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DIAMONDS AND DUST

India through French Eyes

By

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PREFACE

THE canvases and brushes I had brought with me stayed in my trunks ; the pictures I had meant to paint in India were never begun. So varied are the aspects of the vast Indian Continent, so alien from our modes of thought and conduct are its customs and its concepts, that any attempt to give our Western public a coherent picture of a land so utterly unlike our own, using no other medium than that of line and colour, must have proved as futile as to ask a man to read a poem written in a tongue he cannot understand. It would have been necessary to subscribe each picture with an array of footnotes bringing out its hidden meanings.

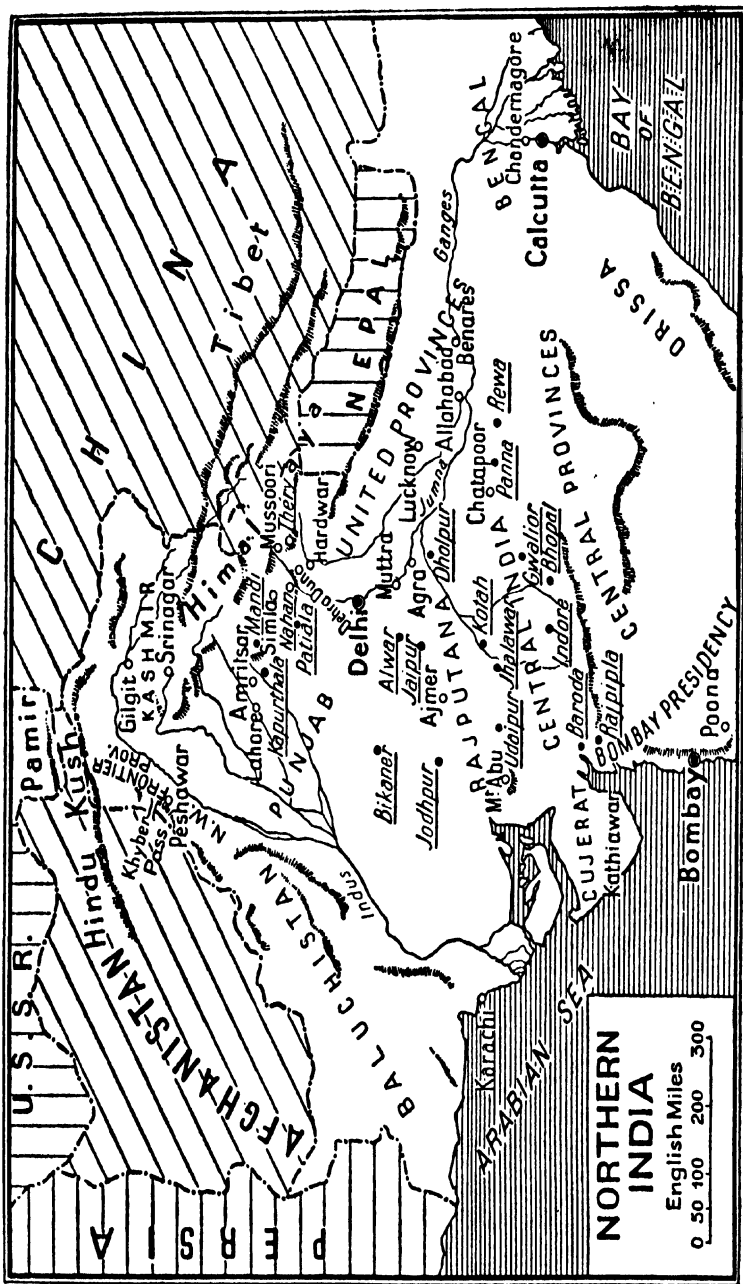
I do not offer *Diamonds and Dust* to the public as the book which every traveller seems as in duty bound to write, or as a panorama of the whole of India, but rather as a sequence of impressionist sketches made in Rajputana and the adjoining provinces ; in a land famed for the wonders of its cities half as old as time ; a region hermits chose for their retreat, where Buddha preached and Krishna dwelt, whither for millennia pilgrims have flocked to worship the first gods of the world, where by night the jungles wake to feverish life, where princedom fostered in the traditions of a glorious past flaunt palaces that look like strongholds ; a country rich in colours, customs and repute, marked by magnificence and misery ; a region where I lived

six eventful months and more ; the district which, in the far north of the great continent, best typifies eternal India.

The first pages of this book were written by a European whose attention was bewildered by the profusion and novelty of the impressions thronging in upon him. Above all was he impressed by such scenes as most contrasted with his native land ; for as yet he had not sloughed his Occidental skin. In the shrines the images of gods diverted his attention from the cults that hallowed them ; in the street his eyes were held more by the colours of the turbans than by the expressions on the dusky faces.

Yet slowly he freed himself from the thrall of Europe and its hide-bound concepts ; censoriousness gave place to growing wonder. He came to know the cities of the Emperors before the Rajas' palaces ; visited the house before he knew his hosts. And presently, when he had met the latter and learned to live like them in a mood of serene expectancy and to the slow, lethargic rhythm of the East, he discovered little by little the inmost soul of India.

In this attempt to portray India as she really is I have followed stage by stage the gradual process through which she showed herself to me. For it is by slow degrees that India unveils herself—and only for her lovers.



NORTHERN INDIA

English Miles

0 50 100 200 300

CHAPTER I

UDAIPUR : THE HEART OF RAJPUTANA

DUSTY PRELUDE

ORDEAL on ordeal ; after the heat the dust. Despite hermetically closed, windows it sifted into the compartment through every cranny, coating seats and luggage with a film of grey, clotting the sweat upon our faces. No sooner did we wipe it off than down it came again. Twenty-four long hours had passed since we had left Bombay, and twenty-four hours long I had been fighting back the grey invasion. I had rung the changes, so to speak, on the three lines of defence provided by the railway company ; had raised the wire-gauze screens, lowering the glass windows ; had closed the windows and pulled up the wooden shutters ; had shut all three together. Now I gave up the hopeless struggle. My head sank back on to the leather cushion mottled with specks of grit that scratched and seared the cheeks. Now and again I rubbed my eyelids when sand and sweat clouded my sight, or irritated past enduring.

At 4 a.m. we had changed trains, leaving the fairly comfortable Bombay-Delhi express for a smaller, less accommodating "local." Then, in the early afternoon, had come another change ; we were consigned to one of the appalling narrow-gauge trains that serve outlying districts far from the main Indian lines. These little trains crawl across the

countryside with the exasperating slowness of a peasant trudging to his toil ; they stop at every village, on every gradient pant their lungs out. But as they cost so little to construct and can be run for next to nothing, they pay the companies almost as well as the main lines.

“ An excellent arrangement, all in all,” I mused. “ Why should they improve on it ? England has done so little for the Indian—why should she take pains to make things easy for the tourist ? ” My ten days in Bombay entitled me, I thought, to criticize the methods of the raj. And I proceeded heartily to damn the Indian Railway System, the climate . . . For I had not yet learned the art of travelling in India ; how to make myself comfortable in the trains, how to avoid the heat and to enjoy the very dust. A newcomer, knowing nothing of the country, what right had I to criticize or curse ?

The little train jerked its way ahead still more slowly, still more precariously. The lamps, which at their brightest had given off a wan, funereal light, now died out completely at every jerk, returning to brief life with each new palpitation of our engine. An hour or two before, while it was yet broad daylight and the train was wheezing through a tract of parched scrub-jungle, I had noticed two pariah dogs, starved to the bone, loping along beside our carriage. For quite a while they had kept level with us, then in a spurt of energy dashed ahead. Presumably some Indian in one of the front compartments had just flung out the *débris* of his dinner through the window. If those spectral dogs, haunting our train as sea-gulls follow ships, were still about, they could now not merely beat the train in a straight race but, did they wish, make playful

circles round it. For a time we hardly moved at all ; the lamp failed in a long eclipse, then timidly bobbed up again. . . .

Suddenly I was conscious of a change ; the train had definitely stopped. At the same moment there was a knock at the door and the bearer, our servant, hailed me.

“ Udaipur, Sahib.”

With a sigh of relief, out of the muggy heat of the compartment I stepped on to the dusty platform, and gratefully inhaled the keen, cold air. Like the inexperienced traveller I was, I had closed the windows and so kept in the heat I wanted to exclude. With the night the temperature had swiftly fallen.

The train went no further. It emptied in the twinkling of an eye. Under the yellow glow of the station lamps I dimly saw a seething mass of humanity, the motley crowd of Carnival. A riot of colours, with orange-red predominant. Our bearer cleared a path for us across a press of men white-shirted and red-turbaned, of women in yellow silks and rust-brown veils carrying children, bundles and strange objects that looked like small tin coffins—their valises, so I was told.

The one and only car available in the station-yard bore us away into the night ; the solitary tourist in the train requested us to share it with him. He was a courteous old American, mellow, unassuming ; sometime an organist, now a votary of dreams, he was living out his annuity in wandering around the world. We had met him in Bombay, and at Delhi were to cross his circuit once again.

The cold was growing more and more aggressive. Our head-lamps cast a fitful glow ahead, conjuring from the serried shadows stunted trees, buttresses of banked-up earth and clouds of dust. How odd

that dust should synchronize with cold ! Till now, like most Europeans, I had always associated dust with heat. Of houses, city, walls or living beings, not a trace. . . .

Suddenly the car drew up in front of what looked like a convent cloister—the hotel. In the dim light I saw the usual type of Indian rest-house, one of the long, single-storied dâk-bungalows with which I was to grow familiar during my eastern travels. The bungalow servants, small, bearded men dressed in white, with vast red turbans, padded round the room on soundless feet, serving various kinds of sweets all of which indiscriminately, following the menu, they called “puddings” ; cherry-tart pudding, vanilla cream pudding, blanc-mange pudding. Similarly every sort of wine or spirits went for “claret” ; Bordeaux claret, whisky claret, cocktail claret.

A large portrait of the former Maharaja lorded it in the dining-room, and magnificent he looked with his full beard cloven in twain and hugely swirling up his cheeks—the typical Rajput beard. An heroic figure, straight out of the pages of an eastern fairy-tale, he watched me eating my stewed orange pudding, with an air of arrogant aloofness. Against his lordly will he had come here perforce, as envoy of the Rajput aristocracy, to greet us at the gate of feudal India.

THE CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS

Next morning I rose very early. Lounging in one of the long-armed, indolent “sleeve chairs” that line the verandah of every eastern bungalow, I took deep draughts of the young morning at its prime, under the cloister-like arcade. Level

with my eyes, incredibly near at hand, the sun was dappled with drifting flakes of gold, shreds of the dawnmist. They streamed up from a mass of fleecy vapour banked in a little ravine at the far end of the garden between me and the sun. Surely I had but to stretch forth my hand to touch it, so near the skyline seemed ; an horizon all in peaks and battlements of clouds !

Then the sun soared like a balloon set free—suddenly, steeply climbing up the sky.

Ever more copiously puff-balls of fleecy vapour breaking in coveys from the cloud-bank lingering in the valley took wing towards the zenith, after a brief ascent to melt into the blue. With each successive flight the parent cloud was growing less opaque and, as it dwindled into air, disclosing a sumptuous panorama, like a vast stage-setting slowly taking form. Tense with excitement as a child watching his father strip the swathes of cotton-wool from a birthday present, I watched its gradual emergence. In the silence of a dream, tier upon tier, there rose before my eyes the roofage of a line of dungeons, clustering towers, a crest-line of tall ramparts, far-flung buttresses and archways ; the massive outlines of an ancient stronghold. A film of mist still clung about the base on which the mighty fabric rested, but now I saw or seemed to see a city of flat roofs and spreading terraces.

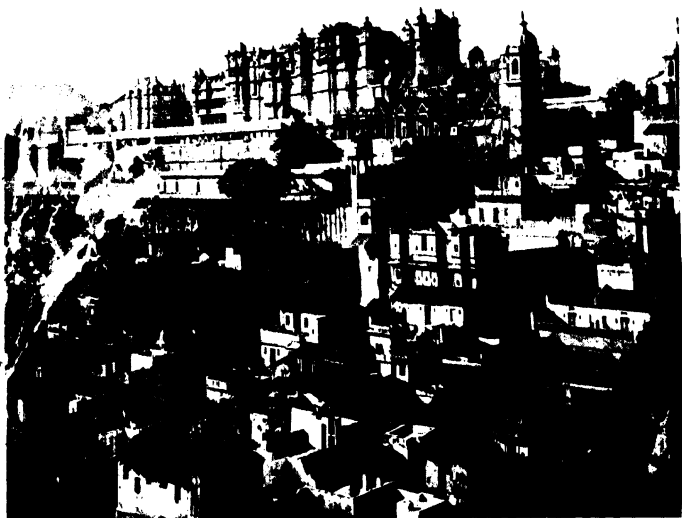
The last veil lifted, discovering the Palace of Udaipur, a blaze of gleaming marble, dazzling white against the grey-blue hills and azure sky. Throned on the summit of a hill, poised midway between earth and heaven, it overlooks the city sprawling at its feet like a mediæval village prone before its warden castle, a maze of rose-red terraces, domed temples and low, flat-roofed houses. High

above the town, vertiginously sheer, towers the tall façade, a marble sheath hermetically sealed, crowned with cupolas and turrets, fretted with balconies and trellised stairways.

Seen thus from a distance the mighty feudal castle seems a symbol, wrought in stone, of Udaipur the Impregnable, the Unchanging City. Inviolable, sublime amidst its lakes and gardens, it soars above the prostrate town, rejoicing in its high remoteness, fenced in by hills ribboned with walls and scarped with bastions.

Rajputana includes a bare tenth part of the Indian Empire ; administratively it consists merely of a cluster of Native States subordinate, like the Punjab or any other Indian province, to the British Government. Yet I see it as unique, a land apart amongst the provinces of India.

Most ancient of Indian stocks, the Rajputs from immemorial time have kept their blood immune from alien intermixture, and not only do we find the old traditions flourishing and intact in Rajputana, but the whole province has kept an autonomous character peculiar to itself. Paramount in India, the Rajput stock gave rise to several distinct dynasties, was subdivided into clans. Under present conditions the senior member of each clan is Prince of a Native State, a vassal of the King-Emperor ; and the aggregate of principalities comprises Rajputana. In certain states the ruling house claims almost unbelievable antiquity. Visiting one of these states, which from the remote past has been governed by the dynasty to which its present ruler belongs, I was shown a series of portraits depicting the predecessors of the reigning Maharaja. I counted them ; over four hundred portraits ! Moreover, all Rajput princes claim lineal descent



The Palace of Udaipur, a blaze of marble against an azure sky

UDAIPUR: THE CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS

The street culminated in an immense gateway, like a triumphal arch

UDAIPUR: THE FEUDAL CASTLE

from Kutch and Lava, the two sons of Rama, the deified hero and avatar of Vishnu, who ten thousand years or more before the Christian Era ruled all Hindustan.

Fanatically proud of the blue blood in their veins, the Rajputs deem themselves a caste apart, and marry only within the clan. Even to-day when a Maharaja wishes to marry off one of his children and fails to find an eligible partner in one of the ruling Rajput houses, he will contract an alliance with a family of commoners, owning perhaps an unimportant hamlet, rather than condone alliance with a house devoid of Rajput blood, rule though it may a territory twice as large as France.

"How is it," I once asked a Rajput, "that with all these consanguineous marriages your race has kept its fine physique?" I could not but recall the plight of certain ancient European houses which, exclusive beyond reason, have ended by devolving a great name on the most wretched specimens of humanity.

"But with us," he smiled, "marriage between near relations is absolutely taboo. There are a great many of us, you know, and when we want to marry off our children we don't need to fall back on cousins."

The Rajputs glory in their past, a stormy past in which, as history and legend tell, they were perpetually at war, and nearly always victorious. Brave and chivalrous, they adore and admire all that links up with their great tradition—themselves included. But how charmingly they are vain of being Rajputs, and what a tragedy it is for any Indian prince to be of other blood!

Still, matrimonial unions apart, the Rajput princes are on cordial terms with other Indian

rulers, even addressing them as "brothers." But with it all there is a shade of condescension in the Rajput attitude towards the "lesser breeds" outside the clan, the feeling that a scion of an ancient house has, or once had, towards the new-ennobled. Indeed one can hardly help noticing that all the maharajas, to whatever dynasty they belong, show in their mutual dealings traces of the rather childish jealousy we smile at in stage-favourites, generals and indeed, looking below the surface, in all the great ones of the earth.

But all these Rajput princes, the aristocracy of India, look up to the house of Udaipur as the senior branch of their illustrious family, regard the Maharaja as their arbiter of morals, almost their religious head, and admire his state as glorious without parallel in India, proud with the pride of its unconquered citadel.

No ruler of Udaipur has ever visited Europe and none will do so, I imagine, for long years to come. The lords of Udaipur are seldom to be seen at Delhi; they eschew the Council of Princes, know nothing of their neighbours, never invite a European to their board. Enisled in splendour like their palaces, they keep serenely to themselves, within their frontiers, behind a ring-fence of immemorial traditions that, like the blue hills bounding their horizon, fence them in.

THE GARDEN OF RIPPLING MARBLE

My bearer was a Mahometan. His name of five tongue-twisting syllables I abridged to "Dim." Dim was a bad valet; as a guide, pretentious and incompetent—but how decorative! One of those big Punjabis, stalwart, bronzed, upstanding, with a

long moustache sweeping the dark, proud countenance. He wore the head-dress of the men of Islam with studied elegance. A long band of coloured silk enveloped twenty times a cap of brocaded velvet, the strip of silk adjusted so that one end dangled on his back, the other stood up like a cock's-comb from his head. He wore a European coat, a tie to match the turban, immaculate shoes, and baggy trousers somewhat resembling those of our Zouaves. Unfortunately he had the habit, prevalent everywhere east of Suez, of wearing his undergarment outside his trousers, and from beneath his well-cut coat hung down the tails of a striped shirt, preposterously flapping fore and aft. For several days I plied him with decorously guarded hints ; respectfully but firmly Dim feigned incomprehension.

For our introduction to the sights of Udaipur Dim chartered a tonga—a two-wheeled vehicle on the lines of a dog-cart, in which fare and driver sit back to back. To the dismay of Dim—a confirmed snob—I climbed into the place in front where normally the guide and driver sit.

“ Please, the Sahib not sit in front,” he protested. “ Not right ! ”

But I was set on breaking with the tradition of the *sahib-log*, and Dim would have to put up with my indecorum. At last, with an air of dignified disgust, he climbed into a back seat. The driver, in short pants and dangling shirt-tails, took the place beside him. From time to time I was conscious of his apprehensive eye as he turned round to watch my handling of his horses. Was he really afraid that they would run away ? It was all the knock-kneed, rawboned pair could do to keep up a gentle trot. Perhaps he feared I might run into

something. Into what? A bullock-cart, a vagrant cow, no doubt; for, as for other vehicles, all I saw during my week at Udaipur were a couple of cars (the Maharaja's) and the three tongas owned by the hotel.

My little horses did their feeble best, jangling the bells upon their collars, tossing the soiled, parti-coloured plumes upon their head-stalls. We ambled down a yellow-golden sand-track, then up a valley leading towards the palace. A long file of bare-footed women with veiled faces came into view, crooning a slow, soft melody rhythmized by the silvery cadence of their anklets. I watched them nearing a lofty portal, the city gate, thronged with a crowd whose tumult I could hear.

Before us lay the city, spread out like a gaily coloured picture-book, inviting my perusal. But no, I would not enter it—as yet.

At a venture I took a turning to the right. Since then I have often wondered what led me thus to turn aside. I had been told so much about the city of Udaipur, and my first enchanted glimpse of it in the dawn light had magically kindled my imagination. Now wilfully I turned away. Some instinct urged me, I imagine, to begin by steeping myself in its environment, testing its predilections; to dally with its favours. In any case, I asked myself, why hurry? Already, unwittingly, I was yielding to the languor of the East, living to the slow rhythms of Indian life.

I was glad not to know where it might lead, the little road on which my choice had fallen; what can be more exhilarating than wilfully to lose one's way? As a matter of fact it seemed to lead nowhere, to come to a dead end at the outskirts of a forest looming twenty yards ahead. So serried

were the trees, the branches came so low, that it looked like a solid wall of tangled greenery without an opening. Warily I piloted my unfiery steeds, waving plumes and all, between two trees and, to my delight, found that the road went on.

But now it ceased to be a road, it was rather a park avenue. Twenty paces back, a minute ago, I had been jolting along a stony track, stifled with dust, half-blinded by the light that battened on the sun-scorched undergrowth. No sooner had I passed the sentinel trees than I was in another world, a dim, green-shadowed oasis, a tranquil garden where the dew-drenched air was cool and sweet with drifts of orange-blossom and wild jasmine, with a pomander of exotic flowers.

A white wall came into view at the far end of a track of pinkish sand, mottled with golden flakes of sunlight; large grey monkeys were gambolling across it. I got down from the tonga and strolled towards the monkeys; they had kept up with us and now were scampering along the coping. Dim had just bought his breakfast from the tonga-man, large flat slabs of bread like pancakes, and handed some to me.

Guttural cries, a patter of swift feet along the wall—the monkeys had observed Dim's gesture. Some morsels tossed in their direction bunched them in a hungry scum. A brisk *mêlée*, a general stampede, then all came capering back in monkey-file. After some more largess we had made friends. Now, instead of throwing it, I held out a large slice of chupattie. Could I be trusted? A feverish palaver, somersaults. In five bounds one of them was up a tree, and down again in two; mustering up his courage, I suppose. The others followed suit, then sat down in the offing and began to scratch

themselves. At last one of the bolder spirits risked a move towards me ; making a long arm, he tried to snatch the bread, and missed it by an inch. Promptly he withdrew his hand. After a half-step forward he tried again. With a little effort he could have grasped the prize, but his courage wilted ; he sat back, glowering furiously. Suddenly he flung his body forward, like a steel spring, grabbed the morsel and made off, shrieking as if his throat were being cut and bounding like a chamois.

In the centre of the wall, framed in a naïve fresco depicting a raja and his train mounted on elephants, a door stood ajar. I stepped into the night-black shadow of a tall mango-tree festooned with lianas, and boldly pushed the door wide open. It was like entering an over-heated room ; a gust of torrid air buffeted my face. An intricate parterre, laid out like one of our formal French gardens, stretched before me, aflame with light and bounded by a dazzling white wall. It was the first court of the Slave's Garden, wonder of all the wondrous gardens of Udaipur. From the cool darkness under the great tree I stepped into a radiant quadrangle bordered by shady arbours, murmurous with the sound of fountains rising and falling in long, silvery arpeggios.

Three pink marble steps, little Indian sisters of the Versailles staircase, led down to a small door set low in the white wall of the second close. Crossing the threshold, I stepped once more into a zone of cool green shadow. A garden small and secret where no flowers grow ; a place of marble and of many waters. I saw a shining pool ringed round with fountains soaring in a mist of rainbows ; in the centre of the pool a little temple of white marble

streamed in a constant shower that gushed from the throat of a gold bird perched above the cupola. Softly, caressingly, a smooth stream laved the summit of the dome, thinned out along the spreading curves, to fall along the colonnade in tendrils of bright water shimmering in the light.

Four trees stood sentinel at the corners of the garden and from a shadowed coign I gazed enraptured at the frail beauty of the enchanted close, the white magic of its rippling marble. Incredibly green, these trees are the only vegetation in the garden ; they have shot up between the flagstones and, following the hour, each casts in turn a shadow on a little temple nestling at its foot and haloed by the glittering spray that issues from the mouths of graven birds circling above the pinnacle.

The fragrance of the flowers in the enclosure I had left was wafted over the white wall. A pot-pourri of mingled perfumes, fainter here, it loitered in the warm, still air between the blue sky and the shining pool. Sweet, almost cloying, it filled the secret garden, mingling with the low sound of falling water. Hither in the breathless afternoons of the hot season the Maharanis of Udaipur come to take their ease in the little bathing-tank, secluded from the world by four white walls.

A miniature palace, like a doll's castle, poised in mid-air at the far end of the pool, blinked in the dazzling light. A room with marble walls, deliciously cool and dark, was pointed out to me as the place where the princesses rest after their water-frolics. And I was told, too, of a certain maharaja who used to come here secretly and sit behind the marble lattice, watching his wives and their attendants at play, naked forms of gleaming bronze in the blue depths of the white-walled basin.

Under the colonnade of the toy-palace I came on a golden doorway like the entrance to a venerated shrine. On a background of illuminated scroll-work hung from an ornamental stud a finely chiselled ring, clamping the two leaves of the door. Only after Dim had quelled his scruples by tendering a rupee did the durwan consent to fling wide the sumptuous portal, and I saw—another garden.

Still more secret, an inviolate retreat, this garden nestled in a bower of orange-trees and roses, shut in by four white walls. Four marble elephants leering like roguish eunuchs tossed up through uplifted trunks four miniature cascades that poured into a shallow pool shadowed by drooping roses. A flight of steps led down to the pellucid water. Here, if anywhere on earth, was fairyland regained, one of those magic pools whither across the golden mists of dawn the princess of a fairy-tale might speed with her attendant maidens to plunge into the water of dreams. A sheen of iridescent silk and sunlight, two peacocks had alighted on the coping of the wall. Preening themselves, they seemed to search in vain for a glimpse of exquisite young bodies splashing in the limpid water ; then, in despite, they took off with two loud flaps and planed majestically above the trees.

I returned to my haphazard exploration. The gardens came to an end as abruptly as they had begun. I was back again in a realm of dust, scrub jungle and wizened trees—but I had lit on a *trouvaille* ! A lake, a magical lake, bright as the sunlit sky, mirrored those very hills of blue which seen from the hotel across the morning mist had seemed so near at hand. The road skirted the bank of the lake, which for some distance was edged with white stones, then unexpectedly diverged from it.

"That Pichola Lake, Sahib."

So long as we had had the lake before us Dim had not dared to pester me with information ; once the blue water left behind, instinct had taken charge again. Rudely I bade him hold his tongue. Personally I felt like singing, so rich in breath-taking surprises was this eventful morning with its prodigious hours of new experience and colour !

AT THE FOOT OF THE RAMPARTS

A little before noon I caught sight of the lake again—this time through a lofty archway spanning the bottom of a street, for I had driven back, un-awares, into the city. The road abutted on a flight of steps descending to the water's edge.

Down in the lake women were washing clothes, waist-deep in the grey-green shallows. Now and then the head of a friendly-looking crocodile bobbed up to the surface. Lithely bending to their task, the women slapped the washing with flat stones, wrung it out and rinsed it, replacing soap—to Indian housewives an unknown luxury—by strenuous manipulation. Sometimes one of the younger women, tired of stooping, would straighten herself and draw back into place a garment that was slipping back from her shoulder, or press back underneath her bodice an evasive breast. Standing thus unmoving for an idle moment with the wet drapery welded to her form, she reminded me of a Tanagra statuette, a gracious Greek figure silhouetted dark against the bright lake-water.

At the top of the steps lethargic cows were moving to and fro amongst a concourse of pigeons and vagrant monkeys quarrelling over grains of rice that had lodged between the flagstones. Two oxen,

crouching face to face under the shadow of the gate on either side, looked like two high-reliefs in bronze keeping watch and ward on a triumphal arch.

Women were coming down the street which, straight and steep as a ladder, links the great archway with the upper town. Seated on one of the steps beside the lake, I watched their slow approach. First there was a rhythmic chime of tinkling anklets, then the bare brown feet came into view under the summit of the arch, then hems of wide, flounced skirts ; next the bronze skin of their bellies set in a glint of silver—the bangles on their swaying arms—then red bodices, and, last of all the brown veils draping their shoulders and dangling from their heads on which were poised, in miraculous equilibrium, three or four shining brass pots, one above the other. At last I had a full view of each in the brave light that beat upon the threshold of the arch ; then, as they passed under its shadow, I saw them outlined statue-like in monochrome, figures of antique beauty posed between the massive heads of the recumbent oxen. Now they stepped forth again into the light quite near the place where I was seated and, as she caught sight of me, each with a calm, dignified gesture drew her veil across her face.

As they came down the stairway towards the lake their anklets tapped each step with a clear bell-like sound. Squatting at the water's edge, they carefully rinsed out the water-pots, replenished them, and with a graceful sweep of their arms replaced them on their heads. Slowly they rose erect, the muscles of their necks taking the full weight of the brimming chatties with little sign of strain ; then, unhurrying, they climbed back citywards.

To the right of the steps, nestling at the foot of

the city wall, was a series of little temples rather like dilapidated mortuary chapels in a European graveyard. In a straggling line they flanked the foreshore, between the ramparts and the lake. Some had been tilted sideways by trees sprouting in the foundations and touched each other, wall to wall ; elsewhere I noticed gaps of shadow where, smeared with ashes, naked priests were squatting in the dust, tending mysterious little fires, or becalmed in trance-like meditation.

The strip of holy ground was thick with gods—gods standing on the earth, gods wedged in the boles of trees or niched in walls replacing fallen stones. Humble, demotic gods, rough-hewn or quite unhewn, they reminded me of the upended stones which stand for Siva's phallic symbol. All were smeared with vermilion and garlanded with flowers, and constantly the faithful soused the hallowed heads with draughts of water which, streaming down the baroque bodies, formed a little foot-bath round their feet.

Incongruously enough, looking at these little round pools, black rings of moisture in the grey dust, I suddenly remembered the chestnuts in the Avenue des Champs Élysées ; they, too, in the summer, stand up in a dry expanse of gravel with a little zone of dark, well-watered earth around the roots. Could I have travelled all the way to India only to be reminded of an aspect of the distant capital ? Surely not ! That man I had been observing for some moments differed—by a whole sky, indeed !—from the owner of the merry-go-round which pirouettes for the delight of young Parisians under Elysian shades. I saw in profile a half-naked Indian standing before a little shrine, rapt in an ecstasy of devotion, his hands joined palm on palm.

Lost in his mystic vision, he seemed an effigy of prayer incarnate. I walked towards him to discover what was the image that inspired this rapturous adoration. In the background of the shrine stood an idol crudely carved in a sort of bas-relief, about the size of a nine-year-old child—the gesticulating form of Hanuman, the monkey-headed god. Wrapped in tin-foil like a slab of chocolate, with two studs of red mica for the eyes, the Hindu god reminded me of the grotesque Aunt Sallys of our country fairs. A little heap of jasmine and orange-flowers, strewn on a layer of red powder, lay between the idol's feet. The man continued praying, I had not disturbed him. Absorbed in his devotions, he had not even noticed my approach.

At the water's edge men were busy washing their long turbans and *dhotis*—loin-cloths—and hanging them out to dry on the low branches of the trees, which little by little seemed to be “going gay” with white and crimson streamers. Just in front of them a holy man, a Sadhu, was performing his daily *yogi* exercises ; waist-deep in the water he vomited effortlessly every two minutes.

With the first hour of the afternoon approached the respite of siesta. Gradually the stairway grew deserted ; the steps shone blinding white ; almost I could hear them crackling in the heat. On my left the foreshore widened out into a sort of quay dotted with trees in whose shadow lay white and yellow forms, men and cattle, drowsing out the ardent hours. A group of women were squatting in a circle on the ground ; with their bright-hued draperies and veils they looked like a cluster of huge poppies fallen in the dust. They were chattering away, but rarely made a gesture. Now and again, when one of them straightened a cramped limb, I saw

glimpse-wise a bare brown leg under the red or bright green flounce, the flash of heavy toe-rings linked by slender chains and a string of broad anklets wedged one against the other from the ankle half-way to the knee. Sometimes a veil would slip aside, discovering a bare arm swathed in silver chains and bangles above the elbow and from the elbow downwards to the wrist.

Of the men an energetic few had not succumbed to sleep and, lounging against the city-wall, were talking amongst themselves. Men and women were segregated in two separate groups with the children a connecting-link between them, naked brown urchins scampering from one group to the other, or rolling in the sand, their little knees and backsides all grey with dust.

Leaning back against the wall, I gazed under the trees across the shimmering vista of the lake ringed round by the blue hills still veiled in gauzy mist. Perched high on islets in the lake, tiny marble palaces, white gems set in the gold of sunlit water, gleamed in the light ; the summer palaces to which the Maharaja repairs in quest of coolness, or for solitary meditation.

LITTORAL

Slowly, lethargically, in the breathless languor of the afternoon, a boat conveyed me across the sleeping lake. In the little island I came upon some pigeons, some poverty-stricken labourers, an atrociously decorated palace, the scent of orange-trees—and one of the most marvellous panoramas in the world !

In the shadow of an orange-tree in flower, at the water's edge, I sat looking towards the bank from

which we had put off, where rising from the level to the summit of the hill magnificently shone the frontage of the palace. Now at last I saw all Udaipur, the city of the lake, in its peerless beauty—a flood of luminous marble cataracting down between the towers in cascades of white masonry high a hundred yards and more, leaping across the terraces and hanging gardens, and plunging sheer into the lake in a white spume of broken lights.

I refused to visit the other islands, for these Indian Hesperides, so charming from afar, are hideous at close quarters. Only the view from them is admirable. As the heat grew fiercer my boatmen rowed ever more languidly along the lake, skirting the pale mirage of Udaipur. The city left behind, they turned inshore at the edge of a parched, deserted strip of jungle where by some miracle of foresight our tonga was awaiting us.

We took a road between a rugged hillside and the placid lake. Suddenly the lake came to an end and we were in the domain of the wild boars. Mangy, undersized little brutes, black but uncomely and no more impressive than farmyard pigs, they flocked forth from the jungle, boldly jostled us and took cover in a thicket just in front only to sally forth again a moment later from a bush behind. Another herd, perhaps—but I could have sworn they were the same. This was the hour, as they knew well, when their keeper, posted on the summit of a tower, would summon them to their evening meal and launch their provender by sackfuls. I was quite aware that these wretched boars were dying of starvation in the arid jungle and the Maharaja of Udaipur (like most maharajas) feeds them out of charity—quite prepared to kill them when the pig-sticking



I looked back to the bank whence we had put off
UDAIPUR: LITTORAL

season comes round. For some unfathomable reason everyone who has seen the feeding of the boars seems to find it vastly picturesque and talks or writes it up with awed enthusiasm. Even if the animals were not so tame, why take so dramatically a species of boar that is to be seen everywhere, in villages and country roads and barnyards? These famous black pigs are merely Asiatic cousins of our pink pigs at home. I had been told of ravening "monsters" at their feast. Well, a monstrous feast, perhaps. There was something revolting in the sight of all these hideous beasts summoned by the call of a muezzin-swineherd, swarming like malignant demons of the forest out of the underwood.

Decidedly I prefer the lake. Seen thus from the far end of the wide stretch of water, the little palaces look like drifting icebergs, glimmering fragments of the gigantic ice-floe that is the Castle of Udaipur.

A little above us, half-way up the barren hillside, a dirty flag, a tattered strip of loin-cloth, flapped in a breeze we could not feel below. There, so Dim told me, dwelt three Sadhus. For six years, often longer, such men live secluded from the world, learning to pray aright and to attain the contemplative state by the daily practice of strenuous physical exercises. Thus they gradually train the body not to trammel spiritual meditation by its exigencies and desires.

I strolled up the hillside to visit the recluses. Four walls and a roof with nothing under it except an image of Siva and three bare sleeping-boards. I looked at the Sadhus; their naked, emaciated bodies were smeared with grey ash, their long hair was plaited—one had dyed his a reddish-brown. In the eyes of another I seemed to see a glint of hysteria. Appalling creatures! But then they

smiled, and I thought better of them ; gentle, simple folk.

They showed me their rustic altar, a flat stone on which stood three amorphous statues dripping with water and garlanded with flowers. They presented me with the corolla of a jasmine-flower, and I laid an offering at the humble shrine. Two of the Sadhus seemed delighted by the idea of being photographed ; alas, the red-haired one, the spit of Harpo Marx, had vanished ! No, there he was, coming back ; he had retired to make himself up. Now his face was chalky white, a vertical red streak, the sign of Siva, ran down between his eyes, and his eyelids were thickly daubed with black. My look of surprise delighted him, and he greeted it with a burst of oafish—or was it saintly?—laughter.

The sudden twilight of the East swept down on us. A ribbon of lights picked out the crest-line of the ramparts, etched in fire the summit of the palace. Down in Udaipur City twinkling lamps began to glimmer furtively between the houses. A scene that Victor Hugo would have loved to sketch in pen and ink, the perfect *décor* for his *Burgraves*.

On the way back I urged my little horses to a gallop. It was bitterly cold.

THE RAJPUT WONDERLAND

I could never have enough of the Udaipur bazaar. Next morning I visited it for the first time, the following morning found me there again ; indeed, it came to be a place of daily pilgrimage throughout my stay at the Rajput capital. I expected to find similar bazaars everywhere ; I never saw its like again. In the native quarter of Delhi, at Agra and Jaipur, the streets were wide, the houses more

or less alike; and the motor-cars, the tiresome Europeans and ugly Ghandi-ites spoil everything. At Jhalawar, Kotah and Panna, Rajput though they were like Udaipur, the streets were not so densely crowded, there was less colour, less diversity of types. In fact, the Udaipur bazaar is unique in India.

Like many other capitals of Native States, Udaipur has no European quarter. The bungalows of the two or three Englishmen who live here are discreetly hidden away amongst the trees. And the breathless tourist-errant, whom Mr. Cook precipitates around the Sights of India, "does" Udaipur in one disgruntled day. A single visit to the bazaar is quite enough for him.

"Of course the palace is terribly picturesque and all that. Rather like Ramon Novarro's palace in that film of his: 'Son of India.' But the bazaar—you never saw such dust, or such filthy people! And there's nothing to buy"—a bad mark that for Udaipur! "Yes, it's a hopeless place, not worth a visit. And that's what I tell all my friends, you know."

Let us hope our tourist is as good as his word. Let him advise his friends to "give the Udaipur bazaar a miss"; for thus the Bombay merchants will have no pretext for descending on the town and setting up their curio-shops. And I sincerely hope the day will never come when the cars and tongas of the personally conducted force their unwelcome way across the crowds thronging those tangled streets, where, one memorable morning, Udaipur bazaar sprang on me its manifold surprises.

Queer streets indeed they are, driving straight uphill, then shooting off at a sharp angle; beginning spacious as a market-place and dwindling into

narrow alleys ; coiling round the houses and rambling into footpaths, sand-tracks or merely dead-ends ; plunging lakewards or soaring to the palace ; fretted with flights of steps or escalading temple-crowned heights ; drenched in sunlight and bright dust, and loud with chaffering voices—the marvelous streets of Udaipur where now as ever for a thousand years the daily pageant of Rajputana is enacted.

No turbulence was here, only composed disorder, reminiscent rather of a fairy ballet than of a market-fair. With the serenity of immemorial routine a motley cortège streamed through the bazaar : cloven-bearded Rajput clansmen in rich brocades coming down from the palace, holding themselves haughtily erect, their swords enveloped in silken scarves ; merchants in coloured turbans, their shirts dangling over their long white drawers ; naked starveling “untouchables,” members of the sweeper caste ; Mahometan women, their faces veiled, in gaudy pantaloons looped in above their tinkling anklets ; conventional Hindu matrons swathed in orange saris, or bold young Rajput beauties moving with a supple, dancing movement of the hips, dressed in the pleated Rajput skirt, their bellies bare to the navel, their firm breasts pointing under bodices of crimson silk.

I was the only European there ; mine the only hat and tie in all the crowd. And what a difference from the Arab bazaars or those of Cairo, spider-webs spread out to snare their guileless prey, the white man who has roamed into their clutches and is promptly set on by a hungry horde of blood-suckers !

Here were no touts, no beggars ; the atmosphere was one of cordial indifference. And very soon I

merged into the crowd and felt myself at one with it. I sauntered between low houses that followed no alignment, sometimes lunging forward with a carved balcony or terrace swarming with children, sometimes standing back, flat-fronted, roofed with canvas awnings. There were no pavements and from dark cavities the market-stalls flowed out on to the road, flooding it with their wares—I was unpleasantly reminded of a running abscess—while the artificer-shopman, squatting in the dust in front, calmly plied his trade amongst the bare feet of the passers-by.

The shops were grouped by trades. There was a dyers' quarter, where on the thresholds men with blood-red arms were dipping veils in vats that looked like witches' cauldrons; in another quarter the calico-printers, bent double over long strips of material spread out on stone slabs, were busy stamping coloured patterns on the fabric with rubber pads; in the seed-merchants' street I saw the salesmen dozing peacefully among baskets dumped before their stalls. At every turn I came on betel-shops, neat and clean as any European chemist's; on a soft bed of lustrous leaves, amid a bright array of canisters and scissors, were laid out appetizing little wads of greenstuff. Everywhere, too, were cook-shops where innominate gobbets sizzled in a pan of frying oil which the cook dosed repeatedly with pinches of spice and pepper. The mixture, whatever it was, gave off a smell of sweat and curry. Now and again he would fish out a sort of rissole, large as a man's fist, wrap it in a leaf or a soft round of bread rather like a pancake, and hand it to a customer.

A cheerful noise of shouts and music attracted my attention. Fifteen men and several veiled women

were grouped round a youngster on horseback ; he was gaudily attired, with a gilt aigrette stuck in his orange turban—a bridegroom on his way to the bride's house. Slowly, to a sound of drums and flutes they marched up the street, forcing their way through the crowd, which took but little notice of them. I had a good view of the bridegroom ; preposterously young he looked, ten years old at the outside. Very gravely the child smiled towards me.

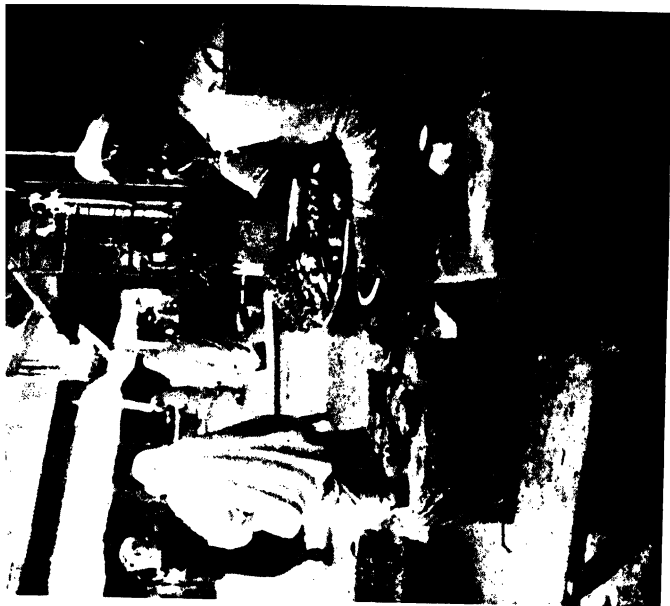
I was about to follow the little procession, when a troop of women going down to the lake, carrying their brass water-pots on their heads, came between me and the wedding party, which disappeared up a side-street.

I was on the point of turning to the right when a cow, spewed violently forth from a covered stall, shouldered me aside, and I turned left instead. The street led into a little square whence a flight of steps lead up to a large temple built on a knoll. Looking at the fantastic figures moving up and down the steps, I quite forgot the wedding and the child-bridegroom. I saw Sadhus in saffron-yellow robes clasping their begging-bowls, with rosaries of sandal-wood hung round their necks ; stark-naked ascetics, painted white from head to foot ; shaggy hermits streaked with powder come back from five years' reclusion in the jungle. The gradient was so steep, each step so high as to throw the body out of plumb, and the people going up towards the temple lurched this way and that like awkward puppets.

As in our French villages the better-class shops cluster round the church, so here at the foot of the temple, around the square and near the corners of the streets that lead away from it, I found the luxury shops of Udaipur. No more cook-shops or



Bearded goldsmiths filing silver bangles



*Everywhere were cook-shops
UD-AIPUR: THE RAIPUT WONDERLAND*

betel-stalls were to be seen in this august vicinity. Here the cloth-merchants' shops had pride of place, and each was lined with European-style almirahs stacked high with rolls of fabric. There were no shop-windows or show-cases, but, running down into the street, was a curious platform which serves both as a show-table—when the merchant is showing a customer his wares—and as a couch on which reclining in his leisure moments he smokes a philosophic pipe, or dozes.

Two elderly Rajputs were debating the purchase of new headgear, hesitating between a mauve turban with yellow spots and another one, mauve-spotted on a yellow ground.

Why I hardly knew, I felt a sudden interest in the issue and, with Dim for an interpreter, listened in to the dialogue.

“There's a rupee—I'll take the mauve one.”

“Very well! And I'll have the yellow one. Here's your money.”

Each drew a silver coin from his trouser pocket.

“The mauve one will make the handsomer turban,” one of them remarked. “That is why I chose it—and that's why I want you to have it. Here it is.”

Smiling, the other locked his hands.

“Exactly what I felt about the yellow one. Take it; I hope you'll value it as much as I shall prize the one you've given me.”

Immediately after leaving the cloth-merchants' corner I came upon the goldsmiths, bearded fellows half-hidden in their shops and half outside—like snails emerging from their shells—midway between their show-trays heaped with bangles, rings and necklets and the little stoves like alchemists' retorts in which their tongs were heating. Here was evidently

the *chic* shopping centre, habitat of jewellers and costumiers—the Rue de la Paix of Udaipur.

Was the crowd denser here, I wondered, or was this the local “rush hour”? Suddenly I found myself unable to make headway. Finally I lit upon the origin of the “traffic-jam”; two camels, laden with firewood from the jungle, were trying to turn in the narrow street. The crowd was held up for a moment, then flowed on again, swaying apart and closing like a cornfield traversed by a herd of cows. Apt metaphor—for the animals in question were very much in evidence, making their ruminative way along the street, lolling outside the shops, sauntering into houses, lumbering out of market-stalls, licking the doorsteps on which deferential Rajput housewives deposit little heaps of grain, their daily tribute to Her Holiness the Cow. For these Indian cows, spoilt children of the Indian streets, affect the self-complacence of infallibles.

I watched a man worshipping a statue posted in a wall-niche. Around its neck he had hung a flower-garland, and with folded hands was doing obeisance to it. A cow sidled along the wall, scanned the image with the placid satisfaction of an animal eyeing a manger, raised a slobbering muzzle towards the holy emblem, and with a deft flick of her tongue gulped the garland. Then she bent down to sniff some flowers which had dropped from her lips. The donor of the garland looked no more surprised than a devout parishioner who sees his priest emptying the alms-bag into which he has just slipped his offering.

For some minutes we had been preceded by an elephant. Like a huge grey building looming unexpectedly between the white-washed houses it had emerged from a side-street. Now it was am-

bling uphill towards the Palace, to the rhythmic chime of bells dangling like stirrup-irons on either side of the huge paunch. Suddenly at the summit the elephant halted abruptly, straddling the roadway. The mahout mounted on its neck jabbed it with his goad. As the iron prong rose high into the air it seemed to hook a ray of sunlight, then it flashed down again upon the massive skull with a clang of metal on hard bone, while the ponderous ears flapped to and fro like fins. To my dismay, the elephant began to back into a house. I foresaw a cataclysm of show-cases, a massacre of turbaned figures. But the daily miracle of the Indian streets renewed itself; between a stairway and a booth, where there was hardly standing-room for three, ten men and a cow, not to mention a merchant's entire stock-in-trade, quietly yielded to the pressure of the huge beast, seeming to dissolve, Proteus-like, into watery wraiths, without a cry of protest, without mishap.

I had a similar surprise at Amritsar, where one rainy day our lunatic of a tonga-driver knocked down a woman, plunging her with the basket on her head into a quagmire of mud. And no one, not even the victim, protested! The same thing happened at Hardwar, where a friend of mine, the world's worst driver, ran over a Sadhu without harming him in the least.

The Indian's suppleness is hardly less amazing than his impassivity.

THE FEUDAL CASTLE

The street up which I was walking culminated in an immense gateway, like a triumphal arch—a monumental cleft in the high walls that circumscribe the

palace. Passing under it, even the elephant looked small. As I trudged uphill some palace grandees in neat but richly coloured garments, with bushy, upcurled beards, strode down from the archway and passed me by. I found something rather engaging in their obvious self-complacence. Too arrogant to cast a downward glance, they trod in the pats of cow-dung littering the streets, with the proud unconcern of *grands seigneurs*.

Some dirty, draggled sentinels were sleeping in the shadow of the arch. Their tunics and swords hung on a nail above their heads ; they had done off the former by reason of the heat, the latter as impediments to slumber. With dreamy eyes they watched us passing.

The archway left behind, I found myself at the foot of a sheer cliff of marble. Gazing up at it I felt absurdly small. The smooth surface ran unbroken almost to the summit, where it became honeycombed with windows, studded with balconies, and thrust forth terraces and turrets, raking the sky with pinnacles. And now I recognized the splendid palace I had watched the previous day slowly emerging from the clouds.

In the foreground was a long esplanade or courtyard flanked on the side that overhung the town by ramparts, and containing cow-houses and stables. For the palace of Udaipur is self-sufficing, like a stronghold of the Middle Ages, and can dispense with the village for protection and its food-supplies.

The esplanade was nothing more or less than a gigantic farmyard. Elephants were lined up outside their stables, and between their feet fowls were scratching about for grain. Cows strayed to and fro around the cattle-pens ; the air was pungent with a healthy odour of manure. At the far end of

the courtyard, in a cloud of dust and startled pigeons, a rider was putting his horse through complicated paces. I had an impression he was being watched by some unseen person high above him, for now and again he cast an anxious upward glance and when about to try some difficult feat of horsemanship swung his horse round to face the castle wall.

I was puzzled to discover where and how we were to enter the palace. Perhaps, I thought, a panel of the façade would be lowered, forming a drawbridge. For not a door, no window was to be seen for thirty yards or so above the pavement. Natural enough, considering how in old days the Lords of Udaipur were constantly attacked, their walls beleaguered. Not only were their neighbours fiercely jealous of their power, but they themselves gave rivals little peace. Along the crest-line of the hills they erected an outer ring-wall twelve miles in circumference, and fenced the city proper in with crenellated ramparts. Then, as a third line of defence, beside the palace they set up another line of fortifications behind which horses and their riders were always in readiness to sally forth at a moment's notice ; and they dared breathe freely only in the topmost stories of the castle, at the climax of their marble keep.

My eyes had failed me. There *was* a door, and Dim discovered it. A dark, steep, narrow staircase that seemed never-ending led within. At last we reached a landing. Then a little inner courtyard where we found a janitor waiting to take us under his wing. Bare-footed out of principle as much as out of poverty, he cut an inconspicuous figure beside my bearer, who assumed his most imposing manner. The two of them embarked on

a long palaver. I gathered finally that we were ahead of the hour fixed for the audience the Maharaja had deigned to grant me ; he had issued orders that we were to be shown over the palace, and meanwhile our bare-footed friend was going to hunt up two acolytes to act as guides.

After another wait two more henchmen put in an appearance, and at last, like pioneers plunging into the jungle, we set out on our explorations. Across a maze of corridors, twisting and turning like roots of giant trees, we made our devious way into a nest of boudoirs and reception-rooms. Next came another series of vaulted passages, black as night and branching out in all directions, and presently we entered another interminable cluster of reception-rooms and boudoirs.

Sometimes we came upon a suite of five rooms opening one into the other, then once again we stumbled through the darkness of an endless corridor, till presently more rooms loomed up, singly or in groups. Were there really no other rooms, I wondered, between these habitable oases, or were we forbidden sight of them ?

After half an hour I had had my fill of it ; I was not tired, merely discouraged. Not that the apartments lacked in interest and had not a certain picturesqueness. The walls were adorned with frescoes depicting hunting-scenes and processions. As in the works of the Italian Primitives, the effect of movement in the composition was rendered by the portrayal of the principal figure in various situations, suggesting a time-sequence. Thus in a panel showing a maharaja shooting a tiger from a tree-top, the tiger appears eight times over. The first picture shows the tiger in the left-hand corner, breaking cover ; in the next it is

slinking down a path ; in the third, passing under a tree, and so on till the eighth picture, which shows the tiger sprawling on its back, four feet in air. Flat, without perspective, the background of these primitive cinema-reels is a series of strips of landscape, placed one above the other ; and the colouring is such as children love. They would make perfect mural decorations for a nursery.

In their setting these naïve frescoes have an engaging quaintness, and the very low, narrow windows of the rooms with their pointed arches are not devoid of charm. I could even make allowances for the floors of ill-polished flagstones which in earlier days, presumably, were carpeted. But the furniture—not to mince matters—was an abomination !

Obviously these rooms were never intended to contain furniture. Those low-set windows eked out with tiny balconies level with the floor, those frescoes running up from the bottom of the walls, were meant to go with carpets, cushions and quilts strewn on the ground for guests to squat on ; with trays laid on the floor. In fact, these reception-rooms have been cruelly maltreated ; some tasteless modernist has foisted curtains on the windows, candelabra on the ceilings. Not a corner but has been desecrated by the cabinet-maker. And what furniture—grotesque, pretentious, pathetically inept !

What European firm, I wondered, had devised this sacrilege ? What scoundrel of an interior-decorator conceived the evil notion of “ unloading ” his misfits on some unhappy Indian prince who blindly trusted to the taste and honesty of his European mentor ? Sad to say, this eyesore is not peculiar to Udaipur ; in all too many of the palaces

of India, even the most recently installed, I was to find a similar style of furniture.

But if the furnishers were rogues, what of their customers' taste?

Obviously, if only Indian princes would take some pains to study the European art in which they wish to see the inspiration of their palaces, they would not be obliged to follow blindly the advice of more or less interested "experts," and could decide such matters for themselves, or at any rate acquire some competence in criticism.

One of the rooms I visited had cut-glass furniture upholstered in red velvet, another one was furnished with copper-gilt sofas. Everywhere, laid out on tables, exhibited in cabinets heavily carved with baroque scrollwork, was a profusion of trumpery odds and ends : alarm-clocks, little Swiss peasants, miniature Eiffel Towers, hideous mantel-clocks in porcelain, paper-weights of painted glass. Now and again I was confronted by the former Maharaja in a tinted photograph enlarged life-size, cut out and pasted on a piece of wood shaped to its outline. Sometimes I saw him thus in solitary eminence, planted in the centre of a room, sometimes a tiger, similarly mounted, crouched beside him.

Dim did not know the palace as well as our shirted guide. On several occasions he had blundered, found himself pulled up midway in an explanation—convicted of incompetence. Now he trailed after us in silence, feigning morose indifference.

In one room, I was shown a picture representing in meticulous detail the former Maharaja standing over a prostrate tiger, with his son beside him.

The guide explained : "That old Maharaja. This the son, ruling prince now, when it was eight."

A guffaw behind me—Dim could not contain his scorn.

“Eight !” he exclaimed, “what a nonsense ! Look, Sahib, he has big moustache ; eighteen, nineteen, more likely,” and added over my shoulder with a protective, confidential air : “All these palace guides no damn good, Sahib ! Never gone to school, never travelled like us !”

Emerging from a hideous Louis-Philippe *salon*, we came on a delightful hanging garden. Trees encaged in wire and covered with birds shot up between the flagstones, and marble balconies floated out above the sunlit lake. Mirror-smooth, the bright expanse was dappled with reflections of the islets, white petals on a field of blue. From another terrace, at a lower level, came a waft of orange-trees in flower. How good it would have been to linger here a while ! Unhappily, I gathered, my grand tour of the palace was far from ended ; heroically I tore myself away.

More rooms followed, and then we stepped into a room so charming that my heroism was rewarded. Walls and coved ceiling were tessellated with little scraps of looking-glass of various shapes and sizes let into the plaster, a marvellous mosaic faceted with broken lights. Every patch of shadow glittered with diamonds ; the room was very dark and luminous at once. It overlooked a small covered terrace, a sort of loggia ; beyond the balcony of fretted marble I saw not the blue lake but a sea of gardens breaking in green billows on the white cliffs of Udaipur city. I could make out the bazaar with its lacework of tangled streets, woven in many colours. Two more wedding processions were wending their noisy way, the bridegroom on

his horse attended by the usual fifes and drums whose distant stridence thrilled the air.

The number of weddings surprised me. I was informed that this period of the year was particularly auspicious—so the priests who fix the dates of marriages had enounced. Sometimes for months on end they would frown on such events ; once the embargo raised, there was a rush of weddings, all the more hasty for the length of time the would-be bride and bridegroom had been waiting.

Once more I was conducted through a series of dark, narrow passages, extremely low in places. With bent head I groped my way across the darkness ; sometimes I stumbled on an unseen step and all but plunged headlong down one of the staircases that opened unexpectedly in the wall. Easy it must have been to lay an ambush in those furtive passages, to deal a death-blow at a dark corner of the twisting stairs. Indeed, the palace records are full of legends of sinister intrigues, of plot and counter-plot.

Was it not here that Myrrha lived, Myrrha whose deeply moving story I was to hear a few months later from the lips of a friend, a Prince Charming of the East and an exquisite story-teller ?

Why not relate it now ? Nothing could be more typically Indian, no description body forth so well as this fantastic tale, the palace that was its setting.

One spring morning, about two hundred years ago, in the Zenana of Udaipur—the portion of the palace allotted to the Princesses and their attendants—the Maharaja's wife was talking to her little daughter. They were sitting on the floor in front of one of the narrow palace windows ; the marble lattice screened them from intruding eyes, but let

them see, across the mesh of woven stone, the streets of the bazaar below, the palace gardens and white-walled pools where on hot summer afternoons they bathed, and in the background blue hills quivering in the heat-mist.

The elder woman sat with her back to the light, smiling towards the laughing child before her. The little girl was barely ten, but beauty was hers already, and her big dark eyes sparkled with intelligence.

Her name was Myrrha.

Suddenly a throb of drums, a burst of merry music, rose in the jasmine-scented air.

The child exclaimed, "What's that?" and, darting to the window, clasped the marble bars with her small fingers, pressing her head against the lattice to see what was happening down in the city.

"A marriage, I expect," her mother replied.

"Oh, Mother, look! Just look! There's a man there on a horse, with a lovely aigrette in his turban—and such a lot of people round him!"

She pointed to the knot of people round a horseman, moving along a street in the bazaar. It was the very scene that I had witnessed, down to the smallest detail; setting and costumes were identical—and perhaps the elephant for whose fat passage the wedding party reluctantly made room was grandsire of the beast I had encountered an hour ago on my way to the palace.

"What a nice-looking man, Mother! Who can it be?"

"The bridegroom, darling."

"What does that mean — 'bridegroom' ? What's he going to do?"

"He is going to fetch his wife."

"What does he want her for?"

"To play with her, Myrrha dear," the mother smiled, amused by the torrent of questions, and stroked her little girl's hair. But the child's face was earnest, unsmiling.

"What a lucky girl she is, his wife, to have a nice bridegroom to play with! Why haven't I a bridegroom?"

"You will have one some day."

"Oh, Mother, can't I have one *now*? It's so dull here," the little Princess sighed, "and I'm so lonely. Do let me have a bridegroom, Mother dear."

There was such childish determination in her look and voice that her mother burst out laughing and took her in her arms.

Next day "I want a bridegroom" was the first word on her lips, and thereafter, day after day, she moped and pined, day after day her tears fell on the marble trellis as she watched the bridegrooms riding out to play with their betrothed.

One day she was saying her prayers to the image of Krishna, entreating him to give her a playmate, when her mother entered the room, and overheard the request.

"Why," she suggested, "why don't you ask Krishna to be your playmate? Wouldn't it be nice to play with him, to take him as your bridegroom?"

An inspiration!—Myrrha danced with joy. . . . At last she had a bridegroom of her own!

Each day she decked her playmate with garlands, strewed dew-drenched sprays of jasmine at his feet; every night she told him fairy-tales and each morning washed his limbs, dressed him in silk robes and draped his altar with rich cloths. Then in a fit of jealousy she carried off the statue to a small, secluded room which she allowed no one else to

enter, a sanctuary into which they often saw her vanish, coming from the garden, her arms laden with flowers.

A pretty fancy, so her parents judged at first her conduct. Indeed they were delighted to see their little daughter so well-behaved, so happy.

For a Hindu the idea of "playing" with God had nothing shocking about it. One day I was told of a conversation between a Sadhu and a little boy. The holy man asked the child what he proposed to do when he was grown up.

"I don't know," the boy replied.

"What would you like to do?"

"I like playing; I don't care for anything else. Can one play with God?"

The saint pondered a while, then answered: "I think that if you could play with Our Lord it would be the finest thing that anyone has ever done. Men always take Him in such deadly earnest that surely He must be profoundly bored with them!"

So Myrrha's parents saw in her conduct a mere childish caprice; the "engagement" of their only daughter with the image of Krishna was a game of charming make-believe.

But when Myrrha was nearly fifteen and they spoke to her of marriage, she greeted their suggestions with a laugh.

"How can you talk of my getting married? Don't you know I have a bridegroom already? And I shall never love anyone except my Krishna."

And she ran out to the garden to weave a wreath of orange-blossoms for the well-beloved. It was the season when, in the Slave's Garden, the air is fragrant with white petals falling thick as snow-flakes from the sunlit orange-groves.

But now the Maharaja and his wife lost patience

with the child, chided her for her folly. Myrrha's answer was to shut herself in her room for days on end, only leaving it to gather flowers for Krishna's shrine. What would the princes of neighbouring states have to say, the Maharaja lamented, on learning that a daughter of the House of Udaipur refused to marry? What explanation could he give? And, worst of all, what rumours would not go abroad? For to omit to marry off a daughter before the age of puberty savours of irreligion and is frowned on by all right-minded Hindus. How much more scandalous to have a daughter at the age of fifteen still unwedded and, crime of crimes, determined not to marry! It was unthinkable that a maharaja of Udaipur should let the good fame of his house be sullied in this wise.

One evening he sent his daughter a casket full of venomous snakes.

Two serving-maids with trembling hands bore the casket down the dark corridors; its lid was heaving with the pressure of the writhing mass within.

"Princess," they said, setting it on a table, "these are jewels which His Royal Highness is pleased to send you."

"How kind he is!" Myrrha exclaimed. "Please tell my father that I cannot accept them for myself—but for the gifting of my Lord Krishna I will keep them."

She opened the casket.

Speechless with horror the maids recoiled towards the door. Suddenly a cry of wonder broke from their lips. Myrrha had emptied out the casket, and from it streamed a bright torrent of emerald necklaces and strings of pearls.

Myrrha waved the servants away and swept the

jewels into a heap. Her one desire was to be left alone with Krishna ; to regain her happy intimacy with the well-beloved, in this little room, her Holy of Holies.

What was the secret of her nightly vigils, the solace of her loneliness ?

Earlier in the day a man had crept into the room above hers and with soundless, ant-like industry had bored a hole in the floor. Now, at the nightfall, the Maharaja entered the room and, pressing his eye to the auger-hole, stared down into the room below. At last he was to know his daughter's secret.

Myrrha's room was changed out of recognition. The walls were draped in silk, the floor was carpeted with heavy velvet. Upon the altar, as on a bed of flowers, Krishna's image glimmered in the wavering lamplight. Curtains veiled the windows, everywhere were flowers ; the room had been transformed into a shrine. Myrrha stood before the altar, the palms of her hands pressed together, the fingers stretched out flat as in the statues of the Indian saints. Only her eyes, her lips, were living.

" Krishna dear, Krishna my lord, my love, you know everything that happens in the world, there's nothing you do not see, no one can keep a secret from you, so you must know my little heart is full of love, of love for you." In the simplest words, infinitely pure and tender, she prayed to her young lord. Then she sang hymns she had composed, hymns which still are used in temple ritual.

Smiling towards the image, she was silent for a moment ; then, " Now I'm going to dance for you," she said.

Bare-footed on the deep-piled velvet, in the centre of the little temple misted with silken shadow like

an alcove, she began a very slow, languorous dance. Naked she moved under the sheen of gauzy veils rising and falling to the slow rhythm of her arms that fluttered like white wings, fanning to fitful life the golden altar-flame.

Always her eyes were fixed on Krishna's image. Her lips grew moist, her movements were abrupt. Now on the verge of ecstasy she smiled, straining towards the idol with all the vibrant force of her young body. A sigh of love, of love that was half pain, broke from her lips.

"My beautiful, my lover, dance with me!"

The altar-flame soared up, swift and sudden as desire, veiling the god in lambent light. And lovelier than any son of man, a tall blue form stepped forth. . . . Krishna took Myrrha in his arms and danced with her.

With knitted brows and sullen lips the Maharaja went down the winding staircase of his palace, trying to set his thoughts in order. To describe what he had witnessed was futile. Nobody would credit it. How could he hope by such an explanation to retrieve the honour of his house? For his shame there was one remedy alone: Myrrha's death.

Next day he had a flask of poison carried to her, in the guise of sacrificial wine. And again, foulest of spics, he slunk into the upper room to watch. Beside her husband the Maharani sprawled face downwards, elbowing him away so as to take his place at the peep-hole whence she hoped to see her daughter drink the deadly potion.

The wine had been poured out. Myrrha had placed the cup at the foot of the altar. Now as on the previous day she stood before her God.

"Krishna," she said, "my father has sent this

wine for you. First I will pray to you, then I will drink to you, my Krishna."

With folded hands she spoke to him, adoring him in childish phrases. Then she sang to him and, clasping the goblet, raised it to her lips.

The flame of the lamp rose hugely, was cleft asunder, and through it Krishna leapt, effulgent.

"Myrrha, do not drink. The wine is poisoned."

"What does that matter, my dear lord? Everything that has to do with you is good, and to be near you is all my happiness; this wine is for you, your wine, Krishna—and I know that I shall find it sweeter than any wine on earth."

She drank the wine; they danced together.

Soon after this Myrrha expressed her wish to go to Kathiawar, to worship at the temple where Krishna died. Her parents whole-heartedly commended the desire—nothing could have better served their fiendish schemes—and placed horses and an escort at her disposal.

After long wanderings the Princess reached her journey's end, and went at once to the temple to pray. The assassins sent by her father had preceded her and were lying in wait behind the pillars.

Myrrha went up to the altar and folded her hands before the image.

"Dance with me, my well-beloved."

The assassins ran forward, their daggers raised, their muscles taut. Nearer and nearer they crept, at striking distance halted, and the bright death flashed down.

There was a crash of thunder. A living form of light incarnate, Krishna descended in a blaze of lightning, seized Myrrha in his arms. Clasped together, welded in light, they sank into the earth

which opened suddenly beneath their feet, then closed above them.

The flagstones of the temple were removed and the earth below them was deeply excavated. Nothing was found except a fragment of the white veil Myrrha had worn about her head. After parting to make way for Myrrha and her divine lover, the pavement of the temple had as swiftly closed again, trapping as in a vice the hem of Myrrha's sari. A little shred of torn silk fluttering above the stones was the last trace on earth of Krishna's mystic bride.

The veil is venerated to-day as a holy relic. It is preserved in the Palace of Udaipur and no European may set eyes on it, or, if he be allowed to do so, its guardians feign he has not seen it.

The tale of Myrrha is two hundred years old, but it is a Rajput tale ; in other words it might date from last week. The setting has not changed in any way, nor has the costume of the protagonists. And the mentality of the Lords of Udaipur is as it was in the beginning ; even to-day, rather than accept a blot on their escutcheon, they would condemn a daughter of the House to death.

I have often been told that the present Maharaja—the pathetic little cripple whom in a few minutes' time I was to meet—was wilfully deprived of medical attention when in early childhood he was stricken down by infantile paralysis. The order emanated from his father, who hoped that, as a consequence, the child would die an early death. For only thus the House of Udaipur would have been spared the breach with a great tradition, the shame of being ruled over by an invalid.

THE MONARCH IN THE TOWER

The time fixed for the audience the Maharaja had granted me was approaching. I had fancied that our divagations in the castle labyrinth had been purposeless, our guide's caprice. Now I knew better. Unawares, we had been shepherded back into the heart of the palace.

I recognized the little courtyard whence we had set out ; then, from the summit of a spiral staircase, my eyes fell on a larger courtyard. All the rooms through which I had been wandering for an hour or more had been untenanted, the terraces deserted ; now the dozen persons before my eyes impressed me as a crowd. Near the portal some partially accoutred guardsmen were crouching in a patch of shadow, an alcove in the wall, where they had piled their rifles and lances.

When I had first arrived two young men, obviously villagers, had been crossing the tessellated pavement in the courtyard, the walls of which were also in mosaic, inset with tiny blue and green tiles forming a peacock pattern. Each of the two men carried an enormous circular platter, the contents of which were hidden under a veil. A group of officers and equerries were lounging under the portico of a small room at the far end of the courtyard, and the two villagers showed them what they had brought. Neatly set out on the huge disks were little heaps of meat, of cooked grain, and of cakes ; in the centre stood a tiny pyramid of silver rupees. These were the offerings that, on getting married, every villager, as in duty bound, must lay before his rajah.

As a matter of fact it is unlikely that the Maharaja ever sets eyes on these gifts. The Brahmins take the

food, the money goes to the castle menials—unless (as well may be) the Brahmins pocket it as well.

In a small room opening on the pillared arcade I awaited the return of an official who had just gone to warn the Maharaja I had come. All the people round me were only half-awake, the very air seemed heavy with languor. At the courts of other Indian potentates—oddly reminiscent sometimes of the comic-opera courts of Ruritanian romance—I was to grow familiar with this atmosphere in ante-rooms where state officials and dignitaries of the palace take their gilded ease.

Idlers born, for all their martial airs, they had unhooked the collars of their tunics, and were yawning away the empty hours. Their days are spent in sleep and bickering about prestige. The ideal of these aides-de-camp, whose pretensions are as vast as their futility, seems to be to ape their monarch and in their own esteem identify themselves with him. Each in turn waits at the royal door, or trots, a loyal poodle, at his master's heels. In full force they gather at his table and—I will say this for them—fit very well into the setting.

Those whom I saw around me that morning seemed to have their uses ; they were equipped with swords. I noticed, however, that some tall, strapping fellows found the weapon too heavy for their liking, and had leaned it, umbrella-wise, against the wall.

A woman crossed the peacock courtyard, a slim, graceful figure in a rich sari—one of the palace dancing-girls. A guardsman moved to another corner ; the sun had found him out. Then all movement ceased—utterly. Squatting on the ground, the dignitaries seemed asleep.

In the little room where I was waiting I noticed

in the middle of a wall-panel a large cupboard with glass doors. At the back of the cupboard hung a circular mirror, a yard in diameter, with rays of bevelled looking-glass like sword-blades jutting out from it in all directions. Had it not been so large, I might have taken it for a decoration from a Christmas-tree suspended in an empty gun-cabinet. It was, however, the dynastic emblem ; all the maharajas of Udaipur are Children of the Sun.

A bare-footed officer bowed to me and, opening a door in the wall beside the solar emblem, led the way up a winding staircase. My eyes were level with his feet ; how, I asked myself, did he contrive to keep them thus immaculate, considering he wore no shoes or socks ? The staircase spiralled up and up unceasingly ; I realized that we were climbing a tower. The monarch was an invalid, I knew, and I wondered how on earth the unfortunate man got up these stairs, far too narrow to accommodate a litter or sedan chair. There was only one explanation I could see ; he was carried up astride on the shoulders of some stalwart henchman. As step succeeded step eternally, I finished by envying him.

Suddenly my eyes rose level with the calves of my foregoer, then with his waist. The long ascent had ended.

A door was drawn aside. I lowered my head. I was in a room lighted by narrow windows set close together and giving on to covered balconies. There seemed to be a number of people standing near the windows. They had their backs to the light ; at two steps away I could not see their faces. The silence was overpowering . . . Where was the Maharaja ?

I had a glimpse of two bowing figures, pointing respectfully towards the balcony on my right.

In a little loggia hollowed out in the wall and lit

by two arched windows opening upon the lake, a man in the forties, a pathetic-looking invalid, sat huddled up in a Directoire chair. He was swathed in a brown rug, wrapped tightly round his skinny shoulders as if he feared the cold.

"I must beg you to excuse me," he said, "but I cannot rise to greet you. Pray be seated."

I stepped on to the platform of the loggia. Two little gilt-wood chairs upholstered in red velvet—the type of chairs one sees in Paris only at charity sales and dances—had been placed facing the monarch.

His dark, lustrous eyes were fixed intently on my face. He spoke English fluently in a thin, effeminate voice which came oddly from his huge black moustache, the moustache of a buccaneer.

He was dressed very simply in a long grey tunic, and the rug almost entirely hid his body. I saw no sign of actual deformity, though he was of noticeably small stature. What struck me most was the curious way he crossed his legs, very high, with the left ankle resting on his right knee.

He was wearing odd-looking brown buttoned boots, made in England without a doubt, and I could not help noticing the smooth, immaculate soles that had never touched rough ground. Perhaps they were new boots ; but I was more inclined to see them as the footgear of a chronic invalid whose limbs have ceased to serve him.

No, he had never been to Europe ; he would prefer to know India well, to travel in his own country, before visiting the West. And a moment before he had informed me that he very rarely crossed the frontiers of his State ! But, like an accomplished society man, he kept the ball of conversation rolling with ready-made phrases, and adroitly turned my questions with vague, general remarks.

Impenetrable as his palace, he set up between us a wall of commonplaces, tricked out with charming *mots*, like the flower-girt walls encloistering his secret gardens.

He drew the rug more closely round him. For a moment his indifferent eyes ranged the vast panorama of the lake gleaming below the terraces, a vision of ideal beauty. Was he blind, I wondered, to all that loveliness, to the perfection of this corner of the earth, his kingdom? Or had he identified himself with it so intimately, so profoundly steeped his soul in beauty, that he no longer seemed to see it?

If Udaipur had a secret, who was the keeper of the secret? Could it be that helpless invalid who high above his palace sits shivering at a tower-window, waiting for a ray of his race-father, the Sun, to befriend him? I had half expected he would reveal to me the secret of that indefinable mystery which broods over Udaipur. But perhaps its curious fascination is lost on him. Or is he conscious of it, but fears that did he embody it in the poor speech of mortal men, it would pass for ever from the world?

He said nothing.

Like its maharaja, Udaipur keeps its mystery intact.

CHAPTER II

JAIPUR : CITY OF ARTISTS

EUROPE ENTURBANED

AFTER the tranquillity of Udaipur, the dreaming city, tranced like the Sleeping Beauty in her spell-bound palace, the briskness and bustle of Jaipur reminded me of a European capital.

Dinner-parties, garden-parties, cocktail-parties, polo, tennis, bridge and hunting occupied our strenuous days and nights. Life in Jaipur moved to the hectic rhythm of the Western *vie mondaine*, and all alike took active part in it—from the young Maharaja, his officers and staff, to the English residents and the crowd of guests in which we were included for an eventful fortnight.

There was something artificial in all this activity, modelled as it quaintly was on Parisian or London life ; it amused me to watch Rolls-Royces speeding from the Palace to the guest-house, from ministers' bungalows to the Residency, conveying young Indian "bloods," obviously in the highest spirits, but apeing the *blasé* airs of social veterans.

But besides acquiring a veneer of Occidental manners, Jaipur has gone to school with Europe in a deeper, more lasting way. It has learned to erect comfortable modern palaces, to build hospitals and *crèches*, to install vast museums, and to organize exhibitions and charity bazaars.

Like so many Indian princes, the sovereign of Jaipur was educated in England and has often revisited his *alma mater*. Quite recently he made a trip to England taking with him his fifty polo-ponies, for he is an adept at the game. Each year he deposes a minister to represent him at the Round Table Conference. His capital witnesses almost every day an influx of visitors, some of whom he personally greets and invites to stay in his private guest-house. Frequent are the Maharaja's trips to England, and numerous the Europeans who break the journey from Bombay to Delhi at this hospitable caravanserai. Thus Jaipur is in constant touch with Europe, as indeed are very many Indian states which, like Jaipur, keep their windows—and their doors—open to the West.

By the good offices of Atal Sahib, the Finance Minister, acting Minister of Entertainments on our behalf, we passed a memorable fortnight, each day of which brought its particular surprise. Experience followed experience in bewildering succession ; some I failed to understand, or understood as yet imperfectly, like the majority of tourists who lack time or the opportunity to steep themselves in Indian life by slow degrees and slough their Occidental skin.

One morning a ceremonial state parade was organized for our benefit in the courtyard of the palace. The State elephants were trapped in all their finery, caparisoned with velvet ; the howdahs in which the prince and his attendants sat were cased in gold from top to bottom, like precious shrines. Camels adorned with golden pompoms followed, then silver chariots, ivory victorias, troupes of gladiators clashing in grotesque sham-fights, to a cacophony of drums and divers instruments. On the

whole the pageant struck me as more Barnumesque than regal ; there was something of the travelling circus about it, something of a museum, too, a museum that had disgorged its contents into the street. One evening, after a formal dinner, some Indian dancing-girls gave a performance at the guest-house ; they were followed by instrumentalists and singers. At the time I could not recognize the movements of the Nautch as being a dance, or hear the sounds as music. It was only after I had passed three or four months in the company of the maharajas, watching the daily round of life in the Native States, and after I had questioned, argued with, and comprehended some of my more cultivated hosts, that I learned to grasp the inward meaning of such entertainments, and thereafter to enjoy them.

But, nearly every day, I witnessed scenes for which I needed no initiation into the secrets of Indian life in order to appreciate at once their comic, or merely diverting, aspects.

One morning a dozen mountaineers descended on the town, each carrying a long staff over his shoulder, at the ends of which were slung, like the pans of a pair of scales, round wicker-baskets, securely fastened. Squatting in a circle in front of the bungalow verandah, they began droning on clumsy flutes a thin, keening melody. Some well-conducted cobras reared flat responsive heads above the edges of the basket, from which the lids had been removed. After a look they evidently found us disappointing, for, with a brief, triangular spit a-piece, they rapidly recoiled from view. Rapped to attention, some of the cobras shot out again like jack-in-the-boxes, but, lacking the springs provided in these toys, relapsed at once.

From a little canvas bag a comical young man with a red-dyed beard extracted a pink grass-snake, then a bright green snake, extraordinarily long and lean—it might have been a frog put through a calender—then a plump snake with a toad's head. He wound them round his neck and arms, knotted them on his belt, and, trilling on his flute, began to dance with dainty little wriggles of his hips and feet, hands fluttering in mannered gestures. There was something rather nauseating in the airs and graces of our all-too-charming charmer; he reminded me of one of those little Chleuh dancing-boys whose ogling contests on the Place Djem el Fna at Marrakesh put diffident spectators out of countenance.

Next an old man, brown as a ripe chestnut, drew from his basket a fascicle of greyish rope, knotted and twisted in a skein. No sooner had it touched the ground than with marvellous adroitness kinks and tangles straightened out, slithered into a single snake—three yards long, so we were told. The old man gathered it up coil by coil, deftly shot his stick across the loops, without drawing them together, and, heaving up the writhing mass, tossed it back into his basket. Neat work! An Italian festooning half a plateful of spaghetti on his fork could not do neater.

Each morning on the verandah after breakfast a concourse of merchants from the bazaar proposed to us their wares: anæmic jewels and lustreless jade. The first time I saw them sitting side by side on the floor, beside their long tin trunks, their air of sombre dignity enhanced by noble Rajput beards brought to my mind a company of bereaved fathers watching in stoic grief the corpses of their little ones, coffined (by reason of the heat, presum-

ably) in tin. As soon as they saw us they raised the lids and produced an array of little paper sachets containing rubies, then small packages of Turkey-red cotton cloth containing pearls. They never spoke or solicited our attention. With dignified resignation they waited for us to evince an interest in their tiny wares. They were not in the least intrusive ; rather, it was we who seemed intruders on their privacy.

In the late afternoon a garden-party or cocktails, at the club brought us into daily contact with a group of charming young people. I was introduced to all the Indian courtiers and ministers ; most were Rajputs and, as such, appended the title " Singh " (meaning " lion ") to their names ; Ranjit Singh, Omar Singh, and so forth. At first I shared the surprise of Ragueneau when he heard Cyrano de Bergerac addressing all his Gascons as Barons, and could hardly help exclaiming : " Are you *all* ' lions ' ? "

One evening, when we were not dining at the palace with the Maharaja, an Indian officer came to the guest-house to keep us company—or was he not rather, egotistically, in quest of an audience ? Anyhow, for two solid hours, remorselessly, breaking off only to drain now and again a liqueur-glass of Chartreuse, he regaled us with tiger-yarns. At last I went to bed, the prey of devastating boredom rather than enthusiasm. Still boredom notwithstanding, that night I dreamed tigers, tiger-shoots, and tiger-skins.

And next morning, as it happened, I received an invitation to shoot . . . partridges ! I was given two attendants : an old man who followed me with my cartridges and a lad whose business it was to walk some paces ahead of me with a mysterious

canvas wallet full of pebbles slung round his waist. The function of my page-in-waiting soon came out. The three of us were advancing in Indian file when suddenly the little boy turned round and pointed to a partridge feeding quietly some twenty yards ahead. Once he was sure that I had seen it, he threw a pebble at the bird which rose at once—the easiest of shots, a “sitter.” After an hour his stock of pebbles—like those of the other boys—was expended. A halt was called for them to refill their wallets, then we all moved on again.

There was fox-hunting too, but on the two occasions when I took part in it the “fox” turned out to be a jackal ! We galloped across country none the less after our despicable quarry for two good hours.

“After all, it’s the horse that really counts in hunting, isn’t it?—not the beast one’s after.”

Thus opined the M.F.H., an Englishman.

On another occasion I took part in an elaborately staged duck-shoot ; only instead of ducks we brought down—parrots.

For two long months incessantly I dreamed of tigers. But I had no business to lose heart ; only the time was not yet ripe. A day would come when I had won the plenary affection of my hosts and when, of their good-fellowship, they would find it natural enough to offer me in their domains a *rendez-vous* with the King of the Jungle.

THE MAKER OF GODS

Even before coming to Jaipur I had heard Mal Ram spoken of as one of the best Indian sculptors. Now I learnt that he was to be found somewhere in the Jaipur bazaar. What better pretext could I

want for playing truant from the amiable travesty of European life with its receptions, jackal-foxes, parrot-ducks, for losing myself in the labyrinth of the Indian town and mingling in the vibrant life of truly native India ?

Jai Singh, the sixteenth-century architect, who planned the capital, saw it intersected with wide avenues, with ample breathing-spaces. Did this genius at town-planning foresee a day when the long, straight roads which he had created purely for their æsthetic symmetry four centuries past would come to be regarded as designed for utilitarian ends ? Did he guess he would be credited with prophetic gifts, the prescience that these thoroughfares would prove a godsend for the present Maharaja and his suite, enabling them to drive their powerful racing cars and bulky limousines at top speed through the city ?

One day, strolling down one of these long avenues on my way through the bazaar to Mal Ram's quarter, I encountered eight cars at least in half an hour. For the capital of a Native State the number was amazing. And how odd it was to see a lordly Rolls-Royce equipped with the most modern and opulent of bodies threading its way in solitary state between sacred cows and elephants, gliding round tiny altars dedicate to Siva set up in mid-street, scattering a motley throng of starveling children and half-naked, orange-turbaned natives with the low, luxurious clangour of the Rolls-Royce horn, recalling to Parisian ears the crowded traffic of the Rue de la Paix in the *Grande Semaine* !

If the pink houses lining the streets are more symmetrical than those of Udaipur, if market-stalls are here replaced by shops with modern windows, and if the crowd loitering on the pavement enjoys more

elbow-room and looks less dense, the denizens of both bazaars are more or less identical. Here, too, I stumbled over cows and goats recumbent in the gutters and outside the shops ; I saw slow elephants and placid camels going their appointed ways, thievish little monkeys everywhere, and troops of peacocks. The women went to the modern drinking-fountains at the street-corners in long files, just as they trooped down to the lake at Udaipur, and here again the brass pots on their heads reminded me of enormous buttercups swaying above a meadow of red poppies—the long veils that the dyers carried two by two along the streets, stretched across the fairway, to dry in the warm breeze. And what hosts of dyers there seemed to be in Jaipur !

It is a town of artisans as well as artists ; the shops are piled with bales of flimsy tissues screwed up tight in sausage-shaped cylinders, one end of which projects fanwise, exhibiting a sample of the material, with the gaudy patterns well in evidence.

Here, too, the brass-workers are more numerous than in any other city of India. The linear designs they favour for their boxes, trays and vases recall the brass-work one finds in the bazaars of Morocco. But there are traces of Persian influence in the work of the Udaipur craftsmen, and their flower-*motifs* have a distinctive charm. The grooves cut in the metal are filled with moist paint which is baked on to the brass over a coal fire. In early days the craftsman's worst enemy was the money-lender ; now it is the wholesale-exporter. At his instigation the art of Udaipur has declined from the delicate perfection of its earlier days towards the trumpery exoticism of the bargain basement.

I was glad to find some narrow streets surviving in Jaipur, capricious little streets that wind a wayward course around the houses grouped between the wider thoroughfares. Wandering through the tortuous maze of little streets in quest of Mal Ram's house, I was delighted not to have found it sooner. The friend who was acting as my guide began by being as lost as I was—only to him it gave no joy ; his vanity was galled. Suddenly he retrieved his bearings.

“ Here we are—the Sculptors' Street ! We are entering the kingdom of Mal Ram.”

For Mal Ram is not only the acknowledged master-craftsman of the artists in Jaipur, the city of marble and of sculpture, but is also president of a remarkable sculptors' guild which has its headquarters in this street. The group, as exclusive as it is united, has its code of traditions, its secret rites and ceremonies. On the feast-day of the clan “ their ” street is strictly closed to all outsiders and the sculptors pay each other ceremonial visits, sing and carouse together to their hearts' content.

Blocks of stone and marble littered everywhere the narrow roadway. Like a series of cupboards let into the lower stories of the houses the studios followed each other in a continuous line, and in each *atelier* I saw four or five sculptors, old men and twelve-year-old boys, chiselling marble blocks. The sheds in which they worked projected into the roadway, and while some of them were hardly visible in the dark recesses, the best craftsmen were always well in view, in front, nearest the light.

Most of these *ateliers* are really schools of sculpture similar to those which flourished in Rome in the days of Pope Julius II. Each team of sculptors has its master-craftsman with several apprentices work-

ing under him ; but all alike are subordinate to the grand-master and paragon, Mal Ram. It is he who creates the prototype of every statue ; the foreman of another studio sends for it and, after making a copy, transmits it to a neighbour, and so on till all the artists in the street have seen and studied it. Then the " model " is restored to its creator, and the various teams of sculptors set to work reproducing more or less—that little less how much it is !—the master's conception, in divers materials and on various scales, but always following as closely as they can the prototype.

We crunched stone shavings and powdered marble underfoot, our ears rang with the clash of hammers, our eyes were dazzled by the light. On every side were Hindu gods in all kinds of attitudes, posed to suit the artist's convenience ; stooping or standing upright in the middle of the road, or prostrate in a mound of stone-dust, their legs in air : elephant-headed gods, gods in the form of boars, monkey-gods, gods with faces set in a grimace and wearing necklaces of skulls.

On the threshold of a narrow door between two sheds we found four or five young men sitting, talking to each other.

" Mal Ram ? "—how reverently they pronounced the name !—" Yes, he's here. The Master is in the upper studio."

We entered a small inner courtyard dotted with consumptive-looking shrubs ; in the four corners, like rats gnawing a round of cheese far bigger than themselves, workmen were squatting on the ground, rough-hewing blocks of stone. A wooden balcony ran round the little courtyard half-way up the walls ; a series of rooms, the doors of which stood ajar, gave on to it. A staircase steep as a ladder led on

to the balcony, and as we climbed it, looking up, we saw a stalwart old man wearing the Rajput beard awaiting us. His hands clasped on his long white shirt, he gave us greeting with the courtly Indian salutation.

With smiling indifference he opened a door, then with a tranquil gesture of his finely moulded, aristocratic hand waved us towards the entrance ; he might have been a monarch bidding one of his ministers precede him into the royal sanctum. We were ushered into a dusty attic ; the whole place, tables, shelves and floors, teemed with statues and statuettes jostling each other for standing-room, astride, askew, all alike clad in a grey uniform of stone-dust.

I recognized Ganesha, Hanuman, and Kali, all the divers manifestations of the Hindu deity, all the "models" I had seen in process of being reproduced in Sculptors' Street. But there were other works of sculpture no less interesting : statuettes of reigning Indian princes, studies of the Indian "man in the street"—fat Brahmins, lean Sadhus, dancing-girls half smothered beneath their veils ; and each work struck an individual note. In the technique employed I found a refreshing element of modernity ; obviously the artist had a keen eye for realistic detail, but tempered it with a certain formalism that gave an added charm. I knew these works for masterpieces, exquisite of their kind, and was eager to acquire one for myself.

"No," Mal Ram smiled, "there's nothing here for sale. Why should I part with this or that ? I like to have my children round me."

I was fascinated by a statuette of Kali, a war-like female figure that seemed striding down towards me from her shelf. The little statue, which was carved



A stalwart old man with the Rajput beard
JAIPUR : THE MAKER OF GODS

in some kind of grey stone, was unfinished or, rather, dramatically half-finished. Face, breast and hands had been completed down to the smallest details, the tongue and eyes were already painted over ; but the hair and feet, the necklet of death's-heads and girdle of severed hands had been left almost entirely in the rough. I could not take my eyes off it !

"Your price is mine. I'd give anything to possess that statuette !"

Mal Ram shook his head.

"No, I mustn't part with it. As a matter of fact it's my new model for a Kali. I have followed the classical tradition, but humanized it on my own lines, as you see. My pupils are waiting to reproduce it ; their copies will serve to import a new conception of the goddess into Indian statuary." And, when I insisted, he added : "What's more, it isn't finished."

"Exactly—and that's why I like it even better. It isn't—how shall I put it?—stabilized. The figure seems to be casting off its shroud of matter, stepping out of darkness. As if it were coming towards me."

Mal Ram looked at me with enigmatic eyes. An arrogant mouth, I thought, and the Rajput beard gives him a look almost of disdain ; his face—a mask of bronze. Yet I divined an infinite gentleness in the dark, lustrous eyes.

He was conscious of my admiration, read the look of disappointment his refusal had evoked. Then, smiling gravely, he took down the statuette and placed it in my hands.

I could not repress an exclamation of delight, and asked the friend who was acting as my interpreter to tell Mal Ram how grateful I was and say that

I would pay whatever price he named. My friend translated. Mal Ram neither frowned nor laughed. He still was smiling, but only with his eyes ; his lips were set, severe.

“ You cannot pay me for it ; it is not for sale. I gave it to you. I could see you loved it. And the delight I read in your face when you took it in your arms has given me a joy more precious than all the gold on earth.” Claspings his hands once more, bowing, he thanked me !

His tall form preceded us as we went down the steps. At the bottom of the staircase he halted and waited till all of us had joined him in the courtyard.

“ There,” he said, “ is my master.”

His eyes were turned towards a wall ablaze with sunlight, in which I saw a black rectangle, a doorway opening into a darkened room. On my way upstairs I had not noticed it ; then the door must have been closed. Now in the shadowy background, by the light of a small lamp at its feet, I made out an image of Krishna. I glanced back at Mal Ram ; always his face wore the same ill-assorted expressions. The eyes were smiling, soft with tender feeling ; framed in the bushy Rajput beard, his lips seemed more disdainful than ever. Calmly, benignly, like one who has seen life’s struggle through and won the peace that passes understanding, he said :

“ Here I have carved the image of my god, here is his shrine, and in my works I praise him.”

I asked if he would let me take his photograph.

“ Why ? ” he asked. “ Think what a paltry thing a photograph is—a scrap of paper ! ”

“ But,” I answered, following his mood, “ when that scrap of paper is the likeness of a friend, don’t

you think it well may mean a great deal to its owner?"

"Very likely," he smiled. Now on the handsome face all I could discern was bland indifference. Bending, he drew towards him a little naked girl whom I had noticed sprawling on the dusty attic floor. "If you really want to have my photo, take my daughter too."

Later on I learned that the veteran sculptor had begotten this child three years previously by his latest wife ; at the time her age was sixteen and a half, and his was seventy. Obviously, I could not help reflecting, for the love the master bears his Gods they recompense him in good measure !

THE FORSAKEN PALACE

The normal route for travellers from Jaipur to Amber is an ancient high-road lugubriously flanked by ruined mausoleums, and for the seven miles or so which lay between us and the former Capital containing the old palace, I preferred to take a cross-country route. Labouring through sand-tracks, bumping along ramshackle roads, our car made heavy going.

The first village we encountered seemed to cringe forlorn beside a waste of sun-bleached tilth ; like a cowed, famished animal it watched us passing, apprehensively. Another hamlet rose into view, its mud walls blistered with dead brambles. Then another exactly like it, and another, in monotonous succession. . . . I thought of tears rolling one by one down the ashen cheeks of a condemned prisoner.

And looking at its squalid huts—mud-walled, patched with cow-dung—and at their inmates, listless, apathetic starvelings, I wondered if Jaipur's

famous " windows open to the sun of Progress " were not the windows of the selfish palace only.

Suddenly, at the crest of an incline, we had our first view of Amber in its entirety. Less a palace than a fortified city girt with lofty ramparts, it rises hugely on the summit of an isolated rock projecting from the plain. Our road took us downhill to the foot of the crag on which enthroned the royal city looms against the zenith. Seen thus from below, Amber resembles a vast stone airship tethered to the valley by the cables of its ramparts and the walled causeways running up the cliff-side ; high in air it rides, a phantom ship, silent as a tomb.

No life is anywhere around us, no sound. A city of the dead. Somewhere a temple-bell is tolling—endlessly. And far above us in the palace muffled drum-beats pound on the universal silence. Here is the hush of a graveyard stretching round a mausoleum. The palace is desolate : forsaken, too, the village nestling below the battlements.

Elephants were waiting for us, motionless as beasts of stone, till, at the mahout's order to take us on their backs, they seemed to crumple up like houses foundering in an earthquake. Sedately they bore us up towards the palace, following the old elephant-track that their ancestors had trodden for nine centuries. A laborious ascent, for the cliff is far too steep to admit direct attack ; the path winds slowly up and up in zigzags at an easy gradient, spanned here and there by massive gateways, like triumphal arches.

At last we came to a spacious courtyard, grandiose and utterly deserted. Under a clump of trees, the playground of a tribe of grey monkeys, we climbed down from our elephants. Looking back to the place whence we had started the ascent I discovered

some large gardens ringed by walls, which I had not noticed when we were below. The fountains played no longer, and the pools were dry ; only some grassy lawns revived forgotten beauty. From a well that might have figured in a biblical vignette, two fat oxen were raising water, and a chain of *malis* passed it on from hand to hand in buckets.

A flight of steps, precipitously steep, leads from the outer courtyard to the first of the courtyards within the palace. Beside it runs a gangway affording a much easier ascent ; to spare him the fatigue of climbing the steps, the Prince was carried up this gangway in a sedan-chair. Everywhere in the palace I saw similar gangways, for the use of palanquin-bearers, flanking each flight of steps. Those within the palace, however, were used exclusively by the princesses ; the palanquins in which they were conveyed looked like lacquer boxes, discreetly hermetic, so that in strict seclusion they could travel from the terraces to their apartments.

At the top of the stairs I saw a dark recess in the wall, a chapel dedicated to Kali, where for many centuries the priests immolated victims to the goddess. Even now, in deference to the memory of the sovereign who resided in the palace in earlier days and came to worship here, a sacrifice is offered every morning at the shrine. But nowadays a goat does duty for the human victim.

A cavernous darkness brooded in the temple. Lamps were burning before a statue swathed in silk and shadows ; near it stood a little bench on which the faithful had deposited their offerings, copper coins and tiny flowers. A large brown stain, still moist in the late afternoon, mottled the soil before the sombre shrine. In the cave-like temple,

impervious to heat, the morning's blood-offering had not yet dried.

I was fascinated by the interior of the palace ; it is incomparably finer than that of Udaipur. Beyond the marvellous stone fretwork of the windows, wrought in earlier days by Mal Ram's forefathers, stretches an endless vista, valley after valley rolling on to the horizon. The walls are covered with fantastically intricate mosaic-work—like the illuminations of a mediæval missal—glittering with gold and silver spangles, with flakes of marble and scraps of looking-glass, in the *ensemble* depicting flowers of various kinds and grotesque birds. And, happily, in these rooms, there is no furniture to mar the general effect.

Through spacious, airy corridors, by way of handsome esplanades, I made my way to the zenana, the group of apartments and terraces reserved for the princesses' habitation. They are provided with some curious square bathing-pools ; sunk in the terrace pavement and flush with it, they have the furtive air of leopard-traps.

Far above us floated terraces approached by winding pathways and ringed round with graceful cupolas sheltering aerial reception-halls. Here it is that on a moonlight night, clad in white raiment among his white-robed courtiers, the Maharaja holds his yearly durbar, as his forbears did before him. Standing on one of these high terraces, I was shown a very old fortress overlooking the palace ; still garrisoned, so I was told, with an invisible army. An air of mystery hangs round those ancient walls, which no one is allowed to cross. Only the Maharaja, at his investment by the sovereign with full powers, has the right to enter. When King Edward VII during one of his visits to Jaipur, as

Prince of Wales, expressed the wish to visit the fort, the Maharaja changed the subject so decisively that the future King of England dared not insist.

The sun was setting behind the crenellated ramparts of the great wall many miles in length that crests the hills encircling Jaipur. Swiftly the tide of darkness flooded the courtyard whence we had set out, merging the motionless grey forms of our elephants with the large shadows of the red-flowered trees, from which some of the monkeys had departed. On the abandoned palace lay the great hush of evening ; brooding, unfathomable silence.

From far below us, steady as a metronome, came the throbbing of a drum, monotonous, exasperating. Alone in his temple at the ramparts' base, a priest was enacting an ancient rite of invocation. And, with the nightfall, in the jungle near at hand another rite, the immemorial tragedy of death-in-life, was being enacted. From the hillside came at long intervals another sound, the belling of a frightened stag in headlong flight before a leopard ; the hoarse, deep cries, were unmistakably a sambur's.

Now it was almost dark. On the lofty cupolas the moonlight spread a patina of blue ; the parapets of the deserted terraces gleamed snow-white. All the monkeys had disappeared.

In the dusk the elephants picked their way downhill gingerly, halting now and then, along the time-old elephant-track. A volley of cries echoed through the darkness of the valley. Evidently the great deer had travelled fast and far, for the sounds came from a distance, somewhere on our right.

Now it was pitch-dark. The temple drum was silent, and I no longer heard the belling of the sambur. Had he escaped, I wondered, or was he lying

prostrate, silent in the throes of death amid the tangled undergrowth, while the red tongue of the leopard lapped the life-blood at his mangled throat?

Suddenly on every side, out in the dark plain and near at hand, broke out a quick-fire of harsh yelps : the jackals.

CHAPTER III

AGRA : THE MOGHUL MASTERPIECES

WE reached Agra one morning very early, half dead for lack of sleep. The Maharaja of Jaipur had invited us to have our last meal with him on the previous evening, before catching the train that was to take us from Jaipur State to the ancient city of the Moghuls. To our consternation it proved to be no ordinary dinner but a ceremonious affair. The Maharaja of Nawanagar happened to be on his way through Jaipur that night, and had halted for some hours to dine with our host, who gave his guest a right royal welcome.

Ranjitsinhji impressed me as the most amiable of *grands seigneurs*. Admired in England not only for the charm of his personality but for his prowess on the cricket-field, he proved no less competent at the bridge-table than at the wicket. Rubber followed rubber for several strenuous hours when dinner was over. Towards midnight a small slam (doubled) removed all hope of catching the 12.15. Atal consoled me with the prospect of another train at about 1 a.m. At a quarter past one I was still at the palace, taking leave of my host and bidding *au revoir* to the Jam Sahib whom I was to meet again at Delhi two months later, only a few weeks before his death.

The guards on Indian trains are usually natives, and as such regard the Maharajas—and indeed all

men of rank—with the blind, atavistic deference of the low-caste Indian towards his superiors. For him the man of breeding is obviously, invariably, the master. And, in India, the mere fact of travelling First Class is, I imagine, in their eyes almost a patent of nobility. For a first-class passenger accordingly they will always hold up a train for five or ten minutes. But, on an intimation that the belated traveller is a guest of the Maharaja through whose territory the train is passing, they prolong the halt for a period varying between twenty and thirty-five minutes, according to the eminence of the ruler of the state in which the station happens to be situated. And, if it be for a Maharaja in august person that the train is being held up—but heaven preserve me from ever travelling in a train which an unpunctual Maharaja is due to make !

As the Prince's guests we were entitled to the second grade of privilege, and the train had been waiting a full half-hour when we turned up at the station. Some British officials, haggard with sleeplessness, were pacing up and down the platform, grumbling at the "scandalous delay." I had hoped to slip past their stern, indignant eyes unnoticed. Illusive hope ! I caught a glimpse of myself and my companions reflected in a carriage window. I was in evening dress, and a good number of the officers and aides-de-camp with whom we had been dining had accompanied us in full court dress.

No sooner were we settled in our carriage than the train steamed out. A quarter of an hour after leaving Jaipur the train was due to halt once more before embarking on a long non-stop run lasting two and a quarter hours. We had reckoned that

Dim, after laying out the bedding, could alight at this halt and run to his carriage. But we had reckoned without our engine-driver. To make good the time that he had lost by waiting for us, he passed the little wayside station without stopping.

No corridor, no communicating door, gave the unlucky Dim an exit, so here we were cooped up with our retainer till four in the morning ! Too proud to squat, without a chair to sit on, he remained standing in a corner of the compartment, his nose glued to the wall, like a naughty boy "stood in the corner." A six-foot boy, whose turban scraped the ceiling. To crown our misery and his, he was seized by a nervous cough, a sort of hiccup, that recurred every two minutes. Between the spells of coughing he sniffed and snuffled, clearing his throat with raucous desperation. In vain I begged him to abate the nuisance. He was feeling ill, he explained, oh, dreadfully ill ! For Dim had adopted not only the European style of coat but the foolish custom of our domestics who, if not in absolutely perfect health, think themselves at death's door. At last it came, much to our mutual relief, the long-expected halt. As he stepped out of the compartment Dim timidly informed us that we could not sleep for long ; in two hours we would be at Agra.

THE PEARL MOSQUE

Surely there is some magically recuperative quality in the climate of Central India. After three hours' sleep at the Cecil Hotel we felt surprisingly fresh and rested, and decided to spend the empty hour preceding luncheon in a visit to

the Fort, one of the many famous edifices built by the Moghuls in the heyday of their Indian suzerainty.

We chartered one of the local conveyances. Here the Udaipur tonga gave place to a victoria, which looked like the conveyance of an old gentleman who has seen better days. Admittedly there was a pair of horses, a Victorian vehicle, even a footman perched behind. But what horses! Rawboned, mangy nags, their harness all in shreds, driven by a coachman in a grimy turban and threadbare, ragged coat. The victoria itself had not been repainted since the days of Shah Jahan; the footman was a purblind beggar who, too slack to stand behind the hood, straddled the back axle-spring.

The utter uselessness of our repulsive pseudo-footman was only too apparent, but there was no dislodging him. Some local law, so I was told, enjoined that to control this mettlesome pair two men must be provided.

I had fancied the hotel lost in the depths of the jungle. Now I realized my error. Tucked away in gardens aglow with sunbright flowers were handsome bungalows with tall bays fronting spacious carriage-drives. In each of these sumptuous mansions a curio- and jewel-merchant lived and plied his prosperous trade. Once we had left behind these lordly houses, all the contents of which are ticketed for sale, we came to a shadeless road infested with the usual apathetic cows nuzzling the dust between the squalid houses. Then abruptly, at a sharp turn of the road, we saw a massive door, a wall, a fortress, looming against the sky, superbly frowning on our dingy turn-out jogging its uncouth way across the tract of open ground that skirts the

Fort, parched and fissured by the sun, and grey with dust.

In the shade, under the lofty vault of the stupendous entrance-gate, buzzed a swarm of beggars, guides and picture-postcard vendors—the usual horde of parasites that on the threshold of a famous building pester the traveller, in whatever latitude he roam.

A rising path, cobbled like a byre, took us up to a second enceinte, a long esplanade ; then to another quadrangle with a large lawn of anæmic-looking grass in the midst of it, sprouting with Mahometan gravestones lime-washed like the lines of tennis courts. I heard my guide naming the open spaces we traversed, “ the Court of Public Audience,” “ the Court of Private Audience ”—but all I saw around me was emptiness and boredom. He pointed an imperative finger at a cleft in the wall where a flight of steps began. I complied without enthusiasm, and plodded up the dark ascent, stubbing my toes on the high stone steps. The staircase was composed of slabs of reddish stone, and on the far side of the wall, thick as a rampart, ended at a one-leaf door. Standing in the warm twilight of a low porch I raised a resigned, perspiring forehead and looked towards an outer door whence light was streaming in. I took a step forward, one only, and in a flash the dust and heat, my boredom, vanished out of mind.

Before my eyes, translucent as a sea-wave, rippling with light, a marvellous mosque seemed rapt in smiling contemplation of its own loveliness. Here was a simple beauty, charming, modulated to the human scale. There was nothing awe-inspiring about the domes, flowing in graceful, feminine curves ; nothing of arrogance in the dainty minarets

at the four corners of the precinct wall ; they might have been posted there merely for decorative ends. They were not in the least intransigent, hardly Mahometan in aspect—indeed I could have easily imagined the *curé* of a French village bidding his sexton ring for vespers in them. The courtyard, too, had an air of amiable intimacy, and the warm shadows of the colonnaded gallery running round it invited dalliance. With its gentle beauty, with the white purity of its immaculate marble, the mosque enthralled me at first sight.

“ Please, Sahib, come and see interior of the mosque,” my guide suggested.

“ Interior ” ? How could the term apply to that long and lofty hall wide open on the courtyard and segregated from it only by massive pillars ?

The covered portion of the mosque contains the pulpit, and, in a wall faced with rich mosaic work figuring Persian flower-*motifs*, a walled-in doorway, the East Door common to all mosques. The pavement is tessellated with marble slabs, each of them set in a decorative pattern giving it an eastward bias ; the general effect is of a series of long rows of white rectangles, like white praying-carpet, pointing to the east. So flawless and so scrupulously polished are these marble flagstones, so lightly is the donor’s name engraved in each, that the tall columns supporting the vaulted dome are carried on in them as in a mirror. At one end of the nave stands a marble screen, a marvellous piece of stone filigree-work, delicate as the finest lace ; one of the noblest works of decorative art that I have ever seen. Behind the screen, in a little room apart, within a shadowy recess, the women sit and watch their lords and masters at their devotions.

Now the sun had reached the zenith. I walked back across the open space and, standing in the half-light of the cloister, looked across the slender pillars to the smooth, silken curves of the mosque, shimmering in the blaze of noon. The cupolas seemed diaphanous, exquisitely wrought jewels floating in bright air. The tall columns bore no weight; unsubstantial as the fabric of a dream, they plunged into their own reflections in a sheen of marble. And over all trembled an iridescent lustre, shot with wayward gleams of pink and white, a mist of powdered pearls. Shah Jahan, who built this mosque in the middle of the seventeenth century, named it well the Moti Masjid, the Pearl Mosque.

THE JASMINE TOWER

At some distance from the Mosque and separated from it by the Courts of Justice and Halls of Public Audience, by vast, featureless expanses and small ornate courtyards, is a portion of the Fort that overlooks the plain watered by the River Jumna, and juts out from the main building like a projecting wing or bastion.

What retreat could be more fitting for a poet-king than this Jasmine Tower erected for his private use by Shah Jahan, the master-builder of the East? Here it was he spent the last years of his life as the prisoner of his son, the fanatic Aurangzeb.

On this little corner of his palace he lavished all the resources of his copious imagination, and such a wealth of ornament that the Jasmine Tower is more than a work of architecture—a symphony in stone. Though the precious jewels have been wrenched from their marble settings by robbers and

by the tourists of earlier days, they have been so judiciously replaced by imitation stones that even to-day we glean an excellent idea of what the walls of the principal room must have looked like when they were inset with a mosaic of porphyry and agate, of cornelian and lapis lazuli, marvellously cut and finished, and glowed with pearls and rubies.

Streams of clear water flowed in tiny marble channels round diminutive courtyards, or brimmed over from low vases covered with gold mosaic. I was shown the sumptuous bathing-pools where almond-eyed beauties of the zenana once took their graceful ease, the shadow-haunted chambers where their lords passed the long hours of the Indian afternoons, the miniature cascades whose gentle water-music lulled his day-dreams.

Why for his prison-house he chose this angle of the palace is clear. From it he could see across the plain, beyond the river, to the domes of the great mausoleum which he built for his beloved, Mumtaz Mahal. Dying in child-bed at the age of twenty, in the flower of her young beauty, she prayed her husband to enshrine her memory for all the generations in an immortal monument. And, true to his promise, Shah Jahan built for his favourite wife the most glorious of tombs.

In the Jasmine Tower lingers yet the presence of the greatest of all lovers, tenderest of husbands, dreaming his life away in gilded durance, prisoner of his memories no less than of an iron-hearted son, his eyes bent ever on the Taj Mahal. Hence, across the marble trellis of the balconies, he saw it gleaming in the distance rising amid cypress avenues and orange-groves, the graceful dome set round with slender minarets that crowns the tomb of the



*From it Shah Jahan could see the domes of the great mausoleum
which he built for his beloved*

AGRA : THE JASMINE TOWER

A pale, imponderable mass floating wraith-like on blue depths of air

AGRA : "STRONGER THAN DEATH"

young empress. Master he had been of the world ; but death had bested him.

He dreamed of building for himself a black Taj facing the white Taj—on the opposite bank of the river. The mind grows dizzy at the thought of what might have been, could he have given his vision form and substance. But the emperor was a captive ; and the black mausoleum but the stuff of dreams, fated to vanish with the master-mind that had imagined it.

As he lay dying, so the story goes, he had a mirror hung upon a pillar facing his bed, that his last glimpse of the world might be the tomb of his beloved.

“STRONGER THAN DEATH”

I yawned away an empty afternoon in my bedroom at the Cecil Hotel. Doors and windows were closed ; outside, the long hours of an Indian afternoon flared in the white-hot furnace of the sun. Stretched on a trestle-bed in stifling, shuttered twilight, I watched the ugly little grey lizards aimlessly flickering to and fro on the dingy white walls, depressing as the four walls of a prison cell. I was waiting for the nightfall.

For dinner the dining-room was crowded. Indeed, the Cecil was completely full, and I had found it no easy matter to obtain one of the hundred rooms it boasts of. This crush of visitors in an hotel which oftener than not is empty was due to the condition of the moon. The Agra hotels are, I imagine, almost unique in following, like the tides, the lunar phases. With the young moon the tide of guests ebbs low, and when the dining-room is full so is the moon.

For there is an unwritten law, a very sound one too, and observed throughout India, that the Taj Mahal *must* be visited by moonlight. And since the Taj for many tourists is Agra's one and only "show-place," they see to it that their visit falls on a full-moon night.

The Taj Mahal is not only a well-established rallying-point for tourists-errant in the East ; for the domiciled European it is what the Italian lakes, before they went out of fashion, were for our parents : a trysting-place for sentimental couples, the honeymooners' Mecca. The Englishman in India is the least adventurous of mortals, so far as visiting new places or seeing new sights may constitute adventure. On short leave, he hastens to Calcutta for the races, plunges into the jungle after big game, or runs up to the hills for a breather of cool air. But no English man or woman, bidding a last farewell to India, has ever failed to make a pilgrimage to Agra and "see the Taj by moonlight."

In all the descriptions of the Taj Mahal that I had read the writers had indulged in rhapsodies over this 'Jewel of the East,' the Moghul masterpiece, and, I must own, this overdose of verbal "glamour" had left me sceptical. And then—the spate of photographs, of posters flaunting the Taj on railway-platforms and in hotel lobbies, the hideous little replicas in transparent alabaster lit up electrically from within, and all those pocket-size Taj Mahals in bromide paper or fitted up as night-lights that are hawked around in every Indian street for a few annas or rupees—everything, everyone had conspired to vulgarize, to prostitute its beauty in my thoughts. After a month in India, before I had set eyes on it, I was sick and tired of the Taj Mahal !

And when the victoria, having trundled us down

streets of darkness, reached the outskirts of the town and took the road that leads towards the Taj, I was far more enchanted by the charm of an agreeable drive in the soft Indian night than by the prospect of a moonlit glimpse of the belauded mausoleum.

We crossed a stretch of plain, a vast expanse of silvery light, the jackals' happy hunting-ground. Invisible, they made their presence known by volleys of shrill yells. Darkness had brought a breath of coolness to the air. Our vehicle was not the same one we had taken to visit the Fort, but it was as decrepit, no less odd and antiquated. It had a family resemblance with the pre-war Paris "growler," and I half expected to see an old top-hatted cabby in a long brown frock-coat seated on the box in front. But instead of that once familiar silhouette I saw a curious pair of seated figures : the fezzed driver and my turbaned bearer, whose pendent shirt-tail flapped in the breeze like an absurd white pennon. The hoof-beats of our trotting steeds rang brisk and clear across the stillness of the countryside.

Then suddenly we were plunged in cavernous darkness. We had entered an avenue of lofty trees that abruptly ended in a sort of glade, an open space ringed round by shadows, an oasis of solitude and silence.

We alighted in front of a massive portal where two other carriages were waiting. High in the vaulted darkness a little lamp was burning, bathing the under-surface of the arch with a dim yellow radiance. Vast, magnificent, the great porch loomed about us and above, opening on to a massive bay that framed in the warm glow of its redstone buttresses a pale, imponderable mass of

masonry floating wraith-like on serene blue depths of air ; in a blood-red setting the frozen beauty of an arctic dream.

The foreground was a garden set with funereal cypresses ; a melancholy Italian garden sombre with death's shadow that seemed sweeping on and on for ever to the world's end, to an *Ultima Thule* of despair, where on the moonlit sky-line hung a cloud of marble poised between four minarets, beacons of prayer on the white foreshore of a sea of sky.

Like a man walking in a dream I made my way towards the garden, uncertainly, unthinking ; the very air I breathed seemed unreal, an atmosphere of trance, steeped in silence, ice-cold light and the warm perfume of nocturnal flowers. My eyes were held spellbound by the white wonder of the dome. I saw it in the distance, beyond the dark recession of the yews, doubled by sheets of water mirroring the aerial radiance ; I saw it near at hand, and touched the warm marble, blue in the lambent shadows, rippling with opalescent gleams under the moon. And then I walked away again and, seated on a stone bench in the defunctive gloom of a black cypress, gazed once more at the great sepulchre.

In blank suspense I sat there void of thought, waiting for I knew not what. Slowly, at last, the strands of vagrant feeling coalesced, crystallized into consciousness. Vague thoughts as yet, drugged by the overdose of sheer sensation, incoherent as a drunkard's.

Little by little my thoughts took form in broken phrases. . . . More durable than bronze . . . immortal love . . . and infinite regret . . . the glory of a poet's dream . . . a litany in stone, insis-

tent, never-ceasing, fervently aspiring, and, if ever prayer can reach, reaching the courts of heaven and finding answer there. A sacrament, a passion-play of love. Here, instinctively, voices sink to a whisper, loud words or sudden gestures would be sacrilege ; and, unwittingly, the watcher's hands are clasped in prayer. So overwhelming is this beauty and so perfect that we feel it raising us above our earth-bound selves towards the heights, itself transcending, revealing to our eyes the immanence of Godhead—and all but making us believe in it. For here are all the elements of perfection : balance of line and volume, a miracle of equipoise, beauty of form, a sumptuous setting, gleaming marble and dim gardens, and under the moon-shadows a sensuous play of colour, of supple, feminine curves :

*Là tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.*

Can this have been the journey's end that Baudelaire proposed to us ?

Like an altar-candle burning before the Host, a tiny flame glimmered above the tomb of the young empress ; a light unfailing as her husband's love, quenchless as her memory.

Now the moon had sunk behind a black mass of trees. The base of the great sepulchre was veiled in gloom ; only the dome rose shimmering with soft, pearly light, like a white upturned breast with passion yearning to the far blue zenith.

THE SLEEPING CITADEL

The following day found our devoirs to the Moghuls still half undone ; before leaving Agra we must needs pay a tribute of respect and admiration

to the greatest of them all, to Akbar, the Napoleon of the Moghul Dynasty, as his grandson Shah Jahan was its Roi Soleil.

Besides a name resounding through the ages and the glory of being the founder of the Indian Empire, the Great Moghul left to posterity a less enduring memory—his city of Fatehpur-Sikri, a masterpiece of architecture and a precursor of the splendid monuments with which his dynasty was to dower the Empire.

He built the new capital twenty miles from Agra in the midst of a plain which at the season when I visited it seemed an arid desert. Then, one day, without warning he abandoned it.

Why? No certain answer can be given to this question—a question that often rises to the lips of travellers in India where so many cities and palaces have been deserted for no obvious reason. How can we explain the abandonment of the Amber palace in Jaipur; of Pathan, the former capital, in Jhalawar; and here, of Fatehpur? And to these names how many might be added! Was it for lack of water, or merely an imperial caprice? Perhaps there may have been political considerations which now we cannot fathom, or the more or less interested advice of some court astrologer. Even in our times, for some inexplicable reason “new palaces for old” seems a guiding principle with almost every member of the younger generation of maharajas. It may be they enjoy creating a memorial of personal inspiration in the guise of a new palace; or do these young men find in bricks and marble an outlet for the spirit of conquest inherited from their ancestors, taking to palace-building as a substitute for empire-building? A quieter, less precarious form of activity, if more self-seeking and less glorious. And

England smiles benignly on these architect-princes whose harmless hobby keeps them out of mischief. I do not think, however, that her look is so benign when by a slip of the royal pen one of them confounds State revenues with private income. A mistake as tempting to its maker as it is frequent in the Indian princedoms ; the trouble is that it involves not only the bankruptcy of the sovereign but that of his state as well. Then London smiles no longer. Lest the young maharaja should go naked in his streets and his people too indecorously starve, Government steps in to replenish coffers depleted by the claims of European tradesmen.

In Akbar's days, however, there was no England to mother them and, with all her scoldings, see that her naughty children took no serious harm. But by way of compensation, in those good old times, Finance Ministers had amiable expedients, never known to fail, for balancing their budget.

Fatehpur-Sikri to-day is a deserted city ; deserted but by no means dilapidated. No breach is visible in the palace walls that tower above the little town whose streets and houses are still intact. The interior, too, with its courts and stairways, its stables, kitchens and trellised balconies, is so well preserved that one might fancy it vacated only for a month or two, the furniture stored in a repository, pending the monarch's absence on a shooting expedition in the hills. But from the palace, as from the old town and village, all trace of life has ebbed ; only now and then a company of sightseers, escorted by their guides, inspects the empty halls—like house-hunters with the agent showing them round. “ To Let, Unfurnished, This Desirable Capital.”

It was Akbar who built the city, not Shah Jahan. The dreamer of amorous dreams who fashioned the

Taj Mahal bodied forth his vision in the whitest of white marble. With marble inlaid with pearls and precious stones he faced the walls of the palace at Agra, and in the cypress' shade, amid drifts of blossoms, he stretched a snowy shroud of marble, light as a caress, over the body of his well-beloved. But Akbar's choice fell on red stone, and in the heart of a barren wilderness he built for his immortal glory a great, imperial city.

I leaned on the balcony of the loggia where every morning he dispensed justice to his subjects. In the middle of the little courtyard below, at the place where the accused criminal received sentence, a large white ring of solid stone is clamped to the red pavement. To this the elephant which acted as the executioner was tethered. No sooner did the death-sentence fall from the balcony on to the convicted felon below than he was haled before the pachydermatous Jack Ketch. And without more ado the jungle headsman lightly tapped the victim's head with his huge foot, cracking it like an egg.

I wandered under triumphal arches built for the most part in white marble and pink sandstone, classic in their purity of form but definitely Persian in technique ; under cupolas where the Jain influence was manifest ; into hybrid edifices blending the Indian and Iranian art-traditions. As I grew familiar with the architecture of Moslem India, I came to distinguish two streams of influence permeating it : that of the native land of Akbar's grandfather, Babar, the Turkish emperor and epic hero, descendant of Tamerlane and Jenghiz Khan and founder of the Moghul Dynasty ; and the indigenous Indian style, an art of lavish ornament, which held its own after the invasion, moulding the rugged genius of the conquerors of the North. Here,

as I had observed them in the Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal, and was to see them later in Delhi, I found the two influences so harmoniously blended and discreetly simplified as to compose a genuinely original art-form of compelling beauty.

Crossing the precincts, I came to the spacious hall which Akbar specially laid out for games of hide-and-seek ; the courts with huge squares let into the pavement on which the Emperor in his lighter moods paraded his courtiers, dancing-girls and jesters. Then he would challenge one of the princes to a game of chess, and move the living pieces to and fro, rejoicing his artistic eye with the intricate patterns of gay colour. Most probably the knights were mounted on the polo-ponies housed in those gigantic stables whose marble racks and sculptured swinging-bails are amongst the wonders of the palace.

I had seen Akbar as the judge dispensing ruthless justice, the artist blending in a new style Iranian and indigenous tradition, the chess-player manipulating living chessmen. Now in a lower courtyard I saw him in a newer and more startling rôle, as the champion of unorthodoxy. The dark portal of a Hindu temple set back in the colonnade that lines the precinct wall faced the bright interior of a mosque.

Could I believe my eyes? Here was a Hindu temple built by a Moslem emperor—and, what is more, lodged in the Imperial Palace ! But Akbar had his own ideas on theological decorum. Why, he asked himself, should men quarrel over a point of dogma ? Is there not good in all religions—had he not, indeed, set an example of religious tolerance by marrying a Hindu princess ? His marriage with a daughter of the House of Jaipur had linked

him still more closely with the local Rajput aristocracy, on whose support he always counted, and with good reason ; their loyalty was unflinching and they provided him with his best generals. Far from trying to wean the young empress from Hinduism, he had this temple built that in it she might worship after the manner of her fathers.

For Akbar, God transcended local cults and creeds. " I see men seeking Thee," he prayed, " in all the temples of the world. In polytheism, in Islam, Thou art present. And if to-day I worship in the mosque, to-morrow in the temple, it is one God whom I adore."

True to this eclectic faith, he would allow no State religion in the empire and enacted laws of tolerance and protection for the Hindu cults. His philosophy taught him to seek out the best religion, condemning none. And in his quest of the ideal creed, he studied all. The most remarkable edifice in Fatehpur-Sikri is also the strangest temple in the world ; an auditorium rather than a sanctuary. It consists of a pentagonal hall in the midst of which rises a pillar topped by a large circular capital ; from its summit five narrow gangways radiate to the five corners of the room. From the summit of the pillar, as from a balcony, he questioned one by one a circle of prelates and philosophers seated far below him round the pillar's base. From every quarter of the world he summoned representatives of all religions, and asked each in turn to expound his theories, to justify his god. He put them questions, tried to make them contradict themselves, to educe the differences between their articles of faith. And, whenever his political activities gave him leisure, he convoked such meetings in this amazing Temple of All Gods.

It well may be he looked on these religious debates as not wholly alien from his imperial policy. Was it really *one* God whom he was seeking to discover? Was not his aim rather a transcendental synthesis of all positive religions, a fusion of their diverse elements? The Brahminic philosophy particularly appealed to him; he had the ancient Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, translated, and it was doubtless from the Vishnuist canon and from Buddhism that he derived his doctrine of universal charity.

"Would to heaven," he said, "that my body were large enough to feed all men on earth! Then they would no longer cause suffering to any animal." Here, indeed, Akbar speaks with the authentic voice of Asoka; and how significant it is (as René Grousset has remarked) that in this ancient land of India, the home elect of speculative thought, a Buddhist emperor of the third century before Christ and the Mahometan emperor of the sixteenth century of our era, though separated by an abyss of time and culture, should have discovered the same eternal verities! This philosophic syncretism inspired the new faith that Akbar sought to disseminate, a kind of eclectic theism reconciling in one common creed all the religions of his Empire.

A man of far-reaching vision, Akbar foresaw what was to prove the weakness, and the bane, of India to-day. Could he but quell the immemorial feud between Mahometans and Hindus, the Indian continent, united by a common faith, would be invulnerable. Had he realized his dream of Indian unity, the face of the whole world would have been changed, perhaps—of India, assuredly. . . .

On our way back to Agra we passed some villages

drowsing by the wayside in the noontide heat. In one of them a laughing, festive crowd was gathered under the shadow of a mango-tree.

I got down from the car and joined them. Two villagers in the centre of the group were playing a sort of *commedia dell'arte*, a rustic pantomime ; their patter, obviously impromptu, was evidently relished by their audience, who punctuated it with bursts of laughter. When the turn was over, some singers took their place ; squatting in the dust, they played their own accompaniments on quaint little violins which they stood on the ground like 'cellos. Next came a dance. Just then some people sitting in the front row noticed us ; they rose at once and, smiling, put the best seats at our disposal. They told our guide that it was a marriage festival and they felt highly honoured by the Sahib's presence. I asked which was the bridegroom. A ten-year-old boy was pointed out to me ; dressed up in velvet and brocade, he looked like an expensive doll. For our benefit the young bridegroom performed a solo dance. The wedding-present in silver rupees that I slipped into his little palm seemed to take the company aback ; then, smiling, bowing, they formed up in a cortège and escorted us back to the car.

In other villages on our way all was silence and siesta ; sleeping cattle sprawled across the thresholds of the low houses, their hinder parts in shadow. Women were eating, or resting, on their doorsteps. On trestle-beds, almost in the middle of the road whither they had been moved so as to catch the shadow from the wayside trees, men were reclining, smoking or asleep, with the cages of their tame partridges hanging from boughs above them.



*The child-bridegroom, dressed up like an expensive doll
Men were lounging with the cages of their tame partridges hanging
from the boughs above them*

AGRA - THE SLEEPING CITADEL

What indeed was possible in such a temperature, save to lie down and sleep—perhaps to dream? And these people who, like the rest of us, fashion their God in their own image, always picture Brahma, the Almighty, lying down, asleep.

CHAPTER IV

MUTTRA—BRINDABAN : SAINTS AND LEPERS

THE LEPERS

SURFEITED with the grandiose, I decided to break the journey to Delhi at Muttra, and give my sense of wonder a few days' breathing-space.

The information given the wanderer in India respecting the country, the people and their gods varies with the informant. Once the sightseer swerves from the beaten track of the conventional tour, the counsels offered him as to the places he should and should not visit are so vague, so contradictory, that in the end he leaves his choice to luck or inspiration.

I had been told there was a British garrison at Muttra. "The British are a comfort-loving nation," I reflected, "and there's sure to be a pleasant little hotel at any place where they have settled. Why not put in a day or two at Muttra, before going on to Delhi?" The truth was I desired a respite from the spate of new sensations that, ever more complex, more overpowering, attend an Indian Grand Tour.

The memorable hours I had passed in the old Moghul capital had, it seemed, put out of action—for the time being—our emotional responses. And so, before visiting Delhi, whose fascination I surmised, it might be wise to take a rest.

Thus it was that one morning at the early hour of seven we found ourselves jogging in a tonga down a drab, empty road in quest of some sedate hotel where to enjoy a rest-cure. We had already travelled over half a mile from the place where we had left the train—a wooden hut dumped in the countryside, styled Muttra Station.

But where was the delectable hotel? Where, indeed, was Muttra?

In the course of two hours' tramp the only sign of a garrison I could discover was a group of sheds and tents straddling the far end of a thirsty plain beside the city gates, and huddled like a flock of dingy sheep around two shops of European aspect. One of these proved to be a barber's shop, a chemist's and a grocer's rolled into one; the second, too, housed a triumvirate: tailor, cobbler and post-master. No hotel or school was visible, the only hospital was the cantonment sick-ward. And for a good hundred years Muttra has been a military station!

Muttra "City," so called, reminded me unpleasantly of a running sore, a festering wound gashed in the bank of a pus-yellow river. As I entered it a horde of lepers was swarming down to the stream, across the golden mist of morning, to wash their emaciated breasts flaking away in livid scales, and the hideous stumps that once were limbs. Their eyes were a pale pink, and like blind men they groped their stumbling way down flights of steps between the temples rising tier on tier along the river-bank. These temples composed a prodigious fresco which, oddly enough, had less resemblance with the Benares Ghats than with those scenes of ruins on the sea-shore pictured by the imagination of certain seventeenth-century artists.

But the tranquil beauty of a smiling landscape worthy of Claude's brush was violated here by a welter of misshapen forms, of humanity at its foulest and most monstrous. My first reaction was one of infinite pity. Driving the tonga along the precinct of the lepers' bathing-ghat, I was held up for a moment by the traffic. As I scanned the road ahead, looking for the cause of the obstruction, I felt a flutter of furtive little taps on my left arm. Glancing round, I saw level with my eyes, only an inch or two away, a flabby pink-and-white knob, the arm, or what was left of it—a bulbous stump—of a leper woman who was tapping me on the elbow, soliciting my charity. Beside her was another beggar, a blind man, waving under my eyes two arms that ended at the wrist. Inarticulate sounds bubbled from his lipless mouth. And now an obscene crowd surged in upon us, a jostling, seething mass of lepers, flaunting armless torsos, fleshless hips, breasts gnarled and pitted by disease ; all of them panting, snarling, emitting bestial grunts through ravaged nostrils.

My pity had given place to loathing. Now an unspeakable horror gripped me by the throat ; my breath came in gasps, I felt like vomiting. All I knew was fear, panic fear, a frenzied impulse to escape this nightmare world of nameless terror.

Whipping up my horse, I jerked him outside the hideous circle and only reined him in when we were well away from the town. With a trembling hand I wiped the sweat from my forehead, and in doing so discovered that despite the great heat (the sun was already high) and my brief panic—now it was past I could afford to smile at it—my skin was icy cold.

I took for an hotel, or something of the kind, the

bungalow of an old padre, who, after a hearty laugh at our mistake, made us understand how hopeless was our quest of any place to breakfast at in Muttra. Still laughing, he suggested we should share his breakfast. Our last meal, dinner at the Cecil Hotel, seemed inconceivably remote, and with a will we fell on the boiled eggs and preserved fruit provided by our reverend friend-in-need.

He told us of his little wooden church, tucked away amongst the cantonment huts. Anything but a bigot, he spoke with even more enthusiasm of the temples dedicate to Krishna at Brindaban, the holy city a few miles distant where the God was born. The Jumna, he informed us, the river we had seen earlier in the day flowing beside the ghats, rises in the Himalayas, like the Ganges ; for the Indians the Jumna partakes in the sanctity of the Ganges, the "sister-river," as they call it. The water of the Ganges is pellucid, that of the Jumna dark. According to an ancient legend the Jumna was in former days as clear as her fair sister ; but, when Krishna departed from Brindaban, the river 'went into mourning' in token of its grief. Speaking of the crowd of lepers and obviously dying men we had encountered at Muttra, he explained that the former hoped for healing in the sacred city where Krishna dwelt ; the incurables came here to die on holy ground, like those other Indians who, setting Siva above Krishna, make a death-pilgrimage to Benares.

SAINTS

On the advice of my friend, the old clergyman, I spent the afternoon at Brindaban, and I could understand his enthusiasm.

A place of pilgrimage, yet void of pilgrims, Brindaban is a city vowed to meditation, leading the simple life of sainthood, cloistered amid her countless temples. Built for the greater glory of Krishna, whose birthplace is here, the temples are indeed the be-all and the end-all of the holy city. In their life she lives, in them alone she has her being ; and this exclusive, unremitting service of the Gods, the ceaseless hymns of prayer that echo in her shrine, make Brindaban seem less a city than a gigantic monastery, a monastery with a myriad chapels—the temples. Immaculately clean and skirting none but sacred edifices, the streets call to mind the aisles of a cathedral ; they peter out into ecclesiastical warehouses that look like sacristies, or widen into open spaces like cathedral squares.

For some time I had been wandering under the dome of a large temple built in red sandstone. The style was simple, but the lofty colonnade impressive. So far the doors of the inner sanctuary had been shut ; now they opened, and a man came out, moving down the nave in my direction. His feet were bare, his loins wrapped in a long strip of white cloth ; one end of it was drawn up his back and, passing above his shoulder, dangled on his naked chest. As he came up to us, his lips parted in a cordial grin, and in his eyes I saw a light of simple-hearted gaiety, the cheerfulness of a Saint Francis. He was evidently the temple priest, and he greeted us with what, I guessed, were words of welcome.

We became friends. He told me that his temple had been built by Jai Singh, the inspired town-planner of Jaipur. And I learnt from him that many Indian monarchs, worshippers of God made flesh in Krishna, have set up temples in this place, the scene of the divine incarnation. Indeed, most of the

Brindaban temples owe their existence to the piety of the maharajas, who from time to time make a pilgrimage to the sacred city. On such occasions they stay in the palaces they have built for their accommodation ; when they are not in residence, however, the palaces are left open for the use of ordinary pilgrims.

We were sitting side by side on the temple steps, in the shadow of the lofty dome. I questioned him about his duties as a priest, and the day's routine.

At sunrise, so he told me, he opened the temple gates. The women of his congregation are always the first to put in an appearance. At about seven he decks the altar with the flowers they bring, and arranges for the meals provided daily for the poor. Then he goes into the city to visit the sick and call on friends. In the early hours of the afternoon he takes a siesta. Soon after that the faithful begin to throng the temple. He sits on the temple steps—just as he was now sitting—talking to the children playing round him. At nightfall the temple serves as a meeting-place for the menfolk of the neighbourhood, a sort of public hall where they gossip and confer. Sometimes he arranges for the production of religious dramas, which, as I gathered from what he told me later, resemble the miracle-plays performed in European churches during the Middle Ages.

Like many other priests whom I met later, while seemingly preoccupied with supra-mundane matters, he was more concerned with the material duties of his calling. He was, in fact, tied to a fixed routine which left him little time or opportunity for transcendental speculation.

To enter the priesthood a man must belong by birth to the highest caste, the Brahmin. All Brah-

mins do not necessarily take orders, but a priest is always a Brahmin. Yet, surprisingly enough, most of the avatars of the Hindu deity were not Brahmins, nor are the prophets numbered in that caste. Buddha was a Kshatriya, belonged, that is to say, like the maharajas, to the warrior class ; Rama was a king, Krishna an emperor.

In their heart of hearts the priests are only too well aware of the worldly nature of their functions. Waiving the prerogative of birth, they permit, even in their own temples, the Sadhus to take precedence of themselves. And the caste of these Sadhus, the yellow-robed monks who are to be seen all over India, ranges from the highest to the lowest.

I had just contributed a handful of small change to the poor-box of my new friend, the priest. Now he rose and walked up to a shrine lodged between two pillars at the summit of a flight of steps. Opening the doors, he disclosed a small room with an altar on which stood Krishna's statue garlanded with flowers. Taking down one of the garlands, he came back to us and gallantly placed it round my wife's neck.

The friendship with which this amiable priest was pleased to honour me made me a *persona grata* with the townsfolk. A friendly group of boys and young men escorted us along the tidy, well-swept streets to a number of temples, no two of them alike. Some were full of people, others given up to solitude. Some were dark, jealously secluded from alien eyes ; others were open, as accessible as mosques. Now and again I came upon a surly-looking priest, keeping vigil beside a latticed niche at the foot of a great tree, in which a little statue stood enshrined ; his eyes fixed on his book, he studiously ignored my presence and my alms.



A surly-looking priest at the foot of a great tree



My friend, the priest, on the temple steps

MUTTRA-BRINDABAN: SAINTS

I encountered a highly decorative patriarch, his flowing robe sprinkled with saffron-yellow powder, as were his uncut locks and majestic beard. He was a Sadhu revisiting the city after twelve years' solitary meditation in the jungle. When I saw him the old Sadhu was leaving a great temple in the centre of a vast quadrangle surrounded on all sides by walls.

Beyond the colossal archway was a row of little cell-like rooms, all exactly alike, flanking the inner wall of the quadrangle. These are the lodgings of the pilgrim-priests. Some of the priests were at their doorsteps, squatting in the roofless marble corridor that runs between the central temple and the row of cells in which they live. In twos and threes they were reading their scriptures, discussing knotty questions of interpretation. As we were walking past them, one of the priests darted towards us. Practically naked, he was one of the fattest and blackest Indians I had seen.

"What country do you come from?" he asked in English. On learning I was French, he burst into happy exclamations in idiomatic French without the trace of an accent.

"How splendid! I love talking French; the pity is I'm getting rusty. See what I read to keep up my vocabulary!" He handed me some pages torn from Lacordaire's *Sermons*.

Eagerly he explained that he came from Pondicherry, where he had been educated at the Jesuit school; he was a priest at a Pondicherry temple dedicate to Krishna and, wishing to learn more of the Master's life, had repaired to Brindaban for study and meditation. I asked him if he was contented with his lot; then, as naively thrilled as every Frenchman is so apt to be when in a distant

land he comes on someone speaking his native tongue, I enquired if I could do anything for him.

“A priest has need of nothing.” Duly impressed, I bowed to the austere detachment of my priestly francophil, but pulled myself up at once—to fumble in my pocket for a few rupees—for in the same breath he added : “ Still, I’d be glad of a little money, I haven’t any left.”

A worse shock—indeed the death-blow to my admiration of his cult—was presently to follow when, glancing back, I saw the priest from Pondicherry trotting after me on his short, stumpy legs, the black and greasy paunch wobbling like a jelly at every step.

“ *Monsieur*,” he panted, “ listen, *Monsieur*, do you want a servant ? This priest business is no damn good ! Won’t you take me with you ? ”

Ah, what a falling-off was there, poor saint of Brindaban !

CHAPTER V

DELHI : THE CITY OF THREE FACES

THE PAST

A RECORD of vicissitude is the long history of Delhi, the prize of many a war and gage of countless treaties. Hindu, Mahometan and Christian turn by turn, the city has been captured time and again, razed to the soil, and built anew with stones extracted from the ruins. First the Pathans, then the Moghuls made it their capital. Quite recently it has become the seat of the British Government in India, which promptly shifted and rebuilt it several miles from its former site.

Seven times Delhi has changed masters, aspect, atmosphere ; and now—most drastic change of all—its very habitat has been displaced. Yet, under the Moghuls, the city acquired a lustre and renown so glorious that, come what may, the name of Delhi will go down through the ages as a synonym for Oriental splendour. For here in Delhi Indian culture touched its apogee on the material plane, the Moghul dreams of luxury and grandeur found their consummation.

We owe it to Lord Curzon, whose energy and competence in this respect entitle him to rank as the saviour *par excellence* of Indian art, that two fine monuments of that heroic age have survived splendidly intact. The first is a gigantic mosque, one of the very few I know of whose outward aspect

is genuinely impressive. The second is the Fort, the Emperor's Palace, which I saw for the first time from the summit of a tower of the great mosque, facing it and built during the same epoch.

The afternoon was drawing to its close ; from my lofty eyrie I had a bird's-eye prospect over all Delhi. Before me rose the high battlements of the fortress-city of the Moghuls, blood-red in the rays of the declining sun. A great hush brooded on the huge square mass of stone framing within flamboyant walls a sombre maze of gardens whence rose the shapely domes of palaces, tapering spindles of a little mosque, and narrow roofs of long arcades.

Beside the stately calm of the old Moghul city, its ordered beauty and rich marble walls red-glowing in the sunset light, importunately squatted like two poor relations, the former British Delhi, a grey penurious welter of stone houses, and the native Delhi, ramshackle and supine, teeming with dusty bazaars and unprepossessing samples of humanity. Two needy parasites, tattered and unkempt, they had fastened themselves on the rich mother-city, for all her age as beautiful as ever. Only the Jumna which had lapped her palaces in earlier days had withdrawn from her. Far away to the South, I saw the river, a long skein of grey silk brushing the far-flung ramparts that defend the city of the Moghuls.

Next day, at the entrance of the Fort, I came on a group of British soldiers dwarfed to insignificance by the tremendous portal. At the end of a long, dark, vaulted corridor, lined with little shops like miniature canteens, were some more fair-haired young soldiers, all as like as brothers, quaffing brown ale. I crossed an inner courtyard, then another and another, all of them spacious and nobly pro-

portioned. Together they composed a vast triumphal way leading up to the Hall of Public Audience, whose majestic colonnade of white marble towers in the centre of the final courtyard.

In modern parlance we would describe the Hall of Audience as a "Hall" *tout court*, the vestibule of the palace-city. For, on leaving it, I entered not another series of courtyards, but large rooms and long white marble galleries where the whole expanse of pillars, arches and string-courses was scrolled with delicate Persian *motifs* in jasper, onyx and cornelian. In one of these corridors stood formerly the famous Peacock Throne, the back of which displays a peacock in his pride, the feathers starred with rubies, pearls and diamonds. The throne itself, so I was told, is now in the possession of the Shah of Persia, and, to my regret, I saw only the marble dais on which the gorgeous throne once rested. In its present plight the empty dais might be mistaken for a marble grand piano—forlornly out of place, and somewhat ludicrous.

Behind it, through an opening in the wall, across a vista of delicately fretted archways, gleamed the dry bed of the Jumna. Here are the balconies on which, in former days, the Emperor used to "show himself" to his people massed on the far bank of the river, to reassure his loyal subjects that their ruler was still alive and flourishing.

Beyond the Audience Hall lie the royal chambers. I took the selfsame way the Moghul Emperors used to tread when after their slave-girls had awakened them, massaged their feet and spooned up sugary ice-cream into their sleepy lips, they proceeded from the marble bathroom to the vapour-bath, and thence to a third room where a cold ablution completed their *toilette*.

In one of the symmetrically laid out gardens a gold-crowned mosque soared white and graceful from an orange-grove. In purity of style and craftsmanship it matched the palace, and it, too, was of white marble inlaid with a floral pattern in precious stones recalling the illuminations of a mediæval manuscript. This miniature "Pearl Mosque," so exquisite in its fragility, stands to the Pearl Mosque of Agra as the Sainte Chapelle in Paris to Notre-Dame.

Some nine miles from Delhi, at the end of a road fringed by mosques and derelict mausoleums, stands another memorial of Moslem Delhi, the Kutb Minar. The Kutb is a remarkable tower, built, most probably, by a Pathan emperor to celebrate a victory. A number of Jain and Hindu temples were demolished to supply materials for the tower. It is a quaint structure, on the lines of a factory chimney, ringed every fifteen yards by balconies that, growing narrower as the tower ascends, give it the appearance of an upended telescope. I own I could not share in the enthusiasm which nearly everyone professes for this edifice. I infinitely preferred the ruins and the flowers growing in its shade between roofless mosques and the decapitated pillars on which friendly-looking buzzards took their ease.

THE PRESENT

The name of Delhi is applied indiscriminately to the existing city and the capital in the making ; the latter, however, like any new-born babe, is still at the purely vegetative stage of its career. And, whenever Delhi is the theme, you can be sure the speaker is referring to the first-named city.

For the politician Delhi is the Washington of



*The majestic colonnade of the Hall of Public Audience
Pillars scrolled with delicate Persian "motifs" in jasper, onyx
and cornelian*

DELHI: THE PAST

India, as Bombay and Calcutta are its New York and San Francisco. For the "conducted" tourist it is the haven of delight to which his heart aspires after brief sojourn at such classic ports of call as Agra and Jaipur. For "doing India" (he will tell you) is a tiring business, and the schedules of the travel-agencies "take it out of you." On his long *via dolorosa* from Calcutta or Bombay to Delhi there was not one bar, no picture-house, and not one single European shop. Delhi—the name is like a bell, ringing in the recreation hour.

Alas for the poor tourist, a rude awakening is in store! True, Delhi boasts of two or three picture-palaces, but nothing could be less palatial than these antique, uncomfortable halls. As in most oriental cinemas, and as it was in Elizabethan times, the "gods" are "gentlemen o' the ground." The cheapest seats are in the stalls, where natives and private soldiers uneasily forgather on wooden benches, while balcony and dress-circle are frequented by the *élite*. The films, mostly American or English, are reasonably up-to-date. Indian pictures, still at the embryonic stage of their development, are shown only in the small native cinemas; repulsive as these hovels are, they are yet less lamentable than the eyesores in them exhibited.

The Indians have taken to the cinema and flock to the picture-houses. In serried ranks they sit, silent and imperturbable, without a laugh, without a gesture of applause. Gazing at the ineptitudes of New York night-life, gangsters at gunplay, rape and rapture, never do they betray the least emotion. Perhaps they hope that these American productions will instruct them in the domestic *mores* of the Occident, which these films profess to

illustrate. In Hollywood we of the West have an agent of publicity that does incalculable ill to our prestige.

At the conclusion of the final film, the *bonne bouche* of the evening, no sooner has Norma Shearer bestowed a long last kiss, or Buster Keaton cut his final caper, than in the sudden darkness a large face flares out, covering the whole surface of the screen, pensive, unmoving—the face of the King-Emperor. A “still,” but synchronized with sound ; the first chords of the inevitable *God Save the King* boom in the air. The reactions of the audience are mixed. Down in the stalls the natives rise phlegmatically—mainly because the show is over—and begin trooping out. Some remain standing till the anthem ends, in half-hearted immobility. In the dress-circle the British officers spring briskly to attention, their eyes fixed on their Ruler, as stiffly alert as on parade. The smiles freeze on their lips ; a subaltern lets fall the cloak he is holding to the lady at his side, a major breaks off in the middle of a declaration. Instinctively the foreigner or tourist falls into line—follow-my-leader is the tourist’s golden rule.

Needless to say, I too rose to the occasion. Yet as I gazed at the huge coloured effigy of the late Monarch, I could not help reflecting how much more I relished Greta Garbo’s smile or Charlie Chaplin’s melancholy grin ; reflecting, too, how promptly we would be taxed with militarism and chauvinism were our picture-houses in Algeria and Indo-China to display the likeness of the French President at the end of each performance.

Though Grand Hotels are few and far between, some of the Delhi hotels are quite charming in their way, and reasonably comfortable. Maiden’s,

the one hotel on purely Western lines, is decreed the smartest. Its famous bar, the *rendez-vous* of the Delhi elegantsia, is a dark, narrow little hall, sunless and airless ; at cocktail-time, however, it can be extremely festive and the scene amusing. The Cecil and some other hotels, set back in spacious gardens gay with flowers, are all the more attractive for their adoption of the style peculiar to the Indian rest-house.

The typical hotel of Northern India is a one-storied bungalow, proliferating endwise. The central block contains the dining-room, the lounges and a covered terrace, and wings are thrown out from it more or less haphazard, following roughly the lay-out of the gardens. If the hotel prospers, these wings are added to each year. The rooms are rather dark ; all of them give on an arcaded verandah which lies between them and the gardens and, while it mitigates the heat, cuts off the light. A Spartan simplicity is everywhere affected ; four white-washed walls, a brown woven mat, two iron bedsteads ill-equipped with blankets—such is the standard bedroom of an Indian hotel.

Happily the traveller always brings with him his private roll of bedding or a sleeping-bag, with which he supplements, on the cold February nights, the scanty bedding provided by the hotel. Those noble nomads, the brown travelling-rugs, that have done sybaritic service in maharaja's guest-house, tonga, sleeping-car, nestle beside humble pink-and-white bedsheets that have never strayed beyond the *dhobi-house* in the hotel compound. I wonder if they talk by night. Perhaps the nomad vaunts his travels, the stay-at-home deplures his humdrum days and unromantic nights ; these sheets have oftener felt the angles of an Englishwoman's knee, or burly

transatlantic hips, than known the stress of amorous encounters.

Indeed these bedrooms give no scope for sentiment ; in the room itself no privacy is possible, while in that barbarous anachronism, the Indian bathroom, it is rudely forced upon you. There are no shutters, only curtains of the scantiest dimensions. The window-opening is fitted with fine-meshed wire-gauze screens, which, while adequate for keeping out mosquitoes, lend to curious disclosures. At night they present a black, seemingly opaque surface to the occupant of the room who, failing to see the window is wide open, forgets to close it. How often, coming back late at night, as I walked past perfidiously open windows, have I had glimpses of charming young persons brushing their hair or powdering their necks, clad only in their innocence ! Outside on the verandah near the bedroom door the " boys " gaze placidly at their mistresses with an air of bovine detachment. In any case they can hardly be accounted males, these feeble, hybrid creatures, who seem a triple cross between a valet, a coolie and an hotel " boots." Like cringing and, on occasion, too familiar house-dogs, they keep watch outside the bedroom doors ranged side by side along interminable verandahs. Sometimes they reminded me of vague, inefficient warders posted in a jail corridor to watch the prisoners' cells.

Despite their primitive accommodation, perhaps because of it, most Indian hotels have a distinctive charm. So highly coloured, so exotic, is their setting that the bleakness and lack of comfort within comes as a positive relief.

A riotous profusion of bright flowers surges round them, breaking at their feet in waves of colour ; bougainvilleas float in the bath-tubs, gladioli sprout

under the dining-room tables. Interspersed between these garden-hotels and the patriotic picture-houses in their vicinity are handsome shops, English and Indian, with spacious modern shop-fronts. Here London tailors and shirt-makers flourish, and their numerous Indian patrons are agreeably thrilled at hearing themselves "sirred" by the English gentleman behind the counter. Here, too, are the jewellers' and antiquaries' establishments where trade goes to the tune of lacs of rupees (Rs. 100,000 = £. 6,666), and merchants talk in these large sums as airily as the Jaipur *bazaar-wallah* in terms of pies and annas—farthings and pennies.

With the cinemas and hotels these luxury shops compose a town apart, which, if not wholly modern, follows the European pattern. In point of fact diminutive, it seems quite large, because the distances to cover are considerable. Moreover, there is no visible demarcation between it and the native town; the one shades off into the other, and it is hard to say where ends the West and Orient begins. Living as I did with a foot in either camp, I could appreciate the contrast; here a stretch of dusty grass bordered by moist, lush gardens; there a dapper bungalow rubbing shoulders with a squalid hut, or hovels sprawling on the threshold of a tall modern building. And in the streets of both alike I came on the selfsame beggars, the same monstrous hordes of lepers, the same unminded cows.

THE FUTURE

Ringed round by decorative ruins, New Delhi lies in a plain some two or three miles distant from the residential town. The site was chosen, I imagine, by an artist whose first consideration was to find a

grandiose setting for the Viceroy's palace, and who gave little thought to the practical difficulties his choice entailed. The climate of New Delhi is extremely hot, and necessitates the annual migration of Government to the cool eminence of Simla on the Himalayan foothills. Before Delhi, Calcutta was the seat of Government, and there was point in the suggestion thrown out by Mr. Gandhi at an interview, that India is too poor to afford three residences for her Viceroy. Be this as it may, the surroundings of the new city are impressive. A dreary wilderness has been transformed into a handsome park where ivy-clad Moghul ruins and pillared temples rise in the midst of spacious lawns, or superbly close the long green vistas. In the centre of the park stands a triumphal arch commemorating the twelve thousand Indians who fell in the World War. A monumental symbol of the new city, it also serves as entrance to the great avenue over a mile long that leads, straight as an arrow, to the new palace. Flanking this Royal Way stretches a ribbon of wide lawns, studded with long rectangular marble basins, a silver chain of water-mirrors. On either side the grassland ends on a straight riding track skirting the forest that rises like a high green palisade beyond the lawns and parallel with them. And, crowning all the orderly approach, above an undergrowth of courtyards, porticoes and terraces, rises in lonely grandeur that twentieth-century Versailles, the "Viceroy's House."

One of my Indian friends, a young officer named Misri Chand, who like many of his countrymen is an enthusiastic airman, took me up one morning for a flight over New Delhi. Seen thus from the air, the city resembles an architect's ground-plan. One might fancy that Sir Edward Lutyens when design-

ing it, having mislaid his ruler, fell back on his compass ; for it is all in circles, round ponds and rings of trees, circular roads and “ roundabouts.” Even the Council House is a rotunda, crowned by a dome. On each side of the Processional Way that leads from the triumphal arch—New Delhi’s *Place de l’Étoile*—to the Viceregal Palace, the maharajas have built stately residences which they occupy for a bare fortnight in the year. Between these palatial buildings are the charming little bungalows of the British officials. A little farther on in the direction of Old Delhi a vast circus has been laid out around which blocks of flats and shops are springing up.

The general impression is one of newness. A charming lay-out, a model city, but like a dummy, lifeless. There is something bleak and raw about it all—the defect of mere perfection. Some years are needed for the Providence of cities, divine Caprice, to inspire the new creation with the breath of life, to make it human—and a masterpiece.

I stayed at Delhi several times and saw this city of quick changes in her various rôles. And whether I saw her as the gay *mondaine*, a noble matron or an idle dreamer, on each occasion I learned to love her more.

MONDAINE

Delhi’s “ *Grande Semaine* ” fell in the beginning of February. Vacating their capitals for a fortnight, many of the maharajas had arranged to meet each other here. Governors had left their provinces, officers their garrisons, residents their posts. The ruling princes stayed in their palaces in New Delhi, or engaged whole floors at the Maiden or the Cecil

for themselves "and suite." Hotel lounges glittered with uniforms and silken tunics. At cocktail-time secretaries and equerries fluttered assiduously round the maharajas; ministers of state gave garden-parties. For these functions the civilians wore white silk, their womenfolk light summer costumes; an oasis of amiable dalliance in the long Indian day, this frolic hour that follows sundown. It is then that balls are mooted, tea- and dinner-parties organized. As everybody wishes to have everybody at his "tamasha," invitations to a cocktail-party are launched five days ahead.

Day and night the streets are thronged with lordly motor-cars, the maharajas' cars distinguishable by the pennons in the State colours fluttering above the radiator-caps, which announce the presence of their royal owners. The monarchs' klaxons bay a deep, imperious warning; shriller bark the horns of the young princes speeding past in racing cars or testing the latest models under the rapacious eyes of salesmen from the Kashmir Gate. Like a school quadrangle at the recreation interval, the streets resound with a gay tumult of shouts and laughter.

Crowded days! Noon would find us at a state-luncheon given by the Maharaja of Kapurthala; night overtake us hastening to dinner with the ruler of Panna; and between these high-lights of a Delhi day we spent busy afternoons at the race-course or polo-ground.

The young Maharaja of Bhaunagar had just presented the city with a magnificent stadium situated in New Delhi within sight of Viceroy's House. He invited us to his box for the opening ceremony. The prince is a good-looking young man with sporting tastes. His Prime Minister, who

was with him when he received us, is one of the most impressive *grands seigneurs* I have ever seen. A tall old man with silver locks and beard, not only did he wear a snow-white turban but was faithful to the ancient Rajput costume—white from head to foot. Striking as was the *ensemble* of all this whiteness, even more so was the old-world charm that emanated from his presence ; beside the swarthy young Maharaja dressed in English clothes, he might have been a living symbol of Old India standing by the new. Though belonging to different generations, they had much in common : geniality, a quick sense of humour, a nimble wit and exquisitely polished courtesy. The Bhaunagar Lancers were giving a marvellous equestrian display in the arena, and the young Maharaja and his ministers explained to us the significance of the uniforms.

The Viceroy in a grey morning-coat presented the winners with their cups ; Lady Willingdon bestowed a smile on each, and others on the English ladies in their garden-party dresses and on the Indian princesses in saris of the latest hues. I might have been at Longchamp on a Grand Prix day, in the Jockey Club enclosure ; the only differences were that white topees replaced top-hats, light suits black morning-coats.

At about five every afternoon all the maharajas' sons descended in a merry band on a small tea-shop just beyond the Kashmir Gate. They were escorted by a host of friends and retainers, and the verandah of the little shop was gay with India's young *élite*. Receptions given by British members of the Viceroy's Staff were the order of the night, and often through the wide-open windows of their delightful New Delhi bungalows we watched the bougainvilleas drooping in cataracts of crimson

blossoms, tears of blood streaming through the blue darkness.

One morning Delhi woke agog with excitement, like a French provincial town on the Sous-Préfet's reception-day. Batmen were busy furbishing their officers' belts and buttons, women hurrying to the shops to buy the indispensable long white gloves. Tourists with any sort of letter of introduction drove post-haste to the Viceregal Palace to hand it in ; less-favoured mortals merely signed the Visitors' Book, vaguely hoping for the best. A feverish activity reigned in the hotels, where everybody at once was trying to book a table for dinner, or to bespeak a taxi for the night. Hairdressers' establishments were crowded out, the club-rooms empty ; every bungalow was in a fluster of preparation for the night's great event, the Viceroy's Ball.

We entered Viceroy's House on the stroke of ten. The dense crowd in the vestibule brought to my mind the *vestiaire* of a Paris theatre on a First Night. Amid a press of British Officers and their lack-lustre wives, our hosts' aides-de-camp, fair-haired youngsters who looked charming in their dress-suits faced with sky-blue lapels, were bustling to and fro ; amiably smiling, one of them took us under his wing and escorted us through two immense reception-rooms to the foot of the most handsome staircase in the world. Starting from the Grand Anteroom it mounts by slow degrees towards the Throne Room. Face to face on each of the wide steps, at its extremities, stood two tall Sikh lancers, motionless as two grim giants hewn in stone. Their heads erect and lances held bolt upright, in their scarlet tunics and white buckskins, these magnificent fighting-men formed a grandiose setting for the long procession of guests slowly ascending the marble

steps in surging waves of light and colour. With the gold of the rajas' costumes mingled the shimmering lustre of saris, the silver, red and blue of dazzling uniforms ; amid the glitter of diadems and jewels, the steely flash of epaulettes, the proud brown faces and the spangled turbans, the flaxen coiffures of the young Englishwomen diffused a softer radiance. High above our heads the sliding panel that roofed the mighty staircase, like the lid of an enormous marble cage, had been drawn aside, revealing in a blue expanse of sky the starlit splendour of an Indian night.

In the midst of an immense rotunda of white marble highly polished as a mirror, the Viceroy and Lady Willingdon stood facing each other on a square of purple, gold-brocaded velvet. Five paces from them at the four corners of the carpet stood the Kings of Arms, each holding rigidly at the full length of his extended arm a gold mace or a lance ; standing thus they looked like coloured statues, bronze-masked, supporting the royal emblems.

The guests advanced in two files up to the velvet squares and were presented by the aides-de-camp to the Viceroy, a charming representative of the English aristocracy, who looked his royal part to proud perfection ; or to his smiling, vivacious wife, who with prodigious sleight of mind found something to say—infallibly the right and fitting thing—to every one of us.

Beyond the line of pillars on the far side of the Throne Room, the innumerable reception-rooms of the palace opened on to spacious balconies where, in an *ensemble* as unique as it is felicitous, British and Indian art-*motifs* are exquisitely harmonized. The outside of the palace had struck me as so superbly

regal, and its effect so perfect, that I had feared the interior would prove a disappointment. Far from it, the interior decoration is a complete success. The New Delhi palace is a masterpiece.

One of the reception-rooms had been converted into a ballroom where, between a military band and two gilded platforms, some of the guests had started dancing. The ball, however, had not yet officially begun, as the Viceroy was still in the Throne Room, facing a constant stream of guests. The two thrones were backed by pillars ; behind them four rows of arm-chairs were set out in a square on the four sides of an enormous carpet. This was the enclosure, so to speak, reserved for the leading maharajas and princesses. The former wore coats of gold splendid beyond description ; the turbans of some rajas sparkled with emeralds, their ears with diamonds. Seated around the red-brocaded carpet in the company of their wives and daughters in gorgeous saris, the dark-faced potentates kept severely to themselves. None other were the costumes that in the great days of the old régime glowed and glittered at the princely durbars of the Grand Moghul. On their left through a vast window opening on the starlit darkness poured soft, sweet wafts of orange-blossom.

Peremptorily a trumpet-call withdrew my eyes from this vision of the unchanging East ; two heralds in old-style Tudor uniforms stood at the entrance of the great reception-room, holding long trumpets from which hung blazoned squares of velvet. Thrice they blew the same brief, eerie call, then remained stock-still holding the long trumpets at arm's length from their bodies, the bell-mouths resting on their hips. Velvet doublets, lace ruffles, plumed headgear — across four centuries, five

thousand miles of land and sea, we were suddenly transported to the spacious Elizabethan age ; a pageant of the great queen's court was here enacted in the heart of India, in the capital whose very name was unknown to Tudor England. For England also has an historic past, and inculcates it, as a timely lesson in world-history, to the maharajas who now, at the instance of the trumpets, rose to their gold-shod feet.

Now the heralds performed a series of ritual gestures, like the figures of an old-time dance. One of them stepped forward and in a voice resonant as a bugle-call announced :

“ His Excellency the Viceroy.”

Taking two steps back, he faced his colleague. A half-turn two paces to the rear, and the trumpets which had been mouth-to-mouth swung apart like the leaves of a double door. Into the opening of the bay thus cleared for the viceregal progress four officers advanced towards the throne, followed by four aides-de-camp, two by two, to the slow strains of the national anthem. I was reminded of a scene of pageantry in a Wagnerian opera. At last Lord and Lady Willingdon made their entrance.

There was a large assemblage, but so vast were the reception-rooms and so numerous, that the company seemed relatively small in number. The Englishwomen, for the most part wives of officers living on their pay, added nothing to the general effect ; but the magnificence of the men's uniforms, the sheen of golden veils and silken tunics, generously redeemed the parsimony of the English ladies' costumes. The princes wore few jewels ; it was no longer the fashion to display at the Viceroy's Ball the wealth of diamonds with which

soon afterwards I was to see them decked at Patiala, for the Prince's wedding.

The ball came to an early end. Under the portico of an ante-room I saw an anxious crowd of guests struggling to identify their cars in the double file of vehicles parading past. Amongst the cars of the English officials, veteran Fords clattering like milk-carts, and taxis with ragged hoods, their mica windows pitted as by gun-fire—amongst these rumbling relics, glided by in silken silence the Rolls-Royces of the maharajas.

The Delhi season was drawing to its close. One by one our friends were leaving us ; the Englishmen to rejoin their posts, the Indians their principalities.

IMPERIAL

I returned to Delhi at the end of March, when the Council of Princes was in session.

The aspect of the city had greatly changed. A picture formed before my eyes of the big schoolroom of my old school, which on speech-day assumed a festal look—the walls beflagged, even the masters debonair—only to revert once more to sad sobriety when, flagless now, it served as an examination-room, invigilated by unsmiling masters.

No longer is Delhi the pleasure-city, a club for princes and a vale of smiles where young emancipated princesses can drop the strict decorum that cloisters them at home ; a place where the Viceroy dances every night and his wife, all amiability, dispenses prizes. Opulent Rolls-Royces and fat Hispanos still haunt the streets, but no little maharani is within. At six, instead of dancing, everyone repairs to Patiala's residence or Bikaner's palace—

and "everyone" now means only serious-minded folk and high officials. The minister, the expert, has ousted the gay young princeling; buoyancy succumbed to gravity. The very atmosphere is ponderous as a ministerial frown. Opening the morning paper, we no longer turn at once to the Society Column on the second page, but study the White Paper on page 1.

One morning I visited the building in the style of a Greek temple on the right of the main entrance to Viceroy's House; under its vast dome are housed the three Legislative Chambers, one of which is the Council of Princes. After crossing some courtyards like Spanish patios replete with flowers and fountains, I came to a semi-circular room, a lofty, spacious chamber where I expected to witness a majestic scene—princes of the blood, superbly jealous of their sovereign rights, in wordy warfare battling for the freedom of their states.

Instead of that I saw before the Viceroy's dais what seemed to be a classroom full of schoolboy princes seated two by two on little benches, at desks identical with those one sees in every European House of Parliament. One after the other, sagely they discoursed of matters which had been threshed out long before in London, at the Round Table Conference. Electric fans, strange flowers with brazen petals, blossomed on long stems pendent from the ceiling. All the princes were in Indian costume, but none wore jewels. The most eminent, or unruly, sat in the front rows, like boys whom the form-master likes to keep under his eye. Now and again some of them rose, bowed to the Chair and strolled off to the courtyard, where they fell to chattering in little groups; but for the flowers and the absence of a buffet, they might have been

French deputies wire-pulling in the lobby of our *Chambre*.

The Maharaja of Bikaner addressed the House in clear, ringing tones ; Alwar followed, his hands gloved in black lace beating the air ; then Patiala rose, majestic, all in white—the most impressive of the Indian princes.

The Viceroy replied. He censured, over-severely to my thinking, the speech of a charming prince who was to die a few months later. He spoke as one in authority, sure of his prerogative and power, rebuking without emotion, frigidly. In the King's name he stated his decision. All the vast Empire seemed suddenly personified by this stately gentleman in a pearl-grey morning-coat, who expressed himself so easily, so composedly, in a voice all but inaudible.

The assembly heard out the reprimand in silence ; then more princes, rising each in turn, enlarged on themes worn threadbare by repeated exposition.

The air was cool and dim ; monotonous the drone of voices. Birds had flown in through the half-open windows just below the dome, and twittered shrilly over the heads of the august assemblage ; some birds had perched on a stone escutcheon blazoned with the British Arms. And I wondered if the Indian princes, for all their looks of lethargy and the sweet reasonableness of their argument, did not feel, deep in their hearts, a thrill responsive to the voices of the birds above them, bright envoys from the jungles of their ancestral homes—careless, irreverent birds that, perching on the crown of England, poured forth in full-throated joy their songs of liberty.

DORMANT

I visited Delhi once again, in the middle of May. Hotels and shops were closed. Some bore inscriptions : “ *Transferred for the Season to Mussoori,*” or “ *to Simla.*”

The streets were empty. The tourists had retreated homewards. The best client of all, he who draws the others in his train, the Viceroy, was at Simla. Delhi was dead, as watering-places or sea-resorts die an annual death, the season ended.

After the festive February nights, after laborious March mornings, Delhi was sleeping through the afternoons of idle May. The city of illusion was wearing her third mask ; the mask of a deserted necropolis, defunct—or waiting for a conqueror.

Only one thing had survived unchanged, the Indian scene ; triumphant sunlight, venerable dust and, basking in the mellow warmth, the slow-moving ruminative life of not inglorious poverty.

Passing the gardens of the Cecil Hotel, I noticed that the flowers were lovelier than ever.

CHAPTER VI

KAPURTHALA : A CORNER OF FRANCE

IT had been drizzling all the morning ; a fine, soft rain, soundless, companionable. I had forgotten what a wet day looked like ; during the four months that had elapsed since I left France, rain had not come my way. That morning I found it charming.

From the wide verandah opening off my bedroom I watched it falling from a luminous pearl-grey sky, falling softly on the young green of gardens laid out *à la française*, softly falling on the blue-green or sombre grey-green foliage of the great trees that ring them round, like trusty bodyguards.

The rain came down, but still some birds were singing, only one or two ; did they think so light a shower too trivial for silence, or were they so used to singing all day long that even for an hour or two they could not bring themselves to mope ? And these persistent birds were all old friends, the birds of France : some tom-tits, a pigeon and a jay.

The terrace roofing one of the porticoes of the Kapurthala Palace—where we had been staying overnight—shone with a watery radiance and, like a laughing, naked baby in his bath, the stone parapet displayed a row of moist, pink-gleaming teeth. Down in the garden white-trousered men with black umbrellas were wandering on long trails of silvery

light, the rain-drenched avenues ribboning the sombre groves.

The rain fell like a *grande dame*—elegantly. The air was mild, laden with the fume of rain-soaked soil, a tang of new-mown grass. A familiar atmosphere ! Easily I could believe myself in France ; so typically French was the garden, with its stately groves and near horizons where scerried trees closed with a mist-blue curtain spacious vistas. The soft, fine rain was an old acquaintance, the perfume of the garden subtle and subdued as a Debussy prelude ; almost, I thought, the birds sang with a French accent. We might have been in Versailles, visiting the Trianon under a shower, or staying in some handsome château of the Île-de-France.

But then—on our left a bird sped past and its call was one I never heard in a French woodland. As it flashed by with the shrill squeak of an adze biting on a rough plank, in a green flash of silken plumage, I saw its bulging forehead and knew it for a parrot. Yes, the Fontainebleau forest was many leagues away. And, if I heard a well-known sound, a brisk reiterated call from some unseen spot behind the trees where an Indian bugler was practising his call, first note by note, and then in a rapid sequence—how often do the outskirts of our small provincial garrison-towns echo with such prentice bugle-calls !—another sound had just begun quite near at hand, a solemn chant, that made me realize how very far I was from France. At first no more than a vague murmur, suddenly it swelled in volume. The sounds came from underneath our verandah—seemingly a choir of four or five male voices ; the muffled thudding of a small drum struck with the palm of the hand beat the measure of a solemn melody, droning on and on like a liturgic chant.

And then I remembered the little room which on the previous evening an aide-de-camp had pointed out to me, where I had seen a Sikh priest, bearded like Father Christmas, seated on silk cushions, his Scripture open in his hands, intoning psalms. The invisible singers just below me were engaged in morning prayer. From the little room downstairs where they were singing the voices did not carry clearly to the balcony ; only a muffled resonance reached my ears, ravelling and unravelling itself in subtle modulations, like a living creature trapped between their folded hands. Now and again a high note at the climax of a phrase soared up ; I seemed to see it quivering in the air before me, a fountain of clear sound in the calm light, then falling crystal-line upon the streaming flowers.

The rhythms were soft, unstressed ; the words, to me, mysterious. Was it a litany, I wondered. It seemed that certain words invariably recurred on the same beat. . . . Suddenly there came a pause, and I heard a still, small murmur ; the priest was reading out a text. Then in the languid hush of the rain-swept air the chanting voices rose again, persistently, soft and sensuous as a song of love.

Lowering clouds were veiling the horizon where, on the previous day, I had seen the snow-capped outposts of the Himalayas, wraithlike forms fretting the skyline. For this delectable land of Kapurthala lies far to the North of India, fifty miles from Lahore, an oasis of good taste and simplicity at the foot of the Kashmiri Tableland.

Kapurthala, a native State in cameo, well might figure at an Exhibition of Decorative Art, in the Town-planning Section, as a "Model Indian State." Nothing has been omitted by the architect. It includes a palace, a post-office, a prison, Law

Courts and residences for state officials. Its ruler, a Sikh, as generous as enlightened, has even provided his subjects with Hindu and Moslem temples. But, as in a small-scale model we never find the actual materials intended to be used in the full-blown edifice, so here the temples and other buildings are in ordinary stone or tinted stucco. The colour-schemes are admirably composed, and, when the time comes for rebuilding in more durable materials, the model should be scrupulously followed as to the choice of marbles and mosaics.

As yet (the present state of things is, I suppose, provisional) Kapurthala is no more than a working-plan due to the architectural genius of a ruler who with unfailing taste appreciates the best in European art ; a paragon of all that the small capital of a relatively new state should be.

Such as it is, the general effect is charming. The traveller has but to disregard the costumes of the townsfolk to believe himself—as I believed throughout my stay and, above all, on that rainy morning—at a delightful French château surrounded by large gardens and handsome forests, with a little village at the park gates, and near by some of those small pink villas, with tiny gardens back-and-front, to which Parisians resort during the summer months. And, at dinner with his host, our traveller's illusion would persist, what with dishes to delight a gourmet's palate, wines of the finest vintages and conversations carried on in French, sparkling with wit and geniality. And, to complete the picture, he would be waited on by smiling and attentive servants wearing a sober livery.

Gifted with exquisite *finesse* and vastly cultured, the Prince has dowered his little state with an atmosphere of refinement, elegance and good taste, mani-

fest not only in externals but in the mood of those around him. Kapurthala is a fragment of France transposed to the foot of the Himalayas.

Two days before we left, a ceremonial parade of three thousand Sikhs took place before the palace. They came now, as every year they come, to manifest their devotion to our host, whom they regard as one of their religious hierarchs. For two days I had noticed them in the public gardens surrounding the bazaar where they hold their annual meeting ; grouped round a tent, they were listening to a priest who, seated beneath a canopy, was reading out their Scriptures. The congregation repeated certain passages in unison, intoning the responses in a minor key.

On the parade day they were due to assemble after lunch, at about three. When we left the dining-room I saw over a thousand yellow-turbaned men already mustered at one end of the palace ; bearing pennons and large standards, they had formed up round a State elephant lent for the occasion, on whose back, in a silver howdah, rode the high priest with the Holy Book. The Maharaja of Kapurthala with his retinue joined us on the balcony where we were standing, and the procession began.

They marched past in separate contingents, each group with its own standard, its band and a buffoon. The buffoons came last, forming the connecting-links between each group and that behind it. Some of them carried big drums and progressed wheel-wise, head over heels, banging the drum in rhythm with each somersault ; one was an old man walking on his hands. In some cases the buffoon had enlisted three or four companions, and engaged with them in comic wrestling-bouts and fencing-matches.

Just below our balcony a large sheet of white cloth was spread, on which the women taking part in the procession seated themselves as they came up ; presently they were joined by an orchestra—side-drums, violas, a small two-octave harmonium—and an attendant choir of female voices. As Sikhs, the women were unveiled ; many of them wore loose trousers bunched in at the ankles, in the Mahometan manner.

The various contingents paraded in no set order ; each seemed a fragment detached haphazard from the mass of men and women in the rear, that was constantly being swelled by new arrivals. As it filed past below the balcony, from each group there burst a roar of loyal cries : “ God bless our King ! ” “ Long live the Master ! ” The huge male elephant that is the glory of Kapurthala loomed up below and, leaving the procession, halted facing us. In the silver howdah a tall old man was intoning verses from a Sikh Bible laid before him on a lectern. An attendant, a sort of sacristan, seated behind the priest, leaned over his shoulder to dust the holy book with a white horse-hair fly-whisk, keeping time to the rhythm of the verses. Patiently the elephant stood his ground, in devout or philosophic—or was it merely elephantine?—immobility. Tired, perhaps, of waving his trunk to and fro and sniffing at the pebbles on the road, he had slipped the tip inside his mouth.

A pious mendicant had climbed on to the balcony ; after kissing the Maharaja’s feet he held out a champagne-bucket, which the attendants filled with sweetmeats. Some other saintly personages followed his example ; they presented us with little birds’-nests in sugar, thumbred and grimy, and departed with a few rupees.

The procession showed no sign of ending ; but the Maharaja seemed to have had enough of it. He bowed, his hands pressed together and stretched towards the priest in the silver howdah, then moved away. The elephant, too, made a move, and re-joined the interminable cortège.

The days were very short ; already dusk was falling and a blue mist forming at the far end of the gardens. For a few minutes yet I lingered on the terrace. Looking down between two tall Louis XIV vases, I watched the turbaned procession massed round the elephant receding into the blue distance between the formal *parterres* of the French garden. It was as if one of the frescoes in blue monochrome that were in vogue at the beginning of the eighteenth century had come portentously to life ; those quaint frescoes in which our French painters, won by the glamour of the newly founded *Compagnie des Indes*, portrayed exotic figures arrayed in Eastern robes, with attendant trains of elephants and monkeys, in a setting that reiterated tree for tree the Versailles Park.

CHAPTER VII

AMRITSAR : THE SIKH ROME

AT the time when Martin Luther was launching his apostolate in the Germanic countries of the Holy Roman Empire, a certain Baba Nanak was preaching the Gospel of a new religion in Northern India. A high-caste Hindu, hailing from Lahore, Baba Nanak had married and settled down, it seemed, to family life, when one day he heard the call, renounced the world and set forth as a half-naked mendicant on a long pilgrimage to the historic shrines of India. He cast his lot among the wandering Sadhus, and his roamings took him far afield ; as far, some say, as Mecca. He had set out as a conventionally orthodox Hindu, but in the course of his long vagrancy round and about the continent became profoundly interested in two religions with the priests of which he often came in contact.

Of the two religions whose theories he assimilated one was Sufism, a creed as curious as its ideal is sublime. It began as a revolt from the rigid and soul-deadening form of Mahometanism prevalent in Persia, and gradually crystallized into a pantheistic mysticism blending the ancient doctrines of Zoroaster with theories remarkably akin to those of Buddha. The noblest Persian poems owe their inspiration to Sufi teachings. Sufism has a large following in Moslem lands ; most of its proselytes, indeed, are ex-Mahometans.

The other doctrine which deeply influenced the founder of the Sikh religion was that of Christianity. Like so many others, Nanak attempted to unravel a single eclectic faith from the elements of several religions. He preached the gospel of a Creative Spirit outside which all is *maya*, i.e. illusion. Salvation is dependent on the intervention of a Guru, a spiritual preceptor, acting as intercessor between God and man. The new faith was called Sikhism ; the name *Sikh* meaning "disciple" (from the verb *Sikhna* : to learn). On Nanak's death another Guru took his place, who in turn was succeeded by a third, and thus an apostolic succession was established. The fifth Guru attempted to combine the sect in a more or less independent race and state, bringing thus upon the Sikhs for the first time the enmity of the central Moslem government at Delhi. From now on the hatred of the old religion for the new intensified with the years. And in the time of the sixth Guru the Sikhs, hitherto a peaceful brotherhood, began to develop into a warrior clan, and took steps to organize their defence. Towards the close of the seventeenth century, during the primacy of Bahadur, the ninth Guru, the fanatic emperor Aurangzeb, the ruthless persecutor of all non-Moslems, attempted to exterminate the sect and had Bahadur put to death. Just before he was led to the scaffold, Bahadur, standing on the roof of his prison, uttered an amazing prophecy. "In a little while there shall come from the West a band of my disciples, fair-skinned men wearing helmets, who will avenge my death and destroy my enemies to the last man."

History renewed itself ; the saintly martyr's death consolidated the Sikh faith. On this rock, on the blood-stained corpse of Bahadur, was founded for

all time the church, spiritual and militant, of Sikhism. The next Guru, tenth in direct succession from Baba Nanak, prescribed a distinctive costume for his followers, drew up a Code of Laws, and did his utmost to purge Sikhism of Hindu and Mahometan elements. Some years later he was murdered, and with his dying breath declared that Gurus were no longer needed ; from now on the Sikhs must look for guidance only to their Holy Book, the Granth.

The Sikh religion is a hard one. The rigour of its precepts, adapted as they were to troubled times, has little application to an India basking in the *Pax Britannica*. Thirty years ago Sikhism showed signs of dying out ; its resuscitation, due to political considerations, came about in a rather curious way. A man is not born a Sikh ; to become one he must on reaching adult age accept the rite of baptism. But the younger generation did not relish the notion of embracing a faith which demands the utmost circumspection from its followers in the observance of the Law. There was a growing tendency to shirk the baptismal rite, to take the line of least resistance and relapse into the status of low-caste Hindus. The British military authorities, however, had realized that the Sikh religion had virtues signally conducive to the making of good soldiers. And they enacted that every recruit born of Sikh parents must be baptized. Moreover, the ceremony was performed by the regimental priest with much pomp and circumstance. The provision that a son of Sikh parents, unless he was himself a Sikh, could not enlist in a Sikh regiment—the ambition of every Punjabi—had the desired effect on this martial race. The Sikh religion took on a new lease of life, and flourishes to-day as in the past.

There are at present some three million Sikhs, almost all of whom inhabit this region of the upper Punjab. Kapurthala, some thirty miles from Lahore, is one of several states professing Sikhism ; in its vicinity is Patiala, the largest and most powerful of the group.

The Sikh is a warrior by birth, and by tradition is as remarkable for his picturesque appearance as for his soldierly qualities. Honesty as well as courage is among his many virtues, and he is much sought after for service in the police force. All over India I saw fine, upstanding Sikh policemen directing the traffic and keeping order in the streets. At Singapore and Hong-Kong, even at Shanghai, I came across Punjabis of grenadier stature, with the characteristic rolled-up Sikh beard, serving as night-watchmen in banks and similar establishments.

The commandments of the Sikh religion are few in number and embodied in the Granth. This canon of the Sikhs is divided into two parts ; the first part was written by Baba Nanak himself, the second consists of somewhat obscure and often contradictory glosses by the nine succeeding Gurus. The gist of the religion is summed up in seven articles of belief :

The fatherhood of God, in the fullest meaning of the word.
The brotherhood of man.

Obedience to the dictates of the divine voice within.

The infallibility of divine justice.

Man's need for enlightenment from above.

The existence of a mediator who can give absolution (atonement by confession).

Strict prohibition of idolatry.

To these seven articles of faith the following injunctions are appended : only accept one baptism ; worship one invisible God alone ; always be pre-

pared for war and covet death on the battlefield as the best of deaths ; be faithful to the five “ K’s.”

The “ K’s ” in question are a group of five commandments, each beginning with the letter K. All of these bear the imprint of the epoch when they were formulated ; thus one prescribes the wearing of short drawers, another bids the Sikhs always go armed with a steel dagger. One commandment, however, the most picturesque, has an amusing origin : the rule forbidding Sikhs to shave or have their hair cut ; they must wear their hair rolled on the head and held in place by a comb. The Indian barber’s shop was, as it is still to-day in the small villages of France, a hot-bed of tittle-tattle and rumours, and the barber often picked up scraps of information which were better kept concealed. Thus secrets of prime importance for a people constantly at war were apt to leak out from the barbers’ booths. By the suppression of the barbers such leakage was precluded. The risk is of the past, but the ban survives, and the orthodox Sikh still wears a tightly wound *pugri* over his uncut hair, securing in its folds the upturned tips of the full beard curling up his swarthy cheeks. Nowadays the ban on smoking is less rigorously observed. Its origin is somewhat similar ; the fact that excessive smoking blunts the power of self-restraint, and that smokers are apt to get together and chatter indiscreetly.

Many passages in the Granth are strikingly akin to the Christian New Testament ; indeed it would not be too much to say that a good half of Nanak’s work deals uniquely with the Gospel narrative from the Birth of Christ to the Ascension. Moreover, it is recorded that Saint Thomas the Apostle made many converts in the North of India, and I have per-

sonally seen groups of Brothers in this part of the Punjab studying St. Matthew's Gospel along with Baba Nanak's Scriptures.

There are countless copies of the Granth, but what is believed to be the original text is preserved in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, the Sikh Rome, where we broke the journey from Kapurthala to Lahore.

Amritsar has no hotel and we lunched at the station. With one of the railway employees as our guide, we set out for the Golden Temple in a tonga. The road led through gardens planted with sombre yews and peach-trees bursting into flower ; here we had our first glimpse of the Indian spring. For, hot as it had been, nature had not till now awakened from her cold-weather sleep.

For three days it had been pouring, and the rain that had enhanced the beauty of the Kapurthala park had here transformed the streets of the bazaar, which we now entered, into a morass of mud. India is tributary to the sun. Stripped of the patina of sunlight, the white houses and brown soil have a disconsolate, depressing aspect. No longer in the narrow streets of the Sikh capital roamed the fierce, haughty clansmen of a hundred years ago, living in a constant atmosphere of war, steel daggers glinting at their belts. In any case, the present population of Amritsar is not exclusively Sikh ; I saw Punjabi Hindus, Bombay Mahometans and, now and again, the wild, barbaric face of a Pathan ; a harbinger of the frontier I was nearing. Bedraggled, their feet black with slime, they floundered in a slough of despond ; the women's trousers were stiff with caked mud, their anklets mired together, and the children stumbling after them looked more wretched still ; little naked urchins smeared above

the waist with a brown coat of clotted clay veined like crackle-ware, their small limbs glistening with liquid mud.

At the far end of a street a clock-tower like a churchless belfry confronted with its gawky gracelessness a monstrous white statue : Queen Victoria many times life-size. Here we alighted from the tonga, to sink at once ankle-deep into the mud. From this point on cigarettes were taboo ; according to the guide we were quite near the Golden Temple. But all I saw in front was a vast square of low houses, enclosing so far as I could make out an empty space. We climbed on to what seemed to be the roof of one of the houses and I caught a glimpse of golden domes ; but forthwith we were bidden to sit down and take off our shoes. I was prepared for this emergency and had bought two pairs of socks (at 4*d.* a pair). Hastily I slipped the socks on and moved towards a porch opening on to a shallow flight of steps. A Sikh caretaker blocked the entrance with his extended arms.

“ Cigarette, Sahib. If the Sahib has cigarettes, please to leave them here.”

I tendered my cigarette-case to the Sikh, who recoiled precipitately.

“ Put it on the ground, Sahib.”

To the renewed horror of the caretaker I made as if to slip my cigarette-case under the little hut in which he lived.

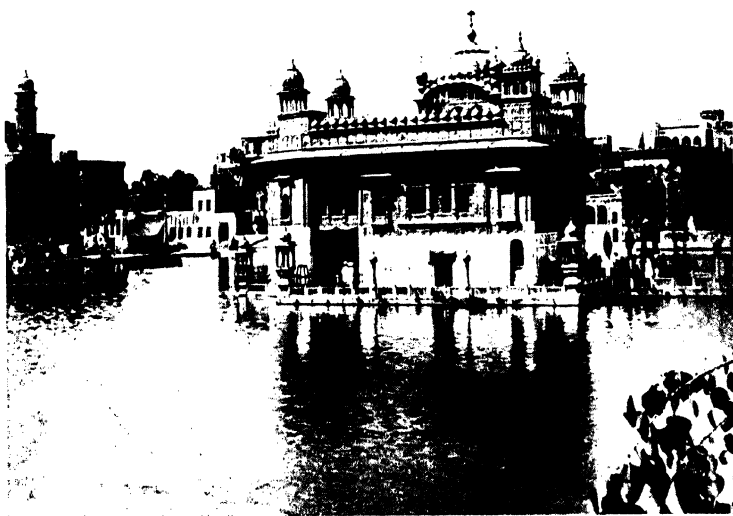
“ No, no ! Not there ! ”

Finally I left my cigarettes on a little mound of earth that seemed slightly dryer than the mud-pats round it. Shoeless, tobaccoless, we now passed muster and were permitted to descend the steps.

Before us lay a huge square tank, each side of which seemed at least a hundred yards long and

was flanked by a long line of buildings, the buildings that when I saw them from the bazaar I had mistaken for rows of squat, one-storied houses. White-washed and hermetically closed, these houses are miniature palaces built by the rulers of Sikh native states to serve as their abode when they come here on pilgrimage. At other times they are at the disposal of ordinary pilgrims. The façades are charmingly adorned with balconies and pillars, and, tier by tier, the palaces descend by two or three degrees to the level of the marble esplanade skirting the tank. Together they form a perfect frame, a simple setting of dead white for the intricate splendours of the Golden Temple of Amritsar.

Zoned in dazzling white, the water of the tank is blue beyond description, and in the midst glitters a marble islet crowned with a peerless diadem of gold. Foursquare it rises, like a great nugget from some fabled Eldorado, the cornice studded with a coronal of shining globes ; four small minarets stand at the angles, golden sentinels around the scintillating dome. A long, narrow marble causeway almost level with the water links the marble island with the marble pavement bordering the tank. The esplanade is planted with shade-trees. The trunks are encased in marble sockets like yard-high candlesticks, which serve as pedestals, and the trees seem to have taken root not in earth but in the solid stone. Incongruous flowers, sprigs of jasmine, roses and orange-blossom, festooned their branches. Now and again the sun shone forth between the rain-clouds, turning the temple to a flaming mass of gold ; then, as the light died out, the glory passed, fading into a soft, diminished radiance.



A marble islet crowned with a diadem of gold

AMRITSAR : THE SIKH ROME

Ultima Thule ; India goes no farther

PESHAWAR : GUARDIANS OF THE FRONTIER

A handsome Sikh, a man of wide culture—whether a priest or merely a custodian, I could not judge—came to meet us and acted as our guide. As he led us round the tank he described the picturesque or tragic happenings associated with each tree, each stone.

“The site of Amritsar, Sahib, was famous long before Buddha’s time as a fitting place for worship and repose. According to one of Buddha’s disciples the Master chanced to spend a day at Amritsar and thereafter stayed here for a long while, finding it an ideal retreat for one aspiring to Nirvana. A little less than four hundred years ago the Fourth Guru dug a hole at the foot of that tree on your right and, lo and behold ! the hole miraculously filled with water. He credited the water with divine powers, but few believed him and the well was left derelict.

“Then one day a girl distantly related to the Guru was wedded to a man who soon after the marriage fell into mortal sin ; his punishment was swift and condign, an attack of leprosy that hideously marred his features. The young wife did not desert him, but prayed God for forgiveness of her husband’s sin. It fell out that one afternoon she led her husband (his sight was wasted by the disease) to the place where we are now. Bidding him sit in the shadow of that tree and stay there till she came back, she went off to the bazaar to buy his meal. The day was hot, and the leper, feeling cool water at his feet, let himself down into the pool and bathed. Presently his wife returned. ‘Friend,’ she asked, ‘have you seen my husband, a leper, whom I left here a little while ago?’ ‘Do you not know me?’ the man asked. ‘Can you not recognize your husband, dearest wife? God has pardoned me ; the waters

of this pool have washed away my sins.' And he leapt out of the pool, a handsome young athlete with flawless skin.

"After this miracle there could be no doubt as to the sanctity of the pool dug by the Fourth Gurū ; it was converted into a handsome tank, and beside it a noble temple was erected. But in the wars waged by my ancestors against the Moghuls and Afghans the temple was razed to the ground, and the tank filled up ; only a hundred years later, in the eighteenth century, did the victorious Sikhs restore our fane, the temple now before you. Our leader, Ranjit Singh, during his governorship of Lahore, had it gilded and sumptuously adorned, and laid out round it the city of Amritsar—*Amrit*, Sahib, means immortality, and *sar*, water—the Waters of Immortality."

Leaving the gnarled old tree which seemed to have caught the disease of the miraculously healed leper, we slowly walked past the lines of *bungas*—pilgrims' lodgings—in some of which I saw the occupants asleep or meditating. The polished flagstones were soft underfoot. Glancing through a latticed window in the whitewashed walls of one of these little palaces, I saw a crudely executed painting rather like an inferior poster, depicting a man brandishing a sword in one hand, his own head in the other. In front of the picture stood vases containing relics. The little shrine commemorated a Sikh saint who in defending the temple against the Moslems had his head severed from his body. A line of troughs under a portico enabled the worshippers to give their feet a summary ablution before entering the sacred precincts. A crowd of beggars loitered before the long buildings containing the kitchens and refectories where free

meals are distributed every day. Wedged between two *bungas*, a large temple occupies a corner of the enclosure ; here it was that the Sixth Guru ministered to his flock. The temple is now used for baptisms and as a confessional ; confessions are always almost public, and the penances imposed often take the form of corporal punishment. Squatting on the steps leading down to the water, some men were performing their ablutions. They had left their turbans on the bank, and very odd they looked without them ; with their hair stacked on their heads in a tall chignon, they resembled bearded women. Twenty yards away a leper— young or old, it was impossible to say—was splashing his body, beating the water with the stumps of his handless arms. The water is changed, my guide informed me, once a week. He told me of a Sikh princess—I recognized the name as that of a lady whom I had recently met—who some two years previously, in despair at being unable to give the prince, her husband, a son and heir, had had the courage to bathe in the wonder-working pool.

Crossing the long marble causeway, we came to one of the four portals hung with heavy red velvet curtains that give access to the enchanting little Golden Temple. The interior was cool and dark. Between the four central pillars a large white sheet covered the pavement. Immediately in front of the entrance-gate two men were seated on the edge of the white cloth, at the receipt of alms. Copper annas were thrown on to a pile ; silver rupees placed in an alms-box. A kneeling scribe entered up each offering in a ledger. In return for my rupee I was handed a little bird's-nest of dirty sugar like the one I had been given at Kapurthala. Facing the alms-collectors, at the opposite side of

the sheet, the Granth lay on a raised cushion, covered with silk veils and garlands of yellow flowers. Along the two remaining sides of the white floor-cloth, closing the square, sat singers and precentors surrounded by a throng of kneeling worshippers, intoning verses of the scriptures in a minor key. New arrivals were constantly coming in ; some gave alms and some did not ; all made obeisance to the Holy Book, stayed a brief while in meditation and went out by another door. Now and again one of them handed a garland to the priest seated behind the Book ; he laid it on the open Granth, and after a moment handed it back.

For a very long while I stayed unmoving, leaning against a pillar, watching the endless stream of worshippers passing through the temple. Earnest and reverent, with flowers in their hands, they came to fortify their faith by contact with the sacred Book of the great founder of their creed. Above their heads loomed the glorious dome of the Sikh temple ; a golden galleon at anchor, lonely and serene, in a landlocked haven girt by marble shores.

A narrow staircase inset in a wall led up to the second storey. Seated on a white floor-cloth in a little upper room a man was reading aloud from another volume of the Granth ; before him, too, were tiny pyramids of annas and a heap of flowers. The reading of the Holy Book goes on unceasing day and night ; every hour the reader is relieved by another who takes his place. The new-comer sits behind the reader whom he is about to relieve and for a while reads with him over his shoulder ; when the latter is satisfied that his successor has found the place, he rises and makes room for him.

Thus the reading proceeds continuously, without a moment's interruption.

After leaving the temple we continued our walk around the tank ; in the declining light the water shone with a delicate grey-blue lustre. On a branch of one of the drooping shade-trees I hung the string of yellow petals that I had brought to the temple and the priest had blessed. I paused to listen to the soft silken sound of naked footfalls on the damp marble flags ; to the pigeons cooing somewhere in the trees now that the rain had ended. With the sunset a vast tranquillity had fallen on the scene, a peace that passed the understanding ; here each moment seemed a benediction, grave yet infinitely simple. And I heard myself murmuring some lines from the Granth, an evening hymn—

As great as Thou thyself art
Great is thy gift ;
That, having created the light of day,
Thou did bestow also the boon of night.

CHAPTER VIII

LAHORE : THE DOSSHOUSE-STATION

I SPENT only two days at Lahore ; I could not bring myself to make a longer stay. Likely enough I got a false impression of the capital of the Punjab, or failed to understand it. But, after the Moghul splendours of Agra and Delhi, the great Mosque struck me as a relatively paltry relic of the past. As for the Fort, so tastelessly “restored”—what an eyesore of banality it is ! For me its one redeeming charm was the fine view obtainable from the summit of its mud walls.

True, I visited the tomb of one of the Emperor Jahangir’s wives ; and admired its charming decorative pattern into which are woven, marvelously carved in marble, nine-and-ninety names of Allah. And, under the sunset light, I gazed at the imposing mausoleum of the great Emperor himself some six miles from the city in the midst of smiling gardens. But generally speaking, the traveller needs to fall back on memory or imagination if he wishes to respond emotionally to the Punjab capital. Hitherto all my emotions had welled up spontaneously, so to speak ; the thing seen in itself had been enough to stir my sense of wonder and to hold my interest. Here it was quite otherwise. Conjuring up my memories of Kim and the historic past of the great city ; making a mental effort to confer the patina of age

on the crude restorations, the modernity of which was only too apparent, I did my best to kindle my enthusiasm. Unhappily enthusiasm is not fired to order.

And I fear that Lahore has stamped itself indelibly on my imagination as a huge, conventional dummy, void of life and personality ; a place where nothing's doing, tedious as a Sunday afternoon.

When the train we were to take that evening came in, we found it full ; the only vacant place was a single sleeping-berth in a compartment for four, occupied by three Englishwomen who feigned sleep and a whimpering child. We decided to wait for the next train, due in two hours later.

Aimlessly I roamed about the station, crossing several lines, exploring subways that ramified in all directions. Time and again I lost my way in ill-lit, elusive corridors. In every dark corner, on benches, on the ground, or sprawling across the platforms, lay Indians of the poorest class, looking like little heaps of squalid cast-off rags, blue with dust and yellow with the cumulative grease of ages. They were waiting for our train or for the next one, due in at daybreak. Their tickets entitled them to stay here under cover, and here they were at home, amongst themselves, with the whole station for their waiting-room. As Indians wait, they waited, squatting on the ground, their legs drawn up and wide apart, an arm lolling on each knee, in silent immobility. Some men were smoking small clay pipes ; others had cigarettes which they held between the little finger and the palm of the hand. When one of them wanted to take a puff he closed his fist and applied his lips to the orifice beside his thumb. A cigarette was shared by several men, who passed it round from hand to hand.

Others were lying down with the rugs they wear across their shoulders cape-wise in the day-time thrown over them, like shrouds. In the Indian night, houses under construction, flights of steps, gardens, railway-stations, benches, are like so many morgues. In long dark rows the sleepers are laid out unmoving along the walls ; the casualties of a battle not of their seeking. Did they really mean to take a train, I asked myself, these draggled night-birds dossing in the station ? How had they contrived to save the few annas needed for a ticket out of their monthly earnings of two or three rupees ? Did they know, themselves ? Meanwhile there they lay—waiting. Patience, in India, is more than a virtue, it is a necessity.

In one corner a camp-fire was burning. Half a dozen Indians were crouching round a brazier, and the glow brought out warm tones in the dark bronze of their impassive faces. I passed bowed men carrying long tin boxes, their travelling-trunks, upon their heads ; the women trailing after them, their features swathed in coloured veils, carried not only similar tin trunks but voluminous bundles wrapped in gaudy fabrics, and sleepy urchins in comically short shirts that revealed their little brown behinds. The child straddled his mother's hips, while she held him to her with an arm passed round his back. Used as she is to carrying burdens on her head, the Indian woman holds herself splendidly erect, her shoulders thrown a little back ; her anklets jingle at each step. When she pauses to adjust a *sari* slipping off her hair, a strip of naked belly—always a trifle bloated—shows between the pleated skirt and the band of coloured cloth that tightly wraps her breast.

We picked our devious way among bundles,

trunks and sleeping forms. The platform was thick in dust, spattered with crimson spittle, the consumptive-like saliva of the betel-chewer. Blood-stains everywhere and sleeping forms huddled in brown rugs, half-naked women, haggard faces stamped with the mark of homelessness—was not this a refugee-camp behind a battle-front? After a day's fighting in the vicinity, a village had been evacuated, and the dead and wounded lay about me. The peasant-women had brought away all they could carry on their shoulders, there had been no time to dress the children. Had I been transported twenty years back to Flanders fields? Illusion . . . yet not quite illusion; India, too, has her great war: the age-long struggle against poverty. A war in which the combatants are never seen; only the vanquished.

Strolling along the Lahore platform, the traveller grows conscious of a curious buzzing in his ears, a rigmarole of words repeated over and over again; he notices it only after a certain lapse of time or, more precisely, when he feels a timid pressure on his arm or sees a wooden box thrust under his nose. It is a news-boy or sweetmeat-vender dogging his steps, shy yet adhesive as a burr; but, to his credit, almost as inaudible. Easily rebuffed, he takes his failure in good part.

Two men came towards us carrying between them a sort of crate closely enveloped in white cloth and slung from a long pole resting on their shoulders. Within the curtained palanquin an Indian lady was being conveyed to the compartment reserved for women; by this means she could travel without "breaking purdah."

If their crudity is less apparent than it would be in the light of day, strangely enough the gaudy

colours of Indian veils and dresses make their most violent effect, it seems, in the uncertain glow of station lights, or lit by flashes from hand-lamps moving in the offing. Stealthily the colours lie in wait in coigns of darkness, whither you have to track them down to apprehend their presence. Sometimes, unexpectedly, they spring upon you at the turn of a passage, from behind a pillar, under a lamp. Everywhere they catch your eye, and in a trice are lost again. An interminable game of hide-and-seek ! Where was that splash of red ? All you now see is a dingy brown. What's become of all that green ? Suddenly it has wilted to a sombre grey. The glint of silver on that woman's ankle ? Dulled to iron. That reddened face, the black forehead yonder, pied with the four white signs of Siva, those eyes of glowing amber . . . ? Lost in darkness, in a limbo of phantom forms.

Yet another platform. Here, however, a train was in, with its attendant crowd, the two or three inevitable European passengers and a tribe of bearers. The platform was no longer strewn with prostrate forms, everyone was up and bustling, the train was soon to leave. Suddenly I noticed one of my Indian friends, a Minister of State, hunting for the carriage that was to take him and his Prince to their destination in one of the Rajputana States. I went up to him and joined him in his quest. Presently we came to a carriage lacquered white with brightly polished fittings, all the doors and windows of which were closed. A large silver coat-of-arms topped by a closed crown was clamped to the side of the coach. A crowd of people in Indian attire stood on the platform in front of it—aides-de-camp, officers, retainers. They were awaiting their monarch, the Maharaja, who

whenever he travels by rail has his private carriage attached to an ordinary train. The prince had not yet appeared. When would he come? In five minutes? In half an hour? No matter, the train could wait. The officers bowed to our friend, the minister, clasping their hands against their breasts; the rank and file stood to attention.

How tiresome it can be seeing a friend off; how embarrassing that two minutes' wait after he has found his seat, before the train starts! But a railway parting when a maharaja is travelling in the train can be ten times worse. Useless to glance up at the clock and reassure oneself: "Only two more minutes!" One can but hope some small still voice of duty or compunction may whisper in the royal ear: "Is it not time Your Highness deigned to make a move?" The train was due out at eleven, so I heard; it was now eleven-fifteen.

Just then there seemed to be a flutter in the crowd. His Highness coming? No, a false alarm.

I went on chatting with my friend, the minister, and now we broached the theme of politics in general. Neither the time nor the place was opportune; but we realized that when the former presses a few brief phrases can sum up one's main ideas, even exhaust the topic. Casting a quick glance to my right, I saw fewer people on the platform and concluded that the Prince had arrived and with his household boarded the train. It was time to say good-bye. We shook hands, made amicable eyes, brought out the phrases we had thought up for the parting moment; we said them once, we said them twice. . . . The train showed no sign of leaving.

But, now we had lapsed into a confidential, almost affectionate tone, we kept to it. For an

expansive moment my friend had dropped his diplomatic affability and over-studied smiles—to become an ordinary man. A tired, a harassed man, judging by his looks. His post, I could well imagine, was no bed of roses. I could not help speaking out my thoughts, and his answer came impulsively, in a discouraged voice.

“Yes, it’s a pretty thankless job, a minister’s, what with the jealousy of other high officials out to step into his shoes, and the court-intrigues, all the more virulent when the court’s a small one. And there’s no help from the British Resident ; he keeps his distance, he hasn’t much use for ministers who are too ‘independent.’ ” A wry smile twisted my friend’s lips. “Yes, I’ve no illusions about the shakiness of my position.”

I was deeply touched by the frankness of his gaze, the sadness in his voice, and suddenly I felt greatly drawn towards him. It was with genuine feeling that I warmly shook his hands again and bade him an affectionate good-bye.

At last the train steamed out. I glanced up at the clock ; a mere thirty minutes late. For a maharaja, H.H. had been practically punctual.

I returned to my platform and, to while away the time, bought from a little news-vender the only publication in a European language that he had to offer. It was an English magazine containing a novelette the scene of which was laid at Monte Carlo during the season. Gala nights at the Casino, the amenities of luxury hotels, the elegant diversions of the younger set ; with glib fidelity the author gave them all. Seated on my roll of bedding dumped down on the grimy platform amid the betel-gobs, I read this chronicle of high life on the Riviera. The lamp over my head, dimmed by a

droning cloud of flies and mosquitoes, shed a spectral light. Half-naked coolies were crowding up on all sides, squatting or standing near me, their rugs and bundles rank with musty smells. And, looking up from the palatial pages, for the first time I realized how far away I was from all that—how marvellously far !

CHAPTER IX

PESHAWAR : WARDENS OF THE FRONTIER

BLACK and forbidding, the North-West frontier of India spans the skyline with a jagged frieze of lofty mountains, peaks of dead silence and perfidious shadows. Serenely pressing forward under their frowning gloom, a narrow valley thrusts its valiant head into the very jaws of the Khyber Pass. The unintimidated "head," the apex of the valley, is Peshawar ; the cantonment, not the city of that name, which is an unsavoury hodge-podge of dusty carpet-shops a mile or two away.

There is nothing picturesque about Peshawar cantonment ; it consists of an hotel, a club, and a group of delightfully cool bungalows shared between the British officers and the frontier crows. The town is thickly wooded, low-lying, intersected by spacious avenues along which creep lethargic bullock-carts ; there is no seeing where it begins or where it ceases, indeed at every step a new-comer fancies he has reached the end of it. In actual fact the limit of cantonments is the ring-fence of barbed wire.

Peshawar is a prisoners' camp ; the prisoners being the British officers posted here to guard the frontier. Contented prisoners, however, who accept internment with the lightest of light hearts. What with receptions, fancy-dress dances, horse-shows, snipe-shoots and race-meetings—not to mention

flirtations—life at Peshawar is a round of gaiety. Almost always in mufti, the officers have not the least appearance of military men, and during the first few days of his stay a visitor is constantly surprised when they introduce themselves or address each other, mentioning their rank. “Ah, there’s the Colonel!” I look round and see a well-groomed, athletic-looking gentleman in a tussore suit entering the club. Affably he discourses of Parisian and London nights, of life and love in general, of last night’s ball, to-morrow’s *soirée*.

No type of man could less resemble the garrison officer in peace time as we know him. No “shop” is talked, backbiting is unknown, and what we call *l’esprit de garnison* is wholly absent. In fact, these frontier officers are far broader-minded than their counterparts on the European Continent, or indeed the typical resident of an Indian State, half-soldier, half-diplomatist.

Though the frontier regiments, the Indian Army’s Foreign Legion, may not be always engaged in actual warfare, they live, one feels, in a constant atmosphere of war and war’s alarms. Just as the frontier officer makes no parade of his military calling—you only learn it by a chance allusion—so it might be said that war is never heard of here; no shots are heard, no *gup* of “trouble brewing,” yet always you can feel it, all but see it, “in the air.”

Round cantonments runs a barbed-wire fence which it is forbidden to cross after sundown. And by day every member of the garrison must carry arms. Soldiers in equipment are to be met with in the streets; “pill-boxes” and watch-towers dot the plain that skirts the mountains. I have never set eyes on grimmer-looking types of humanity than the mountain-folk who roam the Peshawar streets.

These arrogant tribesmen of the border highland, Mahsuds and Swatis, Bajwaris and Afridis, cut-throats all and robbers born, with faces that seem carved in rusty iron and tawny eyes that glow like braziers, who glory in rapine, in murder and eternal blood-feuds, are surely the archetypes of the border-reiver.

Interminable is the record of their outrage : ambushes, massacres, vendettas. Dressed in black or khaki, wearing upcurled shoes like thieves from the Arabian Nights, they come down from their mountains and stroll the Peshawar streets as if they owned them. Uncomfortably you feel that they are biding their time. For what ? For an opportunity to steal, no doubt, or to shoot down an enemy. Life must be boring up in the bleak crags, and the fat plains tempt them down—to lift a heifer or a girl or two, to rob a townsman of his money or his life.

One of the mud-walled hamlets we passed stands out in my memory. “That is the famous Thieves’ Village,” the officer beside me shouted against the wind that whistled through our car. Amongst the queer-looking villagers a little girl standing at the angle of a hut caught my attention. The child was naked but for the brass and silver bangles covering her wrists and ankles. As we sped past I threw the tin container of a roll of films out of the window ; after a hasty glance to right and left she flung herself on it and, as the other children who had seen my gesture came running up, slipped the little metal tube between her thighs and remained where she was, scratching her head with a look of perfect unconcern.

These frontier clans are endlessly at feud amongst themselves, the tribesmen always ready at the least offence to launch a murderous foray ; as each is

ready in domestic life to slash off the nose of an unfaithful wife and kill the paramour.

Barbed-wire entanglements, fixed hours when egress is forbidden, injunctions to go armed, forts, brigands, bearded savages with the faces of assassins, Pathans who look like runaways from Ali Baba's Cave, and all around vast mountain-ranges silent and sinister as their wild denizens, treacherous as their moods—here on the North-West Borderland danger lurks everywhere, from the dagger hidden in the vagrant's rags to rifles lodged in crannies of the cliff.

And, at Peshawar, nights are gay with dancing, drinking, laughter. But it is the gaiety of men who are men indeed ; the attribute of courage. These Frontier soldiers have cast in their lot with danger and face it with high spirits. " It's a far cry to Piccadilly," they admit, " but Peshawar takes a lot of beating ! "

Yet, in his heart of hearts, each, I suspect, is thinking of a home far overseas, of quiet English days, the kindly faces of the peasants of some Welsh or Scottish moorland. But they have their pride ; theirs not to play the high-brow and grumble at their jobs. It is for such men as these that we in France have taken over the word " gentleman."

To these soldiers in mufti, these well-mannered, well-turned-out Englishmen whose unspectacular attitude to danger constitutes their greatness, voluntary exiles who take the constant menace of the frontier with a smile none the less cheery for being a little forced ; to these men Peshawar, least picturesque of cities, owes its unique atmosphere, an atmosphere that fascinates, and all but thrills.

THE KHYBER

With the barbed-wire that rings Peshawar all vegetation ends. We followed a long flat road across a rocky plain. A scene of utter desolation where the only living creatures visible were a few caravanless camels and some goats vainly nibbling slabs of slate. The mountains we had seen from the city drew nearer, gaunt giants proudly flaunting their poverty, cloaked in blue shadows dark with mystery and malice.

At a point where the road forked off some houses came into view. We halted. Here was the first outpost. A group of soldiers gathered round us. No, we had brought no guns ; I had not thought it necessary.

“Indispensable,” said the officer in charge. “What’s more, there’s a regulation about it. But you needn’t go back to Peshawar ; I’ll detail one of my men to go with you, and you can drop him on your way back from the Khyber.”

A huge fellow in khaki, carrying a rifle, took the seat beside the driver. After signing our names in a greasy-looking register (another regulation, so we were told) we entered a road spanned by a horizontal pole, like a level-crossing or a toll-road.

Now the plain ended ; there were no more boulders, only a sleek expanse of solid rock, slate-black, ribbed with ridges. I pictured a herd of sunken elephants with only their ridged backs protruding. The mountains hung above us ; they had suddenly lunged forward as if to take us by surprise and bar our progress. The foothills clamped their knees together, their flanks bulging with the effort to fend us off, their ravishers. You could see their knotted muscles, sinews tautening against assault.

But doggedly the road hacked its rude way along the mountain flank, leaving an open wound jagged with scars and splinters.

For a while renouncing frontal attack, the road stole a long march upon the mountain, winding level round a buttress, cajoling every curve ; till suddenly, the victim lulled into a false sense of security, it took a flying leap ahead, aloft. Several times by this device the road had notched an arduous point, and now, so far as I could see, it had definitively gained the day. Occasionally I had glimpses of the winding track of our ascent behind us ; unlike the continuous white ribbon of the ordinary mountain road it suggested, rather, a long blackish cable chopped into hundred-yard lengths, the ends of which had been unskillfully tied up and swirled aloft or vanished into clefts. A long foul-looking carrion-worm gnawing its furtive way along the mountain flank, wriggling between the ribs of a huge grey carcass.

The wind had risen. At each successive bend of the road the glacial blast grew fiercer, more incisive. Huddled in my overcoat, I took deep breaths of icy air. Was then the wind another enemy, I wondered ; had it joined forces with the hills to bar our passage ? No, this was no local gale ; from a far country it had come, a stranger like ourselves. In the famous pass it met us on its eastward march from Afghanistan, Arabia, Greece, or some far European country, from the lands whence came all India's invaders, all her conquerors. Hot-foot on their trail, it crossed the mountain-neck, driving before it a caravan of clouds, herding them down towards the Indian plains, following the selfsame road—the high-road from the Mediterranean to Hindustan—that before Alexander, Darius knew,

and the Assyrian kings before Darius. After the first outpost, at every turning that was at all abrupt and every incline at all steep, I noticed a sort of sign-post with two notice-boards affixed. On the one indicating the road along which we were travelling a motor-car was outlined ; a camel seen in profile was painted on the other, which pointed to a narrow track parallel to the motor-road. Here the ancient and the modern ran side by side ; the old caravan route still in use, a slow, laborious track worn by the naked feet of generations and the hoofs of camels, and the swift luxury highway—poor and rich sharing alike the perils of the way, driving ahead together through the desert to the unique, providential cleft of Khyber, the narrow gangway been two continents.

Now we ran down a gradient steep as that which had brought us to the windy heights. And unexpectedly we lit upon a keep, almost a fortress, barring the way—the last British outpost.

Instructions had been issued from Peshawar. A youthful British Army Captain was awaiting us, and gave us a charming reception. Inside the fort we crossed some little gardens with green lawns that might have been imported as they stood from an English park. A big log-fire was blazing in the mess-room fireplace. As we sipped our glasses of a potent port, more warming even than the fire, we were shown the book where eminent visitors to the Khyber had signed their names. We saw the signatures of the late King and Queen, of Lord Irwin, of members of the Citroën Expedition ; then some photographs and sketches. When we referred to the pass we had just crossed as “ the Khyber ” our new friend smilingly protested.

“ Yet after all,” he added, “ perhaps that *was* the

famous pass. When one's stationed here, one gets to see it everywhere—it's what you call a *déformation professionnelle*, isn't it? My own idea is that the real Khyber Pass begins only at the place to which I've had instructions to escort you. . . . Well, now you've warmed up a bit, what do you say to pushing off?"

An army car conveyed us farther along the road ; it did not end at the outpost as I had imagined but carried on downhill in the direction of Afghanistan.

We had a glimpse of a large Serai perched on a slope to our left ; the courtyard, large as a public square, was chock-a-block with donkeys, camels, bales of merchandise. Grim-faced, bearded Pathans and odd-looking folk of other races unknown to me bustled to and fro, a grey-and-brown confusion of moving figures hardly to be distinguished from the dun-coloured soil. The caravan had come in from Persia on the previous day and was about to take the road again. I heard no cries, no audible word of command. Inured to walk in Indian file, each man beside his beast, an isolated unit of the league-long caravan, these dour nomads, silent navigators of the wilderness, put out in silence from each port of call.

Bleak and desolate, the road stretched on ahead ; even the scraggy, withered trees I had observed a little way back precariously clinging to the sheer walls of dark abysses were no longer to be seen. Only bare rock, great slabs of solid stone, whipped by a ceaseless wind that sweeps and eddies round them and above them night and day, scouring them smooth as sun-bleached bones. Suddenly our car swerved aside and shot up a hummock on which two Indian soldiers were standing guard over a tree-trunk, as though it were a frontier-mark. This was the Ultima Thule ; India goes no farther.

Alighting from the car, we walked a little way along the rocky bluff, a lonely look-out dominating the vast monotonous horizon of Afghanistan. As far as eye could reach, like an angry sea, the Afghan mountains rolled away below us, rank on rank of grey tumultuous billows, foam-capped on the Northern skyline along the snowy headlands of the Pamirs.

I saw the road, the oldest in the world, after a steep descent shoot westwards flat and straight as an arrow towards Kabul, and pierce the mountain barrier which, like the Red Sea to the Israelites, opens a miraculous passage flanked by towering grey walls.

Derelict in the grey immensity, ancient Buddhist temples crowned the hill-tops, like big-bellied hulks tossing on a ground-swell, flaunting like tattered sails the wreckage of their walls.



H.H. the Crown Prince of Patiala

Durbar at Patiala

PATIALA: THE DIAMOND LUNCHEON

CHAPTER X

PATIALA : ROYAL WEDDING

ALONG THE QUAYS

IT was in Peshawar at the beginning of March that we received an amiably urgent summons from the Maharaja of Patiala, inviting us to the festivities that were taking place in his State to celebrate the wedding of his son, the *Uvraj*, or Crown Prince.

Two days later we took a train on the Peshawar-Bombay-Delhi main line and after twenty hours' travelling reached Rajpura, a little station in the Punjab, situated in Patiala territory and serving its capital.

During the dry season the Indian landscape seen by the traveller across the windows of his railway-carriage is tedious to a degree. The Punjab reveals itself, like Rajputana, as a region wholly lacking in the picturesque, and like it, too, are the United Provinces, which in turn recall the Central Provinces. In fact the whole country is a vast expanse of sun-baked earth dotted with the skeletons of withered scrubs and tufts of burnt-up grass. For league on weary league stretches the selfsame plain, more or less undulating, more or less desolate, devoid of life and beauty. Now and again, but very rarely, as a cluster of mud-huts ringed by a mud-wall slipped past the window, I saw glimpse-wise a group of half-starved villagers and naked children.

Sometimes, too, at sunset a herd of little red antelope diversified the brown monotony of the scrub jungle, the black males scampering away in front with the rest of the herd bounding at their heels. But nearly all the time as far as eye could see the whole land was colourless and dead, a barren moor tousled with clumps of wilted bushes. Here, perhaps, is the explanation why the Indian villager, an artist unawares, always affects the most vivid colours, why the maharajas pile ornament on ornament—even on their elephants—and hotel-keepers pack their compounds with gaudy flowers that force their way into the very bedrooms.

India is the land of contrasts, and of all few are more impressive, not to say startling, than this : the riot of gay colours flaunted by its human denizens on the drab background of the Indian scene.

The greater cities lie at considerable distances from each other, but the train stopped, much too often for our liking, at a host of minor stations. Quaint though these were, there was a tedious sameness about them all. Behind a strip of beaten earth, the platform, rose a large one-storied shed serving at once as station premises, post-office, buffet and lavatory. The whole building was thickly covered with creepers which hung in festoons from the roof, on which a parliament of birds shrilly confabulated. Over each of the doors was a notice-board in English, Hindustani, and the local dialect, specifying the function of the room ; the waiting-rooms assigned to first-, second- and third-class passengers were strictly demarcated. Sometimes the lavatories provided for the humbler classes were picturesquely differentiated ; a turbaned Indian in European dress, dapper and correct, was painted on a door beside another showing a melancholy lady in a *sari*.

Most of the poorer natives being illiterate, things have to be explained to them by pictures, as to children.

When a train comes in the platform becomes a cheerful pandemonium. Fruit-merchants and sellers of vernacular newspapers jostle hawkers of months-old English magazines left behind by previous travellers in railway-carriages, and crook-backed water-carriers pressing to their hips the dripping water-skins. Then there are the sellers of almonds, of pistachio-nuts, of betel, of greasy little meat-balls wrapped in leaves. Up and down the platform, their merchandise set out in the large trays they carry on their heads, they trot along beside the train, crying their wares at the top of their voices. Each has under his arm a sort of wicker dummy serving as a stand for the tray when someone hails him or a carriage looks particularly promising ; on such occasions he takes the show-tray off his head and dumps it down before him like a miniature bazaar-stall. Then there are the friends come to the station for a chat with someone in the train, and others—they are the majority—who forgather on the platform just to look on, or for no reason at all. When the train halts very few people seem to get in ; the passengers, on the other hand, seem all to have reached their destination and bundle out *en masse*. They do not go away, however, but linger on the platform, making its confusion worse confounded, pushing their way from one compartment to another, greeting friends, admiring such of them as, recently enlisted in the Army, have come to cut a figure in their brand-new uniforms. They go off and rinse out their mouths, wash their teeth, souse their heads with water and, before returning to the train, have a drink at one of the two drinking-

fountains which are to be seen side by side in every station, inscribed respectively : " Water for Hindus " and " Water for Mahometans." Both taps are fed from the same water-pipe which passes behind them, and it is obvious to all and sundry that the water they are drinking comes from the same source. Yet no Hindu or Mahometan is ever known to drink at the " wrong " fountain. One day I asked David, my new servant, a convert to Catholicism, which of the two fountains he patronized. " But, Master," he answered in a scandalized tone, " I one time Hindu ! How could I drink Mahometan's water ? "

What with the crowd of people dawdling on the platform and the general exodus of passengers who afterwards rejoin the train, what with the shouts, the cheerful bustle and confusion, such journeys give the traveller a quaint impression that he is taking part in an official tour, and at every station the City Fathers and their townsfolk are turning out in force to wish him welcome.

A FEAST OF COLOURS

When towards noon we reached Rajpura the busy scene on the platform of the little station suddenly brought to my mind the kaleidoscopic brilliance of a Rajputana crowd, such was the diversity and wealth of colour in the costumes. Gone were the dingy white caps of Gandhi's followers, the ugly pomaded coiffures of Young India, the dull decorum of European coats. Here again I could rejoice my eye with red and orange *saris*, embroidered shoes, and handsome bright-hued turbans. The grey monotony of British India lay behind me ; once more I plunged into the seething many-coloured life

of an Indian Native State, for like all the states ruled over by the rajas, Patiala has kept its personality immune from the levelling influence of the British raj, and, profoundly loyal to its ancient traditions, conserved untarnished by the years the colours and the lustre of a glorious past.

And as the sleek *Mercédès*, crested with the Patiala arms, that had been sent to meet us, bore us down the narrow streets of beaten earth, scattering the surging crowd with loud blasts of the horn and the deep roar of its racing engine, I felt a thrill of exquisite delight. Those holy men in saffron robes, the many-hued shawls and head-dresses, the glow and glitter of the Indian streets, the pageantry of colour I had learned to love—I had not seen their like since Udaipur and Jaipur. Even the sunlight seemed different ; it had renewed its sparkling effervescence. Here, too, I revived acquaintance with generous, overpowering heat ; with my old friend, ex-enemy, the dust. Outposts, cantonments were of another world ; here at last I was back again in India.

Our turbaned chauffeur took the road that leads across a flat expanse of fields and stunted shrubs from Rajpura to Patiala as if it were a racing-track, covering the six miles in under ten minutes. Deftly he swung the powerful car between erratic bullock-carts manned by sleeping drivers, and suddenly slowed down at the edge of a tall forest ribboned by the avenues of a great park. We were entering the capital by its "West End," a wooded tract where, amongst sheets of water mirroring the high foliage and charming gardens, nestle the little palaces of the ministers of state, officers' bungalows and the chief public buildings.

All Patiala was on holiday. Triumphal arches

festooned with flowers and picked out with electric lamps had sprouted at every cross-road ; flower-girt pylons soared in the middle of the lawns ; the bridges spanning the waterways were draped in crimson cloth looped with gold braid, and from every balcony hung long streamers of red silk announcing in gold lettering the greetings of the loyal populace. The legends were in English and each was signed, so that there might be no mistake about the donor : “ Hearty Good Wishes to the Bride and Bridegroom from the Teaching Staff.” “ All Happiness to our Beloved Crown-Prince : The Post-Office.” “ Long Life to our Maharaja from the Fire Brigade.” Between the silk-sheathed trees bordering the avenues, between flower-beds dotted with fairy-lamps set out in readiness for the night’s illuminations, passed stately elephants draped in velvet, their foreheads daubed with gold paint, on their way to join a state procession ; guardsmen on enormous horses riding to a parade ; infantrymen in full equipment ; groups of villagers in their holiday best ; lorries stacked with flags and garlands of electric lamps ; and everywhere, incessantly, speeding in all directions, opulent cars *de luxe*, white lacquered Rolls-Royces, red Hispanos, apple-green Cadillacs, all with open bodies and bristling with horns and klaxons, headlights and spotlights, monumental bumpers—all the multifarious gadgets that, fitted to a car, add the last word in complicated luxury ; the joint creations of a small-arms factory and a court-jeweller’s *atelier*. It was as if a fantastically palatial motor-show had opened wide its doors and disgorged its richest models on Patiala, where, bedecked like altars, they were now parading boulevards sumptuous as a stage-setting. Gold-apparelled princes lolled in the back seats, their

aigrettes flashing in the breeze, between unmoving aides-de-camp in silver trappings, their swords uplifted reverently like Hosts.

We passed a whole city of tents pitched in a wood ; then a second, still larger camp on the edge of a lake. The officer who had come to meet us at the station explained that all the palaces would not have sufficed to lodge the guests attending the festivities.

“ The public rejoicings for the Prince’s wedding,” he informed me, “ have been going on for a week and will last at least ten days more. The number of guests, if we count in their suites, exceeds six thousand. So we had to fall back on tents. As you notice, there are several camps varying in size and comfort with the class of persons occupying them. His Highness deeply regrets that he cannot receive you in the palace, but the camp in which he has installed your quarters is, as you will see, the finest of all. In fact,” he added with a flattering smile, “ it’s the camp H.H. has reserved for his most honoured visitors. It’s just in front of the palace, you can see it over there.”

We were approaching a gigantic château ; only the façade was visible from where we were, but I had an impression that the wings must cover a considerable area. In front of the palace, on the other side of the road, a polo-ground had been skilfully converted into a garden complete with flowers and fountains, round which were disposed horseshoe-wise twenty white canvas tents of varying dimensions, each with a private approach and flower-bed. In the centre of the garden two very long tents sheltered the dining-rooms and lounges. Our canvas home lay near the entrance of the camp, and very picturesque it was, lined with yellow-golden fabrics and lavishly equipped with carpets, cushions, divans,

glimmering in the mellow half-light. The tent contained a veritable suite : two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a sitting-room. The canvas walls were double, and enclosed a sort of corridor hung with soft, supple matting, thanks to which the air within was marvellously cool.

The officer who had escorted us to the tent left us with a courteous bow.

“ His Highness has placed my services at your disposal during your stay. Whenever you require me I’m to be found at the staff-tent over there. There are two cars which H.H. has instructed me to reserve for your personal use, and two servants.”

With another bow the emissary of our royal host bade us farewell, letting fall behind him the curtain of transparent silk that veiled the entrance. He vanished behind the tents of the camp, a little self-contained townlet complete with its own infirmary, post-office, public rooms and car-park. It was studded with white pylons flaunting above the flowers the sovereign’s coat-of-arms and linked each to each by ribbons in the royal colours. At dusk the paths were lit up, and officers of the State Police, motionless red-turbaned shadows, kept vigil through the night at every crossway.

HIS MAJESTY DINES

That night I saw King Herod.

The King was seated in his banquet-hall, amongst his peers and courtiers.

About thirty princes and functionaries were gathered at the table, all of them wearing orange turbans, except a few at the far end, who wore velvet caps braided and bossed with gold. Seated,

all seemed of exactly the same girth and stature. In two parallel lines they sat resplendent in their spangled tunics and embroidered robes ; two massive ramparts faceted with gold, rising majestically on each side of the long, narrow table. Down it flowed a flame-bright river of colour, rippling saffron-yellow satin and scarlet silk, dappled with islets of wrought gold and starred with cliffs of sparkling crystal. Above the diamonded breasts and stalwart shoulders, the faces were grim, unsmiling.

Our arrival found the princes still at table. From an adjoining drawing-room where we waited for dinner to be over before being introduced to the Maharaja (whose guests we had been since the forenoon), I overheard the murmur of two or three conversations at the most, all of which died out after a few remarks. There was nothing of the light-hearted chatter of a European dinner-party, nor yet the rather artificial, empty hubbub of an official banquet. It was as if the East personified in all its pride and formalism presided at the Maharaja's board. I surmised it there, an unseen presence, whispering in the ear of one, " Why should you start a conversation with your neighbour, you who are like him a ruling Prince ? Why make the first move ? " and counselling another at the far end of the table, " You are only an A.D.C., my friend, and the person on your right is of a higher rank. Wait for him to address you first. True, your left-hand neighbour is an officer like you, your equal ; but dare you say anything to him that isn't of a strictly general order ? To tell him of your private affairs would bore him ; worse, it would be indecorous, decidedly bad form. And to talk to him about the State you serve would be an act of treason.

If you've nothing indispensable to tell him, why not hold your tongue ? ”

By nature contemplative, and schooled from early youth to practise constantly a shrewd and diffident reserve, those Indians at the long table were conforming with a lifelong habit of haughty reticence. With their natural supineness an attitude of philosophical detachment had come easily to them, and now that air of passionless repose, so characteristic of the Indian scene, was for them a second nature.

Silent, impassive in their robes of gold, the princes sat at table ; with, in their midst, the lordliest, most impressive figure of them all, the Maharaja of Patiala. I had not seen him before but at once I knew him for the Maharaja—so obviously was he the host. Patiala seems the living incarnation of those omnipotent sovereigns of the past whose ungovernable personalities loom large across the ages ; men of the stamp of King Herod, Jenghiz Khan, or Henry VIII. None could embody more superbly the Eastern Prince of fairy-tales, the hero of our childish dreams ; none more aptly illustrate the magnificence and despotic power of the last absolute monarchs.

There is much of the ideal tyrant in his physical appearance. Above a torso bulky as a wine-cask rises a huge, puissant head. Between the Sikh turban sitting well down upon his temples like a helmet, and the black rolls of beard which like a chin-piece wrap his neck and jaw, a dark face peers out as from the opening of a visor. Under the heavy, drooping lids the half-shut, whiteless eyes glow darkly ; but behind their veil of feigned indifference lurks something rather ominous, an elemental force emanating from a world that is not ours and may well not be heaven. The large-lipped mouth is



H.H. the Maharaja of Patiala. He symbolizes the magnificence and despotic power of the last absolute monarchs

fleshly, intrinsically carnal, but with a fine amoral beauty of its own. There is something plethoric about the whole face, inordinately proud, brazenly authoritative.

Two diamonds hung from his ears. I watched his hands as he ate, heavy hands laden with rings.

Suddenly he rose from his place at the centre of the table—now I saw him standing I judged his height a good six feet—and walked straight to the corner where we were sitting in a group. His eyes intent on us, hugely, rapidly, he bore down upon us like a river in spate. All the princes made way for him. At two paces from us he halted and, brushing aside an aide-de-camp who had darted forward to introduce us, scanned us up and down, held out his hand, shook ours and let them drop, then standing to attention gave us a stiff, curt bow, punctilious as a German officer's. A brilliant conversationalist, the Maharaja quickly put us at our ease ; he asked us for news of a mutual friend, and smilingly insisted that we were to stay at least a fortnight. In a few moments he had won our hearts—irresistibly.

Then he went back and brought up one by one the princes who had dined with him. In introducing us to them he often prefixed the title with one of the friendly formulas of kinship that sovereigns accord each other : " My dear Brother, His Highness the Maharaja of . . . , " " My dear Nephew, . . . , " " My beloved Cousin, . . . " The first to be led up to us was the Maharaja's son and heir-apparent, the Uvraj of Patiala. Then came Their Highnesses the Maharajas of Jodhpur, of Jhalawar, of Dholpur, of Panna, the Maraj Kumar of Bikaner, the Nawab of . . . an interminable string of names !

The name of the State invariably followed that

of its ruler and, as I heard it, I conjured up an image of its shape and situation on the map. Somehow I contrived to memorize the names and the cartographic pictures they evoked, and to assemble them in my imagination like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. And little by little before my mind's eye a complete map of India took form.

Coffee and liqueurs were handed round by bare-footed servants wearing turbans of bright orange ; everyone and everything in Patiala—people, animals and common objects—seemed to have “ gone orange.” There is a symbolic meaning in the colour, which is an emblem of felicity and as such prescribed in Indian ritual as the colour to be worn at weddings.

Presently the Maharaja of Panna, whom we had met several times at Delhi, came up and joined us ; little groups began to form, and suddenly an atmosphere of gaiety pervaded the room.

The decorations of the *salon* where we were seated had been tastefully adapted to the lay-out of an Indian palace and—still more noteworthy—the handsome English furniture was disposed in such a way as to ensure a certain comfort. But what an odd abundance of glass cabinets ! And knowing of the marvellous collections the Maharaja owned, I wondered what could have possessed him to gorge his cabinets with such relatively worthless bric-à-brac. On the walls in lieu of pictures hung photographic enlargements representing groups of people, hunting scenes, the Maharaja mounted on his elephant in a procession before the King at Delhi. Most of the photographs were coloured ; for some reason this rather dubious form of art is highly thought of everywhere in India. On the mantelpiece, on tables, in glass cabinets, were white marble

statuettes of naked young women. It was my first encounter with the "artistic" nude at Patiala.

The dining-room doors were flung wide open on a change of scene. The long table had vanished ; a large white sheet was spread out on the floor and rows of little gilded chairs upholstered in velvet were placed round it. The stage was set for that classical diversion of an Indian court, a nautch-dance. The Maharaja installed my wife in a chair next his and called up two or three leading princes to his side ; the rest of us were allowed to choose our seats.

That was the Maharaja's way, I learnt. Each day, as a mark of special favour, he made a point of calling on a distinguished guest to preside at a banquet, to direct a military review or shooting expedition, or to take precedence at a dinner-party.

The nautch-girls trooped in. There were about twenty of them, timid little creatures, bare-footed, dressed in costly *saris* but scantily endowed with beauty. The majority belonged to the dancing troupe of Patiala State, but some had been imported for their weight in gold from a considerable distance. Near the entrance of the room they sat down along the edge of the white floor-cloth, beside the orchestra. Nervously they settled their veils and whispered to each other, only to relapse into the attitude of stolid lethargy they were to keep up throughout the performance. A nautch-girl who had just approached our host and was squatting at his feet was pointed out to me. "The favourite of the hour," my neighbour whispered in my ear. In favour with a vengeance ! I reflected, observing her gorgeous *sari*, her bracelets and a brooch set with splendid diamonds. Now and then the Maha-

raja tossed her a laughing remark which she capped without a moment's hesitation, her hands clasped together, a roguish twinkle in her eye. Her repartees must have been droll, inordinately droll, if their wit matched the potentate's Gargantuan roars of laughter; he stamped the carpet with his feet and clutched his neighbour's arm, chuckling with delight.

For a hearty laugher is the Maharaja of Patiala.

A girl came forward and danced on the white carpet—more accurately, mimed and sang a dance; no sooner was it ended than she began another, and so on—interminably. After half an hour she had had enough of it—or was it that the Maharaja had signalled her to stop with a snap of his fingers?—and sat down again. Another dark young dancer stepped out of the group and took her place . . . Unless seen and heard under very special conditions, as on certain rare occasions I chanced to see them, these Indian nautches can be boring to a degree. That night the atmosphere was all wrong, the white carpet painfully suggested a drawing-room hastily converted into an operating theatre, while the expressionless faces of the guests, the rows of chairs, brought to my mind a jury attired for some Gilbertian trial in fancy dress. “How long, O Lord!” I groaned inaudibly. “How long?”

At last the Maharaja made a move, but so discreetly that no one noticed his departure. After a few minutes we, too, rose, with a vague idea of slipping out unnoticed, like our host. But now the music stopped, and everyone was standing. We shook hands with the princes. As we went out the dancing-girls bowed to us, their hands pressed to their breasts. One of them, a mere child, in the middle of a graceful bow stifled a yawn.

THE ELDERLY RELATION

The wealthy quarter of Patiala, where an array of new-built palaces and stately mansions has sprung up in the cool shade of lofty groves, is of recent growth, a youngster. A prodigal but duteous son, it has not strayed from its progenitor, the ancient mother-city, but prefers to live luxurious days tied to her apron-strings, while that worthy, bare-footed crone, Old Patiala, toils and sweats in the dusty labyrinth of her bazaars, under a blazing sun.

One morning I visited the little town, which for all its age looks brisk as ever. During these gala days especially a mood of bright activity reigned in the streets and quaint old houses. From the carved wooden balconies hung gay orange streamers like those I had seen in the residential quarter ; here, however, the mottoes were inscribed in the vernacular. Door-frames were plastered with gold-leaf and coloured ribbons, and here and there at a cross-road a small triumphal arch bridged the street with graceful arabesques of flowers.

Here in the old town one had a glimpse of the workers behind the scenes, feverishly making ready for the splendid pageants that were taking place day after day in the new quarter, in a sumptuous setting of palaces and gardens. Tailors bent over gaudy tissues, squatting on the road outside their booths so as to have a better light and to work the quicker ; now and then they paused to shake the silken fabric when street-dust had collected on the tracings of the seams. Dyers, their heads and arms stained saffron-yellow, were plunging into cauldrons flecked with orange foam the turbans which were being handed them at every moment. Near them the barbers, crowded out of house and home, had set up

shop on the pavement. On their doorsteps women were weaving flowers into garlands which, no sooner made, were carried off by mysterious little page-boys. All the small fry of an Indian street in its colourful confusion was busy linking flower-chains of jasmine with deft little brown fingers, and all the flowers piled in osier baskets on the thresholds of the houses flooded the languid air of noon with fragrance. On the site of a dismantled house at a street corner a trestle-stage had been erected on which some actors were improvising a comedy in dumb show.

Now and again a sudden eddy of the crowd swept me into one of the little side-streets ; sounding all their horns at once, cars sped past, all going in the same direction, to a large open square which I had had in view for some time, at the far end of a street in front of me. The high façade of an old palace filled one side of the square ; on another was the huge gate of Patiala Fort, a walled city containing the Durbar Hall, the Princesses' Palace and other large edifices. In the centre of the Fort, surrounded by these buildings, is a smaller square which was electrically lit at night with moving sky-signs, a constant source of wonder to the native crowd.

In the city square outside the Fort I came on that curious establishment, the Patiala Bank. Over two adjoining shops, a grain merchant's and a cook-shop, a covered balcony, awned like an harbour by a spreading vine, sailed out above the pavement. A band of calico was fastened to the branches of the vine, and across the leaves I made out two words in faded lettering : " Patiala Bank." A dark, steep staircase was let into the wall, and after stumbling up the uneven steps I found myself in an ill-lit office round which were blocks of counters screened by iron rail-

ings and leaving only a narrow gangway down the middle of the room. Clerks were at work behind the bars. Having no use for such outlandish in-commodities as chairs, they had piled up mattresses level with the cash-desks. Squatting bare-footed on the mattresses behind the bars, these curious cashiers in flapping shirts and baggy drawers brought to my mind the more dangerous inmates of an asylum ward. Indeed the whole establishment looked less a bank than some eccentric clinic. Packed with hot humanity, the room lacked air, was dim with smoke. A young man clad in a shirt, with pomaded hair, hailing like every reputable Indian bank-clerk from Bombay, suggested smilingly that I should wait under the pergola on the balcony while they checked my letters of credit.

Under the vine-hung roof of the aerial harbour I saw beneath me once again the sun-drenched square and bustling crowd. A procession had formed up escorting, to a cacophony of shouts and music, a standard inscribed with mottoes wishing prosperity to the royal bridegroom. There was a burst of laughter as an elephant crossing the square cut the marching ranks in two. The cortège closed up again and receded down the street by which I had just come, fading into a golden haze of sun-motes.

By nine o'clock at night darkness had fallen on the city, and the white streets were dappled with blue shadows. On eaves and window-sills, along the flat roofs of the low one-storied houses, glowed will-o'-the-wisps of dancing flame ; the townsfolk had lit their primitive fairy-lamps, earthenware cups fitted with a tiny wick which, balanced on the rim of clay, darted a tiny, tremulous tongue of fire. There is something strangely appealing about these little lamps, the immemorial illuminations of the Indian

poor ; like toy magic-lanterns they cast upon the night a thousand-and-one dissolving views, and in their wavering glow the houses seemed to palpitate like anxious hearts, rendering to their lord the timid homage of his humble subjects. Now and again some lamps would flicker out, and I saw men bending down to light them—huge black shadows crouching on the edges of the house-tops.

The night air was fragrant with the scents of burning oil and new-cut flowers.

TRIBAL CAVALCADE

Every morning saffron-turbaned orderlies slipped under our tent-flap sheets of glossy paper stamped with the Maharaja's arms, on which the programme of the day's events was announced in orange lettering. This fixture of a daily time-table was a concession to European foibles, a quaint, slightly pathetic effort of the dawdling East to keep in step with Occidental punctuality. For Indian princes time their movements by the meridian of their moods, and the ruthless precision of European watches shocks their Eastern nonchalance. Indeed, their disdain of keeping up to schedule, their natural insouciance in this respect, passes belief ; for them the time dimension is a playground for caprice. Like spoiled children they regard a watch as merely an amusing toy, or a bright bauble for the wrist. Patiala would not subscribe to Louis XIV's views on royal punctuality ; far from esteeming it the politeness of kings, he regards its inobservance as a privilege of kingship. Always he was scandalously late, and as no fête could start without him, he kept everybody waiting—everybody, that is, who, unlike ourselves, had not the rare advantage of living day-

long in the palace near the monarch and thus being in a position to judge by his mood or occupations of the moment the probable time at which he actually intended to put in an appearance at the events figuring on the day's programme.

One morning the time-table announced a march-past of the tribes at noon on the sports-ground adjoining the race-course. At two o'clock we were still at table in the palace. When lunch was over the Maraj Kumar of Bikaner carried me off in his car for an antelope-shoot in the Patiala game-preserves. At half-past six I reached the scene of the tribal tattoo and found that even so I was too early ; the Maharaja had not arrived.

A huge stand had been erected at one end of the sports-ground, facing a long reach of water on the far side of the *maidan* ; already the lake was glittering with illuminations, pin-points of colour in the gathering darkness. The grandstand was a graded platform draped like a catafalque in dark purple velvet ; on the highest tier under an enormous canopy was a row of gilded chairs, or, rather, thrones. Seated on the steps leading up to the platform, as on the front seats of a stadium, a large crowd had been waiting all the afternoon. A flight of steps led up to the throne ; it was draped in velvet brocaded with thick patterns wrought in gold, dappled with the white petals of an avalanche of roses. From my place at the top of the steps I could just make out two shadowy groups of tribesmen massed around banners on each side of the *maidan*. But the night was dark and, as the tattoo should have taken place in broad daylight, at noon, no lighting arrangements had been provided for. The situation was saved by a dozen cars which formed up in a semicircle facing the grandstand, converging

their headlights on a square of open ground just under the front rows. To while away the time of waiting a sort of variety performance lasting an hour was given in the illuminated area, a pool of vivid light in the surrounding darkness, like the arena of a circus. The sentiments of attraction and revulsion that the various turns evoked were so bewilderingly mingled that I could not decide if I desired or feared the arrival of His Highness, which would of course cut short the show.

The first performer was a young marksman armed with a small rifle who took shots at an egg held by his sister in her mouth. I could see the woman in profile, and her poise of preternatural calm, her air of dignity, enchanted me. She wore a green *sari*, the breast of which was splashed with yellow at each shot. Sometimes, ghastlier still, the egg remained intact after the man had fired. And in a brief panic I watched for a red stain to form on the girl's cheek or underneath her eye. But there was no mishap, and in nine shots the marksman broke half a dozen eggs.

A half-naked strong man stepped into the arena, followed by a steam-roller which halted just outside it. The man lay down full length on the hard earth, the monstrous engine got under way, lumbered heavily into the zone of light, and passed over the wretched man's body, beginning at his feet. With appalling slowness it rumbled over him, giving a sickening lurch as it rolled off his head.

Next, a quaint-looking personage, wearing a black European coat, stiff collar and mauve tie, came forward. Introducing himself as "the Professor," he undertook to drink off any poison that the audience might offer him. By way of prelude to his poison-drama he nipped off with his teeth the heads of

various reptiles handed him by some old serpent-charmers, slowly chewed up the flat heads and forked tongues, and gulped them down. Next—a harder feat—he swallowed a handful of nails, a small open penknife and, after crunching it between his teeth, a wine-glass. An Indian doctor sitting next to me—I had taken a dislike to the fellow at first sight—produced from his pocket a bottle of sulphuric acid.

“I’ve heard a lot about this chap from brother doctors in Bombay,” he whispered in my ear. “My opinion is that he’s a fake. Well, if he can swallow this, I’ll take off my hat to him !”

Grinning, he dabbed a corner of his handkerchief with the cork and showed me the material ; it had been burnt through at once and was crumbling into dust. He then told a child to give the bottle to the Professor. The man sniffed it, recognized the contents, and smiled. After steeping his handkerchief in the acid he bundled it together, tossed it into his mouth and swallowed it with a raucous gurgle. Then he drank off the rest at a gulp, straight from the bottle. I glanced at my neighbour and saw his cheeks blanch under the brown, his eyes riveted on the self-appointed victim.

Later on in the evening the Professor showed me the marks on the folds of his hands and at the corners of his lips where the acid had burnt them.

“That’s why I don’t much relish vitriol,” he confessed. The man was thin as a lath—it was impossible to guess his age—and lived on fruit and liquids only. He never took alcohol, so he told me, adding without the vestige of a smile, “Unfortunately, I’ve a very weak stomach.”

Two hours after a performance he ejects through the intestines all the abominations he has swallowed.

“They take me for a fakir,” he continued in a confidential tone, his gaunt face close to mine. “I’m supposed to have occult powers. Nothing of the sort—as I keep on telling them, confound ’em ! I don’t believe in God ; there’s nothing exists except matter. Those Bombay doctor-wallahs are always examining me for their research-work, and it’s an infernal nuisance, as I haven’t any spare time left to write poems. For I’d have you know, sir,”—an ecstatic smile lifted the seared corners of his lips—“I’m a poet.”

Suddenly there was a general stampede in front of the stand. Excited servants began shooing from the arena a troupe of mountebanks juggling with blazing torches, a squad of soldiers ran up at the double and fell in line, officers and A.D.Cs. bustled up, and a gigantic court-usher in a uniform of orange-brocade, holding a gold mace, posted himself at the foot of the steps. The crowd in the grandstand was buzzing with excitement, beginning to stand up. “His Highness is coming ! There’s His Highness !”

A white limousine sailed up out of the darkness, halted at the grandstand entrance. Clad in a robe glittering with orange-red spangles, his bejewelled fingers clasped on the gold hilt of his sword, the Maharaja slowly ascended the velvet staircase, seemingly indifferent to the storm of cheers that greeted him. A train of princes followed and, as he reached the throne, a shower of white petals broke in a fragrant cloud around him—plucked by hand-fuls from the roses which for seven long hours his subjects had been cherishing upon their loyal bosoms. A representative of all the tribes and villages under the sway of Patiala conveyed in an oration the homage of his constituents. Next, a

minister of state read out a long list of gifts and pardons granted by the sovereign on the occasion of the Prince's marriage. Each revocation of a punishment or act of largess was greeted by enthusiastic cheers and cries, "Long live the Maharaja!" Just in front of me I saw a patriotic father box the ears of his little daughter, a three-year-old half smothered in her *sari*, because on one occasion she had forgotten to applaud.

On each side of the *maidan* dark masses of people were getting under way, lighting up their lanterns, and presently began the long procession of the delegations of the various tribes. First came small groups of plains-men carrying streamers, then the mountaineers extracting eldritch sounds from their long trumpets, then Sikh regiments with their battle-standards furled. Each group was preceded by a band; the mountain-men were accompanied by troupes of quaint, exotic dancers, agile, graceful girls muffled in outlandish robes that added to their air of mystery. The mountaineers, so I was told, were tribesmen from the Kashmir borderland. On the far side of the open space, between columns of white smoke, gerbs of rockets mirrored their falling brightness in the lakes.

I joined the Maharaja and Princes in a marquee pitched on the right of the grandstand, where a buffet had been installed. The old Maharaja of Nahum, acting for the nonce for Patiala, handed out the prizes to the winners of the various events in the athletic tourney of the previous week. The name of each winner was announced by an official, and, standing behind a table, the Maharaja handed little packets done up in red paper to the comely brown-skinned men lined up before him; the soldiers standing at attention, the jungle-folk and

villagers salaaming with the palms of their hands pressed together upon their breasts—the time-old Indian form of salutation.

In the distance, between the sheets of water and the old Town, small fire-balloons, each trailing after it a little wisp of flame, soared up one by one in never-ending sequence. And very soon a new constellation took form upon the firmament.

*THE DIAMOND LUNCHEON, THE UNSEEN
PRESENCES*

It was during the eleventh century, and only then, that the Indians took thought to hide their women from the eyes of men. That was the epoch when the first Mahometan invaders sweeping down from the East of the Iranian plateau, after conquering the Punjab, embarked on the victorious career which was to enable them two centuries later to found at Delhi a mighty sultanate, bending all India to the sway of Islam. To shield their wives from the unbridled licence of the invading hordes, the Hindus relegated their womenfolk to zenanas, apartments reserved for their exclusive use, and prescribed the wearing of veils when they went out. What in its origin was a prudent measure of self-protection soon became an institution. Moreover, the Moslem rulers, as a matter of course, kept their own wives in strict seclusion ; such was the rule of their religion. And the customs of the conquerors gradually took root among the conquered, who began to observe with wholly Mahometan fanaticism a taboo which their own scriptures did not so much as mention. The humbler classes, only too well aware that if a home is to be decently kept up each member of the household must lend a helping hand,

soon gave up the habit, which upper-class Hindus have kept alive only out of respect for tradition, or from snobbishness ; or because it suits their book.

Conservatives born, the Rajput princes see to it that the rule of purdah, the absolute seclusion of women, is strictly followed by their own households. But in the courts of many princes not of Rajput blood the purdah system is gradually disappearing, and though in certain states the princesses do not as yet enjoy complete freedom when at home, it is conceded that when they visit Delhi or Bombay they may live the same life, with the same liberties, as European ladies. For these *désenchantées*, as Pierre Loti has so aptly called them, the return to the palace, the resumption of the purdah yoke, is a galling experience. On the other hand, those who have never had a chance of sampling freedom take their exclusion from the daily life of their menfolk lightly. This, anyhow, they give such European ladies as visit them to understand ; out of resignation, maybe, or of stoic courage. But it is equally likely that certain little Maharanis, far from envying the European women whom they watch across the bars of their zenana dancing and laughing with their husbands, pity them. The princesses of the bluest blood of India have received the most casual education, sometimes none at all ; they are " political " wives, of whom their husbands ask but one favour : motherhood. And these poor cloistered souls would be appalled by the bare idea of relinquishing their easy, vegetative life for the dangerous adventure of meeting unknown males, of having to talk about things and places of which, with humble candour, they admit that they know nothing.

Sikh, but a staunch upholder of tradition, Patiala secludes its princesses and Maharanis. The young

woman whom the heir to the throne had wedded a week before our arrival never showed herself. Nor did anyone refer to her, or to her parents, members of a distinguished family living in a neighbouring town, where the religious celebration of the wedding had taken place.

It was the first time in seven generations that a ruler of Patiala had lived to witness his son's marriage. And the Maharaja, delighted to have escaped the ill-luck which had dogged his predecessors, and cut them off in the prime of life, had decided to celebrate the wedding of the Uvraj with exceptional pomp and circumstance. For nearly a month each day was a round of entertainments, some of them grandiose. There were state processions of elephants tricked out like courtesans, followed by silver-gilt victorias drawn by horses caparisoned with jewels. There were cavalry parades of fierce-looking lancers with magnificent black beards ; there were firework displays, exhibitions and banquets at which in the course of his political disquisitions the Maharaja, mindful of a Frenchman at his side, tactfully alluded to my country in flattering terms ; durbars, where under the domes of an old palace tribal chieftains, high Indian officials of the British Civil Service and Mahometan chiefs in flame-bright robes tendered their respects and presents to the royal host. He had invited their attendance for 3 p.m., but it was half-past ten at night when he appeared in the high-roofed hall, vast as a mosque, where, reverently facing the empty throne as if it were an altar, six hundred people had been silently awaiting him, squatting on the ground, for seven weary hours and more.

Rulers of neighbouring states came to visit Patiala for three days or a week ; some stayed out



*Processions of elephants decked out like courtesans
The Maharaja of Patiala with his guests
PATIALA: THE DIAMOND LUNCHEON*

the month. On arrival and departure they were accorded a salute of eleven, twelve, or fifteen guns according to their status—following a strict order of precedence laid down by the Home Government which, according to a prince's powers or conduct, settles the number of guns to which he is entitled.

Meanwhile, the Maharaja and several of the princes staying at the palace had admitted us into their intimacy ; every day we drove out for a deer-shoot with the Maharaja of Jhalawar or Panna, or the Maraj Kumar of Bikaner, or all three together. Our quarry was the antelope abounding in the Patiala game-preserves. Everywhere the forest is ribboned by tracks as trim and tidy as park-avenues. Sometimes, too, we joined in large-scale shoots. On elephant-back, in single file, we made our way through plains covered by low jungle and tall grass, followed by a string of shaggy camels to carry back the day's "bag." As we drove home through the gathering darkness one of our party played a spot-light on the fields beside the road, and we had pot-shots at the wild pig and deer that flashed across the flail of light. Late as usual, we raced back to Patiala ; in the distance the old town, illuminated everywhere with tiny oil lamps, looked like a gutted city with the smoke still rising from its smouldering walls.

It was the Maharaja's whim that all the sovereigns he was entertaining should treat his palace as theirs, inviting friends to meals there as if they were at home. So it was that when our host did not invite us on his own initiative one or other of the princes would ask us to lunch or to dine with him at the Palace, taking it in turns to give the daily invitation. Meeting them constantly and spending almost all the day in their company, we came to know them

well and to feel a deep affection for these charming friends of ours, the last *grands seigneurs* of the modern world, whom we were to meet again within their principalities, as hosts in their own right.

We had been staying at Patiala for twelve days when the Maharaja asked us to a luncheon, after which a group photograph of his more illustrious guests was to be taken.

This luncheon, like its precursors, was an elaborate official banquet. There were about thirty guests and, as usual, the Maharaja allowed them to choose their seats, after selecting two of their number to sit beside him and appointing one of the princes to "preside" over the banquet, the latter also being entitled to choose his immediate neighbours. The food, invariably served in European style, was delicious ; and I have no less appetizing memories of the other Indian courts at which we stayed. Before some guests, however, accustomed to the Indian *cuisine*, a huge dish was set on which, about a pile of rounds of bread like pancakes, were laid ten or a dozen silver bowls containing meat or vegetables floating in highly spiced sauce.

Most of the princes had been educated in Europe and were familiar with its capitals, and the company of Europeans in their midst gave these meals an atmosphere of characteristically Occidental gaiety and cheerfulness.

No sooner was the banquet over than the monarchs retired to change before being photographed. After a while they joined us in the billiard-room, where we had been waiting with a group of A.D.Cs. and other officials already in full dress. All the princes, to do honour to their host, were wearing their most gorgeous attire.

Their entrances were dramatic, marvellously

staged effects. First we saw a glint of silk under the shadow of the heavy canopies that veiled the doorway leading to the drawing-room from which they emerged. Out of the gloom they stepped into the full glare of the lofty windows and, bathed in dazzling sunshine, mingled with their fellow-princes, whose costumes harmonized with theirs in a prodigious counterpoint of cloths of gold. Figured silks interwoven with floral patterns and arabesques vied with priceless brocades embroidered silver upon silver, gold on gold, and over all the splendid fabrics shimmered a haze of broken lights, spangles of saffron-pink and orange-red so subtly graduated that the eye failed to distinguish between pink and yellow, orange- and rose-red. And on this kingly raiment darkly glowed and brightly flashed the noblest jewels of India. Round the stalwart necks, under the pitch-black volutes of the beards, were strings of diamonds large as pigeons' eggs, of emeralds dark as night-waves. On their breasts shone mosaics of diamonds, mirror-smooth and large as miniature playing-cards ; and beside them the most modern fantasies of Messrs. Cartier scintillated at a myriad facets. Their turbans were laden with precious stones and pearls, their hands and wrists with rings and bracelets, their belt-buckles and swords embossed with solitaires of exorbitant dimensions.

Three necklaces, four rows of stones apiece, covered Patiala's spacious chest with a veritable breastplate of diamonds. These necklaces alone, so one of the Maharaja's suite informed me, are insured for over three million pounds. The famous diamond once worn by the Empress Eugénie hung amongst eight others of the same size and water from a *rivière* hitched above his waist. The buckle

of his belt consisted of a flat, carved emerald, a monstrous bauble, large as a Marennes oyster. And, besides rings and bracelets, and ear-drops falling from two emerald clasps in a bright cataract of diamonds, he wore above the elbow, strapped by silken thongs to either arm, two huge chased emeralds.

The Uvraj, his son, had trapped his breast with an antique carapace of table-cut diamonds, and rivulets of diamonds trickled down his forehead to his eyes. Two enormous solitaires glittered in his ears, two patches of dazzling white that set off to perfection the dusky beauty of the boyish cheeks.

And, somehow, there was nothing incongruous, nothing to offend, in the profusion of jewels decking the manly breasts of the black-bearded kings. Indeed its very exuberance was perfectly in keeping with the Court where it was displayed.

Yet I seemed to see a rather constrained smile on the face of that charming, modest gentleman, the Maharaja of Dholpur, as if he were embarrassed by the nine strings of pearls that glistened on his breast and his necklet of a world-famous set of pearls, perfectly matched in orient and size and large as plovers' eggs. The Maharaja of Panna wore a tunic in an exquisitely delicate shade of russet brown and, like the man of taste he is, was contented with a single gem, a large solitaire coming from the diamond-mines of Panna State. Such indigence distressed the Maharaja of Patiala, who packed him off to have five strings of brilliants looped across his chest !

Some hours later the room which had glittered with a fabulous display of gems no jewel-merchant in the world could hope to emulate had resumed its normal aspect, and now looked like a large billiard-

room in a château, or a club smoking-room where a few hours before dinner-time the same habitués gather daily for a friendly chat.

Between the shooting trophies, tiger-skins and antelope heads adorning the upper portion of the walls, and the velvet backs of the wall-sofas running round the room, was hung a series of photographic nudes, groups of women or single forms divine. In poses agreeable to the æsthetic tastes of 1900, or thereabouts, showing to advantage their wasp-waists, hair embossed in chignons, and opulent up-standing breasts, they leaned on broken columns, a little finger pertly up in air. Devoid alike of art and sex-appeal, these insipid masterpieces were mounted in gilded frames of the Louis-Philippe period. In the billiard-room alone I counted no less than twenty-seven such photographs, many of them coloured.

I very soon discovered that all the apartments in the palace, not to mention the avenues in the parks and gardens, proliferated nudity in the guise of photographs or pictures, of statuettes and statues. One day in a small ante-room where the functionaries in attendance spend their mornings, I came on two small bronzes ; one of them depicted a reaper, the other a miner at work. I heaved a sigh of relief. Here at last were statues neither feminine nor nude ! Unfortunately, fingering one of the bronzes, I chanced to touch the wheat-sheaf in the bronze entitled “ Harvest Home,” and discovered that it moved. It was, in fact, a lid ; under the sheaf the reaper was picking up nestled the little ivory figure of a naked girl. And need I add that on examining “ A Wonderful Discovery ” I unearthed under the rock the miner was about to prise apart another naked woman sitting on the ground ?

Though this mania for the nude ubiquitous is, at Patiala, carried to an abnormal pitch—almost to the point of an obsession—Patiala is far from being unique in this respect. In almost all the Indian States I noticed the same phenomenon. They have banished woman's company from half their lives and more, but she has taken her revenge and haunts their thoughts persistently. I remember an exhibition of paintings in one of the Native States ; its ruler did me the honour of asking me to act as judge. As I walked round examining the various canvases I was struck by the number of spectators gathered before each nude, by their giggles, by the sensuality that flickered in their eyes. Lack of culture only half explained it ; surely repression played a part. For in India nudity, the nude woman, is seldom or never seen. The nautch-girls always wear the maximum of garments and in the native stage-plays and films the actresses are always fully dressed. The arts of sculpture and painting have been till now restricted almost exclusively to religious subjects. And from social gatherings women are excluded ; on the rare occasions where they are admitted, the modest *sari* betrays a minimum of naked flesh.

I was surprised to find how little the absence of the feminine element at dinners and receptions in the maharajas' palaces impressed me at the time. Obviously, for one thing, if the princes and their retainers had worn European evening-dress, these gatherings would have ineluctably assumed the boring and portentous aspect of club dinners. The sumptuous garments made all the difference, and there was not the least suggestion of the bachelors' dinner as we know it. Though they were unaware of it, the silken robes, the ear-rings, bracelets and

neck-chains, far from creating an *ambiance* of femininity, invested the scene with a poetic charm, a curious interest. The extravagance of the costumes, their infinite diversity, the way in which each robe seemed to bring out the wearer's personality, not only pleased the eye but pleasantly engaged the mind.

And yet these very costumes which by their opulence, by the coquetry and forethought they imply, make the absence of women pass unnoticed, by the same token evoke their presence. It is hard to believe that the rajas' habits of luxurious display are due uniquely to a desire to gratify their fellow-princes' eyes, or that they wish to shine merely out of vanity or mutual emulation. In his heart of hearts each knows well that all the purdah-ladies will be chattering about his jewels ; that the young European ladies who are his guests, when visiting the zenana, will not fail to vaunt his gorgeous brocades.

The women are not present, but the thoughts of all the guests converge upon the absent sex. If they never mention woman, she is always in their mind. The unacknowledged impulse that inspires them to decorate their walls with nudes prompts them also to stock their courts with servile hordes of nautch-girls. They have thrust woman into the background, kept her in gilded durance, but their palaces blazon forth her image.

Whatever they may wish or profess, woman is ever with them, an unseen presence at their side.

THE HOLI : FESTIVAL OF SPRING

A pellet bursting in a splash of liquid mauve upon your forehead, peals of laughter echoing behind a

smoke-screen of red powder, flight and pursuit, a playful ducking in the saffron-yellow water of a swimming-pool, cries and laughter, laughter everywhere—such is the fête of *Holi*.

Holi, the festival that ushers in the spring, though it has a religious side, is primarily a Saturnalia. Once in the year, rich and poor, beggars and maharajas, meet on common ground, in a riot of colours, amid peals of laughter. *Holi* is a glorified Carnival of Nice for which white garments are *de rigueur*. Confetti is replaced by coloured powder, paper streamers by sprays of coloured liquids, flowers by cellophane capsules packed with indigo or carmine. The streets are raked by a quick-fire of variegated pellets, everywhere are friendly scuffles, and revelers tipping huge baskets filled with green and yellow, blue and scarlet powder over each other's heads.

The *Holi* is essentially a democratic festival and generally takes place in the popular quarters. During the three days it lasts it is dangerous work crossing the town ; for you may be set upon, get a pailful of coloured water in your eyes and have your clothes torn to shreds ; moreover, the merry-makers are always drunk and when they meet a woman are apt to press the joke a very great deal too far.

So it was that the Maharaja decided we should celebrate the *Holi* amongst ourselves. There were thirty of us all told, including the favourite dancers, and only half a dozen Europeans. For the scene of our frolics he chose the grounds of a curious little pleasure-house which he uses as a *garçonnière*—his "Folly" as it would have been called in the eighteenth century. It lies tactfully perdu at the heart of a small, secret pleasance ; all around are parterres of bright flowers, dark nooks, clandestine

arbours screened from view in clumps of jasmine. Like a white naiad waiting for her lover, a marble bathing-pool, the white steps rippling with a constant flow of tepid water, lies prone amid the dark-green leafage of sweet-scented shrubs. Everywhere are life-size statues of naked women, graceful athletes, groups of men and girls in lascivious poses, and on a bed of moss ringed round by flowers sprawls a recumbent woman of superb beauty, passion incarnate in her marble limbs.

Under a tent a row of baskets filled with coloured powders such as are sold by dyers in the Indian bazaars was set out in readiness for the fray. Fast and furious was the offensive. Hither and thither the women raced, volleying handfuls of powder at our faces, their veils afloat behind them like iridescent wings—a swarm of busy bees amongst the flowers, strewing the sunlit air with clouds of pollen. In a few minutes all of us looked like harlequins, spangled red and mauve and yellow. Soon we ran out of powder and fell back on our next line of munitions, fat pulpy balls as big as hens' eggs, which landed straight and hard. No sooner did they touch the target than a coloured liquid spurted out, warmed by the pitiless sun of noon ; whenever I happened to "stop" one of them, feeling the hot, sticky fluid trickling down my cheek, I could have fancied myself wounded by a fragment of spent shrapnel.

Next came the ordeal by water, and now a good many of us had the look of the apprentice chemists, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac's holy terror, as we went careering round the flower-beds and rose-arbours, armed with long medical syringes. Under the tiny waterspouts the coloured powder liquefied and flowed in red and yellow runlets down our

clothes, clotted with scarlet patches where the bombs had burst.

Our hair was stained a brilliant mauve or yellow and one by one our company of harlequins, spangled out of recognition, took headers into the swimming-pool amid clouds of spray and whoops of laughter. After each immersion the water took on a curious metallic iridescence, due, I imagine, to the blending of the colours in the brilliant light. Silent but not to be gainsaid, the servants handed round whisky and champagne, as well as some appallingly salty little appetizers. Mercilessly the sunlight struck down from the zenith, no less potent than the alcohol ; the *Holi*, like the liquor in our glasses, was "going strong" !

A stentorian roar—clad in a dripping white shirt and bathing-cap, the Maharaja rose hugely from the waves. His attempt to duck two little dancing-girls had failed and they had turned the tables on their master.

THE DANCE IN THE TENT

We dined that night in a large tent pitched in the middle of the camp, which served as a dining-room for the English and Indian visitors staying in the neighbouring tents. The interior of the dining-tent was draped with red cloth. Along the centre of the long red vista two narrow tables had been set out parallel to each other, the white tablecloths all but submerged under a rippling flood of orange-coloured satin on which like crystal lighthouses stood massive candelabra. A European menu was served on the left-hand table. The other table was reserved for such of us as relished Indian dishes and for severely orthodox Indians who disliked sitting at the same

table as their Christian fellow-guests. Many of the lesser rajas carried intolerance a stage further and found even this separation insufficient ; fearing such parallel proximity with unbelievers might well contaminate them, they had dinner served in their own tents. Indeed the right-hand table was always practically empty.

The European menu had many more adepts. The table where it was served was crowded every evening, both sides being occupied by English visitors and Indian functionaries who dropped in casually to dine, treating the dinner-tent as if it were a restaurant. There was, however, little intimacy ; British stolidity confronted Indian reticence, and attempts at general conversation usually fell flat. There was nothing doing but to eat and drink, and when the meal was over—merely to drink.

A grey-haired butler, who looked much more like a character from " Uncle Tom's Cabin " than one out of " The Jungle Book," supervised the meal. He had been in Maurice de Rothschild's service during his Indian tour and his employer had brought him back with him to France, where he had stayed some months. Over thirty years had passed but, standing at my back, he would murmur deferential reminiscences of Paris in my ear, with obvious delight. As a Parisian I had won his heart and he saw to it that whether it was the moment for claret, champagne or liqueur brandy, my glass was never empty. On this particular night those magic names, the Champs-Élysées, the Parc Monceau and (though on his lips the name was hardly recognizable) the Trocadero, had acted as a *sesame* not only to the butler's heart but to a regiment of bottles from the royal cellar. I was in a mood of amiable

lethargy, the afterglow of a dinner that, if dull, had, for a solitary man, exceeded in potations. Silent and aloof, the bearded, orange-turbaned Sikhs on the opposite side of the table looked intently at and through me. Now and again they spoke amongst themselves, and there was a burst of dusky, hirsute laughter.

I grew aware that the gentle droning in my ear had recommenced. The ancient butler with the Uncle Tom-like face had strayed back to me, as an addict to his cherished vice.

“Master knowing *Place du Tontal* ? ”

“Eh ? ”

“*De la Tontorde* ? ”

“Oh, yes, the *Place de la Concorde*.”

A timid chuckle of delight. “*Oui, oui !* That it —*de la Concorde*. Good, the *Place de la Concorde* ! And the *Rue Opéra*, please, master knowing it ? ”

My interest flagged and I began twiddling my glass. My unseen guardian angel took it as a hint. “*Sahib ke pas brandy lao ! Jheldi !*” Another glass ? After all, why not ? . . .

How hot it was ! How all those strident colours, reds and oranges crepitating in a blaze of light, worked on one’s nerves ! Those vivid turbans, the loud gusts of laughter followed by dead silence—the hush before a storm—then another shrill remark, another blare of laughter !

Suddenly a voice, obsequious but imperative, resounded in my ear. I turned round and saw an A.D.C., resplendent in diamonds, gold braid, epaulettes, bending towards me.

“His Highness is in the adjoining *salon* and hopes you will come to see the dancing.”

Deferentially the hoary butler drew back my chair with a subservient smile. Rising, I saw a rather

pathetic figure in an ill-fitting black coat, chuckling with delight, bowing and scraping to me. A quaint old fellow ! This evening he had re-lived in memory that fabulous adventure, his trip to Paris thirty years ago. Or, maybe, he was smiling at a general retrospect of all his youth—unless this was the one and only high light of his past. Whom could he have told about it, to whom confide his secret ? For a few moments he had pictured me his boon companion in some gay escapade, had held the door of memory ajar for me to glimpse his treasure. And how he must have enjoyed it ! Now the door was shut, the frolic ended. He took the closure in the Oriental spirit ; what must be, must be. And smiled again, grateful for the brief delight. I saw his gentle, dog-like eyes swimming in a grey mist, bidding me farewell ; adieu to dreams.

I made my way along the table, beside the glowing flood of orange silk. As I passed, some court officials rose, trailing upon the tablecloth, like streamers of bright gold floating on red and orange waves, the skirts of their long tunics, which had till now been hidden in the shadow of the table. The aide-de-camp raised the tent-flap and I stepped forth into the darkness.

All the stars were out. The moonlit Indian night was soft and blue. On my left were the illuminations in the gardens, torrents of electric light flooding the dark tranquillity of lawns and flower-beds ; to the right stretched long lines of silent tents, the canvas glimmering white under the moonbeams. The fragrance of petunias rose warm and cloying from the dark soil. All was silence but for the jackals rifting the shadows with gashes of shrill sound. So perfect was the moment that, standing on the gravel path, I hardly dared to

move lest I should break the spell. Blind to all this beauty that use and wont had staled for him, my escort, who had gone ahead, gave a remindful cough ; bowing to necessity, I caught him up and, stooping, passed below the curtain that patiently he had been upholding for some moments.

At first I wondered where on earth I was. Indeed I doubted for an instant if I had really entered a tent and had not merely passed beneath a curtain hung in air, from outer darkness back into the dark. But here the night was even bluer than the night without ; the stars were nearer, the perfumes richer still. Suddenly the opaque barrier a few steps ahead which had obscured my view began to move ; the shadows which composed it drew apart, discovering the glimmering interior of a long tent where roof and walls and carpet, all were the deep blue of a tropic night. Diminutive electric lamps vizored with sky-blue cellophane spread a pale lustre everywhere ; only in the middle of the tent a crystal chandelier, veiled in blue silk, centred a zone of slightly, very slightly, clearer radiance.

The Maharaja all in white had risen to greet us. We crossed the carpet laid like a blue arena in the centre of the tent and took our seats on one of the low divans draped in ultramarine velvet set out along its edge. The sides and angles of the tent were filled with shadows, clouds of smoke and rows of seated spectators. The Maharaja was the only ruling prince present ; in his white robes he cut an impressive figure. He went and seated himself for a minute or two beside each of the tribal chieftains, one after the other, beside the high Indian officials in the service of the British Government in whose honour the fête was given. Near me I recognized some of the leading chiefs whom I had sometimes

seen at after-dinner receptions at the Palace, but most of the faces were new to me. At the far end of the carpet was a group of gigantic, bearded figures, their massive brows swathed in enormous turbans tied in the Mahometan manner. In the half-light I could see flashes of silk, the crest-lines of their head-gear standing up like cocks'-combs; their gestures were abrupt and bellicose, their voices clamorous. The fête had been going on for some time, and from the commotion, I concluded that many rounds of whisky and champagne had gone their way.

No Europeans were to be seen and we too passed unnoticed amongst the tunics of the Haiderabad contingent, of Moslem chieftains from the Punjab and notables from the Afghan Frontier. We were blurred out of recognition by the smoke-haze, our very presence blotted out by fumes of alcohol; all India had the blue tent to herself.

From a pool of darkness at the side of the tent came the throbbing of cerie dance-music played on odd-looking instruments by an orchestra seated on the ground. In sudden waves of sound the music rose and fell, and singly, or face to face in pairs, without a break, young dancing-girls moved forward, their bare feet drumming silently on the sky-blue carpet. There were about thirty of them sitting, waiting for their turn, at the far end of the silken vista. Muffled in veils, they looked like pink and white lotus-flowers with half-closed petals. And like a flower in a shadowed garden wakening from sleep, aspiring sunwards and bursting into blossom, now and again a slim, veiled form would rise, stand forth amongst the rest, and, dancing forward, preen her fluttering petals under the light, swaying before the fitful gusts of music and quivering in brief suspense. After a while, letting the

veils droop about her, she slipped back to her place and, wrapped in her draperies, went sound asleep once more, indistinguishable among her young companions.

Whisky and champagne flowed freely ; cigarette smoke misted the blue-veiled chandelier. Methodically, between each dance, the Maharaja made a move and sat down beside another member of the company. And as whenever His Highness rose all of us rose too, our movements grew with each reiteration still more automatic, till soon we were bobbing up and down like jumping-jacks. Each person whom the Maharaja had honoured with a chat was obviously gratified, and made no secret of his exultation ; but, so far, enthusiasm was kept within bounds.

A hideous, clownish creature crawled forward into the middle of the tent and, grovelling on the carpet, began to mimic a wounded tiger, a drunken donkey, a mad dog. Personally I could not decide if the performance was funny or repulsive, but at each imitation the turbans quaked with mighty guffaws.

Presently an orchestra of five performers came forward and settled down at the carpet's edge. A young Eurasian girl, fair as an Englishwoman, voluptuous as an Indian, glided out into the centre of the tent. Her wrists were hung with tiny bells, her ankles shrill with tinkling bangles and on her toes were rings, casing the toe-joints with a golden filigree of noisy little beads. By Indian standards she was distinctly underclad ; a beaded brassière sheathed her breast and below her naked belly billowed a white skirt of flimsy gauze. Swift, lithe, instinct with emotion, her movements were patterned on the folk-dances of ancient India—which in

many ways anticipate the technique of the Isadora Duncan school. Now there was silence in the tent. Only the music swelled and died in fitful waves, thrilling our nerves with melodies sub-acid or sickly sweet, and sudden chords that trembled on the air, soared up and, failing, trembled into silence, only to rise again with feverish rapture and die out on a ripple of silvery trills. The dancer followed the subtle rhythms of the music with all her body ; with sinuous undulations of her arms and naked hips swelling and dwindling under the gauzy veils, with sparkling toes and jangling wrists. Her arms flung out before her, hands all but touching, knees pressed tight together, she drummed on the carpet with frenzied feet ; or, running swiftly forward liana-lithe, she seemed to proffer us her body, only to retract it in a flash, with an enigmatic laugh. Now she no longer moved this way or that, only her feet pounded on the carpet in accelerating rhythms, her features working with passionate excitement, strained to the breaking-point of paroxysm ; her breath came in panting gasps and faster, faster, to the shrill, stuttering music her little breasts twitched under the pattering beads. Then suddenly the tiny bells fell silent, a cloud of drapery veiled the golden limbs . . . and the blue arena was empty. There was no clapping, but the tumult of orgiastic cries told more than any plaudits.

Whisky and champagne went round again. The sugary perfumes of the flowers massed in the corners of the tent was heady as the fiercest alcohol. I saw the Maharaja standing, a burly white figure, in a patch of shadow on the far side of the tent. I heard loud cries breaking out around him. All the reivers of the border marches, tall chieftains black and bearded like Persian satraps, were on their feet.

One of them raised his glass and shouted : " Forty million men are at my beck and call." A voice boomed in his ear, " And I have ten thousand fighting-men behind me."

A colossus in a vast billowy robe of cloth of gold planted himself between them. In the black beard his mouth gaped like an open wound. " And I," he shouted, " have twenty-five million men all pledged to follow you."

Appalling in their impassivity, the Maharaja's eyes swept the dark faces. " I," he announced, " will do as my forefathers have done before me."

The group of chiefs closed in around him, hugely shouldering each other aside to touch their suzerain. " All of us—to the last man—we are ready !"

In the blue twilight, across the layers of smoke that sudden draughts were churning into a murky fog as the tent-flaps lifted to the night without, wild oaths of fealty were plighted, vows of baresark frenzy. What, I wondered, what if anything would come of all the whirlwind pledges bandied in this netherworld of spectral blue, this mirage of drinks and music, drifting smoke-wraiths ? Brave words outspoken rather from the heart than from the head, mad schemes that in the atmosphere of such a night seemed to drunken fancy feasible ; was it delirium or desire that in the tented twilight bragged so lustily on the lips of the great Indian overlords of British India ?

CHAPTER XI

DEHRA DUN : TO THE SLOW RHYTHM OF ELEPHANTS

A BAND of bright green duffel woven of flowers and creepers, of elephant-grass and tangled leafage, lines the long valley skirting the foothills of the Himalayas in the North of India, where the mountains meet the plain. In this tract of lavish vegetation lies Dehra Dun, a cool and shady backwater where so many a British Civil Servant, after retirement, ekes out the melancholy remnant of his days. Most of these unfortunates have not the means, nor yet the enterprise, to return to the old country. They have spent three-quarters of their life away from it, their friends at home have given up awaiting them, their families now consist of strangers whom they have never met.

On our way from Patiala we passed only a few days in this tranquil garden-city of the East, and soon moved farther North to Mussoori, where the ex-Maharaja of Indore and his household were staying.

Mussoori is one of the myriad hill-stations to which Englishmen and Indians resort in quest of coolness during the hot season. But on the hill-tops where the hotels and villas perch the period of fine weather had not yet set in, and I found Mussoori freezing in a belt of clouds, shivering in the blasts of icy air that whistled under the doors of its

deserted houses and rattled the bare boughs of the trees.

A week later, coming down from the hills, I relished the warmth of Dehra Dun. But the Council of Princes was holding its last session and, wishing to attend this, we left post-haste for Delhi. In a fortnight's time, however, we were to return to the green valley of the Himalayas, as the guests of Major Shamsheer Singh, who had promised us a week's *shikar* in the jungle.

On this occasion we stayed some eighteen miles away from the European city of Dehra Dun and half that distance from Hardwar, the sacred city of the Hindus, under the thatched roof of a little shooting bungalow hidden away in the dense jungle lining the Ganges banks.

Every day at sunrise we gathered on the mat-and-thatch verandah of our rustic abode, to find the Major's five trusty elephants drawn up in line awaiting us.

I imagine that the pygmies of New Guinea see no great difference between a veteran taxi and the latest Rolls-Royce ; for them there is a *genus* car, undifferentiated into species. And as the savage with his naïve generalizations, I must own that two months previously I looked on elephants as all alike. Now I know better. There are elephants and elephants, and their temperaments are as various as their sizes. Some are cursed with paltry little trunks, so ludicrously undersized that they must stoop to drink ; while others have majestic trunks, so splendidly protractile that they hold them proudly high in air for all to see and marvel at. Some elephants have sagging skins that make them look like convalescents who have grown too thin for their old clothes. Others have their hides tight as

a drum and stiff as plates of steel and, armoured in dull grey, resemble battleships. And, as I have learnt, sometimes to my cost, there are windy elephants that baulk at the mere glimpse of a panther and quake with fright when a wild boar is charging. Trumpeting, they lash the ground with their trunks like frenzied negroes drumming on their tomtoms. Sometimes taking panic, they stampede liked a resistless torrent, crashing down nullahs, across country, through the jungle—often to their death. I have known pacifist and pugnacious elephants, sentimentalists and humorists, gluttons and ascetics; never an elephant that lacked character. The ones we rode at Dehra Dun were two huge males, magnificently strong, courageous beasts, and two females, one of which on our return from a successful shoot would extract hymns of victory from an ocarina held to the tip of her nose, while the other, a gentle, affectionate creature, would explore our pockets with a wheedling trunk for stumps of sugar-cane. The baby elephant, a stubborn little fellow with a narrow forehead, slack-skinned and lily-livered, followed behind; his duty was to carry the day's bag. Unlike his seniors, all he had on his back was a mere pad, whereas the former carried shooting-howdahs, large tubs of wickerwork or grey canvas in which the sportsman and his companion sat one behind the other, with three guns and their stock of cartridges in front. Our armoury comprised a big-game rifle, a lighter rifle and a shot-gun. At a word of command from the mahout perched astride its neck the elephant laboriously settles on to its knees; first it lets down its hind-legs, tottering in the process like a collapsing house; then it aligns its fore-legs on the ground with quaintly finical precaution.

Daily our little company of guns and beaters took up positions in relatively clear ground, plains covered with tall grasses, fields tousled with thick undergrowth that opened in the trackless chaos of the blind jungle. Sometimes we forced our way into dark coverts and, from an ambush in the tangled shadows of lianas, brought down the deer that roamed the clearings haloed in golden light like the celestial beasts of Saint Hubert's vision. The Major proved an expert in jungle strategy and one day, according to plan, his fifteen beaters put up a tigress. I was on the look out for her beside an open track across which she was just about to spring when I first sighted her ; from my eyrie on a tree-top I put a rifle-bullet through her spine. But as a rule we trekked, to the slow rhythm of the elephants, to open country, where we formed up in line, spaced out two hundred yards apart. Slowly we moved forward in the swaying howdahs, rifle in hand, ready for a snap-shot at the antelope that came bounding out of the dry undergrowth, or the wild boars whose humpy bulk, at first invisible, loomed up at last at the end of a long furrow grooved in the high grass, like the track of a torpedo. Green peacocks rose heavily and offered an easy shot, as did the black and white partridges and red quail. With hideous glee vultures like venerable, bald-headed harpies planed ravenously down out of the blue to circle in a death-dance round the deer reeling in their death-throes amid the torrid undergrowth.

Noon came in a blaze of sun-dust. How grateful was a draught of ice-cold Chablis ! The bungalow seemed roofed with molten steel. In a few minutes life would pause, master and man becalmed in doldrums of siesta, the elephants dozing in the

compound. Then, a few hours later, the bungalow would empty ; guns, mahouts and beaters be afoot once more, out in the fiery wilderness. Nightfall found us homing silently along the sand-tracks, listening to a furtive rustling in the dark thickets bordering the fields—the timid footfalls of the antelope.

By nine dinner was ended. After dinner, following a routine that never varied, we stepped forth into the darkness where the elephants were waiting for the warm rolls and fresh-cut sticks of sugar-cane we held out to their roving trunks. If there had been a hard day's work the stock of rolls and sheaves of sugar-cane, laid out on the verandah and generously dispensed, melted away in less than no time into the gaping, triangular mouths of the battle-ship-grey monsters. The mahouts standing by carried big-bellied hurricane-lamps that threw up the great shadows of their charges on the green vault of leaves.

When their meal was over the elephants trooped away to the trees under which they slept. Ringed round by twinkling yellow lights, the lamps of their attendants, they receded into the distance, looming above the blue expanse of brushwood like huge grey genies of the air trampling underfoot a firmament of stars.

Later on in the night, much later, after the final peg, the last *shikar* yarn, after a last good night had been exchanged, as I lay on my camp-bed in the bare bedroom, I could hear outside my open door the uneasy respiration of the Indian night. Screams of agony as a great cat leapt on the startled prey, low sobbing hoots of owls, laughter of hyenas—out there in the great darkness the jungle gasped for breath, and terror stalked the shadows. And

indefatigably the brain-fever bird shrilled its three harsh notes, tick-tack-tock, in rising octaves of monotony, tick-tack-tock, flaying the nerves with pitiless reiteration, timing the feverish heart-beats of the Indian jungle prone in sweltering gloom.

CHAPTER XII

PANNA : THE DROWSING OASIS

LOST in the tameless wild of Central India, remote from cities, cut off from the outside world, aloof, alone, Panna dreams out its sunlit days in placid ease, a jungle city set around with jungles. No railway violates its calm. The nearest passes some sixty miles distant from the capital, through the territory of another state. A car is sent by the Maharaja to meet his visitors at the little wayside halt, and takes them to Panna over rough cart-roads strewn with reddish stones. The countryside is all in ups and downs, littered everywhere with gigantic boulders, straddled by craggy heights and cleft by gorges. Now and then we traversed vast forests, and clearings overgrown with sun-burnt bushes and brittle yellow grass ; sometimes in the heart of a chaos of great rocks and crags, of nature at her grimmest, we would light upon a green and smiling oasis of birds and flowers, murmurous with bubbling springs.

To all appearances the capital has seen two centuries through unchanged. It lies in a zone of rolling country, within a network of irregular ranges of hills encircling two very simple palaces, some ancient temples and the city proper—a small agglomeration of humble dwellings sleepily huddled one against the other along narrow, no less sleepy streets where vagrant cows outnumber passers-by.

An ideal site has been chosen for the guest-house, notched in the hillside about a mile from the Palace. It overlooks a fascinating lake, a mirror studded with pink lotus-flowers and doubling in its pale effulgence the shelving hills that guard it, the ancient Mahometan tombs, bulbous as Russian churches, lining one of the banks, and a tiny marble temple rising in its midst, dazzling white by day and blue beneath the moon.

It was late at night when we reached Panna. Forest-fires were burning on some of the surrounding hills, ridging the summits with long crimson fringes. From the guest-house terrace, looking downhill to my right, I saw the city and its palaces white-gleaming in the darkness. But, on my left, the lake was not, as on succeeding nights, glossed with a sheen of milky blue ; the moon was newly risen and the hills cut off its light. The shadows massed around the lake made it look deeper still ; in the midst of an abyss of darkness it yawned far below, mirroring only the leaping flames that fringed the hill-tops, like fumaroles in a volcanic crater, and played across the smooth black surface in a devil-dance of scarlet smoke-wisps.

Our beds had been set up on the guest-house roof. The night was still. No sound came from the forest close at hand ; not even the bark of a dog, not a jackal's whine, a night-bird's call. The darkness was empty ; none of the furtive sounds of night disturbed the solemn chant that floated up to us from a temple far below. With tambourines beating the rhythm, a melody droned, wavering, monotonously on and on, punctuated at irregular intervals by an eldritch blare of trumpets. For five nights on end we heard this unearthly music rumbling up the hillside ; one of the Hindu mystery

plays which the priest at Muttra had described to me was being given at a temple in the village and this was its accompaniment. These performances, so the priest had then explained, are religious dramas like the passion-plays enacted in our Middle Ages on trestle stages set up in front of churches.

Every morning I was wakened by the sun ; it rose behind a hill on the far side of the lake and the first rays caught me full in the face through the mosquito-net around my bed. At the same moment I heard a bugle-call, bidding the Panna army muster in a village square. The ninety men composing it have no barracks, and when the day's duties are over all ranks retire to their respective homes. But next morning, with the first sunbeam, the first bugle-call, every man springs from his bed and goes on parade. Dawdling by day on sentry duty at the palace, by night a peasant sleeping in the bosom of his family, the Panna guardsman has the " cushiest " of jobs ; Panna, the happiest army in the world.

There was a nip in the morning air. It was hardly six but everyone was up and about. On the terrace water-carriers, bearers and gardeners, were moving to and fro, and already I saw the car which was to take me for a morning's shoot looping the hairpin bends of the road that leads up from the village. From a corner of the garden, leaning on the stone parapet that skirts the terrace, I gazed down at the lake cupped in the solitude of the encircling hills. In the early light the water shone like gold around a point of dazzling brightness, the little marble temple. Every morning, soon after six, I saw an aged priest come tottering down to the water's edge ; clad only in a loin-cloth, the venerable man of God looked like a figurine in bronze,

battered and worn with age. He loosed a row-boat tied to the bank, then, wading waist-deep in the water, his lank limbs hampered by the tangled lotus-stems, pushed the boat outside the belt of water-plants. Once in open water the little boat seemed to halt instinctively, as if inured by long experience, to let the old man clamber in. Then, gently, very gently, he began to row.

Swiftly the sun rose, blazing hot already, in the windless air. No sign of life ruffled the tranquil solitude of the great lake, except the feeble effort of the aged priest linking the lake-side with the temple. Slowly he moved ahead, the rhythmic plash of his oars fraying the young sunlight into long strands of silence. How pitifully small he seemed, that poor old man, how vain his effort ! A patient pilgrim on his tranquil way, his mind as peaceful as the happy corner of the earth where a kind destiny had placed him, he seemed to me then an effigy of prayer incarnate, the daily orison of all devout and humble souls ; a living symbol of the faltering words, the never-answered pleas that, like the ancient oarsman on the lake, wend their lonely way to God. I heard a rattle as the boat touched the marble frontage of the island ; the priest had reached his goal—the temple was less far than God.

The rulers of Panna come of Rajput stock ; their clean-cut, aristocratic profiles inherited from fair Aryan ancestors are in sharp contrast with the uncomely profiles and dark complexion of their subjects who, like all the natives of this part of Central India, seem to have acquired the look of their environment, with all its bleakness, its air of rugged poverty.

The present Maharaja, a keen sportsman and

the mirror of courtesy, has gathered round him a little court as simple as it is charming. He has appointed two of his brothers ministers of State, a step which, natural as it may seem, runs counter to the practice of other Indian Courts. For, as a rule, the nearest relations of the monarch are kept at arm's length, sometimes, indeed, so completely out of sight as to lead one to believe that the ruler is an only son.

Panna lies at the far end of nowhere, in the heart of the wild. Thanks to the simple tastes and wisdom of its enlightened ruler, the little state enjoys an existence very close to nature and in every way delightful. All of us slept under the open sky, dined on the terraced roofs of houses, and drank pre-prandial pegs in easy chairs set out on the palace lawn where large carpets had been laid at sunset. Long solitary walks in the jungles of his State are the Prince's favourite recreation. Nearly every day during our stay at Panna we went in a group to bathe in a wonderful little lake lying at the end of a gorge, remote from the main road. A flight of steps hewn in the solid rock led down to the lake. On one side rose a high red cliff blazing in the sun, on the other a waterfall dropped cool and sheer out of a tangle of lianas on the cliff-brow. After meandering through a maze of flowering shrubs and a verdant coppice at its base, it joined the lake. Close beside the water's edge were the ruins of an old temple, of which only the cloister arches had survived. Large grey monkeys gambolled fearlessly around us, blue peacocks and jade-green birds with pink-tipped wings spangled the bright air. Surely here, if anywhere on earth, was paradise regained ! The Maharaja pointed out to me a dark recess high up in the cliff-wall ; that

was a cave, he told me, where Hindu hermits often pass long years of meditation.

But the Panna cliffs do not serve only as walls for the most marvellous of swimming-pools, and as congenial lairs for the exceptionally large tigers that haunt their wooded flanks, and for the bears that slumber in the grottos—slumbers on several occasions interrupted by dynamite cartridges that dislodged them from their dens to let me have a shot at them. Beneath the tumbled rocks, hidden in the red silt which makes the jungle tracks glow like streams of blood, lurk pebbles of great price.

One morning I paid a visit to the diamond mines. Large red burrows delved in the brittle soil, they still are worked by primitive methods. At the bottom of each pit I saw men busy with picks hewing out of the sides great masses of red rubble, a conglomerate of earth and stones that the women carried off on their heads in little baskets. Under the merciless light they seemed half dazed, and went about their task like sleep-walkers. After hoisting a load up to the surface, they trudged down again, crossing other parties crawling up along the open adits, like long files of slow, incessant ants tracing their criss-cross patterns on an ant-hill. The mines are exploited by private enterprise and a percentage on the net sales is paid into the Panna Treasury. The diamonds extracted are either disposed of on the spot at yearly auction-sales, or dispatched southwards to Golconda, where likewise they are sold at public auctions. Thence they are sent to Europe to be cut.

Panna is one of the rare places, perhaps the only spot in India, where diamonds are still found. Nevertheless this largess of nature seems to leave those who own it, or exploit it locally, profoundly

indifferent. Cut off from the outside world, immune from its cupidities, Panna is a last sanctuary of the religious spirit ; in cloistered quiet, pensive and serene, its people lead the austere life of those for whom the material world is but a tissue of illusions.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TEMPLES OF CHATAPUR : SAINTS OF OLD—HUCKSTERS OF TO-DAY

WHEN I expressed a wish to visit some remarkable temples not far from Panna of which I had heard tell, the Maharaja was kind enough to place a car at my disposal for the trip. The site of these venerated Hindu shrines, which date from the ninth century, is in Chatapur territory, just beyond the Panna frontier.

Our change of principality—the frontier is the dry bed of a watercourse—was a simple matter, informal as in France the passage from one “department” to another. Indeed, had not the officer escorting us informed us of it, we should not have guessed that we were crossing a frontier ; no sentry-posts or boundary-marks were to be seen. The countryside of Chatapur was all in rolling inclines, but no less dour and uncompanionable than the scenery of the state we had just left. On either hand, as far as eye could reach, stretched a dreary waste of ragged jungle, bone-dry desolation.

Suddenly, at the top of an ascent, the massive outlines of a group of temples crowning an empty plateau came into view. No trace was anywhere of human habitation ; the village had crumbled into dust. Built of caked mud the Indian village, once abandoned, soon begins to flake away under the

sun, to liquefy in the monsoon, till in a few years it is as if it had never been.

The temples stand side by side, all facing in the same direction. Each is mounted on a very lofty stone pedestal, forming a platform-base. Steep flights of stairs lead up on to the platform, which, being much wider than the temple proper, forms a flagged esplanade around it. The only entrance to the empty, almost lightless chamber that is the temple lies through a dark, narrow corridor. At the far end is an inner shrine, a stone tabernacle in which the gigantic statue of the god to whom the temple is dedicate glimmers faintly, veiled in hieratic gloom. The interior decoration, as in most Hindu temples of the period in this part of India, is simple and relatively subdued as compared with the lavish ornaments, the intricate patterns that fret the outer walls from plinth to coping, leaving not an inch of uncarved surface.

The remarkable thing, however, about the Chatapur temples is not so much the abundance as the character of the sculpture that adorns the outer walls ; bas-reliefs depicting male and female forms in attitudes of the most unbridled sensuality. In these carvings there is more than erotic frankness ; they show an insistence on details coupled with a technique of exaggeration that stresses the sexual element to the point of caricature. The primitive sculptors who, in adorning the walls of some of our French cathedrals, occasionally introduced an obscene *motif*, were obviously simple, unsophisticated folk ; it was a maniac who carved the walls of Chatapur.

And these wild, orgiastic visions adorn—of all places !—a holy fane ; they are sacred scenes and

body forth in stone, so it is said, the orgies that in earlier days took place within the temple.

Already in many Indian towns and villages I had visited I had been puzzled by the way in which an incongruous strain of eroticism pervaded the manifestations of a religion otherwise so pure and gentle. But the brutality of these sculptures, their glorification of fleshly lust, dumbfounded me. I had conversed at length with erudite Indian theologians, and what they had told me was still fresh in my mind. According to their expositions, Brahminism was a religion of the loftiest idealism, far removed from mundane things. How was I to reconcile the noble spirituality of the Hindu faith with the Saturnalia in stone that I had just seen, these monstrous obscenities that a sex-ridden sculptor, haunted by his obsession, had figured forth with morbid realism on the temples?

For the moment the enigma seemed insoluble, and it was only some time after my visit at Chatapur, and after I had pondered deeply on the evolution of the Hindu religion, that I lit on a logical solution. Of that solution, for what it may be worth, the following pages give an outline. My next move took me to Benares, one of the great religious centres of the East, and the moment seems apt for a brief digression on the origin and spirit of Hinduism.

About a thousand years before the Christian era the nomad Aryans of the Iran tableland began to drive their flocks and herds towards the Indus plain. The migrants were a white-skinned race, blood brothers—in respect of language anyhow—of those whom another ethnic wave was to sweep westward to the frontiers of Europe and beyond. Slowly but surely they made their way down from the high plateau to the lowlands, wresting from the dark-

skinned aborigines first the plains of the Punjab, then the Ganges valley. In those early days they still were simple, pastoral folk, pure and undefiled as the limpid air of their ancestral highlands. Nothing about them foreshowed the abstruse philosophers, the subtle ecclesiastics they were to become five centuries later. Rather they were a race of poets, quick to respond to natural beauty, and seekers ardent to discover the laws that ruled the seasons, the wherefore of the courses of the stars. And everywhere about them, behind the phenomenal world, they divined a purpose, the will of a great organizer, the Demiurge. Natural forces being emanations of the godhead, they came to regard them as objects of adoration. The sun was a divine being worshipped under the name of Vishnu ; Rudra was the god of forests and the storm ; Indra, lord of thunder, ruled the air. Attendant on these was a host of demigods such as the Apsaras, drifting clouds metamorphosed into celestial courtesans, and Kama the god of love, who, centuries before Cupid, carried a bow and arrows barbed with flowers.

The Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, before being reduced to writing in the fifth century B.C., had been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation ; in them the praises of the gods are hymned with passionate fervour, with a robust and realistic lyricism that has the luxuriance of flowers fostered by a tropic soil. But these sacred writings do not merely recount the glories of the Hindu pantheon and legends of the Gods ; certain passages consist of arid formularies codifying sacrificial liturgy and ritual.

These sacrificial rites gained steadily in importance. Obviously it was easier for a worshipper to

comprehend the cut-and-dried injunctions of a ceremonial than such vague formless entities as the gods of high heaven whom the rite invoked. And very soon the formula eclipsed the god ; the elements of the sacrifice were declared divine and worshipped on their own account. Thus *Brahman*, the formula recited by the officiating priest, was held to be of divine essence and came to be adored as the supreme god. The priesthood acquired an aura of prodigious sanctity and enjoyed prestige such as no ministers of other faiths have ever known.

Claiming divine inspiration, the priests split up the Aryan community into distinct groups or castes : their own class, that of the Brahmins, they naturally set highest in the social scale ; the Kshatriya class comprised the warriors and, subsequently, the maharajas and nobility ; to the Vaisya caste belonged the agriculturists and, later on, the trades-folk ; while the black-skinned Dravidians and, after them, all menials were relegated to the lowest class, that of the Sudras. At a still lower level, submerged and outcaste, was a motley horde of nondescripts whose wretchedness and squalor rendered them "untouchable."

But there came a time when the charming nature-cult embodied in the Vedic theogony no longer satisfied the priests ; and they grew more and more addicted to that habit of metaphysical speculation which was henceforth to be a characteristic of Indian thought. Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ these philosopher-priests had worked out a hard-and-fast theory of the universe, a solution of the problem of life and death. Claiming divine illumination, they compiled a *summa* of philosophic and religious thought, setting forth a new theory of life, the doctrine of the transmigra-

tion of souls, the everlasting reincarnation of living creatures in new bodies of the same or different species. In each successive life the happiness or misery of the re-embodied soul is accurately adjusted to the merit or demerit of its previous existences. This amiable belief, which justifies so plausibly the seeming injustices of life, the unequal distribution of happiness between man and man, was henceforth to be the bedrock of all Indian faiths.

In conjunction with the doctrine of metempsychosis they restored the concept of a single God, and, like the shrewd philosophers they were, an eminently philosophic God ; indeed so sublime, so transcendental, was their conception of divinity that the Brahmins of India, as its first begetters, may justly be accredited, even to-day, the forefathers of all the theologians of the world.

This one supreme God they entitled *Brahman*, the name applied in the preceding era to the sacrificial formula. Brahman is eternal, changeless, absolute and omnipresent ; “ the ocean of existence,” its beginning and its end. He is not to be sought for in the external world amid the restless flux and mutability of things seen, but in the secret places of the heart, at the sentient core of life. Not to be apprehended by the senses, he has his dwelling in an esoteric hinterland of being, moving on his mysterious ways in the darkness of man’s subconscious self. He is the “ something behind everything ” of the mystics ; less, indeed, an inward presence than the *atman*, the breath of life or soul of man, which in the Brahmin metaphysic does not stand for the Ego—the unstable personality of the individual, as we employ the term to-day—but for the Self, the essential, impersonal source of all the phenomena of consciousness.

It was believed that by a tremendous effort of concentration the devout Brahmin could plunge, as it were, beneath the surface of his being and, passing through his personal consciousness, attain the universal subconscious. Did he reach his goal, he entered into the peace that passes understanding, and lost himself in mystic communion with the Supreme Being, his soul absorbed into the universal soul, the quintessence of the divine. At one henceforth with the great All, and merged into the substance of divinity, he thus escaped at last the endless round of transmigration.

It was during this early phase of Brahmanism that the prototypes of the ascetics I so often encountered wandering about India began to seek, in isolation from the world, an escape from the unending cycle of rebirths. That cruel immortality of reincarnation, of suffering and death eternally renewed, made the material realities of life abhorrent in their eyes. And they betook themselves to the depths of the jungle, where, in solitude and peace congenial to meditation, they might find deliverance from the treadmill of metempsychosis.

The Jain and Buddhist faiths, which at this time were coming to the fore and gathering their earliest followers, sought to achieve the same end by different means. The founders of these religions were rajas' sons who abandoned their fathers' courts for the ascetic life ; moreover, before launching their new evangels, they had observed for many years the Brahmin canon. While many members of the Jain sect are still to be found in India, Buddhism, after influencing Indian thought and culture for over a thousand years, almost completely disappeared in the fourth century of our era from the land which gave its founder birth.

During the long Buddhist interregnum, the twelve centuries in which the Buddha's influence predominated, Brahmanism suffered an eclipse—and the face of India was darkened. Hitherto the Aryan race, thanks to the rigid framework of its social hierarchy, had successfully withstood the slow revenge of the conquered masses. But now the fair skins of the Aryans began to lose their whiteness. Race distinctions were being levelled out by Buddhist theories of equality. And now that the bar was lifted, the black Dravidians gradually permeated the conquering race, a dark strain mingled with the Aryan blood.

The pure divinities of the Vedas lost a little of their innocence ; the majestic Brahmin god, something of his sublimity. The dark and terrible gods fashioned in their image by the aborigines of Central India, in the eternal gloom of demon-haunted forests, little by little overcast the candour of the pale-face deities.

In the course of ages, as generations mingled and the race grew old, these demotic village gods changed their appellations, and their rites assumed new forms. Meanwhile the various elements of popular belief tended to crystallize into two distinct conceptions of divinity, Siva and Vishnu. Siva was Rudra, the storm-god of the Vedas, in a new form ; Vishnu, the sun-god hymned in the ancient scriptures. Thus, while the aboriginal mythology had influenced Brahmanism, the latter had to some extent still held its ground. And during this millennium, in the course of which a tidal-wave of Buddhism swept the country, the Brahmin priesthood, if it kept discreetly in the background, was not idle. The nature of the godhead ceased to be for them the only object of research. As they learned

more of human nature, they learned the use of compromise. Powerless before the dark hordes of aborigines faithful for the most part to their multifarious jungle pantheon, they acted as the hierarchs of all successful religions have ever acted ; since they could not oust the older gods, they took them over. Little by little they incorporated all the primitive cults in an eclectic orthodoxy. They treated the three predominant religions—Brahmanism, Vishnuism and Sivaism—as three aspects of a single revelation, and adored Brahma, Vishnu and Siva as three persons of a trinity. Thus Brahmanism, originally founded on the Vedas, with the slow process of the centuries, developed into the synthetic faith that was thereafter known as Hinduism.

Even in its ascendancy Buddhism had never been more than a philosophic creed, appreciated only by an intellectual *élite* and maintained in an unstable equilibrium that was steadily yielding to the upthrust of Brahminic elements. Now on its ruins, in the eighth century of our era, was established the vast edifice of Hinduism, foursquare, impregnable.

The ingenious device by which the Brahmins adjusted to their canon a host of diverse cults had curious consequences. To justify the syncretism at which they aimed, they laid it down that at certain epochs, for the salvation of the world, each person of the trinity took it on himself to descend on earth in human form and manifest himself in various guises. And thus the priests accounted for the aboriginal deities by styling them the avatars of one or other member of the Hindu Three. Moreover, since each person of the trinity was infinite and as such might have an unlimited number of avatars, the number of gods capable of being thus accounted for was likewise infinite. The cults,

however, associated with the worship of the aboriginal gods were cruel and erotic, and even after being identified with a person of the Hindu trinity each of these was still adored in the same degraded manner, under another name. Thus the worship of those pure, heaven-born entities, the A yan gods, came to take strange, licentious forms assimilated to the cult of the dark gods. By gradual degrees orthodox Hinduism took over these obscene rites, and presently the religious artist, drawing on them for his inspiration, took to covering the walls of temples with decorative patterns of an incredible eroticism.

It certainly seemed likely that this rabble of outlandish gods, even were all regarded merely as aspects of one impersonal God, would disorganize beyond redress the religion which had taken them to its heart. Strange to say, nothing of the sort ensued.

Hindu teachers had long been conscious of the difficulty that man, a finite being, experiences in apprehending the infinity of godhead. God in his heaven is out of human focus. By humanizing one of his aspects, they scaled down the divine to the stature of humanity and men could think of God in homely terms, perceive him in familiar forms. The concept of a God made in their own image served them as "a stepping-stone to higher things." As a child, eager to draw nearer to his father, asks him, according to his whim, to play at being a horse or a locomotive, to make-believe he is his school-friend or his son, so the Hindu seeks to draw nearer to his God by picturing him according to his temperament, his sex and age, as a child or an old man, tender or stern, of male or female sex. Communion with God is so much the easier, the more

protean are his forms, the more diverse the modes of worship. Hinduism is a religion of a thousand paths, all leading to one goal ; a thousand facets, all reflecting the same God. The lover prays to Krishna, the great lover ; the raja to Krishna, King of Kings. The young wife confides her troubles to Kali, the good mother ; the warrior calls on Kali, Our Lady of the Shambles. The nun adores Durga the Terrible ; the hermit, Siva.

“ That man may have access to Him,” so a gentle Brahmin priest explained to me one day, “ God in his goodness deigns to take on every form. The open door,” he smiled, “ is a feature of our religion, which finds room for every sort of character. Even murderers, thieves and prostitutes have right of entry ; for, as they aver, our God permits them to discern in Him a motive for their deeds, even a model for their conduct.”

The priest was thinking of such clans as the Thugs or Crows whose members, fantastic as it may appear, murder and steal from religious motives and genuinely believe that, by so doing, they are pleasing God.

Without going so far as this pious Brahmin, who presumably failed to see that if you stretch your net too wide, you risk a breakage, that a religion casting off all control ceases to be a religion, and that piety is often a mere pretext—without admitting such extremes of latitude, it remains none the less true that no Hindu can fail to find in his sacred books an aspect of divinity congenial to his temperament.

Brahma, the first person of the trinity, soul and creator of the world, was hardly more than a philosophic concept deriving from the abstruse metaphysic of the early Brahmins, and as such was always far too abstract a divinity to play a part in

art or even in worship. All the emotional and popular elements of Hinduism centre round the figures of Vishnu and Siva.

Vishnu is one of the oldest gods of India. As the sun-god, he already had a place in the Vedic pantheon. His celestial attributes are indicated by the dark-blue colour of all his effigies ; dark blue is likewise the colour of his two most famous incarnations, Krishna and Rama. He is the preserving force that holds the universe together. Traditionally he is represented lying on a serpent, the symbol of Eternity ; he is in a blissful state of suspended activity, asleep, dreaming the universe prisoned in his mind. At the beginning of each cycle of creation he awakes and, incarnated in a new avatar, descends into the world of men to be their saviour. I was told that we are in the last but one of these creative cycles and that Vishnu will come down on earth but once again.

As a matter of fact, a quite considerable number of Hindus, several millions it is alleged, are convinced that the god is actually in our midst, incarnate in Mahatma Gandhi. Of the ten principal avatars of Vishnu two are supremely honoured and beloved. One of these incarnations is Krishna, a national hero raised to the rank of demigod. A tender-hearted, sensual and marvellously handsome youth of noble rank, Krishna was constrained, for political reasons, to spend a portion of his adolescence in pastoral surroundings, in the congenial company of pretty shepherdesses ; the rest of his days he passed heroically in conquest, and as a raja famous for his wisdom. The other avatar is Rama, no demigod but an authentically human hero, a paragon of chivalry and devotion to duty. Like Krishna he had a troubled youth, and on his return from exile

embarked on an adventurous career, subduing Southern India, to end his days as an exemplary monarch in his own kingdom.

Siva, the third person of the Hindu trinity, is, like Vishnu, one of the oldest Indian gods. He was identified with Rudra, the storm-god of the Vedas. Originally a personification of nature at her most dynamic, he came to symbolize in the philosophic system of the Hindus the destructive forces that lie behind creative evolution. Siva, an extremely complex deity, is represented as a naked ascetic ; his ways and deeds better befit a madman. His hair is matted, his body smeared with ashes, and he wears a necklet of scorpions. He haunts graveyards and charnel-houses, breaks for no apparent reason into ecstatic dances, and in the Himalayan monasteries practises incredible austerities. But Siva is also the god of sensuality, indeed, of lust. Sivaism condones, not to say promotes, the most outrageous orgies, and the god is represented and worshipped in the form of a *linga*, i.e. a phallus. This phallic emblem which so preposterously shocks the bashful tourist has a profound significance, an esoteric purport that is invariably misconstrued. It represents the death-bringer at one with the creative principle, the forces of destruction quickening the generative powers. Thus the third person of the trinity is a composite and universal god, in whom all the seeming contradictions of existence meet and are reconciled.

Two of Vishnu's avatars, Krishna and Brahma, took wives unto themselves. Sita the beautiful was Rama's loyal helpmate and shared his exile ; she was valorous in battle, and faithful to her husband despite the evil machinations of the King of Ceylon who coveted her beauty. By Sita Rama

had two sons, from whom every Rajput claims to be descended.

That grim ascetic Siva fell captive to the charms of Parvati, the mountain-maid. Spouse of a many-sided deity, she too is a mass of contradictions. Sometimes we see her as Kali the good mother, sometimes as Kali the Ghoul ; now as a smiling, girlish bride, and now as Durga the Hag, a hideous phantom haunting graveyards. Ultimately Kali is less to be regarded as the wife of Siva than as an outward manifestation of his inherent energy, personified in female form so as to be the more effectively reunited with him in the act of love.

Her son, Ganesh, was in his childhood victim of a mishap. A legend tells that on a certain day when Siva and Parvati were engaged in one of their tempestuous " mountain-shaking " embraces, the little boy disturbed them. Without looking round, Siva picked up a sword lying beside him and slashed off the intrusive head, not knowing whose it was. Parvati, however, had recognized her son, and burst into tears. Siva swore to her he would atone for his mistake and fix on his son's shoulders the head of the first living creature he discovered sleeping west-to-east or east-to-west. He roamed all India on the quest only to find that every human being on the continent without exception slept in the north-south alignment. Only an elephant could be found sleeping in the desired position. And so, to keep his promise to his wife, he took the elephant's head and joined it to the body of his son. This is the origin of that charming, if rather pathetic, figure, Ganesh, to be seen at every turn in India, in statue and in painting ; his human body inconveniently offset by an elephant's head, eyes twinkling with mischief, trunk dangling debo-

nair upon an ample paunch. As a combination of the two most intelligent created beings, Ganesh is the tutelary god of literary men and intellectuals ; also, I believe, — and aptly enough — of *gourmets*. Another of his functions is that of a good genius, bringer of luck to every undertaking. And on house-doors above the lintel, on the thresholds of bazaar-shops, I saw this amiable mascot everywhere enshrined.

Two great historical epics, committed to writing, it would seem, at the beginning of our era, but actually of far more ancient origin, going back to the period of the great Aryan migration, describe the rise of Hinduism and the temper of its pioneers.

The Ramayana, one of these epic poems, deals with the adventures of Rama, his love for Sita the Beautiful, and his misfortunes—symbolizing the Aryan conquest of Ceylon. The other epic, the Mahabharata, describes the internecine warfare of the Aryan clans ; in their battles for possession of a kingdom Krishna often intervenes. On the traditional theme the poets embroidered all sorts of episodes, and the poem in its present form is a veritable encyclopædia. These two Hindu “ Old Testaments,” and the hymns that followed them, show how strikingly akin were the conceptions of Vishnu and Siva. A brief résumé would do scant justice to the lofty doctrines associated with these deities, and I will confine myself to a single illustration of the teachings of Krishna, and another of the Siva cult ; these may serve to indicate the noble spirituality of the Hindu faith, which in a certain class survives unblemished to our times.

To a monarch reluctant to engage a battle which must, he knew, involve the loss of many lives, Krishna made the following exhortation :

“Thou art compassionate where pity has no place. Neither for the thing that lives, nor for the thing that dies, has the wise man compassion. There can be no destroying that which is ; of that which is not no existence. All that is born is doomed to die ; whatever dies shall live again. With what is ineluctable pity has no concern. In the eyes of him who has attained detachment, nothing in this life below is good or ill.”

In the Sivaic hymns the god is often described as dancing in a charnel-house. This conception implies far more than a sinister survival from an ancient aboriginal cult of some dark jungle power, half god, half devil, capering in demoniac frenzy round a funeral pyre. Rather, the quintessence of Hinduism at its purest is implicit in this symbol. The ever-changing patterns of the dance figure forth at once the flight of time and the rhythmic ebb and flow of cosmic energy : creation, conservation, destruction, incarnation and release. By dancing in a charnel-house, the god expresses heroic pessimism, while such ecstatic joy, born of destruction and abiding in the house of death, bespeaks a ruthless optimism. A creed transcending optimism and pessimism alike ; “mankind dancing, dancing through tears and laughter.”

In both cults alike we find the spirit of man exalted beyond benevolence and cruelty, beyond being and not being, into an empyrean of Nietzschean calm.

And yet, I asked myself, was not this high enlightenment deriving from the Hindu scriptures, glimpses of which I caught in conversation with Brahmins and cultured princes—was it not exclusively the apanage of an *élite* ? Once, perhaps, in the distant past, the inner significance of Hinduism may have been “understood of the people,” but nowadays what do the masses make of its exalted teachings ?

So, on leaving Panna, I went to Benares, one of the holy places most popular with Hindu pilgrims. By mingling with the crowd I hoped to ascertain what their religion had come to mean to the general mass of Hindus.

CHAPTER XIV

BENARES : THE CITY OF HOLY SQUALOR

WERE I asked to make a plan of Benares, I would begin by drawing two parallel lines fairly close together across a sheet of paper, from West to East, to show the sacred river. South of these parallels my map would be quite blank ; the right bank of the Ganges is an empty plain. On the North, however, I would have a complicated pattern to fill in : first, a frieze of thin, short down-strokes almost touching, like the hachure-lines on maps contouring mountain ranges, and meeting the river at right angles ; then, woven into them, a medley of tangled loops and crosses, of truncated strokes and tiny circles. This curious pattern, confusing as a futurist fresco and forming a wide band along the river, would give an adequate idea of the lay-out of Benares city. A little above the band, however, order would reign in the symmetrical rectangles and noble squares of the cantonments. Then—as a happy afterthought—well to the left, in the white space below the river belt, I would add a dainty little circle all by itself : the Maharaja's palace.

The British Administration, following its usual practice in respect of pilgrim-cities, has taken Benares under its immediate control, withdrawing the city from the Maharaja, who has had to shift

the capital of his state to Rajpura, some ten miles off. There he has built a delightful little palace in the midst of handsome grounds. The walls are colour-washed and the interior has the merit of being typically Indian in the disposition of the rooms. Some of the reception-rooms, thanks to the total and commendable absence of furniture, are pleasing to the eye. But the huge room which an equerry informed me was the Great Hall of Audience was a disappointment ; it was carpeted with twenty-nine tiger-skins, laid down in two neat rows, the tails towards the walls, the red mouths gaping in a toothy grin, the glass eyes and moth-eaten ears pointing towards the centre of the room. On the walls hung colour-prints, the portraits of fifteen contemporary Indian rulers. A large chair of wood and ivory, not without a certain dignity, throned it in the middle of the room ; but in the four corners, on gilded consoles of the Napoleon III period, were clocks pent in glass domes and twinkling with mechanical toy figures jiggling to and fro.

Like all Maharajas, he of Benares has his private zoo. An Officer of State wanted to present me, on behalf of his sovereign, with a baby lion—an embarrassing gift which I had to decline.

Unless the solitary European hotel and a group of English hutments round it are to be deemed a town apart, there is only one Benares, the native city. In point of fact quite small and narrow, it stretches along the river-bank for a considerable distance—which gives it an air of vastness. Ramshackle temples and squalid houses rise in a maze of winding passages and blind alleys where skinny cattle roam ; streets that without exception come to a dead end at the river. From dawn to dusk, the

city spews upon the river-bank a flood of holy men and beggars and, notwithstanding, all day long is teeming full of them.

One morning very early, I took a boat and dropped down the sacred river whither for three thousand years the devotees of Brahma have come to pray. Tall buildings dominate the left bank, the palaces erected by maharajas for their residence on pilgrimage to Benares, and to receive them if, feeling their last end near, they can steal a march on death and gaze with dying eyes upon the holy waters. They hope thus to achieve the ambition of every pious Hindu, release from the sad round of transmigration. As a matter of fact, these stately residences remain closed year in, year out. Somehow their royal owners never manage to come to Benares to die, or even to do worship there as their faith enjoins. Most of them, indeed, have never set eyes on the palaces erected by their forefathers, those haughty monarchs who could not bring themselves even at the hour of death, even beside these waters of equality, to waive the privilege of caste, but, for the last act of contrition and humility, insisted on surroundings of palatial splendour. Between the vast, imposing palaces of the Jaipur and Indore dynasties, nestle in derelict confusion smaller edifices, rubbing shabby shoulders with brand-new houses. Here and there a nest of temples looms above the houses, and these in turn are overshadowed by a mosque. In ragged poverty or pretentious pride the serried mass of buildings comes cataracting down upon the steps and terraces that flank the foreshore crawling with a tangle of white worms, the bathers. Men and women bathe with strict decorum ; when entering the water or washing their garments and their bodies,

never do they allow a glimpse of unconventional nudity.

Sometimes a girl stepped forth from the water, the drenched veils clinging to the young, lithe form, and I saw her standing on the topmost step silhouetted like a figure on a Grecian urn against the level morning rays, with her long *sari* falling from her breasts in stiff, straight folds.

Suddenly the air was fever-hot ; on the white marble steps the heat must have been still more intense—I saw that strips of matting had been hoisted up everywhere as awnings, on the ends of poles planted in the river or wedged in crannies of the palace walls. Under these primitive parasols people were sleeping, praying, chattering in groups. Seen from a distance, the *ghats* (as these flights of steps leading down to the river are called) were beginning to resemble a crowded beach—where, however, every woman was modest, and there were many bathers but no swimmers. After descending the *ghats* the devotees waded out waist-deep into the stream. First they splashed water over their heads and eyes, then, cupping their hands together and filling them with water, held it up in front of them like an oblation and let it slowly trickle through their fingers. “I give Thee my uncleanness and, washing this my body, do Thou wash my spirit clean.” After the prayer they immerse themselves completely.

The water is surprisingly clean. Down-stream, where the line of buildings ends, washerwomen were at work. Their technique, if violent, is simple. First they plunge their washing in the river, and, after wringing it out, belabour with it the stones in front of them. It looks as if they were trying to pulverize the flagstones with the garments that imprudent Europeans have confided to them.



*In ragged poverty or pretentious pride, a mass of buildings dominates
the foreshore*

BENARES: THE CITY OF HOLY SQUALOR

Two stone elephants, face to face, guarding the entrance of the shrine

JHALAWAR: FORENOON

We passed some heavy barges laden with logs, moving up-stream. Presently they tied up on the foreshore beside a group of knolls with blackened summits. They were bringing fuel for cremations, and the knolls were the famous burning-*ghats* of Benares.

"A good many Europeans whom I accompany," our escort, one of the Raja's suite, remarked to me, "seem shocked by our practice of burning the dead."

"I don't see why they should be," I replied. "You believe the soul leaves the body at the moment of death, so there can be no point in preserving the corpse. In any case cremation is the most hygienic way to dispose of corpses, considering the climate and the teeming population of your country." A woebegone look settled on my companion's face. Thinking I had offended him by my too materialistic outlook, I hastily added: "And, of course, there's a certain dignity in the custom of immolating one's dead friends on funeral pyres. The Homeric heroes, if you remember, were cremated."

"You mistook my point," he said. "What Europeans have against us is not that we burn our dead, but that we burn them in the open—in public view. I was in Paris when the late Maharaja of Gwalior died. Your government refused to provide an open place where we could give that noble monarch the last honours of a funeral pyre. We had to take the body to that horrible crematorium of yours, Père La Chaise—a sordid, mechanical incinerator. It was all so dreadfully sordid that when the ashes were brought back to India we burned them anew on a great pyre and, according to our custom, the High Priest of Gwalior State conveyed them here and strewed them in the river."

He paused for a moment, then continued. "You think the ceremonial we observe in disposing of our dead is a barbarous survival. But, let me tell you, if the family of the dead man has the means for it, the pyre is built of precious sandal-wood. When the body has been laid on it the youngest or eldest of the sons or the dead man's next-of-kin conducts the funeral rite. The mourners march seven times round the pyre, intoning the following prayer—a noble one in my opinion : ' O Thou who hast no longer any home on earth, or in the waters, or in any place, seek not again the garb of flesh, but go thy ways there where our ancestors have gone before us. Follow the path of silence where the Sun wanders in quest of the eternal verities. Go where the gods await thee. Now shall thou play on the flute of silence, and, as for us, we will sing, for death is purified by song.' Then they light the pyre and stay there till the body is consumed."

The officer accompanying me explained that thin corpses take seven or eight hours to burn, whereas the fat ones are consumed in four. The ashes are placed in a water-jar which is carried to the river-bank and broken above the water. And as the stream bears away the ashes, members of the family murmur over them an ancient invocation : " Borne on these brown waters, go thy way with Holy Ganges unto the heaving bosom of her men call the Sea."

In every country the common folk have an unjustified repugnance for the votaries of death, mutes, executioners and their like ; the Indians, so I gathered, are no exception to the rule. They despise, not the grave-diggers—for there are none—but the " stokers " so to speak, the men who pile the faggots, kindle the pyre and tend the flames, and

reproach them with making money out of others' sorrows.

I spent a week exploring Benares. I loitered in the streets behind the blocks of houses, along the river-banks, about the little squares that open out from alleys splashed with the fresh blood of goats slain in the early hours before the Golden Temple—the only temple of any architectural opulence surviving in this city so callously maltreated by the men of Islam. Not only did they raze the buildings to the ground but, adding insult to rapine, employed the fallen stones to build their mosque above the *ghats*. I stood beside the entrance of this temple in a shady by-street along which gaped like vents of sewers a row of noisome booths where Siva's phallic emblem and sandal-wood rosaries were exposed for sale. Peeping across a cranny in a wall, I saw a sanctuary uproarious with frantic devotees grouped round a flame that rose and sank spasmodically like the lust of the licentious deity it symbolized. Entering another temple, I found women garlanding monstrous phalli with flowers, sprinkling them with cold water, pressing their brown lips to them. Seven days that seemed as many centuries I roamed Siva's city, lost in a nightmare world of labyrinthine alleys coiling round shrines and houses in attenuated spirals like tangles of intestines gnawed by vermin. And I saw none but loathsome faces, grotesquely painted, tattooed with symbols, mutilated and misshapen ; I saw only bodies smeared with cow-dung, covered with painted effigies and with ashes ; obscene mendicant lepers flaunting on their scabbed and peeling stumps the foul disease ; self-immolated victims roasting, impaling, quartering themselves—to please their god.

And the pity of it is that these poor witless

creatures think themselves nearest to their religion when they are farthest from it. Of the two hundred and fifty million Hindus how many are like this rabble of Benares, lost in the night of error, duped by false shepherds, maddened by fiery heat and grinding poverty, devotees of a religion that has gone rotten, deteriorated out of recognition ! And what is behind it all but ignorance and disease, pride and madness, and hysterical sensuality, perverse lust for suffering and gloating over pain ?

Christian missionaries are doing noble work amongst them, and their heroic efforts are meeting with success—despite the gibes of those who point out that their converts hail from the lowest class exclusively, from the Untouchables. These short-sighted critics seem to have forgotten that the earliest Christians, too, were Roman slaves. But, even if we rule out the help the pioneers of a new faith may bring, surely the least these poor benighted folk could do would be to follow the precepts of their own religion, as it was in the beginning.

Some holy men, in their efforts to acquire the habit of the meditative life, practise disciplinary exercises and remain for long periods in complicated postures, hoping thus to subdue their carnal appetites, to master the infirmity of the flesh. Others seek the same end by way of penance ; chilly mortals go stark-naked, those who dislike heat light fires beside their bodies, while others who are afraid of pain lie down on beds of spikes. The object of this ruthless discipline is to ensure attainment of the contemplative state ; suffering for its own sake has never been enjoined by the Hindu canon.

In the ancient scriptures an epithet of Kali is Bhadra Kali, the “ black benign.” For the warrior

class she was the goddess of battles ; for all alike, the Good Mother. She is portrayed as a dancer, for the dance is the only adequate expression in æsthetic form of the notions that she stands for : Time, and serial movement.

In early days the priests, like the Roman *haruspices*, sacrificed goats before her image and, according as the victim fell to the right or to the left, decided if the enterprise for which they sought her guidance was *fas* or *nefas*. But never did the Hindu religion call for bloodshed, or take to its bosom this bloodthirsty goddess whose cult I sometimes saw attended by rites of hideous cruelty.

Siva, after his retreat from the world, clad himself only with snakes and scorpions. I have explained above the esoteric meaning of his symbol—an object not in the least disgusting in itself, and, taken as an emblem, assuredly less nauseating than the squeamishness of certain Western creeds. And of this Nietzschean philosopher they have made a god of sensuality ! Thus, too, in an earlier age pious virgins consecrated their lives to God, and as his mystic brides participated in the service of his temples. Those nuns of olden time are prostitutes to-day.

The innumerable statues of the gods are merely so many connecting-links between man and his Maker, enabling him to fix his mind on deity—as indeed they are in all religions. And what right have we to scorn these worshippers of rough-hewn images or mere upended stones, since through these humble *media* they come in touch with God ? Yet nowadays, it cannot be denied, many Hindus have come to adore these effigies as idols.

Krishna, the god, ate with untouchables, loved all mankind. He would not have prohibited

Hindus from sitting at table with Europeans, or forbidden outcastes access to the temples, as is done to-day.

That noble philosophic system of the past, the Hindu faith, if for a chosen few its beauty has survived intact, seems to have lost its power for good amongst the populace at large. What has changed it? Why has it become for the masses what it now is? Questions that admit no certain answer. As possible explanations of this falling-off, we may invoke the gradual decline of religious sentiment, the ignorance of the people now that no one takes thought for their enlightenment; and, above all, the low moral standard of the priesthood in regions directly under British rule, where zealous rajas can no longer, as in the past, see that religious practices are properly maintained.

It is hard to say if the spirit of ancient Brahmanism will ever return to breathe new life into these dry bones. The religious future of India is too closely bound up with its political future, depends too intimately on the social consequences of political reforms. One thing, however, is certain—and it is a point on which I must emphatically insist—Hinduism is not, as the majority of European and American writers have with disgusting unanimity regarded it, a religion of savages, of idolaters and debauchees. The Brahmin faith, whose historical and moral record such authors seem to have totally forgotten (if, indeed, they have ever heard of its existence), is the product of a philosophic system, lofty and enlightened beyond all cavil. Hinduism, its offshoot, as practised by a large number of its devotees, has kept unblemished the purity and idealism of its illustrious precursor. If some travellers—have any of them, one wonders, given Hin-

duism their serious and impartial consideration?—have witnessed revolting scenes, met evil-living priests, and heard obnoxious theories denounced, surely that is no reason for a wholesale condemnation of the Hindu faith. To hold the Hindus, or even Indians in general, responsible for the present degradation of their ancient religion is a pre-judgment summary to the point of rashness. To pillory modern Hinduism and all its works implies a wilful blindness to the noble idealism of its early inspiration. And unless he lies, or speaks with criminal intent, who is entitled to assert, merely because a man is ailing, that he is doomed to die?

CHAPTER XV

JHALAWAR : BOHEMIAN PURPLE

THE PRINCE IN THE TOWER

JHALAWAR State stretches alongside the main Bombay-Delhi line, roughly half-way between the two great cities, ribboning the provinces of Central India with a long strip of Rajput territory. Though its area is relatively small, Jhalawar is a rich and prosperous state, owing its affluence not only to the proximity of the railway and the fertility of the soil, but to the shrewd administration of its young monarch. His predecessor, a great traveller and a distinguished *savant*, frequently visited Europe, where he imbibed the new theories which he sought to put in practice in his state. He died some years ago, bequeathing to his son, the present Maharaja (then a young man in the late twenties), the task of carrying on his programme. The young Maharaja, who was educated in England, while continuing to administer the state on his father's progressive lines, is too much a Rajput to make any radical changes, too much the artist not to do his best to keep intact the immemorial traditions of his race, too much the poet not to impose on every project that he takes in hand the hall-mark of a very personal and striking originality.

When, on the morning of our arrival, the prodigious Hispano-Suiza which had met us at the station halted in front of the Palace in all the glory of its

four silver horns, three headlights and the mirror-lids of the two glass gun-cases clamped to the running-boards, our host came out to greet us wearing silver slippers and a long close-fitting tunic of dark green set off with emerald arabesques.

At lunch, the Maharaja sat at one end of the table, the guests along the sides. No one occupied the seat facing him ; for he punctiliously observes the ancient ordinance that no one shall be allowed to sit at table opposite the sovereign—none being worthy of that honour. Moreover, true to the traditions of Eastern courts, he has surrounded himself with courtiers and, besides the equerries and officials attached to his person, keeps an historiographer and has a court-fool always in attendance. Like all his fellow-rajahs he has his own troupe of musicians, singers and dancing-girls ; his, however, are exceptionally well selected. He has also a private company of actors who give command performances of Shakespeare's tragedies in a theatre specially built for that purpose. No more fascinating and original host can be conceived of than this artist-autocrat : a man of culture and refinement, a music-lover, a boon companion in the best sense of the term, and the wittiest of friends.

The palace is painted white, each door and window picked out with an orange border. From the central building four wings extend, flat-roofed and paved with marble, ringed round by dainty colonnades. The general effect is one of extreme lightness ; pretty, perhaps a trifle finical. Above the terraced roofs a frail tower rises, capped by a circular room like a stork's nest. This singular eyrie, the roofs and walls of which are draped with silk, and only cushions occupy the carpeted floor, the Maharaja has chosen for his music-room. I visited it one

evening when the only illumination was that of candles standing on the floor. For a while I had the room to myself. Across their crystal globes the candles spread a patina of spectral light over the silken tissues. Somehow the atmosphere worked on my imagination and, as I awaited the coming of my host, I had a curious feeling of suspense, delicious but disquieting ; the silence of the room seemed quivering with elusive melody, the harmonies of a dream-music that haunted my mind's ear, thrilling me with a mysterious sense of unseen presences.

I. THE CAPITAL •

FORENOON

Like all the towns of Rajputana, Pathan, the old capital of Jhalawar, is girdled by walls. A massive gateway opens on the surrounding countryside, a yellow flood of jungle grass and wizened shrubs surging forward to the base of the grey ramparts. One morning very early we saw this portal for the first time, gigantically looming at the end of the road that leads from the new capital to the old. Time has brought no changes to the ancient gate, which now as ever plays a friendly part in the city's daily life, proffering its welcome shade to cows prostrated by their immemorial sanctity and to the women who, as in the past, come down from their homes, clad in the traditional Rajput garb, and pass below its vaulted darkness on the way to fill their big brass chatties at the well. On the roof of the archway peacocks were sunning themselves, letting their limp plumage float like veils around them.

What with the handsome Rajput women, their queenly breasts sheathed in silken bodices, and the grandees with their high-swirling beards and mien

so arrogant that even the poorest looked a noble lord, the crowd that streamed along the narrow streets of Jhalawar behind the old grey walls could vie in picturesqueness with the populace of Udaipur.

From a house in no wise different from its neighbours came loud bursts of cheerful music.

"Is there some festival going on?" I asked. "I'd have thought it was too early for a wedding."

My surprise amused the Maharaja. "Nothing of the kind," he said. "Just go up and have a look. You think it's an ordinary house, don't you? Well, you'll see that there's a Jain temple inside."

The house, like all the others in the street, stood back from the roadway on a wide platform, on to which I stepped. These spacious thresholds of solid masonry in front of the doorways jut out into the middle of the street, like raised terraces. From where I stood beside the stone door-jamb I saw beyond the darkness of the portico an inner courtyard bathed in sunlight, and a white temple serenely luminous in the morning calm.

In the midst of a little courtyard paved with sun-bright flags, framed in the pillared darkness of a cloister two huge stone elephants twice life-size stood face to face, guarding the entrance of the shrine. Their trunks uplifted in salute shored up the golden pediment.

The band whose lively strains I had heard when I was in the street a moment past was playing now a slow, soft melody. On my left, out of sight in the cool darkness underneath the covered gallery, a choir of children was chanting liturgic psalms. Now and again a deeper voice broke through the thin, shrill chant, which for a moment paused while someone, presumably a teacher, spoke a few words of explanation, slowly articulated with an obvious effort to

make the comment clear. Then the chant began again, droning monotonously on and on.

My attention was diverted from the young Jains at their morning prayer by a woman whom I had been observing from the corner of an eye, strolling in the cloister. Now she stepped out of the shadows and moved into the sunlit courtyard ; a striking figure, statue-like, in draperies flamboyant as a cluster of bright fruit—peaches and apricots and cherries. Flame-like she glided over the dazzling marble pavement into the half-light of the narrow porch, between the sentinel elephants. Crossing the threshold, she vanished into the inner darkness of the shrine. I waited to see her come out. But she was evidently a pious soul, her devotions showed no sign of ending, and I did not see her again. Only from the hieratic gloom within there came to my ears a tinkle of bracelets, a silken sound of foot-falls on the marble floor. . . .

We left Pathan by the great grey archway and trudged through the dust of a sunken, trench-like road that wound its way through an expanse of dried-up scrub. Suddenly in front of us a sky-blue gate flanked by two small green trees hove into view,—an unlooked-for smile lighting the desert's dusty face.

Opening the gate, we made our way along a shaded path embowered in leafage. Little by little it rose clear of the cutting, on to the level. And now we were in a garden, a green oasis cool and gay with flowers, where wild peacocks, silk-plumaged like birds on Chinese screens, flashed across the sunlight.

Looking over a vast lake swathed in morning mist and, on the farther shore, fringed by green meadows, a little palace, dainty and demure,

nestled in the fraternal shade of giant trees. The doors and windows seemed so many mouths and eyes drinking in the loveliness of a young spring day. On this side and on that of the little blue gate were not only two different kinds of vegetation but two seasons of the year. An odd feature of the Indian climate is that each variety of tree keeps its own calendar ; in the midst of withered forests you find green spinneys bursting into bud. Besides the " winter-jungle " and " summer-jungle," there are unruly species that flout the seasons. And, gathering together all these charming rebels of the forest, one of the lords of Jhalawar arrayed them in this garden.

In the distance I saw crocodiles asleep. With our rifles we shot some large fish and tortoises, which naked divers retrieved from the bottom of the lake. Above our heads birds wheeled round and round the lake in tireless flight, like cyclists spinning round a track. At the end of the garden, on the foreshore, just below the ruins of an ancient keep, a dilapidated stairway stumbled down to the water's edge. Bathers were standing on the broken slabs, and in the first rays of the sun just peeping over the surrounding walls, their dark skin glowed like burnished bronze.

EVENING

It was in this garden that the Maharaja gave a farewell garden-party as a send-off for one of his court officials who was about to join a distant post. The sun was setting when we gathered at the lake-side. We had been out all the afternoon on a tiger-shoot in a neighbouring tract of jungle. The tigress we were after had been tactless enough to

violate all the traditions of *shikar* ; instead of breaking cover on the left of the guns, in front of my machan, she had turned aside and fallen to the Maharaja's rifle.

Meantime the aspect of the garden had completely changed. Now over it there brooded a dim twilight, misted with golden shadows, and the old fortress seemed to have grown larger, doubling its dark bulk in the flawless mirror of the lake. Between a saffron sky and the dun grassland the trees on the far bank etched the horizon with grey filigree : a Corot landscape, touched with Eastern colour by a string of passing camels.

It was a stuffy, ceremonious function. An array of little chairs was set out in a semicircle round us, their Louis XVI spindle-shanks boring into the soft turf ; on these the military members of the suite sat stiff as ramrods. The Maharaja, all geniality, called them up to him, chatted with them familiarly, but there was no making them unbend. The difference of caste kept them, socially speaking, at arm's length from their sovereign, and any attempt at closer contact intimidated them. The prince's efforts to put them at their ease by treating them as equals were for them a veritable torture. They were used to being ordered about by him, not to being chaffed, and when their sovereign accosted them one after the other with jocular remarks, the great bearded fellows stammered inaudible answers, dropped their eyes bashfully like timid schoolgirls.

After some vain attempts the prince gave it up as a bad job. In any case tea had been replaced by now with whisky, and a troupe of musicians sitting on the ground before him had begun to play some of his latest compositions. Wholly intent on the music, he rapped out orders correcting their

interpretation, hummed the melody or explained to us the *leit-motifs* of his work ; his ruling passion had once more subdued the ruler.

A blind singer came forward and seated himself in front of a trio of instrumentalists. One of them from a two-stringed violin drew flute-like sounds, the second played on a small harmonium fitted with hand-bellows like an accordion, the third drummed on a tambourine with thumbs and palms alternately. With outstretched arms, unmoving, his pale eyes raised to the black vault of sky where one by one the stars were glimmering forth, he wailed and shrieked his soul out, jarring the silent dusk with raucous cries of agony. It was, according to the ancient Indian custom, a song without words ; instead of words the singer merely uttered the names of the leading notes played on the instruments accompanying him. The song evoked a specific theme, but, as it was not trammelled by the words of a libretto, the hearer's imagination was left free to interpret it according to his mood. I heard sequences of notes and chords wholly unfamiliar to my ears. "The Indian scale," the Prince informed me, "is infinitely richer than yours." And he explained that between the black and white notes of the European keyboard the Indian gamut admits a host of intermediate tones. An Indian musician has, so to speak, a copious range of colours on his palette—grey-whites, grey-blues and pinkish-greys, tones dark as night or spectre-pale—which his prodigious skill enables him to blend in subtle nuances of sound.

The Eurasian butler replenished my glass. Some women—their faces were as repulsive as their voices ravishing — sang ancient Indian "hymns," the words of which were strangely sensual. Then the

blind man came back and knelt in front of us. With the same agonized air he began to clap his hands in time to the beating of the tambourine, singing love-songs with a dramatic fervour that masked the lack of inspiration.

Night had fallen on the garden. I could not see the faces of my neighbours, but I could hear them now ; with the darkness they had found their tongues, it seemed. Suddenly the blind man stopped singing ; the Maharaja had made a move. He exchanged farewells and garlands of roses with the officer who was going away. Personally, I was already garlanded ; two strings of carnations hung round my neck. Someone handed me a basket of jasmine.

At the bottom of the garden the car awaited us, banked up with roses and orange-blossoms ; we might have been returning from a Carnival of Flowers.

NIGHT

Through the warm darkness, in a cloud of flowers, we sped towards Pathan. It was a firework display given by a worthy Mahometan to celebrate his son's wedding that brought us back to the old Rajput city, which we had already visited in the morning. At the city gate policemen in khaki shirts and shorts started to run in front of our headlights, clearing our way across the crowd which, like a cornfield flattened by the wind, bowed to the royal progress.

An aged Mahometan was waiting for us on the doorstep of his modest home, trembling with gratitude that his lord had deigned to visit it. After kissing the Maharaja's knees he drew himself up

quickly and slipped a wreath of roses round his neck. Then he hastened towards us, embarrassed by the thought that he had kept us waiting for our meed of flowers.

All kowtows and smiles, he backed up a ramshackle staircase leading directly from the street on to his roof. His look confessed dismay that for the occasion he had nothing better to offer than these broken steps and crumbling walls, of which his open, outstretched hands seemed to be making us free. He had covered his dusty terrace with large carpets and set out three chairs, or thrones, one for the Maharaja, two for us. His servants were humbly crouching in a corner, clasping bottles of whisky and piles of cakes with which, as soon as we were seated, he served us with his own hands.

The terrace was very dark ; the street it overlooked still darker. I saw it less than felt its presence close at hand below the balcony, dense with a surging crowd. A burst of cheering for the Maharaja welled up from the darkness, and other cheers broke out just opposite ; evidently there were people posted on the house-tops in front. There were eddies of laughter, fitful cries—an atmosphere of tense expectancy. Something was “in the air” ; the feverish suspense that, in a theatre, precedes the rising of the curtain.

Suddenly there was a hiss, a splutter, and a flame leaped from an extended fist. A ball of fire zoomed up the sky and, bursting, scattered in a golden shower. And, with the first rocket, linked to its ascent, the curtain of the night rolled up into the vaulted darkness, discovering the stage all set.

It was a *décor* of a gala at the Opera that opened out to our dazzled eyes. The street served as a stage, the house-fronts as proscenium, while an

old Hindu temple supplied the backcloth. In the bursts of blinding flame every detail of the scenery stood out, pitted with black shadows at the openings of the narrow streets, faceted with broken lights upon the open spaces. And never for an instant was the scene unchanged. Sometimes a rocket flooded with sudden light the ancient temples, where every possible standing-place was crowded with sightseers clustering in the parvis and along the balconies, massed on the roof, perched on towers and belfries, hanging on the crenellations ; like leaping fires the vivid Rajput costumes flashed out from the dark grey stones. Now and then the flames lapsed into darkness, a mass of serried shadows loud with peals of laughter when a rocket, gold-tasselled like a comet, sprayed the roof with tiny red-hot cinders.

Golden cascades were breaking from the flank of one of the houses, where an elaborate set-piece had been touched off. Swivelled on bamboos, catherine wheels turned in dizzy orbits. Two rockets, racing neck to neck towards the zenith, baulked in mid-course and scattered earthwards in a rain of stars.

The old Mahometan had retreated to a corner of the terrace whence he could get a comprehensive view of the festivities and at the same time keep a near eye on his sovereign's comfort. Behind each chair he had posted servants holding large fans, who slowly swept the warm night air to and fro against our ears. Somewhere in the darkness he had hidden away a little orchestra of muffled tambourines and violins. Now he came forward and plied us with whisky and exotic wines, with cakes and salted appetizers. He hung flowers round our necks, heaped our hands with fruit, and slipped a flattering phrase into each of his remarks.

The old man came up to me again. It was too dark for me to make out what he had in his hand but I could see him like a bearded Gandhi or a domesticated Ali Baba standing before me, his brown garment wrapped around him toga-wise, baring one puny shoulder and two skinny arms, his wizened chaps all seamed, grotesquely hirsute, puckered with mischievous delight. Surely that dwarf-like figure had stepped out of a fairy-tale, the story of that old man of the mountains who never came with his fellow-gnomes to the baptism of the fairy princess because he was much too old, lived too far off, and the rats which drew his coach were always playing truant, watching the moonbeams dancing on the mountain rills.

“Your presence, honoured guest beloved of my dear sovereign, sheds more lustre on my humble house than any of these lights. Like this attar let my gratitude anoint your hands.” From two phials he let fall upon my fingers some drops of scented oil.

The festivities continued, on a prodigal scale ; they had been going on for days, and more were to follow. For according to Indian custom, nothing may be spared, no largess stinted, where a wedding is concerned. It must be spectacular to the point of ostentation, and a single entertainment such as to-night's, however lavish, would be considered quite inadequate. A costly practice, not to say ruinous, for it is rarely that the bridegroom or his family can find the ready money ; to keep their social status, modest though it be, they are obliged to fall back on professional money-lenders. Loans are forthcoming at fantastic rates of interest, and to pay them off the unhappy debtors have to slave all their lives, to count with every anna—and very often die before they have shaken off the load of

debt. The usurer or his heir visits the liabilities of the fathers on the children, who in their turn, forgetting the financial straits in which their fathers' prodigality has involved them, have once more recourse to the same blood-suckers, and for the same purpose. We sometimes read of cumulative sentences passed on old offenders, the years of which exceed by far the span of mortal life ; not otherwise their birthright of accumulated " wedding-debts " dooms countless Indians to hereditary poverty, to worse than lifelong toil.

I could not help thinking of the poor unborn wretch who half a century hence would still be sweating his soul out to pay off some Bombay Shylock for the whisky with which to-night, at his parents' wedding, his grandfather was replenishing my glass.

II. UP-COUNTRY

THE LEVEL CROSSING

It had been raining heavily before we came to Jhalawar. The water-pools were full, the rivers had begun to flow again. Now that water was almost everywhere available, the tigers had resumed their roving habits of the monsoon season. Every evening reports came in to the Chief Forester announcing their presence in one tract or other of the State, but that was the end of it ; the next day brought no confirming message. And it is futile going after an unlocated tiger. However, one day the news was more encouraging ; it seemed fairly certain that a couple of tigers had returned to the place where they usually laired, on the outskirts of two villages. One morning we set out with the Maharaja in quest of them. He himself took the wheel of the car—a

tin-pot little conveyance—and we followed a jungle track worn down by the wheels of bullock-carts to some semblance of a road.

Our first halt was at Bawani Mundi, a village that owes its prosperity to the railway company which has given it a station, and to the grain and cotton interests of the district which use it as a trading centre. The Prince and his suite camped in a rich Bombay merchant's bungalow in the midst of an orange-grove. The bungalow was too small to hold the rest of us and we stayed in a small rest-house beside the permanent way, used by railway officers on tour when they halted at the little station.

The railwaymen's quarters consisted of three dark, bare, cell-like rooms, which, though the windows had been blocked to keep the sun out, were always sweltering hot. They gave on a cemented porch abutting on a lean-to full of lizards and pigeons, where I installed my camp-bed. Under the rustic tester of its thatched roof I spent a restless night, harassed by passing trains that filled my dreams with eldritch shrieks or waked me with a start.

How much more agreeable were the four consecutive nights I spent some ten miles from the railway rest-house, at the foot of a barren hillside, where, perched on a tree-top, I waited till the hapless buffalo tethered below should tempt forth the local tiger! During three months and more he had found there every other night a buffalo awaiting his regalement. On the first three nights my tiger failed to put in an appearance; on the fourth he kept the tryst.

That night as usual I was marooned on a raft of wattles moored to the topmost branches. A thermos flask of coffee lay beside me and my only companion was a very tedious State Official. Once my fellow-

sportsmen had moved away, the crows paid their invariable visit, pecking the head of the fifty-ninth buffalo, and sipping water from the bucket placed beside him—for the tiger's benefit, not his. They dawdled on till it was dark, hopping and croaking round the tethered victim, fluttering to and fro, then all at once took wing towards the hills. There I could hear them carrying on their confabulations from tree to tree till they had talked themselves to coma and yawped a last "Good Night." No sooner did the crows fall silent than it was the jackals' turn to start their concert. From every side, in the far distance and just below my feet, broke out their frenzied chorus, ending as suddenly as it had begun. And now I entered on my vigil in utter darkness, in the vast silence of the night.

On a machan the first few hours pass quickly and easily enough. I had learnt how to stretch my legs without making the dry leaves rustle, to open noiselessly the thermos flask, and to control a cough by promptly switching my mind off on to some other subject. Towards two or three in the morning the effort to keep awake becomes more arduous. Lying on my back, I gazed up at the stars ; after three nights' *tête-à-tête* I recognized some of them as old acquaintances. I tried to stave off sleep by the romantic expedient of mentally broadcasting tender thoughts to friends at home. But with the passing hours I grew less certain if I had these astral colloquies under my control ; were they not rather due to the light-headedness I felt insidiously gaining on me in the struggle to keep awake ? My limbs were aching at every joint, intolerably, absurdly. By three a.m., what with the frantic tension of suspense, the silence and the darkness, my nerves had all but gone to pieces.

Suddenly the blood began racing through my temples in wild, rapid pulsations. I felt my muscles taut, my nerves tingling with a delicious thrill. From below, only a few yards away, there came a sound—there was no mistaking it—the sound of an animal drinking. At the same moment I heard the panic-stricken buffalo pawing the ground and panting violently. Prudently I drew myself up and, leaning forward, brought my eyes to the opening in the leafy curtain where two branches had been drawn aside, leaving a sort of loophole. But I could see nothing, the darkness was too intense.

The buffalo had ceased straining at the leash ; I could visualize him petrified with terror. The only sound that reached my ear was the lapping of the tiger. He drank noisily, gluttonously. Now and then he stopped drinking and in a series of little snorts ejected the water he had drawn up into his nostrils. He could not be more than ten yards away—but where exactly was he ? Where was his head ?

I brought my rifle to my shoulder and, keeping it steady with one hand, felt for my companion with the other—to signal to him that I wanted him to turn his electric torch upon the tiger. And then—at that crucial moment the climax of the long night's drama crashed in bathos, let down as so often happens by a trivial, stupid failure of the human element. Like an unfaithful sentry, the officer beside me had fallen asleep at his post. No sooner did I touch him than he woke with a start and, heavy still with sleep, oblivious to his surroundings, started coughing ! And, as if that were not enough, he must needs speak ! Seeing the rifle at my shoulder, he blurted out, " What's up ? "

Quick came the answer, a gruff snarl from below. That, anyhow, enlightened him. He snapped on

the torch—too late. The little round of pallid light showed up only a buffalo, an abandoned pail of water. A formidable roar detonated somewhere on our right ; then another roar, remoter, unalarming. The tiger had vanished into the darkness.

At that moment I realized how it feels to want to kill a man.

After a little while, it seemed the darkness was growing less opaque. It was the hour before daybreak, the interval of deathly silence when in the jungle nothing stirs, when its four-footed denizens pause on their ways, when birds will soon be calling a reveille to the sun.

Dawn came. My last hope died. Now there was no chance of the tiger's return. The sun peeped over a hill-top. Night-dew glistened on the barrel of my gun. And, with the glow of the first rays, I suddenly realized that I was bitterly cold. Now was the time when the Indian peasant goes forth to tend his beasts, while the housewife meditates beside the embers ; when the Maharaja holds a Privy Council, or starts out on a shoot ; when his European guest, bending above the early breakfast laid near his bed upon the house-top, wonders why he is not feeling in the least tired or sleepy.

And it is, too, the hour of pardoning. I found it easy to forgive the poor little subaltern who, while we waited for our elephant, was collecting with a contrite, shamefaced air the rifles which, thanks to his bungling, had not given tongue. Under the roseate promise of that dawn impossible to nurse a grievance !

As for the tiger, after having been driven out of his hiding-place in the jungle by five hundred beaters, he met his end two days later in broad daylight at the foot of the very tree where I had awaited him.

THREE OR MORE MUSKETEERS

Our next halt was fifty miles from Bawani Mundi, at Dug on the frontier of Kotah State. We pitched our tents behind the thick walls of its ancient keep. This massive fortress rises superbly in the depths of a jungle where, so we were informed, four very large tigers had been lairing for a week.

No railway serves this region, nor has Progress, after Death the greatest leveller, laid its flattening hand on the rugged outlines of the old citadel.

The little village, crouching in its tutelary shadow, has kept intact its trim simplicity. Each of the houses opens on a terrace, a trellised balcony floats from every window, the streets are tidy as a well-swept parquet. By night the criss-cross of flat, terraced roofs looked like a vast grey net spread out along the ramparts' base. A yellow glow of oil-lamps hung on gable-ends flickered at the corners of the empty streets. One had glimpses of poor folk huddling in dark recesses, and now and again a mysterious figure, carrying a sword that jerked up at each step the edges of his cloak, would stride forth from a house and, swaggering through a lamp-lit square, evoke preposterously a Dumas hero. In fact, as seen thus from the bastions, Dug looked like an ancient hamlet sleeping in the darkness of a mediæval night.

Like the inner courtyards of old feudal keeps, that of the citadel was always thronged with market-carts and post-horses, with men-at-arms and bearded henchmen who kept watch, singing or sleeping round us, day and night. Pitched in a corner of the yard, our tents showed dazzling white against the old grey walls. Between their somnolent forms and the great entrance gate, where,

sprawling on a bench under the feeble rays of a smoky lantern, the watchmen drowsed the night away, a motley concourse of singers and instrumentalists, mountebanks and jugglers, gathered each night around a fire. Eagerly they craned their necks towards the summit of the dungeon where—who could tell?—an officer might suddenly appear in an embrasure and call them up to play their turns before the monarch.

It was at the top of the tower, under the open sky, that we dined each evening with the Maharaja. Bare-headed, in a loose silk shirt and voluminous trousers billowing in countless folds above his tip-turned shoes, he bustled gleefully to and fro around a dozen saucepans and stoves in which the dinner was being cooked. All the equerries, court-fools and bandsmen were in attendance on their lord, handing him baskets of saffron, platefuls of curry-powder, strings of spices, bowls filled with red and black and yellow powders that gave off overpowering odours. Some of these he accepted, others waved away. Now and again he paused to taste a soup, or stopped whipping a cream to tell off a musician, or to clout his fool, or else to have me sample some fearsome concoction which, for my confusion, he had double-dosed with chillies. In short, the Maharaja was thoroughly enjoying himself on the dungeon terrace, and there was no resisting his ingenuous high spirits.

The court officials, constrained to follow the example of the royal *chef*, peeled vegetables with embarrassed gestures, puffed miserably at the stoves, or with diminished countenances whisked eggs. I regret to say that their woebegone airs and bilious graces struck me as merely comic. They made me think of dándified and rather priggish little subal-

terns on whom a whimsical colonel had imposed the proletarian fatigue of peeling the mess potatoes.

The belt of hills round Dug is honeycombed along its crest-line with caves vaulted like Romanesque churches and ramifying like convents in all directions. Two thousand years ago these caves were used as hermit-cells by Buddhist monks, who carved the effigy of the Teacher in the mountain-side. Then one day a giant stalagmite was discovered in the humid darkness of a subterranean grotto. Noticing that its size increased each year, the simple jungle-folk saw in the stalagmite a sign of Siva and in its constant growth a symbol of divine vitality. In awe and admiration they built a temple at the grotto entrance and converted the dark cleft where the monstrous phallus grew into a shrine. And a legend went abroad that whoever committed suicide in the temple, gazing on the sacred object, would be reincarnated in the body of a raja.

A large-eared priest who was showing me round the temple pointed out the place where a fortnight previously two youths of twenty had killed themselves with this intent. Asking me for a match, he held the flame to the black, sweating walls for me to see the traces of fresh blood. The brownish stain had not yet been effaced by the moisture trickling like tears along the clammy stone and the wisps of stifling, sulphurous vapour floating like pale wraiths in this cave of dreadful night, where young men rip their bowels open that they may be reborn kings.

We usually started out from our camp in the old fortress just before noon, the hour when heat is fiercest and the great beasts are sleeping, and travelled from three to thirty miles across the jungle. Our destination varied according to the news that

had come in as to the tiger's whereabouts. It sometimes happened that the patch of jungle where he was lurking lay in a rocky tract, on a steep hillside to which no road gave access. On such occasions we found half a dozen elephants awaiting us at the point where our cars could go no farther. Silently, swaying to the amble of the elephants, we made our way up to the "line." There, disposed according to the lie of the countryside, along a gully, facing a ridge, or near a jungle track where the grass and brushwood had been burnt to permit an unimpeded view, machans had been prepared for us in tree-tops.

One day a panther-shoot was organized in some exceptionally open country and, seated as usual on a platform tied to the topmost branches of a tree, I was able to follow the beaters' tactics from beginning to end. Like a dead land laid out beneath a pall of fire, the arid jungle rolled away into the distance, silent and desolate. The only sign of movement was very far away, over a mile off, where a thin white line of beaters was advancing down a hillside, like the first wave of an infantry attack.

They numbered four hundred, and were, as I discovered later, of every age and aspect ; little boys and greybeards hopping on crutches, half-naked coolies and soldiers in uniform. Split up into platoons, each of which had its own commander, whose task it was to keep his men in perfect alignment, they were advancing on a mile-long front. From the back of an elephant in the middle of the line the O.C. beaters directed the advance. Once the line had reached the foot of the hill and started moving through the jungle on the level, I lost sight of them. But now I began to hear their music—the clash of cymbals, roll of drums, strident bugle-calls. Now, too, I understood the little puffs of whitish smoke

that had been shooting up above the trees every five minutes ; the platoon-leaders were firing guns at regular intervals.

Nearer and nearer came the music, rolling all along the line, for the bandsmen were strung out amongst the beaters. Harmony there was none ; it was the deafening fracas of a circus marching up a village street. Louder and louder it dinned its unseen progress into my ears. But in the jungle nothing stirred. That was to be expected ; on a beat for tiger or for panther small game is rarely started by the beaters. The antelope have got wind of their enemy's presence and given a wide berth to the jungle where he lurks. Where could the panther be ? I wondered. When and where would he break cover ?

On my left was a lake. If the panther did not pass between the near bank and my tree, it would have to cross the line somewhere on the far side of the lake. In that case it would be two hundred and fifty to three hundred yards away—a hopeless distance. Not a sound came from the machans. We had been forbidden to move or speak, and even smoking was taboo.

Tense with excitement, I scanned every bush, pricking my ears up for a sound of snapping twigs. Suddenly—what was that ?—I heard a commotion in some bushes on my right. I felt my heart pounding against my ribs. With a silken rustle a great fan of blue and green plumage deployed between two clumps of yellow scrub. Only a peacock.

The heat was terrific ; sweat poured down my forehead, into my eyes. I dared not raise my hand to wipe it off. All I could do was to blink rapidly so as to keep my eyes clear. The beaters were per-

ceptibly nearer. I could even distinguish the notes of the various instruments ; amongst them a bugle terribly out of tune. A rustle of silk—another peacock—then on the far side of the lake a terrified blue bull broke cover and made off at the shambling gallop peculiar to its species, the largest of the antelopes.

“ The panther must be still about,” the Maharaja whispered. “ That blue fellow bolted as if he were scared to death.”

The beaters were now a couple of hundred yards away. I could make out the huge form of the elephant, topped by the howdah, looming above the undergrowth.

A warm breath fluttered in my ear ; I could just hear the Maharaja’s muffled exclamation : “ On your left ! ”

What did he mean ? There was nothing, absolutely nothing there. My arms were palsied with fatigue ; I had had my gun up for a good thirty-five minutes. I was on the point of turning towards him when once again there was a warm breath on my neck. “ Don’t shoot ! Too far ! ”

I felt my throat contracting with exasperation. What could he mean ? The beaters were only a hundred yards away—surely everything was over. My shoulder was numb, my eyes were smarting with the strain of staring at the jungle on my left, eye-raking every bush.

Sleek and glistening it slunk out—on the farther shore. And, in contrast with my previous experiences of big-game shooting, I had time and to spare ; in other words, the agonized suspense of choosing the moment to let fly with my two barrels. One shot smashed the panther’s shoulder. Promptly the Head Beater on his elephant followed up its

trail. The great cat had struggled forward only ten yards. . . . It lay there, dead.

Ladders shot up from the ground. We climbed on to our elephants and made our way back to the motor-park where the turbaned chauffeurs were awaiting us. A light lorry had disgorged its load in the shadow of a tree that had somehow kept its greenness. On a huge carpet tea was served, with a prodigious variety of cakes and crystallized fruit. Ten or a dozen servants from the palace staff handed round whisky, cocktails, twenty different kinds of cigars and cigarettes. Some fifty yards away the band and singers who had followed in another lorry discoursed exotic music.

Reclining on the cushions, an ice-cold whisky-and-soda in my hand, I heard the strange eastern melody, poignant as a dirge, rising in the soft evening air, and watched the sun decline in purple splendour through a haze of golden dust into the red sea of the leaves.

On our way back we found groups of women waiting for us at the entrance of each village. As soon as the Maharaja's car came level with them, they held towards him a brass pot wrapped in green leaves and filled with water, into which the prince dropped silver rupees.

"It's an old Rajput custom," he explained to me. "In the old days when there were no motor-cars, a raja going on a shooting expedition or visiting a neighbouring court always travelled on horseback. On his way back the women of the villages through which he passed went out to meet him with bowls of water. It's thirsty work, you know, galloping for hours under a blazing sun. He rewarded their kind offices by tossing a coin into the bowl from which he had drunk. This custom

has been kept up in respect of tiger-shoots and panther-shoots. If the shoot has been successful, I always stop and drop a rupee into each pot. But if we've drawn blank or the tiger has got away, I shout to them to let them know we've had no luck—they never insist." And he added with a smile : " I hope that every day you're in my company the women in my villages will have occasion to hold out their bowls of water."

And nearly every day they did.

CHAPTER XVI

DHOLPUR : THE ANIMALS' FRIEND

DHOLPUR State lies in the midst of a triangle, the three corners of which are Muttra, Agra and Delhi. These famous cities, where demigods, emperors and viceroys reside, were logically bound to have an influence on the evolution of the little state adjoining them.

Krishna, when as a child he lived in hiding with the shepherd of Muttra who covertly befriended him, may well have driven the herds of his adoptive father to pasture in the Dholpur plain. In any case, even if the god-to-be in his bucolic adolescence never strayed thus far from the Jumna banks, it is practically certain that in later life he travelled through Dholpur territory several times, and performed divers miracles in this region. Some fascinating temples, gracious and serene, commemorate his journeys through this State whose sovereign and populace lead peaceable, god-fearing lives—in pious homage, perhaps, to the divinity who in those far-off days walked in their midst.

Shah Jahan, on pilgrimage from Agra to Ajmer, the Moslem holy city, passed through Dholpur State at least twice a year, and in the vicinity of the present capital he erected a long, very low palace on a margin of a lake, where he and his attendants lodged. Our host had had the crumbling walls restored, rebuilt the fallen roof; and to-day the

ancient Moghul residence mirrors the pristine beauty of its façade, as its great builder planned it, in the calm waters of the lake. We often lunched in this exquisite palace, one of the "prettiest" buildings I came across in Northern India. The dining-room windows overlook on one side a flowered close and, on the other, the vast sheet of water mottled by flights of pink flamingos and black ibises.

Like his grandson, the Emperor Akbar had a great devotion for Ajmer, whither he often made his way on foot. It was in the course of one of these pilgrimages—most likely on his way through Dholpur—that he first noticed the red rocks which are a geological feature of the region, and he forthwith decided to open quarries and have the blood-red stone extracted for the building of his new capital.

From this time on Dholpur put its crimson treasure at the disposal of the Kings of India. For the embellishment of the great cities coming into being beside its frontiers it yielded up its natural resources, transfused its life-blood, incarnadined the Moghul capitals, pale with the travail of a grandiose conception, with a red effluence of rock. Fatehpur-Sikri, Agra Fort and the great Delhi Mosque were built of Dholpur stone. And the Dholpur quarries contributed their share to the great stadium which the Maharaja of Bhawnagar recently bestowed on the New Delhi. Thus an old Moghul emperor's predilection has made the fortune of the present Maharaja.

We had met the Maharaja at Delhi, where he was on duty as Vice-President of the Council of Princes, and also at the Patiala wedding, for which he wore the famous pearl necklace I have already described.

He received us now at his palace in Dholpur City, a huge redstone building where the accommodation for each guest includes besides his bedroom, bath-rooms and a boudoir, two spacious reception-rooms and a terrace. When we arrived the Maharaja was in residence at a small secluded palace some six miles from the capital, overlooking a golf-course carved out of the virgin jungle, far from the *genus homo*, amid the creatures of the wild.

The Maharaja comes of the Jat stock, next of kin to the Rajputs. Never I have met a better storyteller. Highly cultured and gifted with no mean wit, he regaled me during our long walks together with charming legends of his country, and expounded to me some very curious theories of life. What most impressed me was his gentleness and piety ; indeed, the rule of universal charity that he practises is in the Buddhist rather than in the Hindu spirit. Though he did not go to the length of the Jains and Buddhists in his respect for life, down to its humblest form, the idea of killing animals disgusted him.

“ The big deer we call sambhur,” he once said to me, “ had come to look on men and tigers as their natural foes. I’ve cured them of that notion. This evening you’ll see them trooping to my palace to feed, like children, from my hand.”

As night was closing in, we gathered in a group in front of his residence, our arms piled with sticks of sugar-cane and flat girdle-cakes. I could hear the footfalls of animals trampling the leafy carpet of the glen below, two hundred yards away. One by one the great stags stepped forth from the coverts and filed up towards us in long lines, halting now and then to drink from the water-troughs of tessellated marble which the Maharaja has sunk in his

lawn for their especial use. The leaders were quite tame and friendly ; they came right up on to the drive to be stroked and fondled. One of the big stags even tried to nibble the pile of bread inside the car, but his tall antlers would not pass the window. Some of the others, however, stayed in the offing and dared not approach us ; for two or three months they would remain like that, the Maharaja told me, fascinated, craning their necks, in a dilemma between fear and appetite. Behind them, beyond the coverts whence the leaders had emerged, I made out with my field-glasses some fifty sambhurs careering wildly round and round, stopping abruptly to stare in our direction, then starting off again on their gyrations.

“ Those are the novices,” my host informed me. “ It’ll take them another four or five years to become as tame as these big fellows, and let themselves be stroked. But now, if you’ll come along with me, I’ll show you a tiger, the father of a large family who has been one of my *protégés* for over four years.”

As he spoke I heard a stentorian roar raking the silence of the valley. The sambhurs became suddenly alert and, quivering with nervous apprehension, pricked up their ears.

“ That’s our friend, if I’m not greatly mistaken.” The Maharaja smiled. “ The man I sent down there ahead of us must have disturbed him. But he’ll come back all right.”

“ How far off was he when we heard him ? ” I asked as I stepped into the car.

“ About a mile and a quarter. The tower from which we’re going to watch him is exactly nine furlongs away.”

A few minutes later we were coasting down a

hill, the engine idling, along a little road flanked by walls, that brought us to a tower some thirty feet high. All light had died out of the air, and a deep silence brooded on the jungle. We entered the tower on tiptoe. Looking down from a loophole I saw a hundred yards away a buffalo tethered to a peg. A powerful spotlight hung above him cast a little pool of radiance round the victim. Night after night during the past four years the Maharaja had placed a bucket of water and tied a buffalo at the foot of his tower, and had thus accustomed several tigers to dining by electric light. One exceptionally hot summer, however, his nocturnal guest decided that the water in the bucket was not cool enough for his liking and, after a little, gave up his visits. So the Maharaja had lumps of ice put in the water, and then the tiger condescended to return. One night his cubs came with him and had the frolic of their lives licking the frozen blocks and prodding them out of the bucket with their noses and fore-paws.

Soon after this the Maharaja had another inspiration—though he had to proceed by slow stages before he saw it realized. Why, he reflected, should not the tiger share the fondness of his small congener, the cat, for milk? Accordingly, he replaced the pail of water by one of milk. The tiger came as usual, sniffed the pail, but did not drink. After killing the buffalo, he made off. On the next night he tasted the milk and, as if he had suddenly discovered that the flavour was familiar and agreeable, drank it all off without the least demur. Then, licking his chops spattered with white drops, he stayed unmoving for a pensive moment. At last he made a move and slunk away. On the next three nights he came as usual and,

sated with his pailful of milk, left the buffalo unscathed. However, on the fourth night, he killed it. Then, remembering that cats like eggs, the Maharaja had a large basketful of eggs set out beside the water-bucket. When the tiger came he went straight to the milk ; then turned to the basket and made a hearty meal of eggs, after which he turned tail without giving the buffalo a glance. After the tiger had been on an egg-and-milk diet for a month, the Maharaja risked all on a throw and eliminated the buffalo. The tiger turned up as regularly as ever, and during a whole season lived blamelessly on dairy produce. What was more, he put on flesh, and never had his pelt been sleeker. But there came a baleful day when the tiger "went off" his bloodless diet, and on his way to dinner ate a shepherd as his *hors-d'œuvre*. And two days later he replaced the egg course on his menu by an old crone scrambled at the village gate.

"So of course I had to shoot him," the Maharaja admitted. "Still, I assure you, it went against the grain," he added with a smile. "But I hope to get more lasting results with the one we're going to see to-night."

Obviously there could be no knowing ; yet I must confess that when an hour later I saw the tiger greedily devouring the unhappy buffalo which had been awaiting him so patiently under the electric light, I felt little hope that the great carnivore would ever turn vegetarian.

"Did you notice how quickly he despatched the buffalo?" the Maharaja asked me. "No animal is naturally cruel. A tiger takes the offensive only when he's alarmed or hungry."

"I'd always thought one often came across the

bodies of sambhur and cattle which tigers have killed and left uneaten."

"That is so," the Maharaja conceded. 'But usually in such cases the tiger has left the kill because he was disturbed when beginning his meal. Still, I've personally noticed that tiger-cubs are apt to kill for killing's sake. Perhaps it's only by way of practice ; or isn't it, rather, because they have no pity at that age and actually enjoy inflicting pain? Animals are very like children in that respect. Didn't one of your poets say of childhood : '*Cet âge est sans pitié*' ?"

He loved animals for their sincerity, for those essential virtues that in the human race have lost their natural purity. But he loved them with discernment and drew distinctions, appreciated *nuances*. Thus he could not bear the blue bull, whose stupidity revolted him.

Much as I respected his views regarding the preservation of animal life, I saw no particular reason to refrain from going after big game while at Dholpur, and felt no qualms about taking part in the shoots he organized on my account. And admirably organized they were ! Each village had its telephone-office, each tract of jungle a game-keeper in charge of it. At sunrise the Superintendent of game-preserves collated all the reports that had come in by telephone and submitted them to the Maharaja, who chose for his guest, or asked his guest to name, the quarry of the day—a tiger, a panther or a bear. The animal was so well located that a dozen beaters were almost always enough to drive it out of cover. I did my shooting from the summit of one of the hunting-towers which the Maharaja, a keen sportsman in his earlier days, had set up in all parts of his State

—though now he uses them only as observation-posts.

The rivers flowing through Dholpur State are infested with crocodiles that line the banks like greyish logs stranded high and dry. The muscular reflexes of these animals are remarkable ; mortally wounded in the belly, to all intents and purposes dead, they always manage to crawl back into the water. Only a shot through the head can pin them to the bank.

The Maharaja asked his guests to abstain from shooting on a certain long, winding, river-like lake. I understood, and approved of, the injunction when one day he took me with him in his motor-boat for some hours' cruise on this fascinating water. The banks were lined with a dense tangle of vegetation, star-scattered with bright flowering lianas and wild bougainvilleas, and over it the leafless trees fretted the sky with a delicate tracery of branches whence the gayest, most diverse birds of India shot up like rockets through the bright air. Strings of ibises, squadrons of black ducks in " V " formation, planed high above our heads. Crimson fishes, big as pikes, leapt from the water, sometimes rising a full yard above it. On two occasions—tall as the tale may sound I vouch for it—a fish cleared our motor-boat amidships from gunwale to gunwale in one prodigious bound. Long wisps of snake-birds glided past in single file. Swimming with their plump bodies just submerged and only the long tapering necks visible above the surface, these curious ducks have the air of miniature sea-serpents. Antelope coming down to drink observed us side-face with soft almond eyes.

All these creatures lived in peace and amity, showed not a trace of fear. They seemed to look

on us as animals of a somewhat larger, but quite harmless, species. The lake suggested to my mind a backwater of Eden river—or, more prosaically, the bird-pond of a modern Zoo.

CHAPTER XVII

MOUNT ABU : THE TREASURE TEMPLE

MOUNT ABU is the summer resort, the hill-station of Rajputana. And it is also a sacred mountain which Jain pilgrims climb year in, year out, to worship at the great Dilwara temple on its summit. For me it is an evergreen memory, a memory of cool, delightful days spent at the pleasure-house of the Maharaja of Bikaner, in the company of his son, my dear and loyal friend, the Maraj Kumar.

One afternoon, coming from Delhi, we left the train at the little station of Abu Road, at the mountain's foot. May was nearly ended and the temperature had climbed to stifling-point. Through the steaming vapour-bath that was the plain we had travelled, covered with sweat and dust, bereft of speech and thought, hunched over a melting block of ice placed in the middle of the compartment. Still dazed with heat we took our seats in the car that was to convey us up a nine-mile gradient to the mountain brow.

As we left the inferno of the plain below us and behind, our feeling of oppression gradually lifted. Vegetation made a welcome reappearance. Wild rhododendrons and grey trees mottled with pinkish bark, the branches festooned with large monkeys, came to meet us. And steadily we rose into purer and still purer air, in which the nerve-racking

vibrations of the heat little by little died away. Sometimes at a bend of the road we had a glimpse of the plain we had just left spread out below, simmering in spumy heat-mist like an enormous wash-tub boiling over. From a high col onwards we had a gentle following breeze that fanned our drooping spirits into cheerful animation. Palm-trees hove into sight—it was long since I had seen them—then grassy gullies and small deep lakes cradled in rocky clefts. The sun dropped behind the mountain, the crests turned grey, then shimmered into mauve and, suddenly transformed, glowed a bright orange.

On the brow of the plateau a cluster of bungalows hospitably welcomed us into the green shade of their gardens. Half hidden under the trees, behind clumps of rhododendrons, the houses availed themselves of every undulation of the rolling tableland to perch upon an eminence. The town of Mount Abu ends abruptly at a golf-course, bordered on the nearer side by tennis courts. After the green, umbrageous woodland comes a region of little isolated hummocks overlooking lakes, or roads, or nothing in particular. On the top of each stands a house, half palace and half *château*, the summer residence of one or other of the Rajput princes who run up to Mount Abu now and again for a breath of mountain air, a respite from the climate of their states stifling in the windless plains. After Alwar's lonely castle and the romantic dungeon of Jaipur we came at last to the massive, flower-girt mansion of the Bikaners, largest and best situated of all.

THE JAIN TEMPLE AT DILWARA

Mahavira, the "Great Hero," founder of the Jain faith, was, we are told, a contemporary of Buddha and he, too, dwelt in the valley west of the Ganges in the sixth century before Christ. His doctrine, like Buddhism, is an offshoot of Brahmanism; indeed it has been said, plausibly enough, to lie midway between Buddhism and Hinduism. Like Buddhism and Brahmanism it accepts the doctrine of transmigration and, following the teaching of the Buddha, regards Nirvana as the supreme end of human effort. It also follows the two religions already mentioned in prescribing the rule of Yoga, the habit of intensive meditation promoted by uncomfortable postures of the body. For it was first and foremost a cult of asceticism; the soul defiled by worldly contacts could achieve redemption only by retreating within itself. The Jains founded a religious order which practised poverty, chastity, and charity towards all living creatures. Their monasteries and nunneries flourished over a considerable period. One of the characteristics of their noble and enlightened code of ethics was its scrupulous respect for every vehicle of life, even the humblest. I came across Jains who always walked abroad wearing strips of gauze over their mouths so as to obviate the risk of accidentally swallowing insects, each of which, however tiny, is a living creature, and, as such, shelters a soul.

"What," I asked, "what does a Jain do when he discovers fleas or lice on his body, or wakes one morning to find himself afflicted by the itch?"

"Well, strictly speaking," replied the friendly Hindu who was showing me round Mount Abu town, "he should do nothing at all. He should be

glad to know he is providing a little food for these poor, humble creatures. I have heard of convents where rooms are dedicated, so to speak, to them—flea refectories, in fact—in which charitable Jains make a point of sleeping one night every month, and stretched on verminous pallets proffer their bodies as pasture to the despised parasites.”

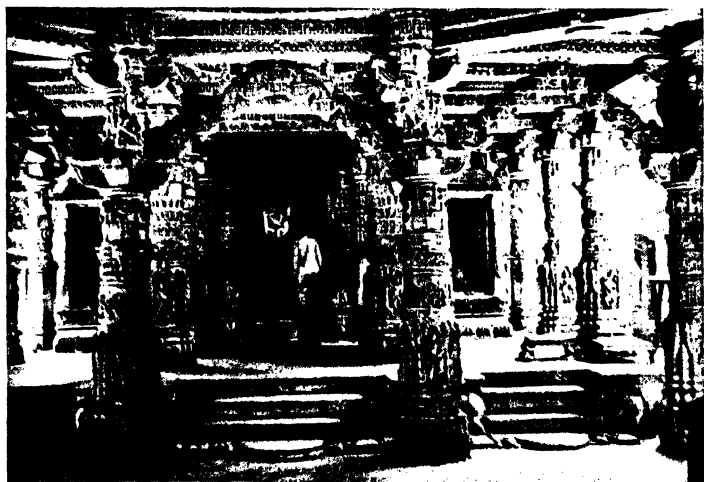
All charity and kindness, the Jains must be the meekest folk on earth. Their pacifism is absolutely sincere and, true to the principle of non-violence (exemplified in modern times by Mr. Gandhi), they never engage in conflict with the Mahometans. From the point of view of art, their gentle quietism has led to the happiest results, and the Jain temples, unlike those of the Hindus, seem to have suffered little from the violence of the Moslem conquerors.

Paradoxically enough, it is almost always the most austere religious orders, those which most strictly observe the vow of poverty, that the richest members of the population choose as recipients of their bequests. It would seem that the favoured few, hoping to make amends for their prosperity by alms-giving, deliberately select as beneficiaries the poorest of the poor ; perhaps they fancy that commerce with ascetics will imbue their sybaritic lives with a redeeming strain of mysticism. It is due to the munificence of these bequests that Jain temples, for all the austerity of the order, are built of such rich materials and possess such marvellous sculpture. The twenty-three mythical patriarchs who, in the course of ages, one by one, made a triumphal entry into the empty heaven of Jainism are portrayed in the Jain temples with every circumstance of splendour. Never did I realize this so well as on that memorable morning when

from the Bikaner palace I made my way on foot to Dilwara, most famous of Jain temples.

The temple, which cost its founder over twenty million pounds, stands at the summit of a low hill and is completely hidden from view by a row of humble, nondescript houses. Like all Jain temples, that of Dilwara keeps its treasure out of sight, embedded, so to speak, within a mass of drab and tawdry rubble. After we had wandered through a maze of narrow streets and compounds, of alleys where the flagstones were hot as fire and small covered-in courtyards where naked Indians sprawled asleep, the *durwan* who was acting as my guide touched the lintel of the door we were about to enter with his hand. I took his meaning and prudently bent my head as we crossed the threshold. When I looked up again I found to my surprise that we were in the heart of the temple.

A covered gallery shelters a row of small rooms or niches all exactly the same size, like the side-chapels in a Catholic Church. In each of them stands, mounted on a sort of altar, the statue of one or other of the twenty-three patriarchs. Half-way down the cloister is the sanctuary, the façade of which is linked up with the cloister by a peristyle. Though the temple is of limited dimensions and planned on simple, symmetrical lines, the wealth of decoration is almost unbelievable. String-courses and arches, steps and pillars, door-jambs and cloister-roof, all that is marble—and the whole temple is of marble—has been chiselled out by patient sculptors working with the meticulous precision of ivory-carvers. The vaulted roofs are faceted with veritable pictures ; here a wedding-scene or rite of offering ; there a willowy figure graceful as a Grecian nymph or a vignette culled



*Chapel-niche with one of the patriarchs enshrined
Statue-like, richly moulded pillars ; arches drooping in flounce-
like folds*

MOUNT ABU : THE JAIN TEMPLE

from Hindu folklore. With its statue-like, finely moulded pillars and arches drooping in flounce-like folds, the whole temple looks like a marvellous piece of lacework wrought in stone, to which the sun-beams glowing through the marble lend an ethereal lightness.

Entering the cloisters, I examined the niches in which the patriarchs reposed. The statues are so much alike that when a worshipper wishes to identify his favourite prophet among the twenty-three he has to begin by studying carefully the decorative patterns round each holy figure, to see if they include any of the prophet's attributes. But gradually I grew conscious of a vague feeling that something was amiss. And it slowly dawned on me that this temple could not have been originally intended for the god who now is worshipped in it. All the figures on the door-posts were of women, and it did not take me long to discover that the temple contained no decorative figures that were not female—a peculiar anomaly, to say the least of it, in the temple of an eminently chaste religion. The only male figures were the apostles' statues, and they, too, looked as if they had been installed quite recently, for the mortar at their feet was noticeably white. Moreover, the postures of the apostles had not the least resemblance with those of the other figures. Stranger still, one of the large bas-reliefs had obviously been amended so as to conform with the Jain canon. For while the upper, unaltered portion was definitely in the Hindu tradition, the lower half had been refashioned and the legs were crossed; a typically and classically Jain posture. Elsewhere, on a pillar, I saw decorative *motifs* deriving from the eating-bowl, one of the adjuncts of images of Kali. And the lotus, which persist-

ently recurred as an ornamental detail, symbolizes a notion which has always been essentially Hindu : the idea of Man raising himself above the world, as the lotus-flower above a stagnant pool, undefiled by contact with the *milieu* whence he springs.

I was told a remarkable story which suggests, I think, an explanation of this strange religious hybridism. Towards the end of the year One Thousand there lived on Mount Abu one Bimal Sha, a General in the army of the Raja of Pathan, a kingdom which occupied the region now known as Baroda. The Raja had bands of armed men who roamed the country, harrying with fire and sword, ostensibly in honourable warfare, the petty chiefs of neighbouring tribes, and despatched to him the ransoms they extorted. Their exploits smacked of piracy rather than privateering ; they were little more than highwaymen who despoiled travellers and carried off their loot to Mount Abu. Bimal Sha, the leader of these robber bands, was lord of all he surveyed from his high mountain-top. Feared and respected by his men, far from his sovereign and from any possible control, he was in fact an independent kingling. Far from transmitting his plunder in bulk to the Raja, he made a point of keeping for himself the lion's share. When his men returned from a foray, he took over the treasure they had brought with them and buried it secretly at the foot of an old fort in the vicinity, erected in former times by the State of Udaipur and bearing the proud name of Achalgarh, the Impregnable Fortress. And in the shadow of Achalgarh the treasure-hoard increased and multiplied.

One day Bimal Sha decided to build a temple ; was it out of pride—that an edifice might perpetuate his glory through the ages—or was it out of piety,

none can say. One thing is sure ; he meant his temple to be supremely glorious, and resolved to devote the treasure of Achalgarh in its entirety to its construction. But to own to sudden wealth is as risky as to confess a remunerative robbery. So Bimal Sha had to trump up a complicated story enabling him to build a gorgeous temple without having to admit the acquisition of a fortune the immensity and suddenness of which might seem, to say the least of it, suspicious.

So he announced that the goddess Kali had appeared to him in a dream and bidden him build a temple in her honour. Further, she had been kind enough to provide him with the means to do it and revealed the existence of a buried treasure at the foot of Achalgarh.

There was little to amaze an Indian, anyhow an Indian of that epoch, in this tale of a divine apparition, and it caused small sensation. On the other hand, the news of the building of a great temple and the discovery of a hidden treasure fired popular enthusiasm. Ceremonies were held to enable the priests to choose the exact spot on which the temple was to be erected. There were processions to Achalgarh ; and so explicit had the goddess been as to the location of the treasure that it was found without the least difficulty. And very soon the building was begun.

It may have been mere sensuality that led Bimal Sha to insist that no forms but those of women should be graven on his temple. But it may be, too, that he was actuated by genuine devotion to Kali, to the goddess who amongst her many other functions has that of patron of the warrior and the reiver. He may have wished to show her in some of her divers incarnations, which have been esti-

mated at nine hundred millions. He died before all the statues were completed, and after he had spent a sum said to exceed ninety-six million rupees.

Two of his cousins, seeing the masterpiece unfinished, were moved at first to carry on with the building ; on second thoughts, they held that to complete it would be presumptuous and, instead, built another temple alongside. Soon after this they died, leaving no offspring.

The question now rose : who was entitled to the temples and the treasures ? The issue was referred to lawyers and scribes ; and since all were Jain they had the happy inspiration of enacting that the temples should be vested in the Jain church. They pointed out that the site was Jain property, and, further, that it had been revealed to a priest that the statue of a Jain god was buried under the foundations. Excavations were made at the place indicated, and a large Jain statue was unearthed. What better corroboration of their verdict could be asked for ? The discovery of the statue was a god-send for the priests, as opportune as it was miraculous—or seemingly-miraculous ; for if I have some qualms in swallowing the miracles of Jainism, I have few doubts about the cunning of its priests.

The story of the origin of the Dilwara temple was told me by an old Jain who kept a tiny shop in the main street of the little town of Mount Abu. The shop was a cross between a grocery and a general emporium. I had been told that on occasion he had curios, relics of ancient shrines, for sale. So it was that one morning found me sitting on a biscuit-tin in his shop, discussing with him, across the showcase containing braces and nougat which served him as a counter, the tendencies of Indian Art. For the old man was quite an expert in his way and,

like so many Indian shopkeepers, far more interested *au fond* in questions of art and religion than in the welfare of his little business. Something akin to friendship sprang up between us, and it was during our two or three long rambles round the temple of Dilwara that he imparted to me the legend summarized above. The authenticity of his tale may well be as dubious as that of a bronze vase he sold me—but, for that matter, he would be rash who claimed to know the origins of this wonder-temple beyond all doubt.

The story of the bandit chief who took to charity and built one of the finest and most delicately wrought of Indian fanes is not only plausible but probable in a land where one still can see religious notions assiduously woven into the texture of man's daily life. Even in criminal circles religion till quite recently had its place ; that notorious fraternity of stranglers, the Thugs, regarded murder as an act of piety, and each of their assassinations was prefaced and followed by prayer. In any case, not only did I find my old friend's story entertaining in itself, but I was grateful for the light he threw on an enigma that had roused and baffled my curiosity : the presence of Jain statues on altars decorated with bas-reliefs composed of Hindu *motifs*.

To recompense my informant for his explanation and his services as guide, I told him I would like to buy an antique bronze bowl that he had shown me amongst others in a corner of his shop. He allowed me to choose it, to admire it, and to take it away ; but declined to accept payment. All he asked of me—a flattering favour !—was to sign my name in his autograph-book.

A page had been torn out ; proudly he pointed

to it framed and hanging on the wall above the counter. It bore Clemenceau's signature ! He told me that he had shown our famous statesman, during his Indian tour, round Dilwara temple. It was a quaint experience to come across the "Tiger's" signature hanging on the wall of this little shop-of-all-trades above a counter littered with cheap scents and tooth-brushes. On one side of this heroic autograph my Jain friend had nailed to the wall a calendar depicting Krishna dancing ; on the other side, an antique picture-postcard in colours showing Joan of Arc.

This worthy Jain is certainly the oddest grocer I have ever met. . . .

There came a day when we had to leave the cool heights of Abu ; the Maharaja of Kotah had asked us to attend a tiger-shoot in his domain. As we left the Bikaner mansion the sun was setting. Dusk had fallen when we reached the foot of a little hill crowned by a church which the Irish troops attend every Sunday to hear Mass. There is a Regulation dating from Mutiny days, bidding them march to church in column and under arms. Their rifles laid beside them, they take up nearly all the pews ; and once a week this peaceful little sanctuary takes on the aspects of a church in war-time on a battle-front.

Little by little as we descended to the plain the air grew heavier, dense with dust. In the darkness our brows were damp with sweat. Our fortnight in a cool climate and pellucid air had made us forget that we had overstayed the clemency of India's climate, that her plains were turning churlish.

A mile from the station we entered a small valley sandwiched between two hills where a breeze made the temperature more bearable. The servants

accompanying us pushed the cars into the middle of a field, and by the light of the headlamps laid the table for an *al fresco* meal. With one accord we made an effort to keep the conversation in a cheerful strain, but the nearness of our leave-taking cast a shadow. How different it was from the light-hearted gaiety that had attended all our previous dinners with our friend the Maraj Kumar !

An hour later we were saying good-bye to our host. A film of steamy vapour was blotting out the stars ; the night was hot as an oven.

CHAPTER XVIII

KOTAH : THE LAST TIGER

FOR a quarter of an hour without a break the big monkey on the top of a hill a hundred yards off had been coughing with terror—a hoarse, dry cough that came in rattling gasps. Now, suddenly, he fell silent. At the same moment I heard the crisp sound of a hand-clap, twice repeated, from the far end of the line upon my left.

The heir-apparent of Kotah who was sitting close beside me on the machan drew still nearer. His voice, the faintest whisper, was marvellously steady. “Keep a sharp look out ! Something’s happening.”

A stampede in the dry leaves—yes, there was the tiger, away there on my left, bounding along the line towards my tree. He took two or three great leaps ; the distance covered at each bound took my breath away. An enormous beast ! The voice in my ear was almost inaudible, but as steady as ever. “Don’t fire ! Wait !”

The tiger was fifteen yards away, extended full length like a racehorse at the gallop, a glorious sight. He had not charged through the line, but broken back upon the beaters. Vanished already ! I had a feeling that the prince behind me was chuckling to himself, though I only heard a whisper.

“Cheer up ! He’ll come back. It was a much trickier shot than you thought. An even chance you missed him. And if you’d only wounded him he’d

have charged the beaters—that would have meant four or five men killed quite likely.”

“Who was it clapped his hands?”

“My father; he’s in the tree at the foot of the hill. The tiger must have broken cover towards him and looked like crossing the line. He wanted to head it off in your direction.”

A roar just in front of me drowned the tumult of the beaters who were steadily advancing towards us, playing all their instruments full blast and constantly discharging shot-guns into the air. There was another roar, from the same spot.

“Isn’t there still a risk of his charging the beaters?”

“Yes, and all the greater now he’s found out where our line is. He knows he’s cornered; that’s the moment he’s most dangerous. Be ready to fire.”

Ready to fire! I inwardly protested. Haven’t I been ready for an hour or more, my nerves on edge, struggling as best I can to keep up a salutary optimism? Why should the tiger choose to come again under *my* tree? The jungle’s dense, I can hardly see a thing. And even if he comes within easy range, as my friend seems to expect, isn’t there the hideous possibility that I may miss him? The whole beat was got up especially for my benefit. All the long preparations, the fleet of cars that brought us here from the palace—and then the old Maharaja turning out in person despite his age and his thousand-and-one duties, all those officers and elephants sent from the capital, not to mention the three hundred beaters—supposing it all came to nothing! Supposing by some clumsy gesture I let down all their plans! I know that no one except myself is authorized to fire. I have two

barrels loaded, and presently I shall have to use them—in a split second !

Ah, there he is, coming straight on me at walking-pace, lithe as a cat. I take aim at a point just above his nose ; the ball should get him plumb between the shoulders. Twenty yards off—I pull the trigger. A click of the hammer, nothing more. A cold shiver along my spine, my heart jumps a beat. Did I forget to load ? I swing the barrels open ; two cartridges there, sure enough, one cap dented. A misfire . . . a palpable miss ! No time to reload. I must take my chance with a singleton. Here goes ! The tiger's spotted me, got a move on—making for the far end of the line. I take my shot all hunched up, my legs twisted under me, in an impossible position. Another second, two yards farther, and I'd have been done. Impossible to slew my shoulder round towards the right and take aim. The shot doesn't seem to have stopped him, he's out of sight. Wait, what's that ! A nerve-shattering roar, vibrant like the low string of a monstrous double-bass, that jars the spinal cord and sets it tingling in sympathy, from waist to brain-pan. And the roar comes from the very place at which I aimed, where he dived out of sight. I see his head jerk up out of the thicket, sink back again. A last convulsion of the mighty shoulders, then his legs give way, and the huge beast rolls over, feet in air. . . .

I leapt to my feet on the machan. Now I could see the tiger clearly, lying on his side, motionless. Dead. I felt like weeping ; what fools our nerves can make of us !

That was the last shot I fired during my stay in India.

Only a few minutes more, and we would be

leaving. Out in mid-stream the boat in which we had been spending a last congenial hour in our host's company was silent now ; but I still could see the Maharaja and his son waving their *adieux*.

On the far side of the river streaming away behind them, the old Palace of Kotah, like a vast escutcheon wrought in stone hung on the hillside, loomed high above its lords, august, aloof as the great men of old who built it. And it seemed to me that all Rajputana, incarnate in the forms of those two Princes of the East, profiled against that impressive background, was bidding us farewell.

The car which was taking us to the Bombay train bore us rapidly away. Princes and far-flung battlements grew blurred, remote. Like a tale that is told, the India we had known, the ancient land of chivalry and hospitality, was fading out into oblivion.

CHAPTER XIX

BOMBAY : THE GATE OF INDIA

FOR my last walk in India I roamed the Bombay streets till night was closing in. After the silence of the Rajput countryside, I found the din and turmoil of the Bombay traffic overpowering.

In the course of my wanderings I recognized various Indian types among the passers-by whose encounter suddenly, delectably, projected me several months back in time, many hundred miles in space. I saw Pathans from Peshawar, bearded Sikhs from the Punjab, Mahometans with bulky turbans, Hindus of every caste and sect, with paint-smeared foreheads and naked bodies. Here were Sadhus in saffron-yellow robes, ascetics streaked with dust and coloured powder come to the city from their jungle fastnesses, and other types unknown to me, strange beings with distraught eyes, hailing from the impenetrable forests of Central India or the Madras hills. In an ecclesiastical warehouse I even came across a native Jew, the first member of his race I had encountered in my seven months' travels ; and a Saint-Vincent-de-Paul sister outside a hospital. I rubbed shoulders with Catholic priests, missionaries of a religion from overseas that owes the mystic glamour with which the Indian eye invests it to the remoteness of its origin ; much as the splendours of the East, the birthplace of this same religion, dazzled the imagination of early

European Catholics. I saw Jains with handkerchiefs pressed to their lips ; white-clad Gandhi-ites with shaven heads, wearing white *chef*-like caps and dressed according to their master's precepts in the home-spun fabrics, woven on hand-loom from flax or cotton made on native spinning-wheels, which are sold in their co-operative stores. And at the street-crossings, like buttercups sprouting from the asphalt, stood bare-legged Nepalese constables in dark blue uniforms and bright yellow turbans.

Now and again I came on countryfolk from the villages of the interior, but always isolated units, never the picturesque confusion of an up-country crowd. Unawares, these immigrants have yielded to the contagion of the city. They have strayed far afield from the brown farrago of flat roofs and cowdung walls that is an Indian village, where the children are too tired to cry, the dogs too weak to bark, where in the dawn the peasants move so slowly that the buffaloes and cattle, dustily, lethargically ambling down the village street, outpace them on their way. Here, unwittingly, they have learned to hold their heads up, to make haste. The afterglow of dreams has left, or all but left, their eyes ; and, with the dreams, the smiles.

There are many temples in Bombay and all religions are catered for, but in the Bombay crowd, as far as I could judge, the deep religious zeal that animates the population of the Native States was lacking. The people round me seemed to have thrust the deity out of their daily life, relegated him to the temple. They do not, like the men of Udaipur, walk hand in hand with God, nor ever are their hearts, like those of the worshippers at Benares, thrilled by a divine hysteria. The sense of godhead has stayed behind in the Indian village,

and if it survives at all in the great city, is pent within the four walls of a temple. Outside the sanctuary it is out of mind.

Some types were new, however—the dark-faced, bare-headed youths, for instance, attired like Englishmen. Embittered intellectuals of the city-bred younger generation, they have studied hard for years, have passed examination upon examination, and now, for all their vaulting ambition, find they have little chance of making good in life. These unemployed youngsters constitute an element of danger ; they are ready to enlist, heart and soul, in the service of any cause that offers a field for their activities. Meanwhile, they bide their time, fretful and discontented, and in the “ advanced ” circles of Bombay plan the overthrow of Europe, of religion, of the whole western world—and into the bargain, though they do not guess it, the ruin of their native land. Their conceit is tiresome to a degree. “ Thank God I am an Indian, not an Englishman,” one of them remarked to me, “ for, as an Indian, I have kept my soul.” And another, jeering at a European in a hurry : “ He thinks that the world ends with him, that he lives one life only ; but *we* know that the journey has no end. So we sit still and meditate.”

And meanwhile these brilliantined young gentlemen make haste to buy the latest make of car, and drive like speed-fiends ! They carp at England, quite forgetting that for nearly two thousand years their race has been incompetent to stem the successive tides of invaders pouring down from the Asiatic highlands into the plains of India. Mr. Gandhi's crusade is essentially a city-dwellers' movement. And the army of the little brown evangelist—an admirable man, no doubt, but, like so many saintly

souls, tiresome, *au fond*—finds ready recruits in these workless city students.

Now and then I encountered Eurasian girls in European attire ; typists, manicures or mannequins and — as their mothers were before them — the frequent consolation of the English exile's lonely hours. There is an exotic fascination in the beauty of the young Eurasian girl, but she suffers cruelly from the anomaly of her position ; rejected by the Indian community, she has not yet gained a footing in English *milieux*. I watched these lithe, alert, young women, their pale skins glowing golden in the sun, hastening to their work or to an appointment, threading their way on bicycles between the bare-foot, bare-limbed Murati women from Poona, their garments of coarse brown cloth quaintly tucked up like swaddling-clothes, with flowers in their hair, who sweep the Bombay streets.

That dusty underworld of penury and squalor, the bazaar, thrust forth grey alleyways like tentacles to hale us in. Its denizens, picturesque and varied though they be, have suffered by their contact with urban life ; the simple ways and tranquil charm of the crowds at Udaipur and Jaipur are far to seek in the great city. Even the places where these people live have lost the look of robust simplicity that can be so attractive in the houses of an Indian village. Mere poverty has degenerated into pauperism, humble cottages have given place to slums, shanties to hovels. There is no gentleness in any of the faces ; all have an air of stolid resignation, at the beck and call of any chance employer. The up-country dreamer has declined into the Bombay out-of-work. This city crowd has the prostitute's mentality ; I felt it ready to sell itself body and soul to the highest bidder, to join in any

political or religious revolution that was held up to it as a lucrative crusade.

For some minutes I had been watching a conversation between a Hindu shopman and a Mahometan. Their shops were door by door ; they lived side by side as do perforce the two religions or, rather, the two races they represented. And as do the two religions these neighbours felt a congenital antipathy towards each other ; nothing could bridge the gulf between them. In the Hindu's eyes I could read the hate he bore towards the Moslem, an iconoclast who kills the cow, that sacred creature which the Brahmins bid men venerate. On the Mahometan's face I saw the contempt he felt for his Hindu neighbour, whom in his heart of hearts he wrote down an idol-worshipper. Nevertheless the two men smiled towards each other, chatted with seeming interest in their topic, never dropped their pose of studied courtesy. Under their superficial affability lurked more than the instinctive rancour of a religious feud ; there was an element of apprehension, a sense of urgent and immediate peril. For the Mahometans, though greatly outnumbered by their rivals, are convinced that if it came to a straight fight their seventy millions could make short work of the two hundred and fifty million Hindus. Whereas the Hindus are obsessed by the idea of their numerical advantage and convinced that the right to rule lies always with the majority. Trusting to their superior education, they have no doubt whatever that very soon they will assume the governance of India. Try as he may, the Moslem cannot but be perturbed by such sublime assurance. He knows that Hindu domination would mean for him and his a life of slavery ; the tables would be turned on the proud conqueror

of old. And in his desperate efforts to fend off the Hindu peril, all that he can invoke to whet his courage is the far-off memory of the great Moghul days—which he vaunts in season and out of season with passionate insistence.

The two men bade each other a smiling farewell.

“What were those fellows saying just now when they parted?” I asked the Parsee who was with me, as we moved away.

“The Mahometan wound up by inviting the Hindu to a reception he is giving this evening, to celebrate his son’s wedding. Charming people!” he exclaimed ironically. “I didn’t hear one disagreeable remark in all the conversation, not a hint of the loathing the two men feel towards each other. Yes, they have racial hatred in the blood—it is driving Mr. Gandhi to despair. He knows only too well that an open conflict between the two religions would deal a death-blow to his schemes for a united India.”

“Aren’t the Mahometans afraid of Gandhi?”

“Afraid? Of course they are; scared to death of him! Were the Hindus to come out on top, it would mean a clean sweep of all the posts they occupy at present in the banks and Government offices.”

At the end of the bazaar the road became narrower, the stream of passers-by grew thicker. I was struck by the fashion in which the Hindus greeted each other, the sudden display of obsequiousness when some of them caught sight of certain co-religionists. There could be no doubt that city life, as it had failed to mitigate the vendetta between Mahometan and Hindu, had likewise failed to abrogate the ancient deference to caste-distinctions.

Yet here, as in the West, the spirit of democracy is making headway ; how often did I hear such theories enthusiastically acclaimed in the so-called progressive circles of the younger generation of Bombay ! And this in a country which has ascribed the founders of its various religions, without exception, to royal houses ; which in the choice of objects for its adoration has always had a weakness for gods incarnate in the form of rajas ! But these progressive young people hope very soon to change all that, and with a new régime to oust the ancient institutions of their country, the immemorial home of autocratic rule.

We had left the bazaars behind us, and now, in the crowd that thronged the street, I observed some Englishmen. Their air of cool disdain towards the " native " is equalled only by the cold indifference of Indian eyes, watching the white man on his lawful ways. One of the grievances of the Bombay Indian is the presumption of the Englishman in forbidding him admission to English clubs. He is offended by the notice posted at the only decent swimming-pool in the city, announcing in large letters that the pool and beach are reserved " For Europeans Only." He takes as an insult the regulations of the leading clubs at Delhi and Bombay denying entrance even to the rajas—even as guests. His lack of culture (as to which he has no illusions) galls him ; he blames the British administration for not giving him free education such as is provided by the maharajas for their subjects in the Native States. Another grievance is that the subjects taught young Indians who have the means to attend the English schools are totally unsuited to their needs. The Indian resents an educational system which lures the peasant from his fields—only

to find that no employment is open to him in the city, no means of using the knowledge he has acquired. But what rankles most bitterly of all is the feeling that the Englishman is prejudiced against him from the very start. He knows that the army officer or civil servant, even before he sets foot on the liner taking him from England to join his post in India, has formed his own idea of the Indian, and that this idea is far from flattering and will have undergone no change when after many years the exile returns to his native island.

“They don’t pay any attention to us !” an old Indian sadly confided to me. “And they hardly seem to want us to take any notice of them !”

As so often happens, small grievances have blinded them to the vast benefits received. The trivial discontents of everyday life have ousted from the city-dweller’s mind the gratitude he otherwise might feel for a hundred years’ beneficence. And one well may wonder why the West, which has conferred its parliamentary system, culture, customs and religion on a land already so well equipped in these respects, should not have added to these “boons” another, and a no less precious gift : a little love for the great nation to which it seems so generous.

After I had had my fill of the bazaar, my Parsee friend took me for a drive in his car along the picturesque road skirting the sea-shore, to Malabar Hill. On the wooded slopes of the little hill that overlooks Bombay, embowered in clumps of roses and a red profusion of bougainvilleas, nestle the large white bungalows of rich Bombay merchants and members of that interesting community, the Parsees.

Of Persian extraction, as their name implies, the

Parsees came to India about the middle of the First Century of our era and opened trading centres in the Gujerat region north of Bombay. They did not establish themselves permanently in Gujerat but travelled to and fro between it and Persia in the interests of their business. In the seventh century, however, when the Arabs invaded Persia and sought to impose their faith upon its people, a very large number of Persians refused to accept the yoke of Islam and fled from their native land, taking refuge in the trading settlements which had been established by their kinsmen on the shores of India. Wealthy, affable and intelligent folk, the Parsee exiles always enjoyed the favour of the Hindu and Mahometan rulers of India, and in the middle of the seventeenth century settled down permanently in the Islands of Bombay. Thereafter, profiting by the stimulus given by British rule to the trade of the great western port of India, they built up year by year the enormous fortunes which are theirs to-day. The Parsees are the richest business men of India ; they live in delightful modern houses on Malabar Hill, dance with their wives at cocktail-parties given at the Taj Mahal Hotel, and play a leading part in Indian finance.

Zoroaster, the founder of their religion, is said to have lived some eight hundred years before Christ. The basic principles of the faith he preached are the belief in one Almighty God and the fear of His adversary, the Spirit of Evil. His descriptions of heaven and hell recall the visions of the Hebrew Prophets and the Revelation of Saint John. He made little efforts to win converts to his faith, nor have his followers displayed the missionary spirit ; there are barely a million Parsees in all the world to-day. Their philosophy of life is tolerant and

humane. They see in light the symbol of the Good, in darkness that of Evil, and they worship fire as the emblem of eternity. Reluctant to pollute the earth, mother of all life, and, since all fire is sacred, unable to cremate their dead, they expose them on lofty towers, leaving the dissolution of the corpses to the birds of the air.

I suggested to my friend that he should take me, before we went to his house for tea, to see the Parsee necropolis where the corpses are offered to the carrion birds. Accordingly, instead of turning into his compound we drove on uphill to the dismal garden where between clumps of flowers the macabre Towers of Silence rise like vast stone troughs or mangers posted high in air for the refec-tion of the vultures. In the silence of the deserted garden the huge structures loomed white against the dark foliage of the trees ; in shape and size they reminded me of the large round tanks erected by oil companies on river-banks to act as reservoirs.

Though the contents of the tanks were invisible, I could see a regiment of fat vultures drawn up in line along the rims, like spectators in the front rows of a stadium, gloating over what they saw below. All in funereal black they sat in serried ranks, hunching their ragged necks, unmoving, bloated with the meat they were digesting. Now and again one of them rose heavily and flopped on clumsy wings into the silent depths of the great bowl. Gorged to bursting-point, he yet could not resist the temptation of snatching another gobbet from the corpse on which he had already browsed his fill. Waiting their turn for a new body to be served up to them, more birds were massed in the surrounding trees, like clusters of some loathly fruit ripening in a shambles. The gravel crunched under my feet like

the pebbles on a graveyard path and there was a rustling as of silken cerements in the tree-tops, stirred by a phantom breeze unfelt below. A place of utter solitude, nerve-shattering stillness. And all around me loomed the great stone charnel-houses, open to the sky like circus-rings piled up with corpses. The Parsee Garden of the Dead was hideous as a disused factory, oppressive as a tomb, and the Towers of Silence sprouting in it brought to my mind lugubrious flowers of concrete round which the vultures swarmed like questing bees.

“How Bombay has changed since the days of John Company! Then it was a little fishing-village, and see what it is now!” A smile of pride lit up the features of my Parsee host as from his terrace he pointed out to me the splendid panorama of the city stretched out below us parallel to the sea.

The seven islets, Catherine of Braganza's dowry inherited by England nearly three centuries ago, and leased by the Crown to the East India Company for twenty pounds *per annum*, to enable the Company to found a trading-centre on the coast, have in the course of time, thanks to the prodigious effort of British engineers, coalesced, and now form a long, continuous belt of land along the foreshore. The hills depicted in old engravings of Bombay as encircling the island were laid low, the rocks composing them thrust forth into the sea. And thus slowly but surely the island widened out. To crown the work of reclamation, the last great breach by which the sea flowed into the heart of the town was closed by a gigantic dyke and now Bombay, a vast and spacious city spanned by docks and railway-lines, can boast itself the greatest port of India.

Near the sea, facing the triumphal arch—a sym-

bolic gateway built at the water's edge—I saw the huge bulk of the Taj Mahal Hotel. Soaring above the City Hall, the Gothic pinnacles of the great railway terminus and the roof of Government House stood out from a congeries of consulates, innumerable cotton-mills, blocks of business premises and private houses. Polo-grounds and race-courses lined the great arterial roads. Within a bay fronting the handsome esplanade I saw a sea-beach thronged with natives holding meetings and plying their trades at open market-stalls. Seen thus from above and from a distance, Bombay gave me the impression of a great European city. But suddenly a memory of all I had observed at the outset of my Indian travels, all I had learned during the last fortnight in Bombay, flashed through my mind, and that first impression, which indeed had taken me by surprise, yielded to second thoughts. The layout of Bombay no longer seemed to me so brilliant, there were flaws in its apparent order. Mean streets, twisting and truncated, streaked the fair visage of the city, like sinister shadows. Grey, unhealthy slums grappled with the salubrious “white” districts in a ferocious stranglehold. I called to mind the Europeans I had seen outside the cinemas and modern shops, a few white faces lost in the motley horde of natives drawn from every part of India condemned from birth to internecine enmity, with aspirations as different as their faiths. Bombay has ceased to be an Indian city, nor is it wholly anglicized—as yet. It is equally remote from the wild life of the jungles and from the *far niente* of the countryside; as far removed from the Feudal States of India as from the new cities coming into being. My final impression of Bombay was that of a *mêlée* of antagonisms and passions, of teeming life

and diverse theories of life ; an outpost of Empire where England has pitched camp upon the threshold of the continent which, whatever she may claim, she has failed as yet to penetrate to any great depth.

The Parsee gentleman handed me his field-glasses. " Do you see the island down there which looks as if it were floating on the water ? That's Elephanta—where I took you yesterday."

Yes, I recognized the little island of the Hindus, humped above the yellow waves like the dome of a sunken Buddhist temple. With its summit pitted like a skull and the grottos gouged in the cliff-face gaping like eyeless sockets, it has a grim, forbidding air. The vaulted roofs of the great caves have been worn smooth by the years, corroded by salt sea-winds ; the emblems of Siva niched within the rocky lobes are pock-marked as with ulcers. In the centre of a vast recess looms a prodigious three-faced bust, the forehead shoring up the roof, the shoulders thrusting back the ground. There is an elemental urgency in its conception worthy of a Michelangelo, something, too, of the more human violence of Rodin's art ; and therewithal the subtle complexity of the Hindu Trinity, symbol of life. But now, to my regret, the mystic isle where in his sea-girt shrine the genius of the world keeps vigil was a mere blur on the horizon, hermetically pent within its shell of verdure. On either side were other islets, dark specks floating on a shallow sea of bilious yellow, turbid with mud, whence the waves were sweating spirals of white vapour, like puffs of eddying heat.

Beyond—the void. . . .

I focussed my glasses, eye-raked the horizon. No sign of land. In the far distance the waves seemed white—a dingy white that matched the greyness

of the sky. A level waste of water, protracted to infinity.

My thoughts sped westering to that small island, invisible, remote, five thousand miles away, which during the past century built up this vast empire of Southern Asia. A conquest glorious indeed—but the new master did not wed the maiden he had won by force of arms. Nor did he make of her a slave, nor yet his mistress ; but schooled her harshly, like an unruly child. He imposed on her a guardian and a staff of tutors, taught her much and spent on her more money than he drew from her. Will the dusky maid keep faithful to her conqueror ? Others in the past have vainly tried to tame her wayward spirit ; Turks and Afghans, Persians and not a few of her own blood. Will the white Christian hold his conquest longer than his predecessors ? Perhaps, for unlike them he lives far from his captive. She cannot wear him down with her enervating climate, her proud disdain takes no effect on him, he is exempt from prejudice of caste ; even the sedulous inertia of his secretariats shackled in red tape does not abate his energy.

The British Empire sprawls across the map ; but, for all its foothold on this Indian shore, its heart is far overseas in the little western island, immune from the corrupting influences of the great dominion. And the imperial heart, endowed it seems with indefectible vitality, is constantly pumping new blood into the flagging limbs. The English liners taking home civil servants, soldiers and proconsuls worn out in the service of the raj cross on their passage liners outward bound, bringing to the East a band of eager, energetic youngsters—systole and diastole. And, if the heart is sound, why should the limbs decay ? . . . Unless the wounds that India

deals herself, for want of proper care, begin to suppurate.

"Here, Sahib, are your tickets for the boat to-morrow."

The Head Porter of the Taj Mahal Hotel held under my eyes the tickets for Marseilles that had just come in from the Steamship Company. In front of me was a table spread with a map of the world in guise of tablecloth, and carelessly he let the two slips of paper flutter down upon it. As Fate would have it, the tickets fell in such a way as to cover up exactly the peninsula I was due to leave next day. India was blotted from the map, as soon it would be from my life. With a thoughtless movement, instinctively, I brushed aside no matter where the irksome strips of yellow paper that apprised me in a style peremptory as marching orders of the conditions of that trite itinerary, Bombay-Marseilles. And India came into view again—welcome as the face of a long-lost friend. I bent above her, scanning her features for the familiar traits that had endeared her to me. One by one I located the towns where I had stayed and, murmuring aloud their names, I seemed to hear an echo deep down within me, and felt the thrill of a profound emotion. And for a moment all around me lapsed into nonentity ; the noisy vestibule of the hotel with its pestering shopmen and uncouth tourists, and the patient porter at my side waiting for orders to see about my trunks. A vision rose before my eyes of dreaming cities, palaces becalmed in sunlit marble, gardens ablaze with birds and flowers, the golden tables of bejewelled princes of the East. For a moment I relived those torrid hours of waiting in the silent jungle ; feasted my eyes on the dust-blurred colours of the bazaars, and the quaint,

delightful villages where as in a Bible picture you see the women trooping down to the wells to fill their chatties with the ice-cold water.

On the left of the map the vivid, clean-cut patterns of the Continent of Europe forced themselves upon my view, like the first impact of the sun on waking eyes. But, on the right, stretched out the grey immensity of Asia, alluring as a night of dreams that lingers exquisitely on.

And suddenly, amazingly, I heard a voice—my own. “Cancel these tickets. I shall take the first boat China-bound.”

As one who keeps his eyes shut to retain the fleeting beauty of a vision, I set my face once more towards the East, to try to dream again.

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