



1. Bhatgaon: the Durbar Square.

A Winter in Nepal

JOHN MORRIS



RUPERT HART-DAVIS

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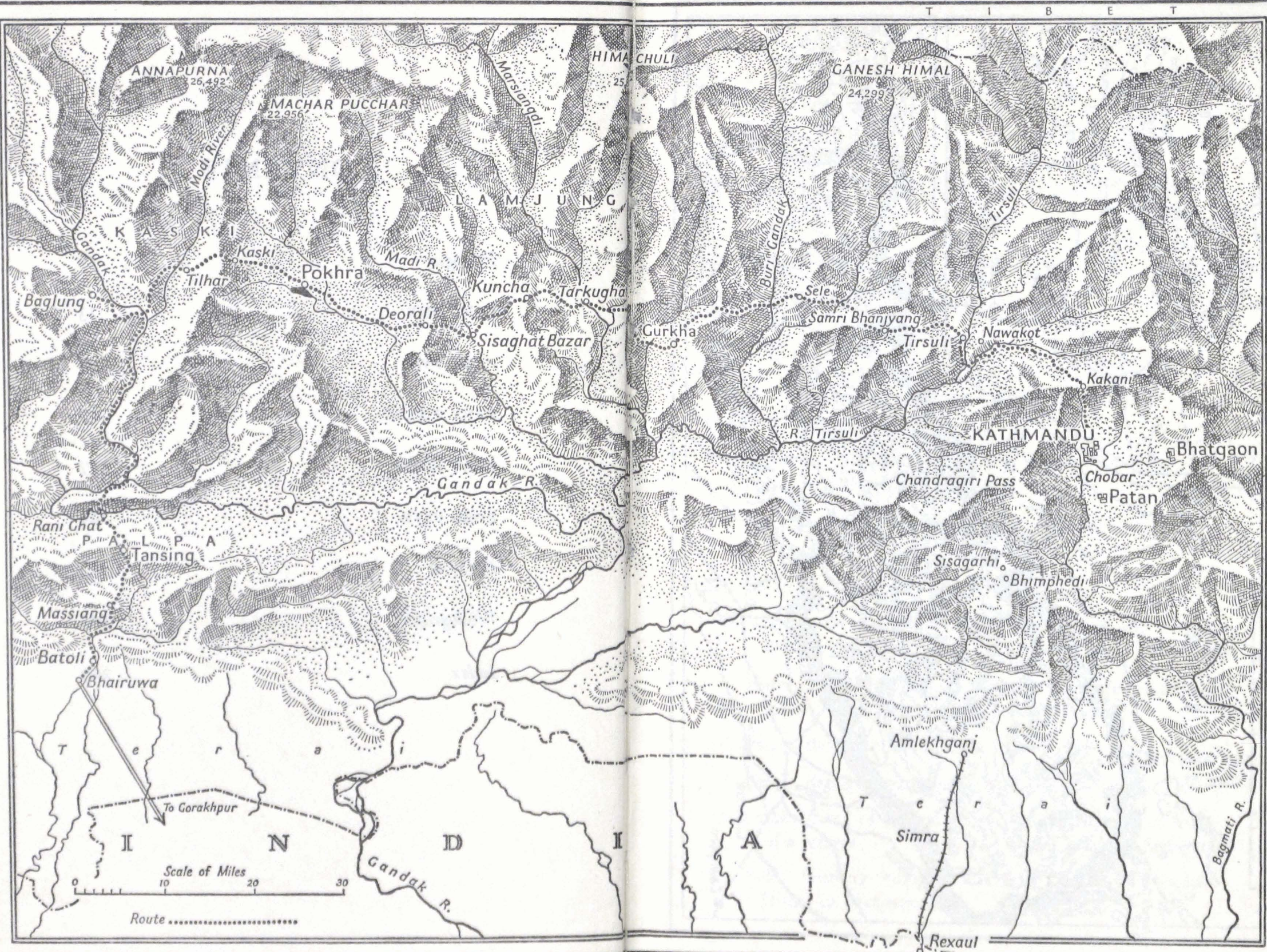
DENYS AND BETTE GALLOWAY

my companions in the hills of Nepal,

my hosts at Chobar

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ANNAPURNA
26,492'

MACHAR PUCCHAR
22,956'

HIMACHULI
25,000'

GANESH HIMAL
24,299'

LAMJUNG

KASKI

Kaski

Pokhra

Madi R.

Kuncha

Tarkugha

Deorali

Sisaghat Bazar

Gurkha

Sele

Samri Bhanjyang

Tirsuli

Nawakot

Kakan

KATHMANDU

Bhatgaon

Chobar

Patan

Chandragiri Pass

Sisagarhi

Bhimphedi

Amlekhganj

Simra

Rexaul

Bagmati R.

Gandak R.

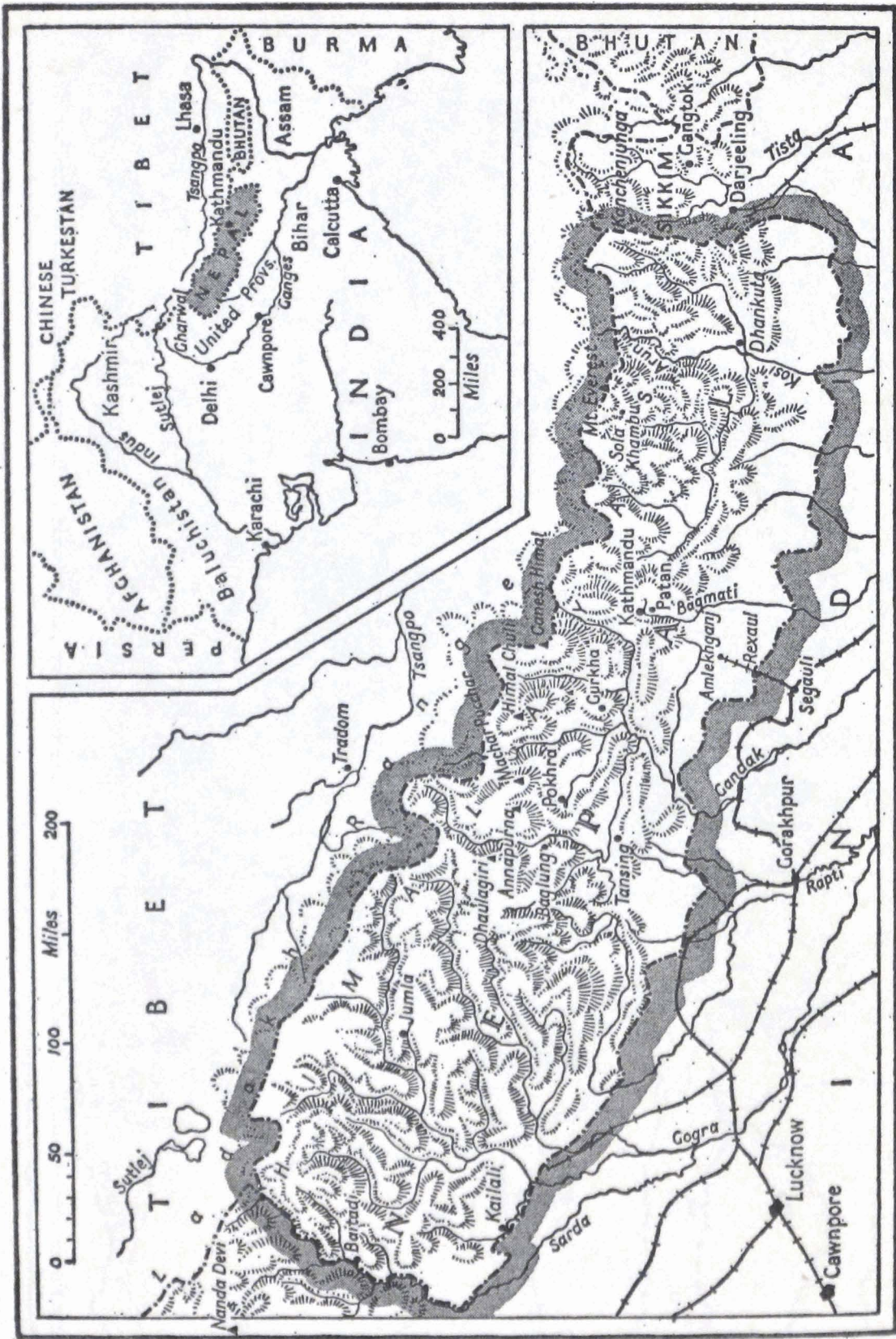
Scale of Miles



Route

To Gorakhpur

T I B E T



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All illustrations are from photographs taken by me in 1960-61, except for five (the frontispiece and plates 2, 3, 4, and 7) which were taken on earlier visits to Kathmandu. The diagram on page 105, showing a family grouping of Gurkha houses, was drawn by Denys Galloway.

J. M.

Prologue

Prologue

THIS book is the outcome of an obsession. Forty or so years ago, when I was commissioned into a Gurkha regiment, I knew nothing about the people with whom luck had cast my lot. But in those furious days it was enough to have got away from France: to be taking part, with comparative safety, in the closing stages of the war in Palestine and, when the end came, to travel about the country. At first there was no available ship to take us back to India, so to pass the idle months of waiting I began to interest myself in the manners and customs of the men under my command. The difficulty was the language, for I knew only enough to give the elementary orders necessary for day-to-day administration of the Company: even in a simple conversation I quickly got out of my depth.

One of the Gurkha's most endearing characteristics is his inability to remain serious for long; very little brings a smile to his face. Also, unlike the peasants of India, perhaps because he has never been a member of a subject race, he is no mock-respecter of persons, so that when the men laughed at my fumbling attempts to talk to them I did not feel humiliated: I sensed that they were laughing with and not at me, and I made up my mind to learn the language as soon as I could.

When we got back to India I found myself before long in temporary command of the battalion, and when one day an order came from Army Headquarters to provide an assistant recruiting officer I selected myself for the job. In any case nobody else wanted to go: recruiting was a military backwater, to be avoided by ambitious young officers, but it seemed the very thing for me.

The main recruiting depôt was at Gorakhpur, an important railway junction in what used to be known as the United Provinces, some fifty miles from the Nepal border and connected with it by a number of small branch-lines. British officers were prohibited from entering Nepal, which in those days was a closed country, and the preliminary selection of recruits was therefore carried out by Gurkha soldiers seconded from their regiments for this purpose. Gorakhpur was thus a convenient centre within easy reach of the western hills. There, too, pensions were paid, so that during the winter months there was a floating population of never less than a thousand or so Gurkhas of one kind and another. When I first went to Gorakhpur the normal work of the depôt had been greatly increased by the demobilisation of temporary wartime battalions, most of whose men passed through Gorakhpur. We started work at six in the morning and were often at it long after darkness had fallen. I found it difficult at first. All our investigations (and widows' claims to a pension were often complicated) had perforce to be carried out through the medium of Nepali, of which my knowledge was still inadequate.

But immediately after the war the pressure of work at Gorakhpur became too great and the authorities decided to open an additional temporary depôt at Laheria Serai, a remote village away to the east, in the province of Bihar. I was sent to take charge of it, and for the first time in my life I was alone in a foreign environment. For a whole year I saw no other English-speaking person. I was often lonely, but without having to make any particular effort I gradually became at ease in Nepali: so much so that when eventually I returned to my regiment it seemed strange at first to be talking English.

The camp at Laheria Serai was in a mango-grove, and on the clear sun-filled winter mornings, which followed each other in seemingly endless succession, I could see, twenty or thirty miles away, a large part of central Nepal. First the long narrow strip of forested Terai, then the foothills, range after range increasing gradually in height, and in the extreme distance the great shimmering wall of the Himalayas, not more than a hundred miles away but looking infinitely remote and inaccessible. I spent many idle hours gazing at this forbidden land: and the more my men told

me about their life in the hills the more urgent became my desire to go there. I knew it was impossible; but the determination some day to travel in the interior of Nepal became implanted in my mind. I realised that it was no more than an idle daydream. Nevertheless I could not rid myself of this intense desire: like a spur, it has been pricking me for half a lifetime.

Meanwhile I learned all I could about the country, and during many evenings of talk round the camp-fire gradually acquired a considerable theoretical knowledge of its geography. And in the course of my work I travelled along the greater part of the frontier with India, sometimes transgressing the regulations to the extent of advancing a few miles into Nepalese territory when I was sure I would not be found out. Once or twice my Gurkha companions urged me to go with them into the hills. Nothing would have been easier, since the frontier between India and Nepal was, indeed still is, unguarded: and by avoiding the obvious trade-routes on which the check-posts were situated there would have been little to stop a determined traveller. But eventual recognition would have been inevitable and I was not prepared to accept responsibility for the severe penalties which would have been meted out to my guide. Moreover, my military training had bred a feeling for discipline: officers did not deliberately disobey their orders.

At the end of a year the work began to slacken off. Conditions had almost returned to peacetime normal and I was ordered to close the depôt and return to Gorakhpur. I did not know it at the time, but I had been sent to Laheria Serai because my inexperience had made me more of a hindrance than a help in the hectic conditions at the main recruiting centre, and there was no time to stop and teach me. I was, however, thought to have done a useful job by myself, and there now came a totally unexpected reward. The chief recruiting officer used occasionally to visit Kathmandu to confer with the British Resident and pay his respects to the Maharaja. Brook Northey had arranged to go there in two weeks' time, and if I liked he would ask if I might accompany him.

In subsequent years I had the luck to visit Kathmandu on several occasions, but the excitement of this first journey was never equalled. Nowadays there is an almost daily flight from

both Delhi and Calcutta to Kathmandu, which is reached in a couple of hours from either city. In clear weather it is one of the most spectacular air-journeys in the world, with a view of the Himalayas that is unobtainable in any other way. But when I first went to Kathmandu the journey took three days on foot from the Indian frontier, and I still think the gradual approach is the more rewarding. The impact of this unique city is in any circumstances staggering, but it seems to offer more if one comes to it slowly, a reward for the toil of getting there.

From Rexaul, which is only a few hundred yards from the frontier, a metre-gauge railway (still the only one in the country) runs through the Terai as far as Amlekhganj, where the foothills begin. We spent a night in the rest-house at Rexaul and soon after dawn the next morning set out over the fields and entered Nepal. There was nothing to mark the border and no kind of customs or other examination, but it soon appeared that the station-master had been warned to receive us. The diminutive train was already packed to capacity: even the running-boards were covered with passengers. Some had climbed on to the roofs of the carriages. There was no danger in this overloading, since the train, when eventually we started, never exceeded ten miles an hour. Passengers got on and off while we were still in motion and there was a great deal of good-natured shouting. As far as I was able to judge, only a few travellers had bothered to pay for tickets, but nobody seemed to worry.

We had been given the Maharaja's private coach. It was upholstered in bright pink satin, a distressing sight in the early morning glare. At every halt, and there were many, people crowded round to gape at the two of us reclining in what was to them the ultimate luxury: but in truth it was not a comfortable journey. The carriage was devoid of springs, a mere box on wheels, and we were bounced about like peas in a drum. At that time the railway was thought to be one of the wonders of Nepal, a symbol of the country's progress, but nowadays it has been superseded by faster means of travel. (By ill luck I was forced to make use of the railway again in 1960, and by pure chance found myself occupying the very same carriage. Most of the stuffing had disappeared from the upholstery and what was left of the spit-stained

satin had faded to a deathly puce. There was no glass in the windows, and this time there were not two but about twenty of us, herded in like cattle. I felt there was a great deal to be said for travelling as an honoured guest.)

At Bhimphedi an officer of the Nepalese army was waiting to escort us to the capital. The Maharaja had sent not only porters to carry our luggage but also a couple of litters. The rough path up to Sisagarhi, where we spent the night, was steep and tiring, and no Nepalese of any quality would have dreamed of clambering up it on foot. But Northey and I were young and active. Also we disliked to see human beings used as beasts of burden, and so we walked. We spent the first night in the rest-house and fell asleep to the sound of bugling from the old fort just below. We had climbed about a thousand feet above the Terai, and compared with the plains of India the air was fresh and cool. We were as yet no more than thirty or forty miles inside Nepal, but already we seemed to have entered a different world.

In those days this track, rough and deliberately untended, so as to discourage visitors, was the only means of communication between Kathmandu and the outside world, and any goods that could not be obtained in the capital had to be carried up on the backs of porters. Even the few motor vehicles then in use had been transported in this manner. We saw one during the course of our journey. The wheels had been removed and the rest of the machine was lashed to a large float, from both ends of which long poles protruded. This ungainly burden, which required much patience to manoeuvre round the many narrow corners, was being propelled by thirty or forty sweating coolies who worked in relays. It was moving forward at about half a mile an hour. The remuneration for this back-breaking work, for which the labour was impressed, was the equivalent of sixpence a day.

On the second day we reached the Chandragiri Pass, from the top of which the traveller gets his first sight of the Nepal Valley. It lay spread out below us, a green bowl surrounded by mountains. Millions of years ago it was a lake, and its alluvial soil is still the most fertile in all Nepal. The gilded roofs of temples shone like points of light dotted about the close-packed city, and even at this distance it was possible to identify many of the Ranas'

white stucco palaces. On the far horizon the Himalayas stood sentinel in a great floating arc of ice, their bases hidden in cloud. I stood there entranced, unable to tear myself away.

We stayed at the British Legation, a large rambling building of a style I can only describe as Indian-Tudor. It had a corrugated iron roof and was extremely ugly, but compared with the tasteless and pretentious Rana palaces it seemed almost aristocratic. The redeeming feature was a superb garden, which a succession of Residents had tended with loving skill. Fortunately most of them had the inclination, since there was little else to occupy their working hours. The plot in which the Residency stands was originally selected by the Nepalese as being the most unhealthy in the district, but because of the way in which modern Kathmandu has expanded it is now in what has become the most exclusive quarter of the city, only a stone's throw from the King's new palace and well removed from the dirt and noise of the town. Some years ago, when the status of Britain's representative was raised to that of Ambassador, he was provided with a more imposing residence. The building which replaced the old Residency is certainly now the most comfortable in the capital, but for some extraordinary reason what used to be the back is now the front, and in the process of reconstruction the old garden was largely destroyed. It now houses the Indian Ambassador, having passed to that country at the time of independence. India's interests in Nepal must of necessity be far more important than those of any other nation and it is right that her Ambassador should be comfortably housed. Nevertheless it is a little humiliating that the Ambassador of Britain, once the only foreign power represented in Nepal, should now occupy what in house agents' advertisements would be described as a compact villa-residence, the outbuildings of which, occupied by members of the staff, were originally built for the clerks of the old British Residency. But except for the Gurkha soldiers she is still allowed to recruit, Britain, I note with sadness, is no longer of much importance in the affairs of Nepal: today only an unbreakable friendship remains.

Even though one was his guest, it was not a simple matter to meet the Maharaja. The Ranas were orthodox Hindus, and while many of them passed their time in debaucheries of one kind and

another, the Maharaja himself was surrounded by Brahman priests, by whom his daily life was ordered. There were auspicious days for even the most minor activities: others on which he remained incarcerated with his sacerdotal advisers. The position of the stars on any given day was thought to be of the utmost importance, and it sometimes happened that owing to some slight astronomical miscalculation, discovered at the last moment, an interview was suddenly cancelled. A visitor who had come to Kathmandu for the express purpose of conferring with the Maharaja was often kept hanging about for days: he never knew when he would be summoned to the palace.

A week passed before we were commanded to present ourselves, and I spent the time in wandering about the Valley. We were at liberty to go anywhere we pleased, but in practice we could go nowhere unattended. Several times I crept out of the Residency by the garden-gate, intending to visit the city by myself, but I never succeeded in walking more than a few hundred yards before a guard came padding along behind me. In theory this service was provided to spare the visitor from getting into trouble with the allegedly suspicious inhabitants, who seldom saw a foreigner and might therefore be expected to resent his presence: but they could not have been more friendly. The arrangement made for our comfort, as was tacitly understood by everybody, was merely a cover for keeping a watch over our activities. Nepal is no longer a closed country, but vestiges of this suspicious attitude remain. Even today it is still difficult to get permission to travel in the interior.

Our audience was arranged for three o'clock in the afternoon, and shortly before this one of the Maharaja's aides-de-camp arrived in a car to escort us to the palace. Since this was my first visit, protocol demanded that I should be presented by the British Envoy, who accordingly came with us. He was wearing diplomatic uniform. The Singha Durbar was not much more than a mile away from the Legation, but on the way we were constantly held up by one or other of the sacred bulls which saw no reason to move from the middle of the road. Now that the narrow streets and alleys of Kathmandu are crowded from dawn until dusk with motor vehicles of every kind, these creatures have become a major

hindrance to the flow of traffic, but in the twenties nobody bothered about them: only Europeans were irritated by their bovine intransigence. Even today they retain their privileged position, and to cause the death of one, though it be by accident, entails a fine of a thousand rupees, the greater part of a hundred pounds.

Nobody took any notice of us as we jolted through the streets. Nepal was still a despotic state, ruled by and in the interests of a single family. The court and the people were two entirely different entities, and what went on in princely circles was no concern of the populace: they had long been accustomed to accept their inferior status.

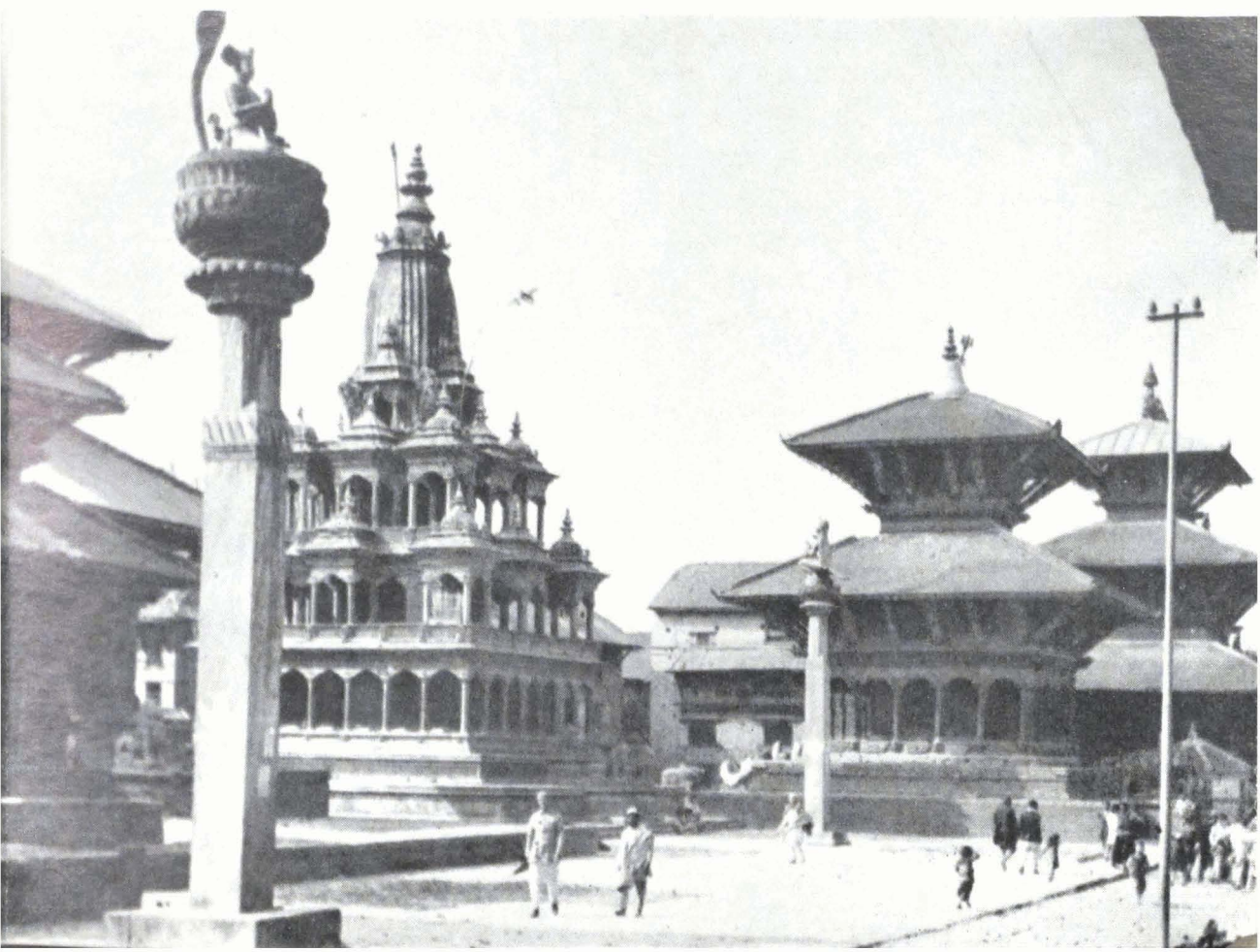
The iron gates of the Singha Durbar swung open as we approached, and when we came to a halt at the front of the building the guard-of-honour was called to attention. In those days it would have been unthinkable for His Britannic Majesty's representative to be received without this pomp. While the troops were being inspected I hovered at the side, feeling, in my civilian clothes, a little out of place on this full-dress military occasion, for it was still customary for officers to wear mufti when visiting a foreign country. The Envoy motioned me to join him and together we mounted the steps, where a secretary was waiting to escort us upstairs to the private apartments.

Most of the ground floor was occupied by an enormous salon, used only on state occasions: here the Maharaja entertained his innumerable relatives and sycophantic hangers-on. The walls were almost entirely covered with bad but realistic frescoes, all of them depicting past rulers engaged, in various situations calling for personal bravery, in the sport of big-game hunting, for which the Terai is still world-famous. The floor was covered in tiger-skins, so that it was necessary to walk with circumspection lest one tripped over their gaping mouths. Stuffed animals, rhinoceros, tigers, buck of every description, were ranged along the walls, giving the room the appearance of a natural history museum. Superb chandeliers hung from the ceiling, but the furniture, over-stuffed armchairs, settees and an enormous throne shrouded in a dust-cover, was in execrable taste. In this room, which has now been stripped of its absurdities, King Mahendra entertained Queen Elizabeth to a state banquet in February 1961.



2. Kathmandu: the Durbar Square.

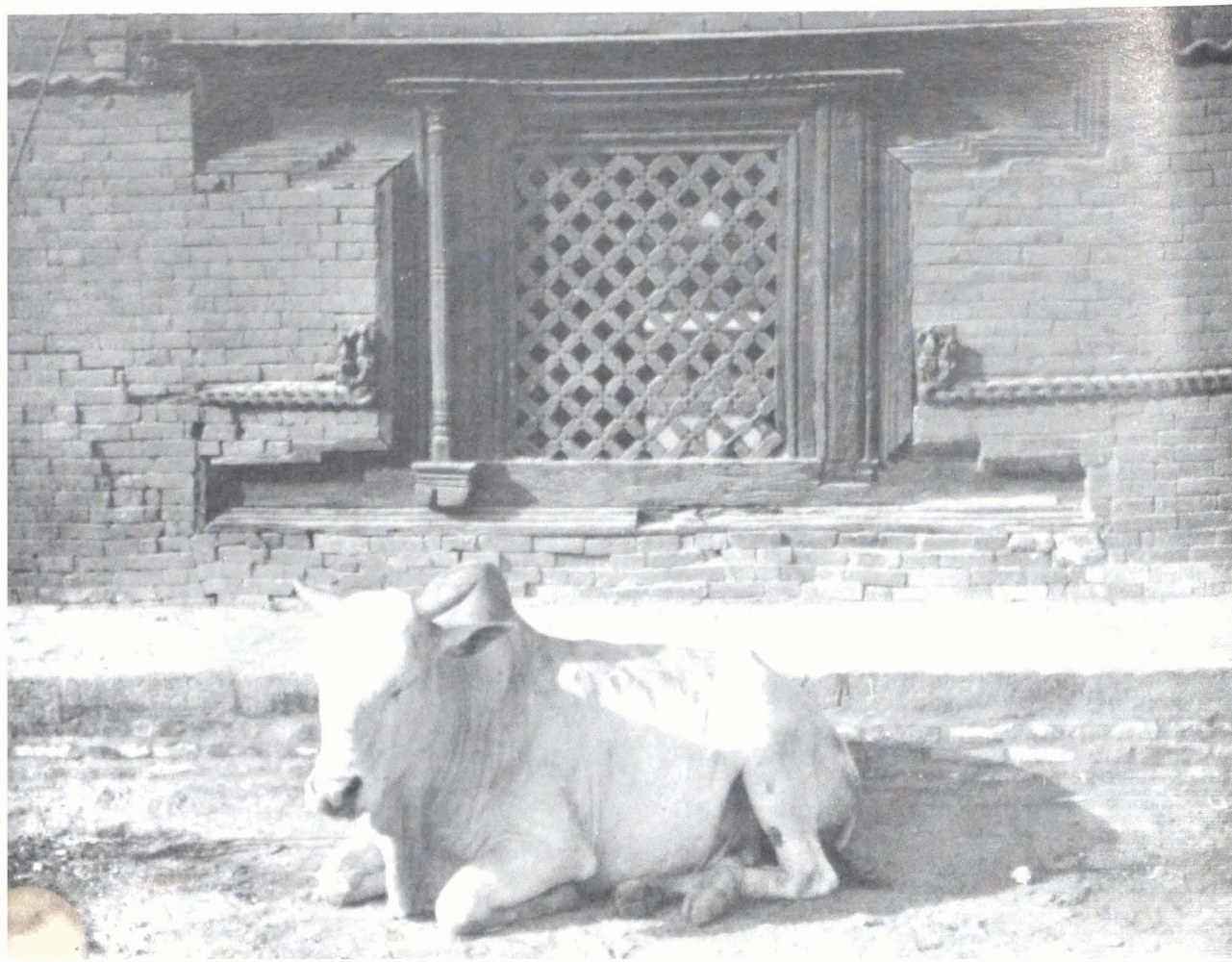
3. Patan: the Durbar Square.

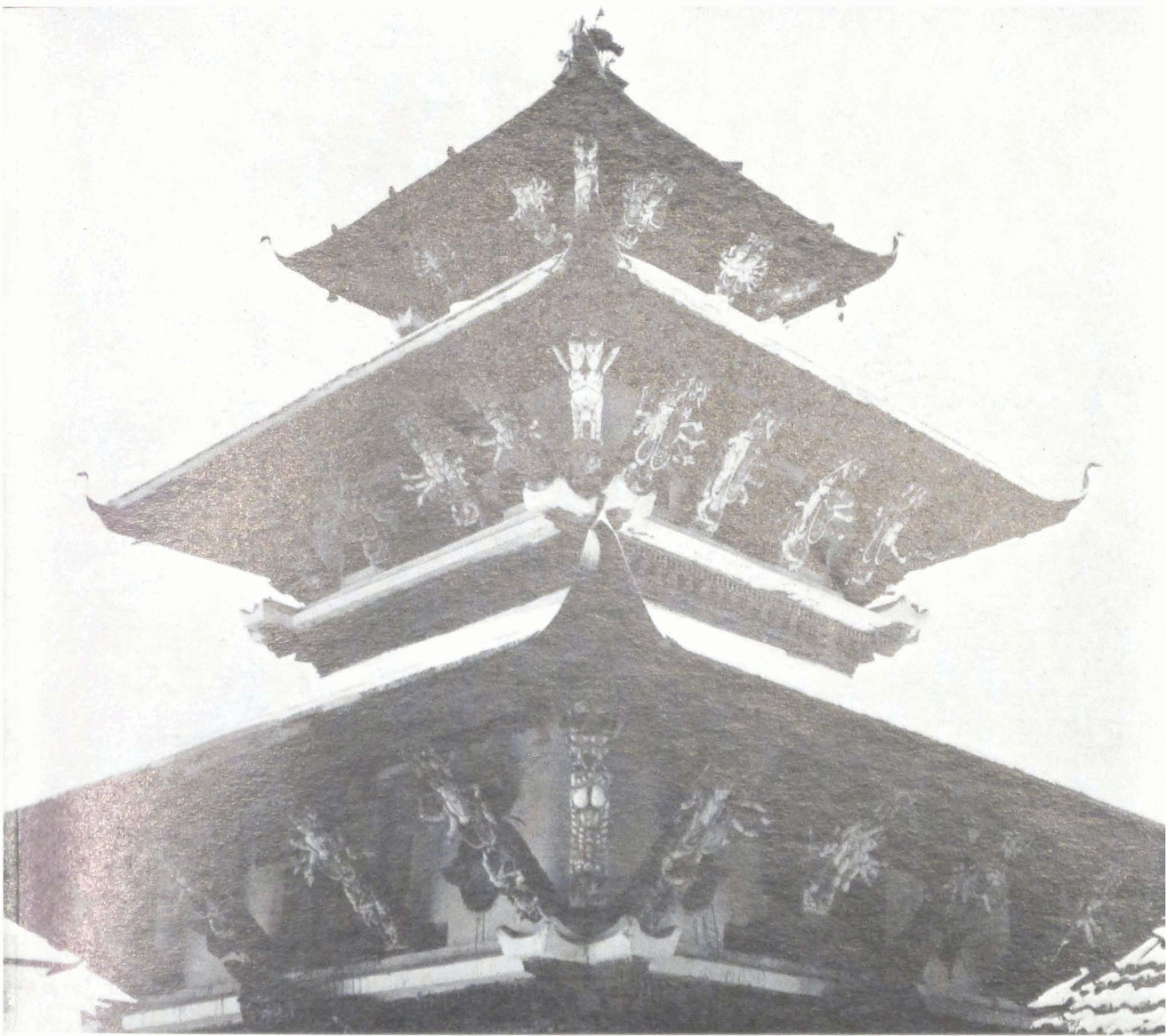




4. Motor-car being manhandled over the Chandragiri Pass, on the old road from India to Kathmandu.

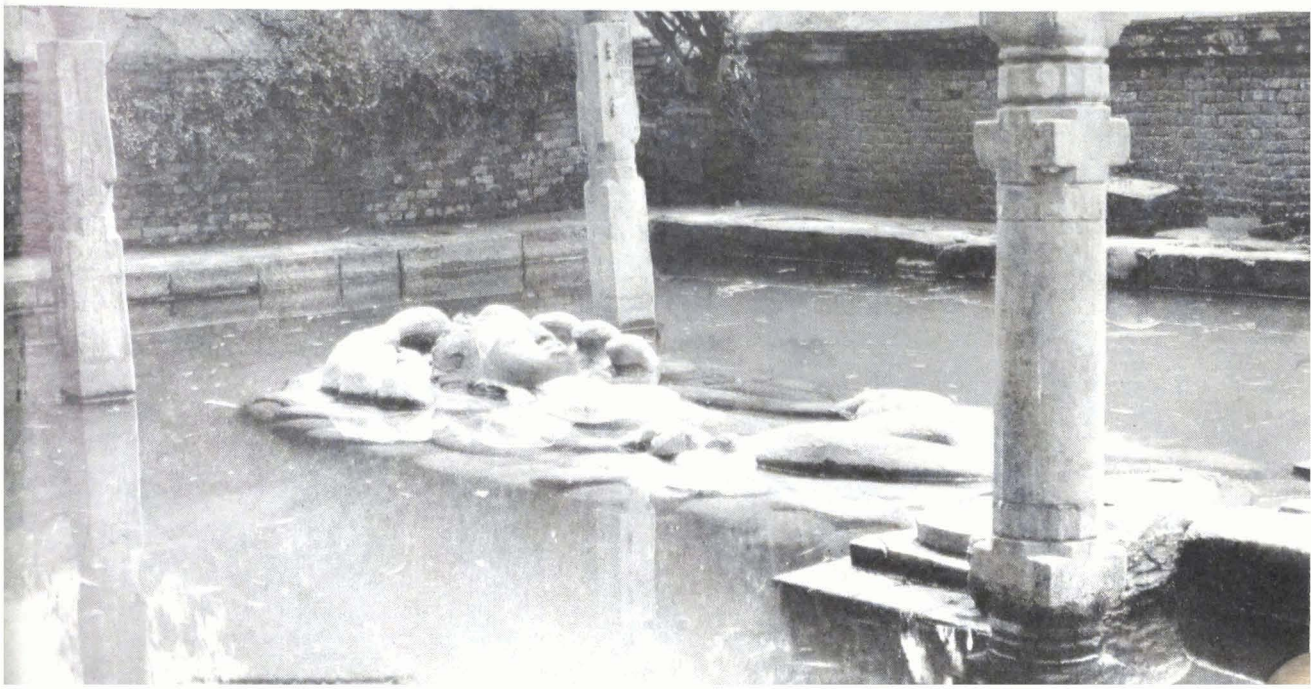
5. Street-scene Kathmandu, 1961: a sacred bull resting in the Durbar Square.

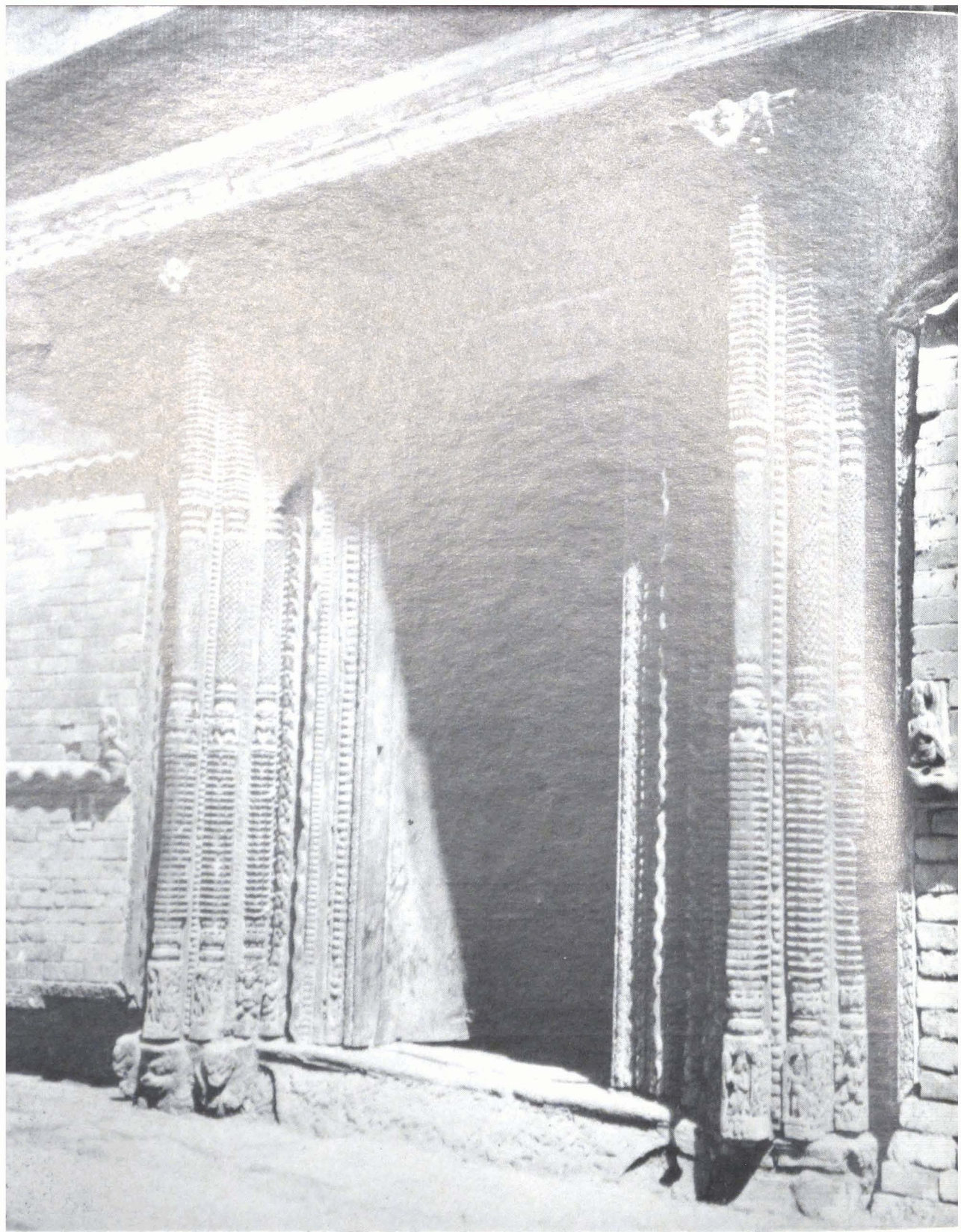




6. Kathmandu: details of typical Newar style of Pagoda architecture.

7. Balaji: submerged statue of Vishnu.





8. Kathmandu: typical carved wooden lintel and Newar brickwork.

We made our way slowly up the grand staircase, to be received at the top by yet another official. He showed us into a smallish waiting-room in which there were three grand pianos and four or five distorting mirrors fixed to the walls. Here we passed an uncomfortable five minutes gazing at each other's images. My own unfortunately exaggerated a natural tendency towards plumpness, while my companion, a slim man, appeared to have shrunk to pencil-thinness and acquired a foot in height. I was too much affected by the pompous solemnity of our reception to laugh. When I returned in 1960 this room had become a government office, but the mirrors were still in place.

A door on the far side of the room was quietly opened and we were ushered into the presence. The Maharaja was standing in front of an enormous desk which, except for a large gilt inkstand, looked as though it was never used. He was wearing national costume of a kind still affected by most members of the upper class and which has since become the standard dress of government officials. It consists of a double-breasted cotton shirt, sometimes padded and quilted, fastened with tapes at the neck and waist. The lower part of the shirt, which is very long, is flounced, so that it sticks out all round, something like a ballet skirt. Older men with conservative taste favour shirts with no more than a suggestion of a flounce, but the young and dandified like to exaggerate the effect. Shirts may be made from any material according to fancy, but on formal occasions white trousers must be worn. These are made to cling tight to the legs, rather like jodhpurs, but the seat is cut in the form of a loose pouch, so that the wearer may squat in comfort on the ground. European socks and shoes are worn when they can be afforded, and the outfit is completed by the typical black cotton Nepali cap, high on one side, low on the other. Many men nowadays wear also a tweed coat of ordinary Western style, below which the shirt, since it is worn outside the trousers, projects. This costume, with slight modifications, is worn by practically every man throughout Nepal, although few peasants can afford to buy shoes and stockings.

I had long been familiar with Chandra Shamsheer's appearance from photographs, but I was surprised to find that his complexion

was much darker than I had imagined. He looked like an Indian of noble birth, and his face had none of the true Gurkha characteristics, the slanting eyes, the high cheekbones, which denote an origin from beyond the Himalayas. His flowing white beard was carefully trimmed, and when he managed a smile he displayed a mouthful of staringly white false teeth of which he was in only vague control.

The Ranas have always considered themselves to be Gurkhas, and although their Rajput ancestry, mixed though it may be, entitles them to be classified as members of the warrior caste, I doubt if they have much claim to be descended from the mountain tribesmen of Nepal.

With his Nepali dress the Maharaja, presumably to emphasise his position, was wearing a red-and-blue peaked cap of the type worn by chauffeurs and station-masters. A large diamond brooch was pinned in the middle of it. On his hands he wore pale lavender silk gloves, a protection from contamination by beef-eating foreigners, after meeting whom he had to take a cleansing bath. He was a man of vision and high intelligence, and I should think it unlikely that he believed in this ritual nonsense, which was insisted upon by his priestly entourage. But Asians, unless they have become completely westernised, do not like the custom of shaking hands, which they consider uncleanly. Ironically the United States has chosen to brand its many gifts to the under-developed countries with a design of two clasped hands, an oddity on which many of my Nepalese friends commented.

After some minutes of trivial conversation, during which the Maharaja made it clear that he had been apprised of everything we had said, every question we had asked, during our wanderings in the city, he intimated that the audience was at an end.

Chandra Shamsher, who died in 1929, ruled Nepal for twenty-eight years. He was an outstanding personality and except for his ancestor, the great Jung Bahadur, the only real statesman to emerge from the Rana family. He was a complete despot: but neither he nor his successors actively oppressed their subjects. They chose rather to ignore their existence, and certainly did not consider that they had any rights. Nevertheless they were forced to recognise the existence of the Gurkha tribesmen. These men

were the bargaining point between the Maharaja and the British Indian Government, and in return for allowing them to serve, the Maharaja and many of his more highly-placed relatives appeared regularly in the half-yearly honours-lists. At the time of his death Chandra Shamsheer was in possession of most of the senior decorations in the gift of the British Crown, as well as numerous foreign orders. The arrangement seems to have been eminently satisfactory, and cost the British very little. The Ranas had no need of material reward, but they had a great weakness for medals and decorations of every kind. Many of them used to have their insignia re-set with diamonds and other precious jewels, and one of them, piqued by his lack of recognition, is known to have made a complete collection, thus encrusted, of every British decoration, none of which he was entitled to wear.

At the time of my first visit, Kathmandu and the two other cities of the Valley, Patan and Bhatgaon, were still unspoilt. The segregation of the country was an effective ban not only to intellectual and political progress, but also to the spread of modern architectural ideas. The tasteless pseudo-Victorian buildings which disfigure so many Indian cities were never found in Nepal, so that the appearance of Kathmandu had remained unchanged for hundreds of years. And since one never saw a foreigner in the streets it was as though one had entered another world. Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan are still unique, with their magnificent planned central squares crowded with pagoda-like temples and carved wooden dwellings, but their former mediaeval atmosphere has gone. They were much damaged in a severe earthquake in 1934, after which little attempt was made to repair them. By this time the Newars, the original inhabitants of the Nepal Valley, had become a race of petty merchants and clerks and had lost all interest in preserving their ancient skills.

Writing in 1877, Dr Daniel Wright, who spent some years as surgeon to the British Residency, had this to say of Kathmandu: "The streets are very narrow, mere lanes in fact; and the whole town is very dirty. In every lane there is a stagnant ditch, full of putrid mud, and no attempt is ever made to clean these thoroughly. The streets, it is true, are swept in the centre, and part of the filth is carried off by the sellers of manure; but to clean the drains would

now be impossible without knocking down the entire city, as the whole ground is saturated with filth. The houses are generally built in the form of hollow squares, opening off the streets by low doorways; and these central courtyards are too often only receptacles for rubbish of every sort. In short, from a sanitary point of view, Kathmandu may be said to be built on a dunghill in the middle of latrines."

From a sanitary viewpoint the description is still accurate, but since it was written the population, and hence the filth, has considerably increased. Even today the narrow streets are used as lavatories and the visitor must walk with extreme caution. Fortunately there is an abundance of strong sunlight in Kathmandu through the greater part of the year, but its disinfecting properties cannot disguise the fact that this is one of the filthiest cities in the world: it is like a beautiful woman whose features are marred by the ravages of smallpox, as indeed are the faces of many of the present inhabitants.

In my opinion the most rewarding sights in Kathmandu are now to be found in the side-streets and little alleys, where it is still possible to stumble across superb examples of carved domestic architecture and pieces of sculpture in bronze or stone by unknown masters. Some of them are by any standards great works of art, but nobody knows who made them. Among the earlier Newars the creative impulse was so widespread that there is no record of the names of individual artists, none of whom signed their works.

A mile or so across the fields from the old British Residency, at the foot of a wooded hill, there is an ancient pleasure-garden known as Balaji, beautiful in its peaceful dilapidation. This is a place of many springs, so that the emerald sward is of a brilliance that I have seen nowhere else in Asia. In the middle is a large stone pond filled with carp, and the overflow runs out through a line of carved waterspouts with a surrounding wall of interlacing bricks. Moss grows in the interstices of the stones, and everywhere there are clumps of pale mauve *ageratum* (a weed in Nepal) and massed bushes of white trumpet-flowered *datura*. The place had been long neglected and few people troubled to go there. Just inside the gateway, not immediately visible since it is screened by a bamboo thicket, is a smaller pool, only a few yards square, in

the middle of which is a recumbent statue of Vishnu, couched on a bed of cobras and partly submerged. The figure gives the impression of complete relaxation, and is one of the most beautiful objects I have ever seen, perhaps the greatest single work of art in all Nepal. Nobody knows when it was made but it is the subject of a curious legend.

The story is that a farmer, in the nearby village of Nilkantha, was constructing a pond in his fields when he came upon hidden rock. As he dug deeper a recumbent statue of Vishnu was exposed, and the tank which was intended by the peasant for the collection of water for his fields was subsequently left as a surround for the sculpture. It is no more than a competent piece of stone carving, but it has come to be regarded by Hindus and Buddhists as an object of great sanctity, and the temple which has been built round it is now a place of regular pilgrimage. By long tradition the King of Nepal is not permitted to visit Nilkantha, since he himself is regarded as a reincarnation of Vishnu, and it is therefore not seemly that he should look upon this ancient image of himself. The prohibition does not, however, apply to copies of the original statue, so, for the King's pleasure, one was placed at Balaji. It is now no more than an object of local village reverence, but as a work of art the original at Nilkantha, now surrounded by hideous modern temples and infested by cringing beggars, cannot be compared with it.

Balaji engenders an overwhelming feeling of contentment. Here in former days the kings came to picnic with their ladies. There are other parts of Kathmandu where one feels overwhelmed by the blood-stained past, but at Balaji there is only peace. When I last went there, in 1960, the garden was even more neglected than when I had first seen it. The melancholy beauty remained, but some of the little summerhouses had been defaced with obscene scribbles (one of them, I noticed, was written in Chinese characters) and the surroundings used as a latrine. The newly-formed Tourist Bureau intends, I understand, to build a hotel in these gardens, but bureaucratic inefficiency, by failing to provide a permit for the supply of the necessary materials, has hitherto impeded this vandalism, so there is still a chance that it may be prevented. Balaji was the inspiration for the title of L. H. Myers's

novel *The Pool of Vishnu*. He himself had never been there, but when I gave him a photograph of the half-submerged statue he told me that it was an almost exact representation of the imaginary pleasance in which he had pictured his characters.

Some years after my first visit to Kathmandu I was asked by the Government of India to write a handbook about Gurkhas. By this time I had got to know the Maharaja well and I wrote and told him that I could not do this job properly without seeing for myself what the interior of the country was like. To my surprise he replied that he had given orders for me to be allowed to go to Massiang. This is a high ridge beyond the Terai, and although it is no more than twenty or thirty miles inside Nepal it affords a glimpse of a large part of the western part of the country. By coincidence I ended my journey in 1961 along this very track and it will therefore be more appropriately described later in this book. But at the time no other European had been allowed to see even this little of the interior.

My last trip to Kathmandu in the old conditions took place in 1935. I had already accepted an invitation to take part in the Mount Everest expedition which had been arranged for the following year. Each of the previous parties had approached the mountain through Tibet, a long and tiresome journey; but since Nepal was closed, there was no alternative. Nevertheless we always hoped that some day an exception might be made: and as a preliminary to the negotiations the Royal Geographical Society decided to make the Maharaja of Nepal an honorary Fellow. I was asked to go up to Kathmandu and present the diploma on behalf of the Society and at the same time to discuss the possibility of a permit. I was received with the same formality as on my first visit, and when I judged the right moment to have arrived I delivered a little prepared speech in which I congratulated the Maharaja on his honorary Fellowship, a distinction only rarely awarded. He accepted the parchment scroll, and without bothering to glance at it, tossed it on to his desk without a word. I waited for him to speak, but since he said nothing I began to talk about Mount Everest. I could see from the Maharaja's expression that he was displeased, but he made no attempt to stop me and as soon as I had finished the British Ambassador, who had come with me,

added some words in support. Maharaja Joodha did not possess either the dignity or the courtly manners of the brother whom he had succeeded. Chandra Shamsher would have dismissed us with the feeling that it hurt him to refuse the request. But not so Joodha: "No: certainly not," he said, and motioned to us to withdraw.

Shortly before this episode the pattern of my life had changed. I had come to the conclusion that the regular army was not my line of country and I resigned my commission. I had not lost my interest in Nepal, but I was convinced that there was no possibility of ever being allowed to travel in the interior, and I felt it was unlikely that I should see even Kathmandu again. Meanwhile I did many other things, the details of which have no place in this chronicle: and then, like most of my generation, I got caught up in the war. In the autumn of 1960, however, I found myself free for the first time in many years: not only free, but restless. Nepal was no longer a closed country; and the more I pored over the map the more strongly did the old urge return. But I had now reached the age of sixty-five, and although I had spent a great deal of my earlier life scrambling about in rough mountain country, I was doubtful if my body, long accustomed to civilised comforts, would stand up to the physical exertion of walking through a country in which there are neither roads, rest-houses, nor even facilities for buying the simplest needs of everyday life. I had another slight worry. There is an intrinsic fascination in the idea of returning after a long interval to a country which originally made a strong impression on one. But after a lapse of nearly thirty years one no longer sees things in the same light: one's capacity for observation and comprehension has inevitably changed. It may be better to do nothing to destroy the illusions of youth, especially as I knew that Nepal had greatly changed.

In the event the decision to go was easy. I was able to persuade myself that the difficulties existed only in my imagination, and after a day or so I ceased to consider them. I left London in October with the vaguest of plans and the usual tourist visa which authorised me to spend only one week in Kathmandu, but I had been told that there would be no difficulty in extending the permit when I got there and could explain what I wanted to see. I

decided to travel light, and although I intended to be away from England for six or seven months, I took with me only one suitcase, which was filled mostly with films and books, but I sent a pair of climbing boots and a sleeping bag by post, to await me at Kathmandu. It was a comforting experience to be without the miscellaneous impedimenta which used to be considered indispensable to the travelling Englishman in Asia. When I first went to India, to go out in the sun without wearing a thickly-padded topi was believed to result in almost immediate sunstroke. This has since been proved to be nonsense and nowadays most people wear an ordinary hat. The last one I possessed blew away during the war when I was crossing the Atlantic, and I have never troubled to get another. I considered buying a hat, but decided against it and went bareheaded. It was my final gesture of defiance: in the old days gentlemen did not go about with their heads uncovered, but I had finished with all that.

Although Britain has been closely connected with Nepal for more than a hundred years, most English people are shamefully ignorant of the country's history. Before describing my journey I have therefore felt it useful, in the next chapter, to summarise the main events which led to the present situation.

Part One

I

THE Kingdom of Nepal is a narrow tract of country extending for some five hundred miles along the southern slopes of the central part of the Himalayas, which form its frontier with Tibet. The average breadth is about a hundred miles. Nepal is almost entirely mountainous: and while most of the inhabited areas lie at altitudes between two and ten thousand feet, contained within its borders are the Terai (a narrow belt of jungle not much above sea-level, which forms the southern frontier with India) and the summit and southern slopes of Mount Everest. Within these two extremes every variety of terrain, except desert, is found. The people, too, are of many kinds: in the Terai they do not differ much from the inhabitants of neighbouring India, while in the extreme north are many tribes whose origin, language and mode of life are Tibetan.

The population of Nepal is between eight and nine million, of whom the majority are nowadays, popularly but erroneously, known as Gurkhas. Not much is known about the early history of the country, but there is no doubt that at one time the mountain districts were inhabited by a number of separate tribes whose forebears had filtered over the passes from Tibet. The hills of Nepal were also a place of refuge for Rajputs fleeing from the Moslem invasion of India, so that over the centuries there has been a good deal of miscegenation, although the mongoloid physical characteristics have always been uppermost and persist at the present day.

The tribesmen from the north were hardy and extremely warlike but lacking in the civilised graces, so it is understandable

that the educated and cultivated Rajputs and their Brahman followers, many of them of aristocratic birth, who sought refuge in the hills, should soon have risen to positions of authority, and in time have become the rulers of the tribes.

There was at first a great deal of internecine warfare between these petty kingdoms, but one of the rulers proved himself to be greatly superior to his neighbours. This was Prithwi Narayan, the Rajput Prince of Gurkha, a small state in roughly the middle of Nepal. Some years elapsed before he was able to consolidate his many conquests, but by 1769 he had become sufficiently secure to advance upon what is now known as the Valley of Nepal, in which Kathmandu is situated. Prithwi Narayan was the founder of the present dynasty, and the ruling monarch, King Mahendra, is his direct descendant.

The name Gurkha should properly be applied only to the ruling family of Nepal and the descendants of the troops and other followers who accompanied Prithwi Narayan from Gurkha, and also to the present inhabitants of the town and district of that name. The word is a geographical and not a racial appellation, but, except inside Nepal, it is no longer used in an exact sense. The Nepalese warriors who began to take service with the British in the middle of the nineteenth century were mostly Magars and Gurungs, the two tribes which occupy most of western Nepal, and of which Gurkha is the administrative centre. Prithwi Narayan's own army was, for geographical reasons, mainly recruited from these two tribes, and because of this all Nepalese soldiers serving in the British Indian Army came to be known collectively as Gurkhas, irrespective of their place of origin. The first six regiments were recruited almost entirely from Magars and Gurungs, but because these two tribes alone could not meet the increasing needs of an expanding army, further battalions were raised in which for the first time service was offered to the two chief tribes of eastern Nepal, the Rais and Limbus, and to the Chetris, who are found in all parts of the country. Neither the Rais nor the Limbus have the slightest connection with the town or district of Gurkha, but by the time they began to be enlisted the term, at any rate in British India, had already lost its geographical significance and was in use

to denote any soldier who hailed from Nepal, and so it has continued.*

When I revisited Kathmandu in 1960 I observed a tendency to restrict the use of the word Gurkha to its original meaning. This seems to have arisen as a result of the rise of a new class, that of civil servants. The ancestors of many of these people without doubt migrated to the capital as followers of Prithwi Narayan and can thus legitimately claim to be regarded as Gurkhas; but in the two intervening centuries their descendants have lost whatever martial qualities they may formerly have possessed, and have declined both physically and morally. Nevertheless in present-day government circles in Kathmandu it has become fashionable to claim a family origin in Gurkha. Moreover, such claims, when they can be substantiated, seem to offer advantages in the way of promotion. The situation is in some ways rather like that in the British Foreign Service, in which an old Etonian, other things being equal, is regarded with special favour.

At the time of Prithwi Narayan's conquest the whole of the Nepal Valley was inhabited by a people known as Newars, who were ruled by a succession of dynasties originating in India. The Newars, who still form the majority of the Valley population, built the unique cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon, the architecture of which is unlike anything else in South East Asia. They had great artistic sensibility and highly-developed skill in wood-carving and sculpture but apparently none in painting. Among other things they evolved a pagoda type of building, and although all scholars are not agreed it seems likely that the typical Chinese pagoda originated in Nepal, since it is known that Newar craftsmen were employed in China many centuries ago. This pagoda type of architecture, with its multiple roofs and overhanging eaves, gives Kathmandu and the other cities in the Valley their distinctive appearance. Prithwi Narayan and his followers were great warriors, but they had no eyes for the beauty which surrounded them: they did nothing to preserve their unique heritage. The Newars were reduced to the state of serfs and in

* Earlier writers used to distinguish the town from the people by spelling the former as Gorkha and the latter as Gurkha, but the distinction is purely artificial and I see no reason to perpetuate it.

course of time lost their interest and skill in artistic pursuits. Nowadays the majority of them are engaged in trade: indeed most of the commerce of the country is in their hands, and even in the remote hill-villages and little towns the shopkeepers are nearly always Newars. They, alone among the tribes of Nepal, have never been regarded as Gurkhas.

In physical appearance the Newars are markedly less mongoloid than the hill-tribesmen, but there is little doubt that they came originally from north of the Himalayas. Their methods of cultivation, weaving and spinning are similar to those in adjacent India, but the Valley of Nepal, unlike the rest of the country, was never cut off from India. The earliest recorded history mentions communication between the Nepal Valley and the various kings whose capitals lay in Bihar, and there has doubtless been a strong infiltration of Indian blood. Up to the time of the Gurkha conquest, and perhaps for some time after, the Newars were Buddhists. Some of them still adhere to the faith of their ancestors, but nowadays Newar religious practices are an almost inextricable mixture of Hindu ritual and Buddhist ceremony. But with the arrival of their conquerors it seemed desirable to seek an orthodox Hindu pedigree, and some Newar scholars attempted to trace an affinity with the Nairs of Southern India, members of which tribe are said to have formed part of Nanya Deva's army which invaded Nepal in the ninth century. But the Newar language, which is distinct from that spoken in other parts of Nepal, has no trace of the Dravidian speech of the south. According to Dr David Snellgrove,* the name Newar is merely a phonetic variation of Nepal and thus means simply a Nepalese. Although the kingdom as a whole is now known as Nepal, the people themselves still use the word to denote only the actual Valley, more specifically Kathmandu. In the hills the sense of tribal separateness is still so strong that even today there is not yet any sense of belonging to a nation. No man, unless he comes from the place, will ever describe himself as a Gurkha, but as a member of his own particular tribe.

Prithwi Narayan did not long remain satisfied with his conquest of the Nepal Valley and soon he had absorbed the little state of Sikkim (then a tributary of Tibet) and, to the west, the districts

* *Himalayan Pilgrimage* (1961).

of Kumaon and Garhwal in India. These Gurkha encroachments continued unimpeded for some years until finally, in 1814, the British East India Company was forced to take action. The ensuing war was notable for the inefficiency of the British commanders, who were at first everywhere defeated, but finally a force under General Ochterlony was able to advance towards Kathmandu. Before it reached the capital the war came to an end and a peace treaty was signed at Segauli, in Bihar, on 2 December 1815.

The war with Nepal revealed the outstanding fighting ability of the Gurkhas, although it was some time before their sterling character was appreciated. Major-General Sir William Sleeman, later famed for his suppression of *thuggee*, took part as a young officer in the war against the Gurkhas, and was not impressed by his enemy's superior quality, although he revised his opinion when he got to know them as friends.

"A series of successful aggressions upon their neighbours," he noted, "will commonly give a nation an idea that they are superior in courage; and pride will make them attribute this superiority to blood—that is, to an old date. This was, perhaps, never more exemplified than in the case of the Gurkhas of Nepal, a small diminutive race of men not unlike the Huns, but certainly as brave as any men can possibly be. A Gurkha thought himself equal to any four other men of the hills, though they were all much stronger; just as the Dane thought himself equal to four Saxons at one time in Britain. The other men of the hills began to think that he really was so, and could not stand before him."*

Soon after the conclusion of the peace treaty, Gurkhas began to take service with the British, and from 1850 were formally incorporated in the Indian Army. Regular recruitment was started in 1886 and was greatly extended at the time of the first world war, during which more than 200,000 Gurkhas, including the greater part of Nepal's own army, served with the British forces. A similar number served on practically all fronts in the second world war. In the two wars no fewer than twenty-two out of the eight hundred and fifteen Victoria Crosses awarded were won by Gurkha soldiers. For more than a hundred years Gurkhas have

* *Rambles and Recollections* (1893).

served the British Crown with gallantry and distinction, although their position has always been that of hired mercenaries: except for the comparatively small number born and brought up in India, none of them were British subjects.*

One clause of the Treaty of Segauli required the Nepalese Government to receive a British Resident at Kathmandu, but for some years the various officers who held this post were treated with opprobrium or their presence was ignored. The situation, however, was a delicate one since, unlike the Indian Princely States, whose affairs were to a greater or lesser extent ordered by the British Residents stationed in them, Nepal was an independent sovereign state. The Resident was thus precluded from interfering in the internal affairs of the country, and in practice his function was little more than that of a consular official. This anomalous situation continued until comparatively recently, and although the British representative's office was raised in status as relations with Nepal became ever more friendly, it was not until 1951, when the Government was overthrown, that the Ambassador, as he had then become, was permitted to travel outside the small area of the Nepal Valley. In later years Britain's representatives were treated with great honour and respect: nevertheless they were for all practical purposes the prisoners of the ruling family. They could entertain an occasional guest, but only with the permission of the Maharaja.

Prithwi Narayan, who died in 1774, was followed by a succession of minors, which meant that for long periods government was carried on by a series of ministers: and while their continuity of power was responsible for a certain stability, it was insufficient to suppress the constant palace intrigues. But in 1846, during a period of particular violence and bloodshed, a remarkable man named Jung Bahadur was given the combined office of Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the army by the Queen Regent. During a subsequent series of plots and intrigues Jung Bahadur deposed the King, exiled the Queen, and assumed the function of head of the state. He had now acquired absolute civil

* When India became independent ten of the twenty regular Gurkha battalions remained in the Indian Army, and the other ten were transferred to the British Army, of which they now form an integral part.



9. Kathmandu: the original Royal Palace, now municipal offices.
Detail of carved wooden pillars.



10. Patan: the Royal bath.



11. Patan: detail of waterspout at the Royal bath.



12. Patan: detail of typical Newar brass sculpture in front of a temple.

and military authority, and later these powers were made hereditary in his family, the Ranas, whose head assumed, in 1856, the additional title of Maharaja. The succession was to pass, not to the Maharaja's eldest son, but to the eldest male descendant of the founder of the family. This curious form of succession, of which the object was to avoid the possibility of rule by inexperienced minors, resulted, in the closing stages of the so-called Rana régime, as brother succeeded brother, in the government of Nepal being invariably in the hands of men so old that they were interested only in maintaining their position: most of them were no longer susceptible to the new ideas of a rapidly changing world.

Until the revolution of 1951 Nepal was in the odd situation of having both a King and a Maharaja. By this time, however, the King no longer had any power: he had become the prisoner of the Rana family. The people had been taught to accept him as an incarnation of the god Vishnu: too holy, therefore, to take any part in affairs of state. He seldom appeared in public, and such occasional dealings as the British had with the Nepalese Government were carried out not with the King but with the Maharaja, who was for all practical purposes an autocrat.

Jung Bahadur, who held the office of Prime Minister from 1846 to 1874, did not foresee that the autocratic system of government he introduced would eventually result in feuds among his successors. These family feuds were largely responsible for bringing the Rana régime to its downfall. They arose as a result of the curious system by which members of the Rana family were divided into three categories. Those born in wedlock were known as A-class Ranas: and they alone could succeed to the highest offices in the state. Children born of mothers whose marriages with their Rana husbands were legitimised after birth were classified as B-class. Of these there were not more than a dozen: and while they could be appointed to positions of importance and power, they had no chance of becoming the head of state. But nearly every Rana of position had also a large number of concubines, official and otherwise, and the offspring of these women were known as C-class Ranas. They were excluded from high office and succession, but the Nepalese army was, and still is, largely officered by them. It is difficult to estimate with any accuracy the

number of C-class Ranas still living, but it cannot be much fewer than a thousand. I have seen a photograph of one highly-placed Rana general posed with his entire family. He is surrounded by so many children that the picture looks more like a photograph of a school than a family group.*

In 1934 the clash between the A- and C-class Ranas, which had always been latent, assumed serious proportions. A few of what might be termed the under-privileged Ranas (although most of them possessed considerable fortunes) had been illegally placed on the roll of succession by their fathers, but they were now struck off and deprived of their various sinecures. These disgruntled Ranas were instrumental in organising the insurrection which took place in 1951, a happening which was made the easier because at this time the younger A-class Ranas, depressed at the thought of being ruled by a seemingly endless line of elderly men with old-fashioned ideas, were themselves unhappy about the succession, and had split into several factions. The turning-point came when the King, the present ruler's father, unexpectedly escaped from his palace and sought refuge in the Indian Embassy, whence he was given asylum at Delhi, later to return as a constitutional monarch. Whether the King was secretly in league with the C-class Ranas, or whether he acted on his own initiative, will probably never be known. The only account of the affair so far published is not trustworthy.

In 1850 Jung Bahadur's position was sufficiently secure for him to leave the country, and he decided to visit England, appointing himself as a special ambassador for the purpose. He was received by Queen Victoria, who would probably not have been amused had she been aware that her visitor made no secret of

* A single example will serve to illustrate the immense complexity of the Rana system of relationship and the family connection with that of the King: three of Jung Bahadur's daughters were wedded to the heir-apparent, and his eldest son married the King's daughter. Marriages between Ranas and members of the Royal family have continued to the present day. According to Dr Daniel Wright, who as Residency Surgeon was stationed at Kathmandu in Jung Bahadur's time, the Prime Minister, in the course of a fairly long life, fathered no fewer than a hundred children, so that the opportunities for increasing his connection were extensive. He also had about the same number of nephews and nieces.

having perpetrated several murders. Nepal, however, in the nineteenth century was in every way still a mediaeval country, and Jung Bahadur's conduct must be judged by mediaeval standards. The visit was a great success, and unquestionably laid the foundation for the immense help which Nepal was later to render to Britain. Laurence Oliphant, who, on Jung Bahadur's return from Europe, accompanied him from Colombo to Kathmandu, was quick to perceive the true purpose of this visit:

"Besides the wish to gratify his curiosity," he notes, "there existed yet another incentive which induced Jung Bahadur to undertake this expedition. The precarious nature of his high position in Nepal urged on him the good policy, if not the necessity, of a visit to England, for he doubtless felt, and with good reason, that the Native Durbar would be inclined to respect a man who had been honoured with an interview with the Queen of so mighty a nation, and he had opportunities of securing support from her Government, should he ever be driven to seek its aid."

As events turned out, Britain, even if she had felt it expedient, was no longer in a position to aid the Rana régime when eventually it collapsed. Nevertheless Jung Bahadur and his successors had been good friends to Britain ever since the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and it is impossible to overestimate the help, in men and money, they gave in two world wars. I myself have had many friends among the Ranas and have received much kindness from them. Some were men of intelligence and great charm, and a few were highly educated, but I find it impossible to defend the system by which they retained their stranglehold over Nepal.

The power of Jung Bahadur and his successors was consolidated by means of intermarriages between his numerous relatives and all ranks of the upper classes, including the Royal family, but the origin of the Ranas' wealth is less clear. Until the revolution of 1951 the entire revenue of the country was at the disposal of the Maharaja. No accounts were published, and such little public works as were undertaken were represented as the personal gift of the ruler. Most of the national income was spent in enabling the senior members of the Rana family to live in luxury and idleness. The Maharaja himself lived in a palace which is generally

believed to be the biggest private residence in Asia. It contains more than a thousand rooms and now houses the entire Government of Nepal. Besides the Singha Durbar, as it is still called, there are in Kathmandu upwards of a hundred other palaces, varying in size according to the rank of their owners. Some of them are still occupied by Ranas who have thrown in their lot with the new régime: others are now used to house foreign embassies and other missions. A few, long untended, are gradually collapsing into heaps of rubble.

But the national revenue of Nepal, which is a poor country, cannot entirely account for the ostentatious luxury in which all these hundreds of parasitic princelings lived. There seems reason to suppose, however, that when the founders of the present state fled from Rajputana to the hills of Nepal they brought with them huge fortunes in the form of jewels. And a senior official, whom I met on my recent travels, told me that it is also generally believed that Jung Bahadur, who was in personal command of the Nepalese troops sent to assist the British in quelling the Indian Mutiny of 1857, was allowed in reward for his services to loot the immensely rich prostitutes' quarter of Lucknow. Of this there is, however, no evidence. Nevertheless the Ranas did possess a fabulous collection of jewellery. Most of them held senior rank in the army, and, on the rare occasions when they appeared on parade, wore elaborate plumed headgear studded with jewels of every kind. Only the King now wears this type of headdress, and I do not know what has happened to the others: presumably they have been turned into cash by their owners.

Many people have wondered how such a state of affairs could have continued to exist in a country whose relations with Britain have long been most intimate. I must again emphasise that Nepal has always been an independent country, and Britain has therefore been in no position to interfere in the internal administration of the state. Moreover, in return for allowing Gurkhas to serve in the Indian Army, the Maharaja made it clear that the seclusion of his country must be respected. Until 1951 Nepal was a completely closed state. No foreigner was in any circumstances permitted to travel in the interior: and while a few privileged guests were occasionally invited to spend a few days at the capital, or to

shoot in the Terai, their movements were severely circumscribed and indeed spied upon. It is probable that even the British Residents, since they were not permitted to leave the Valley, were never fully aware of the backward condition of the interior. The reason put forward for keeping the country closed was that to open it would be so unpopular among all classes that the position, if not the life, of the Maharaja would be endangered. This is almost certainly untrue. In my opinion the reason for segregating Nepal was to keep the outside world in ignorance of its true condition. It was organised and run entirely in the interest of a single powerful family whose leaders were determined to retain their power as long as possible. That the peasantry never revolted was in some measure because thousands of them were in regular well-paid employment in the Indian Army, as a result of which some £500,000 annually found its way back to the hills in the form of individual savings and pensions, which the Ranas could not touch.

The various agreements between Britain and Nepal were, it now seems, based on expediency. It suited the British to be given access to a practically inexhaustible supply of first-class fighting men: it suited the Ranas, in return for this privilege, to be allowed to exploit Nepal for their own personal ends.

For nearly two centuries Nepal maintained social and economic conditions that were completely mediaeval. The far-reaching economic and political changes taking place in neighbouring India, the result of British rule, made no impact on Nepal. British imperialism by-passed the country and when, in 1951, the Ranas were overthrown, it was difficult for Nepal to adjust herself to the outside world, which had changed beyond recognition during the long years of her isolation. The political situation is still in a state of flux, and it is too soon to foresee what kind of organisation is best suited to the country in its present undeveloped state. One thing, however, can be said with certainty: Nepal has paid a terrible price for her former independence.

Part Two

I

DAWN had not yet broken when I arrived at the smaller of New Delhi's two airports on a day in October 1960, and the whole place, although brilliantly lit, appeared to be deserted. The instructions on my ticket had told me to report at half-past five, but it was after six before the booking-clerk, unshaven and enveloped in a blanket, shuffled into the office. Through a window the ungainly bulk of an aircraft was faintly visible in the misty half-light: it looked like a stranded whale. I seemed to be the only passenger, but a little later a bus-load of American tourists arrived with their guide, soon followed by a miscellaneous crowd of Nepalese. These latter were all wearing national costume and each carried a number of parcels and bundles. One of them was trundling a motor-cycle, from which he refused to be parted, and eventually a space was found for it in the corridor of the aircraft. Besides effectively blocking the gangway, the machine, which lurched whenever we struck a patch of turbulent air, was a danger to the passengers sitting on either side of it. Very reasonably, I felt, they asked for it to be removed, but the diminutive hostess, after consulting her book of regulations and with a sly smile at the owner, ordained that since it had been brought on board by hand it therefore counted as hand-luggage and had no need to be secured.

The ancient Dakota (the Royal Nepal Air Lines possessed only four at this time) had been stripped, so as to allow the maximum space for cargo. The normal adjustable chairs had been removed, and in their place were rows of flimsy iron-framed benches with canvas backs. Each one held two passengers who, at take-off and

landing, were fastened together with a single belt like pairs of Siamese twins. We were forced to sit bolt upright, and to look out of the window necessitated getting down on to the floor. There were no ash-trays, but each of us was given a cup half-filled with water instead. Luggage was all over the place, and it looked to me as though the aircraft was considerably overloaded: the conditions were rather like those common in remote parts of India, where buses never start their journey until it is impossible to load anything more on to them. But I did not worry. During the war I had flown thousands of miles in far worse conditions, and I knew that the Dakota was an aircraft that could take any amount of punishment.

For the first hour we flew through cloud, but as the sun rose the weather cleared and the landscape came gradually into focus. Soon we had a superb view of a great stretch of the Himalayas. The Americans wanted above all to see Mount Everest, which is not visible from this direction, even with the eye of faith: and they were so delighted to have had a glimpse of what they believed was the highest mountain in the world that I had not the heart to disillusion them.

I myself was much more interested in the passing landscape below. For much of the time we were flying over the homeland of the Gurkhas, a tract of country which I knew intimately in theory but had never before seen. It appeared to be uninhabited, and it was only later, when I came to walk over this country, that I discovered the reason: the houses are built of mud, the exact colour of the surrounding earth, and are therefore almost invisible from the air.

All this time I had been wondering if I should still be able to speak the language. When we got to the customs-shed at Kathmandu I found that I could understand the drift of the conversations going on all round me, but the meaning of individual words sometimes escaped me: the conscious effort to remember meant that my understanding was always a sentence or so behind, as it is, I imagine, with those who suffer from deafness. When I tried to talk it was worse: the words refused to come. It was a great disappointment and also humiliating, for I had once known Nepali nearly as well as my own language. I made no conscious effort

to relearn Nepali, but after a few days I found myself beginning to remember long-forgotten words and phrases and having to think what they meant in English. After a fortnight I once again began thinking in Nepali, and after that it was as though I had never forgotten the language.

The drive from the airport was something of a shock. In the old days, except for the few cars belonging to the King and the Prime Minister's family, there was no wheeled transport of any kind and only a few miles of surfaced roads, which linked the Rana palaces with each other. The road was now almost choked with motor vehicles of every description, many of them in an advanced state of disintegration and a constant danger to the stream of load-carriers, who saw no reasons to alter their lifelong habit of walking in the middle of the street. Only at the last possible moment would they alter course, and then, invariably roaring with laughter, they scuttled like rabbits to one side. The numerous bulls were another matter: they retained their ancient privilege to wander at will, and if they decided to ruminate in the middle of the road the traffic halted until they moved.

I noticed that much damage had already been done in the name of progress, but I was determined not to be disillusioned, so I waited for the failing light of evening before wandering into the heart of the city. The narrow streets, most of them only a few yards wide, were packed with people from the mountains, among them many Tibetans. I went into the Durbar Square, the scene of much of Nepal's early blood-stained history, but even in the twilight, which hid some of the worst vandalism (cinema-posters stuck on to pieces of statuary; telephone and electric light cables nailed to superb examples of carved wooden balconies), it seemed to have lost some of its former dreamlike quality. The Durbar Square is the one place to which every tourist goes, perhaps because some of its buildings contain a great deal of highly erotic carving. But there seemed now to be something smug about the square; perhaps because, like so many famous places, it has in recent years been too much admired.

Of the few hotels in Kathmandu there is little to be said beyond the fact that they provide board and lodging of a sort. But nobody in his senses visits Nepal in expectation of gastronomic pleasures,

and it would be unreasonable to complain. Excepting vegetables, nearly everything the western visitor needs has to be imported from India at great expense, and this includes furniture and the simplest bathroom fittings. Only the Royal Hotel, a former Rana palace, has any pretensions to comfort, but it is as dear as a luxury hotel in Europe; beyond the means of other than the wealthy American tourists for whom it is intended.

Since I intended to stay for the whole winter I decided that the Royal Hotel was too expensive, so I took a room in a more modest establishment. The Snowview had been built originally as a row of shops. It was a depressing place, largely because all the bedrooms faced west: and since the sun disappeared behind the hills early in the afternoon, they were always cold and gloomy. There was a Bible by every bedside and the walls were decorated with illuminated texts and oleographs of religious subjects. There is no prohibition in Nepal, although it is necessary to grease the palms of those who have power to grant the necessary licence. Nevertheless in my hotel it was not possible to buy a drink or even a packet of cigarettes: and although there were no family prayers before breakfast one felt that this was a concession. I have a particular hatred of artificial flowers, but in the Snowview they were everywhere. Hideous plastic convolvuluses trailed up the walls; vases filled with them stood on every table. And yet the Nepal Valley is a natural flower-garden. Even at this late season the lane outside was ablaze with flowering shrubs.

My bedroom was shoddily furnished. In one corner was a small wardrobe of which the legs were of uneven length, so I put the Bible underneath one to stop the cupboard from falling forward. There were no coat-hangers and no chest of drawers, so that I had to leave everything in my suitcase on the floor. In one corner there was a toy-sized washbasin, and above it a small square mirror so placed that to shave it was necessary to bend nearly double. Unexpectedly, in another corner was a telephone, but since the notice attached to it intimated that it could be used only to communicate with the occupants of rooms number seven and thirteen, with whom I was unacquainted, I had no reason to make use of it. On the bedside-table there was a vase filled with bright blue plastic hyacinths. I screwed them up and chucked

them out of the window, but when later that night I went up to bed I found that they had been replaced.

My bathroom was a cubby-hole across the passage. The walls reached only half-way to the ceiling: and because for most of the day servants squatted in the corridor, I found it inhibiting to make use of the place because the plumbing was defective. Every time the plug was pulled water was discharged all over the floor and ran out into the passage. There was no tub, but a servant brought a pail of hot water when one wanted a bath.

The one thing to be said in favour of this otherwise depressing institution was that it was clean. At table the servants wore white cotton gloves: but since they were generally barefooted and on cold days swathed their faces in dirty woollen mufflers, as though they were suffering from toothache, the intended effect of hygienic smartness was somewhat marred.

There is absolutely nothing to do in Kathmandu at night. As soon as darkness falls the city becomes dead, perhaps a relic of Rana days, when there used to be a curfew, after which it was a punishable offence to be abroad.

I dined early and went up to my room, intending to read. However, one of the major inconveniences of life in Kathmandu is the electricity supply. The power is of a strength sufficient only barely to illuminate the filament of a lamp: occasionally this flickers into a blazing glare for a few seconds and then fades back to its normal dull red glow, occasionally failing altogether for anything up to half an hour. It is impossible to work or even to read at night, and I was generally in bed by nine.

The other great difficulty is transport. Tourists never spend more than two or three days in Kathmandu and their visits to the recognised places of interest are arranged in advance by their hotels. But there is no provision for the more leisured visitor, who must make his own arrangements. There is no suitable public transport, and to hire a car, without which it is hardly possible to move around, costs about five pounds a day. A bicycle is not much use except in the centre of the city, since one spends most of the time pushing it along the rock-strewn roads. The alternative is to walk, but it takes hours to tramp from one place to another and is moreover extremely tiring. There are no maps

of the city, and since nobody seems to know where anyone else lives, walking the streets of Kathmandu is a frustrating pastime.

The city seemed to be filled with Americans, most of them belonging to the organisation that dispenses financial aid to underdeveloped countries. Many of them had adopted the custom of wearing a coloured Nepali cap, like the members of those strange American conventions whose fraternity is marked by the wearing of some exotic headgear.

The Nepalese had always taken pride in their long and close association with Britain, and naturally I was depressed to find that some of them had now begun to talk English with a slipshod transatlantic accent. After a few days I felt despondent and disillusioned by the changes, all of which seemed to me to be for the worse. But there then occurred a fortunate chance meeting which was to alter the course of my stay in Nepal. I had been asked to luncheon by Richard Proud, at the British Embassy. He had retired from a Gurkha regiment with the rank of Colonel and had been most sensibly re-employed by the Foreign Office in the post of First Secretary. He had been longer in Kathmandu than any other British official and had acquired a unique knowledge of the tortuous ways of the Nepalese Government. It was no part of his job to look after wandering Englishmen, but, unlike so many of our diplomats, he went out of his way not only to give them advice, but actively to help them. I had been in correspondence with him for many months and the object of this first meeting was to discuss my further plans.

Among the other guests, a few local British residents, were a young English couple who, like myself, had just arrived at Kathmandu. Denys Galloway was a painter, and he and his wife Bette had spent the whole of the previous year motoring out by easy stages. They had become dissatisfied with life in England and decided that it would be sensible to see something of the remote parts of the world while they were still young and active. Denys had long been attracted by Tibet, but since it was no longer possible to go there, he had selected Nepal as the next best thing. The Galloways had made no plans, other than to spend a year in Nepal getting to know the country.

I do not find it easy to become intimate with people of a much younger generation, but I warmed to this couple at once. We soon discovered that we had many interests in common, and before long we began to go about together. The arrangement suited us both: the Galloways had a car, and I was able to interpret for them and to show them many places they might otherwise have missed. But what began as a mere matter of convenience soon turned into a true friendship, which continues to grow and ripen. The Galloways were living in a room they had rented in a private house and doing their own cooking, but it was an uncomfortable arrangement and they intended to find a cottage somewhere removed from the dirt and noise of the city, make it habitable and settle down. After several weeks of fruitless searching we found a little house at Chobar, a village on a slope above the Bagmati river and about five miles from Kathmandu. Like all Nepalese houses, it had no sanitation, and water had to be fetched from the one stand-pipe in the village. The ground-floor had been used as a cow-byre and was deep in litter and all the walls were encrusted with grime and black with smoke. But the cottage and its setting were enchanting. I feared it would be impossible to make the place habitable, but Denys had set his heart on the house, and when we discovered that it could be had for the negligible rental of twenty pounds a year, and that the owner had no objection to its being adapted to the needs of foreigners, he immediately signed an agreement. I was invited to share in this enterprise, and although at first I had misgivings I decided to take a chance. Anything, I thought, would be better than remaining in the depressing Snowview Hotel.

Meanwhile I began to make arrangements for a trip into the interior, the main reason for this return visit. Richard Proud had already smoothed the way, and one morning I set off for the Singha Durbar, to find out for myself how the land lay. This time there was no guard-of-honour, and the unshaven sentry at the entrance did not even trouble to ask my business. I had been told to present myself at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but after wandering for half-an-hour along the seemingly endless corridors, many of them choked with rubbish and stinking of stale urine, I found myself in the Department of Forests, where a friendly official

directed me to the opposite end of the building. There was nobody to announce me, so I walked in and introduced myself to the official whose duty it was to deal with foreign visitors. He had taken off his shoes and socks and was sitting, with his feet on the desk, reading a newspaper. He was polite and friendly in a slightly guarded way, but it soon became apparent that he had never before heard of me or my application, and for the first few minutes we talked at cross-purposes. I could stay in Kathmandu as long as I liked, he said, but because of the recent trouble on the Tibetan border it was in visitors' own interests to confine their travels to the Nepal Valley. Moreover, he went on to say, there was the language difficulty: outside Kathmandu it was rare to find anyone who understood more than a few words of English. I thought this was the moment to break into Nepali, and when I explained that so far as I was concerned the language problem presented no difficulty, he beamed with pleasure. His manner suddenly changed and he began to recollect that I had written to him before leaving England. He now thought that as I was an old friend of the country it might be possible to make an exception in my favour, and he shouted to a clerk to bring in the appropriate file. My hopes began to revive.

After a considerable delay the file was discovered. I noticed that it contained not only my own correspondence but several hundred other documents on unrelated subjects. They were not arranged as in a normal filing system, but stuck together in the form of a roll of papers many yards in length, an arrangement that precluded any form of indexing. Before long we were enmeshed in the recalcitrant scroll, which had unrolled all over the floor, but after a slight pretence at upholding the efficiency of his office, my friend lost patience and kicked the mass of papers into a corner. "All right," he said; "tell me what you want to do."

I explained my lifelong interest in Nepal and said that I wanted to see for myself what life in the hills was like. The official listened politely, but behind his blank expression I sensed a feeling of the ingrained suspicion of earlier days, and when he asked me why I was so keen to travel I could think of no more convincing answer. "I just want to go," I said. "I happen to like wandering about in mountain country: I have no other reason."

He told me to make a fresh application, saying exactly where I wished to go. He could promise nothing, he said, but there was a reasonable chance of my request being granted.

I did not receive any answer to my application, so after a week I got into the habit of paying a daily call at the Foreign Office to see how things were getting on. I had heard of other visitors who had waited for weeks for a permit and then left in desperation, but I was determined not to be defeated by these delaying tactics. There was plenty of interesting information to be picked up in Kathmandu and it did not matter to me how long I stayed. I decided, therefore, that I would make such a nuisance of myself that the Nepalese Government would be anxious to get rid of me, and after a fortnight of these daily visits they capitulated. I was given permission to go anywhere I liked, provided it was not within fifteen miles of the Tibetan frontier.

Before leaving England I had hoped that, as in other parts of the Himalayan foothills, it would be possible to ride, and I intended to buy a pony. But I now discovered that the country was too rough and steep. There were no roads of any description: not even a bridle-path. In the past I had travelled a great deal in this sort of country, but there was no getting away from the fact that I was no longer physically capable of doing what thirty years earlier I had taken in my stride.

I have always believed that it is more profitable to travel alone, especially if the object of a journey is to gather information. But this time I was a little afraid that I might fall by the wayside, contract some illness or break a limb. Except for one or two small mission stations, there are no hospitals in the interior of Nepal, and I did not fancy the possibility of having to be carried back to the capital in a basket on a man's back. It was then that I thought of Denys and Bette. They too were longing to see the country, but had decided it was not practicable. They did not know a word of the language: even if they could get a permit, which was doubtful, there would be too many difficulties. They welcomed the proposal to come with me, and the British Embassy readily agreed to endorse their application.

Surprisingly the Nepalese Foreign Office raised no objections, but before we set off there occurred a farcical incident which well

illustrates the haphazard manner in which the Nepalese Government conducts its affairs. We had made all our arrangements for departure and had been told to call and pick up the official permit, without which we could not leave the Valley. When we got there it transpired that while there was apparently no objection to the Galloways going on a tour, my name was omitted. Our mentor was as usual amicable, but he tried to conceal his muddle by suggesting that there had been no question of the three of us travelling together. Once again he sent for the file, and after thumbing through it, shamefacedly admitted that there seemed to have been a mistake. Better start again, he said, and submit a fresh application, but to this I refused to agree. We had made all our arrangements to leave, I said, and had even engaged our porters, who could not be kept hanging about indefinitely. Encouraged by the nods and smiles of a hovering clerk, who was obviously discomfited by his chief's unskilful prevarication, I stuck to my point and demanded to be given the pass. "Come and see me tomorrow," asked the director, "and I will have it ready by midday." He stood up, indicating that the interview was at an end. But I remained seated. "No," I said, with an attempt at irony, which was doubtless lost on the victim. "You are a busy man, and it will save you time and inconvenience if you give it to me now."

After a brief silence he offered us cigarettes and walked towards a large map which was hanging on the wall. "Show me," he said, "exactly where you wish to go." I rattled off the names of the places we intended to visit while our friend fumbled to find them on the map. He himself had never been outside the Valley and was totally ignorant of the geography of his own country. The conversation began to assume the character of a lesson and I had to work hard to bring it round to the object of our visit. "Ah, yes," he said at last: "the pass; yes, of course." And walking back to his desk, he opened a drawer and extracted it. He handed it over with an expansive smile. The three of us were granted permission to go everywhere we had asked, and the permit, I noticed, was dated a fortnight earlier. We should be away for a couple of months, during which we proposed to visit Gurkha, Pokhra, Baglung and Palpa, a circular tour through country occupied

mostly by Magars and Gurungs, the two tribes with whom I had served in my army days.

During the weeks of preparation I remained at the Snowview Hotel, but we went almost daily to Chobar. There was a great deal of work to be done on the cottage. Denys himself did most of it, working like a labourer. The villagers were at first scandalised and I was much amused at their comments. "These cannot be people of any consequence," they said: "they do for themselves what should only be done by low-caste people."

At last the place was made more or less habitable, but we decided not to move in until we got back from the hills. The cottage was by this time almost unrecognisable. The walls had been distempered and Denys had levelled and re-plastered the mud floors. He had also designed the simple furniture we needed, but it would not be ready for a month or so.

Being clumsy and entirely lacking in manual skill, I was not much help, except as an interpreter, in these housebuilding operations, but I undertook the responsibility of making the arrangements for our trip. We had agreed to travel as light as possible, but even so there were complications, and I spent many hours on most days searching for stores in the Kathmandu bazaar. There was one shop which had a reasonable selection of tinned food; meat, sardines, tea, sugar, and so on. Our main item of food was a huge cheese, the size of a small millstone, which we ordered from the excellent dairy established by the Swiss Aid Mission. It lasted us throughout the journey. Once we left the Valley we should have to be self-supporting: eggs and possibly vegetables might occasionally be obtainable, but everything else, even such simple things as rice and kerosene oil, had to be taken with us and carried on the backs of porters. We engaged fifteen of them, and lest this seem an extravagant number I must point out that to economise on loads and keep our baggage to the minimum we decided to dispense even with camp-furniture, and to sit and sleep on the ground. The only luxury we allowed ourselves was a few pounds of Penguin books, most of which we read several times. They were a strange assortment, unexpectedly discovered at the last moment in a tiny shop in one of Kathmandu's back-streets: several collections of Maupassant's short stories,

Robert Graves's *Good-bye to all that*, Maugham's *Cakes and Ale*, and Zola's *Germinal*, which I had not before read, and when I did so, it haunted me for days. To these we added *The Brothers Karamazov* (a book I often take on journeys), which, to my disappointment, made no impression on either Bette or Denys, and *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, which none of us ever opened.

We each had a sleeping-bag and a change of clothes, but except for a tent, the rest of our baggage consisted entirely of food. We packed everything in sixty-pound bundles, the normal load carried by a man in the hills. The porters provided their own plaited rope headstraps, but we had to supply each of them with a large funnel-shaped basket. These, costing only a few pence apiece, are in general use throughout Nepal for the transport of every kind of commodity, including personal belongings. The strain of the load is taken by the headstrap, worn across the forehead, which after years of toil often acquires a permanent furrow. Many of the men and women who eke out their lives in this back-breaking work look, except for their over-developed leg-muscles, thin and under-nourished, but even the poorest specimens are capable of carrying a full load for twenty miles, up and down hill, in a day. I never ceased to marvel at their tenacity: even during the steepest ascents they never seemed to get out of breath and, unladen as I was, I could not keep pace with them.

Denys and Bette had assumed that we should cook and generally look after ourselves. They had travelled for a year without help of any kind and could see no reason for change, but in this matter I refused absolutely to compromise. I explained that a cook was a necessity, as without a servant of some kind we should be constantly running into difficulties. I thought it was essential to have a man of the country who could deal with the locals, make arrangements for camping-sites and so on, and, since there were no adequate maps, keep us on the right track. The object of our journey was to see and enjoy as much of the country as possible, but if, after a long day's march, we had ourselves to search for a camp, pitch the tent and prepare our own dinner, I foresaw the trip turning into a penance. Also I knew from long experience of this sort of travel that it was important to have someone in charge

of the porters: to dole out their rations and generally look after them. Since we were a small party, this duty, with a little help from me, could well be combined with that of the cook. I decided to look for a suitable Sherpa.

The Sherpas are to the Himalayas what Swiss guides are to the Alps. Their origin and language are Tibetan, but their homeland is Nepal. They inhabit a district known as Sola Khambu, which lies at an average altitude of 16,000 feet, below the southern slopes of Everest. Many of them have migrated to the Indian district of Darjeeling. Until 1922 not much was known about the Sherpas, but at the time of the first Everest expedition General Bruce discovered their extraordinary ability to carry loads at very high altitudes, and since then every Himalayan expedition has, so to speak, climbed on their shoulders. There was a time when Sherpas were glad of employment as ordinary porters, but those days are past. They have now organised themselves, and the traveller who wishes to make use of their services is bound by the rules and regulations of the Himalayan Society, which is in fact their Trade Union. Darjeeling Sherpas are no longer permitted to work in Nepal. And since there are only a few thousand living in the Sola Khambu area, of whom few seek work with mountain expeditions, there is always competition to employ the best of them. They are splendid people, but in recent years they have been too much pampered by foreign climbers and have acquired many of the characteristics of the traditional old-soldier. Also they now demand a high rate of pay. But since they are resourceful, loyal, and willing to lend a hand at anything, they make by far the best servants in the rough conditions of mountain travel. They are in fact an expensive necessity.

Kathmandu is a place where rumours circulate quickly, and when it got about that I was planning a trip into the hills I began to be visited by various Sherpas temporarily resident in the city. A few of them were uninterested when they discovered that we did not propose to go above the snow-line (for which the rates of pay are considerably higher and necessitate the provision of high-altitude clothing): others I did not like the look of. And then Colonel Roberts, Military Secretary at the British Embassy and organiser of many successful Himalayan climbs, sent a man named

Ang Dawa to see me. He had been in charge of all the porters on the Dhaulagiri expedition in 1960 and was in Kathmandu to settle his accounts. I feared he was too much of a swell for our purpose, but I took to him at once, largely because he spoke to me in Nepali and not in the horrible jargon, a mixture of basic English and kitchen Hindustani, which has become the usual means of communication between Sherpas and their European employers.

He was not at first interested in the idea of shepherding an elderly gentleman on what, from his point of view, was no more than a leisurely ramble through the hills, but when in the course of conversation he learned that I had been a member of two Everest expeditions his attitude changed. His father (who was killed on Nanga Parbat, it transpired) had been to Everest with me in 1922, and he therefore felt it his duty to tend me. He was not a cook, but he persuaded me that he knew enough to meet our modest demands, and I had no doubt of his ability to look after the porters and generally make himself useful.

But the engagement of Ang Dawa was not a simple matter. He was a staunch member of the Himalayan Society, to which I had now to apply and without whose offices it is impossible to leave the Valley, since porters are otherwise unobtainable. There is no doubt that in the past the Sherpas have been exploited, and the Himalayan Society now does a useful job in protecting their interests. But it is an intransigent organisation with a rigid list of rules and regulations. Himalayan expeditions have been divided into various categories according to what they propose to do. Class One comprises the major peaks: and since expeditions of this nature expose their members to considerable hazards, the rate for porters is, very reasonably, high. Class Two includes the lesser mountains, and there is a further category which includes all parties that do not propose to go above the permanent snow-line. Had such a category been recognised, we should have been in about the fifth.

The Himalayan Society had an imposing address, but when I visited the office I found it shuttered. The president, it appeared, had gone on some official mission to China, and a barely legible notice directed enquirers to a lodging in the stews of the city. When, after following a number of false trails, I found the place,

it turned out to be a seedy garret at the top of a rickety staircase. There was a noise as though a brawl was taking place, but when I knocked on the door and entered I found that the room was full of people who looked like Tibetans. The secretary, it seemed, was giving a party, and most of his guests were already in a state of maudlin intoxication. I made my escape as soon as politeness allowed and arranged to come back next day.

Some attempt had been made to tidy the room but it still stank of cheap liquor. In one corner there was a large brass bedstead of which the posts were hung with clothing. The secretary was squatting cross-legged at one end and he invited me to sit beside him. Ang Dawa sat, as though in disgrace, alone on the floor in a corner, with his eyes averted. He made no attempt to acknowledge my presence and appeared to be occupied with his own thoughts. I was not disconcerted by his behaviour, since I had often remarked, in various parts of the world, the ability of Mongoloid people to assume an expression of passive blankness, especially during a business interview.

He had been instructed, it seemed, to take no part in the proceedings. I opened the conversation in Nepali, but the secretary affected not to understand me: he was proud of his knowledge of English and wished to display his knowledge in front of Ang Dawa. Unfortunately his speech was totally incomprehensible: and even when I myself replied, using only words of one syllable with slow deliberation, he was unable to understand a word I said. We fumbled about for some fifteen minutes in a fog of misunderstanding. I saw that Ang Dawa was getting impatient, and at last he could stand the ridiculous situation no longer and joined in the conversation. I now discovered that he had been primed to make the most absurd demands. He was no longer to be regarded as a mere load-carrier: he had been in charge of all the Sherpas on an important climbing expedition, and if we now wanted his services we should have to pay him at the top rate. Besides, he demanded to be given a complete outfit of high-altitude clothing and bedding; and although he had come to Kathmandu on his own business, the rules of the Himalayan Society demanded that we pay him at the full rate for the journey from and back to his home, sixteen days each way. To none of

this would I agree: and saying that I would make other arrangements I terminated the proceedings and left.

I had hardly reached my hotel when, as I had expected, Ang Dawa was announced. He told me at once that he had acted under the orders of his Union, whose demands he now admitted were unreasonable. In any case he was in need of a few weeks' work and had every intention of accepting the terms we offered, provided I would agree to one condition. His previous employment, he explained, had given him a certain standing in the Sherpa community, and this would be reasonably upheld if I would allow him to engage an assistant. What he wanted, he said, using the jargon of Himalayan travellers, was a "cook-boy": a lad to fetch and carry and help generally in the kitchen. A youth from Ang Dawa's own village was available, and since he was willing also to carry a load I agreed to take him on.

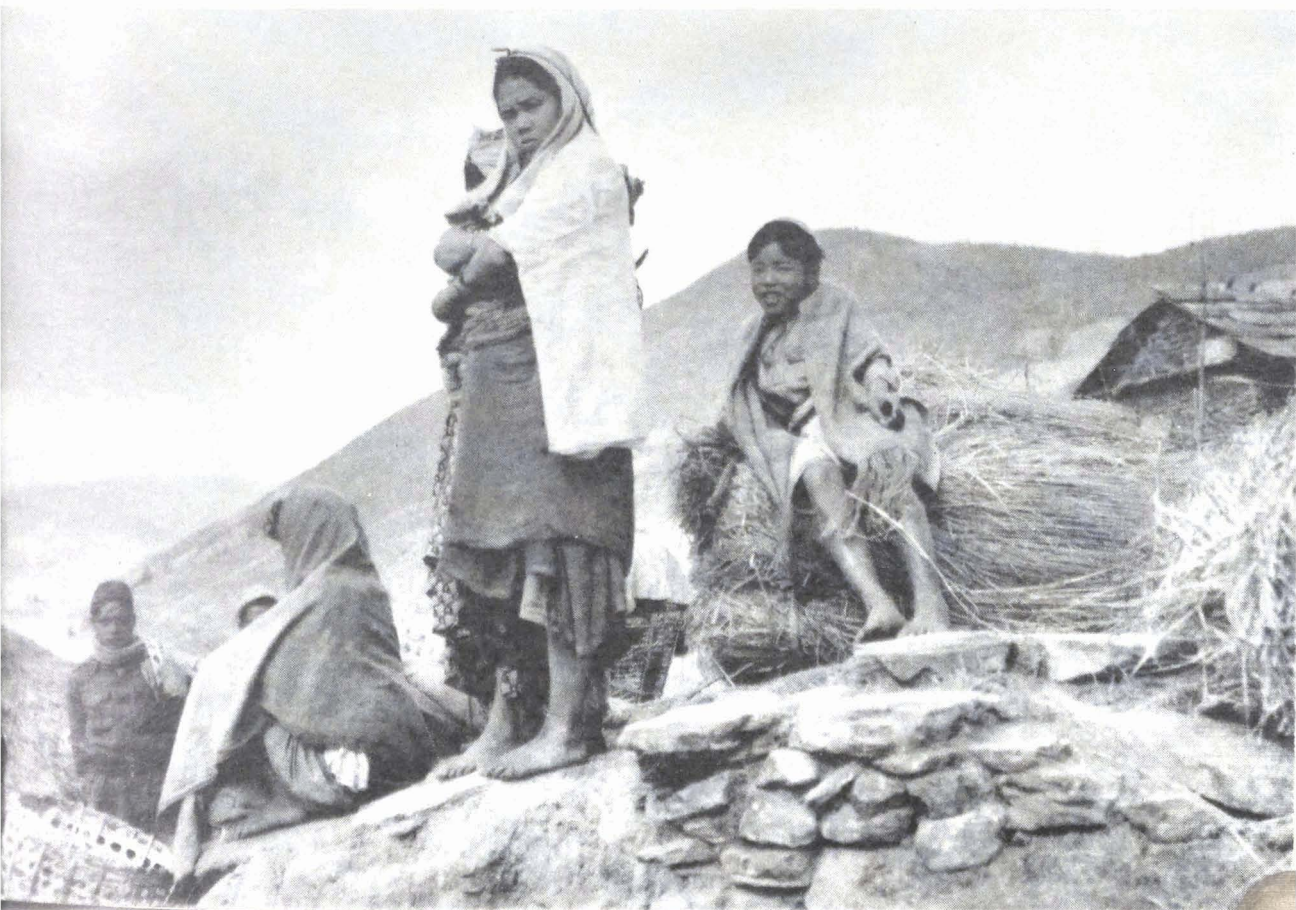
Early next morning I was again summoned from my room. Ang Dawa was below and wished me to interview the cook-boy. He was accompanied by a personable young Sherpa girl, gaily dressed in the Tibetan costume these people generally affect. "This," he said, "is my sister," a term which is politely used to denote even a casual female acquaintance. "Oh, yes," I replied, "but where is the cook-boy?" Ang Dawa looked a little embarrassed and his sister started to giggle. "She is the cook-boy," he said, and went on to explain that I need have no fears: she was as strong as any man and accustomed to carrying heavy loads. No, she was not exactly his sister, but she came from his own part of the world and would be company for him, especially during the cold winter nights. I pretended not to understand the implication, but it was difficult to keep a straight face, and at last Ang Dawa burst into delighted laughter. Her name, it appeared, was Ang Dami, but in order to mark her status she was inevitably addressed both by us and the porters as the cook's boy.

Shopping in Kathmandu is a frustrating business and there were days when it seemed that we should never complete our arrangements. We therefore selected an arbitrary date for our departure and made up our minds to set off on 13 December. We had engaged the necessary fifteen porters through the Himalayan Society, to which we had given an advance of their pay, but so far



13. Sele: Gurung villagers. Himal Chuli and Ganesh Himal in background.

14. A rest at the top of a pass near Pokhra.





15. Gurkha district: bridge in typical state of disrepair.

we had not seen them, and when I gave orders for them to report at six o'clock on the morning of the thirteenth I was doubtful if they would materialise.

I had warned Denys of this possibility and told him that in any case the first few days, before we got properly organised, were liable to be a bit of a muddle. Although he was by training and temperament an artist, he had spent the war years as an officer in the Irish Guards and was accustomed to being obeyed. He detested any form of inefficiency and I foresaw certain difficulties, especially as he was sometimes a bit short-tempered. He promised, however, not to interfere, and in any case, since he could not speak the language, there was nothing much he could do.

In the event my preliminary fears turned out to be unfounded. The Secretary of the Himalayan Society himself turned up with the coolies, saw to their loads and sent them off with a final word to Ang Dawa to look after us. The latter had dressed for the occasion and was wearing much of the finery he had salvaged from previous expeditions. The day promised to be warm and sunny, but Ang Dawa had put on over his chequered shirt several nylon wind-cheaters and a thick sweater. He was wearing a superb pair of cloth breeches, hand-knitted stockings, a peaked cap and heavy climbing-boots, and to complete the outfit he carried an ice-axe. But I was gratified to notice that he was also humping an enormous rucksack: it contained yet more clothes, he said. During the course of the next couple of months he seldom bothered to wash even his face, but he was the only member of the party who was always smartly dressed.

The caravan left at seven-thirty. We had arranged to spend the first night at Kakani, a high ridge on the northern rim of the Valley, which is now connected with Kathmandu by road: and since we still had a few details to settle, we had decided to motor out and meet the rest of our party in the late afternoon.

We reckoned that our day-to-day expenses would amount to about a hundred pounds, most of which would be spent on porterage, but to be on the safe side we now went to the bank and drew out a hundred and fifty. Outside the Valley paper money, although it is legal tender, is generally unacceptable, so we had to burden ourselves with a considerable weight of miscellaneous silver and

copper coins, which Bette carried in a haversack. Nepal has its own coinage, but until recently Indian currency was also in official circulation. In earlier days, when the rupee was made of silver, Indian coins were popular as a form of female adornment, and even now there is a demand for them. The hill people still call them *kampani*, a reminder that they were first seen in Nepal in the days of the East India Company.

2

WE reached Kakani as dusk was falling, paid off the jeep that had brought us out from Kathmandu and sat down by the road to wait. There was no sign of the porters and nobody to ask if by chance they had gone on ahead. Before long I saw a point of light moving steadily in our direction over a crag above us. Hill people are adept at shouting to each other across valleys and have the knack of making their voices carry for enormous distances. The trick consists in using the proper speech-rhythm, like reading aloud in a cathedral, and I have never been able to master it, but I cupped my hands and shouted, hoping for the best. I heard my voice echoing round the cold emptiness, and just as it was dying away there came an answering call. Ang Dawa raced on ahead of the porters and in fifteen minutes our party was united. The porters had avoided the road and come up straight across country, which is why we had not passed them on the way. Men who have been born and bred among mountains have no regard for the fatigue of constant ascents and descents. In their reckoning, to take a bee-line is always the quickest way to get from one place to another and they will avoid an easier but roundabout route even if it is obviously less tiring. Outside the Valley there are at present no roads in Nepal, and such tracks as there are have been constructed in accordance with this fondness for short cuts. This is one of the main reasons why, at any rate for Europeans, walking in the hills of Nepal is excessively fatiguing: the traveller is constantly going up or down a hill, occasionally scrambling along a bouldered river-bed.

Ang Dawa had decided to break us in gently. It was too late,

he said, to pitch a camp, and taking the porters with him he set off along the onward path, telling us to wait. We were beginning to feel that we had been deserted. Also we were cold and hungry. I was about to go and investigate when Ang Dami arrived to fetch us. We stumbled on in the dark for about a mile and then came to a cottage. The porters had already stacked their loads and were squatting round a blazing fire, cooking their evening meal. We made our way to the upper floor, climbing the notched pole which serves as a stair in most Nepalese houses. The little room was filled with acrid smoke and our eyes began to smart. Ang Dawa had decided to make a good impression. Our sleeping bags had already been unrolled, and no sooner had we stretched out on them than he produced a dish of steaming curry. Denys and Bette were delighted: it was their first experience of being properly looked after and they had not expected this kind of service. We were too excited to sleep at once and for a long time we lay talking, drinking innumerable cups of tea. But Ang Dawa had had a long and tiring day and was soon snoring in his corner. After a time we too drifted into sleep, despite the unaccustomed hardness of the floor and the stirring of cattle in the byre below us.

We were up soon after sunrise. The Nepal Valley was filled with early morning mist, above which only the tops of the hills on its southern rim were visible: a landscape of grey and green, like a Chinese painting. Away to the north it was clear and we could see ridge after ridge, deep shadowed valleys between them, crowding the land as far as the northern horizon. The main bulk of the Himalayas was still in shadow, but the highest peaks had already caught the sun, so that they shone in splendid isolation. It was easy to understand the local belief that these remote fastnesses are the homes of vengeful gods. Their unearthly beauty was forbidding: they looked like a series of Valhallas. Far to the west we could faintly discern the outline of Machar Pucchar, the fish-tailed peak. Our onward journey would take us beyond it, but from Kakani it looked so far away that it seemed impossible we should ever get there. We stood transfixed, as the sun rose higher, watching the shifting effects of light and shade, and it was only when Ang Dawa reminded me of the long day's march ahead that we began to make a move.

We were to go as far as Tirsuli, a river-junction four thousand feet below and about fifteen miles away. The path was downhill all the way and said to be easy going, so although this was a longish march for our first day out, none of us was unduly worried and we set off in high spirits.

I had taken little exercise for thirty years and it would have been sensible to have done some preliminary walking. I had, however, deliberately refrained from doing so, because I feared this would merely prove that I was no longer capable of travelling in rough mountain country and I was determined not to admit this possibility: whatever happened, I intended to complete this journey.

We left at nine and immediately plunged downhill. The track was a dry water-course, one of many natural channels down which the heavy monsoon-rains drain away from the surrounding hills. I have already noted that there are no roads outside the Valley, but I must emphasise that the paths in the hills of Nepal cannot in any way be compared with even the roughest tracks in the more remote parts of Europe: they are merely the result of people having walked over the same route for many generations. A very few of the wider valleys are bridged: otherwise there has been no construction work of any kind.

Four hours later we reached the river. For most of the time we had been scrambling over stones and rocks, some of them so large that they could not be taken in one's stride. This sort of thing is excessively hard on the knees and I was glad that I had brought a heavy stick to steady the weight of my body.

Ang Dawa and the porters were waiting for us at the bottom of the hill. They had brewed tea and spread out a picnic lunch. The rest of the way was easy, they said, so we decided to have a good rest, letting them go on to prepare the camp.

We were now no more than a couple of thousand feet above sea-level and the valley was hot and airless. We felt disinclined to rouse ourselves, especially since we believed that the remainder of the march was no more than an afternoon stroll. The onward track was barely visible, merely a series of footmarks in the sandy river-bed, but at least it was more or less level. Ang Dawa, however, had not felt it necessary to tell me that the river was unbridged, and before long we had to wade it up to our waists.

There were five further crossings, but since by this time our boots were waterlogged we ceased to worry.

Whenever we came across a passer-by I asked how much further we had to go. The answer was always the same. The Nepalese measure distance in terms of *kos*, roughly about two miles, but they do not use the word with any exactitude, and in telling us that Tirsuli was but two *kos* away, they were not informing us that we had only a further four miles to go but suggesting that we still had quite a walk in front of us. I did not at first realise this, but the expression soon became a standing joke: each camping place seemed to be but two *kos* from the next, so that after a few days I ceased to ask about distance.*

Soon after sunset we came to a biggish village. We were by this time very tired and our clothes were damp. "No, this is not Tirsuli," a man told us, "but you are almost there," so we decided to rest and have a cup of tea in one of the wayside shacks. In the event it took us another two hours to reach our goal, by which time night had fallen. There was no sign of the rest of our party and

* Laurence Oliphant, one of the first Englishmen to visit Nepal, records a similar experience, an example of how little conditions have changed in the past hundred years. "I had already walked for six consecutive hours," he notes, "over roads exceeding in danger and difficulty most of the mountain passes in Switzerland, and began to feel fatigued and not a little hungry, seeing that I had not touched a morsel of food since daybreak. Thus the prospect of stretching myself out on a slippery patch, with a stone for my pillow, and the contemplation of my miseries for supper, was anything but agreeable.

"As we were in this humour it was not to be wondered at that an intelligent soldier, whom we had for a guide, came in for a certain amount of our indignation when he informed us that it was still four *kos* (eight miles) to Pheer Phing, the place to which we were bound. Base deceiver! he had told us at starting that it was not quite four *kos*, and now, after walking hard for six hours, we had got rather farther from it than we were at starting. It was impossible, at this rate, to say when our journey would come to an end. Nor could we get him to admit his error, and own that one or other of his statements must be wrong. He rigidly maintained his assertions as to the distance, at the same time suggesting that we should push on, encouraging us with the assurance that the rest of the path was a *maidan*, or dead level. As he had made a similar statement at starting, and as the only bit of level walking we could remember was a log bridge, over which we had crossed, we knew too well what amount of confidence to place in his assertion."

nobody had seen them pass. We staggered about in the dark and tortuous alleys of Tirsuli bazaar. Finally we lay down in the street, so tired that we could drag ourselves no further. We had resigned ourselves to staying where we were, when one of the porters, sent out by Ang Dawa with a lantern to search for us, stumbled over our prostrate bodies.

We had just enough energy left to drag ourselves up the steep hill at the top of which the camp had been pitched. Ang Dawa had found a pleasant site in the middle of a grove of mangoes, but for all we cared it might have been on a dunghill. Dinner was awaiting us and twenty minutes after finishing it the three of us were asleep. On this night we did not bother even to undress.

We had not intended to spend more than a night at Tirsuli, but when we woke in the morning we were so stiff from the unaccustomed exercise that it was agony even to raise ourselves from the ground. I was hardly able to move, since my knees refused to bend and felt as though they had hardened into a solid mass. All three of us, as a result of having walked for hours in water-logged boots, had badly blistered feet. Fortunately we were able to laugh at ourselves, and when I suggested that it would be sensible to rest for a day Bette and Denys were both obviously relieved. They had not, they told me later, themselves liked to raise the matter because they thought I should think them soft.

On the other side of the river there was a high ridge, about a thousand feet above the valley. This was Nawakot, and on top of the ridge was the fort from which Prithwi Narayan had set out on his final conquest of Kathmandu. We could see the fort from our camp and decided to spend the afternoon in visiting it. But as soon as we began to climb we had to admit defeat: our muscles were still so stiff that every upward step was a torment and we hobbled back to camp like a trio of old-age pensioners. I was in much worse state than the others: so much so that the porters laughingly called me Grandfather. The nickname stuck, and for the rest of the trip I was invariably thus addressed.

In the evening Ang Dawa, with one of his henchmen, insisted upon massaging our legs and thighs. The more we protested at their painful ministrations the harder they kneaded, but the next

day, although we were still extremely stiff, we could at least move with comparative ease.

We set off early in the morning, intending to have a long rest at midday and eat our picnic lunch while the porters went on and got the camp ready. I cannot pretend that now or during the next few days I took much interest in the scenery. I was entirely concerned with getting my legs and lungs to function properly, but after about a week they ceased to trouble me, and provided I took my own time and made no attempt to keep up with the porters I suffered no further distress. I had already explained to the others that during the day I did not propose to bother about them, because whenever we met anyone on the road I intended to stop and talk. Eventually we evolved a routine that suited all three of us. Denys is a good and fast walker, and, since he is lightly built, was not bothered by the recurring ascents and descents. He generally started before Bette and me and would sit down to draw whenever he found a subject that attracted him. Sometimes he spent several hours in one spot, and one day did not reach camp until after dark. I was always a bit worried about him because he was unable to ask his way, and even in daylight it was sometimes difficult to find the path. But when we knew that he was behind us we scratched arrows on the track and so had no further difficulty.

Bette soon fell into the habit of walking with me. She was unable for long to keep up with Denys, who was in any case absorbed in his work and did not want to talk, so she was glad to accommodate herself to my rambling pace. We would often spend several hours talking to people on the road, and since they were invariably inquisitive about our relationship I invented a story which was calculated to silence wrong ideas about the morals of Europeans.

I should explain that in all primitive societies people marry as a matter of course. I myself am a bachelor, but when I admitted that I had never married the remark was received with incredulity: in terms of Gurkha experience it was not possible that a man of my age should be without a wife. But when I explained this and said that Denys and Bette were merely friends with whom I was travelling they smiled in disbelief, hinting that I was concealing the true situation: in their reckoning it was obvious that if Denys and Bette were husband and wife he would not be so simple

as to leave her alone with me, especially since she was young and extremely attractive.

These constant and unsatisfactory accounts of our relationship soon became wearisome, and to stop them I said that Bette was my grand-daughter. This merely led to a request for further information, and although I am not by nature a liar I was led, almost subconsciously, to elaborate the story.

After a time Bette had become the daughter of my only son, who had been killed in the war, and because I myself had at one time served in a Gurkha regiment I had brought her and her husband with me to see Nepal. The story inevitably became more and more complicated, and some weeks later I was retailing it to an old Gurkha woman who was more than ordinarily inquisitive. "What a sad tale," she said; "but at least you have a grand-daughter to look after you in your old age." Without thinking about the consequences I went on to say that I lived by myself in London. My wife had gone off with another man a long time ago and so I was quite alone. "Do you mean to tell me," she said, "that your grand-daughter doesn't look after you?" I had no alternative but to agree, whereupon the old lady burst into tears. "You wouldn't be treated like that here," she sobbed, and it was true. Life in a Gurkha village is by our standards harsh, and some of their customs are repellent, but at least the aged and infirm are not neglected by their relatives, as they often are in so-called civilised societies.

Some time later my bluff was called. We had met on the road a young Gurkha of more than ordinary intelligence, and after I had rattled off my usual story he turned to Bette and me, enquired our ages and then asked how old my son was when he was killed. I replied, without thinking, that he was in his early twenties. "In that case," he said, "it is not possible for this girl to be your grand-daughter. Any how, you seem to have picked a winner," and roaring with laughter he scampered off down the hill. We, too, found it difficult to keep straight faces and before moving on we sat down to get the details of our story right, after which it was never again questioned.

We decided, on leaving Tirsuli, that it would be sensible to do a short march, only far enough to walk the stiffness out of our joints. One of the excitements of travelling in Nepal, although

there are disadvantages, is that one is seldom sure where the night will be spent. I had a copy of the latest map, but for our purpose it was useless: only the few small towns had been placed with any accuracy and most of the topographical detail was entirely fanciful. Some of the rivers marked on the map did not exist, while others ran in an opposite direction. The few names of villages that were given were often misspelt and nearly always in the wrong place. To add to the general confusion many rivers in Nepal are known by several different names, so that we seldom quite knew where we were. The map gave an excellent picture of the tangled nature of the country, but of this we were already well aware.

None of our party had been along this route, so that on most days we began by discussing the onward journey with local people. The information we got was usually conflicting, and since nobody had any exact sense of time it was never possible to estimate how far we had to go. There was another difficulty: our porters, who had no tents, naturally preferred to stop in villages, where they could find some sort of accommodation for the night. But the average Nepalese village is dirty and insanitary. Besides, foreign visitors are still rare in these parts and whenever we were by circumstances forced to camp near a village privacy was impossible: groups of people would squat outside the tent and refuse to be driven away. They were always very friendly, but after a long day's march all we wanted was to be left alone in peace. We tried whenever possible to pitch camp beside a river, so that we could bathe and wash our clothes. As soon as the sun had taken the chill off the water these mountain streams were not unduly cold: and once the plunge had been taken it was exhilarating to lie in a pool with the water cascading over one's body

We set off along the banks of a small stream, rising gently all the way. At the head was a steep cliff, thickly wooded. We toiled up over the boulder-strewn path, through a dark and narrow glen at the top of which was a pass, where we had been told we should spend the night. The place was known as Samri Bhanjyang, but we discovered that the village of that name, where we had planned to stay, was several hours further on, fortunately downhill. During the day we passed a number of Gurkha pensioners on their way

down to the capital to draw their yearly allowances. While we were resting on top of the pass a man arrived leading a protesting wild boar on a string. He had captured it, he said, in the jungle and was now proposing to sell it in Kathmandu. The wretched animal, unused to climbing hills, was in the last stages of exhaustion and one of its feet was badly lacerated. The owner asked if we could give it some reviving medicine, but when I suggested that what the poor creature needed was rest, he let out a torrent of obscene rhetoric. "I'll give the bastard rest," he said, and putting his two hands round the pig's backside he started to propel it slowly forward down the hill.

We camped that night on a rice-terrace outside the village. We were pleasantly tired and still a bit stiff, but our joints no longer felt as though they had seized up.

The next day began with the usual climb. Passing through a small village I was surprised to see a woman suckling a boy of five. She told me that children are often breast-fed up to the age of ten. The Nepalese believe that a woman is unlikely to become pregnant while she continues lactating, and this custom of giving children the breast up to a late age is practised as a form of birth control. I have since discovered that in the view of some doctors the belief is not entirely fanciful. One would expect this custom to have some effect upon the subsequent psychological development of the child, but it seems that this is not the case.*

Although the winter was well advanced a great many plants were still in bloom. In many places there were clumps of small yellow and pink flowers, something like Alpine rock-roses, and great scarlet poinsettias blazed from the thickets. Strangest of all were the occasional bougainvillaeas, growing alone on the deserted hill-sides. From a distance they looked, as the wind stirred them, like forest fires.

The sun was setting when we arrived at Sele, high above the valley, and the entire landscape was bathed in an indigo glow. Ridge after ridge stood out with unreal clarity, as though cut out

* My friend Dr Anthony Storr tells me this is because the custom is both widespread and sanctioned by society. Were it not so, one might expect unduly prolonged breast-feeding to result eventually in emotional disturbance.

of cardboard, and on the horizon Himal Chuli and Ganesh Himal were already glowing pink. As the sun sank lower they became yellow, changed to a metallic green and finally, long after darkness had spread over the lower hills, to a cruel and icy whiteness. I was entranced by the constantly changing colours and could not drag myself away from our vantage-point. Denys, I noticed, was not impressed by this fantastic display and we began to argue on the subject of vulgarity. I had by this time learned that his preference was for dark tones. He was obsessed by the melancholy loneliness of stony and deserted valleys and the strange shapes of boulders moulded by water, and whenever possible he liked to work when the landscape was no longer sunlit. I suggested that although he personally might not care for brilliant colours, nature was never vulgar. He was astonished at my naïveté and launched into a convincing exposition on the subject of aesthetics. I had finally to admit that the panorama before us was reminiscent of a luridly-coloured picture postcard, but nevertheless I found it exciting, so we agreed to differ. In any case, I said, every one of us possesses some streak of vulgarity: there are traces of it in many of the greatest works of art: what, for instance, could be more vulgar than the last movement of Beethoven's Choral Symphony? And so our friendly argument continued until at last Bette shouted to us that the tea was getting cold.

Most of the villages we had hitherto passed through were inhabited by a mixture of tribes, but we were now getting into predominantly Gurung country. Sele, where we spent the night, was occupied entirely by Gurungs, many of whom had served in the old British-Indian Army.

Ethnographic maps of Nepal show the various tribes confined in well-defined areas, but I now discovered that there is no rigid segregation, although the country west of Kathmandu is mostly occupied by Magars and Gurungs, and that to the east by Rais and Limbus. Since the days when the tribes were at enmity with each other there seems to have been a good deal of movement, so that the former geographical separation has gradually ceased to exist. A given area is still mainly inhabited by a single tribe, but within its confines one comes across many villages occupied by people who have migrated from distant parts of the country. In

the Gurung area, for instance, through which we were now travelling, we came across many Chetri and Brahman villages, and nearly everywhere the little local shops, if they could be dignified by the word, were in the hands of Newars. The situation is similar to that in England where in every part of the country there is still a strong core of people with local characteristics, but because of migration and intermarriage the old feeling of belonging to a particular county has largely disappeared. Conditions in Nepal are much the same, but with one important exception. Marriage is strictly controlled by the regulations of the Hindu caste-system, which forbids a man to marry outside his own tribe. Nevertheless the disappearance of the segregation in geographical areas has tended to blur the feeling of tribal consciousness which was so marked in earlier times. This is not to say that it no longer exists. In the northern areas, along the Tibetan frontier, the rugged nature of the country has offered less opportunity for the movement of peoples, and there are many isolated valleys whose inhabitants have no commerce even with those of villages a few miles away. But in what may be described as the true Gurkha country, the highlands straddling the middle of Nepal, many of the old distinctions are breaking down, at any rate so far as social customs are concerned. There is not yet any feeling of belonging to one nation, largely because the Government at Kathmandu has never concerned itself with the people in the hills. When I first came to know them, the feeling of separateness between the various tribes was strongly marked. Now I was aware of something different: the awakening of an integrated Gurkha, as opposed to a Nepali, consciousness. The present Government would be well advised to take heed of it, for it is the unsophisticated mountain Gurkhas who are the backbone of the country; but for them Nepal would be unknown to the outside world.

On the road from Sele we passed large numbers of laden porters on their way to Kathmandu, and this traffic became a daily sight. Talking to these people I gradually became aware that the economy of the hills is based on the need for salt.

Nearly all Gurkhas are peasant-farmers: and although many of them suffer from deficiency diseases, these are not caused by shortage of food but by unsuitable diet. Rice and maize are the

staple crops and nearly every family grows more than is required for its own immediate needs. But salt is unobtainable in Nepal and surplus grain is sold or bartered in exchange for it.

The salt trade is entirely unorganised and every family makes its own arrangements. This means that between twenty and twenty-five per cent of the entire hill-population spends from one to two months of every year on salt-buying trips. Until recently this trade was fairly equally directed towards Tibet and India: people living in the north took their surplus grain to Tibet, those to the south went to India. Since the Chinese conquest of Tibet, trading with that country has ceased and salt is now obtainable only from the south. This means that people living in the extreme northern districts of Nepal have now to undertake much longer journeys. Only a comparatively few people take their surplus rice to Kathmandu. For most of them it is more convenient to go straight down to the plains of India.

Incidentally the Sherpas, apart from their activities with climbing expeditions, used largely to exist on trading with Tibet. They were accustomed to go over the passes and bring back salt which they sold in the lower parts of Nepal, using the money to buy cheap Indian goods, for which there was a demand in Tibet. Of these the most sought-after were aniline dyes, the crude colours of which are now preferred to those formerly obtained from the beautiful natural dyes with which the Tibetans stained their wool.

The Sherpa economy has been further disrupted by the arrival in their area of thousands of Tibetan refugees. This has meant that in the Sola Khumbu district prices have risen 400 per cent in the past two years, and there is a danger that unless something is done to help them the Sherpas may before long be forced to migrate to other parts of the country and thus cease to exist as an integrated tribe. Fortunately their homelands are suitable for grazing certain kinds of sheep, and the International Red Cross is trying to introduce suitable breeds, although its main concern is with the welfare of the Tibetan refugees.

Soon after leaving Sele we began to meet parties of Tibetans, not refugees from over the passes but people who had long been living on the Nepalese side of the frontier. Tibetans thrive in a

cold dry climate and dislike even the mildest heat; now that winter was beginning they were taking sheep down to sell in Kathmandu. Many of the women were carrying mastiff puppies, for which there is a demand in the capital because these animals, unless they are brought up as house-pets, have a natural ferocity and are splendid watchdogs.

During the whole of our journey we were never once asked for alms by a Gurkha, but whenever we came across a Tibetan he instinctively stretched out his hand. I have long since forgotten most of the little Tibetan I once knew, but enough remained to pass the time of day, and my fumbling attempts to speak the language were received with chuckles of good-natured laughter. Nearly all the Tibetans we met on the road were traders, but one day we came across a solitary mendicant chanting his way up a hill. His clothes were so old and tattered that they would surely disintegrate if he took them off. In one hand he carried a small drum, in the other a battered umbrella. He was a charming old man, but unfortunately his long unwashed body exuded such a stink that we could not bear to linger and talk with him.

Nearly all Tibetans, even those who have adopted the monastic life, have a natural instinct for trading. Although their country was always closed to the outside world there was never any prohibition on their own travels. Until recently it was a common sight all over the Himalayas to come across Tibetan mule-trains, especially in the winter, when they would descend from their wind-swept plateau to take part in the seasonal carrying trade. I once came across a large party of them on their way back to Tibet from Singapore. Their custom was to spend the summer wandering through the hills of Nepal collecting bears' pancreases and the powdered horns of rhinoceros, for both of which there is a great demand in China, where they are thought to have powerful aphrodisiac properties. The money obtained from their sale was used to buy cheap turquoise, which is greatly prized in Tibet. Besides this, Singapore silver dollars, because of their size, could be sold at a large profit to the Gurkhas, who had them mounted as female ornaments. None of these Tibetans spoke a word of any language except their own and yet, so they told me, they somehow made the long journey to Singapore every year.

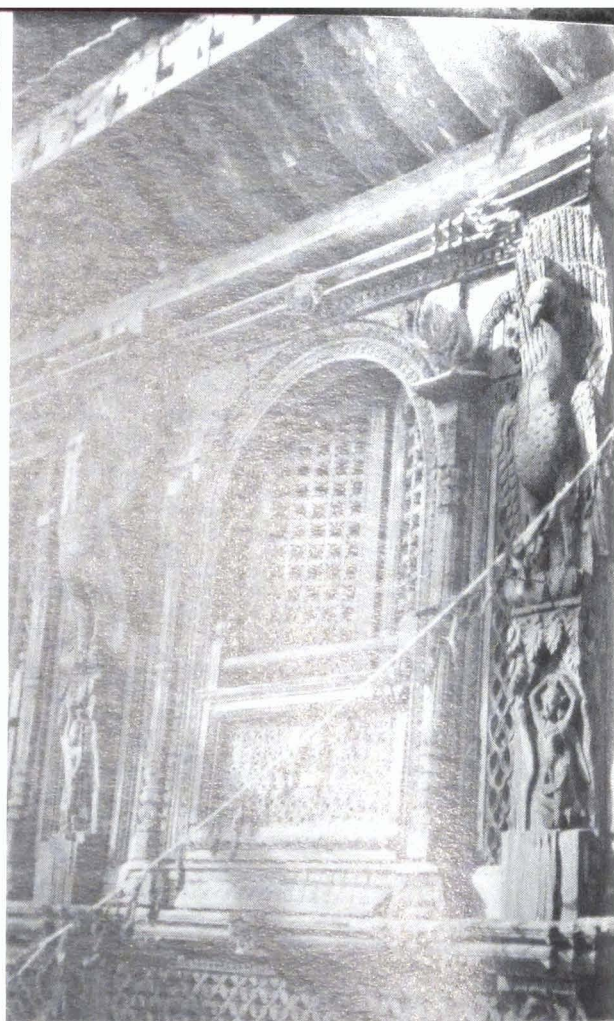
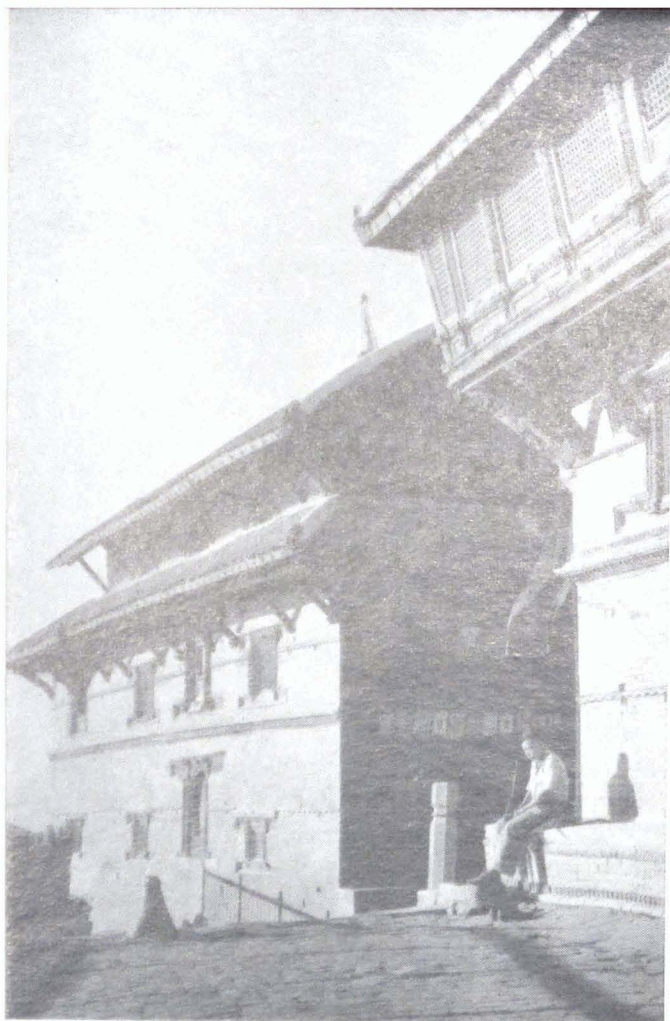
We had by this time become accustomed to the daily round of climbs and descents and were now able to take them in our stride, although my own was still a slow one. A little beyond Sele the track entered thick forest and descended steeply to the Buri Gandak. Shortly before reaching the river we came to a small clearing. Large clusters of butterflies were hovering above the ground and we saw a number of kingfishers flashing overhead. The place was utterly deserted and although, since there was no water near, it was unsuitable for camping, we could not drag ourselves away from the lush splendour which enclosed us. We unpacked our haversacks and prepared for a leisurely picnic lunch. And then we fell asleep. I was awakened by a slight rustling and looking up I saw, only a few yards away, the leaves of a tree beginning to move in a peculiar manner. Before I had time even to consider the reason for this strange phenomenon the leaves parted and an enormous buffalo-head appeared. The creature stared at me with the utmost gravity and then withdrew as silently as it had appeared: it was as though a painting by the Douanier Rousseau had come to life.

A mile or so further on we came to a village where there was a small school, the first we had seen since leaving Kathmandu. The children were sitting in a ring on the ground outside, and as soon as we approached the class broke up in confusion and gathered round, asking us for medicines. In this low-lying spot there was a great deal of malaria, but no provision for its cure. Here we obtained a most welcome addition to our diet: a huge pineapple, which the owner was delighted to part with for the equivalent of sixpence.

A day or so later we were at last approaching the town of Gurkha, where we intended to halt for several days. This was the most gruelling march of the whole journey, and well before the end of it I doubted my ability to finish the course. We began with a steep descent of some four thousand feet. This was immediately followed by a similar climb, and after following a high ridge for several miles, we found ourselves confronted by a deep valley across which we had to toil. Even this was not the end, for when, already exhausted, we arrived on top of the hill which is crowned by the old fort of Gurkha, we discovered that the town itself lay a



16. Magar woman suckling her five year old son.



17. (*Above left*)
Gurkha: courtyard of
Prithwi Narayan's fort.

18. (*Above right*)
Gurkha: detail of
wood-carving on fort.

19. Gurkha: the shrine
of Gorakhnath.

thousand or so feet below. This, more than any other part of Nepal, was the place I had most wanted to see, not only for its historical associations with the rise of the kingdom, but because it is the very heart of the Gurkha country. For the time being, however, I was interested only in sleep: I had just enough energy to unlace my boots.

I did not awake until nine the next morning. Darkness had had already fallen when we reached camp the evening before, and I now saw that our tent had been pitched in a stubbled ricefield, a few hundred yards above the town. We were already surrounded by a concourse of gaping villagers, squatting like crows on the ground. Every effort to drive them away was useless. They would run screaming whenever Ang Dawa shouted at them, but five minutes later they were back.

Gurkha has long been the headquarters of an administrative district, and is the seat of a provincial governor. Until the revolution of ten years ago these governorships were in the personal gift of the Maharaja and were invariably awarded to members of his own family, who were thereby enabled to enrich themselves by means not open to close inspection. Nowadays the office is a political appointment, and as far as I was able to ascertain bribery and corruption are even more widely practised than they were under the Ranas. Nevertheless this is a matter which should not be judged by European standards: in no part of the Orient is a reasonable amount of bribery felt to be immoral; rather is it regarded as a normal part of business dealings.

In Nepal there is as yet little conception of politics as a form of service to the state, and while it would be an exaggeration to claim that all Nepalese politicians are corrupt, there is no doubt that most of them are primarily concerned with furthering their own ends. And because there have been so many changes of Government in the past few years, those in office have understandably made every effort to enrich themselves in the shortest possible time.

Many people with whom I talked were emphatic in claiming that they were better off under the Ranas, whose government was at least stable. Besides, the caste-system, in which the social position of every man is irrevocably fixed, is deeply rooted in Nepal, so

that to some the present emerging form of government appears to be subversive, a seizure of power by those who are not entitled by birth to exercise it. The idea of democratic government, as it is understood in the West, is as yet incomprehensible to the Gurkha mentality. The reasons for this are chiefly lack of education and the long segregation of the country from the outside world, which has prevented the spread of modern ideas. Little more than a hundred years ago the Gurkhas were regarded as barbarians by the orthodox Hindus of India, but the spread of liberal thought has inevitably weakened caste-prejudice in India, so that the situation is becoming reversed, and it is likely that Nepal will long remain a stronghold of the caste-system in its most rigid form.

For want of a better word, Gurkha, like the other provincial headquarters, is generally described as a town, although it is no more than a large village with one street of insignificant shops in which it is possible to obtain only such simple necessities as cigarettes, kerosene oil and cotton cloth. There is no electric light and no drainage system. The governor occupies what looks like a large farmhouse, and below his official residence is a small parade ground and the barracks of the local garrison. These regiments, which are stationed in various parts of the country, appear to me to serve no useful purpose. But Nepal has always regarded itself as a military state, and presumably national pride requires the army to be kept in being. Judging by what I saw, the army is totally inefficient by present-day standards, and still officered mostly by men whose military rank is a matter of birth-right. A high proportion of the national income is spent on the army (there is no air force and practically no artillery), and it is regrettable that this money is not used for some of the other services which are so urgently needed in Nepal: education, for instance, and the provision of hospitals.

The old fort of Gurkha stands alone on top of a dominating hill about fifteen hundred feet above the present town. I was surprised that it does not seem to be regarded with any special interest by the local people, but a military guard is nevertheless mounted in the little courtyard night and day. Probably because of its comparative remoteness, and the fact that it is not suited to present-day needs, Prithwi Narayan's original fastness has remained more

or less in its original condition, the best preserved ancient building we saw anywhere in Nepal. The wooden carving is particularly fine and much better than anything now to be seen in Kathmandu. I presume that the ornamentation was added at some date after the conquest of the Valley, because it is improbable that any Newars were living in Gurkha when it was a separate state.

The fort is reached by a flight of steps, and in a small cavern hewn out of the rock beneath the courtyard is the sanctuary of Gorakhnath, the holy of holies of the original Gurkhas and now a national shrine. Because of Brahman influence, foreigners are not in any circumstances permitted to enter the more sacred temples in Kathmandu and the other Valley cities, because such visits would necessitate a purification ceremony before they could again be used for their religious purpose. We were surprised therefore to be welcomed by the priest in charge of Gorakhnath, who invited us to remove our boots and accompany him into the shrine, which is so small that we had almost to crawl on hands and knees. Here, in the natural recesses of the rock, were a few rusted tridents and swords, but no image of a god. In one corner, barely visible in the dim light, was what looked like a baby's cot, the miniature throne on which Prithwi Narayan is believed to have sat when he was a child. A few marigolds had been strewn on the ground in front and pigeons fluttered in and out all the time we were there. This place, perhaps because of the total absence of adornment, had a strange air of calm, and was for me far more impressive than any of the ornate temples in the capital.

The old priest told me that he had spent his entire life in Gurkha, a great deal of it in tending Gorakhnath. I told him of my surprise in being allowed to enter the shrine. "There was a time," he said, with a charming smile, "when I would have kept you out. But that was when I was young and ignorant. I have spent many years in contemplation, reading our sacred texts, and nowhere do they say that a stranger may not enter our temples. I now believe that all men are equal in the sight of our gods: some of us are good and some are bad, but it is not a question of the colour of our skins."

During the whole of our travels this old Brahman was the only one of his kind I met who accepted the obligations implied by his

priestly birth. Most of the Brahmans who live in the hills are ignorant and narrow-minded. They trade on the superstitions and fears of the peasants, many of whom become so greatly in their debt that they are reduced to the status of slaves. The conduct of everyday life is dictated by the Brahmans: not even the simplest matter, such as calculating an auspicious day to begin ploughing the fields, can be decided without their intervention. These services have to be paid for, and more often than not it is the local Brahman himself who advances the necessary cash. There is a recognised rate for loans in Nepal, but it exists only in theory. In practice it is impossible to borrow money for less than fifteen per cent a month. This means that many families are so permanently in debt that to pay the interest on their loans they are forced to part with their entire possessions. Because of this evil custom, much of the best agricultural land in the hills has now passed into the hands of the Brahman money-lenders. The exorbitant rate of interest makes it impossible ever to pay off a debt, so that many peasant families are for all practical purposes the slaves of Brahmans. These people appear to make no use of their money to live in greater comfort than their fellows. They are natural misers and take pleasure only in the power they have over their neighbours. I was often surprised when some mean little cottage was pointed out as the home of the local landowner. I did not at first realise that this word was used ironically: in ordinary conversation it is synonymous with usurer.

Although Gurkha is the most important centre in the hills of Nepal it is, as yet, little visited by foreigners, because the direct route to the mountains, that followed by the now numerous Himalayan expeditions, does not pass through the town.

A few days after we left Kathmandu, one of the frequent political upheavals had taken place. The King had decided that his so-called democratic Government was not functioning properly, and had therefore imprisoned the Prime Minister and several members of the Cabinet on charges of bribery and corruption. Such, however, is the state of communications in the interior of Nepal that the news of this event had not reached Gurkha while we were there, and we did not hear of it until two weeks later. Even then it aroused little interest. Politics, we were told,

was something that went on in the capital: without significance for the people who lived in the hills. Nevertheless it was believed in Kathmandu that Gurkha was a hotbed of communist activity, but of this we saw no indication. There had indeed been a few small riots in the town, but these, it appeared, were not political and had been caused by the excessive bribes demanded by government officials from the local traders.

We rested for several days at Gurkha, and although our journey had hardly yet begun, I propose now to break the narrative to describe in greater detail the people among whom we were travelling.

Part Three

I

THE information contained in the following sketch of Gurkha social life was obtained over a number of years, mostly in talk with Magars and Gurungs, the two tribes represented in the regiment with which at one time I served. I was taught at Cambridge, where I read anthropology, never to ask leading questions because, more often than not, they produced only the expected answers. This account has therefore been built up from many scraps of thousands of casual conversations.

When I travelled through central and western Nepal in the winter of 1960 I already had in my mind a theoretical picture of what life in these hills was like. The practical experience enabled me to confirm the reality, to fill in on the ground some gaps in my knowledge, and to correct a few misapprehensions.

Because of the mountainous nature of the country, which isolates even nearby villages from each other, there are many local variants in customs, the celebration of festivals, and even religious belief. These differences are more particularly marked as between the groups of tribes which inhabit respectively the western and eastern districts of Nepal. The two main western tribes, the Magars and Gurungs, have, moreover, been much longer exposed to Hindu ideas, because it was to their part of the country only that the Rajputs and their followers fled. I have therefore deliberately refrained from describing social customs or other practices which there is reason to believe are confined to certain districts. A complete account of Gurkha life would demand a number of separate studies, each devoted to a single village, but such an undertaking is hardly a practical possibility.

The following are the chief tribes* nowadays collectively known as Gurkhas: the Magars and Gurungs, who inhabit the central and western hills, the Rais and Limbus, who occupy the eastern districts, and the Chetris, who are not confined to any particular area.

Besides these there are a great many Brahmans in all parts of Nepal. The life of most of them does not differ in any way from that of the Gurkhas among whom they live. Many of them are peasant-cultivators, but their supposedly superior birth affords them certain advantages. In the course of many generations they have acquired some of the characteristics of the hill-people, but they cannot in any sense be regarded as Gurkhas, since their origin is purely Indian.

“The Brahmans,” noted Brian Hodgson, writing in 1874, “when they first arrived in the hills of Nepal found the natives illiterate and without faith, fierce and proud. They saw that the barbarians had vacant minds, ready to receive their doctrine, but spirits not apt to stoop to degradation, and they acted accordingly. To the earliest and most distinguished of their converts they communicated, in defiance of the creed they taught, the lofty rank and honour of the Ksatriya (in Nepalese usage, Chetri) order.

“But the Brahmans,” he continued, “had sensual passions to gratify as well as ambition. They found the native females—even the most distinguished—nothing loth, but still of a temper like that of the males, prompt to resent indignities. These females would indeed welcome the polished Brahmans to their embraces, but their offspring must not be stigmatised. To this progeny also, then, the Brahmans, in still greater defiance of their creed, communicated the rank of the second order of Hinduism: and from these roots (converts and illegitimate progeny) mainly spring the now numerous, predominant and extensively ramified tribe of Khas (Chetri), originally the name of a small clan of creedless barbarians, now bearing the proud title of the military order of the Kingdom of Nepal.”

* I use the word tribe to denote the largest body of people having a common name for themselves as well as a sense of solidarity that expresses itself in regarding other people as strangers. Some, but not all, of the Nepalese tribes have their own languages.

I myself have seen men calling themselves Brahmans whose physical appearance was indistinguishable from Gurkhas. Since the spread of Hinduism, however, with its insistence upon social segregation, irregular unions are no longer tolerated. Nevertheless there seems to be no reason for supposing that Gurkha women, many of whom are extremely attractive, have become less accommodating in the more rigid social conditions of the present day.

I imagine that before Prithwi Narayan and his Rajput chieftains assumed command, the tribes were ruled by their own princelings. Of this there is, however, no definite evidence, but many of the Gurkha tribes retain a distinct feeling of tribal solidarity, and many of them still speak their own languages, although these are gradually falling into disuse.

These tribal languages all belong to the group known as Tibeto-Burman, the most important collection of what are known as Indo-Chinese languages which are spoken in and on the borders of India. But with the advent of emigrants from the plains of India, and emigrants, moreover, who by reason of their superior education and social status were soon to rise to the position of leaders among the illiterate tribesmen, there arose the need of a common language. Nepali, now the official language of the Court and Government, came into being in this way. Some Gurkha tribes, and in particular their womenfolk, because they tend to remain at home, still speak only their tribal language, and in the course of my journey I came across an occasional isolated village in which I was unable to make myself understood in Nepali. But this language is gradually tending to displace the others, and I suppose that in course of time they will disappear from use.

Nepali itself belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages, and is derived from Sanskrit. There are no dialects of Nepali, but the accent with which the language is spoken varies in parts of the country, and there are slight differences of vocabulary: in some of the more remote districts, for example, words of Tibeto-Burman origin have become incorporated into ordinary Nepali speech. At the present time a high proportion of the male inhabitants of Nepal are more or less bilingual, speaking both Nepali and one or other of the tribal languages.

The ruling family of Nepal are strict Hindus, and while there

is no such thing as an established religion (the very nature of Hinduism, which has no canon and did not have any one founder, makes this impossible) the caste-system, which is now an integral part of Hinduism, is observed, in greater or lesser degree, in most parts of the country.

The caste-system, which originated in India and is found nowhere else in the world, is peculiar because of the extreme social segmentation which it produces. Neither a purely social nor a purely religious system, it contains elements of both. Each member of the Hindu community belongs to one or other of numerous castes, which divide it into groups arranged in a complete system of social differentiation. A caste is a bond of union, but the system divides society into sections which, because of the prohibitions against intermarriage, eating, drinking and even smoking together, militate against social cohesion.

“The caste system,” notes L. S. S. O’Malley, “unites and divides thousands of groups, but its salient feature is mutual exclusiveness, for each caste regards other castes as separate communities with which it has no concern. The system does not, however, preclude association for common purposes or social intercourse, for subject to the restrictions which it imposes on mutual hospitality and matrimonial connections, members of different castes may be on terms of intimacy or even friendship. The caste system is the antithesis of the principle that all men are equal, for there is a hierarchy of castes, based on the principle that men neither are nor can be equal. The different castes rank as high or low according to the degree of honour in which they are held by the Hindu community as a whole, subject to the pre-eminence of the Brahman, who forms, as it were, the apex of a pyramid in which other castes are superimposed in layers, one upon another.”*

Most of the Gurkhas living in the hills of Nepal practise a primitive form of animism in which Buddhist influences can be detected, but the presence among them of very large numbers of Brahmans forces them to observe the rules of the various castes to which they were arbitrarily assigned. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the idea of ritual segregation imposed by the caste-system

* *India's Social Heritage* (1934).

is foreign to the Gurkha mentality; but it is very much in the interest of the Brahmans, whose position and wealth are based solely upon their supposedly superior birthright, to preserve and strengthen it.

Nepal has now adopted an organisation based upon allegedly democratic principles. There are various reasons why I consider this system of government unsuited to the present needs of the country, but unless the stranglehold of the Brahmans is broken (and this could be done only by legislation) the introduction of democratic ideas is likely to remain in the realm of fantasy: Brahman supremacy, and indeed the whole notion of caste, is antithetical to democracy. Nevertheless there is a certain religious toleration in Nepal. Christian medical missions are now permitted to operate (on the strict understanding that they do not seek converts), and there are large numbers of Buddhists, who have always been free to practise their own religion. There has long been a mosque in Kathmandu, used by the few Muslim traders resident in the city, but I was surprised to discover also a few families living in the hills. Except for their names, they were indistinguishable from the local Gurkha inhabitants and spoke only Nepali. They knew nothing of their origins, but I presume them to be the descendants of refugees, some of them possibly criminals, from the plains of India.

I doubt if it would now be possible to disentangle the strands, so intertwined have they become, within which Gurkha religious thought is bound. In Tibet and the neighbouring parts of northern Nepal most people are followers of that strange form of Tantric Buddhism popularly known as Lamaism: and because the Gurkhas originally had more cultural affinities with Tibet than with any other country, many of their philosophical ideas are similar. But the Hindu infiltration from India has also played a big part, and so the hills of Nepal have been the natural meeting-place of the two religions. There is no longer any great, or even recognisable, cleavage between them: each has borrowed from the other, and the caste-system, probably at first barely recognisable as such, gradually became established with the rise to power of the Hindu royal family, which had naturally to recognise the supremacy of the Brahmans.

Hinduism divides society into four main castes: Brahmans, Ksatriya, Sudra and Vaisya, corresponding roughly to Priests, Warriors, Traders and Menials. In Nepal, except for the Brahmans, and to a lesser extent the Ksatriya (Chetri), this grouping seems to be quite artificial.

The ruling family, by virtue of their descent from Rajputana nobles, belong to the second, or warrior, caste, although their origin is mixed. During the past fifty years many of them have married into Indian princely families, but I doubt whether this would have been possible in earlier days, when in India more importance was attached to the purity, from a caste point of view, of one's antecedents.

Prithwi Narayan's invading force undoubtedly contained large numbers of Chetri troops, and the Nepalese army has always been largely recruited from this tribe. Chetris were also enlisted in the Indian Army in small numbers; and while there is no reason to suggest that as fighting men they were in any way inferior to other Gurkha troops, they were less popular because of their greater insistence upon the ritual practices of their caste.

The purely Mongoloid tribes, Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus and so on, the very people on whom the fame of the country rests, are not classified as warriors. In their own homes they are peasant-farmers, but it is almost exclusively from among them that the Gurkha regiments of the British and Indian armies are recruited. Nevertheless in the Hindu hierarchy they are regarded as traders, an occupation in which they seldom engage. Most of them, however, are hardly conscious of their position in the system of caste. They still exhibit many signs of their former independence, and although most of them pay lip-service to the Brahman insistence upon ritual practice, they cannot be described as orthodox Hindus.

Although there has been no real collision between Hindu and Buddhist thought, they have not everywhere coalesced. In Nepal there are many isolated and inaccessible valleys where old beliefs and practices have lingered on, unaffected by the spread of Hinduism in other parts of the country. But the strange way in which the two religions have become accommodated to each other is best observed in the capital.

In the Nepal Valley the changes have been less subtle. Kathmandu has always been in direct cultural communication with India, and there is little doubt that the Newars obtained their Buddhism directly from the South. The Emperor Asoka almost certainly visited Nepal some time during the third century B.C., and the numerous shrines situated in the Valley are still visited by pious Buddhists, not only from adjacent Tibet, but from countries as far away as Burma, Ceylon and even Japan. But when the Newars succumbed to the conquering Gurkhas, and after the establishment of their autocratic rule, the cleavage between the two religions was naturally more abrupt. Orthodox Hinduism was the religion of the conquerors; and in the Nepal Valley it has never since been greatly influenced by Buddhist ideas. The reverse is not the case, and in no other part of the world are there so many visible signs of the impact of Hindu ideas upon Buddhism, of which the following is a typical example.

The shrine of Swyambunath is situated on the top of a small hill about half a mile to the west of Kathmandu. According to tradition, the hill was raised by one Manjusri after he had drained the water from the lake which at one time filled the valley. The legend recalls that as the water receded a single lotus flower was seen to be floating on the surface. In this was embodied the spirit of Swyambhu, and on the spot where the flower came finally to rest the present hill was raised. Swyambunath is still one of the most revered places of Buddhist pilgrimage and is annually visited by thousands of devotees. But within the precincts there now stands also a purely Hindu temple. This is dedicated to the goddess Devi Sitla, whose assistance is invoked against the ravages of smallpox. The temple was built at a time when this disease was rampant in the Valley. The Newars, finding themselves no more immune from smallpox than their Hindu conquerors, and having no appropriate deity of their own whose aid might be invoked, did not, therefore, scruple to build this temple, and a visit to it now forms an essential part of the elaborate ceremonial attendant upon a visit to this most sacred of Buddhist shrines.

2

ALTHOUGH there are slight differences in the physical appearance of the various tribes, all Gurkhas, except those of the Chetri tribe, are distinctly Mongoloid, and possess the high cheek-bones and epicanthic fold covering the inner angle of the eye common to all Mongolian peoples. The average height is about 5 ft. 3 ins. in men, a few inches shorter in women. Every variety of yellowish-brown skin is found, but I have seen many Gurkhas whose skin is no darker than that of a sun-tanned southern European, and rosy cheeks are not uncommon. The eyes are invariably dark brown. The hair of the head is usually straight and plentiful, and nearly always jet black, but very dark brown and wavy hair are not unknown. The hair on the face and body is scanty, and it is unusual to see a man with more than a few sparse hairs on the upper lip except in middle age. Few men have any need to shave and razors are not in general use: hairs from the face and chin are pulled out with a small pair of tweezers, an instrument which most men carry permanently suspended by a string round the neck.

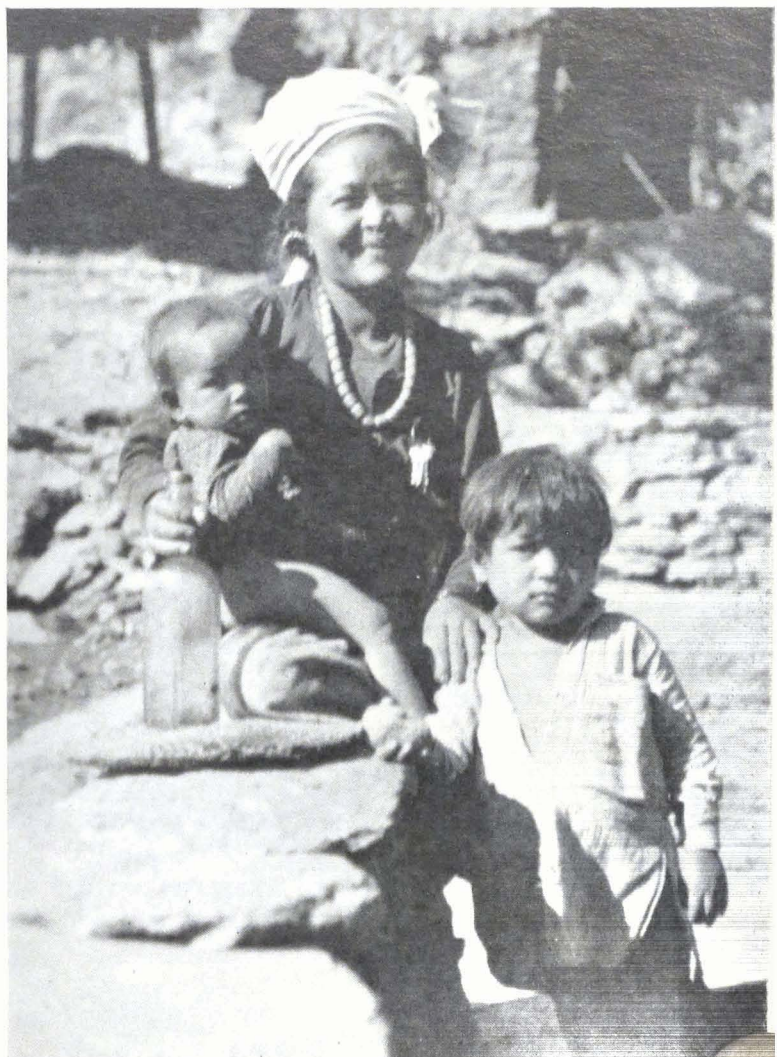
The popular conception that Gurkhas are a people of exceptional physique is false, and is perhaps based on the appearance of the men in military service, the only Gurkhas normally seen by the outside world. These men are in fact no more typical of their race than is the Guardsman of the English.

In the days when I was a recruiting officer I was able to observe many thousands of Gurkhas of all sorts, and most of them were under-nourished. Anaemia and rickets were common, and many youths were found to be suffering from pyorrhoea and other



20. Magar women and children.

21. Gurung woman
and children.





22. Magar girl on the way to join her soldier-husband in India. A typical carrying-basket contains her entire possessions.

deficiency diseases. From what I have since seen of life in the hills of Nepal there is nowhere an actual shortage of food; the trouble is caused by the physical strain of carrying out manual labour in a country of exceptional ruggedness on a largely rice diet, which is low in nutritive value.

Some years ago a revealing experiment was carried out by Colonel McCarrison of the Indian Medical Service. He wished to ascertain the nutritive value of the common diet of some of the various well-marked and distinct groups of people in India. A number of albino rats, all of the same size, sex distribution and body-weight, were put in groups of twenty into different cages. The groups were fed on the common diet of Sikhs, Pathans, Rajputs, Gurkhas, Bengalis, Kanarese, Mahrattas and Madrasis. On the eightieth day the groups were weighed and photographed, and it was found that the Sikhs, Pathans and Mahrattas came first, in that order; and then, after some interval, came the Gurkhas, followed by the rest, with the Madrasis a long way behind.

Colonel McCarrison pointed out that the Sikhs, the Pathans and other peoples of the north-west are all wheat-eaters and drink a great deal of milk: vegetables, fruit and meat also form part of their diet. As one comes down from the north, rice begins to replace wheat; there is a distinct fall in the supply of vegetables and meat, and correspondingly less physical energy. But compared with the people who live in the plains of India, the Gurkha is at an advantage, because the climate of the hills is cool and bracing and not conducive to lethargy.

Although I had long known that the physique of the Gurkhas was by no means as good as is popularly supposed, it was not until 1961, when I was able to see the people in their own homes, that I fully realised the amount of disease in the hills of Nepal. Much of it is due to simple ignorance, in particular ignorance of elementary hygiene, which results in a high rate of infant-mortality and child-sickness. There is also a great deal of tuberculosis, and, because of the strain involved in carrying heavy loads up and down difficult mountain country, a high incidence of various diseases of the heart.

We have already seen that until the revolution of ten years ago Nepal was administered in the interests of a single family.

Attempts are still made to defend that régime on the grounds that the Ranas did not actually oppress the people, and that during their rule there was no political unrest. Nothing, however, can defend the Ranas' callous disregard for the medical needs of the Gurkhas in the hills. Even today, outside the Valley there is not a single hospital which has been provided by the Government, not even a simple dispensary, and the only available medical treatment is that provided by the few Christian missions which have been allowed into the country in recent years.

Every Gurkha tribe is made up of a number of clans, of which some are exogamous, others not.* The clans themselves are again composed of a number of groups technically known as kindreds, the members of which acknowledge descent, genealogically or by adoption, from one family, whether through their father or their mother. These kindreds are strictly exogamous, since Gurkhas are unanimous in regarding all others of their own kindred, even though complete strangers, as being genealogically related. After marriage a woman is considered to have become a member of her husband's kindred.

The Nepalese kinship system, by which the relationship of one man to another is defined, cuts, as it were, across these otherwise rigid social groupings and unites a number of people who would not otherwise be classified together. Thus, although Gurkhas regard all members of their own kindred as descendants from some common, albeit unknown, ancestor, there is no feeling of solidarity among members of the same kindred. The idea of belonging to a unit is more strongly expressed in the use of kinship terms.

The kinship system, by which groups of relatives are classified, is extremely complicated, but the organisation of Gurkha society cannot be properly understood without some knowledge of it. The main feature, and the most difficult for Europeans to grasp, consists in the use of a single word to denote a large number of

* Exogamy is the rule prohibiting marriage of an individual to any person belonging to the same social or local group as himself. This is usually the clan. The opposite is known as endogamy, the rule which prohibits a man from marrying outside his social class, as, for instance, with the caste-system in India.

separate individuals, many of whom, in our way of thinking, are not related to each other. These persons can be distinguished by the use of a possessive pronoun, but this is seldom necessary because of the domestic groupings of the various members of a family, which make it easy in conversation to distinguish the particular individual to whom reference is being made.

The system is based upon the division of society into generations. Thus a man's parents and the latter's brothers and sisters (and their spouses) form one main group. A second group comprises not only an individual's brothers and sisters, but also all the children of those in the first group. A third grouping contains all the children of those in the second. These groups can be extended almost indefinitely, but the three I have enumerated form the basis of Nepalese society.

The Nepali language contains some fifty different words denoting various degrees of relationship, some of them extremely remote. There is, for instance, a definite term for the child of one's wife's cousin, but in practice only the words required to distinguish the members of the three main groupings are in general use.

The conception of what constitutes the family is the basis on which Gurkha society is organised. In most Western countries, although we recognise the existence of a large number of relatives, what we regard as the family is a fairly small and compact unit, usually a man and his wife, together with their children. But in Nepal, and indeed in most parts of India, the conception is much wider.

The immediate family group is held to include every member of a single generation, that is to say a man or woman and all their brothers and sisters. In practice this eliminates the relationships known to us as uncle, aunt and cousin. The word for father, to take one example, is used not only to denote one's actual parent, but all his brothers. The same applies to one's mother and her sisters. Thus it follows that in the next younger generation all those whom we would regard as cousins are addressed as brother or sister.

A Gurkha village is more a series of extended family groups than a collection of unrelated individuals: and because everybody is known to everyone else no ambiguity arises from the use of

kinship terms. There are, however, a number of words which may be added when necessary to the classificatory terms, the purpose of which is to give each one an exact and definite meaning; but except when talking to strangers there is no need of them.

Gurkhas do not normally address each other by name, but by a word denoting their order of priority in the family: eldest son, second, third, fourth and so on, down to youngest. With the addition of these terms it is possible to ascertain a man's exact relationship to his fellows. I once came across a youth who was accompanied by a friend of his own age whom he referred to as his father. To find out the exact relationship all that was necessary was to ask which father. "He is my ninth father," was the reply: that is to say the ninth younger brother of his actual father.

Within the intimate family circle people of both sexes address each other only by the words denoting the order of priority of their birth; eldest, youngest, third, fourth and so on, but Nepali also contains words which group together all those of one's own generation who are older or younger than oneself; elder brother, elder sister, younger brother and younger sister. The use of these words, however, conveys a sense of formality, and they are employed only when a man happens not to be on intimate terms with his brothers and sisters, or when, for instance, there is a great discrepancy between the ages of two brothers, such as is frequent in a very large family; or when a man has step-brothers with whom he is on friendly but not intimate terms.

Children by a second or subsequent marriage are separately numbered. A man may perhaps have had four children by his first wife, but the first child of the second marriage will be addressed by the word for eldest, and so on. When a man has several wives there may be three sons in the house all known as eldest. This, however, does not result in confusion, but serves rather to distinguish the children of each separate mother. Boys and girls take their numerical place in the family separately: that is to say, assuming the first four children born in a family to be boys, the fifth, if a girl, would be addressed as eldest.

In terms of Western family relationships, the Gurkha classificatory system seems clumsy and unduly complicated, but this is not so, since it makes possible the exact placing of an individual

within his own family grouping with a simplicity and economy of words such as is not possible in any European language. I must, however, admit that the linguistic complications are at first difficult for a foreigner to comprehend: until they are understood, everybody seems to be related by blood to everyone else.

Kinship terms, besides their use to denote an exact relationship, are also employed in a more general sense. Gurkhas, like all other peasant communities, have a limited view of life and their conversation is in general restricted to elementals: the weather, the state of the crops, illness and so on. But the way in which kinship terms are used in a wider context is both sophisticated and subtle.

Suppose, for instance, that a man becomes friendly with another, one to whom he is not in any way related. In the early stages of the friendship the two will address each other as brother, but after a time they will substitute the word for brother-in-law, even though the rules of caste prohibit the legal union which would make such a relationship possible. Used in this sense the term merely acknowledges the closest friendship possible between two men whose families cannot be united by marriage. But the word for brother-in-law can also be used as an insult, and in this sense the implication is that one has had sexual intercourse with the sister of the man thus addressed. This is not an isolated example: nearly all the kinship terms may be used in an inverted manner to express the opposite of their exact meaning.

A few of the kinship terms are also used, without any suggestion of relationship, as common forms of address. Thus men and women generally address others of approximately their own generation, even though not related, as brother or sister. A Brahman, even though a youth, will usually be addressed as grandfather, the inference being that his superior social status implies also the wisdom of an elderly man, but in using the expression in this way there is often more than a suggestion of irony. When, as custom demands, a man addresses an unknown woman as either elder or younger sister, according to her apparent age in relation to his own, he implies that his interest is strictly formal. But after the first exchange of civilities a less formal mode of address may be substituted, to which the woman, should she find the man attractive, can respond in the same manner; on the

other hand if she wishes to discourage the man she continues to address him as brother. Thus the approach to casual sexual intercourse is an elaborate game in which the intricate use of words plays the most important part, and because the moves in the game are well understood by both parties, it can be terminated before being brought to a conclusion without giving offence to either of the players. Nepalese village life is in most ways very simple, but the Gurkha technique of approach to love-making seems to me to be far more civilised than that which is usual in many more advanced countries.

3

BECAUSE of the rugged nature of the country very large villages are seldom found in Nepal. Collections of houses, generally at some distance from each other, are grouped together for administrative purposes, but from a social point of view they are separate entities and are so regarded by the inhabitants.

What is known as the extended-joint-family system prevails throughout the country. Thus a household normally consists of a man, his wife (or wives) and children, his brothers, together with their families, and his unmarried sisters. A family of this kind may consist of as many as twenty or thirty persons, so that a Nepalese village is more often than not a large family group.

The local government official, or headman, is generally a member of the most important of the families grouped into a village, and it follows that public opinion, which in Nepal means a proper regard for the established social order, is the most important element in the social fabric.

In a small community, one in which moreover most of the members are related to each other, it is inadvisable, for the sake of harmony, to flaunt the conventions. Nepalese society, although tolerant of social misdemeanours, is at heart conservative, particularly concerning marriage. Family life is a communal rather than a private affair, and in selecting a wife the prime consideration is whether or not she will fit into the existing social framework. But largely because so many Gurkhas have at one time or another served in the army, where the family influence is removed, it often happens that a man forms an alliance with a woman from some part of Nepal far distant from his own home. When he

eventually takes his wife back to the village she will be a complete stranger to the local community. This is a common cause of domestic friction, which often results in the breaking up of an extended-family household. Women, it seems, are less willing than men to recognise minor deviations from established social custom.

This probably arises from the fact that the women are forced to spend most of their time in one another's company, while the men are away at work in the fields. Moreover, the wife of the senior member of an extended family is alone responsible for the feeding arrangements of the entire family, and she is apt to regard the other women as her servants. Even more important, only the senior wife has access to the family money-chest. Many women in this position become viragos and can make life intolerable for the others.

In the two hundred or so extended families of which I was able to collect complete details very few, and only those consisting of a small number of people, have remained in their original extended state. Sometimes one brother has broken away from the family, sometimes another, and I have come across families in which every male has set up his own household. Always the reason has been the same: the inability of the women to live amicably together.

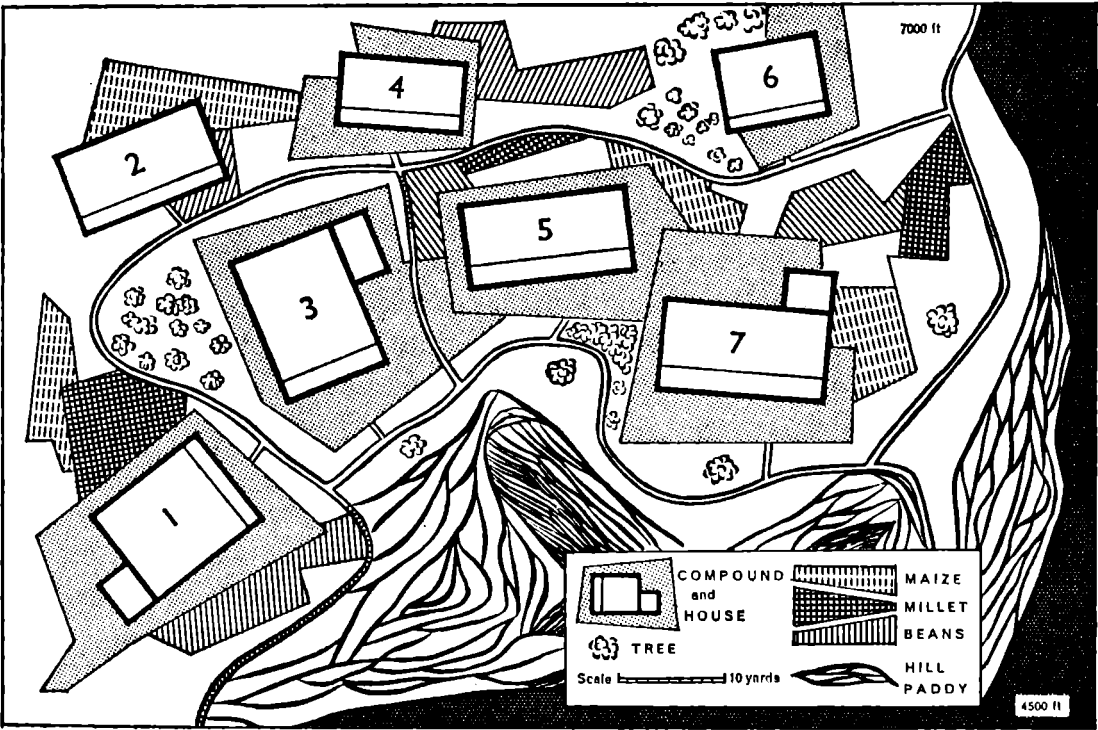
The drawing opposite, which shows the layout of the houses occupied by a family in the district of Kaski, will serve also to indicate the domestic arrangements of Gurkha houses in general. Relationships are described from the point of view of my informant, an exceptionally intelligent soldier named Manlal.

House No 1 belongs to Manlal's eldest "father," that is to say his own father's eldest brother, an elderly widower. Houses 2, 3 and 4 are the property of Manlal's actual father. Each is about fifteen yards square.

The whole of the ground-floor of House No 2 is used as a kitchen, the hearth being in the middle, as is usual in Nepalese houses. Normally the senior wife in an extended family sleeps in the main kitchen, but in this particular example the room is occupied by the wife of Manlal's younger brother and her husband.

The senior member of this extended family is the occupant of House No 1, but because he is a widower and is himself getting

on in years he has handed over the management of the family to his brother, who is my informant's actual father. There is no specific title, nor indeed any actual position of head of an extended family: but the senior male is in personal charge of the family valuables, and it is tacitly understood that he alone has the power to dispose of property. When an elderly man does not wish to



be bothered further with family matters, as in the present example, he renounces his authority in favour of a brother or son. This happens naturally and does not normally result in friction. But it does demand a change in the domestic arrangements, because the senior member of an extended family is privileged to take his meals in his own home, and this necessitates a redistribution of houses among the family from time to time.

House No 3 consists of two storeys. The ground-floor is, as usual, designed as a kitchen, but is not in use as such, both floors being used as sleeping-rooms.

House No 4 is similar to No 3, the ground-floor being used as a cattle-shed.

Houses 5, 6 and 7 all belong to Manlal's second "father," that is to say his own father's younger brother. Although they are surrounded by the homes of other members of the family, they are now regarded as an entirely separate household. The owner, who died in 1933, had spent most of his adult life serving in the Nepalese army, and was stationed in various remote parts of the country. In the course of his wanderings he acquired no fewer than seven wives, of whom six now occupy his three houses. Polygyny is common in Nepal, but it is unusual for a man to have more than two or, at the most, three wives. This particular man apparently never lived with more than one woman at a time, the remaining wives, as he tired of them, being settled in his village. None of the seven, except the first, was previously acquainted with the family, and this seems to have resulted in so much domestic friction that the two brothers (Manlal's uncles), the sole survivors of the senior generation, decided to separate.

The decision to divide a family in this way, either wholly or in part, does not necessarily imply a complete rupture of family life, nor even a change in amicable relations. It is perfectly natural for a man, once he reaches a certain age, to wish to be master in his own home, and once this has been achieved by dividing the family property, relations between the various members of the extended family often become far more intimate than they were before.

When an extended family decides to split up, it is sometimes necessary also to divide the land, but only when there has been such a complete schism in a family that its members no longer wish to remain on speaking terms. In such cases a senior relative who has no personal interest in the property is called upon to arbitrate. Suppose, for instance, that the three brothers of a family wish to separate. The houses and their contents, including the cooking utensils, are first distributed among the three, the youngest brother being given a slightly larger share. The land is similarly apportioned, but it must first be ascertained whether it is all of equal agricultural value: if not, it may be necessary to subdivide every separate plot, so that each brother receives an equally valuable quantity of land. The practical and inconvenient effect of this is that each man will become the owner of a number

of small pieces of land, often widely separated from each other. Because of family disagreements at one time or another there are now few people whose landed property is concentrated in one place. Some of the plots are so small as hardly to be worth working, and owing to the rugged nature of the country it may often take an hour to climb up and down from one to another. So far as their primitive methods permit, Gurkhas are good and hard-working cultivators, but they are greatly handicapped by the inefficiency of their system of land-ownership.

Brothers, although on amicable terms with each other, sometimes wish to separate during the lifetime of their parents. Then the parents generally elect to live with their youngest son, and for this reason he is given a slightly larger share of the property.

The possibility of dividing a family depends to a large extent upon money, because the building of additional houses may be necessary. These may be put up near the original family home, or on a distant plot of land which the owner has acquired in the redistribution. In this way new villages gradually come into being.

A collection of houses occupied by a joint family is generally surrounded by a low stone wall, which also encloses the vegetable garden. Here are grown maize, millet, cucumbers, pumpkins, peppers and other odds and ends required for daily consumption. In front of each house a small strip of ground is left uncultivated. This is used for weddings and other ceremonies, and it is also the children's playground. Here, too, the maize is stored, stacked in pyramids and supported on a pole.

In front of every house a narrow verandah runs for the whole length of the ground-floor. These verandahs always face the strip of uncultivated ground, and during the daytime serve the purpose of a sitting-room, where the women gossip and carry on their petty quarrels.

The ordinary Nepalese peasant-house is solidly built, generally of local materials. The framework is made of rough-hewn timber, the walls of rubble mixed with clay and mud. Roofs are either thatched or, in districts where it is obtainable, covered with slate. When the family can afford the expense, corrugated iron, imported from India, is a popular roofing. This hideous material, although

its usefulness cannot be denied, has done much to disfigure the appearance of many Nepalese villages. On a recent visit to the Cornish village of Veryan I was much struck by the similarity of the so-called round houses, of which few examples now remain, to the peasant homes in Nepal. Many of them are also round or oval in shape, but whereas such primitive dwellings have not been built in England since mediaeval times, they are still the normal pattern in Nepal.

Gurkhas have little need of furniture, but in most rooms there is often a wooden chest or, if the occupant has served in India, a tin trunk painted in gaudy colours. Sometimes there will be a small square mirror hanging on a wall, and a framed photograph or two. If the subject is not entitled to wear uniform, he contrives to have his picture taken in some semblance of European costume, and prominence is given to a wrist-watch, borrowed if necessary for the occasion, and a brightly coloured necktie, later painted in on the photograph.

Most people sleep on the earthen floor, occasionally on a wooden bed of the kind in general use throughout India. Two or three couples often share a room, but this is not a cause of embarrassment: once the lamp has been extinguished the other occupants are disregarded. Young children generally sleep with their parents, but after the age of eight or nine it is more usual for them to share the room of their grandparents, whose sexual activities are presumed to have ceased.

All Gurkhas like to sleep with a blanket or other covering completely enveloping their heads and faces. This habit, and the custom of keeping door and windows tightly closed at night, is largely responsible, despite the cool and healthy mountain climate, for the high incidence of tuberculosis.

Women usually rise shortly before dawn, while their menfolk are still asleep. Their first duty is to purify the kitchen floor by smearing it with a mixture of cow-dung, earth and water. The other rooms are from time to time treated in the same way, but since they are less used than the kitchen they do not require to be resurfaced every day. In a strict Hindu community this mixture of cow-dung is used in a purifactory and ritual sense, but among most Gurkhas the religious aspect seems to be less regarded.

After the kitchen floor has been cleaned, the fire is kindled and the morning meal, the main one of the day, is prepared. The preparation of food is primarily women's work, but there is no objection to its being done by men, most of whom are able to cook. In a small household it is generally the husband who cooks during the period of his wife's menses, when she is considered to be in a state of impurity, or at any time of illness.

Men have a light snack as soon as they rise. This is generally taken in the sleeping room and consists of odds and ends left over from the day before. After this they work in the fields until about ten o'clock, when they return for the main meal of the day. This is a leisurely affair, so much so that walking about the hills between the hours of ten and twelve I often got the impression that the country was uninhabited: everybody was at home.

Work is continued from about midday until the light begins to fail. The last meal is eaten soon after sunset, after which odd jobs are done in the house and the vegetable garden. This is the time when the father plays with his children and has time for a smoke. Most Gurkhas, both men and women, smoke a simple form of hookah, the bowl of which is made from a coconut shell to which a bamboo stem is fitted. But cigarettes, imported from India, are becoming increasingly popular. Incidentally, no social stigma attaches to trading in cigarettes, this being a modern occupation unconnected with the hereditary trades carried on by the menial tribes of Nepal. When a man goes down to the plains for any purpose he will often invest his spare cash in cigarettes. These are not displayed for sale, but it becomes known in the village that a certain man has a supply which he is willing to sell at a profit.

The smaller Nepalese village is frequently a purely family group. Nevertheless, there is a necessity to link one village with another so that everybody may play his proper part in the communal life of the district. The village Headman is the principal means of communication between the local government and the people, and although he is responsible only for what is regarded as one village, in practice he has often to look after a number of separate communities scattered over a wide area.

The Headman is responsible for the collection of land-revenue

and for paying the money received into the nearest District Headquarters, often three or four days' journey from his home. He is also charged with the general welfare of the villagers, and is generally a man of some influence. Headmen receive five per cent of all monies collected, and one day's service each year from every male villager, this last as compensation for time occupied in government business. The office is hereditary: but an unsuitable man may be deposed at the general wish of the community, or a candidate appointed when there is no heir.

Until thirty years ago slavery was one of the characteristics of Nepalese life. At no time, however, could it be compared with the form of slavery existing in some other countries in bygone days. Nevertheless the system was undoubtedly open to many abuses.

Slaves were of two kinds: first, people who had become hopelessly in debt or who were compelled by necessity to raise a considerable sum of money. Such a man would enter into a legal contract to work solely for his creditor until his debt had been repaid. The second kind were roughly grouped into three classes, according to the attitude of their owners. First there were those landlords who found themselves the possessors of slaves as a result of inheritance, and secondly those owners who maintained slaves purely for their labour. The third class, never large, consisted of those who maintained slaves for the sole purpose of carrying on a traffic in human beings. With the exception of the last class the treatment of slaves, in accordance with ancient statute, was humane and not accompanied by physical cruelty.

The custom was officially abolished on 28 November 1924. Owners of slaves were given a cash compensation, and the slaves themselves, after receiving their freedom, were apprenticed to their former owners for a period of seven years, the hope being that freed slaves would eventually settle down as ordinary labourers in the districts where they had previously been living in bondage.

The number of slaves freed amounted to some fifty-one thousand, roughly one per cent of the entire population of the country. The number of slave-owners who received compensation amounted to nearly sixteen thousand. All slaves freed under the decree were formed into a new tribe, to which the name Siva

Bhakti (literally, devotees of the goddess Siva) has been given. They are permitted to marry only among themselves. The term Siva Bhakti is used by Gurkhas of more orthodox descent to express contempt, and most former slaves take elaborate precautions to conceal their origins. In the whole of my journey I came across only one man who openly admitted his former slave status.

The formal abolition of slavery in Nepal was inevitable; no country would wish to be branded with the stigma inherent in an institution with such evil implications. Nevertheless the situation of many Gurkhas today is tantamount to that of slavery, so hopelessly in debt are many of them. I have met men who complained bitterly of the abolition of legalised slavery. In the days when it was in operation they had admittedly to work hard, but in return they were provided with food, clothing and houses by their masters: as for hard work, that is in any case a peasant's lot. But with the abolition of slavery the obligations also ceased, and what was intended as a means of eliminating a social injustice has in practice proved of benefit only to the former slave-owners, many of whom are now in a position to lend money at exorbitant rates of interest.

Three kinds of forced labour still exist in Nepal. The first two are used to meet official government requirements. In the roadless interior of the country everything has to be carried on men's backs, and whenever a district governor, or other senior civil servant, travels, he has a right to be provided with free transport. Until recently such officials lived in considerable state, and to keep them and their large families supplied with their wants from Kathmandu, and even from India, called for the services of a very large number of carriers who, when needed, were forced, at no matter what personal inconvenience, to make themselves instantly available. I have known men who on several occasions have had to leave their homes for weeks at a stretch, and at times when their services were badly needed in the fields. But there was no means of avoiding this duty, and no compensation for carrying it out. On my recent trip I got the impression that this particular form of exploitation is less frequently practised than formerly.

The second form of forced labour concerns public work,

keeping the bridges in order, cutting the undergrowth from paths, and so on, and it does not amount to more than a few days' work each year.

Lastly there remains forced labour carried out on behalf of village headmen, of whose remuneration it is an integral part. For the most part this consists of such work as thatching roofs and working in the fields, which the Headman himself would do if he were not required frequently to be away from home on government business.

Labour required by private individuals is provided on a reciprocal basis. Only seldom is it necessary to call in outside help, because of the large number of people in most families. But sometimes a man will need his neighbour's help in building a house, and then assistance is given on the understanding that it will be repaid in kind when necessity arises. No payment is made for this work, but it is customary to feed the labourers, whether relatives or not, and to give them a feast when the work is completed. The building of a Nepalese house does not call for highly skilled labour, but artisans are needed for making doors and windows. These are made by a menial caste of wood-carvers, of whom there is generally a family resident within reach of most villages. Local carpenters are usually men of little skill, but even so their products often show traces of the traditional Newar carving seen all over the Nepal Valley.



23. Chetri family crushing sugar-cane.



24. (*Above left*) Gurung wearing a loose homespun coat. 25. (*Above right*) A typical Magar. 26. (*Below left*) Gurung youth with khukri tucked into his waistband. He is wearing an amulet suspended from his bead necklace. 27. (*Below right*) A Gurung of the Ghale clan.



4

BECAUSE of the large size of an extended family, the Gurkha child usually grows up in intimacy with a great many people. Children are instructed by their mothers, and at an early age are taught the correct forms of address for all those with whom they are likely to come in contact. Thus even quite small children know the kinship terms for every member of their father's family: but unless their mother's family lives in the same village or nearby (which it usually does not), they generally know little about it. This distinction persists in later life, although to a lesser extent, and is due to the patrilocal arrangement of the extended family.

An integral part of the kinship system is the form of behaviour adopted towards each member of the family. This is expressed in the method of formal greeting, of which the most intimate consists of bending down and clasping the feet, at the same time touching them lightly with the forehead, of anyone to whom great respect is due. This means every relative older than oneself, but unless there is a great discrepancy in age the salutation is generally offered in a perfunctory manner. All Brahmans, no matter what their age, are entitled to be greeted with this mark of respect. But salutations, like kinship terms, can also be used in an ironical sense. Thus to greet a disliked but possibly wealthy neighbour with a form of salutation to which he is not entitled is a subtle method of expressing contempt.

Women perform these salutations in the same way as men, but are also required to make obeisance to their husbands as soon as they rise in the morning. The man will generally be still in bed when his wife greets him and there is no necessity for him to acknowledge her presence in any way.

Affection is expressed by prolonging the time of clasping the feet, and the person being greeted may reciprocate this feeling by removing his shoes before allowing his feet to be touched. Alternatively, to ignore a salutation completely is to imply a lack of friendly feeling. With the exception of the daily salutation given by a woman to her husband, these greetings are in practice reduced to the minimum of formality and usually take the form of bowing with the hands placed, palm to palm, in front of one's body. On all ceremonial occasions, such as marriages and festivals, they are performed in full and offered even to strangers.

Children are also taught by their mothers how to cleanse themselves after defecation, for which purpose water is used, but in places where there is a scarcity, the body is cleansed with stones or grass. There is no sanitation in Nepalese villages, nor even a particular spot set aside as a latrine, and it is not unusual to find the village street used as such. The use of one's field or garden as a latrine by others is not considered a cause for complaint, and it is a breach of manners to take any notice of a man relieving himself. If a woman is thus surprised by a man, she will generally try to avoid him during the next week or so, but after a little while normal relations are resumed.

In a well-regulated household a small brass water-pot is kept in the verandah, and its absence from the accustomed place is a hint that one should postpone a visit to the fields. These little water-pots are commonly used by Europeans resident in India as flower-vases, a custom that is thought decidedly peculiar; it is as though an Indian lady decided to decorate her house with a roll of toilet paper.

When a person wishes to relieve himself he usually says where he is going. The natural functions of the body are discussed in a normal manner, but it is a breach of manners to mention them during meals.

Small children relieve themselves just outside the house and are not expected to go to the fields until they are old enough to look after themselves. There is no sense of shame regarding the natural functions of the body, and I have been talking to a child when, without breaking off the conversation, it has squatted down and emptied its bowels.

5

IN most Gurkha households men and women take their meals together, but this custom is not in accordance with the Hindu idea of propriety. In villages where Brahman influence is pronounced, however, the women do not usually eat until after their menfolk have finished, as is usual in orthodox Hindu households in India. There is a distinct feeling that for men and women to take their meals separately is a sign of social superiority. But one of my informants told me that in his opinion the custom arose out of poverty; the connotation was that the family was too poor to afford a sufficient number of platters for everyone to eat at the same time.

Nearly all Gurkhas will eat anything in company except rice, and, again unless Brahman influence is strong, the ritual requirements of caste are satisfied by placing a guest a little apart at meal-times. This is assuming that the stranger is of approximately the same social standing and not a member of any of the menial castes, in whose company it would be impossible to take a meal without losing caste.

Brahmans, and indeed all strict Hindus, are required to take their meals in what is regarded as a condition of ritual cleanliness. This means removing ordinary clothes and putting on a thin white cotton loin-cloth. The scant covering afforded by this flimsy garment is not inconvenient in the humid plains of India, where the custom doubtless originated, but it is ill-suited to the cold climate of the hills. Most Gurkhas affect to despise all those who live in the plains. Nevertheless they cannot disguise the fact that their social life has been greatly influenced by Indian custom.

The idea that it is necessary to remove one's clothes before taking a meal is gaining ground, but there are still many people who feel that honour is sufficiently satisfied by taking off one's shoes.

Conversation during meals is usual and generally takes the form of praising or criticising whatever food has been provided. Men may demand a second helping without waiting for one to be offered. A guest should always have his plate replenished, but if this is not done he may, without giving offence, ask for more.

During meals it is polite to sit upright, with the back erect, and the usual practice is to squat cross-legged on the floor. It is considered particularly ill-bred to squat in the position usually adopted while defecating, but this does not apply when taking an informal meal in the open air.

Food should be taken up only in the right hand, since the left is used to cleanse the body after evacuation. For the same reason, only the right hand should be used in serving food; to do otherwise is gravely insulting.

Appreciation of a meal is expressed by belching, but to break wind otherwise in the presence of others is to proclaim oneself a boor.

In a well-conducted family water is brought at the conclusion of a meal by the women or, in a wealthy household, by servants. This is poured from a special vessel with a long spout, rather like a teapot. The hands are lightly rinsed, and as the water trickles over them it falls into a bowl which is held beneath. After this the mouth is rinsed and the water spat into the bowl. These are the refinements of table-manners and they are often neglected in poor families.

At the end of a meal the various utensils are cleaned by the women folk, sometimes assisted by their children, a mixture of earth and ashes being used for this purpose. Except in very poor households, there is usually a brass plate and cup for each member of the family, but these are not individually allocated. The idea of ritual cleanliness is closely connected with eating. Thus during her menses a woman must take her meals alone. She is not required to prepare her own food and there is no objection to her being waited upon by the other women of the house. They should, however, take particular care not to touch her, lest they become

contaminated by her supposed impurity. There is a common belief that as soon as a woman begins her menses the others of the household will quickly fall into the same condition, a state of affairs which is liable to disorganise the household arrangements, since it means that the men must prepare their own food and generally look after themselves. When a woman is in this condition she may in no circumstances prepare food to be eaten by others.

At the time of a birth it is customary for a household not to eat with anyone except the immediate members of the family until after the child has been named. This is a time of extreme ritual uncleanliness, and during the period between the severing of the umbilical cord and the child's naming-ceremony the mother takes all her meals alone. The child, too, is considered to be unclean and must on no account be touched by anyone except its mother. Because of this, it is usual to hire the services of a woman of one of the menial tribes to look after the mother during the days in which she is denied the services of her female relatives, but in a poor household this is not possible and the mother is left to fend for herself.

The umbilical cord should preferably be severed by a woman of one of the menial tribes, but in a poor family the mother will herself do this, so as to save the few rupees which would be demanded as a fee.

No man may be present while a birth is taking place, and the father does not see his child until after the cord has been severed and the mother has composed herself. The placenta of a female child is taken away by the other women of the house and buried in an adjoining field where it is unlikely to be found and eaten by a jackal or other scavenging animal. But the placenta of a male child is secretly buried among the stones of one or other of the raised platforms, built round a big tree, which are commonly found in all villages. These platforms are much used by the elders for their discussions, and it is believed that by burying male placentas among the stones wisdom is conferred upon the old men. For the same reason, the placenta is sometimes buried beneath the hearth in the kitchen, the room most generally used in every house.

All Gurkhas believe in sympathetic magic, and I once stumbled across a curious example in connection with childbirth. I was about to throw away an old railway-ticket when the man who was with me begged me to give it to him; he said it was a most potent medicine. In the days before air-travel the railway was the fastest means of locomotion known, and as a symbol of speed the application of a ticket to a woman's neck is believed to ensure an easy birth. I subsequently discovered that there is a great demand for used railway-tickets all over Nepal, and since they are usually collected at the end of a journey, people go to some trouble to avoid handing them over. To be efficacious they should have been used for a journey. Railway-tickets are also hung round the neck of any cow that has difficulty in calving.

6

ELEVEN days after the birth of a child the naming-ceremony takes place, and when this has been performed and mother, child and house ceremonially purified, normal life is resumed.

A local Brahman is generally employed to prepare the child's horoscope and suggest an appropriate name. Sometimes only the initial letter is selected, so that the parents can exercise a choice of names.

Because of the large number of kinship-words in normal use as forms of address, people who spend their entire lives at home in a Nepalese village have no practical use for personal names, and very often do not know their own. But since many Gurkhas spend at least a few years in military service of one kind or another, their circle of acquaintances becomes widened beyond the narrow boundaries of the family, and they need to call people by their names. Nevertheless when acquaintanceship ripens into intimacy personal names are dropped in favour of kinship-terms, often used in a very loose and inaccurate form. There is, however, a feeling that the use of personal names is immodest: and to tell one's name to a stranger is to place oneself in his power. Women are particularly hesitant about naming their closest male relatives and will always try to avoid mentioning the name of a deceased husband. When, in my earlier days, I was much engaged in investigating pension-claims, the proceedings were often hindered by a widow's absolute refusal to tell the name of her late husband; and when at last she was convinced that this was a necessary part of the proceedings she would come near and whisper the name in

the ear of the investigating officer lest some bystander hear it and thus obtain a hold over the dead man's spirit.

When a young man is asked the name of his wife he will generally pretend that he does not know it, or, if pressed, will give a false name. But I never found a man hesitate to tell his wife's name when she was no longer of an age to be attractive to others.

Nicknames are common in Nepal, and great ingenuity and sense of humour are displayed in their selection. A baby whose appearance is more than ordinarily ruddy will be known as the "red one": an exceptionally fair-skinned child "the white one," and so on, and very often these baby names will continue to be used in later life. Besides a natural liking for nicknames, which, as among most peoples, express affection, there is a feeling that it is unlucky to pronounce the names of young children aloud, lest they should fall under the influence of some hovering and malignant spirit.

When a couple have been unlucky and have lost one or more of their children they will sometimes call upon a man of one of the menial tribes, a leather or metal worker for instance, to fix a bracelet on the baby's wrist. The child is then called by the name of the menial tribe in question, and the real name falls into disuse, is indeed often forgotten, so as to conceal the child's identity and free it from evil influence.

Another custom, of similar purpose, is to pretend to feed a newly-born child, especially if it is weakly, with rice. Normally the first rice meal is a ritual occasion (probably the vestige of an initiation ceremony), presided over by a Brahman, and it does not take place until the child is old enough to feed itself. But by telescoping, so to speak, the period between birth and the time when a child would usually begin to live on solid foods, the rigours of babyhood are felt to have been surmounted. Such children are nicknamed "Make believe."

Should a child be born while the mother is at her own, as opposed to her husband's, home, it is named by the Nepali word which denotes the house of a married woman's father. A child born after the death of its father is nearly always called by the word for womb.

Nicknames given to adults are generally indicative of some physical or other peculiarity, and in applying them no attempt is

made to spare the feelings of the person concerned. Thus, a very dark-skinned man is invariably known as "Blackie." "Knock-knees" and "Bow-legs" are also common nicknames.

I once knew a man who was always referred to as "Betel Nut," because of the nut-shaped birth-mark on his thigh, but the most unusual nickname I ever came across was that applied to a young soldier of my acquaintance. This youth was exceptionally good-looking, and since he seemed to personify the ideal Gurkha soldier he was often photographed. His friends observed that most of these pictures portrayed only his head and shoulders, and as a result he was given the nickname of "Torso." As in most countries, the use of nicknames is an index of popularity, and they are seldom applied to men who are not liked by their fellows.

Besides kinship-terms and nicknames, the exact Nepali equivalents for our own four-letter words denoting the genitalia and excretory parts of the body are much used as familiar forms of address. But, as with us, in ordinary conversation they have lost their precise meaning.

The words for penis, pubic hair and anus are commonly used as familiar forms of address. Women, when they wish to be abusive, address one another as "Anus," but a man will often use this word in addressing his child, and then it expresses endearment.

There is no restriction on the use of these words, but there is a feeling that older people should avoid them: coarse language is felt not to accord with the more dignified behaviour expected of the middle-aged and elderly.

7

AMONG Gurkhas marriage may be legally contracted only within the tribe. A Gurung, for example, cannot marry a Magar. Nevertheless inter-tribal marriages do occur, but they result in social ostracism: the couple concerned generally sever all connection with their families and settle in India, where their misdemeanour is more easily concealed.

Marriage usually takes place at about the age of sixteen for boys, fourteen for girls. Except among the Magar and Gurung tribes, a boy or girl may not marry anyone with whom it is possible to trace a direct relationship through either parent. Some of my informants, however, insisted that marriage between cousins was permissible after a lapse of seven generations: others believed that a separation of three generations was enough. Anyone who cares to draw a rough chart will observe that cousins separated by seven generations can hardly claim to be related. In practice they are seldom known to each other as such, and indeed the Nepali kinship-system, which recognises many remote relationships, has no words to denote these distant cousins.

In the Gurung tribe, however, what is technically known as cross-cousin marriage is felt to be desirable. The most suitable marriage partner for a boy is thus the daughter of his father's sister or that of his mother's brother: for a girl, the opposite cross-cousin. In no circumstances may a youth marry the daughter of his father's brother, nor may a girl be wedded to the son of her mother's sister, since such unions are regarded as incestuous.

Cross-cousin marriage is useful in furthering family solidarity, and because it is customary among Gurungs their villages, more

than those of any other Gurkha tribe, are collections of closely related families. Such marriages are not, however, contracted should it happen that the horoscopes of the couple concerned are in opposition.

Among Magars the system is slightly different. A boy may marry the daughter of his mother's brother, but not that of his father's sister: a girl may marry, among relatives, only the son of her father's sister. In this tribe there is, however, a feeling that marriage between cousins should be avoided if possible. Among orthodox Hindus, and Brahmans in particular, marriage between cousins is regarded with horror. The country mostly occupied by the Magars is nearer to the plains of India than that of the Gurungs, and it was to the Magar district that most of the Brahmans fled at the time of the Muslim invasion. Brahman influence has therefore always been much stronger with the Magars than it has with the Gurungs.

Nevertheless there is little doubt that at one time both forms of cross-cousin marriage were common among Magars. The Brahmans who settled in their country, not wishing to appear too revolutionary before establishing themselves, apparently concentrated at first on abolishing only that form of cross-cousin marriage which they considered particularly offensive. If this hypothesis is correct, one would expect the custom of marriage between cousins of any kind eventually to disappear. In any case, so far as the Magar tribe is concerned, it is becoming less usual. Marriages between cousins, however remote, are not permitted in any of the Tibetan communities living within the confines of Nepal. They have retained their own customs, and because the extreme northern part of the country in which they have settled is remote, their social life has been little affected by their Gurkha neighbours.

Cross-cousin marriage apart, a man may wed any girl of his own tribe provided she belongs to a different clan. Nevertheless I have come across cases where this prohibition has been disregarded. Some of my informants considered such a marriage to be in order, others not, but all were agreed that in no circumstances might a man marry a girl of his own kindred, even though she be a stranger from some distant part of the country.

Marriages are generally arranged by the parents of the couple, either of whom is, however, free to refuse a proposed union. Because of the family grouping in Nepalese villages, the majority of preferred marriage-partners will have been intimately known to each other since childhood, and often marriage amounts to little more than the regularisation of a formerly illicit relationship. Sometimes a man may not previously have met the girl to whom his parents wish to marry him: she may live in some distant village which he never visits, or, as often happens, may be the daughter of a soldier and thus have been brought up in India. But a man will not normally refuse to marry a stranger unless he happens to have fallen in love with some other girl. The desire to preserve the family structure is strongly held by all Gurkhas, and this is best achieved by ensuring that the mother of one's children is selected from what is thought to be the most suitable clan. In a society in which a man is not expected to remain faithful to his wife, it is not difficult to adopt this altruistic viewpoint. Nevertheless true affection often develops between the partners of an arranged marriage, especially in later life. I have frequently noticed signs of heartfelt grief on the death of one or other of a couple.

A man may have as many wives as he likes, but except among the very wealthy it is unusual to have more than one at a time, unless the first wife has borne her husband no children. Then the woman herself generally takes the initiative in proposing a second marriage and will often suggest one of her own sisters, this arrangement being the least disruptive to harmonious family life.

Legal divorce is possible but not common, because in a polygynous society it serves little practical purpose. Cases of married women eloping are, however, frequent. In theory a divorce is needed before such a woman may remarry, but the legal aspect is generally confined to the recovery by the husband of any jewellery and other property with which his wife may have de-camped.

Women now have legal rights, but elopement is the only practical way in which a woman may terminate an unsuccessful marriage. Daughters are considered less desirable than sons, and no man

having disposed of a daughter in marriage wants her back on his hands.

With a man the situation is entirely different, for should he find that he has no affection for his wife he merely takes another. Then the first wife generally stays on in the house, but if she is still young and attractive she will probably go off with some other man, leaving any children to be looked after by their father.

When a man takes a second wife he generally ceases to have sexual intercourse with the first. Childless marriages are believed to result only from the wife's sterility; the idea of a man being sterile is felt to be ridiculous. Sterility is believed to have some vague connection with venereal disease, but I think this idea arose as a result of lectures, only half-understood, given to Gurkha soldiers during the course of their military service. Among those who have spent their entire lives in a village it seems not to be known.

When there is more than one wife the women occupy separate houses where possible, or at least have their own rooms. Even when the second wife is a sister of the first there is no guarantee that the two women will live in harmony. When there is a considerable discrepancy in age, relations are inevitably strained, even between sisters. I have often observed the most violent altercations taking place between co-wives. The husband makes no effort to calm them: indeed the spectacle seems to afford considerable satisfaction; a feeling that he is a man worth quarrelling about.

No woman cares to suckle the children of a co-wife: nor does she regard them with any affection. This lack of feeling is well expressed in a couplet which is often heard:

Seven co-wives are not more worrying than the dust on one's feet,

But even a single step-son is like a nail in one's heart.

So far as men are concerned, marriage does not necessarily put an end to casual affairs with other women. Men should not, however, brag of their conquests, although there is no obligation to conceal them, which seems to me to emphasise the privileged status of the male in Gurkha society. Nevertheless married women are not invariably faithful to their husbands, but such affairs must

be carried on with the greatest secrecy; discovery would result in the woman being turned away from her husband's family. I have known cases of this sort in which a husband has forgiven his wife, but they are exceptional and not in accordance with what is regarded as correct behaviour.

Sexual intercourse generally takes place once, or more rarely twice, every night, but men are often away for long periods, either up in the higher grazing grounds or on trading missions to distant parts of the country.

Conception is believed to occur only during the fifteen days following the cessation of the menstrual flow: and provided this period is avoided there is thought to be no danger of pregnancy ensuing. Biological evidence does not, I understand, support this theory: nevertheless it is firmly believed.

It is not polite for a man to ask a girl about her condition, and many women take advantage of this to become pregnant by some man to whom they are attracted, but who would otherwise possibly not be considered a suitable marriage-partner by the girl's parents.

During the first four days of the menses a woman is ritually unclean and sexual intercourse is avoided. Most of my informants, however, said that while they themselves strictly regard the injunction, many others did not.

It is commonly believed that erotic satisfaction is not fully obtainable unless the man grasps the woman's breasts during coition. Failure to do this is thought to retard the female orgasm.

All my informants were unanimous in maintaining that sexual perversions between men and women were unknown, and were indeed regarded with disgust. Nevertheless the many erotic carvings on temples in Kathmandu and other cities in the Valley (one of the main tourist attractions) are almost entirely concerned with perversions of one kind or another, and there is consequently no good reason to suppose that such practices are not indulged in throughout the country.

There is no cult of homosexuality, but it would be absurd to claim, as some have done, that the practice is unknown among Gurkhas. My own investigations lead me to believe that the proportion of true homosexuality is neither more nor less than in any other society, and that otherwise normal men resort to it on

occasions, such as occur during military service, when they are denied access to women for a long time. The general attitude towards such practices is one of amused toleration, never of condemnation.

Infantile homosexuality and masturbation are common, especially when growing boys are away, as they often are, in the grazing-camps. They like to masturbate in groups, but this practice is generally discontinued as soon as the boys reach an age to indulge in more mature affairs.

In a society in which most people are married before they are out of their teens, sex does not present much of a problem, and the frustrations common in more advanced societies are unknown in Nepal.

Gurkhas do not seem to have a clear idea of the basis of mutual attraction between men and women, but all my informants stressed the importance of fair skin: and although to refer to a man or woman as black conveys an element of reproach, this is not considered offensive. Fair skin is not in itself thought to be more beautiful than dark, but it is definitely associated with good birth and as such is felt to be desirable. Most well-bred Gurkhas are in fact fair-skinned, and I have often noticed that the dark-skinned man, however sterling a character he may be, does seem to feel that he is somehow inferior, presumably because his appearance does not conform to the desired standard. I imagine that this preference for fair skin has arisen as a result of Indian influence, and in particular the introduction of the caste-system, which was originally closely connected with the question of skin-colour. I once took a Gurkha to Calcutta and during the course of a sight-seeing expedition pointed out to him the collection of bronze statues of former Viceroys which used to stand on the big parade-ground in the middle of the city. He was not at all impressed and indeed accused me of trying to deceive him. "I may be only a humble soldier," he said, "but even I know that the Viceroy of India is a white man: these are statues of black men."

The nearest I was able to get to a definition of female beauty was an afterthought added by one of my informants. "I don't think there is any particular type," he said, "but sometimes one

finds even a very dark-skinned woman attractive." He thought this was very strange and meant, I think, to suggest that sometimes a couple fall in love for no apparent reason and despite what is considered an unattractive quality.

So far as men are concerned, physical defects and deformities do not constitute a bar to marriage. I know of two men who had been terribly mutilated. The first had one side of his face practically destroyed by a gunshot wound, which gave him a sinister and almost repellent appearance. Nevertheless he had married and become the father of several children. The other, too, had no difficulty in finding a partner.

On the other hand, no normal man would accept a wife with pronounced physical defects, and such women, because of their lack of sexual attraction, are doomed to a life of celibacy. Deformity and disfigurement are very common among these people. I have seen very few men and women whose bodies are not in some way scarred from having fallen into the kitchen fire as babies. Also, because of the absence of medical facilities, many children, as a result of falling from trees and so on, grow up permanently lame or otherwise deformed.

Leprosy, which is common in Nepal, is regarded with horror and lepers are treated with the greatest cruelty and driven away from their villages to fend for themselves. The few medical missions in the hills are doing noble work in looking after these wretched people. Many of them can nowadays be cured, but so great is the fear and disgust with which the disease is regarded that it is almost impossible for one who has been tainted by it, however slightly, to be received back by his family.

Albinism does not constitute a bar to marriage, although it is not common in Nepal. The only albino I ever saw was being examined by some villagers with the greatest interest. His skin was European in colour and his hair bright golden. The mother seemed not at all embarrassed when the onlookers suggested that the child's father must have been a European. "God made the child thus," she said. "What can I do?"

In many European eyes the Mongoloid appearance of most Gurkhas is their chief physical attraction, particularly in youth, when their cheeks are often rosy red, but this is not thought to be

attractive by the people themselves, who associate redness with Europeans. I was once sitting by the roadside when a party of Gurkhas, who had not previously seen a foreigner, passed by. "How red he is," they said, "and what a huge nose." But beyond these brief remarks they paid no further attention; there was no undue staring or other action to embarrass the stranger such as foreigners, particularly when their dress or colour proclaim them so, are apt to experience in Western countries.

Charms and spells are closely connected with sex: and while they are much employed to ward off or cure illness, their greatest potency is thought to lie in enticing a member of the opposite sex. I have never met an untravelled Gurkha peasant who did not believe implicitly in the efficacy of charms and spells. The manufacture of them seems to be the right of certain families, but the man who prepares a charm is not himself thought to possess any sort of supernatural power: this is inherent in the accuracy with which the charm is prepared. The provision of charms is a profitable side-line, and those who know how to prepare them are not generally willing to impart their knowledge to anyone but the members of their own family.

The Gurkha from whom I collected a number of examples of charms had been taught them by his elder brother. He had no idea of what the actual words meant but was convinced of their efficacy. He said he would in no circumstances disclose them to one of his own countrymen, but had no objection to instructing me in their use because for me they would be ineffective in Nepal. He insisted, however, that in my own country they would work wonders.

I was anxious to translate some typical charms into English, but being unable to make sense of them I showed them to Professor Sir Ralph Turner, the eminent Sanskrit scholar and authority on comparative linguistics. He told me the texts were so corrupt that it was impossible to translate more than an occasional word. He also thought it likely that some of them may have been taken originally from the Atharveda (an early Sanskrit collection of occult writing). In the course of time their meaning has become obscured, and they probably become even more corrupt every time they are handed down to a new generation.

The commonest of all charms is that known as "Earth." To bring it into play one must first acquire an intimate knowledge of the daily perambulations of the person whose affections one wishes to attract. A small quantity of earth on which he or she has trodden is then collected and replaced after the charm, together with the name of the desired one, has been uttered into it. When the person next steps upon the charmed ground the spell will begin to take effect.

Another takes the form of repeating the words of a charm seven times over a flower, which is then offered to the loved one, who will immediately become amorous towards the donor.

The simplest of all charms is to offer a cigarette into which one has previously whispered the name of the desired lover. Before accepting such a gift, a girl will often ask if it contains a charm. There is, however, no obligation to tell the truth.

Sometimes a charm works too well and its effects become embarrassing. Then relief may be obtained by having recourse to a reverse-charm, one which removes the effect produced by the first.

All Gurkhas have recourse to charms, but they are used more by Brahmans and Chetris than by the other tribes. They both marry at a very early age, often before puberty, and the bride is nearly always much younger than her husband. This means that when she grows up she sometimes falls in love with another man or may be unhappy because her husband shows no interest in her. He, however, may forestall any possible infidelity by having a charm prepared which will effectively prevent his wife from transferring her affections elsewhere. But the ramifications of charms and counter-charms are almost inexhaustible. Besides their use in furthering human love affairs, charms are much employed in the taming of fractious cattle which refuse to mate. They are also thought to be efficacious in persuading recalcitrant cows and other beasts to be milked.

No account of Gurkha family life would be complete without some reference to abuse, the vocabulary of which, as in many other primitive societies, consists entirely of words connected with sex. The most common of all expletives may be translated as "Bite my (or your) mother!" the verb used being a synonym

for sexual intercourse. This expression is not felt to be insulting but it should be used only to a person inferior in status to the speaker. When used merely as an interjection, the phrase has no connotation of insult and merely conveys mild irritation. It has lost all exact meaning and is nowadays commonly used by women in remonstrating with their children.

When a man or woman is speechless with rage he will hold his right hand in front of him with the fingers together and thumb apart, moving his hand up and down in front of the other person's face with an angry gesture. More insulting than this is to hold the hand out with one finger protruding through the others so as to represent an erect penis. This last gesture may also be employed, in suitable circumstances, without any sense of insult, to suggest to a girl that one would like to go to bed with her.

The greatest insult one man can offer to another is to expose his penis, at the same time simulating the act of copulation. An extraordinary instance of this occurred during the first world war. There was always a certain amount of rivalry between the various Gurkha regiments, generally of a friendly nature, but sometimes amounting to intense dislike. By chance a battalion was sailing through the Suez Canal when another, which particularly despised the troops on board, happened to be stationed on the canal banks. As soon as their identity was recognised, the regiment on board ship was greeted by the astonishing spectacle of hundreds of men rushing to the banks with their genitalia exposed.

Everything I have so far noted in connection with social life applies to the normal custom in Gurkha villages. However, thousands of Gurkhas are permanently resident in India, and although most of them pay occasional visits to their homes, the majority, once the sanctions imposed by living in a closely-knit community are removed, cease to observe many of the customs and practices in which they have been brought up to believe. Many of them contract what in their own homes would be regarded as incestuous marriages, and indeed often do not bother to legalise their unions in any way. All Gurkhas are by nature easy-going and pleasure-loving and exhibit their better qualities only when they are subjected to some kind of discipline, either that of the army or the restraints imposed by organised family life. When

these are removed, as happens with expatriates, moral decline is generally rapid.

There is, however, one custom which is rigidly observed by all Gurkhas, whether they remain at home or not. This is the absolute necessity for a man to avoid as far as possible the wives of his younger brothers, whether blood-relatives or close friends to whom the requisite kinship-terms are applied. No woman should address her husband's elder brothers unless she is first spoken to by them: and they should confine their remarks to the giving of orders and not indulge in general conversation. A man should in no circumstances touch the wives of his younger brothers, and if by chance he brushes against their clothing in passing both parties must immediately purify themselves by drinking water in which some gold object has been dipped. So strong is this belief that even in sophisticated upper-class circles in Kathmandu I have noticed that a man will not only carefully avoid sitting on the same sofa as any of the wives of a younger brother, but will as far as possible ignore their presence.

It is impossible to exaggerate the feeling of horror experienced by any failure to observe this custom, which is similar to that aroused in a devout Christian when confronted with a torrent of blasphemy. Arising from it is a vague feeling that even normal social intercourse with women considerably younger than oneself, unless they are members of the immediate family, is best avoided. Thus a man away from his own village may wish, for instance, to ask the way from a girl he meets on the road. Even though she be young enough to be his daughter, he will address her as elder sister: by doing so he intimates that his only interest is in obtaining an answer to his question.

8

IN a Nepalese village the daily round of work varies with the time of year. From the New Year, which corresponds with the middle of April, for about a month the fields are got ready and there is a first sowing of maize, rice and millet, varying with the altitude of the village. During May and June the main millet-crop is sown, and July, the busiest month of the year, is devoted to planting rice. The monsoon rains generally start about the middle of July and continue intermittently until early October. At this time work consists mostly in keeping the fields free from weeds, but towards the end of August the maize-crop is ready to be cut and stored. A week or so later the millet is harvested. From the middle of October to the end of November, depending upon altitude, the main rice-crops reach maturity, and during these six or so weeks every man, woman and child is hard at work from dawn until well after dusk. As soon as the rice-harvest has been gathered in there is little to do in the fields, and this is the time when houses are re-thatched and general repairs carried out. In February the men go up to the higher forests to cut firewood. The logs are left to dry for a month or so and then carried down to the village by the women and children, during which time the men begin the preliminary digging of the fields.

In a community whose existence depends upon the results of agricultural labour, social activities need to be co-ordinated with the seasonal calendar of work, and this means that in Nepal most family and other celebrations take place between the end of November and the middle of February. Nearly all weddings are solemnised during these three months, because it is easy to gather

people together then, and there is also an abundance of food. Even in Kathmandu and the other cities, which are no longer primarily agricultural, the old customs persist and only in exceptional circumstances are weddings celebrated at other times.

Agricultural work is mostly carried out by men, but the women help with the less strenuous jobs. The planting of rice-seedlings calls for manual dexterity and neatness and is therefore regarded as essentially women's work, though there is no objection to men doing it. The planting of rice by women does not, as in some other countries, seem to be associated in the minds of the people with the subsequent fertility of the crops.

There is no objection to a woman working in the fields during the time of her menses provided she takes care not to handle plants which are in the intermediate stage of growth: her condition is not felt to harm ungerminated seed, and once the crop has set she cannot damage it.

During the menstrual period, however, a woman should take care to avoid looking at growing pumpkins and cucumbers and should in no circumstances handle them, otherwise they will rot. Incidentally it is a breach of manners to carry on a loud conversation, especially if one is a stranger, anywhere near these two vegetables, since this too will prevent them from ripening.

A more serious offence is to point a finger at cucumbers and pumpkins, particularly if it is protruded through the fingers of the other hand. Cucumbers and pumpkins, but not other vegetables, should be picked only with the right hand, otherwise they will taste bitter. There is presumably some connection here with the custom which requires food to be conveyed to the mouth only with the right hand. The sanctions with regard to cucumbers and pumpkins are undoubtedly of sexual origin, though I have never come across anybody who could explain the connection. There is a tendency nowadays not to regard them very seriously: they have declined from what was once a firmly held belief into little more than a superstition.

The general picture of Gurkha social life which emerges is that of a people, many of whose basic attitudes are Buddhist in origin, upon whom a Hindu framework has been imposed. I do not think it would now be possible to disentangle the two strands, so

inextricably mixed have they become. Social customs and beliefs vary greatly from village to village, but in every part of the country where there is a preponderance of Brahmans, the Hindu idea is uppermost. Whether or not it continues is dependent upon the Brahman community's being able to retain its present privileged position. In the hills of Nepal these people, many of whom are both arrogant and ignorant, are the greatest enemies of progress, because it is in their interest that the Gurkhas should remain as far as possible without education.

Life in a Gurkha village is harsh and unrewarding: a matter of unremitting toil. Nevertheless these people are not demanding. They are entirely lacking in worldly ambition and seem to be satisfied with the basic requirements of a house, food and sex, all of which are available in their hills. Their most outstanding characteristic is an unflinching cheerfulness, even in the most adverse circumstances. They have a strong sense of the ridiculous and, what is rare among the peoples of Asia, the ability to laugh at themselves. This last, I think, is the main reason why British troops invariably get on well with Gurkha regiments, despite their inability to understand a word of each other's language.

There is a popular belief that Gurkhas in general are stupid, but in my opinion it is unjustified. Like most true peasants they are stolid and somewhat intransigent in their ideas. But they have long been denied access to any form of education, and the suggestion of mental inferiority arises from this and not from the old-fashioned idea, now disproved by science, that certain races are mentally inferior to others.

Part Four

I

ONE of the difficulties in planning a tour through more or less unmapped country is to select in advance the most suitable spots in which to halt for a few days, replenish supplies and generally reorganise one's arrangements. The obvious places were little towns such as Gurkha, where it was possible to buy simple necessities. From the porters' point of view these centres represented civilisation, a welcome respite from the daily toil of carrying our loads. Their idea of travel was to rush us over the country as quickly as possible and rest only in well-populated areas, where they could relax and enjoy the simple amenities which these places had to offer. We could not altogether avoid them, although from our viewpoint such halts were the least pleasing part of the trip. Suitable camping-grounds were almost impossible to find and usually we had to make do with a stubbled rice terrace at the edge of a village, where we were subjected to the stares and questionings of bands of onlookers from dawn till dusk. The only escape was to incarcerate ourselves in the tent with all the flaps firmly closed. Any form of privacy was impossible, and to perform the functions of nature necessitated making a dash into the countryside before one was observed, or waiting for darkness to fall.

Gurkha was the most unpleasant of all. Before reaching it we had been walking for ten days. There had been no opportunity for other than the most perfunctory daily wash and our underclothes were by this time filthy. But in Gurkha the nearest water was a mile from our camp, and we could neither get our clothes washed nor have the bath to which we had been looking forward.

We started off again on 23 December. The path descended steeply for some five thousand feet, and after wading a river we came to a thickly-wooded valley which rose gently to a pass. Although this was the coldest season of the year it was still very hot in the valleys. In the monsoon season most of them are malarious and we frequently noted that the physique of their inhabitants was markedly inferior to that of the people who lived on top of the hills.

The deeply indented nature of this country, a tangle of mountains and deep valleys, has had an important effect on the social life of the people. During the monsoon season, and for some weeks after, the rivers, many of which at other times are no more than gentle streams, become raging torrents and are impassable except in the very few places where they have been bridged. Because of this many otherwise neighbouring villages are isolated from each other for weeks at a time, so that most Gurkhas tend to think in terms of their village community rather than as members of a tribe.

We had dallied so long by a pleasant river that by four o'clock it was obvious we could not reach our intended goal before darkness fell. We had climbed perhaps a couple of thousand feet and were still in the midst of thick forest. The porters, to whom this was a ghost-infested spot, urged us to go on: they were afraid, they said, to spend the night in such a lonely place. But we were tired, and for once I refused to listen to their entreaties and told Ang Dawa to pitch the tent. Besides, Denys, who had remained in the valley to finish a drawing, was a long way behind, and I feared he might lose his way in the dark.

This turned out to be one of the most enjoyable of all our camps; so much so that we stayed on for an extra day. There was an abundance of firewood, free for the gathering, and as soon as we had eaten supper the porters built a huge bonfire, round which they sang to us and later danced, their fears forgotten in the prospect of receiving the next day's wages without having to work for them. There was for us an added attraction. About a hundred yards from the camp was a small stream, in places no more than a trickle, but with here and there a pool several feet deep. We made each our own selection and decided, as soon as it was dark,

to make some effort to cleanse our sweat-soaked bodies. The cold mountain air was not conducive to leisurely piecemeal washing, so after hovering on the brink for a few moments I stripped off all my clothes and plunged into a pool. After the initial shock the water seemed surprisingly warm and it was delightful to feel it flowing gently over one's body. I have always detested bathing in cold water, but these winter plunges into the clear mountain-streams of Nepal were extraordinarily exhilarating, and once we had discovered the pleasure we camped whenever possible away from villages and near a stream, a proceeding which was thought by our porters to be perverse, but tolerable because it sometimes resulted in an additional day of rest.

We continued up through the forest on to a windswept pass, but as usual we did not remain long on the heights. The path plunged steeply down again, but this time into a valley so wide and parklike that it had almost the appearance of a plain. Presumably, like many similar geographical formations throughout Nepal, this was a lake in some earlier geological age. This was a long march, but it was a pleasant change to find ourselves for once going neither up nor down hill. The porters had gone ahead when we stopped for a picnic lunch and throughout the long hot afternoon nobody whom we met on the path had seen them. We were beginning to wonder if perhaps we had missed the way when we suddenly heard in the distance the welcome sound of tent-pegs being hammered into the ground. The effect was like a stimulant: we forgot our aching limbs and hurried on, to find a huge pot of tea awaiting us.

The tent had been pitched in a mango-grove. Nearby a large party of Tibetans, with a convoy of mules, was encamped, and in the quiet of the evening, as the animals moved round in search of grazing, there was a constant tinkling from their bells. The slightly cacophonous, yet pleasing jingle of tones reminded me of something, but for a long time I could not place it: but just as I was falling asleep I remembered a concert I had attended shortly before leaving London. There had been a piece by Pierre Boulez, *Le Marteau sans Maître*, which had seemed to my untrained ear to consist of unconnected bell-like clangs and bangings. Doubtless it had some pattern, but I had been unable to discern it. I now

realised that there was little difference between the music of Boulez and the jangling of the distant mule-bells. The noise was vaguely pleasant: but, like the formal composition, there seemed no particular reason why it should ever end or, for that matter, why it should have begun.

Dusk had already fallen by the time we reached camp, but at dawn the next morning we got our first near view of Machar Pucchar, the fish-tail peak. This beautiful twin-peaked mountain is not among the giants of the Himalayas, being less than 23,000 feet high, but, because it is isolated, appears to be higher than it is. The rest of our journey was dominated by this mountain. We were to see it from almost every possible viewpoint: only when we descended into a valley was it no longer visible, but even then we could feel its presence.

The next day, after we had been going for an hour or so, we came to a biggish village and decided to stop and have a cigarette. Outside the one primitive shop an unusually well-dressed young man, wearing European shoes, was engaged in conversation with a friend. An elderly and extremely dignified peasant approached the pair and, without uttering a word, got down on his knees and touched the young man's shoes with his forehead, at the same time throwing dust over himself. The Brahman, for such he was, did not take the slightest notice of this abject salutation and went on talking to his friend. A little later he deigned to notice our existence and addressed me in broken Hindustani, but when I replied in Nepali he dropped his patronising air and became obsequious. I had taken an instant dislike to him, and this feeling was increased when he later attempted to ingratiate himself with us. But I could not forbear to ask him why he had ignored the old man's humble greeting. "Why should I acknowledge him?" he said. "I am a man of high birth, a Brahman, and he is a mere peasant. Moreover, he owes me a considerable sum of money."

On Christmas Day we moved on to Tarkughat, a dirty little village with a few shops, but a place of some local importance because it is situated on the banks of the fast-flowing Marsiangdi, one of the bigger rivers of Nepal, which here is bridged. Like most of the few permanent bridges in the interior, this one had

been imported from Britain some fifty or so years ago: also like most of the others, it had been neither repainted nor kept in repair since the day of its erection. The greater part of the foot-way had long since rotted and contained a number of large gaping holes which had been roughly covered with irregular lengths of bamboo, so that it was prudent to cross with circumspection. On later stages of our journey we several times saw bridges, originally good solid structures, which through lack of maintenance had collapsed beyond the possibility of repair. Why, I asked a local headman, had this been allowed to happen? He shrugged his shoulders in reply. "It is not our responsibility," he said.

Shortly before reaching Tarkughat we came across a village school, one of the very few that have so far been established in the interior. There was no building, and the children, a miscellaneous collection of boys and girls, sat in a circle under a tree, chanting their lesson in unison. The master, a half-educated Brahman, was teaching his class to repeat Hindu sacred texts by rote, without any attempt at explanation. He could not perhaps be blamed, for after talking with him it soon became obvious that he himself had never been taught to think. His salary, he said, a few shillings a month, had not been paid since he was appointed a year before. There is the most urgent need of elementary education in the hills of Nepal: and while in the few village schools we came across the instruction being given was wholly on the wrong lines, it must be remembered that until a few years ago no education of any sort was obtainable outside the Kathmandu Valley.

Despite the entreaties of our porters, we refused to camp in the village, and a few hundred yards upstream we discovered a beautiful site with a view of the distant peaks. We had hardly settled in when an elderly man came and squatted in front of the tent. I asked him politely to go away, but he affected not to understand, whereupon I called to Ang Dawa to drive him away. Later that evening, when we were preparing to retire, he forced his way into the tent. "Look here," he said, "I am a Brahman of some standing and not accustomed to being treated with such lack of respect. No doubt you have permission to travel in our country. But it is obvious you are ill-versed in our customs, and I must therefore point out that it is usual for travellers to make a contribution to

the temple of which I am in charge. You are rich foreigners, but I shall be satisfied with a gift of five hundred rupees" (about thirty pounds in English money).

We liked this place so much that we decided to rest for a day and wander up the river. When we came back in the afternoon the old Brahman was again waiting, squatting motionless near the tent, like a carrion crow awaiting its prey. He had been there all the morning and, despite Ang Dawa's entreaties, had refused to go away. I intimated, as politely as possible, that his presence was not welcome, but when he refused to take the hint I ordered him to leave us in peace. He had an exaggerated regard for his supposedly superior birth and exhibited the bad manners of the semi-educated. "Why should I go?" he whined; "I have not done you any harm."

When at last I drove him away he became angry and delivered his parting shot. "I at least am clean," he said, "and shall now take my daily bath in the river." He wandered off to a nearby pool below the camp, removed his shoes and perched on a rock above the water. He remained for some time with his hands in front of him palm to palm, his lips moving in silent prayer. Finally he lowered his feet so that the tips of his toes just touched the water, after which he put on his shoes and wandered off with a threatening stare in our direction. "I think he is mad," Ang Dawa said later, "but these Brahmans are the curse of our country."

We crossed the rickety bridge and at once found ourselves faced with a stiff ascent, but by this time we had become accustomed to these daily climbs up and down. Soon after leaving Tarkughat we met a mail-runner, a bag of letters on his back and in his hand a stick with a cluster of bells at the top to warn the villages of his approach. He was pleased, he told us, that his wages had recently been raised from thirty to thirty-five rupees a month, but he added that he had received no pay for the last eight months. I asked why in these circumstances he bothered to work. The question was naïve because I well knew that as a government servant he was in a position to extort bribes, but I wanted to hear his own explanation. "I do the job," he said, "because if I resign somebody else will be appointed: and there is always a chance that some day my wages will be paid."



28. Gurung girl: not quite certain whether it is safe to talk to the photographer.



29. Camp at Tarkughat, on the banks of the Marsiangdi river.
Christmas Day, 1960.

There has long been an internal postal service in Nepal, and in several villages we saw red-painted pillar-boxes, exact counterparts of those used in England. But there were no regular collections and it was sometimes several months before letters even started on their journey.

On this day, too, we met an old Tibetan with two young disciples, the first true refugees we had come across. Even Ang Dawa, whose own language is akin to Tibetan, found it difficult to understand him, but between us we were able to gather that he had set out from beyond Lhasa two years before. The Chinese, he said, had confiscated his entire possessions and he was now begging his way to Kathmandu, where he hoped to be able to end his days in peace. He implored us to buy his few poor trinkets but he did not ask for alms, so we sent him happily off with a present of a few rupees.

We spent the night on the outskirts of a scruffy little village which straddled across a hilltop, pitching our tent in a stubbled patch barely large enough to contain it, but in the gathering darkness of our arrival we could find nothing better. We were awakened at dawn by the unexpected sound of a bugle-call, and when, after striking camp, we climbed to the pass a company of troops was entertaining the villagers with lively song and dance. The troops were on their way to Pokhra, there to relieve a regiment which was due to return to Kathmandu. They were commanded by a captain who by a coincidence had begun his military life as a rifleman in the very regiment in which I myself had served, but many years after I left.

The onward path was narrow, so to avoid congestion we decided to give the company half-an-hour's start; their baggage was being carried on mules and they would move much quicker than we could.

Kuncha is situated on the line of demarcation between two administrative districts, and although it contains no more than a dozen or so houses has a small government office. The clerk in charge, a miserably unhappy man from the capital, was glad of the chance to display his authority and demanded to see our visas, the only time our right to travel in the country was challenged. But as soon as he had satisfied himself of our credentials he changed

his manner and became extremely friendly, offering us a cup of tea. His life in Kuncha, he said, was a penance which he had done nothing to deserve. There were no distractions and the local people were illiterate. Could I, he begged, when we got back to Kathmandu, put in a word for him, so that he would be relieved. Anything, he said, would be better than this living death.

We sat in the stone-flagged courtyard of his little house. The place was a blaze of colour, with a sprawling brick-red bougain-villaea in one corner and an orange-tree, loaded with fruit, in the other. The valley, which fell steeply below, was filled with early morning mist, but the mountain horizon was free of clouds, a seemingly endless line of crystal peaks, every facet of which was as clear as the lines of an etching. It was the most beautiful setting I have ever seen: the sort of place to which many people dream of retiring. But after a time I began to sympathise with the clerk, to whom even the scenery was of no interest. One could not look at the view indefinitely. Unless one was a peasant-cultivator, how on earth would the days and nights be passed?

We plunged down into the valley and continued to descend throughout the day, discarding much of our clothing as it became ever hotter. We wound from one small valley into a succession of others, and towards the late afternoon found ourselves emerging into a wide plain through the middle of which ran the swirling waters of the Madi river. At Sisaghat, where we spent the night, the river is crossed by a ferry.

Since leaving Kathmandu we had been travelling in a north-westerly direction, gradually approaching the great barrier of the Himalayas. But the whole of this country is built on such an immense scale that even after walking for a fortnight the great mountains still seemed to be nearly as far distant as when we had first seen them from the Kakani ridge. Although we had been toiling along for ten or twelve hours every day, the distance we had so far covered, measured in a straight line, was very little.

At Sisaghat, however, we realised for the first time that the Himalayas were nearer. Machar Pucchar, in particular, had begun to take shape as an isolated peak, although it did not yet dominate the surrounding landscape. The evening was cloudless, and long

after dusk had fallen over our valley the great ice-barrier, stretching across the horizon, remained lit by the setting sun. For some minutes it was bright yellow, becoming gradually orange, after which there was a change to green. Finally, the whole range turned a brilliant violet and then, as though the display was being controlled by a master-switch, all colour suddenly disappeared, and the long line of frozen whiteness quickly merged into the darkening sky. This was the most astonishing effect I have ever seen in any mountain country. It was completely theatrical, and I had for once to agree with Denys that it was also extremely vulgar.

Soon after tea a visitor was announced. He was wearing pyjama-trousers, a khaki uniform-coat, heavy ammunition-boots and had swathed his head in a woollen muffler: and since he had also put on dark glasses I did not at first recognise him as the commander of the troops who had preceded us in the morning. He had brought a present of two large fish which his men had netted in the river. We had hitherto been living out of tins and the fish were a most welcome addition to our otherwise dull menus. Unfortunately they tasted like wet blotting-paper and were full of bones. The disappointment was overcome, however, by a surprise which Ang Dawa had prepared. He now produced a magnificent pineapple, apologising for spending our money on what he feared we might regard as an extravagance. "What did you pay for it?" I asked. "Threepence," he said.

We were up at dawn the next morning, for we had to cross the river, and since there was only a single craft, in which no more than four people could be accommodated, it would take several trips to get us and our baggage over to the other side.

The ferry consisted of a hollowed-out tree-trunk. It had no rudder, but the ancient in charge, an obvious migrant from the plains, squatted in the stern and guided his craft with a paddle. There was about four inches of water in the bottom, in which we were ordered to squat, and the old man told us that we must in no circumstances shift our positions or the contraption would capsize in the turbulent water. We started off at an alarming speed in what appeared to be the wrong direction, entered a whirlpool and then, with a twist of the paddle, were propelled into another current which took us to the further shore. The

passage took no more than three or four alarming minutes, and while it appeared to have been entirely uncontrolled the man in charge was in fact a skilled waterman. The currents, he told me, often changed from week to week, but the crossing was dangerous only during the monsoon months: there was then so much rapid water that it was sometimes difficult to manoeuvre the craft with sufficient speed and there had been occasions when he had been carried downstream for several miles before he could make a landing.

On the far side of the river we joined one of the main routes leading down to the plains of India, and whereas in the earlier stages of our journey we had not met many people on the road, the path was now crowded, and in most of the villages there was a teashop which provided travellers with their modest needs. Most of these places were presided over by Thakali women, and before leaving Kathmandu we had been warned to keep our porters away from them: they have the reputation of being extremely skilful at robbing those who accede to their advances. Thak is a remote district high up near the slopes of Annapurna. I presume these people are Tibetan in origin, and the few foreigners who have visited their country speak highly of their cleanliness and the intelligence of the women. The few with whom I spoke were certainly skilled in the use of ribald repartee and innuendo, and became humorously abusive when I made it clear that I did not seek their favours.

The inevitable climb began as soon as we had crossed the river, and for hour after hour we toiled up the forested hills, winding from one small valley into another, at times apparently returning on our tracks. We had intended to spend the night at Deorali, a large village at the top of a pass, but when at last we reached it even the porters decided that the place was too dirty, so we forged ahead, intending to stop as soon as we came to water. One of the disadvantages of travelling in this sort of country is the need to camp in locally-recognised stopping-places, since a decision to avoid them often entails prolonging the day's march for several hours before the next supply of suitable drinking-water is reached. But at Deorali the villagers had told us not to worry: there was a stream, they said, at the bottom of the valley. The path was

downhill all the way, and it would take us no more than half-an-hour to reach the place.

We had so often been given misleading information that I ought to have reminded myself that these people do not have the slightest sense of time or distance. Three hours after leaving Deorali we were still in apparently uninhabited country and had seen no signs of a river. Darkness was beginning to enclose the valley, so, when, about a mile further on, we came on a little boulder-strewn plateau, we decided to camp, resigned for once to doing without water. We had been sitting disconsolately by the tent for perhaps ten minutes when there was a shout from one of the porters, soon after which Ang Dawa came running towards us, his face wrinkled into a wide grin. "Water," he said, pointing to a huge outcrop of rock a couple of hundred yards away. It was not much more than a trickle but in one or two places little pools had collected. We stripped off our clothes and lay in the revivifying coldness, wallowing there until Ang Dawa's repeated shouts called us over to tea.

The impulse to stay for a day was difficult to resist, but the next march, to the administrative town of Pokhra, we knew would be long and hot. Although we had shortened the normal stage by not staying at Deorali, we were on the road for the greater part of twelve hours. We had now descended to an altitude of little more than two thousand feet above sea-level, and although the path was fairly level the heat was fierce, and, so perverse is human nature, we found ourselves wishing for at least an occasional climb up into the cooler air.

On the road I ran into an intelligent young schoolmaster, a man who had at one time served in the Indian Army. The Government paid him fifty-five rupees a month and the local villagers clubbed together to double this sum: otherwise he would have been unable to exist, for his official salary was, as usual, several months in arrears. He had been trying for a long time to get work started on a schoolhouse, the building of which had been sanctioned by the Government, but he had tired of the delay and was himself now doing the work with the help of his pupils, each of whom was required to deliver at least one large lump of stone a day. During the whole of our travels this was the only example

I came across of a man, without much hope of reward, genuinely trying to better the lot of his people.

Pokhra, which is a Nepali word for lake, is the biggest centre in the interior of Nepal and, like Kathmandu, lies in a wide flat plain encircled by hills. The population is said to be about ten thousand, and although Pokhra is not a wealthy town, it is important because of its geographical situation in the middle of what, outside the Kathmandu Valley, is the only considerable area of flat ground in the entire country. Routes from most parts of central and western Nepal diverge on to Pokhra, from which it is easy to reach the plains of India. There is no doubt that in an earlier geological age the whole valley was a lake, but except for a few small tarns only a few square miles in the north-east corner have remained under water. This lake, reminiscent of Cumberland, has given its name to the district.

The Pokhra valley, which is only 2500 feet above sea-level, is dominated by Machar Pucchar. Only one of its twin peaks, from which the likeness to a fish's tail is derived, is visible from Pokhra. Machar Pucchar is regarded with particular veneration as the home of powerful gods, and although it was climbed in 1957 by Wilfred Noyce and his companions, the party, in deference to local wishes, turned back a few feet from the summit.

Some hours before reaching Pokhra, Bette and I were plodding along in the exhausting heat when we suddenly heard the unexpected sound of an approaching motor. A jeep came bumping towards us in a cloud of dust, but although we signalled the driver he would not stop. The possibility of finishing the march in comfort had miraculously revived our flagging spirits, but they sank even more quickly as the car disappeared in the distance. We suddenly felt so tired that for half-an-hour we sat by the roadside, unable to summon the energy to finish the journey.

Darkness had already fallen when we reached the outskirts of the town and learned that we still had several miles to go. Pokhra has a small airfield, at present the only one in the hills, and before leaving Kathmandu we had obtained permission to stay in the hut which the Government had built to accommodate future tourists, who it was hoped would come in large numbers to this undoubted beauty spot. It was not yet in operation, but we knew that the

furniture had arrived and for days we had looked forward to sleeping in a bed and sitting in a chair. And because Pokhra was roughly midway in our travels, we had arranged to stay for four or five days and recover before starting on what we suspected, rightly as it happened, would be the roughest part of the trip.

Denys had stayed behind in the morning to draw, and since it was now quite dark we were worried that he might lose his way in the straggling alleys of the town. We ourselves were uncertain of the route, for after passing through the bazaar, where we had asked for directions, there appeared to be no further human habitations. But after plodding on through the thick dust for half-an-hour we noticed a hurricane-lamp bobbing in the distance. We hurried towards it, anxious lest we miss a chance to find out where we were. The man with the lamp turned out to be Denys himself. Although he had started in the morning three hours after us, he had arrived at the rest-house soon after sunset, having been given a lift in the jeep that had refused to stop for us. Unknown to us, there was a short cut which by-passed the town, so that we had missed each other on the road. The jeep, it appeared, belonged to the local Governor, who when we had seen him in the morning, was on his way to settle some village dispute.

The bungalow was only a few hundred yards further on. Dinner was waiting and our sleeping-bags had been made ready. The wooden chairs were hard and uncomfortable, but it was a pleasant change for once not to have to sit on the ground. For some days I had been looking forward to sleeping on a bed, but the experience was a disappointment. The wooden bedstead, apparently made to suit the measurements of an undersized Gurkha, was about eighteen inches too short for me, so that my feet protruded over the end. I was so uncomfortable that sleep refused to come, and for the remaining nights I curled up on the floor.

The resthouse was a hideous pre-fabricated metal building imported from America. There is plenty of wood available all over the Pokhra district, and it would have been easy to build some sort of log-cabin which fitted into the landscape, but the Government had been advised that the American tourists whom they hoped to attract would prefer something more modern and reminiscent of their own country, which may well be true.

Nevertheless the only reason for spending a night at Pokhra is the chance of seeing the Himalayas at fairly close range. The view from the airfield in clear weather is breathtaking, but even in the winter it is often obscured by clouds for hours on end and sometimes only visible for a few minutes, so that the visitor must often sit and wait for the miracle to be revealed. I was astonished, therefore, to find that the bungalow had been erected in such a way that the veranda faced in the wrong direction, and to get a view of anything except the landing-ground it was necessary to go behind and stand in front of the outside lavatory.

The journey from Kathmandu to Pokhra had taken us seventeen days. We could have come by air in little more than an hour and at less expense, but in that case we should have seen nothing of the country. The resthouse was temporarily in charge of a clerk from the Tourist Department in Kathmandu who clearly regarded his enforced stay as a penance. He could understand, he said, that visitors might be interested in having a quick look at the snows, but when his Government had gone to the trouble of providing an air service he could see no reason for walking, especially when it cost more money. We became good friends, but he made no secret of his belief that we were slightly mad. There was nothing, he said, worth seeing in the hills: only a lot of dirty people whom he regarded as barbarians.

The next morning we took a picnic and went to explore the lake, on the banks of which the King has built himself a villa of an ugliness it would be difficult to match. The site itself is pleasant enough, but owing to the proximity of the surrounding hills, it lies in shadow for a great part of the day. The house is a concrete box with windows of stained glass in crude colours. A little below the flat roof a neon-lighted sign displays, in Hindi lettering, the words Ratna Mahal, the former being the name of the Queen, the latter meaning palace. The small garden was festooned with clusters of electric-light standards, and the flower-beds were composed of heaped rocks set in concrete, in the interstices of which a few poor geraniums and petunias struggled to exist. At the time of our visit hundreds of coolies were toiling to complete an oversized landing-stage which was being made ready for the visit of Queen Elizabeth in February 1961.



30. Western Nepal: a typical valley.

31. The Madi river at Sisaghat. Annapurna in background.





32. Camp at Pokhara: Machhar Pucchar (*left centre*) and Annapurna (*right*) in background.

33. Pokhara: the lake.





34. Lamjung district: typical terrace cultivation in early morning mist.



35. Annapurna from the road beyond Kaski.

36. Gurkha farmstead, Baglung district: pumpkins placed for storage and a stack of corn-cobs (*left centre*).



The royal villa at Pokhra is thought to be an outstanding example of the best modern domestic architecture, and although it is wholly offensive by the standards of western taste, I have little doubt that a mediocre European architect, if asked to design a building in oriental style, would produce something equally offensive and absurd. Exceptional perception is necessary in adapting the accepted standards of taste of one country to those of another, especially when they differ as much as do those of Europe and Asia. The most successful example is to be seen in New Dehli, but when, as has happened in Nepal, and particularly in Kathmandu, the attempt is made by jobbing builders, the result is disastrous. But the Nepalese have long since ceased to appreciate the beauties of their own unique architecture.

Three miles or so from the airfield there is a British Medical Mission station, the first to be established in the interior. In the days when the country was closed to foreigners, this organisation worked in India, but close to the Nepalese frontier, so that it had long been available to assist such people as cared to come down from the hills, the intention being to move into Nepal whenever this became possible.

This particular hospital, since it is largely staffed by women-doctors, is mostly concerned with gynaecological disorders, which are extremely common. The popular conception that primitive women suffer no complications in childbirth is, it appears, without foundation. Difficulties caused by pelvic and other malformations are frequent and much trouble comes from unsuitable and sometimes insufficient diet.

Dr Watson, the chief surgeon, told me that she no longer had any difficulty in persuading women to have their babies by Caesarian operation. Many of the women who came to her, she said, were unfitted to bear further children, but only if they already had a family of six would they give permission for hysterectomy to be performed, for which the husband's consent was also necessary.

There is a strongly-held belief that if a woman dies in delivering a stillborn child, the body must be removed from her womb before cremation takes place: otherwise the spirits of both will haunt the village. This operation is normally performed by a Brahman,

who demands a standard fee of five hundred rupees (about thirty pounds), a crippling sum by Gurkha standards, and resulting inevitably in lifelong debt.

Rather unfairly, I asked Dr Watson if in such circumstances she performed this service to save the family unnecessary expense; but as an avowed Christian she could not bring herself to pander to this pagan belief.

Medical missions are allowed to work in Nepal on the strict understanding that they neither preach nor openly seek converts; but, as one of them said to me, "Nobody can stop us from talking." I do not wish to suggest that any of the medical missionaries working in Nepal ignore the conditions imposed by the Government, but a Christian missionary cannot, by the very nature of his calling, be content with the provision of merely medical aid.

I myself am not a convinced Christian, so that it ill becomes me to question the motives underlying missionary work. I shall therefore quote Dr Karl Jung who, besides devoting a great deal of thought to the subject, subscribed to the Christian faith. "I am firmly convinced," he wrote, "that a vast number of people belong to the fold of the Catholic Church and nowhere else, because they are suitably housed there. I am as much persuaded of this as of the fact, which I have myself observed, that a primitive religion is better suited to primitive people than Christianity, which is so incomprehensible to them and so foreign to their blood that they can only ape it in a disgusting way." He goes on to consider the western megalomania "which leads us to suppose, among other things, that Christianity is the only truth, and the white Christ the only Redeemer."*

The fundamental error seems to me to lie in the arrogant supposition that the good life is the prerogative of professing Christians. In my experience this is quite untrue. The Buddhist and Hindu canons, particularly the former, are filled with moral precepts. They are not always observed: but neither do all Christians lead decent lives.

In Nepal perhaps the greatest hindrance to any form of social progress is the rigid framework imposed by the caste-system. In India this is breaking down, and with the spread of education will

* *Modern Man in search of a Soul* (1933).

eventually disappear. But in Nepal, with its lack of communications and, at any rate in the hills, almost total illiteracy, this is not so. Nepalese society is likely long to remain fragmented, and among a people which is already divided into mutually exclusive classes, it seems to me wrong to seek converts to Christianity, thus forming what is in effect yet another caste. Moreover Christian missionaries do not all interpret their faith in the same way, and are often actively opposed to the views of members of other sects.

Meanwhile the few mission hospitals in Nepal are doing work of the utmost value, but I wish the harmonium and the piles of prayer-books were less in evidence.

The hospital at Pokhra, like the original British Residency in Kathmandu, is situated on ground believed by the local people to be haunted and therefore uninhabitable. This, however, does not deter them from making use of the hospital, and such prejudice as there is arises, as one would expect, from the presence among the patients of Brahmans, and, to only a slightly less extent, of Chetris. These two castes, with their absolute refusal to touch food not prepared by their own people, make administration unnecessarily difficult. Others, particularly if they have served in the army, make no trouble about food, but even they are often influenced by the threats of those they are accustomed to regard as their betters. The only practical solution that has been found is for the hospital to make no attempt to feed its patients, and anyone who is admitted is cared for by relations. Those accustomed to the efficiency with which even the smallest European hospitals are run would be perplexed at the sight of the kitchen-outhouse at Pokhra, where as many as forty or fifty families may be observed cooking at separate hearths. One result of this is that it is impossible for the staff to control what their patients are given to eat, so that avoidable complications sometimes arise. Nevertheless until such time as prejudice and ignorance can be overcome, there is no other solution to this difficulty.

I have long had an unreasoning fondness for Gurkhas and had persuaded myself that they possess few of the weaknesses common to most other societies, so I was particularly pleased to have at least some of my opinions confirmed by one of the Pokhra nurses

who had served in many parts of the world. With the exception of Brahmans and Chetris, she said, these were the most wonderful people she had met, kind to each other, scrupulously honest and pathetically grateful for anything one did for them.

The Pokhra Mission Hospital is now more or less self-supporting. Except in cases of absolute poverty, free treatment is not provided, although the fees charged are no more than nominal. These simple people, it is believed, correctly I think, would be suspicious of a free service. As it is, the hospital already has more applications for surgical treatment than it is able to deal with. Many families are unable immediately to settle their bills, but there has not been a single debt which has not, often with great hardship, eventually been paid. The sophisticated reader will perhaps regard this as no more than a normal honest business dealing: after all, we are in the habit of paying our bills. But among a primitive society, long accustomed to the oppression of bribery and corruption, it seems to me an admirable reflection upon the sterling character of the Gurkhas, in whose welfare their own Government appears to take so little interest.

2

ALL over the Himalayas it generally rains for a few days towards the end of December. We had planned our trip on the assumption that we should be at Pokhra at the time of this seasonal downpour, and luck was with us. The noise of the heavy rain falling on the tin resthouse was deafening and made conversation impossible, but at least we were dry, and the water collected in the storage tank enabled us to get our clothes washed. But for a day or so the airfield was deserted: it was soon water-logged and out of action. There is a scheduled service between Kathmandu and Pokhra, but since the two towns are not in telephonic or radio communication with each other, only the distant hum of an approaching aircraft warns the airport commander to clear grazing cattle off the landing-ground. This he does by means of a blast on a klaxon horn. There is no runway at Pokhra, but the country is open, and landing is far less hazardous than at Kathmandu. Fearing that it might not be possible to get a permit to walk over the country, I had previously flown up to Pokhra and back in one day. But the clouds had come down soon after taking off from Kathmandu and we had seen nothing except an occasional glimpse of the dun landscape beneath us. Nevertheless it was a flight I shall long remember. In taking off for the return journey from Pokhra, the aircraft makes for a line of rugged hills into which, in the minds of the uninitiated, it seems to be about to crash. Sitting next to me, praying fervently, was a sadhu, a Hindu mendicant, scantily dressed, his face smeared with ashes. He had not flown before and was overcome by fear. Just as we were about to clear the ridge in front of us he uttered a piercing shriek and sank to his knees,

implored his gods to protect him. For a moment or two it seemed as though the other passengers would panic, but as soon as they realised that we were not in the slightest danger common sense prevailed. My companion, however, remained engrossed in prayer until we landed at Kathmandu.

The arrival of an aircraft at Pokhara is the only amusement the town provides, and on most days there are at least a couple of hundred people waiting to see the event. There is no arrangement for controlling the crowd, so that passengers have to force their way out through a press of gaping yokels, anxious to see for themselves the mysteries of this strange machine. Many years before, when I was travelling about on the Indo-Nepalese frontier, I had often listened spellbound to the comments of Gurkhas who had never before seen a railway train. They were unable to understand its means of propulsion and concluded that it was some potent form of western magic. But now I observed that an aeroplane aroused no such thoughts and was accepted as commonplace. For some time I could not understand the reason, but one day, standing on the airport at Pokhara, I heard an elderly man reproaching his son for marvelling at the machine. "In ancient times," he said, "as you well know, our gods constantly flew from one place to another. They visited each other on their mountain-peaks. How else do you think they could have done this, if not in an aeroplane?"

On the airfield we were able to buy the most delicious tangerines at twenty-five for a shilling. I had always known that Pokhara was famed for its oranges but had wondered why there were none in other parts of the country. It seems that in the distant past some enterprising farmer imported a few trees as an experiment, and from them the present groves have spread. Most of the fruit is carried down and sold in the plains of India, but the industry is not organised: a man will invest a few spare rupees in buying the fruit, carry his load down to the plains and sell it for what he can get. The greater part of Nepal is well suited to the cultivation of fruit of various kinds, and there is little doubt that fruit-farming could be developed into a highly profitable industry, as it has been, for instance, in the Kulu Valley in the eastern Punjab Hills.

Shortly before setting off from Pokhara we heard for the first

time, and quite by chance, that a fortnight earlier the King had dissolved his Cabinet and placed the Prime Minister under arrest on charges of bribery and corruption. The news aroused no interest. "What happens in Kathmandu," an old pensioned Gurkha officer told me, "makes no difference to us. The trouble with our politicians is that they are not content to get rich slowly: they try to make as much money as they can in the shortest possible time, and then they get found out. A new lot succeeds them, but the same thing happens again."

When the rains cleared we saw that the snow-line had become much lower and there was a sprinkling on even the lower hills. The atmosphere was now so clear that the distant peaks seemed no more than a day's march away.

We left Pokhra on 5 January in high spirits, for it was a sparkling morning. We were now bound for Baglung, whence we intended to turn due south and work our way towards the Terai, where there was a small airfield from which we hoped to fly back to Kathmandu. Our missionary friends had assured us that Baglung was one long day's march from Pokhra; even the weaker among them did it in two easy stages. I knew that the map we had was fanciful: even so, it hardly seemed possible that we could get to Baglung in much less than a week, and so it turned out. Only later did I discover that with the doctors it was a matter of pride to move over the hills as fast as the local people, and by association with them they had acquired a similarly vague idea of time and distance.

By the late afternoon we had climbed some two thousand feet above the valley. The path ran a little below the crest of a long ridge which completely blocked any view of the mountains, but immediately below us was the Pokhra lake, emerald-green in the fading light. The King's villa was clearly visible, its desecrating ugliness obscured by the leafy distance. There was no village, so we camped by the side of a tiny stream.

We had now crossed into the administrative district of Kaski which, with that of neighbouring Lamjung, provided the territorial titles of Jung Bahadur and his successors. So far as I know, he had no connection with either place, nor had he ever visited them, but it was his hereditary overlordship that gave him and his descendants the title of Maharaja. The Rana Prime Ministers

were popularly but erroneously regarded as Maharajas of all Nepal, and although they were in fact the rulers of the whole country, they were Maharajas only of Kaski and Lamjung.

The village of Kaski, which we reached next day, has declined in importance and is now no more than the usual collection of scattered farmsteads, but it is easy to understand why the place remained independent so long. Situated below the crest of a high ridge which completely dominates the surrounding country, Kaski could not be taken by force with such weapons as were available in the eighteenth century.

The ruins of the ancient fort still stand on top of the ridge, about a thousand feet above the village. From what we could see, the stiff climb seemed to promise little reward, and since we had a long march in front of us we decided to give the fort a miss. Denys, however, was undeterred, and while Bette and I were striking camp, he set off up the hill. When we were about to start, we heard him shouting from the summit: his words were inaudible, but it was obvious that he was urging us to join him. We set the caravan in motion and then, rather unwillingly, set off to climb the hill. There appeared to be no path and I could find nobody in the village from whom to ask the way, but as we were passing through the outskirts a man, the inevitable Brahman, suddenly appeared and ordered us peremptorily to return. "You cannot come here," he said; "this is holy ground. The whole of this hill is sacred and the fort is now our temple." He quietened down a little when I made it clear that we intended to go on. "Very well," he said, "but you must take off your boots and climb the mountain barefoot: otherwise the whole place will be desecrated." It was at this moment that I happened to glance down and saw that we were standing in the midst of what was obviously one of the village latrines. "If this is holy ground," I said, "you might make some effort to keep it clean," and with this parting shot we strode off up the hill, while the Brahman continued to shout at us.

The path, such as it was, was steep and covered with loose stones, so that we kept slipping back. I was badly out of breath and half-inclined to give up the struggle, but Denys shouted down to us to hurry: he seemed to be overcome by excitement. When at last,



37. Machar Pucchar from the Kaski ridge.



38. A halt on the road near Kaski.

still panting, we breasted the ridge there lay before us the most stupendous mountain panorama I have ever seen; it was so staggering that for a few minutes none of us uttered a word.

Immediately below the ridge was a cliff with a sheer drop of several thousand feet, at the bottom of which was a wide valley dotted with tiny villages surrounded by groves of orange. From this height the river appeared to be motionless, a pale blue ribbon winding through the valley. On the far side the ground rose steeply to another high ridge, beyond which the isolated mass of Machar Pucchar stood up, as though it had heaved itself out of the surrounding valleys. The peaks of Annapurna were away to the right, but their greater altitude was dwarfed by the nearer mountain. We had an uninterrupted view of some fifteen thousand feet of Machar Pucchar, every facet and hanging glacier looking as though carved out of crystal. There was not a cloud in the sky, and from where we stood the second peak, which gives this mountain its fish-tail appearance, was just visible. We were so near that the shadows cast by the rising sun produced a pattern that was constantly shifting, so that the mountain no longer looked like an inert mass, but seemed as though it had acquired a life of its own. I am not given to any kind of mystical experience, but on this occasion I did have an overwhelming feeling of the insignificance of man; of the futility of human endeavour.

The little fort, built of stone and wood, had not been repaired for many years and was falling down, but it was of no architectural interest. In front of it was a small paved terrace, in one corner of which was a rock smeared with vermilion paint, and leaning against the rock a rusty old iron trident. This was the shrine which the Brahman in the village believed would be defiled by our presence, but it looked as though the place was seldom visited.

Denys was visibly affected by the beauty of the view, of which he naturally wished to record his impressions. He is by inclination a non-representational painter, but after making several quick sketches he said that the subject was too vast and complicated to be immediately reduced to an abstraction, and he set to work on a series of outline-drawings which, when they were pasted together made a sheet as big as four pages of a newspaper. This was intended as an aid in recapturing the scene when he got back to

his studio. The completion of this enormous drawing was likely to occupy the entire day, so after an hour on the ridge Bette and I decided to go on and prepare a camp.

We followed the ridge for half a mile or so, when it ended in a saddle from which another path led down to the valley we had looked across from our vantage-point. Here there was a biggish village and at the edge of it an isolated cottage with a superb view of the mountains. A bent old man was working in the garden and after passing the time of day I congratulated him on the splendid site he had chosen for his house. "Yes," he said, "I have been here many years and I chose the spot so that I could gaze at the mountains while I prayed to the gods who live there. But the fact is," he concluded, "the gods have done damn-all for me: I am as poor as when I started: even my cow has never calved."

A few miles beyond the village we spotted a small rice-field with a stream beside it. The snows were hidden by a ridge above but there was an uninterrupted view to the south. The Pokhra airfield and a corner of the lake were still visible, and the setting sun, reflected from the tin roof of the tourist bungalow, shone like a beacon. We had not covered much ground since setting out in the morning, but we decided to halt lest Denys should lose his way in the dark.

At dinner-time there was still no sign of him, so I sent two of the porters back with a hurricane lantern. Nothing happened until nearly eight o'clock, when I saw in the distance a point of light coming in our direction. Twenty minutes later it appeared to be hardly nearer, so I set off across the fields to investigate. When I reached the party I was horrified to find that Denys, with an arm round each of the porters, was moving with great difficulty and I feared that he had broken his leg. What had happened was that he had become so absorbed in his work that by the time he finished darkness had fallen, and in trying to make up lost time by hurrying over the pathless and broken ground he had blistered a heel so badly that he was no longer able to put one foot to the ground. The injury was fortunately not serious but for the moment it was almost as disabling as a fracture.

The next morning Denys, although his foot was in a nasty state, said he could manage to carry on. He was still limping badly and

obviously in great pain, but somehow or other he got through the day. After a long and gruelling climb we descended gradually through pine-forest to the village of Tilhar, on a spit of high ground above the junction of two rivers, between which we discovered what looked an ideal site for a camp. The place was so beautiful that we should in any case probably have decided to stay an extra day: as it was, it seemed to offer the ideal conditions for Denys to rest and recover.

In the evening a low-lying bank of mist crept down the valley, but above it the deep blue sky was luminous with stars. Later, when the moon began to rise, the landscape became suffused with incandescent light and we sat outside our tent watching the changing scene, lulled into silence by the sounds of the quietly flowing river.

When we awoke, soon after dawn, the magic had dissolved: in its place was another, a sunlit, kind of loveliness. Behind the camp there was a small stream running swiftly down from a side-valley, and before breakfast we bathed in its deep clear pools, lying in the rushing water until our bodies began to feel numb.

The village had a small school with a one-time soldier in command. When I visited it he was instructing his pupils, boys and girls, in the rudiments of army drill, shouting at them when they failed to salute in the correct military manner. "What about education," I asked: "reading and writing?" He looked at me with blank perplexity. "That sort of stuff is no use here," he said. "All these children need is discipline."

Ever since we had started out from Kathmandu I had been fascinated by watching Denys at work. He is, among other things, a born teacher and he had constantly urged me to try my hand at painting, something which I had always secretly wished to do. We had decided to stay where we were until Denys's foot had healed, so having nothing better to do I asked for paints and paper and set off up the little side-valley. I selected what I felt to be a simple composition and sat down on a rock to draw, but after a frustrating hour or so it was obvious, even to me, that I had not the slightest talent. Nevertheless my inefficient scrawls did bear some resemblance to the scene in front of me. Looking up, I saw that the military schoolmaster had sat himself down beside me. "I see

you are making a map," he observed, "but you have not drawn the course of the river correctly."

The most surprising thing about the village of Tilhar was that it contained a dentist, although this word connotes a greater skill than was in fact possessed by the local practitioner. He was by trade a blacksmith, but as a side-line he also made false teeth, for which there was a considerable demand throughout the surrounding countryside. Primitive peoples are popularly supposed to have perfect teeth, but at the mission hospital in Pokhra I was told that dental disease, particularly caries, is common. Gurkhas, unless they have served in the army or travelled in more sophisticated parts, do not bother to clean their teeth, and the starch diet on which they mostly live inevitably causes their teeth to decay.

I was much interested in observing the Tilhar dentist's methods. He was unaware of the possibility of filling teeth, and although, if pressed, he would attempt extractions, for which he used his ordinary blacksmith's pincers, he preferred to confine himself to the provision of dentures which he made, teeth and all, entirely of gold. There was no necessity, he said, for him to see a patient; a set of teeth was merely ordered as being suitable for a man or woman of such and such an age. In Kathmandu I had often seen Gurkhas in from the hills buying spectacles for their relatives at home in the same way; but whereas an optician could, without examination, provide a pair of reading-glasses which with luck might be some use to, say, a man of sixty, these teeth were of no practical use. I did once see an old man who had managed to force his dentures into his toothless mouth: he appeared to sucking a large loose lump of metal. In the hills of Nepal it seems that teeth are a symbol of wealth rather than of practical use.

After leaving Tilhar we continued downstream for a few miles until we came to a junction with the Modi river here spanned by a rickety bridge badly in need of repair. As soon as we had crossed the river we were faced with the usual climb. There was no shade and it was hot, so that I found myself frequently stopping to admire the view. During one of these halts a passer-by came and sat himself down beside me, and since he was no more than middle-aged and seemed to be intelligent, I asked him about the state of the country. He understood, he said, that for the

last few years there had been some new kind of Government in Kathmandu, and indeed at one time a man had come from the capital to talk to the village, but nobody had understood what he was talking about. But he was a pleasant man and had given cigarettes to everybody. I asked my informant if he had heard that the Prime Minister had been suspended by the King. "I shouldn't be surprised," he said, "but it makes no difference to us. Anyhow, who is the Prime Minister?" "Have you not heard of Mr Koirala?" I asked. "No, never," he replied, "but from his name I suppose he's another of those bloody Brahmans."

We descended again, this time to the bed of the Gandak, which even in winter is a raging torrent, and followed its banks for several miles, until we came to a ferry, the usual kind of dug-out canoe. While we were waiting to cross, a young Nepali-speaking Tibetan came by and asked me how far it was to some distant village of which I had never heard. I felt he would be disappointed if I told him I did not know, so I gave him the answer I myself had so often received in reply to a similar question: "Two *kos*," I said, and he went smiling on his way.

There was a stiff climb on the far side of the river, after which we emerged into a delightful forest, cool and level. On a trip of this kind one learns to appreciate the simplest pleasures. After so many miles of rough scrambling, in which it was impossible to avoid bruising one's feet on stones and rocks, the relief of treading the soft earth path was near to ecstasy.

A few miles further on the path again descended to the river and we then climbed gently up to Baglung, a pleasant little town of some eight or nine hundred inhabitants perched on a small plateau about a thousand feet above the valley. We camped on a rice-terrace beyond the town, near a trickle of water too dirty for anything except washing clothes. But it was the best we could do, for all the water required by the people of Baglung had to be fetched from the river below, and throughout the day there was a constant stream of women and children with large copper or earthenware pots climbing up and down. There was a leper-colony in the valley below, the members of which, driven from home by their families, lived as best they could in pitiful squalor. As soon as our presence was known some of them came and begged

for medicine. They refused to be denied and would not go away: poor deserted wretches, they could not understand that there was nothing we could do for them, and they looked at us reproachfully when, with a guilty conscience, I told Ang Dawa to drive them away. During the whole of our days' stay they remained there, sitting motionless in a field a hundred yards from our tent.

During our second afternoon we were surprised to hear the hum of an approaching aircraft, and before long a helicopter came skimming up the valley and landed in a field just outside the town. It was quickly surrounded by people running from all directions. At this very time it happened by chance that a funeral procession was on its way to cremate a body in the valley below. For a few moments the mournful wails of conch-shells merged with the hum of the throbbing engine, but the bereaved party was soon overcome by curiosity, and after dumping the corpse they ran to join the throng of spectators.

The helicopter took off again after fifteen minutes, and later that evening we learned that the senior local official had gone back in it to Kathmandu, but nobody knew why.

The Government of Nepal has committed itself to an extensive plan for building a network of roads throughout the hills. These, if they are ever completed, will serve little useful purpose. Besides, the cost of construction and maintenance would call for a sum of money out of all proportion to the country's other urgent needs. I had long thought that the helicopter was the answer to Nepal's communication problems, and the arrival of one at Baglung convinced me that I was right. The journey from Kathmandu, which had taken us a month, had been accomplished by helicopter in a couple of hours: and the cost of thirty or forty of these machines, which can be landed almost anywhere, would be infinitesimal compared with the expense of building roads, for the construction and maintenance of which the Nepalese do not in any case possess the necessary skill.

Baglung is not on a main route to anywhere; and since it is both an administrative headquarters and the only place of any size in a scattered district, the little shops were much more self-contained than in any other of the towns we visited. Most of them sold large quantities of cotton-cloth and other simple goods imported

from India, and all were kept by Newars. One of these men had installed a battery-operated radio (the only one we had seen since leaving Kathmandu) which seemed to be turned on permanently at full blast. The owner told me that he listened only to the Indian music broadcast from Bombay. To my ears the distortion and permanent accompaniment of whines and crackles made the noise intolerable. Nobody, as far as I was able to ascertain, listened to the daily broadcasts from the little station at Kathmandu.

We had now reached the most northerly point of our journey, and after a few days rest we turned south.

The natural structure of Nepal is such that the grain of the country is from north to south. The enormous parallel ridges which run down from the Himalayas divide the country into a series of valleys which are watered by innumerable streams which rise in the surrounding mountains. All these flow towards the plains of India, and all converge towards each other so decidedly that they unite into several huge rivers before reaching even the lowest range of foothills. Because of this, any journey across Nepal entails, as we now knew from our own experience, a succession of arduous climbs and descents. There is no natural route through the hills from west to east and people living in remote districts who have reason to visit Kathmandu find it quicker and more convenient to go straight down to the plains and approach the capital by the long and circuitous railway journey to Rexaul.

I had imagined that when we reached Baglung our difficulties would be ended: the onward journey would follow the natural line of the country to the south and we should be descending gradually towards the plains. This supposition turned out to be unfounded, and in the event this last part of the walk was by far the most fatiguing, largely because its difficulties were unexpected. The track followed the general course of the Gandak river, but the valley was at times so steep and narrow, running at several places through precipitous gorges, that we were constantly forced to climb up to the hills above in order to make any progress. The popular idea, based on a study of the maps, that it is comparatively easy to travel in Nepal from north to south turned out to be a

myth. The entire country is so tangled that it makes no difference in which direction the weary traveller proceeds.

The greater part of our first march on leaving Baglung was a return over the outward track, but towards the end of the day, instead of climbing up out of the valley, we continued on down the Gandak. The only villages were on the heights above, so when we felt we had done enough for one day we pitched camp on a sandy spit beside the river. On the far side was a steep cliff, rising to perhaps a thousand feet, which obscured the landscape, but when darkness fell the enclosing blackness served to heighten the brilliance of the star-crammed patch of sky above, which was all the view we had. When I rose, early in the morning, a thin blanket of mist was floating gently down the valley, and above it a pair of cormorants flapped lazily upstream. While I watched in the cold dawn a girl, presumably from one of the villages above, came to wash in the river. She was carrying a small brass tray filled with scarlet poinsettias. Before entering the water she knelt for a few seconds in silent prayer. With her hands together, palm to palm, she bowed to the river and then cast her offering of flowers on the water, keeping only one, which she tucked into her hair. I was greatly moved by the beauty of this simple worship. This, I thought, was a truly religious communion with the forces of nature; nobody could wish to see it replaced by an alien faith.

The next day was a long weariness, a succession of clamberings up and down the cliffs. At the end of it we were high above the river, on a plateau dotted with villages. The track here was joined by the direct route from Pokhra down to the plains, and for the first time we met a lot of traffic: scrap-iron, kerosene and sugar were being carried up from India; bales of wool, from high up near the Tibetan border, were going down. Most of the carriers were men of poor physique and somewhat Indian in appearance. Many of them were inhabitants of the low-lying Terai and had obviously been affected by the prevalent malaria of the region. Economic necessity, they said, forced them to work in the hills, but they hated the cool mountain climate.

The plateau on which we camped was small, no more than a square mile or so. The hills rose steeply above it and on them were many small villages. The ground is too steep and arid for



39. Looking up the Gandak river towards Baglung.
Terraced cultivation in foreground.



40. Dhaulagiri from
the outskirts of
Baglung.



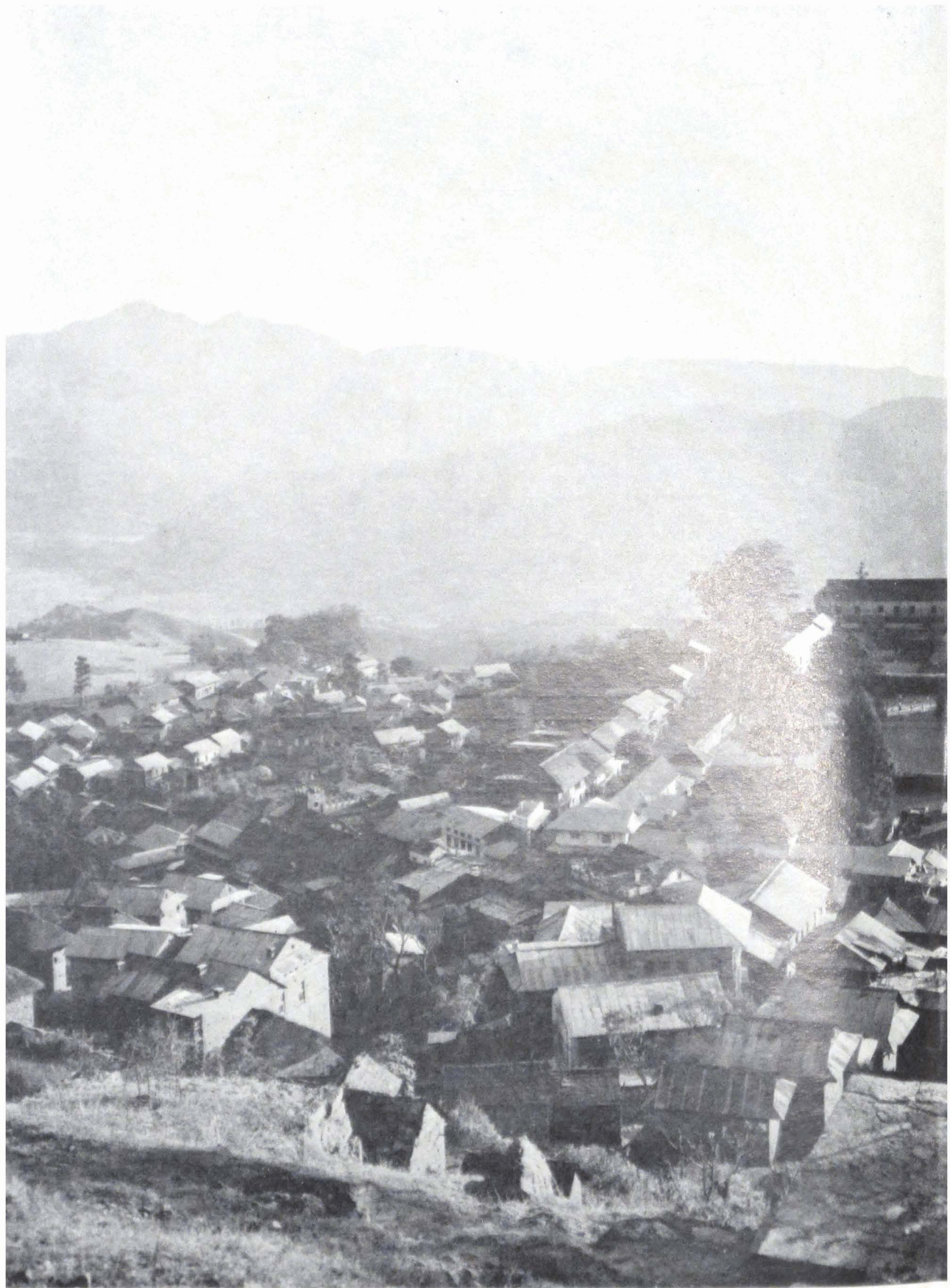
41. Baglung: street-
scene.



42. A Gurkha soldier, carrying his possessions, on the way to his home on leave. The path is typical of the tracks throughout Western Nepal.

43. Man with fractured leg. See page 173.





44. Tansing Palpa: looking south towards India. Massiang (not visible in photograph) is situated on the horizon ridge.

cultivation, so that the people here are mainly pastoral, raising miserable goats and sheep which they sell in exchange for rice. Passing through a village I was hailed by an amiable Brahman, not a priest but an ordinary farmer. He was lounging in front of what seemed a comfortable homestead, but when I answered his greeting he began to complain of his poverty. "I have nothing," he said, "except my house, a few poor fields, some cows and buffaloes." I cut him short and asked what else he wanted. "More," he replied laconically.

We plunged once again into a valley and plodded along beside the river, but it was a great weariness, for even at this season, when the water was at its lowest level, there was no space for even the narrowest strip of path, and to go forward we had frequently to climb some hundreds of feet over a series of precipitous rock-faces; there was not the least danger, but this crab-like progress was fatiguing and resulted in much frustration. Towards the end of the afternoon we reached a point where the valley began to widen, and for the first time that day we discerned a well-worn track. But we also saw that it wound steeply up for some two thousand feet, mostly over an exposed and rocky cliff-face on which there was no possibility of finding a perch for the night. Darkness was falling when we reached the top, where there was a small and miserable hamlet. There was no time to look about so we pitched the tent on the first available spot, a tiny rice-field a few yards square, on the very summit of the cliff up which we had toiled. All night the wind blew down the valley and the noise of flapping canvas made it difficult to sleep. In the morning we found that we had camped on the very edge of a precipice: immediately below us the ground fell sheer to the river.

We were inclined to rest for a day, but except for the view the place was not inviting. Besides, the local people assured us that the next march was very easy; a gradual descent to Rani Ghat, where we had in any case planned to halt for a while. I knew by this time that it was unwise to place the slightest reliance upon local information; but the old woman who came and talked to us was so insistent that, against our better judgment, we decided to go on. Also there was the prospect of good bathing at the end of the journey.

We left soon after dawn and did not reach our goal until thirteen hours later, having had to tackle no less than four enormous climbs and descents. At about midday we reached a charming little glen with a stream close by, and since, in our ignorance, we thought the worst of the day's exertions were behind us, we decided to stop for a leisurely picnic lunch. A large party of laden porters, twenty or thirty of them, had had the same idea and lay sprawled round a log-fire, their heavy bales of wool beside them.

While Ang Dawa was brewing tea we dozed off, lulled by the pleasant hum of distant chatter softened by the sounds of running water. But after a few minutes we were awakened by the strains of singing. A party of women was approaching, gaily dressed and with flowers in their hair. Still singing in unison, they stopped beside a huge tree, which they began slowly to circle. During their perambulations, which were continued for a quarter-of-an-hour or so, each woman stopped momentarily to snatch a few leaves from one or other of the nearby bushes which she then offered to the tree. At the end of the ceremony the bole was deep in scattered leaves, the bushes stripped, and the women sat down beside the resting porters, who had shown no interest in the proceedings. I asked the apparent leader, a woman of middle age, the meaning of the rite. They were all Brahmans, she told me, and had come to worship the spirit of the tree. The day was of no special significance: they came whenever it happened that seven or eight of them were free of household duties at the same time. She could not tell me the origin of the custom: but when she was a child she remembered that her mother had participated in this worship, and now that she herself was a mother it seemed right to perpetuate the ceremony. There was, so far as she knew, no special reason for worshipping this particular tree; but neither, she said, was there any reason to change: it was merely a matter of long-established custom.

We delayed over-long in this pleasant grove: but we were entranced by the sight of the singing women, and the warm afternoon sun was not conducive to further effort. Besides, we had broken the back of the day's journey, or so we thought: the resting porters assured us that our goal was no more than the usual two *kos* ahead; downhill all the way, an easy afternoon ramble.

I sent the caravan on ahead, with orders to pitch camp by the banks of the river, and after giving them a decent start we followed at our usual leisurely pace. Three or maybe four hours later we were still dragging ourselves up and down across the cliffs. There was no sign of human habitation and when at last, from the top of a high cliff, we saw Rani Ghat in the distance I wondered if I had the energy to reach it. The little village was three thousand feet below us, reached by a boulder-strewn path which spiralled all over the sprawling hillside. I was already so tired that for some time I had kept going only by an effort of will, keeping my eyes steadily fixed on the ground. I had long since lost all interest in the landscape and when, several hours later, I struggled into camp, I had walked myself to a standstill. But I must not exaggerate. Twenty years earlier I should have thought nothing of a day like this; it was no more than a longish march in rough mountain country. Nevertheless even Denys and Bette admitted that they had had enough. We sat drinking cup after cup of tea, too tired even to take off our boots. Later on, although the night was well advanced, we wandered over to the river and plunged into its reviving coldness. When we awoke the next morning the sun was already high above the enclosing hills.

Rani Ghat—the Queen's Bathing Place—takes its name from the existence of a villa built by one of the Maharaja-Prime Ministers as a pleasance for one of his favourite wives. The design is a fantastic mixture of Palladian and Indian architectural ideas, and the building, surrounded by lush jungle, looks strangely out of place. Even in the Rana period the villa was seldom used, and the place had not been repaired for many years. Trees had forced their way through the paving-stones of the terrace overlooking the river, and the walls were encrusted with lichen. In one corner was a Hindu temple, still in the keeping of an aged Brahman who showed us round. To one side was a long low shed which had been used to house the guards without whom no member of the ruling family travelled. The corrugated iron roof had collapsed, and judging from the ashes all over the floor the place seemed now to be used as a kitchen by passing travellers. But the local people were proud of their royal association: some day, they said, the Maharaja would again honour the village by

his presence. They did not understand that the Rana family, like their deserted villa, had collapsed. The scene was one of melancholy desolation, and we were glad to return to our sunlit camp across the river.

We had now descended to little more than a thousand feet above sea-level, and although we were still surrounded by hills the Gandak valley, in its approach to the plains, had widened: the river was no longer a mountain torrent, but a wide expanse of swiftly flowing water with sandy banks. In a straight line we were now within twenty miles of the Terai, but we were still separated from it by several high ridges, so before tackling this last part of the journey we decided to rest for a day or two at Rani Ghat.

While we were there a Magar woodcutter fell from the cliffs above and was killed. In the afternoon his relatives brought the body down to the river, on the banks of which they constructed a pyre of logs. I strolled over to see what was happening. There was no Brahman with the party, no ceremony of any kind; nor indeed the slightest manifestation of grief. The mourners sat and chatted to each other, and when I left they got up and followed me back to camp, begging for cigarettes. I asked them about the dead man. He was old, they said: his time had come. They did not go back to the river. At night the pyre still smouldered with a dull red glow in the darkness, but the next morning there was only a heap of scattered ash and a few half-burnt bones which one of our men pitched into the river.

Our porters, realising that our journey was nearing its end and that they would soon be paid their arrears of wages, spent the entire day in gambling, not even bothering to get up and cook a meal.

Soon after leaving Rani Ghat we were surprised to find that the track, although no longer in a good state of repair, had at one time been as wide as a country road. A passing villager told me that many years ago the path had been specially widened so that the Maharaja, when he visited Rani Ghat, could be transported on the back of an elephant. This had required the enforced and unpaid services of the entire surrounding population for several months.

The path ran steeply up through thick forest and while I was resting for a few minutes there came a young man being carried in a large basket on another's back. He had broken his leg, and the fractured limb was being held roughly in place by a sort of cat's cradle arrangement of strings attached to the basket. He pleaded with me to treat him; but even had I been a doctor there was nothing I could have done, for even to my untrained eyes it was obvious that the leg would have to be re-broken before the fracture could be reduced. He had been travelling, he said, for four days, and it would be another two before he reached the mission hospital at Tansing. I gave him what little comfort I could, although, since he had delayed for a fortnight before setting out on his journey, it seemed likely that he would now be crippled for life. When he was gone I fell into a mood of utter dejection, not only at my inability to do anything but at the callous disregard with which these splendid people have so long been treated.

On this day too I fell in with an intelligent young Brahman, one of the very few who, because of his birthright and education, believed that he had some obligation to society. As a youth he had been sent to Kathmandu for his education, but his father had died before his studies were ended, and, because he was the eldest son, he was forced to return to the hills to look after the family farm. He was not, strictly speaking, a Gurkha, but he had identified himself with them, and in order to do what he could to improve their lot, he had become a member of one of the new political parties, the so-called Independents. But he had soon realised that politics in Nepal was little more than a corrupt struggle for wealth and power in Kathmandu. He was now completely disillusioned, for the alleged democratic Government had made no difference to life in the hills. He was inclined to think that on the whole the people were better off under the Ranas: they too were corrupt and oppressive, but at least they knew where to draw the line. The Gurkhas themselves, he said, could not be blamed for their apathetic attitude towards the political situation. Most of them are illiterate, and the Government has done nothing to inform them of the changed state of affairs. Would he not do better, I asked, to settle in Kathmandu for a time and make known the situation

in the hills. But no, he said: he was a simple countryman; he had forgotten the little English he had learned as a boy, and he lacked the means to bribe his way into politics.

That evening we camped on a slope above Tansing, the administrative headquarters of the Palpa district, and, except for Pokhra, the most important centre in the whole of western Nepal, since most of the tracks from the hills down to the plains here converge. The town itself is a scruffy little place, a huddle of tin-roofed shacks and shops, many of them kept by Indians. The only sizeable house is occupied by the Governor, and nearby is a barracks and parade-ground for the regiment which, since early days, has been quartered here.

For a long time I had been looking forward to setting foot in Tansing. Thirty years ago I had seen it from a distance, when the Maharaja had given me the rare privilege of penetrating a few miles into the interior. I remembered he had emphasised that in no circumstances were we to attempt to reach the town, and he had given precise instructions that we were not to go beyond a certain specified ridge. Naturally I had long held romantic illusions about Tansing and had come to regard the place as a symbol of a Promised Land I should never be allowed to approach. Now that the reality had come to pass I was completely disillusioned, for Tansing was the most unattractive town we saw in the whole of our travels. We had intended to halt for a few days, but the place was so uninviting that next morning we set off again.

Tansing straddles a ridge below which is a stretch of open country surrounded by low hills. This, like the Kathmandu and Pokhra valleys, appears at one time to have been a lake. The road down was crowded with people coming and going in both directions. I thought at first that it must be some sort of festival, except that everybody was carrying a load. But in January the seasonal carrying-trade is at its height and our route was one into which tracks from every direction had converged. I spoke to a man who was with a party carrying iron girders from Batoli to Tansing, a job which would occupy five or six back-breaking days. He was a miserable specimen and looked incapable of sustained physical effort. Nevertheless his load was so heavy that I found I was unable even to lift it off the ground. His pay, he said, was twenty-

two rupees (about twenty-seven shillings) for the job, and out of this sum he had to feed himself. The motor-road now being constructed from the plains to Tansing will, at any rate in theory, eliminate the need for this cruel labour. On the other hand, large numbers of people who earn their living by carrying loads will be without employment. Even in this comparatively easy stretch of country the making of a road, which had been going on for several years, had proved difficult. Stretches of it had already collapsed during the monsoon rains: and since the entire road had only a rammed-earth surface, obviously it would often be out of action. Gangs of coolies were working with what could only be described as gardening-tools, uselessly shifting piles of earth from one place to another. I asked the overseer, the purpose of the road. "We are a modern country," he said; "naturally we must have roads." "Yes, of course," I replied, "but this particular road, what use is it?" He looked perplexed, and thought for a moment before answering. "Well," he said, "it will make things easier for the Governor: instead of having to walk, he will be able to motor down to the plains."

When we had crossed a stretch of open country we climbed again through thick forest, up to the last ridge separating us from the plains. Massiang, the village on the top, is about five thousand feet above sea-level and has an uninterrupted view in every direction: to the north, with Tansing in the foreground, an immense stretch of the Himalayas is visible; and to the south we looked down over the Terai, from this distance a sea of mottled green fading gradually into hazy invisibility. This was the very place in which I had camped some thirty years or so before, and it seemed in no way to have changed. In the evening I climbed up to a little knoll on which I remembered I had spent many hours waiting for the mountains to clear so that I could photograph them. This time the sky was unclouded and the twin peaks of Machar Pucchar gleamed in the distance. Now that most of the great peaks in Nepal have been climbed, it seems almost unbelievable that so recently as the nineteen-thirties even the exact position of most of these mountains was unknown. In those days our knowledge of the Nepal Himalayas was very limited. Observers had fixed the position and altitude of the highest summits, and

residents in Kathmandu had questioned the Nepalese, but much of their information was vague and misleading. A selection of my earlier photographs, taken from the Massiang ridge, was published in *The Himalayan Journal* (Volume VI) in 1934. "These illustrations," the editor commented, "though not identifiable for certain, show distant parts of the Himalayas photographed, it is believed, for the first time." I was much gratified, in the light of recent knowledge, now to confirm the complete accuracy of my tentative identifications, which had been based not on scientific survey, but merely upon information obtained from local people.

I stayed alone on the hilltop until all was obscured by enveloping darkness. I knew that as soon as we descended from Massiang we should not again see the mountains, and for me there was something symbolic about this last glimpse of a country which for so long had been forbidden. Also it seemed peculiarly fitting that the journey should have ended in this very place. As I sat in the gathering gloom I remembered all that Nepal had meant to me in the past, and the youthful eagerness which had determined me one day to travel in the interior. Now it was all over, and I was unlikely ever again to set foot in these delectable mountains. I got up and went back to the tent, but for a long time I was disinclined to talk, and Denys and Bette, sensing what was passing through my mind, did not attempt to break the silence.

The path down from Massiang, although a much frequented highway, was a torture of rocks and stones, one of the worst we had encountered. The valley below was filled with villages, in many of which were wayside teashops. We stopped in one to eat our lunch, and while we were there a fakir, an Indian from the far south, came striding along and stood in front of us. He had so trained his body that his right arm was now permanently set in an upright position and could no longer be lowered. His hair was long and matted and he was covered from head to foot in powdered ashes. He was naked except for a strip of cloth, secured round his waist by an iron chain, which barely concealed his genitals and failed to hide a tangle of matted pubic hair. He stared at us with an expression of absolute loathing and then, without speaking, went on his way. I had never before felt physically sick at the sight of a human being.

For some miles the path followed a winding gorge and then, turning a corner, we found that we had arrived in the plains. Looking back from a few miles further on, the thickly-wooded foothills rose up suddenly out of the flat country like an impassable bastion guarding the interior: the gorge through which we had emerged was no longer visible.

A hot wind was blowing across the Terai, and as soon as we reached Batoli we stripped off our sweat-soaked clothes and bathed in the river, which had now become a wide and gently flowing expanse. Batoli is a horrible collection of tin huts and shacks, more Indian than Nepalese, but it is a market of considerable importance, a trading centre for the exchange of goods between the hills and the plains. Wool and other products from the mountains are sold in Batoli and sent on to India in motor-lorries; and the reverse trade, cigarettes, kerosene and other odds and ends, is carried from here on the backs of men. This business is entirely in the hands of Indian traders, who do not scruple to take advantage of the unlettered peasants from the hills.

We spent an uncomfortable night at Batoli. The wind continued, depositing fine grit all over the tent, the flapping of which made sleep uneasy. But we were in good spirits, for our physical labours were ended: the onward journey would be by bus or lorry; or so we thought. Early in the morning Ang Dawa went over to see the transport-contractor: there were plenty of buses, it seemed, and he had booked places for our entire party on one which was due to leave at ten o'clock. This would get us to Bhairuwa, near the Indian frontier, by afternoon, and after spending the night there we would fly straight back to Kathmandu.

By half-past nine we had taken our seats. From long experience of travelling in Indian country-buses I did not expect that we would start on time. But an hour later there was no sign of a driver, and since all the other buses had already departed I went to investigate. The man in charge was a surly Indian, his lips stained from the betel he was chewing. "What you want?" he said in stilted English, at the same time ejecting a stream of blood-red spittle at my feet. I affected not to notice the insult, and asked politely when we should leave. "The seats on the regular buses were all reserved," he said. "You will have to travel in a special.

The cost will be a hundred rupees, and you can go as soon as you have paid me.”

I determined not to be thus defrauded and I was in no mood to haggle, so I went back to the bus and explained the situation to Bette and Denys. We decided that rather than give in to this flagrant attempt at extortion, we would walk to Bhairuwa, and ten minutes later we were off. The long straight road through the Terai forest was hot and dusty and we soon longed for the ups and downs of the hills. After we had been trudging along for about an hour, the bus in which we should have travelled passed us: it was filled with ordinary passengers.

In the early afternoon we came to a pleasant little clearing with a stream and decided to stop and brew some tea. Black-and-white kingfishers darted above the water, but there was no sign of human habitation. We liked the place so much that we were half-inclined to camp for the night. The porters raised no objection: they were glad, they said, that we had refused to be done down by the Indian contractor. But as we were about to begin unpacking, a lorry came chugging along the road and I decided to stop it. The driver was a cheerful Nepali and he would be glad, he said, to take us on for the equivalent of sixpence a head. There was only one condition: his employer was an Indian, and so that his master might not learn that he was earning a few rupees on the side, he asked us to lie flat on the floor when we passed through a village and to get out and walk the last few hundred yards before reaching Bhairuwa.

We camped on the far edge of the airfield, where there was no shade or nearby water, but there was no reasonable alternative, since the area round the airport-shacks lay deep in gritty dust which spiralled into the air with every puff of wind. A hundred yards away from our tent there was the wreckage of a Dakota which had crashed a few weeks earlier. Nobody had yet been to investigate the cause of the accident. Two soldiers of the Nepalese army stood, night and day, guarding the twisted heap of metal. They warned us away when we approached.

In the morning I walked over to see the airport commandant. There was a scheduled service, three times a week, from Bhairuwa to Kathmandu, but for the past fortnight, I now discovered, the

aircraft had been withdrawn from public service and was being used to transport cement to Pokhra, where it was wanted for the completion of a landing-stage on the lake in front of the King's villa. The wrecked Dakota had also been employed in this duty, and the crash, it appeared, had been due to overloading.

Since there was no communication between Kathmandu and Bhairuwa nobody knew when the public service would be restored. A hundred or so passengers, mostly Gurkha pensioners, were waiting hopefully for transport and every day the number increased. The commandant thought he might get us away within a fortnight.

We were not in any particular hurry, but we unanimously agreed that we could not support the discomfort of camping at Bhairuwa for more than a day or two. The alternative was to cross the frontier into India, where there was a railhead, and thence to travel via Gorakhpur to Rexaul, a roundabout journey of several hundred miles, involving many changes. From Rexaul it was possible to get back to Kathmandu by a combination of rail and bus. This journey, we reckoned, would take us about five days if we were not held up on the way.

There were, however, other complications. Our Sherpa porters were Nepalese subjects, but they had no passports, and since their physical appearance was not much different from that of Tibetans, they feared that they might be regarded as refugees from India and refused re-entry to their own country. Besides, before leaving Kathmandu the Foreign Office had warned me that if, during the course of our journey, we left Nepalese territory we could not return without a new visa, which would entail a visit to Delhi, the nearest place where there was a consulate. And even at Delhi a permit could not be issued without reference to Kathmandu. I had suggested that it would be easy to forestall this contingency by a suitable note in our passports, but the official said no: there was nothing in his regulations which permitted such unorthodox procedure.

The next day was one of Nepal's numerous festivals, and everything, even the few village-shops, was closed. The flat featureless landscape was without interest. The foothills were obscured by haze, and a hot grit-filled wind blew across the plains. There

was nothing to do and we spent the day sprawled on the ground outside our tent, too bored even to talk. We had finished the small collection of books we brought with us from Kathmandu, but I settled down to read *The Brothers Karamazov* for the second time on the journey and was at once transported.

The following morning I decided to try my luck with the local authority and after breakfast I went to call on the Bara Hakim, or governor of the district. Ang Dawa came with me, and to mark the occasion he had put on practically his entire wardrobe: a thick knickerbocker suit, several sweaters, thick stockings, heavy climbing boots and a pair of dark glasses. He carried an ice-axe and looked what indeed he was, the complete mountaineer. I was wearing the only clothes I had: a pair of torn and travel-worn worsted trousers and an open-necked flannel shirt. He did not say anything, but I sensed, from his immaculate appearance and the quizzical look he gave me, that he felt I was lacking in dignity.

The governor's residence, a large rambling two-storeyed house in Anglo-Indian style, stood alone in a field behind the town. The approaching path lay so thick in dust that we walked as though through powdered snow. A sentry, smoking a cigarette, lounged beside the gate, but did not bother to ask our business. Some attempt had been made to construct a garden. There was a large bed of flaming cannas and a hedge of oleanders so thickly covered in dust that the pink flowers looked as though they had been painted grey. A pile of stacked benches, presumably for the use of callers, stood in the middle of the withered lawn. The house was shuttered and appeared to be unoccupied. We walked all round, but there was no sign of life; no reply to my repeated shouts. I went back to confer with the sentry. I asked him if we had come to the right place. He was still smoking and could not be bothered to reply, but he nodded his head in agreement and pointed a thumb in the direction of the house.

I went back and resumed my shouting. At last I heard the shutters of an upstairs window being opened and a grizzled, close-cropped head appeared. It was the Governor himself and he was angry, although it was nearing half-past ten, at being disturbed so early in the morning. Come back to-morrow, he grunted, and closed the shutters with a bang. There was nothing to be done,

it seemed, for the moment, but as we were walking away I heard a clatter on the verandah and, turning, saw that the front door was being opened. The Governor, clad only in pyjamas and still unshaven, came rushing out. He had not at first realised, he said, that a foreign gentleman—an American no doubt—had shown the courtesy of calling upon him, and he wished to apologise for his rudeness. But I must realise, he said, that in this barbarous place he had few visitors and he was in danger of forgetting his manners. His English was precise but strangely old-fashioned, rather like the dialogue in some forgotten Victorian novel.

He led the way upstairs to a room in which there was a large office-desk, a sofa and two arm-chairs from which the stuffing protruded in coils like ectoplasm. As I sat down there was a twanging of springs and the pressure of my body released a squirt of dust. The Governor opened a window and shouted into the void for tea to be brought, but I heard no answering call. Ang Dawa was still wearing his dark goggles, which hid the greater part of his face, so that his racial characteristics were not immediately recognisable, and the Governor, understandably mistaking him for one of my fellow-countrymen, now addressed him in English, not a word of which did he comprehend. Without thinking, I began to interpret. "Well, well," said the Governor, smiling and hanging on to his words, "you are the first American I have met who has troubled to learn our language." As soon as I could get a word in I told him my story. "Well, well," he repeated, "so you are English, and like me you have been a soldier. But this is splendid. You will be my guests. I will arrange tiger-shooting, rhinoceros, anything you like. I have elephants; everything is at your disposal."

He went on to say that he was, in his own words, "a Rana bastard," and like the numerous other illegitimate offspring of that family had, as a youth, been commissioned into the Nepalese army. "But as I was only the bastard son of a bastard," he continued, "I could never rise above the rank of Colonel." His knowledge of English was, however, an asset, and since he was too lowly to have had any part in the former palace-intrigues, he had been given civilian employment. He had been in Bhairuwa for the past two years and was now about to retire. "My position

as Governor," he said, "is not glorious, but it has been," and he paused to find the right words, "what shall I say, not unprofitable, you understand?"

The conversation had lapsed into Nepali. Ang Dawa took no part in it, but remained sitting bolt-upright on the edge of his chair, transfixed by the Governor's words. He told me afterwards that he was deeply shocked by his brazen and cynical disclosures.

For some time I was unable to steer the conversation round to the purpose of my visit, for the poor old man was obviously lonely and wanted to talk only about himself. But when he began to flag I told him what I wanted. "Nothing could be easier," he said. "I have supreme authority in this district, and I will order the airport commander to take you with the cement." Not on your life, I thought to myself, thinking of the wrecked Dakota that lay on the edge of the landing-ground. "I think," I said, "that since we are not in a hurry, I would rather return through India. Also it will give us the chance to replenish our stores before going back to Kathmandu."

As I had long suspected, the Governor had no authority to issue a visa, but this he would not at first admit. "Anyhow, give me your official letter of authority to travel," he said, and taking a rubber stamp out of his desk he impressed it with the resplendent arms of Nepal, below which he wrote the word "revalidated" together with his signature. "Thank you, General," I said, promoting him to the rank which he obviously coveted. "I am delighted to be of service, Colonel," he replied, returning the compliment, whereupon we made our departure. The afternoon was well advanced by the time we got back to our tent, and Bette and Denys had begun to wonder if perhaps we had been arrested.

In the old days there was, and indeed there still is, a railhead on the Indian frontier, whence the traveller had to proceed on foot. But there is now an excellent motor-road which runs direct from Bhairuwa to Gorakhpur, sixty miles or so south of the border. We were astonished to find, in this remote corner of India, that the bus service was extremely efficient. Not only did it run to a regular daily time-table, but the buses were of the latest pattern and provided with numbered and reserved seats. After so many weeks of weary foot-slogging, it was a delightful experi-

ence to go bowling over the Indian plains at sixty miles an hour, as though we were touring in Europe.

We reached Gorakhpur, a busy and important railway-junction, in the evening. The bus deposited us at the station and we made at once for the refreshment room which I remembered from earlier days to have been a dirty and flyblown place in which, for want of anything better, one passed the time of waiting drinking innumerable cups of stewed and lukewarm tea. The restaurant had been transformed; the tables were now provided with clean cloths and napkins. A huge refrigerator stood in one corner and the room was brilliantly lit. The Eurasian manager made us welcome. He was delighted, he said, to have the chance, one which rarely occurred nowadays, to serve a European meal, but it would take a little time to prepare. Meanwhile, if we cared for a drink, there was beer, or anything else we wanted. I explained that since we had come from Nepal we had not troubled to provide ourselves with the necessary medical documents which certified us to be chronic alcoholics (without which it is not possible to buy even an occasional drink in many parts of India). "That's all right," he said; "we can mark it on the bill as soda-water."

The dinner was not very good by normal standards, but it was a long time since we had sat at a table with a cloth and all the usual paraphernalia. Besides, the tough and stringy mutton tasted delicious, compared with the succession of rather tasteless rice messes on which we had been living, and even the pink blancmange was palatable. Our train was not due to leave for three hours and we wondered how to pass the time. "Well, I'm still hungry," said Denys, so we ordered a second dinner and started again with the soup.

I had given Ang Dawa some money and told him to feed the porters, but he found it difficult to get them away from the platform. Most of them had never seen a train before and at each arrival they made a mad rush to climb on board, as though it was the last chance of reaching home. Out of their proper environment, they now looked forlorn and bewildered, like men from another planet, but their faces creased into smiles when we rejoined them after dinner. They feared, they said, that we had cast them off.

The train was already crowded when it arrived at Gorakhpur, but fortunately it stopped for ten minutes, so that Ang Dawa and I managed somehow to shove the porters in, but we could not seat them together; and the one or two who were forced to travel by themselves whimpered pathetically, like dogs whose masters have deserted them. But there was no time for explanations, so at every stop, and there were many, one or other of us got out to see that they did not leave the carriage.

The Indian Government is rightly proud of its main-line trains, most of which are now air-conditioned, comfortable and run with great efficiency. The same cannot be said of the branch-lines, which, judging by the one on which we travelled, have been allowed to run to seed. We had taken first-class tickets, but there were no carriages of this category, so we took refuge in an already crowded second which had obviously not been cleaned for days. During the night I had occasion to go to the lavatory, which was of the usual European pattern. There was a large turd reposing on the rim of the seat: evidently it had been deposited there some months before, since, like the seat itself, it had recently been painted black: it looked like a piece of abstract sculpture. When we stopped at a junction I summoned an inspector and made a complaint. He said he would send for a scavenger, but when I suggested that what was required was a man with a hammer and chisel he looked perplexed. He would write to the central authorities, he said. A little wizened Indian, probably a clerk of some sort, was sitting in a corner of the carriage, and soon after the train had resumed its journey, he cleared his throat and summoned up courage to speak. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I did not do it," and relapsed once more into silence.

We had to change trains at four o'clock in the morning and wait for a couple of hours. It was chilly and dark: but where else, except in India, I wondered, would one be cheerfully served with an excellent breakfast of bacon and eggs at a railway station in the middle of the night.

Towards noon next day we arrived at Segauli, now an unimportant little junction stranded in the midst of open country, but in 1815 briefly famous as the place where the treaty between Nepal and Britain was signed. From here to Rexaul, where we should

again enter Nepalese territory, is no more than twenty miles along a small branch-line: but there is only one train a day and it was not due to leave for several hours. I had explained all this to Ang Dawa and left it to him to gather the porters together at Segauli. Meanwhile, since there was no hurry, Bette, Denys and I sauntered towards the main part of the platform, from which a train was just pulling out. I was astonished to find that most of our porters were on it. While Ang Dawa was attempting to collect his following they had seen this train about to leave and, unable to contain their excitement, had rushed towards it and climbed on board. Now, their faces wreathed in smiles, they waved furiously, as they passed rapidly from view. I was wondering how to get them back when it apparently occurred to their dim wits they they were going in the wrong direction and, opening the door of their carriage, two or three of them jumped, somersaulting on to the track. The train was gathering speed and I feared that our journey was about to end in disaster, but fortunately the others, seeing what had happened to their companions, lost their nerve and stayed where they were. Ang Dawa was speechless with rage, but he calmed down when I laughed and assured him that the muddle was not his fault. I decided that there was only one thing to be done: to telephone down the line and ask for the porters to be sent back on the next train to Segauli. But the clerk was an obstructionist little bureaucrat and informed me brusquely that the telephone could be used only for official railway business, so I did something I had disliked doing even in the old days when we British were the overlords in India. I put on my *pukka sahib* act and began to shout, whereupon the wretched little clerk at once began to fawn. "As your honour wishes," he said, and handed me the telephone.

Rexaul, which we reached the next day, seemed in no way changed since I had last been there, thirty years before. We spent the night in the station. The terminus of the Nepalese railway was just inside the border, about a mile away across the fields: and since the only train left at six o'clock in the morning, I had told Ang Dawa to call us at five. When I awoke and looked at my watch it was already a quarter to six, so, without bothering to dress, I pulled on my boots and rushed across the frontier, hoping

that I could persuade the Nepalese station-master to delay the start of the train. He agreed to hold it up for ten minutes. Before leaving I shouted to Denys and Bette and told them to pack and follow me as quickly as possible. There was no sign of either Ang Dawa or the porters. The diminutive engine was belching steam and a bell clanged to announce its departure. I feared that it would leave without us, but while I was looking anxiously for the station-master, to plead for a further delay, I saw the rest of the party, headed by Bette and Denys, haring across the stubble, and I motioned to them to hurry. The train was already packed and some passengers had perched on the roof and buffers, but we managed to force ourselves into a carriage. We congratulated each other on having caught the train, but two hours later it was still standing in the station.

Among the passengers in our carriage was the local agent for the Royal Nepal Air Lines. On the far side of the Terai, about midway between Rexaul and the foothills, there was a small airfield at a place called Simra, from which we now learned there was a daily service to Kathmandu: a flight of forty minutes instead of the wearisome journey by road. Seats, it appeared, were available, so we bought them there and then. Ang Dawa and the porters would continue as arranged by road and rejoin us at Kathmandu. We kept back only our sleeping-bags.

Simra was no more than a dusty huddle of reed-thatched huts. The airfield was about a mile away, and as soon as the train had disappeared into the distance we walked across the fields, accompanied by the agent, who, as soon as he had despatched the aircraft, would return to Rexaul, where he lived, by the evening train. He now disclosed that no aeroplane had arrived at Simra for the last four days. But there was no need to worry. There had never before been such a delay and he was certain that we should get away this afternoon.

We joined the disconsolate huddle of passengers who were already waiting beside the mud-hut which was all the airfield offered by way of accommodation. The aeroplane was due to arrive at two, but there was no sign of it by four. "Never mind," said the agent; "it will surely come tomorrow."

We sauntered back to the station in search of a meal and found

a shack whose owner said he could provide us with hard-boiled eggs and tea. The down-train came puffing in soon after, and the agent, after assuring us that he would be back in the morning, left.

Fortunately we had our sleeping bags. The problem was to find a reasonably clean place in which to spread them. There was a tent pitched at the far end of the airstrip. It was partly filled with drums of petrol, but the ground was clean, and the man in charge said we could sleep there provided we neither smoked nor lit a lantern. He told us that he was a Christian from South India; and although it was strictly against his orders to let anyone use the tent, he could not, he said, refuse shelter to fellow-Christians in distress.

There was absolutely nothing to do, and although I had *The Brothers Karamazov* in my pocket I grew tired of reading after several hours. As soon as the light began to fail we went across to the station and had another meal of tea and hard-boiled eggs, after which we went to bed. It was too early to sleep, so we lay in our sleeping-bags and talked. At about ten o'clock the guardian unexpectedly arrived with a pot of tea. He squatted outside while we drank, and when we had finished he came inside. "It is bed-time now," he said, "but before we sleep let us kneel together and thank the Almighty for His many blessings." I pretended not to understand, and at last he went disconsolately away.

The night was very disturbed: not only was the ground hard and cold, but because of the great drop in temperature the petrol-drums by which we were surrounded contracted, so that every few minutes we were awakened by a noise like a pistol-shot. We got up before it was light and returned to the station. I felt that I could not face another meal of hard-boiled eggs, but there was no alternative. At ten o'clock the train from Rexaul arrived and on it was the airline agent, come again for his daily chore. We had now decided to continue by rail and road. We were dirty and unshaven, and felt that we could not wait indefinitely for a plane. But the agent was insistent. He reminded us that we had paid for our tickets and he was sure there would be no further delay. As soon as the train disappeared into the distance, I was sure that we had made a mistake.

Nothing happened during the morning, and towards two o'clock we had another meal of hard-boiled eggs. While we were squatting in the dust consuming it, we heard a distant buzzing, but it was too soon to know if this was merely an aircraft flying over on its way to India, or the one for which we had been waiting. But we were not taking any chances: and just as we arrived on the airfield, out of breath from running, we saw it coming in low over the trees to land. Five minutes later we were in the air. Our walk in the hills was over.

Part Five

I

A GREAT many changes had taken place in Kathmandu during the time we had been away. Parliamentary government was in suspense, the Prime Minister and several other senior ministers were under arrest, and the country was being run by a small committee of which the King had appointed himself chairman. Large numbers of civil servants had been arbitrarily dismissed, and of those who remained few troubled to attend their offices regularly. The Singha Durbar, the administrative headquarters, which had formerly been like an overcrowded ant-heap, was now deserted except for the few officials whose status was so lowly that they need not fear the loss of their jobs. The King had now been in command for over two months, but he had announced no policy; and while all kinds of rumours were circulating, everything was quiet, except in one respect: the main road, which ran beside the parade-ground, passed the King's Palace and came to an end at the Government Rest House (a former Rana residence now used to house State guests), was a toiling mass of labourers, among them hundreds of Tibetan refugees, who, long conditioned to begging, downed tools whenever a foreigner appeared and began, as though by some reflex action, to importune. Queen Elizabeth was shortly to visit Kathmandu, and apparently it had occurred to the authorities that the narrow unpaved street along which she would drive was unsuited to a royal progress. Unfortunately the road could not be widened without demolishing a number of houses. This was now being done, without reference to their owners. A proclamation informed them, however, that while the question of compensation would be considered, it was hoped that

only those in poor financial circumstances would press their claim. Meanwhile the work continued day and night, somewhat impeded by the sacred bulls, who saw no reason to desert their favourite pitches, and the manoeuvres of several steam-rollers, whose unskilled drivers, heedless of the workers all round them, urged their machines into a dangerous frenzy.

In extenuation of this wanton expense, a decision had long before been made to widen the road, but no action had been taken. Indeed no action was ever taken about anything: and assuming that conditions would remain as they were, an extremely expensive telephone system (a gift from the United States) had recently been installed. Now that the road was being widened, the telephone poles, instead of being at the side, were in the middle, so that a great deal of the apparatus had to be demolished and re-erected, at a cost of many thousands of dollars. I spoke one day to the engineer in charge, a weather-beaten type from the Middle West with an assumed contempt for the country from which his ancestors had emigrated. I had often passed the time of day with him, and he always addressed me as Limey. "See here," he said, "six months' work: and now the sons-of-bitches tell me to move everything. And it's for the benefit of *your* Queen." "Yes," I replied, "and the United States are paying for it." Like jesting Pilate, I did not stay for an answer.

The Durbar Square, the city's chief architectural glory, was also being refurbished. Many of the temples and other buildings are approached by brick steps which have weathered to a beautiful russet. The art of making these bricks has long been lost, and although some of the plinths and steps had begun to crumble, instead of being repaired, they were being buried under a thick coating of cement. The biggest of the temples are ornamented with a wealth of erotic carvings, many of which portray human figures locked in complicated embraces such as few but a professional cortortionist could sustain. In all of them the male organs are grossly exaggerated, presumably a wish-fulfilment, and the roofs are supported at each corner by a lintel carved in the form of a huge priapic demigod. Local newspaper-reports had suggested that some attempt should be made to conceal these amusing fantasies from Royal eyes. They were not normally

conspicuous from a distance, but they had now been crudely painted in primary colours, and nobody driving through the square could fail to notice the huge red, blue and yellow phalluses which seemed to dominate the place. But the square as a whole was temporarily ruined: it now looked like a garish film-set.

The little house at Chobar was not yet fully furnished, so for the first few days we stayed in Kathmandu. The tourist season was at its height and accommodation was difficult to find. Denys and Bette had found rooms in an Indian hostel, which was cheap but not inviting. I could have stayed there too, and later I wished I had, but I had reached the stage when I longed for a comfortable bed and unlimited hot water, neither of which was available in their primitive hospice. Eventually I found a vacant room in the Imperial Hotel, a former Rana Palace which appeared to have been neither cleaned nor repaired since it was built some fifty years before. My bedroom, the best in the place the manager assured me, was a damp cell from the walls of which the greenish moss-encrusted plaster was breaking away. There was one small window, unglazed, but closed by wooden shutters and heavily barred on the outside. In the adjoining bathroom a small tin dipper stood alone on a square of scummy concrete, and three stone steps led up to the closet, a mere hole above which, like a frog, one squatted in a spreadeagle position. But I noticed with satisfaction that the bathroom was provided with a water-tap and that the closet had been fitted with a flushing apparatus. Unfortunately during the three days of my stay neither of these conveniences worked: the city water-supply had been temporarily cut off so as to fill the tanks in the Royal guest-house. The charge for this accommodation was the equivalent of three pounds a day. Meals were included, but except for breakfast, which I do not normally eat, they were inedible.

But we had to eat somewhere and in due course we discovered *The Aroma*, described in the local English-language newspaper as "the only de-luxe restaurant in Nepal." I asked the manager why he had given the place this name. "Because," he said, fumbling for the English word, "it stinks good, yes?"

The Aroma, henceforth known to us as "The Stink," was a converted shop in the main shopping-street. The tables were

covered in grimy oilcloth, and the chairs, designed for Nepalese-size bottoms, were difficult to get into and out of. The walls were painted a bilious green, and at one end there was a large coloured oleograph of the King and Queen of Nepal, their jewels outlined in powdered tinsel. This was later joined by photographs, similarly adorned, of Queen Elizabeth and her consort. The lighting was arranged in brackets, of Indian *art-nouveau* design, in the form of contorted tulips, whose red, yellow and green bulbs pulsed dimly with the rise and fall of the electric current. Running the entire length of the ceiling was a neon strip which, between splutters, emitted a mauvish glow. When the whole apparatus was working, which was seldom, the occupants of the room appeared to have unhealthy grey complexions, and looked as though they were suffering from some terrible skin-disease.

The kitchen was outside, in an open courtyard at the back, and so long as one took care not to notice the cook, squatting in the midst of a pile of fly-covered refuse, the food was not bad. There was always an excellent curry: and when this palled, tea, toast and scrambled eggs. The only waiter, a cheerful Newar youth, had evidently been told that Europeans were fussy and although we tried to instruct him in our habits, we never succeeded in stopping him from wiping the plates with his grubby muffler.

The Aroma seemed to be patronised mostly by local wide boys and servants who worked in the American colony. We were soon accepted as part of the regular clientele, and by sitting and quietly listening I was able to overhear much of the city gossip. Only once did I see another foreigner in the place, when an American woman in tight-fitting trousers, which exaggerated the size of her ample thighs, breezed in. She appeared to be suffering from a hangover and demanded a glass of milk. "I want it pasteurised," she said; "you understand, pasteurised?" "Yes," said the manager, "milk: I understand." When the glass of thin bluish liquid, which all over Asia passes for milk, was put before her, she gulped it down and fled. After she had gone the manager came over to our table. "Please," he said, "what is meaning of pasteurised?"

We became extremely fond of *The Aroma* and used it as a meeting-place whenever we came in from Chobar on shopping

expeditions. Nearly all Americans seem to have a pathological fear of germs, and our acquaintances, when they heard where we ate, were deeply shocked at our indifference to possible infection. I am one of those fortunate individuals whose stomach seldom revolts when it is ill-treated, and in the event none of us was any the worse for our frequent visits to *The Aroma*.

During our walk through the hills we had not suffered the slightest illness, although, except for drinking no water, we took no particular precautions. I was telling an American acquaintance one day that, far from feeling exhausted, I had not felt so fit for many years. "Don't be so sure," he threatened in a gloomy voice. "You may be suffering from all sorts of disease; and unless you have a thorough check-up, you will be in trouble later." He was really perplexed when I explained that in England we do not go to the doctor unless we are ill.

After a few days we moved out to Chobar. The walls and floor of the cottage were now dry and clean, but there was still much to do to make the place habitable. We dug a deep pit in the garden and surrounded it with matting, thus doing away with the necessity for a morning stroll in the nearby fields. But the furniture we had ordered two months before was still not ready, so for the first few weeks we slept on the earthen floor. Bette did the cooking, squatting over a primus-stove in a corner. She seemed to enjoy this domestic drudgery, but I decided that we must have some assistance. My motive was not entirely altruistic: I was disinclined to spend my remaining weeks in helping with the housework, which, in the primitive conditions of our existence, seemed to be unending.

We had found the cottage by chance, when a young man, seeing me looking about, had come up and asked what I wanted. Vikram, it transpired, was a Chetri, the next highest caste below that of Brahman, and his family, which was well-to-do, owned most of the houses in the lower part of Chobar. He was about nineteen, spoke a little English, and took pride in being a member of the new and emancipated generation which had thrown off the shackles of caste, or so he thought. The cottage had been unoccupied for some months, and although it did not belong to Vikram's family, it was enclosed by their property and he himself had undertaken

to look after it. Before leaving for the mountains we had executed a legal agreement, the terms of which entitled us to live in the cottage for a year. Now that we had moved in, our troubles began. Nobody came near us, and the villagers, whenever we met them on the path, passed by with averted faces. Only Vikram paid us an occasional visit, and I began to notice that his manner had changed: there was obviously something on his mind. He admitted that he was worried, but not until I pressed him would he tell me the cause of the trouble. We were not, it transpired, welcome in the village. Most of the simple peasant householders were disposed to be friendly, but the three or four local Brahmans had warned them to boycott us: our presence, they said, was defiling and boded nothing but evil for the village. They realised that we had a legal right to remain, but by making our life as uncomfortable as possible, they hoped to drive us away. Vikram admitted that he was on our side, but he was a weak character, and although he considered himself to be emancipated, he had not the strength to stand up to his Brahman-dominated family. I told him that we needed a couple of servants, and that if the local people were prevented from working for us, I would import them from the city, whose inhabitants, now accustomed to foreigners, were less fussy about the rules of caste.

One of Vikram's uncles lived in a large house on the slope immediately behind our cottage. He was a rich man and much disliked. Most of the villagers, including his own relatives, were in his debt. Vikram detested him, but he was the senior member of his family and had thus to be consulted about the question of our servants. I said that I myself would call upon him, but he sent back a message to say that if I entered his house it would subsequently need to be ceremonially re-purified, and he would therefore come to see me. I took an instant dislike to him. He assumed a fawning politeness, and said what an honour it was to have us in the village. But why, he asked, had we no servants? Fortunately he knew of a man who was in need of a job, the son of a friend, and he would send him down to see us.

The next morning a shifty-looking youth was waiting outside when we came down to breakfast. I asked him what he wanted. "I am your cook," he said, but when I asked him what sort of

work he had previously done, he became sullen and evasive. I did not like the look of him, but I said I would make some enquiries: meanwhile, he could go away.

In the evening, after it was dark, Vikram came again. "Have you," he asked, "engaged that man sent by my uncle?" I said I had not and that I had formed a most unfavourable opinion of him. Vikram smiled. "He has just been released from gaol," he said. "He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for house-breaking. His father owes my uncle so much money that he can no longer pay the interest and has been forced to hand over all his property. He is now my uncle's bondsman and if his son works for you he won't have to be provided for."

Some days later another candidate appeared, a well-mannered youth of pleasant appearance. He was only fifteen, and so shy that at first his speech was confined to monosyllables. After a great deal of prompting he admitted that he had never worked as a servant: he had no idea of what was required but said that in no circumstances would he cook or wait at table, since this would mean forfeiture of caste. I asked him why, in these circumstances, he had come. He had been sent, he said, by one of the village Brahmans. He was about to be married, and if he worked for us his wages would help towards the very considerable expenses of the marriage ceremony which his father, who was poor and already in debt, could ill afford.

The boy was obviously intelligent and although he was no use to us as a servant he seemed worthy of help, so I told him to send his father to see me.

A day or so later he called. He was a well-bred Chetri, a subordinate official in the police service: sophisticated in a way, but obsessed by caste-prejudice. Not wishing to give offence, he accepted a cup of tea, but I noticed that he could not bring himself to touch it: nor would he light the cigarette I gave him.

We discussed the son's forthcoming marriage. It would be necessary, he said, to entertain about seventy relatives and friends: there would have to be musicians and monetary presents for all the local Brahmans, who would otherwise not bless the union. The total cost, he said, would amount to about a hundred-and-fifty pounds. His own wages were fifteen pounds a month, and

he was already indebted to a Brahman for the expense of an elder son's marriage, and could not pay the ever-mounting interest. But he owned a couple of fields and a few cattle. He supposed that in due course he would have to hand them over to his creditor. I asked him if he knew that the Government had fixed an official rate of interest for loans, to exceed which was a criminal offence. Yes, he was aware of this; but justice could not be obtained without bribery, so that in the end there was no difference, except that the Brahmans would ostracise him and refuse any further loans.

I decided to try another line of thought. Did he not think, I asked, that his son was not yet ready to be married: he was only fifteen and young for his age. And if he was prepared to squander all this money, would it not be better to spend it on the boy's education?

He did not even pause before replying. This was the proper season for weddings, he said, and the Brahmans had already calculated that the present year was particularly auspicious for his son. Not for many years would the constellations again be so favourable. There was a further point, which perhaps I did not understand: he was a man of some standing in the community, and as a member of one of the higher castes he had an obligation to set an example to society. He admitted that no great harm would come if his son was not immediately married. On the other hand it was a mark of respectability to get one's children wedded at the earliest possible age: to do so was a sign of affluence and increased the esteem in which one was held in the village. As for education, he was on the whole in favour of it, but he felt it to be a luxury: certainly not something on which to spend good money.

A week or so later we were awakened one morning by the sound of conch-shells and went down to see what was happening. It was the young bridegroom setting out in procession to fetch his bride. He was being carried, as is the custom, in a litter. He was dressed in new white clothes, and wearing a tinsel hat. The procession, consisting of male relatives and an assembly of Brahmans, was preceded by three musicians, the blaring of whose battered instruments vied with that of the sacerdotal conches.

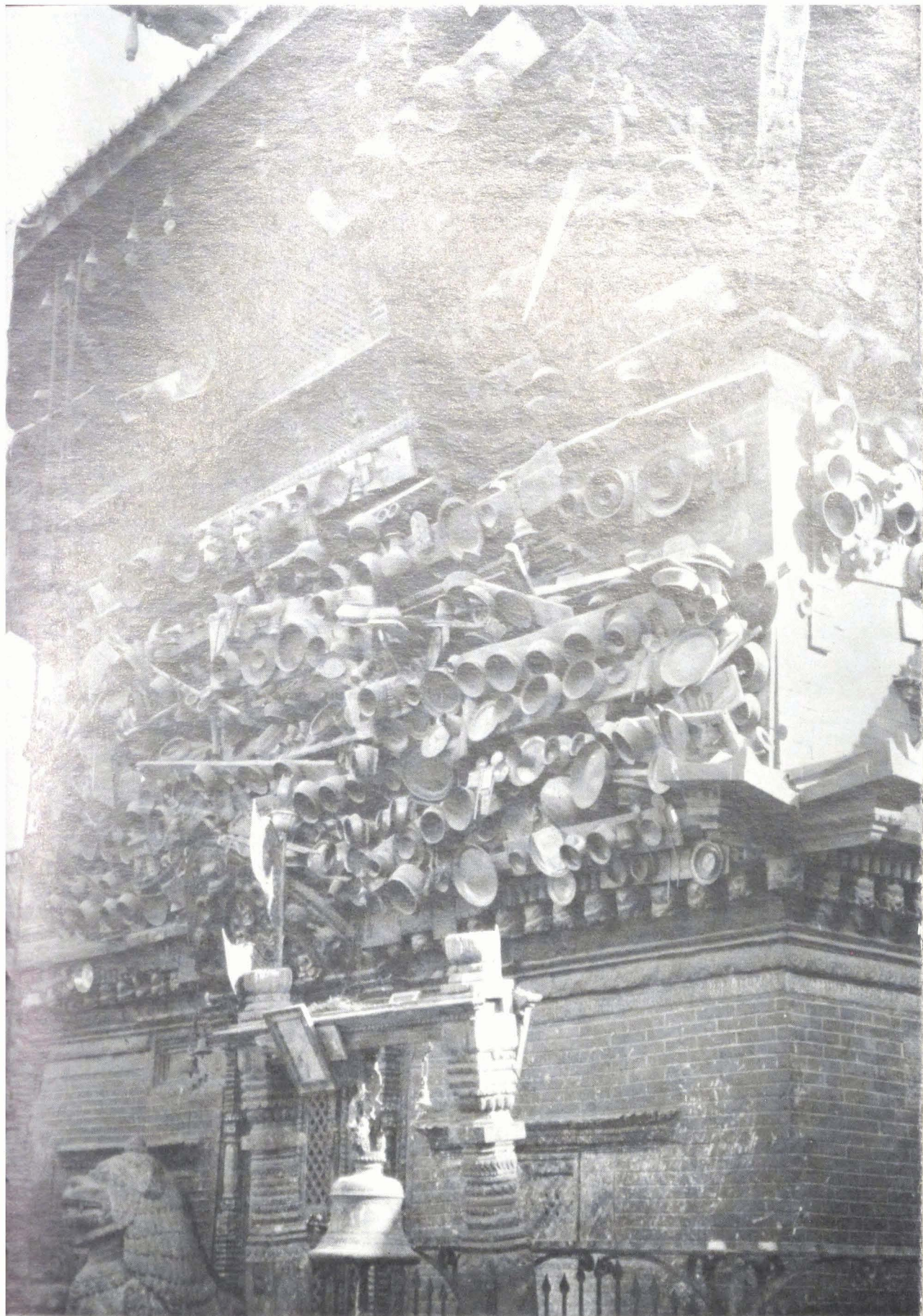
There was something familiar about the music, but at first I did not know what it was. The conches were silent for a moment and I then realised that the band was playing its own version of "For he's a jolly good fellow," out of tune and transformed into a dirge. A few hours later the procession returned with the bride. She, too, was in a litter, and concealed from the public view by a sheet which completely covered her. The musical din continued throughout the night and when we came down to breakfast it was still going on. This, the end of the winter season, was the customary time for weddings. There were several every week, either in our own village or nearby, and before long we grew accustomed to the almost continuous din of raucous trumpeting in the distance, punctuated by the throb of drums.

We were still without servants, and since the nearest water was two hundred yards away, at the bottom of a steep incline, life was becoming something of a burden. At this time we made the acquaintance of the village headman who, I now learned, had been warned by the Brahmans to have nothing to do with us. I had tried before to get in touch with him, but without success: he was either away or too ill to see anyone: the answers were always evasive and conflicting, and I had come to assume that he wished to avoid having to take responsibility for our presence in the village: this was best done by refusing to acknowledge our existence.

I now learned that my assumptions were wide of the mark. In Kathmandu and the other cities in the Valley, local government was now in the hands of men who were hoping eventually to enter politics, the profession which, in the present corrupt state of the country, offered the greatest opportunities of quickly amassing a fortune. But Chobar, although only a few miles from the capital, was still a village, and it was administered, like the other rural parts of the country, on the old *panchayat*, or patriarchal, system which had been originally imported from India. Moreover, Chobar, although it contained a number of wealthy Brahman and Chetri families, was primarily a Newar village, and thus it came about that our headman himself was a Newar. He was neither an elder nor wealthy, but he derived his title from long hereditary association with local affairs. He could read and write but was

otherwise uneducated. Nevertheless he was a man of unusual intelligence and, much rarer, completely honest. He sincerely believed that when the Ranas had been deposed Nepal would be administered in the interests of the majority, and although he was now disillusioned by recent events, he still hoped that things would come right in the end. He believed, he said, that the Prime Minister had been unjustly accused by the King of corruption, but when the former was arrested he had thought it prudent, as a known supporter of Mr Koirala, to go into hiding. All this had happened while we were away in the hills. The political situation had now quietened down, and although officials were still being arrested or at least deprived of their jobs, the Headman had felt it safe to return. He apologised for being absent when we had arrived; told us to ignore the Brahmans, and said he would do everything possible to make our stay comfortable. Yes, he said, certainly he could provide us with servants: there were, it appeared, a number of youths who were anxious for employment, but they had been warned by the Brahmans to keep away from us.

The next morning a couple of candidates appeared, both of them Chetris. The elder was in his thirties. He was afflicted with some rare and peculiar hereditary malformation of the bones, from which his father and son also suffered, but except that it made him clumsy and apt to drop things, he was not disabled. His companion, an exceedingly well-built youth of about twenty, had been deaf and dumb since the age of two, when he had contracted some disease which had gone untreated. He had a bright intelligent face and I gathered from his companion that he was desperately anxious to work for us. It occurred to me that his disability, far from being a handicap, might actually be an advantage. I was due to leave for England shortly, and although neither Bette nor Denys had been able to pick up more than a few words of the local language, they could obviously communicate with a deaf and dumb man as easily as I could. We did not really need two servants, but since the elder of these two was apparently the only man who was able to communicate fully with the younger, we engaged them both. There seemed to be some para-normal bond between them. The mute boy watched his companion with the expression of a trained gun-dog waiting for its order. He could not lip-read, but he



45. Chobar: ex-voto offerings of household utensils at a Newar temple dedicated to the god of food.



46. Mount Everest region of Eastern Nepal: the actual frontier between Tibet and Nepal. The last Sherpa village can be seen in the bottom left-hand corner. This is typical of the country which Tibetan refugees have to cross in order to reach Nepal.

seemed to know instinctively what was required of him. Very occasionally he did not understand and when this happened his face became contorted with anger and he emitted a strange noise, half-howl, half-canine whine. His desperate anxiety to understand was pathetic to observe, but when comprehension came, like a flash of lightning, he beamed with pleasure. He seemed to be happy in his silent world. In the village he was known by the Nepali word for mute, which is also used to denote an idiot. I felt it was unkindly offensive, and could not bring myself to use it. But he had been so long thus known that nobody, not even his own father, remembered his real name. We called him Dumbo, which was equally offensive, but only in an English connotation, and because the word was easy to pronounce he soon became known by this name to the rest of the village. The other man's name was Kali.

With the help of these two we began to make the cottage more habitable. I was not much use, since I am one of those people who cannot even knock a nail in without damaging my thumb. Also a long residence in various parts of the East had bred in me an aversion to any form of manual labour: I had long been accustomed to the idea that, in the Orient, Europeans do not work with their hands. It was an absurd and outdated convention, but inhibitions acquired in youth are not easily eliminated. Denys, on the other hand, had no troubles of this sort, and was not only willing but had the skill to turn his hand to anything. He worked on an average about ten hours a day, plastering the walls and floors, fitting up a bathroom and kitchen and generally improving the place. Although he could not talk to anyone, his influence on the villagers was considerable. They naturally assumed that, as foreigners, we were rich, and indeed by local standards we were. Obviously we had no need to work, and no Nepali in our financial circumstances would have dreamt of soiling his hands. Denys's incessant labours were at first thought to be a form of eccentric meanness, but after a time they began to be regarded with admiration. The Headman told me that the villagers, scornful at first, were greatly impressed; not so much by Denys's practical knowledge as by his readiness and ability to tackle any job, however dirty. Once the Brahmans realised that we were capable of looking after

ourselves and that they were powerless to drive us away, the tension eased and we began to be accepted, particularly by the younger people. We were in Nepal solely for our own pleasure, but as the months in Chobar passed I began to realise that our mere presence in the village was beginning to have some effect: several people asked us to give their children lessons, and others, observing how much the cottage had been improved, begged for the loan of paint-brushes and tools.

Our greatest pride was the bathroom, which had formerly been a goat-shed. Denys constructed a sloping cement floor, and in one corner installed a large steel petrol-drum on an iron stand, below which a small kerosene stove was kept constantly burning. Dumbo filled the drum every morning, so that we had a constant supply of hot water. This contraption soon became famous in the village, and many people came to inspect it, but, listening to their remarks, it was clear that they saw no purpose in making water hot: this, they felt, was merely a foreign eccentricity.

The one disadvantage of the Chobar cottage, which we could not overcome, was the windows. They were unglazed, so on cold days we were forced to close the wooden shutters and thus exclude all daylight.

As the fame of our house spread, the titular owner, an old woman who lived at Patan, felt moved to pay us a visit. She inspected every corner, and although she did not say much, her astonishment was obvious. The next morning, when we came down to breakfast, she was squatting in front of the door and a youngish man sat beside her. I asked him what they wanted. "Nothing," he replied nonchalantly, without making any attempt to move. I knew this was merely the usual opening gambit, so I left the pair alone and went inside to have my coffee. After a time Kali came in and hovered, clearing his throat nervously, as he always did before speaking. I asked him what he wanted. "The old woman," he said, "she desires to have speech with you." I told him to show the couple in.

They shuffled into the room, the woman going immediately to a corner, where she squatted down like a well-trained dog. They accepted cigarettes, which, after lighting, they held between the first and second fingers, drawing the smoke through their clenched

fists so as to avoid contaminating their lips with a foreigner's gift. For a few minutes they smoked in silence, after which I decided it was time to begin the conversation. "No," the man said in answer to my enquiry, there was nothing they wanted, nothing at all: they had merely come to see if we were comfortable. The couple relapsed once more into silence and we remained eyeing one another. I was wondering how to get rid of them when the old woman cleared her throat, spat on the floor and addressed her companion. "Go on," she said, "tell him what I want."

He took a long time coming to the point. I was given a detailed family history, told about the poor state of this year's crops and the difficulties of life in general. The discourse ended, as I knew it would, in a statement of the old woman's abject poverty, and then, after a pause for breath, the object of the visit was revealed: it was not a request, but a demand. We had, by our improvements, so much increased the value of the house that the rent we were paying was now disproportionate and the owner therefore proposed to treble it. I reminded her that we had signed an agreement, but she considered this to be in no way binding. The fact was, she said, that if we vacated the cottage she could now let it (I heard Americans mentioned) at a very much higher rent. She had no desire to turn us out, but she proposed to do so unless we agreed to her demands. I suggested that her logic was worthy of a London speculating landlord, but the irony of my remark was lost. I laughed, and after a time the pair joined in. We never saw either of them again.

Dumbo spent most of his time fetching water and carrying the rocks and stones that Denys wanted for his building. He watched everything with the utmost concentration and seemed never to forget: the only thing that worried him was any slight departure from what had become our normal routine, because the reason could not be explained. He was fascinated by our two petrol-lamps, and every afternoon, when they were cleaned and filled, he stood transfixed. I surmised that he wanted to be given charge of them, but they needed careful handing and we had given strict orders to Kali not to touch them. Two or three times each week we went into Kathmandu for shopping, and since the Headman

had warned us never to leave the cottage untended, we generally left Dumbo alone on guard. As soon as he understood what was required he beamed with pleasure at the responsibility and appeared with an enormous sacrificial khukri with which he squatted, like a sentinel at his post, in front of the door. We were generally away for no more than an hour or two, but one day we had been delayed and did not get back until after dark. Dumbo was in his accustomed position. He greeted us with a glum expression, annoyed, I supposed, at having been left so long deserted. But as soon as we entered the house we were confronted with the sight of a minor disaster. Wishing to be helpful, Dumbo had decided to light the lamp, the blackened components of which now lay in a neat pile on the ground. The mantle had disintegrated, the glass was cracked and the table was covered in a pall of smuts: there was a puddle on the floor. I was thinking how lucky we were that the cottage had not been burned to the ground, when Denys, who is given to sudden bursts of temper, gave vent to his feelings. We stared at each other and then he, suddenly realising the impossibility of asking for an explanation, collapsed in helpless laughter. Meanwhile Dumbo had been standing by, looking like a dog that knows it has done wrong and is waiting to be punished, and when he saw us laughing the situation was beyond his comprehension: he went away shaking his head. The next morning he arrived with a peace-offering; a large bunch of flowering branches. He plonked them down on the table and pointed in the direction of the house above. I gathered, with some satisfaction, that he had filched them from the hedge of our usurious neighbour.

Some weeks later Kali said that Dumbo wanted to absent himself for a couple of days and asked if it would be all right. Hitherto, it appeared, there had been no question of his marrying: he was not a wage-earner, and since the family was poor no girl's father was willing to consider an alliance with a youth who was deaf and dumb. However, now that he was in regular employment the situation was changed. His wages amounted to no more than a couple of pounds a month, but to a man in his position they represented wealth, especially as he had never before been able to earn even a penny-piece. A prospective bride had been found

in some distant village and Dumbo wanted leave to go and inspect her. The day before, he appeared in a brand-new suit of clothes and wearing shoes, although normally he went bare-foot. The money for this finery had, in the usual way, been borrowed.

The local marriage-customs were no concern of ours, but I was nevertheless distressed at the thought of some young girl being tied for life, almost certainly against her will, to a deaf mute. I was not, however, prepared for the outcome of this proposed union. Dumbo returned with a satisfied grin on his face and I assumed that all had gone well; and so it had, but not from the family's point of view. He had spent a day with the girl's family and had then turned her down. While Kali was explaining what had happened, Dumbo, who was standing by, screwed up his face into a grotesque and scowling expression, indicating displeasure. He had refused the girl, it appeared, because she was not sufficiently good-looking. His father was naturally furious, but Dumbo himself was a changed character: for the first time in his life he had been given the chance to make a decision and in doing so had defied his family. At the time I left he was still happily unmarried.

As the months passed we gradually got to know a great deal about the private lives of our two servants. Dumbo, because of his infirmity, was a special case, but Kali was typical and his circumstances well illustrate the difficulties involved in introducing social reforms, without which there can never be progress in Nepal.

He owned a couple of small fields which produced just enough to feed himself, his wife and two children. In the off-season he worked as a casual labourer, generally on road-mending, and the money he thus earned provided the family with a few simple luxuries; an occasional meat-meal, a few cigarettes, and so on. By local standards, since he had been able to avoid getting into debt, he was comfortably off. Unfortunately his wife was a termagant and he lacked the moral courage to stand up to her. She had decided that, for reasons of prestige, her husband must own a buffalo, and although the animal, beyond providing a daily cup or two of watery milk, was of little practical use, Kali

had been nagged into buying it. His troubles began from this time.

The cost of the buffalo was a hundred rupees (a little more than seven pounds), but since Kali did not possess so much he borrowed it from our nearest neighbour who, by means of foreclosure, was well on the way towards becoming the biggest owner of property in the village. The rate of interest was fifteen rupees a month, which in a single year amounted to nearly double the original loan. Kali had found it impossible to pay the monthly interest and had indeed been forced to take a further loan. He was already well advanced upon the road to bankruptcy and in a year or two would, for all practical purposes, have become the slave of his creditor.

We decided to help him by settling the debt, which he could repay by a small weekly deduction from his wages. I was astonished when he refused our offer. Such an arrangement, he said, was not in accordance with the customs of the country: his fellow-villagers would say that he had sold himself to us and they would ostracise him. Moreover it was apparent that he himself felt there must be some catch in our suggestion, since nobody, least of all a rich foreigner, lent money without charging interest. Finally I was able to convince him that we had no ulterior motive and he agreed that we should settle his debt. This, however, was not the end of the matter, for the money-lender refused to have the loan repaid. He was in no need of cash and the last thing he wanted was that Kali should escape from his clutches. But I was determined not to be defeated by this bloodsucker and sent a message asking him to come to the cottage. A few days later he called. His manner was again obsequious but when I began to talk business he changed his tone and became offensive. We were not welcome in the village, he said, for it was now obvious that we were trying to upset long-established local custom. I asked him if he was aware of the official government rate for lending money. He was, he said, but only a fool would advance a loan for such a poor return. I was rapidly losing my temper and at last I told him what I had made up my mind to do: either he would accept a sum in full discharge of Kali's debt or I would go in person and report him to the Finance Ministry for evading the regulations. He

knew as well as I did that the Ministry would not bring a case, since he was in a position to offer a suitable bribe, but when he realised that I was determined, he crumpled and agreed to be repaid. I told him that I would hand the money over in Kali's presence and later that day he returned with the paper on which Kali, who could neither read nor write, had impressed his grubby thumb-mark. I tore it up in their presence, but Kali, far from seeming pleased at being freed from an intolerable burden, looked as though he felt the heavens were about to open and wreak vengeance upon him for flaunting local custom. I asked him what the trouble was now, and after the money-lender had departed he told me, shaking his head slowly as he did so. "He is a very rich man," he said, "and you will not always be here."

Kali soon developed into an excellent servant and after a time he revealed an unexpected talent for stone-masonry. The space in front of our cottage was of rammed earth, but the surface was uneven. When the rainy season came it would obviously become water-logged, so we decided to lay down paving-stones. Dumbo and Kali were at first employed in foraging for the necessary stone, which had then to be trimmed and the pieces fitted together like a jig-saw puzzle. They watched Denys at work; and while Dumbo had not the slightest feeling for pattern, or even a straight line, Kali immediately took charge of the project. He was a perfectionist and would often stay, long after his normal working hours, chipping away at the stones and fitting them neatly together. I surmised that he liked to be away from home as long as possible, for only when his raucous-voiced wife shouted across the valley would he down tools and go. Like many of these people he was a natural craftsman, but he had never been given the chance to develop his gifts.

He remained, however, a feckless character, and our effort to make him solvent, far from being helpful, led only to financial disaster. He began to ask for occasional days off. I did not ask the reason, but when his requests became unduly frequent I pressed him to tell me what was going on. He was at first evasive, but finally, like a naughty child that has decided to confess to some wrong-doing, he burst into tears and confessed. His wife had forced him into accepting responsibility for the wedding of her

widowed sister's son. She had convinced him that not only was this a family obligation he could not decently refuse, but as a man who was now earning good money he could well afford the expense. He had therefore gone again to the money-lender and taken a loan of a thousand rupees (about eighty pounds), in security for which he had mortgaged his entire possessions. I asked him angrily why it was necessary to squander all this money, a sum that was relatively far in excess of what even an English social-climber would be prepared to spend on such an occasion: in fact it would beggar him for the rest of his life. "It is the custom," he sobbed. "There will be two hundred guests, nine musicians and six Brahmans who must be fed for several days and provided with new clothes. And please," he concluded with an attempt at a smile, "will you let me borrow your petrol-lamp?"

Vikram, our landlady's agent, used often to drop in during the evenings. He was typical of the generation that had grown up in the turmoil caused by the revolution, and thought of himself as one of the country's future leaders. His ancestors had come with Prithwi Narayan from Gurkha, and one of his uncles had attained the rank of general in the Nepalese army. However, two hundred years of residence in Kathmandu had cooled the family's military ardour, and although they belonged to one of the martial castes, they had for a long time been engaged in trade. They were not rich, but they were very comfortably off; and because Vikram's ancestors had in the past rendered service to the state, education had not been denied him and he was sent to the school which the Maharaja had founded for training the sons of minor palace-officials, whom they were expected in due course to replace. He regarded himself as an emancipated intellectual, but in fact he was neither. His education would not have enabled him to obtain even any kind of certificate, and although he made fun of the ignorance and superstition of his fellow-villagers, he lacked the moral courage to defy his family and strike out on a line of his own. In only one way had he shown initiative: he had refused absolutely to be married. He had no objections to matrimony as such and said that when the time came he would choose a wife for himself. I suspect, however, that he was incapable of sexual relations, since his under-sized body appeared to be devoid of

muscle, and he was always tired. He was nineteen years old and one of the poorest physical specimens of the human race I have ever encountered. Through the influence of his family he had obtained a post in the Nepal State Bank, but he did not take his duties very seriously and often stayed away for several days at a time, apparently without being reprimanded.

In theory he refused to subscribe to the rules of caste which proscribed eating in company with those of a lower social order, but in practice he could not bring himself altogether to disregard them. We often asked him to stay and share our meal, but he always made some excuse for refusing: he would accept a cup of tea and a biscuit, and then only if the servants were not present. It is easy to deride what seems to us a ridiculous prohibition, a bar to normal social intercourse, but in a society which for many hundreds of years has lived in the belief that to eat in company with strangers is ritually contaminating, the equivalent of mortal sin, it is difficult openly to flaunt accepted custom unless one is prepared to be regarded as an outcast, and Vikram had not yet reached that stage of emancipation.

During March there was a partial eclipse of the moon, an occurrence that is regarded by strict Hindus with great solemnity, a time of danger. A national holiday had been proclaimed, since, to avert any possible disaster, it was considered essential for everybody to take a ritual bath in one or other of the sacred rivers which flow through the Nepal Valley. Soon after dawn we saw large numbers of villagers making their way down to the Bagmati, which ran through a gorge below our cottage. Drumming, to keep evil influences at bay, continued throughout the day, and after the visit to the river everyone stayed at home. The fields were deserted and a hush had fallen over the village. A strict fast had been enjoined: the Brahmans had proclaimed that nobody might eat or drink for twenty-four hours. We too were deserted since our servants wished to observe the rules.

In the evening Vikram came to see us. He was bored, he said, with the atmosphere of solemn piety at home and wanted conversation. Also he was hungry, so we gave him the usual tea and biscuits. His mother was a woman of rigid orthodoxy and he had deeply offended her by refusing to take part in the ceremonial

visit to the river. I had for some time been urging him to stand up for his own beliefs and was delighted that my reasoning had begun to take effect. He agreed that there could never be any progress in Nepal until all this superstition and caste-ritual were cleared away, and that his own generation was the one to do it. However, that night I had gone for a short stroll before turning in and saw a figure approaching in the distance. The village was normally deserted as soon as darkness fell, so I waited to see who the prowler was. Vikram was returning from a belated visit to the river. "I told you," he said, "that I didn't believe in these superstitions, but my mother was so upset that I decided to go and bathe. There was no harm; and you never know, there may be something in it."

The political situation was still unstable. Officials were constantly being summarily dismissed and Vikram himself began to worry about the future. His sponsor in the bank had been retired into obscurity and now that he was without a protector he expected, since he had no qualifications, to be soon replaced by some new official's equally inefficient nephew. He had decided, therefore, to protect himself by studying for the intermediate examination in economics and banking, in which subjects the college in Kathmandu issued a certificate, and he asked me to help him. I explained that I was ignorant of finance and indeed of economics, but I thought I could perhaps assist him to improve his English and general education.

After the first few lessons it became apparent that in Vikram's mind there was no practical connection between economics and the problems of his own country. I tried to interest him in the geography of Nepal, of which he was almost totally ignorant. He had heard of Mount Everest, but he was uncertain of its exact position, but when I talked to him about the Sherpas and their desperate economic plight he asked me who they were. When he was at school, he said, the geography lessons had contained no reference to Nepal. I was unable to convince him of the importance of the subject. He believed that the future of his country was entirely a matter of the modernisation and improvement of conditions in Kathmandu, and that nothing else was of the slightest importance. This attitude was typical: it was the exact reverse of

that in the hills, where I had found that the people were totally disinterested in what went on in the capital. The effect of this is that at present Nepal is for all practical purposes two separate countries: the Kathmandu Valley and the mountain districts in the interior.

2

I HAD now been in Nepal for six months and although I could happily have stayed on at Chobar I began to hunger for Europe. Denys and Bette were by this time at home in the village and I felt that naturally they would now like to have the cottage to themselves. Besides, the splendour of the winter season was over: the landscape was beginning to turn a uniform tint of brown and already a hot wind blew across the valley. Sometimes a sudden gust would rustle the leaves of a large pipul tree outside my window with a sound like pattering raindrops. The sun was often obscured for days at a time, and the snowy peaks hidden behind a blanket of gathering clouds. Not until the following October would they once again stand out in all their glory, as they had when I first arrived.

My one regret was that I had seen nothing of the country to the east of Kathmandu. Just before leaving, however, I had a stroke of luck. The International Red Cross had recently imported a little Porter-Pilatus aircraft with which to drop food to the several thousand Tibetan refugees who were at present waiting, until they could be permanently settled in another part of Nepal, near the frontier, in the high country occupied by the Sherpas. Dr Toni Hagen, who was in charge of the operation, asked me if I would like to go with him on one of the trips. I was particularly glad to do so, not only for the chance of getting a bird's-eye view of Eastern Nepal but because we should fly over the southern approaches to Mount Everest, which I had previously seen only from the Tibetan side, when I was a member of the 1922 and 1936 expeditions.

Flying in a light aeroplane among mountains is always slightly tricky, and although our Swiss pilot was highly experienced in this sort of thing, some days passed before he judged the weather good enough for our purpose.

I had flown many thousands of miles in commercial aircraft, but it was so long since I had been in a light aeroplane that I had forgotten what the experience was like. As soon as we were clear of the Valley we climbed to four or five thousand feet, an ideal height for observing the countryside, which was in general more arid and less tangled than western Nepal. After about thirty minutes we began to circle and lose height rapidly and I thought we were about to make a forced landing. Toni Hagen, who was sitting beside the pilot, shouted to tell me what was happening, but the noise of the engine prevented me from hearing what he said, so he scribbled a note and passed it over. We were passing over the dairy farm where the excellent cheese which had sustained us on our walk was made, and although we could not land we were going down to a few hundred feet to greet the lonely Swiss farmer in charge. He came out and waved, and after circling his cottage a few times we climbed once again on our way.

We altered course and made straight for the Himalayas, climbing to about sixteen thousand feet. Sola Khambu and the other Sherpa villages soon came into view and we could clearly see the Tibetan tents. We nosed our way into the valley, but at first, so great was the air-current coming down from the huge mountains in front of us, we made no headway: the aircraft began to flutter like a leaf, helpless in the wind, and I wondered what would happen if our single engine stalled. The cabin was not pressurised and because of the lack of oxygen I was beginning to feel sick and listless, but I was able to rouse myself sufficiently to take a few photographs.

As soon as it was apparent that we could make no further headway, the pilot turned the aircraft and tried to approach through another valley. This time we were successful and as soon as we had got right into the tangle of ice-covered mountains and glaciers we came down and circled over the area, but by this time I was too frightened to enjoy the spectacle.

When we landed again at Kathmandu the pilot laughed when

I confessed to my fears. There was not really much danger, he said; the Porter-Pilatus is so light and easy to fly that it can if necessary be crash-landed almost anywhere, but if we had come down in the Sola Khambu area it would have meant a walk of five weeks back to Kathmandu. A few months after I left Nepal this particular Porter-Pilatus did meet with disaster: it was forced down by a sudden change in the weather and crashed into an ice-wall, fortunately without loss of life.

I had now seen everything I wanted, so I arranged to leave on 24 March. Denys and Bette motored me out to the airport where, unexpectedly, a few other friends had gathered to see me off. One of them insisted, Nepali fashion, in hanging a garland of marigolds round my neck and I stood there feeling foolish but unwilling to give offence by casting the flowers aside. The Delhi aeroplane was two hours late in arriving. We tried to pass the time recounting our care-free weeks in the hills, but normal conversation was difficult and we became strangely ill at ease. I am not an emotional person, but I had formed a great affection for my two young friends and only in silence could I express my feelings for them. When at last we were ready to leave I embraced Bette and walked quickly out to the throbbing Dakota. A few minutes later we were in the air and even before we had cleared the Valley the landscape was blotted out by a thick blanket of cloud.

I had planned this winter in Nepal in a spirit of catharsis: a last trip to the Himalayas, where in the past I had spent so many happy months. I had convinced myself that this was the end; that never again should I wander in the mountains. By the time we arrived at Delhi I was not so sure, and when we landed, in a torrent of rain, at London, I had made up my mind. This was not the end, but only a new beginning.

Epilogue

Epilogue

IN visiting Nepal I did not intend to write about politics: my interest was in seeing what life in the hills was like. Nevertheless I feel it would be helpful briefly to describe the situation in Kathmandu as I observed it, if only to refute the frequent press reports, most of which emanate from disgruntled Nepalese politicians exiled in India, that the country is undergoing a reign of terror. Up to the time I left, towards the end of March 1961, there was not the slightest indication of such a state of affairs, and letters which I have been getting regularly confirm that the situation has in no way changed.

Since the revolution of 1951 Nepal has had ten different Governments, none of which accomplished anything of note. The King seems to have realised that his country was not yet suited to democratic government; and this was doubtless his motive for suspending parliament in 1960 and appointing himself as chairman of a Council of State. There is, however, no reason to suppose that conditions are now either better or worse than they were before, or that the future of Nepal is secure.

Difficulties arise from two main causes: the extreme poverty of Nepal, which has led the Government to accept financial and other aid from a variety of sources, and the peculiar situation of Nepal in relation to the Republic of India.

Although Nepal has always been an independent country, the British Indian Government was regarded, by tacit consent, as its Protector. The present Government of India, rightly I think, considers that it has inherited Britain's former role: other things apart, any threat to Nepal cannot but be the concern also of India,

and it is in the interest of both countries that there should be the closest co-operation between them.

Unfortunately relations between Nepal and India have steadily deteriorated. The Nepalese, like most other hill-people, have always had a traditional dislike for the dwellers in the plains, and the situation has been worsened by the sometimes tactless and insensitive pronouncements of the Indian Government. Subordinate officials are often needlessly obstructive. Materials and goods from the outside world can be imported into Nepal only through India, and although there is a customs agreement between the two countries, consignments are held up for months before they are grudgingly released.

But Nepalese arrogance, also, has not been conducive to good relations. I presume that this is based on a simple historical fact: India, until recently, was a subject country, whereas Nepal has always prided itself on its independence. This independence, however, was purely theoretical and a matter of expediency: if it had suited Britain, there would have been no insuperable difficulty in annexing Nepal, in which case the country would have occupied a position similar to that of the other Princely States of British India. Had this happened, most of Nepal's present urgent problems would never have arisen: nearly all of them are the result of two hundred years of artificial segregation from the rest of the Indian sub-continent.

Common sense seems to indicate the necessity for the closest possible association between Nepal and India, whose peoples, despite certain differences, share a common heritage. Nepali is an Indo-Aryan language and the majority of the Nepalese subscribe to Hindu beliefs. Most important, the standard of living is more or less the same in both countries. India, moreover, has now mastered many of the problems with which an emerging state is faced, and is thus in the best possible situation to offer help and advice to a country which is still in such a primitive state of development that it hardly realises the nature of its difficulties.

India has already done a great deal for Nepal. The motor-road which now links the two countries was built and paid for by India, and large numbers of Indian technicians are still employed on projects in various parts of Nepal.

Besides the five Gurkha regiments which have, since Independence, formed part of the Indian Army, there are large Gurkha colonies permanently resident in many parts of India, particularly in the big cities, where there is a demand for their services as watchmen.

Even before the Rana Government was deposed, there was an underground Opposition. Most of its members had been educated in India, and were in close touch with the Indian Congress Party. The neighbouring province of Bihar and also the city of Benares have always been places of refuge for Nepalese political refugees, and the present opposition to the King's rule, which has resulted in a number of minor skirmishes on the border, has been largely planned from bases on Indian soil. The Indian Government is not in a position to prevent this activity but it would be absurd to suppose, as has been frequently maintained, that it has been active in its instigation. Nevertheless the existence of this state of affairs makes official relations between Nepal and India increasingly difficult.

Meanwhile various other countries have offered a helping hand. The Russians have built a cigarette-factory and given the King an aeroplane for his private use. The Chinese are putting up paper-mills and have recently signed an agreement by which they are to build a road which will continue that from India up to the Tibetan frontier. The completion of such a road would obviously constitute a threat to the security of India, but having seen much of the country through which it would pass I do not take the proposal very seriously. The construction would tax the ingenuity of the world's most skilled mountain-engineers, and the cost, apart from subsequent upkeep, would be prohibitive.

United Nations teams have drawn up plans for vast hydro-electric schemes, and the World Health Organisation has succeeded in practically eliminating the anopheles mosquito from the fever-ridden Terai. This is unquestionably the most useful contribution that has so far resulted from foreign help. The Terai was until recently one of the most famous big-game reserves in the world and jealously guarded as such by its Rana owners, for whom it afforded opportunities for slaughter on a gigantic scale. Tigers are still plentiful, but since the area has been opened up the num-

ber of wild elephants has rapidly decreased. An American professional hunter who had obtained a concession for organising shooting-parties in the Terai told me that in a few years' time the district will cease to be an attraction to sportsmen: poaching now takes place on a vast scale and it is doubtful if more than a dozen or so rhinoceros, which were never plentiful, now remain.* Now that the Terai is no longer unhealthy there is little doubt that it could be developed into a thriving agricultural area. Nobody, however, seems to have realised that the majority of Nepalese farmers are hill-people. They dislike the plains and nothing would induce them voluntarily to desert their mountain homes, little though these may provide in the way of material comfort.

Among Nepal's benefactions, the aid provided by the United States is far in excess of that given by any other country. It is administered by an organisation known as the United States Operations Mission, or USOM for short, of which the staff, together with their families, comprise some two hundred experts of one kind and another, but none with even an elementary knowledge of the Nepali language. The headquarters, a former Rana palace, is a hive of industry: maps and charts hang from every wall, and detailed statistics, necessarily obtained at second hand, are available on every conceivable subject. Innumerable Nepalese have been provided with the means to continue their studies in America, the building of a university is under way, and a Central Library has been organised in which any Nepali, if so minded, can find all the information necessary for the compilation of a thesis on any aspect of American life. Arrangements are already well advanced for the building of branch-libraries in the hills, but when I questioned their usefulness the earnest young American in charge of the project was sceptical. I reminded him that the mountain people were almost totally illiterate even in their own language, and that in any case they toiled in the fields from dawn until dusk. There must be a beginning, he said: libraries are an important element in the American way of life.

USOM has also installed a modern automatic telephone system, and lest the officials for whose use it has been provided should

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forget whence this bounty came, each apparatus is embossed with a design of hands clasped beneath a frowning eagle. An aerial ropeway, to replace the obsolete model purchased many years ago from the British Government, will soon link the foothills on the Indian frontier with Kathmandu, and besides heavy goods it will carry some of the tourists which Nepal is so anxious to attract. Many other signs of engineering progress are in evidence, among them piles of drainpipes, although Kathmandu has no drainage system. When I first arrived I was perplexed to notice an enormous dump of these pipes outside the garden at Balaji. When, some six months later, I paid a farewell visit they were still in the same place and ferns and moss were growing in them. I should not be surprised if they later come to be regarded, like so many other natural and other phenomena, as objects of worship.

It is very easy for an outsider, who is not called upon to deal with the problems, to criticise American action in Nepal, but nobody can question the generosity with which the United States has poured money into the country. There is also no doubt that the members of USOM sincerely believe in the aims of their mission. But most Americans are so convinced that their own way of life is superior to any other that they seem to be incapable of understanding that their methods are not suited to the needs of primitive countries: it is not possible to bulldoze a mediaeval state into a modern democracy on American lines. Nor indeed is democracy the best kind of government for these countries in their emerging state.

There will have to be changes in Nepal: but they will need to begin at the bottom, not at the top. All that has so far happened has been to widen the gap between conditions in the hills and in Kathmandu. No attempt has been made to help the Nepalese people realise their own desirable potentialities, which are considerable, and until this is done there can be no real progress. "People," says one of the characters in Aldous Huxley's *Island*, "are at once the beneficiaries and the victims of their culture. It brings them to flower, but it also nips them in the bud or plants a canker at the heart of the blossom. Might it not be possible to avoid the cankers, minimise the nippings, and make the individual flowers more beautiful." The answer, I think, is yes, but not if

the Western world, in offering help to the under-developed countries, pursues its present policy of trying to remake them in its own image.

Nepal today presents one of the most bizarre aspects of the cold war. The spectacle would be absurd but for the geographical position of the country, sandwiched between India and Chinese-occupied Tibet. Much depends upon whether King Mahendra is clever enough to keep his country politically uncommitted to any of those whose aid he has accepted. He seems not to have learnt to fear the bringers of gifts, but some day there will have to be a reckoning: the situation cannot remain indefinitely as it is.

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BECAUSE of the long segregation of Nepal from the outside world the number of books about the country is small. Most of them were written by officials stationed at one time or another at the British Residency in Kathmandu and they constitute the only authentic record of historical events during the past century. In the last decade numerous parties have climbed in the Nepal Himalayas, and most have published accounts of their experiences, but nearly all of them are of interest only to other climbers. I have therefore omitted from this list all but the one or two which are not confined to mountaineering technicalities. There have also been a few superficial books written by tourists and reporters after brief visits to Kathmandu, but since they add nothing to our knowledge of the country I have not included them. In 1959 the Bureau of Publications, College of Education, Kathmandu, published a Bibliography of Nepal which is more or less complete up to that date. The author, Professor Hugh B. Wood, who for a few years was American Adviser on Education to the Nepalese Government, has succeeded in tracing practically everything published in Western languages about the people, history, geography and economics of Nepal, and his list is a model of scholarly research.

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