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*Time of the Mango Flowers*

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RODERICK CAMERON

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*My Travel's History*

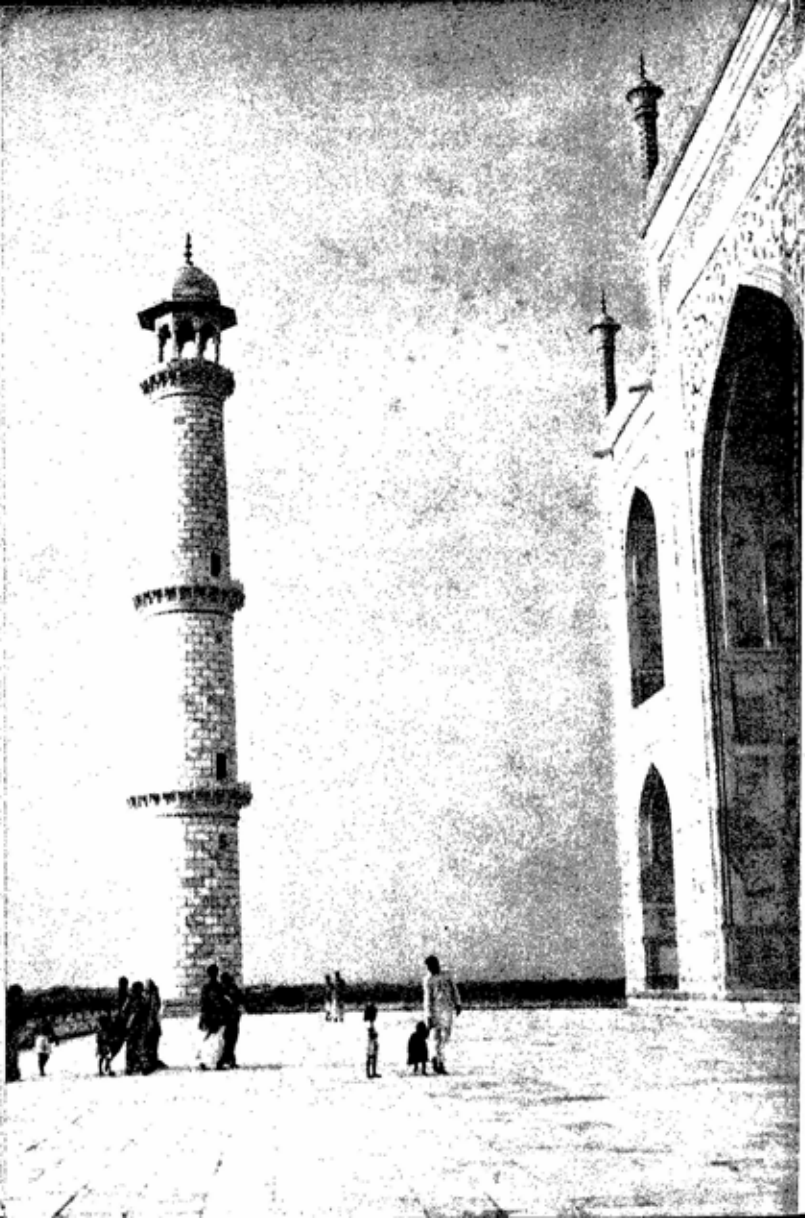
*Equator Farm*

*Shadows From India*

*Time of the Mango Flowers*

FRONTISPIECE

The Taj Mahal is much larger  
than one expects



RODERICK CAMERON

*Time of the Mango Flowers*



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LONDON MELBOURNE TORONTO

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*This book is for*  
ENID, PAT AND ELISABETH  
who proved so patient  
while I struggled with my camera

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\*

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## CHAPTER I

\*

## BOMBAY

In Bombay I had a room with a deep balcony, looking out over the roof-tops, and across the sweep of the bay, to Malabar Hill, the loftiest point of the island on which the city is built. February is the cool time of the year; but even so the heat was oppressive. A fan clattered under the high ceiling of my room: below, in the pale green dining-room, the cold dishes were arranged around a gigantic sculptured block of ice. The name of my hotel was the Taj Mahal although there was nothing faintly Mogul about it, as it was a perfect example of railway-station Gothic. The hotel also possessed the odd distinction of being constructed back to front. My room, approached through enormous stone-vaulted halls, was intended to face eastwards, but, in fact, commanded a westerly prospect. Just what had happened I could not quite discover. Perhaps the Indian contractor pinned the blueprint on to his drawing-board upside down. Maybe the architect was taken ill or called away by urgent business. But anyone can tell you how the story ended. When the unlucky architect reappeared, he cast a single glance at the building he had planned, then rushed up to the summit of the scaffolding and hurled himself off in a gesture of supreme despair.

The Taj Mahal Hotel, nevertheless, was a pleasant place to stay in, standing on the edge of the Indian Ocean, so that at the back of the hotel—which should, of course, have been the front—rippling water-reflections played over the bedroom ceilings. As evening fell, we could watch daylight fading out across the water. But morning was particularly beautiful, for in India the light, when the sun first rises, has an especial radiance and clarity. From my window, in the early morning, I could see a breakwater and Malabar Hill beyond,

both of them several miles away; but before I had finished my breakfast—pawpaw sprinkled with the juice of fresh limes—even the palms in the foreground of the view had melted into an opaque haze. It was through this haze, which, reflected by whitewashed walls, soon becomes an intense glare, that I discovered the city of Bombay, the settlement founded by the Portuguese during the first half of the sixteenth century. Portuguese navigators had been exploring India's western coast as early as 1498; and Albuquerque had conquered Goa in 1510. Twenty-four years later, the Western colonists had advanced as far as Bombay. Bom Bahia, or Fair Bay, they called it, and one would certainly assume that its name was a corruption of the Portuguese; but there are those who maintain that it is derived from the goddess Mumbai, one of the many aspects of Parvati, consort of Shiva, who has a temple dedicated to her in the middle of the city.

Bombay remained a Portuguese possession until 1662, when the Infanta Catherine, daughter of John IV and sister of the reigning King Alfonso VI of Portugal, married King Charles II of England and brought it to him, along with Tangier, as part of her dowry. This alliance was a strategic move on the part of the Portuguese Ambassador, who proposed it in the hope of furthering Portugal's fight for independence against Spain. Among the terms of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty were two clauses of great importance to Portugal: one that she should be allowed to levy men in England to help her fight her war, and the other that the English should support the Portuguese in India against the Dutch, who were everywhere rapidly supplanting them. The treaty suited both sides, England as usual being preoccupied with keeping the balance of power between her European neighbours. Bombay, however, did not actually pass into English hands until 1665, four years after the marriage had taken place. The Portuguese Viceroy at Goa was apparently loath to part with it, having, as he explained, "a much better appreciation of its strategic value than his King"; and when Charles II finally took possession he found that his acquisition "was a source of trouble and expense rather than a profit", and transferred it to the East India Company for the loan of fifty thousand pounds and a small annual rent. Built on an island, Bombay was much easier to defend than Surat;

and the Company wisely foresaw that strong defences might be necessary.

Early travellers give us some illuminating glimpses of life in seventeenth-century Bombay. We hear of the President of the Company "having a noise of trumpets as he is carried out in a palankeen", a horse of state leading the cortège, while large ostrich-feather fans protect him from the sun. It was not until well on into the nineteenth century that Englishmen condescended to dress in a manner appropriate to the climate; and the President must have sweated profusely in his heavy Restoration silks and velvets. We get another glimpse of him at table, the courses being ushered in to the sound of trumpets, with soft music playing in the background. But this early period has left behind no architectural record. The houses were mostly of mud, with thatched roofs, and Bombay, unlike Calcutta and Madras, contains very few buildings of the eighteenth century—enough, however, to astonish the unsuspecting visitor. I was constantly surprised by what I discovered. True, I could find none of the pleasant country houses that Colonel von Orlich describes in his travel book. "They are enclosed by beautiful gardens," he writes, "both storeys being surrounded by a verandah supported by pillars." As soon as the hot winds set in, screens lined with aromatic reeds were placed between the pillars and kept moist by running water supplied by almost naked coolies equipped with large chatties, or earthenware pots.

Most of these spacious houses must have been pulled down to make room for modern blocks of flats: twentieth-century Bombay is faced with the problem of a rapidly growing population. But around the docks, in the old part of the town, one can still discover traces of a more elegant and less overcrowded age—the charming interior of St. Thomas's Cathedral, for instance, with its cane-seated pews, its shuttered windows and its white walls covered by a mosaic of memorial tablets. For parishioners died off nearly as fast as they appeared. "Two monsoons are the life of a man," states a contemporary proverb. Bombay's unhealthiness was notorious; the first settlers speak of it as a 'charnel house'; and so it was to remain until well on into the nineteenth century, when a pestilential swamp was reclaimed and an improved drainage system introduced. Even so cholera continued to take dreadful toll under the guise of agues



and fevers; for the *vibrio cholerae* virus, which lurked in the wells and rivers, was not identified by Koch until 1883.

In the library of the Asiatic Society I came across a vivid picture of the infection at work among the passengers of a coastal steamer. The first three cases were reported at nine o'clock in the morning; and one of them, a woman, died during the course of the same day. "We had scarcely committed her to the sea on Monday morning, when nine men were seized; in a few hours this number was so fearfully augmented, that a portion of the deck was fitted up as a hospital, and above forty of the sufferers received into it." Death generally followed from three to four hours after the attack; and, to make room for fresh cases, the dead were at once cast into the sea, sewn up in their bedding, and weighted with shot. In vain two doctors on board and the ship's officers tried friction and medicine, port wine, sago, arrowroot and brandy. "Some of the scenes of woe," writes the reporter, "can never be effaced from my memory. One fine young woman, in the prime of life, with an infant at breast, threw herself on the ground in an agony of pain." Although struggling with death, she refused to be parted from her child, and before sunset "the bereaved husband had committed both his treasures to the deep". We also read of a handsome young man who had been married only two days before the boat sailed. With tears in his eyes, he implored the doctor to let him die with his wife in his arms. "You cannot imagine the effect this voyage had on us; the cries of lamentation of the dying, the wail of the living and the frightful, distorted countenances of the dead."

Saint Thomas's Cathedral was officially opened on Christmas Day, 1718. It had dried cow-dung floors and, glass panes being expensive, the chancel was lighted by square-cut panes of mother-of-pearl. During services the congregation was kept cool by constantly-moving punkahs. Today electric fans have replaced the punkahs, and the Cathedral has a stone floor; but its elegant array of marble funerary monuments still takes us back to the eighteenth century. Among the handsomest is an obelisk erected to the memory of Captain George Nicholas Hardinge, R.N., who commanded H.M. frigate *San Fiorenzo* of thirty-six guns, and was killed at the age of twenty-eight, fighting a brilliant action against the French frigate *La Piedmontaise*, a notorious privateer. She was heavily armed

with fifty guns: long eighteen-pounders on her main deck, and thirty-two-pounder carronades on her quarter-deck. She had sailed from Mauritius, had been out for eighty-four days and had captured six valuable merchantmen. Hardinge sighted her sails on the horizon and immediately gave chase. A running fight followed, which lasted twenty-four hours. Taking advantage of the night, the French frigate tried to make a get-away and almost succeeded, but was sighted again the next day. "By this time, the masts and rigging of the *San Fiorenzo* had been so badly damaged that she was compelled to shorten sail. All hands worked with indefatigable zeal to make repairs, the ship meanwhile continuing the chase with such sail as she could carry." It was in this last encounter that Hardinge fell mortally wounded. Luckily for the *San Fiorenzo*, the French frigate ran out of ammunition and struck her flag a quarter of an hour after Hardinge's death.

So glad were the merchants of Bombay to be rid of *La Piedmontaise* that no expense was spared in erecting Hardinge's monument, which shows the young Captain borne in triumph through the waves on a conch shell drawn by two prancing sea-horses. A winged Victory protects him from the spray, while a Triton, swimming beside the conch, supports one of the Captain's finely turned legs on the débris of his own rigging. Below, a bas-relief shows the two frigates at the moment of surrender. The obelisk was carved in England and shipped out as ballast. To add a touch of local colour, the sculptor has introduced a tiger and an elephant. The merchants must indeed have been grateful for their deliverance from *La Piedmontaise*: not only did they erect this monument in Bombay, but raised another in St. Paul's Cathedral; or rather, presumably owing to pressure brought to bear by the East India Company, a monument was erected by the unanimous vote of the House of Commons. In addition, the Captain's father was presented with a vase to the value of three hundred guineas.

I can find no mention of the architect responsible for St. Thomas's. From the outside, it is not a particularly distinguished building, being as mixed in style as the Town Hall is pure. The latter, now used as a library and the branch office of the Royal Asiatic Society, is pure Greek Revival and was designed by an army officer. Here and elsewhere the majority of early Anglo-Indian buildings were

planned by military men; for the eighteenth-century tradition died hard in India, and the Augustan man of taste, with his knowledge of the arts and the help of a building manual contributed to by leading architects, was capable of planning almost anything demanded of him. The Central Library is an excellent example: a great sweeping flight of shallow steps leads up to its handsome colonnaded portico, which must surely have been inspired by the Temple of Poseidon at Paestum, or rather by an English engraving of that magnificent ruin. You see the same Doric columns, the same entablatures and the same coping framing the pediment. Inside, the orders change and become Corinthian.

A late afternoon sun lit the Grand Assembly Room when I visited it, and long-shafted fans twirled lazily between the high fluted columns. Around rows of mahogany paper-stands stood white-clothed Indians. They were the younger generation and all wore trousers, some of the less sophisticated with their shirt-tails hanging out. Smaller rooms led off the central hall, lined to the ceiling with books. These rooms were dim, shuttered against the heat; every opening was closed, turning them into fortresses against the sun. The woodwork was painted a deep chocolate-brown, a popular colour in India. The settees and the chairs, also designed in Classical Revival style, were upholstered in worn leather. I have some furniture, inherited from my Scottish grandfather, that almost exactly resembles it—rather heavy, carved with clumsily furled acanthus leaves. Through this fusty gloom the marble statues and busts of once prominent citizens glowed with a kind of phosphorescent light, posturing ghosts rather rudely described by *Murray's Guide* as "some of the weightier curiosities of the Royal Asiatic Society".

Down the side-streets of Bombay, if one looks carefully, there are all kinds of interesting details—houses faced with rustications, set with six-panelled doors and twelve-paned windows. *Oeil-de-boeuf* windows pierce their thick plaster walls, while banisters in the Chinese Chippendale style guard their curving stairs. But such eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century buildings no longer suggest the real character of Bombay; for her great period began with the outbreak of the American Civil War. Then, with Bombay as a Western seaport, India became the cotton market of the world,

taking over that lucrative trade from Charleston and New Orleans. It was a artificial boom, however, lasting four years—the duration of the war in America—and collapsing when it ended. A slump set in; but Bombay meanwhile had acquired the resounding title of '*Urbs prima in Indis*' and, despite the slump, buildings kept on springing up, huge public offices in the Venetian Gothic style, carved by Indian artists. Later at the turn of the century there were clock-towers and a university. Sir Gilbert Scott was kept busy turning out French Renaissance chateaux to house the growing ranks of white-coated government officials. Ugly in themselves, the buildings nevertheless give a certain air of grandeur, an impression heightened by the magnificent trees that line the broad avenues. Some of the streets curve in crescents, and here and there one might for a moment imagine that one was in London, somewhere near Whitehall; there is that same feeling of comfortable solidity.

Yet behind the Western façade teem the inhabitants of another world. Here is India of the Indians. And what an enchanting people they prove to be, warm-hearted, gentle and polite: a politeness that shows a genuine wish to please. Their physical beauty, moreover, is astonishing. As a race they have exceptionally regular features, fine noses, beautifully delineated lips, and gleaming teeth, the spotless blue-white of porcelain. Even the peasants in the fields have the distinction of race-horses. It is a delight to watch the women walking to and from the village well, balancing their brass pots on their perfectly set heads, the straightness of their backs revealed in the classical folds of their saris; or, if one is visiting a Rajputana state, to follow the swirl of their heavily pleated skirts, kicked out behind them as they move, as silver bells clatter on their slender ankles. There is a slow, sensuous rhythm in everything they do; and the farther south one travels, the more curious do their looks become. Liquid black eyes, rimmed around with kohl, in which one reads an intense physical awareness, hold one for a fleeting moment. These, one remembers, are the descendants of the rounded-limbed, joy-loving populations perpetuated in stone on the temples; the only difference is that the years have taught them pudency. First arrived the stern followers of Mohammed, then the prim English. Their feelings and beliefs have never changed; but, always ready to take the line of least resistance, they have merely

shrugged their lovely shoulders and added another fold of cotton.

It was with Sing that we set out to satisfy our curiosity. Sing, a Sikh from the Punjab, had been delegated to us as a driver. All the Sikhs, and a great many of the Rajputs, are called Sing just as all the members of a Scottish clan bear the same surname; it is their given names that distinguish them one from another. I was unaware of this at the time and quite happily called him Sing. He is, anyway, an idealised prototype of all the Sikhs. Like the Jews, they cannot deny their race. They are, on the whole, taller and thicker-set than the majority of Indians and extremely hirsute, a condition encouraged by their religion, which forbids them to cut their hair. Their raven locks are scraped up into a chignon on top of their heads, which they hide under a compactly wound turban, the shape of an elongated melon. Their moustaches they wear long and twirled up at the end, while their beards are carefully tucked up into black hair-nets, especially made for the purpose, the ends secured by an elastic band that passes over the head. I saw some young Sikh recruits drilling on a parade-ground in Bangalore, and the effect that they produced was remarkable. They wore khaki shorts, which became them well enough, but not one of them had on a turban. Instead, their hair was tied up with chiffon bows that with every movement they made flapped like limp butterflies. The bows, I presume, were made of chiffon because it would take up less room under the turban. The fact that the Sikhs are renowned for their valour gave the spectacle an added touch of absurdity. Their martial reputation the Sikhs share with the Gurkhas alone. I have a drawing done by Miss Emily Eden, sister of Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India during the latter part of the last century, which shows two fierce-looking Sikh warriors. Their turbans are pointed and looped down at the side, weighted by two round quoits—flat, iron rings about ten inches in diameter, with outer edges ground to razor sharpness. This weapon they used to twirl round their fingers, or on a stick, then cast with such dexterity and force that the opponent at whom they aimed was usually beheaded. Such warriors were called *Acales*, and formed a special regiment.

It was at the docks, while waiting to clear our luggage through the Customs, that I first became aware of Sing. I use the word 'aware' advisedly. One was *aware* of him. I think we all were. There was

something about him particularly calming, a great dignity of presence and a solicitous gentleness. I had no idea that he had anything to do with us. He was standing in the crowd, tall, silent and detached. His eyes struck me first—a velvety brown fringed with a heavy curtain of lashes. The Indians have their own especial way of looking at one; they fix one with an intense stare, almost—yet not quite—as if they were making love to one with their eyes. It is a look that could only be given by somebody completely free in himself—the way a tiger might look at one through the bars of its cage, a look swept clear of all the complexities of human nature, physically aware, but not necessarily personal. Sing's gaze interested me, but put me, with my white man's ways, on the defensive. I became haughty, as so many of the sahibs must have been before me. But it did not take me very long to understand and, luckily for me, the white man and his influence had disappeared. I started off with a clean slate.

For two hours we awaited our luggage, while the leis of tuberoses and silver tinsel with which we had been greeted on arrival turned brown in the heat, and the sides of the liner from which we had just disembarked glared immaculately white through the grilling of the Customs shed. Eventually Sing was brought forward, and we were packed into his car, an old Buick. During the next couple of weeks he very rarely left our sides; and it did not take us long to appreciate our good fortune.

The Sikhs are a religious sect, and far more liberal than the average Hindu. Unlike their fellow Hindus they believe in the principle of universal toleration. God is pleased when men worship Him, but indifferent as to the form that human worship takes. The founder of their sect abolished the caste system among his adherents and accorded equal rights to every convert, whatever might have been his previous calling. This lack of prejudice showed in Sing's character. He spoke very good English, as indeed many of the Indians do. Their accent, however, is, strangely enough, pure Welsh, an odd effect obtained, it would seem, by the high, nasal pitch they assume when they mouth our words.

Very respectful, Sing seldom spoke unless he was spoken to; but, once we had discovered his gifts, he was not allowed to remain silent for long. Thus we would ask him how to distinguish between

passers-by of different race and creed. Every Indian appears to possess the knack: "That man," they say immediately, "comes from the south: that woman from Orissa." Some differences, of course, are obvious. In a few days we learned to distinguish a Moham-medan from a Hindu; but it takes several weeks, even months, to learn all the different fashions in the women's saris and to recognise the provenance of their clanking jewellery. Sing could tell at a glance. "What do the Parsees look like, Sing?" we asked him on our second day. "Like that," he answered at once, pointing to a woman in a white blouse and skirt, dressed, in fact, like a European. Miss Minbatteerwalla, our first Parsee friend, told us one afternoon that she had been so tempted by the beauty of a certain material that she could not resist having a sari made out of it. "You should hear what my sister had to say on the subject! We Parsees are not allowed to dress like the Indians."

Among our other expeditions, Sing drove us up to the Parsee Towers of Silence, which stand on the highest point of Malabar Hill. Great granite rocks rear up against the pale sky, and round them grow acacias which give the place the appearance of a park. Instinctively I looked for the vultures, but I could not see one. High walls surround the burial ground and I could just pick out the tops of the five cylindrical, whitewashed towers. Steps lead up to open cubicles set in the thickness of the wall, apparently radiating spoke-wise from a central well or shaft. Borne up here on a flower-decked litter, the body has its main joints broken and is then laid out in one of these cubicles. In half an hour the flesh has been completely devoured by the vultures. The skeleton is left to bleach in the sun and the wind, and finally thrown down the well, where it crumbles into dust which accumulates so slowly that in forty years it has risen only five feet.

There is an excellent description of the Towers of Silence written by Charles Muller, a Frenchman who visited India in 1910. He did not actually penetrate the towers; nobody is allowed in except the "carriers of the dead", not even the relatives of the deceased. "Bastions," he calls them, low and white, a dirty white, grey with age. The tops of the towers are smooth and, as he says, usually crenellated with brown vultures; and the walls are streaked by the droppings of generations, mixed with blood. The vultures were

evidently roosting in some near-by palm tree when Muller was there; and he remarks on their clumsy flight, as they wheeled off into the empty sky. While he was watching them, a small funeral cortège wound up a slight incline. It is not the Parsees' habit to attend funerals; and there were only the priest, who carried a black umbrella against the sun, and the "carriers of the dead" dressed in immaculate white. They bore the body of a child, done up in swaddling clothes like a mummy. The cortège disappeared through a low archway in one of the towers. Just as Muller was leaving, he saw the two "carriers of the dead" stand outside the tower clapping their hands above their heads. The response was immediate, and the great birds dropped like plummets out of the blue. Not without a certain malicious pleasure, I feel, Muller describes how it happens sometimes that the vultures drop a morsel of human flesh on to the respectable Britishers promenading along the tree-shaded avenues of Malabar Hill. The English, he observes, are "*fort dégoutés*".\*

In Sing's company we also penetrated the deceptive façade of modern Bombay, with its Victorian Gothic office-buildings and twentieth-century concrete blocks, and entered the swarming town of bazaars that lies behind it. In the cloth bazaar we spent whole afternoons; a kind of covered-in market-place, it is divided up into streets by walls of spangled materials, all the colours of the rainbow and every known texture. The shops are brilliantly lighted, spread with thick mattresses covered by spotlessly white cotton, and furnished with bolsters acting as chairs. Sing watched over us like a nanny, to see that we were not overcharged. He would sit quietly in a corner, all moustache and beard, his bright eyes gleaming through their lashes. We had difficulty in making the shopkeepers pull out the right bolt of silk. We would point to a brown and green stuff woven in waves like undulating water; agitatedly I would lean over: "No, no, not the apricot silk. That one." But there were so many: it seemed hopeless. Then up would come Sing's long brown hand,

\* The Parsees are the followers of Zoroaster, who taught in Persia about 1000 B.C. It was the religion of Persia before its conversion to Mohammedanism. Ormazd is their god, the Lord of Light and Goodness. The elements are his particular symbols and it is due to the Parsees' veneration of them that we find this singular mode of interment. Fire is too holy to allow it to be polluted by burning the dead. Water is equally respected, and so is earth. The mixing of the bones in the well is part of Zoroaster's creed that the rich and poor must meet in death.



exposing the silver bracelet that all Sikhs wear on their wrists. Quickly he would say something in Hindustani and out would fly the bolt we wanted to see, its gossamer folds rapidly piling up on the jumble of unravelled stuffs. Our choice made, he would scrutinise the bill. The accountant, I was fascinated to see, kept his pencil tucked, not behind his ear, but in between his toes.

About six miles from Bombay lies the little island of Elephanta. Two long hills run its whole length, forming a valley; and here, cut into the face of one of these hills, are the famous rock temples, which contain some of the greatest masterpieces of Hindu sculpture. As expressions of pure sensuous enjoyment, they are the most beautiful that I have ever seen.

A rickety old launch waited for us at the steps of the 'Gateway to India', another of our strange confections built in the Indian style to commemorate the landing of King George V and Queen Mary for the great Durbar of 1911, held under the auspices of Lord Curzon, the most autocratic, and probably one of the most successful, of our many Viceroy. But this is past history, a fact poignantly brought home by the shuttered windows of the Royal Bombay Yacht Club. It must have been very pukka in its day. That invaluable book, *Murray's Guide*\*, recommends it warmly: the Yacht Club and Malabar Hill are the first places mentioned by the author, Captain Eastwich, M.P. He warns the visitor, however, that to visit the Yacht Club one must have a formal invitation. It was that kind of place—a citadel of Anglo-Indian society.

When we set out for Elephanta, fleecy clouds flecked the sky and the air was sparkling. The sun had not yet gathered force enough to fade out the rosy pink light of an Indian morning. Small white-capped waves spanked the sides of our boat as we piff-puffed across the bay, and the islands grouped and regrouped themselves as we advanced. Here were the views of peaks and palm-fringed shores with which I had been familiar in Ackermann's prints since my childhood. One of the prints I remembered is called 'Approach of the Monsoon'; but it was still too early for monsoon weather, and the horizon we approached was a pale, misty blue. The day had grown hot by the time we reached the concrete jetty, where we were met

\* *Murray's Guide* (sixth edition). John Murray, London.

by the usual band of noisy children, including a little boy who patted his round stomach and opened big pathetic eyes. "No father, no mother," he whined. "Me hungry." The trick must work sometimes; but, when a stiff white finger was poked into his fat belly, and all his friends burst into gales of laughter, exposing sharp white teeth, he soon came to the conclusion that this was not not his lucky day; and the whole band quickly lost interest and scampered off across the mud-flats.

From the top of a flight of steps above the sea-slimed jetty, we made the last stage of the journey to the temples in carrying-chairs slung on bamboo poles. It was a stiff ascent; then, rounding a jagged crag, we came suddenly upon the temples—an open forecourt leading to some steps and the first of the many columns. Massive and square, cut out of the living rock, they seem to support the whole of the mountain that rises above them, an impression heightened by the cushion-like capital, apparently squashed down by the weight it carries. The first two columns had been broken—shattered (we were told) by a Portuguese *fidalgó*, who fired a great gun into the cave in order to be able to enjoy the echo.

The first cave-temple is of a considerable depth, but, being open on three sides, is lighted by shafts of sunlight which play on the honey-coloured stone. Apart from the incredible beauty of its sculptures, there is nothing cave-like, or depressing, about Elephanta. Here we come face to face with the great classical age of Indian sculpture; the temples, which are dedicated to Shiva, date from the eighth century A.D. Nothing could have surpassed the excitement which which I encountered and recognised, for the first time, the vast Hindu pantheon. It was an intensely moving experience.

The many-armed gods who rose all around me were very different from anything I had seen in photographs. I was prepared, for example, to meet Shiva in his most alarming aspect, bedecked with necklaces of skulls, the god who engenders, also the god who kills. The divinity whom we encountered at Elephanta was a god of a much gentler and more generous type. On the right as one enters, there is an exhilarating representation of Shiva dancing the *Tandava*, or world-shaking dance. Over-life-size, he is represented in all the sensuous beauty of an Indian in the prime of life. True, he has six arms, but the sculptor has managed to suggest that such an equip-

ment, though perhaps unusual, is not entirely impossible, or necessarily unattractive. The supernumerary arms remain in the background and do not disturb the general effect or dislocate its wonderful rhythm. The god's right arm is swung across his chest, its pressure flattening out the muscles of his chest and causing them to bulge a little on either side. His legs have been broken off at the thighs; but their position is still clear. His weight rests on his left leg. His right leg is lifted, exposing the smooth rounded surface inside his thigh. A fragment of pleated tunic is spread, like the wing of a bird, along the taut sinews. Around his waist is tied the sacred thread, tied just tightly enough to crease the flesh. As in all good Hindu sculpture, the stomach, under the navel, has a sensuous fullness. The god's face is beautiful and his eyes are closed. All the gods in Elephanta are portrayed with their eyes closed, so that they seem to be withdrawn into themselves. Here they resemble the figures in Egyptian bas-reliefs, which show gods and royalty in profile, and only slaves full-face, for divinity deigns not to notice the paltry doings of the human world. A pointed cap, beaded with pearls, covers Shiva's head; heavy gold rings weigh down the lobes of his ears; and on his arms he wears jewelled bracelets. An extraordinary feeling of rhythm pervades the whole work. Up and down move his legs, while his torso sways gently from side to side, swung by the slow flailing of his arms. There is nothing frantic about his dance; its pace is slow, measured in years and centuries. He is dancing the world out of existence in order that it may re-form again. It is a dance both of destruction and of perpetual re-creation.

Elephanta contains so many representations of Shiva that it is impossible to describe them all. At the back of the cave, for example, lurks the heroic *Trimurti*, first seen down an avenue of Elephanta's wonderful columns. These columns rise from square bases; then comes a short fluted shaft, the flutings flowing upwards with an air of mobility more vegetable than mineral and interrupted by a narrow line which curls outwards into petals or tongues. The capitals above are unique in form, bulging outwards like fat cushions or like wads of unbaked dough, so that one is tempted to reach up and squeeze them. In their turn, they support square plinths, on which rests the architrave, sloping away on either side, in scrolls connected by a band or ribbon, until it meets the large transverse beams of rock

which connect the range of pillars. The columns of Elephanta are immensely satisfactory in form, and accentuate the sense of tranquillity that pervades the temple.

Slowly, and not without awe, one approaches the colossal *Trimurti*. The three great heads, based on one central shoulder, must measure about twenty feet high. Here Shiva is represented in his threefold aspect of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. There are various interpretations of the *Trimurti*, and the more recent are particularly hard to follow, so obscure and involved are the teachings of Brahminic theosophy. I prefer the original explanation of this astonishing work, which seems to be confirmed by the expressions of the three faces. The beautiful calm of the central head denotes Brahma the Creator; these serene features must surely be the purest plastic rendering of the Hindu concept of divinity. On the left, cut in profile in the rock, we see Shiva, a moustache curling about thick, sensuous lips more African than Asiatic. The right-hand head represents Vishnu, mild and benevolent, a faint smile playing over his full cheeks. All three wear high caps of jewels and flowers looped with pearls. Again heavy pendants drag down the ears, and a wide collar of pearls and gold encircles the neck and chest of the central head. His high, coned-shaped head-dress looks almost Chinese and forms a kind of central column. In her book on Indian art\* Dr. Kramrisch interprets it as a *lingam*, or phallus, a symbol associated with Shiva.

The *lingam*, in fact, is the focal point of these temples, as it is in the majority of Hindu shrines, Shiva being the most popular member of the Hindu pantheon, or rather, the most popular manifestation of a single godhead. Its upthrusting cone can be seen through the openings cut into the walls of the inner sanctuary. The *lingam* shrine is square and lies to the west of the great hall. It has four doorways, opening on to the four cardinal points. Large figures representing divine door-keepers stand cut in relief outside each of the openings. They are coiffed and bejewelled like the rest of the gods.

The *lingam* is a perfectly plain shaft of stone, cylindrical in form and about three feet high. There are no depressions in the stone to

\* *The Art of India through the Ages* by Stella Kramrisch. Phaidon Press, London, 1954.

mark any anatomical detail, and the uninitiated visitor would probably remain quite unconscious of its real significance. As Moor observes in his book on the Hindu religion: "The emblems under which they exhibit the elements and operation of nature are not externally indecorous. Unlike the abominable realities of Egypt and Greece, we see the phallic emblem in the Hindu Pantheon without offence, and know not until the information be extorted that we are contemplating a symbol whose prototype is indelicate. The external decency of the symbols and the difficulty with which their recondite allusions are discovered both offer evidence favourable to the moral delicacy of the Hindu character."\* This is quite true; though intensely physical as a nation, there is a great delicacy in their deportment. India is, after all, a country of continual ablutions carried out in the most public places; yet never once, in our months of travelling, did we see a sign of anything that could be called immodesty.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt of the *lingam's* true significance. One feels its power. There it stands, in the darkest recess of the temple, often almost invisible except for the reflections on its greasy surface where the faithful have anointed it with libations of melted butter. It is the very core of these dark sanctuaries, potent, swollen, charged with magnetism; and that is how the builders of the temples intended that it should appear. The worship of the *lingam* was popularised in its present form by Shankara, the Hindu revivalist, who in his crusade against Buddhism was obliged to make many concessions to popular superstition. With his deep insight into human nature, he correctly judged the importance of the sex-cults and therefore encouraged the worship of Shiva. All over India temples were built in which the worship of the god in the form of the *lingam* was instituted.

In the *Puranas*, or Sacred Books, one reads concerning the origin of this cult a tale invented, no doubt, to please the common run of worshippers: "Brahma and Vishnu, accompanied by a numerous following of illustrious penitents, went one day to Kailasa, the paradise of Shiva, to pay a visit to the God, and surprised him in the act of intercourse with his wife. He was not in the least disconcerted by the presence of the illustrious visitors, and so far from

\* *The Hindu Pantheon* by Edward Moor, F.R.S. London, 1810.

showing any shame at being discovered in such a practice, continued to indulge in the gratification of his sensual desires."\* The *Puranas* relate that he was drunk at the time and in no position to appreciate the indecency of his conduct. The gods and penitents, all except for Vishnu, who laughed at the proceedings, displayed great indignation and abused him roundly for being no better than a loutish brute who should be banished from the society of honest folk.

Having pronounced a few hasty curses, the gods retired, leaving Shiva to return to his senses, which he did shortly afterwards, as soon as the fumes of passion and alcohol had cleared from his brain. Vaguely he remembered that some people had called, and asked his guards who it was that had visited him. They told him the worst, "and their words fell on Shiva and his wife Durga, or Parvati, like a clap of thunder, and they both died of grief in the same position in which the gods and penitents had surprised them". Desiring that mortals should have full knowledge of the act that had covered him with shame and that had been the cause of his death, he saw to it that the story was published abroad. "My shame," he said, "has killed me; but it has also given me a new life and a new shape which is that of the *lingam*. You, evil spirits, my subjects, regard it as my double self. I am the Supreme Being, and so is my *lingam*. To render to it the honours due to a god is an action of the highest merit." And so he goes on, promising those who worship him under his double guise an assured place in heaven.

This legend, of course, reveals the Hindu religion in its basest form. The *lingam*, naturally, has a far more profound significance, being a symbol of the reproductive forces of nature, the source of all human life. But then, throughout Hinduism, we find that the crudest forms of superstition go hand in hand with the noblest philosophical conceptions, and that idolatry is accepted, even by the most highly educated members of the priesthood, because it may ultimately lead to an understanding of exalted truths. "We see little girls with their dolls," said the mystic Ramakrishna. "How long do they play with them? Only so long as they are not married." Similarly, the worshipper needs images and symbols so long as God is not comprehended in His true form. It is God Himself who has

\* *Epics, Myths and Legends of India* by P. Thomas. D. B. Taraporevala, Sons & Co. Ltd., Bombay.

provided these various forms of worship to suit different stages of spiritual growth and knowledge.

Yet one's brain reels at the teeming complexity of the Hindu pantheon. Gods, minor gods, demons are numbered by the thousands. There are even several different paradises—Mount Meru, Kailasa and Vaikuntha, to name only three. Several of the gods have numerous avatars or incarnations; Vishnu, for example, appears in ten principal aspects. The goddesses, too, are very often known under different names. Parvati, Shiva's wife, is the ideal of beautiful womanhood, but becomes unrecognisable as Durga, and as the insatiable blood-dripping monster, Kali, patron goddess of the Thugs. And then the gods have their animal retainers; the bull sacred to Shiva, the kite and various snakes to Vishnu, the nine-headed cobra being his particular pet. But, to get some preliminary idea of the animated legions perpetuated in stone on the facings of the temples, one need only know the names and attributes of a mere handful of divinities. The most important is Brahma, married incestuously to his own daughter Sarasvati; Shiva, married to Parvati; Vishnu to Lakshmi. One suddenly discovers, nevertheless, that Vishnu becomes Krishna of the blue skin, married to the enchanting milkmaid Radha, and that Krishna himself changes to Rama, whose consort's name is Sita. Another great favourite is the pot-bellied Ganesha, son of Shiva and Parvati, who is always portrayed with an elephant's head and four or eight arms. He is famed as a remover of obstacles; and in India one meets him everywhere, by the wayside, in palaces and forts, near wells, usually daubed with red paint and coated in silver foil. He is of a morose and irascible disposition, ready to annoy or thwart those who fail to pay him sufficient respect. For this reason much deference is shown to him. Luckily for the Western student of Hindu myths, Ganesha has remained a bachelor and has no incarnations.

Compared with the voluptuous members of the Hindu pantheon, the athletic inhabitants of Mount Olympus seem an orderly and cold-blooded crew. But from a study of the endless literature that surrounds them one incontestable fact emerges. Hinduism, in its higher forms, is one of the great religions of the world. In essence it is monotheistic, exalting Brahma the Creator as the Supreme Being, whom only saints and initiates can conceive of in the abstract, while

the masses must worship him under numerous anthropomorphic disguises. It is for their benefit that certain aspects of the Supreme Being have been personified and that almost every human activity has received divine sanction. The temples contain images because the Hindus believe that prayers are offered up with more devotion when there is something before the eyes to fix the mind. It is interesting to note that Brahma does not receive public worship anywhere in India, and that there are no temples dedicated to him.

Of all the temples we visited, Elephanta remained for me the most moving. Its simple grandeur and the splendour of its sculptures, charged with such intensity of feeling, typify Hinduism at its best and purest. Not until several hundred years later did Hindu temples become encumbered with extravagant irrelevancies, such as the monsters and grotesques of Madura or Trichinopoly in the southern Indian plains.



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## A DAY ON THE ROAD

For nearly a year before I set out, I had been reading every book on India that I could find. But, even so, many aspects of the Indian scene took me completely by surprise. For example, the magnificent trees: huge limbs sweep upwards, arching over the road, with thick, shining leaves, tough and rubbery in texture, to keep the pitiless sun at bay. Besides the banyans and the tamarinds, there are all the different acacias, which display the feathery foliage of their species, but are three or four times larger than the acacias that we know in Europe. There were many trees that I had never seen before, some with brilliant flowers of pure vermilion, others, like the silk cotton tree, with fleshy bells that resemble inverted tulips; but the handsomest of all are the mangoes, enormous chunks of tree that have the satisfying rotundity of our European chestnut, but are thicker and more elaborately spiked with leaves. When you see them growing in a clump, they look like cumulus clouds—fat clouds that have turned green and gathered on the surface of the ground instead of banking up against the sky.

The mango leaves bear a certain resemblance to those of a loquat tree: long and serrated, strongly ribbed and solid, covered with fur-like hair. The young shoots range in colour from a pink to deep burgundy; and the flowers, growing in woolly clusters, are a pale, dirty yellow and have a strong, pungent smell. They were in bloom when we landed, and their heady scent followed us wherever we went. Mangoes in flower are a symbol to the Indian of love and surreptitious meetings. Again and again in the Mogul miniatures, and particularly in the Rajput paintings, one sees beautiful girls dallying with their paramours on a dais under the stars; the dais,

strewn with cushions and jasmine flowers, is set in the delicious cool of a mango grove. Despite the jasmine and the rose petals and the sandal-wood paste with which the lady is anointed, one knows that in the end it is the scent of the mango that will prevail. When the lovers come to themselves again, it is this musty, cloying, all-pervasive scent that they will be aware of first.

There are dozens of different varieties of mango fruit; and later we were to see them spread out in market-places, variously hued from deep orange to yellow marbled with green. Some of them are tough and stringy, tasting of turpentine. But the best ones are reputed to come from Bombay; and, before the days of mechanised transport, they used to be sent great distances by special runners.

This special Bombay mango is called the Alfonso, and it holds the same position in the mango world as does the Cox's Orange Pippin in the world of apples. The Alfonsos were not quite ripe when I was in India, but a friend of mine has just sent me some by air freight from Bombay, and I have one before me as I write. It is gold in colour, and has a delicious fragrance. Beneath the leathery skin, and closely adhering to it, is a thin layer of firm flesh, the texture of pawpaw, with more body than melon. The taste is hard to analyse—a hint of pineapple with the flavour of an orange. And it has the juiciness of a peach. Mangoes are an acquired taste, which, once acquired, never palls. I have heard of an official who spent most of his life in India, and found mangoes insipid when he tried them for the first time. He did not try them again until he was about to retire. The mango that he then tasted was a particularly succulent Alfonso. It proved his undoing; he now lives in London on a small pension and is obliged to buy his mangoes at Fortnum and Mason, where they cost him seven and sixpence each.

Motoring in India is apt to be a slow business, not only because the roads are bad, but because of the animals that inhabit them. The bullocks harnessed to their carts are there for obvious reasons; so are the goats, driven by goatherds in search of new pastures, although the change seems seldom to bring improvement, for their new feeding grounds, like the old, usually consist of stones and bare baked earth. Nevertheless the goats appear to thrive, and no doubt they have their own method of drawing sustenance from the thirsty country-side. It is, at first sight, more difficult to understand why

the lethargic water-buffalo should prefer the dusty road to the fields, however arid the fields may be. And the same question might be asked about the cows and the monkeys, and the crows and the doves, and the innumerable tree squirrels. The answer is that Indian roads are generally bordered with trees, very often members of the *figus* family, the most common being the banyan, which has a hard little fruit similar, as its name suggests, to a fig. From their over-arching boughs the fig drops right on to the crown of the road, an irresistible attraction to cattle. Naturally, they also welcome the shade and, being for the most part sacred, do not know the meaning of fear. With the exception of wild game, no animal in India does. Thus the cattle feed on the figs, and the lesser fry await their droppings—such droppings as escape the vigilant eyes of the farmer's wife, who scrapes them up and, mixing them with straw, moulds them into pancakes which she slaps on to the walls of her house to dry, using them afterwards as fuel.

So unused are the animals and the birds to speed that once or twice, when the road was clear and the surface good enough to allow us to do a gentle fifty, we averaged about fifteen doves a day. They are too slow in leaving their pickings, and get caught, with a feathery plop, on the radiator or the windscreen. The poor little tree squirrels suffer the same fate, their hesitation marked by a trail of flattened pelts. Monkeys are more agile, but all the same I believe that their numbers are diminishing. During recent years thousands of them have been shipped to America to stock the experimental laboratories. They are used to try out different vaccines; and I saw a photograph of one, the other day, being untrapped after a nightmare journey through space in a guided missile. Scientists were anxious to register its blood pressure and record its heart-beats. I was glad to read that it had first been chloroformed. This lively trade must be carried on in secret, to avoid offending the susceptibilities of orthodox Hindus.

The real trouble, however, comes from cows and bullock-carts. The carts usually travel in convoys of three or four; and, although they do their best to clear the way, in some districts the beautiful white oxen, with their black-rimmed eyes, are quite unused to motor traffic. It was a selfish point of view, but I was often glad not to be able to see the turmoil that we left behind us in our heavy wake



*Above, œil-de-bœuf window in one of the old Bombay houses (page 6)*

*Below, Bombay Town Hall, now the City Library and the branch office of the Royal Asiatic Society (page 5)*





St. Thomas's Cathedral in Bombay. An obelisk erected to the memory of Captain Nicholas Hardinge, R.N. (*page 4*)

of dust. The preliminary stage was sufficiently nerve-racking, as the oxen strained against their harness and the drivers tried frantically to whip them back into their usually placid state. Beating, of course, had exactly the opposite effect; and sometimes, I am afraid, the carts ended up by lurching dangerously down the embankment. Nearly all Indian roads are embanked, and, except on a few main routes, most of the embankments are made of dust. Labourers with baskets, fetching and carrying loads of earth which they strew over the surface of the thoroughfare to keep it moderately smooth, are everywhere a common sight. Even on tarmac roads, the tarmac is reduced to a narrow central ribbon, with soft shoulders on either side. Men and animals both naturally prefer the middle of the road, to which they stick with a firm display of obstinacy. Sacred cows are the worst offenders. They will not be hurried; but at least when several of them decide to move, they generally shamle off in the same direction. Not so the slate-coloured water-buffaloes, which look at you with their china-blue eyes like old gentlemen glancing up from over their spectacles. No amount of hooting or racing of the engine can persuade them to budge should they feel disinclined; and very seldom do they show any desire to move on of their own accord. It is as if they had a grudge against the human race because, unlike their sister, the common cow, they are not considered sacred. Their sulkiness seems to be reflected in their eyes. Yet when, centuries ago, the cow was classified as sacred it was primarily for economic reasons. "The mother of millions" is Gandhi's description of the cow. The water-buffalo, being a more recent importation, was considered surplus stock.

Yet, in their sulky, sultry way, water-buffaloes are enchanting creatures, as pretty as the cows, their horns curving right back, almost parallel with their spines. Only among the pure-bred do the horns curve so. The horns of bullocks and cows, on the other hand, curve in the most various and fantastic shapes: some upwards like a lyre, two feet high from base to tip; others curled under the animal's drooping ears; some rakishly asymmetrical, one horn up and its fellow down. Moreover, the horns of cattle are often artificially coloured, the colours varying from district to district. In Udaipur, for instance, bullocks harnessed to carts have their horns washed olive-green, and in Hyderabad, pomegranate-red. If, instead of

hauling their usual load of dung or bricks, the carts have been attending a wedding, they are bound with ribbons of silver paper, stuck on in spiral twists. Very often little brass knobs have been welded over the sharp horn-tips. Always kept highly burnished, they flame like gold in the sun.

One grows to love these lumbering bullock-carts, which are as much part of the Indian scene as the wells perpetually attended by a sari-clad line of erectly poised women. The drudgery of fetching water becomes a ritual: the women move as in a slow ballet. The jolting procession of the carts, the lazy movement of the oxen—nothing is hurried: Indians have no nerves. A kind of stupendous inertia permeates everything, set to a languid strumming music of buzzing flies and heat.

The only discordant note is provided by the tree squirrel, an impertinent little rodent who scurries around the Indian landscape from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. He is everywhere, bumptious, erratic, refusing to be still. With jerky movements, his bushy tail twitching like an insect's antennæ, he scampers on to the road. Seizing some grain or seed, he starts nibbling furiously, his beady black eyes taking in everything, his little round ears twitching. At one's approach, he bounds off, helter-skelter, almost airborne in his flight to safety. He is small, his coat a kind of ginger brown with three white lines down the back. In America he is known as a chipmunk, which suits him better than tree squirrel—far too dignified a name for his endearing but rather vulgar personality.

On none of the roads that we were to take did I find the sort of jostling crowd described by Kipling in his picture of the Great Trunk Road. This, I imagine, has gone for ever, the oriental equivalent of Chaucer's Pilgrim's Way. What we saw were lumbering bullock-carts and the gay, rattletrap buses painted with flowers, which lurched towards us, trailing behind them enormous clouds of dust. We would approach one another, each vehicle keeping to the crown of the road until a head-on collision seemed inevitable, when suddenly car and bus would swerve apart on to opposite soft shoulders. It seems extraordinary that there are not more accidents from skidding, that more buses don't topple over from sheer overloading. But no, the Hindu counterpart of St. Christopher keeps a watchful eye upon his flock. Indian and European drivers employ

completely different techniques. Sing, for example, never used his horn to warn another vehicle of our approach, but would wait until we were right on top of it before he blasted it to one side. At the very moment when we should have put our foot on the brake, he accelerated. This is not a habit peculiar to Sing, but common to all Indian drivers. In fact I have noticed it elsewhere in the East; and, riding behind Sing, I remembered my progress through the mud villages of the Nile, seated on a ridiculously small donkey and accompanied by an incessant din of shouting, hissing and caterwauling, while my donkey-boy hit out around him at everything within sight. Regardless of my wishes or comfort, it was a matter of personal prestige to him that I should reach my objective as quickly as possible. Here, instead of a donkey, I had a sleek American motor-car; but the idea was very much the same. In Sing's defence I must add that he proved very much less aggressive than any other driver who worked for us.



## AURANGABAD

Aurangabad is well known as a convenient and comfortable stopping-place for those who wish to visit the famous Buddhist monastery of Ajanta and the rock temples of Ellora; but it is also a fascinating town on its own account. Aurangzeb, the last of the Mogul Emperors to exercise effective sovereignty, made it the capital of the Deccan, or South Lands. He alone, among the long line of Persian conquerors, held undisputed sway over the length and breadth of India. "In 1690," writes Mr. H. G. Rawlinson,\* "the tide of Mogul conquest had reached its high-water mark. The last independent kingdoms of the Deccan had been subdued. . . . But, in reality, Aurangzeb's triumph was a hollow one. The mighty empire was actually on the verge of collapse. The Deccan campaign was a continual drain upon the Imperial treasury. . . . India was far too vast to be governed by a single man, and the Emperor was too suspicious to delegate power to another." He had been absent from Delhi, his capital, for more than twenty years, and much of that time had been spent in Aurangabad. The romantic ruins of his city spread across the country for miles.

After a stifling day at Ajanta, I used to drive in the late afternoons out into the ripening cornfields. Bumping down dusty cart tracks, past clumps of palms, I would come upon a domed and arched pavilion, stacked to the ceiling with bundles of hay. Once, no doubt, it had been a kiosk in a spacious garden, the garden of one of the great princes, the Maharaja of Jaipur perhaps, or of Jodhpur, both of whom were forced to attend the Emperor's Court with thousands of their retainers, just as the nobles of France were

\* *India* by H. G. Rawlinson. The Cresset Press, London, 1937.

obliged to fritter away their lives in the antechambers of Versailles.

On Aurangzeb's death, Aurangabad was deserted by the great, and quickly sank into oblivion. Aurangzeb's austere tomb lies in the small village of Rauza, fourteen miles from Aurangabad. It is very unlike his mother's magnificent Taj Mahal or his wife's charming but indifferent copy of the Taj, at Aurangabad; but then, he was a "prayer-monger and a bigot", as Prince Dara Shikoh, his brother, called him. Prince Dara was his father's favourite, the oldest of Shah Jahan's four sons, and thus by right heir-presumptive. This right, however, was never considered as absolutely binding by the possible claimants to the throne, and was generally hotly contested. Prince Dara, however, popular and good-looking, was fairly well assured of his inheritance, and Aurangzeb, his third brother, was his only serious rival. He saw through the mock humility of the young æsthete with a long, pale face, and distinguished an insatiable will to power rather than an ascetic devotion to God burning in those large dark eyes. Events were to prove him right. François Bernier, a French doctor of medicine and pupil of Abbé Gassendi, the brilliant seventeenth-century mathematician and philosopher, wrote an excellent account of his sojourn at the Mogul Court, where he was attached, partly as physician, partly as adviser, to an important nobleman. "My readers," he observes, "have no doubt condemned the means by which the reigning Mogul [Aurangzeb] attained the summit of power. These means were indeed unjust and cruel; but it is not perhaps fair to judge him by the rigid rules that we apply to the character of European princes. In our quarter of the globe, the succession to the throne is settled in favour of the eldest by wise if fixed laws; but in Hindostan, the right of governing is usually disputed by all the sons of the deceased monarch, each of whom is reduced to the cruel alternative of sacrificing his brothers, that he himself may reign, or of suffering his own life to be forfeited for the security and stability of the dominion of another. Yet, even those who maintain that the circumstances of country, birth and education afford no palliation of the conduct pursued by Aurangzeb, must admit that this prince is endowed with a versatile and rare genius, that he is a consummate statesman, and a great king." Consummate statesman he may have been at times—he was crafty enough; but history does not show him as a great king. Memories of the corrupt

Court life he had known in his youth, and of his drug-addicted ancestors, so worked on his imagination that he became a fanatic determined to cleanse society of what he conceived to be its sins.

"The extravagance of the Court were curtailed," we read. "Drinking, gambling and other vices were suppressed: musicians, painters and architects no longer enjoyed the royal patronage, and apostates from Islam were arrested and put to death after due trial."\* A rabid Mohammedan, he considered it his duty to put an end to the religious toleration that had been the keynote of Akbar's and Jahangir's policy. "But his most serious blunder", as Mr. Rawlinson points out, "was the alienation of the Rajputs, whom Akbar had rightly looked upon as the pillars of his empire." Rajputana formed a solid block of independent native states lying to the west of the Mogul Empire. They were fiercely proud and excellent warriors, when well led. Unfortunately, they were Hindu, "Satans in human form", as Aurangzeb called them. Had they been of the same faith as the Emperor, the history of India might have been different.

Bernier's apology for Aurangzeb's character strikes me as extremely unconvincing. But to return to the circumstances in which he gained the throne: Shah Jahan, his father, was smitten in old age with a disorder "the nature of which", Bernier tells us, "it were unbecoming to describe". Whatever it was, his doctors expected that it would have fatal consequences; and when news of their verdict reached his four sons, governors in their different provinces, they were immediately galvanised into action, each one levying an army in the hope of being able to fight his way to the bejewelled Peacock Throne in Delhi. Prince Dara would certainly have proved victorious, had it not been for Aurangzeb, who had previously renounced any claim to the kingdom. Having by a ruse captured the royal fortress at Agra, where his father had taken up his residence, Aurangzeb walled up the old man in a few rooms of the palace and kept him a prisoner there for the rest of his life, which lasted, however, far longer than his physicians had foreseen—nearly eight years.

Next on Aurangzeb's list was his youngest brother, Murad. Among Murad's weaknesses was a passion for wine. Aurangzeb,

\* *India* by H. G. Rawlinson.

always ready to exploit the failings of others, worked on the young man with compliments and flattery, then invited him to dinner. "Murad", Bernier tells us, "was greeted with even more external courtesy and respect than had been usual since Aurangzeb had marked him for his victim; tears of joy seemed to flow, and his brother wiped, with a gentle hand, the perspiration and dust from the face of the devoted and credulous prince."

The dinner was highly successful, and the conversation civilised and amusing. They were unusually talented and attractive, this warrior family from the north, with by now enough Hindu blood in their veins to soften the austerity of their hawk-like features, give a fullness to the lips, and an unexpected softness to the eye. Aurangzeb himself could be abundantly charming, if charm should happen to suit his book. On this occasion, he entertained Murad to the best of his ability, and, towards the end of the meal, a large quantity of delicious wines from Kiraz and Kabul were introduced. Again we revert to Bernier: "Aurangzeb then rose softly, and with a countenance that beamed with affection and delight said, 'I need not inform Your Majesty of the serious turn of my mind, and that, as a Mohammedan, I feel scruples which do not permit me to indulge in the pleasures of the table; but though I deem it my duty to retire, yet I leave you in excellent company.'"

Murad, enchanted with the evening and tempted by the wines, drank himself into a stupor and fell asleep; which was exactly what his brother had hoped for. The young Prince's servants were ordered to retire, while one of Aurangzeb's faithful eunuchs removed his sword and his dagger. The stage was now set. Feigning an outraged fury, Aurangzeb stormed into the apartment and pushed Murad rudely to his feet. "Oh shame and infamy! Thou, a king, and yet possessing so little discretion?" Aurangzeb had led his brother to believe that he was championing his fight for the throne. "What will the world now say of thee, and even of me? Let this wretched and drunken man be bound hand and foot, and removed then within, to sleep away his shame"—a shame which the unfortunate Murad had ample time to ponder over, for he was forthwith despatched to the fortress of Gwalior, used by the Moguls as a place of incarceration for important prisoners of state. It was here in Gwalior that Murad was eventually beheaded on a trumped-up

charge concerning an injustice he was supposed to have committed while governor of his province. His young sons, imprisoned with him, were dispatched with enforced doses of *poust*, a white milky drink made from crushed poppies' heads which have been allowed to soak overnight in water. It is a slow poison, and was thus a popular means of doing away with prisoners of royal birth, for it was supposedly forbidden to lay hand upon one of the blood royal. The victim was obliged every morning to swallow a large cup of *poust*. It had the effect of emaciating those who drank it, eventually making it impossible for them to absorb any solid food, so that eventually they were reduced to a state of helpless stupefaction.

As for Prince Dara, all the cards appeared to have been stacked in his favour: he was the rightful heir, he was popular, and he had his father's backing, which gave him command of the royal treasury. Twice he had victory in his grasp. But his second victory was really his undoing. Aurangzeb's armies had been routed, when across the battlefield came galloping one of Dara's generals, a man called Calil-ullah-Kan, who some years previously had been publicly beaten on Dara's instigation, or rather, 'shoe-beaten' with a slipper on his head, an insult of the worst kind. Set on revenging himself, Calil-ullah-Kan had awaited his time; and now the moment had arrived. "May you be happy! May Your Majesty enjoy health and reign in safety! Praise be to Allah, the victory is your own," shouted the perfidious General as soon as he was within earshot. Then, approaching the Prince, he reined in his horse. "But," he added, "why are you still mounted on this lofty elephant? Have you not been sufficiently exposed to danger? If one of the arrows or bullets that have riddled your howdah were to touch your person, you can imagine what our situation would be!" Continuing in this vein, the General persuaded Dara to leave his elephant and mount a charger. The result was disastrous. High up on his elephant, he had been a rallying-point for his army: his valour put heart into them. On horseback, his presence was known to only his immediate followers. The troops missing their Prince, a rumour quickly spread that he had been killed. Panic seized them and the whole army, victorious up to this moment, vanished like snow under the sun.

Thenceforward, Dara's story is one of continuous misfortune, as he

was chased hither and thither until finally Aurangzeb captured him and had him beheaded. Manucchi, an Italian who travelled in India towards the end of the seventeenth century, tells us that, when Dara's head was brought to Aurangzeb, he examined it with satisfaction and opened one of the eyes "to observe a speck, that he might be convinced that another head had not been substituted in its place". Then, with a gesture of inexplicable cruelty, he had the head embalmed and sent in a box to his father, Shah Jahan. The old man was touched when the box arrived, supposing it to be a filial gift. It was some consolation, he said, for an unhappy father to find that the usurper had not wholly forgotten him. But when the box was unpacked and Shah Jahan beheld the head of his favourite son, he fell into a swoon.

Here again, it is perhaps unjust to judge Aurangzeb by our standards. Indian princes, both Hindu and Mohammedan, however enlightened in principle, in action were all abominably cruel. Jahangir, for example, Aurangzeb's grandfather, is described by Sir Thomas Roe, the English Ambassador, as a "gentleman of a very lovely presence and fine courage"; we know him to have inherited the family love of music and poetry, to have been a great naturalist, and very kind to animals. He thought nothing, however, of having offenders sewn up in raw hides, which contracted in the sun, or impaled on stakes, or blinded with hot irons. Akbar alone, the greatest of the Mogul Emperors, seems to have been free of this taint of royal sadism.

When Aurangzeb had disposed of his father and two of his brothers, one more brother remained to be dealt with. Shah Sujah was quickly despatched. He "owed his discomfiture", as Bernier puts it, "to the same trifling circumstance as occasioned the defeat of his brother"—that of descending too soon from his elephant. Exactly how he met his end seems to be a matter of conjecture. There is a theory that he escaped into Persia; but the result was the same: it left Aurangzeb the undisputed ruler of India. He mounted the throne in 1659 with the resounding title of 'Alamgir', or 'Holder of the Universe'. Once his brothers had ceased to trouble him, he developed an acute distrust of his two sons, not without reason as far as the elder was concerned, for Sultan Mahmoud did, in fact, revolt against the parental rule. Ambushed on his father's orders, he too

was carried off to the fortress of Gwalior, where he remained to the end of his days. Aurangzeb was fond of Sultan Mahmoud, whose behaviour, despite his own example, must have shocked him deeply. The Emperor never visited his son, not daring to trust himself in his presence; but from time to time he sent his court painter down to Gwalior to make portraits of him, so that he should be kept regularly informed as to his general state. Aurangzeb's second son appears to have been a weakling, for his father evidently thought that a stern admonishment was all he needed. He warned him not to imitate the lofty and unyielding spirit of his brother. "The art of reigning," he told him, "is so delicate, that a king's jealousy should be awakened by his very shadow. Indulge not in the fatal delusion that Aurangzeb may be treated by his children as was Jahangir by his son, Shah Jahan; or that, like the latter, he will permit the sceptre to fall from his hand."

Aurangzeb reigned for forty years, a lean period for painters, musicians and architects. Indeed, he seems to have pulled down more buildings than he constructed. Carefully nursed by Akbar, a virile hybrid architecture had sprung up on Indian soil. Employing Hindu master-craftsmen, he had set them building palaces and mosques in the Saracenic style—as Saracenic, that is to say, as their Indian architects wished them to be. They were far too advanced in the art of building to swallow a completely new style of construction: rather, they kept the outward form that accorded with the tenets of the Mogul religion, but masked it with a wealth of detail of their own. One can see for instance, what they did to the Saracenic arch. To their eyes, accustomed to rich carving, this was a monotonous feature; and its clean sweep was therefore broken with elaborate but beautiful soffits. The building immediately became more Hindu than Mohammedan. "With the rarest exception," Mr. Havell writes,\* "the domes of every Mohammedan building in India are crowned, not with the symbols of Islam, but by the Indian kalasha, 'the water-pot motif', the amalaka, the wheel denoting the central force of the universe, or the lotus flower, the traditional symbol which surmounted the Hindu temples. Nothing could more clearly explain the mental attitude of Hinduism towards the followers of Islam. 'We build the mosques and tombs for you, we set our sacred

\* *Indian Architecture* by E. B. Havell. John Murray, London, 1913.

symbols upon them; for the God whom you know as Allah is Brahma and Vishnu and Shiva.' "

Fully aware of the dangers of the Hinduistic influence, Aurangzeb banished all but orthodox Moslem craftsmen from his Court. The result was a marked and rapid decline in the arts, particularly in the art of architecture. The master-builders were obliged to seek patronage from the princes of their own religion; which accounts for the fine palaces of central India and Rajputana. Painters and Court musicians were forced to follow suit. Aurangzeb considered that music was a much over-crowded profession, and so violent did his prejudices become that he employed special police to patrol the city, and, wherever they heard music, to enter the house, arrest the musicians and break the instruments. The musicians, Manucchi tells us, seeing their livelihood endangered, "took counsel and tried to appease the King in the following way: about one thousand of them assembled on a Friday, when Aurangzeb was going to the mosque. They came out with a highly ornamented bier, as is the custom of the country, crying aloud with great grief and many signs of feeling, as if they were escorting to the grave some distinguished defunct. From afar Aurangzeb saw that multitude and heard their great weeping and lamentation, and, wondering, sent to know the cause of their sorrow. The musicians redoubled their outcry and their tears, fancying that the King would take compassion upon them. Lamenting, they replied with sobs that the King's orders had killed music, therefore they were bearing her to the grave. Report was made to the King, who quite calmly remarked that they should pray for the soul of music, and see that she was thoroughly well buried. In spite of this," Manucchi adds, "the nobles did not cease to listen to songs in secret."

Aurangzeb's was indeed a complex character. I have given the lurid details of his accession to the throne and the means by which he attained it; but there are contemporary descriptions that show him in quite a different guise. He was generous in giving alms and personally modest. Manucchi reported: "In privacy, he never sits on the throne nor does he use vessels of silver and gold. No unseemly talk, no word of back-biting or falsehood is permitted at his court. He appears twice or thrice daily in his Audience Chamber, with a mild and pleasing countenance, to dispense justice to



petitioners. . . . If any of them talks too much, or acts improperly, he is not displeased and never knits his brows."

We see him again in old age, on one of his never-ending campaigns, when he is described as an old man leaning on a staff, dressed in white muslin, with a single enormous emerald in his turban, slender and stooping with age, having an olive-coloured skin and a snow-white beard. He was courteous and kind and smiled a great deal. Our informant was shown into the royal tent while the Emperor was busy reading despatches, which he did with great ease, without the use of glasses. Preoccupied as he was, he seems to have found time to put his guest at ease and asked him many questions. Nine years later, Manucchi gives a rather touching description of the ageing Emperor. Again it was in the royal tent that the audience took place. "Most of the time, he sits doubled up, his head drooping. When his officers submit a petition, or make report to him on any occurrence, he raises his head and straightens his back. He gives them such an answer as leaves no opening for reply, and still looks after his army in the minutest particulars. But those who are at a distance pay very little attention to his orders."

The Emperor was then in his eighty-seventh year and already a sick man. He had been forced to admit that his efforts to break the power of the Mahrattas had failed; and, disillusioned and apprehensive of the future, he abandoned his campaign against the South. "My back is bent with weakness," he writes to his son, "and I have lost the power of motion." Now that he knew he was nearing his end, he began to think of retribution. At this moment he almost inspires a certain degree of sympathy. "I have committed numerous crimes and know not with what punishments I may be seized. . . . The guardianship of a people is a trust by God committed to my sons. Be cautious that none of the Faithful are slain, lest their miseries fall upon my head." This touching letter is written in elegant Persian, which had always remained the official language at Court. The old man must have felt desperately alone, for he continues: "The domestics and courtiers, however deceitful, must not be ill-treated." And again that terrible conscience: "It is necessary to gain your views by gentleness and art. I am going. Whatever good or evil I have done, it was for you. Take not amiss, nor remember the offences I have done to yourself." But it was all

too late. Seized with an attack of faintness, one morning after his prayers he passed slowly away. Up to the very last, his thin fingers continued mechanically to click the beads of his rosary.

We drove out over the dusty roads, past dried-up river beds fringed with thickets of palms, to the fortified village of Rauza, where Aurangzeb was buried. If we judge him according to the extent of his empire, he was the greatest of the Mogul Emperors. His tomb, by contrast, is so simple that it is barely distinguishable from the whitewashed plaster tombs of the Moslem saints among whom he lies buried. He wished it to be that way, according to the tenets of the Koran. "By his own directions he was wrapped in a shroud of coarse canvas bought from the proceeds of the sale of caps which he had knitted with his own hand." The glare was blinding as we climbed up the steep steps leading to the little mosque. The guardian was taking his siesta, curled up on a grass mat under the shade of an enormous neem tree. Only the density of its foliage protected him, for its delicate, pointed leaves, something like those of a mountain ash, resembled against the sun slivers of transparent jade. According to their memoirs the ladies of the English Raj used to spread the dried leaves of this tree under the carpets to keep off white ants. It is also supposed to deter cockroaches.

In our stockinged feet we walked around the small courtyard, the hot stones burning us at every step; and there, in one corner, we came upon Aurangzeb's tomb, open to the sky, partitioned off by a screen of filigreed marble.

Aurangabad was our first contact with Mogul India; and it may have been for this reason that we found it so fascinating. But no, perhaps I am wrong. Bibi-ka-Maqbara's mausoleum, though certainly decadent in style compared to its prototype, the Taj Mahal, has, nevertheless, enormous charm, thanks mainly, I dare say, to the enchanting garden in which it is set. In the whole of India this is the only garden that has come down to us more or less intact as its Persian designers planned it. The Moguls were famous for their love of gardens, and they had a very highly developed sense of gardening art. The few gardens that are left of the countless pleasure grounds that once spread in and around Delhi and Agra have unfortunately been sadly tampered with. The garden of the Taj Mahal is an example; and I am afraid we Europeans must accept the re-

sponsibility. True, we restored it; but better far that it should have remained a romantic tangle, overgrown with weeds, than appear as it does today—a suburban park, laid out with plots of grass suitable for family picnics! I think I remember having seen some monkey-puzzle trees even. And why have the restorers truncated the alley of cypress that leads up to the beautiful milk-white building with its bubble-like dome? The cypresses were said to interrupt the view. But its architect took care to set the Taj on an enormously spacious platform, raised high above the ground; and it is from this platform that the great mausoleum should be viewed in all its dignity. But I am anticipating, for I have not yet described Agra.

Driving out of the town, we wound across some hillocks bordered by ruins, where vermilion pomegranate flowers peeped over the crumbling mud walls. Then, after a mile or so, we left all signs of vegetation behind us, so that we seemed to be driving straight into the desert, towards the flat-topped sandstone mountains that ran to the west. The mausoleum itself is approached by a long straight road, and lies hidden behind battlemented walls. A large central gateway, with iron-studded doors, kept us in suspense until the very last. Finally they were swung open with dignified salaaming by a handsome eagle-faced man in a pale apricot-coloured turban. He had almond-shaped eyes and proud flaring nostrils and looked as if he had stepped straight out of *The Thousand and One Nights*. He wore a little pointed beard, and narrowed his eyes when he inspected us; he might have been a genie materialised from a bottle. As he flung open the doors, there appeared before us an oasis of bubbling fountains and long shallow watercourses that reflected tapering cypresses. Latticed walls of pointed bricks, set in different designs, encompassed orchards of oranges, pomegranates and lemons. The air was heavy with jasmine, and from the middle of this orchard paradise rose the huddled domes and minarets of the mausoleum. The place was gay and alive; there was nothing about it that savoured of death; and this was precisely the effect that the builders of these royal tombs intended—a secluded garden plot where mourners and friends could while away the cool hours of the evening.

The sun was setting, casting long shadows across the paved walks, bordered on each side with sunken beds of flowers—a charming idea,

for, when properly planted, the flowers would reach to the level of the pavement. Each bed was consecrated to some special flower; sometimes whole gardens were—the Emperor Babar's violet garden near Kabul, or the rose garden at Lahore; and one reads of moon gardens planted with dark trees and white flowers. Poppies, lilies, anemones and red cyclamen were among the flowers that the Moguls loved.

The Mogul gardens always followed the same pattern. The principal pavilion or mausoleum formed the centre of a square and was raised on a platform; shallow watercourses, bordered by paved walks, led in a long straight line away from the central point to gateways or kiosks set in the middle of the four outer walls. The lay-out was entirely geometric. Water-chutes often broke the monotony of straight lines and brought the water to life, making it ripple and run down slabs of marble carved with undulations like inverted fish scales, which caught the water in their hollows and caused it to murmur like a brook bubbling over pebbles. The fine spray of fountains cooled the air. But this type of garden is to be seen at its best in Kashmir: at Aurangabad water is a precious commodity, and now that all the Emperors have long been dead, the fountains are no longer playing or, if they still play, have been reduced to gentle spurts, silently gushing up and hardly breaking the mirror-like surface of the pools.

Bibi-ka-Maqbara's garden is attended largely by women, young girls in green and mauve saris; their laughter and the clanking of their silver jewels came to us between the boles of the orange trees. The approach of a man, even if he be European, is the excuse for giggles accompanied by sly sideways looks. One smiles in return. What else is there to do? The genie screws up his eyes and flares his nostrils, but I suspect that he is also smiling. The smile should be in his almond eyes, but one cannot see them. That stern face, with a deep scar down one cheek, never quite betrays his feelings. It remains handsomely passive, gaunt, set on a proud neck over a protruding Adam's apple.

It was closing time; and the gardening girls, having downed their hoses, stacked away their baskets and, with a great deal of noisy chatter, performed their evening ablutions in a marble pool. Then they dipped their shining brass pots into the water, piled them, one

on top of the other, sometimes as many as three high, on their heads, and walked off, straight-backed but swaying slightly with a wonderful undulatory movement of the hips. The pots repeated the silhouettes of the finials on the domes and minarets behind them.

It is true that the mausoleum Aurangzeb built for his wife at Aurangabad is far inferior to the Indo-Moslem buildings of Agra and Delhi; but I had not yet seen them and was not obliged to make a comparison. This place, moreover, has a poetry all of its own; and even now, should I return, I know I should still find what I first saw when the genie swung open the doors. The fading sun turned the highly polished chanum, with which the mausoleum is covered, to a rich, glowing ivory. Chanum, or stucco, is used all over India, and was adopted by the British as a covering for columns, walks, and even floors. It is hard and tenacious, and the high polish that it can be given serves to keep a house cool, the glass-like surface refracting the sun's rays. It is usually made of powdered limestone, the lime in some places being composed of chips left by the stone-cutters, in others of crushed sea-shells. The interior of the tomb is honey-combed with light filtered through perforated marble windows. A pall of green velvet covers the Empress's sarcophagus, spreading out to form a square, the edges weighted down with knobs of turned marble. Over this are sprinkled rose petals. Every day they are renewed—at least while roses are in bloom, for soon hot winds from the north strip the garden of its colours. The faded petals are swept away with brooms made from peacocks' feathers.

India is a land of forts. The reigning dynasties, both Hindu and Moslem, erected a fortress at almost every strategic point of their kingdoms, and of these Daulatabad is probably the most remarkable. It sits on an isolated hill, which rises six hundred feet into the air, "a hill which men of olden days have trimmed and whittled and smoothed from its summit to its base, so that it is more astonishing than the pyramids of Egypt." Daulatabad means 'City of Fortune', a name given to it by the Sultan of Delhi in the fourteenth century. The Sultan of Delhi had no connection with the Mogul dynasty, but was head of one of the numerous Mohammedan states that sprang up like mushrooms in the wake of Mahmud of Ghazni, 'the image-breaker'. From the last year of the tenth century onwards India

was a prey to small but well-disciplined Moslem forces that formed like black clouds in the mountain fastnesses beyond the north-west frontier. "Up like mountain goats" they came, as one of the Hindu generals was to remark, "and down like waterfalls." They poured into the rich plains, demolishing idols and shrines wherever they went. The enormous Hindu armies were no match for their rigid discipline, and melted into headlong flight before the scimitars of the Crescent Moon. Indian armies did not lack chiefs of great personal gallantry. What they lacked was skilled command; and then, of course, they were hampered by endless barriers of caste. Both sides were equally handicapped by internecine feuds. Nevertheless, the Hindu armies could not stand up to the fanatics who prayed with their faces towards Mecca.

Daulatabad, or Deogiri, as the Hindus call it, was once a great city, the capital of the Yadava dynasty, the last of whose kings was defeated by Ala-ud-Din, the nephew of the Sultan of Delhi. The city, spread round the foot of the hill, fell into his hands, but not the fortress, which he found impregnable and which was always to remain so. Only treachery, starvation, or the outbreak of an epidemic could have forced open its succession of armed gates. There was space within its walls to store enough victuals to withstand a siege of several years. One wonders why King Ramachandra Rao considered it necessary to buy the besiegers off. He paid the Sultan's nephew the colossal ransom of fifteen thousand pounds of pure gold, a hundred and seventy-five pounds of pearls, fifty pounds of diamonds, and twenty-five thousand pounds of silver. Small wonder that the Mohammedans called it 'The City of Fortune'. And, so far as the Yadava dynasty was concerned, the fortune was spent to no purpose, for eventually Daulatabad passed into enemy hands, becoming the property of the Moguls some hundred and fifty years later.

It then became its possessors' pride, its impregnability fascinating the series of Kings, Sultans and Emperors who occupied it. Each added to it, strengthening its walls, building out bastions, chipping off more of the escarpment that rose perpendicularly a hundred and twenty-five feet out of a moat. So ingeniously is the base of the mountain shaved and scraped that "even a snake or an ant", we are told, "would ascend it with difficulty". For a time, it was Shah

Jahan's favourite resort; and he built himself an eyrie of open courts and wide verandas on the very topmost pinnacle of the hill. There are moments when one could easily imagine that one was in medieval Europe, for these Deccan forts bear a striking resemblance to the strongholds built by the Crusaders in the Near East, whose influence might have been transmitted through the Turkish engineers imported to instal the guns that were beginning to be used in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Later on, it was the Dutch who had charge of the cannons, one of them a monster, twenty feet long with a seven-inch bore. 'Creator of Storms', it was called; and it must indeed have been the terror of the countryside, for it was mounted on a specially constructed platform above Shah Jahan's pavilion and commanded a view of the whole valley. When the fuse was fired, its ammunition carried clear over the city below, to the scrub beyond its walls, a distance of some two miles. The fortress was lost to the Moguls during Akbar's reign, and retaken by Jahangir by a subtle stratagem.

Here we refer to Tavernier, the French jeweller who travelled in India during Aurangzeb's reign, and through whose eyes we see another of the battles in which the Emperors were continually engaged. One has a bird's-eye view of both tented camps. Shah Jahan, or Prince Khurram, for he is still Crown Prince, commands the armies of his father the Emperor. The plan is hatched with the usual diabolic cunning, and how the two principal performers, Prince Khurram and his General, must have enjoyed it! Tavernier describes a scene enacted before the whole army. It had been well rehearsed. Prince Khurram's General came up to him and publicly insulted him. "The Prince was so highly offended that, immediately sending for one of his shoes, he caused him to have six blows given him upon the bonnet." The words are Tavernier's (I point this out, for the English language has changed somewhat since Tavernier's voyages were translated in 1678). The word 'bonnet' for us gives the affair a comical turn. But, as we have already seen, this 'shoe-beating' was considered an appalling insult, "the highest indignity that can be put upon a man, after which he is no more to appear in the Prince's presence".

The secret purpose of the scene was that the enemy's spies should report it immediately to their King, which, being good spies, they

did. Needless to say, he was delighted, and sat back to await the consequences. He was not kept waiting for long. Soon afterwards the General, Aft-Kan, appeared before the King, seeking sanctuary. He was much afraid, he said, for his safety. The King, "who had not cunning enough to discern the imposture", promised him every protection, and Aft-Kan, seeing himself so well received, begged the King's leave to retire, with twelve of his women and as many of his servants, into the fortress of Daulatabad. The request was immediately granted, and he entered Daulatabad, accompanied by twelve camels and two litters. The camels carried howdahs on their backs, the curtains all carefully drawn. The litters were also heavily veiled. As the reader may have guessed, this was an oriental version of the Trojan Horse. The women were soldiers in disguise, as were the eunuchs leading the train; and, once arrived at the innermost defences, they had no difficulty in overpowering the unsuspecting garrison.

Little remains of the city; but the fortress is completely intact and very impressive. We entered the first gateway, passing through the thick walls. The stout doors bristle with iron spikes, like porcupines' quills, arranged as a protection against the battering of war-elephants. In the first courtyard cannon-balls are stacked in neat piles; every nook and cranny appears to be mounted with a cannon; and many of these pieces of artillery are cast in snarling dragon-shape. When two outer *enceintes* had been traversed and four encircling walls penetrated, we had still not reached the fort proper. Meanwhile the heat thrown off by the great blocks of grey stone was suffocating. Across the hot sand that deadened our footsteps we saw the trace of a cobra's passage; turtle-doves kept up a monotonous cooing; and tree squirrels darted by in a series of nervous, impertinent jerks. Obligated to rest, we chose a narrow stone platform running the length of what used to be guard-chambers, cell-like rooms in the thickness of one of the walls. Our guide disappeared into one of them and emerged with a handful of what looked like small sections of peat, only lighter in colour. It was tobacco, a cache that had recently been discovered, stored away originally, no doubt, for the men of the garrison. I put some in my pocket, and it was paper-light, after having lain there in the heat for three hundred years.

Rested, we gathered our strength for the hardest part of the climb.



It reminded me of the rock-fortress of Sigiriya in Ceylon, the retreat of a patricide King called Kasyapa. Having transformed a vast monolith which towered above the jungle into a palace, he retired there, a victim of his own conscience. There a gallery four feet wide winds its way up to the crown, and so sheer are the sides that slots have been hewn in the rock to support the masonry. Daulatabad is no less remarkable a feat of engineering. Having passed a small pavilion where the last King of Golconda, a prisoner to the Great Mogul, spent thirteen years of his life, we came to another moat crossed by a narrow bridge, so narrow that it could only be negotiated by one man at a time. I looked down into the moat kept constantly supplied with crystal-clear water from a near-by spring. Clear it may be; but, confined as it is between steep walls, it takes on the appearance of onyx. A palm grows slanting out from one of the sides, and suddenly I saw two bright green kingfishers flash across to the opposite bank, their brilliant colours caught for a second in the black, mirror-like waters.

Stooping, we entered through a narrow door and began our ascent, but in the dark now, groping our way by candlelight. The way to the fort is cut into the heart of the rock and winds upwards as tortuously as the stairs mounting a minaret. These passages are ventilated, and the candle gutters and goes out and has to be re-lighted. Cooled by the thickness of the rock, we were grateful for the cold air that blew across our faces, even though it was laden with the acrid odour of bat's urine. The guide showed us passages that branched off to a dead end, a false wall behind which snipers could lie in wait with their muskets cocked, pointing through slots, ready to blast the unsuspecting intruder if the order should be given. The place is full of traps. A little farther on was yet another diabolical contraption—an iron shutter, twenty feet high, which slid down blocking the path. But it was no ordinary shutter. Using a large brazier, the occupants of the fort would heat it till it became red-hot, the brazier being fanned by a powerful draught that came from a hole bored in the rock, acting like a bellows. These confined passages were also infested with rats "bigger than cats", a Moorish travellers tells us. "In truth, the cats run away from them and they are unable to resist their attacks."

It was with considerable relief that we emerged into the fresh air

and climbed, almost with joy, the remaining hundred steps to the citadel. At last we reached Shah Jahan's pavilion. In the courtyard iron rings were still in place, to which were once attached the cords that held the royal awnings. Alone I climbed up to salute the 'Creator of Storms', disturbing some young vultures on the way. Fiercely they glared at me, and then, stretching their black wings, laboriously heaved themselves into the air. Once launched, they glided, dipping and turning, with consummate grace. Not a feather moved as they balanced on the rising air-currents. Meanwhile the entire extent of Hyderabad State seemed to lie spread out at my feet.

## CHAPTER 4

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### TEMPLES AND FRESCOES

Our chief purpose in visiting Aurangabad was to see the frescoes in the Ajanta caves, which lie in a deep ravine, twenty-nine of them in crescent formation, looking out over a bubbling stream. It is misleading to refer to them as caves; they should rather be called excavations. Ajanta was a Buddhist monastery, and the so-called caves served either as chapels or as the monks' living quarters. The valley is quiet now, except for the tourists. But how different must have been an early traveller's impressions—those of Fa-Hsien, the Chinese Buddhist, for instance, who visited Ajanta at the beginning of the fifth century! The monastery dates, roughly, from the second century B.C. to the seventh century A.D., and for nearly a thousand years the monks carved and painted. The ravine must have echoed to the sound of chisels and to the crash of rocks as the builders wrenched them from the face of the cliff and sent them tumbling down to the stream below, where they still lie, like boulders dislodged by a glacier. There must have been laughter too, for Ajanta is a gay place. The enchanting scenes depicted for us on the walls draw their subjects from Buddhist folk-lore and illustrate the many legends woven round the life of Buddha, who is depicted in an almost secular mood, for we see him arrayed in ropes of pearls, wearing the peaked head-dress stuck with flowers peculiar to the nobles of his age.

Buddha or Siddhartha Gautama, as he used to be called, was the son of a petty chief who ruled in what was Nepal. "I had three palaces, one for the cold season, one for the hot, and one for the season of rains," Buddha is quoted as saying in the Sutras, or Buddhist scriptures. It is these palaces, and the life of the luxury-

loving courtiers and princes who inhabited them, that leap out at us from the walls, when the guardian shines his light on them. Buddha is said to have been born about 563 B.C., and to have died at the age of eighty. He was only twenty-nine when, as a prince of a royal house, he abandoned everything and set out in his search for the truth. Travelling far and wide over India, he gathered a considerable following; but it was the great Emperor Asoka of the powerful Maurya dynasty, builder of an empire as extensive as that of the Moguls, who was responsible for the spreading of Buddhism in India. "Asoka", writes Mr. Rawlinson\*, "founded Buddhism a local sect and he made it the official creed of his Empire." Asoka died in 232 B.C.—a date that more or less coincides with the founding of Ajanta, when Indian Buddhism was at its height. By 185 B.C. its popularity was already on the decline, and Buddhists had begun to be persecuted by the revengeful Brahmins. One must imagine Ajanta, once a great centre of piety and scholarship, slowly dwindling in importance. Gradually its monks dispersed, some of them, no doubt, migrating to Ceylon, which was always to remain a stronghold of Buddhism. The hammering and the grating of the chisels was stilled now; a few remaining monks painted on; but the flame had gone out of their work, and it quickly degenerated. Then, suddenly, Ajanta was lost to history; a heavy curtain of tropical vines fell over the carved doorways; and so for centuries it remained, known only to the tigers who make their lairs in the dark recesses of the caves.

The story of how Ajanta was rediscovered in 1819 reads like a fairy-tale. In his excellent article† on Ajanta, Alan Moorehead informs us that the discovery was made by a group of British officers attached to the Madras army. Their company was on manoeuvres, and they had taken a few days off to shoot some big game. When they came to the head of the gorge, they met with "a half-wild boy who was minding a group of buffaloes". The boy told them that he knew some tigers' lairs and, taking them down to the rocky riverbed, pointed through the trees to the face of the gorge "thickly overgrown with creepers and bushes. Hacking their way in through this undergrowth, the officers suddenly found themselves confronted

\* India by H. G. Rawlinson.

† *The Cave-Temples of Ajanta* by Alan Moorehead: *Cornhill Magazine*, Spring 1955.

with a large doorway in carved stone". Beyond this, right at the back of a great square chamber lined with pillars, "sat a huge figure of Buddha quietly smiling in the darkness". Then, having lit an improvised torch with a tinder box, they observed that the walls were covered with a series of brilliant paintings.

For the next twenty years Ajanta still remained inaccessible to the outside world, sleeping on under its curtains of green. Only travellers eager for adventure dared visit the caves, for the country round about, inhabited by a wild cut-throat mountain tribe called the Bheels, had a very bad reputation. But several intrepid Anglo-Saxons have left us records of their visits to the caves at this early period. The first was a lieutenant in the Lancers; the second, a Major Ralph, who inspected the frescoes by the smoky, flickering light of bundles of burning grass. To bring out the colours, he threw buckets of water over the walls, much as guides will spit on their fingers and rub them over some alabaster or marble column. Dr. Bird, a young medical officer from Bombay, happened to be visiting the cave at the same time as Ralph. "He had been sent up by the Governor of the Province to make an examination of the caves and see what could be done to preserve them. The doctor's methods were peculiar: he proposed to scrape off with a knife as many paintings as he could conveniently carry and take them back to Bombay. Ralph himself had been making a few little experiments of this nature, and he assured Dr. Bird that it would not work." The doctor thought he knew better, and proceeded to peel off a number of figures from a large representation of the Zodiac. Needless to say, by the time they arrived in Bombay all that was left in the caves was a heap of powder. James Fergusson, the eminent art historian, was the first to take the question of the preservation of the frescoes seriously. He sent a memorandum to the Court of Directors of the East India Company, praying them "to take steps to prevent further desecration and destruction of these venerable monuments of the past, and, above all, to appoint someone to make drawings of the fast vanishing frescoes before decay and the recklessness of tourists have entirely obliterated them". In consequence, Major Gill, an artist attached to the Madras army, was sent up with "an elephant and a gang of coolies, and a bodyguard to protect him from the Bheels". He arrived at the caves in 1844 and, except for a break caused by the

Indian Mutiny, stayed there "for the best part of twenty-seven years".

The Ajanta frescoes, like Tutenkhamen's tomb, are supposed to have a curse on them. "Anyone", writes Mr. Moorehead, "who tries to reproduce the paintings, or deface them in any way, will be overtaken by misfortune." The curse does not seem to have been visited so much on the individual as on his work. Three different groups of archæologists have made extensive copies, and, in every case, nearly all the reproductions have been destroyed. Gill's work, which was excellent, having been shipped home at considerable expense and trouble, was destroyed in the fire at the Crystal Palace, where it was exhibited. John Griffiths, principal of the Bombay School of Arts, was the next to try his hand, working with a mixed team of students; but the same fate awaited his reproductions, for they were also destroyed by a fire that broke out during the luncheon hour in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Strangely enough, although it was an extensive fire, Griffiths's paintings were the only exhibits to be destroyed. The third series of reproductions were executed for Kyoto University by a Japanese copyist, for who made rubbings of the low reliefs carved around the pillars. These, however, vanished in an earthquake.

Lady Herringham's water-colours, which she published in a volume called *The Ajanta Frescoes*, seem to be among the few reproductions that have escaped, apart from photographs in various magazines and in a large volume on the subject recently published by Unesco. We owe a great deal to Lady Herringham, for it is thanks to her intervention with the Nizam of Hyderabad that anything remains of the frescoes at all. Just before her time a curator called Narayan Ekenath had been appointed with the express purpose of keeping the vandals at bay. But he appears himself to have been an arch-vandal, who supplemented his wretched salary by selling pieces of the frescoes under his charge. "If a visitor showed particular interest in some fragment of a painting, he would be delighted to cut it off the wall and offer it as a present. He specialised in removing faces and whole heads." Such a fragment came up for sale at Sotheby's in 1922 and fetched a thousand pounds.

Goaded on by Lady Herringham, the Nizam now procured the services of two Italian experts skilled in the preservation of frescoes by the latest scientific methods. Injections of fixatives were pumped

into the walls with hypodermic needles, and cracks were filled up. An adequate guard was also established and each cave closed by an iron grille. The locks, however, are not always reliable; and in this connection a Parisian friend of mine told me an amusing story. Some twenty years ago she was travelling in India with her husband on a very grand tour, involving countless trunks, bearers and a private train. My friend, as may be gathered, was a *femme du monde*, and spoilt as women were spoilt in those days. Intelligent, well-read and curious, she had insisted, against her husband's will, on visiting Ajanta. The journey was quite an arduous undertaking, even in those days. They spent the night at the nearest dak bungalow, and the next morning, under the harsh sun, they arrived at the narrow defile that forms the entrance to the chasm. Steps lead up to the platform on to which the caves open. The glare was terrific and the heat intensified by the vertical rising walls of rock that tower above. Having finally arrived at the caves, they found them all locked, and no guardian to open them. "Jean was furious," my friend explained, "and refused to walk any farther, so I wandered off alone. My luggage all comes from Vuitton; and you know that they make you special locks, with one key that fits all the cases. I happened to be wearing the key on a bracelet round my wrist. Idly, not actually expecting to meet with any success, I tried the key in one of the locks. Would you believe it? It actually worked. As well as my cases, it opened all the doors." My friend smiled. "By some strange chance we happened to travel back on the boat with the Director of the Department of Antiquities, and I warned him that he had better change his locks."

Like my friend, I wandered from cave to cave, lost in an entrancing world of forest glades, bordered by the pink-columned pavilions of the nobles' palaces. Palms arch over their roofs and lotuses bloom in the pools, pale pink and blue flowers twine themselves round the branches of slender, almost leafless trees. Behind, in the immediate foreground deer run unfrightened through the coolness of green shade that darkens as it reaches into the distance where the real forest begins, where the great elephants live. My attention was held, however, by other things, by the slant-eyed women who walk under striped parasols, dressed not in silks, but in ropes of entwined pearls. Heavy gourd-like ornaments hang from the lobes of their ears,

stretching them half-way down their necks; but this gives them a certain elegance. Coronets and tiaras and aigrettes crown their heads, and their raven tresses are bound with strings of jasmine. Their bodies are sinuous; they have small waists and soft thighs and rounded breasts; their eyes are heavily lidded. Sometimes the painter has omitted the pupil of the eye, or delineated it so lightly that these beauties seem to gaze at one with slits of green fire. The more noble their birth, the lighter appears their skin. I saw queens, their ladies-in-waiting and musicians. I found two enchanting and lively little creatures playing on flutes, while a third, a languorous, full-lipped siren, dances. So supple is she that her hips appear to be almost dislocated; and her hands perform the disjointed movements peculiar to India's classical dances. Ram Gopal, the greatest contemporary exponent of the ancient dances of his country, has paid several visits to Ajanta in order to study the poses painted on the cave-walls.

Pearls are everywhere, carved in festoons on some of the columns, forming pendentives that cascade down their octagonal faces. One of the ceilings is coffered in painted squares of green, greenish-white and pink, set on a terra-cotta ground: representations of strange fruits and flowers, the moon-white, heavy-petalled, sweet-smelling flowers of the tropics. Up there, too, are small pink elephants and geese. Cherubim gambol among a scroll-work of flowers that forms the border. The monks who painted these scenes were as determined as the Mogul Emperors to create for themselves an eternal spring: they have painted flowers everywhere. The particular ceiling I have in mind appears to show a very marked Chinese influence, and is executed with a sophisticated stylisation that suggests a much later period. It was painted, in fact, towards the close of the sixth century.

The colours of the Ajanta frescoes have the wonderful powdered quality common to all real fresco painting. They range from yellow ochre to the red of burnt bricks, the green of oxidised copper and of verdigris. The pigments were nearly all obtained from vegetable or mineral sources, and were mixed by the monks in coconut-shell cups with water. The surface of the rock was spread with a layer of clay, mixed with cow-dung and rice husks. Over this was washed a coat of lime-plaster. The painter first of all drew in the outlines of his



composition, then, after wetting the wall, applied his colours. It was the absorbent texture of his ground that gave those attractive dusky hues, those beautiful blues; the blue of an artichoke in bloom is the nearest I can get to an exact description. The surfaces to be covered were far too extensive for the work to be carried out by a few painters only; they must have been divided into equal parts, and a share allotted to each master-painter, who, in his turn, parcelled out sections to his pupils.

Moving from cave to cave, one notices the changes that took place in Buddhism, and one can date the caves accordingly. "Buddha expressly disclaims either divine birth or supernatural powers. He worked no miracles. He repeatedly warned his hearers that salvation lay in their own hands alone."\* The earliest sculptors carefully refrained from depicting him in bodily form. His presence is indicated by symbols—the Wheel of the Law, or a pair of footprints. The Stupa symbolised his nirvana. As time went on, Buddha's followers conveniently forgot his earlier injunction; and we watch him being deified. Instead of a teacher, Buddha becomes a god to be worshipped. His likeness is sculptured in stone, and painters depict him as the Supreme Being. It was, no doubt, this latter development that alarmed the Brahmins and started the persecution of Buddhism in India. Like all reforms, this one set out with an exaggerated energy that dispersed the monks of Ajanta and cut off the caves for several centuries.

About a hundred miles from Ajanta, another crescent-shaped hill was dug and carved to make the rock-hewn temples and monasteries of Ellora. The sculptors started on their titanic task of carrying the mountain-side at just about the time when the excavations of Ajanta finished—that is to say, towards the end of the eighth century. Ellora, unlike Ajanta, is carved out of the face of a sloping hill, not in a perpendicular cliff. It is on a far vaster scale. We read that some two hundred thousand tons of rock were wrenched from the mountains to make the great Kailasa Temple, a replica of Shiva's celestial abode. There it stands, or rather floats, in an amphitheatre set round with colonnades of square-cut pillars. It is on a massive plinth, twenty-five feet high, supported on the backs of boldly

\* *India* by H. G. Rawlinson.

carved elephants and lions, which gives it the appearance of hovering in mid-air. Legend tells us that when the gods observed it, as they moved around in their celestial cars, they were struck with wonder. "This temple of Shiva," they exclaimed, "is self-existent; for such beauty is not to be found in a work of art!" Even its architect was struck with wonder, and dreaded the prospect of attempting another undertaking of the same kind. "Wonderful!" he cried. "I do not know how it was that I could construct it."

Unlike most excavators, the architects of Kailasa worked from above, delving downwards until they struck a gigantic mass of solid rock. It was this monolith that they shaped into a temple. "The hillside was cut down vertically to the level of the base of the hills. The pit thus formed is two hundred and seventy-six feet long, a hundred and fifty-four feet wide, and a hundred and seven feet deep, leaving in the centre a huge solid monolith. Then began the process of rough-hewing the irregular mass into shape, and as the work progressed downwards the sculptors carried on their operations simultaneously, in order to avoid any need of scaffolding"—an extraordinary feat, when one considers how sure of themselves the architects and sculptors must have been. It is no easy task, to begin a building at the summit and complete it at what should be the foundations.

One can see that the exterior of the temple was once coated in white plaster, symbolic of the snowcap of Mount Kailasa, Shiva's birthplace among the Himalayas. In carving their deep reliefs, the sculptors must have allowed for this extra surface thickness; and, indeed, the gods and goddesses have a smudged appearance, as if seen through a lens not quite properly focused. This does not prevent them, however, from being amongst the most beautiful sculptures of the world. It is extraordinary how numerous are the carvings at Ellora: the deeply carved frieze of the podium, and the attenuated graceful forms of angels and water-nymphs that cover every inch of the great temple's wall. Temples and monasteries stretch for nearly two miles along this amphitheatre of rock and represent some hundred years of carving. In one of the Jain shrines the whole ceiling is carved to simulate the open flower of the lotus. Holding up these inverted rock-cut petals are elaborate square-faced columns that, like those of Elephanta, suggest the work of a jeweller

rather than of a sculptor. So controlled are they in their richness that, ignorant of their locale, one might classify them as French works of the early seventeenth century.

Mounting a flight of steep steps, we reached the entrance to the temple. Inside, it is of an obsidian darkness, the walls and floors burnished with age like a black mirror. In the innermost sanctuary swells the usual *lingam*; and here, for a moment, I understood the feeling of repulsion experienced by so many Europeans. On the blackened walls one sees the union of the male and female, a symbol of eternal consummation. His arms are round her waist, while hers are thrown across his chest. She clasps him tightly and their lips meet. The male figure is sitting erect and motionless, his knees spread open. The woman presses down on to his thighs. I describe but one of the couples, but it is not this that I found so oppressive: rather it was the general atmosphere. The vision of the Himalayas' sparkling snows vanished from view. Figures, gesticulating wildly, loomed out at me from the walls, tinted a cadaverous green, smeared with patches of reddish brown, the colour of dried blood. Like putrid pears in clusters, bats hang and squeak from the ceiling. The place smells of their urine, an acrid smell that makes one catch one's breath. It was partly the darkness and the black greasy walls that so oppressed me, besides the stab one feels at one's vitals on being confronted with such an exhibition of love play. Here is Shiva as I had first imagined him: the god who kindles life in man and beast with mad and mocking profusion, but who takes care to invent an enemy especially fitted to destroy each species that he has created. With inexhaustible art he has made teeth, horns, claws, famine, plagues and the venom of serpents and of flies. He has sharpened the beaks of birds to tear the fish; and, for man who has acquired mastery over savage beasts, he has cunningly kept disease, exhaustion and old age; and into the heart of all he has thrown the foolish and maddening dart of love.

My sensations were almost those of delirium, and sweat began to stand out on my forehead. Despite the glare outside, I made for the nearest door. Beyond its threshold, the midday sun heated the rock-wall in which the temple stands to the temperature of an oven. But the sharp burning light came as a relief. For all its dignity and the beauty of its carvings, Kailasa has none of the calm that I found at Elephanta.



## TEMPLE GIRLS

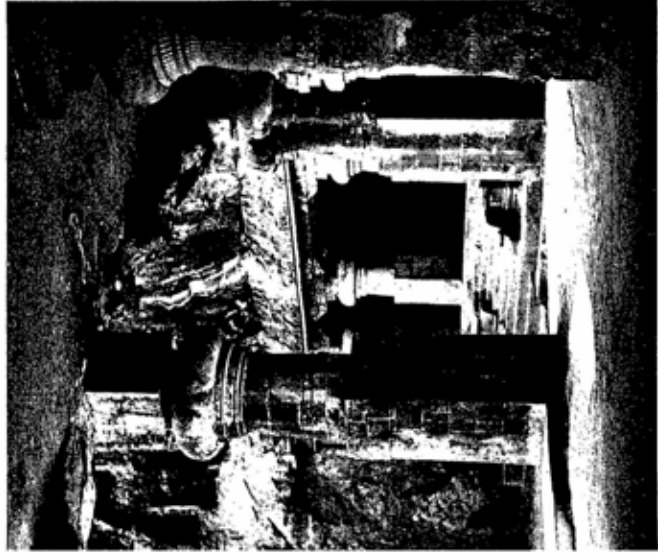
During the next two weeks we travelled south, and the deeper south we went, the hotter it became. One day I bumped off over the dusty roads to the extraordinary temples of Belur and Halebid—extraordinary because they are carved from head to foot with dancing-girls.

The dust whirled up in thin clouds, permeating everything. It seeped through the floorboards, even penetrating the tightly fitting case of my camera. I had to wipe the lens continually, while my throat grew more and more parched. We had lost Sing, who had remained behind in Bombay, and another driver, together with the owner of the car because he spoke English, accompanied me this morning. There I sat, rather grandly with my outrider, being whirled through the dust, past those endearing and ever-recurrent bullock-carts. But the car, although American, had already seen long service, and kept up an incessant bumping and rattling; such composure as I had managed to retain was shattered when we reached a cross-road and were stopped by a party of vociferous young women dressed in red woollen saris sewn with mirror sequins. Laughing and waving their pretty, smooth arms, they refused to move out of the way until I had paid them a rupee. My interpreter informed me that they were gipsies.

Our first stop was Halebid, the old capital of the Hoysala Ballala Kings, a dynasty that flourished in the south between 1050 and 1300. The style developed by the Hoysala Kings was elaborate to a degree; their temples are polygonal and star-shaped, encrusted with sculpture from top to bottom. No two facets of Halebid are the same, and every convolution of every scroll is different. Frieze mounts on

frieze. Set on a tall, solid platform, the temple follows the flat screen-like angles of the ground plan, which gives a perfect interplay of light and shade. The first tier or frieze shows a defile of elephants, symbols of stability. Next comes a row of lions, and then horses for speed; but it is the sixth and largest frieze that is the most fascinating. Here the sculptor seems to have lost all control and to have been carried away by his own virtuosity. Scorning every mechanical restraint, he has attacked the stone as if it were ivory or wood. Round the walls, in and out of the angles, just above our heads, jingle and jangle a posturing collection of *apsarasis*, or heavenly damsels. They form a frieze about five feet in height, and no detail is omitted; each figure is conceived as a separate panel and has about it the precious quality of an over-sized bibelot. One dancing-girl beats on a drum; another clacks silver discs, elegantly poised between thumb and forefinger. Necklace on necklace cascades over their round globe-like breasts, so different from the form admired in Europe and immortalised by Praxiteles, with a short up-curve to the nipple and then a long shallow slope towards the shoulder. The breasts of these dancing-girls are round and full and high. An Indian poet describes his ideal for us, and it is realised in these swaying, gesticulating creatures: "Her throat should be thick and round, like the stem of a plantain tree in full bearing. Her chest should be wide, her breasts full and the shape of young coconuts and her waist small, so slender that it could be clasped within two outstretched hands. Her hip should be large and round, her limbs slender, the soles of her feet without any arch or hollow, and the surface of her person soft, delicate, smooth and round, neither bones, sinews nor angles being visible."

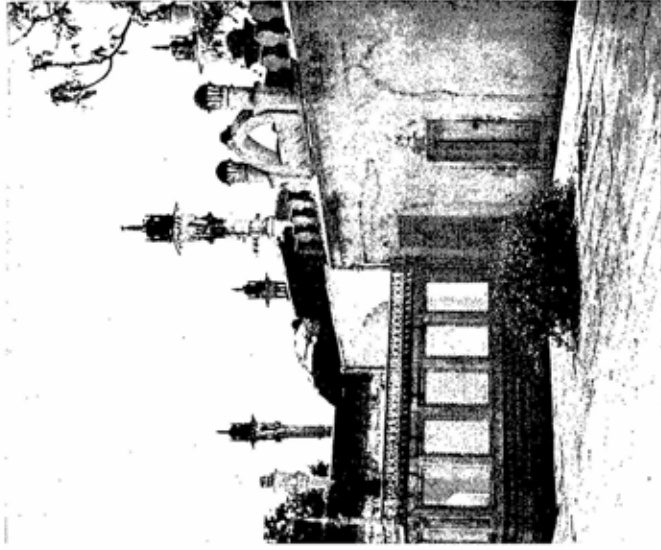
On and on the frieze runs. It is impossible not to follow it to its end. Most of the *apsarasis* have four arms, some of them as many as six; each arm is encircled with bracelets, two at the wrist and another two above the elbow. They are clothed entirely in jewels, in a kind of armour of silver chains and looped belts. Minute bells form pendants, set in motion and frozen in a perpetual tinkle by their dancing legs and shaking shoulders. One of the damsels is so heavily bejewelled that she seems almost to be dressed in feathers; at a first glimpse, she might be Aztec rather than Hindu. For more than six centuries these *apsarasis* have been exposed to all the vicis-



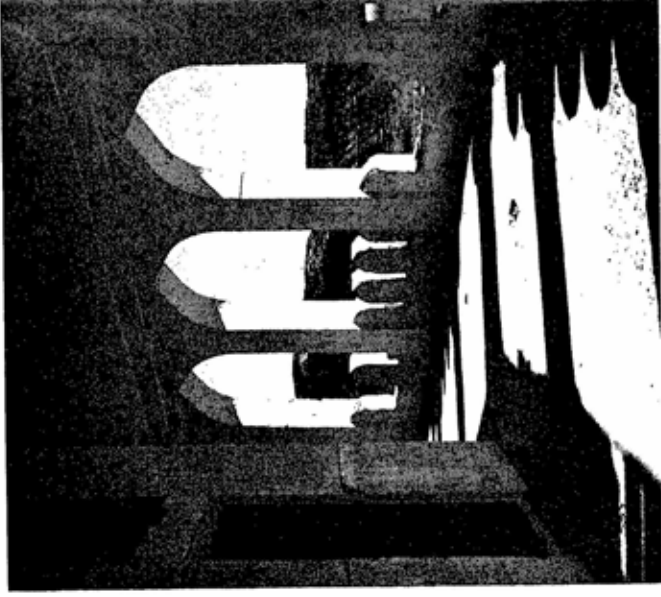
Rock temple of Elephanta. A view showing its cushion-like capitals (*page 13*)



Shiva dancing the *Tandava*, or world-shaking dance (*page 13*)



Aurangzeb's unpretentious tomb in the small village of Rauza (*page 35*)



Shah Jahan's pavilion on the topmost pinnacle of Daulatabad (*page 43*)

situdes of a tropical climate, yet the minutest details are clear and sharp as on the day when they were finished. The stone they are worked in is very fine-grained, greenish-black, of volcanic origin, but so hard that one wonders how the sculptor ever carved it. When it is first quarried, it is said to be quite soft, like sandstone, and only becomes hard after it has been exposed to the air. One might suppose that this riot of churrigueresque detail would interfere with the general harmony of the building, but the architects knew very well what they were about, and the exuberance of the design is closely related to the basic structure. From a distance one is only conscious of the mass and of the calm dignity of its parallel lines. Yet it is hard to judge Halebid; for the temple was never completed, work having been interrupted by a Mohammedan invasion in 1310, and it lacks the low pyramidal tower with which it should have been surmounted.

There was nobody in sight when we first arrived. Crossing the scorching stones of the courtyard in our stocking feet, we mounted the steps of the temple. A young priest disengaged himself from the shadows, pencil-slim, with the spotless white dhoti thinly veiling his thighs. The temple is dedicated to Shiva; and, leading us to the *lingam* in the inner sanctuary, he turned his back on us and began to ring a bell. It was as if by a magic act he had released the dancers from their friezes and had set in motion a whole carillon of bells. But what we heard was only an echo thrown back by the black, shining masonry. Once the evocation of Shiva was finished, he lighted an oil lamp placed on a shallow dish piled with frangipani flowers. He came to each one of us in turn, handing us a flower, in return for which we were supposed to put a coin in the dish.

Directly outside the shrine there was a small circular platform of stone set in between four beautiful pillars composed of a series of knife-edged discs, so thin and sharp that they had the appearance of having been turned on a lathe. It was here that the temple dancing-girls performed. Every temple of any importance had in its service a band of eight or more of these girls, or *deva-dasis*, slaves of the gods. Their official duties consisted of dancing or singing within the temple, morning and evening and at all public ceremonies. Abbé Dubois tells us that, "although their attitudes are lascivious and their gestures indecorous", they executed their duties with considerable



grace. "As to their singing," he continues, "it is almost always confined to obscene verses describing some licentious episode in the history of their gods." Their functions, apparently, were not confined to religious ceremonies. In fact, they were bound by their profession to grant their favours to anybody who demanded them in return for ready money. In other words, they were religious prostitutes, consecrated in a special manner to the worship of the Hindu pantheon.

Abbé Dubois\* tells us that they were trained from infancy "in their shameful licentiousness", and many of them came from respectable families. "It is not unusual for pregnant women, with the object of obtaining a safe delivery, to make a vow, with the consent of their husbands, to devote the child that they carry in their womb, if it should turn out to be a girl, to the temple service. They are far from thinking that this infamous vow offends in any way the laws of decency, or is contrary to the duties of motherhood. No shame whatever is attached to parents whose daughters adopt the career." These courtesans used to be the only women in India who enjoyed the privilege of learning to read, dance and sing. They received a fixed salary for their religious duties, but, as the amount was small, they supplemented it by selling their bodies as profitably as possible. "They employ all the resources and artifices of coquetry. Perfumes, elegant costumes, coiffures best suited to set off the beauty of their hair, which they entwine with sweet-scented flowers; a profusion of jewels worn with much taste on different parts of the body; graceful

\* Abbé Dubois was a Frenchman from Ardèche, and was born in a small village on the banks of the Rhone. Very little is known of his life. We are not even certain of the exact date of his birth; but it must have been round about 1770. We know, however, the year of his death, for he died in Paris in 1848 as *Directeur des Missions Étrangères*. We learn from his letters that the best years of his life were spent in India, working as a missionary, but as a missionary remarkably free from theological prejudices. "I had no sooner arrived amongst the natives of India than I recognised the absolute necessity of gaining their confidence. Accordingly I made it my constant rule to live as they did. I adopted their style of clothing, and I studied their customs and methods of life in order to be exactly like them. By such circumspect conduct I was able to ensure a fine and hearty welcome from people of all castes and conditions, and was often favoured of their own accord with the most curious and interesting particulars about themselves." It is precisely this information that made the Abbé famous. Patiently, year after year, he took notes, eventually producing his *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, a book still as valuable today as it was on the day of its publication, and indispensable to anyone who makes a study of India.

and voluptuous attitudes: such are the snares with which these sirens allure the Hindus, who, it must be confessed, rarely display in such cases the prudence and constancy of an Ulysses."

Also attached to the temples were bands of musicians; and it was to their music that the entrancing *deva-dasis* danced. Their instruments consisted, for the most part, of clarinets and trumpets, cymbals and several kinds of small drum. They played at full blast: I have never heard music softly rendered in India, and one can imagine the volume of sound they produced within the bare stone walls of the temples. Among the other attendants at all Shiva-Vishnu shrines were women bearing the title of 'Wives of the Gods', a different class from the dancing-girls, "but quite equally depraved", complains Dubois. They were known alternatively as 'Women of the Images', and had a special sign tattooed on their thighs. Dubois tells us that they were the mistresses of the priests and other dignitaries. "Still, for all that, they are treated with a certain amount of consideration and respect among their own sort."

It is hard to leave Dubois when he is on the subject of the behaviour in the temples. "There are few temples where the presiding deity does not claim the power of curing barrenness in women. And there are some whose renown in this respect is unrivalled." He cites one at Tirupati, in the south, to which women flock in crowds to obtain children from Vishnu. "On their arrival, the women hasten to disclose the object of their pilgrimage to the Brahmins, the managers of the temple. The latter advise them to pass the night in the temple, where, they say, the Great Vishnu, touched by their devotion, will perhaps visit them in the spirit and accomplish that which until then has been denied to them through human power. I must draw a curtain over the sequel of this deceitful suggestion. The reader already guesses at it. The following morning, these detestable hypocrites, pretending complete ignorance of what has passed, make due inquiries into all the details and, after having congratulated the women upon the reception they have met with from the god, receive the gifts with which they came provided."

The temple of Tirupati seemed to be particularly licentious, for Dubois describes yet another system employed by its priests for procuring women. "Among the noticeable peculiarities that distinguish the great feasts of this temple there is one which I must not

pass over in silence. At a certain time of the year a grand procession is formed, which attracts an immense crowd of persons of both sexes. While the image of Vishnu is borne through the streets on a magnificent car, the Brahmins who preside at the ceremony go about among the crowd and select the most beautiful women they can find, demanding them of their husbands or parents in the name of Vishnu, for whose service, it is asserted, they are destined. Those husbands who have not lost all common sense, understanding, or who at least suspect that a god of stone has no need of wives, indignantly refuse to deliver up their wives, and bluntly speak their mind to the hypocritical rogues." Not at all disconcerted, the priest merely applied to others who might be better disposed. "Some of the men are delighted at the honour conferred upon them by so great a god, and do not hesitate to deliver their wives, and even their daughters, into their hands.

"It is thus that the seraglio of Tirupati is recruited. When the god takes it into his head that some of his wives are beginning to grow old or are no longer pleasing to him, he signifies through the priests his intention of divorcing them. A mark is branded on their thighs or breasts with a red-hot iron, representing Vishnu, and they secure a certificate showing that they have faithfully served a certain number of years as legitimate wives of the god, and are therefore recommended to the charitable public." They are called *Lakshmis*, after Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu, and provided with a certificate of good conduct. Their wants are abundantly supplied when they go. I saw no sign of these handmaidens in any of the temples I visited; and I have the impression that it is a habit that has largely died out, although they may perhaps still perform in the great temples of Madura or at Trichinopoly. The polished black circular platform at Halebid had surely not reflected the tinsel hem of a dancing-girl for many a long year. Attended by its young priests, empty in the afternoon sun, the temple seemed to have cast off the superstitious incrustation of centuries and to be as pure as when it was first built. The architects and sculptors of these early Hindu shrines must have been men of deep spiritual integrity.

## CHAPTER 6

\*

### COCHIN

The plane bumped lower out of the pale sky, and there below us, as I plied my blue papier-mâché fan (Supplied by Air India), was the lagoon-studded Malabar Coast. It is lovely and very romantic, this strip of India's west coast, stretching down and down, a flat expanse of coconut palms, right to the very tip of the peninsula. We were over the 'backwaters', a swampy terrain that covers some hundred miles in a network of lakes and waterways linked together by rivers, or joined artificially by canals. There were moments, up in the plane, when it resembled an enormous lagoon, although, except in the immediate vicinity of the ocean, the effect of the sea is too remote to make the water tidal or brackish. Great beaches sweep the length of the Coast. Here the palms curve outwards over sands patterned by a restless sea, and the waves throw up a mist of spume that covers the beach like a veil of thin gauze. Between the heads of the palms, tugged and tousled by the trade winds, one catches occasional glimpses of thatched huts. The thatching changes to tiles as one nears Ernakulam, the pale ochre-and-white capital of Cochin State. Dutch houses with gay fronts crowd in on the waterway, and on one of the islands rises the baroque façade of a Portuguese church.

Cochin has a damp, hot climate, and we were grateful for the high-ceilinged rooms and the clattering fans of our hotel. Our balconies looked out over a lawn of coarse grass to a scalloped wall, beyond which was what I took to be the open sea, or more probably an estuary. Between us and the water, a distance of about fifty yards, grew a line of flame trees, and below them some fleshy frangipani plants. Their twirling, stamenless flowers smelt very sweet in the evening when the sun went down. The hotel is built on reclaimed

land, and juts at right angles out into the water. All day we enjoyed watching a procession of boats with coconut-fibre sails. From all directions they converged on our corner, crowding together like drift-wood in a whirlpool and jostling each other with wooden thuds as they rounded the bend. The current must run in a narrow ribbon, for beyond its confines are the doldrums and, unless there is a wind, which seems to rise and fall with the sun, the boatmen are forced to pole themselves across the shallows. These boats are called *wallums* and vary in size, from fifteen to seventy feet in length. They are long and narrow and made of wood painted black. The ends curve upwards with a shell-like twirl, rather Phoenician in shape, and bound in brass. Matting, arranged in a barrel vault, covers the centre of the craft; and they carry their square sails forward, which gives them a somewhat Egyptian appearance.

The people of the Coast wear little clothing and one sees the boatmen outlined against the sky in elegant poses, standing against the rudder, holding the *wallums* on their course, or leaning their weight on the long bamboo poles. They have wonderful bodies with square shoulders and flat chests that taper towards slight waists. No clumsy line interrupts their perfect proportions, for the dhotis which they wind round themselves are of diaphanous muslin that reveal their nervous, muscular loins.

Steam ferries take the people from island to island, and we followed them as they chugged down the lagoons, skidding to a stop alongside rickety jetties that crawl out caterpillar-wise from muddy palm-shaded banks. On one of these jetties stood the lonely little figure of a man. Despondently he waved his black umbrella at the approaching conveyance, not at all certain that he would be obeyed. His lack of assurance showed in his attitude. It must have been the wrong ferry, and he must have known it, for it took not the slightest notice of him, but, with an extra flip of steam, churned up the water and sidled away again. Fortunately for us we were lent the official launch that had once belonged to the British Resident, a comfortably solid boat, built towards the end of the last century. It was handsomely fitted with much brass and mahogany and had white shutters and linen awnings.

The Malabari live off their fishing and coir, or coconut fibre. Everywhere along the flat banks are spread their weighted nets,

looking like giant spider's-webs slung between arched poles. They are cone-shaped and about twenty feet square, the four corners each attached to the end of a downward-curving pole, while the top is manipulated by a separate cord. They are mounted on rickety stilts and worked by a pulley system. When not in use, the nets are drawn up with their cone pulled inwards, giving them the elegant form of a convolvulus. They are static, of course, and lined up in groups of forty or fifty. Seen from some way off, they seem to be as much part of the natural vegetation as the palms. Slowly they are lowered into the water; the length of time they are left down appears to vary with the tides.

We sailed by these nets, between great banks of palms, and, turning in off one of the canals, glided up the still backwaters. The water lost its sea-quality; its choppiness flattened out to a dark mirror-surface which reflected the feathery heads of palms. We floated around entranced, looking at it all with explorers' eyes. This is exactly the kind of scenery that Cook encountered on his voyage—thatched huts, woven fences and dug-out canoes. An overpowering smell rose from the prawns spread out to dry in the sun under protecting tents of netting. It was an unpleasant smell, made even worse by the rotting husks of coconuts, which are buried until they become putrid, and then dug up and beaten into a pulp, from which the Malabari extract coir. Once dried and carded, it resembles a tough, fibrous wool, pale yellow-white in colour. One sees the women stuffing billowing piles of it into sacks, which are then loaded on to the *wallums* and floated out to cargo boats riding at anchor in the harbour.

Alas, a terrible affliction haunts this quiet, green world: elephantiasis, or, as it is called here, 'Cochin Leg'. It is a parasite carried by the female mosquito of the *cunax* species, which lodges the eggs of the parasite in the victim it has stung. With the heat of the body, they soon hatch into long thin worms, the thickness of thread, and cause lymphatic obstructions that, here, seem limited to the lower limbs, although in Zanzibar, for instance, it attacks the scrotum, forming terrifying distortions. A doctor I met in Cochin showed me photographs of some of the cases he had treated; and among them was one that I shall never forget. Producing the photograph, he covered part of it up with his hand and asked me what I thought it

represented. I answered that I thought it was a tree-trunk. It was a man's leg. The disease had spread to such an extent that the swelling had quite covered the foot.

Cochin, which has the distinction of being the first European settlement in India, was known to the outside world from very ancient times. The earliest traders in spices were the Phoenicians, and both Pliny and Marco Polo mention Cochin in their records. In 1500 the Portuguese navigator Cabral sailed from Cochin with a cargo of pepper, and in 1502 Vasco da Gama established a factory there. Eight years later, we see the famous Albuquerque installed as Viceroy, to be followed in office by Vasco da Gama, who died in Cochin and was buried in St. Anthony's Church. For fourteen years he lay mouldering in the steaming earth, finally to be exhumed and transported to Belem, where he now lies surrounded by Manuelian splendour. There followed the usual struggle for power between the different companies. The Dutch captured Cochin from the Portuguese, only to lose part of it a hundred and sixty years later to Hyder Ali, father of Tipu Sultan. With the Tiger of Mysore's defeat Cochin fell to the English.

The Portuguese occupation lasted a century and a quarter, and the Dutch a little longer. It is these two countries that have given the place its especial quality.

The town encircles a large green, but, in spite of the football that is played there and the existence of a cricket pitch, the atmosphere remains obstinately baroque. Generations of rajahs have failed to leave their imprint on the palace presented to them by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. The signs of their tenancy are purely superficial, and even the royal bed, swung from the ceiling on four silken cords, I suspect of being either Dutch or Portuguese. We visited the palace with the curator, and he told us that it was in this bed that the sovereign was accustomed to be rocked to sleep after his meals. He told us also about the whitewashing of the walls in the royal chambers. They had been painted over at the direction of the wife of one of the British Residents, who had been shocked by the lascivious frescoes with which they were decorated. Judging by the frescoes that the Resident's lady saw fit to leave in another room, they must indeed have been tempestuous. They show the marriage of Shiva and Parvati and are wonderfully executed with



The handsome, eagle-faced guardian of Bibi-ka-Maqbara's mausoleum (*page 36*)



Sing, our Sikh driver (*page 9*)





One of the languorous, full-lipped sirens depicted in Ajanta's frescoes (*page 49*)



A minor goddess carved in deep relief in the galleries of Ellora (*page 51*)

an extraordinary sureness of drawing and remarkable erotic detail.

Ernakulam, or Cochin as it is more commonly, but erroneously, styled, possesses very great charm. I wandered down its crooked streets, lined with pleasant two-storey houses set with columned porticoes. Brick walls hide the more important dwellings facing the green; and, penetrating some of them, I noticed elaborately pedimented doorways with rusticated piers, not unlike the ornamental arches designed by Rubens for his grandiose house in Antwerp. There is much, in fact, to remind one of the Low Countries. Then, suddenly, one finds oneself in a Jewish quarter, for, surprisingly enough, Cochin has had a Jewish colony for close on two thousand years. In their synagogue they possess a copper plate engraved with a grant from the Prince of Malabar, the Hindu ruler of the time, dated A.D. 379. He concedes them special privileges and allows them to settle in Cranganur, twenty miles from Ernakulam. Legend has it that they arrived even earlier, in the seventy-eighth year of our era. About ten thousand of them are supposed to have appeared off the Malabar Coast, refugees from the second sack of Jerusalem by the Emperor Titus. Without any warning, the streets narrow and one finds oneself in a Leyden or Amsterdam ghetto. With the departure of the Dutch, the Jews of Cranganur had doubtless just moved in. It was strange to see this pallid Jewry staring silently at us from their doorsteps. One old woman was shaking a broom over the top of a half-closed door, a doorway cut in two, the kind one has seen so often in those Dutch interiors; she might almost have been painted by Vermeer, except that, as in Van Meegeren's fakes, the physique was wrong, for she was pasty-faced and freckled, with red hair. These Jews all have red hair and appear as exaggerated examples of their race, their noses having grown even longer and more hooked than is usual. They looked wretchedly unhealthy, a result, I imagine, of generations of intermarriage and the stifling climate. Today there are at the most a few hundred Jewish exiles left. Many of the younger generation are returning to Israel.

Jews in Cochin are divided into two sections: the Black Jews claim to have been the first to settle on the Coast—a claim that seems to be in direct opposition to the legend of the White Jews' long sojourn, dating from the second sack of Jerusalem. Doubtless they intermarried with the natives of the Coast when they first arrived, and

only later decided to segregate those members of the community who had Indian blood. As it stands now, the synagogue appears to have been built in the latter part of the seventeenth century. A plain white wall separates it from the street, and on the other side lies a quiet courtyard. Blown-glass lanterns hang from the gaily painted ceiling of the porch. Many influences combine here. The floor is perhaps the most remarkable feature, for it is entirely tiled with large porcelain plaques from Canton, blue and white variations of the familiar willow-pattern, the kind of decoration one has grown to associate with the kitchens and butteries and baths of minor European royalty. The turned copper columns supporting the gallery also come as a surprise; they rise from the glazed surface of the tiles, shining like gold, burnished by the continual rubbing of human hands. Pretty light-brackets set with hurricane globes are spaced round the milky walls, and twelve or more multi-coloured crystal chandeliers hang from the high ceiling. A sea breeze suddenly shakes their ruby and emerald drops, scattering the cluster of prismatic colours reflected on the white plaster.

I returned several times to the synagogue, to sit quietly on its wicker-seated benches, and on one of these visits I met Salem. He was a Black Jew, with a generous allowance of native blood. What was he doing there, though, in the White Jews' synagogue? But he certainly was a gentleman of some standing in the community, for it was he who showed me the Seven Scrolls kept in a cupboard in the gilded wooden tabernacle. The first time I saw him he was sitting very upright on one of the mahogany benches, reading with a pair of thin steel-rimmed glasses balanced on the end of his nose. He was small and round and old and white-haired, although all I could see of his hair were the side-whiskers which protruded from under the small cap he was wearing. On noticing me, he put his book away. I did not pluck up courage to ask him who he was, but presently ventured to say that I was longing to see the inside of a Jewish house.

"But, my good sir, please let me show you mine," he immediately volunteered. "It is just down the street, a little way."

I was led up some dark stairs to the first floor and shown into a long, pleasant room, crowded with dark mahogany furniture. There was something Dickensian about it. It was mid-Victorian, an austere Victorian without the plush, but with much horsehair and

cane-work and hardwood. It is a style that suits these thick-walled houses in the tropics. One could see at a glance that it was a room in which my host had obviously spent the major part of his life; the tables were piled high with books and old papers; a jam-pot full of pencils and rusty pens stood on the desk and, next to it, a lump of coral acted as a paperweight. Here was the bric-à-brac of a once very active mind. In this pleasantly dim room, where the sunlight, filtering through heavy shutters, made dusty stripes across the floor, we talked for quite a long time. Meanwhile, a young serving boy brought us a tray with two tall, fluted glasses into which my host proceeded to pour a deliciously sweet home-made port. It had a strong flavour of raisin, and must have been a very precious drink, for the old man waited until the boy had left the room before getting it out of the cupboard where it was kept under lock and key. With it too was kept a hoard of gold, which old Salcm showed to me—Portuguese coins dating from Goa's time of splendour. They had been handed down from generation to generation and had lain there for centuries in their coffer of sandalwood.

## CHAPTER 7

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### THE GOLDEN AGE

So entirely different is Cochin and the Malabar Coast from the rest of the country that it must be regarded as an excursion out of India. With our arrival at Trichinopoly we were back again in the familiar bustle and the heat. Damp though it had been on the coast, at least there had been a breeze; here, tucked away in this southern jungle, not a frond stirred. One can understand Ronny's remark to his mother, Mrs. Moore, in *A Passage to India*: "There is nothing in India but the weather, my dear mother, it is the alpha and omega of the whole affair."\*

We were on our way to Madura, famous for its temples, those vast, red pyramids of gods that, dramatically photographed, tower across the pages of travel magazines. We were back in the India of classical antiquity, the golden age. I am referring now to the customs and habits of the people, for as far as architecture is concerned it is too late, most of the temples in the south dating from the seventeenth century. The south of India was the only part of the peninsula never to have been conquered by the invaders from the north and it was the Nayak dynasties of Madura who were the most successful in the desperate fight against Islam. The great temple of Madura can be regarded as a monument to these victories. It was built by Tirumala, the best known of the Nayak Kings, although it is hard to date accurately, for the temples down here are like cities and were continually being added to.

Immediately one is conscious of the difference in atmosphere, for the south has remained obstinately Hindu. Men still wear their hair in long black tresses which hang down on their shoulders, the blue-

\* *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster. Edward Arnold Ltd., London, 1924.

black of a raven's wing, shiny with coconut oil. And then there are the Brahmins who shave their heads, leaving only a crescent-moon-shaped growth at the back. The temple attendants have yet another way of dressing their hair, knotting it into a bun. But there seems to be no hard and fast rule about the different ways they wear their hair, for some of the older Brahmins have their heads shaved altogether. They resemble the priests carved on the slabs of granite by the banks of the Nile. Gone are the shirt-tails and the cotton trousers. Here the town-dweller wears white cotton dhotis round his loins, with a kind of shawl of the same material over his shoulders. The men working in the fields go practically naked, dressed only in a breech-cloth. The fashions in clothing have not changed since the earliest ages. The Brahmins' dhotis are made from pure muslin, as fine as the Egyptian mist-linen, and when properly worn and folded are very becoming. One end is passed between their thighs and is tucked behind into the portion which goes round their bodies, while the other end forms a drapery in front, which hangs with a certain careless grace to the feet. Even the poorest farmer's clothes are spotlessly white. One wonders how the slappings that constitute their laundering give them this immaculate hue, especially as the water is often stagnant and spinach-green in colour. One wonders, in fact, how many of the poorer class Indians manage to keep so tidy, for Indians as a race are scrupulously clean. Many of our habits disgust them. As the Abbé Dubois informs us, "to drink as we do, by putting the glass or cup to the lips, would in their eyes be the height of indecency." The conservative well-to-do Indian never thinks of using china or earthenware to eat off. "Usually rice and other dishes are served on a banana leaf, or on the leaves of some tree neatly sewn together in the form of a plate." Naturally spoons and forks are also forbidden and fingers are used instead. "Hindus cannot at all understand how we can use these implements a second time, after having once put them to our mouth, and allowed them to be touched with saliva." This last reflection of the Abbé's was written, it must be remembered, a hundred and fifty years ago, but even so, it would still apply in some parts of India, particularly in the south, in Madura and the sacred town of Conjeeveram and even as far up north as Puri, and certainly Benares.

The orthodox Hindu's life is an endless round of ablutions and I

think it is worth noting his habits when, as the Abbé tactfully calls it, he "observes the call of nature". "Taking in his hand a big brass vessel full of water, he will proceed to the place set apart for this purpose, which should be at least a bow's shot from his domicile." Then follow several details that we can omit. "The places to be avoided for such a purpose are: the enclosure of a temple, the edge of a river, pond, or well; a public thoroughfare, or a place frequented by the public; a light-coloured soil; a ploughed field; and any spot close to a banian, or any other sacred tree. If it be a Brahmin, he must not wear any newly-washed clothes." His posture should be a squatting one, which any good doctor will tell you is by far the most efficacious one. "While in this position he should take particular care not to look at the sun or moon, the stars, fire, or a fellow Brahmin." There are endless further injunctions, coming to the final one as to what kind of earth he should use for cleansing himself, an operation undertaken only with the left hand. It is always the left hand that is used for anything unclean, for one eats with the right hand. Of course, scrupulous washings go on after this and one can understand why the Hindus regard the European habit of using paper as an utter abomination. Some of the Abbé's friends even refused to believe that such a habit existed. It must be a libel, they protested, invented out of hatred for Europeans.

They are, of course, equally horrified at the sight of a foreigner blowing his nose into a handkerchief and then putting it back into his pocket. It is all a question of point of view. Indians suffered long from the small European official's patronising disdain. I never came across it myself, I must admit, but then things have changed considerably within the last twelve years. Nowadays it is only in literature that we are annoyed by such narrow-mindedness. The Europeans I met in India, all without exception, showed great respect for the Indian. Gone are the days when, as in Mr. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday*,\* Mrs. Bristow asked Ackerley what he thought of the people.

"I like them very much, and think them most interesting," answered Ackerley.

"Oo, aren't you a fibber! What was it you said, the other day, about 'awful Anglo-Indian chatter'?"

\* *Hindoo Holiday* by J. R. Ackerley. Chatto & Windus, London, 1952.

"But I thought you were speaking of the Indians just now, not the Anglo-Indians."

"The Indians! I never think of them."

"Well, you said 'the people', you know."

"I mean us people, stupid."

The Hindus as a race are apt to be very dark; so dark sometimes that it is hard at first to distinguish their features. There have been moments (a waiter in the dining-room, for instance) when it was impossible to see anything but the gleam of teeth. All the more surprising for us is this blackness, for they resemble Europeans to a striking degree as far as physiognomy is concerned. How many times have I been reminded of someone I know at home! The only difference is that they have finer features; their noses are straighter, their nostrils more delicate and their mouths more precisely defined. Most of them have magnificent hair growing in great heavy waves up from a widow's peak that is lost against the darkness of their skin.

The haughty Brahmin measured against these sable hues appears almost white, or anyway a very weak *café au lait*. In Sanskrit the word for caste is *varna*, meaning colour, and it is the Brahmins who head this pale Aryan society.

Early on in its history India was invaded by light-skinned Aryans from the north who imposed their authority upon the dark-skinned inhabitants, and it is these Aryans who developed the caste system. Again I refer to the Abbé Dubois, for he describes the foundation of the caste system more lucidly than any other writer I have come across. "They" [the emigrating tribes from the Iranian plateau who crossed over the Indus valley in about 2000 B.C.] "set out from that cardinal principle common to all ancient legislators, that no person should be useless to the commonwealth. At the same time, they recognised that they were dealing with a people who were indolent and careless by nature, and whose propensity to be apathetic was so aggravated by the climate in which they lived, that unless every individual had a profession or employment rigidly imposed upon him, the social fabric could not hold together and must quickly fall into the most deplorable state of anarchy." Dubois mentions the prejudices he comes across. "In many people's opinion," he writes, "caste is not only useless to the body politic, it is also ridiculous, and



even calculated to bring trouble and disorder on the people. For my part, having lived many years on friendly terms with the Hindus I have been able to study their national life and character closely, and I have arrived at a quite opposite decision on the subject of caste. I believe caste division to be in many respects the *chef-d'œuvre*, the happiest effort of Hindu legislation. I am persuaded that it is simply and solely due to the distribution of the people into castes that India did not lapse into a state of barbarism, and that she preserved and perfected the arts and sciences of civilisation whilst most other nations of the earth remained in a state of barbarism. I do not consider caste to be free from many great drawbacks; but I believe that the resulting advantages, in the case of a nation constituted like the Hindus, more than outweigh the resulting evils.

"Their lawgivers," he continues, "no doubt considered that by this means all arts and industries would continue to improve from generation to generation, for men must needs do well that which they have always been in the habit of seeing done, and which they have been constantly practising from their youth.

"It may also be said that caste regulations counteract to a great extent the evil effects which would otherwise be produced on the national character by a religion that encourages the most unlicensed depravity of morals, as well in the decoration of its temples as in its dogmas and rituals."

These castes can be divided broadly into four; the Brahmins are the first in rank, then come the Kshatriyas, or Rajahs, the third being the Vaisyas, the land-holders, or merchants, and the fourth the Sudras, the cultivators and menials. It was amongst the Sudras that were to be found the 'Untouchables', who numbered fifty million strong, and for whom Gandhi fought so successfully. Untouchability has been abolished by the new constitution.

For many complex reasons that are far too lengthy to go into here, these original four castes have been divided and subdivided until today there are in India more than three thousand different castes; a complication that must surely be simplified as free India evolves and takes her place in the modern world.

For the religious Hindu, however, caste is not primarily social or economic. It is the functioning of *karma*, the great cosmic law of cause and effect. According to *karma*, the inequalities amongst men

are not a divine caprice. They are the result of man's own doing as worked out through the process of reincarnation. One is born into this life, into a higher or lower caste, or even into a non-human form, according to how one has lived in a former life; one will be re-born into a future life according to how one behaves in this one. Though the higher castes have greater privileges, their status imposes greater responsibilities. Brahmins have heavier religious duties than non-Brahmins and their misdeeds are considered to be more serious. The Brahmin who is greedy, for example, may theoretically drop as low as a pig in his next reincarnation.

Over the centuries, probably because they have had privileges so long, the orthodox Brahmins have come to believe themselves only a stage removed from the gods. Indeed, in their early history they seem to have been remarkably saint-like. The Hindu sacred books describe a Brahmin as a penitent and a philosopher living apart from the world and its temptations and entirely engrossed in the pursuit of knowledge, leading a life of introspection and purity. The simple and blameless lives led by the primitive Brahmins, their contempt for wealth and honour, their disinterestedness, and, above all, their extreme sobriety attracted the attention of the princes and the people. The greatest Kings were not above rendering homage to them and treated them with more respect than they would have dared to demand for themselves. So great, in fact, was the supremacy of these priest-philosophers over the Kings in India that they managed to annex most of the wealth of the country, and the King's treasures contained little in comparison to the riches of the temples. The fact that Mahmud of Ghazni, 'the image-breaker', in his raids on India mainly confined his activities to the temples and seldom troubled himself with the palaces is proof of this.

As is always the case, human nature proved too weak for the early Brahmins' ideal of life. The modern Brahmin has degenerated considerably, though he still adheres to a great many of the customs and institutions of his ancestors. Whichever of his duties and responsibilities he forgets, however, there is one thing he clings to with great tenacity, and that is his privilege. It is this assurance of themselves that makes them so conspicuous among the crowd; they develop a sort of Brahmin swagger. I shall always remember a scene we saw. We were in Puri, where we had gone to see the famous

Jajannath Temple. Not being allowed within the sacred precincts, we were watching the goings and comings of the great temple from the roof of a neighbouring house. There was a party of Brahmins standing talking round a high flag-pole from which floated long strips of linen. Their heads were shaved and their torsos bare. They were obviously well-to-do, for their carefully folded dhotis were of the finest muslin. I try to remember all the details; their foreheads were painted with the distinguishing marks of their sect. Devotees of Vishnu, they carried three vertical lines—or, to be more accurate, one vertical and two oblique—which meet at the base of the forehead between the eyebrows, forming a sign which resembled a trident, an emblem sacred to Vishnu, to whom the temple of Puri is dedicated. It gave them a satanic, forbidding look. One of them detached himself from the group; younger than the others and extremely good-looking, he had an even more exaggerated swagger. Up and down he strutted superciliously, as proud as a peacock under his sunshade of palm fronds. But what was even more impressive was the agelessness of the scene. Here was classical India, pure and unadulterated; not a thing had changed. It was this feeling that I had been conscious of all the time in the south, and for the first time since landing I felt a certain hostility. Normally the Indians have a warm, intimate stare, but not these Brahmins of the south. It is a steady cold look that they give you with their dark eyes, indifferent and hostile. Do they regard us perhaps as the instigators of their destruction? After all, it was British rule that gave birth to the new India, a country striving for democracy, in which there would be no room for the stiff-necked Brahmins of the old school. The answer probably was that they hardly noticed us, so completely were we out of their ken. Certainly they made me feel very uneasy.

In Conjeeveram, for instance, it needed considerable courage to walk down the street with my camera. Conjeeveram is the holy city of the south and the proud possessor of a thousand temples and a double quantity of *lingams*. One is immediately aware of its sanctity. It is not that its people are rude; it is more the feeling of utter strangeness and again these cold level stares, stares from another age, for the city is exactly as it was hundreds of years ago. No trace here of the India of the rajahs, or of the comfortable familiarity of the East India Company; Conjeeveram is purely Hindu. It is a hand-

some town and its streets are lined with low, spreading houses covered over with shallow roofs made of crudely formed tiles, set on platforms and faced with verandas. A tall person, on entering, is forced to stoop in order to avoid hitting his head on the cross-beams. Against the walls of the houses, running out laterally on each side of the doorway, are to be found plaster benches, a kind of day-bed with an up-curving end, rather Etruscan in appearance. From these the Brahmins stared out at us. One did not dare engage them with a look, but one was conscious nevertheless of the whiteness of their eyes on one. They do not recline on their beds as do the terra-cotta couple on the sarcophagus from Cerveteri, but squat in the sitting position made familiar by yogi. Their heads are shaved and their pale torsos bare, except for the triple cord hung across their chests, running from the left shoulder to the right hip, which is composed of three strands of cotton, each strand formed by nine threads. The Brahmins, and the other castes who have the right to wear it, prize it highly. Again one sees the painting on the forehead. It is generally yellow, but sometimes red and even black. They make the paint by mixing sandalwood paste with rose-water and adding coloured powder. There are a variety of different signs, some of them having broad horizontal lines. One man I saw had a kind of two-pronged fork in white, streaking up from the bridge of his nose. Another had a single red vertical line. As Dubois informs us, the Hindu code of good breeding requires that the forehead shall be ornamented with a mark of some sort. Nehru's sister, Mrs. Hutheesing, told us the same thing. She explained that the little red dot seen on many women's foreheads is just an act of vanity. "It is a beauty spot intended to add to one's glamour, equivalent to the beauty spot worn by western women on their cheeks or chins."

I took in my surroundings furtively, for it embarrassed me to stare back at people so openly curious and at the same time haughtily independent. The houses were all the same, built on platforms of even earth, about three feet high, which, without any kind of additional covering, constitute the floors. These floors are rubbed every morning with fresh mud and water in order to keep them firm and clean. The richer houses employ professional 'mud-smearers' to do the job. The rooms give on to an inner courtyard open to the sky. Their ground plan would appear to be similar

to the villas one sees in Pompeii, only on a much smaller scale.

There was a small temple I wanted to visit in the vicinity of Conjeeveram and eventually we found it. A priest had been watching our approach and greeted us as we drove up to the heavily-carved entrance way. "Good morning to you," he said. Thoroughly shaken by my experiences in the city, I felt unsure of our welcome. "Good morning," I answered, and then hesitating, "do you mind if we come in to see your temple?" "Do I mind?" the priest parried. "But you *must* come in," and he emphasised it. I was surprised at English so correctly colloquial. I thought that it might be a cleverly learned phrase, but no, for the conversation kept its tenor. The priest proved remarkably well informed about the temple, knowledgeable in our terms of knowledge.

Inside, it was not a typical Dravidian temple. It was small and dark and smelt of rancid fat from generations of guttering oil lamps. As usual Shiva's *lingam* occupied the central shrine. We watched while the daily ablutions were performed and saw a fresh chaplet of jasmine being placed on its head. Then reaching down into the darkest recesses the priest brought out a *lei* of cool flowers, wet still from the water he had sprinkled it with earlier in the morning. Smiling, he hung it around my neck. I was impressed with the man and gave him more than was customary on such occasions, and then, much to my surprise, out came the usual hinting for more money; he was a very poor man . . . the temple needed a big endowment . . .

It was hopeless to try to understand, and I left with the usual doubts, not about the essence of their religion, but about what they had made of it.

In Trichinopoly we stayed at the English Club, not a bad little place, especially the billiards room, which I found charming. It had escaped the general refurbishing and had remained as it always had been. A great six-branched lamp hung over the table and up against one of the walls stood a high wicker-seated bench with a fixed foot-rest. It was raised about two feet off the ground, so that anyone sitting on it could have a good view of the play. There was a cue-stand and, of course, a slate score-board. Next to the score-board hung some faded photographs in black wooden frames; they were the club's fourteen presidents, dating over a period of seventy-

six years, with short typewritten captions under each photograph. One of the presidents, I noticed, had been killed in action at Gallipoli, another one, a great big bushy-headed fellow with secretive eyes, had been murdered in the Trichinopoly District Court.

I wondered what members, if any, remained; I could see nobody around, only Anthony and Mustapha, silent and attentive in their white drill uniforms and their flat white turbans bound round with a red corded ribbon. After all we had not met any Europeans in Trichinopoly. I was taking my evening bath when the piano started playing, the kind of tunes one would have expected—Noël Coward's 'Some day I'll find you' and the 'Merry Widow' waltz. I hurried through my dressing and went over to the main bungalow. The piano had stopped by then and I found a middle-aged couple seated at the bar, drinking pink gins. The woman might have been quite pretty once, in an ordinary, cheerful kind of way; the man was portly and wore glasses, perfectly cast as the English sahib in India; white shorts and tidy stockings folded over under the knee, his shirt open at the neck with over-full sleeves that stopped short above his fleshy elbows. We introduced ourselves; they were called Lake. They offered me a drink, and then followed Mr. Lake's extraordinary story. It made me think of 'the ten little nigger boys'. Three of the members had committed suicide and a fourth had been murdered, stabbed to death, all within a period of six months. Another of the members, a young boy, had shot himself because a girl in Singapore would not marry him.

Another, Mr. Lake's best friend, had just gone mad and put a bullet through his head. "I was having a drink with him, one evening, at this bar," Lake explained, "when suddenly he turned to me and said: 'Lake, do I look all right?' I thought he looked a little bit out of sorts, but nothing more than that, and slapping him on the back told him he was as right as rain. 'Well, I am not,' he answered. 'I am mad.' And sure enough he was. That same evening he went home and shot himself. This happened last week. You can imagine how I feel about it." Lake ordered another drink to steady himself. I forget now the cause of the other suicide. I turned to Mrs. Lake to see how she was taking it. Catching my glance, she raised her glass and drank our health. "We'd better be getting out of here pretty soon ourselves," she laughed, "or we'll be

copping it next." "Don't worry, old girl," answered Lake. "Another five weeks and you'll be on the high seas."

One day we climbed the endless steps leading to the top of Trichinopoly's famous rock temple. We had been asked to remove our shoes before the climb, an operation performed in a rock-hewn antechamber which also served as the temple elephant's stable. Idly he had watched us while flicking at the flies with heavy, loose lashes of his trunk. Clearly the sun never penetrated in between the greasy black columns and the elephant was very bored, stamping with muffled thuds of his great feet. The shattered trunk of a banana tree, the remains of his evening meal, littered the pavement.

Up and up we climbed out into the open where the stairs became steeper. Drums were beating somewhere below, their steady rhythm floating up to us pricked with the shrill notes of a flute. Drifts of people passed us on the stairs; it was prayer time and they were carrying offerings of coconut. Finally, reaching a blue-washed pavilion, we had a wonderful view out over the city. Clumps of feathery palms crowded in on the low, sprawling houses. From up there one could see how large some of them were, opening from one court into another, surrounded by deep verandas with carved wooden pillars. From the road one could not possibly have guessed, for one is deceived by the general air of dilapidation. Some of the houses lodged as many as four or five different families, the various sons, their wives and children comprising the household. Old Hindu society is matriarchal and very clannish.

We could see the great sacred tank with its striped red-and-white walls, and then, cutting across the scene in a diagonal line, the railway. Down its glittering rails flashed an orange and yellow train imported from Japan, streamlined and drawn by a Diesel engine.

The main industry of Trichinopoly is the fabrication of synthetic stones, and we were taken to see the stone-cutters at work. A large section of the town is given over to them and we walked down the streets watching them at work. Squatting in the shade of their verandas, they whittle away with a strong instrument that looks like a bow. Stop near one of them and they immediately produce an old cigarette-tin in which shine beautiful sapphires or blood-red rubies, all false, of course, but so expertly cut that to the naked eye they look quite real. It is amazing how they can cut the stones so symmetrically

with the primitive instruments at their disposal. When they are at work, all you see is dust and wood and putty, out of which drabness suddenly emerges a sparkling jewel, typical of India, the country of contrasts, of mud and glitter.

Down on the fringe of the market we came across the flower-sellers. The flowers are piled into baskets and sold, not in bunches, but by the yard. You see little girls stringing piles of jasmine flowers as they would thread beads. The women twine the jasmine into knots which they tuck into their chignons in the evening. You still see them in the streets, decked with sweet-scented flower-jewellery. They wear their tuberoses and jasmine as did the lovely ladies of the Ajanta frescoes. The maharanees and princesses used to deck themselves in the same way, but fashions have changed in the palace zenanas. Following our example, they now wear diamonds and pearls. Formerly they only wore such jewellery on special occasions.

With the dusk came the acetylene lamps. They shed a hard, bright glare, much brighter than electricity, with a greenish glow about it, like a fire-fly. The evenings in India are magic, and as one wanders around the bazaars, all is tinsel and plastic and paper flowers and piles of sticky orange sweets. The fruit-vendor is nearly hidden, squatting amongst pyramids of water melons, mangoes and oranges on a kind of sloping platform with his baskets all around him. Twenty different gramophones, of the old portable type that has to be wound up, blare out different tunes. Suddenly round the corner swings a procession heralded by pipes and drums. It is not precisely a wedding procession, but rather friends of the bride who are carrying offerings of flowers and fruit to her parents' house. The wedding will follow in a few days' time.

But, of course, the real character of Trichinopoly lies in its temples, which tower all round, their huge pylons, or *gopuras*, reaching into the sky. We visited them for the first time at night; eerily impressive though they are when seen like this, it is in the full light of day that one should really judge them. They are gigantic. Most of these southern temples gave me the same overwhelming impression. At Madura the heavily stuccoed images of the Hindu pantheon, beaked and clawed grotesques with which the *gopuras* are covered, have degenerated into monsters and have nothing in common with the beautifully sculptured images of the ninth and tenth centuries.



Two, three hundred feet these *gopuras* tower into the sky, their lower tiers brushed with feathery tufts of palms and, above, this bewildering display of stuccoed images, twelve-armed godlings who thrash the hot air, their symmetrically disposed arms looking like wings or the legs of a centipede. Up and up these soaring gates rise, symbolising, we are told, the cosmic spheres clustering around heaven. They do indeed appear to tower into celestial realms and it needs little imagination to see them fading finally into pure ether.

At Srirangam warriors mounted on prancing steeds brandished swords and lances at us; there were halls of a thousand columns and great long corridors leading out into vast quadrangles designed to hold the crowds that gather to see the procession of gods. On all sides we were surrounded by gigantic representations of these gods, some of them hewn from a single block of stone. The nearer we got to the shrine the darker it became and the figures, as usual, were black and shiny and greasy, polished by the countless sweating hands that had rested upon them.

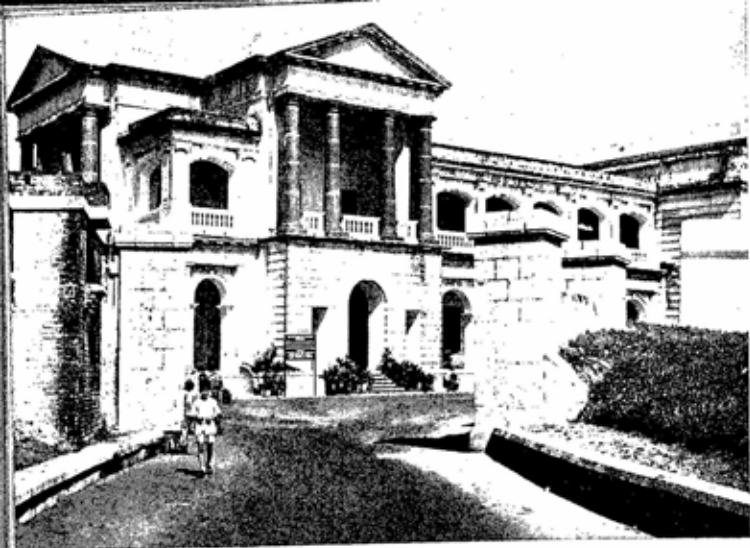
The temples are like towns, teeming with life. There are booths that sell all kinds of fascinating ware, and again the flower-sellers, only this time threading their flowers not for personal adornment but as offerings to their gods. An enchanting little creature with a garnet nose-stud held up a fish in jasmine. It was for Minakshi, the fish-eyed goddess, one of the consorts of Shiva.

Among other sights we saw at Madura was a large sacred tank set with golden lotus flowers. This tank is supposed to contain the seed of Shiva, the essence of immortality, and pilgrims who resort to it for ceremonial ablutions are said to be purified through contact with the great god. Legend explains the pool with the following story. Back in the remote age, Shiva, married to Parvati, was about to beget Skanda Karttikeya, the god of war. Terrified lest the child should shatter the universe by its very coming into being, the other gods sent the fire god, Agni, to receive Shiva's seed in his fiery mouth. Agni could not retain the glowing essence, and so it fell to the ground, where it turned into a golden lake with golden lotuses. In any event Agni's dashing act proved of no avail, for so potent was Shiva that just by drinking from the pool Parvati conceived her child.

There is no denying the fact that these southern temples are



An *apsarasis*, or heavenly damsel, frozen in a moment of her jingling dance by the sculptors of Bclur (page 54)



*Above, the sea-gate leading into Fort St. George, the original Madras (page 81)*

*Below, a view of 'The Bungalow' (page 87)*



impressive by their very size, but I cannot say that they move me. Hardly works of architectural beauty in the first place, they have been further disfigured by continual daubings of red and yellow paint and coats of whitewash, so thick at times that it is impossible to distinguish the detail. None of our Western cathedrals measure more than five hundred feet in length; even the nave of St. Peter's is only six hundred feet from door to apse. Here in the south the temples are enormous by comparison. Ramesqaram, for instance, has side corridors seven hundred feet long and there is not a square inch of its stones that has not been carved. One is impressed if only by the work these corridors must have entailed. I agree with Mr. Fergusson, who, when describing the endless groups of sculptures to be found in all the great halls of southern India, writes: "As works exhibiting difficulties overcome by patient labour they are unrivalled, so far as I know, by anything found elsewhere. As works of art, they are the most barbarous, it may be said the most vulgar, to be found in India, and do more to shake one's faith in the civilisation of the people who produced them than anything they did in any other department of art."\*

\* *History of India and Eastern Architecture* by James Fergusson. John Murray, London, 1910 (revised edition).

## CHAPTER 8

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### MADRAS

Madras lies on a thin strip of land on the Coromandel Coast, the earliest territory acquired by the Honourable East India Company. For some time Madras, or Fort St. George as it was then called, was the only stronghold worthy of the name which the Company possessed, and by virtue of these facts it was the senior of the three great presidencies and very much the post to be angled for in the early days of British India's history. Of the three ex-presidencies—Bombay and Calcutta being the two others—it is certainly Madras that I would choose to live in today. It has retained more of its original charm and has an almost rural air about it, to be compared, in its way, to Rome.

Maria Graham, writing about Bombay society in 1812, complained of the country-town manners. "The ladies," she witheringly remarks, "like the ladies of all country towns I know, are underbred and over-dressed." She probably would have felt just the same way about Madras. As to the over-dressing, the haughty Mrs. Graham should have been a little more discerning in her criticism. The Europeans were over-dressed for a perfectly valid reason, that of keeping up appearances. Unable to compete with the jewellery worn by the native dignitaries they had to deal with, they at least could cut a dash in their white man's fripperies. We know that they succeeded, from the reports that come from the different native Courts. The potentates were openly envious of the quantities of exquisite lace and beautiful embroidery. In private, the Company's servants would perhaps dress in loose, comfortable clothes, muslin shirts, pyjamas and starched white caps, but for all formal occasions and for public appearances in the streets, there seems to have been no

inclination to discard or even modify the style of contemporary costume worn in England. Absurd though their heavy broadcloth breeches and jackets and gallant headwear were, they served their purpose of impressing the natives. William Hickey, the amusing, pleasure-loving attorney-at-law, describes one of his suits for us in his diary on the occasion of George III's birthday, which was celebrated with much pomp, the Governor-General giving a dinner to the gentlemen of the settlement, and a ball and supper to the ladies. At this entertainment in spite of the extreme heat all the men appeared in full dress with swords. "I made up for the occasion a coat of pea-green lined with white silk and richly ornamented with a spangled and foiled lace, waistcoat and breeches decorated in a like manner, being also white silk."

It is impossible when writing of one's impression of Madras not to be influenced by the numerous memoirs and diaries which give a lively picture of the city. Landing in Madras in 1781, Mrs. Fay writes home to a friend that there is something uncommonly striking and grand about the town. "Many of the houses and public buildings are very extensive and elegant. They are covered with a sort of shell lime which takes a polish like marble. I could have fancied myself transported into Italy, so magnificently are they decorated." She is referring to Fort St. George, the original Madras of James II's reign, so named after England's patron saint, but I wonder if there was not a touch of irony intended, whether it wasn't pure bravado on the part of the Company men, to bedevil the Portuguese, their rivals in trade who had a settlement only three miles to the south at San Thomé. They need not have worried, for it was not many years before San Thomé became a suburb of Madras and even in Mrs. Fay's days the town had spread beyond the fort walls.

Altered though it has been, Fort St. George still gives very much the impression it must have done originally. After passing through gates cut into the thickness of its walls, star-shaped fortifications built according to the approved method perfected by Vauban, Louis XIV's military architect, one is confronted by stately, columned buildings grouped around a spacious central square. The tall spire of St. Mary's Church, the first church in India, can be seen rising through the flame trees planted round its old railings. Nothing,

however, is quite as old as it seems, for there is not a building in the fort that has not been added to or completely rebuilt. St. Mary's was entirely gone over in 1759; so also was the Council Chamber, which is very hard to place, for incorporated in its classical portico are black marble columns of a much earlier date coming from a colonnade constructed by Governor Pitt at the beginning of the eighteenth century. When the French captured Madras in 1745, they carried the columns off to Pondicherry and there they remained for fifteen years until the British stormed the place and recovered them. Washed in clear colours, Fort St. George gives a bright, dignified impression, and I often returned to wander about its cheerful streets. I spent an interesting morning in the museum, a big three-storeyed yellow building with green shutters, which used to be the exchange where the merchants and the dealers and commanders of ships transacted all their business. One can imagine the bustle and the noise, the haggling over the bales of printed cotton and bags of spices, over silks and muslins, malacca, teak, mocha coffee and China tea. Few noises disturb its high-ceilinged rooms today. Two ladies from Bengal trailed silently around with me in their ox-red saris and the only sound was the frail clicking of their silver jewellery.

On the stairs I found a map of Fort St. George drawn up in 1673, showing the position of the bastions and towers in the sea wall. A town had already sprung up to the west outside the walls. Various details had been noted on the margin of the map: the streets had been of sand with brick side-walks; these were the streets that an early trader had described as being "sweet and clean". He also extols the houses' beautiful porticos and terraced walks with shade trees planted before the doors.

Below the map stood a statue of Lord Cornwallis, one of the two erected in his honour after his death, which took place in 1805 on the state barge while he was sailing up the Ganges. Lord Cornwallis was one of the first Governor-Generals to thumb his nose at the rigid etiquette imposed on the Governor's Court. Lord Minto, his successor, did not fare quite so well, however, for we read of his complaining rather pathetically of "the four syces or grooms" who followed him whenever he went out for an evening ride. "They run beside my horse armed with ornamental fly-swats fashioned from peacock's feathers." He was equally unhappy when travelling by

palanquin, for he was never able to get a moment's relaxation. "Thirty people go before in two lines, which extend a great way forward. They carry gold and silver maces and halberds and embroidered fans, and cows' tails to keep the flies off. All these run on foot with a round speed, some of them proclaiming my titles." But then these were external signs of pomp that probably had to be borne with. Cornwallis, practical soldier that he was, slashed out rather at the absurdly inappropriate clothes, and ordered his entourage to dispense with the heavy gold and lace jackets during meals. "I am of the opinion," he remarked somewhat bluntly, "that silk vests are less objectionable to the eyes than the unpleasant odour of sweating men to the nose."

Reaching the first floor, I walked into a long room running the whole length of the house. Light poured in through high French windows and streaked the walls hung with full-length portraits of Wellesley, Coote, Meadows, Hastings: familiar names in British India. It was an elegant room and smelt agreeably of beeswax and turpentine and of the sea.

The East India Company obtained their original permission to trade in India with great difficulty. They were only lent the land on which they built their factories and it was made quite clear to them by the Mogul Emperor in power that they were only there on sufferance. The Nawabs or Viceroys, local rulers of the Moguls, had to be continually placated and even the Emperors themselves were not above taking bribes. In one of the glass cases I found an amusing document: a list of acceptable presents thoughtfully sent to the Company by the Emperor's Ministers, like a child's letter before a birthday to a favourite aunt. The list was a strange one and included clockwork junks. Also "one or two small field pieces will not be amiss". Elephants and horses are mentioned *en passant*, but "good pieces of amber grease will do extremely well and of course clocks and watches that strike or have chimes you must by all means send".

After walking out through one of the high windows I stood on the pillared veranda. The glare was terrific and I was grateful for the sea breeze that blew in across the walls. The museum faces due east, out across the bay of Bengal, and it was no doubt from here, and other balconies down the front, that the inhabitants of the fort



watched for the coming of the English vessels. The arrival of an East Indiaman flying the Company's red and white flag must have been an important event. The moat, overgrown now with grass, still borders the walls. Parallel to it runs a beach road and beyond again stretches a wild expanse of yellow sand, hot and shadeless but for a few wind-swept casuarina trees. A white line of restless surf divides the flat beach from the sea, always a clear, bright blue. It was here on the sandy foreshore that the Company's merchants assembled to collect the cargoes landed from the ships riding at anchor in the roadstead. In spite of its importance as a trading centre, Madras had one very serious drawback, that of being a port-town without a harbour. Landing in Madras, until the artificial harbour was built, was a very dangerous affair, especially as in the eighteenth century few Englishmen could swim. Deaths by drowning were a frequent occurrence. It was the danger uppermost in everybody's mind. Warren Hastings wrote home to a friend in England asking him to consult the great engineers, Smeaton and Brindley, as to whether something like Margate pier could not be constructed to help. Mrs. Fay tells us how excessively alarmed she was by the surf. "We got safely over it, but another boat upset just afterwards, however, fortunately no lives were lost . . . Nothing is more terrible at Madras than the surf. They have two kinds of boats to guard against this great evil, but yet, notwithstanding every care, many lives are lost. One of these conveyances called the massulah boat is large, but remarkably light, and the planks of which it is constructed are actually sewed together by fibres of the coconut. It is well calculated to stem the violence of the surf, but for greater safety it requires to be attended by the other, called a catamaran, which is merely composed of bamboos fastened together and paddled by one man. Two or three of these attend the massulah boat and, in case of it being upset, usually pick up the drowning passengers. The dexterity with which they manage these things is inconceivable, but no dexterity can entirely ward off the danger."

Hickey points out a further detail that must have added to the discomfort. Upon reaching the shore much adroitness had to be shown in preventing the returning surf carrying the massulah boat out again with it, "for it runs with considerable velocity". He tells us that, prepared as he was for the surf, the hideous roaring and

foaming of the sea made his heart palpitate quicker than usual. "The rowers assured us that the surf was very moderate that morning. I thought it the most terrific thing I had ever beheld, nor was my alarm at all lessened by observing as we approached it that Captain Waddell threw aside a large boat-cloak he had thrown over his own and my shoulders to protect us both from the spray of the sea and the intense heat of the sun, and also took off his gloves. Upon my asking the reason of his so doing he replied, 'I don't know that there is any immediate danger, but it is as well to be prepared.' " Clear of the Madras surf, Hickey's troubles were not entirely over, for, jumping out of the boat, he sank ankle-deep into the burning sand, "the effect of which I will never forget".

Since Madras now boasts a fine harbour, the massulahs have disappeared, but not the catamarans, which are used for fishing. I went walking down on the beach one evening and found it inhabited by a tribe of fisher-people who live in low-built villages made out of rush, almost stone-age in their simplicity. The beach is so vast however that they have little contact with the macadam driveway and its shining cars. In the days of the East Indiamen they no doubt appeared far less primitive than they do now; they were prosperous then, earning a good living acting as porters. Now, naked and in conical-shaped hats, they look like gnomes coming up out of the sea.

The fishing fleet was just returning when I was there. Out at sea, with nothing to compare them with, the catamarans look quite a respectable size, their triangular sails belling out with the wind; but once near land, their sails gathered in, they are nothing more than logs bound together like a raft, curved slightly towards one end. Two men to a boat, they paddle them in naked through the surf, balancing with extraordinary poise. Once beached they heave these cumbersome floats up on to rudimentary stilts and then the women appear and the bargaining begins. The colours of the scene are muted: the magenta, tobacco, dull purple and black of the women's saris, the muddy sea, the lustreless sands, and the fish they haggle over, small and flat, a dull silver like the anklets of the women.

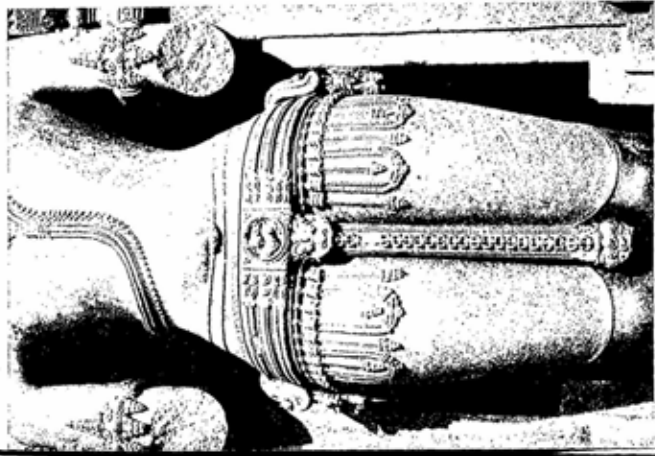
How different this same beach looks in Ackermann's lithographs, littered with bundles and trunks. People travelled with a prodigious amount of luggage in those days. One official tells us that he returned home with twenty-nine trunks, added to which he had two

travelling chests of drawers, those mahogany, brass-bound chests that are now so much in fashion. One can imagine the cargoes of those Indiamen. When Mrs. Hastings, the 'dear Marian' painted so often by Zoffany, left India in the *Atlas*, she took with her all her treasures: "a silver-plated bedstead and ivory furniture, thirty gallons of rose-water." But His Majesty's Customs were firm with her about her more personal belongings and made her pay duty on her ninety squirrel-skins and her gold cloth trousers, a large sum which the East India Company graciously paid for her.

It is interesting to note that Hastings had to pay the captain five thousand pounds in order to persuade him to give up the round-house and the state cabin to Mrs. Hastings and a further thousand pounds for the chief officer's cabin which her companion was to have.

The voyage must have been acutely uncomfortable. It took, on an average, six months from Southampton to Madras, a long time to be imprisoned in a swaying, creaking world, the days broken by the noise of drums beaten to summon the passengers to meals, monotonous fare served up on dishes buttressed with sand-filled baize cushions when the ship rolled.

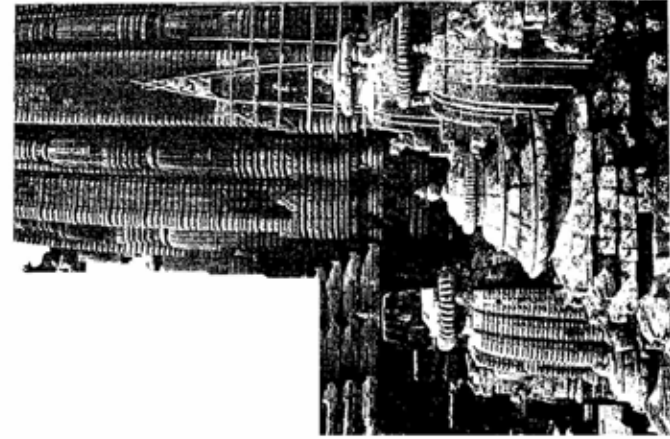
I had been to Madras already six years ago on a brief visit and looking through my diary I find an entry referring to our evening drives. We had taken a car out along the coast to Ennore, "an old resort", as the guide books call it, "early popular with the English settlers at Fort St. George". It is a familiar occupation, this taking the air in India. All the time one comes across allusions to it in the different memoirs. Again we turn to Mr. Hickey, for he has a strange story to tell us of one of his first outings. He had been given a letter of introduction to a friend of his father's, a Mr. Dawson, who appears to have looked after him nobly. Had I been Mr. Dawson I am not sure that I wouldn't have found Hickey rather objectionable, but apparently his charm offset what in his diary I take for bumpiousness. I refer here to a particular episode which happened shortly after his arrival. "In the evening," notes Hickey, "Mr. Dawson walked out to show me his boasted garden. After going over what I conceived to be a wild and uncultivated piece of ground with scarcely a blade of grass or the least sign of vegetation, he suddenly stopped and asked me what I thought of a Madras garden, to



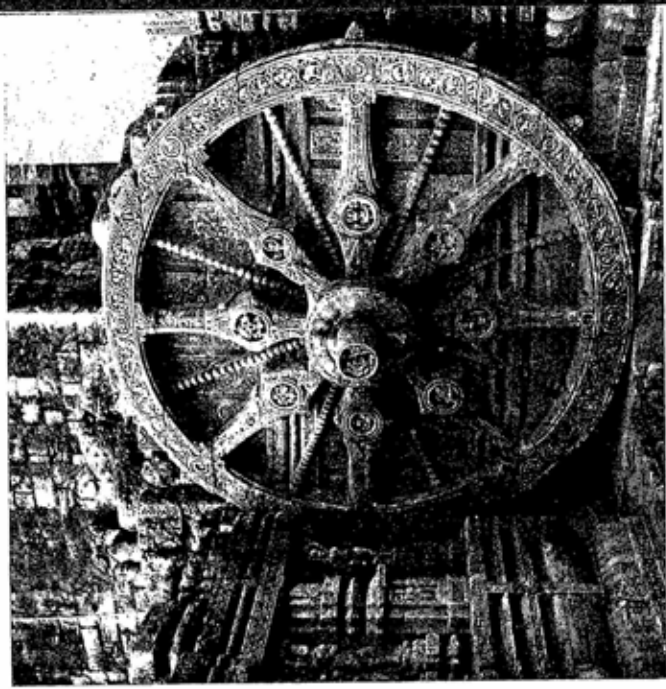
Detail of the green chlorite figure of Suraya,  
the sun god, at Konarak (*page 101*)



Detail of sculpture at Mahabalipuram  
(*page 90*)



The great Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar  
(page 95)



One of the twenty-four giant wheels on which the temple of Konarak  
is supposed to roll (page 99)

which in perfect simplicity I answered I would tell him my opinion when I had seen one. This answer he replied to with, 'When you see one, sir? Why, you are in the middle of mine.' The devil I am, thought I. Then what a precious country am I come to, if this is a specimen of a gentleman's garden." But Dawson apparently forgave him, for in the next entry Hickey says that Dawson "would the following morning show me a pretty place about ten miles northward, belonging to a friend of his with whom we should spend the day and ride home in the cool of the evening, and that I should eat as fine and high-flavoured oysters as ever I had taken in Europe. We accordingly mounted our horses before daybreak, and rode gently to the place, going the last four miles along the sand at the very edge of the sea, and enjoying a most refreshing breeze which blew upon us direct from the ocean.

"Upon coming up to the door of the house, we dismounted, but not a soul appeared to receive us. Mr. Dawson, much surprised, conducted me into the hall, and loudly called for the boy. After repeating this several times without any effect, he said to me: 'This is very singular and I cannot account for it.' He then proceeded to his friend's bedchamber, from where I heard him exclaim: 'Good God, poor Stone is dead,' and again joining me, he told me he was lying upon the bed, a corpse. The servants had fled and were in hiding."

Though much remains of the old buildings in Madras, many of them are falling into disrepair. There is what the inhabitants, not quite inaccurately, refer to as 'the Bungalow'. I had been told to look out for a handsome house somewhere behind our hotel, but the description had been vague and the Indians I asked about it even vaguer. How should they appreciate this Augustan architecture imposed on them by strangers from overseas? I finally came upon 'the Bungalow' by chance, one evening: a great house surrounded by what used to be a large park before the trees were cut down. They had been cleared very recently, for the stumps were still green. Ask as I would I could find out nothing about the place. It must have been the Judge-Advocate's house, or some equally important official's. It was in a pathetic condition, the plaster peeling off its cornices and laths missing from its shutters, probably used as firewood by the family who were camping in two of the downstairs

rooms. In many places the floor was rotting and it was with trepidation that I climbed up its great double staircase that curved elegantly against the wall.

On my second visit, an old man presented himself. He did not talk English but with trembling hands handed me a scrap of crumpled paper written on in pencil in copy-book script. It informed the reader that the property was for sale for an approximate offer of five lakhs of rupees, about forty thousand pounds. 'The Bungalow' had been on the market for several years; a few offers had been made for it, but what could be done with such a white elephant? Some speculator could cut it up into apartments, but I imagine that dry rot would make any thought of transformation prohibitive. There was nothing for it but to pull the house down and sell the land. This is, in fact, what happened subsequently.

St. George's Cathedral in Madras is perhaps the handsomest of the many Anglo-Indian churches. A curving carriage-way sweeps up, passing between the double columns of the portico. The windows are shuttered and the terraces are of marble; in fact, one can imagine it more as an assembly room than a house of worship. The interior is austere, but with its smooth white pillars and raised plaster ceilings it conveys a pleasant impression of light and space, further enhanced by long cane-seated pews. In the vestibule there is a charming life-size marble statue, a memorial to Dr. James Anderson, the one-time Physician-General in Madras. Anderson had also been a naturalist, the importer of silk-worm culture to India and the instigator of the South Kensington Natural History Museum. He sits in a Graeco-Adam chair, a book open on his knees, displaying a cactus, the staple food of the cochineal insect, which he discovered in Madras.

## CHAPTER 9

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### PAGODA COAST

Our ships, trading along India's eastern shores, used to navigate by the shining points of the temples, for the coast was so flat that their copper-lined roofs could be seen glinting miles out at sea. The sailors, either unable to pronounce their names or ignorant of them, gave them a somewhat ordinary nomenclature. Mahabalipuram they called the 'Seven Pagodas' while Konarak, six hundred miles farther north, was referred to as the 'Black Pagoda', so called in contrast to the whitewashed pagoda at Puri, another landmark near-by.

Mahabalipuram lies some fifty miles to the south of Madras and can be reached by boat, up the Buckingham Canal. We took one look at the stagnant green waters and decided to go by car. The road led us first through great stretches of emerald-green paddy fields, then came a change: tall palms crept up on us, their crowns of fan-shaped leaves pricking the pale turquoise sky. The rice had given way to sand bunched in hillocks and patched over with a variety of wild melon, a dusty green in colour. It was as if we had suddenly unrolled a Japanese print. The country had an expectant look about it, as country so often does when one approaches the sea. Perhaps it is inherited from childhood days, this excitement over sandy places, dunes, and the salted tang that blows off the sea. The sun seems to take on a more sparkling quality, touching leaves, people, clouds and the sea itself with points of bright light.

I felt the magic of these temples by the sea long before we reached them. 'The Seven Pagodas' are right on the beach; one of them is lapped by the waves, while legend places another of them beneath the water.



Mahabalipuram used to be an important seaport of the Pallava princes, another of the local Hindu dynasties. They rose into prominence about A.D. 325, and disappeared, absorbed by the conquering Cholas, about A.D. 900. One hears of them trading with Ceylon and Java and Malay, and as far afield as China and Arabia. The sea-girt temples are all that remain of this once prosperous city, and are thought to date from the seventh century.

These temples have a singular nature, for, like Ellora, they are carved out of solid rock. The Pallava sculptors found an out-cropping of hard granite, large detached boulders, monoliths, which they whittled into the semblance of shrines or *raths*, processional cars used to transport the idols of the Hindu gods on festal days. Its use to designate a type of temple probably stems from the concept that the sanctuary was a reproduction of the celestial chariot of the deities. Their scale is small, the largest *rath* measuring twelve feet in height. Another strange thing about them is that they are all unfinished, some of the carvings having been left merely blocked out, the sculptor's intention in some instances barely indicated. The chisel marks of thirteen centuries ago still catch the light on the humped back of Nandi, the Indian bull, lying calm and contemplative outside one of the shrines. It looks as if the workmen had been suddenly called off, perhaps as a result of the Chola invasion. Fergusson has another theory: having nearly finished the exteriors, the sculptor-architects started excavating the interior—blocking out columns. Not practised enough in stone construction, and with the tradition of their earlier buildings of wood still fresh in their memories, they modelled the *raths*, leaving only such pillars and supports as were sufficient to hold up a wooden roof. They had hardly begun hollowing out the shrine when the whole rock cracked open, exposing the sky. Had the excavation been completed, the lower storey would certainly have been crushed to powder. Discouraged, they left their monuments unfinished.

Good architects they may not have been, but as sculptors they are unsurpassed in Indian history. They have taken enormous granite boulders and into their depths they have cut a whole Court of one of the Pallavan Kings. One sees elegant, elongated figures posturing, twisting and turning into profile; so alive are they that it looks as if the sculptor had released them from the stone in which they had

been imprisoned, and they pulse with the same vitality that Michelangelo gave to his slaves. We see the donor, King Mahendravarma, and his wives; they have long attenuated limbs with gentle oval faces and high cheek-bones. The King leads his first wife by the hand, gesticulating at the same time in a graceful manner to the spectator, indicating perhaps the temples he has built. Guarding the sanctuary in which the King is depicted are the usual door-keepers. We had seen them already at Elephanta, watching over Shiva's *lingam*. Here one of them postures with hand on hip and one arm leaning lightly against the niche in which he stands—the stance of a toreador waiting to make his entry into the arena, only the nervous tension is lacking.

In another shrine we see Vishnu sleeping, guarded over by divine beings. A beautiful goddess kneels in supplication at his feet, while watchers are on the alert for any danger. One figure turns as if he had heard a sound, holding a club in his hand and looking over a heightened shoulder with a magnificently proud gesture. The watchers might equally well be demons repulsed by the emanation of sanctity that exudes from the sleeping figure, for never has a god appeared more sublime. Vishnu is in *yoganidra*, a state of slumbering wakefulness, reposing on the World Serpent of seven heads, while his bed is of serpents' coils; he waits, for it is the interval between the dissolution of the world and its new creation.

Even when finished, these extraordinary sculptures have blurred contours, for the salt-laden wind has smudged the hard granite. But how lovely they are like this, as the sparkling sea-light pours over them, casting deep shadows. Here is Parvati, Shiva's wife, in one of her many forms. She is shown as the fierce goddess Durga in the guise of a young Amazon, astride a lion, quite naked except for her jewels. A tassel of pearls hangs from between her full breasts and swings down over her fine hips. It is blown aside by the speed at which her mount is carrying her. A tall spiral head-dress covers her beautiful head. Two of her arms—she has eight—are drawing a bow with the assurance of a practised warrior, and, as Durga, she is invisible. We know that she will be successful in her exploit, in rescuing the universe from the tyranny of the buffalo-shaped demon, Mahisa, who is greater in stature and strength than all the gods.

There is not a rock or boulder innocent of carving. One of the

most beautiful is of the mythical descent of the River Ganges from heaven to earth. The sculptors have taken the whole face of a rock wall measuring some ninety feet and covered it from top to bottom with "all creatures great and small", a whole multitude of deities, mortals and animals. A natural cleft in the centre of the giant boulder represents the River Ganges and towards it from both sides hurry the multitudes to give thanks to Shiva for his miraculous gift to the Indian world. We see them gathering on the banks, holy men in deep meditation, lions and tigers, deer and elephants, all portrayed life-size. Above, suspended on stone clouds, are the *devas* of the skies, their arms uplifted as a sign of reverence. One is conscious of a kind of suppressed excitement as if one were almost part of the scene—this extraordinary effervescence of carving that emerges from the matrix of stone.

According to the Hindus, "the earth was deprived completely of water as a result of certain curious magical happenings, and the holy sage Bhagiratha gained the grace of the celestial river-goddess Ganga by a series of incredible austerities, so that she consented to descend to the earth. The yogi had then to gain, through further austerities, the favour of Shiva, enthroned on the Himalayas, and beg him to receive the weight of the river on his Adamantean head; for its fall would otherwise crush and shatter the surface of the earth. This boon too having been granted, the river—a kind of Milky Way—came down and became entangled in the masses of Shiva's matted hair, which somewhat slowed the mighty rush and reduced the destructive force of the heavenly stream. From the god's head the waters descended to the Himalayas, and there they break into the world to the present day".\*

Aldous Huxley† found that a visit to India made him realise how fortunate, so far as the arts are concerned, Europe had been in its religions. "The Olympian religion of antiquity," he writes, "and, except occasionally, the Christianity which took its place, were both favourable to the production of works of art, and the art which they favoured was, on the whole, a singularly reasonable and decent kind of art. Neither paganism nor Christianity imposed restrictions on

\* *The Art of Indian Asia* by Dr. Heinrich Zimmer. Pantheon Books, New York, 1955 (Bollingen Series 39).

† *Jesting Pilate* by Aldous Huxley. Chatto & Windus, London, 1926.

what the artist might represent; nor did either demand of him that he should try to represent the unrepresentable. The Olympian deities were men made gods; the Saviour of the Christians was God made man. An artist could work to the greater glory of Zeus or of Jesus without even going beyond the boundaries of real and actual human life.

"How different is the state of things in India. Here, one of the most predominant religions forbids absolutely the representation of the human form, and even, where Moslem orthodoxy is strict, of any living animal form whatever . . . Mohammedan art tends, in consequence, to be empty, barren and monotonous."

Here, I must admit, I agree with him. But when we come to Hinduism, I find him altogether too sweeping. "Hinduism," he continues, "on the other hand, permits the representation of things human, but adds that the human is not enough. It tells the artist that it is his business to express symbolically the superhuman, the spiritual, the pure metaphysical idea." He then picks on the *Bhagavad Gita*, and complains that the catalogue of Krishna's members, features and wardrobe covers several pages. Krishna reveals himself in a form hitherto unbeheld by mortal eyes: with many divine ornaments, with many upraised divine weapons, wearing divine necklaces and vestments, anointed with divine unguents, the God all-marvellous, boundless, with face turned every way—and so on. And what, he asks, is the significance of these grotesque and repulsive monsters? They are symbolic, he answers, of the cosmos. "They are the One made manifest, the All in a nutshell. Hindu artists are trying to express in terms of form what can only be expressed—and not very clearly at that, for it is difficult to speak lucidly about things of which one knows nothing—in words. The Hindus are too much interested in metaphysics and ultimate Reality to make good artists. Art is not the discovery of Reality—whatever Reality may be, and no human being can possibly know. It is the organisation of chaotic appearance into an orderly and human universe."

Surely Miss Kramisch is much nearer the truth when she writes: "In Indian sculpture and painting the majority of the figures are based on the human body. Like other natural shapes, this belongs to the visible world, and is shown together with the way of seeing it.

All natural shapes, whether animal, plant, or stone, are known to be instinct with life. Man's body itself, in its living, breathing integrity, is the place where the outer world is transformed. Moreover, it is also the scene of the transformation of the self, that is to say of the as yet unregenerate psychological ego. In this transformed shape the self is represented in art. Thus changed it is translated into form. The transformation results from an inner process of realisation. It is not visible to the physical eye; it belongs to the 'unseen'. The world of inner reality differs from the outer world but could not exist without it. Art is the meeting-ground of the two worlds and, in India, relates the transformation of the inner world into the outer.

"The Greeks made gods of their marble statues of perfectly proportioned man. In India, the discipline of yoga not only controls the physical body, but purges and rebuilds the whole living being. The human body transformed by yoga is shown free not only from defects, but also from its actual physical nature. The sensation of lightness, of release from the bondage of the physical body induced by the practice of yoga, produces the 'subtle body'. The subtle body is filled by breath and nourished by the pulsating sap of life. It is the vehicle for states of realisation above the physical state; in art, it is their receptacle, conduit and shape. The Greeks took as their ideal the disciplined, athletic physical body; the Indians took the disciplined state, or subtle body of inner realisations, on which to model the shape of their images. Greek sculptors were not necessarily athletes, nor were all Indian artists yogis. In either case, training and environment equipped them with their own characteristic types and sensibilities."\*

In many cases it is difficult for us to judge the worth of some of these sculptures because they defy all the canons of Western criticism. But those that deal with purely secular subjects or spiritual subjects treated in a realistic way are of unquestionable beauty. We find such at Konarak, or the 'Black Pagoda', dedicated to the sun god Suraya (Vishnu in another form), the sculptural motives being the illustration of the *kama-sutra*, the Indian *ars amatoria*.

The temples at Bhubaneswar, to which we flew on the way to Konarak, come in clusters like those cylindrical fungi one finds in England, and like them are to be found in waste places. Driving

\* *The Art of India through the Ages* by Stella Kramrisch.

along, one suddenly comes upon a group of them, grey-stoned and lichenous, towering against the sky. Except for the large Lingaraja Temple, they are all more or less the same, the main body of the temple being composed of a tower which begins to curve inwards at about one-third of its height. It has a rounded top crowned by a flat stone disc. The upward movement of this graceful curving tower is emphasised by deep vertical inlets or carved ribs. They look sturdy and strong and heavily planted on the ground, almost vegetable-looking in the way they grow, like those organ-pipe cacti one sees dotting the deserts of Arizona. In the seams, as it were, of the conical spires cluster small turrets repeating the shape of the tower. A tremendous force seems to drive the sculpture upwards.

The drive to Konarak from Bhubaneswar is over country roads, sometimes nothing better than cart-tracks. Our driver seemed very nervous after the rain and kept on stopping to make sure that the roads were passable. Each time we stopped I became more and more anxious, waiting for that shake of the head that meant that everything was all right. But even had they told us that the roads were too muddy, I think I would have refused to turn back.

It was an idyllic countryside, one of the prettiest drives we took in India: small mud villages set amidst palms and paddy fields. The country was rich and green, not the sodden, almost too opulent black-green of the Malabar coast, but spread out, more subtly beautiful. The mud walls of each village were sprigged and dotted with geometric patterns painted in whitewash with a stiff brush made from the frayed ends of bamboo sticks; this process gave the design a kind of third dimension, as if one were looking at it through someone else's spectacles and the focus was wrong. Water hyacinths had taken over where the villagers had not planted rice. Stiff little rounded leaves like mice's ears stuck out of the black water, and amongst them waded snowy-white egrets.

I have often noticed when travelling how colours come in drifts: one day everything seems to be red, on another, blue, and places too have their colours. On this day everything was white: the white bullocks hauling their lumbering carts were of the same porcelain whiteness as the egrets; the men leading the carts were also white, or rather all dressed in spotlessly white dhotis. With their hairless chests, square shoulders, rounded arms and long-fringed almond-

shaped eyes, they looked as if they had stepped down out of a frieze on one of their temples.

Suddenly in the middle of all this I spotted a palanquin being jogged along a footpath that led across the fields. It came as a great shock, this palanquin, I had not known they still existed. I wondered who was in it; probably some old Brahmin on his way to the great temple of Jajannath at Puri, but the shutters were drawn, so we could not see. It had once been shining black lacquer, but this had long since tarnished. Red curtains gathered up into a kind of valance ran all the way round the outside, to be let down, I suppose, in the heat. It was an exact replica of the palanquins I had seen in those charming views painted by the Daniells, Zoffany and Chinnery. Long poles are fixed to a panel at each end and these are shouldered by four men who jog along at a steady trot, averaging three and a half miles an hour. The movement, I suppose, is somewhat jerky and it would embarrass me to feel that I was being lugged through the country-side on men's shoulders, especially as a good deal of puffing and blowing goes on, a rhythmical panting that puts the men into a kind of trance like the chanting of rowers on the Nile when they have to ferry you across the full force of the river in flood.

I have already given a vague impression of Puri and of our view from a neighbouring house-top into the courtyard of the great temple of Jajannath. Jajannath is an incarnation of Vishnu, and means in Sanskrit 'Lord of the Universe'. Puri is dedicated to him and is a town of great sanctity, its narrow streets crowded with lodging-houses. A broad avenue cuts diagonally across it, down which Jajannath's enormous car is drawn at festival time when the god goes to his temple in the country for the rains. Some hundred thousand pilgrims converge on the town during June and July to pay homage to Jajannath, as the very sight of his image supposedly absolves their sins. In medieval times the influx of pilgrims to this shrine was so great that, before the occupation of the province by the British, no organisation could cope with the large mass of humanity that floated towards the shrine. "Thousands of pilgrims used to perish on the way or die at Puri for want of food and shelter and through overcrowding. But this had no deterrent effect on the pilgrims because it was considered a blessing to die within sight of

Jajannath, and pilgrims often courted death by throwing themselves in front of his car when his idol was taken in procession."\*

The immense popularity of the shrine is due to the doctrine of toleration preached by the Brahmins who attend the god. "Before Jajannath," they say, "all castes are equal." Six thousand male adult priests attend him within those grey walls that none but those practising the Hindu faith can enter. It is the most strictly guarded temple in India. Including the monastic establishments in the vicinity and the pilgrim guides who roam through India to escort the pilgrims, there are probably thirty thousand souls dependent on Jajannath. The temple must be immensely rich, as every pilgrim gives offerings appropriate to his standing. The dying Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab bequeathed the Koh-i-noor to Jajannath, but his successors, as we know, did not give effect to his bequest. A large diamond, however, does glitter in Jajannath's head.

I have seen an engraving of Jajannath's idol and it appears to be a crude affair, a habited image looking like a voodoo doll. He stands along with his sister, Subhadra, and his brother, Balarama, who are worshipped with him, placed in a row in the central shrine, bulky, hideous wooden busts grimacing with wide staring eyes and slit mouths like negroid masks, slashed with black, yellow and white paint. The posts on which they repose are dressed in brightly coloured cottons to represent bodies. Jajannath's brother has stumps of arms projecting horizontally forward from the ears, while Subhadra is entirely devoid of even that approximation to the human form.

Puri with its lepers and its cows with five legs frightened me. As we were standing on the roof-top of our house, a man appeared out of the crowd carrying a child in his arms. He ran across the square, past the supercilious Brahmins, up some steps and into a chemist's shop below. The child was his son, and somehow had spiked his eye and was holding a small brown hand over the bleeding socket. The chemist must have told him that he could do nothing and sent him to a doctor, for out came the father a few moments later still carrying the child, still frantic, still trying to get somewhere. It was a nightmare scene.

\* *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners* by P. Thomas. D. B. Taraporevala, Sons & Co. Ltd., Bombay.



We had an excellent bird's-eye view from our roof-top out over the city and stayed up there quite some time. Some young boys appeared in a carriage. Walking before them were three hooligans; one beat on a large drum, another had some cymbals and the third a flute. They improvised as they went along, a Westernised version of some Indian song. The carriage could have driven straight out of a Western film, square and box-like, with sliding shutters, exactly like one of the more primitive kinds of mail-coaches, the kind the sheriff's daughter would have stepped out of in a dimity dress. The boys were facing each other on high wooden seats. There were places for four and I think there were seven of them crowded in against each other. Gesticulating wildly they harangued the passers-by in the streets. They were advertising a new film, of which notices were pasted up on the outside of the coach, showing the Lord Krishna, heavily mascara-ed, with a dancing-girl—obviously some semi-mythological epic in Technicolor that would last at least three hours, for the Indian film producers have beaten Cecil B. de Mille at his own game. But watching the crowded carriage and listening to the boys' frantic beating of their instruments, which cut across the distant sounds of the temple music, I suddenly got a feeling of claustrophobia. We escaped through the crowd to our car and drove out to a long white beach.

Puri has a good hotel and supposedly the best bathing in India. The hotel lies among the sand-hills, a rambling green-and-white bungalow agleam with shining brass door-handles and highly waxed floors. For our luncheon we were given the most delicious prawns I have ever eaten, fat and succulent, their white flesh barely browned in butter, caught that morning by the famous fishermen of Puri, fleet creatures in conical hats of silver straw.

The drive to Konarak from Puri is only a matter of twenty miles. Passing through a small village, we bumped to a standstill in a drift of sand. Unused to foreign visitors, the villagers watched us curiously as we sorted out our various belongings—drawing-pads, thermos flasks, green-lined sunshades and cameras. Five minutes' walk and we came on Konarak. The temples of Bhubaneswar appear pygmies before Konarak, yet all that is left of Konarak is the great audience hall, saved by Lord Curzon, who filled it in with rubble and sand and sealed the door. The main part of the temple

collapsed ages ago or was never quite finished. Archaeologists are not able to agree on this point. Anyhow, lying in the sand near-by are a pile of iron beams that have never been used. They have been there now for close on seven hundred years and were presumably intended as supports for a ceiling.

A gang of some hundred men was working on the flat enclosure in which the temple stands. Round the enclosure runs a small wall about two feet high, over which bulges the dark green foliage of a scrub forest, and the distant clatter of the surf sounds just beyond the trees.

The men were clearing the enclosure and like black ants swarmed backwards and forwards with baskets of sand on their heads. Others were working at the paving of the terrace, straining at crowbars, heaving great slabs of stone into place. Watching them was the curator, a dapper little man in jodhpurs with a riding whip. We were introduced to him and he proved very knowledgeable about his temple. "Every evening I ride around on my pony. You have no idea of the peace and the calm of this place, not, of course, with all this going on," and he laughed, showing very white teeth under a clipped moustache. But the work, like the sea, was merely incidental; one hardly noticed it. Sensing our excitement, the curator took us in hand. He led us over to a point where we had a view of the temple as a whole. "You see," he said, pointing with his whip, "it is an architectural image—the mythical chariot of the sun." Konarak is a perfect allegory in stone: a great *rath*, or wheeled car, rolling on twenty-four giant wheels, twelve each side of the temple, each spoke beautifully carved. It is the sun's chariot and one sees it moving off towards the sea, from where it will take flight and thunder across the sky, drawn by seven richly caparisoned steeds that strain forward on their jewelled traces, their forelegs pawing the air. It is a huge weight they have to carry, and the sculptor has caught them in a moment of strain. The horses, or rather what remains of the horses, flank the stairs leading up to the eastern doorway of the great audience hall, the *rath*, or main body of the chariot. One feels sorry for them, for it would take at least two hundred thousand horses to get this vast square of stone moving.

The roof mounts beautifully upwards in a stepped pyramid, three tiers of horizontal lines diminishing as they ascend. Openings are

cut in between each tier, through which one walks out on to a platform on which stand life-size musicians, bejewelled sirens with swelling breasts, clashing on cymbals or beating on drums. Above them the roof is crowned, as with the temples at Bhubaneswar, with a huge *amalaka*, or circular fluted finial. I climbed up there among the sirens, but the height was too much for me and for a moment, having worked my way out to the very edge, I froze, as static as the stone musicians next to me.

Konarak is the work of Narasimha I of the Ganga dynasty and was built some time between 1238 and 1264. By the middle of the thirteenth century great changes had taken place in India. The Moslems had conquered the whole of north-western and northern India and most parts of the neighbouring Bengal. The Hindu kingdom of Orissa nestling on the eastern coast proved to be the only independent state able to muster a force strong enough to cope with them. With banners flying King Narasimha even took the offensive and conquered some southern districts of Bengal, which became part of the kingdom of Orissa. Islam could not be warded off for ever, but the policy adopted by Narasimha and followed by his successors delayed the Moslem occupation of his kingdom by at least two centuries.

The great temple of Konarak must be judged against this historical background. Narasimha's successful fight against the Moslems must have raised his prestige enormously in the eyes of his contemporaries. The temple was probably designed both as a shrine and a memorial to the great King. Ideas about religious structures were in any case to undergo a change in the late medieval period. The early temples are small, decorated from top to bottom with cult images and religious motives, but breathing an unostentatious religious fervour. Here, in Konarak, one is immediately conscious of the change; all is grandeur and magnificence, the presiding deity is housed with as much pomp and state as the King. Suraya, the sun god, has an audience hall, and one can still see the remains of the dancing-hall and the foundations of what must have been the dining-hall. As in the late temples in the south, Suraya is provided with all the splendour necessary to an oriental potentate: dancing-girls, silks and gold, elephants and horses and palanquins, and, above all, estates to defray the regal expenditures on his daily worship and

offerings. All this is beautifully expressed by the sculptor's honey-coloured stone.

I mounted the tumbled blocks of the largest of the ruined halls to see the green chlorite figure of Suraya. He stands in magnificent repose on his chariot. It is the moment of his arrival. The sun-bird, no longer flying, has already come down to earth, and sunk to his left knee. The figure is a little over two feet tall and yet gives the impression of great size. So accomplished was the sculptor that I remember the god as a colossus.

Suraya, however, is the only figure in Konarak shown in repose. In every niche, in the very spokes of the wheels on which the temple is supposed to roll, are carved interlocked figures, portrayed in the convulsed curves of erotic play. Every position which the mind of man has been able to conceive is portrayed with consummate art and with an extraordinary grasp of perspective and of human anatomy. We witness the dalliance of dancing-girls with kings and princes. The mobility of these groups is breath-taking; one can almost hear the heavy breathing their exploits occasion them; and yet, frank as the rendering is, they have about them a mystical aura of sex that is not disturbing.

I asked the curator how he interpreted them. Did he believe in the theory of purification, which meant roughly that before being initiated into the life of a devotee one had to partake of all earthly pleasures, indulging in the raptures of the body? "Perhaps," he answered, but he seemed not to be convinced. "What do you think, then?" I probed. "Well, it is rather as though the artist who designed this temple of the sun—" he hesitated, searching for his words, "—had realised that, since the sun warms all life, every form and expression of it is sacred, from the most carnal to the most refined. Certainly, though, I think the carvings are symbolic. Do you see," and he pointed to the great hall, "as the building mounts, so the sculptor becomes less erotic? On the roof, as you know, there are only female musicians. The higher you climb, the purer become the carvings, until eventually they fade out into abstract geometrical forms." I liked the curator's interpretation.

Unnoticed the hours had passed, and it was almost dark by the time we regained the car, to be besieged again by the curious villagers. I must admit I was now a little curious myself. Had these

tempestuous scenes turned them into hopeless voluptuaries? It was impossible to tell by looking at them. It was not until I reached Khajuraho that my question was answered.

## CHAPTER 10

\*

### CALCUTTA

This was my second visit to Calcutta. I had been there immediately after the separation, having landed there on my way back from Australia, and spent several days waiting to catch my plane to Ceylon. It had been May, already rather late as far as the weather was concerned. I can still remember the heat, that awful blanket of depression that engulfed one. The thermometer had registered ninety-four degrees in the shade. Under these conditions the sun loses its dazzling radiance. There it sits up in a colourless sky, molten, heavy, oppressive. It is impossible to take joy in it, and one avoids it. The afternoons are spent in the shuttered gloom of a bare hotel room, flat on one's back, prostrate, lost in a fitful sleep like the poor creatures above one on the roof, half-dreaming the hours away. My room had looked out over the wafer-thin walls of the city, out over the untidy roof-lines, on which were camped these countless ragged creatures. They were living up there, stretched out on mattresses, subsisting, it would seem, for they never moved, on the fetid air. Above them wheeled vultures, on silent, outstretched wings. Four and a half millions had been the population of the city in 1947. Crowded already to overflowing, its number had been doubled after the famine of 1943. A further two million, refugees from East Pakistan, have now added to its difficulties and the migration still goes on. According to the latest statistics one million live day and night in the streets. We passed them in the small hours of the morning on our way from the airport, huddled one against the other in shapeless forms.

It was the beginning of March and the real heat had not yet started, but it was already uncomfortably warm. Calcutta is a kind

of Marseilles of the Orient, large and untidy, sprawling out over the flatness of the Ganges delta. The drive from the airport seemed to last for ever, spread out in a succession of ramshackle suburbs. We watched the first copper-pink rays of the sun touch on the roof-tops and slide over down the dirty walls till it reached the sleeping thousands like mummies under their rags. Quickened by the light, they stretched and yawned and rubbed their eyes, and then standing up took on human form. A sultry breeze stirred their dhotis, their shawls and the loose ends of their turbans, but being at the same temperature as the air it did not cool. Performing a perfunctory toilet at the nearest tap, these ragged figures sank again by the roadside, squatting on their haunches, and there they seemed to stay till evening. As in all eastern countries, it is at night that the population of a big city really lives. One sees them standing in drifts by the bus-stop, or waiting to climb up on to double-decked trams as precarious in aspect as those drawn by Emmet for *Punch*. Coloured neon lights dye them a raspberry-pink or stripe them like zebras with bars of green—those of them who can afford the luxury to queue up outside the cinemas.

The total figure for India's population is some three hundred and sixty million and the population increases by three million each year. Until 1921 the growth of population was repeatedly checked by famine and epidemic diseases, and in the thirty years from 1891 the increase was only twelve million. Between 1921 and 1951 it was a hundred and ten million. As the census commissioner points out, if it goes on in this way the population will have risen in another thirty years to five hundred and twenty million, "and the country will be faced with catastrophe, unless there can be the near miracle of a popular movement in favour of family limitations".

The Hindu religion fortunately is not powerfully opposed to the idea of birth control. Following Mahatma Gandhi's example, the Government are making widespread propaganda to try and limit the population. The whole subject, in fact, is discussed with far greater freedom in India than in England, and the Government seems to be making rapid progress in the establishment of clinics. The next worry now is to increase the land under cultivation to correspond with this immense increase in the number of mouths to be fed. Vast irrigation projects are under way in many of the states

and large dams are being built to combat the crop failures due to the vagaries of the monsoon. It is only on the coastal strips that the monsoon can be relied on and before the advent of the railway and the motor there were few years when it could be said that there was no shortage of food—and a shortage of food very quickly became a famine.

Famine was a question of distribution. Before the days of mechanical transport, when the country was dependent on pack camels, it was impossible to alleviate a famine that was really widespread; it was a kind of vicious circle. The animals bringing the grain would have to carry their own fodder, and if the journey was more than a few days' march there would be no room for anything else. Even as late as 1877 grain lay rotting at the railway station in Madras because there were no bullocks with enough strength to drag it away. There were still cases of women selling their children and of men eating each other. One hears of living skeletons, the very colour of their bones visible through the thin black film of skin that covered them. Pierre Loti, travelling in India in 1904, describes for us the grisly spectre of famine stalking one of the Rajput states. Elbows and knee-caps make great swellings like the knots upon a stick. "A woman has just stopped to beg at the stall of a bracelet-seller, who is even now eating hot and savoury pancakes. The woman is a mere spectre who clasps to her bony bosom and withered breasts the skeleton of a child. No, the trader will give her nothing; he does not even deign to look at her. Then the mother, whose breasts are dried up and whose child must die, flies into a fury and the cry of a maddened she-wolf hurls itself forth through her unclenched teeth. She is quite young, and was doubtless beautiful; youth still glimmers in her ravaged cheeks, indeed she is almost a child and can hardly have seen more than sixteen years. But at last she understands that no one will take pity on her and that she is doomed. Then her despairing wail rises into the yell of a hunted beast that knows that its pursuers are at hand. Meanwhile, the huge and pampered elephants walk past with heavy tread, munching the costly forage which has been brought from distant lands."\*

I could quote countless similarly harrowing stories, for there is no dearth of them in the literature on India. But one of them seems to

\* *India* by Pierre Loti. T. Werner Laurie Ltd., London, 1906.



me to suffice, and, contrary to the reports one reads, I have not been conscious of India's heart-rending poverty. I have not been haunted by reproachful tears from famished eyes, and Calcutta, the 'Cruel City' as the Indians themselves call it, would have been the place where I should most likely have encountered it. It is huge and ramshackle and perhaps depressing, but not horrifying. These are the winter months, it is not even early spring yet, and Calcutta still has about it the barren, dusty appearance that is usually found in and around railway sidings. But this is not the Calcutta I had come to see; I was looking for the handsome city depicted in early engravings. Thomas and William Daniell, for instance, both painters of no small merit, brought out an album of aquatints entitled *Views of Calcutta*. They show the fashionable residential districts as they were towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Chowringhi and the Strand, where the gentlefolk used to take the air, the Esplanade and Garden Reach on the Hoogly, a branch of the Ganges, on which Calcutta is built. The banks of the river below the town are studded with elegant mansions called here 'garden-houses'. These houses are surrounded by groves and lawns which descend to the water's edge. "Viewed from the Hoogly," wrote Colonel von Orlich in 1845, "Calcutta has the appearance of a city of palaces. A row of superb buildings extends from the princely residence of the Governor-General along the Esplanade and produces a remarkably striking effect by their handsome verandas supported by high columns."

Thomas Daniell (uncle to William Daniell) shows us one of these houses in a large oil painting. It has the wealth of detail that he knew so well how to depict. White-columned, it stands in a large park of mango trees with tamarind, fig and teak. Clumps of bamboo tower over their compact shapes and so fragile do they look that the slightest breeze must have set their delicate foliage a-flutter. If one listened very hard one could almost hear the liquid notes of the bulbul, India's nightingale. At night, hundreds of luminous insects would hover about in the dark, like little lamps. To place the scene more easily for the spectator Daniell has painted-in a covered carriage; it trundles along the near bank of the river towards the corner of the painting and is drawn by milk-white bullocks. They are humped like the dome of the carriage, like an elephant's howdah

or the Bengal roofs of the Indian palaces. The red curtains are only partially drawn and one has a glimpse of a beautiful amber arm reposing amidst the draperies. The occupant is a lady of rank; one can see a small length of her sari zigzagged over with long strips of silver. Her face is hidden, for Daniell has not dared to take liberties with the strict rules of purdah, Hindu ladies never being seen abroad, but one can imagine her appearance: the eyes, which are already too long, are lengthened by lines of paint, her cheeks are almost too red with the blood under the skin of amber; her raven hair, her eyelids, her eyebrows, teeth, hands and nails have all been meticulously attended to, half her life being passed in complicated rituals of toilet, secret processes to render her charm even more fascinating. This mysterious beauty is attended by armed horsemen, without whom no native of any rank ever travelled. Beyond this cortège a long-prowed boat manned by six turbaned rowers skims the still waters of the river, moving swiftly in the direction of the city; such boats were called *buelgoes* and along with chaises and palanquins were the usual form of transport in the city.

Garden Reach now spreads an ugliness of docks on each side of the river, the grand houses are gone; but if one mounts the Hoogly for a mile or two in its course one comes to Alipur, another fashionable suburb, where Warren Hastings built himself a house. There is a letter from Hastings dated 1772 in which he begs a friend to send him Benares marble for his staircase. A contemporary gives us a quick sketch of him at this period. "If his own brown coat were plain, his horses had silver-plated bits with his crest engraved—and he is building himself a fine new house." This house still exists and many others round it. Hastings House is now a girls' seminary.

The early houses had been comparatively simple, copies of the Indian village huts, comprising a central room around the outside of which there would be a veranda covered by an extension of the thatched roof. They were known as 'Bengal houses', which eventually became corrupted to 'Bungalow'. To hide the sloping roof there was a kind of artificial ceiling made of white cloth. Curtains were hung over the doorway to keep out the wind and the arches of the veranda were guarded from the sun by curtains or lattices of split bamboo lined with a coarse sacking. In May and June, the hottest months, these were replaced by screens of scented grass on which

water was poured by half-naked coolies while others turned the thermantidote, an arrangement of fans which drove air through the moistened screen, lowering the temperature of the room by ten degrees. In the hot weather every opening was closed and the house was turned into a dimly lit fortress against the sun: one would have to pick one's way carefully between the occasional tables in the drawing-room. But by the middle of the eighteenth century the houses had become spacious mansions, having anything up to sixteen to twenty well-proportioned rooms. Importing glass from Europe was still too costly, but Venetian shutters replaced windows and brought with them a certain degree of elegance, while they also allowed the free circulation of any breeze there might be. These houses generally followed the same plan; the dining-room and the drawing-room were on the ground floor, while the middle storey, surrounded by a veranda supported by pillars, contained the sitting-rooms of the family; and in the upper storey were the bed-chambers. The windows were left curtainless and furniture was kept to the minimum because of the heat.

Strolling around the streets giving on to Chowringhi Road, down Middleton Street or Kyd or Lindsay Streets, I found the great houses, though I had to hunt for them, for they are hidden behind the walls of shops and restaurants. Suddenly I came upon them, their tall columns with shutters running between them, sheltering the high-ceilinged rooms behind. Then skirting the Maidan, a vast expanse of burnt grass still peopled with Englishmen in bronze—Dufferin, Kitchener, Roberts, Curzon and Peel, I made northwards to Esplanade Row and the impressive town hall completed in 1813. Beyond this again is the old Mint, built in the purest Greek Revival style, its central portico being a copy of the temple of Athena at Athens. Despite the apparent unsuitability of classical architecture to an eastern landscape the effect produced is often splendid; the best example of this is Government House, residence of the Viceroy before the seat of government moved to Delhi and the original palace of the Governor-Generals of India before the investiture of the Viceroys. It was begun in 1799 by order of the Marquess of Wellesley, the Iron Duke's elder brother, and its architect was a captain in the Bengal Engineers called Charles Wyatt, who took Adam's Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire as his model. It is now

tenanted by the Governor of Bengal, who seems to live only in one wing.

The Superintendent of Furniture showed us round. It takes five hundred staff to run it, and its huge columned halls would appear to dwarf even Buckingham Palace. It is rather sparsely furnished, some of the rooms being quite empty. The only objects of any value were the crystal chandeliers and many of these had been removed for use at Delhi. They were bought in 1801, at the sale of General Claude Martin's effects at Lucknow, and came from the extraordinary house the General built himself on the outskirts of that town. I had not visited 'La Martinière', as it is called, at the time, otherwise I would certainly have taken more interest in them, for 'La Martinière' is probably one of the strangest monuments of the British Raj in India. I wondered what had happened to the original objects in Government House. It must have been remarkably handsome in Wellesley's days, for the Marquess certainly does not appear to have stinted himself, and it seems unjust that his governorship barely outlived the building of his Georgian palace.

It was in the ballroom that our little guide told us of the days he remembered. He had been in Government House now for forty years and wistfully he talked of the "good old days". I do not mean this as a reflection on his government, but rather on the changing times the world over. Nineteen thirty-eight was the year of the last big reception held in this room—the last it would ever see probably, and it was a room made for the glitter of jewels, bright lights and brocades. Two shuttered balconies ran the length of the ballroom, while enormous foyers opened out at both ends.

Wellesley was criticised for the extravagant way in which he lived. "Need Government House have been quite so large?" queried an official at home, and again: "He never moved from one room to another without an accompanying army of attendants and scarcely left the precincts of Government House except in a coach and six with a full escort of dragoons and a body of outriders proclaiming his title as he went." Hastings, we read, rarely travelled up the River Hoogly with less than four hundred boats to carry his entourage. But it must be remembered that the Englishman of the eighteenth century, and particularly the Englishman in India, was jealous of his prestige and proud of his Augustan sense of style. Very

quickly the officers, judges and officials, even those who could not afford it, learned to live on the scale befitting their status, although Europeans in India were apt to overvalue themselves. They lived after all in a country that had ever been used to contrast, "the intoxicating possibility of jewels and slave girls beyond counting one day, on the next, death, bashed to bloody rags at the feet of an elephant". The average official had fifty to seventy regular servants besides fifteen extras in the hottest weather to operate the punkahs and thermantidotes and to keep the grass screens moist. In fact a staff of one hundred was by no means a rarity. Each family attired its retainers in distinctive liveries, gaily coloured sashes and turbans which were worn over muslin costumes.

We get sudden glimpses of what life must have been like. Colonel Booth, for instance, used to bathe in the Indus, which was a dangerous occupation on account of alligators, but the Colonel was so passionately fond of swimming that "in spite of the alligators he plunges in every morning surrounded by a crowd of his servants who by their cries and shouts kept the reptiles at bay". And then in Mr. William Mackintosh's travels there is a description of the levée of a young Bengal merchant: "About the hour of seven, in the morning, his doorman opens the gate and the veranda is free to his footmen, messengers, stewards and butlers. The head bearer enters his bedroom at eight o'clock. A lady quits his side and is conducted by a private staircase, or out of the yard. The moment the master throws his leg out of bed, the whole force is waiting to rush into his room, each making their salaams. He is then dressed without any greater exertion on his own part than if he were a statue." Everyone rode in the mornings, equitation being looked upon as a necessity for the maintenance of good health. The Maidan and the lanes leading out through the garden houses to the open country beyond were popular scenes of this early morning routine. Returning from the ride it was customary to bath and retire again to bed until about nine o'clock, when an enormous breakfast was served.

Apart from the Company's men and the military there was yet another class altogether, the nabobs. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines a nabob in the Anglo-Indian sense of the word as "a person of great wealth, one who has amassed a fortune in India". It was a term of derision used by London society when referring to these *nouveaux*

*riches*, linking them to the uncouth oriental despots of the popular imagination. Nawab is an Indian title given to deputy governors of provinces or districts in the Mogul Empire, but it was deformed by the English so that it came to be applied to the young men who left their native shores penniless to return in early middle-age "with burned complexions, bad livers, abominably short tempers and execrable manners, but with riches enough to satisfy their every whim". Mr. Pearson in his excellent book\* on Calcutta gives us a glimpse of their lives. Attended by vast hosts of thieving servants (the nabobs of Calcutta customarily employed as many as four or five Indian servants to look after their wigs, and perhaps a dozen more to care for their clothes), they blustered and cajoled their way to fortune; "if they survived the perils of the climate, and their own excessive habits of drinking and dining, they would return to their homeland and throw away enormous wealth in a vain endeavour to win the admiration and respect of those who judged them boorish."

After the life they had led in India, they must very quickly have been bored with the tameness of good breeding—and they could not all have been vulgarians, for I found some charming miniatures painted by Indian artists in the Calcutta Museum of Europeans. It is hard to tell sometimes that they are English, for the painters have found it impossible not to invest them with their own black hair and swarthy complexions. There was one woman of great beauty with her hair dressed high in the manner of Gainsborough, with soft curls that fell over her shoulders. One sees by her features that she must have been fair and that she must have been English. There was another woman with raven hair simply arranged in a hard line scraped back off her forehead; a servant is pouring out a glass of water for her which has been cooled in a porous vessel covered with a damp linen. They cooled their wines by means of saltpetre and salt. Ice, when they had it, was imported from America. In another miniature we see a man in a tricorne hat half sitting, half reclining, smoking a hookah. The hookah became an indispensable item of every gentleman's personal equipment to the extent of being cared for by a hookah-buridar, or pipe-bearer, whose sole duty it was to feed the hookah, accompanying his master everywhere, even to dinners at Government House.

\* *Eastern Interlude* by R. Pearson. Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta, 1954.

It is hardly surprising that many of the subjects of these miniatures had taken on an Eurasian air. After the first influx following Plassey, a relatively high proportion of the nabobs were born and bred in Calcutta itself, and from childhood were surrounded by a cultural admixture of the strangest blend. Although they still dressed like Europeans and lived in European houses, their habits were singularly exotic. African slaves were considered to lend colour to the house and negro musicians trained to play the French horn were employed to provide music for the evening trips on the river. Many a household kept its own troop of dancing girls, who dressed in the thinnest muslin with diamonds in their noses. "Even the nursery rimes so familiar in England were replaced by lullabies from the oldest Asian folklore, and one of the earliest memories of childhood would be the Indian ayah crooning gently:

"Sleep make baby,  
Sleep make;  
Sleep, oh! oh!  
Golden is thy bed,  
Of silk are thy curtains,  
From Kabul the Mogul woman comes  
To make my master sleep!"\*

It is little wonder that the nabobs felt strange and awkward in the presence of Court society when they returned to London.

Calcutta today is untidy and overcrowded and ugly, but sufficient of its past remains to make one realise how handsome it must once have been. Colonel von Orlich was not exaggerating when he exclaimed that viewed from the Hoogly it had the appearance of a city of palaces. The grandeur of the merchant princes is still evident if one knows where to look for it. I was much aided by the excellent material to be found in the Victoria Museum; all Miss Eden's drawings, for instance. Nothing can give a better interpretation of the life led in the Governor-General's palace than her water-colour of her dog 'Chance'. He is seen being paraded around the grounds in a small howdah hung with red curtains, atop of a baby elephant.

\* *Eastern Interlude* by R. Pearson.

There are also many evocations of the pomp and splendour of Victorian India, when England had really reached her apogee. We see engravings of the Commander-in-Chief's tents. The luxury of tents pitched in what would seem the most improbable surroundings has always fascinated me. They evoke the same kind of magic or sense of wonder as did Captain Nemo's plush- and mahogany-filled submarine, or, for that matter, as still do the *wagons-lits* with their highly varnished woods, their blue lights and their thick carpets. And no one can deny the fascination of the luxurious lives lived by Saladin and the Crusader kings in their gold-striped tents. In *Ivanhoe* one reads of their being served with gold goblets packed with sherbets made from the pure snows of Lebanon. But nothing could surpass the splendour of the British Raj in India. When out campaigning Sir Jasper Nicolls, the Commander-in-Chief, had two tents for himself, measuring about sixty feet long and thirty feet wide. There were also several smaller ones enclosed in a linen fence. Opposite to these was the durbar tent in which the Governor-General resided. This was enormous and consisted of several apartments. The floors were covered with the most costly carpets and the tents were provided with sofas, tables, chairs, and furniture of every kind. Chandeliers hung from the roof-poles and pots of fern, banked here and there, sent their pointed shadows over the striped walls. At night iron stoves imparted warmth and cheerfulness to the scene. From this durbar tent a glass door led through a covered passage to the dwelling or sleeping tent. This was lined with flowers. When dinner was announced the company sat down to a long table spread with silver to the accompaniment of a regimental band playing 'God Save the Queen'. A servant in scarlet livery stood behind the chair of every guest, while stately Hindu attendants fanned His Excellency in slow, measured movements.

No period of British rule was unrepresented in the Victoria Museum. The scene now moves to Lahore and the year is 1860. Ranjit Singh, the last of the great Sikh maharajas, is holding a durbar for Lord Ellenborough, the Governor-General. Ranjit Singh's Court was the most brilliant in India at the time and in the picture in the Museum Ranjit Singh is seen wearing the 'mountain of light', or the Koh-i-noor, as we know it. He wears it as an arm-band and it is simply mounted between two other diamonds. In spite of the



magnificence which prevailed at his Court, we know that Ranjit Singh himself was very simple in his attire and wore but few ornaments, but he loved to see show and splendour in everything about him. It was he who had a state carriage built for himself, drawn by six horses and surrounded by a kind of veranda or platform on which there was room for twenty Bayadères, who were obliged to amuse the one-eyed hero during his journeys (he lost his eye as a consequence of smallpox).

The guests are arriving, all the Sikh princes, one in a rich green *shoga*, embroidered with gold, with a red turban entwined with strings of pearls. He wears an azure ornament on his forehead, surmounted by a feather fastened by an agraffe of rubies; it becomes him extremely well, for he is very handsome, with clean-cut features, and it gives him a dashing and coquettish appearance. Another fierce warrior strides in, his silver helmet wound about with pearls; yellow and blue silk shawls float over his shoulder. He has just arrived at full gallop on a bay horse with a golden bridle and a panther skin as a saddle. During the banquet the guests are helped to wine and requested to keep the silver goblets and the vessels they use as tokens of remembrance. Kashmir shawls, ropes of pearls and other jewels are handed to the European ladies and a present for the Queen of England is exhibited, a beautiful green Kashmir tent embroidered with silk, containing silver furniture. Lord Ellenborough then produces his presents, but the whole thing, alas, is a mere matter of form, for the Europeans anyhow are not allowed to keep their presents. Attending the banquet is a superior kind of accountant who takes notes of all the gifts and lays an embargo on them in the name of the East India Company. They are sold afterwards, the money thus obtained helping to defray the cost of the presents the Governor-General was obliged to give.

I found it practically impossible to drag myself away from the crowded galleries of this museum, but it was closing time and the last picture I had time to take notes on shows the arrival of one of the Governor-Generals at his camp. He is reviewing the troops who line the road on both sides, and close to the bridge which he has to pass over there are some two hundred elephants, richly trapped and mounted. As the Governor approaches, the sagacious animals salute him by kneeling down and raising their trunks in the air, a

mark of respect which they have been taught by their mahouts. Judging by the length of the cortège following the Governor's wake, the *défilé* must have lasted for at least four hours.

If the Englishman in India lived and planned his house in a grand style, he also died in the same state. I had heard of the great melancholy burial grounds that were to be found in Calcutta, but I had not expected them to be on such an elaborate scale. It is true, of course, that the early servants of the East India Company might look forward to a profitable career; they would have been imprudent to expect a long one. Indeed, they died young and fast, carried away by malaria, cholera and dysentery, or, as the early settlers called them, in their ignorance, "putrid fevers" and "fluxes". The funeral bells toll through Hickey's pages as steadily as the hours in a cathedral close. No one knew that the water had to do with cholera, or mosquitoes with malaria, and bleeding was the panacea for all ills. We hear of one of Hastings's friends being "tormented with the bile, for which he was prescribed mutton chops and water". It is hardly surprising that they died like flies. "One year when I was in Calcutta," writes a sea captain, "there were reckoned in August about a thousand two hundred English, and before the beginning of January there were four hundred and sixty burials registered." In 1703 it was calculated that about twenty reinforcements were needed annually from England to maintain a garrison of soldiers one hundred strong. One continually comes across passages in the different memoirs, mentioning high fevers, cramp in the limbs and the stomach. "In an hour from being seized" one character was dead. And again, "He was not ill more than three days, so rapid is the progress of disease in this country." It was not uncommon for the newcomer to dine out and find his host and hostess dead. Putrefaction set in so quickly in the hot weather that the unfortunate victims were generally buried two or three hours after death.

Not only were the doctors powerless to stem the diseases, but the patients themselves, not understanding that certain precautions were advisable in the tropics, did everything in their power, unwittingly, of course, to bring on these "terrible fluxes"; their main offence was that of over-indulging in drinking and eating. "We continued our orgies," writes Hickey, "until a brilliant sun shone into the room, whereupon we staggered to our palanquins." Judging by the

number of times Hickey seems to have ridden into the ditch in his phaeton, the ladies of Calcutta must have been reconciled to his turning up late, if at all, to their dinners, "dinners so magnificently dressed that it would not have discredited the cooks of London's best tavern." Liberal allowances of the best French wines were served at every course. It was also the age of toasts, which must have helped in the consumption of spirits considerably; "and drinking nine public toasts, coffee was served and the party broke up at dawn." It was a popular conception in the eighteenth century that over-eating was the only way to stave off fever and, their livers congested, these pale-skinned foreigners were ripe meat for all the lurking microbes. Once attacked they could put up only a feeble resistance and each hot season bore off a large crop to the burial grounds.

The largest of these burial grounds lies several blocks away behind the fashionable Chowringhi on the corner of Rowdon and Park Street. I had hired myself a magnificent taxi for the morning, bright orange, with a fierce driver to match, his beard and moustache henna-ed russet pink, his turban the colour of a brown chrysanthemum. He was a Mohammedan and his hair was dyed this way in honour of his prophet, who had red hair. Climbing into my wonderful colour scheme, I showed the driver a map. I don't suppose he looked but he seemed to understand my English, and with a fine grinding of gears we took off, making what appeared to be an ingenious number of detours. I am not blessed with a particularly good bump of locality and felt that he knew what he was doing, but after we had been going for about half an hour I began to be worried and asked if we were nearly there. He answered in perfectly good Hindustani, and it was only then that I realised that he had not understood a word of what I had said. Had I not interrupted him he would have been perfectly happy driving around the whole morning, never arriving anywhere. Again the map came out and we eventually found my corner.

Great pointed obelisks stood all the way round us, like trees in a forest, and the whole district seemed to be cemeteries. Choosing one particular one, I entered through an old doorway. There was an inscribed plaque commemorating the date of its consecration: 1767, it read, and it was already closed by 1790. It had taken only twenty-three years to fill and it was an extensive site. The civic authorities

had been obliged to move over to the other side of the road and then gradually farther and farther down the way as the years went by, until the whole district was taken over. So cramped for space had they been in the cemeteries I visited that the monuments were crowded one on top of the other like a crowd of spectators. Long avenues cut down in between the monuments, but, once away from these, the tombs crowd in pell-mell; great plaster obelisks are set over arched pavilions, some of them domed, others worked with rustications, some decorated with Adam urns. One sees caskets with clawed feet raised on elaborate plinths, and rusted, black, iron railings. One tomb consisted of a collection of truncated columns, each column commemorating a member of one family, the whole family having died simultaneously, probably of cholera. The word haunts the still, hot air. The cemetery was completely deserted except for the crows that made a dry rustling among the dead leaves—the crackling noise of autumn, only it is not autumn, just the brittle echo of leaves that have been scorched by a pitiless sun. There is no damp to soften them. Wisps of dirty ivy struck half-heartedly through the dried grass; it had not the force to climb the plaster walls offered it. The whole place was infinitely sad, sooty and grey, covered with spiders'-webs. Few people can ever visit it.

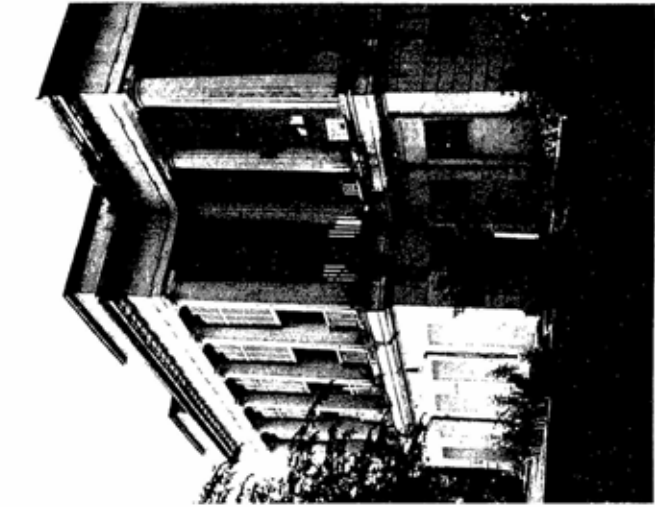
I read some of the inscriptions engraved on white marble slabs which had been floated down the river from the ancient city of Gaur in North Bengal. The majority seem to have died pathetically young. In such a graveyard is buried Rose Aylmer, the short-lived heroine of Walter Savage Landor's famous elegiac poem.

Landor met Rose in the autumn of 1796 on the beach at Swansea. Landor was then only twenty-one and in all the fiery vigour of his youth, the leonine man who was later to become the boisterous Boythorn of Dickens's *Bleak House*. Rose Aylmer was his first love, and when she died of cholera in Calcutta the news of her death inspired him to write the best known lines in all his verses—lines in which Charles Lamb found "a charm I cannot explain":

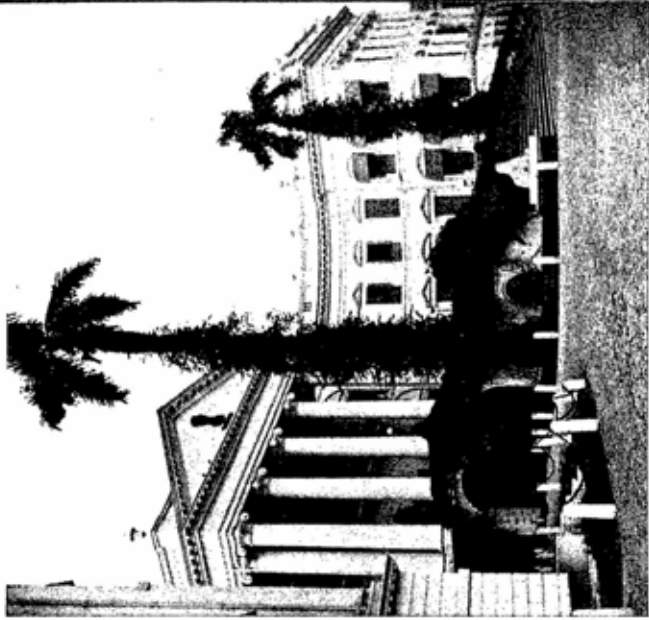
Ah, what avails the sceptred race,  
 Ah, what the form divine!  
 What every virtue, every grace!  
 Rose Aylmer, all were thine.

TIME OF THE MANGO FLOWERS

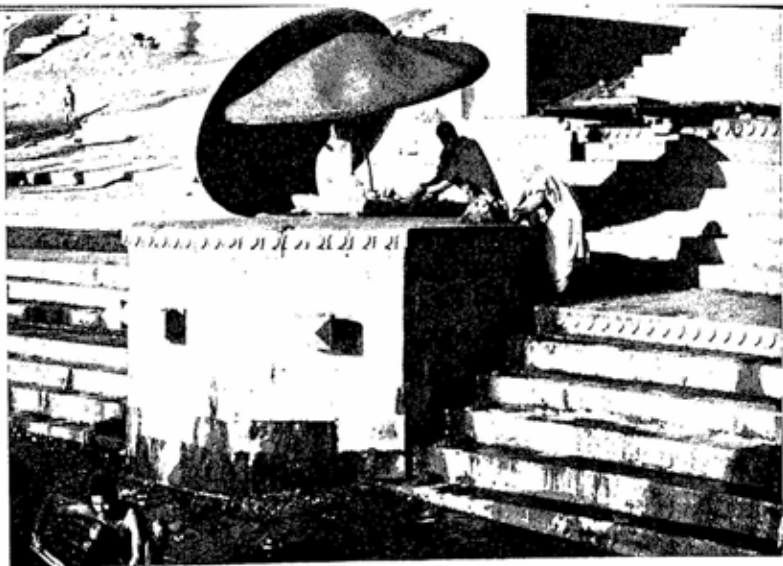
Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes  
May weep, but never see,  
A night of memories and of sighs  
I consecrate to thee.



Calcutta. Town House (*page 108*)



Calcutta. Government House (*page 109*)



*Above, Benares: one of the octagonal platforms where the faithful meditate (page 120)*

*Below, a sadhu on his bed of thorns (page 124)*



## CHAPTER II

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### BENARES

We left Calcutta in a fog. It was strange to see the spiked fronds of palms and the broad oil-cloth leaves of the bananas appearing out of dense vaporous clouds; they were, no doubt, the miasmatic vapours of the delta. It was a subtle send-off for Benares, for one hardly appeared to emerge from these mists, which were like veils in a dream. Benares is without a doubt the strangest place in India, and it remains in my memory like a dream, a terrifying nightmare of great beauty.

For a short moment on arrival we were lulled into a false sense of security, for our hotel was in the cantonment area and was the product of an English woman who had taken a solid, early Victorian house and turned it into a charming hotel for travellers curious to see the city of the dead. It looked as only an Englishman's house can look; shabby and comfortable with much dark furniture and sofas covered in chintz. The curtains of the windows were skimpy, but drawing them aside one could look out on to an untidy garden splashed everywhere with clumps of brightly-coloured flowers. Mrs. Clark had died and the hotel now belonged to some friends of ours, the Gupta family, directors of an important silk industry. It is their looms at Benares that spin the beautiful gossamer threads shot with gold that we saw glinting everywhere in the sun. The Guptas have had sense enough to leave the hotel exactly as they bought it, their only innovation being the jewellery on display in one of the small sitting-rooms. They specialise in jewellery as well as silk, and have a fine collection of Mogul jewels. There were ropes of pearls and ruby stars, and bracelets set with large diamonds the size of a penny, cut flat in the old manner like the eighteenth-century jewels. Some of



the things were of great beauty, especially the bracelets, the stones being delicately set in tendrils of leaves worked in diamonds and gold. They set all their diamonds in gold and the backs of the jewels are invariably worked in enamels, the enamels coloured with paste made from crushed emeralds, sapphires and rubies: this art, Gupta tells me, is now lost, because the craftsmen jealously guarded their secret, refusing to hand it down to posterity. Gupta also explained to me how Benares had become the centre of the silk trade; having been a centre of pilgrimages for centuries, it had rather naturally become a place of trade. The quiet, grey-green waters of the Ganges are used not only to float the pious straight to heaven but also to transport to Calcutta and the world the shimmering cargoes of brocade for which the city is famous.

The town proper lies several miles from the cantonment area and we had to drive there in a taxi, which took us to the main square. From here we walked to the river. I made the trip countless times, for I was to live on the ghats for the next few days. It was here on the long flights of stone steps leading down to the water that I was to experience the most extraordinary sensations, sometimes not daring to look at what I could see. I used to get up early in the morning and take one of the small river boats and be rowed slowly down the river past the ghats, past the furlong-wide flights of steps which lie like a long avenue along the water's edge, their sweep broken every now and then by large octagonal platforms that cut across them, where the faithful meditate under mushroom-shaped umbrellas. The steps are very impressive, tapering at times into thin wedges which reach right up into the dark alleyways of the town; then again comes that long beautiful sweep interrupted only by these platforms. There are places where the steps recede in groups of terraces. Coming to the palace built by Rajah Man Singh of Amber, the steps are suddenly cut across at right angles by smaller steps, forming sharp angles like those to be found on Aztec pyramids. The play of light dramatises the different planes.

The buildings and the steps, the grey river and the mud, when occasionally one gets a glimpse of the natural river bank, are all of one colour, a buff-grey, the limestone becoming rose with the rising sun, while the oily, slow-flowing water takes on the sheen of pale opals.

The boat I took was blue and white and tubby; they are all the same, built over amidships with a closed-in compartment for the women, the stern and the prow being left free for the rowers. I sat on top of the cabin on a kind of terrace surrounded by a low balustrade about a foot high.

Slowly I would be rowed up against the current, and then allowed to drift down again. I got the boatmen to retrace the same course again and again; there was one particularly dramatic strip of the river where the palaces reared up their great blank walls, six or seven storeys high, flowering into windows only on their topmost floors. As they were built on the slope of a high river bank, allowance had to be made for the flood waters of the monsoons. These high, blank walls gave the palaces a bastion-like appearance not unlike the medieval fortresses to be found in and around Florence. One would imagine these palaces to be contemporary with the Red Fort at Delhi or any of the famous buildings of the Great Moguls, but in point of fact they belong to the latter half of the nineteenth century, and are magnificent examples of India's building craft.

Beyond and above these bastion-like walls rose hundreds of cupolas, and pointed, gold-covered spires of temples and shrines, and above this again the Emperor Aurangzeb's mosque, which towered above them all. Ever mindful to belittle the Hindus, he had pulled down the most sacred of Shiva's temples in order to build his mosque, but he could have saved himself the trouble, for in spite of its dominant position it hardly counts at all, and it is only on re-reading my notes that I remember its existence. The atmosphere is so intensely Hindu at Benares that the thin minarets of Moham-medanism are as insignificant as needles in a pile of hay.

There are over two thousand temples at Benares and about half a million idols; it also claims to be the oldest city in the world. It was already an important place six centuries before Christ and one is acutely conscious of its antiquity; it is not important that very little of what one actually sees dates beyond the second half of the eighteenth century. Its age and the veneration with which it has been regarded through the centuries have formed a kind of nimbus round the place; it is as if the very soil has been impregnated, which, indeed, is precisely what has happened. Every inch of ground, the pebbles, the dust of the roads, the walls and the tanks, and, above all,

the waters of the Ganges, are considered so sacred as to remove all traces of sin; anyone, of whatever creed and however great his misdeeds, who dies within the compass of the city is transported straight to heaven.

It is very impressive: there it stands, Benares, a steep pile of honey-coloured stone flashing in the sun; all around, the country is flat and empty. On the opposite bank there is nothing, just cultivated fields stretching away in the mud, and beyond that a low line of trees. If one looks one can occasionally see a ferry-load of pilgrims taking off, tiny little black dots far across the broad expanse of water. The Ganges at this point must be about a quarter of a mile wide. Slowly, negotiating the currents that send up clots of eddying water, they are rowed across the silently flowing river to be lost eventually among the other boats that are putting out in the cool of the evening. These boats converge and separate and meet again like those beetles one sees skidding around on pools at home. They are there, I think, for the pleasure of it and not for any other reason. The light is lovely at this hour. It suddenly struck me that Thebes must have been like this in the times of the Pharaohs, for Benares seems to belong to the times of classical antiquity. There is not a shape, no contrivance, or gesture among the crowd to suggest our age.

Benares is a city of the dead. Hindus in their old age flock to Benares for the pleasure of dying there, and it teems with the old and the sick, and with widows. All day long and throughout the night, smoke curls up in thin clouds from the burning ghats. Walk in the city and you are almost bound to meet a hurried funeral procession, the dead borne on a litter of bamboo bound up in a winding sheet like a mummy, red if it is a woman, and white for a man. For Europeans, the shrouded corpses and the crackling pyres come as a shock. It horrifies us, for instance, that a person who is about to die should be carried down to the banks of the Ganges, where he is smeared with mud, quantities of which are thrust into his mouth, nose and ears. Once the final rites have been taken, there is no question of the patient recovering, for he would then become an outcast; this at least is what the strictest orthodox Hindus believe. Benares emphasises the permanence of death, yet at the same time there are moments when it takes on an almost festive air. Usually

one is conscious of a great physical calm, engendered, no doubt, by the countless generations who have struggled there to die, believing that the sprinkling of their ashes over the opaque surface of their sacred river will help them to the oblivion which is their goal. Like the river, they hope to be lost in the ocean of time.

It is impossible to keep track of the hours at Benares; again and again I found myself wandering down through the tortuous alleys to the river. I felt hesitant about going alone, I needed moral support, a kind of buffer between myself and the staring crowd; at least I could talk to the boy I took with me when I felt embarrassed either by my own ill-concealed curiosity or by the level stares of the holy men, the fakirs and the mountebanks that crowded in on us. Their looks seemed to voice a silent reproach; what, they were asking, was I doing there? Lost in the narrow little streets, I had the feeling of having stepped back into the past; they were lined on both sides with bazaars selling the trappings of religion: souvenirs for the pilgrims; large and small eggs fashioned out of every conceivable material—glass, marble, sandstone, slate. They were not, strictly speaking, quite the shape of an egg, being equally rounded at both ends, but they were, in any case, symbols of the *lingam*, or Shiva's phallus, for Benares is sacred to Shiva. These ovals, like eggs in an egg-cup, are held in a *juni*, the symbol of the female organ or Parvati.

Nearing the river the road begins to open up and it is here that one is faced by the sadhus and the yogis. One is so awed by their appearance that it is difficult to judge them, impossible, in any case, for Europeans. The holy men, their hair knotted and their heads smeared with ashes, are dressed in a patchwork of rags and hung with wooden beads. One of them was blowing on a conch shell, the emblem of Shiva. Some of them, dressed in brightest orange, had their faces smeared with a paste of ashes made from burnt cow-dung, and horizontal bands of yellow striped the forehead from which their eyes stared out at us, black holes in the greyness. I glanced back at them, but quickly, for I have a vague dread of this kind of thing. I noticed that the whites of their eyes were often yellow, crossed over with red inflamed veins. It is an actual fact that some of these men can seize their eyeball with their hand and gradually pull it out of its socket, leaving it to hang loosely on the cheek, suspended

by protruding muscles and veins. Farther on, we came across a naked youth stretched out on a bed of thorns; fixedly he stared up at the sky. Although I did not actually see him, there is a fakir who holds a flower-pot aloft above his head, and he has performed his vow with such energy of will that his nails have grown through the fleshy part of his hand and stick out the other side. During the last century hundreds of these ash-smearred creatures used to foregather at certain periods of the year and perform swinging feats, suspended at amazing heights by means of hooks firmly fixed in the flesh of the back. They then gyrated with a strip of cloth passed under them to catch them should the hooks give way. Sometimes they dispensed with even this precaution. They performed these painful rites in order to obtain pardon for offences they had committed, or was it, as one strongly suspects, a very good way of earning a living, exploiting the credulous? This is certainly the impression I got at Benares.

The boy with me seemed to be intelligent and had had a university education. He must have been used to our European curiosity and I tried to draw him out. He in turn, I noticed, watched me out of the corner of his eye to see how I would react to all this. We passed another man with dried lemons tied to the hairs of his body, which looked as if they had been sewn to his skin. The boy read the consternation on my face. "These are not real holy men," he ventured. "Such men bring shame on us. Our aim is not to torture the body in foolish ways for the sake of public wonder." It was as I had suspected; these men just sat here hoping to extract a few pennies from the poor pilgrims, many of whom are country people ready in their innocence to venerate the charlatans and give them food. Obviously the genuine holy man is not to be found sitting by the side of the road to be gasped at. Today, as in the days of old, the genuine sadhu retires to the mountain fastnesses or to remote pilgrim centres to spend his life in meditation, avoiding all contact with worldly things. "There are plenty of fakirs who are dead to pain, but the real seers," the boy continued, "who could work miracles, no longer exist. They disappeared a long time ago."

We walked on down and soon the steps began. It is inevitable that one goes down to the river, which is the life-blood of this teeming city. We came to a small square between two flights of steps tenanted by the halt and the blind, a terrible study in rotting rags.

Here again one hurried on, for it was impossible to look long at these miserable creatures—then suddenly, sprawled out her full length and turned half on her side, was a woman, dead. Pus had oozed from her nose and from her open mouth, and flies had settled on her face. She had crawled here, poor creature, to die, alone and unattended. Her case had apparently been reported to the police and she would be burnt the next morning. I mention this sordid detail because it is all part of the general scene, as much part of it as the funeral procession that follows immediately on top of it. A rich Brahmin has just died, one hears the music approaching down the side street, the clashing of cymbals and the trilling of pipes, to Europeans so jarringly inappropriate, for it sounds more like a wedding march. The contrast was acute: the dead woman and then, right on top of the shock of seeing her lying there, this portly Brahmin. Quickly the litter appeared round the corner, for the procession moved at a smart trot. The litter was banked up with orange and white flowers and between their bright petals one caught glimpses of the dead man, part of a fleshy forearm and the end of his feet. He looked as if he were asleep, for rigor mortis had not yet set in. I could see his arm moving with the swaying of the litter.

As we neared the river, the scene changed; there was more space, and the sun and the proximity of the water seemed to have scoured the atmosphere. On the wooden platforms built out on stilts over the stairs great circular umbrellas, set at angles, rise out of the boarding like drifts of enormous toadstools; all is the colour of wood and matting, for the umbrellas are woven out of a kind of coarse reed. Under the umbrellas sit the pilgrims being shaved, some of them reposing in a squatting position, having just performed their ablutions, others talking, idling away the hours between prayers. The scene has no age, no country, no time. The men arrayed in the classical folds of their dhotis and the women in their saris mark no special period. Having immersed themselves in the river, their thin draperies cling wet and transparent to their supple bodies and they emerge looking like Tanagra figures.

And then, of course, everywhere among the crowds are the widows, some of them sitting with begging bowls, others hobbling along on sticks, but not all of them necessarily old. They have arrived here in Benares to die, their whole preoccupation is to await

death, and they hope it will come soon. The more fortunate amongst them arrive with a small capital which they give to a hostel, which then guarantees to feed and lodge them for life. The hostels must be run on the same lines as the life insurance companies, relying on the fact that enough widows die comparatively young to compensate for those who live on. The orthodox widow has a hard time of it. She is ostracised by society, made to shave her head and to wear a plain white sari and no jewels. She cannot even eat the same food as the rest of her family and is supposed to partake of something tasteless and unappetising. If she intends to adhere strictly to the rules of her religion there is little left for her to do but to retire from the world. The widows one sees in Benares are those who in other times would have committed suttee.

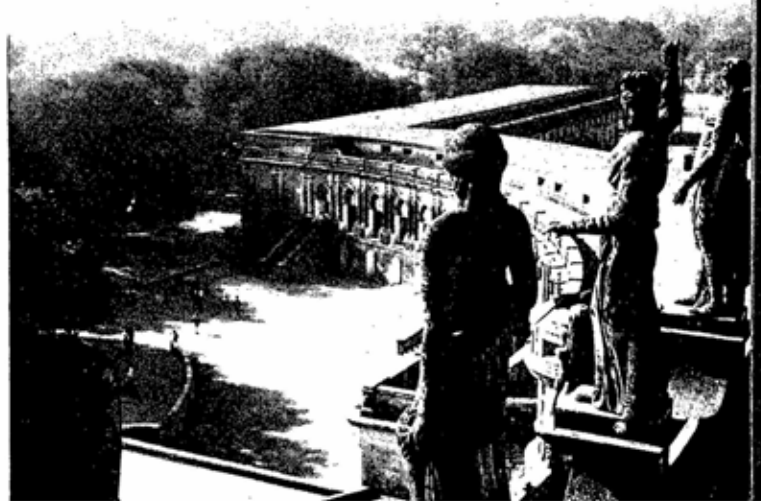
Abbé Dubois describes the ceremonies that the bereaved wife has to endure a few days after her husband's death. Her house is invaded by her female friends and relatives, who begin by eating a meal prepared for them of which the widow is not allowed to partake. "After this they surround her and exhort her to bear her miserable lot with fortitude. One after another they take her in their arms, shed tears with her, and end by pushing her violently to the ground. They next join together in lamenting her widowhood, and finally make her sit on a small stool. Then one of her nearest female relatives, having previously muttered some religious formula, cuts the thread of the *tali*, the gold ornament which every married woman in India wears round her neck. The barber is called in, and her head is clean shaved. This double ceremony sinks her instantly into the despised and hated class of widows. During the whole time that these curious and mournful rites are being performed, the unfortunate victim is making the whole house resound with her cries of woe, cursing her sad lot a thousand times."

It is hardly surprising that widows were attracted to the idea of suttee; after all, what had they left to live for? Not only were they spurred on by the thought of the wretched lives they would lead as widows but also by vanity, by the hope of acquiring notoriety, perhaps also by a genuine feeling of enthusiasm. They were awarded every possible honour and even deified after death. Vows were made and prayers addressed to them, and their intercession was sought in times of sickness and adversity. Such remnants of their

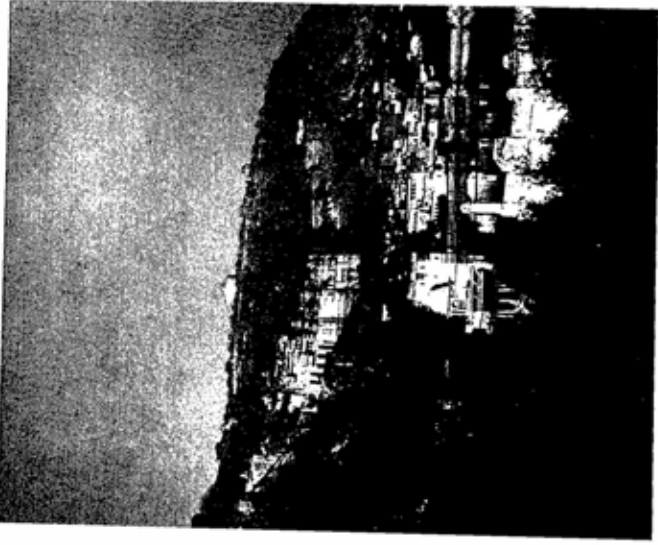


*Above, Lucknow: ruins of the Residency (page 136)*

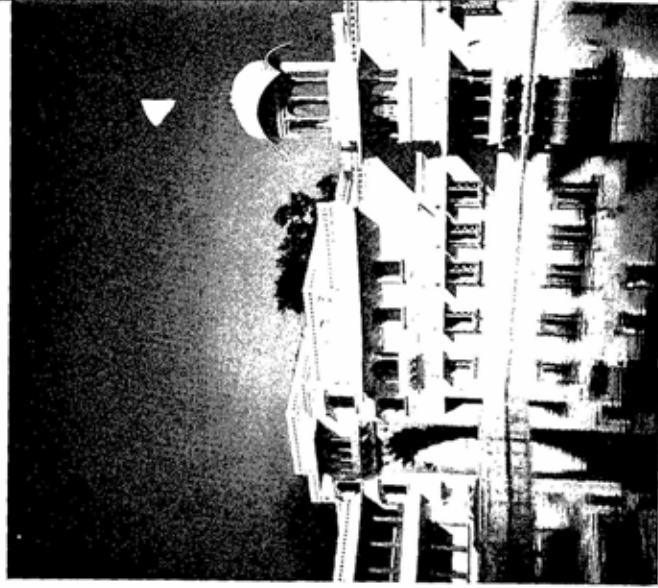
*Below, La Martinière, near Lucknow (page 144)*







Bundi climbs up from the still waters of a great tank (*page 169*)



Phoolsagar Palace (*page 170*)

bodies as were not entirely consumed by the fire were most devoutly gathered together and treasured, and small monumental pyramids were erected on the spot where they sacrificed themselves "to transmit to posterity the memory of those brave victims of conjugal affection—a tribute all the more conspicuous, because the erection of tombs is almost unknown among the Hindus". Even to this day in some old Hindu houses one may come across the marks of hands impressed on the plaster walls belonging to women who underwent suttee.

Once she had decided to commit suttee, the widow's family did everything in their power to keep up the wretched woman's courage, which very often flagged at the last moment. She was congratulated on her heroic decision and finally, when the last hours came, apparelled in all her finery and bedecked with jewels.

There is the pathetic story of the two young wives of one of the Sikh Maharajas, who were only sixteen years of age and great beauties when he died. Two other wives and six of his female slaves had also decided to commit themselves to the flames with his body. The other wives and the slaves showed no great joy at the prospect of being burned, but the two young ones seemed almost to be enjoying it. For the first time in their lives they were able to show off their extraordinary beauty, which up till then had been jealously guarded in the zenana. It was almost like a game for them to be able to flaunt their charms in front of the multitude that had assembled to watch the royal cortège.

Amidst the sound of music, the two graceful queens issued in solemn procession from the palace gates. Nearing the pile where their lord was to be burnt, they stopped and started unclasping their most precious jewels, giving them to their relations and friends. Then, in a moment of bravado, determined to play the role to the full, they asked for looking-glasses and with a slow and measured step walked towards the pile, sometimes gazing at the glass in their hands, and then at the assembly, and anxiously, like children, asking if any change was observable in their countenances. There was a second's hesitation and then before the crowd had time to realise it, they had entered the glowing furnace and in an instant were caught up by the flames.

This performance completely unnerved the other unfortunate

women, who were forced into the flames with faces contorted with horror.

It is supposed that the widows who decided to commit suttee were nearly always given an opiate to confuse their minds and prevent them from realising the full horror of what they had to endure. The dose was given to them in the form of a beverage, a concoction of saffron. Saffron is made from the dried pistils of a certain form of crocus and, taken in large quantity, causes violent and convulsive laughter, sometimes ending in death.

It took the English years to abolish suttee. They tried first to control it by making the local magistrate responsible. He was supposed to go to each case and to use every argument in his power to dissuade the victim. It was not until 1825, during the governor-generalship of Lord William Bentinck, that it was actually ruled illegal. There have been some cases of infringement of the law, indeed there was a case of suttee only two years ago, but the instances are rare.

Looking at the sad faces of the women here in Benares, who have nothing to occupy their lives and who wait for death, one wonders sometimes if they were not better off burnt with their husbands. Listlessly they sit and stare up at one, and I find it improbable that many of them have attained a high enough degree of spirituality to compensate for the terrible emptiness of their lives. No doubt the very mechanics of living occupy much of their time, and like invalids they exist in a world of their own with limited horizons.

Every morning, as I rowed down the river, I passed by one of the widows' hostels, a large building with a stuccoed façade overlaid with a mosaic of glass and bars at the windows to keep the monkeys out. The first time I passed it was just after sunrise and the windows were wide open; I heard a light, gay beating of tambourines, and then the widows set up a mournful dirge in their old, cracked voices, a nasal invocation to Shiva.

Benares comes to me in flashes and I have to try and describe it this way, in bits and pieces. It was early and there were not many people abroad yet, though some youths were washing their dhotis down by the water's edge. High up on the last step, right against the wall of a house, there was a large man sitting upright on a wooden bed, being massaged with oil by a servant. He stretched and filled

his lungs with the fresh morning air. He was probably a Brahmin and certainly prosperous, for he oozed opulence, a contrast to the austere figure who sat directly above me on one of the platforms, the water lapping against its flat sides. He was an elderly man with the thin face of an ascetic. Very slowly my boat floated down the river, and from the first moment I saw him until he was lost to view he had not moved. He sat very erect, eyes closed and torso bare. His legs were crossed under him and his hands were resting on his knees, only with palms upwards, forefinger and thumb touching as if he were holding the stem of an imaginary flower, a gesture one finds sometimes in Flemish portraits. It was a very noble pose. Below him in the river stood another remarkable figure, a woman with her sari clinging to her body. She too was praying, standing still like a statue. Her eyes were closed and she was facing straight into the sun, but then she opened them as she stooped down to scoop up some water in a small copper dish which she was cradling in her hands. Another prayer and she threw it sparkling into the light.

It is hard to convey the beauty of Benares in the early hours of the morning. The long lines of the steps, cut with knife-like shadows, are uninterrupted as yet by the crowds that will gather during the day. One has time to take in and to savour the smallest details of this extraordinary city—and it is surely the most extraordinary city left to us now. Again I am struck by the agelessness of it all. I remember the palanquin hung with cloth of gold that came lurching down the steps. Reaching one of the platforms, it was set down on the ground. There was a heaving of curtains and a small figure emerged. She must have been a royal princess, for she was attended by four ladies-in-waiting. Closely veiled they went down to the river and strewed some flowers on the surface of the water. Then, suddenly, cutting across the stillness of this scene came the strident notes of a bell being rung in Shiva's temple. A drum set up a steady beating, throbbing in one's head like a pulse; on and on it went, with no change of rhythm, insistent, absorbing in its monotony. The noise seemed to grow, drowning everything. By the time we had floated up past the burning ghats, we could no longer hear the cracklings of the logs. Great gusts of heated air flecked with black ashes billowed up from the pyres. There were four of them burning, and the bodies were in

different stages of decarbonisation; one was already burnt to a heap of glowing ashes and would soon be gathered up and sprinkled over the Ganges. The boy with me told me that only holy men, children, lepers and those who have died of smallpox are not burnt but are rowed out into mid-stream and lowered into the water with a weight.

I watched the relations of those being burnt while they squatted silently in small groups on the steps. There was no show of emotion on their faces. Three more corpses appeared and their forms were clearly visible through the light winding-sheets, two of them women and the third a man. They were bound to bamboo stretchers which were tilted down on the steps so that the corpse's feet rested in the water. The relations had gone off to gather fuel, which was stacked in a great pile a little way from the burning ground. From the moment a person dies he must not be left alone and, the corpses being placed like this in the water, it is considered that Mother Ganges is watching over the body. Log by log the relatives build the pyres. The logs are not at all like ours, but crooked and bleached like the drift-wood one finds on a palm-fringed beach in the tropics. A body takes about four hours to burn. A professional burner with a long stave attends the pyre. Once the fire is set, he cracks open the skull, for the head has a tendency to burst. A man's chest and a woman's thighs are the parts that take longest to burn.

Again I felt embarrassed about watching these burnings. Our boat back-watered just off the steps, but my boy assured us that it was all right. The professional burner, like a stoker with his long stave, turns one of the bodies over on its side and pokes at the logs, which respond with a blaze. Looking up, he notices us and starts picking his way over the small skiffs moored between us and the steps. Wiping his ash-smeared hands on his dhoti, he cups them out in front of him and asks for baksheesh. It was difficult to refuse, for we certainly should not have been there, though nobody seemed to object. On the other hand it appeared equally base to have to pay for what we had seen, so in the end the man got nothing.

That evening the city took on a festive air—it was *Holi*. It proved rather difficult, however, to find out anything very precise on the subject. Up at our hotel they proved to be vague. It was a public

holiday, they said, and the crowds in the streets squirted coloured water over each other and threw powders around, and it was advisable not to go down into the town.

"Well, you see, I don't advise you to go down . . ." said the Indian manager, looking away as he spoke. "Why?" I answered, annoyed. He cleared his throat. "They might be rather rough with you and you'll be smothered in coloured powders." "I'll put on some old clothes," I answered. But no, this still did not satisfy him. It was obvious he was keeping something back. I found out why later—it was simply that the poor man was embarrassed. *Holi* is a fertility festival which heralds the spring, and is supposed to have had its origins in the aboriginal orgies of some powerful tribe. Nowadays, of course, it has become an innocent enough affair: rowdy crowds mill about the streets, singing lewd songs, some of them carrying phallic emblems. Very appropriately Krishna, the god of many loves, has become the patron god of this licentious festival and those of the pilgrims who become sufficiently excited by the whole thing are supposed to be able to see visions of him dancing in the moonlight with his *gopis*. Kama, India's Cupid, is also busy on this night, flying through the air on a chattering parrot attended by lovely nymphs. He is represented as a roguish youth with a bow and arrow. The bow is made out of sugar cane, with a string formed of bees. His quiver is filled with flowers, which he shoots off. They are supposed to have a peculiarly heating effect.

All evening I had listened to truckloads of revellers being driven down past the hotel to the town, singing and shouting, already rather tight. Ignoring the manager I bounded up to my room and put on an open-neck shirt and my oldest pair of trousers, and before they could stop me had taken the first taxi in sight. Even the driver had an evasive story to explain *Holi*. By chance I had my university student with me and he translated for me. Hollar and her nephew, Pollka (the spelling is phonetic, for I cannot find these two divine beings in Mr. Moor's pantheon), had been given immortality by Shiva. The driver did not vouchsafe the reason for this singular honour, but anyhow the nephew, a somewhat sceptical character, wanted to prove his newly-acquired capacity and so decided to throw himself on to a huge bonfire of his own building. Hollar, his aunt, a responsible person, decided she could not possibly let him

burn alone and conceived it to be her duty to experiment with him—a disastrous decision, for all that was left of their immortality was a smouldering heap of ashes. Hollar, it so happened, made a speciality of chastising devils, and rather naturally the evil spirits, hearing of her burning, started rejoicing, getting up to every kind of devilry. I did not have time to ask why Shiva had so cruelly misled his supporters, for at that moment an impish brown hand was thrust stealthily in at the window, releasing a cloud of red powder that settled in a fine dust all over my hair. Almost simultaneously from the other side of the car came a handful of bright yellow powder followed by a thorough squirting of navy-blue water from a large syringe. So fast had it all happened that we did not even have time to see our adversaries. At this point I felt we might just as well be in the street and so opened the door of the car and got out. One felt like a child who steps into a muddy pond in his best party clothes. Having gone so far, he has an irresistible urge to go still farther and really wallow in the dirt.

For what seemed hours I wandered around, shoved this way and that by the crowd that, being Indian, was predominantly male. Every now and then one would be conscious of liquid looks from some black eyes rimmed round with kohl. A faint odour of jasmine would scent the air coming from the bunches of flowers knotted in some girl's chignon. But for the most part it was coconut oil that one smelt, for all round me it shone on the curled and waving hair of the youth of Benares. The Indians have wonderful hair, which grows like the plumes in a duck's tail down their necks, curling over the ears and brushing up in heavy waves off their smooth olive foreheads. It grows beautifully and is as black as their teeth are white. There is no denying the fact that the Hindus are extremely good-looking.

I don't remember very clearly what happened in the end. I know I walked for hours, lost in a kind of dream, the air round me smoking with coloured powders. I was glad that the manager was not up to receive me when finally I did get back to the hotel.

The next morning, down by the Ganges, there was a strong smell of wet hair and soap. The pavements, the streets, the steps of the ghats, the soapsuds with which the devout were lathering themselves, even the sacred river itself, were pink from the night's powder-throwing.



## LUCKNOW

A wide veranda ran round our rooms on the first floor of our hotel; it was a rather gloomy Victorian building, but the garden was pretty, with beds of yellow canna lilies, and above them tall eucalyptus trees dangling their long leaves, a tender green in colour, turning to pink at the tips. Lucknow was different from the other towns we had seen and had an air of provincial royalty about it, like Munich. It had been the capital of the Nawabs of Oudh, and the Nawabs, like the Wittelsbachs, had a passion for building. Large, cheaply constructed palaces point their minarets and blow up their onion-shaped domes like bubbles on the sky-line; one finds them whichever way one turns: mosques and palaces, pavilions and tombs. They are effective, but their style is late and decadent and does not bear closer inspection. They are shoddy stage-sets that lie crumbling in the sun; sacking hangs at the windows of elegant kiosks and plaster chips off their attenuated columns. One walks round vast, blue-green audience halls, hung with red and white Bohemian chandeliers. Great mirrors in elaborately gilded frames hang out from the floor in between windows with broken panes. These surely are the palaces that inspired Nash when he was building the Brighton Pavilion. Fanny Eden found one of them, the Chatar Manzil, so pleasing that it was the only residence she coveted in India. The statues for this palace, she tells us, were brought over from England. The King had been delighted with them but had had them set, for some obscure reason that Miss Eden does not divulge, not on their feet, as ordinary statues, but on their heads. They have, I am glad to relate, regained their equilibrium since her day. Lucknow seems to have been one of the few places in India that



Fanny Eden enjoyed. She goes on in the next paragraph to describe the King: "When the Prince of Oudh got off his elephant, George [Lord Auckland, Miss Eden's brother, who was Governor-General of India from 1836-42] had to embrace him three times. We shook hands with him and I nearly made a snatch at the great emerald he wore on his thumb. He wore a gold cloth turban with an egret of diamonds with two great emerald pears hanging from it—his vest and tunic also absorbed a quantity of jewels. He had two sons with him, very fair-looking boys, a little rouged."

They were a rakish-looking lot, these Kings of Oudh. They were Persian by origin and of humble descent, the first Nawab having been a merchant before being appointed Governor of Oudh by the Emperor at Delhi. The title of King was conferred on the family in 1819 by the British when they made Oudh an independent state. I found portraits of them hanging in an annexe to the museum, showing them as a large-boned family, prone to fat. Wajid Ali Shah, the last of their line, deposed by the Governor-General in 1856 (the year of the Mutiny), was the most extravagant-looking creature. The full-length portrait shows him dressed in black-and-white chintz. Large pearls are clasped at his neck and his robe is especially cut to expose his chest, which is so full and puffy that it resembles a woman's breasts. His face is small and hung with double chins. He has a long, thin nose and a small Cupid's mouth, over which curls a thin moustache. His black hair is oiled into long snaky curls and divides over his fleshy ears, which are hung with huge drop pearls. On the side of his head he wears a kind of forage cap. His hands are pudgy and one of them rests on the jewelled hilt of his sword, a weapon surely never employed by His Majesty. The local guide-book remarks somewhat guardedly that the character and habits of this monster were not such as to encourage the prospects of improvement in governing an estate. "Repeated admonishments had been made to His Majesty, but singers and females, provided for his amusement, occupied all his time. The singers were all *doms*, the lowest caste in India, and were continually meddling in the affairs of State. Seeing that it was useless to expect reform from such a creature, the British Government had no alternative but to depose him." He was banished to Calcutta, where he died thirty years later.

Sitting on the balcony of our hotel I was turning the pages of

Murray's handbook,\* scanning the small, closely packed print, my red pencil poised ready to mark any passage of interest. Murray's is an invaluable guide, cautious, level-headed, never committing itself. It is only when it comes to the Mutiny that it really lets itself go. Lucknow gets twenty columns on the defence of the Residency, the massacre of Cawnpore hardly less. It is equally voluble on the fall of Delhi. The Mutiny is better documented in Murray's handbook than any other single event in Indian history. Curious, I turned to the preface and discovered the reason. It was published originally in three volumes and the first volume appeared in 1859, just two years after the Mutiny. Captain Eastwick, who prepared it, made long visits to India during the 'fifties in order to collect the material, and was undoubtedly in India when the Mutiny broke out. Not living in the country, he saw the whole affair as a newcomer, and judged it as would any mid-Victorian Englishman; and it impressed him perhaps more than it need have done. The Mutiny was, after all, confined to a comparatively small area round Delhi; but he considered it, as did the man at home in England, a serious threat to Britain's power in India. He was right to be nervous, for India was indeed held by bluff rather than by force; if there was to be any real trouble, it could have been disastrous. As Mr. Woodruff says,† there was one English soldier to every five Indian soldiers, and one soldier fair or dark to every six hundred civilians. No one can deny the extraordinary courage of the garrison defending Lucknow's Residency. "There does not stand", said Lord Canning, "recorded in the annals of war an achievement more truly heroic."

Today the Residency grounds look like an eighteenth-century Pompeii. Grey lichenous plaster peels off the walls, exposing elaborate brick-work, and plants grow from the fissures while "brilliant creepers rooted in heroic skulls" tug at the crumbling arches, twisting round columned arcades.

The Residency has been left exactly as it was on that memorable day in November when the garrison, at last relieved by Sir Colin Campbell, limped out in pathetic file. With a force numbering four thousand five hundred strong Campbell had managed to rout the

\* *A Handbook for Travellers in India and Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon*. John Murray, London (*Murray's Guide*).

† *The Men who Ruled India* by Philip Woodruff. Jonathan Cape, London, 1953.

besieging rebels who outnumbered him seven to one. All ruins take on a romantic, Piranesque air, and the Residency and its dependencies, having been built at the turn of the last century, are sufficiently classic to appear now quite dateless. Light trees catch the sun on their shiny leaves and, breaking its fall, dapple it like a Pissarro on the grey walls. Further to enhance it the British have turned what must have been a pile of rubble into an enchanting garden of herbaceous borders and sweeping lawns. Much to their credit the Indian Government have kept it up beautifully and every evening now one sees the young university students in their white shirt-tails studying among the antirrhinum, the godetias and the sweet-peas. They sit on the lawns, or walk around hand in hand, mumbling passages that have to be learnt by heart. The choice of flowers is ordinary enough, but perhaps it was precisely this that made it so touching. It could almost be a park in England. Only if one looks very carefully does one notice nature asserting herself, refusing to be cudgelled against her will, to be given a temperate character that was not here. Petria winds its blue-mauve flowers round the gate-posts, there are too many amaryllis, and then suddenly out of a shrubbery explodes a thicket of palms, their aggressive tropicality pricking the sky.

The floors have fallen in and the roofs have disappeared long ago, but one can still mount the tower of the Residency from which floated the Union Jack. Throughout the siege it was the marksmen's favourite target; their bullets riddled the bunting, cut the halyards and splintered the staff; but after dark the flag was patched and refitted and in the morning was always flying. There is a granite cross in the lawn in memory of the officers and men, unveiled in 1899 by Lady Inglis, the widow of Sir John Inglis, who had been in command of the troops throughout the siege. Lady Inglis died in 1904; she must have been a remarkable woman, for not once in her diary does she dramatise the horror of their lives. She emerges as the kind of woman the British Empire can be proud of, a lady with the selfless qualities of Florence Nightingale. She does not mention it in her own diary,\* but when the Residency was finally evacuated and the women had to walk six miles, Lady Inglis walked with them,

\* *The Siege of Lucknow* by The Honourable Lady Inglis. James R. Osgood McIlvaine & Co., London, 1892.

refusing to use the carriage which had been prepared for her. We saw the crowded cemetery and the plaque commemorating the place where Sir Henry Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner for Oudh, fell on the second day of the siege.

The causes of the Mutiny were manifold, but, as Mr. Woodruff says in his excellent book on India, "there is no need to suppose an elaborate organisation. A wind began to blow; stories began to pass, tales of prophecy, of the resurrection of old thrones and of disaster to the English, some maliciously invented, others born of some vague wish or half-forgotten memory." It was a question of a series of unfortunate episodes, the General Service Enlistment Act of 1856, for instance; on joining up, Sepoy recruits were made to swear that they would cross the sea if ordered. To leave one's country, in the eye of an orthodox Hindu, amounts almost to pollution, and they lose caste immediately; and when greased cartridges were introduced for the new Enfield rifles, it was the last straw. The cartridges had to be thoroughly greased before loading and the end bitten off to release the powder. The grease was a form of tallow made from animal fat, no doubt including both pig and cow, both taboo, the one to the Mohammedan, the other to the Hindu. So strict are the Hindus that up till a few years ago a man who killed a cow was sentenced to death; he now gets a term of penal servitude. No Hindu would dream of eating cow's flesh. In Kashmir, for instance, where Hindus are in the minority, even Bovril is confiscated from one at the frontier.

The new rifle had been ordered through the Ordnance Department in England, where those responsible had been blissfully unaware of the mortal offence this new form of reloading would be to both creeds. The tallow was quickly changed for vegetable oil, but it was too late, the fat was in the fire! The story, writes Woodruff,\* had grown in the telling and the Sepoys suspected some dark plot to break their caste and to convert them to Christianity. They were ready at this point to believe anything.

The English had annexed Oudh on account of the King's gross mismanagement and Oudh was the chief recruiting ground for the army. It was in Oudh that the Mutiny was concentrated. First came the fall of Delhi, then Cawnpore, then the gallant defence of

\* *The Men who Ruled India* by Philip Woodruff.

Lucknow. In Cawnpore the revolt had been brought to a head by the absent-mindedness of the military surgeon, who, feeling unwell, had helped himself in the surgery to a dose of medicine. He just put the bottle up to his mouth and drank, a fatal thing to do in front of the native assistants, who of course regarded it as being polluted. Quickly the trouble spread to Lucknow. It is there that we must see the first stirrings of this unhappy episode.

In the hot weather the Commandant and his entourage left the Residency, moving to bungalows in the cantonment, where it was cooler. "Mrs. Case and I", writes Lady Inglis, "generally drove to the cantonment in the afternoon and sat with our husbands under an awning which they had pitched in camp. These visits were a great treat to us; but we were obliged to return to the city before dusk." This was the 25th May; already the ladies had been moved to the Residency proper as a precautionary measure. The Residency stood on slightly higher ground than the rest of the town and was the obvious place to make a stand, if stand there was going to be. Defences had been hurriedly thrown up and trenches dug. *Trous-de-loup*, pits with sharp stakes at the bottom, had been dug outside the ramparts, in front of which had been spread a tangle of *chevaux-de-frise*.

Delhi had been taken and Cawnpore was being besieged. There were continual false alarms. "Sir Henry gave a large dinner party. I think he was anxious to keep up our spirits, but the attempt was, I am sure, trying to him and to all of us." Sir Henry Lawrence had just been appointed Brigadier-General and invested with full civil and military power. "The following evening," continues Lady Inglis, "just as we were sitting down to dinner, Sir Henry and his staff were heard calling for their horses, and we caught the words, 'A fire in the artillery lines!' The table was at once abandoned, and everyone rushed to the door. I shall never forget poor Sir Henry's look of relief when he returned and said all was right. It was almost the first time I had seen a smile on his countenance." The fire had been an accident.

Further on, Lady Inglis tells us of another episode.

"As we were driving to church this evening, about five o'clock, we met Mr. Barber of the irregular cavalry, who said his regiment was just ordered off to Moosa Bagh, where the Seventh Oudh

Infantry were in a state of mutiny. We drove on, and a few minutes afterwards Captain Hayes, military secretary to Sir Henry Lawrence, rode up in a state of great excitement and said: 'I want you and your regiment directly.' We turned our horses' heads and drove home as fast as possible."

One can see the high-spoked wheels spinning in the dust of the parade-ground. It was the height of the Victorian era and Lady Inglis was certainly dressed in the fashions of the period, a large crinoline with voluminous petticoats. A small parasol sheltered her from the late sun. Her husband, Colonel of his regiment, would be in his full-dress uniform. These elaborations somehow make their ordeal appear all the more poignant.

May wore into June. "Miss Dickenson and I dined with Sir Henry in his tent. . . ." "Colonel Case came in from camp this morning; he was always so sanguine and cheery, that a visit from him raised our spirits. . . ." "I asked John [Colonel Inglis] at this time if he thought the enemy would attack us. He said it was his firm opinion that they would. I then said 'Do you think we can hold out?' He answered 'Our position is a bad one, and we shall have a hard struggle.' I was glad to know what one might expect. And it enabled us to prepare for the worst."

The heat was already oppressive, but the women and children were still able to stay out on the roof of the Residency: "the nights were very pleasant in the open air, and the views of the city and country round very beautiful. Everything used to look so calm and peaceful, it was difficult to think it could ever be a scene of war; but looking down into the Residency garden, we could see the guns placed in position ready to be used at a moment's notice, and the soldiers sleeping amongst them. John generally had his bed placed there also, as his presence prevented false alarms." They could see large fires blazing in the distant country, probably signals. A letter arrived from Cawnpore saying they could only hold out ten days longer. They begged for assistance, assistance nobody could give. A few days later the garrison surrendered and were all butchered, the women and children being fired on with grape-shot in the boat which was evacuating them. It was hard to get messages through in a country swarming with rebels: runners were despatched with letters done up in a piece of quill which in turn were hidden in the

usual places. The letters were in a form of code written partly in Greek characters. Cawnpore surrendered on 26th June and Lucknow received the news two days later. It was decided then and there that if the defences of the Residency were carried every man was to die at his post and the women and children were to be blown up with the magazine. Most of the women carried poison with them.

Every day cartloads of provisions and ammunition rumbled up the incline to the Residency. A large rebel army was reported approaching the city. On 30th June it was decided to march out across the river and attack, but the Sikh cavalry and the native artillery deserted and the British troops were forced to retreat to the Residency. The siege had begun. For eighty-seven days it lasted and then came the first relief, effected by General Havelock and Sir James Outram, but this was only partially successful, for they, in their turn, were besieged. It was not until 10th November, with the arrival of Sir Colin Campbell, that the fighting was really over.

At the beginning of the siege the garrison numbered roughly about seven hundred Sepoys and a thousand European troops. The non-combatants totalled about 1,280, women, children and boys, six hundred of whom were Indians. At the end of the siege there remained 979 persons in all, 577 of them Europeans.

The enemy had taken up posts in the high buildings round the Residency and placed sharp-shooters at the windows, hiding them also on the roofs. There was one particular sharp-shooter, an African nicknamed 'Bob the Nailer', who was reputed never to have missed, and altogether the sharp-shooters averaged twenty victims a day. Guns captured from the English troops pounded away intermittently, firing when they ran short of shells, a mixture of pieces of wood, copper coins, iron, and even bullocks' horns. These, needless to say, were comparatively harmless; but the besiegers' fire never wholly died away by day or night, and grew heavier always with the dawn.

All the windows were barricaded, and except for the men at their posts, who were camouflaged as well as might be, nobody was allowed out unless under cover. As Lady Inglis remarks, it is not the Englishman's way to fight behind walls and there were consequently more casualties on a quiet day than when there was heavy firing, as the men used to get careless and forget the danger. One

evening the enemy was so quiet that Inglis thought it safe to take his wife for a short walk. The ladies were allowed to climb on to the roof. "It was a great treat, though all we saw were dead walls." For the rest of the time the women and the children were shut up inside rooms with no air, or down in the *taikhana*, a basement made to shelter the Resident from the summer heat. One can imagine what their life must have been. It was the hottest time of the year at Lucknow, where the thermometer has been known to read over 170 in the shade. Monsoon rain was at its heaviest during July and August and the garrison was exposed alternately to burning sun and drenching rain. The temperature was suffocatingly humid and the nights often cold enough to make the sentries shiver in their wet clothes. And then there were the flies that swarmed in incredible numbers, until the ground was literally black with them. Bad in ordinary times, they had become an epidemic, nurtured in the carcasses of rotting cattle felled by enemy fire. It was too dangerous to try and bury the cattle and the stench was terrible. So thick were the flies that they stopped the wounded from sleeping during the day, in spite of the refugee boys from a near-by college who were especially employed to fan them away. I know what they can be like, having experienced the same kind of thing myself in the deserts of Central Australia. So indifferent were they to any ordinary means of getting rid of them that we actually found ourselves swallowing them with our food.

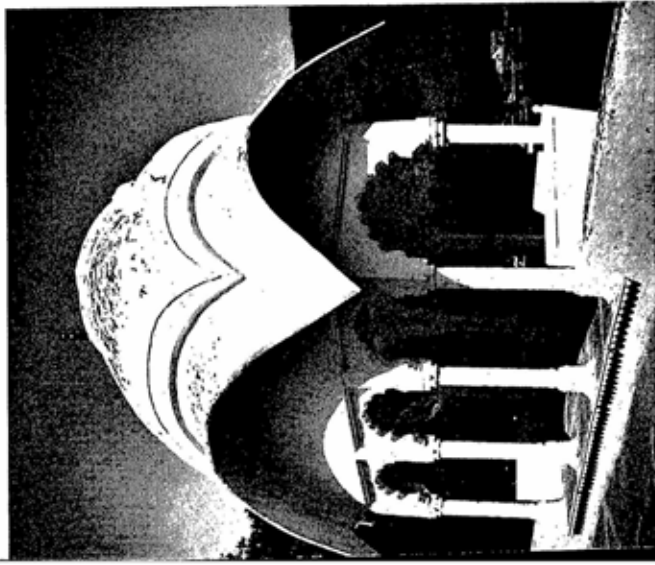
It is extraordinary the hold the Residency can have over one; exploring the ruins still further we found the plaque commemorating Sir Henry Lawrence's death. He was killed on the second day of the siege. A handsome white marble mantelpiece can still be seen high up on the wall of what used to be Sir Henry's room. He was leaning up against it, "a dear old man", as Lady Inglis described him, "who seemed to live only to do good", when the first shell was pitched into his apartment, raising a cloud of dust. His staff begged him to move his quarters, but he refused, answering in his cheery way that sailors always considered the safest place in the ship to be that where the shot had just made a hole. He did not believe that such another good aim would be made. But he proved to be quite wrong. Another shell came, pitched precisely on the first and this time the effect was fatal. Sir Henry had just come in from a tour of inspection



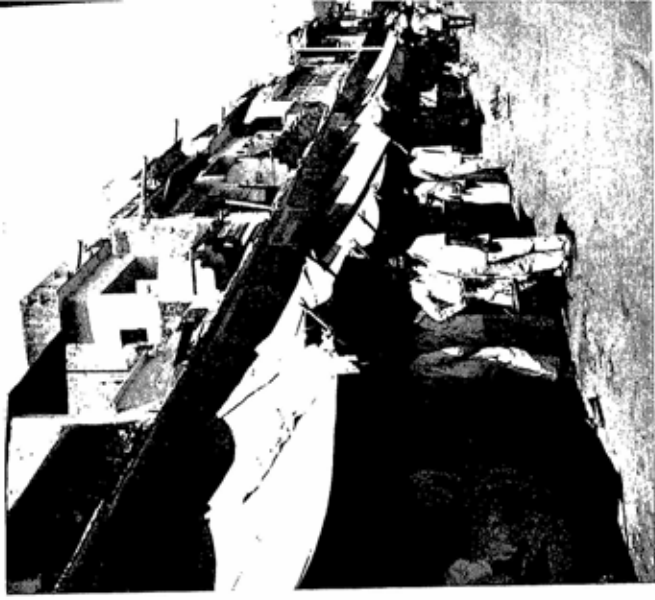
and was lying down on his bed listening to a memorandum which he had dictated to a member of his staff. It was very hot and a coolie was sitting on the floor pulling the punkah. Suddenly the second shell burst into the room; there was a red glare and a shattering report, then darkness. "Wilson was knocked on to the floor where he lay for a few seconds, stunned. On scrambling up he found that he was slightly wounded in the back, half of his shirt being blown away. There was nothing to be seen for the smoke and dust, nor was there any sound from the bed. He asked in great alarm: 'Sir Henry, are you hurt?' There was no answer. He repeated the question, 'Sir Henry, are you hurt?' There was still no answer, and he asked a third time. Then Lawrence replied in a low voice: 'I am killed.' "\* His thigh had been broken too high up to allow an amputation, and all that could be done was to give him drugs to ease the pain.

The sufferings of the wounded must have been terrible. Anti-septic surgery was unknown, and the surgeons poked their bare fingers into the opened wounds as they probed for bullets. If wounded in the leg or the arm, amputation was the only hope, and a slender one at that, for the victim. Except for two cases they all proved fatal. The least wound became serious, the slightest scratch inflamed, owing probably to the want of vegetable food. These men were fed on rations of beef and rum, hardly the correct fare for the dying. The banqueting hall in the Residency had been converted into a hospital, and every day the air became ranker with festering wounds, added to which there were cases of cholera and dysentery. The cholera, fortunately, never became epidemic. The thing the men suffered most from was what they called "garrison disease", its chief symptoms being painful eruptions, low fever, diarrhoea, spongy gums and loose teeth. The nervous strain must have been terrible; every able-bodied man was on duty from thirteen to twenty hours a day. Sentries were posted on the ramparts listening for the sound of the pick, for the enemy were for ever driving mines under the entrenchments. Counter-mines were dug and sorties made to blow up the diggings, all this to the constant accompaniment of heavy shelling. General attacks were usually heralded by a volley of musketry and the springing of mines which caused considerable damage. How

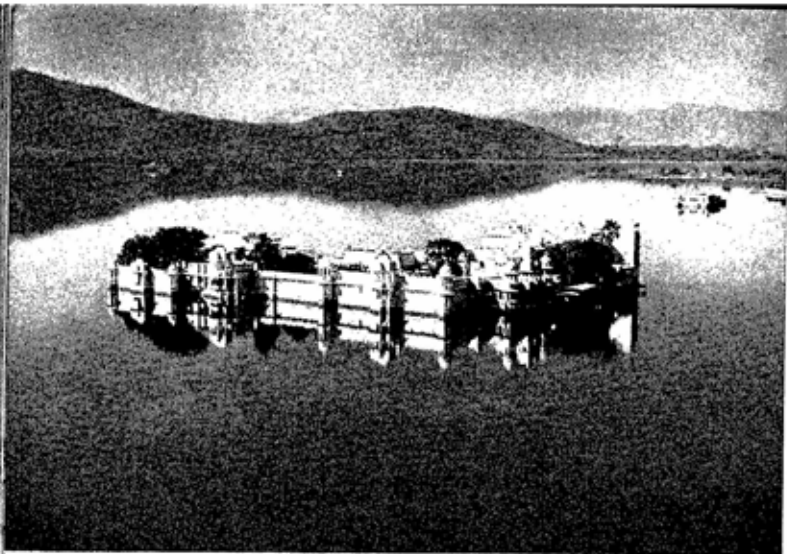
\* *Ordeal at Lucknow* by Michael Joyce. John Murray, London, 1938.



Pavilion on the roof of the Sukh Mahal, Kipling's house (*page 172*)

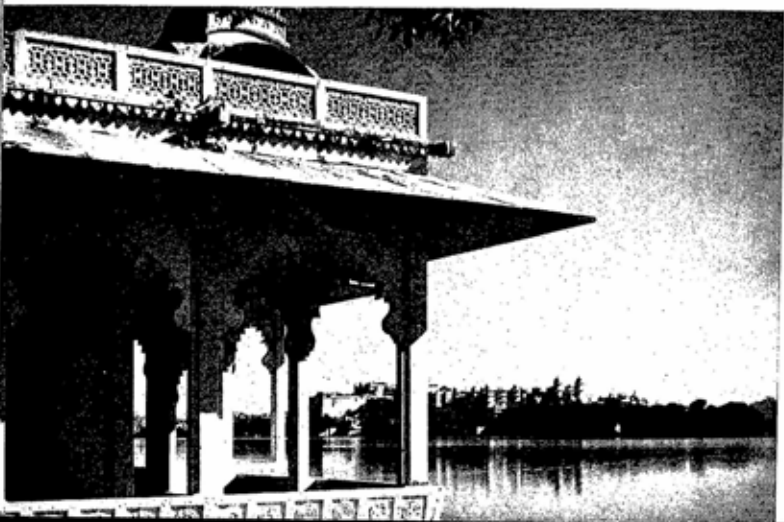


Bundi is a gay town (*page 172*)



*Above, Udaipur: the Bari Mahal palace floating like a marble boat on the lake (page 179)*

*Below, view from the Bari Mahal palace looking towards the city (page 183)*



anxiously the garrison must have listened to the cannonading of the relief force as it made its slow way towards them. It would have been impossible to hold out very much longer. "It was a sight never to be forgotten," writes a Captain Birch, "to see the hand shaking in welcome between the relievers and the relieved. Hirsute Sikhs and brawny islanders were seen taking up the children in their arms and kissing them. Inquiries after relations and friends were eager and anxious—alas! in too many instances to be met by doleful tidings of death." It is a scene surely depicted somewhere by Sir Edwin Landseer.

I have already mentioned the boys from a near-by college who had been sent to the Residency for refuge during the Mutiny. Their college was called 'La Martinière' and lay a little way out of Lucknow. I was curious about it, having seen a portrait of its founder, a Frenchman called Claude Martin, in the Victoria Memorial Hall at Calcutta. There was also a bust showing him in the uniform of a Major-General in the East India Company army; his long angular face with prominent nose, clean-cut chin and intelligent eyes is typically French once one knows its provenance—the kind of looks one expects to find portrayed in France's provincial museums. Zoffany painted a large conversation piece of him with some of his friends. It is an amusing picture set in a room of Martin's town house at Lucknow: the head gardener has brought in a basket of strange-looking vegetables and there is a tame baboon holding up a branch of green bananas. Zoffany has put himself in the composition and is seated at an easel painting a picture of some yogis. In the foreground an Indian servant unrolls what look as if they might be the plans of a house. Martin, in a red coat and blue breeches, is standing up explaining the plans to a third man who remains seated. Perhaps the scroll represents La Martinière, which must then have been in the process of being built.

Better known than these is Zoffany's famous engraving entitled: 'Colonel Mordaunt's Cock Match'. The sub-title informs us that it was "taken at Lucknow in the province of Oudh, in the year 1786", and goes on to add that the company was made up of "several High Distinguished Personages". I was brought up on this print and know it by heart. The arena is set up under a marquee and crowded with the Nawab's courtiers, amongst whom are several Europeans. The

Nawab, a fat fellow with pudgy breasts showing under his muslin tunic, has just left his improvised throne—white bolsters set on a dais—and is in animated conversation with Colonel Mordaunt, an elegant figure in tight-fitting breeches and a light coat. They are laying wagers on a fight that is in progress. There is a key to this engraving, which I have only just recently acquired. Number four is Martin and he is given priority among the Europeans, coming before Colonel Mordaunt, who, with the Nawab and two other Indian princes, is the central figure of the scene. Martin is depicted sitting to the right of the Nawab, obviously the guest of honour. This print, perhaps more than anything, helps one to gauge Martin's importance; his life is a remarkable success story and his Martinière, as I was soon to discover, one of the major surprises India has to offer.

I did not know what to expect. Towards five o'clock in the afternoon, after the battering heat was over, I ordered a taxi and asked to be driven out to La Martinière. The streets of Lucknow are wide and straight and reminded me a little of Khartoum. Bougainvillea tumbles over the gate posts, and there is a statue of Queen Victoria in one of the squares, ringed around with a glowing bed of salvias. Soon we had left the town behind us and were out in the garden district, and then, as if by magic, we seemed to have been transplanted to English park land; there we were, bowling along up a long winding driveway. Sheep nibbled at the grass under low-branching trees that, if one did not look too carefully, might have been oak, the kind of trees that the water-colourists of the last century loved to paint in varying shades of sepia, as if some unwritten law had forbidden them the colour green when portraying nature. My driver's turban and the rattle-trap car seemed, of a sudden, an incongruity. We should have been spanking along in a beautifully varnished carriage. This scene was already surprising enough, but I could hardly believe my eyes when the college itself moved into view. It was a mixture of Vanbrugh's Castle Howard and the Penha, the royal palace at Cintra. The central portion of the house rose in crenellations, rampant lions and statues, to a great central tower, arched over with a double ramp that met in the middle, like the dome of a crown. The ramps were hollow and steps led up to the apex. The college, or rather castle, was framed by two long curving wings and faced across a large artificial lake, out of the

centre of which rose a Ledoux-like column, a fluted monolith capped with a sort of lantern decorated with finials of flame. The base of this enormous column stands on a square platform supported by shallow arches. A flight of steps led up to the platform for those who rowed out across the onyx waters. The lake is T-shaped and framed with sloping green banks, along the top of which runs a walk planted with great tamarinds interspersed with date palms. Water birds feed among the aquatic plants that marble the lake's surface. It is a wide, pale landscape and could almost be Windsor Great Park, only there is a difference, the difference that one finds in Daniell's paintings.

My taxi drove up under the shade of some big trees and I mounted the broad flight of steps leading up to the terrace. At his death in 1800 Martin endowed the house as a college for Christian boys in India and indeed La Martinière is the equivalent of a public school. There was a group of boys standing around one of the cannons mounted on the terrace; they had just had tea and were waiting for the bell to summon them to their classes. How well I remember those last precious moments before lessons began, and here were these boys, probably feeling just the same way, or so I assumed. They were mostly Eurasians, olive-skinned with large black eyes, but some of them were pure Indian. It was strange to see them dressed in the old familiar uniform; grey flannel trousers and white shirts. The belts were of elastic and had twisted serpents as fastenings. Grey stockings covered their legs, turned up neatly under the knee, and crêpe-soled shoes completed the outfit. They were the clothes in which British boys played cricket. The atmosphere came as a surprise. La Martinière could easily have been one of England's large estates taken over by a school, and with an effort of will I could almost imagine it to be a particularly hot English summer. Some of the boys wore turbans; they must have been apostolised Sikhs. Immediately *Kim* sprang to mind. Here in front of me were a whole lot of little Kims! It was only afterwards that I was to find out that La Martinière was indeed Kipling's "St. Xavier in Partibus", his "block on block of low white buildings standing in vast grounds over against the Gumti River, at some distance from the City".\*

\* *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1901.

"What like of folk are they within?" said Kim.

"Young Sahibs—all devils; but to speak truth, and I drive many of them to and fro from the railway station, I have never seen one that had in him the making of a more perfect devil than thou—this young Sahib whom I am now driving."

The driver of the carriage had every right to consider Kim a young devil, for, if I remember rightly, he would not hear of being driven straight out to St. Xavier, but had made the coachman drive him to the bazaars, where he passed the time of day with one or two frivolous ladies at the upper windows of a certain street.

Kipling was rather free with his description of La Martinière. One can hardly describe this crenellated castle of the romantic period as a series of white, block-like buildings, nor was La Martinière even white. It has weathered now to a lichenous grey, but there are still traces of its original colour, which must have been a yellow pink. However, this is a mere detail. It gave me great pleasure to discover that this was Kipling's St. Xavier, where Kim had "learned to wash himself with the Levitical scrupulosity of the native-born, who in his heart considers the Englishman rather dirty. He played the usual tricks on the patient coolies, pulling the punkahs in the sleeping-rooms where the boys thrashed through the hot nights telling tales till the dawn." Here were the sons of subordinate officials in the Railway, Telegraph, and Canal services, of planters and shopkeepers. "A few were cadets of the old Eurasian houses . . . the Pereiras, De Souza's, and D'Silvas. Their parents could well have educated them in England, but they loved the school that had served their own youth, and generation followed fallow-hued generation at St. Xavier's. Their homes ranged from Howrah of the railway people to abandoned cantonments like Monghyr and Chunar; lost tea-gardens Shillong-way; villages where their fathers were large landowners in Oudh or the Deccan; Mission-stations a week from the nearest railway line; seaports a thousand miles south, facing the brazen Indian surf; and cinchona-plantations south of them all. The mere story of their adventures, which to them were no adventures, on their road to and from school would have crisped a Western boy's hair. They were used to jogging off alone through a hundred miles of jungle, where there was always the delightful chance of being delayed by tigers; but they would no more have

bathed in the English Channel in an English August than their brothers across the world would have lain still while a leopard snuffed at their palanquin. There were boys of fifteen who had spent a day and a half on an islet in the middle of a flooded river, taking charge, as by right, of a camp of frantic pilgrims returning from a shrine. There were seniors who had requisitioned a chance-met Rajah's elephant, in the name of St. Francis Xavier, when the Rains once blotted out the cart-track that led to their father's estate, and had all but lost the huge beast in a quicksand. There was a boy who, he said, and none doubted, had helped his father to beat off with rifles from the veranda a rush of Akas in the days when those head-hunters were bold against lonely plantations.

"And every tale was told in the even, passionless voice of the native-born, mixed with quaint reflections, borrowed unconsciously from native foster-mothers, and turns of speech that showed they had been that instant translated from the vernacular."

There appeared to be no one in authority, so I walked in through the great windows, opening out on to the terrace, and found myself in a library. There were two boys over by one of the bookcases. I addressed the older of the two, a tall, slim, good-looking youth of about sixteen. I asked him if I could see the school. He seemed to think that I could and offered to take me to the Principal's office, which lay across a courtyard under the arches of one of the curving colonnades. A respectful servant dressed in white came to the door. "Cummings Sahib is away for the day and Memsab is playing tennis." I asked him for some paper and a pen and wrote Cummings a note asking him if I could come again the next day. I would ring up in the morning to find out if it was all right.

Slowly, laboriously, delving into old records and with the help of contemporary memoirs, I have been able to gather an impression of Martin. He was born at Lyons, on 4th January 1735, the son of Fleury Martin, a cooper. His mother died soon after his birth and his father remarried, producing five more children, but eventually being assassinated near Paris. History does not enlarge on the matter. Martin seems to have had a conventional enough education, showing a decided aptitude for science and mathematics. At the age of sixteen he enlisted in the French Army for service in India. France's position in India had gained in importance under the



leadership of General Dupleix, and it must have appeared more than probable to a Frenchman in France that they were going to rid themselves of their British rivals there. Martin was twelve years old when Dupleix captured Madras. Unfortunately for Martin, though, he arrived in India just as the tide was about to turn. He landed at Pondicherry in 1752. Clive had already captured Arcot and marched south to relieve Trichinopoly, defeating a large contingent of the French Army on the way. For the next ten years they were to fight on desperately, hoping to be able to reinstate themselves. Eventually Dupleix was recalled to France in disgrace and his ambitious programme of procuring the whole of India for his country abandoned by his successor. In 1761 the English had captured Pondicherry and by the Treaty of Paris France was left nothing but the memory of Dupleix's great dream of an empire in the east.

Martin started his career as a dragoon in the Governor's body-guard, serving first as a trooper, and afterwards, probably, as a non-commissioned officer. It was after the fall of Pondicherry that he was taken prisoner. There is a story that he was supposed to have deserted France and sought employment with the British before Pondicherry, but there seems to be no reason for believing this. Anyone having anything to do with Martin seems always to have respected him. Warren Hastings himself summed him up as "being in general esteem, a brave and experienced officer and a man of strict honesty". Under the circumstances the other version of how he got into the good graces of the British is probably the correct story. Shortly after the fall of Pondicherry the Madras Government sent Martin with about a hundred other French prisoners to Bengal on a ship called the *Fatteh Salam*. There was apparently some trouble about finding an intelligent officer to put in charge of the prisoners; probably none had a sufficient knowledge of French. In the end the French prisoners were made to choose one of their own number to exercise control over them, and it is a tribute to Martin's outstanding personality that he was selected. It was understood that he would not be required to fight against his own countrymen if the *Fatteh Salam* was attacked. Actually, the ship foundered off Godavari Point. Most of the soldiers were drowned and the few that were saved owed their lives to the coolness and courage of Claude Martin. The British thought so well of his behaviour on this par-

ticular occasion that he was sent to Madras on another similar assignment. His position at this time appears to have been that of a prisoner on parole. By September 1763, the year of the Treaty of Paris, the Honourable East India Company had offered him a commission. It is hardly surprising that he should have accepted. Peace had been signed for several months already, besides which the Company had agreed to Martin's stipulation that he would never be made to fight against his own country.

From this moment on, Martin's star was in the ascendant. He certainly had proved himself very capable; he must also have been extremely energetic. Ambition also, no doubt, played a part in the moulding of his future, for within a period of twelve years this private from Lyons had established for himself a responsible position in Lucknow, being in favour with both the Company and the Nawab. Commissioned as ensign in 1763, he was a captain less than three years after. There were always some rebellious princes to attend to, so he also saw a good deal of active military service, commanding a Sepoy cavalry unit. His real interests, though, appear to have been on the technical side, for he was engaged more and more on surveying.

It was while on surveying work that he first came to Lucknow. He had been sent to inspect certain territories which had recently been surrendered to the East India Company by the Nawab, who immediately fell under his charm and was much impressed by his mechanical skill. There was apparently nothing this versatile man could not turn his hand to: even we hear of his casting a bronze cannon, and a bell he made is still standing on the terrace outside La Martinière. The Nawab was old and died shortly after Martin's arrival in Lucknow, to be succeeded by his son Asaf ud Daula. One of his first acts on attaining the throne was to petition the East India Company to release Martin in order to make him superintendent of his arsenal. The Company granted his request and gave Martin the honorary title of Lieutenant-Colonel. No doubt it suited them well to have so able a man at the Court of a prince they were anxious to keep loyal. It is evident that the Government looked upon Martin as its own agent, even though he was not publicly acknowledged as such. There is no doubt that he had considerable influence at Court and we get charming glimpses of his life: "Little breakfasts at Colonel

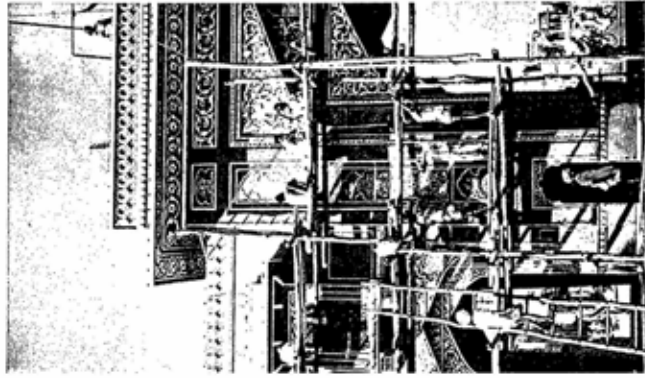
Martin's, where business, politics and pleasure were combined."

Martin's employer, the Nawab, is described for us by Mr. Ferdinand Smith\* as being "mild in manners, polite and affable in his conduct. He possessed no great mental power, but his heart was good, considering his education which instilled the most despotic ideas." He spent fabulous sums of money on the upkeep of his twenty palaces. Smith informs us that he had more than a hundred gardens and over a thousand elephants. "Every year he expended about two hundred thousand pounds on English manufacturers." He had one thousand five hundred double-barrel guns, one thousand seven hundred superb lustres, thirty thousand shades of various forms and colours. How did Smith ascertain these strange facts? It looks as if he were copying out an inventory given to him by one of the palace eunuchs. The list is interminable, including several hundred large mirrors, girandoles and clocks; some of the clocks, Smith remarks, "were very curious, richly set with jewels, having figures in continual movement, and playing tunes every hour; two of these clocks cost him thirty thousand pounds. Without taste or judgment, he was extremely solicitous to possess all that was elegant and rare; he had instruments and machines of every art and science, but he knew none; and his museum was so ridiculously displayed that a wooden cuckoo-clock was placed close to a superb timepiece which cost the price of a diadem; and a valuable landscape of Claude Lorrain suspended near a board painted with ducks and drakes."

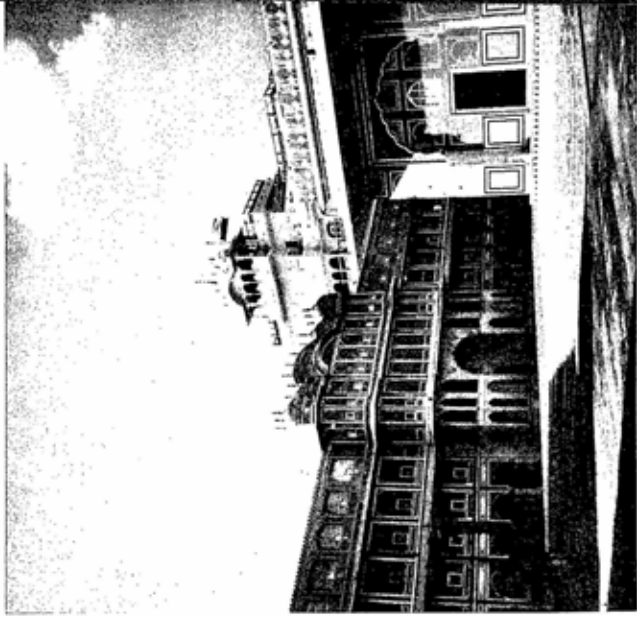
This description could fit the palace of almost every oriental potentate who had been in contact with the West. Asaf ud Daula, however, seems to have been a real eccentric. We hear of his giving small dinners for ten or twelve people, seating them in a carriage drawn by elephants. His jewels, Smith informs us, were worth about eight million sterling. "I saw him in the midst of his precious treasures, handling them as a child does his toys."

Martin, as we have already seen, had proved himself an able soldier, and obviously he proved valuable as a political agent and a man to be trusted, otherwise he certainly would not have stood so high in the Company's esteem, and commanded the respect of both corrupt native courtiers and haughty English officials. He was one of those all-round eighteenth-century characters, for in addition to

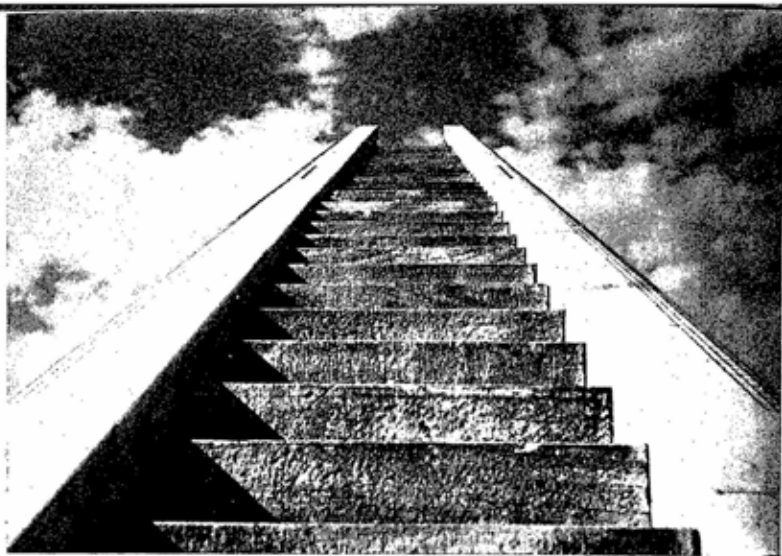
\* See *Oriental Memoirs* by James Forbes, 1813.



Jaipur: the whole city is painted terra-cotta pink and stencilled over in white arabesques (*page 191*)



The palace at Jaipur (*page 192*)



*Above, the stairs of the Yantra Samrat (page 194)*

*Below, the Yantra Samrat, or Prince of Dials (page 194)*



his other talents he was also an extremely astute business man, amassing a large fortune for himself in indigo, and continually augmenting it by clever investment in easily portable articles such as gold and silver bars, diamonds and silk.

It is hardly surprising that Martin, with the Nawab as a constant example before his eyes, should have aspired to an almost equally lavish train of life. He started by building himself a town house: "The house," writes Mr. Twining, a civil servant who visited the Colonel in 1795, "had the appearance of a fortified castle, and was indeed constructed with a view to defence, with drawbridges, loopholes, turrets and water when desired, all round. The Colonel was extremely civil and conducted us through the principal parts of his singular building. The most handsome room was one which he had constructed over the river itself, the exterior wall resting upon pillars placed nearly in the middle of the Gumti, whose stream does flow through the house." The house was called Farhad Buksh and still exists, but so altered as to be hardly recognisable. If one looks very carefully at low water, when the river is not running too swiftly, one can just discern the massive piers on which the pillars were built.

Mr. Twining also gives us his impression of La Martinière, or Constantia, as it was then called. It was still being built and had not yet been inhabited. "It is a palace on a very extensive scale, but in which the singularity of the Colonel's taste is chiefly discernible. Under the principal apartment are subterraneous rooms, intended for the hot season. In the middle of the largest of these dark rooms the Colonel had already raised his tomb, and the number of lights to be burned there night and day, *for ever*, and the sum to be allotted for this purpose were already mentioned, but it was not said what was to be the state and distinction of the immense structure above when its eccentric founder should have taken possession of his narrow chamber below."

Martin is supposed to have built his tomb in the basement of his palace in the hopes of preserving it. It had so impressed the Nawab that, even in its unfinished state, the King had cast envious eyes on it. It was a repetition of the story of Vaux-le-Vicomte. Martin, like Fouquet, had built himself rather too grand a residence to suit his King. Luckily for Martin the Nawab's power was not absolute and

he had to content himself with threatening to annex the palace after Martin's death. It was a threat that could be avoided only by turning the house into a tomb, since no Mohammedan would dare use a house so consecrated, as a dwelling-place. The Nawab, anyhow, was to die in September 1797, three years before Martin. The house seems to have been completely finished in 1796, which left Martin very little time in which to enjoy it. He was, however, buried at Constantia, as he had intended, embalmed in a plain wooden casket watched over by four grenadiers in full uniform. The grenadiers, almost life-size, were only of plaster and were to prove ineffectual protection against the mutineers who broke open the tomb some fifty years later, in search of treasure. His body was scattered all over the place. Pieces of it were found after the Mutiny was over and were replaced as well as could be.

I can find no mention of any architect connected with the building of La Martinière and the Farhad Buksh. Martin was probably responsible for the plans himself, which explains the variety of styles he employed: the fluted Corinthian columns, the crenellations and arabesques, niches and arches and the circular towers which rise between rampant lions, the strange roof line that recalls Chambord, with its pavilions at the corners and its balustrades. Added to this complexity of design there are a quantity of life-size statues, even more clumsy and indifferent in quality than those found on late Italian villas. Italians in fact are supposed to have been imported to work on the stucco and the statues. The sculptors started a workshop for ornamental decoration which, I am told, still exists today.

La Martinière, while bizarre in its details, is impressive as a whole and gives a great feeling of grandeur. The place was only called La Martinière after the Colonel's death, Martin having chosen the name himself to designate the college. The other two colleges he founded, one in Calcutta and one in Lyons, were to carry the same name, but they had to be built with money provided by the trust. No one really knows why he called the place Constantia, but there is a romantic story which has it that Constantia was the name of his first love, a girl he left behind him in France and who died long before he attained to wealth and honour. Perhaps this explains why he never married. What a pity it is that Martin left us no diary. I

would like to have known him more intimately, as it is only in snatches that one captures the real man. In spite of his success, his wealth and his many interests, he had always apparently hankered for the life of a soldier. How otherwise does one explain the fact that, when over fifty and in not very good health, he was willing to leave all his comfort and luxury behind him to go off on an arduous expedition against the redoubtable Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Lord Cornwallis made a special request for him, needing Martin's ability to help him settle the difficult question of supplies. He was appointed an aide-de-camp, being in personal attendance on Lord Cornwallis, taking part in all the attacks. The Company awarded him the rank of Major-General for his pains, and his friend the Nawab struck a special medal for him to commemorate his return. It is of copper, dated 1796, and has his head on the obverse, and on the reverse the titles: "Distinguished Noble, Honoured Lord, Sword of the Country, General Claude Martin Bahadur, Mighty in Battle."

There is so much that I found attractive about the man. While serving in Mysore as a commissary of provision, he took a lively interest in the food for the cattle, and so in Roxburgh's *Flora Indica* we find the following entry: "*Andropogon Martini*. A native of the highlands of Balla Ghat. General Martin collected the seeds while there with the army during the last war with Tipu Sultan and has raised an abundance of it in Lucknow. It is also now plentiful in the Company's Botanic Garden, raised from seed sent there by that gentleman, whose name I have applied as a specific one for this elegant plant." Martin also introduced the Mysore thorn into Bengal, as it proved to be very useful in making hedges round forts and strongholds.

Then again we suddenly come across him constructing balloons on the Montgolfier principle. The *Calcutta Gazette* of the 13th October 1785 reports that: "Colonel Martin has exhibited several balloons at Lucknow, to the greatest astonishment and entertainment of the Viziers." He was busy constructing one large enough to carry up several persons. A Vizier, very enthusiastic about the whole idea, immediately ordered the Colonel to build one large enough to carry twenty or thirty people. Martin replied that he could not possibly accommodate so many, because they would run the risk of losing their lives. That, the Vizier replied in a huff, was



no affair of the Colonel's. The balloon, needless to say, was never constructed.

We have already seen that the handsome crystal chandeliers now hanging in the Governor's palace at Calcutta came originally from La Martinière, and on reading the notice of his sales in the *Calcutta Gazette* one realises that Martin's houses must have been extremely handsomely furnished. He had been a real patron of the arts. There are the usual musical instruments, telescopes, intaglios and bronzes, furniture inlaid with Martin's arms, girandoles, jewellery and precious stones, the latter including "a beautiful rose diamond set for a ring, and known to surpass anything of its kind in this country". There were "about four thousand volumes of highly valuable books in the Latin, Italian, French and English languages, an exclusive, curious and valuable collection of Persian and Sanskrit books and a complete set of Daniell's Views in India, about a hundred and fifty-six paintings in oil colour on different subjects: forty-seven oil paintings and sketches by Zoffany, a very extensive collection of fine prints, drawings, caricatures and Hindustani sketches, gold and silver coins, shawls, a printing press with Arabic and Hindustani characters . . . and a quantity of attar of roses of a particularly fine and pure quality, being the collection of some years by the late General, and esteemed some of the best ever produced."

Martin's collection of pictures must have been quite well known, for when Henry Hudson the mezzotint engraver, an artist of considerable repute, visited India, one of the first things he did was to apply to the Governor-General for permission to visit Lucknow, "to take engravings of some of Colonel Claude Martin's pictures, several of which will be very profitable to me". I suspect also that Martin had a hand in the purchasing of the better paintings in the Nawab's collection, the Claude Lorrains, for instance. It is quite obvious from all the letters and memoirs that anyone of any interest visiting Bengal was given a letter of introduction to Martin, and he seems never to have failed to entertain them.

Zoffany has portrayed Martin as lively and intelligent, with wide-set eyes. There are several portraits of him, a head and shoulders by Renaldi, showing him in his gold lace uniform, and another very similar pose by George Chinnery; both give him the high forehead and long nose. The Chinnery portrait is probably the better likeness

of the two, showing him with a charming, benevolent expression. There is a twinkle in the eyes and I feel the Major-General must have had a sense of humour.

We know that Martin was tall and slight of build, with a good figure. He was known to have had several mistresses, Indian or Eurasian girls whom he adopted, his favourite being a very pretty creature he called Boulone, or Lise. He acquired her from a Frenchman when she was still almost a child. But one must remember that at nine Indian girls are in effect women. Martin writes very affectionately of her in his will. "I brought her up as a child, I loved her and I had her educated with all the tenderness of a father." He intended that at the age of reason "she should choose anyone at her pleasure, for either husband or companion. And I proposed to marry her to anyone of her caste if she chose it; she chose never to quit me."

All the girls in his household were amply provided for at his death, being left pensions for their lives. "I do not intend to put any restriction on their future conduct, giving them full liberty to marry if they choose to do it." He even went as far as stating that if they made and repented any such connection, his executors should use the powers provided by Mohammedan law to rescue them from the consequences of their rash action.

Reading through his will, which is written in English, one realises that he never really acquired a very accurate knowledge of his adopted tongue. He spoke with a strong accent. Lord Teignmouth writing in 1797 states that: "The old General talks English about a degree better than Tiritta," Tiritta being a well-known Indian trader of the time, so that one can imagine what his English was like. He apparently started every sentence with "What do you call it?" and "Do you see?" "He is, however, a man of much penetration and observation and his language would be elegant if it corresponded with his ideas. His singularities are amusing, not ridiculous."

It is thought that Martin died of stones in the bladder; he is known to have suffered acutely from them. He was, in fact, among the first to practise lithotripsy, the operation that breaks up stones in the bladder. What is even still more remarkable is that he practised it on himself. Taking a knitting-needle he cut the end into a file and then set it into a long piece of whalebone which he polished to billiard-ball smoothness. This improvised implement was then

greased and inserted up the urethral canal, right up into the bladder. Once it was inserted, he started to grate the stones away, repeating the operation sometimes twice in twenty-four hours. He did manage to relieve the bladder, but the stones eventually formed again. The operation was such agony that he could not face doing it again and it is supposed that they increased until eventually they occasioned his death. But Martin must have had incredible courage and power of endurance to do the operation in the first place, especially if one considers that he was over fifty when the first experiment took place.

By our own standards Martin can hardly be called an old man when he died, being only sixty-five. No doubt he must have been worn out beyond his years by his illness, which is one of the most painful afflictions that one can have.

As Mr. Hill, an officer in charge of the records of the Government of India, says in his book on Martin:\* "He saw so much which he never told, and so much must have been recorded which has since been lost, that he disappoints whilst he excites our curiosity. We should like to know of his life as a private soldier in the French Army, to have the history of his shipwreck in some other account than that of the captain who left his ship too soon." One would like to know more details about his connection with the Court of Oudh. We know something of the able and distinguished persons who visited him at Lucknow, but of his ordinary circle of friends we know next to nothing. Then there were the malicious tongues of the European faction in Lucknow, who, probably jealous of his success, censured him for keeping a native establishment, referring, of course, to his women. It was said that he was mean, his entertainments were supposed to be "lacking in splendour and conviviality", but, as Mr. Hill points out, one has only to remember that a man of his nationality would particularly disapprove of the heavy drinking which was then a characteristic vice of Anglo-Indian society and that any indulgence of this nature on his part would have rendered his career impossible. The very restraint which would be considered natural in the present days must in those days have done much to make him unpopular with the common herd. But the outcome of it all is that Martin emerges a charming and romantic character.

\* *The Life of Claude Martin* by S. C. Hill. B.A., B.Sc. Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta, 1901.

I rang up early the next morning and asked to speak to Mr. Cummings, but he was busy with his classes. Mrs. Cummings came to the telephone instead. Of course she would be delighted if I came out. She would show me round herself. The voice was clipped and very English, a pleasant voice. I could picture her playing tennis with the other masters' wives. I hadn't detected the slight intonation, but there was one, for, as it turned out, she was Eurasian, her husband also. They were a charming couple, but I was conscious all the time of an almost exaggerated love of England, and they were rather given to criticising the Indian Government. They seemed to have little faith in the future of La Martinière. Martin had specifically stated in his will that the two colleges founded in India were to teach children "the English language and religion".

"Gradually the Anglo-Indian will die out, and what then?"

"Do you mean that the Government will take over the college?" I asked.

Mr. Cummings shrugged his shoulders. Quite rightly, he would not commit himself. "Things have changed so much, lately. I have been here, now, for twenty-five years. The class of boys we are being persuaded to take is not at all the same."

"But isn't it the same thing everywhere?"

"Yes, but here, in India, it is much harder to be democratic. There will always be the problem of caste distinction, even though the boys in question be Christians. The parents of a well-born boy, say from Bombay, are not going to be over-pleased if they hear that their son has been sitting next to a sweeper's child."

"You mean", I said, "that the Government is interfering?"

Mr. Cummings did not answer; I knew that there had lately been a motion in the House of the People that English should no longer be taught in the schools.

"The whole attitude is so different," Cummings continued. "This morning, for instance, I have been having a difficult time with the father of one of my boys. His son failed his exams, and he wants me to falsify his age in my report, which would give him two more years, and another chance to take the exam. It could be done, because they have no such things as birth certificates in India. I flatly refused out of principle. Twice the father has been to see me. He no doubt will start pulling strings now, but I am not going to give in."

Poor Cummings, I could see that he was up against it, doubly so being a Eurasian. There is no doubt that the Cummingses felt they were more British than the British. Cummings was retiring at the end of the year and going to live in Australia. His wife thought she would be able to find work there as a nurse. I only hope that the Australians, with their colour prejudice, will be kind to them.

It is not easy for the Eurasians. I met a young doctor in Bombay who had just come out from England. His mother had been English and his father Indian. He had been brought up entirely in England and passed all his exams over there, and eventually married an English girl. He has the reputation of being a brilliant general practitioner and had worked up a good practice for himself. Suddenly he decided to go to India, feeling that that was where he really belonged. His wife refused to go with him and stayed at home; I think that they were divorced even. Now that he is here, in what technically is his own country, the Indians criticise him. There is a regrettable snobbery about Eurasians; they belong, in the end, to neither world. It is not as bad now, though, as it used to be. As Mr. Pearson points out in *Eastern Interlude*, the Eurasians became the target for the most objectionable snobbery: the reason was that the presence of an intermediate community, large numbers of which lived in the utmost poverty, in itself detracted from the position to which the English aspired, and constantly threatened to break the colour barriers which they laboured ceaselessly to preserve.

Generally speaking, however, this snobbery only became pointed when a member of the Eurasian community attempted to pass beyond the limit of familiarity which might be allowed him. For a Eurasian to attempt to pass himself off as a European was the worst crime he could perpetrate, but already many had borrowed the use of the word 'home' when talking about England, whose shores they had never seen.

Mr. Pearson tells a heart-rending story of how, travelling to England by sea, a Eurasian became weary of the journey and, turning to the ship's mate for want of any other companion with whom he could converse freely, he asked: "How long do you think, sir, it will be before we get home?"

"Get HOME, Mr. Middlerace, get HOME?" the mate returned

for an answer, strongly emphasising the word 'home'; "I reckon we should make land by about midday tomorrow."

When, the next day, the ship arrived at the island of St. Helena, Mr. Middlerace's trunks were ready packed and on being informed that the ship had arrived at Portsmouth he promptly disembarked, to the intense amusement of the English passengers and the crew, and to his own surprise at an English port employing so many dark-skinned porters on the quay!

I spent the whole day with the Cummingses, and we made a complete tour of Martin's extraordinary house. Every room and all the halls and corridors have elaborate stuccoed ceilings and cornices, and some of the more important rooms have walls set with pilasters. The rooms looked almost Venetian, traced over as they are in foliated scrolls—white on pistachio-green, pink on white, some of the ceilings washed a bright hedge-sparrow-egg-blue. The big reception rooms downstairs have plaques interspersed across the ceilings, and along the cornices Muses in Grecian muslins. They appeared to be much finer in quality than the decorative stucco work which surrounded them and I asked Mrs. Cummings about them. Some of them were executed by Wedgwood and shipped out on an order from Martin.

I was given tea in a charming room, its french-windows shaded by a colonnade that ran along the garden side of the house. The walls were apple-green and the ceilings mauve and white. Over the mantelpiece was a small portrait by Zoffany, showing a pretty Hindu girl dressed in thin silks. A small boy stood by her side holding her hand. It was Boulone, Martin's mistress; the boy was a child Martin had adopted from an impoverished Frenchman who wanted to return to his country. Martin sent him to Calcutta to be educated and the result was so satisfactory that Martin left him a handsome pension on condition of his acting as general manager, or solicitor, for all his female dependants.

Mrs. Cummings saw me looking at the portrait. "There is a funny story connected with that picture," she said. "Not so very long ago, just before my day, one of the vice-presidents' wives nearly gave it away to a rag-and-bone man. She was clearing out the place and a friend of hers, a colonel's wife from the cantonment, happened to be having tea with her while it was all going on. She remarked on the

two paintings leaning up against the wall, behind a broken-down chair that was being got rid of. Looking at them she asked what they were doing there. "Of what good are these old things to me?" the other woman replied. The friend protested violently. How fortunate, isn't it, that she appreciated their value!"

Rather touchingly, Mrs. Cummings sent a runner after us to our hotel with a note asking us to sign in her autograph book. "It was a very great pleasure meeting you," she wrote, and she wished each one of us a safe journey on our tour of India, and pleasant memories to take back with us. She signed the letters, "Yours sincerely, Blanche Cummings". I don't know why I should have found this letter so touching. It was a perfectly ordinary letter from a well-brought-up Englishwoman. The writing was big and free, good writing, and the paper was the conventional water-marked note-paper. In it she mentioned going to Australia. Did one perhaps catch a hint of regret in between the lines, of loneliness? I wonder. It seemed to be the end of something, like the smell of autumn leaves on a bonfire.



## THE FRONTIER MAIL

With our flight from Lucknow to Delhi we finished with the blue and silver planes of Air India, for in future we were to travel by train and car.

We had been invited to stay by the Maharao Raja of Bundi, one of the Rajput rulers belonging to the proud Hara Chauhan clan, created, so legend affirms, by no less a personage than Vishnu himself at the fire-pit of Gaumukh on Mount Abu. The ancient rulers of the land having been wiped out, the gods repaired to Mount Abu in southern Rajputana, and there from the sacred fire-pit produced the four fire-born clans—the Powar, the Pariha, the Chauhan and the Solanki—by whom the Rajputana is ruled. Modern research, of course, tells us another story, that these princely families are not divine but descended from Central Asian tribes who found their way across the north-west frontier in the fifth and sixth centuries. Carving out kingdoms for themselves, they settled down in the country, marrying Hindu wives. The Brahmins, finding it politic to support them, wasted no time in providing them with genealogies going back to heroic times. Whether divine or not, the Rajputs are very proud of their blue blood and justifiably proud of their history. They are the knight errants of India, chivalrous and brave. Owing to its geographical position their country, a great plateau lying in the path of the invaders from beyond the mountain-wall of the Himalayas, was the cockpit of India. It is here, beginning with the first Moslem invasion, that India's fate has been decided. The Rajputs were the only people the Moguls never really subdued. It needed Akbar's wise diplomacy to win these proud princelings over to their side. Admiring their qualities and understanding that, with their



support, his kingdom would be doubly assured, he set about courting them. The Emperor assured them of their privileges, giving them important positions at his Court, on equal footings with the Mohammedan nobles. He even took a Rajput princess to wife. Jahangir and Shar Jahan were both of them the sons of Rajput princesses and the most brilliant conquests of the Emperors, including Aurangzeb, were made by their Rajput generals. Bundi's Rajahs, due to the astuteness of Sarjan Singh, their ancestor, obtained even greater concessions from Akbar. Never should they be called upon to give their daughters to the Royal Harem. They also had the privilege of entering the Hall of Audience fully armed and were allowed to dispense with the humiliating prostrations demanded by etiquette when greeting the Emperor. On top of this, theirs were the only temples to be respected.

It is impossible not to be impressed by the Rajputs. Sitting in my corner in the train I came across a reference of Mr. Woodruff's to infanticide as it used to be practised, particularly by high-caste Rajput women. Unable to marry in a lower sub-caste, or within their own, there were few marriages they could make and for these a substantial dowry was needed. To be single was to be unchaste and a disgrace to the family. "Disgrace or expense, one or the other is on the way when a daughter is born and so she is destroyed soon after birth. A pill of opium is given, or the mother's nipples are rubbed with opium or the baby is simply denied all nourishment."\*

I had met the present Maharao Raja in London just before sailing for India and he had invited us to stay in his new palace, built since the war. His Highness, or rather Bundi, as his friends call him, lives in the most remote and rarely visited of the Rajputana states, and for this reason it intrigued me. Bundi was to be the only maharaja on our list, for it seemed to me that the India I had come to see was better discovered alone, and not under royal patronage. I knew from experience how easy it was to be swamped by the attention of too many A.D.C.s.

Like the Sikhs, all Rajputs seem to be called Singh. I had a letter from Bundi's private secretary, Shambhu Singh, telling me to catch the Frontier Mail from Delhi. It left at 8.30 in the morning and got us to Kotah, a neighbouring state, at 4.30 in the afternoon. The

\* *The Men who Ruled India* by Philip Woodruff.

remaining twenty-five miles to Bundi would be negotiated by car. It was already encouraging that Bundi had no connection with the railroad. It seemed to bear out all that we had heard about it, that it was the most fascinating of the Indian states and almost completely unspoilt.

It was tantalising to spend the night in Old Delhi and to know that beyond the garden wall the marble palaces of the Great Moguls shone phosphorescent in the night. They would have to wait. I went to sleep dreaming of a blaze of jewels, and of the swaying of elephants, and the next morning had to grope my way back to reality and the business of getting our luggage ready for the train.

Having abandoned Air India, we had acquired the services of a bearer. Mahomet, he was called, tall and thin and rather distinguished-looking, and very old. He was dressed in a suit of natural-coloured shantung with brown-and-white pointed shoes. A handkerchief peeped discreetly out of his coat breast pocket. He looked like those old gentlemen who used to haunt Deauville, the kind caricatured by Spy. He reminded me also of a drawing master I used to have, a Russian refugee who smelt always of eau-de-Cologne and stale tobacco; two heavy gold rings, one set with a sapphire and the other with a ruby, clashed on his little finger, all that remained of his former splendour apart from his tight-fitting suits. Mahomet also had a large ring. Added to this, he wore a peaked white linen cap, round which he wound a length of turban. The ends were threaded with gold brocade; one stuck up in a fan at the side of his head, the other falling down his back to about his waist. He was the true apostle of Islam, a reminder that we were no longer to see men going about half-naked as we had in the south. From now on, the male population would be swathed in white, their hair would be cut short and their heads wrapped in turbans, rose, salmon and cherry coloured, some the tints of apple blossom, some lilac, others amaranth or yellow. Mahomet's was of the finest unbleached linen and looked very expensive. It was, and so was Mahomet, and really quite useless. I had had my doubts about him from the very first moment he walked into my room, all smiles and affability. He had one of those narrow faces and was obsequious in a way I cannot quite explain. He was always there, squatting outside one of our

doors, sometimes polishing our shoes, which looked absurd, dressed as he was to appear like a retired diplomat. "What time you be called, Sah?" bowed Mahomet, or "Shall I get you a drink, Sah?" It was probably just after luncheon and all one wanted to do was to take off one's clothes and throw oneself down on one's bed. One longed to snap at him: "Oh, for goodness sake, Mahomet, leave me alone and go away." It is not, of course, what we said. The old fool would take the key from one and make a great play of efficiency at opening the door, fumbling hopelessly with the lock. "Here, let me do it, Mahomet," and then one felt sorry for him, which made things much worse. It was not very long before we got rid of him. Gone are the days when one has to have a bearer to travel about India; one can even dispense with the inevitable bedding.

Mahomet proved particularly annoying on this morning of our departure, for he was too old to be hurried. "Where is Memsab's luggage?" A blank look came in answer from the small eyes, pale with age. "Go and get it, Mahomet," and off he stalked, half running like a bird on his stiff legs. Everything about the poor man irritated me; the long end of his turban, hanging stiffly starched down his back, and the way everything was always done at the last minute, a trait, I notice, peculiar to addle-headed people; and worse than all this was the way he used to come to all of us in turn and tell us about the wonderful shops he was going to take us to, and all the things we could buy there. What interested him, of course, were the commissions he would get—the immemorial commissions of Asia. We were perfectly horrible to him.

Having expended a great deal of nervous energy, we finally arrived in two very over-loaded taxis at Delhi's Central Station. It looked exactly as one likes stations to look, being late-Victorian in period and fashioned in cast iron. Stations in India are run almost as if they were hotels. The station-master is a kind of glorified hall-porter and will telegraph ahead for one, should one happen to be going to an out-of-the-way place where some kind of conveyance has to be arranged for. He will even receive letters addressed to his care. All stations have what are called retiring-rooms where one can stay, a left-over from the days when there were very few hotels in India, and indeed in some places one is still grateful for the clean white beds that they supply. It seems strange for us coming from Europe

suddenly to be sleeping in what looks like a series of waiting-rooms, for those responsible for the stations have managed to make them look exactly as they do at home, dark and sparsely furnished with much brass and shining leather. A bare electric light bulb hangs down from a long wire in the middle of the ceiling or, failing this, there are gas brackets. The furniture is of some hard wood resembling mahogany and like its counterpart at home has suffered considerably from being badly varnished in a way that leaves a resinous crackling, like the rind of roasted pork.

These waiting-rooms, however, do not concern us this morning. All was bustle and excitement waiting for the Frontier Mail. It is a fine-sounding name and indeed the train lived up to her nomenclature; she steamed in exactly on time, very important and streamlined, the pride of India's railways. We had a compartment reserved all to ourselves which the station-master unlocked for us. It was air-conditioned and very roomy, with wide seats covered in a slate-blue, plastic material, imitating leather. If necessary the seats could be made up into four berths, and there were a toilet and wash-basin next door. I describe it in detail because I have always been fascinated by trains, which for me can be the quintessence of luxury and romance. Who, for instance, can remain indifferent to the idea of travelling on the Shanghai Express, or the Trans-Siberian Railway? Oddly enough, memories of the Blue Train were among my most nostalgic longings during the worst moments of the war. I wondered if I should ever hear again the creaking of the marquetry panelling as the train, rushing headlong through the night, clattered over some points.

Our luggage stowed away in the corridor, poor Mahomet was sent to squat down beside it; it was the custom of the country. The air-conditioning was a godsend, but so unused were we by now to being cool that very soon we had to ring for blankets, and they brought us blue ones made in Kashmir. The seats were more like large sofas and the only way to be really comfortable was to put one's feet up. I sat curled up in my corner, watching India roll past outside through the blue-tinted windows, a dun-coloured country-side, sparsely tufted with grass. We passed a well round which had gathered a knot of white cattle, attended by four youths; beyond, in a haze of heat, one could just discern a line of lion-coloured hills. We

were travelling south-west, striking out across the plains of Rajputana.

At our first stop I got down to stroll on the platform. Animated by our arrival it took on the appearance of a fair. A water-carrier appeared with a push-cart set with three large earthenware jars from which he scooped the water with a long brass ladle. Close on his heels, emitting raucous cries, came the seller of sweetmeats. His was a very grand trolley mounted on bicycle wheels and piled high with a delectable assortment of unfamiliar foods: balls of what appeared to be puffed rice rolled together and bathed in syrup; twists of amber-coloured sugar and squares of coconut icing; long coils of cheese-straws and meat-balls fried in ghee. The food that one sees for sale in the streets in India invariably ranges from yellow to brown, a kind of culinary palette spread in every shade from ochre to orange. There was also a man selling brightly lacquered toys, rattles shining metallic pink, green and pomegranate-red, and then there were the different reds of the porters' uniforms. At every station they were the same; they wear a kind of loose smock and turban to match, or at least they start off the same shade, but the government-issue cotton on account of constant slappings at the local tank fades from raspberry to rose and geranium red.

The station was noisy and hot and felt almost like a Turkish bath after the cold blue interior of our air-conditioned compartment. Sad to relate, India's trains are not painted white, but a drab brown. I had hoped they would be like the Uganda railway or the blindingly white trains I remember in lower Egypt which meet the dahabiyas when they come to the cataracts.

Walking up the platform I came to the crowded third-class carriages; here was the 'te-rain' that amazed the wondering Lama in *Kim*, here was the burly Sikh thrusting his head through the open iron bars that replaced the windows, the Jat, and the Amritsar courtesan. They sat six in a row facing each other, others squatted on the floor among the bundles and cooking-pots and charcoal braziers that would be used in preparing their meals. The carriages were all packed, and tousled black heads and arms hung out between the bars in listless attitudes of heat. The ticket collector had started his rounds—a slow business in India, where people secrete their tickets in all sort of curious places. Even today tickets and ticket-clipping is dark oppression to India's rustics. They do not

understand why, when they have paid for a magic piece of paper, strangers should punch great pieces out of their charm.

Back in our compartment, a white-coated attendant announced luncheon in the restaurant car. The chairs were covered in wicker, and eight fans, hung in a double row from the ceiling, thrashed the air. We were served delicious curry. I noticed that the car was called the 'Himalayan Queen'.

\*

## BUNDI

We were met at Kotah by Shambhu Nath Singh, one of His Highness's A.D.C.s. We were to become great friends for it was Singh who was delegated to be our guide. It was Singh's job to unlock the fortress for us on top of the hill above the city, and with him we were to wander over the old palace, deserted now except for a few ageing retainers. The new palace, called Phoolsagar, or 'Lake of Flowers', where we were staying, lay on the shores of a lake some few miles out of town.

Singh was dressed in khaki trousers and a shantung jacket with a high collar that buttoned up the front. He was about twenty-eight, I should imagine, with a pleasant face that had grown slightly jowly with too much good living. Like the rest of his race he had wonderful, raven-black hair that grew in waves to the nape of his neck. He was Bundi's second cousin, I think, and was about the same age.

We all piled with our luggage into a Chevrolet truck, driven by one of the palace chauffeurs, his eagle head wound round with a bright marigold-orange turban, the family colours. All the servants in the palace wear the same-coloured turbans. Their size is a question of taste. The small ones are called *safas* and are only nine yards long, the large ones, known as *pagris*, measure up to twenty-five yards. It is hard to give such quantities of material a shape and these *pagris* have no real form; they are worn in twisted coils and look as if they had been made of coloured meringue and squeezed on to the head out of an icing bag.

We hardly knew Bundi and, as can be imagined, we were curious, not to say slightly apprehensive, about our stay. It was natural that

we should have felt our way a little with Singh. Besides, Indians are used to being asked questions, for they never stop doing so themselves. I know of no more inquisitive race. In Agra, one evening, we were shopping and I remained behind in the car while the others wandered off in the blaze of acetylene lamps to explore the inner depths of a cloth merchant's store. Seeing me alone, a youngish man in glasses accosted me, no doubt wishing to show off his good English. After about six minutes there was nothing he did not know about me. So direct is their approach that it is a kind of shock treatment, and the answer is out before one has really had time to consider the question. But Shambhu Singh was far too well brought up to subject us to such treatment; besides which I think he was amused by our genuine interest in his King and his state.

The first part of our way lay through flat country and then slowly we began to climb, for Bundi lies cupped in gently rolling hills. "You will see it in a minute now," and Singh waved a delicate hand towards the open window. We might have been in certain parts of Scotland. The hills were netted over with the grey branches of a low-growing species of tree called a dhokra. They looked like hazel woods. It was the kind of country in which one could expect to frighten up a *covee* of partridges, or possibly a deer, and in point of fact it is India's best tiger country. Our host, I knew, was an excellent shot. It was a little too early for tigers yet, but the very fact that they were there charged the innocent-looking landscape with quite a different atmosphere.

Twisting and winding round the spur of a hill we suddenly came upon Bundi, white and shiny, climbing up from the still waters of the great tank, three-quarters of the way up the farther side of the valley. It looked like an avalanche of masonry. It was impossible to tell where the building stopped and the mountain began, for the town and the crenellated palace were flanked by a curtained wall running along the outcropping of rock that formed the crest of the hill; in fact the buildings seemed gradually to fade into it. Dominating it all, high above, was the old fort. But it would have to wait till the morning, for we were not to enter the city. Our palace lay farther on, out of the valley. "His Highness moved out of town and built himself a new palace because he could not stand the old one," Singh explained, and I see his point, or rather I was to see it after



I had visited it. It was very haunted and very old. Bundi is so alive, so much of our world, that he cannot possibly fit into the warrior-like atmosphere of his forefathers. The steep and narrow corridors of the Bundi-ki-Mahal was no place for a young man who pilots his own plane, who has been A.D.C. to the late King and who had served with Mountbatten in Burma. But even so, in spite of his new palace and his cars, he cannot entirely break away from the atmosphere his land imposes on him.

I was never able to become very intimate with Bundi, for there were too many of us together all at one time; I regretted it, of course. But I have a definite feeling that when he retires to his rooms a terrible loneliness descends on him, as if he were haunted by those moustached portraits hanging in the dimly lit rooms of the palace where he was born. It is not always enough to build a new house. Something of the past had crept into these clean white walls with him; and what a proud, pungent, battle-stained past it is.

The V-shaped valley opened out into gentle hills which swelled over the country-side, and splashed out into one of their hollows was a shallow lake. The evening light, reflected on the glass-like waters, was shot with rifts of saffron and rose, and through the stillness came the mournful cries of many water-birds. Again I was conscious of a familiar echo, Celtic in its wild softness, for here was the rusty green and the dampness of Inverness-shire or of County Donegal. There is a garden on an island off the shores of Cork that is something like this; but no, we were in Bundi, we were in fact arriving at the palace. We drove through unpretentious white gates, a sentry presented arms and, as he did so, two peacocks, frightened by the noise of our motor, took heavy flight into the dusk over the top of some banana trees. The banana trees were part of Bundi's garden and under them he had planted drifts of forget-me-nots.

Bundi chose the site of his new palace with great care and attended to every detail himself. It is built in the old Rajputana style and inspired by a shooting-box that belonged to Bundi's great-grandfather. When given a chance the Rajput masons of the present day seem to build as well as they ever did. How right Bundi was not to be influenced by Europe. I wish I could say the same thing for the inside of his palace.

Phoolsagar is built in a square round a tank, or artificial lake, and

is reasonable in its proportions, being about the size of a fairly large country-house in England. Driving through double archways, we swung up to a small front door, to be greeted by another of His Highness's cousins and his private secretary. His Highness, we were told, had been obliged to go out on business, but would be back in time for dinner. Crossing a small patio set with a shallow marble fountain, we came to the main part of the palace built round the lake. We had been given a whole suite of rooms on the ground floor facing out over the water.

For the first time since we had been in India, we changed for dinner, which was served in the patio on a long table set on grass matting spread across the lawn. Bundi was late and we waited for him seated on hammocks, drinking long whiskies and soda. There were seven of us, Singh, the private secretary and Prithui Raj, Bundi's cousin. Conversation was difficult. Singh, who was not at all shy when he was alone with us, became awkward when there were others around. Finally Bundi appeared. He is a dapper little man with a moustache and lively, slit eyes. He looked handsome in his tight-fitting silk jacket. It buttoned, as they all do, up the middle and had slits at the back. He was very gay and talkative, but still it was not easy. We discussed friends we had in common and places we knew. I should have liked to talk alone with him, although it is difficult when one knows more about a person than they may, perhaps, suppose; one is a jump ahead all the time and can do nothing about it. Bundi is married and has two children, but his wife is in purdah. Never once was she mentioned, not even to the women in our party. There is nothing new or strange about purdah; it was just the fact that nothing was ever said about the Maharanee that caused a slight strain. It must have been like this, staying at Glamis if one believed the story of the monster: somewhere, up there, in one of those many rooms, it had its existence; instinctively one's attention must be drawn up to the windows. Which one? one asks oneself. I felt rather the same way about the Maharanee, and there were times when I had the sensation of eyes looking at me, and I imagined a bright darkness behind the white marble grilles, but it was only an idea. However, it did create rather a strange atmosphere, all the more so because one could not imagine Bundi connected with anything so oriental when his way of speaking is so

English, as is his sense of humour. We saw him only at meal times, over delicious meals prepared by a Goanese chef. For the rest of the time it was Singh who looked after us.

Our days in Bundi were fascinating. I never tired of driving down to the town, cupped, crowded and jostling, in between the hills. It is a gay town, its low houses being washed in clear colours, while awnings line the narrow streets, tempering the glare of the sun. The people looked happy and carefree, and what an eye for colour the Rajput women have! They sweep by, kicking out their kilted skirts with their delicate, silver-bespangled feet. The dance of their skirts is like a flight of Brazilian parrots, flashing with every conceivable combination of colour: marigold and orange, the pale pink of phloxes, yellow ochre and Spanish green, rose-pink and green-yellow, shades and gradations of colour that escape description, yellow and red, and green over red like a water melon. We came upon one lot of women, girls from another state, in black-and-white jodhpurs, with black shawls over their heads. They look like crows in a pen of peacocks. The women are seldom empty-handed, for they either carry a child, straddled sideways across their hips, or have brass water-pots balanced on their heads. Scoured as they have been with constant polishings of mud and sand, the water-pots gleam like gold in the sun.

Bundi is famous for its wells and there are several of them in the town. The water lies very deep, which necessitates the sinking of steep shafts, and over these shafts the Indian craftsmen have laboured hard. For them the construction of a well is as much a religious work as the building of a mosque or temple and some of these wells are extremely fine architecturally. The descent is made by long flights of steps ingeniously disposed within the supporting walls of the shaft. In this way platforms are made providing resting-places for people using the well.

It was while looking for one of these wells that we came upon Kipling's house, the Sukh Mahal as it is called, a pavilion on the lake—"a place of two turrets", as Kipling describes it, "connected by an open colonnade. The 'house'", he continues, "was open to the winds of heaven and the pigeons of the Raj; but the latter had polluted more than the first could purify." Kipling had come to Bundi to find 'copy' for *The Civil and Military Gazette*, for which he

worked in Lahore as assistant editor. The articles he wrote for this paper and *The Pioneer*, at Allahabad were afterwards published in two volumes called *From Sea to Sea*.<sup>\*</sup> He was hardly more than twenty-two when he wrote them, and they show him as astonishingly mature, already the Rudyard Kipling who later was to be world-famous.

His descriptions of Bundi are extraordinarily vivid. He had to struggle with the authorities in order to procure himself a bed. Bundi in those days did not welcome strangers; finally he was lodged in this white pavilion by the lake. I stood leaning up against one of the columns round which seventy years ago two youths had twisted a length of canvas, making a sort of loose-box for the burly young Englishman with bushy eyebrows and steel-rimmed glasses. The *chowkida*, or guardian of the place, had then heaped furniture into the airy enclosure, until he was entreated to desist. "What", said he scornfully, "are tables and chairs to this Raj? If six be not enough, let the Presence give an order, and twelve shall be forthcoming. Everything shall be forthcoming!" The superfluous furniture—chairs for the most part—was then shovelled out into the darkness and the Englishman went to bed "and was lulled to sleep by the rush of the water escaping from the overflow trap and the splash of the water-turtle as he missed the evasive fish. . . . A wind from the lake bellied the canvas. The brushwood of the hills around snapped and cracked as beasts went through it, and creatures—not jackals—made dolorous noises. On the lake it seemed that hundreds of water birds were keeping a hotel, and that there were arrivals and departures throughout the night".

But I was dreaming; it was bright morning now, a breeze crisped the waters of the lake, over which flashed some black-and-white kingfishers giving chase to lacquer-red dragonflies. A dusty road led to the far end of the lake, where, set among some palms, was the old Maharao Rajah's hunting-box. This charming pavilion, overrun with monkeys, was the place that had been the inspiration for Bundi's palace. On our way back we passed a Mohammedan wedding, a double one in fact, for there were two bridegrooms, young men of about eighteen who were mounted bare-back on white ponies. Pink quilts were thrown over the ponies and the bride-

<sup>\*</sup> *From Sea to Sea* by Rudyard Kipling. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1889.

grooms were dressed in bright orange satin. Silver tinsel hung with small cotton balls veiled their faces, although one just caught glimpses of smooth olive skin and blackened eyes. They were as shy as if they had been brides. Behind them walked their relatives, the women jingling their bracelets hung with little bells. Some of them had on new saris especially bought for the occasion. One could tell that they were new by the way they glinted with points of light; it is customary in Bundi to chop up silver foil and mix it in with the dye, with the result that the material shines like mica until it has had its first pounding in the local tank.

It was late afternoon the first time we went up to the old palace, grinding up to it in a jeep over a terrifyingly steep incline. The palace of Bundi, even in broad daylight, is such a palace as men built themselves in uneasy dreams—the work of goblins rather than of men. It is built into, and out of, the hillside and dominates the whole of the city, lying nearly perpendicular to the hill, or so it seemed, as we jammed to a stop in a deserted courtyard. In response to an echoing shout from Singh, an old creature came hobbling out of a shelter where he had been asleep, carrying with him a gigantic key which he proceeded to insert into one of the iron-bound doors. It took all the old man's strength to heave them open. A steep flight of stairs mounted from the second and smaller courtyard and it was up these that we had to climb. It was here that Bundi had been born and where he had lived until, issuing out of the large gates now several hundred feet below us, he had sailed for England and school. Now he returns only for his durbars, held every year on his birthday; then for a brief twenty-four hours the old place lives again, resounding to the clangour of trumpets and the sound of drums and the stamping of steeds. No more, though, would one see some dashing young Hara canter out from among the royal retinue to bewitch the world with his noble horsemanship, for the cortège arrives now in cars, trailing out behind it clouds of dust which a Rajput alone can breathe without inconvenience. One can understand how Bundi finds it impossible to live here; the past weighs heavily in the air, a fierce past. There had been days when the heir apparent would be given a pygmy sword and told to go out and test his skill on kids and lambs.

We were alone with Singh and the old gatekeeper and one gaunt

palace servant who stood staring at us. He was wrapped up from head to foot in bright orange and cradled a scimitar in his arms. As I remember him now, it seems to me that his clothes consisted of bandages wound round his emaciated limbs like a mummy, but this cannot have been; it is just the impression he gave; one had to look at him several times to make sure that he was really there and not a spectre. It was his silence and the way he stood there, in the first large room we came to, without moving except to shift the weight of his bones from one stalk-like leg to another.

From this long arched hall we climbed up to the durbar room; the whole time one is either climbing or descending steps, and they are so worn and shiny and some of them so high that one wonders how these people, lithe and muscular though we know them to be, but nevertheless not very tall, could manage them. I am over six feet tall and even I found them an effort. There is never any symmetry in these Rajputana palaces, and this one just seemed to grow out of the rock to which it clung. They say that there are subterranean chambers leading into the heart of the mountain and that there is a passage communicating with Taragarh, the great fortress which crowns the hill. They say that there is as much room under as above ground and it does not surprise me.

We saw a silver throne, the legs and sides hammered out like Tutenkhamen's royal chair into the semblance of antelopes and lions. There was also a large silver bed in which Queen Mary slept when she stayed with Bundi's father. They had been great friends despite the fact that Bundi's father did not speak one word of English. This royal lady all corseted in lace and the warrior King with long moustaches had charmed each other through the medium of an interpreter. Stylised and remarkably well-painted portraits stared down at us from the walls: fierce gentlemen ablaze with jewels worn over long sleeves of white linen were shown seated on a floor spread with gold-embroidered velvet, propped up against jewelled bolsters. Great circular shields and swords, an inevitable part of their paraphernalia, weighed down the multifold layers of their flounced skirts—kilts perhaps would be a better word, for there was nothing effeminate about their appearance. The painters had used the skirts as a decorative motif and had spread them out round these formidable figures, crinkled in many folds like the petals of a double datura.

Their moustaches and beards are remarkable, the moustache being brushed upwards, while the side whiskers, being long and black, fall outwards like the whiskers of a cat. The beards reach right down to the waist and divide in the middle of the chin into two tapering strands. This strange conceit does indeed give the sitter a cat-like expression.

We saw another room covered with eighteenth-century frescoes representing the Court of the period, and one can recognise the pool in one of the courtyards. Blue, green and white are the colours that predominate in the frescoes and under them runs a frieze of an earlier date, treated in a broader style, and very much simplified, showing combats with elephants painted in red, black and white. Opening off this room was a small family temple like the chapel of a great house. The walls were plain and whitewashed and there were some sacred instruments wrapped up in faded pink cotton. Chintz covered the altar, set with silver dishes.

Following Singh we crossed courtyards planted with great cypress, myrtles and oranges. At one point we had climbed so high that I could hardly stand on the shallow balconies built out from the wall; below me through the perforated marble yawned a drop of several hundred feet. The noises of the town floated up to us as do the distant barks of a dog in some lonely mountain valley. Height accentuates the silence.

I had not read Kipling's description of the palace until after I had been to Bundi, but, of course, it was lived in when he was there. He refers to himself as "the Englishman". "Here," he writes, "the tour of the palace ended; and it must be remembered that the Englishman had not gone the depth of three rooms into one flank. Acres of building lay to the right of him, and above the lines of terraces he could see the tops of green trees. 'Who knew how many gardens were to be found in the palace?' No one answered directly, but all said that there were many. The warden gathered up his keys, and, locking each door behind him as he passed, led the way down to earth. But before he had crossed the garden the Englishman heard, deep down in the bowels of the palace, a woman's voice singing, and the voice rang as do voices in caves. All palaces in India, excepting dead ones, such as that of Amber, are full of eyes. In some, as has been said, the idea of being watched is stronger than in others. In

Bundi palace it was overpowering—being far worse than in the green-shuttered corridors of Jodhpur. There were trap-doors on the top of terraces, and windows veiled in foliage, and bull's-eyes set low in unexpected walls, and many other peepholes and places of vantage. In the end, the Englishman looked devoutly at the floor, but when the voice of the woman came up from under his feet, he felt that there was nothing left for him but to go. Yet, excepting only this voice, there was deep silence everywhere, and nothing could be seen."\*

Perhaps I had found the halls of the palace haunted, but the great fort of Taragarh was straight from *Macbeth*, a place of stone and of wind—a highland chieftain's lair. Bundi's grandfather used to live in Taragarh for six months of the year. The royal quarters were locked when we were there, but we climbed all over the ramparts, right up to the central tower, reached by a long ramp. The last short part of the climb was made up steps formed of slabs of stone set into the thickness of the wall. An equally primitive railing made of undressed poles kept one from tripping. A tattered flag flew from the flag-post, indicating that Bundi was in residence down below in his new palace. The cannons were still there, ranged along the rampart, their muzzles pointing out across the rolling hills of Bundi. Aiming at what now? At time, and the Central Government that would by degrees sweep all this away. Some of the cannons were as much as a hundred and fifty years old and one or two of them had collapsed, lurching to one side on their brass-bound wheels. Singh told us that the garrison of the fort was still stocked with corn, but it must surely have rotted by now. The only company we had in this wind-blown eyrie was some grey falcons and a samba stag, who followed us round, peering at us through empty doorways, and over the tops of thorn-bushes, with great shining, soulful eyes. He fed on white-flowered plants that looked as if they belonged to the salvia family. Though wild they had been carefully propagated, for their leaves and branches were used in the olden times for making gunpowder. After being burnt to ashes they were mixed with sulphur. Though still plentiful in certain parts of the state the samba deer were slowly dying out, and Bundi had imprisoned the stag up here in order to have a good stallion to carry on the breed.

\* *From Sea to Sea* by Rudyard Kipling.



We actually saw some deer on our way back. It was dark and we caught their eyes in our headlights. Singh told us that tigers' eyes look like emeralds, and crocodiles' tiny and quite white. Tigers are seldom seen so close to the town, but crocodiles are to be found quite often. They live amongst the palms growing out of the warm, shallow waters, at the far end of Kipling's lake.

## UDAIPUR,

## 'THE CITY OF SUNRISE'

Udaipur is unique in India. It must lie, I think, within a magic circle, for it is a place of utter enchantment. It was not only the beauty of the place itself, but the atmosphere; it seemed as if with each clippety-clop of our pony's hoofs we were being drawn into another world, a world imagined in an oriental fairy-tale. There we sat, two by two, facing out at the back of our tongas, the dust bowling up from under our rickety wheels; this dust seemed to have a strange analogy with Alice's looking-glass: "*it was* certainly beginning to melt away, just like a bright silver mist." It cleared to reveal the guest-house, perched in a garden on the top of a hill. Everything in Udaipur is built up on a hill. It was once the Maharana's own personal property, a place to lodge distinguished guests. The state has now taken it over and runs it as an hotel. Fortunately it suffered no change in the transfer, for it has remained charmingly Victorian. Solid green shutters shade its quiet rooms, some of which are supplied with four-poster beds.

We would breakfast in the mornings on the wide veranda outside our rooms overlooking the lakes. On one of them seemed to float two shining white palaces, their walls rising straight out of the water like Palladio's St. Giorgio in Venice. The presence of so much water, an unusual sight in India, had its effect on the quality of the light—the colours were softer and there was an added brilliance in the air. If one looked very carefully at the palaces one saw what I can only describe as an effervescence of glitter emanating from their roof-tops. The terminals of their cupolas and towers seemed to sparkle like

crystal. True, I had noticed the brilliance of the air, but the first morning I saw this I thought my eyesight was playing me tricks and went to fetch the field-glasses; and the extraordinary thing is that they *are* actually made of glass and glow, amber, pale green and red. It had been a whim of the present Maharana's grandfather. Sensible, no doubt, to the fact that he ruled over an ethereal kingdom hardly to be counted as part of our planet, he gave orders to his builders to cut off all the plaster pinnacles and finials on his palaces and substitute for them diamond-cut globes of baccarat. Such a passion had he for things that glitter that even his furniture was made of glass. I saw it later on, put away in an unused pavilion. There was also a portrait of him showing him to have been remarkably handsome, and, as was to be expected from one so fond of the luminosity of things, he sparkled almost as much as his palaces, all set with great plaques of diamonds and hung with ropes of emeralds and pearls.

Udaipur is a real city, not so closed in as Bundi and altogether on a grander scale, but even so there is a certain similarity that one finds throughout all the Rajput states, for of the many different parts of India it is the Rajputana that has been the least spoilt.

To reach the palace and the landing-stage where the royal boats are kept, we had to drive through the town, up the main street, past the fruit vendors with their pyramids of tangerines and the silver-smiths with their bunches of bracelets, all dangling little bells. The houses were gay and most of them whitewashed, and nearly all decorated with primitive examples of folk art, ever-recurring pictures of a man on horseback armed with a sword, charging an elephant of war, the elephant on one side of the door and the horse on the other. These are painted with fine strips of bamboo or cane in simple blocks of colours, generally red and yellow and blue, picked out with a heavy black outline. Beyond a wide expanse or square, planted with feathery neem trees, rose the main palace, an imposing pile dating for the most part from the late seventeenth century. It soared skyward, glaringly white, five, six storeys high, the bottom storeys just plain wall with no openings; as they rose, they appeared to bloom into a bewildering collection of kiosks and latticed towers, terraces and balconies, all fretted and carved. It was up there that 'The Sun of the Hindus' lived.

The first two courtyards were deserted, echoing to the billing and

cooing of hundreds of white pigeons. It was not until we reached the third and last courtyard that we could see that the palace was inhabited. Here all was a-bustle with much coming and going. Two soldiers stood guard at the entrance. One felt the Maharana's presence up there, somewhere, in one of those latticed rooms.

If my description has made it sound like a palace in a *Thousand and One Nights* tale, it is as nothing compared to the fantasy of its interior: every room is a-glitter with inlays of glass and the courtyards shine with brilliant mosaics; in one of them enamelled peacocks' fan tails worked in squares of lapis lazuli. There is a room called the Ruby Mahal where the walls are all inlaid in chevrons of red and white glass. The floor is a mirror and the ceiling also, which, being domed and worked in many pieces, catches the reflections and scatters them into a thousand prisms. Every turn brings its surprise; in one of the rooms there are glass paper-weights inlaid in the thickness of the wall, and round them are set petals of different-coloured glass, as if they were flowers; the effect is enchanting. Then, all of a sudden, coming out on to one of the open balconies, one might be in Portugal, the whole thing being lined with a mixture of blue Cantonese and Delft tiles. Opening off this is a little cubicle made, one imagines, to escape to when the heat becomes really unbearable. It is a question of auto-suggestion, for the light is filtered through pale blue glass; and further to heighten the effect of coolness the frames of the windows are worked in a mosaic of turquoise-blue and pale green; the very air seemed powdered in blue, as though one were moving through water.

Reaching the top floor we came to the courtyards, pools and gardens and the many-columned halls where the nobles gather; an old noble was at this moment limping his way across the highly polished floor, leaning on the shoulder of his servant. Everyone in the palace seemed to be aged. The old man was magnificent, with a snow-white beard, dressed as one has seen the courtiers dressed in the Mogul miniatures, his waistband lower than his waist, bound very tight, the turban very tight also, down over the forehead and round at the back. His stick was mounted with a horse's head in jade with ruby eyes; his lean aristocratic hand was too frail to envelop it entirely. Tap, tap, tap, it went across the floor, and I just stood and stared. The old man's servant walked in front, which, as

he was leaning on him with his other hand, forced him to bend a little forward, a movement that made the long ropes of pearls he was wearing hang out from his white-clad chest. Nobody could have looked more distinguished.

We stayed up there, in the pillared halls among the fountains and the trees, for a much shorter period than we would have wished, but it was now luncheon time for the nobles in attendance on the King and they were all seated cross-legged on the floor, up against the marble lattices, being served by the palace servants from dishes made of loquat leaves. His Highness, we are told, eats at regular hours and is very fussy about it. His courtiers have to do likewise. It was natural that they should resent our wandering around in our stockinged feet amongst their platters of leaves—or were the dark looks they gave us just curiosity? They might well have been, for I don't think they see many Europeans.

The two palaces on the lake date from different periods, the southern one, called the Jagmandar, being for the most part early seventeenth century, and the other, the Bari Mahal, being much later, some of it frankly Edwardian. Seen from afar they look like strange-shaped marble boats, not unlike the marble boats on the lake of the Summer Palace in Peking. It was the Bari Mahal that we visited first. It is here that the Maharana lives during the summer months.

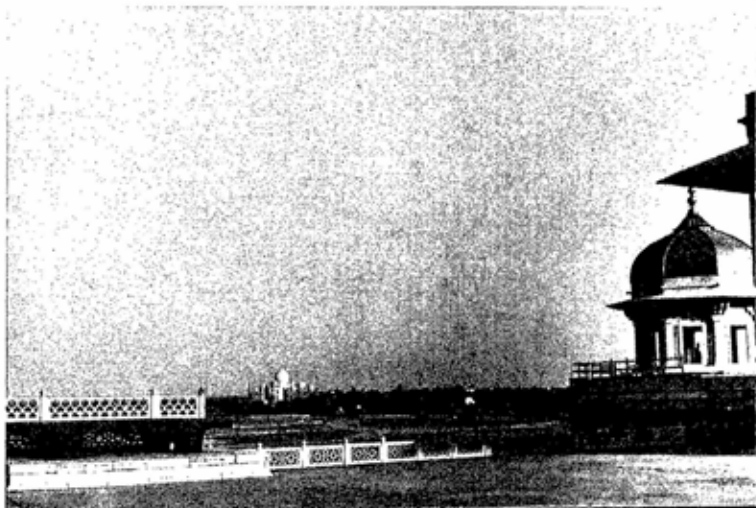
No one who has not experienced it can know the pleasure the sound of water lapping against the sides of a boat can give after days and weeks of dust and heat. We had hired one of His Highness's pinnaces, an ordinary rowing-boat, except that it was painted a bright lacquer-red and had moss-green velvet cushions. Two men rowed us, making a comforting squeaking with the oars in the rowlocks, an age-old sound that carried me back to drizzling days spent on lochs in Scotland. The water, it is true, was the same peaty brown, but that is where the resemblance stopped. It was early morning and the whole lake, or that part of it that touched the palace gardens, was dusted with the pollen from the mango trees, which the sun caught like motes of dust dancing in a sunbeam. There were tortoises paddling around, sunning themselves near the surface, and fish by the thousand, because they are considered sacred and consequently no one is allowed to fish them except the royal

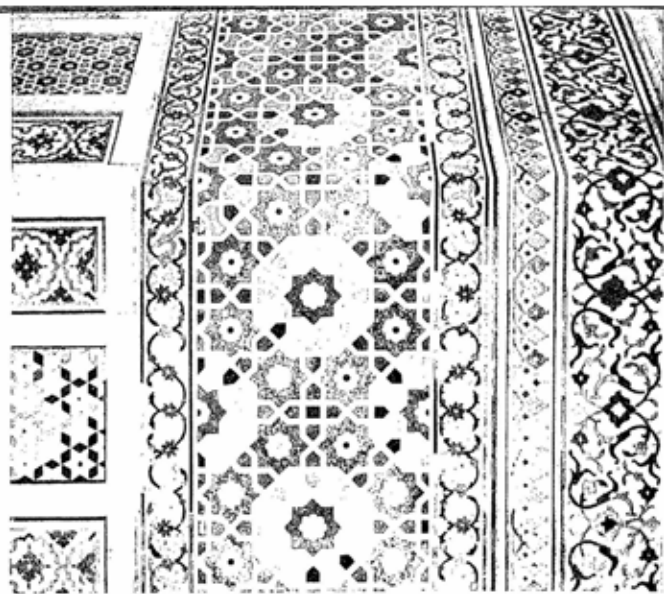


The Taj Mahal:

*Above*, photographed by the light of a full moon (page 213)

*Below*, from the terrace of the Agra Palace (page 203)





Marble inlay as practised by the Moguls

family. No one, however, could control the snaky-necked birds of the cormorant family nor the kingfishers that flashed across the still surface in constant pursuit of their prey. One would have thought they might have died of surfeit.

Just as we were arriving a slight breeze started up, crisping the lake and setting points of golden light dancing in our wake. We were making for a flight of marble steps that reached out at the end of a jetty, and as we drew alongside it seemed that the glaringly white walls had themselves been turned to liquid by the rippling shadows that played over them.

I hesitate to describe the Bari Mahal, frightened that I shall be accused of exaggerating. Even now, when trying to recapture it, I wonder if I have not imagined the whole thing. Not that it is a particularly remarkable building, lots of it, in fact, being in rather questionable taste; the strawberry-pink bathroom tiles, for instance, that line the stairway by which we entered. Rather it is the poetry with which the whole thing has been conceived. Had Giraudoux's Ondine become a lady of fashion round about the eighteen-nineties, this is the kind of place one would have expected her to live in. Oscar Wilde might have stayed here, or Whistler. But even this does not give one quite the right idea, for they would have been figures met in one's dreams, where places and people are never quite real.

The Bari Mahal had been shut up for the winter, but this only added to its charm. The gilded furniture upholstered in pink brocade was hidden under white cotton slip-covers, as were the carpets. The drawing-room is called 'The Light of the Moon'. The rooms are small and most of them have bay-windows that jut out over the lake, set on a skirting made of transparent alabaster. In 'The Light of the Moon' the doors are of mahogany but inlaid with panels of mirror, and all the table-tops are of glass. Fingers of sun crept in through the shutters, liquid sun that rippled over the crystal drops of the chandeliers. On the mantelpiece, instead of the usual clock, the Maharana has a collection of his ancestors' heads, life size, worked in fragile wax, delicately coloured. These are set under glass globes and dressed in turbans of artificial silk with plumes of tinsel. One wonders where he got hold of such things.

We were shown His Highness's private sitting-room, reached by a



lift connected with the landing-stage below. It is a pretty room, plastered in shining, ivory-coloured chunam into which had been worked a pattern of green and amber roses made from flat pieces of glass. The curtains, like the slip-covers on the chairs and sofas, are of faded chintz covered with pale blue delphiniums. Here, at last, was an Indian who understood our taste, or at least the taste of the period when he was young. He had transposed it, that is all, to suit its setting. It is a happy, gay house and full of light. The Maharana's bedroom is minute, hardly more than an alcove, and frescoed all over with a landscape showing mountain scenery and rushing waterfalls cascading down between tightly packed mango trees in which perch peacocks which leopards stalk, while tigers prowl around below. It is naively rendered, precise and detailed in the manner of Mogul painting, and has something about it of a miniature Douanier Rousseau.

On a panel facing the bed there is a surprisingly out-of-scale portrait of the Maharana's father, treated in the same way as the rest of the fresco. One could see that he had been very handsome. This must have been the charming Prince of Udaipur described by Pierre Loti.\* Loti had been musing down by the shores of the lake amidst the thickets of an enchanted wood, a dying wood when he was there. "The trees are of medium height, and the bushes, with their slender twigs, are like our own, but both trees and bushes are as leafless as trees and bushes are in France at the end of autumn. And yet it is spring-time here, a tropical spring, and the air is hot and stifling. Overhead is a cloudless and unchanging sky that stretches over the whole of India, just as it overhangs these forests. The weather is brilliantly fine, and so it has been for three years past, which is the reason why everything is dying. Flocks of superb peacocks strut up and down among the dead trees, under the greyish bushes and upon the ashy-coloured soil. We see them running along in single file with outstretched tails, the wondrous sheen of which looks like a spurt of green and incandescent metal," and then suddenly he heard horses galloping quickly through the trees. It was the King passing with some thirty of his courtiers on beautiful horses. "All the horsemen were clothed in white, and long robes enwrapped their slender forms. Their beards and moustaches were

\* *India* by Pierre Loti.

worn brushed upwards towards their foreheads after the fashion of Udaipur . . . The King galloped at the head of the troop. His beard was worn like the beards of the others, but a matchless beauty and distinction graced his features and his bearing.

"As I watched them disappearing through the leafless glades my thoughts were carried back to our own Middle Ages, and I fancied some prince or duke returning from the chase, followed by his train of knights and barons on the beautiful evening of a century that had long since passed away."

Loti is later granted an audience with the King, as he calls him. After crossing a number of courtyards he at last finds himself in the royal presence. "I am in a white gallery with marble arches, which overlooks a huge white terrace. On the ground is a linen cloth of snowy whiteness. There are no attendants present and in the whole extent of this fresh, airy, and spotless little desert there is no furniture save two gilt chairs that are placed in the centre. In the figure that stands there, alone and upright with outstretched hands, I recognise the horseman whom I saw the other evening. . . . He is clothed in a simple white robe, with a necklace of sapphires."

Loti is made to sit next to the Maharana, and, as he does so, an interpreter glides in silently and places himself behind his chair. "Each time that he speaks," remarks Loti, "he holds a napkin of white silk before his mouth, so that his breath may not annoy his lord—a useless precaution, however, for his teeth are white and his breath is sweet."

The silent prince, so rarely accessible to strangers, completely captivated Loti. "He possesses both charm and grace," he writes, "together with an exquisite courtesy that is tinged with a certain shyness, the kind of timidity that I have sometimes noticed in the very greatest aristocrats."

We were fortunate in being shown the women's quarters, for visitors, I believe, are not often taken into this part of the Bari Mahal. The rooms are more or less the same, except that they have shutters instead of doors. There appear to be a great many Bohemian chandeliers and all the windows are coloured. There is a small section of the palace that is earlier than the rest and in it, in a rather dilapidated state, is the most enchanting courtyard planted with orange trees and jasmine. The walls are inlaid with seventeenth-

century Persian glass mosaics made into panels of flowers, worked in a loose pattern with brown, green, blue, and silver mirrors. The surface of the walls has been made uneven purposely, so that no piece of mirror is quite flat, and in this way there is a play of light and the whole cloister shines.

A car was waiting for us on the far side of the lake, for we were to drive back to town another way. Loti's enchanted wood was no longer brown and dying, the monsoon rains having fallen regularly for the past few years. Nearing the town we came to the palace gardens shaded with huge trees. It was late afternoon and the peacocks, ruffling their iridescent feathers, were beginning to take note again of their surroundings, uttering piercing cries as they flopped down out of the trees where they had been roosting. Still in the palace gardens we came across a whole pack of the Maharana's hunting dogs pegged out under a banyan tree. They took not the slightest notice of us. It was a strange sight, seeing them curled up in hollows of dust, each one chained to a separate post.

Another time we were taken several miles away, to the west of the town, to a place where the wild pigs are fed. Every evening they come trotting in from the surrounding woods. Once away from the lake, the country very soon dries up. We were making for the hunting-box of Sir Sajjan Singh, the present Maharana's grandfather. It was a desolate-looking place set amongst scrub and thorns and guarded by an old man who was already standing at the gate when we arrived, warned, no doubt, by the dust we had put up as we sped across the plain. He salaamed very low. The royal princesses were expected also this same evening, and a red carpet had been rolled down the steps that led to the pavilion. We had to hurry.

The pavilion looked out over a bare arena of shelving rock. The pigs were in the process of arriving, hurrying on their stiff legs, ugly, wiry little creatures with bristling hair and small beady eyes. They watched us and, impatient at not being fed, set up a kind of snuffling whine. They weren't to know that they had to await the arrival of the princesses.

On the other side of the pavilion one looked down into a bare enclosure, something like a fives court, in which lay a large boar. He was kept to fight wild panthers when they could be caught. They

would be introduced into the arena through a trap-door on the far side of the enclosure.

What a bewitching hour it is in the Orient—the lull that comes with the dying of the sun. Nature, held in a vice-like grip by the heat of day, suddenly relaxes. It must be so, for it is then, I notice, that flowers smell their strongest. We could always get hold of one of His Highness's boats, and lying among the cushions we would have ourselves rowed slowly round the lake. The breeze that plays over the surface of the lake during the day drops with the sun, which sets the pale colour of champagne on the flat, oily water.

On one occasion some women from the town had rowed over to one of the small pavilions dotted about the lake, and they were singing in high, wistful voices as they washed and rinsed out their gossamer saris. We passed close to them and they smiled up at us, pretty lithe-limbed creatures, with garnet studs in their noses. Some of them were not only washing their saris, but themselves with them. They were strangely modest about it, dipping into the water fully clothed. Once wet, the sari is very revealing, like the draperies clinging to Greek statuary, wetted purposely by the sculptor that so it should retain its folds and at the same time show the contours of the limbs. Stooping with their backs to us, sluicing water over their shoulders, these dusky maidens did indeed look like statues, not Greek but Hindu; their lines were softer, their breasts rounder and the swell of their hips more abrupt, more exaggerated than in the Venus de Milo. Encouraged by flashing smiles from the boatmen, one of the girls waved at us with her arms straight above her head; as she did so her slim hand was outlined for a moment against the mountains behind her, range after range of them tucked in one behind the other, theatrically pointed, but not too high, looking absurdly picturesque.

Gradually the girls' voices died away as we moved across the water. We passed one of the nobles' houses. Not being built of marble it seemed to be slowly mouldering away in the damp emanations of the lake. The nobles, in all probability, cannot afford to keep them up, for they receive only a tithe of their former revenues. It was dark when we finally reached the southern island and hardly worth landing. I came back again early the next morning and found the Gul Mahal to be perhaps the most beautiful of all the palaces.

It is here that Prince Khurram, later to become Shah Jahan, lived when in revolt against his father, the Emperor Jahangir. It is deserted now and, like the nobles' houses, crumbling slowly away. The garden, however, is kept up, as the royal family are in the habit of coming here on picnics. A row of marble elephants guard the water steps, their trunks turned up in salute across the shining water towards the town palace. Behind them runs a screen of lace-like arches and flower-beds laid out in squares, planted with a jumbled mixture of nasturtiums, blue larkspurs, moss roses and verbenas. There are wild mandarines and some straggly-growing bushes of the yew family. Round the borders of the pools the gardeners have ranged rows of high, narrow flower-pots, none quite similar in shape, planted with a collection of mottled pinks and ferns. The smell of jasmine hangs heavy in the air, its sweetness cut with the farmyard smell of pigeons' droppings.

It was the head gardener who showed us round and he took us out to the other side of the island where he had his vegetables. We walked round the dusty paths shaded by trellised arbours grown over with grapes. Pink hollyhocks shot up amongst the leaves of some young banana trees, a wall of tender green from behind which came the sing-song notes of a water-wheel. No garden in India is complete without its gardeners and there were several of them here, young and supple, stooping down with their brooms, sweeping the fallen leaves into shallow baskets. This is certainly one of the things I miss the most about India, these brown, wisp-like creatures, with their soft looks, apparently sweeping their lives away.

Adjoining the royal vegetable garden I came across a spacious courtyard, rather more dilapidated than the rest. Giving on to it was a series of small rooms. I could not resist exploring and, pushing open the remains of a door, found myself in a circular domed room. Here too there was an overpowering smell of pigeons' droppings, and, in fact, a pigeon was nesting in one of the niches. Terrified at my intrusion she immediately deserted her nest, exposing two pure white eggs. But it was not the eggs that held my attention, for round the peeling wall ran a series of the most beautiful frescoes. I am not expert enough in the Rajputana's schools of painting to be able to date them accurately, but I should imagine they must belong to the early part of the seventeenth century. They were so washed out that

one could barely distinguish them. Large, strangely dressed figures stood out against a pale gold ground. Their clothes would almost proclaim them to have been English personages at the Court of Mary Tudor, which certainly cannot have been the case. Above them ran a frieze splodged with mould, sometimes disappearing altogether. It unrolled around the room, beneath the dome, a magic landscape: Prussian blue lakes and arsenic-green trees, marble fountains and animals like those to be found in a Gothic tapestry. A party of nobles gallop out of a glade towards the fields, on Etruscan red horses. Deer feed under a round tree painted pale coral, dotted with green fruit. The fresco is stylised like an early Chinese painting. No one, I imagine, will bother to save this lovely room. It has at the most a year or two to go before it will have disappeared entirely. How many beautiful things lie mouldering away in this land of dreams!

When we left the island the gardener handed us an enormous pawpaw, all marbled yellow and green. It was the sweetest I have ever tasted.

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## JAI SINGH'S JAIPUR

Jaipur is the present capital of Rajasthan and the best example of a planned Indian city. Maharajah Jai Singh II simply decided one day to build himself a new city. Amber, the existing capital, was perfectly satisfactory, so that there was little excuse for the change, other than to indulge his passion for building, and anyhow it was in the tradition of the great princes—witness Akbar's Fatehpur-Sikri, twenty miles from Agra, and Jodha's Jodhpur, an hour's walk from Mandor. Udaipur of Adai Singh is literally a stone's throw (on the map at least) from Ahar. With the exception of Fatehpur-Sikri, these new cities were a question of politics. Following the death of Aurangzeb and the general dissolution of the Mogul Empire, the Rajput princes felt free to descend from their mountain strongholds and establish themselves on a more fitting scale in the plains. Amber was adequate, but it was nevertheless a medieval fortress, and one imagines that Jai Singh, having managed to maintain the independence of his state while the rest of the country seethed with war and unrest, felt justified in building himself a new capital.

Fortunately for Jaipur, Jai Singh was not only an extremely capable politician, but also a very able town planner, for, considering its date (it was founded in 1728), Jaipur is a remarkable achievement. It could almost be the product of a board of contemporary architects, men with a social awareness who were familiar with the latest theories of zoning. Jaipur is laid out in rectangular blocks, cut into six equal portions by wide intersecting streets. The streets are over a hundred feet wide and paved, an unusual sight in India, where the towns have the appearance of having just grown up, haphazardly clustered as it were, along cow-paths. One can see at a glance that Jai Singh had a tidy mathematical mind, a masculine mind trained

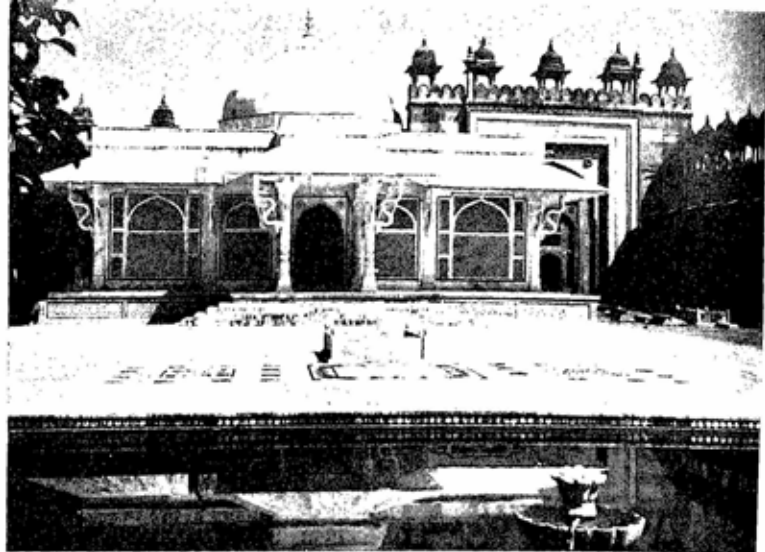


*Above, one of the pavilions of the Khas Mahal (page 223)*

*Below, Fatehpur-Sikri. One of the corner towers of the zenana (page 238)*

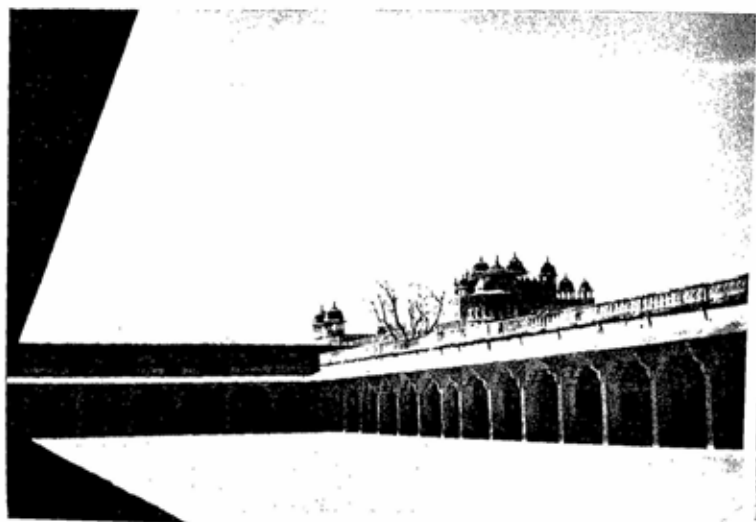






*Above, Shaikh Salim Chisti's tomb (page 250)*

*Below, the elephant stables at Fatehpur-Sikri (page 247)*



in geometry. He was among other things a celebrated astronomer and was employed by the Mogul Emperor Muhammed Shah to revise the calendar, which had become very confusing owing to past inaccuracies.

There is no question that Jai Singh was familiar with the European town-planning of his time, but what is still more interesting is the fact that Jaipur seems to have been laid out at its foundation on a scientific plan according to the traditions of the Hindu city builders, as given in the *Silpa-sastras*, a canonical treatise dating back to early times. As society was then divided up into castes, the zoning formulas provided for a distinct location of areas for the various castes and functions, such as agriculture and public gatherings. Another striking thing about Jaipur is the uniformity of its colour; the whole city is painted terra-cotta pink, the colour Bellini painted those charming though improbable-looking buildings that appear in the background of his pictures. As decoration over these brick-coloured walls there are stencillings of flowers and arabesques, so fine and white that they look like lace, the paper lace one finds on the top of a box of chocolates. Everywhere one walks one is confronted with these uncannily pink walls laced over with this bone-white stencilling, and nowhere are they more dazzling than in the palace. They are re-washed, I am told, every other year.

It is fascinating in India how every city seems to have its own colour scheme; here shocking pink and orange are the leitmotifs. The people have an innate colour-sense, very often choosing discordant combinations undreamt of by us. I remember one particular passage from Kipling's description of Jaipur. He is visiting the Maharajah's palace and writes: "A figure in saffron came out of a dark arch into the sunlight, almost falling into the arms of one in pink. 'Where have you come from?' 'I have been to see —' the name was unintelligible. 'That is a lie, you have *not*!' Then, across the court, someone laughed a low, croaking laugh. The pink and saffron figures separated as though they had been shot, and disappeared into separate bolt-holes. It was a curious little incident and might have meant a great deal, or just nothing at all." One must see this scene enacted against the terra-cotta walls that I have been describing. I can even see the colour now if I close my eyes and think about it.

From outside, the palace is light and airy-looking, with all its trellised balconies. Inside, it gives the impression of having been luxuriously furnished by Maple's, and I seem to remember a great deal of gold mosaic. Sightseeing in Jaipur is very expensive, for the present Maharajah runs the palace as a paying concern, in much the same way as do many British families with historic houses. We have to pay to get in, pay to see his collection of miniatures and pay to see the private apartments. The elephants of Amber are also his property and it is more than one's life is worth to try and arrive at the fortress-palace by any other means of locomotion.

In the private apartments I noticed that there were no stairs, only long ramps. I asked the reason for this and was told that the late Maharajah had been portly and not over-fond of walking. He circulated in a rickshaw, or what looked more like a goat cart in lacquered wood with yellow and grey curtains. It took four men to draw it. It is amusing to learn that when he was on his way to visit his wives in the zenana, he would only allow himself to be drawn thither by women.

This Maharajah seems to have had a penchant for wheeled vehicles, for there are no less than fifty carriages in the coach-house, most of them dating from his reign. There was one rather larger than the rest, slung on very high wheels. It was square in shape like a packing-case and upholstered inside with Genoese velvet, the whole thing having a kind of linen slip-cover over it into which had been stitched perforated metal plaques. It was the Maharanee's coach and there was room for twelve in it. The plaques were for the ladies to look through, and it used to be drawn by camels, which explains the high wheels. There were pony-traps and landaus and two very grand state coaches upholstered in gold-and-silver brocade with silver fittings. They were beautifully finished and lacquered by Carrington's in London, and under them I noticed two deep stone troughs running the length of each carriage. During the summer these are kept filled with water, which evaporates with the heat and keeps the air moist, thus preventing the lacquer from cracking.

But what fascinated me more than anything about the palace was Jai Singh's observatory, a vast quadrangle filled with curious masonry instruments invented and designed by the Maharajah him-

self: great twists and curves in grey-and-white marble set into red sandstone or pale yellow washed plaster, "strange things", as Kipling describes them, "of stone and mortar, of which people hardly knew the names and but very little of the uses." Their effectiveness, however, has been proved of late by competent astronomers, and plaques have been set up by each instrument explaining its uses, explaining them, anyway, to those fortunate people versed in the language of the stars.

Standing by a circular tube about twenty feet high, I read that it gives the altitude and azimuth of the sun and the heavenly bodies. Steps lead up to its rim, from where one can study the twelve horizontal sectors or walls that radiate from a central rod. Meaningful grooves are cut into the sides and the surfaces of the walls are engraved with a fine gridwork of black lines. There are zodiacal dials and a whole series of instruments that have the appearance of being launching platforms for space rockets. Mounting a great platform of stone, I found two hemispherical cups hollowed out in the earth. Their rims are of white marble and they are cut inside, so that one can walk down into them and look up from between belts of marble. A turbaned gentleman, a fellow sightseer, happened to be down there just as I was passing, and I asked him to pose for me to give me the scale of the instrument. I could tell from the expression on his face that he was equally mystified by the whole thing. His smile seemed to say: "It's all right, I should not worry. Jai Singh was a great man, *he* could strive to wring the mysteries from the skies. *We* don't have to bother. But it's all very wonderful, all the same." And indeed it was. I spent hours in the observatory, blinded by the refracted glare thrown off by the medley of angular walls. One did not have to understand the instruments; their shapes alone were extraordinarily stimulating, like abstract sculpture. Here was a perfect example of just how beautiful abstract form can be when made to a suitable scale and in a proper setting. The hours went by and the shadows crept over the face of the dials, measuring, for those who knew how to read it, the time of eternity. For me the shadows were important because of my camera, and it was no easy job getting the cusps and curves and abrupt corners to compose themselves.

There was one instrument that proved particularly hard, and that

was the great Yantra Samrat, or Prince of Dials, rising a hundred feet up into the sky. Steps led steeply up a central shaft to a small domed pavilion. Pointed arches pierce the great slanting wall which supports the steps; the scale of the thing is enormous, a man half-way up it would look like an ant. My turbaned friend, being wise, had fled the blistering heat of the afternoon, and I had no one to pose for me, only the crows. Curving up on each side of the stairs were what I suppose you would call two quadrants, and these in turn had stairs mounting the thickness of their curves, double stairs, in between which twisted a beautiful strip of smooth grey-and-white marble. It turned and rose as might do a steel spring. To be able to accomplish this turn the builders had been forced to use the marble in strips; it would have been impossible to realise this tilted curve in any other way. It rose in a sweeping line of sheer beauty. These twists, I read, are for finding "the altitude and zenith distance of the sun, and thence the local latitude". The climb up the stairs of the Yantra Samrat affected the muscles of my legs for several days. The steps are set at such a height and the climb is so abrupt that one is forced to use muscles that are seldom called into action in the human leg. One wonders how Jai Singh fared; he must have climbed them so often that in the end he became immune.

As in Udaipur, the State Guest House had been converted into an hotel, an unpretentious bungalow set down amidst green lawns. Gardening is a lost art for the Indians of today; they have retained the worst of our gardening craft and forgotten their own. You will find none of the subtleties of planting as practised by the Moguls, an all-white garden, for instance, for the giving of audiences at the time of the full moon. Now one gets the oddest mixtures: in this garden, for instance, hollyhocks are grown against a livid bank of mauve bougainvillea. They are two plants that, despite the Indian's daring sense of colour, could never look happy together. Like the French they have never really understood the herbaceous border, nor, I dare say, did many of the English officials' wives, whose efforts the Indians have rather pathetically tried to copy. It might be worse, I suppose; the lawns, at least, are beautifully shaved and watered and the hedges carefully clipped, and there is no end to the amount of sweeping that will go into half an acre.

There was actually dew on the grass the first morning I walked around the garden. I had gone down to see the peacocks which were roosting in the trees. They had chosen an apricot orchard as their particular haunt and I counted about twenty of them—but then we were right in the middle of the peacock country. Tree squirrels scampered about the place and there were steel-blue sun-birds which hovered around the hollyhocks, sipping the nectar through their hollow, needle-like tongues. Crows, as if conscious of their colour, pecked away appropriately at the yellow grape-like blooms of one of the acacia family. It seemed to be just wilful destruction on their part, for they were not eating the flowers, which littered the ground in tattered shreds, shaken there by their great ugly beaks. I thought I had imagined the dew, for by the time I had regained my balcony for breakfast the ground was as dry and as parched as it had ever been. In an instant the sun had resumed its burning and with the heat came the peacocks. We watched their performance every morning, the ridiculous dance that the male bird does in front of the hen. Spreading his tail wide he just turns his back to the hen bird, exposing a fluffy mushroom-brown posterior which vibrates up and down in a kind of static shimmy, an effort achieved by the manipulating of two thin black pinion feathers. Having thus supposedly riveted the hen bird to the spot, he then swings round and gives her the full effect of his splendid tail, which has stiffened by this time into a rigid fan which he rattles. The hen birds, as far as I could see, took not the slightest notice of the male's elaborate display and just went on quietly pecking. It must work sometimes, though I personally have never seen anything come of it. Much prettier were the hoopoes, tobacco-brown in colour with brown-and-white-striped wings and tails. Nervously they would alight on the lawn and then up would go the crests that stand out at the back of the head, matching their long beaks in size. They would look around with their heads on one side, listening, and then quickly plunge their long, slender, curved bills into the earth to extract the insects on which they live.

I agree with Mr. Huxley when he says that of all the animals he has ridden the elephant is the most uncomfortable. On the level, it is true, the motion is not so bad. "One seems to be riding on a small

chronic earthquake; that is all. The earthquake becomes more disquieting when the beast begins to climb. But when it goes downhill, it is like the end of the world. The animal", he continues, "descends very slowly and with infinite caution, plants one huge foot deliberately before the other, giving you time between each calculated step to anticipate the next convulsive spasm of movement—a spasm that seems to loosen from its place every organ in the rider's body, that twists the spine, and wrenches all the separate muscles of the loins and thorax."\* I am told that it depends very much on which animal you get, some having a much more comfortable gait than others. We certainly were not lucky and, to make matters worse, half-way up the hill our elephant suddenly lifted up its trunk and sprayed himself with luke-warm water which he was carrying. It is a habit they have and it protects them against too much dust and heat. They do not release it all at one time and keep it stored in their trunks for future douchings. I would not have minded the spraying had it just been fresh water, but it had a decidedly animal odour to it, the smell of a sweating horse. It was not unpleasant, but not, all the same, the kind of thing one wants to be saturated with. Jaipur, fortunately, does not boast very high hills, and our elephant felt that one spraying was enough. Quickly we discovered that the only way to sit on an elephant was to let oneself go entirely and not to try and resist the heaving of the huge shoulder-blades. So there we were with our heads in the air, watching the towers and walls of Amber joggling into position about us. I understand now, after having ridden an elephant, the abnormal height of the gateways that one finds built into the curtain wall of these fortress palaces.

Amber, as it stands now, dates from the seventeenth century and shows a very strong Mogul influence, and has the most beautiful of all the mirror rooms, more successful in its way than the *Galerie des Glaces*, or the Maria Theresa Mirror Room at Schönbrunn. Rooms in Indian palaces are seldom large, the halls of audience being pillared courtyards open to the skies. "One must not come to India", as Mr. Huxley writes, "expecting to find grandiose specimens of interior architecture. There are no long colonnaded vistas, no galleries receding interminably according to all the laws of per-

\* *Jetting Pilate* by Aldous Huxley.

spective, no colossal staircases, no vaults so high that at night the lamplight can hardly reach them."\* The rooms are all small, private rooms, places of intimacy adorned with elaborate decoration that is meant to be looked at from close to, and in detail. Such are the mirror rooms at Amber.

Not until it was too late did I realise that I had to have special permission to take photographs, and of all the interiors I had seen in India these mirror rooms are the most extraordinary. I have to rely on my memory and on notes scribbled hurriedly in *Murray's Guide*, and the effect, I am afraid, will be somewhat elusive; but perhaps this is the only way to render them in words. The first impression is of frost and snow, for the walls and ceilings are all of gesso, into which have been worked myriads and myriads of small pieces of mirror that have gone a silver-grey with age. The largest of the rooms has a ceiling patterned like a Persian carpet, the mirror and the plaster being worked alternately like the brass and tortoise-shell in buhl; the ribbing is carried out in fine white lines, for the ceiling is arched, broken into pockets and curves in the manner of Saracenic buildings; the effect is of grey lace and in the smaller rooms it looks as if spider's-webs have been blown up and held aloft by currents of warm air. In one of the rooms the mirror and plaster are picked out in gold, a filigree that enmeshes the whole ceiling; one feels that it has been put there to keep the ceiling in place, for without it it would be in imminent danger of blowing away, so gossamer-light does it appear. The smallest room being hardly more than a cubicle and each piece of mirror being slightly convex, it reflects itself interminably, so many times that it seems as if one were actually looking through the pieces of glass to depths behind. All is pattern: there is not a part of the palace over which the builders have not run their nervous hands, inlaying, cutting, carving; the doorways are worked in ivory and sandal-wood set in the usual complexity of pattern, and the windows are slabs of perforated marble cut like a honeycomb. Even the gardens on to which they look have been worked into parterres traced by a divider into hedges of geometry. The world viewed from up there must, indeed, have appeared a fragile and beautiful place.

Behind the palace is to be found a temple consecrated to Kali, or

\* *Jesting Pilate* by Aldous Huxley.



Durga, in her terrible form, the goddess of epidemics and earthquakes, of floods and storms, the one who snips the threads of life with her scissors. All morning we had heard the drums beating, and the monotonous ringing of the bell echoing through the silence of the lovely mirror rooms. It was a day dedicated to the insatiable Kali; already a goat had been sacrificed, and the blood was still wet on the paving stones where it had been decapitated. It was rumoured that the Maharajah himself was coming up later on to worship the goddess.

Taking my shoes off, I went in. Contrary to all the other temples I had seen, everything in it is sparkling and new. It is built entirely of the purest white marble. The doors are of silver and brass, all gleaming and worked in repoussé-ed panels; each panel represents different incarnations of Kali, her hands stained with red enamel blood, and blood on her tongue. In one panels he is stamping on the body of a victim she has just ripped open with her nails. Kali shocks us, but that is not the way the Hindus look upon her; we are foolish, they say, not to look upon the terrible aspects of nature as being as much a part of God as the pleasant. I am interpreting her, anyway, purely in her visual aspect, and know nothing of Kali's deeper significance.

The temple is small and the noise of the drum-beating was deafening, a terrible thudding that vibrated inside one's head. The shrine was hung in red silk and framed by two life-size banana trees worked very realistically in relief, the leaves, the flowers and the fruit being in different-coloured jaspers. Kali herself is all black and hung with the usual chaplet of skulls, but one cannot see her, or her gruesome jewellery, for she is entirely hidden under innumerable wreaths of jasmine. I press forward to see and am half dazed by the noise and the smell of the incense. A priest passes through the crowd, offering up a dish of flowers, followed by another priest, both in tightly fitting skull-caps and swathed from head to foot in blood-red silk. I was offered a flower and gave some money in return. Before I had time to realise it, the second priest had dabbed my forehead with a yellow spot. Then staring coldly into my eyes he offered me the sacred sugar of Kali. I dared not refuse it. It tasted cloyingly sweet, or so I imagined. The drum-beats continued, two now, one staccato and quick, the other heavy and low, interchanging and

alternating the tempo. On and on it went, incessant and penetrating, reverberating in this confined space like a great pulse beating. I could stand the atmosphere no longer and made for the door, embossed with those blood-smeared Kalis. The warm air seemed almost fresh after the incense-laden atmosphere of the temple. Walking across the courtyard, I went and leant over one of the marble balustrades for a moment or two, to get back my bearings.

From where I stood I could see down over the valley and the city of Amber, now reduced to a sparsely populated village. It was rocky and dry and I could see the road winding out towards Jaipur. Along it a plume of dust was advancing rapidly towards Amber. As it drew nearer, I saw that it was a car, a blue Bentley. It was the Maharajah's. We had been told he was coming to pray to Kali. Swiftly the car moved up the hill, and in no time His Highness was descending the steps to the temple. He stopped not more than twenty yards from where I was standing. I had met him once in Paris, at a dinner given for him at Maxim's. It seemed strange for me, at this moment, that I should find the sophisticated, polo-playing prince intent on worshipping Kali. I remembered him well, as he was then, charming and young with his beautiful Maharanee, a fragile creature in a shining sari with ropes of pearls that formed a deep collar round her neck. I remembered the way they dipped like the finest chain-mail, showing the hollows of her collar-bone. The pearls on her slim fingers were so large that they kept on slipping to the side. I have read somewhere that when the Maharajah of Jaipur is in gala dress, he must be held up by two gentlemen-in-waiting before he can carry the weight of the jewels he wears. I think the reference must have been to the present Maharajah's father. He wore bracelets of precious stones that reached from the wrist to the shoulder, which made it impossible for him to bend his arms. Round his neck hung necklaces of emeralds and rubies, while a cascade of blue diamonds the size of nuts covered his chest, reaching to below his waistline. His crown was made of enormous pearls interspersed with emeralds which ended in a sort of tail descending, to behind his knees.

I can remember the conversation at the dinner well. Jaipur takes his responsibilities seriously and he talked of his country with great feeling. In the old days, when a prince or princess died, the jewels

went into the family treasury and new ones were bought for the succeeding Maharajah. One of us brought the subject up, and Jaipur told us that it was still a custom but one that would surely die out. He has, no doubt, proved right. In Jaipur the treasures lie hidden in the depths of an old fort above Amber. There are two rooms with shelves arranged round the walls, on which the objects repose, each piece carefully isolated, so that it can be seen to its full advantage. Once in his lifetime the new Maharajah is allowed up there in the presence of the highest officials in the land. He is supposed to choose one thing for his own personal use. The head priest must also be present when he chooses, for the ceremony has a religious significance. Perhaps they judge the young ruler according to his choice and in the manner of his choosing. Jaipur has delayed the ceremony and still to this day they are waiting for him up at the old fort. He admits to being nervous about it. I can easily understand his point of view. There is something rather awesome about the procedure. There sits this glittering hoard like an Aladdin's cave, hidden in the darkness, lost to the world except for a few brief hours every so many years—a vault of jewels instead of corpses.



## TAJ MAHAL

We were now heading for Agra and Delhi, in the northern plains, the centre of the Mogul Empire. Am I going to be able to give a vivid enough picture of that remarkable family of men from beyond the Himalayas, who for over a hundred and fifty years dominated India?

The country slid by our carriage window, becoming flatter and drier with every mile. There was no doubt that the scene was changing, that Islam has placed its mark on this land—Islam that seems to love gloomy regions and gleaming deserts. Mosques replaced temples and minarets pricked the sky. A sober, precise and elegant art takes the place of wanton luxury. Under the burning clouds of dust and wheeling flight of crows, vultures and eagles, we were to find Agra. I wondered how much it had changed; whether the saying that the land in which the Mogul Emperors lived is now but a winding-sheet of ruined towers and palaces was true.

We were staying at the Hotel Cecil, in the cantonment area, a building of white columns and hanging baskets of ferns, one of the last strongholds of the British Raj. Our bedrooms were strung in a line giving on to a wide veranda from where we could walk out into the garden, planted with canna lilies and bougainvillea, sweet peas and antirrhinums, a hideous mixture of colours and flowers, but so typical of *our* India that one grows to love them.

Our rooms were separated from the main body of the building and to reach the dining-room we had to walk past an open corridor where the leading merchants of Agra had set up shop. Each time we had to run the gauntlet. The first few times we were rather grand about it, not even deigning to acknowledge the storekeepers' appeal

to inspect their wares. "It will cost you nothing to look!" they say ingratiatingly, knowing full well that once they see you hesitating they have you in their grip. Within a second of time their counters are crowded with a hundred and one different things, from embroidered tea-cloths to marble dishes. There was one particular dish I could not resist, inlaid with mother-of-pearl cut into the shape of jasmine flowers, inspired by the *pietra dura* work of the Taj Mahal. It is the same in every big hotel in India; there is always a battery of little men wanting to sell you things. They seem to pop up around every corner, and amongst them always is a barber and a masseur, sometimes one man practising both professions. I fought shy of the barber, but welcomed the masseur, especially after a long day of sight-seeing. In Europe you either have a massage table or the masseur stoops respectfully over your bed. Here they believe in a far more lively process. Laying you on a towel, they first douse you with olive oil; after this there is no holding them, for they literally jump all over you. They stand over you on the bed while they do your spine, they even sit on your behind while working at your neck. You never know where they are going to attack next for suddenly you will find them squatting at the end of the bed doing a leg, which they clasp between their two bare feet to keep it steady. Your nose, your hair, nothing escapes their attention. Massage is very popular among the people. Often in the bazaars one sees square platforms of wood raised a foot or two off the ground on which the masseurs perform on the public, generally in the evenings, by the bright light of acetylene lamps.

There was also a very persistent snake-charmer who lived at the dusty gates of this hotel. Whenever I saw him, he had a large python wrapped around his neck and seemed to be continually blowing on a mother-of-pearl-studded pipe with a bulbous end. The poor python led a terrible life, for it was held up for inspection by its owner every time a car passed the gate. He held it aloft between thumb and forefinger, squeezing it just behind the head.

We were very lucky in Agra with our guide, whom we procured through a young Sikh acquaintance of ours at the Government Tourist Bureau. The result was Salem Datta, who can hardly be classified as a guide. Datta, I suppose, is a man of about forty-eight, shapeless but not particularly fat, with thinning hair and a jovial

face. He has very white teeth, which he shows continually as he smiles, and wears horn-rimmed glasses with particularly thick lenses. As to his clothes, for the ten days he was with us they appeared always to be the same; loose cotton trousers that tie at the waist like pyjamas, and a khaki shirt sewn with large square pockets. Datta had been a lawyer in Calcutta and finding it a dull existence had given up his practice to write a history of the Moguls, about whom he proved to be a fund of information. He was a Hindu, but this in no way interfered with his understanding of this poetic family of great builders. He hired himself out as a guide to help defray his expenses while working on his book, which in any case would probably not bring him in large amounts of money. "At least this way", as he says, "I see the things I am fond of."

It should surprise nobody that our first visit was to the Taj Mahal. No building, I suppose, has ever been more often described, drawn and photographed. I was brought up on it at home. We have an ivory miniature in which it looks like a large pearl gleaming against a pale, blue-washed sky. The cypresses are so finely painted that they appear more as feathers than trees. Once you have seen it, somebody told me, it will haunt you ever after till your dying day. "It will float in the clear Tuscan air above the bell tower of Giotto and arise across the lagoon beside the Doge's Palace." Bernier tells us that the Taj Mahal is more worthy of a place among the wonders of the world than the pyramids of Egypt, which he refers to as "unshapen masses and heaps of stones". It is hard to believe that Bernier ever saw the pyramids, but since he was in Egypt one must suppose that he did.

Kipling had quite another approach. Sated with literature on the Taj, facts about its design and its proportion, having seen far too many execrable pictures of it in the Simla Fine Arts Exhibition, "having heard its praises sung by superiors and travelled friends till the brain loathed the repetition of the word", he dared not even approach it. Kipling had his first and only sight of the Taj while leaning out of a train window, as he approached Agra. Suddenly he comes upon it, "sulky with want of sleep, heavy-eyed, unwashed, and chilled". And, as he says, "under these circumstances everything, you will concede, is in favour of a cold, critical, and not too partial verdict." But in spite of this one sees that he was profoundly

moved. He first saw "an opal-tinted cloud on the horizon and, later, certain towers. The mists lay on the ground, so that the splendour seemed to float free of the earth; and the mists rose in the background, so that at no time could everything be seen clearly. Then, as the train sped forward, and the mists shifted, and the sun shone upon the mists, the Taj took a hundred new shapes, each perfect and each beyond description. It was the Ivory Gate through which all good dreams come; it was the realisation of the gleaming halls of dawn that Tennyson sings of; it was veritably the 'aspiration fixed', the 'sigh-made stone' of a lesser poet; and over and above concrete comparisons, it seemed the embodiment of all things pure, and all things holy, and all things unhappy. That was the mystery of the building. It may be that the mists wrought the witchery, and that the Taj seen in the dry sunlight is only, as guide-books say, a noble structure. The Englishman could not tell, and has made a vow that he will never go nearer the spot, for fear of breaking the charm of those unearthly pavilions."\*

Rather dampingly King Edward VII when Prince of Wales observed that most writers who have tried their hands at a description of the Taj set out with the admission that it is indescribable and then proceed to give some idea.

No, on the whole I approached the Taj with considerable trepidation. In spite of all I had read and seen, I knew I did not really know what to expect. Not everybody sings its praises. Aldous Huxley, for instance, is very scathing about it. He starts off fairly enough, referring to it as being milk-white amongst its dark cypresses and flawlessly mirrored in long canals of water. It is, he says, positively the *Toteninsel* of Arnold Böcklin come true. And then, quickly, the tongue goes into the august cheek. "And its costliness is fabulous. Its marbles are carved and filigreed, are patterned with an inlay of precious stones. The smallest rose or poppy on the royal tombs is an affair of twenty or thirty cornelians, onyxes, agates, chrysolites. The New Jerusalem was not more rich in variety of precious pebbles. . . . This inordinate costliness is what most people seem to like about the Taj. And if they are disappointed with it (I have met several who were, and always for the same reason) it is because the building is not quite so expensive as they thought it was." And then, further

\* *From Sea to Sea* by Rudyard Kipling.

on, he really explodes. "Architecturally," he roundly declares, "the worst features of the Taj are its minarets. These four thin tapering towers standing at the four corners of the platform on which the Taj is built are amongst the ugliest structures ever erected by human hands. True, the architect might offer a number of excuses for his minarets. He would begin by pointing out that, the dimensions of the main building and the platform being what they are, it was impossible to give the four subsidiary structures more than a certain limited mass between them, a mass small in proportion to the Taj itself. Architecturally, no doubt, it would have been best to put this definitely limited mass into four low buildings of comparatively large plan. But, unfortunately, the exigencies of religion made it necessary to put the available mass into minarets. This mass being small, it was necessary that minarets should be very thin for their height.

"These excuses, so far as they go, are perfectly valid. By the laws of religion there had to be minarets, and by the laws of proportion the minarets have to be unconscionably slender. But there was no need to make them feebly taper, there was no need to pick out the component blocks of which they are built with edgings of black, and above all there was no need to surround the shaft of the minarets with thick clumsy balconies placed, moreover, at just the wrong intervals of distance from one another and from the ground.

"The Taj itself is marred by none of the faults which characterise the minarets. But its elegance is at the best of a very dry and negative kind. Its 'classicism' is the product not of intellectual restraint, imposed on an exuberant fancy, but of an actual deficiency of fancy, a poverty of imagination."\*

Opening *Murray's Guide*, I read that the best time for a first visit to the Taj is late in the afternoon. I remember an old lady in Somerset having told me that one should sail down the Jumna to see it. I can hear her saying it now, a tired voice coming to me across the tea-table set in the garden. "Go, my dear, go to India. The Taj alone is well worth the journey." A crooked smile scissored across her once beautiful face. She had been a woman much loved by men, and in that smile I had caught a faint hint of nostalgia and much tenderness. Was she thinking, perhaps, of the sorrow of the man who built it for the woman he loved? Like a Bengal Army man's

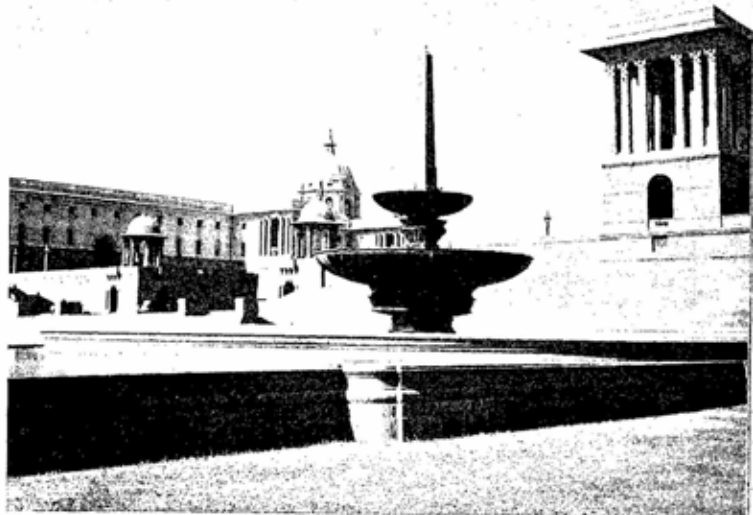
\* *Jesting Pilate* by Aldous Huxley.



wife who, when asked by her husband what she thought of the Taj, answered that she could not tell what she thought. "For I know not how to criticise such a building, but I can tell you what I feel. I would die tomorrow to have such another over me!"

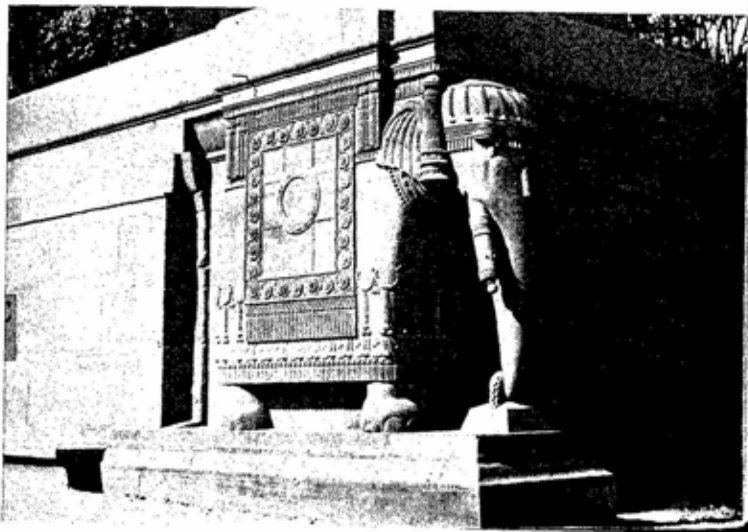
There was no question of approaching the Taj by boat, for the Jumna was in very low spate. We did, however, follow Murray's advice and wait till late afternoon. Hiring a tonga, and in the company of Datta, we drove out under the eucalyptus trees, down the dusty roads to the bend in the river where the Taj stood.

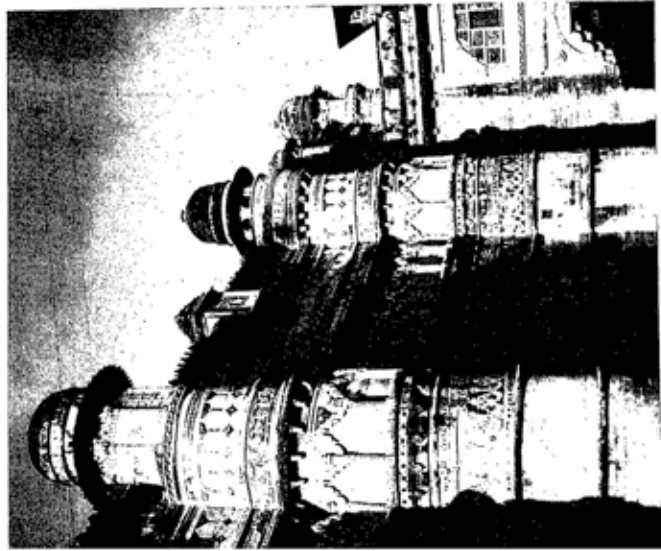
One's first impressions are so important on an occasion like this. It had been the same with the pyramids. Slowly, pitching on our camels, we had wandered in the night, looking and wondering and silent. The toadying guides, the fortune-sellers, and the hawkers of souvenirs had crawled back into their lairs to sleep; so also had the noisy children on their galloping ponies. Once more that vast necropolis had become the city of the dead, the dwelling of those who died over three thousand years ago. How alive, though, they had seemed that night! And how beautiful was the Taj when we first came upon it! It seemed to be carved in mellow ivory, smooth, solid ivory of every tone, from palest cream to a soft, deep ochre. Every change of light seemed to lend new graces to it. But what really were my first impressions? Surprise, I think, at its immense size, and then, once closer to the mausoleum itself, the feeling one has of infinite sadness. I remembered Huxley's criticism of the minarets, and on first sight perhaps agreed with him. But was the Taj's elegance dry and negative? It was too much to take in all at one time. I came back to it repeatedly, and with each visit became more and more fascinated with its history. Catching phrases echoed through my mind—"harmony of proportion", "grace of form". Yes, it was very beautiful, but more than anything it was its size that I had to get used to. It was so much larger than I had expected. A square with its corners cut off, it sits up on a great marble platform, measuring, to be exact, three hundred and thirteen square feet. One sees hundreds of photographs of the Taj, but seldom one with people. It was seeing a group of Indian women walking across the vast platform between one of the minarets and the mausoleum itself, their saris floating in the evening breeze, that gave me my first inkling of its scale. The span of the great alcoves or arches cut into



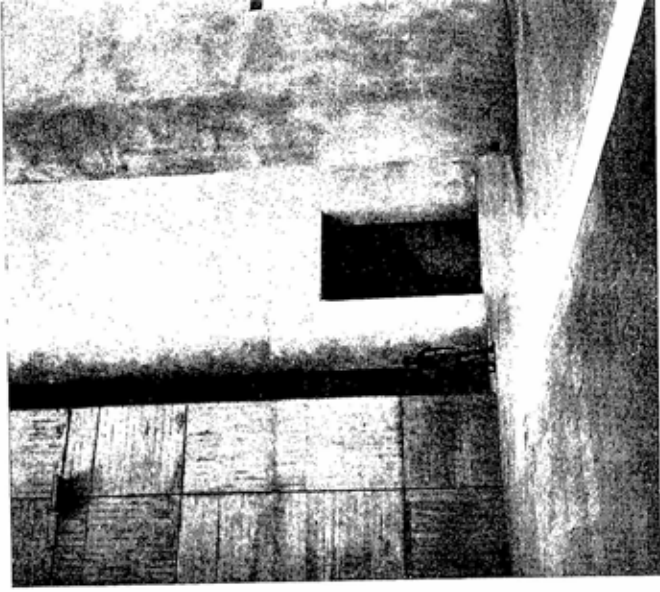
*Above, New Delhi: view of the Secretariats (page 254)*

*Below, one of Sir Edwin Lutyens's stylised sandstone elephants (page 254)*





Gwalior: the Chit Mandir, or Painted Palace  
(page 257)



Chandigarh: guard on duty outside the High  
Court (page 266)

the walls are staggering once one is close up to them. Framing the large central arch are friezes of script from the Koran inlaid in black slate. The letters are graduated in size to appear equal from below and it is a favourite trick with the guides to ask one how far up one thinks one can reach. The answer, if one is tall, might be the third loop of the last letter. One is invariably wrong. I could not even touch the last small dot.

Although, as Mr. Percy Brown says in his book on Indian architecture,\* the tomb building itself was the *raison d'être* of the undertaking, the main structure actually occupies only a relatively small portion of the architectural scheme on the whole. The Taj Mahal is in reality an immense enclosed complex of buildings, comprising the central mausoleum flanked on the west by a mosque and on the east by a similar building acting as a guest-house for those who come to pay homage on the anniversary of the Empress's death. There are other smaller buildings. The massive walls enclosing the garden with its canals and its pools have broad octagonal pavilions at each corner and are entered by several doorways, the main entrance being a monumental gateway or three-storeyed building of many rooms. Beyond this entrance are courtyards, stables and outhouses, and through another gate the remains of a whole town built to house the twenty thousand workmen Tavernier tells us were employed daily in building the Taj. Certainly the Taj Mahal can vie with St. Peter's in Rome for the grandeur of its approach.

Tavernier, the French traveller and jeweller, who visited the Mogul Court during the reigns of both Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, tells us in his memoirs that the Taj took fifteen years to build and that its total cost was over four hundred and eleven lakhs of rupees, about five million pounds sterling, an enormous price in those days. Not only this, but Tavernier confirms the fact that Shah Jahan intended to build another tomb for himself, a replica of the Taj in black marble, the other side of the river. The two were to be joined by a flying bridge. Internal strife and trouble with his ambitious son, however, put a stop to his plans.

One cannot but help being moved by the story of Shah Jahan and his beautiful Mumtaz Mahal. The Empress's correct name was

\* *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)* by Percy Brown. D. B. Taraporevala, Sons & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1942.

Arjumand Banu Begum, but she is far better known by the title her husband gave her, Mumtaz Mahal, or 'Chosen One of the Palace'. They were married in 1612 while the Emperor was still the heir apparent. It must have been a marriage of state, for Mumtaz Mahal was the Empress Nur Jahan's niece, being the daughter of Asaf Khan, Nur Jahan's brother. Mumtaz Mahal was nineteen when she married Prince Khurram, himself still a young man. She was very beautiful, and the Prince fell madly in love with her. Reading all the descriptions there are of her, one sees her to have been an enchanting person and highly intelligent, tender-hearted and kind to the poor. She was at the same time very astute politically, being made Keeper of the Royal Seal. No important affairs of state were decided without her having been consulted first. As a couple they were inseparable, Mumtaz Mahal accompanying her husband even on his campaigns. It was on one of these campaigns, an expedition to the Deccan to crush an unruly Governor, that the Empress died while giving birth to a daughter, her fourteenth child. She was only thirty-nine when she died, Shah Jahan being in the second year of his accession to the throne. The Emperor was inconsolable and shut himself away, refusing to see anyone. In two years his hair had turned silver-grey.

If what history relates is true, it was the Emperor's excessive love of his wife that really killed her. Two days before the child was due to be born, Mumtaz Mahal believed she heard the baby cry in her womb. Sending for the Emperor she told him "that she believed no mother had ever been known to survive the birth of a child so heard, and that she felt her end was near". The distraught Emperor immediately summoned all the midwives of the city and all his Secretaries of State and privy councillors to prescribe for her, which they unfortunately did not hesitate to do—with, as was only to be expected, fatal effects. While dying, Mumtaz Mahal made two last requests, one that the Emperor should never marry again, and secondly that he would build for her a tomb which would perpetuate her name.

The Taj was begun in 1632 and completed in 1647. There seems to be no truth in the assertions of Father Sebastian Manriques, a Spanish Augustinian friar, that the architect of the Taj was a Venetian jeweller and silversmith named Geronimo Veronco. Slec-

man's notion that Austin of Bordeaux, a skilled French engineer and craftsman employed by Shah Jahan, was the architect is equally erroneous. One can see how someone familiar with the West could easily be convinced of the European influence in the Taj; walking up there, on the great marble platform of the mausoleum, one cannot help but give credence to the story. Surely the man who built the Taj must often have looked at the cathedral at Pisa, that long stretch between the cathedral and the baptistry—the whiteness, even the disposition, of the buildings. But I think that there can be no doubt that the Taj is entirely Mogul; the Emperor Humayun's tomb, built a hundred years earlier, is perhaps the best argument to substantiate this, for certainly it served as a model for the architect of the Taj; besides which there is in Agra a contemporary manuscript written in Persian, the language of the Court at that time, giving the full details of the building of the Taj, including the names of the different master-craftsmen in charge. Chirangi Lal, we know for instance, was in charge of the *pietra dura* work, and the names of his chief subordinates are given, including two flower carvers from Bukhara. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this manuscript, and it makes no mention of any Europeans, but quite definitely states that the chief architect who co-ordinated the work of all the master-craftsmen was a man called Ustad Isa, who came supposedly from Turkey; this is not certain, but at all events he was a perfectly good Mohammedan. Besides which, Shah Jahan was passionately fond of building, himself, and certainly had a hand in the general design; it is, after all, the conception of a mind used to seeing things done on a large scale. A possible explanation of the alleged Italian attribution comes from the fact that Geronimo Veroneo was invited, with others, to submit designs when Shah Jahan was looking for an architect worthy of what he wished to be the most beautiful building in the world.

Looking through all the papers on the Taj, I came across an amusing story regarding Ustad Isa. Having made the foundations of the mausoleum, he asked the Emperor for three months' leave to attend some personal business. He was granted his request and forthwith disappeared. Three months went by and Ustad Isa's leave was up, but there was no sign of him. Time dragged on, four months grew into six, there was much agitation at Court. Eventually a year

had gone by and there was a suggestion of taking another architect. Just as they found a substitute, Ustad Isa turned up. Not unnaturally Shah Jahan showed his displeasure. "But, Your Majesty," answered the architect, "it was for the good of the building that I disappeared. I wanted to make sure that the foundation was sound and so let it lie for a year. Had I asked outright, you would have refused my request." Situated as it is, right on the banks of the Jumna, the water awash its walls during the monsoon, it is indeed very remarkable that the foundations have not slipped even an inch.

The Taj, like any other great architectural work, should be seen repeatedly under different lights. The first time I went the sun was already low in the sky, but the marble was still hot to my stockinged feet as I approached the great mausoleum. Under the centre of the dome, enclosed by a trellis-work screen of white marble, lay Mumtaz Mahal's tomb, or rather the replica of her tomb. As in nearly all Moslem-Indian sepulchres, the body rests in the vault at ground level. The elaborately inlaid sarcophagus that one sees, shaped like a pen-box, is an exact copy of the one resting below, only highly decorated, while the original is usually perfectly plain. It stands on a plinth sprigged over with flowers, *pietra dura* work representing a carpet: lilies in lapis lazuli from Ceylon and jasper from Comboy, carnations in cornelians from Baghdad, and roses in chrysolite from the Nile. There are other flowers that were hard to identify. The sarcophagus itself is more austere, inlaid in script with the ninety-nine names of Allah.

It was quite silent inside and lighted by a haze of gold from the sinking sun. The light was filtered through a double screen of fretted marble that formed the windows, honeycombed slabs, one on the outside and one on the inside face of the walls. In our climate, as Mr. Fergusson remarks,\* this would produce nearly complete darkness; but in India, and in a building wholly composed of white marble, this system of double screens was required to temper the glare that otherwise would have been intolerable. The light was incredibly beautiful, soft and subdued, falling in coins of gold on the soap-smooth marble floor. Caught in this haze the screen round the cenotaph looked like a spider's web hung with jewels; it had the lightness of a muslin dress painted by Botticelli; as in the famous

\* *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* by James Fergusson.

'Primavera', the whole place seemed to be radiant with flowers. This screen, Datta told me, was substituted by Aurangzeb for one of gold which was originally placed round the cenotaph by his father. I cannot help thinking that, although no doubt changed for economy's sake, the present screen gives a far better effect.

The Empress's tomb lies, as might be expected, in the centre, under the dome, and on an axis with the composition of the Taj as a whole—in a straight line, that is, with the central watercourse and the main gateway. It comes as a surprise to find Shah Jahan's sarcophagus hardly six inches distant from his wife's, crammed-in a little off to the side. There seems to be no doubt that this is not what Shah Jahan intended. We know, in fact, from Tavernier that he had planned to build his own mausoleum opposite to the Taj, across the river. Again Aurangzeb comes out of it in rather an unattractive light. Unwilling to spend the money to build his father a mausoleum of his own, he just crowded him in with the beautiful Mumtaz Mahal. One supposes that he managed to persuade the people that he was doing it out of sentiment.

Another strange detail that Datta pointed out to me was the fact that while the Empress's sarcophagus bears the prescribed ninety-nine names of Allah, there is not one mention of Allah on that of the Emperor. Apparently his bigoted son did not consider his father a good enough Mohammedan to warrant the usual religious procedure.

The honey-gold light clotted and faded to a white grey as I wandered around through the empty chambers opening out from the octagonal central hall. It still just caught the dados carved in high relief forming a circle of flowers that ran around the walls. Then this too died, and a chill crept into the place. The Cairene lamp donated by Lord Curzon shone out over Mumtaz Mahal's tomb. A late party of sightseers, a family from the Punjab, had drifted silently in on soft brown feet. There was a young girl amongst them, her jet hair caught back in a circlet of jasmine. She had extraordinary eyes and a most lovely line from her jaw sweeping down to the base of her throat. It was partly the way her head was set on her shoulders. I watched her as she stood looking upwards into the double-line of the dome. I noticed that she had tears in her eyes. Datta told me that women still come to pray in the Taj, pray



that they may be loved by their husbands in the same way that Shah Jahan loved his beautiful Mumtaz Mahal.

This party had one of the guardians with them, a red sash over one shoulder, fixed with a brass plaque proclaiming his office. Datta touched my arm: "Listen to him, he is going to call out the opening bars of the Mohammedan's call to prayer." High and nasal, the notes floated up into the great empty space, where they echoed—three, four times, tailing out into a whisper for the fifth reverberation. It was infinitely sad.

Every day we were in Agra saw us at the Taj, sometimes in the morning, when all was dazzling whiteness, a whole series of reflections mirrored in the fountains and the lotus pools built to catch the glittering mausoleum. How beautiful the swell of the great central dome, the way it grows up from the base with exquisite tenderness and subtlety! If they could not carve Mumtaz Mahal's statue, they could at least satisfy Shah Jahan's desire for a lasting monument to her beauty by creating an architectonic symbol of her loveliness. The Taj is India's Venus de Milo; for like Philæ, in Egypt, a Ptolemaic temple built in the time of Cleopatra, it is undoubtedly feminine.

But late afternoon is the best time, one can then watch the light steal softly round the curve of the dome, flushing the smooth surface of the marble. I suppose one of the most impressive things about the Taj is the purity of its material, the whole thing being built in faintly veined marble coming from the vast quarries of Rajputana.

Datta took us on to the roof, and on our way up there we passed a large square room built in between the thickness of the walls. In it squatted several men whittling away at pieces of coloured marble; replacements for some of the exterior inlay. Up on the roof we walked into the dome, or rather, into the space between the two domes. Vaguely, in the darkness I could see the ghostly white shape of the outer shell rising above me, supported only by counter-thrust. Datta tells us that it is so hot in there during the summer that one can boil an egg. I can well believe it.

I am still unable to make up my mind as to whether I agree with Huxley about the minarets. One interesting thing about them is that their centre of gravity is not in the centre but at the corners, so that if for some reason or other they happen to fall, as they might do

if there was an earthquake, they fall outwards and do not damage the central pavilion.

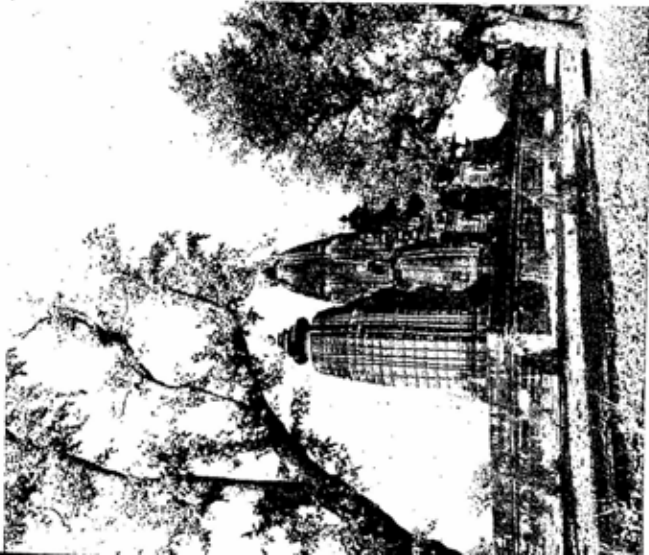
Datta was full of interesting facts; he told us one day that the Taj Mahal had narrowly escaped being sold at auction to a house-breaker for the value of its marble. This gave us a slight jolt, for the British were the culprits. I found out afterwards that Lord Curzon mentions the fact in his speech ratifying the Ancient Monuments Act in 1904. Lord William Bentinck was the Governor-General at the time, the same Governor-General who sold the marble bath in Shah Jahan's palace, which had been torn up a few years earlier by Lord Hastings as a gift to George IV, and which somehow had never been dispatched.

As it was too early for the full moon the first time we were in Agra, I came back for it especially one night from Delhi. It is then, perhaps, in the cold splendour of the moonlight, that the Taj is at its most beautiful. Losing its substance, the dome becomes as thin as the air and seems to hang amongst the stars like a great gleaming pearl. This is not, I see, what Sir Edwin Lutyens felt about it; he noticed that it all became blurred and indefinite, "the pattern disappeared and the arch forms merged into a fog of white reflections." To his wife, not to the Vicereine, so dutifully loyal to the Mogul tradition, he added, "It is wonderful, but not architecture, and its beauty begins where architecture ceases to be."

THE COURT  
OF THE GREAT MOGUL

Immediately after luncheon are the dead hours in India, and there is nothing for it but to barricade oneself in one's room. The shutters tight closed and the fan full on, I would take to my bed, stripped except for a small towel. It was in this subaqueous light that I read up on the Moguls. They are a fascinating family, particularly Akbar, the contemporary of Queen Elizabeth I, who, like the great Queen and her father before her, seemed to epitomise the spirit of the age. But we must see this extraordinary man at Fatehpur-Sikri, the new city he built for himself, twenty-five miles from Agra, founded on a superstition and deserted twenty years later, never to be lived in again; but this is another story. Here, for the moment, we are more concerned with his forebears and his descendants. Their names or titles sing themselves in sonorous Persian cadences as they go: Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb Alamgir. Aurangzeb, the least attractive and the last of the great Emperors of his line, we have already dealt with.

The Emperor Babur, the first of his line, was a Turk from Ferghana, a petty principality beyond the Oxus more or less dependent on Persia. Descended from Timur the Lame on his father's side, and the famous Mongol King, Genghis Khan, on his mother's, there ran in his veins the blood of the two greatest conquerors that Asia had ever seen. He had no love, however, for his Mongol connections. In fact, he and his successors suffered the appellation Mongol, or Mogul, to their dynasty because it was a name of fear well known from China to the Adriatic. Babur's father, who had been Governor of Kabul and



The temples of Khajuraho (page 261)



"And the loose loves carved on the temple of stones" (page 263)



*Above, the Banihal Pass into Kashmir (page 274)*

*Below, the first miles were cloisonné with flooded paddy fields (page 274)*



King of Ferghana, died when Babur was still a young man, leaving behind him various factions whose leaders all contended for the throne. Babur was outwitted in the fight and it was then that he conceived the idea of conquering Hindustan. Subjecting first Afghanistan and then Kashmir, he set out on his march south.

The dawn of the sixteenth century was a momentous time for India. On the north-west frontier were the Moguls under Babur, while on the south-west sea front were the Portuguese in the person of Vasco da Gama, through whom India's direct intercourse with Europe had begun. As I have mentioned in a previous chapter, India had been a prey already to Moslem invaders since the eighth century. The habit of invading India became almost perennial. The booty these small but well disciplined Moslem forces carried off with them was perhaps the richest ever seen, "jewels and unbores pearls, and rubies shining like sparks, or like wine congealed with ice, emeralds like fresh sprigs of myrtle and diamonds in size and weight like pomegranates". At Mathura, for instance, "five idols of red gold, five yards high, with jewelled eyes" were carried off. There is also the terrible story of Mahmud of Ghazni's raid on the Temple of Somnath, dedicated to Shiva. "It housed a massive stone *lingam* five cubits in height, which was regarded as being of special sanctity and attracted thousands of pilgrims. It was bathed every day in water brought all the way from the Ganges and garlanded with flowers from Kashmir. The revenue of ten thousand villages was assigned for its support and a thousand Brahmins performed the daily ritual of the temple." Just from this short description can be imagined the riches the temple contained—chains of massive gold, bells and jewel-encrusted columns. One hates to think of the vast quantity of Hindu sculpture that must have been destroyed. The raiders would take the statues out and heat them over bonfires and then pour vinegar or cold water over the hot stones until they cracked.

The Moslem conquest of India is as tantalising to read as Cortes's conquest of Mexico, for again it is a question of a handful of men overthrowing a whole empire. These Moslem forces were always small; Babur's whole army, including camp-followers, amounted to only twelve thousand men, while in the battle of Talikot, in the south, we hear of the Hindus mustering three quarters of a million men with two thousand elephants against a Moslem army of half

their number. It was a question of discipline on one side and lack of skilled command on the other. Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that Babur should have turned his face towards India. "With the sun in Sagittarius" [November the seventeenth, 1525], Babur writes in his diary, "I set out on my march to invade Hindustan." Seizing Delhi and Agra he founded what his grandson Akbar was to turn into a powerful empire including the whole of India.

Babur seems to have been a remarkable person: good-looking, and unaffected. There are several miniature portraits of him, one of these in the British Museum showing him with an alert, quizzical expression and a tanned face weathered by years of exposure on different campaigns. He was an expert swordsman and archer, he swam and rode, and drank an inordinate amount of wine but was always cheerful in his cups—drank in fact like a gentleman. He must have been enormously strong, for we read of his running along the battlements of a town and leaping over the embrasures with a man under each arm. He was what one might call a typical man's man, but he had more depth and sensitivity to his character than this, as one sees in his diary, a vivacious narrative describing himself and his habits. No other oriental prince has ever left us so authentic an autobiography. We see him in turn as a philosopher, a hunter, an enthusiastic traveller, and an insatiable sightseer. His love of scenery and flowers turns him at times into a poet and certainly proclaims him an expert gardener. Lingering in an orchard he writes, "One apple tree had been in excellent bearing. On some branches five or six scattered leaves still remained, and exhibited a beauty which the painter, with all his skill, might attempt in vain to portray". In another part and in quite a different vein he paints an amusing and vivid portrait of his own father. One can see him as a subject for Teniers or perhaps Hogarth. "Umar Shaikh Mirza was a man of low stature, had a short bushy beard, brownish hair, and was very corpulent. He used to wear his tunic extremely tight; insomuch that he was wont to contract his belly while he tied the string, and when he let himself out again the string often burst. He was not curious in either his food or dress." He seemed to be old-fashioned as far as his turbans were concerned, for Babur goes into detail about how they were tied: "He wore his without folds, and allowed the end to hang down. During the heats when out of the

Divan, he generally wore the Moghul cap . . . he was a middling shot with the bow; he had uncommon force in his fists, and never hit a man whom he did not knock down."

According to his diary he seemed to have little love of his newly-acquired Hindustan, for he describes the flat land round Delhi and Agra as "so ugly and detestable that he was quite disgusted with its want of beauty and disagreeable aspect". Wherever he could he made gardens, reproductions, as far as the climate would permit, of his upland home. He was a hill man and hated the plains. "They have no grapes," he complains, "or musk-melons, no good fruits, no ice or cold water . . . no baths . . . no aqueducts or canals in their gardens or palaces." The abundance of gold and silver and the climate during the rains were the only things that found favour in his eyes. And, anyhow, Babur did not have very long to be annoyed by the heat or enjoy the gold, for he died in 1530 in his favourite garden in Agra at the comparatively young age of forty-seven, worn out, no doubt, by the exertions made in consolidating the empire he had won. He lies buried in Kabul amid the mountains and meadows which he loved so well.

Legend gives a far more romantic account of his death which quite possibly is not exaggerated, for I have known natives in Africa lie down and die quite as easily, convinced that they had been bewitched. Humayun, Babur's adored son, lay desperately sick and the physician had given up any hope of saving him. Distraught with anxiety, Babur had sent for a holy man, asking him what he could do to save him. The holy man could do nothing and recommended Babur to pray to God to save him, whereupon Babur conceived the idea of offering his own life to save that of his son. In vain his courtiers suggested that he make some other sacrifice, the famous Koh-i-noor diamond, for instance, which at that time, before it had been pared down, weighed seven hundred and ninety-three carats and was estimated, as Babur put it, at two days' food for the whole world. But he would not listen to them. "The dearest thing I have," said Babur, "is my life." Thereupon he walked three times around his son's bed, crying out, "O God! If a life may be exchanged for a life, I, Babur, give my life for Humayun's." From that day Humayun began to recover, while Babur slowly sickened and died.

Of Humayun there is little to tell, as a large part of his reign was



spent in exile. Inheriting many of the agreeable and scholarly attributes of his father, Humayun was by no means his equal in character or administrative ability. "Possessed," as Percy Brown writes, "of a charm of manner which never left him, even in the darkest moments of his checkered career, he had all the social but few of the political qualities of a king. And the state of the Empire demanded the latter more than the former. For ten years he strove to continue the work his father had begun, but in vain—it was beyond his power—and, after a series of defeats, he was driven from the throne."\*

Humayun seems to have had a talent for the mechanical arts, for one of the few things I can find out about his short reign is the fact that he had a floating palace built for himself on which he could cruise up and down the Jumna. It was an ingenious affair consisting of several large boats linked together and connected by platforms. There were gardens on board and a bazaar. It must, indeed, have been enormous.

Humayun's name, paradoxically, means 'Fortunate', hardly the correct title for a homeless wanderer. From 1540, when forced to fly from Delhi by the Afghan usurper, Sher Shah, until he returned again as Emperor in 1555, he was a king in name only. After wandering through Sind and Baluchistan, the Emperor ended his flight in exile at the Court of the Shah of Persia, where he spent a whole year. And it was through the intervention of his host, Shah Tahmasp, that Humayun was able to regain his throne. In return for the state of Kandahar the Shah agreed to assist Humayun in re-instating himself in Afghanistan, whence he could organise a second conquest of Hindustan.

Sweeping down from his aerie in the Himalayas, Humayun was entirely successful, but hardly had he established his authority when he died, killed in an accidental fall on the steps of his library at Delhi. It is strange that his grandfather should have died in the same way, or at least have died from a fall, though one of a more dramatic nature. He was visiting his pigeons in a pigeon-house, on the top of a precipice, when suddenly he was hurled to the bottom, pigeons and all, by a landslide. In the Indian Museum of Calcutta there is a charming picture of Akbar receiving the news of his father's untimely

\* *Indian Painting under the Moghals* by Percy Brown. Oxford University Press, 1924.

death. He was campaigning at the time in the foothills of the Punjab Himalayas. One sees him seated cross-legged on a rock, a falcon balanced on the long forefinger of his right hand. The messenger bearing the news looks very agitated.

A few mosques remain to us from the time of these two Emperors, and some long-deserted gardens, of which the Ram Bagh, an old garden palace on the shores of the Jumna whose history has been forgotten, is probably one. Was it one of Babur's pleasure gardens described by him in detail in his memoirs? Or was it laid out by Jahangir for his favourite wife, Nur Jahan, this Bagh they call the 'Light-Spangled Garden'? No one really knows. I went there early one morning, while the dew was still on the grass. It had all the entangled enchantment of a garden in a fairy-tale: there were cypress trees and sandy walls over which roses trailed; terraces with steps that branched off with great purpose but that led nowhere any more. One could still see traces of its apricot orchard and pomegranates still split open on its trees, exposing shining ruby heads. Two old women and a young girl in tattered earth-coloured saris were even at this early hour occupied in tending the artificial luxuriance of this oasis. From morning till night they would be busy with their earthenware jars pouring water over the flower-beds and the dusty roots of the jasmine, precious water that had been drawn by men with much toil from wells that are sunk by the banks of the river. I approached one of the pavilions, which looks out over the Jumna. The Jumna, at this season, is reduced to a chain of long pools reflecting the pale sky. The landscape is dun-coloured and stretches away into the distance, accompanying the river. Directly opposite to me pale washing had been hung up to dry by a local laundry and, beyond this, part of the river-bed had been divided up into fields, their boundaries marked by tufts of reeds stuck into the ground. The alluvial soil is very rich and the farmers use the Jumna as a temporary market-garden for growing marrows and cucumbers.

The only important building dating more or less from Humayun's days is his tomb, a mile out of Delhi. It was built by his widow, Haji Begum, eight years after the Emperor's death. It is important as being the prototype of what Mogul architecture was to become in India and it is certainly more Persian in feeling than the later

buildings were to be. It is here, too, in this handsome red sandstone building with its white marble inlay that one is reminded of the miseries that were to attend this great dynasty in its decline, the monotonous round of patricidal wars, assassinations, mutilations and starvation which marked the history of the Mogul dynasty after the death of Aurangzeb. Splendid as Shah Jahan's reign might have been, it did not stop him from dying in the fortress at Agra, prisoner of his own son, who usurped his throne. And Aurangzeb towards the end of his life always lived in a tent, never entering the palace. He had a morbid distrust of his sons. As Mr. Rawlinson so aptly puts it, "the incessant wars which broke out on the occasion of each fresh occupant of the throne resulted in the extermination of the old Mogul nobility. New blood from central Asia no longer flowed into the country, and it is a commonplace that a foreign race rapidly degenerates under tropical conditions unless it is constantly recruited from without. The descendants of the hardy followers of Babur, who braved snow-storms and mountains on their way to India, had become pale, languid and effeminate persons, clad in voluminous muslin petticoats, who took the field in palanquins, accompanied by hordes of camp-followers, luxurious tents and immense trains of baggage."\*

Humayun's tomb contains the graves of one hundred and seventy others besides himself, most of them unknown. One after another these nameless graves rapidly filled the dark vaults. A few of them, however, have been identified; one knows, for instance, in which tomb the headless body of Prince Dara Shikoh lies, also that of Shah Alam, the Emperor who was blinded by a young Ruhela Afghan called Ghulam Kadir who had broken into the palace during one of the countless sackings to which Delhi has been subjected. Six months later Shah Alam was reinstated on the throne and Ghulam Kadir's eyes were laid before the Emperor in a casket. The sightless old man touched them with his hands and felt avenged.

There is no end to the stories. Already long before Shah Alam's day the rot had set in. We read of the infatuation of Jahandar Shah, Aurangzeb's grandson, for a dancing-girl called Lal Kunwar. Court etiquette no longer existed. The relations of Lal Kunwar, fiddlers and drummers, were ennobled, and every evening common

\* *India* by H. G. Rawlinson.

musicians came to the palace to carouse with the Emperor. "The owl dwelt in the eagle's nest," wrote a contemporary chronicler, "and the crow took the place of the nightingale." One day, the favourite had a sudden desire to see a boat-load of men go down in the river; her wish was at once gratified, and the Emperor and the favourite watched the wretched people struggling in the water from the palace roof.

With the capture of Delhi in 1803 by Lord Lake, the Mogul Emperors became pensioners of the British Government and found peace and repose. But the old glory had gone and the palace bore hardly any resemblance to the magnificent dwelling Shah Jahan had built for himself. Bishop Heber, visiting the Emperor in 1824, records in his diary: "All was dirty, lonely and wretched. The baths and fountains dry; the inlaid pavement hidden with lumber and gardeners' sweepings; and the walk covered with the dung of birds and bats."

But the drama was not quite played out yet. Humayun's tomb was to witness the last tragic act, the complete surrender of Mogul power after the storming of Delhi in 1857, the year of the Mutiny. It was in the crypt of Humayun's mausoleum that Bahdur Shah II, with his sons, sought refuge from the British troops, and it was here that Major Hodson tracked him down. One hopes that Humayun was not able to see Bahdur Shah handing over his own sword, the same one with which he, as first hereditary monarch, had secured the Empire.

Bahdur Shah II was the last of the line, and died in exile in Burma. There is a photograph of him in the museum of the palace, showing him a sad old man lying in bed smoking a hookah.

Akbar was only thirteen when he heard of his father's untimely death. He was immediately enthroned and kept there by the capable leadership of Bairam Khan, Humayun's best General. Akbar, however, lost no time in showing his exceptional qualities and by the age of eighteen was in full power himself. For forty-nine years he ruled, in which time he accomplished a prodigious amount of building. He and Shah Jahan are responsible for the major part of the palace-fortresses of both Agra and Delhi. The walls of the Agra fort are an extraordinary feat of building, solid sandstone ramparts, seventy feet in height and nearly one and a half miles in circuit. In

general it can be said that Akbar built in red sandstone and Shah Jahan in marble. Akbar's official biography, written during his lifetime, states that "upwards of five hundred edifices of red sandstone in the fine style of Bengal and Gujarat graced the Agra fort". Only two of these now remain, the other structures having been demolished to make way for the more sumptuous marble pavilions of his grandson. One of these, the so-called Jahangiri Mahal, in spite of its austerity, is still the finest building in the fort. After a certain time one can tell at a glance the buildings planned by Akbar; they are stringent and alive, and one can feel behind them a terrific creative urge. "The sixteenth century," as we read in Mr. Havell's *Indian Architecture*, "was a period distinguished by strong creative energy and constant experiment in building. Neither Jahangir nor Shah Jahan had Akbar's genius for constructive statesmanship, and so far as their personal influence went they only helped Indian craftsmen to clothe in more costly materials the creative ideas of the preceding century. Sumptuous decoration and lavish expenditure in materials rather than intellectuality in design were the characteristics of the later period of Mogul architecture. The tendency towards over-refinement in structural design and dilettante prettiness in decoration, seen in Jahangir's and Shah Jahan's buildings, was a faithful reflection of the change which took place in the atmosphere of the Mogul Court when Akbar's strong mind ceased to govern Hindustan."

Akbar saw what Babur and Humayun had never seen—the inherent capabilities of the Indian people. He realised that the failure of his forebears and also his co-religionists, who had established themselves in various parts of India, to maintain anything like harmonious rule was due in measure to their lack of sympathy with the Indian race, to the disregard of their manners and customs, their arts and sciences, and their mental outlook. "These invaders had founded independent states in which they had made their homes; but they continued at the same time to conduct themselves more as colonists than as permanent residents in the country of their adoption." As Mr. Brown says,\* Babur and Humayun's real interests were not centred on the people of India and their institutions, but in their own native land beyond the Oxus—towards the

\* *Indian Painting under the Moghuls* by Percy Brown.

blue-domed and glittering minarets of Bukhara and Samarkand. Akbar, an astute politician, saw the folly of this and immediately allied himself as closely as possible with the country, even marrying the Maharaja of Jaipur's daughter, who was eventually to become the mother of Prince Salim, the heir to the throne. Only a very powerful ruler could have dared take the liberties Akbar took in offending his orthodox Mohammedan courtiers. Many of his chief Ministers and intimate friends were Hindus. He also made a deep study of Hindu philosophy and religious teaching. Not unnaturally, Akbar's liberal and beneficial rule attracted many Hindu master-craftsmen to his Court. They found a patron who would allow them to build according to their own ideas, allow them to add Persian and Arabian artistic traditions to their own; thus the impact of Islam upon India brought new ideas and stirred Indian builders to new creative efforts. And it is this vigorous flowering that one finds in all of Akbar's constructions.

Walking around the red sandstone courts of the Jahangiri Mahal, one is immediately conscious of the predominantly Hindu character of the building, especially in the rich details of the soffits that look as if they had been imported piecemeal from one of the temples in the south. It is only the complicated geometrics of the surface decoration that proclaim it to be Saracenic. So minute and fine are they that the sandstone appears to have been as easily carved as wood. The Arabian and Persian craftsmen who came into India with the Moguls were mostly calligraphists, painters and decorators, not builders, and Akbar in particular encouraged his architects to incorporate in his buildings the forms with which they were familiar.

Leaving these austere halls, one walks through a small door into the elegant white marble Khas Mahal built by Shah Jahan some fifty years after the Jahangiri Mahal. It was here that the Emperor met his daughters and the chief ladies of the zenana. Indeed almost the entire palace can be attributed to Shah Jahan. Jahangir has left no mark, for he was too occupied in the laying out of his gardens in Kashmir, to which he travelled as many as thirteen times during his reign, despite the fact that it was an arduous journey in those days. One has to go out to Sikandra, where Akbar lies buried, to see a sample of Jahangir's architecture; there also is the tomb of I'timad-

ud-Daulah, built by Nur Jahan, his Empress, for her father.

Once familiar with the various miniature portraits in the different state libraries and museums of India, in the British and Victoria and Albert Museums, and the India Office Library, one very soon comes to recognise the different Emperors. Jahangir has a long straight nose, drooping moustaches and sideburns curled round and coiled under the ears, which are always hung with large pearls. There is also a miniature of him in a private collection in Paris, painted while he was still heir apparent and known by the title of Prince Salim. In it he bears a remarkable resemblance to his grandfather, the Emperor Babur. They must also have been very similar in character, for both wrote voluminous memoirs, both were ardent nature lovers and great bibliophiles and both loved to travel. Jahangir spent much of his leisure travelling about his dominions and always he had with him three or four of his Court painters, so that any remarkable happening could be recorded. In the Rampur State Library, for instance, one can see a strange incident that took place on a journey from Kabul. The Emperor, seated on a white horse, hung with three large ropes of pearls, is watching a fight between a snake and a huge spider, and it very much looks as if the spider won the day, for it has its fangs well planted into the snake's neck.

Passages in Jahangir's memoirs show how appreciative he is of nature. "There were an abundance of cherries on the trees," he writes, "each of which looked as if it was a round ruby hanging like globes on the branches." It was Kashmir, though, that he found the most beautiful. "And how shall I describe it?" he cried. "Wherever the eye reaches there are verdures and running water—the red rose, the violet and the narcissus grow of themselves; in the fields there are all kinds of flowers and all sorts of sweet-scented herbs." Like Babur he also had a great love of animals. One reads of him worrying over the royal elephants, because they shivered in winter when they sprinkled themselves with cold water. "I observed this," he writes, "and so I ordered that the water should be heated to the temperature of lukewarm milk." He adds: "This was entirely my own idea, nobody had ever thought of it before."

One cannot help being drawn to him, although he was not by any means always so clement. He was thirty-seven years old when his

father died and he ascended the throne, taking the title of Jahangir, or 'World Holder'. As was usual with his family, the throne was not occupied without a struggle. His elder son Khusru, a very popular young man, had many adherents who persuaded him to raise the standard of rebellion against his father. Jahangir, because of the loyalty of one of his Governors, was able to stem the revolt and, as we read in Mr. Rawlinson's history, he stamped out the rising with revolting barbarity. "Two of the Prince's chief supporters were sewn up in raw hides which contracted on exposure to the sun. Arjun, the Sikh pontiff who had blessed the undertaking, was seized and put to death. Three hundred rebels were impaled on stakes on either side of the road, and Khusru, trembling and weeping and loaded with chains, was paraded on an elephant, between the lines of writhing victims, and forced to witness their death agonies. He was then blinded with hot irons, but did not lose his sight entirely." He lived the rest of his life a state prisoner, until his murder in 1622.

But, on the other hand, these barbarous punishments were the habit of the times and not peculiar to Jahangir. Jahangir, however, differed from his predecessors in one major respect. He had not their stamina and was apt to over-indulge himself, particularly in drink, which in the end killed him. Environment had something to do with it; he had inherited a stable throne which gave him all the leisure to develop the artistic side of his nature, a trait prevalent in all his family. He was, in fact, an æsthete, and I suppose what one would call a voluptuary. But this love of peace and ease, the dreamy side of his character, is a question of birth, for Jahangir was the first of his line not to be of pure Mogul and Timurid blood, his mother being a Rajput princess. His Hindu blood with generations of civilisation behind it certainly must have given him a more sensitive character than his forceful forebears.

We have several sources to draw on regarding Jahangir, including the letters of Sir Thomas Roe, who was sent out from the Court of James I on a mission to try to establish trade agreements with the Great Mogul. Sir Thomas Roe and Jahangir were fortunate in each other, for Sir Thomas also happened to be a highly cultured man. The ambassador did not succeed any too well in his mission, but seems to have struck up a charming relationship with the Emperor as friend. "I acknowledge you as ambassador. I have found you a



gentleman in your usage," says the Emperor on their first meeting. "I was received," exultantly writes Sir Thomas, "with more favour and outward grace . . . than ever was shown to any ambassador."

Sir Thomas happened to be travelling with his own collection of European miniatures, among them some portraitures 'in little' by Isaac Oliver.

Jahangir heard that Sir Thomas had some pictures that he had not shown him and sent for him. It was already ten o'clock at night and the ambassador was in bed. "I rose and carryed yt with mee." They had several meetings like this, late at night, and Sir Thomas's descriptions make them sound enchanting. "I came in," writes Sir Thomas, "and found him sitting cross-legged on a little throne, all cladd in diamondes, pearles and rubyes." Round him stood his nobles drinking wine out of large flagons. In front of the Emperor stood a gold table, all set with gem-studded dishes, and like this, by the soft light of oil lamps, the ambassador and the Emperor talked of painting.

Taking Jahangir's portrait must have been a pleasant task for the Court portraitists, for he was a good-looking man, thin and well built, with a good head. We see him celebrating the *Ab-pashi*, or the sprinkling of rose-water festival, and in another portrait he is watching the royal elephants fight. Always round him are the members of his Court, some of them dark-skinned and obviously pure Hindu, others much paler in hue and either high-caste Brahmins or Persians. Jahangir himself, half-Hindu, is always shown between the two, pale coffee-coloured. Persian and Arabic seem to have been the ceremonial languages at the Imperial Court. Looking at these miniatures one can very quickly detect the purely Persian element. The singers and dancers (ladies of quality were never present at these public gatherings) are dressed quite differently, the Persian women wearing high, embroidered caps, while the Hindus have saris draped over their heads. The Persian noblemen also have quite a different way of tying their turbans, which are more voluminous than those worn by the Moguls and symmetrically disposed. Their robes, belted at the waist, are of thicker brocade. I have already described the Mogul and Rajput mode in turbans. They were worn, and still are worn in the Rajputana, wound round at the back of their head and over the front, very tight and small, and bound with a band of gold

brocade that crosses behind the head and diagonally across the turban. The rajahs and princes of the royal blood generally have a sweep of egret feathers fixed by a jewel at the side of their head and further adorn their turbans with a single rope of pearls. Their manner of dress remains the same throughout each successive reign. The nobles in attendance on the Emperor are to be seen with daggers and shields, carrying a ceremonial sword; the cut of their clothes is identical, varying only in the bright colours they wear. Transparent muslin kilts are tied over striped trousers and fixed at the waists with a sash of gold or patterned brocade that falls down in front, somewhat like the apron worn by the Egyptians. The smock or blouse is generally plain and worn crossed over from left to right and tied under the arm. Over this falls a profusion of jewelled necklaces.

It is interesting to note that, starting from Jahangir's time, the Emperor is further distinguished in each miniature by a gold nimbus, or halo, that shines behind his head. Mr. Brown, in his book on Indian painting, explains to us how this device eventually found a place in the Indian miniature. The story of its travel is long and complicated and just the barest outline will suffice here. I have always regarded the halo as a purely Christian symbol, but in fact it has its origin in Persia, where it was portrayed in its embryonic form as a celestial aureole of fire, symbolising Zoroastrianism. In its usual shape, however, as a circular disc, it is first seen in the Greco-Buddhist sculpture of the north-western frontier of India, anciently known as Gandhara, about the beginning of the Christian era. Buddhism having thus appropriated the saintly circle, it was carried with the art of that creed to all eastern countries which accepted the doctrines of the Great Teacher. Slowly then it began to travel towards the west of Asia, and from there it found its way into the Byzantine art of Europe. As Mr. Brown says, "at first it was employed somewhat timidly in Christian art, probably on account of its known pagan origin, but in the course of time, this objection was overcome, so that it eventually became the accepted emblem of the Byzantine Church, to be used profusely in all its figure art".\* Having been adopted by the Christians, it was with the Portuguese Jesuit Fathers that it returned to India during the sixteenth century. As one of the Fathers complained, the Emperor adopted their

\* *Indian Painting under the Moghuls* by Percy Brown.

emblem but not their creed. Jahangir found it an excellent method of distinguishing the Mogul Emperors from all others. He fully believed, anyway, in the divinity of kings. He must have enjoyed the joke, for Jahangir had a very good sense of humour. According to Bernier, there was a moment when Jahangir had a project to clothe the whole Court in European costumes. "Never a very religious man, he became impatient at the reproaches of the Moslem elders when they chided him for eating certain meats forbidden in the Koran. 'What religion,' he asked them scathingly, 'allowed the use of drink and food of every species without distinction?' The elders replied that it was the Christian religion alone. 'We must then,' the Emperor rejoined, 'all turn Christians,' which is hardly the answer the Mullahs could have expected. Thoroughly enjoying the situation, Jahangir pushed it even further. 'Let there be tailors brought to us, to convert our robes into close coats and our turbans into hats.' At these words the Mullahs trembled for their sect. Fear and interest made them immediately more lenient and they hurriedly declared that the Sovereign was not bound by the precepts of the Koran, and that he might, without scruple, use whatever meats and drinks were most agreeable to him."

This was a concession that must have been valuable to the Emperor, for meat and wine formed his staple diet, together with opium. We know this from William Hawkins, an uproarious captain sent out by the East India Company to try to set up a trading factory at the port of Surat. He preceded Sir Thomas Roe by several years. Hawkins, apparently, became very intimate with the Emperor and shared in his drinking bouts. From Hawkins's descriptions of Jahangir's private life it would seem that the Emperor started drinking towards evening, after having been in audience most of the day. "Then he departeth towards his private place of prayer; his prayer being ended, four or five sorts of very well dressed and roasted meats are brought him, of which as he pleaseth he eateth a bit to stay his stomach, drinking once of his strong drink. Then he cometh forth into a private room, where none can come but such as himself nominateth (for two years I was one of his attendants there). In this place he drinketh other three cupfuls, which is the portion that the physicians allot him. This done, he taketh opium, and then he ariseth, and being in the height of his

drink, he layeth him down to sleep, every man departing to his own home. And after he hath slept two hours they awake him and bring his supper to him, at which time he is not able to feed himself; but it is thrust into his mouth by others; and this is about one of the clock; and then he sleepeth the rest of the night."

This differs somewhat from Sir Thomas Roe's picture of the Emperor all glittering in jewels, sitting up discussing the merits of different painters. Somewhere between the two is probably the truth, for like most heavy drinkers he surely had periods of excess.

The effect of drink as he grows older are obvious in his portraits, which do not omit the flabby folds that appeared round the jaw and chin. There is a beautifully painted, but strangely unflattering, miniature of him in the Delhi State Museum, showing him in his late forties. He is in profile and naked down to the waist, his only covering being three ropes of pearls that hang out over his pendulous chest. He holds up a small jade bowl from which, so the label affixed to the miniature tells us, he was wont to drink his opium. He is wearing an orange turban and is painted against a pale almond-green ground. It could almost be a Holbein or a Clouet. There exists another portrait of him, surely the last one painted. It is unfinished and shows him already an old man, far older than his years, for he was only fifty-eight when he died.

But this is not as one wants to remember him; one would rather see him when he was young and handsome, when he first fell in love with Nur Jahan, or 'Light of the World'. It is a very romantic story and resembles, as Mr. Rawlinson points out, that of David and Bathsheba. "Nur Jahan was originally the wife of a Persian nobleman called Ali Kuli Beg, who had been given an estate in Bengal by Akbar. Apparently Akbar made this arrangement to get her away from the Court, as his son was already in love with her. Be this as it may, in 1607, Jahangir sent a force to arrest Ali Kuli Beg, who was killed in the scuffle which ensued. His widow was brought to Agra, but was not united to her royal lover until four years later."\* There is another tale which explains the reason for this long lapse of time before they got married. When they first met they were but children. The young Prince Salim, as he was then called, was playing with some tame pigeons and, tiring of them, gave them to a little girl to

\* *India* by H. G. Rawlinson.

hold, the future Nur Jahan, while he ran away after some fresh distraction. Returning presently, he found one of the pigeons gone, and angrily inquired how it had escaped. "Like this," said the child, throwing the other pigeon up into the air with a scornful turn of her graceful, bangle-laden little arms. This was a fine way to defy the spoilt heir of India; Salim was furious—furious and then, of course, enchanted, because she had stood up to him, and even at that early age her beauty was said to have been remarkable. Nothing came of their friendship, since, although only a young girl, she was already pledged to her future husband. It was, however, love at first sight as far as Jahangir was concerned.

Nur Jahan was thirty-four when Jahangir had her brought to Agra, but the intervening years had not changed her character. He had killed her husband and Nur Jahan would have none of him. Not the least curious part of the story is the fact that Jahangir, who must have really loved her, after trying to soothe and win her by all means in his power, finally accepted the situation; and Nur Jahan, supporting herself by her artistic skill in painting and embroidery, remained at Court in attendance on Jahangir's Rajput mother.

In the end, Nur Jahan must have been moved by the Emperor's constancy. She no doubt also saw that Jahangir really needed her, for the Emperor had already started to drink more heavily. Luckily for the Great Moguls, Nur Jahan was an exceptionally intelligent woman, for she virtually ruled India for the next twenty years. Her name appeared on the imperial coinage with an inscription that gold had acquired a new value since Nur Jahan appeared on it. She used her power well and was "an asylum to all sufferers". Not unnaturally she also helped her own family. Her father was made the Lord High Treasurer with the title of P'timad-ud-Daulah, or 'Paragon of Honesty', while Asaf Khan, her brother, was made a high official in the Punjab and, as it will be remembered, was the father of Mumtaz Mahal, who was to marry Prince Khurram, the Empress's stepson and the heir to the throne. Nur Jahan's family, though of noble birth, had been what one might call adventurers, for her father had arrived from Persia penniless, in the hopes of making a future at Akbar's Court. Nur Jahan had, in fact, been born at Lahore on a family journey southwards.

One wonders, when reading the history of the Moguls, at these

different titles: the 'Light of the World', or 'Ornament of the Palace', and 'Paragon of Honesty'. Bernier's explanation is that such names were given to the great, instead of titles derived from domains and seigneuries as was usual in Europe, because all land was considered the property of the sovereign and hence there could be no earldoms, marquises or dukedoms. "The royal grants consist only of pensions, either in land or money, which the king gives, augments, retrenches, or takes away at pleasure."

I'timad-ud-Daulah, the Empress's father, died in 1622, and it is perhaps the tomb that his daughter built for him that typifies best the reign of the royal aesthete, as it is the most charming example of jewelled architecture ever devised by the master-builders of the Moguls.

Though this tomb cannot be compared in importance with the Taj Mahal, I personally found it far more satisfactory. It is minute in comparison with that huge echoing mausoleum, but has none of its sadness. It is a cheerful place to come and sit in the evening, marble cool and sprigged like a meadow of flowers with inlay that spins its fine filaments in a pattern of subtle colour over every part of it. Inside, its walls are made up of screens of the finest marble tracery, and the sun filtering through these windows throws circles of golden light over the white marble and yellow porphyry floor, which is so bold in design that it looks as if the tomb were carpeted with a rug from Isfahan. Everywhere one looks, one has an impression of spring, a spring of stones worked in jasper and pale-coloured marble; there are cypresses twined round with peach blossom and in the niches of a small vestibule are to be seen shallow dishes of fruit, flasks of rose-water, wine-cups and wine-jars, familiar motifs, often used in Persian tile-mosaics. This small, elegant tomb set around with sombre green cypress must have been a haunting reminder for the Empress of hot summers spent up in the snow-cooled vale of Kashmir, the country both she and Jahangir loved so well. The dying Emperor, when asked if he wanted anything, murmured, "Kashmir, only Kashmir!" and then, barely above a whisper, he gave his last instruction: "Let my tomb lie open to the winds of heaven, so that the rain and dew may fall on it." I did not go there, but the Emperor lies in an old garden near Lahore, asleep under a white marble sarcophagus decorated with sprays of flowers inlaid

in precious stones, lapis and cornelians, amethysts and turquoises. Above is the blue sky, and at night the stars. Nur Jahan must have had her father's tomb in mind when she constructed Jahangir's mausoleum, for, if one can judge from the photographs, it seems, although on a much larger scale, to have the same light and elegant touch.

If Jahangir left little behind him except his memoirs and his collection of paintings by which to judge him, hardly the same thing can be said of his son Shah Jahan the Magnificent. He never stopped building, and it is of him that one is constantly reminded as one wanders through the royal palaces.

I have already referred to several episodes in Shah Jahan's life and it was in his reign that the Mogul Empire reached its climax of external magnificence. It was the golden age and his Court, judging by all accounts, must have been one of prodigal luxury. The imperial treasury at Agra was enormous, estimated as being worth somewhere around three hundred and forty million pounds sterling. His reign was a series of gorgeous pageants enacted against a backdrop of shining new palaces, for not only did he transform most of the palaces in Agra, but, inspired no doubt by his grandfather, built himself an entirely new capital at Delhi, a palace-fortress, indeed a whole city which, as Fergusson says, \* "is, or rather was, the most magnificent palace in the East—perhaps the world". It had the advantage, as he points out, of being built at one time, "by one man, and that man an Emperor, an artist and the greatest builder of his day."

For all Delhi's magnificence, I find the palace at Agra more touching, and it is certainly more interesting from a historical point of view, alive as it is with poignant stories. How lovely, for instance, are the two little side pavilions flanking the Khas Mahal. Their curved Bengali roofs sheathed in gold leaf flash in the sun, a complement to the whiteness of the rest of the palace. They were the living quarters of Shah Jahan's daughters, and all round the walls are niches with deep holes into which the ladies could slip their jewels. The holes are so narrow that only a woman's hand could draw out the contents. And then reaching in front of these pavilions and the Khas Mahal stretches the geometrical parterre of the Anguri Bag,

\* *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* by James Fergusson.

or Grape Garden, laid out by Akbar. It is typical of a small Mogul garden with four terraced walks radiating out from the central tank. The soil for the parterre was brought all the way from Kashmir. In spring and early summer the parterres used to be planted with dwarf jasmine and during the period of full moon the Emperor would give audience in the Khas Mahal. It was called, in fact, the Moon of Royal Audience. One likes to think that Shah Jahan ordered the Court to dress in the purest white muslin and that only the diamonds hanging in great plaques on their chests would shine out in the moon-washed night.

It is easy to see Nur Jahan's and Mumtaz Mahal's feminine influence in the elegant apartments in the palace. Datta had the water turned on for us in the Saman Bag, or Jasmine Tower, and it flowed murmuring into the fountain-baths. Quickly the water reached to the top of the four shallow curves of the basin, running out again over a spillway. The vivid red and green of the inlaid flowers and leaves shone through the ripples like the pebbles of a wet sea-beach, and the white marble lily-buds seemed to float away, dragged down by the swirl of the stream.

We admired the bulbous domes of the Pearl Mosque, but more moving by far was the balcony on which Shah Jahan died, when an ailing old man well on into his seventies. He used to have his bed carried out near to the shallow marble balustrade, whence he could gaze out over the fields and the river to the Taj Mahal. So constantly was Mumtaz Mahal in his thoughts that he even had mirrors placed at different angles in his rooms so that when he had his back turned to the view, he could still see her tomb caught in the reflections. It is a view that must have been engraved on his heart, for the old Emperor spent the last eight years of his life literally walled up in four rooms of the palace, kept there as a prisoner by his son, Aurangzeb, who, as we have already seen, killed his four brothers and usurped the throne.

We must, however, see the palace at Delhi first before we bury Shah Jahan, step back again in time to when he was still in all his magnificence.

We set off from Agra early one morning, in a large well-sprung American car, and covered the hundred and twenty miles between the two capitals in just over two hours. If one concerns oneself only



with the Mogul side of Delhi and Agra, it is hard at times to keep them apart, for they are very similar in feeling; in fact, I have a general muddled impression of mellow, gilded walls, precious inlay and a suggestion of fountains, mingled with the singing of birds.

Certainly the country does not change, with its sandy fields and thorny scrub, the gaunt brown domes of ruined tombs, the crumbling mosques, the forts and palaces which lie between the Jumna and the red, sun-baked rocks running in a ridge from Ajmer northwards, until they die away beyond the plains of Delhi. Our car sped over the dusty softness of the white road which stretched for mile after mile without the least semblance of a curve, until we could see the domes and the huddle of square mud houses that proclaim the suburbs of Delhi. Camels and donkeys and bicycles, and the perpetual lumbering bullock-carts crowded in on us. At the least provocation the fine dust forming the surface of the road would rise in a stifling cloud, almost obscuring the sun, and it was in just such a cloud that we arrived at the gates of Shah Jahan's great citadel.

Here again, as at Agra, one is carried back through the years, lulled almost by the haunting echoes of the spilling and running of water that once bubbled through the different marble halls. No one understood the use of water better than the Moguls, and Shah Jahan planned his palace so that a constant supply should run through the entire vast enclosure. A conduit built to carry the water is suitably called the Nahar-i-Bahist, or 'Canal of Paradise'. Marble canals lead from one open, pillared hall of audience to another. In one, the whole of the centre of the hall, an area of twenty square feet, is taken up by a shallow marble basin sunk into the pavement, its bottom delicately modelled to resemble the petals of a giant lotus. It is dry now, but the water used to be perfumed and came bubbling up out of the silver lotus-flower on a slender stem rising from the centre.

Never yet had we seen such filigreed marble screens, so delicately worked that pieces have been broken out of them, as in a pastry-cook's sugared lace. Corkscrews of inlaid agate run like twisted paper-streamers round the marble architraves of the doors. In one of these antechambers the whole wall, the cornice and the ceiling have been painted with blue and gold flowers which wreath their way over marble turned by age to the colour of ivory. It looked as

if the whole room was hung with the richest of Genoese brocades.

We saw the marble-inlaid throne of the Emperor in the *Diwan-i-Am*, or 'Hall of Public Audience'. Below it stands a square platform raised like a table on four feet. It was the First Minister's seat and it was from here that he transmitted the petitions to the Emperor sitting above. But the most splendid sight of all is the famous *Diwan-i-Khas*, or 'Hall of Private Audience'. This is the hall that has that oft-quoted inscription engraved at either end over the two outer arches:

"If there is a Paradise on the face of the Earth,  
It is this, oh, it is this! oh, it is this!"

It was here that Shah Jahan would receive the foreign embassies and the different Hindu princes, seated on his splendid Peacock Throne.

The hall, like most Indian halls, is open on all sides and measures some ninety feet long by sixty-seven feet wide. The pavement is of polished marble, which reflects the square marble piers that support the roof, once all lined in silver. On the face of each pier are painted gold poppies, each one slightly different, beautiful in their various shades of gold against the marble. One wonders why Shah Jahan chose the poppy as a motif of decoration for a room so much in the public eye. This must have caused comment, for, with the exception of Aurangzeb, the Great Moguls were all notorious opium addicts.

Towards one end of this hall is the dais on which stood the Peacock Throne. The throne was carried off long ago, in 1739, by Nadir Shah and eventually broken up. Such fragments as survived were inserted in the throne which may still be seen in the Museum of the Royal Palace at Teheran. There are descriptions and paintings enough of it for us to know exactly what it looked like.

The description of Tavernier, a travelling jeweller, is probably the most accurate, since it was his trade to judge the quality of stones. Its value must have been fabulous and it was guarded night and day by armed eunuchs. It was probably one of the most valuable works of art ever constructed. Even the jewel-satiated courtiers of Shah Jahan's time were flabbergasted by it and the Court poet asked whether he might inscribe a couplet to be inserted in diamonds on

one of its supports. "The world," he wrote, "had become so short of gold on account of it, that the purse of the earth was empty of treasure."

Tavernier's description is prefaced by a wonderfully bombastic flourish. "It should be stated," he says, "that the Great Mogul has seven magnificent thrones, one wholly covered with diamonds, the others with rubies. The principal throne, which is placed in the hall of the first court, is nearly of the form and size of our camp-beds; that is to say, it is about six feet long and four wide." Then comes a detailed description too long to include in total. It stood on six massive feet which, with the body, were of solid gold inlaid with rubies, emeralds and diamonds. It was surmounted by a canopy of gold supported by pearl pillars, all of which were emblazoned with costly gems. A fringe of pearls ornamented the borders of the canopy.

Tavernier describes a peacock with elevated tail, made of blue sapphires, which stood on the top of the quadrangular-shaped dome, "the body being of gold inlaid with precious stones, having a large ruby in the front of the breast, from which hangs a pear-shaped pearl of fifty carats." There is a painting dating from about 1630, two years after Shah Jahan's accession to the throne, showing him seated on the Peacock Throne. In the painting one can clearly see two peacocks. Another writer describes the figure of a parrot which is said to have stood between the two peacocks and to have been carved out of a single emerald. It is possible that Shah Jahan made various small alterations during his reign. Whatever the details, everyone seems to be in accord as to the general appearance of the throne, although Tavernier is rather scathing as to the quality of the stones. The emeralds are table-cut, he says, "the stones are showy, but very flat". He counted the *cabochon* rubies and there were a hundred and eight of them, "the least of which weighs a hundred carats, but there are some which weigh apparently two hundred and more. They are of good colour, but they have many flaws". It was the pearls that impressed him the most, "being round and of the first water".

Datta, in the car on the way back to Agra, gave us one last glimpse of Shah Jahan, an old, disgruntled man, dying a prisoner of his own son. Aurangzeb had sent to him demanding certain jewels

which he needed for completing some alterations he had made to the famous throne. Furious, Shah Jahan sent the emissary back empty-handed, with a message to the effect that Aurangzeb had better concern himself with things of more importance, such as the wise government of the kingdom. The idea of altering the throne! Roundly he declared that he would be no more plagued about these jewels. Hammers, he stated, had been provided to beat them into powder the next time he should be importuned upon the subject.

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## FATEHPUR-SIKRI

All ruins are romantic, but what of a deserted city that through three hundred and fifty long years has obstinately refused to become a ruin? It is doubly evocative and even more haunted. Few people would expect to see anything or anybody in the charred foundation of Borley Rectory, or in the grass-grown courts of a Pompeian villa, but at Fatehpur-Sikri, the city built by Akbar, the sensation is one of surprise, almost of eeriness, that it is quite empty, that these vast courts and palaces of red sandstone are deserted under the sun. Not even the monkeys, the usual tenants of unoccupied sites in India, have taken up their abode in this silent city. I spent all of one day trying to take photographs of Fatehpur-Sikri, hoping to be able to interpret it as it really is. But it was no good; palaces, houses, halls of audience, my photographs remained dull and uninteresting, inanimate, purely documentary. Climbing up to the second floor of one of the empty houses, I leaned precariously out of the window, focusing my lens on to two balconies in one of the corner towers of the zenana. In the photograph it looks as if I had waited until nobody was in sight before clicking the shutter, as if the sari-clad figure of a woman had just that moment withdrawn into the dark interior. But on second thoughts I have perhaps succeeded better than I imagined, for a building that is intact but deserted is much more romantic, more picturesquely melancholy, than a deserted ruin. One must know, though, that the building is not lived in, for certainly one could not tell it by looking at the photograph; not one stone is out of place and the angles of the cornice are as sharp as they ever were.

Father Monserate, one of the Jesuit priests sent by the Viceroy of

Goa, describes Akbar as being broad-shouldered and somewhat bandy-legged from much riding in his youth. "One could easily recognise even at the first glance that he is King. His eyes are so bright and flashing that they seem like a sea shimmering in the sunlight. His eyelashes are long and his forehead broad and open. He has a small straight nose and flaring nostrils and a languid expression, but full of dignity. He limps slightly, but is very well built. When he is angry, he possesses an awful majesty. When he laughs, his whole face wrinkles up." One can see him, very quick in his movements, a person radiating energy. His son, Prince Salim, the future Jahangir, gives us what might have been a portrait-painter's description of him. "In his august personal appearance," writes the Prince, "he was of middle height, but inclined to be tall; he was of the hue of wheat; his eyes and eyebrows were black, and his complexion rather dark than fair; he was lion-bodied, with a broad chest, and his arms and hands long. On the left side of his nose he had a fleshy mole, very agreeable in appearance, of the size of half a pea." The Prince seems to have had a great admiration for his father. "In his actions and movements he was not like the people of the world, and the glory of God manifested itself in him. Notwithstanding his kingship, his treasures and his buried wealth past computation, his fighting elephants and Arab horses, he never by a hair's breadth placed his foot beyond the base of humility before the Throne of God, and never for one moment forgot Him. He associated with the good of every race and creed and persuasion, and was gracious to all in accordance with their condition and understanding." We know also from his son "that he spent his nights in wakefulness, and slept little in the day. He counted his wakefulness at night as so much added to his life".

There is a pencil drawing of the Emperor in middle age, showing just the head and shoulders; his eyes seem to be closed, he is listening, no doubt, to one of the members of his suite reading aloud, or is it a hurried sketch of him taken during one of those philosophical discussions he was in the habit of holding, which lasted well into the night? Akbar as a boy was the despair of his tutors; he could hardly sign his name and it is remarkable that a man of his intelligence never learned to read or write. With a great effort, and in very childish script, he could just form his signature. But the drawing

does manage to convey a terrific sense of concentration. One can see that Akbar is really listening. He had a prodigious memory and an interested, inquiring mind. But above all it was his energy that seems to have impressed his contemporaries the most, apart from his bravery. Already as a young man of twenty he had managed to seduce his subjects with his prowess. Elephants fascinated Akbar; their power and their size, their swift movements in spite of their bulk, and their intelligence made them worthy contestants in his eyes. The fiercer the elephants were, the more enjoyment he got out of trying to tame them. "In the middle of a fight, for instance, when he saw that the driver of the other elephant had lost control, he leapt from his own elephant to the other." No wonder that people were fascinated watching him. He was a man worthy to be their Emperor. Sometimes they must have wished that he were not quite so reckless. There is an incident, for instance, illustrated in the *Akbarnama*, the *History of Akbar*, written by Abu'l Fazl, the historian and one of Akbar's closest friends—Akbar's Boswell, as he has been aptly styled. The Emperor is shown mounted on "the fiercest and wickedest of elephants", which he has made fight with other elephants. The other elephants had had enough of it and had turned tail in ignominious flight across a bridge of boats. The picture shows Akbar in hot pursuit. The bridge, of course, is too frail a structure to stand the strain and is splitting in the middle. Those unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity are seen throwing themselves into the river, where it would seem they might easily drown. Great fright and agitation animate all the attendants to be seen on the banks. In the background a ferry is being poled furiously across the Jhelum with two spearmen. They hope, I suppose, to reach the other shore before the Emperor, in order to be there to help him. One of the men is biting his nails in a frenzy of apprehension. Akbar, however, seems to be quite oblivious of all the commotion. If we are to believe the Emperor's own explanation, these mad bouts were inspired not merely by physical exaltation in his own strength or skill, but by a deeper prompting. He wanted to test his own fate. Was it God's will that he should live? He seems to have had a strange pre-occupation with death.

It is hardly surprising that these acts of prowess should have intrigued the ladies. There is a charming story of how one of his

chief wives, the proud Rajput princess who was to become the mother of Jahangir, consented to marry him. Akbar happened to be on one of his many campaigns, marching rapidly from one point to another to the rhythm of a single drum beaten at short intervals. At night he slept in the imperial camp, his headquarters marked by a light on a lofty pole. It must have been an impressive sight, this army with all its elaborate appointments. This particular campaign was against the independent kingdom of Malwa, whose prince was stubbornly opposing Akbar's overtures. One of Akbar's camps happened to be pitched in the vicinity of Amber, then the capital of Jaipur. Behari Mal, the reigning Maharajah, was apparently having trouble with an uncle who was claiming the throne, and his fellow Rajput princes advised him to discuss the matter with Akbar, who was so conveniently in the vicinity. Behari Mal rode over to the Emperor's camp and on approaching it saw a squarely built young man struggling with a wild elephant. He was astride the beast just behind the head. It was the same kind of sport as trying to ride a wild steed, only doubly intense as there was the added danger of the rider being pulled off by the elephant's trunk and being trampled to death or gouged with his tusks. For quite some time Behari Mal watched the struggle, amazed at the young man's bravery, a sovereign quality among the war-like Rajputs. Eventually the elephant seemed to make up its mind that it was useless to resist and became quiet and docile, as if mesmerised. It even went so far as to put its trunk up to help the young man's descent to the ground. Of course the young man was Akbar, as Behari Mal was to find out when he was given an audience. It was this story, rather than the young man's physical charm, that had persuaded Behari Mal's daughter to marry the Emperor.

According to Abu'l Fazl, Akbar had a strange mesmeric effect on animals, for the historian makes several references to it. In one particular instance, he describes Akbar as standing on the roof of the palace controlling the movements of a flight of pigeons. They swooped and turned in unison with the signs prescribed by the Emperor's arm. There must certainly be some truth in it, for there are continual references by other people to this rare gift. Akbar's favourite elephant is a point in question. He was called *Restless* because he would not let anyone but his master ride him.



As can be imagined, Akbar was a man of violent passions and, like the rest of his family, had a craving for strong drinks, lacing his wine with opium for added effect. Unlike his son and grandson, however, he was able to control his cravings, subjecting his body to an iron discipline amounting almost to asceticism. It was the same with his food. He only ate one meal a day, and that a very simple one. "Of the austerities practised by my revered father, one was not eating the flesh of animals." "Why," Akbar is quoted as saying, "should we make ourselves sepulchres for beasts?" He fed largely on rice, fruit and sweetmeats.

Everything one reads about the man is interesting and Fatehpur-Sikri, with its stringent architecture, seems to be a reflection in stone of his remarkable mind.

The story of the building of this red sandstone city is one of the most romantic in Indian history. It was founded on a prophecy. At twenty-seven Akbar still had no children; several had been born to him, but they had died in infancy. Desperate to beget an heir, he had made pilgrimages to several shrines, offering up prayers. It was finally Shaikh Salim Chisti, a holy man living among the stone cutters of a near-by quarry in a little village called Sikri, who gave him the assurance of what he most wanted. On meeting the saint Akbar fell at his knees. The holy man was telling his beads and even before he had heard Akbar he assured the implorer that his desire would be granted. His Hindu wife was with child and it would be a son. Immediately the pregnant Jodh Bai was sent to live in a hurriedly built house under the care of the saint. Some months later a child was born and the Prince was called Salim after the man who had prophesied his birth. Akbar in gratitude for the divine favour accorded to him decided to found a city in the place where his prayers had met with such ready response.

Fatehpur-Sikri was founded in 1569 and took five years to build. As if by magic, almost, this great city of red sandstone sprang into being. It measures six miles in circumference, covering a lonely eminence that had risen like a desolation of dry rock from the flat plains surrounding it, the haunt of howling jackals.

Agra lay only twenty-three miles away and one can imagine the exodus the day the Emperor decided to move his Court, the bustle and excitement and the complaints from the courtiers comfortably

installed in the old capital. They must have had doubts about the amenities of their new home.

In history the rapidity with which cities are built and populated always amazes me. I do not understand how it is physically possible to accomplish so much in so short a space of time. Take, for example, inconsequential though it may be, Napoleon's country house on the island of Elba. He was only on the island for nine months and yet there is his house, all frescoed and decorated in the most complicated manner; a reception-room is painted with scenes imagined from the Emperor's Egyptian campaign, and in another room there is a ceiling of blue sky across which flutter two doves, tying a symbolic knot of fidelity in pink ribbons with their beaks, a somewhat inaccurate interpretation of Marie Louise's feelings.

If one is surprised at a small house like this, what of Fatehpur-Sikri, this huge ceremonial capital, a great spacious city spreading out not in streets, but in an arrangement of stately courtyards with palaces all round, roofed with flat terraces which are screened by parapets on which the Court could take their promenades. In one of these flagged quadrangles chess was played on large inlaid squares with living chessmen, the pawns being beautiful female slaves. There were fights between wild animals and polo was played at night with ignited balls, an invention of the Emperor's. There was also a great lake six miles long, dried up now, on which boat trips were made.

But this might give the wrong impression of Fatehpur-Sikri. There was nothing frivolous about Akbar, who was deeply interested in religion and philosophy. Affairs of state occupied him half of the day, and the rest of the time was taken up in debates. We must see Fatehpur-Sikri rather as one of those Italian cities in the heyday of the Renaissance, a beehive of intellectual and creative activities. It was not long before Akbar had drawn round him a concourse of writers, poets, historians and philosophers who debated, lectured and wrote. We hear of his luring a singer away from the Court of a Hindu prince, the celebrated Tansen, who apparently had one of the greatest voices the world has ever heard. Every time he sang, he was loaded with presents. The Rajah, his former employer, is said to have given him ten million rupees after one of his performances. He had a quality in his voice that no one could resist.

Akbar must have had an ear for music, for every morning at dawn

he was aroused to the playing of hautboys and cymbals. We also know that he took a lively interest in painting and—what is rare in a prince of the royal blood—actually practised with the brush himself. Some of his remarks on the subject have been recorded for us by Abu'l Fazl. "There are many that hate painting; but such men I dislike," he is quoted as saying to a gathering of his courtiers. "It appears to me as if a painter had quite peculiar means of recognising God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the Giver of life, and thus increase in knowledge." As Mr. Percy Brown tells us,\* this very carefully composed expression of opinion was recorded not so much to emphasise Akbar's appreciation of painting, but to explain to his more orthodox followers his reasons for setting at naught the Prophet's law relating to the representation of living, especially human, forms. It was a very remarkable mind that could argue like this, and indeed his enforced religious toleration "at a time when the rack and the stake were the accepted weapons of religious controversy in Europe" places him well in advance of his times.

The road out of Fatehpur-Sikri is still the same as that taken by Ralph Fitch, one of the first Englishmen to arrive at the Mogul capital. He had been sent out as emissary with three other men by Queen Elizabeth I to try to negotiate trade agreements. No answer was ever made to the Queen's letter, but it was Fitch's account of his travels, when he reached home, that led to the foundation of the East India Company. The milestones, high bourns marking every four miles, are the same as in Fitch's days, but the stalls he mentions have disappeared, packed up with the centuries. He describes the road between Agra and Fatehpur-Sikri as being more crowded than a London street. There were hostelries and booths, one side for Hindus and the other for Moslems. The twenty-three miles were negotiated either on fine horses or in "two-wheeled carts drawn by little bulls, decorated with silk or fine cloth, and used as our coaches in England". The carts are still there but time has perished the silk, and a farmer asleep on top of a load of dried corn-stalks is probably the occupant. Dust and crows, and a hard blue sky, is all we see,

\* *Indian Painting under the Moghuls* by Percy Brown.

and then piles of rubble where the merchants' houses used to be. Like all imperial cities of the past, only the palaces and places of worship and the legislative buildings were made of stone or marble, the rest of the town consisting of a ramshackle collection of huts built of less durable material. Like Rome's Palatine Hill, the palaces of Fatehpur-Sikri must have risen out of a sea of dun-coloured bricks and thatched roofs.

The car passed under the 'Drum House', a gateway in which was lodged a battery of kettle-drums used to announce the arrival of distinguished visitors. Negotiating a slight incline we drew up outside the great 'Gate of Magnificence', the main entrance to Fatehpur-Sikri. A steep flight of stairs, some forty feet high, led us up to the central entrance-way. Some naked boys greeted us, offering to dive into the echoing depth of a near-by well if we would throw them some rupees. They are related to the caretakers of Fatehpur-Sikri, who live in a collection of mud huts nestling up against the red sandstone battlements. Datta brushed them aside and we went in. The flagged courtyard of the mosque was vast and hot and quite deserted, swept only by the knife-like shadows thrown by the sun.

We spent two whole days at Fatehpur-Sikri, sleeping in the Dak bungalow built originally for visiting archaeologists. The place fascinated me. Whichever way one turns, one is conscious of Akbar's great mind. How much more stringent and alive are these red sandstone buildings of Akbar's than the somewhat over-effeminate and sterile palaces at Agra and Delhi. Hindu architects from Gaur, once a great city and long-time capital of Bengal, had been used in the building of these palaces and one is conscious immediately of the strong Hindu influence.

From the great mosque we walked out to the smaller buildings, Akbar's room in the zenana, a charming oblong hall in which he was in the habit of being served the one meal he partook of during the day. He would eat at any time, giving the kitchens hardly any warning. They boasted, however, of being able to prepare an elaborate repast within an hour, not that the Emperor would partake of much of it. This hall is lined with rows of deep niches into which the dishes were placed as they arrived. As a precaution against poisoning, the dishes were tied up in cloths that had been sealed by the superintendent of the kitchens, the seal to be broken

by the ladies who were serving him—one of his five hundred wives with her handmaidens. Datta added a charming detail; apparently the dishes arrived in different platters, gold platters being tied up in red muslin, or if of silver, in white muslin, while porcelain dishes would be covered in the finest cotton.

We saw also the Khwabgah, or, literally, 'House of Dreams', where Akbar slept, a small pavilion on the flat roof of a large building. The inner room of the pavilion, not counting the wide veranda, measures not more than fourteen square feet. The Moguls, as has been said, had no wooden furniture, and one must see the rooms carpeted with padded quilts and heaped with bolsters. The walls of the private apartments had at one time been frescoed, but little remains now, except for traces of colour wash, with here and there a small fragment. The library used to be decorated with panels of flowers, and one can still see a sprig of peach blossom, painted in what one would say was the Chinese manner. Originally, very little of the red sandstone showed, and in Akbar's bedroom there were several large panels, disposed along the walls, as we would hang our paintings. One of the panels is known to have shown an annunciation scene (probably referring to the birth of Prince Salim), another represented Buddha arrayed in vermilion and gold, sitting under a blue shrine with white bamboos waving in the background. There was also a river scene showing two boats sailing against the current. Over the architraves of the doors and on the lintels of the windows Akbar had had Persian couplets carved in beautiful stone tracery, picked out in gold and ultramarine.

A covered-in passage used to lead from the 'House of Dreams' to the zenana and to the houses of the chief wives. Akbar, unlike his son and grandson, seems to have been prodigal with his affections. There were three chief wives and their houses are each separate. For his first wife, a Persian girl he married in Kabul while still a boy, he built a highly elaborately carved pavilion. "It is impossible", writes Fergusson, "to conceive anything so picturesque in outline, or any building carved and ornamented to such an extent, without the smallest approach to being overdone or in bad taste."\* There is not one square inch of it that is not minutely carved; ribbed lines chevron up the columns, while the walls and even the underside of

\* *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* by James Fergusson.



Once down in the valley, it was as if we had driven  
into a Brueghel or Teniers landscape (page 275)



Clumps of white iris cover the uneven ground  
(page 275)



*Above, our houseboat (page 277)*

*Below, Rsharm Mahommed in his kitchen (page 279)*



the wide projecting dripstones are panelled in squares of changing pattern. Again there seems to be a strong Chinese influence, for the sandstone treated like this resembles elaborately carved lacquer from Peking.

In my memory I cannot accurately separate the two other wives' houses: one of them had ceilings painted in bold black-and-red geometrical designs, like something done by Braque, and the largest of the two had belonged to the Rajput wife and once housed the office of the Public Works Department when the British took over Fatehpur-Sikri for billeting purposes. It was here too that Lord Curzon, horrified at the use it had been put to, sat up all night at a deal table with an oil lamp, drafting the rough copy of his famous Monuments Act.

It is hard to give the right impression of Fatehpur-Sikri, of the heat and the knife-like shadows that cut across the great empty courtyards. There is a peculiar sharpness of outline to all the buildings, an arid, mathematical exactness. I cannot explain it, but one feels nervous alone. Walking alone under one of the covered-in passage-ways, looking out over a landscape of parched earth and bare rocks, I suddenly wished that one of our party were with me. Datta refused to let me walk out alone at night; people had seen too many strange things, but oddly enough it was not by the light of the moon that I was frightened, but in full daylight. We did not have the time to rest in the afternoon and it was precisely then, during those hot empty hours, that I felt the tingling of my scalp. I felt it while visiting the elephants' great empty stables and again in the dry, dusty courtyard of Abu'l Fazl's house, which he had shared with his brother, Faizi, Akbar's poet laureate, both of them intimate friends of the Emperor's. Jahangir, jealous of Akbar's affection for Abu'l Fazl, had the historian ambushed and murdered while the latter was out campaigning, an act of treachery which Akbar never really forgave him.

I think this feeling of nervousness is perhaps responsible for the fact that my photographs of Fatehpur-Sikri are so disappointing. One does not work well when one has to keep on looking back over one's shoulder. I do not even know quite what I expected to see. Forced on it by circumstances, this haunting silence has become the atmosphere of Fatehpur-Sikri. Akbar held his Court there from



1569 to 1585, and never, save for a brief visit, returned. And it must be remembered that Akbar's was a long reign, lasting forty-nine years. He died in Agra of dysentery in 1605. For years then, even during his life-time, these elaborate stone palaces had stood empty but for a few guards. Even as early as 1604 Fatehpur-Sikri was beginning to impress visitors with its sense of eeriness. Father Jerome Xavier, of the third Jesuit mission, passed through the city in that year and found it "totally demolished, save for the great buildings made by the Emperor". The swarming population had abandoned it; the streets were empty. "Here, we might say," wrote Xavier, "stood Troy." One wonders what Akbar's impressions were when he returned in 1601 for his brief visit; surely one of infinite sadness, for one cannot make a whole city re-live in a question of days.

Most guides will tell you that Akbar was forced to abandon Fatehpur-Sikri because of a shortage of water; this is quite erroneous. Fatehpur-Sikri was abandoned for a purely political reason. The orthodox Mohammedans, worried at Akbar's free-thinking, had plotted his overthrow, planning to reinstate his brother, the Governor of Kabul, in his place. Akbar, when informed of the plot by his excellent spy system, decided to move up to Lahore, to be nearer the place of insurrection, should anything come of it. Once there, he found it more expedient to stay, although a simple warning that his brother would lose his head if he persisted in his cause seemed to have been sufficient deterrent, and nothing more was heard of it.

Akbar's religious reforms are too well known for me to go into at length here. It is not difficult to understand the stiff-necked Mullahs' concern, though, over their Emperor. His religious debates held in a hall especially built for the purpose must already have annoyed them. They could not have enjoyed having to defend or argue their beliefs with their Brahmin, Jain and Zoroastrian *confrères*, for, of all religions, Mohammedanism seems to be the most bigoted. It was, in fact, the narrowness of orthodox Mohammedanism that drove Akbar to the lengths of founding his own religion—but not without having first tried others. What must have been the Mullahs' reaction when they heard that the Emperor had despatched an envoy to the Viceroy of Goa, requesting him to send to the Court

"two learned priests who should bring with them the chief books of the law and the gospel"! Three Jesuit Fathers arrived and made a very good impression. The Padres were allowed to build a chapel, and Akbar even attended Mass. For a moment it was thought that Akbar would become a Christian. But eventually the Fathers, whose hopes must have been raised by Akbar's enthusiastic reception, were forced to come to the conclusion that there was no chance of this happening. "The Emperor is not a Mohammedan, but he is doubtful as to all forms of faith and holds firmly that there is no divinely accredited form of faith, because he finds in all something to offend his reason and intelligence, for he thinks that everything can be grasped by reason."

It was with the departure of the first Jesuit mission that Akbar, backed up by the admiring Abu'l Fazl, started formulating his own creed, which was called *Din-i-Ilahi*, or 'Divine Faith', an eclectic pantheism which preached universal tolerance. Worship was paid to the sun and a fire was kept burning in the mosque, which was re-kindled every year by the rays of the sun striking through a magnifying-glass. This happened at a certain conjunction of the stars. Akbar acted as pontiff and had himself declared what amounted to Head of the Church. His interest in religion, although probably largely political, was undoubtedly sincere, his desire being to find a formula which would satisfy men of all creeds in his Empire.

*Din-i-Ilahi* was inaugurated in 1566, and Akbar made an address to his Court in the great mosque of Fatehpur-Sikri. Faizi, the poet laureate, composed a litany for the occasion, which, translated, goes something like this:

"To gather here and there  
From each fair plant that blossom choicest grown,  
To create a crown, not only for the King,  
But in due time for every Mussulman,  
Brahmin and Buddhist, Christian and Parsee,  
Through all the warring world of Hindustan."

Whether the Emperor recited it or not, I do not know, but if he did, he had learned it by heart, for he still could not read.

The 'Divine Faith', as Mr. Rawlinson tells us,\* made few converts, and dissolved at the death of its founder. It was, however, a gallant effort, and there is no doubt that Akbar's magnanimous policy laid the foundation that gave India, for a long time to come, a political unity and a common civilisation.

Datta showed me a reproduction of Akbar's seal and on it is this very suitable inscription:

"Truth is the means of pleasing God,  
I never saw anyone lost on the right road."

I have said nothing of the 'Hall of Special Audience', a vaulted chamber surrounded by a gallery. In the centre rises a colossal bracketed capital, on top of which was Akbar's throne. It is carved in the Hindu manner and is joined to the gallery by four narrow passages which meet in the corners where Akbar's Ministers sat when the Emperor was in audience. Other persons admitted to the hall accommodated themselves standing on the floor below. It was a truly royal conception: the Emperor, barely visible, soaring above his people like an eagle. It is said that this octagonal pillar symbolised the throne of Vishnu, the upholder of the Universe—the ideal Hindu ruler being regarded as Vishnu's Vice-Regent on earth.

I have also said nothing of Shaikh Salim Chisti's tomb, blindingly white marble amongst all the red sandstone, an "architectural cameo", as Mr. Percy Brown calls it, amongst Akbar's grandiose buildings. It is fretted and carved and delicate, and has strange serpentine volutes acting as bracket supports for its shallow sloping roof. The saint's tomb lies through an inner doorway covered over by a wooden canopy entirely inlaid with mother-of-pearl which shimmers in the gloom. This tomb is the only live thing about Fatehpur-Sikri; it is kept so by the barren women who come here in the hopes of arousing the saint's compassion. Descendants of Salim Chisti still live in a near-by village.

With Datta for company, I walked up through the gates of the city for one last look. I stood for a long while on the flat roof of one of the many baths. The moon was not quite full, but it was light enough to see clearly. A night wind blew fleecy clouds scudding swiftly across the stars, setting some dried leaves a-twirling in a

\* *India* by H. G. Rawlinson.

column of dust in the courtyard of the caravanserai, an enormous square walled-in by arcades under whose arches the traders used to store their wares. From all parts of the world they came, bringing their goods on camels to trade in this great city. Cloud shadows passed quickly against the crenellated wall behind me and a moon-beam escaping through a tattered rift struck suddenly, picking out Restless's tomb. Here was buried Akbar's favourite elephant. So fond was he of the beast that he had his architect construct a high tower over the grey remains. It is curiously shaped, being octagonal at the base and circular in the middle and tapering at the top. The circular part is entirely covered with elephant tusks in stone, looking like giant porcupine quills. Leaving Fatehpur-Sikri lonely and desolate in the moonlight, we drove back to Agra and out on another road to Sikandra to see Akbar's own mausoleum.

This tomb in its general outline takes the shape of a low truncated pyramid. It was supposed to terminate in a dome, but for some reason it was never finished and Jahangir, Akbar's son, not pleased with the general design, changed the plans and, instead, built an open platform in white marble, with fretted walls. Akbar's cenotaph lies in the middle of this great square, a monolith of white marble carved over with flowers, roses and irises and cherries. A little away from the cenotaph, about four feet distant, is a small two-foot-high pillar, having a hollowed-out cup, like a small holy water stoup, on top of it. This was once covered in gold and contained the Koh-i noor in its hollow. As with all Mohammedan tombs, the real burial-chamber lies below, in the vaults under the mausoleum. A gently-sloping shaft leads down to the tomb chamber, which is devoid, at the wish of the Emperor, of any decoration. It reminds one in form of the Pharaohs' tomb in Egypt.

Another Englishman, William Finch, travelling to Agra six years after Akbar's death, describes the tomb as being unfinished and covered with a white sheet interwoven with gold flowers. Rich rugs covered the floor and beside the tomb were laid the great Emperor's sword and shield, and on a small pillow his turban "and thereby two or three fair gilden books. At his feet stood some shoes and a rich basin and ewer. Anyone approaching makes his reverence and puts off his shoes, bringing in his hand sweet-smelling flowers to scatter on the carpet".

For over eighty years these things lay there, venerated by the people, who regarded him almost as a saint. Then in 1691 some rebellious Jats seeking treasure broke into the tomb and, scattering the Emperor's remains to the four winds, carried these relics away with them. They were never to be found again.

Fergusson\* tells us that Sikandra is Buddhistic in design, almost like a *vihara*; the details, however, are entirely Mogul—Mogul as interpreted by Akbar's architects. The mausoleum stands in a walled garden, an immense one of 150 acres, and is approached by four great sweeping walks of stone. One enters through the usual monumental gate, in which kettle-drums used to be sounded at dawn and again one watch after sunrise in honour of the dead. The inlay running in a great bold frieze of pattern over the gateway is remarkable. Worked in sandstone and white marble with points of black and olive-green, it looks like an early Matisse and must have been very daring for the time.

There were very few people about on the morning we were at Sikandra and I was pleased that it should have been so. Datta was with me, always interested, smiling behind his thick glasses. He told me how the Emperor had died, surrounded only by a few of his closest friends. Speechless towards the end, he still managed to keep his eyes open, struggling every now and then to utter a few words. Whose name was he trying to form, Mahomet's or God's?

The funeral was a very simple one. A gap was broken in the wall of the great red sandstone fort at Agra, which Akbar himself had built, and the body was carried out, as was the custom, on the shoulders of his son and grandson. A little procession followed to Sikandra. The mourners had already changed into Court clothes by sunset.

\* *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* by James Fergusson.



## NEW DELHI

It was at the Great Durbar of 1911 that the new capital was founded, being transferred from Calcutta to Delhi. "It is my desire," solemnly announced His Majesty the King-Emperor George V, "that the planning and designing of the public buildings to be erected may be considered with the greatest deliberation and care, so that the new creation may be in every way worthy of this ancient and beautiful city." The Government of India were in a hurry to occupy the new capital, but they could not have suspected then for what a comparatively short time the British Raj would actually live in it. "The Viceroy (Lord Hardinge)," writes Lutyens, "thinks only of what the place will look like in three years' time. *Three hundred is what I think of.* I mentioned ten years in regard to something, and he said it was so far ahead that it was not worth considering! This in building an imperial city!!" Lutyens was undoubtedly right as far as his work was concerned, and one wonders if Lord Hardinge had already seen the writing on the wall, a wall that had not yet risen from the dry, dusty ridge of Raisina Hill.

Life in New Delhi appeared to be that of any large capital in a hot climate; cocktail parties and receptions, polo late in the afternoon, and mornings spent in town, where the streets are lined with pink and orange flowering trees. Connaught Place is the shopping centre and is circular and glaringly white, double-storeyed, set with Doric columns. Its classical effect has been marred by the usual rash of hoardings and badly printed signs, but on the whole it is a gay city and the residential district leaves an impression of dappled shade and trees, and of bougainvillea-decked gardens; of ayahs with fringed prams; of station wagons and silent, lean Indians in old

khaki shorts. They are the gardeners, who are to be seen constantly plying plastic hoses. The mornings before breakfast were the pleasantest part of the day. I would go out into the garden and walk across the dew-soaked lawn in my bare feet. There would be sun-birds hovering over the chalices of a variety of pale-pink lily and always in the background would be the gentle booming of the 'brain-fever bird', a species of dove so called because of the monotonous insistence of its call. My host's two Siamese cats would follow me around. Every now and then they would stop to shake the dew off their paws. It was comforting afterwards to see the conventionality of the breakfast-table, the newspaper folded in one's place, the silver shining and the linen crisp and white. There would be oatmeal and cream and brown sugar, and England's slightly stodgy scrambled eggs.

I find it hard to analyse my impressions of New Delhi. I think on the whole I found it disappointing. Impressive, yes, imperial, imposing, but rather thin, especially Sir Herbert Baker's two Secretariats. I do not like the elephant motifs he has stuck on his dome and it seems to me that the columns are too high and not thick enough. The great black marble fountains are very handsome in Prince Edward Place, so also are some of the individual details; the walls, for instance, of the gradient mounting to the Viceroy Court. King's Way is also impressive, bordered on both sides with long strips of water overgrown with lily leaves on to which fountains splash. It measures very nearly two miles from Lutyens's handsome All India War Memorial arch, which forms a terminal to King's Way, to Viceroy's House. I personally do not like the attenuated proportions of the Jaipur Column set in the centre of Viceroy Court, nor do I like the spidery thinness of the wrought-iron screen forming the gateway to the court.

One approaches the great monumental portico of Viceroy's House up shallow slopes guarded by charmingly stylised sandstone elephants—and then comes the question of Viceroy's House itself. It would help enormously were the Viceroy still in residence. The building, I feel, needs that extra kick: the pomp and etiquette of an imperial train. The greater part of it now serves as a State Museum, and climbing the steps one misses that twinge of nervousness which obviously preceded an interview with the King-Emperor's representa-

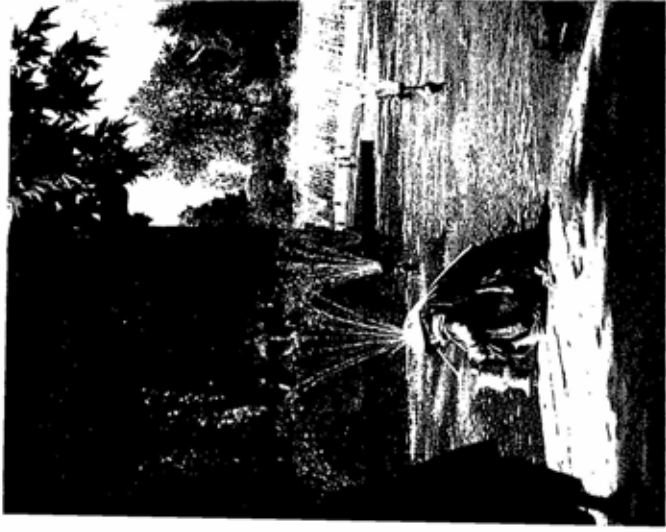


There was something medieval about this young man with a long, sensitive face (*page 287*).



Among the women one sometimes finds extraordinary beauty (*page 289*).





The black marble pavilion at Shalimar Bagh  
(page 293)



The terraces of Nishat Bagh (page 294)

tive. Certainly Lutyens built it to impress, as one immediately realises on entering the huge echoing Durbar Hall with its vast slabs of porphyry reaching for ever, it seems across the floor, reflecting the jasper columns flanking the dais where the throne used to be. I had the same impression once, a feeling of awe, on crossing the endless *sallas* of the Palazzo Colonna in Rome. I was on my way back from several months in Kenya and had been invited to tea by the lady of the house. The contrast between the tangled wilds of the White Highlands and all this tessellated marble no doubt heightened my impressions, and by the time I reached the drawing-room in which she had installed herself I felt very insignificant. The maharajahs and princes, in spite of their egrets and their diamonds, must have felt rather the same way as they progressed across this lake of porphyry.

Am I wrong in saying that the building is a little too dry? I admire Lutyens's inventiveness and his obvious flashes of genius, and hesitate to criticise, but this, I think, is how it struck me. However, the austere dome, sheeted in copper, is remarkably successful, so also is the conception of having fountains on the roof. Eight low truncated pyramids finish off the salient points of the roof and on these Lutyens has set great shallow bowls, which he intended to be continually overflowing with water. One is struck by his courage and dash. It obviously involved an elaborate pumping system, and what, after all, in a hot, dry country like India is more precious than water? Yet here it was, splashing and sparkling in the sun, overflowing in prodigious quantities from the roof of the King-Emperor's palace. It must have been very impressive.

The fountains were not playing the morning I went up there. I was familiar already with Viceroy's House through photographs and knew that there were two life-size marble statues representing George V and Queen Mary, one each side of the great entrance portico. These now have been covered over with what looked like packing-cases and, incongruously, the authorities have placed large blue and white china bowls on top of them planted with aspidistras. Might not the Indian Government have been proud enough of their past relationship with England to have left these statues alone? During the whole time I was in India this question of the statues was the only thing which really annoyed me.

It seemed quite natural that Viceroy's House, or that the part of it not lived in by the President, should have become the State Museum. Crystal chandeliers blaze out across the Durbar Hall, their pendants clanking gently in the breeze that blows in through the wide-open portals. The thrones and the red velvet canopy behind them have disappeared and in their place is a Buddha from Sarnath. Beautiful pieces of Hindu sculpture are exposed on plinths set around the different halls, and what used to be the panelled morning-room is now used to house a collection of early bronzes. Young university students were busy unpacking new treasures that had just arrived from one of the provincial museums. Quite rightly the archaeological society has decided to take its pick; they intend to make Viceroy's House a representative museum for the whole of India. Already they have assembled an astonishing collection.

The first morning I was there I had the whole place to myself—myself, that is, and the guards, and three Rajput women who clanked around in their silver jewellery. With the pride and dignity of their race, they strode out barefooted across the marble floor, their kilted skirts, swinging with each step, giving them a checky, independent air. I wondered what they thought of Sir Edwin's water-troughs lined with black marble, placed all the way down the Viceroy's staircase to cool the air. They took it all for granted, no doubt. After all, their own maharajahs had lived in great splendour, as they had proof in the collection of Rajasthani paintings that were on exhibition in what used to be the State Dining-room. I watched them wrapped in silent attention over a miniature in which Radha is shown offering a garland of jasmine to Krishna. He is departing on some errand and Radha sits up on an open balcony overlooking the gateway to the palace. Krishna is dressed in striped silk, running from orange-pink to green, fading to gold. He is shown astride a white horse that has been stained a pale, pinkish yellow with henna. Tassels of pearls hang from each stirrup. Just behind him follow two attendants bearing long, slender fly-whisks, made of peacock feathers. Above Radha, standing at various balconies of the palace, are her serving-maids. Diamonds shine in their noses and glint as they move. They are busily occupied showering Krishna with cascades of sweet-smelling flowers which they carry in shallow baskets.



## LOOSE LOVES CARVED ON THE TEMPLES OF STONE

The handsome Mrs. Singh, a Sikh lady working in the American Express, had produced a car for us with a Hindu chauffeur. He was to drive us three hundred miles down to Khajuraho, then back to Delhi, from where we were to drive up to Kashmir. It was a black American car, a Dodge. The chauffeur was called Jale. He was small-boned and pale, a high-caste Hindu and a vegetarian. He was a little supercilious perhaps, but quiet and good-mannered.

We had an uneventful day as far as Gwalior, driving through fields of grain past small mud villages. Up on the hill that rose like the acropolis behind the town, Man Singh, one of Gwalior's proud chiefs, had built himself a palace that, as my guide-book tells me, is "the noblest specimen of Hindu domestic architecture in North India". The interesting part about it is that it dates from the early sixteenth century and was built just before the advent of the Moguls. Babur, in his diary, admires it, and Akbar certainly was inspired by it when building his palace at Agra. Fine rounded bastions topped by open-domed cupolas strengthen its high walls, and in between them runs a battlement of singularly beautiful open lattice-work. Below this come a series of wide friezes made in yellow and blue tiles. The enamel has weathered the years remarkably well and still shines out, giving a touch of lightness to the massive walls. It is these tiles, in fact, that give the palace its name: the *Chit Mandir*, or Painted Palace.

Inside, the apartments are small and cramped and give one claustrophobia. It is as if the palace were built exclusively for women, for no normal-sized man can pass through the doorways without

stooping. The top two storeys of the palace are arranged round two open courtyards worked with unusual and very beautiful details. Capitals, hung with bells like a jester's collar, decorate some of the columns, while the balconies are screened off with very finely perforated lattices that look strangely mechanical, as if they had been cut out of plywood on a fret-saw. The rest of the palace is honey-combed with dark underground rooms intended as a cool refuge in the summer. It was these apartments that the Moguls used when they turned the palace into a state prison for prisoners of the royal blood.

We saw another palace and two early tenth-century temples, all on top of this island rock high up in the sky. At the end of the plateau there is a boys' school, a very select one, for I remember Bundi telling me that the majority of the princes, children are educated there.

Winding down, passing through a series of fortified gateways, we are again in the town. There is a handsome early Mogul tomb to be seen, and next to this a small pavilion where Tansen lies buried. Akbar's great singer was one of 'the Nine Gems' of his Court, one of the others being Baswar, the Emperor's chief painter, who lost his mind because he was made to work so hard. There is a tamarind tree growing over Tansen's grave, and such is his reputation that even today singers come to pluck leaves off it, believing that the chewing of them will impart a wonderful sweetness to their voices.

It was fresh and bright as we set off the next morning. We would be in Khajuraho for dinner and had the whole day in front of us. Not far from Gwalior the country began to change, to dry up. Here again were the great boulders that we had seen in Mysore, which litter India. Away stretched grey plains on both sides of the road, and strewn over them these strange, smooth stones that look like heads of monsters. The Indian's story about them is that after God had finished the creation of the world he found himself in possession of a quantity of superfluous material, which he rolled up in his fingers and cast haphazardly down upon the earth. It would be easy to believe, for they are oddly round. The boulders hold still a further interest, for in amongst them lives a brigand who is terrorising the country, a kind of local Robin Hood. There had been an article about him in the morning's paper. He calls himself Man Singh and

has been given the title of raja by the farmers, who idolise him. A man of low caste, who has apparently been deeply insulted by an acquaintance of high caste in his village, he has sworn vengeance and started systematically to eradicate every male member of the offending man's family. The task accomplished, he took to the forest and boulders of this wild country-side. The villagers must know his whereabouts, but no one will inform on him. Carefully choosing his prey, he will suddenly appear armed in the middle of the road, tall and broad-shouldered and very threatening. His victims must necessarily be travelling by cart, for I doubt whether he could hold up a car single-handed. The proceeds of his ill-gotten gains he gives away to the poor. He has been known to kill people, but only when forced to it.

We had brought a picnic lunch with us which we intended to eat on the ferry while crossing over the Batwa river. The crossing, however, did not prove as simple as all that; it took us three hours in all, a long wait being enforced on us by gipsies, a band some five hundred strong, who were in the process of migrating, having recently been allotted grazing-grounds on the outer fringes of Uttar Pradesh, the rich valley watered by the Ganges. There was only one ferry to negotiate the crossing and this plied slowly backwards and forwards, across the pale coffee-coloured waters of the Batwa, manipulated by six rowers. The river must have been at least a mile and a half wide at the point of crossing, for the ferry became an indistinguishable speck on the horizon on reaching the further bank.

The gipsies, of course, were travelling in bullock-carts. There were also several local buses to be dealt with. There was only one fair way of coping with the situation—each ferry crossing must take one bus or car to several gipsy carts and this is what the ferry's captain was doing. It was the hottest time of the day and the sun beating down on the metal top of the car turned it into an inferno. The more we drank of our iced lemonade, the hotter we got, and rivulets of sweat forming on the top of our scalps tickled as they ran down our heads. It got into our eyes and dripped off the end of our noses. A bath-towel was what we really needed. Jalc knew what we were in for, for as soon as we had drawn up in the sandy gully running down to the river he had opened up the bonnet of the car to save the engine.

The wait, however, was not quite as painful as it might sound, for the gipsies proved fascinating. Their colours were quite extraordinary. Imagine the gully of pale buff sand hedged in on both sides by thorn trees dusted with the faintest mist of green. In between this were wedged the gipsies, the men in dirty white and the women in colours that ran from magenta, dark lilac and amaranth to faded rose, the shade depending on how often they had washed their saris, that originally had all been the same deep magenta. With this was the pale glint of greasy silver which shone at the women's ankles. There were no other colours. The bullocks drawing the carts were white, a much purer white than the gipsies' soiled turbans, their torn shirts or eccentrically-tied dhotis. The wood of the carts was the same colour as the sand. The carts were primitively pegged together and covered over with woven straw, or in some cases patched sacking tied on with much string.

I thought that if I got out of the car and started taking photographs it would cause too much of a commotion and, rather ashamed of my lack of courage, stayed put. The gipsies, for their part, seemed only vaguely interested in us. It was a frustrating experience, for their every move, the grouping they made, the different textures, were all perfect material for the camera. Many of the women, taking advantage of being near the water, had washed their saris and had draped them over the thorn trees to dry, at the same time making shelters for themselves against the sun. I watched them squatting in the shade, among them a young girl kneading some flour, mixing it with water that she poured out of a small brass pot. She worked the pancakes between the palms of her hands, flattening them out on the fatty part below the thumb. Having done this she then threw them into a shallow iron pan that sat on a dung fire. The dung is picked up as the cattle drop it and dried. They use no other fuel. Another young girl sat with an old woman whom one supposed to be her mother. She sat with her back against the woman's knees. The woman was hunting for lice, of which she found a quantity, squeezing them between the nails of her thumbs.

Apparently the gipsies stem from India, from the Ganges basin, which they left before the third century B.C. They resided for several centuries in north-western India, migrating eventually from there

across eastern Europe. I learnt this from Dr. Basham\*, who gives a list of Romany words, comparing them with Sanskrit, and there is no doubt a close similarity between the two languages. *Doms*, this lowly caste of people are called in India, while *Rom* is the word the gipsies of Europe used to designate themselves. In Syrian Romany it occurs as *Dum*, even closer to the Indian form. For my part, I am grateful to India for her gift to us. For centuries now the gipsies have provided a romantic and colourful element in European life, with their dances and their music and their gaudy caravans.

It was late afternoon when we finally arrived in Khajuraho. It is a small country village, rather pleasantly wooded, basking in the reflected glory of its temples. There they sit, thirty of them, but only seven really count, each one a bunched-up collection of tubular cones set on a great solid platform of stone. Khajuraho is different from most Indian villages, for the houses face round a green in the middle of which there is a pond with duck on it. The Maharaja of Chatarpur, in whose state Khajuraho is to be found, has given up his palace and the *train de vie* that a palace entails, and now lives very simply in a small house near the temples.

After taking a shower I crossed the road and crawled under the wire into the fields. The temples grouped themselves in front of me, standing out against a cloud-driven sky. They range in date from A.D. 950 to 1050 and are a product of the Chandellas Kings, who ruled over this district until the thirteenth century. The Chandellas represent yet another of the many small dynasties amongst whom India was divided during the Middle Ages.

The eleventh-century Kandariya, or Shiva Temple, is the largest of the group and it is to this one that I made my way, over a tow-path that led through the trees. It is greyish-green in colour and built of granite. It is useless to try and describe its construction—one mounts the lofty terrace on which it stands and there it towers above one into the sky. It is sturdy and strong and heavily planted on the ground. The temples have almost the appearance of vegetable growths, like those organ-pipe cacti one finds in the deserts of Arizona. Small turrets, clustering in the seams of the central spire, repeat the shape of the tower and give the impression of a tremendous

\* *The Wonder that was India* by A. L. Basham. Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1954.



latent force that seems to drive the structure upwards. As in Bhubaneswar, there is no part of the temple that is not carved; the surfaces of its walls are for ever turning, projecting and receding, cut up into a thousand facets: pillared balconies project out over the central mass, and then, perhaps some fifteen feet up from the ground, start the belts of sculpture, crowds of figures, a whole people in stone who never for one moment stop posturing and turning. Their voluptuous bodies are immensely appealing. The sculptures are all more or less erotic, but the Kali Devi Temple seems to be entirely devoted to the arts of love-making. There is no conceivable position of the actual moment of union that is not portrayed.

I have to admit that gazing up at them does make one's pulse beat quicker. Miss Kramrisch\* tells us that *mithuna*, the state of being a couple, is portrayed on the walls as a symbol of the union of Essence and Substance. All the attractions, she tells us, of the Enchantress, the Great Goddess, are laid out in the numberless images of her maids and messengers, the celestial women of the gods, so that by succumbing to their charms man is brought closer to Her. One man to three women seems to be the general theme. In one of the panels the man is shown standing on his head facing towards you, two women stand, one on each side of him, also facing outward, while a third, with her back towards you, has lifted herself and is clasped on to his pelvis. The man's legs are wrapped round her, his feet in the small of her back. Her arms rest on the two other women's shoulders. Thus poised she must work herself and her partner to their climax. The man, although passive, excites the woman on each side of him with his hands. Some of the panels are portrayed with humour. In one of them, for instance, the woman is bending over while the man takes her from behind. This shocks the two female attendants, who have covered their eyes so as not to see what is happening. At Konarak, I remember, I had wondered how the erotic sculpture affected the village people. Aditya Kumar, the manager of the circuit-house where we were staying, was to answer my questions as well as any one person could.

We dined on the terrace outside our rooms. It was a still night, dark indigo-blue powdered with the stars, not a breath of wind stirring the flat obviate leaves of the catalpa trees growing in the

\* *The Art of India through the Ages* by Stella Kramrisch.

garden. A heady sweet smell seemed to hang on the hot air; it could have been the mango flowers after they had turned a little sour, but Kumar told me that it came from the fruit of the moha. The fruit is small and green and is used for making a kind of beer. The fruit is picked and then left to ferment in the sun. The villagers were picking it that night by the light of the stars, and we could hear them singing.

We were having our coffee when Kumar appeared dressed in spotlessly white muslin draped Hindu-fashion, falling in transparent folds round his legs. He was young, about twenty-five, small but not bad-looking, with flashing black eyes and a small moustache. He came and sat down with us. I asked him whether he would not accompany me to the temples as I did not particularly want to go alone. He accepted immediately. That had, in fact, been his intention. I could see that Kumar had something in mind. I had not very long to wait, for he seemed not at all shy and walked me straight up to a frieze running round the platform of the first temple. Pulling me over, he pointed to one particular position of copulation. The girls here wouldn't dream of indulging in such things, he informed me, with obvious regret in his voice. I wondered what an English country girl's reaction would be: probably the same. Kumar showed no restraint in the questions he asked me. The Indians are a singularly direct people and, sitting there on the terrace of one of the temples, our legs dangling over the edge, he was proving it. He was a bachelor and he found it good that we should discuss such things frankly.

I, for my part, had my questions answered. It was quite clear that these erotic sculptures had not the slightest effect on the locals. I remembered a couplet I had read somewhere and all day I had been trying to get it straight, and it was now, while talking to Kumar, that it suddenly came back to me:

"The organs of sex and the circlet of bones,  
And the loose loves carved on the temple of stones."

I wanted to say it aloud, but Kumar, proficient though he was at the English language, would probably not have understood it. It must, anyway, have been written about Khajuraho.

\*

DRIVE  
OVER THE HIMALAYAS

Delhi to Srinagar by road is roughly five hundred miles—nothing if you look on the map, but Kashmir lies five thousand feet up in the Himalayas and it is not an easy climb to reach the passes that lead down into this hidden valley. There are no trains; one must either go by car or fly. There had not been a moment's hesitation as to how we should go, as I had always been told that the drive over the mountains, though somewhat alarming, is extremely beautiful. We were to allow ourselves three days. I wanted to make a slight detour to include Chandigarh, the new capital of the Punjab, which lies at the foot of the Himalayas on the road from Ambala to Simla. Founded in 1951, it is still in the process of being built.

With the separation, Lahore, the old capital of the Punjab, had remained attached to Pakistan, and the Punjab Government, instead of choosing another existing town to replace their old capital, decided to found an entirely new city. With great courage and foresight a mission departed for Europe to engage architects. They finally decided on Le Corbusier and his old associate, Pierre Jeanneret, and two architects from London, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, both members of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*.

Few architects could have been given a better chance to prove themselves. There were none of the restrictions governing the building of New Delhi. The Punjab Government, with Mr. Nehru behind them, gave Le Corbusier and his associates *carte blanche* to choose the lay-out, the distribution of the various zones and the style of the buildings. As terrain they were given a vast plateau between two

great rivers. There were no problems of land tenure, since it all belonged to the state. They would transfer it to individuals only in accordance with the plan. In the reports I read I saw that the only two drawbacks appear to have been the poverty of the material employed, governed by the cost, and the necessity of having recourse to local labour, which naturally was quite unused to modern building technique.

We motored northward all morning from Delhi, until we reached Ambala and the turning off for Chandigarh. It was exciting waiting for the first sign of the city. Slowly the mountains grew out of the distance in a faint blue outline, but there was no sign of any building. We passed great chunks of mango trees growing by the side of a dry river bed a blue-grey in colour, strewn with water-worn pebbles. We did not realise it, but we were already on route V-1, the national trunk road, part of Le Corbusier's arterial network planned to deal with the traffic problem. I have a map showing the grading of the roads; V-2 is the great central artery of the town. V-3 frames each sector, bordering all four sides. This is a road reserved exclusively for fast-moving traffic. No doors open on to the V-3s and no cars may stop except at certain points, every three hundred yards. And so it goes on, down to the V-7s, which run through belts of green trees and grass, past playing-fields and schools. These are dedicated to youth and communal sports. A faint chill strikes me when I look at the map. I am reminded of Huxley's *Brave New World*, but the idea soon passes. We bowled along, describing a majestic curve, and found ourselves in Chandigarh before we had time to take our bearings. It lies low and square, a complement to the line of the distant hills.

The hotel proved gay and comfortable and altogether what might be expected—tubular columns and perforated walls. The different rooms are painted in the flat bold colours we have grown used to seeing in contemporary buildings, colour now being used for architectural effect. The city has been criticised, certainly, but then anything as revolutionary as this is bound to be. I learned that the name of the capital, Chandigarh, is borrowed from that of the nearest village. It is to be a political capital, as is Washington or Canberra, and is therefore not being built to accommodate more than five hundred thousand people. There is to be as little class distinction as

possible and it is to be cut up into sections, each occupied by inhabitants of one particular profession or calling.

The first thing that struck me was the way each building had been insulated from the direct light of the sun. All the smaller houses have protruding ledges or shields running round the windows, stopping the sunlight from penetrating directly into the rooms. Much attention has also been given to ventilation. Every wall that for constructional or domestic reasons did not have to be solid was cut through or laid in oblong or square openings to allow the free circulation of air. It was also interesting to see Le Corbusier's use of materials, the manner, for example, in which he has employed the pebbles from the near-by river bed: mixed with cement, they have been incorporated into the walls of some of the houses, laid in straight lines, thus forming a very pleasing pattern. He has an excellent feeling for texture. But his main preoccupation has been with the violent Indian sun, the problem of shade and how best to isolate his buildings from the terrific heat.

On the plan one can see the intended lay-out: first comes the Secretariat, then the Hall of Assembly and, on an axis with this, the High Court. The Governor's Palace will lie to the north-west, equidistant between the High Court and the Assembly, and near it will be the Chandigarh monument of the Open Hand, a huge open hand, fifty feet high, to be set on ball-bearings so that it turns with the wind. The palm is flat and open; the three middle fingers point to the sky, while the thumb and little finger are inclined a little to the side. It is to symbolise harmony among mankind.

When we were there, only the High Court existed and it still had not been painted. It is a long building of reinforced concrete, sheltered from the sun on both sides by a deep honey-combing of thin concrete louvres. A great double roof curves over the main body of the court, acting as an extra sun-shield; a kind of awning, something like the shell of a tortoise. Openings arched between the two roofs allow the free circulation of air. It is stimulating and, strangely enough, one is reminded continually of Jai Singh's observatory at Jaipur. Le Corbusier's architecture is not as alien to Asia as one might at first have supposed.

It was late by the time we reached Pathankot, our stopping-place for the night. We were met in a jeep on the outskirts of the town by

two Burma Shell representatives. They had arranged dinner for us at the station restaurant, the usual place to eat, when travelling in out-of-the-way places. We were tired from driving all day and I remember the glare of the gaslights and the spotlessly white tablecloth. Driving in India through the heat of the afternoon is quite an ordeal, and even the toughest of constitutions succumb. I was delighted when our turbaned friends led us to the rest-house at Madhopur, four miles out of the town. It was near a river and I could hear the rushing water. One could see nothing in the dark, but a heady wind tore at the trees. I stood on the porch of the rest-house for a moment before going to bed; beyond the hedge at the bottom of the garden, beyond the river, must stand the first gentle heavings of the Himalayas. The wind on my face had body. Unlike those dusty winds in the plain that blow hot, it held a promise of high places. Instinctively I turned up my collar.

We made an early start. The plains lay behind us. The landscape, though, to begin with was slightly disappointing. I had expected something a little more dramatic. We might easily have been in northern Italy. It seemed an age before we came to grips with the mountains. But mountains have a habit of deluding one, for they always look much nearer than they actually are. It was at Jammu, tilted in the foothills, that our climb started. It is from Jammu that the Banihal route into Kashmir has its beginnings. There are three passes into Kashmir and we chose the Banihal route since it is reported to have the best road. Jammu is the capital of the Jammu province and the winter headquarters of the Kashmir Government. Kashmir is called 'J and K' by the locals.

We lunched in a gay little rest-house with a garden full of hollyhocks and roses. Without being really aware of the change we found ourselves having coffee on the terrace in the sun. We had already crept up to a thousand feet. In the car afterwards we had to shut the windows.

All afternoon we dipped and turned, following the contours of the valley. To begin with, it was green and mild in character and the mountains were clothed in clumps of wild oleander mixed in with datura hung with a profusion of green-white flowers. It was a pretty, peaceful scene, but as we climbed there came a change. Turning

the spur of a hill we branched off into another valley, and immediately it became much wilder. The road narrowed, clinging to the side of what was fast becoming a gorge. Below us, at the bottom, a drop of three or four hundred feet, roared the Tawi river, swollen by the melting snows. Logs on their way to some lumber-yard thrashed around in the angry waters. They must have been the slim trunks of the deodar, a variety of cedar which can attain any height up to thirty feet, but which from our vantage point were reduced to mere matchsticks. It had grown cooler and I felt almost cold in my open-neck shirt and rolled-up sleeves. It was now that one realised the scale of these mountains. The Apache Trail, Swiss mountain passes, even the Dolomites, pale in comparison. We had reached an altitude, I suppose, of about five thousand feet and it was about this time too that we met our first convoy.

Since there is no railway all the transport in Kashmir is by truck. Convoys leave Jammu and Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, three times a week, at regular hours—a shuttle service, three one way, and three the other. Buses cope with the civilian population; added to which there is the possibility of meeting military convoys, for Kashmir is heavily patrolled by the Indian Army. I have already intimated the narrowness of the road, and meeting a convoy is an unpleasant ordeal. They average two hundred trucks to a convoy. Every so often there are cut-outs by the side of the road and one is lucky if one reaches them at the right time, otherwise one has to draw right in against the rock face and let the passing trucks by. They come in batches of twelve, Chevrolets, for the most part, their bodies painted with country scenes and scrawled over in Arabic script. Their turbaned drivers are barely visible in the depths of their cabin-like front seats. It must be a hazardous performance, driving in convoy over this pass, especially as most of the trucks free-wheel down the hills, relying entirely on the foot brake. I certainly would have hated to be a passenger bouncing around up there, on those high front seats. It was quite bad enough in our own car, and no one could have been watched with more attentive an eye than our Hindu chauffeur. We all complained in unison if the needle of the speedometer went one degree over thirty.

It was a nerve-racking experience, with these terrifying drops always yawning beneath the very windows of the car. As in

England, one drives on the left-hand side of the road, the wrong side of the road as far as this pass is concerned on the way into Kashmir. All the time we climbed and dipped without losing altitude, and then, towards late afternoon, the road wound down into a small mountain valley. The mountains were immediately less rugged and, our view curtailed, we were concerned only with our immediate surroundings. Great rounded hills cupped us in and one might almost have believed oneself to be in the Scottish Highlands. Banihal, the village after which the pass is named, lay tucked away in the far reaches of the valley. It was here we were to spend the night. The dak bungalow was long and low and lay up against the side of a hill. It was built of granite and had a grey shingled roof. I have not mentioned them at any length up till now, but these dak—or more correctly dawk—bungalows are an integral part of India's life. They are the equivalent of the coaching stages in Britain, only far more frequent, for the English built them for travel by palanquin, or dawk as it used to be called. They occur at intervals of twenty miles on most of the main routes, and we used them whenever we could, for they are clean and well kept and are visited every month by an itinerant inspector. They are not equipped with all the modern conveniences, but that, perhaps, is part of their charm. The bathroom, one finds, is devoid of any kind of fitting, just a bare room with unpainted walls, but call 'Bearer', and immediately a whole procession of utensils appear: tin tub, calabash, chair and bucket, box of sawdust and spade; silently at full speed the bath is filled, then afterwards cleaned and taken away—all so methodically carried out, so rapidly executed, that one is not in any way inconvenienced by the antiquated mode of its performance.

Our rooms looked out on to a terrace above the road, below which the floor of the valley stretched away in paddy fields to a small river. I walked down there over muddy causeways kept flooded by a whole network of bubbling streams. It seemed an incongruous place for rice to be growing, for I had always associated it with hot, damp countries, and this valley could hardly be counted in that category. More and more I was reminded of Scotland by the grey granite and the clattering of the pebbles in the river, which produced excellent snow trout for our supper. Turning round, I looked back over the way I had come. From their distance I could see the lie of the land.



Behind the gently rolling hills rose great rocky giants covered in snow. Black clouds were piling up against an ice-grey sky and forks of lightning could be seen flickering across the valley. After weeks of dust and heat I suddenly felt elated.

The storm held off for a little while longer, which gave me time to walk through the village. The houses were all of wood, with the first floor overhanging. Women in muslin trousers sat at the open windows. They wore caps on their heads and their hair plaited in dozens of tresses. Plaques of silver hung round their necks. In the streets men and children had wrapped blankets round themselves against the evening chill. A great chenar, a species of plane tree, marked the centre of the village and in it roosted hundreds of birds, twittering and chirping away in that noisy half-hour before dark. I noticed lanes lined with willows branching off down to the river—but there was not time to explore any more, already the first drops had begun to fall. Fires had been lighted in our rooms and a boy was sent to fetch oil lamps. The sheets were very coarse, but clean; was it my imagination that they had a faint smell of peat?

A strong wind rose during the night; it tugged at my windows, chasing the smoke down the chimney. Away in the distance I could hear the thunder rumbling over the mountains. What better feeling than listening to a storm when one is comfortably tucked up in a warm bed? It boded ill, though, for the morning.

It had rained hard all night and it had snowed on the great mountains behind. We were up early, wanting to make an early start, to avoid the military convoy which we had heard was due to leave Srinagar at eleven o'clock in the morning. Without a word from any of us the head boy at the dak bungalow had prepared porridge for our breakfast—surprising, perhaps, when one thinks about it, but it seemed altogether fitting at the time.

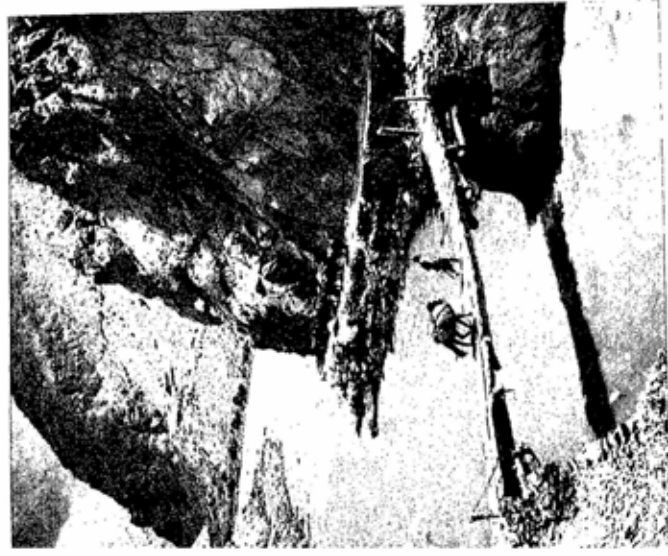
Looking at our maps it was easy to make out the mileage left for us to cover, but not quite so simple to estimate the number of hours we should take to cover it. We had another eighty miles to do, nearly half of which would be taken up in climbing the pass lying another two thousand feet above us. This would certainly be the hardest part of the drive. Once we safely reached flat ground again, Srinagar was only a question of an hour or so's drive. The Vale



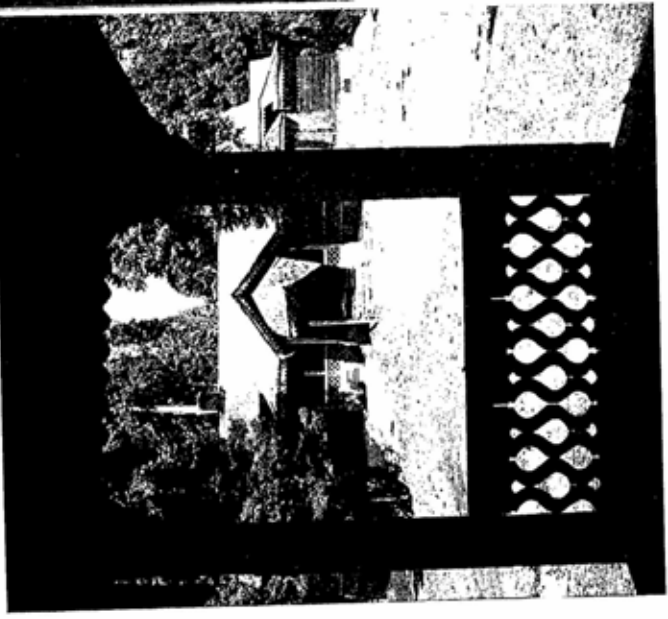
The Chasma Shai (*page 296*)



The waterways opening off the Dal Lake (*page 296*)



‘The silk road’, the oldest trading route into India  
(page 298)



Nestling in the pine woods were wooden chalets  
(page 300)

of Kashmir is small in area, being some eighty-four miles in length and twenty to twenty-five miles in breadth. Srinagar lies roughly in the middle.

Hundreds of people have taken this pass, and some of my friends even remember the days when it had to be negotiated by tonga, but nevertheless it was an adventure for us; we were, after all, going to Kashmir, and no one can deny the romance of driving through the Himalayas. I am not as a rule mountain-minded, nor do I like lakes, but there are always exceptions. Victoria Nyanza can hardly be classified as an ordinary lake, and the very fact that it is the source of the Nile redeems it for me. The same with the Himalayas, which are the greatest physical feature of the earth, in mass greater than all the mountains of Europe, including the Caucasus, put together. In Sanskrit Himalaya means 'the abode of snow' and there they were now, in front of us, all round us, rolling away for hundreds of miles, ridge on ridge and crest on crest; Nanga Parbat, K-2, Everest; they are names that evoke the thunder of avalanches. Small wonder that I should have felt excited.

Wisps of grey clouds still clung to the mountain round Banihal. Then it started to rain, the rain very soon became sleet and the sleet snow. We were suddenly completely blanketed in a muffled world of white flakes. Occasional clearings in the clouds gave us frozen glimpses of vast rocky precipices dropping not more than five feet away from the side of the car. Above us huge stark walls of bare rock slanted upwards, disappearing into the snow. For hours, we climbed, unable to do more than ten miles an hour for fear of skidding. Our poor little Hindu chauffeur paled in the cold and seemed to be visibly shrinking in his seat. No sign of life stirred in this great mountain fastness and our visibility was reduced to a question of feet. Slowly, slowly, we crept round the curves, huddled in our rugs.

The windows misted over, and, turned in on themselves, my thoughts went back to those nature-loving Emperors: Babur, the hill man who hated the plains, Akbar his grandson, who, although he felt more kindly about India, loved Kashmir especially, and then Jahangir his son, who journeyed so often to Kashmir and occupied so much time in spring and autumn on the long journey that Delhi was practically deserted. Eventually, during his reign, the capital

was transferred to Lahore, the city of the Indian plains lying nearest to this mountain barrier. Having now travelled the pass myself I can appreciate the difficulties the Moguls faced, with their never-ending baggage-trains. It is hard to picture them in this stark desolation, the Court in their muslins, with their elephants and their horses. They were undoubtedly swathed in Kashmir shawls, made of wool so fine that they can be drawn through a ring. So deathly silent is it up there that endless echoes must have been set up by the imperial train as it wound its way through the narrow gorge—noises that must have sounded strange to the goatherds and to the eagles wheeling above. We know, in fact, that the difficulties of transport and of securing provisions, as well as the actual dangers of the road over the mountain passes, made it necessary to restrict the number of the Court considerably. Only nobles of the first rank were permitted to accompany the Emperor and Empress. There must have been endless intrigues over questions of precedence, for those not permitted to accompany the Emperor were left behind at the foot of the mountains in the stifling heat to await the Court's return.

Bernier describes the journey he made to Kashmir during Aurangzeb's reign, and tells us in detail of the magnificence of the Emperor's train. The royal tents were partitioned off by high screens of red cloth and, inside, lined with printed calico representing large vases of flowers. The tents of the seraglio were even more splendid, set off with figured satin and all embroidered with silver and gold, with deep, elegant fringes. The royal tents were purposely made higher than the rest, so that they could be easily distinguished from a distance. The nobles, "copying their master, pride themselves on the loftiness of their tents, which must not, however, be too conspicuous, lest the King perceive it and command that the tent be thrown down". Sometimes the King rode on horseback, especially when the weather was favourable for hunting, but mostly was carried on men's shoulders on a field throne. The princesses travelled in palanquins, or in litters slung between small elephants, all silk and gilt, covered with beautiful tassels and hidden under a webbing of shining nets. "These lovely and distinguished females, seated in *mikdembers*, are thus elevated above the earth, like so many superior beings borne along through the middle regions of the air." The Emperor's household effects, his painted and gilt bed, his gold

dishes and his porcelains required some two hundred camels and an equal quantity of mules to transport them. The camels, however, had to be left behind at the entrance to the pass, the mountains being too steep and craggy for their long, stiff legs. Porters supplied the place of camels, "and you may judge of the immense number that are employed if what they tell me may be true, that the King alone has no fewer than six thousand".

At one point of the climb, the Emperor's cavalcade met an aged hermit "of extraordinary appearance, who had resided on the top of this mountain ever since the time of Jahangir. Of his religion everybody was ignorant; but it was said that he wrought miracles, caused strange thunder, and raised storms of wind, hail, snow and rain. His white and uncombed beard was extremely long and bushy; he had somewhat of the savage in his aspect, and was haughty in his manner of asking alms." The old man got very angry with those who made a noise. "After I had entered his cave, and softened his countenance by means of half a rupee which I humbly put in his hand, he informed me that noise made there stirred up the most furious tempests imaginable. It was wise in Aurangzeb, he added, to be guided by his advice, and to order the army to pass with stillness and expedition. His father, Shah Jahan, always acted with the same prudence; but Jahangir, having upon one occasion derided his counsel, and, notwithstanding his earnest remonstrance, having ordered the cymbals to be beaten and the trumpets to be sounded, narrowly escaped destruction." It is well known now, of course, that reverberations of sound dislodge avalanches.

When the worst of the climb was over, with the promise of Kashmir just beyond the last tortuous turn, a terrible thing happened. The elephants carrying the royal ladies panicked and fell down the precipice. "Happily for the women, the place where they fell was of no great height; only three or four were killed; but there were no means of saving any of the elephants." Two days afterwards, Bernier repassed the same way and observed that some of the poor beasts were still moving their trunks.

We left Banihal at a quarter to eight; it seemed an age before we reached the tunnel; once through this, we would have climbed the pass and our descent into Kashmir would begin. It is easy to understand why a new tunnel is being drilled, for the one we splashed

through seemed to be in the last stages of decomposition. Water literally poured through the fissures in the rock above our heads. It was dramatic to think that at the end, in that small glimmering of light, lay Kashmir—beautiful Kashmir that for generations has been considered a kind of Shangri-La. The glimmering, however, proved but a symbolic gateway to this heaven on earth, but at least the the bonnet of our car was now slanting downwards. For another half-hour the mists continued, then suddenly they cleared. We were out of the blanketed world of white. Immediately the wild flowers began, sweet-smelling *daphne fragrans* and great drifts of the orange crown-imperial lily. We could see the road winding below us, like a ribbon, and down there too, serpentineing its way up to us, was the military convoy looking like a line of green ants. We had made such bad time, owing to the storm, that we had been caught. Soon we could hear the whining of the engines as they ground up in high gear. Presently we came upon the first truck; it was drawn up by the side of the road and just behind it stood a staff car. We slowed down and an officer directed our attention to the rocky folds of the hill several hundred feet below us; there, splayed out on a hump of rock, were the remains of a jeep. In it there had been four soldiers. They had been acting as an advance guard and had just this moment gone over the edge. One split second of inattention, or perhaps too high a speed, and they had skidded. At least it made me feel less of a coward having insisted all the time on our driver going so slowly.

It was not raining, but it was dull and overcast. Sad that our first view of the Vale should have to be sunless. We rounded a bend, and there it was, quite flat, for, as geologists tell us, the Vale had once been a large lake. This was way back in the Stone Age and with the centuries the water had drained away; quite enough, however, remains for Kashmir to be decidedly aquatic in character. The waters of the Jhelum and of its lakes are its life-blood. We could see them from our vantage point, glinting like tin among all the green. Immediately below us the first miles were cloisonné with flooded paddy fields, then came the long straight lines of poplars, like stitching bordering the roads. Here and there a field of mustard shone out very yellow, though patched with mauve; the mauve being serried ranks of crocus, a particular variety called *sativus*, grown for

their stamens, which when dry become saffron. Kashmir is famous for the quality of its saffron.

The villages crowd in amongst clumps of willow—tall, three-storeyed houses built of mud bricks and wood with thatched roofs. All round, the ground is stamped bare, and the different holdings are marked by rough walls built up of boulders, glacier débris, rounded and smoothed by snow waters. Streams bordered by willows murmur away between their grassless banks and ducks bobble round like celluloid toys. Clumps of blue and white irises cover the uneven ground marking the village cemetery. The Kashmiri call them the "flowers of sorrow", for they are always to be found on Mohammedan graves. But the irises have escaped from the graveyard ages ago and now run riot everywhere, carpeting whole areas with their thick-growing leaves. Sometimes the villagers use the iris to strengthen the roofs of their houses, the tubular roots taking hold in the loose thatching.

That these villages look like hamlets in a Brueghel painting is but a first quick impression, but it is an appropriate comparison, I think. The Kashmiri are a poor people, dirtily dressed in drab colours, not the kaleidoscopic dyes of India proper; they are real peasants, as we know them, portrayed by the Flemish painters—uncouth but, to do them justice, not boisterous. All through the long winter months they barricade themselves in their houses. The cows are kept in the lower rooms. Upstairs every hole and cranny is blocked with mud and straw to keep out the fresh air. The heat from the cattle mounts up from below and so keeps the family warm. The rooms become so hot that the moisture literally drips from the ceiling.

Quickly now we advanced across the flat floor of the valley; the roads are embanked and run very straight, lined with poplars. I read that the original poplars were planted at the command of the Empress Nur Jahan. One could have been on Napoleon's *routes nationales*, one of those long straight roads that strike out, cutting across Flanders.





## LIFE ON A HOUSEBOAT

I have seen an article in a newspaper by Mr. Nehru, himself a Kashmiri Pandit (Pandit meaning 'learned man' and being a title given to the Hindu inhabitants of the valley by Akbar, who found them remarkably erudite and intelligent), in which, referring to Kashmir, he wrote: "While part of India, it is, in fact, the heart of Asia, and for countless ages great caravans have passed from India right up to central Asia through this state . . . I wonder," he continued, "how many people realise that Kashmir is farther north than Tibet." He is inferring, in other words, how important strategically the country is. Its situation today is far too complicated to be analysed in a few words, but one has only to look at its position on the map; there it lies, tucked in between Tibet, China and the Soviet Union. Moreover it guards the headwaters of both the Indus and the Ganges, India's two most important rivers. Further to complicate matters, another frontier has sprung up of late: the cease-fire line drawn by the United Nations, which now divides Kashmir into two hermetically sealed halves. It has not been decided yet to whom the State of Kashmir should belong, both India and Pakistan claiming it. Owing to its key position Kashmir is not strong enough in itself to be allowed to remain independent.

While we are on the subject I should brush lightly over the country's history, which is more or less that of India; for centuries it was ruled by Scythian Hindu princes, who were succeeded by Tartars, who, in turn, were succeeded by the Moslem invaders who swept India in the early fourteenth century. In 1586 the country was conquered by Akbar. With the fall of the Mogul Empire in the eighteenth century, Kashmir was annexed by one of the Afghan

tribes, to whom it belonged until 1819, when Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forces defeated its Pathan Governor. With the disintegration of the Sikh Empire, Kashmir became feudatory to the British Government, like all the other Indian states, a British Resident being appointed to Srinagar in 1851. The reigning Maharaja abdicated in 1947, fighting broke out between his Hindu and Moslem subjects and it is now the United Nations who hold the peace until Kashmir's fate is decided.

I have to be firm with myself when writing about Kashmir, for life in a houseboat has about it an atmosphere of pure enchantment, and the moment we arrived we were captivated by this wooden world. We had rented our houseboat by correspondence, having specified that it should be as comfortable as possible. I had seen a photograph of one in a magazine and it had looked charmingly Victorian, all hung with scalloped blinds and white linen awnings. I mentioned this in my letter and suggested that the agents should choose among the older types of houseboats. I could not know that they were all like this; a mixture of Noah's ark and a cottage on the banks of the Thames at Henley.

The first European houseboat built dates from about 1890, and the builders have stuck to the same model ever since. Their story is interesting. Kashmir, with its lakes and its rivers and its canals, has from the earliest time been a land of boats. All the important towns in the valley are situated on the banks of rivers, and in some districts, in fact, there are whole villages in which the means of communication between houses is by boat. The Kashmiri take to a boat as naturally as an Englishman to the sea and they have numerous varieties. The craft are invariably flat-bottomed and without sails. No form of engine exists and they are navigated by current, being propelled by cleverly manipulated poles. However cursorily, they have to be enumerated: *bahts* are large barges which carry all the heavy freight. They have a high prow and stern with a cabin aft in which the boatman lives with his family. The whole is roofed over with thatch. After this comes the *doonga*, which is about sixty feet in length and about eight feet in width in the centre. This also has a thatched roof and the walls are made up of sliding wooden panels. As with the *bahts*, the boatman lives aft and hires out the remaining portion to passengers or visitors. These are the two large

types of boats, and then comes a whole variety of smaller craft, the most common of which are the *shikaras* and the *dembnavs*. Tedious though it may be, I have to name them, for in Kashmir they are continually cropping up in the conversation; they are part of one's life, as vital to one's existence as are the gondolas in Venice. *Shikaras*, in fact, are the gondolas of Srinagar. They hold two to four passengers and are paddled by several boatmen and skim swiftly over the water, with their pointed, shallow, uplifting prows. Two is the ideal number in a *shikara*, for one can then lie back on a bed of brightly embroidered cushions while being propelled swiftly to one's destination. The seat, or bed, occupies the whole of the middle of the boat and is shaded by a canopy of plaited straw that slants high up towards the prow and is hung with saffron-yellow curtains. The seat and the poles on which the canopy rests are covered in coarse linen embroidered in orange and scarlet wool with conventionalised flowers patterns. The colour scheme never varies, only the pattern of the embroidery. The *dembnav* is really nothing more than a dug-out in which flowers and vegetables are delivered. Every morning they came crowding round us like so many water beetles, skating over the pale coffee waters of the Jhelum, on which we were moored. All our marketing was carried out in this way, for the farmers and market-gardeners are entirely amphibious.

The Moguls, we know, regarded Kashmir as a heaven on earth, but then so did all the inhabitants of the hot plains of India, the English perhaps more so than any of them. Knowing how they felt about it and fearing a too great influx of retired army officers and government officials, one of the Maharajahs passed an edict forbidding Europeans to own land in the country. The only solution was the houseboat. Large houseboats all follow the same model and average as much as a hundred and fifty feet in length, by about twelve feet wide. They are square-ended and built throughout of unpainted wood, the hull being made from deodar and the rest being carried out in another species of pine, alternating sometimes with walnut. It is like living in a cigar box—the smell of the wood is delicious. One walks down the gang-plank on to an open veranda shaded by an awning and set with cushions on upright seats. The seats are built up against the end of the boat, which is glassed in with square panes. Double doors open into the sitting-room, off which

leads the dining-room. There are generally three bedrooms, each one with its own bath. The kitchen and the boys' quarters are in a smaller boat tethered behind. A long, train-like corridor leads from the dining-room down to the bedrooms. A cat-walk of planks runs all the way round the boat and a stairway leads up on to the roof, which, over the sitting-room and the dining-room, is flat, forming a terrace. A small wooden balustrade frames this terrace, just high enough to keep the earthenware pots of geraniums from tumbling into the water. A linen awning stretched over a frame keeps the sun off. Flimsy curtains hang down the poles and a scalloped edging stitched in black appliqué finishes off the decoration. The pattern is invariably the same. There are chairs and a table on the terrace, and we had our tea there when the sun was out. The roof over the bedrooms, which covers roughly half the boat, is sloping and shingled, each of the windows being topped off with a gable, rising dormer-fashion out of the sloping roof. White linen blinds roll down over each window, which are many-paned and slide back into the panelled walls. One can perhaps understand now why I compared the houseboats to English cottages and how, long and box-like with square ends, they remind one of Noah's Ark.

It was a continual joy to me, stepping off the grass banks overhung with willows on to the gang-plank of our houseboat—the amusement of the fretted balustrades round the entrance, everything a bit crooked, and then, the pleasant springiness of the floor. Being flat-bottomed, the boat itself had no movement. The only drawback to our boat was her name—the *Alexandra Palace*. Edwardian though she might be in appearance, this was going a little too far, but then Kashmiri have a very strange idea of nomenclature, and one of the dealers called the houseboat on which he sold his wares *Suffering Moses*.

The *Alexandra Palace* belonged to a very dignified hawk-faced individual called Rsharm Mahommed. He also happened to be our cook and it was not until the end of our stay that we realised he was our landlord, not that it mattered very much. The agent through whom we had taken it had omitted to inform us of the fact. I only hope that Rsharm Mahommed did not look askance at our attempted embellishments. I don't think he minded, for they were only superficial. Anyhow the interior had great charm in spite of Rsharm. The

furniture, though adequate, was again the worst kind of modern, clumsy and highly varnished and upholstered in drab brown. It is always fatal when Orientals try to simulate Europeans. It is strange, but even their sense of colour goes astray.

Wooden panelling, however, was a great advantage, in addition to which the ceilings were painstakingly worked in the manner typical of the country, being made of tiny, carved pieces of wood arranged in geometrical designs. Electricity had been laid on from a cable branched to the side of the boat, giving a very weak current but sufficient to see by. Ugly, china-shaded light-brackets branched out from the walls, and Rsharm, with great pride, had nailed up porcelain flower-containers made in the shape of a fan. They opened out flat against the wall in between the lights. But these were small details of no importance.

Kashmir is famous for its hook-work rugs and we bought several of these for a few pounds apiece, and spread them over the floors and on the furniture. They were pink and orange and bright green and would have delighted Matisse. And then, of course, there were the flowers, many of them the common spring flowers of our gardens at home. Early every morning men would appear in their *dembnaus*, loaded full to the gunwales with irises and narcissi, bunched into earthenware pots. There were touchingly familiar flowers such as primulas, but then there were also the orange crown-imperial lilies which grow up in the mountains, and sometimes the blue Himalayan primula, and the pretty, delicate red-and-white-striped clusiana tulip, whose pointed head suggests the peppermint rock of one's childhood. They are one of the earliest known species of tulip and grow wild here all over the fields. But perhaps the most surprising of all the flowers was the Persian lilac, which I had never seen before. It is a much finer flower than the European variety and grows in great plumes of pale mauve.

The first morning these flower-sellers appeared under our windows we bought the whole boatload. They charged us exorbitant prices, but we were soon to learn the tricks of the trade. One is forced to bargain, for the average Kashmiri merchant is an appalling brigand and would, if he could, steal one's eye-teeth. We often would buy from these men in the boats, but only after tedious argument about the prices. Sometimes, just to keep them within reason-

able bounds, we would send them away and go and buy flowers from the vicarage near where we were moored. The gardener there was delighted to let us have flowers cheap.

The houseboat, as can be imagined, was always full of flowers. We bought pottery bowls and arranged great clumps everywhere; tall sprigs of Persian lilac and great masses of sweet-smelling wall-flowers. Mixed up with the fragrance of the pinewood the place smelt like a herbalist's shop.

We had four boys to look after us on the boat: dignified Rsharm Mahommed, who could hardly be termed as a boy, Sidique, who was our guide and helped wait at table, and another Mahommed, who was our real house-boy and who spoke with a lisp. The fourth we hardly ever saw, though he was the general factotum, aged about fourteen. It was his duty to clean out the tin tubs and empty the buckets in the bathrooms. We had running hot and cold water, but for obvious reasons of hygiene the toilets did not flush, for there are about two thousand houseboats on the waters of Kashmir.

Rsharm Mahommed was tall and always coiffed in a snow-white turban wound in two halves like a melon round his head. A very long and waisted brown tweed jacket worn over shirt-tails and white cotton trousers completed the outfit. He spoke quite good English, but very slowly. Every morning at breakfast he would appear silently on bare feet and we would go over the day's menu together. It was extraordinary what he could produce on the small clay stove built on to the floor of the cook-boat. Our meals could easily have been those served by a colonel's lady living in retirement at Cheltenham: rhubarb pie, Irish stew, kedgerree, and even suet pudding and delicious apple dumplings. Slowly Rsharm Mahommed would nod his head from side to side when I asked him if he could serve us some Kashmiri food, the negative nod, of course, meaning yes. But mostly we ate his good plain English food, and it was excellent, as indeed English cooking can be when it does not try to be grand.

Rsharm Mahommed was married and lived with his wife and three children in the cook-boat. We never saw his wife, but his children were often around, playing among the irises growing on the bank to which the boat was moored. His two little daughters' heads were encased in round plaques of silver from which hung rows of jingling bells. His son was a serious boy and we used to watch him

squatting down in a circle with the other children reading from the Koran. An itinerant teacher would pass by four times a week to give them their lessons on the bank among the irises. The teacher was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. I tried to photograph him, but, being shy, he could not pose properly. I never succeeded in getting a picture to do him justice.

We were lucky with our boys. Mahommed was quick and intelligent and very clean. He looked after our clothes and was very good about lighting the wood-burning stoves in our rooms when he called us in the morning. Our first week in Kashmir was decidedly cold and we needed them. We must have cut strange figures on The Bund, the European quarter by the river, for our luggage had been held up by the blizzard. We had been forced to borrow coats and sweaters, none of which fitted. But it was too cold to be concerned with appearances, and, besides, the Kashmiri, swathed in their blankets and woollen caps, were far too miserable themselves to bother about us. Mahommed was rather ashamed of the weather. He told us, lisping, that he had never known it to be as cold at this time of the year, but then he added with a smile: "It is Hindu holiday, Master. It always bad weather on these days." Needless to say, they were all Mohammedan on the boat, except for our poor little Hindu driver. Being strictly orthodox, he would only allow himself to eat vegetables, hardly the right diet to combat the cold, with the result that we would find him squatting by the stove in the sitting-room shivering. He had quite literally turned a blue-green in colour and we had not the heart to send him away.

Sidique, though, was the one on whom we depended the most. He was a university man, serious and quiet, and looked older than he was. He must have been about twenty-four. He had a kind face, quick, lively eyes, and a slightly underhung lower lip. He might almost have been Spanish. His large nose and small clipped moustache were perhaps responsible for this Iberian air. He dressed European-fashion with a black tie and a green tweed coat. I never saw him without the grey astrakhan bonnet which is worn like an officer's dress cap and is very common in Kashmir among the better-class people. Sidique had an excellent command of the English language and accompanied us everywhere. He was invaluable, and one certainly needs a go-between with those brigands, the shop-

keepers. Mahommed, too, was very good in this respect. They both of them, I imagine, got their commission, that inevitable rake-off of the East, but at least they backed us up when we complained about the price.

It is the habit in Kashmir to trade from boats and we were continually besieged for the first few days by a variety of *shikara*, either hired especially for the occasion or belonging to the particular trader in question, much as one might own a car or use a taxi. Our houseboat is reputed to be one of the best in Srinagar, and the news that it had been rented naturally spread like wildfire round the town. It was rather early in the year for the general run of tourists, and consequently we were signalled out for special attention, which, although a ruinous experience, proved fascinating. No sooner was breakfast over—they are well trained in the habits of the English sahib—than the traders would start appearing. First came the hawker of postcards, or a man wanting to sell you some badly-cured leopard-skins. These are the humbler traders, who appear quietly with a large bundle tied up in a square of dirty linen and just sit themselves down on your veranda, waiting until you let them in. Some of them, bolder than their brothers, stand and peer at you through the windows. They know that sooner or later you will be forced to acknowledge them. Of course, Sidique or Mahommed could have been told to get rid of them, but we were far too curious to know what their bundles contained for any such drastic action. One has to play a kind of game with them. One knows that they are there and tries to ignore them. Eventually their patience runs out. They have taken stock of their surroundings—all the flowers and the carpets—and have decided that we must have 'much money'. Up comes the hand with the cap: "Good morning, Sahib." One tries to ignore them but in the end it becomes too much of a strain. "Good morning Sahib," this time with an ingratiating smile. Of course one eventually opens up for them. Like quicksilver they spread themselves over the floor. "It costs you nothing to look, Sahib," and in a flash their knotted bundles are untied, exposing a variety of wares: embroidered slippers, bags of loose cornelians or silver boxes studded with turquoise from Tibet.

These are the small traders, but then there are the grander ones, as I have explained, who arrive in their own *shikaras*, propelled by



young boys with heart-shaped paddles. Theirs is quite a different technique; they send in their card and just sit and wait for you while quietly smoking a hookah. Their names, though, slightly belie their looks: 'Cheerful Charley' one is called, and another one 'Honest John', a third 'Butterfly'. You bargain with them and they are wonderfully hypocritical. I told one of them that something was much too expensive. He gesticulated with his hand, palm upwards: "Take off as much as you like," he replied laconically. "Bargaining is a habit I do not have because I make so little profit." And this said with a perfectly straight face. One continually finds one is being addressed as 'Your goodself'. One of them will produce, say, a pair of papier-mâché vases. You say you do not want them. "Keep only one," is the immediate answer. You shake your head. "All right, excuse me!" And so it goes on. They always manage to sell you something. Butterfly was our favourite among these itinerants. "I am Butterfly," he would announce on walking into the sitting-room, holding the sides of his coat as if he were about to drop a curtsy and modulating his voice to suit the action. The whole performance was incongruous, because Butterfly was an old toughy, with a dyed beard. The wares that he peddled proved yet another contradiction, for they consisted of the finest embroidered linens.

Most people will tell you that the best anchorage is away from the town, in the quieter corners of the Bod Lake. They are certainly right. We saw a private houseboat moored out there, beneath the shade of some giant chenars planted by Shah Jahan. They once formed part of a royal garden called the Nasam Bagh. The garden has long ago disappeared, leaving only these huge trees, old and dying but still beautiful. If one walks up to them one will see that their trunks are hollow and that many of their boughs are black and withered. Enough life remains in them, however, to put out a thick panoply of leaves through which the sun filters in long rays falling on the moss at their feet. One could have been in an English park. From the windows of the boat one looks out over the still waters to distant snow-capped peaks. Certainly, if one lived in Kashmir, this is where one would choose to be, or in some similarly quiet reach. But, being there for only a few weeks, we were well content with our anchorage. A broad, willow-shaded walk led along the top of a high bank separating us from the shops. Directly opposite to us was the

old Residency, and a little down the way the Srinagar Club, the only buildings apart from the church and the rectory allowed to Europeans. The Club still carries on, while the Residency now masquerades under the grandiloquent title of The State Emporium and is a trading-centre dealing in Kashmiri home products. Needless to say, we visited it every day. Passing through a small gateway in a wood-paling fence, one walks down a moss-covered brick path bordered by grass. Again the huge chenars and at their feet clumps of snowdrops and violets. The Residency is everything a British Residency should be in Kashmir, built of bricks and wood like the kind of ugly but honest house that one expects to find somewhere in the New Forest, built towards the end of the nineteenth century. It has a gabled roof and can even boast three storeys. A veranda runs round the front facing The Bund. On the other side large steps lead down on to the front drive, beyond which stretch sweeping lawns where garden parties used to be held. Inside there is a generous hall out of which rises a wide Tudor staircase; thick turkey-red carpets cover the floors. I also remember much dark-stained wood and very solid doors.

Srinagar is intensely individual, and yet all the time one is drawn into making comparisons. It is impossible not to describe it as a wooden Venice and there are moments when one is reminded of Constantinople, as it used to be. Tall, four- or five-storeyed houses jostle each other for room, like crowded spectators trying to get ring-side seats on the river. There is no question of planning; the silently flowing Jhelum has dictated its general outline, which is that of an inverted S. A quantity of wooden bridges join the two halves together, the second and third bridge being roughly the centre of the city. The predominant colour is brown, the warm brown of the gills of a mushroom: the houses, the water, also the people muffled in their rough home-spun blankets. It is a poor town and sadly dilapidated, at times to the point of ruin. Every so often earthquakes give it a terrible shaking. So closely packed, though, are the houses, that they seem to have held each other up. Only down by the river, where they project out on stilts, do they lurch crazily from side to side. Some of them, in fact, have collapsed altogether. You see them tearing at their neighbours, their total disintegration prevented by a long pole stuck sideways under

the floor beams, propping them up. So flimsy do they appear that one would suspect them of being made out of matchwood. One puff of wind, and surely one would see them subside like those houses one built as a child out of cards. But the whole town is not like this; the Maharaja's Palace looks fairly solid, as do some of the mosques with their pagoda-shaped roofs. These, obviously, are properly cared for, and so are the rich traders' houses round the third and fourth bridge.

For the first few days, low-lying rain-clouds blocked out the view, hiding the mountains that surround the town. There were moments when Srinagar looked strangely Dutch, like the Holland of Vermeer; and then again, at other moments, it looked suddenly Scandinavian. Similar climatic conditions and the fact that timber is so easily available are partly responsible for this, besides which all wooden folk architecture has certain characteristics in common, provided there be mountains and the promise of snow. These houses of Srinagar with their shale foundations, their projecting upper storeys, and their casement windows could easily be duplicated in the Austrian Tyrol. As I say, it is impossible not to make comparisons, and here again, as with the landscape, the similarity is superficial; on closer inspection one is immediately conscious of the difference.

The town fascinated me and I could never have my fill of looking. Odd details struck me; how out of scale, for instance, the people look at their windows. As these open about a foot and a half from the floor, anyone seated near them fills the whole window, like figures in a stage set, Bakst's 'Petrushka' perhaps. There is little difference between the voluminous woollen garments worn by the men and the women. They button at the neck and fall to the feet. The men, further to combat the cold, muffle themselves in coarse woollen shawls. One sees them huddled up, sitting in groups like their woolly-coated dogs, a variety of husky, which curl up in twos and threes for warmth against the wooden walls of the houses. The men have a preoccupied air about them and it was only on asking that I found out the reason. The Kashmiri have a small portable stove or fire-basket which they carry about with them everywhere during the winter months and it was this, hidden under the folds of their *phirans*, that they were concentrating on. They are called *kangris* and consist of a basket with a zinc or earthenware lining which is

filled with hot embers and covered over with powdered charcoal made from chenar leaves. Quite often one will see men with severe burns, for they doze off over their fire-baskets.

Again and again one is reminded of Venice; the side-streets paved in mud and slippery with rain look like that city's small canals when they are drained for repairs. The houses are equally dilapidated and leprous-looking, and it was up in the third and fourth storeys of these rickety old buildings that we spent our afternoons. The rich traders live overlooking the Jhelum, employing in their back rooms the artisan who, with fine needles and supple fingers, stitches away at the embroidery that have made the shawls of Kashmir world-famous. I found one man working at a square of material, covering it with almond-green, blue and hyacinth-mauve stitching. *Hazara*, or 'a thousand flowers', this silk embroidery is called and it had taken two men over a year to make this particular piece. The son was continuing where his father, unable to stand the strain on his eyes, had left off. There was something medieval about this young man with a long sensitive face, seated on the floor by a small window through which filtered a pale grey light. The magic that flew from his fingers put me in mind of the flowered glades familiar to the 'Lady of the Unicorn'. This fine embroidery is an art that is slowly dying out. The younger generation have not the patience or sense of devotion to carry on.

It is the same with the lacquer painters. I was fascinated watching them at work: the sure way in which they use their brushes, painting a field of blue and gold roses, the strokes of shading being as fine as the finest thread. The painters I watched used no hand rests, but kept the piece of papier-mâché they were decorating steady on their laps and with nervous hands played over the burnished surfaces of a bowl or tray, first picking out the design in thin black lines on a prepared ground of white gesso that had been polished with agate. This done, they started applying the colour; gold chenar leaves, crowded in with blue irises, poppies and roses—all the spring flowers which would soon sprig the meadows. They were formalised like the flowers one sees twining lightly in and out of the pages of Mogul manuscripts. Coated over afterwards with varnish, the work takes on a rich, dull glow of jewelled colours. Good pieces of lacquer are rare now, the trader finding that his hurriedly painted wares, care-

lessly composed, sell much better. In another room we were shown a length of material woven from the soft under-wool of a species of mountain goat. The higher the goat is found, the finer is its wool. The fleece is an extra coating grown by the goat as a protection against the rigours of winter and is plucked from the animal on the approach of summer. The goat is a Central Asian species, the *capra hircus*, more popularly known as *pashmin*, and is found in the upper reaches of Ladakh or Tibet. The material we were shown was a pale beige in colour. 'King material' it was called, a name that suggests its rarity. So fine was it that the stuff stuck to one's hands like gold foil. It measured about twelve yards in length by about three yards wide and the trader pulled it through his ring for us. This was the quality of wool that had been used in the weaving of the Kashmir shawls. All we saw of them were wide borders, remains that had been taken from old shawls and stitched on to long strips of plain material. Originally the shawls had been covered all over in a closely woven design consisting generally of the cone or almond pattern. This peculiarly Indian or Persian form is supposed to have come from the jewelled ornament known as the *jigha* that the Moguls wore in their turbans but which in all probability was merely an abstraction of the floral ornament used in the earlier shawls. The subtle blend of colour in these old pieces was very beautiful and one understood why they had been so popular.

The shawl industry of Kashmir is said to be as old as India's early epics. Shawls were already known to the Cæsars. We read of Nero giving a shawl to a young Grecian athlete who had distinguished himself in the Colosseum. It seems, however, to have been a fluctuating concern and one next hears of the weavers being encouraged to work for the Persian Court during the latter part of the fourteenth century. The shawls were always popular under the Mogul Emperors; an orange shawl belonging to the Khedive of Egypt was taken back by the young Napoleon as a present for Josephine, who wore it and launched a new fashion\*—not entirely new to England,

\* Contemporary records tell us that the Empress possessed between three and four hundred shawls and in the *Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat* one learns that Napoleon, preferring to see her shoulders uncovered, sometimes pulled off the shawl she was wearing and flung it into the fire, whereupon the Empress would calmly send to her wardrobe for another.

however, where they had long been in use amongst the East India Company men's wives. So popular did the shawls become that at one time as many as 27,000 persons were employed on the looms. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 dealt the first heavy blow to Kashmir's flourishing overseas trade and shortly after this came the manufacture in England of Paisley shawls, mill-made copies that sold for a fraction of the price of the originals. Demand in India seems to have been insufficient to keep the industry alive and it has died out completely. The shawl-weavers have now taken up making carpets instead. We watched them, a pale people blanched from generations of sitting all day at looms in small stuffy rooms.

The people of Srinagar are an unhealthy-looking lot and the average Kashmiri is nowhere near as good-looking as his counterpart the other side of the Himalayas; he is poorly built and on the whole tends to have a beaky nose and sallow complexion, sometimes being so fair as to appear almost white. Many Kashmiri have red hair and blue eyes, said to be a heritage from the Greek soldiers who occupied the country under Alexander the Great. Among the peasant women, however, one sometimes finds extraordinary beauty, though not amongst the Moslem women in the town—strange figures in full gowns with loose sleeves, with deep turned-back cuffs lined with white cotton; white cotton also covers their heads in the form of starched, angular coiffes that reach down over their shoulders, the two sides tied together over their chests, making them look as if they had been painted by Van der Weyden. One country girl I remember was plaiting some rushes; her head was down and she looked up out of long almond-shaped eyes at me as I passed. Over her ears she wore a collection of heavy silver rings that were fixed to a band which passed over her head, and became hidden beneath her robe. There were many like her with long black hair parted in the middle, and always the same grey-green and faded black clothes. They looked like beautiful witches.

Shivering in our borrowed clothes we sloshed through the muddy streets exploring the town; even with the threat of fresh snow, the roof-tops of the mosques and the larger houses were bright with green grass, and one of the mosques had its square roof entirely covered with the big red Himalayan tulip. The Jami Masjid, founded in 1390, proved to be the most impressive of the mosques.

It was badly damaged by fire and stands now as it was repaired by the Emperor Aurangzeb, in the seventeenth century. It has a pagoda-shaped steeple and is certainly the best example of Kashmir's wooden architecture. Lofty colonnades extend round the whole building. These are four aisles deep and composed of rows of pillars, each made out of a single deodar trunk, ranging from twenty-five feet to nearly fifty feet in height.

One afternoon I bought an ink drawing from one of the traders, a calligraphic fantasy written in the form of Kashmir iris. On the strength of this he invited us to lunch. He wanted us to try a typical Kashmiri meal, as the Kashmiri cuisine is much nearer to the Persian way of preparing food than the Indian. He lived in one of the larger houses by the third bridge and he received us in a big room overlooking the river. We sat on clean white linen cushions on the floor and were served a delicious meal consisting of about twelve different meat dishes centred round a pilaff of rice flavoured with saffron. One of the specialities I remember was a form of rissole made of meat that had been pounded all day till it had attained the consistency of soft rubber, after which the preparation had been stewed slowly in curd. There were endless sauces, in which the blending of herbs had been so subtly done that it was impossible to distinguish the different ingredients—mint, cinnamon, cadman seeds, and, always, saffron. We drank delicious tea poured out of a great silver samovar. This also was flavoured with cinnamon.

One evening the Prime Minister's younger brother gave us a dinner. His house was English in flavour and near The Bund. Later on he had some musicians in to entertain us. Indian music has never been committed to writing but is an affair of tradition tempered by personal inspiration. The part of the interpreter is more important even than in the West. The five musicians squatted on the floor at our feet and consisted of a zither-player, a man with cymbals, a harmonica-player and two drummers. The zither-player was their leader and resembled the mummy of Rameses II—the similarity was alarming; he had the same fine face, the sunken eyes, the same exaggeratedly beaked nose, even the same mouth drawn back on the teeth. His nervous hands were also those of the long-dead Pharaoh, and he seemed to be possessed of a devil. Sparks flew out of his monkey-bright eyes. His zither had little in common with our

European equivalent, and, although large, weighed surprisingly little, its body being composed of a gourd. Fixed to this was a long square handle inlaid with ivory along which stretched the strings. The leader played it like a guitar, producing a continual humming and twanging which at times sounded like bees in summer hovering over a herbaceous border. The drums were of earthenware and lacquered, one with hunting scenes and the other with flowers. One of them was not strictly speaking a drum, being only a jar with a narrow opening over which the player half slapped his hand to produce a hollow thudding. The man who manipulated the cymbals was as extraordinary in appearance as the leader. He was small and pale with round glasses and a round, black hat and looked like an owl in a comic strip who never stopped grimacing. He was victimised by Rameses II, who twice shot out his bony arm and plucked off the owl's cap, exposing a fast thinning scalp. The owl looked hurt. The music was charming, soft and gay. It was a pity, I thought, that the playing of it had to be accompanied by so much mimicry, but it seemed to be Rameses II's way of controlling the other players. He opened his bright eyes and stabbed the air with a bony finger. He jiggled his head, while his body was never still for one moment, jerking and swaying all the time. He parodied a seduction scene with the owl, ogling him, coaxing him to clack his cymbals. All evening they played, gipsy tunes and songs of spring; and as we walked back to the houseboat I noticed that there were stars up in the sky.





"PALE HANDS I LOVED  
BESIDE THE SHALIMAR"

The next morning there was a gentle feel in the air. Rsharm Mahommed's children scampered across the grass banks lifting their faces up as the sun touched them. Suddenly overnight we were in a flowered spring. There was a noise of an aeroplane-engine over the valley, which meant that the Banihal clouds had cleared. I went up on to the terrace of the houseboat and looked out across the water to the blue mist of the distant mountains. Their flanks were invisible in the haze and one guessed at their substance by the snow lying on their peaks; they seemed to float in the blue air. The snow must have been melting up there too, for it glittered in the sunshine like the inlay on the Taj Mahal when seen by the light of a full moon. There was much animation along The Bund; the houseboat men and their families were busy shaking carpets and airing the rooms, getting ready for the visitors who would now appear over the passes. Discarding their blankets and their *kangris*, the inhabitants of Srinagar seemed to relax into a more cheerful mood. The flower-sellers rowed by in their dug-outs with even greater loads of sweet-smelling flowers. The birds also felt the joy of approaching summer; bulbuls, cheeky little fellows with curling crests on their heads, flew in and out of our rooms and I caught my first glimpse of the paradise fly-catcher, the female of the species being a bright cardinal red, while the male is pure white. Kingfishers flashed across the still waters like a glitter of black opals. On the outskirts of the town the almond and quince trees were in bloom and the wild apricots misted the country-side, shining in the morning sun. Above them, pointing the roads, were the tall, spangled poplars.

It was in this gentle haze that we set out in our tongas to discover the royal gardens sloping up from the east shores of the Dal Lake. Our first expedition was to the Shalimar Bagh, laid out by the Emperor Jahangir in 1619, which lies about six miles north of Srinagar. The country had an unreal appearance—the patchwork-quilt aspect one expects in a fairy-story. We passed some strangely pollarded mulberry trees, sparsely dotted around in a mustard field. The mud villages with their thatched roofs nestling among willows and noisy with gurgling streams only heightened the sense of fantasy.

Shalimar is laid out in four terraces and down the centre comes the water in a long stone trough, its flow conducted at the different levels by a series of cascades, each cut in stone in a different pattern so that the water should ripple contrary-wise in the sunlight. Huge chenar trees now shade its grass-grown terraces. They used to be royal property and could not be cut down without a special permit from the Maharaja. In autumn they turn from translucent yellow to pure flame; and their serrated leaves are to be found everywhere, worked into the embroideries, running a leitmotif over the hook-worked carpets and lacquer trays—in fact they are, for Kashmir, what the oak is for England.

The morning we visited the garden the terraces were snow-white with daisies. On the uppermost terrace Shah Jahan built a black marble pavilion, and one can see that he was influenced by the style his grandfather had evolved at Fatehpur-Sikri, for the pavilion has the same square proportions and Hindu bracketing. It stands in a square, shallow tank and the fountains that play in the pool send a misty spray drifting in through the arches. Some of the pavilions have rows of small jets placed under their cornices so that the whole building can be veiled in a fine mist of water.

Here again we can see that the Moguls were great gardeners, relying for effect not on a wealth of flowers, but on the beauty of the lay-out. Jasmine bushes, Bernier tells us, used to adorn this pavilion and tall cypresses shaded its corners. It was here, in this garden, that the pools used to be set with golden fish that had jewelled eyes. Silver frogs also floated about, so cleverly contrived that every ripple set them croaking. These precious toys were only brought out on special occasions and for the rest of the time were kept hidden away

in a cache known only to the chief gardener. He died suddenly one night and no one has ever been able to find them. Vanished also are the white water-lilies. It is only the bare outline of this lovely garden that is left and it must look very different from what it used to be in Shah Jahan's day. The giant chenars, however, which the Emperor couldn't have known lend it a new dignity. Time has destroyed much, but it has added such mellow qualities as it alone can give; one feels this especially when one sees old brick pavements, once so formal, now become a part of earth itself. I sat for a moment on the royal throne standing like a square table in the shallow water. The noises couldn't have changed, the singing of the birds was all but drowned by the splashing of the water. At night little oil lamps used to be placed in the arched recesses behind the shiny waterfalls. Now the gardeners place bunches of white flowers, which they pick fresh every day.

These gardens lie very near to each other, the Nishat Bagh being only a few miles distant from Shalimar. Nishat Bagh is perhaps the most spectacular of them all, mounting as it does in twelve terraces from the Dal Lake up to the very base of the Himalayas, which tower above it. One cannot but help admiring the art that went into the terracing, for had their sweep been less majestic the gardens would have been completely squashed by the giant proportions of the mountains behind them. As it is, looking through the geometrically carved screen of the main pavilion one gets an impression of infinite space. There is about the gardens the grandiose quality to be found in Versailles.

The Nishat Bagh was not originally one of the royal gardens, as it was laid out by Asaf Khan, the father of Mumtaz Mahal, and there is an amusing story of how its splendour nearly occasioned a rift between the Emperor and his father-in-law. When Shah Jahan was in Kashmir in 1633 he visited the Nishat Bagh and its high terraces, and the wonderful views of lake and mountain so delighted him that he at once decided that the gardens were altogether too splendid for a subject, even though the subject might happen to be his own Prime Minister and father-in-law. He told Asaf Khan on three occasions how much he admired his pleasure-ground, expecting that it would be immediately offered for the royal acceptance. But the Prime Minister could not bring himself to surrender his

cherished pleasure and remained silent. As Villiers Stuart\* tells us:

"Then as now, the same stream supplied both the royal garden and the Nishat Bagh. So Shah Jahan, in his anger, ordered the water supply to be cut off from the Nishat Bagh and was avenged, for the garden he envied was shorn of all its beauty.

"Nothing is more desolate than one of these great enclosures when their stone-lined tanks and water channels are dry and empty. Asaf Khan, who was staying in his summer palace at the time, could do nothing and all his household knew of his great and bitter disappointment. One day, lost in a melancholy reverie, he at last fell asleep in the shade by the empty watercourse. At length a noise aroused him; rubbing his eyes, he could hardly believe what he saw, for the fountains were all playing merrily once more and the long carved water-shutes were white with foam. A faithful servant, risking his life, had defied the Emperor's orders and removed the obstructions from the stream. Asaf Khan rebuked him for his zeal and hastily had the stream closed again. But the news reached the Emperor in his garden at Shalimar, whereupon he sent for the terrified servant, and, much to the surprise of the Court, instead of punishing him, bestowed a robe of honour upon him to mark his admiration for his act of devoted service; at the same time granting a *sanad* which gave the right to his master to draw water for his garden from the Shalimar stream."

Below the walls of the Nishat Bagh there are still the remains of the lilac thickets planted by the Emperor. There is a special lilac-viewing festival and people still come out to observe the rite. The lilac is the Persian variety, and used to be closely planted in squares divided by narrow paths on which to walk in order to enjoy the perfume.

Farther down the valley lies the Verinag Bagh, Nur Jahan's favourite Kashmiri garden, but nothing much remains of it, only the large octagonal tank of opaque green water which is the source of the Jhelum and in which can be seen the sacred carp, some of them still bearing the Empress's inscription on gold rings placed through their gills. There is another garden at Achabal laid out by Jahangir and fed by a gushing spring, and so great is the volume of

\* *Gardens of the Great Moghuls* by Charles Villiers Stuart. Adam and Charles Black, London, 1913.

water that it is thought that an underground river has burst through the limestone. It started to rain while we were there and we took shelter in one of the pavilions. We spread a blanket on the uneven floor, thick with rubble and pigeons' droppings, and gazed out at the fine tracery of a chinar tree just bursting into leaf. It was a giant, mighty of girth, old and hoary at the base, but as the branches mounted they became satin-bodied and young and meshed in a wealth of tender, drooping foliage. The scene had a sad nostalgic charm.

For me, though, the most lovely garden of them all was the Chashma Shai, or Royal Spring. It is smaller than the others and is set high up on the hillside with a wonderful view of the Dal Lake. Standing in its central pavilion we could see out over a mist of blossom to the snow-capped peaks rising in a great serrated line across the far side of the valley. We were taken there on a picnic by a Kashmiri friend and sat out on grass enamelled with daisies drinking-in the warm sunshine. A severely cut grey stone wall framed the forget-me-not blue of the mountains, behind which were packed dazzlingly white clouds—light cumuli, frayed at the edges by a high wind. Directly below the walls was another parterre noisy with fountains. Beyond this, glimpsed through an ornamental gateway, were the gently heaving foothills sloping away gradually towards the lake.

Now that it was fine we would take a *shikara* in the afternoons and explore the waterways opening off the Dal Lake, a maze of canals weaving in and out between little islands. Originally the islands had been floating, built up by farmers who piled the rich soil on to wicker-work frames. Patiently year after year this dredging had gone on and vegetables had been grown in the black loam, fertilised by piles of rotting water-weeds. Eventually slim young poplars had seeded themselves on these muddy rafts and, plunging their roots down into the water, had acted as anchors. Slowly our boatmen would paddle us with their heart-shaped oars, guiding us carefully from place to place. The water was of crystal clearness and the sun striking down into its depths lighted up a world of hidden beauty. The weeds grew like a forest of firs, a strange country through which fish glanced and darted about the business of their lives. If one looked carefully one could see the young lotus-leaves beginning to unfurl, before

opening out flat in the summer to form a swampy freshness through which the *shikaras* would have to force their way, lost among the great, high-growing, shell-pink flowers. It is then, I am told, that a blue-black species of egret appears. It has long legs and webbed feet and steps delicately from one leaf to another. Turning down some of the narrow canals, one finds them so completely overgrown with water weeds that it is like rowing through thick lentil soup. The water is greener than the banks and the willows greener than either. One is reminded of Millais's 'Ophelia' in the Tate Gallery.

The inhabitants of these islands are all farmers and it is they who supply Srinagar with vegetables. One will see one of those beautiful witches in her black-grey clothes plunging her long fingers into the soil, preparing to plant her seedlings. Off one of the islands we came across two farmers, their boats end-to-end, discussing the doings of the day. I took their photograph and the older of the two turned round and gesticulated. Sidique translated for me: "My photograph will be going to Europe," he said, "and I stay here. What is the good of that to me!"

Most of the houses to be found on these islands have wooden walls washed a copper-sulphate blue, a dirty blue, almost the same colour as the mist that begins to rise from the water as the light thickens, dying from pink to yellow. Lights appeared in a ramshackle shop, a crooked wooden cabin that supplies the water-dwellers with their sparse needs. Then passing under one of Akbar's humped bridges we found ourselves again in the waterways of the city. The bright yellow curtains of the *shikara* suddenly caught the last rays of the sun and glowed and burnt like the robes of Buddhist priests in Ceylon.



## THE MOUNTAINS

We had not been in Srinagar very long before I noticed that, wherever we went, the conversation eventually turned to the mountains. The people living in this valley are hypnotised by them, and it is small wonder when one thinks that above them, beyond the mists and the clouds, tower some of the highest peaks in the world. "Have you seen Nanga Parbat?" a Greek friend of mine asked me, rather as if someone new to London might be asked if he had been to the National Gallery. Someone else with great pride announced that he had Eric Shipton's ice-pick, and one day a member of the United Nations staff came out with us in Tensing's blue canvas jacket which he had worn when climbing Everest. This official had offered to take us up to Sonamarg in the Sind Valley, down which wound 'the silk road', the oldest trading route into India. It was exciting to think that we would be on the very confines of Tibet.

For the first part of the way our ears were full of the rushing and roaring of a river and the country wore a gentle air, sprigged over as it was with the blossom of wild apricots. It became more forbidding as we climbed, passing almonds in bloom, their sour pink standing out against the dark pines. They were the last signs of spring that we were to see. We were shown the lean-tos built out of great pebbles from the river which the country people are forced to erect against bears. They come down after their winter's sleep and sometimes destroy a whole field of corn. Hiding in these huts the farmers blow horns all night to keep the bears away. As we climbed, the valley narrowed, almost shutting out the sun. We stopped the car for a moment to listen: the deathly stillness was

depressing, the slightest sound became grossly exaggerated. By this time the river had been forced into narrow confines and had turned into a rushing stream choked by a quantity of avalanche débris, including glacier-smoothed stones and twisted tree-trunks. Right above the jagged snow-powdered peaks a golden eagle hovered in the sky. He rose and dipped on taut, outstretched wings. We had only a few miles to go but we were never to reach Sonamarg, the road being blocked by an avalanche. The snow and ice had melted, leaving behind it a welter of large boulders which proved impossible to move. There was nothing for it but to retrace our steps.

Fortunately the day we had chosen for our expedition up to Gulmarg turned out to be cloudless. Gulmarg lies at an altitude of 8,500 feet, up on the western side of the valley in the Pir Pungal range. It was from here that one got the best view across the flat vale of Kashmir to the great Nanga Parbat, the Naked Goddess, rising to over 26,000 feet, one of the grandest mountains in the whole Himalaya. We had to drive north-west towards Tangmarg, whence the remainder of the climb was to be made on ponies. We left the houseboat just as dawn was breaking and took to the long straight roads lined with slim poplars. They were still wreathed with morning mists, which seemed to cling like wet cotton wool to the clumps of white irises growing down the banks. After about an hour we turned towards the glittering snow-capped mountains and began to climb again. The vegetation changed from birch and maple to spruce and then to silver fir and blue pine.

Being early visitors, to the valley, we were besieged by pony boys when we reached Tangmarg, rugged dishevelled creatures with woollen skull-caps and no shoes, their blankets all in holes. Finally after much wrangling it was decided which ponies we should have and we set off on our shaggy fat-bellied little mounts that puffed and snorted at the sharp air, jangling their bits with energetic shakes of their heads. They appeared to be eager for the climb—perhaps the promise of tender upland grass enticed them on. *Marg* means a mountain meadow and Gulmarg translated read 'Meadow of Flowers'. It was not a very long climb and took us in all about two hours. The ponies' hooves clinked against the stones and we leant forward in our saddles to help them in their climb. The air had become deliciously clear and smelled strongly of pines. The light



sparkled like diamonds on the drifts of melting snow. Then, suddenly, without any warning, the deodars began and between their tall, pencil-thin silhouettes we got our first glimpse of the valley stretched out below. It was only later that we could see Nanga Parbat, at first apparently floating in the sky.

But first there was the surprise of Gulmarg, the British Raj's abandoned holiday resort. I had been told about it, but I was not expecting to find a complete ghost town. It was as if one of the small Far Western cowboy towns had been reproduced by mistake in a snow-marked meadowland. Icicles hung from the scalloped eaves of the high-fronted houses running down the main street and doors lurched crazily on their broken hinges. There were black holes where the window-panes should have been. Strictly speaking there were no streets, only the paths that led across the gently rolling hills, over which, nestling in the pine-woods, were dotted wooden chalets. We rode past some of them on our ponies. Heavy snow-falls had brought their verandas crashing down in ruins and the only noise to animate them was the whining of cold winds. It gave one a strange impression. Rounding a bend we came upon a long, low chalet with a grey shingle roof which had been the summer Residency, and it was over the humped palings of its enclosure that we watched Nanga Parbat.

One can have no idea of immensity if one has not seen the large-scale mountain world of the Himalaya. There Nanga Parbat glittered, dwarfing the Vale. Though only tenth on the list of the world's highest mountains, being some 2,000 feet less than Everest, it nevertheless remains, along with Kangchenjunga, the most dangerous peak. The 'Mountain of Terror' it is called locally. Sherpas refuse to have anything to do with it, and who can blame them? There is hardly a sherpa family which could not count a relative among the dead lying frozen on the flanks down which come hurtling gigantic avalanches of ice. Between 1895 and 1953, when Nanga Parbat was finally climbed by Herman Buhl, an Austrian from Innsbruck, seven different expeditions failed to reach its summit. Mummery was the first to lose his life, and thirty-one lives was the final total claimed by the mountain. Each succeeding expedition found grisly traces of the one that had preceded it. The Bauer Expedition of 1938 discovered the body of a sherpa porter

hanging head downwards on an ice wall, caught up by weather-beaten ropes. He had hung there for four years, having lost his life in the Merkl Expedition of 1934. His features had been perfectly preserved and he was easily recognised by his fellows. Merkl himself was found, his feet sticking out of a rock shelter into which he had crept with his faithful servant. Here again the bodies were in a complete state of preservation. One reads of watches being taken off the victims' wrists and how, when they were put in somebody's pocket, they started to go again. The faces of the men they found were composed and calm, indicating that death had overtaken them as they slept. At least Nanga Parbat had shown some mercy to her victims.

It is a strange thing that when Dr. Herrligkoffer's expedition appeared in 1953 the local people in Gilgit prophesied their success. "The mountain gods will sleep this time," they told them. "You will have good fortune." Herman Buhl reached the summit alone, crawling on all fours. He had been climbing for over sixteen hours when he finally reached the summit. It was seven o'clock and the sun was going down. It was too late to start back for the last camp, where a companion waited for him, and he bivouacked alone standing all night on an unsteady chunk of rock overlooking a precipice, kept alive by Padutine tablets as a deterrent to frost-bite. Already he had lost all feeling in his feet, his boots were frozen stiff and the rubber soles were glazed with ice. Every step had to be considered, the smallest error of judgment could have been fatal. His description of the climb and descent reads like a nightmare. From 25,500 feet onwards the climber entered the so-called 'death-zone', where there is a feeling of great lassitude and general lack of will-power. Lapses of consciousness may occur and the faculty of seeing is affected. Buhl had discarded his rucksack with food and pullovers and had no oxygen and, in the last phase, the ascent to the summit approximated a race with death. Breathing with difficulty and with quickening pulse-beats, Buhl did not really take in when he finally reached the summit. The descent was even worse. Throughout the whole day he had a feeling that he was not alone, that someone was accompanying him. He heard voices. Half-delirious he imagined he saw his companions coming to meet him. He could no longer swallow and blood-stained saliva oozed from his mouth. At last,

towards evening, staggering and swaying he finally fell into the arms of Hans Ertl, who had gone up to meet him. He looked aged by twenty years.

It was a sad day for us when we walked up the gang-plank for the last time. Rsharm Mahommed and the house-boy and Sidique stood bowing us good-bye. Packed once more into the car, we sped all too quickly along the straight road lined with slim poplars. Cloud shadows lay on the snow-capped mountains as we began to climb. After two hours we could still see the enchanted valley stretching away, quite flat, wonderfully tranquil, and at the entrance to the tunnel we stopped to have one last look; and then it was no more.

It was dark by the time we reached Jammu. The ceiling of my room at the hotel was painted with red pomegranates on a gold ground and gazing up at it gave me a heavy feeling of nostalgia.

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