

WINDOW ON NEPAL

by
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ILLUSTRATED

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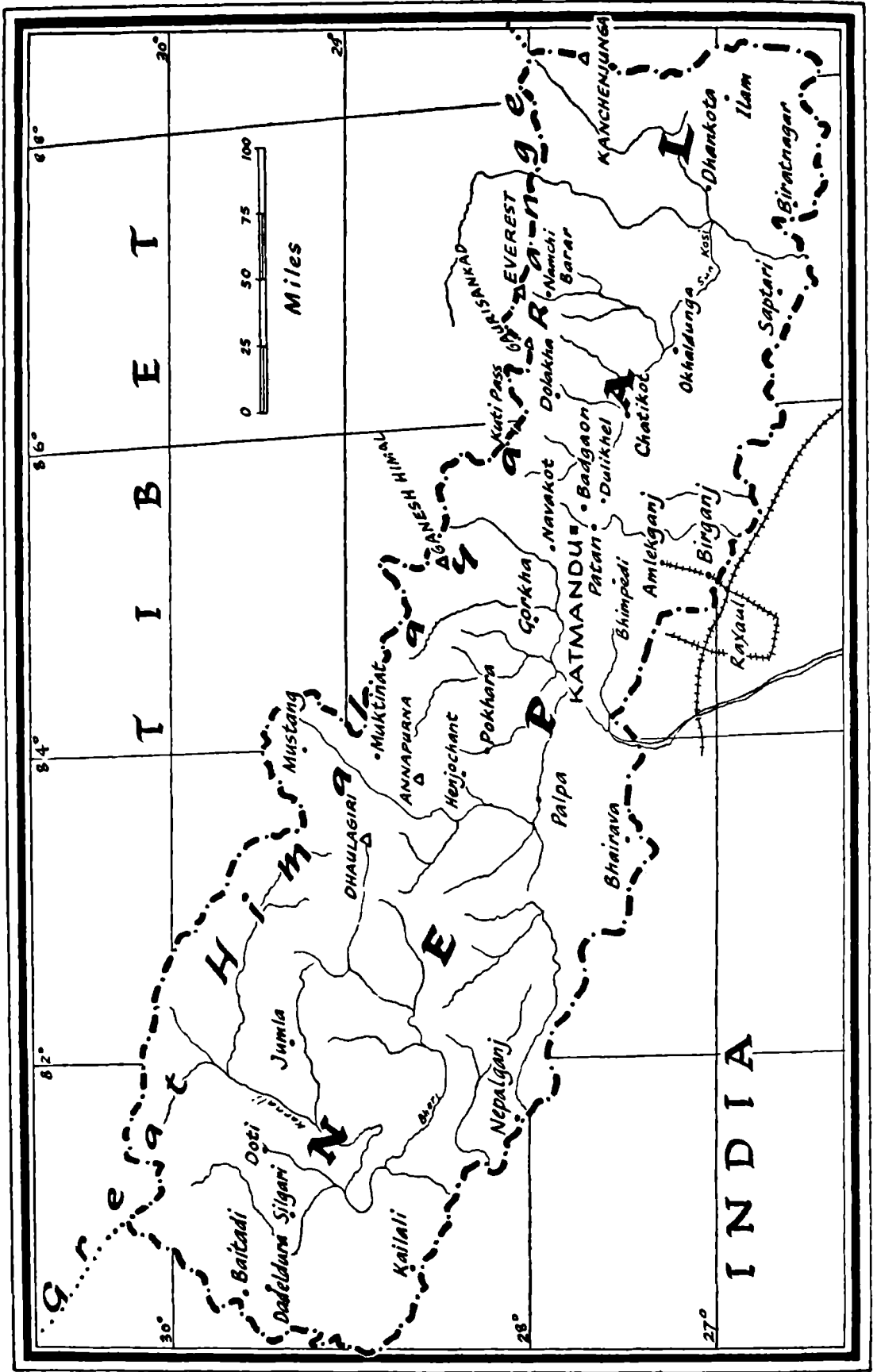
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I

IN THE SHADE OF THE WHITE GIANTS

NEPAL, for the average Western reader, means Everest and Annapurna. For the Oriental it meant little more until 1950. Until that date only strictly selected people could enter the country at all, on "personal invitation" from the Prime Minister. Now any tourist may, after a few routine formalities, obtain a visa for a visit to this small kingdom wedged between India and Tibet, but for a week only.

During the past few years an Indian airline has been making regular daily return flights between Patna in India and Katmandu, with an aeroplane whose twenty seats are often not enough.

It was in one of these aeroplanes that I arrived. Although I was conscious that the enchantment of the "Forbidden Land" was no longer as intense as it once had been, even I, a hardened traveller, was invaded by strange and unfamiliar feelings while flying over the frontier of Nepal. I felt myself a part of the twentieth century, which, by universal ideas, by international co-operation and, last if not least, by means of the aeroplane, breaks through barriers and makes isolation impossible.

Far below our moving window we saw for a few minutes the deep green of the Terai jungle, one of the most untouched animal reservations in the world. The aeroplane rose to fly over the Churia mountain chain. A series of snowy peaks appeared in the clear, cloudless atmosphere.

"Mount Everest!" someone said, and, following his pointing finger, I recognized the sleeping giant under its white blanket. Lo-tze and Kanchenjunga were visible a little to the east. I tried to pick out Annapurna and Dhaulagiri through the opposite window. Below us lay a whole chain of giants, the goals of annual expeditions, giants whose cruel self-defence does not prevent thousands of mountaineers dreaming of a pilgrimage to those summits. With deep respect, I gazed at the roof of the world.

We were flying above heights now covered with forest. Here and there small terraced rice-fields showed brighter on the

slopes, like patches on a garment. At last all the mountains, even the steepest, were transformed into gigantic stairs with irregular, often very narrow steps that followed the curved lines of the slope. Among those rice-fields—those rice-field staircases—were tiny houses, tiny brown earth huts with straw roofs, in the valley, at the tops of the mountains, on the slopes . . . isolated or in little groups, linked by minute paths. Life was pulsating there. We even saw, from our very low altitude, human beings in the fields and beside the huts.

My admiration for this charming region had barely reached its zenith when the scene changed as if we were on a moving carpet. A vast valley covered with thin, translucent mist lay before us. Through the mist we could see a few small towns and villages, between which the silver ribbon of the river was meandering.

We came down quickly over Katmandu. Before we landed I saw a white cupola with a gilded turret, from which the mysterious eyes of the Buddha look at the traveller from every side. The foreign traveller is stimulated to reflection even more by the question-mark instead of a nose between the Buddha's eyes. This did not last long. The aeroplane landed, and after the brief rites of the Customs, Mrs. Betty Thompson and I entered a very ancient taxi. The driver asked us whether we would allow somebody else to share the car with us. Certainly we would, why not? But it turned out that the "somebody" was not one person but a whole family consisting of two adults, four children, several parrots in two cages, six trunks and a few baskets and sticks. On the bad road the vehicle bounced continually, and the parrots let out strange noises. It was enough to look at Mrs. Thompson among the cages and the sticks for us both to burst into loud laughter. Eagerly we stared at the first pagodas in the distance, until renewed bumping of the car made us laugh again. The taxi stopped suddenly and we regretted that this picturesque overture to Nepal had come to an end.

Very soon we were comfortably installed in the Snow View Hotel, where we met about twenty tourists from various countries. Their presence is a proof that "Nepal opens the door" indeed, but the door is being opened slowly, hesitantly and suspiciously. When I examined my passport more carefully, I noticed that my visa was not valid for Nepal, but only for Katmandu, and that for every other place—except for a few

small neighbouring towns in the Katmandu Valley—the special permission of the Government was required. This permission is generally given freely for places to which there is a regular airline service. To any other place the visitor must go with a Nepalese “Liaison Officer”, and himself pay the officer. I set about trying to free myself from this obligation for a fortnight’s visit to the Himalayas. For to be in Nepal and not see the famous snowy peaks would be like visiting Rome and not seeing the Pope. Of course, most tourists have to return from Rome without seeing the Pope; and most visitors to Nepal have to content themselves with the panorama of a mountain horizon seen from their aeroplane, and with the sight from Katmandu—if the day is clear—of a few white mountains in the Ganesh Himal range.

I am not, of course, thinking of the mountaineers who come long distances chiefly to try to conquer one of the great mountains. I need not discuss them; who has not read Herzog’s moving book on the conquest of Annapurna, or Hunt’s about the heroic Everest expedition? It is generally known how other expeditions have come from Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and Argentina to wrest the laurel of victory from some new “unconquerable” peak, or to be defeated, but retain the firm determination to come back next year and break their opponent’s nose. Often the expedition leaves a member behind, to sleep in the eternal snows. Yes—the monsoon-season tempests of the Himalayas have already swallowed many climbers, for the date of their coming cannot be accurately predicted. And the true mountaineer, even if he foresees the danger, is so magnetically attracted by the crystalline-pure summit, that he forgets about the reality and risks his life to conquer the image of his dreams. For a man obsessed with this imagination, neither his family nor any other earthly duties exist in such circumstances. He hears only that inner voice, which shouts louder than all others: “Forward! Alive or dead does not matter, but forward to the top!” I understand this state of mind very well, for I have experienced it several times, and then I followed that inner voice with no thought for anything else.

The Nepalese government, with the means at its disposal, has quite cleverly exploited the height-mania of that visionary caste, the mountaineers. It has decreed that every expedition must pay in advance 3,000 rupees (about £150) for every

mountain it plans to climb, and 5,000 rupees to look for the "Abominable Snowman", even if in fact they never so much as smell him. This "tax on danger" is unique in the world, and seems the more strange in that in Nepal there are no taxes whatever except a land tax, so that it seems as if Nepal wishes to hinder mountain climbers. The most probable cause of this tariff is that, like other tourist countries, Nepal too would like to profit in some way from the expeditions, and since there is no income or profits tax, the Government has no other means of receiving something from the tourists.

However, though I have climbed mountains, my ambitions in Nepal were less lofty. I wanted no more than the fortnight's visit; it took me another fortnight to receive permission, after obtaining a written recommendation from the Nepalese Minister of Education and paying a visit to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, accompanied by the personal secretary of the King's younger brother. My permit carried a strict indication of the places to be visited, and a two-week limit; but the door had been closed for so long that it might be expected to open slowly, reluctantly and with much creaking.

The Pokhara Valley, at the foot of the white giants, is forty minutes' flight away from Katmandu, and as there is no hotel in the small town of Pokhara, tourists for the most part fly there in the morning and fly back in the afternoon, having two or three hours at their disposal to admire the panorama, if the clouds do not decide to have a joke at their expense and cover all the mountains with thick curtains, as happens chiefly during the monsoon, from June to September.

On the day when I flew there with my British friend Allan Wood, a member of the Himalayan Society, no mountain could be seen. But fortunately our visit was planned for three days, and mine, personally, for even longer if something of interest was to be seen. On the day of arrival I made an agreement with a carrier for my load; Allan preferred to carry his own well filled rucksack. He was properly equipped for mountaineering while I was in simple outdoor clothes. This reminded me of an amusing picture in a book written by the British explorer, A. Henry Savage Landor.¹ In the first years of this century, he climbed a high snowy mountain not far from the spot, on the

¹ Author of *Across Coveted Lands*, Macmillan, 1902, *Alone with the Hairy Ainu*, Murray, 1893, *Tibet and Nepal*, Black, 1905.

Nepal-Tibetan frontier, and crossed several high mountain passes. In accordance with his principle, explained in the book, he used no special equipment or clothing whatever believing that Alpinists used it only in order to dramatize themselves. He felt perfectly comfortable in the same clothes as those in which he went for his customary afternoon stroll in Piccadilly. We see him thus on the picture that he himself painted, from a photograph—elegantly dressed, with a bow tie and a flat straw hat, with a cane walking-stick in his hand, accompanied by his four Nepalese escorts, in the middle of a glacier at a height of nine thousand feet. I do not understand how he managed to survive the bitterly cold nights, in which many climbers have been frozen to death in spite of sleeping-bags, tents and other modern equipment of our own era. No doubt the age of miracles is already past!

First we crossed the town of Pokhara. In fact it is no more than a large village, quite unlike the towns and villages of the Katmandu Valley. There is no relic of the ancient civilization. Only here and there, as if by chance, a window is adorned with a wood engraving, timidly and modestly, like a distant echo of the powerful voice of that ancient art of Katmandu. There are no vehicles in the streets of Pokhara. Groups of men play cards in front of the doors of a few shops, in which frequent customers are obviously not expected. We were delighted to see fresh oranges being sold in the street, and bought some.

At the end of the little town we saw four or five vaulted buildings made of corrugated iron: the hospital run by the American Protestant missionaries. We decided to visit them. The missionaries were in fact ladies, and welcomed us very eagerly. One doctor and five nurses care for the sick of the town and the surrounding country with courage, skill, and notable self-sacrifice. We stayed with them for a short time only, and readily accepted their invitation to lunch when we returned from our mountain trip.

We set out on the journey up the mountain slope. On our right we looked down at the River Seti, which emerges, white in colour, from the bottom of a black ravine, through which it forces its way pathetically through the mountains. On the left, in the valley below, there is again water: Lake Pheva Tal. This, leaden grey, reflects the heavy clouds. There are two other lakes in this region, which will some day, in all probability, attract

large numbers of tourists. They have also given the town its name, since Pokhara means "lakes" in Nepalese.

Our excursion began at the beginning of November, that is, in autumn. The temperature, however, was mild and summer-like. Pokhara is about 3,500 feet above sea level, rather lower than Katmandu. Although it lies at the foot of mountains covered with eternal snow, we, on our way, kept seeing banana and orange trees full of golden fruit.

The way climbs continually, passing village homes to right and left. The houses here are built mostly of stone covered with mortar and painted orange-brown, so that they stand out brightly in the green landscape. Where the stony ground permits, rice terraces are arranged on the slopes.

More and more often we came across stone shrines, which gave us the impression that we were approaching the Tibetan frontier. In fact we found ourselves on the route leading to an important pass to Tibet, though still far from the frontier. These shrines, which in Tibet are called *chorten*, are here called *chaur*. They consist most often of a regular, rectangular pile of stones, about six feet high, thirty feet or more long and from twelve to eighteen or twenty feet wide, from whose surface two trees stand out at a regular distance. When the trees are young, they are protected by stone turrets, which give the shrine a characteristic appearance. On others the trees, or one of them, have grown so much that the building is caged in roots, and the shadow of the thick foliage spreads far above. This is the place where bearers rest for a moment, perhaps saying a short prayer or adding a stone to the pile.

We also saw simpler stone piles, where those passing, especially the pilgrims, have added a stone each, expressing some wish. I remember that I found the same custom in Iran, Peru and Bolivia—a strange coincidence of thought in peoples so remote from one another. However, the coincidence may be explained if we consider the origin of the idea. In mountain regions, where the arable or pasture land is thickly sprinkled with stones, collective work is necessary for constant cleaning of the soil. This the peoples contrive, in the name of higher laws.

Among the houses we now saw one elliptical in shape. Then another . . . and then in the next village most of the houses were that shape: the two short sides of the house were rounded, while the longer sides were straight at the middle.

In the evening we reached a fairly large village, near the summit of the small hill we intended to climb. We decided to spend the night there; the owner of a village house offered us his veranda, which we were glad to accept.

The sun wakened us in the morning. The weather was fine; only on the north side the clouds concealed the landscape. In some places, however, the thick veil separated and we thought we saw snowy mountains behind it. We set out on the upward path. After walking for two hours we reached the foot of the double hill-top, where buildings were visible on both summits. These are shrines, and before we ascended a peasant warned us very solemnly that we must take off our shoes; we promised him that we would do this somewhat higher, before approaching the shrine itself, and, after some argument, he accepted this.

The shrine is a small room containing some red-painted stones. After resting there for a while, we crossed the saddle, using some mountaineering technique, and reached the other summit. There the shrine was much larger, but closed; we could remain only in the surrounding courtyard. From there we watched the clouds gradually dispersing and leaving more for our eager eyes to see. Before our eyes the lovely form of Annapurna was disclosed, playing with flakes of cloud in her morning dance of seven veils. Sitting there, on the wall of the courtyard, I imagined Maurice Herzog and his companions sitting there, or somewhere near, seven years before, gazing for a long time at the snow giant before deciding to conquer its 26,391 feet.

After climbing down from the summit we walked forward for another two hours. We met many villagers, and also several Nepalese and Tibetan travellers, whose clothes and loads bore witness that they had already been on their way for a long time, for we were on an important route for communications between Tibet and India via Nepal. A large part of the commerce between the two countries takes place by this route, which goes through several market towns. From Tibet to the south come packages of wool and woollen goods, salt, borax, musk, furs and sheep. On the way back to the North across the Himalayas travel bronze vessels, woven goods, spices, tobacco, cigarettes, rice, paprika and Nepalese home-made paper.

However, the route is most important, not for commercial purposes, but because it leads to the very popular place of

pilgrimage, Muktinat, near the Tibetan frontier, to which, during the pilgrim season, at the end of the monsoon, many thousands of pilgrims go from Tibet, Nepal and India. After the long rains, dozens of people perish every year by dying of cold on the snowy heights, others are caught in landslides, and dozens more die from weakness and various diseases which they hoped to heal at the place of pilgrimage.

The same route is used also by all the mountain-climbing expeditions which intend to climb Annapurna or Dhaulagiri. Lamjung, on this route, is the most convenient place for the base camp for expeditions to Annapurna. Near it the Sima Gaun waterfall, about 650 feet high, is surrounded by other natural beauties. Mr. Kunc, of the Yugoslav Embassy in Delhi, who followed this route to go round Annapurna, told me that the landscapes he saw on this two-week trip were the most beautiful of all he had seen on his many journeys.

We sat down in one village for lunch. Allan could hardly cook the chicken we had bought in the village for five rupees—where, it seems, they reckon one rupee for a year's food! However, we felt compensated for this bad bargain when we bought a hundred mandarines for one rupee. We very happily swallowed one of these inexpensive delicacies after the other, and gave twenty to the bearer, who said very gravely: "They have cheated you! The price is two hundred for one rupee!" Although this assertion proved to be true, it only made us laugh.

Continuing in the afternoon, we crossed rice-fields in which people were ploughing, and when we had to cross a small stream, our bearer offered his back to us; thus, not very gracefully but with dry feet, we reached the other side. A charming girl, loaded with jewels, readily posed for a photograph and was equally ready to accept a few sweets.

Before twilight we reached another village, called Henjochant. We decided to spend the night there. We prepared our sleeping places and set out to cook supper. During that whole day the clouds had been playing hide-and-seek with the mountains, leaving now one summit, now another, uncovered. But now, suddenly, the clouds disappeared, and the whole mountain panorama spread out before us in its marvellous beauty. It was sunset, and while the valley sank into blue darkness, the last rays of the sun poured rosy light on the great snow giants. There they stood before us, as if they were within our

reach. They stood out from the dark landscape as if floodlit on a stage. The whole scene was so absurdly beautiful, so unreal, that for a moment I thought I was dreaming.

In the middle of the mountain group, nearest to us, stood a pyramidal, enormous rock, something like the Matterhorn. It is 23,000 feet high, and its name is Macha Puchari, which means Fish-Tail. Behind it, on the left is Annapurna I, then Annapurna II practically hiding itself behind Macha Puchari, then III and IV of that same family on the right. Annapurna I and IV have been conquered, while the others still await their brave victors. The previous year a British expedition tried to climb Macha Puchari, but without success. In Katmandu I met the members of that expedition. One had a broken arm; one Sherpa had a broken leg; one of the expedition had been attacked by polio.

Our hopes of seeing Dhaulagiri too were not realized. Several small mountains blocked the view. But while we were admiring and revelling in that panorama we could think of nothing else. The pink gradually turned to red, and when it finally faded, nothing was to be seen in the landscape but the greyish-white summits hanging in the middle air.

For hours, that evening, I could not get to sleep. Mountain memories from the Andes re-awakened in my mind, and I felt an irresistible force drawing me to the Himalayas. In the morning the sky was cloudless, the panorama perfect.

While Allan was packing his things to return to Katmandu, I decided to remain for at least one day more. I used this day, not only to make friends with the mountains, but also to make friends with the people who lived in their shadow. Although my small knowledge of the Nepalese language did not permit me to reach much understanding with the people of Henjochant I made friends with them all, entered many houses, received gifts of fruit and smiles, and gave away a great many cigarettes, ornaments for the women, sweets for the children, and also my cooking utensils and a few pieces of clothing that I did not think would be very necessary in hot India, where I was to go the following day.

I met with hostile looks in only one home, every time I passed it. This was because, on the evening of our arrival, their cow had fallen ill, and, next day, had died after suffering for some hours. The grandmother in the house easily identified the

strangers in the village as responsible for the ill-luck. The only domestic animal in this village, apart from a few cows, is the buffalo, which helps in the ploughing and gives some milk. The buffaloes and cows of Nepal, like those of India, give little milk; in both countries cheese is quite unknown and little butter is made. The butter is clarified and used by the name of *ghee* in cookery.

The Nepalese cultivate rice, maize and rye in their fields, with several kinds of vegetables in their gardens. Among fruits, I saw mostly oranges and bananas, and grapefruit are also very abundant. The latter are squeezed and a good drink is made from the juice by boiling it with sugar.

In the village there are only three or four men who can read and write. They were all at one time soldiers in a Gurkha regiment. Many of the children go to school in Pokhara. They are certainly poor, and it seems unlikely that their diet includes the minimum of calories as scientifically defined, but they could hardly be called wretched. They do not regard themselves as excessively poor, or unhappy, like those who live in some other regions.

I tried to find out their religion, but they did not understand the question. They knew nothing of the existence of several religions. They know some legends from Hindu mythology, and have treated the protagonists as divine, as indeed most Hindus do. On the other hand this belief is mixed with Tibetan Lamaism, in which Buddhism is very intimately combined with primitive animism, and so one could in no way apply to their creed any of the names of existing religions.

On the next day, at ten in the morning, I set out accompanied by one bearer from the village, having sent the first bearer home on the previous day, and returned to Pokhara at noon, just in time for lunch with the lady missionaries, which was a princely feast after my own cooking.

Next day I flew south. As the aeroplane rose, the cloudless panorama gradually grew larger. And now I could see not only Annapurna I, II, III and IV and Macha Puchari perfectly, but, behind the green hills, the colossal form of Dhaulagiri appeared with its impressive and unforgettable trapezoid shape. I remembered my good friends in Argentina, with whom I had gone climbing in the Andes, and who, the year before, had unsuccessfully attempted the conquest of the giant. "We shall come back next year!" two of them, Cicchitti and Soria, had said to me when I bade farewell to them in Delhi.

II

SHANGRI-LA AND THE REALITY

I DO NOT KNOW if James Hilton, who created the concept of "Shangri-la" in his novel *Lost Horizon*, ever visited the Vale of Katmandu. It would not surprise me to learn that in fact this place inspired him to his extraordinary creation, for there is a striking similarity between the two.

First of all, there is the almost impenetrable situation, surrounded by mountains on all sides. The only way into it goes through a pass rather more than eight thousand feet high, through which the new road goes. Until recently the journey to Nepal was a dangerous major enterprise. I once enjoyed a performance at the Peking Opera of the classical work, "A Voyage to the West", which lasts several hours and tells of the thousand perils encountered by the pilgrim Hiuen Tsang on his way from China to India, through Nepal, in the seventh century. A more modern version of the "assailing demons" may be found in the reports of modern mountaineering expeditions. Early writers tell in great detail of difficult journeys, on foot or elephant-back, through the jungles of Terai, where tigers, rhinoceros and wild buffalo abound and where, during the rainy half of the year, the country is in the grip of an especially dangerous form of malaria, fatal for even the strongest men, except the natives, who are immune.

After this came a long walk, or a journey in a palanquin carried by four coolies, for several days, over the chain of mountains known as Churia, which reaches a height of more than eight thousand feet. Simple tracks and natural paths ascend and descend the steep slopes; fords and improvised bridges are frequent episodes of the journey, until at last the traveller, having reached the lofty pass of Chandragiri, has an incomparable view of the snow-covered mountain chain on the northern horizon. The mountain path, covered with projecting stones, now descends rapidly. When the traveller has reached Thankot, his happy spirit can do reverence to the Katmandu Valley, which extends at his feet below the breathtaking white

peaks of the Himalayas. By this same route, with unimaginable difficulty, the Nepalese imported cars, lorries, steam-rollers, grand pianos and about ten bronze equestrian statues of prime ministers. None of these were divided for transporting. The lorry or the grand piano, packed in an enormous wooden chest, conquered the steep slopes on the shoulders of some hundred carriers. I remember a photograph of this mode of transport, controlled by a chief carrier who stood in the middle of the surface of the gigantic chest, and with a regal glance surveyed the route and the carriers.

This, however, belongs to the past. The visitors of the last twenty years have crossed the frontier by narrow-gauge railway and, after a picturesque three-hour journey, have found themselves in Amlekganch, beyond the dangerous primeval forest. Some old car, groaning, carried the passengers from there to Bhimpedi. Only a two-day walk or palanquin ride over the mountain passes to Thankot remained; and there a taxi could be had for the last stage of the journey.

Only in 1957 did the Indian Government make the Nepalese a present of a motor road linking the railway terminus with Katmandu, after the wishes of the rulers had for centuries created that isolation which characterizes Hilton's creation, thus permitting an almost completely independent evolution.

Another surprising factor is the climate. When Nepal is referred to as a "Himalayan" land, this suggests a capital covered in frost and snow. The truth is that the Vale of Katmandu, about 4,500 feet above sea level, lying midway between the snow-covered mountain chain of the Himalayas and the South Nepal tropical zone, in the middle of the Himalayan foothills, has an ideal climate. The two winter months, December and January, are chilly, but never so cold as to bring snow. The rest of the year is a mild summer. The "monsoon" which in the high mountains means annihilating snowstorms, appears here as a few hours' rain—necessary for the rice—each day, generally during the night.

As a result of these conditions, the Vale of Katmandu has developed its own culture, a happy combination of the ancient Indian civilization with a strong influence from Tibet and China, creating something new and special. However, while in India the civilization of several thousand years ago has had to be excavated from ruins and deciphered by specialists, while in

China the cultural creations of the same period are preserved as museum items, that remote civilization is, in Nepal, also the civilization of today. Nothing has changed here. The houses are the same now as then, the temples are still places of worship, the gods of those days still live and control the people, and the modes of thought and action of the Nepalese differ only superficially: their daily life is woven out of threads that have not been broken since prehistoric times.

What shall I say about the people of "Shangri-la"? If I had to characterize them with a minimum of words, it would be as "the smiling people". The men look at you with a smile, and the women respond to your look with a smile, whether in town or village; and the slightest gesture evokes a friendly, spontaneous smile from children of all ages. It is at once obvious that the people are poor and simple. But invalids and beggars and a general display of misery, such as is a regular cult in some Asiatic lands, are not seen on the street. Men and women with heavy loads on their backs, held by a forehead-strap, show no envy when they pass others who are sitting staring in the shade of a tree, or sacrificing to one of the many gods visible in the street, or looking out of one of the ancient and beautifully carved windows; after selling their load, in a few days' time they will be doing the same. I would without hesitation repeat the words of Hilton when he characterized the inhabitants of his imaginary valley as "moderately sober, moderately chaste and moderately honest". This applies very well to the Katmandu Valley.

The extraordinary geographical position of this valley, generally called by the natives "the Valley of Nepal", gives it a key position in the history of the country. It is only fifteen miles long and ten across, thus taking up only one four-hundredth of a country whose surface covers about 60,000 square miles; yet, according to the prevailing estimate, at least half a million of the eight million inhabitants of the country live in the Katmandu Valley. The only three cities of the land, Katmandu, Badgaon and Patan, each with about 100,000 inhabitants, are also in the Vale.

The now fertile valley was once the bottom of a large lake, both according to geological investigations and according to legend. Several Hindu and several Buddhist legends about the disappearance of the lake exist. The best known is that accord-

ing to which several Boddhisatvas, that is, future Buddhas, on various occasions went to the edge of the lake and prophesied that one day a fertile valley would lie there instead of the lake, and that people from the various surrounding districts would come to live in it. One of these devotees threw a lotus into the lake, and from the flower appeared Swayambu, the Eternally Existing, in the form of a flame, which still flickers in the shrine of Swayambunat, and has never gone out "since the beginning of time".

At last came Manjusri, a pious man from China (possibly Manchuria) and, after walking round the lake for a long time, he flourished his sword and cut through the mountain, so that the water of the lake flowed away through it, leaving the valley for its settlers.

The site of the legendary event is perfectly well known. On the south side of the valley there is a ravine called Chobar, which looks like a sword-cut in the mountain side, and the River Bagmati flows out of the valley through this ravine. Moreover, this is the only place at which water flows out of the Katmandu Valley.

Bagmati is the sacred river of Nepal, and only a little less sacred is its tributary the Vishnumati. This is not surprising, since the most important city of the Vale, Katmandu, is to be found precisely at the point where the rivers meet. The city extends from the north to the south, and the heart of it, the old quarter, resembles the other towns of Nepal. It consists of a rosary of small open spaces, without definite form, linked by the main street, with side streets and their open spaces branching off. In the midst of the whole, like a chief bead in a rosary, is the central place with the ancient royal palace.

Leaving my hotel in the northern suburbs, I left behind me the Indian and British Embassies with their ample dwelling quarters, in a green park area, and the Indian post office, which I had to visit frequently, as it is the only one which sends letters abroad; the Nepalese post office functions only for Nepal and India.

Following the asphalt road, I passed the royal palace on my left, a beautiful white building, with many columns, in the European style of the last century; but, like all palaces, it is hidden behind a long wall. Opposite is the palace of the King's uncle, Field-Marshal Kaiser Sham Shir Jung Bahadur Rana;

and presently I found several more, but one has been transformed into a cinema, one into a hotel.

Next I came to a large square basin called Rani Pokhari—"the Queen's water-tank". It was built by King Pratap Malla, more than two hundred years ago, in memory of his dead son. On one side a stone elephant, life-size, carries the king, the queen and the dead son. On the right is the large building of the State secondary school, and behind the basin the college which is, as it were, half of a university, for the student has to go to the University of Patna, in India, to finish his studies.

Beyond the basin, my eyes were rested by a very large square patch of grass. This is called Tundikhel, and is used chiefly for military parades. The Nepalese assert that it is the largest parade-ground in the whole of Asia. Having measured neither this nor the others, I do not feel sure; but it is certainly very large and beautiful. A palace called Singha Darbar, the seat of the entire government, is found on the other side of Tundikhel. This beautiful building, with many wings and 1,600 rooms, was, some twenty years ago, the palace of the Prime Minister, who lived there with, it is said, two lawful wives and five hundred concubines.

From the basin I took a street to the right, leading straight into the heart of the city. On both sides of the narrow street two-storied, three-storied and four-storied houses cut off the sunlight. Endless shops occupy the ground floors of all the houses. These are small shops in which a barefooted salesman sits on a cushion on the floor, surrounded by hundreds of bronze vessels, or imported and home-produced textiles, or fruits, or holy pictures. Men and women, townspeople and villagers, crowd the street and the doors of the shops.

The costume of the town-dwellers consists for the most part of a narrow pair of trousers, light-coloured or white and so tight as to outline the body, with a European-style jacket under which the tail of the shirt hangs. The typical Nepalese small hat is black, white, or with a printed ornament in various colours. The town ladies follow the Indian fashion of the *sari*. The peasants do not usually wear trousers, but, instead, a broad white cloth wound round the waist, with one end passing between the legs and tied behind. They carry the curved knife, the *khukri*, at the waist. Over this a typical Nepalese blouse is usually worn, fastened with a cord instead of a button. Peasants

wear a blouse reaching the waist, town-dwellers a long one that comes down to about eight inches above the knee. The hat of the peasant is most usually black, and as small and brimless as that of the city-dweller. The peasant women wear different costumes according to the village from which they come. But in general the skirt is full, with a large piece of material draped in many folds at the front; and a long strip of material is wound round the waist and piled up on the stomach. In their long black hair the women generally wear a large red or yellow flower, provocatively arranged, and, on their necks and arms, a great many ornaments of different coloured glass. They wear a hanging gold ring or some other ornament in the nose. The picture is completed by a dozen small bronze rings or plates at the edge of each ear, or a huge gilded rose in the middle of it.

The faces of the people vary greatly, according to the place of origin and their ancestry. They range from pure Mongols to the type which cannot be distinguished from an Indian. They are generally short or at most of middle height, physically strong and light in movement.

Making my way through this picturesque crowd through the main street of Katmandu, I found more smiles and more friendly glances than in many other lands combined. I was not the only inquisitive observer. Wherever I paused, children and adults crowded round me, staring inquiringly at me, commenting cheerfully on my oddly pallid face, my wrist-watch and my camera. "Angrezhi", they call foreigners; this means "English"—a result of the long isolation of the country from all but a few, who were mostly British. In the street, among the passers-by I often met either some cow reclining at ease, or a large well-nourished bull showing himself off along the middle of the street, hindering the traffic. The sacred animal of Hinduism is respected in this country too, although for the last few years the killing of a bull or cow has no longer been punished, as in former times, with death, but only with a twelve-year sentence of imprisonment.

With delighted surprise I realized that the doors of the houses were surrounded by large and small wooden columns and lintels which extended over a large part of the wall to left and right; and every piece of these wooden constructions was artistically carved. I looked upwards, and admired the superb carvings of the windows and large wooden balconies, with several windows

covered by a network of wood, divided by little columns with a majestic entablature above. The whole was supported by small wooden gods, each with many arms, fantastic animals or their heads, friezes wreathed in serpents and hundreds of other symbolic figures skilfully carved in the dark brown or grey wood. The windows were carved with the same art and precision; their horizontal beams, above and below, intentionally encroached for a long way into the red brick wall, giving the artist room to show his skill in woodcarving, perhaps surpassed nowhere in the world. For centuries woodcarving has been the most important decorative art connected with architecture in Nepal, and it has developed into something astounding. During the last century the modern, European-style buildings have neglected the art, and the present-day master carvers can hardly imitate their forebears.

I came to the first open place; there I found two or three small pagodas, little temples, the largest of which had three bronze-covered roofs one above the other. The outside of the ground-floor building was adorned with bronze sculptures and other decorations. The usable space inside was very small, barely enough for the god to whom the temple is dedicated.

Villagers selling corn sat outside the temple, and purchasers and curious people crowded around. On the other side of the space, another temple was surrounded by sellers of women's ornaments: rings, ear-rings, bunches of red threads for plaiting into the hair, necklaces, bracelets, small red or gilded ornaments to be glued on to the middle of the forehead. Peasant women, laden with ornaments, were bargaining with the ornament-seller; I felt that a large part of the money just received for the load of wood brought from the mountains, or for the corn, would remain in the hands of the seller of cheap jewellery.

I plodded on, colliding with bicycles, stray bulls and men who were carrying unfamiliar vegetables in two round baskets hanging from each end of a bamboo pole held over the shoulder. Sitting on the sill of a shop, a smiling countrywoman was bargaining over a bronze goddess for the altar at home. It cost only two rupees, but even this was too much out of a week's income of three. At last she paid: one rupee seventy-five paysa was a good price for a six-armed Durga, and the woman left the shop satisfied. Next I met a cleanly dressed woman with a great red flower in her hair, walking with measured step and a serene

countenance—barefooted, like most Nepalese. In her hand she carried a round bronze dish full of small saucers with rice, red powder, oil, maize, small leaves and flowers of various colours. She was in festival mood, and, taking advantage of some anniversary, or perhaps just a date with good auguries, according to some astrologer, she was going to walk round a series of gods and pay tribute to them, pouring flower petals, rice and red powder over their statues. Sitting on the floor of another shop on the right, a few men were trying on the typical brimless Nepalese hats. In the next shop, women with children tied to their backs by cloth bands, were trying material for skirts, while the salesman was enthusiastically sucking some kind of local hookah.

The second open space was also crowded as if for an everlasting fair. On one side of the place was a platform on which several money-changers were sitting. These exchange mostly Indian and Nepalese money. At that time they gave 135 Nepal rupees for a hundred Indian. In the next space the large steps leading up to two temples were occupied by a countless heap of folded materials, from thick blankets to delicate, almost transparent fabrics with coloured decorations.

And then, setting out again through the narrow street, I saw, in the background of the panorama, between two rows of high houses, the silhouette of a lofty and impressive pagoda, surrounded with a few subordinate roofs; after a few minutes I found myself in the main square, Hanuman Doka. The great square is surrounded by three large pagodas and perhaps ten smaller ones, and a number of others at the side bear further witness to the piety of the people of Katmandu during the past centuries. Two sides of the square are taken up by the ancient royal palace, from the interior of which rises, majestic above the centre of the city, the harmonious and imposing pagoda of Taleju, the temple of the kings of Katmandu. All the other pagodas form a pattern of rhythm and rhyme with the three roofs of this shining building, from whatever angle we look at the work of those poet-architects of Nepal. In the centre of that square is a large statue of Kala Bhairab, the Terrible Black One, with a severed head in his hand, trampling a newly conquered demon.

Only Nepalese are allowed to enter the palace. Foreigners must have special permission from the authorities. Anyone who

is lucky enough to enter the courtyard of the palace can see the slender construction of the only round pagoda in Katmandu. The gilded gate of the palace, adorned with allegorical figures, is guarded by the red monkey-god Hanuman, dressed in a red mantle and sheltered by a royal umbrella of metal.

There was no system in the arrangement of these pagodas; but this lack of system is typical of the squares of Nepal, and gives them an inexhaustible charm. A Nepalese pagoda generally has a base consisting of two, three or more steps, perhaps as many as eight, decreasing according to their height and each about two feet vertically. On the last is the one room, usually built of red brick, with wooden doors, windows, columns, and very beautifully carved semi-circular ornamental arches over the doors. The roof projects a long way, protecting the building from sun and rain, and is supported on a series of wooden sloping beams, artistically sculptured with many-armed gods and goddesses, real and mythological beasts, and, at the foot of each beam, some complicated figure often dedicated to an erotic scene from the Tantric cult. These supporting beams are generally painted in many colours, breaking the darkness of the wide space under the roof. Above the first roof there is a further square construction, often without a window and most commonly of no practical use at all. Then there is another roof with supporting beams like those of the first storey, and the highest roof culminates in a point topped by a gilded ornament.

The usual surroundings are startlingly informal: for example, on one of the steps salesmen or people simply resting and chatting may be seated; on another children are playing a kind of draughts with red and white stones; on a third a Hindu ascetic, almost naked, with his long hair gummy with filth, sits with his legs crossed before him.

Somewhat to the side, beside the gutter, a man squats attending to a minor physiological need without the slightest embarrassment. And on the streets further out, children defecate everywhere. Adults do so in the house itself in an extremely primitive closet without an outflow pipe.

Anyone entering a house in Nepal is wise to lower his head, irrespective of height, for the doors are very low; windows too are small. A corridor leads into a square courtyard, generally with one or several stone shrines dedicated to some god, and often surrounded by the dirt of several months or even years.

A low narrow wooden stair leads to the living quarters. The rooms are tiny, unfurnished, provided with draperies and cushions; on entering the visitor takes off his shoes. The people are very polite. The women are not usually present during a visit; if they are, they take no part in the conversation. Only the most modern Nepalese houses have bathrooms. Most people bath by means of small vessels, either under the tap in the courtyard, or under one of the artistically built public fountains in the towns, the villages and by the wayside.

Right beside Hanuman Doka I found a large, old house, built several centuries ago to provide lodgings for pilgrims. According to legend it was all built from the wood of one single tree, for which reason it is called "Kastal mandap", or "wooden house". The town took its present name from this.

I walked past several other temples before turning a corner to see a nine-storey building of red brick, with a four-fold roof in the pagoda style. This building, some two hundred years old, is the highest inhabited house in Nepal. Part of this house, and even more the adjoining houses, lean to the left and right, as a result of the fearful earthquake which struck the city in 1934, wrecking hundreds of houses. Thanks to this catastrophe, a modern wide street now extends from this point, with a bronze monument to Juddha Shamshir, the then Prime Minister, who guided the reconstruction of the damaged parts of the town with great energy and enterprise.

And so I walked back along New Road to the immense parade-ground, Tundikhel, beside which, on the road itself, five prime ministers from the Rana dynasty, in bronze, ride proudly on their bronze horses.

Near the road is also to be found the tallest building in the country: a round tower, 200 feet high, called Darara, or "Bhim Sen's Folly". The Prime Minister, Bhim Sen Thapa, built it about a hundred and fifty years ago, simply in order to imitate a minaret he had seen in India, with no real aim or further motive. On the other side of the parade-ground is the power station, the central telephone exchange and the taxi rank. At a corner of the street I saw a policeman, as usual, confusing the traffic by his complicated arm movements.

Though, because Shangri-la was somewhat modernized, I could come as a tourist in an aeroplane, I felt some regret that this remote, insulated kingdom was destined to change. . . .

III

WITHIN MY GRASP

I HAVE ALREADY described my dissatisfaction with the usual tourist visa. I wanted to see more of Nepal, and when the Nepalese Consul in Delhi suggested that Katmandu and the immediate neighbourhood would be enough, "since the surroundings are full of places of interest", I felt resentful. I thought these places of interest would suffice for only two or three days. I had heard one tourist say that he was planning to stay in Nepal for two days, and was sure he would spend these two days sleeping, for there was certainly nothing of interest in the country. I, rather more prudent, took a visa for one week. Renewals of the Nepal visa now fill a considerable part of my passport.

The week passed, then the first month, and the fifth month in due course, and I was still visiting the surroundings of Katmandu, discovering new sights and enjoying the old ones over and over again. To describe my wanderings in the Vale of Katmandu, and those very genuine "places of interest", in a whole book, much less in one chapter, is like compressing a complete banquet menu into one pill.

A solitary hill stands across the River Vishnumati, which flows past the western limit of the town, about a mile away. At the top of the hill a gilded temple tower can be seen from anywhere in the valley; it reflects the sunlight and is like a lighthouse for the tourist. Its name is Swayambunat, and this hill was, it seems, inhabited in the remote past, when the rest of the valley was still a marsh. Legend says it was here that the Chinese monk, Manjusri, who drained the valley, settled on the hill. One of the two great Buddhist holy places of Katmandu is now to be found on its summit.

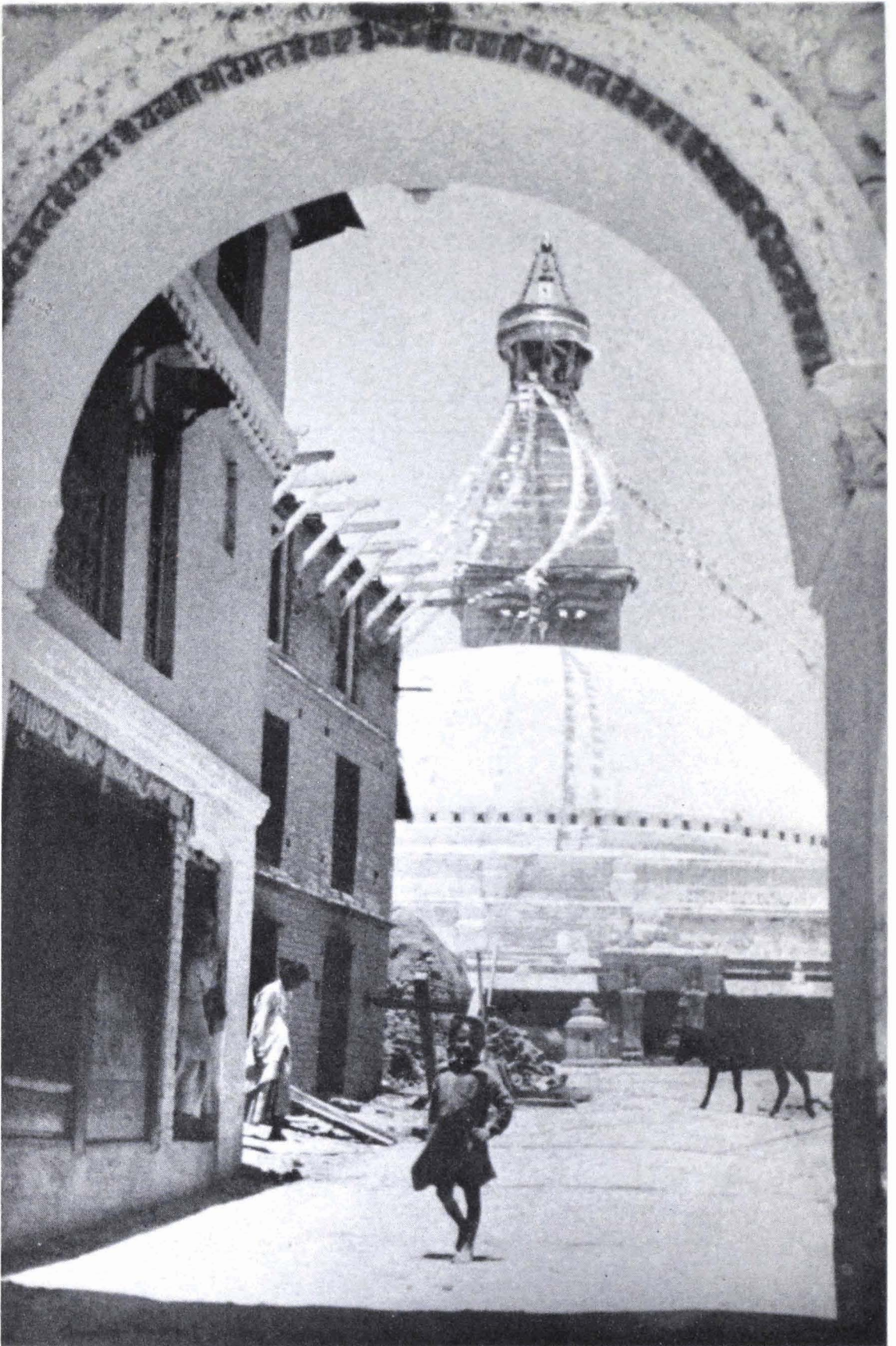
I climbed rather more than three hundred steps to the top of the hill. At the foot three gigantic Buddhas on pedestals sit, greeting the thousands of pilgrims who annually visit the shrine, not only from various parts of Nepal but from distant Tibet, India and other neighbouring countries. Their faces are serene,

radiantly peaceful. After no more than fifty steps three more equally large and beautiful stone Buddhas guarantee the presence of the Enlightened One to the pilgrim. The ascent continues in the shade of century-old, huge trees, with monkeys leaping among them happily in groups or singly. With great speed and astonishing agility they climb on to a wall or leap from tree to tree, an operation during which a monkey baby may cling tightly to the breast of its mother. Out of breath, I passed through an avenue of stone gods and beasts from mythology and reality, and at length, drawing nearer all the time, admired the gilded tower of the "chaitya", the central temple of the holy place.

At the top of the immense staircase, I began my investigations by tripping over a two-yard-long gilded "dorje" or thunderbolt, with which the Hindu god Indra rules the thunder and which the Buddhists of the Mahayana school have adopted as a symbol of the priestly authority. It lay on a round, drum-shaped stone pedestal, on whose vertical portion a tiger, a dog, a duck, a serpent and other beasts were carved in relief; they totalled twelve and symbolized the twelve-year cycle by which the Tibetans and Chinese reckon the passing of time. If a Tibetan is asked his age, he will reply that he was born "in the year of the tiger", for example. This may mean that he is twenty, or thirty-two, or forty-four, since the symbol repeats itself every twelve years.

There I stood, facing the chief holy place; a great hemisphere painted white, at the top of which, from the four sides of a small gilded tower, the penetrating eyes of a Buddha keep watch over the world. Above this are thirteen gilded rings, each smaller than the lower one, and the last and smallest is protected by a metal umbrella, the symbol of majesty. This is the typical form of a holy place called "chaitya" to distinguish it from the "stupa", which is more primitive, consisting only of a hemisphere with a small brick construction on the top, the "dagoba", a rather more developed style, and the pagoda, which is the most highly developed in the series.

The lower part of the *chaitya* of Swayambunat is a wall with a number of niches, from which gilded or stone saints are looking out; pilgrims pay homage to these saints with low bows and gifts of flowers and rice, while monkeys, unembarrassed, leap around them, collecting the offerings or imitating the pilgrims.



The *Chaitya* of Bodnat



Statue of Kala Bhairab in the central square of Katmandu

The rest of the wall contains a long row of prayer-wheels. These consist of a cylindrical copper case, mounted on a vertical axis, which the visitors turn, one after the other, as they pass. These cases are full of paper scrolls with hundreds of prayers and magic words printed on them, and on the outside of the copper cylinder, in Tibetan characters, in relief, are carved the words of the most sacred Tibetan prayer, "Om Mani Padme Hum". This is usually translated as "The jewel is in the lotus", but this translation was made for Westerners, who wish to analyse everything according to its mathematical or dictionary values. In fact, "Om" is not to be found in a dictionary; it has no concrete significance; but it is the most sacred of all words. It is the word that attracts the attention of the Superior Powers. "Mani" is translated in the dictionary as "jewel", but it may be in fact the soul, happiness, existence, that Nirvana or emptiness which every good Buddhist of the Mahayana school pursues. "Padme", the lotus, signifies the world of the highest existence, the divine immanence, the renunciation of earthly goods, purity . . . The last word is a kind of confirmation, like the Christian "Amen". Literally it means "is". Each turning of the prayer-wheel is equivalent to the saying of hundreds or thousands of prayers. Bearing this in mind, I went right into the inner shrine on the first storey of one of the neighbouring buildings, where, facing five metal Buddhas, there is a large and heavy prayer-wheel, more than three feet high; by turning this I won no less than a hundred thousand "points". In the middle of this place is a gilded fire vessel on a tall pedestal, and in this the eternal fire, never extinguished since the beginning of time, goes on burning.

On the other side of the *chaitya* some Tibetan monks are at work, making the scrolls for the prayer-wheels which pilgrims take from this holy place. But even if you do not turn the prayer-wheels, you cannot avoid having prayers said for you, for above your head, hanging on long cords or bamboo poles, hundreds of prayer-flags are fluttering, sending words of prayer to the Superior Powers at every tremor, in the name of whoever may be passing.

Among the many small shrines scattered over all the available space, two graceful female figures in bronze attract special attention. These are almost life-size and are genuine works of art. Their names are Green Tara and White Tara, and they

are the most revered female saints of the Tibetan Buddhists. Both are historical figures. At the beginning of the seventh century A.D., the powerful Tibetan emperor Srong Btsan Sgam-po wished to strengthen his political position by marrying princesses from neighbouring lands. So his ambassadors brought him, from Nepal, the princess Brikuti, and one year later, from China, the princess Wen-cheng, who were both fervent Buddhists, and by their joint efforts converted not only their imperial husband, but, through him, the whole land, to the Buddhist creed. It is thus easy to understand the reverence with which the Tibetans regard these two beautiful women, transformed into Green Star and White Star (*Tara* being "star"). As I am an Esperantist and wear in my buttonhole the green star that symbolizes the International Language, I too bowed deeply to one of them, the former Nepalese princess, Brikuti, or Harita Tara, the Green Star.

But my attention was soon distracted by another small temple in the pagoda style, with a double roof of bronze, before which a group of visitors was singing, burning small oil lamps and making music. This temple is dedicated to Sitla, the Hindu goddess of smallpox, whose many-armed figure dominates the small interior of the shrine. It sounds odd that smallpox should have its own goddess; but, if it did not, to whom could one pray to be delivered from the disease, which affects many Nepalese? and to whom could one give thanks for the "blessing" that the gods express by means of a disease? The absence of a smallpox god in Buddhism is a handicap for believers, so they decided to build a temple to the Hindu Sitla in the framework of the Buddhist holy place, and now Buddhists and Hindus alike seek the favour of Sitla.

The apparent chaos is completed by several more shrines and stone columns with bronze birds, animals and human figures; yet nothing is superfluous. Everything seems to be in the right place, and many people walk hundreds of miles to pay tribute to precisely one or the other figure.

On the other side of Katmandu, about two miles north-east, is Bodnat, the second Buddhist holy place in Nepal. This too consists of a large *chaitya* from which the eyes of Buddha stare at the visitor from every direction and follow all his movements wherever he goes. These four pairs of Buddha's eyes are cleverly painted in blue, red and black. Instead of a nose, a question-

mark is painted between the eyes; Westerners find this mysterious and impressive, but in fact it is not a question-mark, since Asiatic scripts do not have this symbol.

Swayambunat is impressive by virtue of its position on an isolated hill, Bodnat is equally impressive for the opposite reason, being isolated in the midst of the fields and surrounded by one-storey houses, among which it stands out, lofty and visible from a great distance. The *chaitya* itself is the largest in existence. This monument is calculated as belonging to the sixth or seventh century A.D., while Swayambunat is not less than two thousand years old. Naturally both have been restored during this period and their style has undergone some reforms. According to legend, a pious woman asked the then king to give her permission to build a shrine in memory of one of the Buddhist saints, and begged, for this purpose, only so much land as she could surround with a cow's hide. When this was granted, she cut a cow's hide into a very thin strip, and surrounded a sufficiently large round area, on which the shrine is now to be found.

The white hemisphere of the *chaitya* is always a solid construction, with no interior, but usually some relic of the Buddha or some other Master is built into the construction. This relic may be a tooth, a hair, or some object that he used.

The *chaitya* of Bodnat has a staircase leading to the top of the hemisphere, a *sancta sanctorum* at one side, and around it about two hundred prayer-wheels in bronze cylinders, about four or five in each niche.

A belt of one-storey houses surrounds the holy place. During the greater part of the year these houses are half empty. But during the winter months thousands of Tibetans come down from their snow-covered plateau over the Himalayan passes to the mild climate of the Katmandu Valley, and settle round Bodnat, in houses and improvised tents. For two months pilgrims with long plaited hair and sunburnt faces, with thick coarse brown clothes and their typical brightly coloured felt boots, are everywhere. Bodnat is exclusively a Buddhist and chiefly a Tibetan holy place. Its chief priest is known as the "China Lama", because his grandfather came from China and became a lama in Bodnat. The chief priest lives in one of the neighbouring houses, and may be visited after making a proper announcement. The China Lama receives visitors in a room

comfortably furnished, mostly in European style. He is a plump, smiling figure, not at all ascetic in appearance. We talked of various things; his English is quite good. He claims to speak twenty-four languages, all, apart from English, being languages of southern and central Asia. His charming daughter, educated in a college at Darjeeling, is also very ready to take part in the conversation. If possible she will sell the visitor something, such as a silvered prayer-wheel. China Lama owns large farms in the mountain district north of Katmandu and receives a good annual income from them. He usually spends three months there during the monsoon, and then the inhabitants of the district honour him as their chief priest. In winter, when the pilgrims come crowding into Bodnat, great ceremonies take place. Then fearful devil-masked dancers leap about to the rhythm of the religious music and song of Tibetan prayer verses, whose melancholy rhythm the China Lama emphasizes by beating a special double drum made of human skulls.

A little way off, between Bodnat and Pashupatinat, is found the village of Chaya Bahi, which was once quite an important small town. About two thousand years ago, when the emperor Ashoka visited this district, and his daughter Charumati married one of the town-dwellers, she herself settled in the town for the rest of her life. Even now the *chaitya* she built may be seen from the path, and in the nearest street we can also visit a Buddhist monastery which the pious princess founded, and which, with very few modifications in the past 2,200 years, is still a community today.

Beside the *chaitya* there is a small modern building with a very beautiful and serene Buddha in black stone, an ancient work of art, delicate yet majestic. What, however, attracts thousands of pilgrims every year is not the statue itself, but the quadrilateral hole under it, hollowed out in the pedestal from front to rear. It is generally believed that only a person with a pure soul can go through this narrow little tunnel. And all who believe themselves to be pure, without regard for their size, try to go through, firmly believing in miracles. I tried, but no miracle occurred, and I could not get my upper half into the hole. But my friend Purna Harsha, who several times accompanied me here, crawled right through the tunnel successfully. It is not surprising that he should have a pure soul: he is the

son and grandson of eminent Buddhist priests of Newari nationality, perhaps the great-grandson too, and has a long tradition of pious life behind him. It may also be relevant that he weighs about six and a half stone.

On the same route, we come to Pashupatinat, the most holy of the Hindu sacred places in Nepal. It is to this country what Benares is to India. It is also sited on the most sacred river of Nepal, the Bagmati, where it narrows and passes through picturesque wooded hills. There, in the midst of a picturesque and many-coloured confusion, stands the chief temple of Pashupatinat, with a double bronze roof in the pagoda style, shining in the sunlight. Legend has it that this temple was built to commemorate the escape of the god Shiva, when, pursued in the form of a gazelle by hunters, he took refuge in the forest, the remains of which are still visible here. Only Hindus are allowed to enter this temple, and on certain auspicious days they swarm in and around it in thousands. Then the barefooted crowd goes in, with foreheads painted in horizontal red and yellow stripes, and with flower garlands in their arms to pay homage to the god. In front of every temple of Shiva his steed, the bull Nandi, reclines. He is not missing here, and this is an enormous and majestic Nandi covered with gilded sheet metal; the people believe that it is made of solid gold. The occasional visitor can see it only from behind, through the open gate, or from a roof to which the local boys guide him.

There are a great many houses for the priests mixed with small temples and other shrines round the chief temple, especially on the right-hand side of the Bagmati. Across one of the small bridges, on the hillside, there are a hundred temples of Shiva in neat rows, each of them only some six and a half feet square. They are all the same, built of brick or solid stone, with a serene pattern of ornaments outside. Their altar is the *lingam-yoni*, a stone figure representing the combination of male and female sex, which is the most usual symbol of Shiva, god at the same time of Destruction and Re-Creation. The faithful bull Nandi lies at the door of every temple, sure that its divine Master may at any time come out and require his services.

Monkeys are playing everywhere, giving life to the stone structures. The Hindus regard it as an act of piety to feed these monkeys. The monkeys are aware of this, and look at visitors with a hopeful expression; and if the visitor gives one of them

something to eat, he is in a moment surrounded by several dozen pairs of entreating eyes and extended hands.

This is also the place where most beggars attack the visitor. But the small boys, who are capable of accompanying him for half an hour repeating the word "baksheesh", readily respond to a smile or a joke. They are playful boys with personalities of their own. Once Mrs. Thompson and I made friends with one of them and had a long dumb-show entertainment. When he eventually left us, he was not thinking about begging. On another occasion one of these boys followed me and when the constant repetition of his begging word became monotonous, as a joke I myself held out my hand and, imitating his voice, begged "baksheesh". Something then happened which I had not expected from a beggar. He put his little hand in his pocket and produced a coin, which he put into my hand. I looked with surprise at the coin. It was an antique Nepalese coin. My benefactor at once explained to me that this was one paysa (a hundredth of a rupee) and that it was no use to buy anything, only to be offered to the god Pashupati; in other words, the money was not in circulation. The gesture, the rare coin, and the simple, naïve explanation pleased me so much that I was glad to give the boy the first coin I found in my pocket. The boy examined the small silver coin, and then declared in protest that the exchange was not fair; he had given me only one paysa, and I had given him a twenty-five paysa piece! Only after a special explanation would he keep his unexpected lucky harvest.

On special feast days or in the early morning of the days the astrologers have declared auspicious, a crowd of people gathers on the wide steps, on the bridges and especially on the paved bank of the river, which goes down with wide steps into the holy current of the most sacred Nepalese river, the river which, leaving the Vale of Katmandu, cuts out its way through the mountains and jungles of Terai to reach Ganges and mingle with its sacred waters. On the bank, at Pashupatinat, many pious people bathe every day. Youngsters swim happily in the middle of the river, which is here no more than some twenty-five yards wide; older people stand up to their knees in the water and wash themselves. But the ladies from the city, not taking off their brilliantly coloured *saries*, wet the tips of their fingers from the lowest step and so "symbolically" wash themselves

and gain their right to heaven. For it is a general belief that he who has visited Pashupatinat will not be re-incarnated. This assertion may seem strange for Westerners, in whose countries religious and spiritualist movements try to win converts by offering reincarnation or some continued life as a spirit; for a Hindu reincarnation is taken for granted, but it is only a continuation of earthly sufferings, until at last, having attained perfection, the spirit enters heaven to be born again no more.

On certain days groups of pilgrims come from all over the country, and the variety of costumes and faces gives an air of varied, colourful gaiety, whose harmony is not spoilt even by the many *sadhus*, religious ascetics, who, wrapped in their long orange or saffron robes, with long hair and beards, glide silently past from time to time. They wear rosaries round their necks and carry in their hands iron tridents, the symbol of Shiva. A yellow or red spot in the middle of the forehead, with horizontal stripes, usually white, extending from it, also indicates that they are worshippers of Shiva. Many of these ascetics cover the whole body with ashes and only a very small portion of the body with a scrap of cloth.

One of these *sadhus* is generally to be found sitting on a kind of veranda facing the river. He sits on a tiger skin, with legs crossed, resting his arms on a T-shaped branch. This man, not more than thirty, his body covered with ashes, his brown hair combed into disorder and his eyes glassily expressionless, spends his life sitting in Pashupatinat, or in Benares or other sacred places, meditating. Westerners immediately want to know the subject of his meditations. But this question is inappropriate in the East. Westerners think about something, hoping to reach a conclusion. Orientals do not meditate in order to find the solution to a problem, but in the hope of ridding the mind of all concrete thought. This ascetic was a follower of the well-known ascetic Agori Baba, and he himself told me that, according to the rules of his sect, he was obliged to eat human flesh at least four times a month. I asked at once where he obtained this delicacy. He readily explained that according to tradition Hindus and Buddhists burn their corpses, but wood is beyond the means of many people, and so they are obliged to bury their dead. Then he would dig them up and have his feast. Many pious people held him in high esteem, which they expressed by throwing small coins at his feet. I threw him one too, and, wish-

ing him a good appetite for his next special meal, bade him farewell.

But the disciple of Agori Baba must have particular cannibalistic instincts, for the place where he sits is almost constantly veiled in thick smoke and the penetrating, horrible smell of burning human flesh. Only a few paces beyond him, the paved river bank includes several square platforms projecting into the river; on these the Hindus cremate their dead, in the same way as two thousand years ago. Every good Hindu in Nepal dreams of being burned in Pashupatinat. If his relatives succeed in taking a dying man here in time to lay him on the steps, so that the chilly waves of the sacred river lap over his feet, he will depart from this life to the next in perfect happiness. But when there is no time for this, the body is brought in a cloth hammock hanging on a pole. The two men who are bearing the corpse on their shoulders wade the sacred river and place the body on the pavement in front of the cremation platform. While some members of the family prepare the wood for the fire, the eldest son of the dead man, or, failing that, his brother, washes himself, puts on a piece of clean linen as his only garment, and has his head shaved, leaving only the tuft of hair, that is never cut, in the middle of the head. The body is laid on the hearth and covered with pieces of wood. While the priest murmurs prayers, the son, with a lighted torch in his hand, walks three times round the body, then sets fire to a bit of wood in the mouth of the corpse, from which the fire spreads. For three or four hours the son or brother sits beside the fire, takes care of it and watches how the earthly remains of the loved person are being consumed. He afterwards throws the ashes to the wind, which carries them away above the river.

This mode of leaving earthly glory is, however, so natural and usual a spectacle in Pashupatinat and in many other holy cremation places of Nepal that it is no restriction on the lively and even rather jolly life of the sacred place.

If we turn to the north side of Katmandu, we find Buda Nilkanta about eight miles from the town, at the feet of the first mountains. Here, surrounded by pilgrims' hostels, in the middle of a square basin, lies the beautiful statue of Narayan, or Vishnu. The figure of the god is about eleven yards long, skilfully carved out of grey stone, lying on a tangle of serpents which just project from the water. A crown of cobra heads extends behind his

head. Up to the present Vishnu has had nine incarnations. The ninth was Buddha, according to Nepalese belief, which is a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. We are now living in the era of the ninth incarnation. When this era comes to an end the world will disappear and will be reborn for the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, Kalki. Vishnu himself will spend the dark epoch between the two eras, awaiting the rebirth of the world, lying on a tangle of serpents which will float on the waters of Chaos, as we can see him in Buda Nilkanta. It is said that a peasant found the statue while digging his land, more than two hundred years ago.

I took off my shoes to approach the reclining Narayan, as is customary in the most intimate parts of Hindu sacred places. There I stood before his feet, which were covered with red and yellow powder, flowers and holy oil. My thoughts flew to remote times, and I imagined the sculptor creating his masterpiece, which was to survive him for many centuries. My bow came from sincere feeling, and perhaps this could be seen on my face, for suddenly an old man came forward, took a beautiful white flower, a magnolia, and gave it to me. I was much moved, and sank down beside him at the feet of the god of the next era. Then the old man took from the statue a fragment of a brown mass, and marked my forehead with it exactly like his own. I appreciated the honour not often granted to a foreigner: I was, by a Hindu, regarded as worthy to have communion with his religion.

On certain days pilgrims come in crowds to pay homage to Narayan. All Hindus may come here except the King of Nepal. It is generally believed that he would die in the moment of seeing the statue, for he himself is an incarnation of Vishnu, like Narayan, and to see himself reclining on the water would be fatal. According to a legend, many years ago this did happen to a king.

To make it possible, nevertheless, for the King to pay homage to Narayan, the Nepalese have made a similar sculpture, somewhat smaller, and laid it on the water of a basin in a place called Balaju, only two miles west of Katmandu. The place itself is to be found at the foot of a wooded hill, a favourite hunting and excursion place for the royal family. A small temple stands by the Narayan basin, and, beside this, another basin with clear blue water, in which yellow and green carp, some of them as

much as a yard long, play happily and freely. The people feed them as special homage to their ruler for they are caught for the exclusive use of the palace. Somewhat further down, in the fresh air of a garden, is a long fountain with twenty-two sprays leaping from artistically carved stone pipes. These, like hundreds of others among the many fountains of the vale, represent the head of a mythological dolphin called Makara. Under one pipe a man may be bathing, under others women may be washing clothes and spreading the variegated material on the grass to dry. Balaju is a favourite excursion for the people of Katmandu.

It would be a sad omission not to mention among the shrines of the valley the temple of Changu Narayan, which is to be found at the extreme east of the valley, ten miles from the capital. Having left the road, we cross a river, stepping from stone to stone, for the last two miles of the route, and afterwards climb up a small path to the top of the hill, where the temple stands, surrounded by houses for pilgrims and devotees. Specialists say that it is the finest example of the artistic abilities of the Newaris. The front façade of the temple is covered with superb ornaments in hammered bronze, crowded thickly with mythological beasts entwined with flowers and with symbols understood only by religious devotees. For in Newar art nothing is superfluous. The most insignificant ornamental line has its symbolic meaning. Many of these symbols are comprehensible to every Hindu, but others only to the priests and to those who have a thorough knowledge of all the legends of the vast Hindu mythology. Inside the temple there are ceremonial instruments, oil vessels and lamps, spoons and bells and other objects, represented in some European and American museums; and on these too the artistry of the Newaris, shown in all they do, is evident.

The three other walls of the temple are for the most part adorned with wooden engravings, and the two rows of supporting beams under the two roofs in the pagoda style form a veritable exhibition of many-armed goddesses, their respective "vehicles" in the form of various animals, their symbols and accessories, all painted in vivid colours in contrast with the dark brown bricks from which the temple itself is built. Two tall stone pillars stand in front of the temple. On one is the bronze disc, on the other a large bronze snail shell, both sym-

bols of Vishnu. Around these are many other figures of smiling mythological lions, gods and beasts, several small temples and bronze or stone monuments with inscriptions. One of these stone inscriptions contrasts with the others, for it is in the Gupta characters and all the rest is in Sanskrit. It dates from the fourth century, and tells of the actions of the mother of the young king of Katmandu at that time. This was regarded as the oldest inscription in the vale, until a few years ago Professor Tucci discovered two older ones.

We should also visit the temple of Shanku Narayan, on the southern edge of the vale, and so carry out half the pilgrimage of the thousands of Nepalese, who, on a certain day, go in crowds round the four small temples of Narayan at the four extremities of the Vale of Katmandu. To reach the southern Narayan temple we have to pass the place called Chobar. Here we see how the River Bagmati narrows to cut its way out of the vale through a ravine with vertical sides, following the famous sword-stroke of Manjusri.

The temple of Shanku Narayan is charming, in the midst of the natural beauty of rocks and a small wood. Not far from it, but on another road, is a place called Tikha Bhairab, from which, at sunset on cloudless days, there is a splendid view over the snow-covered mountain summits, bathed at that time in the most varied shades of pink.

Some snow-covered mountains can usually be seen from Katmandu itself for three-quarters of the year, that is, during all the year except the monsoon, from June to September. But to enjoy a really impressive panorama of the Himalayas, one should make a trip to Navakot, on the eastern edge of the vale. This involves a two-hour car ride and then two hours walking on an uphill path, to reach the summit of the mountain, where the British Embassy owns some small houses, now hardly used. From this place, which is itself in a romantic environment, a majestic, unforgettable panorama may be seen. A characteristic mountain group may be seen at the eastern end of the range of snow-covered mountains, a little veiled by the bluish mist. I asked a native who stood beside me if that was Mount Everest. He did not understand me. I asked if it was Chomolungma, using the Tibetan name of the highest mountain in the world. But he did not seem to know this name either. Trying to explain what I was wanting to know, I asked him if he had heard of

Tenzing. His reaction was immediate: "Oh, yes, that is Tenzing's mountain!" he said eagerly, pointing insistently to the mountain I had thought was Everest. I could also see Makalu and Cho Oyu very near Everest. Somewhat further west was Gaurisankar, and after that Gosaintan, which is on the other side of the Tibetan frontier. Nearest to me was Ganesh Himal, further west Manaslu and last of all the four summits of Annapurna. Dhaulagiri, which is somewhat to the west, is not visible from here. But even without this, the vast chain of the Himalayan snow-capped giants presents a majestic view. How near they seem, and how inaccessible they are! How many mountaineers in the world dream of a visit to this sacred place of their longings!

IV

PATAN AND BADGAON

LATER I MANAGED to obtain permission to visit Patan and Badgaon.

In the eighteenth century, before the creation of a united Nepal, the Vale of Katmandu, often called the Vale of Nepal, was divided into three kingdoms. Their capitals are still standing and live their own life, defying the passage of time: Katmandu, the present capital; Patan, only two miles to the south-east, and Badgaon, eight miles to the east.

The population of Patan has reached nearly a hundred thousand, as has that of Badgaon, and only Katmandu exceeds this by twenty thousand. The present capital is probably the youngest of the three, but which of the other two is the more ancient has so far never been proved. It is believed that Patan was already an important town in the time of Buddha, five centuries before Christ, and that the Enlightened One visited it during his lifetime. There is no written record on this subject. The only supporting evidence is the fact that two hundred and fifty years later the Indian emperor Asoka, during his pilgrimage to all the places sanctified by the presence and works of Buddha, visited Patan too. And while in other places he set up a column with an inscription, or a commemorative *stupa*, in Patan he carried out his most impressive plan: there he ordered the building of five *stupas*, one in the centre of the town and four at its north, south, east and west boundaries. The central *stupa* has been rebuilt several times, and has thus lost its character; but the other four still stand untouched, still at the four corners of the city, thus showing that Patan has not changed much in size from that remote time. The *stupas* are not of architectural interest. Each is a simple hemisphere, about sixty feet in diameter, built from brick and covered with grass, with a small tower at the top and four small niches for stone saints in the four sides.

Patan remains an important centre of Buddhism, with rather

more than a hundred Buddhist monasteries; almost all the temples belong to that creed.

Many of the ancient buildings are still in existence, but others have been rebuilt and renovated during the centuries. A great part of the city was destroyed by the mountain king Pritvi Narayan when he conquered the vale in 1768, and the great earthquake in 1934 showed scant respect for the ancient royal city. However, the many remaining houses, the temples and the royal palace still bear impressive witness to past glories. The narrow little streets running between curved rows of several-storey red-brick houses on both sides present innumerable examples of the finest Nepalese wood-carving craft, applied to windows, doors and balconies. Skilled craftsmen swarm in the tiny shops by the street: in one shop wood carvings are made, in another bronze figures, in a third gilded jewels with turquoise, coral and glass stones. The master craftsman invariably sits on the floor and with his primitive tools, which include his toes, he produces genuine works of art. The craftsmen are all Newari and, as descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the vale of Katmandu, they inherit, with the blood and the language of their forefathers, their artistic tendencies. Since the conquest of the Vale by Pritvi Narayan, the functions have been sharply divided: the first inhabitants are employed in art, the conquering race from the mountains in government. The chief centre of the artists is Patan.

The central square of Patan is a spectacle never to be forgotten. On one side there is the ancient royal palace, three stories high, in red brick with very numerous woodcarvings round the doors and windows. In the middle of the palace an impressive three-roofed pagoda stands out, and its majestic structure is in perfect harmony and balance with the rest of the square: a dozen large and small temples in various styles are arranged, apparently without any plan, round the square. The temple of Bhim Sen is conspicuous by the great number of gilded ornaments, and the Temple of Krishna by its stone colonnade. As in similar squares in other towns of Nepal, there is the enormous bell hanging from a stone frame, and also the majestic bronze figure of one of the kings of the Malla dynasty, with a serene expression, seated on top of a tall stone column. He is gazing at the palace where once he reigned. Any visitor with a permit for Patan may enter the courtyard and admire the

many-coloured wooden carvings, the internal pagoda-towers and the royal bath-tank in the centre of one of the courtyards, with all the Hindu gods artistically carved in the stone round the gigantic bathtub.

Although I could see at every step how the glory of the city belonged to the past, I found the chief square and the part surrounding it always crowded with city and country people, as if on a holiday. The men, especially those from the villages, were wearing the great curved knife called the *khukri*, and the *topi*, the small Nepalese hat. But the women of Patan impressed me more by their grace. They wore black skirts with narrow red borders. The Patan skirt has many folds in front, but, behind, the two sides of the skirt converge obliquely in such a way that as the woman walks her legs are exposed and the spectator is treated to a view of very provocative calves tattooed with blue designs. The women's faces were pretty and they often glanced at me coquettishly. They were wearing the characteristic ear-ring in the form of a great gold drop.

Through the gate guarded by two mythological lions in one of the side streets I found the Mahavihara (Great Monastery), in the courtyard of which is one of the most magnificently gilded temples in the whole country. Works of art in stone, bronze and wood abound on all the three storeys of the pagoda-like building. In the centre, above the roofs, hangs a narrow gilded ribbon with a figure of a god at the end. This is a kind of flag, such as may be seen on many temples in Nepal.

I arrived on some festival day, and found men, women and children walking round the temple, sprinkling rice and flowers and turning the prayer-wheels outside the shrine. At one side, several priests sat on the pavement, reciting from their prayer-books, yard-long blue cards with antique inscriptions in gilded Nepalese script.

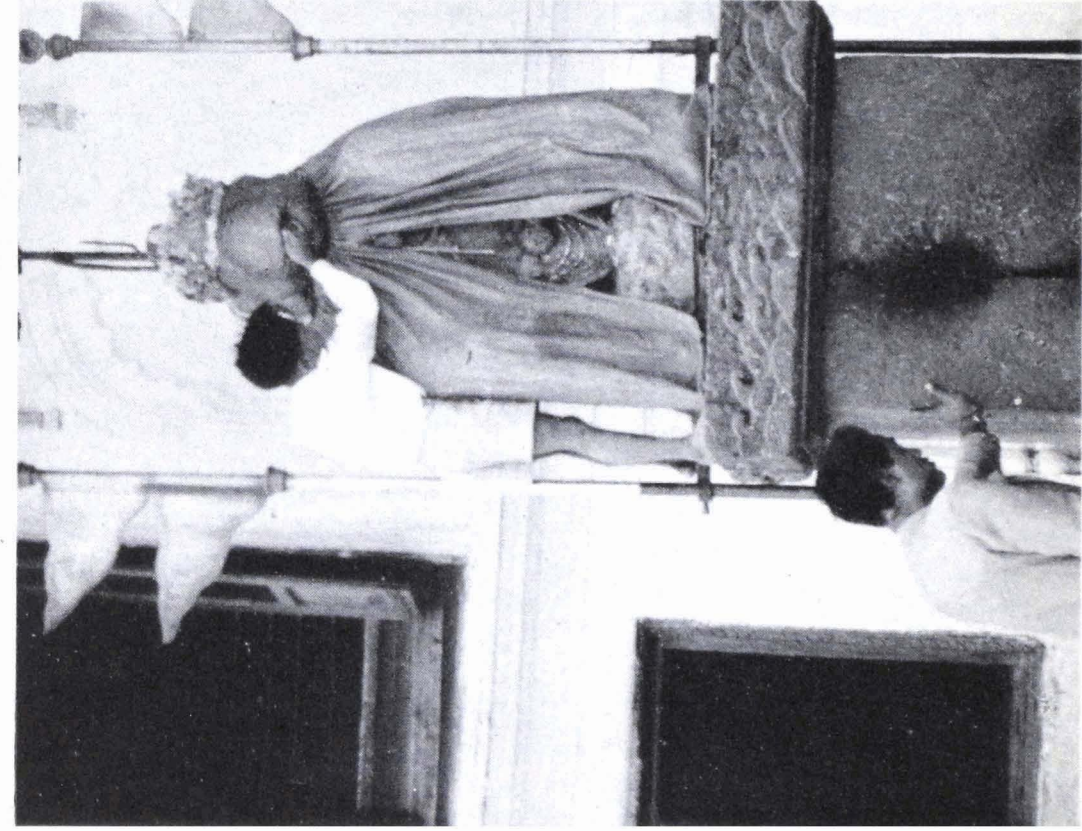
Foreigners are forbidden to go beyond a certain limit, chiefly because they wear leather shoes, made from the hide of the cow, the sacred animal. I found that if I took off my shoes I might visit every part of the temple, even the great prayer-hall on the first floor. What a spectacle! Women and a few men sat in two long rows, with expressions of the utmost piety, repeating the magic formulæ dictated by the Buddhist priests. Each person had in front of him or her some bronze dishes full of flower petals, cereal grains, coloured powder, little vessels of

oil, little bronze lamps, a tiny bell, boxes of fragrant herbs and other things, and constantly did something, obviously in a prescribed order: such as sprinkling water on himself or herself from a little vessel; scattering flower petals round small burning candles or doing something or other with one or other of the numerous objects surrounding. This ceremony lasted for several hours.

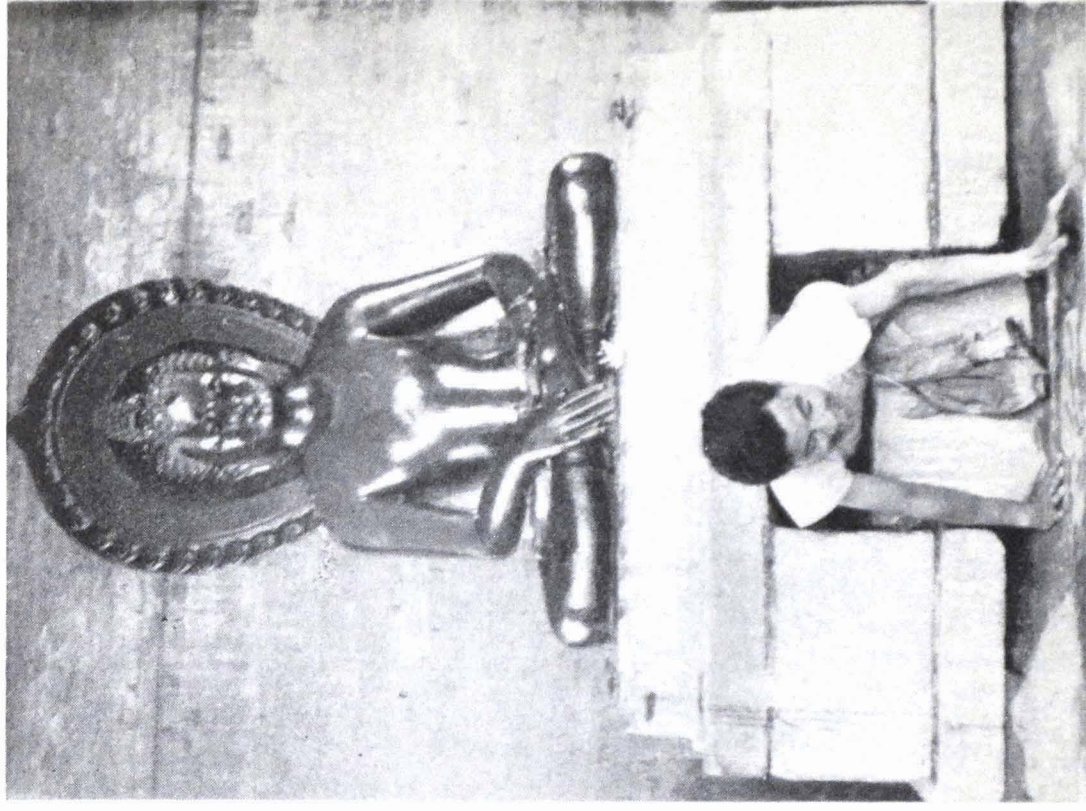
On the other side of the town I later found another Buddhist temple, quite different in character, the Mahabod temple. It was built about two hundred years ago by two brothers, pious Buddhists, when they came back to their fatherland after staying for several years in Bodhgaya, in north India, where Gautama received Enlightenment and so became the Buddha. The two brothers decided to build in Patan a temple similar to that in Bodhgaya. And if the result is not as monumental as the original, if its art is not as balanced or as delicate, nevertheless the brothers left behind a remarkable proof of their piety and also of the ceramic art of Nepal. For besides the many figures of gods, beasts and men in baked clay, on the outer walls of the temple no less than five thousand Buddhas sit.

I only once saw a special ceremony in the courtyard of this temple—which has so small a space inside that its little door is never opened. This is, indeed, generally true of all Nepalese temples. In contrast to Western churches, those of the East usually have most of their ornaments outside, and most of the ceremonies take place there, while inside is only the god to whom the temple is dedicated, with a few accessories. The ceremony which I witnessed in Mahabod was that in which representatives of the people came, and the monks dwelling round the temple washed their feet, in symbolic service to the people who fed the priesthood with their alms.

Another day, in Patan, I was present at the begging ceremony of the Buddhist monks. That morning groups, consisting of the oldest and most distinguished monks of Patan, went out from their several monasteries, dressed in special robes with multi-coloured hats adorned with gold and silver, and large vessels in their hands. In these they collected the gifts of the people. These consisted only of five kinds of food, of which rice was the main item. The monks had to collect their share of the people's contribution quickly, for at a certain hour in the morning a group of senior monks from the great and ancient chief mon-



Hanuman, the monkey-god, in front of the gate of the ancient palace



Purna Harsha puts to test the purity of his soul



(Left) The gilded
“dorje” or thunderbolt
at Swayambunat

(Below) Religious beg-
gars at Pashupatinat



astery near the Mahabod temple would go out, and it was a tradition that wherever this group went, no one else had the right to beg—a tradition which showed the extraordinary importance of the ancient monastery.

Another day several orchestras cruised about the streets of Patan, halting in various places and giving concerts to the assembled public. On this day all the musicians played trumpets and drums adorned with unusually luxurious and strange gold and silver figures. These were instruments jealously guarded for the whole year, to be brought out only on this special solemn occasion.

I was also able to see the procession of the god Krishna through the streets of Patan. The procession was led by two girls, dressed and made up exactly alike, like twins, who swept the street in the middle in time to music. Two more spread out a long and narrow carpet. Another pair of girls followed with a silver mace, like heralds announcing the arrival of some important personage. Every fifty paces they sat down on chairs carried by their attendants, also in ceremonial dress, and this greatly slowed down the procession. But the other participants did the same. The next pair of girls carried small fans made from peacock feathers; then came a pair with similar but much larger fans, fanning all the time. They were followed by two persons dressed in royal robes, and lastly by the god himself, with his two consorts, his wife Rukmini and his sweetheart Radha, dressed in very rich gold-ornamented robes and with crowns on their heads. At every halt they sat down on splendid thrones, and the people gave, as sacrifices, flowers and fruit, and poured out holy red powder at the feet, with the most pious reverence.

But the most important feast in the crowded, sacred calendar of Patan is that of Machendranat, the patron of the Vale of Katmandu. The feast lasts for a whole month at the beginning of the monsoon or rainy season, and has three parts. During the first, the idol of the god is taken out of its temple and carried to the river to be bathed. This idol is a simple trunk of wood very crudely carved and painted red. Some days later the god is placed on a chariot whose upper portion terminates in a tower improvised from branches, some twenty-five yards high, and drawn through the streets of Patan. This is the second part of the feast. It is also the most exciting, and lasts for a week. For although hundreds of volunteers are constantly pulling the two

long ropes tied to the chariot, the primitive vehicle with its great solid wheels and the uneven stone paving of the narrow winding streets do not much help the progress of the chariot. The movements and stops, the falling of the volunteers as they pull, and the swaying of the moving tower, are accompanied by excited cries from the pious thousands who watch. The third and last part of the feast takes place when the appropriate priests undress the god, and show his shirt to the thousands of devotees who have come from the whole vale. There they sit in the wide field the whole day long, in large and small groups, painting red and yellow spots and stripes on their foreheads, chattering and burning dozens of oil lamps. Naturally, as in all religious ceremonies, more women than men are present. The feast reaches its climax in the moment when the shirt is shown. The enthusiastic crowd surrounds the chariot and jostles to see this intimate object. But at the same time another idea is exciting the public. Traditionally, at this moment the first rain of the rainy season is supposed to fall, and the monsoon starts. This is why everyone brings an umbrella to this festival.

I was lucky enough to be present for the third part of this festival. I was borne right and left by the crowd in front of the chariot with the god. And when the priest held out the little shirt through the door of the chariot, all eyes opened wide, and the people, holding their breath, awaited the miracle. And it happened . . . half an hour later . . . and I, who did not know the tradition, got wet on my way home. However, even if the tradition was satisfactorily fulfilled, the dry season continued for another month, and it was not even much use when the King and the whole Cabinet descended to the river Bagmati to pray for rain. In spite of this, the drought threatened famine for the country, and soon the Government had to resign.

I went on to Badgaon, passing first through the village of Timi, which has two specialities: the making of clay pots, and the making of masks for religious dancers. The natives use a wheel to make the clay pots, but also a wheel-less system, hammering out the shape of the large pots with a wooden hammer. When they do use the wheel, this is on the level of the floor, and, by means of a rod thrust into a hole at the edge of the wheel, they give it so powerful an impetus that it will turn for about five minutes, long enough to finish the pot.

In Badgaon, an old aristocratic city, in whose streets and

palaces peasant life is now pulsating, I saw women threshing rice with sticks, women walking round small stakes thrust into the ground about forty yards apart, to stretch over them the thread they were going to use for their weaving, and red paprika drying on big mats.

The main square faced the former royal palaces; the entrance known as the "Golden Gate" was a beautiful piece of bronze-craft, full of masterly sculptures of divine figures, ornaments and inscriptions. Several authorities on Oriental art regard this as one of the most precious bronzes in Asia. I gazed at Bhupatindra Malla, one of the kings of the early eighteenth century, who kneels on a lotus throne above a tall stone pillar. His bronze Majesty, with palms pressed together and a serene expression, gazes at the palace where once he lived, and where he still lives, beyond life and death, in the immortal kingdom of Art. For this figure is the most majestic human figure ever carved by Newari sculptors. Every detail of it is a perfect and harmonious proof of the genius of its creators. Even its pedestal, the tall column with the lotus crown, is unrivalled in its fitness as a pedestal for a human statue.

I wandered about a hundred yards or so from the main square, through a narrow street, to another square, where I admired a work by the same king, the five-storey pagoda called Nyatapola. This stands on four square plinths, each of them over four feet high, narrowing as they rise, and the temple itself has five stories, with five roofs that grow smaller as they go higher. It is an impressive building. But what makes it still more remarkable is the row of monumental figures standing at the side of the central staircase. At the base of the temple, on either side of the stair, two enormous human figures are seated. They are said to represent two giants in the service of the King. They are historical figures. According to the legend they were ten times stronger than a normal human being. Above them stand two elephants, ten times stronger than the giants. Above them are two mythological lions, ten times stronger than the elephants, and above them two dragons and lastly two goddesses, all multiplying the strength by ten. Similar motives are repeated on the steps of other temples in Badgaon, but not in other places in Nepal.

Kirtipur, a small town only three miles south-east of Katmandu, on the summit of a hill, is another of the oldest towns of

the vale; I visited it and found, in the middle, a *stupa* built there by the Indian emperor Asoka, three centuries before Christ. In this small town, which is somewhat remote from modern influences, life continues in the rhythm of many centuries. The old houses zigzag down the slope of the hill, and in front of them sit old men and women, who seem to have come out of some old historical picture. Those who live in the town feed and dress themselves on what they themselves produce, and obtain very little from the city. The Kirtipur people are very polite, smiling people; but they resisted with great energy the decision of the Government to build the University of Nepal on their territory; they did not want to lose ground that they needed for cultivation.

Later I was to learn a gruesome story about the name of this town.

V

KING MAHENDRA UNVEILS HIS COUNTRY

THE NOISE OF the splendid coronation of King Mahendra, the thirty-eight-year-old monarch of Nepal, was scarcely over when the King hammered out a daring project: he would visit his country. The plan was incredible and seemed impossible even to those who knew the country best. Endless mountain ranges without roads or paths, impassably thick jungles, stretched east and west of Katmandu, and no ruler or ordinary man had thought of such an enterprise for two centuries. Nepal was a Forbidden Land even to its own rulers.

Against all advice, the King prepared his plan, and carried it out fully. In six months, between December 1956 and May 1957, he made four journeys: to the mid-western region, to the jungles of the south-east, to the eastern mountains, and to the far west of the country. Apart from the plane journey to the regions themselves, and some short car journeys, he travelled for the most part on horseback, but in the many places where even this was impossible he travelled countless miles on foot, never allowing himself to be carried in a palanquin—a common means of travel in this country.

His chief purpose was to get to know his country, his people and their many problems. He also wished to bring to his people the message that their King, until then regarded as a god—an incarnation of Vishnu—had become human, and wished to be one with his people and work with them for the progress of the country.

Sitting quietly in the small audience hall of the Palace in Katmandu, His Majesty told me some details of his memorable journey and allowed me to share his adventures. I completed the story with more information gleaned from other members of the party.

The first royal journey began with a descent from an aeroplane in the Rapti Valley, in the southern part of mid-western Nepal. There, on a suitable field, the fifty tents of the royal colony were pitched. The monarch was accompanied by several

Cabinet Ministers, the Chief Justice, a doctor, an engineer and a total of sixty-four high-ranking officials, besides soldiers, technicians and some thousand porters. It is not easy to find many suitable sites for such a large camp in the mountain- and jungle-filled Nepal. But appropriate previous announcements and explorations always found the best possibility, even if sometimes it was necessary to divide the camp into two or three parts.

The village chiefs received the King and his followers, and led him through an arch of flowers with inscriptions of welcome to a platform, from which he returned the greetings of the people in a short speech. After visiting some local institutions, he gave audience to many villagers, young, old, all who wished to say anything or merely to see him. Many did wish to; what a moving experience it would be, to speak to the King oneself and personally! Many of the country people stood silent before him with their hands pressed together, unable to say a word. Women came to put garlands of flowers round his neck in token of adoring respect.

The other places visited were Nepalganj and Bhairava. The caravan passed through many villages, and the camp was pitched in some dozen places. The grandeur of the valley and its possibilities impressed the head of state. As they travelled through the villages, the visitors were received by crowds who had come from far away, standing on both sides of the road. Women showered the incarnation of Vishnu with flower petals, holy red powder and baked rice, as used in adoring the gods.

During his audience the King often sat surrounded by his Ministers and other authoritative persons, to hear the wishes of the country people. One village needed drinking water; the King turned to his Finance Minister: "Could we give them three thousand rupees to bring water to the village?"

The sum was given. The schools, too, needed new buildings and small irrigation projects or bridges were all helped by encouraging gifts of money.

Some land workers came to complain, that the owner of the ground took from them almost the entire product of their toil.

"Kindly look into this matter!" said the King to his Chief Justice.

He studied it, and it became evident that the ground had no owner, and the *soi-disant* owners were demanding payment from

the cultivators on the basis of a written paper which had nothing to do with the ownership of the ground.

The caravan doctor sat in a separate tent, where he examined the sick and gave them medicines without charge. A Brahmin priest also accompanied the caravan to counsel the people. In front of his separate tent sat Agori Baba, the famous leader of one religious sect, clothed in a leopard skin and holding an iron fork and a double drum—symbols of Shiva—in his hands; there he gave advice to the inquirers who visited him.

From Bhairava the caravan flew to Pokhara. There were more inspections and audiences for great and small. Suddenly a four-year-old girl with a large bunch of flowers came into the public audience-place and, before anyone could stop her, ran to the King and gave it to him. Some of the leading men of the town were afraid this might annoy the King, but, on the contrary, he took the little girl on his knees and had a long chat with her, forgetting for a while about the “important” people who were waiting. Perhaps at that moment he remembered that he was the father of six children, of whom three were at home in Katmandu and three at school in Darjeeling.

A man gave the King, as a gift, a black polished stone which he presented as “Saligram”. He had made a four days’ journey from his home to present it. Everyone knew what it was: Saligram is a gold-ore stone, to be found only in the River Krishna Gandaki, north of Pokhara. It is rare and is very highly valued in Nepal. But it is valued not for the little gold in it, but because it is regarded as a sacred stone, intimately connected with the gods. If the stone is cut in the middle, it is found to contain a hole in the shape of a wheel, which is a symbol of Vishnu. In some of these stones there are two wheels and then it is called “Lakshmi Narayan”, for in it lives Vishnu (Narayan) with his wife. A Saligram-stone is kept on the domestic altar, and no doubt the King too keeps his there with great respect.

Encouraging gifts of money were here also generously distributed to schools, libraries, for the building of roads, wells and bridges. In the evening the public was invited to see some films, which the technicians in the caravan arranged in all the places where camp was pitched. Most of the country people then saw the miracle of moving pictures for the first time.

From Pokhara the King flew back to Katmandu, and after resting for only a few days he set out again on his second trip.

Now an aeroplane took the head of state and his followers to the south-east, to Biratnagar, a small town in the middle of the Terai region, with a warm damp climate. Biratnagar is called the Manchester of Nepal, because of the various new-born industries, especially cotton weaving, oil and rice milling. The King saw all this and received adequate explanations from the experts.

Some days later the caravan reached the River Kosi and crossed it in a large number of small boats. The King sat in one of them, listening to explanations of the Kosi Project and looking at the plan. The River Kosi is one of the three large rivers of Nepal. Its wild waters, now flooding the region, now leaving it quite dry, are a constant menace. Now a great dam is being built to control the wild river. The King at last reached the dam itself, near the Indian frontier, and looked with great joy at the growing dam, which yesterday had been a mere project, at the many buildings round it, at the hundreds of workmen who greeted him. In this spectacle King Mahendra must have seen the realization of great plans for irrigation, more progressive farming methods, thousands of kilowatts of electricity for factories and homes. In a word, he saw before him a portion of the Nepal of the future.

In the small town of Rangeli the King visited the centre of the home weaving industry. A schoolgirl brought two rolls of delicate many-coloured cloth: "For Her Majesty the Queen," she murmured in a tremulous voice, while the generally grave expression of the King relaxed into a smile. The same evening there was an open-air performance: the village wrestlers were eager to show their distinguished visitor their art in the sport generally popular in this region.

From there the caravan went on to the Saptari district, and gave more audiences, paid visits to institutions and schools, and generously distributed financial aid. Then a jungle expedition of several days began. The primeval forests of Terai are regarded as one of the richest reserves of wild beasts in the world. Wild elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers and wild buffaloes abound there. This was no news to King Mahendra, for hunting is the traditional sport of the royal family and of the family of the Rana prime ministers. Every year, in January or February, there were great hunting expeditions in Terai, often with distinguished foreign visitors. The chief guest on one of these

hunting expeditions was King Edward VII of England. But all this hunting was done in the environs of Katmandu and no previous head of state had entered the wild regions of eastern Terai.

The hunters mounted some dozens of trained elephants, with the King on the middle animal in the first line. The group moved forward. The elephants were skilfully directed by the mahouts seated on their necks. Behind each mahout sat one or two hunters, and behind them a member of the personal guard, on the rear of the huge beast. After crossing a wide plain with tall grasses, the caravan entered the forest. Trees and bushes, entangled with thick undergrowth, protected the wild beasts, but a great many beaters went round on both sides of the hunters and drove the beasts out of their hiding-places with loud shouts. A shot suddenly rang out, and a buffalo with immense horns, rushing towards the royal elephant in a fury, fell to the ground, bellowing, only a few yards from the hunter. A few more shots were heard; animals fell dead and confused shouting filled the air. A magnificent tiger appeared and attacked one of the elephants, which defended itself for a while, then began to run madly through the thick jungle. "It has run amok!" said the hunter in his dialect. One of the hunters (Mr. Dhiraj, Inspector-General of Police) seated on the frenzied animal, managed to seize a branch as the beast ran under it, and clung to this, while his companion, Colonel Bhakta Narsing, was swept off by the same branch and broke his arm in falling. Meanwhile the tiger was laid low by several simultaneous shots from neighbouring hunters.

Only a few days had passed since the end of the second trip when the King undertook the third. The goal this time was a visit to the eastern mountain region. From the Valley of Katmandu the caravan began to walk, through the Districts East No. 1, 2, 3 and 4 in turn. The path, where it existed, climbed steep slopes, sometimes between cultivated terraces, sometimes among trees, but more often on a dry stony surface. The caravan had to make use of several improvised bridges of branches to cross rivers and streams. It was sometimes difficult to find enough flat space for even one tent, and the camp had to be distributed over a wide area. At the side of the road or mountain path small and large groups of mountain folk assembled, many of them arriving after several days' travel on

foot, to see the King. As they spoke different languages—the Sherpa and the Bhotia tongues—they were unable to speak to the distinguished visitor. Thus, in order to show their joy the women smiled, laughed, and even began to dance on the very road. In the afternoons and evenings round the camp-fire, there were great demonstrations of folk-dancing, where the village men and still more the village women spontaneously showed their charming movements to the sound of drums and very long trumpets. The King took an interest in the symbolic significance of the dances, and insisted that the words of the songs be translated for him. He was also much amused to see the lack of embarrassment and free manners of the mountain folk. From place to place their clothes became more like those of the Tibetans, as the caravan approached the northern frontier of Nepal.

The path became very steep passing Magi Tsamu. For several miles the party walked on snow, about eight thousand feet high. Somewhat later the King halted, gazing into the distance. On the eastern and northern sides of the panorama enormous snowy mountains stood, like faithful guardians of the land. The monarch left his escort, climbed a slope and sat down on an isolated rock. He gazed at the horizon for a long time. His thoughts flew freely through the rare atmosphere of the heights. Perhaps at that moment some lyric was born in the mind of the poet-King. It is not remarkable that the extraordinary panorama should have so much impressed the Nepalese ruler. The Himalayas are talked about generally in Nepal, but few people of high rank have ever visited the mountains. The kings themselves have for the last hundred years been prisoners, the captives of the Rana prime ministers, confined to the golden cage of the palace, from which they could travel rarely and under strict restraint. And now the whole mountain range lay before the King in its extraordinary beauty. It must have been an unforgettable moment.

The caravan went on. In Chotang lamas of the Buddhist monastery awaited their guests round a great statue of the Buddha. A fierce north wind would hardly let the workmen put up the tents. It began to snow. But this was not to be allowed to hinder the usual audiences. The King, without hesitation, wrapped himself in a woollen blanket, and thus he received his visitors. This was the most favourable moment to

distribute woollen garments to the swarming children and also to the adults.

The camp was near to the pass which leads to Solokumbu, the birthplace of Tenzing Norgay, and to Namche Bazar at the foot of Everest. Sherpas from the mountain villages came, and made the town people forget the cold with their gay songs and dances.

The visitors again passed villages and hamlets on the way, and were greeted everywhere with smiling faces. Women scattered flowers over the King, and many flung themselves to the earth to take the dust from under his feet and mark their foreheads with it. The dust from the feet of the incarnation of Vishnu would sanctify them for the whole of their future lives.

An old woman ran up, out of breath. What was the matter? Nothing, except that she wanted to see the King. She had in fact passed the caravan, and seen "that young man in a brown soldier's uniform", but could not imagine that this was King Mahendra himself. When she heard this, she ran four miles to see him. Asked if she had any special wish, she replied, "For this life all my wishes are fulfilled!"

Some officials who had gone off the road found a young woman weeping. When they asked what had happened, she explained that her parents, owing a large sum of money to the landlord, had forced her to marry him. "It is your turn to act!" said the King to the Chief Justice when this case was reported to him.

The Chief Justice did act. He not only annulled the marriage and married the girl to her young sweetheart, but, after examining other cases, set free five slaves owned by landowners, and severely lectured the authorities for tolerating slavery, which is forbidden by law in Nepal.

Again many schools were given help, others were founded, and money was allocated for irrigation projects.

One of the many triumphal arches was built from copper vessels, in the making of which one village specialized. In the next, where weaving was the favourite home industry, the chief archway was a veritable exhibition of colourful and artistic fabrics.

In one small town the Mayor greeted the King with a suitable poem expressing a welcome. After the visitor had replied,

his Press attaché, with his illustrious employer's permission, read aloud a poem written by His Majesty himself.

In one of the villages the caravan was enlarged: the villagers gave the monarch a leopard cub, which from then on formed part of his escort.

In the little town of Dhankuta, to celebrate Liberation Day, 18th February, the travellers were present at a football match between Villagers and Visitors. Both teams received silver cups from the King's hands.

Other monasteries and villages were visited on the return journey. The Head of State and his assistants returned to Katmandu tired, but rich in the experience and knowledge so essential to good government.

A visit had still not been paid, however, to the far west, the most forsaken region of Nepal, never before visited by any person of rank. And without loss of time the royal caravan flew thither. When it landed at the newly opened aerodrome of Kailali-Kanchenpur, a crowd of twenty-five thousand awaited the guests. They had come from a very wide area to see the King, but were also somewhat incredulous: would so great a person, about whom there were legends, really come so far, to such a dry, poverty-stricken region? This seemed to them like a dream, the more so as this district, for want of roads, is linked more with India than with Katmandu. If anyone from this zone wishes to go to Katmandu, as very seldom occurs, he has to cross the Indian frontier, travel as far as Patna in India, changing trains three times, and from Patna fly to Katmandu.

The dream seemed a reality. The King himself came out of the aeroplane, with his younger brother, His Highness Prince Basundara, and more than sixty high-ranking officials. A salute of thirty guns was followed by parades and speeches, the inauguration of a school and a seventy-yard bridge. Round the evening camp-fire the visitors admired, with amazement, an artistic folk-dance based on the Indian epic, Ramayana, danced by members of the Tharu tribe, which in distant Katmandu is regarded as half-savage.

Jungles, pathless mountains of the Mahabharata range and dry deserts followed one another in the path of the caravan. The first tremendous downpours of the monsoon followed scorching sunny days. But the difficulties of that walk were rewarded by the beauty of the landscape in many places. Here

an emerald green river meandered at the bottom of a chasm, here a waterfall rushed down the blue and brown walls of rock for several hundred feet. On one rock the natural formation of quartz was demonstrated, and another hill was covered with millions of diaphanous little chips of mica. The King must have thought what a wealth of resources was still untouched.

In Dadeldhura Brahmins stood in rows on both sides of the road, in their ceremonial priestly garments: bare to the waist with only the sacred thread hanging over one shoulder; while the local girls danced the folk-dances with full bronze vessels on their hips.

The group visited several temples. In one of them the Head of State noticed two young women, who apparently belonged to the temple. After some insistent questioning, the explanation forthcoming was that they were *devadasis*, that is, Hindu vestals, given as infants to the temple by some rich man who bought them from a debtor. The institution of *devadasis* had theoretically come to an end long ago in India and Nepal, but in this temple it came to an end only on the day when the King gave orders that these girls were to be set free and given suitable employment.

In Baitadi a hospital was needed and a school for home industries, and an electric power station . . . and all this was at least partly solved from the State Budget.

In Doti two youths appeared with a complaint that they had once been rich, but that the Government had taken everything from them. When did this happen? About two hundred years before, when Pritvi Narayan, the ancestor of King Mahendra, united the country and dethroned the local petty princes, of whom one was an ancestor of these two young men.

"H'm, rather an old story! You have waited quite a long time before saying anything . . ." said the King with a smile, and after a moment's thought he ordered that both youths should receive scholarships to study in Katmandu. As a general principle, no one was to be left unsatisfied, if something could possibly be done.

In one village the King was told of a curious custom. There, when the main meal is ready, the woman serves her husband with food on the veranda, while she herself eats in the room. The man has no right to go in. The King began to look for the origin of this custom, and came to the conclusion that it was

centuries old. When the Mogul invasion occurred in Rajasthan, in India, the aristocrats sent away their wives to take refuge in the distant north, under the Himalayas, until the storm was past. They went there and created a village, cared for by a great array of servants. Meanwhile the storm, instead of passing, became more and more terrible, and most of the aristocrats perished in it. After a long waiting period the ladies began to live with their servants—the remarriage of widows being impossible for Hindus—but as the servants were of lower caste than their mistresses, they had no right to eat together. Their children married those of the neighbouring ladies, and this went on for six or seven centuries, but the men are still regarded as members of an inferior caste.

One day the King caught a cold, and he readily accepted the help of a village doctor according to the ancient Ayurvedic system, using herbs and the recital of magical prayers, which seem to have cured him quickly. Twenty-two difficult but full and interesting days again passed before the aeroplane carried the travellers back to the capital, concluding thus the biggest expedition ever made in Nepal, both in the number taking part and in the area covered, but above all, valuable for the extensive knowledge obtained, so vital to the progress of the country.

VI

LOOKING BACKWARD

IN THE INTERVALS of finding my way about the colourful, busy streets of Nepalese towns, gazing with inexhaustible delight at the woodcarving that spread its wealth of myth and pattern everywhere, or investigating temples and shrines, as well as in the fairly frequent periods of enforced leisure while I waited for some permit or other, I tried to learn something about the history of this remote land from books, statues and conversation. The elementary history I eventually pieced together is hardly known in the West save to a few specialists; but if pity, terror, Nemesis and peripeteia, are the criteria of tragic drama, there is no lack of drama in the history of Nepal.

Geological research confirms the legend that the Katmandu Valley was once a lake, though the date at which it dried up, and the cause, are still not known. The thick layer of fertile soil which covers the bottom of the valley was no doubt once the bottom of the lake, and attracted human settlement in the very remote past. Little by little groups migrated from various directions, settled in the valley and created communities; in this most active part of the region civilization evolved most quickly and historical events were of most significance.

The sources from which historians take their material for reconstructing the early history of Nepal are very scanty. First come the ancient chronicles, the *Vamsabali* and several *puranas* or "ancient books", among which the most important is the *Swayambunat Purana*, found in the Swayambunat shrine. In these books, perhaps a thousand years old, reality is freely mixed with fantastic legends, and the long list of royal names is completed with imaginary names, where there are no authentic ones to fill up an epoch about which no tradition exists. However, although historians look upon these yellow cardboard or palm-leaf pages with their barely legible Sanskrit inscriptions somewhat suspiciously, they regard them as very valuable sources of knowledge about these times, since they are the only sources.

The first truly historical sources are inscriptions on stone

columns, the earliest of which date from the third or fourth century B.C. Later, in the seventh century, a few Chinese travellers visited Nepal on their way to India, and left interesting written records of the Katmandu Valley. In the following centuries the inscriptions on stone columns and also the manuscripts became more frequent, and from about the fourteenth century the events, names and dates are reasonably trustworthy.

It is not my purpose here to enlarge on the doubts and discussions concerning many of the opinions expressed in this chapter, nor by lists of names or dates. The first dwellers in Nepal seem to have been the Kirantis, whose descendants still live in the mountains of Eastern Nepal, and of whom the Newaris are probably one branch. For the last two thousand years the Newaris have certainly been the chief dwellers in the valley, although from time to time they have lost control to others.

The Lichavi dynasty followed the rule of the Kirantis, and was followed in the third century A.D. by the Gupta family of Indian kings, who took over the throne of Nepal.

There is a conjecture that in the sixth century B.C. Buddha visited the Nepal Valley and gained a thousand converts, who subsequently dispersed to preach the new religion. In one ancient book on the life of the Enlightened One, we find the assertion that he discouraged his disciples from going to Nepal, because it was a mountainous and cold country, and to reach it they would have to cross a region with many wild beasts and savages.

The next appearance of Nepal in history comes two hundred and fifty years later, when the powerful North Indian emperor Asoka visited it. Asoka, whose capital was Pataliputra (now Patna, the Indian city from which I flew to Katmandu), led his army in many successful battles, winning vast territories and much renown. He suddenly began to repent of the bloodshed to gain worldly estates and vain glory, accepted the teaching of Buddha and became his greatest propagandist. With an army not of soldiers but of Buddhist priests and monks, he visited all the places where the holy man had once walked, and set up stone pillars with inscriptions commemorating the Buddha or giving rules and advice for a virtuous life. With one of life's common paradoxes, his renunciation of all glory brought him even more glory than his successful battles. His pillars and

stone inscriptions, known as the Edicts, are to be found almost all over India.

According to some calculations, the king Sthunka reigned in Nepal at the time of Asoka's visit, but there is no existing evidence as to whether he came under the influence or domination of the great and powerful neighbour. The only memory of Asoka's visit that has survived to the present day is the stone pillar at the birthplace of Buddha, in Lumbini, in south-west Nepal, and the five *stupas* in Patan that I have already mentioned: four round and one in the centre of the town, and also one in Kirtipur. I have asserted that Patan was already a large town at the time of Asoka; I should also mention that there is another theory, according to which Asoka himself founded the town.

Years and centuries passed, and one king succeeded another on the throne of Nepal. The Gupta dynasty, which reigned from the third to the sixth century A.D., brought the Sanskrit script and language and scattered many stone archives over the country.

Shiva Deva was King of Nepal at the beginning of the seventh century, and was followed by the extraordinary figure of Amshuvarman. He, to begin with, married the daughter of the King and became his important assistant. Gradually he became so conspicuous by his wisdom and energy, as well as his successes in government, that for some time the functions of the Head of State were divided between him and Shiva Deva. At last, on the last stone inscriptions of Amshuvarman, he gives himself the regal title and no longer mentions his father-in-law.

This remarkable man, who founded the Thakur dynasty, extended his rule to the far west and east. Even the powerful contemporary Tibetan king, Srong Btsan Sgam Po, thought it fitting to have good relations with him, and for this reason paid court to his daughter Brikuti a year before he paid court to the daughter of the Emperor of China. One of the strangest features of his story is that with such important occupations in the guidance of the state, he also found time to take an interest in science and write an important book on phonetics. He had copper coins minted.

What was Nepal like in those days? It seems unlikely that any casual visitor could have given a more vivid picture than Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller, who made a pilgrimage to

India and Nepal in order to translate the Chief Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, a task which he carried out admirably. His book describing the journey itself is extraordinary, and furnishes abundant material for the Chinese popular dramas and operas.

He says, "The region of Ni-po-lo [Nepal] is to be found in the centre of snow mountains. Its soil abounds in flowers and fruit, and it has a cold climate. The dwellers in Ni-po-lo are crude and of savage nature; they are not interested in the true faith, or in justice, or in literature, but they are very skilled in the arts. Their houses are made of wood, painted and carved; they like to bathe and are fond of drama, astrology and bloody sacrifices. Irrigation makes the soil very valuable. Among them there are people belonging to the true faith and heretics. Buddhism and Brahminism flourish. Buddhist shrines and the temples of Hindu gods are close together. Trade is prosperous and business well organized and directed."

Only a few years later two official missions from China arrived in rapid succession. Wang Hiuen Tse led the second in A.D. 647 and said: "The King Na-ling Ti-po (Narendra Deva) adorns himself with real pearls, rock crystal, coral and amber, and in his ears hang gold rings set with jade. He sits upon a throne ornamented with a lion, in an atmosphere of floral decorations and perfumes. In the centre of the palace there is a seven-storey tower with copper roofs. Its balustrade, its columns, beams and walls are encrusted with delicate and even precious stones."

Both travellers were greatly impressed by a little lake a few miles south of the capital. One of them describes it thus: "If anyone approaches with fire in his hand, the water of the lake begins to blaze. The fire and smoke rise several feet high. If water is poured on to extinguish it, the fire burns more fiercely. If it is covered with dust the fire goes out and the dust is transformed to ashes. We cooked our food on this fire. In ancient times there was a chest of treasure in this lake. A king gave orders that the chest was to be pulled out, but men and elephants pulled in vain; the chest would not come out of the mud. And in the night supernatural voices repeated: "This is the diadem of the Maitreya Buddha; no one can gain possession of it, for the Naga (Serpent King) of the Fire guards it'."

It is now believed that this lake was a petroleum spring

which has since been choked, for although the place is still known today, it now contains only plain water, and there are no indications of petroleum in the Katmandu Valley. On the other hand, no one has yet made borings to test the subterranean wealth of the valley.

During this epoch art and architecture reached a high level in Nepal, so much so that a group of Newari architects and artists was invited to visit first Tibet and later China, to build temples and instruct the local architects. They thus contributed to the evolution of architecture, sculpture and painting in these countries, and, in their turn, brought back to Nepal the influence of those arts in the lands they had visited. In this and later centuries literature flourished; education reached such a high standard that even ordinary people knew how to read and write Sanskrit, though this was a purely literary language. Eloquent witness to this general culture is borne by the thousands of manuscripts to be found in many museums and libraries in the world, with some twenty thousand volumes in the Bir Library of Katmandu alone. The historians Silvain Levi and Giuseppe Tucci spent many months among them, and much of the material is still unexplored.

Meanwhile there were several invasions by small groups from India, who from time to time held control in the Katmandu Valley or some other part of Nepal, and founded their own local dynasties. One of them was Hari Singh Deva, who arrived in 1324, when the Mohammedan king of Afghanistan, Ghias uddin Tughlak, invaded his country, Simram. Like many other local kings, he too escaped before the invasion by the all-conquering Mogul armies, and took refuge in the foothills of the Himalayas. There, in the mountains to the east of Katmandu, Hari Singh Deva founded his little kingdom, where his descendants reigned for several generations. The Moguls, who came from Persia, occupied the whole of India in due course, and all, even the most powerful, of the Indian kings perished if they did not flee in time. But the Moguls never invaded Nepal, except for a brief incursion by the Sultan of Bengal, though the Nepalese kings probably owed some measure of obedience to the Mohammedan masters in Delhi.

At the end of the fourteenth century the Malla dynasty of Newari origin began to reign in Nepal, and provided many kings within four centuries of this date. The first of them,

Jayastiti Malla, was at the beginning only the husband of a queen regnant, and gradually recognized as a monarch. This situation was one characteristic of Nepal during its whole history. Again and again, sometimes several times in a single century, there was a real ruler in Nepal by the side of the titular king, and he either ruled in the name of his supposed master, or shared the duties with him, or even replaced him, leaving the legal king with only an empty title. In such situations, naturally, the real ruler sometimes took over the title of king and there was a change of dynasty. This phenomenon is seen in the earliest times and has continued until our own day, as we shall see later.

Naturally these usurpers were generally very able, active and ambitious men, with the qualities to fit them for their historic task. And Jayastiti Malla was no exception. He reunited the country, which had been split up into petty princedoms, reorganized the caste system, reformed the criminal law, built a great deal and encouraged art and literature.

But even more able than Jayastiti Malla was his grandson Yakasha Malla, who, taking advantage of the rather unstable condition of the neighbouring countries, extended his realm widely to north and south, at the expense of Tibet and India respectively. He created one of the golden ages of Nepal by good administration and peaceful government for forty-three years.

As has often happened in history, the sons who followed Yakasha Malla managed to destroy the life-work of their great father. They divided the land into four parts, which were later subdivided, and individual princes and princelings reappeared and made themselves autonomous. In the Katmandu Valley itself there were three kingdoms for about two hundred years, with Badgaon, Patan and Katmandu as the capitals. Not only the royal palaces, but most of the temples of those three cities, which we visited in previous chapters, date from this epoch; and to three of them belong the beautiful, majestic figures in bronze, which, from their tall stone pillars with lotus capitals, gaze down at the passing centuries in the main square of the three towns.

One of them, Pratap Malla, whose gilded statue adorns the main square of Katmandu, was a strange mixture. He was a poet and a musician, and sufficiently vain to be called "the

Nero of Nepal”, although he did not burn his city, but indeed tried to enrich it with more buildings. “Kabindra” or “king of poets” was the title that he liked to give himself, although his poems were of no artistic value. He himself had a superficial knowledge of several languages, and a prayer written in fifteen scripts can still be seen on a stone in the wall of the ancient palace. The flourishing trade between India and Tibet, via Nepal, brought him so much wealth that at least twice during his reign he could permit himself the luxury of the “tuladan”, that is, a distribution of gold and jewels of a weight equal to his own, to the Brahmins and the poor. He felt so secure on his throne, that at one time he allowed his four sons to take turns at ruling in his name for a year each. Three of them carried out this task, but the fourth ruled for a single day only. He died the next day. In Katmandu the lovely water-pond with a stone elephant was built in his memory.

On the other hand, Pratap Malla was constantly intriguing and manœuvring against his neighbours, and several times even attempted a military occupation of Patan and Badgaon. During his reign two Catholic priests, Gruber and Dorville, among the first European visitors to this country, went through Nepal in 1662 on their way to Tibet; and there is a curious story about their visit. Father Gruber had a telescope, which he took to the palace to show the King. He looked out of the window through it in the direction of Badgaon, with whose ruler he was having a diplomatic crisis. With a shock he saw the Badgaon soldiers fiercely manœuvring so close at hand that they seemed to be not only on Katmandu territory, but about to enter the city itself. Seeing this danger, the King at once ordered a mobilization and an attack on the enemy, and Badgaon, overcome by the surprise attack, was occupied. Father Gruber did not have time to explain how his telescope worked. Vengeance, of course, soon followed, and the enmities and intrigues among the kings and their courts continued to weaken the kingdoms, so that at times there were even several little kingdoms in the Katmandu territory itself.

In this period there were forty-six princedoms in the west of Katmandu, grouped in two territories. The one nearer to Katmandu was generally known as Chawbisi (The Twenty-Four), among which the most powerful was the King of Palpa. Further west lay Baisi (The Twenty-Two), with its twenty-two

princedom recognizing the supremacy of the Prince of Jumla, in the centre of this territory. The organization to the east of the Katmandu Valley is not so clear, and only some tribal organizations are recorded.

The time seemed ripe for the coming of some reformer, strong and energetic, who should reconstruct the country. And when circumstances demand, history never refuses to provide the necessary person. In this case too, history sent her chosen personality, Pritvi Narayan, the ruler of Gorkha, one of the Twenty-Four western states.

VII

INVADER FROM THE MOUNTAINS

IN THE MAIN reception room of the ancient royal palace of Katmandu, there are not many things worth seeing, except for a row of portraits hanging on the wall. The guide will lead you straight to one of them and say, with no comment: "Pritvi Narayan Shah."

This portrait of the King of Nepal, painted by a contemporary, shows him seated on a simple throne, among cushions, with the traditional turban-crown adorned with pearls and a horse-tail plume in front. He is gazing somewhere into the distance with serious, wide eyes. He holds a flower in his right hand, and a sabre lies before him. Between a flower and a sabre; yes, thus, between idealism and ruthless conflict he spent his life, the most purposeful life ever produced by the Nepali mountains.

He was born in 1722, son of the King of Gorkha, of a family originating in Rajasthan, in India; Gorkha was one of the twenty-four western princedoms, about eight days' march from Katmandu. He inherited the throne very young, and in a short time he had brought several of the neighbouring rulers under his power. In view of this success, his ambition grew until he had the audacious plan of conquering the Nepal Valley. With Pritvi Narayan to think was to act, and he went thither with his army, to conquer the small town of Navakot, half-way between Gorkha and the valley. Jaya Prakasha Malla, the King of Katmandu, learned of his intention and hastened with his army to defend Navakot. The town was already in the hands of the mountain king, but the energetic Jaya Prakasha managed to defeat him, and he had to retreat to Gorkha . . . until next time.

Jaya Prakasha, King of Katmandu, might be called the unlucky man of Nepalese history, for whatever he did was misinterpreted, and he in turn misunderstood the most well-intentioned acts of those around him. For this reason the court was full of his enemies, and even his own wife plotted against

him. His brother Raja Prakasha, King of Badgaon, was blinded by a group of six nobles of his court. Then Jaya Prakasha, to avenge this deed, brought the six very ignoble nobles and their wives to his court by a trick, and, instead of imprisoning or killing them, as, in those days, would have been regarded as quite becoming, he inflicted on them various public and private humiliations and then set them free. Inevitably this created for him a band of enemies who would never forget the humiliations. The people were also very discontented, as to pay for his expedition against Pritvi Narayan he had emptied the treasury of the temple of Pashupatinat, and, moreover, omitted to pay the soldiers he had recruited.

Meanwhile the King of Gorkha marched against Navakot again, overcame the army of Jaya Prakasha, led by Kashi Ram Thapa, and he occupied the town. The commander did not dare return to his capricious master, who, however, afterwards murdered him, believing he was a traitor. Thus the King of Katmandu managed to make an enemy of the brother of Kashi Ram Thapa, commander of the army of Badgaon.

Pritvi Narayan was already well established in Navakot, and there made preparations for his next step. Meanwhile he found an opportunity for a "Trojan Horse" kind of trick, by means of which he hid his intentions successfully. Jaya Prakasha had decided to rebuild the *stupa* of Swayambunat, at Katmandu, but needed for this an enormous beam to support the centre of the building, a kind of tree trunk to be found only in the distant mountains. While work was at a standstill for want of this, Pritvi Narayan, to show his friendly feelings, offered to send such a beam to Katmandu, and indeed sent one over the trackless mountains, carried by labourers with suitable foremen. When the promised task was done, the workmen returned home, in peace and friendship—and most probably took the King much valuable information about the state of affairs in the valley.

Pritvi Narayan had already decided upon his next ambition: the conquest of the small town of Kirtipur, on a hill in the south-western part of the valley, from which the whole valley was visible and could easily be controlled. He attacked the town, and the defence by the townspeople themselves would perhaps not have succeeded, had it not been for the decisive help of Jaya Prakasha, which arrived just in time. Showing

exceptional skill in strategy, the King of Katmandu overcame the King of Gorkha, who had to retreat with heavy losses.

But Jaya Prakasha was not only a good strategist; he specialized in psychological mistakes. He now made at least two such mistakes. One was that he left Pritvi Narayan to retreat at leisure, and did not pursue him to wipe out his army finally. His second mistake was that when the leading men of Kirtipur came in a deputation to his palace to propose that Kirtipur be annexed to his kingdom, instead of to that of Patan, to which it had until then belonged, he ordered all the deputation to be put to death, with the exception of its leader, whom he humiliated by parading him through the streets in women's clothes.

Seeing that he had no prospect of succeeding by a direct attack, Pritvi Narayan thought out a new method. He occupied all the passes that led to the valley, and forbade all entry to them, especially to those carrying food. He brutally hanged on the surrounding trees men and women bringing their produce, and also put to death those inhabitants of the valley who approached the passes in the attempt to leave. He succeeded in creating panic among city- and country-dwellers alike.

When he thought the time was ripe, the cunning and determined warrior united all his forces and again attacked Kirtipur, but the townspeople, now fully prepared, again defeated him with the help of Jaya Prakasha. There, among many others, Kalu Pande, the commander of the mountain king's army, lost his life, and the brother of Pritvi Narayan lost one eye from an arrow wound. He might even have lost his life, had not the Capuchin priest Michaelangelo of Tobiago been there and attended to his wound. Pritvi Narayan was now in a fury, and with the determination so characteristic of him, swore on the way home that he would take an adequate vengeance.

Having assembled an army larger than ever before, he once more descended to the valley, on the route already too well known, surrounded Kirtipur and besieged it. Now the three kings of the valley at last made an agreement to create a common army against the common enemy, but it was too late. The besieger promised the people of Kirtipur that he would not take vengeance upon any of them. This promise made the defenders hesitate; and then the man who had been humiliated when he led a deputation to Jaya Prakasha reappeared; seeing his opportunity for revenge, he showed Pritvi Narayan and his

men a secret entrance to the town, and the conquering army entered.

Drunk with victory, the leader quickly forgot his promise and began to remember how the Kirtipuri defenders had deprived his brother of an eye; he gave orders that every male more than twelve years old, except for those who could play a wind instrument, should have the nose and upper lip cut off. One eyewitness declared that the bloody trophies filled two forty-pound baskets. A British visitor, forty years later, told how he had seen some old men "like skulls" still walking in the streets of the town.

This was not an act of mere blind revenge, but an act well calculated to terrify the next victims to be attacked, and to warn them what happened to those who resisted. "Kirtipur" ("City of Glory") for a time became "Naskatpur" ("City of Amputated Noses").

Patan was the next victim to be chosen. As a last hope of deliverance Jaya Prakasha urgently begged the help of the British army, which had at that time gained some stability in India. The British sent a detachment under Captain Kinloch, whose men for the most part died of malaria and other misfortunes during the crossing of the jungle region of Terai. With what was left of his detachment the brave captain attacked the Gorkhas, and, although the British had to retreat at once, the mere idea of help from outside made Pritvi Narayan hesitate and postponed the conquest of Patan for a whole year.

The mountain king suddenly turned towards Katmandu, and on the evening of 29th September, 1768, during the Indra Jatra feast, when all the men in the city were drunk, he and his soldiers slipped into the town. Having occupied the most important positions, Pritvi Narayan magnanimously ordered the people not to be uneasy, but to continue the drinking and amusement, a first order from the conqueror that was no doubt a good deal more agreeable to the townspeople than the first order given in Kirtipur.

Jaya Prakasha, with a few men, resisted, but in vain. Wounded in one leg, he fled to Patan, and thence, with the King of Patan, to Badgaon, where all three kings, at last realizing their own stupidity, began to assemble their forces to defend at least this town.

Some months later Pritvi Narayan advanced on Patan with

an army, and, by means of a promise to cause no distress to the townspeople, he induced them to capitulate. Then, of course, his men treated the townspeople very brutally.

When the rest of the valley was already in his hands, Pritvi Narayan turned against Badgaon, which capitulated without any resistance, since the seven bastard sons of the King betrayed their father. The conqueror entered the city and the palace was surrounded. Pritvi Narayan treated the King of Badgaon, who was an old friend of his, with courtesy, and, to remove him from his path in a decent fashion, he allowed him to travel to the Indian holy city of Benares to spend his last years there. Jaya Prakasha was captured, but in a very bad condition, because of his wound. He was a dying man, and as his last wish was to die in the holy place, Pashupatinat, on the bank of the river Bagmati, the conqueror showed a final courtesy by readily granting his wish and allowing his faithful courtiers to carry him to the river. However, two days later he still lay by the river bank, alive. When he heard this, the mountain king sent a message to ask if he had any other wish in his last hours. The reply soon came: Yes, if he might have a sunshade and a pair of shoes, he would die more contentedly. Pritvi Narayan readily prepared these gifts, but then the superstitious hill man began to meditate on their hidden significance. The sunshade in Nepal, as elsewhere in the East, is a symbol of royal power; and so the dying man no doubt meant to show, that he was still a king and did not recognize the conqueror. By putting the shoes on he would show that he, or one of his family, now leaving the palace, would some day return. So, though he sent the gifts to Pashupatinat, Pritvi Narayan asked the dying man not to make use of them until after death. A few hours later Jaya Prakasha died.

One day, sitting in a café in Katmandu with my friends, Govinda Malla and Vijaya Malla, one a historian and the other a poet, both direct descendants of that royal line, we discussed the end of the dynasty.

“Do you believe that, having received those shoes, the family will return to power?” I asked.

“Of course. Our country has become democratic, and in a democracy the ruler is the people. So, as we belong to the people, we have already returned to power,” was the clever reply, with the last words clothed in a smile.

But Pritvi Narayan was not satisfied with the conquest of the valley. During the next few years he conquered the Twenty-Four Princedoms, and after that the remoter Twenty-Two in the west, just as in the east he subjugated the Kirantis and other tribes, and united Nepal into approximately the country it now is. He adopted the royal family name, Shah, and founded the dynasty which still rules.

Much earlier, a Catholic mission was founded in the valley, with a church at Patan. The new master, suspecting political activities behind a front of religion, ordered them to leave for India, which they did. But Pritvi Narayan did not live long to enjoy the fruits of his life's work. At the age of fifty-two he died, one of the most memorable figures in the history of Nepal.

To the physical portrait painted at the beginning of this chapter one may add the spiritual portrait brilliantly painted by the historian Silvain Levi: "Pritvi Narayan was a man who fell on his feet wherever he was. To unlimited ambition he added an unwearying sense of purpose. He grasped a situation at the first glance, immediately made his decision, and acted with cold determination. To those who helped him he was magnanimous; to those who opposed him he showed himself brutal and savage. As for religion, priests and even the gods themselves, they were only instruments to help him to win the empire he desired."

VIII

WHO MURDERED WHOM IN NEPAL

THE INFANT SON of the King followed him on the throne, under the regency of his uncle, Bahadur Shah, a very ambitious man, who not only strengthened the state organization, but sent an army to conquer new territories; in the west he successfully annexed the Indian state of Kumaon, and in the east Sikkim. However, when the Nepalese penetrated into Tibet and robbed the temple of Shekhar Dzong, China, at the request of the Tibetans, sent an army of seventy thousand soldiers to fight them. A great number of Chinese soldiers perished in battle or in crossing the Himalayas, but a detachment succeeded in penetrating Nepal and reached Navakot, a key position for the Katmandu Valley. Then the Nepalese offered peace, recognizing the suzerainty of China. From then onwards Nepal had to send a deputation to Peking every fifth year, which was done regularly until 1908.

During the period of the Chinese invasion peril, the Nepalese regent again sought help from the British, but they, not wishing to send an armed force, sent an army mission under Colonel Kirkpatrick to try to pacify both sides. But the mission did not arrive until they had already made peace in 1792.

Even before coming of age, Rana Bahadur, the son of Pritvi Narayan, took the reins of state from his uncle's hands; but he was not well qualified to guide affairs himself. He had two wives. One gave him no children, and he disinherited the son he had by the other. He suddenly decided to marry a third girl, from the priestly Brahmin caste, though he, like all the ruling class, belonged to the Kshatriya or warrior class, and marriage between the two castes was forbidden. The young King married the Brahmin girl, but, as the priests refused to carry out the wedding ceremony, the union was always illegal, and his son illegitimate, although the father adopted him. This did not satisfy the Brahmins. They cursed the new Queen, who soon fell ill with smallpox; to release her from the curse, the King gave the Brahmins the entire contents of the state treasury. But in

vain. The Queen soon died, or, as some believed, killed herself after seeing her smallpox-disfigured face in her mirror. Mad with rage and grief, Rana Bahadur began to destroy temples and break idols, thus earning the hatred of the people, who forced him to abdicate in 1800, in favour of his two-year-old son by the Brahmin Queen, with the second wife as Regent. He himself went to Benares to live as an ascetic, accompanied by his first wife, Tripura Sundari.

But even the ascetic name of Nirguna Nand Swami, which he took, did not change the character of the young ex-King. He took a mistress, for whom he not only spent his own money and the jewels of his ex-Queen, but tried to borrow from the British East India Company. When she heard of this, the Regent was afraid that the British would help the ex-King to come back to Katmandu and re-conquer his throne, and in order to avoid this she made a trade agreement with Britain, and accepted a permanent British Resident in Katmandu. With this title Captain Knox arrived in 1802, but finding that the Durbar (Council) was against him, he felt obliged to retire, and the commercial relations with Britain were nullified.

Then Tripura Sundari, the ex-Queen, returned to Katmandu, overthrew the government and named herself Regent and Government. She gave the post of Prime Minister to the young and capable Bhim Sen Thapa, who had been with her and her husband in exile in Benares. Rana Bahadur himself then decided to return, but the former Prime Minister, Damodar Pande, assembled an army to destroy the ex-King before he reached the valley. The Nepalese soldiers, seeing their King in the humble garments of an ascetic, acclaimed him, killed their leader and swore fidelity to the man whom they had set out to slay.

Without dethroning his little son, Rana Bahadur became the real ruler, and immediately began once more to persecute the Brahmins and repeat his other misdeeds, for three years, until, in his fear of everyone and everything, he gave orders that his half-brother should be murdered. The latter went to the palace and, after an interview, cut down the King with his sabre. His second wife carried out the rite of *sati*, by which the widow mounts the burning pyre of her husband and is burned to death beside his body.

Now life in Katmandu became fairly normal once more;

the little prince sat more securely on his throne; Tripura Sundari again began to act as Regent, with Bhim Sen Thapa as Prime Minister.

Bhim Sen Thapa began to emerge as an energetic, able and unscrupulous person, such as the circumstances demanded. When the kingdom of Palpa in west Nepal acquired some degree of independence, he called the prince and nobles of Palpa together to discuss the matter, but, instead of discussion, he had them all put to death, thus showing himself well in control of the situation. He sent his father, the General Amar Singh Thapa, to conquer Kumaon, but after some local victories he had to retreat. As it was thus impossible for Nepal to expand northwards, eastwards or westwards, the southern boundary, never well defined, presented the only possibility of increasing his territory. After several villages had been occupied, the British reacted, and a conflict began. At the end of 1814 Nepal sent twelve thousand well-equipped and trained soldiers to the southern frontier, and the East India Company sent against them thirty thousand soldiers, divided into four columns. There were several battles partly on Nepalese soil and partly on Indian. On the difficult mountain terrain, the Nepalese soldiers were more skilful than their more numerous adversaries. However, when General Ochterlony took command of the British troops, he won a victory over the Nepalese Amar Singh, and they agreed on peace terms—which the King refused to sign. The war continued, and General Ochterlony marched with a comparatively large army straight for Katmandu. On the way he was halted by the Nepalese army, but, seeing that defeat was inevitable, the Nepalese commander made peace proposals, and in March 1816 the same peace terms as had been refused before were signed. By this “Treaty of Sagauli” the Nepalese government again managed to prevent foreign troops entering Katmandu. According to the treaty the British were entitled to have a Resident in Katmandu, and Nepal had to give back all areas that had been invaded, that is, Sikkim, Kumaon, Garwal and Terai. However, as a gesture of goodwill, Lord Hastings gave back part of Terai to Nepal. So ended the last war between Britain and Nepal.

Shortly afterwards the eighteen-year-old King died, leaving a two-year-old son, Rajendra Vikram Shah, who was crowned King, with his grandmother Tripura Sundari as Regent, Bhim

Sen Thapa as Prime Minister. The latter was for thirty years the real ruler of the country. He brought in a more efficient land tax system, modernized and disciplined the army and carried out various reforms. He also built an immense tower which is still the tallest building in the country, the "Folly of Bhim Sen".

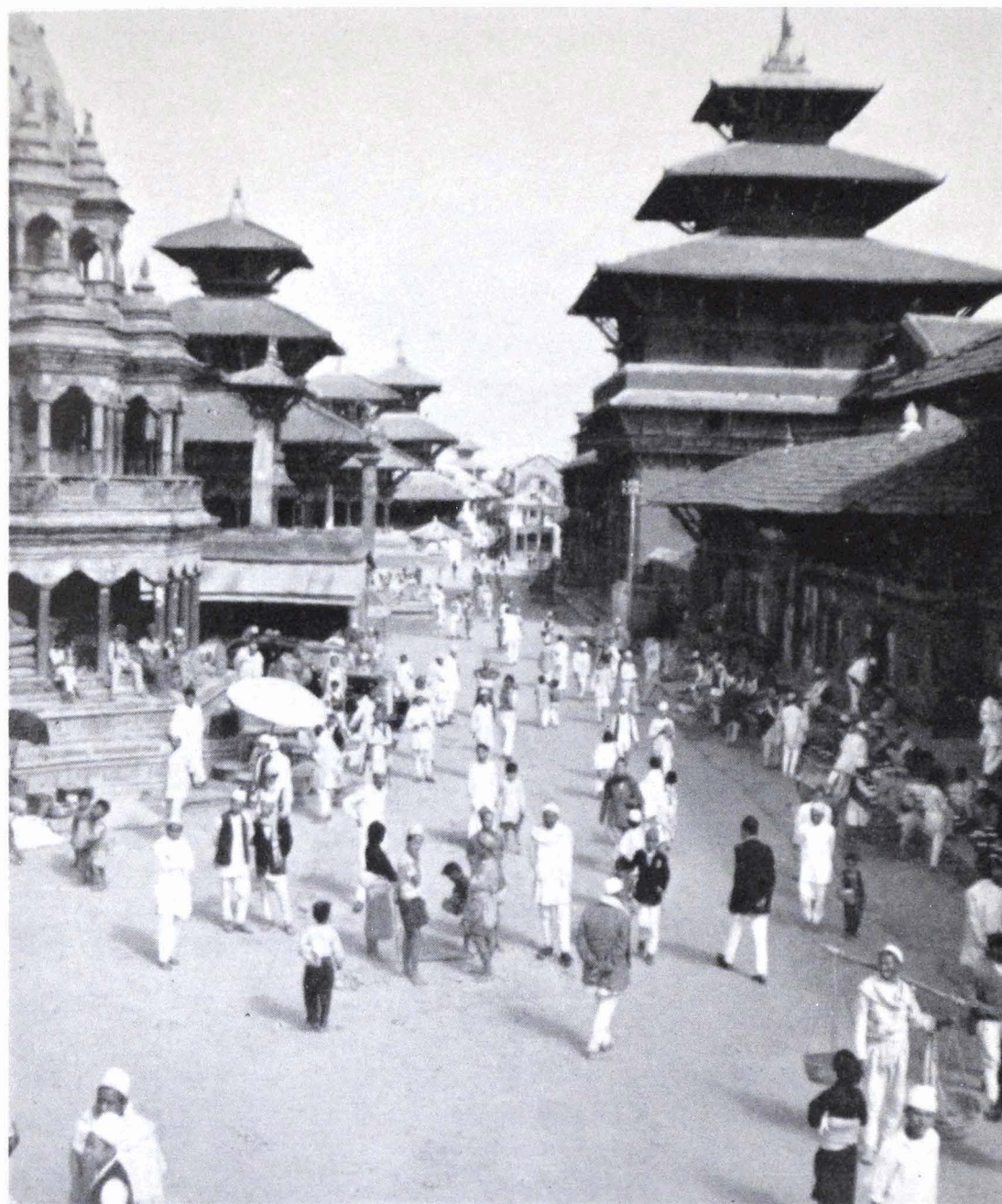
The boy King married two girls, one from the Pande family, and the other from the Thapa family, two families that had long been rivals, thus bringing this rivalry into the royal family itself, and dividing the courtiers into two parties. The death of the grandmother-regent, Tripura Sundari, in 1832, made matters worse.

At this time Matbar Singh, a young and talented man, became a general, and his rapid progress caused jealousy among the other senior officers. They soon began to intrigue against him with the King. Just at this stage in the affair, the little son of the elder Queen, the Pande girl, suddenly died and Bhim Sen was accused of instigating the murder of the child. Bhim Sen and Matbar Singh were thrown into prison and their possessions confiscated; a member of the Pande family, of course, replaced the Prime Minister.

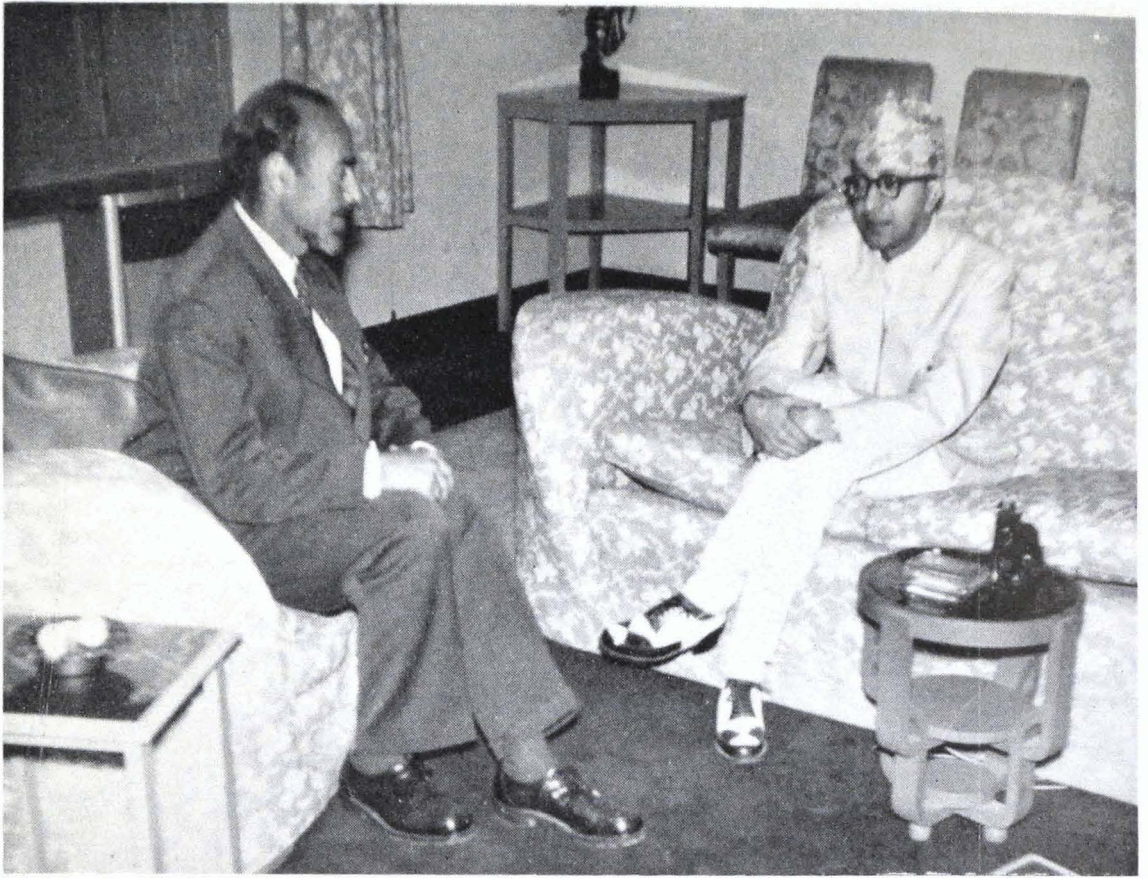
But soon both prisoners were released by the second queen, after which the young general escaped to Panjab in India and the ageing Bhim Sen Thapa remained outside the political arena until two years later, in 1839, he was again imprisoned. After undergoing physical and moral torture he killed himself, cutting his throat with a broken mirror in a dark underground cell.

The way was now open to the Pande Queen and the Pande Prime Minister. They made the King sign a decree by which the Thapa family was not to be eligible for any public office whatever for seven generations.

Seven generations is a long time, if Fate takes no hand in the game, but it did in this case; the elder queen died only two years later, and all powers passed to her younger colleague, a member of the Thapa family. In 1843 she recalled the exiled Matbar Singh as Prime Minister and Commander of the army. To make sure that he would arrive, the Queen ordered the execution of every member of the Pande family, who asked only that they might be executed with their own sharp *khukris*, a privilege that was granted.



The picturesque central square of Patan



King Mahendra tells the author the story of his tour



Statue of Jang Bahadur, and the tower known as "Bhim Sen's folly"

The Queen placed great hopes upon the young Prime Minister, but was disappointed when he refused her plea to nominate her son as the heir to the throne, instead of the son of the late Queen. She then brought an accusation against him before the King, who was a weak tool in the hands of those about him, saying that he was plotting against the life of the King, to seize the throne. She proposed that he should be made away with, as the safest course, and that his own nephew, Jang Bahadur, who had come with him from Panjab, might best do this. The King himself gave the young man a rifle, and threatened him with death if he did not carry out his orders.

Jang Bahadur did not refuse. The Prime Minister appeared in the open doorway, and the shot rang out. The servants, calmly confronting a common spectacle, carried the body away.

For the murder of his uncle the young Jang Bahadur was rewarded with the title of general and three detachments were placed at his disposal. He was already well known. He was a magnificent athlete, incredibly brave, and so capricious that all but his closest friends preferred not to meet him. There are a great many anecdotes about him, some of them almost incredible. One tells how Jang Bahadur once rode a horse up the tower of Bhim Sen, and leaped down on horseback, the horse being killed on the spot. The Nepalese insist that this is true, though some of the more cautious add that this happened when the tower was not yet complete and the ground in front of it was covered with a thick layer of straw.

He was devoted to the heir to the throne, Surendra Vikram, and took great risks to defend him. This friendship was, however, one-sided, as the young prince hated him and several times tried to kill him. It is said that on one occasion the heir to the throne became angry and summoned Jang Bahadur to visit him on the following day. He came, and the young man had him thrown into a deep well, thus, as he thought, putting an end to his career. But to his great surprise the murdered man appeared in the palace two days later, to tell his murderer that he had supposed this might happen, and had given orders for the well to be half filled with straw. On another occasion they were both riding in the mountains. When they came to a wild river, the Prince ordered his friend to cross it by a bridge made from a single trunk. Jang Bahadur, an extraordinarily fine horseman, obeyed without a word, but when his horse was

staggering in the middle of the bridge, he suddenly received a new order to return. The rider, obeying without hesitation, succeeded, at the risk of his life, in turning his horse and returning to Surendra.

Another story tells that once he gambled away a great deal of money and, to earn money to pay the debt, he went into the jungles of Terai to catch wild elephants and sell them. However, it seems that this time he came back unsuccessful.

But now, as a young general with three detachments at his disposal, he soon found himself involved in palace intrigues. He knew that one Gagan Singh was the Queen's lover. The King too knew this, and ordered his murder, which was carried out when the lover was piously praying in his chapel at home. Queen Kancha, burning with a dreadful anger, thirsting for revenge, but not knowing who the murderer was, ordered all the chief citizens to appear before her in the Kot, a great open courtyard opposite the palace surrounded by a wall. The high-ranking people began to come, as usual all unarmed, except for Jang Bahadur, who came not only in full battle-dress, but with his three detachments, which were drawn up outside the open-air audience-chamber.

The Queen now began to question the most likely suspects about the murder of her lover. Obtaining no information, she ordered a general to kill one of the suspects at once. But the general said that to do this he required written orders with the King's signature. This made the Queen even more angry, for it was generally known that she was the real ruler and the King only a figurehead. She ordered another of her ministers to arrest the general, but he too refused. Seeing this, she turned to Jang Bahadur for help, and he ordered his men to seize and arrest all three. One of them defended himself fiercely, but at a signal from Jang Bahadur a soldier cut him down with his *khukri*. At this, panic broke out; those who tried to escape found the doors guarded by armed soldiers and officers, who had orders to make full use of their great knives.

The sun went down on screams of despair and pools of blood. The Queen went up to the palace, and encouraged Jang Bahadur from a window, shrieking, "Kill my enemies! Wipe out my opponents!" This the obedient young man seems to have done with a will. Hours went by and the butchery continued in the darkness. The Queen, screaming like a maniac at

intervals, suddenly nominated Jang Bahadur Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the army. He was now master of the situation, and for very self-respect had to finish his task conscientiously. In that night, known as the Massacre of Kot, sixty men of rank and some five hundred others were slaughtered.

It now seemed to the Queen very easy to free herself of the heir to the throne and his brother to guarantee the throne to her own son. She ordered Jang Bahadur to kill the two boys. This would indeed have been a small favour in return for his new office, a minor matter for such a practised butcher. But Her Majesty was disappointed; the Prime Minister replied with a spirited refusal, and took the two youngsters under his personal protection. And when she insisted, this paradoxical man told her that such proposals were contrary to the law, and that if she dared to speak of such things again she would be punished as was fitting.

This unexpected threat naturally infuriated the Queen. This demanded vengeance. She at once chose her instrument, one Bashniat, and convinced him that he must kill Jang Bahadur. It was not easy to convince anyone that they should raise their hand against one so powerful and so dreaded, and such an act had to receive an adequate reward. It was not only adequate, but a most extraordinary promise: the Queen guaranteed that the murderer and his descendants might commit any crimes with impunity, provided that not more than seven people were killed and that it was not a question of a crime against the royal family.

But this strange privilege never became a reality, for Jang Bahadur found out in time about the plot and killed the murderer and his assistants.

The Prime Minister then went to the palace and, laying his turban at the King's feet, begged that he should either be relieved of his post, or be given power to fight the King's enemies. Only one reply to such a plea was possible. He was given plenary powers. His first care was to call his ministers together as a tribunal, which condemned the Queen to exile. She heard the sentence in a blazing fury. She persuaded her husband to accompany her to Benares in India, the usual place of refuge for noble Nepalese when the soil of Nepal became too hot for them. But even in this holy place, on the bank of the

Ganges, the thoughts of the Queen became no more benevolent. She soon sent two professional murderers with an order, signed by the King, to murder the Prime Minister. But, as might have been expected, Jang Bahadur captured them. He felt so secure that he assembled the army and read aloud the King's order. Thus it was, he said, and the army might kill him in accordance with His Majesty's orders. Instead the army indignantly demanded the deposition of the King, and the heir, Prince Surendra, was proclaimed King.

A little later the Prime Minister invited the ex-King to return to Nepal, which he did, but at the head of an army ready for battle. However, the swift troops of Jang Bahadur surrounded him and captured both King and army. The next development might well have been the murder of the King Rajendra. But this did not happen. Instead Jang Bahadur received him very honourably and lodged him in the palace at Badgaon, and later in that at Katmandu, near his crowned son. It is noteworthy that Jang Bahadur always showed the greatest respect for members of the royal family, and never raised his hand against them.

After the rise of Jang Bahadur to the rank of Prime Minister in 1846, four years passed, during which he managed to surround himself so well with his brothers and friends that he felt able to leave the land for a longer holiday. Having had some contact with the British he admired them, and wanted to see the cause of their superiority; he wished to see them at home. So he decided to travel to London, and was the first head of state from the Indian sub-continent who did so. He went on an official visit, to take greetings from King Surendra to Queen Victoria.

At the beginning of 1850 he embarked in Bombay with a large escort and two of his brothers, leaving the eldest brother, Bam Bahadur, as his deputy.

In London he was received with courtesy by Queen Victoria, and had the opportunity of making himself known to many people of rank in Britain, admiring army parades and going to theatres and concerts, though he asserted that he preferred the music of Nepalese folk-music orchestras to the opera. He was much impressed by some large factories which he visited. The Nepalese began to understand the great power of Britain, more impressive than he had been able to imagine; from that moment

he remained very friendly to the British, and felt it an honour to call himself one of their allies when the occasion presented itself.

He also visited Paris, and a sabre presented to him by Louis Napoleon is still to be seen in the museum at Katmandu.

When he returned, the whole people welcomed him and his impressive procession of elephants through the mountains; but in the midst of the splendid reception a new plot was awaiting him. The plotters this time were the Brahmin priests, who spread the rumour that, by eating with Europeans, Jang Bahadur had lost his caste and could no longer rule over Hindus. According to the plan one of his brothers, Badri Narsingh, was to murder him, and the other brother, who was now deputizing for him, was to become the real Prime Minister. At the same time Prince Upendra, the King's brother, was to kill the King and himself become king. The plan was worked out in perfect and elaborate detail. But some hours before the appointed time the elder brother of Jang Bahadur revealed the plot to him, in time for him to capture all those involved in it. A tribunal was quickly set up and condemned them all to death, but the Prime Minister magnanimously commuted this punishment to exile in Allahabad, India.

He dedicated the next few years to the reorganization of the state apparatus, and to administrative reforms. In 1854 some Nepalese traders were robbed and murdered in Lhasa, and Nepal prepared for war against Tibet. But the Chinese Ambassador in Lhasa managed to bring about a settlement. An agreement was signed, by which Tibet was to pay to Nepal ten thousand rupees annually, and to allow a Nepalese minister to reside in Lhasa. Before this agreement was signed there were a few skirmishes, and as a reminder of this episode there are still two leather cannons, captured from the Tibetans, in the museum at Katmandu.

And now something unexpected occurred. Jang Bahadur resigned in favour of his brother, Bam Bahadur. His intention seems to have been to show that, with or without the title, he was the master of the country. He rejected even the offer of the people to proclaim him King. Then the King gave him the hereditary title of Maharaja. Next year, 1857, Bam Bahadur died, and then Jang Bahadur at once took over the Prime Ministership. He was in fact the absolute ruler of Nepal. But in

case this was not enough, the King issued a decree, giving him power of life and death in the whole of Nepal. He had the right of nominating or dismissing all government officials, declaring war and making peace with other countries. He could make new laws and repeal old ones. Besides all this, he was given the right to correct the King, should the latter do anything amiss in the affairs of state. All these rights the King gave not only to him personally, but also to his heirs, according to the agnate system, that is, one in which power passes not from father to son, but to the eldest male member of the family, brother, cousin or nephew, if he is capable of taking it, and, if not, to the next eldest. By this decree it was therefore recognized that Jang Bahadur and his family were, for all time, the government of Nepal.

Certainly this decree was not a spontaneous idea of the King's, but was well thought out and planned by the shrewd Jang Bahadur himself. He observed the impracticability of the hereditary system of the royal dynasty, which meant that there was always a boy king on the throne, sometimes with ambitious women regents and prime ministers who made the royal power unreal. To avoid this, he thought out a system by which the heir would be a person already of ripe age and tested, with many experiences of administration and leadership. There is a similar system in some Moslem countries, and Jang Bahadur may have taken the idea from them.

Only a few days later news came of a rebellion against British rule in India, in June, 1857. The Prime Minister immediately visited the British Resident in Katmandu and offered him six thousand soldiers to help suppress the revolt. Lord Canning, who represented Britain in Calcutta, refused the offer as degrading, but a month later, when the situation had become serious, he made an urgent announcement that he would accept this help. On the same day, Jang Bahadur was able to send three thousand Gurkhas (a name already in use for Nepalese soldiers, because many of them came from the town of Gorkha) who proved themselves very fine soldiers.

These Nepalese soldiers, short of stature and thin, performed veritable miracles. On one occasion, for example, a detachment had to march thirty-five miles in one day, and when they arrived they went into action and conquered two rebel forts. On the following day they marched another fifty-five miles and

then, without a moment's pause for rest, attacked the enemy again with magnificent success. They had not only staggering capacities for marching and fighting for long periods without food or sleep, but also astonishing skill in hand-to-hand fighting, using their sharp curved *khukris*. They soon became a terrifying legend.

Every day news of the victories of the Nepalese detachments and the value of their help to the British reached Katmandu. Then Jang Bahadur remembered that he was himself a soldier, and he began to long for a share in the victories of his troops. He offered another twelve thousand soldiers and himself as commander, and began to prepare the regiment. The commander marched his soldiers through the difficult country till he reached the city of Lucknow, where the Nepalese soldiers showed extraordinary skill and courage in the fighting, especially in the streets of the city, where they occupied the enemy positions one by one. It is generally recognized that they made a major contribution to the suppression of the revolt. The most eloquent recognition of this came when Britain gave back to Nepal the part of Terai which had been taken away in 1856. This was the last territorial change to take place in Nepal up to the present day.

The rebels were beaten and many thousands had to flee from their British pursuers. As the nearest place of refuge was Nepal, a land of jungle and mountain outside direct British control, more than twenty thousand refugees appeared in the country, half of them armed, presenting a new problem to Jang Bahadur. Among the refugees was one of the chief rebels, Nana Sahib, notorious for his cruel action of drowning forty boat loads of British refugees, and ordering that those who escaped drowning should be butchered or thrown into a well.

Although Nana Sahib never received official permission to remain in Nepal, since such a permission would have been contrary to the warm friendship of Jang Bahadur for Britain, his presence and that of thousands of his followers was generously tolerated, and it was an open secret that the Prime Minister had bought from him, one after the other, many valuable jewels, pearls and precious stones, among them an emerald seven and a half centimetres long, which went into the Prime Minister's official regalia.

The subsequent life, like the death, of Nana Sahib has never

been completely explained. Pilgrims travelling from the western part of the land said in the capital that they met a group of several hundred *sadhus* (religious mendicants) which lived in a type of order never seen except in an army, and moved with military discipline. It seemed that they were under the orders of a powerful "chief *sadhu*", a concept which was in itself novel and somewhat absurd, since Hindu religious mendicants have no such organizations. On another occasion a pilgrim, in whose features some people saw those of the rebel, was seen in Terai and other regions of Nepal and north India. For several years his camp was in the mountains of the west. Once the mother of Nana Sahib came to Katmandu, in mourning garments, to announce that her son was dead; but when an attempt was made to investigate the matter, the lack of proof gave rise to some doubts.

Just beside the ancient palace of Jang Bahadur, on the outskirts of Katmandu, a two-storey villa with its own temple and surrounding wall may still be seen. It is said that the widow of Nana Sahib lived there for over forty years. For from the beginning, in order that his young wife should not suffer the distresses of a homeless life, the rebel sent her to Katmandu, where the Prime Minister gave her asylum. It is said that she was beautiful and that Jang Bahadur himself and several others of high rank were not indifferent to her. But the widow was also very pious, and adopted the custom of feeding religious mendicants once a year, on a specific date. Hundreds came each year, many of them from a long way, as if carrying out some kind of pilgrimage. It is supposed that on this occasion her husband would come and that thus they met at least once a year. It may be worth mentioning that she never ceased to use jewels or to wear the red *tika* on the forehead, both of which are forbidden to widows. In 1892 she again awaited the regular pilgrim, but after thirty-five years he appeared no more. She survived him by a few years only.

Jang Bahadur was not only the ruler of the country, but wished to be informed of the smallest details concerning the administration, and took part in everything else. He was accustomed to give orders in person when two neighbours quarrelled, and personally gave orders for the medical treatment of an elephant's foot. He naturally gave the King no further voice in the government of the country, though he never showed him

personal disrespect. The idea of Jang Bahadur was that the King was a holy person, a representative of God on earth, who must not come down to human miseries or be troubled with such trivial details of everyday life as the administration of the country.

In the ante-chamber of the house of Colonel Minto Jang Rana, where I was a guest for two months, a large portrait of Jang Bahadur hangs in the middle of a row of other family ancestors. There he is portrayed in his kimono with a golden dragon, like a Chinese aristocrat. The scanty tousled black beard suggests a Mongol. Two black eyes, which in life must have been very impressive, stare fiercely and almost frighteningly from the dark brown face.

In 1877 Jang Bahadur again wished to visit England. He had already embarked the mass of luggage and his many attendants, when he suddenly fell ill while hunting in Terai. There was hardly time to carry him to the edge of the sacred River Bagmati, where he wished to die. One of his last requests was that none of his wives should carry out the rite of *sati*, and this was respected, although his four chief wives pleaded very persistently to burn with his body.

In the ashes that floated away above the waves of the Bagmati, borne by the gentle March breeze, vanished the earthly remains of one of the strangest men who ever made an entrance on the stage of history in Nepal. Jang Bahadur had disposed of all enemies and planned a list of successive heirs of the Rana family as prime ministers; but the dead leader had forgotten one enemy—the family itself.

In order of age, the inheritor of the prime ministership should have been Badri Narsingh. But as he was struck off the list for his plot to kill Jang Bahadur, the first on the list was Rana Udip, the younger brother of the dead man. When he came to office his first opponents were the ten sons of Jang Bahadur, who did not understand the purpose of this system of inheritance, and considered themselves defrauded. The leader was the eldest, Jagat Jang. He plotted against his uncle, was unmasked, and was sent into exile with several of his brothers.

Meanwhile, in 1881, King Surendra died, and as his son was already dead, the nearest heir was his six-year-old grandson, Pritvi Bir Bikram. But then a rival appeared—his great-grandfather, the old Rajendra, who still lived in the palace

where Jang Bahadur had installed him after his return from Benares. The dispute lasted for about a year, to be ended by the death of the great-grandfather. The great-grandson was crowned shortly afterwards.

The new Prime Minister, Rana Udip, was a routine-ridden and careless man, and his brother, Dhir Sham Shir, Commander-in-Chief of the army, not only helped him a great deal, but in fact was in control of the country. After Dhir Sham Shir's death, Rana Udip not only allowed Jagat Jang and his brothers to return to the country, but replaced them in the succession. The sons of Dhir Sham Shir regarded this action as directed against them, and acted promptly. Some of them entered the palace of Rana Udip and killed him. They also summoned Jagat Jang thither and, with two shots, decisively eliminated him from the succession, as also his son, his brothers and many other rivals to the seventeen sons of Dhir Sham Shir. One of these, Bir Sham Shir, proclaimed himself Prime Minister on the great parade-ground Tundhikel, in the presence of the King and the Queen Mother, before the whole army and people, in November 1885.

Bir Sham Shir was a moderate and progressive ruler. Many institutions still standing owe their existence to him. Among these are the Bir Library, with a large collection of manuscripts, the Darber High School, the Bir Hospital, the water supply system of Katmandu and Badgaon. He had also no small capacity for enjoyment. His various palaces included one surrounded by a circular canal, with many leaping fountains that were illuminated with coloured lights in the evening. The chief room in the palace was a huge swimming-bath, unique, it seems, in that epoch. After the democratization of the country, the swimming-bath was turned into a cinema auditorium, but was not a success as such. Finally, in July 1957, when I founded the People's University of Katmandu, the present owner of the palace, a grandson of its builder, Mr. Parakram Sham Shir, placed it at the disposal of this institution free of charge. At the inauguration ceremony, in the front row, between the British and the Indian Ambassadors, sat Field-Marshal Sir Kaiser Sham Shir, one of the most eminent living members of the Rana family. So in this way the former Prime Minister has contributed to the cultural development of the country even by his luxuries.

Bir Sham Shir worked out a new list of succession into which he put only the legitimate descendants of Dhir Sham Shir, thus monopolizing government in the country for the seventeen sons and their families. The many members of the Rana family were divided into classes A, B and C, according to the branch of the family to which they belonged, and whether or not they were legitimate, and according to this classification they received their positions in the administration. The members of the most favoured line were colonels from birth.

After his death he was succeeded by his brother Deva Sham Shir, who reigned for only three months, for he was too liberal to be tolerated for longer. During this very brief period he issued a law abolishing slavery, founded the first weekly paper, which still appears, and was "accused" of even wanting to bring in a parliamentary system! His brothers forced this desperately dangerous man to resign, and instead of him Chandra Sham Shir, his brother, became Prime Minister, and held this position from 1901 to 1929.

Chandra Sham Shir left behind him somewhat contradictory memories, as I realized when I talked with various people who clearly remembered him. For some he was the great reformer, the father of modern Nepal, while for others he was a hypocritical seeker of wealth for himself and his family. Quite probably both points of view contain a certain amount of truth.

As a young man he was educated at Calcutta University, and, like a cultured man, he tried to modernize his country, but without altering its traditional exclusion of the West. For this reason he sent several noblemen's sons to Japan to study technical subjects, but the plan was not successful, for they wasted many years before they had a sufficient command of the Japanese language to take part in University courses.

He tried to educate the people by his own example. For instance, in order to moderate the drunken habits of the Nepalese, he himself became an abstainer, and during the public festivals he had only non-alcoholic drinks served, both in the palace and in the popular celebrations. He had only one wife, and many Nepalese followed his example. Even today, although most Nepalese are monogamous, there is no law against polygamy in Nepal.

He was a politician of ability, as he also showed when he brought about peace between Britain and Tibet in 1904. It

happened that when the British authorities sent a letter to the Dalai Lama to put right some difficulty, he asked his minister who were the people who had sent this letter. The minister replied that they were in a far-off country, which paid an annual grant to Butan. "What?" said the Dalai Lama. "If this country is a vassal of the miserable Butan, how miserable it must be itself! Send back the letter at once, unopened!" Naturally this reply did not improve the situation, and led to General Younghusband's march on Lhasa. While this conflict was going on Chandra Sham Shir wrote personal letters to the Dalai Lama and also gave Lord Curzon advice on the political situation in Tibet, thus helping towards a happy solution of the problem.

In 1908 Chandra Sham Shir, too, visited Britain and was as well received as his predecessor had been. He was also much impressed by a splendid army parade which he saw in the company of Edward VII, but what most interested him was industrial and agricultural machinery, which he dreamed of obtaining for his own country.

In 1914, when World War I broke out, Chandra Sham Shir showed himself as enthusiastic a supporter of British interests as Jang Bahadur had been. He placed all the army that was fit for service (some 17,500 men) at the disposal of the British Army and innumerable detachments won honour and lost lives on the most various battle-fronts, under the general name of "the Gurkha regiments". A sequel to this loyalty was the revision of the pact with Nepal on the part of Britain, in 1923. According to this Nepal was not only recognized as an independent state, but given an annual grant of a million rupees.

The King died in 1911 and his young son, Tribhuvan Bir Bikram, came to the throne.

The idea of Chandra Sham Shir was that progress was necessary, but that it should not be forced upon the people; the people should be allowed to accustom themselves to innovations gradually. For example, he did not wish to prohibit the gambling games of which the Nepalese were and still are extremely fond, but gave orders that no one might play on credit. Thus, when a man had no ready cash, he had to stop playing. He thus put a check on the passion and saved many people from wretchedness and burdensome debts.

We have already seen that Jang Bahadur was opposed to the

custom of *sati*, the suicide of widows. In 1920 Chandra Sham Shir set the seal on this with a definite legal prohibition of this rite. In 1924 he took another important step, the abolition of slavery in Nepal. Deva Sham Shir's similar law had remained on paper only. Now fifty-two thousand slaves were liberated and the state paid the owners £275,250 in compensation. It should, however, be said that the institution of slavery in Nepal was in no way as horrible as in some countries, and so the abolition of slavery was not such a milestone. Most of the slaves were labourers for the feudal farmers, often with heavy debts, who lived with them and worked for them. They were usually treated as members of the family, and often, when the family had to go away for some reason, all the property was left in charge of the eldest or most trusted slave, who would look after it as if it were his own.

The Prime Minister himself usually worked to a definite timetable, and expected his officials and colleagues to do the same. He thus gave the Nepalese a sense of the value of time. He forbade the state officials to accept from the people those customary presents that had become obligatory.

In the Nepalese calendar one day is dedicated to the redistribution of posts. On that day all officials, high and low, meet in the main square of Katmandu, and the King or the Prime Minister redistributes all the posts. For many years this meeting had lost its real significance, until Chandra Sham Shir gave it back. In these meetings he dismissed officials who, according to his information, had not done their duties properly, and raised the salary of those who had proved themselves progressive and industrious.

During his reign many bridges were built, a cable railway for transporting goods was constructed, water was supplied to several towns and villages, electric light was installed in Katmandu; and the Trichandra College, the first high school, was built, its name being a combination of the King, Tribhuvan, and the Prime Minister, Chandra Sham Shir.

He was a very strict man, and wanted to judge personally even the smallest fault of any subordinate. He was feared, but not liked. Even the Brahmin priests did not like him, for, though he was not anti-clerical, he deprived them of a major source of income. According to Hindu teaching, when a Hindu goes to a non-Hindu land or crosses the sea, he loses his caste

and a special ceremony is required to restore him to it. For this ceremony the priests demanded quite a high fee, even from those who returned from India only. Chandra Sham Shir cancelled this obligation for those who returned from India and for all soldiers who had served in World War I.

He died in 1929; his successor was very unpopular. Then in 1932 Juddha Sham Shir became Prime Minister. Only two years later there was a terrible earthquake in Nepal, in which eight thousand people perished and many houses, temples and historic buildings were destroyed. As the destruction was even greater in Bihar in northern India, Juddha Sham Shir refused the proffered help from India and spent much of his own and the state money to repair the damage as far as possible. At this time he created two large modern streets in Katmandu, the only ones in the city.

In World War II he placed twenty thousand soldiers at Britain's disposal.

The Rana family, whose founder was Jang Bahadur Rana, provided the country not only with prime ministers, but with a large aristocracy, which was the one family taking part in any way in administration, the leadership of the army, the wealth and all the privileges of a ruling class. But this family, which was enormous on account of the very numerous legitimate and illegitimate children, whom all had, was essentially not united internally. There were too many memories of murder and too many suspicions. Denunciations were everyday affairs. Every official tried to give frequent proof of his fidelity and loyalty by daily appearances before the Prime Minister, when he would greet him with palms pressed together and an insincere smile on his lips, or speak some flattering phrases, or denounce someone. Such a society could not possibly last long.

The Prime Minister now erased from the succession list the illegitimate children of Bhim Sham Shir and Bir Sham Shir, who had been placed on the list while their fathers were alive, and at the same time they were exiled from the Nepal Valley. Naturally this action divided the Rana family, and Juddha Sham Shir turned a considerable part of the clan against him. The "Ranarchy", as the system was secretly called, seemed to be rotten outside and inside. Seeing this, the Prime Minister resigned, and went to India to live with his family, in 1945.

Padma Sham Shir was the next Prime Minister. A wind of freedom and democracy was blowing not only from distant lands, but straight across the Indian frontier. In India the Congress Party was working feverishly to win independence, with eventual success, and this conflict was reflected in the youth of Nepal. They too organized their Congress Party, which undertook civil resistance against the government. Many young men were imprisoned, though, because of the Prime Minister's liberal views, most of them were soon released. Padma Sham Shir himself felt that the time for dictatorship was past, and that new times demanded a new system. He wished to bring in a democratic form of government, and invited specialists from India to draw up a constitution for Nepal. Unhappily this constitution remained only on paper, as those who were around the Prime Minister obstructed the application of his ideas, and he himself was either too weak or insufficiently energetic to force his ideas into practice.

He also democratized education to some extent, creating many state schools, and the first school for girls, who until then had been excluded from education. At last, weary of the conflict between his democratic ideals and the reactionary family defending its "rights", he went to India and from there sent in his resignation in 1948.

His successor, Mohan Sham Shir (after all these names we must read Jang Bahadur Rana, which was, as it were, the surname of every member of the family of rank) was a social reactionary. India, newly independent, could have no sympathy with him. However, when he sent troops to aid the new Indian government in its difficulties in Hyderabad and Kashmir, he was appointed an honorary general of the Indian Army. Meanwhile the discontent among the youth of Nepal increased, and, as a result, many found themselves in prison, others in exile, while a third group continued underground activities. Then Mohan Sham Shir made a blunder in internal strategy. He confiscated the property of all the descendants of Bhim Sham Shir. Two of them, who had property in India, supported the liberation movement with financial help.

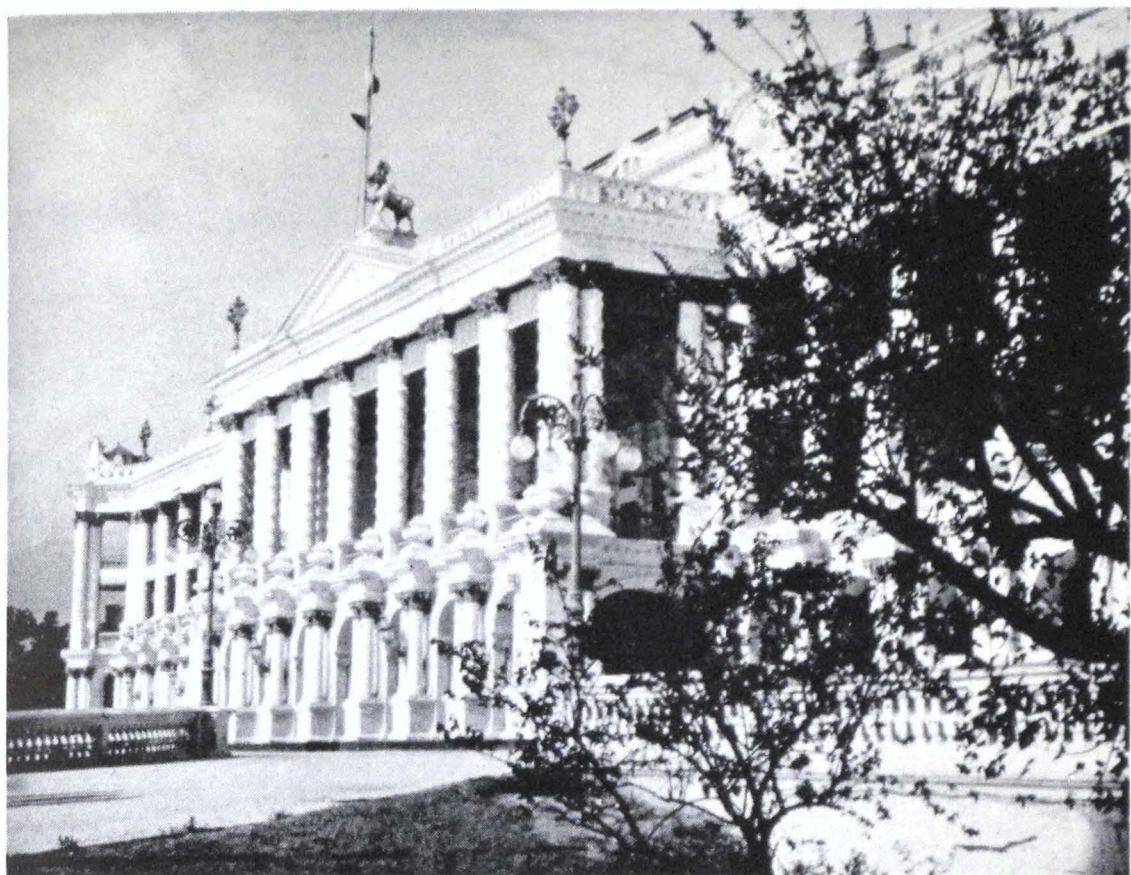
Now something unforeseen happened. The student of Nepalese history will already have grown used to the idea that the name of a king only appears like a ghost when he comes to the throne or takes refuge in India. Again the King fled, but

this time not to Benares, but to Delhi; and this changed the course of history.

King Tribhuvan, only fifty years old, but having been King for forty years already, had been a prisoner in his palace, in the golden cage which the Prime Minister kept locked. With his two wives he lived in luxurious surroundings, amusing himself with reading and photography. But his books were censored. If he received a visit, he had to endure the company of a third person, acting as a secretary or servant, but in fact a spy for the Prime Minister. He was allowed neither a telephone nor a car. On the rare occasions when he was allowed a little excursion, he had to ask the Prime Minister for a car, and a crowd of spies accompanied him, keeping watch over his words and deeds.

Nevertheless, the awakening of the masses percolated through the sealed walls of the palace, and the King found it intolerable that his life should drift on, uselessly. He began to have secret meetings with the Indian Ambassador, in which, it seems, a German Fräulein Erika, who was in the palace as a physiotherapist, treating one of the queens, aided him. One day the King asked the Prime Minister for a car and leave to go on a hunting trip. The Prime Minister sent transport and an escort, which did not suspect that the picnic baskets were full of the royal family's jewels and valuables. Thus prepared, and with his whole family except for his grandchildren, the King drove the car through the gate of the Indian Embassy, which swung open at the right moment as previously agreed. The Indian Ambassador obtained permission for the family to take refuge in Delhi. In November 1950 the family flew to India and were very well received by Prime Minister Nehru. Seeing this moral support from the Indian Government, the Nepal Congress Party concentrated its forces and attacked Nepalese territory in nine places.

Immediately after the flight of the monarch the Prime Minister declared the throne vacant, and a five-year-old grandson of the King, who had remained in Katmandu, was crowned. But now, with the Congress forces attacking and the Indian Government giving moral support, the situation seemed desperate, the more so as the government could not, for want of roads, concentrate troops to defend itself, and India would not allow troops to pass through her territory. The people of Nepal itself and even the regular army showed signs of sympathy with the King and the popular rising.



Singha Darbar, the Government's palace, formerly residence of the Rana



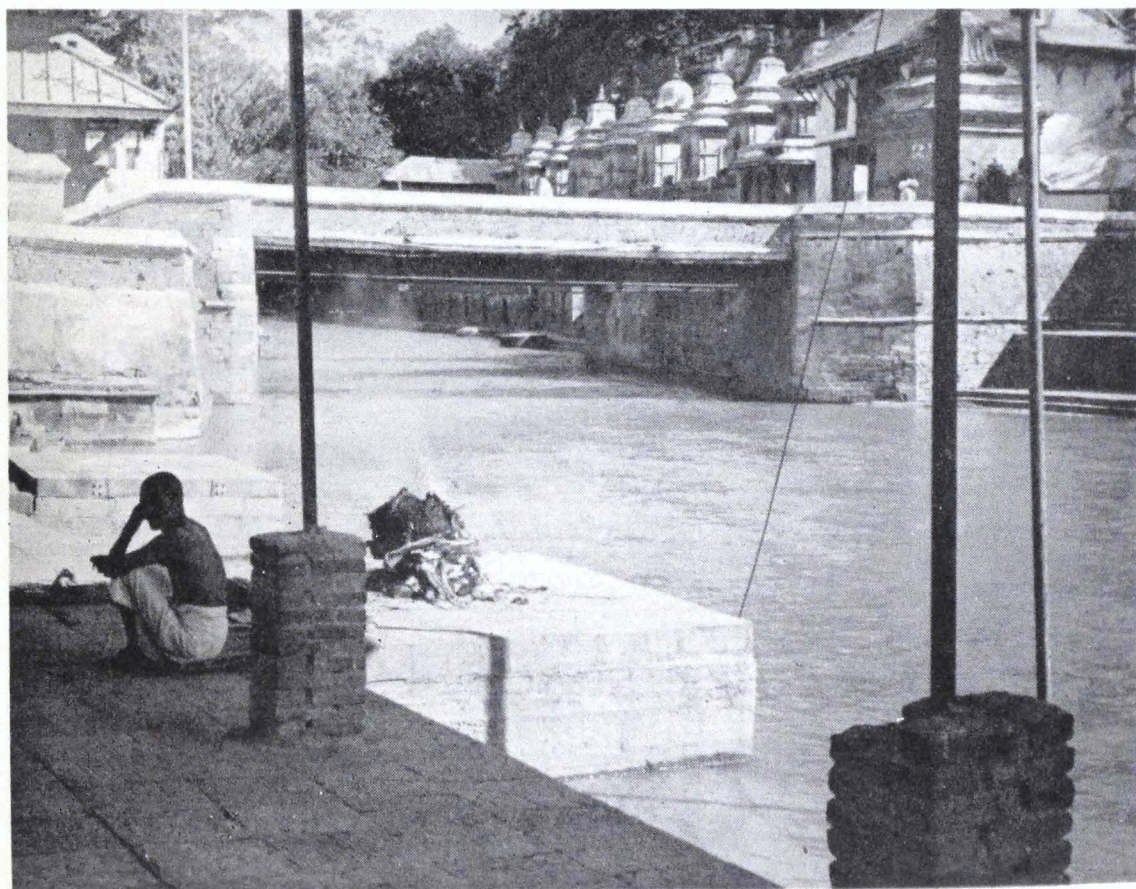
Dawa Tenzing Sirdar (dark coat) with other sherpas



Little girl helps in drying rice



To cure toothache a nail is driven into this log in Katmandu



A son attends his father's cremation

The heads of the Rana family recognized that the situation was against them and decided to accept a compromise. Representatives of both parties, together with the King, discussed the matter in Delhi, after which King Tribhuvan returned to Katmandu on 18th February, 1951, proclaiming the creation of a provisional coalition government. This was the end of the "Ranarchy".

However, neither the King nor the people were thinking of a drastic elimination of the Rana family, or of vengeance in any form. On the contrary, the new government very democratically consisted of five members of the Rana family, four other persons, and the King himself as head.

The leader of the Nepal Congress Party, the able and shrewd B. P. Koirala, became Prime Minister of a democratic government. He changed the Cabinet several times in the course of a few years, but none of the government showed themselves capable of putting the country on a sound economic footing or satisfying the demands of the people concerning free democratic elections.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1955, the King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Deva died in Nice, and his eldest son, Shri Panch (Five Times Lord, that is His Majesty) Maharajadiraj (King of Kings) Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva became King. Special representatives of many governments were present at his magnificent coronation the following year.

But Cabinet crises followed.

In February 1958, at the time when I am writing these lines, he has come to an agreement with several parties to set up a cabinet without a prime minister, with himself as head of the Ministry. Besides the normal tasks of government, this Cabinet will have the task of preparing free democratic elections for a parliament of two houses, to take place in a year's time. Let us hope that this will bring to Nepal the solution of many serious problems, and that internal peace which it deserves to have at last after so tumultuous a history.

IX

WHO ARE THE NEPALESE?

BOTH THE HISTORICAL development of Nepal and the variety of facial types to be seen in the country, show that the people of Nepal do not belong to one single racial stock. The Nepalese may be divided roughly into three main groups. The first is that of Tibeto-Burmese origin, to which belong the Newaris of the Katmandu Valley and most of the tribes of eastern Nepal. In a more general grouping these are attached to the Mongol race. The second group consists of more recent Mongol arrivals, mostly the tribes Gurung and Magar, while the third racial group is composed of the Aryans and the pre-Aryan Dravidians who have come from India. This third group has permeated the other two, modifying their racial characteristics, language and mode of life.

The Newaris are generally regarded as the primeval dwellers in the Katmandu Valley. At all events they are responsible for all the architectural and artistic monuments so abundantly scattered over it. The Newaris are short, most often slender, with a pale yellowish complexion. The cheek-bones are somewhat prominent and the face squarish, with black hair and a very scanty beard in men of mature age only. This outward appearance would in itself confirm a distant Mongol ancestry, and lead the observer to reject the Newari legend that they originated in south India.

The house of the better-off Newari consists of several rooms, either one beyond the other horizontally or one above the other vertically in two or three stories. Perhaps the house of my friend Purna Harsha in Katmandu may be taken as typical. On the ground floor, on the side facing the street, there are shops, and facing the courtyard an empty space intended for cows and farming tools, though not in use at present as he has no cows or tools. After crossing a small square yard with some stone and wooden idols on the wall, we go up to the first floor, where the one room, which is fairly large, is the reception room. Although it contains one chair and a small table in the Western style,

my friend having spent two years in Italy, we generally left our shoes outside and sat on the carpet. Only when we had become close friends did he invite me to the second floor, in which was his work-room, and explain that on the same floor were also the family dining-room and the kitchen. On the third floor were the bedrooms and also a small closed room never entered except by members of the family: the tiny chapel, a place large enough to carry out certain religious ceremonies or to meditate in solitude.

The Newaris are Buddhists, but many of their customs are not found anywhere else.

The birth of a child is an event in which the whole family takes part. Two days after birth, when the umbilical cord of the infant is cut, parents, grandparents and all the family file in front of the baby and assemble in the room in which the child was born, to submit to a purification ceremony. The infant itself is washed with sesame oil.

Often I saw, in some side street of Katmandu, and in other towns, a naked woman sitting in the street outside the door of her house. Only when I came very near would she throw a piece of cloth over her lap. When I asked questions I was told that she had just given birth to a child. After the second-day ceremony the straw that was spread on the floor for the birth is burned, and afterwards the mother must sit naked outside the house for eight days, during which her aunt or elder sister massages her with oil twice a day. During this whole period she does not conceal her nakedness from either family or strangers.

Rice is given for the first time to a girl baby at five months and a boy baby at six. This ceremony, too, is important and is a new opportunity for a family gathering, a communal meal and the bringing of gifts for the baby. At seven years old both boys and girls have their ears pierced. In the same ceremony the boy has his first haircut. Before the barber begins his work, the paternal uncle of the child pretends to cut the boy's hair. When the work has been done, the maternal aunt of the boy gives the barber a complete set of clothes. The boy is given an assortment of sweetmeats, which he must not eat, but throw at the barber. The cut hair of the boy is collected in a bronze box and thrown into a river as part of a religious ceremony.

The next important celebration is at the age of twelve, when the boy is taught how to fasten his loincloth and at the same age

a girl is married to a citrus fruit called a *bel*. The significance of this wedding is that widows in general do not have the right to remarry, but the Newari woman never becomes a widow, for even if her real husband dies the *bel*, her first husband, survives, and therefore she may marry again.

Her first menstruation is marked by another important ceremony, which is perhaps the harshest experience in her life. During this difficult time the girl is shut up for twelve days in a dark room, quite alone, with no one permitted to visit her; even her food is given her through a window or a half-opened door. At last on the twelfth day her aunt comes and puts a betel nut in her mouth, while another woman cuts her nails. On the following day light is let into the room and a priest performs a purifying ceremony. Thus purified, the girl goes to the temple and prays in front of the elephant-headed figure of the god Ganesha, the god of good fortune. Of course this ceremony, too, cannot be allowed to pass without a family feast and many presents to the girl, who, from then onwards, is regarded as a woman.

A wedding is notable for the absence of the bridegroom during the whole ceremony, which is carried out by the bride and her companions. Child marriage is unknown to the Newaris. Divorce is easy for a Newari man, but the Newari woman does not have this right, and cannot go against the wish of her husband in the matter. At the wedding ceremony the exchange of duck eggs has a special importance. These appear in several other ceremonies, and at last when a corpse is laid on an improvised bier four duck eggs are placed at the corners. Only male members of the family accompany the corpse to the cremation ground, and on returning they smoke their faces in a purification ceremony.

The Newaris are a peaceful people. This is also shown by the fact that, though they are divided into castes, the Kshatriya or military caste is not found among them. There was never slavery among them, and there were no untouchables. Apart from the agricultural class called *jyapu* the Newaris are mostly artists, craftsmen and tradesmen, and as such they are unsurpassed in the whole country. They have now also filtered into government administration, but they are not recruited into the army.

The Newari language is related to Tibetan and Burmese,

and retains a monosyllabic character. It does not have a script of its own, but has adopted Sanskrit, which it has modified for its needs. Many Newari manuscripts in Sanskrit script and also a few in other Indian scripts have enriched Nepalese history and literature.

Related to the Newari are the Kirantis, who live in the eastern part of Nepal. They are mentioned in the ancient narrative *Mahabharata* and, as we have already seen in the chapters on Nepal's history, they have been, for a long time, the rulers of the Katmandu Valley. The chief tribes belonging to this group are Rais, Limbu, Khambu, Yakka and Yakthumba. There is now a tendency to call the whole group Rais, once the name only of their chiefs.

In religion these tribes call themselves sometimes Hindu, sometimes Buddhist, but in fact they practise the animism of primitive Tibet. At birth astrologers work out the horoscope of the infant, which will control all the actions of his future life. Three or four days after the birth of the infant, the father organizes a great banquet for the relatives. When the guests depart, they are given what is left of the food, insistently, and the social standing of the father is judged by the amount of food forced on the guests. In order that this event may be organized with sufficient pomp, it is often put off for several months—and after it misery often flies in at the window, but this does not matter, once honour has been saved.

The people of this region have a very cheerful disposition, and sing all day, even on the roads or working in the fields. I often heard women singing in unison as they stood up to mid-calf in mud, transplanting rice all day. Sometimes when they noticed me sitting or standing in the neighbourhood listening to their pleasant melodies, they passed some remarks with a smile and then continued to sing, improvising some verses that referred to me.

They have become very clever improvisers and singers of dialogues. This art is important in courtship. Generally a number of young men who want to marry the same girl meet, and then there is a dispute in song, with the girl, who, from constant practice, is generally more witty than her suitors. The rule is that a man who cannot answer one of her verses must fall out of the contest. But if the girl cannot answer one of the young men, she must marry him. A girl is very seldom stuck for

a reply. And this is precisely her weapon, for, if she likes one of the young men, she simply pretends to be at a loss and does not reply. On the following day the young man will visit her father with gifts and the feast will be prepared.

I was present at such a contest one Saturday afternoon—in Nepal Saturday is the festival day and Sunday a general working day—in a wide street in the suburbs of Katmandu. The actors were two young men, dressed in clean clothes, but bare-footed, squatting on the grassy verge of the street on one side, and on the other side, some twelve yards away, a mother and her two daughters, dressed in the style of prosperous peasants, stood by the wall. About thirty other people stood or sat about enjoying the fun of the sung debate between the two youths and one of the girls. Her sister was married, as one could see by the red line in the middle of her hair-parting. I noticed that the men always needed at least ten seconds to think of their replies, although they were taking part only every other time, while the girl fired off her verses as though she had prepared them long before. In fact most of the verses seemed to be customary ones.

A young man beside me translated some of the verses. One of the men praised the girl's beauty. She replied: "Many fishes in the water are beautiful; why do you not look at them?" The other man sang: "While the fishes swim in dumbness, your charming voice completes the beauty." She: "If you want a lovely song, who does that better than a bird?" He: "Neither fish nor bird has a warm heart, such as a man longs for to make a home." And so they continued for another twenty minutes, while not only the singing girl, but also her sister and mother, observed the young men. At a certain moment the mother made a very discreet signal with her eye to the girl, as if advising her to go. The girl accepted this, but not before she had the last word, which was roughly this: "Many people in the village and the town wear a skirt and a nose-ring; go on looking among them; certainly one of them will be just what you long for for your home." (The nose-ring is a characteristic feminine jewel, since most men too wear ear-rings.) While the last words of the verse were being pronounced the girl made a hasty retreat from the battlefield, so that no reply was possible. It seemed that neither young man was the girl's type—or the type to please her mother.

The Rais in eastern Nepal are very liberal in their marriage

laws. The only rule is that cousin marriages up to the third generation are forbidden, and marriages between the children of friends linked in *mit*—a friendship ritually established by a priest and confirmed in blood, or a kind of blood-brotherhood, known also in other parts of the country. Wives quite often elope with another man, and this is in itself sufficient grounds for a divorce and re-marriage. This makes the marriage system rather provisional.

The Rais, unlike the majority of the Nepalese, bury their dead in tombs, if the family can afford it in a wooden coffin, if not, wrapped in white linen, and they mark the tomb with a simple stone and a flag.

To this group two tribes must be added: the Sherpas and the Bhotias, both of more recent Tibetan origin than the others, although the Bhotias seem to have come from the neighbouring land of Bhutan. Both these tribes live along the Tibetan border, and in physical appearance, mode of life and even language they are very near to the Tibetans. In religion they are Lamaists, with a great desire to visit Lhasa once in their lives. The Sherpas have become world famous as porters at great heights, and all Himalayan expeditions take for granted the use of Sherpas as porters, porter-chiefs and even as climbing companions; for, apart from their amazing strength and ease of adaptation to heights, they show an astounding fidelity to their masters and comrades.

One morning I had a long talk with the young Sherpa, Pemba Norpu, who had had an accident in the recent British expedition to Machu Puchari, and had one leg in plaster, and the fifty-five-year-old, already famous, Dava Tensing Sirdar, porter-chief. He is a veteran of the Cho Oyu expedition of Shipton in 1952, of the successful Everest expedition in 1953, of the Hillary expedition to Makalu, and he has climbed on Kanchenjunga and Annapurna with Evans and with the Swiss expedition on Everest in 1956. Of all these expeditions he says his favourite is that to Kanchenjunga, where there was splendid co-operation between the Europeans and the Sherpas. He loves mountains, and would like to lead an expedition of his own some day. In his village, Khumjung, ten days' march from Katmandu and only a few hours away from Solokumbu, the birthplace of Tensing Norgay, the people traditionally occupy themselves growing millet and potatoes and trading with Tibet.

But in recent years many men have worked as porters for expeditions. He said that in some villages one woman marries several brothers, but not in his village. To be photographed he put on his Western-style coat with several medals, which he explained to me. After so much contact with Europeans, he still wears long plaits of hair, which go round his head. Why? Because his good friend Evans would not let him cut them off.

Two hours later, when I was dining with Colonel Proud, the Chargé d'Affaires to the British Embassy in Katmandu, Dr. Charles Evans confirmed what the Sherpa had said. On this occasion the world-famous mountain climber had come, so he told me, only to take a walk as far as Namche Bazar with his new wife, to introduce "The Mountain" to her. But I was almost certain that in passing he would study some new possibility of climbing some "hill".

West of Katmandu there are two tribes who are recognized as being of Mongolian origin. They are the Gurungs and the Magars. The first live mostly in the mountains, the second further south, in the undulating and flat regions. Both tribes are Buddhist, but their religion and customs, especially those of the Magars, are much modified under the influence of the migrants from India who have mixed with them by marriage. In this way both their racial type and their language have undergone much modification.

The Gurungs are divided into two castes. According to legend, a king of the tribe Takur sought the daughter of the Gurung ruler in marriage. The latter sent a beautiful girl, who was in fact not the princess but a slave. But the practical joke was not discovered until the girl was already mother to three princes. After a bitter protest and some threats, the true princess was sent to be the second wife of the Takur king. According to legend, the descendants of the princess are upper-caste Gurungs and the descendants of the slave-girl are lower-caste Gurungs.

The Magars are divided into six main sub-tribes, whose names are: Ale, Pun, Rana, Buda or Budathoki, Gharti and Thapa.

When I had this list before me for the first time, I noticed a curious coincidence. The Hungarians, Mongol in origin, call themselves Magyars, and this other Mongol people has almost the same name, Magar. The old part of the Hungarian capital

is Buda, and near it there is the small town of Budafok, whose inhabitants are Budafoki in Hungarian. Among the central Asian Magars one sub-tribe is called Buda or Budathoki. Also the name of another sub-tribe, the Pun, is very like Hung, which was the racial name of the Hungarians when they came from Asia something over a thousand years ago. Afterwards I began to investigate, and found that about half of all the family names of the Magars would not be out of place among the Magyars. Naturally I became most enthusiastic about this discovery, and wrote to the Scientific Academy of Budapest at once about my observation, asking if it would be worth while for me to carry out further researches in this field. But three months later I received a disappointing reply. The Secretary of the Academy wrote that this "phonetic coincidence" had been observed already some fifty years earlier, but that today it was regarded as no more than coincidence, and that it is impossible for there to be any relationship between the Magars and the Magyars. So the reader should not allow himself to be infected by my blundering enthusiasm. Blundering, at least, until someone proves otherwise. . . .

Among the Gurungs and the Magars the birth of a child is celebrated for eleven days. For ten of these only the members of the family take part, and on the eleventh there is a great feast to which guests are invited. The feast for the birth of a boy is especially splendid, for only a son can take proper care of the funeral ceremony for his father. The name of the child, or at least its first letter, is given by the astrologer according to the child's horoscope. After the age of five boys and girls may be married, which is done by the future father-in-law giving the girl a gold ring. In fact, child marriages occur only among high-caste people, while others marry between fifteen and eighteen.

A man may have several wives, but is married to only the first with special ceremonies. Those who follow, like remarried widows and concubines, are regarded as second-class wives.

In the past, if a wife was unfaithful her husband was entitled to cut off her nose, and upper lip. This, however, could be done only for a first adultery. I do not know why, but someone has commented that it may be because most wives have only one nose. But this "right" punishes not only her, but also the revengeful husband, who continues to live with a mutilated

woman. However, that is not the end of the matter by any means; the injured husband was also entitled to cut the lover into pieces with his *khukri*. Jang Bahadur modified this unwritten law, commanding that the offender should first be imprisoned, and that the execution might begin only when his guilt had been proved. In a public place and in the presence of the people, the husband gave him a few yards' start and both began to run at the same time. If the husband caught the lover, he could kill him with the *khukri*. But if he succeeded in escaping, the case was closed for ever. The offender could also accept, instead of death, the humiliation of crawling under the feet of the husband, an act by which he also lost his caste. But it is said that this hardly ever happened; everyone preferred death to such a humiliation. Now, of course, this custom has faded into ancient history.

Another example of justice in Nepal is the ordeal which was in use in the Katmandu Valley until the beginning of this century. To decide guilt in a trial, the judge wrote the names of the two opponents on two pieces of paper, and put these, rolled into balls, into the two ends of a reed. Two court officers carried the reed to the basin called Rani Pokhari, where two men of the leatherworkers' caste, after saying a suitable prayer, dived under the water. When the first of them came up, the half of the cane that was on his side, together with the bit of paper, was destroyed. The other half of the cane was carried to the judgement hall, where the name of the "guilty party" was revealed. Thus justice was entirely a game of chance.

The Magars and Gurungs are very fine fighting men and contribute most soldiers to the army.

Higher than these in the social scale stand the tribes Thakur and Khas. The Thakurs claim that they are of royal descent from somewhere in India. They are divided into several clans, and from the highest of these, the clan Shah, the kings of Nepal come. The members of this tribe are pale-skinned, handsome and intelligent.

The Khas are also proud of their descent. Their name is mentioned in ancient writings as early as A.D. 1000, as a people coming from Rajasthan in India.

Lastly, the Brahmins. These are the purest representatives of the immigrants from India in various historical epochs. However, they do not belong to one tribe or even to one nation,

but to the highest caste of the Hindu social system. When the Brahmins came to Nepal, they forced upon the people of that country the caste system, since this established them in a privileged position. And today in Nepal the people is divided into castes, not only those who are Hindus by religion, but also the Buddhists, who nowhere else have any concept of such differences, so essentially contradictory to the teaching of Buddha.

The immigrant Brahmins gave their own priestly caste to no one in Nepal. However, for Buddhists the caste Banra of the Newari priests has the same status, and in the north the Lamas enjoy similar privileges.

The sons of Brahmins and of women of the Gurung and Magar tribes were received into the Kshatriya or soldier caste. The tribes Thakur and Khas automatically entered the same caste. Everyone in the country who accepted the Hindu religion was automatically accepted into the Vaisya caste, that is, the third caste, and the city-dwellers entered the caste in accordance with the profession or trade of each person, whether Hindu or Buddhist.

Only members of the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes use the sacred thread, which is a white thread hanging from one shoulder to the opposite hip. This mark of belonging to a caste is given by the priest at an important ceremony when a boy is of a certain age, and is never removed unless to be replaced by a new one. It is washed every day, but on the body itself.

Contact between members of different castes is forbidden. This prohibition concerns chiefly eating, drinking and sexual relations. But if such a thing should happen, a proper purification ceremony, with prayers and gifts of money to the priests, is possible. According to the law, if someone pretends to be of a caste superior to his own and so induces a member of another caste to eat, drink or have sexual intercourse with him, he may be punished by a fine or imprisonment.

But we have already said that often the Brahmins had relations with Gurung and Magar women. From these relations a quite new tribe resulted, the Chetri, whose members are Kshatriya by caste, as are the descendants of Brahmins and Thakur or Khas women.

Because of these mixed unions and also because of the many occupations, each of which has a special place in the social

hierarchy, castes and sub-castes have now multiplied until there are some sixty-four. For example, the son of a Chetri man with a Magar or Gurung woman (rather lower in the social scale than he) is by name a Chetri, but by the strict rules a true Chetri, even his own father, would never have the right to eat with him. But if the woman is a widow, this again changes the caste of the child and gives him a special family name. Thus everyone has to remember with what caste members he has the right to eat, with whom he may eat anything except rice, with whom he may eat but not drink, with whom he may drink anything except wine, and so on. The lowest caste in the social scale is that of the sweepers, and a little above them come the leatherworkers and fishermen.

In India, the untouchables, who are outside caste, had not the right to enter temples, take water from the common well or go to public meetings. Untouchability in this sense does not exist in Nepal. Here temple entry is permitted to all, and in some temples even the guards and priests' assistants are members of the lowest castes.

All the slaves liberated in 1924 formed a new caste with the name Shiva Bhakti, and they may marry only among themselves.

In the morning, on rising, the Nepalese drink tea with milk and plenty of sugar and spices, but take nothing to eat. They dine at ten. At about midday they drink another cup of tea and perhaps eat some sweetmeat, and have supper at six in the evening. Because of this time-table, offices in Katmandu are open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The main meal consists of rice, except in the poor villages of the mountains, where it is replaced by millet. Potatoes, lentils, some leaves resembling spinach, are also used, all with plenty of spice, especially paprika. Eggs, chicken and goat complete the diet of Nepalese in comfortable circumstances. Buffalo meat is also eaten by some tribes and castes, but this is revolting to a good Hindu. There are many food taboos among the Nepalese. For example, an orthodox Brahmin is a hundred per cent. vegetarian. He never touches even an egg. However, this does not necessarily mean a meagre menu. I was once invited to supper at the home of my friend Keshab Ram Josi, a young Brahmin astronomer. The family name Josi in itself means "astrologer", and he tried to show that his ancestors for at least seven generations had been astrologers.

His father still practises this art, but he himself, bringing tradition up to date, was studying astronomy. That evening we sat cross-legged on a mat, father and son one on each side of me, each with ten plates round him full of various vegetables, roots and cereals, of which more than half were unknown to me. Two dishes were sweet, one of them being a milk dish. Before the meal ended, the mother and sister of my friend, who had waited on us all the time, brought very thick black tea, into which my friend put a large piece of salt, rancid yak butter, as is the Tibetan custom. It was the first time I had taken this drink—I say “taken”, as “enjoyed” would be rather an overstatement. When I ate with my young friend Shri Prakash Rana the food was served on a large nickel-plated dish with square and triangular holes for the various items of food and a larger oval hole in the centre for the rice. The middle classes in Nepal eat with a spoon, whereas in neighbouring India, which is under much more direct Western influence, even an educated city man prefers at home to eat with his fingers. It is a general custom that the women of the house do not eat with the men, but after them, in the kitchen, eating what they leave, though not from their plates.

To kill a cow or bull is a grave crime in Nepal, and the fact that we Europeans eat the meat of the sacred animal makes us barbarians in their eyes. However, there is one caste that eats it readily. This is the caste of leatherworkers. When a cow dies, the leatherworkers are called and carry it away to make the hide into shoes. It is not surprising that, seeing so much meat, they began to eat it, and now this is an accepted fact. They are already so low in the social scale that this cannot make things much worse for them. Apart from them, the Kirantis in the east are the last eaters of beef. Two hundred years ago Pritvi Narayan attacked and conquered their country under the pretext that they “still practise the ancient and savage custom of eating the flesh of cows”. The Magars and Gurungs and several other tribes also do not eat goat meat from female goats, while the Rais will not touch even he-goat’s meat. Some tribes are horrified at the sight of fish, while for others it is a great delicacy.

In almost the whole of Nepal a kind of brandy made from rice is prepared, and both men and women, especially in the villages, are very fond of it.

According to tradition, the Nepalese eat with the right hand only and do not wear shoes at meals. Before beginning to eat they give a small piece to a dog, and at the end of the meal they dedicate a small piece to the gods, with palms together.

Men and women smoke cigarettes, generally rolled in leaves, but those rolled in paper which are now being imported from India on a large scale are undoubtedly conquering the market. In smoking they do not put the cigarette in the mouth, but make a cigarette-holder of the hand, always drawing the smoke through a hole formed by the thumb and index finger, and holding the cigarette either at the other end in a hole formed by the little finger, or between the little finger and the ring finger, or possibly between the index finger and the middle finger. When I asked the reason for this I was told that most people are poor and hardly ever smoke a whole cigarette, but give part of it to someone else, who would not like to take it if it had been in someone else's mouth. I observed that this was true: on an average every cigarette was smoked by two persons, and some by three. But at home or in his shop the Nepalese prefers his Narghile, in which the tobacco, mixed with a little hashish, burns on red coals and the smoke passes through a round water-vessel before it goes to the smoker's mouth by a long, straight tube.

It is said that the very powerful malaria called *arval* which kills all who visit the south-western jungle regions during the monsoon season is quite powerless against the Tharu tribe, which is immune.

In the Doti region the peasants have the curious privilege of using state land and paying for it by giving their women to the army as prostitutes. Recently the government tried to replace this system of payment by another, but the villagers protested indignantly.

The name Gurkha is sometimes applied to Nepalese generally, but most proud of that name are the Magars and Gurungs, who give the largest number of soldiers to the so-called Gurkha regiments serving abroad. The history of these regiments began in 1815, when the British for the first time defeated Nepalese troops. Then many soldiers from the broken forces of Amar Singh Thapa joined the British army. Their families were persecuted in Nepal. In 1816, after the peace treaty was signed, the British, who recognized the fine fighting qualities of the

Nepalese soldier, won the right to recruit volunteers for a paid army. Since then the Gurkha regiments have always existed, though the size has fluctuated. The number of Nepalese soldiers involved in the First World War was something like 200,000, of whom 20,000 perished on the field of battle.

Several British officers of Gurkha regiments have described their experiences, and I was able to converse with some of them. They all agreed that the Gurkhas were among the finest soldiers in the world; their courage and loyalty are generally praised.

The part played by Gurkhas in the Second World War was also large. After it, when the lands of southern Asia became independent, the Gurkha regiments remained within the framework of the Indian and Malayan armies and the Burmese police forces, and a great many demobilized soldiers might be seen doing the duties of night watchmen and janitors in the whole of southern Asia. The *khukri*, a large curved knife carried in the belt, distinguishes them. The Nepalese learns to use this weapon at a very early age, and it is said that if the *khukri* is drawn from its sheath by an angry Gurkha, then blood must be shed. If he then changes his mind, he is ready to cut his own finger so as not to disobey the tradition. His extraordinary skill in manipulating the *khukri* in battle has given rise to the legend that he throws it at his enemy; in fact it is never used as a throwing weapon. Indeed, he does not need to throw it while he can take a few steps forward.

This, at least, I was told by Kul Bahadur Gurung, while we chatted, sitting on the steps of the courtyard of the Royal Hotel in Katmandu, where he now works as a guard. His birthplace is the village Bankata, in the western mountains, from which he sees the snowy peaks of Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, and, if he climbs a small height, also the sharp pyramid of Macha Puchari on the horizon. The slopes of the mountains are wooded, and in spring the abundant rhododendrons give an extraordinary charm to the little village, filling everything with pink flowers. The house of Kul Bahadur is not large, and there are eleven people in his family community. The family is employed chiefly in agriculture, producing maize and millet, as the place is rather too cold for rice. The father of the family also acts as the village priest. They belong to the sub-tribe Koronja of the Gurung tribe, and the members of this group

never inter-marry, although they are obliged to marry someone from the Gurung tribe.

Kul Bahadur joined the army in 1941. When I asked him why, he said that in his village every young man wished to become a soldier. This desire is already in their blood. He himself had two brothers and five cousins in Gurkha regiments. When they came home from time to time, in fine uniforms and with several medals, they were received with great respect by the villagers. They brought fine clothes as presents for their family, and also money for the home. And when they began to tell tales of their experiences in distant lands, their families would listen for hours. Naturally the young men were the most eager listeners. They all wanted to imitate these brave men, and some day come home with glory and money, after visiting so many far countries.

“And how did you join the army? Tell me.”

“I had to walk for three days and travel by lorry one day to reach Gorakhpur in India.”

The British were not entitled to send recruiting commissions into Nepal itself. But they employed Nepalese retired soldiers as their go-betweens. One of these led Kul Bahadur and several other young men over the frontier. On the following day the go-between advised the young men to wash themselves thoroughly for the medical examination. Kul Bahadur was accepted and received a uniform and five rupees; he was then transported to Dehra Dun. There he was taught army discipline and drill, which are very congenial to all Nepalese.

The six medal ribbons in a row on the breast of Kul Bahadur indicate that he is a brave soldier. How did he earn them? In Burma he fought the Japanese in 1944, and on one occasion with some of his comrades, he was without food for a week, but they did not surrender their position. On another occasion, in Indo-China, in 1955, his detachment reconquered a fort by extraordinary sacrifices . . . on a third occasion, in Borneo, he saved the lives of several comrades, keeping the enemy at bay with shots from two rifles. . . . Those little coloured ribbons represented a whole rosary of bloody deeds.

Every second or third year he came home with presents, small sums of money and glory, for a brief rest.

But at the beginning of 1957 he left the army. He had seen enough of the world, piled up glory enough, and decided to

return to his homeland. Thenceforth he worked as a hotel guard, showing his soldierly discipline and those rather rigid movements which have become second nature to him. He receives an annual pension.

That is the story of a typical Gurkha soldier.

X

HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, TANTRISM

IN NEPAL, as in most Oriental lands, religion is so intimately interwoven with daily life that we meet it at every step. The simplest acts, such as washing one's hands, eating, dressing, and all natural phenomena such as rain, the phases of the moon or the flowering of a tree, are in some way connected with religious beliefs and with some kind of ceremony.

Two thousand years ago the majority of the Nepalese were followers of the doctrine of their famous fellow-countryman, Gautama the Buddha. From then until the present day, Indians, immigrating in various epochs, have brought with them the Hindu religion of the Brahmins and forced it upon the natives, together with their way of life and social order. Thus, one might say, simplifying the problem, that in the southern regions of Nepal Hinduism prevails, in the north, Buddhism, while in the middle—that is, in the greater part of the country—both religions have become mixed, and co-exist not only in the same town, but in the same temple and, even more, in the minds and hearts of the people and in their complicated ceremonies.

Extravagant theories have at times forced their way into both religious philosophies, even more extravagant practice has arisen. Thus the sect known as Shaktism or Tantrism was created. It controlled certain groups of both Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal, and exists as a sect of both religions.

Hinduism is not like any other religion; in fact it is not a religion in the usual sense. Other religions have established certain principles, dogmas and ethical rules, which they try to make their members follow. The Hindu religion is more than that: it is the way of life, the principles, the tradition and the literature of the Indian people, sanctioned by the blessing of the intelligentsia, the Brahmins.

Thus it is not possible to speak of some founder of Hinduism, as one can of other religions, nor to define the year or even the epoch in which it began. It was created little by little, through many centuries, adopting legends, gods and customs from

various parts of India, and transforming them, by the inexhaustible creative genius of the Indian people, into a rich system of life. It contains so many diverse and even contradictory elements that at times one begins to wonder if it can really be regarded as a unity. For example, on the one side it commands not only animal but even human sacrifices, such as the burning alive of widows, but on the other hand it forbids meat-eating or the accidental killing of an insect; on the one hand it recommends an ascetic life dedicated to meditation, while on the other hand it commands the strangest sexual orgies. The answer is that Hinduism is a dynamic religion, open to evolution according to place and time, and that it adapts its precepts to the needs of its members.

The most ancient of the Hindu sacred writings is the *Rig Veda*, an anthology of hymns written by many authors and collected several hundred years before Christ. These are followed by one hundred and eight volumes called *Upanishad*, written during several centuries, in which the philosophical ideas of the epoch are explained in story form. During the first century A.D. the great epic of the Mahabharata appeared, as a result of the literary talent of many authors who were separated in time and space. Gods and heroes from this narrative belong to the Hindu religion.

But the most sacred part of it is the *Bhagavat Gita*, on whose philosophy several sects are based. At about the same time appeared the other great epic, the *Ramayana*, written down by a poet named Valmiki; its chief characters too entered the Hindu religion as gods. Innumerable books called *Purana* ("ancient things"), written at this period, collect not only stories and comments on them, but also philosophical and theological arguments. Many hundreds of books under the name *Brahmana* present collections of rites and ceremonies, especially those relating to sacrifices. A great part of this literature is written in Sanskrit, and only part of the *Purana* and others is to be found in the regional languages of India. It gives evidence of the great creative capacity and also the great capacity for metaphysical reflection of the Indian people in all epochs of history.

The many works, and even parts of a single book, were written by different people, living in different kingdoms, in different centuries and often in very dissimilar circumstances.

Most often they knew very little about the ideas of their contemporaries, for the books, copied by hand, spread very slowly. Thus it is not remarkable that Hindu religious literature is full of contradictions and various presentations of the same events, as also of varying philosophical interpretations. However, there are some questions of general principles on which all Hindus are agreed.

All Hindu philosophers believe in *polytheistic pantheism*. They accept the existence of many gods, some of whom they worship, while they magnanimously recognize and adopt many others, for all the gods, formless or in the form of man, beast, plant, stone or water, are all various manifestations of a single Universal Spirit. Yet the ordinary Hindu is a monotheist; believing in innumerable gods, he recognizes one chief god, who, for him, is at the same time all the other gods. When he says "My God" to Shiva or Vishnu, he prays at the same time to all spirits.

Also all Hindus are agreed that our present life is only a fragment in a long chain of lives, in which the soul is reincarnated, using bodies one after the other, like clothes. There is a diversity in the details of this creed. The Vedanta philosophy, the most ancient, regards the soul of a human being as distinguishable not only from the body but also from the character and intellect. However, when it leaves the body the soul hovers away, surrounded by a transparent substance similar to the abandoned body—the "subtle body".

All believe in *Karma* which means "action": our present life is the result of the actions of all our previous lives; so the Hindus are not fatalists; it is not a creator who decides our future, but, to a great extent, we ourselves.

Thus our life—all our lives—are provisional, disagreeable and sometimes tormented states of being, and the dream of the good Hindu is to reach so high a level of spiritual life that the series of earthly lives may come to an end and the soul, instead of a new reincarnation, may come into the presence of Brahma, where it will remain in a changeless state, in union with the Universal Spirit and in eternal rest. No one knows how near he is to this goal, but certainly everyone can, during this life, come near to this ideal by well-intentioned purity in his conduct, and approach the divine spheres by shaping his soul in special practices, especially meditation.

The life of a male Hindu is divided into four parts, each lasting twenty-five years. During the first part one is a pupil. During the second one lives as the master of a house. During the third one is dedicated to teaching and renounces married life, and during the fourth part one must retire to uninhabited places in the mountains or the forests, or perhaps to the solitude of a monastery, to meditate. *Sanyatsin* is the name of these solitaries, and it is the duty of every pious person to give them food.

Many Hindus anticipate age by an early initiation into meditation, like the *sadhus*, religious beggars and other ascetics of various kinds. *Yoga* is based on the idea that fasting, torture and meditation together are able to create a mental condition, in which the Yogi has supernatural experiences, real or imaginary. The first phase in this procedure is to attain perfect physical health by self-torture, in order to set the mind free from bodily cares. Even though this may seem a paradox, *Yoga* exercises are in fact very conducive to health, and the torture gradually decreases; I can confirm this from my own brief personal experience. When one achieves a kind of insensitivity of the body, the intellect can be set free, concentrated, and the soul can fly at will.

Hatha Yoga is a system for attaining mental states by physical methods, while *Raja Yoga* is the attainment of ecstasy by a mental process.

The *Hatha Yoga* consists of eight parts :

1. Practice of the morality of renunciation.
2. Self-torture and purificatory exercises.
3. The attainment of ease in suitable bodily postures.
4. Control of the respiratory system.
5. Isolation of the senses from the external world and turning of them inwards.
6. Concentration of the thoughts on a single object.
7. Attainment of a smooth flow of thought between the mind and the object, without the distraction of other thought.
8. Attainment of a state, in which the mind is identified with the object of thought to such a degree that consciousness of the separate existence of both comes to an end.

This last part has several separate stages, which may be divided chiefly into conscious and unconscious. At first a sense of joy invades the mind, but later, in the state known as *Dharma-megha*, this sense of joy is replaced by an apathy in which the soul becomes isolated from the material, including the mind, and *karma*, the active life, ceases. After *Dharma-megha*, in a higher state, the consciousness disappears, the Yogi falls into a trance and attains provisional emancipation of the soul. Death may make this state permanent.

According to the Hindu creed, therefore, the soul or *atman* is clearly distinguishable from and independent of organs and their functions, and only uses the intellect and senses as its instruments. It is eternal and unchanging.

Four stages are recognized in the life of the soul: awake, dreaming in sleep, sleep without dreaming, and the "fourth stage" which appears to be that of the soul set free from the body.

Yogis or fakirs sometimes succeed in achieving miracles, whose objective truth is disputed; but such miracles are not essential or necessary to the attainment of liberation.

Paradise, in which there is a life something like our earthly one, is not a Hindu concept. The final liberation of the soul signifies only a constant condition of ecstatic union with the Universal Spirit. Also hell does not exist, although various hellish worlds are mentioned, in which, however, the soul remains only provisionally, until it is liberated by its own merits. Thus it is a kind of purgatory. But no Hindu would accept as just the idea that our eternal happiness in a paradisaal existence or our eternal suffering in the torments of hell depends on our conduct in this one life, as the Christian religions teach.

For Westerners man is the centre of creation, and the whole natural world is at his disposal. For Orientals man is a part of nature, and must live in harmony with its various manifestations. These harmonious relations, and also relations between human beings, are taught in the twelve books of the collection known as the Code of Manu. This is the Brahmin and Kshatriya code of laws, the most holy book after the Vedas, compiled some two thousand years ago. According to it, each Brahmin must every day practise the five chief virtues, of which hospitality is one, to create good conditions for his next incarnation. For an evil deed he will be reborn as a stone; for an evil word,

as a bird or animal; for an evil thought, as a man of low caste. But moral conduct is only an instrument for attaining bliss, and in no way an aim or ideal.

Images and temples are not necessary, since God is equally in every place and in every object, so the most important part of the Hindu cult takes place at home, in daily life or in a private corner during meditation.

In the most ancient times when the Aryans came to India from the North, they had no temples and their gods were not at all, or very nebulously, personified. In these ancient Vedic times the chief star in the Aryan firmament was the fire-god Agni, who had mainly three aspects, representing fire upon earth achieved by rubbing two pieces of wood, the fire of lightning and the fire of the sun. Because of this he was first represented as a human figure with three heads and three tongues. *Soma* was a sacred plant, considered not as the dwelling place of a god, but as the very ruler of immortality. *Indra* was the divine protector of the Aryans in their struggle with the native Dravidians. He is the only god who is still adored under the same name. *Varuna* is the creator. He created the sky and the earth, and arranged the sun and the stars. He calculates even the eye-blinkings of men.

Afterwards the Greeks, Persians and Huns invaded India, and brought new ideas, and while the original Aryan creed adopted the local gods and religions of the conquered regions of India, under Western influence the sculptured representation of the gods began to flourish. And at the same time the places where these works of art were preserved attracted more and more visitors, thus creating the temples and places of pilgrimage which, as the centuries passed, multiplied to incredible numbers and collected art treasures which could not be destroyed by even the most diligent destructiveness of the Moslem invaders.

According to an old writing the Hindu religion has three hundred million gods; since then the number must have increased considerably. There are the many great spirits—good and evil—sung in the ancient Indian epics and other books; then all the idols representing them are separately worshipped and deified. All Brahmins and other people who devote rather more attention to religion or meditation than the average man are regarded in India as saints. Outstanding religious men are

adored when dead, and every soul that has left the body has qualities of holiness after the ceremonies have been properly performed.

Many other features of nature such as animals are regarded as holy. If we reckon only the two most sacred species, cattle and monkeys, their numbers would give us the figure calculated in the ancient writing. But we must add that also trees such as the banyan, the poplar, the *tulasi* and several other plants are sacred, that not only the Ganges but many other rivers and lakes and innumerable artificial basins enjoy this privilege. Every projecting stone or round stone or hole in the ground is worthy of adoration. A flower, ashes, water or oil which has been in contact with an idol or a shrine is impregnated with sanctity. Apparatus used in ceremonies—prayer books, rosaries, certain words, letters, sounds, hand gestures and bodily postures, to mention but a few—are sacred.

The chief representative of the superior spirit is *Brahma*. He is so sublime that neither idol nor temple is made for him, so that all may adore him in the most congenial form and under the name preferred. His three great emanations are *Brahmaa* (not to be confused with *Brahma*), *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. *Brahmaa* is the creator. According to one *purana* he came out of an egg, in which the whole world was enclosed before the creation. According to the *Mahabharata* he was born from a lotus which grew out of the navel of *Vishnu*. Although the reporters are not entirely in agreement about the matter, it seems that he created the waters and the earth first. Immediately afterwards he made a number of Brahman sages and four women, to produce the human race. The Kshatriya caste sprang from his arm, the Vaisya caste from his legs and the Sudra, the servant caste, from his feet. The sun came from his eyes and the moon from his mind. He is represented as a man, coloured red, often with four heads and riding on a goose, which is his celestial steed.

Like all other gods, *Brahmaa* has a wife. She is *Sarasvati*, the goddess of arts and sciences, riding on a peacock and playing a kind of cittern. Students worship her and pray for her favour on examination days. But *Brahmaa* had another wife, the milkmaid *Gayatri*. It happened thus: the gods had assembled to make a sacrifice, but the ceremony could not begin, because the wife of *Brahmaa* was absent. She was late because she took so long to adorn herself. Then *Indra* brought in a milkmaid

who was passing, and the priests married her to him. When Sarasvati arrived, she made a scene from jealousy, but eventually accepted Gayatri as her co-wife.

Vishnu is the preserver of what his colleague Brahmaa has created. A great many Hindus regard him as their chief god and adore him, adoring all others through him. The name of this sect is Vaishnava, and its adepts may be recognized by a V-shaped symbol painted on the forehead and on the temples. In some districts the orthodox Vaishnavites, even when sweeping the floor, move the broom only forward and backward ("vertically") to distinguish themselves from the housewives who worship Shiva and sweep from right to left ("horizontally") and who are painted with horizontal stripes on the forehead.

His picture or status is painted blue or black, and he rides on Garuda, a combination of a bird and human form. He has four hands. In one he holds a discus, which is a terrible weapon in his hand, in one a snail shell, in the third a club and in the fourth a lotus.

On earth he has presented himself in nine forms, which are known as his nine *avatars*, in the following sequence :

1. *Matsya* was his name as a fish. He took this form to save the sacred Veda-book, stolen by a demon. In this form he announced the flood to a king.
2. As an enormous tortoise, the "Kurmavatara", he appeared to support the earth while the gods churned the ocean with it.
3. The third avatar of Vishnu was a boar or "Varaha". Like the first two, this was related to the flood. On this occasion, when the earth was drowned in the ocean by an evil demon, he took it out and supported it with his tusks.
4. *Narasinha* avatar, the man-lion, appeared to punish the demon Harinjakasipu, who wished to be superior to Vishnu himself. After worshipping and making sacrifices the demon received the privilege of being invulnerable to any man or beast, by day or by night, in the house or outside it, and by any weapon whatever. With this privilege he felt he was the master of the world and began to defy the gods, until suddenly Vishnu appeared from a pillar as a man-lion (neither man nor beast), and

at twilight (neither day nor night), dragged the demon out on to the threshold of his house (neither inside nor outside) and there himself, with no weapon, tore him to pieces with his own claws.

5. Vishnu appeared in the form of a dwarf called *Vamana* to humble the powerful king, Maha Bali, ruler of three regions, the earth, the sky and the infernal regions. The dwarf asked the king if he might have as a gift only as much space as he could measure in three strides. When this was granted, he grew into a giant and by the first stride covered the earth, by the second the sky; when he prepared to take the third Maha Bali prostrated himself before him, recognizing the god.
6. *Parasu Rama* was the sixth avatar of Vishnu, when, in the form of a young hero, he exterminated a race of tyrants.
7. The heroic and virtuous prince, *Rama Chandra*, was the next form in which Vishnu visited the earth. On this occasion it was to punish the monstrous giant Ravana, who ruled over the island of Lanka, and stole his wife *Sita*.

Their story is told magnificently in the epic *Ramayana*, written two thousand years ago and today as readable as an exciting detective story.

According to this story, Rama gained his wife by his extraordinary strength, breaking a mighty bow that the rival Ravana was unable to lift. But the latter turned himself into a deer on a suitable occasion, and, having stolen the lovely Sita, carried her away to Lanka, where the demon was king. In the struggle to recapture her, Rama received much help from a legion of monkeys, led by the monkey general *Hanuman*. Hanuman was such a fine fellow that he carried ten mountains to make a bridge between India and Ceylon so that the army could cross. But, not waiting for this to be completed, he leaped over the strait, burned the capital with his burning tail and finally carried back the captive, after a long battle, full of surprising incidents, between Rama and Ravana.

Rama is adored by many as a chief god. Sita generally enjoys the distinction of being a symbol of fidelity, and Hanuman, whom we have already met in the main square of Katmandu, is a representative of wisdom, much regarded by the Hindus.

Because of their helpfulness and courage in battle the entire monkey people, enjoys the privileges of sanctity.

8. But one of the most adored avatars of Vishnu is his appearance as *Krishna*, the happy cowherd. As he was the lover of sixteen thousand milkmaids he is appreciated mostly by women, who enjoy worshipping him and listening to or reading the innumerable anecdotes illustrating his love-affairs. He always has a dark skin and is portrayed in the embrace of one or other of his girl friends, or playing the flute to a group of ecstatic admirers. Once when Indra, who ruled the sky, decided to flood the fields, Krishna raised the mountain Govudun and supported it on his little finger to protect the cowherds from the mighty storm.

Krishna is also adored as a baby, and I found many lovely bronze images of a crawling infant in the holy places of Nepal. The reason for this adoration is that his uncle, the King Kansa, wished to kill him immediately after birth, and tried many methods, but all without success. The baby broke a giant to pieces, or killed the king of the serpents, or burned the bowels of the crocodile that swallowed him. On another occasion the King sent a giant in the form of a nurse to suckle the baby. She smeared her breast with poison, but the infant Krishna sucked out not only the milk, but also the blood of his nurse, who died. This episode is a favourite subject for the "Kathakali" dancers.

Krishna is usually adored in the company of his favourite mistress *Radha*, although he had eight other wives, of whom the chief was *Rukmini*.

9. The ninth avatar of Vishnu was *Buddha*, whom the flexible and tolerant Hindus adopted ; but we will speak of him later.
10. The tenth has not yet come. He is the avatar of the future, the "messiah" named *Kalki*. He will come at the end of the present era, as a heroic warrior riding a white horse, adorned with weapons and jewels and with wings on his back . . . and, perhaps, with hydrogen bombs. . . .

The divine wife of Vishnu is *Lakshmi*, goddess of wealth. He obtained her from the sea, from which she was born. She is usually painted yellow, sitting on a water-lily, with a lotus, a club or a shell in her hand. Here we must also mention again *Garuda*, the heavenly steed of Vishnu. He is generally to be seen on a column or stone pedestal in front of temples dedicated to Vishnu. Above a human body he has either a man's or a bird's head, but always two huge wings on his back. He is the symbol of strength and speed. His mother—so it is said—laid an egg, from which he was born five hundred years later. Immediately after his birth he grew to gigantic size, flew up to heaven and set the world on fire with his wings. Which was enough for a baby bird.

Shiva, also called *Mahadeva*, is the great god, the third of the trinity of ruling gods, a trinity not at all comparable with the Christian concept. Shiva is usually painted white or silver, with a third eye in his forehead, and, in the same place, a moon, which he caught in the sea. He is the destroyer and re-creator simultaneously. The sacred bull, *Nandi*, his heavenly steed, is never missing from his temples and his portraits, and very often his wife *Parvati* is sitting on his knee or beside him. He likes to deck himself in a tiger skin, and wear a serpent for a necklace. He is also portrayed as Time, the destroyer of all things. His usual attributes are a trident and a small double drum. As the Destroyer, he often appears with a rosary of skulls round his neck, dangling down to his knees, and a sword in his hand. When the destroyer, Time, no longer exists, Shiva will lose his terrible necklace and other symbols, to show that his kingdom has passed away and he will be trodden under the feet of *Mahakali*, Eternity. Shiva is the king of dancers, and the hundred and eight dance postures in which he is represented symbolize the "cosmic dance" of the Universe.

Two opposing forces are united in Shiva: destruction and re-creation. As the destroyer he is often represented in the form of *Bhairava*. This terrible god can be satisfied only by a blood-sacrifice. He once cut off the fifth head of Brahmaa with the nail of his thumb. He usually rides on a dog and has a sword in his hand. His terrifying grimace with four projecting canine teeth is also characteristic, and many statues of him are to be found in Nepal.

On the other hand, as the god of reproduction, he is sym-

bolized by the *Lingam*—a vertical stone pillar representing the male genital organ. This most usually stands in a base with a hole and a groove on one side, symbolizing the female sex, called *Yoni*. Millions of lingam-yoni symbols are worshipped, mostly by women, in India and Nepal, though most of the pious ladies not only do not think about the origin of the symbol, but are even ignorant of it.

The wife of Shiva, *Parvati*, is also very popular; he lives with her on the mountain, Kailasa, in the Himalayas. She has many names and forms, and her two sons are *Kumar* and *Ganesha*.

There was a tragedy immediately after the marriage. The bride of Shiva, who was then called *Shoti*, was invited to her father's palace without her husband, as the father-in-law did not like his divine son-in-law, whom he regarded as a vagabond who played with serpents and was decked with skulls. This contempt for her husband wounded *Shoti* so profoundly that she died, on the spot. Then Shiva arrived, took his wife, and, with her on his shoulder, began to dance over mountains and valleys. The gods were afraid that if Shiva did not stop this would cause the destruction of the world. After some discussion they decided that Shiva must be stopped by taking his wife's body from his shoulder. In order to do this, Vishnu flung his all-destroying discus on to her, and her body fell apart into fifty-one pieces, which were scattered over the country. Most of the places are now known as holy places. For example, where one of her finger-bones fell the famous Kali Temple in Calcutta now stands. On the Bagmati River in Nepal, very near to Pashupatinat, stands the temple of Guheshwari on the spot where, as the name itself tells us, her "secret parts" fell.

Another form of Parvati is that of *Durga*, whom Vishnu and Shiva created from the flame coming from their mouths, in order that she might slay the terrible demon Muhisha, who appeared in the form of an enormous buffalo; she did this with complete success and so won a high position among the gods. She is represented as yellow, with ten arms and many weapons in her hand, one foot on the conquered giant and the other knee on a lion. The cow is regarded as one of the forms of Durga. In certain parts of India and especially in Nepal she is celebrated with great enthusiasm; but more of that later.

Kali, or Mahakali, is another form of Parvati, wife of Shiva in his character of Time, the Destroyer. She is always black or

dark blue, trampling the body of Shiva, with a sword in one hand and a human head in the other. She is also characterized by a necklace of human heads or skulls, and her red tongue usually protrudes from her distorted mouth. Naturally this cruel-looking goddess expects suitable offerings; and at one time human beings were sacrificed, now only animals—but blood must always flow when devotees pray to Kali.

Maha Devi means literally “great goddess”, and as such some people know Lakshmi, others Sarasvati, but most Parvati, the wife of Shiva, who is indeed known as Mahadeva, the great god.

Bhavani is another of the forms of Parvati, as a personification of Nature. And the rich imagination of Hindu tradition has found a suitable way of showing the superiority of Nature over the whole creation. Thus Bhavani, being the mother of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, then multiplied herself to become the wife of all three chief gods. In spite of this luxuriant personality, she is not very popular among the Hindus.

The goddess *Annapurna* is a benevolent form of Parvati, who, as her name implies, “fills with food”. She is represented as a woman standing on a lotus flower, with a spoon in one hand and a vessel in the other to distribute food.

We have already met the plump *Ganesha*, the god with an elephant’s head. He brings good luck in everything, but especially in business. He is, like his brother Kuma, who has other names in other districts, the son of Parvati. Once when Parvati was bathing she collected the dirt from the water, and amused herself by modelling two babies. They began to grow, and she began to love them as her own real sons. One day, when she was attending to her *toilette*, she made her two sons stand at the door with instructions to let no one in. Suddenly, her husband Shiva arrived, and, angered by this refusal, killed one child and cut off the head of the other, not knowing they were the sons of Parvati. Naturally, the goddess was much distressed by this cruel action of Shiva, and he had to try to do something to mend matters. He brought Kumar back to life by breathing a soul into him, and promised to cut off, for Ganesha, the head of the first creature he should see, as a replacement. An elephant soon approached, and Shiva carried out his promise, with the result we have already seen.

The god of love is *Kamadeva*. He was first the son of Brahma, then was reborn in the family of Vishnu and Lakshmi, then in

that of Krishna and Rukmini. He is a young man riding on a parrot, with a bow and five flower-tipped arrows in his hand. He can appear anywhere, but his favourite hunting-ground is round about the River Jamuna, where Krishna plays with his sixteen thousand milkmaids, and where Kamadeva can be certain that his arrows will not miss.

Yama is the ruler of souls in the lower regions of the world. He is green, with red garments and a crown on his head. To come before him the soul must travel a long road spread with red-hot stones, under showers of molten metals and surrounded by snakes and tigers. After this pleasure trip the unfortunate soul appears before Yama, who sits on his throne and judges souls for their sins. Among his mild and almost fatherly judgments is, for example, the sentence he pronounces for disobedience to the Brahmins—to be burned in molten metal and pinched with red-hot pincers for three and a half million years!

There are also eight Mother Goddesses who almost always occupy the supporting poles of the roofs of pagodas in Nepal, with many-coloured robes and ornaments, several arms and many symbolic attributes, each riding or standing on her personal beast: *Brahmani* on a goose, *Budraini* on a bull, *Kumari* on a peacock, *Vishnavi* on Garuda, *Varahi* on a buffalo, *Indraini* on an elephant, *Kali* on a demon and *Mahalakshmi* on a lion. As the names of Mother Goddesses indicate, they are the female representatives of the gods already mentioned.

I shall briefly discuss the life of Prince Gautama and how he became Buddha, in a later chapter; here I will give a brief account of the religion founded by him.

Buddha did not reject the whole of Hinduism. He adopted many of its gods and beliefs, but regarded them as legends, without importance and with no relationship to the superior spiritual life. His chief teaching was the adoption of the "middle way" for the members of his religious order. The rules which define this middle way certainly seem too severe to a modern Occidental, but let us consider the epoch in which they were laid down. There was then, on the one side, the extremely luxurious life of the ruling classes in India, and on the other side the teachers and their disciples, who, protesting against this life, went to the other extreme, became homeless vagabonds, naked, collecting their food from refuse heaps, torturing

their bodies. Compared with them, the middle way was criticized by many as too comfortable. Buddha commanded the use of the yellow robe in three pieces—yellow being then the most humble and modest colour—begging with a special bowl, and refraining from the use of ornaments in the hair. But he did not recommend self-torture, since for him spiritual progress was always more important than the body. His disciples once asked him to give a display of miracles in order to win converts. But he replied: “There are only three kinds of miracle. The first is flying through the air; the second is the guessing of thoughts, and the third is the education of the heart. I dislike the first two and am ashamed of them. The only true miracle is the education of the heart.”

He ordered his lay disciples to abstain from:

1. The taking of life; 2. The taking of anything except as a gift; 3. Unseemly sexual conduct; 4. Telling lies; and 5. The use of alcohol and other drugs.

The monks had to abstain from five other actions:

6. Eating after the one meal in the middle of the day; 7. Dancing and the enjoyment of plays and music; 8. The use of garlands, jewels and perfumes; 9. High and wide beds; and 10. Accepting gold or silver. The monks lived singly or in twos or threes in caves and huts. So many took up this mode of life that already in the lifetime of Buddha complaints were made that his religion robbed many women of their husbands.

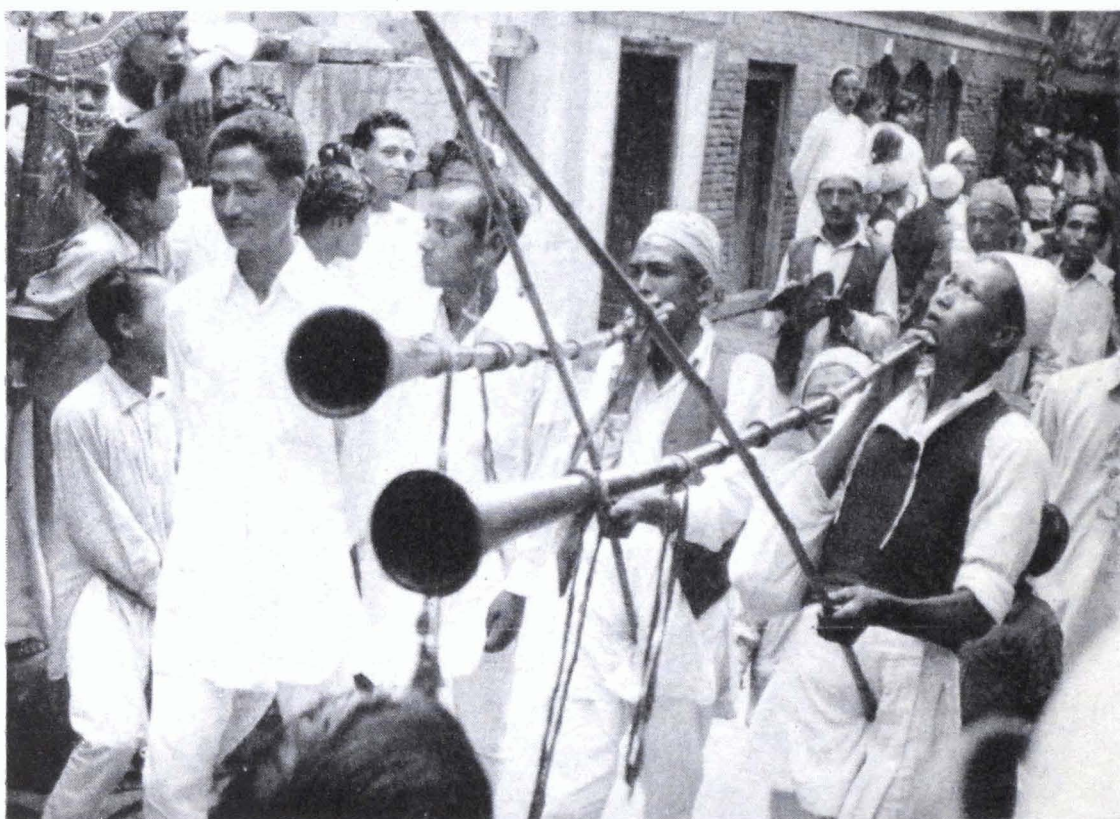
Shortly after his death a group of monks sought a relaxation of his commands, saying that the use of more comfortable beds, ointments, and food after midday or the possession of money were amenities which would not imperil their spiritual life. Many accepted this, others did not.

Buddha himself left no scripture behind. For this reason, after his death five hundred of his disciples assembled in a council to recite the sayings of the teacher, for seven months, and so they fixed the essentials of the religion in their memories. After this the teaching passed from generation to generation by oral tradition, until, for the first time, it was compiled on the orders of the king Asoka.

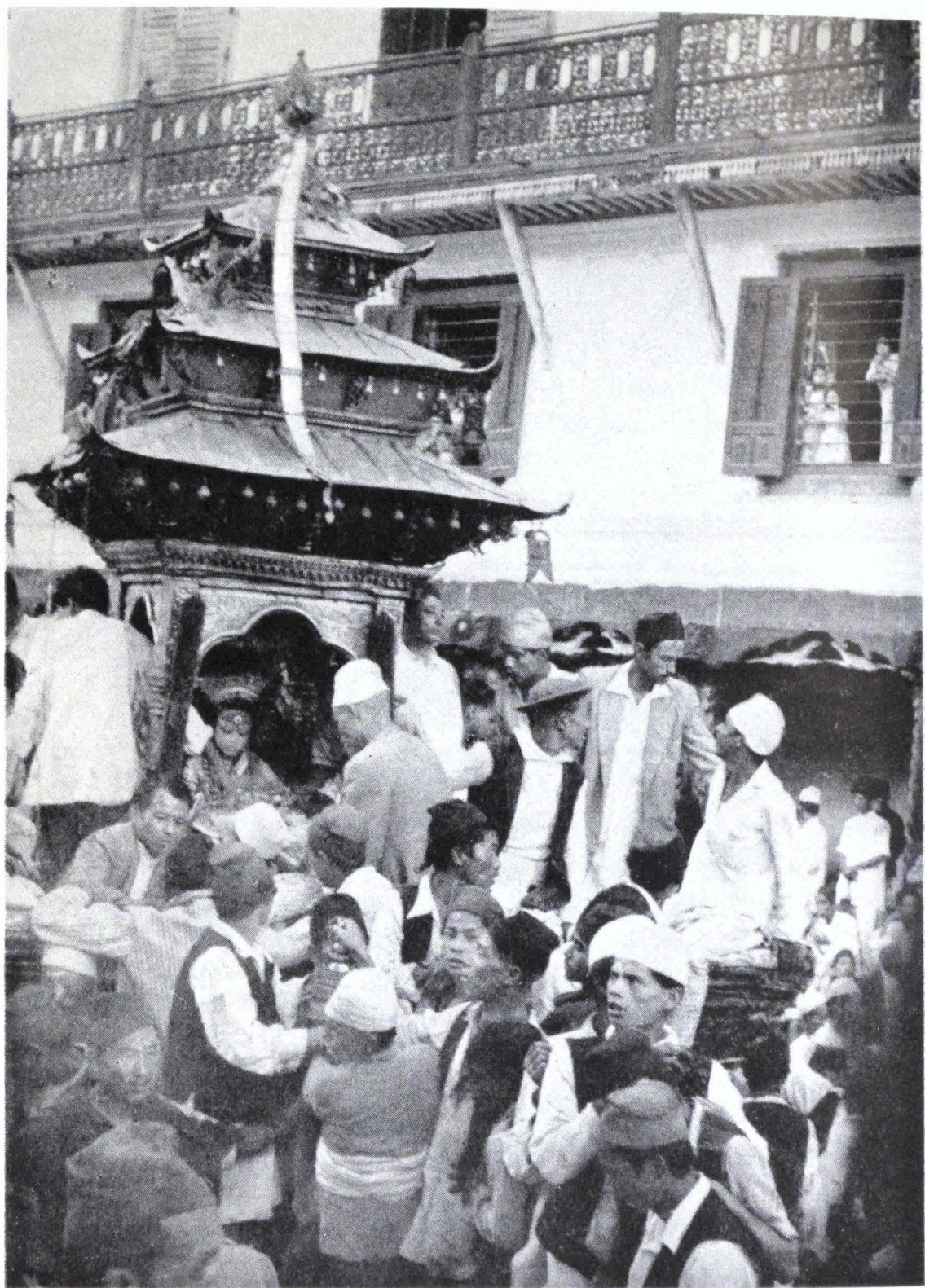
Asoka, after his conversion, drove the sixty thousand Brahmins from his court and replaced them by the same number of Buddhist monks in yellow robes. He began first to reform his own palace. The slaughter of animals came to an end, and



The *khukris* are sharpened to sacrifice buffaloes to Durga



Nepali musicians in procession



Kumari, the living goddess, in her procession-chariot

hunting expeditions were replaced by pilgrimages. Instead of sending conquering armies, he sent peaceful missions to Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Kashmir, Mysore and Ceylon, sending his own son to the last. The last three missions were successful; the others were not.

Asoka was not much interested in the question of salvation. For him Buddhism was chiefly a moral way of life, which he ardently propagated by the innumerable edicts which have already been mentioned. He tried to make a compilation of the teachings of Buddha, and so created the basis for the *Tripitaka*, the "three baskets", a collection of Buddhist scriptures, divided into three parts: the first containing dialogues and stories of various events, the second rules for the life and conduct of the monks, the third discussions on philosophy and psychology.

As is evident from these writings, Buddha accepted the Hindu idea of reincarnation, according to which the soul passes in succession through many earthly wrappings, on its way to liberation. As long as a man has any desire to be reborn, he will be reborn, for creation depends on desire and action—*karma*—and not on the caprice of some external god. Since the reincarnations bring new sufferings, we must endeavour, by our conduct, to come to the end of reincarnation. As the cause of desires is ignorance, we must make ourselves wise by study and meditation, and chiefly by the practice of unlimited altruism. By this means we shall destroy in ourselves the desire for inferior personal pleasures. Thus the individual attains, by meditation, a state of superior spiritual peace known as Nirvana. The way to this state has eight rules: right belief, right thought, right speech, right action, right means of livelihood, right exertion, right remembering and right meditation.

The culmination of this way is illumination, which may be attained not only after death, but also in life, as happened to Gautama himself. He himself is not a god, but he is omniscient and free from sin. His teaching is essentially atheistic. He is in a sense above both gods and men, and some legends show him as instructing the gods. According to Buddhist belief, from time to time superior human beings known as *Mahapurusha* appear on the earth. Before Gautama six such Buddhas lived: Vipasi, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Konagamana and Kasapa. The last three seem to be historical figures, and at the birthplace of

Konagamana, in southern Nepal, Asoka set up a pillar with an inscription, as at the birthplace of Gautama. These superior beings are recognized by certain physical signs, of which thirty-two are important and eighty less important. These traits, of course, are taken from the model of Gautama, and, reading them, we can have a picture of the Enlightened One. The hair of the superior person is black and shiny; his tongue is so long that he can lick his own ear; his hands reach his knees in a normal standing position; his skin is golden-yellow; he has a protuberance on the skull and a smaller one between the brows.

Buddha taught that the world was not created, but had evolved, and that it functions according to definite laws and not by the caprice of some deity. Thus the forms of our reincarnation may be affected by our own actions, by suitable conduct. Our "karma", or actions, prepares the conditions for our next life, and at last for the eventual attainment of Nirvana, a state of the soul without desire, in everlasting beatific repose.

Buddhism instructs us that superstition and credulity are a sign of ignorance. The duty of parents is to educate children in science and literature. No one must believe what other wise men say, until he has himself confirmed it by his own experience and reasoning. Gautama himself was opposed to self-torture, but recommended and practised asceticism, as a preliminary to right meditation.

At about the beginning of the Christian era the Scythians invaded north-western India and there founded their empire. This virile people abandoned its polytheistic creed for Buddhism, adapting the latter to its own needs. Thus they raised Buddha himself in the hierarchy to a real super-god, and transformed many "Boddhisatvas" or "aspirants to Buddha" into gods of various categories, easily reached; and they metamorphosed the too serious Nirvana into a more cheerful Paradise, more easily attainable for the average man. Buddha himself was adored as a Saviour, but was only an earthly manifestation of Eternal God—another new concept.

This new version of Buddhism was approved by a council called by the Scythian emperor, Kanishka, in about A.D. 100. However, not all accepted the new form, and some three centuries later the schism between the two schools of thought

became clear. The innovators called their creed "Mahayana" or "the great vehicle" while the others called theirs "Hinayana" or "the little vehicle". For the vehicle of the innovators carried many simple believers to Paradise, while the vehicle of the conservatives carried only a few elect to Nirvana. The Mahayana sect became more liberal by accepting new elements: mingled with Hindu legends and rites it penetrated Nepal, Tibet and Mongolia, while in China, Japan and Korea it adapted itself to the local animistic religions. Hinayana is retained today only in Burma and Ceylon, somewhat modified by the passage of time.

It must, however, be admitted that the two streams of the same river never came into conflict or persecuted one another, but existed peacefully side by side, as was fitting for a religion whose basic principle was tolerance for every human being and kindness to animals.

Shaktism and *Tantrism* are names equally in use for a sect of Hinduism and Buddhism. *Shakti* means "energy" and *Tantra* is a magic sentence; and presently we shall see that both names are appropriate, from different points of view.

It seems that in Assam and Bengal there was once an ancient animistic religion with the worship of a powerful goddess, in whose honour sexual orgies were arranged, with human and animal sacrifices. And when these regions came into close contact with Hinduism, they little by little adopted also many Hindu gods, legends and ceremonies. Thus a new form of Hinduism, which was widely adopted in Bengal, Orissa, Nepal and Tibet, came into existence.

The chief god of the Shaktists is Shiva, and especially the various forms of his female partner, who has absorbed the functions of all the other goddesses. According to them, the active energy of the reproduction of life is to be found in the female aspect of Shiva, which contains the principle of creation. His male aspect is the indifferent and inactive aspect of the world, although both principles are necessary for the normal working of the world.

Because of this active principle of female energy, the Shaktists personify all the energies of nature in their goddesses—physical, moral and intellectual energies. These goddesses are divided into "white" and "black". The "white" ones are adored by the "right-hand" Shaktists and are called *Lakshmi*, *Sarasvati*, *Gauri*,

while the “left-hand” Shaktists adore the “black” ones in the form of *Durga*, *Kali* and *Chandi*. But these are all different forms of Parvati, the wife or female manifestation of Shiva. But the black Shaktists do not content themselves with a few goddesses. For adequate worship they extend divine honours of various categories to the Mother Goddesses and the Yogini, the many minor goddesses with magical power. Living women also share in the divine essence, and so must be worshipped on earth as earthly representatives of the active energy.

The followers of “left-hand” Shaktism adore Shiva only as a necessary complement to his female aspect, the most highly adored. And, taking her most perverse form, *Durga*, they stress only two of her attributes: she is the ruler of the sexual relations of human beings, and of magical powers.

The ritual ceremonies of the left-handed Shaktists occur in secret, behind closed doors. Men and women form a circle, take off their clothes and throw off all prejudices concerning caste distinctions and family bonds. And the five things whose Sanskrit names begin with M—*Madya*, wine, *Mansa*, meat, *Matsya*, fish, *Mudra*, grain, and *Maithuna*, sexual intercourse, must be made use of to the complete satisfaction of all the goddesses. These earthly sacraments, with the appropriate repetition of magical words or sounds, stimulate or rather force the earth to further creation. The sexual intercourse in which the magic culminates represents the combination of the passive forces of the earth with the active energies of the sun and of water to produce fertility. But it also symbolizes, or, to the Shaktists themselves, it *is* in fact, the union of earth and heaven, of body and spirit.

These orgies generally last for a whole night. The place is a large room where the yellow light of a few candles hardly penetrates the thick smoke of burning incense sticks. At certain intervals the orgy is interrupted to pronounce various *mantra*. These are verses taken from the Vedas, spoken with a special inflection and often as an incomprehensible murmur, so that instead of being a prayer they become a magic formula, which in itself has mystical and magical powers, that may be used for good or evil.

But for the practitioners of Shaktism even the recitation of a few verses has become too tiring. Their priests have created magic words, letters and sounds, of which each one symbolizes

a goddess and also a part of the body for which this goddess is responsible. So if the appropriate letter is fixed to the part of the body, or the correct sound is made while touching that part, any black or white magic can be performed. Drawings of symbols have been added to the magic words and sounds, and the whole has become a new secret "science" in which certain priests specialize.

Shaktism, or the mastery of energies, and Tantrism, the science of magic, are to be found in innumerable books known as "Tantra", of which sixty-four are the oldest and most respected and re-copied. Most of these are books of instruction in magic and mysticism, although some also contain stories of the creation and destruction of the world, instructions on the proper methods for worshipping the gods, and also on the four basic methods for union with the Supreme Spirit.

Some of the Tantric books contain long lists of appropriate sounds, gestures and symbols, which, combined with the right place and time, create the magic force necessary to heal someone or make him ill, to obtain someone's love or hatred, to create pain or pleasure, life or death. It is natural that many of the symbols of Shaktism are to be found on their temples in the form of sculptures, engravings and paintings, letters, colours and decorative forms. Among these symbols a special place is occupied by the culmination of the set of beliefs: the union of the body with the spirit, or of energy with the stagnant forces of nature, represented in sexual intercourse. These engravings found on the sloping poles which support the roofs of the temples, with their surprising oddness in the concept and the grotesque detail, attract the Westerner's attention. The latter wonder why such pornographic items appear on temples. The fact is that they are unchaste only for those who—because of centuries of prejudice—see only the forbidden side of sexual life in them. But for those to whom this intercourse is a sacrament according to the command of the sacred books and in a definite ritual, there is nothing impure in it.

In Nepal there is a curious mixture of the three religions described above. Hinduism is practised as in India, with the addition of some Buddhist divine figures, ceremonies and festivals. The Buddhism whose Mahayana form is accepted in Nepal includes many Hindu legends, rites and gods, and above both of these Shaktism has made a way for itself and conquered

some of the worshippers of Shiva and of Buddha. It is often difficult to tell which is the religion of a given individual.

The old Hindu book *Nepalamahatmya* says: "To adore Buddha is the same as to adore Shiva." And as a gesture of reciprocity the Buddhist *Swayambu Purana* recommends the worship of Pashupati, a form of Shiva. In many Nepalese temples the same statue is adored by both groups under a different name. For example, the Buddhist saint, Avalokiteshvara, is worshipped by the Hindus under the name of Mahadeo. Machendranath, the patron of the Vale of Nepal, is a god for Buddhists and Hindus. Relatively few elements of primitive animism are to be found in Nepal, unlike Tibet, where it is the basis of Lamaism.

We have already learned from history how the Hindu king Pritvi Narayan helped to rebuild the Buddhist holy place, Swayambunath, and when we visited it we saw that by the Buddhist *chaitya* there was a pagoda dedicated to Sitla, the Hindu goddess of smallpox. This shrine is on the path of all Hindu pilgrims, just as the temple Mahankal is visited by all. Its chief god is worshipped by the Hindus as Mahadeo and by the Buddhists as Avalokiteshvara.

Near Katmandu there is a small temple of the Hindu god Ganesha, built, according to legend, by the daughter of Asoka, and there only a Buddhist priest from the Banhra caste officiates. But the best evidence of the mixture of religions is shown in the figures in the small *chaityas* scattered round the central *chaitya* of Swayambunath and other Buddhist places of worship. These stone constructions, from three to seven feet high, are made essentially on the model of the already mentioned *lingam-yoni*, the symbol of Shiva and his female principle. They are dedicated to Buddha, or more precisely to several Buddhas, to whom, on the model of Hinduism, are given wives, sons and favourite animals, and, under the influence of Tantrism, magic colours, signs, gestures, postures and symbols.

The three of the six Buddhas before Gautama thought to be historical, together with Gautama and the future Buddha Amoghasida, are represented on these *chaityas*. One is in the middle and four on the four sides, each with his wife, son and animal.

Here is a table :

<i>Place</i>	<i>Buddha</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>Son</i> <i>(celestial emanation)</i>	<i>Human manifestation</i>	
Centre	Vairochana	Vajradhatisvari	Samantabhadra	Krakuchanda	(past)
East	Akshobya	Lochana	Vajrapani	Kanakamuni	(„)
South	Ratnasambhava	Mamaki	Ratnapani	Kasyapa	(„)
West	Amitabha	Pandra	Avalokiteshvara	Gautama	(present era)
North	Amoghasida	Tara	Visvapani	Maitreya	(to come)

The first of them, *Vairochana*, is the ruler of space. His colour is white. His favourite animals are mythological dragons. His symbol is a wheel, and he is represented with the gesture of a teacher. He is in the centre of the *chaitya*.

Akshobya rules the air and favours the elephant; his colour is blue and his posture is that of calling the world to witness. A thunderbolt is his symbol. His representative on earth is *Kanakamuni*, to whom Asoka set up a pillar at his birthplace.

The third Buddha is *Ratnasambhava*, ruler of fire; his colour is yellow, his animal a horse and his gesture one of giving.

The west side is occupied by *Amitabha*, whose element is water, whose colour red, whose animal is the peacock and whose symbol is a lion. His posture is one of meditation. This Buddha is the most important, not only because he is the ruler of the present era, but also because his earthly manifestation is the historical Buddha, Gautama. Moreover, his reincarnation is the Panchen Lama of Tibet and the reincarnation of his son, Avalokiteshvara, is the Dalai Lama in Lhasa.

Amoghasida is the last of the five "Dyani Buddhas". He will come to rule the next era. His element is earth, his colour green and his emblem the double thunderbolt. Garuda is his beast, and his gesture is fearless. His wife is the green Tara, the previously-mentioned Nepalese princess of the seventh century. His earthly manifestation, Maitreya, is very popular among the Lamaists, especially in China. Maitreya also entered political life in the recent past, when the Buriat Doryieff, a Tibetan politician, wished to gain the support of the last Tsar of Russia for Tibet, by trying to convince him that he was Maitreya, the incarnation of Buddha, for whom the Buddhists had been waiting for the last two thousand years. However, this project was unsuccessful. Perhaps the idea seemed too fantastic to His Majesty who had too European a mind for such an Asiatic idea.

Apart from Gautama Buddha, the most popular divine figures of the Nepalese Buddhists are Avalokiteshvara and Manjusri, the creator of the valley. Among female figures the favourites are White Tara and Green Tara.

XI

A CALENDAR OF FESTIVALS

A NEPALESE FRIEND told me that the Nepalese festival calendar has more days in it than the year itself, which is probably true; for often Hindu and Buddhist festivals or even two of each, coincide, and every day some kind of festival takes place, either in the intimacy of the home, or in the street to the sound of noisy drums.

After a few days in Nepal I became used to being wakened in the middle of the night by insistent trumpet and conch fanfares, accompanied with drums and cymbals, usually the sounds of a procession to perform some nocturnal ceremony, or to reach some temple for the early morning. I would go to the window, and see a long line of flickering little lamps carried by pious women. I often saw similar processions, groups of musicians or groups of men or women, in the daytime heading for some temple to make a sacrifice, or, passing a temple, heard songs and music coming thence; only inside could this festival be seen.

One morning my friends, Jahendra and Ganeshlal, invited me to climb the hill at Swayambunat. There we found a great crowd of pilgrims, burning hundreds of candles, bowing in front of the various Buddhas and diligently turning the prayer-wheels in front of the *chaitya*. In one of the neighbouring buildings a few Tibetan monks were sitting; this was usual. But this time they proudly showed me a gigantic copper-plated Buddha, which they had just completed after working on it for several months. Now one of them was copying magic verses and formulas while the other rolled them into thick cylindrical packets. They explained to me that just as every person has various organs in his body, so the statue of Buddha must have an inside, which consists of thousands of paper scrolls filled with prayers.

Once more we descended the three hundred and eight steps, this time meeting groups of peasants, singing, praying and making music, from the various regions. We descended to

another temple where several Brahmins were busy fastening yellow thread round the wrists of visitors in exchange for small coins. As my friends submitted to this ceremony, I too put my arm out and received my thread from a young Brahmin. It was explained to me that this was a protection against evil spirits, and that it must be worn on the hand for about forty days, after which, on the day of the Cow Festival, the thread is cut and fastened to the tail of a cow. From then onwards the cow will give protection.

We descended a little further towards the river brink, and found there three people carrying out a ceremony. They were Brahmins, and this was just the day when the Brahmins had to change their sacred threads, as part of an important ceremony. We remained there for some time, observing how the three Brahmins, a father with his two sons, smeared themselves all over with cow-dung, even on their shaven heads, then plunged into the water, reading verses from old and mysterious books.

One day there was an eclipse of the moon. On this day Mrs. Thompson and I admired the innumerable musicians and pilgrims, who, carrying bamboo poles adorned with flags and yak tails, threaded their way through the streets of Katmandu in a procession many miles long. That night thousands of devotees swarmed round the sanctuary of Swayambunat, invoking the protection of the Self-Existing with music and songs. On the same night, at a night excursion guided by Tom Mendies, in Pashupatinat, the followers of Shiva silently plunged into the sacred River Bagmati to purify their bodies and souls after fasting all day. The scene, clothed in mysterious darkness, was impressive, as the moon gradually escaped from the shadow of the earth.

Gayjatra means the Cow Festival, and this takes place in August. On this day, in the morning, a long procession of men and especially boys parade through the town wearing cow masks, some leading a cow or a calf with a cord, and accompanied by another person dressed as a *sadhu* or religious mendicant. Each family in which someone has died during the year must send a "cow" in the procession, and from its size we could deduce that not a few people had died in Katmandu during the year. A procession of another kind occurred on the same day. It consisted of carnival groups who, by their clothes, actions and

songs satirized the actions of the Governments and of some private citizens in good-humoured protest.

One morning, when I went out into the street, I noticed small groups of boys here and there tying bundles of reeds in various styles. Others, with a large dish plaited from reeds, tried to stop me and others, begging in unison. In the afternoon I met a group of thirty young men, who, shouting rhythmically, were accompanying a youth of their own age-group, who was naked and whose body was painted with red and black stripes and figures. They went into houses asking for alms. In various parts of Katmandu the same scene was repeated, except that the naked man was an adult wearing a small loincloth. In many places bundles of reeds were set up in the street and youngsters were on duty round them, begging.

When I asked questions even the best informed people could say no more than "tradition" or "the boys beg because of the custom". However, some people gave some explanation of one detail or another, and at last, when I met Mr. Maskey, the curator of the Museum, and then his assistant, Purna Harsha, I gained a sufficiently clear picture of the significance of the day.

Ghantah Karna is the name of the day, after a demon of the same name. Before this day, during the full monsoon season, the farmers must finish their work in the fields. The grain sowed or transplanted after this will not be fruitful; for Ghantah Karna, the protector of the fields, died on that day.

Ghantah Karna was a demon who did much harm to men. He was a rival and enemy of Vishnu, the Preserver, and for this reason was irritated by the mere mention of this god's name. For this reason the demon hung two bells on his ears to avoid hearing the name, when men teased him by shouting it. And that is what his name means: He Who Has Bells on His Ears.

One good quality is curiously combined with the evil nature of this demon: he protects the fields while men work in them. And, as is fitting for such a person, cheerful and sorrowful elements are combined in his funeral.

The youngsters set up in the street, in many places, the dead demon made from bundles of reeds, with a demon mask instead of a head. In the evening he will be burned at a solemn ceremony, according to Hindu ritual. To prepare the pyre suitably, the boys collect money from the passers-by and from house to

house. But the money is not for the boys : it is for the naked man, who always belongs to the caste of sweepers. Among the patterns drawn on his body a conspicuous place is held by the various female sex organs, in contrast with the male organ of the reed-demon in the street. From this I deduce that the naked sweeper represents the widow of the demon Ghantah Karna, who, according to the ancient Hindu rite, will be burned in the evening together with her dead husband.

Evening approaches. The "widow" has succeeded in collecting not only a tidy sum of money, but also a vessel full of rice and other things to eat, and quite a quantity of clothing. Now the boys crowd round the demon. The lamenting widow is among them. Suddenly someone sets the bundle of reeds alight, and, like a torch, it flares up to illuminate the pagodas and the engraved house-fronts. At the same time the naked sweeper with his painted body, the mourning wife of the demon, disappears just in time to save himself from the *sati* ceremony, the widow-burning.

At the same time every family carries or sends to some street corner or cross-roads a plateful of food : raw meat, rice husks and other refuse, since demons eat only this kind of food, of course. Ghantah Karna will need the food for his last journey. For this reason something to eat must be placed at every street-corner, since no one knows by what route he will travel to the next world.

The fires are going out. Everyone is hurrying home. The doors are locked carefully and the streets are deserted. Only witches go out on that night : that night belongs to them ; now they will succeed in all their magic and spells. It is said that on this night they do not walk on the ground, but some three feet up in the air. That is what is said, though no one has seen them except the witches themselves, who guard their secrets well. Everyone else sits at home, trembling and pressing on to their fingers the iron rings, worn only upon this night, to ward off the evil deeds of the witches.

Ghantah Karna is dead, the protector of the fields, and the fields of Nepal lie unprotected. Tomorrow all the peasants will put up scarecrows on their land.

The demon has died with him too. Because of his evil deeds in the last four months there has been no wedding or meeting or any social function among the peasants of Nepal. From

tomorrow people will look more cheerful. In towns and villages music will echo, there will be frequent dance festivals, and drinks will go round without hesitation.

Dasera or Durga Puja is a ten-day festival in Nepal, to celebrate the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon in the form of a gigantic buffalo, Muhisha or Mahisasur. Both Hindus and Buddhists take part in it, and it is a public holiday. Every day there is some procession or special service at a particular temple, or a jolly evening meeting. One day is devoted to a visit to pay respect to the eldest relatives, and to the foreman at work or some other person in authority. On this day, too, the King, Mahendra, receives the people without regard to rank or caste. We, with some other foreign visitors, rode into the palace that afternoon. In the extensive garden courtyard stood the palace, long and in the style of Versailles, more modest to outward appearance than the Government Palace, once the palace of the chief ministers. Some more modern buildings and a Hindu temple in good style are scattered over the park. In front of the palace the red-bloused and picturesque soldiers of the royal guard stood in a long line. All around, in the park and on the splendid staircase, and on the terrace, were high-ranking members of Nepalese society in their best clothes. Ladies in luxurious multi-coloured *saris* went daintily up the staircase with their families. Ministers and officials of high rank were received first, for example, Prime Minister K. I. Singh, with a fresh *tika*, a red round spot on the forehead in the centre, and radiant joy on his face. Above, on the terrace, I chatted with Field-Marshal Kaiser Sham Shir, who was in ceremonial uniform with numerous medals. He explained to me the traditional significance of the day, to help with my book on Nepal; he had placed his very valuable library at my disposal and showed me his historical collection, of great value for the study of the last half century. Talking to various acquaintances, I went into the great reception room adorned with portraits of the kings of Nepal. The crowd, in an untidy line, drew nearer and nearer to His Majesty. At last I reached the goal. There, on a deep sofa, sat the King Mahendra with the Queen Ratna Rajya Lakshmi beside him. As I made the appropriate bow, the sovereign of Nepal made a red sacred-powder mark on my forehead with his thumb. At the second bow the Queen scattered some delicate rice stems over my head, to ensure that my

crops would be abundant in the following year. A French friend of mine who was present was able to take a photograph of both ceremonies, but, alas, was so overcome with emotion that he took them both on the same negative.

One evening at nine my friend Keshab Ram appeared in my hotel. He told me that somewhere in his part of the town there was going to be a special masked dance, which could be seen only once in twelve years. I hurried away with him, and after we had crossed several tiny streets in the heart of old Katmandu, we heard music from a small square that was brilliantly lighted. When we had contrived to push our way into the crowd and get near enough to the vacant space, we saw an unforgettable sight. Twelve dancers, wearing more fantastic masks than I had ever seen on any occasion whatever, even in those shops that specialize in masks and antiques, were performing a dance. The masks, some fierce and wild, others gentle and simple, showed marvellous imagination and artistic skill. The costumes of the dancers were also extraordinarily luxurious and richly coloured. I understood nothing of the dance, which seemed to me to consist only of movements to left and right, with leaps, to the rhythm of weird music. I wanted to take some photographs of the dance, and tried to climb the steps of a house near by; then someone noticed me, and people began to turn towards me, muttering and with hostile expressions. At length it was made quite clear to me that I was not to climb the steps. I obeyed, took up a proper position in the circle, and began to prepare a flash gun for my photograph. But at this moment one of the dancers from the other side seemed to go mad. He crossed the space in two leaps, and with a third flung himself upon me, with one hand on the camera and the other on my face. We both fell before I realized what had happened, and I do not know how this incident would have ended, had not Keshab Ram leaped between us, dragged the camera out of my hands and helped me to make a speedy escape from the excited crowd.

Some students surrounded me and accompanied me to protect me from the angry populace. I wanted to return without my camera, just to see the dance, but they advised me not to do so, as something really dreadful might happen. They explained to me that the twelve dancers were twelve gods from the *Ramayana* story, and during the dance both the dancers and

the public are drunk with wine and emotion, so that their actions are unpredictable. I explained that I had already seen other masked dancers and taken photographs of them with no difficulties, and asked what was the difference between these and the others. The reply was: "The others were only men representing gods, but these are the gods themselves."

All were agreed on this: and they also told me that the individual who had leaped on me so fiercely was the goddess Sita herself, the mild and faithful wife of the hero Rama.

The seventh day of the Durga Puja was dedicated to an army parade on the parade-ground Tundikhel, where cavalry and infantry showed the King, the leading Nepalese and the general public their perfect organization and discipline.

The ninth day was dedicated to the sacrifice of buffaloes and goats to the goddess Durga, to thank her for her victory over the buffalo demon. The chief place of sacrifice is the courtyard of "Kot", the same one in which, a century before, Jang Bahadur carried out his bloody massacre. Now, as then, the pavement would be soaked in red, but this time only with the blood of animals. Most of those who were to make sacrifices spent the night in prayer in the ancient palace temple of Taleju, or some other temple, and the rising sun saw the sharp *khukris* and still longer swords already very busy.

The army officers and other notables brought the beasts for sacrifice. Before sacrifice is made, the beast must give its own consent by a definite shake of the head. It cannot be sacrificed without this consent. There we could see some person of high rank giving grass to a buffalo, putting a holy red spot on its forehead, and talking kindly to it to persuade it to say yes. Sometimes this procedure took half an hour, but the animal hardly ever withheld its permission. After this consenting shake of the head, the buffalo, young buffalo or goat is taken to a post and fastened to it, and then the expert Gurkha must, with one single stroke, cut off its head. If he does not succeed with a single stroke, this is regarded both as a great disgrace and as a bad omen for him and his family. But this never happens: in one two-hundred-and-fiftieth of a second, according to my camera, the head is severed from the body and a murmur of general approbation is heard among those present.

At last the Commander-in-Chief of the army appears, with two assistants, who carry a copper bowl full of buffalo blood.

The Commander-in-Chief dips his hands in the blood and marks with it the flags of all the regiments. The flags are brought to him one after the other, and this is called the Blessing of the Flags.

When the sun is high, the stench of blood becomes overpowering, and the crowd begins to break up. Each identifies his own among the rows of carcasses, and, with his family and relations, or, in the case of army officers, with his detachment, he will eat this during the coming week in honour of Durga.

The five days of the Divali festival are of more cheerful character. This is also called the Feast of Light. For when Vishnu overcame the previously unconquerable giant Narakasur, he entered his city before dawn, and the people lit the streets with countless torches. Divali commemorates this event. Many little oil lamps are used for it, and also many flowers, whose rich colours decorate, at this time, the streets, the market places, the temples and the people.

The first day of Divali is dedicated to the worship of the cow. On this day not only the family cattle, but also those who wander in the streets, are given fresh green food, are decked with flower garlands and painted with a spot of red sacred powder on the forehead. But the cows do not seem much impressed by this treatment, being used to it. I often saw a Nepalese greet a cow with his hands together, and once I saw a man draw near to a urinating cow, take some of the fluid in his hands and sprinkle it on his head as a blessing.

On the same evening the Nepalese float on the river Bhagmati light clay saucers with burning oil, thus creating a procession of small lights which, like lost souls, drift on the waves until they disappear in the distance.

The experience of the crows is not like that of the cows; the second day of Divali is the day of the Crows. These are never, indeed, ill-treated—being the town and village scavengers—but no special food is ever prepared for them except on this day. Then they find special food daintily served to them on large leaves, placed on walls, roofs and streets. No doubt the crows are always surprised, but they seem to understand the allusion and act accordingly.

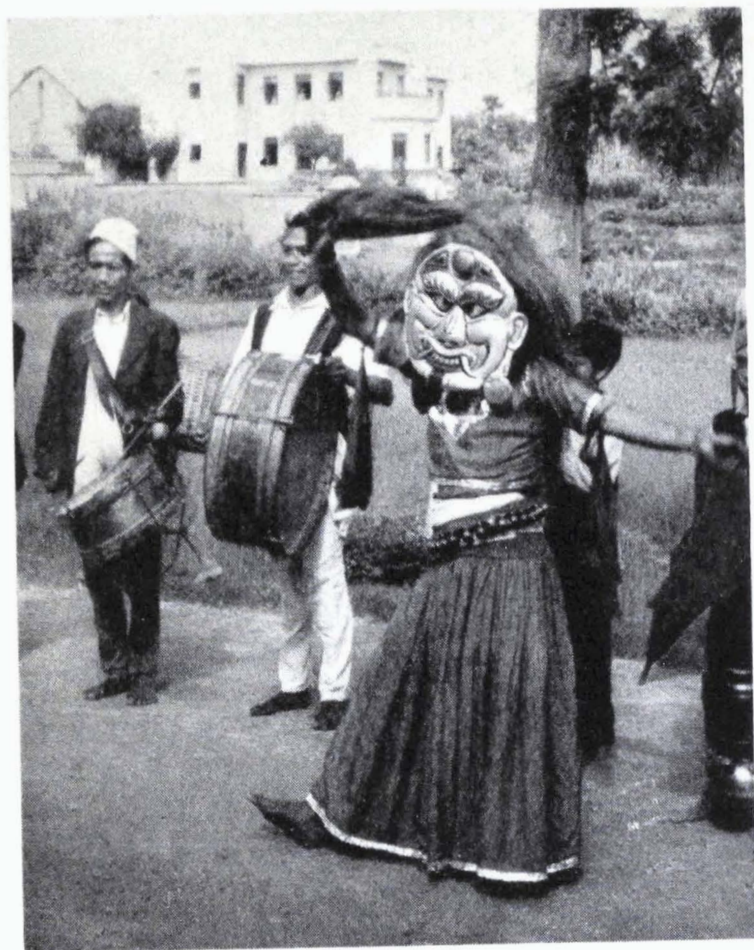
The third day is the day of the Dogs. Just as on the first day cows are worshipped, now dogs are worshipped, and on that day every dog, even the most wretched stray cur, receives his

(Right) Kumari faces the King with a serious and serene look



(Below) A moment of emotion: the chariot of the living goddess is passing by





(Left) A demon with long hair

(Below) Terraced rice fields



gentlemanly dinner, garlands round his neck and a red mark on his forehead.

The evening is sacred to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Straight after dusk, innumerable little clay lamps appear in rows on the windows, walls, cornices and doors of all the houses. They also appear in front of the doors, which is very important. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, will come that evening, and her way into the house must be lighted so that she will know where to come. That evening families assemble in happy circles to ask, together, for prosperity in the coming year. During this meeting some kind of game of chance must be played, such as cards, dice, or a game played by throwing shells. Whoever wins on that evening will have good luck for the whole year. As I have already mentioned, the Nepalese are very fond of games of chance, and now they are forbidden by law the Divali days are left as permitted days for such games. The Nepalese take full advantage of this freedom, and, in proportion to individual wealth, large sums of money and many possessions change hands during these days.

The fourth day is again dedicated to the cow, and during this day I, like my friends, cut the thread from my wrist, and—not without difficulty—fastened it to the tail of a cow in the street. This ensures that when I die I shall be able to swim to the next world, holding the cow's tail. On this day one adores one's own body, as well as the cow.

It will seem strange to a Westerner that the fifth day is devoted to the worship of cow dung, and to—one's brothers. Cow dung is not, in Asia, "dirty" as it is in the West. Here women carefully collect it with their hands, knead it and then stick it, in discs, to the walls of the house to dry. These odd cakes are to be seen on the walls for many weeks of the year, as also in India. Eventually the dried dung is used as fuel for cooking. During festivals, when the country women want their homes to be irreproachably clean, they paint their walls, floor and even the yard with a liquid prepared from cow dung. This makes the house clean and sweet-smelling, and also protects it from mosquitoes and certain evil spirits. The reader will now understand that it is perfectly proper to devote one day in the year to the worship of this useful commodity.

Naturally, brothers ought to be worshipped once a year by their sisters. But what do sisters who have no brothers and

brothers who have no sisters do? For this day adoption is permissible. Since I was aware of this, two months before the festival I made an arrangement with Miss Prabha Rana, my good friend and instructor in the Nepalese language. When I arrived she and her sisters, Miss Mono and Mrs. Sarla, received me with extraordinary politeness, and after some preparations they seated me in an especially luxurious armchair, and, from a great silver vessel, painted my forehead with magic signs in various colours. With folded hands, though with irrepressible coy smiles, they prayed to me as if I were a god. Afterwards they brought some rare fruits on a silver plate for me to eat. On this day the brothers usually give presents to their sisters, and, in accordance with this custom, I, too, gave them presents in the form of *saris* and material for blouses. I gave a similar present to Kali, the servant from the mountains, who was rather wild, but always smiling and friendly.

The festivals described here are only a few of the many in the Nepalese calendar, and a whole book would not suffice to describe them all. I shall describe only one other, in the next chapter.

All these festivals are important opportunities for family and communal gatherings, in which the members of a family or clan amuse themselves together; thus they help to maintain the unity of the community. Some of the festivals are occasions for pilgrimages to particular sacred places in other towns or villages, or into the mountains, where the pilgrims go in crowds, on a difficult journey and living very simply with the food they take with them and some cheap meals that can be bought at the place. Apart from its religious significance, this pilgrimage interrupts the monotony of daily life, for the men and still more for the women, who are busy in the kitchen day after day, and takes them to distant places, where they see new manners and customs, new people, and sometimes also meet old friends again, as we Westerners sometimes do on our holiday trips.

And, above all, they acquire new strength by worshipping their favourite gods, provided that they do not perish, as happens to several hundred every year during the great pilgrimages to the mountain shrines of the Himalayas.

XII

THE FEAST OF THE GODS ON EARTH

ONE DAY—LEGEND is seldom precise about dates—Indra, the Hindu King of Heaven, came to Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, dressed as a simple man, for he came with a special purpose: to steal the mythological flower, *ashok*, which existed only there. The people of Katmandu captured him, bound his hands, condemned and buried him. Happily, the mother of Indra arrived a few days later and revealed his true identity. The people then took him out of the tomb alive and well, and entertained him with a feast that lasted a whole week.

Since then the feast has been revived every year, and anyone who is present can, for a whole week, share in the emotions of a festival whose roots are buried in remote antiquity.

On Friday, 7th September, from early morning onwards, a great crowd concentrated in Hanuman Dhoka, the central square of Katmandu. In the middle of the square was a sixty-foot long wooden pole, which had been put there the day before and was now to be erected in a specially prepared hole. The crowd jostled; women from the town and from the country arranged themselves in rows on the steps of the pagodas surrounding the square. On one side there was a small detachment of soldiers, dressed in curious rags of greyish-green uniform and carrying long rifles. Their officers were withered, grey-haired men armed with sabres. We were told that this detachment represented the army of the mountain king, Pritvi Narayan, who, in 1768, on the same feast-day, conquered the town of Katmandu. The uniforms were museum pieces, but the soldiers were acting naturally, like a picture fallen out of some old album. Their appearance contrasted strangely with a troop of modern soldiers, in newly-pressed modern uniforms, with smart caps, and optimism shining in their faces, who occupied a place on the other side of the square.

A white horse, beautifully caparisoned, led by a red-costumed groom, was parading by one of the temples. The people respect-

fully made a large open circle round it, for in Nepal even the small ponies are seldom seen.

Two orchestras played in competition. Then the raising of the pole, supported by bamboos and pulled with thick ropes, began. At last the pole stood erect firmly, and a long banner with inscriptions was suspended from it: the flag of Indra. From this moment the King of Heaven was in Katmandu, and everyone had to know this, so as not to mistake him for a thief again, as had happened before.

Little by little the crowd dispersed; but now the streets were in festival array: on every square, before almost every house and temple, some idol stood, an idol normally hidden inside. During the week of the Indra festival the gods go out into the street, to share in the popular rejoicing. Some of them are simple figures of worm-eaten wood, others gilded and covered with flowers, placed under elaborate canopies. But the most alluring for the Nepalese—and for me—was the gilded, twelve-foot-high, frightful face built into a house at a corner of the main square. Its name, Jan-Khana Bhairav, means “The terrible one who gives wine to drink”. Bhairav, the Terrible One, was represented in many places, but only from the mouth of this one was there a long, slender tube protruding, from which flowed a constant stream of home-made wine. Naturally, men, women and children jostled each other to catch in their mouths, hands or cups a few drops of the holy and palatable fluid.

For the rest of the day the city was quiet. Some said that a great chariot-procession would take place on the following day, others that it would not be until Sunday. There was, in fact, a theological dispute on this point among the Hindu authorities, since for some reason it was difficult to fix the date by the lunar calendar. The final decision was made for Sunday.

Three large chariots, with heavy wooden wheels, had already been standing for several days by the temple of Kumari, the Living Goddess. Kumari means “Virgin”, and she is a ten-year-old girl, regarded as a goddess and adored as such. I went several times into the courtyard of her temple-lodging, where she lives with her family and a few playmates. When a woman appeared at the window of the first floor, I would pronounce the name of the Virgin in a tone of entreaty. After a few seconds or minutes the girl would appear, usually in a red costume, with her hair combed upwards and two long black streaks painted

beside her eyes, giving her a Chinese appearance. Then I would put my palms together before my breast, in the Indian style of salutation, and respectfully bow my head. When I raised my eyes again, her face usually showed a wide and friendly smile. We stood thus for a short time looking at each other, like two worlds separated by oceans never to be crossed, until I myself interrupted the scene by a second salutation and my disappearance through the low wooden gate, to repeat the performance after two or three weeks.

Nine years ago it was necessary to elect a new Kumari. Then the ecclesiastical authorities assembled a large number of one-year-old baby girls in the hall of the temple, and men masked as demons came in, leaping and shouting around the babies. Most of the babies, terrified, began to cry loudly, and the one who behaved most courageously, perhaps from lack of imagination, was regarded as a person who had had important experiences in previous incarnations, and was chosen as the Goddess, in imitation of the well-known choosing of the Dalai Lama.

This girl will be on the throne of Kumari until she loses some part of her body, or receives a serious wound, or loses a quantity of her blood, which, in practice, means until puberty. Then she will leave her divine office, and another little girl be chosen instead of her as the new Kumari. The former goddess will be lost in the crowd. No one, unless perhaps someone of low caste, will wish to marry her; she brings bad luck.

Until then the poor girl will remain imprisoned in her temple, and be able to enjoy the sunny days, the blue sky and the spring breezes only through a window. And she can also enjoy the bows of processions on feast days, when many pass the temple especially to greet her. But that day, and on two of the other days dedicated to Indra, Kumari comes out of her golden cage for a drive, in another golden cage, in procession through the town.

However, the assembled crowd was not waiting for the Goddess only. The Living God was to come too. King Mahendra, the King of Nepal, is worshipped as the personal representative of the Hindu god, Vishnu, upon the earth. Several thousand people, especially women, were swarming in the square. Every step on the surrounding pagodas was crammed with spectators. On a balcony of the neighbouring

Administrative Palace some people of high rank and a few foreign visitors were waiting for the arrival of the King.

At five o'clock exactly the people made way for the dark-green, up-to-date American car in which the monarch drove, greeted by his people and by the red-bloused troop of guards, whose specially chosen members showed superb military discipline during the parade salute. Four people with demon masks had already begun to amuse the public, but now their dance became more enthusiastic and wilder. One in particular, with a great red mask, long grey hair and a wide coloured skirt, seemed to have gone mad leaping about in the open space in the middle of the square.

A wide path suddenly opened in the crowd, and two rows of men pulling a rope appeared; at the other end of the rope the first large chariot, with a gilded throne, moved slowly. In it a little boy in a golden costume was sitting, wearing a crown. He represented the god Ganesha. After this came a second chariot, with a boy representing the god Bhairav. Both boys were from the Bana caste, and would be well paid for their performance. At last the third chariot drew near. Kumari, the Living Goddess, was sitting in it. Several companions round her protected her, with their bodies and fans, from too much staring. Her face was immobile, but beautiful under its golden crown.

The climax occurred when the chariot halted for a moment opposite the royal balcony. God and Goddess looked at each other for a moment. He, the sovereign, now humbly bowed his head, and she, the little girl, with head held high, without a twitch of the eyelids, dominated the scene with a serene, almost indifferent countenance.

With trembling hands I snapped the shutter of my camera, several times, from very close. Her great eyes, framed in paint, caught sight of me. I thought I saw the trace of a smile at the corner of her mouth; whether she really recognized me or my imagination was working overtime I am not sure. In any case, I had to move to one side, as the crowd pulling the rope was surging threateningly in my direction.

The crowd followed the chariots in their triumphal procession through the narrow, winding streets of the old town, greeted by gods and men, who filled the streets, the doors and the fine carved windows and balconies of the old houses.

Evening was approaching; the streets were quiet. Only women, with the characteristic smiles and with great red or yellow flowers in their hair, were hurrying somewhere. Each carried an artistically wrought small bronze oil-lamp in her hand. But where were they going? I was told something about a procession, but it seemed to me that they were only going in different directions, silently, mysteriously, in small groups.

At last, when it was quite dark, thousands of women formed an endless procession with flaming lamps, winding through the narrow streets. They left little clay dishes, each with its tiny flame, at the street corners and in front of the temples and statues of the gods. They were lighting the city for something that was to happen later. At midnight there would be a battle: gods and demons would meet in the main square, Hanuman Dhoka, and there fight for supremacy. The streets must be lighted for their arrival to guide them. What was, in fact, going to happen? The reply was vague, as usual. It was better to spend the evening somewhere and come back before midnight to the main square to see the spectacle.

In fact, in Hanuman Dhoka—called “The Gate of Hanuman”, because of the red-painted holy figure of the Monkey God, Hanuman, who guards the great gate of the ancient royal palace—I met a crowd of several thousands. People from town and country, from near and far, and perhaps a score of tourists, were there. The silhouettes of the pagodas became confused against the lighted sky, combining their many roofs in a harmonious rhythm, creating authentic internal rhymes by their projecting cornices, the slope of the roofs and the carved wooden supporting poles.

While I was enjoying reading this architectural poetry, some strong paraffin lamps lit up a space in front of one of the temples, in the middle of the square, and a band began to play a lively melody in the same place. The crowd surged in that direction. I was carried along with them, and just in time managed to find a place on one of the great steps of the temple base, from which I had a perfect view of the round open space. On the pavement there, in the middle of the packed crowd, a number of people now appeared, in large, strange masks, costumes and ornaments, and began to dance. The central figures were three adults with many-coloured skirts and large triangular ornaments round the grotesque masks. In the right hand a small

sword went through juggling motions. As I learned later, these were the three goddesses, Mahakali (The Great Black Goddess), Mahalakshmi (The Goddess of Wealth) and Kumari (The Virgin). These, led by Mahakali, fought against the demons of various kinds, and at last succeeded in conquering them, in the eternal symbolic struggle between Good and Evil.

But I must not anticipate. How cleverly the two great demons, with black masks and enormous sharp teeth projecting from their vast mouths, attacked, first with restraint, then in frenzy! Their long, abundant hair, made from grey yak tails, flew right and left at every movement. At each side of each demon was a small figure with a skull-mask, almost naked. These figures represented Death, and by their movements suggested now allurements, now threat. Behind them two men danced, covered from head to foot in costumes of black bear fur. At first sight I would have sworn I had found the Abominable Snowman; but this was not the idea. The two dancer-acrobats represent the evil spirits, whose task is to frighten human beings . . . and, on this occasion, the Goddess. Their part is a most entertaining acrobatic display. They roll round, having made their two bodies into a ball, they jump over each other in a variety of ways or stand on each other's shoulders. The group was completed by three female figures with yellow masks, from the mouths of which long red tongues dangled. These represent various vices, and in the dance they bow to the Goddesses, trying to allure them and bring them under the power of the vices.

The whole group dances at the same time, and the total effect is so rich and colourful that it is not easy to focus attention on a single figure. One needs to be present at the dance several times; I did this gladly, when a score of similar dance troupes, one after the other, presented their art in various parts of the square. The band consists of several trumpeters with long, slender Tibetan trumpets; one or two men blowing into enormous snail-shells; several drummers with assorted drums; two or three bronze cymbals and one man whose instrument consists of two wooden sticks furnished with round pieces of metal, which jingle when struck together.

A score of similar troupes was dancing at different times and in different places, until early in the morning. They were country people and workmen from the neighbouring town

of Badgaon. During the Indra-jatra week they lodge in the capital.

After two in the morning, dancers and spectators, tired and rather drunk both with enthusiasm and from frequent visits to the Terrible One Who Gives Wine to Drink, began to go home. Now I could understand better how Katmandu was conquered by the mountain king, Pritvi Narayan, some two hundred years before, when he entered the town of Katmandu during an evening of the Indra-jatra.

The dancing is repeated over five successive days, and for two other afternoons the chariots of Kumari and her two companions go round various parts of the town.

On the last evening of the festival, at nine o'clock, the King visits the Goddess Kumari, to worship her, giving her a one-rupee note, to which she responds by painting a red spot on his forehead with the tip of her finger. This spot is called a *tika* and symbolizes her blessing. After the King, the whole people, in a long queue, follow to receive this touch from the weary little finger of the poor girl.

That day the dancing begins at ten in the evening, and at midnight the dancers depart in various directions. I followed one troupe, and afterwards, on their invitation, I went with two friends into the courtyard of the house where they were to dance for another hour, thus paying their week's lodging.

While I was bicycling home through the night, the town was regaining its peaceful appearance. Only a few enthusiasts were still trying to win a few drops of wine from the spout of the Terrible One, while two guards were already taking down the various ornaments from his great gilded face. The Indra Festival was over: the gods would go back home until the following year.

XIII

A WEDDING IN NEPAL

HEARING SOME GAY MUSIC in the street, I left the shop where I was making some purchases. . . . In the main street of the old quarter of Katmandu, a joyous procession was approaching. I adjusted my camera. The procession was headed by a heavy chest carried on a long pole over the shoulders of two men. A present for the bride, I thought. About ten musicians followed: clarinet players, flute-players, drummers, all blowing with all their might or mercilessly beating their various drums. Some adults—father and uncles—followed, and after them came the bridegroom himself, seated in a *dandi*, a chair shaped like a bathtub, the elegant mode of travel in Nepal, where there are neither good roads nor beasts of burden. Two strong men were carrying him. His eleven-year-old face wore an expression of seriousness, solemnity and extreme boredom. He hardly turned to be photographed. He was wearing a curious yellow cap, reminiscent of some historical costume of India; from it hung several chains of roasted maize; round his neck was a chain with a golden locket. His train consisted of some thirty men and youths, with, at the end of the procession, a small boy leading a black goat, after an empty *dandi* for the bride, and two large red sunshades.

When I re-entered the shop, a friend asked me, “Did you take a photograph?”

“Yes, I did take a photograph . . . but perhaps not of everything. . . .” And, without another word, so as not to lose the thread of my reflections, I hurried out again, leaped on to my bicycle and rode after the procession. I soon reached the group of companions, and afterwards went along with them. On the narrow street, we wound our way through endless rows of completely open shops. We passed a square with two ancient pagodas, with triple gilded roofs and some twenty smaller shrines in stone. Then came another street. Men stopped; female heads appeared at the small windows adorned with wooden carvings. We reached Hanuman Dhoka, the main

square, with several pagodas round it and the impressive gate of the ancient royal palace, guarded by Hanuman, the red-painted Monkey God.

The procession marched on without stopping; the musicians went on blowing and thumping. I hoped that soon we should reach the house of the bride and that I should be able to see the ceremony. But we had already come to the outskirts of the town and were crossing the long bridge over the Bagmati River. After another ten minutes the procession stopped for a rest.

I took another photograph and sat down. "What do you want with us?" the bridegroom's father asked me sternly. Nothing but to accompany them and see the ceremony. There was a discussion in Nepalese, in which I could catch a word only here and there. The questions were: what I meant to do with the pictures? Was I entitled to be present at a ceremony of Brahmins, the highest caste in Hinduism; and would my presence make the whole ceremony unholy? In order to explain the situation to me, the father of the bridegroom drew out from under his shirt the "sacred thread" which every Brahmin wears hanging from one shoulder to the opposite hip. I acknowledged his gesture with a profound bow. There was more argument, and at last I was accepted as one of the train of Tulshi Prashad, the eleven-year-old Brahmin whose parents had decided to marry him to ten-year-old Kumari from the third village on the slope.

The caravan set off once more, and I with it. The road became a narrow path covered with stones, and then that, too, disappeared. We were now crossing rice fields divided by a narrow path somewhat raised above the flooded fields. My bicycle and I, alternately, slid into the mud.

"*Kothin, Thule!*" (Hard, Uncle!) one of the boys said; from then onwards *Thule* was the name by which they all addressed me in a friendly manner.

The house was near, I was told; but in Nepal "near" is a very elastic word.

After half an hour through the rice fields the path began to climb a slope. The bicycle made me sweat, until at last I decided to leave it in some village house. After that I found more enjoyment in the walk beside an abyss of over a thousand feet, where men were "ploughing" with primitive hand shovels. Now the caravan once more climbed the crest of a small moun-

tain, making a pattern of playful silhouettes against the background of white clouds. Village men, women and children halted in silence to admire and smile at the bridegroom. All the windows blossomed with the faces of healthy peasants. The orchestra played with still more enthusiasm. At last we stopped on a sloping bend of the path, in the middle of a village. Above us, there was a large two-storey house with a long balcony quite full of dozens of women, decked in flowers and smiles.

We had reached our goal. A crowd was standing on the slope above the flat place where we had stopped. For the most part they were dressed in the Nepalese national costume, a white or coloured narrow trouser and some kind of upper garment of the same material. A few were wearing European jackets, and all, without exception, the typical black or light-coloured brimless hat.

The musicians played for half an hour. Two or three priests, not distinguishable in any way from the others, were feverishly preparing, on a large dish made of leaves, an assortment of sweetmeats, small heaps of betel nut, rice mixed with curd, and coins; and everything was thickly sprinkled with rice and red powder.

At last the father of the bride appeared on the scene, and, sitting on his heels opposite the little bridegroom, who was standing, one of them on each side of the dish, he pronounced a series of magic words and prayer-formulas, previously read by one of the priests.

The climax now came. Various leaf-plates with various contents were placed, one after the other, on the extended hands of the little bridegroom, and then removed. At last the future father-in-law made a large yellow mark with his thumb on the boy's forehead, and, on this, a smaller mark with holy red powder. This action symbolized acceptance into the family circle.

The gallant little Brahmin, eleven-year-old Tulshi Prashad, endured all this seriously, without emotion and with a bored air. Perhaps his only feeling was of envy for the other youngsters with playful faces, who were climbing the slope, hanging from the branch of some tree or peering inquisitively into the trumpet of one of the musicians.

Meanwhile, night was falling. The guests sat down in a group on a linen carpet in the courtyard to eat their supper.

“*Thule, Khana khana?*” Did I want something to eat? Yes, indeed. They arranged a special carpet for me on the corridor-veranda, and brought me an abundance of food. Children, youths and grown men crowded round me to look at a foreigner, perhaps one of the very few who had ever visited their village, if not the first. I was sorry that my presence was perhaps putting the bridegroom a little in the shade. Afterwards one of the men led me to his home and arranged for me, on the veranda, a place to sleep, with a woollen blanket and a mosquito net.

People crowded, too, around my sleeping-place; happily, among them was a young man who had some slight knowledge of English. He told me that the wedding ceremony had begun a long time ago, and that what I now saw was only the beginning of the final part. The ceremony had begun at least three weeks before, when the father of the boy chose a suitable bride for him, either because he himself thought his son old enough, or because someone had persuaded him of this. Then he sent a friend, or, more often, a professional matchmaker, to the parents of the girl with the proposal. If the messenger returned with a plateful of curd, the answer was yes. According to tradition, neither the boy nor the girl was asked for any opinion, however old they might be.

On the following day the father of the boy visited the girl's parents, taking as a gift a quantity of meat, a bottle of brandy and fourteen pounds of betel nut for the mother, to be offered to the household gods. After two more weeks there was a feast in the home of the girl, with guests and with the boy's father as the guest of honour. On the following day he paid a personal call on the girl, giving her some gold bracelets. On the same evening there was another banquet, to which the guests came with gifts for the bride: buffaloes, cows, she-goats, blankets, cushions and cooking utensils. Two days later the bridegroom appeared for the first time, carried in a *dandi*, as in the procession I had just seen.

I had to rise before dawn to satisfy the villagers around me. We went into the mountains to wash at a spring. Afterwards two boys led me to the bottom of the valley, by the river bank, where the revellers were preparing the wedding feast. They had cut up the goat for the pot, while rice and vegetables were cooking in two more great copper cauldrons.

As I walked among the pots, killing time, I suddenly heard a scream of "*Juttha!*"

The cry was so loud and desperate, that not only I but everyone else turned round. The man who had screamed glared at me very angrily. A man who had always shown the most friendly attitude to me ran to me at once, and indicated, with a commanding manner, that I must leave the place and remain well away from the cooking. I remembered that *juttha* means approximately "unclean". Any food touched by another person is uneatable for a Hindu, and especially rice, the staple food, becomes *juttha* if any non-Brahmin goes near it. I now noticed, too, that the musicians, porters and others of lower caste were sitting at a distance, immobile, while the meal was being prepared.

My friend Prakasha, who had ordered me away, now came and invited me to bathe, as all the others had done. He assigned to me a place some thirty feet further down the river, below all the Brahmins. . . .

Everyone now sat down in a long semi-circle. First all the Brahmins, dressed only in a large white linen cloth round the legs and middle, with the rest of the body bare, and only the sacred thread visible upon it, sat down. They also took off their hats, and now the characteristic pigtail, which must never be cut off, since the gods seize the Hindu by it to take him to heaven when he dies, stood up or hung down in the middle of the shaven heads. The lower-caste Hindus then sat down at some distance, the space being marked in addition by a stone. These do not need to bathe or put on special clothes before eating.

My friend seated me first opposite the Brahmins. But they protested with one voice. He then came with an apologetic air and placed me opposite the lower-caste Hindus. They were equally indignant. Apparently I was, in their eyes, one grade lower than an Untouchable.

At last I was allocated a place outside the circle, at a distance sufficient to guarantee that I should not make anyone's food unclean. A Brahmin cook served the Brahmins. At the stone-marked boundary he handed over the vessel to another man, who served the others from it. At last he gave it to an outsider, whose chief duty was to drive the crows away—to serve me. I had never before felt, so intensely and practically, the inter-

caste barriers, which are even stronger in Nepal than in India.

At midday the village was wrapped in siesta. After two o'clock the musicians reappeared and arranged us round the bride's house. Its balcony was adorned once more with the brightly coloured clothes of the women; the men stood or sat round, gravely waiting. A village girl began to dance in front of the musicians, and displayed the same dance several times, with graceful hand movements.

Under a red canopy stretched over four bamboos like a roof, someone had placed the two empty *dandi's*. Then, suddenly, the bride, on her mother's back, appeared in the doorway of the house. The bridegroom came from the other side, on his father's back. And thus they rode three times round a fire kindled between the bamboos, under the red canopy. Then the children were placed in the *dandi's* and the caravan set out once more. The face of the boy was bored and resigned; the face of the girl was resigned and bored. They did not seem in the least interested in what was going on around them. They did not even look at one another. Why should they? They would have plenty of time for that!

We retraced our steps, to an accompaniment of music, through the villages, ricefields and mountain slopes. We crossed the town once more, and in the neighbouring village stopped outside a house: the house of Prashad. The bridegroom's mother was waiting for us, and, in front of a door adorned with paintings, ceremoniously received her daughter-in-law, washing her feet.

Two days later the new wife would eat for the first time with her mother-in-law. After two more the girl's father would bring her a present, and ask how she was. After two days more she would return the visit, and assure her parents that all was well with her in her new home.

And when would married life begin? This was not important. The children would grow up together, playing, without restrictions, and when they thought fit they would develop from playmates into man and wife.

Child marriages now exist only among the Brahmins, chiefly in the villages, and this is growing a less and less common practice. In the capital the young people have become quite "Americanized". They normally get to know each other, and sometimes even flirt, before marriage.

XIV

A LAND OF ARTISTS

MORE THAN TWO thousand years ago, when the Huns, Persians and Greeks invaded north-west India, they influenced both Buddhism and Hinduism in that the pictorial and sculptural representation of gods, saints and mythological figures became a custom and a necessity, which greatly stimulated the religious zeal of devotees. This custom spread all over India and the neighbouring countries, including Nepal. During the fifth century A.D. and subsequent centuries, when the Moslems conquered southern Asia, they organized the mass destruction of sculptures and all works of art that represented human figures, forbidden by their religion. From Spain to China, wherever Moslems came to power, the more sober but very decorative impersonal art replaced the local art. Nepal remained untouched by the Moslem conquerors, who, with the most cruel determination, sparing neither blood nor fire, brought the neighbouring regions of northern India under their yoke one after the other. In the fifth century the Buddhist university of Nalanda, near Patna, in India, was dissolved. Many of the ten thousand monks who lived there took refuge in Nepal and Katmandu naturally became a bastion of Buddhism, while Hindu refugees from the Moslem invasions constantly stimulated the further development of Hinduism in this Himalayan fortress.

It is, then, not surprising that Nepal, closed to the south and far remote from the cultural centres of China, should have developed its own art as an aspect of the religion of the country. For that is what the art of Nepal is: a natural emanation of a religious belief, created by the people with strong artistic feeling. And, by a happy chance, the rulers of Nepal have for hundreds of years encouraged the aesthetic gifts and artistic creativeness of the Newaris, the ancient dwellers in the Katmandu Valley.

Although the country is not rich, the city and village scene shows an architecture of comfort and care. In the valley there

are no palm-leaf or stone huts to be seen, or tiny village homes built from mud. Instead, solid two- and three-storey brick houses, richly decorated with carved wood, are the chief element in the non-religious architecture of Nepal. However, more typical is the religious architecture of the innumerable temples and smaller places of worship. The many pagodas scattered through the valley, with their several floors, each with its bronze roof, standing on pedestals with several steps, are a majestic spectacle, in spite of the many-coloured ornaments.

Historians are now generally agreed that the pagoda style developed in Nepal and was taken from there to Tibet and China, from which it reached Japan. It is true that in Japan there are pagodas a thousand years older than the most beautiful pagodas of Nepal, built in the seventeenth century, but this means only that the older Nepalese pagodas were destroyed by fire or earthquake, since they were built mainly of wood. And many were also, it seems, demolished to make room for more modern and more beautiful constructions. We do, indeed, know that the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang spoke with admiration of a seven-storey tower in the palace of the King of Nepal. This admiration and the detailed description shows that at that period—the seventh century—such buildings were not to be found in China. Only some years after his visit were sixty Newari architects and artists invited to Tibet to create and teach their art, and some of these later received invitations from the Emperor of China. The famous “White Pagoda” in Peking was built by the Nepalese architect Ariniko in the middle of the seventh century, as is proved by an inscription on it in Sanskrit and Chinese. Some of the artists who returned from China naturally brought much that was new and that in turn influenced the further development of art and architecture in Nepal.

I have tried to reconstruct the evolution of the pagoda style, and have found some thirty different stages in this evolution, which can still be observed on this or that monument. This evolution, full of searchings and hesitations, may be divided into five main phases :

1. The *stupas*, which are still standing round Patan as Asoka built them, are exact copies of similar contemporary monuments in India. Their form is simple

- and austere: a complete hemisphere, usually in stone, with niches for the figures of saints or gods on the four main sides, and with a small square projection at the top.
2. The next phase of development is the *chaitya*, like those of Swayambunat and Bodnat. The chief difference between *stupa* and *chaitya* is that the insignificant projection on the *stupa* has grown into a real tower, with an increase in height in the square part, on which are placed thirteen layers, decreasing in size, round or square, and related to the thirteen heavens of the Buddhist cosmography. The tower culminates in a metal umbrella signifying majesty.
 3. Since stone is difficult to obtain in the valley and there is plenty of wood, with which most buildings were constructed in that epoch, the use of wood for the building of *chaityas* began. This led naturally to the transformation of the hemisphere into the nearest form that could easily be achieved with wooden poles: that of square plinths one on top of the other, decreasing in size upwards. Since now, with these "steps", the square part of the tower became more accessible, four doors instead of the four niches were made in it, and one or several divine figures placed inside.
 4. The thirteen layers of the tower became roof edges with small spaces in between, and at the same time became fewer. Bricks began to be made on a large scale and used in architecture, and also replaced the wood in the plinths, which had kept the square form.
 5. The various roof edges grew, becoming important as ornament, and the spaces between them also developed into cube-shaped "blind" stories, to enable the artists to fill the large dimly lighted spaces under the roof with works of art. The twentieth century has found the Nepalese pagoda at this stage in its evolution.

Temples, developing thus, needed an increasing number of sacred objects and divine figures, and the Newari artists used, for this purpose, all their imagination, all their artistic feeling and every possible material: bronze, stone, clay and wood.

They reached the highest level of majesty in the bronze statues. The bronze lions spitting decorative fire, who guard

some of the temples, are both forceful and graceful. The many-armed lamps and the typical bronze jug whose tongue is extended to make an oil lamp, have become classics of Nepalese art. Around the temple are often to be found the portraits in bronze of the great benefactors of the temple and members of their families. On the top of the stone columns holy beasts may be seen, ranging from mouse, serpent and peacock to the lion, the dragon, and Garuda, the bird vehicle of Vishnu. But the immortal adventure of the Newari artist will remain the majestic monuments to their kings, sitting on their golden thrones, above thirty-foot stone pillars with lotus capitals, in the main squares of Nepalese towns. With a perfect sense of proportion and an infallible knowledge of anatomy, the artist, accustomed to making figures of the gods and other supernatural beings, breathed a spirit of eternity into those royal figures. Possibly they are not quite realistic portraits, because of the degree of stylization demanded by the fashion of the period. But if those kings only stimulated the creation of such statues, and did nothing else useful during their whole lives, their existences were justified.

The creator of these figures showed no hesitation or uncertainty whatever. Part of the sculpture was modelled in molten metal, parts were brought under his will by means of the hammer. The crown, plumes, little animals and other details were made separately and put together later with metal ribbons to form a harmonious whole, according to a well-thought-out plan. For that artist there was no unknown secret of art or craft. The bronze would obey his thought and the commands of his skilled fingers.

In the stone statues, on the other hand, the Nepalese artists never attained the level of their colleagues who worked in bronze. The stone lions are always somewhat heavy and grotesque, the gods always somewhat stiff, though among these, too, may be found exceptions which show the personal talents of some artist or other.

Clay was used only as a substitute for stone, to fill a niche with some figure of a god or to replace a work in bronze; the artists obtained very good results with such imitations. It is regrettable that this material is no longer used on a large scale in the valley.

Among handicrafts, the most characteristic of Nepal is

undoubtedly woodcarving. Horizontal lintels penetrate deeply into the walls, and the wooden screens covering the windows, specialists say, have never been excelled by the similar works of art in Egypt nor on the Sikh houses in the Punjab. The complicated wooden ornaments, carefully carved, are interlocked in a delicate greyish-brown lacework. It sometimes extends over the surface of the window, which is too small for the woodcarver craving to express himself. To escape from the tyranny of the architect, he creates ornamental balconies, sometimes useless, and covers every square inch with complicated designs, from which, here and there, a peacock stands out, or the figure of some god or other. The woodcarvers never had very many pretensions to be great makers of statues. However, their many-coloured mother goddesses who parade in rows as caryatids under the roofs of the pagodas, with their many arms and their numerous symbols and ornaments, do deserve some consideration.

In painting, Nepal has developed the style of the well-known "flag paintings" or *thankas*, generally regarded as Tibetan painting. It is true that nowadays more of them are to be found in Tibet than in Nepal, but on the other hand this art is not only imported from Nepal into Tibet, but even today the paintings are made by Newari artists living in Lhasa. Like the Chinese and Japanese *thankas*, the Nepalese hang between two sticks. They are painted on cloth with oil paints, or with thick water colours, with a rich colour range and much use of gold and silver. Generally this painting represents one chief figure in the centre, often with a great many arms forming a circle round him, and with various scenes from the legends of this principal hero represented in the surrounding miniatures. Other paintings represent a series of scenes from the life of the Buddha or other outstanding figures in the Mahayana pantheon.

A high standard is also visible in the miniature paintings on the wooden covers of old manuscripts, in which the colour has undergone no change for centuries.

We might reasonably ask what has become of the artists of the Nepal Valley? Do they still exist? Have they forgotten their art? Unhappily the reply is not very encouraging.

Bronze is worked on a very large scale in Nepal, both for daily ceremonial and kitchen uses and for purely religious statues and statuettes. These latter are copies of ancient works,

and some of them are of the same quality, while others are spoiled in the haste of mass-production.

Stone is much less used than in former times. It is often replaced by clay as easier to handle; this resembles stone and the work is often better.

Wood engraving has gone out of fashion. The modern European-style houses which have already been preferred by the rich for a whole century do not favour the art of the wood engraver, since there is no suitable space on either the windows or the walls of modern buildings. Thus this art is almost forgotten. Only a few craftsmen prepare bad imitations of the old models of the divine statues and miniature pagodas to sell to the tourists.

With regard to painting, it must be admitted that *thankas* are no longer made in Nepal. Printed multi-coloured calendars with large pictures of the gods replace them. The professional traditional painters find work in preparing the sheets of paper which the Nepalese stick over their doors or on the walls or use in some other way during the various festivals. Thus, for example, in Gayjatra, mentioned previously, the Feast of the Cow, those taking part in the procession wear a paper mask representing a cow on their heads. These masks are prepared in large numbers by the traditional painters, likewise those that we see over the doors and that represent the serpent king, Naga, which are renewed each year at the Serpent Festival; and for the day of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, everyone sticks on the door of his home a picture of the goddess surrounded by her helpers, who are pouring gold coins and other riches from their vessels. These pictures are sometimes drawn individually from a particular model, but this is the exception. Most often the craftsmen use a wooden block with which they print the black lines of the design, and afterwards colour it. This popular production of pictures can hardly be classed as art.

Some forty years ago the Nepalese still wore almost exclusively home-woven clothing. Weaving was thus a very well-known craft, but it never developed to those higher forms that culminated in the production of delicate silks and heavy brocades in other Asiatic countries. However, within the modest framework of home crafts, a great variety of forms and methods may be found. Even today the simple home looms work and provide clothes for the majority of the Nepalese,

although the cheap and gaily coloured textiles imported from India threaten to eliminate the home weaving industry very soon.

The smiling gaiety of the Nepalese is reflected in the songs and dances of all popular assemblies. Moreover, their taste for dramatic presentations, noticed by the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang one thousand three hundred years ago, has still not disappeared. When I saw the performance of folk dancers, singers and actors, I often felt that it was a mixture of Chinese and Indian elements on a Nepalese background.

The so-called classical drama is seldom acted in Nepal now, and it is very like the same art in India, although it is not on a very high stylistic level. The subjects of these dramas are taken from the Indian epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. In these dramas, in which dancing, music and sometimes song are combined, gods and goddesses, demons and human beings, with masks or thickly painted faces and special heavy clothes, dance, leap or move slowly across the stage, expressing themselves more by the complex art of gesture language than by words or movements. Every step, every trembling, every movement of eyes or eyebrows, and especially every movement of the hand, has its symbolic significance, by which the story of the play is told.

The folk-dances of the peasants are different. In these, too, the movements of the hands are important, but the free movements of the body give grace to the women when, singly, in rows or in circles, they present themselves in the meeting. These folk-dances are always accompanied by songs, which are, most often, dialogues between men and young women. The words of this poetry are very romantic love-songs, often describing the farewell of a betrothed couple when the man goes away for many years to serve in one of the Gurkha regiments, or her long wait for his return, or their meeting again after many years. The peasants sing not only when dancing, but also when planting rice or doing any other work for which they meet in groups.

To the Westerner the Nepalese method of mixing male and female rôles in folk art is very odd, and brings to mind the Chinese and Japanese theatre. Thus I once saw in Katmandu a folk-dancing display with ten dancing girls. The dancers, in women's clothes, were soldiers with their faces whitened, while

their long arms and large feet made a comical and ungraceful impression. But my Nepalese friends saw nothing odd in this. It was just the same, when, on the beautiful stage of the state theatre, we were shown the farewell of a Gurkha soldier to his betrothed, and suddenly the gallant hero began to sing in a soft soprano, more feminine than that of his lady. Moreover, the Westerner also finds something odd in the movements of the male folk-dancers, whose hip and hand movements seem to us more suitable to their fair partners.

The only theatre stage is the one to be found in a separate building in Singha Darbar, the government palace, and it was once the Prime Minister's private theatre. Now from time to time one of the two theatrical companies or one of the various dance or music groups performs in it.

For the plays the main themes are taken from the history of the country. I remember an excellent performance about the Princess Brikuti, who married the Emperor of Tibet and converted him to Buddhism in the seventh century. This was the work of Bal Krishna Sama, who also produced it and took the leading part in it, all of which he did with much talent. But this is not enough for this remarkable artist. His paintings, some in academic style, some experimental, are respectable efforts. And as a poet he is regarded as one of the best in a country in which poets are plentiful. His private collection of antiquities is a real museum, through which he guides the visitor with love and passionate interest.

I have already mentioned the poet Vijaya Malla and his brother Govinda. They have both formed a theatrical group, and also present historical dramas, mostly written by the two brothers, poet and historian. Sometimes artists also come from India, and on one occasion I saw a performance of an Indian social drama acted by the officials of the Indian Embassy in Katmandu, with Dr. Suman, the great Hindi poet, playing the chief part.

If I mention one other poet I shall pass from drama to literature. Lakshmi Prasad Devkota is one of the most respected poets in the country, and he is the president of the large literary society of Nepal. It is not surprising that in a country where poetry is so popular the King, too, should be a poet and that his poetry should be much appreciated. Like drama, poetry is not a new art in the valley. Many ancient works, chiefly religious,

are written in verse form, and it is also known that the ancient kings preferred to express themselves in poetry.

Apart from these, there are many writers of plays, short stories, historical novels and essays among the young generation in Nepal. However, the writer in Nepal has still to maintain himself by some other means, and work in his free time, then use his few spare rupees to publish his own works, and distribute copies among his friends, if he wishes to be read; there is no publishing industry.

Even the newspapers are more or less heroic and idealistic enterprises. Three Nepalese, one Hindi, one Newari and one English paper are published every day, one paper every other day and one review monthly. My friend, Gopal Das Sresta, the publisher of the English newspaper *The Commoner*, told me: "A year ago I began publishing my paper with a capital of seventeen rupees, and I have still not managed to add an eighteenth!"

XV

TWO FAMOUS NEPALESE

IN NEPAL OR outside it, when I asked various people who were, in their opinion, the two most famous Nepalese, hardly anyone had any idea. There are, however, two persons, born in Nepal, whose names are known to every educated person in the world.

They were both born on Nepalese territory, which gives me my initial pretext for calling them Nepalese. It is, however, a common factor in both their lives that they took little notice of nationality, spent the greater part of their lives in neighbouring India, and regarded themselves as not so much Nepalese or Indians as human beings, who belonged to the whole world. A common factor in both is the extraordinary struggle they had to achieve the goal of their dreams, which made them world-famous. The dream was born in their youth, and became a tormenting obsession, reaching a successful climax in the thirty-eighth year. Afterwards they won fame and honour and today are known everywhere.

If the names of the two famous men are united by having so much in common, their differences are no less acute. One was born as a prince, the only son of a powerful king, the other as the eleventh son of a poor peasant family. Both fled from their homes at night, the prince to become a voluntary beggar, the poor boy to seek his fortune. But each of them, that night, carried a great future hidden in his soul. Both aimed at the heights during their whole lives. But while one strove to conquer the heights of the spirit, the other was fascinated by the snowy giants of the Himalayas. And finally, twenty-five centuries separate them.

If I venture to present a sketch of the lives of the two great Nepalese in one single chapter, this is not so much because of the similarities mentioned above, but rather because of the fundamentally different ways by which both achieved happiness: Siddharta Gautama the Buddha on the difficult road of

the quest for truth; Tenzing Norgay on the uneasy paths of rocks and snowstorms leading to the summit.

* * * * *

Two thousand five hundred years ago Kapilavastu was the capital of the small kingdom inhabited by the Sakya people, on the northern frontier of India. Its king, Sudhodana, longed to have a son for many years. At last the happy moment arrived when the Queen, Maya, was on the way from Kapilavastu to Devadaha. At the place called Rummidei or Lumbini she suddenly felt her pains. After bathing in a nearby fountain she walked twenty paces and then, leaning on a tree, bore a child—as countless stone reliefs show, between the ribs on her right side. In this place in south-west Nepal there is still a stone pillar set up by Ashoka inscribed: “Here, Buddha, the Sakya ascetic was born.”

Great was the joy at the court of Kapilavastu when the Prince Siddharta Gautama was born. Seven religious ascetics gazed admiringly at the infant and said: “He will become a great man. If he chooses a secular life, he will become the king of the world.”

In his childhood and youth Siddharta was trained in sport and religion, and became very accomplished in both disciplines. But his goodness of heart was visible in all his actions, for which reason his cousin Devadatta envied and hated him.

At the age of sixteen he married the beautiful Princess Yosodhara, who was born on the same day as he, and he loved her dearly. There was nothing wanting for their happiness: they were young and healthy, and all manner of wealth was at their disposal. He was very fond of hunting, and often went out into the woods with his personal guard, Channah.

One day, walking in the road, they met a man who was very thin and who was rolling on the ground in pain.

“What is happening to that man?” Prince Siddharta asked.

“He is ill,” Channah replied, but could not explain why.

On the next day they went out again, and met a man who was bent with age. Again the Prince marvelled as he looked at him, and asked his companion what was the cause of the man’s condition.

“He is old, O Prince!” Channah replied. Both these sights made the young prince very thoughtful, for, surrounded until

then with riches and pleasure, he had known nothing of human suffering.

The next day they saw a funeral procession. Behind the corpse walked the widow and children, weeping. The Prince asked for an explanation.

“He is dead,” said Channah. “That is a law of life. Everyone, rich or poor, king or beggar, has to die.”

Thinking of the things he had seen, and thinking of the many people in the kingdom of Sakya who were ill or old, or who had lost someone by death, the Prince came to the conclusion that the majority of human beings suffer. Why must they suffer? he asked himself. But he could find no answer, although he knew all the precepts of the Hindu religion. These and many other thoughts began to torment the Prince.

When he was taking another walk through the streets he saw an old religious mendicant, one of the thousands in India who forsake their homes and go to the mountains or the woods to spend their lives in meditation there. Siddharta Gautama decided to become one of these ascetics. If he were to spend a long time alone and have all his time free for meditation and reflection, perhaps he would come to some wise conclusions on the problem of suffering: what is the source of suffering? What is the correct mode of life to conquer suffering? A reply to these questions seemed urgent.

His decision grieved his father. And so as not to make it too hard to part from his wife, who had just had a child, Siddharta Gautama left the palace at night with his faithful guard Channah, by the act known as the Great Renunciation.

Outside the city, Siddharta cut off his hair and sent back the guard with the horses. He set out on foot. A little later he changed his princely clothes for the saffron monk's robe of a beggar, and continued on his journey in search of wisdom.

Siddharta had discussions with many sages, monks and ascetics, wherever he went, trying to gain more wisdom. During one such discussion, Bimbisara, the King of Mogadah, listened and found the arguments of Siddharta showed great wisdom. The King offered him a post as a counsellor, but he refused.

“I must go forward, until I have found wisdom.”

Then Bimbisara made him promise that when he found wisdom he would come back to teach him.

For more than seven years the ascetic wandered there, his

mind open to all arguments. Once he met ascetics who said that in order to acquire wisdom he should fast and torture his body. So he sat down and fasted and tortured his body with them. But one day, when he had fainted from hunger, he broke his fast, saying that he did not think this was the right way to obtain wisdom. The five monks scornfully abandoned this "weakling".

One day he sat in the shade of a great tree in profound meditation. After many hours, it seemed to him that he saw things more clearly than before. He repeated phrases from the religious books that he had learned, and that were in fact the same as he had heard from all the religious people with whom he had had discussions; and he compared these with his own thoughts.

One thought from the Vedic writings kept coming into his mind: "From good comes good, and from evil only evil." This is the law known as *karma* in Hindu religion.

It was nothing new, but, starting from this sentence, new theories now unrolled themselves in his spirit. The ascetic sat there day after day, until everything became clear to him, and he felt he could answer all questions. He had attained *Enlightenment*. The tree under which this occurred still exists in Bodhgaya, in North India, at the foot of a beautiful ancient temple. Among the many thousands of pilgrims who visit it each year, I, too, have made the pilgrimage.

Now Gautama was ready to expound to others the truth that he had discovered. First he decided to find his five ascetic comrades and preach to them. He found them in Benares, and they began to listen unbelievably, when Gautama told them he had discovered the truth.

"The beginning of truth," Gautama said, "is that from good comes good, from evil, evil."

"That we all know and believe. You have discovered nothing new."

"If it is the truth, our prayers and offerings to many gods are senseless," he said. "Water always flows downwards. Fire is hot and ice is cold. However much we pray or make sacrifices, water will not flow upwards, or fire become cold, or ice hot."

The monks agreed.

"Then," he said, "if the idols can change nothing of these laws, why worship them? If we do good, good will result, and

evil will result from evil. The idols have no power over this law, and so to worship them is senseless and unnecessary.”

The five listeners had to agree, not without admiration for his words.

He asserted that it followed from this that even the Vedas were not sacred books. It also followed that the idea of division into castes was false, for if good comes from good and evil causes evil, it does not matter in what house one was born, but how one behaves during life. Now the monks understood that what Gautama said was different from their previous belief, and that it was all clear and logical.

Then he began to explain, that in order to live a good life it was not right either to think only of enjoyment, or to torment the body: the Middle Way was the best. He explained the Eight Precepts of the Middle Way. And he also gave the Five Commands of Honesty.

The monks thought for a long time about all that they had heard. Then they said:

“This is true wisdom. Siddharta Gautama has attained Enlightenment. He has become a *Buddha*. He has set turning the wheel of the true Law of Life.”

Since then Buddha or the Enlightened One has been his name.

The five monks became his first disciples, whom he sent in different directions to preach. He himself kept his promise and returned to the King, Bimbisara; and, when he had had the laws of life explained to him, the King accepted them and became a fervent follower of Buddha.

After a short time thousands of Buddhists swarmed wherever the Enlightened One had been. One day heralds from Kapilavastu reached him, with a courteous request from his father that he should visit the court. He did so; there he explained the discoveries he had made to the members of his family, and they were converted to his teaching. He was called Sakyamuni, the wise man from Sakya.

From the beginning he had founded an order of monks. Now he also organized an order of nuns, at the request of his aunt, the Queen, and his wife became one of the first nuns.

For many years Buddha travelled from city to city, village to village, explaining the Laws of Life, and he sent his disciples all over the world to teach. For his truth was not truth for one

nation or for one caste. It was the truth for every person in the world who chose to adopt it. It was, in fact, the first universal religion in the world.

One day, when the Buddha was eighty, he felt weak and sat down under a tree. His disciples surrounded him and complained bitterly, "The Master is forsaking us!" But he explained: "The Laws and the Teaching remain with you. They will be your Master, who will never forsake you."

He passed to the Nirvana.

His earthly envelope is no more. But his Spirit has expanded over many lands and penetrated the homes and the souls of millions of people.

* * * * *

In the high mountains of north-eastern Nepal there is a village called Thamey, in which Buddha is worshipped by simple and good Sherpas. Tenzing comes from that village. But, as happened to the Enlightened One, he was not to be born in his own village, but in the holy place Tsa Chu, where his mother had gone to pray to a rock shaped like the head of Buddha. So, in a sense, the new hero of Nepal was born under the protection of Sakyamuni.

An ascetic saw him, too, and said to his parents: "Take great care of him for the first three years. If he lives through these, he will become a great man!" This happened in "the year of the hare", 1914.

He, too, did not become world-famous under his first name. Namgyal Vangdi was the name he received at birth. Only some time later an important lama, who again predicted a future for him, worked out from his astrological books that his name, to become "great", ought to be Tenzing Norgay.

His parents wanted him to become a lama, but an angry monk chose to give a blessing by throwing a wooden board at his head, and the novice became a layman once more. He looked after the many yaks belonging to the family on the high mountain slopes between Makalu and Everest, the holy Chomolungma. He was the eleventh among thirteen brothers and sisters; life was difficult.

He heard the name of Everest for the first time after the British expeditions of 1921, 1922 and 1924, in which a few men from his village took part—his village in the wider sense, Solo

Kumbu. They returned with many strange stories of the foreigners, of their strange foods and of mountain climbing.

“Chomolungma . . . the mountain no bird can fly over . . . perhaps birds could not, but perhaps men could reach its summit . . . perhaps some day I may reach it . . .” the little boy thought as he looked after the beasts at the foot of the great mountain.

And with impatience he waited to grow up and test the truth of his name: Tenzing means “devout one” and Norgay “lucky one”. He was certainly devout, but was he to have good luck?

Impatient and restless, he ran away from home at the age of thirteen to push the hands of time forward. He spent two weeks in Katmandu to feast his eyes on the many marvels never to be seen in his village. Then he returned to his home by means of another fortnight’s walk through the mountains. Tears of joy, smiles of joy—and a joyful thrashing welcomed him back to his father’s home.

The months dragged by once more. Years passed. He looked after the beasts on the mountain slopes and grew potatoes and millet. And he dreamed. He dreamed of the great snow-covered mountain, the Mother of Mountains.

In 1933 a new expedition needed porters. The nineteen-year-old boy, with a few others, again ran away from home, this time to Darjeeling, to offer himself for the expedition. But they found him too young.

Two years later, another British expedition set out. Eric Shipton looked at the robust, well-built young man with the lively black eyes, and nodded to his companion, who was recruiting porters. This nod meant the height of bliss for the aspirant to mountaineering.

He carried large loads on his back, so large that they almost brought him down at every step. The forehead band pressed hard on his head, and he was at the same time sweating and shivering. But his white teeth shone between his lips in a broad grin; he was happy.

The climatic conditions denied any success to this expedition. But now Tenzing Norgay had new opportunities for the future; he received a certificate saying that he had already taken part in an expedition, which would enable him to obtain such work again easily.

And so he set out on the way of the heights, of sufferings and enjoyment, of conquest and defeat, the hard way of the rocks and snow, of air lacking in oxygen, of murderous avalanches, under a ninety-pound load. But it was also the way of glorious experiences, of sublime friendships, where the hovering between life and death made further communication needless. It was the way dreamed of by the child, chosen by the youth and lived by the mature man, Tenzing Norgay.

After a season in the mountains of Garhwal in north-west India, it was Everest again in 1938. Tilman was the leader of the expedition, in which other great mountaineers such as Odell, Smythe and Shipton, whom Tenzing was glad to meet again, took part.

The pack on his back was heavy; but this did not stop Tenzing from forging ahead with the best. Tilman introduced the new system by which the heights-porters do not carry great weights until they reach the upper camps. Tenzing was proud to find himself among these. He was to be seen in Camp Five, at a considerable height, always smiling and always helpful. He was indeed in his element. When two other Sherpas could not carry their packs from Camp Four, so creating a problem, Tenzing offered to go back and fetch them. This won him the goodwill of the "Sahibs", but also showed that he was on the mountain, not for pay alone, but also because he belonged there. The next day he was already in Camp Six, 27,200 feet high, a record height for a Sherpa, which he himself broke fifteen years later. Tilman distributed medals and the title of "Tiger" to the bravest Sherpas, who reached great altitudes, and Tenzing was among the first few to receive them.

During the war years he continued to climb and work in north-west India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he learned new languages, manners and customs. His wife died, leaving two little girls, Pem Pem and Nima, who seldom saw him at home. The girls needed a mother, and he married the Sherpani Ang Lahmu, of whom he is proud.

After the war came more expeditions in rapid succession. With Denman to Everest, with the Swiss to the western Himalayas. . . .

In 1948 he had a stroke of luck. The Italian Professor Tucci employed him on a long journey to Lhasa and many other places in Tibet. The great dream of every Sherpa was realized

as if by a miracle. Breathless with emotion, he stood before the Dalai Lama. Tenzing Norgay, the Devout One, the Lucky One, prayed with his palms together, his head bowed: "Om Mane Padme Hum!" He prayed for his father, his dear old mother in his native mountains, his wife at home, the soul of his mother-in-law . . .

In 1950 he was *Sirdar* or Chief Porter to an expedition which tried to conquer the ill-famed Nanga Parbat, and after that, with a French expedition, he reached the summit of Nanda Devi, the holy mountain.

In 1952 Tenzing was overcome with joy when a Swiss expedition invited him to climb Everest. He would not be only a *sirdar*, but an actual fellow-climber on this expedition. At last he saw his chance to fulfil the dream which had troubled him since childhood. He felt intensely the call to The Mountain.

This time the expedition passed through Nepal, for many days of walking in valley and hills and over rope bridges. Namche Bazar was in the midst of the Sherpa region. The whole family, the whole clan of Solokumbu, was there. There was a rapid succession of embraces, and *chang*, the mountain liquor, flowed freely.

After the crossing of an "impossible" crevasse, the camps were set up one after the other. Tenzing never experienced mountain sickness; it was as if he had a "third lung" with a reserve of air, as someone said. The higher he climbed, the fitter he felt. The glacier of Khumbu was already below them. They passed near Nuptse and set up a camp on the saddle between Lo-Tze and the summit of Everest. A new and higher camp was struck. And another, higher still, at 27,000 feet. There Tenzing spent the night with Lambert in a small tent, without sleeping-bags. In order not to freeze, they massaged and beat each other all night.

At dawn they began to climb once more, without food, without sleep, with everything on them frozen, in a terrible snow-storm. But they went on, making a way for themselves in the snow. Hours passed; walking became more and more difficult. It became impossible. Without speaking, they turned, and, with aching hearts, left the mountain. They were only about a thousand feet from the summit—but feet at that height are very long . . . !

Tenzing and Lambert had no language in common, but they

were in such harmony that they became great friends. Autumn found them once more on the mountain slope. But autumn gave place to winter, and the temperature became intolerable. Their hands froze under three pairs of gloves. At last they gave up, gave up the dream of conquering the mountain together.

Tenzing had scarcely left hospital, very weak, when he received an invitation from the British Everest Expedition at the beginning of 1953. He would again be a *sirdar* and a full fellow-climber. He felt that this was too great a responsibility and too great a test of strength for one man. He felt too weak after two Everest expeditions in a single year. His wife, Ang Lahmu, protested bitterly: "Are you mad? Do you want to kill yourself?"

"Perhaps you are right, I am mad . . . but I am going. I must go."

The Mountain was not calling Tenzing any longer. It was commanding him.

I will not tell the tale again here of the famous expedition led by Colonel Hunt. It is too well known. But we may recollect the photograph taken by Hillary on that occasion. In a thick blue and yellow costume, unrecognizable because of his oxygen mask, there stands one of the conquerors of the "Third Pole", the roof of the world. In one hand he holds his ice-axe with four little flags.

There he stands, between heaven and earth, between life and death. His body extremely weary, scarcely holds itself upright, beaten by the mighty wind. But how high the spirit stands! He is not thinking of the salvation of the world. He is thinking of his old mother. Of his friend Lambert. Of his wife and his daughters. One of them, Pem Pem, had given him a red and blue pencil to carry, and here he is, burying it in the snow, with a few sweets, as an offering to the Mother Goddess of the Mountains, Chomolungma.

This portrait, so profoundly human, as transparent and as true as the snows of the Himalayas, as pure as the Five Commands of the Enlightened One for the Pure Life, should remain impressed on this page for my readers. For that is what Tenzing Norgay, one of the two most famous men born in Nepal, is like.

XVI

NEPAL IN 2015

YES, I AM going to speak of Nepal in 2015. But this does not mean that I am making a prognosis of its future. I am simply speaking of this year. According to the Nepalese calendar it is now 2015, when in the West it is 1958. Although the Westerners know that the Mohammedans and the Jews have their own reckonings of time, these are regarded as "religious" calendars, and it is generally believed that apart from these the "civil" calendar in the whole world is that of the West. What a mistake! There are many lands and provinces in the world in which non-Western calendars are still in use; and these are not always "backward" peoples. The matter, too, is sometimes more complex than we may suppose.

In Nepal, for instance, the year quoted above is now generally accepted; it appears on calendars and newspapers. Its era dates from 57 B.C., and it is called the era of Vikramaditya, after the powerful king of that name, who was crowned that year as the King of Ujjain in India. This era was brought to Nepal only seven centuries after it began.

But in Nepal there are various other eras, and the dates on manuscripts and stone inscriptions are now according to one, now according to another calculation, a fact which provides many headaches for historians. These are the most usual:

Kali Yuga begins in 3101 B.C.

The Buddhist era begins in 544 B.C.

Vikramaditya begins in 57 B.C.

Sakya era begins in A.D. 78.

Lichavi era begins in A.D. 110.

Gupta era begins in A.D. 319.

Amshuvarman era begins in A.D. 593.

Newari era begins in A.D. 880.

Many dates in Nepalese history are open to discussion because of this variety in calculation.

The Nepalese year is divided into twelve lunar months, and the months into two halves: the light half and the dark. These two units seem more important than the division into weeks.

The day is divided into eight periods each of three hours, called *prahar*. Each *prahar* is composed of seven and a half *gharhi*, each of twenty-four minutes. Each *gharhi* consists of sixty *palas* each of twenty-four seconds, and one such *palas* consists of sixty *bipalas*—four-tenths of a second.

However, in the town, where many people have watches, this system is rapidly giving way to the Western system of hours.

As I have said, I shall speak of present-day Nepal.

The reader will certainly want to know first how the people live. The chief and practically the only form of production is agriculture. Of the 35,840,000 acres of land, 9,600,000 acres are cultivated, while about 2,500,000 of potentially productive land are waiting to be cultivated, when willing hands are found.

And when I say willing hands, I mean literally hands, for in Nepal the ground is generally cultivated with a curved short-handled shovel, such that the user has to stoop all the time. It is very rare to see a wooden plough pulled by oxen or buffaloes.

In the southern regions of Terai and the valleys in the midst of the mountains the soil and climate are so favourable, that as many as three harvests may be obtained in one year. On the other hand, in the highest mountains and the semi-desert regions even one is uncertain. For this reason the land tax, which is, incidentally, the only tax paid in Nepal, is paid according to the fertility of the land, which is divided into three classes.

The main product is rice, on 6,500,000 acres, with 3,000,000 acres for maize and millet, half a million each for wheat, potatoes and oil seeds, and 2,000,000 acres for tobacco, jute, tea and other products. Anyone who happens to add up these figures may notice that they come to 13,000,000 instead of the 9,600,000 mentioned. But I have already said that some regions may be counted two or three times.

The products of the soil, together with the breeding of cattle, buffaloes, yaks, goats, sheep, pigs, hens and ducks, more or less satisfy the modest wants of the Nepalese. And if the Terai region exports all these products, especially rice, to India, this

is not exactly because there is a surplus, but because, for want of roads, the only market is in neighbouring India. It sometimes happens paradoxically that while on the one hand rice flows from Nepal to the south, it returns by another route from India to Katmandu, where it is needed. Agricultural products are also exported to Tibet, where they are exchanged for Tibetan yaks and sheep.

About 11,000,000 acres are covered with forest. The exploitation of the valuable timber is not at present possible, owing to the lack of roads, but in future they will no doubt be of great value to the country. The mineral resources of Nepal are still not fully explored, but investigations so far have been rather disappointing. There is plenty of mica in the mountains, and many other minerals are to be found in smaller quantities, possibly even uranium. But so far no mineral is exploited on any large scale.

The industries are for the most part still at the cottage industry stage. This produces textiles, clay pots, hand-made paper, woollen blankets and so on. The town of Biratnagar is known as "the Manchester of Nepal" since several factories and mills have been established there.

The exchange of goods with Tibet and India has already been mentioned. Because of this exchange, and also as a land between India and Tibet, Nepal has an important position in commerce. But so far, Nepal does not have commercial relations with other countries. According to a certain commercial treaty with India, all currency exchanges must take place through the Reserve Bank of India, and thus all goods must also be bought or sold through India. In the past year there has been a revision of this treaty, with nullification of this clause, so that from now onwards Nepal will be able to have direct commercial relations with other countries.

During the hundred years of the Rana rule, the economy of Nepal was very simple. The whole of the state income, consisting of land tax, customs duties and fines, went straight into the hands of the Maharaja; he as the Prime Minister disposed of the money. He built fine palaces for himself and his near and distant relatives, and continued to swell the family wealth. If sometimes some public work was done, this was attributed to the personal goodwill and benevolence of the Maharaja. After the fall of the Rana régime, the economy of the country

had to be established on a new basis. And now the problem is how to set up an economy for a country in which there are no traditions in the matter and no experts.

The Nepalese budget is not published, but it is thought to be about thirty-five million rupees (£1,800,000). No doubt this is not a large sum with which to manipulate a country's economy, where everything has to be done as from the beginning: roads, schools, hospitals and hydro-electric power-stations, together with the modernization of agriculture and the creation of industries.

Nepal is a backward country and needs much help from outside. And three countries are competing to give help, if not from a wish to control the country, at least to make sure that the others do not control it.

India, the great southern neighbour, has recently given to Nepal an eighty-mile motor road, is now building for it the "Kosi project", the great hydro-electric station in the east of the country, and has made, from time to time, other very useful gifts. For example, during a dry season last year a generous gift of rice helped to solve the famine problem. India is also giving Nepal postal communications with other countries, so that the Nepalese stamps are used only within the country and for India, while for other countries Indian stamps are used. The cause of this situation is that until 1957 Nepal was not a member of the Universal Postal and Telegraphic Union. In that year it became a member, and probably the position will soon change.

China is the second competitor. It gives Nepal financial help, for which it asks no visible recompense. There is not even one Chinese living in Nepal, though the two countries have exchanged large cultural delegations.

The United States, the rich uncle of the poor world, is the third helper. In Nepal about sixty American families are working at present, as members of U.S.O.M., United States Operational Mission. The work of the Mission is directed chiefly to health work, educational work and agricultural development. In various institutions the Americans work as advisers or as co-directors with Nepalese partners, or as they themselves put it, holding one end of the dollar until they see that it is going to be well used, and then letting go. For not thousands but millions of dollars are involved.

Work has also begun on certain projects of specialist agencies such as W.H.O. (World Health Organization) and F.A.O. (Food and Agricultural Organization). Christian mission hospitals are also active in a few places.

But all these aid programmes, which are certainly welcome, can be only a temporary solution to the problem, and in the course of time the economic and social problems of the country will have to find their natural solution.

One of the great problems of Nepal is unemployment. However, it is an interesting fact that the Nepalese themselves do not feel this. The family-community system alleviates the difficulties. In this system twenty or thirty members of the family, in the wider sense, live in the same house and live as an economic community. This means in practice that the earnings of three or four working members of the family are handed to the head of the family, and distributed by him among the twenty or thirty members according to their needs. In these conditions, naturally, no one is too eager to find employment.

The average salary of an educated Nepalese is sixty rupees (£3) monthly. A civil servant with a university degree starts at a salary of two hundred rupees, while my friend the young and active Naina Bahadur, a post-office worker, receives only forty rupees a month. The normal wage for a servant is fifteen to twenty rupees. If these sums are to be divided among another seven or eight persons, the *per capita* income represents a very low standard of living. And this is true only of the capital. In the villages people generally earn about one-third of the sums mentioned above, and in the remote mountain areas money is seldom seen at all.

But, in spite of all this, when I think of the Nepalese, I do not think of a wretched people, or even of a very poor people. Objectively, their poverty is a fact. But they do not feel it. They do not complain, and gaiety is much more a part of their lives than among other peoples, who objectively live much better.

However, among the educated youth I saw melancholy and disillusionment, which no doubt had their causes.

The Maharajas of the Rana dynasty did not, in general, believe in education, with good reason: a son of the high-class branch of the Rana family was born as a colonel, and his career was guaranteed without regard to his intelligence or

his education. For the son of another family no important post was attainable, however intelligent or educated he might be.

As a result of this fixed destiny, the young men of Nepal—only the men, of course—entered the Trichandra College, the only institute of higher education, merely to pass the time and with no great interest in learning. And even if someone or other had a genuine thirst for knowledge, this was of little use: the standard of instruction is very low, and was then much lower. This college is equivalent to only the first half of a university course. It has “B.A.’s” and “B.Sc.’s” with no further specialization. Such bachelor’s degrees, naturally, are not a qualification for any practical work, or for theoretical specialist research. Its graduates are not engineers or doctors or lawyers or teachers: they have acquired only superficial general knowledge about all the subjects of study.

Most of these intellectuals are unemployed. Some of them hold ministerial posts, especially those who have spent some years in prison in the struggle for democracy, which is their highest qualification. Some others work as officials in the ministries. But what do the other intellectuals do? What do these other graduates do? They are not specialists in anything, and cannot imagine themselves working in trade or on the land after so many years spent in school. Their only occupation is to wander in the streets of Katmandu and meet on street corners for political discussions. They ardently desire the fall of the Government—which one does not matter—for in the next Cabinet there may be some friend who will find them a portfolio or some other post. Any one of these young men considers himself as a candidate for office in the “next” Cabinet. As a Minister of Health, or Education, or Communications? That does not matter; they will accept any ministry or position in a ministry. It never enters their heads for a moment that a minister must have a thorough knowledge of his subject and be a genuine specialist. This has been one of the chief causes of the fall of all the governments so far in the last few years: they fall as soon as a problem arises for which real specialist knowledge is necessary.

Meanwhile, until their turn comes, the youth of Nepal are disillusioned. They have studied for so many years, or fought and suffered for the democratic régime, and now here they are, and the country does not want them. . . .

Some young men go abroad to continue their studies, but when they come home their position is no better. I remember the case of a brilliant student who had just returned from London with a doctor's degree in physics. What could he do in Nepal? There is no institute for research in physics, in which he could work, and with that title the post of an ordinary teacher in the Trichandra College, with a salary of two hundred rupees, was an unworthy future. Now the situation is beginning to change. To begin the rapid development of the country, the Government has decided to found three hundred new elementary schools, which will need three hundred teachers. Illiteracy which now reaches 96% must be reduced radically. So a two-year emergency teacher training college has been established to train them. Similarly there is a two-year medical school to create the urgently needed personnel for various health projects: and a two-year law school is also established.

Outside Katmandu, near Kirtipur, a university is being built. Little by little its various buildings will be complete and little by little the various faculties or colleges will begin to function. So the wheel of progress is beginning to turn in Nepal.

The young people of Nepal have a great desire for culture and for communication with the rest of the world. Once I gave a lecture in the teacher training college on the psychology and pedagogic significance of children's drawings. The interest was so great that I was asked to organize a seminar on the subject. On another occasion I gave a public lecture on the international language, Esperanto. The interest compelled me to start a course in that language with seventy pupils, and in separate classes I taught Esperanto to the Minister of Education, the poet, Lakshmi Prasad Devkota.

I mention these examples to illustrate the thirst for knowledge among the young people of Nepal. And this is a good sign for the future. I believe very strongly that the situation in Nepal is going to improve rapidly. Now various international arrangements and invitations favour more than two hundred Nepalese students, so that they can study various sciences abroad. Some years later, when they return, they will gradually influence the progress of their country in this direction.

Those wheels that have begun to turn will go on turning and the land will develop. But I hope that the development will not take away its charm, this simple charm which captivates the

visitor from the first moment, even before his aeroplane has landed. This charm he will find at every step during his stay in this Himalayan country, whether he is a mere tourist or a serious student of history, religion, art or ethnology . . . this infinite charm that fills the heart with feelings of nostalgia when one leaves, and makes the parting guest repeat, in most sincere tones:

Au revoir, Nepal!

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