PERFUMED TIGERS

One of the *Gopouras* of the Temple at Madura

PERFUMED TIGERS

ADVENTURES IN THE LAND OF THE MAHARAJAHS

By

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Translated by Metcalfe Wood

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I

INDIA, THE LAND OF MYSTERY

As the first Cingalese coolies sprang up the gangway on to the *André-Lebon*, one of the finest boats of the Messageries Maritimes line of steamships, tragic memories of Neuve-Chapelle in 1914 flashed through my mind. . . . Indians of the Lahore and Meerut Divisions held the trenches between La Bassée and Estaires. Baluchis, Pathans, Sikhs, Gurkhas were dying in the mud of Flanders for half a rupee a day, sacrificed to war, that horrible goddess Kali of the Western tribes, whom a beheaded goat does not satisfy.

I pictured them in my mind, shivering with cold, outside our northern farms, going to fight in the flooded trenches with the resignation of *yogis*, indifferent to the misfortunes of the world and its physical sufferings, abandoning all hopes of dying on the banks of the Ganges and being burnt at Benares, where the setting sun paints the sacred waters with its crimson brush. . . .

The sky was clear over the green isle of Ceylon, and the coco-nut palms, in welcome, bowed their high heads against the azure heavens, so I soon dismissed my memories of the sad days of 1914 and landed lightheartedly on the Isle of Paradise.

I am aware that it is heresy to talk of India when landing at Ceylon. The Isle of Delight, where certain insects disguise themselves as flowers and certain flowers devour insects, is a British Crown Colony, whilst India has an administration of its own, with a Viceroy, who represents His Majesty, and a special Office in London.

But the European traveller, when he arrives at Colombo, forgets these shades of difference, and sees, in the Cingalese jungle, only a kind of verdant and flowery antechamber, in which he gets a foretaste of Eden, before he penetrates into India and surrenders himself to her mysterious charm. Mysterious? Can one really speak of India and her mysteries? Can the Western mind form any adequate idea of this Colossus with its hundred heads and hundred arms which symbolizes Hindustan? This important question came into my mind as I was leaving the Temple of the Tooth of Buddha at Kandy, where a bonze dressed in yellow had shown me the shrine which holds the sacred relic, or to be precise, a crocodile's tooth substituted for the real eye-tooth which was destroyed by the Portuguese at Goa in 1560.

I had stopped in the famous Gardens of Paradenia. A Cingalese had pointed out that the bamboos at the foot of which I was sitting, sprouted nearly a foot a day in spring! The old kings of Kandy used them as instruments of torture. Criminals were bound above the growing stem, and died terribly tortured by the plant which slowly impaled them.

Huge bats zig-zagged among the palms. The bending acacias weaved scarlet streamers between the cinnamon trees and giant fan-palms. The silent park was propitious to meditation. I thought of the controversy which has recently stirred all literary Hindus, in which Miss Katherine Mayo, author of "Mother India," has been opposed by Mr. Ranga Iyer, member of the Indian Legislative Assembly, author of "Father India."

Miss Mayo wrote her impressions during her tour. She commented unkindly on Hindu life. She spoke

of castes, of marriages between children of ten years of age, of venereal diseases, of religious fanaticism, of obscenities, of Moslem women cloistered in the purdah, and of Brahmin women shut up in the zenana. She shocked cultivated Hindus by her pessimism. One of them, Mr. Iyer, took up the glove, and replied that " the American tourist " had seen nothing, and that her book is only a tissue of calumnies or of half-truths, that she had only visited certain sects, prostitutes, or traitors to the Hindu cause.

When I had read the two books I realized how difficult it is to judge the life of such a composite country. A country? One should say a continent. The Hindus? One should say, Bengalis, Punjabis, Dravidians, Parsees, Mahrattas, Sikhs, Malabars, etc. . . . There are 500,000 towns and villages in India. There are 2,000 different castes. There are 50 religious sects. How can one really know them? The life of a centenarian is not sufficient.

I am about to take you into a strange land where everything, to a European, excites one's interest and is full of surprises. If I drew conclusions from what I have seen in Bengal or in Kashmir, Mr. Iyer might call me over the coals, if not for taking the Hindu Empyrean for a menagerie, at least for drawing wrong deductions.

One day, in the south of India, I had the misfortune to pass by the shed which served as the kitchen to a rest-house where I was staying. I noticed a Hindu chewing his betel as he made some toast, holding it between his toes, his leg stuck out towards the fire. I was about to protest when the Hindu took a fork, dug it into the toast as he bent his leg and offered me the piece, with a very correct bow. I was disarmed!

Another time I discovered with alarm that the potatoes were being mashed by another cook in the palms of his hands. In a word, he was washing his hands in the *purée*!

I do not want to hurt Mr. Iyer's feelings by saying that head cooks in India are dirty. He would reply that he had often seen dirty cooks in Europe, sweating in dark kitchens. And then, cleanliness, is it not a relative idea? We shock the Eastern people by blowing our noses in our handkerchiefs. We tuck our shirts into our trousers: they wear their shirts outside their trousers.

It is the same with the religions of India. Someone praised, to an elderly English lady who was travelling to Bombay, the beauties of the Parsee religion. . . . Well, one day we were having tea in the garden of a villa not far from the Towers of Silence, where, as one knows, the bodies of dead Parsees are left to the birds of prey; the English lady saw fall by her side the eye of a dead Parsee, that had been carelessly dropped from the beak of a vulture gliding in the sky. You can imagine the opinion that the poor lady formed of the religion of Zoroaster. For my part, on the other hand, I have seen, in villas occupied by Parsees, a room set apart for prayers and services for the dead. For eighteen days each year the young daughter of the house lays on the round table as many crystal bowls as the number of the dear departed, and each morning at dawn decorates them with white and pink flowers. Do not these touching acts of piety offer a curious contrast to the macabre ceremony, with its choir of vultures?

Long ago Bacon wrote: "*What is Truth?* said jesting Pilate; And would not stay for an Answer."

Pilate was a wise man. In the first place, because he had the cleanly habit of washing his hands, and then because the definition of truth seemed to him a pitfall. To get at the truth between Mount Everest and Cape Comorin is still more difficult, because there exists hardly any other country in the world where contrasts are so flagrant. The eye of the traveller is dazzled. His powers of logic are upset. He observes. He is determined to observe in order to understand more clearly, and the more he observes the less he understands. Does not India produce both the untouchable, that is the low caste, rejected of humanity, whose mere shadow soils those whom it touches, and the maharajah, fabulously rich, with unimaginable prestige? Does not India possess the poor illiterate creature who lives in his primitive hut the life of a beast of burden, and Mrs. Sarojini Naïdu, President of the Pan-Indian Congress, an admirable woman who unites the qualities of a good heart with the charm of a very high intelligence?

India is probably the country in which Europeans experience the most varied sensations. They range from admiration to disgust. They oscillate between the sublime and the grotesque. The pilgrim who drinks the waters of the Ganges which carry parts of half-burnt bodies is offensive to us. But the nobility of the sentiments, the asceticism and the generosity of Gandhi (we shall come later to the political value of his doctrine) compel respect. Also from the Coromandel Coast to Kashmir one goes from intense heat to bitterest cold, just as when one visits India one experiences the whole gamut of the emotions from enthusiasm to disenchantment.

It is into this strange country that we are going to

make our pilgrimage, a country where, among the vestiges of a civilization four thousand years old, one sees the eight-cylinder car belonging to a nawab dressed by a Bond Street tailor. In contrast to the charming custom of my Bengali friends, who offer to the visitor *shandesh* and other sweetmeats, saying, "Please sweeten your mouth before you go," I beg you to sweeten your lips before you enter the Indian Empire, and pray with me to beg the protection of Sarasvati, the Goddess of Knowledge.

CHAPTER II

THROUGH THE JUNGLE IN A SLEEPER

BEFORE boarding a train in India, every Western traveller must get two essential things—bedding and a boy.

Bedding is indispensable because " the sleeper " provides only a bunk. The bedding consists of a mattress, a pillow, sheets, towels, etc. It is all rolled up in a waterproof cloth, and takes up no less room than would a thirty-six gallon cask. The " boy " is a smart Hindu, who accompanies you night and day, who awakens you in time at the stations, who looks after your luggage when you go to the restaurant car or the buffet, who pays the coolies and wrangles violently with them, telling them that they have a monkey for a grandmother, and who sleeps in the corridors of the hotels in front of your door like an incorruptible janissary.

You give him three rupees a day (5s.), and for months he follows you like your turbaned shadow. When you part with him you find that he has retained an old shirt in remembrance of you, also your tooth-brush that he will use to clean the shoes of his next master. But you cannot feel really annoyed owing to the excellent service he has rendered.

I shall always miss my trusty boy, a Madrasi with black skin called Rangaswamy, who wore magnificent false diamonds in his ears and on his finger a huge false sapphire; whilst under his sky-blue turban he rolled his ferocious eyes. But it was an amusing kind of ferocity. Although he grew a heavy moustache

and looked like a pirate who had deserted his ship, Rangaswamy was the most serious and the most devoted of the aborigines of the Coromandel. Without him I should have lost myself at the stations. Thanks to him I covered, without any difficulty, 8,400 miles on Indian railways. And this immense network of rails in India does credit to the English engineers who built it. The trains are comfortable. But they do not resemble ours. A coach consists of a third-class carriage which is " the boys' " car; two or three first-class carriages, in which there are single or four-berth compartments with toilet and spray; two second-class carriages for well-to-do natives, and a large coupé, in which six ladies can travel alone. This last compartment is, in short, a kind of harem on wheels, reserved especially for women who have come out of the zenana. The carriages are designed for a tropical climate. They have a double roof, and the doors and windows are low and narrow. Each has three different coverings: one of colourless or blue glass, a netting to keep out insects, and a venetian shutter to keep out the sun.

The guard is often a retired non-commissioned officer or a Hindu who speaks English. With great courtesy he comes to see you in your compartment; he does not merely punch your ticket, he tells you, if you do not know the line, that there is no hotel at X, and that he will telegraph to the stationmaster to keep you a room at the station. For the management of the Indian railways has introduced an excellent system of providing, at certain stations, rooms that are at the disposal of travellers for the modest sum of four rupees a day.

You arrive at X, hot and covered with dust; the

stationmaster, a genial Hindu, receives you like an expected schoolboy, and takes you to No. 6, a large white room, with a hard bed (without either sheets or pillows), a mosquito net, a bath-room and an enormous punkah that a coolie, squatting on the balcony outside, works unceasingly. If he forgets to pull the cord, a light tap with your slipper on his neck reminds him of his duties. After many days in the train this prison-like station apartment, white and without any luxury, is a real paradise.

I have spent many enjoyable days in these lofty rooms and I have listened to the interminable flow of words from the Hindus on the platforms. The crowd which fills the Indian stations is, in fact, enormous. The stations at Calcutta or Bombay, for example, present every day a spectacle like the Gare St. Lazare on the eve of the fourteenth of July. There is an indescribable crowd of *topees*, orange-coloured turbans, black skull-caps and variegated *saris*. To get from the ticket office to the platforms one must jostle masses of bipeds glued to their nondescript luggage; pick one's way among clumps of Hindus squatting in circles. Silent, resigned, they seem to take the station for a temple and the porters for high-priests. Gujarati, Hindustani, Bengali, Tamil and Punjabi commingle and echo under its roof. They all chatter, protest, argue, grumble or snore.

Certain Southern Indian stations are the haunts of the monkeys in the district, who come there at the time the restaurant car goes through. They run along the platform, hurrying like tourists, led by an old monkey who, though he does not wear the traditional red cap, has a red patch on a large part of his

anatomy. You may perhaps be reading a book in your bunk, when, suddenly, an inquisitive monkey comes and peeps in the window to see if you have, by chance, a banana or a biscuit to spare. The train starts. The monkey becomes insistent. He takes your gesture of regret for an insult, protrudes his lips with a *krrr sss!* of reproval, and descends to join the red "flag" of the perturbed old monkey.

One day, as I was shaving in my room on the first floor in front of a station signal, a pretty little monkey with a black hairy face got through the window and inspected the various objects on the table. Suddenly, he picked up my wallet containing my railway tickets and made off. They cost about £50. There was a tremendous hunt along the permanent way, the turn-tables and the railway sheds. The station-master mobilized the lamp-cleaners, two coolies and some Dravidian loafers. We succeeded at length in exchanging the wallet for a nice banana, but the mischievous monkey had torn one of the tickets. So the stationmaster wrote this remark on the remaining piece: "*Ticket accidentally damaged by an unauthorized animal.*"

After April, when tourists have wisely left India, the terrible heat inflicts slow torture on railway travellers. After crossing the desert of Rajputana, I had an inch of sand in my compartment. In May, I came across an old planter who put three blocks of ice under his ventilator, in the hope of getting a little cool air. It is not unusual to see, at this time of the year, Hindus dead from congestion of the brain, and they are taken out of their third-class compartment along with the parcels and the mail-bags.

Though one might admit that the punctuality of the trains is remarkable and the civility of the attendants is all that can be desired, one cannot, alas! say the same for the cuisine. It is really execrable. English cooking as interpreted by Hindu chefs is truthfully nothing less than attempted assassination.

You must be nearly starving to eat in the restaurant cars and buffets, or to relish those tasteless *hachis* that the cooks roll on their naked chests and offer as delicious prime cutlets, decorated with a bone and frill complete; to swallow that jelly made of pink gelatine which constitutes the *nec plus ultra* of tropical sweets! I must say, in justice to the railway company, that the menu is almost as bad in the majority of the hotels.

But I ought not to mention details of no importance. One must surely be a vile Western materialist to grumble about such secondary matters in such a marvellous country, through which one travels, not for the delights of the table, but to enjoy æsthetic visions.

For heaven knows, India has the wherewithal to satisfy the artistic soul, the ethnologist, the painter and the psychologist.

I would forgo all the *homards à l'américaine* to see once more the Taj Mahal lifting to the moonlit night its divine poem in marble, or the wild grandeur of the old palace of Amber, lost in the mountains of Rajputana. I would deny myself also the enjoyment of *carpe à la Chambord* to return to the idyllic peacefulness of a little station in Southern India where fate left me stranded one evening. I can see it now. It was at dusk. A lemon sky with a lace edging of

green palms. The crows ate breadcrumbs on my balcony; the grey squirrels leapt from tree to tree, and the Indian oxen, let loose, began to graze on the dry herbage on the road to the garage. Sweepers, half-naked, were sleeping in the pointsmen's huts. Others were dreaming of Sanatana Dharma, the only Supreme and Eternal Being, under the shafts of the baggage wagons. One or two ascetics, enemies of comfort, were sleeping like sporting dogs on the steps of the bridge. The tiny light of a distant *dagoba* twinkled between the trees as night hurriedly chased the last rays of twilight. On the left, the green signal light. Present day. Over there, the small oil-lamp of a temple a thousand years old; the flame of Rama, incarnation of Vishnu. The Days Gone-by.

And the metallic crescent-moon sheds its silver sheen upon the distant forest, where reptiles and birds observe, under the Southern Cross, the laws of nocturnal truce.

When I return to France I shall have to get used to our railways. I shall probably be a little disappointed that the stationmaster at Marseilles does not come to my compartment and ask me if there is anything I want. I shall regret the disappearance of my brave Madrasi with his dazzling ear-rings; I shall be surprised that I do not tumble over this faithful guardian as I go to my "sleeper," and I shall have to take care not to slip a rupee mechanically into the guard's hand, asking him to wire and reserve me a room on the premises at the Gare de Lyon.

CHAPTER III

AN EVENING AT THE TEMPLE OF MADURA

THE little steamer that takes travellers from the Isle of Ceylon to India is entering the harbour at Danushkodi. The harbour? No. A wooden stockade where the trains from Madras draw up, in a sandy and deserted district.

The lascar deck-hands have thrown the hawser over the mooring stanchions, and the nondescript crowd on the lower deck rushes ashore like a hurrying procession of ants. An English police-constable, followed by a baboo, who carries an official stamp and dusty forms, comes on board.

When one travels much, the ceremony of passports becomes a sort of rite, by which you can learn the psychology of the people that you are going to visit. The official stamp is affixed with expedition and geniality in a country that welcomes tourists. It is hesitant and circumspect when the local authorities suspect the traveller at their gates. In India, the Viceroy's police are on the look-out for emissaries from Moscow, and that is understandable. In which case the inquiry is strict, almost as searching as it is in the United States.

"What are you going to do in India?"

"Collect information for a book."

The official eyes me suspiciously, and lifts his khaki cap to scrutinize me more closely.

"What is your profession?"

"Writer."

The cap slips back again about half an inch on the forehead of my inquisitor.

"What firm do you work for? Have you a card?"

If I had been a representative of Mr. Henry Ford or a traveller for a beef-packing company in Chicago, I should have been able to satisfy my examiner straight away. For want of something better, I show him one of my books. He looks at the name of the publisher and compares it with my passport.

"This is not your book!"

"My name is at the top, not the bottom . . . see!"

He begins to be satisfied.

"How long do you want to remain in India?"

"Six months."

I show him a letter of introduction to the Viceroy. Then his cap slips back over his eyebrows and he quickly stamps my passport. A little later we become the best of friends in the world, for we discover that we have been neighbours on the Béthune sector in 1915. We exchange recollections of the War as we smoke cigarettes, and when the train leaves, my softened Cerberus wishes me a pleasant journey.

"India . . . very nice trip . . . Good-bye. . . ."

The locomotive coughs under the burning sun which bakes the shores of the lagoons. Sea birds, with grey backs and silver breasts, are executing marvellous volplanes in the air with their lazy wings.

. . . . . .

My guide, who, to indicate the standing of his caste, wears a kind of Turkish towel slung over his shoulder, said to me in his broken English:

"Sahib must see the temple this evening. . . . Great illuminations . . . very pretty. . . . Ten thousand lights . . . unique!"

I trusted myself to this fifty-year-old Dravidian,

and at seven o'clock in the evening we entered the great Temple of Madura by the eastern *gopoura.* It is certainly one of the most interesting temples in Southern India. It covers about twelve acres, and, flanked by nine *gopouras* or doors in the form of a truncated pyramid, is about one hundred and fifty feet high, covered with curious carvings.

After passing through the first pyramid we entered a sort of hall which contains a bazaar, where numbers of traders offer Brahmin religious articles, candles, various ornaments, along with razor blades and American soap. On the right they sell exclusively white, pink, blue and yellow flowers, cut without any stalk, threaded together like rosaries, which serve as offerings.

The first arch, which leads to the interior of the temple—an enormous labyrinth in which a tigress would not succeed in finding her cubs—is lit by thousands of little glass fairy-lamps filled with castor oil, whose wicks will burn till nine o'clock in the evening. The temple consists of numerous chapels, consecrated, some to Siva, others to his wife, Minaroshi.

"Follow me," said my guide. "I will show you the god Siva."

A dark gallery. We pass the faithful, who are going to pray to their favourite divinities. In this yellow and glimmering light things appear fantastic, and human beings look like phantoms. I went back thirty years. In those days I shuddered, at the Châtelet, before the model of the Hindu temple, in "Round the World in Eighty Days." But now it is no longer a cardboard pagoda, the proscenium is real stone, and the people are no longer paid supers made

up like pariahs. The people that I brush past believe in the virtues of Siva. The walls that I touch have seen, since the fourteenth century, generations of the faithful, executing the same gestures of adoration and muttering the same prayers, that they do not understand.

Siva is there, before me. I can distinguish his five heads, symbol of his five incarnations; his three arms, and, at the side of him, his other wife—Parvati. A little farther on is the son of Siva. His name is Ganesh. He has the body of a man, the head of an elephant, the belly of a dropsical person. His trunk hangs to the left, and he gazes at his worshippers with two little eyes like a shifty lawyer, two disdainful eyes that are not flattering to those who bow before him. Ganesh receives half a dozen women half-clad, who carry their babies quite naked astride on their left hips, and are reciting their prayers to the elephant, with its portly stomach.

We go forward under the arch, in this bizarre atmosphere, smelling of burnt castor oil, faded flowers and dust from the streets. At the foot of each column an old man squats, motionless, meditating on the third incarnation of Siva; or rather, he is thinking about nothing at all. He gets ready for the last pirouette. The temple mats are the spring-board from which he takes off into the Void. He is preparing to reabsorb himself into the Supreme Being, to reincarnate himself into another life, and so continue through the centuries.

Suddenly, in a dimly lit high gallery, a fantastic apparition rises silent, like a vision in a nightmare. It is a fanatic, almost naked, covered with grey ashes. His hair, face, throat, arms and thighs are thick with

dirt. Is he a monster fallen from the moon? A Martian who has come down to Madura? A man half-burnt, revived by a miracle? No, a disciple, a convert, a sinner greedy for penance. He goes by, a grisly spectre, his eyes bulging. And no one pays any attention to him. In a corner of the gallery, leading to the pool of the sacred Lotus, a man is selling ashes to the faithful. My guide takes a pinch, and gravely rubs it on his forehead and cheeks. He points to the ashes and seems to say to me:

"Doesn't that tempt you?"

I ask him: "Haven't you any ashes of a Rachel shade?"

We are now before the monkey-god, whose jowl is smeared with carmine. The faithful sit down and take a little of his make-up on the end of their fingers and put a little spot or red streak on their foreheads.

The shadows are darker in another gallery. Suddenly a sarcophagus is discernible between four castor-oil fairy-lights. Is some holy man or high priest commemorated there? No. The sarcophagus contains a granite cow, its back covered with a sprinkling of pink and white flowers. Is it a divinity or a table all ready laid, served by a giant master-cook—the table of Gargantua?

My guide makes a sign. . . . A verger of the temple, without staff, his back bare, with a weary air, comes up to me and pays me a compliment. My guide translates:

"Noble Sahib, you are worthy of being especially honoured by the priests of the pagoda. . . . In recognition of your generosity they present you with these flowers . . . may they bring you happiness."

The verger bows and makes me a commander of

the Order of Cut Frangipanes. That is to say, he hangs on my shoulders a wreath of small white flowers which, if they are not too faded, will, a little later, decorate the coat of a new visitor. The guide whispers in my ear:

" The usual offering to the Brahmins is two rupees, master."

I pay, and beg the verger to take his commander's cravat to decorate, to-morrow, the *décolleté* of an American lady tourist.

CHAPTER IV

THE MADRAS–BOMBAY EXPRESS

MADRAS. The town spreads itself out and covers twelve square miles. Six hundred thousand inhabitants occupy the same area as Paris. The favourite promenade for Europeans is the Marina, which runs by the coast. It is as popular as the promenade of a watering-place, and is sprayed by the waves of the sea.

The Madras aquarium contains some strange fish. One of them has the appearance of a porcelain chimneypiece ornament of chrome yellow pottery, and possesses not only fins but also two feet with which it paddles along the bottom of the sea. Others are like little goldfish that have been squashed under a copying press, and are marvellously marked with bands of royal blue and silver. They have a nose like a fowl's " parson's nose " and appear to sulk in their tank.

. . . . .

One day and two nights in the train brings one from Madras to Bombay. It is rather a long time. But in India one loses the sense of time, and adapts oneself, very soon, to the formula of Rabindranath Tagore, that days are rainbow-coloured bubbles which float on the surface of the unfathomable night.

Before one arrives at Bombay a newspaper boy runs along the platform of Poona station selling the *Times of India* to travellers. Surprise! A headline announces serious riots. The Pathans fighting against the Hindus. The cause of these outbreaks is due to

a rumour, that has spread to Bombay, that the Pathans had stolen Hindu children to sacrifice them to a bridge that is being built. The Hindus, enraged, have stabbed half a dozen Pathans. And now it has developed into a kind of religious guerrilla warfare, which has put Moslems and Hindus at daggers drawn in the native quarters. An English officer remarked to me:

"So long as they scrap between themselves it is all right. Things would be more serious if Pathans and Hindus were to unite and attack the Westerners."

"Do you think that may happen?"

"No. With the improvements of modern armaments, a thousand European soldiers can control a revolt of five hundred thousand natives. Two sections of automatic quick-firing guns and a dozen tanks would ensure order in a city like Bombay."

Bombay comes from *boa bahia*, which means "beautiful bay" in Portuguese. The handsome buildings, the shady avenues, the long promenades on the sea front, make Bombay a fine capital. Its geographical position is admirable, unique. Unfortunately, the architecture of the houses is also unique. The villas on Malabar Hill, the quarter where the majority of rich Parsees live, villas built for the most part between 1870 and 1890, are an affront to good taste. Enlarge a hundredfold the little model château built of lard by an artistic pork-butcher for his shop window, or the wedding-cake in white, pink and yellow by a pastrycook who is clever in moulding nougat, icing and marsh-mallow, and you will have an idea of the huge residence of a

magnate of Malabar Hill, who has made money in pearl dealing or cotton manufacture.

The population of the city is as motley as the style of the houses where the ogive, the colonnade, the Roman arch, the Corinthian capital and the art of 1900 have danced a shimmy on the plans of the architect. One can meet a hundred different races in Bombay. The saddling paddock of the race-course, among other places, seems to be their happy hunting-ground, like a tower of Babel, where the inhabitants fraternize in front of the *pari-mutuel*. Mahrattas rub elbows with Arabs from Hedjaz, with the long faces of crafty brigands. Baniahs, Persians, Jews from Syria, half-castes or Eurasians, poor Parsees, Hindus of the lower castes, observe the horses and estimate their chances. Everybody speaks a different language, but horse-racing breaks down all barriers, and a universal smile lights up olive, yellow, coffee-coloured, tawny and chocolate faces alike, when the winner brings in 145 rupees.

A very pretty little Parsee girl, who speaks English perfectly, has brought me to the Towers of Silence. She has a collection of 400 *saris*, in all colours. The *sari* is a long silk scarf beautifully embroidered which the Parsees wear, wrapping it three times round the body and throwing it very gracefully over the head. From head to foot, they resemble the dancers of Tanagra. Only their extremities are modern, for they wear silk stockings and shoes, bought at the well-known shops of London and Paris.

My charming conductress, swathed in *eau-de-nil* voile, has now brought me to the Towers of Silence.

Every visitor goes to Malabar Hill to see the five famous towers of death which, by the way, stand in an idyllic park full of flowers, in the midst of luxurious residences and very modern villas. As we inhaled the scent of the mauve irises Miss M. pointed out the vultures perched side by side on the tops of the towers. They have seen a funeral cortège and, like the audience in the gallery at the theatre, are waiting for the curtain to go up. They watch, without moving, for the opening of the little door which gives entrance to the dead.

The cortège advances. The body, carried by four men dressed in white, wearing white skull-caps, passes between the trees. The vultures become restless. The funeral ceremony begins. In twenty minutes the body is devoured. The skeleton alone remains. The most knowing of the vultures have eaten the choicest bits, that is to say, the eyes, the nostrils and the entrails. The others have to be contented with the remainder, that is, the muscles and the tendons. In twenty-four hours the hot sun will have dried the bones, and the *de cujus* having disappeared in the vultures, without defiling the land by an unclean burial, or without having polluted the air with prohibited incineration, will have reached the ether, the antechamber to the paradise of Zoroaster.

"And now," suggests Miss M., "let's go and have a cocktail at the Wellington Club."

The car takes us towards the harbour of Bombay. My beautiful instructress, in *eau-de-nil* voile, smiles to the sun which shines, to the bougainvillæas that display their red clusters in the gardens. I look at her without speaking. The thought that the fatal

Towers will, one day, be her momentary tomb, makes me shudder. She had guessed what was in my mind because, in accepting a cigarette, she said to me gently:

"You Christians, you are consumed by worms. We—we are eaten by birds. We end up nearer to heaven."

CHAPTER V

A WIDOW AT TWELVE YEARS OLD

RIDING one day with an aide-de-camp of the Maharajah of Patiala, we passed on the road, not far from a Sikh temple, a curious-looking carriage drawn by two horses, a kind of closed barouche. At the back of it stood a turbaned footman. The shutters were closed. The blinds were down. I looked at the aide-de-camp. He answered simply:

"A purdah. . . ."

That is to say, there was a lady shut up in that box. For the women of India, when they are Moslems, are, like their Arab sisters, under the law of the purdah, and when they are devotees of Buddhism, Jainists, Brahmins and other purely Hindu religions, they come under the rules of the zenana.

The rules of the purdah and the zenana do not allow women to show themselves out of doors without being veiled. What then is the exact position of women in India? Much has been written on this subject that is true, and much that is incorrect. Details have been exaggerated. Much imagination has been woven into the veil that hides the Hindu woman's face.

Some Europeans who have just landed ask ingenuously:

"Are widows burnt on the funeral pile that consumes the remains of their husbands?"

At the risk of disappointing lovers of romance, we may say that *suttee* is suppressed. In spite of the fact that she may be driven to hopeless despair, the

Hindu widow no longer throws herself into the flames. She survives. Her position is not a very happy one, but anyway, she endures it. Formerly, the existence of a widow who had not the courage to commit *suttee* was absolutely impossible. She atoned for the simple fact that her husband had died before her. A widow twelve years of age, for example, was condemned during her life to mortify herself, and was despised, and looked upon as possessed of evil spirits.

To-day, the Hindu widow is admitted into the world of the living. One can even say that, in better-class families, educated and open to modern ideas, the young woman whom fate has rendered a widow is received, consoled and well treated by her relations. Is she condemned to perpetual widowhood? Yes, among the Brahmins where traditions are strictly observed. Almost always with the Kshatryas and the Vaishyas, the two higher castes. No longer with the Sudras who, by the way, constitute one of the most numerous of the lower castes. A small tradesman, an artisan, or a farmer will now marry a widow, and does not believe that for that reason he is subject to the evil influences of hostile divinities.

It is the same with widowhood as with the purdah and the zenana. The strict rules that obtained in the last century have become less severe. I have visited innumerable villages far from large towns, villages where a white man is only seen about once in six months. In the streets, with their white houses, I have come across many women going about with faces uncovered. They raised their *saris* to the level of their eyes when I passed because I was a foreigner. But they were no longer shut up in the zenana.

Millions of peasant-women work in the open air. They go along the roads balancing an amphora or a brass bowl on their heads. They have an almost royal bearing, an elegant and harmonious gait and a beautiful poise of the body. A black shawl outlines their oval faces. A small gold ring adorns the left nostril or else a false diamond is fixed to each side of the nose.

The strict observance of the purdah or of the zenana is reserved especially to women well-born, women belonging to the highest castes. But even in this instance one cannot lay down a hard-and-fast rule. One must add that there are, on the one hand, the reactionaries, the fanatics who travel along the roads in a box on wheels like the one that I have just mentioned, and on the other hand, the emancipated, the progressives, the converts to Western ideas, the anglicized, who are determined to imitate their sisters.

The result of these two adverse tendencies is a moral struggle in which the sudden changes are very interesting to the European, an impartial observer of this intellectual fray.

The orthodox, the pundits, conservative by instinct, the extreme nationalists say to the young emancipated Hindu ladies who write verses in Bengal magazines:

"You are only young monkeys, carried away by the new tricks of the Western bazaar. You ape the Europeans. You and your friends in felt *topees* take the shell, but you do not eat the nut, because you are not able to digest it. . . . So much the better for India!"

And the young poetess, who has tea with her

English friends, who goes to London with her father, a doctor or a lawyer in Calcutta, who has written charming stanzas that Mme de Noailles would not disown, replies:

"And you, you are behind the times, back numbers, enemies of progress. The Indian cause of progress has been embedded in a deep ditch for four thousand years. . . . We certainly appreciate our spiritual heritage; but as educated Eastern peoples we are anxious to take advantage of anything that European civilization can show us that is better. Long live liberty. Our destiny is not to entertain or even to amaze tourists by our thousand-year-old customs, our object in life is not to see Americans enter the zenana and look at us through their lorgnettes as if we were strange animals in a menagerie! . . . The heroines of the sacred legends of the *Mahabharata* were models of loyal love and conjugal fidelity. We do not forswear these examples. And we do not consider them incompatible with a mode of existence less out of date."

This modern Hindu revolt is fatal. There are no longer any *désenchantées* in Turkey. The little friends of Pierre Loti are now emancipated under the regime of the Ghazi. So with the Egyptians. The Hindus' turn is coming, thanks to the English occupation.

The men have taken full opportunity, from their contact with their Anglo-Saxon conquerors, to learn and become acquainted with science. Why should the women be excluded from this rapid advance towards knowledge and general culture? There are still enough illiterate people in India, since, alas! only one child in a hundred can read and write.

Let us not forget that precocious marriages are a terrible handicap to Hindu women. A little girl affianced at nine years of age, marriageable at twelve, has neither the opportunity nor the time to improve her mind. She must immediately give a son to her husband.

If she has the bad fortune to bear a daughter, it is necessary for her to bear another child as soon as possible. For a girl is a worthless person in a family. Not so long ago, the newly born female child was made away with, just as a kitten that is not wanted is drowned. The young Hindu mother brings up her children and does not think of educating herself.

Then where do the educated Hindu women come from? From the elderly women eighteen years old (!), from widows, from the children whose relations are enlightened. They study medicine or are destined to be teachers. India needs lady doctors, for no ordinary Hindu would ever allow a man doctor to attend his sick wife.

One day, with an English civil servant in the Lahore district, we happened to visit a Punjabi whose wife was suffering from appendicitis. The husband, in the course of conversation, said:

"I would kill the man who violated my wife. . . . But I would cut into small pieces the man who would uncover her nakedness to perform the operation."

In the meantime, failing a lady doctor, the unfortunate patient died of peritonitis!

The natural consequence of this slow, very slow, emancipation of Hindu women, which, it must be admitted, concerns only an infinitely small minority, has been the cause of the participation of certain

women in the politics of the country. The most outstanding example is furnished by Mrs. Sarojini Naïdu. The daughter of a brilliant man of the University of the State of Nizam, at Hyderabad, brought up with liberal ideas, she has devoted herself as a supporter of the Hindu-Mohammedan unity of her country. She has fought with her pen and with her voice under the ægis of her master, Gandhi. She is the " Grande Mademoiselle " of modern India.

After all, why should not women also help to hasten useful reforms, to elevate the standard of general education?

Women in India are at the same time sacrificed to rules of various sects and respected as mothers. The *Shakta Tantra,* the Holy Book, attributes a sort of divinity to woman, and teaches man to love and respect her.

There have been, in the history of this country, in spite of the purdah and the zenana, some celebrated women: Lilâvati, who was the Mme Curie of her day; Rani Bhavani, who was a kind of Hindu Jeanne Hachette; Mira Baï, who in the century of the great Mogul Akbar wrote beautiful poems.

Whilst I was reading some of her poems, published in Calcutta, a good friend of mine, a baboo with gold spectacles, hand supple as a conjurer, forehead marked with a little red spot, said to me in that English accent, so soft from the mouth of a Hindu:

" When you have read those, what will you think of the precept of our hermit who wrote: ' If you seek salvation, turn away from women and gold '? "

" Were we among blasé Parisians, my friend, I

should reply that your ascetic was right, and that one should not turn towards women except with plenty of gold. But under the blue sky of the Punjab, irony melts, vanquished, and I say, very sincerely, that all the gold in the world is of no value compared with the heart of a woman who loves you."

CHAPTER VI

HER MAJESTY THE COW

It would be absurd to talk of India without offering, if not a prayer, at least a few sympathetic remarks about the Cow, with a capital C.

Every country pays special respect to some animal. The Egyptians worshipped the hawk in the form of the god Horus, and the Russians the sturgeon in the form of the god Caviare. To the Indians, cows, oxen and buffaloes of both sexes are sacred animals. From time immemorial they have respected and honoured these brave chewers of the cud, who seem to show their contempt for this worship by being placid and indifferent to the vain impetuosity of human beings.

In Europe, strange to say, cows are kept in sheds or in fields. Here, the cow has the street for a stable and the sidewalk for a field. So that when you go out of the house you may tumble over a sleeping cow; if you cross the main street you must wait for the cow to pass; and if you are driving a car, you must make a detour so as not to run over the careless ox, who, asleep in the middle of the road, is chewing dry grass or unpleasant thoughts. From the small cow, not much bigger than a hound, to the huge black buffalo, very hairy and with ferocious-looking horns, but who does not want to harm anybody, you pass this lazy collection in every town, hamlet or village from Peshawar to Colombo.

A Frenchman who has lived in India for twenty-five years said to me: " At home one sometimes asks:

'What do young girls dream about?' Since I came here, I ask, but can get no answer: 'What do the small cows dream about?'"

Indian religions forbid anyone to kill them or even to do them the slightest injury. So cows live happily in this paradise regained. Happy? In some respects. But meadows are few and green grass is very rare. During the months when there is no rain, the cows' menu lacks nutritive qualities: dead leaves, dried twigs, burnt and dusty grass, old posters that have come unstuck, that is their daily fare. They do not get fat on this regime. Their milk is not abundant. They die. Sometimes they drag their miserable carcasses along the roads edged with brambles. Their misery may last days or even months. The Hindu lets them die their beautiful natural death. He is devoted to them, but he does not come to their aid.

I did not at first realize the sacred character of the cow, but after witnessing some rather loathsome ceremonies, I came to understand the importance these horned beasts play in Hindu superstition.

The poor Hindu farmer, however, loves his cow, although he does not pay her much attention. He loves her because he is poor and she often saves him from dying of hunger. One must visit innumerable Indian villages far away from the cities, with their art treasures and temples, that lie on the classic route of hurried tourists who "do India" in six weeks, if one wishes to know anything about the destitution of the peasant.

How does the Indian peasant live? In a hut built of mud walls and a roof of dried leaves. An entrance but no door; two rooms without windows or fur-

niture. A mat on the bare ground—that is his bed. A few bricks with a smouldering fire—that is his kitchen. His plough is a wooden anchor. The model was patented one thousand years before Jesus Christ. A yard of white calico tied round his loins—that is his native wardrobe. He does not know how to read or write, and naturally he has never seen a newspaper; he does not smoke, and drinks neither spirits nor wine; he has no idea of the meaning of the word recreation. In fact, he does not live, he exists, or rather he survives until either privation or over-work or a famine in the district kills him. . . .

Out of 320 million inhabitants, there are 250 millions who, from father to son, only know the misery of a terrible existence. We Europeans, spoilt by unseemly comfort, are staggered when we realize the indescribable misery which overwhelms these myriads of primitive creatures.

Amazing! exclaims the surprised traveller; why should there be such poverty in a vast country where the tillable land is unlimited? Because this land, although it is cultivated by the peasant, produces very little. It is not labour which is wanting, it is soil, which is contrary to the fable. On the one hand the soil yields poor harvests because it is not fed. And where the soil is rich and the harvest is plentiful, it is the landowner who takes the lion's share and leaves the coolie hardly enough to keep body and soul together.

On the other hand the soil is not fed because the peasant is too poor to buy manure. But the 210 millions of cattle entered in the Government agricultural statistics—what about them? They

ought to supply the need. Unfortunately, the peasants do not know how to use this manure. It is dried and used as fuel instead of enriching the soil. And if not, it is used for plastering the walls, as it is looked upon as sacred.

The peasants warm themselves by this means because wood is scarce or too dear for them to buy. What is the result? The land becomes more impoverished each year and the yield per acre is far below that of Europe. One can realize more clearly the folly committed by the Indian agriculturist by comparing the two tables: the average yield there is about 160 kilos an acre, while it is about 800 kilos in England!

The remedies? Mr. Lupton, an English engineer, outlined them: "I begin with the immense forests of India which could provide the peasants with a hundred million tons of firewood a year. Unfortunately, they are situated far from the agricultural districts, and thousands of miles of new railroads would have to be built. Where is the capital? That difficulty is not insurmountable; because the ground, better fed, would yield larger crops. It would be a tremendous undertaking. An agricultural policy with great possibilities which should interest a progressive Government. Then the taxes should be revised. The Indian landowner is a fortunate man. He does not pay any tax on his rents. Why should he not be taxed normally, and chemical manure purchased with part of the proceeds?"

We are touching upon a land problem which should interest all economists who have the welfare of the Empire at heart. But it would be puerile to try to solve the problem or even to suggest a remedy

in a few lines. Let us return to our subject—cows, and recognize that these peaceful ruminants are, in spite of everything, a blessing to the tiller of the ground. Iconography proves it to the hilt. One finds, at Mohenjo-daro and at Havrappa, remains of Hindu art dating back to 3,500 years before Christ. Houses and shops have been discovered.

An Indian civilization before the Greek influence, which dates about 327 years before Christ; which existed long before that on the banks of the Nile or at Babylon. Well, oxen and cows inspired the artists of that period! Since that time the cow has continued to appear in sculptures and paintings. I saw in Tanjore a picture dedicated to Krishna and his wives, where the wives of the god are relegated into the shadow, whilst a magnificent white cow licks the divine heel, and two little cows, about the size of fox terriers, decorate the two corners of the painting.

In the temple of Siva at Trichinopoly, the god is seen holding his little wife under one of his left arms; I say "little" wife, not out of irreverence to the divinity, but because the height of the woman is not much more than that of a child five years old. They are sitting on a magnificent cow, harnessed like a circus horse, wearing chains of gold and pearls on every limb.

Poor beasts of to-day. . . . You are like the new poor one meets, as you lumber along, dreaming under the sun of hypothetical rich pastures! One day, passing on horseback near to the old fort at Patiala, I came across an emaciated cow that gazed at me sadly as she chewed a torn leaf of the Allahabad

Pioneer. In France the old manuscripts of the poets eventually end up as coverings to jam-jars. In India, the work of prose writers finishes up in the stomach of little cows. Truth to tell, Destiny, in the East as in the West, does not fail to show to humanity the uncertainty of literary fame.

CHAPTER VII

"CHOTA PEG"

THE entrance to the bungalow gave upon a delightful valley bathed in moonlight. The flowers perfumed the hedgerows. The high tops of the palms, fretted by the gusts of heaven, brushed the stars. The fresh fragrance of the orange trees in full flower intoxicates our senses. There were three of us: an Englishman, an Italian and a Frenchman. The Latin element being predominant, the conversation turned on women. If, that evening, there had been in this bungalow in Madras, two Englishmen and one Latin, we should have discussed the chances of the 4th Cavalry Regiment against the Jodhpur team at Poona. Or listened for the twentieth time to old yarns about pig-sticking. But, strange to say, the Anglo-Saxon element was in the minority. So we talked about women.

We talked about them with the eagerness of men who had been divorced from love for many months. We talked about them like children who have no toys discussing the latest catalogue of the *Paradis des Enfants.*

The Englishman had been rather stand-offish at first. A little superior to such arguments. One could tell his secret thoughts:

"These Latin rakes! . . . All alike. . . . Think only of one thing! Women! . . . But in India, heavens alive . . . one gives them a miss!"

He said that to himself, our captain, . . . I'll bet. The main sympathetic bond among Anglo-Saxons is: muscle first, gentlemen! Conquer the beast with

Sandow, the racket and the horse. . . . Then Nature speaks. She begins by whispering modestly into the ear of the old Etonian. He replies bravely: Thackeray, Coleridge, Stuart Mill . . . or else the *Tatler,* the *Graphic,* the *Strand Magazine!* But Dame Nature, that old *rouée* to whose cheeks even a monkey has never brought a blush, adds:

" And Boccaccio? "

The grown-up Eton boy protests, for form's sake. Nature rebukes him familiarly. A flick of a fan from " the dowager " signifies:

" Get away with you, great-grandson of Boadicea, you are just like other men. You do not speak about women as do the Latin races to whom the Mediterranean sun has given the courage to discuss love without pulling long faces like hypocritical sacristans, but you think about them, all the same. . . . You think under pressure until you explode."

In truth, after having listened condescendingly to our badinage, the captain literally exploded. He swore suddenly, like an Irish non-commissioned officer in the days when Rudyard Kipling wrote in the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore.

" Ah! stop, no more of it. . . . An officer alone in India is like a condemned man, a recluse pledged to strict celibacy. . . ."

He made a vigorous gesture, and ended by the English formula:

" I'm fed up! . . ."

Aldo, my Italian friend, and I were deeply touched by the spontaneous outburst of our companion. I realized that he wanted to relieve his pent-up feelings. . . . I said to him:

" Listen, old man. . . . We don't know as well

as you who have lived five years in barracks in India, the problem of celibate life. . . . Enlighten us. . . ."

"It's quite simple. . . . One has to call a spade a spade. . . . The unmarried man in India can say good-bye to 'the works of the flesh,' as the Bible says. Indian women we do not discuss, because affairs with them are, for many reasons, impossible and generally undesirable. Eurasians, the mixed breeds, and the Indian women at eight to twelve annas need not be mentioned here. The planter isolated on his plantation can, if he wishes, have an Indian mistress. An Indian civil servant or an Indian officer cannot. There are only white women left to him. . . . What white women? The wives of fellow-officers or civil servants? In the first place, one does not pay court to the wife of a fellow-officer in one's own regiment. Then, an affair of this kind, with the perpetual surveillance which we are under from our servants, would be known in forty-eight hours. . . ."

"However, my dear captain," said Aldo, "without wishing to cast any slur on the married women who live in India, one may be allowed to believe that, out of five thousand wives of officers, *one* may have deceived her husband *once*, inadvertently, since 1857?"

"Naturally! You surely don't think me so stupid as to say that every white woman living here is a model of virtue, immune from all temptations. The old Anglo-Indians would laugh in my face. But these lapses happen usually under special circumstances in this country, and are due to the climate. . . . You know that during the warm season, April to October, the majority of white people leave the

sultry plains to get a breath of fresh air up in the hills, at Simla, Darjeeling, Mussoorie and Ootacamund. The officials and officers whose duties keep them in the plains are separated from their wives, whom they send, for the sake of their health, to the smart hill-stations, where they amuse themselves and kill time pleasantly. . . . What do you expect?

"A wife, separated for some months from her husband, becomes acquainted, at five thousand or six thousand feet up, with another, more fortunate officer, who may be, perhaps, aide-de-camp to the Governor, or who has got three months' leave in the hills.

"A flirtation begins between her and the gallant fellow. If the virtue of the lady is true as chromium steel, the flirtation remains a flirtation. If not, it becomes a liaison. The lady breathes the fine air, and conjugates the verb to love with her attractive hill captain, while her husband sweats and becomes anæmic in the terrible heat of the dusty plain."

"Ah, well! After all, that is only quite normal. It is the tale of millions of couples who do the same thing all over the world. In India, one makes love in the hill-stations; in Europe, in bachelor flats. Why, my dear friend, do you not join their ranks, and play the part of a Lovelace in the gallant company of the hill captains?"

"Because I have tried. . . . In the first case I was successful. In the second I failed, nearly lost my commission and all my savings."

Aldo scented a drama in real life. He smacked his lips and said with a laugh:

"I see that our friend is going to give us an idea for a novel: tell us about it, Captain."

"Oh! an ordinary story. . . . A stupid adventure . . . very stupid."

"It was not, at the beginning!"

"Certainly not. . . . A little dark brunette, Welsh, and fiery, who danced like Pavlova, and could beat me at tennis with her back-handers on the back line! It was at Ooti—our abbreviation for Ootacamund. In a week I became madly in love. . . . I had been a celibate for a year!"

"She was married?"

"Naturally. One never finds a pretty unattached woman anywhere in India! . . . Very much married, to a man who was the director of a factory belonging to a very rich Parsee. But, detained by his work, he had sent his wife to spend the summer season in the hills. I will cut short the first three months of our liaison. . . ."

"No, don't do that!"

"You'll cut out the most interesting chapter!"

"I was the happiest lover in the world. About the 15th of September we were arranging our future meetings, she and I, when I received a visit from a Eurasian immaculately dressed. He had something sinister about him, and said that he was a lawyer. As soon as my boy had gone out he began in a rather sarcastic tone:

"'Captain, I am sure that you realize the object of my visit?'

"I foresaw something unpleasant. In fact, the lawyer soon explained the reason for his call. Employed by the husband, who, naturally, had been informed of his misfortune by an anonymous letter, he was instructed to get witnesses, and he had carefully carried out his orders. He showed me a copy

of a string of statements, made under oath, from which it was obvious that Mrs. X. and I had not confined ourselves merely to playing tennis, golf and bridge. In fact, I was caught in a trap. The lawyer then said:

" ' This notorious case will be very unpleasant for you. Your papers will be called for. . . . From Bombay to Calcutta people will make fun of you. . . . The judge will fine you 30,000 rupees and costs. . . . But my client wishes to meet you half-way in this matter. . . . He is not particularly anxious to drag his wife's name into court. . . . Pay us 30,000 rupees in full settlement and we will burn our dossier. . . . I need hardly tell you that if you want to continue your exploits with Mrs. X. you are perfectly free to do so, without its costing you another anna! ' "

The captain stopped, drank his whisky-and-soda, and asked: " What would you have done in my place? "

" I should have punched his head," exclaimed Aldo.

" And I, the husband's," I added.

" Neither the one nor the other solution would have helped me out of the mess. Instead of replying at once, I imitated the wisdom of the Oriental, who relies on time to heal all wrongs. I promised to pay the first quarter in two months' time. . . . I need hardly tell you that I had not 3,000 rupees to my name! "

" And what happened? "

" As it turned out the Oriental plan worked perfectly. The husband had to go to the United Provinces, where he caught cholera and died in twenty-four hours. A providential demise which

gave me such great pleasure—God forgive me!—that my best friends and I had a beano for forty-eight hours. When they heard me singing and dancing about, by myself, in the billiard room, I said: 'I have just come into 30,000 rupees!'

"There was only one blot on the enchanting picture. That was when I learnt that the enraged widow had made known her intention of continuing the case on her own account, in order to make me pay the indemnity for her benefit. Naturally, it was explained to her at once that a civil action, in which proceedings had not been instituted by her, did not lie after the death of her husband. But the knowledge of her intentions was a cruel eye-opener for me. For the recollection of our love had only left in her a desire to exploit me, in her turn, and beneath her kisses there had been, in truth, the grievous germ of venality.

"I got my station changed. The adventure was forgotten. However, judge for yourselves: if the improbable had not happened in the providential end of this too practical husband, who had decided to make money out of his wife's infidelity, as the English law allowed him to do, my career in India would have had the tin lid put on it.

"Now I mistrust soul-sisters who smile at me in the hill-stations, and for some months I have been corresponding with my relations and friends in England in the hope that they will find me a suitable wife! They have sent me some photographs. . . . Alas! the pretty women in my country do not seem very anxious to share the modest lot of an officer in India!"

"So, my poor old captain, you are waiting for the

Princess Charming who will one of these fine days land from a P. & O. boat to charm your leisure hours? "

The officer banged his fist on the arm of the chair and said angrily:

" Damn it all! . . . I will not wait all my life! "

Aldo and I had great sympathy for this handsome young officer with a manly face, like a gladiator well-trained for the games in the arena; we felt sorry for the unhappy condition of this unlucky Don Juan out of a job, whom cruel fate had condemned to be on strike, his arms crossed before an empty alcove.

" My friend," said Aldo, " your lot is not a happy one. . . . However, during some years' service in India you have at least had one little adventure to enliven this loveless desert! "

The captain put his chota peg on the table. He smiled like a tom-cat who is thinking of a half-crunched mouse. He shook his head, and appeared to plunge into a sea of delightful reminiscences:

" You are right; at least one little adventure in five years! Yes! But not here; in the house opposite. . . . I mean in the Island of Ceylon, where, by chance, I was spending a short leave. I was staying at the Little Occidental Palace at Colombo. . . . I did not know many people on the island. I was beginning to get fed up, when an Australian liner touched at the port.

" The call of a liner at Colombo is a providential happening for three classes of people: first for the Cingalese who drag the rickshaws; then for the vendors of curiosities, who rob the tourist in a handsome manner; and last of all for idle bachelors, who are on the warpath in the hope of fascinating, in five

seconds, the pretty passengers who may be perhaps a trifle excited after a long voyage.

"That evening I was taking coffee in the lounge of the hotel when I experienced the most violent sensation in the whole of my military career. . . . I noticed, all of a sudden, that a woman's foot was pressing mine. I looked discreetly from behind my paper, and saw a well-shaped leg; then an evening dress a little out of date, then a charming *décolleté* and the decidedly pretty head of a fair young woman, graceful as a gazelle, who seemed terribly bored, sitting beside a heavily built man, whose likeness to a porcupine was unmistakable.

"The gazelle was bored! With incredible audacity she eyed me, whilst the porcupine was discussing the value of a particular brandy with the waiter, and pretended to sigh like a woman thoroughly wearied with life. Our optical telegraphy was interrupted by the porcupine, who remarked:

"'I'm overcome with the heat, my dear. . . . Shall we go to bed?'

"'Oh! as for me, I don't feel it at all; no darling, you go on to bed. I shall come along later.'

"'Are you going to stay alone in this lounge, dear?'

"'Yes, darling. . . . I'm going to read a book and do some writing.'

"The porcupine mopped his brow, finished his brandy-and-soda, and dragged himself up with a 'Hah!' like a stevedore, and before he vanished, patted, with his hairy hand, the satin-like skin of his wife's forearm.

"'You won't be too late, dearie? . . . No little flirtation on the sly?'

" 'Oh, Edward! . . .'

" The gazelle's expression was a perfect study of injured innocence. I need hardly add that, at the very moment when she exclaimed, 'Oh, Edward!' her little foot pressed mine under the table. . . .

" The porcupine disappeared. I made a move to go nearer the gazelle. She stopped me with a sign. Then, when the lift came down again empty, she murmured without looking at me, as she casually turned over the pages of an old *Bystander*:

" 'I am going to take a rickshaw, and go along the front near to the Galle Face. . . . Follow me. . . .'

" A quarter of an hour later we were sitting on the sand under the palms, out of sight of the visitors who were enjoying the fresh air on the terraces of the hotel. A clear night; a silver night. The sea, deep sapphire blue. A soft warm air; an *apéritif* of love. The lights of Ceylon were reflected on the rolling waves, which cast their curling foam on the beach. An adorable night. The most memorable souvenir of my colonial career. The gazelle, without the porcupine, was transfigured. She explained everything to me, unhesitatingly, just as one turns out a work-basket:

" 'Dear me! . . . I have married that! . . . What a blunder! . . . He has a splendid job in Melbourne. . . . But how awful it is. A fortnight at sea with a thing like that and you feel you must bite the steward, the navigating officer and the barman! You appealed to me at once. . . . What impudence, eh? My foot under the table. . . . I read a story like that in a novel translated from the French. . . . But there, I'm afraid of nothing. . . . Amusing, wasn't it, when he told me not to flirt on the sly? . . .

"'Oh! you'll crease my dress! Can we be seen from the hotel? No. . . . Darling! . . . Take care, there is a Cingalese lying there who is looking at us. . . . What . . . a log of wood? Ah! I was afraid. . . .'

"The conversation continued, time passed. The leaves of the tall palm trees seemed to bless us, murmuring: 'Make the most of your opportunity. . . . It is the hour when porcupines snore. . . . The stars will be silent and the sharks in the bay are discreet. . . .'

"At five o'clock in the morning a fluorescence behind the curtain of the tall trees gave us the alarm signal. It was not the song of the lark, but the first caw of a crow. . . . We went back to our rickshaws. Our coolies were asleep, lying on the sand, and we parted fifty yards from the hotel.

"I asked my loving gazelle: 'But what will the porcupine say?' 'Oh, nothing. . . . He sleeps like a night watchman!'

"She disappeared. The next day I looked for her in vain. I only saw her once, just at the instant when, with her husband, she was hurrying to catch the boat which was to take them aboard. . . . She gave me a longing look, sad, tender; a silent farewell that touched me to the heart.

"Pretending to count her luggage, she turned round once more in the car. . . . And I—I had to stand on the pavement stock-still, indifferent, unmoved; an unknown traveller; an ordinary tourist, with the taste of the kisses of the poor little gazelle still on my lips, as that awful porcupine took her for ever to far-off Australia."

The captain was silent. Aldo sighed in sympathy.

We had both of us, in our minds, lived through the unfortunate captain's adventure. I asked in conclusion:

"Has she written to you since that memorable night?"

The captain replied in a low voice:

"No."

He never said another word. But his far-away look, lost in memories, betrayed the nostalgia of his unspoken regrets. Suddenly he seized the whisky bottle, and holding it up in his powerful grip and shaking it furiously, he exclaimed:

"Can you understand now why, in this damnable country, bachelors—and others—console themselves with this? Can you understand why, in this yellow spirit, they try to forget their still-born desires? Can you understand why, every evening, the wind which blows from the mouth of the Indus to the delta of the Ganges, carries through space the monotonous echo of that ominous call: 'Boy! Chota peg!'"

CHAPTER VIII

THE PASS OF SUDDEN DEATH

ON crossing the Indus by the Attock Bridge one finds that one suddenly enters the zone of the armies who defend the North-West frontier. The two ends of the bridge are guarded night and day by sentries.

After a two hours' train journey one reaches Peshawar, where Europeans live in a compound surrounded by barbed wire. The native quarters are encircled by ramparts, guarded by a fort closed at seven o'clock in the evening, and no Westerner is allowed inside during the night. The impression of *Kriegsgefahrzustand*—" the war danger "—is always in evidence.

When I got to my hotel, I noticed that a Pathan soldier was on sentry duty in front of my neighbour's tent. I thought at first that he was keeping guard over an officer under arrest, but I soon learned that the occupant of this tent was a *vali*, a relative of Queen Souriya. The life of this Afghan had been threatened, so the High Commissioner of Peshawar had decided to put him under armed protection. I thereupon resolved to sleep with a revolver under my pillow, in case the assassins made a mistake in the tent, and my feelings as regards precarious peace became stronger and stronger.

Some days later, thanks to the kindness of Sir Norman Bolton, I explored the Khyber Pass under the guidance of a *tazildar*, or native magistrate, attached to the English Political Agent who keeps a watch on the dangerous tribes of this district.

The Khyber Pass! . . . A fantastic setting, that has witnessed fierce battles and incessant guerrilla wars which have smothered the pages of Indian history with blood. I don't think there is in the whole world a theatre of war where so many men have been massacred owing to the continual ebb and flow of invasions. Between the desolate peaks and rocky walls, whitened by the implacable sun, hordes of Aryans were broken before they could gain entrance into India; then the armies of Alexander the Great, then the Scythians with almond eyes, the Huns with teeth like wolves and the Afghans with sabres edged like saws. Then came the Turkomans of Baber and the magnificent warriors of Akbar, Emperor of the Moguls, who perpetuated in their indescribable pomp the apogee of Moslem power in India. And since 1838, this land, hostile to humanity, has drunk the blood of innumerable English soldiers, who died bravely under the bullets of invisible bandits hidden in their aeries on each side of the pass.

When we had crossed the first barrier, in front of the Jamrud fort, the *tazildar* gave me some descriptive details. We passed then into the entrance. The defile grew narrower and narrower. A military convoy on the strategic road went in and out from tunnel to tunnel like a serpent playing hide and seek. On the lower road, homesick camels were going towards Afghanistan.

" Ever since candidates for the Kabul throne have been fighting," the *tazildar* said to me, " there has been no security for the caravans that formerly used to arrive each Tuesday and Friday at the inns of

A Rope Bridge in the Chitral Valley North-west Frontier

A Gurkha Sentinel in a Khyber Blockhouse

Peshawar, carrying, unmolested, their merchandise from Turkestan. To-day, the Afghan tribes seize the merchants, and demand such taxes that the caravaneers are ruined when they arrive, if they are not killed on the journey."

"Has human life any value in the Pass of Sudden Death?"

"None. The tribes of our district—the Afridis, Waziris, Mahsuds, etc.—carry on a chronic series of bloodthirsty vendettas. The Arab says: 'My horse, my wife. . . .' The Afridi replies: 'My gun, my wife. . . .' The possession of fire-arms is the ideal of his life. Look at that hamlet on the side of the mountain. Every farm is fortified and surmounted by a high tower, from which the war-loving Afridi watches his greatest enemy, who probably lives in another farm three hundred yards from his. For days and weeks he will remain on the watch in his tower ready to fire as soon as he catches sight of his enemy. Raids by a whole tribe upon the village belonging to another tribe are by no means rare."

"What do you do when the Waziris or Afridis kill one another?"

"Nothing. We watch them. When we can, we try to play the part of mediators; our Political Agent calls together a council of the headmen and tries to force upon them a friendly solution in an equitable manner. Sometimes he succeeds, and the bandits promise to sign a peace. Then the bitter war begins again, because a Don Juan from Lalaberg has seized the wife of a nomad from Ali-Masjid. The ferocity of these people is beyond one's imagination.

"Once a Waziri carried off the wife of a Pathan in the night whilst her husband was patrolling the

mountains. He sent her back to him, a few days later, with this message written on a piece of paper, fixed to her silver collar: 'I have taken your wife—I am sending her back. She is not as beautiful as I thought she was.'

"The husband collected some of his friends and started out on the war-path. They wounded the ravisher slightly, brought him back to the hamlet, and tied him up in the courtyard of the offended man's house. The husband called the woman, and ordered the other men to go away. He undressed the unfortunate creature, more dead than alive, in front of her bound lover, and said to him:

"'It seems that you do not find my wife beautiful enough? . . . I do not want to inflict upon you the misery of looking upon an ugly woman.'

"Then he took up a piece of wood, which was burning in the courtyard, thrust the fire-brand into the eyes of the seducer, unbound him, and ended by saying: 'Now, you can go back to the mountains!'"

I did not credit the truth of this story until one day, on the side of the Malakand Pass, I met an English military doctor, a friend of mine, who assured me that the previous year he had treated a bandit of the Swat district, whose two eyes had been burnt out for that reason in the course of a vendetta.

We had left the fortified camp at Landi Kotal. The track descends in zig-zags towards the frontier post, where, on a spur of rock overlooking the valley to the Afghan border, there is a blockhouse. Each strategic point of vantage is surmounted by a little

SHAGAI FORT, IN THE KHYBER PASS

An Attack on a British Blockhouse in Waziristan

brick fort, surrounded by barbed-wire entanglements, and occupied by a section, or half a company, of native troops.

"Would you like to visit this post?"

"Very much."

The entrance to the blockhouse is on the first story. One has to mount an iron ladder that the officer in charge of the post pulls up at sunset, before shutting the steel door. There are Gurkhas there, thick-set, muscular, serious, under the command of a *subahdar*. On the platform of the blockhouse a sentinel keeps guard. He maintains a very careful look-out. From time to time he sweeps all the recesses of the pass with his field-glasses. In the Khyber, Kohat and Malakand blockhouses, it is necessary always to be on the *qui vive*. There is never any diplomatic tension with the North-West frontier tribes. Absolute calm seems to reign in the district. Then, one evening, or one morning at dawn, five thousand armed men, accustomed to mountain warfare, suddenly make the powder speak.

"So you understand that one Tommy warned means two saved. And for eighty years the Afghans from Chitral to Baluchistan have not failed to warn us with rifle shots."

We continued our way. I asked the *tazildar*:

"How do you get any peace here?"

"By paying the tribes. It is a kind of insurance against a perpetual state of war. A tribe of bandits four thousand strong, for example, gets 25,000 rupees a year. Suppose some fanatics fire upon us suddenly from the top of that mountain when they see our car: they would be docked of a quarter or a half the pension that is given them by the Indian Govern-

ment. It is the only way of getting at them. They are punished severely, moreover, by raids on their villages.

"Some years ago, a tribe in the Kohat Pass was punished by a forfeit of a hundred rifles. In the course of a raid, two of the women were unveiled by the soldiers. They resorted immediately to the law of talion, which is their only code. One night, some rebels slipped into the cantonment of the English troops at Kohat, killed Major Ellis's wife and took away with them his daughter, Miss Molly Ellis, without the sentry noticing it. After long negotiations, a heavy ransom had to be paid to obtain this young girl's liberty. The cleverness of the Pathans is, moreover, proverbial, and their dexterity prodigious. When a soldier sleeps in these parts, he must chain his rifle to his wrist or his ankle."

The car stops. A loyal Afridi of the frontier guard, who is on sentry duty at the barrier separating us from Afghanistan, presents arms. Beyond this there are no more soldiers. Neither Amanullah nor Bacha-y-Saccoa think of guarding their frontiers. They have other fish to fry. Three hundred yards distant, in enemy territory, a square white house stands. It is occupied by brigands who, on their own account, levy a toll upon the few camel-drivers who pass.

I turn to look at the Pass of Sudden Death, which rears its bare walls to the cloudless blue skies. An ominous silence broods over this harsh phase of nature, which vents its mute hostility upon men who come near it. These arid mountains, these dried-up watercourses, these treeless lands, seem to have absorbed, for ever, the echo of innumerable armies which for

four thousand years have passed through the valley of the Khyber.

The grandeur of the setting fits the drama of a thousand tragic acts which has been played throughout the history of the country. It may be a centurion of Alexander's army who has trodden the dust on my shoes or, on the other hand, have I covered the imprint of the hoofs of a pony ridden by a Tamerlane cavalier? Has an aide-de-camp of the Great Baber been killed with a blow from an axe near this rock, or, three hundred years later, has a poor little wounded Tommy breathed his last under the scorching sun, whilst his comrades were rushing to help those besieged in Jalalabad? For forty centuries blood has flowed in this insatiable pass; tens of thousands of soldiers have left their bones lying in these ravines; arrows have fallen; spears have been broken; bullets have ricochetted, men have died all around the spot, some with the mad regret of conquest incomplete and pillage unfinished, others in agony far from those whom they loved. Every stone in the Khyber Pass could tell a terrible tale; every crag from Landi Kana to Jamrud could proclaim to the Utopians that for four thousand years men have had a heart-rending love of murder.

Suddenly, in the silence, two distant shots ring out. I turn to the *tazildar*, who is talking in Pushtu with a loyal Afridi. He points with his finger towards the mountains across the frontier and says simply:

" Two Afghans having a game."

CHAPTER IX

TEA WITH THE REBELS

THE atmosphere of the frontier province on the North-West one can never forget. We are no longer in India, but in the ante-room of Afghanistan. Peshawar, that has been called the "Paris of the Pathans," is like no other city in India. All races rub shoulders in the narrow winding streets and indescribable bazaars, where a motley crowd strolls, chatters, argues and sleeps. Merchants of Samarkand, Persians in astrakhan fezes, mountain brigands cloaked like Don César de Bazan, fugitive assassins from Waziristan, Sikh butchers with Andalusian chignons, shepherds from the Pamirs, camel-drivers from Zakka Khel, old Pathans with hooked noses and red beards tinted with henna, perfect illustrations for an édition de luxe of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," beggars with embossed silver bowls, women draped in white linen with a band of net over their eyes, vagabonds in rags, olive-skinned girls with well-cut features and lovely eyes, their noses already pierced for golden ornaments—all this dirty humanity, curious, indolent, scattered between the stalls laid out in the corn-market, finds its way into the culs-de-sac redolent of strange smells of mangy dogs and audacious crows.

Here is the street given over to ladies of easy virtue, to Messalinas resplendent with bracelets, to coffee-coloured Pompadours whose sparkling eyes shine under the *kohl* through two puffs of *chara*. I am shown these beautiful Pathans by my best friend in Peshawar, a modest young butcher with a fine head like an Oriental Christ, framed with curly black hair.

He pushes back the crowd that follows our steps, making, with his hatchet, threatening gestures, and praises the charms of Nur Mahal who, not long ago, poisoned the gentleman whose duty it was to protect her, and the beauty of Srin Jhan, whom the wicked tongues of the neighbourhood have named " the dispensary parrot," because she passes her time in running from the hospital to her divan and vice versa.

" You see, sahib, that man going out of Srin Jhan's house? He comes from the Kohat valley, and makes rifles for the tribes over there."

" What do you say? Rifles are manufactured for the brigands of the Khyber Pass? "

" Yes . . . hand-made rifles. . . . You must go and see the factory; ask Sahib the High Commissioner to take you to the Kohat rebels."

I followed the advice of this handsome butcher with a prophet's face, and went by car as far as Fort Aimal Chabutra, where the *tazildar* of the Commissioner of Kohat took me under his protection, and escorted me across the refractory zone.

The Kohat Pass is like the Khyber Pass. One meets every now and then armed Kassadars, who play, on the Afghan frontier, the part that our Algerian tribesmen do in Africa. One also meets women with pale bronze complexions, dressed in black, who veil themselves so lightly that one is able to admire the beauty of their faces and the unforgettable charm of their deep velvety eyes. One day an interested person stopped to take a photograph of a group of Afridi beauties. A bullet fired from the mountain, grazing his camera, called him to order.

" Here we are at the fire-arms factory," said the *tazildar*. " These gentlemen are expecting you."

"A fire-arms factory? But where?"

The *tazildar* points to a kind of wall of baked mud which surrounds some low, wretched sheds.

"They make rifles in there?"

"Yes. Go and see."

The car stops. The rebel Afridis—armed, and wearing well-filled cartridge bandoliers—surround us. I shake hands warmly with the manufacturer himself, armed to the teeth, and his foremen wearing large Sam Brownes. We go into the works, that is to say, a courtyard of beaten clay, where, under sheets of corrugated iron, about thirty skilled mechanics are at work. I am sure that the manager of one of our large fire-arms factories would have a shock if he saw this primitive workshop. The drills, worked by a youth by means of a fly-wheel out of true, enable them to bore the bar of steel that will become the barrel of the gun. Each rifle is made by hand, from the butt to the sight. They copy exactly, minutely, the Martini or the regulation English Lee-Enfield. When the rifle is finished, it bears the same numbers, signs, identification stamps. An English armourer one day had great difficulty in distinguishing an army rifle from one made by the rebels. He examined with a magnifying glass one of the numbers, and ended up by coming to the decision that one of the tiny ciphers had been reproduced upside down.

"How do you sell these rifles?"

"From 120 to 150 rupees (that is to say, from £9 to £10). As contraband arms are prohibited, and bands of Afghans carry rifles, the manufacture is very remunerative. I supply, without distinction the rebels who fight the Kassadars and the Kassadars

who fight the rebels. The British Government pays their Kassadars thirty rupees a month, but they have to find their own arms and ammunition."

The *tazildar* explained:

"We refund four annas for each cartridge used in recognized service. If a Kassadar, during a personal explanation with an Afridi, uses two cartridges to kill him, we do not refund him eight annas."

"So vendettas are not included in the amount of the allowance?"

"No. Our Intelligence Officers, who command the outposts of native scouts or frontier guards, distributed all along the line near Jandola, Sarwekai or Sararogha, have to consider the balancing of the budget of the North-West Province, and decide if it is necessary to pay for the personal conversations between loyal tribesmen and insurgent Afridis. . . . After all, it is only right that he who kills for his own pleasure should pay for the cartridges."

A young apprentice comes to tell the manager of the factory that tea is ready. As we re-enter the porch I notice that a Bokhara carpet has been placed on the ground near the road. A white wooden table is laid, with teapots, cups, biscuits, and hard-boiled eggs. We take our tea surrounded by fifty inquisitive rebels, who stare at this European guarded by a *tazildar* and the most important manufacturer in the Kohat Pass.

The tea has a queer taste. My host insists that I need refreshment. The apprentice who oils the drills and whose hands are black with cart-grease, kindly shells me two hard-boiled eggs. The fifty Afridis, whom one would not care to meet in the mountains

after sunset, smile affably. The *tazildar* speaks very good English. He whispers in my ear:

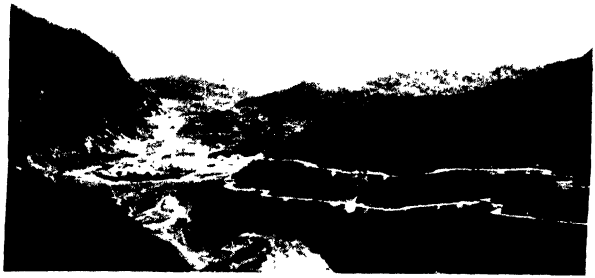
"Notice carefully that tall boy wearing a long dirty shirt over his trousers, with cartridges in his bandolier. He can put ten bullets at four hundred yards in a box of Virginia cigarettes. . . . He is a rebel full of fun. When he is tired of his goats up there, he amuses himself picking off the caps of the radiators of passing cars. At heart, he is a good fellow, and he spends all his pocket-money on his rifle."

I parted from these hospitable people with regret. We shook hands like life-long friends, and I got into the car.

Shall I ever forget that savoury tea-party in those wild surroundings, amongst those sympathetic brigands, within sound of the anvils and the rasping files of the breech-makers, instead of a jazz band? The only industry in all this immense zone is an industry of death. An edifying fact. Every day, between Malakand and Kurram, half a dozen deaths, due to these fire-arms, are reported, that is, not counting the victims who disappear without leaving any trace. My friend, the young Peshawar butcher, was right in saying:

"In war, one kills by order. . . . That is not amusing. In peace-time one kills for pleasure . . . much more enjoyable, sahib!"

The car travels on. In turning off the road which leads to the fortified camp at Kohat, a very pretty young girl, fourteen or fifteen years old, upright, supple limbs, her trousers well draped, passes and smiles under the earthenware jar balanced on her head.



The Khyber Pass, at Lande Kana
In the distance are the mountains of Afghanistan

Illicit Manufacturers of Fire-arms in the Kohat Pass

THE BURNING GHAT, BENARES

" Water is scarce in the pass," the *tazildar* explained to me. " They are obliged to go and fetch it from the pond that you see there."

I distinguished, behind a bank of stones, a pond of yellow, muddy water, in which a peaceful buffalo was quenching his thirst and washing his hoofs. I pity the poor people of the tribal territory who have to drink this questionable liquid. I pity them, and suddenly I remember with uneasiness that the tea at the rifle factory had a very queer taste!

CHAPTER X

LOVES OF THE PATHANS

My dear friend Khagiari, the Afghan butcher and ex-executioner to the Gandamak tribe, who is escorting me in my wanderings through the streets of Peshawar, carries a hatchet on his right shoulder, like an armed man in the Middle Ages; he says to me:

"Sahib, you must know more of the night beauties of the city."

Naturally, in order that this account shall be understood, I will continue in intelligible language the hopeless jargon, half English, half Pushtu, of this excellent fellow. As a matter of fact, our conversation was an Homeric struggle with synonyms, equivalents, the misunderstandings of a European speaking Hindustani, the whole, a mixture of gestures, nods of the head, smiles, emphasized by nudges.

"But it is four o'clock in the afternoon. Your beauties must still be asleep?"

"Oh no! They are always up. . . . Never tired. It is the third street on the right after King Edward Gate."

The street where the "Maisons Tellier" of the Pathan metropolis flourish does not, at first sight, appear attractive. It is three yards wide, hilly, dirty, and full of stall-holders, who cook, in the open air, innumerable *hachis* that they rub in their hands before they grill them on a charcoal fire. Khagiari, with a princely gesture, keeps back the inquisitive urchins, who now form an imposing procession. The good people of Peshawar are happily not spoilt by

tourists, and the sight of a colonial sun-hat excites the interest of the loafers. We make our way between masses of offal and flowers made into wreaths; a symbolical contrast; a fitting prelude to the life of courtesans.

The street becomes a little narrower between the wooden houses scarred by time, two stories high, and flat-roofed. Here and there, as in a box at the theatre, but behind a grille, a woman appears. She is sitting in an unglazed bow window; her bare arm with a silver bracelet hangs over the side. Beauties? Hardly. Strange and fascinating, yes. These Pathan ladies with copper complexions, black and shiny hair, have their noses pierced in three places; the centre partition for an embossed ring, the two nostrils for gold studs with carved heads. Purveyors of thrills, muffled up in multicoloured veils, they gaze at the passer-by with the seriousness of high-priests who do not palter with love and rupees. Their resplendent eyes, their cheeks a little rouged and their lips almost purple, give them the appearance of painted idols rather than women of flesh and blood watching for the Eternal Masculine.

Khagiari was very well versed regarding the vestals of Peshawar. I would not say that he reminded me of the chronicles of the *Œil de Bœuf*; because it would be unseemly to offend certain Hindus of the district by coupling cattle with the realities of profane love; but with the handle of his hatchet, which he flourishes like a village school-master holding up his ruler to emphasize what he has written on the blackboard, Khagiari enumerates, by way of preamble, the social positions of the beauties who do not smile:

" Here is Dil Khusha. . . . Her name implies—' Good-heartedness.' "

I look at Dil Khusha who, sitting in Oriental fashion, unmindful of the contingencies of her liberal profession, draws very slow puffs from her hookah. Hieratic, queen-like, she waits at her window. Juliet the silent, she dreams, maybe, of Romeos enriched by a successful raid, carried out in the night upon a defenceless caravan.

" That is Nur Jahan. . . . Her name implies—' Light of the World.' "

I turn quickly to admire the *Dame aux Camélias* of the North-West frontier, who bears such a poetic name, and I see an old bloated woman, outrageously painted and smothered in tinkling jewels which hang from her nose, ears and neck. The flickering Light of the World. Peace to the courtesans of Goodwill.

We paused awhile before Nur Mahal (" Light of the Palace "), who in this case deigns to smile, and who, for fun, tickles with her red henna-ed finger the handle of the hatchet brandished by Khagiari.

This very good friend says to me confidentially:

" I am going to take you, sahib, to the house of Sharin Jahan. The name means ' Splendour of the World.' She is very beautiful and dances divinely."

It is high time that Khagiari frees me from the curiosity of the citizens, for we are now surrounded by a hundred loafers, who range from five to sixty years of age. The street is literally packed, and interested faces peer from every terrace.

A wooden staircase. A curtain is drawn back. I enter into the sanctuary of the " Splendour of the World." A Pathan lady, corpulent, wrinkled, painted, receives me without much enthusiasm.

Could this be " Splendour of the World "? Khagiari reassures me on the point.

" It is her mamma."

Mother disappears. What a strange house, made of worm-eaten wood, and walls of hardened clay! A sort of latticed balcony, covered and without window, allows one to see the street. The ceiling has a square hole which leads to the terrace. We are not alone. There is a youth, who holds in his hand a fighting quail —for in Peshawar the national pastime is quail-fighting, which gives rise to heavy betting among the lovers of the sport. There is also a dark, handsome young man with long hair, who wears, with grace, the pointed turban of the Pathans. Khagiari gives me to understand that he is the chosen lover of " Splendour of the World." There is also a simple old man squatting in a corner, who is silently sucking a piece of sugar-cane. I never knew if the young man with the quail was the grandson of the old fellow with the sugar-cane. For Khagiari gives me the sign:

" Here is Sharin Jahan. . . . She is pretty, sahib! Look. . . ."

Truly, " Miss Splendour of the World " is fascinating. Her forehead is low, her hair, black and pomaded, is drawn together and tied by a ribbon which has gold embossed shells above each ear. On her chin is the ritualistic blue spot, and her thick lips are rouged according to the custom of her profession. Her firm bust under her white tunic is adorned with a saffron muslin veil. She was born in a village in the neighbourhood of Peshawar. Her origin is certainly Arab, and her grandmother must have been kidnapped by Moslem invaders, glad to enjoy

themselves a little on escaping from the Khyber Pass.

The conversation with "Miss Splendour of the World" is limited, because she only speaks Pushtu. The favoured lover, in a marine-blue cloak and loose trousers of an odalesque pattern, looks at me, moreover, with mistrust. Is he afraid that this infidel dog may dare to become sentimental with his "Splendour of the World," who is exclusively reserved for Pathan loves?

In order to reassure him, I ask my friend to organize a nautch dance, that is to say, a little ballet which, of necessity, will be limited to a single dancer. The idea seems excellent to the mother, who has visions of extra baksheesh. She gives orders to the young man with the quail, who rushes downstairs. The lover, now at ease, accepts a cigarette, which he generously hands to his "mother-in-law," when he has smoked four-fifths of it.

As we wait for the orchestra I gather that "Splendour of the World" has a kind heart, because

"Aux petits des oiseaux, elle donne la pâture."

I discover, in fact, a young parrot whose round cage is placed on a table, a golden pheasant which, in another cage in the shape of a bell, pecks some seed, and a little turtle dove which smooths its feathers under the roof of the balcony.

Now the youth runs in panting, and announces the orchestra. It consists of three musicians in shirts and black waistcoats embroidered with blue; the first bangs with the palms of his hands on two little tambourines, and the two others play on a strange instrument which is something between a piano and an

accordion. The notes of the instrument, which is placed on the ground, are played with the right hand, whilst the bellows are worked with the left.

"Splendour of the World" dances with her mother. They have fastened to their ankles leather straps with small bells, and twist and turn nonchalantly, stamping their naked feet, red and dirty, on the floor, which is dirtier still.

They dance and sing at the same time. The accompaniment by the orchestra is so high that they are obliged to torture their larynxes, consequently the audition of their duet is very painful. At last they are quiet. Distribution of baksheesh. "Splendour of the World" takes my handkerchief, as the colour seems to please her. I give it to her, and take leave of the mother, the lover and the youth, who has, all the time, been mauling his unfortunate quail in his hands, and the old philosopher who nibbles unceasingly at his sugar-cane.

In the street the crowd has grown larger. There are a hundred and fifty Pathans who have been listening to the nautch and are waiting for us. My faithful bodyguard vigorously pushes back these waves of humanity, and leads me away. We have barely gone a few hundred yards when a man, who is running and pushing his way through the crowd, overtakes us. I recognize the lover. I foresee a demand for extra baksheesh at least, if not reparation at the point of the sword, for having neglected the charms of his morganatic wife. Khagiari turns, ready to reply in a befitting manner to this rapacious young man. But it is a question neither of honour nor of money. The favoured lover, very delicately minded, has run after us to give me back my handkerchief. Astonished, I

look at my friend, and I think that Belle Sharin Jahan, possessing doubtlessly a large collection of embroidered handkerchiefs of many colours, has thought fit generously to give me back my modest present. But Khagiari undeceives me at once:

" No need for your present, sahib. . . . ' Splendour of the World ' wipes her nose with her fingers."

CHAPTER XI

MADAME "CORPS DE ROSE"

"AND now, noble sheep-slayer, where do you wish to take me?"

"What time is it, sahib?"

"Six o'clock."

"The gates of the town are shut to Europeans at seven o'clock. I will take you to Gul Badana's, whose name signifies in Pushtu 'Corps de Rose.'"

The British authorities have very wisely decided that no white man is allowed in the native city of Peshawar after nightfall. The other evening, whilst we were peacefully smoking our cigarettes at Dean's Hotel in the military quarter, some insurgent Khattaks organized a secret raid on the town to plunder the merchants. The Pathans of the North-West Frontier Police drove them off with rifles, and the brigands left two dead on the ground. These little surprise attacks are the current money of the district.

"And who is Gul Badana?"

"An Afghan lady from the Parachinar region, who has had bad luck, and so has come to earn a livelihood here. We salaam to her as we pass. If she is in a good humour she will unveil for two rupees."

At last we get rid of our followers, and are only escorted by half-a-dozen tenacious urchins and a Pathan in uniform whose mission is doubtless to watch over my safety.

"Here we are. . . . Follow me up, sahib."

The same decorative scheme. The same strange

odours, in which the spices of India mingle their agreeable perfumes with the stale smell of dirty water and old dust-heaps. My friend taps with his hatchet on a door of ill-fitting boards. A voice replies. He pushes open the door, and in the semi-darkness of this hovel I perceive, squatting behind a carved partition, a stout little woman fanning herself nonchalantly with a fly-whisk. She is slightly made up, even with a certain delicacy, and her black hair is parted at the back in five plaits, interwoven with red ribbons. Her eyes, as is usually the case, are marvellously soft and grave, and her nostrils are ornamented with two turquoises whose pale, clear blue harmonizes with the dusky colour of her face.

Gul Badana welcomes us with the languor of a *grande dame* whose musings have been disturbed by a peasant. Khagiari speaks to her. She scarcely deigns to reply. He insists. Their low-toned conversation is interrupted by a gesture of the butcher, who makes a sign to me to approach.

"Sahib . . . give her three rupees, and she will lift her veil."

An extraordinary sight meets my eyes. Her neck is marked with red-and-white scars which form a quadrilateral figure.

Khagiari seems to enjoy my astonishment. He chuckles, with a gleam of sadism in his large dark eyes.

"One would think that this draught-board had been caused by burns."

"Yes, sahib. . . . Fire. . . . Ha! . . . Ha!"

Like an enlightened amateur who appreciates the value of refined torture, he taps the throat of the

imperturbable lady, and tells a story that I end up by understanding.

Mme " Corps de Rose " lived for two or three years in the territory of an Afghan tribe beyond Parachinar. She was married to the chief of a band whose speciality was raiding belated caravans. He extorted all their money from them and generously allowed them to continue their journey, assuring them that they were in no danger. Then, with some comrades, he ambushed them a little farther on and, for the love of the slaughter, he killed his too trusting victims. One day, he got hold of some dromedaries belonging to a caravaneer from Merv, in Russian Turkestan, and according to his custom tried to assassinate him. He did not succeed. The caravaneer was not one of those who let themselves be shorn, bleating. He recruited a dozen stout brigands, and swore to make the Afghan pay dear for the six stolen dromedaries. By means of a ruse, the caravaneers succeeded one night in taking the Afghan encampment by surprise. The Afghan had with him his wife, Gul Badana, and a friend who was changing his place of abode. The caravaneers killed the friend who watched outside the little tent made of skins which sheltered the couple.

The husband was soon rendered harmless, whilst his wife was stripped of her clothes. The vindictive caravaneer then said to the Afghan whom he had securely bound:

" You have stolen six of my dromedaries, and you have branded them with red-hot irons to make sure that henceforth they were really yours; now I am going to steal your wife and brand her also to make sure that she will from now be my property."

He thereupon took up a sort of iron grill which

was in the fire, and which, if it was not red, at least was burning hot. He made the woman lie naked upon the ground, her limbs stretched out, held still by his confederates, then he pressed the grill to her breast. The wretched woman, horribly burnt, fainted. The caravaneer had her picked up by his friends and taken away, leaving her husband, mad with rage, powerless near the body of his friend. After having gone fifty yards, the torturer from Turkestan turned and called out pleasantly:

"Ah! I forgot that you finish off your victims when they think you have disappeared. . . . I am going to follow your example."

He put his rifle to his shoulder and shot the bandit. A few days afterwards he arrived at Peshawar with his prisoner, who was still suffering terribly from her burns. He had her taken care of, and installed her in this hut. He set out for Turkestan, where he had business to attend to, and since the trouble in Afghanistan has never again been seen.

Then the branded widow, having no other means of livelihood, turned to prostitution.

The story of this wretched woman was dramatic in itself. But the sight of the terrible scars left by her abductor made one realize more vividly the cruelty of the race.

And whilst I looked, fascinated, at this grievous chequer-work engraved into the flesh, the beautiful Gul Badana, insensible to the pleasantries of Khagiari, indifferent to his stupid pawings, looked straight before her. Through her half-closed lids, between her long coarse lashes, I saw in her sombre gaze an unspeakable contempt, a secret hatred of the male, a dull spite, which would put gall into her sophisticated

kisses and saturate with diabolical mockery voluptuousness well assumed, but without *élan*. Mme "Corps de Rose" had shown me her bust just as a wounded tigress allows you to come near her, but I was sure that she would rather have spat in my face. She would have been justified.

it, bellows made of goat-skin, inflated and deflated by a ten-year-old apprentice. The smith is using tools that an ancestor employed at the time when Alexander the Great invaded India by Afghanistan. He is making a chain of cups for a well in the district.

Here is a two-story house with carved bow windows. Among these miserable surroundings, it looks like a palace! Does it belong to a notability? No, it is the property of the village money-lender. For the bugbear of the Hindu peasant is the money-lender. In no other country in the world does one find agricultural villagers so completely under the exactions of usurers.

The Hindu peasant, born poor, grows poorer the longer he works, because he gets into debt. And why does he get into debt? Because each time that he marries one of his children, for example, he is obliged, to meet the expenses of the ritual, to borrow the one or two hundred rupees which he has been unable to save up.

The money-lender lends him the 100 rupees, but makes him sign a receipt for 300 rupees. The debt increases as the years go by. The peasant cannot get free, and becomes so involved that on a harvest worth 150 rupees he has to pay 100 rupees to the money-lender.

Let us continue our walk through the Sikh village. Under the brick wall of an old tumbledown fort an emaciated cow, terribly thin, is slowly dying, her four skinny legs covered with scabs. Her expression, though sorrowful, is tender. She seems to ask

you why the taboo which protects her compels her to die of hunger. Is it the reverence for the spirit of religion that necessitates also the suffering of a sacred animal? Would it not be more humane to kill this ruminant who longs to be delivered by death?

Children, utterly indifferent, pass by on their way to school, which is held in the old fort. They are going to learn the elements of Hindi, the current language, which, however, does not resemble Urdu, another language very extensively spoken, and has nothing in common with Bengali, which, in turn, differs from Tamil. But it is wise not to try to deal with Indian philology; one would have to give one's entire life to it. And, further, no human brain could learn the hundred and seventy-nine languages and five hundred and forty-four dialects mentioned in the statistical tables.

While the two dozen boys—the girls are exempt from schooling—learn to read and write, two black buffaloes go round and round for hours near the large wells, and drive the water into zinc cylinders which pour their contents into a reservoir. An old Sikh is sitting on the beam. He turns. He is turned unceasingly by these two beasts. He has, as an object of meditation, two black rumps, and for recreation, the monotonous grinding of the endless chain.

There is something creaking behind this mud wall. In the small yard of a brick hut, covered with cows' dung, another breed of cattle, a little ox, his eyes bandaged, draws the beam of an oil mill, which grinds linseed in an old hollow block. The golden liquid falls into a square tin which has formerly

contained American motor oil. These empty tins are, by the way, a godsend to the Hindu peasants, who use them in all sorts of ways. I have seen them holding madame's trousseau and also serving as a bath for the baby.

Children are numerous in the village. They swarm like flies. The small-sized young mammas are twelve years old, which is the reason for their diminutive stature. I happened to meet in the street a young buck thirteen months old taking his first steps and looking like a creature escaped from the kingdom of Lilliput. As to the newly-born babies, hooked on to the side of their mothers, sisters, or even papas, they are so small that one wonders whether they have not been boiled and reduced in a double saucepan according to the custom of the natives of Peru.

These continual births are the most astonishing things in India. Émile Zola ought to have come here to write his famous romance "Fécondité." He would have seen an incessant harvest of young humanity, an Homeric progress of continual births always overlapping the number of deaths, in spite of the annual hecatomb due to famines and epidemics. He would have trembled with emotion before the ardour of couples, before their indefatigable prolificness, before their stubbornness in stemming plague, malaria, poverty, that stand like greedy spectres on the threshold of their homes.

The figures are staggering. No statistics have amazed me so much. In 1872 there were 206 million Hindus. In 1881 the number was 254 millions. In 1901 it reached 294 millions, and in 1921 it had passed 320 millions. An increase in

population amounting to 114 millions in about fifty years is absolutely overwhelming. And if infectious diseases and famine did not cause enormous losses in the ever-growing army, one wonders what would be the fate of 400 millions of Hindus living entirely on the resources of their country.

I saw, alas! the quality of the human material resulting from these wretchedly under-nourished creatures, the poor vitality of the puny off-spring of these tiny parents, married too young. And I wanted to cry out to these good people in my Punjab village and to all who imitate them:

"Do not have so many children! Do not beget little Hindus by the half-dozens under conditions so terrible as yours, which would make the hair of all European hygienists stand on end. . . . Obviously I do not say eugenists, who would fall dead with fright!

"Before waxing enthusiastic over the political aims of Mahatma Gandhi—and I do not deny his noble intentions—re-study the teachings of Malthus. There is not food enough for you in India; each year you bring into the world little ones who will lessen still further your share of oats and theirs. . . .

"Learn the meaning of the phrase 'birth control.'. . . Learn to bargain with Nature and deceive her; if not, she will avenge herself on your animal pleasure. Have fewer children, and let them be stronger and finer. Or else, if you prefer, as in the past, to multiply and have a population of 430 millions in 1971, then provide the 250 million pounds necessary for the work of irrigation and sanitary measures to improve vast tracts of fresh

land, for the distribution of chemical manure to feed your impoverished fields. Then your splendid harvests will provide for all of you quite comfortably, and you will be able to breed like rabbits!"

One o'clock. The sun sheds its burning rays on the sleepy village. The village restaurant-keeper is rolling in his hands the oat cakes that he is going to bake, like pancakes, upon a round brick oven. These *chupatis,* with a kind of pease-pudding, form the chief food of the people. When a man has finished his meal he will aid digestion by chewing betel; its reddish brown paste is displayed on a leaf. No liquor. No coffee. No tobacco. And no meat. The Hindu is indeed a model of temperance whom the gourmets and our European big eaters ought sometimes to imitate. Doubtless one must attribute to this frugality the fact that obesity is very rare here. Except in the hospitals, where I have seen dropsical cases and instances of monstrous and exceptional *embonpoint,* I can honestly say that I have never met a fat Hindu. One may add that out of 320 millions there are 200 millions who rarely satisfy their hunger.

The twilight comes. No lights, except some lanterns at the corners of the streets. A shopkeeper, squatting near a candle, covers a dusty register with bizarre-looking figures. He is making up his accounts. In the quietude of the evening, one hears the tinny gong of the tiny temple, which is only a chapel a little bigger than a sentry-box, standing isolated on a hill. It is round, whitewashed and

surmounted by a little dome-like roof. Acacias grow on the outskirts and shelter the little cubes and the niches for tiny figures that the faithful have erected to beg the gods to protect their children from smallpox.

Outside my tent, my trusty servant Rangaswamy is arguing with a Sikh. It is over a question of precedence at the wells. The Sikh has appropriated the bucket of water which was intended for me, and my turbaned valet calls him: "*Oullou kabutchi!*" (Son of an owl!)

The usurper, in order to wash his face in the pail, has taken off his turban. And, as a matter of fact, I do not regret this diplomatic incident, because I had the chance of seeing a Sikh bare-headed—which is rare. According to their religion, the hair and the beard ought never to be cut. So, in order not to step upon and trip over their beards, they twist them on a black string that they fasten like a chin-strap around their cheeks. As to their hair, they twist it up into the shape of a *brioche*, and fasten it with a small piece of string on the top of their heads. A nice subject for moralists to ponder over who, having gazed on the shaved necks of European ladies, come to Asia and see males wearing chignons.

In the trees, above my tent, the dusk brings me the visit of the green pigeons; they are wood pigeons whose plumage varies from *eau-de-nil* to beautiful Veronese green. The birds are also the clock of my Punjab village. In the morning, very early, I am awakened by the ascending and descending scales of

a bird called "the brain-fever bird." It is certain that an invalid who touches 104°, and who listens to the scales of the little flute executed untiringly by this bird, would think that his head would end by bursting. A little later, families of parrots—large green parrots with long tails—screech, chase one another and make friends again. Then the crows take up the performance. They croak, flap their wings, do volplanes, sit on a cart or on the back of an ox that is chewing his cud. These chatterers are innumerable in India, impudent, thievish, unbearable. They ought to take lessons in manners, discretion and harmony from the little grey and pink turtle-doves who fly noiselessly, and coo like a charming marquisette behind the curtains of her alcove.

Sometimes I hear the patter of little feet on the roof of my tent. It is a familiar visitor, who has come down from his tree at great risk—a little grey squirrel no bigger than a marmoset. One comes across hundreds of them in the trees along the roadsides. They are timid, quick, elusive. Mine comes to eat, nervously, biscuit crumbs that he puts into his mouth with his little paws, sitting on his haunches. The slightest movement and away he leaps into his tree.

To complete the fauna of this district there is, at the edge of the pond three miles away, a flock of cranes, beautifully marked, with pearl-grey plumage. They are, contrary to what one might expect, excessively timid. As soon as I come near them with my gun, away they fly to a distance which is just out of range of Number 4 shot.

Night has silenced the village. I am the only person awake, reading. My trusty Rangaswamy is wrapped like a corpse in a white sheet, sleeping on a wooden board. I read. But the majestic stillness of the Indian night, so clear, so blue, with its myriad stars, holds me in a voluptuous grip, free from any disappointing after-taste. Why read? To take myself back to the West with its restless life? To listen across the longitudes to the din of the great capitals? The brain-fever bird, a migratory bird that has probably learnt its piano-tuner habits in Europe, has also become silent. So? . . .

Let us try, among these primitive sleeping people, gladly to forget that civilization which teaches us to be mechanics, too clever by half. Let us follow the example of these Punjabis, who are ignorant of the scandals of Park Lane and the empty gossip of the boulevards. Let us leave at Port Said, the foyer of the Suez Canal, the evil habits of youth, whose ideals are shattered at the universities, and of the old gentlemen who kill our eager enthusiasm. Let us throw our ballast into the Red Sea. In other words, our love of definitions.

I remember, at the moment, a very erudite Brahmin asking me one day, suddenly:

"Do you define the verb 'to be' in your ordinary dictionaries?"

"Yes. And if I am not mistaken, they say that 'to be' is 'to exist.'"

My Brahmin friend, with his grey beard and eyes as tender as a gazelle's, replied to me:

"Ah, well! To give a definition of the verb 'to be,' that is enough to condemn civilization—or at least pedagogy."

As a matter of fact, one can define, more or less, to eat and to drink, to sleep, but has one the right to define " to be "? In all dictionaries the verb " to be " ought to be followed by this explanation:

" A verb, untranslatable into human language. For an exact definition ask the librarian of the world beyond."

My village sleeps under constellations as numberless as our definitions. The wells have ceased their grinding noise. The rupees and the annas lie under the turbans of the Punjabi traders. The wind, every now and again, makes the long leaves of the mango trees, the thin branches of the sacred peepul trees and the lacy green of the pepper plants shiver. I begin to feel sleepy in the tent with its triangular opening, the dark-blue velvet of the night set with glittering stars. But I hear, far away in the brushwood, a pack of jackals whose lugubrious howls resemble the chuckles of hysterical clowns.

Have they, perchance, found a dictionary?

One evening I placed my gramophone on a stone slab in front of my tent, and began to kill time by putting on some records that a friend had lent me. I had not heard any music for months. The sound of forgotten jazz, this sudden recollection of Western cabarets, was so out of keeping with my rustic surroundings that I involuntarily thought of a Marguerite singing " Angels ever bright and fair " to the rhythm of a shimmy or a set of Lancers played by a Bayreuth orchestra.

The first evening I was the only listener to my improvised concert. The second evening, whilst the

melody " Just a Memory " rang out on the peaceful country, I noticed a shadow coming near to the mango tree not far from the wells. I saw very soon the silhouette of a young girl, I ought to say rather of a young woman, because at eleven years old young Hindu girls are almost grown-ups. Timidly, nervously, she came nearer, hiding herself behind the trunk of a tree. She wore a bright red *sari* of thin cotton which covered part of her head; a little gold ring in her left nostril, and bracelets of coloured glass on her dusky skin. She was listening.

I was careful not to frighten her by getting up and saying a few words to her in bad Hindi. I contented myself with glancing at her unobserved. As a matter of fact, she seemed to enjoy the music, so novel to a little villager in this province. Leaning against a tree, she remained there without moving for more than half an hour. She disappeared as soon as I had put away my last record.

The third evening I wondered whether my little listener would come to hear the love song out of *Rose Marie*. She comes, faithful shadow. This time she sits down on the ground, near the tree, her face modestly hidden by her red veil. The fourth evening, about nine o'clock, before I had even opened the gramophone, I saw, as I went outside my tent, the little Hindu sitting a trifle nearer. I had noticed that she liked the " Indian Love Call " out of the famous operetta. I began with this record to please her. She understood, without doubt, my intention, because she opened the fold of her *sari* and unveiled her face completely. I could not see very clearly, because she was sitting outside the edge of the circle of light thrown by my lantern. But I could distinguish

that she had a pretty oval face, a little straight nose and two marvellous eyes—those long dark eyes which seem surprised at their own luminous charm.

Each evening she came, each evening she went. The last night of my stay (she must have known that I was leaving, because my boy had warned the headman of the village) she came and sat bare-headed a little nearer still. She listened attentively to my melodies and seemed to enjoy "The Man I Love." When my last Hawaiian waltz wafted into space the nostalgic rhythm of its guitars, when she saw me slowly and regretfully shut my music box, she understood that it was the end. She looked at me lingeringly. She got up, put her two hands together to her forehead on the red spot of the cult of Siva marked above her eyebrows, and saluted. She folded the *sari* over her head. The red veil closed for the last time over her eyes and she disappeared.

Dear little strange Hindu lady of my Punjab village, I never knew who you were. Your name and your destiny still remain a mystery. Hesitating shadow you came into my nights only to return into the night. We have never spoken. I have not touched your hand. I have not even grazed the drapery which enfolded your graceful young figure.

But our glances met. The distant and tender caress of your large black eyes has fallen upon me, while simple romances rise towards the stars through the thick leaves and the interwoven creepers. For seven nights you came to see me, to listen to the soothing sounds which issued from my magic box. For seven nights I saw the dainty form of your

womanhood tremble under your red drapery, and your eyes close so as to hear better the strange unknown love-rhythms which came to perturb you from afar.

We have not spoken, it is true. But the looks that we have exchanged at a distance, were they not messages that our souls shot at a venture? Messages untranslatable. . . . Too complex for any human language to be able to express them. . . . Fugitive attraction. . . . Indefinite desires? Restless flights? Was it not all this that these rhythms orchestrated, and that the night air carried on its invisible wings —a few of our unuttered regrets?

Dear little Hindu of this village lost in the immensity of India, perhaps, on certain evenings, in the course of your destiny, you will remember the "Indian Love Call" which soothed your restless youth under the leaves of the mango trees. And perhaps I, also, when I do not want to hear the feverish pulsation of Western civilization, nor the heavy tread of European materialism, shall remember your large serious eyes which are for ever shut for me, your large velvety eyes which reflect in their lustre the indescribable splendour of Punjab nights.

CHAPTER XIII

CHARLATANS

Is it polygamy that causes this picturesque publicity in the Indian Press? Is it the climate that extinguishes the ardours of husbands? Be it what it may, I have discovered the following:

FOR PRINCES AND THE RICH ONLY
THE ROYAL YAKUTI
PATENTED IN 1907 AFTER J. C. [*sic*]

Yakuti, or reviving nectar, is prepared from natural plant products carefully chosen. It has the wonderful power of increasing your strength. . . . In short, it makes a man a Man.

This inestimable remedy is used by our rajahs, maharajahs, nawabs and other aristocrats, also in Europe, America, Asia and in Africa.

Sixteen and eightpence for forty pills.

So much for virility. But the sellers of amulets seem to do a trade no less profitable. I came across another announcement which will assuredly give sceptical Western readers furiously to think:

WHY DO YOU WORRY?

Here is the remedy:

This is a mysterious and active power which comes to the assistance of anyone who wishes to gain his end.

The world-wide success achieved for several years by my psycho-electric talisman is due to the fact that it is unique of its kind and has revolutionized the psychic

world. My talisman is not an article made in quantities! It is based upon the unique and marvellous theory of

INDIVIDUALISM

Each talisman is made especially for the person or the object in view. At the first contact a spark emanates from the talisman, and the body experiences a peculiar sensation which is practical proof of the efficacy of the talisman.

It lasts for a life-time.

One then reads the testimonials of happy possessors of the talisman "extra powerful" (12 rupees), the "powerful" talisman (5 rupees), and the ordinary talisman (2 rupees 8 annas):

A European Lady in Bombay:

When your talisman touched me I felt a violent sensation [you've said it]. I was thought to be consumptive. But since using your talisman I have had no more pain. Send me another.

A Gentleman from Southern India:

Thanks to your talisman, I have passed my exam. at the University. Send me an extra-powerful one so that I can obtain a good post in the Government.

Another Gentleman from Southern India:

Your talisman No. 1 has a magical effect. I had worn it for barely three months when I married an accomplished woman, a woman that I never expected to meet.

The following is an announcement that will certainly please those who, at heart, without admitting it, believe in the cult of the mysterious. It is an extract from an Indian paper:

A HAPPY HOUSEHOLD

I married at the age of nineteen, and now I am nearly twenty-seven. My union has been blessed by the birth of a child, although my wife was pronounced barren. I spent endless sums to cure her. Alas, without success! But when the *Mysterious Man* came to Abbott Road I paid him a visit. He consulted the Spirits and gave me some *tavizes* that I have used according to his instructions. These spiritual *tavizes* have worked wonders, because I am now happy to say that my wife is expecting a child very soon, by the Grace of God.

All my thanks to the *Mysterious Man* for his generosity.

(*Signed*) RAJARAM SAKSENA.

CHOWK, LUCKNOW,

February 24th, 1929.

The edifying testimonial of Mr. Saksena, who I hope by this time is a happy father, serves as a *hors-d'œuvre* to the menu of the following miracles:

(1) The exact foretelling of the future.
(2) Healing of chronic illnesses by psychic force.
(3) Photographing the dead [*sic*].

For five rupees four questions will be answered.

Secretary of
The "Mysterious Man,"
Lucknow.

From the Indian Press I learn also that there are some purveyors to the English Court among the astrologers. This is what I read in the *Madras Daily Mail*:

THE AUTHOR OF THE HOROSCOPE OF THE
EMPEROR GEORGE V
(*Government Astrologist*)

The Pandit K. C. Jutisharnava offers his Bashi Karan Kavacha.

(*In cases without result, money refunded.*)

Anyone who wears the Kavacha acquires the supernatural power to put every man or woman under his absolute control. He will be able to get by means of this man or woman everything he wants. Price, 8 rupees 12.

The Calcutta Astrological Syndicate.

Don't think I have taken this announcement from a comic paper. It is not a joke. It is an example, among others, of an astrologer who makes his prognostications of the future pay. And here is another:

FOR "SEVEN" YEARS

THE ANGER OF SATURN

will seriously affect men and women who are born under the sign of Taurus, Gemini, Leo, Virgo, Scorpio and Capricorn. Those who wish to escape the dangerous influence of Saturn bear in mind:

LAKSHA MANTRA JOP

The ceremonies will be performed by celebrated Pandits, according to the rite of Sadhu Sankulin, near the place of holy burning on the banks of the Ganges on March 9th (the day of Siva chaturdasi), on March 11th (the day of Manwantara).

For 2 rupees 10 annas, we will send to the person threatened the Sani Talisman, with the portrait of Saniraj.

But one of the most amusing announcements that I have ever read in any language is this extract from the Indian newspaper *Basumati*:

PLATONIC PRESCRIPTIONS

Against all secret illnesses
Prepared scientifically
according to the old manuscripts [*sic*]
of
PLATO
The renowned Greek philosopher!

I will not quote the diseases of men and women enumerated by this astonishing Indian chemist and all the potions that he offers for five or ten rupees to the unfortunate victims of Eros. I will refrain also from commenting on the unexpected revelation. But I find fault with my professors of philosophy for having, in former days, concealed from me that Plato, our divine thinker, was an eminent venereal specialist and the forerunner of the celebrated French abbé whose mission it was to adjust the circulation in restless women.

Now that you have been diverted by this bewildering publicity, I ask myself whether I have not been wrong in sharing in your ironical smile. Have we any right to make fun of Hindu superstition? Has the super-civilized British lady who goes to consult the clairvoyant in Bond Street, the Parisian lady, very self-possessed, who, without a word to her husband, goes to ask the future from the lady who reads the coffee grounds in the rue des Martyrs, and the young Charlotte, *etwas verrückt*, who has her cards told by

the old gipsy in the Nollendorf Platz—have these charming products of European culture the right to make fun of the young Hindu who orders, by return of post, a " talisman Model B14, extra powerful "?

The credulity and the fanaticism of the Indian is beyond our imagination. But before reproaching him, ought we not to try and cure the " cultured " Europeans who secretly sacrifice on the altar of superstition?

CHAPTER XIV

SLAUGHTERED CUCUMBERS

WHEN one has finished admiring the architectural marvels of the temples or the splendour of the old palaces, one is obliged to remark that the Indian towns are for the most part dirty, of a dirtiness ancient, deep-rooted, incurable. A dirtiness grandiose and fatidical. Hercules himself would recoil from the formidable task which these innumerable Augean stables offer.

One pretends that the Hindu is clean. He is, no doubt, in intention; but as a matter of fact, he is not. He observes the ritualistic ablutions. Unfortunately, he bathes and washes nine times out of ten in dirty water. I have seen a faithful follower of the cult of Siva plunge into, rub himself and clean himself in stagnant ponds of yellowish-black water, or in tanks covered with a horrible scum from the successive bathing of thousands of other followers of the faith. I have also seen women washing clothes in water that one could only class as sewage water. Imagine a family in the suburbs of Paris washing shirts at the outlet of the main drain!

I have discovered that the idea of cleanliness varies according to the longitude. A Hindu boy never fails to rub, with his fingers, the mouth of the bottle that he has just uncorked. A Hindu cook rolls his rissoles on his sweaty naked sides—no doubt in order to give the venison a flavour appreciated by gourmets. A Peshawar butcher cuts his meat with his feet. That is to say, he holds the carving-knife vertically between his toes, and divides the pieces

of meat by rubbing them against the motionless blade.

The peasants, nearly always, collect in their bare hands cow-manure to make fuel. I have seen a working woman in a corner of the street picking fleas from the head of a child three years old, and killing them with her thumb on the body of the little one.

But the *chef-d'œuvre* of crudity is in the matter of childbirth. Our European gynæcologists would be quite out of their element at the birth of a little Hindu. One of my friends, an American dentist, had a man-servant whose wife was *enceinte*. The day of the birth arrived. It took place in a loft, on a pallet of dried leaves. That day the frightened man-servant came to find his master, and begged him to save his wife. The dentist went up to the loft, lit by a lantern. The future mother was lying on the bed, and the old midwife was astride her, pressing her with all her weight, mumbling incantations; whilst another old woman awaited the arrival of the infant, endeavouring to chase away the evil spirits. The dentist sent away the old women, met the situation as best he could, and soon presented to the happy Hindu a living boy-child.

"Master! How did you succeed? For these two old women tortured my wife for twenty-four hours!"

"It is very simple. . . . Your baby is very sharp. I showed him in the palm of my hand a silver rupee. Then he arrived immediately!"

These remarks about dirtiness in India came into my mind, because one day I at length discovered a town of meticulous cleanliness. It is Trivandrum,

capital of the State of Travancore, in Southern India, on the shores of the Indian Ocean, between Cape Comorin and the State of Cochin.

Travancore is tropical, very like Ceylon. The coco-nut palms spring from the ground there like green fireworks, anxious to spread their branches above the large flat leaves of the banana trees, to rival in height the areca trees, and to shed their reflections into the numberless streams which flow through the ochre soil.

The neatness of the village with its red-sand streets, its little, well-kept houses, its inhabitants clothed exclusively in white, the grounds of the palace and the flower-gardens of the bungalows are pleasant to look upon after going through the oppressive bazaars, frequented by mangy dogs, flies by the million and beggars in rags, with their inevitable cry, in the clouds of dust that fall indiscriminately on wounds, dirty clothing and the confectioners' stalls.

One of the peculiarities of Travancore is the astonishing law that regulates the succession to the throne. The son of the reigning prince is not the natural heir to the crown, which appertains by right to his nephew. The last Maharajah of Travancore died in 1924. The regency of the State devolved upon his niece, the present Maharanee, who is, by the way, well known for her wisdom, her progressive ideas and her devotion to public affairs.

If the present Maharanee had had a son he would have inherited the crown. Being childless, she has to accept the regency until her younger sister's son attains his majority. Later, her young nephew will ascend the throne. He will marry. He will perhaps have a son. But his son will not succeed him.

The crown will go to his sister's eldest son. And if by chance his sister did not have a son, she would become the reigning Maharanee. That is the strange law which assures the transmission of the power in the happy State of Travancore.

The idyllic setting of Trivandrum is a delight to the tired eyes of a traveller who for months has toured the Ganges or the Godavari; this little town would have seemed destined only to satisfy lovers of tropical nature if I had not, by chance, come across one of the most amusing things that one could meet in India.

It happened one morning at dawn, the fragrant and delicious hour when the sun barely lights the wooded hills, when the water of the streams and lakes, peopled with herons and crocodiles, reflects the pale ivory of a sky ready to catch fire; where the flat boats glide silently under the foliage, primitive gondolas, loaded with coco-nuts.

A friend had taken me near to the temple. I was contenting myself by looking at the building from a distance, because access is forbidden to Europeans, when I saw one of the faithful going into the sacred precincts with a large cucumber under his arm. I said to my friend:

"A cucumber? . . . Why a cucumber?"

Then my friend smiled:

"You have heard of the terrible rites of the goddess Kali, who demands bloody sacrifices to appease her wrath?"

"Certainly. I have seen goats beheaded in front of various temples. . . . Unfortunate little goats that

they lead to the red block, who bleat in a heart-breaking way as if the smell of blood, already spilt, warns them that death awaits them. . . . I have seen the executioner's assistant throw at the feet of the callous believers the decapitated body, still moving with spasmodic twitches. . . . And I assure you that I have deplored these rites which are a blot on the golden robe of India."

"You are right. Note also that the sacrifice of goats and buffaloes is an advance on the last century. Till 1830 they still sacrificed children to the shades of the redoubtable goddess. But we have progressed even one step farther in the State of Travancore. The reigning Maharanee, being a sensitive woman, does not allow animals to be decapitated in front of the temples in her State."

"What! She has taken up that attitude over a religious question which touches Hindu fanaticism!"

"She has dared to do so."

"And what do the priests, the interpreters of Brahmin dogma and guardians of the faith, say?"

"They have offered no resistance to the wishes of the reigning Maharanee, who exercises all her intelligence in governing her subjects well. They thought it over seriously. And they have found a solution which satisfies both parties. They have advised the faithful to cut the throats of cucumbers."

"Splendid!"

"The juice which comes out of the wound of this cucurbitaceous plant takes the place of the blood which pours from the severed arteries. The juice is sprinkled on the stone. The goddess is satisfied. The faithful also."

Photo Underwood

THE SACRIFICE OF KIDS BEFORE THE TEMPLE OF KALI CALCUTTA

A Fakir who retained this Position for Five Years

Photo Underwood

An Ecstatic Fakir

"That is true. Unfortunately, the cucumber does not bleat before being immolated."

"It was difficult to find an ideal vegetable which, not happy at having its throat cut, also cried out when in the executioner's hands! Agree, however, that the casuists of Travancore solved this delicate problem!"

"I admit it. I must say that the Brahmins ought to be congratulated on their appropriate humour. Because the faithful worshipper of the goddess who, under the red eye of the idol, slays his cucumber, always has the chance of eating it afterwards with oil and vinegar."

CHAPTER XV

NIGHT ON THE GANGES

THE night is warm. The Great Bear has her paws in the air and the Pole Star seems to have lost her bearings. After having made our way into the dark streets, where oxen still wander before they go to sleep in front of the closed gate of a temple full of strange odours, two policemen wearing red pugarees show us the way to the Ganges through the courtyard of one of those old, tenantless, white palaces whose high walls overhang the steps that lead to the sacred river.

Suddenly we come out upon the gently sloping bank, where thousands of Hindus are squatting, awaiting the festivities. Because on the first Tuesday following the fête of *Holi* it is customary at Benares to have a great aquatic soirée, with nautch girls who sing and dance on the boats.

The spectacle of these illuminated barges, mirrored on the water, is very strange. They are little white galleys with forty oarsmen, with a raised deck under a white awning supported by eight golden pillars swathed in white muslin. No coloured lights. Only acetylene lamps illuminate the strange flotilla of little phantom galleys.

There are fifty of them, moored one to another in an inextricable mass in front of the *ghauts*, which are smothered with Hindus dressed in white, who complete the two tonalities of this sketch in *gouache* and Indian ink.

The two policemen push back the crowd to let the English Governor and his guests pass. Without

any difficulty, they clear a path for us through the docile Hindus who are waiting. We go aboard one of the white galleys, where we are received with garlands of frangipanes, lemon flowers and yellow marguerites, by the notabilities of Benares.

The Rajah has sent for the dancers who will initiate us into the rites of the nautch, accompanied by three picked musicians. Upon the neighbouring galleys, other nautch girls will be heard. There will be a cacophony, which will charm the music-lovers squatting in tiers on the sloping bank.

Our dancer is pretty in her black robe edged with silver, with her necklaces and her jewels. Unfortunately, her body is heavy and her stomach prominent. She hardly dances. Every now and then three little turns, accompanied by the tinkling of the tiny bells fastened to her ankles.

That is all. The stanzas, sung to their harsh music in a falsetto voice with the same gestures repeated interminably, are wearisome to a Western audience, but full of charm to the Hindu ears, judging by the patience of the people of the country, who will listen to them all through the night.

The dancer periodically puts her left hand to her left ear as if she wanted to stop up that ear in order not to hear her own shrill shrieks, while with the right hand she outlines in the air a stereotyped arabesque which emphasizes equally well satisfaction, grief, anger and desire.

After having repeated her single motif thirty times, a servant brings her a large basket full of rose leaves and stars made of silver paper. She comes up to us and covers us with a light perfumed shower. Were it not for the grave and bored faces of the

English officers who are near me, and who suggest nothing of the joyous Romans of the decadence, one would think one was witnessing a Lupercal for which an eclectic senator had arranged the *mise en scène*. The comparison, moreover, ceased with the rose petals, for one had to admit that the behaviour of the nautch girls was scrupulously correct, that their costumes were irreproachably chaste and had nothing in common with the unrestrained licence of the Imperial orgies.

Entr'acte. Whiskies-and-soda, cheroots and cigarettes are handed round on silver trays, whilst aboard a neighbouring galley another dancer continues to shriek charming songs in Hindi. Ours is resting. She has given up her place to a fat woman, who I suppose is an unpaid nautch girl, pensioned after forty years of loyal service. She is frankly ugly. Between her thin lips she shows her teeth, which are reddened with betel, and to amuse us she adapts English words to her monotonous rhythm: "I want to kiss my darling.". . .

The fête continues. The livid waters of the Ganges are streaked with reflections. A light breeze causes the muslin robes to flutter. Over there, on the steep banks at the foot of the temples whose fantastic silhouette is outlined against the starry sky, the Hindus, peaceful and pensive, enjoy themselves in the perfect calm. Are not they right who say that pleasures are vain and sorrows relative, since, at dawn, as soon as the last echoes of the nautch have ended, the untouchables will pile up the wood on the funeral pyres of the neighbouring *ghaut*, and the body-burners will calmly burn the first corpse that is brought to them?

CHAPTER XVI

THE GAME OF THE RUPEE AND THE BAZAAR

A HINDU, followed by another Hindu carrying a roll of stuff, enters my room.

"Sahib, do you want to buy some cashmere? . . . magnificent embroidery?"

"No."

"Then, sahib, I have some old Hindu idols made of bronze . . . two hundred years ago."

"Let me see them."

Like leaden soldiers, the heroes of Hindu mythology line themselves up on my carpet. Ganesh commands a squad of Sivas with many arms, and Krishna, the drum-major in front, plays the flute to encourage the little column of which Kali forms the rear-guard.

"How much for your Siva and your Durga?"

"A hundred and twenty rupees."

I burst out laughing, and dismiss with a wave of the hand this regiment of gods that is so thirsty for rupees.

"Do you take me for the Nizam of Hyderabad? A hundred and twenty rupees for your divine couple? Nothing doing."

"Sit down, sahib. How much will you give me?"

"Fifteen rupees."

With a vengeful hand the Hindu gathers up the bronze soldiers and opens out the paper in which they were wrapped.

"No, sahib! You cannot be serious. . . . I

am not dying of hunger. . . . I will go with my gods."

"Very well, go."

The paper which enveloped the knick-knacks is slowly opened. Instead of going the Hindu sits on the carpet. The bartering begins again.

"I am poor, sahib, but I am not in absolute need of money. I will sell you Siva and Durga for eighty rupees, the lowest price."

"And I offer you twenty rupees."

The comedy recommences. I get up. The gods disappear. I sit down again. The gods reappear. The discussion continues. I suggest twenty-two rupees.

"Twenty-two is a number which brings bad luck, sahib. Give me a little more, and before God I'll take it."

"Twenty-three."

The divine couple disappear into the paper. I pick up my cap. The Hindu runs after me. The deal is made. He puts the gods on the table and sighs.

"I would not have sold them to my own father at this price."

"But then, I am not your father."

The Hindu gets up with his parcel under his arm.

"Sahib . . . give me another half-rupee."

"Why?"

"To do a good deed."

I give him half a rupee. Salutations, departure. I look through the barred window which gives out on to the gallery where my Madrasi servant keeps guard as usual. The Hindu dealer goes up to him and slips into his hand, by way of baksheesh, the

half-rupee that I have given him. He performs good deeds at the expense of his clients.

Rangaswamy said to me one morning at Benares:

"Sahib . . . we must buy a knife, fork and spoon if we are going by caravan to Nepal; we shall not be able to find anything on the journey."

"All right. Where can we get them?"

"At the bazaar, sahib."

"I will go with you; I enjoy wandering through the streets of the holy city."

The car dropped us in front of the police station, right in the bazaar. The little stalls offered to the innumerable wayfarers the astonishing collection of trumpery wares that gladden the hearts of Orientals. We went up to a stall two yards square, presided over by a merchant wearing a Gandhi cap and chewing betel. My boy asks for a knife. The merchant turns over a pile of soap between automatic bolts and boxes of nails. He offers me an enormous cutlass with which I could cut up an ox.

"*Chota! Chota!*" (Small! Small!), my boy explains.

Then the merchant forages amongst the boxes, and offers me a penknife suitable for a little schoolgirl's pencil-box.

"*Bara! Bara!*" (Big! Big), says my boy.

The placid merchant shows me a dessert knife with an ivory handle bound with silver, and asks two rupees. It is too dear. I don't want a work of art, for the knife will end its days in the waters of the Ganges as soon as I get back from Nepal. The discussion continues. Whenever a European

makes a purchase in the bazaars in Benares, an inquisitive crowd gathers round him, and seems to take an extraordinary interest in what he buys. I am surrounded now by:

Firstly, an old beggar, half-naked, who tours India with his wooden bowl, and amuses himself as best he can during his pilgrimages.

Secondly, my chauffeur, who naturally has left the car to explain to the idlers that the sahib has come to buy a knife.

Thirdly, several boys about ten years old who, on principle, make a circle round me to see what is going on.

Fourthly, four or five unemployed Hindus, who have a word to say, an address to offer, or baksheesh to pick up.

Rangaswamy has taken each to witness that the stall-holder has not the knife or the fork we want. Two of the unemployed Hindus tell him that he will find knives at eight annas at Priya Lall's.

"Let us go to Priya Lall's."

Preceded by the two kind guides, followed by the hairy beggar, who is evidently anxious to know the epilogue of the serial, and the little boys who skip along the pavement, we reach the better-equipped cutler's shop. I buy a splendid knife with an ebony handle, made in Japan, for a few annas, but I find with regret that Priya Lall does not sell forks or spoons. The procession turns left. It is necessary to search the bazaar to find a complete service.

After having visited several shops, we find the necessary utensils at last. But just as I am going to buy them, three of the out-of-work Hindus, who had fallen out of our procession, and whom I thought

were too blasé to take any interest in such modest transactions, come up suddenly, triumphantly brandishing a selection of forks. Cruel embarrassment! These brave fellows have given themselves the trouble of running to a cousin or a friend, a shopkeeper in the Benares bazaar, and have borrowed forks, promising to do a good deal with them.

I am just going to give preference to the fork-seekers, but the shopkeeper is annoyed, and accuses them of taking away a customer. I go back to the shopkeeper; then the three unemployed Hindus carry on, and pretend that they have run 400 yards in a burning sun to find the object of my desires. What am I to do?

I turn to my servant, and say to him in English:

"I cannot buy six forks when one is enough."

"Listen, sahib. . . . Buy the shopkeeper's fork. It is the nicest. . . . I will put it right."

The cunning Madrasi turns and says to the runners, after having carefully examined their samples:

"Just so! . . . First-rate forks! But the sahib cannot buy five forks. He must have a complete dozen."

"*Bot atcha!* . . . (Very well!)"

And, highly delighted, the runners go off in all directions to make up the required dozen. Then my boy turns to me and says under his breath:

"Sahib! . . . Let us get into the car quickly before they come back!"

I get back to the hotel. I have packed my spoon and fork, my knife, made in Japan, glad at having turned to such good account my perilous expedition to the bazaar.

All of a sudden I hear whisperings in the outer gallery. Through the lowered blind I see three men having a palaver. My boy, who was cleaning my shoes, comes up and says:

"Here they are."

"Who are they?"

"The men with the forks."

"But how can that be! . . . They don't know where I live!"

My boy shakes his head solemnly:

"Here, sahib, they know everything about visitors."

"Ah, well! . . . You must get rid of them. Go and say what you like."

He puts down the shoe, the boot polish and the chamois leather. He arranges his turban, evidently to appear more dignified, and opens the door. Immediately the three runners all speak together. He shuts the door, annoyed! Then he opens it. The concert begins again *crescendo*. In the end, not able to contain himself, my boy goes out of the room and parleys with them. It is not an explanation but a volley of words. Imprecations are hurled. Voices are mingled. Epithets fly. Insults roar, explode. My neighbour, an English officer, appears at his doorway and, a cheroot in the corner of his mouth, seems to enjoy, like a connoisseur, this exchange of amenities.

The runners beat a retreat with their dozens of forks. My boy torments them. They reply. I would give twenty rupees to understand their exchange of violent insults. Fortunately, my neighbour comes to my assistance. He says to me, smiling:

"Would you like me to translate, as nearly as I can, the lively repartee of these excited young people?"

This is the outline of their altercation:

"Why do you come here with your forks?"

"You said a dozen. . . . Here is a dozen!"

"I never said a dozen!"

"Son of a slave! . . . You *did* say a dozen!"

"What! What! . . . Me, son of a slave? . . . Hold your noise, you! Your grandmother had an ape's tail."

"I'll kill you, you eldest son of a green monkey!"

"Kill me? . . . you offal of the bazaar! The sahib will come and break his stick over your backs. Clear off, you spawn of a harem of sick gorillas!"

After this kind translator had revealed to me the richness of my boy's vocabulary, and the style of his backchat, I determined to give him five rupees more a month.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LITTLE MOGULS AMUSE THEMSELVES

"WHAT is a maharajah?" asks the school-master.

And the European pupil replies:

"A maharajah is an important person who wears a turban covered with pearls and emeralds, who goes through the jungle on an elephant caparisoned with cloth of gold."

The man in the street and the lady in her drawing-room would also give very much the same reply, because the ignorance of Indian affairs in Europe is only equalled by the ignorance of European affairs in India. Well, the study of maharajahs is by no means an uninteresting subject. There are, in the psychology of this cohort of potentates small and great, things that intrigue and attract, that surprise and amuse.

Imagine in the eighteenth century, when the Great Moguls attained at Agra the apogee of Moslem power, imagine, I say, that the star of a Great Mogul, after a sidereal cataclysm, exploded into 560 pieces or little Moguls of lesser radiance, but still shining in the Indian firmament. And you have the 560 maharajahs, rajahs, gaekwars, nawabs and nizams that go to complete the Indian "Almanack de Gotha."

If an inquisitive anatomist put a little slice of a maharajah's mind under the microscope, he would make some strange discoveries. He would first of all find some unexpected detail which would upset his histological knowledge. Accustomed to find in the objective a certain homogeneity of tissues, he

would be astonished to see, under the coloured pigmentation of the skin, two elements absolutely contradictory, but closely intermingled—British education and Hindu atavism.

And it is difficult to imagine, in a human mind, oppositions so flagrant, and conflicting evidence so sharp. Here, first of all, are traces of a rather superficial instruction, given in an English college by an indulgent tutor, alongside the congenital traces of absolute autocracy. Then there is the religious routine of Hinduism, Janism, Sikhism, Buddhism or Mohammedanism which has left its imprint, and will compel the prince to practise, without conviction, the fanaticism of his subjects. On the other hand, there are traces of sport (polo, pig-sticking, tiger-hunting, motoring, dog-breeding, tennis, cricket, etc.) that the association with English officers has developed to excess.

Let us move the glass plate which contains this slice of the mind a little to the left and examine, to begin with, the trace of autocracy. It is hypertrophied, because for centuries the power of the maharajah has been absolute. Oriental satraps have, indeed, never known the formula of Western monarchs, who say, " It is our wish."

Akbar and his successors said: " I command." One is shown in the fort of Agra, the residence of the Moguls, a little spiral staircase leading from the harem to the edge of the Jumna. The servants who disobeyed the orders of the Mogul or his favourites were discreetly conducted to this staircase, hanged in a twinkling, and thrown into the waters of the river.

The Little Moguls, heirs of the Great ones, have retained this delightful custom, which they practise

discreetly in their States. I say discreetly, because England watches them. Oh! but the representative of His Britannic Majesty does not interfere with princes who have treaties with the Crown of England. His Excellency Lord Reading, Viceroy, did not fail, however, to seize the occasion to write in 1926 to the Nizam of Hyderabad, who was one of the most powerful princes in India, whose State covers a greater area than half England, a letter in which he defined politely to this unmanageable potentate, a little negligent in the exercise of his sovereignty, the extent of his duties and his rights:

" I wish to remind Your Exalted Highness that . . . the sovereignty of the British Crown *is supreme in India, and therefore no ruler of an Indian State can justifiably claim to negotiate with the British Government on an equal footing. . . . It is the right and duty of the British Government, while scrupulously respecting all treaties and engagements with the Indian States, to preserve peace and good order throughout India.*"

One may note, by the way, that the Nizam brought about this categorical call to order because he had had the presumption to wish to be an ally of England and no longer a feudatory of His Majesty King George V.

In truth, the maharajahs have not much to complain about regarding the untimely intervention of the Viceroy in their affairs. If they rule over their States more or less normally, the spectre of Banquo, that is to say the Viceroy, does not disturb their sleep. But when the under-satraps abuse their power, that is to say, squander their resources, administer their budget badly, exact too severe pen-

alties or lead too scandalous an existence, then the Britannic bogy appears and demands a reckoning.

And it is in such cases that the autocratic atavism of the maharajahs does them a bad turn. Take, for example, the case of the Maharajah of Nabha, who, after the inquiry of a Special Commission, was deposed by the Viceroy; and of the Maharajah of Indore who, after a mysterious abduction, in which the heroine was his favourite dancer, Mumtaz Begum, preferred to abdicate rather than submit to a Special Commission. Still more recently a maharajah who died had some dispute with the Viceroy. This young prince had given all his confidence to his Prime Minister, an inveterate drunkard, who not only depleted his finances, but one fine evening, in a fit of rage, killed one of his attendants. The maharajah, to whom the life of a Hindu of inferior caste had evidently no value whatever, abstained from trying his murderous minister. The Viceroy ordered him to bring the offender to justice. The maharajah refused. Then the minister was arrested, condemned to fourteen years' imprisonment, the maharajah was banished and an English administrator appointed to take charge of the State during the minority of the young heir.

The Little Moguls amuse themselves. . . . But England keeps watch!

How does England keep watch? She places a sentinel near the prince, or if you prefer, a mentor who can become, according to circumstances, a secret adviser or a bogy. These modest but powerful officials are the Political Agents or Residents. When the Viceroy was a Lord Dalhousie or a Lord Curzon, Political Agents often knitted their brows and, like

severe nurses, threatened their patients, at times, with a strong dose of magnesia. More than one maharajah, during the last century, has been on the point of offering bad coffee to the representative of the Viceroy. But such little revolts are tamed by consulting the order of battle of the British Army.

The reigning princes have full liberty except:

1. To enter into direct diplomatic relations with foreign powers.

2. To receive foreign decorations without the assent of His Majesty's Government.

3. To travel beyond the Indian frontier without a previous understanding with the Viceroy.

4. To offer official posts to foreigners without consent of the Viceroy.

5. To name the hereditary prince without the formal sanction of the King-Emperor.

Apart from that, they are free! An English colonel in the Indian Medical Service, with whom I shot wild geese, said to me, speaking humorously:

"The position of Indian princes is exactly like that of a young married man who has his mother-in-law living in his bungalow. She, sweet and attentive, looks after the house without appearing to do so, checks the accounts and gives advice which is amiably imperative. . . . The Political Agent is the mother-in-law to the maharajah."

I ought to add that, to soften the blow of "the mother-in-law," the Viceroy generously authorizes Their Highnesses to receive a salute of seventeen or nineteen guns when they enter their States. As to the Nizam of Hyderabad, the particular potentate whom Lord Reading called to order, he is granted a salute of twenty-one guns. Some spiteful tongues

at Simla suggested that the Nizam must be torn between two opposite feelings: pride at hearing two more rounds than other princes, and sorrow at having to provide two extra cartridges. For the avarice of this crowned milliardaire, whose jewels represent fabulous wealth, is, it seems, inordinate. But I don't believe it. I feel sure that His Exalted Highness is extremely generous. Only, like all great-minded people, he carefully hides his good deeds.

It is fair to add that black sheep are not very numerous in the corps of the maharajahs. It may happen that a prince, spoilt by fortune, surrounded by courtiers anxious to please him, loses sight of the difference between good and evil, gets mixed up in undesirable adventures, or provides copy for European journalists always on the look-out for spicy gossip with a curry sauce. It is unnecessary to recall the unfortunate story of the Maharajah of Kashmir, who was the victim in London of a blackmailing couple, and was called "Mr. A." by the extremely discreet reporters. Really, what is most surprising is not that "Mr. A.," Indian potentate, paid dearly for his amorous comedy with a designing woman, but that similar cases do not happen more often.

Considering the *milieu* in which they live, the servility of their little courts, the size of their civil list, and of their personal riches, the mystico-erotic character of their religion, the prestige of their power in the eyes of women, I think it wonderful that three-fourths of the maharajahs do not give themselves up to unbridled debauchery, do not give free course to most refined perversions, and do not

seek, in their palaces, to surpass the exploits of the Emperor Heliogabalus!

One day, at Colombo, I met a Dutch parson on his way to Java. He was very interested in my visits to the palaces of the Little Moguls, amongst others to the State of Patiala, and asked me details about the luxury there.

"The Maharajah of Patiala," I said, "for his pleasure keeps seventy-two cars, of which three dozen are Rolls-Royces, one hundred and sixty pedigree sporting dogs, sixteen elephants, six tigers, five lions and four panthers; he possesses also the most beautiful pearls, the most beautiful emeralds, the most beautiful . . ."

But the parson did not smile. He interrupted me abruptly:

"Ah, well, monsieur, I think this luxury is terrible. I abhor with all my heart this display of wealth."

"Wait a minute, reverend sir . . . I have not told you all. I have given but the picturesque aspect of the life of this prince. Here is another side: the town of Patiala possesses a large college built by the Maharajah, a college which would make many European towns envious, where a thousand young Sikhs perfect their English to pass their examinations; the Maharajah has devised, with the help of his ministers, a system of education that in twenty-five years, it is hoped, will cause the proportion of illiterates to fall from 80 per cent. to 50 per cent.; a postal and telephone system in all the small market towns of any importance, etc. In short, this Indian prince, whom you reproach on account of his harmless passion for elephants and

emeralds, is a champion of progress for the sake of his 1,500,000 subjects. . . . So, your Reverence, when a maharajah is so zealous for the well-being of his people, one can pardon him for having a few more sporting dogs than he needs for shooting hares and partridges. . . . As to his jewels, and his pomp, which form part of the traditional ceremonial so dear to the hearts of Indians, it is not very surprising. What would be astonishing would be to see a maharajah presiding at a Durbar in a black alpaca coat and wearing a white cotton toque."

The clergyman reflected. Then he replied:

"You mention a little black coat. . . . But Gandhi, the great Gandhi, Saint of Saints, apostle of the Hindus, does not even wear this modest coat. He goes about almost naked among his admirers, and his boast is that he possesses nothing in this lower world."

"Ah! reverend sir, allow me to say that there is a great difference between a prophet and a sovereign. Christ had very little clothing on His body when He preached in Galilee, while Julius Cæsar was clothed in purple when he addressed the Romans. Nobody would have tolerated Cæsar, returning from Gaul, standing naked in his chariot, as it went through the Eternal City. And the same applies today. Gandhi, with a little cotton cloth round his loins, increases the voltage of his psychic radiations, and emphasizes, by the concrete vision of his asceticism, the persuasiveness of his theories. Gandhi, clothed in a pink silk tunic, with a necklet of pearls and wearing a turban ornamented with sapphires, would disappoint his admirers, whilst the Maharajah of Patiala, travelling third-class, with a staff, a brass

bowl and a white cloth round his waist, would disappoint his subjects."

The clergyman was not quite convinced, but his opinion was shaken. He tossed his head, however, and with his mouth expressed disapproval.

"I see, reverend sir. . . . It seems that something is still worrying you?"

"Why, yes . . . ah, yes. . . . It is the hundred and sixty sporting dogs!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CRADLE OF THE MUTINY

I HAVE just made a pilgrimage to Meerut, the cradle of the revolt of the Sepoys, that celebrated Mutiny of 1857 whose tragic recollections have for so long haunted the minds of Anglo-Indians.

Guided by Colonel J. S. O'Neill, with whom I shared at the Front in 1915 the tinned beef of the English commissariat, I was able to visualize the first signs of this terrible revolt.

The quarters at Meerut have been much improved since then. There are avenues. Villas have been built among the mango, mimosa and rose trees. But commemorative tablets, here and there, recall, hour by hour, the events. One can even read on the door of a Hindu temple:

HERE
CAPTAIN AND MRS. CRAIGIE
(3RD REGT. OF LIGHT CAVALRY);
LIEUTENANT AND MISS MACKENZIE;
A TROOPER OF THE 6TH DRAGOON GUARDS,
WERE BESIEGED DURING THE NIGHT
OF THE 10TH AND 11TH OF MAY,
1857.

This laconic inscription, read in perfect security in 1929 in the idyllic and smiling peacefulness of the camp, which resembles a park rather than a military training-ground, is more touching than a long narrative.

And what then was the astonishing cause of the

first act of this mutiny which, later, made so much blood to flow and threatened the British hegemony in India? This is what my friend told me:

"It is the 24th of April, 1857. For some months the Indian Sepoy Regiments have been passing from hand to hand *chupatis* (sort of pancakes) with certain mysterious signs. The carabiniers of the 3rd Bengal Regiment have heard that their cartridges were greased with pork fat. Their religious fanaticism is aroused. They refuse to fire them.

"On the 24th of April the Colonel Commanding tries to force the carabiniers to give way. He holds a parade of the regiment on the training-ground that you see here, and orders them to fire at the targets. Eighty-five carabiniers refuse to fire. They are court-martialled, and condemned to ten years' imprisonment. On the morning of the 9th of May the whole garrison of Meerut witnesses the degradation of the mutineers. There are two native regiments there. The Indians, their eyes flashing with anger, see the fettering of the mutineers. During an impressive silence the blacksmiths rivet the chains of the condemned. Suddenly, the mutineers shout out—insulting their judges, and appealing to the Indian soldiers for help. . . . Nobody moves. But hate grows in the hearts of the silent Indians standing still, at attention. The ceremony finishes. The eighty-five convicts are taken to prison. The officers return to their bungalows. They all breathe more freely, all think that the danger is warded off and that the lesson has been driven home.

"The next day, Sunday, the 10th of May, 1857, whilst the wives and children of the officers are at

church, Lieutenant Mackenzie on leaving his house sees an English sergeant-major running and hears him cry:

"'Sir, mutiny has broken out! . . . The carabiniers are going to massacre us. . . .'

"A cloud of dust advances along the road. The situation grows worse, minute by minute. Lieutenant Mackenzie sets out on horseback to try to parley with the mutineers. . . . He is surrounded, he thrusts to the right, he slashes to the left, and is only saved by the arrival of a friend, another officer in the regiment. The news becomes more and more serious. The mutineers have forced the doors of the prison and set the eighty-five prisoners free. They pour into the native quarters of the village, and have no difficulty in stimulating the Anglophobia of the inhabitants. The butchers arm themselves with knives and lead on the civil population, who are still hesitating. The crowd is now giving vent to its fury and, mad with rage, is ready to massacre everybody.

"You have seen those kind of palanquins, half a century old, jolting along without any springs, that have curtains, behind which Indian women hide when they travel by road? The crowd seizes one of these vehicles. Hands pull open the curtains. A white woman is hidden there. She tries to escape. She is pierced by sabre-thrusts through the curtains. It was Mrs. Courtenay, wife of the proprietor of the inn which is now the Empress Hotel. And now, under cover of the dusk, the rioters begin to set fire to the houses. The women who were leaving the church have tried to get back to their villas. But most of them are on fire. In one of them

Mrs. Craigie, her husband, Miss Mackenzie and her brother are closely besieged. Before being completely surrounded, they run and take refuge in the little Hindu chapel and the siege continues, concerning which you have seen a commemorative tablet. The insurgents do not dare to set fire to the temple. They are awaiting their opportunity to kill the five besieged. In the meantime they go and assassinate the farrier of the regiment in his bungalow. But, unfortunately, his wife is in bed suffering from smallpox. She gets up. The rioters hesitate to stab her or even to touch her for fear of catching the complaint. So they throw burning torches at her and she is burnt alive. Another English officer, chased by the mob, is literally cut in pieces by the butchers and loafers in the bazaars. The granddaughter of a non-commissioned officer receives a cut on the head from a sabre which splits her like an almond.

" The five who are besieged succeed at last, towards dawn, in gaining the camp of the English troops, whilst the army of mutineers marches towards Delhi. The first act of the great mutiny is over. You will read in histories what happened afterwards."

I am introduced at Meerut to the only survivor of the drama. She is a Mrs. Marshall, a poor old lady aged ninety-two years. She is reclining upon a long chair in her great-nephew's bungalow, and she is almost stone deaf. I asked her, my mouth close to her ear, if she remembered the 10th of May, 1857. She looked at me, first without understanding, then her mind went back. In the end Mrs. Marshall shook her head.

"Ah . . . yes . . . Sunday! . . . I had gone to church with the other women. . . . As we came out, we saw the devils running. . . . Several Tommies were killed. It was my *chokadar* [Hindu servant] who saved me from the devils. . . ."

The effort of the poor woman tired her. She ended up simply, as with a trembling hand she pulled her shawl around her:

"I was afraid."

And the light, which for a few seconds had lit up her eyes, faded. Forgetfulness is Doctor Time's best medicine. Mrs. Marshall has almost completely forgotten the terrible hours of 1857 and, if the modest commemorative tablets on the walls of the bungalows did not recall the tragedy of Meerut, who would think now of the treacherous Sepoys, between two chukkas of polo or two dances at the Wheler Club?

As we reached my friend's bungalow, the moon was up, a silver plaque hanging in a rose-pink sky. Perfect peace reigned over the Meerut Cantonment. A Tommy passed, whistling a jazz tune. A black buffalo, lying at the foot of a tree, was chewing, if not recollections, at any rate dry leaves. A handsome Indian Lancer, belonging to the escort of the General Commanding the Division, passed by on horseback, and seeing two white faces, sat up erect, according to habit.

I asked my friend:

"And if a fresh mutiny of the Sepoys broke out this evening?"

He looked at me:

"You are joking! The days of the Great Mutiny are past. A revolt of the Indian troops is impos-

sible, because the divisions are formed now of regiments of different races. For example, Gurkhas are alongside Sikhs, and Mohammedans with Hindus. If one of them mutinied the others would come to the aid of the British troops to keep order. Because, as you know, the greatest delight of a Pathan Mohammedan is to cut the throat of an Indian who is not a Mohammedan. The riots in Bombay, in February (1929), revealed what these people are able to do when fanaticism gets hold of them. . . . Fifty killed and a hundred and fifty wounded every day, not counting the secreted victims. Had it not been for the intervention of the police and the British troops the town would have been given up to fire and bloodshed for several days. . . . No, indeed, the re-enactment of the events of 1857 is not possible. That is why a country—I do not say a nation, because India is not a nation—peopled by 320 million men, a country whose civilization has existed for four thousand years, and among whom are certain individuals extremely cultured, submits to a small nation of 46 million men, living more than six thousand miles away."

My friend was right. When the natives attempted to revolt at Amritsar in 1919, an English General mowed them down with machine-guns. At the time, tender-hearted people grieved in London and elsewhere. The military action was criticized. General Dyer has been reproached for this massacre. But the points of view were different. The English comfortably installed at home in the Motherland, blamed him in the name of humanity, but the English living in the bungalows alongside the natives, approved in the name of safety.

I spoke one day about the Massacre of Amritsar to a high official, who said to me:

"It was a very regrettable incident. But when one governs an Empire it is necessary sometimes to show force; if not, one must pack up one's trunks and say politely to the insurgents: 'I beg you, take my place!"

However that may be, on this day order reigns in India. Meerut is calm. And while we walk, my friend and I, in the soft rose light of the dying day, I see not far from a tablet commemorating 1857, the fair-headed baby of an officer playing in the middle of the grass plot. On the road an old Hindu was squatting, looking at the stars, but seeing them not.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GUARDIANS OF THE GASOMETER

ONE should always go to the sittings of Parliament in the country one visits. They are highly instructive. When a foreigner sees a French deputy offer a casserole to a War Minister, when he listens to a concert of hunting horns executed by members of the Reichsrat, when he hears English Members of Parliament, ordinarily so grave, call out "Damned liar," when he witnesses a fusillade in a Balkan Parliament, he returns home with unbounded admiration and respect for universal suffrage.

At Delhi, I became acquainted with the Legislative Assemblies. The Indian Parliament is composed of two Chambers: the Chamber of State, a sort of House of Lords, which is composed of 60 members, of whom 27 are nominated and 33 elected; the Legislative Assembly, which consists of 144 members, of whom 103 are elected, 26 appointed on behalf of the Government and 15 nominated, without, however, belonging to the Administration.

The appearance of the Assembly is picturesque, for one finds, fraternizing in the same parliamentary gathering, red tarbooshes, magnificent Rajput pugarees, white turbans, little black or light-coloured skull-caps and the bare heads of the English representatives. The members of the Assembly meet at New Delhi, in the recently built white palace, flat and round, in the shape of a tart, a circus or an opera hat. The humorists of the neighbourhood have given it a very suitable nickname. They call it "the Gasometer."

The debating chamber is semi-circular. The Indian representatives sit on the left, the English on the right. The Speaker, or President, wears a wig as in the House of Commons, and possesses an authority which our Speaker would envy. When a member, English or Indian, rises from his seat to go out of the House, he bows to the Speaker; when he re-enters he again salutes the Speaker before he sits down. The English language is naturally *de rigueur*; if not, the meetings would resemble meetings at the Tower of Babel.

The eloquence of certain Indian members is remarkable. They even show at times a keen sense of humour. During a debate over a tax of 1 rupee 4 annas, which the Government proposed to levy upon salt, I heard many Indian orators protest formally against it, and ask the financial representative of the Government whether or not the Legislative Assembly was there to countersign, with its eyes shut, the ukases of His Excellency the Viceroy.

Mr. Munshi then spoke and said:

"Gentlemen, I will tell you a little story on this subject. Once upon a time, a high British official was travelling aboard a liner on its way to India. He asked an American lady, whom he met on the journey, if she intended to visit Delhi. The lady said, 'Yes.'

"Then he added: 'Above all, be sure you go to see the "monkeys' cage."'

"'Ah! Have you a fine collection of monkeys there?' asked the American lady, growing interested.

"'Oh, yes,' replied the Englishman. . . . 'It is the Legislative Assembly.'"

Needless to add that the Indian's story was icily received in the House, and was followed by "Oh!" from the scandalized English members.

Then the Indian murmured:

"Can you deny that you have all spoken of this House more or less as if it were a monkeys' cage?"

From the right cries of "No" rattled out. The Speaker called the House to order, and the debate continued in perfect tranquillity, while, above the heads of the legislators, a dozen ventilators with their enormous white aeroplane propellers, whizzed round in silence, and seemed to clear the hot air of useless words.

While Messrs. Srinewas Ayenger, Munshi and other ardent defenders of the rights of the Hindu Parliament were accusing, with vehemence, the Governor-General of cheapening the prerogatives of the Legislative Assembly, the Finance Member, that is to say the Viceroy's quasi-Minister of Finance, listened with superb indifference to these attacks of outraged political rectitude. He ignored this torrent of abuse let loose, as he leant back comfortably in the corner of his seat, on the right of the Speaker. He was just like a blasé husband, who knows that, after having heard the recriminations of his wife, he will none the less have the last word. Because the Legislative Assembly at Delhi votes many resolutions. Sometimes the Government's procedure is in keeping with these motions. But it is only by a happy chance!

And now, dear Mr. Ayenger, I should like to draw your attention to a little phrase that slipped into your discourse and attracted my notice:

" We are not going to be slaves for ever! "

Let me first tell you that we Europeans, living under the same parliamentary regime, are too blasé as regards the ways of the House to take seriously phrases which seem like threats, or solemn warnings, but which are, in fact, only figures of speech.

The normal man says: " We are not satisfied."

The same man, when he is in the parliamentary arena, says: " We are living under the most atrocious of tyrannies! "

The politician's vocabulary is like the prices of a second-hand dealer. One has to take off 75 per cent. to get at the real value. But to return to your declaration, dear Mr. Ayenger, you speak of a slavery which must not last for ever. To what slavery exactly do you allude?

Do you wish to insinuate, by chance, that the inhabitants of India are slaves of England, symbolized by King George V, Emperor of India, who himself is represented by the Viceroy? Truly and honestly, do you think you are tyrannized over by His Majesty's Governors? Do you wish to make us believe, we European observers who come to India without prejudice, without any preference either for England or the Indians, do you want seriously to persuade us that you are tired of being slaves?

I repeat, Mr. Ayenger, are you slaves of England, who for seventy-five years has been increasing your railways and irrigation-canals, limiting the disastrous consequences of famines and the dramatic holocaust of epidemics, fostering as far as possible

hygienic ideas, and assuring peace between innumerable Indian races? Are you the slaves of this singular tyrant who, in order to ensure the success of his business, pays his officials well, tries to ameliorate the condition of the community? Or are you the slaves of your own fanaticism?

I sympathize with you, when you and your friends stigmatize Miss Mayo, who only reveals to the world the blemishes of modern India, when, in contrast to these blemishes, there are some very beautiful and noble things to write about; but to be quite honest, one must admit that a certain number of the facts stated in her book, which have shocked you, are true. Would your compatriot, Mr. Ranga Iyer, dare to deny that accouchements in the villages are an outrage on hygiene, and that intolerable torture is inflicted on unfortunate young Indian mothers? That the fanaticism of the faithful, who wash in the muddy and contaminated waters of the Ganges before they drink mouthfuls from it in order to gain Paradise, is a practice worthy of the first centuries of our era? That the purdah and the zenana are out-of-date institutions, incompatible with the education of your women, which, as a matter of fact, is practically zero?

And so, I ask you again, are you not rather slaves of the past, which hangs like a lump of lead round the necks of your compatriots? Of the religious fanaticism that is not open to reason, to common sense, to the benefits of that Western science which certain of your apostles pretend to despise?

Mr. Gandhi, perfectly honest in his disinterestedness, asks you to burn in the public squares the fabrics made by European operatives; but he does

not burn European science, symbolized by the eminent doctor to whom he went when he was obliged to be operated upon for appendicitis!

I assure you, if there is any slavery you should not attribute it to the whites who have tried to govern you, but to the zeal of a religion which oppresses 300 millions of unfortunate and illiterate people. Be assured, I am the first to admire your holy books and the philosophical teachings of the *Upanishads*, which constitute the pith of your spiritual tradition. When your ancestors, three thousand years ago, outlined the amazing theory of the Self-Eternal and Universal and the identity of the Individual with the great Whole, they simply anticipated the most modern and perhaps the likeliest of our scientific theories: that of the unity of the substance of the world and of the reduction of all phenomena to the *danse macabre* of the electrons. Unfortunately, your magnificent religion, like all others, by the way, has been exploited by a caste of official translators of the divine thought—the Brahmins.

All the prophets, all the Messiahs have, unfortunately, their greedy commercial travellers, who arrogate to themselves the exclusive right to make the exegesis of their teaching in order to terrorize the faithful in the name of the absent divinity; in fact, to exploit their credulity or their generosity to their own personal profit. It is a far cry from the profound thoughts of Baghavad Gita to the image-worship of the wretched Hindu who prostrates himself before a Dourga horrible and threatening, or of a poor woman of the ryot who hangs a garland of flowers on the *lingam* in a niche to Siva. You are astonished

that certain writers leave India shocked at the rites that they have seen, and that an American author speaks of your religion as a "cloak for depravity." But imagine a man from the West who has read your sacred books, who comes to regard them with the respect that is due to the authors of these admirable texts, and who, a little later on, after having witnessed the decapitation of goats in front of the temples of Kali, sees poor fanatics rush to redden their hands with the blood of the immolated creatures.

I pray you, Mr. Legislator, do not try to hoodwink us. If your people are enslaved by anyone or anything, it is, first of all, by the polychrome idols that are no better than the wooden gods of the Polynesian savages; by those shapeless stones painted red which symbolize some demon, standing by the roadsides to strike terror into the hearts of the unhappy believers. Your two great men, Gandhi and Tagore, are, moreover, the very first to stigmatize this degrading conception of the Divinity.

Your people are, above everything, the slaves of puerile superstitions, which are much more dangerous, believe me, than the barrages built by English engineers to fertilize your provinces. When you have eliminated them, then India, having attained the age of reason, will be able to throw into the sea the undesirable whites who make her pay dearly for their experience, and she will govern herself with every chance of success.

I have come to India of my own free will and not with any idea of propaganda. I assure you, Mr. Legislator, that I do not come to put up a defence for Great Britain, who, by the way, is quite

capable of defending herself, who has not bought my pen, and who, in consequence, has imposed upon me no debt of secret gratitude! But if I were a citizen of a country where filth, ignorance and religious zeal were the causes of epidemics which kill, every year, millions of individuals; of a country where men are bestial enough to produce children like machines, without thinking, for an instant, of the practical means of nourishing them, I should not ask anything better than to be, not the slave, but under the rule of a civilized race who vaccinates me against plague and cholera, who brings water near my village, and who assures peace and social order all around me. And when the Pathans and my brother Hindus kill one another on account of some mad rumours, I should be pleased to see the English soldiers—those tyrants!—restore calm, stop the flow of blood and bring reason to all the hot-heads.

You naturally will reply to me:

"But look at the result of the British occupation. . . . Railways, canals, telegraphs, hospitals; yes. But have they improved the existence of the Hindu peasants who, according to universal opinion, belong to the most unfortunate proletariat in the whole world? Have they taught them, educated them, fed them any better? Their misery, does it not condemn England?"

Then I will put to you the simple question: "And if India had remained independent, had continued to live as in the time of Aurangzeb, would she have changed the lot of 300 millions of peasants? Would she herself have fought against the time-honoured routine of her agriculturists, who have not changed

their methods for two thousand years? The cause of their misery lies, not at England's door, but at your own!

Permit me then to smile when anyone suggests this reproach with regard to England. It is normal, it is human to saddle upon a foreign nation, who by right of conquest occupies a country, all sorts of grievances. Imagine India invaded in the middle of the nineteenth century and conquered by a Moslem Sultan who had installed himself at Delhi instead of the Viceroy. We should hear the lamentations of the Indians who were not Mohammedans, who would call all Europe to witness their distress, and would assert that the misery of the ryots in their mud huts was due to the bad government of the sons of the Prophet.

You complain bitterly that the Legislative Assembly at Delhi is a ridiculous Parliament, where your resolutions often remain ineffective. I feel sure that some of your friends, above all in Calcutta, dream of a Parliament like that of London or Paris, or a Parliament whose votes might have the effect of dismissing the Viceroy. In short, you would like to have the prerogatives of a legislative body which represents universal suffrage. . . . Do you think seriously about it? Does not the application of universal suffrage to India seem to you, to say the least of it, a little premature, in an enormous country where 90 per cent. of the men and 97 per cent. of the women are totally illiterate?

I am afraid, Mr. M.P., you are too advanced for your day, although it may be pleasant to see cultured

Indians at the head of a movement which *much later* will bring about the total emancipation of Hindustan. If I were a Brahmin or a Kshatrya, I should deplore, as you do, the English tutelage, in spite of the material advantages that it has brought me. But as for changing the States of India into a Federal Republic like that of the United States with a Congress at a Washington-Delhi . . . we will talk about that when goats are left to graze in peace, instead of being decapitated in honour of a terrible goddess who wears their dead heads as a kind of necklace. And above all, when the five hundred and sixty maharajahs and ruling princes are ready to accept, like simple governors of provinces, the decrees and laws imposed on Their Highnesses by a Parliament of irresponsible politicians.

CHAPTER XX

THE COUNCIL OF THE BRAHMINS

To meditate, in this century of speed, is a luxury. Since modern life resembles a merry-go-round with each of us riding a wooden horse, it is necessary to make an effort in order to detach oneself from the rapid gyration of the hours, to descend, to rest and shut one's eyes.

After one of these descents from the horse, I asked myself one day if it would ever be possible to live over again, in these days, the life of our ancestors of 1429. I felt sure that I realized this possibility in India.

The feudal system? Why, it is reconstructed for us Europeans, intoxicated with the idea of equality, in the independent States of the Indian princes. The maharajah seems to be separated even farther from the untouchables than the Duke of Brittany was from his serfs.

The strictness of castes in the days of good King Henry was less than that which exists to-day between Sudras and Kshatryas. The plebeian was able to raise himself in the social scale, but a Hindu of inferior caste is born accursed, will die accursed, without pardon, until many successive lives have permitted him to expiate the sins of days gone by.

This division of Hindu society into castes rests upon religious beliefs so deeply rooted in the hearts of men that one asks oneself whether politicians who talk of democracy in India are not humorists or hoaxers.

One day a merchant from Agra, that is to say

a man who was not of a high caste, since he did commercial business, said to me:

"Ah! you are very fortunate in Europe. . . . You know nothing of castes!"

The sadness of this good tradesman having stirred me, I replied:

"Do you imagine, because you have vaguely heard tell of democracy in the West and of a beautiful motto which says 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' that we have no castes? Although our castes may be sanctioned neither by religion nor by the doctrine of Karma, they nevertheless exist. And the most extraordinary thing is that our castes are in flagrant contravention of the teaching of Jesus Christ, who preached fraternity among men."

"But, then, if your religion does not force it upon you, why do you observe this classification?"

"It is the result of an unwritten religion, a religion without a Messiah or an apostle, which calls itself snobbery."

"You have no reason to follow a religion which is not codified by a prophet!"

"Pardon. It is codified by the greatest tyranny of all—public opinion. . . . Do you think there are no castes in England, France and Germany? What a mistake! It is no more possible to see Brahmins eating in company with a Sudra than it is possible to imagine, in Park Lane, a society dinner-party with a plumber at the table. You can take my word for it, when I say that one never meets an engine-driver lunching with a Cabinet Minister. Castes with us civilised Westerners are as strictly divided as yours. Love alone, for as the song says,

'Love knows no Law,' excuses, all over the world, unions between different castes. They admit to their bedrooms people that they do not ordinarily introduce into the drawing-room. The amorous nobleman marries a chorus girl. The rich financier marries his typist. The amorous millionairess marries a handsome little plebeian. But these barriers break down only under the empire of passion.

"You have also examples in the history of India under Moslem rule. Your Mogul Emperor Jahangir married Nur Jahan, a little Persian girl who had been abandoned on the main-road and picked up by a good-hearted merchant. The beautiful foundling became Empress of India, by the will of Jahangir, just as the daughter of a Tooting housewife can become a peeress of the United Kingdom. But when Eros is not a party to the affair, the strictness of caste holds its rights. The European peasant who cultivates the land, never frequents the drawing-room of the rich middle-class. He may work his 120 acres with an American machine, churn his milk with an electric churn, use the most modern inventions, but he will never play bridge with his Lord of the Manor. We have our castes, which ignore, or are jealous of, each other. The diplomat has a polite contempt for commerce. The rich manufacturer is condescending to the little civil servant. The artist looks upon them all as Philistines. The Faubourg St. Germain, the old aristocracy, laughs at the Papal nobility. The rich, whatever their caste may be, have pity for the poor but fear the proletariat, which envies them and hates them, but never approaches them.

"All these people, equal in the eyes of the Law, if not before the judge, armed with the same voting papers, are terribly unequal in reality. What? You pity the lot of your pariahs and your untouchables? . . . But we also have our untouchables: they are the coal-heavers, all black, and the stone-masons, all white."

. . . . .

Everybody knows the origin of castes. It is rather picturesque. Brahma, the creator of humanity, did not form man from a lump of earth, nor Eve from Adam's rib. Brahma created four classes of human beings by extracting them from four different parts of his body. Opening his mouth, he spat out the first Brahmin; from his arms, he made soldiers; from his thighs, he drew out the artisans, and from his feet, he made the lowest and basest castes. So the Hindu imagination is more fertile than the Greek fantasy, which made only one goddess out of the brain of Zeus.

One can therefore compare Hindu society to a hive of bees of at least two thousand different cells (because the four initial castes are subdivided into innumerable sub-castes) with an absolute prohibition to pass from one cell to another.

Our European castes are the result of social customs: they are due to a sort of civil or social hierarchy, accepted and silently observed, while the Hindu castes are congenital phenomena, if one may say so, just as one may be born an albino or tubercular.

The intelligent Western proletarian can escape from his class and figure later among the important

bourgeois. The sudra or ryot (peasant), however intelligent, can never rise out of his caste, because he does not count among the " reborn."

It is only fair to recognize that this shutting up of Indian society into water-tight compartments shocks progressive men. There are in India some generous-hearted people who protest against this fatal classification. I had proof of this when I attended one day, in Wellington Square, in Calcutta, a conference of the Bangiya Hindu Somaj Sammelan, under the presidency of Mr. Pramatha Nath Tarkabhusan.

This Hindu society in Bengal is inspired by the best intentions. In Europe, one would even say of them that they were very advanced.

In the course of the meeting certain delegates, who evidently feared nothing and tried to march in the extreme vanguard of progress, submitted to the vote of the congress an astonishing proposition which did not aim at anything short of *making all Hindus Brahmins*! Carried away by their thirst for emancipation, these gentlemen tried to decree that in future there should be nothing but generals in the Hindu civilian army. Fancy a humorous demagogue demanding that in future all French citizens should be dukes or all British subjects lords!

Then one of the most edifying incidents took place. The president of the meeting who, I suppose, was a Brahmin, and a Brahmin of very high caste, thought it quite ridiculous suddenly to create 320 million Brahmins in India. He certainly favoured reforms, but the thought that the sweeper who executes his humble duties behind his house, the *bisti* who waters his flowers, or the *dhobi* who

washes his clothes, would be able suddenly to be admitted into the privileged caste of Brahmins, the thought made him jump out of his presidential seat. And in spite of the friendly protests of the members of the congress, he retired. Another president had to be elected, Mr. Swami Jnanananda, who voted for a realization, not of the miracle of loaves and fishes, but of a spontaneous generation of Brahmins.

Carried away by their enthusiasm, the Bengalis assembled in Wellington Square expressed further suggestions: the building of a universal Hindu temple for the unification of the cult; compulsory elementary education; encouragement of sports among young Hindus, such as fencing and sword exercise, to enable them to defend themselves against their enemies . . . (which enemies—the English or the Mohammedans?); the protection of their womenkind and their development of physical culture to enable them also to defend themselves; the abolition of premature marriages; the protection of cows; the interdiction of any Hindu from selling his cattle to the butcher and the boycotting of European cotton goods. And then, to crown this tower of good intentions, the members of the congress put forward an excellent principle: namely, that men and women are equal in the body social, and that the duty of their society would be, in the future, to claim the same rights for the two sexes.

Carried away by enthusiasm for the broadminded ideas expressed during this meeting, I expressed my delight to numerous Hindus that I met soon afterwards. Some shook their heads and said to me:

"It is very good. . . . One cannot help approving

of the propagation of these doctrines, but alas! one must not look for too rapid an evolution."

Others smiled in a kindly manner and exclaimed:

" Suppress the castes? . . . We shall have no more castes in India when tigers no longer have stripes on their skins! "

. . . . . .

But, in spite of the sarcasm of the sceptics, European civilization introduced into India is slowly, very slowly, undermining the institution of castes. One notes, occasionally, marriages between individuals of different castes—a thing which would never have been allowed fifty years ago. Enforced widowhood is no longer so rigorously insisted upon, as certain men consent to marry widows, the very widows who, before the edict of Lord Bentinck, were forced to die upon the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. In the Parliament at Delhi, members of different castes sit side by side.

These are symptoms of a slow revolution. One must applaud the wisdom of this tardiness. For the dictator who thought of suppressing with one stroke of the pen the castes of India, who suspended the operations of the Panchayat, or the Council of Castes, formed to administer over and judge members of the same caste, would bring so much trouble on the social system that he would shatter it completely.

Besides, I believe in the wisdom of the old pundit who said to me one day:

" Castes have their good points . . . provided that

the walls which separate them are not too high, and one can learn how to scale them."

"In how long?"

The old philosopher shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Oh! . . . in one or two centuries."

CHAPTER XXI

AFFIANCED AT NINE YEARS OLD

THE marriage customs of the Hindus have often been discussed. When one touches upon this subject with a cultivated and progressive Hindu, who is slightly ashamed at heart of the black spots on his country, he remarks with some heat:

"Oh! Don't believe what American journalists or English writers, eager for scandal, trump up on the subject of marriage in India. Very youthful unions are becoming more and more rare."

I doubt whether the optimism of these well-intentioned Hindus corresponds with facts. It is only fair to say that there is a strong and praiseworthy tendency to increase the age of legal marriage. But premature marriages are so deeply rooted in the minds of Hindus, that a rapid evolution is not at all possible.

Besides, young girls in India grow to maturity much sooner than in Europe, and it is natural that they should marry earlier. But strange to say, it appears that the ancient civilization of the Hindu, which was very advanced for its period, gave, in early days, many liberties and rights to women. The sacred books speak of a certain ceremony: the *Swayamvara*, which was nothing less than the choice of a husband by the woman. In the *Ramayana* it is the hero who is chosen by the beautiful Sita. Women lost their supremacy with the Moslem conquest, which brought with it the institution of the purdah, which has outlived the hegemony of the sons of the Prophet.

One can safely affirm, in every case, that the cham-

pions of precocious marriages are the Brahmins. This marriage is a concerto played in three movements, if one may say so:

Andante.—The young girl, nine or ten years old, is married at her parents' house, in the presence of her family and her friends, to a young man of thirteen or fourteen years. Prayers from the *Vedas* are read as the two little people listen, holding each other's hands. The ceremony ended, the husband returns, very wisely, to his parents' house.

Allegro.—One or two years pass. A new ceremony, which is called "the entry of the wife into her husband's house." The little wife goes under her husband's roof for the first time; but she does not occupy his bedroom; she goes away again, very wisely, to her parents' house.

Rondo Capricioso.—The little wife, who is not yet really married, comes to maturity. Then the third ceremony takes place, and this time her family abandons her to her fate in the marital house. *Pizzicati.* Final chord.

These complicated rites are observed, above all, by representatives of the highest caste. Needless to say that the Sudras, and other humble members of the social hierarchy, marry in a much more simple manner, and young widows now have a chance of finding a husband among the men belonging to these low castes.

It is amusing to read in the Indian Press the matrimonial advertisement column. This always offers instructive reading, and to the foreigner gives examples of edifying morals.

Here is an advertisement taken from the *Hindustan Times*:

Wanted, a husband for a young girl from Gadim Agarwal, fourteen years of age, belonging to a well-to-do and respectable family. She has passed her elementary school examinations, can sew and cook. The question of caste would not be an obstacle, but an Arya Samajist would be preferred.

Note, in this announcement, the liberal-mindedness of the parents, who attach no great importance to the caste of the candidate. Thirty years ago respectable parents would never have consented to give their daughter to a man who belonged to an inferior caste.

Here is another advertisement, taken from the same paper:

An Aggarwala, thirty-six years of age, a Government engineer, earning 550 rupees a month, seeks another wife. His present wife, being childless, would consent to this second marriage. No objection to a young widow.

Although Hinduism authorizes polygamy to an unlimited degree (a Moslem is limited to four wives), here is a Hindu gentleman who does not mean to abuse the authorized licence of his religion. He notifies his future second wife that his first wife will not make a long face, and will accept, with a smile, the consequences of her childlessness.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PRISONERS' ELDORADO

I HAVE visited prisons all over the world. I have seen convicts dressed in striped pyjamas who are expiating their crimes behind prison bars in America, and Turkish jail-birds who, behind walls in Stamboul, await with resignation the last caress of the running noose. But I do not think I have visited so many jails as in India. The elementary politeness of the reigning princes is first to give a kindly welcome to European travellers, which is charming, and then to let them see over the prison in their capital, which is always instructive.

I visited ten. Amongst the most interesting, I will mention first the prison at Bikaner. The native city is very dirty, as is the case with all the cities in India. But the prison is so clean that it would make a Dutch cook jealous. The prisoners go about in white smocks, and work to defray part of the expense of their maintenance. At Bikaner, they make aerated water; the manufacture of bottles of soda-water is especially cleanly, which is not always the case in factories conducted by reputable people. They also make remarkable carpets, *kaddar*—a cotton fabric—and rugs. A little detail, which is important: I have never seen in the world anything cleaner, more fresh and, I might almost say, more attractive, than the prison's lavatory building. I felt ashamed as I thought of our barracks, and to come into the heart of the Rajputana desert to receive such a lesson in cleanliness; and that within walls not reserved to the best society of the country. After Bikaner, the

prison which astonished me most was that of the State of Patiala. The Maharajah of Patiala, the reigning prince, with modern ideas, Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes at Delhi, a generous ruler, always thoughtful for the progress of his Sikh subjects, has made the State prison an object-lesson for moralists.

One of his ministers came one day to take me to the Central Prison. I accepted without enthusiasm; I was a little blasé of this kind of entertainment. The car stopped in the country, about a mile and a quarter from Patiala, in front of a wall, behind which trees grew, showing their thick foliage. I thought that it was a park, or a private estate. The minister said to me:

"This is the prison."

A porter opened the gate. The governor introduced himself, and the visit began. We passed through a long shady avenue, with flowers, which led to a central tower, rather like a lighthouse. I asked:

"Are we in the governor's private garden? Where does the prison begin?"

"You are in it."

Amazed I looked round: right and left were fields of wheat and barley in full growth, vegetables watered by clever irrigation, clumps of green trees. This was not a prison, but an immense farm, made attractive by cultivation and cool shade.

"This central tower," said the governor, "is an observatory, which enables the look-out, whom you see up there, to keep his eye on the prisoners. The prison, enclosed by high walls, is fifty acres in extent. This man looks after thirteen hundred prisoners."

"One jailer for thirteen hundred prisoners? You do not overtax your penitentiary administration."

"No. Because other jailers are chosen from among the prisoners."

"Your inmates act as warders to each other?"

"Yes. A man condemned to five years' imprisonment, for example, behaves well for a year. If he belongs to a well-to-do family, they go bail for the honesty of the prisoner-warder. If he takes advantage of his promotion to escape when he is on duty guarding the squads of prisoners at work outside the prison, his family, who is responsible for him, will have their bail estreated, not to mention the vigorous punishment that awaits the captured fugitive."

After visiting the cultivated land and shrubberies, where contented prisoners work in the fields, we went into the workrooms, where other prisoners were weaving carpets under the supervision of an attentive overseer about forty years of age. He was wearing on his white smock, like all the prisoners, a sort of wooden disk, on which I read his registered number and this inscription:

20 Y.,

which signified that he was condemned to twenty years' imprisonment. He had already served eleven. He was a model prisoner (who had formerly killed his best friend with blows from a club), for whom the governor had nothing but praise.

"He makes his fellow-prisoners work so well that we trust the awkward ones to him, those, for example, whom you see now weaving *kaddar,* whose ankles are chained with iron."

"You encourage good conduct by remission of the sentence?"

" Yes, the good-conduct prisoners get a remission of two or three days a month."

It was four o'clock. The evening meal was being served. I visited the kitchen, where other prisoners were cooking *chupatis* and vegetable soup. A thousand men, grouped in sections, in alignment like soldiers on parade, were awaiting the distribution of their rations.

" Now come and see the farm," the governor suggested.

We went into a large court-yard, where splendid white cows were feeding on fresh green grass, and prisoners were milking them. Marie Antoinette, at the Petit-Trianon, would have been delighted to play at farming with these pretty little cows with their clean white hides.

As I looked at this charming scene, I thought of the happy life of these crooks, men who had assaulted women, highway robbers, optimistic murderers, who were serving their sentences under a radiant sky behind the walls of an idyllic prison, on a farm where the cows seemed to have just come from the perfumer or a beauty parlour. I could hardly believe these happy rascals had committed crimes against society, and if I had not seen two or three " cowmen " labelled " 8 years " or " 15 years " and wearing chains and fetters, I should have thought I was in a holiday camp or a school for gentlemen farmers.

" Really," I said to the governor, " your prison is a regular Eden. And if ever I want to assassinate anybody, you may be sure I shall give the preference to the State of Patiala, so as to be imprisoned here."

As I left this prison, I called to mind the eternal controversy between the partisans of a rigorous prison

life, with severe and well-merited punishment of criminals, and advocates of the prison parlour, where one tries to restore notions of rectitude to misguided consciences. The problem is difficult to solve. If the chastisement is too light, what an encouragement to future delinquents! If the punishment is too severe, don't we risk turning occasional wrongdoers into habitual criminals?

I turned to the minister and said:

"In an ideal community there would be no need of prisons."

"Undoubtedly," he replied. . . . "But do you think an ideal community would be composed of human beings?"

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE SHADOW OF THE ZENANA

JAIPUR, or Jeypore, dates only from the beginning of the eighteenth century. The maharajahs before that time had for their residence the Amber Palace. I asked a friend to come with me to see it.

After nearly seven miles along a road edged with cacti and little shrines, about the size of dog-kennels, some sheltering a *lingam*, others a Ganesh, rudely carved, we reached a pass between two barren mountains, closed in by a gate let into a sort of Wall of China, which followed the irregularities of the ground.

The pass widens little by little, and suddenly, on a plateau, the Amber Palace appears, immense in its isolation, like the Escurial of some neurasthenic Mogul. We mount an elephant, and begin the ascent. Elephants, as everyone knows, love, like dromedaries, to jolt the people they carry. But the great jolt of the elephant has something majestic about it, something formal, something deliberate, whilst the little jolt of the dromedary has an offhand and spasmodic touch about it. Upon a dromedary, sitting astride, one involuntarily imitates the walk of a goose; whereas, on an elephant, sitting side-saddle with a bar in front, like a baby on a high chair, one moves to the movement of the pachyderm with a perpetual *danse du ventre*.

The assistant mahout helps us down by means of a ladder. Here we are at last in the old deserted palace, which shelters a section of Jaipur National Guards, old soldiers with white beards, dressed in patched uniforms and armed with needle-guns.

Among the curiosities of the Amber Palace are the small rooms decorated with a thousand convex mirrors framed in lead, surrounded by coloured plaster-work of decorative design under cupolas in Moresque style. These mirrors, dull with age, seem to look at you wearily, with the tired eyes of a thousand phantoms, aroused from their meditation by the curiosity of intruders.

I was much more interested in the zenana than in the fantasies of the mirror-makers of the period. To penetrate into the harem of the ancient maharajah, one has to go through inner court-yards ornamented with empty pools, to ascend sloping spiral passages, to traverse immense galleries shut in by high walls pierced here and there with ventilation holes. What a frightful prison! How unenviable was the lot of the three or four hundred women who all their lives were condemned to gaze at the walls of this fortress-palace hidden away in this desolate site, surrounded by wild beasts and watched over by guardians armed with yataghans! The rooms of these happy elect had an opening like that of a beehive with oblique slits in the stone, so that the recluse could see the outside world without ever being polluted by the gaze of man. Our convicts to-day would appeal to the League of the Rights of Man if they were made to purge their crimes in this zenana. Not to mention a trap through which the prince made the women who had ceased to please him disappear.

When I reached the turret which crowned this paradise, and which allowed the most favoured one to see the surrounding mountains, the sun had already set. A blue-grey haze hung over the pass, and Mars was shining, heralding the coming stars. I thought

of the beautiful Rajput women, taken from their native desert, who, in this same place, had sighed alone or sung to the constellations their sorrowful dirges.

In a little colonnaded court, an octagonal basin showed its mossy edge and its bed of dusty stone. Centuries of neglect had spread decay over this tiny garden, where, in days gone by, lemon flowers had perfumed the *far niente* of those indolent beauties. I saw them reclining near the clear water, passing the time away like children, watching the evolutions of a tame white pigeon. I pictured, in my mind, their idle, aimless, animal life, like caged love-creatures condemned to smile and be happy, to hide their jealousy, and to submit to the iron discipline with a velvet glove, which reigned in the zenanas; if not, to disappear one beautiful evening, pearly-grey like this one, to disappear swallowed up by the fatal trap . . . silent death, unknown of men; death spoken of in low voices by other wives, which perhaps added a zest to their love-making.

But were they really unhappy? This love of liberty, isn't it a curse of the twentieth century which, with its craze for speed, warps our judgment when we try to reincarnate ourselves in the bodies of the contemporaries of Kings Akbar and Jahangir?

The *Upanishad*s talk of two birds perched on the same branch. One is eating. The other watches it eat. The exegesis of the sacred writings has furnished this fable with many interpretations. Why, the bird which eats and does nothing more, is it not just simply the Oriental, whilst the bird which watches it eat and asks why it eats, is it not the reasoning Occidental? Our logic is a cage which revolves perpetually. And we, the pitiless logicians,

the slaves of the principle of causality, climb, like squirrels, the bars of this wheel. It turns for ever. But it leads us nowhere.

The wives of the maharajahs to-day live exactly as their predecessors did, under the regime of the zenana. They do not disappear through fatal traps, because the manners of the time are more merciful, and it is no longer customary to imitate that Moslem potentate who, if a woman annoyed him, had her hung up by one leg and split in two like a sheep in a slaughter-house. But when, by chance, they go out of their prison-like residence, they are shut up in carriages which resemble coffins on wheels. They only see the outside world through a close black grating, such as is used on a pantry window. Naturally, I do not refer to those few thoroughly emancipated Indian princes who marry Europeans, but to orthodox princes, bound by rules, slaves of tradition, who constitute the great majority.

Those women brought up like their mothers, submissive to the commands of an imperious religion, are often surprised at the activity, the eagerness for responsibility and the feverish restlessness of their Western sisters. They are astonished, and occasionally they laugh. I remember a Bengal lady among others, who, liberated from the zenana, laughingly compared cloistered Indian ladies with restless Europeans:

" Pebbles and humming-tops! "

Many women, more favoured than we poor vulgar males, have had access to the purdah. They assure us that these women, whose lot distresses us, are happy and contented. The future of India? Her social prosperity? The intellectual progress of her women? They do not care a rap about them.

An English lady, an ardent feminist, one day asked a lady dedicated to the zenana:

"But why don't you revolt? Twenty years ago we suffragettes broke shop windows with hammers!"

"We don't want to break anything. With the exception of a few enlightened or highbrow women, we prefer the zenana. If I wanted to do so, I could escape. My husband would allow me. But I prefer not to change."

"Why?"

"Tradition, madam."

The power of this tradition is so great that very modern Hindus, who show their wives in the West, shut them up as soon as they return to their own country. Public opinion is a monster which devours the best intentions.

The sun has set behind the mountain. With regret I leave the quarters of the three hundred women, and although I have not Ariadne's thread, I find my way out of this labyrinth without being stopped by mutes of the seraglio.

As we cross the esplanade of the palace, not far from the *corps de garde,* under a shadowy arch we notice a faint odour of blood recently spilt, and we find a large heap of sand which covers a pool of dried blood. A huge executioner's sabre is there standing up in a bucket. Every day, at dawn, a goat is beheaded according to a time-honoured rite; in this way the anger of the terrible gods is appeased.

Our elephant, which has been rocking itself without ceasing in the court-yard, lies down. He takes us along the ramparts slowly, and inflicts upon us a

second *danse du ventre*, aggravated by the fact that an elephant descending a slope imposes the pangs of arrested descent on his human cargo.

Night falls suddenly. As we arrive at a village spread over the side of the hill, we pass in front of a tumbledown temple. The priest on the terrace calls the faithful to prayer by beating a gong. Higher up, in the violet haze of the mountain, a flame burns before another temple, and a distant voice replies to the chant of the first priest. Then a third. We listen to this litany of three voices chanted by the invisible officiating priests, and we leave the unforgettable scene with regret.

Just as we get into the car, the chauffeur tells us that a native of the village has warned him of the presence of a tiger in the neighbourhood. I ask my friend whether his chauffeur has determined to give foreign travellers a little thrill at nightfall by throwing them into the claws of a prowling tiger. But my friend reproaches me for my scepticism and assures me:

"One sometimes comes across tigers ten or fifteen miles from Jaipur. . . . The Maharajah's shikaris know what they are about!"

Three miles farther on, at the side of the road, I catch sight of two phosphorescent eyes shining brightly. I touch my friend's arm. He looks and replies:

"That is only a young buffalo. . . . In the beam of the motor-lights their eyeballs have a sea-green lustre that is deceiving."

This tiger was only a cow. So much the worse. Another illusion which has vanished through the mango trees to become lost in the mountains.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TREASURES OF RAJPUTANA

ALL is rose-coloured in Bikaner. All is pink and white in Jaipur. Picture houses of Wedgwood, with white decorations on a pink ground, instead of white upon Wedgwood blue.

The old palace of the maharajahs, in the heart of the city, has magnificent gardens in Persian style, and a pool where sacred crocodiles weep for past pageants and durbars of long ago! Because, like the majority of other reigning princes, the young Maharajah of Jaipur, who studies at the college of Ajmer, has built a modern house outside the town.

I thought it only decent to go and offer my condolences to the neglected crocodiles, and for two rupees I bought some "high" meat to regale these poor saurians. Two old Hindus accompanied me on this sentimental pilgrimage. When we got near the edge of a huge deserted pool, four hundred yards long and nearly a quarter of a mile wide, the old Hindus said to me confidentially:

"They are asleep. . . . We must wake them. . . ."

With their hands to their mouths like horns, they emitted a strange noise something like the cries of a Valkyrie being rocked to sleep in her childhood by a Rajput nurse:

"Oua-ho! . . . Oua-oua-ho-hi-ho! . . ."

The crocodiles continued to sleep. Then the two old men, with their turbans undone, began to hurl imprecations rather more complicated. The worthy from Jaipur, who accompanied me, translated as follows: "Offspring of pigs! . . . Someone is going

to shake up your entrails!" Needless to add, that it was merely a figure of speech; the two good old men had no intention of maltreating the pale stomachs of the sacred crocodiles.

The effect, however, was magical. The crocodiles showed themselves above the water at the end of the pool: they were two grey objects, that I took, at first, for two logs of wood, adrift.

"There they are! . . ." exclaimed the two old fellows triumphantly.

Slowly the two derelicts approached. In order to stimulate them, the Hindus took off their old shoes and tied them to the end of a string. They threw them out at least ten yards from the bank, as a fisherman throws lumps of paste to attract the fish. The crocodiles hurried up. They put their feet in the mud and came out of the water. Fine monsters, over three yards long, with dazzling white teeth. One of them followed us with its mouth open, because we were too near him, but we very soon gave him a wide berth. They gulped down the putrid meat with one snap of their jaws, a sinister snap into the bargain, and half-closed their eyelids over their little dull eyes.

I left them with regret, sorry to abandon these revered crocodiles to their solitude. But I consoled myself by thinking that their skin would never be made into the bags with gold clasps which one sees in the "blue train," giving an air of wealth to beautiful but cold-hearted lady travellers.

. . . . .

Every maharajah keeps a herd of elephants; everyone knows that. And the fortunes of the maha-

rajahs allow them to spend twelve pounds a month on forage for each of their pachyderms.

At Jaipur the notabilities and the rich do not sport an eight-cylinder car and a chauffeur, but an elephant and a mahout. It is looked upon as very smart to pay calls, or go picnicking in the country, on the back of an elephant. So that, in the avenues in Jaipur you may meet, at the same time, a poor peasant on his dromedary, a Hindu lady drawn by two oxen in her *ekka,* veiled by thick curtains, a baboo on his smart horse, a pariah drawn by a buffalo, an English civil servant in his sports car, and an old aristocrat on his elephant. Needless to say, the last-mentioned does not increase the pace of the traffic.

. . . . .

The hospitality of Indian princes surpasses anything one can possibly imagine. In his palace, or around it, a maharajah generally has fifty rooms, with bath-rooms at the disposal of his guests. Those who are not entertained in the palace are put up in the guest-house. For there are two classes of guests: the one consists of high officials and the prince's personal friends, who stay under his roof; the second category, called " State guests " or " State visitors," are put up in the guest-house, where they are entertained at the expense of the State.

Whether he be a personal guest of His Highness or a Government guest, the European is splendidly treated. A car is placed at his disposal at any time. If he is fond of riding, the aide-de-camp sends round a hack every morning. If he likes shooting, he is invited to the prince's shooting expeditions, after

tigers, panthers, jackals, black antelopes, gazelles, wild boars, ducks, cranes or partridges.

When the Viceroy went to visit the Maharajah of Bikaner, the host arranged a sand-partridge shoot. The forty guns that took part in this recreation shot, in one day, eleven thousand partridges. The Maharajah showed me a photograph of the bag. The birds placed side by side covered a space not much less than the area of the Place de la Concorde. I could not help thinking of Parisian sportsmen who, after a strenuous day, bring home with pride a brace of partridges in the game-bag.

The organization of the shoots with Indian princes leaves nothing to be desired. There is a chief shikari, who, as a rule, is a retired English officer, a big-game expert; he is in charge of a battalion of elephants trained for tiger hunting, loaders, game-carriers, keepers and beaters. The cost of the cartridges fired in a year would keep five or six families for life.

In Nepal and the Central Provinces, there are tiger preserves, and special shikaris keep the prince informed of the movements and the wanderings of "Mr. Stripes" (the tiger) and "Mrs. Spots" (the panther). One can say that the map of the wild beast front is drawn up day by day by these shikaris, junior members of the hunting staff.

In the State of Bikaner, the Maharajah takes special interest in the preservation of gazelles and antelopes. He has shooting-boxes in various places in the Rajputana district, and has arranged a system of heliography by means of posts perched on the tops of hills, which enables him to communicate

between his hunting-boxes and his summer residence at Gajmer.

. . . . .

A European who was unfamiliar with the generous hospitality of Indian princes found himself one day the guest of a maharajah. The day following his arrival, after dinner, when I went to see him in the guest-house, he said to me with an ironical smile:

"Don't you think this savours rather too much of a café?"

"What?"

"The butler has just given me a little book of counterfoils, in which he has written down my daily drinks:

"*A glass of port.*

"*Two bottles of beer.*

"*A cigar.*

"He asked me to sign it, just like one does in an hotel. Really, when one entertains so lavishly, one does not make one's guests sign for the cigar or port that they consume each day!"

I thought he was joking. But he was not, so I explained:

"You are wrong, you are making a mistake! You do not suppose that His Highness's major-domo will present his little account when you go away? The prince's chamberlains have had to institute this little formality to put a stop to the terrible leakage that took place in the guest-houses. Boxes of cigars disappeared with astonishing rapidity, and the footmen made a regular income by selling drinks that were not drunk by the guests. That is the reason of the control that you have misunderstood."

. . . . .

I was taking tea with a notability at Jaipur. It was an Indian five o'clock tea. There was plenty of tea, but instead of the usual little cakes we were offered fried green peas, various sweetmeats, a soft kind of nougat, sweetened—very good by the way, a nougat for tender teeth—buffalo butter, that is to say butter of a slightly greenish white, the colour of putty, then little pink bananas with grey mangoes that are like potatoes roasted in their jackets and which smelt of turpentine.

My friendly entertainer asked me:

"In your land, do you also reward people who have served their country well, by making them a present of a few villages?"

I looked at my questioner with astonishment:

"You mean, you want to know if, for example, a field-marshal or a well-known scientist receives from the French Government as a recognition of his services Sucy-en-Brie, La Ferté-sous-Jouarre or Meung-sur-Loire? My word, no! I know that the English Government gives gold to its best servants. But I gather from you, that in your country they give villages like sweetmeats on New Year's Day. In France we are still very behind-hand when we reward leading citizens. We do not give an income of 300,000 francs to the general who has saved his country or to the modest doctor who, by his genius, has saved an endless number of lives. We content ourselves by awarding them ribbons and crosses."

"It is a poor acknowledgment. Miserly negro kings, by the way, give an old collar to ministers who distinguish themselves."

"Perhaps you are right, my dear friend. But there are, in France, citizens who are idealistic

enough to be satisfied with an old collar, which is called the Legion of Honour."

My friend thought for a moment, and then shook his head:

"Here is a fine example of indifference regarding worldly riches which ought to impress educated Indians, who have a tendency to despise Western materialism. However that may be, let us come to the feudal regime, which is still in vogue in the independent State of Jaipur. It consists of three classes of land: that which belongs, strictly speaking, to the State; that which has been definitely assigned to certain privileged individuals, and that which is given to the feudatories of the prince in return for abandoning to the State a part of their revenue."

"Explain to me your particular case."

"It is very simple. My grandfather, having rendered great services to the maharajah then reigning, received in recompense the ownership, in perpetuity, of three villages which cover an area of 5,400 acres. I have become absolute master of this territory, and the 1,700 inhabitants who till it are completely under my jurisdiction."

"To whom do they pay taxes?"

"To me."

"And the State?"

"It has absolutely no concern with the fiscal administration of the villages that it has given me. I have my own tax-gatherer who collects the taxes levied by me. According to the harvests, the nature of the land, the business of the shopkeepers, the three villages bring me in, good and bad years, from £16,000 to £80,000. Certain great feudatories, who

own six, ten or twenty square miles, collect five or six lacs of rupees, of which they return 40 or 50 per cent. to the State, so that they have about £250,000 a year for the upkeep of their two elephants and to buy expensive *saris* for their wives."

"And how do they pay their dues to the State? In money?"

"Yes. Unless, according to an old arrangement, dating from two hundred years ago, they have, for example, to provide a hundred or a hundred and fifty horses (with horsemen) and to take a share in the maintenance of the small army of 1,800 men, whose duty it is to defend the independence of the State of Jaipur."

"An independence that is threatened by whom?"

"It is threatened by no one. The English scrupulously respect our liberty within our frontiers, so our soldiers devote themselves to more peaceful occupations: they present arms when an important person passes, and they help the police to move on the oxen."

"That is very strange. And have you the power of life and death over your 1,700 villagers?"

"No. But if there are any undesirables on my lands, I drive them out *motu proprio,* assisted by my 1,700 serfs, who are as happy under my rule as if they were governed directly by the Council of State."

I looked at my Indian friend with redoubled admiration, and I deplored that one of my ancestors had not bequeathed to me the taxes of St. Cloud. To dispel my regrets, I delicately took in my fingers a second green-pea fritter, and I enjoyed this favourite dish of the Rajput gourmet.

CHAPTER XXV

BIKANER, CITY OF A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

We have all read the Oriental tales in which we have marvelled at the adventures of the solitary pilgrim who, after having walked for some days on the sandy desert, arrived at last at the gates of an enchanted palace surrounded by palms, flowers in bloom and white marble fountains, around which majestic peacocks strutted.

I lived the adventure of the solitary pilgrim, dear to Arab story-tellers, when I went to Bikaner. After a terrible journey, shut in an overheated carriage on the narrow railway line, tired of watching the desert of Rajputana, with its tufts of dry grass, its desolate dunes and its wastes without end, adorned here and there by a camel without a caravan or a hut without occupants, after twenty-four hours of penetrating dust, I was asleep on the seat when my faithful Madrasi came and awoke me:

"Sahib . . . Sahib! The palace of the Maharajah!"

I looked out of the door. Across the plain a fantastic building stood up among the trees. Cupolas on little pillars, and little domes ornamenting the roofs, overtopping the verdure of a park, growing, as if by a miracle, in the midst of a land hostile to vegetation. The setting sun tinted the sombre stones with pink, and magnified the splendour of this royal residence. I gazed at it stupefied. The little train turned eastward, and suddenly the whole town of Bikaner appeared before me, an unreal city sur-

rounded by pink walls, bristling with rose-coloured palaces and dotted with rose-coloured houses.

I no longer grumbled about my night in a waiting-room surrounded by multi-coloured Punjabis, nor my breakfast, which had served as a trap for all the flies in the neighbourhood, nor the dust which powdered me with white, like an eighteenth-century abbé. . . . I would have come on camel-back or on roller-skates to see Bikaner.

Lallgarh, the Maharajah's palace, is modern, but it is a marvel in Indo-Arabian style. Its owner, one of the most charming Indian reigning princes, is a great sportsman. He recently bagged his one hundred and fortieth tiger. He is also an art-lover who, unlike some of his neighbours, does not place in his palace alongside an authentic and very rare sixteenth-century bronze, a cheap bamboo table that a middle-class Frenchman would ruthlessly relegate to the maid's room.

The Maharajah of Bikaner has been wisely inspired in rebuilding his residence, and has incorporated in it the beauties of the old fort which dominates the town, and in which his ancestors formerly lived. The Durbar Room, the interior courts with Moorish colonnades, where hundreds of pearl-grey pigeons live, the Throne Room, gold and red lacquer, the outside galleries with yellow and green windows —a luminous puzzle that the sun lights up—the massive main doors bristling with great spikes, which formerly prevented attackers from using elephants to force an entrance into the castle, make this old palace, built about 1470, one of the most beautiful sights of Rajputana.

The minister of the Maharajah, who accompanied

me, opened the armoury, and showed me two very curious sabres. He explained:

"This one weighs forty-four pounds. . . . Lift it, you will see. It was the sabre that His Highness's grandfather used for his astonishing exercises every day. The other sabre, lighter, hung at his side. . . . Look carefully at the edge of it. It is notched in the middle. One day, during a ceremony at a New Year Durbar, the prince was insulted by a Mohammedan. He drew his sabre. With one stroke he cut off the head of the man who had insulted him, who fell on the carpet. But the blow had been so powerful that the blade afterwards struck one of the pillars of the room. . . . You can still see the mark of the sabre blow on the stone, which is a sort of signature of this vindictive potentate."

Manners have become more gentle, even in Rajputana, and the present Maharajah contents himself with killing game. When he is not killing tigers in Nepal, he is shooting black antelopes in the bush in the State of Bikaner. He even tried to initiate me into the amusing sport.

We were staying at that time at his summer residence, the palace of Gajmer, another marvel in red sandstone, which is reflected at dawn in the blue mirror of a little lake surrounded by orange-tinted fields. The prince asked me:

"Would you like to shoot black antelopes in a car?"

"You mean to go by car to the preserves?"

"No! you must remain in the car and fire at full speed. It is more amusing."

The next morning we went off in the direction of Hanumangarh. We had our sporting guns, that

is to say, two long-range carbines, a box of cartridges and a Rolls-Royce without a windscreen. We went for some miles on a perfectly straight road, and then came to the bush with its uneven ground, bristling with large tufts of grass and stumpy trees.

"Are you going to drive in there?" I asked. "Why, it has a surface like the moon, indented by smallpox marks!"

"Quite so. . . . Be ready, take good aim."

"Your Highness's humour amuses me. . . . To aim well in a car going over that ground? You might as well ask a virtuoso to play the 'Second Rhapsody' on a whirligig at a fair!"

"Look out! . . . Black buck, on your left."

I stand up. The black antelopes run past in front of us. I aim, my carbine wobbles as though I had St. Vitus's dance. One instant I get on to a clump of wild asphodel five yards from the car, the next on an imaginary point thirty degrees above the horizon. I call out to the Maharajah:

"Slow down!"

"Oh no, on the contrary," laughed the prince. . . . "The black bucks are getting away. . . . Quick! . . . Quicker!"

My friendly driver presses the accelerator. We drive into a sand-hole. I fall into the bottom of the car. Getting up, I clutch at my carbine, which is falling on the step. We follow the antelopes. They bound along about eighty yards away. I fire. I wound a knob on the bonnet. The antelopes are a hundred and twenty yards away now. I aim again; but as the prince takes a sharp turn to the left to escape an old tree-trunk, the shot goes haphazard.

The Maharajah politely begs me:

"Try not to kill the radiator. We shouldn't be able to get back."

The chase continues. The desert dances. The antelopes leap. The springs squeak. The Maharajah laughs. . . . Twenty-five an hour. . . . I must fire or be disgraced. I fire two shots. I reload. Again a shot without any result. I believe that if the range of the bullets were long enough they would fall sometimes on the Himalayas, sometimes on the isle of Ceylon!

"Do you want a machine-gun?" inquired my august initiator.

I am obstinate. But to my great astonishment the Maharajah has at last determined to stop. Heart-broken, I remark:

"Your Highness is giving up? . . . I shoot badly, I know."

"Not at all. I stop the pursuit of this herd, because you have fired three shots and we have chased it for over five miles. If we go on, the antelopes, over-driven, will fall dead. That would be massacre and not sport. The rule of the game is to try and kill the animal with three cartridges in a run of five miles. If the gun does not do that the beast has saved its life. . . . But don't be down-hearted. The best shots kill thirty antelopes out of a hundred from a car. It is a sporting chance."

Another herd passed. The chase began again. This time I brought down a fine black buck with spiral horns about eighteen inches long. Honour was saved. As we returned to the palace with our trophies we talked of more serious things. The Maharajah told me about the government of his little State. He explained:

"Nature has treated me badly in endowing my territory with an untillable desert and dry seasons, which last sometimes for three years. I rule over 1,750 square miles, 660,000 subjects and a small army of 2,400 men and 1,200 camels, with the assistance of my ministers and a legislative assembly of thirty-five members."

"The resolutions of which are merely formal?"

"No. For example, out of fifty motions proposed by members, twenty have been votes of confidence, and of the remaining thirty, only five have been rejected by my Government."

"Then your Highness is in no way a dictator or a tyrant!"

"In truth, I concern myself chiefly with two things: to improve the lands of the State by means of irrigation works, in order to increase the wealth of my subjects, then to develop hygiene and look after public health."

The Maharajah's programme is laudable, and is opposed to the remarks of certain Anglo-Indians who assured me:

"You will see . . . the Indian princes do not bother about the well-being of their subjects. . . . Five hundred millions' worth of pearls in their coffers, fifty Rolls-Royces in their garages and famine among their peasants."

Exaggerated pessimism! The life of the Indian peasant is certainly not very bright—I shall come later on to this serious subject—but the amelioration of his existence would need much time, effort and capital. The fact that it is occupying the minds of most of the reigning princes is a step in the right direction.

"What is the proportion of the Civil List of a maharajah with respect to the budget of his state?" I asked a Minister of Finance.

"Our expenses and our receipts balance at about a hundred million francs: the Civil List of His Highness represents about 12 per cent., that is, about twelve million francs."

"That is to say, that in a country like France, with a budget of forty-two milliards, the Civil List of the President of the Republic ought to be five milliards a year?"

"It is not the same thing!"

My friendly speaker was right. M. Gaston Doumergue, President of our Republic, is not bound to attend convocations of Parliament with priceless emeralds around his neck! Necessities, east of Suez! Follies, north of Château d'If!

. . . . .

After I left the Minister, I went to the bazaar. Many-coloured sweets, filigrees of ochre caramels, bretzels of golden cane-sugar, bread rolls sprinkled with moist sugar, sticky sweets, are the attraction of myriads of flies that seem to laugh at the Rajput confectioner who, with a tired gesture, whisks them off. In the inextricable crowd of *ekkas* with two wheels, drawn by little Arab horses, ox-wagons with squeaky wheels, dromedaries that waddle like frightened elderly spinsters at a mayor's ball; in the midst of the din of dealers who wrangle, of crows that quarrel, of wells with squeaking ropes, of infants who squall, guns suddenly fire. . . . Nineteen. . . . Has war broken out between the

Rajputs and the Punjabis? No. It is the salute to the Maharajah of Bikaner, who is returning to his capital.

Since 1918 the prince has had the right to a salute of nineteen guns. I once knew a little African king who, when he returned into his state, had a salute of a hundred and one . . . blows of a hammer on a large empty barrel. Powder was too dear in his country!

CHAPTER XXVI

YOUR TIGER, MADAM . . .

THERE are some tiger hunts that finish up badly, in which tragic moments leave a sorrowful memory in the minds of those who take part in them. There are others, on the contrary, which have nothing dramatic about them. Chance willed it that I should take part in one of the most humorous big-game shoots that ever happened in India. And all owing to a lady—when I say a lady, I ought to specify; a pretty young girl—who received the honour of the " pad."

Guests of a maharajah's brother, we formed a jolly trio, composed of an English major, a young American lady and myself. One evening, when our host came to have coffee with us in the guest-house, Mrs. X questioned him, with delightful audacity, to which her piquant beauty gave her the right. In fact, Mrs. X was the most amusing tourist that I ever met between Peshawar and Calcutta. Married at twenty, divorced at twenty-one, she had an irreverent but irresistible way of speaking about the Gods of the Hindu Olympus which made us roar with laughter. Ganesh was, to her, " the old lawyer with the elephant's head," and the terrible Kali, " the virago who let the milk burn; " as to Krishna, playing the flute like Apollo, chief muse of Greek mythology, she called him " the whispering baritone of the menagerie." I apologized in the presence of the Hindu believers, but it was impossible to get Mrs. X to take the cult of Siva seriously. Her sarcasms, however, did not prevent her from being

very generous to the beggars and cripples who hang round the temples, and she distributed many rupees to the grateful Brahmins.

She offered one of her cigarettes to the young prince, and told him plainly:

"Say, my dear boy, you don't suppose I came to your country to kill mosquitoes with my Flit spray. . . . I must get my tiger. . . . I want a tiger-skin. . . . Do you understand!"

The major and I had noticed that the young prince seemed particularly fascinated by Mrs. X's beauty. He smiled, a little embarrassed, and replied:

"Mrs. X, I should like nothing better than to give you pleasure. But, don't forget that tiger-hunting is not child's play. You must first be a good shot."

"Oh, on the back of an elephant one does not run much risk. . . ."

"Naturally, it is less dangerous than on foot. . . ."

"So when can I go? . . . Arrange a shoot, my dear boy. I shall get such a kick out of it."

The prince hesitated. Then, overcome by Mrs. X's glance, he replied:

"Very well. Let me talk it over with the chief shikari and find out in what district we have a chance of finding a beast, and I promise to give you the honour of the first shot before the end of the week."

Mrs. X was delighted; she rushed to the gramophone and exclaimed, as she wound it up:

"You are a perfect dear! When I get back to New York, I shall call my tiger-skin by your first name!"

The same evening, in going out of the bungalow to smoke a last cigarette in the starlight, the prince explained to us his difficulty:

"Mrs. X is charming. But she has put me in rather a fix. You have seen her shoot duck and antelope. She misses everything she fires at. Short of mounting a machine-gun on the elephant, I say to myself, how can she kill a beast? And, as you know, a wounded tiger is a serious danger to all concerned. Let us go and talk it over with the chief shikari. He will perhaps be able to arrange things."

The chief shikari, a retired Forest Officer, was enjoying his last whisky-and-soda in the porch of his bungalow when we went into his garden. The prince explained matters. Then the forester thought it over:

"I see only one way of pleasing everybody and reducing risks to a minimum.

"One of the tigers in His Highness's zoological garden does not seem to be going to live very long in captivity. Ask your brother to give permission to get rid of his animal and leave the rest to me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I cannot tell you any more just now. But you can rely on me."

We saw that the chief shikari had his plan, and we said good-bye to the prince. The major and I returned slowly across the park. I asked him:

"Have you ever met a woman who knows how to subdue men with such cleverness as the beautiful Mrs. X?"

The major threw the end of his cheroot into the grass and whispered:

On the Way to a Tiger Hunt

THE PALACE OF AMBER, JAIPUR

THE TEMPLE OF BUDDHA AT
SAYAMBUNATH, NEPAL

" Subdue men? Why, she is capable of taming even tigers! "

The great day arrived. Before dawn the prince's car came to fetch us to take us to the jungle, about thirty miles away.

Mrs. X was in full hunting kit: boots, grey felt hat, tailor-made costume. A cartridge belt round her waist. A kodak slung over her shoulder. A silent shikari followed her, carrying a heavy, double-barrelled gun. I thought that the kick from it would be rather strong for the graceful shoulder of our pretty divorcée.

In an hour and a half we reached the spot where the elephants were awaiting us.

The beaters started off bareback on their pachyderms, whilst we mounted into our respective howdahs. Elephant No. 1 carried Mrs. X and the prince. The latter was armed as a precautionary measure, so as to be able to fire in the last extremity, for we had arranged to let Mrs. X kill her beast, whatever the fortunes of the hunt might be.

Elephant No. 2 carried the major and myself. Elephant No. 3 carried the chief shikari and his confidential man. Elephant No. 4 carried the butlers, the provisions, the champagne, the ice, extra films, Mrs. X's gramophone, and some telegraph forms for cabling to America.

Of all the sights that one can dream of, dawn in the jungle is one of the most beautiful. The pale light in the east increased minute by minute into an

apotheosis of greenish gold; the black shade of the woods was turning into blue, then into ashen grey; the stars went out one by one on the floor of the inlaid heavens, ranging from azure blue to lemon. But this particular morning, Mrs. X's tiger interested us more than the splendours of awakening nature.

We had covered two or three miles when the chief shikari, who had gone to the head of the column, came to warn us that in all probability we ought to find a tiger in the jungle two hundred yards away. As he passed near us, he added in an undertone:

"Provided that the dirty beast does not escape and give us a chase for eight or ten hours!"

But some minutes later we realized that the fears of the chief shikari were groundless. When we reached the jungle, already surrounded by the beaters on their pachyderms, we saw, in the high grass, that yellow and black striped skin, which, encountered in the open, always gives a little shock to the heart of the most blasé of hunters.

Mrs. X and the prince were on our right; the major and I in the centre, and the chief shikari on the left.

"There you are!" murmured the prince in Mrs. X's ear. "Get ready to fire."

Mrs. X, very pale, took the gun which the loader, sitting behind, offered to her. The major, in the meantime, drew my attention to the pantomime of the chief shikari. Half-standing in his howdah, bending forward, his hand shading his eyes, he muttered some incomprehensible words.

"What's the matter?" said the major uneasily.

"Oh! . . . Oh!" said the chief shikari, "the brute is asleep.". . . And bending closer towards our elephant, he added: "I have given him too much opium. . . . There he is, stretched out like a flat fish. . . . What a nuisance! If Mrs. X finds out she will think the prince is making game of her."

It was necessary to do something. We could not remain in a circle whilst the beast was sleeping off the effects of the opium pills and wait until he deigned to awaken. Fortunately, the chief shikari was a man of resource. He turned to his second-in-command and told him sharply:

"Get down behind the elephant with your gun. As soon as you hear the mem-sahib fire, put a few shots into the doped tiger's hind-quarters. As the mem-sahib is sure to fire wildly, she will see the animal give a start and think that she has hit it and will finish it off."

The shikari obeyed. The major and I had great difficulty in refraining from laughing loudly, the affair seemed to us so comical. . . . Hardly had the man got to the ground when the chief shikari said to his mahout:

"As for you, make your animal trumpet, or we shall all go to sleep here."

Then raising his voice, he called out in the direction of elephant No. 1:

"Madam! . . . Fire! . . . Fire now! . . . Don't you see a tiger lying in wait ready to spring! There! My elephant trumpets with uneasiness. . . . Go on!"

The shot was fired, or rather, a double shot. . . . Mrs. X's, which of course made a hole in the ground two yards from the beast, and that of the shikari

hidden to the left of elephant No. 3, which peppered liberally the tiger's haunches. It gave a start, emitted a pitiful groan, and then fell back in the grass overcome by sleep.

The major and I held our sides. This was not a tiger hunt, but a scene in the Cirque Medrano. The chief shikari murmured angrily:

"Ah, the disgusting old brute! To serve me a trick like that." And immediately he added enthusiastically: "Bravo! You have wounded him, madam! . . . Fire, fire again. . . . If you don't, he'll leap up on your elephant. . . ."

Then it was a matter of slaughter. Mrs. X fired her shots, and the prince passed her the other gun, reloaded. As she fired again, the major, polishing his eyeglass, panted:

"She is not going to get a tiger-skin, but a plaster!"

The comedy at length came to an end. When the chief shikari was sure that the animal was quite dead, we got down. Mrs. X, excited—or shall I say dazed?—ran first through the long grass.

She touched the warm body of the beast which had died without pain like a patient under chloroform, and with a pair of scissors cut the white moustaches, which, as everyone in India knows, have mysterious virtues.

The hour of the kodak had sounded. Mrs. X posed, her pretty little foot upon the head of the dead animal; seated herself in Oriental fashion between its paws; reclined carelessly upon the body of her victim, with her gun, without her gun; with her hat, without her hat. The prince went on snapping. And last of all, a large picture, destined,

without doubt, for a New York magazine, in which would appear, cheek by jowl, the smiling beauty and the awe-inspiring beast.

The champagne flowed. Mrs. X broke a bottle upon the head of the wretched animal and baptized it "Krishna." The prince, very upset, bowed with emotion. Sandwiches were handed round. Mrs. X nibbled hers, powdered her face, lit her cigarette, crossed her legs, and began:

"Honestly, I only got a real thrill when I saw that it was going to spring upon my elephant. . . . Then I took aim and I . . ."

She had already begun to practise how to tell the story of her tiger.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LOVES OF THE BEGUM OF SARDHANA

WHEN one motors into the district of Meerut, after having crossed the Ganges, one comes to a small market town called Sardhana.

It is a collection of peasants' houses, cubes of dried mud, gardens surrounded with palm trees, banyan trees, poplar and mango trees. Sardhana resembles a thousand Hindu villages, and no one would go and visit it if it did not hold a surprise for the traveller.

We follow the side of a wooded park, the cawing of crows fills the air, and suddenly we see two pointed spires of a large Catholic church. From its size one might easily take it for a cathedral.

What! . . . an important church like this, in the country, in India? An unexpected sight which astonishes a foreigner, as much as would a mosque in the middle of La Beauce, or a temple of Siva in the depth of the Black Forest.

The church at Sardhana, however, was built in 1822, by an Indian begum, converted to Catholicism. The building is in Roman style, constructed in the shape of a cross, surmounted by two pointed bell-towers and three domes. One can read on the threshold these words carved in marble:

THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS
JEHANNE, PRINCESS OF SARDHANA
BUILT THIS CHURCH AT HER OWN EXPENSE
AND DEDICATED IT TO THE VIRGIN MARY
MOTHER OF GOD

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC FAITH
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
1822

The interior of the church is poor and dilapidated. But the memorials offer us other surprises. Here is the first:

COLONEL LE VAISSEAU
PRAY FOR HIS SOUL
18 OCTOBER, 1795

Here is the second:

TO THE MEMORY OF
COLONEL J. R. SALEUR
COMMANDER OF THE FORCES OF H.H. THE BEGUM
BORN AT NANCY (LORRAINE)
DIED THE 12TH JULY, 1812
AT THE AGE OF 87 YEARS

Two French officers in the service of the Begum? Who, then, was this Catholic Indian princess, whose court was composed of English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Poles?

I will satisfy your curiosity by telling you the very romantic life-story of the Begum of Sardhana.

This lady, who later was converted to Christianity, was the daughter of Lutif Ali Khan, a prince of Arab origin, living then at Kotana, north-west of Meerut. An orphan at six years old, she was taken to Delhi, where she was given education and instruction in accordance with her rank.

At that time, a Luxemburg adventurer, Walter

Reinhard, joined the Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales. After many avatars he enlisted in the army of the Nawab of Bengal, and distinguished himself by his bravery. The Indians gave him the title of "Sumroo," which means the Melancholy. The Nawab, appreciating his military genius, made him commander of his army. Sumroo proved worthy of the Nawab's confidence by beating the English at Geriah in 1763.

He also took many prisoners, and, by order of the prince, massacred every one of them with his own hand. A price was put on his head.

The Mogul Empire was then attacked on all sides. The English became masters of Bengal. The Sikhs, the Jats, the Mahrattas, began to rebel one after the other. Sumroo realized the advantage he could gain in these internal wars, and enrolled a little army which he hired out to rajahs at war.

After many battles under the flag of the Rajah of Jaipur, or under the standard of the leader of the Jats at Bhuratpur, Sumroo became commander of the fortress of Agra. He fought against a rebel called Zabta Khan, beat him, and received as reward for his victory six lacs of rupees for the maintenance of his little army, and, at the same time, the suzerainty of the territory of Sardhana.

Sumroo had made the acquaintance of the young Arab orphan at Delhi. She was small, but rather stout. She was fair, but had large dark eyes, sparkling with humour. She spoke and wrote Persian. It was a love marriage according to the Moslem rites; for the little princess was not yet converted, and bore the pretty first name of Zebulnissa.

Their happiness was short. Sumroo died in 1778.

The soldiers and officers of the deceased then addressed a petition to the Emperor of India, begging His Majesty to confer on Zebulnissa the principality of Sardhana. The Emperor, in view of the rare qualities and intelligence of the pretty widow, promoted her to the rank of Princess of Sardhana.

In 1781, Zebulnissa, touched by the honour, expressed her intention of embracing the Catholic religion, and was baptized at Agra under the name of Jehanne, by a Carmelite, Brother Gregorio.

Hardly had she become a Christian when the widow found herself bound to go to war at the head of her late husband's troops to help the Emperor, who was besieged in Delhi by a rebel, a certain Golam Kadir, the son of the very Zabta Khan whom Sumroo had defeated.

Golam Kadir made a secret request to the Begum to ally herself to him and share the empire of the besieged king. The Begum refused to play false to her master, and replied with cannon balls to Golam's ignominious proposal. The rebel was beaten. The rescued Emperor let it be known *urbi et orbi* that the Begum would be henceforth "the beloved daughter of our Empire."

Some years pass. The general staff of the Begum is composed of officers of different nationalities. They strive among themselves for the favours of the princess. They neglect the administration of the army, which soon shows its discontent. The Begum is advised to remarry in order to put an end to the intrigues and restore order in the principality. A certain George Thomas, who has distinguished himself at the head of his battalions, discreetly aspires to her hand. But the Begum

prefers a French officer, Colonel Le Vaisseau, and their marriage is blessed in 1793 by the same Brother Gregorio who had formerly baptized her.

The French officer was, unfortunately, very unpopular in the ranks of the army. Hardly had the marriage been consummated when the intrigues begin again. The notabilities of the principality are mixed up in it. George Thomas, at Delhi, suggests to the Emperor that he should banish this undesirable consort. The Begum realizes that the position of her husband is impossible. But loyally, generously, she prefers to abdicate rather than see him go away alone.

One evening they decide to fly from Sardhana, before a rebellion breaks out. They escape from the palace with a few faithful servants. On reaching Kirwa they are overtaken by a detachment sent in pursuit of them. Colonel Le Vaisseau is riding by the side of the palanquin in which the Begum is hidden. The mutineers surround them. The colonel sabres them furiously. The Begum takes part in the unequal fray. Shots are fired at her escort. She foresees that her husband will be killed; as a widow again she will be slighted and fall from her position, and perhaps be maltreated by her enemies. So she takes from her corsage a little dagger, ornamented with pearls and sapphires, and stabs herself in the breast.

Her women, frightened, shriek in alarm. Le Vaisseau hears them and calls to them. They cry out:

"The Begum has just killed herself."

He escapes, by slashes of his sabre, from the men who surround him and comes up. A female

attendant pulls back the curtain of the palanquin, and shows him, lying on the silk cushion, the inanimate body of his wife.

Blood is flowing on the embroidery of her lacerated corsage. Overcome by the death of his adored one Le Vaisseau throws his blood-stained sabre amongst the mutineers, takes a pistol from its holster, fires, the barrel of the weapon pointed to his mouth!

Strange caprice of destiny! Whilst the soldiers rush upon the dead body of the officer and mutilate it terribly, the palanquin is turned towards Sardhana and by degrees the Begum regains consciousness, for the blade of the dagger had slipped to one side.

The soldiers, enraged against the fugitives, bring home the Begum, who has barely come back to life, tie her to a gun and take her, a prisoner, to the castle.

She is saved by Colonel Saleur, reinstated in her apartments and recovers rapidly from the effects of her wound.

Anarchy spreads throughout the principality. And George Thomas, Saleur and the Governor of Delhi think that the only means of restoring order is to give back to the Begum her forfeited rights. Irishman and Frenchman invest the rebellious troops, and force them to recognize the suzerainty of the Begum, who immediately reascends the throne, paying an indemnity of 150,000 rupees to the Emperor. Peace reigns once more in the principality, which has learnt wisdom. Saleur is appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Begum's troops. George Thomas marries a very pretty lady-in-waiting to the princess,

a Frenchwoman named Maria, who is richly endowed by her mistress.

In the year of grace 1804 the Begum, become the idol of the subjects, the Begum whose administration is a model one, signs a treaty with the English Government which recognizes the independence of her territory. For thirty years she shows herself the most zealous, most ardent of proselytes to the Catholic faith. Twice widowed, she never marries again. She gives herself up entirely to her duties. She builds a monastery to hold two thousand Capucines. She builds the church of Sardhana and obtains the blessing of Pope Gregory XVI. Although a strict Christian, she conforms to the customs of her country, which forbid women to show themselves in public. She gives her audiences behind a screen. But the officers of her staff are admitted to her table. Beloved of her subjects, generous, cultured, she is universally respected, and dies in 1836 mourned by all those she has helped and protected.

For some time I gazed at the tomb of the Begum under the dusty marble of her church. A sunbeam illuminated these words:

JEHANNE, PRINCESS
OF SARDHANA

Through the stone, through Jehanne the Catholic, I saw Zebulnissa the Moslem; I saw the little princess with her pink and white complexion, her large eyes sparkling with humour; I saw her loving, loyal, flying in her palanquin with Colonel Le Vaisseau. . . .

And, all of a sudden, it seemed to me that, in the

sunbeam, the precious stones of her dagger were scintillating, the dagger of a despairing woman who had already stained with blood the half-open embroideries of her naked bosom.

For human life, is it not a wound which bleeds, and which in the hour of death pours out its last drop of blood?

CHAPTER XXVIII

DROMEDARIES

THE low houses in the old town of Bikaner look like pink dominoes turned over by chance on each side of the street.

One goes carefully in the sand, one sounds the klaxon. A woman veiled in red, with her ankles decorated with large silver hand-turned anklets, comes out on to the balcony, and lifts slightly her muslin veil to peep at the intruder who dispels the calm of the street. One has to apply the brake every ten yards in order to allow the hordes of dogs lying in the middle of the road, the camels kneeling crosswise, the oxen asleep, to decide very slowly to give free passage to a vehicle.

All of a sudden it is necessary to stop dead; a little boy about the height of a table is on the point of throwing himself into the car. His only clothing is a silver medal hung by a shoelace round his stomach. His dark skin is smothered with dirt. His eyes are begrimed with coal-dust and studded with flies. Then a little girl runs up, quite naked. Medals as large as half rupees form her only clothing.

At the corner of a street, where seven dromedaries tied together nose to tail were ambling along at a slow step, stands a large house in carved rosewood. It is the property of a rich Rajput, who is worth seven or eight lacs.

Opposite, a curious square white house displays on its walls some unexpected frescoes: an elephant in gala dress, followed by a tiger in the jungle, followed again by a primitive locomotive of the Stephenson

type, 1835. The Bikaner artists give free play to fantasy.

The members of the ruling family, and the notabilities, are burnt on the banks of a pond, situated about five miles away in the desert. The burial-ground is a rectangular enclosure, which contains fifty *chattris* or quadrangular chapels, each with four pillars, surmounted by a large spherical bell-turret, like a fig.

The *satis*, that is to say, the widows, who threw themselves alive into the brazier, where the remains of their husbands were being consumed, have a column engraved in Sanskrit, which stands vertically under the white marble cupola. Widows who die a prosaically natural death, without daring to face the purification of the flames, may not have their names inscribed on the vertical pillar. They have the right only to a horizontal tablet, upon which is engraved the imprint of two little feet. . . . Why?

Roland Dorgelès's caravan did not pass through Bikaner, otherwise it would have recruited fresh camels, or rather pure blood dromedaries. The Maharajah, whose name is announced as Raj Rajeshwar Narendra Shiromani Sri Ganga Singh Badahur, is the only Indian prince who keeps a special corps of four hundred fighting dromedaries, mounted by picked warriors.

A review of dromedaries in full dress was very kindly arranged for my benefit. The camel-drivers were superbly dressed in yellow and red, and each

dromedary wore a dog collar on his neck—if one may so call it—ornamented with white shells; seven or eight rows of them, mounted on black leather, giving a wonderful effect. I thought involuntarily of the pearl collars which in 1890 adorned the necks of rich ladies, a little *passées,* in European drawing-rooms.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DELIGHTS OF BENGAL

THERE are in the great city of Calcutta two buildings; each, in its way, is the despair of people of taste. The Hindus are responsible for one; the English, for the other.

I think that it is impossible in the whole of the old or new world to discover anything so extremely ugly, so terribly crude, so *nouveau riche* in character, so glaringly ostentatious, so absolutely hopeless, as the Jain Temple of Badri Das. When a temple is built by the juxtaposition of little bits of glass stuck together by cement, and when among these singular motifs of decoration one finds pieces of broken pots and bottoms of dessert plates, on which the Trocadéro at Paris, during the exhibition of 1889, is represented, there is no more to be said.

The second building is the Victoria Memorial. I read in Murray's "Guide to India" this audacious appreciation: "The Victoria Memorial takes its place as one of the great buildings of the modern world" (*sic*).

An English specialist in insurance matters, but apparently less initiated in the *beaux-arts*, said to me with pride: "It is our Taj Mahal."

May the shade of the gracious Mumtaz-i-Mahal pardon this well-intentioned patriot! But to compare the *chef-d'œuvre* of Agra to the honest work of Sir William Emerson, designer of the Victoria Memorial, is to compare the embroidered silk of Benares with the cotton of Calicut.

I may perhaps be permitted to suggest to our good

friends across the Channel that the Memorial was not imposed on Calcutta. It cost about six and a half million pounds. No doubt the spirit of Her Majesty Queen Victoria would have been more happy to know that a large hospital had been consecrated to her memory than that such a sum had been spent to build a perfectly useless monument.

Before coming to live in Calcutta, I had heard in other parts of India numerous appreciations of the Bengalese. They were varied, but, as a rule, belittling. Some Englishmen in Delhi had said to me:

" 'Bengal? It is the hive where you find most of the politicians and they . . . bore us.' "

Some Pathans had given their definite opinion:

" The Bengalese? Poltroons that we should kick in the back if they dared to maltreat the Mohammedans."

Among the Sikhs they are laughed at:

" Chatterers! Boasters! Reprobates! "

Consequently I was quite curious to come into contact with these people, of whom I had heard such pleasant accounts. I came. I saw. They conquered.

I do not say that all that had been told me was absolutely untrue. But once again I found that slander and religious enmity had warped, in India as elsewhere, man's judgment of his neighbours. How could it be otherwise in so vast an Empire, where nationalist sentiment hardly exists; where so many sects uphold their beliefs; where so many races find it difficult to understand one another; where so many particular interests give birth to conflicts more or less openly avowed; where Mahomet has no wish to hobnob with Durga; where Sakyamouni secretly scorns Nanak, the apostle of

the Sikhs; where Zoroaster and his cohort of Parsees ignore Mahavira, the Messiah of Jainism; where the warlike Mahrattas regret the heroic age of their domination which stretched from Gujarat to the province of Orissa; where the noble and valiant Rajputs look down upon the apprentice democrats of Madras? How can we expect that these 320 million incongruous individuals, who display the whole catalogue of human passions, the vices, the virtues, the mental imperfections and physical qualities, secret hates and noble gestures, regrettable atavisms and the intellectual gifts—how can we expect this conglomerate mass of humanity, this mosaic of customs, languages and beliefs, to have a common outlook, a civic unity, the preface to an approaching nationalism?

Mrs. Nivedita who, with kindly good faith, pleads for the complete unity of India, asserts that the line of religious demarcation which divides Hinduism and Islamism is not so pronounced as that which divides Geneva from Rome. Mrs. Nivedita is five centuries late. The Massacre of St. Bartholomew dates back to 1572, whilst the last slaughter between Moslems and Hindus dates from July 1929 . . . others may follow.

Sceptical Europe has outgrown the age of religious warlike struggles. The eye of Moscow has replaced the cow at Colas, and when fighting takes place in the streets, it is not in the name of Luther or of Gregory XIII, but of Karl Marx.

The incredible fanaticism of India renders all comparison of this kind illusory and all benevolent neutrality of antagonistic believers absolutely out of the question.

heads to the happy sentiments. Two old Bengalese, contemporaries of Miss Gauhar Jan, were enthusiastic over the wealth of her imagination, and doubtless conjured up, with a touch of sadness, the former triumph of the *prima donna* and the passions that she aroused when she appeared in the Court of the Maharajah of Mysore.

At that time she devoured hearts. To-day she contented herself with ruminating, between slices of betel, over the remembrances of her romantic career.

Father Jousse, in his psychological linguistic study, speaks of rhythmic forms, dear to *guzlars*, or itinerant reciters, and mentions a Slav, Milovan by name, who was endowed with a marvellous memory, which enabled him to declaim at least forty thousand lines without missing a word.

Memory, even among illiterate Slavs or Asiatics, is sometimes prodigious. In short, they continue the feats of memory exhibited by the Jewish Rabbis, the Homeric reciters, Moslem story-tellers. The musical rhythm moreover may help them materially. Father Jousse recalls also an experiment made by a monk, who heard a Slav recite to Milovan four hundred and fifty-eight rhythmic lines. Seven months later Milovan repeated the four hundred and fifty-eight lines without a mistake.

I take the liberty of doubting the statement of my Bengalese friends, who claim that Miss Gauhar Jan improvises. Is it not rather a splendid feat of memory?

Women all over the world have splendid memories. Why should not Miss Gauhar Jan, star of the Indian firmament, commit her rhymes to memory?

CHAPTER XXX

TEA FOR ONE

THE Rajah has invited me to tea at his palace. My host is not a reigning prince, but a very rich native from Benares, upon whom the Maharajah has conferred this title as a reward for his civic virtues and philanthropy. He occupies a sumptuous residence in a beautiful park, two miles from the sacred town.

At the park gates I am surprised to see a guard-room and a sentry, armed with an old rifle, who presents arms to me like a regular soldier. In India, in fact, every person of importance has a night watchman, a *chokadar*, who goes on duty at sunset and is supposed to keep guard over the bungalow whilst his master sleeps with all the doors open, on account of the heat. In reality, when you come in late after an evening at the club, or a dinner at Government House, you find your *chokadar* snoring on the steps of the veranda, insensible to calls, reproofs or kicks. The fact is not in itself alarming. The presence of the *chokadar* is, in truth, sufficient to keep off any marauders belonging to the native village; because he pays a small monthly indemnity to the professional robbers on condition they let him sleep in peace. A rich rajah, instead of contenting himself with *chokadars* armed with a stick and a lantern, has the right to keep two or three squads of guards, armed with flintlock rifles loaded, ready to salute foreign visitors.

Tea is served in the large drawing-room of the palace, which contains an anomalous collection of works of art and trumpery articles, dear to the hearts

of Orientals. Family portraits, enlarged coloured photographs, are hanging on the walls, between valuable arms and rare knick-knacks of the Mogul period which, in turn, are cheek by jowl with two musketeers in bronze, in 1889 Marais style.

One day, at the house of the minister of a maharajah, who collected real old Hindu bronzes as well as little tables inlaid with flowers of the nineteenth century, Faubourg Saint-Antoine epoch, I had a surprise in taking a cigarette from a silver-gilt box, for I automatically turned on a little musical box which played the *Carnaval de Venise*.

The tea that I am offered this time is not accompanied by *petits pois frits*, but with delicious sweetmeats; amongst others, cubes of preserved pumpkin, flavoured with ginger, and cucumber cut into thin slices, rolled and dipped in powdered sugar, and sprinkled with rose essence. The Rajah hands me tea; but does not drink or eat with me. Tea for one and not tea for two! My host is orthodox, and strictly observes the tenets of his religion, which strictly forbid the faithful to share any meal with a Christian who habitually eats prohibited meat. My shadow would pollute his clean food.

"The boys are there," said my host. "Will you come and see them?"

"What boys?"

"My Boy Scouts that you are going to inspect."

I learn that the Rajah is the benefactor of the neighbourhood. He has organized a dispensary for his serfs, an elementary school where the peasants' sons receive free education, and a company of Boy Scouts, which develops the taste for sports among small boys from ten to fifteen years of age. From

time to time the Rajah offers also a useful present to the people who live on his property. He calls in to his dispensary one of the most celebrated oculists in India, and makes all his subjects who suffer from cataract be operated upon by this famous practitioner. On the last visit he paid he operated on 560 cases of double cataract. I think this form of philanthropy is most praiseworthy. This Rajah is a wise man, who, instead of regaling the villagers with fireworks or open-air fêtes, is concerned with giving them back their sight.

Here we are on the terrace which overlooks a huge lawn, where the Boy Scouts are drawn up on parade. They are a fine-looking lot, these Benares lads with their yellow caps and their purple scarves on their khaki uniforms. They do their drill very well; some of the evolutions performed in a music-hall would make a great success. They all carry a *laizim*, that is, a bamboo stick, at the end of which an iron chain with metal disks is attached, and when they are shaken in unison they produce a rhythmic clicking effect.

The parade of the Indian country boys is over. They disappear two by two at the far end of the park. I take leave of my amiable host, and I acknowledge the salute of the sentry with his old musket. The car takes me to Benares. Women, very well set, in red shawls, carry baskets of vegetables on their heads. A beggar, squatting motionless under a tree, stretches out a motionless arm, bristling like a porcupine with innumerable pins sticking into its muscles.

CHAPTER XXXI

DELHI, THE INDIAN VERSAILLES

Most French people—and Westerners generally—think that the jungle covers India from north to south, and that, on leaving Bombay, for example, one finds immense forests and thick woods where creepers and bamboos form an impenetrable curtain. What an illusion!

The suburbs of Bombay remind one of outskirts like Pantin, Clapham Junction or Moabit. Factory chimneys replace the baobabs, and workshops the ant-hills, in this industrial and very prosaic jungle.

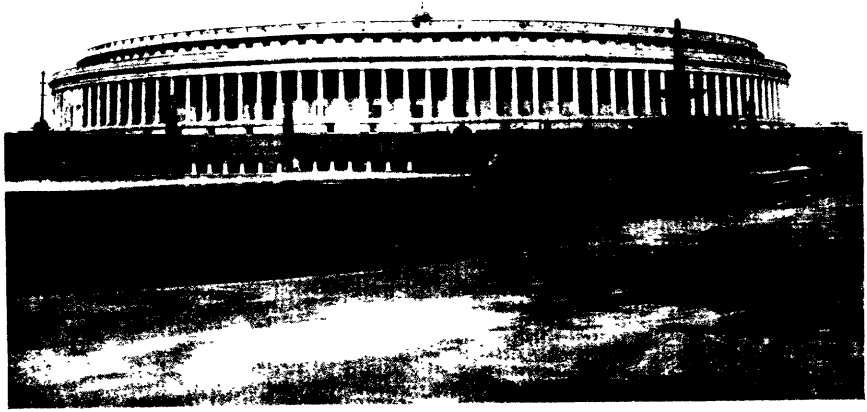
During the twenty-four hours' run by rail from Bombay to Delhi one passes through hilly country, wooded like Fontainebleau, and cultivated fields, with herds of oxen, every now and then. Black buffaloes graze by the side of the track, and watch the Delhi train pass with as much indifference as a Normandy cow, chewing the Calvados grass, gazes at the Deauville express.

Here is Delhi, the capital of the Indian Empire, residence of the Viceroy, of the Commander-in-Chief and high officials of the Government. Delhi, glorious city of the Viceroy, where maharajahs, rajahs, gaekwars, nawabs, nizams and emirs come to pay homage to the representative of His Majesty King George V, Emperor of India; Delhi, a city much sought after, where the wives of staff officers and high officials of the Indian Civil Service turn daily, not the Tibetan prayer-wheel, but the "gossip machine" of civilized communities.

Delhi, with its old, red, battlemented fort, is a

Miniature Votive Chapels erected by Punjab Peasants to Protect their Children against Smallpox

Palace of the Begum of Sardhana



THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, NEW DELHI

magnificent capital. Picture Spa, Baden-Baden or Aix-les-Bains (without the mountains) in the heart of India. The town is very clean, well lighted, with many comfortable hotels; the parks are enclosed by iron railings like Kensington Gardens. There are flowers everywhere; ideal lawns, shady tennis courts, superb clubs, race-courses and polo grounds; everything English to do with sport and love of comfort has been transferred to India. Nowhere is there a suggestion of impermanence. And the impression is still deeper when one visits New Delhi, three miles from Old Delhi.

One enters the town by a long avenue of young trees that lengthen, and electric lamps that light, this " sacred way " of English conquest. Here is the site where the palace of the Maharajah of Patiala is being built. There the palace of the Maharajah of Bikaner. Farther on the splendid residence of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The millionaires of Fifth Avenue are beaten by ten lengths. When the next session of the Chamber of Princes opens, the Rajahs' quarters at New Delhi will be the field of the cloth of gold, pearls and sapphires. In France, the poor thousand-franc note has become a unit of currency. With the rajahs, a lac of rupees, that is, a hundred thousand rupees or a million francs, is a minimum, below which it is not respectable to descend. A prince who has any self-respect ought rather to juggle with a crore, which represents a hundred lacs.

One day, when I was lunching at the Viceroy's, the Maharanee of Cooch Behar told us that that very morning someone had stolen some of her jewels. When asked what was the value of the lost gems, she replied with a smile:

" Oh! only five lacs."

I was shown, at New Delhi, the foundations of the residence that the Rajah of Z—— will occupy for about a fortnight every year. It will cost, furnished, only seventy-five lacs.

The Sacred Way, dotted with lights, leads to an Arch of Triumph, dedicated to the fallen in the War. You pause and you think you have finished these grandiose visions. A grave error. Your attention is drawn to three enormous palaces standing about a mile and a quarter westwards. You drive along the asphalted Edward VII Avenue, edged here and there with superb bungalows, occupied by civil servants, and you reach a kind of esplanade, where two enormous fountains play in front of an immense palace in two sections, built of red sandstone, surmounted by two domes.

You look to the right, and see, all of a sudden, a white palace, low and round; it houses the Indian Parliament, and some humorists at the Vice-regal court have called it the Gasometer.

Then you go past the round palace, and you see, not quite completed, the future residence of the Viceroy, which surpasses, in importance, his present house in Old Delhi.

As one looks at this artificial town, built in a few years on an arid space, where the highest trees are as yet only four feet high, one is amazed. The most contradictory feelings fill one's mind. What is the exact significance of this little Versailles Delhiesque? What does this heap of stones, this orgy of colonnades, mean? Why those colossal avenues, these bare Champs Elysées, these over-large fountains, these dazzling lights?

I mention Versailles because the architectural arrangement of red sandstone makes one think—very faintly—of the bungalow that Mansard built for Louis XIV. I repeat: very faintly. Because the style is cold. The small windows in the high walls (necessary in a hot country) are not in harmony with the ensemble. The designer of this palace has also had in mind the Escurial, St. Peter's at Rome and Buckingham Palace. One must say, on his behalf, that it was well-nigh impossible to find a suitable style. A modern Alhambra would perhaps have been better suited to the golden splendour of the Delhi sunsets. But had the English been inspired by Moslem art, would they not have annoyed two hundred million Hindus?

Whatever one's opinion may be of the æsthetic value of these palaces, one cannot help trying to discover the significance of this monumental display. One ends up by finding it in the necessity to impress upon Indians, from the millionaire potentate to the starving sweeper, a respect for British power.

One can criticize certain acts, certain mistakes committed by the governors of India. But one must recognize their deep knowledge of Indian psychology. In the country of the rajahs, a democratic Viceroy, affecting an excessive simplicity and a contempt for official pomp, a Viceroy dressed in the ordinary clothes of a Socialist Member of Parliament, would command no respect. The ceremonial of the Viceroy's court, in fact, reminds one of the etiquette at the Court of St. James's. The aides-de-camp of His Excellency wear a blue uniform with gold buttons and coloured collars. Guests, when they go into the dining-rooms of the palace, see an army of turbaned

servants dressed in handsome bright red coats edged with gold lace, motionless as statues, saluting His Excellency by keeping their joined hands on a level with their foreheads. The ladies who are invited to the Viceroy's drawing-rooms curtsy when they are presented.

The Viceroy being the direct representative of the Emperor of India, the troops are drawn up in line and present arms when he enters a town. An English politician, a former ambassador or a peer of the United Kingdom, so soon as he is styled Viceroy, becomes the personification of the sovereign. The reigning princes of India, the Nizams, who equip at their own expense an army of 25,000 men, the Maharajahs, possessors of untold treasures, speak to him with deference. A rajah who in his own semi-independent state regales himself with Neroesque fêtes and holds almost the right of the life and death of his subjects, pays homage to Lord Irwin, Viceroy of an Empire of three hundred and twenty million souls.

The English officers in India have many favourite pastimes: polo, pig-sticking and whisky-and-soda. Most of the cavalry regiments have teams, which meet in sporting matches, Indian cavalry teams, maintained by rajahs. Sometimes the Bhopal team beats the 2nd Lancers, sometimes the Indian cavalry beats the Maharajah of Kashmir's team.

Two o'clock. The avenue which leads to the polo ground at Delhi is thronged with sports cars and Rolls-Royces. Glittering in the sun, the Maharajah of Alwar's car passes. A limousine, whose body is all aluminium, shimmers like a mirror. An enor-

mous lamp mounted on a stem stands out in front of the bonnet by a yard, and gold crowns, large as saucers, adorn each of the doors. The buffaloes, when they see this meteor pass, are astonished in spite of everything, and cease chewing the cud for some seconds.

A bugle call. The chukka begins. The umpire whistles. Captain W. is penalized—he is offside by at least a length and a half. Numbers are put up on the board. The scores appear: 4 points to the English. The white people in the stands applaud. Four points to the Indians. The coloured soldiers at the far end of the ground give cheers. The little white ball makes chauvinism oscillate like Foucault's pendulum.

CHAPTER XXXII

INDIA—THE PARADISE OF THE MIDDLE-CLASS ENGLISH

It is said that India is the earthly Paradise of the English. Take an ordinary city employee, an under-manager of the Bank of Liverpool, a qualified engineer from Sheffield. In the United Kingdom who are they? Nobodies. An entity in the host of middle-class folk. What do they earn? From three to ten pounds a week. What prestige have they when they go down into the Tube, mount on to the top of a bus or applaud on the five-shilling stand at a football match at Twickenham? They are of no account. In London society they are unknown. In Regent Street the nobleman's Rolls-Royce which passes bespatters them with mud. If they are married, their wives are humble ladies who are content to do the work of the house, or have a charlady or general servant who, as a rule, is only capable of burning the porridge, that national dish.

Transport them suddenly to India, and their salary, their position, their privileges are multiplied by three, four, five. Instead of a small flat with its sitting-room hardly bigger than a mouse-trap, they live in a spacious bungalow, with enormous rooms eighteen or twenty feet high. Their garden is huge, sometimes limitless. Flowers grow without trouble. Domestics swarm round their villa. Eight servants is the minimum that one comes across in the middle-class Englishman's house. A well-to-do Englishman does not keep fewer than eighteen or twenty. It costs him, moreover, only 250 rupees a month.

As to the standing of a little clerk in the City, transplanted to the United Provinces, or the Punjab, it is multiplied by ten. Mr. Brown, parliamentary registration number 945,692 in the suburbs of London, has become "Sahib." Indians, from the Brahmin to the pariah, respect him and salute him. He dines at home every evening in a dinner-jacket. He runs a car. He is one of the white élite. He looks down in a lordly fashion on the native, and pats on the shoulder the baboo, the educated Hindu, who is sometimes much more cultured, much better read than he is. And if this selfsame Englishman holds a high position in the Government of the country, it is not the shoulder of the baboo that he pats, it is the Indian prince that he addresses familiarly:

"Hallo, Maharajah! How goes it?"

For the potentate with his pearls, the nawab with his diamonds, can astonish the Europeans on the continent, win smiles from Parisian ladies, be treated with courtesy by the French, the Germans or the Italians; in India they are just the protégés of the British Crown which, whilst ostensibly respecting their independence, makes them quietly understand its wishes. Under the shadow of the British flag Mr. Brown feels himself very powerful.

It is the plain truth.

India is, then, the Eldorado of the English—civil and military. The pay of the officers is also very high, and would make French Colonial officers' mouths water. A captain takes a monthly pay of 700 rupees. A colonel has 1,200 rupees. The pension of a retired lieutenant-colonel is £800 a year. The salary of the Governor of Bombay is £10,000.

The Viceroy of India receives £20,000 plus expenses of up-keep, which bring the total to about £40,000 per annum. It is true that the Viceroy has so many receptions and fêtes to give that it is probable that he has to make up from his personal income the full sum of his annual expenses.

This great wealth which flows from the Treasury of Delhi into the pockets of the English officials has been the subject of lively criticism on the part of Indian politicians. They consider that His Majesty's Government is very generous to its servants, generous, of course, at the expense of the Indian taxpayer. Thirty million pounds are appropriated each year to the service of pensions and the administration of public works, railways, canals, roads, etc. Indian politicians say that this is a sterile expense which impoverishes the country. I do not know how far they are justified. That England pays her officials too highly is possible. But that she impoverishes the country by using capital for the construction of railways and roads we cannot believe. The extreme Indian Nationalists play a strong card in criticizing England. But they forget a little too readily all that she has done for India.

. . . . .

The hospitality of the Viceroy of India is not viceregal, but regal. Distinguished visitors are not only received by His Excellency, but housed and fed at his expense during their stay in Delhi. They are put up in the Viceregal Lodge, which is a sort of official boarding-house for guests of high rank.

Perhaps the French Colonial Minister will one day

allow our governor-generals a special indemnity which will permit them to entertain three dozen eminent travellers at the official residence. The wise and prudent economy that obtains in the French overseas dominions will no longer be *de rigueur,* and we shall no longer have scenes of this kind at the garden-parties of our Residents:

The scene is a garden. Tea is being served under the palm-trees. The male guests in white, the ladies in pink, chat by the side of an improvised buffet. Madame, the wife of the Resident, is handing round the cups, and asks each person, the sugar bowl in her hand:

"One lump, or none at all?"

Strange to say, an old planter replies bluntly:

"Two lumps, Madame."

Then Madame simpers, all prunes and prisms:

"Oh! but it will be syrup!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

NEPAL, THE FORBIDDEN REALM

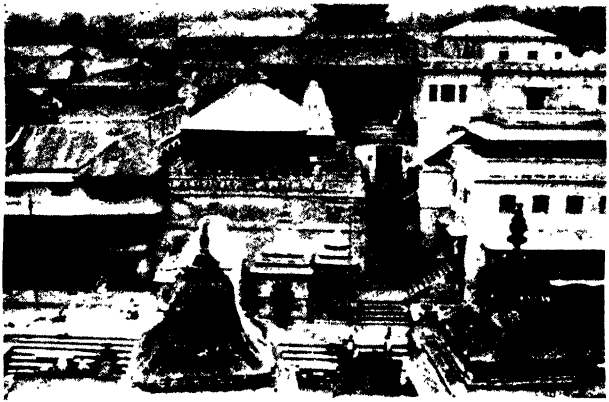
BETWEEN Tibet, or more exactly between the chain of the Himalayas and the valley of the Ganges, there exists a kingdom separated from the rest of the world by mountains that are almost inaccessible—a Kingdom quite independent of British India, where the Viceroy is not represented by a Resident but by a Special Envoy, where Europeans go very rarely, and where Western civilization is carefully excluded by a maharajah proud of his isolation: it is Nepal.

A king reigns over Nepal, but he does not govern. A silent and timid young man, twenty-three years old, he lives under the shadow of an elderly man of astonishing perspicacity and will, jealous of his authority and of his absolute power. This redoubtable prince, who is at the same time the Prime Minister and the Field-Marshal of the army, is called the Maharajah Chandra Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana. And it is because he had the extreme courtesy to invite me to see him that I had the unlooked-for chance of penetrating into Nepal, and of admiring its natural beauties and architectural curiosities.[1]

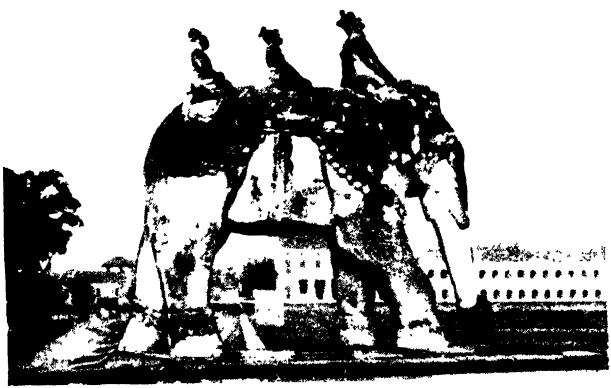
Even if the Maharajah did not prohibit the entry of Westerners into his country, one must acknowledge that the majority of tourists would forgo the journey to Nepal, its access is so difficult, for Benares, for example, which is the nearest large

[1] Mr. Perceval Landon, author of a very well-informed book on Nepal, estimates about 120 as the number of English who have visited the kingdom, and a dozen Europeans who have penetrated there.

THE MAHARAJAH CHANDRA SHAMSHER PRIME MINISTER OF NEP



Hindu Temple at Pashpati, Nepal



The Three Kings of Nepal on the Stone Elephant at Katmandu

Indian town, is four days' journey from Katmandu, the capital of the kingdom.

After having travelled for twenty-four hours and changed trains four times, I arrived one evening at Raxaul, the terminus of the Indian railway. I spent the night in an abandoned bungalow, empty, or rather filled with swarms of fireflies, mosquitoes, lizards and flying ants, not to mention a cobra, which my boy and I tried in vain to decapitate with sticks and which disappeared into the night.

The next morning I started for Katmandu, which is seventy-eight miles from the frontier. A narrow-gauge railway took me through the Terai Jungle, an immense tropical forest, full of beasts, monkeys, many-coloured birds, high bushes and mosquitoes which carry the most virulent malaria that one can get in Northern India. It is the first barrier that opposes the importunate visitor to Nepal. Arriving at Amlekganj, the last station, a car is waiting to take me to Bimpedhi, but it does not go farther than that, because there is no road. The chains of mountains that rise up, inaccessible to any vehicular traffic, are the other barriers that Nepal offers to the too curious travellers.

The car and my Madrasi servant in his blue turban having excited the curiosity of the villagers, I found a hundred Nepalese assembled at the ford of the river. Among these was a Gurkha policeman, chief of the escort, armed with a kukri, eighteen coolies and a Tibetan horse, sent by the Maharajah. I mounted the horse; my boy ensconced himself in a sort of wooden box carried by four men; the

coolies stowed the baggage on their backs, and the policeman took the head of the caravan.

After going up for three hours, we reached, at dusk, the hamlet of Sisaghari, 6,000 feet high, and spent the night in a comfortable (?) bungalow, where I found a bedstead without sheets or blankets, a tub, giant spiders, centipedes as long as one's finger and hairy as a bear, a very choice assortment of lizards and a Himalayan vampire-bat with brown fur which, frightened at my presence, volplaned round me for a few moments and then retired to the neighbouring caverns. I do not mention the food, because if one had not taken the precaution of bringing provisions and drinks, one would have had to forgo eating and drinking during the journey. In the evening, whilst I was watching a blazing forest, which shot up tongues of fire on the side of a distant mountain, the Gurkha policeman said to me:

"Sahib, we must start to-morrow at four in the morning. The journey is rough—twenty-five miles!"

Up before daybreak, our caravan moved on in the darkness over rocky paths, by the side of torrents and cascades.

Suddenly, the dawn lit up as if a hand-grenade had been thrown between two peaks, whilst the thick forest, full of twisted tree-trunks, threw mysterious blue shadows over the valleys of the chaotic mountains. We descended 4,500 feet to follow a pass hemmed in by natural high walls, to reascend 8,000 feet to the neck of Chandragiri, whence the valley of Nepal stretched out before us.

An unforgettable sight, a magnificent spectacle

that will always remain stamped on my memory! The valley was patterned with crops, which undulated in the wind like soft green waves, and which scaled step by step the surrounding mountains. Their massive silhouette stood up in successive bastions, whilst, crowning all, the Himalaya range projected into the azure its dazzling phantasmagoria. Imagine a fantastic barrier of snow twice the height of Mont Blanc, jagged, split, torn by prehistoric cataclysms, bathed in a relentless light which shimmered on the glaciers and enhanced the unspotted whiteness of their eternal snows.

It was eleven o'clock; the coolies, who had been walking since seven, rested at last. The descent into the valley was comparatively easy, and the arrival at Katmandu, the city of pagodas, recompensed us for the tiring journey. The chief of the escort conducted me to the huge habitation which was reserved for me, and which resembled a monastery. I had at my disposal four rooms, with whitewashed walls, plainly furnished, and I had the pleasure of discovering that above my bed, between the beams of the ceiling, three pairs of sparrows had built their nests. They went happily in and out by the doors, accompanied by friends, relations or connexions in the feathered world; they chatted, they quarrelled; they flew here and there without appearing to be in the least troubled by the unaccustomed presence of a stranger. In fact, I was sleeping not in a bedroom, but in an aviary.

The court carriage which came to fetch me next day was a barouche on eight springs in Second

Empire style. On the box I saw the faithful Gurkha of my bodyguard seated at the side of the turbaned coachman, and standing behind me, two footmen dressed in yellow, whose duty consisted in running along the streets in front of the horses and calling out at the top of their voices:

"Hola! Ho! Make room for the carriage! . . ."

The mission of these lackeys and the mediæval setting appeared to me to be superfluous; but I soon realized that they were by no means useless. There are hardly any vehicles in Nepal. The inhabitants have no idea of traffic. It is therefore necessary to tell them that a carriage is coming, if not they would allow themselves to be run over. One wonders how they manage to escape from the cars belonging to the royal family and other notabilities. The happy owners of these six-cylinder cars are only able to use them in the Katmandu valley on two very poor roads, one eighteen miles long and the other twelve. These sports cars were transported, with chassis stripped, over the steep paths of the passes by innumerable coolies, who hoisted them like ants set upon dragging along the ground the body of an insect twenty times as big as themselves.

The coolies of Nepal must be virtuosos in house-removals, for in the Maharajah's palace there are enormous mirrors and bronze statues, weighing more than three tons, that can only have crossed these impassable ridges on the backs of men.

The high functionary who was deputed to be my mentor and initiator into the life of Nepal one day brought me a letter from General Krishna Shamsher, one of the Maharajah's eight sons, inviting me

to attend a military athletic meeting on the Tundi Khel—the parade-ground.

Crowds filled the streets. We passed through the ranks of Gurkhas, and reached, in the centre of the ground, an enormous tree surrounded by a terrace which served as a grand-stand. The Maharajah received his guests in a most affable manner. We were, by the way, only five Europeans: the British envoy, a colonel of the Indian Army on a mission, and a couple of English people residing in Katmandu. His Majesty Tribhubana Bir Vikram Sah, King of Nepal, arrived in a closed carriage of a modest kind, and received a salute of twenty-one guns. The umbrella-bearer hurried up and opened an immense umbrella over the king's head as he came and sat beside the Maharajah.

His Majesty wore a field-marshal's uniform and a French *képi* with an enormous diamond above the peak. This stone, by the way, is a mere bagatelle compared with the royal tiara, worn at important ceremonies, which is entirely composed of diamonds, pearls and emeralds. As to the Maharajah's jewels, they include a fabulous emerald, three and a half inches long, set in a tiara with seven diamonds which belonged to the famous Nana Sahib, of infamous memory.

The athletic events began, but rather than wax enthusiastic over Gurkhas circling horizontal bars, I preferred to admire the Maharajah's grandchildren, who had come to the fête. What charming creatures! There was a little boy ten years old, dressed in black, with a wistful look, and a tall girl twelve years of age in a long mauve and pink robe with stockings and patent shoes. Manet would cer-

tainly have neglected the celebrated Olympia in order to paint her portrait. This girl, with a tea-rose complexion, eyelids darkened with antimony, hair shining like jet, cut in a thick fringe above her eyebrows, with two corkscrew kiss-curls flat on each cheek, this adorable, unreal, little Asiatic fairy with eyes sombre and grave, with regular features, was busy, like a little mother, looking after her three-year-old niece, who seemed to be exactly like her. A strange pink doll, a tiny living idol, her eyes already made up, who seemed to have escaped from a temple, she came, between two of the events, to salute her august grandfather. Then very discreetly she sat herself on the knees of the little princess, her aunt.

The Maharajah's family is numerous. He has eight sons, who are all generals in the Nepal Army. But his sons will probably not succeed him. He has made a list of the possible successors, and his brother, General-in-Chief Bhim Shamsher, is at the top of it. His eldest son is only eighth in the table. In case none of the twenty-two persons mentioned by him can succeed him, their legitimate sons will replace them, but only the son of the legal wife, with whom he is allowed to eat rice. Rice is the essential food of the orthodox, so that concubines have not the right to eat it in the presence of official wives.

Katmandu is a town that is like no other town in India. No white houses, no dried mud walls. Dwellings of two or three stories abound, built in wood or brick, with roofs of brown thatch. But

what gives them their original appearance is that the wood of the façades is marvellously carved. Each window, so to speak, has a lacework frame of ebony. Some of the houses are surrounded by verandas filled with pots of flowers. Others have decorative designs on the walls. Those of a young married couple are adorned with a huge eye painted on the door, which is intended to bring good luck to them.

After having visited the old royal palace of Hanuman Dhoka, which takes its name from the statue of the monkey god Hanuman; after being astonished to see the two tutelary divinities of the capital, Mahadeo and his wife Parvati, who are on the top of the temple, in the middle of a dormer window, like M. and Mme Gnafron, my mentor reminded me that I had promised to pay a visit to the Maharajah at Singha Darbar.

It is an immense palace, with white Corinthian pillars, whose architecture is unfortunately not in harmony with the capital that surrounds it. The mistake made at New Delhi has been repeated at Katmandu. They have built, under the Indian sky, palaces of no definite style, vaguely inspired by the Italian Renaissance, which clash with this Indian setting like a mosque in a Manchester fog.

My excellent friend, General Krishna, was waiting for me in the hall, decorated with hunting trophies—alligators, buffaloes and rhinoceroses. We ascended the Staircase of Honour, and came across an immense mural painting representing various phases of a tiger hunt given in the Terai Jungle to His Majesty King George V. Then we crossed the aides-de-camps' drawing-room, where I saw upon the walls

portraits of fortunate travellers who have visited Nepal, among others, Mlle Isabelle Massieu in 1908, Prince Antoine d'Orléans in 1911, Baron and Baroness Maurice Rothschild in 1913, and M. Sylvain Lévi, the distinguished French authority on Oriental studies, in 1925.

Suddenly I thought I was dreaming. As I turned, I saw General Krishna's figure reflected in a mirror which elongated his silhouette very amusingly. He pointed out five other distorting mirrors like those which amuse visitors at the Musée Grévin, mirrors that caricature us, stretching us out or contracting us. Astonished, I asked him why these mirrors were put there, and he told me:

"Oh! It is to amuse my father. When he has serious things to think about he glances, as he passes, in the mirrors, and that makes him smile."

The room of distorting mirrors preceded a sort of gallery of ordinary mirrors, where the Maharajah holds gala receptions, seated on a throne with busts of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra on either side of it.

In the middle of this highly gilded room was a marble basin surmounted by a fountain made of Venetian glass, with a complicated mechanism, by which, in a moment, one can turn on luminous sprays of changing colours. Louis XIV never thought of installing fountains in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. An oversight! . . .

On the day the Maharajah received me in his private apartment, we talked about India and the secret Bolshevik propaganda. The ruler of Nepal is not only a man, he is a leader. There is probably no authority in the world so absolute as his: he does

not, however, govern Nepal from a high and inaccessible Olympus; he interests himself in the smallest details.

Every day, for instance, after having purified his body in a bath which contains a glass of sacred Ganges water, and offered, according to the ritual, five rupees to the Brahmins of his Hindu religion, he attends to the current affairs of the Government, and in the afternoon gives judgment, without appeal, on law cases submitted by his subjects to his supreme decision.

He represents, in fact, the Court of Appeal of Katmandu in one person.

Conversation (in English) with Chandra Shamsher Bahadur Rana is interesting, because one can see, behind the clear view and authority of the old gentleman of sixty-seven, a strong will and a perfectly balanced mind. Further, like all really strong men, he has no use for obsequious courtiers, nor for platitudes, which are the common currency of Asiatic potentates. Someone said to me one day, regarding this:

"If ever you write your impressions of Nepal, do not consider yourself obliged by politeness to praise His Highness, nor to say that everything is perfect under the shadow of the Himalayas. The Maharajah would prefer frankness rather than sugary epithets."

The advice was superfluous.

The Nepalese, owing to time-honoured traditions and religious fanaticism, have no desire to see Europeans, missionaries or traders, coming freely into

their country, nor do they desire to change their old customs.

I witnessed *de visu* one of their most curious customs, one morning when I was at Pashpati.

The little town, dear to the hearts of the Hindu, stands on the banks of the Bagmati, which, to the Nepalese, is a kind of Ganges in miniature. Surrounded by tall trees and wooded terraces, Pashpati is indeed an ideal place of pilgrimage, a retreat whose peacefulness is propitious to meditation.

My mentor was pointing out the beauties of the temple of Pashpatinath and the numerous chapels and *stupas* dedicated to Siva, when, upon the opposite bank of the Bagmati, along the ghaut where they burn the bodies, we saw a silent group, busy around a stretcher.

"Is it a dead body that they are going to burn?" I asked.

My companion looked more carefully and said:

"No. . . . It is a living person who is dying."

"They are not going to burn him alive, I trust?"

"No. The fact is, it is a man who is very ill, and who, according to tradition, wishes to breathe his last on the banks of the Bagmati. . . . Look, see for yourself."

The stretcher was placed on an inclined plane, with the lower end in the stream of the sacred river. It was dipped deeply enough for the legs of the dying man, draped in white up to his thighs, to be bathed in the water.

Then the relatives withdrew. The curious onlookers disappeared and the bearers squatted in silence.

It was a strange spectacle. The sun lit up the

scene. Crows cawed and flew from one bank to the other. Behind us, in the cedars and the flowering acacias, birds were singing. Twenty yards from the stretcher, two or three men, half-naked, were performing their religious ablutions, without a glance at, without a thought for the sufferer.

The sufferer? Was it, then, with the idea of saving him that they plunged his legs into the cold water? Cannot the laws of medicine in Asia overcome such customs and such human stupidity?

As I watched this orthodox man die, with his livid skin and thin legs that were reflected in zig-zags in the green water, I thought of the Bengal dictum: "Nowhere is it darker than underneath the lamp." The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are the flaming torches which light up the Indian empyrean; but alas! beneath these marvellous lamps, there is a dark shadowy zone where the monster of fanaticism and the ghoul of superstition hold individuals by millions, and condemn them irresistibly to the most barbarous practices and the most inexcusable rites.

Recollecting this tableau, I discovered one day with amazement, that the Maharajah had dared to abolish slavery in 1924. Formerly there existed in the kingdom numerous slaves who worked the farms and belonged, like the cattle, to the families who employed them. The Maharajah, by a succession of edicts, ordered that slaves should be able to buy their freedom for sums varying from thirty to a hundred and twenty-five rupees. He addressed his subjects. He, himself, pleaded the cause of the slaves. He made speeches. He determined to overcome the prejudices of the reactionaries. And in the end he imposed his will on the people. There are

no longer, officially, any slaves in Nepal, where formerly there were fifty thousand. Their redemption has cost the treasury £280,000. The tariff was, by the way, rather curious. One gave twenty rupees for a boy over three years old, seventy-five rupees for a man from thirty to forty years, and a hundred rupees for a woman. Over the age of fifty the price of human flesh dropped to forty rupees for the woman and thirty rupees for the man.

One day, as I was walking with my mentor through the village of Kistipur, he pointed out a freed slave. I looked with sympathetic feeling at this man, freed at last from the most unjust servitude. I should have liked His Highness to have seen this outcome of his noble work. I imagined the life of this liberated man to be one of perpetual graceful actions, a daily delight illuminated with optimism and gentleness. Suddenly he disappeared behind his hut. We asked a peasant what he was going to do. His placid neighbour, with high cheekbones, almond eyes and shaggy hair, replied simply:

"He is going to thrash his farm boy for forgetting to feed his buffalo."

After slavery, the Maharajah attacked the terrible rite of *suttee*. As in India, the Nepalese widows were in the habit of throwing themselves on the fire which was consuming the remains of their husbands.

Jung Bahadur, a predecessor of the Maharajah, tried to stop this desire for the fire on the part of the widows, by ordering that no one had the right to allow herself to burn if she had any children to

bring up. Some obeyed the edict. Others, forced by public opinion, which did not favour any change in tradition, continued to throw themselves on the funeral pyre. The Maharajah then thought it was necessary to put an end once and for all to this barbarous custom. On the 28th of June, 1920, he formally forbade this form of suicide. From that time, all widows had to content themselves with watching the burning of their dead husbands, and to abstain from prolonging the ceremony by throwing themselves upon the pyre.

One will appreciate better the hold that tradition and religious faith have in Nepal when one realizes that *suttees* were forbidden in India by Lord Bentinck in 1829 and in Nepal nearly a century later. Moreover, the Maharajah, who slowly, progressively, enforces his reforms with a true insight of the psychology of the Nepalese, offers a striking contrast to the foolishness of the King of Afghanistan, who offended the feelings of the greater part of his subjects and paid, with his throne, for the hastiness of his innovations.

One has, in truth, to wander into the little towns in the valley, such as Patan, Bhatgaon or Pashpati, to realize that Nepal is not shut off from Westerners without good cause. A peaceful invasion of Europeans into this kingdom, in which the customs at heart have not changed for ten centuries, would bring immediate trouble into the calm atmosphere of these highlanders steeped in tradition.

One day, in a town, we found the inhabitants arguing heatedly. We learnt that a drama had just taken place, and the people were discussing it from door to door. It concerned a case of adultery. An

artisan found out that his wife was deceiving him with a neighbour. According to the custom of the country the outraged husband has the right to kill his faithless wife's accomplice. But it is specified that the accomplice should not be killed there and then. He is given, it appears, several minutes to escape. Then the death hunt begins. The husband, armed with his kukri, follows the lover, who is unarmed, and if he catches him, cuts his throat.

In this instance, the outraged husband asked for authority from Katmandu to have recourse to this method of vengeance, a little out of date. Would the fooled husband be allowed to wash away in blood the offence of his too enterprising neighbour?

Mr. Perceval Landon affirms that the wife's accomplice can save his life if he agrees to crawl on all fours, in public, under the husband's raised leg. But the Gurkhas are a proud and warlike race. None of them would resort to this humiliating expedient to save his existence.

I have not been able to confirm the veracity of this detail regarding the avatars of the Don Juans of Nepal; but if it has been done only once, it deserves to be mentioned, on account of its originality.

The temples in Nepal resemble in no way temples in India. Buddhism and Hinduism offer, side by side under the same roof, their idols and relics for the adoration of the faithful; it is indeed a splendid example of religious toleration and liberty, which one does not find in many other parts of the world.

Imagine a Roman Catholic church with a part set aside for the services of Protestants or Jews. The Brahmins of Nepal have much greater merit by allowing this juxtaposition of two religions, for pure Buddhism, such as was preached by Gautama Buddha, had for its object the release of the faithful from the tyranny and cupidity of these very Brahmins, the suppression of castes, and the condemnation, in a word, of the base image-worship and the bloody sacrifices dear to Hindu fanaticism.

A good example is also given by the Maharajah, who attends, with praiseworthy impartiality, the great ceremonies of these two religions.

The temples in Nepal are very like Chinese pagodas with superimposed roofs, and are quadrangular in shape, built on a stone basement. At the height of twelve to fifteen feet a first frieze, carved in wood, serves as the resting-place for sixteen obliquely laid beams, which support the first roof in the form of a truncated pyramid; this supports a second roof, then a third.

These oblique beams, often coloured, are carved on the front side. Above is a dragon or some other monster; at the base is a bas-relief representing a series of groups whose attitudes are indescribably obscene. Bas-reliefs of such a special character are not, by the way, exceptional, but are exactly reproduced on most of the temples in the kingdom.

At Bhatgaon there is a temple with five roofs, which is among the most curious buildings in Nepal, because, instead of being built upon the ground, it has been erected on the top of a pyramid with four terraces. The central stairway is lined with symbolical sculpture: first Jaya Malla and Patha, two

legendary heroes of Herculean strength; two elephants, two lions, two dragons, and last the two goddesses, Baghinii and Singhini, who, it seems, were stronger than all the dragons, lions, elephants and warriors put together.

During my stay I had the opportunity of being present in Bhatgaon at the fête of the 13th of April, which is the Nepalese New Year's Day. Although the old and picturesque city is nine miles from Katmandu, the road was filled with innumerable pilgrims going in a merry procession. The women were carrying their children on their backs like baskets; they were dressed in gay colours; their black hair was decorated with fresh flowers and knotted in a saucy chignon placed like a brioche over the left temple; the men were walking, or riding Tibetan horses. We passed through a hamlet, where merry-making had been going on since the day before, and groups of men, enlivened by copious libations, and preceded by cymbal players, were staggering under the burden of a huge box of heavy idols, a ton weight, fixed upon two enormous bamboos.

We reached the place at last where the temple stood under five roofs. Its steps were filled with hundreds of women and children, a veritable living kaleidoscope, where red alternated with bright yellow and cerulean blue with almond green. In order better to see the royal princes pass, some spectators were seated in an irreverent fashion on the shoulders of the stone heroes; others were perched on elephants' trunks, others hanging on to the heads of threatening dragons. Some children—youth has no respect—had even climbed upon the two goddesses, framing with their naked legs their unmoved faces.

Farther on, near another temple, in a huge square surrounded by thousands of spectators controlled by Gurkhas, a mast leaning at an angle of forty-five degrees was a symbol of the *lingam* of Siva. Being the only white person in the midst of this enormous crowd, I had the strange sensation of being a monster who had strayed from another planet. The men, women and children who filled the windows and the adjacent streets, looked at me just as French peasants at a national fête would have stared at a Chinese mandarin in a flowered robe, or a cannibal, bedecked with shells and bones.

About four o'clock a rumour ran through the crowd. The troops stood at attention. I expected to see approaching an imposing cortège of princes in sumptuous Nepalese robes, mounted on elephants caparisoned with golden brocade. . . . But Nepal offered me another surprise. The sons of the Maharajah were on horseback, in smart riding suits made by the best London tailors. . . . We shook hands. Was I at Bhatgaon or amongst gentlemen dressed for Rotten Row? A new surprise. . . . Three covered conveyances with blinds down. This detail reminded me that I was indeed in Nepal, for these conveyances, whose occupants could not be seen by the crowd, carried the wives of the Maharajah's sons. I was convinced about it when I noticed that the blinds had been raised a few inches, and I had a glimpse —very fleeting, alas!—of the most beautiful eyes in the world.

At five o'clock the symbolical mast was lowered to the ground. It was the end of the ceremony. The New Year's festivities were over. The people of Katmandu dispersed into the streets of Bhatgaon

and returned in a slower procession towards their deserted home town.

When, eight days later, the caravan which was taking me back to India pulled up for a halt on the summit of Chandragiri, I turned and looked back at the valley of Katmandu, and gazed for a long time at this strange kingdom before wishing it farewell.

This morning, the mountains hid beneath a filmy gossamer of mist the dazzling fairyland of their glaciers and the magnificence of their snowy peaks. The capital was almost invisible at the farther side of the plain. But the recollections of my stay were projected, one after another, upon the fantastic screen of the Himalayas.

I saw them go past with sadness. I regretted that I was compelled to take leave of the Maharajah and his sons, who had shown me such gracious and kindly hospitality. I regretted that I should not see any more those pagodas with their many roofs which look like the practical toys of a race of giants; nor the large sacred fish in the Balaji pool over which, in the neighbouring basin, the statue of Vishnu keeps guard, lying in the water on a bed of cobras carved in stone; nor the god Machendra, protector of Nepal, which is displayed once a year after the shirt which covers his ugly body, painted bright red, has been taken off. . . . I was sorry to say good-bye to my white-washed room and my tame birds; the terrible gods and the gardens full of flowers; the prayer-wheels, the belfries of Buddha, whose windows look to the four cardinal points; the Tibetan caravaneers, so dirty, and the Gurkha peasants, so clean. . . .

I regretted, above all, a charming picture which outshone all the others. The Maharajah's granddaughter, the delightful, dainty little doll who toddled between the general's legs on the parade-ground at Tundi Khel.

Then I shut my eyes on the roof of the world, and I started my caravan on its way. I wished to take away in the glance of this little living idol, the smile of farewell from the kingdom of Nepal.

CHAPTER XXXIV

KARMA

THE Yogi Bhikshu is a Hindu philosopher who, in the schools of the student yogis, teaches the theory of Karma, that is to say, of action. How does this Hindu sum up the law of Karma?

By this strange formula: "Do what you like." A singular maxim which seems to head straight for anarchy. "Neither God nor master. . . . Do what you like." The essential thing is to wish to do nothing contrary to the laws of practical morality. The philosopher seems to imply that as all action has its sources in thought we ought to purify its source. That is somewhat reassuring, and seems to chain the monster "Do-what-you-like." But Bhikshu disconcerts us again when he tells us how to purify the source of thought. One must concentrate one's mind on "*Om*.". . . *Om* is, it seems, a sort of auto-suggestion of Karma Yogo which enables us to put aside evil.

The same philosopher explains to his pupils why misfortunes accumulate sometimes on the head of a good, generous and honest man. It is the fault of Destiny. And this Destiny is omnipotent, because it is the will of the majority of mankind. So the will of one person is overcome by the will of the many.

The Yogi Bhikshu does not appear to worry himself with the Western laws of logic. Is he a fatalist or a partisan of free will? How can we reconcile Karma and fatalism? If the will of Destiny, that is to say, of the multitude, is stronger than the will of

the isolated virtuous man, what is the use of him concentrating his mind on *Om*?

That is perhaps the reason why so many yogis have given up everything, even *Om*. I came across four who had settled themselves in an enclosure in a public square in Madura. They had come 360 miles on foot and were stranded there. One had long hair, nearly a yard long. A magnificent head to advertise a hair lotion. Another, seated on a plank of nails, his arm round his knees, his expression thoughtful, realized Rodin's " Le Penseur," if not in muscularity, at any rate in nudity.

These yogis were terribly thin. Their costume consisted solely of a piece of stuff about the size of a playing-card hanging by a dirty ribbon round their haunches, or a sort of sachet of goat's skin.

While the loafers of Madura around me were watching these four yogis, two were rubbing one another's hair with handfuls of dust. They were totally regardless of the crowd of humans who watched them. They were not concentrating their minds on *Om*. Their subconscious mind seemed in no way to wrestle with Karma. They were forcing themselves to live, or rather, to remain insensible to suffering.

This strange quartet were " The Three Musketeers " of Renunciation, with a d'Artagnan who pricked the end of his back to punish himself for having loved Mme Bonacieux too much. . . .

CHAPTER XXXV

EAST AGAINST WEST

THE Southern Cross shone dazzlingly in the satin blue night. The luxurious *André-Lebon* of the Messageries Maritimes had lost sight of the shores of Ceylon and was heading for the Gulf of Aden. It was so hot that the deck was a dormitory, where pyjamas and kimonos fraternized in the search for the slightest breeze.

My deck-chair neighbour jumped about like a young goat, between a couple of cigarettes and two sips of iced peppermint. The hot damp monsoon bathed the boat with an overpowering moisture which acted on my neighbour's nerves like a too-high current in the mechanism of a robot.

Tired out, she threw her box of rose-tipped cigarettes into the sea and said to me:

"Ah! my dear friend, tell me something to make me forget this heat; if not, I shall throw my kimono into the water as well, and then I shall throw myself in after it in a fit of modesty. It appears that you have just made a long stay in India. . . . Tell me your general impression, sum up your ideas, right now."

"My impression? This is it. I started out with the idea that the antagonism between the West and the East, many a time emphasized by travellers, was not so irreconcilable that an understanding of the two mentalities one with the other could not be brought about by mutual good-will. I leave India, on the contrary, with the conviction that the Isthmus of Suez separates inexorably two incompatible civiliza-

tions, two communities, as different, one from the other, as the animal kingdom is from the vegetable.

"I assure you that this antagonism will always haunt me as a most disturbing revelation. It impressed itself on my mind during the first weeks of my stay in India. And, do you know what saddened me most? The fact that a Westerner cannot become a true friend of an Oriental; the fact that real intimacy cannot exist between them; a spiritual, religious, moral and social difference divides them, in spite of themselves. There are exceptions, naturally. The rule is not absolute. Certain anglicized or Europeanized Indians maintain cordial and affectionate relations with us. But these denationalized and Westernized Indians, honestly converted to our own mode of thought, do not represent India. And that self-same transformed man who has dined with you in his dinner-jacket in Paris, or London, or Berlin, will revert to his ancestral customs as soon as he goes back to his Punjab, his Bengal or his ancestral estate. He will once more eat his *chupatis* with his fingers that he will dip into his little dishes of vegetables seasoned with *ghi,* and will squat in Eastern fashion on the mat in his room instead of sitting on a chair. He will be delighted, if he is rich, to drive you in his American car, but he will never ask you to his house. He will seem to have a great contempt for the system of the purdah, but he will hide his wife away from you, even if he has dared to let her be seen in Europe.

"The inexorable law of caste overwhelms him. He will sit at table with a Christian when he is away from India; when he returns to India he will never ask you to dinner. If he asks you to tea, he will

watch you drink and eat as a visitor to the Zoo watches the animals feed. I have noticed it repeatedly with Indians of high caste as well as with the lowest Sudras. . . .

" One day, in a village on the Nepal frontier, I was obliged to take a light meal in a hut, where lived the driver of the car that I had hired. My servant had put my provisions on the seat, where this Indian of low caste usually fed. Without hesitation, the latter at once begged my boy to take away those infamous foods which undoubtedly had polluted his dirty seat. I had to try not to burst out laughing, the whole thing was so comic.

" So that you may understand more easily Indian customs, I will use a comparison. Imagine a rich man in France, Italy or England, who had invited a Chinese mandarin, a Brahmin, a Moslem savant or a learned man from Tibet to spend a few weeks at his château. His factotum, or secretary, goes to meet the illustrious foreigner at the station, and escorts him to the visitors' quarters at the far end of the park, a long way from the host's house. He wishes him good-bye, and tells him to make himself at home; puts a car at his disposal, so that he can see the sights of the neighbourhood. Then one day, without any ceremony, the important foreigner at last meets his host, who asks him if he is quite satisfied; if there is anything he wants and, if there is, will he please say so. He thanks his host for his gracious hospitality, and so leaves without having had the faintest idea of his personality, without having had the slightest contact with him.

" Now change over the personalities of the comparison, and you will have some idea of the customs

of India. One does not criticize them. One admits that they are so and tries to fathom the reasons. Any member of our European aristocracy would think, and rightly too, that it would be insulting to his visitors to receive them in this fashion. He would, quite naturally, open the door of his palace, and, whether they were Confucianists, Buddhists, or Shintoists, he would invite them to his table. In India, religion, social customs and the law governing caste would prevent him from doing so. How could an orthodox maharajah lunch and dine with his European guests, seeing that they eat beef and drink alcohol, which are forbidden? The mere fact that the Christian cuisine has been prepared alongside his national food would constitute sacrilege, not to mention the presence of men near the zenana where his wife and his concubines are kept closely cloistered. It would therefore be stupid on our part to take exception to revered customs. Especially as a system which consists of isolating visitors in a special house is, at bottom, very wise. Each to his own, and the sacred cows will be carefully guarded!"

"When I say that a barrier exists between them and us, I am wrong. There are innumerable barriers. They paralyse all good feeling, all deep friendship. Friendly and agreeable relationships, yes; but superficial. Please do not misunderstand me: I have the pleasantest recollections of my intercourse with them. I appreciate the courtesy, the forethought, the hospitality of those in higher social circles; the servility, the docility, the primitive good-heartedness of those

on the lower rungs of the social ladder; but I have always realized that between them and me there are three thousand years of irreconcilable civilizations. Between them and us there is, on the one side, the animal that they behead every morning to appease their vindictive goddess, and on the other side, the serums of the Pasteur Institute. I know quite well that we are vulgar materialists, with our sciences, our arts, our progress, our hygiene, and they, on their part, are pure idealists, initiates of Sanatana Dharma, with their bloody sacrifices, their idolatry of Hanuman, the god with a monkey's head, and of Ganesh, the god with an elephant's head. They have therefore the right to look upon us with the polite contempt of people who believe themselves to be part and parcel of the Supreme Being, and to treat our thirst for creation, realization and conquest of natural forces as vain longings. . . . And what also renders all sentimental interpenetration between them and us very difficult is that even if we sympathize with their philosophical system, so admirable indeed when one studies it in itself, bereft of all that gross image worship, which extends from the ever-menacing *lingam* to the sacred bulls with reddened muzzles, even if we were converted to Hinduism, we should never be one of them.

" One may become a very good Mohammedan, although one may be born a Christian, and be admitted without restrictions into the Moslem community. An educated negro, converted to Christianity, will be accepted into the great Christian family, except in the United States, where race prejudice is insurmountable. But a Christian, a white, cannot become a Hindu because Hinduism is not merely a religion.

It is also a bundle of rites, a social armature in which there is no place for a convert. It is useless to try and mix with the twice-born. The *Vedas* did not foresee that other Aryans would be able, later, to try and win an honourable place in Indian society.

"When one quotes a case of deep friendship, of perfect understanding, of intimate harmony between a Hindu and a European, I involuntarily think of those photographs published in magazines in which one sees a dog and a cat living happily together, or an alligator fraternizing with a gazelle.

"I ought, however, to except Bengal, which is the most advanced province, and contains the most modernized community in India. I have met there extremely sympathetic people, keenly intelligent and very cordial. No trace of religious fanaticism. The Brahmo Samaj calms the fanatics. No purdah, no zenana! We take our meals side by side. They do not hide away their wives or daughters. In fact, after I had been five months in India, I met for the first time ladies of position, indeed, of very high caste, who talked naturally with me, as would cultured young ladies in our old Europe. The majority of them were pretty, some really beautiful. They spoke perfect English, and their conversation had a peculiar charm. Everybody knows the "three Graces" of Bengal, the three daughters of a celebrated lawyer (legal adviser to the Secretary of State for India in London), and a very talented poetess whose name, for twenty years, has been a synonym for the progress and the emancipation of women. The intellectual élite of Bengal, over whom falls the shadow of Rabindranath Tagore, allows the baffled Westerner, as he leaves, to approach at last the Hindu soul. But

it is the élite of a province which, in itself, is only a small part of India."

I stopped to light a cigarette, and continued:

"Now, you will, perhaps, ask me why . . ."

The end of my sentence faded from my lips. I noticed that my charming neighbour was asleep. Was it the gentle roll of the vessel which had rocked her to slumber, or the futility of my ineffectual remarks upon a subject that will never be cleared up?

INDEX

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