the incredible rate of 320 seers to the rupee. His last order was that the western gate through which he had just passed should be closed, and an inscription placed upon it forbidding all future governors to open it until rice should again be sold at the same price. After he had gone they did as he had ordered, and so for forty-seven years the western gate of the city remained closed until in the days of Serferaz Khan, whose wise rule again gave prosperity to the province, the price of rice was reduced to the same rate and the gate of the city once more opened.

Five years after his departure from Dacca, Shaista Khan died at Agra at the age of eighty-six, full of dignity and honours, one of the few examples of a great Moghul prince ending his days in peaceful retirement after a long and uniformly successful career.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST DAYS OF DACCA AS CAPITAL OF BENGAL

For the moment the English profited little by the departure of Shaista Khan. Aurungzebe, intent upon his wars in the south, had just now turned aside for a moment to wreak vengeance upon the men who had harassed his fleets, fortified Madras and Bombay in spite of prohibitions, and finally entered into an alliance with his life-long enemies, the Mahrattas. In a fit of passion he had issued orders that the English should be extirpated from his dominions. When the order reached Dacca Shaista Khan had already laid down the vice-royalty, and Bahadur Khan, who was acting temporarily in his place, at once proceeded to carry out the Emperor's commands. The Company's agents in Dacca, as well as Messrs. Eyre and Braddyll, two members of Council who had been despatched to Dacca to negotiate peace, were flung into prison, and orders sent to Hooghly to drive the English once and for all from their settlements at the head of the Bay.

But the orders came too late. The English Company, after much deliberation, had finally resolved of its own accord to evacuate Bengal. A few months before, to add to its troubles, had arrived the erratic Captain Heath, a hot-headed swashbuckler, in whom the Court of Directors had unaccountably put their faith to bring about harmony and a final settlement of their troubled affairs in the Bay. Upon Job Charnock and the other servants of the Company, already distracted by dangers and difficulties on every hand, Captain Heath descended like a whirlwind. The days that succeeded his arrival passed in the true manner of comic opera. Arriving at Hooghly on September 20, 1688, in command of a fleet of ten or eleven ships, he at once announced that he had sole authority over the Company's affairs, and that his orders were to convey the whole of the Bengal establishment to Chittagong. Surprised and alarmed by this unexpected news, they were still further distracted by the announcement that they must be ready packed up and all their affairs settled by November 10. Then, hearing that Bahadur Khan at Dacca was fitting out an expedition against the King of Arracan, the irresponsible Heath sent a truculent offer of help, provided that the Viceroy would confirm all the privileges already granted to the Company and further allow them to build a fort, otherwise the

English would shake the dust of Bengal off their feet, refusing to stay there longer to trade 'in fenceless factories.' Finally, however, blustering and impatient, without even waiting for a reply, he set sail two days before the time he had himself appointed, leaving the Company's servants in Dacca to their fate. Thereafter for nearly four months, with the whole Bengal establishment on board, he went 'tripping from port to port' in the Bay, until at last he finally landed Job Charnock and his much-tried Council in Madras on March 4, 1689.

Bengal for the moment appeared lost to the Company as a centre of trade and commerce. Only its agents in Dacca and a few other out-stations, dispossessed and in prison, represented the English in the Province. Meantime Captain Heath swaggered at Madras, full of reasons for his ill-success, while Job Charnock waited with what patience he might, during fifteen weary months, for the coming of the opportunity that his experience of the strange turns of Eastern politics led him to anticipate.

Aurungzebe's sudden burst of anger cooled as swiftly as it came. The main object of his life at that time was the conquest of the Mahrattas, and he was not slow to find that it was better to number the English among his allies than among his foes.

Not only when open war was declared did the English fleet practically clear the Moghul ships off the Malabar coast and stop his merchants' trade with Arabia, and the pilgrims on their way to Mecca, but the pecuniary loss from exactions he had levied upon English trade was by no means inconsiderable. Aurungzebe swiftly inclined to milder measures, and early in 1690 terms of peace were drawn up in his camp at Vijapur in the Deccan between him and the English Commissioner sent from Bombay by Sir John Child.

The result of this peace was a firman from the Emperor to Ibrahim Khan, whom he had recently appointed Viceroy of Bengal. It is dated April 23, 1690, and reads quaintly in the light of other days: 'You must understand that it has been the good fortune of the English to repent them of their irregular proceedings, and that, not being in their former greatness, they have by their vakeels petitioned for their lives, and a pardon for their faults, which, out of my extraordinary favour towards them, I have accordingly granted. Therefore upon receipt hereof, my Phirmaund, you must not create them any further trouble, but let them trade freely in your government as formerly and this order I expect you to see strictly observed.'

Ibrahim Khan at once endeavoured to give effect to Aurungzebe's orders. He was a man of peace,

a strange figure, as he sat buried in his books and deciphering his Persian manuscripts, undisturbed in the midst of the stirring events of his time. Utterly unambitious of military glory, he bore no enmity to the English, and was eager to promote the interests of industry and commerce. He at once released the Company's agents in Dacca, restoring to them their factories and all their goods which had been sequestrated in Bengal. Further, he sent letters to Job Charnock at Madras, and after some natural hesitation the veteran representative of the Company returned and once more anchored off Sutanati on August 7, 1690. It was a memorable day in the annals of the English in Bengal. With an escort of only thirty soldiers, the Chief of the English Factories began the difficult task of once more reconstructing from the beginning the whole fabric of the Company's settlement in the Bay. But from the small establishment at Sutanati, which was all that Charnock could at first attempt, was destined to rise in after years the great city of Calcutta. Job Charnock lived only two-and-a-half years after his return, but, though he knew it not, he left behind him the small beginnings which in later days were destined to become the second city in the empire. Under a huge mausoleum in St. John's churchyard the veteran servant of the Company, his thirty-eight

years of loyal service done, sleeps his last sleep, not yet forgotten by those who follow in the paths that he made straight.

The strong hand of Shaista Khan once removed, it was not long before disturbances arose in Bengal. In 1696 Sabha Singh, a Hindu zemindar, having a grievance against the Raja of Burdwan, and securing the help of the Afghans in Orissa, who were ever ready for the fray, attacked and killed the Raja and all his family with the exception of one son. This son, Juggut Rai, fled to Dacca and implored the help of the Viceroy. But Ibrahim Khan, immersed in his books, paid little heed, and contented himself with a hasty order to the military governor of Jessore to punish the rebels. It was this supineness of Ibrahim Khan that gave the Company at last the chance it had so long awaited. The rebels, rapidly advancing, took Hooghly, and the English, left to their fate by the local Moghul governor and with no hope of help from the Viceroy at Dacca, were forced, with the rebels at their very gates, to take measures for their own defence. Ibrahim Khan, still unwilling to bestir himself, responded to their call for aid only with vague orders to them to defend themselves. The English at Sutanati, the French at Chandernagore, and the Dutch at Chinsura liberally interpreted these orders and hastily raised fortifications round

their factories. Thus for the first time the English undertook military works on Moghul territory. It was a far greater step in advance than they themselves at the time were aware. It was an admission that the Moghul power was no longer able to protect them—that in future they must provide for their own defence. The rise of the ramparts of Fort William was a notable landmark in the history of the English in Bengal.

It is said that Aurungzebe first heard of the rebellion through the newspaper, so careless had Ibrahim Khan been even to report the disturbance to his imperial master. The Emperor, indignant at his Viceroy's neglect of duty, at once appointed his own grandson, Azim Oshan, to the united government of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa. The brief reign of Ibrahim Khan, in striking contrast with that of Shaista Khan, was over. His son, Zubberdust Khan, was left in command until his successor could reach Bengal, and being, unlike his father, a keen soldier and energetic administrator, he undertook a vigorous campaign against the rebels, which he continued with eminent success until the arrival of the new Viceroy.

It was in 1697 that Azim Oshan arrived in Bengal. The first three years of his viceroyalty, during which he made his headquarters at Burdwan, were spent in subduing the western portions

of the province. It was not until the year 1700, after having restored peace throughout the kingdom, that he sent for the state boats that Sultan Shuja had built sixty years before, and prepared to make his triumphal entry into Dacca. Once installed there he had leisure to turn to the affairs of the English. The struggle between the two Companies, the Old and the New, was at its height, and Azim Oshan, ever ready to do anything for money, took bribes impartially from both. For 14,000 rupees he was willing to make any number of promises to the New Company, while in July 1698, for 16,000 rupees he had given the English letters patent to purchase from the existing holders the right of renting the three villages of Calcutta, Sutanati, and Govindpur, where they had finally made their headquarters on the Hooghly. The historic ramparts of Fort William, so named in compliment to the reigning monarch, rose rapidly round the English factory in the months that followed. Two years later the final settlement of disputes and the amalgamation of the two Companies enabled the English henceforth to turn a united front to their enemies in Bengal.

Meanwhile the closing scenes in the story of Dacca as the capital of Bengal were taking place. Azim Oshan's chief care was the amassing of wealth, and he looked with envy upon the large

amount made annually in trade by the European factories. The idea suddenly dawned upon him that he might become the sole merchant of all European and foreign goods brought into Bengal. He therefore attempted to form a company of his own, despatching agents to all the ports to purchase forcibly the cargoes of all ships that arrived, and afterwards to sell the goods at a profit. This suicidal form of trade he called Sondai Khas and Sondai Aam—special and general traffic. But there were newspapers, it appears, even in those days, that threw a fierce light upon the doings of authority even in these far-off provinces of the empire, and Aurungzebe read of this new form of trade. 'It is not Sondai Khas (special traffic),' he said scornfully, though the originator of it was his own grandson, 'it is Sonda Khas (special madness).' He wrote peremptorily that it must cease, and reduced the military escort of the Prince by five hundred horse to mark his displeasure. Baffled in one source of gain, Azim Oshan turned to another. There were at that time many wealthy Hindus in Dacca, men who, in spite of the oppression and taxation that had fallen heavily upon them through centuries of Mussulman rule, had amassed large fortunes. Desiring to ingratiate himself with these, with his own ends in view, the Viceroy himself took part in the celebration of their holidays. It

is related that he even put on yellow and rose-coloured garments, and entered personally into the performance of their festivals. This, too, came to Aurungzebe's ears, and he wrote to his grandson with his own hand a letter of scathing reprimand and contempt. 'A yellow turban and rose-coloured garments,' ran the old Emperor's scornful message, 'suit ill with a beard of forty-six years' growth.'

It was doubtless these follies that induced Aurungzebe to send a man after his own heart to take charge of the Dewani, or revenue administration of Bengal, in the person of Murshid Kuli Khan. The rise to greatness of this prince is another of the many romances of Moghul annals. Born the son of a poor Brahmin, he was purchased by a Persian named Haji Shafi, who took him to Ispahan, where he educated him in the Mahomedan faith. At the merchant's death he received his freedom, and leaving Persia sought his fortunes in the Deccan, where he succeeded in obtaining employment under the Dewan of Berar. Even at that early age he showed his skill in accounts and all matters of finance. His worth once proved, his promotion was rapid, and it was not long before he was brought to the notice of Aurungzebe, who appointed him to the important office of Dewan of Hyderabad. In 1701, dissatisfied with the financial administration of his grandson, Azim Oshan, in

Dacca, he appointed Murshid Kuli Khan Dewan of Bengal. In this province, Aurungzebe's practice had been to keep the military and revenue branches of the government distinct. The Nazim or Viceroy was the representative of the Emperor. His duty was to defend the country from outside attack and to maintain peace and order within. The duties of the Dewan were less prominent, but scarcely less important. His it was to collect the revenue and undertake full financial control of the province. In the days of the great Viceroys the office of Dewan was an entirely subordinate one. The Nazim had the power to send written orders for government expenses to the Dewan, with which the latter was forced to comply. The Dewan, in fact, hitherto had been little more than the collector of taxes and treasury officer of the Viceroy. But with the coming of Murshid Kuli Khan, strong in the Emperor's favour, the office of Dewan grew in dignity and influence. Murshid Kuli Khan soon found that, during the years of peace under Shaista Khan, Eastern Bengal had thriven and developed into a rich agricultural province. But the revenue, carelessly collected, had been dissipated under the weak rule of Ibrahim Khan, and appropriated to his own use by the avaricious Azim Oshan. The new Dewan was a reformer of the most energetic type, and he at once set himself to abolish abuses

and restore order. Much of the land had been made over to military *jagirdars* as the reward of past services or in payment of services still rendered, thus withdrawing it from all control of the exchequer. The consequence was that, though the revenue of Bengal should have amounted to a crore (10,000,000) of rupees, it had fallen far short of that amount, and had become insufficient even to pay the expenses of the Viceroy and his administration. Murshid Kuli Khan succeeded in obtaining the cancellation by the Emperor of all the *jagirs* except the stipends of the Nizamut and the Dewani, most of which were transferred to Orissa, where the revenue was still badly collected and the military *jagirdars* might be trusted to restore some semblance of order. Thus the whole of the zemindars of Eastern Bengal were brought under the direct control of the exchequer, and their rents were largely increased, the revenue consequently rising far beyond its recent limits. Within a short time Murshid Kuli Khan was able to despatch royal revenue to Delhi to the amount of one crore and thirty lacs, the greater part in specie, escorted by a guard of three hundred cavalry and five hundred infantry. To the Emperor and the chief ministers he also sent presents—'hill horses, antelopes, hawks, shields made of rhinoceros hide, sword-blades, Sylhet mats, Dacca muslins and

Cossimbazaar silks, filigree work of gold and silver and wrought ivory.' A Dewan who could transmit such a huge accretion of revenue naturally found favour in the sight of his imperial master.

But it was otherwise with Azim Oshan, the Viceroy. Hitherto it had sufficed for him merely to write an order for money required, and the Dewan had submissively provided it. Now, Murshid Kuli Khan claimed control over all pecuniary transactions, and Azim Oshan's power of enriching himself and his unbounded extravagance received a severe check. Even his escort of five thousand cavalry had been abolished by the new Dewan on the plea that cavalry were of no use in a river-locked district like Dacca. The peculations of all the courtiers were also at an end, and Murshid Kuli Khan was soon the most unpopular man in Dacca at the viceregal court. But, strong in the Emperor's favour, he was unassailable. Azim Oshan, enraged beyond measure, finally resorted to violence and intrigue.

It was a dramatic scene that took place in the streets of Dacca in the early days of the year 1702, a scene that led to the final abandonment of the city as the capital of Bengal. Abdul Wahid, the commandant of a corps of horse, known as the Nukedy, devoted to the person of the Viceroy, had willingly listened when Azim Oshan unfolded

a plan for ridding himself of his obnoxious Dewan. Murshid Kuli Khan, too wise to flout openly the authority of the Viceroy, was punctilious in attending his court and paying his respects. Azim Oshan held his court in the Pooshtah, a residence now long since decayed, that once stood on the river-bank. Thither Murshid Kuli Khan was accustomed to go in his state palanquin, surrounded by his escort, whenever the Viceroy held court. It was on the way there, in the crowded streets of the bazaar, that Abdul Wahid hoped to catch him at a disadvantage. In a narrow lane not far from the palace he placed his troops to waylay the Dewan. Endeavouring to surround his palanquin as he approached, they clamoured for some arrears of pay which they said were overdue. But Murshid Kuli Khan, well versed in the tortuous ways of Eastern politics, had not failed to arm himself and his escort, and pushing his way through the hostile soldiers reached the palace in safety, surrounded by his guards. There, seeing that the end of all peaceful relations between them had come, he openly accused Azim Oshan of complicity in the design of Abdul Wahid and upbraided him with his treachery. 'If you desire my life,' he is reported to have said, laying his hand upon his dagger, 'here let us try the contest.' But Azim Oshan was no warrior and refused, taking

refuge under his viceregal dignity. Then, proceeding to the Hall of Audience, Murshid Kuli Khan called Abdul Wahid, and, after inquiring into the alleged arrears of pay, gave him a settlement in full and dismissed him and his troops from the imperial service.

Azim Oshan, a coward at heart, was thrown into great fear by the failure of this attempt, knowing that his relationship to Aurungzebe would not spare him from that potentate's wrath. Murshid Kuli Khan, returning home, drew up an account of the morning's proceedings and despatched it to Aurungzebe. Then, deeming that he was no longer safe in Dacca, he left the city that same day, accompanied by all his followers and the whole machinery of the Dewani. He departed without paying his respects to the Viceroy. Azim Oshan, from his palace on the river, saw the state barge of his rival pass by with its attendant fleet, and, fearful of the issue of an open contest, made no effort to stop his going. It was well for Murshid Kuli Khan that he had previously disbanded the Viceroy's bodyguard of seven thousand horse.

As the fleet sailed slowly down the Dullasery, carrying with it all the revenue machinery of the province, it tolled the knell of the greatness of Dacca. Murshid Kuli Khan chose Murshidabad as his residence, and it was there and at Rajmahal that the

closing scenes of the Mussulman Empire in Bengal were finally enacted. Shortly afterwards there arrived in Dacca the Emperor's orders in response to the protest Murshid Kuli Khan had sent to him. His near relationship to the Emperor did not save Azim Oshan, and Aurungzebe's anger fell upon him in full force. He was ordered to leave Dacca forthwith, and to proceed immediately to Behar. Though he left his son Farrukh Siyar behind him to act as his deputy, it was only for a brief period, and the appointment was apparently never ratified. With Azim Oshan's departure the end had come. Though leaving in disgrace he was still Viceroy, and his love of display led him to depart with all the splendour due to his position. From the landing-stage near his palace, the Pooshtah, taking with him eight crores of rupees as the spoils of his term of office, he embarked, to the sound of cannon and the roll of drums, in the state barge that had been built years before by the ill-fated Sultan Shuja, himself so great a lover of display. With him departed all the public officers—the immense following that gathers round an Eastern Court—and all signs of authority, embarked in a great fleet that covered the river for many miles. Slowly the long procession passed from sight, and Dacca was left strangely quiet and deserted, with its interests dwindled suddenly and

become purely local, no more to be the city to which all eyes turned, and from which all orders issued for the whole Province of Bengal. The hundred years of its greatness had passed. The next Viceroy who should tread its streets was destined to be one of that race which, ignorant of future empire, was still struggling manfully against great odds, and suffering many indignities at the hands of Moghul emperors and princes, in its endeavour to gain for itself a trading footing at the head of the Bay. So strange are the turns of the wheel of fate!

CHAPTER VII

THE DECLINE OF THE MOGHUL POWER

THE great Aurungzebe lay dying. Before the walls of the city of Ahmednugger, whence twenty years before he had set forth with all the pomp of war to the conquest of the south, the end had come. Worn out with his long campaigns, the old Emperor realised at last that his days were numbered. It was a pathetic scene. Death faced him, and the enemy went as yet unconquered. At the age of ninety-one he looked back upon his life's work still undone and his highest aspirations unfulfilled. The iron had entered deep into the soul of this last great Emperor of Hindustan, and as at length he recognised that his last fight was fought there took possession of him a vast remorse. Alone he faced death; and as he waited the coming of the great conqueror the memories of many years rose up before him and accused him. The faces of those whom he had ruthlessly swept aside to push his way to empire seemed to hover threateningly about his bedside. Fifty years of

stern, just rule counted as nothing in his distorted mind against such crimes as these. In his efforts to prevent his sons wading their way through each other's blood to empire as he had done, he had sent them far from him. Brave and an emperor till the end, he would face death alone. Heart-broken, he wrote burning words to his sons, eloquent with pathos and appeal. 'Many stood around me when I came into the world. Alone I go hence. What am I, or for what good purpose came I into the world? I cannot tell. I bewail the moments that I have spent forgetful of God's worship. I have not done well by my country or my people. My years have gone by profitless. God has been in my heart, yet my darkened eyes have not seen his glorious light. The army is confounded and without heart or help, even as I am apart from God, with no rest for my heart. Nothing brought I into this world, but I carry away with me the burden of my sins. Though my trust is in the mercy and goodness of God, yet I fear to think of what I have done. Yet, come what may, I have launched my barque upon the waters. Farewell, farewell, farewell!' He had often expressed the wish that he might die on a Friday, and this small desire of his was granted. He died on Friday, March 4, 1707, and his simple yet dignified burial was carried out according to his last wishes.

'Carry this creature of dust to the nearest spot, and there commit him to the earth with no useless coffin.'

With Aurungzebe died the greatness of the Moghul Empire. Rapidly, during the years that followed, it sank into a decline from which there was no awakening. Over Bengal, its fairest province, it had already relaxed its hold. Within the next sixty years it was doomed to see it slip completely from its grasp.

The century that had dawned so inauspiciously for the English Company in Bengal with worthless promises and fruitless negotiations, and in the midst of alarms from the anger of Aurungzebe and his Viceroys, was destined to see a wonderful transformation before its close. The eighteenth century was the critical period in the history of the English in India. It saw the gradual abandonment of their first timorous attitude as merely a Company for trade, and the gradual forced adoption of a new position of political supremacy. The small company of Englishmen who, beset with danger, gathered on the banks of the Hooghly and in the out-stations of Dacca, Patna, and Cossimbazaar at the beginning of the century, had acquired before its close, thanks to the victories of Clive and the leadership of Warren Hastings, the supreme control of the vast territories of Bengal, Behar, and

Orissa, while the Moghul princes who had so often threatened their extermination survived only as effete puppets living on their bounty.

But there were sixty years of disorder and unrest to come in Eastern Bengal before the beginning of the peace and order that slowly began to descend upon it under British rule. With the departure of Farrukh Siyar on his way to ascend the imperial throne, Dacca fell finally from its high estate. Handed over to a Deputy or Naib Nazim, who governed under the control of the Viceroy at Murshidabad or Rajmahal, it was no longer a city of the first importance. Yet its governorship was still one of the prizes of the imperial service. A huge province stretching from the Garo Hills on the north to the Bay of Bengal on the south, from Tipperah and Chittagong on the east to Orissa on the west, it comprised an area of more than fifteen thousand square miles. It was considered the first and most lucrative appointment under the Nizamut, the jurisdiction being the largest and the province the richest. Such a post Murshid Kuli Khan, now Viceroy of Bengal, was not likely to allow to pass out of his own family, and he bestowed it upon Mirza Lutfullah, who had married his granddaughter. All power during the long rule of this prince centred in the hands of Mir Hubbeeb, a native of Shiraz, in Persia, one of the many keen-

THE EMPEROR FARRUKH SIYAR.

witted adventurers who had come east in search of fortune and found it. It is reported of him that he could neither read nor write, yet that he possessed great activity of mind and expertness in business. It was he to whom fell the honour of adding new conquests to the Moghul Empire in its declining days. Tipperah, which had hitherto lain outside the sphere of Moghul influence, was now first definitely incorporated with Bengal. It was a wild country, with huge stretches of jungle, the home of elephants, where Buktyar Khiliji and Mir Jumla and many other Mussulman generals had penetrated and returned with the spoils of war, but leaving behind them no permanent sign of conquest. It was a quarrel in the Raja of Tipperah's own family which gave the Moghul Naib Nazim at Dacca his opportunity. The nephew of the Raja, having displeased his uncle, fled the country and took refuge with a Mussulman zemindar, Aka Sadik, who, being a friend of Mir Hubbeeb, brought his guest's case to the minister's notice. Mir Hubbeeb was not slow to see the advantage that might be gained. Obtaining a *perwana* from Mirza Lutfullah, he set out with all the troops available in Dacca and, crossing the Megna, marched straight upon the capital of the country, guided by the Raja's nephew. Surprised at the suddenness of the attack, the Raja fled to the mountains, and his

nephew, with various conditions that made him completely subordinate to the Moghul power at Dacca, was seated on the *gadi*. Mussulman troops were left in the country, and the name of Tipperah was changed by the Naib Nazim to Roshenabad, the Land of Light, being the most easterly portion of the Moghul Empire on which the sun first shone in its daily course.

Shuja Addin Khan, who had married Zynet-un-Nissa the daughter of Murshid Kuli Khan, now ruled at Murshidabad as Viceroy, and after the success of his deputy in Tipperah he determined to send him to Orissa, another province on the outskirts of the empire where the strong hand was still more necessary. In his place he appointed his own son, Serferaz Khan, Naib Nazim of Eastern Bengal. But Zynet-un-Nissa, the imperious lady who, as the heiress of Murshid Kuli Khan, regarded herself as his successor in political influence, refused to part with her only son, and he remained at Murshidabad, two deputies being sent to Dacca in the persons of Juswunt Roy, who was to be Dewan and to have the active direction of affairs, and Syed Ghalib Ali Khan, who was associated in the government with him. Juswunt Roy, who had been one of the ministers of Murshid Kuli Khan, was a wise ruler and an eminent financier. Abolishing the monopolies imposed by Mir Hubbeeb,

THE WIFE OF THE EMPEROR FARRUKH SIYAR.

he did everything in his power to foster trade. Under the joint rule of these two deputies, Dacca enjoyed again a brief spell of peace and prosperity such as it had not known since the days of Shaista Khan. It was during this time that rice again fell to 320 seers to the rupee, and the western gate of the city, which Shaista Khan had closed on his departure forty-six years before, was once more opened with much ceremony and great rejoicing.

But the spell of prosperity was brief. Again Serferaz Khan, away at Murshidabad, allowed a woman to influence him. His sister Nuffessa Begum, imperious and self-willed, true daughter of Zynet-un-Nissa and granddaughter of Murshid Kuli Khan, persuaded him to recall Ghalib Ali Khan from Dacca and appoint his own son-in-law, Murad Ali, to succeed him. Murad Ali brought with him to Dacca, as his right-hand man, one Rajbullub, and together they commenced a rule of oppression and injustice that quickly reduced the city from its former prosperous condition to a state of poverty and distress. Juswunt Roy, the Dewan, powerless to prevent this ruin of his labours, resigned, and all power fell into the hands of Murad Ali and his satellite.

These were the days of the invasion of the Persian usurper, Nadir Shah, and the central authority at Delhi was tottering to its fall. Its

hold over this province of the furthest East had already become practically non-existent, and Serferaz Khan, who seized the viceroyalty on his father's death in 1739, appears never to have been confirmed in office by the Emperor. Bengal, left entirely to itself, quickly became a prey to rival factions. The battle was to the strong, and Serferaz Khan, completely under feminine influence, was not the man for the moment. His rule was brief, and in the following year he fell slain in battle near Murshidabad, and his rival, Ali Verdi Khan, governor of Behar, seized the viceroyalty. He immediately despatched his nephew and son-in-law, Shamut Jung Nowarish Mahomed, to be his Deputy at Dacca, and with strange clemency in the days when even fratricide in the case of newly succeeded monarchs was scarce accounted a crime, sent under his charge the widow and two sons of his rival Serferaz Khan to reside in honourable confinement in the eastern capital. For many years they lived peaceful lives, untouched by the stirring politics of the day, in the Zanjira palace, a beautiful building raised by Ibrahim Khan on the right bank of the Buriganga. Thither the haughty Nuffessa Begum, sister of Serferaz Khan, was also permitted to retire. So devoted was she to her late brother's family that the story goes that she offered to undertake 'the office of superintendent

of Nowarish Mahomed's seraglio' if she was allowed to adopt as her heir a posthumous son of her brother named Aga Baba. It was an extraordinary position for the haughty Nuffessa Begum; but she excused the degradation on the ground of her devotion to her brother's family. Yet her pride was not dead, and it is related that so scrupulous was she in her conduct that she was never seen by Nowarish, who used to converse with her on business through a curtain. The infant for whom she sacrificed so much was destined in after-years to rouse an equal devotion in another—one Rahim Allah Khan of the Punjaub, reputed 'the best archer and the stoutest man' throughout the whole army, who for devotion to the cause of Aga Baba suffered imprisonment at the hands of Mir Kassim Khan.

But, like Serferaz Khan, Nowarish Mahomed resided for the most part at Murshidabad, and the glimpses of the Eastern Capital during his long rule by deputy are few and brief. Two years before his death, however, yet another of those dramatic scenes that so constantly recur in Oriental history took place in Dacca, and another act of treachery was added to the long list that fills the city's annals. Ali Verdi Khan, the old Nawab of Bengal, exhausted with his struggle against the Mahrattas, was spending his last days in his beautiful palace

at Murshidabad. Infatuated with the evil youth, his grandson Surajudowlah, and regardless of the welfare of the province, he had nominated him his successor as Viceroy of the three Subahs of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa. But Nowarish Mahomed, married to Ghesetti Begum, Ali Verdi's own daughter, was a formidable rival whom Surajudowlah eyed askance. The air was thick with intrigues that spread and ramified as Ali Verdi Khan approached his eightieth year and grew daily more infirm. In the midst of them chance suddenly threw in Surajudowlah's way an opportunity to injure his rival that he was not slow to take. Nowarish had appointed Hossain Kuli Khan his minister at Murshidabad, and the latter's nephew, Hossain Addin Khan, as his deputy at Dacca. With the latter, one Aga Sadoc, the son of a zemindar in the Backergunj district, had come into violent collision. Enraged at a decision of the deputy's, Aga Sadoc had journeyed to Murshidabad to appeal to Nowarish Khan himself. But there he met with scant success, and was thrown into prison by the all-powerful minister, the uncle of Hossain Addin Khan. Enraged still further at this treatment, he eagerly threw himself into the hands of Surajudowlah, who promised to make him Naib in place of Hossain Addin Khan when the latter had been satisfactorily disposed

of. Effecting his escape with the help of Surajudowlah, he returned to Dacca, and with his father, Mahomed Bakhar, conspired against Hossain Addin Khan. At the dead of night, with an armed band, they broke secretly into the palace by the riverside and murdered Hossain Addin as he slept, ignorant of the danger that threatened. But Aga Sadoc had reckoned without the people of Dacca. Hossain Addin Khan had ruled them with justice and impartiality, and vague rumours of the excesses and oppressions of Surajudowlah had already reached them. When morning came and they heard of the murder of their chief, they rose in a body and surrounded the palace, where Aga Sadoc and his father, who intended to assume the governorship of the city, had remained. When asked by the people to produce his sunnud of appointment as deputy governor of the city, he pointed significantly to the sword that was still stained with the blood of Hossain Addin. But the populace surged angrily round the palace, and with shouts and cries rushed up the steps and, seizing Mahomed Bakhar, killed him on the spot, while Aga Sadoc, his son, barely succeeded in escaping with his life. So failed, owing to the loyalty of the populace to their dead chief, one of the last attempts in Mussulman annals to seize the government of Dacca by force.

This brutal murder of Hossain Addin Khan together with that of his uncle, Hossain Kuli Khan, which occurred shortly afterwards, seems to have stood out in Surajudowlah's mind, and to have been impressed upon his conscience, beyond all his other misdeeds. It was little more than a year later that, fleeing from the battle-ground of Plassey, and betrayed by a fakir and brought back a prisoner to Murshidabad, he was murdered in his own palace by order of Mir Meerun, his own general's son. When his murderer came into the room in which he was confined it is reported that Surajudowlah cried out 'I must die to atone for the murder of Hossain Kuli Khan!' Then the murderer slew him in cold blood with his sabre, and the wretched youth of scarce twenty years fell exclaiming 'Hossain Kuli is at last avenged!'

Rajbullub, who had been in charge of the Fleet Department, was appointed by Nowarish Mahomed to administer the government, and he at once took the opportunity of confiscating all the property of the conspirators, appropriating to himself the big zemindari of Rajnaghur. Rajbullub was not the man to let opportunities slip, and during the short time he was in command he is said to have amassed two crores of rupees. But his patron died in January 1756, and three months later the death of the old Viceroy Ali Verdi Khan put supreme control

into the irresponsible hands of Surajudowlah, who was no friend to Rajbullub, his rival's nominee. He at once demanded from him a large sum of money as the price of his remaining deputy governor of Dacca. Rajbullub, frightened for the safety of his hoarded wealth, conveyed it out of the town secretly under charge of his son, who set out ostensibly for the temple of Juggernath, but with the intention of seeking an asylum for his wealth within the ramparts of Fort William at Calcutta. It is significant of the strong part the English had already come to play in the politics of Bengal that Rajbullub should have chosen them as the guardians of his wealth. It was partly because the English in Fort William refused to deliver up the son of Rajbullub and his wealth that Surajudowlah set out on the expedition against them which ended in the Black Hole, and finally led to his own undoing and their triumphant ascendency in Bengal.

Those were exciting days for the little company of Englishmen in Dacca, during the hot weather and rains of 1756. They were absolutely at the mercy of the local Mussulman authorities. A mere handful of men, the Nawab Jusserat Khan could have overwhelmed them by sheer force of numbers and disposed of them as he pleased. Calcutta itself was far from safe, as events were shortly to prove, and how great was the risk run

by the Company's agents in an out-station like Dacca, eleven days' journey distant, may be easily judged. Courage and tact of no mean order were necessary to meet the dangers that beset them. If it came to a question of actual force they were helpless and there was little to protect them but the prestige which attached to the European name. Yet so potent was that prestige that even Surajudowlah, in the hour of his triumph, forbore to take the extreme measures which, at least for the moment, would have freed him completely from the rivalry of the English in Bengal. In Dacca, the Company's staff seems extraordinarily small considering the immense trade interests it possessed there. Mr. Richard Becher was the chief of the factory, and under him were Mr. William Sumner, second in Council, who was absent at this time in Calcutta. Messrs. Luke Scrafton, Thomas Hyndman, Samuel Waller, Mr. John Cartier, a factor of one year's standing and Mr. John Johnstone, an assistant 'just commencing.' Lieutenant John Cudmore was in charge of the garrison and Mr. Nathaniel Wilson was the Company's surgeon. In addition, there were at least three English ladies living in Dacca at the time—Mrs. Becher, wife of the chief of the factory, with her child, a Mrs. Warwick and a Miss Harding. The factory itself, 'little better

than a common house, surrounded with a thin brick wall, one half of it not above nine foot high,' offered but poor protection, while the garrison under Lieutenant Cudmore consisted of only 'four sergeants, three corporals, and nineteen European soldiers, beside thirty-four black Christians and sixty *Buxerries*,' the last named probably being Portuguese half-castes.

There could be no question of resistance, and on June 9 advices were received from the Council in Calcutta warning its agents in Dacca to collect the Company's goods and be prepared to seek safety in flight if the danger increased. Anxiously the Englishmen in the far-off out-station awaited further news of the fate of Calcutta, on which so largely depended their own safety and the very existence of all the English factories in Bengal. At length on June 27, news, confirming their worst fears, came in the form of a message from the Nawab Jusserat Khan, announcing the fall of Calcutta and the flight of Governor Drake. Intimation was also sent at the same time of the order of Surajudowlah that the English factory in Dacca should be seized and all the Company's servants thrown into prison.

Astounded at such ill news, the Dacca Council refused for the moment to believe in it, suspicious that it was only a trick on the part of the local

authorities to induce their submission. Mr. Scrafton, third in Council, was at once directed to write to M. Courtin, chief of the French factory in Dacca, asking if he had received any confirmation of the news. Letters had already been received from Chandernagore, and these M. Courtin sent across to the English factory for its information. There could be no longer any doubt that the news was true, and, hopeless of assistance from without now that Calcutta had fallen, there was no choice but submission. The French, however, for the time being, were in favour with Surajudowlah, and the English Council in Dacca determined to appeal to M. Courtin to obtain the best terms possible for the Company from the local governor, Jusserat Khan. The French proved true friends in the hour of need. 'Their conduct everywhere to us on this melancholy occasion,' wrote the English Council in putting on record its sense of indebtedness, 'has been such as to merit the grateful acknowledgment of our nation.' Not only did M. Courtin induce the Nawab to forgo any active measures against them, but he even obtained permission for them all to take refuge in the French factory, he himself standing surety for them that they should there peacefully await the orders of Surajudowlah concerning them. All the Company's property,

however, to the value, it is said, of 1,400,000 rupees, was at once seized, and so careful was Jusserat Khan that nothing of value should escape his clutches that he refused to allow them to take with them into the French factory anything except the clothes they were actually wearing. Thus for all the necessaries of life they were entirely dependent upon the French, who treated them with the greatest generosity and consideration. Little did the latter foresee that within less than a year the destitute English Company which they were so gallantly befriending would have seized their factory and driven them out of Dacca. It was one of those crises in the affairs of nations when events move with startling rapidity.

For over two months the French extended their hospitality to their English guests, and it was only then—very largely owing to their intercession through M. Law, chief of the French factory at Cossimbazaar—that an order permitting them to join their ships was obtained from Surajudowlah. How great their danger had been may be judged from M. Law's memoir, in which he left on record the story of these eventful days. Writing of the difficulty he experienced in obtaining the order from the Nawab, he adds significantly: 'Surajudowlah, being informed that there were two or three very charming English ladies there, was strongly tempted

to adorn his harem with them.' But though the English in Dacca escaped the worst that might have befallen them, all their personal property had been confiscated, and nothing was restored to them. They were still entirely dependent on M. Courtin, and it was to him they owed the means of joining their fellow-countrymen at Fulta, where they arrived in a French sloop on August 26.

It must have been a dispirited remnant of the members of the Calcutta factory that Mr. Becher and his companions found encamped at Fulta. But brighter days were near at hand, and with the coming of Colonel Clive and Admiral Watson from Madras hope again revived for the English in Bengal. On January 2, 1757, just over six months since it had fallen, the English flag once more floated over the ramparts of Fort William, and the English Company, though doubtful and hesitating still, had finally made good its footing in the province. Measures for the recovery of the Dacca factory were promptly undertaken. 'The expedition to Dacca is in great forwardness, which is to be carried on by four hundred sailors in boats under the command of Captain Speke,' wrote Clive on January 28 to the Select Committee at Madras. 'The surprise of this place may be of great consequence to the Company's affairs.' Less than six weeks later the expedition—on March 8—

arrived in Dacca, and retook possession of the English factory. It was not, however, without some opposition that Messrs. Sumner and Waller, who returned to take over charge, resumed the Company's trade. On March 23 they wrote to Calcutta that the Nawab Jusserat Khan refused to accede to their demands to restore the factory cannon or to allow their trade without a new *perwana* from Surajudowlah. So engrossed was the Council in taking measures for its own security, and so uncertain as to the turn affairs would take, that it could offer little immediate help; and although the new *perwana* was obtained, it wrote to its agents in Dacca warning them to look to their own safety in case of need. All the assistance it could render was to send an armed sloop to Luckipore to cover their retreat in the event of its again becoming necessary to quit Dacca. Messrs. Sumner and Waller, fearing the worst, at once hurried down the river all the valuable goods then in the factory and placed them in safety on the sloop. They themselves, anxiously awaiting further news, prepared to follow if need arose. Outwardly, however, they maintained a bold front, carrying on their trade with unabated vigour, and as the days passed and no ill news came confidence was gradually restored. Finally the news of Clive's victory at Plassey on June 23,

which quickly reached Dacca, assured them that the danger they had so long feared was safely past for all time.

Meanwhile the French factory had fallen on evil days. The declaration of war between England and France had become known in India early in the year, and it was on March 13 that Clive sent his famous summons to the Governor of Chandernagore to surrender in the King's name. Ten days later the fort had fallen into the hands of the English, and orders had been received by the Company's agents in Dacca to pursue a similar course with regard to the French possessions there. This was an embarrassing duty for the newly returned English agents, whose predecessors had so recently sought shelter in the French factory and received so much kindness at M. Courtin's hands. For a considerable time they apparently took no action beyond communicating to the French the orders they had received, and it was not until June 22 that M. Courtin and his followers finally left Dacca. The English agents were not unmindful of past services, and extended every courtesy to their rivals in their day of distress. They even offered to secure to M. Courtin all his private effects on condition that he made over to them the French factory and all that belonged to the Company, and himself departed for Pondicherry

within a given time. Even though he rejected this offer as inconsistent with his personal honour, he was apparently allowed to leave Dacca unmolested, taking with him what he would.

The departure of the French was not the least interesting and momentous of the many scenes that the Eastern Capital had witnessed. Their factory was on the river bank, and from there they set sail in a fleet of thirty-five boats on June 22, 1757. On board, besides M. Courtin, were MM. Chevalier, Brayer, Gourlade, the surgeon, an Augustine Father, chaplain of the factory, eight European soldiers, seventeen gunners, four or five servants, and some twenty or thirty peons. Their object was to join M. Law, the chief of their factory at Cossimbazaar; but a few days after setting sail from Dacca news reached them of the battle of Plassey, and for the next eight months they were wanderers in Northern Bengal, building Fort Bourgogne, contending against hostility and treachery on the part of local zemindars, and waiting with diminishing hope for the long-expected help from Pondicherry, which was destined never to reach them. It was not until March 1758 that they finally gave up the struggle and threw themselves upon the mercy of the English at Murshidabad. One is glad to learn that M. Courtin was treated by the English there

as honourably and courteously as he had treated their fellow-countrymen in Dacca two years before. He was not even detained as a prisoner of war, and Clive, in writing to him on July 15, 1758, granting him permission to retire to Pondicherry, concludes by paying him this tribute: 'I am at this moment sending an order to the captain-commandant of our troops to restore to you your two guns. I am charmed at this opportunity of showing you my appreciation of the way in which you have always behaved to the English, and my own regard for your merit.'

One last tragic scene was enacted in Dacca under native rule before the firm hand of the English began to make itself felt. To the Zanjira palace, where, through the clemency of Ali Verdi Khan, had long lived the wife and children of Serferaz Khan, there came after the battle of Plassey, less honoured and well dowered, the household of Surajudowlah—the proud daughters of Ali Verdi Khan himself. Both Ghesetti Begum and Amina Begum, in the days of their father's rule, had played important parts and seen strange and chequered times. Ghesetti Begum the elder, wife of Nowarish Mahomed, who for sixteen years had ruled as deputy governor of Dacca, had lived in luxury in Murshidabad, and after her husband's death had retired with her great wealth and her lover

Mir Nuzur Ali to her splendid palace the Moti Jhil, the Pearl Lake, near Murshidabad, a stately pile, ornamented with pillars of black marble brought from the ruins of the ancient capital of Gaur. But she had spent scarcely four months in this luxurious retreat when her father died, and her nephew Surajudowlah assumed the viceroyalty. Now Ghesetti Begum during her husband's lifetime had done her best to prevent her nephew's accession, and one of the first acts of his reign was to send to his aunt a demand for the wealth of her late husband. But Ghesetti Begum was a woman of spirit, and she attempted to defend her palace of the Pearl Lake against her enemies. It was not until deserted by the last of her attendants in the hour of need, even by her lover Mir Nuzur Ali, who fled with fifteen lacs' worth of jewels to Benares, that she submitted to the troops sent against her. Breaking into the Moti Jhil, they carried off vast quantities of treasure, and rudely drove her from the palace. Treated with little dignity, she was sent off with her women 'huddled together into some bad boats,' with none of the state which was due to her rank, on the long and tedious journey down the river to Dacca. There, 'in the most disgraceful and shameless neglect,' she joined the relatives of Serferaz Khan in the Zanjira palace.

It was but a few months later that Ghesetti Begum was followed into exile by her younger sister Amina Begum, from whom she had been so long estranged, and against whose son she bore so deep a grudge. Amina Begum had experienced vicissitudes amazing even in those stirring times. Cradled in luxury as a viceroy's daughter, she had married her cousin Syud Ahmed, and spent prosperous days with him in Patna when he ruled as governor of Behar. She had seen the uprising of rebellion and the quartered body of Mustapha Khan hung on the four gates of Patna as evidence of her husband's prowess. Then, the enemies of her house defeated, she set out to witness the marriages of her sons, celebrated with all the pomp and splendour that her soul loved in her father's palace at Murshidabad. It was a scene of true Oriental luxury and magnificence. Illuminations that seemed 'to have set both heaven and earth in a blaze,' and the 'splendid pageants and gorgeous processions of the bridegrooms' were spoken of throughout Bengal for years to come with wonder and delight. But it was the luxury that precedes the fall of empires, and it must have been a strange memory to Amina Begum amidst the grief and poverty that befell her later years. Dazzled by the attractions of the viceregal court she plotted with her husband to secure the throne, but

treachery met with treachery, and the Afghan chiefs they had called in to their help fell upon Syud Ahmed and, brutally murdering him, carried off Amina Begum as a prisoner to their camp. For seventeen days she was forced to listen to the cries of her father-in-law, tortured by every horrible device known to Oriental cruelty, to reveal the place where his treasure lay hid. Then for well nigh a year she spent anxious days a prisoner in the enemy's camp, waiting for the approach of her father's army that tarried long upon the way. Rescued at last, she returned with Ali Verdi Khan to Murshidabad, and there for seven years set all her hopes upon her son Surajudowlah, scheming to secure for him the kingdom on her father's death. Then, the victory won and Surajudowlah Viceroy of Bengal, she enjoyed her last brief days of splendour. Within a few months the end had come. From her palace windows she had looked down upon her son's dead body carried with scant respect through the streets of Murshidabad, and, forgetful in her grief of all custom and tradition, she had fled out into the public gaze, and thrown herself upon his body in the midst of the crowd, only to be torn aside by the rude hands of the soldiery, denied even the consolation of her dead son's corpse. Stricken with grief, she too was soon pursuing the long and tedious journey to Dacca,

there to reside unhonoured and dispossessed of all her former wealth and luxury.

It was thus a strange company that gathered within the walls of the Zanjira palace and looked out at the great city of Dacca across the Buriganga. The family of Serferaz Khan still inhabited the best apartments, living in luxury, though still prisoners, the youths growing up in idleness with all the indolence of the East. It must have been with something of revengeful joy that they watched the approach first of Ghesetti Begum, the elder daughter of their proud enemy Ali Verdi Khan, who had dispossessed them and theirs of their own, and then the younger daughter mourning the extinction of her dignity, with her widowed daughter-in-law by her side, a mere child, yet with a child of her own at her breast. The banks of the river, it is said, were crowded to see them arrive, the wife and mother and child of the man whose name had become a by-word throughout Bengal for cruelty, debauchery, and oppression. In the Zanjira palace they could have met with little welcome even from their own near relative Ghesetti Begum.

But even this refuge was not to be theirs for long. There is one last tragic scene. Mir Jaffir, who was married to the sister of Ali Verdi Khan and who had been placed upon the *musnud* by the

English after Surajudowlah's death, had grown old, and left the management of affairs in the hands of his son Mir Meerun, whose enormities soon caused to be well nigh forgotten even those of Surajudowlah himself. This monster, it is said, had already slain two of his own officers and cut off the heads of two women of his seraglio with his own hand for some trifling offence. On setting out for the defence of Patna, he entered in a note-book the names of three hundred persons who had offended him and whom he determined to put to death on his return. But before starting he sent orders to Jusserat Khan, the governor of Dacca, to put to death the mother, aunt, widow, and daughter of Surajudowlah. It was a cruel order, unprovoked, and with little object. Robbed of all their wealth, these ladies, shut up in the Zanjira palace, could have given but little cause for alarm to Mir Meerun. The governor of Dacca, to his credit, refused to carry out the order. When the news of his refusal reached Meerun, the latter was so enraged that he added the governor's name to the list of persons he had entered in his note-book to be put to death on his return from Patna. Determined that the relatives of Surajudowlah should not escape, he sent one of his own servants with orders to put them on board a vessel, with the pretence of taking them to Murshidabad, and to sink the boat on the

way. So on an evening in the hot weather of 1760 the relatives of Surajudowlah embarked from the Zanjira palace on the Buriganga, unsuspicious of their fate. But they were scarcely out of sight of Dacca on the broader waters of the Dullasery, when their escort withdrew the plugs which had been carefully placed in the bottom of the boat, and, putting off in another craft, left the helpless women to their fate. The once haughty Ghesetti Begum, broken and cowed, took fright and shed tears, but Amina Begum cried out against her fate. 'O God Almighty,' she is reported to have cried, 'we are indeed all sinners and culprits, but we have committed no sin against Meerun; nay, rather to us he owes all that he has.' Then their cries rang out across the stillness of the waters far into the night, but no help came, and they perished miserably as the boat slowly sank. So ended the once proud family of Ali Verdi Khan. But vengeance soon overtook their murderer, for from his campaign against the Emperor he never returned. In the neighbourhood of Patna, Mir Meerun was struck dead by lightning as he lay in his tent in the midst of his camp on July 2, 1760, only a few days after the relatives of Surajudowlah had perished by his command.

CHAPTER VIII

DACCA UNDER BRITISH RULE

A NEW day was dawning for the city that had seen so many vicissitudes. The old scenes of lawlessness and disorder, of treachery and intrigue, of murder, rapine, and licence, that had stained her annals, were things of the past. The old typical Eastern unrestraint, and the unchecked play of passions, slowly began to give way to a strange unwonted spirit of law and order which the city even in its best days had never before known.

It was unavoidable that much of the romance should pass with the old rule. The men who were henceforth rulers of Dacca, men for the most part of strict honesty and impartiality, busy with the administration of justice, the punishment of wrong-doing, and the collection of the revenue, and content with the reality, cared little for the show of power. Their factories and offices, their court-houses and jails, rose up scornful of architectural pretensions, hideous and unsightly, built by a company of traders solely for use, with a fine

disregard for appearances. Plain, blunt Englishmen, with a touch of Puritanism in their blood, Oriental splendour and magnificence made to them but little appeal. With their advent, the picturesqueness of the old court life at Dacca rapidly disappeared. Jusserat Khan still ruled nominally as Naib Nazim until his death in 1781, but from the year 1765, when Lieutenant Swinton, long remembered among the people as Sooltin Saheb, came to Dacca to take over charge of the revenue after the famous treaty of 1765 had given the English the Dewani of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa, all power gradually passed into the hands of the Company. Jusserat Khan vacated the palace in the Fort, which had been a residence of the rulers of Dacca since Ibrahim Khan built it a hundred and fifty years before, and withdrew to the Bara Katra temporarily, until the Nimtoli Kothi, the new residence which was being prepared for him, was completed. At the Nimtoli Kothi, Jusserat Khan and his descendants lived for three-quarters of a century, holding their mock court, shorn alike of its state and its authority. It was a pathetic lingering of the old *régime*, a mockery of the splendour that was past, paper and tinsel where once there had been vellum and gold. Opposite the eastern gateway, half guard, half escort, was quartered a detachment of the Company's Sepoys—

a constant reminder, if such were needed, that the power of the Moghuls was a thing of the past. Of this last of the palaces of the Naib Nazims nothing now remains save portions of the western gateway and the Baradari, the large hall where they held their diminished court and jealously preserved the few outward symbols of authority that still remained. Close by, in the Hossaini Delan, lie buried the last four Naib Nazims of Dacca: Nusrut Jung and Shams-ud-dowlah, grandsons of Jusserat Khan, Kumr-ud-dowlah, and Ghaziuddin, on whose death, childless, in 1843, the Company at last took full and complete possession.

Innumerable difficulties faced the English when first they assumed control in Dacca. Every department of the State showed unmistakable signs of the corruption and decay that had overtaken the Moghul Empire in the eighteenth century. The famous Mahomed Reza Khan was in charge of the office of Dewan at the time, and an inspection of his accounts revealed the fact that the revenues of Eastern Bengal had fallen to twenty lacs of rupees as compared with thirty-eight lacs in 1722. The lands originally allotted for the maintenance of the Nawara—the fleet—had amounted to over seven lacs, but of this only half a lac was found to be recoverable. The abuses that sprang

from the absolute power of the Naib Nazims as to life and death shocked beyond measure the inherent sense of justice of the law-abiding servants of the Company. The Dak, or posting department, is described as being 'involved in a labyrinth of obscurity, without check or system,' and the delays and peculation beyond belief. Of the hundred and ten prisoners in the Dacca jail, it is recorded that ninety-five were employed at work upon the roads in irons, 'whose guilt had never been established,' and many of whom 'had been so circumstanced for nine years.' Encouraged by the weakness of the local government, dacoits infested the rivers, waylaying travellers and seizing valuable merchandise, well nigh totally disorganising trade and commerce. Raiding the villages on the river-banks, they laid waste whole tracts of country, robbing and murdering the unfortunate cultivators without mercy. So bold did they become that they even set upon and murdered a Government officer, one Captain Holland, while on his way from Dacca to Calcutta. Crime of every kind was rife, and no man went secure in life or property.

These must have been busy days for the first English administrators. Their powers ill-defined, and an infinity of difficulties awaiting their solution, it was no easy task that they had to face.

With wise caution they proceeded slowly, tentatively trying method after method of dealing with the colossal work that lay before them until they found the instrument most suited to their need. Step by step, with due order and precision, they gathered up the threads from the tangled skein that little by little fell within their grasp. There was nothing that savoured of revolution. Quietly the servants of the Company stepped into the place of the Moghul administrator and made use at the outset of the much-abused forms of government they found to hand. In 1769 Mr. Kelsall was appointed the first Supervisor of the Revenue, and the great work began in earnest. Everywhere the revenues had fallen, eaten away by wanton extravagance and peculation, and one of the first cares that demanded the attention of the new Supervisor was the reduction of expenditure. The Nawara, the famous fleet, which had been for so long the pride and glory and safety of Dacca as it rode at anchor in the Buriganga, had seen its day, and in the new *régime* it had no place. It was summarily abolished and the ships sold, the lands that were still recoverable of those that had been granted for its maintenance being taken over by the Company. To check the abuses of the Naib Nazim's Courts, prompt measures were adopted. Every sentence of death passed by the Naib Nazim needed

confirmation by a representative of the Company before it could be carried into effect, while a European officer was deputed to attend the Adaulat Courts to see that justice was properly administered. But Mr. Kelsall had only four English Assistants at the outset, and it was impossible for a little band of five Englishmen, unversed in the methods of Oriental cunning and intrigue, to make great headway against the mass of corruption and confusion that confronted them. The great wonder is that they were able to do what they did. They make a striking picture, those five Englishmen set in the midst of a vast and alien province, struggling through heat, discomfort, and intrigue to bring order out of chaos, and to lay the foundations of an administration of honesty and integrity that should confer untold benefits upon a harassed and exhausted people, and upon many generations yet to come. Average level-headed Englishmen, in no wise distinguished above their fellows, their very names long since forgotten, they yet played their part in the foundation of a great empire, unostentatious to the end, writing their epitaphs in deeds, not words. In the midst of a newly conquered people whose great traditions had not yet become a memory, they had little but their own prestige, then only in its first youth, to place against overwhelming numbers. The force at their

disposal was absurdly small, a mere handful of men in the midst of the teeming population of the great capital which but a few years before had sent out its orders to exterminate them root and branch. Mr. Grewber, appointed to be Supervisor with the new title of Collector in 1772, found only two companies of Sepoys, ill-trained, unproved men from a corps at Chittagong, as the sole defence of English authority in Dacca. It was a strange turn in the wheel of fate that the proud city which had seen great armies contending for its possession should settle down, striking no single blow for independence, under so small a force, led by a little company of Englishmen. The peaceful acquisition of the Eastern Province is one of the most remarkable features in the English annals in Bengal.

It was to face no organised resistance that the Collector was forced in 1773 to ask for an augmentation of the military forces at his command. They were inadequate even for the duties of police. Dacoities and murders were still of everyday occurrence. So weak had become the local Moghul authority in its last days that whole companies of banditti roamed the countryside or infested the great rivers, bent on plunder and rapine. It is said that as many as ten thousand *sunyassees* were collected in one part of the district

alone, compelling the wretched inhabitants to pay tribute and driving them in terror from their homes. A detachment of Sepoys sent out against them, completely outnumbered and overwhelmed, met with a severe defeat, and the English officer falling into their hands was brutally murdered. In the following year a regiment of Militia was raised to augment the force, consisting of six companies, each one hundred strong, commanded by an English Captain and a Subaltern, with a native adjutant and a full complement of native officers. The troops thus raised played in those first days many parts. They guarded the Katcheries and the Treasury, they acted as excise officers to prevent the smuggling of salt, they escorted treasure on long and dangerous journeys by land and river, they executed decrees of the Provincial Courts, and they made their way into remote and unknown corners of the district to seize and bring in refractory zemindars who refused to pay their rent or otherwise disobeyed the orders of the Courts. Ten years later the Militia was disbanded and a Provincial Corps raised in its stead.

Reforms in the local administration quickly followed. In 1772 the Company assumed charge of the office of Dewan in place of Mahomed Reza Khan, and a Court of Dewani Adaulat was insti-

tuted under the Collector as President, who, with the assistance of a native Dewan, tried all civil suits. Two years later the Provincial Council was established, with the famous Mr. Barwell as chief, but, an experiment in local government, it was abolished in 1781, and Mr. Day was appointed first Magistrate and Collector, while a Court of Judicature was established, of which Mr. Duncanson was first Judge.

It is during these early years of British supremacy that two famous names figure for a brief space in the annals of Dacca. William Makepeace Thackeray, sixteenth child of Dr. Thackeray, Headmaster of Harrow and grandfather of the future novelist, had arrived in India as a Writer in the Company's service in June 1766, at the age of seventeen. For the first five years he was employed in Calcutta, for some time as secretary to Mr. Cartier, who became Governor of Bengal in 1769, and it was during this period that he was joined by two of his sisters, Jane and Henrietta, who were doubtless glad to escape from the overcrowded household at home to the wider outlook that India afforded. Both these ladies, as well as their brother, were soon destined to become intimately connected with Dacca. It was there that Mr. Cartier had spent a large portion of his earlier service, and he had good cause to remember

how great were the advantages it offered to a young civilian in the way of private trade and emoluments. Desirous of doing his best for his *protégé* before leaving India, he appointed him factor and fourth in Council at Dacca, and there Thackeray, accompanied by his sisters, arrived in 1771. It was still the time when large fortunes were to be made by the Company's servants in Bengal, and though great changes were impending from the following year when Warren Hastings assumed office as Governor-General, Thackeray in the years that followed found unlimited opportunities, which were regarded as perfectly legitimate, and of which he made good use, of amassing considerable private wealth. He remained only a year in Dacca, being appointed, under Warren Hastings's new system of administration, the first Collector of the neighbouring frontier province of Sylhet in 1772. As virtual ruler of this wild, unexplored country, new opportunities opened out before him, and although he only held the Collectorship for two short years, he associated himself so closely with the district that he has become known for all time as 'Sylhet' Thackeray.

It must have been a fascinating life for a young man of only twenty-three. Though nominally under the control of the Council at Dacca, he was practically in supreme authority over a vast

district, untouched as yet by British influence, and waiting to receive the impress of the strong rule that should evolve law and order out of chaos. A free hand and a wide scope gave full play to the young Collector's individuality. The infinite variety of his work is astonishing. First and foremost he was the Collector of the revenue, and so long as the full tale of it in cowries, the local currency, reached the Treasury at Dacca the Council there evinced but little further interest in the Province. Those were the days before the writing of voluminous reports, the laborious making of petitions and appeals, and constant references to higher authorities; and Thackeray was left unhampered in the control of his district, save only in so far as he did not touch the revenue interests of the Company. The summary administration of justice, the making of roads and bridges, the trapping of wild elephants, the building of jails, the control of the Treasury, the organisation of famine relief, the control of the police, the establishment of schools and dispensaries, and the introduction of experiments in agriculture, these were but a few of the subjects with which the young Collector of the district was called upon to deal.

In 1774 Thackeray was back again in Dacca as third in Council, but so profitable had proved his

two years' tenure of office in Sylhet that he was already able to turn his thoughts towards retirement. On January 31, 1776, he married Amelia Richmond-Webb, a reigning beauty of the day in Calcutta, and shortly afterwards sailed for home. During just over nine years' service, the most important and lucrative half of which had been spent in Dacca and Sylhet, he had amassed a fortune, which, though not comparing with those of many of the 'nabobs' among his contemporaries, was by no means inconsiderable. William Makepeace Thackeray and his bride—a young man of twenty-six and a girl of eighteen—returning from India with a competence large enough to maintain them in comfort for the rest of their lives, present a sufficiently striking contrast with the changed conditions of modern days.

Meanwhile, both the Thackeray sisters had played important *rôles* in Dacca. Henrietta, the younger of the two and the beauty of the family, had created a great impression on her arrival in the up-country station where ladies were few, and in the following year she had married her brother's chief, Mr. James Harris, head of the Council in Dacca and of the Company's affairs in Eastern Bengal. Reaching India in 1758, Mr. Harris had put in the whole of his district service in Dacca and to such good effect that already in

1772, at the time of his marriage, he was contemplating retirement. The Eastern Capital, with its many opportunities of private trade, had always been one of the prizes of the service. Even in the days of the 'Pirate' Pitt, it had been a coveted post. Writing to a friend in May 1701, the latter says: 'I hope you may go to Dacca, which I take to be as advantageous a post as most in the Company's service,' and it had not lost its reputation during the sixty years that had intervened. Mr. James Harris had exploited its possibilities to the full, and, retiring with a large fortune early in 1773, he settled down in England, living for many years in the typical nabob-like style of the retired Anglo-Indian of the eighteenth century.

Jane Thackeray, the elder sister, spent a considerably longer time in Dacca, and through her famous husband became much more intimately associated with it. In 1772 she was married to Major James Rennell, the distinguished scientist and geographer, whose name occupies so honoured a place among the worthies of the Eastern Capital. His is an interesting figure, that of a man of science and devoted to the arts of peace utterly untouched by the petty rivalries and ambitions of the society in which his lot was cast, yet forced by the exigencies of the times to play his part in the stirring events that accompanied the consolida-

tion of British rule. Early engaged in scientific research, he was appointed Surveyor of the Company's dominions in Bengal on his arrival in India as an ensign in 1764, at the age of twenty-two; and under his personal superintendence the thorough exploration of the Eastern Province was for the first time taken in hand. The services rendered by him to the Company, in penetrating into hitherto unknown regions and adding to its knowledge of the country over which it had just been called to rule, were incalculable. Extraordinary ignorance prevailed in the early days among the Company's agents as to the geography of Bengal outside certain well-known limits, and James Rennell, by clearly defining the extent and characteristics of the Province by means of his maps and surveys, immensely facilitated the work of government.

The story of his labours gives a vivid glimpse of Eastern Bengal in those first days of British suzerainty. It was a wild, turbulent country, lawless and unsettled, on the eve of the final break-up of Mussulman authority while as yet the new authority had not had time to make its power felt. The natural difficulties alone with which Rennell had to contend were appalling. Roads there were none, while dense jungle covered the land wherein tigers and herds of wild elephants

roamed at will, a constant source of danger at every camping-place. Most of the travelling was done by river, but even here dangers were to be encountered. The rivers themselves, with their swift undercurrents, were treacherous, and sudden storms drew annually a heavy toll in human life. Still more dreaded were the gangs of marauders which infested all the large rivers, rendering life and property unsafe within their reach. James Rennell himself suffered much from their attacks, and again and again he was able to pursue his labours only at the point of the sword. On one occasion, in 1766, he was set upon by a band of river pirates, some eight hundred strong, and though they were driven off at the first encounter, thanks to the loyalty and discipline of his native escort, they lay in wait for him on the following day and literally cut him and his little troop to pieces. So seriously wounded was he that his life was despaired of. His right shoulder blade was cut through, 'laying him open for nearly a foot down the back, cutting through or wounding several of the ribs.' His left arm was also slashed, and a blow on the hand carried off a finger. More than three hundred miles away from the nearest surgeon, his condition was pitiable, and it was due solely to the devotion of his native servants that he survived the terrible journey by

boat down the river to Dacca. For months after reaching the station his life hung in the balance, but, recovering, he was promoted to be Captain of Engineers and Surveyor-General of Bengal, and once more resumed his difficult task. On another occasion, five years later, he was again called upon to disperse a company of marauders who were oppressing the people and interfering with his own survey operations. It was a difficult journey of three hundred and twenty miles from Dacca, but, in spite of the heat, he accomplished it in fifteen days and freed the neighbourhood of the dacoits once and for all. But tasks such as these, in a climate which, he himself wrote, 'proved so prejudicial to European constitutions that scarce one out of seventy ever returned to his native country,' seriously affected his health; and his thoughts, too, turned towards what, in his case at least, was well-earned retirement. He sailed from India in 1777, to continue at home his scientific researches, to reap every possible scientific distinction, and to be laid to rest at last, at the age of eighty-seven, among the dead whom England honours in Westminster Abbey.

But in spite of the energy with which such men as these entered upon the task of reform, abuses and customs sanctioned by long usage died hard. The zemindars in the remoter parts of the

district still lived much as they had done before, petty despots on their own estates and a terror to the countryside. Many of them did not disdain to share their spoils with bands of dacoits who were in reality armed retainers in their pay. Slavery still existed, and even seventy years after the English had taken possession, slaves were still bought and sold in Dacca—a male slave for 150 rupees and a female for 100 rupees. Refractory ryots were confined in irons, and the most loathsome forms of torture practised to force from them their rent to the uttermost farthing. It was impossible that the first little company of administrators in Dacca, with the limited means at their disposal, could at once enforce their principles of law and justice in far-off districts where no white man had yet been. Everywhere there was the meeting of the old and the new—the old spirit of lawlessness, tyranny and disorder gradually giving way and disappearing under the strenuous new rule of justice and integrity. The mock court of the Naib Nazims representing centuries of tradition, and all that was past, still existed side by side with the Katcheries of the Magistrate and Collector, typical products of a modern *régime* and symbolic of the new era that was dawning for India and the Indian people.

At the very outset of their rule the English,

inexperienced and beset with difficulties, were called upon to deal with one of those great natural calamities with which, unfortunately, they have become but too familiar in after years elsewhere. Eastern Bengal, a land of rice-fields, fertile and well watered, has known little of the horrors of famine in recent times. But when the land was still unsettled and whole tracts had been laid waste by dacoity, tyranny, and oppression, the unfortunate inhabitants were constantly reduced to the very margin of subsistence, and a partial failure of the crops meant disaster. Three of the worst famines that have ever been visited upon Eastern Bengal occurred in the early years of British rule. Scarcely had Mr. Kelsall been appointed the first Supervisor in Dacca when he was called upon to deal with the terrible famine of 1769–70. Sudden and prolonged inundation destroyed a large proportion of the crops, and a period of great heat and drought following, robbed the unfortunate cultivators of their harvest. Though the distress here was small compared with what it was elsewhere, many of the poorest classes were reduced to great straits.

The famine of 1784 was even more disastrous to Eastern Bengal. A sudden rise in the rivers destroyed whole villages, the mighty force of the swollen currents sweeping away all within their path, houses, people, cattle, and trees, a ghastly

wreckage tossed on their whirling eddies. So great was the scarcity that rice, though lately selling for 160 seers to the rupee, fell as low as 16 seers. 'The distress of the inhabitants,' writes Mr. Day, the Collector, 'exceeds all description. The country is in a great measure deserted, and scarcely a cultivated spot is to be seen.' It grew worse as the month of October drew to an end, and it became evident that the winter crop must also fail. The poorer people in Dacca and its neighbourhood, goaded by hunger, grew riotous, and the Collector found it necessary to employ the Sepoys to protect the bazaars from the starving crowds that surrounded them clamouring for food.

But it was left for the third of these terrible visitations to surpass anything that had gone before in horror and severity. In 1787 the rains began unusually early in March and continued without intermission until, in July, the rivers had risen to a height unrecorded in the annals of Dacca before or since. Though the streets of the city stand ordinarily well above high-water mark, they were so completely inundated that boats sailed over them—in fact, it was necessary to go by boat from house to house. All round the city in the low-lying districts the people had to desert their houses, and either erect *machans* or live in floating huts hastily constructed on rafts. The early crops

completely failed, and, mindful of the former years of famine, those who possessed a stock of grain hoarded it against the coming season of distress. Prices rose 300 to 400 per cent., and rice fell to four seers to the rupee, and even at that excessive rate but little could be obtained. In July, 1787, the famine began, and continued far into the following year. The poor, homeless and penniless, crowded into Dacca, and though ten thousand of them were fed daily by subscription, these formed but a fraction of those who stood in need. Hundreds died of starvation in the streets of the city, until Dacca became a scene of horror unparalleled even among all its many vicissitudes. To increase the misfortunes of the stricken people, a fire broke out in the city, and no less than seven thousand houses were burned to the ground. Large quantities of grain, for want of which the people died, caught fire before their eyes, and a hundred people perished in the flames, many of them burned in the mad rush to save the grain that to them meant life itself. Mr. Day, the Collector, did what he could to arrest the famine, but in those days, when the means of communication were still imperfect and organisation was not yet complete, the difficulties were great. He applied to Government to ask Collectors in Behar to send down rice to the starving districts in Eastern Bengal, but it was

not until August, 1788, that the first consignment came. Even then it only amounted to 7,250 maunds, and that was little when divided among the tens of thousands upon whom famine had fallen. Even when the floods at last subsided the people were in dire distress. Their houses washed away and their cattle drowned, they had nothing wherewith to start life afresh, and it was many years before Dacca and the neighbouring districts returned again to their former prosperity.

But the result of the famine of 1787–88 went much further than mere temporary distress. It left its permanent mark in the acceleration of a great change that had already begun to make itself felt in Eastern Bengal, forming one of the most striking features of the early years of British rule. It was by a strange irony of fate that the coming of a trading company should have coincided with the rapid decline of manufactures and a sudden movement in favour of agriculture and the extension of cultivation. Until the middle of the eighteenth century spinning and weaving had been the main sources of the prosperity of Dacca. The chief interest had centred in the city itself. Ever since its foundation it had drawn the people from the countryside, who had crowded into its many streets and bazaars where highly paid labour was always to be obtained. So great had been the influx that

the town of Dacca is said in the days of its greatest prosperity to have extended fourteen miles inland from the bank of the river, while its population numbered nine hundred thousand souls. Outside, in the district near by, vast tracts of land still lay uncultivated, much that had been cultivated in the days of the kingdom of Sonargaon having fallen back again into waste and jungle. The same tendency to desert rural occupations for town life observable in England in the latter half of the nineteenth century had been exhibited in Dacca two centuries before. Even Capassia and Sonargaon, famous of old for their manufacture of muslins and fine cloths, sent their best workmen to swell the population of the overcrowded city. Agriculture, conducted on the crudest principles, was at the best anxious and unprofitable labour, and in the unsettled condition of the time, when dacoity was rife and zemindars oppressed at will, there was no certainty that he who sowed would ever know the joy of harvest.

A succession of events, however, in the last decades of the eighteenth century wrought a sudden change. The famine of 1787–88 left the land desolate, having swept whole villages and homesteads, and in many instances the cultivators themselves, out of existence. There was an urgent demand for labour in the years that

followed. Landholders found themselves in possession of large estates with none to cultivate them, and they were driven to offer every inducement to draw the labourer back to the land. The abolition of the export duties on corn and the introduction of indigo came to their assistance, while the Permanent Settlement, whatever its merits or demerits, gave for the time being a feeling of security among the agricultural classes hitherto unknown. Rapidly a return back to the land set in. Under the new government, which every day made its influence more firmly felt in the greater security of life and property, the cultivator began to see that he might carry on his labour with every hope in due time of reaping its reward. The country districts speedily revived, and cultivation extended far beyond its former limits, converting swamps and jungle, in the years that followed, into the fertile rice-fields of Eastern Bengal. To such an extent did the agrarian revolution affect the distribution of population, that Dacca, which had once boasted well nigh a million inhabitants, could only muster some fifty thousand in the early part of the eighteenth century.

But the greatest impetus to the agrarian revolution was undoubtedly to be found in the marked decay of commercial and industrial prosperity. Even in a land of rapid changes this sudden decline

is startling. A number of events seemed to have combined to ruin the great industry for which the city had been so long famous. In 1781 the weaving of muslins was introduced into England, and on the expiry of Arkwright's patent and the introduction of mule twist in 1785, the manufacture of cotton goods increased by leaps and bounds. From two millions in 1781 their value sprang to seven and a half millions in 1787, no less than five hundred thousand pieces of muslin being manufactured in one year. They were not muslins of the quality and texture for which Dacca was so well known, but they were of a kind that met with a ready demand. The Moghul Imperial and Provincial Courts, which had entirely monopolised the finest and most costly of the muslins that Dacca had produced, were no longer in a position to make large purchases, and the high prices of the best muslins were prohibitive to any but the richest classes. The old days of luxury and splendour were over, and the change told heavily on the Dacca weaver. Robbed of the demand for their most expensive muslins, they found themselves at the same time called upon to meet the influx of English machine-made cloth, which, owing to its cheapness and durability, at once found a ready market. All classes of the inhabitants were further affected by the introduction of

English-made thread, which quickly superseded that locally prepared. The rapid decline of manufactures was the inevitable result.

In 1787 muslins to the value of thirty lacs of rupees were exported to England. But the flourishing state of the English cotton trade during the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, fostered as it was by the prohibitive duty of 75 per cent. and aided by mechanical device and invention of every kind, was the death-blow of the industry in Dacca. In 1807 only eight and a half lacs' worth found a market in Great Britain, and the total fell again in 1813 to three and a half lacs, while so low had it fallen in 1817 that the Company abolished its commercial Residency in Dacca altogether. An apparently trifling order of the Sultan of Turkey is given as the cause of the death-blow that yet another industry in Dacca received later in the third decade of the nineteenth century. In 1835 *kashida* cloths embroidered in Dacca were sold in Calcutta to the value of four lacs of rupees. In the following year the sales only amounted to two and a half lacs, in 1837 to one and a half lacs, and in 1838 to one lac only. It is said that the majority of these embroidered cloths had been exported to Turkey, where they were used as turbans for the Sultan's troops. But the Sultan issuing an order changing the uniform

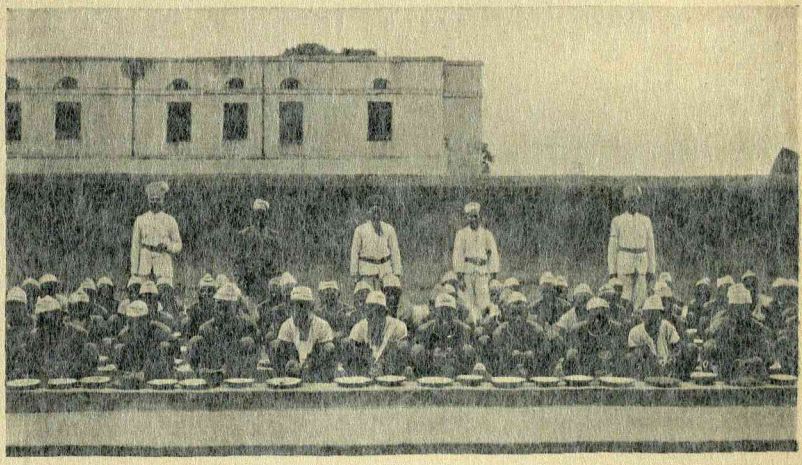
of his army, the demand from that quarter for the *kashida* cloth altogether ceased, with disastrous results to the industry in Dacca.

In almost every other direction, however, Dacca benefited greatly during the years that followed the assumption of authority by the Company. The condition of the city itself during Moghul times is almost unimaginable from a sanitary point of view to an Englishman of the nineteenth century. Undrained and unswept, the lanes and alleys of the great city of nearly a million inhabitants were foul and pestilent beyond description, and it is small wonder that sickness was prevalent and mortality extraordinarily heavy. In the earlier days large portions of the bazaar, lightly constructed with a view to that end, were burned down every year, a drastic measure of sanitation rendered necessary by months of neglect. Accidental fires, too, were of such common occurrence that people kept their valuables buried under the ground, or placed in boxes on wheels, ready at a moment's notice to be drawn away. Some attempt was made under Moghul rule to care for the poor and sick, a grant from the crown lands for the purposes of a Langar Khana, or refectory for the poor, being set aside for the purpose, but it was too small to have been able to deal at all adequately with the amount of poverty and sickness that

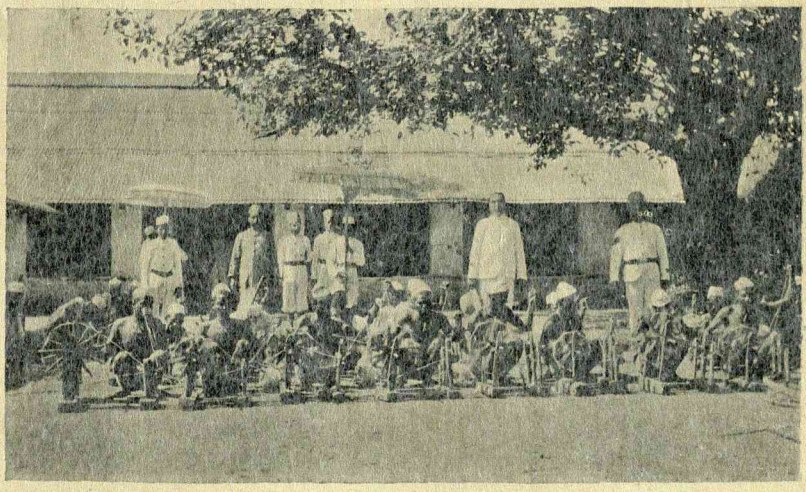
must have existed. 'Hospital charges and black doctor with medicines to attend the poor sickly people, 1,578 rupees 10 annas,' 'allowance to lame and blind, 3,600 rupees,' together with a few other items, amounting in all to something under nine thousand rupees, were apparently all that was found existing in the way of official charity in 1769. The Emperor Jehangir's orders for the construction of hospitals and refectories appear to have become a dead letter in Eastern Bengal, like so many other imperial rescripts in the last days of Moghul rule. A hospital was soon started by the Company, and a bequest, at a later date, by Mr. Mitford, once Collector and afterwards judge of the Provincial Court of Appeal in Dacca, to the extent of some eight lacs of rupees for charitable, beneficial, and public works, gave to the city the fine hospital now known by its donor's name.

But it was in the peace and quietness and settled order that the establishment of its rule gave to a distracted province that the English Company's chief claim to gratitude lay. The nineteenth century was the most peaceful that Dacca and Eastern Bengal had ever known. Undisturbed by wars and rumours of wars, and secure in the possession of their own, the people have led for the most part peaceful lives, engaged in agriculture and the growing of indigo and jute, gradually

bringing vast tracts of hitherto untouched soil under cultivation. Crime, it is true, was rife in the earlier years, but isolated cases of robbery and dacoity were small evils compared with the ravages of pirates and roving banditti of earlier days, who plundered and murdered and laid waste whole villages unchecked. Excessively prone to litigation, and much given to local disputes among themselves, the people of Eastern Bengal but seldom showed concern in wider interests and the political questions of the day. It was under the English Company as under Hindu and Mussulman rule. The bulk of the population, accepting the fact of a ruling race, cared little who their overlords might be. The spirit of fatalism, inherent among the majority of the people of Eastern Bengal, precluded all thought of rebellion against authority. It had been ordained that they should be governed. It therefore mattered little who their governors might be. If good, so much the better; if evil and tyrannical and oppressive, they must needs submit and wait until the tyranny was overpast. Only very occasionally, as in 1810, when a measure was passed that touched them too closely, have they shown any attempt at resistance. In that year a house-tax was imposed upon the city of Dacca, and the inhabitants rose in a body and presented a petition at the government katchery, which



DINNER-TIME IN THE DACCA JAIL.



PRISONERS AT WORK IN THE DACCA JAIL.

stood in the old Fort, on the site where the jail now stands. The Collector refused to receive the petition from so turbulent a mob. It contained, however, the signatures of nine thousand of the most respectable householders in Dacca, and, apart from the angry crowd that presented it, could not be altogether overlooked. It petitioned not only for the repeal of the house-tax, but also for the abolition of the stamp duty. On the Collector's refusal to receive the petition there was danger of the mob looting the katchery, but a company of Sepoys being called out it speedily dispersed, and the petition was quietly presented on the following day by delegates appointed by the signatories.

An interesting glimpse of Dacca in the first quarter of the nineteenth century has been left on record by the pen of a contemporary writer. Reginald Heber, one of the most famous names on the roll of Calcutta Bishops, visited Eastern Bengal in the course of one of his episcopal visitations in 1824. Setting out from Calcutta on June 15 in 'a fine sixteen-oared pinnace,' accompanied by his domestic chaplain, Mr. Stowe, he reached Dacca by leisurely stages on July 3. 'As we drew nearer,' he writes, 'I was surprised at the extent of the place and the stateliness of the ruins, of which, indeed, the city seemed chiefly to consist.' He was the guest of Mr. Master, the

judge of the district, and of his eighteen days' stay he has left a full account. 'Dacca is merely the wreck of its ancient grandeur,' he writes, acknowledging Mr. Master as his informant. 'Its trade is reduced to the sixtieth part of what it was, and all its splendid buildings, the castle of its founder Shahjehanguire, the noble mosque he built, and palaces of the ancient Nawabs, the factories and churches of the Dutch, French, and Portuguese nations, are all sunk into ruin and overgrown with jungle. Mr. Master has himself been present at a tyger-hunt in the court of the old palace, during which the elephant of one of his friends fell into a well overgrown with weeds and bushes. The cotton produced in this district is mostly sent to England raw, and the manufactures of England are preferred by the people of Dacca themselves for their cheapness.'

Bishop Heber was struck by the smallness of the English community in this important outpost of the Company. 'Of English there are none,' he writes, 'except a few indigo planters in the neighbourhood and those in the civil or military service.' There were, however, no less than ten companies of infantry stationed in Dacca at the time; and a small flotilla of gunboats, said to be on its way to guard the Burmese frontier, was also there temporarily. The Hindu and Mussulman population,

though less than in the prosperous days of Shaista Khan, was still considerably more than in the present day. Mr. Master estimated it at three hundred thousand, while in the last census returns the population is given as less than one-third of that figure. 'The climate of Dacca Mr. Master reckons one of the mildest in India,' writes the Bishop, 'the heat being always tempered by the vast rivers flowing near it,' and it is curious at the present day to read that 'the neighbourhood affords only one short ride at this season, and not many even when the ground is dry, being much intersected by small rivers and some large and impenetrable jungles coming pretty close to the north-east of the town.'

Of the Nawab Shams-ud-Dowlah, Bishop Heber gives an interesting account. It is with something of surprise that one reads of him as 'fancying himself a critic in Shakespeare.' The grandson of Jusserat Khan, it was only two years before that he had succeeded his brother, Nusrut Jung, as Nawab. Previous to that he had spent several years in Calcutta, where he had been kept in honourable confinement for the part he had played in a conspiracy against the Company. But in 1822 he was considered so harmless that he was allowed to succeed to most of his brother's empty honours. Though denied the State palanquin, the sign of authority, he was granted an allowance of

ten thousand rupees a month, with the title of Highness, and was permitted to maintain a Court with a company of guards of his own. His is a pathetic figure. Shorn of all power, life from the outset had little to offer him. From beginning to end it was nothing but a puppet-show. All that he could hope for was to succeed to the empty honours that his brother held. It is small wonder that in his youth he was led into joining a conspiracy that offered him a chance of breaking the bonds and playing a man's part in life. Inheriting much of his grandfather's astuteness and ability, he had no chance to show his worth. In his younger days he is described as a man of 'vigorous and curious mind, who, had his talents enjoyed a proper bent, might have distinguished himself.' But, incentive being lacking, it is not to be wondered at that, when in after days Bishop Heber met him, he had become 'infirm and indolent, more and more addicted to the listless indulgences of the Asiatic prince: pomp so far as he can afford it, dancing girls and opium, having in fact scarce any society but that of his inferiors, and being divested of any of the usual motives by which even Asiatic princes are occasionally roused to exertion.'

Dacca, in 1824, must have been a curious meeting-place of the old order and the new. In

Bishop Heber's account of his visit of ceremony to the Nawab they seem strangely to mingle. 'In the afternoon,' he wrote on July 8, 'I accompanied Mr. Master to pay a visit to the Nawab, according to appointment. We drove a considerable way through the city, then along a shabby avenue of trees intermingled with huts, then through an old brick gateway into a sort of wild-looking close, with a large tree and some bushes in the centre, and ruinous buildings all round. There was a company of Sepoys drawn up to receive us, very neatly dressed and drilled, being in fact a detachment of the Company's local regiment, and assigned to the Nawab as a guard of honour. In front was another really handsome gateway, with an open gallery, where the "nobut," or evening martial music, is performed, a mark of sovereign dignity to which the Nawab never had a just claim, but in which Government continues to indulge him. Here were the Nawab's own guard, in their absurd coats and caps, and a crowd of folk with silver sticks, as well as two *tonjons* and *chahtahs*, to convey us across the inner court. This was a little larger than the small quadrangle at All Souls, surrounded with low and irregular but not inelegant buildings, kept neatly and all whitewashed. On the right hand was a flight of steps leading to a very handsome hall, an octagon,

supported by Gothic arches, with a verandah round it, and with high Gothic windows well venetianed. The octagon was fitted up with a large round table covered with red cloth, mahogany drawing-room chairs, two large and handsome convex mirrors, which showed the room and furniture to considerable advantage, two common pier-glasses, some prints of the King, the Emperor Alexander, Lords Wellesley and Hastings and the Duke of Wellington, and two very good portraits by Chinnery of the Nawab himself and the late Nawab, his brother. Nothing was gawdy, but all extremely respectable and noblemanly. The Nawab, his son, his English secretary and the Greek priest whom he had mentioned to me, received us at the door, and he led me by the hand to the upper end of the table. We sate some time, during which conversation was kept up better than I expected: and I left the palace a good deal impressed with the good sense, information, and pleasing manners of our host.' It is the last glimpse of the old *régime*. Within less than twenty years even the very name and symbol of Mussulman authority in Dacca had passed away.

The mutiny of 1857 touched the mass of the people not at all. They watched the short drama that was played out in the Lalbagh as something apart—an interesting spectacle, in which they had

no share save as spectators. But for the English in Dacca those few anxious months in 1857 were the most exciting moments of its history throughout the nineteenth century. There were only two companies of the 73rd Native Infantry, numbering no more than two hundred and sixty, with the artillery, stationed in the city at the time. Upon the arrival of news of the outbreak of the mutiny at Meerut a spirit of unrest took possession of the Sepoys, alarming their officers for the safety of the small European community, which lay practically at their mercy. Upon advices being sent to Calcutta, a company of a hundred men of the Indian navy was at once ordered up. It was a small force, but it was the most that could be spared at that critical time, and the station put itself in what state of defence it could by enrolling all the European and Eurasian residents as volunteers. They numbered some sixty, all told. Mr. Davidson was Commissioner of Dacca at the time, Mr. Abercrombie, Judge, and Mr. Carnac, Magistrate and Collector.

All through the rains the Sepoys continued in a state of disquiet, eagerly waiting for the news that filtered down, diluted with many exaggerations, from up country. At last, on November 21, boatmen coming up the river brought the news that the Sepoys at Chittagong had mutinied. Wild

stories were soon afloat in the bazaar. It was confidently asserted that the treasuries there had been looted, and three lacs of rupees carried off in triumph by the mutineers. The head officials of the station held a hurried consultation with the officers of the two companies of Sepoys, and it was resolved that the troops should be disarmed if possible by surprise early on the following morning. At five o'clock on Sunday morning, November 22, 1857, in the cold, misty half-light of a winter dawn, thirty European volunteers and the hundred marines formed up in the open space in front of what is now the Victoria Park. From there a small company marched to the treasury, which stood on the site at present occupied by the Central Jail. There they found about thirty of the Sepoys, some on guard, some off duty, and all were disarmed without difficulty. The Sepoys quietly laid down their arms, protesting that they had not merited this disgrace, and that they had had no intention of mutinying.

The treasury secured, the sailors were at once marched to the Lalbagh, where the main body of the Sepoys were quartered. But here news of the disarming of the treasury guard had been before them, and the Sepoys were prepared to resist. As the sailors entered the Lalbagh enclosure through the broken wall near the southern gateway the

sentry fired into their midst, and one man fell. The Sepoys, committed to resistance, fired a volley, and the guns which had been placed in front of Peri Bibi's tomb were turned upon the sailors as they advanced. Most of the Sepoys had gathered on the ramparts to the left, and it was soon evident that, deprived of their officers, disorder and confusion reigned among them. Led by Lieutenant Laws, the sailors and volunteers charged the ramparts and drove the Sepoys before them towards their quarters, where they were driven from house to house till at last they reached the turret in the angle of the wall, where they made a stubborn resistance, many of them being driven over the edge of the parapet and falling to the ground, fifty feet below, on the other side. Mr. Mays, a midshipman, at the head of eight men, had meanwhile pluckily charged down upon the guns, which were taken and spiked—a deed which won for him the Victoria Cross. The Sepoys were utterly routed, and the majority of them fled, leaving forty of their number dead upon the field. Among the sailors and volunteers the casualties were few. One man had been killed by the sentry's bullet at their entrance into the fort, and nine were severely injured, of whom four subsequently died. Dr. Green, the civil surgeon, while attending to one of the injured men, was himself wounded in the thigh,

and Mr. Bainbridge, the Assistant Magistrate, fell from the ramparts and sustained severe injuries. But these were small calamities in comparison with the dangers that had threatened. Dacca had been entirely at the mercy of the mutineers, and it was largely due to the prompt action taken by the officials that all danger was averted.

The diary of Mr. Brennand, who was Principal of the Government College at the time, throws some interesting sidelights on the Dacca of 1857. Though the danger was real, and there was an undercurrent of excitement and alarm throughout the station, outwardly the daily social round went on much as in more peaceful times. In fact, from an English point of view, Dacca was probably gayer than it had ever been before. The arrival of fresh troops considerably augmented station society and in spite of the anxiety and danger social amenities were not neglected. On October 12, we learn from Mr. Brennand's diary, the Cavalry Volunteers gave a ball to the Infantry, and on November 9 the Infantry Volunteers gave a dinner to the station. It came off in Mr. Brennand's own house, and was one of the largest parties that had ever been given in Dacca. No less than seventy were invited and over fifty sat down to dinner. This was only twelve days before

the eventful 22nd when the Sepoys were disarmed and the fight took place in the Lalbagh Fort. Exciting as this event was, however, so little did it affect the official life of Dacca that on the following day Mr. Brennand records that 'everything was quiet again and we were going on with our work as if nothing had happened.' The social life of Dacca was at its height in the months that followed. Even the hot weather and rains seem to have failed to damp its energy. 'The station is very gay' is the entry in Mr. Brennand's diary of the 12th of July. 'A ball at Gunny Meah's, a station ball at Carnegie's, and a bachelor ball after that.' And again on the 15th of August: 'The station is very gay. Three balls in succession.' Six balls in Dacca in a little over a month during the rains! One can only marvel at the energy of a past generation of Anglo-Indians and the transformation that has taken place in the social life of Dacca during the past fifty years.

Great changes were impending in the city which had already seen so many vicissitudes. The marvellous progress in almost every branch of life, that seemed to keep pace with the advancing years of the nineteenth century, was about to rouse even this far-off city of the long sleep. As yet it knew nothing of railways and telegraphs: and it still stood as isolated in the midst of its network

of rivers as it had done in the earliest Mussulman days. But in 1858, that year of momentous change in India, the long days of Dacca's isolation were ended and the city was brought into close and immediate touch with the headquarters of the British power in the East. On the 18th of October, we read in Mr. Brennand's diary, telegraphic communication between Dacca and Calcutta was completed, and how great an advance that implied in the slow-moving Eastern city it is difficult to realise in these days of still more wonderful inventions. Owing to the difficulties presented by the many rivers that surround Dacca the question of a railway was less easy of solution, and the line of rail between Calcutta and Dacca is still to-day broken by a six hours' journey by boat.

The last and most important entry in Mr. Brennand's diary was made on the 5th of November 1858. 'The Proclamation of the transfer of the Government of India to the Queen,' it runs, 'was read in English and Bengali on Monday last, in the space in front of the College. The military were drawn up in line and the European residents were upon a platform erected for the purpose. Between two and three thousand people present. Some of the houses were lighted up in the evening in honour of the occasion, and there was a dinner

given by the civilians and the military to the station.'

So with its great traditions and wonderful memories the old East India Company ceased to be, and a new Empire rose on the foundations it had laid with so much labour, courage, and persistence.

CHAPTER IX

THE DACCA OF TO-DAY

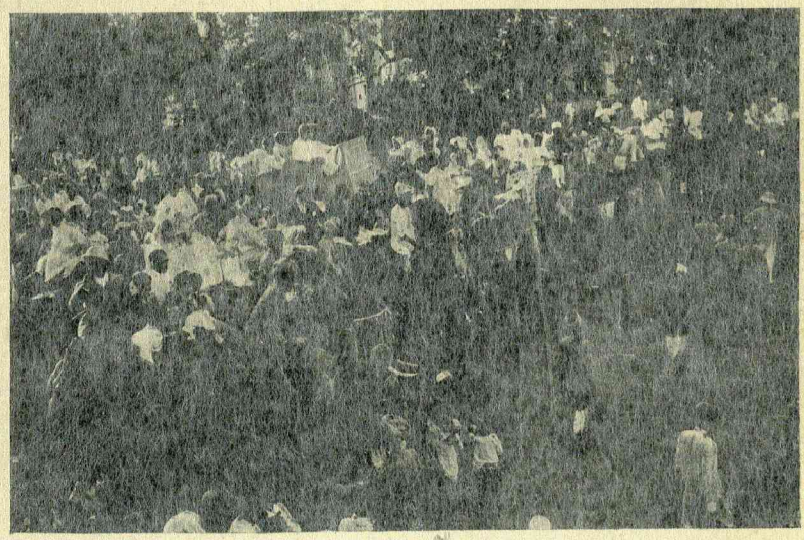
To-day Dacca stands at the parting of the ways. Behind it lies the past, with its three centuries of memories that crowd close around its crumbling mosques and palaces. Before it, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there has suddenly dawned a new future, fraught with great possibilities to the capital of a newly created province under British rule. Raised suddenly to eminence by Islam Khan, it held for almost a century its proud position as capital of all Bengal. Then, suffering eclipse as suddenly as it had risen to fame, for two centuries it lay apart from the stress and hurry of great events, its splendid traditions neglected and forgotten. In later years, under British rule, it has occupied but a humble place as the headquarters of one of the many districts of Eastern Bengal. Now, after its long sleep, there has come a re-awakening, and once more the name of Dacca figures among the capitals of the East.

The city which has suffered so many vicissi-

tudes bears unmistakable traces to-day of the transition through which it is passing. It is like an old garment with a patch of new cloth flung carelessly here and there upon its dim and fraying texture. The city of many mosques and ruined palaces, of moss-grown walls and crumbling turrets, of tortuous alleys and narrow winding byways, of secluded sunless courts and crowded tenements, still survives, wrapped in its impenetrable cloak of mystery, its countless secrets buried deep in its inmost heart and jealously safeguarded against prying eyes through all the years to come. But in the midst of it, startling in its newness, brick-red against the time-worn grey, a modern city has begun to rise. As yet it is but in its inception, and its first beginnings give but a faint forecast of what it will one day be. Yet already, in a marvellously short space of time, a temporary Government House has sprung into existence, the centre and symbol of the new life that has dawned for the old-time city. The permanent Government House is to rise later, a stately building befitting the new capital, overlooking the racecourse close by the ancient mosque and tomb of Haji Khaja Shahbaz, the merchant prince of Dacca in the days of Shaista Khan. Other buildings, designed to house the army of officials which follows in the wake of governments, are rapidly giving a modern aspect to the time-

worn city, the twentieth-century 'purple palaces of the Public Works' contrasting strangely with the graceful domes and minarets of the mosques and palaces of a bygone age.

Yet even to-day there are times when the city assumes an aspect that is wholly reminiscent of the past. Most of the great festivals, though still celebrated, have lost much of their one-time splendour and magnificence, but there is one that still retains all the vigour of its earlier days. It is the special festival of the Dacca weavers, known as the Jamastami, and held in honour of Krishna's birth on the twenty-third day of the lunar month of Sraban (August). Then, for a time, the quiet, sleepy city is transformed. Vast crowds, in all their Oriental picturesqueness, gather from far and near, thronging the main streets from end to end. It is like a scene from the middle ages as the time for the great procession draws near. This might, indeed, be the very city of Shaista Khan. All that is modern seems to have disappeared, hidden by the gaily dressed crowd that fills the roadway and swarms at every vantage-point. From window, balcony, and housetop, group beyond group looks down, alive with colour and expectancy. A company of elephants, ponderous and magnificent, stands drawn in line, waiting to take its place in the long procession as it passes. The blazing sun



THE LINE OF ELEPHANTS AT THE JAMASTAMI FESTIVAL IN DACCA.

beats down, and scarce a breath of wind stirs in the air. Yet, hour after hour, the intense interest holds, undaunted by the heat of the day. And then at last it comes. Slowly, amidst a scene of indescribable excitement the great procession heaves in sight. Merged in the crowd, a veritable sea of heads, it sways from side to side, ever moving like some restless tide that rolls onward almost imperceptibly yet steadily draws near. Huge effigies, representations of gods and goddesses, or grotesque figures of beasts and men in all the glory of tinsel and paint, are borne aloft, the wonder and admiration of the crowd. Some of the erections, lightly constructed of bamboo, stand fifty feet high, depicting whole stories in the glittering scenes and figures that adorn them. The subjects chosen for representation exhibit the widest catholicity of taste. The Fall of Port Arthur, a strangely modern and foreign incident to figure in this old-world festival, is shown in tier on tier of one of the most magnificent structures, the designer's idea of war and of Russian and Japanese being quaint in the extreme. Behind, more in keeping with the celebration of the great god's birth, follows a huge car with an immense representation of Krishna, ablaze with colour and the flash of jewels. And so, with its wonderful Eastern fascination, the great procession winds

slowly on, and for a few brief hours the quiet, slow-moving Dacca of to-day is stirred by a passing memory of the life and pageantry of the viceregal capital of the olden times.

But deep down in the heart of the city, close by the river-bank, something of the old aspect it must once have worn in days gone by still remains. Time and climate, and the vandal hand of man, have done their worst, crumbling even the massive walls that the Mussulman architects loved to build, and putting to base uses once proud and noble buildings. Yet much of their dignity and beauty survives even in decay. It is pre-eminently a Mussulman city—a city of mosques built by the Faithful, strong in the belief that for him 'who builds a mosque on earth God will build seventy palaces in Paradise.' Of pre-Mussulman days, before Islam Khan sailed down the river in search of his new capital, there is little to be told. Whether it was already a city with a history of its own, or whether its existence began with the coming of Islam Khan, is still open to dispute, so vague are the traditions that linger round the beginnings of things in Dacca. The Dhakeswari Temple, from which, one tradition has it, the city takes its name, is the most celebrated Hindu building in the district, but its origin is shrouded in mystery that none may penetrate. First built,

it is said, by Ballal Sen, on the site where he found the image of the goddess hidden in the jungle, it was restored by Man Singh during his brief stay in the city, the famous Rajput general rejoicing to find this symbol of his creed among the many mosques of another faith. But all signs of these older buildings, if such existed, have disappeared. The present temple is only some two hundred years old, and is said to have been built by a Hindu agent in the employ of the East India Company. Beyond its vague traditions, and the veneration in which it is held by the Hindus for many miles around, there is little of interest in the Temple of Dhakeswari of to-day.

There are few other buildings whose memories carry them back into the remote past beyond the days of Islam Khan. Binat Bibi's mosque is probably the oldest building now standing in the city. It was built in 1456 A.D. in the days when Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah was King of Bengal, with his capital away at Gaur, over a hundred and fifty years before Islam Khan set out to found his new capital in the East. Small and solidly built, with no architectural pretensions, its only interest lies in its antiquity, and in the fact that its existence proves that there were Mussulmans settled where Dacca now stands long before the days of Islam Khan. Who Binat Bibi was, or what memory of

her the mosque perpetuates, has long since been forgotten.

In the centre of the town, near by the place where the old fort once stood, survive the remains of another mosque, built, according to the inscription, only two years later than Binat Bibi's. Struck by lightning and shaken by the earthquake of 1897, it has at last, after more than four centuries, succumbed to the ravages of time, and only the walls remain. It was built while Nasir-uddin was still King of Bengal, and the inscription, which has survived intact, states that it was finished on 28 Shaban 1458 A.D. The walls, some four feet thick, stand firm as if invulnerable against the onslaught of storm and time.

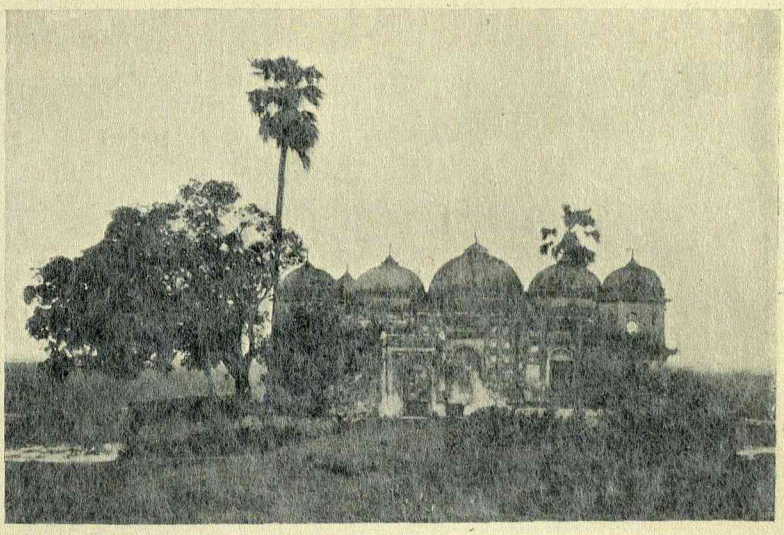
But it was not until the hundred years of Dacca's viceroyalty that there grew up the numberless mosques and palaces that still dominate the city to-day. Of Islam Khan, the founder of the city, but few memories survive in brick and stone. In Islampore, a quarter of the city which still preserves his name, stands the most important building which tradition ascribes to Dacca's first Viceroy. It is a plain, unpretentious mosque, designed for utility and permanence rather than for architectural effect, and to such good purpose that for three hundred years it has survived the vicissitudes of the city, and to-day the voice of

prayer is still heard within its walls as in the days of Islam Khan.

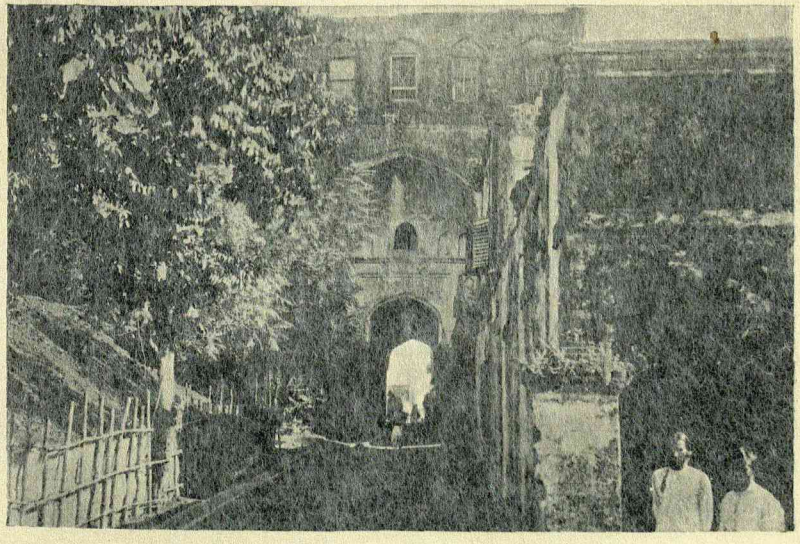
Of the old fort, built by Ibrahim Khan, the third Moghul Viceroy at Dacca, nothing now remains. Containing the Palace, the Courts of Justice, and the Mint, it stood on the site at present occupied by the lunatic asylum and the central jail. It was in the palace in the fort that the Naib Nazim was living when Lieutenant Swinton, the English Agent, came in 1765 to take over the Dewani on behalf of the East India Company. Another residence was found for him and his successors, and the buildings in the fort were used for many years as the headquarters of the newly established British rule in Dacca.

Next to the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan, it is that of Shah Shuja, the pleasure-loving son of Shah Jehan, who was doomed to so tragic an end, which has left its impress most deeply marked on Dacca. Some of the finest buildings in the city bear witness to his taste in architecture and his love of magnificence and display. The son of the builder of the Taj at Agra, it was small wonder that he set himself to beautify the capital in the East over which he had been called to rule. The Bara Katra, the beautiful building that faces the river half a mile down stream from the Lalbagh fort, probably was originally intended as

a palace for Shah Shuja. It is effectively designed, stately and imposing as it towers up, turning its solid front to face the river. Its central gateway is of magnificent proportions, lofty, with dome-shaped roof, flanked by smaller entrances and crowned by two octagonal towers. Within is a veritable network of rooms and corridors and terraces, grass-grown now and long since disused, open to all the winds of heaven, a home for bats and owls and every creeping thing. Built by Mir Abul Kasim, the Dewan, in 1644, so great was its beauty when it reached completion that the inscription declares that it puts High Heaven to shame, and is itself a foretaste of the Paradise to come. But Shah Shuja, for some reason unexplained, appears never to have used it as a residence. He established it as a caravanserai, a public halting-place where travellers and the poor might find rest and shelter. 'Sultan Shah Shuja was famed for deeds of charity,' ran the inscription which once stood over the city gate of the Katra. 'Wherefore, being hopeful of the mercy of God, the sacred edifice was endowed with twenty-two shops attached to it, on the rightful and lawful condition that the officials in charge of the endowments should expend the income derived from them upon the repairs of the buildings and upon the poor, and that they should not take any rent



THE SATGUMBAZ MOSQUE.



THE BARA KATRA.

from any deserving person alighting therein. So that the pious act may reflect upon the monarch in this world, and that they should not act contrariwise, or else they would be called to account on the day of retribution.' Shorn now of much of its glory, with its walls broken and decayed, robbed of its northern gateway, and with new buildings crowding it close, it bears upon its face the impress of 'Ichabod' writ large. Yet, so long as the walls remain, nothing can destroy its charm, and it is to be hoped that the new Government will not fail to preserve what is left of one of the most beautiful buildings of the Dacca of a former time.

Another memorial of Sultan Shuja's viceroyalty is the Hossaini Delan. The tradition runs that Mir Murad, Superintendent of the Nawara, dreamed a dream in which the Imam Husain appeared to him and desired him to build a house of mourning in memory of his martyrdom. The very next morning Mir Murad started to build the Hossaini Delan. Here, from that day to this, the great festival of the Mohurrum has been celebrated with all its traditional pomp and circumstance. Lit with a thousand lights on the tenth day of the festival, its courts filled with a throng of eager worshippers, it still retains something of the life and interest of other days. Within a

mausoleum close beside it lie buried the last four Naib Nazims of Dacca—Nawab Nusrut Jung, who died in 1822; Shams-ud-Dowlah, 1831; Kumr-ud-Dowlah, 1834; and Ghaziuddin, with whom the line ended in 1843.

A curious tradition lingers round the Churihatta mosque, which is yet another survival of Sultan Shuja's time. It is said that it was originally built as a Hindu temple, a tradition which its vaulted roof and general appearance tend to confirm. The story is told that a Hindu officer of the Moghul Government was ordered to build a mosque, but that, taking advantage of the absence of the viceroy and the chief officers of Government from Dacca during the interval when the city had ceased for a time to be the capital of all Bengal, he built a temple instead, and it was not until it was finished and the idols were placed within it that the fact came to the knowledge of the viceroy. Thereupon orders were issued to cast out the idols and consecrate the building as a mosque of the true faith. In seeming corroboration of this story there was found in the compound some years ago a stone image of the Hindu deity Basudev, which may have been one of those ignominiously cast out of the temple by order of Sultan Shuja. But if this story is true the case was an exceptional one, since the Mahomedan conquerors in Eastern Bengal

interfered but little with the worship and religious beliefs of the Hindus, whose temples everywhere remained unmolested in close proximity to the mosques of the Faithful. Religious persecution on any extended scale is one of the evils which Eastern Bengal has escaped through all the many vicissitudes of its long and chequered history.

More than a mile beyond the limits of the present city stands all that remains of the Idgah, the once beautiful building where, in the old days, the Faithful of the city came to offer up their prayers at the great Id festival. Only a single line of wall survives, exquisitely pierced and traced, though sadly broken and fast crumbling to decay. Once the great city of Dacca lay close all round, extending for miles on either hand. The Idgah was in the very centre of the busy life of court, and mart, and camp, and many a stirring sight it must have witnessed as the crowd of white-robed worshippers thronged from every quarter of the vast city to celebrate the welcome festival that closes the long fast of the Ramazan. Now the portion of the city that once lay close around the Idgah has utterly vanished, leaving it solitary and neglected, stranded alone in a wide waste, as if mourning for the days of its glories that have for ever passed.

Beyond the Idgah, further away from the city,

lay another centre of interest, the memories of which have long since grown vague and dim. Out in the waste, half hidden in bramble growth, a well and a broken arch are the only visible signs of the Sikh monastery that once flourished here. The well is known as Guru Nanak's Well, after Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. There is a local tradition that the great teacher once visited Dacca and drank from this well, to the waters of which miraculous properties have ever since been attributed. Another and more possible story is that it was Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, who came to Dacca in the time of Aurungzebe and gathered about him a large following, which has never quite died out in the city. Close by the racecourse there is a Sikh temple where the Sikhs still meet and worship.

Much had been done, during this first period of Dacca's prosperity as capital of Bengal, to beautify the city and make it worthy of the honoured position it had so suddenly acquired, but it was not until the long viceroyalty of Shaista Khan that Dacca became famed as the city of mosques and palaces. Himself a great builder, he gave to the architecture of the day in his own capital so distinctive a style that it soon came to be known as *Shaistakhani*. It must have been almost immediately on his arrival in Dacca that he com-

GURU NANAK, THE FOUNDER OF THE SIKH RELIGION.

menced his first work, the Chhota Katra. Overlooking the Buriganga, only a hundred yards away upstream from the Bara Katra, it is a beautiful building, well proportioned, with massive walls that have stoutly withstood the ravages of time. But later years have treated it with scant respect and put it to base uses, making of it a storehouse for coal and lime. Within the courtyard a small circular mausoleum once covered the grave of Bibi Champa who gives her name to this quarter of the city—Champatoli. Of the lady herself nothing is known with certainty, but it is probable that she was one of the daughters of Shaista Khan. Over the door of the mausoleum, it is said, there was once a tablet bearing an inscription, but if such existed, it has long since disappeared, and nothing now remains to tell the story of Bibi Champa. As so often in Dacca, only the name survives. All else is dead.

Close to the Chhota Katra is the Chauk, the market square, its centre filled with a jumble of tiny booths, closely packed on market days with a bantering, gossiping crowd of humanity. Right in the centre, half hidden by the booths, stands a huge cannon, a curious survival in the midst of the busy mart. There is no authentic record of its history, but tradition says that it was one of two such that Islam Khan brought with him when he

came to found here his capital. The other one is said to have been lost in the river, and even to-day the superstitious native attributes to this lost gun the curious sounds, as of the distant booming of a cannon, which are occasionally heard in the vicinity, and to account for which no satisfactory explanation is forthcoming. Known locally as the Barisal guns, the deep, vibrating sounds can be distinctly heard in Dacca, and it is small wonder, no other explanation being to hand, that the native superstition attributes them to the gun that lies deep down beneath the river. The gun that still remains in the market-place has become in consequence an object of great veneration, and those who come to buy and sell, place their votive offerings round it before the business of the day begins, with a muttered prayer that their enterprise may prove successful.

Overlooking the Chauk from the west is a handsome three-domed mosque, built in the *Shaista-khani* style of architecture. Raised on a hollow platform some ten feet high, it towers up, a solid mass of masonry, overlooking the flat low-roofed booths of the bazaar. Here the Naib Nazims in the old days came in state to repeat the time-honoured prayers at the great festivals, and though much of the pomp and state have disappeared, the feet of the Faithful still throng the courts of the

Chauk Mosque, and, illuminated at the time of the Id or the Bakrid, it still retains something of its old life and colour.

But the most beautiful of all the buildings erected by Shaista Khan is the mausoleum he caused to be raised over the tomb of his favourite daughter, Peri Bibi. She was the wife of Prince Mahomed Azim, third son of the Emperor Aurungzebe, and he it was who acted as Viceroy of Bengal during Shaista Khan's two years' absence from Dacca in 1678 and 1679. During that time he commenced building a fort which was to be worthy of the capital of a great province, and which he named, after his august father, Fort Aurungabad. It has, however, always been generally known as the Lalbagh Fort, and it is perhaps around it that memories gather closest in Dacca. Planned on a generous scale, it was destined, like many another Mussulman building in Eastern Bengal, never to reach completion. In the second year of his viceroyalty Prince Mahomed Azim was recalled to assist Aurungzebe in his lifelong struggle with the Mahrattas, and Shaista Khan returned, after this brief interval, to take up again the reins of government in his much-loved capital. But the Lalbagh Fort, though far advanced, was little likely to find favour in the eyes of Shaista Khan. It was no child of his, and but few Mussulman governors

were content to carry out the designs of their predecessors and complete the buildings that they had begun. And in this case there was another reason that brought the Lalbagh Fort into disfavour with Shaista Khan. It was while her husband had been busy in the building of it that his favourite daughter, Peri Bibi—the 'Lady Fairy,' as she was affectionately called—had died suddenly. To a superstitious Court that alone was sufficient to stamp the enterprise as unlucky, and Shaista Khan added but one thing to his predecessor's work, leaving the rest unfinished. Within the walls of the Fort Peri Bibi lies buried, and over her grave rises the stately mausoleum that the great Viceroy raised to her memory. It is reputed the finest building in all Eastern Bengal. In the inner apartment, built of marble and chunar stone, with doors of sandalwood, lies the tomb itself, and over it a graceful dome exquisitely proportioned. Round the inner sanctuary runs a cloister divided into compartments, once embellished with fine mosaics, which time and many vandal coats of whitewash have done much to obliterate and destroy. But though long neglected and fallen upon evil days, it still remains an abiding monument of Peri Bibi and of Shaista Khan.

Of the Fort itself only the battlements facing the river, with terraces and turrets and two im-

posing gateways, still remain. Grass-grown and falling to decay, the old red walls, with the thin, flat Mussulman bricks here and there destroyed and broken, have but grown the more picturesque with age, the high-arched gateway, rising tier on tier, looking out like a watchtower over river and land. The river that once flowed beneath its walls has now receded, as if it, too, deserted it in its decay.

Within the Fort, facing Peri Bibi's tomb, stands the Hummam, a two-storied building with stone pillars and turreted roof, now repaired and modernised without, until it looks strangely out of place in its old-world setting. Within, on the lower floor, was the Hummam, the bath from which the building took its name, while the upper floor was used by Prince Mahomed Azim as his Hall of Audience. In later times, it too has fallen on less prosperous days, being recently used by the Bengal Police, whose brand-new quarters, hideously incongruous, now crown the ramparts a few hundred yards away. Further off, beyond the mausoleum of Peri Bibi, against the western wall of the Fort is Prince Mahomed Azim's mosque, built and finished by him during his brief viceroyalty. To-day it bears deep upon it the impress of desolation. The goats and cattle wander unmolested through its once sacred courts and precincts, and the voice of prayer is no longer heard within its gates.

The last stirring events enacted within the walls of the Lalbagh Fort were in the dark days of 1857. Since then the uneventful years have passed and left no record of their passing, save in an added touch of decay and desolation. It is still owned by the descendants of the proud Amir-ul-Umara Shaista Khan, to whom it was given as a favour by the Emperor Aurungzebe. In 1844 it was permanently leased from his heirs by the Government of Bengal at an annual rent of sixty rupees, which is still drawn by the direct descendant of the former Viceroy. Close beside the Bara Katra lives this twentieth-century representative of the once proud family and traditions of Shaista Khan. He is a pathetic figure in the midst of the decay and desolation, a reminder of a day long dead. As he moves through the silent, deserted rooms of the Bara Katra, or walks with humble tread over the historical ground of the Lalbagh Fort, the thoughts go back irresistibly to the great Viceroy, the Amir-ul-Umara Shaista Khan, Lord of the Nobles, and the contrast between his magnificence and the fallen fortunes of his latter-day descendants is a living sermon on the vanity of human greatness. Sadly fallen from the high estate his family once held, and bereft of its once great possessions, the pathetic figure of the heir of Shaista Khan moves

like a shadow amidst the scenes and memories of the past.

Some two miles north of the present city there is yet another memorial of Shaista Khan, almost rivalling in elegance and beauty the famous mausoleum of Peri Bibi. The Satgumbaz mosque, so called from its seven domes, stood in the beginning right on the edge of the northern bank of the Buriganga, but the river, fickle in its course like all the rivers of the East, has now receded, leaving a mile or more of low-lying rice land between it and the walls of the mosque by which it once flowed. It is a picturesque building, standing alone on the bank and framed against the low marshland, its seven exquisitely proportioned domes outlined against the sky. In the centre are the three large domes, flanked at the four corners of the mosque by the four smaller ones, each crowning an octagonal tower. Towering above, a slender willowy palm looks down upon them all, adding the last touch of Eastern colour to the scene. The inscription that once stood over the entrance has disappeared, but otherwise the mosque is in a good state of repair, and, though lonely and deserted now that the city and the river have withdrawn, the voice of prayer still ascends from it to heaven as in the days of Shaista Khan.

Though the Amir-ul-Umara has left behind

him so many evidences of his viceroyalty in brick and stone, little remains of the residences where he kept his Court and spent the long years of his stay in Dacca. It is probable that when visited by Tavernier in 1666, which was some twelve years before the Lalbagh Fort was commenced, Shaista Khan was living in the palace known as the Katra Pakartali, which once stood to the north-east of the mosque in Babu Bazaar, on the site of the Modern Medical School and Zenana Hospital. Of the palace itself, of no great pretensions even in its heyday one would gather from Tavernier, no trace survives to-day. But the Babu Bazaar Ghat, close by, still exists, with the foundations of the Naubut Khana still visible, and the mosque, a small, plain building, must be much as it was in the days of Shaista Khan, but little changed by time. The inscription upon it, unique in this respect among all the inscriptions in the city, is in Persian prose, composed apparently by the Viceroy himself. It is said to have been built during the first period of Shaista Khan's governorship, but the inscription has been so much damaged by fire that the date is no longer visible. To the north of the mosque stood the mausoleum of another of the Viceroy's daughters, Shahzadi Khanam, known as Lado Bibi; but this too has been swept away by the

modern builder to make room for modern improvements, and the plain, utilitarian structure of the Zenana Hospital now occupies its site.

With the departure of Shaista Khan at the close of his long viceroyalty, the period of Dacca's greatest prosperity came to an end. Since that date few buildings of interest have risen to beautify the city, which for so many years was left forgotten to sleep its long sleep. Khan Mirdha's mosque was one of the last buildings of note erected while Dacca was yet the capital of all Bengal. During the viceroyalty of Murshid Kuli Khan it was built by the order of the chief Qazi of the city, the Defender of the Law, as he is described in the inscription. The mosque has fallen now on evil days, the lower floor being used as stalls for the municipal bullocks, and furnishing a barely sufficient income to pay for the *muezzin* and to light the mosque at sundown. In a better state of repair is the Lalbagh mosque, a large, solid building, just beyond the southern wall of the Fort, with space sufficient for some fifteen hundred worshippers, but with few of the architectural pretensions that mark all the buildings connected with the name of Shaistâ Khan. It was built on the eve of the final desertion of Dacca by the viceroys of Bengal in the days of Farrukh Siyar, who was destined so shortly afterwards to set out

from his eastern capital to ascend the imperial throne at Delhi.

It was in the Nimtoli Kothi that the last scenes of Mussulman Dacca were enacted. Turned out of their palace in the old fort in 1765 when the East India Company took over charge of the Dewani, Nawab Jusserat Khan moved, after a brief stay at the Bara Katra, into the Nimtoli Kothi, which was to be his home and that of his successors until 1843, when the last Naib Nazim died childless, and the Company gathered up into its own hands the last remnants of the sovereignty which it had in reality so long held. The Nimtoli Kothi, which for nearly three-quarters of a century had housed the fading glories of the Naib Nazims, was then put up to auction, and many of the buildings were pulled down. The Baradari, however, a large hall of fine proportions, still survives. It was here that the last of the Naib Nazims held their court, and in imagination one can conjure up again the scene—the great pretensions, the effort at display, the pomp and ceremonial, the pathetic adherence to custom and tradition, and hovering over all, unmistakable but indefinable, the spirit of a departed glory and a lost cause.

In the Dacca of to-day the Nawab Khaja Salimullah Bahadur plays a large part. In no way connected with the old Nawabs of Dacca,

whose line expired in 1843, the present title was at first bestowed by the British Government in 1875 as a purely personal distinction upon Khaja Abdul Ghani Mia, grandfather of Nawab Salimullah. The rise of the family to wealth and influence reads almost like a romance of the days of Shaista Khan. Born in Kashmir, Khaja Abdul Hakim, the founder of the family, set out early in life, like many another of his countrymen, to seek fortune at the Imperial Court. There his promising career was cut short only by the final overthrow of the Moghuls, and, doubtless attracted by the rumours of the wealth of the Eastern Province which had always been looked upon in olden days as the treasure-house of the Court of Delhi, he set out to pursue his fortunes on the outskirts of the Empire. Establishing himself as a trader in Sylhet, such success attended his efforts that he was soon able to send for his father and brothers from Kashmir, severing all connection with his old home and settling down with the determination to secure a position for himself in Eastern Bengal. In the next generation the family removed to Dacca, and gradually acquired large landed property in that district and in Barisal, Tipperah, and Mymensingh. It was left, however, for the Nawab Abdul Ghani to reach the highest dignities and honours. The wealthiest

and most influential Zemindar in Eastern Bengal at the time of the Mutiny, he loyally placed all his resources at the disposal of the British Government, and himself did much to allay the unrest among the native population. Liberal and enlightened, he was foremost in the relief of distress and in all works of charity, many of his gifts being on a princely scale. To him Dacca owes its splendid water supply, upon which he spent some two and a half lacs of rupees. The foundation-stone of the waterworks was laid in August 1874 by Lord Northbrook, the first Viceroy to visit Dacca since Azim Oshan, Aurungzebe's grandson, had shaken the dust of the city off his feet over a hundred and sixty years before. Created Nawab in 1875, a distinction which was made hereditary in 1877, and K.C.S.I. in 1886, Abdul Ghani died full of years and honours in 1896. His son, Khaja Ahsanulla, who had long been in charge of his father's vast estates, succeeded, and for seven years worthily carried on the great traditions of loyalty and generosity which had been bequeathed to him. It is to him that Dacca owes the installation of the electric light which has done so much to improve the city. Created Nawab in 1875, Nawab Bahadur in 1892, and K.C.I.E. in 1897, he only survived his father seven years, and his son the present Nawab Khaja Salimullah Bahadur now

reigns in his stead. The British Government has already shown its appreciation of the loyal assistance he has given to the making of the new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam by conferring upon him the distinction of the C.S.I. at the commencement of the present year. The leader of the Mussulman community in Eastern Bengal, he holds a position of unrivalled influence and dignity in the new Province of to-day.

Of the various European factories that were established in Dacca during the period when the city was the capital of Bengal all trace, save in one instance, has disappeared. The English factory, the first insignificant outpost in Eastern Bengal of the race destined in the end to found an empire of which Shaista Khan himself could never have dreamed, was started during the early years of the great Viceroy's long reign, in 1668. It stood on the site now occupied by the Dacca College, and for a hundred years it formed the centre of English interests in Eastern Bengal. The French factory, founded within a few years of it, stood where a portion of the palace of the present Nawab now stands, close by the river. For over a hundred years it maintained its struggle for existence, in constant rivalry with the other factories, until it was taken by the English in 1757 during the war with France. The Mitford Hospital now covers

the site of the Dutch factory, which survived until 1781, when it, too, was swept out of existence after its long struggle. All that remains to-day of the various factories is a portion of the house which the Portuguese once made their headquarters. It must have been in those days a fine, commodious building; but, like everything else in this city of the long sleep, it is sadly fallen and decayed, retaining but a memory of its better days.

The English cemetery, picturesquely situated a little apart from the noise and stir of the great city, is full of many memories. So utterly unlike the ordered graveyards of the West, there is something strikingly alien and pathetic about this 'God's-acre' of the East. The quaint Moorish gateway, the avenue of sad whispering casuarina trees, the luxuriant vegetation, the moss-grown pyramids and obelisks, seem to accentuate the sense of exile and decay. As one moves along the narrow paths among the graves, some surmounted by pretentious mausoleums, some beneath modest headstones, some with only a mound of earth to mark their site, one is irresistibly carried back in thought to those early days of the English pioneers when death lurked near, and few families escaped homewards leaving no toll behind them in the graveyards of the East. It was among the children, the young Englishmen fresh from

home, and the young Englishwomen who had braved the dangers of the unknown to share a brother's or a husband's lot, that death was busiest. How many hopes and ambitions have been laid to rest beneath those silent stones! Here lies the infant child of James Rennell and Jane Thackeray, a model of whose grave in silver, taken by the heart-broken mother to her English home, is still among the possessions of the family. Here, beneath the oldest inscription of all, lie the remains of the Rev. Joseph Paget, Chaplain of Bengal, who died while visiting Dacca, aged only twenty-six, on March 26, 1724, just two years less one day since his arrival in India, his sudden death leaving Bengal without a chaplain for two years and five months. Not far off stand the monuments of Thomas Teake, October 1750, and Nicholas Clerembault, November 1755, chiefs of the Dacca factory, the former aged only thirty-two. Here, side by side, beneath a curious double tomb, lie Robert Crawfurd, factor of the Company, and his wife, the latter dying in June 1776, aged twenty-three, and the former surviving her less than two months. Reading strangely beside these English names is the inscription to one Wonsi Quan, erected by his friend Wona Chow in 1796, both Chinese converts to Christianity. Still more strange is the most imposing monument of

all, which bears no inscription to tell who rests beneath. A high octagonal Gothic tower with eight windows, the whole surmounted by a cupola in the same style, it stands nameless, dominating the whole cemetery and jealously keeping watch over the three graves that lie within. Only the vague tradition survives that it is the tomb of 'Columbo Saheb, a Servant of the Company,' but a search among all available sources fails to bring to light any such name in the Company's annals. Even so long ago as 1824, Bishop Heber, who consecrated the cemetery on July 10 of that year, could obtain no further information about it from the officials of the day. Silent and impressive, the towering mausoleum keeps well the secret that it holds.

CHAPTER X

THE EIGHTH DAY OF THE MOON IN CHAIT.

'WHOSOEVER bathes in the water of the Brahmaputra on the eighth day of the moon in the month of Chait finds shelter and forgiveness beneath the omnipotent feet of Brahma the Divine.'

In one long continuous stream, ceaseless, unending, like the river that flows beside the sacred ghats, the pilgrims come, wending their way towards the holy place, as the appointed hour draws nigh. All day long on the seventh day of the moon they have hurried onward, winding along the narrow paths between the fields like busy ants that turn aside neither to the right hand nor to the left, but press straight onward to their goal. This is to them the greatest of all the yearly round of many festivals. 'Know this, O thou that seekest after truth. The virtues of all the holy places in the world meet in the Brahmaputra on the eighth day of the moon in Chait.' The day is full of hope and expectation for the morrow. 'At the very touch of the water of the

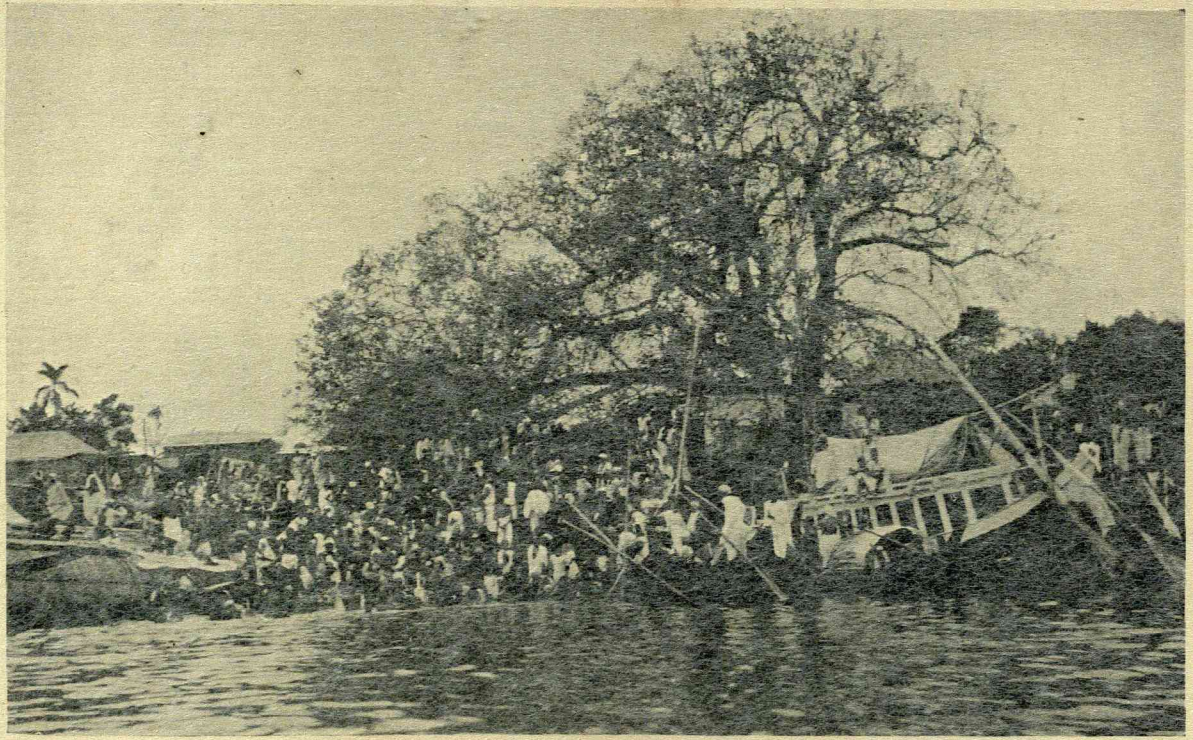
river all are absolved from sin, and by him who bathes in its sacred waters everlasting salvation is attained.' The stream of pilgrims, moved by one common impulse, presses onward, eager to obtain the beneficent promises of the gods.

It is a wonderful crowd. Many a weary mile has been tramped ere the sacred river is reached, and often the pilgrims bear upon them plainly marked the burden and heat of the way. From Dacca and Naraingunj near at hand, from Mymensingh, Comilla and Barisal further afield, from every corner of Eastern Bengal, they have come in their tens of thousands, by train, by boat, and on foot, to this great festival of the washing away of sins. Strangely intent, strangely earnest, this is to them no mere occasion of merrymaking, tinged only with the scant performance of some perfunctory rite, almost forgotten amidst the cries of them that buy and sell even in the very precincts of the most holy place. Buying and selling and all the accompaniments of a *mela* there must necessarily be where half a million people of the East gather, but the one main object of the festival, the washing away of sins, is marked clearly in the eager faces of the pilgrims as they hurry onward with bent heads. Unmindful, oblivious of the way and all its incidents, they pass on, silent for the most part as if in meditation on the greatness

of the gods and the wonder of the promise that on the morrow shall meet with its fulfilment. Only occasionally, as they near the holy place and the tide of enthusiasm surges high, they give vent to one long continuous cry, weird and plaintive, rising higher and higher like the appeal of some mysterious denizen of the jungle throwing its note of mystery and wonder out upon the silent awesome world.

They have banded themselves together in groups of a dozen or twenty for safety by the way. Quaintly a line of women marches, single file, one man only with them, tramping steadily ahead in charge. Each group represents some far-off village, all the women of which have started on this journey of such promise, leaving their menfolk behind, and taking with them but one of the village elders to protect them by the way. The women outnumber the men by five to one. It is a striking fact among this people in whose midst the women play so small a part. As the endless stream of pilgrims passes by, one's wonder grows. The element of youth seems almost wanting. Old, feeble, wrinkled beyond belief, bent with age and weary with the way, they pass on, each with the roll of bedding, and bundle containing the few necessities of life, which are all the comforts they will know throughout the great Snan Festival.

Timorous and weak, scarce ever moving from the tiny plot of ground that they call home, this journey is to them a thing of great adventure. None knows just where and how the vast crowd of pilgrims will spend the coming night. Booths there are to be had, rough roofs of matting lightly held on bamboo posts, but these are only for the more fortunate among the pilgrims, for those endowed with the wherewithal to pay, and these are few. For, next to the fact that they are old, one sees that they are poor. This is no festival of the rich. The zemindar, the opulent money-lender, the well-to-do babu, these are all there, but lost to sight among the hundreds of thousands of the poor and needy. Ill clad in a single garment of white, the pilgrims look almost as if they had adopted some sombre uniform for this great festival. Only here and there, a woman, younger than the rest, has given her love of colour rein in a light red-bordered sari that adds a welcome touch of brilliance to the white-robed throng. But for most of them the joys and vanities of life are past. With youth gone—fled with all the rapidity of youth in the East—perchance widowed, ousted from place and power in the home by the springing up of younger generations, their thoughts linger on the promises of the gods and the blessedness of that nirvana which for them may be so



THE WASHING AWAY OF SINS IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA DURING THE NANGALBANDH MELA.

soon attained. So each with her joys and sorrows, her hopes and fears, each with her own life-story hidden in her great reserve in the innermost recesses of the heart, the seekers after the great washing away of sins pass on to await the hour when the waters shall be stirred to such sublime and wonderful effect.

Suddenly, with all the variableness of the East, a storm sweeps over the pilgrims' way. The white-robed figures disappear as if by magic, like ferrets seeking cover underground. The paths so lately thronged lie silent and deserted. The rain pours down as if the floodgates of heaven had been unloosed. Huge puddles fill the paddy-fields. The roads that the pilgrims so lately trod dryshod are damp and slippery, soon, under the passing of many feet, to become a veritable sea of mud. It is an extraordinary sight, this sudden cessation of all life. Only the heavy, pitiless rain beats down upon a world that waits its passing. Then, no less wonderful, there comes the re-awakening. The storm of wind and rain dies down. As swiftly as it came it passes. And even as it ceases the whole world within one's ken awakens. The white-robed figures creep out like rabbits from a warren. From mysterious and unsuspected hiding-places, where they had sheltered from the storm, they rise and shake their rain-soaked garments, flying them wide

to dry in the breeze beneath the returning sun. Then the endless stream of pilgrims sets in again, until at last the sun wanes, and the brief Indian twilight hovers in a wondrous haze of purple and gold, ere it sinks, reluctant, into the grey-clad arms of night. And even then, in the light of the moon and the stars, the ceaseless tide of pilgrims still moves on.

All night in the vast encampment on the river-bank there is a stir of expectation. The hoarse babel of tens of thousands of voices goes out into the night, dull, monotonous, ebbing and flowing, yet continuous, like the roar of some distant sea upon the beach. A myriad lights twinkle out in the blackness of the night, tiny *chiraghs*, nothing but rough-cut wicks in earthen saucers of oil. The boats along the bank lie close packed, wedged in, each filled with its full tale of humanity. The outlines of the country-boats, of every shape and size, rise black and weird in the ruddy glow. Faces, old and young, peer out of the darkness, distorted into phantom elflike shapes by the flickering light. The noise of the tomtoms throbs out, but the stirring cries of the day have ceased. The faintest breath of air stirs the dead stillness of the night. It is the herald of the dawn, and one by one the lamps flicker and die out as if they feared to meet the coming day. The Brahmaputra, the Great, the

Divine, flows by unceasingly, waiting for the dawn that shall bring to it its few brief hours of healing and omnipotence.

The origin of the Nangalbandh festival is as shrouded in mystery as most other things in this land of fleeting memories. One asks in vain of the worshippers who throng with eager feet the way to this most holy place. They only know that it is holy. This they cling to as the unquestioned belief of centuries. Into the why and wherefore they make no search, blissfully content, as is the nature of the Oriental, to accept what is and let things be. Only here and there from some venerable patriarch, in whose memory the stories of his childhood's days still vaguely linger, can be gleaned strange rambling tales of gods and men. Once in the distant past, no man knows where, there lived a great and holy sage, one Jamadagni. His wife was Renuka, a princess of royal blood, famed for her rank and beauty. To them were born five sons, but of them all there was none to be compared with Ram, the youngest. In all manly sports he excelled, and, his favourite weapon being the axe, they gave to him the name of Parasuram. But in spite of the devotion of her five sons and of the holy sage her husband, Renuka sighed for the gaiety of the days she had once known. The sage lived the life of an ascetic in the forest, and his

wife's thoughts flew back with regret continually to her life as a princess in her father's court.

Now it chanced one day that there passed before the door of her humble abode a neighbouring king with all his following, and Renuka, seeing them, wept for the pomps and vanities of life that were no longer hers. In this mood there came to her Jamadagni, her husband. Discovering why she wept, he grew enraged that this worldliness should have survived in the woman he had so long since taken to wife, and who had become the mother of his children. Turning to his sons in his anger, he ordered them to take their mother's life. But each in turn refused in horror, until he came to his favourite son, Parasuram, the youngest. Unhesitatingly, at his father's command, Parasuram raised his axe and struck off his mother's head. His punishment was swift and terrible. The axe with which he had committed the awful crime of matricide remained fixed in his hand, and no effort that he could make succeeded in detaching it. Finally he gave up hope, and, overburdened with remorse and grief, spent his days in meditation. To him at last there came a rumour of the sanctity of the waters of the Brahmaputra, a lake that lay far off concealed in the mighty ranges of the Himalayas. Hope reviving, Parasuram set out to search for

the sacred waters that might wash away his sin and free him from the curse that had fallen so heavily upon him. For many years he trod the desolate mountain region unrewarded, his penance long protracted by the gods. But at length, one morning, as the mist rose up from the valley below, there lay disclosed a lake of purest crystal in the hollows, on which the rising sun shone till it glittered like a lake of purple and gold. Parasuram, trembling at the glad sight, rose up and falteringly spread his hands in supplication. 'O Thou whose limpid waters the foot of mortal man hath not defiled, let all thy sacred attributes combine to wash away my punishment and my sin.' So saying he cast himself into the sparkling waters, and straightway the axe fell from his hand, and he knew that in that selfsame moment his sin had been washed away. To give this healing water to the world and as a work of penance, Parasuram fashioned the axe that he had so long held into a plough, and ploughed a way through the mountains that the Brahmaputra might flow down to the plains. After many years of toil and labour he brought the river down to the place where Nangalbandh now stands. Here the plough stuck, and Parasuram, considering that his work was done, went on a pilgrimage to proclaim the healing powers of the great river, vowing

that he would make it first among all the sacred rivers of the world. But close by, where the Brahmaputra had stopped, flowed Sitalakhiya, most beautiful of rivers, fair and luxuriant in the pride of her youth. The fame of her beauty reached even to the ears of Brahmaputra, mighty in sanctity and strength, and the god greatly desired to see her. Breaking all bounds by the force of its current, the mighty river advanced with a roar of triumph. Sitalakhiya, afraid at the sight of this impetuous and majestic river, swifter and mightier than her own placid stream, hid her beauty, and presented herself to Brahmaputra in the guise of an old woman, the Buriganga. When the great river saw her he was disappointed, and cried out to her 'Where, old woman, is Lakhiya in the bloom of her youth and beauty?' And Lakhiya, veiling her face, replied, 'I am that Lakhiya.' Then Brahmaputra, rushing onwards, tore aside the veil, and found that Lakhiya was indeed beautiful, and mingling his waters with hers they flowed on together. Now upon that very day Parasuram returned from his pilgrimage, and beheld that the river he had blessed and brought to earth had left him and joined the beautiful Sitalakhiya. Thereupon his anger blazed forth, and he cursed them both. But Brahmaputra prayed for forgiveness, reminding Parasuram

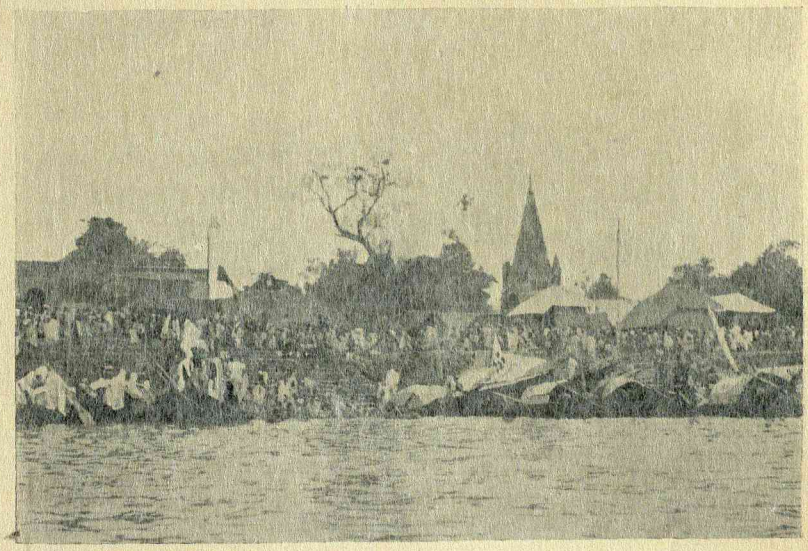
of the benefits he had once conferred upon him. So Parasuram, remembering, relented, and said 'O thou whom it was my intention to make the most sacred of the rivers of the world, that daily thou mightest confer blessings on those that came to bathe in thee, now only on one day in all the year shalt thou be holy. Only on the eighth day of the moon, in the month of Chait, shall especial virtue be found in thee.'

So, as on the appointed day the first faint stir of dawn appears in the eastern sky, a wonderful thrill of awe and mystery vibrates through the great encampment on the river's bank. In the last watches of the night, the pilgrims, tired out with the long day's march, have slept. Only the few, tense and eager with the excitement of the day to come, have lain wakeful or told one to the other strange tales of the greatness of the gods and the healing waters of the river on this the great day of all the year. But with the approach of dawn there comes a great awakening. Nature and man rise up jubilant to await its coming, which to-day is fraught with so much promise.

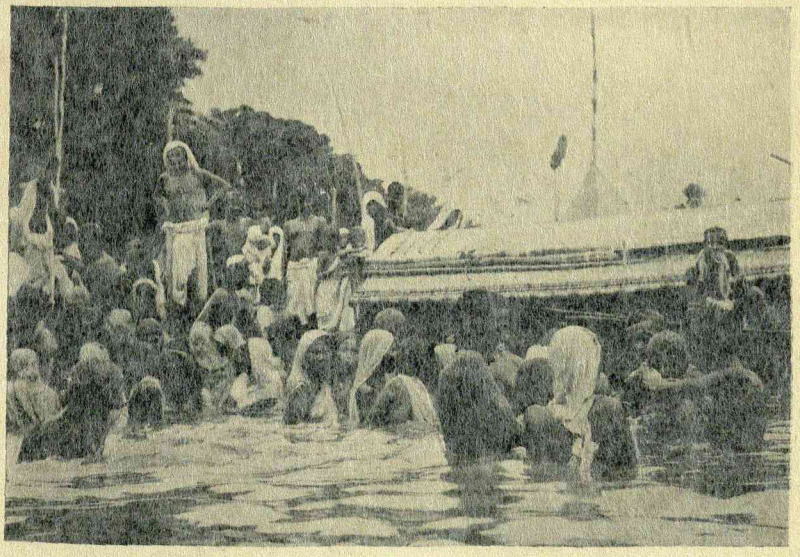
Slowly across the sacred river the sun rises. Radiant and triumphant, it would seem to have reserved for this day of days its most glorious and wonderful apparel. Rose-pink and exquisite shades of green merge imperceptibly into flashes

of saffron and silver and a broad expanse of blue, bathing the sacred stream in a dazzling glow of colour and light. And as the great sun-god lifts his golden orb above the eastern horizon, the whole vast assemblage of pilgrims stirs responsive to his coming.

The bank above the sacred ghats is alive, black with its dense moving throng of humanity. It is a never to be forgotten sight. For miles the countless multitude of worshippers—some half a million souls—extends along the river's edge, moving continually, ebbing and flowing, restless, like an ever-surging tide. The deep broad steps of the ghats, packed beyond belief, stand hidden from sight by the press of many eager feet. In one great wave of expectation the pilgrims push their way towards the stream whose waters are already stirred to such miraculous effect. Far out into its midst they wade, eager that the cleansing tide should not pass them by unlaved. Many of them bear in their hands their simple offerings to the great river. They are small, unpretentious gifts, a few flowers, a circlet of the strong-smelling *genda* blossoms, a bunch of plantains or merely a pepul leaf, for the pilgrims are poor and the expenses of the way have swallowed up their hard-earned savings. With many a prayer and oft-repeated formula they cast their gifts upon the great



ONE OF THE SACRED GHATS ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA
DURING THE NANGALBANDH MELA.



PILGRIMS BATHING IN THE SACRED RIVER DURING THE NANGALBANDH MELA.

river, that with their sins it may carry away some outward tokens of their gratitude and faith. Again and again they plunge beneath the stream that no part of them may go uncleansed. Men of every age and caste, from the venerable Brahmin patriarch to the low-caste Manjhi youth, women old and worn, bareheaded, with grey hair streaming in the breeze, uncared for and unkempt, stand waist-deep with folded hands and moving lips, absorbed in prayer. Regardless of the jostling crowd around them, each intent with her own petitions and her own needs, with eager faces and straining eyes that see only into the future or back into the past, with no thought of external, fleeting, momentary things, they fervently repeat the time-honoured formulas of their religion. 'Om Brahmaputra!' is the salutation on every lip to the great river as each worshipper salaams before the mystic cleansing power that on this great day has stirred its waters.

The murmur of the vast multitudes that swarm the bank is like the roar of a distant sea. Long strings of worshippers, one behind the other, hand in hand, pass through the crowds, making their way with wild, unearthly cries, from ghat to ghat. For each of the ghats must be visited for the full benefits to be attained. It is a marvellous crowd of pilgrims of every age and many castes, fired by

an enthusiasm that carries it beyond the thought of trivial passing things. That is one of its chief characteristics—its absolute unselfconsciousness. It has gathered, inspired by one great purpose, which leaves no thought for aught besides. Here in a circle, breast-deep in the stream, is a group that arrests the eye. Four generations strong, a family has come for prayer and the cleansing away of sins. Forgetful of all else, they perform the elaborate rites of their worship, turning aside neither to the right nor to the left to watch the ceaseless panorama that unfolds itself on either hand. Intensely earnest, with clasped hands and moving lips, each claims a special blessing from the gods.

So throughout the morning hours the wonderful bathing festival continues. The great river that at dawn had flowed by, clear and limpid, is churned to a deep mud-brown by the stirring of many feet on its shallow bed. The *genda* blossoms float down, trampled and stained. Yet still the worshippers push their way far out into the stream, eager to immerse themselves beneath the muddy waters which have been so divinely stirred to cleanse away their sins. Not until the sun is high overhead at noonday does the crowd along the bank begin to thin.

Then, the end and object of their pilgrimage

attained, there is time for rest and relaxation ere they take again the homeward way, to begin once more the common round of daily things. Many shrines raised here and there about the vast encampment attract the more devout, gorgeous presentments of the gods in all the glory of tinsel and paint, where offerings of pice and fruit and flowers must needs be made. Beyond, strongly reminiscent of an English village fair, but cruder and less finished, are roundabouts and shooting-galleries and peep-shows which never fail to attract the youthful native mind. Yet, considering the vast crowd of pilgrims that has assembled, these are comparatively but little patronised. The Snan Festival is one of such intense earnestness, so eminently religious, that the ordinary amusements of a festival, the gaieties, the feastings, the buying and selling that the heart of a native loves, play but a secondary part. All the pice that still remain are reserved for the shrines of the gods and goddesses whose special blessings the pilgrims most desire.

Slowly the great day passes. Streams of pilgrims throng the homeward way. Far off in the crimson west the sun sets in a blaze of splendour, leaving the river and eastern sky alight with its reflected glow. Clear again, and flowing swiftly, the great river hurries onwards with its ceaseless

murmur, the mighty Brahmaputra, carrying away on its broad bosom, out of sight, out to the great engulfing sea beyond, the sins of the countless throng of pilgrims who have bathed in its waters on this one day in all the year, on the eighth day of the moon in the month of Chait.

CHAPTER XI

A MEETING-PLACE OF EAST AND WEST

Within sight, far as the eye can reach, there is no other symbol of the West. The expanse of broken ground, reclaimed from the jungle in days gone by, stretches beyond, desolate and forgotten, shrub-studded and bramble-grown, unkempt, like a woman in rags. Groups of mud-built, straw-thatched huts dot the landscape, slung together, battered and worn, marked with the angry passing of many a storm of wind and rain. Tiny nut-brown urchins play in the mud, lazy and somnolent, naked and unashamed, in a necklace of coral or a single string with a golden charm. Teams of oxen, four abreast, move slowly with all the languor of the East as they turn the heavy sunbaked soil of the homestead fields. The cry of the elephant-driver and the deep-voiced tinkling of the bell come faintly as the huge beast lumbers away along the grass-grown path. All these are of the East, Eastern. Only the low whitewashed building, round which the monarchs of the forest seem to

have grouped themselves in loving and protecting care, bears fearlessly aloft the symbol of the West. Raised heavenwards above the western porch there stands the Cross, triumphant over the storm and stress of centuries, steadfastly looking out at once a challenge and an appeal to the alien faiths that lie within its ken.

Out of the east a great storm gathers. Light masses of film-like cloud race onward, precursors of the dead, dull, bank of grey that moves more slowly in their wake across the sky. The air grows full of the noiseless sound of abundance of rain. The rustle of leaves, the bending boughs, the sough of the wind, make sad music like the voices of mourners mourning for their dead. The world grows dark as if at twilight. Deep gloom reigns in the dim dark shadows of the trees. Athwart the Cross a ray of light still lingers like a living flame from an ashen sky. A mighty rush of wind sweeps over the plain, bending the forest trees with sudden force. It is as if the world, moved by a sudden impulse, bowed down before the Cross that stands alone unmoved by the gathering storm. Firm like a rock in a troubled sea, it rises white against the darkening sky.

The first huge drops of rain strike heavily on the fallen leaves like the patter of feet that flee in terror from the anger of the storm. The doors of

the church stand open, thrown back wide, as if in mute offering of sanctuary from the raging elements without.

Buffeted by the wind and rain outside, there is a wonderful calm within. The great empty church, with its silent time-worn walls, is like a sudden haven of rest in the storm-tossed world. Straight from the wild Eastern scene without, one is caught in a strange atmosphere of familiarity and peace. This might be some village church in the far-off West. The stoup of holy water, the Stations of the Cross, the side chapels with their bright figures of the saints, and high above them all, towards the east, the dim brilliance of the altar, far off and mystic, clothed in the surrounding gloom as in a veil—here there is nothing of the East. Outside, save the church itself and the Cross it bears aloft, there is nothing of the West. In all this land of great and vivid contrasts, there could scarcely be one more sudden and complete.

It is with something akin to awe that one pauses on the threshold. This is all that has survived of the once great quarter of the city that stretched for miles on either hand. Here, in days gone by, the English, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese once had their settlements, while beyond and around, to the river to the south and to Tungi on the north, lay the great city of the Moghuls, the

capital of all Bengal. Four miles, silent and deserted, lie between it and the Dacca of to-day. Gone are the palaces of the Viceroys and the garden-houses of the merchants; gone are the busy streets and market-places and the clamouring camps of armies. Of all that stood in the olden days on this once densely populated spot, only the church of our Lady of Rosary survives.

How this outpost of the Faith came there, no man knows. It may be that the Syrian Christians, whom Vertomannus found in the opening days of the sixteenth century in Bengal, first worshipped here, and that the Portuguese, hastening in the van of European nations in the East, but restored and added, making what they found tenantless fit for the service of their Church. But of the story of these early days no record has survived. The builders have left an enduring monument of their piety and faith, and with that they have been content. Their names are forgotten, but their work remains. The faith and the ritual that had been their birthright in their own land in the West they brought through much strife and tribulation, bravely planting it in their new home in the East among a hostile and fanatical people. They came of a magnificent, fearless race—the race of Henry the Navigator, of Cortez and Vasco da Gama—a race of intrepid explorers, of skilled seamen, first

in the field in the new world that suddenly opened its gates upon the old in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, eager to push the fame of their great little country into untrodden paths. In India they had quickly taken their place in the east and south and west of the great peninsula, founding their factories and building their churches, showing the way to the other nations, who were not slow to follow in their wake. When they reached as far as Dacca in the east one asks in vain. Now almost all visible sign of their presence has passed away. This enduring monument of their faith, four miles north of the city, is one of the few traces that still remain of their one-time power and influence in the land.

Within the church itself there is evidence sufficient of its antiquity. As one treads with reverent feet the time-worn stones in nave and chancel, one passes above the resting-places of many a worthy of a bygone age. The epitaphs commemorative of their virtues still remain, faithfully preserving their memories among succeeding generations that would elsewise have long since forgotten. Scattered here and there in no set order, but casually, as if each sought in death the familiar spot where each in life had worshipped, they lie beneath the stones inscribed in Armenian and old Portuguese, difficult to decipher and worn

by the passing of many feet. Here lies the oldest inscription of them all—to one Choy Daviatis, who died on June 7, 1714—a long narrow slab, half in Armenian, half in Portuguese, carrying one back to the days when Mussulman Viceroys still strove to rob the English of their privileges in Bengal, and Farrukh Siyar, setting out from Dacca, had but a little while before made his triumphal march to Delhi and seated himself upon the great Aurungzebe's throne.

The rain has begun to fall with a ceaseless patter on the roof. The great nave of the church grows dim and shadowy as if at nightfall. Over the chancel a veil has fallen. From without there comes the glorious scent of the refreshing rain upon the grateful earth. A sudden gust of wind sweeps in through the open door, swinging the lamps like censers before the altar.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, from overhead there comes the call to prayer. It rings out into the storm, slowly and solemnly, pregnant with warning and appeal. Along the path the quick patter of bare feet comes hurrying out of the rain, and the figure of a girl stands framed in the great stone doorway, her steps arrested, her large dark eyes widening at the unfamiliar sight of a stranger in the familiar place. Her spotless sari, white, neat-bordered, drawn gracefully over her head, clings to

her slim body, heavily soaked through with the rain. Great drops fall from it, forming little puddles on the flagstones as she stands. But it is only for a brief moment. Then, the old hereditary instinct surviving even after long centuries of Christianity, she hastily draws the veil across her face and, dipping her finger in the stoup, makes the sign of the Cross and moves noiselessly to her place before the altar of the Virgin. There is no backward glance, no furtive look from behind the veil. Nothing but the momentary startled flash in the eyes showed her knowledge of the unaccustomed. Absorbed in her devotion, she kneels, oblivious of all else.

Then in straggling groups or one by one they come, these simple worshippers in the church of our Lady of Rosary of Tezgaon. Descendants, many of them, of the original builders of the church and bearing their names, there is little now, after the lapse of many generations, to distinguish them from the natives among whom they dwell. Others of pure native strain, they and theirs have so long professed the Christian faith that they have forgotten their own past days and know not whether their forbears once were Mussulmans or Hindus. It is a wonderful sight. Here, on one common ground, East and West seem to have met. All caste distinctions long since forgotten, they have united

now for many generations in the *Credo* of the Catholic Faith. As one watches them, each so utterly Indian of the East, yet performing the observances that one associates so entirely with the West—the finger reverently dipped in holy water, the signing of the Cross, the genuflexion towards the altar and the silent passing with hushed feet to the appointed place with no glance to the right hand or to the left—it seems to be given to one to see as in a glass darkly a dim vision of the great miracle of the drawing together of East and West.

An acolyte in spotless white moves silently with lighted taper before the altar. One by one the tiny flames gleam warm and red, out of the surrounding gloom. On blue and white and gold the light falls with marvellous effect. Raised aloft, the massive candlesticks seem to lift heavenward the light they bear. Out of the dim grey shadows they gleam like beacons. Everywhere the familiar symbols of the great Faith of the West stand out pre-eminent.

The fretful cry of a child breaks suddenly upon the stillness. One is back again in the East as one turns towards it. A mother is rocking at her breast a naked, struggling, brown baby, crooning to him softly in hushed whispers. A jingle of bracelet and anklet, as a girl beside her moves from her

cramped position on the narrow wooden footstool, makes unaccustomed music. A tiny urchin calmly unwinds his scanty garment, soaked through with the rain, and, spreading it on the ground to dry, stands forth naked, sublimely unselfconscious and sublimely happy. Another lies on the floor, with laughing eyes, and plays with the hem of his mother's robe. The mother, a still smaller infant in her arms, kneels on regardless. The rest of the white-robed throng, noting none of these things, kneel motionless, absorbed and unobservant.

The service has begun. The hushed voice of the priest, speaking the first solemn words of the Mass, breaks the silence. 'Introibo ad altare Dei.' Could there well be anything more of the West, Western? The majestic Latin words ring with strange insistence in this far-off and forgotten outpost of the Faith. 'Dominus vobiscum,' and its quick response, 'Et cum spiritu tuo.' Then the thrice repeated 'Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison,' and again 'Dominus vobiscum' and the unfailing answer 'Et cum spiritu tuo.' Things of the East and things of the West fade out of sight. The 'one Church' of the magnificent confession of faith in the words of the *Credo* is without distinction of race or language, of peoples or nations, of East or West. In a flash one sees the consummation of all that men deem

impossible. For a moment the difficulties seem no longer insurmountable, and the differences fade away and vanish.

The great service, which has been repeated such countless times, which has survived such marvellous vicissitudes, which has been the light and life of such unnumbered generations, draws towards its consummation. Out of the shadow round the altar the priest, and the acolyte, swaying the censer, move slowly. Censing the kneeling worshippers, they stand in the fuller light of the chancel steps, and a wonderful silence falls. Absorbed in the service of the West, forgetful of the East, one's eyes fall suddenly on the bare brown feet of the acolyte, and things of the East, with their immeasurable remoteness, crowd back again, and the dim vision that had held one, in spite of oneself, half slips away. The spotless robes are the robes of the West, but all else in the small figure that stands beside the priest is so strikingly of the East. Then, as swiftly as it came, the momentary confusion of thought ceases, checked in the wonder of the deeper hush that has fallen upon the reverent worshippers. The tinkling of the bell proclaims the passing of a mystery. The climax of the great service is reached, and the people wait with bowed heads the solemn moment of the Elevation of the Host. 'Sanctus, Sanctus,

Dominus Deus Sabaoth.' Again all distinctions are swallowed up. One watches, spell-bound, the passing of this magnificent service of the Mass here in the midst of these unexpected surroundings. It is the same wonderful mystery, the same solemn ritual, the same faith that has been as the soul of nations, for which men have fought and died, which has held enthralled the greatest minds that the civilisation of the West has given forth, to which one may deny allegiance, but not admiration and respect. It is the same great act of worship here, in this far-off Indian countryside, as in the magnificent cathedrals and churches of the West. The same reverent hush falls at the tinkling of the bell. The gentle whimpering of the child at its mother's breast, that one only notes at its cessation, is stilled. The jingling of anklet and bracelet ceases. There is not a movement. The silence is oppressive, such a one as makes its presence felt. One is carried back in thought to that great silence that falls upon the vast throng of waiting people in the courtyard of St. Peter's as they hear the momentous words ring out, 'Habemus Papam,' or when the Holy Father from the loggia, turning about to the four quarters of the globe, solemnly bestows his blessing on the world. Surely, if ever, it is here, in the common profession of a great faith, that East and West shall meet.

And then again one's eyes fall upon the kneeling worshippers, and in a flash it seems to be borne in upon one that 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' They are repeating the Rosary, reverently, befittingly. But it is in a tongue unknown in the West—a soft, sibilant tongue, yet strange, uncomprehended, fixed like a barrier between them and the West. Clad in their saris, their veils half drawn across the face, these women of the East have so little in common with their sisters of the West, and those with whom they have come in contact have mostly passed them by. The men, living the simple life of the cultivator and the labourer, knowing nothing beyond the joys and sorrows of the moment, in thought, in speech, in manner of life, lie centuries behind the West. Is there a force in the world that could furnish them a meeting-place ?

A sudden ray of light falls full across the altar. One had almost failed to notice that the rain had ceased. Brilliantly the sunshine falls on white and blue and gold, and upon the Cross that towers above. It illuminates the face of the priest as he turns once more to give the blessing. 'Dominus vobiscum,' and again the answer comes, 'Et cum spiritu tuo.'

There is a stir at last among the congregation.

The solemn service is at an end and the worshippers file slowly out. The tiny urchin gathers up his single garment, and winding it round his waist, with eyes wide fixed upon the stranger, toddles out, holding his mother's robe. The women, still with bent, reverent heads, pass by with gaze averted. Only when outside the sacred precincts do they allow their curiosity full play as they glance back furtively before they hurry out into the warring elements beyond. For the storm has begun again, and the earth is given over to the wind and the rain.

The acolyte hastily puts out the lights upon the altar, and the chancel falls back again into shadow. The outlines of the Cross grow faint and indistinct. The wonderful vision that it was given to one to see of the drawing together of East and West has passed. In the great emptiness and silence of the deserted church it seems but as a dream when one awaketh. Yet as one passes out and leaves the church behind, the last backward glance reveals the uplifted symbol of a faith of world-wide claims and aspirations, crowned in a halo of light, triumphant, insistent, a steadfast beacon of hope through every change and for all time. And one knows that within its shadow the East and the West have met.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE LAKHIYA

It is just before the dawn.

Overhead the stars blink clear on a dead blue sky. The waning moon, low on its back, mirrors its silver light in every dancing wave of the great broad stream that flows on ceaselessly into the night. The banks on either side rise black, studded with twinkling lights that gleam like eyes of fire. Beyond, on river and land, a faint white mist has fallen like a garment of sleep on a sleeping world.

The busy traffic of the river is stayed. The noisy hum of the teeming mart is stilled. Over all there has fallen the great Silence and the great Peace.

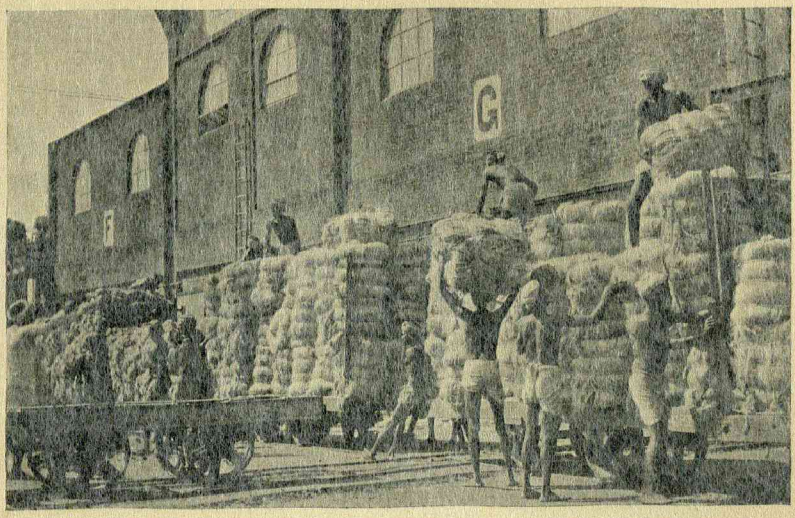
Unchecked, untrammelled, the river slips by, laughing as if with joy to be free. Like some refrain sung by a mother to the child at her breast, its ceaseless ripple breaks in upon the silence of the night, lulling a time-worn world to slumber. Gently lapping the banks on either hand, striving

ever to rise higher and enfold them in its close embrace, it seems to murmur softly of the vanity of human life and wishes, as if it laughed, in its own great constancy, at the petty passing cares of men. On these same banks for centuries it has watched men come and go. It has seen great principalities and kingdoms rise and fall, the fleeting glories of a fickle world. On its broad bosom it has borne brave fleets and armies to victory and defeat. Now they rise but as ghostly memories out of the past. Their day has waned, and no man is mindful of their passing. Only the great river, through all the changing years, flows onwards, and as it ripples by it murmurs, half mocking, half consoling, its constant message and refrain. 'Vanity, vanity, vanity,' it seems to whisper, and again the oft-repeated 'All is vanity.'

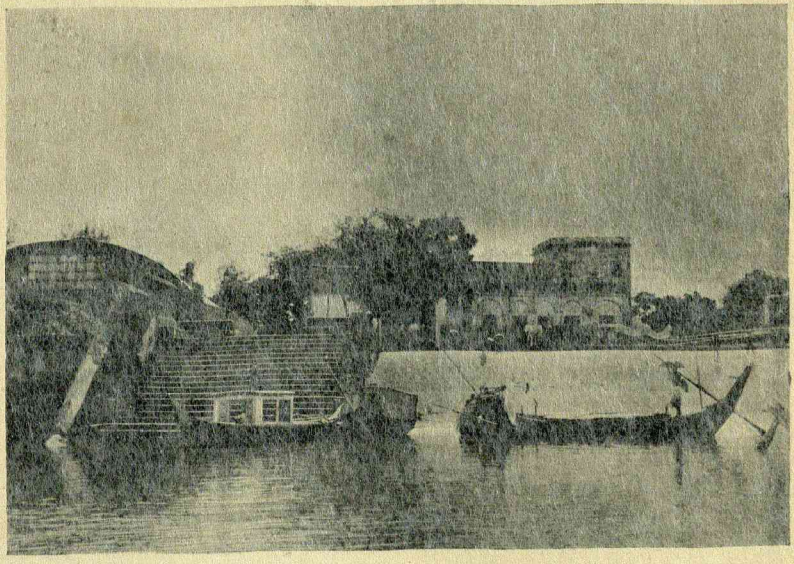
Slowly the waning moon sinks out of sight, hidden behind the masts of the shipping that line the further bank. The clear dark waters throw back the light of a myriad stars that shine the brighter for the passing of the moon. A breathless silence enfolds the earth, as if reluctant to yield it to the coming day. Even the murmur of the river dies down to but the faintest whisper. That wonderful brief hush that comes before the dawn enfolds the world.

Only on the huge river steamers that lie at anchor beside the wharf away up-stream is there any sign of life. Lit with electric light, their great hulls stand out clear-cut against the lesser blackness of the night, illumined by the dazzling glare within. Here night is as the day. Innumerable dark forms passing from out the shadow across the radius of the light, like marionettes, move silently, crouched low beneath huge burdens. The clank of chains, the thud of burdens cast aside, the quick, hoarse cries of orders oft repeated, float ever and anon across the rippling waters, heard only like some faint stirring from another world, apart from the peaceful sleeping world of the river and the land.

Then suddenly, unseen, unheralded, there comes a strange, mysterious stirring in the air. It is as if the world were young again, when the stars of the morning sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for very joy of heart. All to the naked eye is as it was before—asleep. But to the ear attuned there comes the first faint sound of the awakening dawn. It is as if the Great Spirit breathed the breath of life upon the waiting earth, and bade the night awake. So faint it is, so mysterious, so all-enthralling, that as in a dream one knows and feels that which it is not given to the eye of man to see. To that sixth sense that



LANDING JUTE AT NARAINGUNJ.



NARAINGUNJ.

lies deep down in the unprobed depths of man, it makes its own most wonderful appeal.

The first great mystery of the coming dawn is past. The wonder of the unseen passes into the knowledge of things seen. A soft, cool breeze, grateful after the stillness of the night, sweeps over river and land. Every leaf on every tree leaps gladly to its coming, and sings aloud its song of thankfulness. The tall bamboos sway gracefully in its embrace and kiss the water's edge. Roused from their sleep among the branches, a crowd of *minas* start the day with loud-voiced chattering and much ruffling of their dew-drenched plumes. Like evil revellers of the night, caught by the dawn, a company of rooks sweeps low over the face of the waters to their home among the poinsettia trees that overtop the buildings on the further bank.

A siren cry from one of the river steamers breaks the silence like a warning voice. Slowly, like a giant shaking aside his chains, it moves, with clatter, and shout, and groaning, free from its moorings against the bank. A dazzling flash from its search-light throws clear its path before it, bathing the dancing waters of the river, the shipping, and the frowning mass of bank, in its weird, white, ghostly radiance. Defying the night, it makes the darkness light as the day; but, kinder than the day,

while making all things clear, it lends to all a strange, mysterious charm. Even the row of boats, hideous by day, with corrugated iron roofs, shine out beautified, bright like silver, in the fantastic, unaccustomed light. Slowly the great steamer, its bulk magnified in the darkness behind the light, moves out into mid-stream, and, girding its strength, passes straight and purposeful out into the coming dawn.

A dead, pale grey light creeps out of the east, outlining the masts of the shipping that ride at anchor up-stream. The huge hulls of the sloops close at hand loom out black and phantom-like in the faint half-light, half-darkness of the dawn. Their masts and spars and rigging rise up clear-cut against the lightening sky. The brilliant lights in the river steamers that still remain beside the landing-stage go suddenly out. The eyes of fire that here and there gleamed red from either bank have disappeared as if by magic. The world is a study in grey.

A blush rose pink creeps into the grey. The white mist that hangs beyond, where river and sky unite, melts ghost-like into the dawn. The stars blink sleepily in the face of the rising sun and one by one go out.

The world is suddenly awake. From under the shelter of the banks, where they have lain all night,

tiny skiffs creep out into the stream, paddled by dark brown forms in the bows. Huddled close in their cotton cloths in the damp morning air, the fishermen make ready their nets against the long day's work. Narrow *goyna* boats glide noiselessly down the stream. A dinghy unfurls its nut-brown sail and, catching the morning breeze, skims swiftly out of sight. A brig, heavy and age-worn, looking like some survival out of the past, begins to discharge its cargo of English salt into the iron-roofed warehouse on the wharf. The long-deserted banks swarm once again with the busy hive of men.

The sun arises like a giant refreshed with sleep. The shadows flee noiselessly to join the vanished forces of the night. The silver river dons new robes, reflecting every colour and shade of the coming dawn. Red and orange and gold, purple and yellow and mauve, they break like waves on a boundless sea. Glory of dawn and wonder of night have met and merged in the day. Steadfastly the river flows on unheeding, yet throwing back every passing change as if accentuating its own constancy and the inconstancy of all besides.

The daily round of life has begun. It is the midst of the jute season, and Naraingunj is one of the busiest centres of its trade. Huge go-downs line the banks on either side, tin-roofed, red-bricked,

ugly with all modernity, yet adding their note of life and colour to the scene. Tall chimneys tower behind them and huge cranes swing on the landing stages, symbols of the activity and stir of the busy mart. Solid, stone-built bungalows, screened by a wealth of trees from the water's edge, or standing out boldly, set in shady garden or well-trimmed lawns of exquisite green, look out over the broad expanse of the river. Close anchored against the banks are boats innumerable of every size and kind, each intent on landing the burden of jute it has carried down from the low-lying fields up stream.

The river is alive with craft. Tiny black fishing boats that scarcely seem to touch the water, prow and stern high in the air, skim over the shining surface. Dinghies, with circular roof of thatch, skilfully propelled by a single oar-rudder, roughly tied near the bow with a piece of rope, pass on more slowly. A steamer, lithe and buoyant moves out into mid-stream, then steadies itself as it settles down to tow three of the huge iron-roofed flats that have lain like sleeping monsters under the lee of the wharf. A whole fleet of jute boats, mat-thatched, start slowly up the stream, rowed by oarsmen quaintly standing on platforms on the roof.

It is a fascinating scene. Every moment the interest changes as the launch leaves its moorings

and picks its way along the crowded stream. The glory of the first morning hours is bathing the world in light. In the first clear brilliance of the day returned, the earth and river seem to palpitate anew with life, grow buoyant and sing with joy. The trim little steamer seems literally to dance upon the sparkling river as it rushes through, lashing it into a froth of foam and leaving its long broadening ripples on its surface like a lingering caress. On either hand it is historic ground. Hidden, forgotten in the noise and stir of the busy mart, memories still cling thick round these lower reaches of the Lakhiya, close by where the great rivers meet. But just below, the Megna, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Dullasery, and the Ishamutti, all unite, and this meeting-place of the giant watercourses is the most historic spot in all Eastern Bengal. The many tides that have ebbed and flowed this way have seen strange scenes. Behind to the left lies the ancient kingdom of Vikrampur, with its memories of the famous Ballal Sen and the ruins of its once great capital of Rampal. Back but a short way to the right stretches the kingdom of Sonargaon, for centuries the centre of all interest in Eastern Bengal, to-day but a peaceful rural countryside, yet studded with the remains of its once great forts and palaces that, grass-grown and crumbling

to decay, survive as fading memories of the past. Feringhi Bazaar, just below on the Ishamutti, recalls to mind the days of Portuguese adventure when these same rivers swarmed with seamen roving, in the true spirit of the age, in search of whatever enterprise might chance to hand. In their wake, learning from them new skill in navigation, came the Mughs, plundering, murdering, and laying waste, impudently defying the Moghul power. Close by, on both banks, stand the forts of Kalagachhia, Sonakunda, Tribeni, and Hajigunj, built by Isha Khan and Mir Jumla to drive back their fleets. From Hajigunj it was that Man Singh, Akbar's great Rajput general, set out against them. It must have been a brave sight that the Lakhiya saw that day. A great fleet that covered the river for a mile on either hand had gathered here, huge ships manned by forty rowers with towering hulls, a forest of rigging and great sails, cumbersome, unwieldy, no match for the nimble craft of the Mughs when it came to a hand-to-hand encounter. But they won in the end by their very stolidity and strength, these great fleets of a great empire. Sonakanda, only the barest outline of its fort surviving, teems with memories of Isha Khan, last of the famous Afghan chiefs in Sonargaon, and of Sona Bibi, his heroic wife and comrade in the field. It was here that he, a follower of the

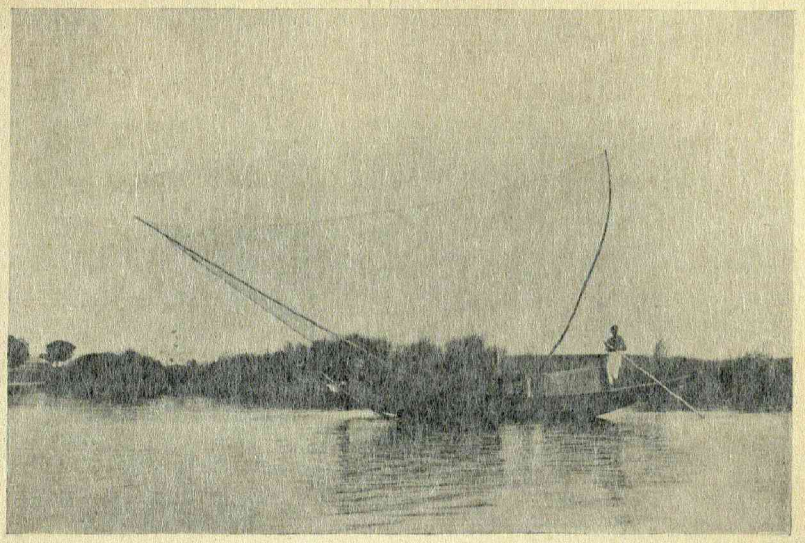
Prophet, brought her, in the heyday of her youth and far-famed beauty, straight from Chandpur across the river, whence he had taken her by force, a Hindu child widow, the daughter of his deadliest foe. It was here in after years that, widowed again, the widow of Isha Khan, she defended her dead lord's fortress against his foes, even though they were of her own kith and kin, making the city at last her funeral pyre rather than that it should fall into the enemy's hands.

Further on up-stream, just as Naraingunj is left behind, stands the Kudam Rasul containing the print of the Prophet's foot, its huge gateway, massive and imposing, half hidden in a wealth of trees. Opposite, close by where the Hajigunj Fort once stood, still survive the mosque and mausoleum that Shaista Khan, the greatest of Viceroys, raised to the memory of his daughter Miriam Bibi, who died on her father's state barge while it lay at anchor in the river. And so, on past the last of the huge jute go-downs, leaving the masts of the shipping and the stir of the busy port behind, one hurries onwards, away up-stream.

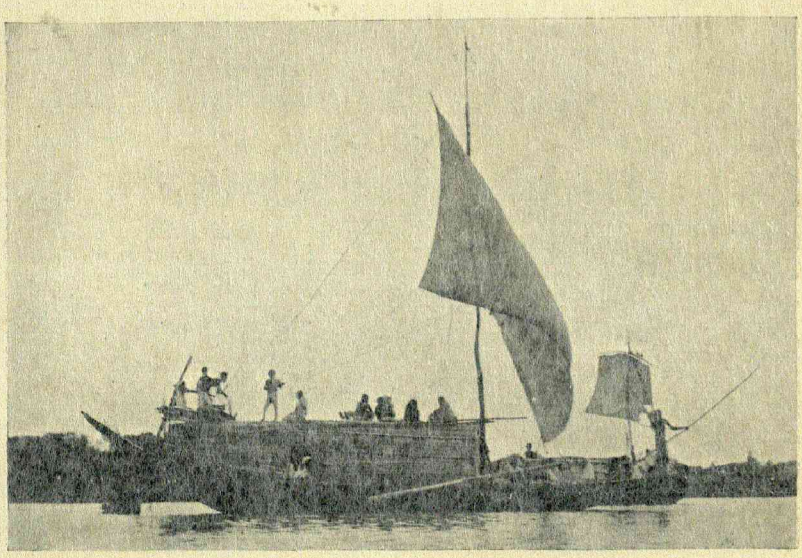
Out beyond, the years have wrought less change. So, save for the jute that everywhere meets the eye, might it have seemed to the Portuguese sailors as they looked out from over the prows of their high-pooped ships, scanning the horizon in search

of adventure; or fair as it seemed to Miriam Bibi as she peeped from behind the silken curtains that screened the daughter of the Viceroy from the vulgar gaze. Tranquil and smiling, the most beautiful of all the rivers of Eastern Bengal, the Lakhiya stretches northwards straight and wide and rippling silver in the morning sun. The stream sweeps down a mighty current, straining to burst its bounds like a boy at school. It leaps and engulfs the overhanging branches of the trees that fringe the banks. For miles they stretch, a glorious jungle growth, untouched now as when in the days of their youth they first bent down their heads to listen to the song of the river. Banyan and nim and pepul, palas and mango and tamarind, they crowd rank on rank, thick like a wall of green. Here and there a palm towers up above the rest. A group of plantain trees, with their cool pale-green leaves, stands out, the purple sheaves of their buds a brilliant patch against the green. The delicate sprays of the willowy bamboos sway gently in the breeze, a study in exquisite form and grace. White sails belly and bend in the lap of the breeze. Brown sails throw their deep rich touch of colour on the scene. Blue sails flaunt their heads to heaven, putting the bluest of skies to shame.

For every pulse-beat of the plucky little steamer



A FISHING-BOAT ON THE LAKHIYA.



HOMEWARD-BOUND AT EVENING.

as she gallantly ploughs her way up-stream there is some new glimpse. A high wooden bridge, frail but rustic, set in a background of trees, spans a tiny creek that joins the river, and over it a line of women passes slowly single file, balancing their waterpots upon their heads with typical Eastern grace. Nut-brown urchins play among the goats that browse contentedly on the lush green grass upon the banks. A herd of buffaloes squelches in the mud where the land lies low, a crowd of paddy-birds hovering near, fearless and alert to pick up whatever of insect life the cloven feet of the huge great beasts disturb. Well-thatched roofs and neat mat walls peep out among the trees with an air of opulence and comfort. For it is a fertile land, and jute has proved a source of much wealth to many. Living is dear on the banks of the Lakhiya, compared with Western Bengal, but wages are good and the standard of comfort is high. The talukdar, the petty zemindar, and the merchant sleep snug within trim homesteads or more pretentious houses of brick, that add their touch of opulence to the exuberant luxuriance of the tree-clad banks.

Under a huge banyan sits the Panchayet, administering village justice, inquiring into the rights and wrongs of some dispute that is agitating the little community, or discussing a sin against his

caste which one of their number has committed. Two brothers, it may be, are quarrelling over their inheritance. The journey to court is long and the expenses many, and for once the brothers are wise. The President of the Panchayet is a just man and impartial. Who should decide better than he, the venerable old man in their midst, who has known them from their youth up and their father before them, and is fully conversant with the custom and rules of succession among them and theirs? What he decides will be right, and they have agreed to abide by his decision. Or it may be that the dispute is as to a boundary between neighbours, or a question of fishing rights in one of the numerous *khals* that branch off from the main river; or a man may have complained that another has forcibly cut and stolen his jute, and the case has been sent by the Court to the President to inquire on the spot where all the villagers know the facts of the case, and where the truth, concealed by many an art and subterfuge, is most likely to be found. A thousand and one things claim the attention of the Panchayet. Nothing is too small for it to be called upon to decide. Under the trees the village elders form a picturesque group, like patriarchs of old, recalling far-off early English days, when the Witenagemot deliberated on affairs of State in like primitive and informal

way. The President rises and salaams with courtly grace as the steamer passes close beside the bank, a venerable Mussulman figure with flowing beard and long white robes, the very personification of dignity and repose.

On past Murapara, with its handsome modern house built by a rich zemindar, one races up the stream. Ornamented in red and white, with its trim set trees and shrubs, its broad steps leading to the water's edge, the house stands out a strange thing of modern days, thrust on the peace and old-world beauty of the river. Behind, in sharp contrast, crumbling and lichen-grown, still stand the ruins of the palaces and mosques once peopled by the descendants of the haughty Shaista Khan, when the first days of the greatness of his house had passed and the last evil days were still far distant. Opposite, the Rupgunj Thana peeps out among the trees, mat-walled, tin-roofed, an unimposing outpost of the British Raj. On the open space in front sits row on row of blue-coated, blue-and-white turbaned chowkidars, waiting with pleased anticipation the distribution of their three months' pay. A picturesque group they make as their khaki-coated, red-turbaned duffadars move in and out among them, forming the first link in the mighty chain of British justice. The foundation-stone of our Indian administration,

the chowkidar represents in every village the primitive and ever-present source of the greatness and majesty of the law.

A sudden bend of the river, a glimpse of rich red banks that rise up like the ruins of some old fortress crowned by a wealth of foliage, and again the ever-varying scene is changed. The brilliant sun, a ball of blazing fire, creeps high overhead. Giant betel-nut palms tower up against the sapphire blue of the sky, tall and stately, their tapering stems ending in a crown of spear-like leaves. For a space the banks are higher, and the river races by, baffled and kept in bounds, chafing to expand and embrace the fields that lie behind.

Round the bend in the river the breeze freshens. A huge *bepari* boat, heavy laden with jute, lies low down in the stream, stolid and slow-moving. The rowers on the platforms on the mat-thatched roof cease toiling and lay aside the oars at the grateful touch of the wind. With noise and clatter and shouts, as if they made ready a man-of-war with the enemy already in sight, they unfurl the enormous sails that flap and stagger, then, catching the swell of the wind, fly taut, and the heavy lumbering boat, suddenly awake, leaps forward on its way. Every craft on the river follows suit, and, with sails spread full in the breeze, pulsates with life renewed. It is the last little note of beauty and grace, as

when the painter skilfully plies his brush for the finishing touch ere he casts his palette aside. White sails, brown sails, sails patched and torn yet picturesque still in their last days as in their first, they crowd the river, each one straining at the ropes held taut in the grip of the breeze. The river is a pathway of hurrying life. Heavy boats, jute-laden, that have crept along in the lee of the bank, slowly and with much toil, now sail out lightly in midstream to catch the swell of the wind, and speed on, stately and majestic, over the rippling stream. Tiny dinghies and *jalkar* boats, top-heavy with hastily rigged sails, sway and dance and skim over the laughing water like great white birds on the wing. Full of the joy of life and in a great content the river slips by, murmuring still that the great and wonderful present—the hour of life and duty—is slipping by, and that all besides is vanity.

So on past Denga, with its busy market-place in full view from the river, where many of them that buy and sell gather from all the countryside. It is market day, and beneath the rough mat sheds one catches a glimpse of wares exposed, and the noise of loud-voiced bargaining floats out across the river. The native loves to haggle, and parts with his pice only after due deliberation and with much grudging. So the buyers and sellers make long talk though the sun beats high overhead.

It is almost noon. The sun strikes full on the river, making it flash in a blaze of dazzling light. Slowly the breeze dies down as if it grew weary in the all-pervading languor of the heat of the day. The tall cocoanut palms stand stiff and straight, their dignity unruffled by the faintest puff of wind. The sails on the boats flap lazily, and one by one fall limp. The heavier craft put in to the bank to await the return of the breeze or to let the heat of the day pass by before the rowers toil again at the oars. The trees on the banks stand motionless as if cut in stone. Not a leaf stirs, not a blade of paddy in the fields moves. The cattle lie in the shade, only their tails alive as they ceaselessly flick off the crowd of flies that worry them eternally. So for a time again life sleeps. Only the river flows onward, as steadfast and purposeful in the languor and heat of the day as in the silent watches of the night.

This is the broadest stretch of the stream away past Kaligunj, with its rows of jute go-downs and boats of many kinds waiting for their burdens, all asleep now in the blazing light. Beyond, the banks lie low, and the river has long since burst its bounds and engulfed the fields on either hand. Save for the trees and the crops, it is hard to see where the river ends and the banks begin. A clump of bamboos stands out in the stream, a group of betel-nut palms rise up straight out of the

river, mirroring their long light stems to greater height in the water at their feet. Patches of jute submerged look as if they floated on the flood. The paddy in the hidden fields throws up its fresh young shoots, struggling to raise itself above the water's level.

Everywhere now there is evidence that jute is the predominating interest of the river and of those that dwell upon its banks. Here, where the land lies low, buried beneath the flood, one sees the full extent of its cultivation. Field after field of it stretches away, towering ten feet high in flourishing patches of rich dark green. The brief spell of rest in the heat of the day is over, and the river is alive with busy workers, standing knee-deep in the water as they cut the long shoots and bind them up in bundles. These, laid side by side, are left to steep in the shallows where the stream runs clear. There for days they lie, till the river has washed them through and through. Men and boys stand waist-deep out in the water, fixing them firm with bamboo sticks, that the stream may not carry them away. Huge straw-plaited hats on their heads, at once a protection from the sun and rain, the workers work with a will, their nut-brown bodies, bare save for a cloth about the waist, gleaming with heat in the sun.

Further on they are beating out the jute that

has been sufficiently steeped. Peeling off the long white strips of fibre from the stalks, they wash it in the water, beating it, as a *dhobi* washes clothes, then hanging it up on a bamboo rail to dry in the sun. All along the river-banks there are groups at work. The sharp, rhythmical thud of the coils of jute as they hit the water sounds like an accompaniment all the way up the stream.

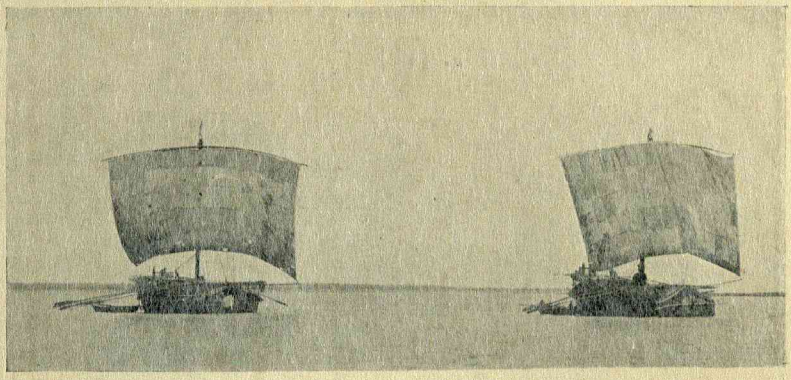
Out of the west a mass of fleecy cloud has crept up unperceived, scarce dimming the joyousness of the day till it draws near the face of the sun. Soft white feathery clouds race over the sky, chasing one another like children at play. Grey clouds, slower and more sombre, follow in their wake, and a grateful shadow falls on river and land. The glaring heat of the sun is stayed. A sudden gust of tempestuous wind blows straight from east to west across the river. Raindrops beat down heavily, till they make the face of the water splash in a thousand jets. The river breaks like a sea, and leaps in a thousand waves. The racing clouds roll on, and the sun escapes again like a giant released from the toils. Nothing remains of the April storm save a glorious freshness in the air. Sails leap up again to catch the fickle breeze. The water laughs and leaps on its way as if refreshed, and revels again in the sparkling light of the sun.

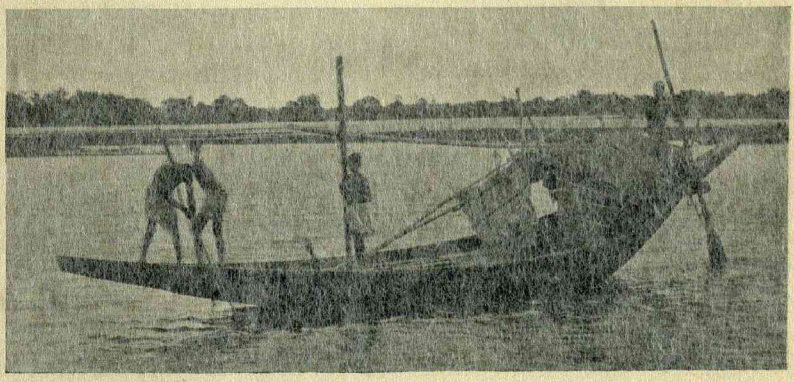
Slowly it draws to evening. A kingfisher flashes out across the stream, a glorious lithe vision of black and white, swoops suddenly and, with flutter of wing, splashes the smooth mirror-like surface of the river, and is away again poised lightly on the air. A single sail, chasing the setting sun, glides on till it loses itself in the golden west. Slowly the cattle come down to the water's edge to drink in the shadows under the trees. A tiny urchin leads them, with the air of a man and a staff just twice his length, demanding and obtaining unquestioning obedience. A herd of buffaloes wades far out into the shallows to revel full length in the cool of the stream. Only their great long plaintive heads rise up above the water's level. The urchin, leaving the cattle, wades out and belabours their leader with his staff and, clambering fearlessly astride as the huge beast gets ponderously to its feet in the mud, he leads them slowly home.

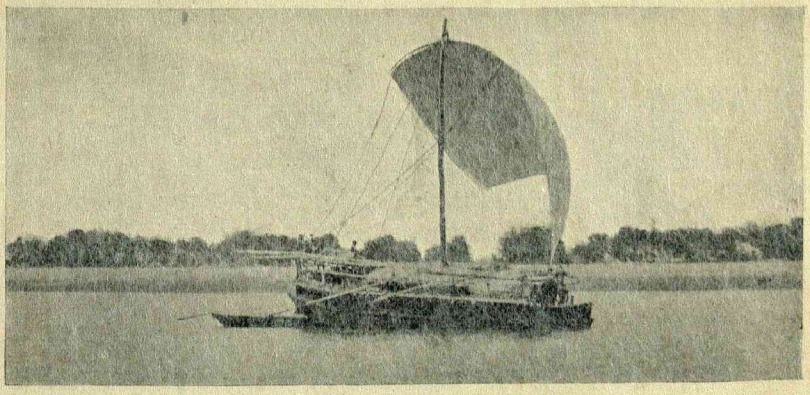
Across the water, soft and low, there comes the call to prayer from the mosque beyond the trees. The cry of the muezzin rings out suddenly, like a challenge on the evening air, "There is but one God." Throughout the East, the wonderful, mystic East, throbbing with the hopes and fears of its countless people, from a thousand mosques and villages the same call to prayer goes forth. At eventide,

as the sun dies down and night begins to fall, the oft-repeated name of God floats out to reassure the Faithful. Long, weird, rising and falling in thrilling cadences, the cry vibrates upon the evening air and lingeringly dies away. On the bank close by a little company of villagers, hurrying home from the *hât*, laden with their purchases, hastily place their burdens on the ground and, looking towards Mecca, kneel reverently in prayer. Absorbed and forgetful for the moment of all else, with many genuflections, bending their foreheads to the ground, they repeat the magnificent confession and supplications of their faith. The oarsmen on the passing boats cease from their labours and, laying by their oars, kneel on the mat platform above the roof, their faces turned towards the west. A hush seems to have fallen over all the river. The earth lies still as if content to listen. Everywhere the voice of prayer and praise fills the world. All things cry aloud that there is but the one God of a great Faith, and that the work of His hands is good.

The sun sinks low. Focussed until now in one great ball of fire, it breaks suddenly, spread left and right in a blaze of colour over the west. Sapphire and topaz and pearl, opal and amethyst and onyx, it blends them all in a glorious blaze of light. Faithfully the river mirrors them back. One moment







ON THE LAKHIYA.

a shimmer of gold, the next a leaping column of fire, it pales at last to orange and mauve and grey. The river itself grows almost still. Placid and calm it seems to rest from its strenuous race. Subduing its murmur as the world prepares for slumber, it grows limpid and clear like a lake revealing itself deep down. The hot impetuous rush of its youth in the dawn has gone. Its mocking note is hushed, lost in the great peace that its scarce-moving stream bears softly on its bosom. Even as it moves, the river seems to sleep. The cares of the day have fallen away down stream. They grow far off, unreal, like things of a dream. The petty strivings and the paltry ambitions of men fade out of sight in the length and breadth and depth of this twilight world. It is needless longer for the river to murmur that all is vanity, for the vanity of the world is already far behind. Its message is all of quietness and peace. Men and nations and empires come and pass, but on the broad bosom of the river there is for all time forgetfulness and rest.

The palm trees cast long shadows out into the stream. Tiny fishing-boats shoot out like long black lines against the paling river, the naked black figures propelling them clear cut like an etching. Dark, silent, with a fascinating air of mystery, they glide by into the night. Across the river there comes the first short, sharp cry of

a jackal. A dog in the village close by barks at the coming night. Fires, one by one, gleam out on either bank. The sky is filled with a thousand stars that watch the world asleep. Slowly a great peace falls over all, and river and land grow still. And so at last there comes a little folding of the hands to slumber, a little pillowing of weary heads to sweet forgetfulness, ere the long Indian day of toil begins anew.

LIST OF SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT AUTHORITIES.

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Seir Mutaqherin.
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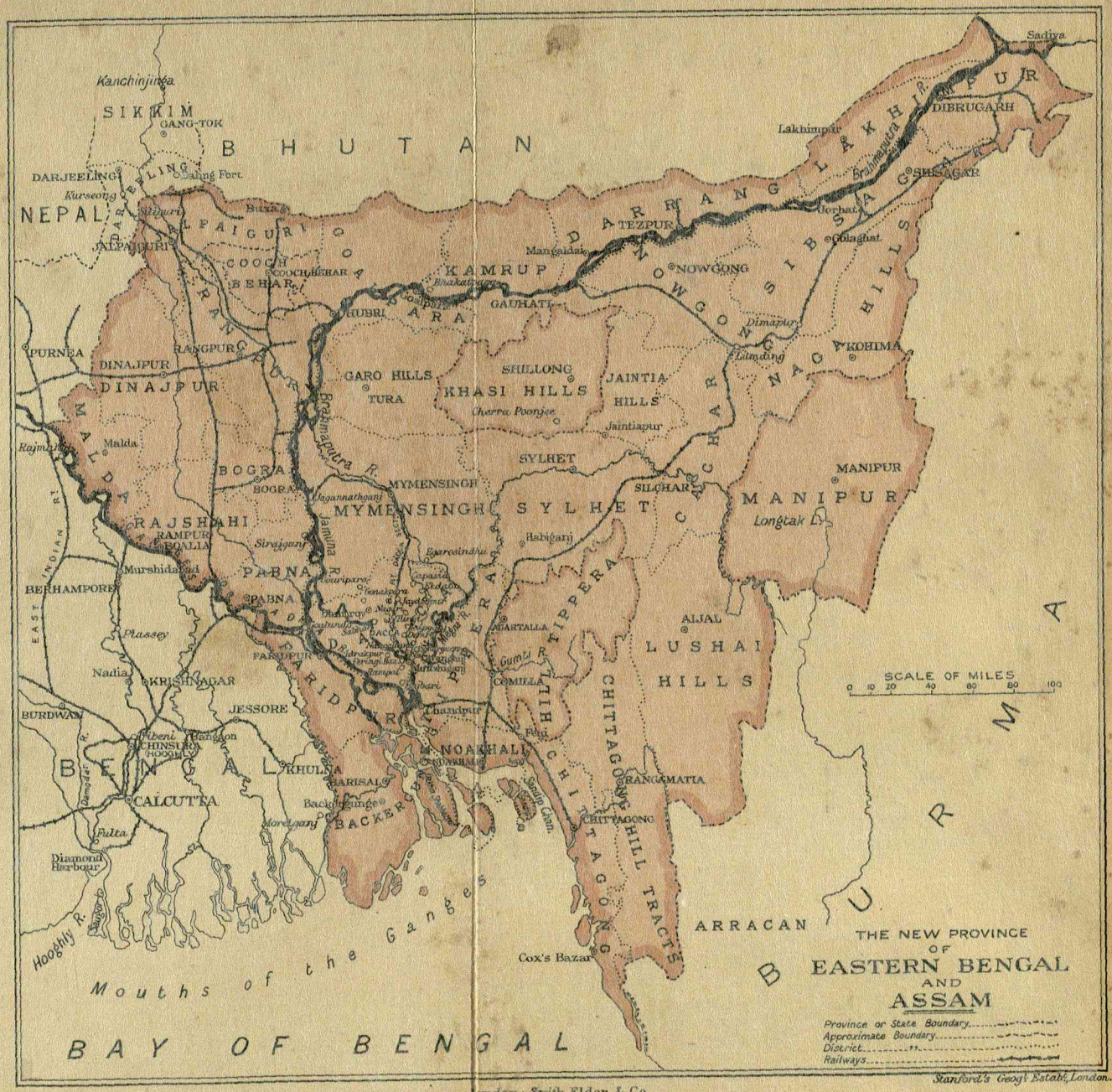

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