

NEPAL

(Continued)

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Monday evening 31st January—The Commander-in-chief has sent me this morning precise informations on the inscriptions he desires me to study. It concerns really in fact the inscription on the wall of the Darbar by the food pedant Pratapa Malla, collector of alphabets. I then proceeded to town, but the inscription is so enormous (it covers 4 metres of wall space) that I gave up the idea of taking a stamping, the stamping paper being here scarce and very costly. All that is not an indigenous produce undergoes an enormous rise in price, because the transport of bearers back from Segowlie to here is paid at the rate of 3 rupees for 25 kilograms. This time at seeing me photograph the mysterious inscription, the crowd rushed, expecting the appearance of the treasure. The most amusing part of it was that the soldiers of the Darbar, equally convinced by the hidden meaning of the inscription began pushing back the crowd with blows from their fists as if it was bank of thieves. The end of the day besides reserved for me a more living commentary of the scene. I spent two hours at the Library of the Darbar School and I was shown the provi-

onal catalogue of the Tantra section. Certainly such a rich collection will not be found anywhere else in India; more than 500 numbers and half of them are unknown to me. When the turn of Tantric studies comes round it will be necessary to have recourse Nepal. I was returning on my pony at a center when I hear a cyclone blowing behind me. A wave of dust is raised by about a hundred ruddians running who trace the arc of a circle, pushing back violently the unfortunate passers-by. I can see and hear blows from fists and shouts. Nepal is getting civilized, she knows how to use her police. A vehicle surrounded by a mounted bodyguard passes and behind this another human wave. It is the commander-in-chief, provisionally, Maharajah who is out on a promenade. I draw myself up to greet him. He sends me a "good evening" and invites me to caracole near his vehicle. The troop of sbirros opens out not without mistrust. Where on earth could such beautiful collection of human beasts have been gathered? In this charming country the Maharajah gives an audience to his brothers only when he is surrounded by guards holding naked swords in

their hands. This nice little Deb Sham Sher in company with his two elders, killed with his little hand his old uncle who was wrong in showing an excessive good-will in favour of the sons of Sir Jang Bahadur. Then the small hand without the least scruple slays as much as it can the too numerous posterity left by the same Jang. And the eldest of the Sham Sher has attributed himself the office of Maharajah and the remainder of Sham Sher (they are about fifteen brothers in all) have distributed among themselves by rank of progeny all the high employments. Khadga Sham Sher, the second of the family seemed disposed to promote himself. The stroke was soon carried. Khadga who was the Commander-in-chief comes to the palace of the Maharajah to submit his report; four men throw themselves on him, take him by writs and the Maharajah announces to his younger brother that by an overflow of affection he creates him governor of Tansen, the district West of Nepal. Here we find a nice variation of the famous scene: Hear you, be then marquis of Castellance, etc. A palanquin is all ready; will you give yourself the trouble? And my wives? And my children?—They will be looked after. And under a strong escort, through mountain necks and dililes, they lead the Governor of Palpa in spite of himself. The caravan of spouses with the little Sham Sher followed after a few days. And the day will come on the morrow, in a month, in a year, when another little hand will slay unerringly the Maharajah but this will only mean a change of ministry. The poor Dhiraj as they call him here, the Maharajadhiraja in whose name everything takes place, lives closely cloistered in his palace with women and flowers, without any other distraction than to change

from one pavilion painted in blue to dwell in another painted in yellow—sacred marionette always ready to make gestures without asking who pulls the string.

Then we skirt the tank of Rani Pokhari, vast stretch of rectangular water that Jang Bahadur has had surrounded with an ugly white wall; a rather narrow foot-bridge leads to a small pavilion erected in the middle of the water. The spot is safe, sentinels guard the whole wall. "We shall be better able to talk if we alight at your Excellency's disposal" I replied carefully to be polite without lowering myself I take care to alight at the very moment he alights and side by side we converse on the narrow causeway". Have you seen the fish of this tank? You have not? You will see them. Dry grass-hoppers are brought and it is the tank of Fontainebleau. He enquires for news of the inscription and of my researches. A tomb was discovered at Kapilvastu containing a few scraps of gold. —Ah congratulations— I am very much afraid that if nothing serious will be found. Do you believe that this gold has a great value? Wait. Kapilvastu was a city of temples. Pilgrims from all over Asia came thither. Then do you believe that a treasure could be found. I replied to him that the real treasure is the inscriptions; it is that which connects man to his past and expresses to him his present. A people without history is a tree without roots. Kings have their genealogy, of humanity. These considerations developed in an English which enthusiasm makes eloquent, impress the small Gurkha who requests me to come and speak to him in the palace tomorrow afternoon. We shall attempt to awaken him.

(To be continued)