



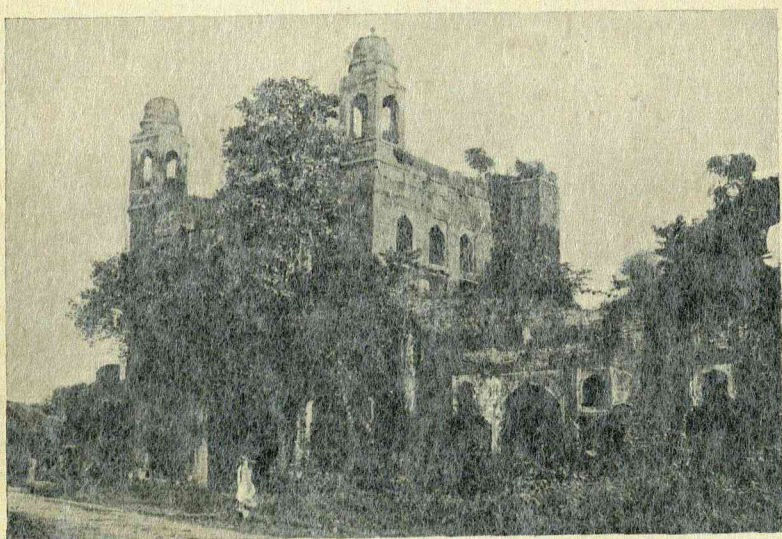
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THE ROMANCE  
OF  
AN EASTERN CAPITAL





*Frontispiece.*

THE LALBAGH FORT AT DACCA.

(See page 278.)





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# THE ROMANCE OF AN EASTERN CAPITAL

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'CHOTA NAGPORE: A LITTLE-KNOWN PROVINCE OF THE EMPIRE'  
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WITH THIRTY ILLUSTRATIONS  
AND A MAP

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### Erratum.

Page 109, lines 9 and 10. *Delete the sentence :* The name of  
Chittagong *down to* Islamabad.





## PREFACE

EASTERN BENGAL, lying outside the beaten track of the tourist and making no insistent claim to notice, has long failed to attract the attention it deserves. The much-discussed question of the Partition of Bengal, however, has recently brought it prominently before the general public, both in India and at home, and it is hoped that the story of its Capital, which the following pages attempt to relate in popular form, will be of special interest at the present time. The task of setting forth something of its history in a manner calculated to appeal to the general reader has not been without difficulty. Of the record of its earlier years, during Buddhist and Hindu supremacy, little that is authoritative has survived; while so fast did events move, and so rapid were the changes that occurred in later days, that Mussulman annals are apt to degenerate into a confusing medley of unfamiliar names, or a bare recital of





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the doings of Kings and Governors. Such authorities as these, moreover, are often hard to reconcile with one another, adding to the difficulty of the writer who strives for accuracy. It would have been out of place in a work of this kind to enter at length into controversial points, but, while much has been necessarily omitted, the aim throughout has been to give a connected readable account of the old Mussulman city in the heart of Eastern Bengal, which now, after the lapse of two hundred years, has once more attained the dignity of a Capital.

To Moulvi Sayid Aulad Hasan, who has done much to revive interest in old Dacca, my thanks are due for kindly reading the proofs and for many valuable suggestions. To him I owe the portraits of the Viceroy Shaista Khan, of Guru Nanak, and of the Emperor Farrukh Siyar and his consort. A list of some of the more important authorities consulted is given at the end of the book.

SIMLA : *June 25th, 1906.*



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# THE ROMANCE OF AN EASTERN CAPITAL

## CHAPTER I

### A LAND OF RIVER AND PLAIN

FLAT like a map, Eastern Bengal lies spread out vast and limitless, a land of river and plain. The plough of the gods, runs the legend, wielded in swift anger, had in days gone by torn down this way from the Himalayas to the sea, furrowing hill and valley, mountain and plain, to one immense dead level. From the foot of the rocky tree-clad Rajmahal Hills on the west to the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra on the east, from the snow-clad ranges of Sikhim and Nepal on the north to the shores of the Bay of Bengal on the south, it is one great wide-sweeping plain, low-lying and fertile, drained by some of the mightiest rivers of the East as they forge their impetuous way through many and ever-changing channels





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to the sea. Watered abundantly by nature in generous mood, the trim rice-fields stretch mile on mile, locked close in the embrace of countless streams and rivulets, luxuriant in every exquisite shade of green, like emeralds set in a silver sheen.

In the very heart of this land of river and plain the successive races that have dominated it have built their capital. Time and again, as empires rose and fell, its site has changed. At the whim of kings and conquerors, eager to perpetuate their fame, new cities have arisen with startling rapidity, often but to be deserted in their turn well nigh before the last stones have crowned the minarets and pinnacles of their mosques and palaces. Yet, variable as its site has been, the chief city of Eastern Bengal for over two thousand years has never been far removed from the junction of the great rivers where Megna and Ganges, Brahmaputra and Ishamutti meet at the head of the delta, a hundred miles from the sea. Here, in the days of legend and myth, Vikramadit founded the first capital of which the fame remains. Here to-day, scarce twenty miles away, still stands the time-worn city of Dacca—the once imperial capital of all Bengal, which, so long fallen from its early greatness, now again assumes the proud position of a capital—the capital of the newly formed Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam.





In all India, with its varied interests and its wonderful diversity of character, no province of similar importance has met with less notice and appreciation than Eastern Bengal. Though close within reach of Calcutta, in which, early and late, so much of the interest of the British Empire in India has centred, it yet remains apart, unknown and unappreciated, its vast expanse of river and plain unexplored save by those whom duty takes this way. Even the average official, caught by the glamour of Behar, avoids the eastern districts, and the makers of books have left it for the most part severely alone. Until it sprang into prominence recently in English politics, the very name of Eastern Bengal conjured up in the average Englishman's mind nothing but vague visions of a land of jungle and swamp, and the meeting-place of many rivers. Dacca alone, with the fame of its muslins, was familiar to English ears. The globe-trotter, absorbed in the great spectacular panorama of the beaten track, has passed it by. Treading with unvarying monotony and a strange absence of originality a certain set itinerary, he has gone home, primed with scant knowledge of the real India, to rhapsodise over the great wonders of the East that have been described again and yet again until one well nigh wearies on paper of the beauties of the Taj, the magnificence of Delhi





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and the memories of Lucknow. Scarce one has turned aside to explore this new field so near at hand. Calcutta seems to have fixed itself as the eastern limit of the tourist's travels in Bengal, and the great Province that lies beyond, making no dramatic bid for the notice of the passer-by, still remains but a name—its story untold and its charm unknown.

Yet it is there, a charm unique among all the wonders of the East. From the dry, sun-baked land of the beaten track, one turns gratefully to rest the eye upon the fair luxuriance of this well-nourished land. Small wonder that ancient chroniclers, revelling in picturesque description, called it 'a land of emerald and silver,' 'a garden fit for kings.' Even in official documents it is styled 'Jannat-ul-bilad,' the Paradise of Countries. Its perennial freshness knows but the lightest touch of autumn. Its wealth of green, in every wonderful shade, from the deepest of olives to the tender green of the earliest rice, covers the earth like a carpet lovingly spread by the gods. Here nature in luxuriant mood has lavishly bestowed the boon most craved by the sun-scorched plains of the East, watering it with the thousand streams that twist and turn like the paths of a maze through all its length and breadth. Almost all the terrible calamities that time and





again have fallen upon the Indian people this favoured province has been spared. Plague has not yet forced its way across the network of rivers that stand like a barrier to bar its path. Famine is almost unknown within the memory of man. Yearly the dense population of Eastern Bengal imposes a heavy burden upon the land, but the rich alluvial soil proves equal to the task. In the trim, well-watered rice-fields, men labour with the joy of certain harvest, knowing that bread cast upon the waters, after no long tarrying, will faithfully render up its full return.

It is a scene full of life and interest, as one passes up the great rivers on one of the many steamers that run through the heart of Eastern Bengal, linking the first city of India with the furthestmost limits of empire towards the East. There is no easier mode of travelling in all India than this. To the tourist jaded with the noise and rush of the long rail journeys that India entails, and sated with the stir and ceaseless activity of cities, there comes a strange sense of peacefulness and rest. Smoothly the huge steamer glides onward, forging its even way ahead, gallant and determined, buoyant with a sense of joyousness and power. A soft cool breeze blows gratefully. At ease in a long deck-chair, one watches the fascinating life of the river unfolded in brief



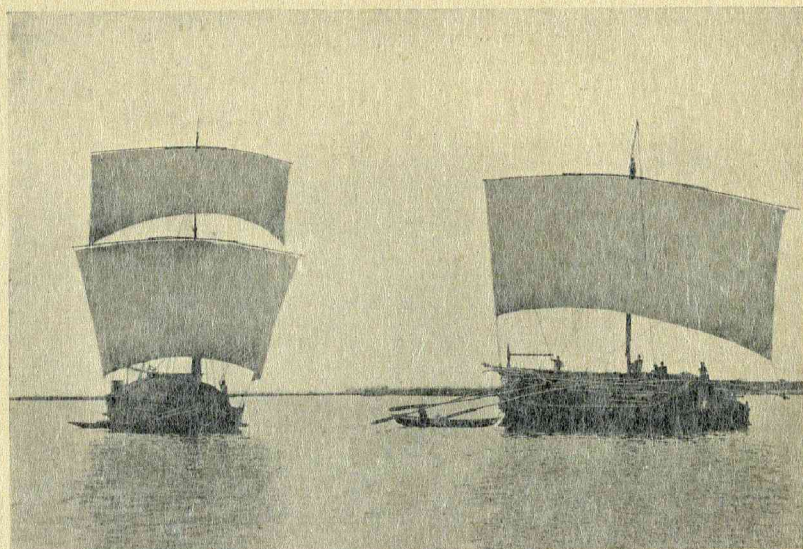


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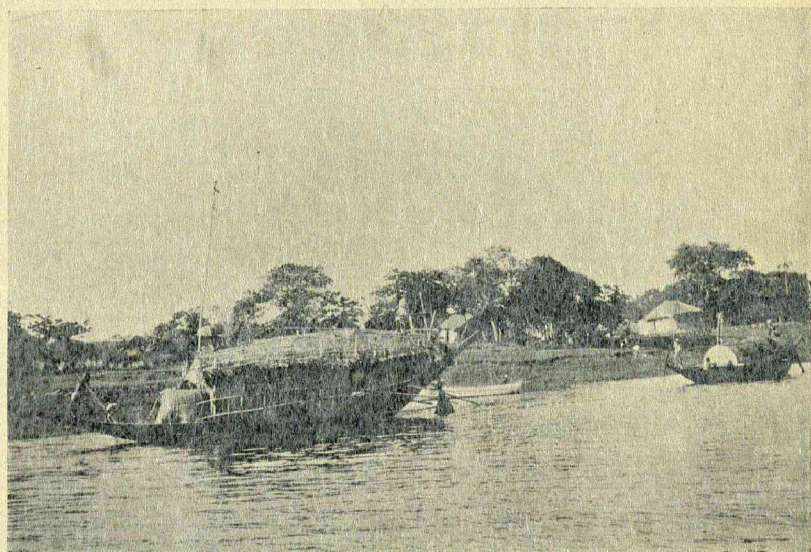
flashes before one's view like a kaleidoscope, each glimpse a picture in itself more illuminative of the real India than many pages of description. The morning sun comes slowly over the water's edge, bathing the river in exquisite tints of pink and silver and gold. All is still with the wonderful stillness of dawn. Only the river moves ceaselessly, now smooth like glass, mirroring every passing glory of the sky, now murmuring on its way in a thousand laughing ripples, now angry and storm-tossed like a sea in miniature, ever changing, yet fascinating in all its moods. Strange craft glide swiftly by, sails set and bellying proudly in the wind. Tiny fishing-boats curved and narrow, swift *goyna* boats long and pointed fore and aft, larger craft heavy and slow-moving, houseboats snug and neat with mat walls and roof, all pass by, busy, alive, intent, speeding onwards each to its appointed goal. White sails, brown sails, sails in yellow and blue, add exquisite touches of colour as they fall and dip and strain at the mast like things alive with joy in the breeze and the light of the sun. The river throbs with life, yet a life so smooth, so noiseless, that passing it leaves unbroken the exquisite sense of peace that the river has made its own.

Close within hail of the bank the steamer passes, each moment disclosing some new glimpse





IN THE KINGDOM OF VIKRAMPUR.



ON THE BURIGANGA.





of the daily round of Indian life. A group of women, ornaments jingling on wrist and neck and ankle, come gossiping to the water's edge, poisoning their waterpots upon their heads with the grace that only Eastern women know. A straggling village, mat-walled, thatch-roofed, peeps out among the trees, raised but a foot above the river level. Its inhabitants, slow-moving and deliberate, pursue the daily round seemingly unmindful of the threatened inundation of their homes. A crowd of tiny urchins, innocent of clothing, happy and free in a string of beads, play lazily in the sun. A youth, scarce bigger than they, but with an air, lustily belabours a herd of buffalo, urging them far out into the river until only their great black heads appear as they wallow contentedly in the grateful coolness of the stream. As the sun mounts high in the sky, every bathing ghat along the banks is crowded, picturesque groups of men, women, and children punctiliously performing the daily ablution that their faith enjoins. Then the heat of the day, and life for a space seems lulled to slumber. One by one the bathers quit the banks and every sign of life creeps into the shade. Even the breeze is still, and the sails of the countless craft on the river all lie furled. Only the river itself moves on, ceaseless and untiring. Then a glorious sunset, such as one sees but seldom, save in Eastern Bengal





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across the face of the waters, that reflect every fleeting shade of brilliance, of amber and red and purple and orange and gold. Then night and a new world of the deep blue vault of the starry sky above and dim shadows beneath, broken only by dazzling flashes from the searchlight as it makes clear the path ahead, throwing upon river and land its ghostly mystic radiance, revealing in brief flashes the secrets of the night as limelight throws a picture on a screen.

In sharp contrast with the peacefulness and quiet charm of Eastern Bengal are the streets and story of its capital. Here there is a charm of another kind, the fascination that a great historic city never fails to cast upon him who treads its streets with the seeing eye, with sympathy and understanding. Mystery, that is as the breath of Eastern cities, baffles one at every turn in Dacca. The crumbling walls of its mosques and palaces rise grim and time-worn, hiding within their ruined turrets and dim walled chambers a thousand unrecorded secrets that no man living knows. Strange things have passed within their ken. They have listened to the whispered mutterings of intrigue, the plotting of foul crimes and dark mysterious deeds, and the softer voices of the fleeting loves and passions of a race swift in love as in war. They have watched the tragic passing





of great Viceroys and Princes, and the triumphant entry of those who followed in their wake, to enjoy their brief spell of glory ere their own knell sounded. In rapid flight they have witnessed splendour and decay, triumph and exile, victory and defeat, a very sermon on the vanity of human strivings and desires. But silent, inscrutable, they make no sign, holding fast to their own that no man may wrest it from them. Even the winding alleys and tortuous ways that lead into the heart of the great city seem designed with jealous care to shroud a mystery from the outside gaze. So little is known, so little there is that can now be rescued from the limbo of the past, that one turns aside baffled, foiled in the attempt to wring from the great city the countless mysteries that lie hidden deep within her heart.

Time and man have treated the once imperial city with but scant respect. Many storms and the great humidity of Eastern Bengal have wrought havoc with brick and stone, wearing away at last the wonderful workmanship of a race of great architects and builders. Man, with incredible vandalism, has even outdone Time, pulling down the exquisite structures that he could never rival, to build with the selfsame bricks some hideous modern structure of his own base design. But even in its decay the charm of the city remains. Neither time nor the vandal hand of man can rob





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it of the wonder and romance of its many vicissitudes, and the great memories that for all time remain its own.

Round all that concerns the early days of Eastern Bengal there is the same impenetrable mystery that has fallen like a veil over so much of the past throughout India. Of the time before the Mussulman invasion well nigh all is legend and myth. The Buddhists and Hindus who then peopled the land were no chroniclers. The compilation of pedigrees seems to have been almost the limit of their literary skill. Of passing events and the strange happenings that befell men in those far-off days they made no note. Life was too strenuous, the struggle for existence too keen, to foster the development of an impersonal interest in the history of the time. In the midst of a life so precarious, of alarms so constant and insistent, there was no time for the chronicling of events. If such was done, the records must have perished with their makers. A few inscriptions, a mass of vague traditions, and brief glimpses of them in the records of their conquerors, are all that remain to tell what manner of men they were, and how life fared with them in the Eastern Bengal of the olden days.

Round Vikrampur, where Dhaleswari and Megna meet, the first traditions cluster. Here





for centuries a Buddhist dynasty flourished, yet finally passed away leaving but little trace of its long dominion, and not a single descendant of its faith in all Eastern Bengal. Opposite Vikrampur, across the Ishamutti, in Sonargaon, a long line of Hindu kings held sway, but all that remains to-day in their one-time capital is a single building, once the Royal Treasury. Almost without a struggle the Hindu kingdom in Sonargaon fell before the Mussulman invaders. Bukhtiyar Khiliji, at the head of an Afghan army, speedily drove Lakshman Sen, the last Hindu King of Bengal, from his capital at Lakhnauti, and pressing eastwards, took possession of Sonargaon, founding a great Mussulman viceroyalty under the imperial authority at Delhi.

In pre-Mussulman days there seems to have been no general name for the land now known as Bengal. The Mussulmans themselves first knew their newly conquered province as Lakhnauti, the name of Lakshman Sen's capital, since known as Gaur. The word 'Bengal' first appears in Indian history as 'Banga,' possibly derived from Anga, the East, as in Vangala-Agadha, the Eastern Ocean. It was not till near the end of the thirteenth century that the name apparently reached England. Marco Polo, the famous traveller, is the first European to use it in the form of Bangala, and he gives





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it as a general name to all the land at the head of the Bay of Bengal—the Vangala-Agadha.

Under Mussulman rule Eastern Bengal suffered many strange vicissitudes. On the furthest frontier of the empire, it was a far cry from the central power at Delhi, and none but the strongest arm could make its power felt as a reality so far afield. The weakness of emperors was the opportunity of ambitious viceroys, and little more than a hundred years after the first Mussulman conquest, Fakiruddin threw off his allegiance to the Imperial Court and proclaimed himself independent king of Bengal.

Then for well nigh two hundred years the kingdom went to the strongest. The mass of the people, still almost entirely Hindu, cared little. The Mussulmans, who had imposed themselves upon Bengal as the ruling race by the sword and by their genius for rule, were still but a small portion of the population. The people, conquered and apathetic, knowing that the oppressor must needs be, stood by indifferent while kings and princes fought out their feuds. It is a terrible record that fills these two hundred years of rebellion and intrigue, of father fighting against son and brother against brother. The strong man arose, sweeping all before him, and while he lived enforced his rule. With his death came anarchy and a fierce struggle





for the throne, a reckless riot of plunder, murder, and fratricide. Out of the contest one stronger than the rest at last emerged, ruthlessly forging his way to empire and giving a brief uncertain rest to the exhausted land. With his death—and death came suddenly in those days—anarchy once more reigned. And so the monotonous round goes on. It is a confusing chronicle. Ruler succeeds ruler, only with startling rapidity to meet the fate of his predecessor, and another reigns in his stead, until one grows weary of the oft-repeated tale of treachery and intrigue.

The Afghans were a fighting race, and it was not without a determined struggle that they gave way before the all-conquering Moghul. Once again under their magnificent leader, Sher Shah, they wrested back from the conqueror not only Bengal but the empire itself, and Sher Shah reigned in Humayon's stead. But it was their final effort, and thirty years later the great Akbar's forces destroyed the last hope of the Afghans in Bengal.

These were the days of the greatest prosperity of Sonargaon. The art of weaving, the gift of the Mussulman conqueror, had here attained a perfection wellnigh unrivalled in the East. The fame of the exquisite muslins that its artificers alone could produce had already reached Europe and excited the wonder and admiration even of the most skilled





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workmen of Italy and France. Travellers dwell in astonishment on the cheapness of provisions, and Ralph Fitch, visiting the district in 1586, speaks of it as 'abounding in rice, cotton, and silk goods.' Not even the wars and alarms of the most turbulent period of Mussulman rule could wholly rob this much favoured land of its prosperity. Even from the repeated attacks of the river pirates, Mughls and Arracanese, aided and abetted by a roving company of Portuguese adventurers, it revived with wonderful vitality, nature rapidly making good the ravages of man.

But with the final triumph of the Moghul in Bengal, and the re-enforcement of imperial authority, the days of Sonargaon drew rapidly to an end. A new ruler, eager to perpetuate his fame and moved thereto by the exigencies of the time, desired a new capital, and the ancient city was left to crumble to decay or forced to yield its very bricks and stones and monuments to grace its rival's triumph. Twenty miles away, on the banks of the Buriganga, rose the new city of Dacca, designed by Islam Khan from its inception to be the capital of all Bengal.

The hundred years that followed were momentous years in the history of the new capital. It was the time of the great viceroys, and distinguished names crowd thick upon its roll of fame.





First the name of Islam Khan its founder, the conqueror of the Afghan, and the trusted minister of Jehangir; then Ibrahim Khan, the victorious in war and patron of the arts and commerce; Shah Jehan, the builder in after-days of the world-famed Taj Mahal, a fitting shrine for the beauty of his queen; Sultan Shuja, foiled in his bid for empire, an exile at its gates, hastening to his ignominious death at the hands of the Arracanese; Mir Jumla, the invader of Assam, whose soaring ambition and consummate ability made even the great Aurungzebe fear; and, greatest of all, Shaista Khan, Lord of the Nobles, brother of the famous Empress Mumtaz Mahal, who has left his mark for all time upon the city he so long ruled.

But this brilliant period in the history of the city came to a sudden end. At the whim of a viceroy it had risen. In like manner it fell. Murshid Kuli Khan, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, transferred his capital to Murshidabad, and Dacca, deserted by the viceroy and all the paraphernalia of courts, was shorn of half its glory. Left to the rule of its Naib Nazims or Deputy-Governors, it sank in dignity and importance, and henceforth its name is heard but seldom in the larger issues that convulsed Bengal. So for fifty years it remained with varying fortunes, prosperous and content under the wise guidance of





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a Juswant Roy, or harassed and oppressed under the rapacious rule of a Murad Ali. The central power, exhausted by Aurungzebe's life-long struggle, was rapidly falling to decay, and Eastern Bengal, on the outskirts of the empire, was quick to feel when the strong hand had relaxed its hold. Unchecked, the local governors wreaked their will upon the province, and well it was for the people of Eastern Bengal that, in the midst of all the self-seeking violence and oppression that marked the last days of Mussulman rule, there were still from time to time wise administrators and just judges numbered among its rulers.

Then at last, when the Mussulman Empire had reached its lowest ebb, when the Mahrattas were knocking at its gates with no uncertain hand, when imperial rescripts no longer ran, and a despot of the worst type ruled at Murshidabad, there came an unexpected end. A little company of English merchants, bent only upon trade, had made the smallest of beginnings in Bengal some hundred and twenty years before. Battling with true British pluck against innumerable difficulties, they had doggedly pushed their way, checked and harassed at every turn, but insistent, ignorant of defeat, turned aside from their purpose by no let or hindrance. So after many vicissitudes they had won for themselves a place,





and the founding of Fort William at the close of the seventeenth century, though they knew it not, was only the first step to far greater things. But a long series of events, culminating in the attack upon Calcutta in 1756, forced the reluctant East India Company, in the protection of its own interests, to assume the functions of government which the ruined and dismembered Moghul Empire was no longer able to perform. To obtain freedom and security of trade it was necessary to enforce law and order, and this the local native authorities had signally failed to do. It was left for the English Company to bring peace and good government to the harassed province. Just over a hundred years after the English factory had been established in Dacca, the first Collector was appointed there to take over the administration of Eastern Bengal.

It was by a strange irony of fate that the commercial prosperity of Dacca should decline with the assumption of power by a Company whose very *raison d'être* was trade and commerce. Such a result, due to a number of causes over which the Company had no control, was as unforeseen as it was unavoidable. But if Dacca suffered through changed conditions in one direction, she gained immeasurably in many another. The days of unrest, when battle, murder, and sudden death stalked





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everywhere, were past. For the first time in its history Eastern Bengal knew the blessings of a prolonged peace, and, secure in life and property, the long down-trodden people saw the dawn of a new era of prosperity and content. The ryot, assured of the fruit of his labour, and confident that now no longer others would reap where he had sown, rapidly extended his cultivation of the responsive soil, and, deserting Dacca as manufactures declined, sought a new home in the most remote corners of the district, felling the jungle and driving the beasts of prey that once carried off his flocks and herds on the outskirts of the capital itself into the far-distant patches of jungle that still remained.

To-day a new era in its history has dawned for Dacca. After eclipse for just two hundred years, it once more regains the proud position of a capital. Eastern Bengal, withdrawn from its one-time alliance with Bengal Proper, Behar and Orissa, now joins Assam, forming the new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, with its own Lieutenant-Governor, and Dacca as its capital. The old Province of Bengal had long been held to be too heavy a burden for one administration; and Eastern Bengal, being in many directions considerably behind the western portion of the Province, had failed to keep pace with the general progress of





the whole, and, from press of interests, to receive the attention on the part of Government that it demanded. The object of the Partition was, therefore, twofold. In the first place it sought to relieve Bengal of a portion of its unduly heavy charge, and in the second place it was hoped, by giving to it its own local government, that the interests of Eastern Bengal would be more jealously safeguarded and its general progress accelerated. The division was carried out as far as possible with due regard to racial distinctions. In the old Province there now remain no fewer than forty-two million Hindus as compared with nine million Mahomedans. On the other hand, in the new Province the Mahomedans predominate to the extent of eighteen millions as against twelve million Hindus. One of the chief objections urged against the Partition was that it severed old ties and split up an ancient Province which long custom had indissolubly made one. Such an argument, however, can have little weight with anyone who is at all familiar with the history of Bengal. Unity and permanence were noticeably absent in Mussulman days. Not only was the capital continually changed by successive viceroys, but the Province as then constituted bore little resemblance to the Bengal of British rule. Behar and Orissa were for the most part provided with





their own governors direct from Delhi, Chota Nagpore and the Damon-i-Koh remained practically unconquered, while Bengal itself was continually divided up into deputy governorships under its viceroy. The formation of Bengal into a Lieutenant-Governorship was an entirely modern scheme, that was only carried into effect by the British Government, long after its rule had been firmly established in India, during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Province, as constituted, was therefore considerably less than a century old when the Partition took place on October 16, 1905.

Practically unanimously welcomed by the Mahomedans, it can hardly be doubted that it will immensely promote their welfare in the near future. An extremely backward and ignorant people for the most part in Eastern Bengal, they had shown little of the keenness and adaptability to modern conditions which the Hindus have so strikingly exhibited. The large native press is almost entirely in the hands of the Hindus, and the Mahomedans, without the art of agitating and too ignorant and apathetic to make their grievances known, have inevitably fallen behind in the general advance. Now, included in a splendid Province some one hundred and six thousand square miles in extent, and with great possibilities as yet un-





tried, in which they largely predominate, their interests will meet with the fullest and most sympathetic consideration on the part of their own local government. Already under their first Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Bampfylde Fuller, K.C.S.I., much has been done, and his resignation, which took effect on August 20 last, was deeply deplored by the Mahomedan community. Under the Honourable Mr. Hare, however, who has succeeded him, the progress begun will doubtless continue and justify beyond dispute in the near future the creation of the new Province.

To Dacca itself the Partition has brought a wonderful revival. Already there is an unwonted stir of life and interest in the old imperial city. The sense of awakening is in the air. New buildings are rapidly rising to accommodate the army of officials, and all the following that Government necessarily carries in its train. The pulse of the city, so long weak and listless, throbs with renewed vigour. Once more it is the centre of affairs where great issues are fought out, and important decisions arrived at, affecting no fewer than thirty millions of people. The long sleep of the city is past. It may even be that, with the present movement to resuscitate native arts and commerce, the weaving of muslins may be revived in Dacca, and its workmanship once more excite the wonder and





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admiration of the West. The art is not yet lost, and the encouragement that it has so long lacked may even now revive it. The crumbling walls of its mosques and palaces, also, it is not too much to hope, may be at last arrested in their decay and carefully preserved among the rising evidences of the city's restored prosperity, as perpetual reminders of her great historic past. Dacca, so long folded in the fatal sleep that falls upon all Eastern cities once their greatness has departed, has at length awakened, and standing at the parting of the ways, midway between the memories of her past and the possibilities of the future, looks hopefully along the vista of the coming years, and awaits with confidence the fulfilment of their promise.





## CHAPTER II

## THE KINGDOM OF VIKRAMPUR

ENCIRCLED in a network of rivers where Ganges and Buriganga, Megna, Ishamutti and Brahmaputra meet, lies the ancient kingdom of Vikramapur. At the very centre of the great watercourses of Eastern Bengal, it occupied a position unrivalled in the days when roads were few and jungle covered the land. On every side stretched broad highways, ever open, offering the swiftest means of communication with the world beyond. On land, innumerable perils beset the wayfarer. Dense forests covered Eastern Bengal from end to end. It needed an army with a train of elephants to force a passage through, and beasts of prey lay in wait for him who passed by alone. The storms that caught the traveller on the great rivers were indeed to be feared, and annually they claimed a heavy toll in human life, but they were as nothing to the unknown dangers that awaited him who passed through the forest tracks on foot.

Everywhere the influence of the great rivers





has made itself felt in the story of Vikrampur. Silted up by them in days gone by, when the world was young, it is practically an island set in their midst. Having brought it into being, they made of it their special care. Raised but little above their level, it almost disappears beneath them in the rains, its rich alluvial rice-fields drawing new sustenance from this bountiful supply of moisture, annually renewed. But not only did the rivers give the land new life, they proved for it a never-failing bulwark of defence. For almost half the year the waters covered the land, and the enemy incautious enough to stay was driven out by the floods. It was impossible to fight for a kingdom where there was no dry land, and time and again the invader was driven back baffled, from this land that the great rivers encircled and defended with such protecting care.

It was here, says the Hindu legend, that the famous Raja Vikramadit made his home. Feeling the desire for rest after his many journeyings to and fro, he sought for a place where he might spend the remainder of his days in peace. Coming upon this fertile island in the midst of many waters, restful in its garment of luxuriant green, it pleased him more than all the lands that he had visited, and here he set up his kingdom. But the annals of his rule are a sealed book, and even





tradition is content with the bald record that he ruled with justice and wisdom, and that the fame of his piety and learning spread far and wide. There the first brief chronicle of Vikrampur ends, and only the name of its capital still survives to give some point to the vague uncertain legend.

Of the years that follow there is still less told. How Brahminism lost its early vigour in Vikrampur, and well nigh died out, it is impossible to say. The coming of the Buddhist Rajas of the Pal dynasty, and the manner in which they, a comparatively small company of men, imposed themselves upon the mass of the population and ruled for a thousand years, is equally shrouded in oblivion. But that they came, carried on the crest of the wave of the mighty influence that suddenly stirred the India of that day, there can be little doubt. The fourth century before Christ had seen the rise of one of the most wonderful forces that ever stirred the world to its depths. Gautama the Buddha, after much searching of heart, had at last found the Truth and given to his disciples a new religion—that marvellous faith, simple, yet hard to attain, which taught that duty was better than sacrifice, and self-respect than many prayers, and that the path of purity of thought and word and deed alone led to the great and perfect peace that weary and suffering humanity had so long sought in vain.





It was a strange gospel to men who had sought that same end by much mortifying of the flesh, by the repetition of long prayers, by the washing of cups and platters, and by the purifying of the outer man. Yet so great was the veneration Gautama the Buddha inspired by his life and teaching that men, in those days of the youth of the world, were found to forsake all and follow him into the unknown paths of this new teaching, which led them by such stern and searching ways.

With the early history of the rise of this new religion the name of Asoka the Great is closely associated. Extending his empire until it stretched from Kabul to Bengal, he established Buddhism as the State religion. It is a strange and unexpected picture of early India, this enforcement, not of creeds and tenets that man loves to propagate, but of purity and integrity, of the faithful fulfilment of the daily round of man's duty towards his fellow-man and the whole wide world of nature. Religious toleration was complete. Persecution of creeds and faiths was a thing unknown. All that Asoka and Buddhism required were that men should obey the dictates of morality and live in quietness and amity one with another.

It was with the high ideals of this great religion that the Pal kings came to Vikrampur. Strong with the enthusiasm of a young faith, they easily





imposed themselves upon the followers of Brahminism whose first fervour had long since waned. But from first to last Buddhism remained only the religion of the ruling race, affecting not at all the vast mass of the population, which still clung to the lifeless forms of Hinduism though its spirit was long since dead. Buddhist monasteries flourished side by side with Hindu temples, both content to strive, though by far different ways, for the attainment of the same great end. But between them there was a great gulf fixed. Centuries of existence in close proximity failed to draw them together, and, with the rigid exclusiveness of Eastern creeds, each remained untouched in spite of long contact with the other. A State religion, Buddhism perished with the State. With the passing of the Pal dynasty, it disappeared as completely from Vikrampur as if it had never been.

Of the decline of Buddhism in Vikrampur and the revival of Hinduism, typified by the rise of the Sen dynasty, history and tradition relate but little. It may be that Buddhism, after more than a thousand years, had fallen from its first nobility of purpose, and that its representatives, the ruling race, sated with long exercise of power, had fallen a prey to that apathy and effeteness which has overtaken almost every conquering race





in India in turn. Or it may be that King Adisur, the first of a famous line of Sen Rajas in Eastern Bengal, at last awoke the great mass of the Hindu population to a sense of its own strength and power, and by right of might displaced the Buddhist kings and founded a new Hindu kingdom of his own in Vikrampur.

Slowly the mists of antiquity begin to lift, and the memory of King Adisur stands out clear and distinct against the uncertain background of his time. To the Hindu his name has been handed down as worthy of all respect, for to him is ascribed the restoration of Brahminism in Eastern Bengal. So far had the Hindu religion fallen during the long centuries of Buddhist rule that King Adisur, it is said, found no Brahmin in all his kingdom who could faithfully perform the ceremonies and ritual of his faith. If Brahminism was to be restored, help must come from without, from some source that had not suffered under the long supremacy of an alien faith. King Adisur, sending out emissaries far and wide, found that the purest form of Brahminism had been preserved in the city of Kanouj. Thither he despatched a minister of his court with a letter setting forth the deplorable state of Hinduism that existed in his kingdom, and praying that a company of learned Brahmins





might be sent there to restore the faith among their co-religionists who had so far fallen from its teaching. So there came, in response to King Adisur's request, from the famous city of Kanouj five Brahmins learned in all that appertained to their religion. Welcoming them with fitting respect, the king established them in his capital of Rampal, and there they flourished, they and their descendants, restoring for a time by their teaching and example the great doctrines of the Hindu faith.

After Adisur reigned Ballal Sen, the most famous of the Sen kings in Vikrampur, round whose name gather almost all the traditions that still linger in Rampal. So great was his repute that many things, of which in later days the origin was unknown, seem to have been attributed to him on the universal principle of 'to him that hath shall be given.' Such confusion has this wrought that events centuries apart are placed by tradition as happening within his reign. While one story makes him the son of King Adisur, the founder of the Sen dynasty in Rampal, another places him at the end of a long line of kings with whose death the kingdom fell into the hands of the Mussulman invaders. It seems evident that there must have been two Ballal Sens, one the son of Adisur, and the other the last

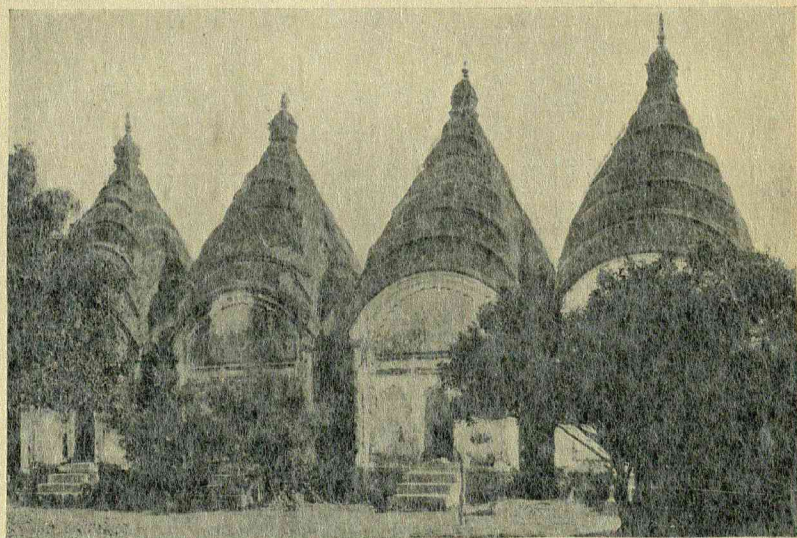


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of the Sen Kings, but such is the maze of rumour and tradition that surrounds their names, that to disentangle their life stories is well nigh impossible at the present day.

The object of so much veneration, it is not strange that a miraculous birth should be ascribed to the first Ballal Sen, or that the miracle should be attributed to the great river, the Brahmaputra, which has so indelibly impressed its influence for all time upon this land and people. Desiring to clothe its hero with every conceivable honour, Hindu legend has given him for parentage the great river itself, materialised in the form of a god. His mother was the favourite among King Adisur's wives, and the king, discovering her infidelity and unwitting of the intention of the gods, banished her in anger from his court. An outcast, in despair, she threw herself into the Brahmaputra. But the sacred river, folding her in its embrace, carried her swiftly and safely to the opposite shore, placing her under the care of the goddess Durga, whose home was on the banks of the Buriganga, close at hand. There, in the jungle beside the river, her son was born, and grew up under the protection of the goddess, proficient in all manly exercises and endowed with the wisdom that became one of such illustrious birth and such high destiny. One day, while still a youth and roaming in the forest, he





THE DHAKESWARI TEMPLE OF TO-DAY





found, hidden in the jungle, the image of Durga, his protectress, and on this spot, in her honour, he raised the temple of Dhaka Iswari, the concealed goddess, from which tradition says the city of Dacca took its name in after-days. So, favoured of the gods, Ballal Sen grew to manhood, and his father, hearing at last of his kingly qualities, desired to see him, and when the young man was brought into his presence he conceived for him so great an affection that he made him the heir of all his kingdom.

Such is the tradition of the birth and up-bringing of Ballal Sen, obviously an invention to surround with yet greater glamour a famous name. Another story, less ambitious and more probable, makes him the son of Bijoy Sen, a great warrior who had invaded the adjoining kingdom of Kamrup, and places his accession to the throne in the historic year when William the Conqueror was wresting the crown of England from the Saxon on the field of Senlac. Almost all that remains to this day in his capital of Rampal is associated with his name. Ballal Sen was a great builder and maker of roads and tanks. The outlines of his palace, still visible, show on how large a scale it was planned, though no architectural remains survive to show what manner of building it was. Covering an area of something like three thousand





square feet, it was surrounded on every side by a moat two to three hundred feet wide, a pathway on the eastern side providing the only means of access to it. Nothing but scattered mounds of earth now survive where the palace within the moat once stood, and to-day the cultivator peacefully tills the very soil whereon kings and princes once held their courts and great armies pitched their camps. Many of the bricks that once graced the royal palace were used to build the modern houses of Rampal, some of them having been carried across the river to Dacca when that city was built as his capital by Islam Khan. Vague rumours of buried treasure still linger round the long-deserted site, and it is a fact that less than a century ago a ryot, ploughing his field close by, came upon a magnificent diamond worth seventy thousand rupees, which, doubtless, in its day, had shone in the palace of Ballal Sen.

Rampal is full of quaint traditions. Even the roads that Ballal Sen is said to have constructed have their own story. They were broad high-banked roads, planned on the large scale of a bygone age when kings ordered and their subjects hurried to obey. One of the finest ran from Rampal to the Padma river, and its name has furnished material round which to weave a legend. The astrologers had predicted that Ballal Sen would die from





the effect of fishbones sticking in his throat. Alarmed by this prediction, the king resolved to banish fish from the royal table. But in the Padma river there was a fish known as Kachki, which is boneless, and in order that he might readily obtain a supply of it from the river he constructed the road, which has ever since been known in consequence as the Kachki Darwaja.

The great Rampal Dighi, a huge artificial lake near Ballal Sen's bari, has likewise a legend of its own. A mile long by some five hundred yards wide, it was in its day a fine example of the magnificent scale on which the old Hindu kings planned their works. Like all else in Rampal, it has suffered from neglect, and much of it has now become filled up, remaining dry for a great part of the year, while the cultivator has seized upon it as a fertile land wherein to grow his paddy. It was undertaken, runs the legend, by Ballal Sen as a work of charity in gratitude for some favour of the gods. To determine its size he fixed upon a quaint device. Its length should be as far as his mother could walk at one stretch without stopping to rest, and he vowed that he would excavate the whole of it during the following night. His mother doubtless had done but little walking in the whole of her life, and her son imagined that the length of the tank would not exceed reasonable





limits. But it was soon evident, to his dismay, that he had greatly underestimated his mother's pedestrian capabilities. Closely veiled and attended by the whole of her court, she set out from the palace. Starting off towards the south, she walked with unexpected sprightliness and showed no sign of weariness as time went on. Ballal Sen, in alarm, soon saw that if she proceeded much further he would be unable to keep his vow and excavate so large a tank in a single night. Yet to break his vow would be a sin unpardonable. The King grew desperate as his mother still marched on. Knowing that the extent of the work of charity which would so greatly benefit the people depended upon her powers of endurance, she plodded on, seemingly miraculously endowed with new strength. Matters at length became critical, and Ballal Sen was reduced to resorting to an artifice. Ordering his servants surreptitiously to touch his mother's feet with vermilion as she walked, he suddenly gave a great cry that a leech had bitten her, and she, looking down and seeing the red stains upon her feet, imagined that they were of blood and stooped to examine them. The place where she stopped was the southernmost limit of the lake, one mile from the palace. That same night Ballal Sen fulfilled his vow. Collecting a vast army of workmen, the huge tank was





excavated before the dawn, of such a length that it was impossible to see from one end to the other. But because Ballal Sen had resorted to stratagem to prevent its size from becoming excessive the gods were angry, and the bed of the lake, in spite of its depth, remained dry. Day after day no water came to fill it, and the king was put to a great shame. At length, however, his chief friend Rampal dreamed a dream. Therein it was revealed to him that he must sacrifice himself in order that the tank might be filled and the full benefit of it accrue to the people. Assembling all the courtiers and people upon the banks of the lake, Rampal told them of his dream. Then, ere they could recover from their astonishment, he rode slowly down into the bed of the lake, and immediately a hundred streams of pure water gushed from beneath and closed rapidly over his head. Suddenly the horror of all those who stood by found vent in one great cry: 'Rampal, Rampal, Rampal!' But already the waters had risen and filled the tank from end to end, and Rampal was no more seen. Then Ballal Sen wept for his friend, and exclaimed, 'Since I, by my sin, am responsible for the death of my friend, let this tank be no more called after me, but after Rampal.' In consequence it is known as the Rampal Dighi to this day.





Not far off is a smaller lake, connected by a curious tradition with the Rampal Dighi. It is said that Ballal Sen, having seen the completion of his great work, ordered all the men who had been engaged upon it to dig one spadeful of earth from a spot close by. So great was the number of men that a large tank, some seven hundred by five hundred cubits, was the result. It still bears the name of the Kodaldhoa Dighi—the spade-washing tank.

A striking feature of the Rampal Dighi is a magnificent *gajariya* tree, rising to a height of a hundred cubits on its northern bank. It has been there long beyond the memory of man, and tradition ascribes it, like all else, to the time of Ballal Sen. Among all the Hindu population it is an object of the greatest veneration, and miraculous powers have been ascribed to it. It is said to be immortal, and every leaf is held sacred. Many are the stories told of its healing and cleansing properties, and none would dare to lay rude hands upon it. The story is told of a fakir who camped beside it, and, needing fuel for his fire to cook his evening meal, lopped off one of its branches, and immediately he vomited blood and expired. The childless have great faith in prayer beside this sacred tree, and the cultivator seeks its protection against the many dangers that beset his crops.





Close by, in its honour, a fair was long held annually on the eighth day of the moon in the month of Chait.

But it is as the founder of Kulinism that Ballal Sen lives chiefly in Hindu legend. Brahminism in Vikrampur had once more fallen into disrepute. King Adisur had for a time revived it by the importation of learned pandits from the great Brahmin city of Kanouj, but in the years that followed society had become disorganised, and Hindu observances had been again neglected and forgotten. Ballal Sen on his accession had found the various grades of Hindu society in a state of great confusion, and he at once set himself the difficult task of reforming them. To prevent the deterioration of the higher castes by their constant intermarriage with those of lower status, he rigidly enforced the caste system. The descendants of the Kanouj Brahmins were first divided into two classes. Those families of acknowledged purity of descent were grouped together in one class and known as Kulins, while those who had intermarried were known as Srotriya. But it appears that these caste distinctions were not always carefully observed, and a further division took place at a later date. Those who stood the new test and were found to be of irreproachably pure descent were known as Mukhya Kulins, or those





Steadfast in Principle; while the remainder, and they were by far the larger number, were made Gauna Kulins, or those who had Deviated from the Right Path. But, strangely enough, a Mukhya Kulin (that is, the purest of the pure) was allowed to marry a girl outside his own caste. Hence the competition in the marriage market for Kulin bridegrooms among those of lower caste with eligible daughters to dispose of became great, and a curious state of things arose. Marriage became a profession. There being no limit to the number of wives a Kulin might have, he found himself in a most fortunate position, any number of men of lesser rank being anxious to marry their daughters to so desirable and high-caste a bridegroom. For the honour of being his first wife a large sum was paid as dowry, but with each succeeding marriage the amount grew less, so that a Kulin's value in the matrimonial market dwindled as the number of his wives mounted up. A case is reported of a Kulin having a hundred wives, while his three sons had no fewer than fifty, thirty-five, and thirty respectively. Fortunately for the peace of society, these huge families made no attempt to live together. A Kulin who made marriage a profession went gaily on his way, leaving his brides behind him. His fathers-in-law, satisfied with the dignity acquired, were content to support their





daughters and their families. The only duty incumbent on the Kulin father was to provide for the marriage of his daughters, but as this meant dowries which the gay Lothario of a father was seldom in a position to provide, the result was that the unfortunate maidens but too often went unwed, thus exhibiting one of the rare instances of the existence of old maids in India.

Tradition is as busy with the death of Ballal Sen as with his birth and career. Near Abdullahpur, not far from Rampal itself, it is said, there lived a Mussulman family, one of the first which had penetrated so far east as Vikrampur. But the head of the house was childless, and the denial of the gift of a son for which he had so long prayed had embittered his life. Now it chanced on a day that a Fakir came to his house begging alms. The Mussulman, however, brooding over his own sorrow, roughly bade him begone. 'Since Allah has refused me the blessing that I crave,' he said bitterly, 'I will give no alms in his name.' But the Fakir answered that his prayers were already heard, and that before long a son would be born to him. The Mussulman, overjoyed, gave him alms, and asked what boon he should grant to him when the desire of his heart should be fulfilled. The Fakir asked only that he would sacrifice a bull to the altar of Allah. In due course a son was born,





and remembering the Fakir's request the Mussulman at once made preparations for the sacrifice. But the Hindus among whom he lived, holding the bull sacred, rose up and indignantly prevented him. Determined, however, to fulfil his vow, he set out into the jungle and there at a distance performed the sacrifice. Taking with him as much of the flesh of the bull as he and his family could eat, he buried the remainder beneath the ground and returned home. On the way, however, a kite swept down, and, snatching one of the pieces of flesh out of his hand, flew with it towards Vikrampur and let it fall in front of the palace of Ballal Sen. The king, perceiving that it was the flesh of a bull, the sacred animal of his race, sent out men to discover who had committed so great a crime. After much search in the jungle they found jackals tearing up the flesh that the Mussulman had buried, and following the marks of blood that had fallen from the flesh which he had carried in his hand they traced him to his home. The king, hearing the story, ordered that the child on whose account the bull had been killed should be brought before him on the morrow and put to death. It was not meet that one for whom so great a crime had been committed at his birth should live.

The Mussulman, being secretly warned of the king's decree, fled that night with his wife and





new-born child, and, escaping out of the kingdom of Ballal Sen, made his way across India to his home in Arabia, whence his family had first come. There, at Mecca, meeting with a Fakir, one Baba Adam by name, he told him the story of his flight. The Fakir, learning that there was a country in which Mussulmans had no liberty to follow the practices of their religion, gathered together as many as seven thousand followers and set out on the long journey to Vikrampur, determined to win for his co-religionists freedom to profess their faith. Arriving there after many adventures by the way, he approached almost within sight of Ballal Sen's capital, and, building a mosque, began to practise openly the rites and ceremonies of his religion. Many bulls and cows were sacrificed, and the Mussulman call to prayer rang out across the plains, and was heard even within the walls of the king's palace. Then Ballal Sen rose up in wrath. He sent messengers hastily to the newcomers demanding that they should leave his kingdom or cease to practise religious ceremonies obnoxious to Hinduism, the faith of himself and his kingdom. But Baba Adam, confident in the support of his numerous followers, sent a haughty reply to the great king. 'There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet,' rang out the challenge. He, Baba Adam, would perform the





ritual required of his religion, let Ballal Sen the Infidel do what he would. Then the Hindu king, gathering together his forces, set out against Baba Adam. But the fame of the Mussulman victories had already reached Vikrampur, and Ballal Sen, wise in his day, made provision against defeat before he left his capital. Within the walls of his palace he caused to be constructed a great Agnikundi, a pit of fire, wherein, in case he made no return, all the members of his household might commit themselves to the funeral pyre, and so escape the ignominy and dishonour of falling into the conqueror's hands. Lest they of his household might be surprised suddenly by a victorious enemy, the king arranged a signal whereby they might know his fate in case of defeat. As he left the Ballal Bari with his army, he placed in the folds of his robe, at his breast, a carrier pigeon. If the day went ill with him he would release the bird, and its return to the palace should be the signal for the lighting of the funeral pyre and the immolation of all that he held most dear.

On the site where the mosque of Baba Adam now stands the two armies met, and a long and fierce battle was waged between this first advanced guard of the Mohammedan onset and the last great Hindu king of Vikrampur. For long the issue was uncertain, but at length the tide of victory set





steadily in favour of Ballal Sen. The Mussulmans were finally defeated with great slaughter, and in the end Ballal Sen came face to face with Baba Adam. It was the hour of sunset, and the Fakir knelt with his face towards Mecca, praying the time-honoured prayers of his faith, unmindful of the fate that drew near. Even while he was still at prayer, Ballal Sen rode up to him and smote him with his sword. But the blow was miraculously of no effect, and Baba Adam rose up from his knees and stood before Ballal Sen—the representative of Islam over against the chief of Brahminism. ‘Why hast thou come to disturb me at my prayers?’ asked Baba Adam at length. ‘I have come to slay him who has slain and dishonoured what I and my race hold sacred,’ answered Ballal Sen, and again he smote the Fakir with his sword. But the Fakir’s body might have been of iron, for the sharp steel fell upon it again with no effect. Then Baba Adam, looking upon his dead followers who lay scattered over the plain, cried out, ‘It is the will of Allah that I should die at thy hands. Yet not by the sword of the Infidel. Take my sword and destroy me, for no other sword than mine can do me hurt. And upon thee may the curse of Allah fall speedily.’ So, taking his sword, Ballal Sen smote the Fakir and killed him at one blow, cutting his body into two parts, one of which was





miraculously transported to Chittagong, where a mosque dedicated to his memory still stands.

Ballal Sen, flushed with victory, went down to the river-bank to wash away the stains of battle. But as he stooped over the water the pigeon escaped unperceived from the folds of his robe. So it came to pass that the household of the king, watching eagerly for news from the walls of the palace, saw at last against the evening sky the white wings of the pigeon that flew straight homewards, unconscious of the false message that it bore, and settled with loud-voiced contentment upon the topmost pinnacle of the Ballal Bari. Then there arose within the palace the wailing of women and the sounds of mourning, and hastily lest the conqueror should come and take from them their honour and their pride of caste, which were all that fate had left them, the torch was placed to the funeral pyre in the Agnikundi and the whole of the family of Ballal Sen perished in the flames.

Then, even as the smoke still rose above the ruin of his house, the king returned in hot haste. Having discovered the flight of the bird, he had spurred home furiously, but the curse of the Fakir had fallen speedily and he had arrived too late. Not one of his family remained in Vikrampur, and in his grief and despair he flung himself upon the still-smouldering funeral pyre and perished in its





ashes. Thus, the victim of a cruel fate, perished the last great Hindu king of Vikrampur. To this day he is remembered as the Pora-Raja—the Burnt King.

On the site where Baba Adam met his death a mosque was erected after many days by the Mussulman conquerors when they had finally established their supremacy in Eastern Bengal. It was built, as the inscription states, 'in the middle of the month of Rajab, in the year 888 A.H., during the reign of Jalaluddin Fateh Shah' (1483 A.D.). It is sadly fallen from its first estate. Yet, half in ruins as it now stands, it gives full evidence of what it must once have been. Highly ornamented, with the thin bricks of the Mussulman period, polished and carved, its six domes, three only of which remain intact, are supported by two stone pillars in the centre of the hall, huge monoliths of white stone which tradition calls the *godas* or clubs of Ballal Sen. Moisture oozes out from these pillars in the rainy season, and this sweating has caused them to be regarded with superstitious awe. The Hindu women who enter the mosque to pray before them and mark them with *sindur* are but another instance of the strange mingling of Hinduism and Mohammedanism that occurs so often in Eastern Bengal. Not far from Baba Adam's mosque is another mosque, plainer





and less famous in the neighbourhood, but curious on account of the stone idols of Hindu gods and goddesses preserved in the verandah, doubtless as the spoils of a conquered race, which the Hindus of the neighbourhood still worship beneath this dome raised by an alien faith.

After the death of Ballal Sen, Vikrampur seems for a time to have fallen back under the rule of the Pal dynasty. The Mussulman had not yet arrived in full strength to take possession, and in the brief interval the Buddhist Rajas enjoyed their last brief spell of power before their final disappearance from the land. Lakshman Sen, the son of Ballal Sen, had built a capital for himself which he had named Lakhnauti, but the last years of his long reign were spent at Nadia, whence, at the venerable age of eighty, he was forced to flee before the advancing Mussulman host of Bukhtiyar Khiliji. One tradition relates that he and his son Bisvarupa returned to Vikrampur, and there his family reigned for over a hundred years more before the final overthrow of the Hindu power in Eastern Bengal. With him fled many of the most learned Brahmins from Nadia, the seat of learning, and, settling in Vikrampur, they made that place the centre of Brahminism in Eastern Bengal. Vikrampur, for many centuries, was famous for its learning, and clerks trained in





its schools went out to earn their livelihood in other parts of Bengal in such large numbers that it became a saying in Vikrampur that a boy who was good for nothing at home might yet make a living as a clerk elsewhere.

The story of the kingdom of Vikrampur is almost done. Two miles from the ancient capital stands Munshigunj, the present headquarters of the subdivision of that name, now part of the Dacca district. Rampal, through all the centuries that have passed since the days of Ballal Sen, has found no place in history. Under the Mussulmans it was but one of the many outposts on the outskirts of empire. Sonargaon, on the opposite bank of the Ishamutti, became the capital of Eastern Bengal, and the ancient kingdom of Vikrampur, placed under a Kazi, a subordinate government officer, sank into insignificance, with only the memory of its former greatness and its many traditions to distinguish it. The centre of interest passes across the river to Sonargaon.





## CHAPTER III

## SONARGAON

It is hard to realise that this was once the capital of kings. At first glance, with its trim rice-fields and patches of jungle growth, it might have been in the beginning as it is now, peaceful, thriving, and content, undisturbed by the noise and clamour of passing events in the world beyond. Strangely little of all that is past has survived. To-day the ancient kingdom of Sonargaon is but a collection of insignificant villages. Scattered here and there over the land, they still cling faithfully round some battered and time-worn memory of the past. Gone are the retainers of kings and princes, the marts of merchants, and the camps of armies: gone the stir of great events and the busy hum of life. Generation after generation has passed away to whom its stirring history has been but as a tale that is told, and the humble cultivator to-day lives and dies on the very scene of its former greatness, careless and ignorant of its long-forgotten past.





From the banks of the Lakhiya, the Megna and the Ishamutti on the east and south and west, the kingdom of Sonargaon stretched seventy miles away to the north, where the Brahmaputra, fickle in its course, then flowed from west to east. Enclosed thus like an island in the midst of the great rivers, it was admirably fitted for defence. But it was in the south, in the angle formed by the Megna and the old bed of the Brahmaputra, that the chief centre of interest lay. Here, in what are now the villages of Aminpur, Pannam, Goaldi, and Moghrapara, the ruler of the day placed his headquarters. Sonargaon was apparently the name given to the whole district, and also particularly to the place where for the time being the king held court. Further afield all over the district there are the remains of a past civilisation. Huge tanks and mounds and mosques survive, and the ruins of many forts, thrown up to defend the frontiers from attack, which in their day played their part in the history of Sonargaon.

It was to this land, well fitted for defence, that the descendants of the last Hindu kings of Bengal fled before the advance of the victorious Mussulman armies. Here, undisturbed, they continued to rule for well nigh a hundred years after the Mussulmans had conquered Central Bengal. Bukhtiyar Khiliji lived but three years to enjoy his triumph, and



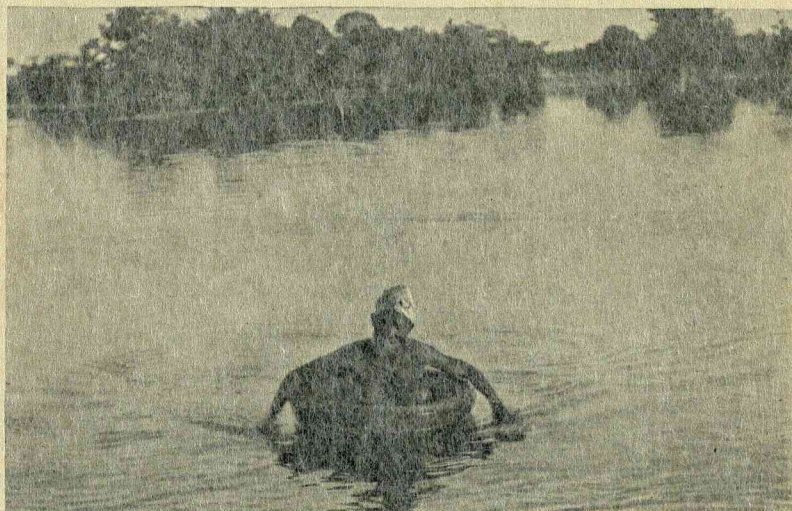


throughout that time he was fully occupied with his ambitious schemes for the conquest of Tibet. The Sen Kings made no attempt to repel the Mussulman invader and regain their lost position. Without a struggle they gave way before a stronger than themselves. Living peacefully in Sonargaon they constituted no political danger, and the earliest Mussulman rulers attempted to impose upon them but the slightest form of control. Busy with their own schemes far away in their capital of Gaur, they asked nothing more from them than a payment of tribute and a formal acknowledgment of their dependence. Dispossessed of all political authority, they soon sank to the position of mere zemindars and local magnates, and their final disappearance from the stage which they had so long occupied was not long delayed. With Danuj Roy, grandson of Lakshman Sen, the end came. It was in the days of the Viceroy Tughril Khan, who, from a Tartar slave of the Emperor Balin, had by his wonderful ability and address risen to be Governor of Bengal. But success and advancement had so inflamed his ambition that neither gratitude nor prudence restrained him from open rebellion against his master. Fresh from his latest triumph in Tipperah, whence he had returned laden with immense treasure borne by a train of a hundred captive elephants, he gave

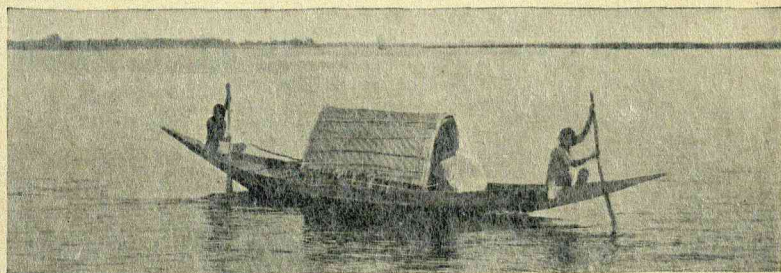




A FERRY-BOAT ON THE DULLASERY.



AN EARTHENWARE VESSEL USED AS A BOAT ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA.



CROSSING THE MEGNA NEAR SONARGAON.





out that the Emperor was dead, and, assuming all the insignia of royalty, proclaimed himself independent King of Bengal. But the Emperor, enraged at this treachery of his former slave, raised an army and set out against him with all despatch. Panic seems to have seized Tughril Khan as his master approached, and, collecting all the wealth on which he could lay hands, he fled with a huge train of elephants and a picked company of troops towards the east, intending to take refuge in the last resort in Tipperah, where he had recently achieved so great a triumph. Following in his wake, the Emperor Balin reached Sonargaon. It had been a long and difficult march across the hot bare plains of Upper India, through Behar and the Teliagharia Pass, and down the great rivers of Bengal—an undertaking not to be lightly entered upon. It was an historic occasion for Eastern Bengal. Never before had an Emperor of Delhi visited this eastern frontier of the empire, and Danuj Roy, trembling at his approach, pursued the traditional policy of his race and offered no resistance. Setting out from Pannam, where he had placed his capital, he met the Emperor as he entered Sonargaon, and, giving in his allegiance, offered his help against the rebel Viceroy. Shortly afterwards the imperial troops came up with those of Tughril Khan and won a





great victory on the banks of the Megna. There is a tradition that Tughril Khan himself, attempting to escape across the river into Tipperah, was taken captive and spent the remainder of his days in prison in Sonargaon.

The shadow of imperial affairs had at length fallen across the ancient Hindu kingdom of Sonargaon, and from this time onwards, during the next three centuries, it became the headquarters of Mussulman rule in Eastern Bengal. The Sen Rajas quietly disappear from its annals, making a tame and spiritless exit after their long centuries of kingship. Almost every trace of their rule was speedily obliterated by the new Mussulman governors, who everywhere lost no time in transforming the Hindu capitals well nigh out of recognition and imparting to them a new character of their own. Hindu temples were ruthlessly pulled down that the stones might be used to build mosques wherein the faithful might worship, and on the site of the forts and palaces of the Hindu kings rose the far grander and more imposing buildings of the Mussulman conquerors. The Sen and Pal kings had proved themselves great builders of temples and palaces, as there is sufficient evidence elsewhere to show, yet so completely has the Mussulman obliterated the traces of their rule in Sonargaon that only one





Hindu building survives. Under the shadow of the official residence of the Imperial Karori, the Mussulman tax-gatherer, whose descendants still live close by, it stands, a building of no architectural distinction, and interesting only as the solitary survival of centuries of Hindu rule. Known as the Jhikoti, it is formed of concrete with elongated dome-shaped roof, its walls pierced with numerous openings. Until recently it was used as a meeting-place for worship by the Hindus of the surrounding villages, but now it stands deserted and neglected, moss-grown and falling to decay, yet having survived to see the passing of the Mussulman empire in Sonargaon and the strange revenges that time takes.

The last year of the thirteenth century marks the opening of a new era in the history of Sonargaon. In that year the Emperor Alla Uddin divided the government of Bengal into two parts, and appointed Bahadur Khan to be governor of the eastern portion, with his capital at Sonargaon. For the next three hundred years it remained, with varying fortunes, the seat of the Mussulman government in Eastern Bengal. It was a troublous period that was opening for the newly formed province. Events succeeded one another with startling rapidity. Situated on the easternmost limits of the empire, it had all the advantages





and disadvantages of a frontier province. Free from immediate control, Viceroy after Viceroy was tempted to throw off his allegiance and proclaim his independence. Time and again the empire, beset on every side, was forced to relax its hold. To the people these things mattered not at all. They were content to sit by, unmoved spectators of the drama, yet perhaps not without a touch of humour, as they watched their rulers fall out and war continually among themselves. Still, though these contests interested them but little, in other directions the mass of the people felt to the full the advantage and disadvantage of their position on the frontier of the empire. On the one hand Eastern Bengal enjoyed an immunity from strife and bloodshed unknown in the lands that lay nearer the heart of the empire, where great issues were constantly at stake, and vast armies for ever passed to and fro, leaving ruin and desolation in their wake. Though the lot of the cultivator in Eastern Bengal was by no means a secure one, yet he suffered comparatively little from these human locusts. It was no easy country for the transport of troops, and the armies that came this way to subdue some rebellious Viceroy, or to attempt the conquest of Assam, wandered little afield from certain well-defined highways, keeping always close to the great rivers. Delhi was far off, and





the journey down through Oude, Behar, and Bengal, was beset with difficulties and a matter of many days. Sonargaon, set in a circle of great rivers, was inaccessible by road for a great part of the year, and well fitted by nature to defy attack. It was a foolhardy general who lingered in Eastern Bengal as the cold weather drew to an end. Annually the rivers rose and swept the invader out of the land, or, cutting off his retreat, left him at the mercy of the enemy. But, on the other hand, Sonargaon suffered to the full the disadvantages of a frontier province. Beyond, away to the east, lived the Mughls and Arracanese, and the unknown tribes of further Kamrup and of the jungle lands at the foot of the Himalayas to the north. Its eastern boundaries ill-defined, the province suffered terrible things at the hands of these wild tribes, freebooters and marauders by natural instinct. To the peaceful inhabitants of Eastern Bengal the Mughls close at hand were a constant source of terror. Sailing up the rivers, they robbed and plundered and laid waste whole villages along the banks. Allied in later days with the Portuguese, who taught them better seamanship, they became so great a menace that a new capital of Bengal was founded nearer the easternmost limits of the empire to protect the province from their depredations.





The first governor of Eastern Bengal under the new *régime* was not slow to take advantage of the opportunity his position on the outskirts of the empire offered. The Emperor Balin's march from Delhi to Sonargaon was still fresh in men's minds, but it had been a marvellous feat, and Bahadur Khan might well regard it as an event beyond the common that would not soon occur again. The death of the Emperor Alla Uddin and the accession of the dissolute Prince Mubarik Shah occasioned a great weakening of imperial authority, and in the years that followed Bahadur Shah gradually threw off his allegiance and at last boldly proclaimed his independence. Assuming the white umbrella and all the insignia of royalty that an Eastern monarch loves, he ordered the coin to be stamped with his name, and for over a quarter of a century ruled undisturbed in his kingdom of Sonargaon. Of the passing of those years, with all the varied incidents that must have filled them, history and legend have little to relate. They must remain for ever a book that fate has closed.

But again a turn in the wheel of fate, and a strong hand was once more at the helm of imperial affairs. The Emperor Tughlag, hearing complaints from Sonargaon that 'the Emirs and magistrates were exercising great cruelties and injustice towards





the inhabitants,' set out to visit the Eastern Province and call Bahadur Khan at last to account for his insubordination and misdeeds. Again an Emperor of Delhi entered Sonargaon, and again the governor went out to meet him and offer his submission. For Bahadur Khan, during his long rule, had not succeeded in winning the fidelity of his army or the devotion of his courtiers, and, deserted by all in the hour of need, he cast himself upon the mercy of the Emperor. He was finally pardoned, but only on resigning all his wealth and offices and attending the Emperor to grace his triumphal return to Delhi. To this humiliation came the first Mussulman Viceroy in Sonargaon who strove for independence.

In his place the Emperor appointed Bhiram Khan, and for fourteen years he ruled, it is said, with singular wisdom and equity. But again the book of the chronicles of the Kings of Bengal is silent. Nothing is recorded of his reign. On his death, in 1338, the first of a long series of palace revolutions disturbed the peace of Sonargaon. It was a scramble for the throne, and the prize went to the strongest. Fakiruddin, who had been armour-bearer to Bhiram Khan, finally triumphed, and not only succeeded in seizing the governorship of the province, but with consummate effrontery declared himself independent of imperial authority,





assuming the exalted title of Sultan Sikunder. The usurper, however, was not left long in undisturbed possession. Events moved fast, and it was an exciting drama that was played out in Sonargaon during the two-and-a-half years of Fakiruddin's brief reign. The Emperor, hearing of the violence and disorder that had followed the death of Bhiram Khan, sent orders to Khuddar Khan, the Viceroy of Gaur, to proceed with all haste to Sonargaon and bring the usurper to swift justice. In the battle that ensued Fakiruddin was defeated, but refusing to despair he escaped from the field, fleeing into the jungle with a few devoted followers, there to await the turn of events. His chance was not long in coming. Khuddar Khan, having taken possession of Sonargaon, at once loyally prepared to send to Delhi the large amount of treasure that he had discovered there. Fakiruddin, fully informed of all that was taking place, learned with dismay of the proposed dispersal of the treasure which he had himself accumulated. With this treasure would depart his last hope of regaining the province, and he conceived a bold design to obtain possession of it. Sending emissaries secretly to Khuddar Khan's own troops, he made them promises that if they would kill their leader and assist in restoring to him his kingdom he would distribute the whole of the treasure





among them. The soldiers, mercenaries willing to fight for the highest bidder, grew wild with cupidity at this chance of sudden wealth, and having on a fixed day assassinated Khudder Khan they marched to join their new leader, who lay in hiding close by. Fakiruddin at once made a triumphal entry into his capital, and, being still dependent on the troops who had so recently become his allies, he was forced to keep his promise, and all the treasure was distributed among them.

For the moment the triumph of Fakiruddin was complete. Khudder Khan, the Viceroy of Gaur, having been slain, he proudly proclaimed himself king of all Bengal, and, ordering the coin to be stamped with his name, threw defiance at the Emperor's wrath. But his triumph was short-lived. Not content with the kingdom of Sonargaon, his soaring ambition led him to dream of yet greater conquests. But Fakiruddin was no general. He had won his way solely by intrigue and his ready wit. On the field he showed neither generalship nor the power to inspire confidence in others, and, realising this, he sent his favourite slave, Mukless Khan, in charge of the great expedition that he fitted out to take possession of Gaur. But though Mukless Khan had made a reputation as a leader, his troops proved





no match for the army which Ali Mubarik, the new Viceroy of Gaur, led out against him, and he suffered a crushing defeat, himself being slain in the battle. Ali Mubarik, at the Emperor's orders, followed up this success by invading Sonargaon, and Fakiruddin, again defeated, was captured as he fled from the field. In his capital, which had witnessed the many dramatic events of his brief reign, the final curtain was rung down on his meteoric career. He met with a brutal death at the hands of his conqueror, and his body was flung contemptuously out of the gate of the city which he had entered in triumph so short a time before. His career was typical of the rapid turns of the wheel of fate in Mussulman days in Bengal. Starting from the lowest rung in the ladder, he attained, by the most unscrupulous means, to wealth and power. A brief period of prosperity, then another more powerful than he arose, and his place knew him no more.

But Ali Mubarik, the latest conqueror of Sonargaon, enjoyed even a briefer spell of power than Fakiruddin. After a reign of only a year and five months he was assassinated by his own foster-brother, Ilyas Khaji, who immediately took possession of the kingdom. It is strange to read in the old Mussulman chronicles that the perpetrator of this treacherous act was of a mild and generous





disposition, 'a man much respected and beloved by the people.' So constantly had fratricide, intrigue, and murder paved the way to empire that they had come to be but lightly regarded as the natural accompaniment of each new king's accession, and thus the memory of Ilyas Khaji, whose reign was inaugurated by the treacherous murder of his foster-brother, remains as that of one of the most just and honourable kings who ever reigned in Sonargaon. Assuming the high title of Shamsuddin, he ruled the whole of Bengal for ten years, undisturbed by any interference from the imperial authority at Delhi. Then again the strong hand gathered together the reins of empire, and strove to bring the outlying provinces back to their obedience.

The Emperor Feroze Shah was not the man to brook lightly the insubordination of rebellious Viceroys. The unchecked ambition of a Viceroy had proved too often the ruin of an empire, and the reports that reached Delhi of the wealth and strength of Shamsuddin roused deep suspicion in the mind of Feroze Shah. Resolving to be first in the field, he set out with a large army to reduce the Eastern Province to submission. On his approach Shamsuddin fell back upon Ekdala on the Banar river, which he deemed the strongest fortress in all Sonargaon. Built by the Pal





kings in days gone by, it had been neglected since their disappearance after the Mussulman invasion, but Shamsuddin, recognising that its situation would be well nigh impregnable against attack, hastily restored it and staked his kingdom upon its strength. The ruins of the fort that can still be traced show how admirably it was designed for defence. The river, three hundred yards wide and in some places forty feet deep, itself affords sufficient protection along its front. Here the banks, unlike those of most rivers in India, rise abruptly out of the stream, showing, when the river is low, like a solid wall of masonry that it was well nigh impossible to scale. Like a crescent on the river's bank runs the outer wall of the fort, some two miles in circuit, with a broad moat surrounding it on the further side. Within this outer circle can still be traced the lines of a second defence, the citadel, with walls and bastions. Beyond, the country rises in hilly ridges, intersected by innumerable small ravines, and covered with low shrub jungle. The imperial army soon discovered to its cost the strength of the enemy's position. For twenty-two days the Emperor Feroze Shah invested it without success. Even the small triumph that followed was due to accident. Determining to change his plan of attack, he withdrew his troops to reform his en-





AT ANCHOR FOR THE NIGHT NEAR SONARGAON.





campment at another point. Had the movement been designed as a stratagem to draw the enemy from his entrenchment, it could have met with no greater success. Shamsuddin, mistaking it for a retreat, hastily sallied out to the attack. But the Emperor, though baffled in his attempts to take the fort, was by no means vanquished, and he met the sortie with such vigour that Shamsuddin was forced to seek shelter again ignominiously within the fort, leaving in the hands of his enemies no fewer than forty-four elephants, his umbrella, and all the insignia of royalty.

Re-forming his troops, the Emperor continued the siege. Little is recorded of the days that followed. Only one legend lifts the veil as the armies face one another across the ramparts of the fort, uncertain as yet of the result. In the neighbourhood, it is said, there lived a saint named Raja Biyabani, to whom Shamsuddin was much attached. During the siege the saint died, and Shamsuddin, anxious to pay the last tribute of respect to his friend, disguised himself as a fakir and attended the funeral ceremonies outside the fort. Then, seized with the whim as he returned, he passed on into the enemy's camp and solemnly made his obeisance to the Emperor himself, returning to his fort unrecognised and unmolested.

For many days the imperial troops lay before





the walls of Ekdala, unable to break down its magnificent defence. Already the rivers were rising and the rains were at hand. Soon retreat would be well nigh impossible, and the Emperor had no desire to be caught so far from the imperial city and forced to wait the abating of the rains in the enemy's country. Rather than this he finally acknowledged himself beaten, and, accepting the vague promise of an annual tribute from Shamsuddin, he raised the siege and returned to Delhi. Three years later the Emperor Feroze Shah, distracted by other cares, was reduced to granting to Shamsuddin a definite treaty formally acknowledging the independence of Bengal.

Full of honours, and after a uniformly successful reign of sixteen years, Shamsuddin died in 1358. No sooner did the Emperor Feroze Shah hear of his old enemy's death than he made preparations to restore the imperial authority in Bengal. But in Sekunder Shah, the son of Shamsuddin, he found an enemy no less determined and adroit, and the fort of Ekdala as impregnable as before. Sekunder Shah, on the approach of the imperial forces, following his father's prudent example, shut himself up in this safe retreat, and though Feroze Shah invested it again with a greater army than before, he was forced, after a long and fruitless siege, once more





to acknowledge his defeat. Thus twice had the fort of Ekdala baffled and defied the power of the empire. For the second time Feroze Shah withdrew, taking with him a present of forty-eight elephants and a sum of money with which Sekunder Shah regarded the independence of his kingdom as cheaply bought.

Then for a few brief years there was peace. Sekunder Shah, busy with his schemes for rebuilding Pandua, where he had fixed his capital, was content with the independence he had won. But, successful abroad, his last years were clouded by domestic strife. It was the old story of intrigue to secure the succession, of plot and counterplot among the courtiers and the women of the palace. Sekunder Shah had married two wives, by the first of whom he had seventeen children, by the second only one son, Ghyasuddin. But this one son was loved by his father more than all the children of his first wife. The latter, in consequence, regarded Ghyasuddin with hatred and suspicion as the rival of her own sons for the succession. Having obtained the king's ear, she endeavoured to set him against his favourite son, saying that he was plotting not only against her sons, but against his own father's life, and advising the king to avert the mischief he intended, 'either by sending him to prison, or, by depriving the pupils of his eyes of their



visual powers, rendering him incapable of effecting his flagitious schemes.' Although Sekunder Shah indignantly rejected this horrible suggestion, Ghyasuddin, afraid of his stepmother's influence, fled to Sonargaon and, collecting an army, openly defied his father. Sekunder Shah, enraged at this ungrateful conduct of his favourite son, set out against him, and the armies came face to face at Goalpara. Ghyasuddin had given strict orders to his troops before the battle that not a hair of his father's head was to be injured, but in the midst of the fight news came to him that Sekunder Shah had been mortally wounded. Hastening to his side, Ghyasuddin wept bitter tears of repentance and implored his father's forgiveness. The dying monarch, raising his hand in blessing, let it fall upon his son's head, murmuring 'My kingdom has passed. May thine arise and live for ever.'

Scarcely had the breath left his father's body when Ghyasuddin, relinquishing the last offices of the dead to others, hastened to Pandua to secure the throne. Arrived there, he perpetrated one of the most revolting deeds that has ever stained the accession even of a king of Bengal. Partly out of revenge for the hostility of his stepmother, partly to rid himself of rivals for the throne, he ordered the eyes of all his stepbrothers to be torn out and sent on a salver to their mother. Yet this same Ghyasuddin, it is





recorded, was a mild and just ruler, and legends survive of him that make him a very Solomon for wisdom and judgment. The character of an Oriental is full of contradictions and surprises, yet it is strange to find such a story as the following told of one who could be guilty of such cruelty and injustice towards his own flesh and blood. It is related that one day while practising with the bow he accidentally wounded a boy, the only son of his mother, who was a widow. The woman, ignorant of the king's identity, went and complained to the Kazi, demanding justice. The Kazi, perceiving who it was who had wounded her son, was torn between his desire to do justice and his fear of the king. But, fearing God more than the king, he finally sent a messenger to summon Ghyasuddin to his court. The latter, on receiving the summons, immediately arose and, concealing a short sword beneath his cloak, repaired to the court of the Kazi. There, showing him no especial respect, the Kazi ordered him to compensate the woman for the injury done to her. The king complied, and, giving her a large sum of money, sent her away content. Then, the case being disposed of, the Kazi descended from his seat and prostrated himself at the king's feet. But Ghyasuddin, raising him up, showed him the sword which he carried beneath his cloak, and said: 'Kazi, in obedience to your





commands as the expounder of the sacred law, I came instantly at your summons to your tribunal, but if I had found that you deviated in the smallest degree from its ordinances, I swear that with this sword I would have taken off your head.' Then the Kazi, laying his hand upon the scourge which hung in the court, replied: 'I also swear by the Almighty God that if you had not complied with the injunctions of the law, this scourge should have been laid upon your back as upon that of any other criminal.' The king, pleased to find justice so impartially administered in his kingdom, handsomely rewarded the Kazi, and raised him to great honour.

Ghyasuddin was a man of a gay and convivial disposition. He it was who invited the poet Hafiz to visit him at Sonargaon, sending him as a gift some of the exquisite muslins for which his capital was famous; but the poet, although he wrote an ode which is to be found in the 'Diwan,' was not sufficiently tempted to undertake the long journey to Eastern Bengal, far removed from the pleasant delights of Shiraz. Ghyasuddin's favourite wives were poetically named by him the Cypress, the Tulip, and the Rose. Once being near to death, he ordered that, in case of his demise, none but these three should wash his body and prepare it for the last funeral rites. But the king recovered, and





the other ladies of the harem had their revenge upon the Cypress, the Tulip, and the Rose for the favour shown them by nicknaming them Ghos-salehs, or Washers of the Dead.

The tomb of Ghyasuddin is still to be seen in Sonargaon. On the outskirts of the village of Pannam, it lies sadly ruined and neglected. Yet even in decay it is a striking testimony to Musulman skill. Of dark grey basalt stone, it is elaborately carved, and the intricate arabesque tracery on the sides and corners of the slabs is as perfect to-day as when it was first executed over five hundred and thirty years ago. The stones lie prone and scattered, the sport of many a storm of wind and rain. Half buried in the earth at their head lies a sandstone pillar, doubtless used as a *cheraghda*n, where a light was kept burning in the days ere yet the memory of this one-time great and famous king of Bengal had faded into the forgotten things of the past.

For almost a century after the death of Ghyasuddin, Sonargaon figures but little in imperial affairs, and of local history there is little that has survived. Deserted as a capital for the more famous cities of Gaur and Pandua, the eastern province passed on its uneventful way under the control of local Mussulman officials. From this comparatively peaceful period dates the oldest in-





scription in Sonargaon. Facing a modern mosque in the village of Moghrapara is a small graveyard of nameless graves enclosed within plain brick walls. Let into one of the walls is a large black stone, round which for centuries a curious superstition has lingered even down to the present day. Over the stone was placed a thick coating of lime, and if any theft occurred in the neighbourhood all the villagers were summoned before it and, placing their hands upon it, swore their innocence. The belief held that the hand of the thief would stick so tightly to the lime that he would be unable to remove it without great difficulty. The stone is still completely covered with a thick coating of lime, and it was only recently discovered that beneath it is an inscription bearing the name of Jalaluddin Fateh Shah, A.H. 889 (A.D. 1484). There is only one older inscription than this in Eastern Bengal—the inscription, dated one year earlier, in the mosque of Baba Adam near Rampal.

It is not until 1489, a hundred and sixteen years after Ghyasuddin had been laid to rest in Sonargaon, that the chief interest in Bengal once more turns eastwards. Attracted by the fame of the fortress of Ekdala, which had twice so stoutly resisted the attack of the imperial forces, Hossain Shah, on his appointment as Viceroy, fixed his headquarters there. Hossain Shah's career was





typical of the possibilities that awaited the adventurer on the outskirts of empire in early Mussulman days. Quitting the deserts of Arabia to seek his fortunes in Hindustan, he was forced at first to accept a subordinate post at the Viceregal Court in Bengal, but being of good birth though an adventurer, he won the daughter of the Kazi of Chandpur in marriage, and by his conspicuous ability rapidly made his way to the front rank. So wisely did he rule as King of Bengal that it is recorded that no insurrection or public disturbance occurred throughout his long reign of twenty-four years. Of Eastern Bengal in his day a brief glimpse is obtained from the pen of a European writer. It was in 1503 that Lewis Vertomannus, a gentleman of Rome, visited Hossain Shah's kingdom when that monarch was waging war against Orissa. The traveller is astonished at the extent of his dominions and the size of his army, which he declares to have consisted of no less than two hundred thousand footmen and cavalry.

Like all Mussulman rulers, Hossain Shah was a great builder. In Sonargaon a mosque still preserves his name. Even amid many things that are old, this mosque is known among the villagers of Galdi as the Purana Musjid, the Old Mosque. It was a fine building in its day. Sixteen and a half feet square, the four walls



## THE ROMANCE OF AN EASTERN CAPITAL

as they ascend give place to the eight walls of an octagon. As usual, there are three arched recesses or *mihhrabs*, the centre one formed of dark basaltic stone well cut and ornamented with arabesque work, the two side ones of brick, clear cut and cunningly laid. The sandstone pillars are evidently the plunder of some Hindu shrine, forced from their resting-place to grace the triumph of another faith. Until recent years the call to prayer still rang out from this Purana Musjid of Hossain Shah, but time has told at last even upon its massive structure, and its worshippers, after nearly four hundred years, have deserted it for the modern mosque of Abdul Hamid, a hundred yards away, whence at morning and evening the same call to prayer is heard across the plain.

Away in Hindustan great events were pending at the time of Hossain Shah's death. The empire was passing away from the Afghans, who had held it for so many generations, falling beneath the yoke of the all-conquering Moghuls and their great chief Babar. But Babar's career as Emperor was short, and his death in 1531 was the signal for a brief revival of the Afghans. Once more with lightning rapidity the much-tried province changed hands. Sher Shah, the famous Afghan adventurer, defeating the son of Hossain Shah, secured possession





of Bengal, and finally, after a nine years' struggle, overcame the Emperor Humayon and established himself upon the throne of Delhi.

Sher Shah, triumphant, was careful to avoid the dangers which had been the ruin of so many of his predecessors. As an independent king in Bengal, he himself had proved a menace to the empire, and his first care was to see that no subject of his acquired sufficient power to follow in his footsteps. Partitioning the whole province of Bengal into minor governorships, he arranged that none should be of such importance as to render an attempt at independence possible. So admirably did this plan succeed that in his day there was peace throughout Bengal, so strange and perfect that it was known as the Peace of Sher Shah. Men slept on the highway at night without fear, wrote the chroniclers of the day, such was the terror that Sher Shah had inspired in evildoers. From Sonargaon he built a road as far as the Indus, a distance of three thousand miles, erecting serais at distances of every twenty miles, and digging a well at the end of every *kos* (two miles). Also along this great highway he erected many mosques, so that those who travelled by it might never be far from the sound of the call to prayer. For the welfare of travellers he planted trees on either side of the road, to give shelter to those that





needs must travel in the heat of the day, and fruit-trees to provide them with refreshment by the way. To communicate quickly with all parts of his dominion, horse-posts were established at intervals along the road, so that news might be carried to him quickly, and all rebellion and disturbance quelled at the outset. It was much to accomplish in five short years. 'It was the will of God,' he said in his last days, pathetically fingering his white beard, 'that I should only obtain the empire towards evening. Therefore it behoves me,' he added, rousing himself from vain regrets, 'that I be up and doing before night falls.'

It is during this brief revival of Afghan rule that we get a fresh glimpse of Eastern Bengal from the writings of another European traveller. Caesar Frederick, a Venetian merchant, touring in this part of India in 1565, mentions with astonishment the cheapness of provisions. In Sundeep he notes that he purchased 'two salted kine for a larine (2s. 6d.), four hogs for the same price, a fat hen for a penny, and other commodities at a like price.' And yet he naïvely adds that his men said that he paid twice their worth. This abundance and cheapness of provisions seems to have long been characteristic of Eastern Bengal. 'All ages have spoken of Egypt as the best and fruitfulest part of the world,' writes Bernier a hundred years





later, 'but as far as I can see by the two voyages I have made to the kingdom of Bengal, I am of opinion that that advantage belongs rather to it than to Egypt.' Hamilton, speaking of Bengal from personal observation at the end of the seventeenth century, writes that 'the plenty and cheapness of provisions are here incredible.' It was a wonderful land, whose richness and abundance neither war, pestilence, nor oppression could destroy.

But, the strong hand of Sher Shah removed, Bengal speedily fell back into the old paths of turbulence and disorder. Sher Shah's successor once more appointed a governor for the whole of Bengal with fatal results. He and his successors quickly proclaimed their independence, and it was not until the days of the great Akbar, in the reign of Daud Khan, that they were finally reduced. With the death of Daud Khan, in 1576, the long line of Afghan rulers in Bengal comes to an end, nearly four hundred years after Bukhtiyar Khiliji had led the first Mahomedan army to the conquest of the province.

The Afghans, however, were not the men tamely to accept defeat. Ousted from Central Bengal, they long continued the struggle for independence in the outlying provinces. Sonargaon, in the furthest east, where imperial authority was proverbially





weak, offered them a secure retreat, and there, led by the famous Isha Khan, they long made a determined stand. This chief was the grandson of Kalidas Gozdani, a Hindu, who, it is said, delighted in religious controversies, and having been worsted in argument by a learned Mussulman, acknowledged his defeat and embraced the faith of Islam.

From the outset Isha Khan's career had been full of adventure. In his young days, hearing of the fame of the beauty of Sona Bibi, the widowed daughter of Chand Roy, Zemindar of Vikrampur, he determined in spite of all difficulties to win her for his wife. Besides the difference of religion there was the fact that she was a widow, and remarriage for such was contrary to the tenets of her faith. But Isha Khan, not to be denied, carried her off by force, and, pursued by Chand Roy and her indignant relatives, he held her against all odds in the fort of Kalagachhia, where Lakhiya and Megna meet. Sona Bibi, won by the courage and address of her captor, soon ceased to repine at her lot, and renouncing Hinduism, she embraced her husband's faith, remaining throughout his life a devoted helpmate, and defending his kingdom against his enemies, her own kith and kin, even after his decease.

On the death of Daud Khan, Isha Khan fled





to Chittagong and thence to Jungalbari, near Haibatnugger, in Mymensingh. So large a body of troops had he gathered together that the Raja of Cooch Behar fled at his approach, and Isha Khan fixed his headquarters there, far removed from the seat of the new Moghul government in Bengal. Thence he gradually extended his kingdom, building forts at Dewanbag, Hajigunj, Egarasindu, Sherpur, and Rangamatti, drawing a ring fence round his capital to protect himself on all sides from attack. So powerful did he become that Akbar finally sent his famous Rajput general Man Singh against him. The story of the meeting of Man Singh and Isha Khan reads like a romance. Advancing to the banks of the Lakhiya, Man Singh encamped at Demra, where a large tank named Gangasagar still marks the site of his halting-place, and marching along the river bank drew near Egarasindu fort, strongly situated on the Brahmaputra, where the forces of Isha Khan lay. Outside its walls a great battle took place. All day the armies strove in deadly combat, and when at last it grew towards evening neither side could claim the victory. Then as night fell, to save further bloodshed on the morrow, Isha Khan sent a messenger to call Man Singh to single combat at dawn to decide the issue. The Rajput general accepted the challenge,





but when the moment came, he sent his son-in-law in his stead, and Isha Khan, ignorant of the trick that had been played upon him, fought with him and slew him. Then, finding that he had been deceived, he challenged Man Singh again to combat, and this time the Rajput general himself came to do battle with the Afghan. On horseback the combat took place, and after a long struggle the victory lay with Isha Khan. Thereupon, according to the legend, there ensued a dramatic scene. The Afghan, dismounting, hastened to raise the fallen general from the ground, and each silently clasped the other's hand in unspoken admiration of his prowess. Suddenly like a whirlwind from the door of her tent, where she had watched the combat, came the wife of Man Singh. Regardless of convention, she flung herself in the abandonment of her grief at the feet of Isha Khan. If her husband returned defeated, she cried, his head would pay the forfeit, for Akbar knew no mercy to the unsuccessful. Was it the wish of Isha Khan to see her widowed and her children fatherless? With a torrent of words she implored the mercy of the conqueror, and Isha Khan, struck with her beauty and moved by her distress, chivalrously consented to accompany Man Singh to Delhi and throw himself upon the Emperor's clemency. Akbar, knowing him at first only as a rebellious Afghan





chief, threw him into prison, but afterwards learning the full story of his courage and generosity, he released him and promoted him to great honour. Giving him the titles of Dewan and Musnad Ali, he appointed him commander-in-chief in Bengal, and gave him twenty-two parganas in the neighbourhood of his old capital. He returned to Jungalbari and, appointing twelve ministers, he assigned them to different portions of the province to carry on the government in his name. Great prosperity is associated with his reign. In his day, it is said, rice sold at four maunds to the rupee, and trade and commerce flourished. His was the strong hand, and during his life the land had rest. After a wise and just rule of many years he died, and was buried at Bukhtarapur, not far from the famous fort at Egarasindu. ✓

His wife, Sona Bibi, survived him, and heroically carried on his great traditions, furnishing almost the sole instance in the history of Sonargaon of a woman publicly taking an active part in political affairs. Isha Khan's death was the signal for his enemies to sweep down upon his kingdom and wreak the vengeance which they had so often before attempted in vain. Kedar Rai, the Raja of Chandpur, with the Raja of Tipperah, sailed up the Megna with a great fleet, confident of success now that the great Afghan chief was gone. But





they were soon to find that, though Isha Khan was dead, a valiant defender remained to guard his memory and protect his kingdom. Their own kinswoman, the Afghan's widow, was as vigorous and determined a foe as Isha Khan himself. Entrenched in the fort of Sonakunda on the Lakhiya, she held out stubbornly for many weeks, defying all the forces of her enemies, and at length, when the end drew near, determined that her dead lord's fort should never surrender to his foes, she ordered it to be burned to the ground, and, perishing in its ashes, made of it her funeral pyre. To this day the memory of Sona Bibi is held in honour on the banks of the Lakhiya.

Once again a glimpse is obtained of Sonargaon from without. It was during the time of Isha Khan that Ralph Fitch, an envoy of Queen Elizabeth to the Emperor of China, visited Eastern Bengal. 'The chiefe king of all these countries,' he writes, 'is called Isacan, and he is the chiefe of all the other kings, and is a great friend to all Christians.' The country he describes as extraordinarily fertile, rice and cotton and silk goods being the chief articles of trade. The inhabitants were rich and prosperous. 'The women weare great store of silver hoopes about their neckes and armes, and their legs are ringed with silver, copper,





and rings made of elephant's teeth.' Of Sonargaon itself he gives a general description. 'Sinnergan,' he writes, 'is a towne sixe leagues from Serrepore, where there is the best and finest cloth made of cotton in all India. The houses here, as they be in the most part of India, are very litle and covered with strawe, and have a fewe mats round about the walls and the doore to keepe out the Tygers and the Foxes. Many of the people are very rich. Here they will eate no flesh, nor kill no beast: They live of Rice, milke, and fruits. They goe with a little cloth before them, and all the rest of their bodies is naked. Great store of Cotton cloth goeth from hence, and much rice, wherewith they serve all India, Ceylon, Pegu, Malacca, Sumatra, and many other places.'

The fall of Sonakunda was one of the closing scenes in the history of Sonargaon. The Rajas of Chandpur and Tipperah plundered and ravaged far and wide over the whole country to the south, and in their wake came the Mughls, a wild race of pirates and freebooters, whose name soon struck terror among the peaceful cultivators along the banks of all the great rivers of Eastern Bengal. The ancient kingdom of Sonargaon was falling on evil days, and the end drew near. Disorganised and without a leader, the last vestige of unity had vanished, and the land lay an easy prey to the

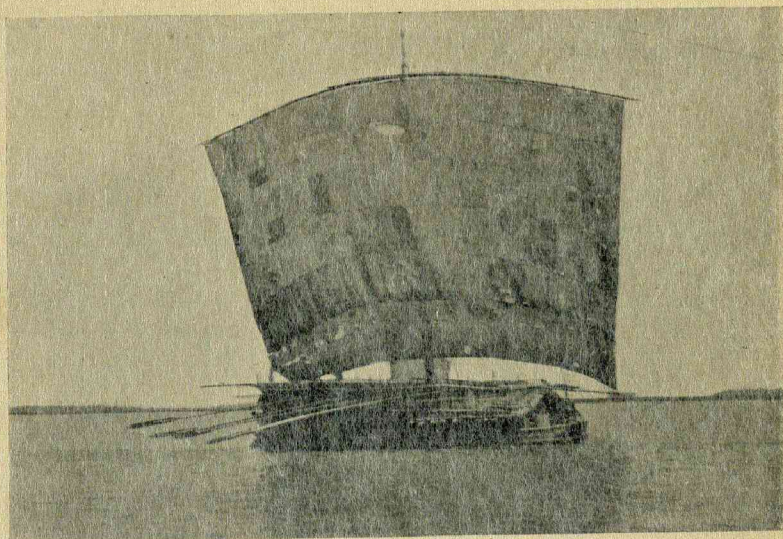




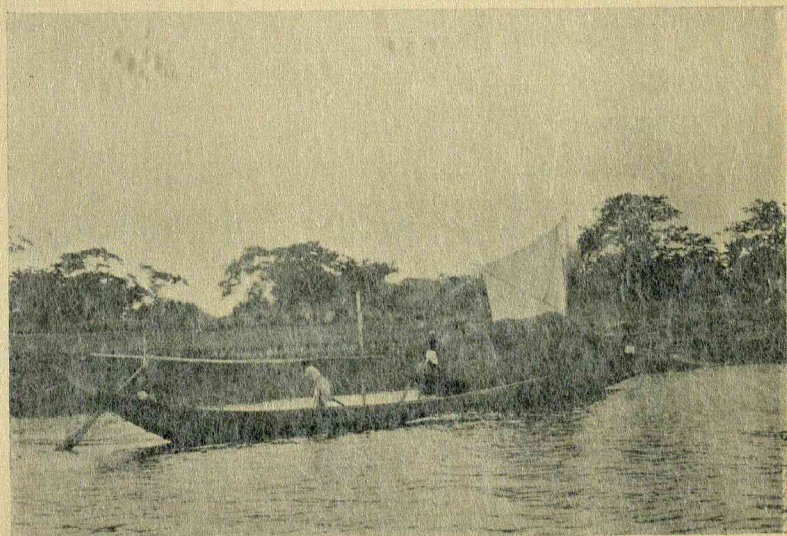
enemies who had so long hovered round its gates. When the Mughls were reinforced by bands of roving Portuguese, expert seamen, who taught their new allies new methods of navigation and attack, they became a menace which the new Moghul government in Bengal could not long overlook, and Islam Khan, quitting Rajmahal, resolved to remove his capital further eastwards, where he might hold them more firmly in check. But Sonargaon, already falling to decay and exposed to the attacks of the Mughls, offered no desirable site, and Islam Khan founded a new capital, more securely situated, across the Lakhiya. On the banks of the Buriganga the great city of Dacca sprang rapidly into being as the capital of all Bengal, and from this time onwards Sonargaon passes out of history almost as completely as if it had never been.

Scattered over the land, hidden in thick patches of jungle or stranded like things forgotten in the open rice-fields, lie the few memorials of the past that still survive. Great tanks and earthworks alone preserve the memory of the Buddhist kings. The outlines of their forts, wherein the ploughshare has long since replaced the sword, and the cultivator tills the fertile soil, mark where the Afghan fought his last fight for independence, while countless mosques and the tombs of holy men witness to





A CARGO BOAT LADEN WITH JUTE LEAVING SONARGAON.



ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA NEAR THE TOMB OF THE FIVE PIRS.





the strength of a great and inspiring faith. Everywhere are to be found the rough mounds of earth or *gadis* that mark the resting-places of saints and worthies of a bygone race. In the last days of its greatness, Sonargaon, it is said, swarmed with Pirs and fakirs, religious mendicants, who gathered here from all quarters of India. Of all those whose memory remains, the greatest were the Five Pirs. Who they were, and when they lived and died, has long since been forgotten. That they came from the west is the one vague tradition preserved among those who still worship at their shrines. Only the memory of their sanctity still survives. Unprotected from the storms that sweep the rivers, they lie beneath five mounds of earth raised parallel, a small mosque beside them keeping guard, and rapidly itself falling into decay. Once the Brahmaputra flowed close by them; but the river, ever fickle in its course, has long since changed its bed, and the sacred water no longer washes by their feet. So sacred are these tombs of the Five Pirs still deemed, that even Hindus make reverence as they pass, while Mahomedans come from great distances to worship at their shrine. Only to two other shrines in Eastern Bengal do Mahomedans make pilgrimages—to the tomb of Shah Ali Sahib at Mirpur, a few miles north-west of Dacca, and to the *durga*





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of Pir Buda Auliya at Chittagong, the patron saint of all Hindu and Mahomedan boatmen on the great rivers.

In the small market village of Moghrapara, where once the kings of Sonargaon had their capital, is the tomb of Munna Shah Darwesh. At its foot a lamp is still lighted as darkness closes in, and every Mahomedan stops to mutter a prayer as he passes by. Close by is the *durga* of Sheik Muhammad Yasuf, a still more famous Pir. It contains the tombs of himself, his wife and his son, and consists of two elongated dome-roofed buildings, each surmounted by two pinnacles, said to have been once covered with gold, of which all trace has long disappeared. Even the Hindus pay homage at the shrine of Sheik Muhammad Yasuf. If the ryot is in fear for his crop, he brings a handful of rice. If his child is ill, or his cattle a prey to disease, he lays some small propitiatory offering on the tomb. If the harvest has been plenteous, he gives a bundle of rice straight from the field as a thank-offering. In joy or in sorrow the tomb of the Saint plays its appointed part in the inner life of the people.

Close by is a ruined gateway called the Naubat Khana, where in the days of its prosperity musicians played to announce to fakir and traveller that a place of rest was at hand. The music has long





since ceased, but until recently the majestic words of the Koran were still heard in the time-worn building near by, where the old men taught the youth of their race the elements of their religion, repeating in unison the resounding phrases of a great faith.

Many other quaint traditions linger in Sonargaon. Suddenly, in the midst of the jungle, grass-grown and neglected, with the water rapidly rising round it, one comes upon the tomb of another Pir. The story is told that Ponkai Diwanah, as he was popularly known, desiring to live a life of righteousness, retired into the forest, where he sat for twelve years absorbed in meditation and unconscious of the lapse of time. When at last he was found by his *Chelas*, who had long sought for him, he had to be dug out of the mound which the white ants had raised all round him as he sat and which covered him up to his neck. This legend must have sprung up in comparatively recent years, since men still living say that they knew the son of this famous Pir. Father and son lie buried side by side, and at the head of the former is placed the stone lattice on which he spent his twelve years of meditation.

A short distance away, across the fields, there lies the tomb of Pagla Saheb (Madman), so much venerated by both Hindus and Mahomedans that parents offer at it the 'choti' or queue of their





children when dangerously ill. Why Pagla Saheb was deemed mad one asks in vain. Some say that he went mad from the fervour and intensity of his devotions. Another tradition has it that he vowed vengeance on all thieves, and catching all whom he could, he nailed them to a wall and himself cut off their heads. Then, stringing the heads together like a necklace, he threw them into an adjoining *khal*, which has ever since been known as Munda Mala—the Necklace of Heads.

Little else, save legends such as these, has survived the passing of the years in Sonargaon. Its records are few and scanty and its long and varied history, mostly unrecorded, was soon forgotten as the centre of interest passed westwards to the new city rising on the banks of the Buriganga. Deserted and forgotten, it passed out of the realm of history, and none cared to record the annals of a kingdom whose day was done. So Sonargaon slept unminded, and itself unmindful of its past.





## CHAPTER IV

## THE RISE OF DACCA

'HE had grown up with me from youth and was one year my junior,' wrote the Emperor Jehangir of Islam Khan. 'He was a brave man, of most excellent disposition, and in every respect distinguished above his tribe and family. Up to this day he has never tasted any stimulants, and his fidelity to me was such that I honoured him with the title of Farzand (*son*).' Such in his master's eyes was the Founder of Dacca, the new Capital of all Bengal.

It was no easy task that awaited Islam Khan on his appointment to the Viceroyalty of Bengal in 1608. The province, torn by the long struggle between Afghan and Moghul, lay exhausted and disorganised. Such cohesion as it had known under its independent kings was gone. Petty chiefs, freed from immediate control, gave full vent to their inherent love of lawlessness and independence. The Afghans, defeated again and again, yet clung stubbornly to their last footing on the out-





skirts of the province. Established in Orissa and the furthest limits of Eastern Bengal they were a constant menace to the empire. Not even the strategy of Raja Todermal or the brilliant generalship of Man Singh had altogether succeeded in completing the conquest that had been so brilliantly begun. Only the timely death of the great Afghan chief Kutlu Khan in Orissa had at length freed the recently established Moghul power from a danger that at one time threatened its extinction in Bengal. But Osman Khan, the son of the great chief, still lived, a source of much anxiety to Islam Khan in after days. Petty Afghan chiefs, driven back on Eastern Bengal, still held the forts of Gonakpara, Gauripara, and Dumroy on the Bunsu river, finding in the Bhowal jungles a secure and safe retreat. The whole of the ancient kingdom of Sónargaon lay practically at their mercy, Moghul authority never as yet having been fully imposed upon it. Islam Khan, seeing on his accession that Central Bengal had settled down peacefully under the new rule, resolved to take up his headquarters in the midst of Eastern Bengal, which so urgently required the grip of a strong hand.

But there was yet another and more urgent reason that induced Islam Khan to move his capital eastwards. A new danger had arisen in Eastern Bengal, threatening to lay waste its fertile





rice-fields and drive its peaceful inhabitants in terror from their lands. Taking advantage of the general confusion and the weakness of the central government, consequent on the struggle between Afghan and Moghul, the Mughls had boldly sailed up the great rivers and robbed and plundered in every direction unchecked. A wild, turbulent people, pirates and adventurers by nature and profession, they swarmed up from their homes in Chittagong and Arracan as news spread of the plunder to be obtained from this rich and unprotected land. Along the river-banks they swept like locusts, leaving desolation in their wake. Of mercy and honour they knew nothing, and every form of cruelty and oppression was practised upon the unfortunate inhabitants of Eastern Bengal who fell within their reach. Buddhists by religion, they had fallen far from the high ideals of that great faith. A chronicler of the time quaintly records the Emperor Jehangir's impression of them when some prisoners of their race were produced before him. Their customs, it seems, appeared to his Majesty 'very reprehensible,' as he was informed 'that they ate animals of every kind, married their half-sisters, and that their religion was of the greatest idolatry.'

Torn by dissensions from within and ravaged by the Mughls from without, Eastern Bengal





presented a happy hunting-ground to yet other adventurers who had lately appeared upon the scene. The century that had just closed had seen the Portuguese at the height of their fame. Bold seamen and skilful navigators, they had eagerly pressed forward at the head of the nations of the West in the search for new lands beyond the sea. As early as 1517 a little company of four ships, flying the Portuguese flag, had sailed up the Bay of Bengal and entered the Ganges, first in the field here, as in the new world in the West. Twenty years later the unfortunate Mahomed Shah, pressed by the Afghan in his capital of Gaur, had sent an urgent appeal for help to Nuno de Cuna, the Governor-General of the Portuguese settlements in India. In response a squadron of nine ships had set sail from Goa, but the journey was long, and they arrived only after the surrender of the city. The Portuguese, however, had made the first armed entry of a European force into Bengal, and they were not the men to let slip an advantage that offered them so much. Here was a land of promise, rich and unexplored. A people of the sea, the great rivers of Eastern Bengal made to them special appeal, giving as they did full scope to their love of navigation and all that appertained to ships and shipping. Many of them had already settled in Chittagong and Arracan, and a small company





sailing up the Megna established themselves at Serripore, only twenty miles south of Sonargaon itself.

They were a strange crew, from all accounts, these first Portuguese adventurers in Bengal. François Bernier, the celebrated French traveller, writing of them in the seventeenth century, speaks of them as men who had been forced to flee from the older and more law-abiding Portuguese settlements to the south. 'They were such as had abandoned their monasteries, men that had been twice or thrice married, murtherers.' They were a desperate, buccaneering crew, ready for any adventure, and rivalling in recklessness and daring the wildest heroes of romance. 'Such as had deserved the rope were most welcome and most esteemed there.' It needs no great stretch of imagination to believe that the life they led, unchecked by any of the restraints of civilisation, was 'very detestable and altogether unworthy of Christians, insomuch that they impunely butchered and poisoned one another, and assassinated their own priests, who sometimes were not better than themselves.' Bernier's description of them is delightfully graphic and realistic. 'Their ordinary trade was robbery and piracy,' he continues. 'With some small and light gallies they did nothing but coast about the sea, and entering into all rivers there-





about, and often penetrating even so far as forty or fifty leagues up country, surprised and carried away whole towns, assemblies, markets, feasts, and weddings of the poor Gentiles, and others of that country, making women slaves, great and small, with strange cruelty; and burning all they could not carry away. This great number of slaves, which thus they took from all quarters, behold what use they made of. They had boldness and impudence enough to come and sell to that very country the old people which they knew not what to do with; where it so fell out, that those who had escaped the danger by flight and by hiding themselves in the woods, laboured to redeem to-day their fathers and mothers that had been taken yesterday.'

It was not surprising that the King of Arracan at first looked upon these turbulent adventurers with suspicion and distrust. In fact, so great a source of danger had they become that at the beginning of the seventeenth century he determined to extirpate them from his dominions. But his plans miscarried, and many of them, escaping from Chittagong, made their home on the islands at the mouth of the Ganges, where they continued their acts of piracy undisturbed. The year before Islam Khan was appointed Viceroy, Futteh Khan, the local Moghul governor of that country, had at length attempted to suppress them; but, miscalculating





their strength, he had suffered a complete defeat, he himself, with the greater part of his troops, having been killed, and his fleet annihilated.

Such was the position of affairs that confronted Islam Khan on his appointment as Viceroy in 1608. In order to cope with the danger that beset Eastern Bengal, he at once resolved to take up his headquarters there, at the very centre of the scene of disturbance. Quitting his capital of Rajmahal, with all his court, he set sail for the eastern province, and the Afghans evacuating their fort of Gonakpara, on the Bunsí, at his approach, he halted there with the intention, it is said, of making it his capital. But finding the land too low-lying, and the Bunsí river prone to overflow its banks, he quitted it and moved on down the Dullasery and Buriganga, in search of a more convenient site. Arriving opposite the spot where Dacca now stands, Islam Khan was struck with its strategical position and the facilities offered by the wide stretch of high ground that lay beyond it, and at once determined to build his capital there.

What Islam Khan found on the site of his future capital at his first arrival is a matter of considerable uncertainty. So shrouded in doubt is its previous history that it is almost impossible to state with any definiteness whether a town of considerable importance or merely a collection of





insignificant villages was formerly in existence there. Several attempts have been made to identify this site with the city mentioned by European travellers and in Mussulman chronicles as Bengalla. Tradition says that in pre-Moghul days there existed here fifty-two bazaars and fifty-three streets, and the town, from this circumstance, acquired the somewhat unwieldy name of 'Bauno Bazaar and Teppun Gulli.' One of these fifty-two bazaars, known as Bengalla, is said to have been the most important of them all, and its fame as a centre of trade was well known throughout the neighbouring district. It is possible that, from the importance of this bazaar, its name was accepted by travellers in place of the more cumbrous one of 'Bauno Bazaar and Teppun Gulli.' The identification of Bengalla with Dacca is strengthened by the fact that no traveller or chronicler ever mentions them both. The traveller Methold, in the sixteenth century, speaks of Rajmahal and Bengalla as fine cities, making no mention of Dacca. Mandelslo, who visited Bengal about the same time, mentions Dacca, Rajmahal, and Satgaon in his book, but in his map he has written Bengalla making no mention of Dacca. If Bengalla is not to be identified with Dacca, its site remains a mystery. Had it met the fate of Serripore, and completely disappeared from sight,





washed away by the river, it would assuredly have left some tradition in the neighbourhood where it once stood. But none such remains.

How Dacca acquired its name is almost as great a mystery, and the endeavour to explain it has been fertile in many inventions. One story is that it derives its name from ancient pre-Mussulman times, when Ballal Sen, having found the image of the goddess Durga concealed in the jungle, raised a temple to the 'Hidden Goddess,' the Dhaka Iswari, by which name the city that gradually sprang up round it came to be known. Another story is that the town takes its name from the dhak tree (*Butea frondosa*), which is said in ancient times to have covered the whole of the river-bank where the town now stands. Yet another tradition associates the name with 'dhak,' the Bengali term for a drum. The story runs that when Islam Khan first landed to inspect the site which he had chosen for his new capital, he found a party of Hindus performing one of their ceremonies to the accompaniment of drums and music. Struck by the noise of the drums, a whim seized him, and he ordered the musicians to stand on the river-bank and beat their loudest. Then, sending out three of his attendants, he ordered them to proceed two in either direction along the river-bank, and one inland as far as they could within



sound of the drums. Where the sound ceased, they were ordered to place flagstaffs, and here Islam Khan erected boundary pillars, and fixed the limits of his capital.

It seems probable, however, that the name Dacca was in use before the time of Islam Khan, as that of one of the numerous local bazaars that went to form the town. In tracing the history of Indian towns it is repeatedly found that, owing their origin to a collection of small villages which gradually expanded and united, they eventually took their name from the largest of these villages, or from some famous shrine or temple in their midst. The villages themselves often retain their own individual names long after they have become known collectively under a common appellation. Dacca itself to-day is a striking example of this retention of local names still used to distinguish the different quarters of the town. It is probable that the fame of the Dhakeswari temple, or the fact that Islam Khan first resided in that quarter, accounts for its having given its name to the new capital. Islam Khan, in compliment to the Emperor, gave the city the official name of Jehangirnagar, by which name it is generally known in Mussulman annals.

Established in his new capital, Islam Khan at once set himself to check the incursions of the





Mugh and Portuguese. A new and entirely unexpected change had recently taken place in the relations of these two peoples, threatening a still greater danger to Eastern Bengal. From the deadliest of enemies they had suddenly become allies, intent on driving the Moghul out of his newly acquired province. Elated with their victory over the local Moghul governor, the Portuguese had elected a chief from among themselves, a common sailor named Sebastian Gonzalez, and under his leadership they seized the island of Sundeeep, with the intention of making it the headquarters of a permanent settlement in Bengal. The adventures of Sebastian Gonzalez read like a mediæval romance. A bold adventurer, of limitless ambition, unscrupulous, roistering, always spoiling for a fight, he yet possessed many of the qualities of a born leader of men. Putting a thousand Mahomedans to the sword, he established himself in Sundeeep, wringing a servile recognition from the terrified Hindu population. Thither, drawn by the fame of his exploits, came adventurers of every sort from all directions, until Gonzalez numbered among his adherents no less than a thousand Portuguese, two thousand Indian soldiers, two hundred cavalry, and eighty sail, well mounted with cannon.

It was towards this force that the Raja of





Arracan turned envious eyes. Always closely watching the fortunes of the Mussulman Empire, which had for so long loomed, a powerful and dangerous neighbour, on the border of his kingdom, he saw in the accession of the Moghul conquerors, and the removal of the capital of Bengal to the easternmost limits of the province, a new menace to his independence. Desiring to strike while the new capital was still in its infancy, and while Islam Khan was engaged in a last struggle with the Afghan in Orissa, the Raja of Arracan looked upon the Portuguese in a new light. With their skill as seamen they would be the most desirable of allies against the Moghul, and the Raja, sending messengers to Sundeeep, quickly concluded a peace with Gonzalez and solicited his help. The terms of an alliance being agreed upon, it was arranged that the Portuguese should sail up the river while the Arracanese marched by land, and, forming a junction below Dacca, should make a combined attack upon the capital. Victorious, they would proceed to divide Bengal between them. But they had to reckon with Islam Khan. Learning their plans, he sent out a large body of cavalry, which caught the Mughls before their junction with the Portuguese and defeated them with great slaughter. Gonzalez, having no desire to measure forces with the Moghul viceroy unaided, withdrew





to Sundeeep. Mutual recriminations ensued between the allies, and for a time Eastern Bengal had rest from their designs.

After a rule of only five years, Islam Khan died at Dacca in 1613. But before his death he had had the satisfaction of seeing his labours everywhere crowned with success. By his efforts the invasion of the Mughls and Portuguese had been repelled, and his armies had robbed the Afghans of their last semblance of power in Bengal and Orissa. The year before his death he had seen his victorious general, Shujat Khan, make the first triumphant entry into his new capital, bearing in his train the son and brother of Osman Khan, the Afghan, with a crowd of elephants and a howdah full of jewels as the spoils of war. So, in peace and honour, passed Islam Khan, the first Viceroy of Dacca.

As a mark of the esteem in which he held Islam Khan, the Emperor appointed his brother, Cassim Khan, to succeed him as Governor of Bengal. But the new Viceroy had little of his brother's ability, and after five years, during which the chief interest centred in the renewed activity of the Mughls and Portuguese, he was recalled from office. Between the Raja of Arracan and Sebastian Gonzalez a bitter feud had soon succeeded their brief alliance, and during the





whole of Cassim Khan's reign they had made common cause only in their hostility to the constituted Moghul authority in Bengal. After many years of extraordinary success, Gonzalez's adventurous career at last came to an end. Failing in an attack on Chittagong, he was forced to fall back on the island of Sundeeep, and being pursued there by the Arracanese, he was overwhelmed by numbers, and finally defeated and slain. The Mughls, once more victorious, established themselves in Sundeeep, and again had leisure to renew their incursions into Eastern Bengal.

In the third Viceroy, Ibrahim Khan, the strong hand was once more apparent in Dacca. Though he owed his position at Court to the fact that he was the brother-in-law of the Empress Nur Jehan, he had already earned for himself the title of Victorious in War. For four years, under the strong rule of Ibrahim Khan, Eastern Bengal had rest. Trade and commerce revived, and agriculture, encouraged by the cessation of war, was greatly extended. The weaving of muslins, for which this part of the country had long been famous, now, under imperial patronage, received fresh stimulus. At the Moghul court the Empress, Nur Jehan, intent on enhancing her loveliness in Jehangir's eyes, was introducing many new fashions in adornment, and all the finest





products of the weavers were bespoke in Dacca and despatched to Delhi. It was the dawn of the brief period of Dacca's greatest industrial and commercial prosperity and success.

But the years of peace were few, and again the shadow of imperial affairs fell darkly upon the Province of Bengal. Nur Jehan, who bore no son to Jehangir, was intriguing to secure the throne for Shariar, the Emperor's fourth son, whom she had married to her own daughter by her first husband, Sher Afgan. But Shah Jehan, the Emperor's third son, seeing his father's health decline, determined to make sure his own succession, and, openly taking up arms, marched with his army upon Delhi. Jehangir, however, ill though he was, would brook no rival while he lived. Rising from his sick bed in anger at his son's unfilial conduct, he advanced to meet him at the head of all his troops. Defeated, Shah Jehan fell back upon the Deccan, and there resolved to seize the government of Bengal, considering it the most favourable province whence he might later make good his claim upon the Empire. The Viceroy Ibrahim Khan, loyal to his master, hastened from Dacca to meet his master's rebellious son, but he was defeated and slain in the famous Teliagharia Pass, the Gateway of Bengal. Shah Jehan rapidly pursued the advantage he had gained, and made good his





hold on Bengal. Collecting all the boats that were available in the neighbourhood, he hastened down the river, with all the pomp and circumstance that he could muster, towards Dacca. Arrived there, he found the gates thrown open to receive him. Ibrahim Khan's nephew, who had been left in charge of the city, finding himself powerless to oppose his entry, came out to meet him, and delivered to him all the elephants and state property of his late uncle, together with forty lacs of treasure from the Government treasury.

From the first, Shah Jehan looked upon Dacca and Bengal only as stepping-stones to greater things, and his stay in the eastern capital was brief. Again the gates of the city were thrown wide, and a splendid cavalcade rode forth as Shah Jehan set out on his way to make his second bid for empire. Darab, son of Khani Khanan, Chief of the Nobility, his favourite courtier, was left as governor of Bengal, but Shah Jehan had learned to trust not even his dearest friend, and he carried Darab's son with him in his train, half honoured guest, half hostage. Shah Jehan's march, begun with so much pomp, continued for a time in triumph. The governor of Patna fled at his approach and the city opened its gates. Daunted by his success, the governor of Rhotas gave up to him the keys of that magnificent fortress. But





defeat soon followed at the hands of the imperial army, and Shah Jehan barely escaped with his life back to Rhotas, where he had left his family in safe retreat. Thence he sent urgent messages to Darab Khan in Dacca to advance to his help with what force he could. Darab Khan, however, proved a broken reed. In spite of the fact that his son was in the hands of Shah Jehan, he treacherously betrayed his master when his fortunes seemed to be on the wane, and falsely sent word that the zemindars and people all round Dacca had risen in arms, and prevented him leaving the city. His son paid the penalty of his father's perfidy in Rhotas when the news came. But vengeance speedily overtook Darab Khan, and when he surrendered to the victorious army of the Emperor, expecting to be met with honour, he met instead the fate that he deserved, and his head was sent to Delhi, that all men might see the end of traitors.

On Shah Jehan's flight from Bengal, his father, Jehangir, appointed Khanazad Khan to be governor. But his rule was short, and nothing noteworthy is recorded of him, save the fact that he remitted to Delhi no less than twenty-two lacs of rupees in specie, being the surplus revenue of the province. That it was possible for such a sum to be remitted when Dacca had recently been occupied by a rebel





army speaks much for the wealth of Bengal. Then followed Mukurru Khan, who ruled for only six months. His reign, though brief, was one of great magnificence and splendour. Never before had such pageants been seen upon the river as those arranged by Mukurru Khan. He is reported to have been passionately devoted to aquatic sports and pageants of every kind, and the city by night, illuminated along the bank and on the river, with hundreds of boats of every description, made a veritable fairy scene. It was an ill fate that this man, who so loved the river, should perish by it. He had been Viceroy for scarce six months when, hearing that a firman conferring fresh favours upon him was on its way from the Emperor, he organised a great procession of boats upon the river to go out to meet it with every token of honour and respect. All day they sailed up the river, the state barges a gorgeous sight in gala dress, and the white sails of the escort fleet gleaming in the sun. It grew to evening, and the messenger tarried on the way. At the hour of prayer, when the muezzin's voice rang out across the stillness of the water, the Viceroy gave orders for the fleet to put ashore. The state boat that he had chosen for himself was long and narrow, a swift-going boat usually propelled by oars, but upon which a sail had been hoisted. A strong





current was running, and in endeavouring to turn towards the bank the boat capsized in a sudden squall of wind, and the Viceroy and several of his courtiers who were in the state-room, unable to escape, perished miserably in sight of the whole fleet.

Then for a year Fedai Khan ruled as Viceroy, but on the Emperor Jehangir's death, Shah Jehan, who some time before had made his peace with his father, appointed Kassim Khan, a favourite of his own, to the coveted viceroyalty. Kassim Khan was a zealous Mussulman, and the worship of the Christians seems to have excited the same repugnance in him that it had in Mumtaz Mahal, the beautiful wife of Shah Jehan, when a few years previously she had lived in Bengal. Evil days were at hand for the Portuguese, who, since their first settlement at Hooghly in the Bay in 1575, had flourished there and prospered. Here were the better class of traders, having but little in common with the pirates of their name and race who, in alliance with the Mughls, had so harassed the Moghul governors. At Hooghly they had established themselves with every hope of permanence, building a church and a ring of forts that might place them in a strong position of defence. But Kassim Khan viewed their increasing strength with suspicion and alarm. He complained, with some



justification, that they had arrogated to themselves sovereign rights and levied tolls from all the boats that passed down the river, administering their own rough justice upon the neighbouring people, and committing many acts of violence upon the Emperor's subjects. They had already drawn all trade away from the royal port of Satgaon. Dark stories, besides, were whispered of their doings. It was said they had kidnapped Mussulman children and sent them away to Goa to be educated in the Christian faith, and daily within the handsome church that they had raised in their midst the mystic service of the Catholic Church created wonder and alarm. The images that decorated the interior seemed, to zealous Mussulmans like Mumtaz Mahal and Kassim Khan, sure signs of the idolatry of the worshippers.

When the report of their doings reached the imperial court, the Portuguese could expect little sympathy from Shah Jehan. A few years before, when his fortunes were at their lowest, he had appealed to Michael Rodriguez, the Portuguese governor of Hooghly, for help, and it had been denied him in no courteous terms. Shah Jehan, remembering these things, and with his empress at his side urging him to exterminate the idolaters, sent an order to Dacca that the Portuguese should be driven from Bengal.





Accordingly, in 1631, a great expedition set sail from Dacca to carry out the Emperor's commands. Kassim Khan planned the campaign with consummate skill. Three armies concentrated upon the doomed city, closing it in on every side, and for three and a half months Hooghly knew all the horrors of a siege. Day after day the defenders held out, hoping for the help from Goa that never reached them. Finally, the besiegers blew up the largest bastion of the fort, and the end came. A thousand of the Portuguese were killed, and over four thousand taken prisoners, many of whom were sent in chains to Agra. So complete was their defeat that out of sixty-four large vessels, fifty-seven 'grabs,' and two hundred sloops which had been anchored opposite the town, only one 'grab' and two sloops escaped. The church and all the symbols of their religion were ruthlessly destroyed. Kassim Khan rapidly rebuilt the fort and city, establishing it as the royal Fort of Bengal. But it was only a few months that he survived his triumph. That same year he died in Dacca, his death foretold, as the superstitious remembered, by a Portuguese priest who was slain at the altar of his church in the sack of Hooghly.

It was by a strange turn of events that only two years later, while Azim Khan ruled at Dacca, the English received their first permission to trade





in Bengal. The firman granted by Shah Jehan is dated February 2, 1634; but as the Moghul Government had seen the unwisdom of allowing foreign traders to sail up the Ganges and establish themselves on its banks as the Portuguese had done, the English vessels were only allowed to enter the port of Pipli in Balasore, and it was there that they established their first factory in Bengal. It was perhaps as much due to Azim Khan's indifferent and negligent disposition as to any other cause that the English obtained their first firman. Azim Khan, content with the pleasures of life at Dacca, felt no call to military glory or to fame as a ruler, and so lax was his rule that the Mughls and Assamese, quickly aware of the governor's weakness, once more sailed up the rivers and resumed their old piratic depredations.

Azim Khan was soon recalled; but the fact that his daughter, destined in after days to meet with so tragic a fate, was married to Prince Shuja, the Emperor's son, caused his weakness to be overlooked, and he was soon afterwards appointed to the less onerous post of governor of Allahabad.

Islam Khan, his successor, was a man of different stamp. An old and experienced statesman and soldier, he was eminently fitted to cope with the difficulties that beset the easternmost province of the empire. Scarcely had he made his state





entry into Dacca than there sailed up the river a fleet of Mugh ships, the first that ever came this way on a voyage of peace. Makat Rai, the governor of Chittagong, having quarrelled with the King of Arracan, came to seek the protection of the Moghul governor. He was received in audience by Islam Khan in his palace by the river at Dacca, and there acknowledged himself a vassal of the empire. The name of Chittagong, out of compliment to the Viceroy, was changed to Islamabad. But Islam Khan was too much occupied elsewhere to press his advantage in this direction, and it was not till twenty-eight years later, under the greatest of Viceroys, Shaista Khan, that the sovereignty of the Moghul became more than a name.

This same year there came another fleet almost within sight of Dacca—this time on no peaceful errand intent. The Assamese, ever ready to take advantage of weakness at the Moghul court, and encouraged by the supineness of the late governor, had collected a huge fleet of five hundred boats to plunder and lay waste the fertile fields of Bengal, and make a dash for the eastern capital. For miles on either side of the Brahmaputra, as they advanced, they burned and looted the towns and villages, and the inhabitants, deserting their homes, fled in terror into the jungles to escape this new foe. But Islam Khan, hastily setting out from





Dacca, turned his cannon upon them from the river-bank, and wrought havoc in the Assamese fleet. Many of their ships were set on fire, and the crews, forced to seek the shore, were mowed down by the Moghul cavalry. The wild, untrained levies of the 'barbarian' were no match for the disciplined troops of the Moghul empire. Pursuing the ships that escaped into Assam, Islam Khan subdued the whole of Cooch Behar, and took possession of many of the frontier forts; but, baffled as all the previous invaders of Assam had been by lack of provisions and the difficulty of transport, he was forced on the approach of the rains to return to Dacca. There he found an order summoning him to court, to take up the office of vizier, and the Emperor's second son, the ill-fated Sultan Shuja, was appointed to the viceroyalty of Bengal in his place.

For some reason not recorded, Sultan Shuja transferred the capital from Dacca to Rajmahal, where he built for himself a magnificent palace, and lived in luxury such as Eastern Bengal had not previously beheld.

But Dacca, deserted for a time, was a few years later to prove an asylum to the very man who had deserted it. The Emperor Shah Jehan was growing old, and once more a struggle for the throne was about to disturb the peace of the empire from





end to end. Shah Jehan in his day had rebelled against his father; it was but the nemesis of fate that his sons should rebel against him in after-days. Sultan Shuja, relying on his possession of Bengal, was the first to take the field, but his younger brother, Aurungzebe, had already forestalled him at Delhi. Seizing his father's person and proclaiming himself Emperor, he advanced at the head of the imperial forces against Sultan Shuja as against a rebel, and inflicted upon him an overwhelming defeat. Shah Shuja was no fit match for Aurungzebe in generalship, and he was forced to fall back upon Tondah, the fortifications of which he hastily repaired. Defeated a second time, he made his escape, accompanied by his family, on swift rowing-boats, setting out on the long journey for the city which he had at first disdained as his capital. It was a humiliating entry into Dacca, such as no Viceroy had yet made. There were no signs of welcome. Even the honours due to a prince of the empire were omitted, for the city had no warning of the fugitives' coming, and as Shah Shuja and his few faithful friends landed from their country-boats at the river ghat, only a great crowd of people, hastily gathering, watched them silent and open-mouthed. Defeat was stamped plain upon the faces of Sultan Shuja and all his party.





Among the small band of faithful courtiers who followed the drooping fortunes of Shah Shuja was Mahomed, Aurungzebe's son. This youth had become Sultan Shuja's son-in-law under the most romantic circumstances, while the war raged round Tondah. Before Shah Shuja and Aurungzebe took the field as rivals for their father's throne, the latter's son, Mahomed, had been betrothed to Shah Shuja's daughter, the fame of whose beauty was said to rival even that of her grandmother, the famous Mumtaz Mahal. In the heat of the contest all talk of the marriage had naturally ceased, and Mahomed, at his father's order, had accompanied the army which he despatched under Mir Jumla against Shah Shuja. At Tondah, while the armies lay encamped over against each other waiting until the rainy season had passed to resume hostilities, the daughter of Sultan Shuja, moved by her father's misfortunes, wrote a touching appeal with her own hand to the man to whom she had once been betrothed, and who now, by a turn in the wheel of fate, had become her father's enemy. She lamented this state of things in such pathetic terms that Mahomed, touched by the appeal, chivalrously resolved to relinquish all that his position as his father's son might promise in order to go to her assistance. Secretly by night he crossed the river that lay between the two camps,





hoping that a large portion of his army would follow at dawn. On the bank Shah Shuja, warned of his coming, received him with open arms, but the advantage that he hoped to gain from his accession to his ranks was not fulfilled. Through Mir Jumla's prompt action, Mahomed's troops did not follow him into the hostile camp. Yet, in spite of this, Aurungzebe's son, even though he came alone, was no mean ally, and in Tondah the rejoicings were great, the marriage being celebrated with all the splendour that the besieged city could afford.

Fleeing with Shah Shuja after his defeat, the newly married couple took up their abode with him in Dacca. But Aurungzebe, furious at the conduct of his son, was not above resorting to artifice to withdraw so powerful an adherent from Shuja's camp. Writing a letter addressed to his son, he sent it by a trusty messenger with instructions that he should allow himself, as if by accident, to fall into the hands of Shuja's spies, and permit the letter, after a show of resistance, to be taken from him. The letter ran as follows :—

‘To our beloved son Mahomed, whose happiness and safety are joined with our life. It was with regret and sorrow that we parted with our son when his valour became necessary to carry on the war against Shuja. We hoped, from the love we bear to our firstborn, to be gratified soon with his return, and that he would have brought the enemy captive to our presence in the space





of a month to relieve our mind from anxiety and fear. But seven months passed away without the completion of the wishes of Aurungzebe. Instead of adhering to your duty, Mahomed, you betrayed your father and threw a blot on your own fame. The smiles of a woman have overcome filial piety. Honour is forgotten in the brightness of her beauty, and he who was destined to rule the empire of the Moghuls has himself become a slave. But as Mahomed seems to repent of his folly, we forget his crimes. He has invoked the name of God to vouch for his sincerity, and our parental affection returns ; he has already our forgiveness, but the execution of what he proposes is the only means to regain our favour.'

This letter, falling into the hands of Shuja as Aurungzebe had designed, was not calculated to increase the confidence between the prince and his son-in-law. Privately, Shuja sent for Mahomed and showed him the letter, but all Mahomed's protestations failed to eradicate the suspicion that it had aroused in his father-in-law's mind. Shuja, attracted at the outset by Mahomed's chivalrous conduct, had since come to love him as his own son, and the very possibility of his treachery grieved him to the heart. Finally, calling together his council in the hall of audience in his palace by the river, he told Mahomed that it was impossible that the same love and trust could ever again exist between them, and with singular magnanimity in that age of violence he asked him to depart with





his wife, and all the wealth and jewels that he had bestowed upon them. 'The treasures of Shuja are open,' he said, generous even in his grief and the mistrust that he could not conquer; 'take therefrom what pleases thee. Go, lest him whom I have regarded as a son I must perforce count henceforward among my enemies.'

Bursting into tears and protesting his innocence, Mahomed cried out that he was willing to swear even by the holy temple of Mecca. But Sultan Shuja was firm, and Mahomed and his wife set out from Dacca in one of the Viceroy's state boats, Sultan Shuja himself accompanying them to the landing-stage and bidding them farewell with every mark of honour. There were few princes of that day who would have allowed thus honourably to depart from their court one on whom the suspicion of treachery had fallen. It was this nobility and generosity of disposition that secured for Sultan Shuja his many friends, a faithful little company of whom followed him even to the end of his chequered and unfortunate career.

It was not long before Mir Jumla, having settled affairs in Western Bengal, set out in pursuit of Sultan Shuja to Dacca. The latter, hearing of the great army that accompanied the imperial general, recognised that he could not hope to hold out against it. He had withdrawn





the troops and the greater part of the fleet from Dacca when he placed his capital at Rajmahal, and the city was ill calculated to stand a siege. With all the members of his family, and the wealth that still remained to him, mounted on elephants and escorted by a small body of cavalry, he left Dacca by the eastern gate, a fugitive as he had entered but a few months before. Crossing the river, he plunged into the wild hill country of Tipperah, hastening on towards the miserable fate that, after many adventures, awaited him at the hands of the Arracanese.

The English Company, which had begun its struggle for existence in Orissa six years before his accession, met with little opposition from Sultan Shuja. In 1633 a small band of Englishmen, sailing up the Bay, had established factories at Hariharpur and Balasore, and eighteen years later, by the favour of the Viceroy, they were allowed to settle at Hooghly, pushing their out-factories as far inland as Patna, Cossimbazaar, and Rajmahal. To account for the unusual favour shown to the English by Sultan Shuja, a story is told of a ship's doctor and a princess quite in the typical style of Indian romance. Jahan Ara, the sister of Sultan Shuja, and the eldest and best-beloved daughter of Shah Jehan and the beautiful Empress Mumtaz Mahal, while passing closely veiled along one of the





corridors of the palace, by accident brushed against a lamp which stood there. Her light silken sari at once caught fire, but as 'her modesty, being within hearing of men, would not permit her to call for assistance,' she fled to her own apartments, and thus fanning the flames, was so severely burned that her life was despaired of. The Emperor, distracted at the misfortune which had befallen his favourite daughter, sent an urgent message to Surat, asking the English Company to send a surgeon to attend her. The Council at Surat, in reply, despatched Mr. Gabriel Broughton, a ship's doctor, who was fortunate enough to cure the princess of her hurt. In consequence of this, Mr. Broughton was naturally in high favour at the imperial court, and a certain measure of the favour with which he was regarded fell upon his fellow-countrymen. For some time Mr. Broughton stayed with Sultan Shah Shuja in his capital of Rajmahal, and it may have been partly due to his influence that the English Company obtained its first authoritative *nishan* about the year 1651. The original of this grant is lost, but a copy has been preserved in the diary of Streynsham Master, who played so prominent a part in the affairs of the Company in the days that followed. The letters patent of the 'great Emperor, whose words no man dare presume to reverse,' decreed that





'the factory of the English Company be no more troubled with demands of custom for goods imported or exported either by land or by water.' After-events show with what 'special care' these commands of the 'great Emperor, whose words no man dare presume to reverse,' were obeyed.

Mir Jumla, the victorious general who had driven Sultan Shuja from Bengal, was appointed as his successor in the viceroyalty. He was a native of Persia, and, like many of his fellow-countrymen before him, he had come east in search of fortune. Recognising Aurungzebe as by far the most able of the four sons of Shah Jehan, he had early attached himself to his fortunes. By Aurungzebe's influence he had been appointed Vizier, with the command of 6,000 horse, and his military abilities meeting with quick recognition, he was shortly afterwards appointed generalissimo of the imperial army, with the high-sounding title of Khan-i-Khanan, the Chief among the Nobles. His success and loyalty to Aurungzebe in the war against Shah Shuja met with their due reward in the Viceroyalty of Bengal. Being at Dacca when the news of that appointment reached him, he resolved to restore the city again as the capital of the province, and from this time dates the second brief period of its greatest prosperity.





Mir Jumla's short rule of three years in Dacca was almost wholly taken up with his wars in Cooch Behar and Assam. A soldier by profession, he was never so happy as when in the field at the head of his troops, and the desire for military glory was the guiding influence of his career. Cooch Behar, though often overrun and forced to pay tribute, had never been a part of the Moghul Empire except in name, and Raja Bim Narain, taking advantage of the struggle between Shah Shuja and Aurungzebe in Bengal, had seized upon the imperial district of Kamrup. Mir Jumla, once secure in Dacca, had an excuse immediately at hand to set out on a fresh campaign. Round his standard gathered one of the largest armies that Dacca had yet seen. For miles the vast encampment stretched outside the northern gate of the city, while the river was crowded with a great fleet in the making. Embarking all his artillery and stores on board the boats, specially designed as the easiest mode of transport, Mir Jumla marched his army along the right bank of the Brahmaputra. By this route there was no made road, and it was often necessary to cut a way through the dense jungle that covered both banks of the river. It was a three months' journey, and so great were the difficulties that, to encourage his men, Mir Jumla himself worked among them axe in hand. The





proud Moghul cavalry, inspired by his example, followed suit, and, with the help of the three hundred elephants that formed his advance guard, the long journey was at length accomplished. The Raja Bim Narain, not expecting the enemy in this quarter, which he considered sufficiently protected by the impenetrable jungle, was taken by surprise and fled from his capital as the enemy approached. Mir Jumla entered Behar in triumph, and in compliment to the Emperor, renamed it Alumgirnugger. It was a dramatic scene that was enacted on his entry. Mir Jumla was a zealous Mussulman, and the conquered province was one of the outskirts of empire where Hinduism still reigned supreme. In the chief temple in the centre of the city stood the celebrated image of Narain, the tutelary deity of the Raja and the people. Halting in his triumphal entry opposite the temple, Mir Jumla waited while the whole army formed up within view. Then, amidst a breathless pause, he entered, and, carrying out the idol, destroyed it with his own hands in the sight of all. Then, it being the hour of prayer, he ascended to the roof of the temple and himself acted as muezzin. For the first time in its history the Mussulman call to prayer rang out from the chief temple in the city of the Rajas of Cooch Behar.





Nothing could well have appealed to the victorious Mussulman army more than this dramatic triumph of their religion. In spite of the hardships they had already undergone, they were willing to follow Mir Jumla onwards to the conquest of Assam, to bring yet other lands within the Fold of the Faith. Save for his suppression of the Hindu religion, Mir Jumla suffered no other hardship to fall upon the conquered people of Cooch Behar. It was not until he had made provision for the good government of the conquered province that he set out, leaving fourteen hundred horse and seven thousand musketeers to guard what he had won. The revenues of Cooch Behar he fixed at ten lacs of rupees.

Mir Jumla's march into Assam was destined to meet with the same disastrous results that had attended so many previous attempts on the part of Mussulman governors to subdue that country. It was a wild, untamed land of immense extent, with no roads and a scattered population, with nothing to oppose to the huge invading army, yet fertile in resource to harass it on the march. The difficulties of the way would have appeared insurmountable to anyone but a general burning with the desire for military glory. Mir Jumla worked like the meanest among his soldiers, and they, ashamed, could not but follow where such a leader





led. Yet often they progressed no further than a mile a day. Determined not to lose touch with the artillery and stores which he had placed in the safe keeping of the fleet, he marched close beside the river bank, which often entailed the cutting of a road through dense jungle. In Semyle the full strength of the Raja's army awaited him, but before his cannon the fortress was unable to hold out, and Mir Jumla entered it in triumph, naming it Atta Allah, the Gift of God. The dry season of the year, however, was at an end, and he was forced to settle his troops in a huge encampment that stretched for seven miles along the river-bank to await the termination of the rains.

It was from here that, misled by his first triumph, he sent his famous despatch to the Emperor. He had opened, he proudly asserted, the road to China, and the next campaign, he foretold, would see the Moghul standards meeting those of the Tartar relatives of the Emperor, the descendants of Jengriez Khan, who had long since founded their kingdom in the farthest East. The Moghul Empire united should stretch from sea to sea. But Mir Jumla's triumph was brief. He little knew the force of the rains in the upper reaches of the great rivers, and that year they exceeded all bounds. The country lay beneath a vast expanse of water, and food and fodder were





almost impossible to obtain. The Raja, reappearing with a new force, harassed them on every side, and such dire sickness attacked the camp that scarce one man in ten was left untouched. Mir Jumla himself fell a prey to disease, and with the clearing of the rains the inevitable retreat began. Again the bright hopes that lay towards the East were relinquished, and the army, unconquered by the enemy, was yet forced to set its face towards the setting sun. At Gauhati fresh ill-news awaited it. The Raja of Cooch Behar had returned from Bhutan, whither he had fled at Mir Jumla's first approach, and, the whole country rallying round him, had driven out the imperial troops. Baffled, robbed of his dreams of military glory, and worn out with disease, Mir Jumla hurried on towards Dacca, whence three years before he had set out with such high hopes. But he was destined never to see the city again. At Khijerpore, on the 2nd of Ramzan, 1663, he died, to the great grief of the whole army, which, even in the evil days that had befallen it, never faltered in devotion to the general who had so often led it to victory in the days gone by.

So influential and powerful a Viceroy was Mir Jumla deemed at the Moghul Court that the saying went that only on the day of his death did Aurungzebe become King of Bengal. The Emperor





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himself is said to have watched his exploits and his growing authority with jealous eyes. 'You have lost a father,' he said, turning to Mir Jumla's son when they brought to him the news of the Viceroy's death, 'and I the greatest and most dangerous friend I had.'





## CHAPTER V

## SHAISTA KHAN

No other name in Mussulman annals, not even the name of Islam Khan, its founder, is so closely connected with Dacca as that of Shaista Khan. At a time when Eastern Bengal, on the outskirts of the empire, had become the sport of princes, a stepping-stone to greater things, and all was change, confusion, and disorder, this greatest of Eastern Viceroys, strong in the enormous influence he wielded at the Court of Delhi, ruled undisturbed for well nigh a quarter of a century. In the midst of the chequered careers of his contemporaries his own stands out with singular force, his authority undiminished until the end, enabling him to retire full of dignity and honours at the advanced age of eighty-one.

Proud, high-born, the Amir-ul-Umara Nawab Shaista Khan started life with all the advantages that even in those days of royal favouritism and interest could have been desired. Yet, born in the purple as he was, the fortunes of his family had





only begun two generations before. Among all the romances of the East there are few more fascinating than the romance of the family to which Shaista Khan belonged. No women of the East are better remembered in history and legend than Jehangir's beautiful Empress Nur Jehan, the Light of the World, and the Empress Mumtaz Mahal, whose fame will live for ever in the wonderful Taj at Agra which Shah Jehan's love raised as an everlasting memorial of her beauty and his grief. Shaista Khan was the nephew of the Empress Nur Jehan and the brother of the lady who sleeps within the Taj.

The rapid rise to wealth and dignity of this once obscure Tartar family is typical of Mussulman annals. A native of Western Tartary, of a noble but impoverished family, Shaista Khan's grandfather Khaja Ghayas, with no prospects in his own land, turned his thoughts to Hindustan, that Eldorado of the needy Tartars of the north, determined to follow that road to fortune which so many of his countrymen had taken with such eminent success. The legend of his setting out is a tale of poverty and distress. With a young wife, frail and delicate, and one sorry steed as their only means of transport, their progress was slow, and, their small stock of money exhausted, they came nigh to perishing in the inhospitable

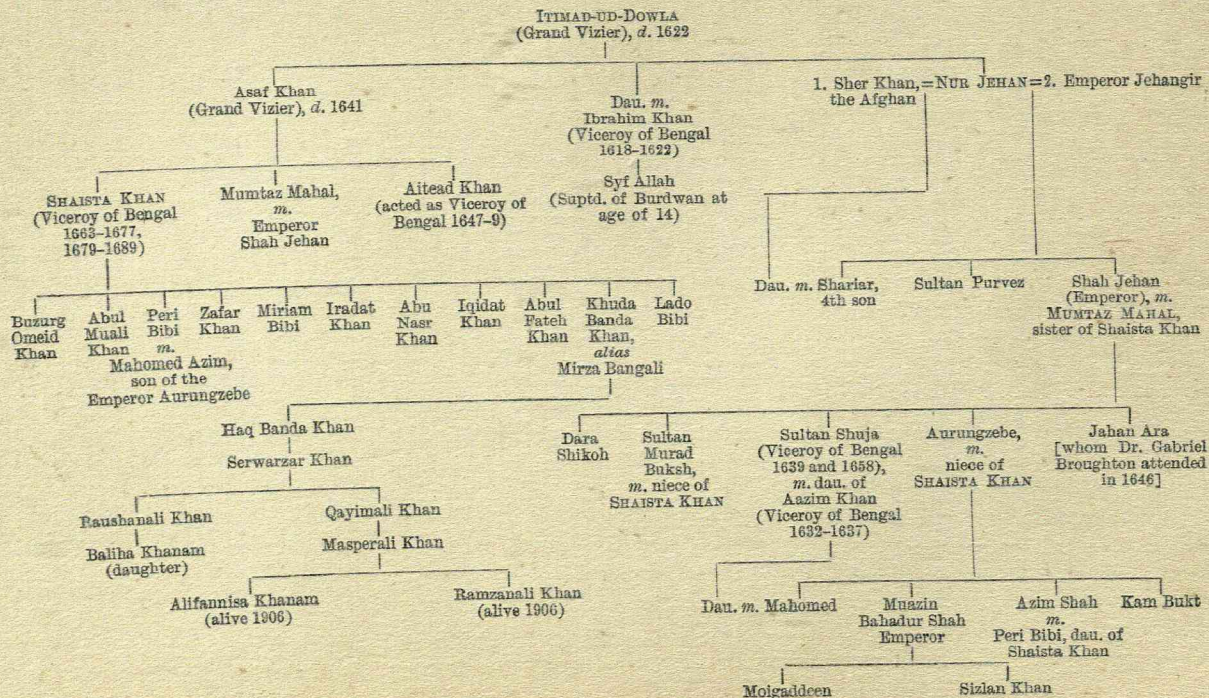




SHAISTA KHAN, VICEROY OF BENGAL.



# DESCENT AND CONNECTIONS OF SHAISTA KHAN







wastes that divided Tartary from the furthest limits of the empire of the house of Timur. Without food, on a lonely road where travellers were few, their fortunes reached their lowest ebb. To return was as impossible as to proceed, and no hint of coming fortune cheered them on. To put the last touch to their difficulties and distress, the wife of Khaja Ghayas gave birth to her first-born child. No infant destined for future greatness could have made its first appearance in the world under circumstances apparently more inauspicious. Too weak to struggle on with the child at her breast, the mother left the infant by the roadside; but, grief overtaking her, Khaja Ghayas returned only just in time to save it from a huge black snake which had already coiled itself round the infant's body. Then, when they were all three again united, apparently only that they might die together, a company of travellers came upon them and gave them food and the means wherewith to proceed. The tide of fortune had at last set in, and without further harm they reached their destination. Within a few years Khaja Ghayas had so completely won the favour and confidence of the Emperor Akbar that he was appointed High Treasurer of the Empire under the title Itimad-ud-Dowla. From an impoverished adventurer he had won his way in an incredibly





short space of time, with all the determination of his race, to one of the highest and most coveted positions in the empire. Now, surrounded by many of the members of his family, he sleeps his last sleep in the magnificent mausoleum at Agra, across the Jumna, not far from the wonder of the Taj.

But it was the child born in poverty and abandoned in the desert who was destined to raise her family to the highest pitch of greatness. Named Mehr-un-Nissa, the Sun among Women, she justified the lofty title and grew up more beautiful than all the women of the East. The ambitious adventurer was careful that no extraneous advantage that might enhance his daughter's beauty should be wanting. In music, in dancing, in poetry, in painting, we are told, she had no equal among her sex. Her disposition was volatile, her wit lively and satirical, her spirit lofty and uncontrolled. Betrothed young, she was a fit mate for the famous Sher Afgan, the Conqueror of the Lion, but Mehr-un-Nissa, Sun among Women, aimed higher than an adventurous Turkoman noble. The Emperor Jehangir, having once seen her, desired her for his wife above all women; and, shut up in Burdwan as the wife of Sher Afgan, she waited while her royal lover devised scheme after scheme to rid him of the





obstacle that stood in his path. It is the story of David and Uriah the Hittite retold. The evil designs of Jehangir and the prowess of Sher Afgan, who time and again defeated them, have become part of the legends of the race, and live in the memory when much else has been forgotten. But at last Sher Afgan was destroyed and Mehr-un-Nissa, the Sun among Women, became the Empress Nur Jehan, the Light of the World.

The woman whose ambition led her to defy the traditions of her race and marry her husband's murderer on the plea that that husband had urged her to do so, since he feared that his exploits would be forgotten unless they were associated with the fact that he had given an Empress to Hindustan, was not likely to neglect the advancement of her family. Her influence with Jehangir was supreme. Jointly with him she ruled the empire. 'By order of the Emperor Jehangir,' runs the inscription on a coin of the period; 'Gold acquires a hundred times additional value by the name of the Empress Nur Jehan.'

Itimad-ud-Dowlah died in 1622, six years before his son-in-law the Emperor, leaving his daughter Nur Jehan scheming for the accession of her own son-in-law, Jehangir's son, who had married her daughter by Sher Afgan. Her brother, Asaf Khan, succeeded his father as Grand Vizier to





Jehangir, and retained that post under his successor, Shah Jehan, over whom his influence was still more complete as the father of his wife, the beautiful Mumtaz Mahal. Asaf Khan died in 1641, and his son, Shaista Khan, succeeded to his honours. A man of thirty-three, Shaista Khan had already, during his father's lifetime, enjoyed a distinguished career. Governor of Behar, Grand Vizier to the Emperor, Viceroy of Guzrat, and Generalissimo of the Golconda war and Viceroy of the Deccan, he had played many parts and occupied many posts before finally becoming Viceroy of Bengal, the dignity he so long held.

Thus, closely connected with the Imperial Court, Shaista Khan occupied a secure position vouchsafed to few of his contemporaries. Brother-in-law of one emperor and uncle of another, yet with no claim or aspiration to the imperial throne, he had already won the life-long gratitude of Aurungzebe, having done much to secure for him the throne against his eldest brother Dara Shikoh, who at one time threatened to forestall him in the race for empire. In the very year, 1663, that he was appointed Nawab Nazim of Bengal, he was suffering from the wounds he had received from the assassins of the Mahratta chief Sivajee while fighting Aurungzebe's battles in the Deccan. It was not until the following year that he arrived in





Dacca and assumed the viceroyalty. His tenure of office falls into two parts, the first from 1663 to 1677, and the second, after an interval of less than two years, from 1679 until his final retirement ten years later.

The first great difficulty with which the new Viceroy had to contend lay in combating the incursions of the Mughls and their allies, the Portuguese pirates, who still troubled Eastern Bengal. No vengeance having been inflicted upon the King of Arracan for his shameful treatment of Sultan Shah Shuja, the late Viceroy and son of the Emperor himself, the Mughls had resumed their piracy with increased vigour, harrying unchecked even within sight of Dacca itself, which Mir Jumla four years before had restored as the capital of Bengal. But Mir Jumla's brief reign had been fully occupied by his war with Cooch Behar and his ambitious undertakings in Assam. It was reserved for Shaista Khan to bring the long struggle with the Mughls and the Portuguese to an end, and by so doing confer an unintentional benefit on the struggling English factory laboriously making firm its footing on the low-lying lands at the head of the Bay.

Recognising how greatly the English factories at the mouth of the Hooghly would benefit by the extermination of the pirates, it is said that Shaista





Khan made the not unreasonable request that they should aid him with a company of European gunners from their factories. But the English, still strong in their resolve to abstain from all interference in native politics, and particularly in warfare of any kind, refused, and Shaista Khan, incensed at their refusal, doubtless was not unmindful of it when in later days the Company was bent upon obtaining new concessions. Failing with the English, Shaista Khan endeavoured to enlist the support of the Dutch, and sent ambassadors to Batavia asking them to join in exterminating the pirates and subduing the kingdom of Arracan. The general of the Dutch Company, anxious to break the power of the Portuguese, readily consented, and despatched two men-of-war to join the Moghul fleet in the Bay. But Shaista Khan meanwhile, by threats and promises, had secured the submission of the Portuguese in Sundeeep. The two Dutch men-of-war arrived later, but Shaista Khan, freed for the moment from fear of the Portuguese, now saw his way clear without the embarrassment of outside help, and, politely thanking them for their goodwill, gently hinted that he had no further use for them. 'I saw these ships in Bengal,' writes Bernier, 'and their commanders, who were but little contented with such thanks and liberalities of Shaista Khan.'





It was an imposing expedition that Shaista Khan fitted out at Dacca. The Buriganga was alive with craft as the three hundred boats of the fleet were hastily equipped and manned. Of the army of forty-three thousand men, three thousand were placed on board the ships, and, under the command of Hossain Beg, sent on ahead of the main army to clear the rivers of the pirates. The troops under the command of his own son, Buzurg Omeid Khan, were ordered to proceed by land, and in conjunction with the fleet, after driving the Mughls from the islands of which they had taken possession in the delta of the Ganges, pursue them to their own land and once for all rid Eastern Bengal of their presence.

Sailing from Dacca after the rains were over, Hossain Beg led his fleet down the Megna and driving the Arracanese before him from the forts of Jugdea and Alungirnugger which they had wrested from the Moghuls, he sailed on towards the island of Sundeeep, which had so long been the headquarters of the Portuguese adventurers. But it was no light task to drive them from the island which for fifty years they had fortified and strengthened. They were adepts in the art of fortification and defence, and it was only after a determined resistance that they were finally expelled.

Hearing of this first hard-won victory, Shaista





Khan sought to lessen the difficulty of the conquest of Chittagong by detaching the Portuguese adventurers who still adhered to the King of Arracan from his service. Offering them all the advantages and more than they were obtaining from the Mughls, including a grant of lands near his own capital with freedom of trade, and threatening to exterminate them if they persisted in their attachment to the Mughls, he won them to his side. They recognised in Shaista Khan the strong ruler that Eastern Bengal had so long awaited, and they realised that their days of piracy and freebooting unrestrained were over. Consequently, escaping by stealth from the territories of the Raja of Arracan, they set sail for the island of Sundeeep, where they were welcomed by Hossain Beg. The most useful of them he retained in his service to assist his forces against their late allies, sending their wives and families, with the less adventurous spirits, to the lands on the Ishamutti which Shaista Khan had promised them. At Feringhi Bazaar, not far from the ancient capital of Vikrampur, they settled down into peaceful ways and long continued in the neighbourhood, many of them becoming officers in the cavalry of Shaista Khan, while others established a factory for trade in Dacca itself. They lived in the city in the vicinity of the Dullaye Creek, where they built an Augustinian monastery and a church,





which Tavernier admired, on his visit to Dacca, for the beauty of its architecture. Another church of theirs still survives four miles away at Tezgaon, beyond which the city in its heyday once far extended, but from which it has long since shrunk away.

Meanwhile the land army, under Shaista Khan's own son, had by forced marches reached the river Feni, the boundary of the Arracanese territory. Here Omied Khan found the Arracanese waiting to receive him, but it was the first time that they had ever been confronted by the Moghul cavalry, that splendid force before which far finer troops than they had been forced to give way. These rude, unskilled adventurers fled in terror before their onslaught, and the entry into the kingdom of Arracan was easily won.

Hossain Beg, hearing of the arrival of the land forces, endeavoured to effect a junction with them, and set sail from Sundeeep. But the Arracanese were on the watch, and sailing out from Chittagong, hurried to intercept him. Taught by the Portuguese, with whom they had been so long associated, they were no mean seamen, and their fleet of three hundred ships was no unworthy match for the Moghul navy. But Hossain Beg had the best of the Portuguese seamen in his fleet, and they did much to turn the tide in favour of their new





master. The arrival on the bank of Omeid Khan and the main body of the army, who turned the guns upon the attacking fleet, completed their discomfiture, and they were forced to retreat. The way was open to Chittagong, and it was here that the Mughls made their last stand. It was well fortified, and its walls well manned, but the garrison, looking out anxiously to see the victory of its fleet, saw only its irretrievable defeat, and grew disheartened ere the fight began. Beset by land and sea, the Mughls gave up the struggle and sought to escape to their own country in the dead of night. But the dreaded Moghul cavalry pursued them in the morning, and as many as two thousand of the luckless survivors were caught and sold as slaves. Chittagong, however, proved a source of untold disappointment to the victors. On so extensive a scale had been the piracy of the Mughls that the Moghul troops expected to find great stores of treasure in the fallen city. But beyond an extraordinary collection of pieces of cannon, numbering, it is said, twelve hundred and twenty-three, there was little found. Shaista Khan changed the name of the conquered city to Islamabad, the City of the Faithful. Chittagong was thus for the first time conquered by the Moghuls, and permanently annexed to the Kingdom of Bengal.





Beyond this single expedition, the whole course of Shaista Khan's rule in Bengal was of a strangely peaceful nature. After the continual wars and invasions of the Mughls and Portuguese from which Eastern Bengal had so long suffered, these years came as an inestimable boon to the much-harassed land and people. It was a time of prosperity in Dacca hitherto unknown. The number and variety of things exported at this period are sufficient evidence of its flourishing condition. To almost every country in the world Dacca sent her produce. With the discovery of the Cape route to India, Surat on the western coast had quickly become the chief emporium for the goods of India and Europe. Through this busy mart Dacca carried on a great trade in cloth, and although chanks and tortoiseshell were taken in exchange, the balance of trade lay so greatly in her favour that it was necessary to import specie direct, which accounts for the appearance of the Arcot rupee in Eastern Bengal. Tavernier, visiting the city in 1666, found 'cossas muslin, silk, and cotton stuffs, and flowered or embroidered fabrics' being exported in large quantities to Provence, Italy, and Languedoc. To Bhutan, Assam, and Siam went coral, amber, and tortoise-shell; to Nepal, large quantities of cloth, otter skins, and shell bracelets; to the Coromandel





coast, rice, which sold in Dacca at the extraordinary rate of 640 lbs. to the rupee. But in spite of the great export of cloth, all the best and finest kinds were reserved for the imperial and viceregal courts. Manufacturers were forbidden by imperial rescript to sell cloth exceeding a certain value to any native or foreign merchant. To supervise the carrying out of this order a special agent was appointed to reside on the spot to see that none of the finest muslins went astray. He had full authority over the weavers and brokers, and jealously watched their output, that none but his masters might obtain the best and finest of the produce. All the cloth and muslin, however, that was not required for the royal household might be disposed of as the producers pleased, and much of it, in addition to that sent abroad, was despatched all over Hindustan and overland as far as Persia and the Arabian seaports.

Of the exquisite fineness of the Dacca muslins much has been written. 'In this same country,' runs one of the earliest accounts of them, 'they make cotton garments in so extraordinary a manner that nowhere else are the like to be seen. These garments are for the most part round, and wove to that degree of fineness that they may be drawn through a ring of middling size.' Tavernier relates that a turban sixty cubits in length, 'of a





muslin so fine that you would scarcely know what it was that you had in your hand,' was contained in a cocoanut about the size of an ostrich's egg. There were many different kinds of muslins manufactured, and some of them were given figurative names indicative of their exquisite texture. The Ab-i-rawan or Running Water, and the Shabnam or Evening Dew, were some of the most highly prized, while no less beautiful were the Jamdani, flowered muslin, and the Malmal Khas, the King's muslin. For transparency, fineness, and delicacy of workmanship, these fabrics have never been equalled, and not all the improvements in the art of manufacture in modern times have been able to approach them. Yet the implements used by the weavers at their work were primitive in the extreme. They consisted only of pieces of bamboo or reeds roughly tied together with thread, and so laborious was the process of manufacture that it is said that one hundred and twenty instruments were necessary to convert the raw material into the finest fabrics, such as the Ab-i-rawan. Infinite care and skill were demanded, and the strain on the eyesight was so great that it was only between the ages of sixteen and thirty that weavers could be employed on the finest work. The excellence of their muslins was largely attributed by the Dacca weavers to the peculiar dampness of the





climate, and they were careful not to work in the middle of the day lest the heat of the sun might affect them. A story is told illustrative of the delicacy of the texture of the muslins and the value placed upon them. One of the weavers spread the piece he had just finished on the grass to dry in the cool of the evening, and, carelessly leaving it unguarded, let it be eaten up by a cow which was grazing near at hand. So great was the indignation against him that he was ignominiously turned out of the city and allowed to weave no more.

It is during the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan that we get another of those brief illuminating glimpses of Eastern Bengal from the pen of a European traveller writing at first hand. François Bernier, visiting Bengal in 1666, cannot say enough in praise of its wonderful fertility and abundance. 'You may there have almost for nothing three or four kinds of legumes,' he writes, 'which together with rice and butter are the most usual food of the meaner people; and for a Roupie, which is about half a crown, you may have twenty good pullets and more: geese and ducks in proportion. There is also plenty of many kinds of fish, both fresh and salt; and, in a word, Bengale is a country abounding in all things.' Apparently there was a proverb in those days among the Portuguese, English, and Dutch, to the effect that there were





a hundred open gates to enter into the kingdom of Bengal, and not one to come away again. 'As to the commodities of great value, and which draw the commerce of strangers thither, I know not,' continues Bernier, 'whether there be a country in the world that affords more and greater variety: for besides the sugar I have spoken of, which may be numbered among the commodities of value, there is such store of cottons and silks, that it may be said, that Bengale is as 'twere the general magazine thereof, not only for Indostan or the empire of the Great Mogol, but also for all the circumjacent kingdoms, and for Europe itself. I have sometimes stood amazed at the vast quantity of cotton-cloth of all sorts, fine and others, tinged and white, which the Hollanders alone draw from thence and transport into many places, especially into Japan and Europe; not to mention what the English, Portingal and Indian merchants carry away from those ports. The like may be said of the silks and silk-stuffs of all sorts: one would not imagine the quantity that is hence transported every year.'

Though Bernier never made his way as far east as Dacca, the waterways along which he travelled at the head of the Bay are typical of those of Eastern Bengal. He speaks of the country as of 'incomparable beauty,' very fertile,





'filled with fruit-bearing trees and all sorts of verdure, and interlaced with a thousand little channels which you cannot see the end of, as if they were so many water-mails all covered with trees.' Though here and there the banks were well cultivated, for miles dense jungle covered the lands on either side, with 'no other inhabitants but tigers, and gazelles, and hoggs, and poultry grown wild.' Tigers then, as for many years afterwards, constituted a continual source of danger to travellers in Eastern Bengal. 'For there are now and then men surprised,' writes Bernier, 'and I have heard it said that tigers have been so bold as to come into the boats and to carry away men that were asleep, choosing the biggest and fattest of them, if one may believe the watermen of the country.' In spite of many dangers by the way, Bernier could 'not be satisfied with beholding such beautiful countries,' even although he writes that 'in the meantime my trunk and all my baggage was wet, my pullets dead, my fish spoiled, and all my biscuit drunk with water.'

Of the climate, however, Bernier does not speak so favourably. 'It cannot be denied that the air, in regard to strangers,' he writes in his own delightfully quaint, inimitable style, 'is not so healthy there, especially near the sea: and when the





English and Hollanders first came to settle there many of them dyed. Yet since the time that they have taken care and made orders that their people shall not drink so much *Bouleponges*, nor go so often to visit the seller of *arac* and tobacco; and since they have found that a little wine of Bourdeaux, Canary or Chiras is a marvellous antidote against the ill air, there is not so much sickness amongst them, nor do they lose so many men. *Bouleponge* is a certain beverage made of *arac*, that is of strong water, black sugar, with the juice of limon water, and a little muscadine upon it; which is pleasant enough to the taste, but a plague to the body and to health.'

Another French traveller actually visited Dacca itself about this time, and he has left on record a brief account of his visit. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, travelling a portion of the way across India with Bernier, with whom he parted company at Patna, arrived in Dacca on January 13, 1666. He had met Shaista Khan before at Ahmadabad, when the latter was Governor of Gujarat, and he gives elsewhere an amusing account of a pecuniary transaction between them, which he ends with the sad reflection that 'this Prince who is otherwise magnificent and generous, shows himself a stern economist in matters of purchase.' In Dacca, however, things went more smoothly. He speaks





of Shaista Khan as 'the uncle of King Aurungzebe, and the cleverest man in all his kingdom,' and proceeds to relate his dealings with him.

'The day following my arrival in Dacca,' he writes, 'I went to salute the Nawab, and presented him with a mantle of gold brocade with a grand golden lace of "point d'Espagne" round it, and a fine scarf of gold and silver of the same "point," and a jewel consisting of a very beautiful emerald. During the evening, after I had returned to the Dutch with whom I lodged, the Nawab sent me pomegranates, China oranges, two Persian melons and three kinds of apples.' By which exchange of presents it appears that the astute Nawab distinctly scored. Yet so valuable did the merchant-traveller consider his custom that on the following day he presented still more valuable gifts. 'On the 15th,' he writes, 'I showed him my goods and presented to the Prince, his son, a watch having a case of enamelled gold, a pair of pistols inlaid with silver, and a telescope. All this which I gave, both to the father and to the young lord of about ten years of age, cost me more than 5,000 livres.' The secret of Tavernier's apparent generosity is probably to be found in his entry of the following day. 'On the 16th I agreed with him as to the price of my goods,' he writes, 'and afterwards I went to the Vizir to receive my bill





of exchange,' which was doubtless sufficiently large to make good the value of the presents.

Though the English did not formally establish their factory in Dacca until two years later, they already had agents there at the time of Tavernier's visit. 'On the 22nd,' he writes, 'I went to visit the English, who had for chief or president Mr. Prat,' and he also mentions their house in his brief description of the city itself. 'The residence of the Governor is an enclosure of high walls, in the middle of which is a poor house merely built of wood. He ordinarily resides under tents which he pitches in a large court in this enclosure. The Dutch, finding that their goods were not sufficiently safe in the common houses of Dacca, have built a very fine house, and the English have also got one which is fairly good. The church of the Rev. Augustin Fathers is all of brick, and the workmanship of it is rather beautiful.' From the 23rd to the 29th Tavernier was busy making purchases to the value of 11,000 rupees, the nature of the purchases not being divulged but probably consisting of the famous Dacca muslins. 'On the 29th, in the evening, I parted from Dacca,' he concludes the narrative of his story in the Eastern capital, 'and all the Dutch accompanied me for two leagues with their small armed boats, and the Spanish wine was not spared on this occasion.'





The viceroyalty of Shaista Khan is the period of great advance among the European companies in Bengal. The Portuguese had settled at Hooghly as early as 1575, only to be expelled thence by Shah Shuja in 1632. The Dutch had probably arrived at the close of the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The English, setting out from Fort St. George, had established factories at Hariharpur and Balasore in Orissa in 1633. Eighteen years later, twelve years before Shaista Khan became governor of Bengal, Stephens and Bridgeman had established a factory at Hooghly, which they made their headquarters station in the Bay. It was later, during the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan himself, that the Dutch finally established themselves at Chinsura, the French at Chandernagore, and the Danes at Serampore. Further, it was in 1668, the year of the establishment of the Bengal pilot service, when the first English ship sailed up the Hooghly, that the English opened their new factory at Dacca itself, Shaista Khan's own capital. Thus, though Shaista Khan is vilified as the enemy of the Europeans, it cannot be denied that his reign synchronises with a great advance in their position throughout Bengal.

Affairs were in a critical condition for the struggling English Company in the Bay when





Shaista Khan succeeded in 1663. They had already, by the high-handed capture of a native boat, incurred the wrath of Mir Jumla, and it was only because he was fully occupied with his expedition to Cooch Behar and Assam that they had escaped condign punishment. Shaista Khan at his accession viewed the interlopers with all the distrust with which they had inspired the Moghul on their first arrival in the East. Yet during the first half of his viceroyalty the relations between him and the Company appear not to have been openly hostile. If the imperial rescripts which the English Company obtained are any criterion, its position was rapidly improving. Aurungzebe himself issued letters patent in their favour in 1667. Five years later Shaista Khan confirmed the English privileges in the kingdom of Bengal. He followed the practice of his predecessor, Mir Jumla, in exacting an annual tribute of three thousand rupees from the Company, but his *perwana* sternly forbade his officers to impose illegal exactions upon them on their own account.

Apart from their relations with their Moghul neighbours, these were stormy days for the English Company. The established and privileged corporation was engaged in a fierce struggle with the free traders—‘interlopers’ and ‘pirates,’ as the Court angrily dubbed them. The long rivalry





between the Old and the New Company was just beginning, dividing the small English community in Bengal into hostile camps, and weakening its front against their common enemy, the Moghul Viceroy at Dacca, and their Mussulman neighbours close at hand. Interlopers sailed up the Hooghly, openly defying the Company on its own ground. Most notorious of all the intruders was Thomas Pitt, discoverer of the most famous diamond in the world, and the ancestor of two of the most celebrated among the statesmen whose names are inscribed for all time upon the roll of England's fame. Later, in more reputable days, Governor of Madras and the honoured servant of the Company, he was long the most notorious of its rivals, and contemptuously termed in official correspondence the 'Pirate Pitt.' Married to the niece of Matthias Vincent, Chief of the English factories in Bengal, he had friends at court in high places, and Vincent soon fell under the suspicion of aiding and abetting piratical trade in the person of his nephew—the most heinous crime in the Company's eyes that its servants could commit. The Bengal factories were still under the Governor of Fort St. George, Madras, and twice Streynsham Master, deputed by the Court at home, had visited them to correct abuses, issuing a number of regulations for 'advancing the glory of God, upholding





the honour of the English nation, and preventing of disorders.'

Shaista Khan may well have looked on content while these disorders and disputes divided the English traders against themselves. In 1668, he had allowed the English to set up a factory at Dacca, thus bringing them into closer touch with the central Moghul power in Bengal. At first it was only an out-station of small beginnings, but within a few years, in 1677, the sales of Dacca goods, principally muslins, for which the city had long been famous, turned out so profitably that the Court raised the stock of the Company from 85,000*l.* to 100,000*l.* Four years later the Court determined to set the factories in Bengal upon an independent footing. With this purpose they superseded Vincent, whose 'odious infidelity in countenancing interlopers' had long enraged the Directors, and on Nov. 14, 1681, appointed William Hedges, with special powers, to be their Agent and Governor in the Bay of Bengal, assisted by the famous Job Charnock as second in command, and a Council of five others who were already engaged in the English factories in the Bay.

Then ensued one of those comedies that enliven the pages of the annals of the English in Bengal. On January 28, 1682, Mr. William Hedges, the





Company's Governor, set sail in state from England with a guard of a corporal and twenty soldiers, on board the 'Defence' commanded by Captain William Heath. Three weeks later came the news that 'Pirate Pitt' was also setting sail for Bengal in the 'Crown,' attended by three or four other vessels in his pay. The Court of Directors was frantic. Every means in its power was employed to stop the 'pirate' and 'interloper' from starting, but in vain. Failing this the Court consoled itself with the fact that Governor Hedges, with his three weeks' start, would have already ousted Vincent and be prepared to give Pitt the reception he deserved. In fact they became quite hopeful of the 'total wreck of the interloper,' which they trusted would 'have such an effect upon all men's minds as to convince the deluded world of the vanity and folly of these persons.' But the Court counted without Thomas Pitt.

It was a race between the 'Defence' and the 'Crown.' In a six months' voyage a three weeks' start, though considerable, was not impossible to overcome, and Thomas Pitt had chosen an admirable vessel for speed in the 'Crown.' Within two months she sighted the 'Defence,' pursuing her dignified way with legitimate authority on board, unconscious of the danger in her wake. The 'Crown' easily outdistanced the larger and heavier





vessel, and on July 8 Pitt landed at Balasore, eleven days before the 'Defence' was sighted. Every day was of value to the 'interloper,' and he was not slow to make use of the advantage he had gained. Giving out that a new Company had been founded, of which he was the authorised agent, and attended by a company of Portuguese and native soldiers and trumpeters, he sailed up the river to Hooghly in three ships, with all the state due to the Governor of the English Factories in the Bay. Vincent, knowing that his credit with the Court was small and that it was only a question of time before he was superseded, joined his adventurous nephew, and together they treated with the native governor of Hooghly, obtaining commercial privileges and a *perwana* to build a factory in the name of the New Company.

It was in the midst of this confusion that William Hedges arrived, the first independent Governor of the English Factories in the Bay. Shaista Khan may well have smiled at the situation, content to play a waiting game. To him Hedges appealed, but negotiations dragged on interminably. The astute Moghul governor was not ill-pleased that such dissensions should continue among the English. The Interlopers, anxious for his favour, willingly paid the dues that he demanded from them, and though at length the





Governor obtained an order from him to Balchandra Das, the Customs officer, and to the native governor of Hooghly to arrest Pitt and his associates, a further bribe easily secured their immunity. Shaista Khan had no intention of advancing the interests of the English Company by removing the Interlopers from its path.

In the following year the Interlopers reached what the Directors considered the 'height of impudence.' One Captain Alley openly sailed up the Hooghly in great state, 'habited in scarlet richly laced, while ten Englishmen in blue caps and coats edged with red, all armed with blunderbusses, went before his palanquin, eighty peons before them and four *musmins* playing on the waits, with two flags before him like an Agent.' In this state he had the impertinence to call upon the Governor, and Hedges bitterly complains that every considerable person in the factory except himself returned his visits. He openly negotiated with Balchandra Das, the Viceroy's Customs officer, agreeing to pay three-and-a-half per cent. on all goods imported and exported, upon which, says Hedges, 'they parted good friends.' Hedges at last succeeded in getting an order from Shaista Khan to the governor of Hooghly directing him to arrest the interloping captains and send them to Dacca. But they had proved themselves too





valuable to Balchandra Das to be allowed to slip so easily out of his hands. He sent urgent representations to Shaista Khan, pointing out that the Interlopers were no enemies of his. It was all the fault of the Old Company, which wanted the monopoly of trade. The Interlopers were traders too, and they were willing to pay even five per cent. duty. Why should he drive such useful and profitable subjects from his realm? Shaista Khan was not slow to see the wisdom of the reasoning of his astute Customs officer, and in spite of his *perwana* to the Old Company the Interlopers met with little interference at his hands. Hedges had only been installed a few months in the factory on the banks of the Hooghly when the Council found trade in such a disorganised condition that it was 'agreed and concluded in consultation that the only expedient now left was for the Agent to go himself in person to the Nawab and Dewan at Dacca as well to make some settled adjustment concerning the customs as to endeavour the preventing Interlopers trading in these parts for ye future.' To go with the Agent, Mr. Richard Trenchfield and Mr. William Johnson were appointed, and it was thought convenient to go by way of Cossimbazaar in order to consult with Mr. Job Charnock, second in Council and high in favour with the Directors at home.





Governor Hedges prepared to set out for Dacca with all the state becoming the Chief of the English Factories in the Bay. Two barges and several small boats for servants were made ready, and on the evening of the 10th of October, 1682, the Governor, with Mr. Trenchfield and Mr. Johnson, escorted by twenty-three English soldiers and fifteen Rajputs, proceeded on the first stage of their journey to the English garden to the north of Hooghly. But the local officials, doubtless guessing that this embassy would be by no means welcome to Shaista Khan in Dacca, took every means in their power to hinder it at the outset. Parmeshar Das, the local Collector of Customs and the creature of Balchandra Das, actually sent out to seize the English boats. Two of them were taken and the English, endeavouring to recover them by force, Parmeshar Das beat and ill-used all the boatmen and footmen on whom he could lay hands, and even succeeded in enticing away many of the Governor's native retainers by means of threats and bribes. The Governor protested in vain. For five days he was kept waiting, unable to start, watched by the minions of Parmeshar Das, who were ready to harass his fleet the moment he set sail. Finally the dignified Governor of the English Factories was forced to run away in the night, under cover of darkness, on the 14th of October. The





story is best told in Governor Hedges' own indignant words. 'Resolving now to be abused no more in this manner, I sent all ye laden boats before, with Mr. Johnson to see them make all the haste that might be and not to stop all night. Next to them went the soldiers with ye other budgero. I followed that, and two stout fellows, an Englishman and a Spaniard in a light boat, came last of all. About two hours within night a boat full of armed men came up very near to the Spaniard, who, speaking ye language, demanded who they were and commanded them to stand; but those in the boat returning no answer, nor regarding what he said, he fired his musket in the water, at which they fell astern. About an hour after, when we were got up as far as Trippany, the armed boat came up with ye Spaniard again, who commanded them to keep off, otherwise he would now shoot amongst them, though he shot at random the time before: so the boat fell astern, and perceiving that we resolved not to stay at that place, we saw them no more.'

Such was the commencement of the first voyage undertaken by a Governor of the English Factories in the Bay. It was only a journey of eleven days to Dacca with favourable winds, and Hedges arrived on the 25th of October. The rivers were in flood, the season being just at the end of the rains, and





the route lay up the Hooghly and the Jellinghi into the Ganges and thence by many of the numerous streams that intersect all this part of Eastern Bengal. The boats in which they sailed were such that they passed easily up the flooded watercourses, which a month later would be almost completely dried up. It was a pleasant voyage, especially after the heat and discomfort of Calcutta. There is always a breeze on the river in the rains, and the voyagers must have been pleasantly surprised at the coolness and comfort in which the journey was performed. Mr. Hedges fully appreciated the interest and novelty of the voyage. Budgerows, large, flat-bottomed boats, much in the form of an English houseboat, were roomy and comfortable. With a favourable wind, a sail was hoisted and rapid progress made. Venetian windows along each side made the budgerows light and airy, and afforded a full view of the delightful river scenery with its constantly changing interests. Country boats of all sizes and descriptions passed up and down, skimming over the water with their wonderful variety of sails. It was a new experience and constant source of interest to Governor Hedges, who had but recently arrived from home. Here fishermen plied their time-honoured profession, with their huge nets and tiny skiffs that they managed with so much skill: there, majestic and





slow sailing, passed a company of sloops, doubtless carrying their own goods down from Dacca to be shipped to England in the Company's vessels that awaited them at Hooghly. At midday the Manjhis rested and took their meal, while the Saheb-log dined beneath the trees on the bank, and stretched their limbs for a while after the somewhat cramped space of the budgerow. In the evening they rowed on again, and at night they were towed from the bank by the boatmen, who chanted their weird songs as they walked, to keep off the wild beasts that infested the river-banks, and to make their labours light.

It was an imposing sight that greeted the embassy as they approached Dacca on the evening of October 25. Facing the river which then flowed beneath its walls rose the towers and turrets of the Lalbagh Fort, begun but a few years before by Prince Mahomed Azim, son of Aurungzebe, during his brief viceroyalty. Not far off, the high imposing front of the Bara Katra, built some forty years before in the time of Shah Shuja, rose the most conspicuous object on the river-bank. Its high central gateway, flanked by smaller entrances and the octagonal tower, faced the river, a magnificent and lofty structure. Beside it stood the Chhota Katra, built by Shaista Khan himself, smaller but scarcely less beautiful, designed in the style of





architecture that has come to be popularly known as Shaista Khani, after the great Viceroy himself. Behind lay the Chauk with its handsome mosque, built in the same style of architecture by the same great Viceroy. Further back still rose the Hossaini Delan, constructed during Shah Shuja's time forty years before, and beyond again the Idgah, built about the same time, and then in its first glory; while still higher up on the bank of the river, which has long since receded, stood the beautiful seven-domed mosque just completed by Shaista Khan. Away beyond for fourteen miles the city stretched as far as Tungi, a vast labyrinth of streets and villages, the camps of armies and all that followed in their train. On the river, facing the town, rode at anchor the state barges of the Viceroy and the Nawara, the great fleet of seven hundred war-boats that but a few years before had returned in triumph from the conquest of the Mughls.

The English factory, which has long since disappeared, originally stood where the College now stands, and it was here that Governor Hedges stayed. It was a building of no pretensions, constructed solely with a view to commercial usefulness. The French factory lay a short distance away, on the site now occupied by the palace of the present Nawab of Dacca, while the Dutch factory





stood close by on the river-bank, where the Mitford Hospital now stands. Shaista Khan was apparently living in a palace within the Lalbagh Fort, and it was there that Governor Hedges came to interview the great Viceroy and seek better terms for the Company he served. Shaista Khan, with typical diplomacy, was full of fair words and promises. No further countenance should be given to the Interlopers. Mussulman officials should no longer be allowed to oppress the traders, and the Company's servants should be forced to pay nothing beyond what was actually due. The meetings, held with all the Oriental love of stateliness and display, continued with growing satisfaction on Governor Hedges' side. Shaista Khan was gracious, and the English Agent, after a month and a half spent in negotiations in Dacca, departed full of gratification at the result of his embassy. 'My going to Dacca,' he wrote, still pleased and flattered at the fair words of Shaista Khan, 'has in the first place got seven months' time for procuring a Phirmaund; 2ndly, taken off wholly ye pretence of 5 per cent. customs on all treasure imported this and ye three preceding years, besides  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of what was usually paid at ye mint for some years past: 3rdly, procured the general stop to be taken off all our trade, our goods now passing as freely as ever they did formerly: 4thly, got a command to turn Parmeshar Das out





of his place, and restore ye money forced from us : 5thly and last, prevailed with ye Nawab to undertake ye procuring a Phirmaund for us from ye King . . . If God gives me life to get this Phirmaund into my possession ye Hon'ble Company shall never more be troubled with Interlopers. I bless God for this great success I have had, beyond all men's expectations, in my voyage to Dacca.'

Fresh from home, Hedges knew little of the tortuous ways of Indian diplomacy. But the glow of satisfaction with which he penned the above words must soon have cooled. Things remained exactly as they had been before. Balchandra Das, the superintendent of customs, and Parmeshar Das, his minion, flourished as of old, unchecked in spite of all the promises of Shaista Khan. Governor Hedges soon learned that his journey to Dacca had been productive of little save promises and fair words. It was small wonder that, smarting under the knowledge that all the high hopes he had built upon his mission to Dacca had come to nought, Hedges angrily wrote of Shaista Khan as the 'old doting Nawab.' But none could have known better than he how fully alive to the situation the 'doting Nawab' really was.

Shaista Khan, meanwhile, doubtless listened with keen enjoyment when the internal affairs of





the Company at Hooghly were duly reported to him in Dacca. First came the news, in August 1684, that Governor Hedges had been dismissed by the Company, and John Beard appointed Agent in his place, while the factories in the Bay were once more brought under the control of Fort St. George, Mr. Gifford being appointed President of the Coast of Coromandel and the Bay. But President Gifford soon sailed away from Bengal, and John Beard, weighed down with the anxieties and responsibilities of office, died in the following year.

It was about this time that a momentous change, destined to transform a small trading company into a great political power, first began to make itself felt in the history of the English in Bengal. It was gradually borne in upon those in authority in the English factories that the great Moghul Empire, in whose greatness and authority they had so long believed, was powerless to carry out its obligations. They had all that they could desire in the way of *firmans* from the far-off Imperial Court at Delhi, but these were repeatedly rendered of no effect by the powerful Viceroy at Dacca. The latter, again, seemed equally powerless to check the exactions of his local officers at Hooghly. It was a tremendous change in the political outlook that was only slowly borne in





upon the English in the Bay. It left them but two alternatives : either to withdraw from Bengal, where the Moghul Empire was powerless to protect them, or to strengthen themselves until they were able to stand alone in defiance of the local authority if need be. Governor Hedges was among the first to see that the English must look to themselves for their own protection, and he strongly advocated the building of a fort on Saugor Island, at the mouth of the river, whence war might be waged upon Interloper and Moghul alike. President Gifford in 1685 did in fact apply to Shaista Khan for permission to erect such a fort at the mouth of the Ganges to guard their trade against the Interloper and for the general protection of their factories. But Shaista Khan viewed anything in the nature of a military fortification with suspicion, and refused his consent. It was quite clear that what was to be done must be done in spite of the Moghul Governor at Dacca.

But the Company, ever timorous at the outset, deprecated such an extreme measure as falling out once and for all with the Great Moghul, the fame of whose power and authority still lingered in their minds. Yet in the end even they were forced to acknowledge that it was a question of withdrawal or the adoption of a bolder attitude. With their usual caution, however, they contented themselves





with half-measures, turning aside from the main point at issue and advocating an attack on Chittagong. Obtaining sanction to retaliate upon Shaista Khan and his minions from James the Second, who was too busy endeavouring to secure his throne to exhibit great interest in so far-off a venture, the Court of Directors despatched the largest force to the Bay that they had yet sent to India. It consisted of ten ships of war, with twelve to seventy guns each, under the command of Vice-Admiral Nicholson, having on board a regiment of six hundred soldiers which was to receive an addition of four hundred men from the Governor of Madras. The avowed object of the expedition was to seize Chittagong and transform it into a place of arms for the English Company on the eastern side of the Bay, as they had already done in the case of Fort St. George on the western shore. It was an attempt to gain a firmer base at a greater distance from Dacca, whence operations might be gradually extended up the Hooghly. No sooner should they be fully established in Chittagong than the expedition had orders to proceed at once to Dacca to dictate terms to Shaista Khan.

It was a strangely ambitious scheme for the timorous Company suddenly to evolve. It assuredly did not err on the side of diffidence. The Directors





showed all their usual ignorance of the needs of the moment. Long overawed by the shadow of the Great Moghul, no sooner did they begin to doubt his omnipotence than they flew to the other extreme and talked glibly of sailing up to Dacca and dictating terms to the greatest of Aurungzebe's Viceroys in his own palace. The expedition, born of over-confidence, was dogged by misfortune from the outset. Contrary winds delayed the fleet and storms dispersed it, while the Vice-Admiral, disregarding orders, sailed up the Bay with the few ships that remained to him, the 'Beaufort,' the 'Nathaniel,' and the 'Rochester,' with their attendant frigates, and anchored opposite Hooghly. Here Job Charnock was awaiting them with the four hundred soldiers who had been sent round from Madras, and a company of native Christian infantry, 'very sorry fellows,' as the English termed them. But insignificant as the first British force to enter Bengal was, it was sufficient to alarm Shaista Khan and stir him to action. He at once ordered a large body of troops, three thousand foot and three hundred horse, down to the royal fort at Hooghly to watch events and overawe the English. Thus strengthened, the local Moghul officials adopted a still more overbearing attitude. All trade was stopped, and even the local market was closed to the British soldiers. The English forces



were practically placed in a state of siege. It was obvious that only a small incident was necessary to bring about open war, and that incident occurred on October 28. Three English soldiers, entering the bazaar as usual to buy provisions, were not only refused supplies by the native dealers, but when they protested, were set upon by the governor's men and severely handled, being finally carried off as prisoners. The news spread like wildfire within the English factory, and Job Charnock took such active measures that before sunset full vengeance had been exacted, the enemy's battery taken, the guns dismantled, and the governor put to flight. The English soldiers 'firing and battering most part of that night and next day,' and having taken a ship belonging to the Moghul governor, made frequent sallies on shore, burning and plundering all they met with. But Job Charnock, realising the danger, had determined on removing from so dangerous a position and withdrawing to the island of Hijili at the mouth of the Hooghly.

Shaista Khan, on hearing news of this fracas, at once took prompt measures. The Company's agents in the out-stations were seized, and large detachments of horse despatched to reinforce the troops at Hooghly. Mr. Watts, the Company's agent at Dacca, was in no comfortable position,





and it speaks much for Shaista Khan that no extreme measures were taken against him. He had a friend at court, however, in one Baramal, a Hindu who had won Shaista Khan's confidence, and who pointed out to his master that the English factory at Dacca was not responsible for the misdoings of the factory at Hooghly, and that Mr. Watts had engaged in nothing but in peaceable trade. So the agent in Dacca escaped, and by the end of December he was on his way down to Hooghly with Baramal, who was sent by Shaista Khan to negotiate terms of peace. Charnock had withdrawn from Hooghly to Sutanati, and thence, through Baramal, submitted his demands to Shaista Khan. The old demand for a fort was again urged, and in addition Charnock asked that all damage done to their factories might be made good, the establishment of a mint permitted, and full freedom of trade allowed. Shaista Khan, as usual, had nothing but fair words when these demands were presented to him. He appointed Baramal and two others to act as commissioners to draw up the terms of peace. At Sutanati, now the northern quarter of Calcutta, the conference took place. Twelve articles, embodying the English demands, were drawn up and signed and sealed by the commissioners. They were then despatched to Shaista Khan for confirmation, with





a request from Charnock that they might be ratified by the Emperor himself.

But Job Charnock, with all his thirty years' experience of Indian life, had yet much to learn of the ways of Indian diplomacy. At the sight of his demands definitely formulated on paper, Shaista Khan threw off all pretences. He had previously delayed in order to gain time, but that this small body of men should make these impudent demands upon the great Viceroy of the East aroused the full tide of the old despot's wrath. The English, he declared, should be driven out of Bengal. Orders were sent in every direction that the Company's servants should be seized, the factories closed, and the English at Hooghly driven into the sea. The news of the reception of his terms at Dacca having reached Charnock, he lost no time in doing what damage he could before falling back on the island of Hijili. Burning down the royal offices at Hooghly, he took the Thana forts, 'with the loss only of one man's leg and some wounded.' Then, baffled for the moment, he withdrew to Hijili.

With the withdrawal of all the Company's servants, Shaista Khan seems to have been content. They had chosen the most unhealthy spot in all Bengal, and the most trying months of the year were upon them. News reached him that more





than half the European troops had succumbed to malaria, while the remainder were scarce fit for the lightest duties. Shaista Khan may well have deemed them unworthy of further effort, and left them to their fate. Though the local Moghul commander harassed them and drove them to desperate straits, Shaista Khan appears to have taken but half-hearted measures against them. Had he been as bitterly opposed to them as he is popularly supposed to have been, it would have required little energy to have finally driven them out of Bengal. So far from this, he even allowed them, a few months later, to return to the river as far as Ulubaria and continue their interrupted trade. For this unexpected complaisance on the part of Shaista Khan there was probably a double reason. The English on the Bombay side, indignant at their treatment, had withdrawn from Surat and declared open war upon Aurungzebe, and with their superiority at sea had practically annihilated the Moghul maritime trade and interrupted the pilgrimages to Mecca. Aurungzebe was fully occupied, intent on taking Hyderabad, and he was willing to make peace with the English to avoid further contest. They were restored to all their privileges on the Bombay side, and an imperial order was received by Shaista Khan, ordering a similar restoration in Bengal.





The order came but just in time to save Charnock and the remnant that remained to him. Yet Shaista Khan's order, dated Dacca, July 2, was of so grudging a character that Charnock indignantly refused it. A further order, dated August 16, while not granting their demands for compensation, for exemption from taxation, and for the establishment of a mint, gave them permission to return to Hooghly and renew their trade. Job Charnock eventually returned as far as Sutanati, which, after many experiences, he had finally determined upon as the most defensible position on the lower reaches of the Hooghly.

It is not surprising that Shaista Khan should have looked on the small affairs of the English with something of contempt. He was now eighty years of age, and his mind turned to thoughts of peace and well-earned retirement. For nearly a quarter of a century he had ruled Bengal. Though in the annals of the English he figures as a 'tyrant' and as the 'old doting Nawab,' as the ruler of Bengal he appears conspicuous for his wisdom and justice. It was but natural that he should regard the English as interlopers, and their bombastic language and impudent demands enraged one accustomed to excess of deference. But that he had any particular active ill-will towards the English seems improbable. They





were entirely in his hands. Had he actively taken sides against them, there can be little doubt that he had the power to sweep them out of Bengal. At the most, even when reinforced by Vice-Admiral Nicholson and his fleet, they were but a handful of men compared with the forces at the disposal of Shaista Khan. The Viceroy who could equip a fleet of seven hundred war-vessels, and had sent an army of one hundred and forty-three thousand men against the Mughls, could have made short work, by sheer force of numbers, of the little company of Englishmen, had he been so minded. Aurungzebe was too busy elsewhere to do aught but call for a map when he heard of these petty disturbances in some obscure island in the Hooghly. All power was in the hands of the Viceroy. That no harm befell even the unprotected servants of the Company at Dacca in his time speaks much for the clemency of Shaista Khan, and the close of his long reign left the English Company in Bengal in a far more flourishing condition than it had been twenty-five years before.

As the Viceroy of a Moghul province, Shaista Khan stands out beyond his contemporaries. Above all things, he gave a distracted country the peace and quietness it so much needed. Not since the Mussulman first came to Bengal had the



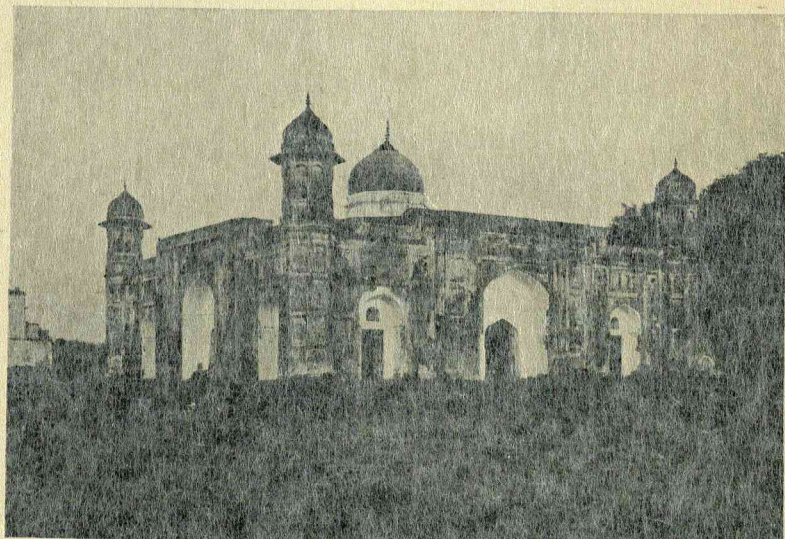


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province enjoyed so long a rest, and the blessings of peace in those days conferred a distinction upon the giver that later days cannot wholly appreciate. His rule was the period of Dacca's greatest prosperity. Noble buildings, designed and executed with all the skill of Mussulman art, rose to beautify the city. The marble tomb and mausoleum that he erected over his favourite daughter Peri Bibi, shorn as it has been of much of its glory, still remains the most beautiful Mussulman monument in all Eastern Bengal. No other viceroy or governor has so impressed his memory upon Dacca. It is truly the city of Shaista Khan. What, one cannot refrain from wondering, would be his feelings could he see it to-day, the new capital of the descendants of that despised little Company whose doings on the far-off island at the mouth of the Hooghly he regarded with so much contemptuous unconcern?

Full of years and honours, Shaista Khan laid down the viceroyalty and quitted the city where he had so long ruled. The manner of his going was full of dignity. Attended by the whole city and all the state due to his rank, he passed out through the western gate. There the great procession halted, and the aged Viceroy took his last farewell of the great city. In his day there had been unparalleled prosperity and rice had sold at





THE MAUSOLEUM OF PERI BIBI, DAUGHTER OF SHAISTA KHAN