

THE NAKED NAGAS

*By the same author*

The Chenchus : Jungle Folk of the Deccan

The Reddis of the Bison Hills

The Raj Gonds of Adilabad

Himalayan Barbary

The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours





Chingmak, the Chief of Chingmei, with  
the chest tatto of a headhunter.



# THE NAKED NAGAS

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## PREFACE

TWENTY-THREE years have passed since the first edition of this book was published in London, and it is exactly a quarter of a century ago that I first entered a Naga village. Much has changed in the intervening time. The old tribal life, so enchanting in its gaiety and simplicity despite some streaks of cruelty, has ceased to exist. First the Japanese invasion during the 1939-45 war, and then the political upheavals which for years bedevilled relations between the Nagas and the Government of India, have shattered the hill-men's seclusion and transformed their traditional way of living. What I saw in 1936 and 1937 is now a page in India's history, to be remembered and recorded but never to be observed again.

In a world of rapidly improving communications and the resultant levelling of local differences, there is no permanent place for archaic, isolated societies. Their cultures, however vigorous and colourful, must gradually give way before the impact of the one or the other of the great modern civilizations. Though occurring throughout the world and recognizable as an intrinsic part of human development in the twentieth century, this process can hardly fail to arouse sentiments of regret in those who enjoyed the pleasure of living with a people as self-contained, happy and attractive as the Konyak Nagas were twenty-five years ago.

"Impartiality is difficult to maintain when writing of friends" I wrote in the preface to the first edition. "Even if these friends belong to a primitive people and your first approach was that of a scientific observer, you find that sharing their daily life the first studied aloofness gives way before a growing emotional attachment. Later the memories of joyous experiences overshadow less pleasant impressions, and the tendency to idealize one's far away friends is inevitable."

The knowledge that the scenes described in the pages of this book will never be re-enacted adds poignancy to the memories of a rich and aesthetically satisfying cultural pattern which is now rapidly fading. There is in human nature an instinctive tenderness for that which is doomed. Just as the archaeologist unearths



with infinite care the brittle remnants of past civilizations, the anthropologist contemplates with nostalgic affection the way of life of people he was fortunate enough to know before their traditional world fell to pieces. When the Nagas of the present generation have been gathered to their fathers, there will be no-one to remember that world. The great Feasts of Merit, the ritual dances at the Spring Festival, the gay communal life in men's houses and girl's dormitories, no less than the thrills and dangers of head-hunting, will all be forgotten. No doubt future generations of Nagas will develop as satisfying and perhaps less harsh a pattern of living, but it will be a new creation combining indigenous and imported ideas and elements.

Though written as a personal narrative of a year's work in the Naga Hills, and not as an anthropological study of any particular tribe, this book reflects some aspects of the traditional Naga way of life, and its re-issue is perhaps not unjustified at a time when the future relations between the Naga hillmen and the populations of the plains of Assam have become a burning human and political problem. As one whose recollections of a year's stay among the Nagas are matched by no less happy memories of more than a decade spent in various other parts of India, I can only hope that in a small way this book may help the Indian reader to arrive at an understanding of the Nagas and appreciation of a cultural heritage fundamentally different from his own.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE NAGA HILLS

IT IS STILL an open question why the Nagas are called Nagas. Some philologists derive the name from a Sanskrit word for 'hill-men' and others from a word meaning 'naked people'. But however this may be, let it suffice here that the Nagas not only live in the hills, but that among some of the Naga tribes men and women alike used to go almost completely naked.

Until the second world war the Naga Hills were one of the least accessible parts of India. The only motorable road led then from Dimapur on the Assam-Bengal railway to Imphal in Manipur State. To the north and east extended a vast mountain tract, rising in the peaks of the Patkoi Range to heights of more than 12,000 feet. Except for an indifferent bridle-path leading from Imphal eastwards to Sittaung on the Chindwin River only hazardous jungle tracks used to connect here India and Burma. But even these footpaths were closed to the traveller. British rule extended only over the part of the Naga Hills lying nearest to the Brahmaputra valley ; beyond lay country inhabited by warlike tribes subject to no control or administration.

For thousands of years the Naga tribes remained untouched by higher civilizations. Neither Hindu culture nor the Buddhism of Burma ever spread into these hills, where primitive races persisted in ancient types of culture. Entering the Naga country one left behind the twentieth century and was surrounded by people who followed a way of life in some respects not very different from the style in which neolithic man must have lived in the greater part of South East Asia. Yet even before the advent of the British had opened the country to some western influence, the seclusion of the Naga Hills was never as complete as that of a Pacific island. Foreign goods, such as cowrie-shells and metal implements must have been bartered from village to village for hundreds of years, but their impact on Naga culture



was not revolutionary. Migrations and the subsequent blending of populations and customs may from time to time have brought about changes in the cultural scene, but these seem to have occurred within the framework of one and the same cultural sphere ; the sphere of archaic, pre-literate civilizations which throughout South East Asia preceded the later Hindu and Buddhist civilizations of historic times.

While during the greater part of Indian history the Naga tribes and their colourful culture had remained in almost complete obscurity, they attracted the interest of western students of anthropology as early as the beginning of this century. Several of the district officers stationed in the Naga Hills took a keen interest in the tribes in their charge, and a series of monographs on individual tribes contains a wealth of anthropological information. Already in 1911 T. C. Hodson published a book on the Naga Tribes of Manipur, and Professor J. H. Hutton, then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, followed with detailed accounts of the Angami and the Sema Nagas. The late J. P. Mills continued the series with three excellent books on the Lhota, Ao and Rengma Nagas, which together with Hutton's works covered nearly the entire southern and western part of the district. But information on the tribes to the east and north-east, many of whom lived in territory outside the borders of British India, was almost completely lacking, and even the Konyaks, the northern neighbours of the Aos, though partly administered since 1911, had not been studied. Other tribes to the east, such as the Changs and the Kalyo Kengyus, had been visited only occasionally by punitive expeditions and survey parties, and along the Patkoi Range were several tracts of unsurveyed and unexplored territory of whose population next to nothing was known.

When early in 1936 I prepared myself in London for anthropological work in Assam, it was these relatively unknown parts of the Naga Hills which aroused my interest. By a lucky coincidence Philip Mills, then Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills was on leave in England and nothing could have been more heartening than his enthusiasm for the Nagas and the interest he took in my plans. He encouraged me to concentrate on the study



of the Konyak Nagas, whom he described as differing in appearance, culture and language from all the other Nagas under British administration.

A few months later I arrived in India and after brief visits to Simla, Delhi, Benares and Calcutta, I sat at last in a train rolling northwards through the plains of Bengal. This was a part of India very different from the dry parched landscape of Rajputana and the United Provinces, which in May I had no doubt seen at its worst. The luscious green of the young paddy gave the country an air of fertility, and the little settlements of neatly thatched houses between palm trees and bananas seemed cosy and well kept. At this first glimpse of Bengal I succumbed to the fallacy of regarding a landscape with luxurious tropical vegetation a kind of paradise where man can suffer no want. I certainly did not realize that a rural economy based on a single crop, such as that of Bengal on rice, is far more easily upset than the agricultural systems of Middle India where a number of dry crops, ripening at different times, provide a reasonable safeguard against catastrophic famines.

But on that first journey I looked only for the picturesque in the Indian landscape and rejoiced in the brilliant light and the dark shade, in the graceful naked children waving to the train and in the buffaloes lazily wallowing in the mud surrounded by elegant, snow-white egrettes.

After a night and a day in the train, I crossed the Brahmaputra by ferry at Gauhati and slept on yet another train. Next morning the scenery had entirely changed. Dense jungle, dripping with last night's rain, hedged in both sides of the railway running through the wide plains of Assam nearly as far as the North East Frontier of India. My destination, the station of Manipur Road, could not be far off.

Would Mills, knowing of my coming, have arranged for some sort of conveyance to bring me to Kohima? Without my bearer and without a useful knowledge of any Indian language I felt strange and rather uncertain. In Calcutta I had sent my bearer back to Bombay, and I deeply mistrusted the little Assamese I had learnt from a Bengali student in London. That I could nego-



tiate the purchase of chickens, eggs, and bananas and was conversant with the ways of addressing superiors, equals, and inferiors, seemed to me of little use in arranging for the transport of my sixteen pieces of luggage.

In 1944 Manipur Road became one of the busiest station of India where soldiers and military equipment for the Burma Front poured out in an endless stream. But in 1936 it was a rather insignificant wayside station and an unknown European alighting was not an everyday occurrence. My feet had hardly touched the ground when a small policeman in an immaculate brown uniform ran up to me. Saluting, he handed me a letter, and promised in quite understandable English to look after my luggage. At first I was astounded by the Mongolian, rather un-Indian type of this man. Later I discovered that he, like most members of the Assam military police, was a Gurkha from Nepal. The letter was from Mills, who apologized for not coming to meet me, but told me that a lorry would bring me and my luggage that very same morning to Kohima. Enclosed with this letter was a pass, an indispensable document when entering the Naga Hills District.

It was a narrow but very good road which led for the next few miles through a friendly meadowland with patches of secondary forest and the thatched houses of Assamese peasants. The sky was cloudy and the air cool. Despite palm trees and clusters of bananas I felt almost like in some Alpine valley so homely appeared the fresh green grass and the peacefully grazing cattle. It was not long before we came to a road barrier where all travellers had to show their passes. There ran the line dividing the plains of Assam from the Naga Hills, which no stranger, Indian or European, was allowed to enter without special permission.

The road following a swiftly flowing river swollen by monsoon rains wound through a wooded valley, and then began to climb steep hillsides in sickening hair-pin bends.

The gradient was considerable, for the forty-six miles from Dimapur to Kohima brought one to a height of almost 4,800 feet. Dense tropical forest with garlands and curtains of creepers hanging from high trees lined the road on both sides.



A group of road-workers appeared in front of us. They were Angami Nagas—the first Nagas I was to see. Their dress was unmistakable. Black loin-cloths embroidered with cowrie-shells scantily covered the brown bodies, their legs were encased in cane-rings and hardly a man lacked a necklace of multi-coloured stone beads. Bundles of white and black cotton-wool were stuffed into their pierced ears. My first impression of the people among whom I would have to spend the next year was definitely pleasant.

The tropical forest receded as we gained height, until at last we came to the region where the Angami Nagas grow rice on irrigated terraces. During the rains the road is often threatened by landslides and at one place numerous Nagas were busy clearing it.

About 4800 feet above sea-level the houses of Kohima, seat of the Deputy Commissioner and administrative centre of the Naga Hills, lay scattered over a broad saddle. There were not many of these low, red-roofed bungalows, for the number of Government officers was small and only as many shop-keepers were permitted in the one-street bazaar as were required to cater for the needs of the few clerks and the small garrison of Assam Rifles.

The lorry stopped before the gate of a sloping garden where deep-purple bougainvillias blossomed and bright red bells flowed on the branches of hibiscus bushes. It was the garden of the Deputy Commissioner, and the next moment I saw Mills coming down the steep path from his bungalow.

‘I am sorry I couldn’t come to meet you. I should have loved to show you the country myself, but I had a lot of work and couldn’t get off.’

Small wonder that a man responsible for the entire administration of a district of about 4,293 square miles with a population of more than 178,000 Nagas should not lack in work. Later I discovered that Mills who combined the functions of nearly all the officers of an ordinary plains district, was personally accessible to everyone of these 178,000 Nagas and that even quite trivial cases were brought before his court for settlement.

‘The day after tomorrow I am going on tour through some



Eastern Angami villages. Would you like to come with me? We shall be away about a fortnight.'

Nothing could have pleased me more. A tour with Mills was an excellent initiation into life among the Nagas. All sorts of preparations had to be made. As soon as one leaves the motor road one is dependent on coolie transport, and my suitcases and boxes were all too heavy or of the wrong shape. Nagas carry on their backs, the load supported by a headband, and everyone travelling in the hills uses high covered baskets plaited of cane and bamboo. Mills lent me a few of these slender and more or less water-tight *joppa* and in them I packed my kit and bedding.

Next I had to engage a boy and this seemed to be no easy matter. The Nagas, proud and independent as many hill races, scorn as a rule domestic service, and there were then only a handful of men who had ever worked as servants. However Mills knew how to find them and a few hours later a man who had previously worked as cook and bearer arrived at his bungalow. He was a Lhota Naga and was called Tsampio. Nagas are well known for their cheerful temperament, but Tsampio took himself and his work extremely seriously and it was seldom—all too seldom—that he smiled. At first I attributed this to the difficulty of understanding me, but though gradually this difficulty disappeared, there was no change in his temperament. Like many Nagas in touch with the American Baptist Mission, he wore shorts and a khaki shirt, and on tour he adorned his head with a thick, wine-red woollen cap. Even in the heat of midday he pulled it deep down over his ears.

The weather was fine as we started from Kohima—a piece of luck early in June when the monsoon is normally at its height. Mills had arranged for ponies for himself and for me, so that we could ride whenever we were tired. Otherwise we preferred to walk, talking to one or other of the Angamis who accompanied us. The most amusing figure in our company was Thevoni, an Angami with a merry full-moon face and a round belly, bloated with too-frequent bouts of rice-beer. As a sign of his office as Government interpreter, he wore a waistcoat of bright red over his black loin-cloth. Thevoni was an irrepressible talker, and



only too eager to tell us of all the customs and beliefs of his tribe. His stay in Kohima, where he had interpreted the complaints of his own people at the courts of the Deputy Commissioner, even helping in the decision of some of the quarrels, had in no way shaken his belief in the goodness of the old customs. Mills valued him highly, for it is men such as Thevoni through whom Government can exert its influence without upsetting Naga customs and the traditional social order.

The well-kept bridle-path led along an open slope. Immeasurable mountain country extended before our eyes ; mighty wooden ridges succeeded one another, grouping themselves into high ranges and long chains till they finally blended with the sky and the clouds in the haze of the blue distance. On many of the slopes there are clearings and terrace fields, but the greater part of the mountains is covered with forest and secondary jungle. The Nagas do not live in the valleys ; their settlements are situated on the central ridges between 2000 and 6000 feet above sea level.

After several hours' march, we climbed down into the valley and crossed a small river. On the opposite bank there were several women waiting for us. The prettiest among them was Thevoni's young wife, who had done one day's march to meet him. The women had brought huge gourds full of rice-beer in their carrying-baskets and though the beer did not have a very inspiring look, it tasted definitely good. But one can always have too much of a good thing : we had to taste the beer of each of the women in turn. Without rice-beer, the life of the Angami is little more than a bad dream. 'Only when we go hunting do we sometimes drink water'. Thevoni remarked, 'then it is difficult to carry rice-beer with us. But when we go fishing, the women bring us rice-beer down to the river.'

Lest our ponies should have been brought entirely in vain, we rode up the mountain to the Chakhabama rest-house. It was one of those two roomed inspection bungalows which are distributed all over the District at distances of eight to twelve miles along the most important bridle-paths. Our boys had gone ahead and had already prepared a meal for us. I found travelling in the Naga Hills much more comfortable than I had imagined.



Chakhabama consists nowadays only of a few small houses near the bungalow. But here there was great excitement. The keeper of the bungalow, an Angami from Kohima, had died that morning of dysentery after a short illness. His relations arrived one after the other, and a grave had already been dug on the slope near the path. Was it an evil omen that a funeral should be the first Naga ceremony I was to witness ?

Loud wailing and crying came from the house of death, and the shrill, long-drawn-out screams of the widow filled the air and mingled with the dreary lamentations of the other relations. Some men cut up the flesh of a cow, while from time to time others fired off shots from old muzzle-loaders to scare away the evil spirit. Then a good friend of the dead man, with tears streaming down his face, ran out of the house ; he jumped madly in the air, screaming challenges to the spirits who had caused the death to come and fight. Finally the corpse was carried out wrapped in a coloured cloth. The widow, a slim young woman, wailed loudly and, beating the ground with a cloth, cursed it. Her hair was dishevelled and the cloth slipping from her shoulder left her breasts free. The other mourners, covered with grey and white cloths, moved in slow procession towards the grave. After the burial followed the distribution of the meat ; tempers cooled down, and even the widow tidied her hair and quietly accepted her share. Again and again the mourners put the gourds of rice-beer to their lips ; but as soon as they had all received their shares of meat, they returned to their villages.

The next day, arriving at one of those small rest-houses in the middle of the woods that the Nagas like to erect on their paths, we were greeted by a large and noisy crowd. Thenizumi, Thevoni's home village, lay a few miles off the path, and about thirty people had come to welcome Mills. They explained that since one of the dignitaries of the village had died the evening before, the village held a *genna*, and none of the inhabitants might work on the fields. Apparently this tour brought the people little luck. The village headmen or *gaonbura*, wrapped in the insignia of their office—the red cloths of the Government—came forward to welcome Mills. This is a widely chosen 'uniform', for it blends



admirably with indigenous culture, responding to the Naga's preference for coloured cloths. The women wore the large brass earrings peculiar to the Eastern Angami Nagas, which are so heavy that the weight must be worn by a band run over the straight black hair. Their broad, definitely mongoloid faces are not exactly pretty, but with their friendly and cheerful expressions and deep blue cloths the women are often very picturesque. Thevoni's divorced wife was among those who welcomed us with rice-beer. She behaved much more reasonably than many women of more civilized lands ; in front of Thevoni and his new wife, she showed not the slightest embarrassment.

We arrived at the bungalow, lying slightly below the village of Cheswezumi, at the head of this strange procession. After a short rest, and while Mills listened to reports on several cases, I climbed up alone to the village. I wanted my first impression of a Naga village undisturbed. Only a beginner is so sentimental, but even today that first moment is unforgettable ; when Naga culture, so familiar from books and ethnographical museums, appeared as a living entity.

The slippery path led through a narrow rocky passage, overgrown with bushes and prickly creepers. The defence of such a tunnel must be easy, for there is only enough room for men to pass in single file. Emerging, I found myself on a large open space. On two sides stood houses, with facades of broad, upright planks decorated with conventionalized carvings ; I recognized the representations of cattle, pigs' heads, women's breasts, dance ornaments, and human heads, those symbols of successful head-hunting which for the Angami now belong to the past. Crossed barge-boards rose from the gables of one of the houses, like the enormous antlers of some proud stag. Proud, too, must be the owner of these wooden horns, for they show that he has given several of those expensive Feasts of Merits whereby the Naga rises in social prestige and in the esteem of his neighbours.

An old man sat in front of one of the houses mending a basket ; without stopping his work he gave me a friendly smile. Nor did my appearance upset an old woman, spreading out rice to dry. A dog began to bark, and she chased it away. I went on down



the broad street between the houses. The village seemed rather deserted ; apparently most of the inhabitants were out in the fields. Only a few small boys sat on a high stone platform in the middle of the village. No sooner had they noticed me than the village seemed to wake up. In a few minutes they collected in a little group and began to follow me at a respectful distance. Eventually an old man in the red cloth of a *gaonbura* appeared and invited me with signs and gestures to come into his house. It was so dark inside that at first I could see absolutely nothing ; Naga houses have no windows and it takes some time to get used to the blackness, before the rows of huge store-baskets and various pieces of household furniture take shape. I sat down on a long bench, carved from a single piece of wood and furnished with holes for pounding the rice. My host cleaned a small gourd, in which he offered me rice-beer. Our conversation was definitely limited ; we smiled at each other and murmured some words, which however, remained equally unintelligible to us both. Even had I been fluent in Assamese it would have made little difference for the Eastern Angamis come so seldom in touch with outsiders that very few of them know any language but their own. The beer was good, and, according to custom, I accepted another gourdful. But I was not through with this one round. I had hardly taken leave of my old man, with many gestures of thanks, when a neighbour of my host pulled me into his house ; there the whole ceremony was repeated.

On returning to the bungalow, the villagers brought me a cock as a present. It is a Naga custom to honour distinguished visitors with gifts of chickens and the refusal of such a gift would be a serious insult. On some of my tours I was given more than I could eat and ended by travelling with chickens in small coups tied to the carrying baskets.

During the next few days Mills was mainly occupied in counting the houses of several villages for the assessment of the taxes. The Angamis paid in place of land-revenue an annual house-tax of three rupees, old and sick people being granted exemption. It often happened that two families lived in one house, and in such cases the house was taxed on the number of its hearths, for every



family must own its own hearth. But the Nagas, like everyone else, hate paying taxes, it was a favourite trick of theirs to cover one of the two fire-places during the visit of the Deputy Commissioner, pretending that only one family lives in the house.

Whenever we arrived in a village the inhabitants held a holiday. It is difficult to say whether it was from joy at our visit or whether, according to the old Naga belief, it was for a *genna*, when the abstention from work averts the evil consequences of any such unusual event as an earthquake or the violent death of a member of the community. Crowds of men and boys followed Mills from house to house, and the women peeped shyly and curiously out of their doors. It is not an easy job to count the two or three hundred houses of a large village and at the same time to check all the statements of the *gaonbura* as to poverty and inability to pay on the part of the individual villagers. Even the purely physical exertion is considerable, and an official without a mountaineer's training would be lost in a Naga settlement. Since most of the villages climb steplike up the mountain slopes, scarcely three houses stand on the same level, and strolling through the village you have incessantly to scramble up and down stone steps and slippery paths. In front of a house there is often a drop of more than thirty feet to a neighbour's roof. Tall posts propped up against the edge of the steps carry the platforms that serve the Naga as lookouts. Like rows of swallows, the young men often perch on these airy scaffolds, each clutching his tall bamboo mug filled with the inevitable rice-beer. High above the yellow roofs and the fantastic gable carvings of the houses and the bamboos that tremble in the slightest breeze, you have a magnificent view of the country, over the bright green of the forests belts and the shining gold of the rice-fields, which, if the spirits are gracious, will fill the great store-baskets in the autumn, guaranteeing a care-free life for the whole village and unlimited quantities of rice-beer until the next harvest.

But there still remained many months before the reaping ; now, in June, the rice had to be transplanted, and a great deal of hard work was to come. The Angami is expert in constructing terraced fields and irrigation systems. For thousands of feet the



mountain slopes are divided into terraces, many as wide as fifteen or twenty feet, others merely narrow strips. Reinforced by walls of pebbles and plastered with mud, these terraces are well able to withstand the torrential rains of Assam. Every rivulet on the mountain side is captured, and the water led through land channels to flood the terraces, for during the whole of its cultivation the rice must be kept under water. The water flows down from one terrace to the one below, and a complicated system of water-rights governs the distribution of the precious liquid ; the share in a spring can be bought in exactly the same way as a field. Nocturnal theft of water by illegitimate tapping of the channels, often causes quarrels that ultimately come before the Deputy Commissioner's court in Kohima. The maintenance of the terraces is an endless work, for each one must be levelled with the greatest care, so that the water may lie at a uniform depth ; water that is not needed for one terrace is conveyed through channels to the next, but across the face of the rocks, or wherever the ground is uneven, it is carried in aqueducts of bamboo.

One day we climbed up to the village and as we made our way through the labyrinth of terraces, the rhythmic working-songs of the groups of boys and girls fell upon our ears. They stood in rows, ankle deep in water, planting out the rice seedlings in the soft, flooded ground while one of the lads walked ahead, throwing down the green bundles of seedlings at short intervals. The sun blazed on bent brown backs and the water reflected a thousand dazzling rays. Many hours later, returning on the same path, we found the people still standing in the water and still singing the same rhythmic song. They had probably rested at noon in the field-house and quenched their thirst with quantities of foaming rice-beer, and then they had taken up their work once more.

We spent that evening at the Sathazumi inspection bungalow nearly 6000 feet above sea level. The sunlight lay golden on the dark wooded ridges, and white fluffy clouds whipped by a stiff breeze, lapped against the steep slopes of the mountains ; the valleys were wrapped in deep violet.

But we were not to be allowed to give ourselves up to the



peaceful atmosphere of this beautiful evening. Scarcely had we arrived in the bungalow when a tremendous noise arose. There were several cases to be brought before Mills, and the quarrelling parties had each brought hordes of clansmen and friends to support them. This support the clansmen and the friends thought best to render in loud altercations and expressions of opinion. The cork was out of the bottle, and all the anger that had been suppressed for months seemed to explode at the long expected visit of the 'Great Sahib'. Thevoni and another interpreter, acting as examining magistrates, had had the cases explained to them beforehand ; but it was as much as they could do to keep the quarrelling parties in hand and to calm their shouts and those of their followers. Most of the quarrels were about land or the succession to property or the claims of a betrayed husband, suing the seducer of his wife, or the damage that one man's cattle had done to another man's crops. Very patiently Mills worked through the tangle of accusations and defence, and finally passed judgement. But even then the excited harangues still continued outside the bungalow, and every moment I expected the different sides would come to blows.

Why is it that the Angamis of those remote villages, whose economy had then not been disrupted by any outside force, were unable to settle their disputes among themselves and brought the most trivial quarrels before the Deputy Commissioner? Unlike primitive populations who have suddenly been confronted with the full impact of an alien civilization, this tribe had then no problem of the detribalized wage-earners, who refuse to submit to the authority of the elders, nor had the imposition of a foreign system of land-tenure upset the social balance. I do not know the Angamis well enough to venture an explanation for their failure to maintain their own tribal jurisdiction, a failure all the more remarkable since other Naga tribes such as Aos and Konyaks very rarely appeal to the officers of Government for the settlement of internal disputes. But it may be that the peculiar organization of Angami villages is partly responsible for this breakdown of the traditional jurisdiction. The Angamis were never ruled by chiefs, and no one



individual seems ever to have had authority over an entire village-community. Wealth and prowess in war certainly gave a man a good deal of influence, but the villages were run on strictly democratic lines and no one could command his neighbours. Nearly all villages are moreover divided into *khel*, local units which in the old times had often independent foreign policies and who settled their own disputes by bloody fights. Even today the fortified walls of the *khel*, separating one section of the villagers from their neighbours, are still to be seen. When with the coming of British rule head-hunting and feuds were suppressed, and the fear of enemies no longer re-enforced the cohesion of the *khel*, while on the other hand inter-*khel* quarrels could not be decided by the right of the stronger, individualist tendencies gained the upper hand, and disputing parties no longer content with the rough and ready justice of village-elders began to carry their claims to the court of the Deputy Commissioner.

Today it is difficult to see how in the old days an Angami village was run. With independent *khel* and rivalling clans one would almost suppose that except for the common village site there is hardly any bond uniting all the inhabitants of a settlement. Yet, enquiry into their ritual organization reveals that there is an institution which for certain purposes does link the whole village. To understand it you must go back to the time when the Angamis invaded the country, took possession of the land, and founded their villages. The formal founder of a village was always a man of note, whose wealth and prowess in war revealed his 'virtue'. It was his duty to perform the sacred rites necessary for the prosperity of the village and its protection against supernatural dangers. The office of the founder was inherited by his descendants; even today the Tevo, a direct descendant of the village founder, is the mediator between the community as a whole and the supernatural world, the personification of the village in its relations with the magical forces pervading Nature and human life, and, more concretely, the vessel of the 'virtue' of the village.

The privileges of a Tevo are neither numerous nor important. He works in his fields as any ordinary villager and in the council



his voice has no more weight than that of any other man of equal wealth and moral influence. His office, in fact, is in no way an enviable one. It is true that he receives special shares of all animals sacrificed in the village, but many burdensome obligations more than out weigh this privilege. During the first three and a half years of his office he may not visit any other village, and even later on he may never partake of a meal in a strange village, but must always carry his food with him. Still more irksome is the regulation that forbids him to indulge in sexual intercourse during those first years. You would think that the man envisaged as the successor of the Tevo must cut but a poor figure on the marriage market. Nevertheless there are always girls to be found who are willing to marry a Tevo, though a Tevo's wife may not seek consolation with any other men, and even in the case of divorce, must refrain from all love making until the end of the period under taboo. Should the wife of a Tevo break this law, she is threatened with exile, for she is thought to be so closely linked with the Tevo, and therefore with the well-being of the whole village, that she must observe the same taboos as the Tevo himself. That the breaking of the taboo may have been accidental or involuntary makes no difference, and Thevoni told us that such a case had occurred in his village not so long ago. A woman from a neighbouring village came to see the Tevo's wife, and during a friendly chat obliged her by picking a few lice out of her hair. Later it became known that the treacherous friend had abstracted one hair from the head of the Tevo's wife and taken it back to her own village. The Tevo and his wife were immediately deprived of their dignity and exiled, for a part of one of them, and therefore a part of the 'virtue' of the whole community, had been carried off to a foreign village.

With such beliefs it is not easy to hold the office of Tevo. Yet it had one material advantage : an understanding administration, recognizing the value of the traditions of Naga culture, exempted the Tevo from paying a house-tax. For would not the realization of a tax decrease the wealth of the Tevo, and thus lessen the 'virtue' of the whole community?

Passing through an Eastern Angami village one soon notices



that the youngest—and naturally often the prettiest—girls wear their hair quite closely cropped. This is a sign that they are virgins, or at least are taken for such. But the average Naga girl soon grows weary of her premarital state, her short hair, and her virginity. And since a suitable husband is not always easily found she is inclined to dispense with the burdens of maidenhood by entering into one of those trial marriages which seldom last long and are usually dissolved in the most peaceful way and on the most trivial of pretexts. The young wife, now freed of all her chains, returns to her parents' house to grow her hair, and to look for a more desirable marriage-partner.

Mills thought that hardly one per cent of these first marriages led to permanent unions. Perhaps it is the fear that the girl may die without love experience which is responsible for this strange custom. For nothing appears more deplorable to the Angami than the fate of a luckless, unloved girl in the next world. Virginity wins no halo in the Naga heaven, but is regarded rather as a sin, for has not the deceased failed to fulfil the duties of her earthly life? Just as a girl advertises her new status by growing her hair, the young man boasts of his first love affair by decorating his black loin-cloth with three rows of pure white cowrie shells, while a Don Juan, succeeding either in seducing a married woman or in carrying on a simultaneous love affair with two sisters, proudly adds a fourth string of cowrie shells to his loin-cloth. You cannot help wondering at the consequences of such customs—what must happen at the marital breakfast-tables of a small Angami settlement when the beau of the village struts about with a new and fourth row of cowries on his kilt?





An unmarried Angami girl with short hair,  
the sign of virginity.





A young Angami wife with half grown hair.



## FEASTS OF MERIT

IMPERCEPTIBLY the first grey of dawn crept over the sleeping village as the pale, tired moon sank below the heights of the mountains. Peace lay on the houses, herded together on the crest of the ridge like frightened sheep. A door opened silently, and the figure of a man separated itself from the shadow of one of the houses ; shivering, he threw the end of his large cloth over his shoulder and clutched it tightly until it completely enveloped his naked body. The light grew, and shapes of roof and posts began to stand out. On one of the neighbouring houses boldly curved 'house-horns' rose against a dim sky. Today Netsoho saw them without anger in his heart. The sight of them no longer wounded his pride, but only excited his impatience. A few days more and his own gable would carry these same treasured ornaments. How fervently he had longed for them ! For his stately house with the rich carvings of buffalo heads and women's breasts seemed quite valueless to him if these—the wooden house-horns—the highest symbol of glory and prestige, were still lacking. But now everything was prepared for the sacrificial feast ; and the dreams of last night supplied the necessary good omen. Two strangers, a man and a woman, had come to his house and drunk rice-beer ; should this not forbode good luck and wealth ? The first pink rays of sun broke through the dawn as Netsoho stood at his house door, turning the events of the last few months over in his mind ; an abundant rice-harvest, filling his granaries, had encouraged him to plan a stone-dragging feast ; for a long time he had sought for two suitable boulders, but now he had found them, and soon they would stand near the village path—eternal monuments to his glory. During many days he had abstained from the required dishes and separated his bed from the bed of his wife. The women of his clan had



brewed enormous quantities of rice-beer, and a fortune in animals stood ready for slaughter.

Thick mists still hid the valley and the rice-fields, but already the morning sun had kissed the yellow straw of the roofs so much higher up on the hills and life began to stir in the village. The women hurried down the rough stone steps to the spring, throwing their long shadows in front of them. They had to fill their long bamboo vessels with water and carry them up to the village before the day's work could begin. And then it was not long before a delicate blue cloud hovered above the houses fed by the smoke from hundreds of hearths.

The day was a feast day, and no one went to the fields. The men and women sat in front of their houses putting the last touches to their ceremonial costume. The young men's head-dresses cost them much trouble. Roll upon roll of white cotton must be bound with scarlet ribbons so firmly on to bearskin frames that, forming semicircular structures, they will support the huge fans of hornbill feathers with each feather adjusted individually and so loose that it revolves in the slightest breeze. There were ear ornaments of the glittering wings of the emerald beetle, innumerable necklaces of carneol beads and *Tridacna* shells, and occasional breast-plate of Job's tears and red goat's hair, and many red and white tassels that would dangle from the belts. It was the men's day, and the women were content with their plain cloths dyed blue with indigo, with sticking bundles of red goat's hair into their large brass earrings, and squeezing their arms into as many arm-rings as they could lay hands on.

Late in the morning, when all the preparations were complete, small groups streamed towards Netsoho's house. Two choice bulls were tied to the posts of the protruding roof. A man of Netsoho's clan went up to them; he scratched them gently on the forehead, as though to distract their attention from the business in hand; then, pointing his spear behind the shoulder of one of them, he suddenly drove it home. Stabbed to the heart, the bull plunged forward, moaning horribly; almost at once the second bull was speared. The meat was



quickly and skilfully cut up and distributed, not, as one would suppose, in a haphazard manner, but in strict order of precedence, to the dignitaries of the village. Netsoho received one of the hind legs ; it was to be his only meat dish during the next fourteen days, for as long as the ceremonies lasted all other flesh was denied him.

The grey-haired Tevo was politely invited into Netsoho's house. There, in solemn silence, Netsoho sat with his wife on the huge rice-pounding table. The Tevo was offered a little rice-beer in a banana-leaf cup. He swallowed it and blessed the couple :

'May your crops be plentiful, may your rice-beer be inexhaustible, and may your health be preserved from all dangers.'

The feast was now formally opened, and all the guests revelled in food and drink. Neither was lacking. Two more bulls, three buffaloes, and one mithan<sup>1</sup> stood tethered to two strong crossed posts on the open space in front of Netsoho's house. Swiftly their lives ended under the axes of his clansmen. Again and again the *dao* flashed—crashing down on the neck, often severing the head with a single blow.

But it was not yet time for the men to lose themselves in the enjoyments of the feast ; there was still work to be done. When the sun stood high in the sky, Netsoho and his wife, leading the rest of the villagers, followed the steep path down to the forest, through the heavily carved gate, under the branches of the high bamboos, over the ridge to the place where two enormous stone boulders, two slumbering monsters, lay in the jungle. Strong cane ropes were slipped over the stones, which, with tremendous efforts, were hoisted on to the two wooden sledges. Thirty or forty young men strained at the cane ropes, their half-naked bodies glistening with sweat under the mid-day sun. Muscles tightened and slackened under taut burnished skin as the awkward sledges bumped, stuck, and were dragged yet farther over the rough ground. With their feather

<sup>1</sup>*Bos frontalis* (cf. p. 48).



crowns, their long white cords fluttering, and those queer swinging 'tails' of floating human hair that are the only remains of a one-time quiver, the men resembled huge grotesque birds of prey hovering about their victim, settling and dispersing again, as the sledges stuck on some root, were freed, and moved on.

It was an excited, riotous crowd that wound its way through the sunlit forest. Rhythmical shouts encouraged the sledge-draggers at the steepest parts of the path and mingled with the chirping of the cicadas and the voices of scared parrots. Netsoho alone did not wear the ceremonial dress, but the black, richly embroidered stone-dragging cloth. Very proudly he headed the procession with his wife.

Near the path to the fields, and close to the stone monuments of other men, two holes had already been dug, and as the sun touched the horizon, Netsoho's stones were allowed to slide into the holes. Netsoho poured rice-beer over the larger stone and smeared its face with the blood of the pure sacrificial animal ; his wife poured rice-beer over the smaller stone, and also smeared its face with blood.

'May my meat increase, may my crops increase, may my food last long, may my food not be finished quickly,' they murmured in turn.

This duality is one of the essential features of the whole ceremony ; no bachelor may perform the stone-dragging feast. For just as the larger stone represents Netsoho, the smaller stone represents his wife.

The ceremony was over. Netsoho uttered a long-drawn-out shout of joy, and the whole crowd took it up. Spears were tossed in the air, *dao* whirled as with singing and dancing they returned to the village.

There were few in the village who slept that night. Rice-beer flowed freely, and until early morning the fires threw great pools of light into the darkness.

It was not many days before a pair of newly carved house-horns adorned Netsoho's house, revealing to all the world that he had performed the stone-dragging rite, the first of the major Feasts of Merit. He had climbed a large step on the social



ladder, and the two grey stones on the path to the fields would perpetuate his glory for many generations to come.

Hundreds and thousands of megalithic monuments such as those Netsoho erected are scattered over the Angami country, most of them lining the approaches to villages or the paths past abandoned village-sites. Unlike the dolmens and menhirs of Stonehenge they are not dumb mysterious remnants of a dim past, but are a living and vital part of Naga culture.

Most menhirs stand in pairs or in long double-rows. Wealthy men have set them up to commemorate their fame and generosity, and to enhance in a magical way the fertility of their fields. Only for the first of the long series of Feasts of Merit is the Naga content to erect two stones ; to attain the higher degrees of prestige four, eight and even ten menhirs are set up. Great is the cost of the sacrificial animals and of the food required even for the first feasts, expenses increase with every stage, and only very few men ever complete the full series.

There is a subtle connection between a man and a stone erected either by himself or after his death by his heirs. While he is still alive the stone becomes the seat and vessel of the magical 'virtue' which has lent him success and empowered him to accumulate wealth, and after his death this same virtue or soul-substance adheres to the menhir. I have heard Angamis, pointing to a pair of menhirs, say : "This is the dead man and this is his wife." Do they imagine that the soul of the deceased takes its seat in the stone ? This would seem to conflict with their idea of the Departed travelling to some distant land or, according to another belief, of being ultimately transformed into butterflies. But it is not the spirit of the dead, but only a part of the soul-substance which is thought to remain attached to the stone, benefiting the entire community. The menhirs stand near the paths so that they may shed their virtue on the passing villagers and increase their wealth and the fertility of the crops.

For the same reason the dead are buried within the village or by the side of the village paths. The graves are often built in the shape of low stone platforms, and these serve men and



women coming from the fields as seats and resting-places. On many of these graves there are tales of the deeds of the departed : large stones to indicate the number of captured heads and smaller stones to represent the women whose favours he enjoyed in this life. On one grave, evidently that of a great favourite of the fair sex, I counted sixty-two small stones, and I could not help wondering how his relatives or indeed he himself remembered the exact number of his loves.

We returned to Kohima after a fortnight's tour. Mills had counted the houses of several villages and settled numerous quarrels, and I had learnt a good deal about the practical side of anthropological field work. But I was still hopelessly dependent on Mills for translating the peculiar Assamese which is used as the *lingua franca* of the Naga Hills. As I found it difficult to understand a single word I felt rather dejected at the prospect of being left to myself in a Naga village. Once again Mills came to the rescue. He found Nlamo, a young Lhota Naga, to teach me Assamese. Nlamo was about twenty years old and had attained the dream of all mission-trained boys—he had been sent to the high school in Shillong. But to his great grief his talents were forced to lie fallow ; for there was as yet little scope for educated Nagas. Some had found employment as clerks or village schoolmasters, and there were even some Naga doctors and compounders, but the number of available posts was small compared to that of applicants, all eager to find jobs in Government service. Nlamo spoke besides his mother-tongue Assamese, Hindustani, Bengali, Ao and a passable English, and so it was perhaps understandable that he did not relish the idea of going back to his village and growing rice for the rest of his life. Giving Assamese lessons seemed to him an admirable occupation and curiously enough he proved far more efficient than my learned Assamese teacher in London. Nlamo stayed with me until I left the Naga Hills and accompanied me on all my tours as interpreter and factotum. His faithful service found its reward when Mills got him a clerk's job in the office of the Governor's Secretary in



Shillong. There I met him a short time ago. He has turned into a most respectable babu and is happily married to a Khasi girl. When the Japanese threat was at its gravest he went with an Allied column as guide and interpreter through parts of the Lhota country, and he is full of the changes that the war has brought to the Naga Hills. He is certainly one of the few Nagas who have successfully accomplished the transition to a new economy and it is remarkable that though content enough with his life in Shillong he yet talks of settling ultimately in the Naga Hills.

With Nlamo's help I began questioning old Angami men about their customs, and together we went to some of the neighbouring villages. Perhaps the most picturesque was Khonoma, a village famous for its power and war-like exploits. At one time it dominated a large area and collected tribute from villages within a radius of twenty five miles. But when British rule put an end to raiding and the weaker villages, no longer needing protection, ceased to pay tribute, the men of Khonoma took to trade and to the manufacture of many articles of Angami dress. The plaited cane-armlets and gauntlets of Khonoma are unrivalled and fetch high prices throughout the Angami country.

Khonoma stands on the crest of a ridge, a natural fortress ; on all sides the slopes fall away steeply. Stone steps lead up the hill to the gateway in the strong stone wall. The solid wooden door, painted in red, white and black with symbols of wealth and fertility—mithan heads, drinking-horns, hornbill feathers and suns—is an effective defence against any Naga weapon, for no *dao* could split the thick wood.

• The high stone structures built between the houses in the form of truncated pyramids distinguish Khonoma from all other villages. Like mighty towers they rise above the village, glorifying the clans who built them, with what must have been an infinite amount of labour. The Nagas, unlike many other primitive peoples, expend much trouble on things of little practical use, merely to enhance the social prestige of the individual or the community. Many generations ago stone circles, en-



closed by squared stone blocks, were built for such reasons in Khonoma. They were erected by men of fabulous wealth, as the highest stage in the series of the Feasts of Merit; today they serve as dancing places and the village elders sit on the stone blocks watching the performance. 'The elders, however, sat on smoothed stones in the sacred circle', runs a line in Homer.<sup>1</sup> In the Naga Hills Homeric times are alive today and a megalithic culture which in Europe belonged to the late Stone Age still flourishes among the Angamis.

The headmen of Khonoma gave me the most friendly reception and I spent hours photographing stone circles, discussing the complicated series of Feasts of Merit—which in Khonoma are different from those of other villages—and drinking a good many mugs of white, milky rice-beer. But strangers have not always been welcome in Khonoma, and a simple memorial still stands to tell of the death of a British officer at the hands of the men of Khonoma.

In 1879 a rebellion started by Khonoma swept over the whole Angami country and the Europeans in Kohima soon found themselves besieged by thousands of determined Naga warriors. In view of the importance of Kohima for India's defence in 1944 it is not without interest to recall that earlier siege when the Nagas were not trusted allies, but with a few exceptions fierce and resourceful enemies.

Kohima seemed to have been then as peaceful as I knew it nearly eighty years later. No one suspected danger and there were two European women and several children in the station. The garrison consisting of 118 men of the 43rd Assam Light Infantry and Frontier Police had only one day's warning that trouble was brewing and the defences of the post were largely dilapidated. The only defensible place was a stockade surrounded by weak pallisades of wood and bamboo, which offered practically no protection from fire. Thatched buildings crowded the enclosure and the only water supply was a spring outside the stockade. Food was short from the beginning, the

<sup>1</sup>*Iliad XVIII, 503-504.*





A village of the Eastern Angami Nagas—the houses of rich men are adorned with horror

A stone circle and a grave in Khonoma.







View over the Konyak country, the village of Longkhai on the ridge in the foreground.

View from Wakching over the unadministered area outside British India.





three hundred and seventy non-combatants having practically no supplies.

From the outset communications with the plains were cut, and all runners with letters intercepted by hostile Nagas. Only the outpost at Woka could be informed and its garrison joined the defenders of Kohima.

Soon afterwards the attack began. Some six thousand Nagas, including contingents from nearly every Angami village beset the post. About five hundred of them had firearms. Favoured by the ground they could fire into the stockade, and throwing up earth works and barricades, they pressed closer and closer. Soon they were near enough to throw spears wrapped with burning rags into the enclosures, and only the continuous vigilance of the defenders prevented the outbreak of fires.

The position of the garrison appeared desperate, but some of the *khel* of Kohima village maintained a friendly neutrality and ultimately a message concealed in the hair knot of a Naga woman got through the ring of enemies. On the eighth day of the siege the Nagas with deafening war cries attacked in force and the already weakened garrison lost heavily in holding out against the onrush. But three days later, when food and ammunition were nearly exhausted, relief came from Manipur. The Angamis dispersed without a fight as Lieutenant Colonel Johnstone with two thousand Manipuri levies, some Cachar police and his personal escort raised the first siege of Kohima, and saved the five hundred and fifty survivors from almost certain death.

How different was the siege of 1944. Both sides were then armed with modern weapons. Once again the defenders of Kohima were hard pressed, the attack was sudden and the scarcity of water was one of the main difficulties. But this time the Nagas fought staunchly on the side of the defenders and in innumerable ways helped the cause of the Allies both inside and outside Kohima. To simple and illiterate hillmen, who for two generations had looked upon Government as supreme and all-powerful, the temporary British weakness must have been a trying puzzle, but even when the Japanese swept



over the hills with apparently irresistible force, and C. R. Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner, was besieged and impotent in Kohima, the Nagas never faltered in their loyalty. They slipped through the Japanese lines with valuable intelligence, rescued Allied wounded, and misled the Japanese giving them false information. Villages that were for three months in enemy hands, still maintained contact with the Allies, and the news received from them by runners travelling secretly and at night, often guided the Allied air-arm. This co-operation was only part of the Nagas' share in the common fight. After seventy years of peace the blood of warriors stirred again amongst the Angamis; poorly armed, they ambushed and killed many a Japanese straggler and brought in a large number of prisoners. The full story of their part in the battle has still to be told, but it would seem that fewer Japanese heads were taken than one might have expected. Nagas anxious to win the status and fame of head-hunters would not have bothered to take prisoners, and we may thus assume that as an institution head-hunting is dead among the Angamis. Konyak Nagas would no doubt have made better use of the chance to perform once more the head-hunting rites and not many dead Japanese would have been found with their heads still on their bodies.



## CHAPTER III

### AN ORGY IN STONE

SWARMS OF shrieking parrots flew off low boughs as Mills and I approached the clearing. Their jerking flight aimed at the highest branches of a tall tree, jutting out, dry and fantastic, from the entanglement of exuberant creepers. Thousands of clamouring arms clawed the gnarled trunk in deadly embrace and, climbing higher and higher, had gradually suffocated the giant tree. And now the tree was dead ; the next storm would probably fell it, and with it those living fetters would themselves be cast upon the ground to lie in tangled heaps, thickening the thicket and making the jungle even more impenetrable. A little way off rose the red brick ruins of a powerful gateway ; the reliefs on the withered facades still spared by time showed the influence of late Hindu art. It was the gate of the old Kachari capital, which flourished here until the fifteenth century. The Kacharis spoke a Tibeto-Burman language, and their rule had once extended over the plains of Assam, from the foothills of the Himalayas almost to the frontier of Burma. Here, on the edge of the immense Nambur forest, had stood their capital, Dimapur, 'City of the River People' ; lying close to the banks of the Dhansiri River and containing numerous large water-tanks, it well deserved its name.

We passed through the arch of the gateway, and found ourselves once more under high trees. No ruined wall bears testimony to the palace of the King who once received tribute from the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. For his capital was a bamboo city. Bamboo poles carried the wooden buildings, light and perishable, but singularly suitable for this damp ground, flooded again and again by the waters of Dhansiri. My eyes fell on a huge tank overgrown with tangled masses of that peculiar vivid green that marsh-plants take when they creep along the surface of open water. What could have induced a people, living



almost on the banks of the Dhansiri River, to construct artificial tanks within the precincts of their capital? Mills offered a simple explanation. To build houses out of the reach of flood-water, earth must be heaped in great mounds and in the rainy season the resulting pits fill automatically with water. Not altogether unwelcome, perhaps, in the heat of the Assam summer.

As the jungle thinned, the path opened out on to a large space, where well over fifty gigantic stone monuments stood against an orange evening sky. Some were cracked and some were chipped, but others remained in almost unharmed splendour. An orgy of fertility symbols in stone had long outlived the fall of a mighty empire. More than half of the monoliths represented phalli surpassing in realism any of the stone *lingam* of the Hindu god Shiva, and between them stood colossal forked stones in the shape of the letter V: the symbols of the female complement. The tallest stone phallus is well over twenty feet high, and five men with arms outstretched could scarcely encircle it. Most of the monoliths are decorated with reliefs: peacocks, the royal heraldic animal of Kachar, parrots, buffaloes, and various kinds of plants. On one of the stones the image of a human head on a pole is clearly distinguishable. It would seem that the Kacharis of those days practised a custom prevalent among some of the Naga tribes today—that of hoisting the heads of their enemies on tall poles of bamboo.

It is difficult to understand the full implication of so many enormous symbols of human fertility. What can have given birth to the idea of adorning a city with colossal representations of the male and female generative organs? In the whole of India there is no parallel to the monuments of Dimapur, and their meaning would probably remain obscure for ever, had we no knowledge of the megalithic rites of the Nagas, the immediate neighbours of the Kacharis. For they not only set up rough unworked menhirs during their feasts of merit, but also wooden forked posts and carved wooden phalli. It is this conformity of shape which excludes any doubt as to the relationship between the wooden monuments of the Nagas and the stone monoliths of the Kacharis.



The phalli and forked stone monuments of the kings of Kachar are evidently the memorials of great sacrificial feasts, when the blood of hecatombs of bulls and buffaloes flooded the sacred place. The character of these feasts as fertility rites is more clearly pronounced among the Kacharis than in the megalithic ceremonial of the Nagas. But the perpetuation of the rite stands in both very much to the fore ; houses, and even palaces, may be built of wood or bamboo, but stone must immortalize the monuments of the sacrificial feasts through the changing face of time and with them the fertilizing power of the rite. The Kachari religion at the time of Dimapur's greatness appears to have resembled in many respects the religions found today among the Tibeto-Burman hill tribes. Hinduism had not yet conquered the valley of Assam, though its influence is noticeable in the art of Dimapur.

During the sixteenth century the power of the Kachari kings succumbed to the Ahoms, a people akin to the Shans of Burma. After a prolonged struggle the Ahoms captured and looted the capital Dimapur, and the Kacharis retreated to the south-west. There they lived under their own rulers until the occupation of the country by the British in 1830.

We know little or nothing of the relations between the Kacharis and the neighbouring Naga tribes. But the chronicles of the Ahom kings, the heirs to their might, record fierce fights as well as peaceful dealings with the inhabitants of numerous Naga villages. These chronicles, or, as they are called, the Ahom Buranjis, reflect events much the same as took place in other parts of the world when warlike conquerors of higher civilization and superior organization came into contact with an aboriginal and primitive population.

The oldest of the reports date from the thirteenth century, when Shukapha, the Ahom King, came with his army over the mountains from Burma. Passing through the land of the Nagas, he conquered many villages with the greatest cruelty.

'A great number of the Nagas were killed and many were made captives,' reports the chronicle ; 'some Nagas were cut to pieces and their flesh cooked. Then the King made a younger



brother eat the cooked flesh of his elder brother and a father of his sons. Thus Shukapha destroyed the Naga villages.'

The Nagas do not lack the taste for a gay and thrilling raid or the cutting off of a few enemy heads, but they certainly did not appreciate such refinements of Ahom civilization ; in the years to come they often stood out in open rebellion. About the year 1400, the Ahom kings, deciding to change their tactics, invited a great number of Nagas to a feast ; during the meal the unsuspecting guests were set upon and murdered. 'Their heads were placed on a big stone in the form of a garland.'

This, however, did not contribute in any way to pacification and during the fifteenth century the wars with the Nagas, and particularly with the restless tribes of the Konyaks, became more and more frequent. Yet there seem to have been times when the relations between the Ahoms and Nagas were quite friendly. For, of the visit of several Nagas to King Suchaupha, the chronicle contains the following idyllic report :

'They came to take their presents from our King at Itanagar. The heavenly King spread two gorgeous cloths and having seated himself thereon taught them rules. On that day they drank with fear. The great King drank with them with drooping head and placing one leg upon the other.'

Traditions of the Konyak Nagas tell of an Ahom King who, fleeing from his enemies into the hills, found refuge in the village of Tanhai. He married the daughter of the chief, and even today the people of Tanhai point to the stone which served the exiled King as a seat. Apparently the cultural differences between the Ahoms and the Nagas were not insurmountable, and the 'savage' Nagas proved more human than the proud rulers of the Ahom kingdom.

But in the hot, fertile plains of Assam, the Ahoms, like the Kacharis before them, lapsed gradually into decadence. Fiery warriors turned to peaceful peasants, and their small settlements often fell victims to the raiding Nagas from the near-by mountains. The taking of a head from the villages of the plains became a convenient habit, and one that was hard to extirpate even after the country was taken over by the British. Till quite



recently a tea-garden coolie would now and then disappear in some mysterious way !

The ruins of Dimapur lie quite near the railway station of Manipur Road, and from there Mills and I took a train to Simaluguri, about 200 miles away. The railway runs in a north-easterly direction along the foothills of the Naga country, and from Simaluguri it is two days' march to the land of the Konyaks, where I planned to start work. We could have reached it without leaving the hills by taking the direct bridle-path from Kohima, but such a trek would have taken at least twelve days.

A narrow-gauge railway connects Simaluguri with Naginimara, and then it is only four miles to the colliery of Borjan on the very borders of the Konyak country. Railway traffic on this branch line is distinctly primitive, and since there is only one passenger train a week, Mr. Castles, the manager of the colliery, had sent us his trolley. The trolley was just a platform on wheels, sideless, with two benches for passengers, propelled in much the same way as a small boy's 'kiddie car'—by means of a hand-lever. We mounted this strange vehicle and the three coolies sat behind and worked the hand-lever backwards and forwards. The track was more or less level, and we moved fairly quickly ; but we had an exhausting time, shouting and screaming at the cows and goats peacefully grazing on the lines. They had told us at Simaluguri that a down train was expected ; so we made our way cautiously round the bends lest the approaching express should catch us on the single track. But we need not have worried, for when the train finally appeared, the puffing and rattling gave us ample warning. We lifted the trolley neatly from the rails, allowed the train to pass, and replaced our vehicle.

It had become very hot, and after riding through the stifling jungle, we arrived at Borjan covered in sweat. Mr. Castles was charming, and received us with that matter-of-fact hospitality which I found only in India. He received us, too, with what we had been longing for during many weeks : iced beer. On all our future tours Castles' beer became proverbial and often, when we had climbed some 3000 feet up a sunny slope, I would ask



Mills, 'What would you give now for a glass of Castles' iced beer' ?

The electric current at the disposal of managers of collieries, factories, and tea-gardens, permitting the installation of ventilators and frigidaire, incited in those remote parts the envy of all Government officials. To them such luxury was usually denied and they worked in air-less offices and drank warm whisky.

In the following twelve months Castles' bungalow became for me the very essence of civilization. Here, only a few days' march, and sometimes only a few miles away from the villages where I slept in Naga huts or a stuffy tent, drank coffee-brown water, ate bony chickens, and was myself devoured by hosts of mosquitoes—here was a mosquito-proof bungalow with electric fans, bathrooms, wireless, good food, and—iced beer. It required not a little self-restraint to stay away, often for months at a time ; but I shall never forget Castles' hospitality and his iced beer, which I enjoyed on more than one occasion.



## ABOVE THE CLOUDS

THIN MIST filled the forest, and the trunks of the huge liana-clad trees rose steep and straight to their first spreading branches, and then they faded and were lost with the leaves in the grey haze. Heavy drops dripped from the damp foliage, sinking soundlessly into a ground covered with rotting leaves. For hours we had climbed through the silent forest, that seemed to grow denser and denser, and even more luxuriant, with every step ; no human axe could have disturbed this forest for hundreds of years. Were the mountain slopes too steep for cultivation, or did the Konyaks, owning so much land, think it scarcely worth their while to clear away these age-old trees ? We did not pass a single field on the whole day's climb.

We were already high up—certainly well over 4000 feet—and there was still no trace of the village, when at last some men emerged from the mist. Halting near a spring, they had waited for us, and passed the time by boiling tea over a small fire. They were Konyaks from Wakching—Konyaks from the very village where I wanted to work. I looked them over anxiously, wondering whether I could succeed in making friends with them. At first sight they seemed anything but prepossessing. Those horrible mouths ! Smiles showed double rows of coal-black teeth, lips, red from chewing betel, with pinkish saliva dripping from the corners. But the magnificent orchid one young man wore in the lobe of his ear shone as a bright star in the dark night. Can those who wear flowers in their ears be absolutely charmless ? I did not know that this young man—it was Shankok—would become my best friend. I never found a better either among the Nagas or in Europe.

The men from Wakching offered us tea ; it tasted dreadfully bitter. But this was not really surprising, for the leaves had been boiling in water for a long time and the beverage was now



a deep brown colour. Why did these Nagas offer us tea ? I began to long for the good Angami rice-beer.

Mills chatted with the men. He knew some of them well, for he had been to Wakching before. They talked fluent Assamese. This was a great advantage, for I would have found it quite hopeless to learn the language of Wakching, a tonal language of Tibeto-Burman affinities as well as Assamese.

The Konyaks reached up to somewhere near Mills' shoulder, but their slim bodies were so beautifully proportioned that, living alone among them, I quite forgot my first impression, and thought of them as quite normal-sized people. The *gaonbura* had donned their red Government cloths to welcome us. They wore them with great dignity, one end tossed carelessly over the shoulder, in much the same way as a proud Roman wore his toga. Under their Government cloths they wore their everyday dress—thatis, they wore tight cane belts, or belts of the bark of the 'agar' tree (*Aquilaria appallocha*), with a small apron hanging down in front. The small apron is quite a recent custom and has developed among the Konyaks only as trade with the inhabitants of the plains increased. But the old men of Wakching do not hold with such new-fangled fashions, and stick to the good old custom of belt without apron. Farther in the hills, young and old alike go about completely naked, for they still live in the good old times. There the Konyaks are still the 'Naked Nagas'.

When we arrived at Wakching a teasing fog blotted out all vision. We were in the clouds, those clouds which lay only too often like a blanket over the ridge of Wakching. Whenever there was anything exciting to photograph, the clouds would rise from the valleys and hang about our mountain, until my subject was no longer exciting or there was absolutely no light left.

But on the first day of my arrival the fog showed some consideration, and as we reached the inspection bungalow, standing on open ground a little outside the village, the clouds broke, and the most magnificent view lay before us in the light of the evening sun.

East and south, slopes green with young rice curved into a deep wooded valley. It was the valley of the Sinyang River, and,



standing there, Mills made me promise never, under any circumstance, to cross it. This was a hard promise to give—harder certainly than the other promise already made : not to interfere with native women ! For the Sinyang formed the boundary between British India and the unadministered and partly unexplored territory, where war and head-hunting still run rife, and across it lay the promised land, that I was to look on, but not to enter for many long months. On the crests of the mountains, sweeping up from that valley, I could see with my naked eye brown patches that were neighbouring villages. Beyond rose the peaks of a still higher range, lying not in Assam, but in Burma. The frontier running along the Patkoi Range is of little practical importance, for on both sides extends a more or less unknown area, and it is here that the maps show white patches.

Day after day I looked over this untouched country, that stretched from my very door, and one clear night, standing before my bungalow, I watched the results of war between two villages : on one of the mountains the fields of a village had been set alight, and the whole night long a line of sprouting flame climbed steadily up, though it never reached the hostile village.

From the other side of the bungalow I looked over the broad valley of the Brahmaputra to the foothills of the Himalayas. On clear mornings their snow caps shone white against the horizon, but it was in the evenings, after a particularly lovely day, that this view was most beautiful. Then the setting sun would fill the whole valley with yellow light, and the winding ribbon of the Brahmaputra would stand out like shining gold. Long after I had left Wakching, I longed for that wide untrammelled view stretching to all points of the compass.

When I woke up on the morning after our arrival, it seemed as though we were on an island, or rather on one of the many islands of an archipelago ; for a white sea of fog filled the valleys and surged round the mountain-tops, which rose sheer from the curling waves, like the faces of huge dark cliffs. But the sun soon dissolved the mist, as it disperses the frost on winter window-panes.

The *gaonbura* came to the bungalow after breakfast, and went

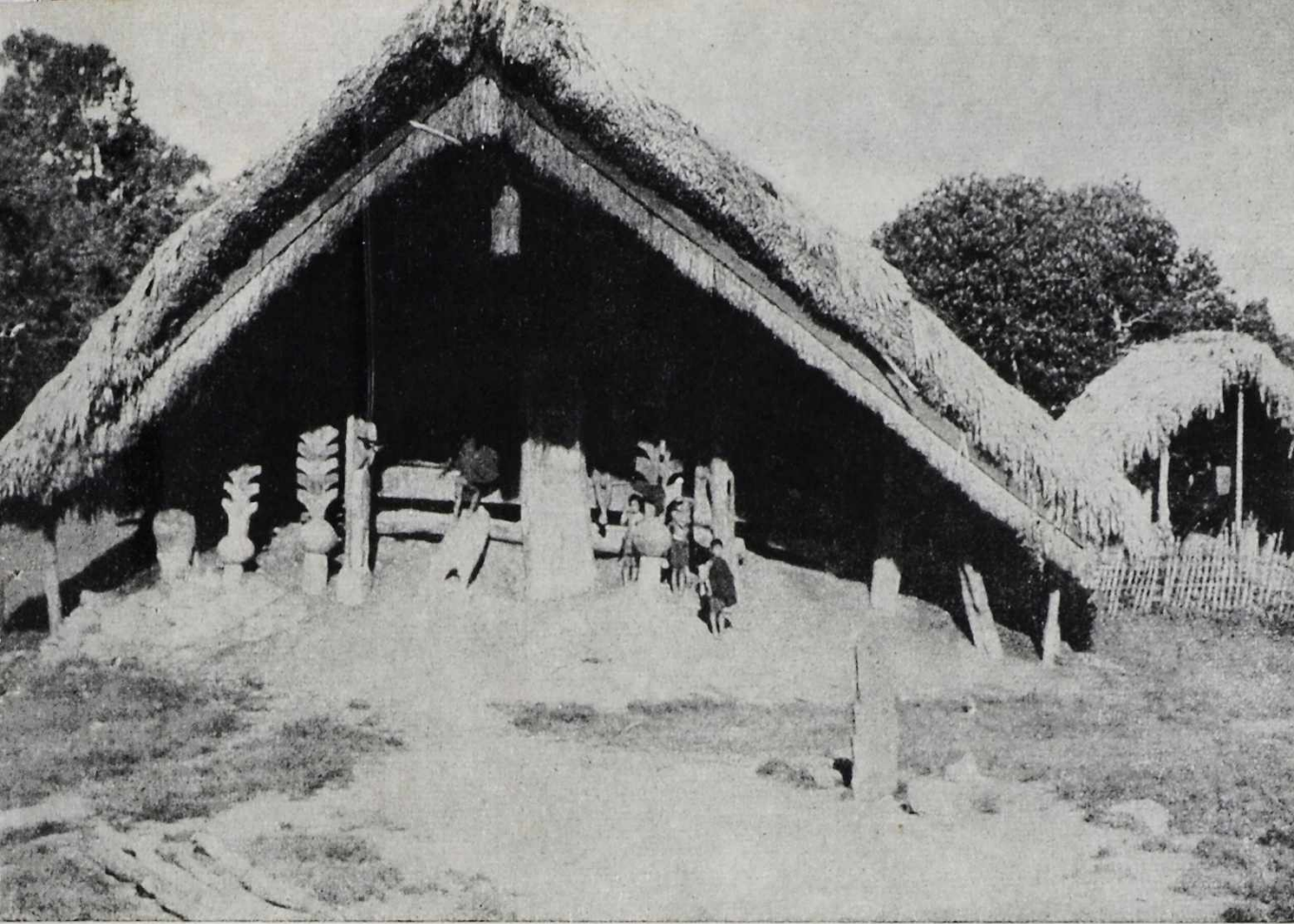


with us up to the village. A steep path led through a narrow belt of trees, where green pigeons and bulbuls and the scarlet Burman minivet nest in the high branches. If you raise your eyes from the large smooth stones, put there to benefit the naked soles of the Wakching people, you see on both sides little groups of curious figures, like dwarfs, with pointed caps, who seem to have sprung from the damp earth : conical baskets wrapped in palm leaves stand on top of strange sandstone urns, and from large cavities bleached human skulls grin at the passers-by. So the dead watch in their quiet way over the life of the village, guarding the daily comings and goings of their relatives, and receiving their own share of food and drink during the great festivals. A few steps farther, and we came to where the sun and the rain help to prepare the body to complete Nature's cycle. Surrounded by swarms of flies, the open coffins rested here on bamboo platforms, mercifully covered with a few coloured cloth such as are worn on feast days.

Leaving the corpse-platforms, we passed through the narrow street of the village granaries, guardians, in more than one way, of the village productivity ; their strong doors, with carvings of buffalo horns, were tightly bolted, and round stones, used to beat open the bolts, hung in baskets near the doors. Without locks and keys, the Nagas have hit upon this simple and ingenious device against grain-thieves ; for stealth is impossible where bolts must be hammered open. The small veranda in front of the door is partly protected by plaited bamboo mats, and here young lovers come at night and spend many happy hours completely undisturbed. The owners of the granaries welcome such guests ; for are they not ample protection—surer than any bolt—against prowling grain-thieves ? And then there is a belief that the magical current emanating from human fertility benefits the seed-rice heaped in the store-baskets inside the granaries.

At the entrance of the village proper a mighty banyan-tree stretched in a wide bow over the path, its aerial roots, grown anew into the ground, forming countless pillars about the mother stem. Connected with the men's house by a gangway on high bamboos, this giant tree served in former times as a village look-





Morung and drum-house in the Konyak village of Tamlu, small menhir in the foreground.

The Konyak village of Wanching, the ridge of Wakching in the background







The Sacred chief of the Konyak village of Banpara.



out. From here sentires watched over the paths leading deep down through the fields ; no movement stirring in the country round escaped their notice, and their warning shouts alarmed the villagers on even the most distant fields.

The men's house or *morung* appeared, with its open front, like the wide-open mouth of some gigantic whale ; numerous carved sticks and boards, dangling from the eaves, sounded softly as the wind hit them one against the other. Powerful posts carried the palm-thatched roof, and four gable carvings, painted a faint red and forming the happiest contrast against a delicate blue sky, stretched their arms heavenwards. High up on these carved gables three hornbills perched, as though taking the whole house under the protection of their wings. These sacred birds, with their enormous beaks, formed, with tigers, elephants, snakes, and humans, the main motifs of the manifold carvings on the coloured frieze. Differences of sex were emphasized clearly and not always with great delicacy.

Fantastic carvings adorned the open porch of the *morung*—the head and tusks of an elephant, a life-sized leopard running head downwards, and two warriors, holding captured heads in their hands, flanked the open doorways leading to the central hall. Crudely painted in red, white, and black, these doorways reminded you of an ultra-modern theatre *decor*. There were also carvings of love-couples, and if these representations are to be believed, love among the Konyaks would appear a rather uncomfortable and hurried affair.

A few men sat about on the open porch, plaiting baskets and mending their fishing-nets. I suppose you would get used to rubbing shoulders with the tusks of an elephant, to finding yourself slipping into the open jaws of a python after a doze in the midday sun, or, coming home late at night, perhaps a little the worse for too much rice-beer, to discovering a prowling leopard before your door. Our arrival caused them to drop their work ; a European in Wakching was still a sensational event, and even Mills had not visited the village for more than six years.

One of the men had a pretty box, carved in the shape of a human head, and Mills bought it for one rupee. The happy



owner of such unexpected wealth looked with incredulous eyes at the silver coin that seemed to him quite out of proportion to the value of his little box. I decided to take advantage of this *naivete* but hardly had I started a systematic collection than the people adjusted their mentality and began to ask boom-prices. The Konyaks have learnt very quickly to understand the value of money and to think in terms of rupees instead of in terms of rice. Money is now gradually taking the place of barter, even in trade with the villages in the interior. Of the three articles that find their way most swiftly into Naga culture, taking their places as though they had always existed—money, matches, and umbrellas—the Konyaks have acquired only two : money and matches. But no self-respecting Angami will ever leave his village in summer without an umbrella, and in a country with an annual rainfall of about 250 inches, you can hardly blame him.

The Konyaks, however, are not so particular. They do not in the least mind getting wet, for unlike the Angami, they seldom wear clothes that are in any way damageable, and they are philosophical enough to know that they are only really safe from the rain and cold in their well-built houses. With their thick roofs of palm-leaf bundles, pulled well down like warm arctic caps, these Konyak houses give you at once a comfortable impression ; and there must be many a family in Europe, crowded together in some diminutive city apartment, who would be happy to have such a spacious dwelling. True, the insides of the houses are dark, but, probably for this reason, most of the daily life goes on upon the open platforms at the back. From here you can watch the neighbours at their work and you have a nice view over the little kitchen-gardens, with their flaming red and yellow flowers, which the boys and men, but never the girls, like to wear in their ear-lobes. These carefully fenced-in little gardens are almost the only places where one is quite safe from the innumerable black pigs. With their squeaking offspring they roam about in and between the houses, and walking through the village on a hot summer afternoon, you might suppose that it is exclusively inhabited by black pigs. They are ugly but useful animals, and do their best to keep the village free of rubbish and refuse ; at



feasts they are indispensable, and it is hard to think of a Naga ceremony without the savoury smell—forestalling the savoury taste—of roast pork.

Narrow paths thread the thicket growing rank on all ground not cleared for building ; an abandoned house does not stand empty long, for the jungle soon takes possession. It was a long time before I learnt to know my way about the village, the steep and stony paths, and the damp and over-grown ones. For two hundred and fifty houses seem to have been almost inconsequently dotted over the hill-side, with five mighty *morung* protecting the entrances. Wakching is a strong village, and not so long ago it stretched a war-like arm right into the Assam plains, extorting various tributes from the helpless peasants. Today fourteen Konyak villages, some lying as much as two days' march distant, still pay tribute to Wakching.

When we returned to the bungalow after a whole morning spent in the village, we found it surrounded by a strange crowd, squatting on the ground and chewing betel. Their faces—they struck me first—were covered with intertwined lines of rich blue tattoo, like pictures I had seen of old Maori chiefs ; the lines wound in curves and twists round the eyes, nose, and mouth. Tight cane-belts pulled in waists to astonishingly small proportions ; the wasp-like waists of the early years of the century came to my mind, and those caricatures of what seem to us ridiculous fashions. But there was nothing ridiculous about these men. Their slim bodies, more elegant and supple than those of the Wakching men, were really beautiful, and even their fantastic head-dresses, worthy of any carnival, did not weaken this impression. Boars' tusks, goats' hair dyed red, monkey and bear fur, and great hornbill feathers were all in some way or other attached to the small cane hats perched on the top of their heads. Straight black hair was tied in a firm knot at the back, and flat pieces of wood, flying tails of goat's hair, stuck horizontally through the knot. Sometimes the ends of these flat pieces of wood bore the carvings of miniature heads, and these, we were told, tallied with the enemy heads the wearer had helped to capture.



One man, with a head-dress of a monkey skull framed in boar's tusks, seemed to stand out from all this motley crowd. White conch-shells covered his ears, and antelope horns were stuck through the lobes; he wore heavy ivory-armlets and red cane rings on his arms, and his legs were encased in rings of cowrie shells and more of the red cane rings.

But it was his self-possession and his composure, even more than his head-dress and fine ornaments, that distinguished him from those surrounding him. I had not expected to find such composure among primitive tribesmen and I was rather surprised at his obviously princely bearing. This was the chief of Sheangha, a village lying outside British territory, who, hearing of Mills' arrival, had come to pay him a visit. The relations between the independent chiefs beyond the border and the officials of the neighbouring Naga Hills District are of a rather curious kind, depending more or less on the personality of the Deputy Commissioner himself. Without in any way giving up their sovereignty in their own territory, the autocratic village chiefs sometimes invite the 'Great Sahib', as they call the Deputy Commissioner, to act as mediator in settling their long-drawn-out tribal feuds. Mills, who for years had been Sub-divisional Officer at Mokokchung, from where the Konyak area is administered, knew most of the chiefs beyond the frontier personally, and he possessed considerable influence and authority among them. But when Nagas from across the frontier raid villages in British territory, the Deputy Commissioner no longer acts merely as mediator; he usually calls the offender quickly to account, and even undertakes punitive expeditions against unruly villages when he considers it necessary. Fortunately such actions are extremely rare, for the chiefs usually know just how far they can go.

The appearance of the chief of Sheangha, and the deference with which his followers and even the Wakching men treated him, were quite different from anything I had hitherto experienced in the Naga Hills. The autocratic chiefs or Angs of the Konyaks hold a unique position in these hills. They are the undisputed rulers in their own villages and all the villages under their overlordship. Their person is sacred, and no commoner ever approa-





Henlong, the belle of Wakching.





Ngapnun of Longkhai giving a friend  
a drink from a bamboo vessel

Girls of Shiong at their morning toilette.





ches them upright. The servants of the Ang of Sheangha crouched every time they had to pass him and literally crept up to their master when they offered him betel.

The Ang of Sheangha brought Mills a goat as a gift of welcome, and Mills entertained him and his suite with a few cups of rum ; I gave them several packets of cigarettes, and then they went happily home. Curiously enough, even those Konyaks who are only used to chewing their own rough, home-grown tobacco, greatly value cigarettes when they are offered to them for the first time.

Many other people from across the frontier had come to welcome Mills, but the powerful Ang of the near-by village of Chi sent his excuses. He could not spend the night in Wakching, he said, as there was dysentery in the village, and to sleep in the huts near the bungalow where our servants put up was beneath his dignity. But the youths bringing this message proudly wore the fresh tattoo of head-hunters on the forehead and cheeks. Was it entirely on account of the dysentery that the Ang of Chi would not come to greet Mills ? No ; Chi had recently taken a head from Totok. Both Chi and Totok are clearly visible from Wakching ; lying a short distance from one another on two neighbouring mountains, they had been at war for many years. This feud taking place just outside British territory, but involving on more than one occasion people from administered villages, had long been a cause of anxiety to the Sub-divisional Officer at Mokokchung.

The next day we visited the small village of Shiong. Though lying with its fifty houses hardly one hour's march away, it is astonishingly different from Wakching. Even the languages of the two villages have little resemblance ; most of the men comprehend their neighbour's speech quite well, but the women, who do not go about very much, cannot understand each other at all. A very intelligent Wakching boy, whose mother came from Shiong, told me that, whereas he could speak a little Assamese, he could not say a single word to his mother's relatives. This difference in language is not, as I ascertained later, restricted only to the vocabulary, but applies also to the phonetic system.



If you go a few miles farther, you come to Tanhai, where the people speak yet another language, and on a two days' march you can easily pass through four distinct language-areas. For this reason Mills had three Konyak *dobhashi* with him, who had to translate the various languages into the usual Naga Assamese. Talking among themselves, each of the three spoke his own language, the others understanding, but not being able to speak it without difficulty.

Shiong is very different from Wakching. The men tattoo their faces and wear the same coiffure that we had so much admired on the Sheangha men. Long, luxuriant hair is their pride, but the Wakching men, far from envying long hair, cut their own short, and are not impressed with their neighbour's hair-dress. Nor are they impressed with the dress of their neighbours' womenfolk. Quite on the contrary, the fashion of the fair sex of Shiong is a source of continual hilarity to the men of Wakching. For the skirt of a Shiong belle is little more than a hand's width, while a respectable Wakching woman wears this only piece of clothing at least two or three hands wide. Can you wonder that the Wakching boys make fun of the 'naked' girls of Shiong? But their scorn is not due to the moral indignation that makes a puritan of the Middle West condemn a too scanty bathing suit; it is due rather to the feeling that these girls, through their nakedness, are deprived of all erotic attraction. To run about in a skirt that excites no curiosity, so 'that no man wants to look at them'—isn't that a shame?

I must admit that I could never share the opinion of my Wakching friends; for me the missing width of skirt did not lessen the charm of the Shiong girls. Climbing up the steep mountain with their high loads of fire-wood, their lithe, elastic bodies seemed immensely more beautiful than the figures on many a fashionable bathing-beach. I never saw a fat Konyak woman; even after innumerable pregnancies they preserve the slimness of youth in some miraculous way, and you are spared the sight of those pendulous breasts which are so frequent among other races.

In Shiong we were first entertained in the house of Ahon. He was an old friend of Mills and only too pleased to see him again,



his whole household assembled to welcome us, and the hostess never allowed our rice-beer mugs to stand empty. I am afraid, however, that, fresh from the over-anxious atmosphere of Europe, I could not help feeling that it was just the hostess that presented one of the drawbacks to that otherwise well-assorted household—for the hostess was a leper. Ahon, too, must have come to the conclusion that in the long run a wife with leprosy is not very pleasant, for he had married a second wife, his first wife's cousin, and they had seven children. But the first wife—the leper—continued to live in the house, attending to her duties as best she could. And as she had not so far infected any of the members of the family, my prejudice against leprosy was somewhat appeased. If you are afraid of leprosy—and it is a sorry sight—you had better not go to Shiong, for the place is full of lepers ; but after a time, if you can overcome your aversion, you get quite used to these poor stricken creatures. Even in Wakching, where there were only four lepers, the people could not make up their minds either to isolate or to settle them outside the village. The kind-hearted Konyaks refuse to exile poor, sick members of the community. 'After all, they are our brothers', I often heard them say. 'How should we chase them out of the village' ? Yet they are fully aware that this 'evil illness', as they call leprosy, is contagious.

But leper-wife or no leper-wife, I had to make friends with Ahon. He had once served the Government as a *dobhashi*, and knew the country beyond the frontier as well as his own home. He was an excellent informant not only on the customs of Shiong, but also on those of Chi. For Chi was his home village, and he had only been forced to leave it when he came into conflict with the autocratic chief. By serving the Government, and through his numerous connexions with the neighbouring villages, he had gradually made his fortune and nowadays his influence surpassed that of many smaller Angs. But in his heart he still hated all chiefs, and even in Shiong, where he lived quite peacefully, he was on very strained terms with the Ang, a cousin and vassal of the Great Ang of Chi.

Ahon loved to tell stories of the less glorious deeds and fates



of the Great Angs. He would spend hours relating how the Ang of such and such a village committed such and such dastardly deeds : all typical of Angs in general. One day, walking along the path to Tanhai, he recounted with great relish the story of the quarrels for the throne of Hangnyu, a village about sixteen miles north-east of Wakching.

It appears that twenty years ago the old Ang of Hangnyu died ; and his two sons and his brother quarrelled over the succession. By right his eldest son Auwang should have become Ang, but he was so young that his uncle hoped to supersede him. Time is not very important in Konyak villages, and the quarrel dragged on for some time, until the old men of Hangnyu, growing restless, sent a message to the powerful Ang of Chi, asking him to send one of his brothers as Ang to Hangnyu. In itself this would have been nothing unusual, for just as the Balkan countries have received their dynasties from the other royal houses of Europe, so the Konyaks often 'called' their Angs from other villages. But the Ang of Chi, realizing that he could only aggravate the situation, refused the offer : the ruling house of Hangnyu was not yet extinct, he said, and there still remained two pretenders to the throne. But the people of Hangnyu, anxious to set their affairs in order, sent a message to the Ang of Pomau, who, not so wise as the Ang of Chi, sent his ambitious brother Kiwang to accept the throne of Hangnyu.

At first all went well with the village of Hangnyu and its Ang Kiwang ; he succeeded in defeating the hostile village of Tang, and quite a number of heads were captured. But not many years has passed before misfortune followed misfortune : Kiwang's wife, of the chiefly house of Mon, died, and soon her only son followed her. And though Kiwang had numerous other children in the dark rooms of his long house, none of those sons could ever succeed him on the throne of Hangnyu, for their mothers were commoners, and the pure blood of the chiefs did not flow in their veins. Then several bad harvests shrunk the wealth of the village so much that Kiwang often found difficulty in providing the necessary number of buffaloes and pigs for the Spring Festival, and Tang, reversing the fortunes of war, attacked a party



of Hangnyu people out fishing and captured no less than nine heads on a single day.

The villagers—rather unjustly, I thought—held Kiwang responsible for all these misfortunes, and the now grown-up sons of the old chief only further embarrassed his position. Day by day the resistance to his power grew ; his orders were ignored, only scanty tribute was paid, and his fields were neglected by his unwilling subjects. Finally the chief's sons, confirming his disgrace, publicly and ostentatiously ate the right hind leg of a buffalo sacrificed at the rebuilding of a *morung*—by right the share of the Ang.

Kiwang knew that his days in Hangnyu were numbered and he secretly sent messengers to his brother, the Ang of Pomau. But how could Ato, the mighty lord of Pomau, appreciate the prospect of Kiwang's resignation ? Would it not mean a loss of prestige for his whole house ? His advice was not to precipitate matters ; for though he could not openly interfere, he would invite the arrogant young Angs to a feast in Pomau and murder them. The plot was betrayed, however, and only one of the young Angs, Lowang, accepted the invitation ; he arrived with an enormous escort of warriors, and they took great care never to let their weapons out of their hands. With icy politeness Lowang thanked Ato for his lavish feast and returned to Hangnyu, where he and his brother immediately dethroned and banished Kiwang. But the story did not end here, for many followers and servants had come to Hangnyu with Kiwang ; they had built houses and acquired fields in Hangnyu, and their sons and daughters had grown up and found mates in Hangnyu. Were they now to return handless to Pomau ? No, they had become Hangnyu people, and Hangnyu people they wanted to remain. 'Well, if you are Hangnyu men, why don't you fetch us a few heads from Pomau ?' Mockingly the words had been said, but four of Kiwang's one-time followers took them all too seriously.

They crept into Pomau on a moonless night and cut off the heads of an unsuspecting sleeping couple. Unfortunately the deed was immediately discovered, and the Pomau warriors took up the pursuit of the raiders. Only one escaped, two were over-



taken and put to death, and the fourth man, fleeing into the forest, climbed a tree, hoping to put his pursuers off the scent. In the morning the warriors found him. They surrounded the tree and held council. But the case was a difficult one. Under cover of darkness, and ignorant of their identity, they had killed two murderers ; but now the light of day revealed with whom they had to deal, and though the crime, violating the most sacred bonds of the village community, had to be punished, their hands were tied, tied by the strictest of all taboos, which forbids the shedding of a relative's blood. There was only one way to end the ghastly unprecedented situation : the Ang himself must intervene, for he stood above all taboos, and was so filled with magical power that nothing, not even the killing of a man of his own village, could harm him. So the old Ang Ato climbed a neighbouring tree, and, taking his muzzle-loader, shot the offender. Auwang ascended the throne of his father, and still ruled in Hangnyu.

Mills was to try a case while he was in the Konyak country. It concerned the taking of heads, and since Konyak villages inside British territory, as well as villages across the border, were involved, Mills had decided to save the people the long march to Wakching and to hold the court at Tanhai. We started early in the morning ; the path, soaked by the night's rain, led first through a belt of forest, and then down over slippery steps cut into the ground, and finally through high grass and bush. On the boundary of the Wakching land, we found two crossed reeds blocking the path. The men of Sheangha had set them up ; returning from Wackhing two days before, they had thought to foil the following spirits of disease, when they left the land of the infected village, by crawling through the arch.

The house of the Ang stands in the centre of the village of Tanhai. It is a long, low building, divided into numerous small rooms. At the back, and partly covered by the roof, a platform is built out over the slope. Generally, the women spin and weave, clean taro, and spread the drying rice on this platform ; but today it was transformed, for the 'Great Sahib', lord over 178,000 Nagas, was to hold his court here, question witnesses,



and pass his judgement. It was a very important day for Tanhai.

The case Mills had to try was a difficult one. A woman of Chen, a village lying in unadministered country, had lost her head ; so far it was simple and the men of Sheangha, a colony of the great Sheangha, admitted the capture of the head. They said that they wished to send it as a present to the Ang of Mon, for the Ang of Mon had recently had much misfortune : he had lost his house and the whole of his collection of more than a hundred heads by fire. But the hostile village of Tang lay on the path between Sheangha and Mon. Sheangha gave this reason for employing two youths of Hungphoi to convey their gift. Hungphoi is friendly with Mon and it is friendly with Tang ; and besides, Hungphoi lies in administered country, which more or less guaranteed a safe conduct to the youths in the neighbouring independent villages. According to the boys' story, they had done nothing but carry the head from Sheangha to Mon, this undertaking alone entitling them to the face-tattoo in whose new splendour they obviously gloried.

The trial proceeded in the most friendly fashion. It was rather like an informal gathering on the side of the fields, when you stop to discuss the state of the rice-harvest. Defendants, witnesses, *dobhashi*, and spectators all squatted in front of us, arms resting on drawn-up knees and mouths casually chewing betel. Some of them had dressed up for the occasion, and had wrapped themselves in embroidered cloths, but the majority of the men wore only cane belts, with the little apron hanging down in front. Women and children assembled in the background, only too eager to enjoy the unique sensation of the Great Sahib's visit.

The accused Hungphoi youths came in leisurely—they were not led in by force ; indeed, they had come quite voluntarily, and even Sheangha, lying outside the proper jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner, had sent representatives. The *dobhashi*, Ahon of Shiong and Chingai of Oting, translated the evidence from the various tongues into Assamese—inevitably adding their own opinion to every testimony. Of course two *dobhashi* mean the possibility of two different opinions, and this is just what hap-



pened. The two *dobhashi* disagreed on the most crucial point. There was a suspicion that the two heroes of Hungphoi were not so blameless as they made out ; that they had not only conveyed the strange present to the Ang of Mon, but had had a hand—perhaps more than a hand—in the capture of the head. This was Ahon's opinion. He explained that the fresh tattoo, covering not only the face but extending in a lace-work pattern down the neck, was clear proof of their active participation in the deed.

Chingai, apparently trying to exonerate the Hungphoi men, pretended that the mere touching of a newly captured head entitled the wearer to this extensive tattoo.

The intricacies of the case seemed hopeless, for with the experts disagreeing there was no way of ascertaining the exact meaning of the disputed tattoo. In the end Mills, adopting Chingai's view, condemned the Hungphoi boys for the admitted transfer of a head-hunting trophy. Hungphoi was fined two mithan ; for the village as a whole and not the individual has to pay such fines. Mills also fined Sheangha one mithan for involving British subjects in their own head-hunting raids.

The mithan or gayal which plays so important a role among the Nagas is a species of cattle black-brown in colour with white stockings and sometimes a white mark in the forehead. In the Dafla and Abor country you find piebald and even entirely white mithan, but I have never seen such an animal in the Naga Hills. Like the Nagas' buffaloes, the mithan wander about the jungle in a half-wild condition, their owners feeding them only occasionally with salt. Neither mithan nor buffaloes are milked or in any way used for work, and however well-stocked a Naga village is with cattle, you cannot get a drop of milk. Indeed when I brought a cow and her calf from the plains, the Konyaks expressed the greatest horror at the idea of drinking an animal's milk. But time marches on and in 1945 I heard that Nagas rolling in money gained by war work had taken to buying condensed milk at a rate of one rupee per tin.

The trial ended with Hungphoi and Sheangha both promising to pay the imposed fine of mithan, and the youthful offenders





A Konyak Youth with the face and chest tattoo of a head-hunter.





A Suspension bridge across the Dikhu river.



went back to their villages unscathed. We returned to Wakching, which involved a tiring climb of some 1500 feet in most oppressive heat.

Mills had now finished his work, and he decided to return by way of Mokokchung of Kohima. I wanted to accompany him as far as Mokokchung, for the path from Wakching passes through the country of Aos, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to get to know these southern neighbours of the Konyaks.

There was a fine drizzle when early next morning, we walked over the ridge to the neighbouring village of Wanching, and then climbed down innumerable stone steps on the southern side of the mountain. Here, on a stone by the path, we found the claws of a Chinese pangolin, and the *dobhashi* told us that, according to a Konyak belief the scratching of the skin with such ant-eater claws soothes the inflammation caused by the touch of hairy centipedes. Some Konyak must have killed a pangolin, and altruistically left two of the claws in this conspicuous place.

In the forest, only a little below the fields of Wanching, we came upon mounds of giant droppings sprawling over the path. Wild elephants ! The Konyaks do not like it when the elephants come up so high, for they are apt to do much damage to the crops.

Deep down in the stuffy, jungle-filled valley we crossed the Dikhu River. Its flooded, coffee-brown waters, carrying broken branches and whole uprooted trees, surged and gurgled between its banks. High above, a delicate cane bridge spanned the turbulent waters ; suspended by numerous cane ropes from the branches of the high trees on either bank, it seemed as fragile as any fluttering spider's web spun over-night between two bushes. Three or four rows of bamboos formed a floor, and a fairly high, plaited railing provided a certain security, when once you had embarked on this swaying journey. How thankful I was to reach the other side, and after what seemed an interminable time, to climb down the ladder on to firm ground ! Yet our heavily burdened coolies seemed quite unconcerned and quite at ease.

That evening we reached Tamlu, a Konyak village lying about 3000 feet above sea level on a ridge that rises from the Dikhu



valley. Two different languages are spoken in this village ; two of the three *morung* speak a language particular to Tamlu, while the people of the third *morung*, whose ancestors immigrated from Tanhai only a few generations ago, speak quite a different language. There was difficulty at first, the people told us, but now the villagers have learnt to understand each other. Recently the linguistic divergency was complicated by a religious controversy. Tamlu and the neighbouring Kanching were the only Konyak villages where the American Baptist Mission had gained a footing. I was to see and hear more of its activity in the land of the Aos.



## CHAPTER V

### HEATHENS AND BAPTISTS

THE BACHELORS' hall overlooking the Ao village of Chantoga was a depressing sight. Rain dripped through holes in the roof, and the rooms once used as dormitories by the youths of the village now stood empty and deserted. Like some huge antediluvian monster, the gigantic long-drum lay in the centre, filling more than half of the building. Would its powerful voice ever resound again over the hills? The radiant crowd that dragged it into the village with solemn songs and joyous cheering belongs to the past! Gone are the merry feasts, when young and old alike assembled in the *morung* round the great pots of sweet rice-beer. Gone are those days, perhaps never to return.

A bell rang, feebly and tinnily, and the sound of singing rose in our ears. Were these Naga voices? It sounded like a hymn or a chapel-chant—or perhaps not quite like either. This singing was entirely different from Naga expression—as discordant as the ugly tin-roofed chapel amidst the palm thatched houses of the village.

People with serious faces came out of the chapel. There was the 'pastor', a skinny young man in khaki shorts and a mauve coat. Some of his flock had also adopted shorts, but the rest of the community were content to emphasize their allegiance to the new doctrine by wearing plain dark-blue cloths, while the women wore white blouses, imported from the plains, with their Naga skirts. The Aos' most cherished and valued possessions, the pride of generations, lay unheeded and scattered in the jungle; ivory armlets, necklaces of boars' tusks, cowrie shells, head-dresses and baldrics, and artistically woven coloured cloths, all discarded because they belong to the old times.

I asked the 'pastor' why the bachelors' halls were no longer used. 'How could a Christian boy sleep in these houses of the heathen?' was his answer. 'To use them would be against our rules.'



In the past the older boys and girls were not allowed to sleep in the houses of their parents, lest it led to incest ; but the missionaries encouraged their converts to disregard tribal laws and customs even in spheres not directly connected with religion. The bachelors' hall is an institution much like the English public school ; one may agree or disagree with the principle of giving boys a training in community spirit outside the individual family, but there can be no question that the *morung* is one of the main pillars of the Aos' social order. The bachelors' hall was the social centre of the village, the age groups of the *morung* were the natural labour teams for every public work, and the rights and obligations of every member of the community were regulated by his place in the age-group system.

Similarly the Feasts of Merit, disapproved of by the missionaries, fulfilled an extremely important social and economic function. To rise in the social scale an Ao had to give a series of feasts, defined by custom in every detail and necessitating the expenditure of large quantities of food-stuff. For among the Aos a man did not gain social prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending it for the benefit of the community. The ambition to outdo their neighbours in the giving of Feasts of Merit stimulated the rich to produce rice beyond the requirements of their household and to rear mithan, buffaloes and pigs for slaughter. Social prestige was not their only reward ; with every feast they acquired the right to increased shares of meat whenever another villager gave a Feast of Merit. This system of reciprocal gifts made for the smooth distribution of perishable food. In a country where effective preservation of meat is unknown any individual household slaughtering a mithan or a pig would suffer considerable loss, unless there existed an organization of exchanging surplus meat for shares in animals to be slaughtered in the future by other villagers. The Feasts of Merit with their slaughter and distribution of animals provided such an organization and were thus the very opposite of a thoughtless squandering of wealth. But they did more than this ; the wealth of the ambitious was employed to provide food and enjoyment for the less prosperous members of the community, for at a Feast



of Merit there was meat, rice and rice-beer for every man, woman and child in the village.

In Christian villages the rich, free of traditional obligations towards their neighbours and forbidden to perform Feasts of Merit, tend to hoard their rice or to sell it to the highest bidder. With the community spirit broken, individualism begins to assert itself, and the Western idea of pride in the possession of goods, fostered probably quite unconsciously by missionaries, replaces the Ao's traditional pride in the lavish expenditure of his wealth. The Christians object to the Feasts of Merit presumably because the animals consumed in their course are not just slaughtered but sacrificed with appropriate invocations of the spirits. Yet one would think that with a little trouble an institution of an essentially social and economic character could have been remodelled so as to be compatible with Christian tenets. Were such adjustments impossible, Europe would have long lost all its folk festivals and the Christmas tree would long ago have been condemned as a pagan symbol.

One of the main obstacles to any participation of Christians in village feasts was the American Baptist Mission's rigid enforcement of teetotalism. To the Ao a feast without rice-beer is unthinkable, for what wine is to the Italian and whisky to the Scotchman, rice-beer is to the Naga. It refreshes him on hot days, encourages him to carry the heavy harvest-baskets many hundred of feet up the steep mountains to the village, loosens his tongue, and makes him merry when, on feast days, he sits with his friends round the fire. But he had to forswear it directly he was baptized. Drinkers of rice-beer, converts were taught, would burn in hell fire for ever, and the Naga, impressed by the missionaries' teaching and not knowing that since the oldest times wine and beer have been drunk throughout Christendom, eschewed his cherished national drink. But although the spirit is willing, the flesh is often weak, and not all converts find it easy to remain true to their resolution ; many drink secretly and with a bad conscience.

As a substitute for rice-beer the Mission had introduced tea, which drunk without milk is greatly inferior in nutritive value. Its other disadvantage is that it has to be bought for hard cash,



whereas rice-beer is brewed at home from surplus rice. Since in peace-time there is no market for the coarse rice grown on the Aos' jhum fields, this change-over lessens the Naga's economic self-sufficiency. I often wondered how Christian Nagas were supposed to obtain the many foreign goods for which the Mission had given them a taste. Shorts and shirts, the blouses of women, tea, sugar and many novel household goods had all be imported and while the Mission was certainly pouring a good deal of money into the country and the pay of pastors and teachers as well as many gifts to converts accounted for most foreign articles, the economy of the Christian Nagas could very well be permanently based on such outside support. But it does not seem that the Mission had any clear plan of how to restore the disturbed balance of the Aos' economy. I never heard of any new industries started in Christian villages, or indeed of the introduction of improved agricultural methods which would enable the Nagas to produce for sale and thus obtain the money necessary to satisfy their new wants.

The sale of such jungle-produce as pan leaves and cane in the plains which has long enabled the Nagas to buy their iron and salt can hardly be increased sufficiently to pay also for the import of numerous manufactured goods, and home-industries, such as weaving, have rather declined since the introduction of Christianity. The converts have no more use for the gorgeous, richly embroidered cloths, for these were the insignia of the donors of Feasts of Merit and their use was discouraged, if not actually forbidden by the missionaries. Work for wages, in a few cases in the employ of the Mission, but more frequently in the tea-gardens of the plains, is therefore the Naga's only answer to the new demands on his economy. At the time of my stay in the Naga Hills this movement had not assumed serious proportions, but we have only to look to Africa to gauge the threat to tribal harmony caused by the periodical absence of the young men in mines and on plantations.

There is also a psychological reason for the Christian Naga's inclination to accept employment outside his village. There the hard toil on the fields remains, while much of the bright side of



village-life, the great annual feasts, the dancing and singing, the happy community life in the *morung* and last but not least the gay parties round pots of sparkling rice-beer have for him disappeared. No longer does the ambition to entertain his friends and neighbours at elaborate feasts to gain the right to the wearing of magnificent ornaments and to rise to prominence in the council of elders, lend zest to the growing of rice ; village life, shorn of its colour and entertainments has become monotonous, and all the teaching the Mission provided pointed to a wider, and in the eyes of the young convert, a more desirable world. Seeing his own customs condemned by the missionaries, he learned to despise his own tribal and cultural inheritance. Christianity and Naga culture seem to him opposite poles, and on the side of the missionaries there have indeed been few attempts to bring the two into harmony and build on that which was valuable in tribal life.

Nothing shows this disparity more clearly than the churches you find in Ao villages. Most of them are low, square, tin-roofed buildings, the interior resembling an empty school-room and the walls hung with crude colour prints of scenes from the Old Testament ; scenes which can mean singularly little to the average Naga. There may be some window panes of green and red glass, but next to nothing in such a church is made by Nagas. Yet there seems to be no reason why the churches of Aos should not be decorated with their own traditional wood-carvings. Just as medieval craftsmen decorated Gothic cathedrals with fabulous animals, gargoyles and demons, so the expert wood carvers among the Aos might have been employed with advantage in building their houses of worship. In time new motifs could have replaced hornbills, monkeys and tigers, and a church containing the works of local artists would undoubtedly lie closer to the hearts of the community than one adorned with foreign colour prints.

As it is, the Aos' highly developed art of wood carving is in danger of extinction. The high reliefs and carved figures in the bachelors' halls and on the houses of the donors of Feasts of Merit were the main works of the craftsmen, but with the disappearance of *morung* and the ban on Feasts of Merit, there is neither incentive nor scope for the Naga sculptor.



In the villages I visited with Mills, the mission had then not won a complete victory, and many Aos persevered in their traditional faith. Curiously enough they showed on the whole far more tolerance than some of their Christian neighbours. I never heard that 'heathens' had damaged a church or disturbed a service. But unfortunately the Baptists were less tactful, and only too often hurt the feelings of their fellow-villagers by cutting down their sacred trees and desecrating the spirit-stones. And under the pretext that they had nothing to do with the old customs, they sometimes even refused to collaborate in the purely worldly affairs of the village.

Undoubtedly there must be Nagas who embraced the Christian faith because they were impressed by its lofty ideals and seriously convinced of its truth. But for many the adoption of Christianity, of which they had only a vague comprehension, was little more than the transition from one system of taboos and rites to another. The Naga convert, adopting the 'customs' of the white man, often believed that by their observance he not only escaped a painful fate after death, but, ceasing to be a real Naga, became nearer the admired example of the missionary. Often, however, the adoption of the new doctrine, seeming to command so powerful a magic, had a purely concrete aim. A Naga, having employed all other healing magic in vain, would seek refuge in the foreign ritual. But if this too failed, he might abandon it, and, shaken in his old beliefs, would waver between the two faiths, unable to decide which is best. Thousands of Nagas were in this position, and did not feel themselves bound by either moral code ; many of them were men and women excluded from their Baptist community for the surreptitious drinking of rice-beer.

Government officials and missionaries took unfortunately exactly opposite views on what was good for the Nagas, and a great deal of confusion was caused in the minds of the tribesmen if one sahib praised their *morung* as the most excellent institution and the other decried it as an invention of evil spirits. Government's policy was then to avoid any sudden disruption of Naga culture, respect tribal custom wherever it did not prejudice the maintenance of law and order, and tamper as little as possible



with the old village-organization. The ousting of the products of village crafts by foreign imports was discouraged, and Government interpreters were indeed forbidden to wear western dress. With their land closed to traders, money-lenders and land-hungry settlers from the plains, the Nagas have been saved from the exploitation which has caused the ruin of so many aboriginal tribes in other parts of India. Respect for the old order has, however, not meant a policy of *laissez faire*. The Naga has been given security, cheap and effective justice within the spirit of the tribal law, hospitals and dispensaries, a good many schools and improved communications—not, it is true, motor roads which would not benefit the tribesman, but good bridle-paths with bridges crossing all major streams.

It is a pity that the American Baptist Mission had little sympathy with the aims of Government and even less appreciation for the valuable elements of Naga culture. Many of its aspects conflict in no way with the principles of Christianity, and I believe that even some of the old feasts and ceremonies—certainly the agricultural festivals—could have been adapted to the new faith, given a new meaning and retained by the Christian communities. Where the Ao prays to a supreme deity who send him happiness and misfortune and watches over the doings of men, an appropriate Christian prayer might have been substituted and there seems to be no reason why at the first sowing or at harvest the Ao Christian should not pray for the prosperity of his crops. No one will question the good faith and admirable enthusiasm of the missionaries. They were doing great work in the medical field and have made thousands of Naga children literate. But it may be that with a little more understanding and sympathy for Naga culture they might have brought more happiness to their flock and avoided many of the more unfortunate results of a sudden clash of cultures.

At Mokokchung, a large Ao village and headquarters of a Sub-division, came the parting of the ways. Mills went on to Kohima, while I returned to the Konyak country. It was a strange moment half of regret at leaving Mills and half of excitement at being on my own in a new field, when in pouring rain I left Mokokchung



with Nlamo, Tsampio and a few coolies. Before me lay my life with the Nagas.

Several days later we made our way from Chantongia to Merangkong. The sun blazed down from a deep blue sky and the air was filled with the shrill buzzing of the cicadas and the yelling of gibbons from the jungle in the valley—sounding sometimes like the barking of dogs and sometimes almost like human voices. Birds twittered and rioted in the branches. The Burman minivet was the most beautiful; the cock scarlet with black wings, the female lemon-yellow and black. They did not seem to mind our coming, and let us approach within a few steps of them before fluttering unconcernedly to a higher branch.

The village of Merangkong, with its three rows of houses, one on top of the other, presented an entirely regular front; seen at a distance it seemed like an enormous hotel looking over the valley. When still a mile or two from the village, we met a group of young men hurrying down the hills, with long bamboos over their shoulders. They told us excitedly that the whole village was out to ring a tiger, that the bamboos were to build the fence against which the tiger was to be driven. They pointed, and far below the path we could see crowds of men surrounding a patch of steep, sloping jungle; they were building a stockade on the lowest edge. There was so much noise and clamour that I doubted whether the tiger could really be in this piece of jungle, but the Merangkong boys allayed my doubts, and assured us that the tracks clearly led to it, but not out of it.

The spectacle of ringing a tiger was not to be missed. I hurried towards the village. I swallowed a few mouthfuls of food and hastily searched my luggage for my small revolver, the only fire-arm I had with me, since I had left my gun at Wakching. I had no illusions as to how much harm my revolver could do to a tiger, but perhaps I had a naive idea, and not a very altruistic one, that, if the worst came to the worst, I could with a few shots divert the tiger from myself to the men alongside, who would be armed at any rate with shields and spears. After all, it was their tiger.

On my way to the jungle, I passed groups of boys cutting



bamboos and carrying them down to the fence. The piece of jungle to be ringed was surrounded by much activity, and at the lower end, where a small brook trickled through a ravine, a high bamboo stockade had been erected; funnel-shaped its wings ran up the slope into the jungle, Young men climbed about on this stockade strengthening, stiffening, and tying together the individual bamboos; where the warriors of the village, armed with spears and shields, had ranged themselves behind the two wings. The old men and the boys ringed in the upper part of the jungle; tigers apparently always attack down-hill. None of the men had fire-arms: spears, dao, and high-plaited shields were their only weapons. Some of the older men had given themselves a most terror-inspiring look by wearing head-dresses of bear's skin and various other hunting trophies; check-straps set with tiger-claws showed that they had already bagged many a tiger.

When the stockade was ready, I climbed the swaying structure and found myself about eighteen feet above the ground; under my weight the bamboos bent towards the centre of the ring in a most frightening way. The tiger was to be driven against this stockade and speared, or at least I hoped so, practically beneath me, by the men ranged up behind the fence. With one hand I grasped an unsteady bamboo, with the other I gripped my camera, fitted with a telescopic lense. I wanted a close-up of the tiger actually being killed by the Aos—or vice versa.

The ringing of the tiger began, and with every minute the tension grew, as the boys and old men came yelling down the slope. Ferociously they cut down the jungle, and we expected any moment to see the tiger fleeing before the noise and the breaking branches towards the stockade. The warriors stiffened and waited, spears poised. Endless minutes passed—but no tiger came. My perch on the bamboo stockade was not exactly comfortable. Gradually it became evident that there was no tiger in this thicket; he must have saved himself long before that empty piece of jungle had been ringed. All that trouble! And all those precious bamboos wasted!

In every civilized country the cheated hunters would have vented their disappointment with loud words of anger, and each



would have reproached the other for the failure. It must have been some one's idea, after all, that the tiger, having killed a cow, was licking his chops in that particular piece of jungle, and that some one was therefore responsible for a whole day's lost labour. But it did not occur to the Nagas to reproach each other. They did the only possible thing under such circumstances : they laughed heartily over their own misfortune.

'Isn't it funny, Sahib ? We all went out with spears and shields, and now there is no tiger ! Well, today he was more clever than we, but another time we will get him, all the same !'

The rice-beer held in readiness to celebrate the killing of a tiger tasted just as good as consolation for an unsuccessful hunt, and after hours on that bamboo stockade in the blazing sun it was pleasant to rest in one of the airy Ao houses. Several men invited me to have a drink with them, and, anxious not to offend, I made at first a sober, and later a slightly tottering, round of the village. It was a little like rushing from one cocktail party to the next. But society life is simple in Merangkong ; there is no need to hasten from Mayfair to Kensington and then on to Chelsea, for all your friends live conveniently side by side.

Nowhere will you find better rice-beer than in Merangkong ; it is clear and sweet and frothy, like champagne. What a loss to future anthropologists, if the Mission ever gains the upper hand here !

Eventually I visited the house of a famous old man called Sakchimtuba. In his youth he had taken part in many a head-hunting raid, and once he had even crossed the Dikhu and raided Wakching. But when he began to take heads from the neighbouring village of Tamlu, nine Konyak villages formed an alliance against the truculent Merangkong and took a dreadful revenge.

Dusk had come, and the women of the house returned from the fields. They sat down among the men without the slightest shyness. Young Ao girls are pretty creatures, with soft, happy faces, and such light skins that you often see the red blood showing on their cheeks. Tastes differ, however, and when, many months later, I pointed out a particularly lovely Ao girl to the Konyak *dobhashi* Chingai, he showed little enthusiasm and re-



marked that her lips were too pale. Compared to the lips of Konyak women, scarlet from betel, her mouth did indeed appear pale, and I am afraid that as long as lip-sticks do not find their way into the Naga Hills, the Aos will have to forego the favours of their Konyak neighbours. I don't suppose they really mind, for the blackened teeth of the Konyaks must be anything but attractive to girls used to the magnificent white teeth of their own men folk.

I thanked my hosts for the delicious rice-beer by offering them cigarettes, which were much appreciated even by the ladies ; and as it so often happens when alcohol inspires the mind, our conversation turned to supernatural things. I welcomed this turn, for I wanted to clarify a doubt about the deities of the Aos. The old men were delighted to find a white man who took an interest in their beliefs instead of decrying all their old gods as evil spirits.

'Why should we not pray to Lunkizungba ?' wondered Sakchim-tuba. 'Is not he lord over all ? Even our life belongs to him.'

'But when you invoke him, does he really help you ?' I asked carefully.

'Certainly, Sahib : he sees all and helps everybody. If we ask something of him, we receive it. Of course, he added with a smile, 'we cannot become rich when we want.'

'You say that Lunkizungba is the lord over all, but in Chantongia the people told me that they prayed to Lichaba at their sacrifices.'

'Oh yes, Lichaba ! We, too, give him offerings ; he made the earth ; but first we always call Lunkizungba, for he was there first. He is like the wind, and he made the sky ; also the sun and the moon he made—only afterwards Lichaba made the earth. But it was Lunkizungba who made men ; therefore we belong to him.'

'Well, then Lunkizungba is certainly greater than Lichaba ; but do you know how he made man ?'

'No, Sahib ; how shall we know that ? It was a long time ago, and the people have always said only that it was Lunkizungba who made man.'

'And when a man dies, what do you believe happens to him ?'



'The dead—they go to a distant land. At its entrance Moyotsung keeps guard ; he leads the men who have lived a good life into a good village, but thieves and murderers he sends to a bad place. Men are afraid of him, and therefore, they try to be good.'

Sakchimtuba became pensive and was silent for a while ; then, as with a sudden resolution, he turned again to me and asked almost timidly :

'Sahib, I should like to ask you something. The white men say that Lunkizungba is an evil spirit to whom we should not pray, they say that all who do not believe what they believe are cast into a great fire. I had a wife—she was a good woman and gave me many children, never did she stop working ; then she died—it must have been five years ago. Do you think, Sahib, that she, too, was thrown into a fire ? Our fathers, who all sacrificed to Lunkizungba, have they all been thrown into the fire ?'

'No Sakchimtuba, you must not worry about your wife. I am sure that she went to the same place where all honest people go. Lunkizungba is the same as the God of the Christians ; only the names are different. But Lunkizungba, who knows everything, does not care about the name we give him. He looks after you, and he is looking after your wife in the land of the dead, where you will meet her again.'



## CHAPTER VI

### DEATH IN THE RAINS

I RETURNED to Wakching and settled down to my work among the Konyaks and to the incessant boredom of rain, rain, rain. For days and days it would pour down in dreary sheets, and then, without any warning, the wind would rush up the valley and the rain would rattle down on the tin-roof of my bungalow. To live in a tent in this weather would have been hell, and I fully understood why Mills had warned me against touring before the end of September. As long as there is an average rainfall of one inch a day, when you often do not see the sun for three or four days at a time, there is little to be done but stay where you have a solid roof over your head.

There I sat in the rain, not making nearly as much progress with my work as I had hoped. At the beginning everything had been promising, for then I was still a novelty to the people, and the *gaonbura* sacrificed many an hour to answer my first questions. But my Assamese was still meagre, and most conversations had to be carried on with Nlamo as interpreter. This tired the people, and took away much of the pleasure of telling stories ; for even talkative Konyaks are naturally bored if every sentence must be translated. And then it was weeding-time, and they were all extremely busy on their fields ; it was not always easy to attract enough informants.

Yet in those first weeks I was able to learn quite a lot about the people of Wakching, and though much of what I wrote down was incorrect or incomplete, it led me later to more successful questions and to a gradual understanding of their economy and social order.

There were two men who, more than any others, helped me in my work ; the *gaonbura* Chinyang and Yongang. Chinyang had a bony, expressive face and a head of dishevelled grey hair, and in spite of his sixty years his extremely slim body showed hardly



a trace of old age. When he climbed a hill in front of me, the muscles playing under the brown skin at every step might have been those of a young man, so beautiful was this well-trained body. His chest was covered with a blue tattoo ; punctuated lines ran from the centre of the stomach over the shoulders and half-way down the upper arms, while a necklace was tattooed over the collar-bones. But Chinyang's special pride was the two small human figures between these lines ; these 'decorations' showed that he had cut off heads with his own hands. He hardly ever wore any ornaments, and only a small apron hung down from his belt. Chinyang had a very happy and well-balanced temperament ; he was always friendly, always helpful. As one of the most influential men of the village, he considered it his vocation to initiate me into the customs and the beliefs of the Wakching people. Exactly as in any other society, knowledge concerning the laws and customs differs among the Nagas according to the individual. Chinyang was an expert on all questions of tradition, and often, when I talked to several people and could not get a point clear, he would cut into the discussion :—

'Ami kobo,—I will say it ...' and then there would follow an intelligent explanation of the point.

Chinyang was proud to belong to the Oukheang *morung*, the oldest men's house of Wakching, built in the old times by the founder of the village. As the first *morung*, it still retains a certain ceremonial precedence over the other four *morung* : Thepong, Balang, Bala, and Angban, each forming with the surrounding houses, a social and political entity with a strongly developed 'patriotism'. I heard many stories, some amusing, some tragic, of how, regardless of the rest of the village, the individual *morung* formed alliances with other villages, declaring war and receiving tribute from their own vassals. Yet the *morung* are in a certain manner dependent on each other, for they provide each other with wives. No man of the Oukheang, for instance, may flirt with a girl of his own *morung* or the 'related' Thepong *morung*, but he must look for his girl-friends, and finally for his wife, among the daughters of the three remaining *morung*.

Nevertheless there exists between the *morung*, in spite of the



many kinship ties, a rivalry. Some forty years ago such a rivalry led to the expulsion of the Bala people and the burning of their houses ; it was only after many years of exile that they were permitted to return. Later, under the Pax Britannica, peace and friendship among the *morung* was restored but, for all that, every man was convinced that his own *morung* was superior to all the others.

It was this strong *morung*-feeling which led Chinyang to complain to me one morning about the declining birthrate in the Oukheang ; so few boys had been born lately, that he foresaw a considerable shrinkage of its population. Chinyang, and many other Nagas, held the prohibition of head-hunting responsible for this and other evils.

'In the old times we were men, now we are only a crowd of women,' I often heard him say. 'When we captured heads, then we had good harvests, then we had many children, and the people were healthy and strong ; but now we are no longer allowed to go to war, and many die of illness.'

This view contained no doubt an element of truth. Since head-hunting had been forbidden, the intercourse between villages had become safer and more frequent, and disease, so easily carried from one village to another, took greater toll of Konyak lives than any wars did in olden times.

Chinyang himself had had much misfortune. Three wives had died one after the other, and three of his children. Now he was married for the fourth time, and had a grown-up son and a daughter by the fourth wife. Yet he was fondest of the seven-year-old son of one of his dead daughters. And the boy, although living in the house of his father and belonging to the Balang *morung*, was always to be seen with his grandfather ; and Chinyang, as so often happens with grandparents, spoilt the boy more than any father would spoil his own child. I would offer Chinyang a cigarette, and he, after puffing at it for a few minutes, would hand it to his grandson, sitting silently beside us, and the little boy would smoke it to the end with obvious enjoyment. Whereupon I felt bound to offer the generous old grandfather another cigarette.



Chinyang, though an opium-smoker, was the soul of honesty, and I would not have hesitated to entrust hundreds of rupees to his care. How little harm his opium did him, I learnt to my discomfiture on many an arduous march. Yongang, his friend and my other most important informant in those first weeks, was also an addict of this vice. But for men such as Chinyang and Yongang, the smoking of opium can hardly be called a vice, for the effects never hindered their work or upset their moral balance. No one drinking his nightly two whisky and sodas has the right to object to Chinyang's or Yongang's opium.

Yongang was slightly younger than Chinyang ; he had a great sense of humour, and his peculiarly high laugh would often ring out while we were talking. He preened himself as any cock-sparrow, and probably with reason, over his success with women ; I gathered that in his youth he had led rather a gay life. He was three times married and three times divorced before he married his present wife, a pretty, fairly young woman, who seemed to hold her own quite well, despite the definite disadvantage of so many predecessors.

These two *gaonbura* explained to me how Wakching was divided into clans and *morung*-groups, how the marriage customs and the laws of inheritance worked, the occasions for the feasts and ceremonies, and hundreds of other smaller but equally important things. I had first to learn the outlines of Wakching culture, so that later I could fit my own observations into the pattern.

In these first weeks, when it poured with rain, there was little going on in Wakching besides the weeding of the rice-fields and endless funeral ceremonies ; the violent epidemic of dysentery had not yet come to an end, and every day there was at least one death in the village.

I was often wakened during the night by the sinister sound of the great log-drums, as the young men announced each death to the neighbours. When I heard the hollow thudding for the first time, I rushed out into the open, regardless of the rain, which soaked me in a few seconds. I could not imagine where the noise came from, nor had I the slightest idea what it could



mean. The strange death-rhythm begins with several powerful strokes, and, gradually quickening, dies away in a low rumble.

It was not only the drums of Wakching which boomed through these August nights, but also those of the neighbouring villages of Chingtang and Wanching. The epidemic had spread like wildfire through the hills, and in Wanching alone fifty adults and thirty children died during the summer months.

On my way to the village one morning, I found a group of boys and girls by the path. They were setting up a monument to the soul of Chinyak, a young man of the Oukheang who had died during the night, not from dysentery, but from some other illness that had lasted several months. Countless times he had sacrificed to the sky-god and to the spirits of the earth, and at last he had even moved from his house, which he felt must be cursed, and settled in the house of one of his clansmen. But all had been in vain ; that night he had died, and now the youths were erecting a bamboo scaffold and putting up a roughly hewn wooden figure for his soul, and the girls were fashioning two caps from large fresh leaves, and painting them with white chalk ; one for the wooden figure and the other for the head of the dead body.

These were the *morung* friends of Chinyak and young girls of the Balang *morung*. They did not seem at all shattered by the death, as they talked in their usual light way to each other—these youths, who had lost a companion, and these girls, who had so often sung and joked with Chinyak. Perhaps so many are stricken in their midst that Nagas are more used to death than we, and therefore take it more lightly. I followed the girls up to the village, careful not to tread on the trail of leaves they had strewn on the path, so that the soul of Chinyak, on leaving his body, might find the way to his monument. Chinyang told me that this last act of piety is always performed by the girls of those *morung* with which the deceased could have intermarried.

There was much movement in the village : gifts of betal, rice, and vegetables were being carried to the dead body by clansmen and friends. They came to the house either singly or in small



groups, and before leaving they dipped a finger into a bamboo mug of water at the door to dispel all infection.

It was ten o'clock then, and the wailing continued the whole morning ; so we sat about and waited for the funeral to begin. Owing to the death of their clansman, none of the Oukheang men was allowed to go to the fields—an infuriating taboo when the weeding was pressing, but one which I welcomed, for at last I found plenty of informants in the *morung*. They were pleased to pass the time in answering my questions and smoking my cigarettes ; and many pages of my notebook were filled in the hours of waiting.

Early in the afternoon some old men carried an open bamboo bier into the house, and it was not long before I heard a solemn and curiously urgent voice addressing the dead :

'Enter the land of the dead ; do not be afraid, and if you are asked whose son you are, say : I am Chinyak, son of Yongmek.'

Time after time these same words were repeated ; time after time the dead was enjoined to be of good courage and to remember whose son he was. Suddenly an old man, wearing Chinyak's ceremonial dress and armed with all his weapons, came out of the house. Behind him came four old men, all completely naked, carrying the bier with the corpse. Funerals are not the time to depart from ancient customs, and so they had discarded their new fashioned aprons. Hardly had the procession formed than it stopped again behind a house—the cursed house of the dead, Chinyang whispered to me. Hoisting the bier to a platform, the old men covered the corpse with a cloth and a few palm leaves, and then they tied the bundles of food to the platform for the soul of the dead to feed on. It is usual for a chicken to be sacrificed near the platform, but Chinyak had offered so many chickens for his recovery that there were no more in the house, and since neither of his sisters, both married in Tanhai, had foreseen such a dilemma, they had not brought a chicken with them. The gods had to be content with what they had already, so ungraciously, received.

After several minutes of lingering round the platform, during



which they did little more than look at the corpse, the mourners dispersed ; but the relatives were left with the duty of providing the dead man with food-offerings at meal-times as long as the head was attached to the body.

In the heat of the summer a corpse decomposes very quickly, and already on the day after the funeral swarms of buzzing flies surrounded the platform. The putrescent liquid of decomposing flesh oozed through the slits in the bier and dripped on to the ground ; no words are necessary to describe the suffocating stench round every corpse-platform. To make matters worse, Chinyak's corpse had been disposed of in the middle of the village. One gets accustomed to most things, but not to that revolting smell of disintegrating flesh ; even the Konyaks are by no means insensible to the evil smell of rotting corpses. They hold their noses when passing anywhere near a platform, and a small boy once complained to me that the smell of the corpses in his parents' back garden was so sickening that at meals he could hardly swallow a mouthful of rice.

When I went to the village on the sixth day after the funeral, I was told that the head was to be wrenched from the body ; however, I decided that I could dispense with this bit of the ceremony, and was satisfied with hearing a description of how the old women of the dead man's family cleaned the skull and removed the rotting parts of the brain. Chinyak's white skull, housed in a sandstone urn, was placed close to a path on the outskirts of the village, to be fed for three years with food and rice-beer on all feast days. The fate of the corpse, or rather the bones, is not of great importance ; they gradually fall to the ground, and are either forgotten among the undergrowth that soon covers them, or are dragged out and gnawed by one of the village pigs. The inevitable destructibility of all flesh could scarcely be better demonstrated ! It is only small babies who are disposed of in another way ; they find airy resting-places among the birds' nests high up in the branches of strong trees.

My two Lhota boys, Nlamo and Tsampio, were horrified that the pigs should be allowed to gnaw the human bones, and they vowed never again to touch pork in Wakching, 'because the



Wakching pigs eat human flesh.' Neither would they eat dog's meat, otherwise highly prized by the Nagas ; for they pretended that the missionaries had told them that devils live in dogs. There was apparently no chance of my getting my stuffed dog.

I must admit that I was rather surprised that, after the care with which the skull had been treated, the body should be liable to such disrespect. Chinyang explained that Konyaks do not pay much attention to the bones of the dead, for they are 'empty things.' One part of the soul adheres to the skull, while the other part goes to the land of the dead.

Late that evening we sat on the veranda of my bungalow and looked over the valley enveloped in clouds. It was still raining ! Would it ever stop ? I thought. We had just assisted at the placing of the skull in its sandstone urn in the forest, and we were sitting, four of us, discussing the events of the funeral. I asked Yongang about the world of the dead—and for once his reply was rather incoherent. But patching my notes together, and later adding things I heard from other people, I gathered that the road of the dead runs from Wakching over the village of Chintang, across the Dikhu River, touching Chinglong, Chongwe, and Choha, and leads at last under the ground to Yimbu, the land of the dead. There the Departed lead a life similar to that of this world ; they grow rice, work and celebrate feasts, and they even marry and have children.

But a part of the soul, or rather a part of the magical virtue of a man, adheres to the skull after his death. It took me a long time to understand exactly what this meant, but months later I witnessed a peculiar magical rite which helped me to clear up the question.

The men of the Thepong had been unable to spear the necessary game for the rebuilding ceremony of their *morung*. Many days had they set out hunting, only to return in the evenings without any luck. The people reflected, and it came to their mind that perhaps the soul of Shouba, the father of Shankok, and once the richest and most important man of the whole village, might not sufficiently support the men of his old *morung*. So they sacrificed a cock at the skull-urn of Shouba. They brought





A girl of Wakching enjoying a joke.





Shankok's youngest brother wearing  
a necklace of spirit stones.



a fish-net with them, and threw it over the urn, to catch the soul attracted by the offering. Contentedly they carried the net into the *morung*, certain that the captured soul of the famous Shouba would now communicate its 'virtue' to all the men of the *morung*. As a matter of fact, they killed an antelope next day.

Shankok himself took part in the capture of the soul, and he seemed to have no misgivings that he might thereby inconvenience his father.

Those weeks in August, when dysentery ravaged Wakching and the rain poured down in streams, were not particularly pleasant. Everything was wet to the touch : clothes, bedding, and books were wet, or, if not wet, damp and covered with mould ; if I did not wear a pair of boots for two days, squashy mushrooms began to grow inside. The continuous rain and the epidemic weighed not only on my mind, but also on the minds of the Konyaks, for they knew that only with the coming of the dry season would the epidemic stop.

One morning I found Ngamang and Dzeamang on the veranda—two curious and at first rather shy boys of eleven and thirteen. A Naga hardly ever knows exactly how old he is, and the parents lose count of the years as soon as the children pass six or seven summers. Indeed, the number of years is of little importance ; important only is the age-group to which the boy belongs—that is, with which set of boys he entered the *morung* ; for during the whole of his life they form a close unit. I tried to make friends with Ngamang and Dzeamang, for they were merry youngsters, and, surprisingly enough, we got on very well ; both of them had a smattering of Assamese—in fact, we all three had a smattering of Assamese. That simplified matters, for I found it much easier to understand these boys than the men who spoke so fluently.

To the two boys the friendship with the 'new Sahib' was the greatest fun. They thought themselves immensely important, explaining all the things in the village and teaching me the Konyak expression for this and for that. They came to my bungalow whenever they managed to sneak away from the



work in the fields, and they would go with me on my daily walks through the village ; until finally their interest faded and the 'new Sahib' was not 'new' any more, but a usual figure in the village. Before this happened, however, I had picked up a great deal from Ngamang and Dzeamang.

What a lot of things they knew ! The whole genealogical tables of their families—the ways of addressing various relatives. To find out all those kinship terms alone was difficult enough, but when I checked the boys' work with older men, it was only to discover that they had made hardly a single mistake.

It is surprising what reasonable and independent creatures Naga children are. You can talk with them as you would talk to any grown-up, and though their knowledge is, of course, limited, they do not live in a world of their own, but take an intelligent interest in the events of the village—perhaps because they share the life of their elders, or perhaps because from their earliest youth they are treated as reasonable and responsible persons. There are few opportunities for coercion or punishments of naughty children. During the whole year I stayed among the Nagas I only once saw a child beaten ; and that beating was nothing more than a few smacks an angry grandmother gave to a screaming little boy who refused to leave the fascinating spectacle of house-building and go to have his dinner. Parents generally speak to their children in the same quiet and friendly tone they would use to any grown-up—a grumbling father, shouting at and terrorizing his children, would rouse public disapproval at once and lose much of his social prestige. And if it happens, that the boys do not want to do exactly as their father wishes, the father only laughs and says : 'What shall I do with them ? Children are like that, after all !'

That is what happened when Mills sent a Tamlu man to Wakching to teach the boys reading and writing. At first the *gaonbura* and the older men were most enthusiastic over the plan. It was explained that, with a knowledge of these new arts, they would not be so easily cheated by the traders of the plains. A house was built, the schoolmaster installed, and the pupils assembled for the teaching to begin. At first the boys thought



scribbling on their little black-boards fun, and far more amusing than the tedious work on the fields. But soon the scribbling lost its charm, and they found it still more amusing to play truant, running about in the forest and shooting birds while their parents thought them in 'school'. The despairing schoolmaster asked my help and complained that he could not hold school without any pupils. This was understandable, and I promised him to do what I could. I talked to the parents of the runaways. They promised me that they would send their sons to school. And so they did, but the boys did not come. Once more I tried to assist the poor schoolmaster, and once more I talked seriously to the fathers, lauding the advantages of learning in the most glowing terms.

'Well, we have told the boys they should go to school,' was the answer, 'but if they don't go, what can we do?'

The schoolmaster—incidentally not a mission disciple, but a convinced adherent of the old faith—went back to Tamlu. And the Wakching people were quite happy without a knowledge of reading and writing.

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## CHAPTER VII

### FISHING WITH TACTFUL COMPANIONS

'SAHIB, Sahib,' I heard a soft voice say in my sleep.

Angrily I sat up.

'Sahib, we are going fishing, would you like to come with us ?'

Achin, the young brother of my friend Shankok, stood in the door of the bungalow. Had any one else torn me from sleep at such an early hour with that remarkable information, I would probably have given him a very irritated welcome. But one would have had to be very insensitive to say an unfriendly word to Achin. I never saw a more charming child, with his soft dark eyes in a gentle oval face, his melodious voice, and the graceful movements of his slender brown body. Perfectly unconscious of his charm, he retained even towards me the full simplicity of his fourteen years.

I crept out from under my mosquito net and went to the door to see what was happening. At last a clear morning. The first rays of the sun bathed the land in a sea of light and colour, and clouds of damp mist lay over the valley. I decided at once to join the fishing-party.

There were four of us when we started : Achin, Nlamo, Yongem, and myself. I have not yet introduced Yongem to my readers ; he was the newest member of my household. He had the very important task of fetching water, chopping wood, and sparing my other two boys any work that they found irksome. For this he received the princely pay of ten rupees a month—quite enough to make it worth his while to leave the work on his fields to the rest of his family. Yongem was a man in the early thirties, and I believe his fellow-villagers, though too tactful to mention it, looked upon him as a ne'er-do-well. He was still unmarried, and owned only few of this world's goods ; but somehow I rather liked him, and found him a very useful addition to our household. Besides, he learnt to speak Assamese tolerably



well in the course of a few months, while even in the end I could not speak more than a few phrases of Konyak. That fact could actually prove that his intelligence ... but I think that that question had better not be gone into, for the Wakching people really did not have any too high an opinion of Yongem's mental capacity.

I once sent him to Borjan on an errand, telling him to fetch my post at the same time, but quite forgetting to give him a note for the postmaster. He told the postmaster that 'he was the Wakching Sahib's son and wanted the Sahib's letters.' The postmaster babu, a Bengali unfamiliar with Naga expressions, thought that he was dealing with a lunatic, and was careful not to hand over my post. Of course he could not know that Yongem used the word 'son' in the sense of a member of my household, in the same way as the Konyaks describe their tributary villages as their 'sons'.

On a fishing expedition Yongem was to carry my gun—a job perfectly suited to his mental capacity. Since the whole of Wakching was streaming in the same direction, we soon found ourselves marching in single file along the narrow path leading to Shiong.

Every one was in excellent spirits, and happy to leave the monotonous work on the fields for one day. The sun ahead of us glittered and sparkled on the million drops covering the grasses and reeds ; it was as though a silver rain had fallen over the thicket. So must the world have shone on the first day of Creation in the rays of the new morning sun. It will always remain the mystery of the tropics that hell can change to paradise with hardly any transition. Unfortunately paradise can just as quickly change to hell ! I wanted to burst out singing 'When with my new-cut walking staff, forth I saunter early. . .' or any other appropriate song, but I knew that the Konyaks would only roar with laughter at my song—a reaction so completely in accord with that of my friends in Europe that it would have appealed to every advocate of the fundamental similarity of the human mind.

When we arrived at Shiong, the village seemed completely deserted. Nearly every one had already hurried down to the



river, and only a few stragglers joined our party. The path now led along a steep slope, and we could see the winding river deep down in the valley beneath us. I had already realized that we would have to drop more than 3000 feet to the river, but at the sight of that steep hillside I shuddered at the thought of the way home. We continued our way on a narrow path through the ripening rice-fields of Shiong. But the rice-fields soon receded, and a high thicket of reed swallowed the long serpent of our column. Every time I was surprised anew at the height of those reeds and grasses ; they did not look so very tall from a distance, but when you came up to them they towered above you ; even an elephant would have been lost among them, and prickly-creepers, mixed with the reeds, formed two impenetrable walls on either side of the path. This path was rarely used, but it was tolerably well cleared, and the people before us had trampled down grass and undergrowth. Now each of the men would casually improve it as he passed, here and there cutting off an overhanging bough or an obstinate creeper. Gradually trees mixed with the thicket, and soon we crept through green tunnels and struggled over trees fallen across our path ; I was relieved to notice that I was not the only one to stumble over the smooth bamboos hiding maliciously in the grass. Suddenly the path descended so sharply that we were forced to hold on to climbers and bushes to prevent ourselves from slipping, and where the path was particularly difficult to negotiate, the people would queue up as patiently as any theatre queue, and wait their turn.

At last we entered the dusk of the high forest. Here walking was easier, for the undergrowth, cut off from the light, was not so exuberantly developed. Delicate mauve orchids—drawing my thoughts, even in these wilds, to white shoulders and a ball-dress they would suit so well—grew high up from the bark of old trees.

We emerged from the forest into the full sunshine, and knew by the density of the reeds that we must be close to the river. Quite abruptly the narrow path led into the river, and without any hesitation, my Naga friends waded into the brown water up to their hips. With my heavy shoes and more extensive dress





A girl of Oting  
carrying fire-  
wood.



Men of Hung-  
phi with tight  
cane-belts, their  
only piece of  
dress.





Konyaks sowing rice on a hill-field

Konyaks fishing in a poisoned stream.





I could hardly afford to follow their example. With the help of my belt and a handkerchief, I quickly constructed a costume which at the Lido might have caused me several uncomfortable hours at a police-station, but was perfectly correct in the Konyak country. For the Naga boys, too, had only small pieces of cloth hanging down from their belts, while the older men did not even bother with a belt when fishing.

It was a gay and boisterous crowd that was scattered over the narrow sandbank near the opposite shore ; some put their nets and fishing-baskets in order, others splashed about in the water. In some places, where the river was narrow, it was fairly deep, and there the boys showed off their skill in swimming. My disguise as a Naga caused obvious astonishment and tactfully controlled hilarity. But the hilarity turned to utter surprise when I began swimming on my back against the current. Swimming on the back is an art unknown to the Konyak, and it evoked general applause. Even the pretty girls, their velvet skins burnished like old bronze, did not find a stranger swimming with their boy friends so very awe-inspiring, and that day they posed to my camera for the first time, instead of hiding with embarrassed giggles. Weeks later Shankok confided to me that the girls had had a good look at my anatomy, just to make sure whether creatures with a peculiar white skin were made like other men.

A little way up-stream a weir had been built of bamboo and branches, and near-by on the bank the young men, their foreheads beaded with sweat, pounded the poisonous bark of a creeper. Six or eight together, they stood round holes in the ground, lifting their sinewy arms to rhythmical shouts, and the next moment letting the long pounders fall heavily. From time to time the smaller boys, scrambling between their legs, collected the earth, now mixed with the poison, and strewed it over the weir. At last, when a thick layer of poisoned earth covered the weir, the men and boys lined up behind it, and, with much screaming and laughing, splashed so much water over it that the poisoned earth was washed out and mingled with the water of the river. In the end the whole weir was entirely demolished, and the fish stupefied by the poison, drifted an easy prey into the nets and traps of



the people farther down-stream. But the catch was meagre, and though the men threw out large round nets again and again, they did not have much luck. Only here and there a silvery fish flashed in the hand of one more favoured by fortune.

Gradually the whole crowd moved down-stream. There, they told me, a less steep path branched off to Wakching, and I had no other choice but to follow them. If you have ever tried to wade at midday in a river under a cloudless tropical sky, you are unlikely to repeat the experience. Every step in the muddy water was hazardous. Now I slipped on a slimy stone and fell, with ridiculous and ineffective arm movements, full length into the water ; now I would sink suddenly into a hole, hitting my toes on all sorts of hard things that I could not see. On the bank I could put my feet down just four times on the hot pebbles, before once again having to save myself by plunging my burning soles into the river. I did not even realize that the left bank was outside British India and that unconsciously I had entered unadministered territory. The current was so strong that it was difficult to stand upright, and yet there were only few places where you could swim. Yongem carried my clothes and my shoes in a basket, and the merciless sun, reflected off the water in a dazzling glare, burnt my skin ; soon I was the colour of a well-boiled lobster. My Wakching friends assured me that it was only a mile and a half to the last weir, but that last mile and a half seemed to me more like five. Eventually, when we reached the weir, everybody left the water to eat rice and have a short rest.

But I was more dead than alive, and I began to comprehend all those numerous warnings against the tropical sun that are given to every new-comer. Soon—much too soon for me—we had to start again, if we were to reach the village before dark. The path led through the jungle in that eternal up hill and down dale that drives every European to distraction. The Nagas do not mind climbing, and rather than make the smallest detour they will climb the steepest hill. After an hour of most exhausting going we were still near the river ; not a leaf moved in the damp heat of the forest, and I had to stop more often to regain my breath while black spots danced before my eyes. The path



ascended now with greater steadiness, and I soon found the uphill climb harder than the greatest fatigue alone would have justified. Light sunstroke was an easy diagnosis. Some Wakching people coming up behind us realized at once what was the matter with me, and without many words they fell in with our pace. I have never met more perfect tact. None of them had had any luck that day, and now they were hurrying home, hoping at least to reach their village before dusk, but without a shadow of impatience they halted with me every quarter of an hour or so. In vain I tried to persuade them to go ahead—for, after all, I had Yongem to show me the way—but they would not hear of it.

‘No,’ Chinyang assured me, ‘we won’t leave our Sahib alone. When an Ang goes with his men, do they leave him alone? No, may tigers come, may bears come, they remain with him. And you are now our Ang.’

All agreed with him, and I was not a little flattered, even in my exhausted condition, to be awarded the rank of a chief.

If a similar misfortune had befallen me on a tour in Europe, I tremble to think of the impatient faces of my companions, or those few nice words about slacking and lack of stamina, which would have been slung at me. But my Naga friends behaved as if a leisurely walk was exactly to their taste and did their best to save me the embarrassment of my miserable condition.

‘Of course, a Sahib cannot walk on our paths,’ Yona comforted me. ‘We Nagas, we are like the monkeys, we climb the mountains—straight up.’

Little Achin, though all his friends had gone ahead, only looked at me with serious, anxious eyes. He did not show the faintest trace of a superiority that most European boys of his age would have felt in a similar situation.

At Chingtang people waited for us by the path with water and bananas. One of my companions had gone ahead to get me these refreshments, and Chinyang suggested I should hire some young men in Chingtang to carry me up to Wakching on a stretcher. But I did not want to stake my prestige on such an issue, for I felt that if I once allowed myself to be carried the atmosphere of comradeship would somehow be spoilt.



Chingtang lay on top of a hill, and I really thought we must be well on our way up to Wakching, but as we left the village we dropped again, and soon most of the height so hardly gained was lost. Now dark storm-clouds precipitated the short dusk. The first lightning flashed, and the thought of the terrible down-pours of the last weeks was anything but cheering. But my friends paid little attention to the weather ; nothing was to make me believe that we were in a hurry. Now they proposed we should rest again, and brought small green tangerines from the forest ; they were dreadfully sour but refreshing.

Night fell and every moment flashes of lightning illuminated the country for whole seconds at a time. Slowly, very slowly, we moved up a steep, open slope. I had fever, and I knew I would not be able to manage the remaining two thousand feet without a good rest. But before I could mention the fact, Chinyang suggested that we should make tea in one of the nearby field huts, and the others accepted the idea without debate. We went down to a hut through the fields, where large taro-leaves stood between the rice-plants. And there I lay down on a mat, while my friends fetched water from a brook and made a fire. Nagas usually carry small bags of tea with them, and they took out a handful and let the leaves boil in the water for some minutes ; after a few mouthfuls of the bitter beverage my spirits were somewhat revived. Again they found excuses for me, and Yona told me that exactly the same thing had happened to him one day when, coming home from the plains, he got fever and 'felt like dead'—nobody could help such a thing !

At last we could start again. The thunderstorm had luckily passed, and two torches, made during the rest from split bamboos, brightly lit the path. From the height of the ridge glowing points moved downwards. They were the torches of men coming to meet us, for our absence had already caused anxiety in the village.

After yet another hour we arrived at the bungalow. I stumbled into bed with tired and aching limbs, but even in my exhaustion I felt that the experience had been worth while. The Wakching people appeared to me in a new light. Nowhere could I have found more consideration and helpfulness, and, above all, more tact



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HARVEST

'No eggs, Sahib', were the sombre words Tsampio chose for greeting, as he brought me my breakfast one morning. I think he rather enjoyed informing me, with furrowed forehead and sorrowful voice, of the various deficiencies of our larder. The lack of vegetables was certainly unpleasant, but no eggs—that was a much more serious obstacle in the way of Tsampio's culinary efforts.

Yet I could not feel completely innocent of the sudden dearth of chickens, and consequently of eggs. Day after day we had bought and eaten two or three chickens, and the village was unaccustomed to such demands. Not that I had such an enormous appetite, but a Wakching chicken is thinner and bonier than a partridge in spring, and is scarcely enough even for one meal ; indeed, the Wakching chickens are famous all over the hills for their smallness, and even the Aos describe a miserably thin person as a 'Wakching chicken'.

However this may be, the birthrate among the chickens of Wakching was not high enough to sustain the heavy toll that my incessant demands imposed on them—and the many sacrifices for the souls of the innumerable victims of the recent dysentery epidemic had accelerated the decimation of their ranks. Later on, in the winter, my Wakching friends sent for chickens and eggs to all the neighbouring villages, and even across the border into the tribal area. It was only unfortunate that the Konyak idea as to the freshness of eggs did not quite coincide with mine ; and understandably so, for they use them only as offerings to the gods, who are certainly not particular as to the flavour, while my last resort was scrambled eggs—*kuni rumble tumble* as Tsampio called them—with the largest possible dose of pepper.

But during these days of September my friends in Wakching had no time to provide me with eggs, for the harvest had begun.



and all their thoughts were entirely wrapped up in this most important of tasks.

Popular opinion was inclined to imagine the Nagas as a fierce and warlike people, continuously occupied with head-hunting, human sacrifice, and other exciting customs. But this picture had very little in common with reality. The Naga is first and foremost an agriculturist. Nine-tenths of his thoughts and his life are devoted to his fields, and the things that mean most to him are the state of the crops, the weather at harvest-time, and the number of rice-baskets in his granaries. Those who see him only in his village can neither really know him, nor understand the complicated social organization that attains its full expression in the daily work of the fields ; and they will find it hard to realize the enormous amount of work accomplished by men, women, and children, at certain times of the year.

The Konyak's system of agriculture, with the continual shifting of fields, is undoubtedly of great antiquity. It is much more primitive than that of the Angamis, for the Konyaks know nothing of complicated terraces or artificial irrigation.

From early autumn, when the elders of the Wakching council decide on a particular block of land for the next year's cultivation, the entire population devotes all energies to the work on the fields. This decision is generally only a matter of form, since a definite cycle has long been established, whereby each section of the land is brought under cultivation once in every fourteen years.

Unlike the land of a European peasant, the property of a Konyak is not grouped together in one place, but is scattered irregularly over the whole of the village land ; and thus it happens that whether the land to be cultivated that year lies to the east of Wakching or to the west, north, or south, a man is sure to own, or to be able to hire, enough for his own needs. Among many tribes practising shifting cultivation most of the land is owned collectively by the village-community, and every man is free to clear any piece of jungle he chooses. Not so in Wakching, there each piece of land, each tree, and each clump of bamboos has a jealous owner, and trespassing is energetically prosecuted.



The clearing of the land is the work of the individual families, the old men and women cutting down the undergrowth with their *dao*, and the young men felling the trees. Only a few are left standing, so that the jungle may regenerate quickly, once the period of cultivation is over. Then, after the felled jungle has been left to dry for several weeks, it is burnt, and in January and February you can see smoke and lines of fire on all the slopes, slowly eating their way up through the thicket. Often on windless days the smoke lies idly over the land in long wreaths, and the sun is tinted dull red in a leaden sky. The Konyak uses no animal manure, but the ashes from the burning jungle provide a valuable fertilizer.

Before the sowing can begin, the charred pieces of wood must be collected and the ground smoothed and cleaned ; huts spring up in the fields, and here the workers go to seek protection against the burning sun and the heaviest of the summer showers. Digging over the soil is dull work, and one which the Konyak does not dream of undertaking alone. The idea of the solitary ploughman would not appeal to the Naga, for he knows how much easier and how much more amusing it is to work together ; the young people, at any rate, join in gangs and cultivate each other's fields in rotation. Even the small boys and girls are organized in groups, and all over the fields you can hear the songs and shouts with which they accompany the work.

The Konyak performs no rites or ceremonies till the sowing begins. He realizes that the cutting of the jungle and the proper clearing of the fields depend only on the efficiency of man. Why should he trouble the gods ? But when the seed is entrusted to the earth, where hundreds of dangers may threaten the crops, the Konyak turns to the gods, and solicits protection with offerings and prayers.

The first sowing is a ceremonial sowing, a solemn act performed by a descendant of the village-founder on behalf of the whole village. He sacrifices a chicken on one of his fields and addresses the sky-god Gawang :

'Let there be many blossoms this year ; be gracious, O Gawang. Give us rice, give us millet, O Gawang.'



The he throws out the rice, murmuring : 'May my rice sprout first. Shut the beaks of the birds, bind the mouths of the rats and mice. May the crops prosper.'

From now on you can see men and women hurrying to the fields, their baskets full of seed-rice, and the first blossoming branches of a peach-like tree sticking in the grain.

Men sowing rice and millet make a lovely picture, and I shall never forget the first time I saw the young sower, a red woven bag slung over his shoulder, striding up and down a sloping field with long, free steps, and scattering the rice with large sweeps of the arm ; behind him a row of stooping women covered the seed almost before it rested on the earth.

Taro, on the other hand, a tubercular fruit found as far away as the islands of the South Sea, but little cultivated in India, is planted by the women. They dig small holes in the ground with their *dao* in which to lay the tubers, and then cover them over with earth. It is the women's task also to carry home the taro harvest, for to carry taro is considered a shame for a man. Yet it occupies an important place in the diet of the Konyak. There are even several villages to the east of Wakching—for instance Chen—where no rice, but only taro and millet are grown ; and it may be that rice is of comparatively recent introduction, and that taro was the original staple crop of the Konyaks ; it is possible, too, that the cultivation of taro was primarily the responsibility of the women, who did thus the bulk of the work in the fields.

When the luscious green of the young rice covers the undulating slopes, there begins a time when the Konyak knows little leisure. Side by side with the sprouting rice, weeds grow, and unless they are frequently removed, only a scanty harvest can be expected. Shankok was always complaining of the difficulties of keeping pace with the weeds on his ten fields, and even though he often hired one or two gangs, feeding them during the day and paying them a little cash, the obstinate weeds always seemed to get the better of him. Once or twice, driven to desperation, he even hired boys from a *morung* of Chingtang. This keeping pace with the weeds means weeks and months of endless



work in the rice-fields. The women wear large rain-shields made from palm-leaves, but the men work unconcernedly with either rain or sun beating on their bare bent backs. Yet who would find even weeding boring, when he is working side by side with his love ? A wise Konyak custom allows the most tedious work to be performed by girls and boys together. The boys of a gang invite their girl friends to go with them to the fields, and the next day they help in return on the fields of the girls' fathers. These working-gangs are always composed of the inter-marrying *morung*—the girls are the potential wives of the boys, and more often than not their actual mistresses. Small wonder that much laughing and joking banishes boredom, and many of the Wak-ching love stories begin in the rice-fields.

At the end of the weeding there are feasts in the field-houses, and these are the greatest fun. The boys of each gang invite the girls who have worked with them, and take a pride in making their fair companions so drunk that they must carry them home to the village.

One evening, as I was going home with Shankok through the ripening fields, we heard peals of laughter coming from one of the field-houses. Shankok whispered to me, it must be an 'end-of-the-weeding feast'. Sure enough, the next moment out tottered a girl, who subsided almost at once on the ground. Boys tumbled screaming out of the hut, and with roars of laughter tried to drag the fallen girl to her feet. The six other girls, who one after the other appeared in the doorway, did not seem to me any more sober than the first—the pretty Meniu of Shankok's clan, by now hanging helplessly round the neck of a Bala boy. He made short work of it, and taking the half-unconscious girl on his back, walked triumphantly ahead, while the other tottering girls followed, very much with the support of their friends. The light of the deep yellow moon creeping over the mountains shone full on this rollicking bacchanal, and the evening stillness was rent by shrill, drunken laughter.

'Look, Sahib,' whispered Shankok, 'the boy there with Meniu on his back is Henryong. Until a few weeks ago he went with Liphung, the daughter of Yona, every night ; but she got married,



and now he runs after Meniu. The poor girl, she has had too much rice-beer to-night. Only look ; now she is being sick—oh ! look, all that beer on Henyon's shoulder. He will be proud of that !

Funnily enough, the boys actually consider it an honour if finally they succeed in making their girl-friends sick from too much rice-beer ; it proves that the hosts have not been stingy with their entertainment.

I followed at a distance up the hill, curious to see the reactions of the parents of these beauties. What would they think of this lavish hospitality ? But there were none of those floods of reproaches with which many European mothers would have received their daughters, or those who brought them home dead drunk ; they seemed only too pleased that the girls had had an enjoyable evening !

'You should see, Sahib,' remarked Shankok, smiling, 'when the girls entertain the boys. Then there is even more fun. They, too, must often carry their boy-friends home. Oh yes, they are strong enough—a girl can quite well carry a boy a short distance ; of course, when it is far, then two girls must lend a hand to bring a drunken boy to the top of the hill.'

I still regret that I never saw such a spectacle, but Shankok's word is reliable, and I have confidence in the Wakching girls and their capacity to reverse the roles on occasions.

The end of the weeding is a joyous time, and is celebrated all over the village. Wealthy men give small parties for their daughters, the girls who worked with them in the fields, and their boy-friends of the other *morung* group. Although I had not done any work, I was also invited to one of these parties.

All morning the household of the host was busy with preparations ; the girls indefatigably pounding rice and the men mixing the meat of a newly-slaughtered pig with millet and wrapping it firmly in strong leaves, so that it could be boiled in earthen pots and served in little packets.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when I arrived at the party. I was apparently the first guest, for only the people of the house sat round the hearth in the living-room. A thick brown liquid



steamed in a large pot over the fire. It was a horrible beverage—a kind of warm ‘beer’ that the Konyaks prepare from the fermented rice left over from the brewing of the clear rice-beer. I never succeeded in swallowing more than a few drops.

One after the other the girls, friends of the daughter of the house, trickled in. I asked one of the sons of the house their names. Four were called Meniu, he said, two Shuidzing, and two Mendzing. What a lack of imagination ! and one that makes it almost impossible ever to disentangle the complicated kinship system ; with this uniformity of names, how are you to know whether a man talks of his sister Meniu, or his uncle’s wife Meniu, or the daughter of his mother’s sister ?

The girls chatted eagerly to each other, and after a considerable time had elapsed we heard the voices of the young men outside. Quite indifferent to the rain pattering on their large rain-shields, they stood almost half an hour before the door, singing a song of strange harmonies, while the girls sat rather shyly on the long pounding-table in the great hall.

When the boys had finished their song, they came into the house, and without paying much attention to their pretty friends, ensconced themselves round the fire. The girls and the people of the house emptied the earthen pots, heaping meat and rice on large wooden dishes ; four boys sat round each dish, and without many words began swallowing huge quantities of food. When they had eaten, they made no attempt to entertain their companions with gay after-dinner conversation, but devoted their whole attention to chewing the *pan* leaves and betel nuts that the girls offered them in neat parcels.

They seemed quite content sitting before the fire, and it was a long time before they decided to take a little air on the veranda. Here they squatted down on mats with the girls, who mostly sat with their backs against the wall. Conversation did not seem to be one of the girls’ strong points either ; they were very silent, laughing only now and then when the boys made some isolated joke. But they chewed betel all the more energetically, lifting the mat every few moments to spit on the floor. Soon the boys resumed their choral chant, but this time each in turn start-



ed a sort of recitative, all the other voices joining in after a few notes.

Feeling that perhaps it was my presence that weighed on the atmosphere, I left the party at about eleven. It had stopped raining, and even at that late hour a few night-revellers sat on the small platforms before their houses.

I heard next day that the party had lasted the whole night, and the young people had not gone to bed at all ; because—as Shankok told me—the girls were so very young ! At other parties of this kind the couples slip away to the privacy of the granaries quite early in the evening, but these girls, being little more than fifteen, hesitated over their first steps in the court of love.

These small private parties for the weederers are crowned by the great village feast at the beginning of the harvest, the Ouniebu. The Konyaks propitiate the gods before they begin to reap rather than wait for the celebrations until after the harvest.

On the first day after full-moon the *gaonbura* surprised me with the information that the Ouniebu had already begun.

‘We made a mistake in counting the days’, they explained, ‘for how could we see the moon while it was raining night and day ? But yesterday we caught a glimpse, and saw that the moon was full. Quickly we called together the old men and decided to start the Ouniebu today.’

Had I known of their trouble I could have helped them with my calendar, and told them that the moon would be full on the 2nd of September ; as it was, I had not realized on which day the Ouniebu should begin. The miscalculation was not considered serious, however. That morning Yongmek, of the founder’s clan, had cut a few ears of each of the seven kinds of rice and hung them up in the house, and so the harvest could begin.

When I went to the village the calm of the morning was broken by the squeaking and grunting of pigs tied up to be slaughtered. The men of the Thepong *morung* alone killed eighteen pigs and one mithan bought for thirty rupees by Shankok and some of his friends from Chi.

The killing of pigs is not a pleasant sight. It is performed,



not by the owner, but by the oldest man of his clan, who receives the heart and the kidneys as a reward. Two men hold the miserable squealing animal, as a pointed bamboo spike is driven into its breast. Small comfort to the luckless pig that the killer calms its last moments with the words : 'We do not send you on a bad path, we send you on a good path ; do not be angry with us.'

The use of any metal instrument for slaughtering pigs is strictly taboo. The bamboo spike is an ancient instrument that survives for ritual use, although iron is used for all other purposes. The custom of slaughtering pigs during the harvest festival presumably dates from a time when the Nagas made all their instruments of bamboo and stone.

Mithan, buffalo, and cattle may be killed with any weapon—spear or *dao*. For they are comparatively recent additions to Konyak culture, and therefore are not subject to the old ritual. Some Konyaks are even afraid to eat the meat of mithan or cattle, and Shankok, though feeling he owed it to his prestige to present a mithan to his relatives and friends, refrained from eating the meat himself.

An exchange of gifts between the families related through marriage is a main feature of the Ouniebu, as indeed of many Konyak feasts. A complicated system determines the beneficiaries and the donors, and every man tries to surpass his partner in generosity. And the unmarried girls prepare millet-breads to give to their lovers, friends, and working-companions of the opposite *morung* group.

It was the night of the second feast-day, when the boys went to receive these breads, and the palm roofs shimmered like silver in the bright moonlight that flooded the village. The girls had assembled in their dormitories, and groups of boys moved singing from one to another. Everywhere they were given millet-breads, and everywhere they rewarded the girls with their monotonous song.

In the old days the feast of the Ouniebu was brightened by dancing, for the young warriors did their best to procure a head for the harvest, and its capture was celebrated with dancing and



singing in full ceremonial dress. But now head-hunting was forbidden, and the harvest festival took a simpler form.

The reaping was in full swing as I went one morning with Dzeamang, a pleasant, talkative young man of the Bala *morung*, to his fields ; they lay an hour's walk from Wakching, not far from the village of Shiong. In the field-house we found Dzeamang's brother and his wife just boiling tea—nine out of the ten times you see Konyaks resting they are boiling tea ! It is strictly taboo to enter another man's field-house during the harvest ; apparently, however, I was above such taboos, for they invited me in and offered me tea. We sat talking a while, and then Dzeamang's brother asked me whether I would not like to help cut rice. He handed me a toothed reaping-knife, and I felt I could hardly refuse. Soon I stood between the two brothers, cutting one sheaf of rice after the other, and piling them in small heaps. It was tiring work ; for it needed a lot of care to raise the rain-bent stalks before cutting, and at the same time to avoid the fleshy leaves of the taro growing in the same field, and a great deal of physical energy to stoop continually and to work the knife with the unaccustomed movement. It was not long before my back ached and my hands were sore from little blisters. How I admired these people, standing from morning to evening with bent backs on the fields, diligently and unceasingly reaping rice ! But I admired them even more on the steep path home—after a long day's work. Here they were carrying baskets heavy with grain, not once, but sometimes twice up to the village.

The majority of the fields is cultivated by individual families, though sometimes with the help of hired labour. Yet some fields are cultivated by groups, for, otherwise, from where would the *morung* get the rice for its feasts ? Every man must contribute to the work on his *morung's* field, and on certain days you can see all the members of the *morung* leaving the village together instead of in the usual twos and threes ; the boys and the girls to work and the old men to sit and look on.

One day, the boys of the Balang *morung* called to me as they passed on the path below my bungalow ; they were going to reap



their *morung* field, they shouted. The Sahib should come and watch the work. I finished writing some notes, and then made my way to the Balang *morung*-field. Long before I reached the field I heard the cries of the boys ; both sides of the path leading to the field-house were literally covered, on the one side with girls and on the other with long rows of boys' spears stuck shaft foremost into the earth—a glance at this 'cloakroom', and it was easy to enumerate the workers that day. Long lines of girls worked on the lower slope, reaping their sheafs and throwing them behind. When a whole patch had been cut they would gather the sheafs and carry them on bowed shoulders up to the field-house. There the boys threshed out the rice with their feet, throwing the empty straw through the opening at the back of the house, where two boys stood on top of the stack, continually pitching it on to make room for the next bundle. Higher and higher grew the stack of straw, and the dust-clouds blowing round the field-house thickened. Now and then the threshers would give a peculiar quick, swelling laugh, ending almost in a shout, and this would be taken up and echoed by the groups working on the fields. How different were these fierce cascades of cries from the rhythmical work-songs of the Angamis !

Once more the shyness of the girls defeated me ; they would run away with shrieks and squeaks at the sight of my camera or duck deeper among the ears, and long before I could outwit them huge mountains of cloud towered up in the sky and covered the sun for the rest of the day.

A hearth had been built in front of the field-house, and here the old men sat comfortably under an awning, taking pleasure in mugs of tea or rice-beer. They worked and fought for their *morung* in their youth, and now they sat and watched the exertions of the younger generation. All these strong boys and girls filling the air with laughter assured them that they need have no anxiety for the future of their *morung*.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE GIRLS' CLUB OF PUNKHUNG

ALL through the rains I had comforted myself with the thought that towards the end of September the weather would improve and in October I could begin touring through the villages lying north-east of Wakching. So when at last we had several clear days I decided to start, and sent messengers to the nearest villages announcing my visit. Chingai, the *dobhashi* of Oting, was also informed that he should meet me in Punkhung four days after full moon. We spent a whole day in dividing up the tent, the camp-bed, cooking utensils, clothes, and provisions into nine coolie-loads, and then, just as the baskets stood packed and ready, the heavens opened as though the whole world must once more be soaked before the respite of the dry season. However, rain or no rain, I could not postpone my tour ; the Wakching boys who were to carry my luggage to Tanhai already squatted on the veranda of my bungalow and would not have appreciated being sent home on account of a little rain. When you hire Konyaks as coolies, they come in twos, or even in threes for each load, carrying it alternately. Of course they must also share the wages, but they do not mind that. The Angami prefers carrying a full load and receiving the whole wage for himself.

Thus it was that, for the nine loads, eighteen boys had appeared and squatted near their baskets since early morning. Though the Konyak dislikes early rising, there is one thing that drives him to leave his bed at dawn : the hope of picking the lightest load. For it is a case of first come, first served, the first comer tying his carrying-hand to the load he has selected, secures his claim.

It was pouring with rain when we started from Wakching. Our coolies went ahead, next came Tsampio with his umbrella and wine-red wool cap, while Nlamo and I followed at a distance. The path to Tanhai had not been cleared since July,



and we had to wade shoulder high in wet grass, often hardly able to discern the track. Even the greatest enthusiast, delighting to praise the pleasures of walking in rain through autumn woods or summer fields, could have found little charm in such a march through the dripping jungle and wet grass, on a path full of small rivulets. Nlamo was my only comfort, for he thought it horrible too, and was not one of those unbearably optimistic companions who go on assuring you with forced gaiety that 'it could be worse'. For my part, I did not think it could be much worse.

Not a stitch of my clothing was dry when eventually we reached Tanhai, and I asked the people of one of the *morung* to light a fire so that we could warm and dry ourselves a little. I took this opportunity to talk to the *gaonbura*, filling several pages of my notebook with information on the social organization and various customs of Tanhai. What strange fatality followed me? Wherever and whenever I arrived there was bound to be a funeral. No sooner had we reached Tanhai than we heard the now-familiar wailing and a procession with the corpse of a boy passed in front of the *morung*. Here in Tanhai, as in Wakching, the people of one of the *morung* are disposed of on bamboo biers, while those of the other *morung*, as well as the people of Ang clan, are placed in open wooden coffins.

Slightly drier, we continued our march on a much better path, running straight along the ridge. The loads had been taken over by Tanhai men and the Wakching boys had gone home.

Close to Punkhung, the Ang and a *gaonbura* of that village waited for me on the path. They had erected a shelter of palm leaves, and entertained us with rice-beer and bananas. Together we climbed the steps cut in the rock leading up to the village, and entered it near the upper *morung* that stands in a splendid strategical position, isolated on a little hill. More stone steps led down to the houses of the village.

It was a pleasant surprise to find that the good people of Punkhung had built me a hut of bamboo and palm leaves on an open space near the chief's house. To pitch my tent on the sodden ground, would have been most uncomfortable, but this



excellent hut had a floor of plaited bamboo raised several inches, and I could rely on the roof of palm leaves.

The chief sent me a goat, two chickens, and some bananas as gifts of welcome, thus solving the food-problem for the moment. The Punkhung people were friendly, but full of curiosity, and half of the village congregated round my hut to see the unpacking, watching every movement with burning interest. My electric torch caused gaping surprise, and every cigarette was received with enthusiasm. A lover of solitude would long for the peace of a big city after a few days in such a jungle village, for to be surrounded by spectators from morning to night gets on the nerves of the most phlegmatic of people. I could hardly throw the boys out of the hut they had built me, and apart from that, I felt that the curiosity of an anthropologist must be even more infuriating to them than their curiosity was to me. What would we think if a foreign visitor were to take out his notebook after drinking a cup of tea and begin writing down the names of our parents and the descent of our grandmothers, and finally inquire into our customary behaviour when our wives committed adultery? Sometimes I admired the Konyaks for their patience in answering all my questions, which must often have seemed quite senseless to them, and for the endless trouble they took in dictating texts in their complicated tonal language, which—to their great amusement—I never succeeded in pronouncing correctly.

That evening the *dobhasi* Chingai arrived in Punkhung, and I was glad to see him, for here, where none of the men understood much Assamese, his services were indispensable.

I heard the rain dripping on my palm roof the whole night, and the next morning there was little improvement in the weather. I would have liked to take many photographs in Punkhung, for it varies in many ways from Wakching. The style of the men's houses is entirely different; they lack the great open porches, and the communal room lies at the back. Even in their importance as social centres they are overshadowed by the chief's house, where all the councils of the village take place.

Though the chief of Punkhung was not a 'great Ang', but only belonged to the 'small Ang clan', his house was a stately building



about 100 feet long, and his wealth appeared to be considerable. In one of the many dark rooms there was a great wooden bench carved with hornbills' heads. It was his throne, which only he and his son used, and in the failing light of the afternoon I found him there covered with his cloth, peacefully sleeping.

It was difficult to write in his dark room, and we went to the open hall at the back, where the light was better and where most of the life of the chief's family went on. The old wife of the Ang was busily spinning a peculiar material from the bark of a low shrub (*Urticacea Debregeasia velutina*). This bark is first shredded and then spun, and after many boilings the thread is eventually so soft that it can be used for weaving cloth. This bark textile belongs no doubt to an older cultural stratum than the material woven from home-grown cotton which is found in the villages of the Wakching group.

Towards evening the girls with their baskets full of vegetables returned from the fields, and came and sat down near the fire. Among them was the chief's daughter, covered with jewels, and wearing only a narrow skirt. By chance we spoke of the marriage customs, and I unwarily inquired the bride price of a chief's daughter. Hardly had Chingai translated my question, than the whole circle burst into unrestrained laughter, and the giggling girls cast glances at the daughter of the Ang, who covered her face with her hands in embarrassment. Some one remarked that the white Sahib might want to marry the daughter of the house and was inquiring after the price. I knew that the Konyaks love to spin out such a joke, shaking with laughter for a long time, so I described at great length the spears, *dao*, bronze gongs, cloths, and other valuables that I had already collected : a great treasure, that I would willingly hand over to the chief for his daughter. She was actually a very pretty girl, though the custom of blackening the teeth gives rather a grim expression to the smile of all these beauties. Chingai confided to me later that girl had a liaison with a married man and that, much to the anger of her father, she was expecting a child. Now all the hopes of the old Ang of marrying his daughter to a chief's son from another village were shattered, and it was difficult to find a fairly honour-



able way out of this embarrassing situation, for the girl's lover, not being of chiefly rank, could have only one wife. However, when I came back to Punkhung five months later, I heard that the lover, in compliance with the chief's wishes, had divorced his wife and was going to marry the chief's daughter ; not a very distinguished fate, certainly, for the daughter of an Ang, even though he is only of 'small Ang clan'.

If I had unconsciously touched on a sore point, my joke had so amused the other girls that they invited me to their club, or so I should like to call the separate room in the chief's house where the girls of the Ang *morung* spend their nights. Here they receive the visits of the boys from other *morung*, and no objection is raised if these visits last far into the early hours of morning.

When I turned up that evening with Chingai, the girls were still alone. In the light of the flickering fire they sat on their broad sleeping-benches round the room, and passed the time with the chanting of songs. There was no cause to doubt their good spirits, but their songs sounded sad and monotonous, rather like dirges at the grave of a dear friend, and even when the boys came in one by one, and sat down, each next to his girl, the songs did not become any merrier. There was much silvery, high-pitched laughter in the pauses between the songs, and the jokes flying to and fro were no longer ambiguous. Nevertheless the behaviour of the young people was unimpeachable, and the couples did not dream of flirting openly ; they would have plenty of time for that when the red embers of the fire burnt out and the shadows on the walls had faded into the darkness. There was a great romp, with much laughing and screaming when one of the boys left his place for a moment and another girl jokingly slipped in beside his sweetheart.

My cigarettes once more found great favour and one of the boys sold me a plaited ribbon, the kind that the girls give their boy-friends to tie together their *pan*-leaves. Probably the girl was not present, or perhaps she no longer enjoyed his favours ; for another boy, more gallant, refused to part with a similar band for double the price.



It was midnight when I got up to go, but the girls begged me to stay ; apparently they were not burning to be left alone with their boy-friends. I assured them I would gladly stay the whole night, but which of them would spend it with me ? Obviously I was joking, but I had apparently found the right tone of conversation for the Punkhung Ladies' Club, and we parted with great hilarity.

The young people certainly laughed a long time, and no doubt commented on the white man who went to sleep quite alone in his hut. How could they know that far into the night I sat at my table recording my comments on them in my diary ?

But the Konyaks are born night-birds, and they only begin really to wake up at midnight. This quality can be very annoying when you would like a little peace in the camp after a tiring march. I remember nights when the people immediately next to my hut or tent chatted in the liveliest tones until three or four in the morning. The following day, of course, it was often difficult to find the necessary carriers in time, and to shake my *dobhashi* awake. Before nine o'clock in the morning, Konyaks are as good as incapable of any mental effort, and the few times I got up early and wanted to make some notes I soon gave it up, in face of the continual yawning and stretching of my informants. But they would often come and want to tell me endless stories until late into the night, and then it was I who had the greatest difficulty in keeping my eyes open. The Konyaks even go to work on the fields quite late. Between nine and ten in the morning is *tai-dzim*—'Assembling-together-time'—the hour when the men and the boys come to the *morung* and sit about on the open platforms, chewing betel and discussing the events of the day. Only about ten o'clock—at the time of 'all go', as it is called—do they start off, and the sun often stands high in the sky before the men begin their day's work.

Why exert yourself when it isn't necessary ? the Konyak thinks ; and apparently he is right not to sour his life with too much work. To him the hours in the girls' club are not wasted time, and enjoyment is worth more than any material gain.



## CHAPTER X

### PARADISE IN THE JUNGLE

DENSE virgin forest covered the low saddle between Punkhung and Oting, the home village of Chingai, where I had decided to spend the next few days. After months in the higher hills, I revelled in the hot, crowded forest, with its hundreds of voices, which remained ever invisible and ever mysterious. I was conscious of life teeming round me, and yet, when I stayed my step and peered among the branches, not a leaf moved, and only the isolated shafts of sunlight slanting through the foliage painted an emerald mosaic on the green of the forest floor.

The village of Oting, in the shade of palms and high clumps of bamboos, was like some dream from the childhood of man. The crest of the long ridge, only 2200 feet high, was covered with a tangle of vegetation, far more luxuriant than the forest round Wakching. It grew close up to the houses that stood singly and seemed almost crushed by the riot of untamed jungle. The branches of the orange trees bent under the weight of fruit, and yellow pomelas, as on some pictured tree of knowledge, shone from among dark leaves. The pulp inside the thick skin of these fruits is pink and reminds you of grape-fruits ; but they are rather bitter, and I never learnt to like them. I preferred the tangerines, which the people brought me in great baskets ; they did not look so good, for the skin was still bright green, but the fruit inside was deliciously golden. After the unvarying monotony of bananas they were a welcome change. It was fresh fruit that I missed most in Wakching.

The people of Oting, acting on Chingai's suggestion, had also built me a comfortable hut on piles ; it would be good to stay in this friendly village. I do not think that any other Naga village can boast of so lovely a position as Oting, and the people seemed to have the easy amiability of many sun-kissed lands. To my great surprise, even the girls were not afraid of my camera, and



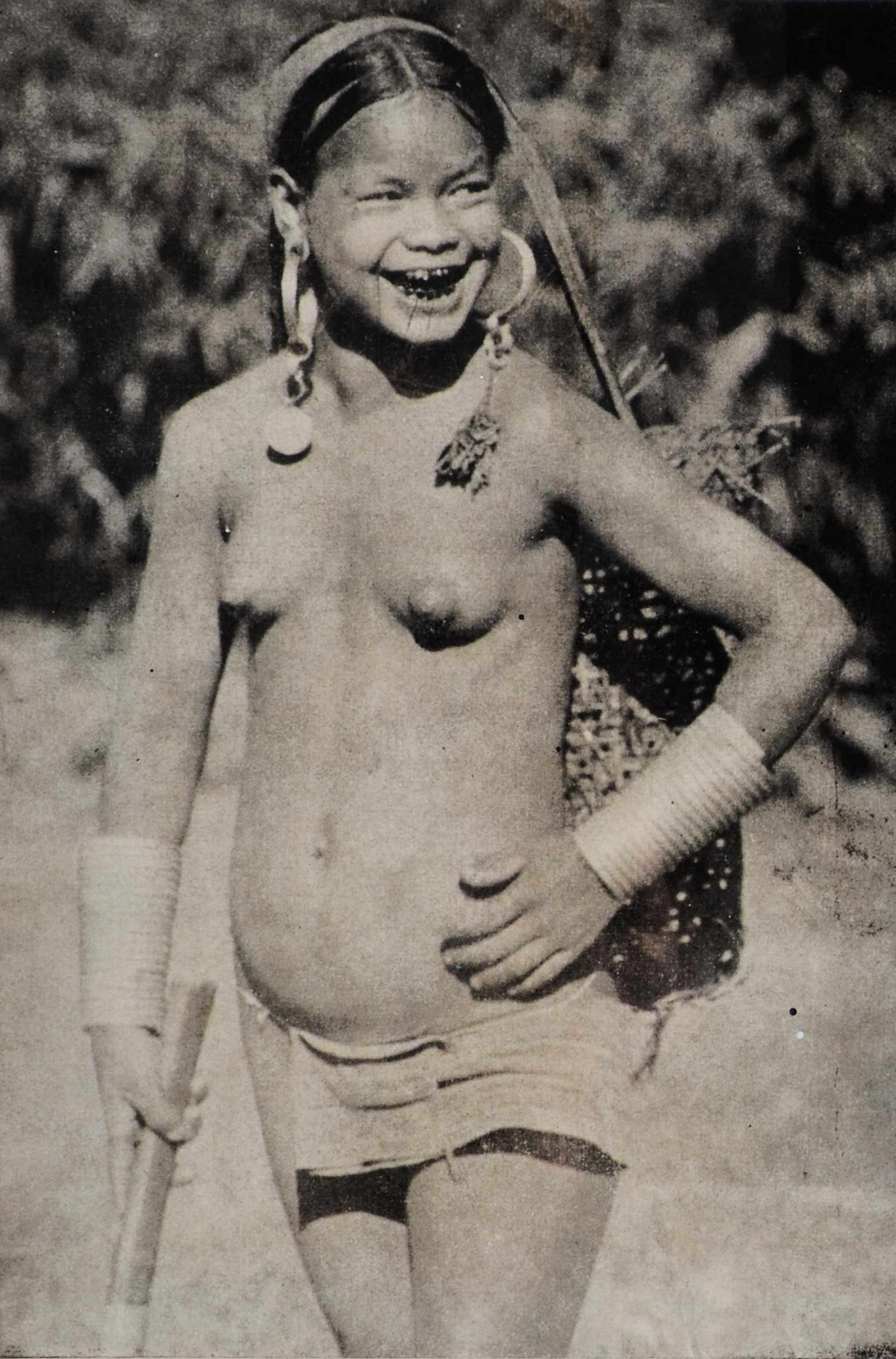


Girls of Longkhai spinning bark-fibre

Women of Oting making pots.







A girl of Oting with blackened teeth



smiled gaily with black mouths whenever I wanted to take their photographs. The great difference between the individual villages in their attitude to my Contax was always a puzzle. While there were villages where the photographing of women was either altogether impossible or a matter for diplomacy when *dobhashi* and *gaonbura* must intervene, there were others where the girls seemed to think it fun to be taken, and would continue with their normal activities as though nothing unusual occurred. Perhaps the women are shyest in the villages lying closest to Borjan or to the plains ; evidently on their frequent visits to the markets of Assam they have already had unpleasant encounters with strangers.

But the girls of Oting are an unembarrassed and gay crowd, and if you tried to explain that it would be more decent if they permanently covered their brown bodies with a cloth, they would laugh incredulously. Until their fifteenth or sixteenth year they go about as God has made them. Only later on do they adopt a small skirt, hardly a hand's-breadth wide ; a symbol that they now belong to the adults. *Naturalia non sunt turpia* is the Konyak's motto and nobody minds if a little blood reddens a girl's thighs. This refreshing naturalness finds expression in a most useful custom, which no doubt saves many quarrels and hard words. I noticed that some girls wore leaden, and some brass rings in their ears. That, explained Chingai, shows whether the parents consider their daughter old enough to take a lover, for only then may she change the leaden rings of her childhood for brass. So the boys always know where they stand, and there is no playing at hide and seek—no risk of the reproaches of infuriated parents. The provident father even builds a bamboo bed for his daughter in a separate room of his house, where from the day of the changing of the earrings she may receive her lover.

The girls are not sparing with their favours, nor do they reserve them only for the boys of their own village. They often make friends with boys from neighbouring villages, and the days of their youth are full of amorous adventures. But to sell her body would be unimaginable to a Konyak girl. Prostitution is



unknown and I shall never forget the half horrified and half amused face of Shankok, when he told me what he had heard from Kongan men about the ways of some Assamese women. He simply shook with laughter at the idea that among the plains people you should pay four or eight annas for an hour of love.

The Oting girls, on the other hand, seem to be impervious even to magic. One day I suggested to Chingai that since the fertility of crops, luck in the chase and even success on the war-path could be secured by offerings and magical formulae, surely there must exist some magic to win the hearts of women. But Chingai considered this ridiculous.

'No, Sahib,' he retorted, 'there is no such magic ; in love every thing depends on the girl's whim. Even if a man sacrificed three hundred or four hundred buffaloes, it would be useless if the girl did not like him.' And he laughed loudly at the thought of trying to beguile a girl with magic.

I believe that among the Konyaks the relations between men and women are perhaps not quite as often the cause of unhappiness as in western societies. Not that every young man can possess the girl he desires, or that marriages are invariably happy. But where attraction is mutual custom erects few bars to fulfilment, and most young people choose their own marriage-partners. True, early marriages arranged by the parents are not infrequent, but they have only the character of engagements and are dissolved without difficulty, often before they are consummated. Except for those chief's daughters burdened by the obligations of high rank, there is no Konyak girl who may not enjoy the first passionate raptures of love with a youth of her choice, even should she later have to live with a husband to whom she is less attracted. Tragedy in love seems to be a rare exception, but it is not unknown : I heard of a girl who hanged herself because she could not marry the man she loved.

As a rule the domestic life of the Konyaks is certainly happy. And this is not surprising. Most marriages are concluded by people who have known each other long and intimately and are not greatly swayed by economic considerations. The spirit of *camaraderie* and equality which prevails between the young girls



and boys colours also the relations between husband and wife. A girl who enjoyed for years almost complete independence and was used to be courted by a number of youths, is not likely to turn into a meek wife, and whoever watches the Konyaks at work, in their houses and at feasts realizes that there is an essential equality of men and women.

Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills their high status and their free and happy life ; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as 'savages'.

Life in Oting seems not only singularly happy but also easier than in the higher hills. There is a great deal of land at the disposal of the village, and even in times of bad harvests bananas ripening throughout the year never allow the feeling of hunger to arise among the villagers. There is no wrecking of brains over economic problems ; clothes and food are always at hand, and in a land where bamboos and palms grow abundantly, there is no difficulty in finding the other necessities of life. In the course of a few hours a house is durably thatched with a roof of palm leaves that offers equal protection against the cloud-bursts of the rains and the strongest rays of the summer sun. Bamboos are excellent building material ; they can be cut from the jungle in any required strength, all ready for use. Thick, strong stems provide the posts, split and plaited into strong mats, they are admirably suited for house-walls and floor-coverings, while narrow cane strips form ligatures that, taking the place of nails and clamping-irons, bind the posts together. A great house can be built in two or three days, for all clansmen and friends lend a hand, and are paid on completion by lavish entertainment with much food and rice-beer.

It is certainly the freedom from all those daily worries, so overshadowing the life of the more civilized world, that is responsible for the gay, carefree temperament of the Konyak. Perhaps it is also responsible for the absence in their villages of any serious crime. Talking to the old men sitting in front of the *morung* one evening, I turned the conversation in the direction



of punishment and crime ; for, after all, I thought, there must be black sheep even in Oting. The old men admitted that cases of theft did occasionally occur, but they said it hardly ever happened that a man stole rice from his neighbours' granary. He can so easily borrow what he requires, they explained, the next year he has only to repay the same amount ; if he borrows two baskets, he returns two baskets. It seems that the Oting people are more generous than my friends of Wakching, who make a profit of fifty per cent on such a transaction by demanding three baskets in return for the two.

'But tell me,' I continued, 'what would you do if two men of your village quarrelled and one killed the other ?'

There was a thoughtful silence for a moment. None of the old men knew what to answer.

'Sahib, I have seen many harvests fill my granaries ; these palm trees did not yet stand when I was young, but never have my eyes seen such madness. I do not know what would happen, for our fathers' words do not tell of such things.'

'All right ; but may it not happen that some one sets fire to his neighbour's house ? What is done with him ?'

'What should we do with him, if he has bad luck and the fire escapes his hand ? We just help to build a new house.'

The others nodded in agreement ; yes, all would help, that was clear to them ; that needed no long deliberation. It never occurred to their minds that the fire might have been intentional. Yes, they would just help to build a new house !

'Of course', remarked the old man after several minutes, 'it does happen that two men come to blows. After all, we have women in the village. Do you see Dhakai over there, plaiting a basket on his platform ? Well, once he went to Wangla, but on the way down to the bridge he noticed that he had forgotten his pouch with betel nuts. So he quickly puffed up the hill again and entered his house, and there he found the rascal Photun with his wife. Sahib, you should have heard the noise when he chased Photun through the village. Two fat pigs the boy had to pay the infuriated husband. However,' he added with a sly smile, 'few women are so stupid ; is the jungle not large enough ?'



And he pointed with a vague gesture to the palm-forest encircling the village, and then added with pretended indignation : 'Why must the boys play with the wives of other men ? Are there not enough girls with brass earrings ?'

Happy Oting people, whose only quarrels concern the faithlessness of women, who cannot imagine a murder or the thirst for revenge disturbing the peace of their village. Are they angels forgotten in this far-off paradise ? They are certainly nothing of the kind, for their blood boils quickly, and they show a certain naive indifference to the value of human life which manifests itself in the custom of head-hunting. But side by side with this you find an amazing tactfulness. Rarely is anything mentioned in front of a man that he might find embarrassing. 'His mind would hurt' is the literal translation of the stereotyped explanation for such consideration. All Nagas are careful not to hurt the feelings of others, and often, when I worked with several informants, one of them would come to me afterwards and tell me that one of his friends had made a mistake, but he had not wanted to contradict him in his presence, for 'his mind would have hurt.'



## CHAPTER XI

### SACRED CHIEFS

WATCHING the people of Oting at work in the village and on the fields, listening to their talk in the *morung* and on the verandas of the houses, you would scarcely think that there existed among them a difference of class, a difference between the high and the low, between aristocrats or Angs and commoners or Ben people.

Their daily life does not seem in any way different, the aristocrats do not possess better houses or richer furniture, and except for the village chief himself, the people of Ang clan are in no way outwardly conspicuous. The running of the village, however, lies mainly in their hands, the adult men of Ang clan forming the council of the chief, which decides all quarrels and settles disputes over field-boundaries and the like. Yet there is no animosity or opposition between the two classes of Oting—at least, I did not discover any. The aristocrats and commoners are in no way secluded, but mingle freely together, and are natural marriage partners. Those aristocrats who do not marry Ang girls from other villages must seek wives among the daughters of the commoners in Oting ; likewise a man of Ben clan may not marry a girl of his own class, but must woo a girl of Ang clan. The children, though naturally of mixed blood, belong to the father's class.

The position of the so-called 'Great Angs' is quite different. These powerful village chiefs, such as the Great Ang of Mon and the Great Ang of Chi, have the sacred blood of the chiefs, pure and undiluted, in their veins. There can be no more exclusive community than that of the Great Ang clan, for as the kings of Egypt kept the royal blood pure by marrying their own sisters, so the Great Angs take their wives from their own Great Ang clan, and it is only the children of such a union that acquire the father's rank.



Few of the small vassal chiefs can boast of a spotless genealogy, and even Dzaknang, the proud Ang of Oting, was not of the highest rank, though his family was nevertheless considered equal to most of the chiefly houses of the smaller neighbouring villages. His mother was the sister of the old Ang of Punkhung, and he married that uncle's eldest daughter, who bore him two daughters and a son.

Dzaknang invited me to his house, a long building in a prominent position. His two daughters were covered in jewels and seemed rather plumer than the other girls of the village ; perhaps because they worked less than the daughters of ordinary men. Though they were not particularly young, both girls wore lead rings in their ears. They were a warning to the boys, for the rings clearly said, 'all trespassers will be prosecuted.' But it was not enough for the Ang to forbid his daughters to flirt with the commoners of the village ; now he was faced with the necessity of finding them husbands, if possible of corresponding rank, from the chiefs' house of the neighbouring villages. This was a pressing and not a very simple task, for at the moment there seemed to be a dearth in possible husbands for such girls. The houses of Wangla and Lunglam were out of the question ; they were too nearly related to the Ang of Oting. It was a pity, the Ang said, that the houses of Punkhung and Hungphoi had no sons of a suitable age, for many of the Angs of Oting had taken their wives from these villages in the past. When Tanhai was mentioned, the old Ang only shook his head ; he looked down on the Ang of Tanhai. He was not his social equal, he said. The Oting girls, on the other hand, were not of high enough rank for the sons of the Great Angs of Chi, Sheangha, Hangnyu, and other powerful villages. To my question why they could not marry half-brothers of the Great Angs, belonging also to the Small Ang clan, Chingai remarked that it is better to be the wife of a chief in a small village than the less respected member of a great chief's house.

The situation was further complicated by the refusal of the girls to marry into villages more than one day's journey from Oting. How could they visit their parents and their old friends



at the annual feasts ? 'We would never hear in time of the illness or the death of our parents,' the girls complained. No, all by themselves into a far-off village they would not go.

Indeed, when high birth restricts the circle of possible mates, it is difficult even for Konyak girls to get married in time. Their rank obliges them to refrain from the amorous adventures with which their less noble friends fill the years before marriage, and amidst the frivolity of the Oting girls such enforced chastity is certainly not enviable. Perhaps discontent born of boredom was the reason why both the Ang's daughters seemed to me serious and a little morose, or perhaps it was only natural shyness before a stranger of whose rank they were uncertain.

Chingai, himself of Ang Clan, confided to me that not only the father but all the men of Oting's Ang clan worried over the fate of the chief's daughters. However, after months of discussion, a compromise was found, and when I came back to Oting in the spring, I heard that the Ang had decided to allow his younger daughter to marry a Ben boy of Oting, and had arranged to marry off the elder girl to the son of the chief of Hungphoi. From the point of view of rank and family the fiance was no doubt eminently suitable, but he had the drawback of being only ten years old. I am afraid, I do not know whether the unfortunate Ang's daughter was supposed to remain chaste until her husband was grown-up, or whether she could seek consolation with other boys ; perhaps one of the cousins of the young husband acted as proxy until the latter was old enough to take up his marital duties.

It is a remarkably close tie that unites the Ang families of the Konyaks even across the frontiers of their own villages, and one which was concretely demonstrated to me while I was still in Oting. One evening, I sat with Chingai and the old men before one of the *morung* ; as it was growing dark, the sun had set behind the dark-violet mountains, and the high palms and the broad, massive banana leaves stood outlined against a sky flooded with orange, when suddenly a band of richly decorated warriors emerged out of the dusk. They were an embassy from the Great Ang of Mon, the over-lord of Oting, and they came to pay his



respects to the recently deceased Ang of the Dingdon *Morung*. The leader was a very young boy of the Great Ang clan, with a magnificent head-dress of hornbill feathers, and all the other warriors were rather young and apparently deeply convinced of the importance of their mission.

They rested for a short while, and then proceeded to the open space in front of the house of the late *Morung* Ang. Here, in the failing light of dusk, they enacted a dramatic representation of all the phases of a head-hunting raid. With cat-like movements, one of the warriors crept over the open place, peering to left and to right, and then, seeming to sight his quarry in the distance, cautiously retreated, fetched another warrior, and pointed out the discovered enemy. Now, signing to their companions to remain in the background, both the warriors crept forward. After breathless moments, considering themselves near enough to the enemy, they raised their *dao* and fell on their victim with furious yells. A short fight with the imaginary enemy ensued ending with one triumphant warrior's cutting off the head off his victim. Now, all the other warriors rushed on to what must have been innumerable enemies, suggesting by the frantic movements of their *dao* a wholesale massacre. This slaughter continued for a few minutes, and when not a single enemy could conceivably remain, they raised their spears to the sky, shouting battle cries that rang out in wild, ghastly shrieks. Then they paced in a circle round the open place, and one man recited over and over again : 'The Small Ang of the Dingdon *Morung* is dead, the Great Ang of Mon feels therefore great sorrow.'

They were hardly human roars that rang through the night, and for the first time in the Naga Hills a cold hand gripped my spine. Would these young warriors from the unadministered territory remember the mockery of the fight, or, overcome by the enthusiasm of the dance, might they not seek a real victim ? I was a stranger in a foreign land—no doubt a most suitable victim !

But the warriors hardly noticed me sitting with Chingai on the porch ; they streamed past me into the *morung* with the Oting men, and soon two fires flared up, and the great hall,



so often empty, seethed with people. The guests lined up on either side of the great wooden body of the log drum, bringing the heavy wooden drum-strikers down thuddingly on the thick wood, taking the time from an expert drum-beater, and not, as I would have thought, from the Ang. The rhythm changed several times ; at first it was not very marked, all the warriors hitting with their full force. The resultant booming was terrific, and almost hurt my ears. But soon the leader, a heavy drum-stick in either hand, while the rest of the players held sticks only in the right hand, began drumming two strong consecutive beats, the others following with quick little strokes. Then once again the rhythm changed ; this time it was interspersed with short complete pauses followed by a small whoop of the leader and the crashing of all the strikers on the drum.

I noticed that the Oting men, busily hurrying to and fro, bringing wood for the fires, crouched when they passed the drum-playing Ang ; even though he was quite a young boy, the respect for the sacred Ang blood forced them to this submissive attitude. After a time, when the players, their sweat-covered backs glistening in the light of the fire, put down their drum-sticks the young Ang played the death rhythm alone for several minutes, thus once more announcing the death of the *Morung Ang*.

The next morning the guests exercised their right to spear one pig within the area of the Dingdon *Morung*. The animal was not held and slaughtered in the ordinary sacrificial manner, but was chased, as on a hunt, and killed by hurling spears. The men of Mon fastened the pig to a bamboo, singed it over an open fire, cut it up, and, boiling the meat, ate it on the spot. The honour shown to a deceased *Morung Ang* on such visits has thus to be paid for, and I think that the young men consider the eating of the pigs of the mourners the main part of these ceremonial visits of condolence.

Late one night, sitting writing in my hut, I heard voices outside, and I stepped out into the darkness to see what was the matter. The small light of my oil lamp shone upon two figures, prostrating themselves full length at my feet. Unused to such





The wife and the daughter of Mauwang,  
sacred chief of Longkhai.





A Konyak warrior of Joboka.



oriental homage, I was rather bewildered at first, and at a loss what I should do with the men who were brushing the ground with their huge feather plumes face down in the dark. However, a little persuasion finally induced them to stand up and tell me what they wanted ; they were from Joboka, a village beyond the frontier, and had come to welcome me, bringing with them two chickens as 'salaams'. As soon as I heard they were from Joboka, I began to understand. The day before, Chingai had told me of the ambush the Joboka men had laid for a group of Yannyu people returning from a trading expedition in the plains, when they captured the large number of nineteen heads. The Nagas themselves do not consider the ambushing of trading expeditions as legitimate game, and such exploits are not looked on with favour by the officials of the adjoining districts. So the Joboka men, hearing that a white Sahib was in Oting, had no doubt seized the opportunity to find out how the land lay, and whether they would be called to account for their recent exploit. Since I had neither any desire nor authority to interfere in this affair, but only displayed a great interest in their newly acquired neck tattoo and other head-hunting insignia, they left me greatly satisfied. Since it was too late at night to call on one of their friends in the village, they asked whether they could spend the night in my camp and I told them that if they liked, they could sleep in the small shelter standing beside my hut. I must admit that the inadvisability of establishing two such recent head-hunters in my camp outside the village never occurred to me. But, they justified my unconcern and proved camp-companions with excellent manners. Next morning, as we sat all together before my hut, chewing betel, one of them suddenly jumped up and with desperate gestures seemed to ask me something. At first I could not understand, but later I discovered he only wanted to know where he might spit out his betel !

One of the Joboka men wore a neatly plaited gauntlet of red cane, instead of the usual loose cane rings. I wanted to buy it, but he explained that he could not sell the gauntlet, for his pregnant wife had plaited it, and in case of a difficult delivery the gauntlet would have to be cut into pieces. It is a general



belief among the Nagas that during a difficult delivery all baskets in the house must be cut open and all knots loosened. The idea seems to be that their loosening facilitates in some magical way the loosening of the child from the mother's womb.

Our start from Oting was beset with difficulties. Tsampio had been suffering for several days from troubles of only too obvious a character. He had gone on leave some time before we had begun touring, and perhaps it was in Kohima that he had picked up his malady from a bazaar beauty ; now he was suffering acutely, and I seemed to have no other choice but to hire several coolies and have him carried on a bier to Wakching ; ultimately he reached Kohima, where he found medical attention. Tsampio's departure left me without a cook and though Nlamo succeeded quite well in preparing the few things we got in these villages, he found it difficult to do Tsampio's work as well as his own and still find time to assist me as interpreter. Perhaps this produced the necessary stimulus, for I quickly overcame the final difficulties in talking and understanding Assamese, and it was not long before I became quite accustomed to working without an interpreter.

The way to Wangla, the village on the opposite hill, passed through a broad valley, probably cleared for cultivation that year for the first time for generations. Gigantic trees had defied the clearing-fires, and now they provided a most pleasant shade as we walked through the reaped rice-fields. In the bottom of the valley there was a cool, fresh stream, and here we rested at midday and enjoyed a delicious swim in the dark-green water.

Wangla and Hungphoi both received us well, and I stayed in each of these villages several days. They were full of interest, for even though they lay so close together—scarcely a few hours' march apart—there were many differences in the traditions and the customs of the villagers. Nearly every village still has its collection of captured heads stored away on the many shelves of its *morung*, and once a year, at the Spring Festival, they are fed with rice-beer. In front of one of the *morung* in Hungphoi I noticed a tall, slender stone ; on inquiry, it turned out to be the stone erected by those Hungphoi youths who had 'carried' the



head of Chen woman to Mon. Such stones can only be set up at the bringing in of a head ; the two youthful heroes had evidently played a different role from the one they admitted in Tanhai, and there can be little doubt that they brought at least a small piece of the head back to Hungphoi.

While I was eating my breakfast, on the morning after our arrival in Hungphoi, Chingai came running into my hut. There was a young wife in the village being tattooed ; would the Sahib like to watch ? The girls are generally tattooed on their legs and arms at the age of eight or nine, but the full tattoo, consisting of two broad bands above the knees, is only completed when a girl becomes pregnant and wants to move into her husband's house ; the completion of the tattoo marks the wife's entrance into the man's clan. When I arrived, I found the girl stretched out on the floor of the veranda of her parents' house, amidst a crowd of laughing and chatting friends. Five women held her down as she writhed with pain, while a woman of Ang clan, alone expert in this art, drew two broad rings with geometric ornamentations in dark blue dye round the knees, and then punctured the design into the skin with an adze-like instrument made from the thorns of a small palm. For hours the artist hammered mercilessly and the thorns pricked into the sensitive skin round the hollows of the knees. Curiously enough, even the whimpering of the victim followed a prescribed pattern swelling up and down in little cascades. The other girls did not show much sympathy with their moaning friend, but considered the whole affair more or less amusing, and continually broke into peals of laughter. What woman would not think it natural to suffer in order to be beautiful ? Returning after some time I found the operation completed, and the patient sitting in the shadow enjoying a meal of rice and taro with the other women.

It is proof of the enviable health of the Nagas that the tattooing wounds, though they often bleed profusely, hardly ever become septic. Even the best constitution, however, is no protection against diseases such as malaria, and while Wakching lies above the danger zone, the villages on the lower ridges often suffer severely. Wherever I went, numerous Nagas crowded round my



camp, hoping to be cured of something or other. As long as it was only a question of malaria, quinine brought at least temporary relief ; and I even attained some measure of success when treating acute indigestion or open wounds. But I learnt to curse my reputation, which used to fly before me into the villages, so that I would arrive to find crowds waiting to be treated. After all, what was I to do with people, like one old woman in Oting, who complained of a pain in her stomach, which, she told me, had begun when she was a young girl ? Nothing will convince the Naga that not every European is a physician with miraculous capacities and inexhaustible supplies of medicines for all imaginable maladies. Their confidence in my little pills and jars of ointments was all more touching, as the Nagas themselves have much more spectacular remedies. They believe, for instance, that washing the body in the blood of a slaughtered enemy will cure leprosy.

Hungphoi was the noisiest village I have ever been in. Large crowds of children surrounded my hut the whole day but as soon as I approached, hoping to make friends with them, they would disperse with shrieks of laughter. Children of seven and eight carried their small brothers and sisters on their back and I cannot imagine how these infants slept solidly through all the noise. I would not have minded if the children had only screamed and shouted ; I should have got used to that, but unfortunately their incredible curiosity drove them to creep up to the walls of my hut and peep through the plaited walls at all hours of the day or night. Whether I ate, washed, or wrote my diary, each movement of mine would result in a torrent of whispered comments, until I was so infuriated that I would either leave the hut or extinguish my oil lamp. If only I could have turned their interest to some purpose ; but their boldness behind the protecting wall changed to the most unbelievable shyness whenever I pointed my camera in their direction.

After a few days I decided to leave Hungphoi, and so we started for Longkhai through the reaped rice-fields under a radiant sky. The chief himself waited for us on the top of the hill before his village with one of the *gaonbura*. Mauwang, the Ang of Longkhai, is the only Great Ang in administered territory, and I was



very interested to meet him. He was comparatively tall, middle-aged, with the strongest and most impressive personality I have ever met among the Nagas ; but he had none of the august dignity of the Great Angs of Mon, Chi, and Sheangha. His Assamese was poor, but the expressiveness of his face, worthy of any actor, lent such emphasis to every word, that there was hardly ever any doubt as to what he meant. And he had a wonderful sense of humour—that quality which so many times delighted me among the Nagas. He could talk with a deadly serious expression, and, suddenly changing his tone, would pull such grimaces that I could not help bursting into laughter. Perhaps it was the consciousness of his rank that encouraged him to make light of everything or perhaps it was the artist in him that induced that particular versatility.

The only things he was really serious over were his works of art, and in these he took an almost childish pride. Yes, Mauwang was an artist ; there was no one to equal him in the blacksmith's art in the whole district, and only his deaf-and-dumb half-brother carved more beautifully in wood. To understand his creative genius you would have to see him before a rough block of wood with his chisel in his hand. He would look at the wood lovingly for a little, and then suddenly the strong blows of the hammer would make the chips fly. Unhesitatingly the chisel sank into the wood ; faster and faster fell the blows of the hammer ; and soon a human body seemed to grow out of the wood. Perhaps it would be an arm that came first, then a head. Quicker and quicker he worked, without even a pause, and now you could see that the figure was not to remain alone ; already there was an arm of a second figure lying round the shoulder of the first. Gradually, as Mauwang hammered on, a love-couple took shape, with entwined arms. The extraordinary thing was that once he had begun his work he never paused to think how it was the arm should lie, or what position the feet might take. The sculpture must have stood before his spiritual eyes before the first stroke of the chisel. Only when the figures had been worked out in rough, Mauwang would begin the finer retouching with a small knife.



Most wood-carvings of the Konyaks serve to decorate their men's houses. In Longkhai the *morung* are full of carvings, most of them works of the present Ang, his deaf-and-dumb half-brother or a deceased third brother. This third brother was the greatest genius of the three and his work was the most mature ; on one of the main posts of the Ang *morung* a particular carving of a man and a woman surpassed in force and expression and real artistic feeling all the carvings in Longkhai.

Other posts of the men's house bore carvings of animals, and Mauwang showed me proudly one of his latest works : the high relief of a snake in the act of devouring a frog. Here too sexual motifs are numerous and there can be no doubt that they aim at enhancing in a magical way the fertility of the inhabitants.

On the open space before the house of the Ang there were two stone seats ; great round slabs on a support of rough boulders. The larger seat was used by the Ang of Mon when he visited Longkhai and the smaller by Mauwang himself. No commoner and none of the men of Small Ang clan was ever to sit on these thrones. The Ang of Mon was the overlord of a whole group of villages which included Longkhai ; indeed Mauwang belonged to the chiefly house of Mon.

Mauwang's life-history is unusual and shows that even a 'sacred' chief may have to build up prestige by his own efforts. When Mauwang was still a boy his father violated the then newly promulgated law forbidding head-hunting and was sent for three years to the jail at Kohima. After his release he decided that life under the *Pax Britannica* would be a dull affair and emigrated across the border to Mon, where his powerful kinsman gave him shelter. His eldest son went with him, and only the boy, Mauwang remained in Longkhai and was brought up by a relative. The long years of his growing up saw the great house of the old Ang fall gradually into ruins, and the prestige of the Ang family of Longkhai was at its lowest. Little attention was paid to the houseless boy Mauwang for he was unable to fulfil the duties of a chief. Since he could not entertain his subjects, they would not work on his fields or rebuild his house.

Mauwang's face had a strained, sad look as he told of those





Mauwang, the chief of Longkhai





Carving on the central post of  
the Ang morung of Longkhai.



first hard years ; they were full of shame for the son of a Great Ang, those sad years before he found a way of winning back his father's throne. But his face lightened with one of those miraculous changes—it was as though he had found anew the solution of his lost heritage. He told me how he had apprenticed himself to the blacksmith in the village, how he had learnt to forge knives, *dao*, spear-heads, and hoes ; how then he began to make ceremonial spears for the Ang women, inventing little figures of iron to put between the points of the two pronged spears. And eventually, after working for a few years, he sold so many of his creations that he was able to collect enough money to buy a buffalo and several baskets of rice. Triumphantly his eyes burned. At last he had been able to give the people a feast, and so they rebuilt his house for him. It was a noble house that he pointed to on the other side of the open place. There the building stood, more than 100 feet long, where he lived with his wife, the daughter of the Great Ang of Chi. He had wooed her with twenty *dao*, sixty spears, two big pigs, seven chickens, one goat, a great quantity of salt, and two baskets of 'pan' leaves.

It was growing chilly outside, and the Ang got up from the porch of the *morung*, and together we went over to his house. His wife sat in the main hall. You could see at a glance that she was a great lady, and with her calm and graceful dignity she stood out clearly from Mauwang's Ben wives and all the other women living in his huge house. Self possessed and spirited she joined at once in the conversation ; that she did not know a word of Assamese did not deter her in the least from making jokes which Mauwang had to translate.

In no other Naga house was I welcomed with more obvious pleasure on the part of my hosts. Yet the personal charm of this aristocratic couple and the happy atmosphere in Longkhai did not blind me to the fact that life in the village of a sacred Ang can have its serious drawbacks. Most of the Great Angs in the still unadministered territory were at the best rather autocratic, and at the worst definitely tyrannical, commandeering the labour, property and—last but not least—many a pretty daughter of their subjects. Compared to conditions in villages such as



Mon or Chi there was much to be said for the social system of Wakching and Wanching where differences of rank were of little practical account. Indeed quite a number of voluntary exiles from the domains of sacred Angs lived in democratic villages. While they themselves were still recognizable by their different tattoo, their children became completely assimilated and grew up in the language and customs of their new home. But I never heard of a Konyak who had exchanged the free air of a community organized on the principle of general equality for the authoritarian regime in an Ang village. Thus history repeats itself and fundamental human impulses seem curiously similar in a society of head-hunters and in the mechanized civilizations of modern times.



## TOWARDS UNKNOWN COUNTRY

ONE evening, while I was sitting with Mauwang on the large stone seat, his 'throne', outside the chief's house, we saw runners coming up the hill. They brought me a letter from Mills which he had sent to Wakching and the *gaonbura* had forwarded by two young men. I tore open the envelope. It held marvellous news. I had known for some time that Mills was planning an expedition into unadministered territory, and now he wrote that the Government of Assam would permit me to accompany him. It was already late and I had to content myself with another night in Longkhai, but next morning I left almost at dawn.

It is not very far from Longkhai to Wakching, and yet the way back that day seemed long ; ordinarily it would have been a pleasant march in the sunny weather, but now I hardly noticed the country as I passed. I was turning over in my mind all those events which Mills had told me would probably lead to an expedition. Serious news had come from the tribal area, that the Kalyo Kengyus on the western slopes of the Patkoi Range were terrorizing their neighbours, and had developed the hunting of heads into systematic man-hunts. A few months ago they had treacherously raided and burnt two villages lying several days' journey from British territory. Only a few of the inhabitants escaped to tell the tale ; the rest had been slaughtered or carried off as slaves. It was believed that the raiders were men of a Kalyo Kengyu village known as Pangsha, but Pangsha was not on the map, and the two destroyed villages, Saochu and Kejok, lay near the eastern limit of the land surveyed in 1923 and 1924. The area further to the east was still unmapped, and the country of these Kalyo Kengyus had never been entered by any outsider.

As long as the feuds in the tribal area were restricted to the usual head-hunting raids, a more or less casual affair leading to



little loss of life, the British authorities did not usually interfere. But now whole villages had been wiped out and the survivors carried off into slavery. That the Governments of Assam and Burma did not tolerate. They had fought a long time against slavery, for the most part successfully, but in the most remote mountains on the frontier of both countries such customs were not easy to control, and on rare occasions it still sometimes happened that slave-trading was carried on. The victims, however, were not destined to be used as domestic slaves but as victims of human sacrifice.

It is difficult to distinguish clearly between head-hunting and human sacrifice, for the main importance of taking a head is not the glory of war, but the gain of the magical forces inherent in the skull. Why, therefore, should these forces not be acquired in a less dangerous way than by raiding ? Then there is always the risk of losing your own head, or so the Konyak argues ; and to lose your head on a raid is a disgraceful death for the Naga. No honour is accorded slain heroes, and their whole families suffer from the disgrace, for custom compels them to abandon their houses and throw away their property and ornaments.

My friends in Wakching were full of excitement when I told them that I was to go on the tour and full of appreciation of the circumstances. They remembered previous expeditions into the tribal area and they were sure there would be a fight with the Kalyo Kengyus. If only they could all come too ; but as I was going, I would bring back a head and that would be nearly as good. Yes, I should bring them back a head. Again and again they implored me to shoot an enemy and cut off the head. The men of Thepong, who were just building their *morung*, explained that it was imperative that they should have just such a trophy for the inauguration of their *morung*, and during the remaining days in Wakching the young men harassed me continually. But where should I take a head from ? I could not exactly see myself stalking over the battle-field and decapitating the fallen foes and yet I felt that my prestige in Wakching would be lost if I returned without a trophy !

The prospect of this adventure seemed to liven the minds of



the old men. Like a torch, it lit the dark, forgotten corners of their own memories. The slave-raids of the Kalyo Kengyus brought to them other tales of their youth, when even here in the Wakching country the people had sometimes bought slaves and cut off their heads, thus gaining the magical virtue without running any risk. Such a deed was certainly considered less glorious than the slaying of an enemy in a raid, yet it conferred the right to the ornaments of a head-hunter.

'One day, when I was a young man,' related Chinyang, 'the Chongwe people asked us whether we should like to buy a slave. "Where did you get him from?" we inquired at first. He was a boy they had captured from Mongnyu—that is a Phom village behind that mountain,' and he pointed to one of the mountains to the south. "So, he is a Phom; well, if he is a Phom, we'll take him." We paid for the boy twenty *laya*,<sup>1</sup> one pig, and a lump of salt. All the men had to contribute. Then a few old men went to Chongwe to fetch the slave; it was a small boy, and he had no idea what was going to happen. They put a feather headdress on his head and led him away with friendly words, for they felt sorry for the boy. There below, near the river, our young men lay in hiding; when they saw the boy, they rushed up to him and cut him into pieces. But I only looked on,' added Chinyang, 'for I had captured heads in a real raid, after all, it is rather a shame to kill such a young boy.'

Yongang had behaved with less reserve. He told me he had carried off a leg of the victim, and that after a few moments, when nothing had been left of the boy, the Wakching men hurried home singing and dancing.

Although this had not been an isolated case, the buying and selling of slaves was not considered quite right by my Wakching friends. Perhaps it was that they had already unconsciously adopted a few of the standards of the plains, to which they lived so near; for they told me indignantly that the people of several villages to the south used to sell even their own brothers and clansmen. But this raises the wrath of Gawang, the god of

<sup>1</sup> Brass discs, now worth between two and six rupees.



heaven, who punishes the offenders even during their lifetime. Whoever sells a human being into slavery will never have a son, and will die early.

But the Kalyo Kengyus were apparently not bound by any such scruples. I never discovered what their gods thought of the matter but they themselves certainly considered the capture and selling of slaves as an extremely profitable business, and one that they would not easily renounce. Armed force alone would press them, and Mills was to depend on an escort of Assam Rifles to lend weight to his mission.

The 10th of November was the day fixed for assembling in Mokokchung. Mills said we would probably start on one of the following days ; and that meant leaving Wakching four days earlier. Hardly had I begun my preparations when I suddenly went down with fever. Living so long out of the danger-zone in Wakching, I had been careless enough not to take any prophylactics in the malaria-infested villages of Oting and Longkhai. Could there have been a more inconvenient time for such an attack ? At first I thought it would only be a light bout, and brushed the whole thing aside, but the fever mounted steadily and my head became muzzy. In the intervals when I could think clearly, I worried that I would not be able to arrive at Mokokchung in time, and that the long-hoped-for expedition into unexplored territory would start without me. It was a miserable situation, and I cursed my negligence—and the malaria-infested Longkhai and Oting. Luckily I had atebrin with me, which is supposed to be far more effective than quinine, and is said to cure malaria within four or five days. I dosed myself heavily, and the results were excellent. I was free of fever on the fifth day.

As soon as I stood firmly on my legs, I started with Nlamo and a few coolies ; there was only just enough time to get to Mokokchung. Again we crossed the Dikhu valley, but the atmosphere was not so damp and oppressive as it had been four months ago, and the flooded, mud-coloured river of the rains had changed to a clear stream, quietly running over white sandbanks.

I spent only one night in Tamlu and in each of the Ao villages



of Chantongia and Mongsenyimti ; my pace seemed quick even to the Konyaks, but I arrived in Mokokchung punctually on the 10th.

The small settlement resembled a bee-hive. It had been so calm, so empty, the last time I had been there with Mills, and now coolies streamed together from all directions, surging between the houses. Every open space was occupied by camps, and groups of Aos, Lhotas, Sangtams, and Rengmas crowded together under improvised shelters. *Dobhashi* in red cloths hurried through the swarms of people ordering about the coolies and men of different tribes shouted at the top of their voices—some kind of compensation for the lack of a common tongue.

I caught sight of G. W. J. Smith, a young police officer, in the middle of this confusion. He was then Subdivisional Officer at Mokokchung, and had the not very enviable task of hiring the coolies, dividing them into groups, and seeing that the loads were equally distributed. We had to carry considerable provisions with us, for even in friendly Naga villages there would hardly be enough to feed the whole column, and to live on the land in hostile country would be impossible. A coolie who has to carry his own food for even a fortnight cannot carry more than half a load in addition, and although we had established rice-dumps in friendly villages beyond the border, we needed every one of our 360 coolies to carry kit and provisions for the four of us, for our escort of 150 Assam Rifles, and for the staff of *dobhashi*.

Our Naga coolies were no mere hired porters, they were all volunteers, and only a few had joined the expedition for the sake of their wages. Most of them hoped to participate in the fighting, which they were convinced we would meet, and so gain the right to the dress and ornaments of a head-hunter, which they were unable to acquire in administered territory. It seemed a little ironic that they should accompany a British expedition to recapture the glories of the head-hunting days, but I am sure they did not think of such things. They were eager and ready for any kind of scrap, armed with spears, *dao*, and shields : curious-looking warriors, slightly stooping under the weight of their conical carrying-baskets.

Mills was already in Mokokchung, and Major Williams, the



commander of the escort, arrived that same evening. We all dined together in Smith's bungalow, and discussed the prospects of the tour. Rumours of the attitude of the hostile tribes, spreading from village to village, had reached Mokokchung and created great excitement among the *dobhashi* and coolies. There was not a man among them who doubted that there would be a fight—in fact, they did not hope for anything else. Mills, Major Williams, Smith, and myself did not quite share the enthusiasm of the Nagas and we discussed the best method of defence against a sudden attack. The narrow jungle-paths lend themselves admirably to the Nagas' special form of ambush ; an enemy can come within a few yards of you completely unseen, and then even the strongest escort is not much protection. I had little confidence in my marksmanship with a revolver, and Smith and I finally agreed that a shower of S.S.G. shot in the face of an attacker would be the most effective deterrent.

We spent two more days in preparations before all the coolies were ready and all the loads packed. My own luggage consisted of my tent and three carrying-baskets containing mainly clothes and warm bedding. When we left Mokokchung on Friday, the 13th November, the whole of the village was on foot to watch the departure of this strange crusade against the slave-raiders. The women and children crowded on the bamboo platforms staring at the long file of sepoy, and at the last minute *gaonbura* held up the whole of the column in the middle of the village by offering us farewell drinks of rice-beer, the usual way of giving a raiding party a send-off.

Twelve men marched ahead ; they formed a kind of advance guard. Mills, Williams, and I followed with the main body ; then came Smith in front of the coolies, interspersed with a few of the sepoy, and a small rear-guard concluded the column, which drew out over a mile. The sepoy of the Assam Rifles, most of them Gurkhas, wore light-blue flannel shirts, shorts, and hats with broad brims, and they carried bayonets, and large curved bush-knives indispensable for camp-building and clearing the way through thick jungle.

Travelling first east and then south-east, the long column



wound along the cultivated slopes into the valley of the Upper Dikhu, where we crossed the river on a bamboo bridge while the coolies waded through the shallow water. This first day was very quiet ; we were still in administered country, and apart from one of the coolies, who managed to spike his leg on the spear of the man behind, there were no casualties. As on many days to come, there was a fairly stiff climb in the afternoon, for, going east, we had to travel almost at right angles to innumerable, long-drawn-out ridges. Nagas always settle on the tops of the mountains, and since we usually camped near a village, the daily routine entailed starting in the cool of dawn downhill, arriving in the hot, stuffy valley about midday, when the sun was hottest, and then climbing up the mountain as the sun sank, to spend the night on some windy height. That first day we climbed to Chare, lying 2400 feet above the valley. The people had built us a camp on a slope before the village gate—two huts and numerous shelters of bamboo and banana leaves, with just enough space between for our tents.

Getting into camp was astonishingly easy, for the first apparent confusion dissolved in a very short time. The sepoy, his rifle always on his back, improved the shelters, and the coolies had soon lit fires and fetched water to boil their rice. Mills and I went to the village to gossip with the *gaonbura* over mugs of rice-beer and hear something of Sangtam customs.

Cows and goats were killed for our coolies, and soon after they had been divided up a most savoury smell of roasting meat enveloped the camp. The dignitaries of Chare sat with the *dobhashi* and *gaonbura* of our party round a large open fire at the gate of the village quite near our tent. It was not long before the thirst of the visitors was quenched and tongues loosened, for, as we ate our dinner of chicken-curry, we could hear them laughing almost as clearly as if we had been amongst them. This was apparently the 'club' of Chare, and the conversation was so noisy that we sincerely hoped it was not extension night.

Next morning it rained, and it was still raining when we broke camp. At midday we crossed the Chimei River, which formed the frontier of the administered territory, leaving British



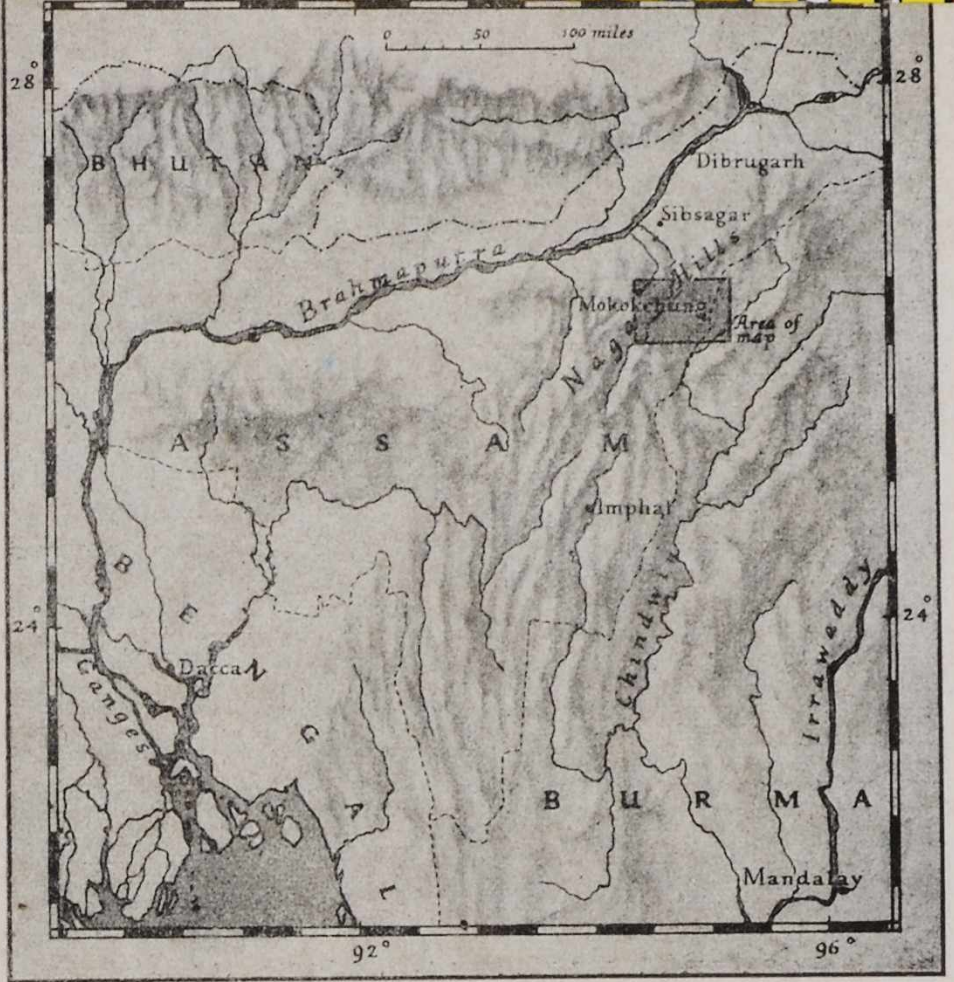
India behind and entering the land of the independent Naga Tribes. If only the crossing of all frontiers were so simple, so inconspicuous as that exit from British India !

After a long and tiring march we camped for the night at Phire-ahire. We were now in the middle of the Sangtam country, inhabited by a tribe in dress and custom akin to the Aos, which has been gradually driven northwards by its more warlike Sema neighbours.

These first days were so easy and comfortable, and we were always received with such friendliness, that it was hardly believable that we were on anything but a rather large inspection tour. However, here in Chare we tasted a little of what might come, for a *gaonbura* showed us a poisoned arrow and proudly held up the magnificent tusks of a boar. 'The animal ran only thirty yards after it was hit', he explained. We were not very enthusiastic over this hunting exploit. The arrow was too like those arrows we had heard that the Kalyo Kengyus used in such a deadly way. They are short cross-bow arrows of bamboo, with iron barbed heads ; the poison is applied in thick layers just behind the head, and the shaft nicked so that it breaks off easily, leaving the poisoned head in the wound. Some time ago Mills had obtained a small quantity of this substance and sent it to Calcutta to be analysed. It had not been identified, but experiments proved that it was a powerful poison, causing death by paralysing the respiratory organs. The victim, the report continued, could be saved by the administration of oxygen through artificial respiration. Not exactly a comforting thought many days' march from medical aid. However, watching several of the youths of the village who shot with cross-bows at the gable-figures of the house, we noted that every one missed his mark, and our anxiety was somewhat allayed. If the Pangsha warriors were no better shots, there was no need to worry.

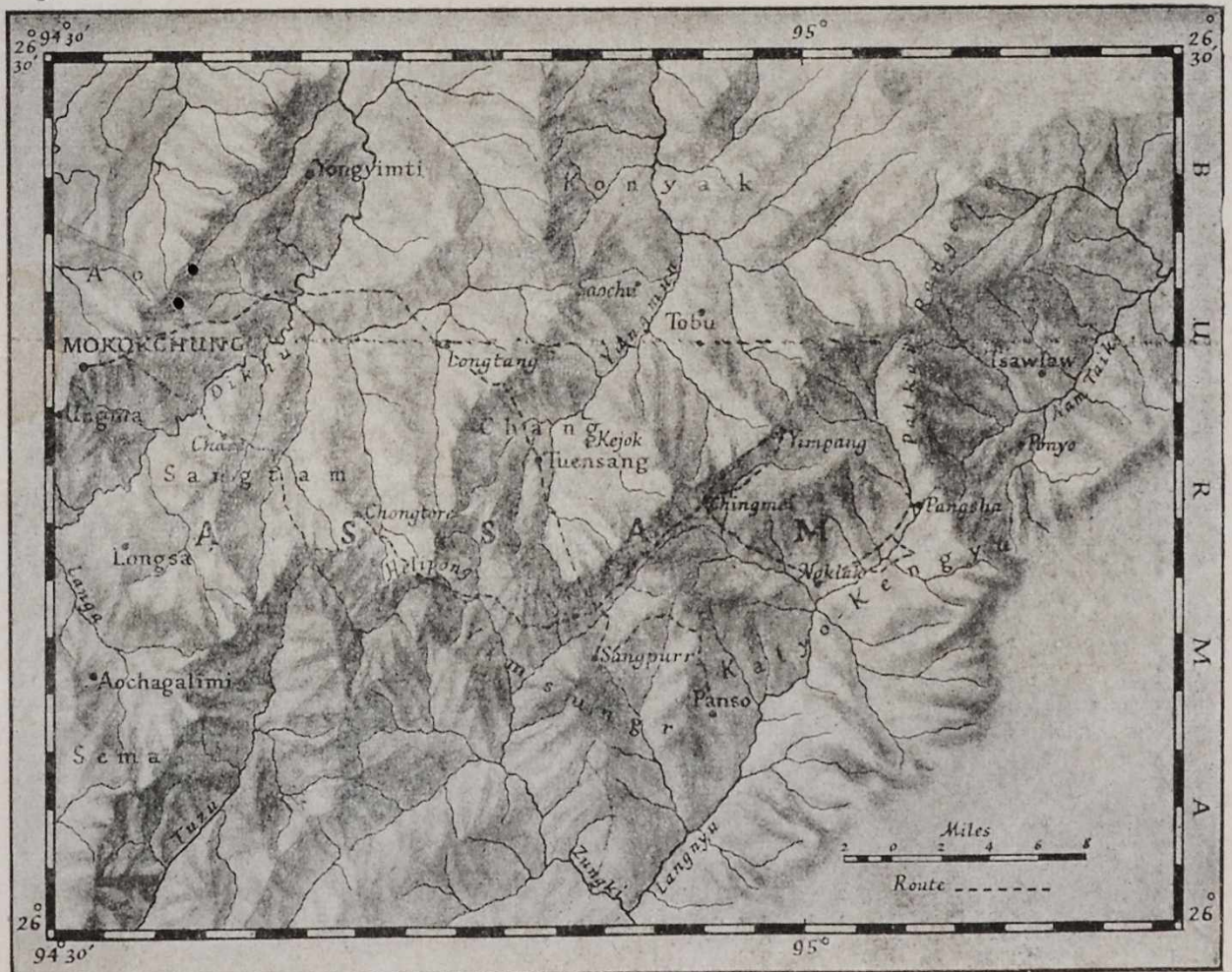
The next evening we were to camp at Chongtore, and Mills and I decided to make a detour over the hills to visit some of the more remote villages, while the column took the direct path. There was no need for an escort and leaving the column, we climbed steeply for a short way to the village of Holongba, lying





The position of the Naga Hills.

Map of the Chang and Kalyo-Kengyu country,  
corresponding to the shaded rectangle  
on the map above.





with its rather miserable grass-thatched houses irregularly scattered over the ridge. None of the Survey Parties of former years had touched Holongba, and we were therefore the first Europeans to cross the threshold of the village. It is the dream of every anthropologist once to enter 'virgin' country, and so this was a particularly solemn moment for me. The villagers were not at all shy, and even the women, entertaining their unusual guests with gourds of rice-beer, seemed quite at ease and unaffected. The houses were smaller than Konyak houses, and by the light of smouldering fires the furniture seemed poorer and people's faces thinner. On these wind-swept mountains of the higher ranges the country has none of the affluent look of the lower regions and the life of the people seems to be much harder. Holongba, and many of the other villages across the frontier welcomed Mills with obvious pleasure.

But all strangers are not given such a friendly reception ; rows of bleached skulls hung in the drum-houses, telling grim tales of less fortunate visitors from other tribes. Yes, all these victims were men of other tribes, for the Sangtams do not hang up in the *morung* the heads of their own tribesmen with whom they have had a slight misunderstanding ; such heads are thrown into the jungle. Walking through the village you recognize the houses of renowned heroes ; whoever takes part in a successful head-hunting raid fastens a string with a plaited cane ball to the gable of his house ; and on one string, I counted no less than thirty trophies. These strings, with their head-tallies, are put on a man's grave together with the skulls of all animals slaughtered during his life. Impaled on posts, they speak more clearly than any tombstone inscription of the dead man's deeds. There are little fences round every grave, and drinking-gourds turned upside down on the head of the spikes tell of the last mug of beer the mourners have drunk with the dead.

Most of that day Mills and I walked over the open ridge looking over the country of the Sema Nagas. The weather had cleared during the day, but as we reached the village of Anangba, it started raining again, and a wet, cold wind coughing over the hills made life appear anything but rosy at a height of 6600 ft.



Mills found his old friend Chirongchi waiting to greet him. He was a man with an eventful past, for during the 1914-18 war he had enlisted in the Naga Labour Corps recruited in administered territory. The chance of great deeds of war induced him to join the 'raid' and he soon found himself with many other Nagas on the way to Europe. It speaks for their cold-bloodedness that although they had never seen a great water before, they did not panic when they were shipwrecked in the Mediterranean. To their bitter disappointment they were not allowed to fight, but put to the more peaceful task of building roads; it was incomprehensible to them that they were even forbidden to cut off the heads of fallen foes. The only trophy that ever found its way into the Naga Hills was the spiked helmet of a Prussian grenadier—not a bad substitute for a head! Chirongchi himself succeeded in smuggling an army rifle in his uniform trousers, but a rifle without cartridges was of little use in Anangba, and he finally gave it up to the subdivisional officer at Mokokchung. I wonder whether the experience of his journey to Europe had widened his horizon. He appeared very dignified in a magnificent plaited hat with floating red goat's hair, but in no way different from his less-travelled fellow-villagers.

He showed us with pride the skull of Pukovi, a notorious Sema Naga who had raided even into the administered territory and often annoyed Mills by his daring misdeeds. Chirongchi told us of the treacherous feat for which Pukovi ultimately paid with his life: once he had suggested to some neighbouring Semas that they should raid his own village, and he marked roofs with bundles of straw so that the right people should be murdered. It was unfortunate that a girl from Anangba happened to be staying in the village at the time, and was murdered with her hosts, for Chirongchi did not forget, and many years later decoyed Pukovi to Anangba and cut off his head with his own hands. Now Pukovi's skull dangled in the drum-house, to the general satisfaction of the villagers of Anangba.

We came into Chongtore in time for tea. The rest of the column had arrived an hour or so earlier, and the sepoy had already built a spacious camp. The wind got up as the light



failed, and it was bitingly cold in the one-sided bamboo pavilion where we ate our supper, wrapped in coats. We shivered with cold, while the gale blew mercilessly all night, billowing in the sides of my tent until I thought that any moment it would be carried away.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CAMP ON A PEAK

A HUGE tree had fallen across the stream or perhaps the Nagas had pushed it there to act as a bridge. It was still wet from the night's rain, but the long file of our coolies unconcernedly balanced their loads over the slippery trunk. For my part I hated such tree-bridges ; my nailed boots found no grip on the slimy bark, but, rather than wade through the cold water, I tried my hand as a tight-rope dancer, contributing at least to the amusement of the party. Mills shared my prejudice against such tree-bridges, and usually preferred the wet but secure way through the river.

Our path rose almost perpendicularly ahead, sheer from the narrow valley filled with abundant jungle. The steep slope, only sparsely covered with low bushes, meant many hours' climb in a broiling sun, which had at last dispersed the clouds. Endlessly we climbed, and the wooded peak of Mount Helipong stood always above us—high above—and never any nearer.

'Hokshe, how far may it be to Helipong ?' asked Smith for the third time, as he took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

'Perhaps an hour and a half, Sahib; we are not far any more.'

Silently we climbed on. It seemed hardly believable that at breakfast we had been shivering despite pullovers and coats. It was now incredibly hot. After another hour Smith stopped again.

'Listen, Hokshe. The ridge up there looks just as far as it did before. When in the hell are we getting to Helipong ?'

'Perhaps in two hours, Sahib, if we go quickly.'

'Damn you ! an hour ago you told me that it was only an hour and a half to Helipong, and now you say it should be still two hours ?'

'Certainly, Sahib, but if I had told you then that we had still three hours to climb, your mind would have hurt. And we would not have got on quicker, anyhow. Why should I have



told you something unpleasant ?' His logic was convincing, and resignedly we climbed on.

At last the secondary jungle gave way to tall forest, quite different from the woods in the lower regions ; wild bananas and ordinary bamboos do not grow at these heights, but only a certain thin, thorny bamboo that stands the intense cold. Enormous trees stretched their gnarled branches against the sky, and from the rich, dark earth, formed by centuries of fallen and rotten leaves, sprang an impenetrable undergrowth. Almost the whole year round clouds hang round these mountains, and now a white mist filled the forest. When we stepped into the open, leaving the protection of the trees, a strong summit-wind dispersed the mist, and the village of Helipong lay before us.

Not more than twenty houses clung to the bare rocks, 7280 feet above sea-level, while a little way away several granaries stood in a small hollow, seeming to seek even the smallest protection on these storm-ridden peaks. We were told that the harvest had only just been brought in and the granaries were full of millet and hardy Job's tears cultivated on the slopes below the forest belt. Rice does not grow well in these regions, and the people of Helipong consider it a rare luxury.

When leaving the protection of the forest we had pulled out some warm things from the baskets, yet in spite of all our clothes we shivered in the icy wind. But the men and women of Helipong walked about apparently quite comfortable with little more than loin-cloths. Strangely enough, they have not adapted their dress to the climate, and the mere look of their bare backs made me shiver. Their lot seemed less deplorable only when we sat in one of their astonishingly warm huts.

Why should these few people choose to settle here ? It seemed strange that they had selected these uninviting heights. The reason was a political one ; this was the much-contested frontier district between the Sangtams and the Chang Nagas ; and the small village of Helipong, built as an outpost by the Changs, secures their right to the whole ridge. Outside the village we found concrete proof of the support lent to the small community by their more powerful tribesmen : a human hand sus-



pended from a bamboo pole. Rather wizened it looked, but quite recognizable. It was a complimentary present, the people of Helipong told us, they had been sent by the Changs of Chentang. and obviously they were proud of their unusual gift. The men of Helipong, though rendered immune from attack by their splendid strategical position, are too few in number to sally forth on raids of their own, and they are grateful when their tribesmen from the lower and more fertile ridges send them a share in their spoils of war. No doubt they feel they are participating in the exciting world below them, for the people of Helipong must spend their whole lives looking down on mountains and valleys, which, except for the hills to the east of their friends the Changs, are more effectively closed to them than by the stoutest iron bars. Certain death awaits the wanderer in a country where to be a stranger is tantamount to death sentence.

The view from Mount Helipong over the immense mountain country was magnificent. We overlooked the land of the Lhotas and Aos and beyond the distant hills of the Konyaks. The country of the Changs and Sangtams lay at our feet and in the east the unexplored mountains of the Kalyo Kengyus and the Patkoi Range, with the 12,622-foot peak of Mount Saramati, were clearly visible. Here in Helipong we were on the watershed between the Brahmaputra and the Irrawaddy. The rivers to the east belong to the basin of the Chindwin ; following them, if you were lucky enough not to lose your head en route, you would arrive in Burma. All these high ridges, running almost at right angles to our proposed route, were not a very encouraging sight, and yet the glimpse we had caught of the distant Patkoi Range only sharpened the wish to set foot into that distant, unknown land.

Even as we watched, the view that had lain so clearly before our eyes began to veil itself. Shreds of hunted clouds stormed across the sky and caught on the peaks till a burst of wind, jerking them upwards, swept them on. Now it was as though the mountains spat white steam, for the sun suddenly withdrew, and the clouds thickened, rose, were driven over several ridges, and dissolved again. It was a wild, grand scene that played over the



open theatre of the sky ; and then suddenly the clouds were white no longer, but tinged with scarlet in the light of the setting sun.

That evening Major Williams thought it would be a good idea to hold a trial alarm to train the coolies in case of an attack on our camp. At a given signal they rushed with spears, shields, and *dao* to the stockade, forming a second and a living wall. In spite of the fatigue of the most exhausting day's march, their tense fierce faces showed clearly that they were ready to throw themselves on any enemy.

Again that night storm raged round our tents and even covered as we were with every available blanket we spent another cold night. In the morning a thin, penetrating rain fell noiselessly, and nothing was to be seen of yesterday's view. We dropped down on the other side of Mount Helipong ; perhaps this side was not as steep as the one we had come up, but the roughness of the path made walking difficult. We soon left the country of the Changs, although we were to cross back into their territory later, and our march that day and our subsequent camp were in Yimsungr country, the land of a scarcely-known tribe which in some respects resembles the Changs. A little uncertain of our reception, we marched the whole day on our guard, and the suspicious attitude of the villagers of Kuthurr where we arrived that evening, left no doubt that we were no longer in friendly country. They were, it is true, not altogether unpleasant, and even sent us the customary gifts of pigs and chickens, but we felt that this courtesy was dictated rather by the size of our column than by any spirit of generosity or welcome. Had we arrived singly, or even in a small number, there can be no doubt that their joy at such unusual guests would have taken other forms, and our chances of ever leaving Kuthurr would have been slight, for our skulls would have certainly occupied places of honour in the men's house. In fact we mistrusted the Yimsungr as much as they seemed to mistrust us, and when building our camp we took particular care, reinforcing it with a strong palisade of spiked bamboos.

Next morning, when I wanted to take photographs in the village while the sepoy broke camp, Major Williams insisted



that I should take an escort of five men. I felt like a convict, as, surrounded by sepoy with levelled bayonets, I walked through the narrow streets, while the inhabitants of Kuthurr watched my odd behaviour with the camera with profound suspicion. It was characteristic of the atmosphere that there was not a woman and not a child to be seen ; uncertain of our intentions, the men had apparently sent them into the safety of the mountains long before we arrived.

That day, keeping on the border of Yimsungr country, we turned north-east, and camped at the Chang village of Chentang. As long as we marched through the country without incident, our days were much the same, for, starting at about eight in the morning, we would march until midday, when we would rest for a short while, and munch our sandwiches, and perhaps one of the *dobhashi* would produce rice-beer which in some miraculous way they always seemed to carry with them. Indeed, we had a joke that Nakhu, our head *dobhashi*, would be able to produce rice-beer even in the middle of the Sahara. And then we would go on through the afternoon, and finally come into camp about three o'clock, thus leaving enough time to build a palisade before dark.

On the path of Chentang, one of the *dobhashi* pointed to where a couple of months ago an old man of Chentang had been ambushed by three men from the Yimsungr village of Sangpurr. Lying in the bushes at the side of the path, he said, they had waited till the old man had passed, then they had speared him in the back as he tried to escape, and cut off his head. I was used to this kind of tale, yet the idea of the poor old man, running for his life with a spear in his back, shattered me for a moment. Perhaps, it was that those other stories had all been told to me in friendly, peaceful country, where they appeared more or less as fairy tales of some by-gone day, but here in Yimsungr country the proximity of hostile tribes provided reality enough for the gruesome account.

'I like you anthropologists,' remarked Mills ; 'you come to the Naga Hills in order to study the head-hunters, and when we show you a nice little practical example, you are horrified. I am



sure that more than one man has been slaughtered on this path.'

He was right, for outside Chentang we passed under a pipeline that, we were told, the men of Chentang had been forced to build because so many of their women had been killed in the last years on the way to the spring to fetch water. It was a clever idea, for the water now flows unaided from the spring through the narrow bamboo pipes supported on poles, high above the ground, to within the defences of the village.

But the Yimsungr are war-like people, and since apparently they no longer found an opportunity of ambushing the women of Chentang when they fetched water, they entered the village while the men worked on the fields, and set fire to the houses. One man of Sangpurr lost his head in the adventure, and it was his hand we had seen hung up in Helipong. But even the head dangling from a high bamboo pole in Chentang was small comfort to the people for the loss of their houses.

More than half of the village had been burnt, and now only a few small miserable huts stood among the charred posts. In this part of the country trees are scarce in the vicinity of the villages, and at short notice it is often difficult to replace the houses with their strong posts and gable boards.

Outside the village our attention was attracted by a small hut on high bamboo poles. It contained the corpse of a favourite hunting-dog, and there were a monkey-skull and several cane rings, tallying his hunting successes in the same manner as on the graves of men symbols tally the feats of the deceased.

We chose a site for the camp in a small dip in the ground, overgrown with grass, and set two pickets on the surrounding hills ; for though Pangsha was still far away, we were in the middle of the much troubled area, near the borders of the three tribes, Chang, Yimsungr, and Kalyo Kengyu.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE RESCUED SLAVES

FEATHERS fluttered on the top of the hill as we climbed slowly up the saddle of the mountain between Chengtang and Chingmei ; Chingmak, the chief of Chingmei, had sent his warriors in full ceremonial dress to welcome us, and it was their high hornbill feathers we had seen quivering on red, plaited cane hats. They had rolls of indigo-blue cloths, embroidered with cowrie shells, tied over the breast and back, protecting the most vulnerable parts of the body against blows ; their sword like *dao* were stuck in sheaths at the back, which formed part of the broad belt. With a single movement these *dao* can be drawn over the shoulder and crashed down on the head of an enemy. Beside this weapon, the men carried long spears, tufted with red goat's hair, and heavy shields of buffalo hide.

The warriors led us through the forest and over open clearings to the village. Many years ago the chief, Chingmak, had undertaken the long journey to Mokokchung to make friends with Mills, and he welcomed us now with overflowing joy. It had been agreed that we should use his village as a base, pushing on from here into the land of the Kalyo Kengyus, and Chingmak was to serve as mediator in the negotiations with neighbouring villages. This meant a great deal of prestige for his village, and he was only too happy to render every possible support to our expedition, for Chingmei had a long-standing feud with the Kalyo Kengyu villages to the east.

The Chingmei people had built us a large camp on the flat top of a hill not far from their village. Several spacious, straw-covered huts served as welcome shelters for the sepoy, and though we pitched our own tents, we were pleased to eat our meals within four walls once more. The posts of our 'dining-room' were decorated with the most surprising wood-carvings. Naturalistic symbols of masculine power were probably the



greatest form of compliment, and meant to show that the Chingmei men took us for 'he-men', to whose houses the same carvings should be accorded as to their own *morung*.

Chingmei, the last Chang bulwark against the Kalyo Kengyus, is a large, strongly fortified village, encircled by a double stockade set with sharp bamboo spikes ; sentry-boxes high up in the trees dominate the narrow entrances and the doors bristling with spikes.

The houses within the stockade have steeply-sloping roofs, rising from just above the ground at the back to about thirty feet in front; thus the gables, protruding far over the facade, are so close together that the roofs often dovetail, and the streets, running in between the houses, are completely overshadowed. This has an advantage in the rains, for protected by the jutting gables, you can pass from one house to the other with dry feet. Even steeper and more sloping, the roofs of the *morung* tower high above the other houses, and give the village the bizarre and characteristic silhouette of all Chang settlements.

The first call we paid in the village was at the house of the chief, or rather I should say the houses of the chief, for Chingmak, not content with his first wife, the mother of two already grown-up and famous sons, had married a second time, and, wisely recognising that two wives under one roof are not conducive to domestic happiness, had built a new house opposite his old one. Chingmak's second wife had given him two daughters. They were still quite small, and one of them, a girl of about ten, immediately found a place in Mills' heart. It was amazing how confidently the little girl approached the strange white man, and how she would sit quite near him on the ground while he talked with her father. When Chingmak brought her to our camp next day, she was thrilled with all the unusual things, and especially with our waterglasses. Again and again she put her little fist into the glass, and could hardly believe that anything transparent could be so solid.

Strangely enough, though Chang and Kalyo Kengyus are almost continually at war, Chingmak's first wife came from the Kalyo Kengyu village of Panso. Such marriages are said to be quite



common, and the Chingmei men seem to entertain no scruples if they have to fight against the brothers and the fathers of their wives, even if they eventually bring their heads home in triumph—a rather drastic way of venting a feeling common enough among ‘in-laws’ all the world over.

When Chingmak had visited Mokokchung, Mills had treated him with great consideration and now he showed us proudly over every inch of Chingmei. He took us first to the *morung*, where he pointed out the skull of a famous Panso warrior, the captor of fifty heads. There were many other skulls, some bleached and old and some apparently new, hanging in the *morung*. In fact, it was quite a remarkable collection, for on many of them buffalo and mithan horns were fastened, thus increasing their magical power and furthering the ‘virtue’ of the whole village. Chingmak showed us a peculiar funeral monument that had been erected in the village. It was a huge crescent of plaited bamboo, representing a rainbow, raised several feet off the ground, and staked with wooden forked posts, which Chingmak explained were tallies for the buffalo and mithan sacrifices performed by the deceased.

But our appreciation waxed loudest when we discovered that the slaves we had set out to rescue were already waiting for us in Chingmei. Since we had received the threatening message from Pangsha in Chentang, we had given up all hope of a peaceful understanding. The messages had declared that Pangsha had no intention whatsoever of giving up their captives ; that they were not afraid of a crowd of women, as they called us, and that they would not even honour us by fighting with spears and *dao* but would beat us off with the wooden rice-pounding pestles of their wives.

We had not taken these menaces literally, but now we were astonished that the bare news of our persistent advance had driven the Pangsha men to part with their victims. Chingmak told us that they had delegated their allies of Yimpang, a village in sight of our camp, to mediate with him, and had sent him the three slaves without demanding ransom ; and Yimpang, impressed by the behaviour of the more powerful village, and at the same



time afraid of the punishment that might be meted out to them for their participation in the raid on Saochu and Kejok, had bought two of the other slaves back from Pangsha, delivering them up with the other three to Chingmei.

I have never seen more miserable creatures than these five 'slaves': a young woman, a youth of about twenty, two small boys, and a small girl. After the massacre of their relatives they had been dragged off to hostile villages, conscious always of the terrible death awaiting them. All through the hills the tales of human sacrifices among those tribes in the east were well known, and the two adults, at least, can have had little doubt as to their ultimate fate.

Few of the captives of those tribes ever lived long; for just as mithan and buffaloes were sacrificed by the Angamis, the tribes on the Patkoi mountains beheaded slaves at their Feasts of Merit. The only humane trait in these cruel ceremonies was perhaps the custom of making the victim so drunk before slaughter that he went to his death only half conscious. At the erecting of a men's house the sacrifice of a human being strengthened the new building; the trussed slave was thrown into the hole, and was crushed as the main post came smashing down. But the worst fate awaited those slaves who were sacrificed on a newly cleared field, for the victim was bound to a stake, from where he watched the flames creeping up the dry felled jungle, roaring as the wind fanned them. The spirit which left the poor charred body was believed to have a fertilizing influence on the crops.

The Chingmei men did not understand the language of the captives, and so it had been impossible to explain to them the change in their fate; perhaps they thought that these curiously pale people, with the bewildering behaviour, were those notorious adepts in human sacrifice to whom they had been sold. Our Konyak *dobhashi* Pongwei talked the language of Saochu, but their minds were so dimmed by fear that at first they could not grasp what was said. Patiently and slowly Pongwei continued, and only when he asked the two older slaves about their experiences did they seem to understand; then they explained haltingly that after the burning of Saochu, they had been hurried to Pang-



sha by the raiders. No, they had not been too badly treated, and had always had enough to eat, but the Pangsha men, although not afraid of the young women and children running away, had thought the man might try to escape, and had hammered his knees till he was quite lame ; even now he could not walk very well.

For worse than the physical hardships of captivity had been the fear of their future fate. The terror of the last months had so eaten into their minds that the two grown-up slaves, even when they did understand they were free, could only continue to stare apathetically ahead, and showed no relief at being rescued.

It was easier to make the children smile and with good food and freindly treatment they soon climbed happily on Mills' knees and played with his pipe.

The release of these five 'slaves' did not end our mission ; Pangsha still held another girl, the sister of the woman from Saochu, and as long as she remained in their hands, we could not think of returning. Besides, Pangsha had apparently experienced a change of heart, or perhaps they thought we would not bother any more now that we had five of the slaves. They sent us new messages ; if we dared to approach their territory they would kill us man by man, and, once we had left the country, they would wipe out all the villages befriending us. However, these new menaces did not deter Mills ; to return would have been taken for weakness, and would only have increased the arrogance of Pangsha ; consequently there would certainly have been new slave-raids.

Here in Chingmei, where we rested our coolies for a few days, I often wondered how the people of these villages could live, and even enjoy life, under the constant threat of war and destruction. You would think that the fear of raids would never allow them a quiet sleep, and that every step outside the village would be haunted by the thought of an ambush. But instead of fear, the people had only a certain caution that had become their second nature. They did not dream of going to a distant field alone, and no woman left the village to fetch water after dusk. The men went well-armed and in groups to the work on the fields,



and sentries of young warriors saw that the women were not attacked by enemies. There is no room for a free-lance in the world of the head-hunters ; it is only a community that provides the necessary security, and protection. Once within the large and well-protected village, danger was comparatively small, and life not very different from life in more peaceful country. Only when a village was hard pressed and the people could no longer cultivate their fields properly, food became scarce. But this was exceptional, for even villages at war for many generations still led quite normal lives within a few miles of each other.

To slip up was possible in this, as in every system of safeguards, and now and again a man paid for his carelessness with the loss of his head. But such misfortune created no more terror among his fellow-villagers than the news of a traffic accident does among us. We realize the dangers of the road, and calculate how best to avoid them ; so the Naga knew the danger threatening, yet did not lose his *joie de vivre* ; in administered country he even wished back the 'good old days' of head-hunting, before his country was pacified.



## YIMPANG'S BLACK DAY

SOME weeks ago Matche, a Yimpang man, had fled to Chingmei before the wrath of Pangsha and the threats of his own fellow-villagers. For it was he who first listened to Chingmak's pleadings for an understanding with us. Once on our side, he proved very useful, informing us as to the enemy's plans, and acting as a much-needed guide in Kalyo Kengyu country.

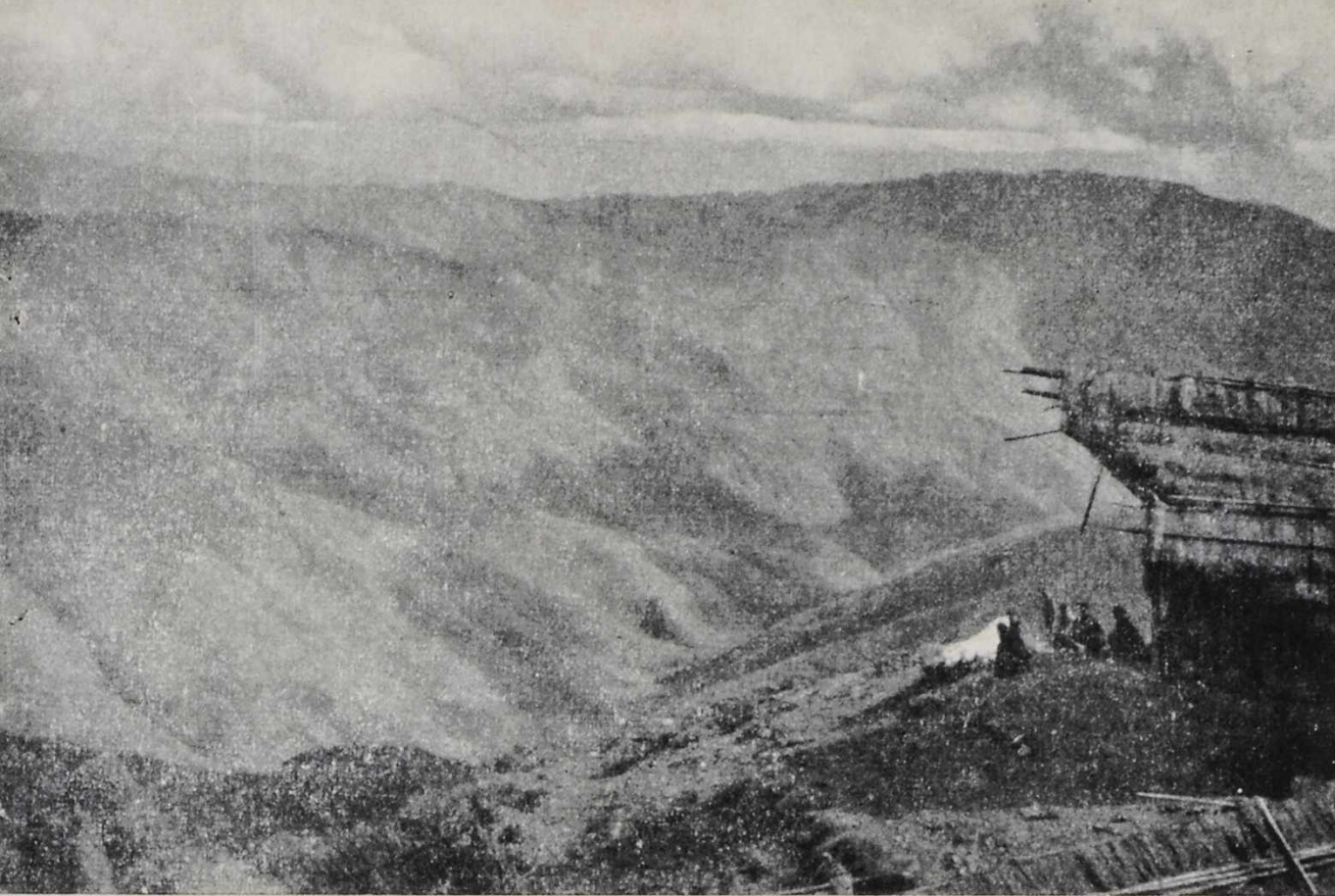
Although the men of Yimpang had nominally redeemed themselves for their part in the raid on Saochu and Kejok by handing over the slaves, Mills thought it would be just as well to convince them of our strength before marching against Pangsha, and so remove any desire they might harbour to attack our camp and the coolies staying behind in our absence.

It was not far to Yimpang, and we could clearly see the village on one of the slopes to the north-east of Chingmei as we stood looking up the valley. The path led gently upwards through fields of jobs' tears, interspersed with a particular species of high red millet, beans, oil-seeds, and tobacco. Rice grew only in small patches, and was considered such a delicacy that the successful harvester shared his crop among his friends in much the same way as he shared his much prized meat.

The village was strongly fortified, with an inner and an outer wall. A removable bridge between the walls, led, not over an impassable water-moat as did the bridges of mediaeval castles, but over an equally impassable ditch bristling with thorns and bamboo spikes.

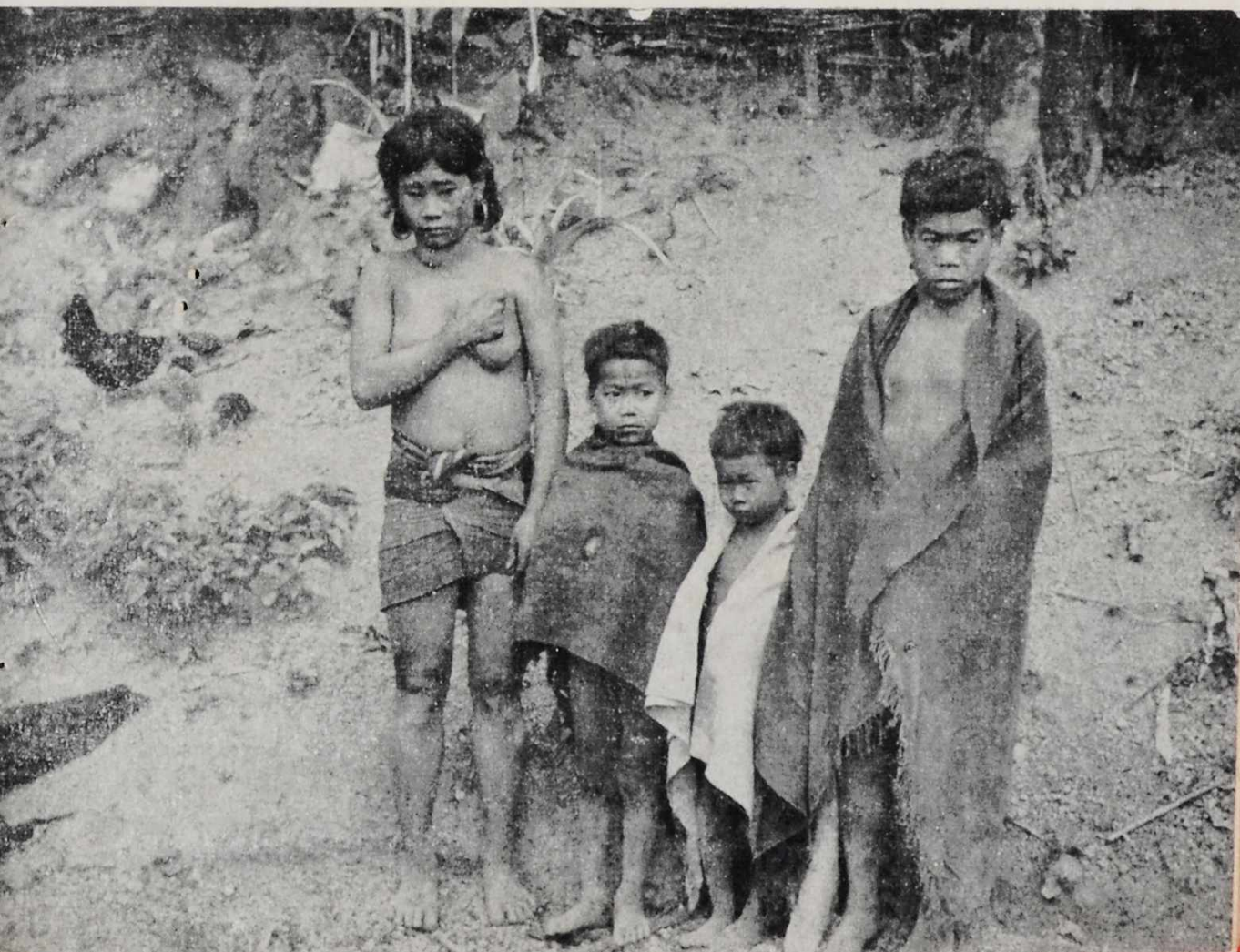
Normally Yimpang had a mixed population of Kalyo Kengyus, Changs, and Yimsungr, but Chingmak must have painted our fierceness and the punishments we would mete out pretty black, for when we arrived the whole village was almost deserted. Here and there a man sat with a sullen face watching us intently from the cover of his house as we walked through the village.



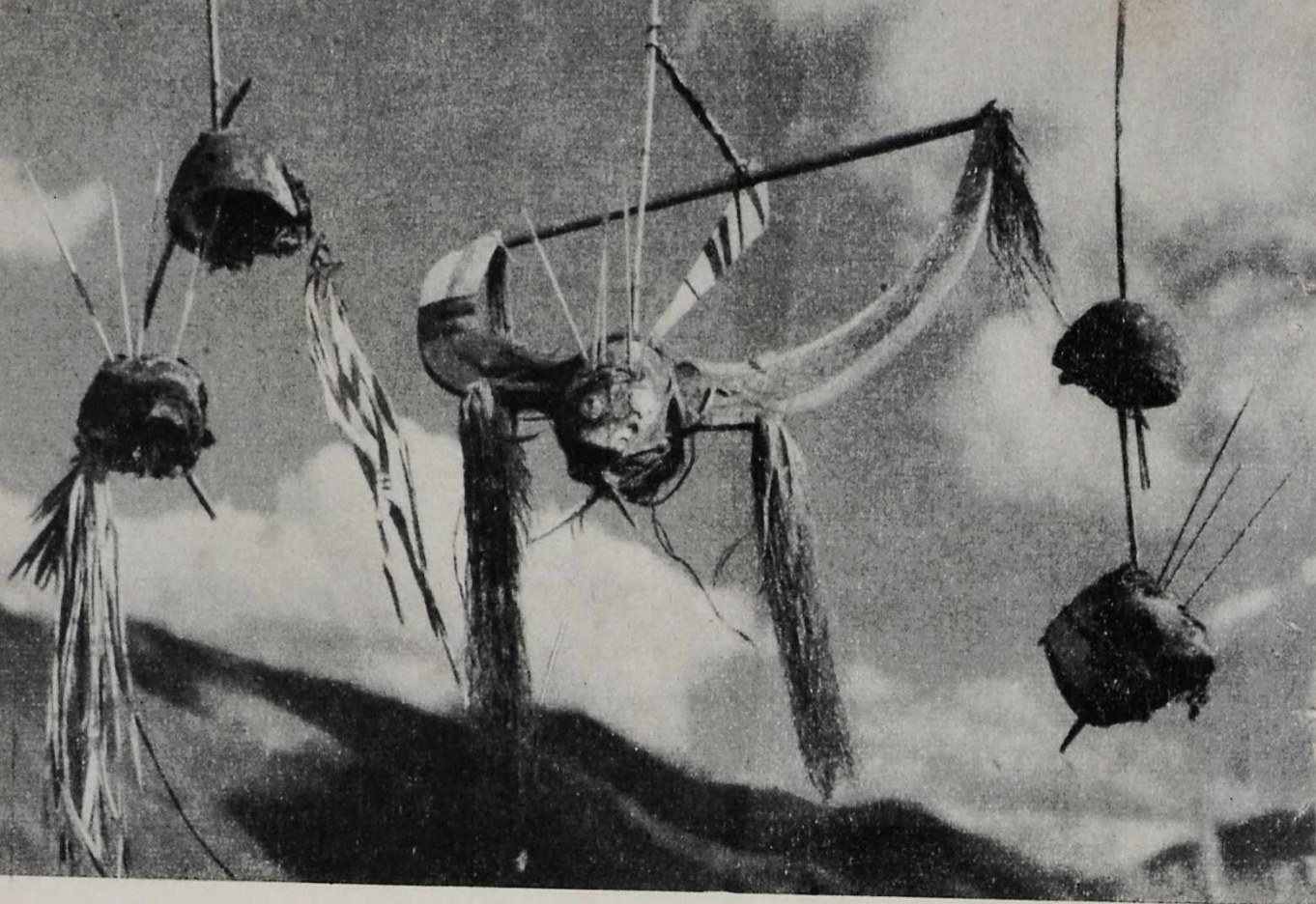


View from Mount Helipong over the  
Chang and Yimsungr country,

The four slaves set free by Pangsha.

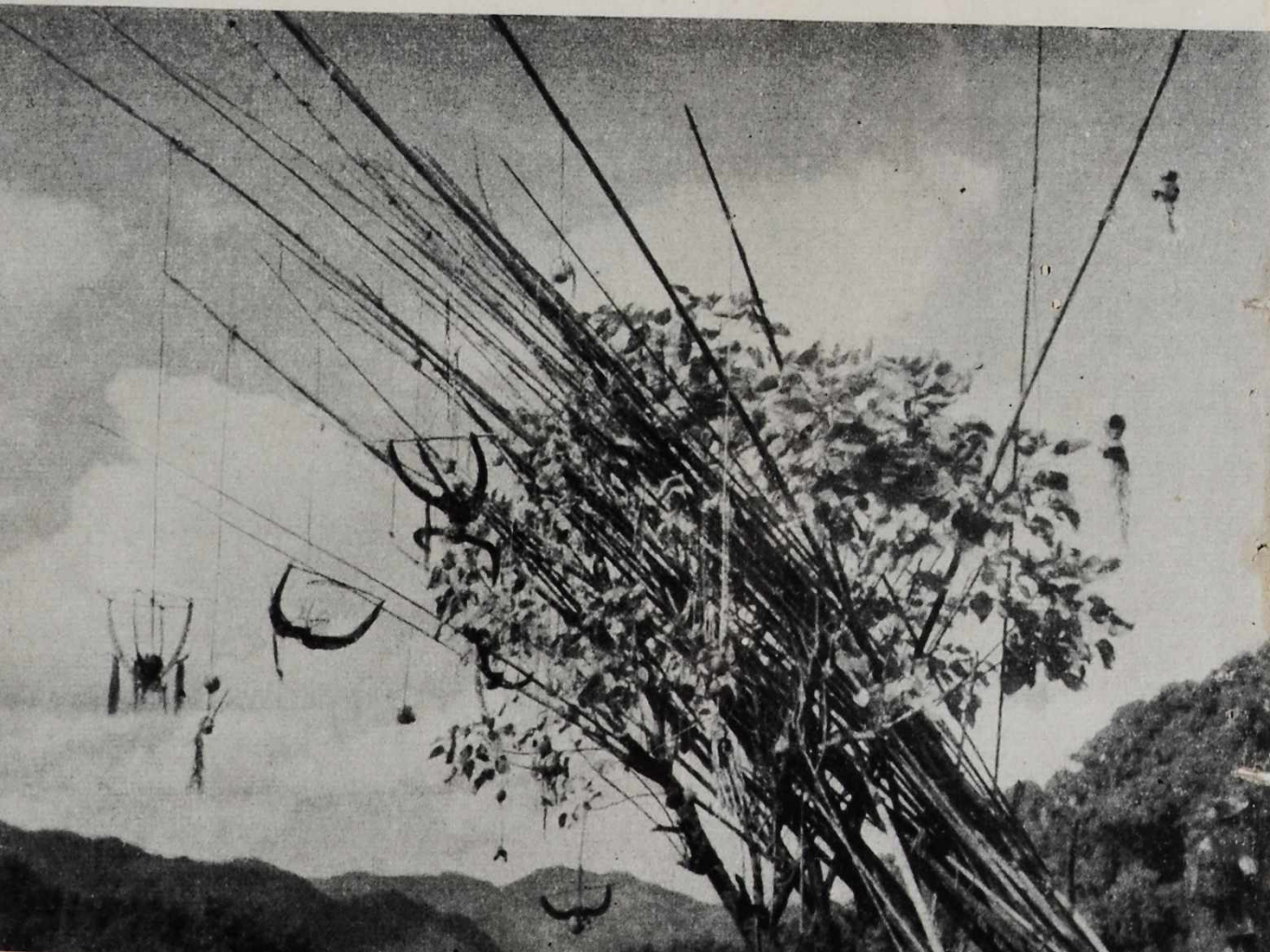






Captured human heads with bamboo spikes thrust into the eye-sockets.

The hade-tree of Yimpong.





There was not a woman or a child to be seen ; they had all been evacuated the day before, taking with them the livestock. Perhaps it was this total lack of the usual straying pigs, goats, and cows that gave the village such a particularly desolate look. Later we were told that the villagers had devoured those animals that could not be taken away, rather than let them fall into our hands. It was scorched earth policy on a small scale.

We were obviously not a social success in Yimpang ; even the air seemed to hang heavily round us, and Major Williams determined to try to brighten up the atmosphere with a little music. He made one of his Gurkha bag-pipers play Scottish airs on the open space in front of one of the *morung* and the strange sounds did actually draw some of the intimidated inhabitants from the shelter of their houses. It is improbable that they enjoyed this artistic performance very much but the music seemed to allay their suspicions and they may have felt that intending looters and murderers would hardly waste time on producing these ludicrous sounds.

On the Saochu raid they had not hesitated ; for they had come to take heads, and they had set about their business, carrying off the trophies to their village as swiftly as possible. I shall never forget that first impression, when we suddenly came upon a tree with innumerable human heads dangling from the branches. Looking closer we discovered that they did not hang from the branches, but leered at us from the tops of bamboo poles, leaning against the *Erythrina* tree.

The heads were garlanded in true Kalyo Kengyu fashion with tresses of long grass, and decorated with huge wooden horns, and in some cases with wooden models of hornbill feathers ; bamboo spikes had been stuck in the eye-sockets, for so the Nagas thought to blind their victims even in death, and prevent their souls seeking out and avenging their murderers. Wind and sun had shrivelled the skin and distorted the features, and where teeth still remained they gave the gaping mouths a gruesome expression. Some of the skulls were scalped ; these belonged to men, Chingmak explained, for the long hair of the southern Konyaks was much prized by Kalyo Kengyus as decoration for dance-hats, ear-



ornaments, and other insignia of war, but the women with their closely clipped hair were more fortunate in death and their heads retained the valueless scalps.

As soon as I had recovered from my first astonishment, I began coveting those heads, I wanted to take them home as museum specimens, and Mills, deciding to show his disapproval of the extermination of Saochu and Kejok by confiscating the fresh heads, furthered my idea. The heads were ordered to be cut down and taken to Chingmei.

Although Yimpang had come off very lightly, all the old heads remaining on the tree, we felt we were anything but popular ; we were very conscious of the relief on the faces of our 'hosts' as we left the village with our booty.

Instead of returning directly to our camp, we followed the ridge of the mountain for a couple of hours, and then climbed up to Waoshu. This small Chang village received us with an overwhelming friendliness, tinged no doubt with relief ; for they stood in deadly fear of Pangsha. They had heard of the recent raids, and had consequently strengthened their fortifications till they were almost impregnable to Naga weapons. We easily convinced them of our peaceful intentions for they still remembered how once before other white men had come to Waoshu. Thirteen years ago J. H. Hutton crossed the ridge with a survey party, believing it to be the main range of the Patkoi, but he was bitterly disappointed on climbing the 7000 feet only to discover that the main range lay yet further to the east.

When we returned to Chingmei, the camp was bubbling with news. Matche and the men with the heads had brought back word that a strong armed force of Kalyo Kengyu warriors from Noklak had stalked us that morning up to Yimpang. They had moved parallel with us on the hillside, and had walked into Yimpang as soon as we had left, explaining to the inhabitants that they had been ready to help if we had dared to do them any harm.

Will Noklak resist us ? Will they oppose our march through their land ? These are the questions that run in all our minds



and form the main topic of our dinner conversation. The path over Noklak is the only way to Pangsha, and now that Chingmak's men have returned from clearing the path for tomorrow's march, bringing with them only messages of defiance from Noklak, there is not much chance of a peaceful passage.

Mills folds up the map he has been studying. Neither Noklak nor Pangsha are marked ; the map reaches only as far as Chingmei, and tomorrow we shall enter virgin country, virgin not only for us, but also for Chingmak and his warriors, who have never dared to cross the eastern boundary of their village land.



## CHAPTER XVI

### INTO THE BLUE

IT IS still pitch dark as Nlamo slips into my tent and puts the small hurricane lamp down by my bed. Here it stands, blaming me for every extra minute I spend under the blankets. It is not a question of sleep, for the intense cold has kept me awake for the last few hours. But to get out of bed into the icy air needs an effort, and I find it difficult to muster the necessary resolution.

Day has not yet broken but the camp is alive ; the coolies pack their loads and squat chatting round the fires, warming themselves and boiling their rice. Nagas will discuss the most negligible thing for hours and now that the excitement of the tour grips the whole camp conversation is rife ; looking at their eager, determined faces you would think that they were making important decisions. They are asking each other over and over again : will there be a fight ? This is the question on all lips. However much I hope there will be no bloodshed, I feel deeply for the coolies. They are filled with the hope of glory, and dream of attaining the rank of head-hunters. They are desperately afraid that in the last moment we will come to terms with Pangsha, and that all the trouble and privation of the last weeks will have been in vain ; for to the Naga money is no compensation for heroic exploits missed.

The coolies grasp their shields and spears ; they are already prepared. It is only a matter of seconds to throw off their heavy loads and transform themselves from carriers into fully-armed warriors. Those who go with us are fervently envied by their less fortunate friends remaining behind in the camp, and yesterday a mutiny had almost broken out when Mills proposed to leave one particularly eager band behind. But now there is peace again, for the would-be heroes have had their way, by solemnly promising not to harm a hair of the enemy's head without express



orders. 'We will even step over the fallen Pangsha men,' they swore, 'without so much as a touch of the *dao*.'

In the dark hut we shiver over our breakfast, waiting for the first rays of the sun to grope slowly down the hillside—in several minutes they reach Chingmei, and then, as the palisade of our camp casts its first bizarre shadows, our column begins to move.

The six Chingmei men, acting as scouts, go ahead. They are pleased to accompany us, rather for the love of adventure than for the promised reward. The picked warriors of a war-like village—and their rich tattoo and ornaments tell of many victories—they seem dangerous men indeed. But today they have a strange appearance, for we have tied white bandages round their heads and chests, and they look as if they had come from, rather than were hopefully advancing to battle. The bandages are marks of identification, lest our Chang scouts be taken for enemies in the confusion of the fight. Their leader is Chingmak's son ; he is not yet twenty-five, but he is already a famous warrior and has captured eight heads.

The scouts are to help us find the way to Pangsha and to circumvent the obstacles awaiting us in hostile country. Nagas are expert in all sorts of tricks that complicate the passage of an unwelcome guest. They run strings through the dense grass of the paths, and a touch of the foot releases a poisoned arrow that pierces you in the ribs ; they dig pits harbouring large spiked poles, and cover them with a thin grating and dry leaves, so that an unwary step precipitates the victim and he is impaled on the spikes at the bottom. A dangerous but favourite device consists of small, bamboo spikes—*panji* they call them—with which the Nagas sow the ground, to spike the feet of the approaching enemy.

For the first hours of the way, however, we are in friendly country, and there is no need for caution. Steeply we climb from the camp into the valley. It is still bitterly cold, and we grudge the loss of so much height ; now, early in the morning, we would gladly climb up-hill, but, as it is, we shall probably have to climb the treeless slope opposite under a midday sun.

Deep down in the valley a brook rushes over huge blocks of



stone. The water is clear, and looks horribly cold. Across it the path leads up from the valley over a precipitous slope, and soon loses itself in jungle. For many years Noklak has been at war with Chingmei, and the path is completely overgrown. The scouts at the head of the column cut their way through the thicket with strong *dao* blows, this kind of travelling is a slow business, and you require patience as the column moves forward step by step.

Here and there huge patches of blue flowers cover the shadowy floor of the forest. It is wild indigo that grows where the sun hardly ever penetrates, and it is from these leaves that the Nagas make the dye for their blue cloths.

As the forest recedes, a stony slope unrolls before us. It is torn by deep ravines, and even the light steps of our scouts crumble the surface and send rubble clattering into the depths. What will happen to our heavily-loaded coolies ? But my anxiety for the Nagas, as so often before, proves unnecessary ; in half an hour all the loads are across.

Now once more the path leads through the forest. As we pass under the first trees there are excited shouts from the head of the column. 'Beware *panji*' the warning comes back. Now there is no doubt ; we are in hostile country, for the bamboo spikes set in the path are freshly pointed, and obviously intended for our feet.

The column moves yet more slowly, feeling its way through the thick undergrowth, but all this caution is not enough, and soon there is an angry cry. One of the Chang scouts stands on one leg, with a *panji* sticking through his other foot, the bloody point protruding some way above the toes.

'Silly of me, to step on a *panji*,' is all the man says, as they draw the spike out of his foot, and as soon as the wound is dressed with one of the hitherto decorative bandages, he insists on rejoining his friends at the head of the column. A Gurkha is the next victim. A *panji* pierces the muscles of his calf, but he too makes light of his misfortune.

The sun burns down on the hillside, and the air stagnates between the dense bushes. We would like to rest and eat, but we dare not waste precious time ; we are not certain how long



it will take us to get to Noklak, nor how we shall be received, and two clear hours must be left before dusk in which to build a fortified camp.

Round every bend we expect the village to come in sight, but time after time we are disappointed, until at last we see Noklak lying about two miles away on a broad spur. It is in a splendid position on our right, dominating the head of the valley, where the mountains, widening out, give way to an unhampered view of the main range of the Patkoi.

But the ground that lies between us and the village is difficult to negotiate. High bushes cover the slopes, and once among them our vision will be blocked. Carefully we search the country with our glasses, and eventually pick out a group of men in the long grass near the village. They are coming slowly towards us. Noklak has certainly been warned of our approach, and their sentries have probably been watching us for a long time as we made our way along the hills. According to old Naga tactics, other warriors should lie already in an ambush above the path.

The sepoys level their rifles ready to fire. I feel in the pocket for my revolver and load both barrels of my gun. Step by step we move through the thicket. You cannot see more than six yards ahead—the back of the man in front and a few heads of the men farther ahead—and to the left and to the right nothing but grass, reed, and bushes. A wall impenetrable to the eye, but not so impenetrable, I think, for those famous poisoned arrows.

Involuntarily the fate of that other punitive expedition against the Konyak village of Chinglong creeps into my mind, when the Chinglong warriors broke through the thicket along the whole length of the column, cutting off the heads of the coolies and sepoys before they had time to defend themselves, and then disappeared into the jungle on the other side.

The tension grows with every slowly passing minute. Still I can see nothing but the brown, crackling bush and the deep blue of the sky overhead. Any moment a spear may whistle out of the thicket.

Action would be a relief—even a clash. But no, this is against all better judgement ; Noklak had no hand in the slave



raids of the last months, and it would be awkward to leave a hostile village in our rear while we march against Pangsha.

Quite suddenly the path opens out into a clearing and our presumed enemies stand before us, still far away, but clearly visible as they brandish their spears and *dao*. Shall we fire? The *panji* that blocked our way leave us in no doubt as to their hostile intentions; we might have to pay dearly for a hand-to-hand fight in the jungle. On the other hand, their obviously troubled behaviour seems to point to uncertainty. We halt. Surely they see that there are many of us. Yes, there is a movement in the crowd, and three men separate themselves from the others. What are they calling to us? Only Chingmak can understand. Where is Chingmak? He is in the centre of the column with the coolies, but now he comes forward, as once more the faint call comes up to us.

'They ask if we want peace or war,' translates Chingmak 'and look now, they are breaking branches—they wave them over their heads. That means peace.'

The opinion of the old men seem to have triumphed over the young hotspurs, and Chingmak makes haste to answer, 'Ho-o, ho-o, peace, peace! Come here'; and his powerful voice carries far through the breathless stillness.

Soon the three old men approach, mistrustfully, eyeing the bayonets of the sepoys, pointed so obviously in their direction. These men are the first real Kalyo Kengyus I have seen, and even at a glance one can see a great difference between them and the Changs of Chingmei. Their heads are rounder, their features more mongoloid, and a small dark blue cloth, tied in some peculiar way round the body, leaves the breast nearly bare. They are richly tattooed, with a large ostrich-feather ornament and groupings of suns and small human figures, all doubtless symbols of captured heads. Their small aprons are embroidered with cowries. Through how many hands must these shells have passed while making the long journey from the sea to these mountains?

The negotiators are obviously nervous, and their astonished gaze wanders from one to the other of these four white men,



but their faces lighten as they recognize Chingmak, and the time-long adversaries greet each other as old friends, and soon squat chatting cheerfully on the ground before us.

As a rule there exists little personal hate between the individuals of two hostile Naga villages. War is a sport, and no one is blamed if now and then a head is brought home. The opponents are quite unembarrassed when they meet on neutral ground, and are often to be seen drinking a mug of rice-beer together in the most friendly fashion.

Not so long ago the young warriors of Noklak plotted to take a head from Chingmei, but the inglorious result only caused much laughter in Chingmak's house, and the warriors returned sorrowfully home. It appears that three Noklak warriors, seeing a solitary Chingmei man enter his field-house, decided it was too good a chance to miss ; the unsuspecting man lit a fire to warm his food, but hearing a frog croak in the nearby brook, and eager to secure such an unexpected dainty, slipped out of the back door unseen. Meanwhile the Noklak warriors crept cautiously through the millet. Reaching the field-house, and thinking the victim still inside, they divided ; two guarded the back door with raised spears, the third entering by the front door found the house empty ; imagining his prey escaping he rushed through the back door, only to receive a spear in his stomach. Too late did his friends realize their mistake, and they had to carry his body instead of an enemy's head back to Noklak. No wonder the people of Chingmei laughed over their mishap, and the Chingmei man blessed the little frog that had croaked in the brook.

Today Chingmak and the men from Noklak do not think of such old stories, for there are more important things to talk of. It soon transpires that Noklak does not want to fight any more than we do, and that they placed obstacles in our path only from fear of Pangsha's wrath. Now they beg us not to enter the village, for Pangsha would be bound to deduce a friendly welcome and would take dreadful revenge.

Since it does not really matter whether we visit Noklak now or on our way back, we instruct Chingmak to agree, but to demand a fine in the shape of pig and goats as compensation



for the damage done by their *panjis*. With two hundred coolies and sepoy to feed, such fines are extremely useful. We find quite a good place for our camp, near a stream and the ever-important bamboos ; with them close at hand the sepoy and coolies can build a fence and rows of small huts in just about two hours.

Space in camp is always limited, but today we are particularly cramped, and with the increasing darkness it becomes more and more difficult to move between the tents, the huts, and the open fires. It is still worse when the coolies begin to slaughter pigs, and after cutting them open, to singe them over the fires. The whole air reeks of the pungent smell of burnt pigs' bristles, and the whole of the ground is strewn with intestines that in the darkness get entangled in your feet as you pad through the camp.

Next to the shelter that we euphemistically call the 'mess', our scouts have settled down round a fire. Somehow or other they have contrived to procure a whole pig as their ration, and now with refreshing thoroughness, they begin to devour it. Even the man with the pierced foot refuses to allow his small misfortune to spoil his meal. While we eat our own dinner, we cannot agree amongst ourselves whether they will or will not be able completely to consume that tasty animal. But when at ten o'clock I notice that the good fellows, after a short sleep, have begun to eat again, my doubts vanish. I am certain of the eventual disappearance of that pig and I am certain, too, that on this night at least our scouts will not suffer from 'night starvation.' In the morning, as they swallow the pieces of meat they have saved for their breakfast rice, the whole pig is finished, and only the picked bones bear witness to the feast.

The sun rises radiantly over the high ranges of the Patkoi. Ahead stretches a mysterious blue wall, the jagged line of the peaks separating the delicate blue of the sky from the deeper blue of the hills. The western slopes lie still in deep shade and the sun shines through the fine morning mist which hangs over the valley like gossamer silk.

It is getting late, and we cannot wait to watch the lifting of the veil—to see the woods on the far slopes take shape as the



morning advances—for we must follow the path to Noklak. It is well-trodden, and when it reaches the village it runs between the two *khel* into which so many Naga villages are divided, and then it leads on eastwards towards Pangsha. There is a sentry-box in the top of a large tree that stands strangely outside the palisade overlooking the entrance to the village, the sentry evidently gaining access by a long bamboo ladder that hangs down on the inner side of the palisade.

Looking at the houses of Noklak, there is little doubt that we have left the land of the Changs and are now in the country of a very different people. Dark grey slates cover the flat roofs of the small houses, which stand close together and side by side. We are among the Kalyo Kengyus, the legendary 'stone-house dwellers'. By this name the other Nagas call the tribes living on the western slopes of the Patkoi. How far their land extends to the east it is still impossible to say. Are they a homogeneous people like the Changs? Do they consist of many different tribes with different languages and different cultures? The answer to all these questions can only be found in the future, when the country is finally surveyed and its people become the subject of further observation.

To the south the land of the Kalyo Kengyus borders on the hills of the Southern Sangtams, and it was here that J. H. Hutton visited several of their villages when he went with a Survey Party towards Saramati 12,622 ft., the highest peak of the Patkoi Range, which was first climbed in 1935 by Po Nyu, a young Karen. But a large area extends between Noklak and these Southern Sangtam villages, and it is here that the map shows the white of unknown country.

Leaving Noklak we follow a good and apparently much-used path, leading along open slopes towards the north-east. Noklak and Pangsha are close friends, and Chingmak tells us that yesterday the Pangsha men were in Noklak to find out 'how the thing smelt'. There are fresh tracks in the damp places on the path, of men coming and going; no doubt they are the tracks of the Pangsha men. Nagas are always full of gossip, and this morning the elders of Noklak have confided to Chingmak that the slave-



girl we seek is still in Pangsha, but that without adequate compensation her owner refuses to part with her.

Small herds of mithan, belonging partly to Noklak and partly to Pangsha, graze on the grass-covered slopes. They are magnificent animals that take no notice of our approach ; not so much as a head is lifted as we pass ; they are much more interested in the grass, moist from the night's dew.

It is not long before we leave this open slope and find ourselves in low bush-land. Visibility is bad, and as it grows worse, Major Williams sends flank patrols to protect the long line of our coolies. Soon the path is running between walls of thick bushes, prickly creepers, and strong, dry reeds ; the pace is infuriatingly slow, for once more we have to cut our way step by step. Just here, where the thicket is densest, we hear calls coming from the hill-tops ; they come from somewhere directly above us, but we cannot see anything. Perhaps Pangsha's sentries have sighted us, and are calling warnings to each other. It is not pleasant to have our coming announced while we have no idea where our opponents hide. Mills decides that the rear-guard shall burn the jungle behind us on both sides of the path, so that we shall have no difficulties on the way back. But hardly do we hear the crackle and catch a glimpse of the flames drawing out along the slope, before a light wind springs up and drives the flames close on our heels. This forces us to abandon the manoeuvre ; to be caught between burning jungle and hostile forces might be unpleasant.

It is five hours since we left Noklak, and the sun stands high in the sky, when suddenly we come out into the open and see before us the unknown and much-dreaded land ; beyond the Langnyu valley at our feet, steep slopes sweep up to wooded ranges, and behind these peaks towers yet another rocky ridge—the main range of the Patkoi. We have no way of measuring their height, but we are already more than 6000 feet above sea-level, and they must be close to 11,000 feet.

On the gentle slopes on the opposite side of the valley the sun shines on golden roofs. Is this Pangsha that lies so peacefully above ripening rice-fields ? Matche, whom we have persuaded to



act as our guide, is the only man of our whole column who has ever seen this country. Yes, he says, this settlement belongs to Pangsha, but the main part of the village lies hidden in a hollow, and the hundred or so houses on the shoulder opposite us are only Pangsha's colony.

With Pangsha in sight, we feel that it will not be long before we learn with which particular strategy we are to be opposed. Matche has told us of Pangsha's intentions, for apparently they had boasted of their plans in Yimpang. Either to meet us on the path with many gifts and, putting us off our guard, trap us in an ambush, or to allow us to enter their village, overwhelming us with every sign of friendship, and then, as we leave, and least expect it, to fall on us, counting on our confusion and their superior numbers.

So Pangsha is counting on catching us unawares, and when we hear far-away calls and make out the figures of three men with a conspicuous white goat, we are very much on our guard ; they are coming towards us over the open hillside, but we do not in the least trust the peace that the goat appears to offer ; carefully we sweep the valley with our field-glasses.

'Do you see there, down by the river ? Something moves ! Yes—there are men down there—many men !'

Something glints in the sun, and then is lost to the naked eye, but it is enough to rouse our attention and we rake every inch of that valley until, triumphantly, we pick out hundreds of fully-armed warriors streaming over the river. It must have been their spearpoints that caught the sun.

Swiftly they disappear in the wood close to the ford, where the path runs on to the village. Will they appear again ? If they mean to meet us in the open, it should not take long for them to make their way up to the large clearing on the slope. We wait a long time, but nothing stirs, only the peace envoys come nearer on the hillside. Our doubts vanish : the Pangsha warriors have certainly taken up their places for an ambush !

The calls of the envoys again ring to and fro. It is a riddle to me how they can make out the shouting at this distance, but Chingmak has understood, and explains that the Pangsha men



want to talk to us. Mills tells him to assure them a safe conduct and ask them to meet us half-way. They seem to understand his answer, for almost immediately they begin to move upwards, and we plunge into the jungle once more. It is not long before our advance-guard meets the Pangsha men, and escorts them to Mills. It is a peculiar feeling to have the enemy before us at last, or rather the envoys of the enemy. They are not imposing figures, though they are probably the most important members of the village, these three middle-aged and one old man ; rather short and insignificantly dressed in faded clothes, they compare unfavourably with our magnificently turned-out Chang scouts. Yet their features betray a little of that energy and cold-bloodedness that have made them dreaded overlords of the whole district. One of them leads a goat on a string, and another carries a chicken in a small basket.

Where is Matche ? We need him now as interpreter, but he is not to be found. Afraid of the revenge of Pangsha, he is hiding himself at the farthest end of the column, but Chingmak speaks Kalyo Kengyu tolerably well, and the conversation is carried on through him and our Chang *dobhashi*.

Mistrustingly the Pangsha men glance at the bayonets of the sepoy, but Mills reassures them, saying they are *lambu*, sacrosanct negotiators, and need have no fear. The message they bring seems astonishingly friendly. The goat is a present of welcome from Pangsha, who are greatly pleased at our visit. They will treat us as elder brothers—no, as their own fathers. Never have they thought of fighting against us, for peace and friendship have always been their wish.

It sounds all very gratifying—all too gratifying perhaps—and Mills replies that we, too, are anxious for peace, and only seek the captured girl from Saochu.

At this the ambassadors pull long faces, for it is just this slave girl that they cannot give us—she has been sold a long time ago far over the mountains to the East.

Can it be true ? Did not the Noklak people tell Chingmak that yesterday the girl was still in Pangsha ? But the ambassadors deny this ; they say they did not visit Noklak yesterday. The



raids on Saochu and Kejok—yes, they raided the two villages—but there is no need to quarrel over a few captured heads. To our questions why they have so far sent us insulting challenges and threatened all the villages who befriended us with destruction, they produce all sorts of excuses.

They are most surprised when Mills sends them back with their goat, the small squawking chicken, and the message that without the slave-girl no understanding is possible and that their stubbornness and all the threats will be punished by the burning of the village.

This is a declaration of war.

If Matche had not betrayed Pangsha's plan, we might have been deceived for a while by their apparent friendliness, and would probably have fallen into the ambush ; but now we avoid the obvious path, and climb straight down the steep slope to the river, thus foiling Pangsha's first plan.

In the broad valley we are safe from surprise attacks and we make our way without further obstacles to where, just below the main village, we find a natural island in the middle of the river, which presents a most favourable camping-ground.

Soon the coolies are hard at work bringing in bamboos to build the palisade and the huts, while a group of Pangsha men sit above on a little hill watching our every movement. Suddenly one springs up. What can he have seen ? To our horror, we notice that some of our coolies have ventured too far, and are unsuspectingly cutting bamboos just beneath the outlook of the enemy. We cannot warn them in time, for the rushing of the mountain stream deadens our voices. If the Pangsha men run down the hill it is only a moment's work for them to hold a coolie's head in their hands. Quickly Major Williams orders the slope to be covered. Already several men, whirling their spears, run down the narrow path. A command, a salvo—two men fall, but they pick themselves up and disappear into the thicket.

No other coolie leaves the safety of the camp that evening.

Night falls, and with the dwindling of daylight dwindles the advantage of our rifles. Luckily Nagas will seldom attack in the



dark, but usually wait until the grey light of dawn increases visibility, for it would be an easy matter to ply our camp with their famous poisoned arrows from the safety of the river-bank. During dinner we discuss the possibility of an arrow piercing the canvas of our tents, and Mills thinks that to be quite safe I would have to sleep under my camp bed. Even the promise of safety does not lure me into such discomfort ; we have an exhausting day behind us, and a few minutes after my head touches the pillow I know nothing more of poisoned arrows or head-hunters for seven hours.



## CHAPTER XVII

### PANGSHA BURNS

PANGSHA has allowed us peaceful night's sleep, and we are grateful for such consideration as once more we break camp before the sun rises. A few of the sepoy's are to remain with the luggage, while the rest, with the coolies, fully armed, climb with us up to the village. The Pangsha men shout challenges from the top of the hill, but they are always careful to stay out of range of our rifles. Once more we are grateful to them, as once more they miss their chance of attack ; on the narrow path leading steeply up to the village through scrubland, the result of a fight would be dubious. But the danger passes as we reach the open heights of the hills.

Climbing we speculate—will Pangsha try to defend their village ? A few figures move among the bamboo bushes before the houses, but as we come nearer they disappear, to the intense disappointment of our coolies, who really think their hour has come and are burning for the glory of a fight.

While all other Naga villages are strongly fortified, Pangsha, resting on the laurels of her invincibility, lies comparatively unprotected ; there is no one in the whole country round who would dare to wage war against Pangsha.

The village is divided into three *khel*, one of which stands apart, separated from the rest of the village by a deep ravine filled with jungle. Well over five hundred houses lie between gardens and huge banana trees. The inhabitants have succeeded in removing most of their goods into safety ; only the obstinate and immovable pigs, and an occasional goat or cow, stray about the village in the light of the morning sun. Until yesterday, the Pangsha men must have relied entirely on their strategy, never thinking we would reach their village, or they would certainly have hidden their animals somewhere in the woods.



Mills and Williams, taking up a position between the three *khel*, direct all further operations, and since the village is doomed, our coolies and scouts beg for permission to loot. Jubilantly they throw themselves on the deserted streets, on the empty, fated houses. A spear flies through the air and hits a squeaking pig ; the head of a cow falls under the mighty stroke of a *dao* ; the last pieces of furniture are brought out of the houses, and one or two forgotten ornaments. Even Chingmak, generally so dignified and calm, I see venting his furious rage on a perfectly innocent rice-basket, slashing it from end to end. In his boldest dreams he had probably never dared to hope that he would one day plunder the almighty Pangsha.

I cannot stand calmly by Mills and Williams and see all this wonderful ethnographical material passing before my eyes. And despite Nlamo's anxiety, for he is certain that there are still enemies lurking somewhere, I join the coolies in their search of the houses and the remains of the village possessions.

The houses are built of bamboo ; they are rather small, and, now that the fires have gone out, quite dark and difficult to search. Here the roofs are not slate-covered but thatched with palm leaves, like the houses of the Konyaks. At the end of one of the *khel* stands a house, larger than the others, which must certainly be a *morung*. It has a high pointed gable and a carved mainpost ; and a little distance away a huge wooden drum lies in the open. But the drum is not like the drums of the Konyaks ; it has a peculiar form, tubular and open on both sides, and is overshadowed by a low tree, hung with whole bundles of heads, many of which are still partly covered with skin and hair and are apparently trophies of the latest raid.

All these heads convince me that we do no wrong to Pangsha in plundering the village, for what, after all, is the plundering of an evacuated village compared to the massacre of Saochu and Kejok ? For every pig our coolies spear today, five human heads at least were cut off on that raid.

Hurriedly I take a few photographs of the village, a section of the sepoys and several coolies are setting fire to the third *khel*, and already I can see the flames licking the roofs and springing



from house to house. In a few minutes a great fire blazes and a broad column of smoke climbs into the sky.

In the upper *khel* Smith and some of the coolies round up a few Pangsha men hiding among the farthest houses, but they flee into the jungle, and then he too sets a light to the dry palm-leaf roofs.

From every side come sounds of explosions—the detonations of burning bamboo poles ; the crackling and rattling grow into a wild roar, and the ash, carried high into the sky by the clouds of smoke, falls again as the fumes disperse, covering us with little grey flecks like flakes in a snowstorm. Clouds of smoke darken the sun, and the light round the village changes to a ghastly reddish violet. It is an unreal and theatrical play of light that, in the midst of the friendly, sunny day, pours out fantastic colours in eccentric patches over the landscape. Our primitive instincts sometimes take pleasure in works of destruction, and these hours of Pangsha's ruin are not without fascination. What we do not realize is that the clouds of smoke are seen far over the land and that in distant villages the people are singing and dancing from joy at Pangsha's defeat.

Since it is impossible to follow the inhabitants into the woods and hunt for the slave-girl, there is little we can do for the moment in Pangsha, and Mills and Williams decide to withdraw to the camp. But first the lower *khel* must be set alight, and a few of the coolies are detailed off for the job before joining us in the camp. Waiting until we see the flames take hold of the houses in this *khel* too, we climb slowly down the hill to our camp and our lunch.

We are incredibly hungry and we throw ourselves on the contents of several tins, and then—I suddenly miss Nlamo. I sent him with the coolies to set fire to the lower *khel*, thinking that it would be a good opportunity to add to my collection of trophies, and told him to cut a few heads off the tree. He should have rejoined the column with the coolies, but he is nowhere to be seen. Now Nakhu, our Chang *dobhashi*, comes to us in great excitement. Nlamo and two Lhota coolies were last seen in the burning village.



'They are lost !' gaps Nakhu. 'Chingmak was at the end of the column, he heard the voices of the Pangsha men crying from the hill to their own people, "Cut them off, cut them off." But Chingmak did not know that Nlamo was still behind him, and did not take any notice.'

'My God ! Then the Pangsha men have got Nlamo !'

'If he really was seen with the two other Lhota boys staying behind in the village, I am afraid there is very little hope.'

'But this is ghastly—can't we do anything ?'

'I'm afraid not. We have been a quarter of an hour in the camp already, and it would be at least another half an hour before we reached the village again ; by that time the three will have long lost their heads. Perhaps, though, they are only lingering on the way, and will soon turn up.'

I feel quite sick, as though the blood has left my body ; never have I seen Mills so pale. Now Nlamo is lost, and all for those stupid heads. And it is all my fault. But for me, he would still be in Kohima. I seem to see his body already without its head. How dreadful that moment must have been when he suddenly found himself alone amongst enemies ! Why in the devil's name did he stay so long in the village ? Didn't he hear the order to withdraw ? It is true, he carried my gun, and he is not a bad shot ; strange that we did not hear anything.

Anxious moments go by as we stand about, perplexed and helpless, at the thought that Nlamo's head and those of the two Lhota boys may have long been in the hands of Pangsha.

Suddenly we see men running down the path through the burning grass we had set alight behind us. They are the missing boys, who finally reach the camp completely exhausted and covered in sweat.

Little by little we drag from Nlamo the story of how, after he and the two Lhota boys had cut the heads from the tree, they had not followed the coolies, but thinking that we would still be at our position between the two *khels* had returned there through the burning village. In the distance he had seen some men, whom he took for our coolies, but as he saw no signs of us, he had started with the two Lhotas on his own way back





Bachelor's halls in Pangsha,

Pangsha burns.







Chingmak's son (left) and another warrior of Chingmei.



to the camp. Hardly had he left the village, however, when again men appeared in the smoke, but this time quite close, and in terror he recognized Pangsha men. He seized the gun and fired. The men coming towards him suddenly turned and fled. Luckily the smoke made it impossible to see that Nlamo was alone, and naturally they did not realize that the three Lhota boys were separated from the column ; they probably thought we were all still in the village and were just as terrified as Nlamo, who dropped the heads, and incidentally my electric exposure meter, which he always carried, and ran for his life.

We sit down again to our interrupted meal with light hearts, and enjoy the so-far-disdained tins with relish. But we cannot rest long, for Pangsha's colony on the shoulder of the mountain is four miles away, and it must also be burnt to the ground. Mills thinks that it will be an easy march along the bed of the valley, and that we will be able to climb up to the colony before evening, returning to Noklak by the light of the full moon.

Quite frankly, I am horrified by this programme ; I feel we have already had quite enough trouble and excitement for one day. However, Mills is determined, and we start at about three o'clock down the valley, though not for long on the comfortable march Mills has promised us ; soon the broad valley narrows and, to our great disappointment, the river changes from a gentle stream to a swift-running torrent ; in some places it rushes between steep cliffs, and to make any progress we must wade downstream in the icy water or scramble over the precipitous banks through a tangle of jungle.

It is the worst march of the whole tour, and we soon give up the thought of reaching Pangsha's colony that evening. The sun is already sinking before we find a flat place in the bend of the river for our camp. Water flows on two sides, and towards the mountains the sepoy erect a palisade of quickly-felled bamboos. The mist gathers over the river intensifying the cold, and the camp-fires provide only a very inadequate warmth.

There is a full moon tonight, which, shedding a cold, clear light, silvers the earth and heightens the bewitching unattainability of the high mountains behind Pangsha.



It seems senseless to carry our luggage up the hill, when a small force is enough to burn the village, and Mills decides to send the coolies, protected by half our escort, back to Noklak early in the morning. The long line of the coolies will move as ostentatiously as possible along the open clearings on the opposite hills, while we attack Pangsha's colony with forty rifles.



## A SKIRMISH WITH HEAD-HUNTERS

ONCE more, as the first grey of dawn lightens the sky, we break camp. The coolies with the luggage set off for Noklak under a strong escort of sepoy, and we, with forty sepoy, several *dobhashi*, and our Chang scouts, climb the hill to Pangsha's colony. We intend to surprise the inhabitants, and if possible to take a few prisoners to use a pawn in future negotiations for the release of the slave-girl. The burning of the main village was not enough, for as Nakhu said last night : 'The houses are burnt, but Pangsha has still all her teeth.' He meant, of course, that the warriors had suffered no losses and that their pride and courage were yet unbent.

The path leads through fields already reaped of rice, but the giant millet growing in between the cut stalks stands yet in ear. It is amazingly high, this reddish millet, standing well over ten feet, and affords us excellent cover ; as long as the slope lies in the shadow we approach unnoticed. Quite close to the village we have to cross an open clearing, and this is the moment the sun chooses to rise over the ridge of the mountains, shining full in our faces. This morning the sun befriends the Pangsha people, for in the first dazzling blaze, their sentries suddenly catch sight of the enemy so near the gates, and immediately a long-drawn cry comes from the village ; a cry that is echoed all over the valley and relayed along the ridge in the direction of the main village. There must be Pangsha scouts sown over every yard of the mountain.

A stone wall blocks the pathway where it leads over a narrow shoulder, but it is not defended, and the small holes that should be filled with cross-bow arrows are unmanned. It is a matter of moments and a few pushes, and the stones give way under our weight ; the inner side is reinforced with banana stalks, for it is an old Naga belief that banana stalks 'cool' bullets and render them harmless.



We enter the village, and one glance tells us that it has been abandoned ; the people must have taken to their heels without so much as a thought for anything but their personal safety. Before the village stands a huge log drum and, near by, an Erythrina tree, where the trophies of Pangsha's victories hang. I am quite accustomed by now to the sight of human heads with skin and hair, more or less decomposed, but the sight of the not quite disintegrated leg of a child about three years old, that hangs among the other trophies, fills me with disgust and indignation not mitigated by anthropological interest. When we found the decorated trophies in Yimpang, and even the bundles of recently captured heads in the main village of Pangsha, I experienced a sense of curiosity and a certain detached excitement, but this small child's foot is somehow another matter. Each one of us sees the foot, but no word passes ; we may revenge this child, but the hope of liberating that other small girl still in Pangsha's grip is very remote.

Smoke still rises from the hearth of the houses, and the inhabitants must have dropped everything and run for their lives, for everything is as if they had just left the village to work on the fields. Not so much as a piece of household furniture have they taken with them ; incidentally we notice how poor are the material possessions of the much vaunted Pangsha, the few textiles we find are pieces of a rough stuff woven from bark fibre. Here and there, under the bamboo beds ashes still glow, almost dead after their night's task of keeping the sleeper warm. Matche tells us that according to a peculiar custom girls put glowing ash under their bed as a sign that their lovers may share it with them.

It is a pity that the beautiful carved posts of the men's house must be sacrificed, but today the regret of the ethnologist at the destruction of such works of art must once more give way ; our *dobhashi* are already running from house to house with burning torches and soon the flames seize the dry roofs ; it is not long before Pangsha's colony is nothing more than a smoking ruin.

Since Nlamo, now on his way to Noklak with the coolies, failed yesterday to bring the heads into camp, I determine to try my



luck with the trophies of Pangsha's colony. Quickly I cut four heads from the head-tree and pack them into a carrying basket that I manage to save from destruction ; but to have the heads all ready packed and to have them conveyed to Noklak are two quite different things. Not one of the sepoy, the *dobhashi* or the Chang scouts will so much as touch the basket ; so, if I am not to fail again in securing my specimens, there is little else to do but to take it on my own shoulders. With great difficulty I hoist the gruesome booty on my back, much to the amusement of the Nagas and the sightly shocked surprise of the sepoy.

Feeling that for the time being the chapter of Pangsha's punishment is closed, we follow the path running along the edge of the ridge that falls steeply away into the valley. The main village is down there in the hollow on our right. Good God ! Unbroken chains of fully-armed warriors stream along the path leading from the village, and our eye, following the path up the hillside, discovers that it runs along the mountain half-way up, and eventually crosses our path at right angles. In spite of their spears and their heavy shields, the warriors run with astonishing swiftness, and although they are still a great distance away, and appear only as tiny figures, yet there is something extremely expressive in their movements. Is it their firm determination this time to fight to the death ? Their hoarse war-cries resound through the air ; there is nothing tentative about them, and we are left in little doubt as to the business in hand.

It seems that at last we shall come to blows with Pangsha. Today they will learn that a real fight does not in any way resemble the massacre of women and children they perpetrated in Saochu.

But Williams and Mills take a much more serious view of the situation.

'Of course Pangsha will try to cut us off from the river. If they attack in the jungle, the result might be nasty for us. Look there ! More and more men are pouring out of the wood—there must be at least six hundred of them.'

Six hundred of them ! We take stock of our fifty-odd men.

'If we continue on this path, we can't reach the river before



them. We must go down this precipice—and as quickly as the situation.

Every man turns where he stands and leaves the path to run down the slope, which falling steeply away is almost completely covered with fields. There is no path, but we run at random through the fields of giant millet as fast as our legs will carry us. The unrelenting and elastic stalks break back and hit me in the face, and every few minutes they seem, in some exasperating way, to get entangled in the basket on my back.

We reach the crossing of the path to the village half-way up the hill ; there is no time to find out where the enemies are, but we hear them coming up the path, and any moment they will turn the bend of the hill. The way to the river is open. We have only to run straight, almost perpendicularly down. But, for that free passage we have paid a high price ; the Pangsha men have now an enormous advantage, they are above us, and we hear their war-cries coming nearer.

We run on through the millet-fields, with the soft earth giving way under our feet ; more than once I slip and fall, for it is not easy to run through that forest of millet with a camera and a gun and the uncomfortable basket on my back. This encounter with Pangsha is not exactly as I had imagined it ; there is no denying that we are running away.

But who wanted to deny it ? If only I could run quicker ! The others were surely running faster ? There is Smith in front, and there a sepoy. If only we could stick together ! This damned millet ! You can see nothing at all : hardly more than ten yards ahead. A Chingmei scout passes me. He has dropped every piece of his precious loot from Pangsha and is running for his life. He probably thinks that we have not the slightest chance against this ten-fold superiority in numbers.

Behind us the war-cries swell to a roar that I am never likely to forget. They sound hardly human, these passionate, terrifying cries that rise from hundreds of throats. What use are the guns in your hands when you cannot even sight your target in this confounded millet ? We hear the enemy, but we will only see him when bullets can no longer prevent a hand-to-hand fight,



when the howling hordes surge over us ! If only we could reach the hillock that somewhere here ought to interrupt the steep slope of the hill. Two Changs pass me—their faces are alive with terror ; the enemy must be close on their heels.

A salvo—bullets whistle over my head. I almost pull up, as I feel the air disturbed in the giant millet above me. Shots in front and the cries of the enemy behind. Who can be firing there in front ? Surely the sepoy's can't be firing blind ? No, they are running much too fast for that. But all is well. The advance-guard have reached the small hillock on the slope, and are firing over our heads at the enemy behind and above us. Thank goodness ! But don't shoot too deep !

Breathlessly we reach the hillock. The sepoy's have stopped firing for the moment, and the enemy seem to have withdrawn. The fire of our vanguard must have broken the wave of the attack only a few seconds before the launching of the first shower of spears. They must have been near ! Now the fall of several leaders has stayed the rush, for Nagas depend almost entirely on the leadership of a few champions, and if they fall, the courage of the other warriors evaporates, as the courage of the Philistines at the death of Goliath. If the Pangsha warriors had run blindly on they would have certainly overpowered us.

Now there is not an enemy to be seen, and if I had a word to say regarding our policy, I would stay here on this very convenient hill, in this splendid strategical position, and wait for a second attack. However, Major Williams has good reason to think that the Pangsha warriors will change their tactics and attack us again in the jungle by the crossing of the river. Their numbers are so superior that to surround us would be an easy matter. A quick withdrawal is the only way to avoid any such manoeuvre.

Already we can see the groups of warriors collecting again on the slopes above us, and their battle-cry rises once more ; but not with the same relentless urgency. It is no doubt tempered by the effect of our bullets, for in the face of our continuous firing they keep at a respectful distance, though always at our heels, as we make for the valley.



Luckily there is only a narrow strip of jungle lining the river-bank, and by some special act of providence we hit upon the narrow path that brings us to the bridge. How thankful we are for the open, treeless slope on the other side, where no danger can approach unseen.

The Pangsha warriors follow us up to the river, and their shouts are anything but flattering. The Chingmei scouts catch some of the remarks and, as we go, they tell of the calls of our pursuers—rather monotonous, since they all harp on the same theme : ‘First you come to fight with us and now you run away’. Well, yes, it is more or less true ; but yesterday it was the Pangsha people who had run away, and they had only dared to attack when they found our numbers greatly diminished.

The danger has passed, but in face of the long march to Noklak, we find ourselves rather exhausted. There is still a long climb in the full blaze of the midday sun, and the basket on my shoulders, which in the excitement of the flight has been only infuriatingly clumsy, becomes suddenly very heavy. It may appear strange that none of the Nagas will carry my heads, but they argue that such a thing is taboo until they really understand how the heads are to be treated. If they are to be considered as captured heads, then it means that each man who touches them may hold the head-hunting ceremony, but he is subject to the strongest taboos until he returns to his own village. If, however, they do not fall under the category of trophies, and their magical forces are already dissipated in the hands of Pangsha, then it is better that they should not touch them in any way. Until the question is seriously discussed and satisfactorily solved, no one will have anything to do with my heads.

Today we are received with great friendliness in Noklak ; the people have seen the flames of Pangsha mounting high into the sky, and they have no desire to share the same fate, or perhaps they are secretly relieved that their powerful neighbours have received a blow to their pride.

They wait for us at the gate of the village, with great mugs of rice-beer, and very grateful we are for a refreshing drink ; yet, despite all this outward show, our hosts do not quite trust us, for



again there is not a woman or a child to be seen in the whole village.

While Williams and Smith rest in the shadow, drink rice-beer and try to get cool, Mills and I, forgetting our tiredness for the moment, embark on an ethnological tour of the village. Noklak considers the shortest possible line of defence a strategic necessity, and the houses are built closely crowded together. There is hardly a banana bush in the whole village, for in the narrow spaces between the walls there is no room for such luxuries. The houses are all slate-roofed, but the *morung* are thatched with palm leaves, and stand at the entrances to the village. The strongest fortifications lie towards Panso ; between two fences built from the outer ribs of a thorny palm there extend some three or four yards of dense impenetrable thicket, and the only way through is a covered passage with strong wooden walls, so narrow that only men in single file can pass through to the strong wooden gate.

Now that the excitement is over and our curiosity to see the strange village is somewhat appeased, we notice how exhausted we are. The short way to the camp, which our coolies have already made quite comfortable, seems endless, and I can hardly put one foot in front of the other.

'We must celebrate our lucky escape,' says Mills as we sit down to lunch. 'I think there are still a few tins of salmon. We will slaughter them.' Tinned salmon has never tasted so good as it did that afternoon.

As dusk falls, we hear that men from Ponyo have arrived in Noklak, and we are surprised, for Ponyo lies on the Burman side of the Patkoi mountains, and is a close friend and ally of Pangsha. They have apparently heard of the burning, and have come to pay their friends a visit of condolence. Why they have also come to Noklak is not quite clear but perhaps they want to boast at home about their encounter with white men. Mills invites them to our camp, but it is late in the evening before they appear with a few of the Noklak people. We soon set them at ease, and when they have drunk a little rum they tell us that five Pangsha men were killed in today's fight and many



more were wounded. Mills takes this opportunity of using the Ponyo men as ambassadors to Pangsha. He sends them messages, still offering them peace, but demanding the slave-girl. The envoys accompanying her will be assured of a safe conduct, and are to meet us in Chingmei the day after tomorrow. But should Pangsha continue their policy of raiding and slave-hunting, then there were still more bullets in our rifles.



## MAKING THE PEACE

OUR spacious camp in Chingmei is untold luxury. After the cramped quarters of the last days we thoroughly appreciate its comforts, sufficient sleep, and freshly cooked meals. To add to the plenty Noklak has paid up a further fine of one mithan for the blocking of the path on the way to Pangsha ; the coolies are already roasting the meat over the fires and preparing for a feast, while we indulge in that supreme delicacy, boiled mithan-tail. It is one of Mills' favourite dishes, and after twenty years in the Naga Hills he certainly knows what is good to eat. The succulent meat on the tail vertebrae of one of these huge animals is surprisingly tender, and much more tasty than any ox-tail.

The unusual stillness of the camp, where the coolies are also obviously enjoying a rest, is suddenly broken by excited voices, and a *dobhashi* rushes into our hut :

'Sah'b, Pangsha men are at the gate !'

We all jump up. No, these Pangsha warriors are not storming the camp. They are the negotiators whom Mills invited to come to Chingmei, and with them are the men from Ponyo. Mills has always been convinced that, in spite of our rapid retreat, Pangsha would take the loss of five of her best warriors and the burning of the village as a bad defeat, and would try to come to terms with us.

The door is opened and the *dobhashi* let in the men, one by one, taking away their *dao* as a precaution. Nakhu and Matche are called to serve as interpreters.

Mills' reception of the negotiators in the 'mess' is a strange scene. I feel my pulses hammering ; there is something solemn and tense in this meeting with men who only two days ago attacked us without the least intention of giving quarter.

Eight men squat in a semi-circle in front of us. Only three are from Pangsha, the others come from Ponyo and Tsawlaw,



two villages lying across the Patkoi, and it speaks for their courage that they have once more delivered themselves unnecessarily into the hands of their allies' enemy, or perhaps they have already discovered that we are not so fearsome as we were painted. However, they seem quite at ease, but the envoys of Pangsha stare gloomily before themselves. One of them is Mongsen, the most famous warrior of Pangsha, and leader of one of the *khel*. The Noklak people have told us how he and Sangting led the raid against Saochu, rivalling each other in the taking of heads, and how Mongsen won, with the proud number of fourteen. But Sangting fell in yesterday's attack, and Mongsen now holds the undisputed place of 'first warrior.'

His speech is open and dignified. He attempts neither defence nor accusation. What has happened, has happened ; we have burnt their village and killed some of their best men—they, too, have tried to kill us. But now they wish to make peace, and so they have come to Chingmei in answer to Mills' message.

Mills replies that peace is also his wish. He bears them no grudge, but Pangsha must swear not to take revenge on any of the villages who have befriended us. It would be futile to exact from Pangsha a promise to desist for ever from all head-hunting, and Mills demands only that in future they shall not raid 'this' side, leaving it open what is to happen 'that' side, i.e. in the unexplored area to the east. But above all they must return the slave-girl. All the other terms are agreed to, but in this last demand there lies a difficulty, for the Pangsha men assure us that the child has really been sold across the Patkoi through the mediation of Tsawlaw, but they know which village bought her. The transaction must have been carried through shortly before our coming, and in a great hurry, for Mongsen complains that the price is still owing. Well, so much the better ; it should be easy to recover the child from a defaulter, and Mongsen promises to bring the slave-child as soon as possible.

The terms of the peace are concluded. Solemnly Mills asks Mongsen once more if he agrees that there should be no more blood between them, and, according to custom drinks a mug of rum touching Mongsen's hand. He passes the mug to Mongsen,



who, dipping a small piece of ginger into the rum and throwing it away, empties the mug of the last dregs. The ceremony is repeated with the two other negotiators.

Soon the Pangsha men lose their shyness, and they chatter freely about all the details of the fight. Mongsen tells us that he was in the front line during the attack, and though four bullets whistled a hair's breadth past him, he remained unharmed, because Mills, at their first meeting, when he had acted as Pangsha's envoy, had called him a *lambu*, a sacrosanct ambassador, one who will not be killed. The gods had heard the word, and he had escaped death. His companions smile during this tale in quite a friendly way ; they seem to feel quite comfortable talking to their enemies of yesterday. They recount their losses during the fight, which they apparently consider an honest affair, and no cause for recriminations among straightforward men.

Involuntarily I think that we could learn something from men with such magnanimous minds. What a pity it would have been if a man of Mongsen's candidness had fallen victim to a bullet ! Until this moment I have seen Pangsha in only the blackest light, but now even the remembrance of that three-year-old child's foot on the head-tree is dimmed, and I feel that you could surely make friends with these people just as well as with my Konyaks. They are Nagas, after all, and all Nagas have an amiable side to their characters !

Noticing that Mongsen has a burnt foot, Mills has the wound dressed. The foot was burnt, Pangsha's first warrior tells us, when he rushed into the blazing village as soon as we had left, in the attempt to save a pig he had trussed up and hidden in one of the houses. The wound is a bad one. But he led the attack and then limped all the long way to Chingmei with a wound that would have laid any of us up for weeks.

In the course of the conversation we learn that the Pangsha people themselves call their village Wailam. They know nothing of the expression 'Kalyo Kengyu', and apparently have no tribal name for themselves ; they speak a language which, though related to that of Noklak, is different from the Ponyo language. I have the impression that the Ponyo men are not pure Kalyo



Kengyus, but probably belong to the southern Konyaks, and in some way have become isolated from the main tribe.

When many mugs of rum have passed between us, we part from the men of Pangsha, Ponyo, and Tsawlaw as friends, and looking at the cordial faces, you would think that the friendship was of much longer standing. The guests are to spend the night in Chingmei, partly in the camp and partly in Chingmak's house in the village ; it will probably be late in the night before the groups round the pots of millet-beer will think of going to bed.

We too are stimulated by the conference, and in no little way triumphant ; we celebrate the peace with an extra gin-and-bitters. Mills has every reason to be proud of his policy. A great area has been freed from the spectre of slave-raiding, and we can reasonably hope that gradually it will become more and more difficult for the devotees of human sacrifice in Burma to procure victims so that eventually the custom will die a perfectly natural death.

In the full light of day we have a better opportunity of observing the men of Ponyo and Tsawlaw. They wear their hair tied up in a knot in exactly the same way as the eastern Konyaks, and their faces, arms, chests, and backs are covered with most elaborate tattoos. We are astonished to notice that not only on paper but also culturally, the main range of the Patkoi marks the boundary between Assam and Burma. For these men from villages lying on the other side of the mountains, but nevertheless only a short distance from Pangsha, wear the Burmese kerchief on their heads and carry *dao* of a pattern never found in Assam.

When Chingmak had first met the Ponyo men in Noklak, sheltered behind his white friends, and bolstered by the defeat of their allies, he had demanded the release of a Chingmei man, said to live as a slave in Ponyo, and now the young man is brought to Chingmei. Years ago, he had been sold as a small boy by Panso to Ponyo, but in some miraculous way escaping death he had been adopted by a kind-hearted couple and had grown up as a Ponyo man. He is tattooed and dressed like the other men from Ponyo ; he does not show the slightest desire to be 'liberated' ; he speaks only Ponyo, is married to a girl of Ponyo,



and apparently lives there as a free and respected citizen, who does not appreciate in the least the idea of being liberated.

As farewell gifts Mills presents the envoys and the other guests with considerable quantities of salt, a highly-valued commodity in these hills and invests the leaders of Pangsha with the red cloths which mark them as the representatives of a village at peace with Government. Greatly satisfied with the result of their mission and their experiences, which will provide enough food for gossip round the hearth fires for many a long day, they all leave the camp.

The main object of our expedition is achieved, but before returning to Mokokchung, we want to take the opportunity of visiting the famous Panso, a village said to lie beyond Mount Yakko.

We are sorry to leave Chingmei and our camp there, for in these last weeks it has stood as a kind of home for us, and I realize that the chances of ever returning are small. All the last days in Chingmei it has been bitterly cold, and as we start early in the morning the ground is covered with hoar-frost. It is the first frost I have seen in these hills, and it dissolves quickly under the rays of the morning sun.

Chingmak and his sons accompany us, but we must bid farewell to all the other friendly Chingmei people at the gate of the village.



## CHAPTER XX

### WITH PANGSHA'S ENEMIES

As the crow flies, it is only eight miles from Chingmei to Panso, but in-between rises the broad bulk of Mount Yakko, and it takes us three days to skirt the base and make our way up the other side of the hill.

We are not afraid of any resistance, yet the enthusiastic welcome of the inhabitants of Panso takes us completely by surprise. They have seen the smoke of the burning Pangsha in the distance, and are beside themselves with joy at the defeat of their enemies. There is a certain maliciousness in their remarks on Pangsha's ruin when they meet us before the village ; and we soon realize that it is not altogether without reason, for early this year a troop of Pangsha men, appearing before the gates of Panso, and challenging them to fight, had taken without any losses to themselves no less than twelve heads. The Panso men were inside the strong fortifications of their village ; why, then, we asked, had they ventured outside ? But Panso prided themselves ; they were famous warriors, they said, and could not allow such a challenge to go unanswered. Well, Pangsha had taken twelve heads, but the white men have burnt her to the ground, and she has paid for those last insulting remarks her warriors had thrown over their shoulder as they left : 'We only wanted to show you what sort of men we are ; you have nothing more to fear, only be careful ! Don't follow us.' Sadly the men of Panso tell us they had not had the courage to follow and take revenge."

Now we have destroyed their enemies, and the people of Panso joyfully acclaim the victors. They build us a good camp on a nearby hill, and come in a long train bringing pigs, rice-beer, and water, singing all the while, a strange work-song that resembles nothing so much as the desperate bleating of lost sheep, so strange a song that even our coolies find it funny, and spend a long time trying to imitate it.



When I begin taking a few photographs among the crowd collected outside the camp, my camera attracts the interest of the Panso men. It is hopeless to try to explain to them exactly what I am doing, but I seize on my green filter as something they might understand, and satisfy curiosity by letting them look through. The tinted landscape creates great hilarity, and each warrior wants to try, until one man—turning my hand impatiently, the better to see—feels my wrist between his fingers ; he finds its thinness much more interesting than the distorted view, and hastens to tell the other bystanders of the curious phenomenon, whereupon they all chatter excitedly and each wants to touch me, and feel my bones for himself. This interest is becoming altogether too personal ; and I feel that at any moment these brown hands, clasping heavy *dao*, will itch to test the comparative frailty of my bones. Hastily I make for the camp.

Mills and Williams are horrified when they hear I mingled with the crowd outside the camp and that I aroused such interest among the warriors. More than one man has lost his head in this way ; you should not lead Nagas into temptation, they say.

In Panso I have at last an opportunity of collecting some information on the social life of the Kalyo Kengyus. The main settlement is divided into two *khel* or quarters, separated by a narrow corridor. Each of the two *khel* is fortified against the other by a strong palisade forming two sides of a long corridor, and from sentry-boxes in high trees guards can watch the movements of their neighbours. It seems that civil war is not an uncommon occurrence, but, in contrast with more civilized nations, the men of Panso have wisely invented special weapons for these internal quarrels. They are in the habit of using on such occasions, wooden swords instead of their iron *dao* and protect the head with huge plaited helmets lined with pieces of old cloth. So armed, even the fiercest rivals do each other no serious harm, and superfluous energies find an innocuous outlet.

But these Panso men are not always as unsuccessful as in their recent encounter with Pangsha, nor so harmless as in their internal quarrels ; outside the house of the village dignitary, who functions at all rites connected with head-hunting, more than



sixty heads are lined up against the wall. All the trophies of the village, when they have hung sufficiently long on bamboo poles in the open, are brought to his house and kept there ; at his death they are ranged on his grave, and his successor begins a new collection. Apparently this particular dignitary has been in office a long time ; sixty heads are not taken in a day.

The great log drum, almost filling the *morung*, is very similar to those we have seen in Pangsha and Noklak. It is a mighty wooden tube, with two small holes instead of a slit in the upper side. Neither Mills nor I have ever seen such an immense drum, for it has a diameter of about four feet, and a man can sit quite comfortably in the mouth.

The great dance in honour of the victors is soon to begin, and a wonderfully colourful crowd gathers on the open space outside the village. The men stand in a long row, stretching from our camp down the slope, and start the dance with slow, measured movements. They wear full ceremonial dress—you might be tempted to describe it as full war-dress, but the Nagas never risk their costly feathers and ornaments in a raid ; they treasure them for the glory of the dance. They have conical hats of red and yellow plaited cane, tufted with flaming red goat's hair, and surmounted with two white hornbill feathers striped with black. Warriors who have themselves captured heads are permitted to load their hats with shining mithan horns and hold their hats in place with chin-straps set with tiger claws. Cowrie-shells are embroidered on most of the dark blue cloths and the small aprons reaching from the belt to the knee. The broad belt is set with white seeds, and supports a wooden sheath at the back, which takes the long *dao* when it is not in use. In fact, their ceremonial dress is very like that of the Changs, except that, in addition, they wear leggings of bearskin, which not only protect the legs against *panji* but complete the harmony of the costume.

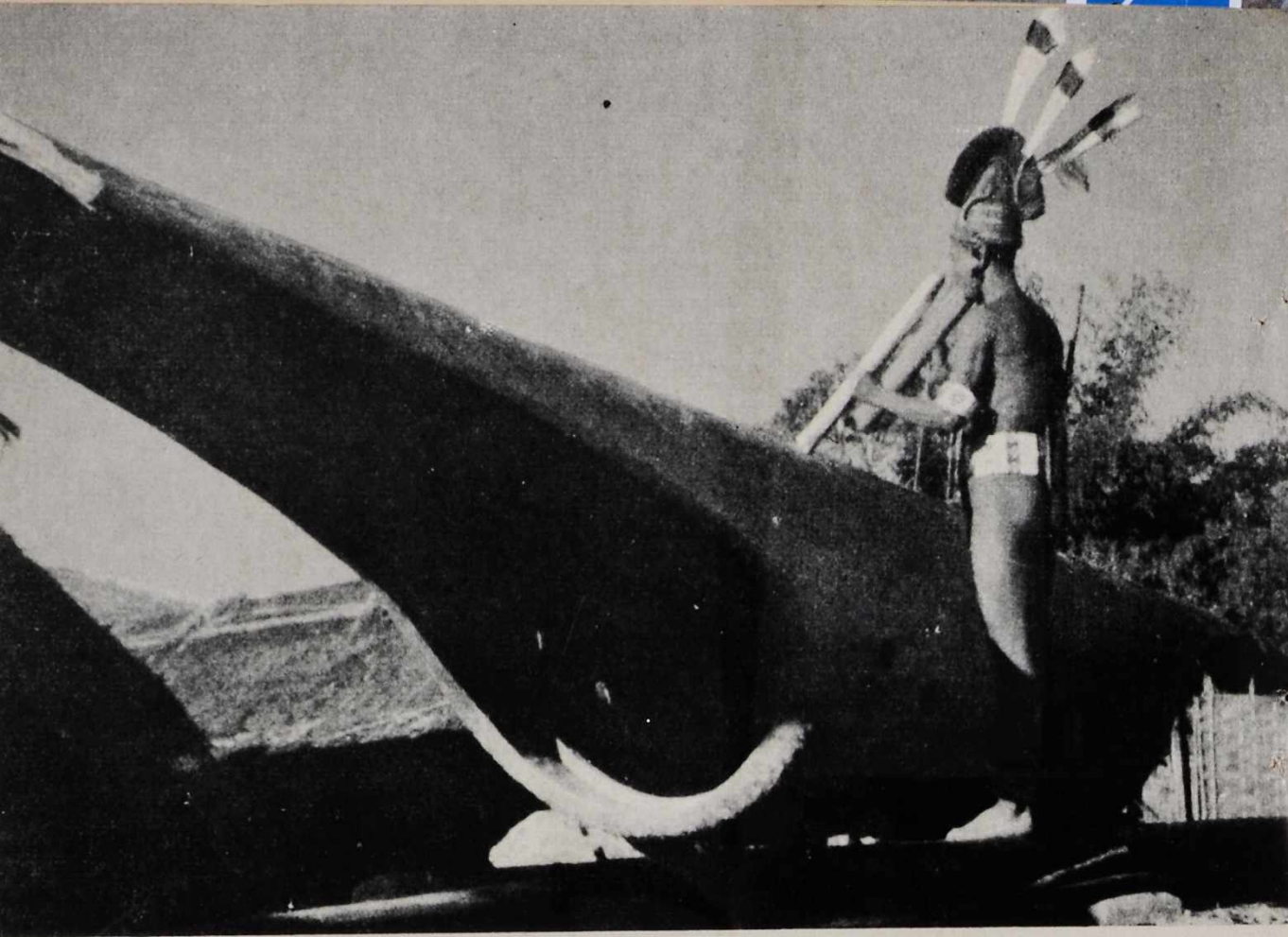
In one straight line they move together, slip-step right and slip-step left, and the song they sing, now and during the whole dance, is always the same, and consists of a monotonous rhythmical baaing with a little bark on a high shrill note, only slightly different from the work-song that we had heard in the morning.





A Panso warrior with a  
head-dress of Mithan-horns.





A log-drum of the Kalyo-Kengyu Nagas.

A drum in Panso, large enough  
for a man to sit inside.





Sometimes they jump into the air, with both feet together and closed knees, managing this with a precision that would honour a troupe of chorus girls, and then once more they relapse into the tediousness of the slip-steps and the bending of the knees. There are none of those temperamental outbursts that characterize the dances of the Konyaks.

Now and again, without leaving the line, the dancers will stop, and several spectators, hurrying up with bamboo jugs full of rice-beer, will quench their thirst in a most original fashion. A tube stands in each vessel, and the dancers in turn suck up rice-beer, without even touching the vessel. Often the dance begins before all have received their full share, and the men bearing the rice-beer will go a little way with them so that the dance is not interrupted.

It is a lovely sunny afternoon, and this is a picture that even in these mountains you do not find every day. Again and again my Contax clicks, and men never before seen by outsiders are now fixed on my film. The dance is a splendid opportunity for photographing them naturally, and my telephoto lens allows me to pick out individual portraits from the crowd. I work, as so often, with both my Contax, using them in turn, with Nlamo holding one of the cameras, and in this way I save the necessity of changing my lenses. One is fitted with a rapid lens of normal focal length, for taking the group-pictures in quick motion, and the other with a telephoto lens, which is particularly useful among primitive people, who gaze, rigid and frightened, into the camera, as soon as you come too close. With such a lens you can take the tense expression during the song or dance at a distance of several yards without attracting very much attention.

Long after we have returned to our camp the dance continues, finishing finally with a feast in which Chingmak takes part ; it is not until late in the evening that he comes home with a glowing nose and tottering steps.

In the morning we hear that he excelled himself the night before, making great plans with his drinking-companions. Full of pride at his successful negotiations with Pangsha and Noklak, and stimulated with quantities of rice-beer, unusual even for a



Naga chief, he manifested himself as the great diplomat, establishing peace and concluding agreements with other villages, forging alliances and negotiating Panso's relations with their neighbours. But this morning he says he can remember nothing, and when Nakhu calls him to account for his altogether too far-reaching political conceptions he is most astonished at the stories of all these peace plans.

On the way back from Panso, we pass through the village of Sangpurr, once more coming across the forked posts set up at mithan sacrifices by the Changs, Aos, and Semas. Strange that, as far as we can ascertain, they are lacking among the Kalyo Kengyus, although these too hold Feasts of Merit. While our way leads through Yimsungr country, first two, then the next day yet another, of our coolies pierce their legs on *panji*, those devilish bamboo spikes that here are hidden everywhere in the grass. This time the wounds are serious, and the men have to be carried.

At Chentang we find more than one surprise, and, as after the climax of a drama, all our problems seem to solve themselves at once. The parents of the slave girl from Saochu, whom we had long given up as dead, suddenly appear to fetch their daughter. To the liberated youth, they bring the news of his wife's escape, and even the father of the small boy from Kejok has come to fetch his son. All's well that ends well, and the only shadow on the horizon is the uncertainty about the fate of the little girl sold over the mountains. However, Pangsha prove worthy of their new scarlet cloths, and soon Chingmak's men bring the child to Chentang, where Mills can hand her back to her rejoicing mother. The Chingmei warriors bring too Pangsha's fine of four mithan and a gift of six eggs ; incidentally, not fresh eggs, for they are the same ones that Pangsha had prepared for our first visit. Pangsha sends a message with the fine ; they are very proud to be considered 'sons' of the Government, but beg us not to return, for, as it is, they have a difficult enough time with their wives, who refuse to allow them to rebuild their houses as long as we remain in the neighbourhood. We send them all the necessary assurances, for we



understand that even bold Pangsha men may have difficulties with their own wives.

The last stretch of the journey home leads through the land of the Changs, and we camp for two consecutive nights at their great mother-village Tuengsang, from which all the other Chang villages are said to have sprung. It has already been visited by several other expeditions, and we find an ancient man sitting outside one of the houses and peacefully smoking his pipe, who can boast of having captured a sepoy's head many years ago. The sepoy had incautiously left the camp alone to fetch water, and this had been too great a temptation for that peaceful old man.

There are bundles of human hair waving from the hats of many of the Tuengsang men. It is the hair of the women they have murdered—or seduced ; failing the hair from a captured head, a man may wear the hair of his mistress, but never of his own wife, as an ornament to his head-dress : successes in war and in love seem to be displayed with equal pride.

After several long marches, crossing more than one 5000-foot ridge, we reach the borders of administered territory and build our last camp by the Dikhu river under the cover of high trees. It is the first time for several weeks that we do not suffer from cold during the night.

Our tour is almost at an end, and now we must think of dividing the spoils. We have been presented with more than fifty *dao* in the different villages and we distribute them among the *dobhashi* and the leaders of the coolies.

But the other part of our booty is much more important and there is a strained tension about the camp until it is known exactly what will be done with the trophies. To their great disappointment, our coolies have not taken part in any fight when they could have used their spears and *dao* and thus won a warriors' laurels ; the sepoys on the other hand have indisputably killed several Pangsha men, and resourceful jurists among the coolies hit upon the ingenious idea of substituting the heads I robbed from the Pangsha head-tree for those of the killed enemies left lying on the field. It is argued that since they were fairly



fresh and had hung only on the head-tree, and not been stored in the *morung*, it is plausible to assume that their inherent virtue has not yet been finally absorbed in Pangsha's store of magical power. By this interpretation the value of my heads suddenly mounts, and it is soon apparent that they will never reach any European museum.

By no means all the coolies take this point of view ; the Lhotas and Rengmas recognize the heads as valuable trophies, and are burning with impatience to receive their share, but the Semas and the Sangtams stand on their dignity ; a head that has not been separated from an enemy's body is to them useless for ceremonial purposes.

These discussions naturally make me think of my Wakching friends, and my promise to bring them back a trophy. I wonder which attitude they will take, but since they even substitute wooden models for the heads of fallen foes, I think they will accept the looted Pangsha heads as welcome trophies.

I hand over one of the heads to the Lhotas and Rengmas, telling them to divide it, so that each village should receive a small piece. It is not only the men who have been with us on the Pangsha tour who will thus gain the right to the dress of the head-hunter, but all those who touch the small piece of head with their *dao*. Excitement runs high among the coolies ; their fellow-villagers will acclaim them as heroes, and the bringing in of the head will be followed by days of feasting.

As we cross the Dikhu next morning, a fine mist lies over the valley, giving the river, with the overhanging trees and boughs and the line of the coolies mirrored in the hardly-moving water, an ethereal look, almost like a Chinese picture.

Long rows of rice-beer pots stand ready in the Ao village of Longmisa to quench the thirst of our coolies ; in addition, the village has set aside a pig, which Nakhu, as the oldest and most esteemed Naga of our column, kills with the lower end of his spear. Such is the old Ao custom of greeting the home-coming warriors.

We welcome the small corner of civilization in Mokokchung offered by Smith's bungalow. His cook has prepared a mar-



vellous meal, and after so long a time on short rations we eat gluttonously. Here we hear of the abdication of King Edward VIII. The world and its troubles have caught us again.

Only Smith is to remain in Mokokchung. Mills and Williams must return to Kohima ; while before me lies a long march into Konyak country. Once again the evening finds us united over gin-and-bitters. We congratulate each other on our safe return and a tour full of unusual experiences.



## THE WHITE HEAD-HUNTER

THE news of my coming, and more particularly of the spoils I bring with me, has flown like wildfire through the countryside and it is not long before I realize that it is easier to carry a basket of bread untouched through a hungry crowd than a head-trophy through the Naga Hills.

Hardly have I entered the Konyak country, before I am waylaid by young men from Tamlu begging for a piece of head. Exultantly they carry the small piece I hand them over back to their village, singing of the glorious deeds of war, which incidentally they have never performed.

‘We are like tigers, terrible to our enemies ; like hawks we pursue our enemies. Our enemies tremble and shake. We have captured a head from the village of the enemy....’

Here one breaks off the song and asks me in a whisper :

‘What was the name of the village, Sahib ?’

‘Pangsha !’

And then, raising his voice, he sings.

‘.... we have captured a head from Pangsha ; conquered are the men of Pangsha !’

It is no less grotesque when, shortly after, they ask me whether it is the head of a man or a woman, and close on my answer, follows the pompous announcement that they have captured the head of a man from Pangsha.

Tamlu holds a feast in the evening, but in spite of all the singing and dancing, I feel that here the head-hunting ceremonies, after forty years under British administration, are little more than the enactment of a drama. There are not enough men from the good old days, not enough warriors who possess the rank of head-hunter ; the ritual of the ceremony is definitely lacking in the right emotion.

I know there will be dancing and feasting tomorrow too, and



since I should like to take some photographs, I ask the *gaonbura* if the boys could start the dance before midday. Of course, they would be only too happy to dance for me—they would do nothing else the whole day. In the morning they tell me that as soon as the sun rises higher in the sky and the mist withdraws the dance will begin. Two hours pass, and the dancers are said to be prepared and fully dressed, and only hurriedly strengthening themselves with a little refreshment. Apparently they are still indulging in this pleasurable occupation when the sun reaches the apex of his climb and begins his downward journey. Somewhat annoyed, I go to the house of a *gaonbura*, where I interrupt a drinking-party with my expostulations. Oh, yes, they say, the dancers are burning to show off their art, and would soon be called together. After yet another hour I meet the same *gaonbura* in the village ; he asks me politely and innocently whether he should not hasten to call dancers, and before which houses would the Sahib like to see the dance ? Those who know the Konyaks will not be astonished that much time still elapses before the dance actually begins ; and by this time the sun is rapidly sinking.

In my sleep I hear voices in front of my door and, dragging myself out of bed and stepping into the open, I find myself in the midst of my Wakching friends. Shankok is the first to greet me, and there is Dzeamang and many other whose faces I know, but whose names I cannot for the moment remember.

‘We have spent the whole night on the way, Sahib ; we heard yesterday evening that you were coming, and we set out immediately with torches. We were not even afraid of the tigers in the Dikhu, valley.’

‘But in any case I would have brought you the heads....’

‘No, Sahib, that is not the same thing ; we ourselves must bring in the heads, as if we were coming from a real raid.’

‘I see, but shall we divide up the heads here ?’

‘Yes, yes, Sahib.... I want a bit.... and I—you promised me a piece .... and me too—— !’



'Sahib, don't give everything to the Wakching people ; we are from Namsang and we also want a piece.'

'We are from Wanching—Sahib, Sahib—a piece for Wanching.'

There is a turmoil of voices, shouting against each other, for boys have come from all the neighbouring villages.

'Now peace ! Don't shout all together, and let's sit down and divide up the heads.'

I take the heavy *dao* Chingmak gave me in Chingmei, and set to work. Never had I thought it could be so difficult to hack up a skull.

First I satisfy the boys from each of the villages of Namsang, Kongan, and Wanching, and they go off with the small but precious pieces of bone, beaming with joy. But now I must be more careful with the Wakching people, for I don't want to hurt the feelings of any of my friends.

'Listen a moment, I can't give each of you a separate piece, but each *morung* will receive a piece, and then you can hold separate ceremonies.'

The solution is accepted.

'Shankok, your *morung* has just been rebuilt, you are most in need of a head ; which piece would you like ?'

'The part round the eyes, and there should also be a part of the jaw.'

This wish I gratify, but when I propose to give the Balang people a piece from the back of the head they cry at once :

'Not from the back of the head ! not from the back of the head ! We too want a piece of the jaw.'

Whereupon the people of the Ang ban and Bala come with the same demands, and I have finally to break into the head I have set aside for the villages north of Wakching, before everyone is satisfied. For the Konyaks believe that the magical powers furthering fertility are not distributed equally over the whole human head, but adhere especially to the parts round the eyes and to the lower jaw.

Immediately after breakfast we start ; we are a long procession, for besides the Tamlu coolies carrying my luggage, there are all the boys from Wakching and Wanching.



No sooner have we left the village behind than the boys scramble into the near-by palm trees, cutting the young yellow and still unfurled leaves. They fringe them and fasten them to their carrying-baskets in long bundles that wave and flutter as they move, like great gigantic tails, sweeping the ground behind the very small boys.

It is a decoration that can be worn only after a successful head-hunt, Shankok explains, and the high, shrill shouts of the boys as they run down the path to the Dikhu river also belong unconditionally to the ritual of the bringing in of a head.

The hanging bridge has fallen into bad repair since last I was here, and my coolies cross over with some anxiety, and careful not to overburden the frayed cane, leave great distances between each other. But the newly fledged head-hunters find this too slow and too boring ; they throw themselves into the river and wade through the water, squatting on the other side while they strengthen themselves with a little boiled rice before the long climb.

Dzeamang and I go together up the hill. He is more talkative than ever. He tells me that he has just married again ; his *morung* has just been rebuilt ; and now he is in possession of a head. Yes, now he can 'really jump to the sky'. His new wife comes from the neighbouring village of Chingtang, but it would seem that his marital pleasures are as yet of a somewhat speculative nature, for she still lives with her parents, and it is uncertain when she will move to Wakching. As the other boys laughingly tell me later, she probably uses the time very well, and thoroughly enjoys herself with her young friends in Chingtang.

Gradually the bold head-hunters catch us up, and soon I find myself climbing through high jungle grass at the head of a long procession. Again and again shrill shouts ring out, seeming rather to increase than die down as we climb the innumerable stone steps up to the rest-house of Wanching. Many of the Konyak rest-houses are built over the paths like mediaeval porcos, and here, where the path passes through, we find the smaller boys of Wanching are awaiting their brothers and friends



with feather hats and shields. Soon the young heroes are dressed and run with small, dancing steps into the village, where the women and children are gathered together, awaiting tensely the arrival of the procession. The warriors stop under a large tree and form a circle, uttering hoarse cries that swell to a mighty song, full of vigour and strength in its long drawn-out notes. An old and completely naked man begins a wild dance ; neither advancing nor retreating, he jumps frantically from left to right, shouting shrilly and swinging his *dao* with movements that appear to challenge a crowd of enemies to fight for life or death.

Then the warriors all go dancing to the house of the chief, but my Wakching friends are anxious to leave. The people in their village wait eagerly for us, and we have still a good two hours to go.

Long before we reach the village we meet the *gaonbura* and the other old men ; they give us an overwhelming greeting, and ply me with innumerable questions about the tour against Pangsha and the winning of the heads. I am glad to be in Wakching again, and to exchange the nomadic life of the last weeks for steady work among my Konyaks.

Excitement stirs in the procession as we climb the stone steps. There are large crowds on the resting-place before the village where the warriors have collected, they have put on their dance-hats and the old men wear the head-hunting ornaments of their youth ; once more they can be proud of them, for has not the white Sahib kept his word and brought a head to Wakching ?

So great is the throng crowding the place, and so loud the whirring of voices, that I almost miss a most important ceremony. The head-trophies have been laid down on a particular spot, and the eldest men of each clan solemnly smash a raw egg over the head. The egg is supposed, by sympathetic magic, to blind the relatives of the dead and render them innocuous. Then the clan elders sprinkle a little rice-beer on the heads, murmuring : May your mother, may your father, may your elder and younger brothers, may they all come and drink our rice-beer, eat our rice ; may they all come and eat our meat. May they all come !' Chinyang translates these hardly distinguish-





Panso dancers with brass discs used as fig-leaves, their blue clothes embroidered with cowrie-shells.





Panso dancers carrying their  
dao in sheathes at the back.



able words and adds his explanation, 'When we captured heads in my youth, we poured rice-beer into the mouth ; today, we have only pieces of bone, so we must pour the rice-beer over them.'

These words are believed to compel the souls of the dead to call their relatives, and thus give the Wakching people the chance of capturing still more heads. Let us hope the magic will not succeed this time, for if the Pangsha men come here, I would be sorry for my Wakching friends ; I do not want to cast any aspersions on their courage, but I feel they do not realize whom they conjure !

I no longer regret having given up my muse's specimens, for the recording of an ancient head-hunting ceremony, so obviously doomed to extinction, is certainly of greater scientific value than a few skulls that can just as well be collected in fifty years. The magic formula at the time of feeding the heads has already excited my surprise, for it is with exactly these words that the head-hunters in Formosa feed the heads of their victims with rice-beer, and thus this Konyak ceremony adds yet another element to the many parallels between the Nagas and the hill-tribes of that distant island.

However, this is hardly the time to dig up ethnological culture-link ; the men and boys of each *morung* are already forming processions and heading for the village with solemn chants. An old man with a piece of the head walks before, the men beating bronze gongs, and the long train of the young warriors and boys follow. I allow the five processions to pass me on the open space of the Balang *morung*. How different from the villagers of Tamlu ! Here, not a man or a boy is missing, and the expression on their faces is deadly earnest. This is no show for the Wakching men, but a religious ceremony that will bring prosperity to the village and fertility to the fields.

The men of each *morung* dance for a while on the great place outside the chief's house, and then they go to their own men's house, where women wait with bamboos full of water and the young warriors start to wash away the 'blood' of their enemies. The older men bind the baskets with the heads to the great log drum, and soon the new warriors begin beating on the huge



wooden trunk with such enthusiasm that the mighty rhythm, announcing the bringing in of a head, resounds over the whole country ; each *morung* takes up the same rhythm, and it is late in the night before the thudding of the drums is silenced. When the boys eventually lay down the strikers and go to dance in their *morung*, their places are taken by the young women and girls, and the drum resounds just as loudly for they beat as arduously as the warriors. Their naked breasts tremble and sway with the movements, ever repeated, of striking the drum ; milk streams from the full breasts of one young mother, but she does not pay much attention to it nor to the sleeping infant on her back.

Night has fallen, and the elders of the Thepong *morung* hang the head in the central hall of the newly built men's house. There can be no better inauguration of a *morung* than this, for although the head of an antelope took the place of a human head at the rebuilding ceremony, the Thepong men are overjoyed at being able to make up the much-regretted deficiency, and the boys dance endlessly in front of the captured head. Over the fires rice-beer is boiling in huge pots, and even the women stroll about in the *morung* which today are open to them, so that they too may join in the singing and dancing. The spirit of the feast takes hold of the whole village, and no one thinks of going to sleep. Who would miss such an event ? Years have gone by, and small boys have grown to manhood, without a head being brought to Wakching, and now the drum-houses resound with the full force of the head-hunting rhythm and the good old days seem to have returned.

Wherever I go I am acclaimed the hero of the day, and even the old women smile at me happily ; for have I not brought a head to the village ? But happiest of all is my old friend Chin-yang ; memories of his youth stir in him, and with tears brimming in his eyes he repeats again and again : 'Today Wakching is as it was in my young days, and in the days of my fathers.'

I would like to stay longer with my friends, for there is much to do at the feast, telling of my adventures, drinking rice-beer, and watching the dancing, but I am tired after the long march, and



soon it is only dimly, and in my sleep, that I hear the distant beat of the drum.

After so many nights in different camps, it is good to be back in my comfortable bungalow. I revel in the thought that I will not be woken at the crack of dawn by the sound of bugles and that I will not have to shave and eat a scanty breakfast in a windy shelter before the rising of the sun. Here I breakfast at my leisure, waiting till the sun has graciously warmed the veranda of my bungalow. The Konyaks themselves rise late, and so breakfast is the only meal when I am seldom disturbed by visitors ; and to it generally belongs the comfort of reading, for which otherwise I find little time. There is no morning paper in Wakching, and so I always fall back on my library—if the few books standing on my window-sill can be so called. Beyond a few anthropological works, the selection is not extensive ; they are sufficient for my many months of solitary breakfasts. The Oxford Bible acts as a kind of book-rest to Goethe's *Faust*, Rupert Brooke's *Poems*, and *The Heart of England* by Edward Thomas. In my boxes lie a few detective novels, but they remain untouched, for before this view of plains and mountains that reaches from the Himalyas to far-distant Burma—here, where good is still good and evil is still evil—who could be interested in the escapades of gangsters ? In Mokokchung the post had brought me George Moore's *Memoirs of my Dead Life*, and skimming over the pages, I feel already that it fits well into my contemplative atmosphere.

But the enjoyment of my first peaceful breakfast is disturbed. Yongem, my faithful water-carrier, appears with something apparently lying heavily on his heart. He comes with a woe-begone face and explains that unfortunately there has been some mistake in the distribution of the heads, and it is just his *morung* that has come to grief. When I divided up the heads yeasterday morning in Tamlu among the boys of the other *morung*, I did not notice that there was no representative of the Oukheang *morung*, and packing the heads in a basket, had sent them ahead of me to Wakching. Thus it was that meeting Yongem on the path, I had no piece of the heads with me, and it had been impossible to hand over the Oukheang *morung's* share before we came into



the village. The piece Yongem then received was not nearly so valuable as if he had received it on the path and brought it in triumphantly himself, because it does not lend sufficient support to the fiction that he himself is the hero. And there were further complications for since he had received it in the village, it is difficult to decide whether he might wear the full dress of a head-hunter, and in particular if he might decorate his basket with a monkey's skull.

As consolation he wanted a second piece that he could use at the rebuilding of his *morung* next year, and since he thinks nothing of my objection that the head will be too old by then, I at last cut him off a small section more—anything to have a little peace.

Life begins to stir in the village. It is taboo to work on the fields today, and, after dancing through most of the night, the young people have slept well into the morning. Now they can be seen sitting on the platforms in front of their houses arranging their ornaments for today's feast.

In front of the Bala *morung* the young boys are helping each other to put on their war-paint. Carefully they mark the two or three parallel lines on the breast and back with chalk. There are many different designs for the face. Here you see a boy with huge, spectacle-like paintings, there a boy with small spots on the cheeks and two lines running over the forehead. Even the huge shields of buffalo-hide are today covered with chalk designs.

The men shave each other's heads, first wetting the hair with a little cold water to soften it for the razor ; they leave a small tuft in the middle, and allow the straight hair to fall forward over the forehead. In front of another *morung* the young people are busy grinding indigo leaves and painting their belts of white, pliable bark with the green juice. It is only when it is cooked that indigo turns blue ; the cold crushed leaves produce a green colouring. Strangely enough, there is no word for green in the Konyak language. Red and blue are the only colours used in weaving ; and in painting the men's houses, only red, black, and white ; you always mention whether a flower is red or blue or yellow, but the greenness of the rest of Nature is taken for granted, and there is no word to describe it ; the Naga would never



think it necessary to mention that he went through the 'green' forest.

The joyous spirit has also taken hold of the women, and although they will only be spectators of the day's dance, they do their best to make themselves beautiful. Most of the shyness of the girls has vanished, and they laugh at me, and make the gestures of cutting off a head.

Several of the boys are already dressed up and now they begin to dance in groups of four or five through the village, showing off their beautiful attire. They run through the narrow streets in single file, spreading out on the open spaces to dance with small jumps and rocking movements on the spot, with the rhythmical swinging of shields from the side over the chest and the simultaneous raising of *dao*.

The sun stands high in the sky, when the men of the Thepong form a procession and walk solemnly to the former house of the chief. This house has long fallen into decay, for the Ang Chinkak, the feckless descendant of a more powerful father, is without any influence and lives in another house ; but this is where the ceremonies at the bringing in of the head used to be held, and the men of Wakching will always consider this the ceremonial site. Yesterday they have cleared it of all the overgrowing jungle, and today its prestige is once more established.

Shankok, the so-called captor of the head, walks in front of the procession of young warriors, carrying fully-leaved bamboos. It is as though a whole grove is moving, as though 'Birnam wood comes towards Dunsinane.' Behind come the old men and the eldest man of Shankok's clan carrying the head.

A small monolith stands on the ceremonial site ; the young warriors quickly and securely bind their bamboos to this stone, and the head is laid in the centre, while Yonglong, a descendant of the village-founder, but otherwise an inconspicuous man, begins the ritual of the ceremony. According to ancient custom, the tongue and ears should be cut from the head and buried under the stone ; there are neither tongue nor ears on the heads I have brought to Wakching, but Yonglong generously covers over this deficiency, and continues the ritual with the requisites in hand.



Once more the soul of the dead man is bidden to call the souls of all his relations so that they too may fall victims to the Wakching men. Now Yonglong is killing a small chicken and sprinkling the head and the stone with its blood ; the intestines show whether the omens are favourable to the future of the Thepong *morung*.

The young people end the ceremony with a slow round dance, as the procession of another *morung* arrives, and Yonglong must once more repeat his part of the ceremony.

It is not until late in the afternoon that the great head-hunting dance begins, when every member of the *morung*, from the oldest men to the six-year-old boys, takes part. The men between forty and fifty, who have known the old days, and have captured heads in their youth, proudly put on their head-dresses with the curved horns, carved from the horns of buffaloes. Tassels of long human hair wave from the tips, and in between are fastened masses of different ornaments. Here is plenty of scope for individuality ; one man has fixed two huge hornbill beaks between his horns ; another wears a white-painted monkey skull. Shankok stands out from all the other young men of the village. There is none who can compare with the richness of the ornaments he has inherited from the old Shouba. Since the death of his father they have lain useless in the great store-baskets, for until now Shankok had been without the right to the head-hunter's dress. But, today he stands in all his long-cherished glory ; six boars' tusks hang round his neck, shell discs cover his ears, and a fortune of yellow stone necklaces, the so-called 'spirit money', hangs on his chest. His hat is covered with boars' tusks and with the most beautiful of hornbill feathers.

Even the smallest boys, as yet too young to live in the *morung*, are all dressed up in hats and feathers, and most of them enthusiastically swing *dao* much too large for them.

Slowly the dancers pace round the stone-circle in front of their *morung*, but they are so many that the younger boys form two concentric circles within that of the older men. The song consists of two parts : the gruff voices of the older men sing a phrase in measured tones, and the shrill voices of the boys join in with





The great head-hunting dance at Wakching.

A war-dance in the jungle before the warriors approach the village—a forest of spears and daos in their raised hands.







Konyaks of Punkhung throwing spears during a sham fight.

A phase in the head-hunting dance of the Punkhung men.





hearty shouts. Though these alternate chants follow definite formulae the words are more or less improvised. Side by side with hymns of glory to Wakching and her warriors occur such phrases as 'Before we captured many heads, now we may not cut them off ourselves.'

The Thepong people leave their own *morung*, and move in turn to the Bala, Balang, Ang-ban and Oukheang, dancing before admiring crowds of girls and women. Each of the other *morung* forms its own procession, dancing independently through the village. It is a gay, colourful, and fantastic mixture of quivering, dazzling white feathers, swaying red goat's hair, and flashing *dao*.

In the old days, after a successful fight, things must have been much like this, and Chinyang's happiness at seeing once more the Wakching of his youth is echoed in me. It is a joy to see the eagerness and enthusiasm with which he instructs the youngsters and the care with which he prompts them with the words of the songs, or shows the right dance-steps to a small boy. It has long been a source of worry to the old men, that the younger generation was growing up without the right to the old ceremonial dress of their fathers. Now the danger is banished for some time, for today even the six-year-old boys taking part in the head-hunting dance acquire the right to wear the head-hunting dress. There are tears in many eyes as the old men watched the roaring and dancing crowds, reviving the happy memories of their own youth ; the days of head-hunting seem to have returned, be it only for one glorious month.

I am happy too, for helping the younger generation to acquire the dress of their fathers is but small return for all the helpfulness of my Wakching friends.

Today's ceremonies by no means end the head-hunting feast. The trophies must be hung in carrying-baskets adorned with plam-leaves on the ficus tree outside each *morung*, 'there to dry and rot,' and the final ceremonies will not be held until the fifteenth day of the coming lunar month, when the skull will be once more fed, and finally stored in the ancestral houses.

The weeks before this final feast are full of preparations. In threes and fours the young men visit the neighbouring villages ;



they must barter pigs for the forthcoming feast, and those who have not inherited their ceremonial dress from their fathers must make haste either to buy or to prepare the necessary ornaments. Much that belongs to the dress of a man of head-hunting rank is not manufactured in Wakching, and the villages in the east, who sell plaited dance-hats with goat's hair plumes, ceremonial spears and *dao* handles, and a special kind of dance-basket experience a period of roaring trade.

But money must be found for these transactions, and the Wakching people carry their *pan* leaves and plaited mats to the markets of the plains.

Thus the bringing in of a head not only furthers in a magical way the fertility of the village, but also in a more concrete manner acts as an incentive to trade and production. In fact, the prohibition of head-hunting deprives the Nagas, not only of an exciting sport, but also of a stimulant to economic effort. In the life of primitive tribes every institution is linked so closely with the whole social structure that any enforced infringement has more far-reaching consequences than it is possible to foresee without intimate knowledge of the whole social and economic organism.

The feasts in Wakching are not the only head-hunting ceremonies I witness. Messengers from the other Konyak villages in administered territory have besieged my bungalow for days with petitions for pieces of the precious heads, but I do not want to hand over their shares at once, for I know that they will all hurry home to their villages and all hold their ceremonies at the same time. A tour of the villages in the east appeals to me much more ; then I can bring the trophies personally, and learn to know the differences between the various celebrations. This is not at all to the taste of the heroes, and they sulk on the veranda of my bungalow. In their own minds they see themselves already running home with the heads, when the whole village would welcome them as heroes, and now no amount of persuasion or explanations as to why they must have the head at once can change the Sahib's mind.

That I want to keep one of the trophies is incomprehensible



to Shankok ; he has always heard that the white men don't hunt heads.

'Why don't you give us this head too ? It would be so useful to us here in Wakching, and you don't need it.'

'Look Shankok, I want to take this head home myself ; I have divided all the others up, but this one I want.'

'What will you do with the head at home ? You don't celebrate any feasts with heads.'

'For ceremonies such as yours, of course I don't need it. But think, what would the girls of my village say if I returned after a whole year in a foreign land without a head ? They would not believe I had ever marched against Pangsha, and they would not consider me a real man.'

This explanation Shankok understands. 'Well, if you need the head for that reason, then I won't take it away from you.' And laughingly he added, 'Perhaps you will even find a wife—when you go home with Pangsha's head.' He never understood why I was not married.

Once more I am in Longkhai. The light of the flickering fire plays on brown figures, crowded round the hearth, but does not illuminate the whole of the huge hall. Only the contours of the great wooden throne are recognizable in the gloom ; but the throne is empty ; the night is cool, and Mauwang sits with us near the fire, where a pot of red rice steams on three stones. Mauwang's half-brother lifts the pot off the fire, and with a long bamboo ladle heaps the rice on to the banana leaves, one set between every two men ; and then distributes the thick taro mash. Conversation ceases. Squatting back on their heels, the men shove huge balls of rice dipped in taro into their mouths. Only Mauwang has a leaf to himself, for he belongs to the Great Ang clan and must not stain the purity of his rank by eating with other men—no, not even with his half-brother. In a few minutes the huge heaps have disappeared and the men pour water over their hands and begin to prepare *pan* leaves with chalk and aromatic bark, ready for chewing.

Now is the time to speak, and with serious faces the men listen



to my account of the march against Pangsha, the fight, and the capture of the head trophies. None of them has ever seen that country, but wild rumours of slave-raids and human sacrifice have sometimes reached their ears, and now, when they hear of the children abducted from their parents, they do not spare expressions of indignation at the inhumanity of the evil men beyond the mountains. However far you wander, even if it be to the ends of the earth, people will always consider themselves the personification of all virtue, and attribute to their neighbours all that they consider bad or despicable. The slave-raider horrifies the head-hunter just as much as the head-hunter horrifies his more peaceful neighbours.

Suddenly comes the sound of music. What is that song out there in the night ? Stepping into the open, I see the young men of the village approaching with measured steps. The rising moon glitters on the broad blades of the *dao*, and the hornbill feathers on the hats shine white in her light. The boys are forming a circle on the place in front of the chief's house ; already the song is rising, knees bend in rhythm, and the ceremonial dance begins, I am no longer alone watching, for the chief and the men of his house stand near me, and in a moment a crowd of women and girls emerge from the darkness. Why are they all looking so expectantly at me ? A young man leaves the circle of dancers—he is coming towards me.

‘Friend, you must dance too,’ he urges me ; ‘you have brought us the head. We are singing of the defeat of your enemies. We all want you to dance with us !’

It is quite a natural thought, for I am considered the real head-hunter, and if I refuse to dance I will shake the people's confidence in me ; the confidence I need so much. Already an old woman is plucking at my sleeve and showing me with gestures that I should join the dance.

In the hall of the chief's house I remember having seen a great *dao*, tufted with red and black goat's hair ; I fetch it from the wall, for if I am to dance, I must swing the weapon due to my assumed rank as head-hunter, and so armed I slip into the rank of the dancers ; not one of the boys shows that there is any-



thing unusual about this new performer, and they continue the dance without a pause ; only through the crowd of women passes an astonished murmur.

The dance is not difficult. A simple sequence of steps, endlessly repeated, but the dancers bend their knees on every beat and raise their heavy *dao* in their right hands. After a short time my knees and arms ache, but the strong rhythm of the song irresistibly compels me to continue.

The girls have prepared small parcels of *pan* leaves to chew, and they press them into the hands of their friends as they dance. I too find a parcel being pressed into my hand, and looking round I find that the principal wife of Mauwang has shown me a sign of favour by offering me betel. Whether for good or evil, I must put it into my mouth. It has a sharp, aromatic taste, not altogether unpleasant, reminding me faintly of pine needles, but the astonishing thing is how strongly it stimulates the flow of saliva. In a few minutes I must follow the example of the other dancers, spitting again and again.

Is it the betel which holds in abeyance the tiredness and aching of arms and knees, or is it the suggested strength and endurance of the rhythm ? Although the words are strange, I do my best to join in the melody of the song that swings the dance and conjures up visions of fights and heroes. Voices carry far into the night, and the rhythm that they bear resounds in the darkness, gripping the singers and blending them one and all, till they finally merge in the unity of the dance. This rhythm is more than art, it is the voice of man's primeval instinct, the revelation of the all-embracing rhythm of growth and decay, of love, battle, and death. The pallid skulls watching the dance from the front of the *morung* are also symbols of this harmonious alternation of death and life, life and death ; brought home in triumph from countless raids, they are in death magically linked with the happiness and prosperity of the village.

It is only man who seems suddenly possessed by this all-overpowering rhythm ? Are not the white clouds, sweeping over the moon's face before a mighty wind, is not this play of light and shade in the heavens, a part of this same rhythm ? Song and dance



have become one, and they are one, too, with the rustle of the dark tops of the palms, the wild flaming fire, and the distant outlines of the mountain peaks.

The ranks of the dancers break at last ; brandishing their *dao* and uttering shrill war-cries, they rush round the place, ending with a long-drawn howl. I am exhausted and suddenly so dizzy that I have to lean against a house-post. Now that the tension is past, I look at my watch. We have danced more than two hours without stopping. I am suddenly glad that my bed is not so very far away.

From Longkhai I go to Hungphoi, Wangla, and Oting, and wherever I arrive with the pieces of the Pangsha heads, there is occasion for elaborate ceremonies.

During the feasts it is not always easy to distinguish between the traditional songs from ancestral times and the many improvisations. My notebooks are full of fragments, many almost impossible to understand. Often even the Konyaks themselves do not know the exact meaning of the individual words, for the ancient language of songs is very different from the language in everyday use. Yet it is no dead idiom preserved only in traditional formulas, for today the young men and women still compose new songs in the same stereotyped phrases, though they are unable to give a word-for-word translation. In Hungphoi I manage laboriously to write down one complete song, thinking that I have captured on paper another part of the old head-hunting ritual. However, with the help of Chingai's word-for-word translation into Assamese, I learn that it is only a song about myself and runs :

The Sahib came as the wind, as the storm is he over our land ; he brings heads to us all, all men give him thanks. Here stay the heads ; from Pangsha are the slaughtered enemies.'



## LOVE AND POETRY

To record ceremonies and ritual, to discover the basic elements of a tribe's social structure, and to learn of myths and religious beliefs, is easy compared to the task of gaining an insight into the psychological and emotional relations between individuals and of understanding a people's attitude to fundamental human problems. At first a stranger among a primitive tribe is so much the centre of interest and colours by the very attention he attracts every situation to such an extent, that he has little chance of observing the people's normal reactions to events belonging to their own sphere of life. Unless he is particularly unlucky or the village where he stays has had bad experiences with outsiders, he will soon find men prepared to tell him a good deal about their work and their possessions, about customs, rites and festivals and perhaps also about the traditions and history of their village or tribe. But the subjects touching the individual man and woman most intimately, those joys, hopes and disappointments which affect the most primitive no less than the most civilized man, they are not likely to discuss with a stranger.

This was exactly what happened in Wakching. The *gaonbura* were only too pleased to tell me of their customs—all rather better than in other villages—the glorious history of Wakching, and the exploits of her warriors in former days, the system of alliances by which even today they receive substantial tributes from smaller villages, and above all their agricultural work, a subject of always engrossing interest. But several months passed, before the one or other man began to speak of the things that lay nearest his heart. But now that I have brought the Pangsha heads the ice is broken, and I feel that I am gradually getting to know the Konyaks.

Of all the men of Wakching, I am fondest of Shankok, the son of the late Shouba. Often I go with him to the fields or



to hunt for green pigeons in the palm-groves, and many an evening he will sit for hours on my veranda talking of the events of the day and our own personal experiences and reactions. I could not hope to find a more ideal companion ! Shankok is never sulky or morose, he is always eager to tell me of anything I want to know, or to show me how things are done and why, and I am quite at home in his house, walking in and out at any hour of the day, almost as though it were my own.

Last year, Shouba, Shankok's father, died. He was the richest man in the village, and left a huge fortune, which Shankok, as his eldest son, inherited. His two hundred and fifty fields lie strewn over the Wakching land, and this year, he tells me, his wealth of rice and millet fills four granaries. Shankok is popular for there is always a place at his hearth for the hungry, and during the great feasts his house is full from morning to night.

However, even among the Konyaks wealth carries its burden, and in these first days of spring, Shankok, despite all his riches, is not happy. His heart aches for his love Shikna, and his spirit revolts against a fate, which would be considered cruel in any society.

When Shankok was still a boy, his father had married him to Shonga, the daughter of a rich man of the Bala *morung*. The girl was already full-grown at the time, and her father had hesitated to give her in marriage to so young a boy ; but the old Shouba had overridden his objections, promising that if the marriage broke up, Shonga should receive heavy compensation.

The boy Shankok was not greatly interested in this marriage, for according to Konyak custom Shonga stayed in the house of her parents as long as she had no child. She was a pretty girl, and had no lack of lovers ; no doubt it mattered little to her that so many years must elapse before the consummation of her marriage. In time she bore a son, and should have moved to her husband's house, but the child died, and she remained with her parents, continuing her love-affair with one of the boys of the Thepong *morung*. About eight years ago she bore yet another child, this time a girl, and then went to live in Shouba's house, under the same roof as Shankok.



By this time Shankok had grown to manhood, and thus nothing stood in the way of his married life, except that he just was not interested in his wife ; he could not help it if she lived in the same house, for there his father was master, but to lie with her was different ; no one could force him to do that. He simply ignored her, looking straight through her as though she had no more substance than the air around her, and never addressed her with so much as a word.

The passing of the years saw no slackening in Shankok's resolve. He did not love Shonga, he could not bring himself to be her husband, and therefore he continued to lead the gay and charming life of a bachelor in Wakching. This suited him exactly, for Shankok himself was gay and charming, and why should he spoil the best years of his youth ? He did not forswear love because he had a wife ten years older than himself ; there were plenty of pretty girls in Wakching, only too happy to yield to his persuasions, and the years that have passed since his growing up have been full of light-hearted frivolity and light-hearted affection.

When the old Shouba died last year, the position changed but little. Shankok is now head of the house, and he could divorce Shonga if he wished, but his mother still creates difficulties ; she is a dignified and highly energetic lady, and opposes such a drastic measure ; and Shankok himself shuns the scandal and the payment of the colossal fine.

Even now he takes no notice of Shonga. He does not sleep in his own house, but as night falls he meets his love and together they go to the granaries on the outskirts of the village. His love is called Shikna, and ever since I came to Wakching their love has blossomed like the rice in the fields, and the nights have been full of joy and happiness. Their love is an open secret, but during the day they are never seen together, and if by chance they meet, hardly a word passes between them ; but every evening Shankok goes to the house of the Balang girls, where Shikna sings and makes merry with her friends, and together they slip away, disappearing among the shadows of a granary. In former years, Shankok would take his loves to his own granaries, but



now he has given that up, and goes where he is less likely to be recognized, for it once happened that his wife Shonga, followed him, and tore him from his sweet dreams with a flood of insults ; on that occasion he had not been lazy in retaliating and had continued the night with his love, but he is careful that no such unwelcome disturbance should recur.

Alas ! the weeks of love for Shankok and Shikna are numbered, for Shikna is expecting a child, and as soon as it is born she will have to move into the house of her husband, and will be lost to Shankok.

'It is always so,' complains Shankok sadly. 'Whenever I love a girl she immediately becomes pregnant. There are already two of my children growing up in the houses of other men, but the child in my house, the small daughter of my wife, is not mine.'

Every man in the village knows who the real father is, but it is Shankok who is considered her lawful father ; she belongs to his clan and he must look after her.

But much more tormenting than the thought of his children growing up as those of other men—after all, quite a common occurrence among the Konyaks—is the loss of his beloved Shikna. He assures me that he will never love another girl as he loves Shikna. For her sake he gave up an affair with Henlong, whom I think the most beautiful girl in the whole village ; true, he had tried to carry on both affairs at once, but before long Henlong noticed his unfaithfulness, and bade him choose between her and Shikna. He chose Shikna ; and with her he has been happy—happier than he could have imagined ; but now she was going to have a child and would be lost to him.

There was only one way out of the situation. He would have to divorce his wife, richly compensating her family for the insult ; he would have to pay Shikna's husband a large enough fine to compensate him for the bride-price he had paid and for the expenses incurred at the wedding. In addition, he would have to pull down his house and build it anew, for it is considered wrong to bring a second wife to the house where the first has lived.

But these are not the only obstacles. His mother tells him she will not live under the same roof as a new wife and his



relations will certainly reproach him for squandering the family fortune on his love. To me a separation of his purely nominal marriage seems the only possible course, and I try again and again to win him over to the idea of divorce. I remind him that there are many other Wakching men separated from their wives, and even his own father Shouba only married his mother after divorcing his first wife.

Shankok is bound by the fetters of his own riches ; the relatives of his wife demand an unheard-of fine, and the men of the village council, whose task it is to pass judgement in all such cases, are trying to line their pockets at his expense.

'I myself don't know what to do—sometimes I think so, and then I think so. It tears me in both directions !'

'In your place I would not be afraid of the opinion of others. Look at Metlou—he has already divorced two wives ; and think of your fathers—they went to fight, and they were not afraid. Come, Shankok, you should not be frightened either.'

'Yes, to go to war—to fight, even to die, that does not frighten me. But all these negotiations ! Today discussions, tomorrow discussions, day after day shouting and quarrelling in my own house—that I am afraid of.'

Shankok's is not a fighting nature, at heart he is too sensitive ; and the Wakching people feel this too, for when I talk to the old men of the possibility of Shankok's divorce, they remark, and perhaps not unjustly : 'Shankok is no "he-man" or he would have divorced his wife long ago, and paid the fine to her relations'.

Neither is it avarice that makes Shankok shun the cost of the proceedings—no one can be more generous—but he thinks of his four younger brothers, all dependent on him, and hesitates to encroach on their inheritance. He is the first-born, and the sole heir to old Shouba's land, but when his brothers marry and build their own houses he must give them enough land for their needs.

In spite of all these troubles, Shankok retains his good humour, and I am often astounded how quickly a mood of deep depression can change and how he will once more laugh heartily over some joke.



His love for Shikna and his sorrow at losing her do not in any way dim Shankok's appreciation of the charms of other pretty girls, and when we go together to Chingtang for the celebrations of the Ou-ling-bu, when the leafless branches of the high trees are covered with white blossoms, I notice that it is not long before he picks one from the circle of dancers. I find her very pretty too, with a narrow, unusual face, and Shankok praises her smallness, which is considered beautiful among Konyaks.

He shows me the room in the chief's house where the girls sleep, each in her own tiny compartment, each on her own small bench, which looks narrow even for one, but which, Shankok assures me, is wide enough for two. Completely enclosed, these small compartments give on to a corridor, but the entrance is so narrow that the girls can easily shut it to unwanted visitors. Yet it does sometimes happen that under the cloak of night strange boys slip in and dally a while with by no means reluctant partners. If no word passes and the dark throws no betraying shadow, they leave unrecognized, and a girl of Chingtang may thus find herself with child, unaware of the father's identity. In such a case, Shankok tells me, a clever girl will entice a rich youth into her chamber, but instead of letting him go in secrecy, will hold him tightly, screaming at the top of her voice, so that all the members of the Ang family come to see what is happening. The sly maid then accuses the unfortunate lover, caught like Ares in the net of Hephaestos, to be the father of her unborn child; circumstances speak all too plainly, and there is nothing left for him to do but marry the girl or pay a fat fine.

The next morning, Shankok tells me with great pride how he has really conquered the little one with the merry eyes, and how he has exercised his right as member of a great and strong village to throw out a Chingtang boy, also courting the favours of his love. The Chingtang people, who in former times enjoyed the protection of Wakching, even today recognize the overlordship of the Thepong *morung*, and pay them considerable tribute. To enjoy the favours of the girls of Chingtang is one of the privileges accorded to Thepong men, and though the girls are not compelled to comply, they are seldom hard-hearted enough



to allow the boys, who have come all the long way from Wakching, to go home uncomforted.

Shankok, does not consider his adventure in Chingtang in any way unfaithfulness to Shikna ; to sleep with a pretty girl of a neighbouring village at the Spring Festival is the most natural thing in the world, and has little to do with his love for Shikna.

Several weeks later Shankok appears in the evening, his face full of despair. I understand at once what has happend : Shikna has borne her child, and is already in the house of her legitimate husband. They met under the moon, the night before last, but yesterday when he went to the Balang girls' dormitory he heard the other girls talking among themselves of the birth of Shikna's child ; sad and ashamed, he turned away, without even asking whether it was a boy or a girl.

'Then I went to the *morung*, but no sleep came the whole night. It hurts, if we have to separate so suddenly. We were so long together. Like brothers, we helped each other. Like father and child we were together. This morning I went with my *morung* friends to the fields. They did not yet know of the coming of Shikna's child, but they all asked me what was the matter. "What is the matter with Shankok ?" they said. "He doesn't talk, no word comes out of his mouth ; are you ill, Shankok ?" So they all asked me, but I was ashamed to tell them. The whole day I can think of nothing else. Alone, how shall I go to sleep in the *morung* ?'

When I ask him if he and Shikna might ever meet again, he replies apathetically that even if they meet by day, they will be too shy to speak to each other, and now they can no longer go together at night. Of course, he says, it is possible to meet even a 'woman in her husband's house,' in some far-away granary, but such fleeting moments are not the real thing, and there is always the danger of being pounced on by the husband or his friends.

I try to cheer Shankok, and a few days later I suggest that he should seek among the girls in Wakching for another love ; but he shows very little interest. 'A new girl cannot be as Shikna ; with no other girl could I get on so well. What I said



entered her head, and her words easily entered my head ; what shall I talk of with a new girl ? It can never be as with Shikna.'

Some time ago I happened to take photograph of Shikna, and I give a copy to Shankok ; he fixes it to a kind of wooden back, so that he can always carry it with him and keep it in his bag.

Gradually, however, the solitary life begins to pall, and in spite of his first scruples Shankok sets about looking for a new girl. But it is not so easy, for all his old acquaintances have married long ago, and the younger girls, who have not grown up with him, or who have only known him as their elder sisters' friend are afraid to trust a married man. So he spends long, boring nights alone in the *morung*, and he laughingly remarks that this is turning his face quite 'brown and ugly'. Only when you sleep with a girl, Shankok says, does it remain beautiful and reddish.

Considering the sexual freedom among the unmarried and even the young married couples, you would think that no Konyak should ever be sex-starved or suffer from repressions resulting from enforced continence. Yet erotic dreams—so often ascribed to sexual frustration—seem to be fairly frequent, and Shankok tells me that he often dreams of making love not only to the girls of the other *morung* (who are his legitimate partners for flirtations and marriage), but also to girls of his own *morung*, and clan, and even his own sisters. He thought it himself rather odd that sometimes he dreamt of sleeping with elderly women and, as he added with a wry smile, even with his much despised own wife, whom in reality he has never touched. A psychoanalyst would find an interesting field among the Konyaks, and I would not be surprised if research in a society so different from those of Europe would lead to unexpected results.

We would, of course, be quite wrong to assume that because the Konyaks set no value on virginity and are indifferent to the amorous adventures of childless married women, their society lacks restrictions in the sexual sphere. Far from being promiscuous, the Konyak has his own etiquette in regard to matters of sex. I often noticed that within the domestic circle even the faintest allusion to sex causes a man embarrassment, and my most intimate friends shut up whenever I forget this prejudice



and broach the tabooed subject in their houses. But alone or in other company they will without the slightest hesitation speak and joke about the most intimate matters. Soon I realized that a man avoids references to anything connected with sex only in front of women of his own exogamous unit, and particularly before his own mother or sisters. It is also considered tactless to talk to a man about the love-affairs of girls of his own clan, but this taboo is less strict and when there is a scandal or a break of the rules of exogamy the elders may in the deliberations of the village-tribunal have to discuss the misconduct of girls of their own group.

Between men and women of intermarrying clans or *morung*, there prevails on the other hand the fullest freedom to "talk sex" and jokes with which the young people amuse each other at the nightly gatherings in the girls' clubs are often exceedingly risky and crude. Thus we find that the Konyak—like many a man of more civilized lands—adjusts his conversation to his company, at times indulging in the most ribald talk and at times covering sex with prudish silence.

For a young Konyak the girls of his village fall within two classes : potential mates with whom he may flirt and joke, and the girls of his own *morung* or *morung* group, whom he has to treat like sisters and in whose presence he is not even to mention the word love. You would think that the daily contact with a large number of attractive young girls, ever present in the village and yet placed out of reach by the strongest of taboos, would give rise to many a secret and hopeless romance. Shankok's dreams of adventures with such 'forbidden' girls are perhaps the unconscious reaction to this system, and there can be no doubt that incest, although one of the most serious social crimes, is not without romantic associations. The incestuous love of a brother and sister—standing here perhaps for any couple thwarted in love by the rules of exogamy—is the subject of a short, terse song :

Yinglong and Liwang  
Dearly loved each other,  
Loving they lay together,



Red as the leaf of the *ou-bou* tree,  
 Flamed love and desire  
 On the paths to the village,  
 The two lit fires,  
 Skywards, upwards curling,  
 The smoke of the fires united,  
 And mingled, never to part.

In this poem the love of Yinglong and her brother Liwang is not condemned but idealized. Happy fulfilment of so unorthodox a passion was impossible and the lovers were doomed. But before they died, they lit fires on two paths leading in opposite directions from Wakching, and the smoke rising in two columns met and mingled over the village, and in it the lovers were for ever united.

Poems and song give us often a clearer insight into a people's soul than the most lengthy discussions, and in the poetry of the Konyaks lie certainly important clues to their philosophy of life. But the recording and translation of their innumerable songs meets with peculiar difficulties. Konyak, as other languages of the Tibeto-Burman group, has a complicated tonal system. No outsider has ever learnt any of the many Konyak dialects, and even Nagas of neighbouring tribes comment on the great difference between these idioms and their own languages : indeed I have rarely met a non-Konyak Naga who could converse in Konyak, and after a year's stay in a Konyak village my Lhota servants had picked up hardly a dozen Konyak phrases. Though I recorded the outline of a grammar and a vocabulary of the dialect spoken in Wakching as well as a great number of texts, my knowledge of the language remained very superficial and throughout my work I conversed in Naga-Assamese, the *lingua franca* of the Naga Hills. It was also in this language that the texts of songs were translated to me, and I have little doubt that the translations leave much to be desired. In many cases it was impossible to ascertain the exact meaning of a word or a phrase, and this was not only due to the limitations of Naga-Assamese, but also to the fact that the poetical language of the Konyaks is very different from the idiom



in daily use. And just as the spoken language varies from village to village so greatly that within a radius of ten miles one may find three distinct dialects, so too differ the poetical idioms not only of villages, but even of individual *morung*. Thus many songs are fully understandable only to a limited circle and even the singers can often not explain the meaning of each word. 'This is the way we sing', they say, 'but in speaking we never use these words, and we cannot tell exactly what they mean.'

Yet songs are the principal and recognized medium through which the individual as well as the group express their most intense emotions. At an early age Konyak boys and girls receive their first training in singing ; they are taught not so much by their parents, but by the older members of their *morung*. All the great feasts are occasions for singing, and every night the boys visit the girls in their dormitories, and there they spend hours in singing and friendly talk. Small boys of eight or ten already join in these visits, but they return later in the evening to their own *morung*, while the older boys stay on in the girls' dormitory or seek the secrecy of a granary on the outskirts of the village where they can be alone with their loves. And when at dusk young people return from work on the fields they assemble on the raised platforms specially built for this purpose at all the entrances to the village : boys and girls, leaning affectionately against each other, sing alternative songs, which though following traditional lines and couched in archaic poetical language, are often spontaneous compositions. Boys and girls sing in turn, each vying with the other in appropriate responses and their verses, sometimes sentimental, sometimes taunting, always play on the inexhaustible theme of love. Many songs are straightforward descriptions of the usual occurrences in the Konyak's daily life, and make to us, who are denied the full appreciation of their poetical language, no very great appeal. Such a song is the following :

To the village, to the girl's house,  
To our girl friends, we go.  
Of food we don't think,



Of drink we don't think ;  
 For love alone we have come ;  
 Walking we come,  
 Walking we go.

This song needs no explanation ; the boys of the *morung* which lies usually near one of the village gates, go through the village to a dormitory of girls belonging to another *morung*-group. Usually they are welcome, but sometimes they find the hospitable girls entertaining young men of another village. Such is the situation depicted in the following song :

Our girl friends  
 The red berries of the *ben* tree  
 Many berries on the branches.  
 Porcupine and hedgehog,  
 Come to eat the berries.  
 From the Dikhu valley, from the far-off land,  
 Small hornbills come,  
 Great hornbills come,  
 High in the tree-tops they eat the berries.  
 We, boys of our *morung*  
 We, like the *yuki* birds,  
 When we come all fruits are eaten,  
 Stripped are the branches,  
 On the naked branches  
 We cry and weep.

Here the red berries are a symbol for the girls, and porcupine and hedgehog, animals difficult to tackle, as well as the hornbills who come from across the Dikhu, a river near Wakching, represent the visitors who have monopolized all the girls of the dormitory ; the boys compare themselves to *yuki* birds, small birds of about the size of a minah, which cannot stand up to the more powerful hornbills.

Once the boys are in the dormitory and sit in the bamboo benches by a pleasant fire, their arms round the waists of their



girl friends, the songs become more direct. Here they address themselves to the girls whom they court :

Girls of the other *morung*,  
O, our friends,  
In your mother's hand  
Money and jewels ;  
In your husband's hand  
Little or nothing.  
Once you have borne  
Two or three children  
Gone is the beauty of your body.  
Love your friends,  
Love the friends of your youth.

And a girl may answer :

When you are with me,  
Your tears flow,  
When you are with your wife,  
You smile and laugh.  
Why, leaving your wife,  
Have you come to me ?  
Her you love more  
Than the friends of your youth.

In the first of these songs the boys urge their girl friends to be faithful to the lovers of their youth ; the 'money and jewels in the mother's hand' signify the happy life under the parental roof and this is contrasted with the drudgery in the husband's house. Konyak girls are proud of their beautiful bodies, and the allusion to the fading of their beauty after the birth of two or three children is designed to make married life appear even less desirable. The evident fact that just the 'love of their friends' is likely to bring on pregnancy and the dreaded parting from the youths' company is conveniently overlooked.

But many of the boys who paint so dull a picture of married



life are themselves married, though they may still go their own way, and in the second of the songs a girl teases her love for his alleged attachment to his wife. The first four lines may be interpreted in two ways ; the 'tears' and the 'laughter' may simply be ironical over-statements of the greater happiness the boy is supposed to find in his wife's company, or they may mean, 'when you are with me you cry for my love, but when you are with your wife you make fun of me.'

Another type of song hummed by the boys as they sit round the fires in their *morung* and play on their single-stringed bamboo fiddles, or return with the girls from the fields, are those which comment on everyday life. Here a boy contrasts his own accustomed bed in the *morung* with the unfamiliar sleeping place for which he has to search when visiting another village :

At night time,  
At sleeping time,  
From the *morung* calls my bed.  
Searching, searching,  
A sleeping place,  
For a bed I have to search.

A curious gap in the range of Konyak songs is the absence of working chants. Nagas of most other tribes sing at work on the fields or when carrying loads, and in the Angami country at planting time the work songs of boys and girls resound from all the rice-terraces and fill the valleys from morning to evening. The Konyaks, on the other hand, do not sing at work : when they drag in a huge house-pole it is to rhythmic yells and shouts and young people weeding the hill-crops will break into cascades of laughter and shrieks but never into song.

Very different from songs sung by individuals or small groups of boys or girls in the intimate atmosphere of a peaceful evening in men's house or girls' dormitory, are the dance-songs chanted by the full complement of a *morung* from the youngest boy to the oldest warrior who can still swing a *dao* and bend his knees in the rhythm of the festive round dance. Pride in one's own





Wakching boy  
painting each  
other's bodies in  
preparation for  
a dance.



Intoxicated dan-  
cers of Wakching  
shouting a chant





Konyak boys telling the author texts of songs.

Shankok encasing his brother's leg  
in a cane legging.





*morung* is expressed in numerous songs praising the might and prowess of its mythical or historical founders.

Thus the men of the Oukheang *morung* of Wakching, whose claim that their *morung* is the oldest in the village seems not without foundation, sing the praise of the sons of Yana and Shayong, their legendary ancestors :

O, since earth, water and rocks existed,  
We are the sons of Young-wem-ou-niu.  
O, may the boys be healthy and strong  
May they live together united.

O, man and tiger, the sons of brothers  
They ate of the jungle pig's flesh.

O, as so many stars,  
As the sun rises,  
The sun in the sky,  
O, Yana and Shayong's sons  
So high are they in the sky.

O, like the high trees  
Like the virgin forest,  
O, Yana and Shayong's sons,  
Great are they on the earth.

O, like the lightning  
Flashing through the darkness  
O, where the waters meet,  
At Dzei-lao stream  
Like the roll of thunder.

O, like a gong resounding  
So walked Yana and Shayong's sons.

O, Yana and Shayong's sons,  
Such is their greatness and might ;



O, all their off-spring  
Filled the whole village.

In this song we find a trait typical of most Konyak poetry : tales are not described but only alluded to ; the song is not designed to inform the listeners, but to recall certain facts, well known to all, and thus to create a particular atmosphere, here one of pride in the greatness of the ancestors and *morung*-founders. To those unfamiliar with the ancient traditions such a song is necessarily ununderstandable, while to the Konyak it is pregnant with meaning. The first two lines refer to the mythical origin of the Konyak tribe, whose ancestors were born of the giant bird Yong-wem-ou-niu, while the next two lines are an invocation for the prosperity of the *morung* boys and the harmony of their community life. The fifth and sixth lines again lead us into the realm of legend and recall in a minimum of words the following story :

In the old times man and tiger were friends and kinsmen : the man had one field and the tiger another. Once wild pigs damaged the tiger's crops and so the two chased and killed one of the marauders. When they had cut up the pig, the man began cooking the meat, but while he cooked the pork for himself, he prepared a dish of bitter roots for the tiger. The tiger wondered at the taste and when the man turned to blow his nose he took a piece of the man's food and found it very tasty. In anger he turned on the man : 'Why do you eat good meat when you give me only horrible bitter food !' he said. At his friend's anger, the man ran away and when the tiger chased him he sought refuge in a hole in the ground. Only the end of his cane-belt remained sticking out. So the tiger pulled at the belt ; but the belt was very long and unwound as the tiger pulled ; at last the tiger got tired and went away.

In a Pardhan song of Middle India this story might easily be elaborated into a hundred verses, but the Konyaks, bent on arousing emotional associations rather than on amusing an audience, are content to indicate the mythical background in exactly six words.



The second part of the song is devoted to the praise of the descendants of Yana and Shayong, the ancestors of the two most important clans of the Oukheang *morung*, which still bear the names Yana-hu and Shayong-hu; they are likened to stars and sun, and to the high trees of the virgin forest, and their coming from a certain place near the confluence of two rivers, which lies on the traditional migration route of the Wakching people—a route along which also the path of the dead is believed to run—is described as accompanied by lightning and thunder, while their steps resounded like the ringing of gongs. The last lines emphasize the greatness of the clans which filled the whole village.

Just as the Konyaks sing the praise of their own *morung* during the communal dances, so do they delight in heaping scorn on the members of rival *morung*. The following taunt song is sung by the men of the Balang *morung*, which belongs to the *morung*-groups opposite to the exogamous groups formed by the Oukheang and Thepong *morung*; it is the men of the latter two *morung* who come in for ridicule :

Wakching, greatest of all villages,  
 With the shells of the ears  
 With the drums of the ears  
 • Hear, O hear our song.  
 O villagers, O commoners,  
 O chieftains, hear our song.

• Prick your ears like the ears of dogs,  
 • Like the long, long ears of dogs.

Those commoners plotting  
 The destruction of villages  
 What work have they done ?

On the cross-road,  
 At the rubber-tree,  
 In the *morung* they swore an oath ;



Alone they found the Kongan men,  
And yet they took to flight,  
Where the Phei-wang river flows.

Search for your mother's carrying bands  
Hold on to the shelves above your hearths  
Hanging there, weep and cry for your mothers.

Those destroyers of villages  
What work have they done ?

This song refers to an abortive raid undertaken by the men of the Oukheang and Thepong *morung* on the village of Kongan. The unsuccessful raiders are referred to as 'commoners,' because all the members of these two *morung* belong to Ben clans, while the leaders and several clans of the opposite *morung*-group are of chiefly rank and blood. The men of Oukheang and Thepong had apparently gathered at a certain cross-road below their *morung* and sworn to raid and burn Kongan ; but when they arrived at the village their courage faltered and when the Kongan men, who were alone and unsupported by any allies, put up a stout opposition, they fled across the Phei-wang stream between Kongan and Wakching. In the last part of the song it is suggested that the disgraced raiders should hang themselves by the carrying bands of their mothers or hold on to the bamboo shelves that hang suspended from the rafters over all hearth fires and cry for their mothers like terrified children.

While in this taunting song the event singled out for ridicule is described in broad outline, there are other songs which allude to the event in a minimum of words and are consequently understandable only to the initiated :

O Dzu-hu, O Dzek-ben  
Their brothers' temples  
To cut with *dao*  
Thus we taught them.



O Keangdzing,  
Great chief's brother,  
Squashed by the drum,  
He lay dying.

Both these songs are sung by Wakching men in derision of the alleged—and in Wakching proverbial—stupidity of the people of Wanching, a neighbouring village. Although Wanching was founded by kinsmen of the founders of Wakching, the people of Wakching claim that they have frequently made fun of their simple-minded neighbours and the stories alluded to in the above songs are typical of the many tricks played on the Wanching men :

Once upon a time the Wanching men inquired from the Wakching people how they should set about cutting their hair. Now the Konyak custom is to hold a *dao* with its back to the forehead, arrange the hair over the sharp edge and then tap along the edge with a piece of wood, thus evenly clipping off the tips. But the malicious men of Wakching told their neighbours to place the *dao* with its sharp edge against the forehead and hit against the back of the axe with a heavy mallet. The unfortunate Wanching men followed the instructions literally : the *dao* cut the hair, but also the heads of all those who submitted to this method of hair-cutting, and many died at the hands of their well-meaning friends and brothers.

Another time the Wanching men wanted to make a log-drum and they asked their neighbours' advice. The Wakching men told them that they should choose a big tree, and while three or four men felled it, all the others should support the trunk. Again the evil advice was followed and the tree in falling squashed the chief's brother Keangdzing and many of the others who had in vain tried to hold it up.

Dance poems in praise of the founders of a *morung* or of a warrior's exploits are sung only by the members of that particular *morung*. But apart from such compositions there exist songs which, though of a more general character, are regarded as the property of individual *morung* and any infringement of 'copy-right' is fiercely resisted. I have mentioned already that



even within one linguistic area there are certain differences in the poetic language of the various *morung*, and once a dance-song has been composed by the men of the *morung* they watch jealously lest the young men of any other *morung* appropriate the composition. Innumerable quarrels have arisen over the proprietary rights on songs and the only time I saw the Wakching men come to blows was when during the great Spring Festival the young men of the Ang-ban *morung* danced to a song and rhythm belonging to the Oukheang. The provocation was all the greater since they danced to the disputed song in front of the Oukheang under the eyes of its lawful owners. The Oukheang men were not slow to interrupt the dance and the ensuing fight completely wrecked the ceremonies of that evening. Some years previously a dispute that began over the rights in a particular song led to man-slaughter and resulted finally in the temporary expulsion of the entire Bala *morung* from Wakching.

The violence of emotions aroused by the unlawful appropriation of a dance-song is proof of the enormous importance which the Konyak attaches to his songs, both those that are traditional and those newly composed. As in the lyric poems sung in the intimacy of the girls' dormitory or on the sitting platforms on a moonlit night when the Konyak pours forth all the joys and longings of his heart, so his pride in his *morung* and the heroic feats of his ancestors, and the vital feeling of solidarity between all the members of his *morung*—the only 'patriotic' sentiment the Konyak knows—find expression in the dance songs which are claimed as the property of individual groups ; love-songs and lyric poems, though sometimes also composed and favoured in one particular *morung*, are the common property of all Konyak youth, and it is these songs which fill the happiest hours of every boy and girl through the years of gay comradeship and romantic love-affairs. To us, who are still ignorant of the delicate shades of the Konyak's poetical language, they may appear artless, but to the Konyaks themselves they are the flowers in a garden of enchantment.



## THE SPRING FESTIVAL

THE platform of the chief's house is filled with a merrily chattering crowd of women and girls, and in the middle the whole family treasure of the house of Longkhai lies spread out on two large mats. Early this morning the girls of Ang clan have pulled down the great store-baskets hanging in the roof and cleaned all the glass beads, shells, and brass bells with water and sand. Now they lie, sparkling, gay, and tempting, in the sun, and the girls are longing to try them on, for it is only once a year, at the great Spring Festival, that they may be worn.

Mauwang's wife is already dressed, many precious necklaces hang round her neck, and now she is dressing her four-year-old daughter. She would like to hang all the valuable ornaments and trinkets on this much-loved child, but already the little one can hardly move, and blinks wonderingly at all the shimmering things she is so unaccustomed to see on her chest. Now the mother begins to shave her head, but the child protests with hands and feet ; she does not find the procedure at all pleasant and lets out furious shrieks, which even Uncle Wankau cannot calm as he hurries up and takes her on his knees. Suddenly the small girl stops ; one look at the stranger approaching to take her photograph has done more than all the kindness of her relations, and her mother begs me to go on playing the bogey until the operation is finished. The child is shorn bald, except for a small tuft on top of the head, and her mother adorns her with a fan-like feather-crown.

Now the Ang's wife turns her attention to the toilette of the young girls ; she is an artist at dressing hair, and all the Ang girls beg her help. They sit back happily on their heels, one behind the other, each dressing the tresses of the girl in front. First the hair must be thoroughly cleansed and combed and brushed down over the back and shoulder. Then it must be rolled



tightly into a tail, and bound round with a long ribbon of bark. If any girl's hair is on the short side, then the end is tucked into a bamboo tube and the bark ribbon so bound that not even the most curious eyes can detect where the hair fails.

Among the girls is Ngapnun ; I recognize her at once, for the last time I was in Longkhai I was struck by her graceful movements and perfect figure. Perhaps, for the first time among the Nagas, I almost regret the necessary reserve of the anthropologist, for to watch Ngapnun merely as a cool observer seems almost an insult to her beauty. She has all the graciousness and self-assurance that you find in a great lady, or sometimes in the naive women of southern countries. But her gracefulness is in no way naive ; it is rather an expression of her strong personality and a consciousness of her rank. I have never suffered such a defeat as in my attempts to make Ngapnun smile ; I might just as well have been making eyes at the statue of a Greek goddess. Even when I gave her some skeins of red wool, so valued by all other Naga women, the proud beauty does not deign to look at me, but takes the gift as some tribute she has a right to expect. Much as this behaviour hurts my self-respect, it has one great advantage : unhindered, I can photograph Ngapnun wherever she goes and at whatever she is doing, without her paying the least attention.

At last the long brown hair is ready, the parting made, and the hair plastered down with water, and now Ngapnun can begin dressing. She throws aside the coarse cloth of the ordinary working day and replaces it with a gaily embroidered skirt scarcely the width of her hand, more of an ornament than a garment. While her skirt is of scarlet, the other girls of the common people may, even today, only wear skirts of dark colours. Round her slim waist fastens a girdle of many rows of coloured beads. Innumerable necklaces, many of golden-yellow stones, others of shells and discs of bronze, make any other bodice superfluous ; the wealth of ornament nearly conceals her small, firm breasts, and her long, delicate arms, that have almost a childish look, are covered from wrist to shoulder with rings and bracelets. Now she puts on her little anklets of bells that tinkle at every step. They are quite new acquisitions brought from a bazaar in the plains,



and Ngapnun is very proud of them ; but however much they please her heart, they are not nearly so valuable as her bronze armlets, heirlooms whose provenance is shrouded in mystery. A broad band, made that morning from a fresh leaf, binds her forehead like a tiara, and heavy earrings hanging to the shoulders put the final touch to her ceremonial dress.

No part of her is now unadorned except her narrow hands with their long, slim fingers, whose only ornaments are the fine blue lines tattooed at the cost of so much pain. Does Ngapnun suspect that despite the traces of hard field-work these hands of hers are beautiful ? You have only to see her regal carriage, her confident smile, and the slightly mocking twinkle in her brown eyes, to know that she is fully conscious of her charms.

No primadonna could take longer over her toilette than these girls, and it is already past midday when they begin to dance on the bamboo platform. For hours they pace about hand in hand, tripping round and round in time to a monotonous chant. There is little variation in the steps of the dance and in the eternally repeated songs ; but the old women, crowding round the platform and proudly watching their daughters, find nothing boring in the performance, and seem in no way different from the ball chaperones of the last century. Every other minute they adjust their daughters' hair-dress or pieces of jewellery ; here is a straying tress, and there a necklace is out of place. No one else would notice these faults, and the way they worry continually over the looks of the dancers is rather laughable, and yet somehow touching.

You might well imagine that the youths of the village would be here, forming an enthusiastic audience round the dance-platform ; but there is as yet no sign of them. The boys are far too busy with their own dressing. They are sitting in front of the men's house combing out each other's long hair and arranging the white hornbill feathers in the bushy crests of red goat's hair on their hats. This morning they searched the forest for the choicest of ear ornaments—gold and mauve orchids—only the most beautiful are fitting for the Spring Festival.

All this trouble is not in vain. The hearts of the girls beat faster, as the men, whirling their spears and *dao* as though setting



out on the war-path, rush through the village with wild cries. With their tossing feathers, and the gaily dyed goat's hair waving from weapons and head-dress, they look like fantastic birds, and, like birds in the mating season, they rejoice in the glory of their brilliant spring dress, that reduces the weaker sex to comparative insignificance.

Singing and dancing, the crowd of men leave the *morung* at the farthest end of the village and pass along the narrow streets till they reach the chief's house, and soon the open place is thronged with singing crowds ; *dao* flash high in the air, voices are raised, and the song swells forth, breaking at the climax into harsh, uncanny yells.

Suddenly all is quiet. The individual groups break up, the girls stop their dance, and the men and the boys form a great circle. And now there is a space with an old man in the middle ; by descent and office he is the intermediary between man and the immortals. He is taking a handful of cooked rice—now he throws it towards the sky, and his solemn voice sounds through the breathless stillness :

'Oh, Gawang, Lord of Heaven. Give that our fields may be fruitful ; give us rice in plenty ; give us millet in plenty ; give us taro in plenty. The people of the village, let them be strong. Our children, let them be strong.'

After each phrase the crowd of men raise their *dao* to the sky and shout in unison, 'So let it be !' The hearts of the whole assembly tremble with awe before the deity, for in his hand lie happiness and misfortune, good and bad harvests. However bold and self-willed they may be, they know only too well that their efforts alone do not safeguard the growth and ripening of the crops, so they sacrifice to Gawang, god of the sky, who grants fertility to the fields and children to men. They trust in him alone, and trouble little over the lesser spirits, who have no power over the sun and the rain.

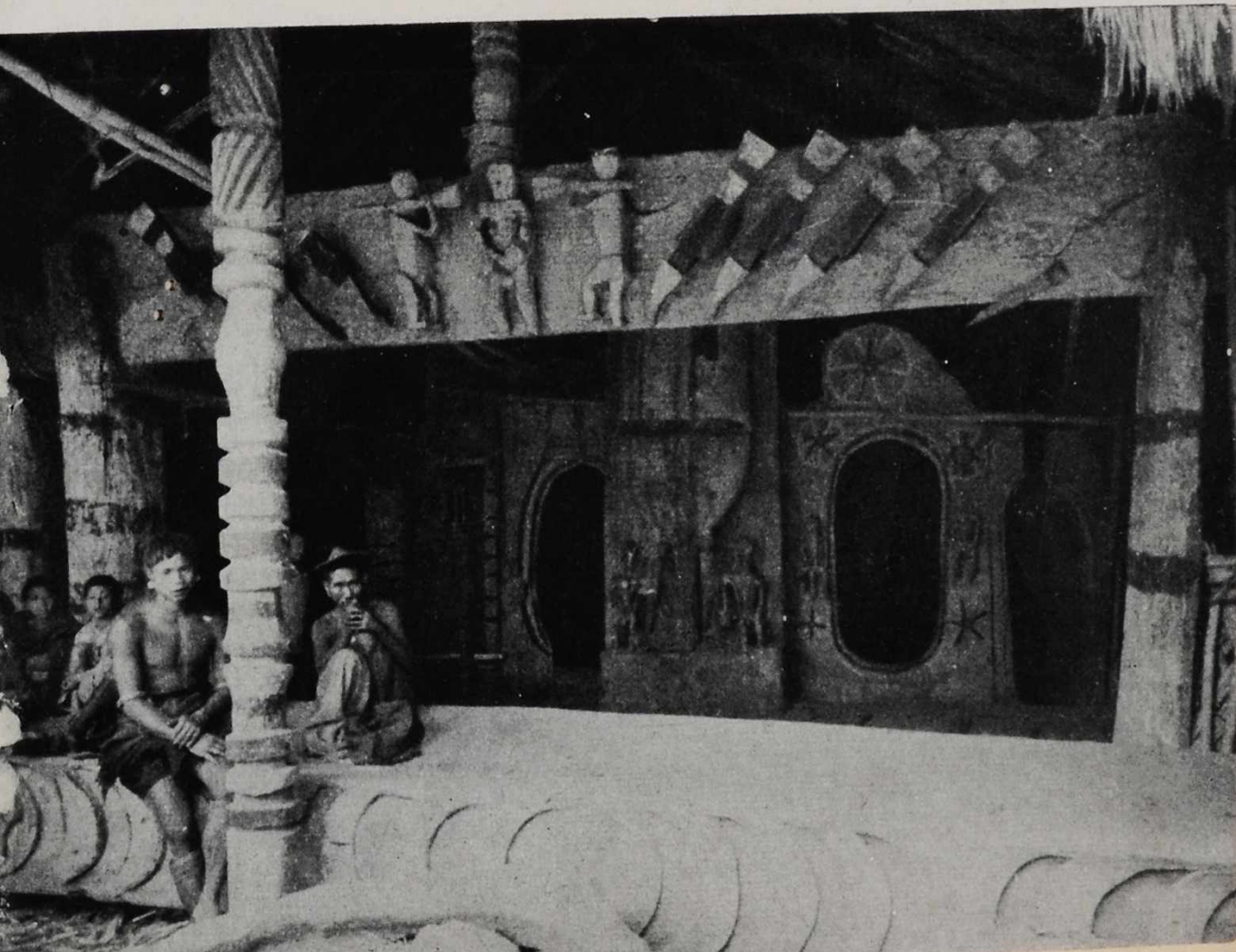
Dark clouds have gathered over the mountains ; and as though the god deigns to answer, lightning rends the sky and thunder rolls in the distance. Heavy drops begin to fall, and the people have hardly time to run for the shelter of the chief's protecting





Girls dancing the spring festival.

The open porch of the Balang-Morung  
of Wakching,







Mauwang and his brother with  
newly made grave-figures;

Sand stone cists housing the skulls of  
recently deceased Wakching men,





roof before the rain pours from the sky. A spring storm in all its sudden might breaks over the hills, and the thirsty earth drinks greedily of the welcome rain.

No sooner has the rain passed over than the old men press round a bamboo pole, which has been erected in front of Mau-wang's house. For about half an hour they murmur secret formulae, while the young men dance round, swinging their *dao* and shouting loud songs, lest any woman or any of the younger people should hear the words of the elders. Almost half an hour these secret prayers last, and the whole time howling crowds race round the pole.

It was months before I could induce a man to confide the secret of this rite. Its theme is also the fertility of the fields, and the central formula runs : 'As a woman embraces her lover, so may the earth take the seed of the rice into her womb.' The fertility of field and man are closely linked in the mind of the Naga : they are different expressions of the same force, and the prosperity of the village depends on its abundance.

The solemn ritual of the feast is now over, and the girls entertain the boys in the chief's house. For days they have pounded rice and brewed beer, pigs have been killed, and the food is steaming in the huge pots on the hearth. Afterwards the dance is continued in the large hall, the girls and the boys dancing separately. It is almost dark, and the gleam of the flickering fire picks here and there on glistening naked backs or blades of swinging *dao*. Gradually the dancing throng thins ; the youngest boys and girls dance on, but the older ones slip away and celebrate the birth of Spring in their own way.

I go out into the night, glad of the cool air after the stuffiness of crowded chief's house. A full moon sails in the cloudless sky. Light and shade alternate in a fantastic mosaic ; the silvered, palm-thatched roofs gleam like glittering stones. From time to time belated groups of revellers sing and dance through the village, where only a few sleep that night. But for such outbursts, stillness reigns and only from the chief's house can you still hear the occasional verse of some indefatigable singer.



As I open my eyes after a short sleep, I can see the girls through the slits of my bamboo hut still dancing in the light of the breaking dawn. Only when the sun emerges in all his red glory from behind the mountains does their song cease.

Piece by piece the girls divest themselves of their ornaments, and bid a reluctant farewell to the time of leisure and feasting. Today is still a day of rest but tomorrow the work on the fields must begin again ; with the new year starts the eternal round of sowing, weeding, and harvest, and for long months to come every day will see the people busy on the hill-slopes, now still barren and brown after the burning of the jungle, but soon to be covered with a delicate carpet of luscious green.



## THE WORLD BEYOND

RICE is sprouting in the fields, and each day the Wakching people look anxiously at the deep blue sky and a sun mercilessly burning down on the young crops. Although it is May, the heavy rains of summer have not yet started and only now and then a short thunder-storm breaks the long drought. Once more I am on tour and camping in Wanching. The sky is still cloudless and starry, mist lies on the distant mountains, and a half-moon rises from the veil wreathing the peaks, dark yellow like old gold. She does not climb the path of the heavens upright, but sails out into the sky like a rocking ship, her curved keel to the earth ; on the horizon threatening lightning blinks spasmodically, miraculously outlining the rim of the sky where it touches the earth.

Hardly have I gone to sleep when there is a terrible clap of thunder and I am awake again. The calm of the evening has given way to turmoil. Violent squalls throw themselves on my tent, and soon the rain pelts down on the canvas ; my small tent window is lit by almost incessant flashes of lightning, and rolls of thunder drown the howling of wind in the trees. I try to persuade myself that the storm will soon pass, but instead of passing, its fury grows with every minute. The tent trembles and sways ; still lying in bed, I grasp one of the two posts and try to counteract the worst blows. The surrounding ditch no longer traps the water ; it is full to overflowing, and the floor of the tent is soon flooded.

Suddenly there is a frightful crash as of splintering wood. If only the huge tree spreading its branches over my tent stands firm ! From the noise on all sides it sounds as though all the trees in the neighbourhood are breaking up. Just as I jump from my bed, Nlamo rushes in, shouting that I should seek refuge in the *morung*. Quickly I collect my precious camera and some of my notebooks, and run through the rain and the torrents of



water streaming over the hillside towards the *morung*. There I find Yongem and several Wanching boys disturbed from sleep. Suddenly I remember that the carrying-basket with my diaries, stands probably open in the tent. So I run once more through the downpour, slipping continually with my bare soles on the slimy clay and struggling against the masses of water rushing downhill. The tent still stands ; I manage to throw all my most valuable things into waterproof baskets and tie them up firmly. Now nothing very serious can happen.

Returning to the *morung*, we sit wet and shivering round a small fire. My boys are worse off than I, for their small hut has been blown down by the storm, and all their things are scattered. They complain too that all the provisions are swimming about in the water. That does not sound very hopeful for a hot breakfast.

By morning the storm abates, and, to my surprise, we find my tent has resisted its force. But the village presents a scene of destruction. Roofs have been blown away, and big trees broken or uprooted. I would never have thought that such giants could break under a storm like matches. On the path to Wakching a whole patch of forest has been battered down ; most of the field-houses are destroyed and the fragments dispersed untidily over the ground.

Just as the Konyaks did some weeks ago after an earthquake, the whole village holds a holiday to avert further misfortune. For whenever anything unusual or disastrous occurs, a day of abstention from work is supposed to re-establish the disturbed balance and protect the community from latent dangers. .

What is the Konyak's idea of the natural phenomena that sometimes threaten his life and his property ? Is he that 'primitive man' who lives in constant and vague fear of unknown and hostile forces, so often depicted by some philosophers ? He certainly is not. His conception of the world is clear and simple, and his ideas on Nature are mainly the result of logical deduction. Ideas and conclusions may be wrong—the conception of the world as held by the ancients was also partly wrong—but this does not mean that the Konyak's approach to Nature is funda-



mentally different from that of the European peasant in the Middle Ages.

Mysticism and speculation do not appeal to the Konyak. When lightning flashes over the sky and thunder resounds behind the mountains, he knows they are produced by Gawang, the lord of the sky. How this happens, he cares little, but whoever digs near a tree struck by lightning finds one of Gawang's thunderbolts—is this not proof enough? For much money I have acquired some of these magic stones, but there would be little point in trying to explain to my friends that they are the polished stone celts of an older population or perhaps even of their own ancestors.

Gawang is thought of as a definitely personal being but no Konyak can say exactly how he looks. 'Like a tall Naga with spear and *dao*', some men suppose, but so that my feelings shall not be hurt, they admit that they might look like a sahib. 'But who can tell?'

Yet they all agree that he lives somewhere in the sky and that long ago he made the firmament:

'Gawang made also the earth and man', Chinyang remarks one day, 'but how he made man, we do not know. But we say that we are his children. When we become rich or poor, it comes from Gawang; when we have plenty to eat, it comes from Gawang; when we have fever, it too comes from Gawang.'

'But tell me, does Gawang live quite alone in the sky? Has he no wife and no children?'

'We do not know anything of a wife of Gawang', explains Yongang with a smile 'and his children, these are we ourselves!'

The Konyaks are firmly convinced that Gawang can see and hear everything. If a man exaggerates or boasts too much, someone may say: 'Don't tell such lies, Gawang hears, and will tear your mouth'. Generally, this is only a jest, but in cases of serious crime Gawang's punishments are called down on the head of the offender.

It is in keeping with the Konyaks' realistic philosophy of life that Gawang does not wait to judge earthly offenders till after death, but his rewards and punishments are mainly for this,



and not for the next world. He gives no male heir to a man who pursues adventures with 'women living in their husbands' houses', and whosoever steals from his neighbour or incites quarrels in the village is punished by an untimely death.

Gawang watches over the numerous taboos and sees that they are observed. When once I ask Dzeamang, a young man of Ang clan, whether during the meals in the field-houses he too may eat from the same dish as the girls of Ben clan, he answers quite spontaneously : 'Of course, I should like to eat with them, but Gawang sees it'. Therefore he does not dare eat with commoners.

It is not only during feasts and ceremonies that the Konyak invokes Gawang ; often in the course of his daily life he will murmur a prayer to the sky-god. When he begins to eat, he will throw a bit of rice or taro to one side saying : 'Gawang, eat you first'. When he is lucky out hunting, he cuts off a small piece of flesh and throws it into the forest for Gawang with the words : 'In the future, give me again such luck'.

Compared with Gawang, the spirits of the earth, the wood, and the rivers are not very important. They may be malignant towards man, and they must therefore be placated during illness with offerings of chickens and pigs, but it is only Gawang who holds the power of life in his hands, and it is only Gawang's wrath that can send a man to his death.

Sometimes ordinary mortals see the spirits of the wood or the water as they slip by, but only men particularly endowed can see Gawang in their dreams. There are not many Konyaks with this faculty, and I know of only three in the country round Wakching : Lemang of Kongan, Shopong of Tanhai, and the Wakching woman, Limnia. They are not only seers and prophets, but were tigers, for at night they roam the country in the shape of their familiars.

Among the Nagas this is a well known phenomenon, and Shopong himself tells me how his soul leaves his sleeping body and enters the body of a tiger ; how he joins the other tigers at night in some far-distant place ; and how at any hour of the day he knows exactly the whereabouts of his tiger. Lemang pretends



his tiger is no ordinary tiger, for he says he does not kill man ; in his youth he hunted animals, but now he has grown too old, and so the other tigers bring him food in the evening, but he never shows himself to men, for he is afraid of being shot.

There are many people who from personal experience can tell of Lemang's adventures in the shape of a tiger. One night two Aos in Government service were frightened by a tiger moving noiselessly through the jungle near Namsang, but they missed when they fired, and the tiger immediately disappeared. Arriving at Kongan next day, Lemang greeted them at the village gate with the question :

'Why did you shoot at me last night ? You only missed me by a hair's breadth !'

According to Konyak belief, the death of the tiger would have caused Lemang himself to die within a few days ; if one of these animals is even wounded, a similar wound is believed to appear on the corresponding spot on the man's body. Mills told me of many weretigers among the Aos who actually did die suddenly a few days after their tigers had been killed.

An incident which greatly strengthened Lemang's reputation occurred while I was in Wakching. Thirty silver rupees, a brass-disc and an embroidered apron were stolen from the house of Apong, the *dobhashi* of Wanching. All investigations proved fruitless and so at last he went to Kongan to consult Lemang. The old man told him at once that he knew of the thief. In the shape of a tiger, roaming about in the valley of the Dikhu, he had seen two Yungya boys coming from the direction of Wanching. They had wrapped up a stone in an apron and thrown it into the Dikhu with the words : 'As this apron shall never again come to the surface, so shall our deed remain for ever hidden'. Apong had only to go to Yungya and ask the boys whether they had seen a tiger by the Dikhu.

And then Apong remembered that there had been three Yungya people in Wanching the day of the theft, and he set out at once for their village. There he met the boys, and confronted them with Lemang's accusation. Shattered by such supernatural



knowledge, they confessed to the crime and all its details. They had actually seen a tiger by the Dikhu that day.

However, there are sceptics even among the Nagas, and one of the *gaonbura* of Namsang-Sumniching, when I spoke of Lemang and other seers, only remarked deprecatingly :

‘How is it that a man can sleep and his soul can wander about ? That is a swindle. These seers see nothing more in their dreams than other people, but of course it is pleasant to pocket rupees. Lemang earns two rupees here, and three rupees there ; naturally he likes to tell the people all sorts of lies.’

When I asked whether the seers really wander about as tigers at night, he answered excitedly :

‘How can a man become a tiger ? Man is of man’s clan, tiger of tiger’s clan, and pig of pig’s clan. Can a pig change itself into a man ? No ; then how shall a man change himself into a tiger ? That is all lies !’

Once, he says, a woman soothsayer warned him to beware of her tiger roaming near the village, and so he took his gun and went to look for the beast ; not so much as a track did he see in the jungle.

A few months before I am to leave Wakching, I decide to employ the services of the soothsayer Limnia to learn more of the nature of her prophecies. So that she shall not be upset by an unaccustomed task, I take Shankok with me to help formulate the questions. He tells me I should take, as is the custom, a little rice for Limnia, and on entering the house, I must scatter a few grains, unnoticed, on the floor.

Towards evening we climb down through the labyrinth of narrow streets of Limnia’s house. She lives with her second husband and five children, the youngest scarcely a year old, and seems just like any other middle-aged Wakching woman. Shankok tells her that I have heard of her fame, and now I have come to her because I want her to prophesy for me. I want to know if fate will grant me a safe and peaceful return journey to my own country, if all my relations are living and in good health, and lastly—which to Shankok is the most important of all—whether I shall soon find a wife. Limnia listens calmly and without say-



ing much ; she only remarks that she will have great difficulty in reaching a land so far distant as mine.

I ask her about her experiences in her dream-life, and she answers me with clear and short sentences ; her manner of speaking is more self-assured than that of other women. No mystic veil envelops this seer, and nothing suggests an unbalanced mind ; her description of the next world coincides with the traditional conceptions of the Konyaks, except that she enters the Land of the Dead in her dreams, and herself speaks to the dead. If a man has reason to believe that a lately deceased relative is angry, he asks Limnia to find out the reason and to discover a way to propitiate the dead.

Before Limnia falls into her trance she strews rice on the floor and speaks to Gawang :

‘Gawang grant that I may see all beings, that I know clearly all things, that I see you in my dream. Give me good dreams.’

Then she falls into a deep sleep and her soul goes to Yimbu, the Land of the Dead. If she meets a man yet living on the way, then she knows he will soon die ; however, she can save his life by an offering to Gawang—that is if the threatened man is prepared to give her a cloth, a *dao*, and a spear, and to sacrifice a pig, which Limnia kills saying :

‘Gawang, give that this man remains alive, that he will become old, that he lives until his hair becomes white’.

The following night Limnia goes to the Land of the Dead, to bring back the soul of the man.

Presumably Limnia is clever enough not to try to persuade men in good health that their souls are already on the way to Yimbu, but looks for ready believers among those that are ill and in the grip of high fever, whose consciousness is already dimmed.

Small children who die when not yet able to walk lie crying on the path to Yimbu until Limnia carries them to the Land of the Dead and hands them over to those of their relations already there ; for this service too she receives payment from the parents.

The life in Yimbu resembles the life on this earth ; the Dead work on their fields, celebrate the Spring Festival, marry, have



children, and eventually die once more. Then they go to another Yimbu, where Limnia cannot follow. Good and bad alike live in one village, but those who die an unnatural death arrive by a different path.

Often I am surprised by the equanimity with which the Konyak views his own entrance into the Land of the Dead. As Chinyang put on his head-dress with buffalo horns and human hair at the Spring Festival, he told me quite calmly that this ornament would eventually adorn his death-monument :—

‘I would not give it up for any price, for when I die it shall hang on my death-monument, so that all shall say “That is the death-monument of Chinyang, who himself captured heads.” And in Yimbu I need all my ornaments and all my weapons, for the men I have slain in this life wait for me on the way to Yimbu, and I must fight them all once more.’

He said all this in a casual tone, as though he talked of the work on the fields, or of a feast shortly to be celebrated. The Konyaks speak with sorrow or sentimentality only of their deceased relatives and friends, but never of their own death. They consider it unavoidable, and do not fear it in the same way as other peoples.

Limnia promises to dream for me tonight, but now she says we should leave her alone ; tomorrow morning she will answer my questions.

Early next morning Shankok arrives, and tells me with great excitement all he has heard from the neighbours ; that Limnia has had a bad night, and is now quite exhausted from the efforts of the long journey to my land. For this reason, we do not go to her house until late in the day ; even then she still lies on her bed. A neighbour tells us that soon after our departure Limnia fell into a trance and behaved in such a frightening way that her husband called him to stand by. They had stayed up till the first cock-crow, for they had been afraid that she might die.

While we are talking, Limnia gets up, she is indeed a picture of misery, and complains of a violent headache and pains in the legs from the long journey. Then she begins her tale, rather haltingly in a low voice.



In the shape of her tiger, she searched for the path to my land, and roamed about in the jungle for a long time before finding the right way. Then she ran and ran, a very, very long distance through a large plain, and when at last she arrived in my village, it was so late that all people were in their houses, and she had to remain outside my house, without seeing my family. But she knows that all my relations are alive and in the best of health. I shall come back to my country without meeting any danger, and I will not encounter any enemies on my path. I shall have plenty to eat and plenty of money. Soon I will find a wife. She sees my wife quite clearly : she is white as I, and pretty to look at—neither very tall nor very small, but of middle height.

Shankok is highly satisfied with the session, and I pay for Limnia's trouble with a few rupees. I do not doubt her good faith, but I realize that a careful and intentional swindler could have given the same answers to my questions.

However this may be, Limnia's prophecies have all come true—only as to the money the tiger must have made a mistake.



## FAREWELL

THE veranda of my bungalow is covered with the specimens of my collection ; spears and *dao* from Wakching, Longkhai, Chingmei, and various villages beyond the frontier ; valuable bronze gongs ; cloths of different colours ; red plaited hats with buffalo horns ; ornaments for men and women ; baskets ; wooden dishes and agricultural implements ; a long row of carvings, and hundreds of other things, many of which I have acquired only after long negotiation and at a high price.

I cannot help my eyes falling also on those objects which I feel now I would rather never have possessed—a small log-drum, a pair of grave-statues, and the model of a chief's coffin—for their making has brought much sorrow to their creators.

It was in the first month of my stay in Wakching that I told the *gaonbura* of my wish to purchase a small log-drum. They advised me to talk to Chinkak, the Ang of Wakching—he said the *gaonbura*, was a good wood-carver and since he did no work he had plenty of time to carve me whatever I wanted. Chinkak, though nominally Ang of Wakching, has not achieved much in this life, and is one of the few Nagas I would describe as a social misfit. His father, a scion of the powerful Ang family of Chi, had been offered the chieftainship of Wakching, at a time when the peace of the village had been disturbed by internal quarrels. However, his strict autocratic rule had not been to the liking of the Wakching people, and when he died, leaving no heir of pure Ang blood, they were careful not to repeat the experiment with a 'Great Ang', preferring rather to recognize Chinkak, the son of a concubine. But Chinkak never succeeded in gaining any influence, and, an addict of opium, he soon wasted the rich heritage of his father. He still receives tribute from the vassal villages of Wakching, but more often than not he mortgages it long before it falls due.



Chinkak was therefore only too pleased to raise some extra cash by carving me a log-drum. Yet he had his doubts about the task ; to carve a drum, otherwise made and dragged into the village with numerous ceremonies, was not so harmless as it appeared, for just then his wife was pregnant, and he feared the child might be harmed if he carved that drum. I considered this only a pretext for raising the price, and my willingness to pay a larger and a comparatively high price for the drum eventually conquered Chinkak's doubts.

He carved the drum, and I paid the price. A few months later his child was born—with a hare lip.

'Of course', said the Wakching people, 'the slit in the drum and the slit in the child's lip are one and the same ; Chinkak should not have carved that drum while his wife was pregnant.'

The two grave-figures, dressed and armed like real warriors with small spears and *dao*, are like so many of the other carvings of my collection, the work of my friend Mauwang, the Ang of Longkhai. He, too, had hesitated for a long time before promising to carve them.

'When an Ang dies, we carve grave-figures', he argued, 'if I now carve such figures for you, might it not happen that some one will die ?'

But at last I persuaded him, and so he sacrificed a pig before starting, as though he were working for a real funeral. Hardly were the figures completed, than Mauwang fell ill, and though he sacrificed many chickens, he did not recover. Returning from Pangsha, I found him emaciated and worn-out by recurrent attacks of malaria. Atebrin soon put him on his feet again, but instead of reproaching me for exposing him to the danger of illness by asking for the two figures, he thanked me again and again for the miraculous cure.

These two experiences should have put me wise, and warned me against persuading a man to carve objects linked with magical dangers. But my collection lacked a model of a coffin, and Chinkak, once more in need of money for opium, offered to carve me one. Angs' coffins are laid out on platforms like those of ordinary men, but they are carved at both ends with hornbill



heads. Soon after Chinkak had brought me the finished coffin, and received his reward, his five-year-old daughter fell ill, and died within a few days. Now it was necessary to make a child's coffin similar to the model Chinkak had carved for me, and there was not a soul in Wakching who doubted the fateful connection between the making of the model coffin and the child's sudden death.

Men from three villages have gathered to carry my luggage and the objects of my collection down to Borjan, for it is only there that I shall be able to pack them into boxes. All the *gaonbura* are here to distribute the loads and to say good-bye ; Mauwang, too, has come with his brothers from Longkhai and Ahom from Shiong. They all have only one question :

'When will you come back, Sahib ?'

For the last time I look over the valleys and mountains I have seen so often in the morning mist and the gold of the setting sun, and I too, ask myself : when shall I come back ?

No way has ever seemed so hard as that way down the hill past Wakching, past the rest-house, where we have sat so often, and past the little path to the fields, where now a few girls wait and smile at me as I pass.

'Good-bye Chinyang ; keep well and thank you for everything. Yes, I too should like to stay longer with you—and you too, Yongang ; may Gawang give you a good harvest. Metlou—Dzeamang—good-bye to you all. Let's hope we may meet again.'

Shankok goes with me through the high forest where so often we shot green pigeons. We both have only one thought : Good-bye for a long time, perhaps forever. To talk of something, we talk of Shankok's fields and the chances of a good harvest now that the spring is past ; once more we count how many fields he possesses ; it is about two hundred and fifty—anything to avoid remembering all those evenings we have spent together, all the friendly talks and all the fun we have had. Such a happy time it has been. Does Shankok know that I have never spent a happier ?



But now it must be :

‘Thank you, Shankok. I know it is hard. But I will come again—certainly I shall come again.’

Neither of us can speak. I hold his hand ; tears trickle down his cheeks. He turns round. Only when I have gone a short way does he turn back and wave to me. Quite small he stands there on the slope, a brown spot against the green of the jungle. The sun is setting, and deep below me the golden ribbon of the Brahmaputra winds through the immense plains of Assam.