IMPRESSIONS OF AN INDIAN CIVIL SERVANT

TEMPLES ON THE GANGES AT BENARES

IMPRESSIONS OF AN INDIAN CIVIL SERVANT

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TO

MY WIFE LILIAS

PREFACE

THIS book is based on over twenty-three years' experience in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh as a member of the Indian Civil Service, covering the period from 1910 to 1934. Most of that time was spent in district work, and that must be my excuse for writing this book; for it aims at describing India from what is, I believe, to English readers a novel point of view, that of the district officer, than whom, I would venture to say, no European is in a better position to become intimately acquainted with the Indian people and their doings. This book is neither a collection of personal reminiscences nor a systematic treatise, but an attempt to convey to the reader the general impressions carried away by me from India and to interpret certain subsequent events in the light of those impressions.

The spelling of Hindustani words has caused a little difficulty. I have tried to be accurate without being pedantic and have accordingly used the English spelling and ordinary print for words that have become anglicised, and a simplified form of the Hunterian spelling and italicised print for words that have not become anglicised. Thus I have written the English form ' bazaar ', not the Hindustani form ' bazār ', and ' kānūngo ', not the Hunterian ' qānūngo '.

Another difficulty has been to decide when to use a Hindustani word instead of its English equivalent; and in this matter I have tried to avoid being either slovenly or pedantic. Europeans who have lived in India are so accustomed to using certain Hindustani words that to give their English equivalent would seem to them ridiculous. I have accepted this point of view and have, for instance, preferred to speak of a ' *lāthī* ', rather than a ' bamboo-club '

The meaning of Hindustani words will often be clear from the text itself, but a glossary has been appended.

Readers who desire to pronounce the Hindustani words correctly are referred to the note at the heading of the glossary.

It is hoped that the photographs will materially assist the reader to obtain a true appreciation of the subject of the book. They are intended not so much to illustrate particular passages in the text as to give a general idea of the conditions prevailing in an Indian district and to provide a background for the verbal picture.

For most of the photographs I am indebted to Mr. E. H. N. Gill of the United Provinces Civil Service. In spite of his arduous official duties he has spared no time or trouble in the performance of his voluntary task; and I am deeply grateful to him.

Eight photographs are printed with the kind permission of the High Commissioner for India; and a few were taken by or given to me while I was still in India.

No one except myself is in any way responsible for any views or statements included in the text.

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CHAPTER I

AN INDIAN DISTRICT

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INDIA is a vast and complicated subject, and there are various ways of embarking on a study of it. We may, for instance, start either from the top or from the bottom—that is to say, our method may be either analytic or synthetic. In other words, we may either regard India primarily as an entity and then proceed to split it up into its component parts, or we may concentrate our attention first on the parts and then proceed to build them up into a whole. The method which I intend to follow in this chapter is the second, except that I shall content myself with describing a single typical part without attempting the second step of combining it with others. The kind of part to be selected for description is obvious—the district.

The district also may be regarded from two points of view by the European. He may regard it either impersonally or as it affects his own comfort and habits. At present I shall endeavour to be as impersonal as possible, reserving the second consideration for a later chapter.

But while there can be no hesitation about taking the district as the unit for examination, it is much more questionable which district should be taken as the typical one. The district that I intend to take is an ordinary one in the plains of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Now it would be idle to deny that a strong reason for my doing so is that it is with that province that I am most familiar. At the same time I can honestly maintain that such a district is as typical as any. For the United Provinces are representative both of Hindus and Muslims, containing, as they do, not only some of the most sacred Hindu cities but also Agra, the capital of the Moghul Emperors at the

zenith of their power; and the plains constitute by far the greater part of the area of India.

I must, however, warn my reader not to assume that every district in India resembles the one I shall describe. The climate and contour of the country, and the race and customs of the people, vary greatly from one part of India to another, and full allowance must be made for this before applying my description to any other kind of district. Yet, in spite of the weakness inherent in the method I have chosen, I am of opinion that it is the most vivid way of making one who has never been there understand what India is like.

The nearest English parallel to an Indian district is a county; and, like a county, a district is primarily an administrative unit. In this chapter, however, I do not intend to describe how a district is administered but to treat it as a convenient section of the people and country for observation. Actually what was originally an artificial division has now almost come to be regarded as a natural one; for loyalty to the same district officer, continual visits to the same headquarters, and co-operation for the same objects, have brought the people of each district together and even created something akin to local patriotism—comparable with the pride that the men of Sussex, for instance, take in their county, or the men of Kent in theirs.

The analogy, however, must not be pressed too closely, for in many respects it does not hold good. Thus the area and population of a district in the United Provinces are both much in excess of those of an average English county[1]; the average area of the district being about 2,200 square miles and the average population about a million against, say, 1000 square miles and 762,000 people.

The distribution of the people in the two units is also very different. In an English county most of the population is concentrated in a few big towns, the rest of the land being sparsely occupied. In an Indian district, on the other hand, the bulk of the population live in villages: at headquarters there will usually be a 'city' with a population of some tens of thousands, and there will probably be half a dozen towns or so each with a population of several thousands, but elsewhere there are nothing but

[1] According to the new reckoning there are forty-nine English counties.

A Kachcha Road

A Bridge of Boats over the Jumna

villages in most of which the population is to be numbered merely by hundreds. In India two-thirds of the working people are engaged in agriculture as contrasted with less than a twentieth in England; and in India 89 per cent of the people live in villages, while in England only a fifth do so. England, in fact, is predominantly industrial, while most of India has never passed beyond the agricultural stage.

Climate. But before I go any farther let me make a few remarks about the climate, otherwise the references I shall have to make to it from time to time will not be clear. It is a subject on which any European who has lived in India can wax eloquent for hours at a stretch, but for the present I will restrain myself and confine myself to a brief and strictly objective account.

There are three main seasons: the cold weather, the hot weather, and the rains. The cold weather lasts from about the beginning of November to the end of March, and consists of an almost unbroken succession of days of cloudless sunshine with the maximum temperature ranging from 70 to 90 degrees, but there is usually some light rain at the end of December or the beginning of January. From the beginning of April the temperature, starting in the 90's rises higher and higher; and during May and June it normally never falls below 100, and is often nearer 110, and sometimes higher. At the beginning of July the rains are due to break, and when this happens the temperature drops with a splash; but the monsoon is often unpunctual and sometimes fails altogether and always disappears for weeks at a time, during which the temperature rises once more, though the excessive humidity of the air remains. From the beginning of October the temperature begins definitely to fall till cold weather conditions are again established.

Communications. Let us return now to the cities, towns, and villages, and see how they are linked up one with another. We have to consider three 'r's'—railways, roads, and rivers.

The railways are being constantly extended, and there is now not a single district in the United Provinces that is not served by some railway or other; but, generally speaking, the function of

the railway is to connect district with district rather than one part of the district with another.

Of the metalled roads some, like the Grand Trunk Road, join far-distant places, and merely, so to speak, pass through districts, but the bulk of them are intended primarily to serve district needs and radiate from headquarters to the chief towns of the district, occasionally shooting out branches to railway stations and other places of importance.

Let me give you a picture of a typical metalled road. In the centre is an eight-foot strip of *kankar* and on each side an earthen track about six feet wide, flanked with irregular and broken rows of trees. This bit of the road I have chosen to describe first is in good condition, but, as the traffic passes, clouds of thick blinding dust rise from the untarred surface.

What a strange medley of East and West the traffic is! Private motor-cars and lorries fitted out as buses dispute the road with *ekkas*, bullock-carts, camels, and herds of cattle. They straggle anyhow across the road—for outside big cities there is no rule except for motorists.

If you go to the next milestone you will see from the inscription on it that it is eight years since the second mile was renewed. You might have guessed that without the warning, for the metalled strip, unable to withstand the sharp, rough edges of the narrow iron-bands that encircle the bullock-carts' wooden wheels, has developed such fearsome and numerous pot-holes that the traffic has deserted it for the earthen tracks. And if you go farther the process repeats itself, good stretches alternating with bad.

Another point you will notice. As the road extends mile after mile there is scarcely a bend and never a hill, so flat is the country which it traverses.

Most of the roads, however, are not metalled at all, and are hardly more than broad belts of uncultivated land between rows of fields. Where the ground is firm and when the weather is dry this is good enough, but in places the sand (or mud) lies many inches deep. Moreover, many villages lie off any kind of road at all, and can only be reached on foot or horseback along narrow boundaries between the fields.

Much the most pleasant roads, on account of their excellent

condition and freedom from dust and traffic, are those that run along the canal-banks; but these are closed to all but a privileged few.

In certain districts large rivers, such as the Ganges and the Jumna, are still used for traffic, but for the most part they are obstructions rather than waterways. During the rains the swollen waters, often a mile or so broad, are impassable except by the all too rare permanent bridges; and though during the rest of the year the stream that remains can be crossed by pontoon-bridge or barge-ferry, there is often a stretch of hundreds of yards of loose shifting sand to be ploughed through on either side.

The smaller rivers are more adequately bridged, and except during the rains are mostly fordable, but where there is no bridge the banks are often perilously steep for vehicles to negotiate.

Flora and Fauna. Let not my reader imagine from the title of this heading that I intend to give a systematic account of the flora and fauna of the United Provinces. That, even in the sketchiest form, would require a whole book to itself. Nor will there be anything scientific or a single Latin name. All that I shall try to do is to give a general impression of animal and plant life from a human point of view.

Let us take the best feature first—the birds.

What a fine variety India possesses—in this, at any rate, excelling England! And what sights and sounds does the thought of them conjure up!

Everywhere and at every season the birds of India make their presence felt.

Even the interior of one's house is filled with the mournful cooing of doves and pigeons perched at the top of the verandah; and every compound abounds with feathered life—with friendly minas and wagtails strutting on the lawn, with chattering seven-sisters, with tapping woodpeckers, with rollers displaying every shade of blue, with hoopoes bathing in the dust with crest erect, with scarlet cock- and yellow hen-minivets flashing in the sun, with screeching, scurrying green-parrots and with many other brilliant species.

Others are more associated with the open countryside—the

heron brooding on the pool at evening, the stork jabbing at tit-bits with its bill, the paddy-bird squatting intent and huddled up at the water's edge and changing from brown to white as it rises, the chocolate and blue kingfisher falling like a plumb upon the fish beneath, the curlew eternally repeating its plaintive cry, the peacock lumbering from tree to tree and calling it own name ' Mor, mor ', the ungainly hornbill, the weaver-birds flitting round their hanging nests and the kites hovering aloft.

Others haunt the groves and bring up memories of camp—who that has heard them can ever forget the monotonous hammer-beats of the persistent coppersmith or the lovely liquid notes of that queen of warblers, the fantailed fly-catcher?

Others are most familiar to the sportsman—the coots taxi-ing like seaplanes, the terns and razor-bills circling round the *jhīl*, the snipe squelching as they are flushed and jinking as they fly, the geese squawking as they pass high overhead in military wedge-like formation or dozing on a sandbank with sentinels alert, the teal whizzing through the air faster than an express train, the innumerable varieties of duck that keep so maddeningly out of range, the *sāras* uttering its harsh warning of an intruder's approach and the partridges and quail with their tell-tale whirr.

And some birds there are that bring no pleasant memories—what creature can be more loathsome than the vulture pecking at a carcass or what noise more hideous than the raucous shrieks of the brain-fever bird, growing shriller and shriller, as it proclaims the advent of the hot weather and the time when even birds will gasp with bills agape?

Truly the birds of India play a great part in the life of the countryside.

Among domestic animals the bullock and buffalo predominate, and are used to pull cart, plough, well-bucket or anything at all; while the females of the species are kept for milk. No wonder that the cow is sacred. The wonder is that the buffalo is not sacred, too. For the transport of man and goods other animals are also used. No *dhobī* is complete without his donkey to carry clothes, and sometimes master too; the camel carries goods across broken country where no bullock-cart could go; little ponies known as *tats* carry plump villagers to market and to court, while a few

plutocrats maintain lordly elephants for transport in the rains, for show, or for shikar.

Indians rarely keep animals as pets. Such cats as are of domestic descent are so neglected that they have to hunt for their own food and literally run wild; and the only common kind of dog is the *pi*, packs of which attach themselves to every village. Foul creatures these dogs appear, as, half-starved and covered with disease, they search for scraps of food among the filth and garbage; and yet they deserve more pity than contempt for their obstinate refusal, in spite of all rebuffs, to renounce their claim to companionship with man.

As regards wild beasts, India does not swarm with fierce monsters as is sometimes supposed. In most districts of the United Provinces the tiger is as extinct as the dodo, and even a panther is a rare phenomenon. The wild boar, too, though ferocious enough when brought to bay, confines its attacks to crops if left alone, and is only common where ravines or forests provide hiding-places for the hours of light. Wolves too are rarely found in most districts, and though they occasionally carry off babies, are usually content with cattle; and wild cats, though savageness itself, do not attack man unless provoked.

But while wild beasts afford little danger to men's lives, they inflict much damage on their crops. In addition to wild boar, the chief offenders in this respect are *nilgai* as large as horses, monkeys that trade on their reputation among Hindus for sanctity, black buck and sometimes porcupine; while the gathered grain is raided by the elusive rat and the ubiquitous little grey squirrel.

On the other hand there are also friends of man, such as the nimble and fearless slayer of snakes, the mongoose; and neutrals too such as the fox that, unlike its English cousin, neither stalks the domestic fowl nor in its turn is hunted by man; and the jackal, that makes night hideous with its yells but plays a useful part as one of the many natural scavengers of the East.

Reptiles next call for attention: two kinds in particular, snakes and crocodiles.

Snakes abound in India, and are especially in evidence during the rains when they emerge from the ground after their hot-weather sleep. There are many kinds—some poisonous, some not.

The most common kind in the United Provinces is the *dhāman* or rat-snake, which, though non-poisonous, is rather terrifying with its length of eight feet or so. Of the poisonous snakes the most common are the cobra and *karait*. The cobra is usually four or five feet long, and is easily identified by its hood which, when angry, it expands preparatory to striking. The *karait* is shorter but equally venomous. In a way indeed it is more dangerous, for it appears to be deaf—at any rate it does not move off so promptly on the approach of man. Not that snakes are, as sometimes depicted, malicious creatures that attack any one at sight. On the contrary, snakes (like most other wild animals) attack man only in self-defence. The danger consists of treading or laying one's hand on a snake unawares; and it is disregard of this danger that costs thousands of Indians their lives each year. One other snake deserves special mention—a short, thick kind of earth-snake, reputed to have two heads. Tail and head indeed are so much alike that it is quite possible—I speak from experience—to mistake one for the other.

Crocodiles are found in all the big rivers. There are two main kinds—the long-nosed *ghariyāl*, which subsists entirely on fish, and the snub-nosed mugger which eats anything it can get. Even muggers, however, rarely attack a man. Some man-eating muggers undoubtedly there are, but, like man-eating tigers, they are usually very old ones that find it difficult to catch more active creatures. In one respect indeed muggers are benefactors of society, for when (as often happens) Hindu corpses are thrown into the river only partially cremated, the muggers, assisted by the turtles, devour the remains, and to this extent protect the water from pollution.

Allied to the crocodile but, except for its voracity, of very different habits, is the house-lizard. These creatures are a familiar sight on the walls of every house, assiduously chasing and devouring moths and flying-ants and other winged pests till, their stomachs swollen almost to bursting-point and the wings of their last victim protruding from their mouth, they can eat no more. Yet in spite of all their beneficent activities they are considered by Indians to be unlucky.

And I must just refer to frogs, though I know they are not really reptiles. In the rains they come out in their thousands and

the countryside resounds with their croakings, so that you begin to realize what the Egyptians suffered from a plague of them.

About fish it is sufficient to mention the mighty mahseer, the king of the river, and the *rohū* which for its palatability must be awarded the chief place in the tank.

As for insects I simply cannot speak about them impersonally, and they must await their turn till I have freed myself of my self-denying ordinance.

Leaving the animal world, let us take a glance at the flowers and trees.

The flowers will not detain us long, for in the plains there are no wild flowers worth mentioning, and few houses outside civil lines or cantonments possess gardens. Garden flowers are mostly of the kinds known in England and need no special mention, but an exception must be made in favour of two kinds which may not improperly be described as the national flowers of India—I mean the jasmine and the marigold. These are the flowers, especially the marigold, which have the honour of being formed into garlands for the adornment of distinguished guests and being scattered before the gods and goddesses.

Outside gardens the most usual places for trees are formal groves and the sides of the road. The large trees in the Indian plains are of quite different kinds from those in England—in fact I cannot think of a single large species common to both regions.

As if to make amends for the want of wild flowers, the Indian plains can boast of some fine flowering-trees, particularly the scarlet and orange 'gold mohur', the yellow laburnum-shaped *amaltās*, and the pinky-white *kachhnār*; not to mention the blazing red flower of the *dhāk*-shrubs, masses of which still retain hold of the land in places. All these choose the beginning of the hot weather to display their loveliness.

The queen of the Indian trees is the mango, which excels all others in fruit and, so important in India, shade. Other common trees are the *shīsham*, with an excellent hard wood; the *nīm*, whose twigs serve the Indian as tooth-brush and tooth-powder combined and whose bitter leaves are more efficacious than camphor for keeping insects out of clothes; the sacred, hoary-looking *pīpal* whose figs, as every sportsman knows, have an irresistible attraction

for green pigeon; the less imposing but more graceful *gular*, which also bears figs; the banyan, which sends down roots from its branches; and the *mahua*, which produces liquor from its blossoms and oil from its seeds.

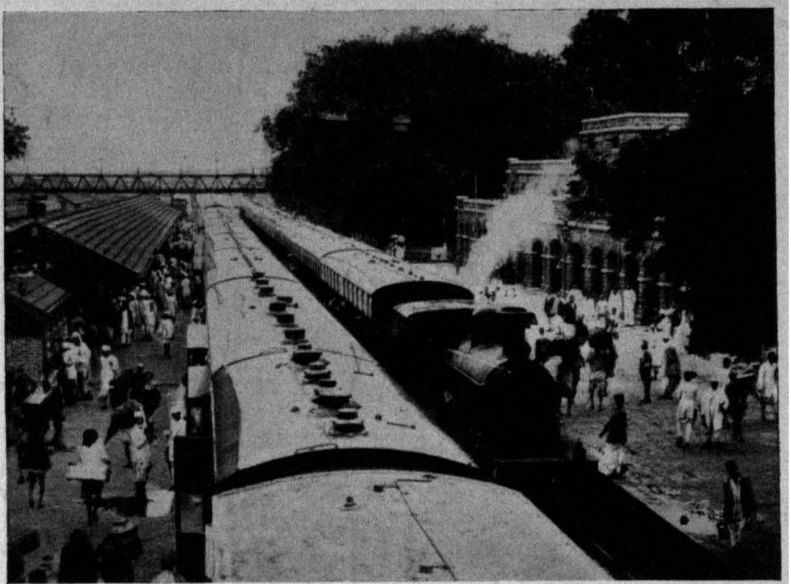
In orchards, besides some of the trees already mentioned, many kinds of fruit-trees are grown, such as the *jāmun*, the jack-fruit, the pomegranate, the custard apple, the guava, the plantain, the lime, and a bitter kind of orange; but to the produce of none of these can a high place be given.

Another common tree, though a lowly one, is the scraggy, stunted *babūl* which has at any rate the two advantages that it will grow where no other tree will and possesses a bark which is much used for tanning.

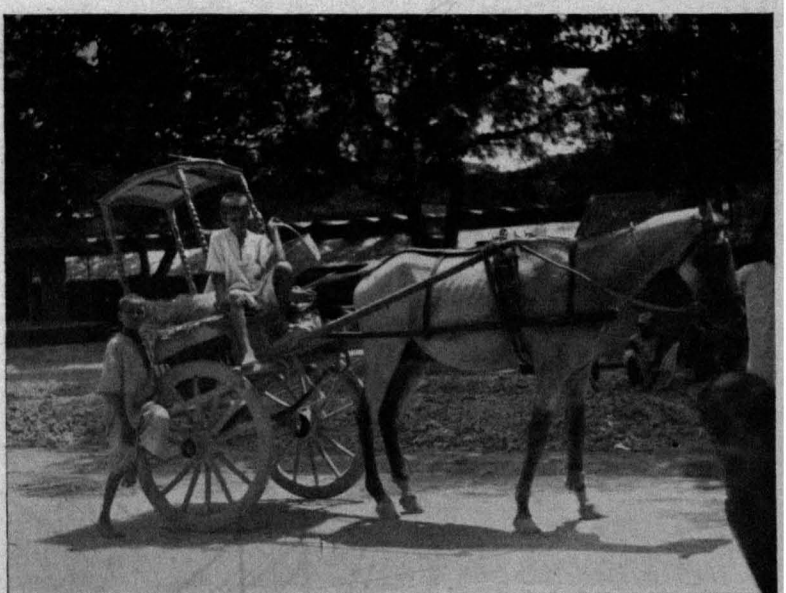
A City. Leaving Nature for the present, let us concentrate on man and his activities. Let us visit an Indian city first. Imagine that it is a November morning, and that we suddenly find ourselves in a bazaar, which is merely an Eastern word for a street of shops.

What confusion there is! People wandering all over the road, though no one seems in a hurry; an odd cow or so here and there, such vehicles as there are hooting or shouting their way through the crowd. Add to this flies, dust, a blazing sun, and a regular orgy of smells, and you will realize that our tour is not going to be a very comfortable one.

When you have recovered somewhat from the shock have a look round. First, at the people in the street. How variously they are clothed! The first man that we examine wears a turban, a long-sleeved cotton vest, a *dhotī* of the same material, and a pair of clogs: the next one wears a stiff black lozenge-shaped cap, a shirt with the ends hanging out, long baggy linen trousers, and shoes with turned-up toes; a third, a Congressman, is dressed, except for his shoes, entirely in coarse home-spun cloth from his Gandhi-cap downwards. Many wear little soft cotton caps; and a good number velvet waistcoats over their shirt or vest. Some are bare-headed, some bare-chested, some bare-footed. One or two wear semi-European dress, but without collar or tie. There are not many women, but their dress is more uniform—a *sārī* over their



A Railway Station



An Ekka

head and half-concealing their face, a cotton bodice and a long shapeless kind of petticoat, usually dark blue and made of some heavy stuff. A drab dirty white is the prevailing colour. You look in vain for the reputed brilliance of the East.

And now let us turn our gaze towards the shops. How untidy and ramshackle they are! There is no window-dressing, because there are no windows and no dressing. To enable passers-by to see inside, the front wall is altogether missing, except when shuttered up at night; and the goods are piled in any haphazard manner. Wooden platforms, covered with sunshades of thatch or corrugated iron, project over the drains; and many of the shops overflow into the road with odds and ends placed on makeshift tables. Over most of the shops there is a second or even a third storey where the owner lives.

Now let us take a closer look at some of these shops. The first is the nearest equivalent in India to a grocer's shop. You notice that the drain in front is full of stagnant sullage-water—one smell tracked down! The owner is squatting on the floor with a long limp red-covered book in front of him, making up his accounts. Around him are spread his wares—spices, chillies, dried grapes from Afghanistan, and asafœtida—another smell explained. The next is a fancy shop with a show of cheap German and Japanese goods. A customer asks the price of an electric torch. The shop-keeper tells him, the customer offers a third of the amount, they start haggling, and are still at it when we move on. Then comes a sweetmeat-shop, the sugar *laddū* balls and the yellow sticky pancake-shaped *jalēbīs* almost black with flies; a ghee-shop revealing the origin of yet another smell; a brass-shop with stacks of cooking-vessels and water-pots of various shapes and sizes; a cloth-shop with piles of Japanese cloth masquerading as Indian *khaddar*; a grain-shop exuding an appetizing smell of parched gram; a shop where you can buy areca-nut wrapped in betel-leaves to chew—a habit which largely takes the place of smoking; a 'goldsmith's' shop where the owner is busy melting silver with blow-pipe and bellows; and so on indefinitely.

Beyond the shops we come to some women sitting on the ground with their vegetables laid out before them. An arrogant, gross bull with a large hump approaches and helps himself. The

victim looks as if she would like to stop him, but she doesn't. Branded on his flank you will notice a trident. That is the mark of the god, Shiva, to whom the bull has been dedicated by his previous owner. So now the bull roams where he wishes and takes what he likes, no Hindu daring to drive him off for fear of offending his divine protector.

Leaving the bazaar we make our way towards the market. The centre consists of a large open space—or at least it would be open if it were not so packed with bullocks and buffaloes and carts and drivers all standing about anyhow with no semblance of order. Most of the carts to-day we notice are laden with coarse cotton. All round the central space are rows of buildings, looking much like the shops of the bazaar but really more of the nature of warehouses, the owners of which, mostly *banyas*, buy the peasants' produce at wholesale rates. In front of most of these warehouses there stand several carts awaiting the pleasure of the warehousemen. In spite of the congestion little progress seems being made, and we soon pass on.

Now we will have a look at the houses. We turn up an alley. It is the habitat of the more well-to-do, and most of the houses are made of kiln-burned bricks and are several storeys high. But for all that it is no paradise. The road is so narrow that, except at midday, the sun's rays never reach it: the air is far from savoury; and in front of many of the houses are cesspools, full of filthy water, with the appearance of never having been cleaned for months. And how oppressively dreary the houses are, without the slightest pretension to beauty! Some, too, have ugly cracks, and seem hardly safe. Most of the houses have no glazed windows but merely openings with hinged shutters, and even these are few and mainly closed.

We make our way onwards through a maze of other tortuous alleys. In some respects they vary. Some have *kankar* roads, some are paved with bricks sloping towards or from the centre to form a drain or drains: in some the houses are mostly made of inferior sun-dried bricks; and so on. But all the alleys, though differing in degree, are beyond doubt unlovely, insanitary places.

Finally we come to a yard where members of a menial caste are settled. Here the houses are made merely of mud, with roofs

of thatch or corrugated iron. A good many have been abandoned, and no one has troubled to demolish the ruins.

I have purposely omitted to show you any of the public buildings—for at present we are not concerned with administration—but, before we say good-bye to the city, I should like to give you a glimpse of a temple and a mosque.

Here is a little temple! It is not much to look at—just a small building, about twelve feet square, with a characteristic tapering roof (reminding you a little of a spire), and surrounded by a courtyard. The priest approaches, with a caste-mark painted on his forehead and clad in an ochre robe. He is friendly and invites us in. In the courtyard you notice a plant in a pot. That is the *tulsī* or sacred basil. Over the door of the temple you see an image of what appears to be an elephant-headed, pot-bellied man sitting on a rat. That is Ganesh, the god of luck and welcome. As a special favour the priest permits us to look inside through the door, though we must on no account venture to cross the threshold —that would pollute the temple. The light is dim, but there is not much to see—only a stone idol against the farther wall. It represents Vishnu, to whom the temple is dedicated. There is not much room, but it is sufficient for the priest—the people, you see, do not meet together here to worship, they merely present their offerings and go away.

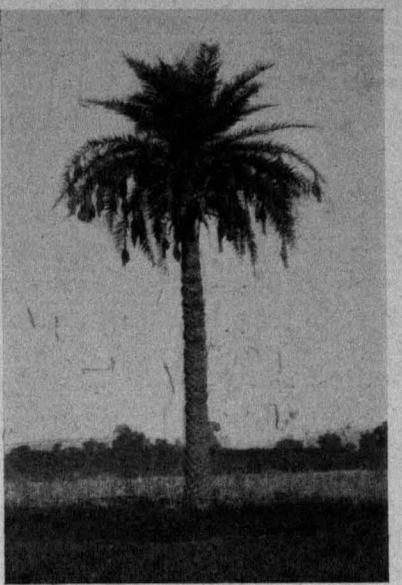
But do not run away with the belief that all temples are just like this. They vary greatly in size and shape. Some are built on a magnificent scale, though most are small, and many have a bulbous instead of a tapering roof. The images, too, vary according to the god to whom the temple is dedicated—a bull, for instance, or a phallic symbol appearing in Shiva's temples. Still what you have seen will give you a general idea of what an ordinary temple is like.

A little farther on in a Muslim ward is a small unpretentious mosque. It is crowned by characteristic domes, and at each of the front corners of the roof there rises a minaret. In front of the building is a courtyard. Luckily the priest (he is called the *imām*) is present here too, and permits us to have a look round. Like most good Muslims he wears a beard in imitation of the Prophet, but there is nothing in his appearance to declare his profession.

The building is long-shaped and occupies the whole of the farther side of the courtyard. At one side of the building is a little room where the worshippers perform their ablutions before entering the mosque itself. The *imām* is even ready to let us go inside the mosque provided that we remove our shoes, but we prefer to stay outside from where we can really see the interior well enough, for in front the mosque is entirely open towards the courtyard. Inside the most conspicuous object is the pulpit, but the *imām* points us out another interesting feature—the Western (or Mecca) wall, towards which all turn as they pray. The mosque is more commodious than the temple we saw, and here the people come to pray together, though at the Friday midday prayers which every good Muslim must attend, the congregation will overflow into the courtyard. But, as with temples, please remember that there are mosques *and mosques*.

That is all we have time to see this morning; but as we return towards Civil Lines let me tell you a little about the people who live in the city. In many ways, of course, they are the same as the villagers whom we will visit presently, but there are also marked differences. In the first place the composition of society naturally varies. In the city there are fewer agriculturists and more shopkeepers, many clerks (especially those attached to Government offices), prominent landholders who are not satisfied with village life, and many well-educated men, such as lawyers and the staff of the various high schools. And partly as a result of these different elements, and partly perhaps as a result of crowd psychology, the cityman is more sophisticated than the villager, more independent and more discontented; and it is the city that is the most fruitful soil for every sort of agitation, whether it be political or of a religious nature.

A Village. This time—it is still November—we are going to see what those who know their India like to call the real India: the village and the villager. For if the district is the unit of the province, the village is the unit of the district. There are two main reasons for this statement. In the first place, an Indian village is typical of the country as a whole, as nearly all the inhabitants of a village earn their living from the land, and agri-



A Date-Palm with Nests
of Weaver-birds

A Sacred Banyan Tree on the edge of a Bathing Tank

culture is India's staple industry. And next, an Indian village is compact and isolated. How you will see when we reach the village I am going to show you.

Well, here we are! Let us leave the car on the pukka road and trek across country to that village you see a mile or so away. I dare not give its name, beyond mentioning that it begins with the abbreviated name of the founder and ends with *pūr*, which is the equivalent of the English *ton* or *ham*.

Now you see what I meant by saying that an Indian village is compact and isolated. You notice how all the houses are clustered together and that there are no other houses within a mile or so. That is mainly a relic of the days not so long ago—it was only in 1818 that the Marathas were finally overthrown—when the peaceful occupants of the countryside had to be prepared to unite against organized marauders, in much the same way as old European towns were enclosed within a protecting wall. Still even now the system has an advantage when, as sometimes happens, a gang of dacoits descend upon a village. But while the arrangement makes for security those peasants who have their fields on the outskirts of the village-land must find it very inconvenient.

As we approach the houses a chorus of barks informs us that the *pi* dogs at any rate do not welcome us. A man throws a clod of earth at one of them, and with an accuracy of aim produced by constant practice hits its lean ribs a resounding *plop*! The dog yelps and with its fellows retreats to a safer distance from which to carry on their hymn of hate.

As we thread our way between the houses, what is the first thing that strikes you? Probably the primitiveness. The tumble-down houses with their crumbling mud-walls and their crude thatched roofs, the naked children, the dirt, the dust, all combine to make you feel that here you have before you one of those places of which you have had no previous experience except from pictures or travellers' tales, and which have nothing remotely resembling them in England.

But let us examine things in detail—and let me act as guide, and add an explanation of what is not obvious to the eye.

As in the city, let us start with the people. There are not many men visible, for the able-bodied ones are mostly in their fields.

Those whom we do see are not only more simple-looking and more simply clothed than those we saw in the city but also more respectful. They nearly all salaam us as we pass: in the city it was quite exceptional.

Now have a look at the children. See how the flies swarm around their noses and lamp-blacked eyes, and how bulging their stomachs seem! Yet they have not been overeating—their spleens have been distended by malaria. The lamp-black is to scare off the evil spirits.

We do not get much chance of scrutinizing the women, for as we meet them all draw their *sāris* closer round their face and turn towards the wall. It is not that we are staring at them too much. Their modesty would have made them shrink away, however detached had been our attitude.

As we turn one of the many bends a bullock tethered in the middle of the road—if it can be called a road—leaps back in fright at the unaccustomed sight of white men and jerks madly at its rope. We wonder how we are going to get past, when the peg comes out and the bullock dashes off, hotly pursued by its shouting master.

That is only the first of many animals we meet thus tethered—bullocks and buffaloes, goats and ponies. Nor are they the only obstructions. Fallen walls, *chabūtras*, beds, refuse-heaps—all help to make the narrow alleys still narrower. But it does not matter much, for no wheeled traffic except an occasional bullock-cart ever ventures along this way.

We have passed a good many wells. Let us stop and have a look at this one.

On the broken brick-platform round the well-mouth a woman lets down a brass pot by a rope into the water. As she does so, her toes project over the edge and pieces of dirt fall into the water. It does not seem to occur to her that the dirt will mingle with the water which she and others will drink. She might have avoided the danger by standing back from the mouth and using the one of the two pulleys which is still intact, but she prefers the more direct method. If you had come in the early morning you would have seen men bathing on the platform, and the dirty water running off their bodies into the well. Strange, is it not, that

people who have such a dread of spiritual pollution should think so little of physical contamination?

We look down the well and notice that the cylinder is made of brick too, and that this also needs repair.

Meanwhile a small crowd has collected. Let us ask them a few questions.

"What people use this well?" I ask.

"Brahmins and Thākurs," comes the reply.

"Is the water good for drinking?"

"Yes, very sweet."

"Is the water in all the wells sweet?"

"No, in some wells it's quite brackish."

"How deep is the water level?"

"About twenty cubits."

"Who built the well?"

"Lala so-and-so in memory of his father."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, ever so long ago. We can't remember."

"Where do the Bhangīs and the low-caste people get their water?"

"From a *kachcha* well outside the village."

You notice that the villagers and I do not understand each other perfectly. The fact is that we speak two different forms of that very composite language, Hindustani. I have been taught Urdu which favours Persian and Arabic words, while the villagers speak Hindi which is akin to Sanskrit and not even pure Hindi but a dialect. Moreover some of the sounds of the Hindustani alphabet are frankly beyond me. I cannot, for instance, distinguish properly between the hard and the soft *r*'s. And so our conversation has been rather a struggle.

We move on once more, and observe that on some of the house walls rude figures or symbols are painted. They are the handiwork of the women, and some perhaps are merely for ornament, but most of them are designed to ward off the evil eye—that symbol in particular which you recognize as a swastika.

A little farther on two men, squatting on a *chabūtra*, make you stop and stare. They are face to face, and one is shaving the other.

Neither shows the least self-consciousness or embarrassment at this alfresco toilet.

Then suddenly we come upon a sight which takes us right back to the Old Testament—a potter surrounded by his pots. As his wheel revolves he deftly shapes the clay, now into a pot, now into a saucer. The sun will bake them hard.

And that is not the only primeval occupation followed here. A little farther on a woman is spinning cotton with her wheel as her ancestors had done for centuries.

And there you see another of the world-old occupations—a man preparing a warp for the loom and stretching the yarn from one upright stick to another for a length of twenty feet or so.

And from inside that house do you hear a monotonous humming sound? That is a woman grinding the grain into flour.

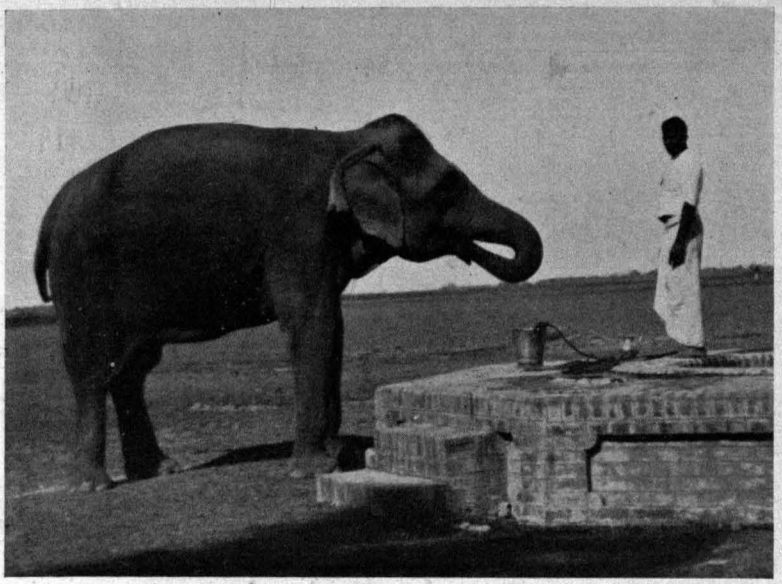
By now it is almost time we went into the fields, but first let us have a peep inside a house. There is a pleasant-looking old Hindu standing in front of that largish one. He seems a little surprised at our request, but consents if we wait a minute. He shouts into the house and we hear a scampering of feet. The women are making themselves scarce.

No windows are visible from outside. The house seems to have its back turned towards the road.

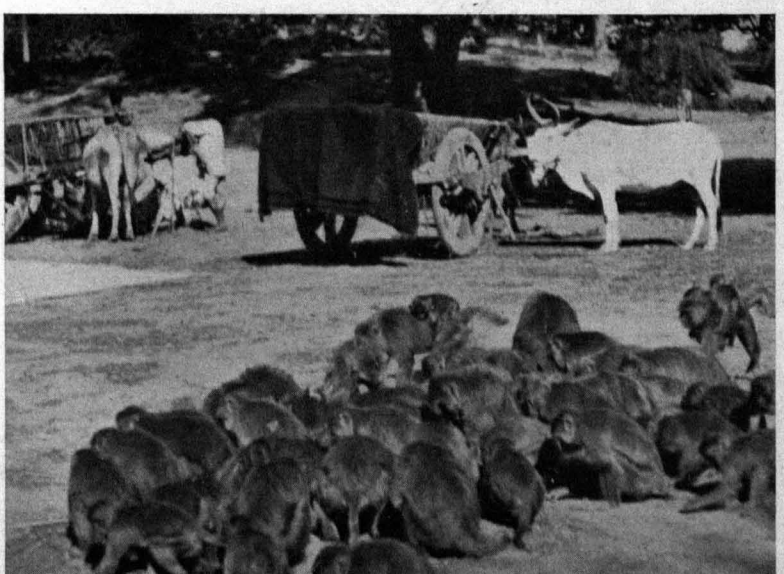
There is no garden, but as we pass through the door we come into a courtyard. There are a few cattle tied up here and a couple of charpoys with shabby cotton quilts thrown negligently on them. In a corner there is a three-sided erection made of earth and a foot or so high. That is the *chūlha* where the fire of sticks or cow-dung is placed for cooking.

Round the courtyard are grouped a few rooms. We look into one or two. They are dark and stuffy, and contain no furniture except grain-bins, cooking pots, charpoys, and a hurricane-lamp. In this last respect the household is lucky—many rely for light on a mere earthen lamp, in shape resembling those used in ancient Rome.

What a cheerless place to live in even now! But it must be far worse in the hot weather when the sun's fierce rays beat down upon it, or in the rains when the roof leaks and parts of the walls get washed away.



THE ELEPHANT'S REFRESHER



THE MONKEYS' SNACK OF GRAIN

Leaving the houses behind, we observe a little ahead of us a red flag hoisted on the top of a *pipal* tree; and when we get nearer, we find under it a few carved stones stained red, some marigolds, and the clay image of an elephant. This is a shrine. The stones have been brought from the ruins of some old temple, and the red stains, the marigolds and the elephant represent offerings, the clay elephant perhaps symbolizing a real live one. The deity worshipped here is some petty godling with whom the villager can feel more intimate than with one of the greater gods.

As we are here, let us have a look at that tank close by. It is merely an excavation about a hundred yards round and twelve feet deep. It serves a double purpose. The water is drunk by the cattle, and the clay which forms the sides and bottom provides material for repairing walls or making bricks. Unfortunately it also has a harmful side, breeding mosquitoes, and thereby spreading that dread disease, malaria.

And a little beyond there is something else I must point out. You see that bulbous masonry block standing on a brick platform. That is a suttee shrine, and marks the spot where some devoted Hindu widow sacrificed herself upon her husband's funeral pyre. She now receives more honour than she ever did when alive. And now, without any further interruption, let us make our way towards those all-important fields.

But please walk warily. Remember that the village has no arrangements for sanitation. That is one of the reasons why there is such a luxuriant crop of vegetables and tobacco just round the part where the people live.

Let us first take a general view. As far as the eye can reach the land is all dead level, and arable field succeeds arable field endlessly without even a hedge to break the monotony. You look in vain for thick woods: there are only a few small mango-groves. The most conspicuous feature in the landscape consists of dense green masses of what look like giant stalks. Those are fields of sugar-cane. On the other hand many of the fields are bare, or almost so, November being the mid-season when the *kharif* (or autumn crops) are being harvested and the *rabi* (or spring ones) being sown. For the hot sun has this advantage that it ripens

most kinds of crops so quickly that there are two main harvests in the year.

Now let us move on and take a nearer view of some of the different sorts of fields.

Here is a sugar-cane field. The plants, though not yet ripe, are already taller than a man and so close to one another as to make it difficult to penetrate them. They do not reach maturity so soon as most kinds of Indian crops, for they have occupied the ground since the beginning of the year and will continue to do so for a few months more.

In the adjoining field a pair of bullocks are pulling a plough, preparatory to planting cane next year. You observe that except for an iron sole the plough is made all of wood. It merely scratches the surface. But do not be too scornful. Look at the lean animals. Could they pull anything heavier?

Further on we see some men breaking the ground by hand—they probably cannot afford bullocks or buffaloes—with an implement unknown to English agriculture. It looks rather like a hoe, but is being swung above the shoulder for each stroke and wielded like a pickaxe. If we regard its function it is really a kind of inverted spade—one of the many instances in which the Indian method is the reverse of the European.

Much of the profits from the cane go to the modern factory which has sprung up a few miles away, but even so the peasant of the United Provinces, thanks largely to the prohibitive tariff imposed on Java sugar, finds sugar-cane the most lucrative crop that he can grow.

Not all the sugar-cane, however, goes to the factory. Some is still crushed in the old-fashioned *kolhū*. Let us go and have a look at that one just over there. The power, as you see, is supplied by the bullock and buffalo which revolve the mill by pulling the rough pole as they go round and round; while a man squats on the ground and feeds the two geared wheels between which the cane is crushed. The juice is pouring into that earthen bowl beneath. It is a tedious process and far from thorough, but good enough for making coarse *gūr* for the grower's own consumption, and has the advantage of keeping him independent of the factory-owner and his minions.

Returning to the fields we see a stream of water pouring into them; and if you traced it to its source you would find that it is coming from an outlet in a channel which in its turn takes off from a distributary of the canal. Indeed without such a constant supply of water as is normally assured by the canal to the fields it serves, sugar-cane can hardly be grown at all.

But not all the fields are so favoured. Only a limited number can be irrigated from the canal as the supply of water in the great river from which the canal is filled is not inexhaustible. So now let us visit a field beyond the area dependent on the canal.

Making our way along the narrow boundaries between the fields, we soon arrive at a field relying on the next best form of irrigation—a well. This is a wheat field with the plants hardly showing above the ground; and here too a stream of water is flowing, but this time it comes from a well in the corner of the field. What attracts your attention is the rather complicated method of drawing the water. A pair of bullocks are hauling a rope which passes over a wooden pulley erected over the mouth of the well. At the end of the rope is a limp leather bucket. One man is managing the bullocks and another is standing by the well and alternately emptying the bucket as it comes up and letting it down into the well again. That is all quite clear, but what perhaps you do not grasp at first is the object of the earthen ramp, sloping upwards towards the well to a height of four feet or so. You will notice that before they commence to haul the bucket the bullocks clamber up the ramp's steep side by the well and then descend gradually along the ramp's length away from the well. By the time they reach the end the bucket has come up and the bullocks now walk back to the well, not up the ramp but along the low ground beside it. Now the manœuvre is plain. The downward slope gives the bullocks' weight more power as they draw the water; and the driver, you see, adds his weight too when necessary, by sitting on the rope.

If you look down the well you will notice that it is merely a *kachcha* one—that is, just a deep hole in the ground. All the irrigation-wells, however, are not so primitive. Some are made of brick, though sometimes the bricks are not baked in a kiln but merely dried by the sun.

Some fields, however, belonging to this village are irrigated in a different way. Here is a field in point. This too has been sown for the *rabī*, but instead of wheat it contains a mixed crop of barley, mustard, and peas. The water for the field is coming along a channel which extends to that *jhīl* over a hundred yards away. The *jhīl* is quite shallow, and merely the accumulation of rain in a broad clay depression.

Arrived at the edge we observe that the water-level is about four feet below the level of the surrounding fields, and that to reach this the water has to be lifted twice. To enable this to be done two steps, so to speak, have been dug in the gently sloping bank. On top of the lower step a rough reservoir has been dug out, and into this four men—two standing on each side and facing the other two—are lifting water from the *jhīl* in a leaky basket which they swing by means of connecting ropes backwards and forwards with a rhythmic motion. Above them four other men repeat the process, swinging their basket, however, between the reservoir and the top of the higher step which is slightly above the level of the field to be watered. The method is an inferior one, for not only does it require much man-power, but the supply of water depends on that uncertain factor—the rainfall.

The crop that has been sown in the field we are contemplating is not so valuable as wheat, but on the other hand it needs less virtue in the soil, less manure and less water.

But before we leave the *jhīl* you will notice in the distance another method of raising water. The apparatus looks rather like a monstrous fishing rod and line, with the broad end of the rod fixed between two posts and with a bucket instead of a hook dangling from the line. That is the *dhēnklī* system; and though primitive in execution, the device is quite ingenious. For the handle of the ' rod ' is so weighted with a lump of earth that the minimum of human effort is required to pull up the bucket full of water.

Some fields, however, are altogether dry, without any artificial irrigation. Such fields are mostly sown for the *kharīf* when the sub-soil may be expected to retain some of the moisture from the rains. Here are two adjoining fields of the kind I have in mind.

They contain two kinds of millet—the first field *jawār* and the second *bājra*. They have been reaped already, and now there are only stumps to tell the tale, but presently we will go to the neighbouring threshing-floor and you will be able to see for yourself what the plants looked like when growing.

First, however, let me point out those lines of thin dark-green plants still standing between the stumps. They are *arhar* plants, and will produce a kind of lentil, but require several months before they are ripe.

On the threshing-floor you notice great stalks six or seven feet long. Some have tops like a spear-head, they are *jawār*: some like a bulrush, they are *bājra*. The tops contain the grain: the stalks will be chopped up for fodder for the cattle.

As you watch the bullocks treading out the grain your mind goes back once more to the Old Testament. Only, in spite of the ancient prohibition, these poor beasts are muzzled.

By now we are beginning to perspire. But before we return there is just one more thing I wish to show you—that part-brown, part-white *ūsar* plain. It must be fifty acres in extent. It is quite uncultivated for the simple reason that nothing will grow on it, but a hundred animals or so—bullocks, cows, buffaloes and goats —have been brought by two small boys to graze on it. The scientists tell us that *ūsar* is a saline efflorescence caused by water-logging, but all that the half-starved animals know is that it is mighty hard to get a meal off it.

As we proceed homewards let me explain to you a few things not obvious to the naked eye.

First the ownership and tenure of the land. The systems vary greatly from province to province, and even within the United Provinces the system in Oudh differs widely from that in the Agra districts. Moreover the systems in the United Provinces, with which we are now concerned, are most elaborate and could not be explained without a long and technical description. I cannot therefore attempt here to do more than touch the fringe of the subject and give a very brief account of the general conditions as they affect the life and position of the peasant and the landlord.

Although every village contains a large number of peasants

as distinct from mere labourers, yet very few of them own the land they cultivate. Usually the land in a village belongs to a comparatively small number of zemindars or even a single one, though sometimes the land is owned by a host of petty landlords known as *pattīdārs* who cultivate a great part of their land themselves. The tendency indeed is for the estates to get split up more and more, for, except in respect of certain ancient estates to which the title of Raja or Nawab appertains, there is no law of primogeniture in India either among Hindus or Muslims, and on a man's death all his sons and also other heirs inherit various shares of his property. In Hindu law indeed a family may remain joint even after the death of the original ancestor, but when disputes arise, as they often do, the usual remedy is partition.

But though few peasants own the land they cultivate, most of them in the United Provinces are now 'statutory tenants' and are practically assured of tenure for life with a few years' extension for their heirs provided they observe certain rules: and in the near future most of them are likely to be admitted to the hitherto privileged status of occupancy tenure, which includes permanent and heritable rights. On the other hand some tenants are liable to ejectment at the landlord's pleasure.

For the preservation of statutory or occupancy rights, what are the rules to be observed? First and foremost, the peasant must pay his rent punctually. Next, he must not sub-let his land beyond a limited extent. And, thirdly, he must not misuse his land; in particular, he must not use agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes.

The rates of rent vary greatly, partly according to the nature of the soil (which may range from a heavy clay to a light sand), partly according to the nearness of the houses, partly according to the tenant's caste, and partly according to the landlord's temperament.

The peasant, however, is protected from excessive enhancement of his rent by Acts which regulate enhancement and prescribe the intervals which must elapse between one enhancement and the next.

Yet notwithstanding the beneficent land-system, agriculture in India cannot be said to be in a flourishing condition. At present

this is partly due to the post-War slump in the prices of grain; but there are more permanent causes.

In spite of all the provisions for artificial irrigation the nature of the Indian harvests depends largely on the monsoon, which (as we have already seen) is most capricious. When it fails over a large area the crops, even if sown, either wither up altogether or yield merely a poor outturn.

But while drought is the peasant's chief fear, he has many other enemies, such as floods, frost, storms of hail as big as marbles, locusts, wild animals, blights, and fire on the threshing-floor; indeed he cannot be sure of his harvest till it has actually reached the market.

Moreover in one important respect the land is being constantly robbed of its fertility. For the cow-dung instead of being put back into the land as manure is burned for fuel and used to plaster floors or walls.

And there are two other matters which, though they do not directly affect the outturn of the crops, help to make agriculture uneconomic. In the first place most holdings are far too small to support the number of persons who occupy them, this in its turn being attributable to the density of the population; and secondly, there is the wasteful habit of maintaining a large number of unserviceable cattle which diminish the already scanty supply of pasture, the Hindus refusing from religious scruples to kill off old or unfit animals.

Nor beyond the sphere of agriculture are there wanting circumstances that act adversely to the peasants' interests. For the peasants are subject to the general Indian failings of inordinate extravagance at weddings and other important family ceremonies, and wasteful expenditure on profitless litigation.

You will not, therefore, be surprised to hear that the ordinary peasant is pitiably poor, and that a very little is sufficient to submerge him beneath the level of the barest means of livelihood and sink him into debt.

The indebtedness of so many of the peasants is indeed one of India's most malignant maladies, but I will deal with that more fully in a later chapter concerning India's problems.

The Indian peasant does not enjoy the robust health which we

are accustomed to associate with tillers of the soil. Generations of child-mothers, enervating heat at one time and cold severe enough to numb ill-clad bodies at another, an insufficient and unbalanced diet, neglect of the most elementary rules of hygiene, and the ravages of malaria have all combined to undermine his physique and lessen his powers of resistance against disease. Such people readily succumb to pneumonia and general debility, and fall an easy prey to the pestilences of cholera, plague, and smallpox which sweep the land year after year with relentless regularity.

Turning to another matter: what is the peasant's daily round? If he is a Hindu, he starts the morning, we are told, with prayers to the household-god and with a bath—the latter operation, however, consisting not of immersion in a tub of water but of standing by the side of a well and pouring water over his body. Then he proceeds to his fields, and at midday some member of his family brings him out some food. In the evening he returns home and partakes of his chief meal. After that he has usually nothing to do but sit outside, perhaps round a fire, and chat with his cronies. The favourite sitting-place is the *chaupāl*, which for meeting purposes takes the place of the English village-inn, and is merely an earthen platform with perhaps some rough kind of roof. The Muslim's round is much the same, but his special time for prayers is sunset. In the hot weather when agriculture is at a standstill the peasant instead of going to his fields will repair his house or do any other odd job required.

"What a dull life!" you exclaim. And you are right. Though, of course, there are special occasions. Still the Indian villager has hardly any amusements in our sense of the word, and his diversions are almost limited to religious festivals, religious recitals and family ceremonies, though among Hindus at any rate family ceremonies of a religious or semi-religious nature are very numerous.

Not, I believe, unconnected with the dullness of his life is the villager's habitual quarrelsomeness. Occasions for outbursts frequently arise. Perhaps one party of peasants breach the bank of the canal-distributary and thereby divert to their own fields water intended by the canal authorities for others, or two sets of peasants both claim possession of the same field, or cattle trespass

A Bazaar

A Residential Quarter

in a field and before the owner of the field can get the cattle to the pound the owner of the cattle arrives and tries to rescue them.

Or the occasion may be more trivial. A man may tether an animal near his house on land claimed by a neighbour as his own; or even a children's squabble may lead to a fierce fight between their respective parents.

The national weapon is the *lāthī* which is a stout bamboo-stick, often tipped with brass; and a hasty blow with this on a thin skull or weak spleen may easily result in a charge of manslaughter or even murder.

Nor are these quarrels ended as quickly as they start. Few villages in fact are free from feuds, which last sometimes for generations.

And yet for all his weaknesses there is something very attractive about the Indian peasant, displaying, as he does, such patience in adversity and revealing to those who treat him properly that courtesy which so often marks the members of an ancient race. Everyone indeed who knows India has a soft place in his heart for the peasant, and, as I said at the beginning of this section, believes that it is he and not the proud raja or the mystic *sādhū* or the eloquent *vakil* who most truly represents the real India.

So ends your first glimpse of an Indian district. If you remember what you have seen and heard, it will form a background to all that follows.

CHAPTER II

THE ADMINISTRATION OF AN INDIAN DISTRICT — PART I

Introductory—The District Officer as (i) Collector, (ii) District Magistrate, (iii) Head of the District

AT the beginning of the last chapter I referred to India's vastness, and at the beginning of this chapter I wish to emphasize that vastness once again. Before the separation of Burma it used to be said that the Indian Empire was as large as Europe excluding Russia. To-day we should have to exclude a further area, say the Iberian peninsula, but even so India remains huge enough with an area of 1,575,000 square miles and a population of 338,000,000.

It follows that the Government of India, as the Central Government is called, cannot cope directly with the administration of the country as a whole, but has to leave most of it to the local governments of the various provinces.

Even the provinces, however, are far too unwieldy for the personal rule so dear to the hearts of Indians—the United Provinces, for instance, being considerably larger than Great Britain. Accordingly the provinces are divided into divisions, and the divisions into districts, of which there are two-hundred-and-thirty-one in British India, excluding Burma, and forty-eight in the United Provinces.

And it is the district that may be called the unit of administration, for it is the greatest area with which, generally speaking, any one can remain in personal touch and over which any one can exercise direct control, though the district itself is again divided for facilitation of the work of the various kinds of administration.

In the previous chapter I warned my readers of the impossibility of making sweeping generalizations about the main features of a district, and I must now issue a similar caveat about its administration.

The remarks that follow apply primarily to the United Provinces, which may be taken as pretty typical of India as a whole, not only (as we have already seen) on general grounds, but also for the purpose of administration.

Nevertheless conditions vary considerably from province to province. In Madras, for instance, there are no divisions. In some provinces, particularly Bengal, and Bihar and Orissa, much of the land revenue has been permanently settled, and where this is so the land records are not kept in such detail as in the temporarily settled areas; and in more than a third of British India, excluding Burma, the land revenue is collected direct from the cultivators instead of an intermediary zemindar.

Nor will the description given in this chapter be true even of all districts in the United Provinces. In the hill districts, for instance, the system of administration is more primitive than in the plains.

From the previous chapter the reader will have gained some idea of what a district is, but for the sake of clearness I repeat that the average area of a district in the United Provinces is about 2,200 square miles, and the population about a million, and that the bulk of the people are engaged in agriculture.

A district contains a multitude of officers and officials—there is a subtle distinction between the two—and of these all the officials and most of the officers are Indians. Chief of the host is the district officer, who more often than not is a Britisher, though the number of Indians is being gradually increased till there is an equal number of each race.

But though the district officer is the head of the district, this does not mean that all the official hierarchy is subordinate to him. On the contrary there are many departments represented, each with its subordinate officials owing allegiance to their own chief, whether resident within or outside the district. The relation between these departments and the district officer is not well-defined, but amounts to one of co-operation, in which each department for the most part acts separately but is expected to consider the district officer's views on matters of general policy substantially affecting the welfare of the district.

Nor is limitation of the district officer's powers to be found

merely in official quarters. The district and municipal boards show a growing tendency to flaunt their independence; and the local members of the provincial legislature watch the district officer's behaviour meticulously, and on the slightest provocation are ready to bombard the Government with searching questions.

Yet, in spite of all these reservations, the district officer rules the district in a sense for which there is no parallel in modern England, and the administration still depends largely on his character and ability. So much so that an examination of his work is the obvious and easiest way of approaching a study of the administration as a whole.

Let it not be thought, however, that by adopting this method of looking at things from the district officer's point of view I intend to belittle the work of other officers. To some of them I shall have occasion to refer in my analysis of the district officer's duties, and the work of others will be described in the next chapter. And if it be thought that I give these officers and also the local bodies less than their share of mention, that must be attributed partly to my desire to keep the account within reasonable limits and partly to my special acquaintance with the district officer's work.

Even my description of the district officer's work will be far from complete. His duties are so numerous that to give an exhaustive account of them would leave my reader bewildered if it did not have the effect of making him shut the book; and, besides, a good many of them will appear from the inspections which I shall describe in a later chapter. So all that I shall attempt to do is to outline the main features, particularly those peculiar to India.

Perhaps the best introduction to this sketch will be a brief reference to the three classes of assistants with whom the district officer could least dispense—sub-divisional officers, *tahsīldārs*, and *patwāris*.

The district is divided into four or five sub-divisions in charge of sub-divisional officers—or sub-divisional magistrates, as they are alternatively called. Much they perform on their own responsibility, but in matters of special importance they are guided by the district officer. They are, so to speak, the district officer's lieutenants; and their work is in many respects analogous to his,

Sweets and Flies

A Betel Shop

but while the district officer devotes most of his time to his executive duties, the sub-divisional officers are often overwhelmed with the burden of unending cases.

A *tahsīl*, of which a *tahsīldār* is in charge, is usually co-terminous with a sub-division, and the *tahsīldār* ranks as subordinate to the sub-divisional officer, but for some purposes the *tahsīldār* takes his orders direct from the district officer. The *tahsīldār* has magisterial powers, but these are of a petty nature, and he is pre-eminently an executive officer, his principal duty being to collect the land revenue (*tahsīldār* in fact being merely the Hindustani for 'collector'). Besides this principal duty, however, the *tahsīldār* is expected to carry out any job that may be required of him, whether it be to organize a meeting, to spread propaganda, to collect dues, to raise subscriptions, to reconcile factions, to twist a mischief-maker's tail, or to perform any other of the countless duties which arise. The *tahsīldār*, then, is the man who must get things done. The district officer and the sub-divisional officer are mainly concerned with giving orders and the *tahsīldār* with carrying them out. To take a military analogy, the district officer and the sub-divisional officers may be likened to the colonel and officers, and the *tahsīldār* to the sergeant-major. True to his character, the *tahsīldār* resides at the headquarters of the *tahsīl*, unlike the sub-divisional officer who usually resides at the headquarters of the district.

The *patwārī* is primarily responsible for preparing and maintaining the land records of his circle, which usually consists of three or four villages. Though at the very bottom of the official ladder, his work is of first-rate importance, for the entries which he makes vitally affect the interests of most of the residents of his circle, and if there is any agrarian dispute his papers generally form the most weighty evidence. But the maintenance of the land records by no means exhausts the *patwārī*'s duties. He is also expected to supply many kinds of local information to the authorities and to do all sorts of odd jobs. If, for instance, frost damages the crops, or an epidemic breaks out among man or beast, he must report this to the *tahsīldār*: or if a census is to be taken of the people or the cattle, or an election to be held, he will be expected to assist. He is, indeed, a kind of maid-of-all-

work, and in a sense may be regarded as the district officer's village agent: and without him administration would come almost to a standstill.

For this responsible work the *patwārī* gets from the Government only about £1 a month. But in the East a petty official's pay and income are vastly different matters: and the *patwārī* is no exception to the rule. Still it must be remembered that the unofficial takings of most *patwārīs* may be more fairly classified as perquisites than bribes, and, though undoubtedly there are black sheep ready to falsify their records for a consideration, these do not form a large proportion of the fold.

And now the way is clear for our exploration of the duties of the district officer.

The district officer has three capacities—as collector, district magistrate, and head of the district: and it will be convenient to examine his main duties under each capacity in turn.

The District Officer as Collector. This title represents historically the district officer's original capacity, and dates back to the time of the East India Company when India was regarded mainly as a source of income. But it is now misleading, for though the collector is responsible either immediately or ultimately for the collection of revenue of all sorts, he collects it through his subordinate officers, and that, though an important duty, is only one of many.

The chief kind of revenue to be collected is the land revenue which is paid in the United Provinces by the landlords out of the rent which they collect from their tenants. On account of this association, 'revenue' in the jargon of Indian officialdom besides its ordinary meaning has the peculiar meaning of anything connected with the ownership or holding of agricultural land: and the district officer as collector is in charge of the whole revenue administration.

Taking the word in this wide sense the collector may be said to have six main duties: (*a*) collection of the land revenue, (*b*) maintenance of the land records, (*c*) protection of the interests of agriculturists, (*d*) control of the revenue courts, (*e*) custody of treasury, (*f*) administration of excise.

Collection of the Land Revenue. What is land revenue? I cannot attempt to give its detailed history, but will content myself with saying that a land-tax has always been of great importance in India and has been imposed from time immemorial, and that before the British assumed the government of the country the zemindars were treated not as landlords but as contractors for realizing the tax from the peasants and paying the bulk of it to the ruler of the day. If that is not borne in mind the proportion which the land revenue bears to the rent-roll may seem unduly high. At present in the United Provinces the rate usually applied at settlements is about 40 per cent, but in the old days the share demanded by the ruler or the Government was much greater: and actually the rate in force in most districts of the United Provinces is much less than 40 per cent owing to the rise in rents since the last settlements.

Land revenue is still much the largest source of income in the district, though customs now take chief place for India as a whole.

The amount of revenue to be paid depends naturally on the rental value of the land; and for each district in turn a settlement officer is appointed every thirty or forty years to examine the assets and fix the revenue payable by each landlord annually till the next settlement.

The land revenue is collected, as a rule, in two half-yearly instalments, the first being paid by the landlords out of the *kharīf* rents and the second out of the *rabī* ones.

We have already seen that the district is divided into *tahsīls* for the purpose of collection, but for all that a *tahsīldār*'s task is a formidable one. In each *tahsīl* there are hundreds of villages, some of which are owned by scores of co-sharers, a certain number of whom reside outside the *tahsīldār*'s jurisdiction.

To simplify the problem most villages are divided into *mahāls*, and in every *mahāl* or undivided village one landlord is appointed *lambardār*, who is responsible for the payment of the revenue of the whole *mahāl*, and, as compensation for his trouble, receives a small remuneration at the expense of the other co-sharers.

Even so, however, no one knows better than the *tahsīldār* that the money will not find its way to his office if he merely sits

back in his chair. So as soon as an instalment falls due he lets loose a host of *chaprāsīs* to stir up the bad payers with writs of demand or summonses to appear before him.

When these fail to have the desired effect he resorts to severer processes, and sends out bailiffs to attach the defaulters' property—cattle, or crops, or vehicle, or even house—with the threat of sale.

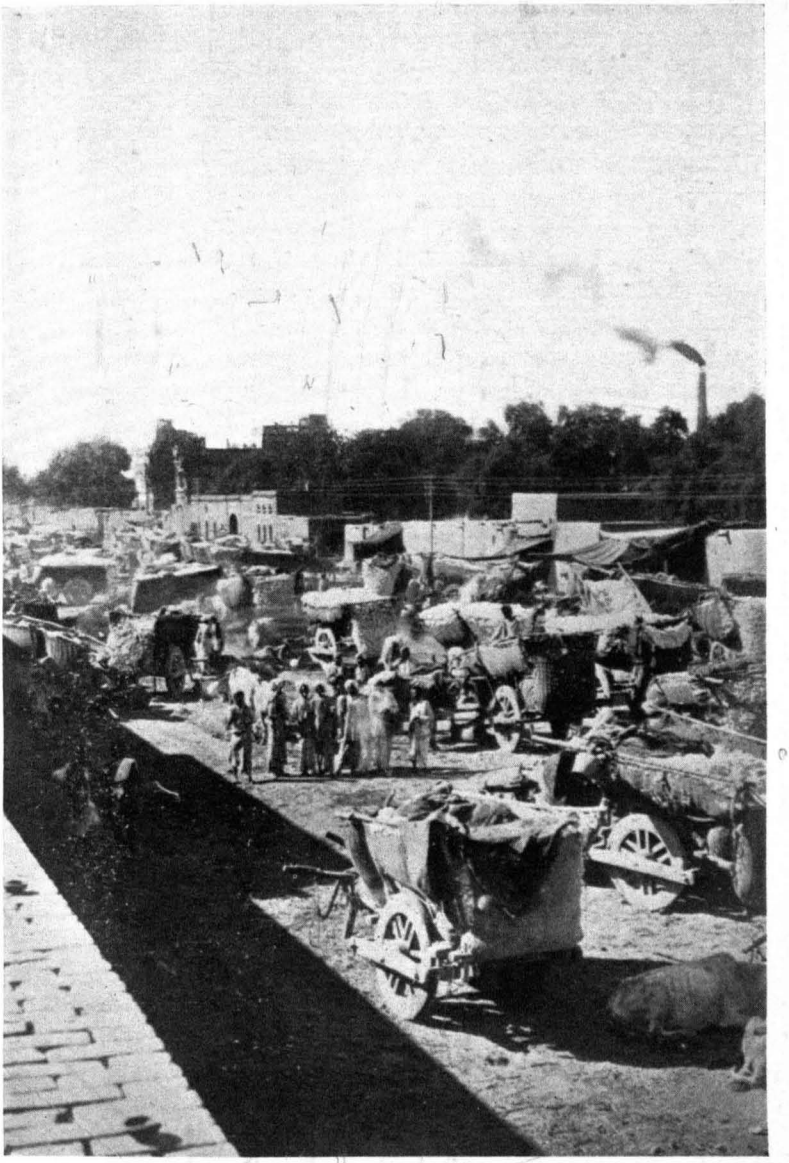
Or if the *tahsīldār* knows that a man can pay but will not, he may have him arrested by a *chaprāsī* and keep him locked up for fifteen days, or until he is prepared to disgorge, which is usually pretty soon.

Or in special cases the *tahsīldār* may find it necessary to attach the defaulter's landed estate and collect the rents himself; and according to the law the estate may even be sold.

Let it not be thought, however, that the *tahsīldār* exercises these powers tyrannically or arbitrarily. There are all sorts of safeguards, and he is precluded from having recourse to the more drastic methods without the sanction of higher authority.

A special problem is presented by defaulters who live outside the *tahsīl* where the money is due. These landlords are apt to take advantage of their immunity from most of the weapons at the *tahsīldār*'s command; and as the final date for payment of the instalment draws near, the collector is sure to receive requests from each of his *tahsīldārs* to use his personal influence to urge other *tahsīldārs*, some within the same district and some beyond it, to make a serious attempt to collect the money, for which official reminders have already been sent *ad nauseam*. And the collector in his turn will send stern orders to his own offending *tahsīldārs* and polite personal requests to his fellow-collectors to do the same with regard to their *tahsīldārs*, and finally all the money capable of being collected comes in.

In the old days a *tahsīldār* considered it an aspersion to leave a single pie outstanding by the last day fixed for payment, but with the hard times on which agriculture has fallen in consequence of the post-War slump in the prices of grain, other standards have arisen, and *tahsīldārs* are now expected to pay more attention to sympathetic methods than to rigorous insistence on prompt and complete payment.



A Cotton Market

Maintenance of the Land Records. The land records are prepared every year by the *patwārī* in minutest detail. Every single field is shown on the village map, together with full particulars about the rights of the landlord and the tenant, the rent, the crops, the means of irrigation, and so on.

The original object, however, of this elaborate survey was, it must be confessed, not to protect the people's rights but to provide a basis for the assessment of the land revenue.

Every *patwārī*'s records are checked every season by an inspector known as a supervisor *kānūngo* who usually has about twenty *patwāris*' circles in his charge; and the records of a certain number of *patwāris* are checked each year by the *tahsīldār* and his assistant and the sub-divisional officer, while over all the collector exercises a general supervision. Yet even this formidable hierarchy does not avail to keep out wrong entries altogether.

Protection of the Interests of Agriculturists. A good collector is the peasants' friend, and holds none of his trusts more sacred than their welfare. Especially is he on the alert to come to their assistance in all times of special need. If they require money for sinking wells or buying cattle or seed, he grants them a loan at a low rate of interest; if the crops fail, he lessens the blow not merely by a loan but by a suspension or remission of their rent, to which the landlords' consent is won by a proportionate reduction in the demand of land revenue from them; and if the distress is so widespread as to amount to famine, work is provided for the able-bodied, and money, food and clothes for others. In these and innumerable other ways the collector protects the interests of the peasants committed to his charge.

But the peasants are not the only agriculturists. There are the landlords too. These, as a rule, are quite capable of looking after themselves and their estates, but there are exceptions; and when there is a danger of a big estate being ruined for want of proper care, the collector steps in and assumes control as manager of the Court of Wards. The ground of incapacity may be that the owner is a minor, or a woman (!), or insane, or extravagant, or just incompetent. The estate is managed for the benefit of the owner and his heirs, and as soon as this can be safely done

is restored to the family. Some owners, however, do not appreciate the Government's beneficence, and, regardless of the ultimate prosperity of their estates, badger the collector and the special manager, who works under him, for extra grants unceasingly.

Control of the Revenue Courts. Petty revenue cases are tried by *tahsīldārs* and the more serious ones by sub-divisional officers, but the collector hears all appeals from *tahsīldārs* and certain classes of appeals from sub-divisional officers, and is also responsible for seeing that sub-divisional officers and *tahsīldārs* alike dispose of their cases with reasonable despatch. Other appeals from sub-divisional officers go partly to the commissioner in charge of the division and partly to the district judge.

The system is far from ideal. In the first place it is anomalous that matters of a judicial or quasi-judicial character should be tried by executive authorities at all.

In partial recognition of this view the law provides that those appeals from sub-divisional officers which relate to specially judicial matters, such as claims for rent or estate profits, should go to the district judge, but the compromise has itself introduced an additional evil—an element of confusion: for sometimes the issues in a case are such that they have to be decided partly by a civil and partly by a revenue court: and sometimes the same issue is decided in one way by a civil court and in another by a revenue one.

And, lastly, the opportunities for appeal provided by the system are a positive encouragement to litigation. For in many cases not one but two or even three appeals are allowed, up to the High Court and the Board of Revenue: and sometimes an appeal lies even from these exalted authorities to the Privy Council. Is this a reflection on the competency of the Indian courts—or a concession to the obstinacy of litigants, or the avidity of lawyers?

Custody of the Treasury. Any sane person in England who has a large amount of money in his charge gets a bank to keep it for him, but most collectors in India are debarred from that expedient. For in most districts there is either no bank at all, or at any rate no branch of the particular bank with which the Government deal. In such districts the collector has to keep the money