the first floor. It was quite small, and the only furniture was a writing desk so low that one did not need a chair, but sat on the floor. In a corner were some books, held up against the wall by a stone. Most of them were in English: textbooks in arithmetic and geography, a ragged atlas, *Gulliver's Travels, Alice in Wonderland,* the speeches of Mao Tse-tung . . .

"The food will not be ready for nearly an hour—I hope you do not mind?" Mohan said. Of course not, I replied. He looked at me with a faint smile.

"Sometimes foreigners are a little impatient," he said quietly. I blushed, for I knew he was thinking of my behaviour a few days ago when I had shouted and cursed because a mutual Nepalese acquaintance had failed to show up for an appointment.

Mohan said he had tried to persuade his mother to have the food ready by eleven o'clock, but without success. "What if the foreigner does not come on time?" she had asked. "Then the rice will be spoiled." He had assured her that his foreign friend was never late, but even so she had not put the rice on the fire until she saw me on the stairs.

"She just will not believe that people will come until they are already here," Mohan told me. "Most Nepalese are like that. When I go to fetch my friends it is the same thing—they don't start to make themselves ready until I arrive."

He looked wistfully at his wrist watch. "I want so much to be punctual, like you. But it is so difficult when nobody else is. The students hardly ever come on time for the lectures, and even the teachers are often late. Nobody cares. Time just doesn't mean much to people here . . ."

When he stopped talking I could hear the faint ticking of his watch. At that moment I envied the Nepalese because they are not slaves of time the way we are.

A little while later we heard a hooting that sounded somewhat like a foghorn. This meant that his grandfather was through with his daily religious ceremonies, Mohan said. His father was dead, and the old man was the head of the family. Every morning he went up to the shrine on the roof. Here he washed himself from top to toe, meditated, prayed, and finally he blew on a sacred conch shell.

"He thinks that the gods like to hear it," Mohan said in the tone of someone who knows better. "He also says that it is good for the lungs. When I was a boy he tried to teach me how to do it. He often took me up to the shrine, but now he does not like me to go there."

"Why not?"

"Because he practically considers me unclean. You have no idea how many rules I would have to follow if I were to live the way he wants me to. You have to wash yourself practically every time you have been outside the house. Every time I visit you I ought to go through a special cleansing ceremony afterwards. Fortunately, my grandfather did not know about it that evening when we visited the untouchables—otherwise he would not have permitted me to eat together with the others."

Mohan cocked his ears. We heard steps on the stairs,

and an old man entered. We both rose. He greeted us with dignity, and only when he had seated himself did he ask us to sit down.

" My grandfather says that he is happy to see you," Mohan translated. " He has heard me talk about you, but it is the first time he meets a foreigner."

The old man's strong, intelligent face was framed by a grey beard. He sat with his legs crossed and looked at me. There was an air of tranquillity about him, as if he had brought along some of the peace he had found at his shrine.

Mohan told me that every morning his grandfather fetched water for his personal use from the river. He refused to use the water from the public faucet, and there was a strange story connected with this.

When the first Rana Prime Minister came to power there was no running water in Katmandu. He decided that the brother next to him was to succeed him, and so on. When all the brothers had died their sons were to assume power according to age. But their turn never came. The fourth brother was killed by a relative who appointed himself Prime Minister and transferred the right of inheritance to his own branch of the Rana family. This evil deed must have weighed heavily on the murderer, for he installed half a dozen public water faucets in the capital. According to an ancient Nepalese custom which originated in India, a murderer can atone for his sin by giving water to the people.

About half a century later, there was again trouble over the sequence of inheritance. A new murder was committed, a third branch of the Rana family moved into the Prime Minister's palace. This time, the murderer sought to expiate his guilt in an even grander manner. He built a water reservoir in the mountains and had a tap installed in every one of Katmandu's larger streets.

" Many people have forgotten this, but not my grandfather," Mohan said. " He says that the water in the taps has forever been defiled by the two murderers."

A pale little girl came in and greeted me. I could have guessed that she was Mohan's little sister, for she had the same large, placid eyes. She drew the curtains, disappeared, and returned soon after with our lunch on a tray. We were going to eat by ourselves. The old man rose and went upstairs to take his meal with the others.

Before we began to eat we took a jar of water to the window and rinsed our hands. Mohan poured some yellow sauce over his rice and mixed the whole thing thoroughly with his long fingers, then formed a lump and threw it into his mouth without touching the lips.

"Aren't you hungry?" He looked questioningly at me. I was happy that he could not read my thoughts. I had often smiled indulgently when he told me about the caste rules of his people. It seemed laughable to me that there were so many kinds of food they could not touch, so many people with whom they were not allowed to eat.

Yet now I could not get myself to start on the food. I was suddenly afraid of feeling sick. My prejudices were of a hygienic nature—but so were those of the Nepalese. Their complicated eating habits had originally been dictated by the fear of contamination. I was really no better than they . . .

Quickly I mixed a little sauce with my rice and ate it. "Sure I am hungry," I declared with my mouth full. I was no longer afraid of becoming sick, for the curry sauce was so hot that even the toughest germs could not possibly have survived it.

Some of the other dishes were quite tasty; fried brain and stewed tongue of buffalo, cauliflower omelette, spinach with onion. Mohan told me that the daily fare of the city people consisted mainly of rice with hot curry sauce and a little vegetable. Most Nepalese eat only two meals a day, I learned: one just before noon, the other around seven o'clock.

I asked how old his sister was. Eight, he replied, adding

with a smile that she was going to get married in a couple of months. "But not to a man!" He explained that when a Newar girl is eight or nine years old she is wedded to a fruit—a bell-fruit it is called because of its shape. I have not been able to find out when or why this custom began. Mohan thought it came about in order to save Newar widows from the fate of Indian widows who are condemned to remain single, despised by everyone.

"A Newar woman does not become a widow even if she loses her husband," he said. "That is because she has been married to the bell-fruit all along. When she has mourned for a suitable period she is allowed to find a new husband."

I asked why his little sister had drawn the curtains. His mother had probably told her to do so, he replied. She did not want the neighbours to see us eating together, for they were bound to gossip about it.

"I don't mind about such things," he assured me. As if to prove it, he suddenly took some rice from my plate and ate it.

"Look—I am not even afraid of eating from your plate," he said. I was touched by this proof of his friendship and broad-mindedness, for it was as significant as an offer to seal a bond of friendship by the ceremonial mingling of blood in ancient Scandinavia.

He began to talk about his future. In a year he would pass his final exams at the college of Katmandu. What then?

"If I get a high grade I may become secretary to some official. That is the best I can hope for. Even now it is not easy for Newars to get good positions. Otherwise I can become a schoolteacher. Those are the only two possibilities . . ."

Other roads must be open to him, I protested—after all, there were so few educated people in Nepal.

"But we are not trained for doing anything else," he replied. "Our educational system is completely out of date. It was copied from the British more than half a century ago—the Prime Minister who was then in power had heard

that a country was uncivilized without schools. We learn exactly the same things now as English school children did in those days. Nothing has been changed, no new subjects have been added. I can recite long passages from Shakespeare, I know *Gulliver's Travels* and *Alice in Wonderland* almost by heart, but I have never learned anything practical, I do not know anything about science or business methods or about my own country."

He dreamed of going to India or England or the U.S.A. —anywhere outside Nepal. But his grandfather wanted him to get married and had in fact already found a suitable girl for him. And Mohan felt it was his duty to obey the old man.

" What do you think I should do?" he asked. Poor Mohan, I thought—he was torn between the petrified old world of the Newars and the twentieth century . . .

Shortly after we had finished eating, the rest of the family came down the stairs. They greeted me in passing by putting their palms together. Mohan's grandfather had on a black Nepalese cap. He was followed by Mohan's uncle, a man of about thirty who smiled kindly to me. Then came the old man's wife who was so bent with rheumatism that she had difficulties getting down the stairs. She was followed by the uncle's wife, Mohan's mother and little sister and three more children. All of them were dabbed with bright colours on their foreheads, and the girls carried brass trays with flowers and delicacies for the gods.

From the window we watched them cross the yard. As soon as they had disappeared into the corridor leading to the street, we left Mohan's room and went up the stairs. In a low voice he told me that his grandfather and uncle had their rooms on the second floor. On the third floor we entered a large room, so low that I could barely stand upright. There was no furniture of any kind, no ornaments on the clay walls. The ceiling was of unplaned wood, dark and cracked with age. Only a stack of polished brass dishes

and some clay pots showed that this was the dining-room. The kitchen was next door.

"But there is nothing to see in the kitchen," Mohan said in a whisper. We tip-toed over to a narrow ladder which went up to a hatch in the ceiling. Before Mohan opened the hatch he turned and looked at me.

"Be sure to keep your head down, or the neighbours might see you. My grandfather would never forgive me if . . ."

Without completing the sentence he opened the hatch and we stepped out on a little balcony which was built in a recess of the roof. In front of us were the pagodas and temple roofs of the city, and in the far distance lay the snow mountains, blinding white in the strong light.

At one end of the balcony was a clay shrine which looked somewhat like a doll's house. It was only a couple of feet high, and under the roof I could make out some blackened stones, a couple of clay bowls and a long, rusty object with a handle. That must be the sword. I moved a step closer . . .

"No!" Mohan grabbed my arm. His face was shiny with perspiration and he seemed strangely agitated. "Do not go closer! You have seen enough—let us go down again. Hurry, please!"

A moment later we were back in his room. He was breathing heavily as if he had been running. "You must excuse me," he said earnestly. "I cannot understand it—I didn't think the shrine meant anything to me. It doesn't really—I don't believe in such things. But all of a sudden I had a feeling that I was doing something wrong—it was as if my grandfather was watching us . . ."

He smiled weakly. When I left a while later he still wasn't quite himself. Since then he has never talked about the old sword.

## CHAPTER NINE

DURING THE LONG rule of the Ranas, no foreign visitors came to Nepal. The borders were closed in those days, but shortly after the revolution in 1950, Indian Air Lines opened a route to Katmandu. In the beginning there was only one plane a week. Now there is a daily service, and among the passengers are bound to be some adventurous tourists.

From the airfield they are taken by jeep to the Royal Hotel where they are welcomed by the manager, a kind and gentle Anglo-Indian. He seldom knows how many guests are coming, for though many of them wire ahead to reserve rooms, he often does not get the cable until they have left again.

Even an unexpected invasion fails to upset him, though. The hotel is an old Rana palace, so there is plenty of room. Before the guests are shown to their quarters, he may give them a bit of advice about local conditions. You should not be surprised if the waiter brings you a bouquet of flowers when you ask for a glass of water, for he does not speak English. Electric razors aren't much use early in the evening, for then the over-worked little power plant of the capital gives only between fifteen and twenty volts. But around nine o'clock, when the inhabitants have gone to bed, the razors run amok; then there is close to three hundred volts . . .

When the guests have freshened themselves up after the journey, the manager sometimes takes them on a tour of the

building. He shows them the dining-room where the former owners ate with their fingers from plates of solid gold. In another hall, which is even larger, he points to a small lattice window just under the ceiling. This was the peep-hole of the harem women—from here they looked down wistfully when there was a party going on. No man but their master was allowed to see them.

A narrow corkscrew staircase leads up to a dark room with bullet-proof steel plates on doors and windows. Here the last owner had intended to hide if the people rebelled or his own relatives wanted to kill him.

The round-trip ends on a broad veranda which runs along the front of the palace. The whole valley lies before you, and behind it tower the white peaks of the Himalayas.

"Which one is Mount Everest?" one of the guests is sure to ask. The manager explains that though less than forty miles away, the giant is hidden by other mountains. Just to get to its foot takes a trained mountaineer about three weeks . . .

Too bad, for the guests had hoped to get a snapshot of themselves with Everest in the background. Well, but then they will have to content themselves with a picture of the Abominable Snowman. Again the manager shakes his head. The Snowman is camera-shy, he explains. Every summer one of the big London papers sends a costly expedition to Nepal to look for him, but thus far they have found nothing but his footprints.

This is a serious blow to the guests, but there is usually a third attraction on their programme for Nepal. Surely they will be able to see Boris, the famous ballet dancer and night-club king who goes hunting with film stars and maharajas?

Yes, the manager replies—but not until noon, for Mr. Boris, the owner of the hotel, never gets up before twelve o'clock . . .

This is not quite true, for the first time I met Boris was

only a little after ten in the morning. I remember that I knocked gently on his bedroom door.

" Who's that?" a husky voice inquired.

" A Danish journalist . . ."

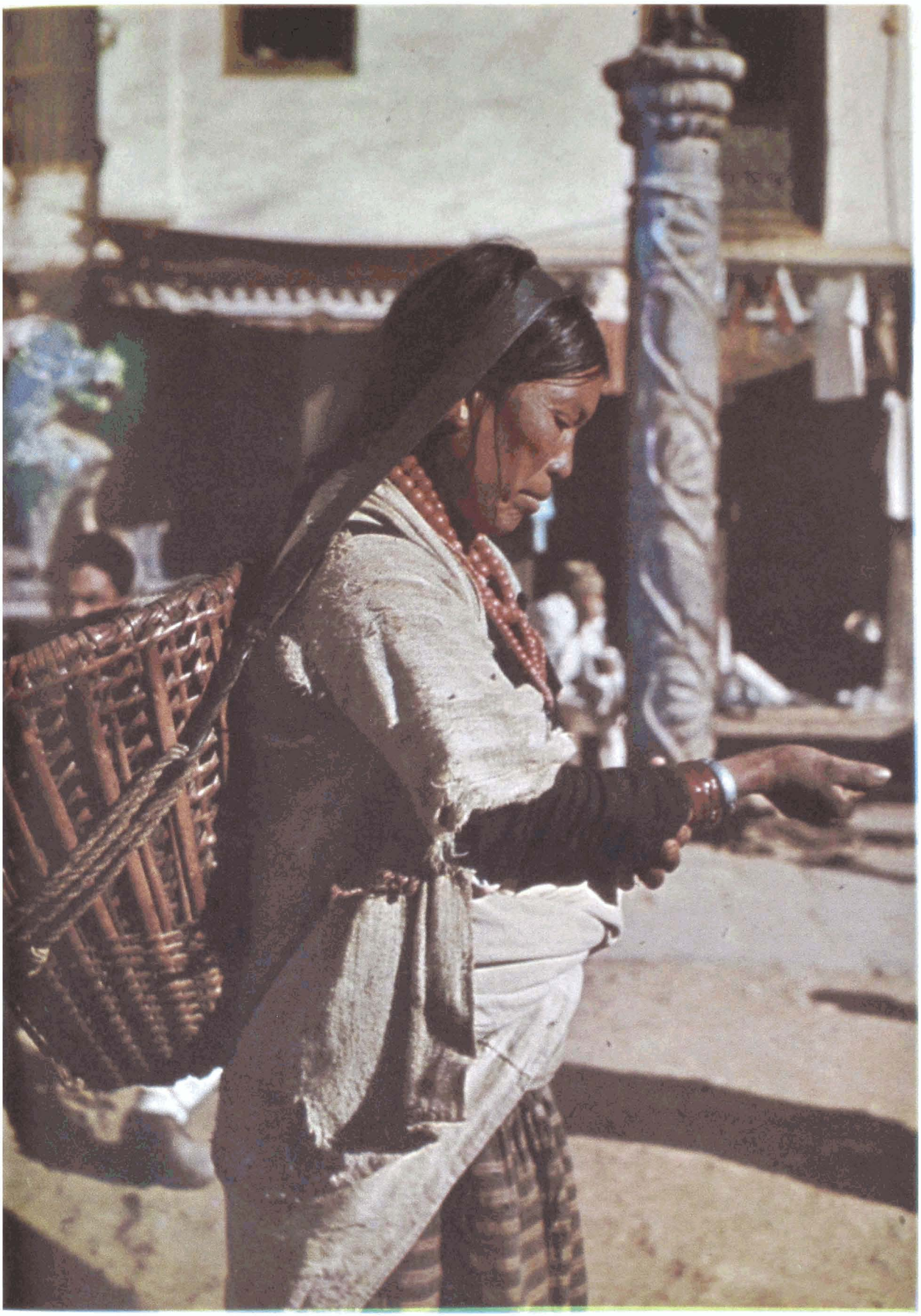
" Oh, so you're from Denmark!" The door was opened by a tall, slender girl in a kimono. She had blue eyes and flowing blonde hair. " So am I. Come in."

Her name was Inger and she was Boris's wife. Of course he would give me an interview. " I don't remember ever having heard him say 'no' to anyone," she said with a laugh. " He has just gone over to the kitchen, he suddenly felt like fixing something up for himself. Yesterday he had wild boar steak and cucumbers for breakfast. God only knows what he is going to cook up today."

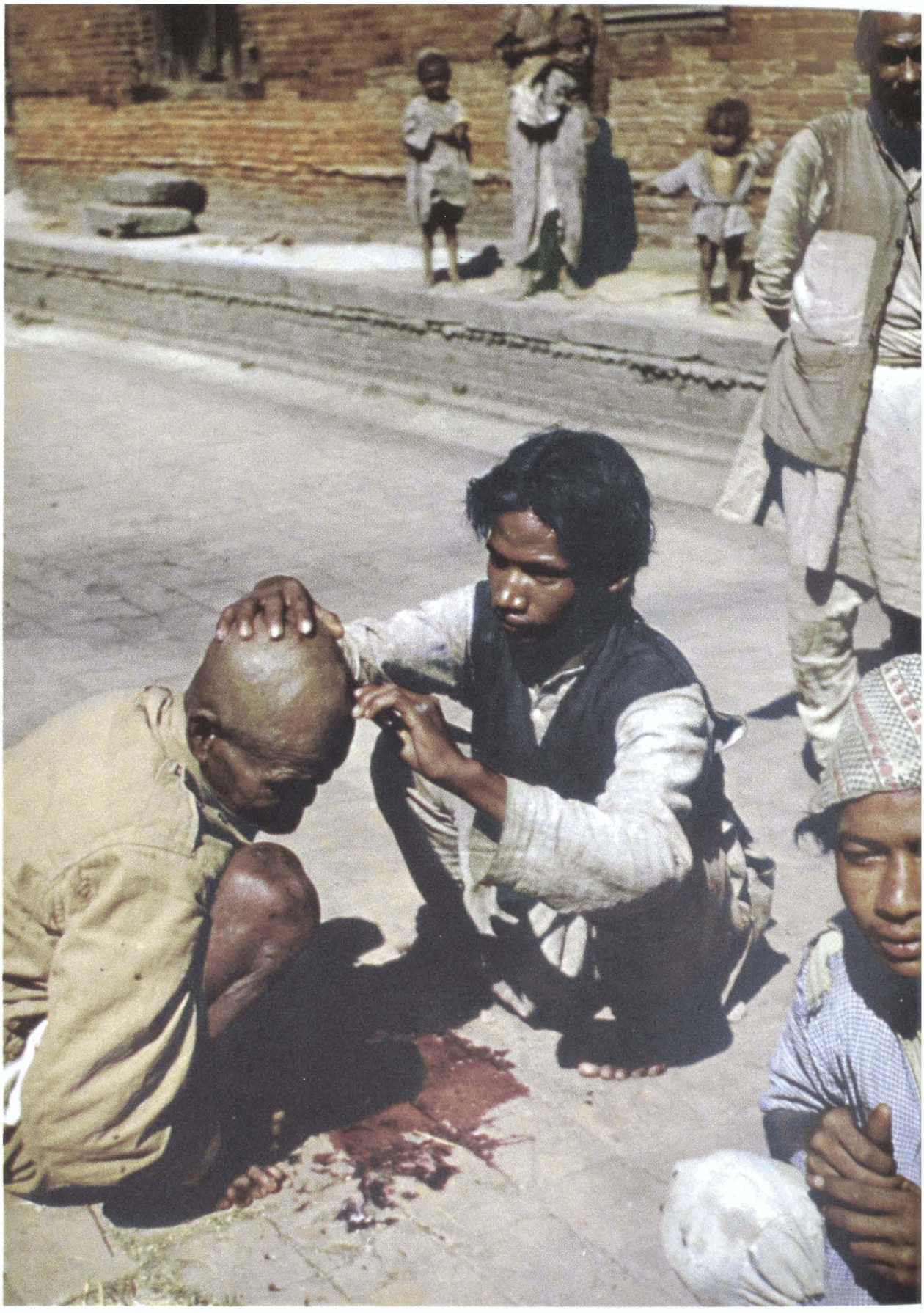
The large room looked as if its inhabitants were living on a war-time footing. There were clothes on all the chairs, and next to the unmade bed stood a couple of open suitcases. In a corner were stacked some mattresses, on which slept their three sons, aged six, seven and nine, when they were home during weekends. They studied at a boarding school, started by a Catholic father from Chicago in a palace outside Katmandu. Some days later Chi-yun and I visited this school which had close on a hundred pupils, most of them the sons of wealthy Nepalese. The blond heads of the three little Russo-Danes shone like suns among all the dark children.

" I am afraid my Danish has become a little rusty," Inger continued, seating herself at a toilet table. " You see, I was only nine when I left home." She began to rub cold cream on her face. " My father was chief mate on a ship that sailed between Far Eastern ports, so mother and I moved to Singapore, and later to Calcutta."

That was where she had met Boris in 1947. " He had a night club on the ground floor of the house where we lived. I wasn't allowed to go there, but I often saw him in the lobby. I fell in love with him because—please don't laugh



7. A woman from the mountains has arrived at Katmandu to sell her vegetables. In the last couple of years the Nepalese have begun wearing plastic bangles imported from India.



8. A Newar having his head clean-shaved in one of the many market squares of Katmandu.

at me, I was only nineteen at the time! Because he looked like Peter Lorre . . ."

Boris was twenty-seven years older than she. Her mother thought the difference in age too great and sent Inger home to Denmark to forget him, but Boris followed her. They were married in Brussels and flew back to India.

"You should have seen my mother's face when Boris knocked on her door on Christmas Eve. *Merry Christmas, Mother,* he said, and kissed her. *I have a present for you.* And the present—was me. . ."

The door opened. I found it hard to believe that the man who entered had once enchanted the pampered ballet audiences of London and Paris. He was half a head shorter than his wife and wore flannel trousers and a blue sports shirt that hung loosely over his big, round tummy. Wherever you see Boris—at official receptions, on picnics in the mountains, or at parties with Nepalese princes—he is always dressed like that. Some maintain that he has only the same shirt, but Boris says it is not true, he has two.

Behind him came a waiter with a tray. When Inger had explained who I was, Boris nodded to me and helped the servant to clear the table of glasses and empty bottles. In contrast to his wife his movements were quick and nervous.

"Sit down and have a bite." Boris held a chair for me. "Roasted mushrooms with garlic and pheasant liverpaste, my own recipe."

I had already breakfasted, but this was too tempting. When we had finished eating, Boris sat down on the floor and crossed his legs like an Oriental. It was definitely not Peter Lorre he reminded me of—rather a mixture between Bevan and the fat, happy Chinese God of Wealth.

"I must have a whisky," he said. "Then I talk better." He poured himself three fingers and added a little water. "You see, it isn't so easy to tell about my life. I have had a lot of amusing experiences, but there has been neither head

nor tail to them. Sometimes it seems as if it has all been a series of coincidences."

Boris Lissamevitch was born and grew up in Tsarist Russia. His father was an army officer, and young Boris was to follow in his footsteps, but when he was a cadet the revolution came. He was in Odessa when the city fell to the Bolsheviks and hid himself in the home of an old friend of the family, a lady who had a ballet school. Next day the house was searched.

"That was one of the worst moments in my life," Boris said. "When the Bolsheviks found a cadet he was shot on the spot, but she calmly told them that I was one of her pupils. That was how I became a ballet dancer . . . You smile! In those days I was as skinny as a bean-pole."

He wanted to get out of Red Russia, but the authorities turned down his request for an exit permit, stating that he did not have sufficient reason for leaving. At that time, the troupe he danced with was performing a ballet in which a cardboard castle was burned at the end of the last act. One night they made such a thorough job of it that the whole theatre went up in flames.

"Then I had the reason I needed—I persuaded the authorities to send me to Berlin to order new equipment for the theatre, for I could speak German."

In central Europe he changed trains for Paris where he arrived without a cent in his pocket. "I soon got a job at an automobile factory. I had never really worked before, so at the end of each day I was ready to drop, but the monotony was worst of all. Day in and day out we had to be there early in the morning and go home exactly ten hours later." He came to hate the alarm clock and promised himself that once the nightmare was over he would never get up early again.

For lunch he usually ate black bread, sausage and salted cucumbers which he bought at a Russian store. One day while he was eating he noticed an item in the newspaper in

which his food was wrapped. Diaghilev, the famous Russian ballet impressario, had come to Paris and was staying at Grand Hotel.

As soon as the whistle sounded, Boris went to the Grand. He was so poorly dressed that the gateman stopped him, but just then a tall man in a fur coat came out of the swing door. He stopped and looked at Boris.

"You must be a Russian," he said. "I can tell from your accent."

Boris explained that he was a dancer and wanted to talk to Diaghilev about getting a job.

"I am Diaghilev," the tall man said. He wrote something on a card. "Go to this address tomorrow morning. I am organizing a new troupe. Perhaps I can use you."

During the next five years Boris danced for Diaghilev. When the great impressario died in 1929 his troupe was disbanded. For a while Boris was leading dancer at a theatre in Buenos Aires. Afterwards he under-studied Massine in London. Here he met a Russian dancer who became his wife.

The depression made them both jobless. They sold everything they had and bought two third-class tickets for the East. Here there wasn't much interest in ballet, but they became popular with a tango number which they performed in most of the night clubs between Tientsin and Bombay.

In Calcutta they became friends with a maharaja who complained that all the good night clubs were for whites only. "Why don't you open a place which also admits Indians?" he asked. Boris replied that he would like nothing better, but where was the capital to come from? He and his wife were leaving for Madras the next day, and he was not even sure he had enough to pay his hotel bill.

"My friends and I will raise the capital," the maharaja said. "Will you stay?"

Thus was born the *300 Club* which soon became one of India's leading night spots. Boris made more money than ever before in his life.

"And what has become of it?" Inger interrupted. She leaned over towards Boris and gave him a friendly jab in the stomach. "I'll tell you! It is all here—goose liver paste, caviar and champagne. Too many parties, my friend—you just can't keep money."

Boris straightened himself and tried to draw in his stomach. "Well, that is better than putting it in the bank, isn't it? We only live once, we might as well have a good time with our friends."

In 1947 he was divorced and met Inger. How had they happened to become hotel owners in Katmandu? Well, one evening a group of Indian officials had come to the *300 Club*. One could tell right away that they were big shots, for they arrived with a police escort. They all paid special attention to a shy, middle-aged man in their group. He drank nothing and said very little, just sat there and watched the dancing couples with a rather wistful expression.

That was the King of Nepal. The Ranas were still in power, but they had permitted him to go to Calcutta for a medical examination. Soon after he left the club together with the rest of the party, but at midnight he returned, alone. He wanted so much to dance, he told Boris in correct but halting English.

It was hard to believe that he was the same man who had been there earlier in the evening. He laughed and talked and it was nearly impossible to get him off the dance floor. From early childhood he had been surrounded by the henchman of the Ranas, and this was the first time he could let himself go.

It was dawn when he left, and during the following week he returned almost every night. Already then he must have had hopes of making himself master in his own house. On the last evening he invited Boris and Inger to visit him in Nepal. Not now, he quickly added, but one day it would become possible for him to have guests.

The revolution took place two years later, and early in

1952 Boris and Inger received an invitation from the King. Now they could come and visit him.

From the aeroplane they gazed down on the sun-filled valley between the snowcapped mountains. One of the King's motor cars met them at the airfield. As they rumbled through the alleys of Katmandu, Boris was silent for once. He was fascinated by this strange, ancient world where everything was so new to him. Suddenly he turned to Inger.

" I don't feel like returning to Calcutta. Do you?"

Inger shook her head. She had never cared for the hot, crowded Indian metropolis.

" Let's stay here!" Boris continued.

" But how can we? How would we make a living?"

" I'm sure some thing will turn up . . ."

A couple of days after their arrival the King sent for them. When they entered the audience hall he was talking to two men from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was formal, almost cold, but as soon as the officials had left he relaxed and began talking about his night excursions in Calcutta.

Did they like being in Katmandu? Of course, they replied —they had been given a whole palace to themselves. But the King was worried that Europeans might not feel comfortable in a Nepalese dwelling. There ought to be a European-style hotel for foreign visitors . . .

Suddenly, Boris knew what he wanted to do. " With Your Majesty's permission I will open a hotel in the capital," he said. The King thought it was a good idea, and it was arranged that Boris should rent a Rana palace. Inger flew to Calcutta to fetch the children. When she returned, Boris was already busy fixing up the Royal Hotel.

Some time after the hotel had opened, the King went to Switzerland to undergo treatment for a serious heart ailment. The last time they saw him he was a very sick man.

" I don't think I am ever going to dance again," he said sadly . . .

Here Boris got up and walked over to the window. He cleared his throat a couple of times before he continued. "A few months later the King died. It was a great loss to Nepal. He was one of the finest men I have ever known."

A moment passed before he sat down again. He now told me that a group of conservative Nepalese politicians had been working against him practically ever since his arrival. "One can't blame them, really. To them, the hotel and I symbolize dangerous new ideas which in the long run will undermine their power."

But then came the coronation of the Crown Prince. Hundreds of diplomats, journalists and other guests arrived in the primitive little capital, and all of a sudden the officials needed Boris. The mere thought of the hectic coronation days made him reach for the whisky bottle.

"They left everything to Boris," Inger said, but her husband broke in. "I didn't mind. It was a challenge—I've always enjoyed a good fight."

Boris had to house and feed all the guests. Virtually nothing could be bought in the shops of Katmandu, but he imported three dozen cooks and several aeroplane loads of cutlery, food and drinks from Calcutta.

"The gala dinner immediately after the coronation ceremony was the most trying. At first the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told me that there would be thirty-six guests. The day before the dinner they changed it to sixty. When the table had already been set they sent me a message saying that they had made a mistake, there would be a hundred. And an hour before the dinner was served, the Foreign Minister's secretary came and told me that there would probably be a couple of extra guests. One hundred and eighty-two people finally showed up."

Every evening, a couple of deer and wild boars were roasted on a spit in front of the hotel. "The guests loved it, they thought it was part of the show," Boris said with a smile. "But I couldn't possibly have fed so many in any other way."

Some of the visitors had to sleep in tents in the hotel park. The French Ambassador from New Delhi was put up in a small bungalow which Boris at the last moment had built near the hotel. Shortly after the Ambassador's arrival Boris went over and asked if everything was all right.

" Yes—that is . . ." The Ambassador was tripping in a strange way. " I should like very much to go to the bathroom, but the servant does not seem to understand . . ."

The door to the toilet was locked and no one knew what had happened to the key. Without hesitation, Boris rammed the door open with his shoulder.

" Please, Your Excellency." He made a deep bow and the Ambassador hurried past him.

When all the guests were gone, Boris had a nervous breakdown. " But you have to take the bad along with the good," he remarked to me. " I was a grand show—I would do it over again any day."

" Then it would be without me," Inger exclaimed. " I got enough, I can tell you. But in a way it wasn't so bad as when you were in jail. I just couldn't stand the uncertainty . . ."

" Yes, it must have been awful for you." Boris went over and put his arm around her. I looked questioningly from one to the other.

" Why were you in jail?"

Boris sat down again. " If you want to hear about that I have to have another drink. It is a long story—it goes all the way back to the first time I tasted Nepalese firewater. I spat it out—horrible stuff, pure poison. I suggested to the government that they give me sole rights to sell liquor in the valley. In return for this monopoly I would import some decent stuff and pay them ten thousand rupees a month. They agreed."

On paper it was an excellent arrangement for both sides, but the government calmly went on selling licences to all the Nepalese distillers—there were a couple of thousand of them in the valley.

" I protested time and again. The officials listened politely to me and promised to put a stop to it. I really think they intended to keep their word, but it is very difficult for the Nepalese to make up their minds. I lost a lot of money, and finally I told them that I considered the agreement null and void."

That was that, he thought, but one morning at 3.0 there was loud knocking on his bedroom door. Outside were fourteen soldiers and an official from the Excise Department. He begged Boris to excuse the odd hour and presented him with a bill for 170,000.15 rupees, this being what the Excise Department figured that Boris owed them.

" I hope you can pay cash," the official said.

" Of course not," Boris replied.

" Then you are under arrest."

He was allowed to remain at the hotel until the next morning, though. The soldiers slept in the corridor outside his bedroom, and for once Boris had to get up early. The few guests who were up and about at 8.0 a.m. could hardly believe their own eyes when they saw a flock of soldiers marching off with the owner of the hotel. Boris was taken to the Excise Department and again presented with the bill.

" You have to stay here until you pay up," the chief of the department told him. Boris sent to the hotel for a camp-bed and a mosquito-net. During the next few days a huge crowd followed his every move from the alley outside, for the story of his arrest had quickly spread all over town and everybody wanted to see the foreign prisoner. Before taking a bath—which he did in a washbasin, in several sections—he would chase out the office clerks and the soldiers who guarded him.

" The Nepalese were quite discreet," he said. " The people outside looked the other way until I had dressed again."

Twice a day he was permitted to go for a walk in a garden behind the building. His guards—by now there were only four soldiers—saluted him every time he walked past them.

" Being locked up really wasn't so bad," Boris said. " For

the first time in years I had time to do some reading, and Inger brought me food twice a day—the chef at the hotel made all my favourite dishes for me. But the nights were awful, at least in the beginning. As soon as it got dark, a crowd of dogs would start making a racket in the alley, and every morning between three and five, two old women met to exchange gossip outside my window. They must have been deaf, for they shouted at the top of their voices and paid no attention whatever when I asked them to be quiet.

Finally Boris could not stand it any longer. He asked Inger to bring him a slingshot and ammunition. "One shot was enough to chase away the two women. They never came back. After a few direct hits the dogs moved their headquarters to another alley. Then I could sleep in peace."

On his birthday he went to bed early, but around ten o'clock he was awakened by a chorus singing "Happy Birthday to You." Outside his window stood Inger and half-a-dozen of their Nepalese friends, one of them a prince. They had brought along vodka and a portable gramophone. That night Boris taught one of his guards to do the Cossack dance . . .

When Boris had been locked up for two and a half months the Excise Department gave up. As soon as he was released he sued the deparment on no less than five counts.

"But I might as well have saved myself the trouble," he said with a smile. "All the cases were tried by a group of officials from the Excise Department, and of course they were completely unable to see my side of the question."

That was pretty rough treatment, I commented. Boris shrugged.

"Every country has its own moral standards," he said. "We have to accept that or go home. I'll rather live here—in fact, I still think that the Nepalese are about the nicest people in the world."

## CHAPTER TEN

" IF ONLY THEY don't discover that I am a foreigner," I said over my shoulder. I could not see Mohan, but I could hear him breathing heavily just behind me. The path was so narrow that we could only walk single file.

" Don't worry," he replied. " Even your own mother would not recognize you like this. Just remember not to say anything, then it will be all right."

We struggled on in silence. A friend who owned a jeep had driven us to the foot of the mountains. It was still dark when we left him and began to walk. Now, an hour later, dawn was breaking. High above us the mountain tops lay bathed in golden light, but the rays of the sun had not yet reached down into the valley.

At a turn of the path, a hut appeared some distance ahead. A couple of soldiers were talking outside the door; little white clouds came out of their mouths to dissolve quickly in the raw morning air.

" That must be the control station." Mohan stopped. " Let us wait for the bearers."

They caught up with us a moment later : three squat mountain people with short, muscular legs. Their straight black hair was as coarse as the wool of their ragged, homespun jackets. Each one had a large basket on his back, hanging from a broad leather strap that went up over the head. The

straps had worn half-inch-deep grooves across their foreheads.

One of the bearers lit a cigarette butt which was passed from hand to hand while they listened to Mohan's final instructions. Their tribe had its own language, a Tibetan dialect, but the eldest one of them understood Nepalese. He translated for the two others. They were told not to say anything about us except if the soldiers questioned them. Then they were to tell them that we were Newar traders . . .

Mohan was wearing his usual European-style suit. I had offered to buy him some warm clothes for the journey, but he would accept only a woollen stocking-cap which he now had pulled over both ears to protect himself against the cold. The bearers listened attentively—until one of them happened to look at me and made a remark. Then they all three bent double; they smacked their thighs and the echo of their laughter came rolling back from the mountains.

Had I seen myself in a mirror I probably wouldn't have been able to keep a straight face, either. A pair of tight-fitting Nepalese trousers made my legs seem even thinner than usual. The loose shirt, also Nepalese, flared out around my hips like a ballet skirt. My eyes were hidden behind sunglasses, and on my head was a black Nepalese cap several numbers too small for me.

It wasn't for the fun of it that I had rigged myself out like this—it was for the sake of the authorities. When Nepal was a closed country, the officials thought all foreigners were spies. Their attitude has not changed much since then. Foreign visitors are allowed to go wherever they please in the valley, but if they want to make a trip into the mountains they have to get the Foreign Minister's permission first. He usually says no.

My application had been turned down as expected, but I just had to go. I had heard of a Shangri-la, a valley situated four days' march to the north, not far from the Tibetan border. Helambu, it was called, and the women here were said to be the most beautiful in Nepal—some even said in

the whole world. I had not been able to find a Nepalese who had been there, but there must be something to it, for the Ranas got most of their harem girls from Helambu, and they were connoisseurs . . .

When the laughter had subsided we walked to the control station in a body. The soldier stopped us and called their officer. He was not barefooted like the others, but wore tennis shoes, though without laces. He gave us a quick glance. Had he seen through me? No, for now he began to examine the baskets.

Rice, beans, tinned food, half-a-dozen bottles of cheap perfume (they were " presents for the natives "), cooking utensils, candles, sleeping bags, camera equipment (this was hidden at the bottom of the baskets). Altogether, our provisions weighed close to two hundred pounds. I felt a little ashamed when I looked at the bearers, each one of whom brought only a small blanket, a little food wrapped in a piece of cloth, and the inevitable *kukri*.

While the examination was going on I went over to a tree to perform a little errand. Mohan came rushing after me.

" Squat down!" he hissed. " Everybody will know right away that you are not a Nepalese—only foreigners stand up."

Never before had I squatted down so quickly. When I returned, the bearers were lifting up the baskets again, ready to continue, when the officer said something in a low voice. Mohan turned to me, blushing.

" He—he asks why you and I have changed clothes!"

The soldiers and the bearers screamed with laughter. The officer had seen right away that I was a foreigner, he told me with a smile. He knew that foreigners were not supposed to go into the mountains without special permission, but he was a reasonable man, we could talk about it. A small present for him, some cigarettes for the soldiers . . .

I managed to slip a few rupee-notes into his pocket without the others seeing it. The officer was evidently not so sensi-

tive as I about such matters. He at once took out the notes, counted them, and nodded to show his satisfaction. When we said goodbye they were all puffing away at the cigarettes I had given them.

For the next two hours the narrow path went steeply uphill. When we stopped to rest and the hammering of our hearts quieted down, we could hear a waterfall. Sometimes it was only a whisper, sometimes it turned into a roar, but we never saw it.

We walked through a forest of poinsettia trees which were twice as tall as a man. Thousands of orchids grew from the tree-trunks, but unfortunately they were not in bloom. Then we followed a stony belt where only a few bushes grew. The valley had disappeared behind white clouds. We were still walking uphill.

When we finally reached the top we discovered that this was only a foothill. Ahead of us was a wide chasm, and beyond it lay one mountain range after the other like great waves which grew bigger and bigger until they broke against the blue sky.

The oldest of the bearers, whose name was Nim, pointed towards the snow-covered peaks.

" We have to cross seven mountain ranges," he said. " Then we will be in Helambu."

Down we went into the gorge, up again on the other side. I was happy that for once Chi-yun had stayed at home. She gets dizzy easily, and in many places the narrow, zigzagging path was hacked into almost perpendicular mountain sides. Loose stones that rolled off the path started small landslides. Three or four times we came to places where both Mohan and I lost courage, but Nim took us firmly by the hand and helped us over, one by one.

We saw several low wooden huts with mossgrown bark roofs. Each hut was surrounded by a web of long, narrow terraces planted with potatoes, barley or corn. At one place I counted eighty-two terraces, as regular as a staircase. It

must have taken the owner about an hour to climb from the lowest to the highest of his fields.

Nim said that when his father was a boy his tribe had not known the potato, which is now one of the staple foods of the mountain people. It was introduced in Nepal by a foreign mountain-climbing expedition early this century. Before that, the diet of the mountain tribes consisted almost entirely of barley, corn, pepper, and butter.

When we reached the top of the next mountain, the bearers each picked up a large stone. I was about to ask if they did not have enough to carry already, when they hurled them to the top of a heap of stones as large as a house. Nim said that here lived a mountain god; if you did not sacrifice a stone to him you would never return.

Mohan and I slowed down. We assured each other that we did not believe in such stories, it was pure superstition, but finally we agreed that it would make a good impression on the natives if we followed their customs. We hurried back and each one of us threw a stone on the heap. After that we felt much better.

In the afternoon I began to limp from a large blister on my left foot. It hurt rather badly, especially after it burst. The next time we stopped for a rest I took out my medicine box, but discovered that I had forgotten to bring along vaseline as well as adhesive tape.

Nim said he would take care of my foot. He went back to a hut which we had just passed and returned with his index finger in the air. On it was a lump of butter which he rubbed into the bleeding wound. After another hour's walk the pain had disappeared.

When we stopped to rest the bearers would immediately begin to search their clothes for lice which they cracked between their thumbnails. Within a few minutes they could catch a dozen each. The vermin laid their eggs in their woollen jackets, Nim said. If there was only a cotton shirt between the wool and the skin the lice could not reproduce, it was too cold

for them—but none of the three men could afford to buy a shirt.

At dusk a heavy dew began to fall. Mohan thought this was dangerous. "It gives people malaria," he said.

Now Nim was walking in front; he seemed to be able to see in the dark. It was after seven when we finally reached a mountain hut. I wondered how we could spend the night here, for the low-ceilinged room was already chock-full of people. Nim told me not to worry and quoted a Nepalese proverb to the effect that where there is room in the heart there is also room on the floor. We stepped over the people who moved closer together to make room for us by the fire. Including the children I counted twenty-two persons.

Five of them were from the next valley. They were on their way home from Katmandu with cigarettes, matches, and salt, which they had exchanged for wool. There were three generations—the youngest was only a few months old while the grandparents must have been around fifty; they did not know their own age.

The grandfather spoke a little Nepalese. Through Mohan I questioned him about the terraced fields around the hut. He said it had taken many hundred years to build them, but the oldest ones hardly yielded anything. Every year the people had to add some new terraces. There were hardly any mountain-sides left which could be brought under cultivation, but there was an ever-increasing number of mouths to feed . . .

No one asked where Mohan and I came from, where we were going, what our business was. I think this was due to lack of interest rather than politeness—they had enough in themselves and their own little world. My pocket knife attracted some attention; the men tested the edge by cutting notches in their thumb-nails. They finally agreed that their own *kukris* were better.

I made some ham and cheese sandwiches. Mohan and the bearers ate a piece each, then declared that they would die if they had to live on such food. Mohan boiled a pot of

rice and some curry sauce for himself. Before he began to eat he rinsed his hands at a water trough near the door.

"My grandfather would be horrified if he saw me eating among all these people," he said. "Just think, it is the first time in my life I have been outside the valley. I have never been permitted to travel before because he was afraid I should take my meals with people of lower caste."

Mohan's two-week winter holiday had just begun. I asked if he had told his grandfather that he was going to Helambu with me.

"Oh no, he would have forbidden it. I said I was going to visit a Newar schoolmate of my own caste. I do not like to lie to him, but sometimes I have to."

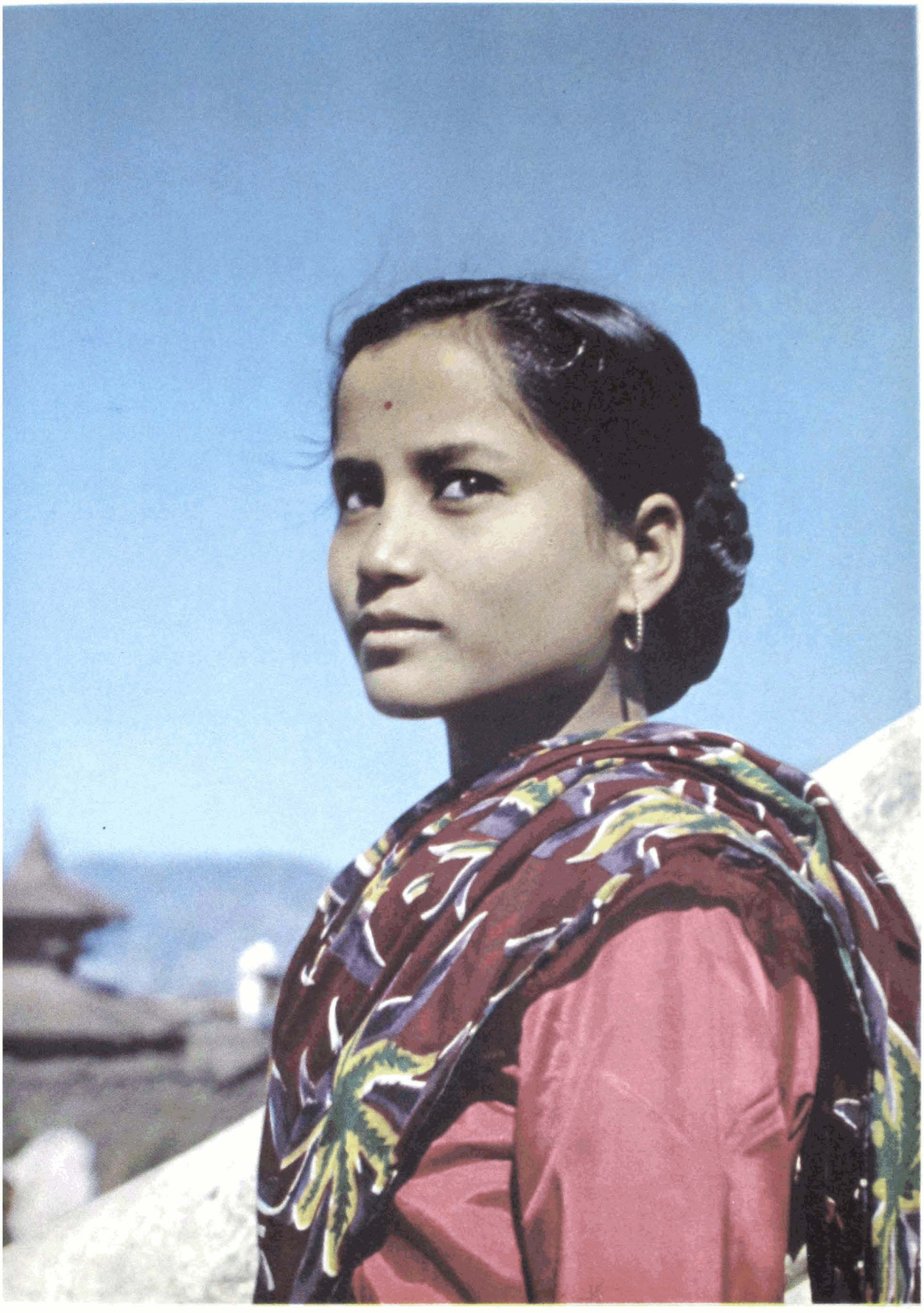
He began to eat the rice. It looked as if there was enough for five or six people, but he finished it all except for a little bit which he gave the bearers. He was used to eating rice twice a day and said that nothing else could fill him up.

Nim sat next to us, taking bites from a sticky lump of barley cooked with a little tea and butter. This was his staple diet when travelling, and in his opinion nothing else could satisfy a hungry man.

Before we went to sleep the fire was replenished with fresh wood. The smoke did not bother the others, but Mohan and I coughed and wept. When we opened the door to get fresh air the mountain people would cry that they were freezing to death; when it was closed we suffered.

There was hardly room for all of us to lie outstretched on the earthen floor. The mountain people took off their clothes and wrapped themselves in thin woollen blankets. I had not thought it possible that anyone could snore so loudly. Before long rats began to scamper about, jumping over our bodies and squeaking with fear when someone hit at them in his sleep.

Once during the night I had to go outside. It was pitch-dark and I had not brought along my flashlight. I fumbled my way ahead sleepily, but a few steps from the cottage I



9. It was hard to persuade the parents of this Newar girl to let their daughter be photographed. The young girls are strictly segregated from the opposite sex.

10. On the eve of a public festival the Nepalese build a kind of Ferris-wheel, which goes round and round all day long.

could not find anything to put my foot down on, there seemed to be only empty space ahead, so I went no further.

At dawn they blew new life into the smouldering fire. When the bearers awoke they held their *kukris* over the fire, then stuck them under their belts to warm their tummies. They did not eat breakfast—the Nepalese are used to taking their first meal late in the morning—but gulped down some firewater. Then they shared a cigarette and were ready to continue the journey.

When we came outside the hut I discovered to my horror that I had been standing on the brink of a precipice during my little night excursion—it was over a thousand feet down to the bottom!

It was bitingly cold, and during the first hour or so my whole body ached from the exertions of the previous day. You are getting old, I thought, but it encouraged me to hear that Mohan also was sore all over.

When we reached the top of the mountain he suddenly picked up a hard, transparent object. His eyes widened. He had read about ice, but it was the first time he saw it. "It bites my fingers!" he exclaimed, letting go of it. With a tinkling sound the piece of ice splintered against the frozen ground. Mohan looked like a little boy who had lost his toy.

In the next valley we came into a cloud of fog so dense that we could hardly see each other. Soon it began to rain. The path became as slippery as a slide, and Mohan and I fell several times although Nim had cut a staff for each of us with his *kukri*. The bearers walked as surely and steadily as ever, perhaps because they were barefooted. You could see how their broad toes dug down into the mud.

We were almost soaked when we reached a hut where an old woman was busy making thread out of lumps of wool. She used a kind of spinning top which made a whistling sound. We did not ask her for permission to enter; in the hills, every wanderer is welcome to a seat by the fire.

Nim asked the woman if she had any of the crude mats with which the mountain people cover themselves when it rains. She nodded. How much did they cost? A rupee-and-a-half each, she replied.

Nim had just told us that the price was slightly less than a rupee. We asked the woman why she charged us so much.

" Because it is raining," she replied without batting an eye. A quarter of an hour later the rain had almost stopped, so we got them for a rupee and ten pais each.

Early in the afternoon we heard a buzzing sound. It was the daily plane landing outside the capital. Katmandu seemed so far away, yet the plane sounded very near. And in fact, the valley was probably less than ten miles away as the crow flies.

The following night we slept in a lean-to together with a group of Tibetan pilgrims who were going to pray at a Buddhist temple near Katmandu. The wind whistled, and Mohan and I stuck only our noses out of our sleeping bags, but they took off their fur-lined jackets. Coming as they did from the icy heights of Tibet, they were bothered by the heat down here in the " lowland ", as they called Nepal.

Some years ago I had read that Tibetans greet each other by sticking out their tongues. I had often wondered why, and now I finally got an explanation. Tibetan devils have black tongues, and you are supposed to show immediately that you are not allied with the evil one.

I asked them how things were in Tibet after its occupation by the Chinese Communists. They replied that there was a shortage of food, but where they came from one hardly noticed the presence of the " strangers ". It was impossible to get them to say whether the Communists were well liked or not. They accepted them the same way as they did the weather or a natural catastrophe.

The next day Mohan and I did not have to rest so often; we were getting toughened. The path went up to an altitude of about thirteen thousand feet. Here were beautiful trees

with trunks so thick that a man could not reach around them, but in some places only blackened stumps and heaps of wooden shavings were left. Nim said that when the mountain people want to make a door or a shutter they first fell a tree by building a fire at its foot. When the tree has fallen, they cut away at it from two sides with their *kukris* until they have a useable plank in the middle.

On the third night we slept in a hut which was so low that I could not stand upright. There was not a single utensil from the outside world; the inhabitants had made everything themselves, even their *kukris*. The head of the family, a stern, middle-aged man, sat almost naked by the fire and carved a ladle. It had taken him several evenings to hollow it out, and now he was carving a face on the curved handle.

I offered him two rupees for the ladle. He was not a bit interested, but when I asked him if he would exchange it for a bottle of perfume he nodded. I had a twinge of bad conscience, for I had paid less than a rupee for the bottle.

There were fourteen in the family. Everyone wanted to have a little perfume in the hair, and in a few minutes the bottle was empty. The man calmly began making another ladle.

The people had nothing but potatoes for dinner. There must have been close to thirty pounds in the big clay pot. Due to the high altitude it took nearly an hour and a half to boil them. Fortunately for the housewife, everyone peeled his own potatoes.

Mohan was surprised that they did not all suffer from leprosy. In the valley, people believe that one gets this sickness from eating too many potatoes, he told me.

After dinner I asked the man of the house if he had ever been to Katmandu. It turned out that he did not even know the name. He had heard of a large valley a couple of days' walk from here, but thought it was called *Nepal*. He had no idea that this was the name of the country in which he lived or that he himself was a Nepalese. Nor did he know that

Nepal had a king, but he had heard of the Ranas. He thought they were still the rulers of the valley.

Before we went to sleep I asked Nim when we would get to Helambu. Tomorrow, he replied. Had he ever been there before? Yes—it was his home. Eagerly I asked if it was true that the Helambu women were the most beautiful in the whole world.

" I have not been to the whole world," he replied.

" But are they more beautiful than other women you have seen?"

He thought for a while. " They bear many children," he finally said. What did he mean by that? A long silence followed. I thought he was weighing my question, but then a loud snoring announced that Nim had fallen asleep.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SUN WAS just rising when we came to the top of the last mountain chain which we had to cross before we reached Helambu. There was a crunching sound every time one of us stepped in a frozen puddle. Nim walked in front, but suddenly he stopped and pointed towards the east. I caught a glimpse of a broad, snow-covered peak, bright against the pale morning sky. Then the clouds closed over the distant giant.

The two other bearers had also stopped. They straightened themselves, their eyes shone. With reverence in his voice Nim said that we had just seen Everest, the mountain which was conquered by a Sherpa named Tenzing . . .

Nim and his two companions were also Sherpas. The members of this tribe only live high up in the Himalayas; all their villages are at least a mile above sea-level.

" The air is too thick further down," Nim said. He added that all the people in the Helambu valley were Sherpas.

The path soon began winding its way downward through a forest of tall fir-trees. The white hoar-frost on the branches gave me a feeling of Christmas. After walking for a while we came to an old two-storied temple with a slanting roof. In front of the building, eleven white prayer flags flapped in the wind.

The bearers put down their loads and slowly mounted the temple steps with their heads bowed and their palms pressed

together. They stopped in front of a large, barrel-shaped bronze cylinder which turned on a perpendicular axis. It was a prayer wheel containing 6,666 quotations from the sacred Buddhist scriptures. They took turns pushing it as they prayed: Aum, manu padme hum . . . *Greetings, oh Jewel in the Lotus flower . . .*

In an open space close to the temple were fifty or sixty houses built of slate. Along the sunny side were open verandas a couple of yards above the ground. I had a vague feeling of having been here before, until I remembered that I had seen stone houses almost exactly like these in remote villages of the Alps.

The windows were shuttered and not a soul was to be seen. Nim explained that the village was inhabited only during the summer, when the cattle was grazing on the high pastures. During the winter, which lasted from December until early March, the people went further down in the valley.

Smoke rose from one of the roofs. A few old people always stayed behind and looked after the summer dwellings, Nim said. He shouted something—was it because I was still thinking of the Alps that it sounded like yodeling? A shutter was opened and a toothless old man blinked against the light. He and Nim exchanged a few words, and we walked on.

" Did you know him?" Mohan inquired.

" It was my father," Nim replied. They had not seen each other for four or five years.

A little further down the fir trees disappeared, and at a turn of the path the Helambu valley suddenly lay before us between two gigantic mountain chains. High up near the snow, the cliffs were almost perpendicular; a little further down began the terraces. In the centre of the valley rushed a foaming river on either side of which lay toy-like blocks. Those were the winter dwellings

Soon the path broadened; where it was especially steep, steps had been hewn into the rocks.

When we reached the huts after a descent of nearly an

hour, people appeared in doors and windows to look at us. Many were Nim's childhood friends, but they greeted him with a bare nod. The men had on coarse, light-coloured woollen jackets and short trousers. The women wore long black or red skirts. Some of them had blouses of a kind of velvet which I later found out came here from China via Tibet. Around their necks hung heavy silver necklaces inlaid with coloured stones.

Nim took us to a hut which lay a couple of hundred yards from the river. From the windows hung flowering geraniums in clay pots. The window frames were carved with swastikas which were turned counter-clockwise. I knew this pattern from China, where the swastika symbolizes eternity.

A young woman came to greet us on the open veranda in front of the hut. Her golden ear-rings, large as silver dollars, sparkled in the sunlight. Her hair was drawn tightly back from her strong, Mongolian face, giving her an expression of severity, but her smile was sweet and girlish. When she had looked at us for a moment she stepped aside and asked us with a gesture of the hand to enter her house.

As soon as we were inside the door, Mohan and I stopped and looked around in wonder. Instead of the low, smoky den which we had come to expect here in the mountains we found ourselves in a large, attractive room, about forty feet long and half as wide. From a fireplace in a corner, smoke curled lazily towards the mat ceiling. The stone walls were hidden behind wooden panels carved with Chinese-looking patterns and dragons. The light came in through four large paper windows in the south wall. Along the opposite wall was a long shelf with cooking pots, some of clay, some of brass. The only furniture was a couple of heavy chests of drawers.

" We better take off our shoes," Mohan said, impressed by the clay floor which was as clean as the kitchen floor in his home. We sat down at the fireplace. My heart sank when the woman took out a tall wooden cylinder and began to brew Tibetan tea. I had tried this drink once before, in a Buddhist

temple outside of Katmandu, and just the thought of the rancid smell nauseated me. I had sworn never to touch the stuff again—but could I refuse a drink of welcome?

While I struggled with myself she prepared the tea, added butter and salt, churned the whole thing in the wooden cylinder. She took the butter with her bare hands and then cleaned them off by rubbing them against her hair and cheeks. In the mountains of Nepal, people use no other kind of cold cream. Our servants in Katmandu were fond of using our salad oil; they did not just rub it on their faces, but all over their bodies.

The tea was served to us in Chinese porcelain cups. I had decided to empty mine quickly to get it over with, but after the first mouthful I sipped it with relish. I had discovered that Tibetan tea is a delicious drink—if it is made with fresh Yak butter.

The woman also handed a cup to Nim who accepted it with both hands, bowing his head slightly. Was it really the same lowly bearer whom Mohan and I had hired in the capital a few days ago? Here among his own people he had acquired a new dignity.

Some children came in to look at us. The toddlers were carried by the slightly bigger ones who told them to be quiet when they chattered too loudly. They obeyed right away; they seemed to have respect for their big brothers and sisters. At the same time they were fond of them—one could tell that from the way in which they clung to them. As in China, the small ones had a practical slit in the seat of their pants. The bigger ones were dressed exactly like their parents; they made me think of marionettes. When I let them look down into the viewer of my camera they clapped their hands excitedly.

"We can see you, we can see you!" they shouted to a girl who was standing a little apart from the rest. She hurried over to the camera to see for herself. After a quick glance into the viewer she accused the others of having deceived her: she

was not there at all! Through Nim I tried to explain how the camera worked, but they were not interested. They seemed to prefer to think of it as a magic box.

A boy of about three went over to the woman and sat down on her lap. It was her son; her husband did not seem to be at home. Without a trace of shyness she pulled up her blouse and gave him some milk.

Mohan blushed and turned away. He hardly seemed to notice it when people in Katmandu relieved themselves in the street—but it shocked him to see a woman bare her breast.

It was not easy for me to talk to our hostess whose name was Doa Ani. She did not know any Nepalese, so I had to use two interpreters, but somehow it helped that she looked me straight in the eye every time she said something to me. Mohan also considered this a sign of shamelessness. Newar women are not supposed to meet a man's glance unless he belongs to the family.

The house belonged to Doa Ani who had inherited it from her father. She was an only child, and he had also left her about a hundred cows which were looked after by some relatives. In addition to this she had many terraces—here she made a gesture towards the mountains. They were built by her father who had been a very hard-working man. She did not cultivate them herself, but leased them to tenants.

I was surprised to hear that her tenants kept two-thirds of the harvest. In most countries of the East, the landowner gets the lion's share. In India I have heard of cases where the tenants received as little as ten per cent of the harvest.

Our talk was interrupted by a middle-aged man who entered the hut. I shuddered at the sight of him, for one side of his face was an open gash from temple to chin. He had been wounded at a feast a couple of months ago when he and a friend had attacked each other with *kukris* during a drunken brawl. The knife had cut through both the cheek-bone and the jaw-bone and had splintered several of his molars. It did not hurt so much any more, he said, but he could not chew

properly and was sick and tired of lapping up barley porridge. He had heard that many foreigners knew something about doctoring. Could I help him?

I suggested that he should go to Katmandu for treatment. That was too far away, he said. When I asked how he had treated the wound he replied that he had put bear's fat on it. To my surprise it was not infected and his temperature was only a little above normal.

Penicillin probably cannot help a patient who already has such strong natural resistance, but on the other hand I did not like to disappoint him, so I gave him an injection. This was by no means easy, for he had skin like a hippopotamus and I bent the needle twice before I got it in.

It was the first time someone in Helambu got an injection, yet the others looked on as if it were a daily occurrence. The man showed no sign of fear. Two days later he came and presented me with half-a-dozen eggs. He was much better, he said—whether this was due to the penicillin or to his belief in my medical ability I do not know.

Doa Ani had already finished her lunch, but Mohan and I were hungry. As soon as the " patient " had left we began to cook. We had no more curry and decided to fry a garlic to give some taste to the rice. When Mohan was about to put it on the pan Doa Ani called out to him not to do so. If the local god smelled fried garlic he would punish us by raining down hailstones as large as fists, she said. Raw garlic, on the other hand, did not bother him.

It surprised me that they had such superstitious, for I had heard that the Sherpas were Buddhists and that their religious head was the Dalai Lama. (The present Dalai Lama is the fourteenth re-incarnation of a Buddhist pope appointed by Kublai Khan to ensure unity among the many different Buddhist sects of Tibet.)

They were indeed Buddhists, Doa Ani said, but every mountain and every alley had its own god whom one should take care not to offend.

It is not only the religion of the Sherpas which ties them to Tibet. When there is a serious disagreement among them they often go North and let the case be decided by a Tibetan judge. To many of them Tibet is closer than Katmandu, and the Nepalese officials do not understand the customs of the Sherpas.

Doa Ani had never been to Katmandu, but a few years ago she had walked to Lhasa and back, a journey of a month and a half. She had no definite purpose in going there, she said; she had just wanted to see a little of the world.

She rose, and from one of the chests of drawers she took a worm-eaten Tibetan book. Carefully she turned the yellow pages; one could tell that it was a prized possession. For many generations this book had belonged to her family, she told me. She could not read the intricate, hand-printed letters, but she knew that the book contained powerful and pious incantations which kept evil spirits at bay.

In the afternoon Mohan and I went for a walk, accompanied by Nim. I explained to them that I would like to find the most beautiful girl in Helambu. The bearer looked a little doubtful, but obediently took me from hut to hut. In most places we were invited inside to the fire and offered Tibetan tea. All the huts were fairly large and clean, but none were as attractive as Doa Ani's. Nim told us that she was very wealthy. When people were short of grain they came to her. For every ten baskets of grain which she lent out, the borrower had to return eleven after the following harvest.

If Nim, Mohan and I had been judges at a Beauty Contest, we would probably never have agreed on a winner. Mohan looked only at the faces of the girls. He had a weakness for large, dreamy eyes and tiny, cherry-red mouths. Small, white hands also made a strong impression on him, but the rest of the girl did not seem to exist as far as he was concerned. Perhaps this was due to shyness. The Newars have a puritanical attitude towards sex, and from the age of twelve Mohan had been kept strictly apart from girls.

Nim, on the other hand, seemed more interested in quantity than in quality. He preferred broad, plump girls, while I was on the look-out for the modern pin-up type. To give him an idea of what I meant I made a little sketch for him in my notebook. After one glance at the wasp-like waist and the long, thin legs he declared that no girls looked like that except after a long, severe illness.

The Helambu girls were literally bursting with health. I later heard that it was their apple-cheeks which had made them so popular among the Ranas. We finally found a girl who came fairly close to the western taste. Nim was told to ask her if she would come along with us. The girl, who had smiled to us, suddenly seemed at the point of tears. She said something to Nim.

"She would rather not," he told me through Mohan. "She says she already has a friend."

Nim had asked her if she would spend the night with me. The idea had not shocked him in the least, for it is not uncommon that the Sherpas supply a lonely visitor with female company, especially after a drinking party. I told him to explain to her that I did not have designs on her, I merely wanted to photograph her, preferably with Doa Ani's carved window-frame as a background.

But nothing came of this anyway, for the shadows were already growing long. Twilight came early down here at the bottom of the valley. Walking home, we saw the people milking some strange-looking creatures with thick fur, horns, and tails like horses. They were a mixture between Tibetan Yaks and Indian cattle. Nim said that, like the Sherpas, these animals thrive only in a high altitude. It is necessary to tie their legs and rub salt on their noses before they are milked; otherwise they kick too much.

"Do you people never eat the flesh of these animals?" I asked Nim. He replied that the religion of the Sherpas prohibits the slaughtering of animals. But, he added, when there is a feast in the offing it often happens that a cow falls

down a steep hillside, and then the people have to eat the meat . . .

I asked why he had become a bearer. Would he not have preferred to remain here in Helambu? Yes, he replied, but there were too many people in the valley. It was impossible to make more terraces, nor was there grass for any more cattle. Every year some of the young men had to leave, and outside the valley they could only make a living as bearers.

When we returned, Doa Ani had lit some small lamps whose wicks floated around in melted butter. It gave a sweet, pleasant odour. Around the fire sat half a dozen of her relatives who lived here permanently. Mohan and I gave them some of our rice and tasted their barley-porridge which was mixed with tea and butter. After dinner I gave them a piece of chocolate each. They ate it, but without relish. Nim explained that the preferred salty things.

Each person took his own plate to the veranda and rinsed it. Now they served a cool, refreshing drink which was full of small particles. It was the local beer, made of crushed barley which is fermented and then diluted with water.

When our cups had been emptied and filled a few times the conversation became lively. They talked about a bear which had killed some cows. Doa Ani told about the latest exploits of her little son. One of her cousins began plucking at a home-made string instrument, a kind of guitar. It made a hard, twangy sound, and I could not detect much melody to the tune, but the others jumped up and began to dance. They flung out their arms and legs, made a long jump, and then went around in a circle. They laughed and clapped their hands when I rose to join them, but I could not keep step with them.

Suddenly my attention was caught by a man standing in the doorway. He leaned heavily against a staff and held one foot out in front of him—no, there was not foot—only a red, inflamed stump!

I called Mohan and Nim and we went over and talked to the man. Several years ago he had been stung in the foot by a poisonous insect. A severe inflammation set in, and one by one the toes fell off. The wound stank. He wanted to know if I could help him, and I gave him some aspirin. I knew it would not improve his condition, but what else could I do? Long after he had left it seemed to me that I could hear the thump of his staff as he walked down the stairs.

After the dancing we sat around the fire and drank more beer. Doa Ani's little son was asleep in her lap. When I asked about her husband I was told that she no longer lived with him. Getting a divorce from him had been easy enough. When a Sherpa couple agree to disagree, they each take hold of one end of a string and pull until it breaks. Then they are free.

What about the children? They usually stay with the mother, but in case of disagreement the decision is left to a council of elders. Such councils seem to be the only form of government in many of the isolated Sherpa communities. They can impose fines for minor offences—usually, the guilty party has to treat everybody to beer. More serious cases are tried by the nearest official.

To get married is also easy. Every spring the marriageable young people hold a rhyme-making competition where each man gets a chance to address a verse to his chosen one. If she cannot give a witty reply she belongs to him. There is no wedding ceremony, only a big party for which the groom has to pay. Usually, the girl moves to the young man's home, but each one keeps separate ownership of property. If it is found out that the wife is unfaithful she is usually free to move to her lover—provided he refunds the cost of the original wedding feast . . .

We lay down to sleep wherever we felt like it. The others fell asleep soon after the lights had been blown out, but I lay for a while and thought of all that had happened since I saw Mount Everest at dawn. I liked these Sherpas. From a

European point of view they were poor and primitive, but it seemed to me that they were happy. In a way I envied them their free, natural life. But then I thought of the man with the rotting foot—and I was not so sure.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

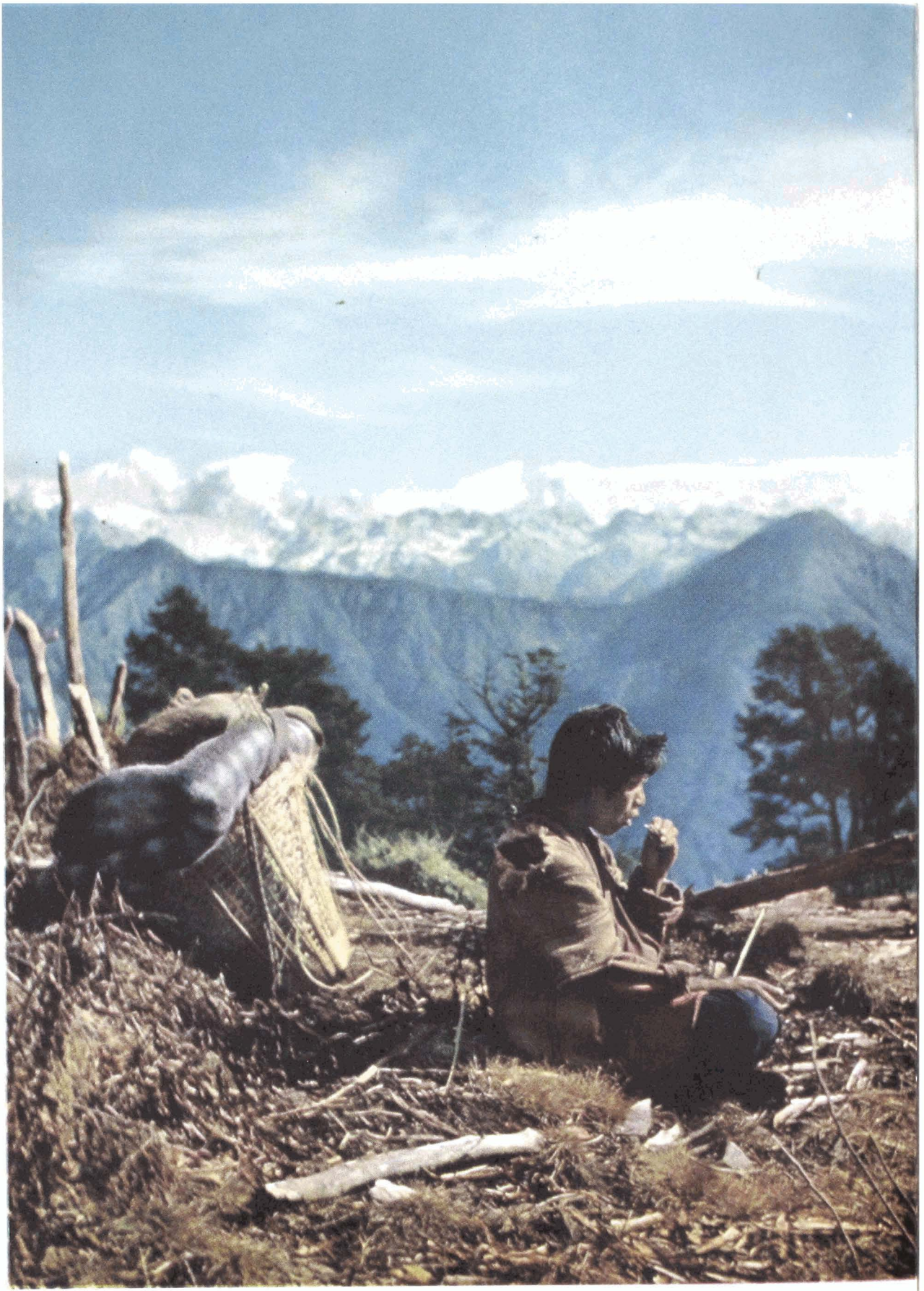
WHEN I COME walking down the main street of Katmandu, a plump little curio dealer often waves to me from his shop. "Come, come—I have something very special today!" he shouts to me in broken English.

And he usually has. I have bought a couple of trunks full of exciting things from him: worm-eaten wooden figures, copper and ivory images, antique religious paintings. I know that most of these things have been stolen from temples, but this does not give me a bad conscience—on the contrary. Practically all the temples in the valley are falling to pieces. Many have already collapsed, and nothing is done to preserve the remaining ones. Keeping this in mind, is it wrong to say that I practically do a good deed every time I save an irreplaceable work of art from certain doom?

One day the curio dealer lured me inside his shop with a promise of something "very extra special". This turned out to be a wooden yo-yo studded with small copper figures and a ragged silk painting. Both were Tibetan and very, very old, he assured me. Only because I was a close friend would he let me have them for two hundred rupees.

Neither of us took this sum seriously. He knows from experience how happy his European customers are when they can squeeze the price down to half—then we feel like masters in the Oriental art of bargaining. Therefore, he always begins by asking at least twice as much as he expects to get.

11. At one place I counted eighty-two cultivated terraces as regular as stairs. It must have taken the owner almost an hour to walk from the top to the bottom of his fields.



12. Across the skulls of the porters there are depressions shaped by many years of pressure from the straps.

While we were discussing the price, a tall, good-looking man entered the shop. When he saw me he broke into a smile. "Davs!"—how are you—he greeted me in Danish slang.

He was Werner Jacobsen, the only archaeologist in Nepal. Five years ago, when Chi-yun and I went to India, we brought greetings for him from a mutual friend in Denmark, but we did not get to meet him. When we came to the south Indian town where he had his headquarters we were told that he had disappeared in the jungle. Everybody thought he was dead.

It had been a pleasant surprise to find him here in Nepal and hand over the somewhat delayed greeting. He had already been here a year, and every time we were together I filled page after page in my notebook with scribblings, for his knowledge of Nepal's history and culture seemed inexhaustible. He lived in a small house outside the city, but we often met at the curio dealer's place.

When we had talked for a while I showed him the things which I was about to buy. What did he think of them? True, Tibetan antiques were rare, but even so it seemed to me that a hundred rupees was a rather stiff price . . .

Werner Jacobson sat down on the floor and crossed his legs—he has spent so many years among the natives of the East that he now automatically assumes this position when he is going to think. His kind grey eyes under the bushy brows looked thoughtfully at the yo-yo. He drew a deep puff from his cigarette and shook his head.

"It doesn't add up," he said. "I know that the Tibetans used to play with yo-yos. So did the Chinese—as far as I remember they originated in China. But that is a long time ago—probably somewhere around our Middle Ages. I doubt whether they have been used much since then. If it were really that old, it should be worn . . ."

He sniffed at the round toy.

"I thought so! Fresh pinewood—can't you smell it?"

I could. "You crook!" I began, turning to the curio dealer, but Werner Jacobsen stopped me. "You don't have to say anything. He knows very well that he has been found out—that is why he is smiling so sheepishly. Don't make him lose any more face."

Werner Jacobsen began to examine the religious painting. Without removing his eyes from it he lit a fresh cigarette from the butt. His fingers were stained with nicotine. When I blame him for smoking so much he replies that it is the only vice he can afford. He smokes Nepalese cigarettes which cost a shilling a hundred.

"So this is supposed to be Tibetan," he said, pushing a lock of grey, curly hair away from his forehead. "The old fox! He knows better than that, but he has learnt to tell the tourists what they want to hear. This picture is from Puri, a religious centre in India. The god in the middle is Krishna in one of his reincarnations—the sixth if I remember correctly. The two other figures are his brother and his sister. Hindus don't like to admit it, but in this reincarnation Krishna had a love affair with both his sister and his brother."

The curio dealer did not say another word about it being a Tibetan painting. I got it for thirty rupees, and when we left he handed me the yo-yo.

"A souvenir from Nepal," he said with a little bow.

Werner Jacobsen was going to a temple of which he was making a study at the moment. I went along. We crossed the crowded square in front of the old royal palace and came to a small market place where the money-lenders squatted on the ground with piles of banknotes and stacks of coins in front of them.

"There is probably no other country where one finds so many old coins in circulation," Werner Jacobsen said. "The other day I found one from the fifteenth century in a handful of change. There are quite a few Tibetan coins in circulation, too, but mainly in the mountains to the north."

Some of these Tibetan coins came here in a curious way. About eighty years ago a small Nepalese army advanced into Tibet whose mighty protector, the Emperor of China, was busy at the time with internal disturbances. The frightened Tibetans bought peace by promising the Nepalese the equivalent of ten thousand Indian rupees in silver every year. They went on paying faithfully until 1953, when the Chinese Communists put a stop to it.

The temple was situated in an alley close to the river. As we approached the building, Jacobsen pointed at a narrow brick groove which ran along one side of the alley.

"You can't imagine how many headaches this damned thing has given me," he said. "The first archæologist who noticed it was an American who came here on a visit a couple of years ago. He thought it was part of an ancient sewage system, and I must admit that I too fell for this theory.

"But on closer examination I discovered that it does not lead towards the river and in fact has no outlet at all. I asked the old people of the district what it had been used for, I talked to the priests about it, but they had no idea.

"Then a couple of months ago there was a big celebration in honour of the tutelar god of this temple. His statue was placed on an old temple carriage—you can see the wheels over there. Except for this one day a year, the carriage is dismantled so it does not take so much room."

He pointed at two large wooden wheels which were standing in the gateway of the temple. The carriage had been made in India and then carried up here, he said. At the celebration, hundreds of people had harnessed themselves to it and pulled it through the street, chanting songs and prayers. They drove no further than the point where the groove stopped. No one knew why—it was an ancient custom, people said.

"Suddenly something dawned on me. When they got the temple carriage from India they had probably never

seen a wheel before. They did not know it was possible to steer a carriage, so they made the groove as a kind of track to guide the wheels . . ."

Some children now came running from the temple, shouting greetings to Werner Jacobsen. They grasped his hands; each one wanted a finger to hold on to. A lively argument followed. I could not understand a word, but Werner Jacobsen speaks Hindi, which is closely related to Nepali.

"I see them practically every day—they are quarrelling about whose turn it is to carry my camera," he explained. He solved the problem by hanging it round the neck of a little girl who looked gratefully up at him. Proudly she walked ahead of us into the square temple yard. In a corner, a three-storied pagoda rose above the roofs.

"Isn't this a cosy place?" Werner Jacobsen said, looking about him with a pleased expression. A woman with a white flower in her long, black hair was rubbing butter on to the foot of an image. Behind her squatted a family who were eating rice and vegetables from large palm leaves while they talked and laughed. At a pump near the entrance, a woman was bathing a little boy who screamed and fought back. Two boys wrestled on the ground and a cow chewed sedately on a garland of flowers which it had stolen from a meditating Buddha.

"There is quite a difference between the atmosphere here and in a European church," Werner Jacobsen continued. "In a way I prefer this. In our part of the world, there seems to be a widening gulf between the people and the Church. Here, the religious practices are woven into the daily life."

He took the camera from the little girl, put in on a tripod, and began taking pictures of a golden statue which looked down on us from a stone pedestal. The children followed his every move. They shouted in unison to stop an old man who came walking across the yard, deep in his own thoughts. He gave a start. Was he blind? the children inquired. Could

he not see that he had nearly walked into the path of the foreign gentleman's magic eye?

"It is not so very old," Werner Jacobsen said of the figure. "Not much more than three hundred years, I imagine, but there is an amusing story connected with it. It is a statue of a Hindu god, while the inscription on the back of it is Buddhist. This blending of the two religions is typically Nepalese. The statue was brought to this temple during a small-pox epidemic more than a century ago. The Buddhists have no deity of their own which offers special protection against small-pox, so the Hindus gave them this one. The Hindus in this country have also accepted Buddha—they say he is the ninth reincarnation of Vishnu . . ."

A middle-aged man, with a dark red cape over his shoulders, came over and bowed slightly to us, at the same time joining his palms in salutation. He was a priest who came here almost every afternoon to help Werner Jacobsen translate Newar inscriptions. The two men began to study some copper reliefs. The priest translated the intricate letters while the Dane, who towered a whole head above him, wrote rapidly in his notebook.

*On the third day of the second month in the Newar year 779, the head of the Shibashraj family presented this Vishnu to the temple. May God protect him and his descendants . . .*

The two men were absorbed in their work, and the children saw to it that they were not disturbed. When they stopped to rest for a while, Werner Jacobsen told me about his friend who belonged to an ancient Newar family of priests. He used to hold a Government post; his priestly duties had begun only when he was in his fortieth year and would last no more than ten years.

Was he married? Yes, he lived in a nearby temple with his wife and children. The Newars of his sect thought it was easier for people with a happy, normal life behind them to contact the gods. That was why they preferred their priests to be middle-aged. The term of service was limited to ten

years to prevent the priests from becoming too professional . . .

A little later in the afternoon the priest had to leave, but first he opened the gate to the pagoda for us. It was locked with a large, oblong padlock like those one sees in China. We walked up a steep, narrow staircase which smelled of dust and age. As we entered, hairy lumps which were hanging under the heavy beams became alive, fluttering and screaming above us, for they were bats. Under the topmost roof was a platform, so low that we could not stand upright.

From the temple yard, the children pointed up at us and clapped their hands. The pagodas of Katmandu stood out sharply against the bright blue sky. Tiny spots were moving about in the yellow fields outside the city. The farmers were gathering the harvest. Far away, the mountains rose like a wall around the valley.

" Whenever I see the pagodas, I get just as excited as I did the first time," Werner Jacobsen said. " That was exactly how I imagined the East when I was a boy, longing to get away from Denmark . . ."

He had never told me much about himself, only about his work. Now I learned that he was born in a small town in Jutland forty-four years ago. His father was a bank director, his mother came from a family of seafaring people.

" I suppose I got my desire to travel from my mother's people. My uncle sailed on the China route. When he came home to visit us it was nearly impossible to get me to bed, I loved to listen to his stories. By the time I was ten I had made up my mind that I wanted to go to the East when I grew up."

He would have preferred to go as a sailor, but his father wanted him to study, so he chose archæology as the easiest and most interesting short-cut to his goal.

When he was in the midst of his studies at the University of Copenhagen he met Haslund-Christensen, the famous Danish archæologist and explorer who was then about to start on an expedition to Mongolia. When Werner Jacobsen

asked for permission to go along he was first refused, but he begged so persistently that Haslund-Christensen finally gave in.

The expedition made its headquarters in a deserted temple in one of the driest areas of Mongolia. " Water was too scarce to be used for washing, so we rubbed ourselves with butter like the Mongols. It makes you smell like a cow, but you get surprisingly clean that way."

The Danish scientists studied the language and customs of the Mongols and made a collection of their costumes, ornaments and utensils. It was one of the happiest periods in Werner Jacobsen's life. He was never homesick. When the expedition went back to Denmark in 1939 he had only one desire—to return to the East as soon as possible.

But the war came. During the occupation of Denmark by the Germans, Werner Jacobsen was so restless that he could not settle down to his studies. He got a temporary job as inspector at the ethnological department of the National Museum in Copenhagen.

" One day I walked down a corridor which was closed to ordinary visitors. A nice-looking girl was squatting in front of one of the cabinets—an art student, I thought. In passing I gave her a little push, just for fun. She fell backwards with a bump—and then I discovered that it was Queen Ingrid. When we had recovered from our mutual surprise she laughed heartily. We talked a little about the collection which she had been looking at; she was very interested in foreign peoples."

Soon after the war was over Werner Jacobsen went to India as a buyer for the National Museum. He had not graduated, but he didn't care—he wanted to get away from Denmark at all costs. At first he settled down in southern India to study the primitive jungle tribes. It took him several weeks to get in contact with them. They have no definite place to live, but wander about in the forest, collecting resin and honey. This they leave at certain spots on the outskirts

of the jungle where it is picked up by Indian traders who in turn leave behind knives and glass ornaments.

Sometimes Werner Jacobsen could feel that he was being watched. It was not very pleasant, for he was unarmed and knew that the natives, who did not like strangers, were experts at throwing their primitive spears. Little by little they became convinced of his peaceful intentions, and one day an old man came to him in a clearing and explained with signs that he had fever. Werner Jacobsen gave him quinine, and some days later he returned with his whole family. They were all suffering from malaria.

The jungle people were divided into fourteen tribes who spoke as many different languages. They are mentioned briefly in an account of a Danish ship which visited south India some three hundred years ago. The area where the naked jungle people lived was then under the Dutch, whose commander invited the officers from the Danish ship to go hunting with him. The ship's doctor had misgivings when he heard that they were not to hunt animals, but wild people who lived in the forest. Wasn't that rather inhuman?

"Not at all," the Dutchman replied. "We only shoot the old males."

Werner Jacobsen also spent some time with a small tribe which for many years has puzzled the ethnologists. *Todas,* they are called, and neither by looks, language or customs do they have anything in common with other ethnological groups in India.

There are only about seven hundred left of them. They are tall and slender and have rather light skin. The men have full beards and wear wine-red togas. The women have long corkscrew curls.

"The Todas have a pure dairy culture," Werner Jacobsen told me. "They keep water buffalos which are just as afraid of water as their masters . . ."

The Todas never wash, but it does not matter so much, as they live on the cool mountain plateaux of southern India.

Their buffalos are divided into three castes. Those of the highest caste are kept in the most sacred temple which lies on top of a mountain. It is somewhat like a co-operative dairy, the manager being the high priest. The Toda men hold this position by rotation.

Only the high priest is permitted to milk the high-caste buffalos whose milk is churned into butter which must not be eaten; it has to be sacrificed to the gods. The buffalos of the second caste may be milked by any Toda, but the milk has to be blessed by the high priest before it is made into butter which only the Todas are allowed to eat. The milk of the low-caste buffalos must not be used for making butter; it is sold to the Indians and is the main source of income of the Todas.

Year by year, the pastures of the Todas become smaller because the hungry peasants of India move in with their ploughs. To avoid getting too many mouths to feed, the Todas often leave their new-born girls in the forest. Consequently there is a shortage of women, and several brothers will often agree to share one wife. The Todas never marry outsiders, and most likely they will disappear entirely within the next fifty years or so.

Several times, Werner Jacobsen had to leave the jungle for long periods in order to earn money. " Unfortunately, one cannot make a living as a buyer for a museum," he said with a sigh. " Otherwise I would never live in a city. I know nothing worse than arriving in Bombay or Madras after a long stay in the forest, The very air seems filthy and the noise nearly drives me crazy. One of the best things about Katmandu is that there are practically no motor cars—but I'm afraid it won't be long . . ."

For a while he sold threshing machines. Later on a Danish firm asked him to start a combined slaughter-house and sausage-factory in Ceylon. " I hate every form of killing—that is the Buddhist influence—and I knew nothing about sausage-making, but I took the job, I just had to earn some

money. And it is incredible how fast you can learn when you have to. A year later the slaughter-house was built—the animals came in at one end and sausages were spewed out of the other end . . ."

He hurried back to his tribes in south India. He was planning to leave the jungle just before the rainy season began, but that year it came several weeks earlier than usual. The rivers swelled up, the paths became impassable.

" So I had to remain in the forest. The tribe I stayed with was rather primitive, but they did have huts, and I was permitted to string up my hammock on the chief's veranda. I had plenty to do, observing the natives and questioning them about their customs. Strangely enough they paid no attention whatever to me; it was as if I belonged to another species which did not interest them."

As soon as the rainy season was over he went to Madras to buy film. At the Danish Consulate, where he went to ask for mail, the consul looked at him as if he were a ghost.

" But Jacobsen—I thought you were dead! Come in and have a Carlsberg and let me hear what's happened."

While they were talking the telephone rang. A *Reuter* correspondent wanted information for an obituary about the missing Danish archæologist . . .

" I suppose that is the closest I will ever come to getting famous," Werner Jacobsen laughed. " You don't make headlines when you work the way I do—they go to the big exhibitions. I prefer to potter around by myself. It would probably have been more sensible of me to have finished my studies and found a steady job with a museum, but I hate anything that smacks of office work. I have always preferred to work with people—to try to figure out what it is in the past that makes them think and act as they do today.

" Of course I am always having trouble making both ends meet. Sometimes I get a small grant from a museum, but it never goes very far . . ."

For a moment he looked sad. Then he smiled.

"But I am free, and there is no place on earth where I would rather be than here. What more can one ask for?"

"A wife, maybe," I replied. "It is more fun when you are two, I think. Have you never thought of getting married?"

"Yes, twice. The first time the girl insisted that I settle down, but I just couldn't get myself to do it. The second time I was at the point of leaving on an expedition. When I came back it was too late."

Some men are not suited to be alone. They become queer, but Werner Jacobsen seems to manage well by himself. My wife has said several times that she wishes I would always be as clean and neat as he. He is no dandy, however; he always wears a sweater instead of a jacket, and I don't remember having seen him with a necktie. His darning and cooking would put many a housewife to shame.

His house is spartanly furnished, but one can see that everything in it has been selected by someone with taste. He hopes it will become a centre for visiting archæologists. There are several guest rooms, a dark-room and a small library.

His only servant is a cook-boy. "He is a pig if there ever was one," Werner Jacobsen told me one day. "Stupid, too, and he can't cook at all. But he has such a nice smile."

Some months ago, the boy handed him a letter which a friend had written for him in English. "Honourable Gentleman Mr. Jacobsen," it began, "By the serious circumstance of my sister having reached high age and my being responsible for same getting married which impossible without large dowry, I hearby request advancement of rupees one hundred, no less than seventy-five will do . . ."

When Werner Jacobsen had read the letter he asked how old the sister was. Sixteen, the servant replied.

Werner Jacobsen also has a flock of eager volunteers at his disposal: the children of the neighbourhood. They consider it a privilege to polish his bicycle or run errands for

him. Around Christmas I did not see him at the curio dealer's: he was busy teaching the children to make Christmas decorations. The religious aspects of the matter meant little to them, but they had a wonderful time. On Christmas Eve his sitting-room was bright with tinsel and candles and he was visited by thirty-odd children each of whom was given a basket of fruits, nuts and chocolate . . .

For more than an hour we had been standing on the pagoda platform, looking out over the town. "I'll admit that the work here becomes a bit monotonous at times," he now said. "I mean, photographing and measuring old buildings and statues. But you cannot always do only what you like. All this . . ." He gestured towards the town with its temples and pagodas. "All this will soon disappear. Most of the buildings are several hundred years old. The woodwork is rotten. Every single day, a temple collapses somewhere in the valley, a wooden statue becomes a heap of sawdust because it has been eaten up from the inside by ants. This place is one of the richest archæological treasure chests in the world—not dead ruins, but houses and temples which are still in use. I am trying to catalogue as much as possible of it before it is lost forever."

He lit a cigarette and we began walking down the stairs. "There is so much to be done," he said. "And so little time."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EARLY ONE AFTERNOON Chi-yun and I went out bicycling with Mohan. A few miles from Katmandu we stopped to rest in a Newar village. We were sitting in the shade of a tree and talking, when suddenly we heard a plaintive cry. It ended in a drawn-out wail, and then it began all over again.

Chi-yun and I jumped up, but Mohan calmly remained seated. "Someone has died in the village," he explained, "and the relatives are taking turns weeping at the side of the body. The louder, the better—it is supposed to keep the evil spirits away while the soul takes its leave."

The wailing made us ill at ease. Quickly we got on our bicycles, but a couple of hundred yards further on we stopped again, for in the middle of the road sat a naked woman on a heap of straw.

My first thought was that she was a close relative of the deceased and had lost her mind from the shock. Next to her was a new-born child, almost hidden by a cloth which was held up like a tent by a couple of sticks.

"Don't disturb her!" Mohan said, adding that she had just given birth to the child. When a Newar woman has delivered her baby, she is supposed to sit for three days in the sun without clothes on. It is an ancient custom, but nowadays it is only followed by the country people. The rays of

the sun are believed to replace some of the strength which the mother has given to her child.

The woman was smearing oil on her body. She had a far-away expression, as if she did not know what was going on around her. Chi-yun now took a step forward to get a better look at the little one. At the sight of the red, wrinkled face she clasped her hands admiringly—what a lovely child!

The young mother looked up. Her lips curved into a faint smile and the two women exchanged a quick, understanding glance.

A skinny old man came out of the nearest hut and greeted us politely. His face was covered with deep pockmarks. Chi-yun wanted to know whether the child was a boy or a girl and asked Mohan to translate her question.

"A boy," the old man replied with a proud smile. "It is my grandson." He tried in vain to straighten his bent back. There were cakes of dry earth on his feet which were nearly twice as broad as mine.

Next to the baby lay a long chain which looked as if it were made of silver. All sorts of strange objects were attached to it; shells, coloured stones, the teeth and claws of beasts of prey, tiny images and a shrunken monkey's paw.

This was a "protection-against-disease-chain," said the old man who seemed happy to get an opportunity to talk. It had belonged to his family for many, many years. He himself had worn it in early childhood and was thus a living proof of its efficacy, for he was more than three times twenty years old—an unusually high age in Nepal, where the average life expectancy is only around twenty-two years. This is due to the high child mortality.

We wanted to know if none of the children who had worn the chain had died. Mohan said that he preferred not to ask, for one should not use the word *death* in the presence of a new-born child. If it had not yet acquired a soul, death might enter into it.

The wailing grew fainter and then it stopped. Chi-yun and I drew a sigh of relief. The old man had squatted down with his back against a haystack; his bony knees came all the way up to his chin. We sat down next to him, but Mohan remained standing. Maybe it was because the old man was of lower caste than he, or maybe he was afraid of dirtying his clothes.

The old man owned three pieces of land. It was difficult to find out how large they were, for they did not use the same measurements here as in the capital. After many calculations we came to the result that his fields were about two hectares.

This seemed very little to me, but I later found out that many farmers have even less. The valley is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. There are more than eighteen hundred inhabitants per square kilometre, and at least ninety per cent of the population are farmers.

There were ten people in the old man's family: himself, his two sons and their wives, and five grandchildren including the new-born baby. They harvested rice in the autumn, wheat in spring, and in between there was just time to raise a crop of vegetables. In dry years the wheat harvest was poor, but you could always rely on the rice, for the paddies were irrigated. Usually, however, a large part of the harvest was eaten by monkeys from a nearby temple. Nothing could be done about that. If you chased the animals away it might bring you bad luck.

I asked the old farmer how ten people could live on such a small piece of land. He shook his head. "My father had three times as much land. He could easily live on it, he even sold rice on the market. But when he died the land was divided among myself, my brother and my sister. We all got children and grandchildren."

Then, the land no longer sufficed. It became necessary for the old man to find work outside the village. He had cut timber for the dwellings of the Ranas, and he had also

made bricks for them. There had been no end to the number of palaces which they built. In those days you were paid less than a quarter of a rupee for a day's work, but then a rupee had bought a lot more rice than it did now . . .

Some ragged children came and stared at us. Each one was surrounded by his or her own little cloud of flies. They had given up chasing them away, merely blinked when there were too many around the eyes. The naked mother had picked up her son and was looking out over the valley while she nursed him. The sun rays had lost their sting. White clouds came drifting from the mountains; it looked as if they had torn themselves loose from the distant snow-capped peaks.

My next question was whether life had been hard under the Ranas. It surprised me that the old man hesitated before he answered. Our Newar acquaintances in Katmandu were always quick to condemn the Ranas.

" We pay the same taxes as we used to," the old man finally said. In the old days he had given the Government five bags of rice a year for the right to cultivate his land, and he still did. Formerly, he had also had to work four days a year for the Ranas without pay, and to pay a small annual sum to the priests at the nearby temple. This had been discontinued after the revolution . . .

The old man went on talking, but Mohan forgot to translate. He seemed indignant about something, and the next moment a quick, sharp exchange of words took place between him and the old man. I asked what was the matter.

" He is talking nonsense," Mohan replied. " He says that he was better off under the Ranas, but that is impossible. They were tyrants, they oppressed the people, but now we have freedom . . ."

I suggested that we ask the old man why he thought he had been better off before. This time he answered without hesitation. It had been easy to get work under the Ranas, he said—they were always building grand palaces and parks.

13. Doa Ani with her little son. A divorce from her husband was attained by the couple pulling at each end of a cord until it broke.

14. Sherpa children. They were dressed exactly like their parents and looked like puppets.

But today it was nearly impossible for him and his two sons to find work when they were not busy in the fields. Practically all the men of the village were unemployed for several months of the year. This was a serious matter, for it meant that they had no money for buying extra rice, and they could not live on the grain from their own fields.

" Under the Ranas we had enough to eat," the old man said. " Now we often have to go hungry to bed."

Some of the farmers rented land from land owners who lived in town, but that was a poor business. You worked yourself half to death, and the bigger the yield of the land the more you had to pay to the owner . . ."

Here Mohan broke in to mention a law which had been passed after the revolution. According to this law, the land owner was not allowed to keep more than half of the harvest.

By way of an answer, the old man took five pebbles and put them in a row before him. " Last year my son rented a piece of land," he said. " It belonged to a merchant in Katmandu. The merchant's share of the harvest was so much." He picked up four of the pebbles. " All my son got was this much." He held up the fifth one and let it fall in the dust.

Mohan protested that this was unlawful. The old man replied that he knew nothing about that. He only knew that it was impossible to rent good land for less. Many people were in distress, and those who owned the land took advantage of this.

He told us that shortly before the birth of his second son he had got into debt because the harvest had failed one year. Ever since then he had been paying off on the debt, but even so it grew bigger and bigger . . .

Mohan informed him that " after democracy " the Government had made it unlawful to charge more than ten per cent a year in interest on a debt. The old man had no idea what interest was. His debt was in rice. For each hundred bags of rice which he owed he had to pay forty bags a year

in interest. When he could not manage to do this the balance was added to the debt. Practically all the farmers were in debt, and many of them paid fifty per cent a year in interest.

Mohan declared that this was unlawful and something ought to be done about it. Had the farmers tried complaining to the authorities?

"It is no use," the old man replied. "The officials work hand-in-hand with the money-lenders. It has always been like that . . ."

He was about to add something, but just then the wailing began with renewed vigour. Now there were several voices. It sounded as if they were approaching, and a few minutes later a small procession entered the main street from a side alley. Two men walked in front, carrying a litter on which lay a small, still figure under a white cloth. Behind them came two women, each with a child in her arms. One of the women was crying loudly. The other wept silently, her face was wet with tears.

As we watched them go by, Mohan told us that the dead child was less than three years of age. He knew this because the mourners had only shaved off their eyebrows. If the child had been older they would have had to shave the whole head. When a grown-up dies, the closest relatives have to fast several days a month for a year. The fast is stricter when the deceased is a man. And the funeral pyre of a woman need have only seven layers of logs, a man's must have nine . . .

The small procession walked down to the bank of a nearby river. Here they were going to burn the body. The ashes must be thrown into flowing water; otherwise the soul cannot liberate itself from the body and the deceased will return to haunt his or her relatives. Infants are seldom burned properly, but it does not matter so much, for their ghosts are considered harmless.

The naked woman had turned away while the dead child was carried past us. For a while we sat in silence. Then Mohan made a last attempt to convince the old man that

the peasants also had benefited from the revolution. When the Ranas ruled, there had been only a couple of schools in the whole country. Today, close to seventy-five thousand children were going to school . . .

None of his grandchildren did, the old man replied. True, a young teacher had come to the village shortly after the revolution. He had taught in the open, as there was no building large enough to hold all the children. Many of them had learned to draw letters and numbers in the dust, but then the Government had stopped sending the teacher his salary . . .

Mohan nodded darkly. This sort of thing was not new to him. His own father, who worked as a clerk in a Government office, had not received his salary for seven months. Many of the lower officials are in the same situation. In some cases they never get the money. In other cases, their superior privately informs them that they cannot hope to get the full amount, but if they will be satisfied with say two-thirds, it might be possible to arrange it . . .

When the teacher had not received any pay for several months he began to demand a small tuition fee from the pupils. After all, he had to live. It was a matter of less than a rupee a month for each child, but the farmers could not afford to pay so much, so the teacher had left again.

Mohan said nothing. The shadows were getting longer, and a while later the woman rose and went indoors with her child. We took leave of the old man and rode back to Katmandu. Long after we had left the village we could see a thin column of smoke rising from the bank of the river.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NEPALESE PARENTS DON'T have to tell their children about the flowers and bees. The little ones know all about it. They play daily in the temples, and here they are surrounded by figures which show how children are made.

The erotic figures serve a most useful purpose. They protect the temples against lightning. The Nepalese believe that lightning is a virgin. When she comes rushing down towards the earth she sees the daring love scenes, blushes, and hurries back to heaven.

One day Chi-yun and I were busy photographing these " lightning rods " at one of Katmandu's many temples. Suddenly, a pretty little girl who was painted black around her slanting eyes peeped out of a window on the first floor of the main building. She looked eight or nine years old and smiled to us, surprised and curious.

I immediately trained my camera on her, which was a mistake, for she shrieked and jumped out of sight. A moment later a man in white clothes and a plump old woman with sharp eyes appeared in a ground floor window. The woman shouted something and pointed at me. I could not understand what she said, but it definitely did not sound like a compliment.

Perhaps they want money, I thought and took out a five-

rupee note. As I held it towards her, I pointed at my camera with my other hand to make clear that I only wanted to take a picture. But that made it even worse. The woman stamped her foot and shook her fist at me. I could not understand the reason for her anger, for the Nepalese usually don't mind being photographed.

We decided to look up Mohan and ask if he could throw some light on the woman's strange behaviour. Fortunately he was at home. We were invited to his room and sat down on the floor. When I had told him what had happened he smiled.

"Of course she was angry," he said. "The girl you saw must have been Kumari. Some months ago another foreigner tried to photograph her. He was nearly arrested."

"But why?"

"Because Kumari is a goddess."

"A goddess?" I looked at him in amazement. "Listen, Mohan, we're living in the twentieth century—do you really expect me to believe . . ."

Mohan flushed. He hated being considered old-fashioned or superstitious. If I had continued in the same vein he would probably have shut up like a clam, for he could become very stubborn, but now Chi-yun put her hand on my arm.

"That is the first time I have heard of a living goddess," she said. "It sounds very interesting—please tell us some more about it."

Mohan's face softened. "I better call my grandfather, he knows more about such things. Please wait a minute."

He went out of the room and returned soon after with the old man, who greeted us politely and at once began telling us about Kumari. After each sentence he stopped to give Mohan time to translate.

Many, many years ago the gods were much closer to man than they are today, he said. In those days the heavenly beings would often come down to earth and live among

us. The most beautiful and virtuous of all the goddesses was a virgin by name of Kumari.

Once Kumari visited the King of the valley to teach him some of her heavenly wisdom. The King sat at her feet, but instead of listening to her he looked at her body and became hot with desire. He rose and tried to caress her . . .

The old man had stretched out his hand as if he himself were the tempted king. He gasped, and a shadow seemed to fall over his face, for suddenly Kumari was no longer there—the King heard only a voice which reproached him because he, who ought to have been an example to the people, could not even control his own desire. Never again would Kumari show herself among men, but as a proof of her boundless mercy she would sometimes speak to them through a pure, innocent girl who must not even know the sight of blood . . .

The old man lowered his arm and grew silent. Chi-yun and I understood that we had just heard a Nepalese version of the Fall of Man and his expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

"And since then, there has always been a Kumari in that temple," Mohan now said. "In a way it is wrong to call her Kumari, for she is not really the goddess, only the one whom the goddess speaks through."

We learned that the two old people at the temple were only a kind of guardians, but it was they who decided who could talk to Kumari. Once a year, the high priests would meet and examine her. If they found as much as a scratch on her—yes, if only her nose had bled—a new Kumari had to be selected.

"How is she selected?" I asked. Again Mohan had to ask his grandfather. The old man said that when a new Kumari is to be chosen—this usually happens only when the incumbent becomes a woman—the goldsmiths of Katmandu are told to bring their little daughters to the temple.

It is surprising that Kumari has to come from the caste of the goldsmiths, for they are on the border-line of being untouchable. Mohan's grandfather could not explain the reason for this. " It is an old custom," he merely said.

From among the prettiest girls are chosen those who do not have a single blemish on their bodies. They are taken into a dark temple hall filled with statues of the gods in anger. The girls begin to weep, but there is always one who does not become frightened. She is Kumari's choice.

Most of the temples in the valley have large, tax-free land holdings—it is said that these estates bring in more money than the total income of the state. But all the expenses for the upkeep of Kumari's temple are paid by the King; perhaps it is a form of atonement for the sin committed by his predecessor who tried to lay hands on the goddess. And once a year, on the day when Kumari is driven through the capital in a flower-decked carriage pulled by men, the King must bow his head to her in the presence of the people. Only on this day is it permitted to photograph her.

" I know the present Kumari quite well," Mohan said. " She used to live just around the corner—she was my sister's playmate until she was chosen."

He also knew a former Kumari who was now married and had two children. When I heard this I said I would like to meet her. That could easily be arranged, Mohan said, and a couple of days later he and I went to see her. She was middle-aged and poor, but one could tell that she had once been very beautiful.

She told us that when she was Kumari she had fallen in a trance during certain religious ceremonies. Then she had spoken to the priests, but afterwards she could not remember a word of what she had said. She had been given choice foods and fine clothes, but had been very lonely. Her mother had only been permitted to visit her three or four times a year and then she was not permitted to touch

her. Children of her own age could come and play with her, but violent games had been prohibited for fear she would hurt herself and bleed.

The woman described an ornament which had belonged to her when she was Kumari—a golden snake with eyes of diamonds. When something important was going to happen, this snake would begin to writhe. She had seen it happen several times, she assured us. If a pregnant woman as much as looked at the ornament she would have a miscarriage, for the snake was somehow connected with Kumari's innocence and would not tolerate the presence of women who bore in them the fruits of incontinence.

When she left the temple at the age of thirteen she had been given the choice of another golden ornament or five hundred rupees. She had chosen the money, but in spite of her beauty and this rather considerable dowry it had been difficult for her to find a husband. Most men feared that the gods would be jealous of them if they married a former goddess. There were three other ex-Kumaris living in Katmandu, and none of them was married . . .

Before I talked to this woman, Chi-yun and I had paid another visit to the Kumari temple. This time we were accompanied by Mohan and did not bring along our cameras. Perhaps that was why the old woman seemed a little less gruff when she saw us. She even permitted us to put a few questions to her charge.

It was a strange interview. We had to stand just inside the temple gate and were under strict orders not to come any closer. The old woman and her husband were leaning out of a ground floor window from where they could keep an eye on us as well as on Kumari whose room was on the first floor of the building opposite us.

The " goddess " was very solemn when she first appeared. She would not even deign to look at us, but Mohan's opening remark caused a smile to break out on her round, childish face. The old woman shouted something in an angry voice,

and at once Kumari disappeared. I asked Mohan what had happened.

"I just said *hello, Nanni,*" he replied. "That means *little sister* in Nepalese—I have always called her that. The man does not seem to mind, but the woman says it is disrespectful of me."

He grinned and added that perhaps it would appease her if we gave Kumari a present. Chi-yun had an embroidered silk handkerchief in her bag, and Mohan thought it would make a good present. He told the old woman that we would like to give something to "the high goddess", as he now called her. After a moment of hesitation the woman shouted something to Kumari, who again appeared in her window. I suppose she had heard what Mohan said about giving her a present, for she looked expectantly at us.

Mohan now stepped forward and gave the handkerchief to the woman, who looked disdainfully at it.

"Oh Goddess!" she whined, "it is only a piece of cloth."

Her husband brought it up to Kumari who now spoke for the first time. In a high, thin voice she asked what she was supposed to do with the cloth. Mohan explained that in my country, people kept such a piece of cloth in the pocket and blew their noses in it. Kumari made a face.

"Then people must be unclean in that man's country," she declared, quickly putting the handkerchief away. In Nepal as well as in India, secretions from the nose are looked upon with the utmost horror.

I wanted to know if Kumari was getting any kind of education. How dared we ask such a question? the old woman demanded. As if a goddess could learn anything from lowly human beings! We had better be careful what we said, or she would not permit us to talk to Kumari . . .

How did a goddess pass the time?

"I am so bored!" Kumari replied before the old woman could stop her. "No children come to play with me, all I have is my dolls . . ."

The old woman turned purple in the face and shouted that we were not allowed to ask any more questions—I suppose the conversation was too earthy for her taste. The little girl looked sadly at us and withdrew into her room.

"I think the hen does the crowing in this place," Mohan said loudly in Nepalese and looked meaningly at the old lady. I nodded, for I had already heard this proverb, which means that the woman of the house is a shrew and hen-pecks her husband.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE ONLY PICTURE in the room was a drawing of a young man with heavy chains around his wrists and ankles. He was crouching in a cell so small that he could neither stand up nor lie down. Defiantly he stared out from behind the bars. Below the drawing was an inscription in Newari.

"What does it say?" I asked the man sitting opposite me. His thick glasses gave his bony Mongolian face an expression of absent-mindedness. You could tell at a glance that he and the prisoner were the same person, only he looked older now.

"It may sound a little melodramatic today," Poorna replied deprecatingly. "But it didn't at the time. It says: *Give freedom to the people or let me die a prisoner. Life is not worth living under the tyranny of the Ranas.*

I asked him how long he had been imprisoned by the Ranas. A little over seven years, he answered. "But I was not in chains all the time. I spent two years in that little cell—it seemed longer to me than the rest of my life put together."

We could hear voices from the rooms above. Poorna lived in the most densely-populated section of Katmandu together with his parents and two brothers who were both married and had children. Being the eldest son, he should have had a room on the second floor as close to the kitchen as pos-

sible, but all sorts of people came to visit him, also untouchables. Out of consideration to his old father, who was very conservative, he had therefore moved into this rather gloomy little room on the first floor, just above the staircase. Here, people could come and visit him without disturbing the rest of the family.

His sleeping mat was rolled up in a corner, and on a nail above it hung his European-style jacket which was getting frayed at the sleeves. He always took it off as soon as he came indoors, I suppose to save on it, for it was his only one. His Nepalese-style shirt and trousers were of crude cotton material.

I had met Poorna through Mohan who practically worshipped him. " He is the only one of the revolutionary leaders whom we students respect," Mohan had said of him. " Three times he has been offered a Cabinet post, but he does not want to have anything to do with the corrupt politicians."

I rose, stretched my legs, and sat down on the floor again. My knees rebelled when they were bent too long at a time.

" How did the revolutionary movement really begin?" I asked. " You have never told me about that."

" No, I know." Poorna looked down thoughtfully, shaking his head. " You see, it is rather difficult for me to explain how the state of mind was in those days. You were born and raised in a free country. I doubt whether you can understand what happens to a people who have been enslaved for hundreds of years. Their spirit withers away. When I was a boy, my people would no more have dreamed of protesting against the tyranny of the Ranas than against sickness or bad weather."

In those days, Poorna's father had been a bookkeeper in a Government office. The Ranas had created a small middle class of lower Newar officials without whom they could not have managed the administration of the country. Generally speaking, this class was faithful to them. Most of the Newars had a feeling that the Ranas were enemies

of their people, but hardly anyone thought it wrong to serve them—you took the crumbs that fell from their table and were grateful that you did not belong to the destitute masses.

Poorna was a bright child and his father succeeded in getting him into the only middle school then existing in Nepal, apart from the Sanskrit schools which were only for Brahmins. When Poorna went to school he had to walk on a narrow path running along the only asphalt road in town, which was reserved for the Ranas. And when a Rana rode by in his horse carriage or automobile, Poorna always took off his hat and bowed deeply. Otherwise he would have been whipped.

" Of course it is possible to find excuses for our apathy," Poorna told me. " We simply had no idea that it could be different. Freedom was an unknown concept among us, our language did not even have a word for democracy. Our Brahmin priests were all in the pay of the Ranas and advised us to be submissive towards our rulers.

" When I was fifteen or sixteen years old . . ."

Quickly I counted on my fingers. I knew that Poorna was forty-five, so it must have been around 1930.

". . . something very important happened to me. Among my father's acquaintances was a poet—a man you should keep away from, people said, for the Rana's considered him a trouble-maker . . ."

" I wonder whether I know him," I interrupted and mentioned the name of the poet whom I had met at a reception a couple of months ago; it was he who had told me about the history of the Newars. Yes, that was the same one, Poorna said with a smile which revealed a row of ugly false teeth. He had lost his own in prison where his sight had also been weakened from lack of vitamins. " A fine fellow," he added. " We were in the same cell for about three years . . ."

One day when the poet visited Poorna's home, he had left a book behind by mistake. It was printed in India and told about the mechanical wonders of the world. When

Poorna opened it the first thing he saw was a picture of an aeroplane circling around a zeppelin.

To understand how deep an impression it made on him one must remember that the Nepalese knew virtually nothing about mechanical things. They had seen the automobiles of the Ranas, but many believed that it was a kind of magic which made them move. The book also told about ships larger than houses, skyscrapers, submarines . . .

While Poorna was absorbed in reading about all these things, the poet returned. He was nervous, for it was prohibited to possess such books: it had been smuggled in from India. At first the poet wanted to take it away from him, but he begged for permission to finish it and was finally allowed to do so on the condition that he did not tell anyone about it.

During the next few years Poorna borrowed other books from the poet—works on science, history, politics and philosophy. At first he read only for pleasure, but then he began to ask himself why his own country was so backward while the rest of the world kept advancing. Little by little he realized that things did not have to be this way—that it was the Ranas who had put a stop to all development in Nepal.

He would often read the forbidden books during classes at school. One day he was caught by a young Newar teacher who told Poorna to report to him after school.

The book Poorna had been reading was about the political institutions in the democratic world. He was certain that he would be whipped and dismissed from school, but when he came into the teacher's office he could tell from his face that he was not angry. He closed the door and asked Poorna to sit down. This was in itself surprising, for the pupils usually had to stand at attention when the teachers had anything to say to them.

"What do you think of the book?" the teacher asked. Poorna did not have to be afraid of saying his honest opinion,

he continued, adding that they were both Newars and probably held the same views on many things.

This teacher came to mean a great deal to Poorna. He had studied in India and was full of enthusiasm for Ghandi's Independence Movement. In Nepal there was no one he could talk to about his ideas. Once Poorna asked him why he had returned—why had he not stayed in India?

"I would have preferred to," the teacher replied. "But once you realize what freedom is, you have a duty towards those who are oppressed."

For the first time Poorna felt that he, too, had a duty towards his people. The two of them agreed that the best they could do under the circumstancese was to try to influence others by spreading information about what was going on in the world outside Nepal. They started a secret library. All they had was thirty-odd books which they lent to students and intellectuals whom they thought they could trust.

Though they were extremely careful, the Secret Police of the Ranas somehow got on their track. When the library had existed for about a year the teacher was arrested and accused of having planned to assassinate the Prime Minister. He was tortured, but did not reveal the names of any of the others. They sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment. Three years later he died in his cell . . .

Poorna clenched and unclenched his hands, but went on talking in the same low, monotonous tone.

At the time of the teacher's death, Poorna was in India. He had passed his final exams at the Katmandu College with high honours and had been rewarded with a scholarship at a university in Calcutta. The Ranas had given him permission to study abroad because they trusted his father and because they thought they could buy loyalty with favours.

In Calcutta he got in touch with other Nepalese who were working against the Ranas. There were not many of them—a few political refugees and a handful of idealistic

students. Towards the end of 1938 he got his degree and immediately returned to Nepal.

Though he was a Newar, the Ranas gave him an important position: there were so few Nepalese with a higher education. He became chief of a newly established bureau of statistics and was in charge of the first census ever made in Nepal. But his real interest was the work which he and his friend had started together.

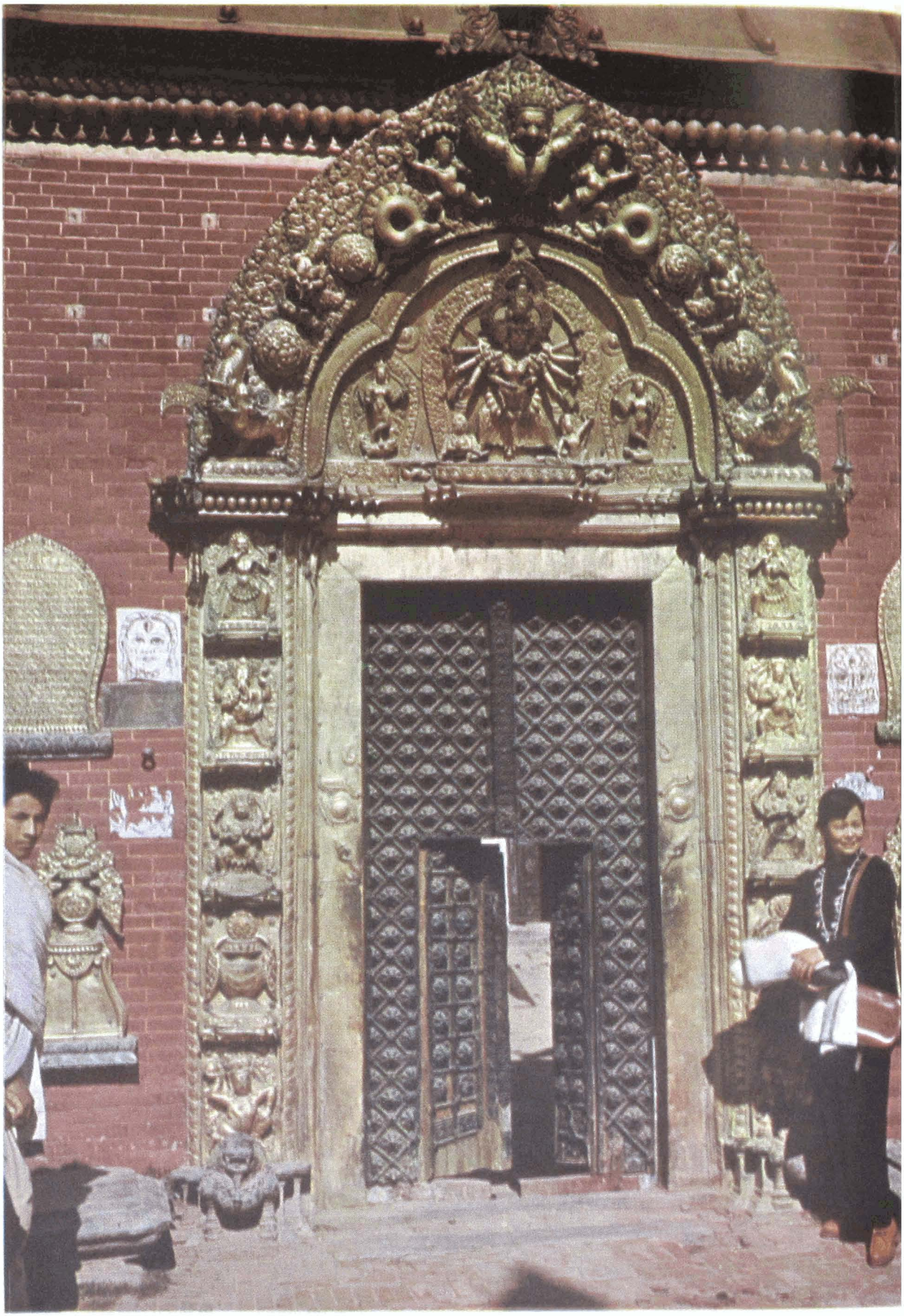
His job brought him in contact with all the different population groups. He discovered that there was a growing dissatisfaction with the rule of the Ranas. The lower Newar officials were indignant because their chances of advancement were so limited. Former Gurkha soldiers who had served under the British complained because of the great poverty in Nepal. The more daring among the students were beginning to discuss the possibility of reforms which would give more freedom to the intellectuals. And the illegitimate sons of the Ranas—the so-called Class C Ranas—longed for a change which would give them a greater share of the cake.

Together with some friends, he tried to unify the discontented elements. They never even dreamed of overthrowing the Ranas. They merely wanted to make the Prime Minister give Nepal a constitution which guaranteed the people fundamental human rights.

It was not easy to overcome the jealousy and suspicion which the different groups felt towards each other. Newars did not trust Gurkhas, the lower-caste intellectuals had no confidence in the Brahmins, who usually had the best education, and the C-Ranas looked down on everybody who did not belong to their own family.

Despite these difficulties an underground movement was organized. Plans were made for a civil disobedience campaign in style with Ghandi's. When it began, the farmers were to refuse to pay taxes, students, artisans and merchants should go on strike, and leaflets announcing the objectives of the campaign were to be distributed.

15. Werner Jacobsen in front of an ancient god in Katmandu. The valley is one of the richest archaeological treasuries in the world, he says.



16. Chi-Yun Eskelund at the entrance to one of the oldest temples of the Katmandu Valley. Around her neck she wears a Nepalese "protection-against-illness" chain.

Through a Newar employed at the royal court they got in touch with the King who let them know that he sympathized with their plans. He also helped them with money, for they had practically no funds at their disposal . . .

I looked up questioningly from my notebook, for Poorna had suddenly stopped. He turned his face away, and his voice was unsteady when he continued.

About two weeks before the campaign was to begin, the Ranas struck. An informer had revealed the whole plan to them and given them the names of forty of the leaders, who were thrown into dungeons at the Government palace. But two of them, who were Brahmins, were locked up in a separate cell. The Ranas adhered strictly to the caste system. " Divide and rule " was also their motto.

The Prime Minister was present during part of the trial which was conducted by a Rana official who was both prosecutor and judge. One by one, the forty were led before him and accused of having conspired to assassinate the Prime Minister. They all replied that they had not wanted to kill anyone, only to try to gain more freedom for the people. As soon as they had said this, they were grabbed and held by two men while a third whipped them until their backs were bloody.

During the trial, the King suddenly entered under guard of two Rana officers with drawn pistols. The man who was being lashed just then was the Newar who had served at the royal court. The prosecutor now asked the King whether he sympathized with the revolutionaries.

" It would have meant so much to us if he had stood by us," Poorna told me. " But he failed us. That was the bitterest blow of all, even worse than the whippings. But in a way one cannot blame him. From his early youth the Ranas had done their best to undermine his character and his health by drinking and debaucheries. He hated them, but he was entirely in their power. Some years later, when he fled to India, he did prove that he had the courage of his convictions."

Six of the leaders were condemned to death. Among them were the two Brahmins, but their sentences were changed to life imprisonment. No one could have executed them, for to kill a Brahmin was an even greater crime than to kill a cow. The remaining thirty-four were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Poorna was only given six years, perhaps because of his good education. The Ranas had great respect for learning.

On the way to prison they were led past the bodies of their four executed comrades. They were in chains, and ahead of them walked a policeman who shouted that this was what happened to those who tried to overthrow the government.

Looking back, those six years did not seem so bad, Poorna said. There were half a dozen of them in each cell, so there was always someone to talk to. One of his cell-mates was the poet, who had been imprisoned some months earlier for using the word *freedom* in a poem which he had read to some friends. The prisoners planned how they would continue their activities when they were released. They were certain that those of their comrades who had not been arrested continued the work in their absence.

But when Poorna finally got out, he discovered that the others had given up the struggle. Some of them pretended not to know him; others said that if he was mad enough to continue his activities against the government he would have to count them out.

Shortly after his release he was called before the Prime Minister. " I suppose you are cured now," the dictator said. " We need people of your ability. We will give you a small job, with good chances of advancement. But if you are ever caught doing anything against the Government again you will be left to rot in jail."

Poorna glanced at the drawing on the opposite wall. " His words nearly came true," he said with a wry smile. " Two years later I was arrested again." The police had discovered that he carried on secret correspondence with the anti-Rana

Nepalese in India. Without any trial, he was chained and thrown into a tiny cell.

"You can't imagine how terrible it was to be alone, for months and months. I never saw anyone but the jailer who brought me water and rice and green pepper. I talked to myself, I repeated aloud everything I had learned in school and at the university. Finally I could not think straight any more, I did not know what I was saying."

One day in the beginning of 1950, when he had been imprisoned for twenty months, the jailer removed his chains and told him that he was free. The power of the Ranas was broken . . .

Poorna stopped. His lips moved as if he wanted to say something, but could not find the right words.

"Then the revolution had taken place while you were in jail?" I asked.

He nodded. "But it was not the kind of revolution I had hoped for. The Indians were behind it—in a way we were only pawns . . ."

He explained that at the time when the Chinese Communists began massing troops for the invasion of Tibet, Nehru had suddenly become interested in Nepal. "It was strategic considerations more than anything else. He realized how dangerous it would be for India if the Chinese took advantage of the dissatisfaction in Nepal and organized a revolution. He decided to steal a march on them."

The King's flight to India was planned in New Delhi. Before his arrival, Nehru had negotiated with the leaders of the Nepalese political refugees in India. Among them were several C-Ranas who had been forced into exile because the Prime Minister feared they would attempt to overthrow him.

When the King came to India, the Nepalese revolutionary leaders were divided into two camps. One wanted to overthrow the Ranas and confiscate their property. Those who belonged to the other camp were mainly C-Ranas who themselves had large estates in Nepal. They favoured mild reforms,

but wanted the country to remain under Rana rule. Nehru showed clearly that he did not care for the Ranas, but at the same time he wanted to find a quick solution to the problem.

"As you know, the negotiations between New Delhi and Katmandu resulted in a compromise. The Rana Prime Minister was allowed to remain in power, but only half of the Ministers could belong to his own family; the rest should represent the people. Some of the powers which the Ranas had taken away from the crown were restored. The new Government promised large-scale reforms in favour of the common people.

"*After democracy,* we call the period which began with the return of the King. But in fact, no democratic development has taken place during the seven years which have passed since then . . ."

"Now, aren't you being a little too pessimistic?" I asked. "After all, there have been some improvements. The borders have been opened. There is freedom of speech, and the Ranas have lost their power . . ."

"No, they haven't!" Poorna's gentle voice had a sharp edge to it. "You and the other foreigners believe that the Ranas are harmless now. You are wrong! They are practically as strong as they were before the revolution, only now they rule in a different way—through their money.

"Let me give you an example. Nepal has had six different governments since the revolution. Every one of these governments has promised to carry out tax reforms, which we need more than anything else. I will explain why.

"The way it is now, the government gets virtually all its income from taxing the peasants. It is not enough. Every year there is a deficit of about fifteen million rupees. The government makes up for this by accepting loans or presents from Washington, New Delhi and Peking. It goes without saying that the great powers try to get influence in return for their money.

" But why should we prostitute ourselves in this way? There is only one sensible solution—we must tax the estates of the Ranas and of the Brahmins. If we did we would have a surplus in the treasury, and they can afford to pay. Together, they own about half the land of Nepal. But every time somebody proposes to do this, he is voted down. Why? Because the Ranas bribe those who make the final decision.

" The original revolutionary movement has split up into a dozen or so different parties. If you ask the leaders of these parties to explain their programmes they will reply with high-sounding phrases about freedom, equality and democracy. But once they come into power they only try to enrich themselves. They have no principles whatsoever . . ."

As an example he told me about an officer who had joined the rebels during the final phases of the struggle against the Ranas. When the Ranas and the Indians reached a compromise in New Delhi, he protested that the agreement gave the Indians too much say in Nepalese affairs and demanded that the land of the Ranas be confiscated.

" I agreed whole-heartedly with this," Poorna said. " We have almost become vassals of the Indians. They have sent a large military mission to Nepal, the government has many Indian advisers, and a number of Indians have been given important administrative posts in Nepal."

The officer in question was commander of a couple of regiments, and when the King returned from New Delhi he revolted against the new government. Units of the regular Indian Army were sent against him and he was finally forced to surrender. He escaped from prison and fled to Tibet.

When he returned about a year ago he declared that he was still dead-set against the strong Indian influence in Nepal and that the Ranas ought to be deprived of some of their economic power. Shortly afterwards he became Prime Minister. The first thing he did was to go to New Delhi and sign an agreement which made Nepal even more dependent on India. During the four months of his rule he also proved

himself to be an exceptionally good friend of the Ranas.

"All our political leaders are like that," Poorna said. "I know them, because most of them used to belong to the revolutionary movement. Every one of them gets money secretly from the Ranas and the Indians.

"One day you asked me why I don't belong to any party. Now perhaps you understand. I want to keep away from politics as long as the strings are being pulled by the Ranas. They have a finger in everything that is going on—they are fighting tooth and nail against every attempt to introduce democratic reforms. The former king did his best to weaken them, but his son, who is now on the throne, is under their influence. He is married to a Rana girl and is closely connected with the most influential members of the family."

Poorna told me that practically all the officers in the Nepalese Army are still Ranas. There are no trained people who can replace them. For the same reason, most of the high government posts are held by Ranas, and the foreign aid organizations which are active in Nepal have many Ranas on their local staffs.

"The foreigners here in Nepal associate practically only with Ranas," Poorna continued. "You seldom hear of a Newar being invited to their parties . . ."

"You cannot blame the foreigners for that," I interrupted. "The Ranas speak English fluently. Very few Newars do. And the Ranas are used to being with foreigners, they like it, but the Newars keep to themselves."

"You are right," Poorna said. "It is all due to our caste prejudices. I am afraid many years will pass before we grow out of it. And meanwhile, the foreigners here will have all the problems of the country explained to them from the point of view of the Ranas."

He said he had sometimes wondered whether the Nepalese by nature were more corrupt than others. "But I rather think it has something to do with our long period of oppression," he went on. "The Ranas treated us harshly, as if we were irre-

sponsible children, and we became just that. We lost our self-respect and our initiative. The Nepalese thinks only of himself, he does not give a damn about his country."

He shook his head sadly. " Sometimes I feel like giving up. I have even thought of leaving Nepal, of starting all over somewhere else. But my duty is here. I keep in contact with some of the young people who have not been corrupted by living under the Ranas. Among them you find a little of the idealism which the older politicians lack. Nepal's only hope lies in these young people."

He smiled. " I am afraid it will be quite a while before they find each other and become a political force," he added. " But I can wait—I learned that in prison."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SOME OF MY Nepalese friends in Katmandu find it hard to distinguish between foreigners. Our uniform way of dressing, our pale faces and big noses make us look alike to the point of confusion, they say. But there is one foreigner here whom they can easily tell from the rest. His bushy beard flutters in the wind when he comes roaring through town on his motor cycle. People smile to him and nod, for everybody knows " the milkman ", as he is called. His name is Werner Schulthess, and he is always dressed the same way: leather jacket, khaki pants and a black Nepalese cap.

One of my acquaintances has described him as the man who has done the most to help the Nepalese through the difficult transition period " after democracy ". When I told Schulthess this he burst out laughing.

" Nonsense! " he said with his hard Swiss accent. " I have taught them to make butter and cheese, that is all. And to eat it, for when I first came they only ate boiled butter and they would not touch cheese."

That was in the beginning of 1952. Schulthess was thirty years old at the time, the youngest of six U.N. people who were to help the Government modernize Nepal. It is hardly worth explaining what the others were specialists in, for a little over a year later they were all gone.

" I was also at the point of giving up a few times," Schul-

thess told me one day when he managed to find a couple of hours for telling me about his work. The interview took place in a large new dairy which he was building on the outskirts of Katmandu. Workmen were hammering and sawing all around us, and every once in a while someone would come and ask his advice.

" From the very beginning, the Nepalese were extremely kind and obliging," he continued. " But it was impossible to get anything done. First there was the problem of our living quarters . . ."

The Government had promised to take care of the housing of the U.N. experts and did give them a palace to live in, but when a month had passed the electricity was turned off. The owner of the palace said he was very sorry to do this, but the Government had neither paid the rent nor the electricity bill. Some weeks later he removed every stick of furniture because the Government still had not paid him a penny.

" Of course we protested to the Government," Schulthess told me, " but the ministers said that they simply could not pay. Of course we thought this was a subterfuge."

In those days he had not yet discovered how the Nepalese Ministry of Finance functioned. They had no budget in the European sense of the word. As long as there was money in the treasury they paid promptly enough, but Schulthess and his friends had arrived at a moment when the national purse was completely empty.

" So we slept on the floor and used candles," Schulthess said. " We didn't mind that so much, but we could not get anywhere with our work. Every time we presented a plan the government people nodded and said yes, we were very, very clever, but nothing was ever done."

Most foreigners who come here are soon convinced that the Nepalese are thoroughly unreliable, but Schulthess discovered that it is often a matter of linguistic misunderstanding. " When we say *yes* in Europe it is considered a promise. In Nepal it only means *I am listening*. That is why the govern-

ment people were bewildered and unhappy when we accused them of having broken their word."

Schulthess was supposed to look into the possibility of starting a modern dairy industry in Nepal. One of the first things he did was to go to the Ministry of Agriculture and ask where there was a surplus of milk in the valley and how large it was. They looked at him as if he wasn't quite right in the head. How on earth were they to know? Their job was to calculate how much the peasants could pay in tax, not to go around counting cows.

Schulthess decided to make his own survey. He rented a bicycle and started riding around in the valley. There was no regular milk supply for the capital, he found. Many of the cows in the valley were ownerless and were milked by anybody who came along. They seldom gave more than a pint or two a day. Before the milk was sold it was usually adulterated with river water. He had some samples flown to Calcutta and examined at a laboratory which wrote back that the milk contained practically every known germ.

On his trips Schulthess often saw some Nepalese who sat by the roadside selling bowls of refreshments. At first he did not know what was in the bowls, for they were always black with flies. It turned out that underneath the flies was curd . . .

Here we were interrupted by a workman who was powdered grey with cement dust. We followed him down into a cellar room where he had made a cement floor which he wanted Schulthess to inspect. He was obviously very proud of it, but I could tell from Schulthess that something was wrong. He made some measurements with a rule, then cursed softly in *Schweitzer-Deutsch*.

"The cold storage plant is going to be here, and the fool has made the floor an inch too high," he told me in English. "The whole thing has to be torn up. I had hoped we could be finished by Sunday, but this will delay us a couple of days."

He sighed. The workman watched us with a worried

expression. Schulthess put a hand on his shoulder, smiled to him, and quietly explained what was wrong.

"Of course he should have asked me before he made the floor," he said as we walked upstairs again. "But I have told them again and again not always to wait for orders. They must use their own initiative, and that is exactly what he did, so I praised him more than I blamed him. Where were we?"

"The curd."

"That's right! I did not feel much like tasting it, just the sight of all the flies nauseated me, but I made myself do it . . ."

Though a little stale, the curd tasted rather good. Schulthess could tell that it was made of rich milk. He already spoke a little Nepali—he had begun to study the language as soon as he arrived—and now he asked the vendors where the milk came from. They pointed towards the mountains in the north.

So he knew where he had to go. The other foreigners told him that he could not possibly travel in the hills without a tent, provisions and bearers. Schulthess stuffed a pair of extra socks and a set of clean underwear inside his sleeping bag and set off, accompanied by a young Sherpa.

Some soldiers stopped them at a control place in the foothills, but a pack of cigarettes solved that problem. When they had walked for seven or eight hours on a narrow path they heard a faint tinkling of bells. They quickened their steps, and some minutes later they saw a large herd of cattle grazing on a slope. This was just what Schulthess had hoped to find—big, healthy cows, quite different from the skinny wretches in the Katmandu valley.

A shepherd showed them the way to a small valley inhabited by a couple of hundred families. They went from hut to hut and talked to the people. Many asked them to come in and sit by the fire and offered them curd.

There was an abundance of milk, and it cost only about a fifth of what it did in the capital. The people drank a lot of it themselves; that was why they were healthier than any other

Nepalese Schulthess had seen. They also made a little butter, but each family did its own churning and the method they used was primitive and slow.

They had so much curd that they hardly knew what to do with it. Some of it was sold to buyers from Katmandu, but they came irregularly and their prices were low. That was understandable, for the cost of transportation was high since a man could not carry very many filled bowls through the mountains.

Schulthess figured that the people of this valley could supply many hundred quarts of milk after their own needs had been satisfied. He called a meeting and told them that perhaps he would be able to buy their milk surplus and sell it in the capital. The young Sherpa translated; his language was closely related to the local dialect. Schulthess said he could promise them a considerably higher price than they were now getting, but then they would have to supply him regularly . . .

The people looked from the bearded foreigner to the hills which had always shut them off from the rest of the world. Could he really conquer the mountain? Some of them asked how he could get the milk to Katmandu. It would get sour on the way, they said.

Not if it was carried at night, Schulthess replied. He would organize a transport team of local young men. How long did it take them to walk to the capital? Around seven hours. And how much could one man carry? Eighty pounds, if it was a compact load.

Schulthess is an agricultural graduate with dairy farming as his speciality. He made some quick calculations, then informed them that he could pay them two rupees (about two shillings) a head for each journey if they would carry the milk to Katmandu for him.

Two rupees! All the young men wanted to join such a team, but they doubted whether anything would ever come of it. No sane person would pay so much . . .

Two days later they returned to the capital where Schul-

thess worked out a report to the U.N., requesting capital for starting a small dairy in Katmandu. He had been told never to do anything without consulting the Government first, so he also applied to the Ministry of Agriculture for permission to open a dairy which was to get milk from mountain villages.

The U.N. replied that his plans sounded rather vague and in any case there was no capital available just now. The Ministry of Agriculture never replied. This taught Schulthess that when you want something done in Nepal, don't ask the authorities first—just go ahead and do it, or you will only embarrass the officials, who are used to all decisions being made from above.

He had about two hundred pounds sterling of his own. This was not enough, but he succeeded in raising eight hundred more from Nepalese friends. They would probably not get any interest during the first year, he warned them, but after that he promised them at least ten per cent. They have been getting considerably more than that.

Schulthess rented a couple of rooms on the ground floor of a house in the centre of town. He went to some of the local blacksmiths and explained that he needed a large metal container for pasteurizing milk. They shook their heads. Such a container had never been made in the valley, so they thought it could not be done.

It is first of all this dread of everything new that keeps the Nepalese back, Schulthess said. They are quite clever at whatever they do know, but they have done the same things over and over for centuries.

He himself comes from a small Swiss village where he learned to do a little of everything. Now he got hold of a young blacksmith, and together they produced what was probably the largest metal container ever made in Nepal. Then he went to a carpenter whom he helped to make a number of light, yet strong wooden containers for transporting the milk.

The foreigners in Katmandu welcomed the prospect of get-

ting pasteurized milk. They ordered more than a hundred litres a day from him. When the deliveries from the mountains began he would get much more than that, but he figured on being able to sell the rest locally.

Everything was now ready—but when he got back to the mountain village he discovered that unexpected difficulties had arisen during his absence. The people would not sell him any milk after all. They needed it themselves, they said. He tried to find out what had caused the sudden change in their attitude, but they would hardly even talk to him.

He and his Sherpa stayed with a poor farmer. During the first night he woke them up and said somebody wanted to talk to them. Outside the hut were half a dozen young men who whispered that the people really wanted to sell their milk to Schulthess, but they did not dare to do so.

For generations the people had been in debt to a rich family. The present head of this family was a sly old man who feared that if the peasants earned more, they would pay off their debts. Then he would lose his income, for he and his relatives lived almost exclusively on usury.

The old man had told the people that the foreigner would never give them a penny, but would only kidnap the young men and sell them to a foreign army. As the farmers did not believe this, he warned them that anyone who sold milk to the foreigner would be beaten to within an inch of his life. He had several thugs in his service, and they had repeatedly beaten people who could not pay interest on their debt or had displeased him in some way.

To appeal to the law was useless. If a local agreement came before a court in Katmandu the usurer would bribe the officials, so they invariably decided for him.

Schulthess' blood boiled as he listened. At first he had only been worried about his supply of milk, but now he felt it his duty to rescue these people from the claws of the moneylender. He promised the young men to protect them if they

would bring him some milk the following afternoon and carry it to Katmandu for him.

Next morning he visited the rich old man who received him with the utmost cordiality and assured him that he had done his best to persuade the people to do business with the honoured foreigner. Schulthess smiled sweetly and thanked him. Then he told the old man that he was not a private buyer, but worked for a tremendous organization which had representatives all over the world and to which even kings had to bow. The leading Generals and Ministers in Katmandu were his personal friends and would back him up any time . . .

" I put it on thick," Schulthess told me with a laugh, " but it worked." In the afternoon the young men brought him the milk. All the inhabitants gathered around them, for it was the first time anyone dared to stand up openly against the old man. Schulthess paid them cash for the milk and also paid them in advance for the trip. The mountain dwellers were impressed by the sight of so much money. The milk was poured into the wooden containers which Schulthess and his Sherpa had brought along, and then the little caravan set out.

The men looked nervously about and kept close to the foreigner; only when they were several kilometres away from the village did they feel safe from an attack by the rich man's bullies. Like the rest of them, Schulthess carried a container with nearly eighty pounds of milk. He was dead tired when they arrived at Katmandu, but immediately began to pasteurize the milk. As soon as the foreign customers had been supplied, he sent a couple of men to the market place to announce that he had pure, rich milk for sale at half the usual price. When he went to bed at 9.0 a.m. he had sold out.

During the next three months he accompanied the milk carriers on their night trips. He wanted to make sure that the usurer did not try to take revenge. He didn't—in fact, he and the foreigner became friends, and today he is one of Schulthess' biggest milk suppliers. When the farmers began to pay

off their debts Schulthess advised him to invest in cattle, which he did, and today his income is as large as before.

There was another reason why Schulthess made the strenuous trip together with the bearers. "In a way I like the Nepalese attitude towards time," he told me. Not only do they not wear watches—most of them have no idea what day of the week it is. It does not matter to them whether something is done today or tomorrow.

But it does matter when you have to run a dairy. It was not enough to tell the mountain people that they had to deliver milk on certain days and at a certain hour. If Schulthess wasn't there they just did not show up with the milk. And if he didn't accompany the bearers they might decide to take a nap halfway, and not wake up until dawn.

But when the Nepalese have done something a certain number of times it becomes a habit and they do it without thinking. Now, two teams of fifteen bearers each take turns making the trip. They are practically never late.

Schulthess also trained the small staff which takes care of the dairy. For a while he thought he could never teach them to pasteurize the milk properly. It just did not seen important to them, for they had no idea what bacteria were. When he explained that they were so small that one could not even see them, they replied that then there could not possibly be any harm in them.

He finally wrote to the U.N. and asked for a film about bacteria. When they saw them on the screen, as big and terrifying as snakes and scorpions, they were finally convinced of their existence. Since then, they have watched the thermometer as carefully as any European dairyman.

When the Nepalese could manage the dairy without Schulthess, he and his Sherpa went on a long trip into the mountains. They slept in huts whose inhabitants were still living in the iron age. Schulthess thrived on the crude local food. Seven days from the capital, not far from the Tibetan border, they reached a large Sherpa community—a land of milk and

honey, Schulthess said. There were no cuckoo-clocks and he knew only a few words of the language, but otherwise it was in many ways as if he were back in one of the remote parts of Switzerland. The people lived in clean, spacious huts and were as calm and taciturn as the mountain dwellers of his own country.

They had sufficient milk for supplying several large towns, but to transport it to Katmandu was of course out of the question. There was only one way of exploiting these rich resources. The milk would have to be made into cheese—but could he create a market in the valley for this unknown product?

Schulthess decided to take a chance. He rented a hut for ten rupees a year and began to make cheese. The Sherpas quickly learned the process. He trained three men, and after a few weeks he could leave the work entirely to them.

When the first cheeses were ready, the Sherpas were visited by a representative from a Lama temple across the border. He came twice a year to purchase butter for the Tibetan monks. Now he could not get any unless he was willing to pay the same price as Schulthess—that is, about forty per cent more than he was used to.

" Though he was extremely courteous I realized that he did not care much for me—and no wonder, for after all, I had ruined his business. On the last evening before I was to return with the cheeses, the Sherpas gave a party in my honour. A lot of local beer was consumed, and I also drank too much. I was dancing together with the others, when I suddenly saw the Tibetan coming towards me. He had drawn the long, straight dagger which all Tibetans carry in their belt. When he was a couple of steps away from me he raised the dagger."

*Now I am going to kill you,* he said in Nepali. The dancing stopped, there was not a sound in the hut. Schulthess had suddenly become sober.

" My knees shook. It was no empty threat, I knew. His face

was distorted with hatred, and it would not be very risky for him to finish me off. The arm of the law is in any case not very strong in Nepal, especially not in the hills, and once he got across the border it could never reach him.

"I looked him straight in the eye. At the same time I slowly put my hand into my pocket—like this . . ."

Schulthess stepped back and took out his pocket knife. Without taking his eyes off me he opened it and held the tiny blade forward.

"'I also have a knife,' I said. 'Shall we exchange?'"

A roar of laughter greeted his words. Even the Tibetan could not help smiling. Without a word he lowered the dagger, pushed it back into its sheath, and went out of the hut. Since then he had not been seen south of the border.

After an absence of several months Schulthess returned to the capital accompanied by half a dozen Sherpas, each of whom carried a couple of cheeses the size of an automobile wheel. At first he could only find customers for the cheese among the foreigners, but he gave free samples to all his Nepalese friends. Before long some of them returned for more, and the next batch of cheese which arrived from Sherpaland was sold within a couple of weeks.

Since then Schulthess has opened two more cheese centres in the mountains. The production has doubled several times. He sells a part of the cheese in the valley and exports the rest to India, where there is an almost inexhaustible market for cheap dairy produce.

About a year ago, Schulthess received seventeen thousand pounds sterling from the Colombo Plan, and it is this money which he is using for the new dairy. He himself drew the plans for the building which will be equipped with up-to-date dairy machines from Denmark.

When he ordered the building materials he discovered that about half of the locally made bricks went to pieces as soon as one touched them. He wrote home to Switzerland for information about how to produce bricks, and after several trials and

errors he built a kiln. He had only intended to make enough bricks for his own dairy, but people soon found out that "the milkman's" bricks were far better than others. Since then he has built several more kilns and will probably soon become the leading brick producer of the valley. He has also established his own smithy and a small saw mill and will soon open a butter refinery which will export boiled butter to India.

These new undertakings are mostly financed by private loans from Nepalese. "They must learn to invest in their own country," Schulthess told me. "Unfortunately, the Ranas are setting a poor example. They have always sent their money to India, and they are still doing it—they have billions in Indian banks while their own country is desperately in need of capital."

Many people have told Schulthess that he ought to organize co-operatives in Nepal. "But I am afraid that would not be any use," he told me. "A co-operative must be composed of people who have approximately the same standard of living and the same education. Otherwise it won't work. And it cannot be organized from above. In this country, a few people would invariably take advantage of the ignorance of the majority."

Before I talked to Schulthess I had collected material on two U.S.A. aid-organizations which are active in Nepal. The Ford Foundation is backing a centre where Nepalese artisans are taught modern working methods. Furthermore, the American Government is financing an ambitious development programme. Among many other things they have established a training college for teachers, and they send out teams to teach the farmers sanitation and improved methods of cultivation.

These two organizations spend millions of dollars and have able, energetic leaders. Even so they do not seem to accomplish very much. It is as if they only scrape the surface: they have not taken root in the country. Nearly three years passed before they succeeded in persuading the inhabitants of a

couple of villages to dig latrines, and many farmers still prefer to go out in the fields. At one place, the organizers were stoned when they came to vaccinate the people. Only after a small-pox epidemic which took the lives of more than a hundred children did the inhabitants of this village submit to vaccination.

If one talks to the Nepalese employed by these organizations one often notices a depressing lack of enthusiasm. They do not feel that they are taking part in an inspiring attempt to bring their own country out of the middle-ages—they are merely working for some foreigners whose ideas and efforts do not seem to concern them very much. These foreigners drive shiny automobiles and live in palaces—in a way they are just as remote from the common people as the Ranas were.

"It is not easy to help the Nepalese," Schulthess said. "When I tell the farmers how they can produce more they often say: *Why should we? In the end, only those who exploit us will benefit from our efforts.*"

I suddenly thought of Africa—of a village in Ghana, where a former American missionary had described the attitude of the Negroes towards progress in almost the same words. Like Schulthess, this American had won the confidence of the people by going out among them and sharing their little sorrows and worries with them. Money alone is not enough if we in the West want to help backward nations . . .

Schulthess told how some time ago he had been visited by a delegation from a village on the outskirts of the valley. They had heard about him and wanted to know if he could help them to get a small power plant which would enable them to irrigate the fields.

"I went out and examined the possibilities. A diesel engine would be too expensive to run, but a few miles from the village was a river which could supply the necessary power for a small electric plant. I told them that perhaps I could help them if they would build a road to this river. I did not expect them to do it—I thought they were just trying to get

something for nothing, for many have come to consider the Foreign-Aid Organization as a kind of Santa Claus.

" But some days ago the same delegates came back and told me that now the road was finished. All the inhabitants had worked on it during their spare time. That sort of thing makes up for many disappointments. I have already ordered a small turbine for them—it will be a loan which they will have to repay within ten years. I am sure they will do it."

Schulthess told me about the young Sherpa who had accompanied him on his first trip to the mountains. " Before I met him he had taken part in a couple of mountain-climbing expeditions. About a year ago, Tenzing offered him a job as a teacher at the school for mountain climbers which he has started in northern India. Tenzing offered him more than twice as much as I was paying him. I congratulated him—I was sorry to see him go, I said, but of course he would not say " no " to such a wonderful offer."

Schulthess smiled. " My Sherpa replied that money is not everything, he would rather stay on with me. That also made up for many disappointments."

It was time for lunch. Schulthess had an errand at his old dairy and offered me a ride, as we were going the same way. I climbed up on the back of his motor cycle and we roared off towards the pagodas in the centre of town. When we were a little over half way he had to slow down for an ox-cart. For several minutes we crawled behind it, swallowing dust. When the road finally widened so much that we could get past the cart, Schulthess turned his head and grinned to me.

" You must have patience," he said. " Otherwise you don't get anywhere here in Nepal."

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