

Tiger for Breakfast

The Story of Boris
of Kathmandu-Adventurer,
Big Game Hunter, and Host
of Nepal's Famous Royal Hotel

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ALSO BY THE AUTHOR
The Lost World of Quintana Roo



TIGER *for*
BREAKFAST

The Story of Boris of Kathmandu

by MICHEL PEISSEL

NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

1966

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FIRST EDITION

To Mimi Holmes

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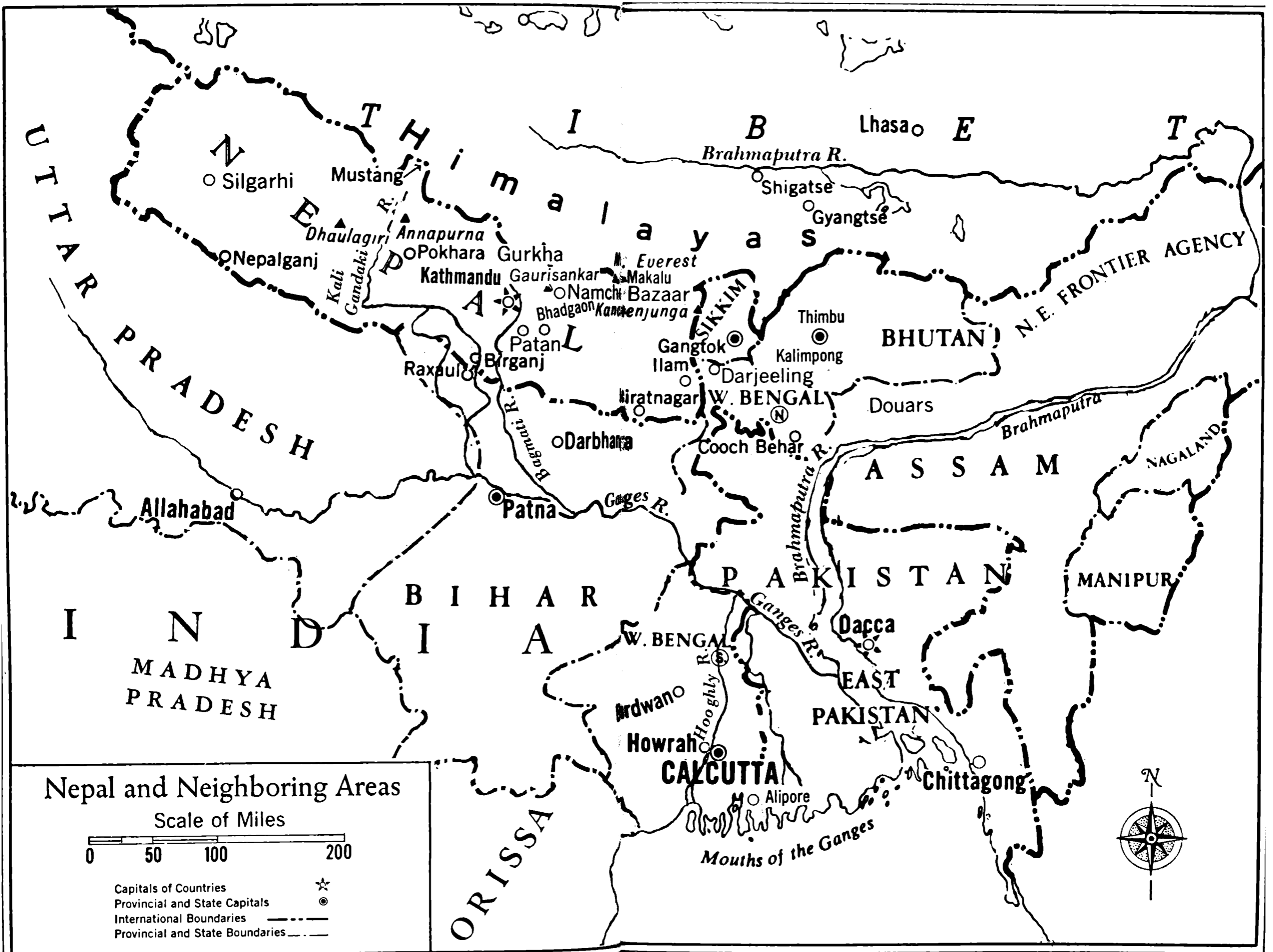
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Nepal and neighboring areas

TIGER *for* BREAKFAST



Nepal and Neighboring Areas

Scale of Miles



- Capitals of Countries ☆
- Provincial and State Capitals ●
- International Boundaries ———
- Provincial and State Boundaries - - -

I Arsenic for the Birds

“And what is this?” asked the customs officer, prodding a large pint tin in my luggage. “Arsenic,” I replied. The Indian official looked at me with suspicion. He then opened the tin and was about to take a lethal dose, dipping his finger into the white powder. “Don’t taste it, or you’ll die!” I shouted. That was enough. On hearing those words, all the officers and guards present closed in on my suitcase.

Why had I got enough arsenic in my baggage to kill a regiment, they asked. I found it hard to explain after having spent twenty hours in a plane from Boston to Calcutta; the staggering heat and strange faces around me made me feel desperate.

“The arsenic is for the birds,” I ventured. “For the birds,” repeated a gruff man with a turban around his head, as he snatched the tin from the small, dark fellow about to poison himself. All this time, in my mind, flashed only one thought: “The letter. As long as they do not find the letter, I’ll be all right.”

“Yes, for the birds,” I explained. “You see, I am planning to do an anthropological survey of Bhutan—I mean, a study of the people of the Himalayas—and I also want to catch some birds for a museum. One preserves the birds in arsenic.”

It was the spring of 1959. For the first time, my project seemed rather far-fetched. All those around me in the customs shed were

certain that I was a maniac, and I wondered myself what on earth I was doing over here with the one pound of arsenic, and that letter written in the gracious Tibetan script of the brother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Ever since childhood I had been fascinated by the mysterious Himalayan lands of the snows, countries that right into the second half of the twentieth century had remained ignorant of the most elementary technological inventions of the world. These small forbidden kingdoms of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan stretch along almost the entire eastern half of the Himalayan range.

With that letter of recommendation from Thubten Norbu, the brother of the Dalai Lama, to the Prime Minister of Bhutan, I felt confident of the success of my mission. I was off to meet Jigme Dorji, the Prime Minister of Bhutan, in the small Indian border town of Kalimpong, the gateway to Tibet.

The day after I arrived in Calcutta my plans were shattered. I had managed to clear my luggage at last, when from the morning newspaper I gathered that 600 million Chinese had leagued against me. Two Chinese mortars fired in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, into the Norbu Linka, palace of the Dalai Lama, had started a full-scale war in Tibet; all the Himalayan states were in turmoil, and no one knew when or where the Chinese invasion would end.

Kalimpong, the town for which I was headed, had become overnight the key center of news about the Tibetan tragedy. As the day wore on, the Indian government, which was then friendly to China, announced that Kalimpong was closed to all foreigners. The town was declared inside the "inner line," a new border established by the Indian government twenty miles within the official Indo-Tibetan border. This because the Chinese had claimed that Kalimpong was a "nest of Occidental spies"—and what was worse, the Chinese accusation declared that "the spies were under the disguise of pseudo-anthropologists and bird watchers." What with my arsenic for preserving birds and my being new at anthropology, it seemed evident that the Chinese dispatch was aimed at me.

It was too late, however, for me to turn back. Now that the road to Kalimpong was barred, I fumbled through my notes to find the address of a mysterious Mr. Smith, who was, I gathered, a secret agent of sorts living in Calcutta. I had discreetly been given his name "in case of trouble." From my room in the Grand Hotel in Calcutta I dialed his number.

"I will come right away," a voice answered.

Half an hour later, seated in the lobby of the hotel under the noisiest fan, so as not to be overheard, the gentleman gave me the names of two people who could smuggle me into Kalimpong. Already what I had planned as a pleasant scientific project was turning into the James Bond type of wild adventure.

From Calcutta I flew to Badogra, a small airstrip at the foot of the Himalayan hills. There I found one of the people whose names I had been given, and soon, hidden in the rear of a jeep, behind canvas side curtains, I headed incognito toward the "inner line"—past police check posts, through mysterious tea gardens into the forbidden foothills of the Himalayas, and right into what the Chinese had called a "nest of Occidental spies." For the first time I was on Himalayan soil.

I had heard and read a great many accounts of the Himalayas, but I soon realized that descriptions fall short of expressing the impalpable atmosphere that emanates from the greatest mountain mass in the world. In a way the Himalayas are like most mountains: they begin as hills of deep green that are at first unspectacular but at the same time remarkable, for these green hills gradually rise, one beyond another, like the buttresses outside the nave of a cathedral. Peeping from behind the jeep's canvas, I could see arch after arch reaching up to support, high and aloof, the white, unreal masses of the world's highest summits, a sawlike range of glittering white crests, bleached against the deep blue sky. Clouds occasionally invested these summits, making them even more impressive. Amid one bank of drifting clouds I noted that one higher than all the others was motionless; it turned out to be a fierce battering ram

of ice-covered rock breaking above the heavens as an assertion of earth's grandeur.

This sight was particularly impressive as, coming from the absolutely flat rice fields of the great Indian plains, I suddenly saw the unexpected vertical continent of the Himalayas. In the foothills, the dry trails and sandy fields of the plains are replaced by luxuriant forests and jungles. Water becomes abundant, damp rivulets slither over shiny rock, mist trickles through ghostly trees, parrots shriek, and the fresh air prickles one's skin. If India is exotic, the Himalayas at first, before one reaches their awe-inspiring giants, recall a feeling of the temperate climates of Europe and America. Gone are the camels, the palm trees and the cactus of India. The jungles of the foothills strangely suggest the giant forests of France and England. Here great trees generously give the shade that so much of India lacks. After the jungle belt, the world begins to change, the depressed faces of Hindus are replaced by the smiling faces of small Mongoloid peoples, the first hill tribesmen appear.

For hundreds of years the Himalayas have exercised their fascination on the world. The Hindus of India claim them as holy. Among them Buddha made his sacred retreat, and for centuries foreigners have been attracted by them. Their mystery was much enhanced by the presence of the three secret Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, which were closed to the outside world. These three countries, extending along the great range, contain the world's highest peaks. Under the British administration of India, these kingdoms had been declared "buffer states," and British forces, having been repulsed by fierce mountain people, had respected the autonomy of these countries, which thus, like Tibet, escaped the influences of colonialism. They remained unknown and unexplored while the rest of the Far East saw the encroachment of Western ways. The governments of Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet barred access to their territory to all foreigners. No one knew what went on beyond the foothills in these small kingdoms, which rapidly became Shangri-las for thousands of fiction writers' imagi-

nations. I now hoped to be among the first to make a study of Bhutan, a land that today is still ignorant of the most elementary Western influences.

But now, as I was headed for the hills, the Himalayan states after many decades of peace were once more playing a vital role in Eastern politics. Hidden in the back seat of a jeep, I was being driven right into the heart of the most controversial town of the Himalayan foothills.

After endless loops, and climbing up a steep hill to the accompaniment of the roar of the engine and the screech of tires, we reached the outskirts of Kalimpong. The road ran between thick hedges that bordered the green, flowery gardens of what had been the elegant villas of Englishmen escaping from the heat of the plains. But the road was now clustered with sorry-looking men, women and children clad in ample cloaks of thick red wool. Some sat by the roadside, others had erected medieval-looking tents of blue and white cloth in the surrounding flat-terraced fields. Ponies with elaborate saddles and large tinkling bells shied as the jeep passed near them. From the mountain passes just above the town was already coming the first flow of Tibetan refugees, refugees unlike those seen in any European war of the last four centuries. These people pouring into Kalimpong were not only abandoning their homes, but entering a world so strange to them that it was a common sight to catch them in near adoration of cars and trucks as these giant mechanical monsters overtook them as they reached the first paved roads they had ever seen. They were men from a land so mysterious that their sudden breaking out into the headlines of the world was often considered abroad more in the realm of fantasy than of news.

But the reality was grim. Kalimpong, long a starting point for caravans from India into Tibet, was swamped with miserable, suffering and frightened followers of the Dalai Lama. Each new batch of refugees brought with them terrified accounts of invasion and fighting, and the Tibetan language did not contain the words

necessary to describe the modern armaments that had poured death on the ponies of the fleeing refugees.

The streets of the town, and especially the great Tibetan bazaar, were humming with intrigue and activity. Soldiers mingled with refugees, some of whom were high Tibetan warlords who had fled with their servants and retinues. Newsmen and—or so it was rumored—many spies mingled with the Tibetans, seeking information and details on the Chinese Communist invasion of their country. Every foreigner was regarded with suspicion by the Indian government. Prince Peter of Greece, a distinguished anthropologist who had made Kalimpong his home, had just been asked to leave on the grounds of his sympathy with Tibet, and British newsmen had been thrown out of the town.

To my disappointment, Jigme Dorji was away in his native Bhutan. I ended up for the first days of my stay in the Himalayan Hotel, which was, it appeared, the hub of the town's agitation. Run by jovial Mrs. Annie Perry, of half-Scottish and half-Tibetan descent, it sheltered a strange variety of guests, from high Tibetan officials to a Greek philosopher, as well as British tea planters and Indian civil servants. All these guests would gather around old Mr. David MacDonald, the father of Mrs. Perry and longtime British trade agent in Tibet. Mr. MacDonald, an expert on Tibet, would explain much of the crisis to the guests when all present were not engaged in large rummy games in which the Tibetan language was as much used as English.

Shortly after my arrival came news of the successful flight of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa and of his arrival in India. This was greeted with joy by the Tibetans; it was a small break in the usually tragic information that filtered to the bazaar. But the Chinese, it was now feared, might go right into Sikkim and Bhutan. One thing was clear and evident: my well-prepared plans were upset, and despite my being in the company of charming Tesla Dorji, the Tibetan wife of Jigme Dorji, the Bhutanese prime minister, there seemed little or no hope of ever being able to go on into her husband's country.

Two weeks after my arrival, I sat pondering what I should do when Mrs. Perry came up to me.

"Take my advice," she volunteered. "I know these people. You don't stand a chance of getting to Bhutan now. Why don't you go to Nepal?"

I had considered working in Nepal as an alternate project, but I knew that to obtain permission to carry out an expedition in the kingdom was a long-term project in itself. It required months if not years of preparation before one could leave the capital, Kathmandu, and wander out into the hills. Furthermore, as I pointed out to Mrs. Perry, I had had all the royal introductions necessary for Bhutan, but I did not so much as know a soul in Nepal.

"Don't worry about that," said Mrs. Perry. "Go and see Boris. He alone can help you. There is nothing Boris cannot fix, and what's more, he's an old friend of mine. He has a hotel in Kathmandu and has lived many years there. Take my advice and go and see him. Just go and see him."

That same evening I collected from the rummy table more information about the enigmatic Boris Lissanevitch. I gathered that the hotel owned by Boris was the only one worthy of that name in the isolated Valley of Kathmandu. Its bathrooms had been carried in on coolie back, and the hotel, located in some sort of a palace, was like a stranded Ritz in primitive Nepal. Boris's fame, however, seemed even to overshadow that of his hotel, as in turn it was explained to me that he had been a ballet dancer and a friend of such geniuses as the famous impresario Sergei Diaghilev and the great choreographer Balanchine. I was also told that Boris had starred in England in a ballet with the well-known socialite actress Diana Manners, the elegant Lady Duff Cooper, before he became one of the leading big game hunters in India! In fact, Boris's name could not be mentioned without someone recalling a new and even more incredible incident involving him. These ranged from a story of a so-called anthropological survey of Hollywood carried out in person by Boris and three multimillionaire maharajas, to tales of his hav-

ing created Calcutta's most select club, the 300 Club. Boris, I was given to understand, occupied a respectable place in that popular novel by Han Suyin, *The Mountain Is Young*. All in all he sounded like some strange divinity worthy of the complex heavens of Tantric deities. To my surprise, the Tibetan princess, the tea planter, and all those present agreed that Boris was the most unusual person they had ever met.

After much reflection, I decided that maybe, after all, this person Boris could help me, and that in view of the local political situation I should direct my footsteps to Nepal and perform my anthropological study there. Much intrigued by the enigmatic Boris, I made up my mind to go to Nepal.

One cool and misty morning a month after my arrival in Kalimpong I took a jeep over to Darjeeling on my way back to Calcutta, from whence I could reach Kathmandu by air. Kalimpong was silent and still asleep as I was driven down into the Tista valley and up its other side, through tea gardens and dense jungle to Darjeeling. Situated at 7,500 feet above sea level, Darjeeling was before independence the summer seat of the government of Bengal. Here Englishmen from Calcutta had attempted to escape the summer heat and the humidity of the monsoon in the plains. Consequently Darjeeling, once a small, Tibetan-speaking village, had flourished into a great resort famous for its health homes and particularly for its schools. The outstanding reputations of these schools spread surprisingly via Kalimpong all over Tibet and Central Asia. In particular, one school, a Jesuit institution, has had such notable and unusual pupils as the brother of the Dalai Lama, the son of the King of Nepal, and the children of Bhutanese dignitaries and of Tibetan lords.

Taking a bus in Darjeeling, I was driven back to the airport of Badogra at the foot of the hills. From there I flew to Calcutta, where I boarded another plane for Nepal. There being no direct flight to Kathmandu, we were to go first to Patna, a small Indian town situated on the edge of the sprawling, muddy Ganges. Patna

is one of the hottest places in India during the monsoon. When we landed there some three hours after leaving Calcutta, humidity rose from the airfield in great whiffs, linking the damp ground to the tiers of billowing clouds that hung menacingly over our heads.

Into that whirlwind of clouds the small Dakota, the daily and at the time the only link between Nepal and the outside world, took off. "Inaccessible" is a word that planes have often made obsolete. By air, Kathmandu, formerly reachable only by days of walking along impossible trails, is only forty-five minutes from Patna.

During the monsoon, it happens quite frequently that heavy clouds bar access to the Valley of Kathmandu, and Nepal becomes once again the isolated land it has so long been. In good weather—that is, from October to June—the flight to Kathmandu affords some of the most spectacular sights in the world. After the takeoff from Patna the Dakota droned along below the monsoon clouds over the monotonous plain of India, flat and seemingly endless, with its succession of small square fields enlaced by twining canals and large rivers that flowed lazily through broad wasteland stretches of mud and sandbanks, opening up to form large pools of dirty water. The broad, flat plain was dotted by thousands of mud-hut villages that shelter part of the tremendous population of India—villages joined to each other by narrow footpaths. It was only occasionally that a straight modern road added to the scenery a note of geometrical symmetry in a chaos of jumbled plots of land. The earth was gray-brown, like the villages and the water of the rivers and the innumerable buffalo ponds that glittered in the sun.

This eerie and often seemingly desolate vastness was then suddenly cut by a dark green belt that sprang up unexpectedly, jolting me from my lethargy. Then a different sort of chaos began. The dark green, I knew, was the belt of the terai jungles, part of the great rain forests that stretch the entire length of the Himalayan chain where the mountain torrents reach the lowlands. To the east this forest is the Bengal and Assam jungle, the home of tigers, elephants and rhinos. To the west of Darjeeling, along the entire

border of Nepal, this jungle is called the terai, a wilderness whose very name evokes thoughts of the fever, malaria, cholera, and terrible diseases that kill most of those who venture there on foot. This stretch of jungle, in a way, has been just as instrumental as the high peaks in making the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim inaccessible, and in perpetuating their long isolation.

Traveling by plane, though, I had little time to contemplate the terai. It was rapidly replaced by the first upheavals of the earth's crust, the first longitudinal mountain ranges, ridges upon which the jungle still clung, but that were rapidly replaced by a welter of mountains cut and hacked by the mighty torrents that had gouged deep wounds in the mountain flanks, forming narrow, dark valleys and gorges. These mountains seemed to start rising in a succession of prisms with jagged crests. This no-man's-land of the Nepalese border was soon replaced by even higher hills, perched upon which, above the gorges, I could see the first Nepalese villages. They clung high on the slopes, surrounded by the first rice terraces, gigantic stairways carpeted now, in summer, in dark green, but at other seasons pale green or yellow. The huts were painted red or dark pink. It is in such small villages that most of the nine million inhabitants of Nepal live.

I had no opportunity to contemplate these hills in leisurely fashion, for already the first jolts of the Dakota as it skimmed the ridges attracted my attention to the great peaks of the Himalayas that loom up above the lesser hills. The incredible masses of rock and snow are the unreal and awe-inspiring backdrop of Nepal, the ever-present deities of the Hindu and Buddhist world, the magnets that have drawn to Nepal so many adventurers, sportsmen, and prophets.

Before I realized that the flight was over the plane had begun to circle, and the Valley of Kathmandu came in sight, unreal and improbable, a flat expanse some fifteen miles long and eight miles wide, of pale and dark green rice fields marked in shallow steps into undulating curves like those of a contour map. We seemed to

be no longer in the exotic East; the scenery was once again of human and, in a way, Occidental proportions. Here and there neat, boxlike houses with sloping tiled roofs sat in the midst of the rice fields like square barges surrounded by water. Then appeared villages and towns, some of the nine towns of the strange valley, the onetime kingdom of the Newar lords and artists, later conquered by the Gurkha kings, whose descendant, King Mahendra, rules over Nepal today.

In the center of the valley lies Kathmandu, surrounded by nine towns with a total population of some 500,000 inhabitants. This is the richest and widest valley of Nepal. Here for over two thousand years have flourished one of the world's most artistic peoples, the Newars, expert wood-carvers, goldsmiths and architects. Today their valley, I was soon to discover, is still simply one vast work of art, from the humblest of the peasants' rectangular brick homes to the most impressive of the two-thousand-odd pagodas whose gilt roofs rise above the neat rows of houses. Each house, each temple, each shrine is decorated with delicately carved beams representing gods and goddesses, or animals drawn from reality and from fantasy, carved in dark wood that stands out against the background of pale pink bricks. Not the least striking of these strange carvings are the erotic scenes that decorate many of the temples, scenes in which wit is more dominant than lust, though their realism may seem like sheer pornography to the Western intruder with a prudish Victorian mind.

Every doorknob, every window, every lock, every single detail of Kathmandu is the work of an artist, like the hundreds of thousands of stone Buddhas, Hindu gods and shrines with phallic decorations that nestle by every roadside, and often in the middle of a road, by every well, every bridge, and imbedded in every house, if not lined up by the dozens in palace courtyards. Such artistic profusion reminds one that most of the Tibetan copper and silver artifacts as well as larger sculpture are the doing of the Newars, who, in large colonies, lived in Lhasa and also in many cities of ancient China

and even India. Architecturally, Nepal, through Buddhism, has influenced China, Indochina, Japan and Burma. And there is no country in Asia that has not felt Nepalese influence in the other arts.

After various acrobatics on the part of the Dakota, which left me covered with perspiration, we landed. I disembarked hardly daring to believe I was in this fabled, forbidden and still mysterious kingdom. My excitement was overshadowed by anxiety. I had, on a simple recommendation, risked the success of my project upon one man. And now that I was about to meet him I felt sure that all this was a mistake. Amusing and fascinating as Boris had been described to me as being, I could not believe that he could be of any true assistance nor could I imagine that he would care to go out of his way to produce for myself, a stranger, a miracle, even a small one. The isolated Valley of Kathmandu seemed a better setting for a Somerset Maugham-type Western misanthrope than for a kind-hearted, helpful soul.

At the airport I took, after much haggling, a small, battered jeep, one of the rare cars, not numbering more than fifty in all, that roll the brick-paved streets of Kathmandu. The fact that no road led into Nepal made it necessary for these vehicles to be carried into the country on men's backs, not in parts, but fully assembled and in one piece, tied to great bamboo trays under which crawled fifty coolies who, to a jogging step, scrambled up over the abrupt foothills. Dressed in ragged white jodhpurs, my driver handled his jeep as though it were some pack animal, shouting at it each time he changed gears.

We had run down a half-dozen dogs and petrified more than one medieval-looking Nepalese peasant when the jeep approached a stately gate in a great brick wall that rose beside the dusty road, along which jogged rows of coolies and hundreds of minute Nepalese women tightly wrapped in long pink, red and black skirts. By the entrance stood two sleepy-looking watchmen, dressed in white. Through the portal, the jeep turned into the expansive grounds of what I concluded must be some gigantic royal palace or

center of administration, on the other side of which I assumed we would emerge and continue our ride. It was a shock when my driver, with a wave of his hand toward the vast palace that loomed up in the lush oasis of green lawns, announced, "Royal Hotel."

The grounds, shaded by gigantic pine and cedar trees, recalled a British park without the rain. A pink, brick-paved driveway swooped in a wide curve across a lawn to the pillared portico, the main entrance of the hotel.

The building itself was most impressive, a huge rectangular structure of white stucco, the facade composed of two superimposed galleries running for three hundred feet between two baldachin-like oriental turrets that sat lightly above the two lateral wings of the building. Crouched all around the grounds and on the steps by the entrance were dozens of Nepalese servants dressed in the same manner as the men I had seen in the streets, with thin white jodhpurs partly covered by long white shirts with straight buttoned collars like those of surgeons. Some were smoking, others taking in the sun with characteristic oriental nonchalance. Three rickshaws were lined up at the foot of a wall. The jingle of a few bicycle bells could be heard above the cawing of flocks of crows that flapped from tree to tree above my head. From all this arose a sense of peaceful luxury; only the servants added a mysterious note of exoticism.

The jeep came to a dusty halt, and immediately a rush of servants laid hands on my luggage. Hauling myself down from the front seat, I turned toward the entrance, a vast door leading to the foot of a staircase.

Standing a few steps above me on that staircase, framed by the enormous stuffed heads of two rhinoceroses, who were gaping at each other with sympathetic small beady eyes, was a sturdy, handsome man. Around him on the steps hustled four servants, carrying envelopes or bowing with timidity in an effort to attract his attention. As I entered the hall the man stepped down to greet me. It was Boris.

We spoke in French and after a few words I realized that the Royal Hotel is not so much a hotel as a decor for Boris's sense of elegance, and I felt as if I were being greeted by some exiled European lord rather than a hotel manager.

When I nervously dared inquire about rates and the possibilities of staying, Boris put me at ease.

"Of course, stay here. Don't worry about the rates. Those are for tourists." I immediately became an object of Boris's generosity—generosity that has kept in the Royal Hotel many of the extravagant characters, whether rich or poor, who have strayed into the Himalayas.

Boris then showed me to my room. "It's an unusual place, you'll soon see," he explained, as we made our way down a wide corridor into which opened large green doors. By each door squatted a servant who quickly rose to attention as Boris passed by.

"It's not the Carlton in Cannes," Boris said, "but remember, there are no other hotels from here to Calcutta, 450 miles away."

Climbing up a staircase, we emerged onto an open gallery. I could now look down into a vast square courtyard in the rear of the hotel, enclosed on all sides by the three-story palace.

"This," Boris explained, "is the end the hotel is in." Then, pointing beyond the massive quadrangle, he showed me the extent of the palace. Beyond it were two more such quadrangles; the palace contained perhaps seven hundred rooms in all. With a twinkle in his eye, Boris explained that this style was known as "Kathmandu baroque," and there were nearly fifty such great palaces in the valley.

"The Ranas wanted the best from Europe," he said. "This is what they got."

Looking over a balustrade, I could see, rising above green clumps of trees, more white turrets and the great roofs and long galleries of white palaces all around the hotel.

Boris then pushed open a door, saying, "Will this be all right?"

I peered into what seemed a gigantic cement garage with win-

dows. I decided Boris's question must have been a joke. Then I noticed at the far corner of this vast room a large marble trough. I understood that this great empty room was the bathroom. Through another green door, we entered an adjoining room. I say "room," but I felt more as if I were entering an exhibit hall of some Victorian museum. The proportions of the place were truly immense. A cool, dim light coming through great shuttered windows filtered through the air; a streak of sunlight picked out the large mass of a tiger-skin rug with a wide open, pink and jeering mouth. Two outsized, ornate Victorian chairs, no doubt from one of London's nineteenth-century clubs, opened their vast embrace to other pieces of furniture, all equally tortured and dated.

"All carried in on coolie back," I reflected.

Boris sat down and I could examine his features at leisure. By any standards he is a handsome man, his eyes twinkling with mischief in a jovial but dynamic face branded with a certain degree of elegance and refinement. His hair, parted in the center, gave him a Proustian look, while his heavy build did not prevent him from moving with the agility of the man who was once a ballet dancer. Boris, I noticed, does not merely walk; he seems almost to float around with unexpected grace. But he does not float for long; like a lord he is constantly approached by servants and guests as he moves from one conversation to another through the vast galleries of the hotel. Its crystal chandeliers and Venetian mirrors (also carried into Nepal on coolie back) reflect the imposing portraits of bejeweled figures of the now overthrown Rana maharajas of Nepal who line the walls of the ballroom and galleries of the palatial building. Although fifty-five, Boris looked forty-five and had the dynamism and energy of a much younger man. His hair, only slightly gray, with its center parting, reminded me of the well-groomed clients of Maxim's in the Gay Twenties, as seen in old-fashioned magazine drawings.

Contrasting with Boris's general appearance when I first met him was the vividly striped cotton bush shirt with short sleeves that

he was wearing. Although it was appropriate to the mild climate of Nepal, I assumed this informal attire was the result of his having just returned from some outing, perhaps a tiger shoot. But that evening at dinner I was surprised to see that Boris had not changed his style of dress, but was still wearing a shirt of the same cut, though this one had even more colorful stripes. I then learned that Boris, whether for a royal occasion or an everyday function, always wears his legendary and famous colored, striped bush shirts. Thus attired he contrasts strangely with the usually elegantly dressed guests of the Royal, who are generally impressed by the grand air given to the hotel by the innumerable tiger skins and the other members of the strange, inanimate zoo that populates the corridors and the rooms of the hotel. Not the least remarkable of these stuffed inmates is a fifteen-foot-long crocodile whose ever-open mouth awaits the tipsy tourist as he leaves the bar.

The bar sits on the second floor in a large, rectangular room opening on two sides upon the green park. Appropriately baptized the Yak and Yeti, after the characteristic long-haired Tibetan bovine and the "Abominable Snowman," the bar is not only the heart of the hotel but also the nerve center of Kathmandu. The bar counter itself is framed by numerous delicate wood carvings of Nepalese divinities, who wave their countless arms and legs gracefully before a large central fireplace whose smoke escapes through a circular copper column that dangles from the roof, a small masterpiece representing the combined efforts of a Swiss architect and a Nepalese coppersmith who used archaic techniques.

One of the most unusual characteristics of the bar, I soon discovered, was the fact that it often served nothing to drink. This surprising state of affairs, only one of the unexpected facts about Kathmandu, was one result of Boris's having been jailed after his first attempt to set up a distillery in Nepal. Since then liquor finds its way to the capital only subject to the erratic fancies of the Indian and Nepalese customs offices, and most of the bar's clients, who range from Sir Edmund Hillary to such personalities as Prince Basundhara, brother of the King of Nepal, have grown accustomed

to sitting there sipping lemonade and hopefully awaiting the arrival of the next plane from India, which may bring the long-awaited cargo of whisky. To date the Yak and Yeti has rarely known the great joy of receiving both soda and whisky at the same time, thus leaving customers with either Scotch *or* soda, as if the two were never made to blend together in Nepal.

For the first two days after my arrival I attempted vainly to have a quiet chat with Boris about my expedition plans. This proved impossible until the third day. I was strolling around the hotel gardens when I ran into Boris bent over some young plants.

"My strawberry plantation," Boris explained. "These are the first strawberries to be grown in Nepal. They seem to be doing all right. What do you think?"

I approved and tried to steer the conversation to what was bothering me, at first without success.

"These strawberries were smuggled out of Switzerland and through India and into Nepal by some friends," Boris carried on. "Do you like strawberries?" he asked with relish. "Well, you must come back and I'll try to have some cream flown in from Hong Kong, or better still, some kirsch."

Boris apparently paid no attention to my queries; he was busy weeding out the bed. I again tried to change the subject to the delicate problem of getting a permit to study the Mount Everest district. When he had finished his weeding, Boris stood up, somehow stirred from his absorbing labor. He now listened to my requests.

Ten minutes later it was all over. I had the names of the key government officials, the assurance of Boris's assistance, letters of introduction, the technique of applying for a permit; in short, all the inner secrets of the government operations and other information and aid I needed to succeed in my operation. Boris, I realized, was not one for wasting words when he was faced with a problem. His face intent, he gave me his expert advice and then reverted to strawberries.

Against all predictions, less than a month later, leading a caravan

of porters loaded down with equipment lent to me by Boris and some of his friends, I was on my way to the Greater Himalayan range. There I was able successfully to complete my study and survey of the highest inhabitants of our planet, the Sherpas. There for the first time I gained some knowledge of the inaccessible interior of Nepal, with its valleys inhabited by numerous tribes almost unknown to the outside world.

This first contact with Nepal, its unforgettable people, Boris, and the Royal Hotel decided me to return to learn more about them. Four years after my first visit, in November 1963, I set out for Kathmandu again. I had just been married and had asked Boris if he would be willing to have us for six months and could introduce us to the India and Asia he knew so well, the East of my childhood dreams, of tiger shoots and bazaars filled with the political intrigue of maharajas and princes, a world that is rapidly disappearing and being obliterated by westernization. Boris, I knew, was among the last to hold the key to this Oriental world.

"If you have the time, I have the alcohol," had been Boris's answer to my request. "Come as soon as you want. . . ."

Two weeks later, with my wife, Marie-Claire, I landed in Kathmandu and headed for the Royal Hotel.

II A Coffin at Cocktails

“The problem, you see, was where to find an aluminum coffin. How else could we have brought the body back? I explained to the parents that when the helicopter arrived he was dead, and that there was no way to carry down the body. I wish you would tell me what I should have done.”

We had just arrived and while Marie-Claire was unpacking I strolled into the Yak and Yeti with three fellow passengers with whom we had flown into the valley. They were, I had found out, bankers, and their looks of Wall Street and the City contrasted oddly with the fresh spring breeze and the lazy atmosphere of the bar.

On hearing the word “coffin” the *Time* correspondent nosed in closer to the small group seated around empty glasses. A stocky, dark-haired man with a strong Italian accent was carrying on about the dead body. Crowded close on each side of him were a lanky priest and the massive form of a man in a striped bush shirt.

Absently the man in the striped shirt looked up. Noticing me, Boris quietly rose, and took my hand with a great smile.

“What will you have?” were his first words, while he silently made me understand that I should sit down and listen to the group.

“Scotch and soda,” I ventured. Maybe there was both now in

Nepal. A slight young Nepalese servant with a black hat and white jodhpurs skipped off with my order. Drinks were served all around.

Father Moran had sherry; the gentleman from the Italian expedition slipped out of the bar. The tone of the voices rose somewhat with his departure. Everyone felt sorry for him. What else could he cable back to the family in Torino? Father Moran assured him that he would climb up to bless the grave. Boris had reassured the Italian climber that it really would have been impossible to return the body to Italy. "Why, in Nepal they do not even know what a coffin is! As for an aluminum coffin, there *is* no aluminum in this country!" Nobody was unduly disturbed, and now we all sat talking pleasantly.

One more climber had died, the seventh that year and probably the hundredth since Nepal, in 1950, was opened to mountain climbing. It was hard to sympathize with those strange youngsters who flew in to the Royal Hotel with their tons of equipment and then marched out confidently, followed by hundreds of ragged coolies, to disappear into the hills beyond the valley, up the trails to the foot of the glaciers in the kingdom of the lamas. Months later they would return, tired, sunburned, bearded young men, depressed and sad, explaining to the now uninterested foreigners of Kathmandu how Paulo or Peter had died, falling on the north ridge or caught in an avalanche. Useless death, while so much in the country of greater importance had to be done.

Good humor prevailed after the climber's departure. Boris rambled on about the problems he had had the night before. Prime Minister Nehru of India had arrived, his plane landing as usual before the one bringing in the food he was supposed to eat, and the banquet had been a frantic pantomime of ersatz and last-minute substitutions. Served by exquisite young Nepalese youths from the Royal Hotel, everything in the end had been perfect, and King Mahendra had been pleased. *Cœur d'artichauts à la Boris* had been served at the King's banquet, while the Prime Minister—

who had given a banquet immediately after the King—offered in return *crêpes à la Boris* and *sole à la Boris*. In fact, as usual, Boris had saved the day both for Nepal and India. In the meantime, outside the bar I could hear the desperate Dr. Antony, a retired dentist from Chicago who had also been on the plane, swearing his head off to a smiling Nepalese clerk because his room had not been reserved.

A tour was just in, and trooping after its guide were twenty-eight Americans, Britons, Germans and Scandinavians, aged sixty to eighty, on their world marathon.

"It's a miracle they can keep up the tempo," remarked Boris's Danish mother-in-law, Mrs. Esther Scott. "Usually one of the party dies before reaching Kathmandu. They're a sad-looking lot. I do feel sorry for them."

A delegation of the World Bank, who were also quartered at the Royal, had a big project in mind and needed Boris's help; the climbers needed Boris's help; the news correspondents needed Boris's help. So did everyone else. Boris's help usually consisted essentially of translating into a form capable of European comprehension the mind and tempo of Nepal, or, contrariwise, explaining to the Nepalese the do's and don'ts of the West. Compromise was the answer, and I felt that the bankers, climbers, correspondents and tourists would soon look more relaxed, and altogether life in Kathmandu would settle down again to a more leisurely pace.

As I sat at the bar, realizing that I was finally back in Nepal, I noticed with pleasure that Boris had not changed. He was still as contagiously jovial as before, and he practiced with perfection the art of making total strangers feel important and accepted. As usual, Boris's interests seemed as wide as his vast imagination. Concerning all subjects, from bee breeding to elephant shooting, from Tibetan art to Picasso, he has not only opinions but experiences, and with such a variety of interests he never fails to find a common bond with every one of the thousands of people he constantly meets.

In the next couple of days I discovered that relatively little had changed in the city either, except for the presence of more foreigners, who, in the shadow of their legations and missions, or that of the Royal Hotel, wound and unwound the eternal complaints of people abroad, full of the petty intrigues characteristic of a small, inbred society. Its members, for the most part, remained blind to Nepal and the Nepalese, only to pull each other to pieces at the parties and counter-parties that one has to give so as to keep up with every detail of other people's personal lives. To these receptions, as they were pompously called, flocked the cultured Nepalese whose fortunes had authorized them to obtain "British university" certificates—the necessary titles to copy the West with assurance. In Nepal, this represented but a small number of princes, for the most part Ranas. Until 1950 these descendants of a family in which the office of Prime Minister of Nepal was hereditary had reigned with the power of sovereigns, and to a degree tyrants over the Valley of Kathmandu and over the innumerable hills of the nation.

A strange land, Nepal . . . its existence is due more to the work of surveyors than to any very definite modern administrative unity. Mountains are the only common denominator, mountains and mountain people from east to west, north to south, from the damp pestilential terai jungle up through the rice-terraced foothills on to the mighty snow-covered peaks of the Everest Range, the Annapurna Range, and the Dhaulagiri Range, which separate Nepal from the invisible but ever present psychological mass of Chinese-occupied Tibet. From the bar I could see the snow-capped mountains beyond which looms the specter of communism and mysticism combined, representatives of which occasionally come down to the sunny Valley of Kathmandu, where Tibetan monks brush elbows with silent employees of the Chinese Embassy.

As always, the hotel was buzzing with projects and intrigues, millionaires and princes. Boris had just returned from Hong Kong, barely in time to cater successively the banquets given on successive nights by King Mahendra of Nepal in honor of Nehru and to

Nehru in honor of the King. Sir Edmund Hillary of Everest fame, now engaged in building schools for the Sherpas, was scheduled to arrive the following day. And Boris told me of his pleasure that Russia's space couple, Valentina Tereshkova and her husband, Andrian J. Nikolayev, were due in on their honeymoon the day after, accompanied by another cosmonaut and his wife. The depressed, bearded members of the ill-fated Italian expedition still haunted the corridors of the hotel, wearing blue jeans and smelling of Tibetan butter, amid American tourists complaining that in Nepal conditions were not up to par, having forgotten that the country, to use Boris's expression, "was still in the seventeenth century, having already in ten years moved up from the Middle Ages."

How I was to get to know Boris in such a whirlwind was a question that no one could answer. Being around Boris was like touring the world in a capsule. One unusual character after another appeared, seemingly with each round of whisky, ranging from the Russian cosmonauts on their honeymoon to the newly arrived German ambassador, whose room adjoined that of the Pakistan ambassador. Both were waiting for their new legations to be built.

"How do you think you can catch him alone?" remarked Inger, Boris's beautiful young Danish wife. "In the fifteen years we have been married, I have spent only two evenings alone with him." Upon which Inger hurried off to have tea ready for the Tibetan refugee committee that would meet in their private flat before the king's brother, Prince Basundhara, arrived with his American fiancée.

Just how, I wondered, would I find out about Boris in Russia, Boris and the ballet, Boris in World War II, Boris and the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Boris and Hollywood, Calcutta, politics, Saigon, tigers, elephants and Nepal?

The day after our arrival a slight noise awoke me at dawn. The room servant was bringing my "morning cup of tea," a detestable colonial custom of British India that requires that the white "sahib"

have a cup of tea left by his bed at five in the morning. Needless to say, the only advantage of this custom is that when you get up three hours later the tea is cold and you have to order more.

That morning I could not fall asleep again. I therefore rose and strolled out of my room into the park. There I was surprised to see rows and rows of maidens coming in through the gate. Girls of marriageable age, they were covered with heavy gold and silver trinkets that dangled upon their black, tight blouses, which were tucked into the broad belts that held up their long pleated skirts. They laughed and joked as, bent in two, they carried in heavy loads of pink wood cut from the rhododendron forests that cover the summits of the green hills that enclose the valley on all sides. In Kathmandu there is no modern fuel. Cow dung is the most common source of heat, and as Boris could hardly use cow dung, he has had to resort to the services of the Tamang tribe, a mysterious people notable for their jewelry and the way they put their young women to use. It is the privilege of the members of this tribe to bring each morning to the hotel the wood necessary for the clients' daily baths. The isolation of Kathmandu and the primitiveness of services in Nepal have resulted in the slightest convenience becoming a complicated ritual. A good example is the preparation of a hot bath.

The wood carried in each morning is stacked in neat bundles in a corner of the gardens, and while the Tamang girls await their pay (given in silver coins, as paper money is still regarded with suspicion by the peasants), a lowly caste of half-naked coolies, wielding primitive axes above their bare feet, go about smashing it up. Once this operation has been performed, the hotel room servants, known as "bearers," come and collect the wood and bring some to each room. As central heating would be unthinkable in a land where lead pipe is unknown, every room has a small, archaic oven, along with its own boiler and water supply. Such a complicated system, through careful synchronization at the expense of the hurried guests, can occasionally provide a tepid bath at about ten

A.M. This is the time when Boris himself gets up and grabs a book to retire for an hour in his bath, a morning ritual that he misses only when in the jungle.

Immediately after the Tamang girls have disappeared, the hotel sees its grounds invaded by the goldsmiths and other merchants who come in to take up their positions by the small showcases that cluster the ground floor gallery of the hotel. Ever since Boris first proved that Nepalese handicrafts were beyond doubt one of the greatest attractions of the country, the artisans of the valley have been busily at work. Most of them speak Tibetan, as their best clients before the arrival of American tourists were the monks and wealthy nobles of Lhasa, where thousands of Nepalese craftsmen used to resort to carry on their trades before the takeover of the Tibetan capital by the Communist Chinese.

The Nepalese seem to excel in filigree copper work encasing thousands of semiprecious stones, and their wares vary from bejeweled miniature birds to great representations of Kathmandu's pagodas executed with a refinement worthy of the most precise scale model.

Kathmandu, which has no regular modern industry whatsoever, is still a medieval hive of goldsmiths, wood-carvers and engravers, and remains the greatest market town of all the Himalayas.

Strolling out of the hotel gate, I stepped out into the road. A few hundred yards away from the hotel is the end of what seems like a small footpath. This is in fact one of the twenty or so trails that lead into the city from the hinterland. Unimpressive to see, these paths nevertheless lead on for hundreds of miles over hills and down valleys, winding a network of communications all over Nepal.

Here I could watch the porters and coolies jogging to the sway of the bamboo poles balanced on their shoulders. From before sunrise till after sunset a constant flow of humanity brings to the capital the varied fragrances of all the districts of the nation of Nepal. Here can be seen every dress, every costume, every cargo, and every type of man from the innumerable different regions of the

country: wool coming in in large bales carried by red-dressed, sweaty and often smelly Tibetans; small steel ingots brought in by the *kami*, or steelworkers, from Those, where mines thousands of years old are still worked. Here also come the wealthy merchants with their leather bags containing gold and precious stones: turquoises from the high Himalayan plateau, coralline and other semiprecious stones from the hills. Over these paths also travels rice, the great commodity of the country, which pours in incessantly to feed the thousands of city dwellers. Along these same tracks come peasants with great baskets loaded with chickens, or driving herds of thousands of goats to be either killed in sacrifice or simply shorn of their wool in the main squares of the capital.

Food is a great problem for the inhabitants of Kathmandu, who are forever menaced by a rice shortage. It is almost as great a problem, however, for Boris. In Kathmandu the only meat available is buffalo meat. Practically everything else has to be imported. This forces Boris to spend much of his time fighting the customs officers; not those of Nepal but those of India. The primitive postal service further complicates transactions for Boris. Until recently all mail had to be sent through the Indian Embassy, as Nepal had not yet joined the International Postal Union. Boris has now finally helped set up a customs office in Nepal, explaining to rice-eating clerks the origin and ingredients of such things as caviar and salami. In fact there is not a single dish served at the Royal Hotel that could not tell of an incredible journey. And between Copenhagen and Calcutta more than one precious cargo has been lost. Usually this happens in Calcutta, where goods are frequently mislaid, and very often are found only when the smell of their putrefaction finally succeeds in attracting the attention of negligent customs officials.

His towel wrapped around him after his one-hour bath, Boris then begins his daily fight to keep the hotel supplied with necessities, sending endless messages to customs offices in India and to the border towns of Nepal.

In 1954, when Boris started the Royal, he had had no experience in hotel operations. Even in his former activities as executive secretary of the famous 300 Club, which he had founded in Calcutta, his functions had been primarily social. It came as something of a shock to discover that in Nepal almost everything, even providing the guests with baths, had to be arranged from scratch.

It was only as the years went by that it grew somewhat easier for the most urgent necessities to find their way into the valley. The newly built road from the Indian border to Kathmandu was the first great leap forward. Although it looked at first as though this masterpiece of engineering would revolutionize the valley overnight, much patience was needed before it came into full use. The lack of vehicles was the first problem. Then the Indian government delayed in building a linking road between the Nepalese border and any Indian town of significance. The nearest large Indian town was more than 200 miles from the border. All this led Boris greatly to enlarge and develop his own vegetable gardens on part of the hotel grounds. In these gardens a variety of vegetables new to the country now grow in abundance under the influence of Kathmandu's exceptional climate.

I have always marveled at what has drawn foreigners away from the peaceful countrysides of Europe and America to establish themselves in outposts of civilization. In that respect Boris was to me a mystery. Why should such a man as he have chosen the strange hardships of Nepal, when all Europe and the West were open to him?

Though I had at first regarded Boris as a sort of efficiency expert, I was soon to discover other facets of his personality when, upon climbing a rattling, spiral steel staircase, I was first introduced into his private apartments. Situated above the hotel in a studio-type loft, Boris's flat, the inner sanctum of the hotel, is lighted by great windows rising to the ceiling and looking out over the rooftops of Kathmandu. Here, tucked away and aloof, Boris directs his small world.

To know Boris it is essential to know his wife Inger. Twenty years younger than Boris, she has now been sharing his life for fifteen years. Inasmuch as Boris is an exuberant extrovert it is she who protects the privacy of their personal lives. In her flat she attempts to bring up their three sons, Mikhail (nicknamed Mishka), Alexander and Nicolas, out of reach of the slightly mad atmosphere of the valley.

Boris's flat reflects clearly the varied aspects of his personality. Beside a huge fireplace, welcome in the cool Nepalese evenings, stands a grand piano on which rest the photographs of famous ballet stars with whom Boris has danced on the stages of Europe and South America. Beside golden Buddhas from Tibet stand the autographed portraits of Queen Elizabeth II of England and King Mahendra of Nepal, reminders of Boris's important role in the nation.

A huge cabinet stretching around the room harbors Boris's incredible record collection, ranging from the music of Stravinsky, which Boris knows so well, to the folk dances of his Ukrainian homeland. Here in these surroundings Boris is the artist and musician of his youth; here are collected the souvenirs of a life so varied and full that at first I was at a loss to grasp its scope.

So unusual is life in Kathmandu that the business affairs that fill a large part of Boris's days are a strange combination of the modern and the medieval. Tourists arriving daily from the airport, with their minds still vividly impressed by the luxury of the great hotels of Hong Kong and Calcutta, naturally expect the same conveniences in Nepal. In this they are in for a disappointment, and they have to learn to adjust to such peculiar requirements as ordering a bath two hours in advance. On the other hand, Boris has laid out for them sight-seeing trips that would send not only the most blasé tourist into ecstasies, but even the most sophisticated and best-heeled travelers.

One of the marvels of Nepal is Patan, the sister town of Kathmandu, which up to the present has entirely escaped the en-

croachments of Western ways. Patan is a dream city in the same sense that Venice is: not a single structure is out of place, its narrow, brick-paved streets separate large blocks of pink brick houses whose wooden frames are covered with the most delicate representations of dragons, goddesses, and other carvings. The imperial city of Peking cannot have been more beautiful. But there is nothing imperial about Patan, nor is it, like so many of the great historical sights of today, a dead city. You do not have to close your eyes and imagine how the city was four hundred years ago, for nothing has changed. In each little workshop craftsmen perpetuate their trades and one encounters goldsmiths with their minute anvils and small hammers, bell founders with their antiquated blast furnaces, and every sort of artisan imaginable. High in the attics of the houses can be seen those who spend their lives setting jewels into the delicate work of the coppersmith.

In the city each block of houses, surrounded by its streets, encloses a vast stone-paved courtyard where rise the shrines of the district's gods and goddesses. Once a year the thousands of copper divinities are taken out of the surrounding pagodas and exposed in these courtyards. The Newars are Buddhists of a primitive sect that has survived nowhere in India or in the rest of Asia. Distinct both from Tibetan Buddhism and from that of Southeast Asia, the Buddhism of the Valley of Nepal is descended from religion as it was practiced in India two thousand years ago, shortly after the death of Buddha. Hinduism has now gained much ground in Nepal; the fact that the local population practices both religions has simply resulted in every other day being a religious festival.

These festivals, if they are the delight of travelers, are one of Boris's main headaches. There is no written calendar, and often it is only after one of these holy days has arrived that Boris realizes that there are no cooks or servants to run the hotel.

All these problems soon have the head bearers running up the small, rattling spiral staircase to see Boris, who, before he has finished his bath, suffers at least ten interruptions. Then comes the

moment for the accounts, methodically kept in a great ledger by a medieval clerk who spends most of his day squatting by the kitchens keeping an incessant eye on all that goes on. The paying off of cooks, room boys and coolies goes on all day long. If there are no unions or syndicates in Nepal, Boris still has to tackle similar problems when he runs into the incompatibility of various castes and religious groups. Sweepers will not do beds, bed doers will not sweep, servers will not cook, and cooks will not associate with anyone of lowlier occupation.

Once he is dressed Boris immediately makes for the kitchens, which offer the casual visitor a vision of Dante's *Inferno* . . . a dozen vast, smoky, dark rooms whose walls are blackened darker than coal. Boris cruises about through the kitchens like some sort of steamship caught up in fog. Years ago in India he learned that everything must be supervised and watched, and not the slightest thing is done without his advice or orders.

The other side of the kitchen partition shows a different picture that does not let the tourist suspect what goes on behind the stage. Here white-dressed servants flutter around, barefooted or in slippers, with their usual smiles. Practically none speak English, Nepal never having been a British colony—a source of frustration for the guests, who are rarely understood. The servants smile wider and wider as certain guests grow angrier and angrier, all this ending in a confrontation of all involved with Boris. So the day moves on, and Boris shifts constantly between the two strange worlds of the valley—the modern one he has helped to create and the ancient world with all its picturesque ways and customs.

Outside the hotel gates the valley continues in its leisurely, centuries-old tempo. The introduction of bicycles, today the most popular means of transport among both local people and foreigners, is the only widespread concession to Western manners. One rapidly learns the art of weaving in and out among coolies and porters, over and around stray dogs, and through and in the midst of swarms of flies and rats. The streets of Kathmandu are alive with

a great variety of fauna. One might assume the animal life of the town ended with pigs, sacred cows and bulls (the fierce bulls seem to keep to certain well-defined districts where none of the inhabitants dare to go out of their homes except in sprints and dashes). This is not so; the valley is alive with animals, insects, and various birds. Giant flying foxes share the sky with countless flocks of crows whose chorus is the most characteristic background music of the entire valley. More picturesque are the hundreds of white cranes that majestically pace about the rice paddies, treading slowly above their hazy reflections, when not clustering in hundreds like great blooms upon the tentacular branches of the bodhi trees, the sacred trees of Nepal, which grow out of many wayside shrines.

Behind all the activity of the streets, and floating like a mist above the valley, is the mystery of Nepal. Although intangible as such, it can be felt in everything. It has something to do with the thin air and the lofty mountains, ever present at the end of the slightest alley or behind each monument, that remind one that Nepal and Kathmandu are truly the lost paradise of the Himalayas. There is a sense of intimacy in the valley derived from the great peaks that cut this small part of the world off from the rest of our planet.

Every morning the sun rises over Kathmandu as if upon some sleepy hollow; mist usually covers the town at dawn to be dissipated into thinner and thinner streaks by the morning sun. Dew then lines the grassy borders of the tree-shaded roads and small tracks. Already the incessant lines of coolies begin their jogging ballet along the trails. The tiny shops lower their wooden shutters, the cows are milked in the streets, and all the women of every household, accompanied by children, go and deposit flowers and sprinkle colored rice upon the shrines nearest their houses. In so doing they are followed by chickens and dogs that gobble up the morning offerings, if small, ragged, poor children have not done this before them. At dawn also the small groups of sacred musicians assemble and start off at a happy pace through the town play-

ing their tunes, which are devoid of the rigid pompousness of our Occidental religious music.

Although the country has nine million inhabitants, it seems that a secret web binds all these people together. Practically no country in the world has such a variety of different tribes, languages and races as Nepal; nevertheless there exists among them all a bond that is difficult to describe, but which truly exists. Before being Tamang, Rai or Gurung, these people are above all Nepalese. No political unity explains this, nothing, perhaps, beyond the fact that they live beneath the shadows of the same majestic peaks and that they all tread the same small, familiar trails. Tradesmen and coolies all know each other, and one cannot set out upon the tracks of Nepal without fast acquiring friends, people one meets again in Kathmandu, to which flock so many hundreds of thousands of the country's inhabitants every year. The Kathmandu Valley, to the Nepalese, is known as Nepal, the home of their king, and the peasants coming there never fail to spend an hour or so spellbound before the gates of the king's palace in the hope of catching a glimpse of the divine monarch before trudging back to their isolated villages far away. For the Bhotias, the Tibetan-speaking people of Nepal, Kathmandu is Yambula, a sacred city to whose shrines one must go at least once in a lifetime. Thus the paths that lead to the city see as many pilgrims as businessmen pass by.

To the foreigner Nepal is above all a friendly land, for almost all those one encounters have smiles upon their faces. Such a mixing of tribes and people has brought the Nepalese to look upon foreigners with amused kindness, and one is always greeted by friendly smiles when one lingers in the secret courtyards of the city or passes by the well-built houses of the countryside.

For Boris and all those in the country with a little education, Nepal is the new nation that is now being built. In our era of modern economic development, we see various nations suddenly beginning to develop their potentials. But what is interesting in Cambodia, in African countries, and in South America, is even more

amazing in Nepal, for Nepal was never a colony of a foreign power, as almost all the other small, underdeveloped countries of the world were. When today a doctor reaches a distant outpost in Nepal, he is very often not only the first doctor to go there, but the first white man. When a dam is built, the bulldozers and trucks that go to work are often the first motor vehicles the local population has seen.

Despite the efforts made to open up the country, Nepal is too well guarded by its natural bastions to become rapidly accessible to the outside world. Communications are still the greatest problem; no modern road can resist the great rains of the monsoons, and landslides rapidly destroy the encroachments of modern man. Many valleys and gorges are just too remote or too steep ever to hope to be visited by cars or the like. Into these districts foreigners can penetrate only on foot.

Until as recently as 1950, the world in general remained practically ignorant of what was going on in Nepal. Then, in that year, the ban against foreigners in the country was lifted—at least slightly—and a few daring people with the proper introductions were allowed in.

Boris, who since his childhood had always been ready to volunteer for the unlikely and the difficult, did not hesitate to plunge headfirst into life in Nepal. And it is thanks to Boris that today, fifteen years later, Nepal is accessible to all foreigners, even including casual visitors and tourists. In fighting Nepal's century-old liking for seclusion, Boris has played his most striking role in the country. For the Royal Hotel is far from being simply a convenient place for tourists to spend the night; its creation and existence have been the pivot of much of the country's tourist development.

Immediately upon his first arrival in Kathmandu, in 1951, Boris was enchanted with the incredible beauty and charm of the valley. Having toured the world, he was in an excellent position to appreciate the exceptional beauty of such towns as Patan, Bhadgaon and Kirtipur, not to mention Kathmandu itself. Coming from ugly

Calcutta, where he had lived a luxurious urban life, he was immediately struck by the tourist potentials of the country. No place in the world, he felt, offered such a variety of exquisite architecture, superb monuments and attractive houses, in such a tightly knit area as the Valley of Kathmandu. In Nepal it was not just the case of a few monuments or shrines being worthy of a visit; almost every home was an artistic creation of genuine interest, quite aside from the incredible Buddhist shrines of Bodnath and Shyambunath.

These two sacred places, located on the outskirts of Kathmandu, were truly fantastic. Their central shrines were composed of two large stupas, semispherical buildings of great height topped by gilded copper towers capped by slim copper steeples. On these towers were painted the enigmatic, all-seeing eyes of Buddha, facing the cardinal points. These eyes guided to the stupas the thousands of Tibetan and other Buddhist pilgrims who annually came down to the valley to visit these holy places. The pilgrims themselves were an incredible sight: monks in large red robes mingled with old, pigtail-wearing men from the remotest regions of Tibet, men who had measured the road to Bodnath with their bodies, prostrating themselves at each step. The streets about these shrines were thronged with medieval crowds of priests and scholars, laymen and simple peasants, who to the sound of drums and gigantic copper horns, prayed and chanted as in groups they circumscribed the large stupas. About the shrines cylindrical prayer wheels rattled on their shafts and hundreds of featherlike prayer flags beat in the winds, sending up innumerable prayers to Buddha. Surely, thought Boris, tourists would go mad for Nepal. As further attraction the valley offered its beautiful view of the eternal snows of the Himalayan peaks, which every day were becoming more famous as large climbing expeditions drew the attention of the world to the great snowy ranges of Annapurna, Everest and Dhaulagiri.

Despite this, in 1954 it was still as difficult to enter Nepal as to enter Tibet. Formalities were long and complicated; there was no road leading to Nepal, while air transport was inadequate and

irregular, and visas were obtainable only by foreigners with specific objectives and well-guaranteed credentials. Boris mentioned the possibilities of tourism to many of his Nepalese friends, among whom was the Prime Minister. All these people at first just smiled. How could anyone be interested in Nepal, a country that had no beautiful modern buildings like those of Calcutta or Delhi? The Nepalese felt that their old streets and temples, although dear to their hearts, would be totally uninteresting to strangers who had such sights in their own lands as fifty-story concrete buildings and great steel bridges.

Boris, in view of the tourist potential, suddenly had the idea of opening a hotel that could cater more fittingly to the future visitors and the increased number of foreigners to be expected in the valley. Also, thought Boris, he could thus cater to himself and bring to Nepal some of the gastronomical treats he missed. The installation of a United States aid mission under the Point Four program had already increased the number of foreign residents. Food in Nepal was a catastrophe if anyone wanted a European meal.

So it was that Boris managed to interest in a hotel project General Bahadur Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. The General had little use for the totality of his gigantic palace, which was set ideally close to the city, and agreed to make one half of it available to Boris for his hotel.

No sooner had an agreement been reached with the General than Boris flew back to India to collect all that was necessary to start a hotel. This was no small problem, for in Kathmandu virtually nothing was available. Drinking glasses, knives and forks were unknown in the local shops; they had to be imported along with such things as toilets, beds, bed linen, and modern cooking utensils, and in fact almost everything, down to the smallest article. Kathmandu was still an isolated country with no easy access and few mass-manufactured goods available in its shops beyond glass bangles and small cotton items that found their way into the country on coolie back.

In Calcutta, Boris rapidly set to work to gather together all that

was needed. He recruited cooks, headwaiters, and clerks, plus a strange load of china, linen, cutlery, water closets, and other necessities. With all these wares packed in 140 crates, Boris headed by train for the Nepalese frontier.

A hundred miles from the border, in northern Bihar, trouble began. The monsoons had just ended and excessive storms had flooded most of the countryside. The train, at a snail's pace, waded through what seemed a gigantic lake. When the train finally pulled into Raxaul, a small, dingy station at the Nepalese border, Boris found the entire town under two feet of water. On the outskirts of the town he managed to locate a shed above water level where, after chasing away the cows that had taken refuge there, he was able to store his equipment for the night.

There being no road into Kathmandu, Boris decided to transfer his hotel gear the next day to Simra, a small airstrip on the Nepalese side of the border. When he awoke the following morning, however, the outlook seemed grim. It had rained continuously for twelve days, all radio and telegraphic communication with Kathmandu was dead, and wild rumors were circulating that the Valley of Kathmandu, which had originally been a large lake until the water drained away through the narrow Chobar gorge at its southwestern end, had reverted to its former condition. No planes had landed there for twelve days and it seemed that there were none forthcoming. Boris met an Indian officer who was ready to attempt to walk it over the hills to Kathmandu. Boris joined him and they drove by jeep to the end of the small strip of road. There they set out on foot. All the torrents were unfordable, the few small bridges had been swept away, entire hamlets had disappeared under seas of mud that had crashed down from the hills above them. Even the smaller torrents carried great boulders that endangered men and horses when they tried to cross them. Finally Boris had to return; but the Indian officer carried on, climbing up the hills to avoid having to cross the torrents, and arrived in Kathmandu six days later, having walked with little food over the rain-soaked mountains.

Finally, a week later all the equipment and personnel reached Kathmandu safely. But when Boris got there General Bahadur informed him that he had changed his mind about the hotel. Boris for some moments was desperate, but at last, after a heated conversation, he persuaded the General to give him a perpetual lease on half of the palace. Thus began the Royal Hotel.

Flying equipment to Nepal soon was to prove the easiest of the tasks that lay ahead of Boris.

A hotel of a certain standing was as new to the country as the idea of tourism was to most Nepalese. In all the valley there was no kerosene, no gas, and no electricity worth speaking of. All cooking had to be done on wood fires. Almost all food except the rice that forms the staple of diet of the population would have to be flown or carried into the valley. Boris set up a bakery, constructing an oven (a device unknown in Nepal) in the manner of those of Russia, and soon the bakery, employing ten people, served the entire foreign community. Finding his green thumb, Boris also introduced to Nepal dozens of varieties of fruits and vegetables that were unknown in the country—carrots, beetroots, spinach, lettuce and strawberries. These plants grew well and fast and some of them have since been taken up for cultivation by the Nepalese peasants themselves. As for the servants who assisted those imported from India, they had to be taught everything, from what a spoon is made for to how to make a bed, hold a plate and shine shoes.

Patiently, Boris saw to all these tasks. He also had to teach the servants such strange things as how to wear shoes, how to wash their hands, and not to serve clients water from "the little white wells in the bathroom," as they called the toilets.

When the first beds were available, Boris proceeded to lobby actively to try to persuade the Prime Minister and the King that visas should be given to tourists. In the early spring of 1955 he had received a letter from Thomas Cook and Sons of Bombay asking him whether he could arrange for visas to be granted for three groups of tourists on the famous *Caronia* cruise around the world to spend two days each in Nepal. After much persuasive talk and

string-pulling, Boris obtained government agreement that visas could be delivered to these first tourists on their arrival.

Boris hastily got the hotel into as good shape as possible before the arrival of the first group of tourists ever to enter Nepal. This was no small event for the kingdom or for the outside world, and *Life* magazine, on March 28, 1955, ran a four-page feature article on the event:

“The irrepressible stream of tourism, which has upset many a sanctuary, finally broke into remote Nepal. Nestled in the Himalayas, Nepal has for a century peevishly shut its borders to all but a few foreigners. But recently Boris Lissanevitch, a British-naturalized ex-Russian, managed to lease a palace in Katmandu, capital of Nepal, and to convert it into the “Royal Hotel” by flying in everything from cutlery and cooks to flush toilets. Then Lissanevitch lobbied until Nepal allowed Thomas Cook & Sons to fly in a tourist group. . . . Even in Nepal tourists were tourists.”

Boris did more than arrange for the visas; he arranged that the King himself should attend a reception for the newcomers. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander of the Ford Foundation, who had arrived a few months earlier and were the first clients of the Royal Hotel, scanned Patan's artisans' shops for intricate and beautiful Nepalese jewelry and handicrafts. They felt these might interest visitors and could be a new source of foreign exchange for the country. On the day of the reception, before the surprised King Mahendra and his royal ministers, the tourists rushed on the handicraft exhibits, fighting with each other to buy up everything. So popular were the bejeweled copper boxes, the masks and other artifacts that there were not enough to go around and more had to be ordered immediately.

King Mahendra was so impressed by the evident enthusiasm of the tourists for his country and its crafts that he gave orders to his ministers then and there, on the terrace of the Royal Hotel, that in

the future visas should be issued to all tourists on sight. Thus Nepal, thanks to Boris's efforts, was suddenly opened to the world. And today, a decade later, the increased number of planes that make daily flights to the valley are not enough to accommodate the large flow of tourists that now flock to visit the most picturesque kingdom in Asia.

With the introduction of tourism and the setting up of international aid agencies after Nepal's admission to the United Nations in 1955, there was an obvious increase in the number of white faces in the valley. The Royal Hotel soon became the meeting place of Europeans and Nepalese. And Boris, with his buoyant charm and enthusiastic personality, became the leading spirit of the town's social activities. As a correspondent of a large American paper put it, "Boris is the number two attraction in Nepal after Everest."

This is no small distinction, when one considers that for some unknown reason the valley of Kathmandu abounds in extravagant personalities.

III Pigs and People

Thousands of miles away from the hectic capitals of Europe, half the world around from New York, hundreds of miles from the nearest large Indian city, one would expect Kathmandu and its isolated valley to be a haven of peace and quiet. With this in mind, Marie-Claire and I settled in a small bungalow situated in a secluded corner of the hotel grounds. We were soon, though, to be disillusioned. It quickly became apparent that the world was converging on us, and our social engagements rivaled those of the debutante season in Paris. There were not enough tailors to make Marie-Claire the stock of cocktail dresses we found she needed. At first we wondered whether Boris might have planned a particularly hectic schedule for our arrival; in fact, as we soon discovered, the social whirl into which we were drawn had been routine for Kathmandu ever since Boris transplanted his headquarters there. More people dropped in to see Boris than to look at Everest. The first of these arrived a week after us.

Climbing up the rattling staircase to Boris's flat, I ran into a great tall figure attempting to pass in the other direction. The tall, sunburned, handsome man was Ed, Ed being the name by which, at the Royal Hotel, Sir Edmund Hillary is known. For Sir Edmund the Royal is in a way a home away from home; his numerous expeditions to the Himalayas and his present work of setting

up schools for the Sherpa children of the Mount Everest district of Nepal bring him to the hotel at least once a year.

I hoped that now, with Hillary at the hotel, I would learn a lot more about climbing. In fact, I did not; on the other hand I learned a great deal about bees. Unassuming and energetic, Hillary is the incarnation of energy and dynamism. Unspoiled by his fame, this lanky New Zealander still retains his natural friendliness and charm. Boris, who always manages to turn every situation to the benefit of his palate, did not forget that Sir Edmund, before being the first to climb Everest, was a bee breeder. Boris now wanted to import hives of bees from New Zealand. It was one more of his endless projects and schemes. Ed, an old friend of Boris's, shared his enthusiasm on the subject, which he definitely seemed to prefer to repeating endlessly the story of how he reached the summit of the world.

The day after Hillary's arrival, the grounds of the hotel were invaded by short Nepalese police uniformed in khaki and red. Jeeps with little blue-and-red, double-pennanted Nepalese flags pulled in by the dozens. Boris was hurrying around all over the place with greater velocity than usual. In the ballroom of the hotel, lined with the portraits of the fierce, medieval-looking, bejeweled Ranas, tables were laid out for a gigantic tea party. All this commotion was in preparation for perhaps the strangest gathering ever to be held in anachronistic Kathmandu. Just 15 years after the landing of the first airplane in the kingdom, the first men and woman to have flown in outer space had come to pay their respects to medieval Nepal.

The Russian Embassy had asked Boris to handle the reception, an amusing tribute to Boris's popularity, as he is a refugee from Communist Russia. Little does this worry either Boris or the Russian Embassy; Nepal is neutral and Boris's Russian food is best appreciated by the Communist personnel of the Embassy.

At five, accompanied by appropriate Nepalese ministers and their wives, the latter still shy from purdah (which had kept them

practically locked up until less than 10 years ago), came the three space explorers. The woman cosmonaut, Valentina Tereshkova, was a tall, stout, blond figure among the frail Nepalese women who had come out in force to greet her. Boris, in high spirits, spent the afternoon chatting in Russian and getting opinions about space from the cosmonauts. Had they stayed a little longer, Boris would definitely be one of the best friends not only of the highest men on earth but also of the highest woman in the sky. But the cosmonauts, no doubt from habit formed in orbiting the earth in 90 minutes, did not linger in Nepal, the hotel seeing more terrestrial guests after their departure.

I had ample time now to meet and become friendly with some of the unusual residents of the valley. The first, and probably the most remarkable, was Father Marshall Moran, the American Jesuit I had met at the bar of the hotel on my arrival, and who had been attempting to cheer up the leader of the Italian climbing party, one of whose members had died on the slopes of the mountain they had hoped to conquer. The Tibetans call him the "American Lama," and many of them believe he is the Dalai Lama of the West. Father Moran, as he himself similingly points out, is Nepalese—the first foreigner to acquire Nepalese nationality. That a Catholic priest should receive such a distinction from a Hindu god-king is a good indication of the remarkable character of Father Moran and the esteem and affection in which he is held in Nepal. He came to Nepal a year before Boris's arrival. Father Moran had been initially invited by the Ranas, then later, at the request of the government, he set up the first secondary school for boys in the valley. Father Moran possesses all the characteristics that have made his Jesuit order famous. A diplomat, a scholar, and in many ways a saint, he and Boris are beyond doubt the most famous foreigners of the valley.

Father Moran is forever astounding those who know him. Whether bashing along on a motorcycle, tearing through groups of sacred cows in a jeep, or simply walking, Father Moran always speeds. And like a true amateur racer he wears while traveling the

grim face of a desperado about to miss a curve. Occasionally cows have suffered, although Father Moran, in accordance with the law, strictly respects the local faiths. When Father Moran is off his horse or motor bike or out of his car, and has peeled off his layers of jackets and driving equipment, his face wears the radiant smile of one pleased at having won a race (an easy matter in the valley, where the minute number of vehicles eliminates any serious competition). The usual introduction to the racing Jesuit is the shriek of brakes that precedes the inevitable, "Hi, there, come here, I want to tell you somethin'."

By telling something to so many people, Father Moran has succeeded in doing the impossible in Nepal. He is regarded as having a unique ability to shake the placid, calm outlook of sleepy civil servant, noncommittal official, and hesitant minister. But when Father Moran starts talking, it is hard to realize that he is such a busy man. He always knows the best jokes and the latest American baseball scores, if not some incredible news from the world's trouble spots, information that he picks up in his nightly ham radio activities. Once out from behind the wheel, Father Moran never seems to have a worry. This is a rare thing for Nepal, where most foreigners spend their days lamenting and cursing about their problems and difficulties in securing the essentials for survival. Not so Father Moran. "I don't see why I should worry about things that the Nepalese don't even think of," he says. The remark definitely is a résumé of how to get along in Nepal without undue pain. It may be mentioned that to get anything done in the valley without asking Father Moran or Boris requires weeks of patience, days of anxiety and hours of frustration, the Nepalese officials on their side demanding lengthy consultations with obscure divinities and months of meditation before being moved to action.

Whether solving problems for Tibetan refugees or arranging delicate questions with the Foreign Office, Father Moran always wraps things up at high speed, smiling and making numerous dashes around town.

Besides Father Moran, a second pillar of the Jesuit mission is Fa-

ther Niesan. A short man, who hates fast driving as much as Father Moran loves it, Father Niesan is usually to be seen slouched next to the driver's seat of Father Moran's jeep, with his eyes closed. St. Xavier's School has now taught English and other subjects to hundreds of young Nepalese and Fathers Moran and Niesan still find time to nurse the personal problems of the now much enlarged foreign colony of the valley.

Another true character of the valley was the Swiss geologist Toni Hagen, who had arrived in Nepal a year before Boris. Beyond doubt the man who knows the country better than anyone else, Toni Hagen is in fact the only man to know all of Nepal. Hillary and Tensing may have conquered Everest, but nobody can claim to have climbed more widely in Nepal than Hagen. For twelve years he has constantly roamed all over the kingdom—through every pass, down into every valley, and up to every slope-clinging village—in a series of journeys that should win him the title of the greatest climber on earth. A true explorer, Toni Hagen has covered on foot some eighteen thousand miles of the most difficult and remote reaches of the country, occasionally dropping into Kathmandu, where he has always with great courage attempted to impress on the Nepalese what they should do for their country. No one realized the extent and variety of Nepal till Hagen brought in his reports of the nineteen different tribes he has identified, the thousands of valleys he has visited, and the innumerable uncharted areas he has explored. Braving highway robbers, crossing passes believed impracticable, Hagen has visited hundreds of areas that no other foreigner has ever penetrated. For twelve years he has risked his life and nearly died in his quest for full knowledge of a country of which not only Westerners, but the Nepalese themselves, who rarely wander beyond the valley in which they live, were ignorant.

The Swiss, it seems, have taken naturally to Nepal, a country whose scenery is very similar to that of the Alps. Werner Schultess, a compatriot of Hagen, arrived in Kathmandu six weeks after Boris did. Schultess is a hard worker and a remarkable contrast to

the usual inefficient foreign "experts" who set out to aid undeveloped countries. In a matter of months Schultess set up among the rough Tibetan-speaking tribesmen a dairy and cheese factory that would put many of those in the Alps to shame. So successful was this scheme, which owes its existence to one man's energetic drive, that in no time Werner's cheese became Nepal's largest item of export. Relays of primitive pigtail-wearing Tibetans make up Schultess's "milk men." Over the difficult passes they travel miles on foot to gather the yak milk that eventually is turned into gigantic wheels of savory cheese, which is fought over by all the great hotels and restaurants of India.

Bearded and ferocious looking, Werner Schultess is actually a quiet, calm man. He modestly shrugs off any compliments, but when he sets his mind on something, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations and the Swiss government aid mission shudder on their foundations.

"If they won't help me, I'll do it myself," is Werner Schultess's slogan. Like Father Moran and Boris, Schultess has worked a small miracle in the valley.

It was almost by accident that I discovered Peter Aufschnaiter. Shy and reserved, he avoids foreign visitors. It was, strangely enough, the Tibetan wife of the Prime Minister of Bhutan who asked me to "look him up."

An Austrian by birth, Peter Aufschnaiter is a Tibetan at heart, and only those who are persistent can make him unwind and reveal the secrets he guards so well. Peter Aufschnaiter beyond doubt knows Tibet better than any other foreigner. Unassuming and modest, he is in Nepal as an engineer for the FAO. Aufschnaiter is forever devising methods of aiding the Tibetans in Nepal. It was he who accompanied Heinrich Harrer, author of *Seven Years in Tibet*, into the forbidden kingdom of the snows. Aufschnaiter, though, remained in Tibet even longer than Harrer. He had been the leader of the ill-fated 1939 German expedition to Nanga Parbat, whose members had been interned by the British at the

outbreak of war. Escaping with Harrer and five other prisoners who headed in other directions, Peter Aufschnaiter remained seven years in Tibet with his friend. When Harrer left for the outside world in 1950 Peter remained behind, slowly moving eastward as the Chinese took control of central Tibet until the Communists finally forced him out of the land of the Dalai Lama, nine years after his arrival there. With his thorough knowledge of the Tibetan language and literature, Aufschnaiter, who has many close friends among the aristocrats of Lhasa, soon became practically Tibetan himself. He has set up residence for good in Nepal, where, in a small but beautiful Newar peasant house, he plans to stay for the rest of his life. Like Toni Hagen, but in a quieter way, Peter Aufschnaiter has roamed over much of Nepal, especially the highest regions inhabited by Tibetan-speaking people. A more charming, fascinating and in a way mysterious person is hard to imagine.

In 1952, these strange and exciting figures and perhaps half a dozen other people were the only foreigners that Boris found in Nepal, with the exception of three British diplomats and a few of their Indian opposite numbers. It was only in 1959, many years later, that this small group of foreign residents was substantially increased by the opening of Russian, American and Chinese embassies in the kingdom.

Equally fascinating, I found, were the Nepalese personalities who dominated the political and social life of the country. Beyond doubt the most famous among them was His Highness Field Marshal Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. The Field Marshal, as he was familiarly known by all, was one of the most colorful and enigmatic of Nepalese.

One day friends of mine arranged for me to meet him. "At ten o'clock you must be at his palace," I was told. In advance I was ready, and leaving the hotel I walked over to the impressive gates of the Field Marshal's palace, which lay next to the grounds of the Royal Hotel, facing the rather larger gate of the king's own palace.

A driveway clustered with flowers led to a circular lawn hedged in by pink rhododendron bushes. A great botanist who could rattle off the English, Latin, Nepalese and even occasionally the French name of every known flower, the Field Marshal has planted his majestic park with many of the innumerable varieties of Nepal's flora. At the door of the palace an old manservant, bowing low, bade me come in. I stepped into a vast marble hall cluttered like the antechamber of a museum with rare vases, dark paintings, and the huge figures of great buffalo heads and other trophies. Shown a small bench, I was asked to await the arrival of His Highness Field Marshal Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. I was more than a little awed. Such titles led me to expect a great, six-foot-tall, impressive person. I was therefore a little surprised when a small, frail man, stooped with age, came to greet me. He was every bit the image of a slightly Oriental Voltaire, but he also possessed the shrewdness of a Talleyrand allied to the intelligence and culture of a French academician. Like Talleyrand, the Field Marshal had survived and retained favor through many a palace intrigue, and after the fall of the Rana regime he continued to receive titles and honors from the Shah kings.

With pride the Field Marshal showed me around the huge white palace he had built in the manner of Versailles. It is complete with an elaborate garden like that of the Little Trianon but with six pavilions, rather than four as in Louis XIV's folly, for, as he explained to me, in Nepal there are six seasons: spring, dew, summer, rains, autumn and winter. His stately palace, which contains countless suites of elaborately decorated chambers and majestic reception rooms, also harbors the Field Marshal's library, believed to be the largest and most complete private library in the East. To possess a large library would be little claim to distinction were it not that the Field Marshal's most famous attribute was his encyclopedic memory. Upon the mention of any author by a visitor, the Field Marshal would lead his guests to the rooms filled with steel bookcases containing his library. He would then quote

from memory a sentence from the book referred to by the visitor, and the page of the quotation, and then with his aristocratic finger would point out the exact location in his library of that very book. The Field Marshal's passion for knowledge was equaled only by his love of refinement. A gourmet, he had one of the best wine cellars in Asia. His taste for beautiful women and fine food was as famous as his political and diplomatic ability.

Boris had first met the Field Marshal at the 300 Club in Calcutta when His Highness was passing through on his way to London, where for several years he was the Nepalese ambassador. Field Marshal Kaiser died shortly after I left Nepal.

Besides the Field Marshal it seemed that the entire valley of Kathmandu was populated by generals, for many a Rana son was made a general, or at least a colonel, at birth. In their elaborate uniforms, these officers presented in the evening a pleasant, nineteenth-century picture as in full regalia they attended the numerous official functions of the valley. To Boris they recalled the early days of his childhood when in czarist Odessa he had been allowed to peep at some large dinner party at home before being packed off to bed.

Other familiar Nepalese figures were King Tribhuvan's three sons, Prince Mahendra, Prince Himalaya and Prince Basundhara. Boris became very friendly with Prince Basundhara, a short, wiry man with a shrewd look in his eye and a mysterious smile.

There was always something unusual to do or strange people to meet, and with Boris I had to be ready for anything. A few days after the Russian space trio had left, Boris asked me if we would like to go to Ichangu.

"What is that?" I queried, wondering what Boris was going to spring on me.

Boris is quite unpredictable, but I never expected his reply: "It's my weekend house." In Kathmandu this simple sentence sounded utterly strange—a weekend house in the valley where there existed no weekends as office hours were practically unknown. Furthermore, in Nepal for some reason Saturday, by royal decree, is the

day of rest equivalent to our Sunday, which leaves one perplexed as to where the weekend fits in.

When I questioned Inger for further details on Boris's weekend house, she answered absently, "I don't know. You know how Boris is. I haven't seen the house. Boris has made some sort of arrangement with a Rana to rent a farm out in the hills."

When I pressed Boris for details he simply said that he was getting tired of parties and had decided to breed pigs. Had anyone but Boris answered me in such a fashion I would have lost my temper, but with Boris one must learn to be prepared for anything.

Three days later I was quietly seated at the Yak and Yeti with a young British mountaineer when all of a sudden a shriek rang out through the hotel. We all jumped up, wondering what was happening, as more fearful screams echoed from outside. Through my mind flashed what Boris had told me about one day when the bakery workers of the hotel had knifed each other practically to death. I rushed to the gallery on the second floor by the bar and peered into the park. All was dark outside and nothing was moving. At that moment Boris came rattling down the spiral stairs from his flat.

"The pigs have arrived," he called to me as he shot off down to the ground floor. There shortly, by his side, I witnessed the unloading of forty-three large Yorkshire Whites by the lobby entrance. The howling and squealing pigs had unexpectedly arrived from India by truck. Boris had cabled to his best friend, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, to send him some of this prize stock. Boris had not been joking after all; he did indeed intend to breed pigs.

In Boris's enthusiasm over becoming the highest and only hog breeder of the Himalayas, and in all his greedy anticipation of glorious bacon and fresh ham, he had forgotten to plan a resting place for his noisy herd.

"What about Ichangu?" I asked, recalling his mentioning his weekend house where he would "breed pigs."

“Oh, Ichangu! Yes, we will go there the day after tomorrow, but the pigs will have to stay here. There is no place for them yet. Now, where could we put these wonderful animals?” continued Boris as if ten o’clock at night was the best hour to find a resting place for forty-three snorting, squealing pigs, greatly excited by hundreds of miles of dusty and tortuous roads.

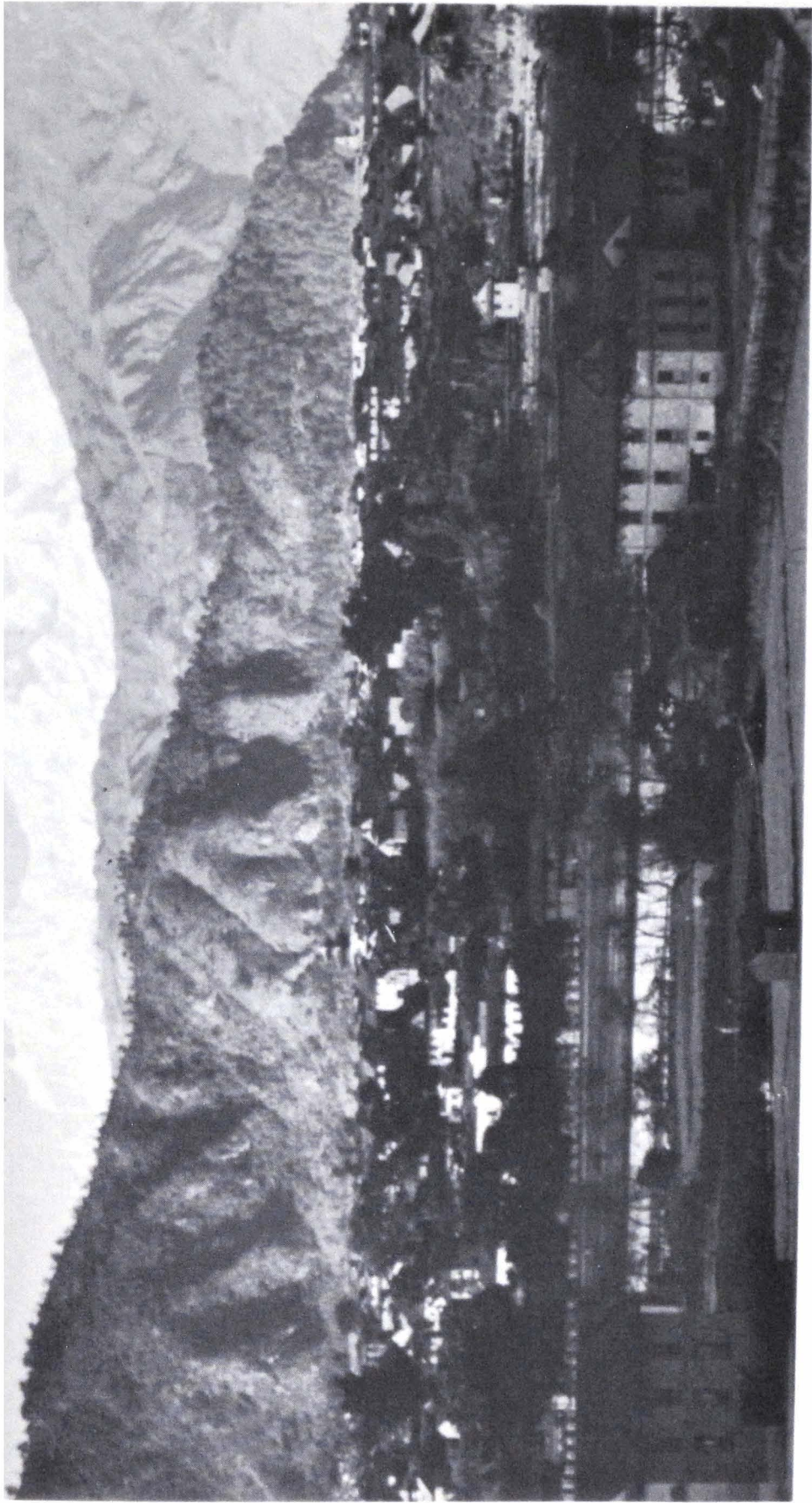
The unfortunate answer to this quandary landed me with the pigs as neighbors. “We will put them behind the bungalow,” said Boris. With flashlights, and assisted by the hotel’s room bearers, he and I managed to drive the herd into an enclosure behind our living quarters. Marie-Claire regarded these neighbors with a cold eye. The next morning we thought Boris’s imagination a little too fertile. A rather well-known odor drifted about as we drank our morning tea. In pyjamas I strolled out to the veranda of the bungalow for fresh air. To my disappointment the air smelled worse outside. I had hardly noted this when, looking up, I saw two hundred faces staring at me. Threatening to break down the brick wall that had once secluded us from the street was a huge crowd of Nepalese, all laughing and chatting away gaily. Overnight the pigs had become one of Kathmandu’s greatest attractions. Now hundreds of peasants and coolies, along with children held in their arms, gaped at the great pink and white monsters, so different from the thin, black little pigs of Nepal, with their scraggy, long hair.

For three weeks the pigs were to do away with all our privacy and to drain Marie-Claire’s precious store of perfume.

We quickly began to look forward to Saturday and the much promised visit to Ichangu. We now felt we deserved to recapture the fresh air for which till then the valley had been famous.

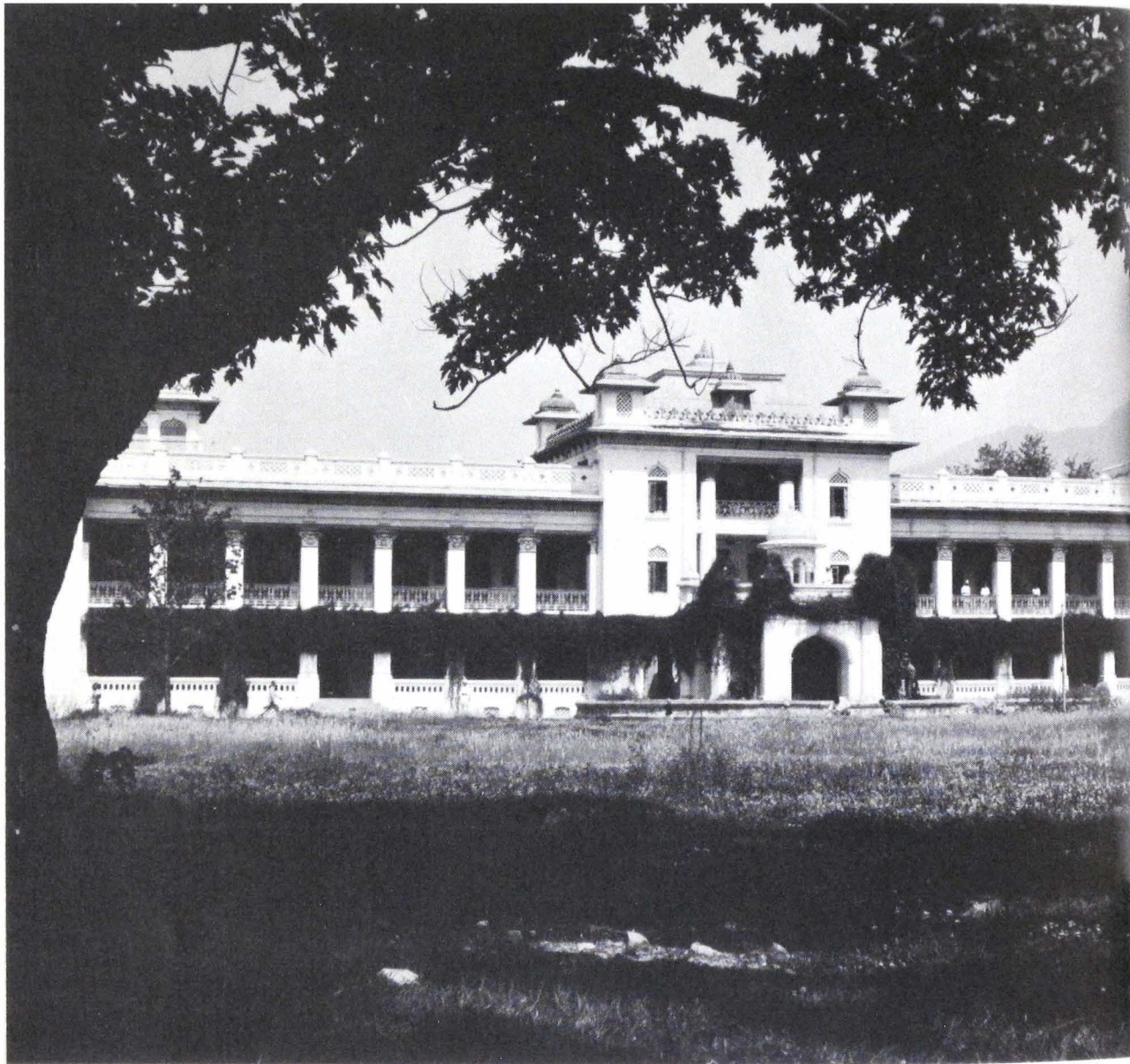
Boris had said we would leave at dawn. When I climbed up to his flat it was ten, and Boris lay in his bath with a novel. “Right away!” he shouted. “Call me a bearer.” I fetched a servant and soon Boris was giving endless orders in Nepali.

We did not leave before two in the afternoon. This was no surprise to me when I contemplated the dozens of wooden crates, steel



Katmandu and the snow-covered Himalayas.

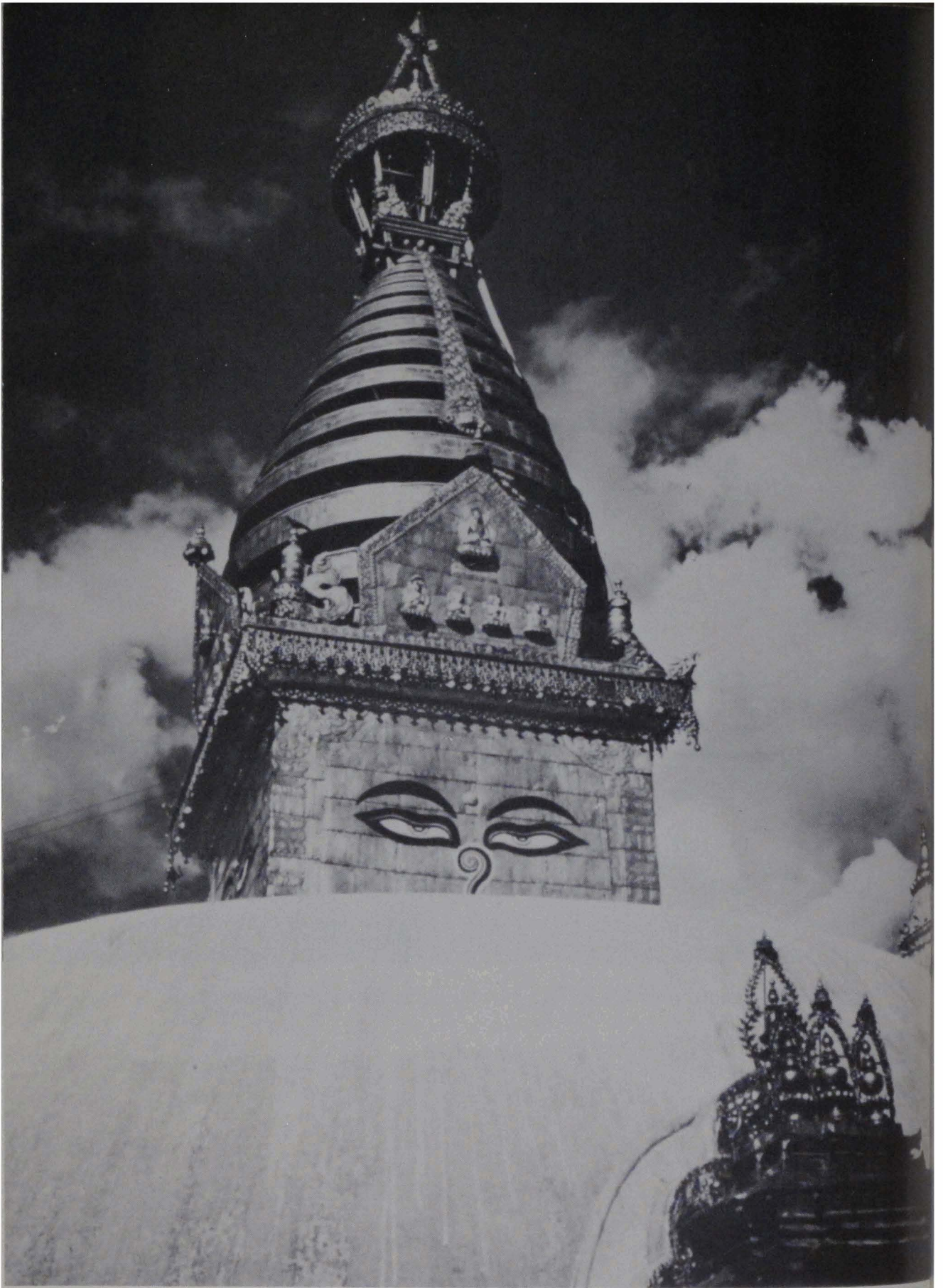
Frederick Ayer



The Royal Hotel, Kathmandu.



Boris Lissanevitch at the Royal Hotel. Boris was the first to grow strawberries in Nepal.



Frederick Aye

The eyes of Buddha survey Kathmandu from the shrine of Shyambunath.

boxes, and other baggage that littered the steps of the hotel around Boris. It seemed as if we were setting out for Everest. This became more evident when ten coolies filed into the hotel. Nosing around, I discovered a crate of French wine, endless bottles of vodka, and enough other stores to keep a regiment happy for Christmas.

"Tonight I'm doing the cooking," announced Boris triumphantly. "I will prepare a borscht the like of which you have never tasted before!"

On these words we all piled into three Land Rovers—Boris, Inger, Marie-Claire and I, along with ten coolies, two cooks, and a small Nepalese contractor who Boris hoped would build the pig pens overnight.

We rattled out of the grounds of the hotel into the midst of the town. To the noise of the car's horn we crept through the crowded main street of Kathmandu, winding a crooked path around sacred cows that glared greedily into the small wooden shops that lined the street on both sides. Passing a small band, we erupted onto Hanuman Dhoka Square, the heart of Kathmandu and one of the most impressive sights of the city. The square looks virtually like a forest of pagodas, which spring up all over and around it. Neat, pyramid-like platforms support numerous little temples, some with gilt roofs, others with tiles. Everywhere loom the great stone figures of kneeling winged divinities or stone bulls, which lie alongside live ones.

Working our way through the crowd of shrines and people, both equally disdainful of motor vehicles, we made our way down a busy alley to the edge of the Baghmati River, along which Kathmandu sprawls. The Baghmati, as a tributary of the Ganges, is held sacred in Nepal, and for this reason its banks are usually the scene of gruesome bonfires, as the dead are disposed of by burning. Clattering over an ancient Nepalese bridge of wood and brick never intended for motor traffic, we reached the opposite bank safely. Here, a stone's throw from the town, begin the pale green rice paddies that stretch off toward the southeast around the vertical mound on

which stands the great Buddhist shrine of Shyambunath, the oldest pilgrimage place of the valley. Skirting around this hill, avoiding devout Tibetan pilgrims, we headed for the edge of the Kathmandu Valley. Three miles out of town the jeeps came to a stop in an open stone quarry. From there, Boris announced proudly, we would have to climb.

Our weekend outing was taking on the aspects of a wholesale expedition. The porters were loaded, while Boris, whom late nights and endless cocktail parties should have softened a little, struck out first up a sheer, steep track that led us out of the peaceful confines of the Kathmandu Valley.

Dripping perspiration, I attempted to keep up with him, while Boris, panting, commented on the beauty of our surroundings. The moment we had left the cars behind it was as if we had changed worlds. The narrow track now led between deep hedges of blooming flowers and cacti. We passed a few neat, ocher-colored houses where little girls in rags, flowers in their hair, stared as our strange caravan advanced. Passing two ancient ruined temples, whose half-destroyed carven lintels would fetch a fortune in any museum, we walked on for an hour.

Finally, after one great steep stretch, we found ourselves at Ichangu. I had no time to catch my breath before Boris ushered us around his new dream house. Built on a tall, narrow ridge, the house, a remarkable compromise between a British country cottage and a Nepalese home, overlooked the Valley of Kathmandu. Below us it now seemed that the town was a pale pink island floating amidst a lake formed by the water-filled rice paddies that reflected the pale blue sky. Beyond the valley were the great, white, frosty peaks of the Himalayan range glaring in the sun. Directly down from the house, on steep terraces on three sides, grew countless orange and other citrus trees whose sweet blossoms gave out a fragrance suggestive of the Italian Riviera. All around the house was a stone-paved formal garden through which ran a network of small, bubbling brick canals fed by a little stream. Behind the house the

ridge merged into a great hill whose towering mass was covered with great pine and rhododendron trees. The hill, I learned, was the king's private game preserve, where within an hour from the city leopards and great bears abounded.

This amazing house, the only one of its kind in the valley, had been built by an educated member of the Rana family who had allied the best of taste in Nepalese architecture with European influence. Ichangu was a true paradise perched amid scenery taken from a dream.

When the coolies finally arrived, Boris set about organizing the place. Beds were put in, mattresses unrolled, and before long, on a small wood fire assisted by two servants, Boris was busy making our supper. He has, it seems, always time for everything, and although we were all busy finding kerosene lamps and rescuing furniture from ants that had invaded the place, Boris still managed to see to it that a regal meal justified the celebration of our first coming to his "pig farm."

While the borscht was cooking, with a Bloody Mary in each hand, I followed Boris around the grounds while he excitedly explained to me where he was going to have the piggens built, and how he would have the irrigation canals changed, and the orange groves improved. Boris had a plan for everything, and seemed completely to disregard any reasonable objections that I tried to muster. In the first place, how could all the pigs be brought up to such a high spot? What would they eat? This seemed to be of little concern to Boris, who had an answer for everything.

That night, after zakouskis of smoked oysters and caviar, French *saucisson*, canned olives, and the like, we had Boris's excellent borscht. From that day on, every weekend, we retired to Ichangu with Boris and Inger, and here, after he had stage-managed the coolies and workers who were now busily building the pens that were to make him the highest hog dealer of the Himalayas, Boris and I would get the first moments of calm together we had had since my arrival.

How was it, I was able at last to ask Boris, that he had ever come to the East? Seated around a small table facing a window overlooking Kathmandu, drinking vodka as the pale lights of the city twinkled below through the warm night, Boris took me through the varied episodes of his amazing life.

IV Bolsheviks and Ballet

The Lissanevitch family was from Odessa, the great seaport and capital of the Ukraine, on the lazy waters of the Black Sea.

"I owe everything to the Russian Revolution," was Boris's surprising comment in answer to my question as to how he had been launched on his incredible career. "You see, otherwise I would have done like my elder brothers—gone into the Imperial navy, served my time, and then joined my father horse breeding at our country home in the hamlet of Lissanevitchevka in the Ukraine. Odessa has a pleasant climate, in a way like Kathmandu, although it can get quite cold when the north winds blow and bring south the freezing air of the plains.

"I had three brothers. I was the youngest of the family, and I spent most of my childhood making mischief around the stables and training grounds. I would get up early in the morning and see the horses tried out by my father on the track just in front of our house.

"Our Odessa home was on the outskirts of the town, between the race track and the cadet school. Those were the two places that played the most important parts in my life in Odessa."

Nicolas Alexandrovitch Lissanevitch, Boris's father, was quite famous in Russia as a horse breeder. He had imported from England the thoroughbred stallion Galteemore, who became one of the lead-

ing sires of Russian race-horse stock. Every morning before breakfast the Lissanevitch home would welcome wealthy princes and generals coming to inquire about and oversee the training of their horses. Boris, escaping the watchful eye of his French nanny, would run out and join his father and his friends in the paddocks, mingling with the smart sportsmen who sought his father's advice and knowledge.

Very young, in fact at the age of nine, three months before the required age, Boris left the shelter of his home and was sent to the Cadet School in Odessa. Dressed in a miniature uniform, he knew the rigors of discipline at an early age. It was at this school that from then on he received his formal education.

Four years later Boris was still at the Cadet School when the revolution broke out in Russia.

Today one often forgets how far the Russian Revolution was from being a spontaneous affair or being concluded suddenly. Pockets of resistance were all over Russia, and for three years it was common for one district to shift from revolutionary control back to czarist hands over half a dozen times. During this tumultuous period Odessa's history was to be a particularly stormy one. First, in 1917, the Reds took control. After some fighting, the Cadet School, the anchor point of the White Russian resistance in the city, fell. The cadets were lined up on the drill ground, given a red flag and ordered to parade fifteen minutes later before the leaders of the local revolutionary committee.

The youthful cadets, passionate czarists to the last boy, and unaware of the danger they were running, prepared a small coup of their own. In the interval before the order to start parading, they dipped the red flag in kerosene, and just when the marching cadets reached the official tribune the flag bearer set fire to the red banner. This dramatic demonstration was followed by severe reprisals, and ended in the school's temporary dissolution. Boris was sent home as chaos spread through the city.

At first only a local Communist committee had taken Odessa.

Soon, however, the news arrived that the Red Communist army was closing in on the city. Already the Polish Legion, which had been fighting the Reds, was falling back on Odessa with the enemy hard on its heels. The Poles who had stabled their horses with the Lissanevitches planned to escape and agreed to let Boris and his father join them.

One cold morning Boris was told by his father to get ready to leave. All was dark as Boris finished getting dressed, putting on his stiff riding boots and packing the bare essentials for a trip that was to prove as dangerous as it would be tiring. Nervously Boris went out to the stables, saw that the horses were given a good ration of oats, and had been properly shod for the departure. In silence he and his brothers led the horses out into the paddock. He was helped into the saddle and given the reins of two other horses that he would have to lead by hand. As the sun rose over Odessa they were already on their way, the silence of the morning broken by the clatter of the horses' hoofs.

The first days were the most difficult; the thoroughbreds were quite jittery and kept plunging, rearing and pulling at the reins that he had in hand. Crossing little wooden bridges was the cause of no end of trouble. An excellent rider, Boris soon had the better of the two horses he had in tow. As they marched on and the horses grew tired the task became gradually easier. For Boris this was the first great adventure he had ever experienced. Traveling from village to village, from inn to inn, they galloped and trotted right across Rumania and the Balkans, working their way slowly north over the plains and through the forests to Poland, till finally, after seven weeks in the saddle, the party arrived in Warsaw. Such a trek today would make headlines and have all the earmarks of a remarkable expedition. In 1917 this was but an incidental journey; there were practically no paved roads in Russia and horses were still the principal means of transportation.

As luck would have it, hardly had they arrived in Warsaw after this journey, with its hardships, than they were told that Odessa

had been liberated. A few days after reaching the Polish capital, therefore, they set out by train to return to Odessa via Constantinople.

On arrival, they found their house in good order and the White army in control of the city—a situation that was not to last long. Boris was only thirteen then, but he enlisted in the Imperial navy as a cadet and assistant quartermaster. But his career in the navy was short-lived. The situation in Odessa was again degenerating into chaos and confusion. The French fleet had for a while taken possession of the city, and held parts of it together with the White army. One quarter of the town was in the hands of the Reds, while the anarchist bandit Machno held another district. These hostile areas of the city were barred off by barricades of tables, chairs, beds and other furniture and rubble piled up in the streets. Often, from a vantage point, one could see the opposed flags flying just a few hundred feet apart. The best way to know what was going on, and in which territory one was, was to look at the uniforms of the guards behind the barricades.

While this situation dragged on, Boris returned from his short stay in the navy and reentered the Cadet School, the grounds of which were held anew by the White army.

It was in that troubled time that Boris's second brother, Mikhail, met his tragic death. He was on a destroyer whose commander feared the worst as to the fidelity of his crew. The sailors had for the most part been won over to the cause of the revolution. The officers had, however, managed to keep the upper hand, due mostly to the strong discipline that reigned among the crews of the destroyer flotilla. But now, while patrolling on a mission in the Baltic Sea, Mikhail Lissanevitch's ship hit a German mine. The ship was close to land, and after some difficulty the crew was saved and brought ashore while the destroyer was sinking. The officers were menaced if they disembarked with being made to face a revolutionary tribunal on shore. They therefore courageously remained on board, preferring to go down with their ship in the gallant tradition of the Imperial navy.

The news of Mikhail's tragic death reached the Lissanevitch family in Odessa while the town was still under the partial control of the White army. Boris was still in training in the Cadet School. The situation in Odessa being what it was, the school was evacuated to Tuapse. There, rations having given out, the cadets were not fed, and survived only by raiding the local gardens. After a short time, as it seemed that the situation in Odessa was turning in favor of the Whites, thanks to naval support by the foreign fleets, the school moved back again into the town and the cadets were constituted as a "Special Squadron for the Defense of the Rear Guard."

Here, at the age of fifteen, Boris experienced gunfire and was, in the course of maneuvers in the surrounding countryside, hit by a bullet in the thigh.

Few boys could look back, at the ripe age of fifteen, on having already seen five years of service and having been wounded in battle. Boris's boyhood was already symptomatic of his later life.

In Odessa, life was now a succession of privations, horror and distress. The city still remained free, but not for long. As a member of the "Special Squadron," Boris continued to live at home, reporting each morning, after his wound had healed, to the Cadet School where the boys heard the news of the night's developments and received orders for the day. Every day rumors and counter-rumors flashed through Odessa's streets. "The Reds are advancing," some said. "They are on the outskirts." No one knew whom or what to believe. Food was getting short, Boris's father was absent, and the stunning news suddenly reached the family that he had been captured and deported.

Boris's mother was grieving for the death of her second son, while the eldest was still in the north fighting the Reds. She decided that she and her two youngest boys should escape to Rumania. The Lissanevitches were then staying near the center of Odessa in the house of an aunt, which they shared with another relative, Mrs. Gamsakurdia. For days before the date fixed for their escape, the house was the scene of frantic preparations. A horse

and carriage were readied in the backyard, belongings were piled onto the roof of the vehicle. Everything was arranged for the trek. The day before they planned to set out, Boris ran over to the Cadet School to get the latest information on the position of the Reds. It came as a grim shock to him to find the school abandoned. This left only the rumors of the town to go by. Those seemed bad: the Reds, it appeared, were near at hand.

Next morning at dawn the family prepared to leave. Boris's brother had silently opened the gate and was attempting to start his motor bike and lead the way when shots rang out at the end of the street. Then four horse-drawn wagons rumbled into view. Upon them were posted machine guns manned by unshaven soldiers draped with bandoliers. There was no mistaking them: they were the Reds, and they were entering the city from all sides. Odessa had fallen; the road to Rumania was barred.

From the house to which the family withdrew in discouragement, Boris watched as the soldiers machine-gunned the street. In a road at right angles to them, he saw some White Russian officers pile into a car, fire shots, and drive away into the battling city. The Lissanevitches were now stuck and surrounded. There being no escape possible, they unpacked the carriage and settled down to what was to seem like a siege.

When the shooting quieted down, people began to risk venturing into the streets once more. Many thought they would once again be liberated, for the population of Odessa had become used to changing rulers in the last few years. But as time advanced, the situation settled down and the revolution neared its end.

Although he was very young, Boris's situation was desperate. As a member of the defense corps and a cadet of the Imperial armies, he could expect no good treatment from the Reds if they found him or had any suspicion about him. With his older brother Alexander, therefore, Boris planned to escape. But one afternoon he returned home to learn that his brother had left. Alexander had hurried in a few hours earlier to tell his mother that he had met

with some fishermen who were leaving at that moment and were ready to take him with them out of Russia. There was no way for Alexander to wait for his brother, and besides, it would have been risky for them both to leave on the fishing trip together.

Boris's brother's escape was not uneventful; all the Lissanevitch brothers were to know trying and tragic adventures during the revolution.

Having boarded his fishing vessel, Alexander sailed toward the Crimea. The craft was about to reach safety when a raging storm came up. The small vessel, forced to heave to in the gale, drifted helplessly back toward Red-occupied territory. Alexander and the crew would have been doomed had it not been for their good fortune in running into an Allied destroyer, which picked them up. They were then taken to Istanbul, from where Alexander reached France.

Meanwhile Boris remained a virtual prisoner in the aunt's house. The situation could not be allowed to continue; they had to think of some way of removing Boris from suspicion. It so happened that their relative, Mrs. Gamsakurdia, was the ballet mistress and teacher at the Odessa Opera House, a grandiose copy of the Paris Opera that was the center of social life in what had once been the gay city of Odessa. Boris's alibi was found: he was given a certificate stating that he was a member of the *corps de ballet* of the opera. These were the strange circumstances that made Boris a ballet dancer, for he presently joined the ballet school, starting a career—one of his many careers—that was to take him around the world.

Attending the ballet school, if it saved Boris's life, did little to change the situation in Russia. Boris's elder brother was still fighting, and his father was missing and presumably dead.

Famine was now at its worst in Odessa, and ragged soldiers begging in the street were a common sight. One morning a few weeks after Boris entered the ballet school, an old soldier came to the door of the house. When Boris attempted to shut him out, the soldier,

apparently mute, put his foot in the door. Boris was about to push him when, to his surprise and joy, he recognized the weary, distorted features of his father. It was only three days later that the older Lissanevitch was able to regain his speech and recover from the shock he had suffered.

He told them how he had been taken prisoner and carted away in a cattle car for five days with practically no food. On the train Nicolas Alexandrovitch Lissanevitch had caught typhus, and had been unloaded from the railcar and thrown into a cholera ward. There he had remained for twenty days. When he came out of his delirium, he crawled out of the ward, and on discovering that he was in Imanska, remembered that one of his old horse trainers lived close by. He succeeded, despite his weakened state, in reaching the village where his friend lived. There he was taken care of and nursed back to reasonable health. His friends then put him on some peasants' cart headed, so they thought, for Odessa.

The journey was a long one, and Boris's father was nearing the age of sixty-five. In the course of the journey the peasants attacked him, taking all his clothes except for his overcoat, and then, without scruples, threw him off the cart. Though knocked out by the fall, N. A. Lissanevitch later came to and by a miracle overcame further hardships and made his way through the famine-devastated Ukraine to Odessa.

Just at this time, also, terrible news reached Odessa. George, Boris's eldest brother, had been condemned to death by a St. Petersburg tribunal. He had been captured on the Archangel front after the withdrawal of the British fleet from that area, an episode often considered one of the darkest in England's recent history.

George Lissanevitch's personality and courage, as it turned out, were to save him. In St. Petersburg a petition was drawn up by his own sailors and submitted to the court. The People's Committee commuted his sentence from death to three years' imprisonment. George Lissanevitch must have been a most popular young officer, for even before the episode of the St. Petersburg petition his sailors

had saved him from death on an earlier occasion. George Lissanevitch had been instrumental in the fateful Kronshtadt revolt, in which the navy partly rebelled against the Reds. The two other leaders, Admiral Stchastnyi and Admiral Zelenyi, had been caught and shot, while the sailors hid George in their boat, where despite a search, he was not found. From this boat George, accompanied by eight of his sailors, had escaped to Archangel. There he put to use his talent as an inventor, which had already, while he was at school in St. Petersburg, won him two gold medals, one from the Czar, and one from the Admiralty. In snowbound Murmansk, almost at the Arctic Circle, George became the first person to place an airplane engine on a sled, and thus invented the snowmobile. With a unit using these strange vehicles he was able to break deep into the Red lines. It was when he was on one of these breakthrough missions that the British withdrew their support and left the White Russian armies to be captured. George Lissanevitch was made prisoner, sentenced to death, and then, thanks to the affection of the sailors he had once commanded, only imprisoned for three years. George remained in Russia until 1935, the time of his death, or rather of his "liquidation," as the tone of his last letters seemed to indicate.

Finally the revolution was over. Although the situation in Odessa was once again politically stable, Boris, who had the fighting blood of his brothers, was not satisfied to be a ballet student. His mind was set on escape, but for a while he had to bide his time. From childhood, however, Boris had loved music, and very rapidly he took to ballet, an occupation which had been forced on him by circumstances. After the rigid discipline of the cadet corps, the less strict ballet school had its advantages. Slim, well built, agile and strong, he made an excellent pupil.

After one year in the good care of Mrs. Gamsakurdia, Boris was admitted to her troupe, which provided the ballets for Odessa's theatrical season and for the operas performed in the imposing Opera House. At the opera the splendor of Czarist Russia had dis-

appeared. The stalls were no longer occupied by princes, barons, and generals, in gold-epauletted uniforms, with their brides beautifully gowned. In the winter the theater was unheated, and on the drafty stage the temperature was sometimes below freezing point. In operas that necessitated tights as parts of their costumes, members of the male choir wore them over their trousers, looking like monsters with swollen legs and huge varicose veins. Nevertheless nothing, not even a revolution, had tempered the enthusiasm of the Russian people, and especially the inhabitants of Odessa, for ballet and opera. Russians from north to south are a musically minded nation, and the ballet in particular owes practically everything to Russia.

At first Boris had not liked ballet, regarding it at the beginning as sissy stuff, but slowly he became interested. Not that the ballet in any way altered his aggressive frame of mind; at first he thought of it only as a means of survival.

The years 1920 to 1923 were a terrible time of starvation in Odessa, mass starvation the like of which had never been seen before. It took all Boris's wits to provide for his parents and to survive himself. Thousands of people starved to death, and the thin, emaciated, dried bodies lined the streets. "The bodies were so shriveled up from hunger," Boris remembers, "that they did not even smell. There was practically nothing left to rot." Often the gruesome sight could be seen of trucks rumbling through the city with a sinister cargo of dead bodies, with arms and legs sticking out.

This was hardly a setting for ballet and opera. But the Communists were like the Romans: to try to keep the people quiet they provided distractions. Instead of the arena, when they could not give the people food, they promoted ballet. In such circumstances Boris had no choice but to go through his apprenticeship as a ballet dancer. Made a full member of the troupe of the Odessa Opera, he performed before half-starved audiences in all the standard operas and ballets.

Gone were the easy, pleasant days of the past, the elegant atmosphere of the race courses set green against the dark background of the great Russian forests. Although Boris, a modest man, does not like to recall the titles of his family (unlike too many Russians who thrive today on princedoms and dukedoms often of their own invention), his family coat-of-arms and the hundreds of photographs saved by his mother testify to the luxurious life of the Lissanevitches in Odessa before the revolution. Many of these photographs show various members of the family trying out beautiful thoroughbreds on the steeplechase courses, or sitting on the lawn of their mother's ancestral estate, a gigantic palace that was burned down during the revolution.

One cannot forget what must have been the impact on Boris of such a sudden change of fortune. For now the Lissanevitches were reduced to sharing the house of their aunt. The year after the revolutionary government was installed, a campaign known as "*izyatie izlishkov*" (taking over the extras) was carried out. Soldiers passed from house to house collecting linen and valuables, leaving each person only one pair of sheets and the bare essentials for survival.

"What with famine, typhus, and the revolution," Boris told me, "I learned the relativity of values early." In Odessa in those days a gold dinner service could not have purchased a loaf of bread. A total disregard for money was later to be one of Boris's major characteristics. He could gamble away a fortune in an evening as easily as he could ruin himself by his great generosity. For Boris money has always been immaterial in his projects, but somehow he has always had money and what he wanted.

Because of the sheer necessity of finding food for the survival of its members, Mrs. Gamsakurdia's troupe would often go for tours in the country, dancing before the peasants in the hope of comestible remuneration. On such tours the twenty-odd members of the troupe, composed mostly of young ladies, would board a train in Odessa and go beyond the flat plain to the great forests bordering Poland. The trains had only freight cars, called *teploushki*, with

inscriptions over their doors reading "8 horses or 40 men." Usually these cars were so full that most of the troupe travelled on the buffers or the roofs. Coal was unavailable and wood was used instead. The trains stopped often in the forest between stations, and all the passengers had to get down to chop wood for the engine.

From the train the dancers often set out on horse-drawn carriages for remote villages where they would dance in warehouses or in the open air. The comfort of Boris's childhood was replaced by the strange, exciting atmosphere of putting up in peasants' houses for overnight stops.

The peasants paid their admission fees to the performances in lard, flour, bread, and sausages. By the end of a four- to six-week tour, all the young ladies of the *Corps de Ballet* looked slightly pregnant, stuffed as they were with rich, rare food.

Boris, a handsome young man, was the great center of the sentimental life of the girls of the troupe, who outnumbered the men ten to one. On his romantic entanglements Boris could write volumes; be it simply said that he rapidly acquired the irresistible charm of a man well surrounded by women.

Toward 1923 the famine and crisis conditions at Odessa petered out and Boris again began to plan his escape from Russia. Mrs. Tamara Gamsakurdia, the ballet teacher's sister, had married a distant cousin of the Lissanevitch family who had managed to make his way to France. With the reforms of Lenin before his death the Russian regime had grown temporarily more lenient (the NEP or New Economic Policy), and there appeared the first possibilities for Boris to escape. He managed to receive from France a contract, arranged by his cousins in Paris, to dance at the Alhambra Theater there. Boris burned with eagerness to join his brother in the outside world, from whence the news of Diaghilev's success had come back to Russia.

There was one great problem, however: because of his family's record as landowners, plus the facts that his brother Alexander had escaped and that he himself had been a cadet, Boris had little hope

of getting an official pass to leave Russia. He nevertheless attempted to obtain one from the newly formed Committee for the Organization of Tours Abroad, in Moscow. While in the capital he stayed at the home of a ballerina who had spent two seasons in Odessa. He remained two weeks there, running from one office to another in an attempt to gather the innumerable documents required for his permit. Communist bureaucracy was then at its worst. When Boris finally brought all the necessary documents to the committee offices, they told him that his authorization papers could not be examined for two weeks, as the committee met but twice a month. When he heard this, Boris blew his top and started a row. On hearing his angry voice, a senior official came out to see what was the matter, and upon learning Boris's name, walked up to him. Instead of arguing, he warmly took Boris's hand, recalling that as a fanatic of the steeplechase he had been a great fan of Boris's father. On learning Boris's problem, he promptly issued him a temporary permit, to enable him to apply for his passport, saying that once the committee had examined his file a telegram would be sent to Odessa that would either confirm the authorization or annul it.

The night after Boris returned to Odessa the Opera was performing *The Prophet* of Meyerbeer. This now dated opera was set in a grandiose romantic decor, and in the final act, accompanied by appropriate vocalization, came the destruction and burning of the castle. The stage manager overdid himself that night: not only the castle scenery burned, but the entire Odessa Opera House went up in flames.

The ruins of the opera house were still smoking when a reconstruction committee convened to consider the disaster and how to remedy Odessa's loss. The head of the reconstruction committee happened to be also the head of the Communist Party of Odessa. Having heard of Boris's planned departure for France via Germany, the president of the committee called Boris to the conference room. He then went on to explain his ambitious new plan for re-

constructing the opera. He wanted, he said, to make the new opera house a model of its kind, with all the latest trimmings in stage gadgets and lighting. For this purpose the committee had designated Boris, if his travel permit were granted, to go to Berlin to collect data on these lighting and stage techniques.

Boris immediately saw in this proposal a means of anticipating the ruling from Moscow. He replied that he would like very much to gather all this information, but that having been so much delayed already, his engagement in Paris would begin only two days after the expected date of his permission, if it was forthcoming from Moscow. This would leave him no time to make arrangements and investigate the purchase of modern equipment in Berlin. "But," Boris suggested, "if you could give me a certificate right now, in the expectation that Moscow will agree, then I could leave tomorrow and spend the necessary time in Berlin." After some hesitation, this was what the head of the Odessa Communist Party did. He signed, without Moscow approval, the exit permit for Boris.

With the much desired permit in hand, Boris rushed over to his parents' home. His mother, who had long been looking forward to Boris's escape, helped him pack and he bade his family good-bye. Despite all their efforts to seem cheerful and optimistic, both they and Boris realized that it might be many years before they saw each other again, if ever.

At the down-at-heel railroad station of Odessa, Boris boarded a train and slowly made his way northward toward the German frontier, the border of the free world. Without trouble he crossed the frontier four days before his case was brought up before the Moscow committee.

"I never knew what their decision was, but then I did not care a damn," Boris told me.

He spent a day in Berlin, marveling at how clean and undamaged the city looked, and that evening went to the circus to see a trapeze artist from Odessa with whom he had become friendly

while dancing in ballet there. The next day he took a train to Paris, arriving at the Gare de l'Est to be greeted by his brother and the cousins who had obtained for him the contract at the Alhambra. Boris was free. The following day he went to Versailles to take out Dr. Nansen's certificate, the League of Nations passport for refugees.

"The fact that I was a refugee and had no national papers," Boris explained, "was eventually responsible for my settling in Asia, but when I managed to escape from Russia I had no idea yet where that flight would eventually lead me."

From Ichangu, Russia seemed an entire world away. Although Boris was only nineteen when he left his motherland, he was the embodiment of a Russian and carried with him the spirit of his homeland and the passionate temperament of the Slavs. While he had been revealing his youth to me his features showed his deep absorption with his past, just as he becomes absorbed in everything he undertakes.

It was very late when Boris finished talking and we strolled out into the garden at Ichangu. The Valley of Kathmandu lay veiled in a thin sea of mist above which towered the pyramidal shape of the shrine of Shyambunath. The moon shone eerily, illuminating the dark masses of the hills around us. It seemed for a moment as though we were looking down upon the entire world, and yet here it was hard to believe that the faraway society of the West, with its wars and revolutions, really existed. Nepal struck me again as the true Paradise Lost, lost in the oblivion of centuries, hidden from the world, out of reach of its crushing tempo.

The next morning Boris was again carried off by his projects. I felt as if Boris had been born in Nepal, seeing with what ease he spoke Nepali and how he dismissed current affairs that would have driven foreign-aid experts mad. There were servants claiming compensation because an evil spirit had attacked them while they worked for Boris. Letters would come in from people wanting his

advice on the existence of the Abominable Snowman. While Boris was trying to breed pigs, he was also setting up a safari business with a Nepalese general, at the same time that he was acting as general counsel for a Tibetan refugee committee—not to mention his current hotel affairs and letters from travel agents all over the world. I had only begun to grasp the complexity of Boris's involvements, which were so numerous that they often understandably ran out of hand.

After three weeks the great day came when my wife and I were "liberated" from the pigs. Boris, who since the arrival of his prize hogs had spoken of little else than how he would lodge them, feed them, and breed them, now proudly came to assist in their transfer. There was only one insoluble problem: the pigs could neither be carried to Ichangu nor delivered by truck, and we would therefore have to walk them up the narrow, steep, hilly path. This was no small problem. The sophisticated thoroughbreds, with their generous layers of fat, simply refused to climb; all our pushing and pulling was to no effect. The Nepalese onlookers came up with a thousand suggestions, but they all failed: a few yards off the road the pigs just stopped, and pushing them resulted only in their slowly backing down.

When, after a half hour's wait up at Ichangu, Boris saw no signs of his prize pets, he ran down to inquire. Still no progress. The new pigsties would remain empty, so it seemed. Even I began wondering whether Boris was not better cut out for horse breeding, like his father, than for dealing with hogs. But finally Boris, in his desperation, found an effective system. Reversing the pigs, he now had the coolies prod them downhill, and to everyone's sheer amazement they actually walked all the way up to Ichangu backward, thinking they were refusing to go where we wanted them to go.

Unfortunately for my wife and me, the day the pigs left the bungalow the shallow ornamental pond before it received a stock of loudmouthed fancy geese, which like the pigs suddenly popped up from India. We became less enthusiastic over Boris's agricultural projects after that!

As I sat talking with a friend of Boris's from Calcutta about Boris's agricultural ambition, the man laughed.

"Is he at it again?" he muttered. "I thought his Cooch Behar experience had satisfied him."

"His what?" I asked, interested. "Well, you see," the man explained, "Boris, after India became independent, had the great idea that he could cultivate thousands of acres of bush for his friend Bhaya, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. When the maharajas lost their states in 1947 and India became a republic, they were only allowed to keep the land they could cultivate themselves. Boris had the inspiration that he could put acres and acres of elephant grass under cultivation for his friend. He transported the equipment miles into Cooch Behar, across the Ganges, where there were no roads, and he went to work. With great tractors he plowed under thousands of acres of elephant grass, thinking he would thus kill off the stuff. The dramatic result came a year later, ending Boris's first agricultural venture. You see, each time you cut up the roots of elephant grass it just springs more shoots. For each blade Boris destroyed four or five grew in its place."

I soon realized that there must be more of Boris's wild schemes about which I knew nothing. His latest project had landed Boris \$20,000 in debt, with 117 elephants and 200 Tibetan horses to look after, right in the middle of the jungle, not to mention 300 knife-happy Gurkha soldiers all clamoring for pay. This was the unfortunate ending of a projected French film superproduction that collapsed in Nepal, leaving Boris to pay off and clear up the mess of what should have been the greatest battle scene ever staged in movie history.

As the days went by, I tried to satisfy my growing curiosity about Boris. From friends, books and Boris himself, I finally learned about his heyday in the ballet in Europe. I was surprised to discover that all the rumors about Boris's talent as a ballet dancer were actually true!

V Caviar Canapés

While the Russia Boris had fled had been depressed and poor, the Europe of 1924 into which Boris was projected was in the full euphoria of what has been called the "Gay Twenties."

Luxury and frivolity were the signs of the times as Europe tried to make up for the lost years of the First World War. The decade preceding the crash of 1929 was the era of the emergence of the machine age at the service of a wealthy few. The first sports cars were careening along the boulevards of Paris; planes were proving to be an amusing pastime. The Charleston, imported from America, symbolized a new era of short skirts and modern living. Montparnasse was in its heyday, surrealism and cubism were the talk of the town, while on the terrace of the Café la Rotonde could be seen side by side the entire host of artists whose names would soon adorn the walls of the museums of the world. The musicians, painters and writers of those years were soon to prove the most prolific and famous of our century.

Boris had come to Paris as a ballet dancer, a performer in an art he had begun to practice at first by accident, and in which he had continued out of the necessity of securing food in starving Odessa. In any other era and at any other time than in the mid-twenties the

calling of ballet dancer would have seemed a rather insignificant one associated with the minor arts. And Boris, with his military background and dynamic drive and zest for accomplishment, would hardly have been content with the profession of dancer had it not been for the fact that, thanks to the genius of a Russian by the name of Sergei Pavlovitch Diaghilev, the ballet in the Europe of the early 1920's had been elevated to a pinnacle around which many of the artistic movements of the time may be said, in a sense, to have gyrated.

Until Diaghilev rose to prominence in Europe in the season of 1909, ballet had fallen to the level of minor danced interludes in operas and plays, diversions acted on the front of the stage while the scenery was being changed. Pantomime of a trite nature, ballet had exhausted its early vigor and lost contact with its artistic origins. It took a genius such as Diaghilev to make the ballet, in less than twenty years, into one of the most refined arts of the stage. Not only did Diaghilev's Ballet Russe set new standards of choreographic perfection, but in fact the ballet as an integrated art form became the rallying point for painters, musicians and authors. Although neither a dancer, musician or painter himself, Diaghilev exerted a deep influence on his era in all these fields. His ability to create enthusiasm among his co-workers was equaled only by his genius for spotting talent.

The influence of Diaghilev went as far as the field of fashion; leading couturiers were inspired by Diaghilev's ballet costumes. He was further responsible for having shown to the world the brilliance of such musicians as Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Manuel de Falla, Ravel, Debussy and many others. He also drew into the ballet many of the famous painters: Picasso, Braque, Miro, Derain, Matisse, and Di Chirico, all of whom, at one time or another, designed stage settings for his creations. Diaghilev was in a way a prophet, and around him revolved the world of the arts in one of its most intense periods. As for the ballet proper, with *Petrouchka*, *The Firebird*, *Prince Igor*, *Scheherazade* and other unforgettable

productions, Diaghilev created the ballet as we know it today.

After his arrival in Paris, Boris was to waste no time. Upon completing his engagement at the Alhambra, he secured a contract to tour Germany, where he appeared in sixty-five cities and towns in a few weeks of hectic one-night stands. Then he secured a contract with the Théâtre Romantique Russe, headed by Boris Romanoff, a choreographer of great talent who was later to become ballet master at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Boris thus began dancing in support of some of the famous stars of the ex-Imperial ballet of St. Petersburg. With this company he toured Italy and, once again, Germany.

Dancers' salaries were low, however, and on returning from this tour Boris, then twenty, had to seek a job—the first and last regular employment he has ever had. With the help of his brother Alexander, who had fled earlier to Paris, and on the grounds, no doubt, of his competence with horses, Boris ended up for three months as a foreman in the Renault automobile works. He moved into a flat in the Place d'Anvers, near the Place Clichy in Paris, which he shared with three young Russians, one of them the beautiful dancer Sonia Orlova.

One evening on returning from his job Boris found Sonia in a great state of excitement.

"Diaghilev is in town," she announced breathlessly. "He's staying at the Grand Hotel. How can we get an audition?"

Boris said they must immediately go to see the great master. Little did they suspect then that Diaghilev, an erratic eccentric by nature, was as unapproachable to outsiders as the Emperor of Ethiopia. Boris hurried into his only good suit and rushed out with Sonia into the Métro, and they headed for the Grand Hotel, on the Place de l'Opéra, in hopes that their wildest dreams might become reality.

Out of breath, they burst into the lobby of the hotel where Diaghilev was staying and asked to see the great maestro. They were arguing with the receptionist when a hefty man draped in a large black overcoat with a fur collar walked up behind them.

"Why," the gentleman asked, "do you want to see Monsieur Sergei Diaghilev?"

With his Russian accent, Boris answered in French that they hoped to be given an audition and join Diaghilev's famous ballet company.

"I see," said the gentleman, "you are Russian." Then he continued in Boris's mother tongue: "Tomorrow morning go to the stage entrance of the Théâtre Mogador and ask to see Mr. Gregoriev." Gregoriev, Boris and Sonia knew, was the famous manager of Diaghilev's company. "Say that you come on behalf of Sergei Diaghilev." With these words the man took his keys and went to his room.

Next morning they jumped into a taxi (Boris having impulsively quit his job) and made for the Théâtre Mogador. There, sitting in the half-lit orchestra, they found Gregoriev, at first encounter a sullen and frightening man who has well been described as being "as dour and uncommunicative as a Scotsman." Gregoriev was more than simply the *régisseur* of the Ballet Russe; he was the true backbone of the company, Diaghilev's right hand and other self. It was he who kept a strict tab on all that went on, his legendary notebook being his only confidant. With his sullen eyes the *régisseur* examined Boris and asked him to wait his turn while other young dancers went through their try-outs on the empty stage before him.

At last Boris in his turn was asked to execute a few figures and then bade to sit down, having in no way been reassured as to whether his short performance had pleased or not. After a few minutes, however, a message arrived for Gregoriev from Diaghilev, asking that Boris be sent to the Théâtre Sarah Bernhard, where a rehearsal was in progress. With Gregoriev and Balanchine, the master of ballet, Boris left for the Sarah Bernhard to undergo the examination of the great master himself.

"I was so excited," remarked Boris, "that I overdid myself. I had never done a double turn in the air before, but in front of Diaghilev I just flew. And I was taken on."

Boris had now penetrated into the inner sanctum of ballet. From 1925 until Diaghilev's death, he was to live at the incredible tempo set by one of the time's greatest artistic geniuses.

A few days after being engaged Boris was given a minor role in *Petrouchka*, the ballet that portrays a Russian fair in which the puppets of a show become alive. Sonia also was accepted in the company. Boris played the role of the policeman. As the first rehearsal was beginning, Diaghilev called out, "Lissanevitch! I hope that you are aware that Massine started out with me in the same role. I trust you will follow in his footsteps!"

Trains rattling across Europe, hotels in every capital, and every night the electrifying atmosphere as the curtain rose above the stage, revealing to the dancers the elite of Europe, who had come to applaud the productions of one of the greatest creative geniuses of our century. This was now Boris's life. Until Diaghilev's death he was to share in the daily life and trials of one of the most distinguished ballet companies of all time. Gifted as he was, it would seem that Boris might well have followed in Massine's footsteps if it had not been for the independent and unpredictable frame of mind for which he was later to become famous. Boris was going to have no ordinary career, even in the ballet, and if he ever followed in anyone's footsteps, they were those of Marco Polo rather than Leonide Massine.

Le Carnaval, La Boutique fantasque, Prince Igor, The Three-Cornered Hat, Petrouchka, Mercure, Parade, The Firebird were a few of the famous ballets created by Diaghilev in which Boris danced. Three weeks in London, three weeks in Italy, a month in Paris, four months in Monte Carlo . . . so ran the hectic schedule. In all, he appeared in some twenty-five productions, in almost every European capital and sometimes in such incredible surroundings as the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain.

Such schedules, it seems, would have been sufficient to keep anyone busy. Not so Boris. Not content with just knowing his part, he wanted to learn the trade of a choreographer at the same

time. Boris also played the piano well. He knew all the roles and was constantly asked to stand in at rehearsals for sick members of the troupe.

Off the stage, life itself reflected the incredible artistic fame of the ballet. Backstage, in the restaurants and in private homes Boris met and became friendly with such figures as Cocteau, Derain, Matisse, Stravinsky, Serge Lifar, and Manuel de Falla, to mention only a few of the great artists who orbited around the enigmatical Diaghilev, known to all as "Chinchilla" because of a white tuft of hair in his black head.

While Boris was rehearsing in Monte Carlo in 1927, the sad news reached him from Russia of the death of his father. In 1923, the elder Lissanevitch, through his old racing connections, had obtained a post managing a stud farm in the Kuban region. Now he had passed away there, a victim of malaria.

Of all the stages and towns where the company played, Boris preferred Monte Carlo, then at the height of its postwar heyday.

Great galas in the crystal shimmering halls of the Casino, receptions in the suspended flowery gardens of elegant villas dominating the blue Mediterranean, preceded and followed every performance. Boris, like all the dancers of the company and like Diaghilev himself, lived above his means. Most of the dancers were forever in debt, living on the advances that Gregoriev, the imperturbable *régisseur*, would hand out parsimoniously.

It was to remedy this financial situation that Boris launched one of his first so-called "economic ventures." He loved caviar and as he could not afford enough for his demanding palate, he entered into the caviar trade, hoping to profit by the Riviera's extensive consumption of canapés. Through the assistance of some friends, Boris was soon distributing caviar along the entire French Riviera.

Toward the end of the season the other members of the *corps de ballet* saw Boris collect his dues as high profits started to roll in. When Boris had amassed a small fortune, he invited his friends, with his customary generosity, to a great dinner party. The party

ended, along with Boris's earnings, at the Casino. "There," commented Boris, "I learned that luck comes in strokes."

This first attempt to make a fortune did not discourage Boris. Money meant less to him than caviar, and for a while he had had his fill.

For five years Boris stayed with the Ballet Russe. Then, in the summer of 1929, the company was in Monte Carlo; the season had ended, and as usual Boris and the rest of the young dancers were in need of money. On August 19, Boris caught sight of Gregoriev walking down a street. Boris was about to pounce on him for yet another advance when he saw Gregoriev stop. Boris noticed that his features were pale. Gregoriev hurried up to Boris.

"Something terrible has happened," he said. "I've just heard that Sergei Pavlovitch Diaghilev died a few hours ago in Venice."

Gregoriev asked Boris to break the news to Anna Pavlova, Diaghilev's lifelong friend and perhaps the greatest dancer of her time. Pavlova was staying at the Hotel de Paris, which overlooks the peaceful blue harbor of Monte Carlo. Boris made his way to the hotel and up to her suite. Despite his efforts to break the news softly, on learning of Diaghilev's death she fainted in Boris's arms.

Diaghilev all his life had been a superstitious man. A gypsy many years previously had told him that he would die on water. For this reason, Diaghilev had refused to accompany his ballet when it went to America. True to this prediction, the great genius had died in Venice, surrounded by water. His body was floated down in state upon a funeral barge through the Grand Canal.

With the death of Diaghilev an era ended. For a short while the Russian ballet company was disbanded. Boris and a few other dancers were stranded in Monte Carlo, in debt and with little hope of seeing the Ballet Russe rebuilt in the near future.

The least one can say is that Boris is resourceful. His companions were still bemoaning the disappearance of Diaghilev when Boris popped up in Paris on the Boulevard de la Madeleine with a camera in his hands.

"What are you doing?" called out a friend from the terrace of a café.

"Why, didn't you know?" answered Boris, slightly embarrassed. "I'm a photographer."

Three months later Boris was no longer a photographer. Now he handled his own contracts and was dancing again. Four months with the Opera of Monte Carlo, then it was South America. Leon Statz, *maître de ballet* of the Paris Opéra, was organizing a tour of Brazil and Argentina for the Ballet Franco Russe. Boris was taken on as one of the leading dancers, with Vera Nemtchinova, Schollar, and Anatole Vilzak. Off went the company. The tour was a failure for everyone except Boris. In Buenos Aires Helena Smirnova, the great dancer of the St. Petersburg Maryinsky Theater, offered him a contract that provided for his spending six months each year in Europe and six months in Buenos Aires, where he would dance at the famous Teatro Colon. Boris signed and returned to Europe and Monte Carlo.

When the time came for his return engagement in South America, however, his plans were suddenly altered. Boris already had his Argentinian visa and ticket to Buenos Aires on the Italian liner *Conte Biancamano*, which was sailing for South America in a few days' time, when he stopped in at the rehearsal room of the Casino in Monte Carlo to see some old friends who had arrived with Chaliapin's opera company.

Watching the rehearsal, he noticed a short, very lovely girl in pink tights and black tunic, and lunching with her one hour later, he learned that her name was Kira Stcherbatcheva. She lived in Paris with her Georgian mother and her father, who as a former commander in the Imperial Russian Navy was naturally a taxi driver. By the end of the lunch they were in love. The ballet master of the Chaliapin opera company was Boris Romanoff. He needed a good character dancer and next morning all was arranged to everyone's satisfaction. The ticket to Buenos Aires and a two-year contract at a nice, fat salary were sent back, and a six-week contract with the Chaliapin opera group was signed. After a few

more days in Monte Carlo, the company, with Boris as a new member, left for London.

There, however, Boris soon learned that one cannot live on "love and thin air," especially in foggy London. Leonide Massine came to Boris's rescue by asking him to come and dance at La Scala in Milan. On arriving at the world's greatest and most famous opera house, Boris learned that Mussolini had granted two million lire—a far greater sum than it would be today—for the production of Ottorino Respighi's ballet *Belkis (The Queen of Sheba)*. Leonide Massine was doing the choreography and Benois the scenery. Hundreds of dancers were collected from all over Italy and a real Kurdish princess, Princess Bederkhan, was engaged to do the part of the queen. It was probably the most elaborate ballet ever produced.

After three months of rehearsals and eleven performances, Boris was offered another contract for a leading role in a ballet called *Vecchio Milano*. Soon after having accepted this contract he received a letter from London. It was from Massine, asking him to be his understudy in *The Miracle*, which Max Reinhardt was directing in the British capital. Boris was in a dilemma. He could not leave now, being bound by his contract. Yet here was the greatest break he could ever hope for. At the last minute his quandary was solved. The local Fascist party objected to a White Russian being given the role of the patriot, the Conte D'Alba, the part for which Boris had been cast in *Vecchio Milano*. Boris willingly collected a check for breach of contract and happily made for London via Paris.

In the French capital he found Kira sick in bed. With his usual haste and enthusiasm he told her to get up immediately and come with him to London. "There we shall be married," he said. A week later, in London, Boris married Kira, with Leonide Massine as best man at the wedding.

The Miracle was to rank as a famous success. Neither a ballet nor a play, it was a combined pantomime-ballet-opera, with music

by Humperdinck, and unique of its kind. Produced by the famous London impresario C. B. Cochran and directed by Max Reinhardt, *The Miracle* had a mystical theme which caused considerable controversy at the time. The general subject was that of a nun who feels an urge to leave her convent and taste worldly life. She falls in love with a knight, and debates before a statue of the Virgin whether to abandon her religious community or not. Finally, driven by her desire to bear a child, the nun snatches the infant Jesus from the arms of the statue, which suddenly becomes alive, takes up the religious garments of the nun, and assumes her place in the convent. There it remains in her stead until the nun, plagued by unfortunate adventures, at last returns with her own dead child to pray for forgiveness. The leading character opposite the nun is Spielman, the spirit of evil who follows the nun through her secular experiences. The setting for the beginning and ending of the play is a cathedral. The religious character of *The Miracle*, combined with its many profane happenings, made it from the start a much discussed play. Massine played the role of Spielman while the production was at the Lyceum in London. Tilly Losch, the beautiful Austrian dancer, did the part of the nun, and Diana Manners (Lady Diana Duff Cooper), the famous English beauty and daughter of the Duke of Rutland, played the part of the Madonna. The appearance on the stage of such a socialite, famous as the most beautiful and sought-after lady of British society, did not lessen public interest in *The Miracle*. Glen Byan Shaw had another of the leading roles. Already, in 1931, a remarkable actor, he was later to become a great deal more famous as the director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford on Avon, and recently as the producer of *Ross*, the play based on the life of Lawrence of Arabia.

After Boris's first six months at the Lyceum with Massine, a new company was formed, and Boris was engaged to stage a new production of the show, following Reinhardt, but with a new cast. With this company he toured the United Kingdom for over a year.

Boris took Massine's leading role as Spielman, costarring with Diana Manners and Glen Byan Shaw. The British press and public hailed delightedly Boris's performance as the spirit of evil, a role in which critics wrote that Boris compared favorably with Massine. Indeed all the reviews applauded, besides the talent of Diana Manners and Glen Byan Shaw, the excellent performance of the young Russian, Boris Lissanevitch.

At the age of twenty-seven, Boris had achieved full recognition in the ballet and the theater. The hungry beginner of Odessa was now costarring in London with Diana Manners. Few dancers could claim having danced as long as Boris alongside such personalities of the ballet as Leonide Massine, Serge Lifar, George Balanchine, Anton Dolin, Ninette de Valois, Vera Nemtchinova, Lubov Tchernicheva, Felia Dubrovskaya, Alexandra Danilova, and many others. With great energy and talent Boris had made the dream of everyone in the theater a reality, having achieved artistic distinction, fame and recognition. But this career, which would have satisfied most young men, only left Boris restless. Did he have visions of the other careers that awaited him? I doubt it; Boris is more a practical man than he is a mystic, and neither he nor anybody else could have seen in the brilliant young dancer of those days the Boris who was soon to win a very different reputation as a leading tiger hunter and the confidant of kings and rajas.

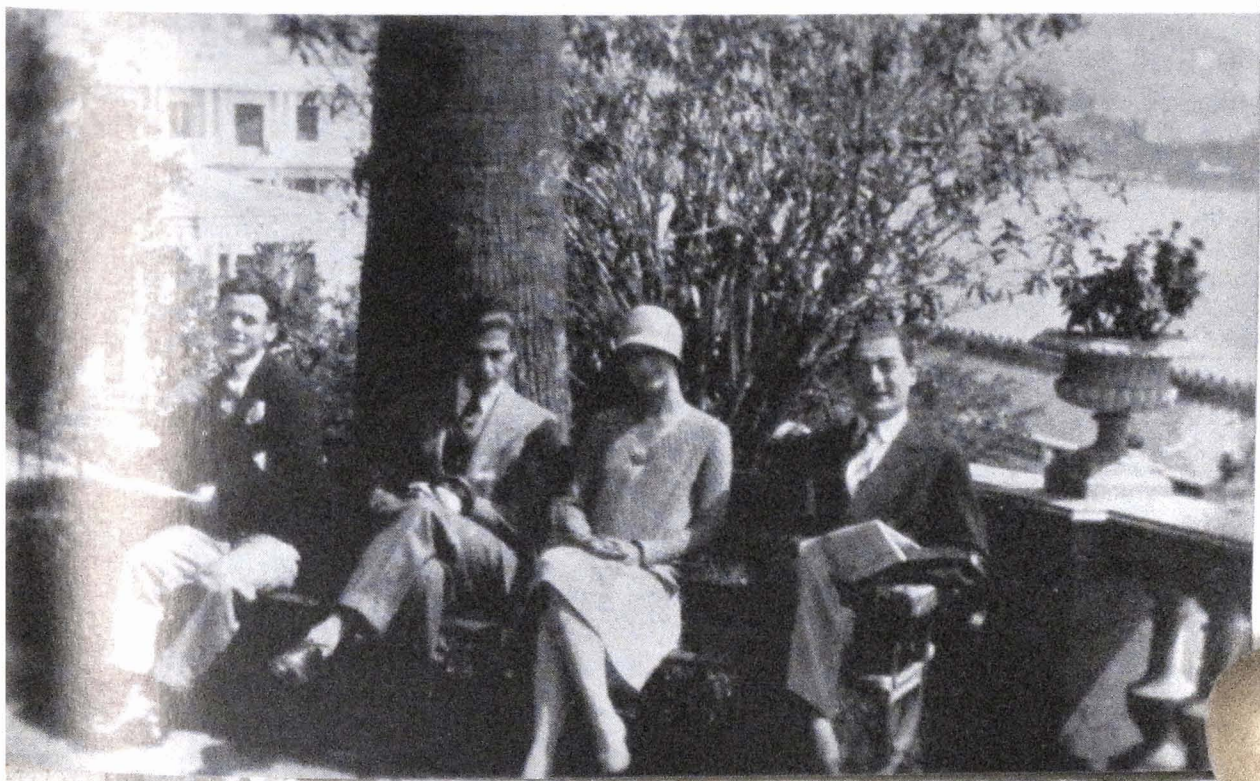
While Boris's career now seemed destined to run its natural course, events were to change it. Now that he knew he had the ability to become a leading artist, the prospect of remaining in the theater somehow held less interest for him. This was accentuated by the refusal of the British government to renew his working permit. The authorities agreed—under heavy pressure from Boris's influential friends—to extend his permit to perform in the theater in England for the duration of *The Miracle*.

After *The Miracle*, Boris had been offered a contract for forty weeks with the Moss Empire chain of English music halls, in which he was to have his own show. He was organizing the act

Boris (standing, left) as a cadet in Odessa, with his family.



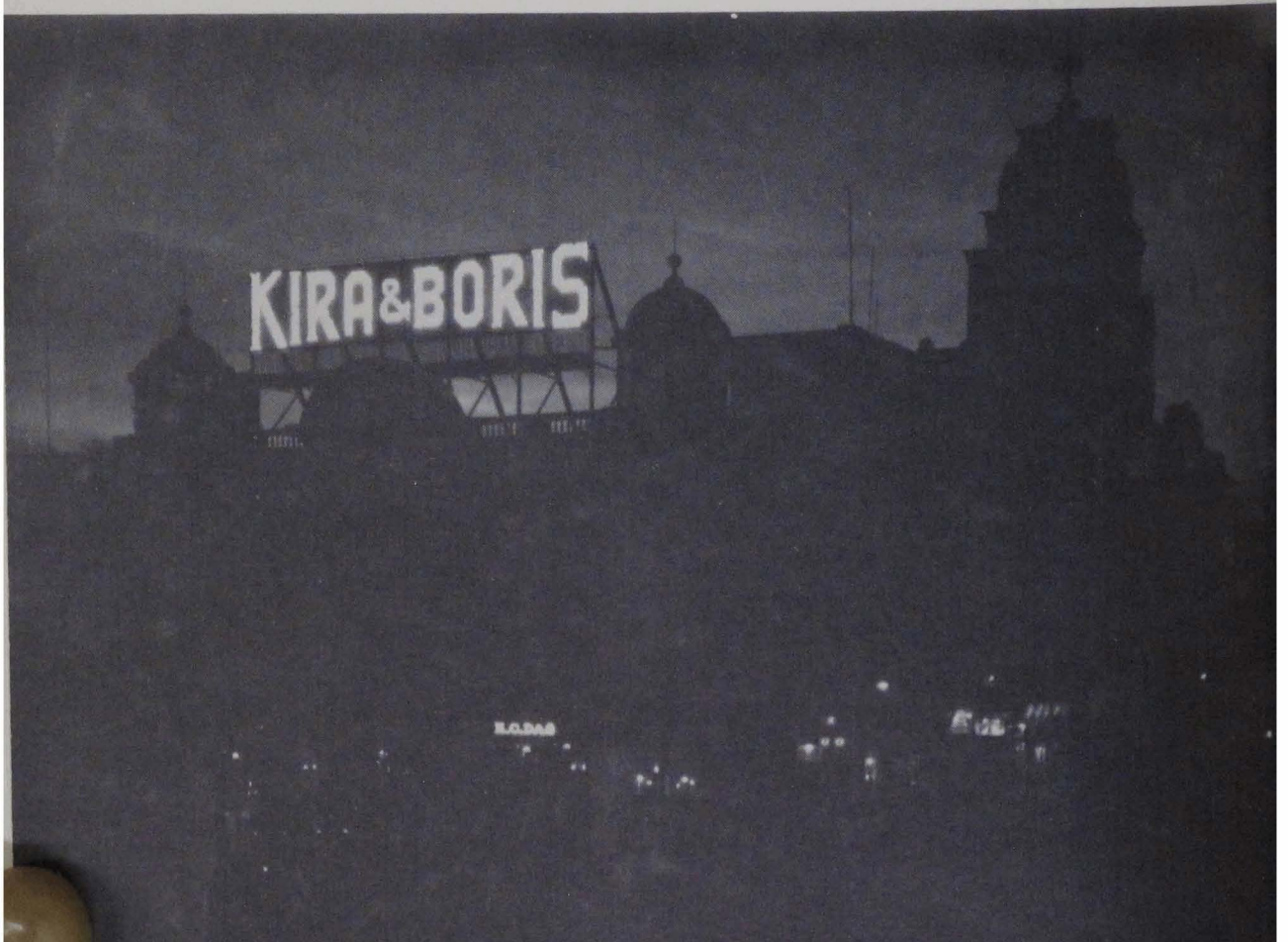
The dancer Serge Lifar (second from left) and Boris (right) with friends at Monte Carlo.





*Kira and Boris performing the dances of
"The Gay 1900's" in Shanghai.*

In the bright lights at Calcutta.

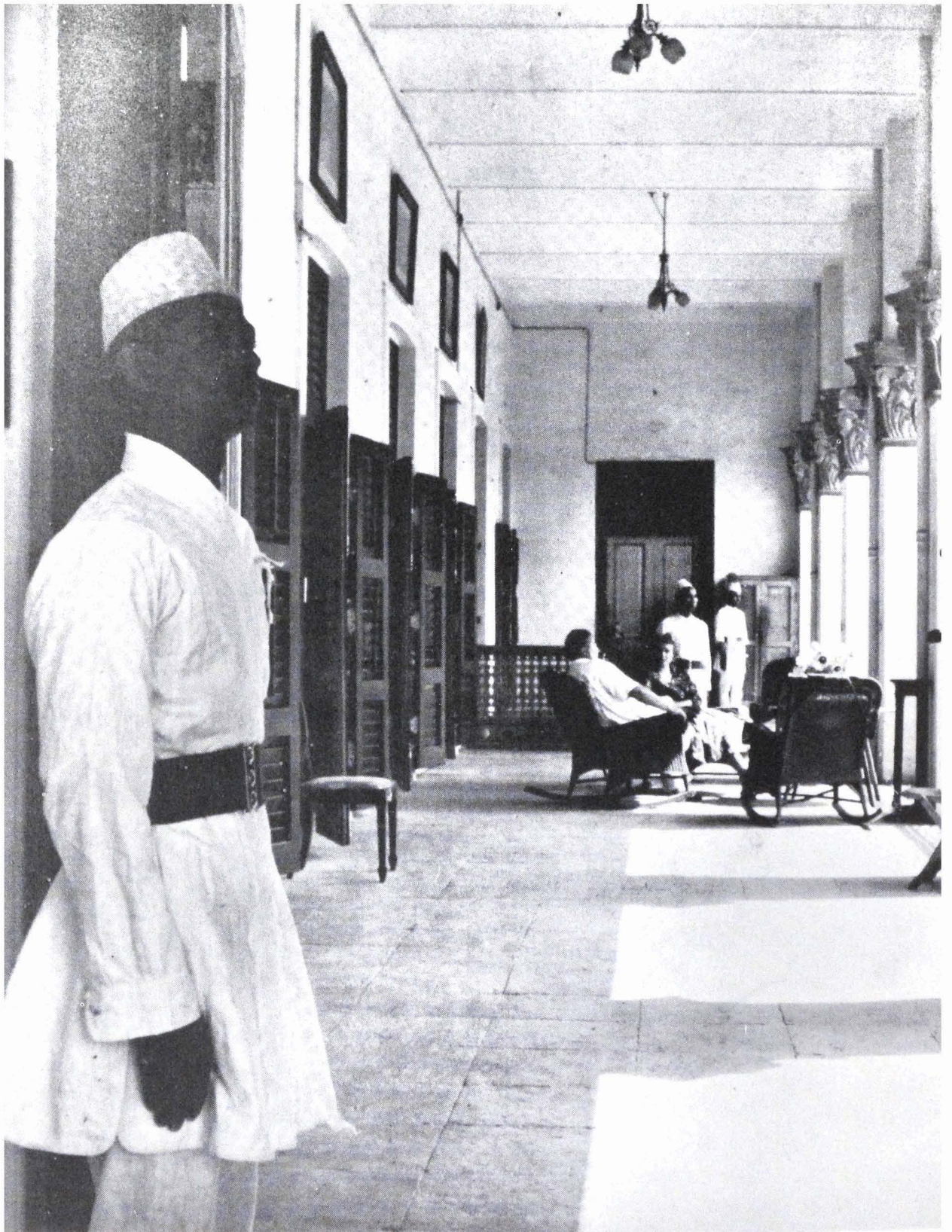




The Maharaj Prithy Singh (center) with a group of pilots of the China National Aviation Corporation in the garden of the 300 Club at Calcutta.

The Royal Hotel, west wing.





On the terrace at the Royal Hotel.

and had started rehearsals when he was obliged to leave the country.

At least Boris had now regained the independence he had always loved. For a few months he toured the music halls of France, dancing with his wife in Deauville, Cannes, and Paris Plage, and at the Théâtre Paramount in Paris. It was while he and Kira were appearing in the French capital that Boris received an invitation to take their act on an extended tour of the Far East.

“Why not?” said Boris.

VI Vodka in China

In 1933, the year Boris set out for India, the British made their third attempt on Mt. Everest. The expedition was led by Hugh Ruttledge. The press devoted many headlines and a great deal of space to this venture, which the public hoped would solve the enigma of Mallory's and Irvine's disappearance on the North Ridge in 1924. Ruttledge's expedition failed to reach the summit, but after having crossed Tibet and clambered up the Rongbuk Glacier to the North Col, its members peered into forbidden Nepal. Two years later Eric Shipton rightly concluded that the route that would lead to the conquest of Everest was in Nepal.

Little did Boris suspect that in the not so distant future he would become intimately linked with all mountaineering expeditions to the Himalayas, and that in twenty years he would already be solidly entrenched in Nepal, a figurehead of the valley, having paved the way to opening this lost kingdom to the outside world.

Bombay is an impressive city. Its massive six-story buildings make it the most Westernized city of India. Boris arrived there in 1933. Twenty-two years earlier King George V and Queen Mary had sailed to Bombay to attend the great Coronation Durbar at which all the nawabs and maharajas, the ruling princes of India, bowed before the newly crowned King of England and Emperor of India.

In those days there were no airliners flying to India, and the term "tourist," so far as India was concerned, was applied mainly to millionaire sportsmen and other wealthy travelers who would set out for the East accompanied by their valets and twenty or thirty cases of baggage. Some, like the Duke of the Abruzzi, would take to the Himalayas. Others, like Prince Hans Henry of Plesse, would be out for shikar in the hope of "padding" a few tigers, several leopards, some buffalo and perhaps, with luck, a rhino or two—trophies that would fill an additional thirty cases and would be sent by steamer to adorn the entrance halls of vast family estates in Europe.

Along with these travelers the only people to visit India regularly and in any numbers were those who had employment there, or rather, those with commissions. They were members of the Colonial Office, a special caste of British civil servants, and the officers of the British army, most of them products of Sandhurst—men who sought in India a life they could not find in England: polo, pig sticking, big game shooting, and other sports. They formed the two main strata of India's well-defined society, and they enjoyed practically feudal privileges in the country. Along with these officials came the entire host of nannies, schoolteachers and artisans necessary to keep up a British style of life. With them into India also filtered a strange breed of adventurers and businessmen who could be found at every level of Indian society, from the sneered-upon Armenians to the successful Scotsmen who dominate the majority of British firms in India.

Bombay, the great seaport and commercial center of India, was a lavish town filled with wealth and extravagance. The only Indians who were suffered to participate with the British in the high life of the city and its social functions, however, were the rare maharajas and the incredibly wealthy Parsees. Although segregation was not generally practiced, even the wealthiest Indians were not allowed access to the best clubs, where, surrounded by literally hundreds of servants (known as "bearers"), the smallest of white men could sip

his scotch and soda in surroundings recalling the elite clubs of Picadilly.

As for the hotels, only the most extravagant hostelries of Europe or America could approach such vast and magnificent establishments as the Grand Hotel in Calcutta, the Imperial in Delhi, or the Taj in Bombay. There thick "English" carpets would completely hush the already silent maneuvers of the barefooted servants who, gaily adorned in snow-white jodhpurs, bright silk belts and incredible turbans, might well be mistaken by the uninitiated for maharajas. Great, handsome, bearded Sikhs from the Punjab attended to the slightest whims of the guests, and any request would find dozens of anonymous bearers scuttling away to satisfy the sahib's demand.

Boris and Kira had been invited to entertain wealthy clients of the Taj Hotel. At the age of twenty-eight, Boris found it more an amusement than a chore to perform before the strange public of the Taj. The dances were for the most part creations of their own, excerpted from parts they had learned on more sophisticated stages. The couple were an immediate success in Bombay, and for the next three years Boris and Kira were to tour the Far East earning a living by dancing while they acquainted themselves with India, Burma, China, Java, and Ceylon.

The public in these countries was honored and surprised that such talent had come out to the colonies, and the English-language newspapers were filled with praise of the dancers who had "co-starred with Lady Duff Cooper." "FAMOUS RUSSIAN DANCERS IN BOMBAY," ran the headline in the *Bombay Chronicle*, and similar ones graced the *Calcutta Statesman*, the *Ceylon Times*, and other newspapers. Reviews recalled the high praise Boris had received from European critics for his performances in *The Miracle* and with Diaghilev. Such success opened new horizons to Boris. His engagements required little work and furnished him with ample opportunity to become acquainted with the East and the most interesting of its characters. Boris has always

had a penchant for luxury, especially gastronomical, and his total disregard for money always led him to live beyond his means in the earlier years of his life. Elegant, handsome, with a lot of free time, and a great socialite, Boris was soon to acquire from his tours an intimate knowledge of Indian society.

For six months he and Kira stayed in Bombay, living at the Taj and feasting on the activity of the streets as they discovered the Orient. Boris was particularly struck by the terrible poverty of India and fascinated by the religion of the Parsees, an Aryan caste professing the Zoroastrian faith, the ancient religion of Syria and Persia. He was especially impressed by the sinister Towers of Silence where the Parsees laid their dead. These were low, circular structures surrounding a large stone funnel emptying into a central well. Here on the stone the dead were laid out in the sun, not to be cremated or later buried, but to be eaten by the vultures. Thousands of these scavenger birds, no doubt out of predilection for human flesh, clustered in the surroundings of these tragic towers. The dry bones were later pushed into the central wells.

The bazaars of Bombay gave Boris his first sense of the feverish pulsebeat of the Orient, the throb of the great masses who in the anonymity of their numbers create the electric atmosphere of India's cities. He was astonished by the varied throngs of the Indian bazaars, from the snake charmers to the fat, lazy merchants sprawled out upon mattresses in the doorways of their places of business, which suggested dens rather than shops. The destitution of the ragged Untouchables who composed more than a third of India's population shocked Boris. These poor outcasts of Indian society, clothed in soiled, yellowed rags, wandered about and slept in the streets when they were not seen sweating like Egyptian slaves as they struggled to push or pull heavy carts that jolted and squeaked on their clumsy wooden wheels. Bombay was full of wretched wagons driven mostly by peasants who came into the city from the surrounding countryside in swarms, seated proudly behind the horns of their bullocks, whose relatives grazed about the

streets at an unhurried pace contrasting with the quick gait of the human masses on their eternal quest for something, however little, to put in their stomachs. White-clad Muslims mingled with crowds of Parsees and occasional elegant Brahmins. Women looking as if they had come out of the Old Testament peered at passersby through the square, mesh-covered openings in their long veils, which hung almost to the ground.

When Boris's and Kira's highly successful engagement at the Taj finally ended, they prepared to leave for Calcutta. A few days later they boarded a train at Bombay's Victoria Station, a pretentious monument to the bad taste of the nineteenth century. Railroads had been the backbone of Britain's rule of the Indian Empire. For strategic reasons, trains were pushed through to the most remote areas of the country, providing, in case of emergency, the necessary rapid links among the British military garrisons. In the charters of India's independent states (those run by maharajas) it was stipulated that the railroads and telegraphs should remain under British control. Through dense jungles and over formidable hills these vital arteries of the Empire wound their steel tracks, the whistles of the trains ever contrasting with the primitive surroundings in which they could be heard. From the luxury of a first-class compartment one could contemplate the most remote areas of the Empire and watch as oxen plowed the dry, dusty fields of the plains or startled monkeys fled into jungles that were often quite unexplored. From the train windows one could also catch glimpses of the ruins of the great ancient palaces, forts and tombs which in countless numbers dot the countryside of India, ghosts of vanished empires remembered by such great names as Asoka, Lodi and Akbar.

After only a brief stay in the great commercial center of Calcutta, Boris and Kira went on to Ceylon. To Boris the island seemed like a large stage set for a Diaghilev production to be acted against a backdrop of blue sea and mountains, varied by the slim shapes of tall, shaggy coconut palms. Boris and Kira danced at the

Galleface Hotel before an audience of British tea planters and their fair ladies, who lived in Ceylon a life reminiscent of that in Louisiana before the Civil War.

While in Ceylon, by pure chance they were offered a contract to dance in Java. As a result, they toured that entire Dutch colony, which afforded them a view of a new world, that of the small, clever Indonesians on their luxuriant, violent island. Everywhere in Java were visible the marks of the stern and rigid Dutch rule that later was to be so much criticized. In Indonesia Boris was to meet countless strange characters, ranging from an Italian ice cream manufacturer now living in Java as the "king" of an isolated community, to urbane, jovial Fred Gimbel, an American, one of America's richest men and a great traveler. With Gimbel, Boris drove down to the eastern tip of Java, where they chartered a small boat to visit Bali.

Bali is today world famous and familiar to all tourists as a living tropical paradise amidst whose exotic flora beautiful, bare-breasted maidens dance to the delicate, soft music of the gamelan. But unprepared as he was in 1934 for the impression Bali made on him, Boris was absolutely shattered by the beauty and charm of the island, its people and its music. On hearing the gamelan, the percussion instrument of the Balinese, he was immediately struck by the similarities between the tunes and their rendering with Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*, and, had he not known Stravinsky personally and been told that he had never been to the Orient, he would have suspected that the composer had been influenced by Balinese music. As for the dancing, coupled with the music and the scenery, it simply sent Boris mad.

For days he and Kira wandered around the small villages of this latter-day paradise. They then set off on a local trading schooner to visit all the small island trading posts and villages from Bali down to Timor. Sailing in pirate-haunted waters, they caught glimpses of many half-explored islands whose primitive populations flocked down en masse to barter copra for trinkets off their schooner. After

three months of life at sea in the hot tropical climate, they proceeded to Singapore. Their return journey was supposed, after final dance engagements in Calcutta and Ceylon, to take them back to Europe.

Boris was now totally captivated by the East. Bali had left a deep impression on him as artist and dancer; never before had he been able to believe that the sense of beauty and fulfillment that up to now he had experienced only on the stage could exist in the world of reality. The music, the color, the costumes, the entire setting of the lovely island had represented for him his dream of beauty and harmony. The East with its varied crowds, its picturesque religious ceremonies, its perfumes, its heavy aroma of incense and exotic music, created a setting that until now Boris had thought belonged only to the imagination or the world of fiction. Aside from his aesthetic liking for the Orient, his expansive personality relished its slightly mad atmosphere, which often seemed to have the effect of bringing out the most unusual aspects of foreigners' personalities.

In Singapore Boris and Kira found yet another unreal city. The Malayan capital was the meeting place of all the races of Southeast Asia. This bustling international port and trade center, despite its hot and humid climate, possessed an atmosphere of cosmopolitan elegance. Singapore's 60 percent Chinese population included many of the richest of the two-million-odd Chinese who compose half the population of Malaya. As the gateway to Southeast Asia and the Pacific, the city enjoyed great commercial wealth. Into Singapore came all the products of the East: silk from Burma and Thailand, brocades from China and Java, objects of art from all over Asia. Chinese millionaires exploited the rich Malayan tin mines and also controlled much of the rubber, of which Malay grew 40 percent of the world's production. The Malays, as Muslims, kept pretty much to themselves, in contrast to the cosmopolitan, free-thinking Chinese expatriates—who were, on the other hand, ruled by mysterious secret societies.

In Singapore there existed none of the racial barriers found in

India and most other colonies. At the Raffles Hotel, where the Lissanevitches danced, Westerners and the elite of the Orient mixed freely. The ballroom floor was graced by the delicate figures of wealthy Thai and Burmese women, pale Annamese, Cambodian, Javanese and Chinese ladies, all draped in the most luxurious of brocades, and dancing gaily to the latest European tunes.

From Singapore Boris and Kira returned to Calcutta, where Boris bought return tickets for himself and Kira to Europe, via Colombo. The day before they were to board the Lloyd Triestino liner, both of them came down with severe cases of dengue fever. Nevertheless, dragging themselves aboard the steamer, they set sail for Ceylon, where they landed just in time to play their parts shivering with fever on the stage. The show over, they were rushed to the summer resort of Newaralia, among the hills at the foot of Adams Peak. There, in a setting recalling a European spa, they settled down to rest for a few days before returning to Colombo to catch the next steamer for Europe.

They were having breakfast one morning when a servant knocked at the door of their room and softly entered, bearing an envelope. Tearing it open, Boris found a cablegram from a theatrical agency asking whether they would like to go to China. Boris did not hesitate long, but readily accepted, putting off their plans for returning to Europe to seize this opportunity of seeing still more of the Far East. The agent offered them a two-month contract to appear at the plush Cathay Hotel in Shanghai. The legendary Cathay had already found its way into all the novels and films set in the fabulous China of the years between the wars. The luxury hotel was the property of the British multimillionaire Sir Victor Sassoon.

When Boris and Kira had totally recovered from their attack of fever they packed their luggage, which included the large cases containing their costumes, and made for Colombo, where they boarded the Lloyd Triestino liner *Conte Rosso*. From there they sailed to the bustling port of Hong Kong. After a short stop there

the *Conte Rosso* steamed east and north along the coast of China into the broad, muddy estuary of the Yangtze, then nosed into the swarming Wangpoo River to tie up at a pier in the great port of Shanghai.

Few cities in the world can have claimed the atmosphere of excitement that was normal in Shanghai. The gateway to China, Shanghai was the largest and wealthiest city of the Celestial Republic. It was, however, in many ways more a European than a Chinese city. With the setting up of the so-called treaty ports where foreign powers had the privilege of governing under their own laws, rather than under the draconian and often corruptly administered codes of the Chinese, much of Shanghai had been divided into various concessions. The French Concession also sheltered most of the large White Russian colony. The International Concession covered a large sector of the city, while Japan, whose battleships anchored in the Wangpoo, off the Bund, among those of the great Western powers, held a concession the other side of the Soochow Creek. Surrounding the European quarters were Chinese districts, and the entire city, concessions and all, teemed with Chinese and foreign businesses, the Chinese merchants plying their trade in premises ranging from rich establishments to an immense succession of small shops, stalls, and dark, miserable alleys.

Here in Shanghai began the vast expanse of China. André Malraux has well described the atmosphere of Shanghai, a town of turmoil and intrigue perpetually overshadowed by the unpredictable monster of China ever ready to rise and menace the precarious foreign settlements. The concessions of Shanghai were themselves always centers of rivalry and intrigue as Europeans carried far into the East the problems of London, Paris and Berlin. The only common bond among the foreigners in China was their love of luxury. Shanghai for Europeans was a paradise of wealth, and the impressive office buildings, hotels, clubs, banks, newspaper offices and apartment houses that rose along the large avenues and roads of the city were designed on the pattern of Europe's best.

The city was a scene of perpetual activity. Sailors from all over the world milled around the bars and dives near the waterfront. The Bund, the great artery along the busy Wangpoo River, was always crowded with foreigners hurrying to offices in the tall buildings or busying themselves among the Chinese shops. The dirty waters of the river teemed with junks, sampans and thousands of other craft, from the traditional slat-sailed Chinese vessels to the modern warships that moved in and out of the Wangpoo. Along Nanking and Bubbling Well Roads, Boris and Kira found some of the most luxurious hotels and restaurants, jewelers' shops loaded with delicate jade, lacquer and ivory *objets d'art*, and the display rooms of antique dealers with their fine porcelain vases, Buddhas and furniture. In contrast, the congested street traffic included thousands of rickshas pulled by sweating coolies dragging wealthy European women out shopping, or men on the way to their banks and clubs.

For four months the team of Boris and Kira presented their act before enthusiastic audiences at the Cathay Hotel. Before their engagement at the great hotel ended they were offered a contract to remain in Shanghai for four months more, at the Paramount Dancing Hall. This was a large and elegant nightclub which had the reputation, Boris knew, of being one of the best in Shanghai. The manager was a Viennese, Joe Farren, who had landed in Shanghai after various adventures in other parts of the Far East. Joe, who became a great friend of Boris's, was to know a tragic fate: after Pearl Harbor he was captured by the Japanese, tortured, and finally shot.

At the Paramount Kira and Boris danced music hall comedy, mostly of a satirical nature; one of their numbers, for example, was entitled "The Gay 1900's." These burlesque dances were about the only thing the public seemed to appreciate. Boris missed classical ballet, but it was pleasant to have one's pick of choice contracts and opportunities. Of their entire tour in the Far East, Boris's and Kira's greatest success was, beyond a doubt, in Shanghai. Instead of staying two months, they remained a full year.

Before long they had many friends in the city. The orchestra at the Paramount was composed of Russians, with whom Boris was able to recall his motherland. Shanghai society flocked every night to the Paramount, and Boris soon became friendly with a number of the influential foreigners.

Sharing the bill with Boris and Kira at the Paramount were other foreign dancing and dramatic troupes, Spanish Gypsy dancers, American comedians, and other attractions. Among these were two Americans, Cowan and Bailey, who presented a short show entitled "Black Magic" in which they sang and joked in the disguise of Zulus, half-naked, painted black, and wearing enlarged feet. Backstage at the Paramount were a few rooms that were often rented to wealthy Chinese for the purpose of opium smoking. One evening a Chinese client was occupying one of these rooms. He soon developed the intense thirst that assails opium smokers. Having been unsuccessful in calling a servant to bring him tea, the Chinese addict, dressed only in a towel around his waist, ventured into the corridor of the Paramount in search of a servant. There he ran into Cowan and Bailey walking down the corridor dressed as Zulus. The poor Chinese, thinking that he was in hell and that his visions had come true, shrieked and ran down the corridor, grabbed a door and opened it. To the amazement of the patrons of the Paramount he burst onto the stage in his practically nude state, shrieking with terror until he crashed into the orchestra.

It was only after a year to the day in Shanghai, with occasional short visits to other Chinese cities, that Boris and Kira left, this time for French Indochina. They now definitely intended to return to Europe, with no other delay than a one-night stand in Saigon, where they had an engagement to dance at the "Fête Annuelle" of the Cercle Sportif, the city's smartest club. But with characteristic nonchalance Boris was to find that their projected 24-hour stay was to extend itself to three months.

As their steamer carried them upriver toward Saigon, Boris and Kira watched the mangrove-bordered banks and flooded rice

fields slide by, and marveled at the wide gamut of Vietnamese aquatic craft plying the water around them. They found Saigon itself to be a city of contrast, with its wide boulevards, lined with tall trees, off which sprouted a typically Oriental network of narrow, miserable alleys. Its marketplaces and squares of European aspect harbored a host of Indo-Chinese street peddlers, craftsmen, and tiny restaurants on wheels. The main artery of the town, Rue Catinat, was lined with smart shops distinguished for their Parisian chic, and the sidewalk cafés that were Saigon's most characteristic feature. Here the finest of Oriental cooking was available.

Contrasting with Saigon was Cholon, its Chinese twin city, which abounded in all the mystery and charm of the other Oriental cities Boris had so far visited. In Cholon beautiful Annamese and Eurasian girls haunted the clubs and opium dens. Although these dens were illegal, a great deal of opium smoking went on among both the natives and the Europeans.

After their engagement at the Cercle Sportif, Boris and Kira were invited to appear for a few evenings at the Continental Hotel. Its star guests at the time were Charlie Chaplin and his bride Paulette Goddard, who were on their honeymoon, accompanied by Chaplin's new mother-in-law. While Chaplin's wife and mother-in-law enjoyed the hotel's champagne and caviar, less demanding Charlie ate sauerkraut and drank beer on his own.

One night, after Boris and Kira had finished their act at the hotel, Boris changed out of his costume and went to sit among the café guests. He had ordered a beer when a blond, clean-cut young man wearing a monocle came up and introduced himself as M. Lainelot, a civil engineer and official of the French civil service.

"I enjoyed your act tremendously," Lainelot commented. "I get no chance to see any shows where I live now."

Lainelot then explained that he was engineer in charge of road construction in Indochina, and was now engaged in building the famous Route Number 13 from Cambodia to Tonkin through Laos. Boris had heard about Route Number 13, which would cut

through some of the wildest parts of Southeast Asia. He became even more intrigued by the young engineer when Lainelot started to talk about the wonderful shooting he enjoyed along the route of the new highway.

Ever since childhood Boris had had a passion for shooting. When he was ten, his father had given him a 16-bore shotgun, which was his most prized possession. By the time Boris discovered that Lainelot's wife was Russian, they had already become the best of friends. Lainelot invited Boris and Kira to come up to stay with them at Kratie, a small town up the Mekong River near the Laos border.

"We can go shooting together," suggested Lainelot. Boris needed no prodding, and changed his plans, again delaying their return.

At last Boris was able to indulge his love for a sport that rapidly was to become his greatest passion: big game shooting. Lainelot gave him his first real opportunity at large game in some of the best areas of bush and forest in Asia.

In 1936 these areas surrounding the new road were practically unexplored by foreigners. The road crossed the bush and savannah territory of the fierce Mois tribes. These primitive people, who went almost naked, were fierce and expert hunters. Like the Indians of the Amazon, they used blow guns, with which they could hit and poison large game at a surprising range. The lightly wooded terrain, where visibility was fairly good, alternated with swampy patches and regions of dense, green jungle. The region was famed for its numerous tigers, clouded leopards, deer and buffalo, especially—in the last category—bantengs and gaur. The bantengs had the reputation of being highly dangerous beasts, and very prone to charge hunters. In Laos they roamed about in herds sometimes as large as from eighty to one hundred animals. The road under construction was dotted every twenty to sixty miles by camps for the convicts who served as forced laborers on the road. These camps were the usual starting points for shooting.

Lainelot assigned a Cambodian army corporal who had been employed in guarding the convicts to Boris as tracker. A convict of definitely sinister aspect, who had killed his wife and mother-in-law, was ordered to carry Boris's gun.

"Won't it be a bit dangerous," Boris asked, "to leave my gun to this convict and wander out in the bush with him?"

"Nonsense!" Lainelot assured him cheerfully. "None of the convicts here would dare run away or cause any trouble. They're far too afraid of the Mois, who would either kill them or return them to us."

Despite these reassurances, Boris somehow never felt quite at ease walking before his gun bearer.

Day was just breaking when Boris set out with his Cambodian corporal and the convict. In the dry dust they soon found spoor showing where a herd of bantengs had crossed the road. They spotted shrubs that had been torn and bent as the large animals passed. Excited as he had rarely been before, Boris walked ahead, followed fifty yards back by his corporal and the ragged gun-carrying convict. They were passing through an open part of a stretch of burned-down forest when, at the foot of a large dead tree, Boris saw a deep hole. Catching a glimpse of something moving in the depths of the den, he foolishly bent down close to peer into it. His face two feet from the lair, he waved to the gun bearer to approach. Then suddenly, with a growl, a blurred shape shot out of the hole, and struck Boris a glancing blow with its body. As he staggered back, trying to keep his footing, Boris heard the crack of a rifle. The corporal had fired. The animal at which Boris had been gaping dropped in the middle of the clearing. It was a big clouded leopard. Boris felt a little shaky when he realized that he could have been badly mauled.

This unpleasant first experience in no way shattered Boris's enthusiasm. Later that day he shot two large banteng bulls.

On the second day out, Boris bagged two more bantengs. Dusk was falling over the hushed, dim jungle when he finally prepared

to return to camp. His party carried acetelyne head lamps for night shooting, although Boris considered this kind of hunting highly unsportsmanlike. The corporal told Boris that the stretch of country that lay between them and the camp beside the road, toward which they were heading, was good for swamp deer. After a quick meal and rest, Boris and his tracker separated and on parallel courses began working toward the road, turning their heads now and again toward each other to indicate their respective positions.

Cocking his French army carbine, and tired from the day's hunt, Boris silently and slowly marched toward the road. Now and again he caught the spark-like flash of the head lamp of the Cambodian tracker to his left. All was silent in the dark, gloomy forest. Tense, Boris marched forward, scanning the trunks and bushes that his beam lit up with an eerie glare. Suddenly the beam flashed back from two glowing eyes—those of a swamp deer, thought Boris. Freezing in his tracks, he peered ahead of him. The two eyes shone brightly, barely fifteen yards away. Boris raised his rifle and fired. The eyes disappeared. Forgetting all caution, Boris moved forward to examine his deer. Crushing bushes, he made his way to see whether he had hit his mark. Suddenly, as he parted some leaves, Boris's lamp lit up at his feet the great shape of a still living, though wounded tiger!

Boris jumped back, instinctively drew his pistol and put two bullets into the still lively tiger that he had mistaken for a deer. Calling out to the corporal, he proudly showed him his kill. Fifteen yards had been a close range. This was Boris's first tiger. He was as proud of it as if it had been the biggest tiger in the world. In fact, it was relatively small, for the tigers of Southeast Asia never attain the size of those of the terai of Nepal.

In this hunter's paradise, Boris lingered on. Every weekend he and Lainelot would return to the luxury of Lainelot's bungalow at the town of Kratie, where their wives stayed. Life in Kratie was very pleasant, the Lainelots being a delightful couple and excellent company.

One Saturday, after an epicurean dinner of choice game shot during the week, topped with excellent wine, Lainelot produced pipes and introduced Boris to opium smoking. Today, through novels and detective stories, opium has become identified in the popular mind with the shady world of addicts and criminals, and it is hard to conceive of a person indulging in it without thinking of him as steeped in terrible immorality. This, of course, is a distorted picture, for to try a pipe of opium out of curiosity can do little harm, unless one becomes addicted to it. Lainelot had received from a liveried servant a batch of particularly good opium, a gift from the King of Cambodia and an excellent excuse to initiate Boris.

Boris had first visited an opium den with friends in Saigon. He had gone to one simply to have a lark. In Cholon there were many such dens, some shabby and of ill repute, but others of high standing. The dens were a favorite night resort for the elite of Saigon, not so much for the opium as for their atmosphere. The den to which Boris was taken was lit by a diffuse, soft light coming from a filigree coconut lamp. In the center of the room was a large couch, big enough for six or seven people to recline on. In its center squatted a beautiful young girl who prepared the pipes. All around the central couch were low chairs with tables from which one could talk to the smokers or have any drink from champagne to cognac if one did not care to indulge in a pipe personally.

This luxurious place, like the worst dens, carried within its doors the sweet, mysterious, slightly sickly smell of opium. Boris watched with interest how the lovely girl performed for the smokers the delicate and intricate task of preparing the pipes. The preparation of pipes plays a primary role in opium smoking and is a small art in itself. Beside the girl were small glass jars filled with what looked like thick chocolate cream. This was the opium, the distilled coagulated sap of the seed pod of poppies. The pipes used were of wood with a long stem, flat, round bowl, and a very small, narrow well.

The young girl prepared the pipes by dipping a metal wire into the thick paste in the jars, then passing the paste over a lamp. Under the effect of the heat the opium bubbled up around the wire; while it was in this state she rubbed it around the edge of the wire. In this manner various coats of opium were laid around the wire, finally forming a conical pellet. She placed the pipe over the flame and inserted the pellet of opium into the well. The pipe was ready for smoking. The smokers, who were all lying down, leaned over on their couches, each placing the end of his pipe above a flame, not so close as to burn the opium but just enough to make it bubble; at the same time the smoker inhales deeply. While clients were smoking, Chinese tea was served to them, as opium dehydrates the body very quickly and makes one thirsty.

One can smoke six to eight pipes in a session. It is generally after the second or third pipe that the effects of the drug begin to make themselves felt. One has a sense of great lightness, but provided one does not stand up, one does not feel sick.

Boris experienced this feeling of airy lightness and calm beatitude while smoking opium at Kratie. All his worries disappeared and all his wishes seemed to have been fulfilled. He would have thought that he was dreaming but for the apparently contradictory fact that at the same time all his senses became particularly acute; he could notice and even hear a cockroach scuttling across the floor of the bungalow. Opium has on women the side effect of being a considerable sexual stimulant, while it produces the opposite reaction in men. This rarely mentioned fact may partly account for the large number of women who indulge in opium smoking.

Boris spent in all three months in the bush in Indochina, hunting like mad. Meat being in great demand, there were no restrictions; everything was welcome. When they left Kratie he had shot thirteen-odd bantengs, ten bison, six leopards, two clouded leopards, innumerable deer, six tigers and also two rare gray gaur—the latter was later identified as an almost extinct separate species, but was then thought to be a cross breed of gaur and buffalo.

Boris had had all the skins of the big cats preserved, and the horns of all the other animals packed and crated. Unfortunately he never recovered his trophies. They were sent down to Saigon but, owing to a sudden exhaustion of Boris's funds, they had to be abandoned.

Having arranged for the shipping of their costumes to Penang by sea, Boris and Kira set out by hired car through Cambodia to Penang, where they had an engagement to dance. Their first stop was Angkor, where they stayed for five days. Never had a place struck Boris as more beautiful. Whether it was the mystery of the abandoned Cambodian city or the rhythm of its stone dancers that appealed to Boris most, he could not tell, but he left Angkor stunned by the incredible beauty and charm of the place.

Hunting in French Indochina, though interesting, had not been beneficial to Boris's wallet, and on leaving Angkor he discovered that they were down to their last penny. With no money left for food, they took a train to Bangkok and then on to Penang, to be saved at last by a loan from the porter of the P & O Hotel, where they danced for three weeks.

Now at last, they felt, they were on their way back to Europe. They had another contract in Calcutta and then one in Mussooree, a hill resort north of New Delhi, which would be their last stepping stone to home. In Penang they boarded a boat for Calcutta.

That first evening at sea Kira rushed down to their cabin in a great turmoil, uttering something about nude monsters on deck. Boris hurried up the cabin stairs to see for himself. To his amazement, he found on the promenade deck a group of savage-looking men with long hair, dressed in rich-hued red robes, and engaged in intoning strange prayers. As the sea breeze caught their gowns bare legs and thighs were revealed.

This strange band of individuals was nothing less than the Tibetan mission to Peking on its return journey to Lhasa after having negotiated an attempted return of the Panchen Lama to Tibet. This was the first time Boris saw Tibetans. The group was a

strange lot; their cabins were adjacent to that of Boris and Kira, and all night they droned their psalms, spinning hand prayer wheels, while surprised cabin boys kept the holy delegation supplied with Western *chang*—beer—which they drank with great enthusiasm between the verses of their religious litanies.

From Calcutta they went to dance in Mussooree, their last stop before Europe and home. It was in Mussooree, just before leaving, that the realization that still being stateless, he had no real home, came over Boris. It struck him that there was little future for them in Europe, where they would be bound to run into the same visa trouble that had caused Boris to leave England four years previously. On the other hand India offered them the possibility of eventually obtaining a British passport. Now he recalled with renewed interest discussions he had had with friends in Calcutta about the possibility of creating an elegant social club where the elite of both the European and the Indian worlds could meet.

Suddenly Boris made up his mind and informed Kira that they were not going to Europe after all but were heading for Calcutta, immediately.

VII Maharajas for Dinner

What happened to Boris in Calcutta has already become part of the legend of that city in its heyday before the Second World War. In Kathmandu, whenever a person came up from India, he would evoke the Boris of Calcutta, recalling with great enthusiasm the "good old days" of the 300 Club, the reputation of which had long since spread around the world. I had even heard of the club in Paris before I knew that Boris was its founder. At first I had imagined it to be some special nightclub, and later, for a long time, I had imagined Boris as a large shadow in a dimly lit room, overseeing the serving of drinks while on stage girls who would have made Diaghilev shudder went through exotic routines. Even after my first meeting with Boris, his modesty had led me to imagine that one entered the 300 Club by a small, dark staircase leading into some sort of basement nightclub, Paris style.

This conception I soon had to correct when to my surprise I discovered that the 300 Club was a venerable social club and had in fact been housed in a building as large as the Royal Hotel! To get things straight I concluded the best thing I could do would be to go to Calcutta both to see for myself the building that had housed the famous 300 Club, and to gather on-the-spot accounts of what it had really been like.

One day when Boris was particularly hard pressed with engage-

ments and when his pig breeding adventure was at its most hectic stage, he rather vaguely suggested, "We must go to Calcutta together some day." After three months in Kathmandu, this proposition seemed all the more enticing since I had come to miss some of the more trivial advantages of civilization. I modestly yearned for a beer (a rare drink in Kathmandu), while Maire-Claire had visions of buying everything from silk dresses to handbags, as shopping in Nepal for Western goods was like looking for geraniums in the Kalahari Desert.

Calcutta seemed an even more pleasant place to go when Boris suggested that I should meet some of his friends there, as these included a list of maharajas whose fame and personalities had always intrigued me. The opportunity suddenly arose one day; at dawn, with Marie-Claire and some friends, we motored out of the valley leaving Kathmandu asleep while we headed over the mountains to Calcutta, some 450 miles away as the crow flies. The small size and remoteness of Kathmandu, its isolation, and our lengthy stay there, made the idea of a large, bustling city glitter with anticipated attractions. Like children we looked forward to the pleasure of seeing a film, of buying books, and much more. Despite our anticipation, nothing prepared us to expect what was actually awaiting us: the revelation of a new Boris, and a new world of his as different from Nepal as ballet in Monte Carlo had been from life in Shanghai, or horse breeding in Odessa from herding pigs up to Ichangu.

Boris was to join us by air when, after having negotiated the dust of India's cattle-crowded roads, we reached Calcutta. Dusk was falling over the megalopolis when after three days driving we entered the sprawling suburbs of the city where four years previously I had lived the first adventure that had led me to the Himalayas. But even my earlier visit was not enough to warn me of what I was to witness. I had come to see luxury and now discovered that with six million inhabitants, hundreds of thousands of whom sleep in the streets, Calcutta today is no doubt one of the most repulsive cities in the world. Yet this is also a city of excitement and luxury,

known for its gaiety and sophistication. Nowhere else can such a contrast between wealth and poverty be found, but this is mainly because the poverty and filth of Calcutta are unequaled by any ordinary slum in the world. There are no words adequate to describe the rusty inferno of the sprawling suburbs of the city, which stretch for miles over the swamps and mudbanks of the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra on which Calcutta was founded. We drove past factories with smoking chimneys which appeared like bits of paradise in their relative neatness, compared to the huts of the squatters which rose against their walls. But nothing is sadder than a palm tree in a factory yard, or more distressing than the endless roads that drive like furrows through the heaps of dirt, dust and misery that surround the heart of what was known as "the second city of the Empire," Calcutta, "city of palaces" and the largest metropolis of the Far East. The narrow streets are lined with gutters, the open bowels of the city on whose banks squat, lie and sit the wide-eyed, practically nude figures of skeletal beings in perpetual famine. Calcutta is a caricature of a modern metropolis with its fringes of sordid, mechanized landscapes of factories and warehouses, of slums and dirt. Into Calcutta famished peasants pour by the millions from all Bengal in the naïve hope of finding in the city the food they have been refused in the rice fields. Despite the heavy toll that epidemics claim, each year sees a new horde of peasants swarm through the cement inferno of Calcutta's streets, which they share with bulls, cows, oxen and such unexpected monsters as double-decker buses. Before such a sight one is obliged to reconsider one's norms and reevaluate one's notions of humanity, human dignity and human purpose.

Founded by the Honorable East India Company in 1690 as a trading post, Calcutta soon grew and prospered to become the greatest center of trade and industry in India. The city is situated on the muddy banks of the Hooghly River, one of the numerous tentacular branches of the great delta. Up the treacherous course of the river the famed Hooghly pilots each year guide thousands of

vessels past the treacherous reefs and sandbanks to Calcutta, and thus keep the metallic pulse of the city's business and industry going.

In days of old the banks of the Hooghly were the site of bloody human sacrifices as hundreds of Hindus gave themselves to the crocodiles, a sacrifice, to quote an early visitor, "which they effect by walking into the river and waiting till the ferocious animals approach and draw them under." Today the shores of the Hooghly are clustered with warehouses, docks and cranes, while to the north of the city huge palaces throw wide stone staircases down to the murky river on which float large, ten-oared, crescent-like barges. The mighty Howrah Bridge, a gigantic steel structure, gives access to the heart of the city; shacks are replaced by cement buildings under whose overhanging porches sleep innumerable beggars wrapped up in dirty clothes, their only possessions.

In Calcutta all buildings save those perpetually tended and kept up rapidly acquire an air of delapidation due to the dampness of the climate, which eats into the most robust paint or strongest stucco in less than a year. For as further blessing the city has one of the most unpleasant climates imaginable—exceedingly hot and humid practically all year round—with as the only relief a short spell of "winter" when the thermometer rarely goes below sixty. In the summer Calcutta is all but intolerable and the government of Bengal, which had its seat in the city, would migrate with many of the officials' wives and children to the cool hill resort of Darjeeling, situated at 7,500 feet in the Himalayas at the foot of Kangchenjunga.

In reaction to the climate and the poverty of the city the British applied much of their fast-acquired wealth to establishing themselves in extreme luxury, and Calcutta, "the city of palaces," can rightly claim to possess more grandiose residences than any other town in India. The center of the city is built about the maidan, a vast, open, grassy field three miles square and bordered on one side by magnificent avenues lined with stately mansions, clubs and

hotels. The principal artery is Chowringhee, where rise the Grand Hotel and the famed restaurant, Firpo's, along with the sedate, majestic Bengal Club, whose seat, a gigantic structure, rivals the governor's residence in splendor. To the north of the maidan is the race track, one of the finest in the world, with its shaded paddock and stately grandstand; this is the site of the city's most active sport, thoroughbred racing. It is the property of the sophisticated Calcutta Turf Club. Calcutta's temples of racing are but little surpassed by the Jockey Club in Paris or the races at Ascot. Imported thoroughbreds of the finest pedigree compete there practically all year round, there being a special monsoon track suited to the torrential rains of those seasons.

As Calcutta grew in size and importance, still more luxurious residences cropped up, oases of green lawn and flowery gardens guarded by high walls, in front of which liveried servants stand at attention. The district of Alipore, behind the race track, was and still is the most sophisticated. There the various rajas and maharajas had their homes adjacent to those of the wealthy merchants and high officials. Money came easily to the foreigner in imperial Calcutta, a town where for many years all Europeans were practically assured of making a fortune in a relatively short period. Although the city was large, society there was small and well-established routines set the social pattern followed by all. Private parties and clubs were the center of social life, the race track the meeting place. Keeping a racing stable was not limited to the very wealthy; even young trainees of the city's large business firms could afford to own a horse or two in partnership with friends. Membership in the right clubs, and not only money, was the essential factor in social distinction. To be British or European was the major requirement for belonging to the wild social set of Calcutta and participating in its elegant parties, race meets and club life.

Winter in Calcutta was a great season. Then the Viceroy came to reside there, and on the occasion of his arrival a grand "darbar" was held to which all the rulers of eastern India came. These

maharajas, in full regalia and attended by elegant aides-de-camp, collaborated to make the winter season all the more elegant and sophisticated. Calcutta was the largest city in the Empire after London.

Even today the city is truly a monument to colonialism. The maidan is littered with statues that recall India's former grandeur. There are statues of Sir John Lawrence, the "Savior of Punjab"; of Canning who, as someone put it, "steered the Empire through the tempestuous waves of the mutiny into the calm waters of material and moral progress." The Victoria Memorial, an enormous, rather dubious structure of white marble, a cross between the Taj Mahal and St. Louis des Invalides in Paris, lends a baroque air to the city. Not far from it rises St. Paul's Cathedral, a neo-Gothic building that suffers from the monsoon and its proximity to palm trees, but nevertheless recalls "home." In amongst these monuments stray the sacred cattle in search of the complement of their daily meal that they usually steal from grocers on their habitual concrete grazing grounds.

Despite the colonial aspects of the city, before independence it was not so much the civil servants as the *barrab sahibs* ("great white men"), the big business magnates of the metropolis, who took the lead in seeking in luxurious amusement oblivion from the hardships imposed by the climate. Although not as gay or as cosmopolitan as Shanghai, Calcutta was more sophisticated and lively than other Indian cities. It rapidly became a center of pleasure and luxury famous all over the East.

As early as 1750 writers criticized the women of Calcutta for their passion for dancing, "a sport unsuited to the climate." Horse racing was also introduced early to the city. The Calcutta Lottery, predecessor of the Irish Sweepstakes, for many years paid the highest prize in the world to the fortunate winner.

Having washed away the grime accumulated on the trip down, Marie-Claire and I made our way to Firpo's, the Italian restaurant café on Chowringhee. Firpo's is an institution in Calcutta that

with Boris's 300 will go down as a beacon of an era fast disappearing.

Opening onto the avenue, the ground floor of Firpo's is patterned after the great cafés of Rome and Venice; marble columns supporting gilt ceilings reflect endlessly in Venetian mirrors that catch the gleam of heavy silver cutlery set upon countless tables. To one side great glass cases display chocolates, pastries and sweets the fame of which was already widespread in India in the days of the viceroys. Whether two or two thousand miles away, the tables of British royalty visiting India, and those of sophisticated maharajas, always had assortments of Firpo's chocolates, which at great expense were shipped thousands of miles by rail in sealed boxes and treated as if they were gold. While awaiting Boris we made up for Kathmandu's diet by tasting some of the numerous varieties of ice cream that have also made Firpo's Italian chefs famous.

That evening Boris did not turn up; I was hardly surprised, as he has never been known for punctuality. Even at the Royal Hotel he can rarely be expected to keep an appointment. Now that he was probably hundreds of miles away I felt sure he would never come. No doubt something terrible had happened, such as the hotel burning—or more probably an old, old friend from China, or Odessa, had turned up unexpectedly in Kathmandu.

The following day at luncheon time I made for Firpo's again, this time going up a large staircase carpeted in red to the first floor.

"Do you know if a Mr. Lissanevitch has arrived?" I tentatively asked a maître d'hôtel.

A blank look met my question.

"Mr. Lissanevitch from Kathmandu," I explained.

"You mean Mr. Boris! Are you expecting him?"

"Yes," I answered.

The maître d'hôtel immediately disappeared through a crystal door into the grand dining room on the second floor. Here at the tables, lunching, were seated at least a hundred well-dressed peo-

ple, many of them rather elderly, waited upon by turbaned servants who lent the marbled hall, with its crystal chandeliers, the look of a fancy dress ball in a Venetian palace.

Standing by the door, I awaited the return of the maître d'hôtel, expecting to see him emerge with Boris. Then to my surprise the maître d'hôtel came hurrying back, followed by the manager and a small crowd, and before I knew what was happening I found myself shaking a dozen extended hands and holding a small press conference.

"When is Boris going to arrive?" everyone seemed to be asking. "Where is he going to stay?"

I had started a small riot and in an instant I had a demonstration of Boris's incredible popularity. Boris's isolation in Kathmandu had not had the effect of dimming his popularity in Calcutta.

Ten minutes later I was saved from further explanations by Boris himself popping up to find me in heated conversation with his friends at the bar. Correctly dressed in our dark suits and ties, we were all sipping brandy when Boris made his triumphal entry, his hair parted in the center, and wearing his bush shirt, which looked strange, to say the least, as its bright colors were reflected a thousand times in the stately mirrors of Firpo's. Boris had arrived.

I noticed other ways in which Boris contrasted strongly with his Calcutta friends. Among them were tea planters from Assam bitterly complaining of the present disastrous economic situation in India, and managers of large firms desperately seeking to transfer their capital out of the country, trying to sell out and leave their huge villas in Alipore to return "home" to England. "The good old days" were constantly being mentioned, and I was surprised to find that the distinguished Indians were the first to criticize the present government and to regret the great days of Calcutta's past. At first I did not see much justification in these complaints, Calcutta seemed so big and modern compared to Kathmandu, and life here was certainly more lavish than in Europe, at least for a select few. But on looking more closely, I noticed how in fact all the institu-

tions of the city were slowly crumbling away. The city of palaces was becoming a city of ghosts. Those who remained behind seemed bitter. Among these people, Boris alone stood out, dynamic and enthusiastic. He seemed ten years younger than the other men of his age and never moaned over the past.

At Firpo's Boris arranged for us to obtain passes for the afternoon races. The passes would admit us to the select Royal Calcutta Turf Club enclosure. This was easily arranged; both the secretary of the club and its president were great friends of Boris's.

In the black limousine of the club secretary we drove off beyond the maidan to the great wrought-iron gate of the club members' enclosure. There, today, survives the magnificence of Calcutta's heyday. In the judges' box Boris was greeted by all as a long-lost friend. The day's racing was explained to us, and in going over the entries I saw to my surprise that Prime Minister Jigme Dorji of Bhutan had numerous entries, alongside of those of a long list of maharajas. Beautiful saris mingled with elegant dresses from the leading Paris ateliers. I saw with pleasure that my friend Tesla Dorji, the wife of the Bhutanese prime minister, outshone all the other ladies in her long, remarkably modern and elegant-looking Tibetan silk robe.

Nevertheless, there was something nostalgic about the race meet, and I readily imagined the even more striking significance that such gatherings had had in the days when maharajas had still owned states the size of small European countries. As someone put it rather blatantly, "Nowadays we can't even import race horses from England! Foreign exchange, you know!" This, of course, was not the only grievance I encountered, nor the best founded, but it well suggested what a peak of luxury Calcutta's upper class had known in the days when at the 300 Club these same people and many more had pored with enthusiasm over catalogues and pedigrees, purchasing from Ireland and England the finest thoroughbreds to be shipped halfway around the world for their weekend racing pleasure.

Those days were now over, as accompanied by Boris, I witnessed the sites of the city's past glories.

It was more than thirty years ago, in 1934, during his and Kira's first engagement in the Bengal metropolis, that Boris had first mentioned to a friend of his, the prominent leader of Calcutta society Allen Lockhart (later Sir Allen Lockhart), that he found it amazing that the second city of the Empire had no decent place to go after the two A.M. closing time.

"Why don't you try to open one?" Lockhart had suggested.

A few days later, at Firpo's where Boris was dancing, he met J. C. Mahindra, one of Calcutta's wealthy Indians, who was sales manager of the great Tata firm. Tata's was the commercial and industrial giant of India. It was owned and headed by a famous Parsee of Bombay, Mr. J. R. D. Tata, a multimillionaire whose vast fortune came from interests in such diversified fields as aviation, steel, and all forms of trade. To J. C. Mahindra and another wealthy gentleman by the name of Dr. Rao, Boris had suggested the idea of creating a mixed club. This idea did not materialize till after Boris's return from China.

From Mussooree in 1936, Boris had reached Calcutta on the weekend. His mother had written to him from France (where she was staying with her son Alexander after having fled Russia in 1928), urging Boris without fail to meet a certain John Walford, a distant relative of the family. Mr. Walford was an old Calcutta resident and a director of Blacker & Co., a well-established shipping firm in the city.

From reflex Boris, on his arrival on Saturday in Calcutta, made for the race course, where he met John Walford, who introduced him to various members of the elite of the city. He discussed his intention of setting up a club. Walford arranged a dinner conference with J. C. Mahindra at Firpo's for that evening. After the races Walford dropped Boris at the Great Eastern Hotel, where in a hurry he was to don the "black tie" very much *de rigueur* in all Calcutta's social activities.

Getting out of the taxi Boris somehow managed to leave his hand in the door, which was rudely slammed shut. Paralyzed with pain, Boris could not scream, and the driver, seeing that the door was still slightly ajar, gave his fingers another blow.

The "300 Club" thus knew a painful debut as, that evening, Boris discussed his plan with J. C. Mahindra while under the table he bathed his crushed fingers in a glass of ice.

The discussion, nonetheless, seemed successful. Mahindra was very keen on Boris's idea, and felt that through his friends in the city he might be able to get the backing to launch a venture that to many would have seemed foolish—that of creating not only another club in Calcutta, but a mixed Indian-English club.

Calcutta possessed at that time more clubs than any other city in the Far East. For if private clubs were numerous in England, they were even more so in India and the colonies. The noted historian G. W. Forrest points out with pertinence that in India "the Englishman unfortunately imitated the luxurious style of living of the nobles of the Moghul Empire, and this luxurious splendor came to be regarded as a necessity."

Among the most famous of the existing clubs was the Bengal Club, the elegant residential club situated on Chowringhee. Membership in the Bengal was open only to the *barrab sahibs*. Austere and traditionalist, the club never authorized women to enter its sedate precincts, and when on the occasion of its hundredth anniversary ladies were invited, a few of the older members resigned in disgust that their carpets and sancta should thus be defiled by females. An all-white club, there was no question of an Indian, however rich or influential, ever penetrating its doors.

As for the Royal Calcutta Turf Club, to which Boris took us when we had gone to the races, it was also a segregated institution. One of the richest of the clubs, it drew considerable funds from its controlling interest in Calcutta races. Before the Irish Sweepstakes came into existence, the club used to run the lottery on the Derby, the kitty of the Calcutta Club Sweepstake running into several hundred thousand pounds sterling. With the 10 percent it col-

lected on all betting, the Turf Club had amassed a considerable fortune.

There also existed the Saturday Club, a club for young men of "the mercantile." Screening of prospective members was very careful and entry was absolutely refused not only to Indians (their admission would have been unthinkable) but also to anyone belonging to the trades, "the mercantile" and "trade" being two of the many well-defined sets that made up Calcutta society.

The society of the city was comprised of one group made up of civil servants, who ranked themselves according to office, the Governor of Bengal being Number One when the viceroy was not in residence. Along with the top members of the civil service came the *barrab sahibs*, wealthy owners and directors of large firms. After this group came the army and "the mercantile," followed by the traders and the shop and hotel owners. Since its foundation, Calcutta had had a well-defined and stratified society, and some of the early governor generals had even maintained a court whose protocol was as rigid as that of the small German courts of pre-Bismarck days.

As for other clubs, Calcutta had the Tollyganj, which sported a golf course and a race track set within a majestic park around which crowded the slums of the city. The very existence of this all-white club in this location was an insult to the Indians, both wealthy and poor, so glaringly did the luxury of its gardens and its service contrast with the wretched shacks that surrounded its well-kept lawns. It even claimed that all the trees of the immense club grounds were of European origin.

Needless to say, all these places were run with the greatest number of turbaned bearers and other well-groomed personnel possible. None of the clubs admitted Indians save one, the Calcutta Club, which was purely a men's club.

But Boris, whose capacity for creating enthusiasm seems unlimited, soon fired his friends with his idea. It was decided to name the new club "The Three Hundred," suggesting that since Cal-

cutta was the second city of the Empire it should have a 300 Club in opposition to the famed 400 Club in London. As "400" referred to the number of members, the 300 Club was thus claiming, in a way, even greater exclusivity than its London counterpart.

J. C. Mahindra introduced Boris to E. L. Watts, a Calcutta solicitor who was president of sixty-odd firms. Mr. Watts drafted the charter of the club, which was to be a proprietary club, financed by a small group of businessmen, before it was turned over to its members. Into the club, as charter members, besides Allen Lockhart, were drawn Toby Campbell, Patsy Warren and Michel Levay, all well-known figures in Calcutta society who were enthused by such a revolutionary idea. It was decided that it would not only be a mixed club but also open twenty-four hours a day, a considerable novelty in a city where, as in England, most places for eating and drinking closed at two A.M., a relatively early hour for the tropics.

Boris immediately set out in search of an appropriate home for the club. The heart of Calcutta is full of stately buildings but none of those that were available seemed to suit Boris's intentions. His wild imagination sought a place that would be not only luxurious, but truly unique and well adapted in its originality to the purposes of the new club.

Suddenly Boris found what he was looking for, a large palace whose character was as unique as its history. The house, known as "Phillip's Folly," had been abandoned for many years. It had been erected by one of the famed three "builders of Calcutta," a man whose eccentricities have now become legend.

In the 1870's there arrived in Calcutta three ambitious young Armenians. Although penniless, these confident young men made bets among themselves as to who, on making his fortune, would erect in Calcutta the most extraordinary house. All three of the friends entered, in one form or another, the construction and real estate business, and all three took English names and became millionaires. One was J. C. Gaulston, who erected a gigantic manor

known as Gaulston Park which later became the residence of the fabulous Nizam of Hyderabad. Gaulston became the king of Calcutta real estate before his speculations ruined not only himself but also his two companions. He also built the Gaulston Mansions along Park Street, a main artery of Calcutta.

The second Armenian, who anglicized his name to Stevens, built and for some time owned the Grand Hotel, at that time one of the largest hotels in the world. Today the Grand Hotel still stands, occupying a gigantic block along Chowringhee. It was for a long time the only hotel that sported twenty servants to each guest, each of its suites providing an antechamber in which slept, by the door of the occupant, the various bearers attached to his person.

As for the last of the trio, Phillips, he made a considerable fortune in real estate and coal before he started building his "Folly." During his lifetime Phillips was known for his many eccentricities. Not the least of these was a steam car he constructed that looked like a gigantic swan. In it Phillips for some time would amuse himself by driving around the city until the authorities had to ban his vehicle from the streets because it caused riots. It must be mentioned that the gigantic swan on wheels would frequently stop, issue steam from its nostrils, start to shake, hoot, and finally lay eggs of pure gold, as huge crowds followed the car in anticipation. Today this incredible vehicle reposes in a museum in Bombay.

In the course of his life Phillips had one great love affair, with a beautiful young lady. He built his famous marble "Folly" for her. But unfortunately, on the day before their planned wedding, his fiancée ran away with a common soldier. For many years Phillips spent a considerable part of his fortune on detectives whom he sent in pursuit of her, until finally he gave up the chase and retired to his "Folly" on Theatre Road, where in twelve apartments he installed twelve girls of different nationalities. Once a week he would give stag parties in the course of which the twelve fair ladies were carried in on large silver trays as a savory.

Finally ruined, Phillips died in a mental institution. The three Armenians had lost most of their fortunes when they backed up the real estate speculations of Gaulston, who had overextended himself and was declared bankrupt after the First World War. Stevens had committed suicide, but Gaulston lived till 1948, an old, familiar, and well-liked figure of Calcutta who haunted the race track till his death.

A house with such a history was precisely what Boris was looking for. After having looked over the four stories of the marble palace and its vast garden he decided that at all costs the 300 Club should be set up there. Theatre Road, the street on which Phillips' Folly stood, runs perpendicular to the maidan and, strangely, ends at the cathedral. Having always had a taste for grandeur, Boris was in no way awed by the size of the great building. Phillips' Folly was not exactly what one could have called homelike. Massive, rectangular, and the size of a great block of offices, its lawns groomed and cultured with Victorian expertise, the building appeared like some great bank that had drifted into a pleasant garden. With its impressive, massive portal framed with huge wrought-iron lamps that lit the flight of steps leading into a marble hall, the structure was worthy of the "City of Palaces."

"This is just what I need," thought Boris, who already imagined himself the king of the castle.

After hasty negotiations the lease for the house was signed on December 6, 1936, and the club was scheduled to open on December 18, exactly twelve days later. In those twelve days Boris proposed to transform Phillips' Folly into a respectable club, rebuild the parquet floors, construct a kitchen, hire personnel, find a cook and musicians, and establish a sufficiently appealing public image of the new club to guarantee its success.

With Boris's characteristic energy he managed this incredible feat. A small army of carpenters, masons, plumbers and painters were put to work immediately and additional kitchen and restaurant equipment and furniture were bought and installed. Chefs,

barmen, waiters and bearers were hired. A gourmet himself since his boyhood, Boris was determined that the food served at the club would be truly epicurean. As no orchestra of real talent was available, he found two pianists and a drummer and trained them to play together. Such an ensemble having never yet been produced, the strange combination at least had the virtue of being completely original.

By the time opening night for the 300 Club arrived on December 18, no fewer than six hundred guests, including the majority of the fashionable and influential socialites and magnates of Calcutta, had accepted invitations to attend. The guests were expected at eleven P.M. At six P.M., to Boris's horror, the garden of the new 300 Club still looked like a work yard. The parquet floor of the ballroom was still in process of being assembled; carpenters were busy building the last panels of the two bars and assembling some of the furniture. At eight P.M. panic was running through the clubhouse. Boris rushed around everywhere seeing that the normally slow-working Bengali craftsmen speeded up their efforts, while the phone rang constantly as new members checked on the address or friends asked if they might bring extra guests.

Finally, incredibly, as the hands of the clock swept on toward eleven, the last of the mess was cleared away and Boris hurried into his white tie and tails to welcome his guests.

Shortly after eleven-thirty the first guests arrived, followed by a long train of chauffeur-driven limousines that deposited at the club the most important men of Calcutta, civil servants, business and professional leaders, distinguished and bejeweled Indian princes, and their elegant spouses. In little groups the inquisitive new members looked over the club. Boris's strange drummer and piano ensemble was a great success, everyone marveling at this new and unusual combination. Boris attempted to look calm, although he was still perspiring from the hurried last-minute preparations. Without a hitch, in the main ballroom, under glittering chandeliers that lit the now well-adjusted parquet floor, six hundred meals were served.

Of that hectic evening Boris can remember little more than the fact that it was a roaring success. At seven A.M. the last guests dwindled away. The 300 Club was born. From the very start the club was a tremendous success.

Phillips' Folly in many ways lent itself to providing an intimate atmosphere. The house possessed numerous alcoves and corners, recesses, terraces and loggias allowing for intimacy. Large arched doorways led from the central ballroom to the wide marble staircase and the bar at one end, while opposite the staircase the ballroom overlooked the garden. There were a dining room and a second bar on the same floor. Above the club, Boris had a comfortable flat built for Kira and himself in rooms once occupied by the strange concubines of the eccentric Phillips.

As for the garden, it soon was to become a favorite spot for the club members. Thick shrubs sheltered it from the street. In the middle of the area rose a magnificent, flamboyant, golden mahaw whose towering branches offered much-needed shade and sprouted innumerable flowers which formed a red marquee above a dance floor and tables set outside. Here by day one could lunch, while for belated party goers the garden also became the favorite spot to have breakfast at dawn.

Among the 180 founder members of the 300 Club were included the elite of Calcutta, the roll reading like the index of the *Arabian Nights*. The charter members included such people as His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, the impressive old Maharaja of Burdwan, his two sons the Rajkumars, His Highness the Geekwar of Baroda, the multimillionaire Maharaja of Darbhanga, the Maharaja of Dumraon, the elegant Maharaj Prithy Singh of Baria, the Raja of Bamra, the Raja of Nilgiri, the Raja of Parkud, the Raja of Talcher, and numerous others. This list of distinguished names and titles represented a truly fascinating group of pleasant, sometimes eccentric, millionaires and sportsmen, a colorful lot when, decked out in the Oriental costumes of their respective states, they visited the 300 Club after attending the annual durbar of the viceroy.

Such an aggregation of titled members soon brought into the 300 Club the elite of Calcutta, and very shortly the elite of India followed suit. The diplomatic corps also made the 300 their rallying point, while big business flocked there, thanks mainly to Allen Lockhart, one of the most sympathetic members of Calcutta society. Overnight the 300 became The Place to go.

Elegant and distinguished Allen Lockhart, one of the principal backers of the club, was also one of its most familiar figures. Allen had come to India in the middle twenties, his extreme dynamism and energy bringing him considerable popularity. When he arrived in Calcutta what was known as the Bengal Terrorism had just started. White civil servants were being shot down and the city for a short while was highly unsafe. All the efforts of the police proved fruitless against this movement. It was partly due to Lockhart's energetic action that the terrorism was curbed. He organized the anti-terrorist league which, taking over from the police and operating on the basis of the slogan "five Bengalese to pay for one white man's life," rapidly reduced the terrorists to silence. Strangely enough, this action led by Lockhart in no way reduced his popularity among the Bengalese, and he was always an ardent supporter of *rapprochement*, an interest reflected in his complete endorsement of the 300 Club as a mixed club.

Allen Lockhart was also famous for his incredible ability to work fifteen hours a day and stay up all night till six A.M., when he would often leave the 300 Club to go home, have a shower and go to his offices where, as director of numerous firms, he worked like three men till long after closing hours. It seemed that he never slept. In fact he did, but for minutes only at a time. During World War II Allen Lockhart was given charge of ammunition production in Calcutta and for his services in this post was later knighted.

Among the many members should also be mentioned Sir Biren Mukerjee, an old Bengali aristocrat who was influential in bringing the cream of Bengal society into the club.

When people are asked today what was the cause of the unprecedented success of the 300 Club, they usually simply answer, "Boris." Boris, with his enthusiastic and warm personality, was the pillar of the club and the source of its incomparably gay and sophisticated atmosphere, which overnight, even in club-packed Calcutta, made it the most popular and most congenial of them all.

When I sought from Boris an answer to this question he immediately gave the credit to his friends. "Of course," he went on, "I did a good deal to get the best food. I imported a friend of Kira's family, Vladimir Haletzki, as cook." Haletzki was a true *cordons bleu* and until he came to the 300 had been one of the chefs of the famous Negresco Hotel in Nice. An officer in the White Russian army, he had studied cooking in France after the revolution. With Haletzki the reputation of the 300 Club grew, not only as a smart social club with a good orchestra and congenial atmosphere, but also as the club with the best chef and cuisine of the entire Far East. Such a combination was no small factor in its success.

Boris also introduced into the club various clever business ideas, one of which was that of having differently colored checks, or as they are known in India, chits, which were used according to the hour of the day: white chits from six A.M. to eleven P.M., pink chits from eleven P.M. to two A.M., and green chits from two to six A.M. The club never closed, but drinks increased slightly in price according to the color of the checks that the members signed. In the club cash was never used. Unlimited credit was extended to all members. Four days after the club opened Calcutta suffered its annual invasion of military officers pouring into the city for their Christmas holidays. Army officers were given honorary membership and that Christmas many flocked to the 300, which left Boris, on the third of January, with several thousand unpaid chits signed for the most part with illegible signatures.

One evening Boris, understandably upset by these huge outstanding unpaid bills, called Allen Lockhart to come and sort them out with him and try to identify some of the signatures. For the

most part the signatures were those of officers stationed out of town whom even Lockhart did not know. The green chits were especially illegible, having been signed between two and six A.M. Running through the bills, Allen Lockhart ran into one for 112 Scotch and sodas.

"I can't read the signature," Allen told Boris, "but it looks familiar to me." He put the large unpaid bill aside, every now and again looking at it, till suddenly he called out, "How stupid, it's mine!"

The following Christmas Boris put a basket by the 300 Club door with a sign reading. "Please recognize your chits and pay your bills," and sure enough the army crowd that had come back paid every single bill. In the first eight years of the club's existence, only 280 rupees (\$40) in chits went unpaid. "Since then I believe in the honesty of the human race," remarked Boris.

"One of the cornerstones of the 300 Club," he recalled, "was Fuzzy. One day the American consul took me aside, asking me if I could help a poor American, or rather a Samoan, who had landed penniless in Calcutta with his family. The man, I was told, played the drums and Hawaiian guitar. I asked to see the fellow. So up turned Moe, a tall, tanned fellow with the incredible curly hair of his race. After having heard him play, I immediately hired him. That was how Fuzzy Moe entered the 300 Club, where he remained for over fifteen years." Fuzzy was a great success in Calcutta, charming everyone with his delicate tunes and amusing them with his antics.

Fuzzy had a passion for Boris that often went beyond the call of duty. One day he heard a steward by the name of Chattergee say something disrespectful about Boris. Fuzzy immediately took offense, and seizing a large kitchen knife set about to bring expedient justice to the offensive Chattergee. The Bengali took to his heels and rushed out of the 300 Club with Fuzzy fast in pursuit. It finally took all the efforts of four policemen to calm the indignant Fuzzy, who was returned to Boris under escort.

Fuzzy's affection for Boris was rivaled by his friendship with a

distinguished British naval reserve officer who stayed for a while in Calcutta while his destroyer was in drydock for repairs. This officer had lived many years in Samoa and spoke Fuzzy's mother tongue. Each evening he would come to the 300 Club, and two A.M. would find Fuzzy and the naval officer, arms around each other's shoulders, crying as they sang nostalgic Samoan songs together.

In the music department, Boris later discovered in Calcutta a young Viennese pianist, eighteen years old, whose talent was revealed in weekly Sunday concerts at the 300 Club. The winner of many European awards, Liesl Stary developed into an exceedingly brilliant pianist. Today she gives concerts in Europe and would have no doubt achieved world fame had she not married a distinguished Calcutta surgeon. A tribute to her talent was the fact that she commanded the respect of even the most hard-boiled and hard-drinking members when she played at the 300.

When the rush of the first few months was over and the season in Calcutta was dwindling to an end preceding the monsoon, Boris was able to tidy up the 300 Club and give it its definite aspect and finishing touches. In a very short time the club became one of the institutions of Calcutta, a rallying point of the young, wealthy and brilliant men of the city. For years the 300 Club was to maintain its popularity, a period from which emerged Boris's close relationships and friendships with many of the maharajas of India. No one has been more intimate with rajas and maharajas than Boris, who was sought after more as a friend than because of his position as secretary of the 300 Club. Two of Boris's particular intimates were the Maharaja of Cooch Behar and a Nepalese general with the long name of Mahabir Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. The closest of friends, this group became known as "the Three Musketeers" and for many years were inseparable. It was with Cooch Behar and Mahabir that Boris was to engage in such ventures as hunting, setting up a distillery, a farm, and an airline, and even performing the lavish "anthropological survey" in Hollywood. It was eventually through Mahabir that Boris was to become intimately linked

with the King of Nepal and the revolution that reinstated the King in power in Kathmandu.

At first, however, the relationship of the trio was only one of comradeship based on a shared *joie de vivre*. Mahabir had joined the club shortly after its opening. Boris recalled a bearer coming to his flat with a message stating that General Mahabir and Major Rana from Nepal wished to speak to him. Boris, unaware of Nepalese customs, came downstairs, where he found an elderly gentleman accompanied by a handsome young man about twenty-five years of age. Bowing respectfully to the elderly gentleman, Boris addressed him as "General," only to find the old man protesting that he was not the general but the major, the young man being General Mahabir.

From the instant they met Boris and Mahabir became good friends. Mahabir was a member of the all-powerful Rana family who ruled Nepal as dictators, providing the country with its hereditary prime ministers. He himself was governor of Ilam province in eastern Nepal. Like hundreds of Neapalese of the Rana family, Mahabir had practically been born a general. Of a lesser branch of the ruling family, his appointment to a lonely province had been in effect a measure to exile him. A few years later, with a considerable fortune, Mahabir had left Nepal to take up semipermanent residence in Calcutta. There he very successfully invested his fortune, which grew in size till Mahabir was able to finance the movement for the liberation of Nepal from the tyranny of the elder Rana rulers, his uncles.

The third Musketeer was His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. Handsome, taller than Mahabir, the twenty-two-year-old Cooch Behar, known to his close friends as "Bhaya," beyond being one of the most eligible young bachelors of India, was the prototype of the brilliant maharaja. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge, intelligent and handsome, an excellent all-round sportsman, His Highness was one of the most popular people in Calcutta. All women were madly in love with him. A topflight polo, tennis and

cricket player, he was also a crack rider and owned a fine racing stable. In the tradition of his family, Bhaya was also a remarkable big game hunter. For a century the state of Cooch Behar had had an unrivaled reputation for its big game shoots, to which had come the nobility of Europe and the highest dignitaries of India.

Outside of Cooch Behar the young Maharaja had a vast reputation for charm and recklessness. Much of this charm and elegance the Maharaja had inherited from his mother, the beautiful daughter of the famed Geekwar of Baroda. Bhaya was also famous for his car crashes. One time he smashed a car to bits a few yards from the 300 Club; bruised but otherwise unhurt, he strolled from the wreck to the club. Another time, in Kashmir, he failed to return from an outing in a convertible and alarmed friends started a search for him. Finally the search party found Bhaya's car overturned and a complete wreck. Everyone was sure he had died; cranes were called to lift up the wreck, and as the car was raised, someone looked into the front seat. There was the Maharaja, apparently dead. It was only when a doctor approached the "body" that Bhaya woke up; unscratched from his accident, and tired of waiting for help, he had simply fallen asleep.

In the spring of 1939 the Maharaja asked Boris if he would like to come up to the palace in his state.

In a small plane they flew northward over the rice paddies of the giant delta of the Ganges toward the Himalayas. Situated three hundred miles north of Calcutta, Cooch Behar was a small state as Indian states went, covering only a couple of thousand square miles. After a two-hour flight the Maharaja's private plane was over Cooch Behar where it soon made its approach run to Bhaya's private airfield, banked into the wind, and rolled to a landing a short distance away from his palace.

Boris noticed that the moment his friend stepped off the plane in his own state he became a different man, a young and conscientious ruler, quite different from the carefree person Boris had known in Calcutta. Boris very much admired Bhaya, who when he

was only twenty already had the problems of administrating great tracts of land and seeing to the well-being of tens of thousands of people who looked up to him for all their needs. As Boris remarks, "The Cooch Behar that I knew in Calcutta was an entirely different man from the Cooch Behar the Maharaja in his own state. The moment he entered his land Bhaya became a serious, respected administrator."

The state of Cooch Behar lay along what is today the northern border of East Pakistan, covering a great part of the Brahmaputra Valley up to the Assam Duars, the region of India's famous tea plantations. Covered by marshes, jungles and savannahs of elephant grass, the state of Cooch Behar, if it was not one of the largest or richest in India, was beyond a doubt the most famous for its wild game. In its swamps and jungles roamed the fierce tiger, the great one-horned Indian rhino, wild buffaloes, and herds of wild elephants that annually were rounded up and the best specimens captured for taming. Set in a park in the middle of the state was the Maharaja's palace, an immense building whose front was crowned by numerous Oriental turrets, the entire structure overshadowed by a gigantic dome reminiscent of that of the Invalides in Paris. Hewn of red granite and set in its vast grounds closed off by iron railings, the palace, like the Maharaja himself, contrasted sharply with the rest of Cooch Behar. For the most part, Boris soon saw, Cooch Behar lived in the Middle Ages despite the incessant efforts of its rulers to bring in the advantages of civilization.

This was the first of a number of visits that Boris was to make to Cooch Behar with the young maharaja. If Bhaya and Mahabir were Boris's best friends, they were not the most eccentric of the maharajas and rajas he knew. Among these fabulous potentates who made the 300 Club their rallying point was the eccentric Maharaja of Darbhanga. A stout, short man, often seen at the 300 decked in his costly *lamee achkan* (the round-collared coat worn by most Indian princes), His Highness was an extremely wealthy man. Beyond the fact that he had six fingers on each hand, he was

noted for possessing one of the biggest and most exclusive collections of jewels in the world. The Maharaja collected fabulous jewels that were famous for their size or historic associations. Over the centuries his family had combed the entire world to purchase and obtain rare emeralds, diamonds, rubies, sapphires and other stones. Boris first became familiar with the Maharaja of Darbhanga's collection when His Highness asked him to translate a Russian book on the crown jewels of the Czars. The Maharaja had gone to a Leipzig sale and purchased some of the ancestral jewels of the Czarist imperial family when they had been put up for sale by the Bolsheviks.

No doubt the two most famous pieces in the Maharaja's collection, however, were the necklace of Marie Antoinette and the famed great Mogul Emerald, which measured about four inches long and one inch wide. Boris for some time had been keen on seeing these jewels, and when one day he asked Darbhanga if he could see them, the Maharaja just said, "Are you going to the Maharaja of Dumraon's party tonight?"

Boris was.

"Well then, I'll bring some over," Darbhanga promised.

That evening Boris went to the party held in the Maharaja of Dumraon's house, located in a lonely and unlighted part of Alipore. What was his surprise when the Maharaja of Darbhanga turned up, not in his Rolls or escorted, but simply in a taxi. In his arms he carried four boxes. This entrance seemed even less understandable when Boris found out what the boxes contained. The drawing room in which all the guests were sitting was poorly lighted, but when the maharaja opened his *cassettes* the room was actually brightened by the sparkling glow of magnificent, huge diamonds. On his turban the Maharaja wore the tremendous Mogul Emerald, a stone so large as to seem unreal, and as if this jewel alone were not enough, the Maharaja had mounted below the great emerald the large, perfect teardrop-shaped diamonds from the bottom of Marie Antoinette's necklace!

Such jewels and such wealth make one wonder at the fortunes of these princes, especially when one considers that Darbhanga was not India's richest maharaja. That distinction was perhaps held by the Nizam of Hyderabad, a Moslem monarch whose palace vaults hid an accumulation of jewels estimated in value at over two hundred million dollars.

The great Mogul Emerald had, before falling into the hands of Darbhanga's forebears, belonged to the great-grandfather of the present Maharaja of Cooch Behar. In need of money, the Maharaja had pledged the emerald as security for a loan. When the Maharaja of Cooch Behar's secretary went later with the necessary money to redeem the famed stone, he was informed to his grief: "It is a tradition that a jewel once worn by the Maharaja of Darbhanga shall never leave the family." Thus the fabulous Mogul Emerald changed hands.

Another personality who never failed to dine at the 300 Club when in Calcutta was the late Aga Khan. The Aga Khan, Boris discovered, spoke perfect Russian, and Boris spent many evenings in the company of the famed leader of the Ismailis, mostly discussing food. Also to the 300 came the Maharaja of Kapurthala and one of his brothers. This brother had a glass eye. One night, after a late dinner party at the club, Boris was awakened by the Maharaja's aide-de-camp. The glass eye was lost and none could be found of the right color to replace it. A great search was made of the 300 Club until at last, behind a settee, the glass eye was found. As for the Raja of Barwani, he, like the Maharaja of Darbhanga, also had six fingers—or rather, two thumbs to each hand. This profusion of fingers in no way prevented their owners from possessing excellent trigger fingers.

For most of the members of the 300 Club money was immaterial. Boris recalls how a Prince Ram Raja, whose title and wealth came from a state that covered parts of both Nepal and India, came to Calcutta with a fortune amounting to somewhere between twenty and thirty million rupees—a fortune that was entirely spent

in a little over three years. Ram Raja would lavishly spend on guests and acquaintances, entertaining huge parties nightly; at the same time he gambled fortunes with the Calcutta bookmakers, who were probably among the wealthiest bookmakers in the world. One year an American revue with some twenty-odd dancers came to Calcutta. The entire troupe, especially the young ladies, was entertained by Ram Raja, whose eagerness to please his friends was such that one evening when the curtain rose to open the show the spectators caught a glimpse of nineteen coolies laden down with cases of champagne and whisky, and led by Ram Raja, clumsily pushing across the stage through the cast to deliver their liquid goods, scheduled for a "small" party after the play.

Not only the maharajas had the right to be eccentric. Their customs were, it seemed, contagious, and many an Englishman in the swing of the luxurious life of the Orient would go, like Phillips, slightly mad from eccentricity and wealth.

But by far the most fascinating of the princely occupations was hunting. Boris soon found in India an opportunity for the realization of his greatest ambitions in that field.

VIII A Woman-Eating Tiger

On the third day of our stay in Calcutta I was driven by Boris to the Alipore district, where I was to meet Boris's best friend, Bhaya, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. Woodlands, the residence of the Maharaja, had once spread over dozens of acres in this exclusive residential section. Now, what with the modern times, part of its grounds had been sold. The Maharaja's house nevertheless remains an impressive and most luxurious home, and the servants that rushed down to open the car doors still testified to the "regal" service and position of our host.

It would be ridiculous to paint an anachronistic picture of the Maharaja and his household. I had expected, through the distortion of childhood symbols, to meet a beturbaned potentate. I met only an exceedingly handsome man in his early forties, or so he appeared; the house, decorated in the best of modern taste, reflected a discreet luxury, over which reigned the elegant and very beautiful young British wife of His Highness. Nothing here recalled the rather feudal stiffness of palace life in Nepal. The Maharaja, a brilliant and gay person, with his impeccable Etonian accent, unmistakably represented true aristocracy. The only exotic note—it was one which had pursued me since I had come to India and Nepal—was the stuffed trophies, the great tiger-skin rugs and mounted heads, the ever-present reminders that India has the great dis-

tion of possessing the sport of sports, the sport of kings and princes, tiger shooting.

A small tiger cub that crept into the drawing room while we had drinks reminded me that all these trophies were not just so many dead reminders of the past. A true pet, the little cub made me forget what fierce and formidable beasts tigers are, and how hunting them is one of the most risky and exciting sports in the world . . . a sport still much practiced today.

Although India has a population of 475 million, much of its territory is still covered by jungles and marshes. Even where this jungle and marshland is inhabited, game is plentiful, the natives having no right to kill large wild animals, nor any means of doing so. The famous stories of man-eating beasts are explainable by the surprisingly large number of tigers and leopards living in densely populated areas. Hunting in India, before being elevated to the rank of a sport, was mostly performed by rajas and high dignitaries upon the solicitation of the local peasants to rid an area of a man-eater or of a particularly dangerous animal who had claimed a heavy toll of local cattle. Later, tiger shooting became highly popular, and as a court amusement took the place of the earlier regal sports such as hunting with a tame cheetah, which was a favorite pastime of the great Mogul emperors. In the same way that the courts of Europe reveled in stag hunts (three French kings died from falling off their mounts while stag hunting), those of India went in for tiger shoots. Elephants were used in heavily jungled areas or savannahs, these gigantic beasts allowing one to cross in the comfort of a howdah, the rectangular box attached to the animal's back, what would normally be impenetrable territory. In the same way that aristocrats today delight in possessing fine race horses, many maharajas prided themselves on keeping a large number of good hunting elephants. In some parts of India the elephant is still held sacred; the great Hindu god Ganesh, the common household god and adviser on all enterprises, bears the face of an elephant, the animal being revered for its intelligence. All religious

and governmental processions or ceremonies in India require the presence of elephants that are bedecked with magnificent, often bejeweled howdahs. Elephants are not only draped with trappings of silk and velvet but also painted, they themselves becoming fabulous multicolored monsters typical of India as foreigners picture it.

For Boris today, as in the past for the members of the 300 Club, the most popular subject of conversation is shooting. Before the war, every weekend during the winter, a favorite pastime among Calcutta businessmen was snipe shooting around the city. The small, fast birds were so numerous that they offered the best of game-bird shooting less than five miles from the center of Calcutta.

Before the war Boris's life in Calcutta was pleasant and relaxed. As the boat mail left for Europe on Friday morning, almost all offices closed Friday afternoon. Boris would lunch at Firpo's or Pelliti's, where the merchants would congregate to carry on in a leisurely manner the last business before the weekend. The afternoon he would spend either listening to the concert at Firpo's, in the gallery of the restaurant overlooking the maidan, or he would go to the venerable Tollyganj Club—although this club was most popular for its "golf and breakfast" affairs, which were held at the early hours around dawn before the heat made walking in the sun unbearable even for Englishmen. Tennis and golf would occupy the latter part of Boris's afternoons, before the evening cocktails and receptions whose guests eventually ended up at the 300 Club, where they enjoyed themselves into the early hours of Saturday morning. This left Boris little time for a nap before twelve-thirty, time of the first race at the Calcutta track or at the steeplechase track at Tollyganj during the monsoon. The only major breaks in this pleasant routine were provided by expeditions up country for "big" shooting.

In Laos Boris had experienced some of the finest sport in Southeast Asia; but it was with a greater thrill that he set out with the Maharaja of Cooch Behar on his first large tiger shoot in India in 1939.

The moment he stepped off the train in Cooch Behar and entered the palace gates it was as if he were entering into a medieval court. Servants hustled around and the trackers came to give their reports on the situation in the jungle. In a few words Bhaya gave orders as to when the party would set out and immediately hundreds of porters made for the bush to establish a camp.

These hunting camps in India had nothing in common with the simple camps Boris had known in Indochina. Some tents boasted such luxuries as hot and cold running water, along with comfortable furniture and carpets instead of ground sheets. For shooting the Maharaja of Cooch Behar employed dozens of mahouds and shikaris, servants devoted to the elephants and experts in the art of following wild game.

No amount of words can describe the electrifying atmosphere that preceded the beat. From the moment the shikaris reported the presence of a tiger the shooting camp took on a new air. All those present became hypnotized by the report and listened in silence to the description by the tracker of the size of the "pug" marks of the beast. Immediately a battle plan was arranged. The Maharaja directed the elephants to their positions. Slowly the great beasts lumbered off, while the guests clambered onto their kneeling elephants and in hushed tones discussed the possibilities of bagging the brute. Excitement doubled as Boris reached the vicinity of the spot where the ill-fated buffalo had been tied. Prints in the soil revealed the mute story of the preceding night's tragedy when a tiger had killed the buffalo. The pug marks of the tiger were clearly visible where it had circled the bait until it made the kill. Bloodstains darkened the soil and a wide track revealed where the buffalo, set out as bait to attract a tiger, had been dragged off. The shikaris pointed toward a thick path of jungle which would soon be invaded by the beaters. In its cool, shaded tangle of trees and vines the king of the forest was now certainly lying.

Then the beat began. The noise of crashing trees signaled the progress of the beater elephants. Seated on a large tusker, Boris waited, scanning the forest for the mighty tiger. Waiting for the

tiger to emerge is the tensest, most magnetic part of the shoot. Boris's senses became raw; every sound, every movement, made him jump in anticipation. Birds startled by the shouts of the beaters signaled to each other from their perches, while monkeys ran out shrieking in terror, followed by the fast-trotting, graceful figures of spotted deer. The beater elephants drew near, their rumps visible above the tall grass in which they advanced like heavily laden ships in a rough ocean. Then suddenly, pushing out of a mass of brush and foliage, the tiger appeared, advancing slowly and majestically, thrashing its tail in anger at being disturbed. It then sighted the elephants and stopped short—this is the fraction of a second in which to shoot, or the tiger will be off like a dart. This was the moment that made tiger shooting the most fabled sport in the world. Boris aimed and fired. The tiger bounded forward, fangs bared in a snarl, then crashed heavily to the ground. The first beat was over and Boris had "padded" his tiger.

To operate such a beat is no small affair; the slightest slip on the part of the beaters can be fatal for the hunter.

This first shoot was the beginning of a long series for Boris. In the jungle and at these camps he was in his element, so much so in fact that even today his friends regard him as one of the best hunters they know. Boris has, it seems, a sixth sense for big game and a memory suited to recalling the slightest spinney and corner of jungle. In the field Boris becomes tense, with no more wasted words, jokes or careless remarks. All intent on the game sought, he becomes an untiring strategist, a true fanatic of hunting.

Methods of shooting tigers in India vary greatly. Boris tried them all, eventually shooting tigers on foot, on elephant back and from *machans*. Shooting from a *machan* is the least sporting manner. For this, one stakes out a buffalo and waits until a tiger kills the roped animal. When a kill has been reported by day, a platform (*machan*) is erected in a nearby tree. One climbs up to this lookout in the afternoon, since tigers rarely return to their kills in

broad daylight. In the hour preceding sunset, there is a strong probability that a tiger will come back to a kill, having already digested most of the food he ate the preceding night after actually killing the animal. In silence, one simply sits and waits. The minutes, perhaps hours, drag by before the tiger may appear and one can take a shot. This is not much sport, although it usually yields a tiger.

An eccentric friend of Boris's, another wealthy maharaja, practiced *machan* shooting in a big way. In his state he had a road some thirty to forty miles long and at every mile he had platforms erected, on each of which he staked a goat alternating with a buffalo. After dinner the maharaja would set out in a car with a built-in refrigerator stocked with six bottles of soda and two quarts of whisky (his evening ration), and equipped with a spotlight. In solid comfort His Highness would drive up the road shooting from his car at the game feeding on the bait. His Highness's record, the fruit of such organization, was seventeen leopards and a tiger in a single night.

One day His Highness was sitting over a killed buffalo on top of a precarious *machan* twenty feet above the ground, with a beautiful, new, very powerful, double-barreled .577 caliber rifle. After a short while a tiger came up to the kill, the maharaja aimed and both barrels went off at once. On one side of the *machan* lay a dead tiger, on the other side the half-dead Maharaja. When His Highness came down to Calcutta a few weeks later and dropped in at the 300 Club he brought along the guilty rifle. Boris had it taken to the best gunsmiths in Calcutta, Manton's. The rifle presumably repaired, Boris went to try it out, fortunately not from the top of a tower.

"I aimed and fired," he reported later, "and was simply lifted off my feet and hurled backward, even though I was well prepared. Again, both barrels had gone off at once."

While in India Boris had the opportunity to handle some of the finest guns in the world, from small .22 calibers to large guns espe-

cially made for various hunters. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar, owns a fine collection, in gauges ranging from 24-bore bullet- and shot-carrying guns to the rare 4-bore, biggest of them all. The Maharaja's grandfather, who was a physical giant, had a double-barreled 4-bore gun made especially for him that was so large and heavy that it took two normal men to raise it. It was that same Maharaja of Cooch Behar who made his state famous for its great "shikars." In a book entitled *Thirty-seven Years of Big Game Shooting*, the Maharaja recorded the incredible list of tigers, bears, rhinos, panthers and buffalo shot by him or his distinguished guests, who included many of the highest aristocracy of Europe and the Orient, such as Prince Esterhazy, the magnificent Lord Lansdowne, Lord Hamilton, Prince Christian Victor, Prince Hans Henry of Pless, HRH the multimillionaire Count of Tunis, and others.

The outstanding reputation of the shooting in Cooch Behar was also based upon the number of fine elephants owned by the maharajas of that state. In Cooch Behar, Assam and the Duars, hunting on foot is practically impossible, the elephant grass sometimes growing twenty to thirty feet tall. Naturally the elephants were the objects of considerable care. They were known to live as long as sixty years. Each elephant owned by the young Maharaja of Cooch Behar had its individual name and personal history. In general, four different sorts of elephants are recognized: the tall tuskers, upon whose backs are placed the heavy wooden and wicker howdahs; the *maknas*, males without tusks; *kunke*, which are rapid and agile; and *chaknas*, which are *maknas* with big heads. All tame elephants are called *hati* as compared to the wild elephant, which in Assam are known as *banuwa*.

When Boris first went to Cooch Behar there were some seventy elephants in the Maharaja's stable. The elephants that do not carry howdahs are saddled with pads, large, straw-filled, jute mattresses girthed around the belly of the elephant with the aid of thick ropes. The Maharaja owned one elephant that would inevitably signal the proximity of a tiger with a shriek.

If roughly disturbed by noisy beaters or elephants, tigers will not hesitate to pounce on the elephants, gashing them with their claws and at the same time burying their teeth in the elephant's skin. Elephants, when attacked by a tiger, will generally get the better of the beast, but only after suffering a severe clawing and loss of blood. Elephants have their size as an asset. An elephant need only roll over to crush its assailant or can lift a tiger with its trunk and fling it against a tree. It sometimes kicks the tiger and with a remarkable speed runs up and stamps the tiger to death with one hammering blow of its gigantic foot, and then kneels on him. Nevertheless tigers are very dangerous adversaries, even for elephants.

Old or lame tigers that have been wounded in unsuccessful attacks by men are those that usually turn into man-eaters. The word "man-eater" has given rise to innumerable tales, a great many of which have been romanticized. But it is a fact that man-eaters are quite frequent, and any one man-eater is likely to claim a toll of at least two or three human lives, and in most cases more. A tiger turned man-eater will generally, if possible, eat nothing else but human flesh. Because of a full-grown tiger's considerable requirements, their victims will often run into the dozens. The native population of India is in general too poor and ignorant to put an end to these beasts by their own primitive means. Furthermore the man-eating tigers tend to travel great distances, catching new victims in the outskirts of villages where the news of their whereabouts has not yet spread. Not only can tigers become man-eaters, but also panthers, which are even more dangerous, as they stalk humans right into their huts.

In 1939, while shooting in the state of the Raja of Bamra, southwest of Calcutta, Boris had the opportunity of stalking a man-eater. He had long been looking forward to such a chance. The news of the presence of a man-eater at a nearby village had reached the palace of the Raja at five in the evening. Boris immediately proceeded to the hamlet where the kills had been made. The "man-eater" had killed, that very morning, three women. It was a typical Indian vil-

lage with mud and reed houses, some thatched with straw, others with shaky roofs made of thin pottery tiles. On his arrival Boris found all the villagers mourning and weeping. Their shrieks could be heard a long distance away in the dusty, dry air. The season was excessively hot, and most wells having dried up three of the village women had gone out a mile and a half into the forest to a water hole to wash clothes. A few hours later a passing peasant had found two of the women lying beside the pool, dead. A blow of the tiger's paw had sufficed to kill them, ripping open the backs of their heads. On further searching the villagers found other traces of blood that led them to suspect that the two women had been accompanied by a third who had been carried away by the tiger.

The following morning before sunrise Boris sought out a peasant who knew the surrounding country well, and leaving the women shrieking and the funeral pyres burning, they set out for the fateful spring. There they examined the bloodstains and tracks showing where the tiger had dragged his third victim into the forest. The village was surrounded by low undulating hills covered with sal trees and dotted with bamboo clumps. At the peak of the hot season much of the forest and underbrush had burned, allowing fairly good visibility. Following the tiger's tracks, Boris and the native soon came upon the ghastly remains of the beast's third victim. The rib cage of the poor woman had been ripped open and the ribs eaten dry of their meat; the arms and legs had been devoured to the bone and the head was only a shapeless mass of bloody flesh. Boris moved cautiously away from the revolting sight—cautiously, because he knew that the tiger could not be far away, resting till it had built up more appetite to finish its horrible meal.

All was silent and still. Heat waves flickered above the brown grass of the patchy sal forest floor. Boris stalked around the hill upon which they had found the body, his heart beating with excitement and nervousness. He had never killed a man-eating tiger, and realized that to such a beast he meant just another meal. Un-

like other tigers Boris had stalked on foot, this one would not walk away if it saw them, but probably would attack outright, like those that had often flung themselves on Cooch Behar's elephants.

"Suddenly," recalls Boris, "I spotted the tiger above me, lying at the foot of a clump of tall bamboo, about sixty yards away. I was carrying a Mauser with a five-shot magazine. I took aim and fired, but my bullet hit a bamboo trunk and was deflected. The tiger jumped to its feet and ran up the hill away from me. Before it reached the crest, where it would have disappeared, I fired again. I got the tiger somewhere in the hindquarters, but too far back. Whether the tiger was dazed or simply infuriated, I didn't know. It spun around and kept on going, but this time downhill, straight for me.

"Being downhill from the beast, all I could see was its head. I aimed at its forehead and pulled the trigger. The rifle misfired—nothing happened. I aimed again in a hurry. This time the rifle worked—the bullet seemed to have hit exactly between the eyes. The tiger stiffened and braced itself, skidding to within ten feet of me. There it stopped and started shaking its head. I could see where I had hit it and expected that it would drop dead. But it just stood there continuing to shake its head. Because of the previous misfire, and having only one bullet left, I dared not try to shoot again immediately. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, still shaking its head from side to side, it turned and started walking away. I quickly put a new magazine in and fired, hitting the tiger twice before it collapsed.

"When I had made sure it was dead, I was able to examine the man-eater. It was tremendously large, but lanky and thin, a fierce-looking, scraggly brute. It had lost most of its tail, probably in a fight with another tiger. On all four paws it only had three whole claws, and in its mouth it had only one tooth that wasn't broken. There was no doubt that it had turned man-eater from old age."

When Boris brought the man-eater back to the village the inhabitants immediately switched from mourning to rejoicing, and that

afternoon staged a large beat of the surrounding forest so that Boris could shoot some meat for them to eat. That afternoon's beat proved incredibly rich. Herds and herds of deer and wild boar emerged from the jungle. Choosing only the very large heads, Boris shot two sambas, two chittals, a wild boar, two bears and a nilgai. This last animal is a large antelope the size of a horse. The name nilgai is Hindi for "blue bull." Bulls and cows being sacred, nilgais, because of this name, were not shot by villagers and became very numerous, causing enormous damage to crops. Around 1953 the government of India renamed the animal "*nilgora*," which means "blue horse." This new appellation effectively dispelled the religious scruples of poachers and hunters.

In a similar fashion, in Nepal, yaks, which are of the cow family, were declared in 1856 to be of the deer family, and thus could serve as food for the Nepalese army invading Tibet.

While in Calcutta Boris had an opportunity of shooting in practically every part of central and eastern India. In the Central Provinces he often went shooting with the Raja of Karia. There Boris shot stags and buffalo, accompanied in the field by local shikaris of the Gond and Baiga tribes. These primitive people are the greatest trackers of India and are unequaled hunters.

In the Poona area, in Bombay province, Boris often went shooting leopards, as he did also in Orissa, near Cuttack, where he shot another man-eater.

Before World War II it was a fairly simple process to obtain permission from the government of India to go shooting. One first made a request for several "blocks" of jungle from the Forestry Department, then made arrangements for the hire of elephants if necessary; then, having secured the appropriate shooting license, one would set out.

Boris's favorite mode of hunting, though, was not with a large party, but alone on an elephant at dawn, just riding through the jungle doing what is known as "*gooming*." At sunrise one can see many animals going back to their lairs. The forest is alive with the

noise of birds and tense with the activity preceding the arrival of the day's heat. One such day, while *gooming*, the elephant on which Boris was riding suddenly stopped and started shaking. Suddenly the mahoud uttered a shriek.

"*Mara, mara, sahib, mara*—kill, kill," he yelled.

There in front of the elephant, across the trail, lay a huge hamadryad, or king cobra, the most deadly and vicious of India's snakes. Although it presented little danger to Boris or the mahoud, it could have attacked and killed the elephant. Boris's shotgun was loaded with No. 4 shot. He fired both barrels and cut the snake in two. Looking down, Boris saw the horrible sight of the two halves retracting and both disappearing, one on each side of the path.

It is practically impossible to describe the charm of the jungle at dawn, the massive, moss-covered trees, the open, marshy spaces with the giant elephant grass that ripples in the wind like some gargantuan rice field. The atmosphere of shooting camps is always electrifying, and as man pits himself against the great wild animals of the jungle one cannot help but realize that the battle, although unequal, can sometimes be lost by the hunter.

In December of 1938 a Swiss friend of Boris's from Calcutta named Hollenstein, a great *shikari*, came over to see Boris at his apartment above the 300 Club. Hollenstein begged Boris to help him shoot a dangerous wild elephant, a "rogue," that had been posted for destruction by the Forestry Department of Assam, with a reward on its head. However, Christmas was drawing near, and as that was the time of the greatest activity at the club, Boris could not get away. He was forced reluctantly to stay behind while Hollenstein and some non-shooting Swiss friends went ahead on their own.

A few days later, however, Boris could no longer resist his desire to join the party. Taking a train, he went up to their camp. When he got there he was horrified to find Hollenstein dead.

Hollenstein had been killed the preceding day by the rogue elephant. The Swiss had been tracking on a *bathi* when he came

upon the rogue's trail. Hollenstein got off his elephant and began stalking the rogue on foot through the thick grass. Spotting the mighty, infuriated beast behind a thicket, he had fired. The elephant crashed down in its tracks. Then, as the rest of the party, on tracker elephants, and unarmed, came forward, Hollenstein foolishly did what no hunter should ever do: presuming that the rogue was dead, he walked up to him "head side." No sooner had he gotten within reach than the wounded beast flipped out its trunk, grabbed Hollenstein, and banged him to death on the ground in front of his helpless companions. Not satisfied with this treatment, the rogue got up and with his mighty tusks gored poor Hollenstein beyond recognition.

Most assuredly, pursuing wild game on elephant back is not without danger. One particularly horrible accident that may occur is when an elephant becomes entrapped in quicksand. Frequently the jungle and savannahs in Assam and Cooch Behar give way to marshy patches into which elephants have been known to start sinking. This death is a particularly dreadful one for an elephant, as its trunk enables it to live for hours when its entire body and head are submerged and only the trunk protrudes from the mud. When an elephant starts to sink in such a place its riders must beware, for in its panic an elephant will grab at anything, including humans, to pack under its feet and stop it from sinking.

A more common disaster is when a tame elephant suddenly turns "*musth*" and practically goes mad. It is then likely to tear away through the jungle with its riders on its back until they either fall off or are dashed against overhanging branches and crushed. Falling off, however, is not necessarily the most enviable solution to the problem of finding oneself on a runaway elephant, for in its panic the elephant may take a fallen man for a tiger and stamp the poor fellow to death. Fortunately, the suppuration of glands below the elephant's ears usually allows the mahoud to foresee his animal's turning *musth*. Runaway elephants are nevertheless frequent. In Nepal, Boris's second wife, Inger, was nearly to lose her life in such an accident.

A rarer type of disaster is when a tiger manages to catch someone who is hunting him on elephant back. Although a tiger will occasionally charge an elephant, they rarely get sufficient hold to do any harm to the people on its back. However, in one case, believed to be unique in the history of tiger shooting, a planter, an acquaintance of Boris's, was actually attacked on an elephant, in one of the most hair-raising, terrible experiences in hunting annals. The tiger in this case was not a man-eater, but had been previously wounded.

An Indian tea planter with little experience had shot and wounded a tiger in the vicinity of Paksa Duar, north of Cooch Behar along the Bhutanese border. Thinking the tiger dead, he sent laborers to find the carcass. Entering the forest, they were suddenly attacked by the enraged beast; one laborer was killed outright and another severely wounded.

The following day a local English tea planter, Mr. Pullan, at the request of the Indian planter, set out alone with two elephants to kill the wounded tiger. Riding on the first elephant were Pullan and a mahoud, while another mahoud, a Nepalese, was alone on the second elephant. As they were returning after an unsuccessful search, the tiger suddenly charged, pouncing upon the hindquarters of Pullan's elephant. He attempted to push the beast off with his rifle, but the tiger caught the rifle with his mouth and bit through the trigger guard, setting off the gun. Frightened, the elephant stumbled and fell, knocking off Pullan and the mahoud.

In the fall Pullan passed out and when he came to he found that one of his legs and one arm were broken and the other leg horribly chewed up. The tiger was standing over him, snarling! Half-conscious, Pullan heard his mahoud shouting and saw him up a tree a few yards away. The mahoud called out to him to try to come near and that he would pull him up to safety. Desperately, with his only good arm bleeding profusely, Pullan dragged his mutilated body toward the tree. At each foot he gained the tiger took one slow step after him. The planter owed his life to the courageous arrival of the second elephant, whose mahoud urged his

frightened beast, at the risk of his life, to walk up and kneel just in front of the infuriated tiger and the wounded man. The Nepalese mahoud then managed to lift the planter out of the tiger's reach. First aid and many ligatures saved his life, although he remained for months in hospital in England, where eventually one of his legs was amputated. The Nepalese mahoud was given a medal for bravery. Needless to say, this incredible adventure is one of the most fantastic on record in tiger shooting.

Although Boris's friends disagree, Boris himself claims that he has never had any really close shaves with elephants, tigers or bears. As the years went by, Boris became an ever keener and better hunter. In 1958 he shot his sixty-eighth tiger. This is far from a record—the Maharaja of Sarguja, for example, has shot to date, despite his old age, the world record of 1,177 tigers, and is still shooting—but it does place Boris among a select few, considering that he is neither a professional nor given the opportunities that await maharajas.

Apart from Boris's sixty-eight tigers, three of which were man-eaters, Boris did hold and still holds a unique distinction—that of having shot the only white leopard on record.

This occurred on a shoot with a great friend of Boris's, the Maharaja of Dumraon, whose large estates covered a part of the present state of Behar, lying west of Bengal along and south of the Nepalese border. From 1938 on Boris would hunt every year with the maharaja in Assam, in addition to the numerous shoots he would share with Dumraon on his estate. Dumraon, a short, stocky, jovial man, and a keen, alert hunter, was also famous for having fought and won one of the longest legal battles in India and perhaps in the world for his title. An impostor claimed that the Maharaja's grandfather had adopted him a day before his death and that the title of Maharaja of Dumraon was therefore rightfully his. Supported by some unknown financier, the false pretender engaged in a legal battle that raged for forty-five years, first through all the law courts of India till finally the matter was brought to the

Privy Council in England, where the final verdict was given, ironically, in 1946—a year before India became independent and all maharajas and princely landowners lost their estates.

In 1942 Boris and Kira went for a shoot with the Maharaja and Maharani of Dumraon in Behar, in a forest neighboring the town of Sassaram. The first three days of hunting brought out no game whatsoever, despite the one hundred native beaters accompanying the party. In fact, the whole outing was highly disappointing. Boris had spent a night in a *machan* over a kill, but was unable to sight the tiger which, although it roared in the vicinity, never returned to feed on the bullock it had killed.

On the last day, in the morning, three successive beats were organized, but again without success. Not a single animal came out of the dry sal and bamboo forest. Eventually everyone, deeply disappointed, returned to the camp. Kira and the Maharani decided to go for a walk, while the Maharaja suggested to Boris that in consolation they have a go at shooting peacocks. They set out on foot, the Maharaja taking with him a 16-bore shotgun, while Boris for no particular reason brought along, in addition to his shotgun, a rifle.

They walked some hundred yards from camp and sat down on a little path, fifty yards from each other. The beaters started their work, slowly drawing toward the path. They were not far off and could be heard shouting, but yet nothing flew or walked out of the forest. It looked as if their bad luck was holding out. Then suddenly, about thirty yards away, Boris saw a strange-looking animal. It was definitely a leopard, but with something wrong about it. Boris picked up the rifle he had luckily brought along, and fired. The bullet grazed the animal's head. Wheeling around, it rushed straight for Boris, but fortunately stopped, only eight feet from him. Boris was still seated, an awkward and unpleasant position for shooting. Hurriedly he jerked back the lever of his magazine rifle: the empty cartridge was ejected, but in his excitement he had not pulled the lever far enough back. When he squeezed the trigger

there was just a dry "click." With a sinister growl the big cat turned around and disappeared back into the thickets. By this time the beaters had practically come out in the open. Opening his rifle, Boris now discovered that he had not had an actual misfire but had merely not pulled the lever back far enough to introduce a new cartridge. He was standing up when the leopard, having run into the beaters, plunged back across the path. As Boris hastily fired again, the animal somersaulted and disappeared in the bush.

"What have you shot?" asked Dumraon, coming up.

"A strange-looking leopard," said Boris.

They then found traces of blood on the bushes nearby. As it was getting late they decided to leave the animal for half an hour and go back to camp and have lunch. Lunch over, they returned to the spot and, following bloodstains, soon came on the leopard, stone dead.

To their amazement, the leopard was unlike anything they had ever seen. Its body was completely white, except that the spots which should have been black were a pale cream or sandy color. One might have thought that it was an albino, but its blue eyes and a detailed examination proved this was not the case, and that it was simply a freak of nature. The leopard measured six feet, six inches, from nose to tail. The skin was immediately sent to the famous taxidermists Van Ingen & Van Ingen of Mysore. There a complete examination and report were made on the skin. The only skin resembling it—one that had been brought to the Van Ingen firm for examination forty-five years previously—was a badly damaged one whose origin and present whereabouts were unknown.

Complete information was forwarded by the Van Ingens to the Bombay Natural History Society, where the record was duly registered and the unique particulars of the animal noted. Later an article in *Natural History* magazine of Bombay discussed the white leopard. An account of this unique trophy is also given in Arthur Musselwhite's book *Behind the Lens in Tiger Land*. The Maharaja pleaded for the skin and Boris, much to the chagrin of



Boris and Inger at a tiger shoot in Nepal.

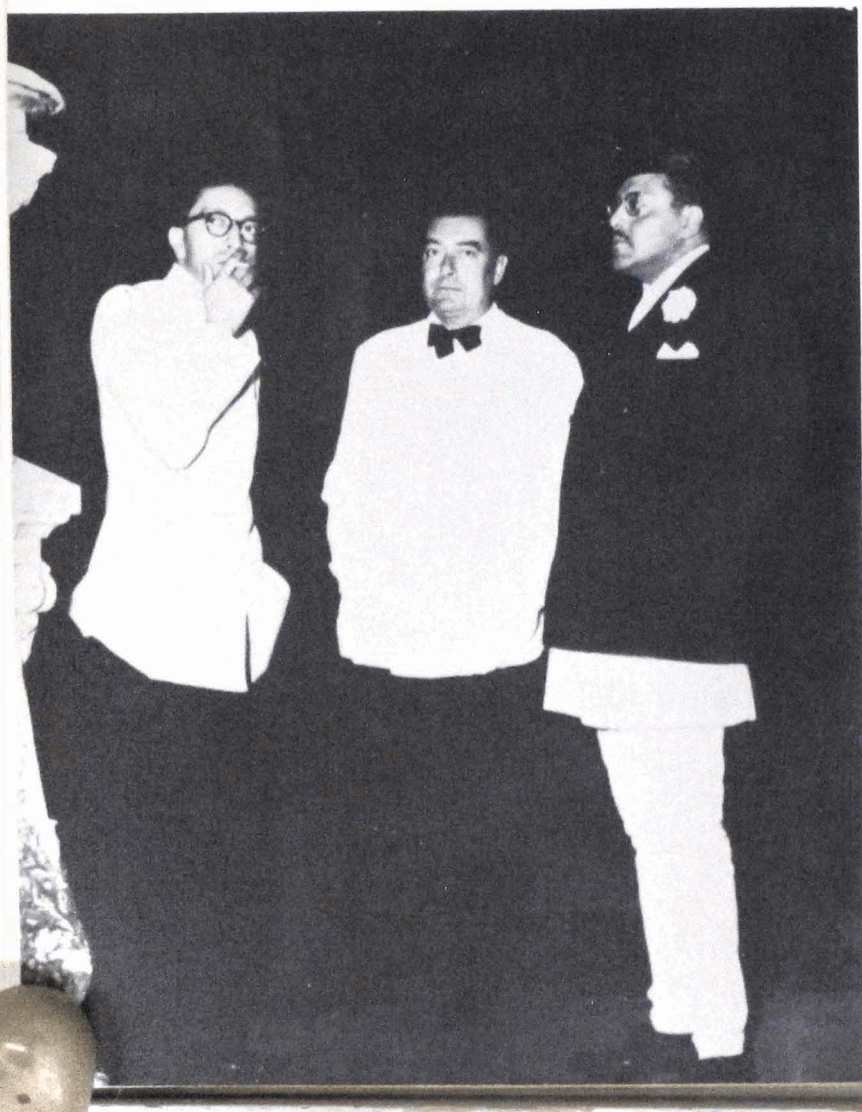
An afternoon's kill of Nepalese tigers.



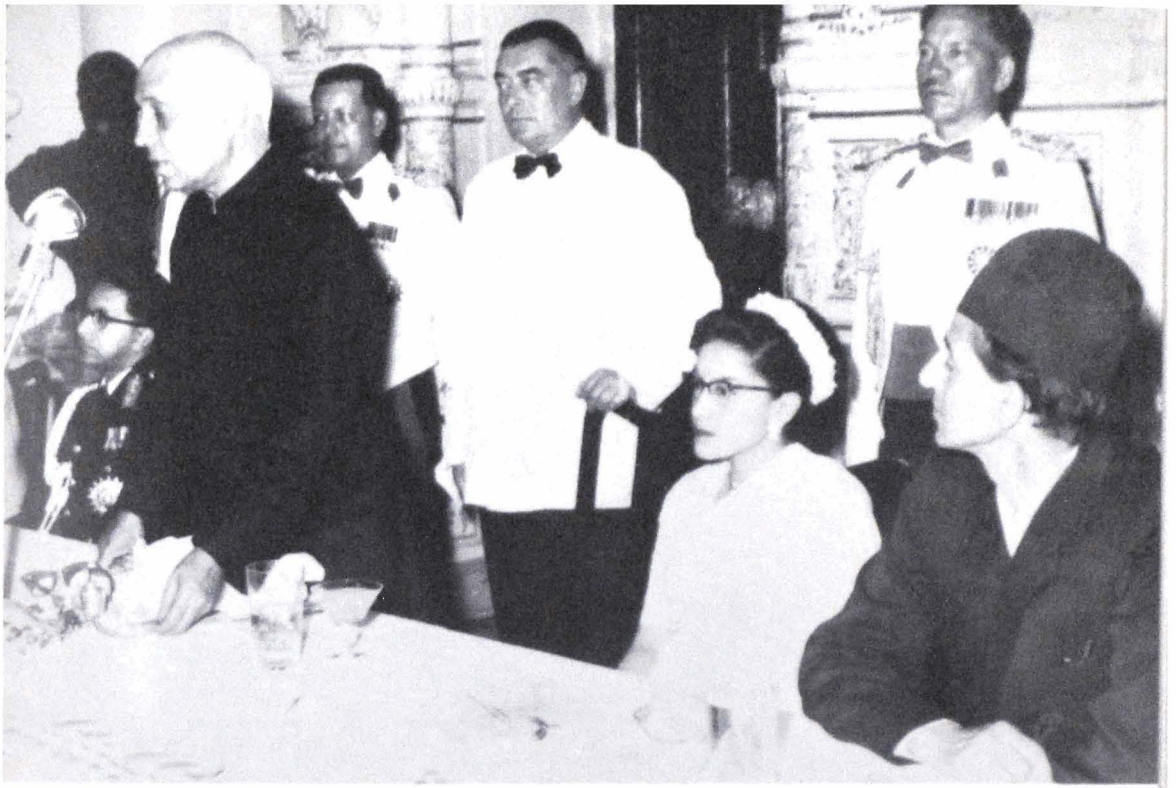


H.M. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva of Nepal receiving the homage of foreign representatives at the evening durbar following his coronation on May 2, 1955.

Wide World Photos



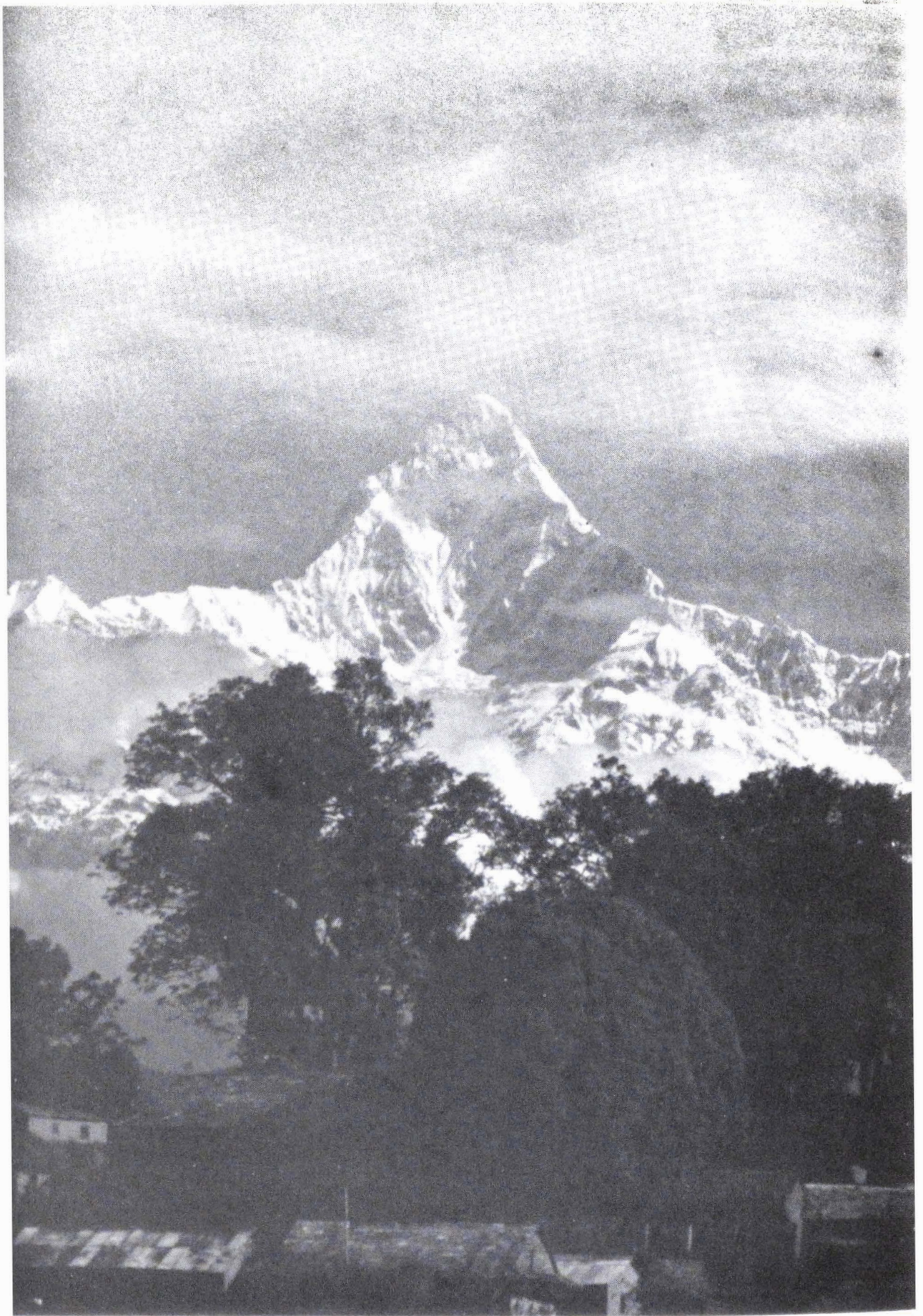
(Left to right): H.M. King Mahendra, Boris, and General Kiran of Nepal.



The late Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking at a banquet, with H.M. Queen Ratna Devi of Nepal seated at Nehru's left, and Boris standing with hand on chair.

Colonel Jimmy Roberts, second from left, and members of the British expedition to Annapurna II, around Boris and Inger at the Yak and Yeti Bar.





Michel Peisse

"I myself had first been attracted to Nepal by the mountains." This view shows Machhapuchhare as seen from Pokhara.

his wife, gave it to him. Today the skin is in the possession of the Maharaja of Dumraon's son.

Various theories have been advanced to explain this freak white leopard. If white leopards were believed to be almost nonexistent until Boris's specimen was shot, a certain number of white tigers have been found, and the Maharaja of Rewa has now managed to breed a white tiger which has sired cubs like its father, pure white with dark stripes and blue eyes. Boris believes that the coloration of white tigers and leopards is due to the presence of certain minerals in the soil. Nearly all white tigers that have been captured or shot were found in the vicinity where Boris bagged his leopard, in Behar around Takari, Rewah and Sarguja, a geographical area with formations of limestone. It is believed that this mineral or some other in the water or the salt licks may be responsible for the pigmentation of these freaks.

From his numerous shoots Boris has brought back not only skins and antlers as trophies, but occasionally also live animals. On one occasion he returned from Cooch Behar with a seventeen-foot-long python. These snakes, although exceedingly frightening, are non-poisonous. Feeding the monster was no problem as Boris found out it would swallow a live chicken which would last it for months. Boris trained his python so that he could walk about the grounds of the Zoo Club with the snake on the end of a stout leash. Needless to say, the python was a sensation. Boris considered painting it green with red spots, but gave up the idea.

One night when a group of members were standing around the bar in high spirits, Boris secretly brought in the python and, suddenly pointing to it, cried "Snake!" He had expected some violent reaction. Actually, to his disappointment, people just turned their heads, looked, and carried on with their conversation, a certain proof that alcohol does slow down reflexes. Boris later gave the snake to the Calcutta Zoo.

More affectionate and popular was Puss Puss, a pet leopard that Boris brought up from the age of four months. Puss Puss was kept

on a leash in the 300 Club and remained tame even when full grown. At the first call of his name he would rush up in great leaps and lick Boris's hand. Several times Puss Puss broke loose, causing a panic among the servants of the club and particularly among the *durwans* (gatekeepers), but Boris had no trouble in bringing the animal to heel on these occasions. Puss Puss was completely tame, but as Boris remarked, it was an unwise thing to turn your back on him. Leopards are playful things and when a 160-pound leopard jumps on your back for fun you simply go down to the floor.

Wild animals, according to Boris, are like humans in that each one is an individual. It is foolish to say that a pet leopard or even a tame tiger will turn bad when he grows old; it is just a matter of individual character. Puss Puss stayed tame throughout his entire life, while another leopard that Boris nursed back to health, bathing its infected paws and curing it of rickets, always remained ill-tempered and savage. Puss Puss, even when full grown, was still obedient. When he reached full growth the Maharaja of Dumraon found him a wife and the two were installed in a cage at Dumraon's palace. Each time Boris went to visit him the big leopard, now a heavy, powerful animal, would purr and allow Boris to take him on walks on a leash. Later Boris gave Puss Puss, too, to the Calcutta Zoo. After two years, he returned to the menagerie to see him. As soon as Boris called his name Puss Puss ran to the bars. Boris climbed over the exterior railing and was able to scratch Puss Puss's head while the big animal purred like a thousand cats.

During those years Boris spent much of his free time "up country" shooting. When back in Calcutta he often regretted the exciting and tense moments he could have been spending in the field. He missed the beauty of the jungle with its teeming life of countless animals treading mysteriously the rusty carpet of leaves in the undergrowth, the vision of fleeting bucks lit by the pale-hued sunlight filtered by the great branches of majestic trees. Confined to the city, Boris would dream of the open spaces of the elephant-grass swamps, their endless, undulating surface cut only by sandy

rivers, and the dark blue outline of the hazy, distant Himalayan foothills. There alone, close to nature, was Boris able to become oblivious of the tumultuous world of his city life.

Then suddenly one morning great headlines in the *Calcutta Statesman* announced the march of Nazi troops in Europe. Overnight, with the outbreak of the war, even in such distant places as Calcutta an era passed away. Life at the zoo changed, and Boris thought his days of shooting for sport were over.

IX A Kingdom in Confusion

When the war broke out Boris hurried to enlist, but because he was Russian he was not accepted in the regular army. He therefore joined the Home Guard (civil defense) and was attached to the censor's office in Calcutta, where he put to use his knowledge of foreign languages.

In the tense atmosphere of those early months of the war a daughter, Xenia, was born to Boris and Kira. Another welcome addition to their household was Boris's mother, Maria Alexandrovna Lissanevitch, who had come out from France to join her son.

The first years of the war in Calcutta were relatively calm; the city became the center of ammunition production in India, work that was headed by Boris's old friend Allen Lockhart. The Calcutta docks were enlarged and facilities were constructed for the repair of warships. But it was not until Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into the war that Calcutta gained its full importance as a strategic center in Asiatic military operations.

At the outbreak of the war, while all seemed outwardly calm, the internal situation in India grew tense, and the latent struggles of the Indian people for independence soon boiled to the surface in a series of riots. The various political parties headed by intellectuals and religious leaders took advantage of the war situation to express their hatred of the British. One of these was the Congress Party

which, under the aggressive leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, regrouped the intellectuals of India, while Mahatma Gandhi led the "non-violent" faction of the population whose passive resistance had greatly contributed to causing unrest in the country.

In Bengal all was quiet, the Bengali patriot Subbhas Chandra Bose having secretly, at the outbreak of the war, gone to Berlin, where he sought Hitler's assistance against Britain. Months later Bose was secretly shipped by submarine from Germany to Japan. There he joined the Japanese army on its march through Southeast Asia to Burma. From Burma Bose broadcast appeals to the Bengalese urging them to revolt against Britain. The Bengali leader shortly afterward met a mysterious death in an air crash, and today is considered in Calcutta a national hero.

In the spring of 1942 Boris was in Simla, north of New Delhi. When the rioting broke out he hastily returned by rail to Calcutta, accompanying the sick wife of a friend. For three days they rode through a devastated land. Railroad stations had been burned all along the line; the entire country seemed ablaze. During the journey no food and practically no water was available. At the few stops passengers dared not leave the train for fear of being seized and murdered by fanatics.

After the riots Boris found a changed Calcutta. The town was aboil with military activity. The battle for Asia was raging; the Japanese had invaded China, Malaya, the Philippines, Indochina, Thailand and Burma. American soldiers flocked to Calcutta, which became a major center of operations of the U. S. Tenth Air Force. All of a sudden the jungles of Assam, where Boris had hunted for so long, were also a strategic area of the highest importance. The Burma Road was under heavy attack and was soon to be cut, thus isolating China. Saigon, Bangkok, Singapore, and Rangoon had fallen to the enemy. Calcutta was the next large city on the Japanese route.

The only way to reach free Nationalist China was by air. Thus began history's first and most famous air lift. Taking off day and

night from large air bases hastily laid out in the jungle and on the plains of Assam, courageous pilots flew over "the Hump" of the Tibetan and Chinese Himalayas into Kunming and Chungking.

The pilots in Calcutta were a strange lot of daredevils and adventurers, ranging from the highly paid China-based volunteer soldiers of fortune of the AVG (American Volunteer Group), known as the "Flying Tigers," to the young men of the private commercial CNAC (China National Aviation Corporation) who worked alongside the courageous pilots of the Tenth Air Force in the struggle to keep China stocked with arms, gasoline and ammunition.

Overnight the 300 Club was invaded by generals and colonels, as it had been a custom in the past for senior ranking officers to be given admission to the club. At the end of the club gardens a huge hangar-like structure was erected by the Air Force. It became known as "Monsoon Square Gardens" and contained a theater capable of accommodating three thousand soldiers, who were entertained there by famous film stars from the United States and England.

The top floor of the 300 Club, above Boris's apartment, became an artillery unit HQ. One afternoon Boris was standing on the roof of the club in the company of the colonel in command of the unit when high overhead appeared dozens of planes in compact formations.

"Here come our men back from bombing Rangoon," muttered the colonel, just before—to his surprise—the first Japanese bombs exploded on Calcutta. During the war Calcutta was fortunately raided only three times, the worst raid being this first one that Boris witnessed from the top of the 300 Club. The bombs fell mostly in the waterfront area, killing a fair number of people but causing no crippling damage to the war effort, although in the port that day lay three ships loaded with ammunition which, if they had blown up, would no doubt have destroyed much of the city.

Just as Boris's personality had made the 300 Club a success in

peacetime, it now became, in wartime, not only the most popular home for officers and men on leave, but one of the key unofficial military headquarters of the city. Boris became a personal friend of American Brigadier General Frank Haggett, known to all as Charley. A boisterous, happy-go-lucky character, General Haggett soon developed into a big-game enthusiast. Boris took him out on his first tiger shoot to Cooch Behar, where the general, in one day, padded a nine-foot-four-inch tigress and a ten-foot-two-inch tiger. It was generally agreed that this was quite a record.

On the arrival of the Tenth Air Force in Bengal, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar turned over his private airport to them as a training ground for young pilots. Soon Boris was taking many of the generals and other senior officers who passed through Bengal into the jungle for shooting. A Dakota and a twin Beechcraft were available at any time to fly big brass out to Cooch Behar or Assam after tiger.

One day General George E. Stratemeyer, who from his headquarters, located in a former jute mill in Calcutta, headed all air operations in the India-Burma sector, called Boris and asked him if he could take a friend of his, Colonel Ormond Hunter, for a shoot. As Boris could not get away for a long trip at that time, he suggested that he take Colonel Hunter snipe shooting on the outskirts of Calcutta. Snipe are abundant around the city and the shooting is extremely good. Colonel Hunter came over and it was arranged that they would go the following Sunday. Ormond Hunter, it developed, was brought up in Savannah, Georgia, and had shot quite a lot of snipe around his home. When Sunday came, they started out at six in the morning, Boris laughing inwardly at the prospect of seeing Colonel Hunter half dead by ten A.M., as the shooting was around the rice fields, and one had to walk on very narrow and slippery borders between the fields, or else through two feet of thick, sticky mud, with the temperature at 110° Fahrenheit. They shot successfully until one o'clock, and when they sat down to have their lunch Boris was nearly exhausted, but Colonel Hunter seemed

as fresh as ever. About five P.M. the shoot, which had been resumed after a one-hour break, ended with a total bag of sixty-five pair of snipe, Boris dead of weariness, and Colonel Hunter still going strong. After this shoot they became great friends and had many outings together, shooting everything from snipe to tiger.

Another American officer with whom Boris became very friendly in the snipe fields was General Robert R. Neyland, who was commanding American troops in the Calcutta area. Bob Neyland, a big man who worked sixteen hours a day and seemed to need only a couple of hours' sleep, was also a football coach, and later Director of Athletics at the University of Tennessee.

With China blockaded and cut off from the Allies, operations in Assam were stepped up. Suddenly the closed and inaccessible parts of Assam along the Burmese and Bhutanese border became the scene of frantic activity. Thousands of tons of equipment were flown and driven to these remote areas, and a pipeline was built through the virgin forest territory of Assam to supply the vast airports of Lido and Chabua.

Into the 300 Club tramped many young pilots with astonishing tales of how they flew the long, terrible flights over the Himalayas to China. The death toll among these young men was considerable, for when Kunming and Chungking were attacked by Japanese bombers the radios of those cities went dead and hundreds of planes went astray, crashing into the jungles of Yunnan or into the high, inaccessible reaches of the Himalayan plateau. Over two thousand planes disappeared in this manner in the pilots' heroic attempts to supply China. Many of the pilots were young novices, just out of training schools in America, who were put to the rugged test of long flights in monsoon weather, in which dozens of them came to grief.

"It was terrible to see so many young men who were doomed to such a tragic fate," Boris recalls of those days.

Boris seems to have been particularly popular with these young pilots, possibly because of the recklessness of his character, a tem-

perament like their own. This is hard to tell, as Boris is mute on the subject. In New York, after I had left Nepal, I discovered from old acquaintances of Boris that he frequently sent money of his own to the young widows of pilots whom he had known and who had not returned to the 300 after their missions. This is only one of the numerous cases of Boris's discreet generosity, which though never paraded openly is nevertheless one of his deepest and most endearing characteristics.

At the 300 Club Boris was always posted as to the happenings on the flights over the Hump. The most colorful of the pilots who frequented the 300 were those of the AVG, the famous Flying Tigers, most of them former U. S. military flyers who had responded to the call for volunteers to fight for China against Japan. Paid from \$600 to \$750 a month, with a bonus of five hundred dollars per plane shot down, these young daredevil pilots operated directly out of Chinese bases, their planes carrying Chinese insignia. Often sleeping under the wings of their planes, they flew around the clock, sometimes in pajamas, to carry the attack to the Japanese. One of their great sports was swapping planes shot down with the pilots of the RAF and Tenth Air Force, who could thus benefit by a percentage of the bonuses given the AVG men.

Many of the commercial pilots of the China National Aviation Corporation, who also flew the Hump, gathered at the 300. With these young men and other pilots on leave Boris would often go shooting in Cooch Behar and Assam. Thus he naturally got a lot of firsthand information and, as the center of attraction at the 300, he was soon suspected of spying for the Russians. Military Intelligence officers kept a close watch that no military secrets should be revealed at the bar, but to little effect. It was later, after the war ended, that Boris found out to what degree he had been suspected of spying. When he and Kira visited America in 1946 and landed in Savannah, Georgia, three officers were waiting for Boris. Two of them were his old friends General Bob Neyland and Colonel Ormond Hunter, with whom he had often gone shooting. The

third officer was a man completely unknown to Boris. Ignoring the presence of General Neyland and Colonel Hunter, this man came on board and started to put Boris through a severe interrogation. The intelligence service, Boris now discovered, knew practically every move he had made during the war, and to his amusement Boris had the daily record of his life read out to him. The cross-examination was finally broken up by General Neyland, Boris's great friend. After leaving the ship, Boris, Neyland and Hunter had a party that lasted until four the next morning, and at six they embarked on a chartered motorboat to go fishing for catfish. Not much fish was caught but a lot of beer was consumed.

This was far from being the only time in his life Boris had been suspected of being a spy because of his unusually wide circle of friends and acquaintances and the exceptional breadth of his information on happenings in Asia. The Indians thought Boris a Russian agent, the Russians thought him an American agent, and the Americans, a Russian agent.

Although there was nothing in any of these suspicions, it was nevertheless a fact that for some time the 300 had been the scene of hushed secret activity. It had all begun one quiet evening in 1944. It was very late and already some of the club members were leaving. A few officers sat around the bar talking of their operations. The servicemen in the hall did not notice a large limousine that turned off from Theatre Road into the club gardens. The car drove under the well-lighted porch, where a servant came down with a smile to open the door to the limousine's owner, General Mahabir, that well-known member of the club and great friend of Boris's. From the car there also descended a man in his mid-thirties, short in stature, with a great tuft of hair and a slightly boyish look. No one took any notice of their arrival. Rapidly the young general showed his guest up the flight of marble steps to the second floor. There, before Boris's flat, a servant was slouched on a chair. At the approach of the two men he rose; recognizing Mahabir, he adjusted his turban and knocked on the door.

"Come in!" shouted Boris. Bowing, the servant announced General Mahabir and a friend.

The two men were shown in, the door to the flat closed. General Mahabir then bowed and introduced Boris to the young, slightly timid man. He was Tribhuvan, five times king, the monarch of Nepal, the only Hindu king in the world, the ruler and god of nine million people.

No end of precautions and planning had been necessary in order to make possible this interview at the 300 Club. For this young monarch was not an ordinary king, but a prisoner, a prisoner of his own prime minister, who ruled his country and kept him sequestered within his golden palace as within a prison. Perpetually guarded and spied upon, the king had never been free since, as a child, he had been crowned. For over a century his family had been deprived of its rights but maintained within their palace in Kathmandu, for the Rana rulers could not do away with the King of Nepal because the king, to his people, is a god.

In his palace King Tribhuvan had everything he could want—everything except freedom. Everything that came to him, his mail, his visitors, were closely screened, and his captors took good care that nothing filtered in or out of the palace that could help the descendant of the mighty Gurkha kings to take back the effective rule in his country.

Behind the King's timid appearance Boris discovered the ardent character of a man who was in no way resigned to his fate. At any cost the king was determined to regain the power that had been seized from his family. He craved knowledge of the outside world, information, assistance, and the education that had been refused him. He wanted books about government and all the other topics that had been hidden from him. Immediately he and Boris became friends. Boris hurried about providing him with the books and other material he desired. This first escape of the King from his bodyguards while he was in Calcutta on a short escorted visit in charge of officials loyal to his Rana captors, was the first of a succes-

sion of visits that made the 300 the center of the operations that were to see King Tribhuvan eventually back in power in Nepal.

The King would elude his guards on the pretext of a medical visit, and friends would assist him to go, unnoticed, where he pleased, in the city. Boris's friendship with the King was to be long-lasting and would eventually change Boris's life.

At the end of the war a procession of two-and three-star generals from the European front passed through Calcutta to collect the "Chowringhee Star," the mythical medal for wartime experience in that city. As all of them wanted to go tiger shooting, Boris and the Air Force planes were kept busy.

After the war Boris launched into a joint venture with the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, setting up a distillery in the Maharaja's state. This type of project was later to cause Boris the worst trouble he was ever to have in Nepal. In the beginning all went well with the distillery. Later, the coming of India's independence in 1947 and the partition of the country to form Pakistan were to leave the state of Cooch Behar, situated on the edge of East Pakistan, without either road or rail connections with Calcutta. This would eventually bring the distillery to a halt.

At the same time that Boris was occupied with the setting up of the distillery in Cooch Behar he became increasingly interested in visiting America. There he looked forward to renewing many friendships with veterans of the AVG and Tenth Air Force. Kira, too, was quite fed up with Calcutta.

In 1946 Boris relinquished actual direction of the 300 Club, although he retained his apartment on the second floor of Phillips' Folly and continued to serve as honorary secretary for several years longer. For ten years the 300 Club, Boris's creation, had led the pace in the social life of Calcutta. Its cuisine had become legendary, the chef, Haletzki, having trained at the 300 Club practically all the outstanding chefs of India today. The 300 had launched new cocktails, set the pace in fashion, and acquired a reputation which with that of Boris spread all over Asia and far around the

world. Boris's bold move of setting up a mixed club in India had borne its fruits. He had patiently toiled for its success; now it was a highly profitable, well-organized venture, and consequently Boris's interest somewhat dimmed and his usual highly developed sense of curiosity and interest in new adventures led him to seek a fresh field for his creative talent elsewhere.

Thanks to his new familiarity with the United States through his numerous friends in the American Army, it did not take much persuasion to give in to his wife's wish that they go to New York. For some years differences of opinion had been brewing between Boris and his wife; Kira did not share Boris's passion for India, and their marriage was under a strain.

In New York, though he was a stranger, Boris rapidly found a new circle of friends. While in New York he set up an importing and exporting firm called Borilis for trade with the Far East. With orders for the firm, Boris then traveled back to India where, he realized, his heart and true home lay. The import-export business was not overly successful, as independent India soon shut off the availability of foreign exchange for the purchase of goods abroad, and the sharp operators of New York were a little too much for Boris. He wrote his wife to join him again in Calcutta, but she decided to remain in America. Six months later Boris was back in New York again; Kira had by then started a ballet school in New London, Connecticut. After a short stay there Boris, who could not remain captive in such a small city, returned again to Calcutta.

Walking down Chowringhee, Boris did not recognize the city, so much had it changed. Shacks were set up at the entrances to the smart hotels and restaurants. Independence had come to India only to be followed by the terrible massacres that came with partition. Across the land Hindus and Moslems had clashed in bloody riots that grew into one of the most terrible slaughters in all the history of Asia.

Calcutta had been particularly badly hit, as it was divided into two large colonies of Moslems and Hindus. Over ten thousand

people were killed there in street riots alone. Suddenly friends of Boris's from the Moslem community disappeared, and a mass influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan made Calcutta one of the most crowded cities in the world. The British civil servants started to leave. Life in India changed dramatically, though less so in Calcutta than in many other cities, since most of the British residents in Calcutta were merchants rather than civil servants. Many of Calcutta's institutions held out for the first years after independence and partition; several clubs even dared to remain "all white" and are so today, it having been justly established that individual members of a foreign colony are allowed their own institutions. This was not the case in most other cities of India, where the considerable exodus of English residents saw the crumbling of British social institutions, which were turned over to Indians who from race and culture were not disposed or prepared to carry on with the grand customs and manners of colonial times.

The closing of clubs, if they were in the absolute no real loss, did a great deal to rob India of much of its slightly outmoded charm. A few years after Boris's resignation as secretary, the 300 Club, much to the regret of all Calcutta society, was to decline with the introduction of numerous members of low social standing. In Boris's short absence, mishandling of the club by its newly appointed directors had greatly depleted its capital and its stocks of fine liquors and wines. Restrictions on liquor imports, the suspension of an "all night" license, and the introduction of dry days slowly brought the 300 Club to a much regretted end. A last effort by the members to recall Boris to save it failed when Boris was not given the free hand necessary to reorganize the 300 in line with his high standards. The club survived until 1961, a ghost of its former self.

For Boris, Calcutta remained an exciting and interesting town. Surrounded by his old, best friends, General Mahabir, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar and the very handsome Maharaj Prithy Singh, he kept busy with various new projects. The war years over, his

financial situation was on the rise. Late one evening in August of 1947, after many drinks, Mahabir, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Maharaj Prithy Singh and Boris concocted a plan. This was followed by other conferences. The result of their hushed talks was first revealed when a surprising invitation, elegantly engraved, reached four hundred and fifty leading members of Calcutta society. It read:

On the eve of the departure of the first scientific expedition for the study of stars (in Hollywood), you are cordially invited to attend a meeting at the 300 Club on September the twenty-third, at eight o'clock in the evening. Light refreshments will be served.

The afternoon of the day before the meeting, a heated discussion arose at the 300. It concerned the weighty question of what to feed the guests. Boris was keen on a new recipe for crab. The chef, Haletzki, was opposed, as crab was out of season. Nevertheless, crab was served.

Most of the guests were surprised and amused, others mildly shocked, when in the ballroom of the 300 details of the plan were revealed. The guests ate with appetite and discussed the project. Had they known the expedition treasury contained seventy thousand dollars to spend in three months, they would have seen how interesting the trip was going to prove. It was clear that even Hollywood, a hard town to surprise, would be in for a small shock when the maharajas and Boris began playing havoc in Beverly Hills. The film world was going to see some genuine maharajas who were just as seductive as the imaginary ones featured on the screen. It may be added that besides being wealthy Cooch Behar, Mahabir and Prithy Singh were all exceedingly handsome.

It was at this unusual send-off party that Boris was first introduced to Inger Pheiffer, the beautiful young blond from Denmark who was later to become his wife. By that time it was too late for

him to drop out of the Hollywood expedition and stay in Calcutta, though Boris says that after meeting Inger he did consider it.

The day after the party, as the members of the scientific expedition emplaned for Hong Kong and Manila, a severe epidemic of crab poisoning struck at their guests. News of this caught up with Boris en route. For a week or more business in Calcutta came close to a standstill as more than 260 guests went to the hospital, where one unfortunate person spent six weeks.

"It would have been less serious for us," Boris said, "if Prithy Singh had not also rapidly developed acute pains in the stomach, and we had to diagnose his ailment as the same one that had laid low our friends back home. What to do? The answer seemed to be to spend ten days in Honolulu so that we should be able to carry out the rugged scientific purposes of the expedition at the top of our form."

In Honolulu Prithy Singh was packed off to a hospital. "He was the only one of us ill," remembers Boris, "although I had consumed plenty of the crab."

When Prithy Singh was released from the hospital the four men prepared to invade Hollywood. Boris was named treasurer of the expedition after having carried and twice nearly lost the briefcase that contained the expedition's entire funds. The base camp was to be the luxurious Town House in Los Angeles, from whence it was later pushed forward to a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

The arrival in Hollywood of the most eligible bachelor of India, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, and three other exceedingly handsome men, was not without causing a stir among Hollywood's young starlets, established actresses, and even the stars. The scholars of the expedition seemed to have done a large amount of homework in the small hours of the morning. During afternoons all four expedition members were kept busy planning their engagements and meeting celebrities of the film world. The phone, from seven onward, rang incessantly, as some member of the expe-

dition declared simultaneously on two lines that he had never met anybody quite as exquisite as the ladies to whom he was talking.

As treasurer, Boris was at first surprised at how little the members of the expedition were spending. He assumed that when they ran out of cash they would ask him for more. Boris would then search in the kitty and give out the needful rolls of bills. But during the first week practically none of the expedition members came to him for cash. Boris soon found the answer when he received the first weekly bill from the hotel. The rooms at \$100 a day were the smallest item. The rest of the bill—and those that followed—were full of such items as:

Flowers, Cooch Behar . . .	\$200
Flowers, Mahabir	\$500
Cash, Prithy Singh	\$1000

and so on, till finally the expedition had to be shortened to two months, so rapidly did the funds disappear.

The expedition has not yet (in 1966) produced a report, so it is difficult to find out what exact objectives were reached. One thing, though, is certain: in Calcutta the news of its success and the stories of its adventures still circulate, perpetually fed by new releases from the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Boris, and occasionally Mahabir. As for the Maharaj Prithy Singh, he met a tragic death in the crash of a TWA Constellation in 1950.

From Hollywood, the expedition flew to Chicago, the objective this time being to visit the Studebaker works in South Bend and buy three Studebaker convertibles. The journey was uneventful except that the treasurer lost five thousand dollars, which by miracle turned up later on in the trip. From Chicago the expedition proceeded to New York, after which it broke up and Boris returned alone to Calcutta, anxious to see Inger again.

Inger's Danish mother, who was married to a Scottish chief engineer, Charles MacNab Scott, took a dim view of her young daughter's being courted by Boris, who was then forty-two. She

packed Inger off to Copenhagen. Not even this, however, was successful in breaking up Boris's and Inger's interest in each other. When Inger flew to Copenhagen, Boris rushed to Bombay to see her a last time *en route*. He then returned to Calcutta and presently flew to New York, seeing Kira in the States. She still preferred to stay in America rather than return to India. Finally Kira and Boris obtained a divorce.

Back in India, a single man once more, Boris suddenly made up his mind to marry Inger. Boarding a plane, he flew to Copenhagen, where she had been exiled. They were married there in December 1948, and to Mrs. Scott's surprise Boris brought back her daughter to Calcutta for Christmas.

Inger had been conservatively educated in Denmark, and only her youth and sprightly character enabled her to keep up with her unconventional husband. She soon discovered that although Boris was much older than she, he had no intention of settling down to a peaceful life.

Boris's second marriage was nevertheless to prove a happy one. Back in Calcutta, he and Inger returned to live above the 300 Club. They spent much of their time, however, at Woodlands, Cooch Behar's magnificent home in Alipore.

From that time dates Boris's first agricultural venture. Indian independence had reduced the Maharaja's land holdings from an entire state to a few thousand acres which, according to law, he had to cultivate. For this task Boris volunteered with great visions of turning wastelands into productive fields. As in all Boris's projects nothing could limit his enthusiasm—not even the advice of experts. Almost overnight, with a speed that startled even his best friends, Boris changed from a city socialite into a rugged pioneer.

The first years of Boris's and Inger's married life were hectic ones: quartered above the 300 as they were, their life was a perpetual round of parties that alternated with visits to Cooch Behar. In March, 1950, five months after the birth of their first son, Mikhail, Boris collected his small family and set out for Cooch

Behar on an expedition to bring up to the Maharaja's estate all the modern equipment needed for his ambitious farm project. Since the partition of India and the formation of East Pakistan had cut off Cooch Behar from direct rail or road contact with Calcutta, they had to journey over trails and along cart tracks. The trip was planned to last four days. The biggest problem in reaching Cooch Behar was crossing the Ganges; even today there is but one bridge across the Eastern part of the mighty sacred river of India. The only other way to cross is by country boats, flat, sail-driven barges of dubious seaworthiness that often can barely float on their own. On one of these Boris loaded jeeps and tractors, along with his wife, his small son, and a few Indian helpers to drive the motor vehicles. As there was no road opposite the barge loading point they would have to sail some thirty miles downstream to reach a possible landing spot from whence they could continue the journey overland.

Trouble started soon after embarkation when a barge full of steel scrap attached to their own heavily laden craft began to founder in mid-river. The crew of the sinking barge jumped onto the heavily laden one on which Boris's jeeps and equipment were precariously balanced. As the frantic new passengers piled aboard, the clumsy barge listed perilously, shipping dirty water in sheets that cascaded into the bilges, soaking everyone. Violently flinging and pushing the frightened Indians away from the low side of the barge, Boris managed to get it on an even keel, while the one loaded with scrap was cut adrift. But the muddy river water was still lapping at the rail. Grabbing a couple of buckets, Boris passed them to the crew and with shoves and blows finally got them started bailing out the water they had shipped. Gradually the freeboard of their overloaded craft rose a few inches.

As he watched the distant shore, however, Boris realized with a sinking feeling that owing to the strong head wind no progress was being made at all. The trip was supposed to have lasted five hours, but hours passed and the lumbering vessel was still abreast of the

same deserted stretch of sandy bank. When the scorching sun set in the tropical sky Boris discovered that there was no more food on board. And then came the worst news of all—the water supply was dry. This meant no water for little Mishka's formula; the situation was drastic. Although horrified by the idea, Inger was obliged to risk giving her son water from the Ganges itself, a brew that washes the sick bodies of thousands of pilgrims in Benares and all along the course of the sacred river, and is full of human ashes from the burning ghats.

The night dragged on, seemingly endless; still progress was slow and it became apparent that the trip might take two or even three days. The next morning the sun rose hotter than ever. The passengers were now all ravenously hungry and in a bad mood. Inger again scooped some water from the Ganges; this of course had to be boiled, and the ship's crew did such a good job that they set the craft on fire. It was only through desperate effort that the flames were stopped before they could reach the numerous drums of gasoline that Boris was taking along with him. At noon the temperature rose to 118° ; there was no shade on the cramped deck and the inside of the jeeps was like an oven. All was silent and not a breath of wind came to relieve the passengers, some of whom from sheer desperation swam in the dirty river. Inger feared the worst for her small son, seeking in every way to cool him a little. To heat up the child's formula all she had to do was to leave it a few minutes on the scorching hood of one of the jeeps. The second night wore on, bringing little relief, and the third day dragged out with the weather just as stifling as before.

Late on the third day, practically dead from exhaustion, the crew and passengers sighted the landing spot on the north bank of the river. Here, after lengthy unloading of the gear, Boris and his little family, with their six Indian helpers, began a long overland trip along the sandy, scorched banks of the Ganges. The low point of this portion of the trip came when one of the jeeps, hitting a large rock, overturned. Fortunately neither Inger nor the baby, who happened to be riding in it, were harmed.

When this ordeal ended at the fork of the main overland road leading north to Cooch Behar and northwest to Darjeeling, Boris sent Inger and Mishka up to Darjeeling to escape the heat, while he and the rest of the party went on to Cooch Behar and began plowing in the elephant grass of the virgin bush. It was Boris's theory, as previously mentioned, that this high growth would thus be killed off and the land made ready for cultivation. Unfortunately, he was just plowing under his own ambitions. Each root his disc plows cut simply thrust out new shoots, and six months later the grass was thicker and denser than ever before.

Only momentarily disheartened, Boris gave up his agricultural venture. "You have got to try to learn," he explained later to his amused friends.

Back in Calcutta, the focus of Boris's attention was turned to Nepal. In secret sessions in Boris's flat General Mahabir and his associates worked out the plans for the overthrow of the Rana regime. Mahabir had acquired a considerable fortune that allowed him to support the Nepalese Congress Party, which, although bearing the same name as Nehru's independence party, had as objective the ultimate return of power to the Shah dynasty. That house had been responsible for the unification of the country at the end of the eighteenth century. It had ruled over Nepal until 1846, when the Ranas had taken control.

Since his very first arrival in Calcutta Boris had been fascinated by Nepal. In 1938 he had made an attempt to enter the forbidden Himalayan kingdom on the pretext of organizing the catering for the British viceroy's shoot in the terai, an occasion on which a magnificent display of pageantry accompanied what were beyond doubt the most elaborate tiger hunts in the world. For these colorful hunts Nepal's Rana maharajas were noted. But Boris had not succeeded and was obliged to wait until the Rana regime was overthrown before penetrating the then completely closed Himalayan kingdom.

After 1944 King Tribhuvan came a few times to Calcutta, again escaping when possible to Boris's flat above the 300 Club, where

the preparations were carried on for his reinstallation on the throne of Nepal. Plans were made for the sending of troops into western Nepal to arouse the population. Boris was now working in close friendship with those people who were to be the future leaders of the country. One of the leading figures among these men was M. P. Koirala, who became prime minister in 1952. The rumbling of revolt was sounding in the valley beyond the damp foothills of the terai jungle.

Suddenly, in 1950, all the effort that had gone into the long preparation bore fruit. What happened belongs to history. The Mahabir-financed Congress Party took control of eastern Nepal. Fighting then spread through the terai. King Tribhuvan, pretending to leave his palace for a shoot, fled with his family to the shelter of the Indian embassy, and from there, unharmed, he was flown to New Delhi.

On the flight of the King the Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur declared the king's grandson, Gyanendra Jung Bahadur (then four years old), the true King of Nepal. The forces loyal to King Tribhuvan continued their attacks until finally the prime minister agreed to the return of King Tribhuvan from India on condition of the formation of a new cabinet with four ministers to be appointed from each side, under his premiership.

In triumph King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu and six months later he succeeded in eliminating Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur as prime minister, thus terminating the 105-year rule of the Ranas over Nepal.

While these events were unfolding in Nepal, Boris was busy with new ventures and schemes. One of these was the creation of Cathay Pacific Airlines, a now famous airline operating out of Hong Kong. Cathay Pacific was conceived at the 300 Club when Boris and his friend Sydney de Kantzow put their heads together about what they might do with a surplus plane left behind after the war by the U. S. Army Air Force. The first planes of the fledgling company, operated by a certain ex-pilot of the CNAC, made the

flights out of Shanghai after the war when the Communists, rolling southward through the crumbling Nationalist forces, menaced the city. At the top prices charged, these flights are said to have brought profits of almost a million dollars in a matter of weeks. Later the company developed into one of the major airlines in the Pacific area.

Another airline that owed its inception to Boris was Himalayan Aviation. Just after the war he had often flown to the distillery in Cooch Behar in a small chartered aircraft that belonged to the Survey of India. The pilot was a Pole by the name of Boudzikowski, who had flown with the RAF. He spoke Russian and soon fired Boris with the idea of persuading General Mahabir to buy a surplus plane that Boudzikowski would pilot. Later, just before the Hollywood expedition, Mahabir bought another aircraft, a surplus DC-3 which was converted into a luxury plane. At the time of the partition of India, when the creation of East Pakistan left Assam completely isolated from India, this plane earned high profits flying the airlift to Assam. To this first Dakota another was added, then another, until finally Himalayan Aviation was born. Thanks to Boudzikowski's imagination and capacities as an administrator the airline developed rapidly, soon becoming a flourishing firm.

Himalayan Aviation flew the first night mail service in India and the first planes to land on the small airstrip built in Kathmandu in 1950 also belonged to it. Nepal's long isolation was finally really broken for the first time in its history.

Although Boris was partly responsible for these profitable operations, they somehow failed to make him very rich. The spring of 1951, in fact, found him in a bad way financially. It was just at this moment, as luck would have it, that he received a note from the Home Ministry of Bengal informing him that twenty-three Russian refugees from the Soviets had arrived unexpectedly in the Tibetan border area and were asking for political asylum. It was up to Boris, so the note suggested, subtly but unmistakably, to take responsibility for them.

Though no details were available except that the Russians were

refugees who had turned up on the Indian frontier after a long journey, Boris accepted without hesitation. He could not, he felt, refuse his help and hospitality to compatriots arriving in need in a country that paid so little attention to white refugees as India. His first move was to get on the phone and put in a call to a friend in another department of the Home Ministry. By pulling wires, he obtained two barrack-like buildings in the gardens of the viceroy's former residence for the refugees' use. Here he hastily installed furniture, made arrangements to quarter his guests.

For the next nine months Boris was to play host, guardian and interpreter to the strangest group of Russians ever to have reached Indian soil. When he first met them he received a shock. There before him stood twenty-one Abominable Snowmen, bearded ragamuffins with long hair and bushy beards, accompanied by two wild-looking Snowwomen, all dressed in homemade sheepskin coats. The tallest of the monstrous-looking characters introduced himself as Sidor Michaelovitch Belov, joint leader of the group, and presented his male companion, who was smaller but equally ragged, as Mr. Charnov. Six foot four and weighing some 250 pounds, Sidor was every bit a giant even when he had peeled off his sheepskin rags and shaved his fierce beard.

When the harassed men had washed and rested, they began to explain to Boris their amazing story, which, although it has never been published in full, is worthy of being remembered as one of the most incredible adventures of our times. During the Russians' nine-month stay in Calcutta they dictated the story of these experiences to Boris. They were installed in the houses at the viceroy's one-time residence, and to support his new friends Boris reverted to dancing, giving a series of performances for the benefit of the newly arrived Russians.

These people came from the Altai region of southern Siberia, near the meeting place of the borders of the U.S.S.R., Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang. They were members of the religious sect of Starovere (Old Believers), a sect that had been persecuted

under Catherine the Great and ultimately, breaking with the Orthodox Church, had set off like the Pilgrim Fathers for the remote areas of the Siberian-Chinese border. Fleeing from the Russian revolution, they settled and through much toil had converted large areas of what had been arid land into fertile and prosperous farming country. The wealth of these Starovere settlements along the Chinese border so increased that it aroused the bitter jealousy of the Soviet Communists. They, despite their collectivized farms and forced labor, proved quite incapable of succeeding as well as the hard-working, God-fearing Old Believers.

During the years before World War II, Soviet troops made numerous attacks on the Starovere settlements. After a period of relative calm in 1946 the Russians, enjoying a respite from other preoccupations, renewed their attacks on the Old Believer villages. Soviet troops finally managed to capture Chinkure, the village of Belov and Charnov, while the men of the community were fighting out in the forests. The Russians captured most of the women and children and slaughtered them. When the fighting men returned and found their village in the hands of the Communists, their commander ordered all those men who had horses to flee southward into Mongolia.

To reach Mongolian territory they had to swim their horses across the open part of a half-frozen river. Mustering their people on the other side, the leaders found among their number, totaling 115, one woman, Maria Sharipov, who was with her husband Grigori, her father, Fedossei Karpov, and her young daughter, Tatiana, only nine years old. A long hegira had started for this small band of survivors. They drifted gradually southward, passing back into Nationalist Chinese territory. Here for some time the Chinese authorities gave the fleeing men, and the mother and daughter, refuge. Then in early 1949 the Chinese Communists began extending their power in China's far northwest. Town after town was being won to the Communist cause. The time came when the village where the Russians were stationed was on the point of fall-

ing under Communist authority. The Old Believers knew they were being closely watched by pro-Communist guards. At the last minute, cleverly concealing their intentions, the leaders of the Russian group were able to escape from the village. Stealing out into the countryside in the dead of night, they fled into the mountains. In this part of their adventures they acted as an escort to the American consular representative in the region in his effort to escape from falling into Communist hands. Later, after leaving the Russians, this officer was making his way to Tibet when on the border of that country he was shot and killed by Tibetan border guards who had evidently mistaken his party for bandits or Communist raiders.

In the meantime the Old Believers, traveling by night, made contact with the forces of the Kazakh leader Osman Bhatu, who with thousands of warriors was fighting the Communists. Hardly had they joined Osman, however, when a Red Chinese attack separated the Old Believers into two groups. While Osman Bhatu's forces, including about half of the Starovero, were defeated, the rest of the Old Believers escaped and were able to join the troops of the Nationalist Chinese commander, General Slim, who were still fighting deep in Sinkiang.

The Old Believers stayed with General Slim until eventually his men either passed over to the Communists or were routed and scattered. Then, together with Slim himself, the twenty-three remaining Russians set out in a desperate search for a Mongolian prince, Bobra, who was said to be at the head of hordes of Mongolian warriors still resisting the Communists. Traveling in forced marches by night, always pursued and always in danger of capture, they made their way over desert and plain in territory that was entirely in the hands of the Communists until they arrived at the edge of the much-feared Gobi Desert.

By lengthy forced marches the Russians advanced over the barren desert, their horses dying one by one by the roadside. Having reached a mountainous area, they were then attacked four times by Communist troops, losing many men. An informant then volun-

teered to guide them to Bobra, of whom they had such great hopes. But they arrived too late. Bobra's forces had been decimated, though Bobra himself had escaped. After further hardships, the Old Believers finally did locate Bobra, with the remnants of his once considerable force reduced now to a dozen men and women. The only consolation was that Bobra had 180 camels with him. Now enjoying the luxury of riding on camels, the Russians, guided by their Mongolian friend, journeyed for weeks toward the great snowy reaches of the Tibetan border. Behind them they left a track littered with the carcasses of camels which had not survived the severe punishment of the route. The last of the big camel herd died almost as they reached the Tibetan border. By now the party was reduced to killing bears and wild asses (kiangs) for meat and clothing.

In Tibet the Starovere met with a cold reception. They were disarmed and informed that they could not proceed to Lhasa but as a special dispensation they would be given wives and could thus become Tibetan citizens. On declining this invitation, the party was jailed, but by night they were able to flee unnoticed, entering ever deeper into the most arid and terrifying area of Tibet, the high glacial plains of Chang Thang. Sleeping on the ground, avoiding villages, suffering from frostbite, the men, the woman and the child slowly made their way to Lhasa. Only a few miles from the sacred capital of the Dalai Lama they were overtaken again and forbidden to proceed. Once again the Tibetan authorities urged them to take wives and settle in Tibet. To this offer Charnov explained that his party "had not come to Tibet to search for fiancées," but the Tibetans insisted and forced them to trek back to the small town where they had been locked up previously.

By night two members of the party secretly stole out of the garrison encampment and headed out alone to Lhasa to plead their companions' cause. On arriving in the capital of Tibet they were told they should all be locked up for having disobeyed orders. This punishment was about to be carried out when finally, through the

assistance of Mongolians in the Tibetan capital, they gained a pardon. It was now the Indian officials in Lhasa who were reluctant to give visas to the refugees.

Three months passed during which the suspicious Indians delayed issuing the precious visas, which they habitually gave only reluctantly and under pressure and on condition that some Indian residents promise to be financially responsible for the immigrants. It was then that Boris was approached in Calcutta and asked to take responsibility for his fellow Russians.

The Tibetans also delayed the Old Believers' departure from Lhasa for some time before, at long last, a most impressive-looking passport, with twenty-three photographs affixed to it and measuring one yard long, was delivered to the group. At Yantung the refugees met the Dalai Lama, who already feared a Chinese invasion and was staying close to the Indian border, ready to flee if necessary.

Only a few days away from freedom, the Russians were now informed of the arrival from India of a Chinese delegation that had come to negotiate with the Dalai Lama. Fearing the worst in the event the Chinese took control of Tibet, the Old Believers told the agents of the Indian government that if they were not hurriedly allowed to leave Tibet and enter India they would attack the Chinese delegation and kill its members.

The same day the Chinese delegates marched into Tibet the Russians marched out, the two groups tramping over different passes seven miles apart in Sikkim.

Thus came to an end the incredible odyssey of the men from Altai. For four years they had fought and fled through the most desolate and unexplored areas of Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet. From one hundred and fifteen in number they were now only twenty-three, but they could pride themselves not only on having survived the most incredible trek possible, but also on having valiantly, under terrible conditions and against frightening odds, fought to their utmost against the Communists.

Boris now became the helper of these poor people, and for nine months they remained under his supervision in Calcutta. Finally, with Boris's assistance, their case was taken up by the Tolstoy Foundation and they emigrated to the United States, where few of their present American neighbors suspect what heroes these people truly were. Boris still retains the "passport" given the party of Old Believers by the officials in Lhasa. This document, unique of its kind, was a not inappropriate memento and reward for what Boris did for his compatriots.

The story of the Old Believers' adventures heightened still further Boris's interest in the fabulous lands of the snows, in Tibet and the other countries of the Himalayas. One day, with General Mahabir, Boris boarded one of the Himalayan Aviation planes for Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The airstrip there, opened a year previously, was then only a pasture. At last Boris was able to visit Nepal, a land about which he had heard so much from General Mahabir and King Tribhuvan himself. The strange world of the Himalayas, with its monks and mountains, its traditions of isolation, and its intriguing people was now open to him.

X Parties in Prison

On September 23, 1951, seated in the luxuriously appointed plane that served as the private aircraft of the King of Nepal, Boris looked out in anticipation as it neared the small, grassy airstrip of the Valley of Kathmandu. Today this facility is known as Gaucher Airport (*gaucher* means cowfield) and in September of 1951 that was exactly what the strip was. A pilot waiting to land there had to buzz the airfield several times to shoo the cows off it before landing.

The moment Boris set foot in the valley and encountered the first small, smiling Nepalese, he knew this land would have to be his home. Never before in all his tumultuous life had Boris seen a site as enchanting as the valley of King Tribhuvan, the shy monarch whom he had welcomed and received in the secrecy of his apartment over the 300 Club.

Boris had by now grown tired of Calcutta as he had tired of the ballet, of life in Paris, Monte Carlo, Shanghai and many other places. India was on the decline, and all of a sudden Boris realized that here in Nepal lay the land of tomorrow, a country untouched, whose possibilities were countless and whose charm was incomparable.

On the evening of his first visit to Kathmandu, Boris made a call on a young attaché of the Indian Embassy. He lived in two rented

rooms on the first floor of a vast palace set in a large garden where immense pine trees grew, shading an open lawn and a tennis court. Little did Boris suspect that he would later set up the Royal Hotel in this same palace.

After drinks, when he left the Indian attaché's rooms, he found a large car awaiting him at the entrance of the palace. At the wheel was King Tribhuvan, with two of his sons, Prince Himalaya and Prince Basundhara. It was fairly late and the car made its way unnoticed through the brick-paved streets of Kathmandu. All was silent in the empty streets, a century-old curfew obliging all people, as in medieval Europe, to stay at home after eleven. To go out at night the social elite had to know a secret password that was changed every night. As the car drove up to the second prince's residence the headlights suddenly spotted a huge leopard in the middle of the road. It jumped onto a low wall, from where it stared at the car for a full minute before rushing off through the small gardens of the closely packed houses.

A leopard right in the city of Kathmandu certainly gave Boris a shock. Although he has never seen one since in the town, it was nevertheless symptomatic of what an unusual place the valley was. The King gave Boris a warm and friendly welcome, spending much time showing off his country to him.

In 1951 only a few foreigners had penetrated into Nepal. They were mainly British Embassy officials, British officers of the Gurkha troops, a few stray scholars and friends of the royal family. Coming from the noisy, dirty city of Calcutta, with its tramways and offices, its trains and cars, Boris could hardly believe that Kathmandu was ignorant of such simple technological inventions as the telephone. But all the trite clichés used for describing primitive charm would fail to represent truly the face of Nepal and that of Kathmandu in 1951.

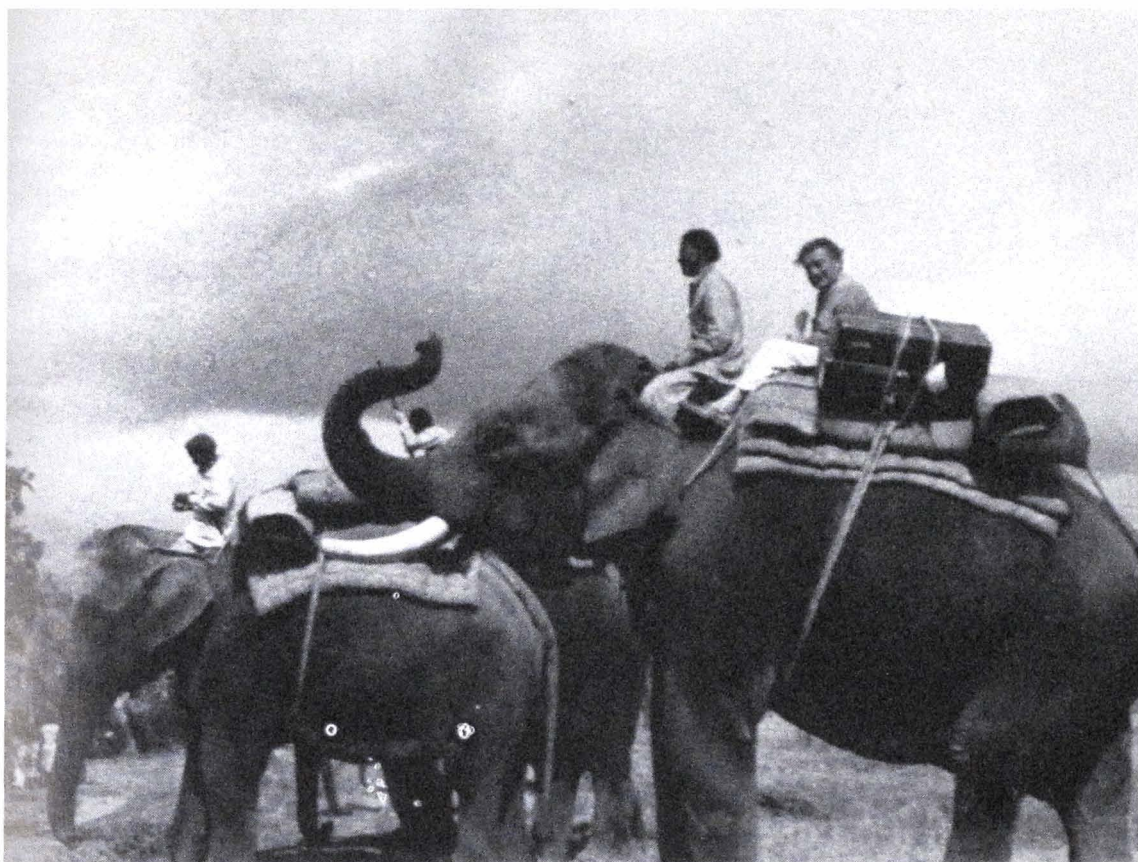
On the other hand, Boris realized that Nepal is not, and has not been for centuries, a primitive country. Its true charm lay in the fact that despite its isolation and its centuries-old scorn for outside

influences, Nepal is a land whose culture along native lines is highly developed. Gone were the poor mud huts of India, Iran and most of Southeast Asia. Kathmandu appeared like some sort of wealthy medieval city in Europe, with its large, sloping-roofed, two- to four-story brick houses shading narrow streets lined with neat, well-kept shops. All proportions seemed harmonious. There were no railroads, no gasoline vehicles (or hardly any), no concrete buildings or parking lots to disrupt the harmony of the architectural styles that blended so well with the traditional life of the population. Gone was the cheap contrast of bullock carts and double-decker buses, of snake charmers and taxicabs that make most of the Orient so tritely fascinating.

The valley seemed to breathe a complacent prosperity, a contentment natural in a place created by people in accordance with customs well suited to their needs. The scientist or efficiency expert would no doubt have found in the streets of the city many opportunities for progress, but no one could have claimed that Kathmandu had any major shortcomings as it stood—a product of the refined Newar culture, a city with no slums, no undue poverty, and nothing to hide.

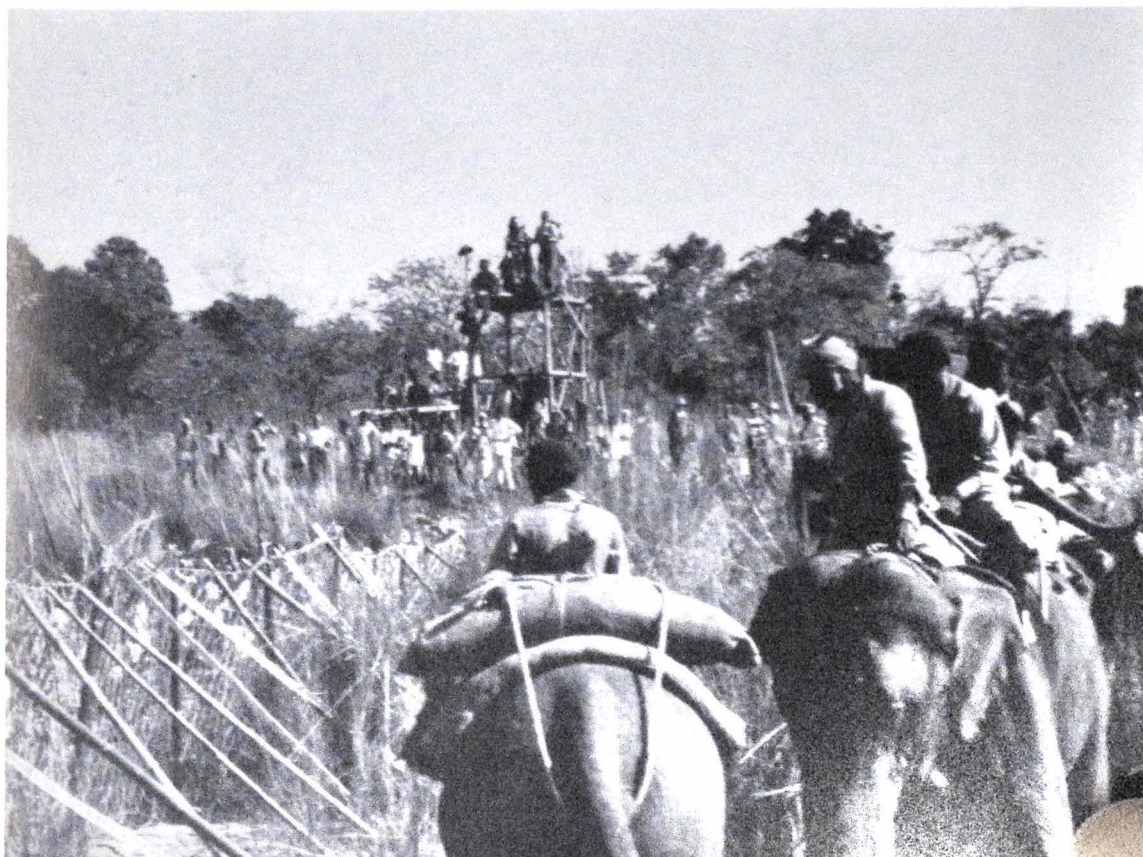
A journey to the interior of Nepal is beyond doubt one of the most startling experiences to be had in the East. A trek outside of the Valley of Kathmandu is in every sense an expedition. Provisions have to be taken not only to feed oneself but also one's porters. Outside of Kathmandu there are practically no markets, and the peasants are reluctant to sell any of the little food they have.

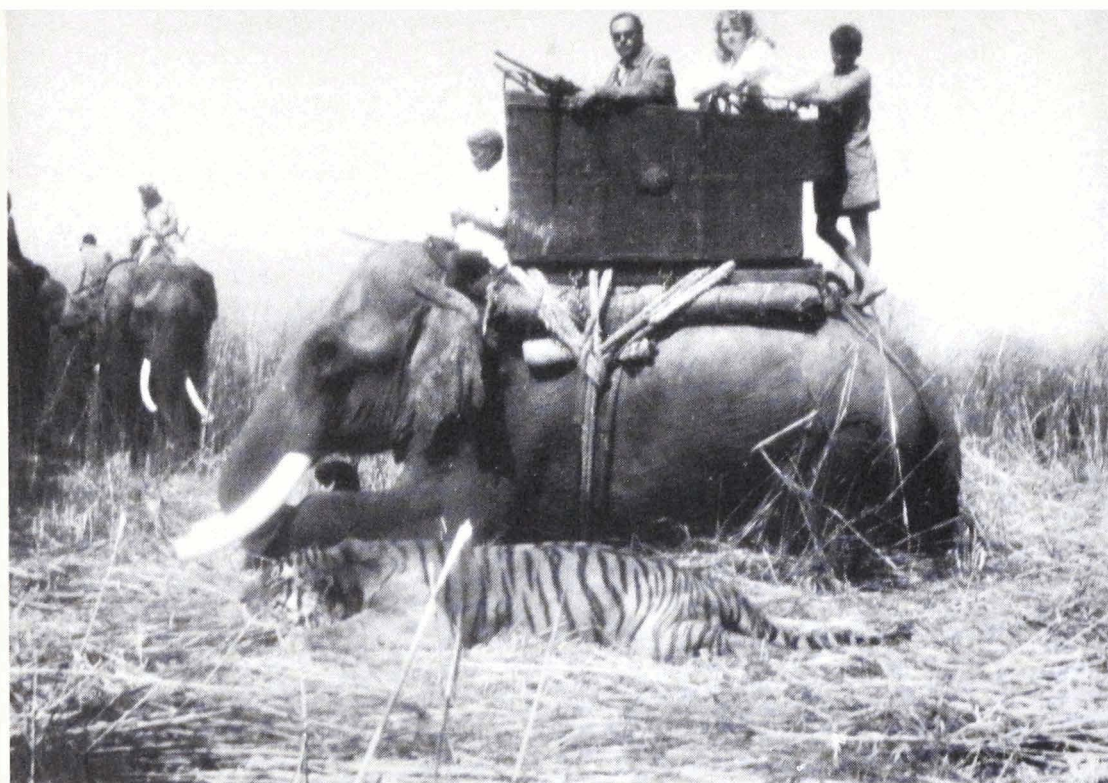
Beyond the Valley of Kathmandu one discovers the Asia of Kipling and Pearl Buck combined, a mixture of China and India set in a landscape that makes Switzerland look tame. Awe-inspiring bridges held together with rough, homemade rope span mighty torrents whose turbulent waters carry down from the foot of great glaciers huge rocks that wear ever deeper into the limestone of the valleys. The borders of the narrow gorges are thickly covered by jungles in which monkeys shriek and fierce leopards prowl.



Boris on a tusker's back in Assam during the filming of elephant catching.

Tribesmen hunting tiger with net and spears during the making of a Lowell Thomas film in Assam.





Inger and General Kiran of Nepal in a howdah. Later that day this same elephant ran away and nearly killed them.

Boris (in left background) surveys the buffet for a "small" banquet for the King at the Royal Hotel.





*The tiger shoot during Queen Elizabeth II's state visit to Nepal,
February, 1961.*



A rare spectacle: 376 elephants were lined up to salute the royal party when Queen Elizabeth II visited Nepal.

Above this jungle begin the first rice paddies, dominated by the villages that prefer the high slopes to the deep chasms. In a matter of hours, one climbs from the hot river banks to the cool, pine-wooded slopes of the great foothills. From summer one slips back to spring, and as though in the pages of a great botanical album, the vegetation follows suit. Palms and bamboos disappear; oak, great rhododendrons, and other trees of temperate zones begin to crop up. There is nothing more striking than the rhododendron forests of Nepal, which for a month or so in spring crown the summits of the foothills in pink and red halos outlined by the frosty white, jagged forms of the higher summits. These forests have an additional charm in that they are covered with seaweed-like moss that dangles from the branches like lost ribbons fallen from heaven.

It is in this country that one encounters the true heart of Nepal. At the turn of a trail one falls upon the first signs of a village, announced by a shrine, a stone slab bridge, or simply by the first of the peasants' houses. These vary in style according to region but they all have one trait in common: they are nearly always large and neat, and it would be absolutely true to state that from Italy to Japan, nowhere does one encounter such well-built and harmonious homes. The mud huts of the Arabs, the clay boxes of the Greeks, the houses of the peasants of Iran, Pakistan and India are all inferior in aspect to the majority of the rural homes of Nepal. Every little house would make a pleasant country home in Europe or America; two, three, and sometimes four stories high, these houses are all large and well proportioned, with big windows. Beyond doubt the architects of the lost valleys of Nepal can be considered the best house builders of rural Asia. The Nepalese climate does not permit dingy homes, and however poor the Nepalese peasant may appear in statistics, his dwelling is well advanced beyond that of most peasants of the world. Clever woodworkers, the Nepalese take good advantage of all the local materials. The Gurungs build sturdy stone houses with rock slab roofs, the Tamangs split planks to cover their houses, the Rais make the best

use of thatch. These houses are either left the color of the stone or painted white or different shades of red. Village streets are often well paved and all along the thousands of miles of footpaths across Nepal one encounters every half-mile or so neat stone benches set up for coolies and porters to rest their packs upon. The old tracks are also lined with small coolie houses, shelters well built by the villagers as a courtesy to passing traders and their porters. Here, sheltered from rain or snow, one can rest through the night.

More fascinating are the great trade routes that lead through and over the Himalayas. Here the tracks are wide and in many parts paved, forming a seemingly endless stone staircase rising over hill and mountain, sometimes cutting into the side of mighty cliffs like a gigantic groove. Particularly famous are the routes that go up the Kali Gandaki River. This route is used and exploited largely by the Thakali people, who include a subcaste that consists entirely of hotelkeepers and their families. The Thakalis have for generations operated the great trade route between Nepal and Tibet.

Dramatic descriptions, vivid testimonials, and cheap comparisons with a mythical Shangri-la had failed to describe truly to Boris a country and a valley whose unique quality, he discovered, lay partly in the fact that in Nepal there is nothing startlingly shocking or bizarre. Nepal was simply an ordinary sort of place; Kathmandu an ordinary fifteenth-century city with ordinary fifteenth-century folk living a commonplace life.

"What first struck me," remembers Boris, "was that everyone seemed so happy, natural and smiling." This was all the more noticeable after sullen India, where one's slightest movements are always followed by suspicious eyes. In Nepal the people who lined up to stare at Boris (foreigners were then, as today, a great attraction) all wore the smiles of a contented people, a people who had found in their ancient manner of life the answers to all their problems. Even when epidemics strike Nepal the dying victims smile in gratitude at the goddesses who they believe are sowing their blessings through disease.

Added to the harmony, charm and beauty of the country, Boris was struck by an electrifying atmosphere about the valley, which some people attribute to the altitude. It is a fact that in the valley every act, word and contact seems to take on a particular intensity.

When Boris's first brief visit to Nepal was over he had made up his mind that at the first opportunity he would return. This opportunity soon arose. Mahabir, consequent to the reinstatement of the King, had been named Minister of Industry. It was a rather pompous title for a country which in 1951 had no industry at all.

One afternoon back in Calcutta, Boris was sitting with Mahabir in Firpo's, when gazing into his glass of Scotch he had one of his brainwaves.

"You know, I have an idea," said Boris.

"Another?" said Mahabir, only too familiar with Boris's innumerable schemes. "What now?"

"A drink," said Boris, fingering his glass.

"Not alcohol again," Mahabir protested. "Remember what happened to your distillery in Cooch Behar. A failure—with all that valuable material and equipment lost."

"That's just what I mean," Boris explained. "In Nepal there is no taboo against alcohol, and no dry laws like those being introduced in India. Why, if we could set up a distillery in Nepal and centralize the production of alcohol it would fantastically increase government revenue from taxation. There's plenty of sugarcane in the terai and what this all adds up to is an industry for you: a distillery. As for the equipment, we have it all in Cooch Behar, along with the know-how."

In Nepal the drinking of *rakshi* (a local rice alcohol) was a general indulgence that should, Mahabir agreed, contribute to filling the state's empty coffers. With Mahabir's backing as Nepalese Minister of Industry, Boris immediately set about to investigate the problem. A quick survey showed that the quality of liquor sold in Nepal to the general public was poor, that there was practically no government control on the production of alcohol, and that taxes

from its sales could easily be increased twenty-fold. This was more than enough information to stoke the fires of Boris's creative genius and optimistic imagination.

Shortly afterward, Boris flew back to Kathmandu, this time accompanied by Inger and his two sons. Their family had been increased by the birth of the second, Alexander, in February, 1951, only nine months before. With them also went Boris's mother, Maria Alexandrovna Lissanevitch.

In Kathmandu, Boris immediately got to work with figures, strange symbols that he has never been able to master with complete science but has always used with a great deal of imagination.

On paper the project looked wonderful, and the plan was, it seemed, perfectly reasonable, which for Boris was unusual. Mahabir was to introduce proper excise laws in Nepal and Boris was to take charge of the production and distribution of spirituous liquors.

Inger and Boris and their family moved into a small wooden bungalow just outside the city in view of the great snows and the many pagodas of Kathmandu. The day they settled there, however, it was brought home to them that Nepal had no common bonds with any country they had previously known, and very soon Boris found out to his cost that Nepal was not yet ready for the introduction of such sophisticated schemes as the establishing of an excise tax on alcohol.

Boris realized to what extent the institutions of Nepal differ from those of a modern country when he first walked into the government headquarters in the huge residence of the last Rana prime minister. This building, known as the Singha Durbar, is said to have been the largest residential palace in the East. A year prior to Boris's arrival it had been still "lived in," its rooms having sheltered the fifteen hundred servants of Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. A huge baroque building of white stucco, all its wrought-iron railings, its elaborate chandeliers, ornate mirrors and Carrara marbles had been carried to Kathmandu on men's backs. When Boris entered the palace for the first time he

found its corridors on all four floors jammed with thousands of scribes seated cross-legged on school benches writing with paint brushes. This was the "administration" he would have to deal with. Such a thing as a typewriter was unknown and, needless to say, the government documents (written on crude, brown, handmade Nepalese paper) clogged up even worse than usual an administrative system worthy of the courts of ancient China. Few people spoke English, as travel to India had been forbidden under the Rana regime. Before 1950 even the various members of the prime minister's family, if they desired to go to India, either had to simulate appendicitis or grow a beard and walk out of the country incognito.

Politics in Nepal had been and still was on the level of medieval palace and court intrigue. The history of Nepal in the past hundred years reads like the wildest pages of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Jung Bahadur Rana, who was the first Rana prime minister, gained power in 1845 by murdering his own uncle in cold blood. He then massacred, in an hour, all those who opposed the queen, with whom he was friendly. In this blood bath, known as the Kot Massacre, a hundred nobles perished. Jung Bahadur Rana then exiled the queen, who wanted yet more massacres, and seized the effectual power for himself. Later, more than ten plots to take his life failed. After him, three prime ministers were murdered, and up until as late as 1949 to murder the leader of the country was the most usual way of gaining power. Even patricide is found all through the history of Nepal, among its leading class, and a natural death was the most unnatural way in which any Nepalese leader could expect to die. Every official in Kathmandu is still strongly influenced in his thinking by these former ways of life, while Nepalese who have never played any political role remain unaffected by edicts stemming from the leaders, whose true power has never extended far beyond the valley. Now Boris planned to "go into business" with the government!

Boris soon discovered that even the calendar of Nepal was too

complicated to have ever been written down. Practically every day was a holiday, and these holidays were the occasion for religious festivals of every description, as both Hindu and Buddhist feasts were observed by most of the population.

Even as late as the year 2007 of the Nepalese calendar, or 1951 of our calendar, it was rumored that occasional human sacrifices were still being performed in out-of-the-way parts of the country, and thousands of bullocks, goats and chickens were sacrificed every year, staining with blood the innumerable shrines of Kathmandu.

This was hardly a place to set up a business, and Boris was working against all sorts of unexpected obstacles. A further spur to his efforts was the birth in September, 1953, of his third son, Nicolas.

Philosophically Boris stuck to his task and went about trying to implement his plan for setting up a distillery. King Tribhuvan would often come to the Lissanevitches' pleasant bungalow, dropping in unexpectedly for drinks and supper. This rare attention was commented on throughout the court and the valley, with much envious speculation. One evening Boris was entertaining two young secretaries of the British Embassy when in came His Majesty, King Tribhuvan. The next day the British ambassador was in a great fret, blaming his innocent underlings for not having requested formal permission thus to meet and chat with His Majesty. With Boris, the King set aside protocol, recalling their friendship born in Calcutta when His Majesty was still virtually a prisoner of his prime minister.

Boris in return often visited the King, who lived in a small bungalow in his palace grounds, the large palace itself having been badly damaged by the terrible 1934 earthquakes in which two of the King's sisters had died. Unfortunately the King's health was declining. A friend of Boris's, Dr. Ronald, a Viennese heart specialist, was called to the King's side from Calcutta. For months he remained in Nepal, but the health of His Majesty grew worse and worse. Finally it was decided to transfer the King to Zurich for special treatment. On March 13, 1955, the news reached Boris that King Tribhuvan of Nepal had died in a clinic in Zurich.

"It was the first and only time I've seen Boris cry," Inger recalled. Boris had lost a great and true friend.

The news of King Tribhuvan's death set the entire valley in deep mourning. Prince Basundhara flew to Switzerland and the body of the King was brought back to Nepal. At the airport thousands of Nepalese dressed in white, the color of mourning, had gathered to escort the remains of the King. Boris arrived there while flowers were being piled so high upon the coffin that the twenty-four pallbearers had to push some of them aside before they could lift the bier. Then a long and sad procession slowly wound its way from the primitive airfield some four miles across the valley floor to the sacred shrine of Pashupatinath, the most sacred shrine in Nepal and one of the most highly revered in the entire Hindu world. Situated on the banks of the Baghmati River, the main river of the Kathmandu Valley, held sacred because it is an affluent of the Ganges, Pashupatinath is virtually a small town, as hundreds of minor shrines surround the great, gilt, two-story central pagoda of Shiva that stands in a vast yard where rises also a gigantic golden bull, Shiva's legendary mount. Only a Hindu may penetrate this inner sanctum, the mysterious, magnetic center of Hinduism in Nepal. The steep banks of the Baghmati at Pashupatinath are lined with row upon row of tomblike structures enclosing lingams symbolic of Shiva. Pashupatinath is also famous for its sacred monkeys, which, like the cow, are never harmed and are fed by the priests. The monkey represents the god Hanuman, who in Nepal has a considerable cult.

The road to Pashupatinath from the airport winds through terraced rice fields and lightly wooded grazing grounds and between high brick walls along which thronged, twenty deep, hundreds of thousands of Nepalese peasants from all over the country who had come to see their "good King" on his last journey. King Tribhuvan was particularly popular in that he represented for his people the symbol of new Nepal freed from the Ranas, whose sometimes brutal administration had not been too popular with the masses.

Women, men and children wailed as the body passed, lifting to the sky laments that would touch the toughest heart. That day the valley was clouded and a storm was in the air.

At Pashupatinath began the long and complicated Hindu ritual of the King's cremation. A great pile of sandalwood had been erected on the edge of the Baghmati and upon this the body was placed. At the moment of ignition there was a delay. It had been a tradition in the past that the king's wife should burn with her husband. This custom, the suttee, was no longer practiced, but the protocol of the ceremony required that the queen's gold wedding bangles be thrown onto the fire. In her grief the Queen had forgotten the combination of the palace safe where she kept her jewels. While the royal safe was being forced all the officials of the country stood in respectful silence around the body of their King. The steep banks of the river were lined with thousands of dignitaries in full regalia. All the ambassadors accredited to the kingdom, who for the most part reside in Delhi, had flown up to attend the funeral. When Prince Himalaya and Prince Basundhara lighted the pyre the sun that had been hidden all day broke through the clouds and from the crowd arose a deep murmur breaking into an uproar: "The King is dead; long live the King."

After the cremation began the formal mourning. All the males in Nepal shaved their heads, no one was allowed to wear leather; thus everyone started wandering around barefooted or wearing tennis shoes. King Tribhuvan was succeeded by his eldest son, Prince Mahendra Bir Bikram. The formal coronation of the new king would follow the mourning period. For eleven days the two younger sons of the dead king, Prince Himalaya and Prince Basundhara, lived in a temple in Kathmandu called Tripureshwar on the shore of the Baghmati, dressed in unstitched white tunics, of homespun, sleeping on straw beds, eating only boiled, unflavored rice and drinking only fruit juices.

On the twelfth day a tent camp was erected around this temple, each luxurious tent representing one of the rooms in which the late

king had lived. These rooms were filled with all the articles the monarch had used during his life: his furniture, household wares, clothes and other belongings. A Brahmin was then imported from India (no Nepalese priest would accept the unpopular function of Chaser of Evil) to sleep in the dead king's bed, dress in the king's clothes and wear his crown. This the priest did, donning the king's golden robe and crown and even his new shoes, purchased before his death in Switzerland. The Brahmin was then served a meal in the tent representing the king's dining room, the menu including all the foods customarily forbidden to Hindus. The priest was then given 150,000 rupees, which he counted. Then, on an elephant, he rode across the Baghmati and with crowds shouting and hurling stones at him was driven out of Nepal. By this ceremony he was symbolically assuming the sins of the late king. By accepting this unpopular task the priest lost his Brahmin caste, the highest in the Hindu hierarchy. All the articles that had belonged to the king, his furniture, his cars, and his clothes, were then sold at auction and the money sent to the Indian priest.

A similar ceremony was performed six months later by the high priests of the valley, who received the same gifts as the "Chaser of Evil" and a purse of 600,000 rupees, without losing his caste or leaving Nepal.

Gradually life in Kathmandu returned to normal. Boris had lost his principal friend and supporter in Nepal. He carried on, setting up his distillery at Biratnagar and attempting to organize an excise tax in Nepal. He had brought to the valley the same chemist he had employed for a distillery in Cooch Behar, and distilling equipment was slowly being transferred to the terai for what would be Nepal's first factory.

Having obtained the exclusive concession for brewing alcohol for the entire valley of Kathmandu, Boris signed a contract with the government authorizing him to import five thousand gallons of rectified spirits a month to Nepal from India till the Biratnagar factory was ready for operation. Headquarters for the business was

set up in a small palace there owned by the Ranas. The contract between Boris and the government stipulated that on the sale of alcohol $33\frac{1}{3}$ percent was to cover cost, $33\frac{1}{3}$ percent profit and $33\frac{1}{3}$ percent tax, and Boris guaranteed the government a minimum of 120,000 rupees tax revenue a year. Four hundred and fifty tiny Nepalese shops became his subcontractors and distributors. He also devised a clever method of differentiating various kinds of spiritous beverages. They were flavored with fruit essence and sold according to proof under names representing animals: 100 proof known as *gainda*, rhino; 80 proof as *bhag*, tiger; and 68 proof as *chitua*, leopard.

All this sounded wonderful on paper, but in his enthusiasm, and while lost in the maze of figures and statistics Boris had overlooked the fact that there were twelve hundred illicit distilleries in his territory. In Nepal the brewing of *rakshi* had always been a private and family affair, the purchase of three earthen jars being all the equipment necessary for making alcohol according to the traditional local methods. Among the moonshiners, furthermore, there were a considerable number of influential people who turned out *rakshi* not only for home consumption but also for profit, and when Boris attempted to curb these illicit producers he ran into serious trouble. The government smiled at his complaints, the police refused to act. In fact, Boris discovered that the local policemen were often helping the moonshiners.

Soon the public outcry against Boris's plan grew so loud that the government suddenly scrapped his license to import alcohol. This obliged Boris to stop operations altogether, even before the distillery in Biratnagar was actually in operation.

"We had invested over a hundred thousand rupees in our project," he recalls, "but now everything came to a halt."

Outraged, Boris tried to get his import license for raw spirits returned to him, but that was to no avail. Too many prominent officials were interested in their own highly remunerative moonshining operations.

There was only one thing to do, and this was to sue the government for breach of contract. But Boris could find no legal system in Nepal capable of dealing with the government, which was deaf to all his formal protests.

Ten and a half months passed before he heard more about the subject. Meanwhile, with the closing down of the distillery, Boris went to work setting up the Royal Hotel and obtaining governmental permission for foreigners to visit the valley.

On a Friday afternoon shortly after the arrival of the first tourist groups, to Boris's utter astonishment thirty police officers and soldiers in khaki, bristling with rifles and sidearms, marched into the Royal Hotel. Boris came down to the lobby and demanded to know what they wanted.

The captain in charge fished in his pocket and drew out a roll of grubby-looking brown paper covered with hieroglyphics in India ink.

"We have been dispatched," he answered solemnly, "to collect from you immediately the sum of 175,000 rupees and 15 pice."

Boris was flabbergasted. There must be a mistake. But no, the officer and two of his aides sternly explained that this was the amount of minimum guarantee Boris owed the government for the period since he had closed down his operations. To no avail did Boris explain to the forbidding-looking detachment that it was unthinkable that he should be ordered to pay such a sum almost a year after the government, by breach of contract, had put him out of business by refusing him the permit to import the raw spirits necessary to carry on business. He further pointed out that he could not have paid the money anyway, even if he had had it or had wanted to pay it, as it was now Friday afternoon and the only bank in Nepal was closed till Monday.

The angry crowd of police officers and armed soldiers, exchanging knowing looks, would not listen to this preposterous explanation. They would have to arrest him, they said. Boris finally managed to talk them into agreeing to postpone taking action for

twenty-four hours, but that night armed guards slept in the corridor of the hotel in front of the door of his room.

The next day a sly official came over to talk to Boris.

"Listen," he told Boris, "why don't you sign a paper recognizing the debt, which you can repay in instalments over three years, and reopen the distillery?"

On Boris's refusal the officer declared, "You must come with me." Upon which he marched Boris out of the hotel. "You are going to be put in prison," he explained bluntly.

Prison in Nepal is no gay affair; even today, a small crime can bring a very long jail sentence. Flogging, according to rumor, was a common police tactic.

Boris was first taken to the offices of the Tax Department in the district of the city known as Dilli Bazaar. There, in an alcove adjoining a large room where the tax clerks sat at their work, he was temporarily confined.

Never before in all the history of the country had a European in Nepal been brought to prison. What was good for a Nepalese prisoner was judged good for Boris. He was about to be locked up with fifteen other men in a small cell and given half a rupee a day for food and firewood with which to cook his own meals. On learning this, the British ambassador immediately protested Boris's being put into the communal jail. As a result, instead of being locked up with other prisoners charged with less serious crimes like manslaughter and elephant stealing, he was incarcerated in the large one-room tax office.

Thus began the first days of Boris's stay in prison, which was—for a while—the most hilarious incident in all his career in Nepal. Boris completely intimidated his jailers and soon ran havoc in the tax office, demanding that he be given a small pot and occasionally shooing out of the Tax Department all the scribes and employees so that he could either relieve himself or take a splashing bath in a tub set right among the paper-strewn mats and desks of the Tax Department. A small gallery open to the public allowed Nepal for six

days to have the show of its history. Boris's imprisonment made news, and every inhabitant of the valley crowded over to the tax office to see the first white sahib in jail.

"I realized then," Boris said, "what it was like to be a monkey in a zoo. Faces would come up, stare through the small, barred window at me with bland eyes, till the pushing crowd would slowly edge the spectator out of view, his face replaced by another, and so on till I had looked into the eyes of every single race to inhabit Nepal. I saw women with rings in their noses, men covered with saffron marks on their foreheads, others wearing the black or flowered Nepalese hats, and lifting up children for a better look. Had I been an anthropologist, I could have written quite a thesis in that tax office."

Before long Boris was making life impossible for the Tax Department. Its officials, at the whim of Boris's fantasy, were forced to abandon their work every half hour while Boris voluptuously splashed their documents with his bath water.

After six days Boris was transferred to a dingy, damp room on the ground floor of the headquarters of the Police Department. This was located in the palace belonging to a friend of his, General Modan. With the monsoon rains, Boris's new prison was dripping with humidity and each morning he could wring water out of his sheets. Boris came down with an attack of sciatica. This thoroughly frightened his keeper, who now moved him to a sunny, pleasant room on the first floor of the palace. Friends were allowed to come and visit him freely, except for the British ambassador and other embassy officials and also doctors and lawyers, who had to apply for permission.

Inger came daily and on numerous occasions parties were held in Boris's room, to which flocked all his friends, Nepalese and foreigners alike. But despite the fact that these visitors included the King's brothers, it seemed that for lack of a true judicial system nothing could be done to release Boris. All his actions and visitors were witnessed by guards who perpetually stood in the corridor.

One day Inger was served a formal written notice stating that she might visit her husband but on no circumstances was she to be allowed to sit on his bed!

Though he had tried at first to keep his spirits up by telling himself he would surely be released shortly, the days dragged by and Boris's imprisonment grew more and more serious and infuriating. He had put vast effort into the work of starting a hotel, and now, just in the critical first days and weeks of that operation, he was locked up and completely cut off from his business. Inger, after all, was young and without Boris's experience in club management gained at the 300. The thought of all that might be going wrong in his absence, and the fear that his work and big opportunity might be wasted, aroused worries almost too bitter to bear.

Even this faded into insignificance, however, when one day Inger arrived looking frightened and distraught, bringing Boris the news that his mother, Maria Alexandrovna Lissanevitch, was very ill. Boris frantically demanded to be released long enough at least to visit his sick mother. To these requests no definite answer came. His friends from the British embassy helped Inger to summon the most respected doctors in Kathmandu to Maria Alexandrovna's sick-bed. Boris was given reassuring reports—then, suddenly, when Inger came to his cell weeping and unable at first to speak, he knew instinctively the terrible news she could not bring herself to tell. His mother was dead. She had died in a strange country, far from the things she had known and loved all through her girlhood and years as a young wife and mother, in that faraway world of Russia. They had been years heavy with war, death, worry and sacrifice. And now she herself had died while again separated from her son—while he was in jail.

After a while Inger left to carry on as best she could with the things that had to be done and to deliver Boris's angry demands that he be let out of prison at least temporarily. For hours Boris sat on his bed staring at his hands, or paced the floor, trying to understand what had happened. Scenes in his own past life went

through his mind. There had been that day when at dawn his mother, his brothers and he had prepared to leave the old house in Odessa and the wagons filled with Bolshevik soldiers had turned into their street, cutting off their escape. How brave his mother had been as she led them back to the house, never betraying to the boys the fear and disappointment she must have felt. And there had been that other day when his mother had helped him hurriedly pack his things before he left Odessa and Soviet Russia for the last time, and escaped to Berlin. Out of the years that had passed since then he had all too short a time with her, and now he had not been there at the end to show her his love and gratitude.

Bitter, slowly dragging days followed. Boris's health grew steadily worse, adding to his concern, and he demanded treatment. In came a doctor who looked Boris over, gave him a shot, and walked out. The next day a different doctor arrived, examined Boris, gave him a shot and walked out. When this operation was repeated a third time Boris, who was by now in severe pain, wrote an angry letter stating that he would rather die in jail than serve as an official pincushion!

In the meantime Boris continued to suffer, feeling totally helpless and wondering how long all this would last. His only distraction by day was to walk in the grounds of the police headquarters, a vast park that had been designed by some architect from Europe—imported, no doubt, for the purpose—fifty years ago. Each time Boris passed before the sentry guarding the main gateway to the palace he noticed that the soldier went through the elaborate routine of presenting arms. Desperate for anything better to do, Boris would walk up and down past the gate giving the sentry excellent practice as each time, like an automaton, he went through the drill, ten, twenty and thirty times in succession.

The day after Boris sent his wrathful letter the Chief of Police came to see him with an apologetic and annoyed air. He sympathized with Boris's troubles and declared that he must immediately be transferred to the hospital located in the center of town, not far

from the Royal Hotel. Boris gladly accepted this change and was driven by jeep down to Kathmandu, a transfer in which he took considerable pleasure as gasoline in Kathmandu was 20 rupees a gallon, it, like cars and all modern commodities, having to be either carried in on men's backs or flown in.

As the hospital had only four large communal wards, a special place was cleared for Boris on a small, open veranda on the ground floor. More centrally located now, Boris had a pleasanter time, as it was easier for callers to reach him. The only drawback to this new "cell" was the unbearable noise at night. Kathmandu was and still is packed with stray dogs, and the canine world, for some mysterious reason, elected the surroundings of Boris's veranda as their favorite spot for making love when not simply howling and fighting over hospital refuse. Boris had to ask his jailer for a slingshot, with which he managed to clear the hospital compound.

Why Boris was still kept prisoner, nobody seemed to know. He had now become the victim of the fact that there was no power that could truly condemn him and no official channel by which he could be released.

Finally one day the King's secretary came in and explained to Boris in kind words that he must understand that the judiciary system had not yet been reformed and since everyone in Nepal, as he knew, liked him, all he had to do to be liberated was to write a letter to the King apologizing and asking for pardon. Boris had now been in jail for two and a half months. The idea of writing a humiliating letter infuriated him. What he most resented about his imprisonment was that he had been refused permission to go to his mother's deathbed, despite the illegality of his detention.

Finally, as this prison affair had to end, Boris agreed that if the secretary to the King would write the letter for him, he would sign it. This was done and Boris was immediately released. Later he was received by the King, who expressed the hope that he had "no hard feelings" over the unfortunate episode.

XI A Crown of Feathers

Boris's prison ordeal did a great deal to increase his popularity in Kathmandu. A month after his release, the Foreign Office called him in and asked whether he would take charge of the catering and arrangements for the forthcoming coronation of the new ruler of Nepal, King Mahendra. After having been fed by His Majesty's government in jail, Boris was now going to turn the tables and serve the King. He determined to do everything to help insure that the coronation should be a successful and memorable occasion.

In the meantime continuous changes seemed to be occurring in the pattern of life in Nepal. Soon there would be a new road linking the capital with India. After his depressing weeks in prison, Boris now resumed attendance at frequent parties and receptions, he and Inger receiving more invitations than ever.

Boris says he will never forget those elaborate affairs given by members of the Rana family, in particular the weddings. At the banquets that took place on such occasions could be seen all the ancient splendor of the Orient that had long ago disappeared from other parts of Asia. Generals of the Rana clan appeared in their pearl, emerald and diamond helmets, which glinted and flashed in the light of the candles. Generals and other military officers attended these parties decked in superb parade uniforms that vied

in elegance with the impressive ceremonial dress of the British ambassador.

The receptions held by Field Marshal Kaiser were particularly fabulous. In the huge ballroom of his palace were spread in lordly fashion buffets and bars where one could choose from twenty different vintage Bordeaux and as many Burgundies that ran the gamut of the last twenty years, many of them unavailable in Europe. There were also ten varieties of all sorts of spirits to help digest the gargantuan feast of fifty different dishes. Despite the rather gaudy style of the Ranas' palaces—"Kathmandu baroque," as Boris says—these occasions never lacked a grandeur and sophistication recalling ancient European courts. The entrance of the King, his sister or brothers was always marked by a murmur and hush while servants bowed to the ground and the assembly paid homage according to rank. On winter nights, as Inger got into a long evening gown to attend one of the innumerable receptions of the valley, she was careful also to wear long woolen underwear, for the heating of the great Rana homes left much to be desired.

Life in Kathmandu seemed unperturbed by the outside world; few newspapers ever reached the capital, and no radios disturbed the peace of the streets, which knew only the merry tinkle of the copper bells of the temples and the drums and whistles of the innumerable musical processions that accompanied all the religious rites of the valley.

Boris had only just recovered from his sojourn in prison when he had to begin tackling the task of taking care of the new king's coronation. He had received from the royal palace a message reading approximately as follows:

His Majesty has given orders that Boris shall arrange all the catering and attending to the Royal guests on the occasion of the Coronation.

No one in Nepal ever remembers Boris's family name; he is "Boris" to everybody from King Mahendra down.

The coronation of King Mahendra was to be an event that rocked Nepal and attracted the attention of the world to the little-known Himalayan kingdom. No funds were spared to make it not only the biggest affair the kingdom had ever known, but also the first big step of Nepal in its progress away from isolation and toward modernity. Everything had to be done from scratch. The entire nation could muster in its two hotels, the Royal and the Snow View, accommodations for only about fifty people. All of a sudden, Boris was asked to see to it that 190 foreign dignitaries and over 100 news correspondents be given the best in board and lodging.

The whole valley became the scene of feverish preparation, and the Royal Hotel the headquarters of operations. Every temple in Kathmandu was redecorated; roads were enlarged; the two miles of tarmac streets in the valley were lengthened to three miles with the aid of volunteers. For the great occasion the Cow Field Airport had to be rebuilt; the thatched shed that had served as customs house and air terminal there was replaced by a true stone one. Boris was given charge of the government rest house and of five other palaces destined for distinguished guests.

Rumors soon circulated all through the hills that Boris was going to buy fifty thousand chickens, hundreds of tons of rice, and millions of eggs in preparation for this lavish entertaining, and inflation threatened throughout the valley. Boris finally had to make a public declaration that all food would be purchased in India.

Only two months after being in prison, Boris had suddenly become one of the key figures in Nepal. The small Himalayan kingdom had much to learn of Western ways, and Boris was incessantly called in for consultation on matters concerning the do's and don'ts of Western society.

Kathmandu is not a large city, the entire valley having a population of not more than about 500,000 inhabitants, of whom only about 108,000 represent the population of the city itself, the rest being farming folk of the surrounding countryside. At all costs,

however, Nepal, in line with its traditional hospitality, wanted to give its guests the best of the amenities of the Western world. And despite the disadvantages of its centuries-old isolation, it succeeded not only in proving an excellent host but also in offering the foreign dignitaries one of the most beautiful and incredible spectacles imaginable.

Right in the center of all this was Boris. For the coronation he rebuilt Nepal's accommodations for foreigners almost from the ground up. The government imported by air thirty bathrooms complete with water heaters and bathtubs, staging for this purpose a unique airlift from India to the valley. The bathtubs brought little trouble, however, in comparison with the food.

For three days Boris had three chartered DC-3's flying incessantly between Patna, India, and Kathmandu. This was an equally bizarre airlift as the cargo included six thousand live chickens, one thousand guinea fowl, two thousand ducks, five hundred turkeys and one hundred geese. Along with them came a ton and a half of dead—in fact a little too dead—fish, two tons of vegetables and—perhaps strangest of all—a couple of tons of ice! Apart from the eternal snows, there was no ice plant in Nepal.

This forced migration of so many fowl was not without incident. The birds had come to Patna by rail, and as the planes were two days late, more than half of them died in the sun at the airport. As it was too late to replace them Boris had to plan to do without. The fish, needless to say, had to be thrown away, particularly the large *becti*, a delicious fish from the Bay of Bengal that had been intended as the *pièce de résistance* for the coronation banquet. Out of one hundred cases of fruit only thirty-five could be saved. The only loss out of this pantagruelian cargo that was not surprising was that of the ice, most of which of course melted.

Boris received this sad news in his office at the Royal where two telephone lines (field equipment, there being few telephones in service) linked him with other strategic points in the city. For nine days he went almost without sleep as one after another the major problems of the coronation landed on his desk.

"Three thousand chickens dead," came the alarming news. Immediately peasants were sent out into the hills to search for replacements. Fifty-seven cooks and one hundred and fifty trained servants arrived from India, a little dazed by their first air flight and Kathmandu's altitude. Despite the fact that all these servants had been screened by the Criminal Investigation Department in Calcutta, those in charge of protocol decided that no imported servants were to wait on the King or other high dignitaries. Immediately classes had to be set up to teach a few choice Nepalese bearers the art of serving royalty.

Problems rolled in one after another. "Not enough cars." Immediately orders had to be sent out and vehicles imported from India over the not yet completed road to Kathmandu.

From the United States was flown in the strangest shipment of all. Since 1924 the sale of bird of paradise feathers had been banned for the preservation of the species. The elaborate crown which would be placed on King Mahendra's head at the climax of the coronation, however, required many such feathers on its summit. It was considered an appropriate present for the United States to send to Nepal one hundred of these rare plumes that had been dug up in the storerooms of New York's American Museum of Natural History—a strange but welcome gift.

Taxis, servants, bathtubs, food, feathers and ice were only a few of the things that had to be imported. New guest houses and eight miles of new roads were completed. From London, at a tremendous expense, a complete set of china, cutlery and crystal glasses was shipped by air to Kathmandu for the occasion.

As the day of the guests' arrival drew near preparations became more and more frantic. Atop every pagoda could be seen artists going over the fine woodwork with brushes, adding tones of color to the erotic carvings of the roof beams or gilding copper doors and windows. Every shrine, every small sanctuary in all the towns and villages of the valley was given a new face, some restored and others embellished, enhancing the beauty of the countryside.

In the meantime the press of the world began converging on

Kathmandu. The idea of penetrating a forbidden country and witnessing pageantry unequalled in its splendor and primitive charm attracted no less than 160 correspondents from abroad, even including a reporter from Radio Iceland! This unexpected rush put a new strain on Kathmandu's already heavily taxed accommodations and supplies of food. Boris erected for the newsmen a whole village of tents in the gardens of the Royal Hotel. These large Swiss cottage-type tents became the temporary offices of the journalists. The newsmen raved about the sensational aspects of the valley, fighting for photographs before bewildered Tibetans, shy Newar girls and beautiful Tamang women, who overnight became the center of attraction for the idle photographers awaiting the great event.

The single telegraph line connecting the valley with India was now the most congested artery in Nepal. Frantic to see their dispatches off to beat their competitors, newsmen literally fought to send out their messages to the far ends of the world, in French, English, Spanish, Burmese, Chinese and a babel of other tongues. The poor telegraph operator was quickly overwhelmed, especially as none of the press, understandably, could speak Nepali. Scores of journalists hit the Royal Hotel and the bar hummed with rumors and counterrumors as each correspondent, sipping his beer or whisky, spied on the movements of his rivals.

Among the throng of these writers was a frail young woman, a Eurasian. Unassuming and modest, she participated in the frantic life of Nepal in the weeks preceding the coronation. With observant eyes she took in all the details of what went on around her. A slim, rather reserved woman, Han Suyin discovered love in the valley, and her at first rather casual appearance changed to one of unusual elegance. Sent to Kathmandu to report the coronation for a newspaper, she fell in love with a handsome Indian engineer and later produced her remarkable novel *The Mountain Is Young*, which so well captured the spirit of Nepal. Many times since the coronation Han Suyin has returned to the valley, staying at the Royal Hotel, a good friend of Boris, whom she portrayed in her book under the name of Vassili.

Although *The Mountain Is Young* is fiction, all its characters can be easily identified. The Field Marshal, a philosopher, as Han Suyin calls him, is every inch the scholar and astute thinker she presents him as being. Even the more dramatic characters are true to life, based upon generals, scholars, journalists, artists, missionaries, priests, Buddhist monks and others who moved in the enlarged society of Kathmandu during the coronation months.

Father Moran, Werner Shultess and Toni Hagen all found their way into Han Suyin's novel, along with about every other character of importance in the valley.

Boris had little time now, however, to chat with the newly arrived visitors who all day long queued outside his apartment asking for information, wanting help with translations or requesting other personal favors. The press was left to cater for itself, for already the first guests were arriving.

The small Kathmandu airfield, its brand new building still smelling of fresh paint, was now the center of activities. Never have so many winged steel monsters been seen over the valley. In fact planes were forced, as at major airports, to circle about high above the valley awaiting their turn to land.

The first guests to arrive were the Bhutanese and Sikkimese delegations. The Bhutanese were represented by Jigme Dorji, the sophisticated prime minister and brother-in-law of the king, accompanied by his elegant wife Tesla. The three other members of the Bhutanese party were dressed in the national costume with legs bared, and wearing vast double-breasted coats—one arm of which is allowed to hang loose, baring one shoulder and revealing an elegant, round-collared shirt of Tibetan silk. The Sikkimese delegation was led by the Maharajkumar (Crown Prince) Palden Thondup Namgyal, the present Maharaja, whose marriage to the American girl Hope Cooke in 1963 was to be a world sensation. The Bhutanese delegation had had to walk and ride eight days to reach India from their capital before embarking on a plane for Nepal. Thus the coronation brought together leaders of the three isolated and mysterious Himalayan states.

The other guests were no less spectacular in their own way. India was represented by Vice President Radakrishnan. The Vice Premier of China was dressed in the obligatory drab Chinese Communist suit that contrasted with the elaborate attire of the other guests. The British sent the Earl of Scarborough; the French, Count Ostrorog, their ambassador to New Delhi. Then came the Japanese envoys, the Burmese, the Thais and all the other guests, the United States sending Dr. Mayo and his wife as President Eisenhower's special representatives to the coronation. Lowell Thomas came accompanied by the intricate gear and crew of a Cinerama camera that was to record faithfully every detail of the ceremony.

When the count was made, Boris discovered to his desperation that instead of the 112 official guests who had been expected, 190 had arrived.

Panic set in at the Royal Hotel. What with chickens dying, the fish going bad and a host of unexpected guests, Boris's talent as an organizer was strained to the extreme. At Sital Niwas, the most luxurious of the five guest houses, in the rush of installing the new bathrooms overhead tanks had been forgotten, and Boris had to send someone to buy the beautiful traditional Nepalese copper cauldrons and organize a chain of men to take the place of a storage tank and create an illusion of running water.

On a quick visit to this guest house Boris was confronted with an angry member of the French delegation pacing the corridors, his face wearing a pained expression that suggested colic. The lavatories had all been locked.

"Why is this?" Boris asked one of the servants.

"Because they are new," came the reply.

As for keys, the head bearer had taken them with him and gone to lunch. Boris found enough energy, after calming his anger, to break through a locked door and thus save the French diplomat.

On the day after the first guests' arrival a telephone call informed Boris that Their Excellencies of the Bhutanese and Sik-

kimese delegations had not been served breakfast. A quick investigation revealed that the reception committee had completely forgotten to give him the location of their residences. Simultaneously Boris had to serve meals at all the other different guest houses. To cover up the fact that none of the dining rooms in these new residences had been completed, all the guests were given room service. As might be expected, on his arrival every official of every country began to entertain, and for all these receptions, dinners and parties Boris had to do the catering on short notice.

No doubt frustrations arose among some of the guests who had not been sufficiently warned about the conditions in Nepal. But few officials had to complain, and even fewer realized that when they ordered whisky and soda not only had the whisky, the soda and the glass been flown in a few days previously, but even the ice had come by air, and that one small cube had meant flying in five pounds, what with the loss from melting!

Not far away from the Royal Hotel thirty elephants that had just been introduced to the art of mountaineering were eating vast stocks of foliage imported along with them from the terai. Busy artists who had just put the finishing touches to the foursomes and *parties à cinq* of the erotic statues around the town now rushed about painting the pachyderms, which were soon complete with flowered ears, spotted trunks and pedicured golden toenails.

The political, religious and social variations among the guests called for extreme tact. The Americans could not be lodged with the Chinese delegation; the vegetarians could eat no meat, while others could eat no eggs; Hindus could eat no beef and Moslems no pork. For large banquets this meant either serving nothing but bread and butter or having to serve every man as an individual. Boris chose the latter alternative.

No fish had arrived to replace the lost *behti* that had succumbed to the 117° heat of Patna airport. From the hills runners brought in rugged chickens, excellent climbers but poor substitutes for the Indian birds that had died. Wild boars by the dozens that were to be

served whole arrived from the terai, along with deer and other game to round out the gargantuan feasts.

It took all Boris's talent as a showman, a hunter and the ex-secretary of the 300 Club to perform what everyone had thought at first to be impossible. As the days went by everything, as if by miracle, fell into place. Boris did not sleep a wink, night or day; besides having to prepare for the receptions and other functions he had personally to entertain friends, newsmen and various delegations.

A day prior to coronation day, on May 1, a simple ceremony was held in the courtyard of Hanuman Dhoka, the old Newar palace in the center of the city that took its name from the monkey-faced god Hanuman, whose statue adorns the gilded brass doors of the palace. This ceremony was that of purification.

Inside the palace courtyard, which is overlooked by three pagodas, a small bamboo and thatch hut was erected in which, dressed in simple white Nepalese jodhpurs and long overshirt, the man who was to be crowned king took his place, seated cross-legged next to his wife, who was dressed in a red and gold sari. This hut symbolized the fact that the king was a man like any other and king not only of Kathmandu but of the simple villages and dwellings of his nine million subjects. In another corner of the courtyard were arranged countless leaf plates containing a gaily colored assortment of ritual food offerings, grains of rice and flowers sprinkled with saffron and bright red powders. These Mahendra blessed and then distributed to those attending the ceremony, while a simple choir of womenfolk sang a melodious Nepalese tune. A cow and its calf gravely attended the ceremony, wearing saffron scarves; these sacred animals were gifts from the King to the Brahmins who on the following day were to perform the actual coronation. After being purified and blessed, the King made the ritual *tica* marks on the foreheads of the priests and gave them the clothes they were to wear for the coronation ceremony.

Around the King flocked the newsmen, in striking contrast to

the serene ancient ceremonial, and the ever-present eye of Cinrama insolently glared down on the royal couple.

On May 2nd the sun as usual made a clear appearance in the crystal air of the valley. That day the only Hindu monarch of the world was to be crowned, King Mahendra, incarnation of Vishnu, the god of preservation, King of Kings, Five Times Godly, Valorous Warrior and Divine Emperor.

Thirty-four years old, the young king took in elegant stride the burden of the complicated Vedic ritual that was to see him succeed his father, who had been only fourteen years older than he!

This was the first time the outside world in such large numbers was to witness the crowning of a king of Nepal. When King Tribhuvan had been crowned forty-three years previously at the age of six, only the British Resident and five other foreigners had been present. Now, in 1955, cameras and flash bulbs started King Mahendra on his journey to his enthronement.

Seated in a jeweled howdah on top of a huge decorated tusker elephant, Mahendra came in solemn procession to Hanuman Dhoka Square and into the courtyard where the ceremony was to take place. Above his head a yellow and gold umbrella shaded him from the sun. In the enclosure waited all the ambassadors and envoys dressed in their full regalia, the French ambassador in his gold-braided uniform and tricorne hat, the Earl of Scarborough magnificent in the blue silk cloak of the Order of the Garter, Vice-President Radakrishnan of India in a yellow silk robe, the severe-looking Japanese ambassador in tails, all of them contrasting with the Chinese representatives in their austere attire. Next to these dignitaries stood all the Rana generals and princes of Nepal. The Ranas had not been allowed to appear in the jeweled crowns they had worn in the past, as they were too much like that of the king, and had replaced them with helmets decked with yellow, red and green plumes. The scene was ablaze with the gold braid of the innumerable officers and generals, not the least remarkable being old Field Marshal Kaiser and General Kiran, Commander in Chief of

the Army and surveyor of royal hunts, who stood six foot two, towering above the small field marshal.

Mahendra and his queen were led under gay parasols to a private apartment where the King's body was smeared with earth gathered from the far corners of his country and from the sacred Hindu shrines of India. The couple were then anointed with waters brought from thirty different rivers and from the seven seas. After this, dressed in pure white silk, the royal couple entered the thatched hut in the palace courtyard before the eyes of all present, to receive further blessings from the high priests.

Then at 10:43, the exact time predetermined by scholars and astrologers as most auspicious, the King was crowned with the heavy jeweled crown topped with bird of paradise feathers. He then walked to a platform on which had been erected the golden royal throne, which stood, according to tradition, on the skins of an ox, a cat, a leopard, a lion and a tiger, symbolizing the monarch's rule over all animals. In the olden days there was, it is said, an additional skin, that of a human being, but this practice has now been abandoned.

His Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, the bright star of Nepal, had been crowned. After this the princes and dignitaries paid their respects to Their Majesties, offering gold coins, a sign of tribute. The royal couple then mounted an elephant to ride around the Hanuman Dhoka square, where beside the palace rise no fewer than twenty pagodas and hundreds of shrines. In so doing the King was informing the gods of his coronation. After this tour the King mounted his father's horse, thus symbolically taking over the reins of the country.

The coronation was over, but not the festivities—they were only beginning. That afternoon on the Tundikhel, a vast parade ground in the center of Kathmandu, great processions were to be held and speeches made, while the army was to render homage to their new king.

After having hurriedly seen the crown placed on Mahendra's head, Boris rushed out to the Singa Durbar, where the great royal

banquet was to be served. After sleepless nights, he had finally found a solution for the missing *becti* by molding canned salmon into the shape of this large fish. With the whole dish well concealed in garnitures of lobster mayonnaise and shrimps, the substitution went unnoticed and several foreign guests even congratulated Boris on the taste of his *becti*.

In the afternoon, gingerly seated on elephants' backs, the foreign dignitaries made their way to the great parade grounds where the King began the celebration attended by thousands of Nepalese from all over the country, some of whom had walked twenty days for this occasion. Nepal, which is 40 percent Buddhist, produced a startling display of this great faith. The coronation was a Hindu affair, but now, from all the monasteries of the valley, processions of Buddhist monks and lamas came forth carrying the golden idols of their temples, who were lined up on the royal route to witness this great ceremony. Some of the Buddhas were ten feet tall, coming from Patan, Bhadgaon, Kirtipur, Godavari, Thimi and all over the kingdom. Prayer flags fluttered in the wind and paid reverence to the King. Standing on an elephant, the magnificent General Kiran distributed silver coins to the crowds along the roadside from a huge bag that four men had hoisted onto the back of the pachyderm.

The show then started, with dancers from the four corners of Nepal. There were parades of Gurkha soldiers with their bands, and a cavalry display. The celebration ended with an address by the new king to his people, promising elections and the creation of a welfare state in Nepal, words that drew the fascinated guests back from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century of reality, the reality of a kingdom assailed by the thousands of problems of modernization and evolution.

For Boris the turmoil of the coronation did not end on the day of the crowning of the King. For days ambassadors, journalists and visitors lingered in the valley giving official parties and counter-parties, taxing to the last the generous hospitality of Nepal.

The presence of so many foreign dignitaries in the valley

changed the habitually quiet life of Kathmandu into one of political and diplomatic intrigue. Caught between China and India, the East and the West, Nepal from now on had to steer a careful course among its large neighbors and the other great powers of the world.

These political stresses were particularly strongly felt in the small Valley of Kathmandu, where Russians, Americans, Chinese and Indians openly competed to woo Nepal and secure its allegiance and friendship. Wild rumors were constantly circulating as to India's and China's views on Nepalese territory. India controlled all the trade and commerce of landlocked Nepal, and more than one difference arose between the two countries, with Nepal often obliged to suffer certain forms of embargo imposed by India. Even today in Nepal, to secure commodities from abroad requires months of patient negotiations with Indian customs officials and other authorities. To reach the closest port to Kathmandu—Calcutta—by the truck routes is a journey of some 600 hundred miles over roads that can well be described as difficult. Still many parts of Nepal are more accessible from India than from Kathmandu. The steep, dangerous hills of Nepal seem practically an unbridgeable obstacle to internal communication.

The immediate result of these political strains and ambitions was to bring more foreign aid flowing into Nepal than the country could at first ever hope to spend. Today Nepal is largely supported by foreign aid, which has been channeled into such large and diversified projects as constructing a giant ropeway across the mountain ranges to a railhead near the Indian border, a super mountain road to India, a telecommunication and telephone exchange in Kathmandu, a modern Russian hospital, and a dam expected to be one of the largest in the world (this dam will, if and when constructed, produce electricity to sell to India, as there are hardly enough consumers yet in Nepal). China, at the same time, offered to build a road linking Nepal through Tibet with Peking, a project that, although it was foolishly criticized as a possible invasion

route, will be of great benefit to Nepal in that it also joins the high Nepalese hill tribes with Kathmandu, the capital.

All these projects caused a considerable increase in the number of experts, technicians and their assistants in the valley—a strange breed of civil servants whose competence is often to be doubted. Regardless of these efforts, little has truly changed in the country, as vast projects get priority over the simple and urgent needs of the dispersed hill tribes that comprise the greater part of Nepal's population. The country has only one hundred doctors for its nine million inhabitants, and of these more than two thirds are concentrated in the valley. The monsoon still cuts off the capital from most of the hill districts, the country lacking the small, inexpensive suspension bridges that could readily be built across the turbulent mountain torrents. Airstrips are being cleared in the terai and one new airport has been opened to the west of Kathmandu at Pokhara. A few ungainly cement houses have started sprouting inappropriately between the neat rows of old brick homes and ancient pagodas.

These changes, if considerable for Nepal, actually make very little difference to the eyes of the Westerner who comes to Nepal primarily in search of beauty. Tibetans still pour into Kathmandu during the winter to pay homage to the shrine of Bodnath, where the mundane abbot, the Chini Lama, the guardian of that holy spot, awaits them. Here it is as though one had been transported to the faraway days of the Middle Ages in Christian Europe, a world of priests and prelates attended by modest monks. Red-robed lamas spinning cylindrical silver prayer wheels and topped by incredible hats spend their days chanting and psalming to the rhythm of gigantic drums, tubas and cymbals. The expressions on the faces of the pilgrims, some of whom have come over two thousand miles, betray the charm of remote mystical lands and a naïve warmth that is unknown in India or other parts of the East. Pilgrims from Ladakh, Russian Turkestan, Mongolia, Kham, Amdo and Burma all converge on Bodnath, known as "the *chorten*" (the shrine) by all Tibetans.

Time in Nepal has often moved too fast for the local people, and when modern roads are built and bridges thrown over rivers, these operations still have to be sanctified by the sacrifice of goats and other complicated rituals required by local priests. In 1961 one of the first bus lines was set up in the valley, and today most of the buses, when passing the shrine of Shiva near the Singha Durbar still circle the building twice in holy reverence before proceeding on their way to Patan.

When an airport suddenly linked Pokhara, a small village eighty miles west of Kathmandu, with the capital, its inhabitants, who were ignorant of all modern developments, were exposed in reverse order to the technological evolution of the West. The first wheels they saw were those of an airplane. When a flying boxcar carried two jeeps to the town and was being unloaded, an old man was overheard explaining to his grandson, "You see those two funny little ones being born—soon they will grow wings and fly like their mother." After discovering the plane, then jeeps, and then tractors, the inhabitants of Pokhara finally discovered the bicycle, the ultimate link in their last-to-first initiation into modern times.

All the engineers of the West could never succeed in persuading the valley's population to remove the shrines that cluster the streets in some places, and in many a road the tarmac opens to make way for the head of a Ganesh or a bullock of Shiva. The project of installing gutters brought up such problems as that of defiling sacred land. As every other lot in the valley is the property of some religious sect or supports a temple, engineers are faced with obstacles that often arise from theology rather than technology.

The discovery of the unusual in Nepal is a daily thing, for in every field new and surprising local traditions and beliefs come to light. Despite everything, however, Nepal is proceeding by leaps and bounds to bridge the gap between its old culture and the elementary necessities of a modern state.

In Kathmandu life has continued in much the same way as always, the principal and most notable change being the increase of

cars and the ever-growing influx of tourists. At the same time, the shortage of accommodations, the small number of flights into the valley, and the remoteness of Nepal have preserved the country from the noisy hordes of trippers and vacationing crowds that invade the other beauty spots of the world. A tourist in Nepal today still feels the adventurous aspects of his decision to visit that land, and those who stay more than a few days are inevitably drawn into the intriguing life of the valley and the strange tempo of Nepal.

As these changes went forward, Boris became more and more the vital link between foreigners and Nepal, and his hotel became all the more notable for intrigues and personalities. For Boris himself there was never a dull moment, his own imagination ever adding new projects to his already bewildering schedule. Between tiger shoots in the terai, preparing and assisting mountain expeditions, and weekend flights to Calcutta and Hong Kong, he still found time to prepare projects and expeditions covering almost the entire continent of Asia.

XII Rocks on a Bar

All the great climbing expeditions now made their way through Nepal, and Boris became very much involved in them. Kathmandu may well be called the mountaineering capital of the world, and the inner sanctum of climbing in Nepal is invariably the Yak and Yeti bar of the Royal Hotel.

Like so many foreigners, I myself had first been attracted to Nepal by the mountains, and as I had been told in Kalimpong, "a person who plans to organize an expedition had better get in touch with Boris." In the same way that I had been drawn to Boris in my efforts to climb the Himalayan foothills, countless foreigners out to explore the great peaks of Nepal have come into contact with him. So many, in fact, that Boris is something of an authority on the mountains, the expeditions, and the climbers, most of whom are now his personal friends.

One evening I was chatting with Boris in his flat about Everest when he fumbled under a couch and pulled out a box.

"That's Everest, that's Makalu, that's Annapurna II, that's Jannu, that's Dhaulagiri, and this one is from Mount Nilgiri."

One by one Boris removed his trophies from the box and lined them up on the edge of a table—trophies that to him, and no

doubt to the world, were rarer and harder to come by than the skins of tigers or even of a white leopard.

Before me were six little rocks taken from the tops of the world's highest peaks by victorious climbing expeditions. On each of these lofty summits a friend had remembered Boris and with an ice axe had chipped off a souvenir to bring back to him.

This little collection is a good reminder of the part that Boris has played in assisting, feeding, and lodging so many of the large and famous expeditions that have found their way to Nepal in the 1950's and 1960's. For though Boris has been facetiously called "the Number Two attraction in Nepal after Everest," it is the world's highest peaks, which form Nepal's northern frontier with Tibet, that have always been the focal point of the country's attraction. Their lofty, snow-covered summits have often overshadowed the artistic and cultural beauty of the valley, just as they frequently outshine the gilded pagoda roofs of Kathmandu.

Ever since the Indian Survey Office recorded in Nepal, in 1856, a mountain 29,002 feet high, this summit has been the ultimate goal and the supreme ambition of climbers. This peak was at first known as Peak XV till it was baptized Mount Everest in memory of Sir George Everest, a onetime Surveyor General of India. At first much controversy arose regarding Everest, the peak having been measured only from the distant plains of India by triangulation. To ascertain Mount Everest's location accurately, a party of German geographers set out for Tibet. Since peaks often look alike from a distance, confusion arose, and Mount Gaurisankar was erroneously identified with the great peak, so that many children until 1910 were taught that Gaurisankar was the summit of our planet. This mistake was later corrected and despite rumors and false claims it was definitely determined that Chomolungma, as the Tibetans call it, or Sagarmatha, as it is known to Nepalese, was the true Mount Everest, highest mountain on earth. Many contradictory heights have been given for Mount Everest, every survey coming up with a different altitude. The results of highly accurate

measurements made in 1953 have now set Everest's height as 29,028 feet (8848 meters) above sea level, as opposed to the earlier figure of 29,002 feet given in 1856.

Himalayan climbing was born at the end of the nineteenth century when a few adventurous civil servants and officers used their home leave time to go trekking in Sikkim and Kashmir. After the conquest of the first 20,000-foot peak, men began looking with envy across Nepal to Everest. Access to the mountain through Nepal was impossible, the Rana family objecting to any parties crossing their land. Tibet, although a forbidden country too, became the only possible route by which to approach the peak when the Dalai Lama condescended to give right of way to a British expedition in 1921. Mount Everest marks the border of Tibet and Nepal, its northern face belonging to Tibet, as the frontier is established according to the summit line dividing the streams that water the Tibetan plateau and those that make their way south through Nepal to the Ganges or the southern portion of the Brahmaputra.

Thus in 1921 the race to Everest began. The first expedition was led by Lieutenant Colonel C. K. Howard Bury, its objective being to map the area surrounding Everest. The first true attempt on the summit was made the following year under the direction of General C. G. Bruce. This attack was abandoned when bad weather conditions brought about the death of seven Himalayan porters. The third and most famous expedition, that of 1924, ended in the tragic deaths of G. L. Mallory and A. C. Irvine, who disappeared in mysterious circumstances and were last seen within less than 1,000 feet of the summit. What happened to them is an enigma, and it has not yet been determined whether or not the two climbers reached the summit before dying. The expeditions of 1933, 1934 and 1935 were no more successful than the preceding ones. Before the war Everest was a monopoly of the British, as the Dalai Lama would allow no other foreign power to send a party through his country. World War II then halted all expeditions for a time.

Everest's fascination for all men had attracted in 1933 a solitary climber named Wilson who tried to reach the summit alone; he died in his ambitious attempt. Immediately after the war two more lone climbers set out to conquer Everest singlehanded. Without authorization, they sneaked into Tibet and Nepal. One, a Canadian, Denman, reached the strikingly high altitude of 23,100 feet; the other, a Dane named Larsen, also failed but like Denman returned safe and sound with the story of his daring adventure. Despite all these attempts, however, Everest remained unconquered.

Suddenly in 1950 Nepal opened its doors (although reluctantly) to mountaineers. It decided to tax each party according to the height of the peak they wished to climb. New mountains were now accessible and new routes could be taken by climbers.

In 1950 Maurice Herzog of France obtained permission to go through Nepal to Mount Dhaulagiri. This peak, west of Kathmandu and Everest, proved too difficult, as the party possessed no accurate maps of the mountain they intended to climb and had to grope around to find access to it. In searching for some other mountain to scale, the expedition decided to climb the somewhat less difficult peak of Annapurna. The story of the expedition's success, which nearly cost the lives of two of its members, rapidly circulated around the world, Annapurna being the first peak of over 8,000 meters ever conquered by man. This expedition started a great rush to the Himalayas in the years following.

Also in 1950 Charles Houston and H. W. Tilman, two outstanding mountaineers, secured permission to survey the foot of Mount Everest on its Nepalese side. For the first time an accredited party was able to visit Solu Khumbu, the home of the Sherpas, the mighty Himalayan porters who had been so invaluable in assisting all previous expeditions.

The following year, in 1951, Eric Shipton made a reconnaissance of the southern approach of Everest, thus checking on his assumption of 1935 that on this side lay the route to the summit. All

these early trips were also exploratory expeditions, as the only maps of Nepal available were the old and inaccurate ones that had been drawn up by the British, the famed ¼-inch maps of the Indian Survey, charts compiled from information gleaned in the late part of the nineteenth century by secret agents. The most famous of these agents were the Pundits, native Indian explorers trained to travel secretly in disguise through Nepal and Tibet, taking notes which they hid in prayer wheels and counting distances with the aid of Tibetan rosaries.

The first flight over Everest was in 1933, but from that time until 1950 only four major aerial surveys were made in the high Himalayas. Aerial photographs, although helpful, were not sufficient for determining the exact topography of these high mountains, and the climbers, such as Herzog, had to explore as they advanced, for lack of adequate information on the local geography.

The Nepalese authorities were not particularly interested in the early expeditions as they did not share or understand the passion of Westerners for climbing up peaks just "for fun."

In 1952 the Swiss organized a party to attempt Everest and climbed above the famous Khumbu Glacier and Icefall along the "Éperon des Genevois" to the South Col, from which Lambert and Tenzing proceeded almost to the summit of Everest; eventually they were forced to abandon the assault only 1,000 feet from the top. To the Swiss went the credit of opening a southern route to Everest. The race to the summit was now on, each country eager for its chance. The year 1953 was set aside for the British; in 1954 the French were to have a try.

The story of Brigadier John Hunt's British expedition of 1953 is now well known. The success of Tenzing and Hillary rocked the world when on May 29, 1953, they reached the summit of our planet. The British expedition had set out from Kathmandu, which from now on took over from Darjeeling as center of operations for Himalayan expeditions. For sixteen days the party marched across eastern Nepal to reach Namche Bazaar, the small

trading village in the greater Himalayan range that is the capital of Khumbu, the abode of the Sherpas. Base camp was then set up at the foot of the treacherous Khumbu Icefall. Major (now Colonel) Charles Wylie, a good friend of Boris's and a familiar character in the Kathmandu Valley, was in charge of equipment and supplies for this memorable expedition, which owed much of its success to Wylie's highly efficient organization and the party's excellent equipment. A great climber, Major Wylie himself reached the South Col on Everest, at an altitude of 7986 meters. The triumph of the British expedition, if it was due above all to splendid teamwork, the calm leadership of Hunt and the endurance of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing, owed a good deal as well to the perfect logistic preparations, and much credit is due to Major Wylie for having seen to the good organization of supplies to all camps.

With the conquest of Everest, one might have thought that there would be fewer expeditions to the Himalayas. This soon proved a mistaken assumption, for every year saw an increased number of parties setting out for Nepal.

Boris, a sportsman at heart and a keen amateur of exploration, placed himself entirely at the disposal of incoming parties, sharing his knowledge of the country and its leaders to assist everyone he could in starting off for the hills.

Climbers, either on their way out or on their way in, soon became a familiar sight at the Royal Hotel. Boris would patiently accompany the leaders through the maze of the corridors of the Singha Durbar and assist them in obtaining permits. He rendered considerable service to the French and Swiss parties as many of their expedition members did not speak English, and countless expeditions benefited from his generosity in the form of cut rates or free lodgings.

"I've always lost money on expeditions," Boris recalls. "The climbers would come back starved, and you ought to see them eat! Take Raymond Lambert, who got above 8600 meters on Everest with the Swiss in 1952. He would break all records eating! For

breakfast he and a couple of friends would down an omelette made with twenty-four eggs, two whole chickens and tons of porridge! Most climbers lose about forty pounds up in the hills, but they seem to make them up in a week at the Royal after they get back."

Boris's rock collection is one of the best testimonials to his role with expeditions. The chunk of Everest's summit was a gift from Barry Bishop after the successful American expedition of 1962. The stone from the top of Dhaulagiri came from Boris's old friend Norman Dyhrenfurth, of the victorious Swiss expedition. Jean Franco, the leader of the French expedition to Makalu, brought Boris the fragment of rock from that summit, and Lionel Terray, one of the heroes of Annapurna, presented him with a piece of Jannu. To this impressive collection the Dutch climbers De Booy and Ejler added the specimen from Mount Nilgiri in western Nepal, and the incredible Colonel Jim Roberts remembered Boris with a fragment of the summit of Annapurna II.

Having spent three months trekking in the greater Himalayan range myself, I know to what degree the Royal Hotel has been instrumental in keeping up the morale of worn climbers in the eternal snows. All mountaineers are sustained at the highest altitudes by the thought of the first bath they are going to have at the Royal, the first good meal, and the first cold drink at the Yak and Yeti. To climbers the Royal Hotel is home, and to Boris are brought down all the secrets of the snows, from the joyful news of success to the tragic tales of disaster. Living in Kathmandu, he has been close to all the tragedies and joys of climbing. In his flat he has a copy of *Everest, 1933*, Hugh Ruttledge's book on his expedition of that year, autographed by all the leaders and most of the climbers of the three successful expeditions to Everest . . . his friends Sir Edmund Hillary, Norman Dhyrenfurth, Raymond Lambert, Barry Bishop, Jim Whittaker, Tenzing Norkay, and many others.

As early as 1952, before Tenzing's success, Boris counted himself

among the friends of the now famous *sirdar* who reached the summit of Everest with Edmund Hillary. Many times since his great feat Tenzing has been a guest at the Royal. Another of Boris's great friends is Jean Franco. Boris had rendered particularly valuable services to the French expeditions, helping them out not only in administrative problems, but also by serving as interpreter, not to mention his valuable services in giving their mountain rations a gastronomical touch. Boris's famous Genoa fruit cake has been eaten on nearly every great summit, and once, on Raymond Lambert's birthday, was served frozen at 25,000 feet on Cho Oyu.

The hotel is always being livened up by unusual characters among the mountaineering fraternity. There was Gillione, the Italian climber, who at the age of seventy-one and seventy-two led two expeditions to the higher reaches of the Himalayas. On one of these attempts Gillione left Kathmandu with three young companions to climb Mount Api in western Nepal and came back alone. All three of the strong young climbers had died on the great snowy slopes, leaving their old leader to return alone from their tragic venture. In the matter of energy Gillione was one of the astounding men of our time; his death at the age of seventy-three in a car crash brought to a tragic end his fantastic career as a climber.

At the hotel I had many opportunities to meet Colonel Charles Wylie and Colonel Jimmy Roberts, M.C. Both could be called "typical British officers" and both, of course, are great climbers. Yet the fact is that they are not in the least alike; each is in his own way unique, both as a soldier and as a striking personality.

Colonel Roberts, better known as Jimmy, is one of the ablest and most experienced of Himalayan climbers, and is especially noted for his endurance. Now retired from the army, in which he served twenty-six years with the Gurkhas, he speaks Nepali fluently. Jimmy Roberts has served as British military attaché in Nepal and has spent eleven years in the country. He has led over seven expeditions and participated in nine others, including the American Everest expedition of 1962. He was in charge of all transport and

equipment on this huge expedition, which, with the sixty tons of equipment and over nine hundred porters, was the largest ever undertaken. His work in this essential role is given a major credit for the expedition's success. He is also famous for his victorious expedition to Annapurna II and his daring attempt on Machupuchari, the Matterhorn of Nepal. Jimmy Roberts' feats are legion. Always acting slightly dazed, in appearance vague, he is actually a true man of decision and is a delightful companion.

As for Charles Wylie, the more conventional of the two soldiers, his grandfather was British Resident in Nepal in 1890 and his family for two generations have been devoted to the rugged, brave Gurkha soldiers, the famous Nepalese troops whose courage was proven in both world wars. The Gurkhas have earned more Victoria Crosses than any other British regiments. Until quite presently also military attaché in Kathmandu, the elegant and modest Colonel Wylie was a familiar figure at the Royal Hotel, along with the retired Colonel Roberts, who is bent on organizing small expeditions for the new breed of adventurous tourists who want to trek outside Kathmandu.

Another character with whom Boris is intimately acquainted, at least by reputation, is the Abominable Snowman. From the first "Snowman expedition" to the last, Boris, with his always acute interest in animals, has followed step by step the investigations of this monster in Nepal, and the changing views of his existence or non-existence held by those out to shoot him or prove him a figment of credulous imaginations. Boris still has on hand the "Alka Seltzer" gun or "yeti" gun given to him by the Tom Slick expedition from Texas, a strange piece of weaponry designed to put the monster to sleep. Boris was given the gun with two unmarked bottles and to his dismay has lost the instructions. One bottle contains a drug to lull the yeti into slumber; the other a stimulant to wake him up. Boris dares not lend the gun to anyone, or use it himself, for fear that an overstimulated, infuriated snowman might kill the person who fired the dose into him. Boris was invited in 1954

to lead the Slick expedition in search of the Himalayan monster, but unfortunately could not accept. He nevertheless believes in the snowman—and as the only person to have intimately known and interviewed practically all the witnesses of his tracks, he is perhaps in a better position than anyone else to formulate an opinion.

Boris was particularly struck by the testimony of Father Bordet, a French Jesuit and geologist, concerning the Snowman's footprints. Father Bordet, who has accompanied many French expeditions to the Himalayas, is not a man who goes around telling jokes. He declares that in 1959 he followed the tracks of a yeti for hundreds of yards, and had numerous photographs of the footprints. Boris himself has shot an animal that was believed to be nonexistent (his white leopard) and as far back as his days in Laos was familiar with a species of bison so rare that it was not known to science. He is perfectly willing to agree that an animal yet unknown could and very well may exist. The case of the panda, first captured less than thirty years ago, seems to prove how easily a large nocturnal animal could have escaped observation in the remote crags of the high Himalayas.

In 1951 Boris brought to Nepal from Calcutta a large number of nets that he had had made by the Russian refugees from Siberia. With these nets, and after conversations with the famous ornithologist Dr. Dillon Ripley, Boris has tried to find and catch a specimen of the mountain quail, a bird so rare it was once believed to be extinct. Although he has never caught this seldom seen bird, he had not been in Nepal long before he built up a large menagerie of unusual animals and birds. Today the Royal Hotel still harbors two full-grown Himalayan black bears, dangerous brutes with white "V" markings in their dark fur under their necks. They are the last remnants of Boris's zoo, which at one time included spotted and barking deer, an albino barking deer, three jharals (mountain goats), a scaly anteater, several panthers, and four binturongs (bear cats), along with many lesser pandas.

The lesser panda, a distant cousin of the large black and white

panda of China, but with a tail, rarely survives in captivity. Boris has had many of these animals in his private zoo, but all died until he found Panduji, who later became the most famous guest at the Royal Hotel. A hater of nylon stockings, which he always ripped, Panduji was nevertheless popular with all the hotel residents. He would pay regular morning rounds to each room, finishing off the sugar in the sugar bowls that came with the guests' morning tea. The most photographed animal in Nepal, he achieved an international reputation when numerous articles with such titles as "Panda in My Bathtub" publicized him to the world.

When Ralph Izzard returned from his sensational *Daily Mail* Yeti expedition he gave Boris as temporary guests two rare Himalayan wolves. In return for this favor Boris entrusted the zoologist of the party with a flying squirrel to be delivered to the London Zoo. Flying squirrels are great fun. If put on a high window ledge and pushed off, away they glide in a slow curve down to earth. They leap in huge, flying bounds, and are as elusive as quicksilver.

When the flying squirrel was loaded in a crate on board the chartered DC-3 that was taking some of the *Daily Mail* equipment back to England, some inquisitive person opened the lid to have a look. The squirrel flew out and there followed a mad chase among the cargo and passengers of the plane. Captured, he got out again, and this time no one while in the air could catch him. On arrival at Dum Dum Airport in Calcutta the squirrel jumped out of the plane door and there on the airfield, before all the departing passengers, took place one of the greatest animal hunts in the history of aeronautics. Pilots, mechanics, passengers and fire trucks were mobilized to catch the only four-legged animal that not only runs but flies.

To his personal zoo Boris added a strange host of beautiful and unusual birds, which he kept in large outdoor cages. This collection included snow partridges, monals, red tragopans, blood pheasants, and many other rare specimens of Himalayan birds.

Never a man to content himself with watching other people's

expeditions, however, Boris soon set out on one of his own. One, in 1957, was an adventurous drive by automobile from England to Nepal. The other was a wild film expedition to Assam with Lowell Thomas.

XIII Tiger for Breakfast

In the months after the coronation of King Mahendra, Boris started getting restless.

"Inger," he said one evening, "it's time we got some cars for the hotel. The local taxis are old and worn out and we need three or four good, strong, modern vehicles."

Inger objected that they hadn't the money to buy several cars. "What with the price of cars in India," she pointed out, "it would cost us a fortune."

"We could buy them in Europe," suggested Boris.

"But the freight would be terrible," Inger argued.

"Well, let's drive them here!"

"Oh, you *are* mad," answered Inger. "Drive all the way to Nepal? We had better wait till they build a road."

Her husband reminded her that the jeep track between Kathmandu and the Indian frontier was being steadily improved; he believed they could get through. As for the rest of the trip—well, he wasn't sure about the auto roads in southeastern Iran, but he would write the Royal Automobile Club in England and get the latest information.

Thus was born Boris's first overland expedition. He flew to Europe where, after a short holiday that allowed him to pick up the thread of his early years in ballet, he set out, accompanied by

Inger, H.R.H. Prince Basundhara's secretary, and three young men friends, to drive from Solihull, England to Nepal.

In Solihull, Boris bought three long-wheelbased Land Rovers, and from there they drove down to Paris, Stuttgart and Munich, then on through Switzerland and northern Italy to Venice, pushed on through Macedonia, the ancient homeland of Alexander the Great, to Salonika. In 1957 the paved roads stopped in Turkey, and the trip then became a long, arduous, dusty one. From Ankara Boris drove to the base of Mount Ararat, then across Iran, via the brown, dry villages of the fiercely independent Kurds, to Teheran. From there they headed southward to the city of Qum, with its sacred shrine of Fatima and splendidly furnished mausoleums of the pious Shah Akbar II. Thence their route led through Isfahan for a tour of southern Iran. From here they went on through Pakistan via Zahedan, Quetta and Lahore, and finally to Delhi.

The last part of the route from New Delhi to Nepal was in many ways the most difficult, as they had to drive through six inches of soft sand and dust in Bihar to join up at the Nepalese border with the Tribhuvan Rajpath, the new road that leads to the Valley of Kathmandu. This road is a masterpiece of engineering, as in the course of its ninety miles it climbs incessantly over ridges and peaks, soaring from 3,000 feet to 8,100, its highest point, from where one suddenly sees through the moss-hung rhododendron trees the breathtaking spectacle of the incredible white barrier of the Himalayas. Visibility on a clear day allows one to see from Mount Dhaulagiri and Annapurna in the west to Mount Everest in the east—peaks over 200 miles apart.

To enter Nepal by the auto road, or even better, on foot, is the true way to approach the country, for then alone does one realize what massive barriers the foothills represent and how inaccessible a kingdom Nepal is from a geographical point of view. Turn after turn of the road yields new perspectives of craggy hills, lofty pinnacles and dangerous clay ridges, which at every monsoon crash down into the valleys, obstructing roads and submerging villages.

The ninety miles of the Tribhuvan Rajpath take six hours' driving now that the road is all macadamized; in 1957 one had to count on at least ten hours of continuous motoring. The great loops of the passes in the Alps seem small compared to those of this road. At last, after hours of exhausting driving, one discovers the Valley of Kathmandu in its true light, an oasis of flat, fertile soil wedged in a nightmare of chaos. Then only does one realize what a privileged place the valley is and how unique it is, in size and wealth, for this part of the world. It is a true paradise surrounded by a craggy hell. After the small villages clinging with difficulty to the hilltops along the road, the towns of the valley appear like dream villages, with their large pink and red houses alternating with lofty pagodas and spacious palaces.

This was the forbidden kingdom; this is Nepal. The name Nepal is a deformation of Newar, and is never used by the hill people outside the valley to describe anything other than Kathmandu and its surroundings.

The valley's strategic location halfway between India and Tibet accounted for its wealth; all trade with Tibet and the manufacture of all jewelry and luxury goods were controlled as monopolies by the Newars, whose towns flourished especially from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries of our era. It was only with the arrival, in the seventeenth century, of the Gurkhas, the warrior tribe who take their name from a small village halfway between Kathmandu and Pokhara, that Nepal became unified and the crown was given to a Rajput prince, Devi Shah, the first of the dynasty of the present king.

It would be not to know Boris to think that upon getting back to Kathmandu after his long overland journey he planned to rest. The fact is that he was so fascinated by the adventure that he immediately thought up a wild scheme by which he could make a similar trip all over again, but this time in even more difficult circumstances. He conceived the idea of a mammoth overland cruise with luxury house trailers.

Boris quickly got to work on this idea, which was considered crazy by his friends but aroused great enthusiasm in the press, which is always ready to take up a newsmaking project. He planned to build twenty house trailers, each luxuriously equipped with two-way radio, a freezer, and air conditioning. Custom built, these trailers were to be dustproof and of the most comfortable model possible. They were to be drawn by specially designed Land Rovers. Two passengers would travel in each trailer, attended by a Nepalese valet; the Land Rovers were also to be driven by Nepalese chauffeurs. Following in the wake of these carvans Boris planned to have two large kitchen trucks staffed by five cooks. On entering each of the different countries en route a local chef was to be picked up to provide the nation's specialties. Further, on crossing each border scholars were to be hired as guides and to broadcast en route, on the radio network, lectures to the participants in the land cruise. "This," as Boris put it, "is to be the most luxurious cruise on *earth*"—as comfortable and de luxe as an Atlantic crossing on the *Queen Elizabeth*.

The cost of the cruise was to be one hundred dollars a day, a small sum when one considered the advantages of such a trip. All Boris's friends smiled when at the Royal Hotel he enlarged on his project to those who cared to listen. To Boris's exasperation, no one took his idea seriously. But when Boris has an idea in his head he usually gives it a try, and two years later he flew to Europe again for a trial luxury caravan run.

In London he ordered a house trailer built according to his design, containing every convenience from flush toilet to air conditioning and freezer. This time he and Inger were accompanied on the expedition by their friend Wing Commander Paul Ritchie, author of the well-known book *The Fighter Pilot*, and by their children. With Boris's huge caravan and two Land Rovers, they set out again for Nepal. Although the first trip had not proved too hard, and since 1957 roads had improved, it was to be a history-making journey as the trailer was a long, ponderous juggernaut that

weighed four tons. Many a time during the eventful trip that followed, bridges proved too narrow or underpasses too low, and a great deal of skill was required to haul the small palace on wheels across desert and mountain range.

Driving one night at full speed, pulling the trailer along a narrow Turkish road atop an embankment that rose ten feet above the surrounding countryside, Boris froze when suddenly an unlighted, oncoming vehicle loomed in the sweep of his headlights. It was a massive tractor pulling a heavy trailer. Desperately, realizing there was no room to pass, Boris blared his horn and tried to brake. Both vehicles' momentum was too great for them to stop before a head-on collision. Boris twisted his wheel in the final seconds and deliberately steered the Land Rover off the road and down its steeply sloping embankment, the trailer lurching after it. Fortunately, the ground below was firm and they slowed to a halt without capsizing, though badly shaken.

Later in the trip they encountered another crisis when, within a few miles of the Nepalese border, they had to cross a makeshift bamboo bridge that started to collapse. The assistance of a hundred coolies saved the day, and three months after leaving England, the caravan reached Kathmandu.

Boris had proved his point. The trip was feasible and the luxury cruise one step closer to eventual realization. Future events, however, would retard the completion of this ambitious project, for before it could be launched Boris was unfortunately to get mixed up in a financially disastrous tangle with six score of elephants and other white elephants in the production by a French company of a "super-colossal" film epic.

In Nepal, 1959 was a year of great activity. In that year Nepal joined the International Postal Union, and Chinese, American and Russian embassies were set up in Kathmandu. In the spring of that year, moreover, a revolt broke out in eastern Tibet and after severe massacres and loss of life, the Chinese Communists seized Lhasa and took control of all Tibet under the pretext of "liberating" the age-old kingdom of the Dalai Lama.

In the months subsequent to the Chinese takeover, fierce Khamba warriors continued to fight to the last for their country. The Khambas, who compose no less than 80 percent of the Tibetan population, were from eastern Tibet. A warrior tribe, they are tall, as opposed to the short people of Lhasa, and have Caucasian-like features. For years they had been considered in Lhasa as the brigands of the land, until in 1957 they unified their army to defend all of Tibet. Over the Himalayan passes arms were secretly imported to Tibet in an effort to support the isolated groups of Khambas in their attacks against the Chinese.

The great Tibetan shrine of Bodnath, two miles from Kathmandu, became the scene of frantic activity. Instead of the usual pilgrims, refugees started pouring in while other men in disguise set out for Tibet to fight. The takeover of Tibet by China hung as a menace over all the Himalayan states, and the incapacity of the free world to defend the simple, peace-loving Tibetans against Chinese Communist attacks allowed Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim to expect no help if the Chinese Dragon should want to "liberate" those countries also. It was during these tense times that I arrived in Kathmandu and met Boris for the first time.

On the other hand, tourism to Nepal in 1959 had gained by leaps and bounds. Four years after Boris had secured permits for the first tourist groups to enter the kingdom, the arrival in the capital of parties of round-the-world travelers was now a familiar occurrence.

Boris's activities in Nepal have been so various and intricately interrelated that it is hard to grasp them all quickly. Among the most complicated enterprises in which he has been involved were his film projects. To backtrack a bit, after the coronation of King Mahendra in 1955, Boris had attended various royal shoots in the terai. These elaborate displays gave him the idea of writing to Lowell Thomas in the United States, suggesting to him that he return to Nepal and make a film on tigers and elephants.

Lowell Thomas, when he received Boris's letter, had just been

asked to produce a series of films, to be entitled *High Adventure*, for television. Boris's idea fitted in perfectly with the outline of this series, and Boris was given a green light to set the stage in Nepal for shooting the film.

Boris immediately applied for the necessary permits to take motion pictures in the terai. Assured that permission would be granted, and being familiar with the administrative slowness of Nepal, he left matters at that stage to mature and flew to England in 1957 to purchase his three Land Rovers for the first overland trip.

The arrival of the crew from Hollywood was scheduled for shortly after Boris's return to Kathmandu. On reaching Nepal Boris went over to the Foreign Office to pick up his written permit, when to his sorrow he was informed by the Foreign Secretary that his application for permission to make the film had been rejected. Despite Boris's insistence, the verdict was final.

Boris was desperate. He finally sent a telegram to Lowell Thomas calling the whole project off. Matters got worse when the following morning he received a cablegram which had crossed his, saying that the director, Willard Van Dyke, and a crew of cameramen were arriving the following day in Calcutta. Boris, now frantic, flew down to meet them in Calcutta and after running through all airline lists he discovered that the cameramen had already proceeded to Delhi where they were awaiting him.

Not knowing what to do, Boris reached Delhi. Finding the crew there, he had a council of war in which it was decided to make a long-distance call to Lowell Thomas in New York. Thomas was understandably annoyed, and insisted that the film just had to be made.

Boris, who has rarely been known to be without resources, suddenly had a new plan. As the film was supposed to be on tigers and elephants he hastily called some of his old friends in India. With incredible last-minute haste, he organized on the spot a second project that was to prove even more exciting than the intended filming in Nepal.

Boris contacted his old friend the wiry Raja of Gauripur. The Raja's fame came from his being a fully qualified senior elephant catcher, the highest rank in the strange hierarchy of those concerned with elephants. The Raja and his men had captured over six hundred wild elephants by means of lassos. This record attested not only to their skill but also their courage, for catching wild elephants is a highly dangerous operation.

Yes, said the Raja, he indeed had a catching camp on the border of Assam and Bengal, and he readily agreed to allow the crew to film his operations. Furthermore, on phoning his old friend the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Boris learned that Bhaya had recently established a tiger-shooting camp a few miles from the Assam-Bhutan border where they could also shoot footage of that classic sport. This was enough information for Boris, and in half an hour he had made arrangements for the transfer of the cameramen and the producer to film activities at the Raja of Gauripur's camp.

The crew was lucky for, thanks to the Raja, they were to witness a strangely elaborate and fascinating form of chase—that of wild elephants.

The capture of elephants is an art that dates back to obscure times thousands of years ago when man first dared tame the mightiest beast of the jungle. In the Duars, little or nothing has changed over this long period of time, and today the same age-old process for taming elephants is employed.

The principal character in the cast of elephant capturing in Assam is known simply as "the Catcher." This title is no little honor, for it signifies that its bearer has gone through all the various degrees of rugged training required of those "in the service of elephants." In Assam a young boy enters the service of pachyderms at the age of thirteen. His first job is that of learning the trade of *pachwa*. His duties are to collect grass and other fodder, feed his elephant, bring him to bathe, scrub him and take care of him. The *pachwa* is in a sense the mechanic of the elephant's two-man crew. When riding, the *pachwa* stands on the elephant's hindquarters and has a spear to urge him on. After having proved

a satisfactory *pachwa* a man can accede, if he is good, to the grade of *maboud*. The *maboud* is the actual driver of the elephant. He sits on the elephant's skull, his feet behind the animal's ears. The *maboud's* sign of office is a small crook with which he can implement his commands. Usually *mabouds* and *pachwas* are attached to one particular animal, with which very often they remain all their lives, as elephants often live to be sixty and thus have a much higher life expectancy than the average Indian peasant.

The Raja of Gauripur had, like his employees, gone through the full, rugged apprenticeship of the various orders and in all India was no doubt the man who knew these mighty animals best. He had supplied elephants to practically all the Indian dignitaries. An unusual character, his friends joked that he had slept, eaten and lived with elephants all his life. It is a fact that the Raja possessed a pet elephant that he cherished like a child, or rather like a brother. This elephant, which followed him wherever he went, had been captured when the Raja was a small boy. Approximately the same age, the Raja and his elephant had grown up together.

When Boris and the film crew reached the Raja's camp in the dense jungle of the Bhutan foothills, they found two neat rows of huts lined along an open avenue at the end of which was the Raja's large hut, in front of which his pet elephant was lying like a dog.

Boris, entrusted with the entire organization of the camp to meet the requirements of the technicians and as a stage setting for the film, rapidly got to work. A village of tents was erected close to the huts of the elephant catchers. Boris had known the Raja of Gauripur for many years and he had often shot with him in Assam. He gave Boris a warm welcome and together they began investigating how best to enable the cameramen to get good pictures of elephant catching.

At the camp were forty tame elephants. These were divided into two groups, the heavy tuskers used as bulldozers and blockers in the manner of bookends to control wild elephants, and the second

group, called *kunki*, who were the catcher elephants, the fast ones. On Boris's arrival, five elephants with their *mahouds* were sent to roam in the jungle in search of herds. Soon the *mahouds* sent word to the camp that a herd had been located. The catchers, riding *kunki* elephants, started off, five or six at a time, after the herd, each catcher concentrating on one animal, separating him from the group and driving him off through the jungle.

On each of the fast *kunki* elephants stood a *pachwa* with a rope coiled around one shoulder, while the catcher sat behind the ears of his elephant holding a large lasso, its end secured around his beast. The chase was one of the most exciting and dangerous parts of the catch. Like a bulldozer the wild elephant plowed through trees and shrubs, breaking down great trunks and crashing through everything in his passage. The pursuing elephant followed in his tracks, and it took ample skill on the part of the *pachwa* not to be swept off by a low branch or crushed by a falling tree. The *pachwas* had to have an incredible sense of balance, as from their standing position on their elephants' backs they had to lie down flat at each overhanging branch or other "low bridge." This chase went on perhaps for two hours, at speeds up to thirty miles an hour. Finally, if all went well, the wild elephant, bewildered and frightened, would begin to tire.

Watching one such chase from a spare elephant driven by a *mahoud*, Boris arrived in a trampled clearing just as the wild elephant, starting to tire in its flight, stopped, wheeled, and shrilly trumpeting its rage, flung itself against the pursuing *kunki*. For this eventuality the catching elephant had been trained in self-defense. The tame elephant maneuvered itself parallel to the wild one, then the catcher threw his lasso over the quarry's head. As an elephant's trunk is very tender, it curls it up on feeling the rope, which thus slips and catches around his neck, as it did on this occasion. Then the inevitable tug of war followed, the catcher risking his life to reach over and with a small rope and a special knot anchor the loop of the lasso so that it could not tighten and strangle

the captive wild elephant. This operation, which calls for leaning right over to within a few inches of the wild elephant, in reach of his trunk, requires great skill, speed and courage. While the catcher did this, his own elephant protected him with its trunk. The noose secured, the *pachwa* jumped off the back of his elephant and with his coil of rope entwined the hind legs of the wild animal. This delicate task performed, the rope was solidly anchored to a large tree.

The wild elephant finally caught, the catcher blew a signal with a conch shell to give his location. Immediately on hearing this and guided by the repeated sound, two large, heavy tuskers were sent out to help master the wild beast. The two big beasts moved in on the captive, crushing him from both sides and punishing him with their trunks when he tried to act up. Ropes were thrown around the three elephants, securing the wild one to the big tuskers. The tuskers then dragged the captive to the training camp.

In camp the wild elephant was secured between two large trees, his legs stretched out so that they could hardly move. Then his training began. For two days and two nights the wild elephant was left stretched out without food or water. On the third day two tuskers escorted him to a river where he was bathed and watered. He was then taken back to camp, tied up and fed choice pieces of food by hand. As the elephant is likely to catch the arm extended to him and would willingly kill the person feeding him, this operation is performed by two men, one securing his companion and ready at any instant to pull him out of range in case of any unexpected trick on the part of the wild animal. Accidents are nevertheless frequent. This part of the training is to show the captive that man is responsible for giving food.

That same evening fires were lit all around the elephant, who was given the test of horror. There is nothing that frightens beasts more than fire, and the wild elephant was forced to remain painfully extended, surrounded by crackling, flaming bonfires of bamboo. Burning torches of dry cane were passed all along his body

and over his head to make him accustomed to fire. This operation lasted for three nights alternated with great tickling sessions. Elephants, despite their rough appearance, have an exceedingly sensitive skin; a common house fly biting an elephant will draw blood! It is therefore necessary to take the tickle out of the elephant, otherwise he would never tolerate anyone on his back. With great poles the elephant was rubbed and tickled till, screaming, it nearly went mad.

While the tickling and fire training lasted, an age-old religious ceremony was carried on by all those present. To appease the gods of the jungles it is necessary that for the life of each creature taken from the forest, two be returned. Two chickens were therefore set free amid chanting and noisy rejoicing around the captive elephant. This noise and commotion further helped to accustom him to humans. These festivities, accompanied by drums and pipes, were carried on right through the night.

On the sixth or seventh day after his capture, the true training of the wild elephant begins. He has now learned how to master his fear of fire, has been rid of his ticklishness, and has become accustomed to man and to human voices. Although it may seem cruel to inflict such torture on a wild beast, it has proved the most rapid and satisfactory way to make him manageable. One must not forget that an elephant weighs five tons and can cause great ruin with its tremendous strength; it is therefore no unnecessary precaution to inflict on him a severe lesson.

On the seventh day the wild and terrified animal is taken between two tuskers and guided by them first right, then left to the orders of the *mahoud*. While this goes on, the *mahouds* sing the elephant a song whose naïve simplicity is evocative of the great jungles and man's struggle there.

"You are not *banwa* (wild) any more, now you are a *hathi* (a tame elephant), you belong to us," sings the *mahoud*. "If you behave well we will feed you, if you do not we will beat you." And in unison those around hit the captive elephant with sticks and poles.

The elephant is then taught, one by one, the commands that he must obey all his life:

Kneel down	<i>beit</i>
Back	<i>pechu</i>
Stop	<i>dbut</i>
Break an overhead branch	<i>upoor dale</i>
Smash	<i>mar doob</i>

In all, later in his life, the elephant is taught and obeys over a dozen command words.

On the second day of this training between two elephants, a courageous *mahoud* slowly swings himself onto the back of the elephant, far down toward his rump, where he remains all through that day's training. The following day the *mahoud* moves a little closer to the head, till after about six days the elephant allows him to sit on its neck. The most amazing thing about training elephants is the rapidity with which they learn. After the fifteenth day of training the elephants are sold and driven away, having passed in less than three weeks from being completely wild to being tame!

The speed with which an elephant learns may have to do with the great intelligence attributed to these animals. Elephants have been known to have long memories and often have demonstrated initiative and a certain form of wits far beyond the capacity of most animals. Wild elephants often live to be a hundred, while tame ones rarely live longer than sixty or seventy years.

Arrangements were made so that in most of its details the process of elephant catching and taming could be filmed. Boris, accompanied by Inger and Mishka, then went on to arrange also for Lowell Thomas, who by now had arrived in person, the filming of tiger shooting at the camp of the Maharajah of Cooch Behar.

The camp, equipped with large "Swiss cottage" tents, was in the Dharan district of Assam, a mere three miles from the border of Bhutan. On the evening of his arrival Boris spent many hours with

Willard Van Dyke discussing plans. At eleven P.M. Boris left the director's tent to go to his own. On walking outside he smelled the odor of tiger, which is like that of a hundred tomcats. He quickly walked over to his tent, where Inger and Mishka were sleeping. Boris grabbed his rifle, which was leaning by the entrance, and a large torch. He told his wife that he thought he smelled a tiger. Inger replied that she had tried to call him because she heard something growling behind the tent.

When Boris turned his torch on outside, to his amazement he saw two tigers standing fifteen feet away; instead of bolting they just stared at the lamp. Boris called Van Dyke, who came out in turn and saw them also. In fact, for fifteen minutes the curious tigers (no doubt quite young) just stared and remained by the camp, giving everyone an opportunity to look at them. In the end Boris actually had to shoo them away. This was a little better luck than the director had expected.

It was decided on the following day that the crew should visit a local tea plantation where some of the film would be shot. The party was about to leave camp for this purpose when it drove a jeep with two tea planters with the news that a man-eater had been bothering them, and that this brute had killed a laborer the preceding day. When the crew went over to their plantation it was able to inspect the spot where the laborer had been killed. He had been carried away by a tiger at midday in front of all the other workers. Boris followed the bloody tracks into the jungle, which at that particular spot was exceedingly steep and ravined, covered with thick bushes and interlocked with vines and creepers. After a hundred yards or so he came upon the blood-stained loincloth of the laborer. Boris decided that it was too dangerous to continue and that he had better turn back, as the land gave the tiger every chance of charging him.

The same afternoon *machans* were erected over a live buffalo bait and other platforms arranged around for the cameras. Nothing turned up, however, and the vigil was eventually called off.

Then, two days later, the tiger attacked again. Two brothers had gone to fell a tree on the edge of the jungle when the tiger suddenly appeared, grabbed one of the men and started to drag him into the cover of the forest. The second brother, on seeing what was happening, had the nerve to grab his large axe and run after the tiger, giving it a blow on the head. The tiger let go of its intended human lunch and disappeared. The victim had been badly bitten on the shoulder and was all scratched up, but with adequate treatment he survived.

With all these happenings the crew from Hollywood were starting to get a little nervous. Suddenly Boris had another idea. He remembered having heard that there existed in the North East Frontier Agency of India—that remote, largely unexplored tract north of Assam and east of Bhutan—a primitive tribe that still captured tigers with nets and spears!

Tiger catching in this manner had been the sport of the ancient kings of Assam. Boris suggested that he go and collect the entire tribe and bring it to the tiger camp. Everybody said this was impossible, although they agreed that for filming it would be unique if it could be pulled off.

Not disheartened, Boris drove out to the area where these natives lived and by paying the chieftain a fee was able to cart back the entire tribe of 550 men, packed into 12 buses, over 150 miles of small trails to the camp. During Boris's absence, bait had been tied for tigers in the jungle around the camp. Several kills were reported and one particular tiger, recognized by its pug marks, had killed four buffalo.

Stout rope nets were set up in a wide circle, with the scantily clothed tribesmen behind them, armed with ferocious-looking spears. Then a funnel of white cloth four feet high was strung up, making a passageway into the net-encircled area of open savannah. Towers were erected all around the nets for filming, and elephants were then sent out to beat a tiger into the trap.

Slowly the tiger was edged into the catchers' circle of nets. It

slipped through the entrance and the signal was immediately given to close the gap. Once in the trap, the tiger twice rushed the nets, and in one of these attempts was badly wounded with a spear. Boris, who had driven into the enclosure with his Land Rover, got out and gave the animal the *coup de grace*.

During the filming of the tiger hunting scenes Boris not only busied himself in setting the stage for the cameras and organizing the camps, but went as far as preparing for Lowell Thomas and the sponsors of the film, for breakfast, "tiger steaks à la Boris," a rare delicacy that, broiled on charcoal, received great applause.

Not all Boris's filming projects, however, were as successful as this one. In 1961 he received a visit from a famous French producer who wanted to shoot in the terai one of the first French superproductions. At first all had worked well. Boris put his capacities as organizer at the company's disposal. In no time he had performed the incredible, gathering 118 elephants and 170 Tibetan ponies, and erecting in the jungle a village with forty huts, two of which were three stories high. Then from all over Nepal Boris engaged, through the British embassy, three hundred ex-Gurkha soldiers, pensioners who came from the far corners of the land to be extras in the film. The producer's costume designer then set up headquarters in the hotel and engaged Nepalese tailors and other artisans, and four hundred flamboyant costumes had been made ready, along with swords, helmets, boots and shields.

At the camp in the terai all the elephants, their *mahouids* and tons of fodder were gradually assembled. The 170 Tibetan ponies were furnished with rented gold and silver Tibetan saddles; all was ready for the shooting of an impressive epic. The main feature was to be a battle on elephant back and the destruction of a village by the 118 pachyderms.

The twenty-thousand-dollar initial payment by the producer against expenses, however, soon ran out. When the balance of the funds that had been promised to Boris had not yet arrived, frantic cables were exchanged. The producer promised the money for the

following week, later cabling that the funds had been cleared through to India. In the meantime the elephants kept on eating, the Gurkhas grew impatient, and the bills started pouring in. The making of the four hundred costumes, the mock arms and boots soon had every artisans' guild in Kathmandu sending delegations to collect their dues.

The producer's representative flew off to Delhi. More cables came in, one reading, "Funds ready, arriving soon." Boris had started paying out of his own pocket.

Then the final blow came: a cable from the producer reading, "You know, Boris, that I will never let you down. Love." That was the end of it, the company had gone broke, and Boris was left with all the commitments to meet with his own funds.

The Gurkhas wanted their full salary. Boris flew down with Charles Wiley and found an angry group of drunken men with shiny, dangerous looking *kukris*, the lethal, banana-shaped Nepalese knives. The Gurkhas were paid off with a quarter of their salary, but still grumbled and protested. With much nerve Colonel Wiley shouted a command, asking the men to fall in by platoons. The rugged discipline of the Gurkhas showed and Boris and Colonel Wiley just managed to escape alive from the angry crowd. All Boris's savings went down the drain and he then had to borrow money at 4 percent interest a month, an exorbitant rate but one fairly usual in Asia. Boris had been rooked in a grand manner while the producer, oblivious to the harm he had done in Nepal, escaped paying his debts through legal devices.

Back in Kathmandu, Boris was soon caught up anew in the life of the valley. He first addressed himself to the task of remodeling part of the Royal Hotel, whose austere décor was in dubious taste; it was filled with the worst of Victorian furniture and badly needed an overhaul. Using Nepalese craftsmen, he built a dining room that reflected the atmosphere of the city with its carvings in dark wood, and kept busy expanding the hotel in other ways to meet the increasing flow of tourists to Nepal.

By now mountaineering and exploring expeditions in Nepal had become ever more numerous, and the valley was continuously rocked by political intrigue. Since the fall of the Ranas, government had succeeded government, and for a while it was impossible to know from one day to the next which minister was in office and which had been put on the black list. This unstable state of affairs was not changed until finally, in 1961, the King jailed the new prime minister, B. P. Koirala, and in a bloodless coup took the reins of Nepal into his own hands.

One of the biggest events in Boris's life in Kathmandu was the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II of England to Nepal. He was informed early in 1961 of the invitation that King Mahendra had extended to the Queen and Prince Philip. The small Himalayan kingdom, which had for more than a century maintained close, friendly relations with the British, and had been host to King George V in 1911, wanted to show again to a British monarch the splendor of its regal displays and its fabled tiger shoots.

The Queen's Shoot, as it later became known, was indeed to be a spectacle worthy of this purpose, a spectacle so magnificent, in fact, that it is certain that never again in history will such a show ever be produced. As at the coronation, Boris's services were to prove essential in the realization of the ambitious Nepalese plan.

Newspapers and magazines throughout the world have described, and published hundreds of photographs to illustrate, the spectacular pageantry and grandeur of this royal hunt. Little has been said, however, as to how this extraordinary affair was staged and organized.

Hunting in Nepal had until 1960 been exclusively a royal privilege, and in the days of the Ranas the tiger shoots in the terai had already acquired the reputation of being the most elaborate, fabulous and luxurious in the world. King George V's party on his visit to Nepal in 1911 had shot thirty-nine tigers, eighteen rhinos and four bears.

In fact, tiger shooting in India was but a pale affair compared to those royal shoots in Nepal. In 1961, while all around the world high taxes and democratization were reducing the splendor of pageantry, Nepal got ready to produce the largest shoot in its history and give Queen Elizabeth II a welcome that none of her own subjects could have staged.

The Nepalese army was mobilized for the task of setting up the shooting camp. The spot chosen was on the banks of the Rapti River in the Chitawan Valley, at a place called Megauli. This was deep in the heart of the great terai jungle. For years the terai has been known for its malaria and other dangerous fevers. A land of snakes, scorpions and diseases, it also abounds in all of Nepal's fabulous game.

A road was bulldozed through the jungle to the proposed camp site, and in virgin forest an airstrip twelve hundred yards long was built. The actual camp site was then measured out: a mile-square tract of land on the edge of the Rapti River. For days bulldozers toiled and clanked, taking off two inches of topsoil from the vast camp site. Coolies were then sent with baskets to pick up every scorpion, bug and beetle from the ground. Aerial sprays then rid the entire vicinity of flies, malaria-carrying mosquitoes and the other remaining insects. After this operation, selected turf taken from other parts of the terai was laid down over the now aseptic camp site. Steamrollers were hauled in and for days huffed and puffed to flatten the newly laid down turf, and the fire engines of Kathmandu were then mobilized to water the grass, making it a lush green.

In the center of the camp a model of Mount Everest was erected of local stone decorated with colored sand. A large avenue was then drawn out and streets at right angles to it were traced in the soil. On either side of the main causeway, facing toward the central model of Mount Everest, were erected the tent palaces of Queen Elizabeth and King Mahendra of Nepal. From the airport large moss-covered arches led the way to the royal tents. On the eight-

foot-high screens of the royal compounds were painted the arms of King Mahendra and the British crown.

On the Queen's side of the central avenue was erected an entire village of large tents for her retinue, and a separate large camp for the press. On the King's side a large camp was provided for the Nepalese royal bodyguards, along with tents for the numerous attending generals and other officials, and a large encampment for Boris, his servants and the field kitchens. Three separate dining-room tents were also erected. The Queen's enclosure measured 150 yards square. At the entrance rose the tents of Her Majesty's aides-de-camp; and on passing beyond them into the enclosure one found a large campfire surrounded by comfortable benches covered with cushions.

To call the Queen and Prince Philip's residence at the camp a "tent" is slightly to underestimate the cloth palace that was to be theirs for one day and one night. Built a foot and a half off the ground, the "tent" comprised eleven rooms connected by corridors: a large sitting room draped in colored prints, two bedrooms, one for the Queen and one for Prince Philip, two dressing rooms, and two bathrooms, two toilets and two additional rooms, one for the Queen's lady-in-waiting and one for Prince Philip's aide-de-camp. All the fittings of the Queen's rooms were pink and all those of Prince Philip, blue. This included the bathtubs and toilets and all the small trimmings. The entire camp had hot and cold running water, not to mention the flush toilets. This subject was not overlooked, for Boris had often heard about the amusing contretemps that had occurred on the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to India. In the palace of a maharaja a new toilet had been installed for the royal visitors, but an oversight had failed to supply water to the overhead tank. At the last minute, no doubt to save face, a servant was placed above the privy with a small hole to spy upon the royal guests. When they pulled the chain he poured down from his perch a bucketful of water.

King Mahendra's camp had none of these shortcomings, and

everything was as modern and as comfortable as could be. A special well was drilled to supply the camp, and night and day large open fires heated great tanks of water for the guests.

The list of British guests included Foreign Secretary Lord Home (later Prime Minister of England) and his wife; Rear Admiral Christopher Bonham Carter, Prince Philip's treasurer; and Sir Michael Adeane, Queen Elizabeth's secretary. These last two members of the royal party were to play a significant role in the events of the days to come.

As final preparations in the camp, the night before the arrival of Her Majesty flowering trees were uprooted in the jungle and planted along the avenues!

While these preparations were going on in the terai, Boris was frantically making his own arrangements. He had been given short notice of the Queen's visit and had immediately flown down to Hong Kong, where in a frantic, ten-day shopping spree he purchased forty-eight tons of goods, not only food, but also such items as freezers, camp stoves, camp chairs and other equipment, which he packed and shipped by steamer to Calcutta in record time. With this immense and unusual cargo Boris began a rush against time. He flew to Calcutta and there learned to his dismay that the ship with the precious, urgently needed goods had been indefinitely delayed at Chittagong, the port of East Pakistan. Boris rushed to see the Pakistani High Commissioner and arranged that the ship be no longer held up but immediately sent on to Calcutta.

When the freighter arrived at the Sand Heads of the Hooghly River Boris achieved miracles with the usually slow Calcutta port authorities and the habitually meddlesome customs officers, who were accustomed to taking their time. The moment the freighter arrived in sight a pilot rushed out to meet it and steer it into port. At the docks all was prepared to unload the vessel. But time was running short; the ship arrived on February 11 and the Queen and her party were due in Nepal on the 26th. It seemed impossible that

the vital supplies could reach Kathmandu in time. At the docks the cargo was to be loaded directly from the vessel onto trucks, but the day the ship arrived it rained—and when it rains in Calcutta the dock men do not work. The rain lasted for three days. Finally, in exceeding haste, everything was piled onto the waiting trucks, which in a convoy of nine rumbled off to the Nepalese border, a trip of some six hundred miles by road.

While the trucks drove up to Nepal, Boris flew back to Kathmandu. There a small plane had been placed at his disposal. He flew down two days later to the terai to check on his precious cargo. When he reached the frontier town of Raxaul he was informed that the bridge over the Segauli River had been washed away and that all the trucks were stranded. He immediately hired all available vehicles in Raxaul and made for the Segauli, fifteen miles away. The cargo was then shipped on primitive boats across the river to the new trucks, which proceeded on to Kathmandu. On February 23, three days before the arrival of the Queen and her retinue, all essential supplies and equipment finally reached the Royal Hotel.

Those next three days were spent in frantic preparations. The forty-eight tons of goods were rapidly sorted and expedited either to the camp in the terai by plane, to the Singha Durbar, where in the famed crystal room the King's banquet was to be held, or to Sital Niwas, the newly appointed and redecorated guest house. Queen Elizabeth was to give her banquet in the large baroque dining room and palatial drawing room of Laxmi Niwas, the second palace in the valley after the Singha Durbar, which belonged to the descendants of the last Rana maharaja.

While Boris had been rushing around, Kathmandu again gave itself a complete spring cleaning. As for the coronation, buildings were redecorated, streets widened and paved, trees cut down and houses pulled to the ground. Newspapers in England openly attacked the royal party for participating in a shoot that not only was cruel and outmoded but that also taxed the budget of a small, un-

derdeveloped country. Whether it was for this reason, or simply a coincidence no one knows for sure, but it was a great disappointment to everyone in Nepal when Prince Philip turned up wearing a handsome uniform—and a bandage on his right forefinger.

The Prince, it was announced, had an infected “trigger finger” and would not be able to shoot!

The first great event after the arrival of Queen Elizabeth and her party was King Mahendra’s banquet in the fantastic crystal hall of the Singha Durbar. This hall, the pride of Kathmandu, is decorated with heavy crystal chandeliers and has as its central attraction a large crystal fountain and a crystal grandfather clock. Here, with an army of servants, Boris served the first elaborate meal of the Queen’s sojourn, which included fresh caviar sent by air from the Caspian Sea in a relay race by international airlines.

The banquet went along smoothly. When saddle of *muntjak* (barking deer) was served, the King called Boris to explain what *muntjak* is. Prince Philip, seated next to the King, asked, “Are you Boris?” and went on to say that he had heard of Boris’s overland luxury cruise project. For five minutes Boris chatted with the Prince, who informed him that the Duke of Norfolk had imported barking deer to his estate in England and that some had got away and occasional reports were heard of barking deer being shot in the English countryside. The Prince remembered this conversation, for three weeks after the royal visit Boris received from the British embassy a copy of the magazine *The Field* in which had been singled out an article relating to a hunter having shot a *muntjak* in England.

The following morning Boris saw to the serving of the royal breakfast, then rushed to the airport to fly down to the royal camp where the hunt would take place. The flowering trees had just been planted and all around the camp Gurkha soldiers of Nepal, with fixed bayonets, awaited the eminent guests.

To speak only of the hunting camp is to overlook the most fascinating aspect of this shoot, which was declared by the world’s

press to be the most spectacular such display ever seen. It was not the bathtubs, the immense camp, or flowering trees that made that day of shooting in the terai unforgettable. Nor was it the marksmanship of the hunters, which in fact was deplorable. It was the splendor of no less than 376 elephants that had been gathered all over the jungles of Nepal for the occasion. Never had so many elephants been assembled together in modern times, and they formed a truly incredible spectacle. Lined up one behind the other these elephants would have made a chain two miles long!

Many of these beasts were richly decorated and they formed an impressive living herd of gigantic proportions as they trumpeted and swayed with their *mahouds* and *pachwas* on their backs. The fame of the mighty shoots of Nepal had always stemmed especially from these tremendous beasts, which in the past, through court privilege, had been at the disposal of the Rana maharajas, and which were now available to King Mahendra.

Queen Elizabeth was taken by car to the jungle from the airfield; there on a saddle elephant she rode out to a large howdah elephant that had been prepared for her. In the meantime, in stately procession, hundreds of elephants had filed into the jungle, where the tigers were presumed to be lying beside their kills. There were elephants for all the foreign dignitaries, a dozen reserved for the press alone, and six bar elephants that Boris had set up as extensions of the Yak and Yeti. These bar elephants, with Inger and other girls serving as barmaids, circulated during the shoot, serving anything from beer to iced champagne to all the guests.

When the impressive caravan arrived at a designated spot marked out by the shikaris who had beat the bush the preceding day, they split in two, one elephant turning right, the other left, the double column fanning out and finally forming a gigantic circle. Trampling down bushes and trees, the pachyderms then moved in so as to form a vast circular trap enclosing the unsuspecting tigers. This ring of elephants side by side measured no less than a

mile in circumference. Two elephants loaded with white cloth passed inside the edge of the ring, dropping to the ground the white sheet, a yard high, that was to be strung up, forming a shiny barrier that the tigers would not dare to cross.

This complete, and once the Queen and the other royal guests had taken up their positions around the ring, six elephants penetrated into the ring to rouse the powerful beasts. The *mahouds* of these elephants then drove a tiger toward the guns. As Prince Philip could not shoot, the honor of the first tiger was given to Lord Home. Suddenly the tiger thrashed out of the tall grass, right where it should have been, within easy range of Lord Home who, from his howdah, aimed and fired. He missed; the infuriated tiger disappeared before the now nervous elephants. When he reappeared Lord Home missed again, then again, till finally, after having missed three times, he sought the help of Rear Admiral Carter and Sir Michael Adeane. They both fired simultaneously and dropped the tiger. This poor show of marksmanship in no way reduced the grandeur of the shoot, although the comic aspect of the matter greatly amused the press, to whom Lord Home confessed that he had never been on an elephant before and had seen tigers only in a zoo.

After the morning shoot the Queen retired to an open-air table on the banks of the Narayani River, where Boris served an exquisite meal. The Queen was offered twenty-two varieties of Nepalese game, including such gourmet delicacies as black partridge, wild boar shashlik, shredded vension curry, and rare florican crane. The guests went through this gastronomical tour de force of Boris's before the beautiful scenery of the river and the jungle and the white backdrop of the great Himal Chuli range.

The afternoon was reserved for shooting a rhinoceros, unfortunately one of the last few of the once numerous one-horned rhinos of Nepal. Again Lord Home asked the assistance of Carter and Adeane and the three together dropped the rhino in his tracks.

That evening the royal couple were entertained by the King in

the large dining tent. There Queen Elizabeth congratulated Boris on the peacock pilau he had served, along with other exotic dishes.

The Queen remained at the camp overnight, enjoying herself tremendously, filming the shoot herself and racing Prince Philip back to camp on elephant back. Before departing, the Queen told radiant King Mahendra that it had been "one of the most exciting days of my life."

As the royal party was about to leave, Boris suggested that all the elephants be lined up along the route of the guests. This took some time and occasioned a short delay, which was nevertheless worthwhile, for never before and probably never again in hunting history will such a spectacular sight be seen as those 376 mighty elephants, decorated and painted, with gold and silver howdahs on their backs, forming a massive, living wall along the royal route, and lifting their trunks in a salute as the Queen slowly drove along.

From the camp the Queen flew directly out to Pokhara to catch a close glimpse of the Annapurna Range. Boris flew ahead, supervised a meal there, then rushed back to Kathmandu, where at a reception in the British embassy he was given an autographed photograph of the Queen and Prince Philip in recognition of the job he had performed. From the British embassy Boris rushed off to Laxmi Niwas, where the Queen was to entertain King Mahendra at a banquet again composed and served by Boris. After the meal, at coffee, Queen Elizabeth came up to Boris to thank him, and Boris, on departing, kissed her hand, as he had done before, against all rules of protocol. It now appeared that the Queen appreciated the czarist gallantry, as she extended her hand to be kissed.

From Laxmi Niwas Boris charged out to prepare the final reception at Singha Durbar. Finding no car to take him there, he ran out into the street hoping to be picked up by some friends. In fact, a fire engine came by and to the wail of the siren and clanging of bells he arrived just before the Queen to set everything up.

Boris had hardly slept for a week, and was by now completely

exhausted. The friendly atmosphere of Nepal had allowed it to appear as if Boris had been personally receiving the Queen, and as in the past, Boris had vastly contributed to the success of the trip, from the standpoint of both the host and the visitors. When the last party ended, Boris beckoned all the guests onto the large open gallery of the Singha Durbar. Then, opening twelve bottles of champagne, he proposed a toast to Their Majesties the King of Nepal and the Queen of England. The toast was warmly accepted and Boris, when he had drunk, in Russian fashion threw his glass over the balustrade, and all the guests followed suit. Then only did Boris remember that the glasses were not the King's, but his own! The royal tour had come to an end.

XIV Artist of the Unusual

In Kathmandu there was never a dull day for us. While Marie-Claire explored the intricate bazaars and put to good use, at my expense, the talents of the Newar jewelers, I spent my mornings more economically, learning Tibetan in preparation for an expedition I had been planning to the remote and little-known kingdom of Mustang, a mysterious region of northwest Nepal that still had its own ruler, a Tibetan-speaking king who lived, so I was told, in a fortified city.

With the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese the Tibetan population of the valley had been greatly increased by the refugees. Reduced to extreme poverty, many made their way to the Royal Hotel. There they were greeted by the combined Scottish and Danish accent of Mrs. Scott, Boris's mother-in-law, who after strange discussions would purchase the relics and jewels they had come to sell.

Mrs. Scott, who had come to live with her daughter at the Royal Hotel, had rapidly grown famous in the valley. Energetic and lively, although not "all that young," she would police the hotel in the absence of Boris. Her headquarters was a small, dark, damp room on the ground floor where she had her Tibetan shop. To stop and chat with Mrs. Scott in this dimly lighted hideout was always delightful. Her den was covered from wall to ceiling with Tibetan

carpets, silver saddles, human-bone necklaces, great copper trumpets and countless idols. From all this emanated a gamey smell of Tibetan butter that contrasted sharply with Mrs. Scott's own impeccable appearance.

"Ma" Scott's generosity was equaled only by her business sense. With great humor she would wangle high prices for the Tibetan objects that she sold for the benefit of the refugees. Invariably when she had succeeded in obtaining from us an unusually exorbitant price for her wares, she would shower us with gifts taken from little hiding places in her den. She always had a stock of luxuries brought up from Hong Kong to give away as presents, among them such items as nylon stockings and other Western goods that were otherwise not to be found in the valley.

The fiercest Tibetan soldiers and the most hardboiled and rugged merchants from Lhasa soon came to regard "Ma" Scott with awe. She was a match for the shrewdest, and it was an amusing sight to see her chase away the occasional rough and intrusive Tibetans, who sometimes got on her nerves.

As time slowly went by the valley began slightly to affect our sanity. The company of Boris, the incredible daily life at the hotel, and probably the altitude had, in a mild way, undermined our judgment. At first we had lived in relative calm in the white bungalow in the hotel park. When the pigs had been withdrawn we knew a little bliss.

This did not last long. First we bought a Tibetan dog, then a second, then our rooms became cluttered with strange objects of art, dragon-like wood carvings and Tibetan scrolls and books. This went on until finally we thought it necessary to acquire two small, wretched Himalayan bear cubs named Pugu and Pumo.

There are few hotels in the world where you can have a pet dog in your room. At the Royal Hotel, though, no one minded this. Quite the contrary. Our having two small Tibetan terriers attracted no attention at all. It was only after our menagerie came to include the two black bear cubs that Boris paid any attention to what was

going on in the bungalow. And then he only sent down two extra servants along with the proper formula of Horlick's and buffalo milk to help my now overworked wife feed her monstrous babies.

There are said to be six seasons in Nepal, but during our entire six-month stay at the Royal Hotel we could only describe the weather of the valley by the word "spring." Whether in winter or the monsoon, morning inevitably saw the sun rise over the dew-covered lawns of the hotel to warm the brisk, cool valley air. Flowers bloomed all year round and we saw two harvests reaped, one in July and one in November, in the rice fields about the town.

Outside of the monsoon season it practically never rains in the valley, a condition that has given birth to many sacred "rain bringing" ceremonies. On the banks of the Baghmati River we witnessed the most striking of these, the milking of cows. The milk of these sacred animals was allowed to mix with the water of the shallow river, and as Nepal is still a country of magic and superstition, the gods after such a demonstration brought down beneficial showers. In the twelve years Boris has been in Nepal, he told us, he had never known this strange ceremony to fail to bring about rain.

Practically every week a new festival would stir the valley and add an unusual note to the town. In November came the Devali festival, when every temple and building was outlined by the flickering lights of oil lamps. This was followed by the Holi festival, which lasted for three days. During this time the entire population of the valley, including the foreigners, were transformed into red-faced, red-haired monsters, as adults and children alike threw upon each other bright red powder that it is considered sacrilegious to brush off. On other occasions immense chariots, fifteen feet tall, with heavy wooden wheels, were driven ceremoniously around the narrow streets. In nearby Patan we were fortunate enough to see a festival that is held only once every five years. Known as the Panchdan, it is accompanied by bringing out into the street hundreds of gold and copper Buddhas, which are then carried about for

all to gaze upon. These were the same strange, richly cloaked divinities that had been the mute witnesses to the King's coronation. On other occasions hundreds of goats are herded in from the surrounding countryside and slaughtered in bloody sacrifice to the lingam shrines of Shiva. In this strange atmosphere Boris sets about his daily occupations.

The last days of our stay were as exciting as the first, and the only routine aspect of our life was the occurrence of the unusual and the unexpected. It was hard to believe that Boris had once been a ballet dancer, a familiar of the artists' cafés of Paris and a socialite in Calcutta. To us it seemed that he had always known the life he now led in Kathmandu.

The usual excitement begins each day with the hum of a plane that reverberates in the thin air, allowing everyone in the valley to set their watches. The "sky boats," as they were called by the Tibetans, play a vital role in Kathmandu as they bring the mail and the new faces, the two principal preoccupations of the foreign colony and the only links between the valley and the outside world. For Boris the planes mean unexpected surprises. To Kathmandu the entire world seems to flock, and almost every plane load brings to Boris an old friend or acquaintance or some remarkable personality.

At the top of the treacherous spiral staircase that leads to Boris's hidden flat, two servants attired in white, with blue belts and black Nepalese hats, guard his door. The plane has no sooner landed than one can hear the rumbling of motors as in great speed the newly arrived visitors are driven to the hotel. Immediately afterward someone knocks on Boris's door, perhaps a friend of his from Odessa whom he has not seen for years, or some acquaintance from Calcutta who has at last decided to visit Nepal. The door no sooner closes behind this visitor than another knock comes. In walks an anthropologist about to set out for the hills, who wants ten large specimens of Boris's fruit cake. Then in comes the German ambassador, who wants a new room, followed by a pitiful-

looking domestic who wants a ten-cent raise. Then the mail arrives: letters from the National Geographic Society, requests for advice from climbers, and reservations for tours.

The hotel cook, who was with Boris in Calcutta, waddles in, and while Boris shows off Tibetan Buddhas to the anthropologist, he dictates the menu of the day and sorts the letters into disorderly piles in which they remain till Inger gets up energy to file and sort them. The gardener then comes in and Boris, who has been dressed since dawn, but in a pair of shorts, goes to his room and puts on his vertical-striped bush shirt. He then bounces down the rattling spiral staircase, bumps into somebody important, says hello, beckons three Nepalese with briefcases to sit down and wait, and wanders to the reception desk. There he signs some papers and then goes out with the gardener to his private experimental garden to inspect the strawberries and the cauliflowers, the beans and the roses, set in long beds across the large open lawn. It is typical of Boris that he plants many things but forgets to collect the fruits of his efforts when they are ripe. His keen eyes examine the small shoots and he plucks a flower or two. He then jumps into a now battered Land Rover, which still carries the words "Solihull to Nepal" on its side. Everyone in the valley knows about the obscure town of Solihull, although they have heard of nothing else in England save perhaps London.

Boris, with a servant next to him, drives through Kathmandu to transact some business. This accomplished, he rattles back to the Royal. By now lines of people have accumulated on his expected route through the hotel to ask questions, favors and advice. Boris answers all in kind, accurate words before reaching his room. There Inger is already entertaining six people newly arrived, among whom are a nervous Italian countess who knew Boris in Shanghai, an American couple from Long Island, an overdressed French engineer speculating in the sale in Paris of Nepalese jewelry, and a rugged, bearded fellow who has just come from a mountain trek.

Boris makes his entrance, retaining a few callers and inviting others for cocktails in the evening. The trekker is given a free room and the casual tourists advice on where to go and what to see.

The French ambassador then arrives with his wife and some friends, the engineer disappears, the trekker remains behind, and Boris has a servant produce a bottle of Pernod. In comes General Kiran, the greatest hunter of Nepal, tall and dignified, with questions about the new shooting camp in the terai. Will Boris be able to come shooting Saturday? What about provisions? There is no whisky left but plenty of fodder for the elephants.

Father Moran is also likely to speed in with his, "Hi, Boris, I want to tell you something about the Tibetans."

In an apparent turmoil of confusion Boris unravels the innumerable problems of running a hotel, a pig farm, a shoot and an open house simultaneously. Relaxed and smiling, he has always genuine kindness to offer to anyone who comes to see him. Inger, on the other hand, frets and worries. Young Mishka is at boarding school in Switzerland. There is, as usual, no money in the kitty. "It's those pigs and that film producer," she confesses to me, while she explains to the ambassador's wife where to buy Tibetan idols.

The relaxed atmosphere is braced up by the shout, "The Royal Hotel is a madhouse," as Ma Scott rushes in brandishing a Tibetan banner, followed by two German tourists. The shrewdest woman in Kathmandu, Mrs. Scott, always trim and perfectly neat, mothers everyone's complaints.

"I'm the only person running this place," she comments. "Boris is a darling, but he has no time to chase after the servants. Why, I have to watch the chickens or the boys steal the eggs when they're laid. And you should see how dirty they get squatting in the garden in their uniforms. Oh, they make me so mad! But I'm not afraid of them. Boris, do you want to buy this *tanka*?"

"For heaven's sake, Ma, you know I can't," Boris replies. Ma then rushes down the stairs, the curio-hunting Germans in hot pursuit, to negotiate her bargains over a cup of tea that she takes with her dogs and the other pets that share her den.

Nicolas, Boris's youngest son, suddenly bursts into the room brandishing a vicious seventeenth-century Nepalese head chopper, with which he is violently menacing two urchins who usually work as ball boys at the tennis court. It is three o'clock when the bearer brings in the lunch and the cablegrams. Another film company wants Boris to help them shoot a picture in Nepal. "No," writes Boris over the request. Boris has had enough of films.

Films have never been too successful in Nepal, although the country beyond doubt offers the most remarkable setting possible. But till now all attempts have somehow failed owing to extraneous circumstances. Paramount in vain tried to film Han Suyin's *The Mountain Is Young*. Another firm wanted to do *A King in the Clouds*, a romantic story of a therapist's two-year stay with ailing King Tribhuvan in Kathmandu under the Rana regime. John Houston was anxious to film Kipling's story, *The Man Who Would Be King*, but none of these projects succeeded, and the most elaborate decor in the East, that of the valley, has so far been spared the ignominy of serving as a backdrop for gaudy film stars and obnoxious comedians.

Boris, when his pigs allow him to get away, still occasionally indulges his passion for shooting by going down, sometimes with the King or with small foreign parties, to the terai to pad a tiger or shoot leopard and deer. It was on one of these shoots that the elephant that was carrying Inger suddenly went *musth* as he came alongside a female "bar elephant." A drink in her hand, Inger, along with General Kiran and his son, were suddenly swept away in a stampede that would have ended in death for the three of them had not the *mahoud*, after cutting the runaway's head with great blows of his kukri, managed to stop the infuriated elephant just before it plowed into dense jungle.

After luncheon Boris scouts around the hotel preparing the evening reception to be held in the grand ballroom decorated with the weird portraits of bearded Ranas topped by their outsize jeweled helmets.

Nepal is small, and at the hotel Boris has played host to such

celebrities as former Presidium Chairman Voroshilov of Russia, Chou En-lai, the late Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Ayub Khan of Pakistan, and Crown Prince Akihito of Japan, not to mention every ambassador who has stayed at the hotel on coming up from New Delhi to present his credentials. Boris has seen at the Royal Hotel most of the dignitaries of the East, and has added many of them to his already incredibly long list of friends and acquaintances.

Each year brings exciting new projects in Nepal and finds Boris brewing up new schemes. Today Boris is as active as ever, and, as Inger had rightly predicted on my arrival, I was never able to have one quiet evening alone with him. . . . There was always someone to entertain. After having arrived at the same time as Hillary and the Russian cosmonauts, for the next four months I met new personalities every day, from Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, the German magnate, to George Patterson, the expert on Tibet, passing through the social registers of London, Paris, Rome and New York, the select membership rolls of the Alpine Club, the impressive names of great hunters, talented musicians and actors, lavish millionaires of international fame, and touring couples from Ohio, not to mention the sober elite of India, Thailand, Burma, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

What will Boris do next? No one can tell, and when asked such a question his usual reply is, "I'll have a bath." No one knows what goes on in Boris's mind, what surprising new project he will think of, or what folly will next occupy his attention. One might think that Boris, having already lived a full life, not to say ten full lives, would look forward to a calm future. This is not so, for in the tight coffers of his mind remains a seemingly inexhaustible store of plans and ideas. He has yet to realize his overland luxury caravan journey; he wants to stage more great shows and scenes; he has yet to finish his breeding farm and revels in plans for his plantations, his next shoots, trips to Europe, forthcoming visits of Russian bigwigs, express flights to Hong Kong, treks to remote areas of Nepal that he has not yet seen, and the need for modernization of the hotel.

In the evening he gathers acquaintances around him and when pressed will talk till the late hours of the night, recalling over caviar and vodka the days of Odessa, his father's stud farm, the gay parties with the ballet, the crowded avenues of Shanghai, the opium of Kratie, the tigers of Assam, the eccentricities of the Maharaja of Dumraon, the capture of tigers and elephants, parties at the zoo, the expedition to Hollywood, the Queen's Shoot, General Mahabir and King Tribhuvan, Massine, Balanchine, Hillary, the Russian escapees in Tibet, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Maharaj Prithy Singh, Anna Pavlova, Lady Diana Manners and countless others. But Boris never reveals all the truth—his most surprising stories, on which his legend has been built up, have always been understatements of the actual facts, and in the midst of his anecdotes Boris forgets to mention the true role he has played in all these strange circumstances.

I thought, as Boris's close friend, that I had grasped the essentials of his life, that I had heard all that was to be said. But then I discovered the evidence of whole chapters in his experience that were completely new to me, and knew there was a lot I had missed and a lot more to come. Looking through dusty suitcases, I encountered strange photographs: Boris as a child in Russia superbly capped in astrakhan before a magnificent estate; Boris as a young cadet; autographed photos of famous dancers; photos of Boris and Serge Lifar . . . and I began to wonder whether this was all the same Boris, rather than just different people or imaginary characters. When I investigated documents to correct facts and check on what seemed the improbable, I only encountered new details and even more striking revelations that Boris had overlooked or forgotten. There were also all the various anecdotes that had to remain off the record for reasons of politics, diplomacy or simply kindness. In Boris's life there is much that cannot be said, for his intimate connections with so many people have imposed upon him a certain obligation to respect confidences, a discretion that might be termed professional. What is more, everyone I met had some particular revelation or

anecdote about Boris, in all so many that they could not possibly all be told. Certainly not enough can be said of Boris's generosity and kindness. And surprisingly, despite the turmoil of his life, he has no enemies.

Boris's fame has now spread all over the world. Asia and the West recall his elegant 300 Club, politicians remember his influence with the princes and rulers of India and Nepal, Himalayan climbers like him and his name is gratefully remembered in their books and reports. The world of ballet also retains the memory of Boris, and many books on that art refer to his dancing career. Three articles in *Life* magazine have boosted in America his talents as an organizer of royal banquets and producer of gastronomic rarities in unusual places. Every one of his projects, from the scientific expedition to Hollywood to the land cruises from Europe to Nepal, has made the world press. In the narrow international society of big-game hunters Boris's prowess has been duly recorded, and far and wide his name crops up in conversations dealing with the unusual.

But amidst all this publicity, beyond this reputation created by rumor and enlarged by the thousands of tourists who now visit Nepal annually, one may still wonder where Boris himself stands—Boris as he really is.

For however amazing and unreal all his experiences may appear, there has remained behind the name Boris only one individual: an artist of the unusual, a man who is at his best in strange circumstances, working against incredible odds. Boris is also a way of life; he is a distiller of pleasure in its most violent, magnificent, exotic, and artistic forms. Because of such contrasts and the tremendous variety in his life, Boris, seen from afar, may appear either as a "*monstre sacré*" or as some obnoxious showman.

In fact, Boris is neither, and those who know his reputation, on meeting him for the first time are immediately disappointed to find in him a simple, unassuming, generous man—a polite, delightful host. But Boris is a compilation of contrasts. His happy-go-lucky

aspect hides violence and passion, his amiable ways conceal Boris the hard driver, of indefatigable energy. His late nights and drinking bouts in what often appears a loose life hide the disciplinarian who has retained his lessons from the cadet school and from Diaghilev. Boris the playboy is countered by Boris the artist and Boris the collector; Boris the raconteur by Boris the administrator.

If Boris's momentous life were his only claim to fame and recognition it would be a feeble one. Behind the sensational aspects of his activities, behind the vivid and exotic decors in which he has lived and acted, there lies the true tone of his life, the spirit that has made him act. It is here that Boris's true genius can be discovered. This Boris is deeply hidden behind a facade of tiger skins, long stories and friendly conversation. Yet there lie in Boris a truly magnetic mind and character that have been entirely responsible for casting under the spell of his charm thousands of individuals, from the famous and influential people he has known down to the humble servants who for twenty years have followed him from India to Nepal and through all the chaotic ups and downs of his life.

To many, Boris seems to escape analysis, and this is no doubt the cause of his being legendary. No one knows the whole truth about Boris, and this mystery accounts for the contradictory opinions one encounters about him. In the midst of a conversation he can often be caught closing his eyes, freezing still and looking beyond his interviewer into the confines of his secret mind. It is then that Boris thinks and acts, never giving explanations, and calling all his own tunes. In many ways one could find him Oriental.

"What is it really that you value?" I asked him, exasperated, one day. "What in your life have you particularly liked and appreciated? What do you hope to accomplish? What drives you on?"

Boris swept his arms around the hotel, toward the distant crest of the vast snowy summits, past the terai, and over the pornographic pagodas of Kathmandu. "All this," he said, "is a game."

To which the great drinker of the 300, the playboy of Holly-

wood, the happy-go-lucky adventurer, the reckless tiger hunter, ballet dancer and friend of rajahs and refugees added: "There is only one thing that counts: it's how many people you make happy."

Smiling, Boris turned away, picked up a Scotch and water, and headed toward a lonely-looking stranger, saying, "Have another!"

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