

MAY 20, 1968NELSON S. KNAGGS

The year was Nineteen Hundred and Fifty-six... It was an early August evening in Cincinnati. I had just returned from my office, loosened my collar and settled on the terrace with a cool drink to take a leisurely look at the Enquirer before dinner.

It was hot, and the star shaped sweet gum leaves hung motionless on their drooping stems. The cicadas fiddled out their incessant strumming. The heat would have seemed more oppressive, but the tinkling ice in my glass and the little fountain in my Japanese garden splashed musically, transporting me to an oasis sheltered from the waving heat wall that surrounded me. My little garden spot was completely sufficient making the whole world seem remote and distant.

Then a heading in the paper seemed to ZOOM OUT and demand my attention. An article on the coronation of a new king in the remote Kingdom of Nepal brought to the world the news that Mahendra, thirty-six year old son of King Tribuvana who had died in 1955, had been crowned in an elaborate week-long ceremony. The history of Nepal unfolded in the ensuing paragraphs... After nearly three hundred years this forbidden Kingdom had opened its doors to foreigners and a few Westerners had trudged across the mountains from India and found an unbelievable land of pagodas, temples and snow capped Himalayan mountain peaks; and, in a hidden valley, a strange capital named Khatmandu. Several hundred years ago, the prime minister of Nepal, who was of the Rana family, secured control of the Government; and for generations, this family ruled the Country, perpetuating its dynasty year after year. During the Rana control, the King was only a figurehead and was actually a captive in his own palace. The Ranas would not allow the Nepalese subjects to become educated or to leave the Country, as they did not want them to know about the outside world. No one was permitted to enter Nepal either. Nepal, like Tibet, was truly a forbidden country. Only the British made contact... after many years the Ranas finally allowed a few British people to come to Khatmandu and establish an out-post embassy.

But the situation was changed now...With the

aid of the British, King Tribuvana had escaped from his palace prison in 1950 and had been smuggled into India, at which time his subjects had revolted, overthrowing the Rana regime. After the King returned to his Country in triumph in 1951, he opened Nepal to the outside world...open, that is, if one cared to walk the treacherous paths that lead through the mountain passes, as there were no vehicular roads between Nepal and India at that time. But King Tribuvana ruled only a short time; and when he died in 1955, he left his throne to his son, Mahendra. The changes in the ruling power of Nepal, however, left the country still untouched by western civilization. THIS intrigued me....What a wonderful experience it would be to see this mysterious land before it had been tainted by our materialistic world!

I studied a globe and found Nepal tucked away on the north of India between China and Tibet. Mt. Everest, the highest peak in the world (unscaled at that time) rose over 29,000 feet on the border between Nepal and China.

Several days passed, and I could not seem to escape the picture of Nepal that had invaded my imagination. I was planning to go to India on the occasion of the dedication of a chemical and dyestuff plant built under a joint venture between our Company and an Indian Company. Why don't I take my vacation after the dedication and go to Nepal, I thought. But how does one get there? And how much time would it take?....Many questions crossed my mind.

If I went to Nepal, I certainly wanted to see the King. Well, of course, this was out of the question. He lives in a thousand room palace, and besides, the people of Nepal think he is a reincarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu.

The phone in my office rang significantly the next day...the caller was Charles P. Taft, who was then Mayor of Cincinnati. He wanted to know if I would be Chairman of the City's Columbus Day Ceremonies. I regretted that I must decline as I would be in India on October 12..."As a matter of fact," I said, "I am going to Nepal"....the words just came out like that. The Mayor was interested; and in his inquisitive manner inquired about my journey. I told him that I hoped to

see the King and asked if he would consider preparing an official greeting to him from the citizens of Cincinnati. His answer was in the affirmative, and the next day I went to his office to help draft the greeting. When it was finished with the gold seal and red ribbons affixed, it was a very handsome document. Several days later we obtained the correct spelling of King Mahendra's name and we inserted it in the proper place. The Mayor also gave me one of his famous gold keys to the City to present to the King. But at this point I still had no idea how I was going to get to Nepal, let alone see the King...But the feeling persisted that I was destined to go there.

Several days later I received a call from the State Department advising that Mr. John Sherman Cooper, then U. S. Ambassador to India, was in Washington and was coming to Cincinnati. The official advised that Mr. Cooper wished to see me concerning the dedication of the new chemical plant in India. When the Ambassador arrived in Cincinnati, I told him, also, of my plans to go to Nepal and asked if he could help me secure the proper papers to get into that Country and, possibly, to see the King. Ambassador Cooper informed me that at this point the U. S. did not have official diplomatic relations with Nepal but that work was progressing toward this goal. Nepal had just opened its first embassy in New Delhi; and he stated that he would arrange to introduce me to the Nepalese Ambassador to India when I arrived there. From this point on, everything would be up to me. The encouragement that he offered, meager though it might seem, was sufficient to send me delving more deeply into my plans to go to Nepal.

I scoured through the libraries searching for literature on this remote kingdom. To my surprise, very little information was available on this country--what I did find was very sketchy.

The hot August days in Cincinnati swept by rapidly, and the cool, glistening rains of September came to revive the browning grasses and quench the cracking earth, reminding me that I had less than a month left before leaving for India. More and more I thought about Nepal. Then one day I imagined myself in the Royal Palace facing the King, presenting the Key

to the City of Cincinnati and the documents of greetings from our Mayor. Somehow, the document did not seem quite sufficient to give to a royal monarch who lived in a fabulous palace and wore a two million dollar jewelled crown....But what else could I present to the King? Then it came to me. Why not a watch? A Gruen watch made in Cincinnati.

Without wasting anymore time I picked up the telephone and called the Vice President in Charge of Sales of Gruen and told him my story, stating that I was going to see the King of Nepal. I was taking a special document from Mayor Charles P. Taft and a gold key to our City. Would the Gruen Co. consider giving the King a Gruen watch inscribed to the King from the Citizens of Cincinnati? I explained that this would have a two-target effect--not only would it be a symbol of good will to the Country of Nepal from our citizens; but if I was successful, I would try to get a picture of the King with the watch and Gruen could use it in a top-level publicity and advertising campaign. The Vice President said, "Come down to our office tomorrow."

The next day I went to Gruen's executive offices and related my story again to the President, the Public Relations Director and Sales Manager. They were intrigued with the idea and asked many questions. Finally, I said, "You know, you can not give His Majesty a Mickey Mouse Watch....he lives in a fabulous palace and is one of the few real kings still living in regal splendor." The President opened his safe and pulled out a large flat drawer lined with purple velvet. Gleaming like golden coins were some two dozen custom made watches. Right in the center was a handsome glittering thin white gold watch with eighty diamonds circling the face. Gulping slightly, I pointed to the diamond studded watch and said, "This is the watch you should give to the King." The three men looked at each other, then one said, "But, Mr. Knaggs, you know this is the most expensive watch we have ever made." "That is all the more reason that this should be the King's watch," I replied. By this time one of the men had lifted the watch from the case and handed it to me to examine. It sparkled like a miniature tiara. "Has a King ever owned a Gruen before?" I asked.

"Not to my knowledge," someone replied.

"Then this could be a real 'first' for you," I continued earnestly.

"Mr. Knaggs," the President smiled, "you can have the watch for the King. Tell us how you want it engraved."

The ice was broken. As I left the Gruen Company and headed back toward my office, I suddenly thought---What if I never get to Nepal? What if I can not have an audience with the King?...What if? But the excitement of the challenge just seemed to spur me onward...toward the fabled kingdom of Nepal.

In a few days the watch was delivered to me, and I made the final frantic preparations for my long journey to India and Nepal.

Then, two days before my departure, I received a letter from Ambassador Cooper in India. As I read his message my heart sank. Slowly I read, "I am sorry that I will not be able to attend the dedication ceremony of the Amar Dye-Chem Chemical Plant in Bombay. I will be on my way back to the U. S. A. on that date. Our President, Mr. Eisenhower, has called my back to run for the Senate in Kentucky. He thinks that as a Republican I have a chance of defeating my Democratic opponent. There will be no U. S. Ambassador in India when you arrive, but I have instructed the First Secretary of our Embassy to attend the dedication and have told him to do what he can to assist you in meeting the Nepalese Ambassador in New Delhi..." This was bad news, I thought, but nevertheless I could not give up at this point. Finally, I departed--armed with over 5,000 feet of 16 mm. motion picture film, my cameras, a kit of special medicines, rough clothes and heavy shoes, as well as a tuxedo and the diamond watch tucked safely in my inside coat pocket. I winged my way across the Atlantic to Paris, Rome, Cairo, Karachi, finally touching down in the glaring white light of Bombay....

Passing through customs, I brushed shoulders with handsome black bearded sikhs with pale lime, pink and saffron colored turbans; small thin Indians dressed in baggy white dhoties; barefoot hawkers; lithe Indian girls wrapped in bright colored, flowing saris. There was a Babel of voices as Hindi, Gujarati and English

blended in an exciting hum of Oriental octaves. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a turbaned snake charmer seated cross-legged on the sidewalk playing his strange flute; a weaving cobra emerged from his basket and darted toward the master.

Then I saw my Indian friends waiting for me. Mr. J. H. Doshi and others stepped forward from the maze of strange faces. They placed garlands of flowers round my neck in traditional Indian fashion, and I was whisked to the old Taj Mahal Hotel.

In a few days the dedication of the new chemical plant took place before several thousand people, including dignitaries from many parts of India who converged on the plant for this auspicious event. It was a gala affair with inspiring speeches, the planting of dedication trees and much feasting. A huge white tent had been erected in the Garden, and great six-foot blocks of ice, colored with red, yellow, blue and green dyes, encircled the tent. Behind them large electric fans blew air over the melting ice to air condition the tent. The dedication ended. A new industry had started in India. This plant has tripled in size since that date, furnishing hundreds of jobs for Indians who before were working on starvation wages. Many American ideas have been incorporated in the operation. Clean Company houses for workers who were living in mud huts have been erected. Educational facilities and organized recreation headquarters have been installed. An esprit de corps permeates the entire company. The dignity of the workers has been raised to a happy living level....all because of the dream of one imaginative Indian.

The dedication was over, and the crowds dispersed with a gay holiday air. The red sun had lost most of its power and rested on a green horizon, for it was the end of the monsoon season.

I had met the First Secretary of the U. S. Embassy during the dedication and now we talked briefly about Nepal. He advised me to come to see him at the Embassy in New Delhi when I finished my work and he promised to do all he could to arrange an appointment with the new Nepalese Ambassador to India.

A week of conferences and social engagements passed quickly...The diamond watch ticked musically on in my inside pocket. When my work was completed, I flew to the capital of India, New and Old Delhi with its Red Fort, graceful towers and palaces and buildings of the powerful Moghuls who had once conquered India.

Finally, I was escorted to the Nepalese Embassy and introduced to the Ambassador who was dressed in a dark Western Coat, a high necked shirt and close-fitting white jodphurs. It was a terse moment for me. Our Secretary excused himself and left me alone with an interpreter and the Ambassador. Slowly and carefully I stated my mission, explaining I had a special message and gift for His Majesty King Mahendra from Mr. Charles P. Taft, Mayor of my City and son of a former President of the United States and brother of the powerful and good Senator Robert A. Taft. The Ambassador listened carefully.

"Shri Knaggs," he said, using the salutation of high honor, "I will do what I can for you. The King is very difficult to see as he is busy with the affairs of State. Please come back next month and by then I hope I can give you some information."

"But, Mr. Ambassador," I said, "I have only a few weeks left...I am on my vacation and I can not stay in India for another month. I must return to the United States and I am sure the people of my Great City will be disappointed if I can not deliver this special gift to the King..." I knew I must plead my cause well, and I drew out the red velvet box containing the watch and handed it to the Ambassador. "This is the gift for the King." The diamonds caught a ray of light sending a shower of multi-colored sparks from the case.

The Ambassador's eyes lighted up. "His Majesty surely will be most pleased," he said. "I will try to contact the palace in Khatmandu. Come back tomorrow." "But, Mr. Ambassador," I said, "Khatmandu is far away. How can you contact the palace?"

"Shri Knaggs," the Ambassador replied, carefully holding the shining Gruen watch, "we have one single strand of telephone wire running from the palace

through the plains and across the mountains into this Embassy. Sometimes we can raise the palace in an hour, but sometimes it takes a week or even two weeks. You see, the wire breaks with the landslides and snowfalls and it sometimes takes a long time to locate the break."

But I persisted, "Mr. Ambassador, would it be possible for your aid to try to call the palace now? Could I wait?"

He must have perceived the depth of my earnestness. "Yes, he said, "we will try. Please be seated."

I settled in a comfortable chair in a large lobby. Surveying the room, I noted that everything was new. A picture of the King in his robes and jeweled crown hung on the wall above a dark, heavy chest. He looked so young to be King of a country with nearly nine million subjects. A door squeaked, and I saw a bright red feather project through the crack formed by its opening. It was as if some exotic bird were trying to emerge. Suddenly, the door was shoved aside revealing a general or some other high ranking officer. His scarlet uniform was topped with a handsome jacket laced with gold braid and adorned with jeweled emblems denoting rank and accomplishments. From his helmet brightly colored feathers of Birds of Paradise swept over his head making a shower of plumes. He bore a sheaf of papers in his hands. Glancing at me, he hurried across the room...and for the next two hours there was a constant parade of similarly decorated officers marching back and forth. All had sheafs of papers and looked very busy. I surmised the word of my request had gotten around, and they had all come out to look me over. Suddenly, the Ambassador himself emerged, his white teeth gleaming in a smile that spread across his dark skinned face.

"I have good news," the Ambassador said with a flourish of his arms. "We have contacted our Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Royal Palace. He is arranging an audience with His Majesty, King Mahendra." Excitement sent my heart pounding so hard I feared the jeweled watch tucked inside my coat might break. I thanked the Ambassador profusely and asked him about protocol and how to get to Khatmandu and where I could stay. "I will

give you a confirming letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and he will arrange the audience. You can stay at the Royal Hotel, which is run by Mr. Boris, an unusual White Russian. We have just established air service into Khatmandu," he stated proudly. "The plane goes once a week. Fortunately, it leaves tomorrow. We will arrange a seat on the flight for you." For the next hour the Ambassador gave many orders. I said good-bye, scarcely believing my success and raced back to my hotel and packed for Nepal.

I was at the airport early the next morning and boarded the old British Dakota plane with high anticipation. The pilot was a fierce looking black bearded Sikh wearing a beautiful pink turban perched firmly on his head. Could this man fly this plane across the Himalayas, I mused....The ship skittered across the skies above the broad planes of India like a scared silver beetle. There were only a few passengers aboard, and I kept moving from side to side to photograph the land below. After what seemed like an eternity, I perceived what appeared to be a mirage of gleaming white peaks puncturing the blue sky. The magnificent range of the Himalayas came into view. Leaving the co-pilot to fly the plane, the big sikh pilot came back to talk with me and he pointed out lofty Mt. Everest, still challenging men to scale her summit. We entered banks of wooly white clouds and the ship began to bounce. The mountains appeared closer around us. Then we glided into a gradual descent over the Valley of Khatmandu. The mountains were sculptured up the sides surrounding the Valley in fanciful serpentine patterns. Peering at the markings more closely I detected the familiar outlines of rice paddies. In the center of the Valley stretched out a City of Golden domes and spires like something out of the Arabian Nights. At last, I beheld the fabled capital of Khatmandu. My heart raced.....at last, my destination was in sight. The sikh guided the plane toward an immense white building which was the royal palace and glided to a stop on the parade grounds before it. Stepping from the plane I breathed in the crisp cool air of an October Himalayan afternoon...I could scarcely believe I had reached my goal.

Dozens of people were milling around, eager to get a glimpse of their first aeroplane. Buddhist

lamas with shaven heads, dressed in purple and saffron robes, had trudged down from the mountains to see the flying bird....Some had journeyed all the way from Lhasa in Tibet.

Boris, the White Russian who ran the only Hotel, met me and greeted me in English. There were only a handful of people in Nepal who could speak English. Boarding a Land Rover with Boris, we bounced into the City passing scores of people with great heavily laden wicker baskets on their backs. Broad leather tumplines stretched across their foreheads supporting their burdens. As we rode along, Boris explained that the Valley of Khatmandu was 15 miles long and 10 miles wide. The elevation, he said, was about 5,000 feet and it lay in a latitude nearly equal to that of Northern Florida. The only roads in Nepal were in the Valley, rocky foot trails not even wide enough for the smallest vehicle being the only connections between points outside the Valley. To my amazement I learned that there were about 200 cars in the Valley, and all had been carried across the mountains in one piece on huge platforms by 80 coolies. Even the gasoline to run these cars was still carried in on the backs of men.

Curious, I asked Boris why and how he had come to Nepal to start the first hotel. Boris replied, "Mr. Knaggs, I will have dinner with you this evening and then I will tell you my story."

We screeched to a halt in front of a large white building with huge white pillars. "This is the Royal Hotel," Boris said, "it is an old palace." We climbed a broad staircase with tiger skins stretched across the walls and stepped onto a wide porch which spanned the front of the hotel. A beautiful blond girl in her middle twenties, trailed by several equally beautiful small children, rushed up to Boris and kissed him. "This is my wife and these are my children, Mr. Knaggs." He lifted the smallest child into his arms. "My wife is Danish and I am Russian. Don't you think this a good combination?" I had to admit it was--as they were a handsome family. Boris appeared to be at least twenty-five years his wife's senior.

The Russian showed me to my room which had

been one of the ruler's bedrooms some hundred years or more before. It was immense. Pointing out a slot in the wall, he showed me that I could see down into the garden. "This," he said, "is where the ruler spied on his harem." A huge old-fashioned iron bath tub, standing on clawed legs, occupied one corner of the room. Boris explained that only a few rooms had bath tubs and that these tubs had only recently been carried across the mountains. "Slowly we are making a hotel out of this palace," he explained. "A boy will carry some water up to your room for your bath...." Then Boris left me.

I could scarcely wait to change my clothes and return to dinner so I might hear the big blond Russian's story. Going to the dining room I noted that there were only a few people present. At the end of the room was a small bar; and seated over a warm Scotch and a heavy black cigar which Boris presented to me, I learned the almost unbelievable story of my host.

"I was born into the aristocracy of Czarist Russia," Boris said. "When I grew up as a young man I became a member of the Royal Russian Ballet. While on an European tour matters turned from bad to worse in Russia, and I decided not to return. I worked at many jobs. The years passed and finally I opened a successful night club in Calcutta, India. One night a small party came to my club and I was introduced to an interesting man. He was His Majesty, King Tribuvana, the King of Nepal. He had just escaped, from Nepal, and he was being shown his first night club, for the King had never been out of Nepal before. The King was fascinated by the atmosphere of my club and returned night after night. As I became better acquainted with him, I found him to be an intelligent and interesting man. One night the King asked me, 'Why don't you come to Nepal and start a hotel? There is none there; and when I return I am going to open our country to the outside world and travelers will have to have a place to stay. I will let you have one of the old palaces in which to start the hotel.' "But I do not want to have a hotel in Nepal", Boris replied. "I have a very successful club here." The discussion might have ended there, but the King continued to return night after night.

"One evening," explained Boris, blowing a huge

puff of white smoke from his cigar, "the King said, 'If you do not want to start a hotel, come to Nepal as my guest and I will take you tiger hunting.' Now this was different," said Boris, "for I loved tiger hunting. As a result, in a few months when the King had returned to Nepal, I found myself in this strange valley of Khatmandu. I was so fascinated with the culture and the beauty of the land that I consented to stay. I sent for my family...and after many months of hard work, I opened the Royal Hotel. The King gave me all kinds of concessions, one of which was the exclusive right to start an alcoholic beverage distillery, tax free. In the meantime, the King died and relatives of the Royal family also wanted to start distilleries and they wanted me to pay a tax. I told them the King had promised me a tax-free exclusive right on distilled beverages, and I refused to pay the taxes. They said they did not know anything about the King's promise and they politely threw me into jail. My wife ran the Hotel while I was incarcerated."

I listened intently as Boris continued. "They treated me very well in jail, but they would not let me out. Then one day I remembered that my birthday was only a few days away. I called to the jail keeper and said, 'It is going to be my birthday in three days and I want to have a party for my friends. One can not have a party in this small cell.' The jail keeper said, 'You are right, Sahib, one must celebrate a birthday in the proper manner. We will let you out of jail for your birthday.' Boris poured himself another Scotch and went on with his story. "I sent for my wife and told her of my plans. 'Invite all of our Nepalese friends to the party, including those who put me in jail. Get all of our best foods, whiskey and cigars together. We are going to have a party like they have never seen before. It may break us, but I am getting tired of staying in jail and doing nothing. My wife worked day and night in preparation for the party. The jail yard was decorated with gay streamers and lights. Everyone came to the party, and it lasted all night. The sun was just coming up when the guests left. Then they put me back in jail."

Boris continued, "In the meantime, since King Tribuvana had died and great preparations were afoot for the coronation of his son, Mahendra, dignitaries

and heads of state were being invited from all over the world to be present. It was probably to be the last great coronation to be held in the Orient. But the committees were completely baffled. How does one go about giving banquets and housing these guests in Western style, for no one knew the customs of the outside world. Finally, they swallowed their pride and came to me and said, 'Boris, we wish to make you a proposition. If you will handle all of the state banquets and organize and teach our people western manners and how to use Western utensils, we will let you out of jail.' I told them I would agree to do this on the one condition that they give me a free hand to work without interference. 'First,' I told them, 'you must furnish me with an aeroplane. I will have to fly many times to India to hire experienced waiters and cooks and we will have to have complete sets of western style table settings with the King's royal emblem imprinted on them....' they agreed. I was set free like a bird out of a cage..To make a long story short, I flew to India many times and brought dozens of trained men back along with tons of special equipment and food to handle the coronation. The coronation was a huge success with sixty-eight elephants in the parade and news coverage from all over the world." Boris heaved a sigh, "Now tell me of your mission with the King", he said.

I explained the whole story to him, showing him the watch and the gold key to my City. He was intrigued with these gifts and the idea of a one-man good will mission to Nepal. "This will do more good than the gift of an aeroplane from the Chinese or the Russians", said Boris. "Give the watch and key to me and I will put them in my safe. I will contact the Minister of Foreign Affairs tomorrow, and he will arrange the audience with King Mahendra. Do not be surprised if it takes a week. In the meantime, I will arrange to let you have my Land Rover and a driver. You can explore the Valley of Khatmandu. It is fascinating. If you wish to go beyond the Valley, you will have to climb over to the other valleys on foot...but they are beautiful, and you must make the effort."

I was up at dawn the next morning and breakfasted on the second floor porch. Glittering golden domes shone in the distance and prayer flags fluttered

from the finials of the shrines. Around the Valley were green wooded mountains rising up to eight and ten thousand feet. Behind them were the shining ice capped Himalayas rising to 25,000 feet. Truly it was a magnificent sight. Soon my guide arrived with the Land Rover. He was twenty-six years of age and was one of the few people in Nepal who could speak English. He told me he had escaped from Nepal and had gone to India where he was educated. After the overthrow of the Ranas, he returned. How fortunate I was to have such a scholarly guide.

As we bounced down the streets of Khatmandu, we passed hundreds of pilgrims who had come from all parts of Asia. Some had walked more than a thousand miles. This was the 2500th Anniversary of Buddha, and since Buddha was born in Nepal and according to tradition his ashes were interred there, the observance of the occasion made an exciting spectacle to behold. Many times I saw pilgrims from Lhasa, the forbidden Buddhist capital of Tibet.

The cultural and historical life of Nepal is centered in the Valley of Khatmandu. There are three cities in the Valley--Khatmandu, Bhatagon and Patan--the latter two being former capitals of the Newars who ruled Nepal before the conquests of the Gurkhas.

Each day I would set out early in the morning for a different area in order to study and photograph the ancient arts and present day culture of the people. In the central plaza of Khatmandu, free standing and resting on twenty-foot slender columns, are golden statues of former kings who once ruled in the Valley. In the distance I heard a shuffling of feet and a commotion of voices superimposed on strange musical notes. Soon a procession of worshippers came into view. Leading the group was a holy man carrying a small altar with religious artifacts resting on it. Flanking him were men trumpeting on long slender silver horns, while others beat out resonant notes on drums.

Every day I went out at sun-up with my guide and worked with the cameras until sundown. My guide was a most gracious young man and was a walking encyclopaedia of historical information. "There are two religions in Nepal," he said, "Hinduism and Buddhism".

Since Nepal was cut off from outside influence for so many years, these two religions more or less merged. It is the only place in the world that this has happened." Sometimes we would go into a Buddhist temple or shrine and see Hindu gods and many times I saw a statue of the Hindu God Vishnu next to Buddha.

As I traveled along, I was often side-tracked. Every bend in the road brought some fascinating scene or unusual custom. One day I came to a group of people taking part in a strange ceremony. A young girl was being married to a nut from a tree. Now I had vaguely heard of this custom but scarcely believed it existed. When my companion told me that the girl was marrying a nut, I laughed and said that in my country many girls are also married to nuts, but that they are of the human race. But my guide went on to explain that in Nepal a girl is united in marriage to a nut first and to a man afterwards. In this manner a girl can never become a widow. If her husband dies, she is still married to the nut.

During the ceremony the nut is cast into the river, floating downstream where it eventually lodges on the bank and grows into a tree, producing more nuts for more girls to marry. My guide continued to explain that after marriage it is always easy to divorce in Nepal. If a man wishes to divorce his wife, he simply places two betel nuts under his wife's pillow; when she awakens and finds the betel nuts there, she knows that she is through. I never ceased to wonder at the strange customs of the Nepalese, but I suppose our customs would seem just as unrealistic to them. Sometimes I would seek a change of pace and ride up some mountain road to the point where the trail ended and commence climbing. Invariably, I would descend into some hidden valley, any one of which could have been a Shangri-La. It was rice harvest time, and the most beautiful season of the year held sway over the country. The rice stalks hung heavy with golden clusters of grain and the rice paddies seemed to have been carved up the sides of the valleys by a master artist. Never before have I seen such scenic beauty and serenity and such friendly people.

Many times I would set the motion picture camera up on my tripod and sight through the lens. The

rice harvesters, having never seen a camera, would put their eye up to the lens to see what I was looking at in the black box. They were sweet and friendly people, and it was difficult for me to explain to them what I was doing.

A Swiss Mt. Everest expedition had just left Khatmandu before I arrived after nearly reaching the summit; however, one of their members, Arthur Duerst, cartographer of the expedition, remained behind as he had become ill during the climb and had to be carried on an improvised sedan chair by runners travelling day and night over the rugged terrain back to Khatmandu. It had been a race between life and death.

Fortunately, the United Missions Hospital had just been established in Khatmandu, and Duerst's life was saved with antibiotics administered by the good American doctors, Mr. and Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Fleming. Duerst and the doctors became friends of mind during my stay. The United Missions Hospital was held strictly to the treatment of patients and was not allowed to perform religious conversion. They were doing a marvellous work at a great personal sacrifice. Duerst, while convalescing, was compiling a dictionary of Nepalese words.

I became friends of the Drs. Felmmings and Millers and made the rounds with them to see their patients in the ancient palace which they were attempting to outfit as a hospital. Many of the patients were lying on straw piles on the floor as they did not have sufficient beds. There were no trained nursing staffs at that time and the patients' families cooked their meals over tiny wood fires outside the hospital and brought the food into the sick. Many times I saw whole families of six and eight sleeping on the floor next to their sick relatives whom they had brought in from across the mountains. Never before have I seen such suffering as only the dieing and hopeless cases were brought to the hospital as the poor people from the mountains were very superstitious.

The Millers and the Flemmings were wonderfully dedicated people. Seeing their desperate need for drugs and medicines, I immediately went to work on my return to the States to secure a substantial shipment

of drugs for their hospital.

One day Duerst and I set out to visit the Chini Lama, or head lama, at the great Buddhist stupa of Bodnath. According to the Chini Lama, Buddha's ashes are interred in this stupa; and, to me, it is the most impressive of all the religious temples in the Valley. Although it is not situated on a hill like its sister stupa, Swayambudnath, it may be seen for miles.

As one approaches, it seems as if an overpowering force is descending through the fierce eyes of Buddha staring down from every direction. Resting on a huge terraced plinth rises a great, white umbrella dome atop of which there is a lofty golden spire. The square base of the spire has painted on each side of it in white, black and red and blue the penetrating eyes of Buddha with what appears to be a question mark for a nose.

Actually, it is not a question mark, but the numeral "one" in Sanskrit, which denotes power. There are thirteen golden steps on the spire representing thirteen steps of life which man must pass through before reaching Paradise. The finial is in the shape of a royal umbrella. Brightly colored strands of prayer flags strung from the pinnacle to the base of the stupa, fluttered against an azure sky. According to Buddhist beliefs, prayers which are written on the flags are sent out to God each time that they wave.

Around the base of the stupa is a stone-flagged ambulatory. In the course of a year, hundreds of pilgrims walk from left to right on this walk, spinning the many prayer wheels set in the base of the stupa. The Chini Lama, dressed in a beautiful saffron colored silk robe and twirling a small gold and silver prayer wheel, came out to greet us.

He immediately invited us into his house, where he sat cross-legged on a silken canopied bed and served us tea with rancid yak butter in it, in delicate china cups resting on a silver pedestal, and having lids shaped in the form of a tiered pagoda. We talked for hours on numerous subjects, including religion, the history of Nepal and Tibet, and world conditions. We

found our host to be humorous and intelligent....He spoke eight languages.

The Chini Lama excused himself saying that it was time for him to perform a religious ceremony. We went out to observe. It was the time of the year for the Tibetans to make pilgrimages to Bodnath and we watched scores of them--some lamas and other, laymen--participate in the ceremonies. Some of the lamas were doing penance on prayer boards. Standing on the end of the board before the stupa, placing his hands together before his face and saying a prayer, the lama would fling himself face down onto the board; this penance went on for hours.

Two dusty pilgrims arrived. They had prostrated themselves, one body length at a time, all the way from Lhasa. We wandered over to the Chini Lama, who had seated himself on the ground before a large image of Buddha. A food sacrifice ceremony was taking place. A huge four-foot mound of rice was placed in front of the lama. Fruit and vegetables decorated the mound like a Christmas tree.

A low chanting commenced, superimposed on a wierd background of Tibetan music. The orchestra was composed of long, six-foot horns, flutes made from human thigh bones, tooting conch shells and drums. The music fused into a most mystical sound. At the end of the ceremony each lama from the orchestra received a bowl of rice and the remainder was distributed among the poor.

I will never forget the end of each day in Nepal. In the evening the sun plunges from sight, painting the snow pinnacled peaks of the Himalayas in soft shades of pink, gold and crimson. A full moon floods Durbar Square, in the heart of Khatmandu. It is completely deserted and dark---only the melancholy notes spun out from a single flute break the silence. Tiny lanterns, suspended from freshly cut green bamboo poles, wink on from each housetop in the city. They are hung out at this time of the year to guide one's deceased ancestors back to their homes.....

A journey to Nepal is not complete without a trip to Pokhara, an eleven-day march across the

mountains from Khatmandu. Pokhara is situated near the base of the great mountain range of Annapurna, and, from here, one can view some of the most breath-taking scenery of the Himalayas.

Even though Pokhara is within the country, one had to obtain a separate visa at that time to travel there, but it is worth the trouble. The people in this mountain-locked vicinity are real mountaineers, and their dress and some of their customs are different from that of Khatmandu. A beautiful lake is situated near the town of Pokhara; and in the background, Annapurna raises her ice-sculptured head into a frozen blue sky with snow banners trailing off her pinnacles. Her grandeur is reflected in the placid waters of the lake.

Nearly a week had passed by and not a word had come from the King...I was so intrigued and interested in what I was seeing that I had almost forgotten about my mission with King Mahendra. After I had been in Khatmandu a week, another American arrived. Like myself, he had a mission and being another lone American at the Royal Hotel, he sought me out immediately. He was interested in recording primitive music which had not been influenced by the West. He had brought a battery operated tape recorder with which to record the various Nepalese musical instruments playing their folk songs.

"I have discovered a most unusual instrument which is unique to the mountains of Nepal," I said. "It is a leather violin." I explained that since there was no news media in the villages, a few wandering minstrels strolled from hamlet to hamlet playing their leather violins and translating news as they picked it up into song. He was most excited and asked me to lead him to these villages. The next day we set out for a remote village. Late in the afternoon we encountered one of the Nepalese Shakespearean bards. While my new friend recorded his music, I photographed him against the ice capped mountains. I tried my best to purchase the violin, particularly since I had played this instrument for many years, but the old man would not part with it. I could not blame him. The traveling news reporter was quite old, had a magnificent white flowing beard and a wonderful seamed brown face which

matched his leather instrument. Bill, the American, was thrilled with his first day of recording. He told me that he was going to stay in Nepal for two or three months and in order to move about in the Valley more rapidly he wanted to get a car which he could drive by himself. I told him that this was not easy but we would solicit the help of Boris.

Sure enough, the next day a car had been carried across the mountains and Boris secured it for Bill on a limited basis. That night at dinner Bill told me of an unusual experience which he had. When Boris made the request for the car for Bill, the official said, "He must pass a driver's test." Bill went to a Government official in an old stone building. An interpreter came and the Government official gave him the test by asking him three questions: 1. What was your grandfather's name? 2. What did your grandfather do? 3. What would you do if you hit a sacred cow with your vehicle? My friend was very quick in his replies. "Your excellency, one would never hit a sacred cow", he said, "as it is forbidden". The official beamed, stamped his driver's license and said, "Congratulations, you have passed your test."

Night after night, Bill and I roamed the mysterious dark side streets of Khatmandu listening for music coming from homes and from small religious gatherings. When we would hear strange notes being spun out on the night, we would pick up our courage, knock at the door and with our few acquired words of Nepalese gained entrance and were welcomed. Months after I returned from my journey to Nepal I received a tape of Bill's recordings and I have used some of the music for my film, "Nepal, Kingdom in the Sky".

I was having breakfast one morning when Boris rushed up to me all out of breath and handed me an auspicious envelope which was sealed with the King's golden emblem. He said excitedly, "This just came by special messenger from the Palace".

I opened the envelope and found a message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs stating that His Majesty, King Mahendra, would receive me in an audience the next day in the Royal Palace at 4 p.m. The Minister further advised that he would call for me at 3:30 p.m.

I was most excited and showed the message to Boris.

The next afternoon I dressed in a dark blue suit, secured the gifts from the safe, loaded my cameras and waited. Promptly at 3:30 the Minister of Foreign Affairs arrived in a state limousine. It was the most unbelievable car I had ever seen. The sedan was at least 30 years old and it had been transformed into a royal coach. It was shining black, with old fashioned running boards and emerging from each fender were gleaming brass dragons, their mouths open and a forked tongue protruding. The entire car was decorated in brass emblems.

The Minister was dressed in black formal attire and after we met he proceeded to instruct me on how to behave in the presence of the King. I remember the most important thing he said, "Shri Knaggs, our noble and honored King is a God; he is a reincarnation of the Hindu God, Vishnu. Do not touch the King. If he offers to shake your hand, it is quite proper to respond accordingly, but do not touch him unless he offers to touch you first."

There was not much time to talk to the Minister enroute to the Palace, as it was nearby. We stopped at a great iron gate. Six fierce looking Gurkha guards, armed with old bayoneted rifles and wicked looking curved knives which were shoved into their belts, barred our way. Their great mustaches and bright red turbans gave them an air of importance. They snapped to attention after the Minister presented his royal pass, saluted, and we proceeded. We passed through six such gates, the last one being guarded by two giant men armed with sub-machine guns. I noted that these guards were unusually large, as the Gurkha soldiers are small. In the background was the gleaming white 1000 room palace. It appeared not at all like the pagoda type architecture of the Nepalese, but more like the old palaces of Europe. The minister explained that many years before, the ruling Ranas, having heard of the great palaces of Versailles, sent to Europe for a famous Italian architect and that he had designed the palaces. Suddenly, we came to a halt at an entrance on the side of the palace. "This is the King's office," he said, pointing to a door. "His Majesty will receive you there."

"But," I said, "Of course, you are coming with me". "Unfortunately," he said, "no. I do not have an appointment with His Majesty. You will have to go alone." I was amazed. "I will return for you in one hour," the Minister said.

I stepped out of the sedan and the car pulled away, leaving me alone. Timidly, I approached the door, looked into the room and saw there was no one there....I opened the door, walked in and sat down, placing my cameras on the floor behind my chair. A silver framed, autographed photograph of Prime Minister Nehru of India stood on an elaborately carved desk. Then the door opened; I looked around and saw a medium sized man wearing dark glasses, a soft Fez-like Nepalese hat and a dark western style coat with white jodphurs. I arose, thinking this was the King's Secretary. Quickly, the door opened again and a small, alert looking man followed, saying in broken English. "This is His Majesty, King Mahendra"....It was the King! I expected him to be in robes or some symbolic clothing. Quickly collecting my wits and remembering the salutation I had practiced in Nepalese, I placed the palms of my hands together in prayer-like fashion, brought them down, bowed and said, "Namestay."

The King repeated my gesture, then approached me and timidly shook my hand. I had touched a God. There was silence....Then the secretary said, His Majesty understands some English but prefers to have me translate in Nepalese so he will understand every word." More silence.....

Summoning my courage, I said, "I am Nelson S. Knaggs. I am from the United States of America. There is a great and good city far inland from the Sea named Cincinnati. It is in the beautiful State of Ohio, located on a shining river. I am from this City, and I have traveled half-way around the world to bring you and your subjects our citizens' good wishes and, also, the good wishes of the ruler and Mayor of our City, Mr. Charles P. Taft, our Mayor is a great statesman, son of a former President of the U. S. A. and a brother of the powerful and good Senator, Mr. Robert A. Taft, and he wishes me to present you this special document of good will and, also, this gold key which is a symbol of our City." Then I presented the key and

document to the King. He arose, took them very graciously and proceeded to read the document. Evidently, he could read English, but was timid about speaking it. The King thanked me, and said he also wished to send best wishes to Mr. Taft and the people of Cincinnati and that it was especially good that this message had been delivered by me in person. The King continued, "I will write Mr. Taft". Later he gave me a carved ivory elephant for Mr. Taft, and I told the King that the elephant was the symbol of the Republican Party, which was Mr. Taft's political affiliation.

Before the King seated himself again, I presented him the diamond wrist watch, telling him that it had been made in Cincinnati and that it was a further token of the good will of our citizens to His Majesty.

The King's face lighted up when he saw the glittering watch. Slowly he removed it from the case, turned it over and read the inscription--"To His Majesty, King Mahendra, with good will from the Citizens of Cincinnati, Ohio, U. S. A." Underneath was the date. I could see by his actions that His Majesty was highly pleased and his little secretary could hardly contain himself. I knew that I would have to act at once if I wanted to get the King's picture. I had purposely hid my cameras behind my chair, as I did not wish the monarch to think this was the only reason I had come.

Standing, I said, "Your Majesty, I am sure the people of Cincinnati will be anxious to know whether I delivered the watch and key to you safely. I would like to take a record of the occasion back with me. Would it be possible to take a picture of you with the watch? The King replied, "Yes, Shri Knaggs, I would be happy to have the photograph made."

I brought out my cameras. It was too dark in the King's office for a photograph and I asked the King if he would mind stepping out into his garden where the light was better. He obliged and as we proceeded into a delightful small oriental garden, I was busy guessing at light and distance. I placed the King facing the sun, then summoned his Secretary and explained which button to push on both the still and motion picture cameras. Stepping back, I joined the King who grasped

my intention quickly and returned the watch to me so I might present it to him in the photograph.

The secretary fumbled with the cameras and after several false starts he took the pictures which, fortunately, turned out excellently.

Although the King was somewhat shy, he seemed to be jubilant about the one-man good will mission. We returned to his office and talked for a short while. The Monarch thanked me profusely and said he would contact me again before I left Nepal. I bade him good-bye and departed, feeling exhilarated. My mission and goal had been accomplished.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs appeared soon and we roared through the Palace gates, the Gurkhas saluting and opening the gates as we approached. Back at the Royal Hotel, Boris and my other newly made friends were awaiting me, anxious to hear about my experiences with the King. I related the story in detail, then we all settled on the porch where Boris provided the round of drinks with which to toast the King.

Several days later a heavily ornated invitation arrived for me from the Palace stating that President Prasad of India was arriving and a State Dinner would be given for him by the King and Queen. Boris was arranging the dinner and I was most amazed to see the preparations take place in the Royal Hotel. The President's visit was the first visit by a high ranking dignitary since the Coronation and there was an atmosphere of gayety in Khatmandu.

On the day of the Banquet a most thrilling spectacle occurred. The Indian President was invited to review the Gurkha troops. Huge tents with banners and ribbons were erected on the parade grounds. I had obtained permission from the King to photograph the parade. Never before have I seen such a thrilling spectacle as this review.

The King and President Prasad were seated on royal chairs in one of the tents. First came the band with their peculiar collection of instruments. Then the lancers, charging down the field on snorting sleek

brown horses; afterwards, the famous Gurkha foot soldiers, dressed in bright scarlet. They made a magnificent sight with their fierce mustaches and wicked looking curved knives thrust in their belts. The Himalayas sparkled like white diamonds against an intense blue sky; and in the distance I could see the golden domes of temples and shrines reflecting their yellow light in the late afternoon twilight.

The parade ended, and that evening, like a setting from the Arabian Nights, the banquet took place. The splendor, protocol, toasting to Kings, Queens and Presidents---the costumes and gowns all seemed like a Midsummer's Night's Dream.

The time to leave Nepal came all too soon. The day after the Banquet I said good-bye to my friends and winged my way out across the fairybook Kingdom of Nepal and back to the United States. On returning to Cincinnati, I reported to Mr. Taft, giving him the King's written greetings and the ivory elephant. The photos of me presenting the diamond watch to the King were turned over to the Gruen Co. that they might use them in a high level news story.

Three years later, I received a letter and invitation from our Secretary of State advising that President Eisenhower had invited the King and Queen of Nepal to the United States for a state visit. Since I was one of the few people in the U.S. who knew the King, I was requested to attend a formal dinner given by the Secretary of State for the King and Queen in Washington. A few weeks later I was standing in the receiving line at a reception given in honor of the King and Queen at the Nepalese Embassy. As we formed the line, a protocol officer instructed us how to greet the King. "Do not touch His Majesty", he said, "you know, the King is believed to be a reincarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. You may bow to him."

When I came to the King, I bowed, placed my hands together and said, "Namestay". The King's face lighted up in a smile, then he shook hands with me and engaged me in conversation. The entire receiving line of dignitaries was delayed. The television lights burned down upon us as the cameras cranked away. But the King took his time in talking with me. Then he raised his sleeve--there on his wrist sparkled the

diamond watch. He said in perfect English, "The Watch has served me well. Thank you for your friendship again."

The entire line of dignitaries and their ladies craned their necks to see who the unknown man was who had dared to touch a God.

Nelson S. Knaggs
