

L. Gilpin
Please return

Letter #6

Elizabeth S. Cowles
Delhi, India

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Dear People, Dears:

This comes to you from Delhi. No big news this time, like meeting any more Kings but just that we are enjoying a week's breathing space between chapters of our Asiatic Adventures. Fine to have the lull, from which to look back, and look forward. I love so thinking of Katmandu. Did I tell you about the flocks of snowy egrets that used to fly overhead in the late afternoon? They call them "paddy-birds" there. Love to remember the long shadows and the sunset colors, and wonderful profile of the hills against the sky as we watched from the guest house porch. So like the evening sky-line of Colorado. I always felt nearer to it (and nearer to you) at that time of day. It's fun too to look ahead, to the real adventure that awaits us. Don't mean to sound as if we'd been sitting in contemplation, hands folded, during this Delhi interval; actually fur has been flying around here. Piled high in the Houston's room across the hall lies a great mound of food and equipment. There is 900 lbs. of it, in sacks, boxes, tins and crates, and let me tell you it is BEAUTIFUL. An American expedition is superbly mounted these days. One has the benefit of endless new inventions and devices - the light comfortable tents and sleeping gear (my double expedition bag is 9 years old - I love it - but my light-weight blow-up mattress is new and so is my Latex pillow, soft as a cloud). Nylon ropes, plastic bags and containers, and food supplies (lots of the dehydrated variety) that are a miracle of lightness, tastiness and nourishing qualities. Wish you could see our handsome pressure cooker! We're also taking a pressure lamp and the best in primus stoves. I have clothes problems licked (I hope). Have just been stowing away in my duffle such items as long underwear (red), flannel shirts and sweaters, mittens and heavy socks, as well as lighter things for the lower altitudes. Of course my mountain boots with Bramani soles are with me (they and I had a wonderful time together in Switzerland last summer) and I just bought a topi to save my face from the all-day, high altitude sun that can give one such a beating. I have a white tailored Nylon blouse, easy washed and fresh looking, that should be nice for fancy with a bright sweater, don't you think? One's beauty standards in mountain travel wouldn't pass with Liz Arden or Saks 5th Ave. but I've never been one to feel that the rough life became more and more delightful the worse you look. I shall have certain advantages over my companions (won't have to grow a beard) and it is a comfort that important essentials (a lipstick for instance) don't weigh too much to bring along.

In some ways this trip is going to seem easy. In South America, where no porters were to be had, load carrying was one of our big jobs. And in all western climbing, one has to step lively with cooking and camp work besides getting oneself up and down the peak. But here in this country you are a Sahib and a lot of things are done for you. Coolies carry the loads and the Sherpas act as personal servants, make camp, and do the cooking. Pretty soft!

Hope you haven't any false ideas about the mountaineering we're going to do. This isn't an expedition to climb anything, it's a trip to look a situation over. But the way we are organized now (Tilman and Charley Houston being the best there is), if an obstacle of Alpine proportions were to interpose itself between us and what we want to see (the south face of you-know-what), we're strong enough - some of us anyway - to surmount it. But I do wish you could hear Oscar when people ask (as they constantly do) if we are going to climb Everest? "Oh, no," he says, with the sweetest smile, "we really do not expect to, that is unless it should be an exceptionally fine day."

Charley arrives Thursday by air from America. Friday he, Oscar and I start on the 3 day train trip to Jogbani, via Lucknow. A look at the map will show you (though you'll never find Jogbani, I'll bet a nickel) that to go to E. Nepal we

shall have considerable step-retracing to do. Tilman, who decided to go direct from Calcutta, and Andy Bakewell who is coming from Darjacling, will meet us at Jogbani on the 30th. A wonderful break for us was meeting (in Katmandu) the man who owns the big jute mill there. He also has a guest house and a string of trucks and has put both at our disposal. Very useful, especially the trucks which will carry us and all the gear to the end of the road at Dharan. Here we meet up with the Sherpas, the coolies, the ponies and our Nepalese liaison officer and start off - Deco volante!

With all this ahead, and no after-thoughts possible later on (you can't pop into the A & P for any forgotten items up on the Kosi) we are trying to think of everything now. I nab Nell at every opportunity (she's a superb housekeeper) for recipes and suggestions - mustn't forget (I say to myself) darned things so as to be able to attend to everybody's socks. And lots of bright ideas like: Wonder if they wouldn't like Breakfast in Bed Sunday mornings??? (No days off, however. If we have any, they'll probably come inadvertently when the coolies give out or a crucial bridge turns out to be missing).

The various jobs have interfered with extensive Delhi sightseeing (and with the wonderful letter I was planning to write you telling all about it). I know more about how to get to the Army-Navy Store, Mr. Thos, Cook's and the American Embassy (where they've been doing a lot of trouble shooting for us) than I do about finding my way around places like the Friday Mosque, etc. We pass the Mosque often; it's right on the way between Delhi (where the Cecil Hotel is) and New Delhi (where we do all our jobs and errands). It is a vast cream-and-red many-domed affair and so beautiful it makes you catch your breath. Across the road from it is the famous Delhi Fort which we have seen. There can be more to a Fort, my Dears, than places named Leavenworth and Knox would perhaps lead you to think. This one is Terrific: great red walls (some scalloped top and perforations to shoot out of as at Agra). Inside you find everything a Mogul emperor could possibly ask for in his daily life. The fort, featured in many bloody wars, in the Indian mutiny of 1857 and in 2 or 3 earthquakes. But I shall be more apt to remember the quiet expanses of green and the big peepul trees inside those vast walls, and the graceful minarets of Shah Johan's tiny private mosque, each one topped with a golden spire. This is our Shah Johan from Agra, the Jasmine Tower man, the gent who built the Taj Mahal. The same incredible inlaid work is found in these halls and palaces that we saw there (jade, carnelian, onyx and agate set in the form of birds and flowers). The walls and arches are covered with delicate carving and wonderful gold tracery. There is one screen, said to be the most remarkable piece of work of its kind in the world. It is all made of a single vast piece of marble and is as delicate as if the material were wood or metal. We were there on a Sunday afternoon (reduced rates) and I wish you could have seen the throngs pouring in. Some sweet pictures (noticed but not taken - cameras are all being mended in Calcutta!): a young Hindu couple, she in a lovely rose sari, sitting on the grass absorbed in each other. And a tiny Indian babe, all by himself on the marble floor of the big Audience Hall, tracing out a flower pattern with one slow finger. This is the place, more beautiful than I could ever describe, that has the Persian inscription on its walls:

"If there is a Paradise on the Earth

It is here, o, it is here, o, it is here."

(After thought about Saris: I said they could be worn anywhere? Well, almost. Just saw a lady on a bicycle in one - not so good!)

We love the Cecil Hotel where we are staying. It is cool, clean, quiet and comfortable, all rarities in a country which is overwhelmingly otherwise. There are green lawns and gardens, and a big airy porch (where we drink lemon squashes). Miss Hotz, who runs the place, is Swiss-English (fine combination!) and a great character. Just wish you could hear her go on about India (she's lived here all

her life). Some grand stories, like the one about the servant surprised by his mistress straining the soup through his master's sock. "But, Mein Sahib, it was not one of Sahib's clean socks, it was a dirty one," Miss H. once discovered the native cook of the moment sitting by the fire at breakfast time, a piece of bread between each toe, comfortably warming his feet and making the toast, same time! Her stories are not all humorous, however. The account she gives of the Delhi riots of '47 is grim: Moslems hauled out of houses and cut up right before your eyes. The Cecil compound was never invaded, although there were lots of Mohammedan servants here. It was a real sanctuary throughout the violent period (people just poured in) and obviously it was the personal reputation of the place and the family that saved them all.

It is something of a temptation to sound off about the political situation here. Naturally we see a lot and hear a lot, and have been giving it a great deal of thought. But on the whole, I'll probably do better to leave summaries and diagnoses to people who know something and confine myself to keeping you (my dear family and friends) posted on the cheerful progress of our travels.

Lots of things occur to me to tell you about - like the flood of traffic that pours down the Delhi streets. It includes A) automobiles, B) carriages, C) bicycles with 1, 2, 3 or 4 people aboard, D) tongas propelled by a 1) horse 2) motorcycle 3) bicycle or 4) man, E) enormous carts with huge wooden rough-hewn wheels pulled by 1) oxen, 2) camels, 3) water buffalo or 4) donkeys and F) people carrying all manner of loads or (unladen) wearing every possible kind of dress. Considering the variety of man, beast and vehicle that fills the streets, it is a wonder that the Delhi policeman can keep his head. But he does well and seems to love being in the thick of things. But the costume he wears builds him up - he looks very spruce in his trim tan uniform and crimson puggeri. Added complication we noticed today: a large cow taking a nap in the middle of the busiest street in the rush hour! And speaking of Puggeris (not sure I'm spelling it right) you people know what one is? A Turban. Besides as a head covering they can be put to a variety of important uses (and are). Need a handkerchief, napkin, washcloth or towel? Need a lead rein for your camel? (Just unwind five yards or so; plenty left to protect your bald spot from the sun).

Some interesting news (in re the people we meet). One of the best is a Mr. Thomas, Himalayan explorer and traveler who blew in yesterday, heard about us and looked us up. He's just back from a long trek into Tibet. He brought his Sherpa with him, young man, name of Gyaljen. He's wonderful: small, wiry, alert with eyes like bright little buttons set in an olive Mongolian face. Thomas thinks the world of him, is just letting him go home for a vacation, and where do you suppose home is? Namche Bazar - ever heard of that place before? It's where we are going, right in Mt. E's front yard. So guess what: Gyaljen's going along with us on loan from Mr. T. and will be MY Sherpa! Never had one before, like him immensely, and feel wonderful about it. (Just a sample of the many breaks we are getting. Have you been noticing?)

So one thing I am doing today is to make out a list of BASIC URDU - Thomas is coming to the Cecil to stay for our last day and I'm going to ask him to fill it out (in Block Letters). Thought I'd better equip myself so I can communicate with my nice bearer in some way besides smiles and nods! By the way, do you know about URDU? Oscar was telling me about it today. It is the only synthetic language that has ever worked, and is all due to the Emperor Akbar who found that his army was using 97 different languages and commanded that a new one be invented. His experts took Hindustani as a basis, omitted all declensions, conjugations, grammar and syntax. If the Hindustani word was too elaborate they picked something simpler from another tongue. When they had finished, Akbar told his army "now you

boys use this, or else ..." and so they did, and people still do. (And now I shall). Isn't it an interesting story?

Dears, I am dragging this out I know. Hate to let you go though as it is now Oct. 26 and we leave TOMORROW; a long gap in communications after that. What comes next is going to be the great adventure of my life and I feel wonderful about it. Hope you do too! *****

Betsy