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WITH PEN AND BRUSH IN EASTERN LANDS WHEN I WAS YOUNG

BY

SIR VALENTINE CHIROL

ILLUSTRATED WITH SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON
JONATHAN CAPE 30 BEDFORD SQUARE

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1920.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY **J** AND J GRAY
EDINBURGH

INTRODUCTORY

AN eminent person whose name has escaped me laid it down as a golden rule that one should never explain. I prefer to be quite frank with my readers. If I have been tempted to write another volume which skirts and occasionally overlaps some of the ground I covered in my *Fifty Tears in a Changing World,* it is largely because I have been persuaded - perhaps over persuaded - by many friendly critics who said they wanted to hear more about my personal experiences and impressions during my early years of Eastern travel. When I objected that I might not be able to avoid repeating myself sometimes - a failing to which old age is only too prone -1 was bluntly told that nobody would remember in 1929 what I had written in 1926. My hesitations only ceased when my publishers agreed to have the book illustrated with some of the sketches I had brought back with me from remote corners of the world to which few artists - or even modest amateurs such as myself - had had my opportunities of penetrating. For water-colour painting has long been my favourite hobby, and, as a malicious Frenchman observed, *on est souvent porte a se targuer sur tout des petits talents qui ne sont pas de son metier.*

But as soon as I had undertaken to gather together the frayed

threads of recollections spread over a long series of years, I began to envy, save for his physical anguish, the drowning man to whom is, it is said, vouchsafed in his last moment of agony a brief but perfect vision of the whole of his past life. I am not aware that anyone who has recovered after being drawn out of the water, even when life seemed to be extinct, has ever borne witness to such an experience. But I am writing about the East, and Mohammedans at any rate hold a somewhat similar belief as a solemn article of faith. For them at the moment of death the soul of the True Believer, passing to the Seat of Judgment, crosses a bridge 'as fine as a hair and as sharp as the edge of a sword/ and whilst he is crossing it the whole of his life flashes past him in the presence of the Recording Angel who decides his fate in the next world. A Persian friend once indeed likened the supreme ordeal with which he too would be one day confronted to the awful unfolding of a pitilessly truthful cinematograph. He was altogether one of the most interesting products I have known of Western education grafted on to a fine Oriental intellect. I had met him when I went for the first time to Persia in 1884. He had just returned from studying in Europe - a very rare thing in those days - and what was still more rare, he had studied hard and with conspicuous success. For he had come out at the top of the list from the Ecole des Ponts et ChausstSes, the nursery of French civil engineers, and he had gone home with high expectations. For where could a young engineer find greater scope than in a country where there were no roads at all and most of the bridges were falling into ruins? He received a robe of honour from the reigning Shah, Nasr-ed-Din, who, however, had no desire to waste on roads and

bridges the contents of a treasury which barely satisfied the requirements of his personal pleasures and well-stocked *anderoun.* So my friend had had to be content with the high-sounding title of Engineer of the Realms, which he earned by tidying up the ramshackle city of Teheran and building new stucco palaces for the King of Kings and pavilions for his royal ladies. He had brought back with him the Parisian's *esprit gouailleur,* and as I was one of the few who could appreciate it in his very different homeland, he often let himself go with me, and entertained me greatly with his shrewd and cynical comments on high life in the Persian capital. I lost sight of him for many years, but met him again in 1904 when he accompanied the Shah Muzaffer-ed-Din on a state visit to London. He had waxed in the meantime rather portly and very prosperous and, though his French was as perfect as ever, his manner had acquired a rather ponderous solemnity as he described to me the way in which *mon auguste mattre* and his suite were passing the time in London. It was their visit to the cinema, then in its infancy, that seemed to have made the deepest impression upon him because, as he assured me with a pious gravity which I should never have suspected from my earlier acquaintance with him, *'J'y ai constate une des belles verites de notre Sainte Religion,'* and then proceeded to compare it with the experience that awaited him and all True Believers on the sharp and narrow bridge on which *tout bon Musulman fait ou perd son salut.* I answered in the same tone that I felt sure that *de toute jagon Votre Excellence saura y faire convenablement son salut.* Then only his old sceptical smile flitted once more across his face, and as I rose to retire and he shook hands with me, saying how glad he had been

to see me again, he added, with a slight shrug of his shoulders: *'Voyex-vouSy mon ami, j' appartiens en Jin de comp te a l' Orient oil Ia religion est encore bien porteeV* Whether he would have now said that religion is still as fashionable all over the East is another question that would lead me too far afield.

There is anyhow no process available to me by which my memory can be refreshed like that of the drowning man or the dying Mohammedan, and having on the other hand the undeniable advantage of being still alive-though in my seventy-eighth year -1 must be content to draw as best I can on recollections which time has not yet seriously dimmed.

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CHAPTER ONE

MY FIRST WINTER IN CAIRO (1876-77)

THE lure of Eastern travel which I felt for the first time in Egypt more than half a century ago is hard to define. It was not merely the attraction of strange countries and strange peoples, or of wider horizons, or of more brilliant sunshine and scenery often wilder and grander, though seldom really more beautiful, than in Europe. It was certainly not at first the absorbing interest of ancient civilizations and ancient religions far removed from our own, or of the problems involved in the adjustment of world-wide relations between the white and the coloured races, for that only grew upon me with wider experience and knowledge. It was, at the beginning, chiefly the curiosity of a youthful and naturally eager imagination that was stirred by the picturesque unexpectedness of things and their often humorous incongruities, as I watched the daily life of people whose habits and beliefs and general outlook were as the poles asunder from my own; whilst, behind it all, there constantly peeped out the same human nature common, for better or for worse, to all mankind.

I have never, perhaps, rubbed shoulders so continuously and

familiarly with the popular life of the East as during my first winter in Cairo. I did not stay at Shepheard's Hotel, which, though only the embryo of the present Palace Hotel, had been the chief resort of English visitors since British enterprise had opened up an overland route to India *via* Alexandria and Cairo, long before the Suez Canal existed. I took up my quarters at the far more modest H6tel du Nil, down a narrow lane off the Muski, in what had been the old Christian quarter, when Christians only existed on sufferance. Bonaparte had at one time resided close by. The small inn had been modernized for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and it had a score or so of pleasant rooms looking out on a tiled courtyard, with a tiny fountain and bright flower-beds, and tall palm trees overhead against the deep blue sky. For a traveller who had only just landed in Egypt, to whom everything was bewilderingly new, the approach was rather disconcerting. Coming from the station on donkey-back - then practically the only means of locomotion, except one's feet -1 skirted the new semi-European quarter, which the Khedive Ismail had created round the then new Ezbekieh Gardens. But as soon as I turned into the old Muski, still immune from all modern improvements, I crossed the threshold of the thoroughly Eastern and still largely mediaeval city that was then still the real Cairo.

When I began to explore its crowded bazaars and its narrow streets and tortuous alleys, with long blank walls and mysterious latticed windows and infrequent doorways, low and inhospitable, nothing at first impressed me more than the absence of all wheeled traffic in what was, after all, a great and populous capital. Except the highest in the land, every one who could afford it

rode donkeys; each with an attendant donkey-boy to clear the way through the surging crowd of pedestrians, with good-humoured warnings to them to move to the right or to the left, or to have a care for their feet or for their heads or for the bundles they were carrying. One Hassan had annexed me to himself and his donkey from the moment when I selected him outside the railway station to convey me to my inn, and they both soon bulked quite large in my daily life. They were both very friendly creatures. Hassan, who belonged to a generation of donkey-boys which has long since disappeared from the streets of Cairo, and had not yet been spoilt by tourists, was a merry and quick-witted lad some fifteen or sixteen years old - like most Orientals he disliked saying exactly how old he was - and we were soon very good friends. He took a great pride in his white donkey, its tail and ears carefully dyed with henna, and a string of lucky blue beads round its neck, and he always had a nosebag handy to hearten it up with fine-chopped straw and an occasional handful of fresh green *berseem.*

The more I saw of Cairo and its surroundings the more fascinated I was by the strangeness of it all, and I was keen to learn as quickly as possible something of the language. Before I came out I had puzzled over an Arabic grammar and acquired a fairly long vocabulary of ordinary words and simple sentences, which I could not yet pronounce intelligibly. I lost no time in enlisting the help of a certain Ahmed EfFendi, *professeur licencie de langue Arabe,* who had graduated from an indifferent Government school, but without reaping the reward he had hoped for in some small official post. He was lean and sour-faced, but as he wore a long if rather shabby black *stambulina* and red

tarbush he was, in his own opinion, quite a superior person. We were of about the same age, and having some knowledge of classical Arabic he could not understand why a man of my education should bother about the vulgar tongue. Indeed, I soon found that I could pick the latter up much more rapidly from Hassan, who in the course of our donkey-rides was always ready to tell me the names of everything we saw, and thought it great fun to make me wrestle with all the terrible gutturals and aspirates of his native language. He had, too, a great store of popular stories, which he would repeat again and again until he had driven their meaning home to my still unfamiliar ears. He knew his Cairo by heart, though his knowledge was often a strange jumble of fiction and fact. But I had my *Lane's Modern Egyptians*, and other then standard works, by which to correct his flights of fancy, whilst our leisurely pilgrimages to the countless mosques of the medieval city, living examples of the finest Arab architecture, and to the scattered wastes of tombs on the edge of the desert, gradually helped to initiate me into Islamic art and history. The religious and social aspects of popular life revealed themselves day by day to me in the gay processions assembled for a circumcision or a wedding, or in the more sombre ones hurrying their dead to humble graveyards with a ragged tail of hired women mourners wailing for all they were worth, or in the everyday forms of Islamic worship when, at the appointed call of the Muezzin from the nearest minaret, the unsophisticated True Believer spreads his coat as a prayer carpet and bows down, wherever he may happen to be, in the direction of Mecca, falling on his hands and knees, and even touching the ground with his forehead in accordance with an

unchanging ritual. Most striking of all was the Call to Prayer in the silence of the night, when it was borne from minaret to minaret over the sleeping city - the call which is heard five times every day throughout the world of Islam, from the Atlantic to the far Pacific. As I first heard it then, and as I heard it hundreds of times afterwards in Mohammedan countries far removed from Egypt, it has seemed to me to breathe the whole spirit and the very history of militant Islam in the first shrill notes of defiance and triumph which reflect its early career of irresistible conquest, and its gradual decline and waning power in the prolonged and mournfully tremulous wail in which it fades away.

Still stranger to me, though as I afterwards discovered peculiar neither to Egypt nor to Islam itself, were the periodical excursions into the realm of religious ecstasy in which the populace of Cairo and the fellaheen of the adjoining villages periodically delighted. The corybantic performances of dancing and howling dervishes became, later on, familiar features in the round of sight-seeing provided for European tourists who flocked in ever-increasing numbers to Cairo and Constantinople. But they became so clearly just spectacular displays, staged to gratify the curiosity and loosen the purse-strings of foreign visitors, that they lacked the spontaneity of the wild *xikrs* in which almost the whole male population of a small village on the outskirts of Cairo would join under the leadership of three or four peripatetic dervishes to celebrate a local saint's day. Dervishes and saints' days are alike alien to Mohammedan orthodoxy, in which there should be no room either for the worship of saints or for the growth of those vast confraternities of dervishes which have

been often, if very superficially, compared to the monastic orders of our own Middle Ages. Their appeal was, indeed, to an instinctive mysticism far older than Islam, and what began in strange physical exercises under the compulsion, it was held, of some higher power, usually ended in boisterous saturnalia, reminiscent of far more ancient creeds and customs. I was present at one of the last performances in Cairo of the *Doseh* - a popular pageant then held every year on a great open space, long since built over, between the Ezbekieh and Bulak. The performers, all, of course, men and fairly full-grown youths, laid themselves down full length with their faces flat on the ground and their bodies stripped to the waist, in two long and closely-packed rows. After a period of waiting, during which the spectators wrought themselves up to a high pitch of expectancy by continuous shouts of, 'Allah! Allah!' a white-bearded sheikh, in a long white robe, and wearing the green turban of a descendant of the Prophet, appeared on a white horse and rode slowly once up and down the closely-packed floor of naked backs, which, as far as I could perceive, never even quivered under the impact of the horse's hoofs, whilst all around the shouts of, 'Allah! Allah!' rose and fell in rhythmic cadence. The sheikh himself seemed alone unmoved. His eyes were cast up to Heaven and the reins rested so lightly in his hands that there was no perceptible attempt to control his horse's steps. Sceptics hinted that the performers had been drugged for the occasion, and many of them certainly wore a somewhat dazed look when they got up and dispersed.

Times were already changing in Egypt, and the *Doseh* passed out of fashion there, but I saw it held once more a couple of

THE NILE CATARACT BEFORE THE BUILDING OF THE GREAT ASSUAN DAM

years later in a small Syrian town at the foot of Anti-Lebanon, and Christians and Druses flocked to it almost as eagerly as Mohammedans, though only the latter took any actual part in it. As if to show the subtle nexus between many different exhibitions of religious ecstasy all over the East, I witnessed a good many years later, in an ancient Byzantine church at Arghilescu, in Roumania, a ceremony which at once reminded me of the *Doseh.* In much the same way as at a *Dosea*$_y$ there were stretched out in the nave, but on soft and evidently padded carpets, rows, not of men and youths, but of little children, mostly still of a tender age, on whose naked backs a priest, carrying the Sacrament, strode bare-footed to an accompaniment of droning chaunts behind the screen, which in the Eastern church divides the nave from the choir. None showed any signs of hurt and very few even whimpered. Perhaps they, too, had been slightly drugged for the occasion. When it was over, their parents picked them up tenderly and dispersed with the rest of the large congregation, all crossing themselves repeatedly, and devoutly convinced that this strange form of benediction had rendered the little ones immune against every kind of infantile ailment.

But to return to Cairo. The bazaars were always close at hand, and I found that I could learn a great deal by watching the kaleidoscope of popular life which they presented when the fellaheen came in from the country to do their early marketing, and squabbled as loudly over their infinitesimal purchases as, an hour or two later, the heavily-shrouded townswomen, whose dark eyes peeped out from under tantalizing veils, whilst they chaffered with the shopkeepers at their open stalls with

maddening volubility, whether over a set of gold bangles, or the packet of henna with which to dye their own nails or their donkeys' tails, or the spices needed for their evening dish of pilaf. The whole atmosphere of the bazaars was very different in those days. Visitors to Egypt were still few in number - barely five hundred altogether during the whole of that winter as against the thousands that pour in now in a single week during the height of the season. The merchants, mostly belonging to old-established guilds, squatted serenely in their little shops in dignified receipt rather than in clamorous pursuit of custom. One soon got to know many of them by sight, and was offered a friendly cup of coffee whether one made purchases or not. Hassan, too, proved to be invaluable there as elsewhere, for he had a privileged position amongst donkey-boys, as an uncle of his had charge of the sedate and well-groomed mule on which one of the principal curio dealers rode to and from his business. This merchant was a man of consequence, but he soon showed himself very forthcoming and quite ready to produce his most treasured wares when he saw that I took an intelligent interest in them. He was the proud possessor of a splendid damascened scimitar, reputed to have been worn by Bonaparte, which he kept in his own house, and after he had talked to me several times about it he invited me to come and see it and have an evening meal with him. His house itself, which dated back to the seventeenth century, was well worth seeing. Largely of old timber, with wonderful carved woodwork, it was built round a pleasant courtyard, with orange trees and running water, and beyond the *selamlik* reserved for male visitors, the tittering of female voices behind lofty wooden screens betrayed the presence

of a discreetly amused hareem. The supper - an excellent one - was served on large brass trays, at which we sat cross-legged on the floor, with a couple of cushions for my special benefit. My fellow-guests were, like my host, mostly elderly men of the merchant class, greybeards with grave and extremely courteous manners, who had been born and bred and had prospered in their time-honoured surroundings. But the most interesting figure of all was the patriarch of the household, too infirm and blind to join our party, who sat on a raised divan in the background, twisting his amber beads and mumbling verses from the Koran. He had, I was told, witnessed as a child the French occupation which first made Egypt the cockpit of European rivalries and wars, and had actually seen the sallow, keen-faced Corsican when he on occasion donned a turban and issued his decrees to a Mohammedan people in the name of Allah the All-Merciful and His Prophet Mohammed. Even men barely past middle age remembered the gloomy end of Mohammed Ali's long reign in 1849, after he and his son, Ibrahim Pasha, who had twice made the Sultan of Turkey tremble for his throne, had long been furtively watching for each other's death with the jealousy bred of incipient insanity. There was, I generally found, more inclination to talk about the stormy past than about the dangers of the Rake's Progress on which the Khedive Ismail was already rushing Egypt into ruin. All these worthy folk were good Mohammedans, but there was no trace of anti-foreign feeling. I only once heard it mentioned with a spice of malice that, after the defeat of an ill-fated British expedition in 1807, the heads of British prisoners had been exposed to the popular gaze, hoisted on pikes in the old Ezbekieh Gardens. During

the great Mohammed Ali's long struggle for emancipation from his vassalage to Turkey, Palmerston's pro-Turkish policy had driven the Pasha of Egypt into the arms of France, whose cultural influence, dating back in no small measure to the French savants whom Bonaparte brought with him to Egypt, prevailed until long after the present British occupation, and has not yet by any means disappeared. *Franghi* was still the name generally applied to all Europeans, and if a distinction was made in favour of the *Inglizi,* or English, it was mainly due to the appreciation of the greater spending powers of British travellers - and to the sensational financial *coup* by which Disraeli had just acquired the Khedive's shares in the Canal.

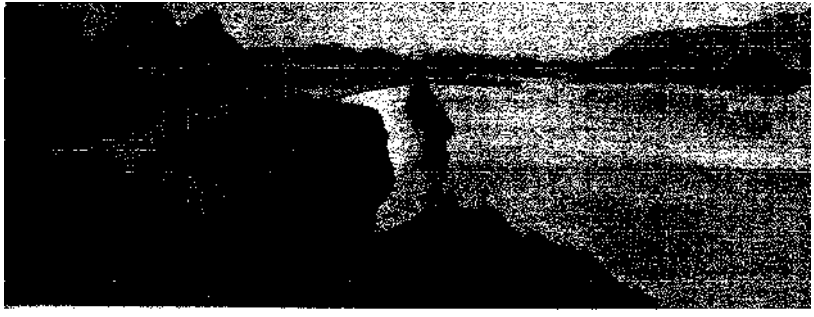
To Ahmed Effendi I was indebted for a very different circle of acquaintances. For he introduced me to the small, more up-to-date cafes frequented by the young *intelligentsia,* with a smattering of foreign education, who were beginning to develop Nationalist aspirations. They knew little and cared less about the past history of Egypt, but claimed to be familiar with all the underground currents of the Egyptian Court and the intrigues of foreign Powers which they were apt to construe into covert assaults upon the independence of Egypt. Amongst recent scandals was the sensational disappearance of the once all-powerful Mufettish, who had been for many years during the Great Oppression the chosen confidant and instrument of the Khedive Ismail. Had he been still alive or already strangled before he was conveyed on to the Khedivial yacht to vanish for ever into space, or, at any rate, into the Sudan? Never a word was heard of sympathy for him, but they discussed with bated breath the value of his palaces and treasure which Ismail had

confiscated, and the amounts which his vast hareems had fetched in the hidden slave-markets of Cairo and Constantinople. Angry denunciation of the existing regime was only checked amongst the wildest hot-heads by the dread of Palace spies, who were said to be ubiquitous. A new spirit of discontent was clearly abroad, but it had to wait for the appearance of Arabi, the Egyptian, to galvanize it into open revolt.

But whatever circles I frequented my knowledge of Arabic was steadily increasing, and what was scarcely less useful, I learnt most of the customs essential to polite society, whether conservative or progressive; as, for instance, that I should always cross the threshold with my right foot foremost and handle my food with my right hand only, and say, 'Praise be to Allah' when I or anyone else sneezed, and, above all, proclaim that I sought refuge with Allah the All-Merciful from Satan the Evil One if I happened to yawn, lest Satan should take advantage of my gaping mouth to step in and take possession of me.

Whilst I found all these different glimpses of Eastern life very entertaining and stimulating, I had European acquaintances also who kept me in touch with the curious and often grotesque aspects of the social and political life of which Abdin Palace was the centre. Round it gravitated not only the diplomatic world, and the international financiers into whose hands Ismail was selling himself and his country, but a swarm of foreign and native adventurers who had settled down on the unfortunate country for their different purposes. Ismail might talk of having made of Egypt a corner of Europe projected into Africa, but the western facade on which his vanity and extravagance had squandered millions was as meretricious as it was thin, and, to

those who had eyes to see, it did not conceal an underlying strain of Oriental barbarism nowhere more conspicuous than in the long line of huge stucco palaces enclosed behind high walls on one side and overlooking the Nile on the other, which were the cloistered barracks -1 can think of no other words to describe them - in which lived in idle luxury, but in strict confinement, the thousands of women who either belonged to the immediate household of the Khedivial family, or were their innumerable attendants or slaves. Ismail's mother, a masterful lady, who was for a long time a real power behind the throne, lived in the largest of these palaces, and alone had nearly a thousand women to share her gilded prison. The keepers of her prison, and of a dozen others of the same type, could be seen at all hours of the day slouching at the outer gates - coal-black African eunuchs, themselves the victims of one of the most cruel customs of the East. They were mostly slaves, captured as children by the great slave raiders and traders of the Sudan and Central Africa, and subjected by them at once to an operation so barbarously and clumsily performed that they had to be hastily buried for a time up to their waist in the hot desert sand so that they should not bleed to death. So many did die that General Gordon estimated at barely eight per cent, those who survived and were surreptitiously brought down for sale, chiefly at Cairo and Constantinople, where they fetched very high prices. During the wave of profligate extravagance of which Ismail set the example, the numbers of eunuchs attached to a hareem connoted the wealth and power of their owners. Some of these poor wretches, who knew how to curry favour with the principal ladies of the hareem to which they were attached, were able to



EGYPTIAN OUTPOSTS AT WADY HALFA BEFORE THE RECONQUEST OF THE **SUDAN**

amass large fortunes which, however, were never really their own, and, on their death, passed automatically to their masters. The most important bore high-sounding official titles; the Chief Eunuch at Constantinople, for instance, who still took precedence in Abdul Hamid's day of all the highest dignitaries of the State, except the Sheikh ul Islam, being sonorously styled, 'His Highness the Guardian of the Gates of Virtue and Felicity.' In Cairo the Chief Eunuch in the household of the Khedive's mother was reputed to wield upon and through her very considerable influence even in public affairs. By the rarest of chances I had an opportunity to meet him once at the house of a German doctor who had specialized on the diseases to which eunuchs are most liable. Over six feet in height, broad-shouldered and rather corpulent, but with thin shambling legs, he was a pure negro with the characteristic features of his race, and though his woolly hair was turning white and he was much bent with rheumatism, he had a striking presence. Like most of his kind, who have a strange conceit of their personal appearance, he had big jewelled rings on his fingers and well-fitting patent leather shoes, and wore the fez and long black coat, buttoned up to the neck, and black trousers of the Egyptian official, evidently made by a smart Egyptian tailor. He smoked cigarettes continuously, which, like his jewelled cigarette-holder, were then a fashionable innovation in smart Khedivial circles and gradually displaced the long Turkish *chibouk*. He talked Turkish, which was still the language of the Court, as well as, and, I think, more fluently than Arabic. He had a smattering of European politics and an immense curiosity about Court life and all exalted personages in Europe. He poured out streams

of haphazard questions, sometimes shrewd enough, but more often childishly ignorant. He took little notice of me at first, but when he heard I was English he wanted me to tell him whether Englishmen thought Disraeli was really a greater man than Bismarck. Every one knew, he observed with a broad grin, that Disraeli was the richer man, for he had just bought the Khedive's Suez Canal shares for four million pounds; but had not Bismarck created the greatest army and the greatest empire in Europe and made the French eat dirt? His manners had all the formal courtesy of the East, and he salaamed profusely when he shuffled heavily out of the room and was helped by a younger eunuch into the magenta satin-lined brougham which was waiting for him. Luxurious carriages built in France were one of Ismail's recent importations from Europe; victorias for the use of the Court and a few privileged pashas, and curtained broughams for the ladies of the hareems to take the air in of an afternoon in the Shubra Avenue, almost the only carriage-road then available, with a black eunuch on the box next to the coachman, perhaps to protect them from illicit curiosity or perhaps to see that they should not display any.

This barbarous plague spot was, however, soon to disappear out of Egypt when the Rake's Progress ended in Ismail's deposition by the Powers in 1879. His son Tewfik, who succeeded him and was the husband of only one wife, set the novel example of a simple domestic life. In a country as impoverished as Ismail's extravagance had left it, the fashionable and extremely expensive demand for eunuchs would have slackened even if the supply had not been rapidly arrested by the chaos in the Sudan which culminated in the revolt of the

Mahdi. The huge hareems in Cairo melted away. The palaces they had tenanted stood empty until they were successively bought and pulled down to make room for new residential quarters of a European type. Of the eunuchs, who were usually short-lived, as they fell a ready prey to consumption, only a few survivors are left as pitiful reminders of old and evil days when Ismail was burning his Egyptian candle at both ends, Eastern and Western.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PYRAMIDS AND THE P{ILE

WHEN Herodotus wrote that Egypt is the Nile and the Nile is Egypt, he may well have had before him some such vision of the Nile valley as I had one afternoon, just before sunset, from the crest of the Mokattam hills high above the Cairo citadel. Behind me was the immense desert which stretches eastward in an almost unbroken belt across Arabia and Persia and inner Asia to the Great Wall of China. In the lengthening shadows Cairo lay grey and unobtrusive, and beyond it my eyes ranged up and down the valley of the mighty river without which there would have been no Cairo and no Egypt. To the south, descending from the remote lakes and mountains of Central Africa, its waters, at that hour a glittering riband of molten gold edged with darkening palm-groves, emerged from behind the prolonged escarpments of the Mokattam range, whilst to the north they could be traced for a much greater distance on their way to the Mediterranean, across the broadening Delta, which had already exchanged its noon-day coat of emerald-green for an evening mantle of soft blue haze. Straight opposite and just across the one strip of verdure, quickened to life by annual

inundations from the Nile, the desert resumed its sway, stretching again in almost unbroken desolation to the Atlantic Ocean. It glowed like a fringe of fire under the rays of the setting sun, until the great orb sank behind it in a last flash of expiring brilliance. On that background of crimson and purple there stood out for a long time, yet in solitary relief, the great Pyramids, as if they were the only things that mattered, the only things whose imperishable majesty defied time and nature. I am glad I had not yet seen them at close quarters, for when one is too near to them they seem to get out of focus and one's chief impression is of inordinate and almost monstrous bulk.

An excursion to the Pyramids was not the easy morning or afternoon run that motors and tram-cars have made it to-day. The long straight road from Kasr-el-Nil, the one bridge that then spanned the river, had been laid out and planted with Nile acacias for the Empress Eugenie's visit in 1869. But seven years of Egyptian neglect and the destructive feet of shuffling camels had played such havoc with it that when my donkey, with the faithful Hassan trotting at its side, brought me out in just under two hours, it was reckoned very good going, and at the end of the dusty and thirsty ride there was no Mena House nor any other European habitation to which one could turn for refreshment. Where an ugly square building for the officials in charge of the Pyramid area now stands at the foot of the Great Pyramid, there could still be seen the empty and dilapidated shell of the wooden pavilion which the Khedive had provided for the Empress's brief but sumptuous entertainment. Already, however, one of those fantastic legends had been woven round it, which in the East grow up like mushrooms in the night and are

as quickly forgotten. It was to the effect that when the mighty ruler of Egypt, to wit the Khedive Ismail, had visited Europe in order to see the great 'wonder show' - the Paris Exhibition of 1867-he had fallen under the spell of 'the beautiful Empress of the Franks,' and captivated in turn by him, she had promised to come out one day and wed him under the shadow of the Great Pyramid. The worthy sheikh who told me the story had forgotten all about the opening of the Suez Canal, and hardly knew what the Canal meant. What he did know was that the enchantress had come out, and that his Lord and Master, Effendina the Khedive, had built for her as she had desired it, under the Great Pyramid, a costly pavilion for the celebration of their nuptials after a whole week of splendid festivities in Cairo such as the world had never before seen or dreamt of. But she was an Infidel - a word he emphasized by spitting on the ground - and the Devil had entered into her. At the last moment, after Effendina had himself brought her out in wedding procession, she had refused to keep the word she had pledged to him; and the wrath of Allah had in due course descended upon her. For had she not had to fly within less than a year from her kingdom and leave it to be ravaged by barbarous invaders? Had not her great capital, and the palace in which she had lived as a glorious queen of beauty, been themselves burnt to the ground by her rebellious subjects? And the old man raised his hands to Heaven and then bowed his head reverently, and exclaimed: 'Praise unto Allah and there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet.' Surely none but an Oriental would ever have conceived so dramatic an interpretation of the Franco-Prussian War and the tragedy of the Paris Commune!

THE SOURCE OF THE ADONIS IN HIGH LEBANON

The Pyramids themselves were still a happy hunting-ground for the predatory Arabs, half bedouin, half fellaheen, who lived in a squalid village on the edge of the desert and the town, and the visitors who came out from Cairo to see the Pyramids were their appointed quarry. No attempt had yet been made to bring them under any control. They swarmed round you and took bodily possession of you, dragging you up over the huge tiers of terraced stones to the summit of the Great Pyramid, and as soon as you had reached it and would fain have had a quarter of an hour's peace to take in the marvellous panorama, the clamour for *bakshish*, which you imagined to have settled before you began the ascent, became more and more insistent and pursued you the whole way down whilst you were being dragged or lifted to the bottom by your unsavoury bodyguard. When you had got to the bottom much the same painful process was still in store for you if you wanted to crawl through the low and narrow passages leading into the gloomy sepulchral chamber that once held the Great Pharaoh's tomb.

On one beautiful moonlight night I and three other kindred spirits were moved to ride out to the Pyramids in the hope of enjoying them in peace. When we arrived there the Pyramid Arabs were, as we had expected, all wrapt in deep slumber in their village. I had prescribed absolute silence to my trusty Hassan, who in turn enjoined upon the other donkey-boys that they must at any cost prevent their mounts from braying. We were all of us familiar with the customary way of ascent to the top and we stole noiselessly along, though there were moments when we perhaps regretted the absence of the brawny arms that on other occasions had pushed or hauled us up some of the most

difficult bits. We got to the top all right at last and were amply rewarded for our pains; for wonderful as is the panorama in the daytime, it takes on at night under the full moon a peculiar atmosphere of silent mystery. The air was keen, but the stone platform on the summit still gave out some of the heat which the sun had poured on to it the whole day long. We lingered for about half an hour in that great peace, but just before descending we were seized with a sudden and rather impish impulse. What would happen if we gave a tremendous view-hallo? Would it rouse the sleepy Arabs out of their lair? If it did, would they take our voices for those of dreaded *afrits* and pull their cloaks all the more tightly over their panic-stricken ears, or would they recognize them as those of Frankish intruders who dared to rob them of their appointed spoils? So we gave three lusty view-hallos at a minute or two's interval, and we soon saw what was to happen. In the silence of the night voices carry as far over the stillness of the desert as they are borne on the surface of the water. There was a tumultuous rush of excited figures gesticulating and shouting up every path that led towards the Pyramid - dark figures in their indigo blue *galoubiyehs,* and white figures in lighter woollen cloaks thrown over their shoulders. As they swarmed on the moonlit strip of desert and seemed to multiply at every step, they suddenly reminded me of pictures by Italian or German Primitives of the dead rising in their winding-sheets out of their graves at the sound of the last trump. It was a curiously ghostly scene, but ghosts they certainly were not, as we soon discovered when half-way down the Pyramid we encountered them climbing hot-foot towards us, some cursing us angrily for having stolen a march

upon them, and some shouting with laughter and chaffing each other, I gathered, for having been caught napping. The upshot of it all was of course a long wrangle between them over the *bakshish* which we ultimately had to dispense more lavishly than if we had submitted to the commonplace daytime ordeal. But it was well worth the experience.

Before riding back to Cairo we went down to have a look at the Sphinx. He - for the Egyptian Sphinx is reputed to be a male - wore also a more mystifying smile in the gentle moonlight than under the fierce noonday sun. It was not, however, then that I saw him at his best, but later on when there was a Mena House to stay at, and it was easy to get up early and enjoy the sunrise from the Pyramids. The view I have in mind is only to be had just about the winter solstice, when the sun, rising at a given point on the horizon, flushes the opposite face of the Great Pyramid with a golden glory against which the head of the lower-lying Sphinx still in shade stands out, grey and strangely serene, like a Byzantine icon in a triangular frame of burnished gold.

Bonaparte's stirring appeal to his troops to remember that forty centuries were looking down on them from the Pyramids, when he engaged and broke the flower of the Mameluke cavalry, is known to every schoolboy. But there is something much greater than sheer antiquity behind them. There have been, as we are now discovering, much older civilizations than that of which the Pyramids are an amazing survival. But has there ever been in the record of the human race any period in which the eternal problem of life and death has been so fearlessly faced by the mightiest of the world's rulers as by the Pharaohs of the Pyramids,

when each one began as soon as he ascended the throne to erect the huge structure that was one day to enclose his tomb? As it grew year by year he doubtless gloried in his achievement, and in the length of his reign and the omnipotence to which it bore witness. But what else was his achievement but a perpetual *memento mort* raised within sight of his own palace and a constant challenge to the pomp and circumstance of his mortal life? At Thebes the Tombs of the Kings are dug into the mountain side in a valley well out of sight of the splendid city in which the Pharaohs of the southern Empire had their abode, and though the sacred ritual of the dead, with which Egyptian mythology is so closely bound up, must often have haunted them, they had not for ever in front of them the solid mass of ponderous stones which the Pharaohs of Memphis watched rising tier by tier, and growing day by day, as the goal to which their shortening lives were irrevocably moving. Never surely have mortal rulers, who in their lifetime ranked almost with the gods, so taught themselves to visualize their own mortality and to ponder on the mystery of the Great Unknown to be disclosed to them only when they were laid to rest beneath the Pyramids, built, we know, by their own orders and under their own eyes, but at what cost of human labour and suffering and life we have no means of knowing.

Just as the Pyramids gaze down to-day on great crowds of trippers who come out from Cairo in motors and tram-cars, and seldom have the curiosity to climb up to the top, the Nile has had to suffer the noisy invasion of tourist steamers which have almost completely superseded the old-fashioned dahabiyeh with its picturesque lateen sails and leisurely mode of progress. Yet

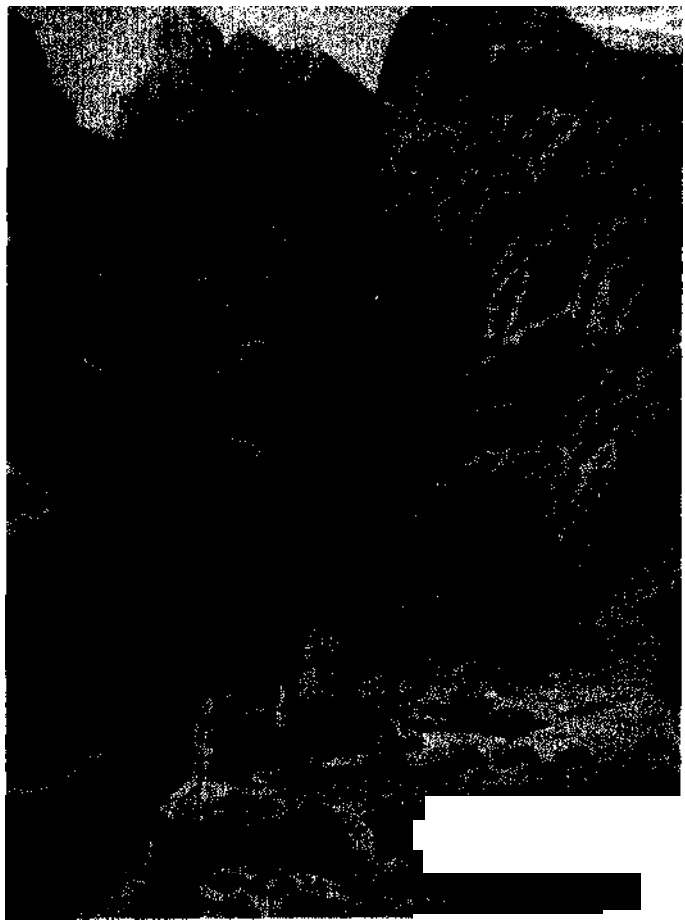
the journey up the river had a peculiar charm in the old days when the dahabiyeh, with a stiff northerly breeze behind it, glided all day long peacefully on the silent waters until the time had come to tie up somewhere for the night. When one had grown tired of watching the varied life of the river, the stream of native boats loaded down to the water's edge with red earthenware pots made out of Nile mud or with green produce from the ripening harvests, or the fellaheen stripped almost naked plying to the rhythm of their ancient chaunts the leathern *shadouf* which raised the river water in successive pailfuls from pool to pool until it reached the level of their fields, one could land for an hour before sunset and learn something of their village life from a friendly people often eager to pour out their grievances to the stranger they credited with unfailing power to procure redress for them. Sometimes one could measure with one's own eyes the terrible plight to which they were reduced in the last years of Ismail's reign, when the *kur bash* was mercilessly applied to the soles of the recalcitrant peasant's feet to extract from him the last piastre of taxes already paid two or three times over; or when all the able-bodied men of a village were suddenly seized and marched off in chains, or heavily guarded, to cultivate the huge domains which the Khedive had filched from the people for his own and his family's aggrandisement. During the night all was at rest on the dahabiyeh, and the only sound, which became an accustomed lullaby, was the creaking and moaning of the waterwheels worked night and day by patient oxen, or sometimes by a donkey and a camel harnessed grotesquely together. Few dahabiyehs struggled up beyond the first cataract at Assuan where, with the desert closing in on either side, the

river carved its tumultuous way between huge rocks and islands where the great Assuan dam stands to-day. One of my sketches shows the line of sun-scorched rocks which had to be removed, or may in some places have served for the foundations of the dam which has now for more than twenty years stored up for the dry season a vast supply of water that formerly ran to waste in the Mediterranean. It is a sketch that, for me at least, recalls one of the greatest material achievements by which the British occupation of Egypt stands justified - an achievement conceived and completed by the great British engineers, who were my friends, Sir William Willcocks and Sir William Garstin, during Lord Cromer's proconsulate.

Not till many years later did I go up the further stretch of the Nile which lies between Assuan and Wady Haifa, when there were some small steamers plying between the two places. In 1894 Wady Haifa had become the military base for the Egyptian army after the evacuation of the Sudan, and Kitchener, who was biding his time for its reconquest, procured a little flotilla for the easier transport of his troops on that reach of the river. He was very proud of the way in which he had done it, and it certainly showed his remarkable capacity for business. The old Government steam-launches used for carrying the mails between Port Said and Ismailia had been laid up since the construction of a narrow-gauge railway along the Canal, and the Postal Department decided to put them up for sale by public tender. Kitchener quickly contrived to find out who were likely to tender for them, and bought them all off before sending in his own tender on behalf of the Egyptian War Office. He thus got them, as he said, 'for a song,' at the expense, of course, of the Postal Depart-

ment, with whose interests in the matter he professed to have had no concern. He had then had them broadened and lengthened and converted at no great cost for the work he meant to get out of them. I was Kitchener's guest, and he took me out to the Egyptian outposts beyond which lay the lost Sudan still submerged under the vast flood of barbarism that had flowed with irresistible force north and east and west since the fall of Khartoum in January 1885. I' was almost certain death for any white man, and even for any Egyptian, to venture beyond those outposts, and whilst I was sketching one day the line of desert hills that lay just beyond the range of the Egyptian guns, the Egyptian soldier who had been sent with me pointed to some figures, men and camels, sharply outlined against the clear horizon. 'Look!' he said, 'there are the Dervishes,' and I could distinctly see them carrying a great Mahdi standard. To me it was a thrilling sight, for I had seen something of the great Sudan tragedy at closer quarters during the campaign in the Eastern Sudan, conducted from Suakim, in support of the expeditionary force sent up for the relief of Khartoum in the winter of 1884-5. It had probably been a forlorn hope from the first, or at least the effort had been made far too late. But there was nevertheless a good deal of sharp and rather purposeless fighting along the foothills of the desert ranges west of Suakim, and I had watched the headlong rushes of Osman Digna's dauntless spearsmen, who once for a moment broke a British square, but in the end always recoiled and melted away before the deadly volleys of modern rifles and machine-guns. Finer specimens of humanity could hardly be found anywhere in the world than these 'fuzzy-wuzzies' with their great heads of bushy hair and their lithe and

almost naked limbs striding over the open ground to the cadenced shout of 'Allah, Allah.' One youth I shall never forget, whom I saw after the fighting was over, lying dead, but as if he were only sleeping, with just one clot of blood where a bullet had passed through his heart, and his shield still clutched firmly in his right hand and shading his head - a dark statue in bronze, than which none could be more finely modelled, of a stricken warrior with the fierce sun beating straight down upon it in the glare of the pitiless desert all around. That vision haunted me again whilst in very similar surroundings I was sketching the no-man's-land between the Egyptian outposts and those of the wild hordes who still threatened to pour yet further down the Nile Valley. What the Egyptian soldier, who sat at ease in front of me gazing down into the broad and peaceful river, thought about it all, I could not tell. To the few questions I put to him his one reply was a cheerful: 'The Sirdar [Kitchener] knows all about it.' And doubtless Kitchener did know all about it. He was not fretting at the delays which finance and politics imposed upon him. He had imbibed something of the fatalism of the East. He knew that the Sudan would have to be reconquered and that it would fall to him to reconquer it - probably, he said, in five or six years' time. He was conscious that without the very substantial help of British troops the Egyptian army alone would never be equal to the task, but in the meantime he was reorganizing it patiently and methodically, and in 1898, well within the time-limit he had set himself, it was ready to play an extremely useful part in the final advance upon Khartoum and the crowning victory at Omdurman.



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MY CAMP IN THE GORGES OF THE KARUN RIVER IN PERSIA

CHAPTER THREE

HIGHWAYS AND "BYWAYS OF SYRIA

SYRIA lies next door to Egypt. Its people are for the most part Arabs of much purer blood than the people of the Nile Valley and the Arabic they speak is nearer, than in Egypt, to classical Arabic. It shares with Egypt its Mediterranean sea front, and like Egypt it is hemmed in by far-flung deserts. There all likeness to Egypt ceases, for Syria is a land of many hills and streams and pleasant valleys and fertile plains. When I first went there in 1879 it was of course a province of Turkey governed from Constantinople, and though the Great War ended Turkish misrule neither the military steam-roller which the French tried for some time in their Syrian Protectorate, nor our gentler mowing machine, with Zionism harnessed to it, in Palestine, has done much so far to obliterate the deep lines of cleavage between its rival creeds and races. Railways and motor roads and aeroplanes have made travelling immeasurably easier, but they have also tended to confine it to well-beaten highways from which the tourist, accustomed to present-day standards of comfort, is less inclined to deviate than when highways and byways were nearly all equally rough. It was the byways

that beckoned to me, and being still of an impressionable age when so much depends on the stimulus which companionship provides, I was singularly fortunate in falling in with companions older than myself whose keen interest in Eastern life strengthened the hold which the East had already acquired on me in Egypt.

One of them was Lawrence Oliphant, whose wide knowledge of the world ranged from the psychology of London society and American revivalism and the cross-currents of European politics to the emergence of the Far East when China was still slumbering, but Japan was already awakening, under the impact of the West. Neither diplomacy nor Parliament, nor the thrill of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune which he had witnessed at close quarters as correspondent of *The Times,* nor an eccentric quest for new religious emotions in America, had satisfied his restless soul, and he had just come to Syria on a mission which had suddenly fired his eager imagination. Moved by the sufferings of their co-religionists in Eastern Europe, the Rothschilds had just conceived a scheme for obtaining permission from the Sultan of Turkey to settle some of them as agriculturists in the waste spaces of Syria, where, released from the degrading atmosphere of the Russian and Polish *ghetto,* they would be free to recover their sense of human dignity in honest manual labour expended on the hallowed soil of the ancient homelands of their race. As a first preliminary Oliphant was to seek out the most suitable areas available and the least likely to arouse the jealousy of non-Jewish neighbours, or the political suspicions of the Turkish Government. The byways rather than the highways beckoned therefore to him as well as to me, and if I found him

an ideal companion the knowledge of colloquial Arabic I had acquired in Egypt was of some help to him.

So we wandered happily together on marvellously sure-footed Syrian ponies with a pack-mule which we shared for our very little luggage, relying, seldom in vain, for our night's lodging on the frugal hospitality of the people of the country, whether Mohammedans or Christians or Jews. One of the most interesting and least known places we visited was the ancient village of Malula in a sheltered valley of Anti-Lebanon where the people still spoke the old Syriac tongue that Christ Himself had spoken. It was still early spring. The poplar trees were already in leaf and the almond trees were blushing pink round the noble ruins of Baalbec when we started to ascend into Anti-Lebanon, a gaunt and arid range only rarely intersected by small deep valleys in which vegetation had a chance. After a long scramble up and down absurdly steep and stony paths, on which the winter snows were just beginning to melt, we took a final plunge into a ravine, and having with difficulty forded a rushing stream between big boulders and trees, we pushed on through a tangle of vegetation just bursting into life again, and presently the track which we had almost lost led us into a narrow cleft between precipitous cliffs, so narrow that there was barely room for our baggage-mule - carrying a pair of rather bulky saddle-bags - to scrape its way through. One cleft succeeded another whilst others opened out at right angles. But our track had evidently been trodden by others before us and it was bound to lead somewhere, and it led us at last into a wide amphitheatre of sheer and fantastically riven cliffs at the foot of which, flooded with sunshine, the village of Malula clambered up a gentler hillside in a succession of

terraces, the flat roofs of one tier of houses serving as a courtyard for the neighbours immediately above them. Malula is one of the most ancient villages in Syria, and we needed no one to tell us how little contact it had had with the outside world. Its population were Christians of the Eastern persuasion, and though there were a few Moslem families their Christian environment had re-acted so strongly upon them that their women went about with their faces entirely unveiled. But the paramount interest of the place was that, although they could almost all speak Arabic, their own mother tongue was Syriac. Foreigners had not been seen in Malula for years and years; even middle-aged folk could not remember having seen any. They quickly swarmed round us, though when we approached the village it had seemed to be wrapped in noon-day rest. They welcomed us eagerly with deep salaams and friendly smiles, and one of the elders led us up a little zigzag path from terrace to terrace to the house of the sheikh, perched high up above the little community of which he was the acknowledged head. He himself was away, but his family, which appeared to be a large one, consisting of women and children whose precise relationship to him we were unable to establish, vied with each other in offering and dispensing their simple hospitality. We were shown into a small inner chamber in which our baggage was speedily unpacked, and whilst one of the women brought a large brass basin and ewer of water and clean home-spun towels for our ablutions, the others prepared for us a delicious meal of fried eggs and roast corn-cobs and fresh Arab bread with honey from their own hives. The children fluttered about us bright-eyed and inquisitive but quite well behaved, and when the women were inclined to chide

them and send them away, we liked to remember that it was probably in their very tongue that Jesus had bidden the people of Galilee to let the little children come unto Him. After our meal was over they all discreetly retired to leave us to rest for a while. In the afternoon we sallied forth to explore the neighbourhood. Below the village the gorge expanded into a small but carefully cultivated and well-watered valley which supplied the place with abundant produce of wheat and barley and fruit. Out of this valley there opened another deep fissure in the range similar to that through which we had approached it, only, if possible, still more cavernous. At its mouth was perched the Orthodox Greek Monastery of Mar Thekla, and in a cave just below it a very old and almost toothless monk showed us the tomb of St. Thekla herself, the first woman ever to have suffered martyrdom. She had been, he said, a disciple of St. Paul and had fled into the wilds of Anti-Lebanon from the wrath of her heathen father. An inscription in the niche where her body was said to lie bore witness to these facts, and there was even a picture of her of which the outline and the date were almost equally obscure. A priest we met told us that he always recited his religious services in Syriac, and as Malula was the oldest of the few Syriac-speaking villages still left, they attracted many pilgrims on festival days from even distant villages where Syriac was no longer spoken, as the people liked to come and hear the Gospel read in the language of Christ. He deplored, however, that it was no longer taught in the village school, but only modern Arabic, and he feared the day was not far off when it would be completely forgotten and the glory would depart from Malula. It was a wonderful evening, and there was no doubt about the

crown of glory which Malula wore as the setting sun flushed its cliffs and its terraced houses with gold and crimson. After the voices of the people, chattering cheerfully from roof to roof and from terrace to terrace in their own strange and now almost extinct tongue, much more gentle and musical - it seemed to us - than Arabic, had been gradually hushed in sleep, we sat for a long time watching the peaceful moonlit scene with one star alone conspicuous in the deep purple firmament, which for us, just then and there, could clearly be no other than the Star of Bethlehem. We felt at any rate much nearer than at Bethlehem itself, with its rather tawdry shrines, to the simple story of the Adoration of the Magi.

The next day we had a longer but less strenuous march to Damascus, up and down the north-eastern flank of Anti-Lebanon. We halted at mid-day at the Convent of Sednaya, where the fat and friendly Mother Superior told us all about the miracles wrought by their picture of the Virgin which she assured us had been painted by St. Luke himself, but we had no chance of judging its artistic merits as no one was allowed to gaze at this treasured possession. Other topics of conversation the good old lady had none. Our track continued to wind up and down over arid slopes, on which the afternoon sun beat rather fiercely, until quite suddenly we found ourselves on the edge of a high cliff a little above the Kubbet-en-Nisr, or Dome of Victory, overlooking the great city of Damascus, a shining expanse of flat white roofs broken by countless domes and minarets, and entirely encircled by a broad belt of gardens and green trees and orchards, the golden deserts of Arabia stretching far away beyond towards the Euphrates. It was a striking view, which lent a fuller meaning to

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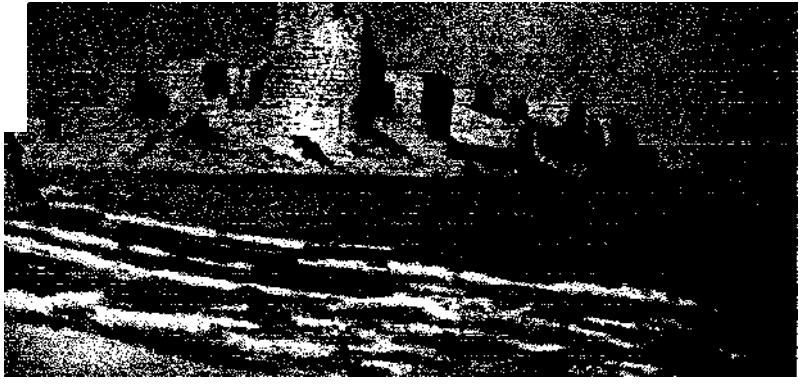


ATHLIT. A CRUSADER'S CASTLE ON THE SYRIAN COAST

the Mohammedan legend that when the Prophet with a few of his companions reached this spot he halted for a few moments as in a trance, and then turned his camel back towards the wilderness, exclaiming, 'Oh, my brothers, let us not be tempted to go down into that earthly paradise of the Infidels lest we risk to forfeit the heavenly paradise which Allah reserves for True Believers.'

We had no such apprehensions. We went down into Damascus and called on Midhat Pasha, then Governor-General, who at first professed to be favourably disposed towards Oliphant's scheme of Jewish settlement. He was one of the Turkish 'reformers' to whom the Sultan Abdul Hamid largely owed his throne; but as soon as that astute potentate felt himself firmly seated on it they outlived his liking, and a few years later Midhat, transferred to Smyrna, was put on trial for high treason and exiled into the interior of Arabia, where he died before long of the traditional cup of coffee which has ended the lives of so many Ottoman grandees. Whilst he was referring Oliphant's business to Constantinople, and awaiting his Imperial Master's orders, we saw all the usual sights of Damascus and also one which few foreigners had a chance of seeing. It was the great annual festival of Sheikh Ahmed Bedawi el Tantawi, the founder of a celebrated order of Dervishes, whose followers in Damascus claimed to have preserved his ritual more faithfully even than at Tanta in Egypt where he is buried. Oliphant - or at least the mystic Oliphant who used often to get the upper hand of the brilliant man-of-the-world Oliphant - was deeply interested in the Sufi philosophy which underlay the Dervish observances, and he somehow obtained permission for us and a few other

visitors to attend the great *Zikr* held to celebrate the festival of the founder of the order. It was a weird performance, the weirdest I have ever witnessed of the kind, and I have witnessed many. Sheikh Ruslam lived in an unpretentious house outside the Bowabet Allah, or God's Gate, in a straggling suburb frequented by the tribesmen from the desert and the hangers-on of the Hajj, or Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca, which starts every year from that gate. The Sheikh, a handsome man of about fifty, with fine Arab features and a pleasant smile, welcomed us himself in an apartment overlooking the courtyard in which the *Zikr* was to take place. The roofs all round were already crowded with expectant spectators, many of them veiled women unable to restrain their shrill cries of excitement. The performance when it began seemed to me an orgy of wild emotionalism often verging on insanity. Poisonous snakes coiled on the ground and big scorpions with their tails wickedly erect were reduced to torpor by the Sheikh's incantations, and whirling Dervishes danced round and round them, at first gravely and sedately, and then, as their pace grew more furious and they were seized with an ecstatic frenzy, each of them caught hold of one of these writhing reptiles and set to work to devour it whole. Some of the performers fell into convulsions from which the Sheikh seemed to have considerable difficulty in restoring them, as the veins stood out visibly on his forehead whilst he was concentrating his will-power upon them. Then a brazier of burning charcoal was brought in and fanned into a blaze, and on to it sprang three young dervishes, almost naked, who stood on it for two or three minutes with their hands uplifted in the attitude of prayer, invoking in rhythmic cadence the sacred name of Allah.

Oliphant whispered to me, 'Just like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,' and just like them they leapt back out of the flames apparently unscathed. This was followed by other equally incredible performances. The Sheikh ran large skewers through the cheeks of his disciples who successively and eagerly volunteered for the ordeal and seemed to glory in it, and he was preparing to run a still heavier one through another disciple's throat when he was arrested in the act by cries of horror from some of the more weak-kneed members of our party, who there and then fled from the place. I was, I confess, quite inclined for a moment to follow their example, but Oliphant wore such a strange look on his face that I could not bring myself to leave him, and for him the Sheikh had evidently reserved his master stroke. He seized hold of one of the older Dervishes, whose waist displayed a semi-circle of well-defined scars, and drawing a sharp curved knife about eight inches long, plunged it deep into the man's body and withdrew it without even a spot of blood issuing from the open wound. We were invited to examine the knife and to inspect the wound and neither of us could deny the evidence of our eyes. Had we ourselves been hypnotized? I have often wondered since then, and, if my eyes wore the same dreamy far-away look that Oliphant's then did, it may well have been so, and I must leave it at that.

We retired immediately afterwards. The Sheikh, who himself showed signs of great nervous exhaustion, had to rouse himself to conduct us to the threshold with the same courtesy with which he had welcomed us. The next morning, at Oliphant's invitation, he paid us a long visit, and perhaps hoping to have found a new disciple in Oliphant, he proceeded to explain the powers he

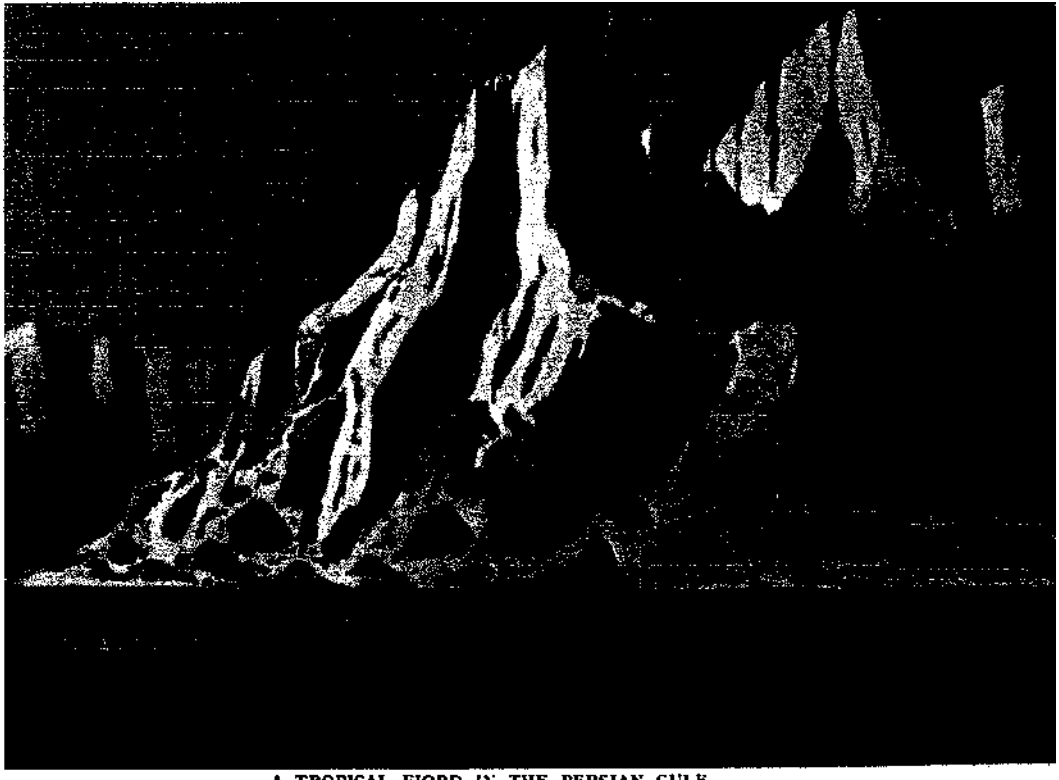
possessed whilst careful to claim for them no merit of his own. They had descended from remote antiquity and had been exercised in turn by the sages and seers of the Old and New Testaments and other sacred books, and were the special inheritance of the great Sufi philosophers, amongst whom none ranked higher as a miracle worker than the sainted founder of his order. Purity and piety of life and the spirit of charity were more essential to the exercise of these powers than any dogmatic belief. He reminded us himself that Christendom also had produced great saints and mystics who had been endowed with the power to work miracles, and he quoted in particular the lives of St. Francis and St. Theresa, with which he was surprisingly familiar, though he admitted that most of the members of his order professed Islam and that there were no women amongst them. He did not even claim that those powers were super-natural powers. They merely arrested the ordinary laws of nature and brought into operation other laws held in reserve by nature for those who knew how to qualify for their exercise by mortifying the flesh and training it to undergo such trying ordeals as we had witnessed the day before. He himself had been trained from infancy by his father and was in turn training his son to be his successor, and the training was long and severe, because it involved intense prayer, great self-denial, and a supreme concentration of will to produce the highest degree of spiritual exaltation. He was ready to answer every question that we put to him, and as the interview often severely taxed my powers as interpreter, he took great pains to speak very slowly and distinctly and would repeat in other words whatever I at first failed to understand. But it was clearly to Oliphant that he

was always addressing himself. He stayed with us for over an hour, and pressed us to come and witness another *Zikr* in which the ordeal by fire would play a still more important part. His earnestness could not be denied, and he left Oliphant in a curious state of nervous excitement, whilst I still remained a doubting Thomas.

Only a few days afterwards we passed out of that heavy atmosphere of Sufi mysticism into the more bracing air of Lebanon. The large Christian population of 'The Mountain,' as its people called it, were steadily recovering, thanks to the intervention of the Western Powers, from the last of the many sporadic outbreaks of Mohammedan fanaticism which the Turks from time to time countenanced or instigated in different parts of the Sultan's dominions. In the 'troubles' of i860 the large Maronite village of Zahleh, where we spent our first night, had been laid waste by the Druses, but it had risen again from its ashes and, with its fourteen conspicuous white-washed churches and never a minaret amongst them, it looked very bright and flourishing above the mulberry trees and vineyards to which it owed its economic prosperity. As usual in the Lebanon we were most hospitably entertained at the house of a well-to-do family, where during most of the afternoon all the elders of the place flocked in and plied us with questions. The British occupation of Cyprus had set every tongue wagging. The wildest rumours were afloat. 'When were the Turks going to be driven out of Syria?' 'Would the English come over from Cyprus and take possession of Syria?' 'If so, would the French come too and have the Lebanon as their share?' They would not be denied when we assured them that rumour was ever a lying jade. As

the Maronites recognized the supremacy of Rome, and had long enjoyed the special protection of France, they were honest enough not to disguise their hopes that the French rather than the English would effect their liberation from the Turkish yoke. Some of them even spoke a little French and were fairly well-educated men and had a smattering of European politics. A few of the older women from time to time broke into the conversation with fervent ejaculations of mingled piety and patriotism. Our friends proved somewhat slow to take our hints that we should like to be left to our night's rest, but they withdrew at last, one of them, with a Parthian shot, mumbling as he went out of the room that 'you English would never have gone to Cyprus unless you meant also to cross over into Syria.'

The next morning we began to toil up the loftier slopes of Lebanon where rhododendrons in full bloom and patches of violets and many other wild flowers reached to the edge of the fast melting snows. But we climbed only to descend again on the western face of Lebanon, where we passed through a number of scattered villages in which we were tempted to seek quarters for the night. The villages with which these upper slopes of the Mountain are dotted are apt to look quite near, but they are often separated by deep chasms across which the peasants may carry on a brisk conversation in their shrill and high-pitched voices, whilst it may take an hour or more to climb down and up a mere goat's track to reach them. Even the magic of a glorious sunset and the mystery of a still more glorious after-glow scarcely compensate one for being told that one's destination is twice as far *off* as at the last time of asking. We met very few wayfarers, and when we did their replies to our questions were various and



A TROPICAL FIORD IN THE PERSIAN GULF

confusing. The village of Mezraa, where we intended to sleep, seemed to recede every time further and further away. Night fell upon us whilst we were still scrambling up and down one rugged staircase after another, and we had begun to despair when the dim lights of the elusive Mezraa at last came into sight far below us. Nor should we then have found our way down across a network of small but rushing streams, had we not been lucky enough to commandeer a belated goatherd to pilot us. We had been told at Zahleh to go to the house of Abdullah, the son of Jirius the Priest, and to it he conducted us with some swagger, as it might have been to the Ritz Hotel. It was, in fact, a large newly-built and newly-furnished mansion which was shortly to receive its owner's bride, who, we soon learnt, was one of the heiresses of the Mountain. Its owner was not yet living in it, but he was quickly fetched from a neighbouring house, and, though we had no credentials but our wayworn appearance and our nationality, he at once gave us a cheerful welcome and placed a whole apartment at our disposal, where soft mattresses with linen sheets and silk quilts were laid for us on carpeted floors. But, as too often happens in the East, our well-meaning host would not understand that being hungry and tired we should much have preferred the simplest food provided without delay to the more elaborate spread for which we had to wait nearly two hours, whilst he and his neighbours plied us, as at Zahleh and everywhere else in the Lebanon, with searching questions concerning the political situation in Europe and at Constantinople.

The next, day's march began with another long ascent which took us still further up into the recesses of the Lebanon before

we found what we had set out to see. There is no more beautiful or secluded spot in the Lebanon than Afka. Under sheer cliffs of limestone, fluted like gigantic organ pipes by the disintegrating effect of wind and water, a great stream leapt out of a cavern in the side of the mountain and poured itself out into a deep crystal pool sacred of old to Adonis. We were in a sheltered amphitheatre in which lingered the poetic myths of ancient times. On its edge stood the ruins of a temple of Venus in a grove of splendid walnut trees. There Phoenicians and Romans had in turn worshipped the Goddess of Love, and from the platform of her ruined shrine the eye swept down the precipitous valley of the river which the Romans dedicated to Adonis — it is now vulgarly called the Dog River - to the pale blue Mediterranean beyond with the faint outline of the mountains of Cyprus, sacred also to the Goddess of Love, dimly visible on the western horizon. One of the delights of travelling in Syria was that it kept one leaping backwards and forwards through the chequered centuries of its history. At Afka we were not far away from the few remaining groves of stately cedar trees which had once been forests when King Solomon drew from them the materials for the building of his great temple at Jerusalem, and we would both have tarried willingly for another week or more in the high places of Lebanon. But Oliphant had settled to go on to Constantinople to press his colonization scheme on Porte and Palace, though, as it turned out, to very little purpose. The two days' journey down to Beirut were even longer, but no less picturesque, than those which we had already done, but he caught his steamer and we parted there; only, however, to renew later on a still closer friendship.

My good fortune had not deserted me, for I wanted to see much more of Syria before I proceeded into Asia Minor, and I fell in with another travelling companion to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude as it was he who first induced me to try my hand at sketching. Tristram Ellis, whose studies of the Near East came to be a familiar feature every spring in the Water-colour Room of the Royal Academy, had come over to Syria from Cyprus, where he had gone to paint soon after that island was brought into the limelight by one of Disraeli's spectacular strokes of diplomacy. I was able to introduce him to a good many picturesque corners of Syria, and I used to sit and envy him whilst he was at work, and presently I ventured to make suggestions and even to criticize. So one fine day, under the cedars of Lebanon, which Oliphant and I had wanted to visit together, he said to me that as I evidently had an eye for colour and for composition I ought to start painting myself, and there and then proceeded to fit me out with some of his own materials. I yielded quite willingly to his friendly persuasion and soon made, he assured me, enough progress to justify his belief that I 'had it in me.' Afterwards too I had the good fortune to count several other artists amongst my friends, who were always ready to let me learn from them. So it turned out that in the course of my many travels I was able to derive immense enjoyment from my paint-box - much greater enjoyment often than from my pen, though writing had become my profession. For apart from such success as one may achieve in some particular sketch the mere attempt to reproduce what one sees impresses it as nothing else can on one's memory. More than that, my sketches recall to me,

years and years afterwards, not only the subject but all the circumstances, sometimes pleasant, sometimes extremely unpleasant, in which the sketch was done and in many cases also a friendly companionship which lent an extra zest to a sketching expedition.

CHAPTER FOUR

ON THE FRINGE OF THE ARABIAN DESERT

To another friend, T. S. Jago, then British Consul at Damascus, I was indebted for the opportunity, very rare in those days, of visiting the sort of no-man's-land between the Desert and the Sown which then extended almost from the gates of Damascus all through the land of Gilead in which the strife of centuries had left no balm. On an early morning late in June we sallied forth by the Bowabbet Allah and followed, during a long and hot and dusty march of nearly forty miles, the great Hajj road to Mecca, which was nothing more than a broad and irregular track, sometimes half a mile wide, worn by the shuffling feet of thousands of camels during the annual pilgrimage. The few villages we passed were almost deserted, as their chief harvest was the pilgrims and they were then out of season. We left the great landmark of Mount Hermon, still capped with winter snow, far away on our right, and skirted the land of Og, King of Bashan, where the Israelites had found sixty walled cities in well-watered plains with abundant pastures. Patches of pasture land we occasionally crossed, but the streams that watered them had grown rare and the walled cities had disappeared. It was late in

the afternoon when we neared the land of Uz - a name which had captivated me in my childhood as the home of Job, one of my Biblical favourites, whose superb wealth of language impressed me even more than his strange sufferings and inexhaustible patience. Our first night's halt was made at Sheikh Saad, where his tomb is shown by the pious Moslems who worship there, the Koran having borrowed the story of Job, like many others, from the Old Testament. In the middle ages the Makam Eyub, or Resting Place of Job, was, according to Chrysostom, often visited by Christian pilgrims who, he tells us, 'come from the ends of the earth to seek for the dung-hill on which Job lay and kiss with rapture ground where he suffered.' It is now chiefly the resort of Mohammedan pilgrims, and they associate the legendary figure of Job with one of their own saints, Sheikh Saad, who had a special cult for him and shareshis resting-place. The tomb is a small white-domed building and not far from it is a small pool of clear and cool water which springs miraculously out of sun-scorched rocks and is called Our Lord Job's Fountain of Ablution. Within the same meagre patch of garden lived the sheikh of the village who, to our surprise, was then a full-blooded negro, as were also most of the villagers. For some reason which we failed to ascertain - perhaps for some instinctive bond of sympathy between the long-suffering sons of Ham, inured to the worst forms of Oriental slavery, and the sorely-tried Hebrew patriarch, the memory of Job seems to be specially sacred to the negro Mohammedans of Africa who, after having crossed the Red Sea for the pilgrimage to Mecca, will often journey all the way up to worship at this shrine before they return home. One can perhaps realize better at this spot

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BUNDER ABBAS FROM THE SEA

what the unfortunate Job went through in his days of tribulation than the prosperity he had enjoyed before they befell him. For the surrounding country as we saw it was terribly desolate, and it was hard to believe that it could ever have afforded good grazing and ploughing land for 'seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses,' so that he had 'a very great household and was the greatest of all the men of the East.' The village is certainly of great antiquity, for fragments of granite columns and massive slabs of basalt are built into the mud walls of the wretched hovels in which its poverty-stricken population, about two hundred souls in all, now live and extract a precarious livelihood from the pilgrims. In the upper part of the village we saw the remains of an ancient temple which at one time clearly served as a Christian and afterwards as a Mohammedan place of worship, and probably goes back to a still more remote period when Baal and Ashteroth were worshipped there, as in the centre of the temple itself there is a monolith of black basalt known as the Stone of Job which, though broken and mutilated, still suggests a phallic emblem. Fortunately, we had not got to sleep in the village. Jago, with a proper sense of consular dignity as well as comfort, preferred to travel with a few light tents and a small staff of servants, and by the time we had finished our sight-seeing his smart consular cavass, an imposing figure in his blue and gold uniform, with a long sword on his belt, had pitched our camp under a few trees near Job's 'Fountain of Ablution,' but far enough away from the village to be out of reach of its smells and noises.

Leaving the pilgrims' road the next morning we made a long

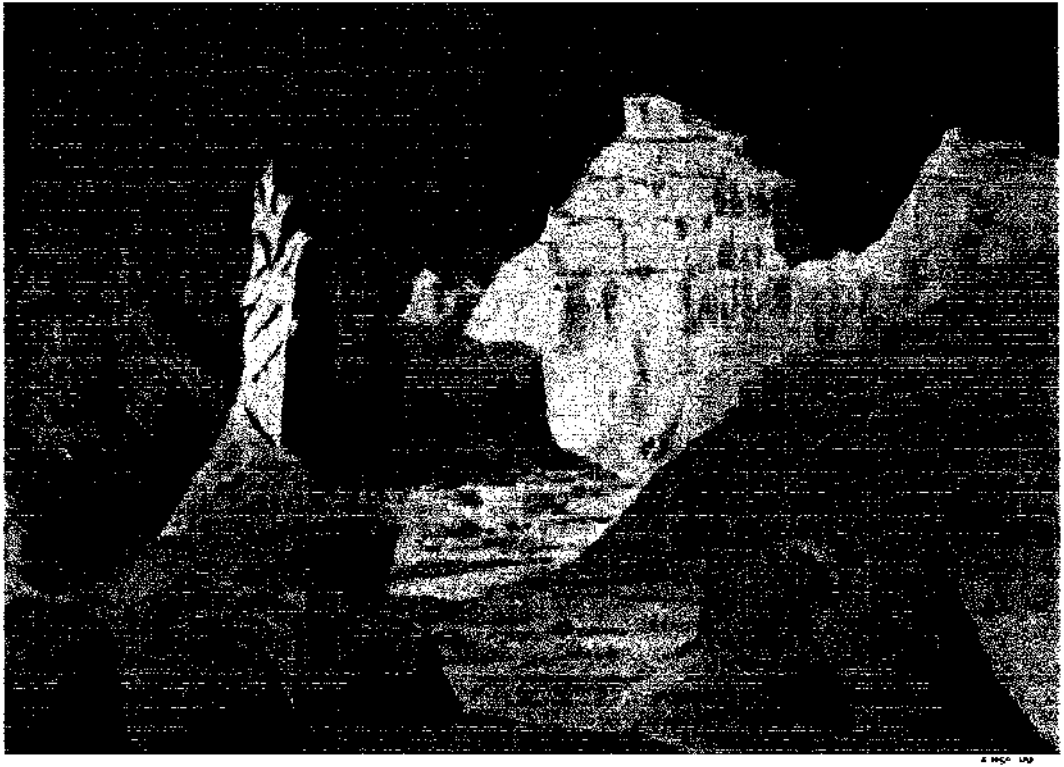
detour into the desert to explore part of the strange volcanic region of Trachonitis, as the Romans christened it when it served them to guard Damascus against incursions from the Arabian desert. We had seen its extinct craters in the distance on our left during the greater part of our previous day's march. But its most remarkable and, to my knowledge, unique feature, for which we were now making, is a lake of once molten lava of which in some mighty convulsion of nature, the storm-tossed waves were suddenly petrified into their present amazing shapes. Rising about twenty or thirty feet above the plain, and about twenty miles in length and fifteen in breadth, it forms an almost impregnable natural stronghold which has often afforded a safe refuge against invading hosts to a handful of resolute defenders. Where we entered it, coming from Sheikh Saad, the slender annual rainfall had worn a very rough track over which we stumbled as best we could on foot, leading or driving our beasts, and in places it grew so narrow that we had to abandon it and climb round over the crests and down the troughs of the basaltic waves, some of them rising fifteen feet almost sheer. It was hot work as we were now well into the summer, but a couple of hours brought us to a point where the Romans had effected a large clearing and built a town almost in the centre of this wilderness of stone. The remains of a temple and of a handsome prefecture still testify to their dauntless enterprise, and there were traces of an aqueduct which must have brought in a supply of water from some far distance, but none of any road, though they must have made one to keep up communications with the outside world. This was a disappointment to us, as we had hoped to strike somewhere a rather easier way out. We

tried a short cut, but it proved neither easier nor shorter, and when we at last emerged at the southern end we were much more inclined to credit the story of the two long sieges unsuccessfully laid to the Lejjah within the last century - the first by Ibrahim Pasha, the Egyptian conqueror of Syria, who is said to have lost twenty-five thousand men inside of a year in desperate attempts to destroy the eight hundred defenders who held him at bay, and the second by the Turks, when the Druses from Mount Hermon fled there to resist conscription and repulsed an Ottoman grand vizier himself with a heavy loss of men and even of guns. We had met no human beings whilst we were crossing the Lejjah, but on its rocky fringe there were a few miserable villages and patches of cultivation belonging mostly to Druses who had, some of them, quite recently found sanctuary there from Turkish oppression. Yet the great plain that lay in front of us was the Hauran, which had once been a Roman granary. But the Turks in their decline had, as usual, allowed it to relapse into little better than an arid waste, and not until we reached Busra-Eski-Sham, then the last fortified post held by Turkish troops towards the desert, were there any signs of permanent cultivation. Our tents had arrived there before us and they had been pitched outside the walls of the small and squalid town which had once played its part in history, and was to play it again during the Druse rising against the French Protectorate. The Turkish authorities eyed us with great suspicion and began by questioning our right to camp within a fortified area/ but they left us in peace when the Consul produced his credentials from the Vali of Damascus, with whose orders they had, however sullenly, to comply.

Our route was once more to take us somewhat further into the desert, and we were met on the next day by four Bedouin horsemen armed with long Arab spears, who were to escort us on the *next* few stages of our journey in case we should fall in with some of the rifF-raff of the desert who, outlawed for some tribal offence by their own tribes, were apt to congregate in small bands and raid far into the sporadically settled lands on the extreme fringe of the desert. Our escort was more picturesque than reliable, as I personally discovered on the second day. I was anxious to visit the ruined city of Umm-el-Jemal, which was known to be exceptionally well-preserved, about thirty miles east of the Hajj road. Jago was rather unwell and could not accompany me, but if I left very early in the morning I should be able to rejoin him in the evening at our next halting-place, which was to be Mineh, another station further along the Hajj road. So I set forth at dawn with two of our Bedouin horsemen who undertook to pilot me there and back. As pilots I did not find them particularly trustworthy. They were both well mounted on Arab mares, and mine was also a thoroughbred mare which I could not have bought for love or money had she not been barren and therefore of no great marketable value. So we cantered off at a good speed. But after two or three miles our pace slackened and my escort began to stop more and more frequently to scan the horizon and enter into long discussions as to the direction we should follow. Sometimes they wanted to turn back altogether and pretended that Umm-el-Jemal was at least two days' march away. But I put them to shame by asking them what the word of an Arab was worth since they had started by telling me that they would take me there and back between

sunrise and sunset. But much precious time was wasted in these frequent halts and parleys. The heat grew intense. There was not a blade of grass, except a few camel thorn bushes, or an atom of shade in that glaring expanse of endless desert, but 'fire around and fire beneath and overhead the sun/ It was noon-day when a dark patch on the horizon showed us Umm-el-Jemal still a good many miles away. When we reached it I was amply rewarded for my pains. It was deserted and silent and had been so for centuries. But it looked less like a dead city than like one which had once suddenly fallen into a deep sleep and was still sleeping. Many of its houses were still intact and of a type I had never seen before, built entirely of black basalt. Even the roof of every room consisted of broad slabs of black basalt, as much as eighteen feet long, skilfully tongued and grooved, and the doors of solid black basalt still swung easily on heavy stone pivots, whilst light was admitted through deep windows of open stonework carved in beautiful designs. Larger buildings of the same type had evidently served for religious and public purposes, but the most striking features of all were the deep reservoirs for the storage of water. They also were built of black basalt and one could still descend into them by an open staircase leading into covered galleries, which, at different heights of the water, must have afforded a delightfully cool retreat to privileged citizens during the heat of the day. They had long been dry and only some ruined arches remained of the aqueduct which had brought water from afar to feed them, and there was no one to tell me whence. Little, in fact, was then known as to the origin of Umm-el-Jemal. Dr. Porter, one of the few travellers who had explored this region, included it in the kingdom of Og in

Bashan. Since then other archaeologists have been struck by the connexion between its architecture - especially the tracery of vine leaves and grapes in the stone windows - and that known to have prevailed in Southern Arabia before great natural changes drove its people to migrate into the north of the peninsula, where an early Christian civilization was swept away by the Mohammedan invasion. There was so much to see, and so many relatively cool spots invited one to rest, that it was late afternoon before I could tear myself away, though my escort repeatedly urged me to hasten. I imagined that on the way back we should cover the ground much more quickly, as there would be no further need for halts and consultations as to our direction. But not a bit of it. My escort behaved more and more strangely, and after we had ridden perhaps half a dozen miles they stopped dead and announced that they could not accompany me a yard further because they had detected the quite recent track of Arab horsemen who could only belong to a tribe with whom they were at deadly feud. I had not even time to remonstrate, for they pointed with urgent signs of alarm to a small group of horsemen silhouetted against the sunset, not more than a mile or so away, and promptly digging their stirrups into their horses my two braves galloped away, barely stopping to point with a wild wave of their spears - which covered pretty well all of the horizon - to the direction I should follow to get back to our camp. It was not a very cheerful situation in which to be left. But I had a pocket compass which gave me more or less of an orientation, and I knew, too, that if I kept straight on I must strike the Hajj road somewhere, which I could hardly fail to recognize even in the night by *cette obscure clarte qui tombe des etoiles.* For the rest



A HADES IN THE PERSIAN GULF

I trusted to my luck, and digging my spurs into my willing mare, rode hell-for-leather until I had lost sight of both my absconding escort and the other group of horsemen, who seemed to have taken no notice of me. But I had still many miles in front of me, and in the darkness which presently fell upon the trackless desert, it grew more trackless than ever. It was no slight relief to me when I discerned a glow in the far distance almost straight in front of me. Jago, who had become anxious about me, had lit a big camp fire to guide me in case I had lost my way. I guessed this, and like the Israelites of old I followed this pillar of fire by night until it led me back to our camp and my day's adventure was happily ended.

The next morning our other two Bedouins had also disappeared. I had given them over night a piece of my mind as to the way in which their fellows had dishonoured them by deserting me, and they had probably come, and quite rightly, to the conclusion that their prospects of *bakshish* were therefore now very small. We got on quite well without them. For we had only a short march to Kalaat Zerka, a fortified castle thrust out from time immemorial into the desert, and Midhat Pasha had told Jago before we left Damascus that he had just sent a detachment of Turkish troops to reoccupy and hold it, as his predecessors had allowed Turkish authority to be so seriously shaken along the borderland of the desert that even the safety of the Holy Caravan had to be bought by heavy blackmail to the hungry tribes. Between Kalaat Zerka and the Jordan he was confident we should find that he was rapidly restoring order and security. The latter part of this statement was scarcely borne out by our experience, but at Kalaat Zerka anyhow a

Turkish force of about three hundred men was encamped in flimsy white bell tents under Turkish officers who received us with unusual courtesy. Having been through the Russo-Turkish War, one of them, who spoke a little French, remembered the good work done by the British Red Cross with the Turkish army, and offered to show us over the fort originally built by Bibar, one of the Mameluke sultans in the thirteenth century, but now so frightfully dilapidated and in such a filthy state that it was impossible to quarter the men inside its walls. Only one of the chambers, which one entered by a pointed Arab archway, was inhabited by a wretched old Arab with his family, who proudly called himself the Sheikh of Kalaat Zerka, but had promptly made his submission. From the top of the walls we looked straight across the boundless desert towards the Euphrates, and the hill on which they stood had clearly been an important strategic point in the days in which Israelites and Amorites and Persians and Romans and Greeks and Arabs and Turks had successively fought for mastery in this remote no-man's-land.

Then we said good-bye to the Hajj road, and leaving it to the east of us, entered upon a refreshing country of hills and valleys and the grateful sight of vegetation; sometimes through scattered forests with fine oak and karub trees; sometimes through park-like scenery which might almost have been English; sometimes over pasture land with little rills and streams which, after the parched desert, seemed to us to be indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. But the curse of centuries of misrule and strife rested upon it. There were ruined cities of ancient fame, Amman and Es Salt and Jerash and Ajlun, where we halted in turn during a leisurely ten days' march back to the valley of the Yarmuk and

the Lake of Tiberias, and thence by well-beaten tracks to Damascus. It was a rare experience in those days for, in spite of Midhat's optimistic assurances, the Turkish writ did not run then very far in Transjordan. The whole country was very sparsely inhabited. In some parts there were groups of Arabs squatting on the land and just scratching its surface under some blustering sheikh whose demands for blackmail usually turned into obsequious offers of service when Jago's *cavass* taught him with no stint of language what mighty personages we were. Elsewhere we came upon Circassian settlers who were more truculent, for they were the flotsam and jetsam of the Russo-Turkish War that Constantinople had sought to get rid of by promises of land which they not unnaturally thought themselves entitled to make good with their own strong hand. But with them too our nationality generally ended by proving a sufficient safeguard. In yet other and more peaceful districts, both Moslem and Christian villages welcomed our appearance with the same heartiness to which I had been accustomed in the Lebanon. But there is no need for me to linger on those delightful days in Transjordan. That country is now an open book. The greater part of it forms part of a British Protectorate ruled *tant bien que mal* by a member of the Arab dynasty which the genius of Colonel Lawrence brought to the front during the Great War. Amman, which was our *ultima Thule,* is one of the great centres of world aviation where a few years ago my friend Gertrude Bell, flying straight across from Bagdad on one of her too few holidays, alighted as it were almost at the feet of her father, Sir Hugh Bell, who had arrived half an hour before by rail from Cairo to meet her.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTO ASIA MINOR

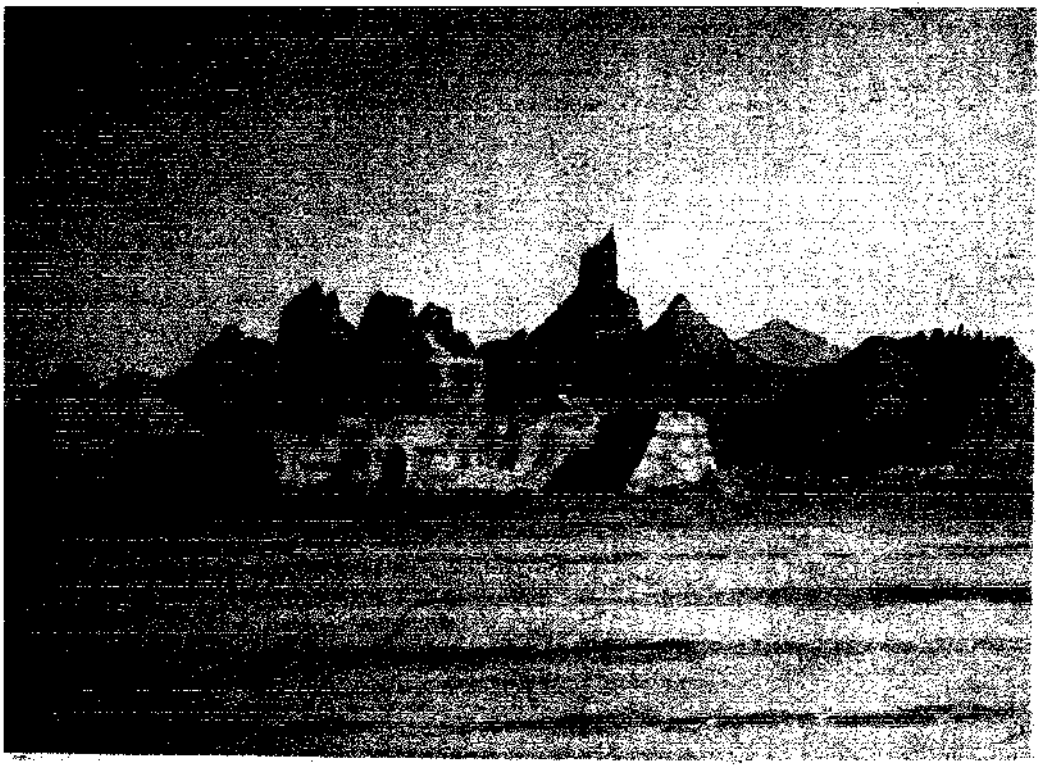
IN Syria the Turkish authorities seldom interfered with one's movements, but as soon as one wanted to travel in Asia Minor they grew very suspicious and one had to apply for special permits at almost every stage and explain fully why one wanted them. Even when I applied at Aleppo for permission to visit the ruins of the basilica of St. Simeon Stylites, which lay off the beaten track into Asia Minor, I was at first informed that it was out of the question. I then went straight to the Governor-General who was not unfriendly, though quite unable to understand why I wished to go there; and after I had satisfied him that I was not engaged on any political mission dangerous to the security of the Ottoman Empire, he granted my request on condition that I took with me a Turkish *zaptieh,* or mounted gendarme, to see that no harm came to me in so wild a bit of country, often haunted, he admitted, by marauders. His object, I knew quite well, was that I should have with me someone who would report to him what I was really up to, for he could not bring himself quite to believe that I was not a secret agent of the British Government, and since we had just occupied Cyprus the

Turks feared, as much as the Syrians hoped, that we meant to use that island as a stepping-stone to Syria.

Having dispatched my own servant with most of my kit to travel an easier route, on which I could rejoin him three days later at Beilan, I set forth from Aleppo on a bright winter's morning with my *zaptieh* - a picturesque fellow with a yellow *kejfyeh* wound round his fez, a fierce moustache twirled back under his ears, an embroidered belt bristling with knives and pistols, and an ancient gun slung across his back. What pleased me most was that he was well mounted on a good Arab marc. He was, in fact, himself an Arab of Aleppo and very proud of it, and he grew quite friendly and loquacious when he found that I knew enough Arabic to understand his stories, and ended by assuring me that he and all Arabs hated the Turks and looked to the exalted Government of England to free them before long from their yoke.

For the first couple of hours our route lay across a stony and almost barren plateau, but there was at first a fairly defined track, and the mountains of Siman Dagh in front of us gave us our direction. Then heavy clouds began to gather, and a driving mist was succeeded by driving squalls of snow which gradually obliterated our uncertain track. The mountains were blotted out and I had only a small compass by which I could approximately steer our course. Soon the snow was falling so steadily and so heavily that our horses stumbled over the rough ground and stones which it had covered up and concealed, and we had to dismount and lead them. We plodded along at a very slow pace for another few miles, and darkness gradually fell upon us. My *zaptieh's* spirits drooped and failed, and after repeatedly asking

me in a woebegone voice how far we had still to go - a question I was asking myself with some internal misgivings but could not possibly answer - his tone got very sulky and he finally declared that he could not go on any further and that we ought to lie down and wait till the storm was over. In vain I argued with him that to lie down where we were would mean being frozen to death and buried under the snow. We wrangled and stumbled on for a bit, and then his language grew suddenly violent and threatening. Not a yard further would he go. I too had to resort to threats, and, dragging my own horse along a few paces ahead of him, shouted that he might do what he liked and that if he chose to stay behind and die I meant to go on. As I proceeded to suit the deed to the word and he saw me disappearing in front of him into the darkness he abated his truculence and cried piteously to me not to desert him. So I relented and promised that if he would only pull himself together and be a man, and push on for another hour by my watch, we would give it up and die together 'like brothers.' This heartened the poor fellow, and we resumed our weary efforts. I had myself an unpleasant foreboding that that hour would be my last, for my strength also was almost exhausted. I looked again and again at my watch by the light of a match, and three-quarters of an hour had already gone before the snow ceased and the wind, which had suddenly sprung up again strong and bitterly cold, dispersed the clouds. We had reached almost the edge of a steep cliff, and just below us, by this time in bright moonlight, stood deep down in a valley the basilica I had risked so much to reach. My *zaptieh* grew almost delirious with joy, threw himself at my feet, kissed my hands, and vowed by Allah the All-merciful that I was a worker of miracles.



THE ISLAND OF ORMUZ

It was indeed almost a miracle how we scrambled and slithered safely down the semblance of a zigzag path half buried in snow to the valley below. Then there was still the awkward problem of finding some shelter for the night and, if possible, some food. But as we drew near to the ruins I discerned a faint glow of light proceeding from them, and presently heard occasional voices. The snow-storm had driven some Kurdish shepherds to seek for their flocks of sheep such shelter as could be found inside the ruined church. They were scared at first by the appearance of a foreigner with a Turkish *zaptieh,* the latter's genus being everywhere more dreaded than esteemed, but I succeeded very soon in reassuring them, and when I told them that all we wanted was a few hours' rest till daybreak for ourselves and our horses they at once grew quite friendly and helped us to unsaddle and tether our weary beasts, and made room for us to lie down amongst them close to the big wood fire they had kindled for themselves. More than that, one of them hastened to milk one of their ewes and gave us each a bowl of hot ewe's milk, which, in the circumstances, was like ambrosia. Gradually, whilst I explained our adventure to them, and we were wringing the water out of our clothes, soaked through with snow, and trying to dry them by the fire, I realized exactly where we were - almost at the foot of the pillar on which St. Simeon Stylites had stood for some thirty years in the first half of the fifth century, doing penance for his sins and working wonders in the sight of the crowds who came to worship him. All around, and for the most part open to the sky, there were the remains of massive columns and lofty arches that had withstood the ravages of time and man, and still bore witness to the noble proportions of the great church erected in

memory of the saint shortly after his death. It was a weird spectacle in the uncertain light of the piled-up fire now blazing up into a bright flame and then again almost smothered in a cloud of smoke, whilst the shepherds, wild and ungainly figures in their stiff brown coats of Kurdish felt, shouted from time to time in raucous voices to their sheep or started some weird chant to keep off the evil spirits of the night. But weariness overcame before long, not only my curiosity, but my consciousness of creepy-crawly visitors whose insistence I could not deny.

It was not exactly an ideal night's rest, but when I at last roused myself out of my heavy but not unbroken sleep it was dawn and the shepherds and their flocks were already on the move. Refreshed by another big jorum of hot ewe's milk which my queer but kindly hosts again insisted on providing, I sallied forth into the open, and after cleaning myself as far as circumstances allowed in a big pool of half-frozen water, I set forth to explore the ruins of which the church formed the most conspicuous and best preserved, but by no means the largest part. Several monasteries and rest-houses for pilgrims had grown up around the church, but were now mere heaps of crumbling stone. St. Simeon had been the first and the greatest of the 'pillar saints,' and his fame spread far and wide even in his lifetime. It was in 423 that he first built himself, in that wild and remote valley, the low platform or pillar, which he had gradually raised to the height of forty cubits, whereon he spent his remaining years in prayer and contemplation, and in conveying, sometimes in fervid sermons and sometimes in lengthy epistles, his blessings and his counsels to princes and bishops and pilgrims

from the most distant lands, even from Britain, and acquired such a reputation for the miracles he was reputed to work that when he died in 459 his body was transported to the great city of Antioch with not only religious but military honours. The Emperor Leo would willingly have had it brought to a basilica in Constantinople itself. Little known at the time I visited it, it has been thoroughly explored since then, and is now easy of access over quite tolerable roads, and maybe there is a regular service of charabancs from Aleppo to take tourists there and back in a few hours.

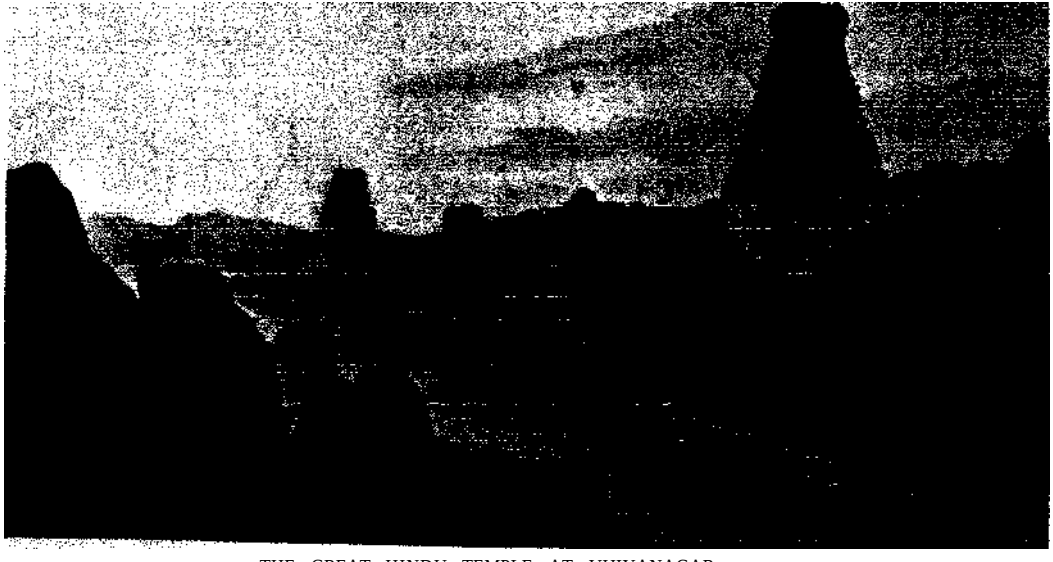
My *zaptieh* took leave of me at Beilan with profuse assurances of his devotion, and returned to Aleppo to give no doubt to the Turkish authorities a more or less faithful account of my doings. The story he unfolded before leaving, to my servant, who had arrived ahead of us, must certainly have been a grim one, for though the latter had been in Turkey and I had engaged him to go with me to Constantinople, chiefly because he knew some Turkish, he suddenly announced that Asia Minor was far too dangerous a country to travel in, as it was infested with brigands, and its Turkish pashas were brigands themselves, and he was a poor Syrian who had to remember his wife and children at home, and in short, nothing would induce him to risk his neck amongst Turks, who were all 'sons of Satan.'

I often had occasion afterwards to recall his warnings, very highly coloured though they were by racial and religious prejudice. To begin with, travelling was much rougher work than it had been for me in Syria. There were, of course, no railways at all except one short line inland from Smyrna, constructed many years before by British enterprise and systematically

hampered by Turkish official obstruction. There were no carriage roads to speak of, for if some progressive pasha began one in the course of his usually brief tenure of power as Governor-General, it was apt to end nowhere in particular when he or his successor found that there was no more money to be squeezed out of the building of it as soon as it reached a broad river-bed to be bridged, or a mountain range that would need expensive engineering. What were called roads were merely tracks worn by the slow traffic of centuries, sometimes across dry, and sometimes across swampy plains or up or down difficult mountain slopes, and where there had once been bridges, rivers had usually to be forded, which was no easy task even when they were not in spate, and when they were one had not infrequently to wait for a day or more until they subsided to their normal level. I therefore did my travelling on horseback, with only my Turkish servant to carry my slender kit on another horse, and sometimes a mounted Turkish *zaptieh* forced upon me, as at Aleppo, by the pasha of the district, nominally to ensure my safety, but really to report what I was doing. Often I had to attach myself to one of the caravans trading along the customary routes between the chief towns of the interior. It was the safer course in many districts where brigandage was rife, and in some the brigands were just discovering that nothing paid better than to carry off a European traveller and hold him to ransom. One's progress, however, was very slow, as the average speed of such a caravan was seldom more than three miles an hour for perhaps eight or ten hours a day. To carry a tent and all the other camping paraphernalia was to add considerably to one's encumbrances, and there might be no suitable or safe place to pitch it

when one had reached the end of the day's journey. So the simplest course was to sleep with the rest of the caravan in a Turkish caravanserai or *khan,* usually a large walled enclosure with small chambers for the travellers looking out on to an open courtyard. These chambers, though they had no furniture, were not very often free from vermin, and the first thing to be done was to get one's servant to sweep the floor as thoroughly as possible and sprinkle it with Keating's powder, and then to spread in the cleanest spot the sack carried with one for the purpose and fill it with fresh hay as a mattress to sleep on - and not a bad bed either for a weary traveller who was young and healthy - with his saddle and his clothes as a pillow. Food was a difficulty, but fresh eggs and a bit of mutton and sometimes a chicken were obtainable as well as a brazier and cooking utensils, and, of course, all the cooking had to be done outside one's door in the courtyard, where horses and mules and donkeys were carefully picketed and haltered so as to prevent free fights amongst them, and on the whole they seldom made enough noise to render sleep impossible. The Turkish *khanji^* like most of their fellow-country men outside the ranks of officialdom, were easy-going folk, and for the most part quite friendly and anxious to help within the limits of their very slender resources and rather dull wits. Not less so were one's travelling companions to whom the ways of the foreigner were a constant source of good-natured amusement and curiosity. There grew up rapidly between us that fellowship of the road and sense of cheerful vagabondage together which found its expression in the familiar greeting, 'Oh Brother of the road,' exchanged between companions in the common adventure of travel where travelling was always

flavoured with some slight spice of adventure. That spice it must in some measure have lost since the material facilities and amenities of Western travel have begun to penetrate far into Eastern countries, and large parties of Western tourists are now swiftly carried in express trains with dining and sleeping carriages, and in luxurious motor cars over the same remote regions through which I once had to travel as best I could, very slowly and certainly not luxuriously, sharing for weeks and months together with the people of the country primitive modes of travelling which had hardly changed for centuries. But if I can now look back upon the discomforts and hardships of travel in Asia Minor in the 'eighties with some pleasurable amusement, time has not dimmed other and more painful recollections of the country. For the misery and ruin wrought by the Russo-Turkish War was still widespread all over Turkey; and Asia Minor especially, though for the most part far removed from the actual operations of war, was suffering not only from the aggravation of all the ordinary evils of Turkish misrule by military disasters and financial bankruptcy, but also from a devastating plague for which Constantinope was itself wholly responsible. There swarmed over the country large hordes of *tnuhajereeri)* or 'refugees for the sake of the Faith' - chiefly Bulgars and Circassians to whom the Sultan's agents promised golden opportunities of settling afresh in lands flowing with milk and honey, free from the curse of Christian rulership. Some of them were poor harmless wretches who were merely the victims of an unscrupulous and fanatical propaganda. I met such a party once almost starving and plodding along in rags through the winter snow across one of the dreary plains of



THE GREAT HINDU TEMPLE AT VIJIYANAGAR

Cilicia in search of the Yeni-Shehir, or 'new city,' where they had been told they would find the promised land. They had started from Burgas, a Bulgarian port on the Black Sea, for Constantinople and thence had been shifted from one ship to another by the officials of the *muhajereen* department, who fleeced them gradually of all their small savings, until they had been finally cast ashore at Alexandretta, where they had been given a small stock of provisions for a five days' tramp to Yeni-Shehir. I knew what Yeni-Shehir was, for I had myself passed through it a couple of days before in order to visit the scanty ruins of Hellenic times scattered amongst hovels long since deserted owing to malaria. That was the 'promised land' towards which these poor wretches were trudging, some sixty or seventy men, women and children, the remnants - they told me - of a party who had originally numbered over two hundred. I did what I could for them, but it was terribly little, as I was naturally travelling with only a minimum of ready money and provisions.

But there were other hordes of *muhajereen*, especially Circassians, who wantonly preyed upon the country. If they were not satisfied with the bit of 'promised land' allotted to them they took violent possession of another, either ousting the peaceful peasantry or quartering themselves in villages which they terrorised. Many of them had, or boasted that they had, influential friends in Constantinople, none the less influential because these friends were inmates of the Sultan's own hareems or of those of other powerful pashas. Sometimes even such friends could be found closer at hand in the hareem of the *Vali* or Governor-General of the province. Worse too than the

muhajereen were the troops of disbanded Circassian cavalry. On the other hand, the sorely stricken people of the country still looked confidently for help to any English traveller, for they knew vaguely that at the end of the disastrous war England had saved Turkey from the Russians, and had wrung from the Sultan the most solemn promise of far-reaching reforms. Of the exact meaning of the word 'reform' which had come into current use amongst them they had little or no idea except that it was a pledge of better days for them. That I had no connexion whatever with the exalted British Government nothing I said could make them believe, for if not, why should I be travelling amongst them? Their confidence was sometimes quite pathetic. I was compelled once to spend a night in the most primitive type of caravanserai. It had no separate cubicles but only under a tent roof a long row of slightly-raised wooden boards, with a rough line of demarcation between them, on which you could lie down at full length and try to sleep. One of my neighbours on this occasion was a poor old Turkish woman with two little grandchildren, who hastened to pour out her woes to me. Her only son - she had lost two others in the war - had been killed by Circassians - the curse of Allah be upon them - who had seized his small farm and driven her mercilessly out. She was taking the two poor little mites away to some relations in a far-away town which she hoped to reach if the All-merciful willed it in another ten or twelve days. She had already been six days on the road, but she had been fortunate so far as, out of the small hoard which she had saved from the Circassian sons of Satan, she had been able to buy a donkey which carried the children and her few bundles. But surely I could do something to help? She

was not begging for alms and I had great difficulty in getting her to take a few small coins for the little ones. She wanted, on the contrary, to share with me her one Turkish quilt when she saw that I was wet through from my long day's ride in drenching rain, and had had to leave my servant, whose horse had fallen slightly lame, to follow on next day with my kit. She was naively convinced that it must be within my power as an Englishman to stay the hand of the oppressor, and what made it the more pitiful was that I knew all the time, not only that I, of course, could do nothing, but that the reforms to which we had indeed pledged the Sultan under the Cyprus Convention were no more than a mirage.

The measure of Turkish misrule was the fellow-feeling that for the time being brought the settled Turkish and Christian population together. It was, however, in small Turkish towns in which there was barely a Greek or an Armenian to be seen that feeling often ran highest against Constantinople, and in one of them so high that I heard a young Turkish official, who had travelled further afield than the group of local Mohammedan worthies with whom he was discussing the political outlook, swear a great oath and declare that there could be no salvation for Turkey until the power of Constantinople was broken and a *Rimpublic* proclaimed. By a curious coincidence this happened at a little town called Kediz within a few days' march of Angora, which is now the capital of the Turkish Republic. Wholesale massacres and expulsions of Armenians and Greeks have since then drained Asia Minor of its keener-witted and more enterprising population. But can anyone who, like myself, remembers those far-away days of misery and misrule all over Asia Minor,

regret that the Sultanate and the Caliphate and Constantinople itself have been deposed, and a new era inaugurated by even the most violent and revolutionary methods for a people whose many kindly qualities I learnt to know in the worst times of Hamidian Oppression?

CHAPTER SIX

ACROSS "PERSIA

IN Egypt, in Syria, and even in the wildest parts of Asia Minor, I had found the people, apart from a suspicious and obstructive officialdom, very easy and often quite pleasant to get on with. Outside the very few beaten highways the European traveller was still a *rara avis* and the Englishman especially, however unaccountable his motives for travelling might seem to them, was credited with the knowledge of many useful things and of a far-reaching power to help them in their public and even in their private necessities. He was expected to doctor them if they were sick, and sometimes to advise them even as to their family affairs, and however firmly he might deny having any official status, he was believed to have behind him the influence of an exalted Government whose policy was summed up for them in the magic word 'reforms.' They were good and often entertaining companions on a long day's march as soon as they realized that one was laughing with them and not at them. They were generally ready to be helpful in such little ways as they could, and when one had occasion to accept their hospitality it was large and wholehearted. Not so in Persia, when I travelled for

the first time, in 1884, across that ancient and famous country from the Gulf to the Caspian on the wild-goose chase which I have described in my *Fifty Tears.* Lord Curzon, in his *magnum opus* on Persia, published eight years later, in which he laid down the main lines of the policy towards Persia which he afterwards advocated and pursued as Viceroy of India, says many hard things about the Persian character. I am not concerned to deny their truth, but what struck me most in 1884, and during my later visits also, was the utter apathy and indifference of a people who seemed to have lost *dlljoie de vivre* and to be incapable of any effort to emerge from the drab routine of their daily lives. Great as was the misery I had seen in Asia Minor, the prolonged resistance which the Turks put up against the Russian armies during the recent Russo-Turkish War had shown them to be still possessed of their old virile qualities. Even the spirit of those who had suffered most from the cruel aftermath of the war had not been altogether cowed, though they had come to place their hopes, not in their own rulers, but in the pressure upon them of British power. The widespread disaffection accompanied by mutterings of revolution which I had heard expressed by some of the most conservative and law-abiding amongst them was evidence, at any rate, of an enduring measure of vitality of which I seldom saw any trace in Persia. Even when, twenty years later, the spirit of revolt crept ultimately into Persia it was imported at first by non-Persian elements - Armenians from the Caucasus, unruly tribesmen from the Bakhtiari Mountains, and the Turkee-speaking people of the north in whom there was a preponder-ating strain of Turk or Turcoman blood. Corruption and oppression were as great and as universal in Persia as in Turkey,

IN WORSHIP BEFORE A MONSTROUS VISHNU

but the Persian people seemed to be far too exhausted to react in any way against it, for whenever they had done so repression had been swift and fierce so long as the reigning dynasty had not itself sunk into hopeless decay. Perhaps their religion accounted for a fatalism more invincibly inert than in any other Mohammedan country, for the Persians are Mohammedans of the Shiah persuasion, who alone have an organized priesthood, and their *Mujtehids* set them an example of bigotry far less frequently displayed by the Sunnis, though Persian literature and poetry are saturated with highly unorthodox philosophies. Their mosques were, I found, everywhere rigidly closed against Unbelievers, though I was more than once secretly approached by those in charge of them with offers to sell me beautiful old tiles from the roofs and walls and even from old tombstones. Of aggressive manifestations of fanaticism I need recall only one instance. When I called, as in duty bound, on a Persian official in a small country town he offered me the usual glass of tea - for extremely sweet tea served in glasses is the national beverage - and when I had drunk it, as courtesy required, he called for his servant and ostentatiously ordered him to break the glass in order, as I knew, that no good Mohammedan should drink out of it after it had been defiled by the lips of an Unbeliever. However, when he returned my visit I adopted the same ceremonial and broke the glass out of which he had drunk his tea. But, with greater courtesy than he had shown, explained that I did it merely in order that no one else should have the honour of drinking out of the glass to which His Excellency had deigned to put his gracious lips. I had worked up that phrase carefully in my best Persian, and he was, I think, somewhat taken aback,

but merely replied with a perfunctory salaam. It was a trifling incident but it typified a prevailing atmosphere of resentment at the intrusion of the foreigner. During my second visit in 1902, when I crossed Persia again, in the opposite direction, such an attitude might have been more readily explained. Persians had by that time some reason to fear that Russia and England were going to grind them politically between the upper and the nether millstone, but in 1884 that danger seemed at any rate remote. Hardly anything had as yet occurred to rouse Persia out of the torpor into which she had sunk under the Kajar dynasty. The official classes, especially those connected with the court, were perhaps more corrupt than in any other Oriental State at that period; Teheran made a great show of spurious magnificence and tawdry luxury, and the old Shah, MuzafFar-ed-Din, who had twice been to Europe, was less proud of possessing the Peacock Throne, which Nadir Shah had brought back from his victorious raid on Delhi, than of a wonderful map of the world wrought in precious jewels for him by a Parisian jeweller in which a vast Persia in diamonds had been expanded to twenty times the size of his actual dominions.

The country itself was lifeless - as lifeless as its people. It has been not inaptly described as a series of small deserts within a big desert. But the pity of it was that many of the small deserts need not have been deserts at all, and one constantly came across the remnants of stone dams and deep underground *kanats* that belonged to the highly-skilled system of irrigation by which the winter rains had once been stored and carried down into green fields and pleasant orchards. No wonder that the country had been in some parts wholly depopulated, though there were still

traces of once prosperous villages long since deserted. I rode once through such a tract two or three hours without meeting a living human being - only a dead man walled up to his head in a low pillar of cement with myriads of flies preying on the ghastly face that had lost almost all semblance of humanity. A brigand, I was told, but had he been a worse one than many other brigands who had risen into high places and flourished like the bay tree?

Decay had overtaken also the great cities which had formerly played a large part in Persian history. At Isfahan the Zill-es-Sultan, then the favourite son of the old Shah, still held his court proudly as the almost independent ruler of Central and Southern Persia, but to enter the city the traveller had to make his way through the squalid debris of once opulent quarters and the empty shells of once crowded bazaars. To the Zindeh Rud, the one great river of Central Persia, the shrunken city of Isfahan owes such appearance of prosperity as it still retains, for before it loses itself in desert sands the Zindeh Rud waters the great plain of Isfahan and converts it in the early summer into one unbroken field of opium poppies in full blossom. I well remember how the heavy scent went to my head and relaxed the lassitude of my limbs as I rode across that plain after a long night march. But how few were left of the fifteen hundred villages which Chardin counted within ten leagues of Isfahan. How few too were left within the city of the numbers of mosques and baths and caravanserais and splendid palaces which, two and a half centuries ago, under Shah Abbas I I , the greatest of the Sefawi dynasty, the last really national dynasty to reign over Persia, justified in some measure the boast that Isfahan is Nusf-i-Jehan' or half of the universe.

Shiraz afforded an even more melancholy instance of an advanced stage of creeping paralysis. Every one has heard of Shiraz with her nightingales and roses as the home for centuries of Persian poetry. She has stood, far more than any other Persian city, for a peculiar culture which has delighted in abstruse philosophies and metaphysical discussions, flavoured with a mysticism that derived probably not a little from India. There is one approach to Shiraz which opens up such a pleasant view over the distant city with a few blue-tiled domes and graceful minarets enshrined in cypress trees and orchards that the Persians call the pass of Tang-i-Allah-u-Akbar, and pious wayfarers pause there to prostrate themselves and proclaim that indeed 'God is the greatest.' But what a disillusionment when one reached the town itself! In many quarters, now half empty and in ruins, grass grew in the narrow streets. Through the gaps in the crumbling walls one had glimpses of houses and gardens which had doubtless seen better days but were now uncared for or untenanted. The Great Mosque, the oldest and the only fine one, was little more than a ruin. Even the bazaars, in which centred such life as there was in the city, had a listless and forlorn appearance, and though a considerable caravan trade still flowed through from Northern Persia to the Gulf, it was mainly in the hands of a few foreign merchants, one of whom, a Dutchman, kindly gave me his hospitality. It was a relief to pass out of the smells and squalor of the streets into his clean and well-appointed house and garden bright with flowers. They were not, however, Persian flowers but the tulips of his own country. Just outside Shiraz the tombs of Hafiz and Sadi recall the golden age of Persian poetry. That of Hafiz, in a funereal grove of cypresses,

is a fine sarcophagus on which skilful hands had chiselled, more than five hundred years ago, some verses in which he himself invited his friends to visit his resting-place with mirth of minstrel and flagon until he should in turn arise from the grave aglow with desires. Many other graves have crowded in upon it to show how high an honour it has been deemed to be allowed to sleep near him. It is still a place of pilgrimage for his fellow-citizens in the spring when the Persian roses which he sang burst out into their large red single blossoms and lavish their heavy scent upon the quick and the dead. But when I visited it there was only one queer, turbaned old man, without minstrel or flagon, squatting on his heels at the foot of the grave, and swaying his body gently as he recited in a quavering nasal voice what were doubtless his favourite passages of the poet's works. He raised his large horn-rimmed spectacles to see who was the intruder, and though I saluted him most courteously, the sight of a foreign Unbeliever was enough to make him pack up his book hastily in its old silk cover and go away muttering what were certainly not blessings. Otherwise the Hafizieh was entirely deserted and the garden, which was no garden in our sense of the word, looked sadly neglected, as if no one was responsible for tending it or cared to take the trouble to do so. Still more forlorn was the grave of the even older poet, Sadi. Those of his fellow-countrymen who delight in smelling out heresies hold his poetry to have been tainted with Sunnism, and declare that it still blows in upon his resting-place from the Demon's Cradle, a great fissure in the mountains above the Sadieh. Some years after I was at Shiraz Professor Browne spent several months there, and in his delightful *Tear amongst the Persians* he tells us how he found his spiritual

home amongst the *literati* who were still carrying on the old traditions of mediaeval Persian culture. I was only once privileged to spend an evening in one of their houses, but I could not speak their language sufficiently to enter into communion with them, even with the help of a very kindly and efficient interpreter. They lived, it seemed to me, in a world of abstruse theories and subtle metaphysics for which, possibly through my own fault, I had no understanding. Perhaps it was that the fumes of many opium pipes that were passed round unceasingly during the evening merely gave me a headache without stimulating, as with them, the stream of high-flown conversation. They were, it seems, far less repugnant to the brilliant Cambridge professor, as he himself more than once admits! His chosen friends were for him the only Persians he knew, or sought to know, and in them and through their eyes he saw a nation that had not its like elsewhere - a nation absorbed in 'dreaming the dreams of the soul's disentanglement.' What I, on the other hand, saw in Persia, was a once historic country running to waste under the profligate rule of wastrels who cared nothing either for the bodies or the souls of the people on whom they preyed. So when I came home I wrote an article in a monthly Review and gave to it the title of *Persia in extremis.* Persia has, nevertheless, survived that article five and forty years, and may, I trust, secure a new lease of life under the new dynasty that has displaced the decadent Kajar dynasty. But Riza Khan himself is not of purely Persian extraction, and if he has swung himself on to the throne of the Persian Kings of Kings, he has done so with his own masterful hands and not by 'dreaming the dreams of the soul's disentanglement.'

As to the actual conditions of travel in Persia, I too often found them as rough and as primitive as in the worst parts of Asia Minor. In Persia also there were, of course, no railways, and though they were already talked about then, there are none to the present day unless one counts as such a single very rickety narrow-gauge line, eight miles in length, that was laid in 1888 to connect Teheran with a popular shrine at Shah-Abdul-Azim. There were not even the fragmentary bits of carriage-road which I had seen here and there in Turkey hastily begun and still more hastily abandoned. The main approach to the great plateau of Central Persia from the Persian Gulf is up a veritable staircase of *kohtals,* or mountain passes, of which the first is deservedly called 'The Pass of Curses,' and it leads up to two others mysteriously known as 'The Pass of the Old Woman' and 'The Pass of the Daughter,' which must both have re-echoed quite as often the curses of the old and young of both sexes and the groans of the poor beasts which toiled up and down them. One bit of this 'Royal Road' - for so it was styled — from Bushire to Shiraz, I still remember as a particularly bad nightmare. On one side the 'Royal Road' tumbled along the rock-strewn bed of an untutored mountain torrent and on the other it fell precipitously from ledge to ledge down an almost sheer mountain wall. Even the Persian pack-mules, the nimblest and the most patient in the world, often jibbed at the worst corners, and toiling up behind them on foot, as riding was out of the question, I had all my work cut out to find a foothold for myself, and to drag along on its four feet my own unwilling horse that had not been trained to acrobatic feats. Sometimes the knowing muleteers, familiar with every inch of those terrible *kohtals,* had to lie well back

against a rock and catch hold of their animals' tails as they were slithering down past them so as to act as an effective brake on a too rapid descent. Across these *kohtals* I had the company of a small caravan of Persian merchants, who took advantage of the greater assurance of safety which, I was told, they instinctively derived from the presence of a European traveller amongst them. Not that they ever showed the slightest acknowledgment. They were most of them, if not downright surly, at least wholly indifferent to any of the good-natured advances I tried at first to make to them. Never in Persia was I greeted as a 'brother of the road.'

But even the *kohtals* of Fars have an end, and from Shiraz onwards to Teheran, if one follows the usual route by way of Isfahan, the Persian plateau consists largely of more or less level plains with only lesser ranges of hills to separate them, and there one could take advantage of one mode of travel which had no like in Turkey, and showed a capacity for organization which the Persians never, as far as I could see, displayed at the time in any other direction. At intervals of some twenty or thirty miles, according to the nature of the country, there were *chappar* or posting stations at which, if one were content to travel light, one could get fresh horses to carry one from stage to stage. This afforded a much quicker mode of progression than travelling with a slow-moving native caravan, for the supply of horses was generally fairly good, and in the plains they would rarely drop out of a hand canter between one *chappar* station and another. There was stated to be an unwritten law of the road which allowed the traveller to cut off, as a warning to others, the tail of any horse that stumbled and fell too often, but I doubt

whether it was ever really put into practice and fortunately I never had occasion, even if I had had the heart to do so. My only trouble was that my mount sometimes resented my European saddle, which could never sit equally well on the back of the big Turkoman horse and of the small Arab indiscriminately provided at successive *chappar* stations. One had, of course, to send on all one's heavier luggage by caravan several days ahead, or to wait for it for several days at the other end, but I learnt to reduce my needs to a very scanty minimum which my Persian servant and the post-boy who rode with us from one station to the next could squeeze into their very capacious saddle-bags. The post-boy was often quite a character, for however ragged were his clothes he was apt to regard himself as an official of the postal service and put on airs accordingly. His profession was not, in fact, held to be incompatible with a higher social status than would have usually attached to it in Western countries. For in Persia the fortunes of a family frequently pass through great vicissitudes in the lifetime of one or two generations, and several of my post-boys lost no time in informing me that they were extremely 'well-born.' One of them when I asked him his name drew himself up proudly and replied, 'I am called Shah-zadeh,' *i.e.* Son of a Shah. I inquired of what Shah, to which pertinent question he replied rather evasively, 'Oh, my father too was Shah-zadeh.' We left it at that, and in the course of time I discovered that Shah-zadehs were plentiful as blackberries; and they might well be when the great Fath-Ali-Shah, during a reign of thirty-six years, not much more than a century ago, was reputed to have had more than a thousand sons born of his body, and every one of his sons and their sons and grandsons in turn were

entitled to style themselves Shah-zadehs. I saw a Shah-zadeh as a street-sweeper in the chief square at Isfahan, which had once been a great polo ground in the days when that noble game was originated in Persia; but he was held to have fallen terribly low. Not so a post-boy, probably because he could be counted as a horseman, and horsemanship has from all ages been held in high esteem by the Persians.

It was especially during the hot summer months, when on the central plateau the day temperature sometimes rises to over 110o in the shade - and one seldom finds any shade at all - that I appreciated the advantage of *chappar*. For a relay of horses could be obtained almost as easily at any time of the night as during the day, and they knew their way in the dark as well as in daylight over their own appointed stages. On one occasion I was able to cover about 120 miles without discomfort on a beautiful moonlit night between 5 p.m. and 10 a.m. across a terribly hot stretch of desolate plains when I was riding from Isfahan to Teheran. In this way, too, I avoided having to put up so often in Persian caravanserais, even more squalid and infinitely more grasping and quarrelsome than the worst in Turkey. Some of them, however, it is fair to say, had one distinctive and redeeming feature for the guest who was willing to pay: namely, an upper chamber built up over the doorway and thus raised a little above the noise and stench of the great courtyards, crowded as they often were with passing caravans. This upper chamber, or *balakhana* (whence our word balcony), was, like the cubicles opening out on to the courtyard, entirely bare of furniture; but it gave some assurance of privacy, as it could only be reached by means of a ladder, and it was much

more free from things that creep and crawl, whilst fresh air came in from the outside through its large window and sometimes also through large holes in the walls. One had to be content with a very frugal meal produced from the contents of one's saddle-bags with the addition, perhaps, of a few eggs or an extremely emaciated chicken; and there was nothing to lie upon except an extemporized bed of hay or straw, but the nights even in the hot weather were pleasantly cool, and with the breeze blowing in on to me I had many blessed hours of undisturbed sleep in a *balakhana* which I could never have had in the stifling lower regions.

The scenery on the great plateau was apt to be monotonously flat and bare, but the clearness of the atmosphere surpassed anything I have seen elsewhere. Never have I witnessed so frequently the strange phenomenon of the 'false dawn' when the eastern sky glows with a warm light as of sunrise more than an hour before the sun really rises and then fades away again for a time before the true dawn heralds the actual return of the long, hot day. Scarcely less wonderful were the mirages, which in the noon-day heat conjured up visions of smiling lakes and green fields and trees and stately domes and towers in the dim distance - visions which receded further and further until they suddenly vanished with some slight movement of the air and left one face to face once more with the vast emptiness of sun-scorched plains. But it was not always a mirage and sometimes the vision would gradually materialize into a rare stretch of vegetation with running water from an unexpected stream and the golden fruit of the over-rated pomegranates and great spreading plane trees; and then one could loiter for a moment in the blissful shade.

North of Teheran the face of the country changes again. The great range of the Elbruz Mountains culminates in the snow-capped dome of Damavand, and as soon as the watershed is reached one descends towards the Caspian over gentler slopes covered with forests into a broad belt of fever-stricken swamps in which the plague of mosquitoes at night is less formidable than the plague of poisonous horse-flies by day. The rare and miserable villages consist frequently of hovels raised high up on stakes or even built into the branches of trees in order to mitigate the effects of the deadly miasmas that ooze out of the water-logged soil. I had been warned not to take the risk of sleeping anywhere in that belt, and by far the worst and most trying of all my long rides in Persia was my twelve hours' ride through the steaming night to reach Meshed-es-Ser, where I embarked in a small Russian steamer to cross the Caspian.

When I made my second journey, nearly twenty years later, but in the opposite direction, namely from the Caspian to the Gulf, the country had sunk still further into the slough of despond and Russian influence was supreme in Teheran, where it practically wielded the power both of the purse and of the sword. The journey from the Caspian to Teheran had, however, been made relatively easy, for the Russians had built for their own military purposes a fairly good carriage-road and rest-houses from the port of Enzeli. This 'Russian road' was something quite new to most Persians, and the possibility of travelling in a carriage instead of on horseback at once appealed to the laziness of the official classes whenever they were compelled to travel, and they were the only class to count. There was soon a talk of carriage-roads all over the country, and the central plateau at least was as

a rule level enough for carriages with three horses harnessed Russian fashion. The carriage might stick sometimes, but an official could always requisition a sufficient number of hands to lift and pull it along. This was the death-knell of the old *chappar* system. Most of the stations were abandoned and there were no more posting-horses for riding. From Teheran to Isfahan I had therefore to adapt myself to the new fashion and be bumped along for several days and in sweltering heat in a ramshackle closed carriage of ancient Russian build and often to be stranded in a bad place until by hook or by crook outside help could be called in aid. The caravanserais were worse than ever, and when we at last reached Isfahan my companion and I were delighted to turn off into the Bakhtiari Mountains and make our way across to the Tigris and so down to the Persian Gulf, though this involved the purchase or hiring of tents and horses for our expedition. The so-called ' Lynch Road' on which we travelled was due to British enterprise, but it was little more than a track made just practicable for caravans through a network of mountains and ravines. How formidable these often were my sketch of our camping-ground in the great gorge of the Upper Karun river may suffice to show. Happily it did not elect on that occasion to rise, as I only afterwards learnt it sometimes did, forty and fifty feet in sudden and furious spate above the slope of silt on which our tents were unsuspectingly pitched!

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THE "PERSIAN GULF

IF the first of the great passes from the Persian Gulf up to the Persian plateau deserves its name of 'The Pass of Curses,' the Gulf itself may well be called 'The Sea of Curses,' possessed, if we are to believe the native seafarers, who ought to know, by seven-and-seventy devils. An almost land-locked sea, over five hundred miles long, but seldom much more than one hundred miles broad, it is encompassed on both sides with far-stretched deserts and stark, barren mountains. In the heat of summer the surface water gets so hot that the hand can hardly bear it, and in almost all seasons it is liable to sudden and violent squalls, bitterly cold in the winter, when they sweep down from the snow-covered highlands of the north, and like furious blasts from a furnace in the summer, when the fine sand of sun-scorched deserts, with which they are laden, obscures the sky for hours together. Its shores are as inhospitable as its waters. The foot-hills of the great mountain ranges often run down sheer into the sea, whilst in other places the gently-sloping shores are only the sandy fringe of the endless desert. It has scarcely a harbour accessible to ships even of quite moderate draught which have

generally to lie several miles out in open roadsteads. The scanty population, Arabs on the one coast, Persians and Beluchers on the other, are what their natural surroundings have made them - lawless by tradition and instinct. I have travelled up and down the Gulf under many different conditions. In the small liners of the British East India Company I have visited almost every little port in which our Indian merchants have had the enterprise to settle since our warships swept piracy off the waters of the Gulf, and carry on a varied trade with caravans that make their way down from the centres of tribal life in the deserts of Arabia. I was the guest of Lord Curzon on board the *Dufferin* when he made his stately viceregal progress up the Gulf at the end of 1902, and I spent five extremely interesting weeks with Admiral Sir Edmond Slade, the Naval Commander-in-Chief in the East Indies, on his flagship the *Highflyer*, whilst in 1911 his squadron was engaged in the difficult task of suppressing the traffic in arms carried on from Arabian ports to the Persian coast for ultimate conveyance to the rebellious tribesmen of our North-West Frontier. On these two occasions I saw much that the ordinary traveller has little chance of seeing.

With Lord Curzon I sailed up the long Elphinstone Inlet at the southern entrance of the Gulf, a strange tropical fiord of which the towering cliffs rising three or four thousand feet above us, might have reminded one of a Norwegian fiord but that they were bare of all signs of vegetation, and that their deep blue waters were even in December more than tepid to the touch in an oppressive atmosphere of over 90^0. The only sign of human life was one tiny and miserable village in a small sandy cove with a meagre spring of water. There some

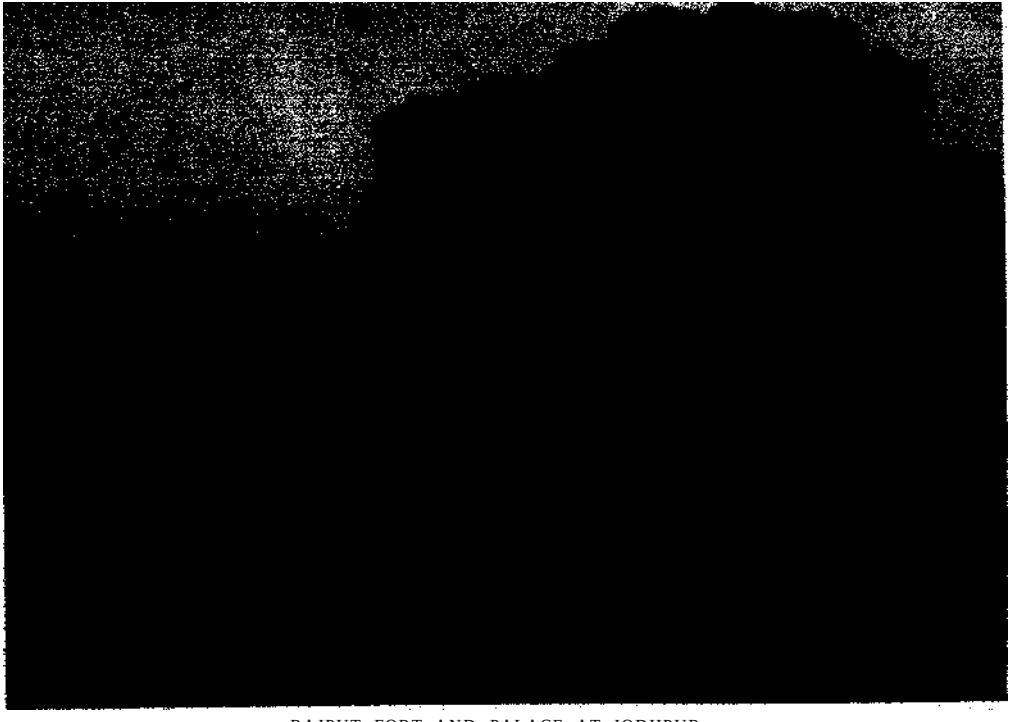
two or three hundred souls lived entirely on the fish they caught. They had doubtless never seen such a ship as ours, perhaps never any ship at all. Their curiosity ultimately overcame the terror which they manifested when they first saw us slowing down opposite their village, loosely built of stones from the cliffs that overhung it. Half a dozen of them were induced to come out in one of the two or three dugouts which constituted apparently their only valuable possessions. The headman amongst them, after much hesitation, took his courage in both hands and came on board. He spoke Arabic, but was difficult to understand as he was too dazed to reply to the simplest questions. His face only lightened when he was given a few loaves of Arab bread from the sailors' pantry. As the dugout was moving away a large lump of ice was - I think at Lord Curzon's own suggestion - thrown into it. None of the poor wretches had of course ever seen or touched ice before, or even heard of the existence of such a thing. They did not in the least know what to make of it. One after the other they picked it up and quickly dropped it when the coldness of it stung them. One of them, perhaps thinking it might be rock salt, licked it and then dropped it even more quickly than those who had merely tried to handle it. The excitement was so great that they nearly upset the dug-out, and one man fell into the water but was soon hauled in again, and with their flat rounded paddles they pulled away with all their might to the shore, and must have wondered still more when they saw the precious lump melting away under their eyes. This unexpected incident gave me time to make a hasty sketch of one of the most striking reaches of the fiord in the noon-day blaze when the bare cliffs seemed to be aflame with many colours

against the deep azure of the sky. So sheltered were the waters, on which we steamed for a whole day up to the end of the inlet and down again, that we were quite unaware that within not so many miles as the crow flies one of the sudden squalls for which the Gulf is famous was blowing on to the roadstead just round Cape Musselin, where the Trucial chiefs of the Arabian coast had been assembled from far and near on a small steamer of the Indian Marine to await the arrival of the Viceroy and do homage to him on the *Dujferin.* These chiefs were descended from the boldest of the pirate tribes that had for many years, in the early part of the nineteenth century, successfully defied British sea-power when we were first attempting to extend the *Pax Britannica* into the Gulf. I wondered whether any of them remembered that perhaps their own grandfathers had taken part in the great naval engagement in which a swarm of native dhows had attacked and stormed H.M.S. *Minerva* in 1809 and slaughtered all her crew. Several decades of peace had weaned them from the rough-and-tumble of the sea, and the poor fellows, attired, of course, in their smartest robes, presented rather a sorry spectacle when, after climbing an unstable gangway, they were marshalled on the equally unstable deck of the *Dujferin* and ushered up to the foot of the raised dais on which the Viceroy sat in full state and as steady as a rock to receive their homage. Handsome figures, many of them, with fine-cut Arab features, but of the desert rather than the sea, they struggled hard to preserve their dignity throughout the long ordeal of such a ceremony, but when it came to retiring backwards from the Presence and stopping to salaam three times, some of them could bear it no longer and turned and fled hastily to the ship's side. The cruise was full of political

incidents as varied as the weather. From the Trucial coast the *Dujferin* steamed across to Bunder Abbas, on the opposite Persian coast, where the Viceroy was met by Sir Arthur Hardinge, the British Minister at Teheran, and by the Admiral of the Persian navy on the one gunboat which constituted the whole Persian navy - for on the Caspian Russia did not allow Persia to have a single warship, large or small. Everything went off well at Bunder Abbas according to plan. The sea was like a mill-pond. The *Dujferin* had to cast anchor about five miles out but the Viceroy's steam launch transported our whole party into a wretched little harbour, close to the still more wretched city, which alone gives access from the sea to the waste spaces of South-eastern Persia. There followed an interminably long banquet in the evening, at which Sir Arthur, an accomplished oriental scholar, made on the Viceroy's behalf a flowery speech in Persian, and both the Persian governor and the Persian admiral welcomed their illustrious visitor in the name of His Majesty the Shah. Our visit immediately afterwards to the mud flats of Koweit, which bulked then very large in international politics as a terminus coveted by the Germans for the Bagdad Railway, went off also quite successfully, according to plan, but before we left Bushire there were signs in Lord Curzon's temper of an impending change in the political weather. A hitch had occurred in the programme for the Viceroy's reception by the Persian authorities at Bushire, which had been arranged by Sir Arthur Hardinge with the Central Government before he left Teheran. He was now dispatched on the *Lawrence* ahead of the *Dujferin* to smooth over the new difficulties. But they had not been smoothed over when the *Dujferin* anchored in the roadstead

of Bushire, also, like that of Bunder Abbas, five or six miles away from the town. For the next thirty-six hours Sir Arthur hurried constantly to and fro in the *Dujferin's* steam launch, and Lord Curzon emerged repeatedly from his state-room to tramp up and down the deck endeavouring to disguise an Olympian frown, till the beautiful Lady Curzon came to the rescue with her smiling serenity. A stiff and almost cold northerly breeze had sprung up and was blowing straight down upon us from the Persian mainland, and behind it there bore down upon us an equally unpleasant diplomatic breeze from the north. For since Sir Arthur's departure from the Persian Capital, the Russian Legation had been at work, and had persuaded the Shah's Government to change its original attitude towards the Viceregal cruise. Though Lord Curzon had already been welcomed with Viceregal honours at Bunder Abbas by the Persian authorities on behalf of their sovereign, orders had come down from Teheran that he was only to be received at Bushire with such honours as were due to a highly-distinguished guest but with none that could imply recognition on Persian territory of his status as Viceroy of India. Sir Arthur wasted his most exquisite Persian on the Governor of Bushire. Lord Curzon never landed, and the *Dujferin* was put on her course back to India. But we were to land for a few hours on our way down on the large island of Kishm on the Persian side of the Gulf, where Lord Curzon knew there were wonderful caves and sulphur springs which he was bent on exploring. But here again he experienced another disappointment, which at the moment irritated him even more than his rebuff at Bushire. The expedition began badly, with an extremely hot wind and short, very steep seas which overcame

some of our party on the very lively launch that conveyed us from our anchorage a couple of miles off the shore. Lord Curzon was an excellent sailor and had no sympathy with those who were not, and he seemed to regard Sir Arthur's misery as the proper retribution for his failure at Bushire. But he ceased to be amused when he failed to find any convenient place for landing and the Indian sailors, who were called in aid to bear him on their shoulders from the launch to dry land, twice very nearly dropped him in the surf. One of the political residents in the Gulf was in charge of the expedition, for which he had been instructed to prepare, but he himself had never been on the island and so had been compelled to rely on vague descriptions from native sources. One of my sketches conveys, I hope, some impression of the Hades through which we tramped under a blistering sun for over an hour without seeing any signs of the caves of which we were in quest. We came, however, on a trickling stream of highly sulphurous water and the Viceroy, with his indomitable courage, determined to follow it up for another half-hour whilst I craved permission to stay behind and do my sketch. When he returned he did his best to conceal his disgust. 'We have had,' he remarked blandly, 'a most interesting walk, but it led nowhere.' But the unfortunate political officer was taken aside when we returned to the *Dufferin* and reappeared with a terribly red face. We had indeed landed in a particularly hellish corner of the island for there were other parts in which Indian and even English troops had from time to time been quartered in support of naval operations against piracy until sickness ultimately compelled their withdrawal, and we had seen the British flag still flying at Basidu, a desolate point at the northern end of Kishm where the



RAJPUT FORT AND PALACE AT JODHPUR

Government of India maintained an agent in charge of a small coaling-station. What Western enterprise in the past has been able to do and to endure in such a region and in such a climate we saw later on when we anchored off Ormuz under the walls of the old Portuguese castle. At the beginning of the XVIth century the tide of Portuguese conquest had swept up the western coast of India into the Persian Gulf. Ormuz had already been long before that a flourishing emporium of Eastern trade which raised it to such a high estate that early English travellers waxed enthusiastic over its exceeding wealth and beauty. Yet it did not possess a single well or fresh-water spring. Its natural products were chiefly salt and sulphur, and the very hills surrounding it were deeply encrusted with salt. There Lord Curzon was at his best, for he had visited Ormuz when he travelled as a young and keen student of the East, and he could quote almost all that had been written by Ralph Fitch and Sir Thomas Herbert and the Frenchman Tavernier when poets sang of Ormuz as 'the gem and ornament of the East.' With a wonderful flow of stately language his imagination conjured up before us a vision of the splendid past whilst I sat sketching what remains of it to-day.

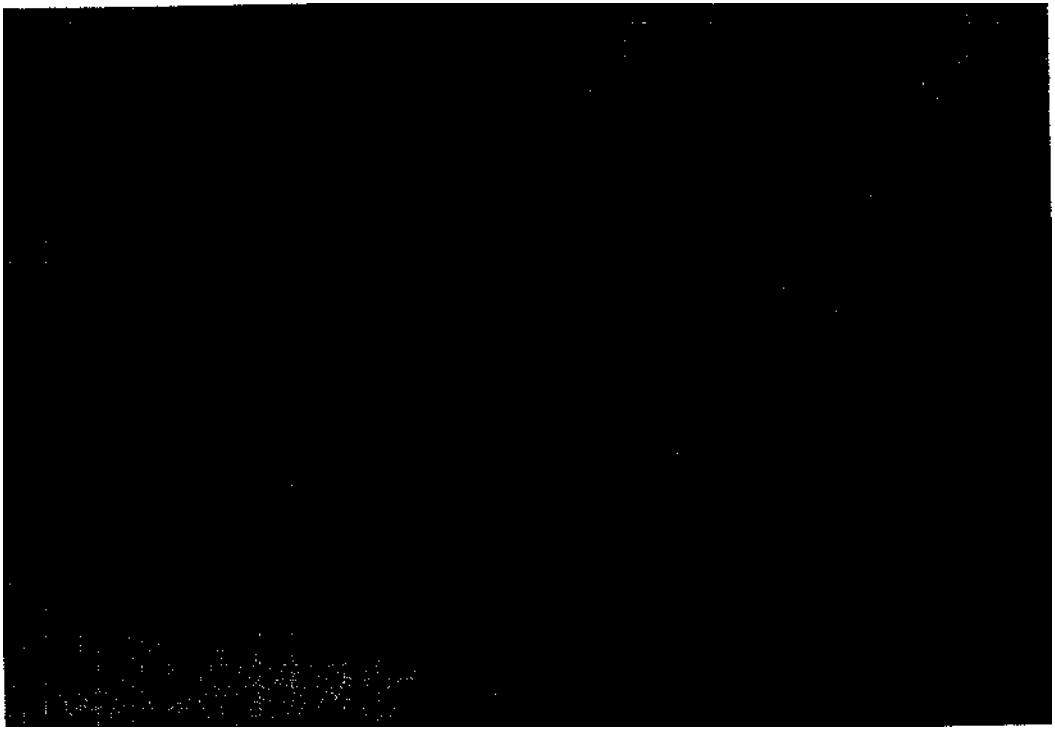
With Admiral Slade my experiences were very different, but no less interesting. The operations he conducted for the suppression of gun-running across the Gulf foreshadowed in some w[r]ays those that were conducted against German submarines during the Great War, for the native dhows engaged in running arms and ammunition from the Arab to the Persian shore were scarcely less elusive. All that part of the Gulf was mapped out in his chart-room into small areas in which gradually every dhow was located and hunted down by launches and ships' boats from his squadron

and by auxiliary craft enlisted for the special purpose. The flagship's boats were often at sea for days with scant provision and with little shelter, frequently drenched by rough breaking seas whenever the Gulf was swept by sudden squalls, and still worse, constantly blistered by the fierce sun when the weather was calm. The success of the operations depended largely upon wireless communication between the flagship and the rest of the squadron. Wireless was then still in its infancy, and at times when atmospherics were particularly bad it broke down altogether, sometimes for hours. The air-waves were capable too of extraordinary freaks. One evening the Admiral could not get into touch with a single ship of his squadron though none was further than two hundred miles from us, and even his unfailing good temper was ruffled until his flag captain came along with a message, which had just been picked up from the Admiral at Malta, rating in pretty strong terms the commander of a British warship in Greek waters, which for some reason gave Slade much amusement and satisfaction. He was less amused on another occasion when the *Highflyer* was lying off Bunder Abbas in one of the worst roadsteads in the Gulf. Perhaps he was rather unwisely induced to go ashore in the afternoon and have tea with our Consul, who pleaded the pathos of his wife's loneliness, just fresh from England, in such a dreary and stifling place. The Consul's house was a little way out of the town and we could land, he said, on the foreshore close to it, but not, as we discovered, without difficulty, though the sea was then as calm as a millpond. The water was so shallow that the Admiral's launch grounded gently on a sand-bank a mile from the shore. There we transferred to his gig, but that again grounded three-quarters of a mile further

on, and then we had to be carried on the sailors' backs to *terra Jlrma.* We sat on the veranda of the consulate in the tepid evening air, watching the gaunt yellow mountains, eleven thousand feet high, fade into a dull and dusky haze of which Slade did not at all like the look. Our host and hostess pressed him, however, to stay on for dinner and go back afterwards by moonlight. But hardly had dinner begun when we heard the first ominous shriek of a Gulf squall. The Admiral knew what it meant, and with only the most hasty apologies we rushed back to the spot where we had landed, sprang on to the shoulders of the waiting boatmen, and with little waves already breaking up to their waists in the shallow water, we reached the gig and scrambled into it. The men pulled with a will and got us safely out to the launch, though she had had to stand some way further out in the rising sea. We contrived somehow to tumble on board her, but by that time it was blowing a gale against which she seemed at first unable to make any headway. The little launch rose and fell and twisted and turned with such sudden jerks that we both soon gave up smoking and sat in lugubrious silence hanging on desperately to our seats and both of us, I think, wondering how long the inner man would hold out. At last, after more than an hour of the worst tossing I have ever had, the lights of the flagship showed up relatively near. But at the last moment the Admiral collapsed, whilst I stuck it out to the end - a very proud moment. We had still to climb a rope ladder on to the heavily-rolling ship. Anxious to help me, as I was a mere land-lubber, the Admiral waived his precedence and pushed me on in front of him. Again I had the luck to jump at the right moment and get a secure hold of the rope, whereas he slipped and missed his footing and fell up to

his neck in the water before the sailors pulled him up, dripping, on to his quarter-deck. He was, however, as usual, quite unruffled. His genial companionship invariably enhanced the pleasures of a cruise which was of constant interest to me. Whilst it enlarged my knowledge of the Gulf as a 'Sea of Curses,' it gave me repeated opportunities of watching the extraordinary pluck and endurance and good temper of the British bluejacket under extremely trying conditions at the call of often irksome duty without any of the rewards and glory of a great naval war.

Once again, at the beginning of 1915,1 went up the Gulf with Lord Hardinge of Penshurst who, as Viceroy of India, was proceeding to Basra to inspect the expeditionary force who had occupied it as the base of coming operations against Bagdad. The Gulf was kind to us on that occasion, and everything went off 'according to plan,' whilst there seemed to be no reason to anticipate what that campaign was yet to cost us in disastrous reverses and heavy casualties. My last recollection of the Gulf was when the long procession of hospital ships came down bearing to Bombay their melancholy freight of sick and wounded.



BURNING-GHATS AT BENARES

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN AND 'ABOUT SOUTHERN INDIA

EVEN when I first went to India forty-five years ago travelling was relatively easy. It had little of that spice of uncertainty as to what the day or the night might bring which lent a frequent zest to travelling in other parts of the East. British rule had stamped out most of the old forces of disorder, and new ones had not yet been evolved out of the growing contact with the West. It had tidied up many frayed and tangled edges. The large cities had their European quarters with such variations as the Indian climate required. Even the smaller administrative and military stations up-country displayed in their trim avenues and compounds, and in the characteristic complex of church, club and race-course, the desire to reproduce as far as possible the favourite features of home life. There were trunk railways serving the chief cities from the extreme south at Tuticorin to the extreme north at Peshawar, and right across Middle India between Bombay and Calcutta, besides many other subsidiary and narrow-gauge lines, though then, and indeed to the present day, the construction of railways has lagged badly behind the needs of the country. The trains, of course, lacked the modern amenities

of electric fans and ice and restaurant cars, but as there were few first-class passengers, and as yet no invasion of Western tourists, railway travelling was in some respects perhaps more comfortable, except in the very hot weather, than it is in the more up-to-date but also far more crowded trains of later years. Again, though motor roads and a more liberal extension of the railway system have opened up many parts of the country which were then difficult of access, there were few one could not reach if ready to face the discomfort and weariness of a bullock-cart stuffed with straw; or of an *ekka* in which one had to sit bolt upright under a flimsy canopy of coloured cloth that just sheltered one's head from the sun; or of *zpalky* - or litter, rather like a coffin - in which one was carried by relays of sure-footed native runners. In very primitive and jungly districts the slow elephant might have to be called in aid, and only in the more progressive ones were there decent roads on which one could rattle along in a hooded *tonga* behind a pair of sturdy horses. But the manifold drawbacks of all these modes of conveyance were, to my thinking at least, outweighed by the greater opportunities they afforded one of seeing the country and learning something of the manners and customs of its multitudinous peoples and the amazing variety of them. Religion, even more than race, has been, except on rare occasions, the deepest line of cleavage since successive waves of Mohammedan conquest began to pour into India early in the Xlth century, but never submerged the ancient Hindu civilization which had grown up and taken root there long before our Christian era. The profound antagonism between Islam and Hinduism is in fact one of the salient features of the present political situation. In the

Mohammedan countries of the East which I had already visited, Islam was still the dominant power, whilst with Hinduism I had had no contact save through books, until it confronted me in Southern India, still the stronghold of Brahminical orthodoxy. There it lives not only in its splendid Dravidian temples, unmatched in any other part of India, but in the social and religious customs of its peoples, for whom they still embody, as in the days when they were built, the highest sanctions that govern the human and the divine. That was to me the absorbing interest of Southern India, and the main incentive of my travels there.

No temple was so wholly untouched by any breath of the West as the famous temple of Rameshvaram on the island of Pamban, the northernmost of the chain of islands known as Adam's Bridge that nearly link up Ceylon with the Coromandel Coast. I went there long before the railway that, save for one considerable gap, has now connected them up, and I had to cross an arm of the sea from the mainland in a ramshackle native sailing-boat. It was not the season for pilgrims, but there was one large family of well-to-do Gujerati *bunnias* whom I had already noticed on the train that had brought me from Madura and them from the other side of India beyond Bombay. They all talked a few words of English, and I soon scraped acquaintance with them, and especially with their five rather attractive little children, during the three hours' crossing which laid their elders prostrate, but never affected their lively young spirits. I left the party at our landing-place far more *depayses* than myself, as they were quite unaccustomed to wrestle with strange surroundings and a clamorous crowd that besieged them with offers of service in a tongue that was still more strange to them. I too was in the

hands of the Brahmans, to whom the whole island belonged, but though an English visitor was very rare, they had apparently learnt to accommodate themselves to his more business-like habits, and one of them, naming a quite moderate fee, at once took charge of me. He jumped on to the shafts of a light covered cart drawn by a fast-trotting little bullock with a preposterously large hump, and cleared the way for us with a wave of his Brahmanical hand as effective as any London policeman's baton. Every inch of the island is sacred to Rama, for one of the most romantic and popular Hindu epics, the Ramayana, associates it with Rama's adventurous journey to Ceylon in search of his beloved Sita. The Brahmans make their livelihood out of the cult of Rama, which during the great festivals attracts thousands of pilgrims even from great distances. For their accommodation long rows of guest-houses of varying degrees of comfort line at intervals the avenue, some four or five miles long, of Indian acacias and umbrella trees which leads from the landing-place to the great temple which occupies, like most Dravidian temples, a commanding position. It faces on one side on to the ocean and is almost surrounded on two other sides by a large lagoon. The pale blue of the lagoon and the deep blue of the ocean alone relieve the glare of the fierce sun that beats down on the sacred enclosure that measures over six hundred feet in breadth and one thousand feet in length. The main gateway which gives access to it distantly recalls the great pylons of Egyptian temples, and the still loftier towers of the sanctuary are embroidered with a fretwork of mythological scenes and figures carved, tier upon tier, with the exuberance that marks Dravidian architecture. One can walk for nearly a mile through the vaulted galleries that

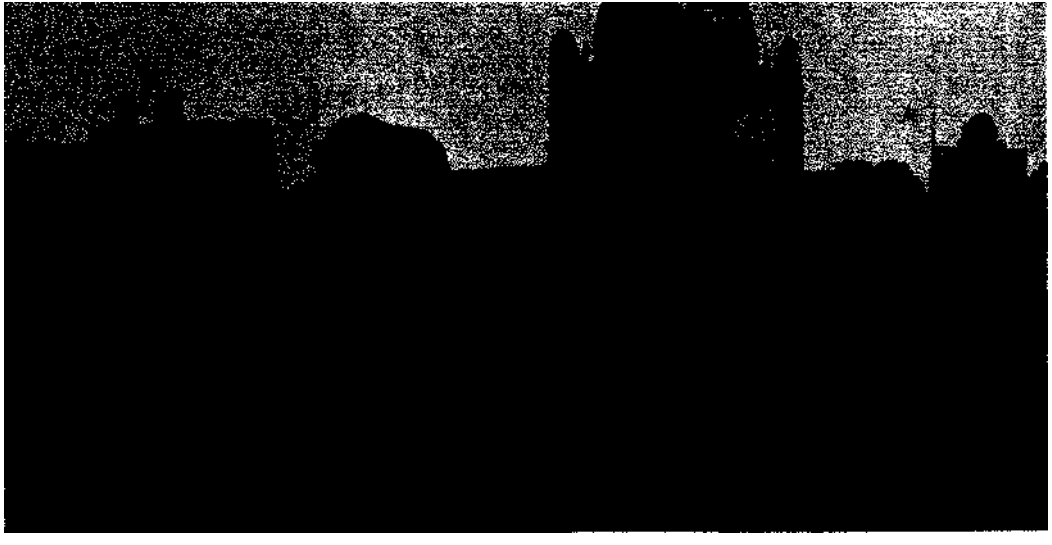
encompass the shrine. Frequent shafts of light illuminate the sculptured walls and pillars that display the unending phantasmagoria of the Hindu pantheon, whilst the clash of sacred gongs and cymbals, and the droning of the chanting Brahmans at prayer merge in the Holiest of Holies with the booming of the ocean as its great rollers break against the outer walls.

I had the great temple at Rameshvaram almost to myself, and there was nothing to disturb me whilst I wondered over the mysterious faith embodied in its ancient walls. In Madura one steps straight from the busy city into the well-known temple of Shiva the Destroyer, and it was an uncanny sense almost of horror that came over me when, out of the light and shade of the Hall of a Thousand Pillars, I passed into the gloom of long subterranean galleries in which monstrous figures of many armed gods and goddesses, and the ubiquitous symbols of reproduction loomed up out of a darkness broken only by a few oil lamps, until the sudden flare of torches, mingling their acrid smoke with the heavy scent of incense, heralded a weird procession of painted elephants in gorgeous trappings with their attendant Brahmans, and a shrieking crowd of worshippers in different stages of ecstatic frenzy. At Conjeeveram, still reputed to be one of the holiest places in Southern India, a still more repellent feature of the great temple was its dancing-girls, with gold armlets and anklets and jewelled ear and nose-rings, 'dedicated to the gods'; an euphemism which meant that they had been brought up within the sacred precincts to a life of prostitution which was held to be hallowed by that environment of sanctity.

In a dozen other temples, varying but slightly in style and in excellence of craftsmanship, the constantly reiterated emblems

of phallic worship showed how deeply Hinduism is rooted in the primitive cult of the crude forces of nature, though it has evolved many subtle and esoteric philosophies which have for centuries inspired great poets and thinkers, and satisfied the spiritual needs of a highly gifted people.

The more I was impressed by the grandeur and wealth of the temples, and the vitality of the faith which had created them, the more I wondered that none but religious monuments had survived to tell the story of the civilization that produced them. We know but little of the history of Southern India in those ages: Indian chronicles of the Hindu dynasties that reigned there are scanty and obscure. Fortunately one of the great Hindu kingdoms of the south lasted at Vijiyanagar well into the XVIth century, when it in turn perished by the sword of Islam. Its capital was still a mighty city long after the Portuguese had first opened up India to the West, and from them we have detailed descriptions of it almost at the zenith of its fortunes. After the hosts of the last king of Vijiyanagar, to the number, it is said, of nine hundred thousand, had been routed with great slaughter by the Mohammedan armies, the royal city was sacked and destroyed, but enough has defied the vandalism of the conquerors to show what it had been. Deserted and silent for more than two and a half centuries, and lying far away from the stream of modern life, it amply repaid a hot and tiresome railway journey. From Hospet, a small station on a branch line of the South Mahratta Railway, a bullock-cart conveyed me in a couple of hours along an atrociously bad road to the rest-house nearest to the principal ruins of the city. The rest-house itself took me straight into the heart of Hinduism. Quite unlike the common-



THE GOL KUMBAZ AT BIJAPUR

place structures of stone and brick and plaster usually provided all over India on stereotyped lines of strict utilitarianism by an economical Public Works Department, the rest-house of Kamalapur consisted of a couple of chambers that had once been part of an ancient temple, and the walls still showed the mutilated remains of grimacing deities and fabulously fearsome animals. Quite original, but rather uncanny surroundings, I thought, to sleep in! Inner and outer lines of fortification divided or surrounded the city, of which the Tungabhadra river, then a broad stream in spate, as it was the rainy season, formed its northern boundary. Its best preserved monuments are three great temples of the Dravidian type, to which officiating Brahmans are still attached, though their spacious courtyards are trodden by few worshippers. But I had seen finer ones elsewhere, and of more immediate interest to me were the remains of the royal city and palace enclosed within a walled citadel overlooking the site of the once great city. There I could picture to myself something of the pageant of court life as Paes and Nunis had seen it and described it for their Portuguese masters at Goa. A succession of granite platforms still leads up to the throne-room, and the walls on either side showed, in excellent preservation, elaborate carvings in relief of processions of elephants and camels and animated hunting scenes, and dancing-girls disporting themselves in the royal presence. Near to the throne and with direct access to it is the royal bath, a tank now empty of water, which was fed by a massive granite aqueduct of which some remains are still visible. Then came zenana buildings and the riding-school and the huge elephant stables in a long row, each one surmounted by a dome over its thick stone walls-for the kings of Viji-

yanagar went into battle on their state elephants, and they were arrayed at Talikot, to the number of two thousand, and routed in wild confusion by the Mohammedan horsemen just as those of Porus had been routed by Alexander the Great's horsemen on the Hydaspes. A broad street, lined with the shells of stately mansions, but with their facades often almost intact, marked the quarter in which the nobles resided. A royal city suddenly struck down and for ever, but just enough remained to show that the magnificence of its secular buildings had equalled that of its temples. The meaner parts of the city have long since disappeared, but both within and without the walls small canals, that now served only to water the fields, had once formed part of an elaborate system for supplying water to a great capital with over a million inhabitants that had covered at least six square miles. Its boundaries can still be traced here and there by a few scattered villages and fragments of old walls.

The distances were great, and the day was one of those sultry days during a break in the monsoon when a brilliant but scorching sun pumps up out of the earth the moisture which the seasonal rains have just poured out abundantly upon it after months of unbroken drought. In the afternoon great copper-coloured thunder clouds were piling up again in a stormy sky, and it was against that lurid background that there loomed up before me the huge and monstrous shape with which Hinduism has chosen to invest the eighth of the ten merciful incarnations of the great god Vishnu. A colossal seated figure has been boldly hewn on an almost Egyptian scale out of a single block of granite. But the godlike Pharaohs at Luxor are serene and impassive. In the Narsimha Avatar Vishnu has a human body, but under a

canopy surmounted by a grim hooded cobra, his head is that of a ferocious lion with enormous protruding eyes and a still more enormous gaping mouth. The arms and legs were badly mutilated by the Moslem conquerors, and the fragments lie shattered on the ground. The stumpy arms and the broken legs which do not reach the feet of the gigantic statue lend a curious air of impotent rage to a ponderous figure designed to inspire terror. It is hard to describe it in words, and I sat down to try to convey in a sketch the uncanny impression it made upon me. Whilst I was painting, a gentle touch of human pathos was introduced into the scene by a poor little peasant girl who, carrying a small child on her shoulder, advanced towards the hideous idol and, after remaining for some time in an attitude of prayer, laid down before it her humble offering of wild-flowers just as the simple folk of Italy or the Tyrol are wont to do at the foot of a roadside Crucifix or Madonna. But what a difference between the Indian and the Christian conceptions! By some process of reasoning, which it is impossible for us to follow, Hindu piety has been taught to associate divine compassion and love with the most repulsive forms of terror. Can anything seem more repulsive to us than the great goddess Kali with her protruding blood-red tongue and with her necklace of human skulls, holding in one of her many hands the bleeding head of a foe she has just decapitated, whilst her feet dance on the prostrate bodies of others? Yet is she not invoked as 'the gentle Mother,' and is not the great temple, in which she is thus worshipped in one of the suburbs of Calcutta itself, still constantly thronged with her devotees amongst whom may be seen any day, cheek by jowl with the humbler masses, not a few of the Western educated

classes in Western clothes from a great city that prides itself on being in the van of Indian intellectual and political progress?

No sooner had I got back to the rest-house than the monsoon rain poured down in sheets, with its usual accompaniment of thunder and lightning. It lasted throughout almost the whole night. I was tired, and tried hard to compose myself to sleep. But the weirdness of my surroundings worked more and more feverishly on my nerves. A small oil lamp merely deepened on the walls the shadows of grotesque gods and fabulous animals, whilst the vivid flashes of lightning which from time to time suddenly illuminated them, and the deafening crash of thunder, seemed to be an angry protest of the elemental nature-forces against my intrusion into precincts once devoted to the gods that personified them. When I at last fell asleep I was haunted in my dreams by frightful visions, in which the lion-headed Vishnu leered and grinned at me horribly, and the hooded cobra over his head descended from its canopy and came sliding down to wind its coils about me. Was I already subconsciously aware that, not a visionary, but a real cobra was sharing the chamber with me? I awoke suddenly out of my nightmare in a cold perspiration. Perhaps also I was feeling rather chilly, as one often does, even in hot weather, at the approach of dawn. Anyhow I reached out almost instinctively to draw over me a blanket which I had laid loosely on a camp stool near me in case I should feel the need for it. It fortunately slipped out of my fingers, but the lamp which was still burning gave enough light to see that there was something moving in the folds. I realized at once that it was a snake and when I jumped up and shook the blanket violently away from me a large cobra fell out of it and, probably

as much frightened as I was, retreated swiftly into a corner where, hissing with rage, it raised its quivering hood ready to strike at me. But I used always to carry about with me a heavy hunting-crop, and having had some previous experience of cobras at close quarters, if in less melodramatic circumstances, I knew how to despatch this one with a swift blow across the uplifted neck. After that I slept undisturbed, and the sun shone once more in a cloudless sky when I looked out from the back of my bullock-cart on the broken landscape which only half concealed the scattered remains of what had been the mighty city of Vijiyanagar. My visit had, I felt, been well worth while, and even the cobra fitted appropriately into the picture.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MALABAR COAST

ONE of my most delightful journeys in India, except for a very unpleasant beginning, was in a house-boat from Cochin down a succession of lagoons and waterways to Quillon, near the southernmost point of the tapering peninsula, and I was fortunate enough to have Mr. Percival Landon, who was then on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph*, as my travelling companion. We had at Cochin itself a striking object-lesson of the influence of the Hindu caste system even on non-Hindus. There are very few Jews in India, but Cochin possesses a Jewish community which is believed to date back to much earlier times than the appearance of Western Europeans in India. Whether the great Dispersion, or more probably some later stress of persecution, drove them across from Mesopotamia, it is on record that they were well received by the then Hindu rulers, who not only treated them with generous tolerance, but bestowed on them considerable grants of land. But the caste system which prevailed all round them reacted upon them also. They converted many of their native tenants and servants to their own faith but never admitted them to social equality. Hence there are at the present day two castes of

A SUN TEMPLE IN KASHMIR

Jews at Cochin, White Jews and Black Jews, who do not live in the same quarter nor eat the same food nor worship in the same synagogue nor ever intermarry. Quite suddenly out of the Cochin bazaars, just like those of most other small towns on the Malabar coast, we came upon a quarter that reminded one of the poorer quarters in some southern ports of Italy or Spain. Narrow streets and tall houses, which had seen better days, with dirty linen hanging out of the windows and decaying walls cracked and stained by wind and rain, some of them already falling almost to pieces. This was the White Jews' quarter, and its inhabitants bore the marks of a decaying race. We saw hardly a woman, and very few children, but the men, clad in long greasy caftans, had sallow white complexions. For the most part tall and lanky, their shambling gait and a general look of indifference and weariness betrayed the feebleness that comes of generations of interbreeding. We inquired for the Chief Rabbi, who came out to meet us and welcomed us very courteously in the few words of English he knew, but without a smile on his thin and melancholy face. He at once assumed that we wanted to see the synagogue. Some fine woodwork and ornamental tilts, together with old manuscript Hebrew Scriptures and a few parchment title deeds, testified to its antiquity in spite of some vulgar modern additions and slovenly repairs. We gathered, and indeed we could see for ourselves, that these unfortunate people had fallen upon evil days. In their intense pride of race they had failed to hold their own in the stress of modern competition, even with their Hindu neighbours, whom they despised. When we asked the Chief Rabbi whether the Black Jews worshipped in his synagogue, he replied, with an almost blank look of surprise,

that they did not. The Black Jews had, of course, their own rabbi and their own synagogue, and he left us to go and look for them ourselves. The Black Jews' quarter consisted mainly of the same sort of miserable hovels and bamboo huts to which the Hindus of the depressed castes were relegated. Only their very modest synagogue was built of brick and plaster.

The house-boat in which we embarked was a rather clumsy craft with a large square sail and eight long oars, but it had, as the event was shortly to prove, the supreme merit of being unsinkable. We started in perfect weather with a favouring breeze, and as we sailed before it our little crew plied their oars lazily to the rhythm of their not unpleasant folk-songs, and after a modest supper which we cooked for ourselves, we lay down to rest in the stern of the boat in which a frame of matting was meant to secure for us some privacy at night and shelter from the sun in the daytime. We were then crossing a very large lagoon some fifteen miles broad, and only cut off from the Indian Ocean by a narrow strip of dunes. We were soon roused from our slumbers by a hurricane of wind and thunder and lightning. Our boatmen had lowered the sail and were pulling for all they were worth at their oars, still singing lustily but to an entirely different rhythm. Lashed into big waves, which whitened the face of the lagoon whenever it was illuminated by a vivid flash of lightning, the water began to pour into our boat; but though we were soon sitting up to our knees in it, and our craft was practically waterlogged, a substantial framework of bamboos prevented it from sinking. The most alarming feature of the situation was that there were large gaps in the sand dunes that sheltered the lagoon from the open sea. In spite of our boatmen's desperate efforts,

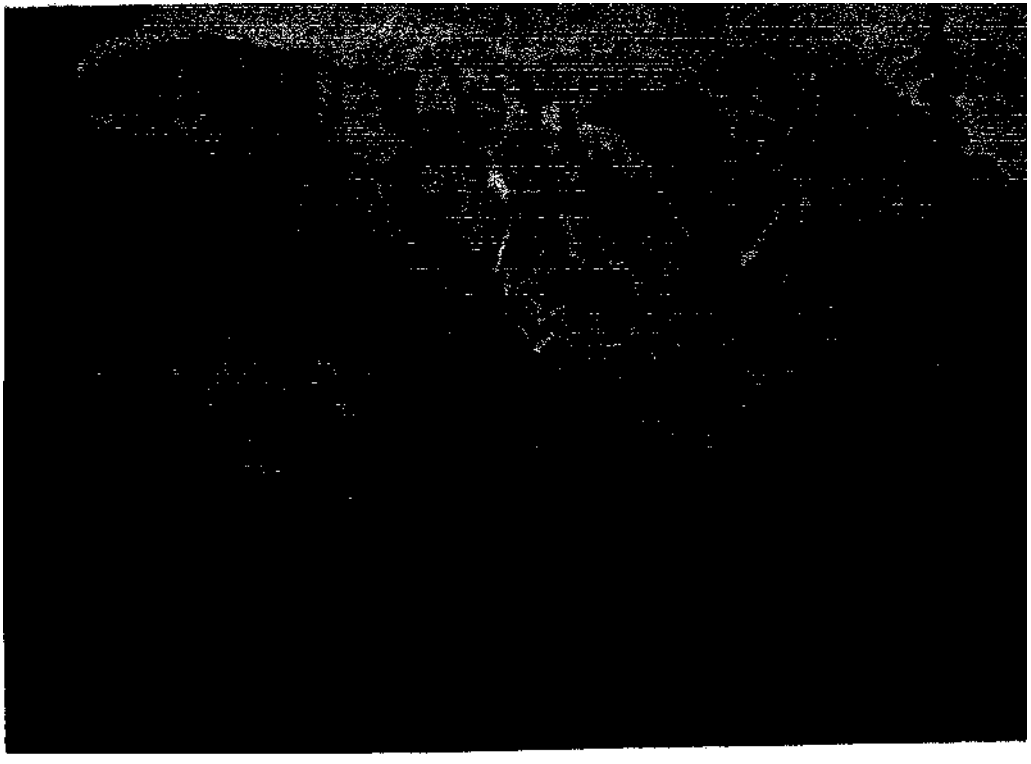
when they ceased even to sing, we were steadily drifting before the wind which might have carried us helplessly through one of these gaps into the ocean, and at one ugly moment we could hear unpleasantly near to us the roaring of the breakers. But fortune favoured us. After a couple of hours, which seemed much longer, the thunder and lightning rolled away, the sky cleared and the wind fell as suddenly as it had sprung up. We and our slender kit were soaked but nothing worse. Our willing crew, who had never lost courage, hoisted the sail again and trimmed it to the breeze which was once more blowing from the right quarter, and went on plying their oars but to a gentler cadence. The air was now soft and balmy. We got back to sleep as best we could in our wet clothes and awoke at dawn on unruffled waters within sight of a fairly large town. As soon as the sun rose in its accustomed glory it quickly dried our garments and we landed in relatively good triml It was Sunday morning, and nearly half the population of Kottayam consists of Christians belonging to the so-called 'Syrian' Christian community of Mesopotamian origin - a very progressive community with its own High School and College. The church is one of the most ancient on the Malabar coast, and the service, which we were just in time to attend, was conducted in accordance with its own ancient ritual. But here, again, we had evidence of the reaction of Hindu surroundings on non-Hindus. The large congregation was divided up according to complexion. Those of a lighter colour, which denoted a larger strain of Western blood, sat on one side of the church, and those of a darker colour, undistinguishable from that of the Hindu population, sat on the other side. They formed two separate castes who had little contact with each other, and it

was clearly a concession to their common faith that they were allowed in the same church.

The next days we threaded between much smaller lagoons a network of winding waterways, often lined on either bank with trees, mostly cocoanut trees, of which the leaning fronds sometimes almost met over our heads. From time to time we opened up green stretches of cultivated land and paddy fields. Occasionally we landed at villages to buy fruit and eggs and milk, which were all the provisions they could supply, but always supplied cheerfully, sometimes even refusing at first to take payment for them. The villagers whom we now mostly saw were Nayars, and their womenfolk, with a bright flower stuck jauntily into a coil of smooth black hair, frequently justified their reputation for beauty by the fairness of their olive complexion, the regularity of their almost Aryan features, and the slim gracefulness of their figures only slightly concealed by tight white bodices and short skirts of many colours. The Nayars are a caste as peculiar to the Malabar Coast as the Nanpudra Brahmans, with whom their women are allowed to have intimate relations, without prejudice, before they marry; for the Nanpudra Brahman claims to stand higher than any other Brahman caste. To him all castes owe service, and if the Nayars, who were once a military caste, are on a plane only lower than his own, with whom he can condescend to have certain intercourse, he rigidly asserts the full measure of his Brahmanical rights over the depressed castes whose mere touch or even proximity would defile him. We grew familiar with the strange bellowing noise he makes when going abroad to warn them off his path. Once when I was out for a walk I had to cross a narrow causeway over an arm of a lagoon,

and a little way in front of me there was a well-to-do Hindu, dressed up evidently in his best - presumably a *Bunnia* or small trader from a neighbouring village. Suddenly he turned back, and quickening his steps brushed past me and made for the end of the causeway we had both come from, and then disappeared hastily into a palm-grove lying off the path. He had heard the bellowing of a Nanpudra Brahman who was approaching the causeway from the opposite direction, and he had fled back as it was too narrow for him to pass the Brahman without coming nearer to him than the rigid laws of untouchability allowed. I naturally continued on my way and presently passed the Brahman at somewhat close quarters, who did not look too well pleased, but nevertheless returned my polite salutation. I had already seen in other parts of Southern and even Central India under direct British administration how tenacious are the Hindu traditions of untouchability. In the villages and smaller towns to which Western influence had scarcely penetrated at all, the local administration, long before the reforms, was often entirely in the hands of subordinate Hindu officials, mostly Brahmans. The lower castes were relegated to one particular quarter which had its own bazaars, and they were only allowed to use the wells specially allotted to them. When primary schools were established it was frequently impossible to get the Brahman schoolmaster to admit lower caste children to the school, and I had more than once seen them squatting on the outer veranda where the poor little fellows could follow as best they might, or scarcely at all, the lessons that were being given inside to their more favoured schoolfellows. When an inspector came along and remonstrated with the schoolmaster, the latter usually replied

with some force that if he allowed the 'untouchable' boys into the schoolroom the parents of the higher castes, who were in a large majority, would instantly withdraw their own children. We were not, therefore, surprised to see similar customs prevailing in the most archaic districts of the Malabar Coast. Nevertheless we came across one exhibition of 'untouchability' which topped all others. A magistrate on circuit, who was a Brahman, was holding his court outside a large village in a shady grove of mango trees. The parties to the case which he was trying, and the witnesses, were all low caste people, and could not, therefore, be brought nearer to him than their varying degrees of 'untouchability' prescribed. So they were posted at different distances from the bench, some eighteen, some thirty-six, and some forty-eight paces away, and questions and answers were carried backwards and forwards by ushers of intermediate castes so that the bench should be preserved from pollution. Let it be said, however, that the magistrate seemed anxious to probe the case, and listened carefully to the evidence produced by the litigants and to their own statements. This happened five and twenty years ago and Travancore, like the other great neighbouring Hindu states on the Malabar Coast, has shown, under its present ruler, some desire to remove the disabilities under which the depressed classes labour. Those amongst them who happened to be fortunate enough to acquire a good modern education in missionary schools at Madras have sometimes risen to important office in the State, and one of them, for instance, was Chief Justice of Travancore, with Brahman judges sitting beside him. Yet when the saintly Gandhi, who himself supports the Vedic caste system, but condemns the excessive lengths to which it has been



THE UPPER GORGES OF THE GANGES

carried, journeyed down to Travancore to preach against untouchability, he met with such widespread opposition that he deemed it advisable to give up his mission as premature.

Another institution which gives the measure of the persistence of ancient customs probably descended from the earliest age of Hinduism, when the Aryan conquerors were, as invaders, concerned to preserve the purity of their race, is the law by which descent is traced, not through the male but through the female line. Succession goes through the sisters' children, and even in the reigning house of Travancore, though only a male of the family can be Maharaja, any failure in the direct female line can only be remedied by the adoption of two or more young women amongst the nearest relatives, who acquire at once a privileged status as alone entitled to provide heirs to the state. Such circumstances have arisen even in our own time when the Government of India, as the paramount Power, was moved to sanction the adoption of two girls of the reigning family in order to secure the birth of an heir under the immemorial custom of Travancore.

Unlike the Brahmans of the present day, who in other parts of India may be constantly seen pursuing many lowly avocations without forfeiting the caste pre-eminence (so long as such avocations are not prohibited by the laws of Manu - as, for instance, chauffeurs, as this for obvious reasons does not figure on Manu's lists), the Nanpudra Brahman is for the most part concerned only with the land in the intervals left to him by the performance of his elaborate ceremonial duties. His ablutions alone take up several hours of his day, and if he owes his power mostly to the long-descended superstitions upon which it is built up he must be terribly hampered by those peculiar to his own caste. The

number of omens which he is bound to consult before he goes abroad on his daily businesses is so great that one wonders how he can ever get through his day's work. Yet with all his shortcomings he is a commanding figure in the world of Hinduism, an aristocrat by birth, and often does his best to justify the status he claims by his ancient learning and his fidelity to principles of which he deems observance to be a sacred duty devolved upon him by his privileged *Karma.*

Lest one be tempted to forget the parable of the beam and the mote, and to dwell with excessive self-righteousness on the seamy side of Hinduism, it is worth while to travel north instead of south from Cochin along the same Malabar coast till one reaches Goa and sees there the ruin that has overtaken the earliest centre of European power in India, and of Christian evangelization as it was ultimately practised there. For Goa was once the seat of a great Portuguese empire in India which, for a century after Vasco da Gama had discovered a new ocean highway from Europe by rounding the Cape of Good Hope, extended from point to point along the Malabar coast until it reached up, far north of Bombay, into the Persian Gulf. Behind the decline of great empires there is always a Nemesis which explains it, though sometimes of such a complex order that it cannot be very easily traced. But at Goa it stares one in the face. There is indeed a new Goa, a place of little importance or interest, in which the Governor-General of all that remains of the Portuguese Indies still holds such state as frequent revolutions in Lisbon and consequent financial stringency allow, but it lies several miles away from the old Goa, which has been long ago deserted and left a **prey to the** hungry jungle. Through **a** dense belt of dank **and**

fever-laden vegetation in which are buried the ruins of the Goa Dorada or Golden Goa of the XVIth century, one at last reaches one great open space where the sun blazes fiercely, beating down on the blinding whiteness of the huge churches which are all that has survived. Chief amongst them is the Bom Jesu, containing the body of St. Francis Xavier in a gorgeous shrine and a triple sarcophagus of costly jasper and marble that encloses the actual coffin of solid silver. On the opposite side stands the cathedral which alone still has a permanent staff of officiating clergy. For a few days in the year the great square is again alive with crowds of pilgrims who come to worship on the saint's festival, when his mummified body is exhibited with immense pomp and ceremony. For the rest of the year it is empty and silent, haunted only by the ghosts of the victims of the Holy Inquisition that held its grim *auto dafe'* there to the tolling of the great cathedral bell. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* There is in the Bom Jesu church, besides a big silver statue of St. Francis Xavier, a picture of him which, though of no great artistic merit, is far more striking. It shows a singularly gentle face of olive complexion, with a sad and pitying eye. To such an one there would surely have been no more cruel travesty of the message of peace and goodwill amongst men, which he had been the first to bring to the peoples of India, than the scenes of sinister fanaticism enacted outside the church in which he was finally laid to rest. But it was the curse of Portuguese rule that it sought to bring the Gospel into India with the sword, and, reaching the zenith of its power at a time when Europe was plunged into religious wars, it reflected their fierce spirit under cover of its work of evangelization, and nowhere more systematically than in Old Goa.

It was a relief to emerge from the sultry atmosphere and gloomy memories of Old Goa and get on the river again and breathe the clean wind blowing up it from the ocean, though our small Portuguese steam-launch made heavy weather on the big swell which the ocean also sent up to meet us before we got back to Mormugoa, the new port built by the railway company which connects the Portuguese strip of coast with the British Indian railway system. The south-west monsoon was then at its height, and beat with unsurpassed fury on that part of the western coast of India with mountainous seas and torrential rains. I was fortunate in having a bright day during one of the short breaks in the monsoon for my expedition to Old Goa, but on the very next day at Mormugoa I knew what rain was like. It measured eighteen inches in the twenty-four hours, though it did not fall quite continuously and there were even some short intervals of brilliant sunshine. But when it fell it did so in such solid sheets of water that from my veranda I could not see ten yards across the compound. It was almost a record, and to those who have never experienced such things I may mention that the average rainfall for the whole year in London is only about twenty-six inches.

CHAPTER TEN

CRISS-CROSS THROUGH MIDDLE INDIA

JUST two hundred and eighty-three miles north of Madras, on the main line to Calcutta, an otherwise inconspicuous station displays a big notice-board which reads in English and in several Indian vernaculars/Change here for Puri.' It might equally well read, 'Change here into the Middle Ages.' For on the short branch line that takes one to Puri I soon saw the great temple of Jaganath looming up out of the flat plain that stretches northwards all along the Bay of Bengal. Outside Puri the line opened out like a fan into a greater number of sidings than one sees even on approaching an important terminus. They have to accommodate during the great festival the rush of special trains which bring from all parts of India immense crowds of pilgrims only comparable as to numbers to those that flock down to Epsom on Derby Day. For of all the chief centres of Hindu worship Puri possesses one unique excellence. On the culminating day of the great pilgrimage there emanates from the shrine of Jaganath, the Lord of the Universe, an atmosphere of saving grace which for a moment obliterates all distinction of caste. Yet the temple itself, pre-eminent as it is amongst a hundred and more temples

at Puri, possesses none of the architectural grandeur of the great Dravidian temples of Southern India. Nor is there anything very inspiring in the form in which the deity is worshipped there - an almost shapeless idol rudely carved out of a large log of wood. Nevertheless, in a town that numbers out of the pilgrimage season little more than fifty thousand souls, twenty thousand are employed directly or indirectly in the service of the idol, and live entirely on the large endowments of the temple and the lavish offerings of pilgrims. Probably no other idol claims such exacting service. The god has to be dressed and washed several times a day. He has an army of cooks to prepare his meals and bevies of nautch-girls to while away his leisure hours. At nightfall he has to be put to bed with an elaborate ceremonial. More than that. During the fierce summer heat he has to be moved to another temple in a rather cooler quarter. It is for these august *diminagements* that the famous car of Jaganath is used. A huge wooden car, standing thirty-five feet high and mounted on ponderous wooden wheels, it forms a movable temple lavishly adorned with mythological groups, rather gross and rather grossly carved in relief out of its wooden walls. There is little foundation for the stories that scores and hundreds of people throw themselves under its wheels to seek salvation in being trodden to death by the Lord of the Universe. This may have been the case in former times but British rule has not only done much for the sanitation of a city which used to be a hotbed of devastating epidemics, but it has also contrived to secure some regulation of the traffic during the annual progress of the car. Accidents, no doubt, still often occur, as it is drawn the whole way by worshippers fighting wildly for that high privilege.

I was not there during the car festival, but the broad road connecting the great temple with the smaller summer temple could scarcely present, even on such occasions, a more extraordinary spectacle than it did when I saw it in ordinary times, a representative exhibition of Hindu asceticism in all its strangest forms. For a prolonged sojourn in sacred Puri counts as an exceptional qualification for the legions of *sanniyasis,* or professional ascetics, who to the number of over four millions perambulate India and congregate in large force at all religious festivals, and at the principal *melas* or fairs, at which mundane business is combined with a special errand of piety. Asceticism has been practised all over the East from remote antiquity and by every creed, but in Puri I saw the concentrated essence of it. For nearly half a mile along that broad *via sacra* rows of ascetics stood or squatted or lay, each on his own mat, in various stages of self-inflicted discipline. Some displayed a withered arm or hand or finger atrophied by dint of immobility. Some knelt as in a trance produced by long periods of motionless introspective contemplation. Some reclined on spiked mattresses which had dug festering sores into their flesh. Each of them had an alms bowl into which the faithful dropped their mite, and food and water were brought round to them at appointed hours by the temple Brahmans. I was assured that many fasted altogether for days and days, and there were some cases of such extreme emaciation that I could hardly disbelieve it. But in this vast army of *sanniyastSy* who are one of the economic plague spots of India, it is difficult to distinguish between the genuine fanatics, devoted to the fulfilment of their *Karma,* and those who, without proceeding to the most excessive forms of mortification, have

merely chosen a line of life in which they can trade on popular superstition and find many compensations even for the flesh. Most of those I saw at Puri and elsewhere were almost entirely naked, their bodies being smeared all over with white ashes, and their special caste marks and the symbols of the special deity to whom they had consecrated themselves painted in coloured chalks on their foreheads. Not a few of them looked remarkably well-fed, and their tired eyes and the sensuous expression on their bloated faces showed traces of a life not wholly devoted to pious works and spiritual exaltation.

The present temple of Jaganath, enclosed within double walls, may or may not have been built at the end of the XIIth century. Far more interesting is the tradition that it was built by a powerful Rajah in expiation of the most heinous of all crimes that a Hindu can commit. He had killed a Brahman and in atonement he spent, it is said, the enormous sum, in those days, of a million sterling on a shrine which still maintains probably a larger number of Brahmans than any other temple in India. It has in fact been so often and so clumsily repaired and restored that no date can be definitely ascribed to it, but if, as there is some reason to believe, it was originally dedicated to the Sun, it may go back to a remote period when the worship of nature forces was beginning to be merged into that of the later Hindu pantheon. Probably of greater antiquity still is the ' Black Pagoda' (eighteen miles north of Puri along the coast) - the name given to the ruins of what was once almost undoubtedly a temple of the Sun. To visit it I made my longest journey in a *palky* with two relays of bearers who, as the days were extremely hot, carried me all through the night. It was a long wooden box in which I could

lie at full length propped up on pillows, and after the sultry air of Puri, which had weighed upon me morally as well as physically, the clean breath of the ocean and the even rhythm of the waves breaking upon the sands almost all along my route, were inexpressibly refreshing. Equally so were the solitude and silence and simplicity of the ruins themselves. Fergusson has described at length the porch and the fine sculptured groups that guard the gateways to the temple, one of them a group of horsemen instinct with movement, and without his help I should certainly have overlooked in the roof of the temple the wrought-iron beams which, as he says, show a knowledge of the properties and strength of that metal peculiarly remarkable in a people who afterwards entirely lost the art of forging such masses. It was one of the surprises - like the rock-hewn temples of Ellora or the marvellous frescoes of the Ajunta caves - that in India constantly set one thinking about the many mysterious chapters in her history of which we have only so far caught rare glimpses in her ancient arts and crafts, for centuries forgotten in the turmoil of religious and political strife. I had exhausted the sights long before mid-day, and my afternoon was one of pleasant rest in the shade of a sacred banian tree before the time came to resume the *palky* journey back to Puri, which I confess seemed to me considerably longer than on my way out.

For aught I know motors may now have replaced the *palky* between Puri and the Black Pagoda, but they took a long time to reach India, and the first I remember seeing there were at Curzon's Delhi Durbar at the end of 1902, and then only half a dozen of them. But afterwards they came with a rush, the princes and ruling chiefs of India especially importing them

almost wholesale, and of the most luxurious types, as no doubt their dignity and opulence required. It was not until a tour through the little group of Bundelkund native States, shut away from the world in their own little corner of Central India, that the large hospitality for which all Indian rulers are noted gave me an opportunity of realizing the comfort and convenience of motors in a part of the country still almost untouched by railways. The roads left much to be desired, as they were still mostly old bullock roads quite inadequately repaired and widened. In Ajaigarh, the smallest of these States, the roads had not even reached that stage, but the Maharajah had somehow got out from England a baby two-seater in which, with a child's delight in a new toy, his cheery Highness himself drove me round and round the grounds of his palace to which, as he proudly showed me, he was adding a large garage. The Maharajah of Panna, on the other hand, sent one of his several Rolls-Royces to drive me through his State to his little capital, which he told me would soon be 'completely modernized.' I had my doubts, but he had certainly introduced many modern comforts into his own palace. He was very anxious that I should make a sketch of his palace and I could not refuse so gracious a host, though I drew the line at making a prominent feature of his new and magnificent garage. I got much more enjoyment out of sitting on the shore of a great lake in the shade of spreading trees near to a group of stately ancestral shrines built on the water's edge, and trying to paint perhaps the most perfect of Indian sunsets on a scene of perfect peace. The subject, however, did not appeal to the Maharajah's utilitarian turn of mind. He prided himself on being Very progressive' - in fact, some-

thing of a hustler as far as hustling was possible in his sleepy little State.

There was an amusing piquancy in being conveyed back in another Maharajah's Rolls-Royce into the stormy past of these Bundelkhund States when petty Rajput chiefs conquered the country and held it even under the Mogul emperors, sometimes in strife with them and sometimes owning more or less real allegiance to them. One of the delights of travel in the byways of India was that it constantly opened up unexpected peeps into the romance of her extraordinarily chequered history. My good luck brought me to Chattarpur in time to witness a religious ceremony of unique interest in my experience. The State is devoted to the cult of Indra, who is one of the gods of early Hindu mythology still directly associated with the great forces of nature. But policy requires the cult of the greater god to be in some way subordinated in practice to the cult of the family deities imported by the new rulers who founded the State. The Maharajah was celebrating the annual festival of his own tutelary god. The setting was picturesque. His large palace, recently restored and enlarged, was an imposing structure with arcades and terraces and cupolas in the Rajput style, and it stretched along a lake which as soon as night set in reflected the brilliant illuminations prepared for the occasion. For a whole week before the minor local deities of the countryside had been brought in from their village temples, and the temporary shrines erected for their reception were lined up in a large open space in front of the palace, so that they all faced, in their tinsel bravery, towards a spacious marquee bright with flags and banners and coloured lamps which sheltered the larger and far more elaborate

shrine of the family deity with its Brahman attendants. At its foot sat on a raised dais the Maharajah himself, in his robes and jewels of state, with his male relations and high officials who formed a glittering group of colour in contrast to the more sober and commonplace attire of the small party of foreign guests. At nightfall the real old-world drama began with a great blare of trumpets and beating of gongs and drums. Out of the outside darkness there emerged a procession of state elephants in their ceremonial trappings, their foreheads and ears gaudily painted, with a large escort of chanting Brahmans. They filed solemnly past the marquee, each in turn doing homage, the elephants by raising their trunks and trumpeting, the Brahmans by profound salutations to the Maharajah and his tutelary deity. Then came a bigger elephant arrayed in a cloth of gold bearing on an illuminated howdah the great idol representing Indra which had been brought down from its own temple in the city. The elephant stopped directly in front of the dais, and kneeling down, trumpeted its obeisance. The Brahmans in attendance on the Maharajah's family god immediately swarmed up short ladders on either side on to the howdah, and invading it with loud war-cries, knocked the god Indra's attendants about with every appearance of violence, and seizing hold of the idol itself bundled it unceremoniously down to the ground where they, and not its own attendants, supported it and made it turn its face towards the Maharajah and his god. The Maharajah sat for a few minutes unmoved until Indra had been made to go through a somewhat clumsy form of obeisance to the family god. To this the family god replied by nodding his head, and the Maharajah, who had been watching for this sign, if he had not himself pulled a cord,

A PASS INTO THIBET

also nodded. Thereupon Indra was restored to his own attendants, who hoisted him up again on to his elephant's howdah. The huge animal, having now duly trumpeted another and still louder salutation, rose slowly from its knees, and whilst the Maharajah and his court also rose to their feet and salaamed with all the reverence due to so great a god as Indra, it marched slowly away to rejoin the rest of the waiting procession amidst the acclamations of a crowd of outside spectators who had watched the whole proceedings in absolute silence. By publicly enforcing upon one of the great gods of Hinduism so humiliating a form of homage to his family god, the Maharajah had formally reasserted in the sight of his people his hereditary rights of sovereignty. It was a spectacular illustration of the long conflicts between the deities associated from time immemorial with different phases of Hinduism in the political as well as in the spiritual life of India.

In British Central India I often came across other and more nai've illustrations of ancient beliefs and popular customs. Near a village where there had been quite recently a bad outbreak of smallpox, I saw a small shrine garlanded with marigolds to which a crudely-painted image of the goddess of smallpox attracted many humble supplicants. At another turn of the road, where a tiger had once killed a child, there was on a low platform of stone the very roughly moulded figure of a tiger designed both to quiet the ghost of the victim buried under it and to propitiate all the other tigers that infested the district. Still more extraordinary was, on a hillside overlooking a large and swampy lake, a regular forest of godlings fashioned out of sticks about five or six feet high with knobbly heads smeared with colour to represent their faces. These godlings were believed to be potent against

malaria, and though they had failed entirely to avert it, the people continued to add a fresh godling whenever another outbreak occurred, in the hope, presumably, that quantity would ultimately make up for quality and abate the wrath of the mysterious powers whom these simple folk knew no other means of propitiating.

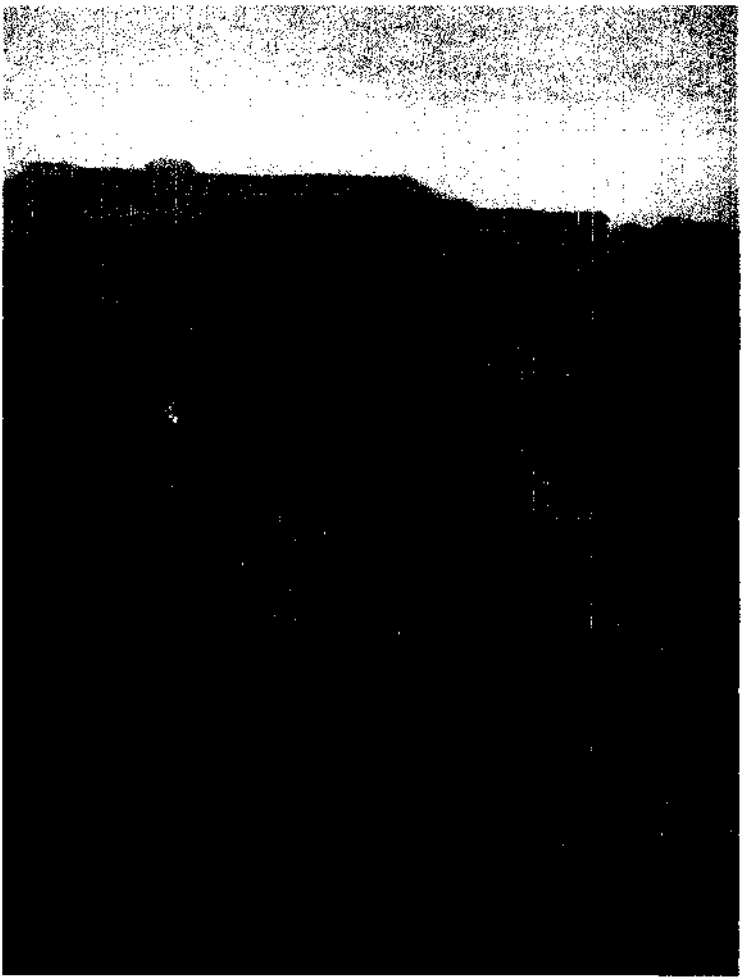
Having seen the desolation of Vijiyanagar, I naturally wanted to see the Mohammedan city built from its spoils in the Deccan by the Ahmed Shahi sultans who had played a leading part in the overthrow of the great Hindu Kingdom of the South. Bijapur, has been called, like Vijiyanagar, the City of Victory, and it is not unworthy of so proud a name. The Adil Shahis were one amongst several Mohammedan dynasties that carved for themselves kingdoms out of the chaos that followed Timur's meteoric and devastating eruption into India. Many of the Mohammedan rulers surpassed in cruelty and extravagant luxury the worst of the despots of the Italian Renaissance, who were roughly their contemporaries, but like them they were magnificent patrons of art, and above all of architecture. In few cities of India does Mohammedan architecture display such exuberant variety as at Bijapur, and some have traced Hindu influence in the extraordinarily florid ornamentation of the Ibrahim Rosa, a group of stately sepulchral monuments erected when the Adil Shahi dynasty was reaching its apogee. But it is the simple grandeur and constructive boldness in which the greatest Mohammedan architects have sought to give expression to the austerity of their stern monotheistic faith that soar there to their greatest height in the Gol Kumbaz built for his own tomb by Ibrahim's successor, Mohammed Shah, who, as one of the inscriptions tells

us with a singular touch of Hindu pantheism, afterwards entered into Paradise as 'a particle in the house of salvation' in 1659. Pierced by lofty gateways on its four sides the walls rise unbroken by any decoration to the series of pendentives that provide the platform on which rests the most perfect dome in the world. Broader than that of St. Paul's, but rather less so than that of St. Peter's, it encloses an immense space which has no equal or rival. From the broad gallery that encircles it, to which one gains access by exhausting spiral staircases cut out of the thickness of the wall, the plain marble cenotaph over the sultans' tombs in the middle of the immense hall beneath me seemed to be the intended symbol of the insignificance of human life, even when, as in this case, it had worn the splendid trappings of royalty and power. My guide, however, was more anxious to draw my attention to the acoustic properties of the dome itself. A mere whispered word roused an echo which he compared to the distant tread of victorious Mohammedan armies on the march.

But Mohammedan armies on the march, even from Bijapur, have not always been victorious; whereof I was reminded by rows of small tombstones close to a fine reservoir with the remains of arched galleries cut into the walls which still enclosed a deep pool of water. For history or legend has it that they connote a tragedy which prefaced the departure of the last of the many Mohammedan armies when from Bijapur it marched out to disaster. Shivaji had then already raised the Hindu Mahrattas of the Upper Deccan against the Mogul Empire, and Afzal Khan had been ordered to go forth from Bijapur and smite him. He had, it is said, forebodings that he would lose his life in the adventure, as he actually did when Shivaji came out to meet him

with promises and pledges of peace and friendship, and then, whilst the Mahrattan army was waiting in ambush, plunged into the bowels of the Mohammedan general, whom he was embracing, the steel tiger's claw concealed under his flowing white garments. Now Afzal had great possessions, and amongst them a pleasance outside Bijapur to which he had retired during the hot weather with his large hareem, and when his marching orders reached him there he must presumably have also had forebodings of the cruel fate that might overtake his wives and all their many women-folk at the hands of Hindu soldiers. At any rate it seems that on the eve of starting for the war he invited them all to a farewell entertainment in the cool galleries of the reservoir, which was one of the most attractive features of his country residence, and that when the feasting and dancing were over he left them there and himself suddenly opened the sluices through which a great volume of water rushed in and drowned every one of the unfortunate women caught in that liquid death trap. Little tombstones, to the number of sixty-four, mark their grave close by.

Shivaji's revolt did not break down the Mogul Empire but hastened its disintegration, and when I travelled on through his homelands on the high Deccan plateau with its steep cliffs and deep ravines, I visited some of the chief strongholds in which the Lion of the Deccan, as his people still call their heroic leader, and his successors held the Mogul armies at bay, pending still later days when Lord Lake rescued the last of the Mogul emperors from the victorious Mahrattas who had captured him and blinded him and held him as their bondsman at Delhi. All the strongholds are small fortresses of which the strategical position was admir-



ably chosen for those days, whilst their thick walls rendered them almost proof against assault. Whilst I was staying at Mahableshwar, at the summer quarters of the Bombay Government, I went over to the little hill fort of Pratabgarh whence Shivaji had started for his fateful meeting with Afzal Khan. It was only seven miles away, but it was a steep descent into one of the many deep fissures carved by the torerntial summer rains that tear down from the higher Deccan plateau, and a still steeper ascent to the small stronghold which Shivaji had built on a projecting crag almost equally protected by another ravine on the further side, and behind it tiers upon tiers of precipitous cliffs. The castle, now desolate but still fairly well preserved, looked as grim as its history had been in the blazing sunshine that had withered and scorched every blade of grass on the slippery slopes leading up to it. It was just at the end of the fierce hot weather, and whilst I was sketching I was forced into acquaintance with one of the many hot-weather plagues. A great swarm of wild bees, moving quite low down, came straight along the slope of the hill on which I was sitting. It was not a pleasant sight, as there are many stories of people being attacked and stung to death by these swarms. But I had fortunately a friend with me who knew how to deal with the situation. 'Lie down flat on your face and do not stir. They will probably pass over us and, if a few swarm down upon us, do not move and they will soon rejoin the others.' I followed his example, not forgetting, however, to turn my sketch with its face also to the ground and shut up my paint-box. A few at the tail end of the swarm did alight upon us but we lay motionless and let them crawl over us for perhaps five minutes five very uncomfortable minutes - and then they sailed away

with the rest. A fortnight later there would have been no bees, and instead of a flaming yellow the landscape would have put on for a few months a tender and luxuriant green. For the earth was already panting for the burst of the south-west monsoon, which annually carries across the Indian Ocean an immense volume of moisture generated during the rainy season in Central and East Africa. The bursting of the monsoon on the west coast of India is a wonderful and almost terrifying phenomenon. For days and days before it bursts heavy storm-clouds, illuminated by sheet lightning at night, tower up into the skies, dissolve for a time, and then form up again into darker masses until, with a roar of incessant thunder and the crash of forked lightning, they pour themselves out in almost solid sheets of rain, nowhere heavier or more incessant than where they break against the mountain sea-wall of the Western Ghats. At Mahableshwar, on the topmost edge of the Ghats, over three hundred inches of rain are measured during the worst weeks of the monsoon whilst it is spreading inland with rapidly diminishing intensity. A large part of the Indian continent depends on the south-west monsoon for its harvests and in many districts even its partial failure spells dire distress if not famine. Small wonder that millions and millions still see in a phenomenon which may often mean life or death to them the direct manifestation of the wrath or the mercy of the great gods and goddesses in whom they have been taught to personify the formidable forces of nature.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

UPPER INDIA AND THE HIMALAYAS

GEOLOGISTS tell us that in remote aeons Upper India lay at the bottom of a broad if shallow sea which separated the southern part of the peninsula from the Himalayas. Upper India is, therefore, mainly a land of immense alluvial plains, as drab, except when the harvests spread over them their annual mantle of green, as the drab villages scattered more or less thickly over them and the drab lives of its scores of millions of toiling peasantry, seldom free from the dread of starvation. A deep melancholy often seemed to me to brood over them, as if they still bore the marks of all the infinite labour of nature that gradually washed down from the Himalayan snows the soil and silt which has raised Upper India above the level of the sea to be the cradle of many peoples and of their peculiar civilization. It was there that the Aryan migrations out of Central Asia first settled down to evolve the religious and social system of Hinduism. There Buddha was born and taught a gentle gospel which, though it has disappeared out of India, has spread, if in a debased form, to all the countries of the Far East. Upper India has produced the romance of Rajput chivalry and the splendour of the Mogul

Empire revealed for all times at Agra and Delhi and Lahore. At Benares, more strikingly than anywhere else, Aurungzeb's great mosque symbolizes the relentless struggle between Islam and Hinduism. The long line of Hindu temples and palaces on the banks of the sacred Ganges, nowhere more sacred than at Benares, and the burning-ghats on which it is the highest privilege of any pious Hindu to have his body consumed by flame and his ashes scattered with garlands of flowers on the purifying waters that redeem him from sin, seem to ignore with a large and silent contempt the challenge flung at them by the lofty domes and minarets which the last of the great Mogul emperors erected as a warning to his idolatrous subjects that he still wielded the sword of Islam.

No part of India is, however, better known to sightseers than Upper India, and though I have spent there altogether the greater part of my time in India, especially during my later visits, my acquaintance with it has generally lacked the sort of intimacy which lent a peculiar charm to many of my wanderings in Middle and Southern India. Perhaps it is because I was seeing India from a different angle of vision, as I was chiefly engaged in studying the political problems of modern India. It was my privilege then to be frequently the guest of Viceroys and Governors and to accompany them 'on tour,' and on such occasions I have seen many places I should not otherwise have had an opportunity of seeing. I cannot deny that I have often thoroughly enjoyed the luxury of special trains and ample quarters, and the continuous pageant of state receptions and departures at gaily-beflagged and scarlet-carpeted stations, and ceremonial processions through lavishly decorated streets be-

tween salaaming crowds all in their best, and the well-ordered stateliness of brilliant durbars and banquets. But often, too, I could not help feeling that there was something rather artificial behind all this pomp and circumstance, and that the inevitable uniformity of official procedure in these semi-regal progresses tended to disguise the essential variety of the different parts of the country through which we were travelling. There was something of the same unreality in the life of the splendid camps in which some of the greatest Indian princes delighted to entertain scores of English friends and visitors in the cold weather, and especially during the Christmas holidays. Nothing could divest Rajputana of its romantic old-world interests. The rock castle of Jodphur, half fort and half palace, and the grim old palace at Bikaner live in one's memory infinitely longer than all the European luxury with which the profuse hospitality of the Maharajahs surrounded their guests. It was the gorgeous East, but with a Western facade often singularly out of keeping with a picture straight out of the Middle Ages.

On the North-west Frontier, however, and in the Himalayas, one was once more face to face with nature, the untamed lawlessness of man and the inviolate majesty of eternal snows. When I visited the North-west Frontier in the spacious days of Curzon's Viceroyalty, some wag, who modestly shared his taste for Latin quotations, had chalked up *medio tutissimus ibis* on a signboard pointing to Kabul. He clearly knew the law of the great high road which the British Raj had built from the boundaries of British-administered territory in the North-west Province to the frontier of Afghanistan over the Khyber Pass. On either side of the road there was a sort of no-man's-land in which Pathans and

Afridis were still free to follow their own turbulent habits of life so long as they respected the safety of the one high road over which a carefully regulated traffic was conducted on three days of the week between Peshawar and Kabul. The valley, before one reached the steep approach to the Pass itself, was dotted with small mud villages, each of them dominated by a two-storied house, also built mostly of mud, in which the village chief and his family were securely entrenched in the event of his falling out with one or other of his neighbours, and there was apparently always one or other of them with whom he was at deadly feud. War might be carried on between them at long range rifle shot. But sometimes, if either belligerent was hard pressed and feared an open assault, he drew up the ladder which gave access to the second storey from outside and retreated with his family, ready, if the worst came to the worst, to pour down boiling water and other primitive missiles on the heads of his assailants from the covered gallery which ran round the upper part of his little fort. So long as the supply of water from his well was not exhausted his position was almost impregnable, but again the enemy might be in sufficient force to bring up big piles of faggots and smoke him out or set fire to the place. More often the enemy exhausted his ammunition and retired to fight another day. Once, just before I was there, an enterprising chief had laboriously dug an underground channel leading to his enemy's small village mosque, and with his own followers had taken him by surprise and shot him and his five sons down whilst they were at prayer. Work in the fields was in such circumstances difficult, and I saw one field being ploughed behind a covering party that was engaged in a desultory fusillade with an enemy whom I could

ONE OF THE GREAT GATES OF PEKING

locate by the puffs of smoke but could not clearly see. Sometimes the feud between near neighbours was so mortal that both would dig shelter-trenches between his own mud fort and the great high road so as to reach the latter in safety and get the benefit of the *Pax Britannica* which the law of the road imposed on all.

Yet the safety of the Khyber Pass was largely entrusted to a local militia levied and easily recruited amongst these same lawless tribesmen. Under their British officers the Khyber Rifles accepted military discipline as readily as they adapted their wiry limbs to the irksomeness of their smart tight-fitting uniforms. They laid aside their lawless habits with their loose flowing rags for the duration of their service. Sometimes one of them might ask for a few days' leave 'on urgent private affairs.' This meant, of course, that he had received from his folk a peremptory call for help in the most acute stage of some tribal or family feud. No question was asked. The man left his kit behind him and went off the same tatterdemalion that he had been when he joined up and, unless he happened to have been 'done in/ he came back punctually to resume his uniform and his round of military duties. His officers understood him and he trusted them.

The valley narrowed into a steep rocky defile between gaunt mountain ranges, and on the way up the pass I met one of the caravans of heavily-laden camels led by sturdy Afghans - whose features were often strikingly Jewish - that were allowed to come down from Kabul to Peshawar on the appointed days, as fierce-looking a lot as the Pathans told off to escort them. At the top of the pass stood the third of the well-built forts that guard the

road from the boundary of the North-west Province to the Afghan frontier. Further than that I was not allowed to proceed, but from the top of a hill nearby I had a fine panoramic view of the confused succession of bare mountains and valleys, with glimpses of the shining Kabul River, itself to the far-away snows of the Hindu-Kush. Had that desolate waste, I wondered, ever really been worth the blood and treasure expended in our three barren wars with Afghanistan? At Landi Kotal I lunched with the dozen or so British officers in charge of that forlorn outpost of empire. They were not, however, in the least forlorn. Keen on their job and confident of its importance they had little but praise for the body of wild tribesmen they commanded, and they all spoke with enthusiasm of their endurance and pluck and their loyalty to their salt. No finer fighters anywhere, and none with a more unfailing sense of humour. That their humour could at times be grim one story told to me went to show. Had I noticed half-way up the pass a little tomb of rough stone and white-washed mud gaily adorned with paper flags and coloured bits of cloth? That was the tomb of a Mohammedan saint and a relatively recent one. It came about in this way. A fanatical Mullah, of the kind that are always hovering about the border-land, and in troublous times try to stir up the tribes to a holy war against us, had been apparently annoyed at the luke-warmness of the congregation he had gathered around him. He abused them for their godlessness. Why, he had never even seen a single *wait* or saint's tomb anywhere in the country. They conferred quickly together. If that was all that was needed for their salvation they would at once provide themselves with the needful tomb. They sliced off the Mullah's head and then buried him

with the customary Mohammedan rites, and erected over him the little shrine I had seen on the way up which few Moslems passed without commending themselves to his prayers.

The Mohammedans in their invasions of India used the easier passes, such as the Khyber, through the lower mountain ranges that dwindle away towards the Persian Gulf. They never penetrated into the formidable mass of the Himalayas, where only a few and very difficult passes, seldom free from snpw even in the height of summer, lead down from Central Asia into Upper India. I had once seen during my first visit to India the marvellous view of Kinchin Junga and the Western Himalayas from Darjeeling, and it had been enough to fire me ever since to get somewhere nearer to the heart of those stupendous ranges twice the height of our Alps which had once been a favourite playground of mine in my youth. But travelling up into the Himalayas is not an easy matter, and I never got a chance until many years later, when Colonel Manifold, then Inspector-General of Health in the United Provinces, invited me to accompany him on a long tour up the Gurwal valley and through the gorges of the Ganges that lead up to its sources under the great glaciers from which it leaps out not very far from the Indus, though both these mighty rivers soon part to make their opposite way down to the western Indian Ocean and the eastern Bay of Bengal. Hinduism has invested the sources of its sacred river at Badrinath and Kedarnath with peculiar sanctity, and thousands of pilgrims, regardless of the hardships and dangers of the long and arduous journey, travel up there every summer. Numbers perish miserably from sickness and cold and privations against which, knowing but little beforehand, they fail to make any provision.

Cholera often makes terrible havoc amongst them and spreads in their track whilst they journey back to their distant homes. Government has done a good deal to help them by establishing, wherever it is feasible, rest-houses and dispensaries where they can obtain help and some slight medical assistance. The chief purpose of Manifold's tour was to see how this system was working and how far it could be improved. One of the difficulties of travel into the Himalayas is that before one can, so to say, come to grips with them one has to march perhaps for several days up and down and round their foothills. Before making a start one has to collect all the requisites required for a long journey on which hardly any shelter and none but the most simple provisions, such as native bread and hill sheep or kids, are forthcoming. We were travelling in considerable comfort, for we were carrying tents and a goodly stock of stores, and Mrs. Manifold, who with another friend and myself was accompanying her husband, had developed unusual efficiency in running a movable camp and providing for our daily needs. Starting from Ranikhet, a day's journey from the summer quarters of the United Provinces Government, our track was sufficiently good for us and our servants to ride and all our camp paraphernalia to be carried on baggage mules and ponies. But as soon as we joined the valley of the Ganges itself riding became very difficult and often impossible on the narrow and slippery paths, now and then merely the roughest staircase cut along the face of the cliffs, that rose sheer above our heads or fell sheer into the depths in which we could hear, but not always see, the roaring river beneath us. Then I began to realize the tremendous scale on which nature has built the Himalayas. With our coolies strug-

gling along behind us with their heavy loads in single file up and down the narrow track - a file sometimes half a mile long - we marched now for five more days through this deep valley in which the river seemed to have carved its way athwart the mountains that hemmed it in. The cliffs on either side were so high and so precipitous that unless we had the sun immediately in front of us, or behind us, they cut us off from its rays for the greater part of the mornings and afternoons. In some places it was hard to find any sufficiently level space to pitch our camp for the night, as it had to afford some sort of shelter for our army of coolies, some of them with wives and babies. One night was made hideous by the shrieks of a two-year-old child carried off by a panther from the coolies' quarters. We spent the following morning as soon as it was light trying to track the beast down, but it was a fruitless task, as it had clearly escaped with its poor little victim into the thick bushes and inaccessible rocks sloping down to the river beneath us. For four days we had to part with our own horses and send them round by a more circuitous route to rejoin us where the track again became practicable for four-footed animals other than Mrs. Manifold's long-haired terrier. Unluckily just then I got a return of an old trouble, and for a great part of two marches I was carried in a *dhooly* - a chair slung on to a stout pole borne by coolies, two in front and two behind, with others close by to relieve them every half-hour or to help in particularly awkward places. It was not always a pleasant experience, as, for instance, when they swung sharply round an ugly corner so that one seemed to be hanging out in the void, or when they rushed one along a tiny ledge trimmed out of the bare cliff so as to reduce the risks of a shower of stones

from above. Twice when one side of the gorge became quite impossible we had to cross to the other side by a flimsy rope bridge on a couple of narrow planks supported only by a network of ropes swaying precariously over the roaring torrents perhaps two or three hundred feet below. But doubtless, without all these thrills, there might have been some monotony in these long marches through a ravine so deep that, except for an occasional break, its walls shut out from us the snow ranges behind them. At last the gorge opened out where the two fountain streams of the Ganges descending from Badrinath and Kedarnath unite at the foot of a formidable buttress formed by the dividing range. There for the first time we came upon a village of some importance, bleak and grey and built of the dark granite quarried from the cliffs to which it clung. A Hindu temple, whitewashed and decorated with flags which had once been brightly coloured, alone relieved its sombreness under a leaden sky such as we had not before met with. Still more depressing were the groups of pilgrims returning from ice-bound shrines which were to be reached only by trudging over frozen streams and snowfields, and even crossing, in some cases, dangerous moraines and glaciers. Some of them had come all the way from Southern India and had only their thin cotton clothing and a blanket or two to protect them from the bitter cold and biting winds. Many were sick and some had lost their friends on the way, but they bore all their hardships with inexhaustible and almost cheerful resignation, counting their sufferings and their losses for nothing beside the saving virtue of their supreme pilgrimage of grace.

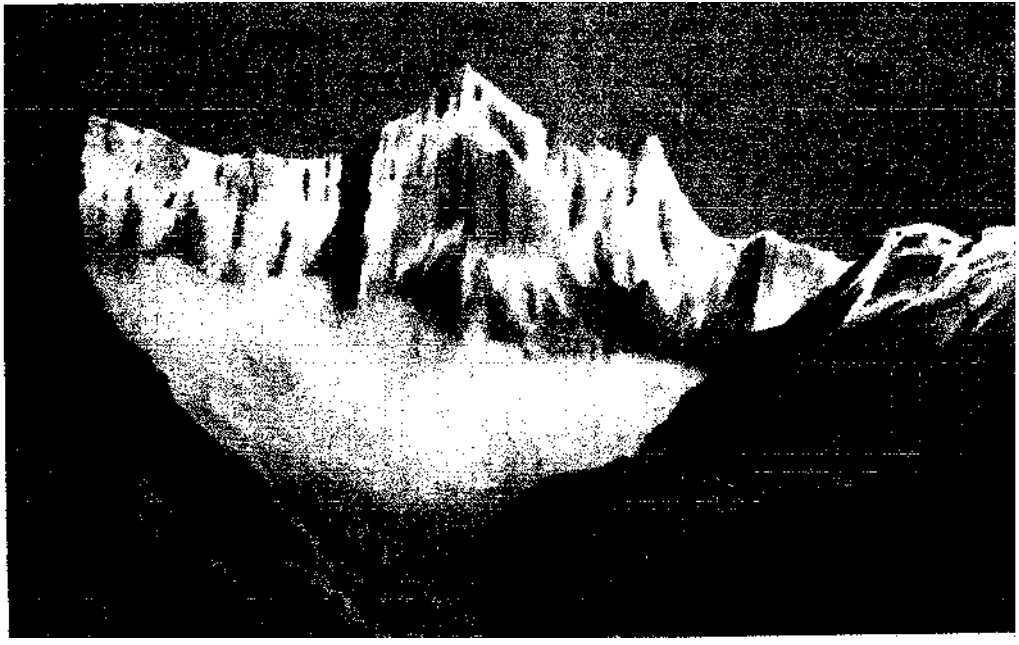
Our route then left the Ganges. It still took us upwards but over easier and pleasanter country, sometimes through splendid

THE VIA SACRA TO THE TOMBS OF THE MANCHU EMPERORS

forests, gold and crimson with long festoons of creepers trailing from the branches of lofty fir trees, and sometimes over open moorland on which were large patches of bracken already turning yellow and brown. In sheltered places we even skirted bits of cultivated land with the golden corn cobs from the maize-fields drying on the roofs of lonely hamlets and rough log cottages which reminded one remotely of Switzerland. We had left our very short spell of bad weather behind us and two more marches brought us up almost above the highest zone of vegetation on to an undulating plateau, where we pitched our camp for two days in comfort, and with a view which even in the Himalayas can have few rivals. There were still a few strips of forest to shelter us in the one direction from which the wind blew sharp and cold at night, but facing our camp and seemingly quite close to us, rose the great peak of Dunaghiri, one of the boldest of the Himalayas, with a touch of the Matterhorn about it as it stood out in solitary relief amongst the many other less sharply-moulded mountains around and beyond it. For two successive days I saw, even without moving from my tent, the rising and the setting sun pour out upon it a flood of pink and crimson and gold whilst the intervening valleys shrouded it in a transparent blue or purple mist. It was perhaps unpaintable, but I sketched to my heart's content whilst the rest of our party were busy trying to shoot for the pot a few hill pheasants and other birds that had not yet gone down to lower altitudes, and our army of coolies were collecting logs and faggots for the huge camp-fires round which we sat sometimes late into the evening, watching a nearly full moon shed its gentler light on the far-off snows. We climbed still further up to the top of a pass leading well on towards Tibet

- a pass which evidently marked an important stage in the journeys of the small caravans that travel that way to and from Tibet, in summer mostly, carrying bags of salt on the backs of sturdy little yaks. For there were two large cairns to which each wayfarer contributed his stone and two long poles on which he hung a bit of coloured rag as his votive offering. The view overwhelmed one with its immensity; encompassing more than half the horizon there stretched in front of us, range beyond range, but in an unbroken line of perpetual snow, a large part of the untrodden Roof of the World. It was the culminating point of our journey and easier, but always beautiful, routes brought us back within the month to our starting point at Ranikhet.

Only once have the Himalayas made upon me an impression, not of greater beauty, but of still more overpowering and massive grandeur. That was on the road leading up from the Wular Lake in Kashmir to Gilgit, one of the wildest outposts of our Indian Empire. It was then very early summer and the foothills I first rode up were clothed for a couple of thousand feet with an almost seamless mantle of wild roses, pink and white and red, rather larger and with larger clusters of blossom than our own. Then through woods of birch and other deciduous trees with the tender tints of spring upon them, and through darker pine forests the road led up and down by easy gradients to the foot of the first of the two great passes over which it has been carried right through to Gilgit. It is a British military road, though on Kashmir territory, and except over those passes, which are often blocked by snow and heavy landslides, it is a fairly good road, just broad enough and with easy enough gradients for light army transport on which the small garrison of Gilgit is wholly



THE VAST FACE OF NUNGA PURBAT

dependent for its communications with British India. I camped at the foot of the Burzil Pass and in order to reach the top by sunrise I had to start at three in the morning. It was fortunately a clear and windless morning, and having soon left the zone even of stunted juniper trees behind me, I presently came across large patches of still unmelted snow. I had calculated my time to a nicety, for when I reached the top the night had melted into dawn and the dawn into sunrise. The views had hitherto been circumscribed. Then suddenly there burst upon me the immense face of Nunga Purbat, the fifth highest mountain of the Himalayas, thrust out from the Roof of the World like a colossal wedge between the upper waters of the Indus on their way to the Indian Ocean and the many rivers which go down to swell the Ganges in the plains of Hindustan. Nunga Purbat does not soar up into the sky in sharply-cut pinnacles out of a foreground of glaciers and icefalls. It is a huge unbroken wall rising ten thousand feet sheer out of the mist of low intervening valleys, and, as I faced it, it seemed to block the whole horizon. The sun first picked out its actual summit, twenty-six thousand feet above the sea, and then, creeping round, flushed the immense expanse of its glittering and frozen face, where, somewhere, intrepid Momery, who alone ever attempted its ascent, lay buried with his companions under some avalanche of snow. It was an overwhelming spectacle - there is no other word for it - and doubtless unpaintable. But as I despaired of any mere words to describe it, I took my courage in both hands in the hope of conveying some impression of it in a sketch which would be as true to nature as I could make it. But it was bitterly cold work as the sun could not reach for some time the slope on which I was sitting (nearly fifteen thousand feet

above sea-level), and if it was not actually freezing, my fingers felt as if they were frozen. Then the lights began to shift and change and the face of the mountain lost its early glow and light billowing clouds rolled up out of the valley. Fortunately it was the season in which one could depend day after day on the same perfect weather. I rode back to my camp loitering on the way to delight in the marvellous variety of wild flowers, primula, dwarf iris, tulips, columbine, sky-blue gentians, and tiny forget-me-nots, and many others of which I did not know the names. I retired very early to rest and made the same early start next morning in the same peerless weather. Exactly the same vision awaited me on the top of the pass, and I finished my sketch - such as it is.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PEKING IN 1895

WHEN I first went to China in 1895 Japan had just pricked the huge bubble of her 'latent power' so dear to British diplomacy in those days. But Peking had remained inviolate and secret. It still hoped to keep the outer barbarian at bay. It had laid railways under taboo and it could only be reached by a long two days' ride on horseback or in a bone-racking Chinese cart from Tientsin, or by a tiresome journey up the Peiho River in a Chinese house-boat at the mercy of winds and currents to the 'port' of Tung-chow, itself a dozen miles or so away. Its long grey line of battlemented walls rose grim and forbidding out of the emptiness of the surrounding plain, its hard face of stone softened only by a golden haze of dust when the sun sets behind it in a hot and cloudless sky. Its sixteen gates were inexorably closed all through the night so that none should come in or go out except under special orders issuing direct from the Throne. When one was safely through the deep archways of one of these sixteen gates the same atmosphere of secrecy prevailed in the several cities into which the capital was subdivided: the Chinese city, the Manchu city, the Imperial city, the Forbidden City were each enclosed

within their own separate walls and had their own separate gates, also all closed at night. Nowhere else in the East have I ever felt such a sense of utter isolation. The telegraph was the one slender thread that kept one in touch with the far-off Western world, but that too was cut *off* at night, for the only available telegraph station was in the Chinese city, and the British Legation, where I was the guest of my old friend Sir Nicolas O'Conor, was in the Manchu city.

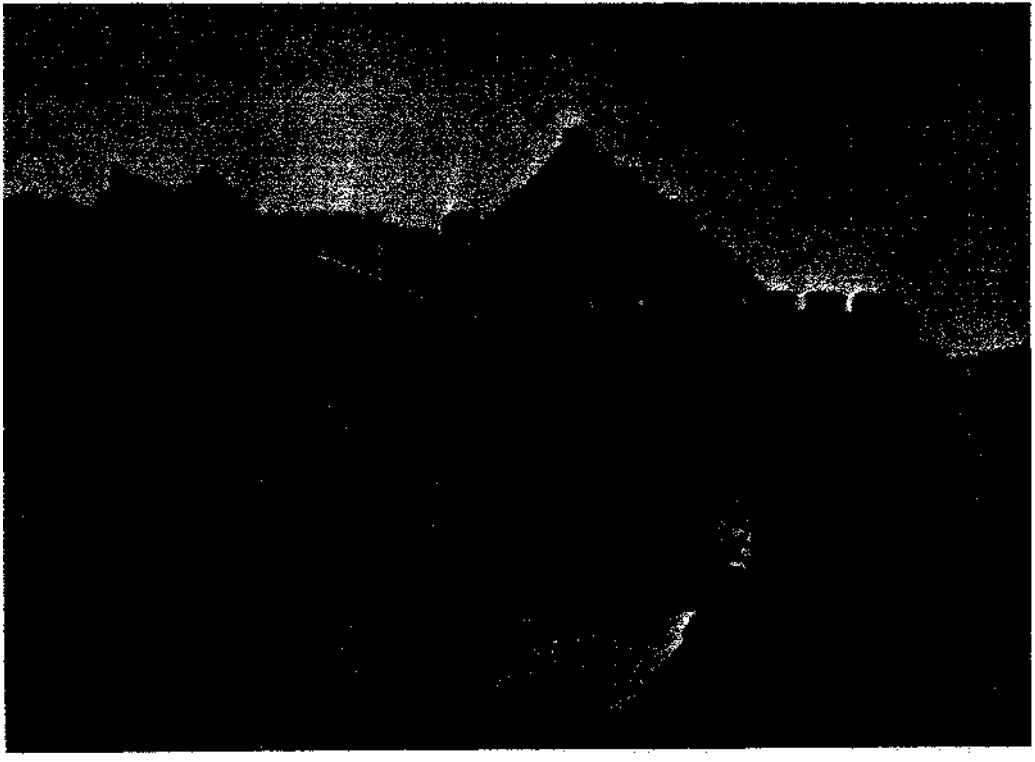
The few foreign residents - chiefly diplomatists - were not only confined to one quarter of the Manchu city but kept there at arm's length by Chinese officialdom, whose relations with them were rare and distant. The right of foreign residence in the capital had only been grudgingly conceded after the Anglo-French expedition in 1860, and the pride of the Manchu rulers had constantly sought to restrict it within the narrowest possible limits. Only after long years of wrangling had the representatives of foreign Powers succeeded in asserting their right of audience, and the gates of the Forbidden City, where the Dowager Empress, the 'Old Buddha/ reigned supreme, had been only on rare occasions opened to them, and so reluctantly that they were only received in an outer pavilion of the Palace. No other foreigners could penetrate within the Pink Walls, and the great temples of the capital, the Temple of Heaven, the Temple of Agriculture, and the Confucian Temple, at which it was the custom of the emperors to worship once in the year, remained strictly closed to every foreigner. Closed also, except for a few hundred yards above the Legation quarter, was the broad rampart that ran behind the whole line of the outer walls. It afforded the only walk for foreigners who needed fresh air and exercise away from

the noise and smell and turmoil of crowded city streets. The Chinese authorities were afraid of foreigners getting too close a view of the Imperial yellow tiles of the Forbidden City. But it had not occurred to them that by allowing foreigners to walk on any part of the walls they were giving away one of the many shams dear to Chinese mandarins. The frowning gun embrasures in the great towers, which rose at regular intervals along the level line of walls, were merely lath and plaster, and all their formidable array of cannon mounted in them were harmless bits of painted wood. From the walls, too, one could discover that even the vast size of the capital, as measured by its outer circumference, was equally deceptive; for of the immense area - some twenty-five square miles - enclosed within them, the larger part was seen to consist of open fields and squalid waste spaces, whilst it was only from congested agglomerations of grey-tiled roofs (grey was the only colour allowed for plebeian roofs) that was borne up the confused buzz of human life from a population estimated at over a million souls.

One was, anyhow, free to wander at large about the streets of all but the interdicted quarters, and street life in Peking afforded endless and indescribable variety, always picturesque but often weird and repellent. Almost everywhere, and especially in the most populous quarters of the Chinese city, all one's senses seemed to be assailed at the same time; one's nostrils by the most pungent effluvia, one's eyes by often revolting sights, one's ears by the discordant din of a strange and uncouth tongue. In dry weather one had to tramp ankle deep in dust and when the rains came on through pools of liquid mud, dust and mud alike compounded of the unutterable filth of an undrained city where

every street and lane did duty for a sewer and where the doorstep of every house was used as a cesspool. In fact, even in the most public places, Chinese habits offended against the most elementary standards of decency. The plague of beggars was ubiquitous and they would often thrust their hideous deformities and open sores right into one's face to emphasize their right to alms. They were indeed a highly-privileged class not to be lightly ignored, for they formed a professional guild, with an Imperial prince as their patron who took the lion's share of their earnings. Strings of wretched prisoners, who were also licensed beggars, advertised the majesty of Chinese justice as they wandered through the streets with heavy chains on hands and feet and their heads protruding through a hole in a big wooden board on which the nature of their crimes was set forth in large Chinese characters. More pitiable still, if one passed a Chinese prison, of which there were many, were the rows of convicts stretching out their arms through barred windows and snatching at the bits of food brought to them by their friends and relatives to supplement such scanty rations as their gaolers chose to give or to deny them.

The Chinese are the most industrious of all races. But Peking, producing little for itself, lived mostly on the provinces. There was no large industrial or manufacturing population, and half the people seemed to spend their time in idle loitering. Every quarter had its opium dens and gambling hells and other disreputable houses, but they were kept in the background and were chiefly frequented at night, and no foreigner would have ventured into them. What one could watch the whole day long was the ceaseless ebb and flow of people who seemed to spend



THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

their lives idling about the streets. In the meaner quarters they hung round numberless unsavoury cook-shops or blocked the way to listen to peripatetic fortune-tellers whom the shop-keepers doubtless tolerated or encouraged because they helped to loosen customers' purse-strings by foretelling always an imminent windfall that should naturally justify some spending of cash in advance. Now and again the crowd would have to give- way as best it could to a long string of slow-treading Mongolian camels, long-haired and with two humps, whose right of way in the narrowest streets was as unquestioned as that of the more disorderly trains of nimble but overloaded donkeys that did most of the Peking carrying trade. Every alley had its swarm of irrepressible children, often extremely dirty, but sometimes with much brighter faces than most of their elders, playing or fighting heartily but always ready to stop playing or fighting at the unwonted sight of a foreigner and shout,' Red-haired devil,' or more indiscriminately, 'Foreign devil.' One saw far more boys than girls and when one saw a girl one could never be sure that it was not a boy dressed up as a girl to deceive the gods, who do all sorts of bad turns to boys but ignore mere girls as quite beneath their notice. So easily may the gods be outwitted though every neighbour knows the boy to be a boy and not a girl! Sometimes my attention, but not that of the Chinese crowd, thoroughly inured to the thing, was attracted to an Homeric slanging match between two irate citizens, generally at a safe distance from each other. It was conducted, apparently in accordance with custom, on a steady crescendo of imprecations and insults, chiefly to their respective ancestors, until both parties were exhausted. This noisy appeal to public opinion

was known as 'bawling the street.' Only rarely did it end in a personal conflict which, if it took place, was generally confined to skilful manoeuvring in order to catch hold of the other man's pigtail, and it seldom resulted in any serious bodily harm. Indeed, until the Revolution swept away, with many other things, the pigtail, no bodily harm could inflict more 'loss of face' upon a Chinaman than having his pigtail roughly handled. Though it was originally a badge of inferiority and subjection imposed upon him by the Manchu conquerors, he had come to take such a pride in it as the peculiar ornament of Chinese manhood that when, with advancing years, nature ceased to provide him with a sufficient amount of hair of his own, he would weave into what remained of it a second-hand queue bought from some poor wretch driven to part with his, or an artificial one made up of very obvious silk tresses.

Another form of 'street bawling' was specially favoured by females. A woman would appear at a window or on a roof and, for perhaps half an hour on end, pour out her woes and hurl her imprecations on the world at large with the shrillness and wealth of nasal tones and inflections in which the Chinese language seems to excel all others. I never saw any Manchu women give way to such hysterical outbursts which, as they belonged to the ruling race, they may have regarded as beneath their dignity. Perhaps their temper was more equable as none of them had 'lily feet' - the cruel euphemism employed to describe the poor little stumps, mutilated from babyhood, on which Chinese women had to limp through life. Even before the Revolution a movement had set in, largely under missionary influence, in Shanghai'and other 'treaty ports,' to check so inhuman a

practice, but in 1895 it had barely reached Peking, which was the stronghold of Chinese conservatism.

It was much more difficult to form an idea of how the more well-to-do classes lived. Social intercourse, as we understand it, even of the most formal character, between Chinese and foreigners was still unknown. During my two months' stay at the Legation two mandarins deputed by the Board of Foreign Affairs attended the Minister's garden party on the Queen's birthday and twice, I think, a Chinese official who had been in London paid a more or less stealthy visit. Extremely few officials had ever been abroad. When I was received in audience by the Board of Foreign Affairs only two of the seven mandarins of whom it consisted had ever been outside Peking, and none outside China; nor did a single one know any foreign language. Only once was I privileged to enter one of the great houses of Peking to see a wonderful collection of jade, and then only, so to say, by the back door, as my host, though he received me very courteously, insisted on the utmost secrecy. As with the plebeian masses all one could therefore get to know of the life of the upper classes was what one could see of it out-of-doors, or in a theatre or fashionable restaurant where a foreigner, though clearly not very welcome, was tolerated as an object of amused, but not very friendly, curiosity. Only in the great curio shops could one be sure of abundant civility, and indeed their owners were quite willing to come and display their wares in any foreign Legation where they could count upon finding clients. Fortunately, after the Tartars conquered it, Peking was rebuilt by Kubla Khan on the lines of a great military camp, and there were still spacious thoroughfares in the Manchu city in which the wealth and

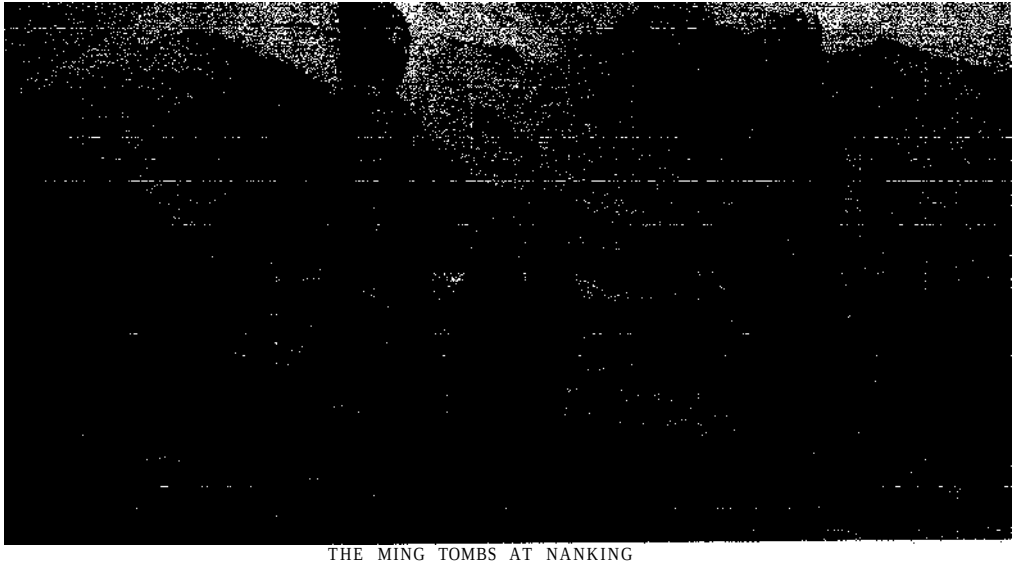
fashion of the capital displayed themselves unstintingly. One could get a glimpse of Manchu ladies of high degree being jolted along in their hooded carts, the position of the springs and the number and design of the copper nails driven into the heavy wooden wheels indicating, like the crests or armorial bearings on a London barouche on its way to a Drawing-Room, the social status of the owners. Mandarins, whose robes of heavily embroidered silk also denoted their high position in the hierarchy, were borne along to or from their offices in their silk-padded and silk-curtained chairs by four or six or eight sure-footed runners. Bloated and evil-faced eunuchs travelled equally luxuriously on their errands from the Palace where the'Old Buddha' maintained some five thousand of these pampered parasites, some of whom stood high in her confidence and favour as the trusted instruments of her secret will. Smart young Manchus showed off their bravery on horseback, and all the time the stream of humbler traffic flowed on incessantly. The finest of these thoroughfares was at the same time a sort of Peking Bond Street, as it was lined on either side with shops in which were stored not only all the fashionable luxuries of the day but great treasures of Chinese art and craftsmanship, jewellery and jade more costly than jewels, embroideries and brocades, rare books, and masterpieces of Chinese painting and of Chinese calligraphy even more dear to the Chinese collector. But otherwise it was not at all like our own sober Bond Street. Its shop fronts showed a glittering riot of colour. They were lofty structures of open woodwork carved and gilt or brightly painted. Above them there were projecting signboards, sometimes with gold inscriptions in Chinese characters, sometimes fashioned into the shape of auspicious birds

and dragons, and higher still there was a procession of flagstaff's flying the banners of the different trades and guilds. I had seen nothing in the world like it and I was determined to get a sketch of it, however rough and hasty. I was told it could not be done as I should inevitably be stifled and perhaps even crushed by the surging stream of people on foot, on horseback, on camels, who would all want to know and see what the foreign devil' was doing. But Sir Nicolas O'Conor, always an optimist, kindly provided me with a Legation 'cart' and two Legation 'guards.' Sitting inside the 'cart' I was raised slightly above the crowd, and the 'guards' kept its curiosity within tolerable bounds. But it was a hot summer's afternoon and the hood of the 'cart' only shielded me partially from the blazing sun, whilst nothing could protect me against the penetrating dust and smells and sounds of a multitude of perspiring Chinamen. It was a curious experience and not an altogether pleasant one at the time. I have never done any other sketch under such trying conditions. It figures as the frontispiece to this book, and it has at least this special interest that five years later the whole of that quarter of the city was burnt down by the Boxers, and the subject of my sketch disappeared for ever, in their first orgy of plunder and arson.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AN EXPEDITION TO THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

T H E Great Wall of China is unique in the world, for no other nation has ever built a wall fifteen hundred miles long for the protection of its frontier. Where it separates China from Mongolia it is within easy reach of Peking, and our small party of four Europeans had the best of pilots in Mr. C. E. Campbell, Secretary and Interpreter of our Legation, who knew the country and the language well. We were travelling light with only two or three pack-horses carrying the indispensable amount of bedding and provisions to make a Chinese inn, at which we were to spend two nights, at all tolerable, and when we had passed out of the gates of the city we soon left our impedimenta behind us as we cantered in a cloud of dust across the empty plain and took some of the 'bobbery' out of our spirited little Chinese ponies. It was a brilliant summer's morning and we could soon discern the pink walls and yellow tiles of the Imperial necropolis, faithfully reproducing those of the Forbidden City, which we were to visit on our way. Presently we were riding up the long *via sacra* that leads up to them, fringed on either side with gigantic figures of gods and demi-gods and elephants and



THE MING TOMBS AT NANKING

fabulous animals guarding the road against evil spirits for the last earthly procession of those who in turn depart to Ascend the Dragon Throne/ These figures are built up of brick and moulded into shape with smooth plaster. They are not raised on pedestals but are planted on the level ground, hence at a distance they have a singularly living appearance. So great was the awe in which they were held that, when I got off my pony and sat down to sketch them, my Chinese 'boy' was horrified and clearly thought that in unpacking my sketching materials he was abetting an act of sacrilege. Had some of the detachment of Imperial Guards under the command of an Imperial prince, who were quartered close to the tombs, been on outpost duty, as they should have been, I should probably never have got my sketch. But they were more agreeably occupied smoking and gambling just outside their quarters, and their discipline was about as ragged as their uniforms. They scarcely even turned round to look at us as we approached the shrines behind which the tombs themselves lie far back in deep recesses hollowed out of the live rock. Even those shrines bore evidence of slovenly neglect. The Emperor Tuo Kwang, who died in 1850, was the last of the reigning dynasty to have been buried there, and at the entrance to his tomb there stood in a spacious chamber a tablet of solid white marble, ten feet high and four feet wide, covered with a finely chiselled inscription recording all his glorious achievements and incomparable virtues and surmounted by a tortoise carved in red marble as the symbol of Immortality. In front of it was a white marble altar with the customary sacrificial vessels and censers and massive bronze candlesticks. According to immemorial custom, the reigning Emperor should

worship there once a year. But no one had for many years occupied the throne draped in faded and rather tattered silk on which the Imperial worshipper was to sit on such occasions. For the old Dowager Empress, originally merely an Imperial concubine, was not qualified to perform those sacred rites, and she would not allow the poor young Emperor Kwang-shi, whose power she had usurped, to perform them lest his people should be reminded of his existence if he appeared in public as fhe central figure of so august a ceremony. She was herself always terrified of death, and as nothing could be done to arrest the decay of the necropolis without a formal report to the throne, the high officials in charge of it may well have shrunk from memorializing her on a subject which would needs remind her that she too was mortal. Hers were, indeed, the last remains to be interred there before the dynasty was swept away a couple of years later by the Chinese Revolution. And with what pomp and magnificence! The Court astrologers waited nearly a year for an auspicious day befitting the occasion and the funeral procession was over a mile long. But Nemesis came in a shape which no Court astrologers could have foreseen. In the orgy of brigandage that followed the civil wars of the Revolution greed overcame even the Chinese reverence for the dead. The proud old woman's coffin was torn open and her body, so carefully embalmed, and with the rouge still fresh on her shrunken cheeks, was dragged out and cast shamefully aside in the search for the treasure buried with her. An incalculable treasure, if we are to believe the diary - and there is no sufficient reason for disbelieving it - of the nephew of the grand eunuch who stood longer and higher than the highest court dignitaries in her

favour. **Her** body rested on a thick mattress, seven inches deep, of gold tissue heavily embroidered in pearls and on it a coverlet of pearls into which was woven a figure of Buddha of whom she professed to be a devout worshipper, and at times believed herself to be a reincarnation, if a woman could ever be one. Her head, crowned with a chaplet of pearls, rested on lotus leaves of jade and her feet on a jade lotus flower; a rope of pearls was wound nine times round her waist and eighteen jade images of Buddha were laid between her arms. Thousands of pearls and costly jewels were strewn all about her to fill up every interstice, so that the ocean of wealth in which she was immersed was valued by those responsible for its safe keeping at over six million sterling. All this was still in the lap of the gods at the time of which I am writing, and if any of her many Court astrologers could have foreseen it, none would have dared to reveal it to the high and mighty mistress whose wrath was swift and pitiless. Were there not anyhow innumerable temples in which the gods kept watch over the dead, and chief amongst them the God of War with his hideous grimacing mask, like the *jacciaferoce* of the old Neapolitan drill-book when King Bomba's troops had to 'look fierce' at the word of command and spread terror in the ranks of the enemy?

The geomancers who had originally selected this spot as the Imperial cemetery of the Manchu dynasty had at least an eye for the picturesque, for ancient fir trees afforded a dignified background to the yellow-tiled roofs and pink walls of the sacred enclosure, and behind them range upon range of scarped and barren hills stretched away towards the distant lands from which Manchus and Mongols had in turn swept down from inner Asia

on to the Flowery Kingdom and its flesh-pots. There were signs of the dynasty's decay that might then already be read into the pages of its history as one passed from the tombs of Kien-lung and Kiang-shi, the great emperors under whom it reached the zenith of its destinies in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, to those of their lesser successors; and not far away there was another cemetery that told the tale of the rise and fall of the dynasty which the Manchus overthrew. There lay most of the emperors of the Ming dynasty, their tombs grouped round a mound known as the Mount of Imperial Longevity. But longevity has its appointed limits for dynasties as well as emperors, and though thirteen is esteemed a lucky number by Chinese astrologers, it was the thirteenth of the Ming Emperors who committed suicide on the Coal Hill to escape capture by the Manchu invaders. The Ming mausoleum betrayed all the signs of two and a half centuries' neglect, but the Manchus never desecrated the tombs of their predecessors.

We spent most of the day with China's mighty dead, and evening was closing in when we reached the small walled town of Nankow where we were to spend the night before going on to the Great Wall. There we found life again, and to spare, in its crowded streets. Thousands of Chinese soldiers, disbanded at the end of the war with Japan, were straggling through on their way home. I had seen a sample of the Chinese army in the special 'guards' bivouacking in the Legation quarter, but those were supposed to be to some extent picked troops and under some sort of rough discipline. The rabble in Nankow was indescribable. They had fortunately thrown most of their rifles away, and they had discarded most of their uniform, as no Chinaman at that time

felt at ease in close-fitting tunics or trousers modelled on European patterns. Most of them had also discarded their regimental headgear and had wound their pigtails round their heads with some old rag of a handkerchief, or had bought or probably stolen one of the rough broad-brimmed straw hats worn in the summer by the peasants of Northern China. But they swaggered about the place as if they were conquerors whose prowess had earned them the right to every licence of victory, and they had taken possession of every inn in Nankow, so that although our party was provided with official documents which ought to have procured for us the best accommodation in the place - and the best would not have been good - we had great difficulty in securing any. Only the intervention of a civil magistrate with a red button on his cap, whom Campbell dragged out of his *Yamen* equally terrified of offending foreign visitors with properly - sealed credentials and of rousing the wrath of a turbulent soldiery, induced some officers - not easily distinguished from the rank and file - to give up to us a couple of filthy rooms opening into a large courtyard crowded with horses and donkeys and mules and camels. Our servants had arrived ahead of us and were waiting to unpack our slender baggage, looking unusually limp and helpless, and complaining bitterly that the soldiers had 'blackened their faces.' As soon as something had been done to clear the dirt and make our rooms somewhat more habitable we fell with great zest on the frugal supper we had brought with us. But privacy cannot be easily secured in China, and in such circumstances none could be expected. We were soon besieged by a mob of soldiers, for the most part good-natured but some rather truculent and aggressive, who pushed their way right in,

shouting to their comrades to come and look at the 'foreign-devils' having their *chow*. Many of them had doubtless never set eyes on Europeans, and least of all had they ever had a chance of seeing any European having a meal. Their curiosity was quite excusable. If a party of Celestials suddenly dropped down in a small English country town and ate their rice with chopsticks in a more or less public place, our own people's curiosity would probably not be kept entirely under restraint by their good manners. Campbell, however, knew what a broad sense of humour the ordinary Chinaman possesses, and he succeeded in chaffing our over-assiduous visitors into less unseemly behaviour. We had at any rate a rare opportunity of watching the ways of a Chinese army, or of what had been one. The Civil Magistrate confessed as frankly as he dared to, without admitting his own absolute impotence, that the soldiers had taken possession of the town, seizing everything they wanted in the shops, cuffing and beating anyone who refused to do their bidding, and making themselves at home in honest people's houses, and still more freely at home in all the houses of ill-fame. We ourselves had little to complain of beyond their uninvited company. It was about full moon, and the soldiers, whom darkness might otherwise have reduced to relative silence, kept up their revels till long past midnight, sipping their tea, consuming large bowls of rice, and imbibing still larger quantities of hot, strong *samshu*, whilst the opium pipe circulated freely and plentifully. One huge fellow was the ring-leader and jumped up periodically, brandishing a heavy sword and shouting at the top of his voice how he had smitten the 'yellow dwarfs,' and sliced off so many Japanese heads on one day and so many on another until only

the backs of the survivors could be seen as they fled over the hills to their accursed country. Presently, however, a welcome diversion was created by the arrival of a band of strolling musicians whose discordant instruments proved a more potent attraction than a party of 'foreign-devils' who refused to be drawn. Soon after the musicians a couple of fortune-tellers arrived also on the scene, and the chief swashbuckler hurried off to the corner of the courtyard where they had spread their mats and little heaps of coloured sand which, with their muttered incantations and the drawing of symbolic lines and figures, could be made to foretell the future. He was no doubt anxious to know whether the future held other opportunities in store for him to repeat his prowess on the stricken field. Whether he had ever seen a stricken field was extremely doubtful. For, as we afterwards found out, he, and in fact most of his fellows, formed part of a division which had melted away before reaching any battlefield. But even when the human turmoil had subsided we were not at peace, for our sleep was perpetually disturbed by more silent and more persistent and intimate invaders whom even our supply of Keating's powder could not wholly keep at bay.

But the crisp morning air and the first bright rays of sunshine quickly revived us. We passed out through a monumental gateway cut in the shape of a truncated hexagon. Adorned with six images of Buddha, and with many intertwined dragons and other auspicious devices, and magniloquent inscriptions, it was so solidly built more than six centuries ago that it had almost escaped the ravages of time, and formed a splendid approach to the most extraordinary of all the works wrought by the hand of man. As the Great Wall first opened up before us one could only

liken it to an endless carapaced snake of stone crawling along the crest of the hills and mountains east and west as far as the eye could reach, now disappearing down a steep cliff into a hidden depression and now emerging again to make another climb and show itself once more on the skyline, and then disappear and reappear again until it was entirely lost to sight. Yet we could only see a small section of it. Its tail lay half buried hundreds and hundreds of miles away in the remote deserts of Inner Asia, and its head reached to the cold northern waters of the Yellow Sea. The height of the wall was about thirty feet and each face was sheer and much too smooth to afford a foothold to the boldest climber. But there were places where one side had fallen in, and one could climb over the broken piles of debris on to the paved way, ten to fifteen feet broad, between its breast-high parapets. Then, when one stood on it and looked down and up the great roadway between the parapets - a roadway once paved with flagstones but now often overgrown with weeds-it suggested an endless track laid for some gigantic switchback railway covering more than twenty-two degrees of latitude from east to west. No wonder the Chinese have woven round it a marvellous wealth of legends! We need not believe that it was built in a single day, nor that Chin, who in the third century B.C. enlarged his small state by conquest into an Empire which derives its European name from him, travelled through the air on a winged charger from under whose hoofs, when they struck the ground at a mile or two's interval, sprang up the hundreds of towers that guard the Great Wall. But Chin was its chief, if not its first builder, and Chinese chronicles have it that he set three hundred thousand men to work on it immediately after some ill-omened

astrologer had prophesied that his kingdom would be overrun and conquered by barbarians from the interior of Asia. He certainly did everything on a grand scale as a destroyer as well as a builder, and as he would tolerate no rival or equal in the past any more than in the present, he consigned to the flames the great libraries in which the achievements of those who had lived before him were recorded, and burnt with them hundreds of *literati* lest they should preserve the memories of the past from the oblivion to which he was determined to relegate them. He was bold enough to style himself the First and Only, but no other megalomaniac has ever had such a daring conception as the Great Wall, which for centuries sheltered his country from Central Asian storms, and still stands as a monument of his singular genius.

About a mile beyond the point at which we had reached the top of the wall there stood, in fairly good preservation still, a battlemented castle not unlike those that protect the principal gates of the outer walls of Peking. It did not, however, pretend to have embrasures for modern guns. Long since disused, it was not ashamed to show in its narrow loop-holes that it dated back to the days of bows and arrows. Like the many other but more distant towers that could be seen crowning other strategic points along the Wall, it had been built to resist any assault from the north and had doubtless served to shelter part of the enormous garrison required to line the Wall whenever an attack in force was feared. Many of the weird figures of beautiful glazed pottery which, like those in Peking, adorned the finials of its tiled and curving roofs, were still sometimes intact, and amongst the many fragments that had fallen off I was lucky enough to pick up a

horse's head which was almost undamaged and still retained enough of its original lustre to display the skill of the potter who had once moulded and glazed it.' In one salient the sand blown in from storm-tossed deserts had piled itself right up to the top of the Mongolian face of the Wall, and on the other face the old stairway giving access to it from the Chinese side was still quite practicable. So we could clamber down to view from below the massive structure built over a core of rubble, but of such huge bricks and solid blocks of stone, generally several feet thick, so well cut and so closely fitted that one could rarely see any traces of mortar. We returned to the top and rambled about for a long time enjoying the spacious view of serrated hills and more distant mountain ranges to the north, bare and arid, but pink and amber-coloured where the sun poured down upon them, and cobalt-blue or deep-purple where the valleys lay in shadow. On the other side, towards China Proper, beyond a few scattered villages and rare clumps of trees, the great yellow plain was swimming in a haze of dust and heat, where somewhere lay Peking and the Forbidden City, ruled now by the descendants of the Manchu conquerors who knew how to take advantage of one of China's many periods of internal strife and turn to naught her great rampart of stone.

Not less did we enjoy, after our night at Nankow, the immense silence of the Wall. Not a human being was in sight, nor a beast nor a bird, except an occasional vulture circling high up in the

' The homed sea cow reproduced on the cover of this book formed part of the procession of tutelary deities that figured as finials on the curved roofs of every Imperial yellow-tiled building. After the Boxer Rising I obtained a complete set of them from one of the buildings that was being pulled down in a part of the Imperial carriage park recently annexed to the grounds of the British Legation which had been often subjected from it to a very hot fire during the siege.

cloudless sky. The noon-day heat grew fierce and we sought shelter for our mid-day rest under one of the outer walls of the castle, as, inside, the smell of bats, though we saw none, was intolerable. Campbell had brought with him a little note-book packed with the lore of the Wall, and he read out to us some of the most characteristic extracts from a medley of fact and fiction. The Wall has, of course, its own Imperial dragon who helped the builders when in doubt about the *track* by leaving during the night the impress of his five sacred claws for their guidance. He would, however, hardly have ranked high to-day as an engineer, for he seemed never to have troubled to seek the most obvious way round an awkward corner, but generally preferred a bold frontal attack up the steepest mountain side to any deviation that avoided difficulties. Other legends told of the gruesome holocausts in which scores of thousands of human beings were sacrificed to propitiate the evil spirits of the air that constantly fought against its building -legends which illustrate the universal belief of the Chinese in the supreme importance *oifeng shui,* but which doubtless have a more sinister foundation of truth in the horrors of forced labour employed with oriental ruthlessness. Chinese history is largely alloyed with fantasy even in its most reputable chronicles, but a good many inscriptions have survived on the Wall itself to show how ceaseless a pre-occupation its maintenance was to the rulers of China in years of stress and strife. There are, for instance, tablets reciting the names of high officials, civil and military, who strengthened and repaired the Wall during the long reign of Wan Li when the Ming dynasty was already nearing its end. But we know also that memorials were frequently laid before the Throne by the Imperial censors

reporting the straits to which the Empire was being reduced by famine and disorder, the garrisons of the Great Wall itself being often left in dire need of supplies. Even the Emperor's own decrees acknowledged the gravity of the situation by exhorting all officials to examine their consciences and live up to higher standards of virtue. Excellent precepts but hardly reinforced by the example he set to his people of spendthrift extravagance and often ruthless cruelty. In the last years of his reign parts of the northern Wall were lost, and his grandson, the last of the Mings, hanged himself when the Manchus, having turned the great rampart, streamed in to establish their new Ching dynasty at Peking.

But when we settled down to philosophize on the chequered history of the Great Wall, could it be denied that this amazing enterprise had fulfilled the purpose of the genius that conceived it? Our own North Wall served as a strong bulwark against the Picts for three or four centuries whilst Rome laid the foundations of civilization in Britain. The Great Wall of China for twenty centuries, and along a vastly greater frontier, was the still mightier bulwark behind which China built up her own civilization, whilst westward successive streams of Central Asian barbarism were pouring forth freely along lines of less resistance, and finally overflowed through Western Asia into a large part of Eastern Europe, and even to the gates of Vienna. The Great Wall served as a cultural as well as geographical boundary between two different worlds - the world over which the sword of Islam long prevailed, and a world nurtured in the milder creeds of Buddhism and Taoism and the ethics of Confucian philosophy, that was the mother of many scientific inventions and fine arts long

THE SHAMEEN BRIDGE AT CANTON

before Western Europe was aroused out of the torpor of the Dark Ages. So deep were the roots which Chinese civilization had struck in a nation which must then have numbered, as it does to-day, a large proportion of the human race, that in the days of Marco Polo it had already absorbed and dominated the Tartar conquerors whom he saw holding their court at Peking or Cambalac, just as it afterwards absorbed the Manchus when they had overthrown the last of the really National dynasties of China. How long, we wondered, would it be before China yielded - whether under foreign coercion or in a great internal upheaval - to the irresistible impact of modern forces from which no Great Wall could preserve her?

We rode back in the late afternoon along the foot of the Wall, and when we reached Nankow again we were pleasantly surprised by the stillness that had fallen upon it after the turmoil of the previous night. Something had happened during the day. The people were reticent, but seemed to breathe more freely, and we gathered that a military mandarin of high rank had arrived hot-foot from Peking in the morning and dealt summarily with some of the rowdiest elements which had been terrorising the town. Anyhow the particular horde we had found in possession had passed on, and though another stream of troops had come in, they were much less truculent. Our inn was almost deserted and our innkeeper very obsequious, perhaps attributing partly to Campbell's influence the change that had taken place so suddenly, for people of his class still held foreigners in considerable awe and were apt to believe that, foreign-devils' though they were, they possessed mysterious powers which were not to be denied. We had another visit from the strolling musicians,

but they were quite content to pocket a few small coins and spare us their concert, and when the fortune-tellers also put in another appearance they begged humbly to be allowed to tell our fortunes, and promised each and all of us, after their wont, wealth and long life and beautiful wives and handsome sons. When Campbell asked them what they had foretold to the big swash-buckler who had consulted them the night before, they grinned, and one of them said with a grim chuckle that he would get what he deserved, though propriety had not allowed them to tell him plainly what that would be; and we were left to suspect that he had got it even before he had time to leave Nankow. We had a relatively peaceful night before we rode back to Peking, But the recollection of our first night at Nankow has often come back to me of recent years as a faint picture - indeed a mere suggestion - of the reign of terror which the civil wars of the last decade have spread all over China.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MIDDLE AND SOUTHERN CHINA

AFTER Peking other Chinese cities seemed drab. They were, like Peking, enclosed within walls, for no people have surpassed or even equalled the Chinese in the building of walls, but they were generally falling into ruins and sometimes merely outlined the boundaries of what had once been a great city. Nanking, though it had been more than once the capital of China, was more dead than alive, and showed no signs of ever regaining the high estate from which it had fallen. It had never recovered from the devastation it had suffered half a century before during the Taiping Rebellion when the taking and retaking of the city alone cost hundreds of thousands of lives. I was there in mid-winter. A mantle of thick snow covered the Purple Mountain where the new China of the Revolution has now erected a national mausoleum to Sun Yat Sen, and melting snow and slush added to the desolation of the deserted road - if it could be called a road at all - which led to the tombs of the founder of the Ming dynasty and of one or two of his early successors. Only a few statues and a few buildings with crumbling walls that had once been pink, remained to mark the old *via sacra* which doubtless

was the prototype of the far more stately one I had seen outside Peking. Of far greater importance at that time were Wu-chang and the two cities of Han-Yang and Hankow which face it on the opposite banks of the broad Yang-tze river. The Yang-tze Kiang is one of the great rivers of the world, and it has carved its way down through Central China by cutting right athwart a series of mountain ranges several thousands of feet high. No steamer at that time attempted to navigate those stupendous gorges. The voyage could only be done in Chinese junks with sturdy crews who alternately poled and rowed, or landed to haul their craft upstream with long bamboo ropes which they often had to carry a hundred or a hundred and fifty feet up the side of steep and broken cliffs. When the strain is too great the ropes break and the unlucky junk is carried back on a rushing tide of swirling waters for several dangerous miles before it can be steered into some relatively safe backwater. This is what happened to me when I tried to travel up the gorges into the distant province of Szechuan. I had the bad luck of an exceptionally high river and on my way down again on less tumultuous waters from Ichang to Hankow the flood waters had spread over the country for hundreds of square miles on either side so that all that could be seen was tree-tops and villages slightly raised above the level of the plain. The Yang-tze floods are only less devastating than those of the evil Yellow River, but when I asked a Chinese fellow-passenger, who was a well-to-do merchant from Shanghai, whether such a flood as we were witnessing must not cause heavy loss of life, he merely replied in his picturesque pidgin English that China had 'too muchee people,' though he quickly added, 'too muchee flood makee too muchee bad trade.'

Only in Canton were there already in 1898 some signs of the old antagonism between South and North which was to play so large a part in the Chinese Revolution. One name, already whispered with bated breath, but with undisguised admiration, Was that of Sun Yat Sen, and it happened not to be altogether unknown to me. Two years earlier, after the old Dowager Empress's feathers had been however slightly ruffled by the disasters of the Chino-Japanese War, a young Cantonese medical student in London had been marked down by her as one of the most dangerous spirits amongst the few of a new generation that had just begun to assimilate, in Western countries, Western ideas of progress and Western standards of education. He had already had a narrow escape from her clutches when some of his associates in Canton had been summarily executed for spreading foreign doctrines, which she dreaded almost more than the political encroachments of foreign Powers. He had fled to London, but what was the good of a Chinese Legation if she could not use it to enforce there, as well as in Peking, the orders issued under her Vermilion Pencil? So he was enticed one day into the Chinese Legation in Portland Place, and kept a prisoner there, to be quietly conveyed back to China to await the Dowager Empress's pleasure. What form her pleasure, in such matters, was likely to assume could be easily foreseen. That youth was Sun Yat Sen. Fortunately, he succeeded in getting a letter through to an English friend, Dr. Cantlie, whose acquaintance he had originally made when he was at the medical school in Hong-Kong; and there are limits to diplomatic privileges. Dr. Cantlie satisfied our Foreign Office that the 'Old Buddha' was exceeding them, and her Minister was compelled to release his prisoner. I was acting

then as Foreign Editor of *The Times*, whose influence Dr. Cantlie at once enlisted in favour of his friend, as I had recently been out in China and heard not a little about the 'Old Buddha's' methods. What manner of man his friend was I only vaguely knew, and still less could I then foresee that he was to be the first acting President of a Chinese Republic and the founder of the Kuomintang, or Nationalist party which, after a decade of storm and strife, has at length, though three years after his death, carried the Southern flag into Peking.

Even when I was at Canton I only knew that Sun, who could never, of course, set foot in his own country until the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, was busy carrying on an active revolutionary propaganda, sometimes from the United States and England, sometimes from Japan and Singapore. He was an idealist who, when his opportunity first came, failed altogether as a statesman. But as a conspirator, animated always by genuine patriotism, he knew how to utilise his fellow-countrymen's infinite capacity for forming secret societies, for which his native city of Canton had been long peculiarly noted. The soil there was eminently fruitful, for it was in Southern China that the Taiping Rebellion had originated, and even in recent years there had been so little love lost between Canton and Peking that at the close of the war with Japan the Cantonese Viceroy, bidding for local popularity, had himself rather nai'vely requested the Japanese Government to return to him some Cantonese vessels of the Chinese navy which had been captured in northern waters, on the plea that Southern China had never been concerned with the war. But from such slight pinpricks to a breach with Peking there was still a very long way to travel. The Manchu

emperors had always maintained in provincial capitals a Manchu garrison on which they could rely in the event of any serious outbreak of Chinese disaffection, and at Canton it had been recently strengthened, with the immediate result that small affrays frequently occurred between the Chinese and the Manchu clansmen, and the whole city was in a state of suppressed excitement. 'Just a fit of Cantonese nerves/ I was assured when I arrived at Canton from Shanghai. I was staying with the English Commissioner of the Imperial Maritime Customs in the British Settlement at Shameen, separated from the Chinese city by a narrow canal. As I wanted to have a morning in the city, chiefly to make some purchases in its famous bazaars, my host kindly lent me his official chair, borne by eight bearers wearing the Customs uniform. We crossed the bridge over the canal, which was to be the scene twenty years later of some violent attacks upon the Settlement; but in those days the Chinese mostly cursed the 'foreign devils' under their breath. The contrast on crossing the bridge from the foreign settlement into the Chinese city was as sudden and as striking as that which the Chinese cities of Shanghai and Hankow and Tientsin offered to the foreign settlements adjoining them. On the one side, clean and well-kept streets, good residential and business houses, an adequate supply of wholesome water, a small, disciplined but unobtrusive police force, and a general air of orderly prosperity amongst busy crowds of Chinamen who, in increasing numbers, were seeking refuge there from the oppression and corruption of their own rulers, and readily accepting the stricter but less arbitrary methods of foreign administration. In the Chinese city, on the other hand, one was assailed at once by all the pungent smells

with which Peking and other Chinese cities had made me already too familiar. Like them, Canton was an undrained city where every thoroughfare did duty for a sewer, and every house discharged its filth into the street. There was the same crowd of hungry beggars and the cook-shops were as malodorous and they dealt in even more unsavoury delicacies. Only the common people seemed more alive, and though of smaller build than the people of the North, they looked keener-witted and more active. Outside the official *yamens* a few slouching soldiers with nondescript arms and ragged uniforms represented the forces of law and order. There was no warning of trouble in the congested streets through which my skilful bearers made way for my chair with lusty shouts and, I fear, some bad language. Still less was there any trace of anti-foreign feeling in the obsequious welcome I received from the curio-dealers at whose shops I alighted. The principal bazaar was, as usual, crowded, and the shopkeepers sat in receipt of custom wearing their wonted smile - 'childlike and bland.' Suddenly, however, shots rang out a short distance away, and not only were the heavy gates at either end of the bazaar at once hastily closed, but in a trice every shop let down its shutters, and before I had time to realize what was happening, everybody had scuttled away to take cover in the tiny alleys opening out of the bazaar, and with them my bearers, who just left me sitting in my chair. It was not a pleasant sensation to find myself absolutely the only occupant of the deserted bazaar, wondering what on earth would happen next. There was the silence of the dead around me, but I could hear the confused din outside the bazaar, and for another ten minutes occasional rifle shots. These gradually ceased altogether - perhaps half an hour later, but a dis-

agreeably long half-hour to me - and then with equal suddenness, as at some mysterious signal, the gates of the bazaar were re-opened, the shops pulled up their shutters, and the people emerged from their hiding-places as impassive and leisurely as Chinamen in ordinary times are wont to be, and my bearers also reappeared, perhaps slightly shame-faced and tongue-tied. When I rebuked their head man, who knew a little pidgin English, all I could get out of him was that 'Master no want-chee Chinaman's bobbery,' by which I understood him to mean that the Chinese city was no place for me just then, for he added at once, 'Master want-chee go home,' and without waiting for a reply my chair was borne back to Shameen much more swiftly than it had travelled on the outward journey.

The slight trouble, of which I thus caught a rather uncanny glimpse, had died down before I left Canton, as the result of a few timely decapitations and 'deaths by the thousand slices.' Even in the Boxer Rising, when the Dowager Empress burnt her fingers badly by trying to divert it into anti-foreign channels, the turmoil in Northern China found scarcely any echo in the South, and the 'Old Buddha' was able to recall her veteran henchman, Li Hung-chang, who was then Viceroy in Canton, to make peace for her with the foreign Powers after she had fled from the capital at the approach of the international forces dispatched to the relief of the beleaguered legations. In the later years of her reign Canton became the centre of the growing anti-dynastic agitation which Sun Yat Sen still inspired and guided from abroad, but it did not ripen into revolution until she had 'ascended the Dragon Throne,'

having carefully arranged that the unfortunate young Emperor, Kwang-shi, should precede her by just one day on her last journey, and never grasp for a single hour the rightful power of which she had for years and years successfully defrauded him.

FUJIYAMA AT SUNRISE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SOME STORIES OF JAPAN

To cross over to Japan as I did for the first time straight from Peking on the morrow of the Chinese-Japanese War was to find, if one had eyes to see, an immediate and full explanation of the humiliating disasters to which China had been subjected on land and sea. Japan, like China, though some years after China, had been compelled by Western pressure, first exercised in her case by an American squadron, to open her ports to foreign intercourse and to emerge from the self-imposed isolation that had preserved the mediaeval structure of her semi-feudal polity. After a period of often severe internal strife between the old forces of reaction and the new forces of modern progress the latter had signally triumphed in the memorable surrender by the once dominant clans of all their feudal rights into the hands of the dynasty that had for centuries reigned but never ruled at Kyoto. Under the guidance of her Elder Statesmen, who were as remarkable a group of statesmen as the world has ever produced, the whole framework of government and administration was peacefully revolutionized within the next two decades and adapted to the needs of the new Japan without sacrificing the

fine traditions of the old. Once she had been coerced into cutting herself adrift from her ancient moorings and launching out into the dangerous currents of the modern world she took warning from the impotence of China and resolved to secure her own independence by equipping herself so as to claim her rightful position amongst the great Powers of our times. This was the contrast with China that stared one in the face at every turn and reflected, as in a living mirror, the causes of China's ignominious collapse. Fresh from having witnessed at Nankow the brutal licence of a disbanded Chinese soldiery, I saw more than once the Japanese troops returning from Manchuria as orderly and trim as if they were marching back from an ordinary parade ground, whilst the people who acclaimed them delighted to honour even higher and often with more conspicuous manifestations of joyful pride, those who did not return but had fallen for their Emperor and their Fatherland. But the causes of Japan's resounding victories went far deeper than the superior equipment and prowess of her soldiers and sailors.

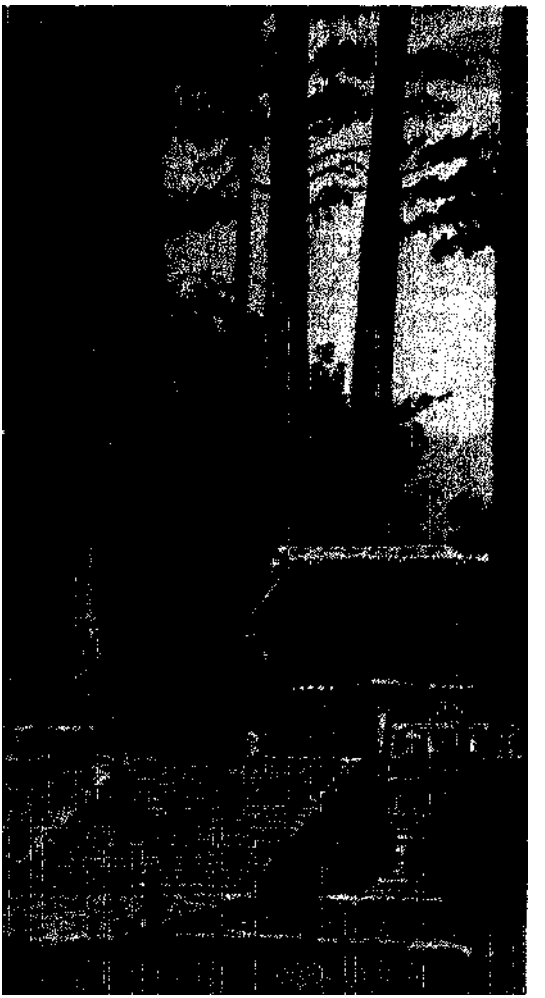
This is, however, a long enough digression for a mere book of travel. For as far back as 1895 travelling in Japan was relatively easy and quite safe, and it was only in the course of my later visits that I was more frequently reminded of the terrifying forces of nature which periodically devastate her fair countryside, and sometimes, as in the great earthquake of 1923 at Tokyo and Yokohama, overwhelm her most populous cities.

I have encountered many typhoons in the far eastern seas, but never one so furious and reaching so far inland as at Chuzendje, a favourite summer resort of European diplomatists. I had just been visiting in perfect summer weather the beautiful temples

of Nikko whose exquisite daintiness and brilliancy, set off by a sombre background of lofty Japanese cedars, looked almost as diaphanous and evanescent in their beauty as the wings of a butterfly or the hues of a rainbow. But huge clouds of the livid complexion which foreshadows a typhoon collected in increasingly dense masses as I climbed, on the next day, the wooded slopes that lead up to Chuzendje. My friend, Gerard Lowther, who was then Secretary of the Legation at Tokyo, had built himself on the very edge of the lake a delightful Japanese house, whose solid wooden framework rested on the "boulders of the foreshore-a Japanese mode of construction designed to secure greater elasticity during an earthquake than if the foundations were actually embedded in the earth. There was not a breath of wind at first, but the atmosphere was heavy. Suddenly there came, with the rumbling of distant thunder, an ominous succession of squalls in which the typhoon shrieked an unmistakable warning of its approach. Every one of the wooden shutters which do duty for windows in a Japanese house was pulled to and made fast lest the inrush of the hurricane should lift off the roof, and we retired to rest hoping still that only the tail of the typhoon would strike us. But we were too sanguine. A typhoon is a circular storm in which the wind veers rapidly round all the quarters of the compass. When it attained, about midnight, its maximum of velocity, well over a hundred miles an hour, it swept down the whole length of the lake, some fifteen miles, straight on to the little promontory on which our house was perched. There was still no rain, but lightning and thunder were incessant, and the whole lake was white with big waves which hurled themselves bodily against the side of the

house, whilst the fiercest blasts of wind seemed sometimes to lift the whole house for a moment off the boulders on which it rested. Lowther came and told me I had better get up as he was afraid that the house would be blown down. Then, having put out every lamp lest, if the house were blown down, it might at the same time catch fire, we sat together in the dark and prepared for whatever might happen. We could hardly hear ourselves speak for the shrieking of the wind and .the lashing of the waves and the crash of constant thunder. Presently, however, the rain began to fall - sheets of torrential raiti, such as no one ever experiences at home - and the typhoon shifted round to a point at which we began to be sheltered from its full fury by intervening hills and mountains. The worst was over, and we retired once more to rest. In the morning, when the shutters were drawn back, the lake was a smiling expanse of blue waters under a blue and cloudless sky. But in the village over two hundred houses had been blown down, and some of them had gone up in a blaze and were still smouldering. On the densely wooded mountain immediately behind us, a belt, two or three hundred yards broad and a mile long, in which every tree had been torn up by its roots, marked the devastating track of the typhoon about the same time as we had experienced its greatest fury. But the worst typhoon is child's play compared with a serious earthquake, when the solid ground begins to rock under one's feet under the stress of absolutely incalculable forces.

Nowhere in the world does a seismological observatory register so many earthquake shocks as at Tokyo, where the recording needle scarcely ever remains stable for a whole day. Japan lies,



AT THE NIKKO TEMPLES

as her people say, over one of the cracks of the earth. I was never in a really destructive earthquake, but in the course of four visits I grew fairly familiar with minor trepidations, and had several curious experiences. One of them in Tokyo is worth recording, because it gave me, I think, an opportunity of measuring, quite definitely, the duration of a dream. I was in my first sleep, and dreamt I was in the midst of an earthquake. I was travelling in a railway train over an interminable viaduct which ran along and far above the sea coast. Suddenly the viaduct rocked, and I saw the sea recede a great distance and then gather itself together into a mighty wave which, in its tremendous sweep, climbed the shore and overwhelmed a number of villages, as it were, at my feet. I could hear the shriek of the unfortunate people caught up in the surging whirlpool, and I could see them in the wreckage carried out to sea again by the retreating wave. My train swept along on the swaying viaduct, past falling cities and steep mountain sides in which great fissures were torn open. The climax came when the noon-day sun itself began to rock in the heavens and suddenly went out, leaving us in black darkness, whilst we still sped on to the deafening crash of a world in ruins. I awoke with a start, and realizing that a sharp earthquake was shaking the building, I jumped out of bed and stood under the arch of a window, as that was supposed to be the safest place in such circumstances. I had time to take my watch off the dressing-table close by and count thirteen seconds before the earthquake was over. On the next day the seismological station reported that earthquake as having lasted three-quarters of a minute, so it was easy to calculate that before I woke up and realized that an

earthquake was going on only a very few seconds can have elapsed, though the nightmare provoked by the first shock seemed to me to have lasted for hours.

May I conclude with another earthquake story of Japan of a much lighter kind? Whilst on a walking tour in the hills beyond Nikko I was seized with a violent toothache, and told my Japanese innkeeper that I should have to curtail my stay and hurry back to Tokyo to sec a dentist. He assured me that in a small town, only a few hours off, there was an excellent young Japanese dentist who had studied in America, and that if a messenger were sent at once to fetch him, he would be with me at cock-crow, long before I could even reach the nearest railway station. I agreed, and after a night of agony, almost before it was light, I heard the welcome bell of the rickshaw, which had brought up the dentist in double-quick time. He spoke very good English with a strong American accent, but he had the exquisite manners of old Japan, and its quaint terms of polite language. He made me a deep bow, rubbing his hands over his knees and drawing in a deep breath, as the rules of Japanese courtesy required, and asked permission to see 'the honourable tooth' which was hurting me. He agreed with me that he had better pull it out at once. It was a big upper molar, and the job taxed all the skill of his singularly small and beautifully shaped hands. Twice he pulled but failed. The pain was almost intolerable. Then whilst he gave a third pull the whole house rocked for a moment. This time he was successful, and having displayed to me the trophy, he again made me a profound bow, rubbed his hands over his knees, drew in a long breath, and said, 'I reckon the honourable earthquake did help/

Some of my best friends have, I confess, smiled rather incredulously when I told them this story. But it is a true story. Truth indeed is, as far as a fairly retentive memory has served me, perhaps the chief merit that may, I hope, commend these pages to indulgent readers.

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