PALACE DAYS

THE ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES OF A GUARDIAN TO A RAJAH'S HEIR

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"The Life of Sir Partab Singh"

LONDON
H. F. & G. WITHERBY
326 HIGH HOLBORN W.C.1

First Published 1934

5784

Printed in Great Britain
for Messrs. H. F. & G. Witherby
by the Library Press, Lowestoft

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PALACE DAYS

CHAPTER I

MY "AUSPICIOUS" ARRIVAL AT GURUMPORE

"PLEASE wait in Bombay until we wire the auspicious day for your arrival at Gurumpore." The magic carpet of the East was spread before me, and my feet were fidgeting to step onto it. Tutors in England are not usually of sufficient importance to require an auspicious day to be set apart for their arrival, but the Rajah of Gurumpore apparently thought otherwise, and all honour to him for it.

Two days followed in which to enjoy the novel sights and scents which Bombay offers to the traveller. My most vivid recollections are of a squatting barber shaving without lather the scalp of a customer on the pavement of Bombay's Regent Street; of the tikka-gharries, for motors were rare then, whose fez-crowned Mussulman drivers delighted to face round as they drove, in order the better to converse volubly with a friend behind, gesticulating with reins and whip; and lastly of a succulent ham-steak for tiffin at the Yacht Club, whose grey stone terrace-wall is lapped by the sea, and where the German Emperor's Cup was still to be seen as one ascended to the dining-room floor.

But fascinating as it all was I was eager to be off, and hailed with delight the wire announcing February 1st as the fateful day. The same evening, after dinner, saw me embarking on my two and a half days' train journey. At home we grumble at the length and boredom of a three-hour run!

I had a spacious first-class compartment to myself. In pre-war days nearly all sahib-log travelled first.

It was due to their izzat (prestige) as well as comfort, and the majority do so still.

I made two discoveries: one, that, from lack of expert advice when buying my kit, my large portmanteau was about an inch too high to go under the seat, and two, that the bathroom, which I had fondly pictured as one of the joys of travel in India, was complete except for the bath. Experience taught me later that, if there had been a bath, it would have been either too cold, at the risk of a chill, the water too dirty, or, as I believe even our good King once found to his cost, no water, because the coolie responsible had forgotten to fill the water-tank.

The next day, and at every stop, my instincts of decorum were shocked by the crowd of third-class passengers who swarmed out of those carriages which overlapped the platform, squatted in a neat row with backs to the train and "answered to the call of nature." Like everyone else, I soon got used to it.

At Wadi, where I changed, another new-comer to the country joined me for the next stage, and we must have been passing through paddy-fields soon after dark, judging by the raucous rattle of festive frogs.

We reached Secunderabad at dinner-time. Neither of us had yet acquired a bearer, but a lady in the next carriage had left an ayah in charge of her belongings, so I bethought me to ask the woman to keep a friendly eye on our kit as well while we dined. I was too inexperienced to tackle her in English, which she would no doubt have understood well enough, but thought it a good opportunity to air my Hindustani, which I had been flirting with on the way out. The good woman looked first surprised, then alarmed, and finally darted into the carriage, whence she eyed us timidly from behind a pile of her memsahib's luggage. So I gave up the unequal contest and we went off to dine, leaving our kit to its fate. Looking back I realize that instead of saying "Take care of this"—there is no 'please' in Hindustani—I kept repeating, with ever-increasing insistence, "Take care!" until she evidently began to wonder which of her peccadilloes had come to light.

At dinner I was introduced to another pleasing custom of the country. One of the diners was dissatisfied with everything and said so "very loud and clear". At last he called fiercely for the "Complaint Book", which has to be kept in every Refreshment Room. The khitmatgar, from long experience, was equal to the occasion. The book could not be found until the train was on the point of starting, so that a pithy little comment on the food and its service was lost to posterity.

During the night, at waking intervals, I was dimly conscious of the very slow and stately progress of our train, which, we learned in the morning, was the result of recent floods which had washed away long stretches of line. The repairs were still going on, the line was none too safe, and the result was to make us late by a trifle of four hours; so that, when my next changing place was reached, I found my train had left two hours before. It also appeared that there was no train which could get me there until twenty-four hours after the time appointed. So the auspicious day would have to do without me, so far as Gurumpore was concerned.

I sent a long telegram of explanation and prayed for the best. After all, it was difficult to feel depressed with the cloudless blue sky above—how often in after years did I not long for clouds!—studded with shrilling kites circling and planing, and everything around me a fresh object of interest.

The day was hot, but not *so* hot, as friend babu neatly puts it, and the time passed pleasantly enough as I lay at ease in a long-chair placed for my benefit on the deserted platform.

A long-chair, cane backed and bottomed for coolness, with the arms prolonged into leg-rests, may be comfortable, but it does not show a man to advantage. Recumbent, he exhibits a vast expanse of foot and trousers with an oasis of bare shin between, and, on rising, his back view presents a neat pattern which the cane has imprinted.

The day was punctuated at intervals by solitary breakfast, tiffin, tea and dinner in the refreshment-room. It was a typical up-country junction; a tiny booking-office, a first-class waiting-room, a refreshment-room;

a long platform of red earth edged with stone flags, with a row of half a dozen godowns for the station staff near one end; a goods train as a rule every three hours or so, and an entertaining troup of crows and pariah dogs, who contended viciously for any loathsome scrap they could find. There were no signs of other habitation, nothing much to see and nothing to do, so, like the House of Peers in "Iolanthe", I "did it very well" and thoroughly enjoyed my day.

At each meal I had noticed an increasing interest on the part of the khansamah as to where I proposed to pass the night. I tried to assure him, in terms suited to his peculiar and limited English vocabulary, that I could manage well enough on a long-chair in the waiting-room, but the idea seemed more and more painful to him the longer he considered it. I thought it very nice of him to be so concerned for a mere bird of passage, and tried to convey my appreciation through the medium of a tip, but even that failed to disperse the gloom.

Just before dinner the stationmaster, whom I had not seen for some hours, reappeared with the welcome news that, instead of waiting for the mail next morning, I could take a "passenger", i.e. slow train, after dinner which would get me to my destination at the same time next day as though I had waited till morning for the mail. There would be one first-class carriage and no likelihood of any other candidates for it, so that I could bed down comfortably there instead of uncomfortably in the waiting-room.

I arranged to do so and at dinner found the khansamah all smiles once more. Putting two and two together I had reason to believe that the worthy man preferred the waiting-room to his own stuffy godown, and also allowed a selection of his friends to sleep there, for a consideration no doubt, and so had been brooding all day on "flies in the ointment" and how to remove them.

I tipped him again, for the fourth time. It was probably weak, and I suppose one tip at the end of the day would have sufficed; but how many people, women excepted, would have had the hardihood to do otherwise? Not many, I venture to think. In Europe a

waiter frightens one into tipping, in India he shames one into it.

All went well this time, and next day, at about 14.30 railway time, or 2.30 p.m. according to our conservative reckoning, I stepped onto the platform at Gurumpore, to be greeted by a portly Indian who touched his forehead rather cursorily, extended a flabby hand with a great show of yellowish palm and then handed me a short note from the Rajah's secretary, Farnell, whom I had met a few months before in England. I gathered that Farnell was ill, that I was to stay with him, that the flabby gentleman Ramamurti was the Indian tutor under me, and that it was all right for me to shake hands with him. This was just as well, because I had been given very little chance of doing otherwise.

I had yet to learn that there are more pitfalls of etiquette in India than ever beset the unwary freshman at Oxford or Cambridge, and that one slip takes a long time to live down.

It has been the increasing custom in England of late years to talk and write of the Sahib in India as an oppressor and a slave-driver: one who treats the Indians under him as dirt. Believe me, such cases are rare indeed. It is the Indian himself who insists, in a way we should never do, on the most scrupulous observation of what he considers his due by his own race, and woe betide the under-dog if he fails in the smallest iota. Such Oriental ways as we have insisted on—the removal of shoes in the house, for example, are expected of us by the Indian himself, and no one is quicker to resent their non-observance than the Indian serving under us. His dignity suffers equally with our own, and laxity would very soon cause him mentally to label us as "teck nai" (no good), and he would also quickly seek pastures new.

As we drove to Farnell's bungalow the painstaking pundit favoured me with a lengthy discourse on the methods he proposed we should adopt for the instruction of the Rajkumar, our pupil. As he progressed he swelled in importance like the proverbial frog, until I began to feel quite humble before his magnificence and had some difficulty in pulling myself together enough to remind

him that it was early days for me to decide anything. The drive luckily was short, so the lecture came to an abrupt end.

Farnell, it appeared, was in bed, where, after a very late lunch, I found him looking decidedly the worse for wear. As soon as was decent I asked how my non-arrival on the auspicious day had been received. "Did they think it was a bad omen?" I inquired anxiously.

"Oh no," he replied, "as soon as I told the Rajah about your wire he sent for the astrologers, who decided that February 2nd, not the 1st, was the auspicious day. They will be here in a few minutes to see you and let you know the auspicious hour for you to meet the Rajkumar."

This, if odd to my prosaic Western mind, was a great relief, and I settled myself contentedly to listen while Farnell gave me details of the Rajah, his family, the local intrigues without which no Indian seems really happy, and finally a very sketchy idea of what was expected of me. As a matter of fact I never did get any more than a sketchy idea. Excepting for a few instructions on matters of health from the Rani (the boy's mother), everything was left to me with a touching faith.

By the time we had finished a peon came in to announce that the astrologers were in attendance and desirous of an interview with my august self.

I had visions of something cloaked in black and mystic, so it came as rather a shock when two dingily-dressed bare-footed Brahmans entered. They looked very gaunt, and the caste-marks on their foreheads caught the eye, but otherwise they were disappointingly ordinary.

Farnell acted as interpreter, for they spoke liquid Telugu and no English, I the reverse. They asked the date of my birth and inspected the palm of my right hand, then retired into a corner to whisper for a time. Finally they emerged and gave Farnell the fateful hour.

"Six a.m. at the palace," he announced.

Now I was fresh from England, where six a.m. is a good deal earlier than it is in India, and had been three

and a half days on my journey from Bombay, so that "six a.m. at the palace" had a very unpleasing sound. I drew a bow at a venture and pointed this out to Farnell, who obligingly fell in with my suggestion that, if a mistake had been made in the auspicious day, why not in the auspicious hour also?

How he explained it to the astrologers I never knew, but they sought their corner again and after a due interval delivered their ultimatum.

"Eight o'clock precisely at the palace."

This was a decided improvement, so we left it at that.

Seven-thirty the next morning found me refreshed by a long night's sleep and, after chota hazri of tea, toast and fruit, sitting in the verandah waiting for the carriage. I waited long and I waited in vain. Soon "Eight o'clock precisely" became an impossibility and I began to get fidgety. The stars had obligingly changed their courses twice already for me, but there were limits; moreover, I have suffered all my life from a provoking punctuality, so my fidgeting increased. There was no sign of my host and hostess or of any English-speaking servant, so I paced the verandah, I paced the drive, and finally set out on foot, oblivious of the indignity of such a proceeding in Indian eyes; for I did not realize until long afterwards that my arrival had been discussed for weeks past and my humble self had become one of the most important figures in local eyes.

At any rate, no harm was done. I had gone scarcely a hundred yards when a carriage and pair met me. The syces skipped nimbly from their insecure perches behind, let down the steps of the early-Victorian vehicle, and in a trice we were heading for the palace, the coachman ringing the gong-like bell with his foot every few seconds to clear the way.

Away we sped along the broad, red, dusty road, scattering bullock-carts and pedestrians alike, the latter fluttering like startled hens from under the noses of our steeds. We skirted a lake, on whose glassy surface a number of pelicans floated, rounded a corner of this and turned to face the low square stone Fort which enclosed the palace of the Rajah.

We entered by a wide bridge over a dry moat holding nothing but rubbish and mosquitoes, through an arched gateway guarded by a couple of untidy sepoys with untidy salutes—but I enjoyed being saluted, even untidily—into a carriage-way which ran round two sides of the Fort between the outer wall and a long row of flat-roofed office buildings.

We pulled up with a flourish opposite a white archway lofty and wide screened by a huge heavily weighted [illegible] before being hastily withdrawn.

The syces darted from behind me and let down the steps. I descended, it is to be hoped with dignity, though I would much rather have jumped down. The curtain was drawn aside by unseen hands, and I stepped past a row of salaaming attendants straight into a scene from the Arabian Nights.

I beheld a spacious courtyard, some seventy yards square, of dazzling white, flecked here and there with a splash of green and roofed with the vivid blue of an untarnished sky. White marble was the paving, intersected at intervals by raised, marble-cased beds of crotons, pink and white oleanders and other fragrant bushes, with, here and there, a crystal fountain, shapely, but dry. High walls of white formed the side of entry and that opposite to it. On the right ran a long, deep, arched verandah, six inches only above the level of the court, from which a number of chick-shrouded doorways led to the apartments secured to the Raja himself. The [illegible]

were placed a table and two chairs. I seated myself and looked with delight on my novel surroundings. The attendants withdrew into the background, from whence they inspected me in detail in the disconcerting way Indian servants have; for they have a way of making their presence felt under a pretence of eliminating themselves.

It brought me with something of a bump out of my Arabian Nights' dream to see a number of mechanical tableaux, like the penny-in-the-slot horrors of the pier, scattered about the verandah. Every one was out of action and dilapidated; but there had been a day when they were the pride of the palace, so they remained undisturbed.

The crystal fountains, too, never played save once within my recollection. One festal night we rejoiced in the prospect of silver moon-kissed jets spraying the marble floor; but, alas, they merely spat and dribbled feebly for a brief space and then resumed their leisured life.

In royal purple on the white floor was marked a tennis-court; it was very fast to play on, and, after a few drops of rain, like a skating-rink to the rubber-soled, as I found to my cost on one occasion, but to the open delight of the Rajah, who knew the ropes and played barefoot. The balls, dyed purple in order that they might show up against the white, heightened the royal effect. From a tennis point of view humbler courts may be better, but playing on this one always gave me the comfortable feeling of having been raised to the peerage, at the very least.

Before very long a wicket in the great gateway of the further wall opened and a little procession advanced slowly towards me.

I could see little more than a small pair of patent-leather shoes, two small, white, trousered legs under a large umbrella of golden silk, bordered and tasselled with purple, and a little knot of white-clad, gaily-turbaned servants in close attendance.

The little shoes twinkled slowly across the marble court under the nodding umbrella, which an attendant

was managing none too cleverly, and a minute later the procession reached the carpet, when the umbrella was lowered to disclose to my astonished eyes a very small boy dressed in a cream-coloured, gold-faced military uniform of sorts. A sword, which was altogether too much for him, was girt about his chest rather than his waist, and a majestic turban of the palest blue almost obliterated him.

He held out a small hand and greeted me with a "How do you do?" of due solemnity.

"Please sit," he continued; so we sat and had a good look at each other, while I tried hastily to readjust my ideas, for I had expected to meet a boy of twelve instead of this mere infant.

It is true Farnell, when in England, had seemed rather hazy about the exact age of my future pupil, but I had undoubtedly been led to expect someone years older then this.

However, the ice was soon broken and, as he possessed a smattering of English, we were soon chattering gaily. He had a charming smile, a keen sense of humour and an inexhaustible store of questions about my journey, the voyage, did I get any food and a hundred other things.

Happy is he to whom the whole-hearted trust of a child is given, and woe betide him if he betrays it. I had been dimly conscious of it for years, but the full realization seemed to burst upon me that morning as the little Rajkumar leaned confidingly against me as he prattled happily of this and that.

Before we parted, the foundations of a mutual and lasting affection were well and truly laid. I might have missed the auspicious day, and long over-stepped the auspicious hour, but for all that the omens remained favourable.

Months later, when I had got to know the Rajah and Rani well, I asked if my belated appearance at the palace had mattered at all.

"Oh, no," said the Rajah with a chuckle; "if they say 'Eight o'clock' it means anything up to midday."

Who are we to disturb this blissful state?

CHAPTER II

I HEAR OF INTRIGUES

Up to now I possessed but the sketchiest idea of the Rajah and his belongings, so that, on my return from the palace, it was a relief to find Farnell up and about again—albeit on milk-and-soda diet—and to be able to absorb the information I sorely needed.

The Rajah, I gathered, was the adopted heir of the late Maharajah.

The title of Rajah was hereditary, but both his predecessors had been given the personal title of Maharajah, and it was a sore point that this, too, had not been made hereditary.

He possessed estates which brought in a revenue of about 20 lakhs (over £125,000) in a good year.

Some of his productive land lay near the river Godaveri, and the title to it had been disputed by the provincial government. A long and costly law-suit followed, which hinged on a single document reposing in a Government file. Its production, which would have settled the case against the Rajah, was awaited at the final hearing. To the general surprise the document was not produced, and the Government lost its case and land.

The sequel supplied the reason. Some years later, at Gurumpore, an English official, newly posted to Gurumpore service, found the missing document, not in any Government office, but in an old file at Gurumpore! By what means that document had found its final resting-place, and the responsibility for the action, remains a mystery.

The Rajah also owned a palace with large estates at Benares, together with an odd house or two in Madras, Coonoor, Ootacamund, Calcutta and Lucknow.

This sounded a very delightful heritage, but the Rajah was not to succeed to it without a struggle. In

default of a direct heir the late Maharajah had followed the custom, common enough in India, of adopting one, and the Rajah was his selection.

On his succession, a syndicate was formed to put up and finance a rival who claimed the title on the ground that the Rajah had not been ceremonially adopted on some public occasion, and that he himself had a better right to it. He also claimed the property, in which, he asserted, the Rajah had only been left a life interest.

Most of the principal Indian pleaders of Calcutta and Madras swarmed hungrily into the fray as vultures to a carcase. They received five hundred rupees (about £30) a day and all their expenses, so they pleaded eloquently and they pleaded long until the larder was bare.

The result might be called a draw. The court found for the Rajah on the question of title and on some points in connection with the property, but for the claimants on others.

Notice of appeal was given, which was heartening enough to the pleaders, but to nobody else. Nobody was prepared to lend money to the syndicate, or their nominee, until their claim proved more substantial than it appeared at the moment; while the Rajah, though receiving a substantial income from the estates, was to say the very least a lavish spender, and had reached the extreme limit of his credit until a decision was given in his favour, at that time a very open question.

As a matter of fact, after an anxious year or two the syndicate collapsed from lack of funds and hope, so that the Rajah was left at last in undisputed possession.

This was all very complicated for me, especially as Farnell, like many an official in India, expected his audience to understand what he was talking about.

The little band of Europeans in India is so closely knit, and so united at heart in purpose, that each makes it his business to understand to the best of his ability the affairs of his neighbour, and so be able to work to the common end—the welfare of India.

It is irritating to the globe-trotter, but the globe-trotter is often irritating to the official, whom he vituperises because he fails to understand him.

Poor little globe-trotter—the one with a mission I mean—how signally you fail to understand and how triumphantly you broadcast your folly!

The Rajah, it appeared, did not enjoy the full revenues from his estates. These were administered by an English official, one Lightfoot, lent by the Government. The Rajah incessantly complained of the scanty allowance made by Lightfoot for his personal expenses, and Farnell, who had been with him for many years, first as tutor and then as private secretary, very patently supported the Rajah.

Matters were further complicated in palace-circles by the presence of an old dowager princess known as Rewah Maharani, or old Maharani. She sounded something of a termagant, from Farnell's account, but had the merit of possessing untold riches; therefore the Rajah could not afford to quarrel with her.

It did not require any vast intelligence to see that it behoved me to walk warily in such unsafe "country", so I vouchsafed only non-committal grunts to all that was told me.

As a fact, and before many hours had passed, I was to hear a very different version of things, and to grunt just as disappointingly to the narrator as I was doing now to Farnell.

Actually the old lady, Maharani in her own right and an aristocrat to the finger-tips, was a fine character who disapproved of the Rajah as likely to lower the family prestige by his ways as well as by his birth, the latter being too lowly to meet with her approval.

According to Farnell, she was fond of the little Rajkumar, but displeased at my appointment: a displeasure which was shared by my fat friend Ramamurti, who had been her private secretary before, by devious ways, managing to get himself appointed tutor to the Rajah's heir, in order to better his prospects. The Rajah, though under thirty, was not expected to live many years, and the post of tutor to the future Rajah held dazzling visions of power.

Therefore, I was warned to look out for squalls from both quarters. I did, and got them from Rama-

murti to my great advantage in the long run, though this was far from his intention. But from the Maharani there was never a trace of unfriendliness, much less opposition, and, whatever her feelings about me may have been to start with, she ended by cordially approving of me and telling me so in Calcutta, where she sent for me—our first and only interview—to thank me for arranging an interview for her with the Queen on the occasion of the Royal Visit to India.

Fortunately, perhaps, much of this cloud of intrigue drifted harmlessly past me, but even as early as this I learnt two valuable lessons—to trust nobody and to keep clear of intrigue. Every Indian State, and I have known many, is honeycombed with it; for in the ruler and in the humblest of his subjects intrigue is ingrained.

An Indian, in a burst of frankness, once startled me by saying, "Sahib, there is not one of us you may trust, myself included!"

Even that great old warrior, the Bayard of India, Sir Partab Singh, could descend on occasion to become the artfullest of "Cunninghams", to use one of his own phrases.

What interested me more than anything else was to listen to the prospective plans for the Rajkumar and myself. Both the Rajah and Rani were only too well aware that the one hope for the boy was to get him away from the noxious influences which would inevitably surround him in his own home.

Very wisely they had decided to send him right away to the other side of India, to be educated at the Mayo College at Ajmer in Rajputana, the leading Chiefs' College of India, where many of the best-known Princes have spent profitable years in their youth.

A house was to be taken for us; the Rajkumar would attend the college daily, and I was to act as guardian.

Since landing in India I seemed to have been perpetually called upon to readjust any ideas I might have been forming, so that, at the time, I did not take in the delightful prospect Farnell was holding out. Later, I was to thank my stars for my good fortune.

"But surely," I objected, "they will not take so

young a boy at the college ? " For it turned out that the little Rajkumar was only six and a half.

"Oh, that is all right," said Farnell airily; "the Principal knows, and everything has been arranged."

It turned out that Farnell had been as vague there as he had been with me, and the Principal was just as surprised as I had been when this diminutive pupil was presented to him.

I strongly suspect that the boy's tender age was deliberately kept in the background to prevent any interference with the Rajah's plans for his son's upbringing and social advancement. Undoubtedly the Mayo College was intended to pave the way for arranging suitable marriages for my ward, his little brother and sister; and the College authorities, had they known his true age, would have suggested a postponement of at least a couple of years, though this would have been most unpalatable to the Rajah and his ambitious consort.

At this stage in our talk there was a great commotion outside, a peon hurried in chattering volubly, and darted out again followed by Farnell. A minute or two later he returned preceded by no less a personage than the Rajah himself.

CHAPTER III

I MEET THE RAJAH

THE Rajah had been away, which accounted for his non-appearance on the scene till this moment.

It must be confessed that he came as something of a shock to me. I had expected someone imposing and striking, but, poor little man, he may have been striking, but was certainly far from imposing.

He was short and, though not ill-proportioned, presented an awkward appearance; his apparel, too, rich though it was, did not sit well on him.

He wore a brocaded silk tunic, collared like a clerical frock-coat and about as long, which sparkled with diamond and emerald buttons. His trousers, tight from the knee downwards, were of white linen, and on his feet were buttoned boots of patent leather.

His face was not altogether prepossessing. It had a peculiar yellowish tinge which made me think he was suffering from jaundice. In my ignorance I thought his mouth had been bleeding, but it was only the stain of betel-nut on his teeth—a practice common all over India to which I was then unused. His eyes looked in different directions, and one was nearly closed by the folds of his turban, which hung low on that side. The turban completely covered one ear, while the other was adorned with a large ring of gold, studded with pearls and rubies.

He shook hands and we all sat down.

There was a silence.

"You had much difficulty to get here, is it not?" said the Rajah at last, looking, I thought, at Farnell, but obviously addressing me.

"Yes," I replied, uncertain whether to add "Rajah" or "Your Highness" or nothing at all, so I decided on nothing at all for the present.

There was again silence.

"How you think my son is in English, Mr Van Wart?" he broke out once more, looking unmistakably at Farnell.

"I think he will soon speak very well." Hang it, if only Farnell would join in I might get some idea of how to address the Rajah.

This time the silence was very long indeed, the Rajah being apparently intent on the manœuvres of a lizard on the wall, though I was uncomfortably conscious that he was studying me carefully and methodically "for future reference."

The ordeal was ended by the entry of a peon with a letter for Farnell, who read it and burst out laughing.

"Look here, Rajah," he began, solving my difficulty at once, "here is your chit telling me you were coming up this afternoon. How did you manage to get here before it?"

"That sowar, I sent him; he is a very bad fellow; he shall be cut one rupee, is it not?" he said, looking at me.

This was beyond my ken, but luckily Farnell answered.

"It probably wasn't his fault," he said. "I should not fine him."

"All right, then I shall not."

A long discussion followed about some big luncheon which was being held in the near future. As it did not, or I thought it did not, concern me, I drifted off into speculation as to what the Rajah's opinion of me might be, and also what mine was of him.

I was fascinated too, by a collection of jewelled toys attached to his watch-chain, the one which caught my fancy most being a diamond and ruby ball about the size of a cherry.

When the luncheon question seemed to have died a natural death, and as I had now discovered the correct mode of address (though "Rajah Sahib" would have

been better), it seemed good to put a question on which I needed enlightenment.

"Rajah," I began boldly, "what is your son's name?"

The Rajah scraped his right foot up and down his left calf and looked miserable, remarking abruptly:

"Mr Farnell, when is Ramaswami sending?"

I supposed he had not heard me, so tried again at the next lull.

"What is the name of your son, Rajah?" I hoped this simplified version might have better fortune.

This time the Rajah appeared on the verge of tears and began to crack his knuckles vigorously—as a charm against evil spirits I was to learn—as he burst forth again: "Mr Farnell, have you arranged for a photographer?"

Mr Farnell had not.

"Y'are to arrange for a photographer."

This struck me as rather peremptory, but it was not what it sounded. The Rajah's English was a law unto itself, and he was only saying, "Y'ought to——" though for a long time it always rubbed me the wrong way to hear him say it.

It was still within calling hours, four to six, when the Rajah left, so I drove off to pay my short round of calls. Not a very formidable business, as there were only four married couples, in addition to the Farnells, in the station.

Calling in India is vastly simplified by the fact that everyone knows everyone else's job, pay and dossier.

Every place has its club; Gurumpore, with nineteen Europeans only, had one. The newcomer is expected to make a round of the station as soon as possible, dropping cards into the little tin boxes at the gate, or on the verandah, informing all and sundry that "Mrs So-and-So Not At Home" does not wish to be disturbed. These calls are returned in the same way when the newcomers are married, or left at the club for grass-widowers and bachelors.

The careless bachelor has been known to drop two or even three offerings in the same box on successive

days, and I myself once left cards in the cage of a parrot on a verandah when no human responded to my repeated cry "Qui hai?" (Is anyone there?)

But, all said and done, it saves a lot of trouble, and "My dear, do tell me? Ought one to call on the So-and-So's?"

Simla, in fact, has evolved a system which is simplicity itself.

It has a Calling League.

The newcomer sends to the secretary details of name, rank, station and duration of stay, together with one rupee. The secretary, after consulting military or civil lists for purposes of verification, forwards a receipt together with a list of members, complete with similar details, of the Calling League.

Your troubles are over, you have saved dozens and dozens of cards, miles of riding or rickshawing, and are now free, as friend babu puts it, "to make dinner-party arrangements," with all and sundry.

On this occasion I did not get far; less than three hundred yards in fact. My first call was on Lightfoot, the manager of the Gurumpore estates, and his wife.

I found more than half the station playing tennis there.

After I had been properly inspected—this is not said in any carping spirit, for one discordant element can set a small station by the ears, and Gurumpore was only then recovering from the period when its eight families were divided into three hostile cliques, and two ladies had had to be torn apart at the Club—Lightfoot invited me into his office-room, where, over a peg and a cheroot, we could discuss my agreement.

On this matter of agreements I cannot too strongly warn those who think of taking service in India—other than under Government—not to commit themselves in any way until they have a signed agreement that is pronounced absolutely watertight by some competent authority, preferably one acquainted with local conditions.

I could give instance after instance where agreements have been treated like the historic "Scrap of Paper"

by unscrupulous or domineering officials in Indian States; in some cases, Indians carrying out the whim of an unstable Prince, and sometimes, happily not often, Europeans like one who tried to override a friend's agreement because adherence to its terms "makes me look such a fool!"

Now I had been rash enough to come out from home with nothing more binding than a letter from Farnell outlining the general terms offered to me, backed by a telegram confirming my appointment and asking me to start by the earliest possible boat; and this despite an insistent warning by a friend, who had just suffered in the matter of a similar agreement at the hands of another local potentate.

Luckily I had found a true friend in Lightfoot, who had seen to it that my interests were safeguarded, and insisted on certain points which would never have occurred to me, but which his experience regarded rightly as material. I owe him a deep debt of gratitude for such kindness to a complete stranger, and his foresight was to stand me in good stead later on.

"There is one thing," he said, after I had read the agreement, "did Farnell tell you anything about the Rajah?"

"No, nothing special; why?" I asked with some surprise.

He then gave me certain information and concluded by saying, "Farnell ought to have told you in England. I only heard a few days ago that he had not done so, and I told him I should not allow you to sign any agreement without a full knowledge of all the more important and necessary details attached to your appointment."

"Thanks," I replied, "it is good of you to take so keen an interest on my behalf. I'll sign the agreement."

This was a definitely thoughtful act of Lightfoot's, and the measure of its thoughtfulness can best be judged by any man of long service in the East, where, probably owing to climatic conditions, indifference to the difficulties of others is so much more marked than it is at home.

I had not in any case come out all this way to a job, in all other ways most attractive, just to turn back at the first fence, so I signed myself, without more ado, into the service of Sri Sri Pusapatti (etc. etc. for two lines of the document), Rajah of Gurumpore.

CHAPTER IV

I PAY MY RESPECTS AT THE PALACE

TEN o'clock the next morning saw me at the Fort, by appointment, to pay my formal call on the Rajah.

I had had little time to dwell on Lightfoot's information, as I had been subsequently fully occupied.

Mrs Lightfoot had asked me to take pot-luck and dine with them, and during the course of the evening I was given the other side of the picture in which the Rajah was painted as cunning, dissolute and a spendthrift, who made Lightfoot's life a burden, and seemed to look on him merely as an inexhaustible money-box.

I gathered, further, that I was very lucky to be going right away out of such an atmosphere of petty plotting and back-biting; and, indeed, thus early, I began to realize my luck.

Lastly, I incurred the displeasure of my hostess by allowing the swaying punkah to disarrange her coiffure as she rose to lead the ladies from the table. I felt distinctly aggrieved at the rebuke, as it was my first experience of a punkah, and I had no idea that it was my duty to indulge in a tug-of-war with the punkah-coolie and probably bring him (or her) crashing from his sleepy perch on an up-ended orange-box.

To return to the palace. At this visit there was much more life and bustle, as the Rajah was in residence.

I was ushered, as before, to a seat in the verandah, where I was left to kick up my heels on a long-chair. Attendants squatted in the background, or drifted past, attempting to look as if they were about their lawful occasions.

10.10; 10.15; 10.20; 10.25. No Rajah. I tried to attract the attention of servant after servant. It was

not easy, as I had no Telugu and they no English, and they failed to "answer to 'Hi' or to any loud cry", but disappeared like rabbits through the chick-draped doorways.

At last I captured one, and said "Rajah" fiercely to denote impatience.

He looked pityingly at me, placed the palms of his hands together, and inclined his head against them.

Ever quick in the uptake, I gathered that the Rajah slept, so made signs indicative of one rousing a Rajah from sleep and said still more fiercely, "Rajah, tell, Mr Van Wart."

He shot away so purposefully that I was hopeful for a space, but I realized very soon that he, too, was but a broken reed.

By 10.45 I was really annoyed. The ways of the haughty potentate of the East were new and far from palatable to me, for I had not yet learned that "8 o'clock precisely" meant "anything up to midday."

I had waited for three-quarters of an hour; even a woman could not expect more, let alone a Rajah, so I stalked off in dudgeon to my carriage.

It worked (quite unintentionally on my part) like a miracle. Servants, grooms of the bedchamber as it were, and others obviously of higher rank, materialized from nowhere, stretching out imploring hands to me, beseeching me in Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, and in English to return, as the Rajah would be angry, so very angry, if he awoke and found they had failed to announce my arrival.

I remained adamant and was actually climbing the "staircase" of the carriage when one came rushing to say that the Rajah was here at last.

I allowed myself to be salaamed back to greet the Rajah as he emerged from one of the doorways.

"Sorry, Mr Van Wart," he began, "these stupid fellows did not tell me you had come."

Looking back in the light of experience, I believe he had known of my arrival from the moment I entered the Fort.

Many, though not all, of the Indian Princes attempt

to impress those at their beck and call by keeping them waiting just as long as they think the individual concerned will stand it.

It is a childish proceeding. They can impress in plenty of ways without that, and, so far as Europeans are concerned, this particular way may irritate, but it certainly does not impress.

Let us take, as an example, the case of the artist, officially sent out from England, at a fixed fee, to paint portraits of all the leading Rajput Princes for the hall of the Chiefs' College at Ajmer. He accepted the job expecting to be back in London in time for the season, when, as a rising artist, he might fairly look forward to sundry commissions for portraits. But he reckoned without his Princes. Two sittings or even one were all he asked, for their robes and jewels could be finished without the owners. Six months, instead of three, had passed, and all save one of the portraits were finished.

The Prince in question, one of the most cultured of them all, was so distinguished as to be one of the two Indian representatives at Versailles in 1919. He is to his guests the perfect and punctual host, but his dignity apparently demanded that he allow this luckless artist to come day after day, often actually by appointment, to sit waiting hour after weary hour, and finally to be told that "His Highness is too busy to see you to-day, but will see you at eleven to-morrow morning."

This incident occurred in the hills, where His Highness was not too busy to attend dinners, gymkhanas, or play polo and tennis. The poor man confided his troubles to me, and I gave my advice for what it was worth.

"You may be quite sure," said I, "that, if there is one portrait which His Highness intends to hang in that hall, it is his own. Write and say that you have been called home by the next boat, and see what happens."

He may have taken my advice, or he may not, but he got the necessary sittings without more ado. "And that," said John, "is that."

This is not an isolated case; such happenings are of daily occurrence in any State. But to return to the Rajah. He was not wearing gloves, so I was able to make

a careful inspection of his hands. They were unwholesome looking, puffy, with scaly backs and the nails suggested "something rotten in the state of Denmark." There was a likelihood, it was said, that he would soon lose a little finger; but there was nothing, so far as I could see, to indicate this, and indeed it never happened.

I have often wondered since why everyone took such a distressing malady so calmly. Possibly the name leper conjures up such ghastly pictures that it seemed impossible to associate it with one who was little more than unprepossessing in appearance, and did not seem to differ essentially from his fellows.

Certain it is that, although his leprosy was a matter of common talk, people never seemed to treat him any differently on that account, and, for my own part, I very soon ceased to think about it, save for an instinctive disinclination to touch him, and an occasional feeling of pity for one so afflicted.

He was the more to be pitied in that his mental outlook was affected by it. Insignificant and almost boorish in his ways, possessing little to attract and much to repel; in public he assumed an attitude of pathetic pomposity and persisted in thrusting himself forward, in season and out of season, in such a way as to make himself either a nuisance or a laughing-stock.

H.E. the Governor of Madras once told me, when we were discussing the Rajah's eccentric behaviour, that he had known another case of an Indian suffering from leprosy who had also made himself conspicuous in the same way, and that it was probably a phase of the disease.

In the Rajah's case it was a pity, because he always appeared at his worst in public.

In private he was, at that time, much more likeable. He was generous, responsive to kindness and fond of his children, particularly my ward, to whom he was a kind father, anxious to do his best; although his wife generally got the credit for this. Later, unfortunately, he went utterly to pieces and became impossible, but he had much to contend with and hardly a real friend in the world.

But all this time we have been sitting, he and I, on the verandah carrying on a conversation in jerks which was his usual method.

He chewed the end of his ideas, so to speak, and allowed himself long periods for rumination. At intervals he would bark out an order, which one of his retinue hastened to carry out obsequiously. He might have given several of the orders at once, but preferred apparently to keep the servants on the move.

He needed a handkerchief, then cigarettes, cheroots, matches, one after the other; then a fly attacked him, and he summoned two attendants, who stood behind our chairs and slowly waved large palm-leaf fans behind us, which did little save blow out the match whenever I tried to light my cheroot.

There had been no lack of exciting happenings since my arrival in India, and to-day was to increase the number by two. The Rajah was responsible for the first. He suddenly remarked in a casual way, "Will you come at four this afternoon? My wife would like to see you. She wishes to talk with you about the boy."

This was a surprise indeed. It had never occurred to me that I should be allowed to see the wife of a high-caste Hindu. The custom of centuries is very strict on this point.

Even though the last twenty years have seen a corner of the veil of Purdah lifted, it is only a corner after all, and the ladies of the Zenana themselves are, for the most part, reluctant to emerge from their seclusion, where they are secure from all unwelcome visitors, and where they exercise more influence than they believe would be theirs in the hurly-burly of the outer-world.

CHAPTER V

I VISIT THE RAJAH'S ZENANA AND IMPERSONATE A GOVERNOR

As I drove that afternoon along the broad, red road with hedges of untidy cactus and prickly pear; as I watched a coolie, monkey-like, ascend a tall palm beneath whose tufted top was tied his gourd of toddy, I had visions of lofty chambers, dimly lighted, cloyingly perfumed, wherein languorous beauties lay on luxurious cushions. Where all was sensuous appeal.

Dreaming thus, I was conducted across the sunny, marble court, through the far gateway into an unpretentious stone-paved space, leading to another of the great curtains screening a smaller gateway.

Heads draped in filmy saris peeped round the curtain, which was drawn a little to one side as I stepped across the threshold of the Zenana.

My first feeling was one of disillusionment. All my visions vanished at the prosaic picture presented. I saw a small courtyard some thirty yards by ten, with low, one-storeyed, flat-roofed rooms on two sides and at the farther end, and a high, white-washed wall at the entrance end.

There was a water-tap against this wall at which women servants filled the brass pots and lotas. These they carried away on their heads with graceful floating gait, leaving the tap to run with that typically Indian waste of their most valuable possession.

Smiling handmaidens led me along a verandah, with doors at intervals leading into bare, dark rooms with low charpoys covered only with rezai (thin mattress), sheet and pillow.

There were more penny-in-the-slot-machines and occasional banana-skins and mango-stones relieved the monotony of the stone floor.

Actually I could see very few people, but I was conscious of eyes everywhere and stealthy whisperings.

At the end of the verandah were three or four shallow steps, and at the top a wide verandah, carpeted, furnished with portions of one of Mr Maple's, or Mr Lazarus of Calcutta's, best drawing-room suites.

It was all very ordinary and unromantic.

I found the Rani seated on an ornate sofa with two handmaidens standing behind her.

As she rose to greet me she proved to be short and of a pleasing plumpness. She was of a fair brown complexion, large-eyed, and from her nose hung one large pearl which bobbed and waggled in a fascinating manner as she talked.

She was draped from head to foot in a sari of finest silk, through the back of which showed a long, black plait of hair in which flowers were twined. Beneath the sari she wore a tight-fitting bodice of white silk which descended a little below her breasts. The sari discreetly veiled the rest, save her feet, which were encased in high, patent-leather boots, round one of which was clasped a massive anklet of gold.

In English, much better than any the Rajah could produce, she bade me welcome, and it did not take me long to discover where the brains of the establishment were to be found. She was full of life, full of questions, and full of instructions about the management and health of her son.

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"Yes, Rani,"—I felt safe in risking this mode of address—"One sister."

And so on through a string of questions dictated by a mixture of curiosity and politeness.

"I was very anxious to see you," she continued, "as there is much that I wish to say about my son. I am putting him in your hands. I want you to train him to become a good man. If you will do this your name will always be great in Gurumpore. My son after he had met

you said, 'He is a very good man,' and I know he will be safe with you."

With traditional English modesty I merely murmured that she might rely on me to do my best, but inwardly I felt deeply sensible of the trust that was being placed in me, and was stirred to the depths.

"I am sending good men with him; all but one came with me from my home when I was married. I was only twelve then." (She was only twenty whilst we were talking, and the mother of three children!) "My son is too thin, skinny; he must grow strong and fat," and the Rani launched into details of how many seers of this and how many seers of goat's milk he should consume daily, until I had to say that she had better give me a list, as I could not possibly remember half of them.

"Once every fifteen days he must take castor oil, or as often as he does not have regular motions."

Indians are happily untrammelled by feelings of mock modesty, and, unless Westernised, discuss topics of which we fight shy with as little embarrassment as they eructate when nature dictates.

"You will please sleep in his room always; it is very important that you should do this."

A certain hint of unspeakable happenings should I fail to do so, left me uncertain as to whether any evil-minded folk had designs on the little Rajkumar, or whether an over-anxious mother was picturing imaginary dangers.

I have never been clear about it, but it proved one of the least attractive of my duties; for the anxious mother decreed that the Rajkumar's bed should be in the middle of the room with a faithful retainer sleeping on the floor on every side, so that, if he chanced to roll out of bed, he could at least fall softly. The result was a nasal orchestra capable of banishing sleep, if not of waking the dead.

Fortunately for all concerned there need never be any danger, in India, of interviews too long drawn-out.

When the visit has lasted long enough it is the privilege of him, or her, whose rank is the more exalted,

to bring it to a tactful conclusion with, "I must not detain you any longer," or "I must be taking my leave;" and so, in this case, I was saved from the danger of overstaying my welcome by the Rani herself bringing the interview to a close.

After shaking hands she turned to one of the handmaidens and took something from her. I could not see what it was, nor did I know what was expected of me, but some lucky instinct impelled me to bend my head, over which the Rani placed a long chain of gold tinsel.

So I was garlanded for the first time, and drove back thus adorned feeling a bit of a fool, but all the same rather proud of myself. And so indeed I might be, for such garlands are reserved only for the great from the great on great occasions, necklaces of scented flowers sufficing for ordinary purposes. The most lovely garland I ever saw, fashioned of white camphor balls in triple rows interlaced with tinsel flowers, was sent three years later for the Rajkumar to present to the Queen when she visited the Mayo College, Ajmer. But, alas! all presentations were taboo, and I benefited at Her Majesty's expense.

So much for my first surprise that day. The second was awaiting me when I returned to Farnell's bungalow.

He had practically recovered and had just returned from an interview with the Rajah, the purport of which he conveyed to me abruptly enough.

"The Rajah," he said, "is giving a lunch to about a hundred people, both Indians and Europeans, with the Governor as chief guest. It takes place the day after to-morrow at Waltair, about two hours from here by train. As I am not feeling very fit I suggested that you should run it instead of me, so the Rajah wants you to go there to-morrow and make all the necessary arrangements."

Without more ado he gave me a rough, in fact a very rough idea, of what the necessary arrangements were, and left me to work out my own salvation.

When I went through my little stock of knowledge on my verandah, for the joint benefit of myself and an attentive lizard, my mathematical mind viewed with

dissatisfaction the haphazard nature of the arrangements, or lack thereof. There appeared to be altogether too much of the "It'll be all right on the night" for my liking.

The position was this. Two days hence the Rajah, who was an enthusiastic though unorthodox Freemason, was giving a Masonic lunch to about a hundred guests, with the Governor, virtual ruler of about one fourth of India, as the guest of honour.

The luncheon was to be held fifty miles away. The caterer was just starting on his own account, and was expected, therefore, to be on his mettle; he would, however, also be inexperienced. He and his supplies were coming from Madras, over twelve hours by train; probably on the morning of the lunch, possibly the day before. There was only the ordinary bazaar, no real shops as we know them, on which to rely in case of accidents.

About half the Indian guests would require food of which I had never even heard, and prepared by special cooks.

I knew that the Masonic Hall was the scene of action, but had no idea of the size or shape of the luncheon room; and, finally, until I arrived at Waltair, the day before the fair—I had no list of guests—it would be impossible to make out the table-plan, a ticklish task at the best of times.

I was not even to have the help of an experienced man from the Rajah's establishment, but was left to my own devices.

All I started out with was the list for checking of wines and stores ordered, and a glad and adventuring heart.

The next day, at Waltair, a delightful spot on the sea, the Collector, the big man of the district, gave me list of the European guests, also some invaluable hints and Mr M. R. Ry Venkatarachariar Pillai, or words to that effect, supplied the Indian list. Followed an hour or two at the Club, after which I walked the short distance, after dark, without a lantern, from it to my little two-roomed hotel, and just after being warned to beware of snakes. In consequence, I saw a snake in every

shadow, and no Russian dancer could have pirouetted more nimbly to avoid them.

The night also was not without its experience, for a jackal elected to try the empty bed by the side of mine, and, as it rushed away from my shooing, scared a servant sleeping on the floor outside the open door.

The fateful morning was one of alarums and excursions.

The caterer was nervous and fearful lest the mail-train should not bring the ice. Swarms of Indian Freemasons dogged my footsteps. They all seemed to be Past-Deputy-Grand-Masters or personages of high degree, and, as such, claimed the right of sitting next to His Excellency.

I was firm but, I hope, tactful. My plan had been carefully prepared and could not be altered, although, at the last minute, a spirited attempt was made to change all the name-cards while I was at the station assisting to receive the Governor.

I admired the way in which His Excellency's carriage stopped in the exact centre of the red carpet (the deviation of a foot brings shame to the heart of the engine-driver). The Rajah presented me in due course, and the Governor with his customary thoughtfulness, after saying he had heard much of me and was looking forward to a talk later on, released me from further attendance that I might get back to my duties.

I was, thus, the first to emerge from the station. The Rajah had provided me with a ceremonial carriage

finger-bowl flying across the table during the recital. Let me tell you, there are more unpleasant things in life than the plaudits of a multitude, however undeserved, so I had no complaints either.

The luncheon passed off as all well-organized functions should.

The ice had come; all the Deputy-Past-Grand-Masters bore up nobly at being excluded from the coveted places.

One little drop of bitterness there was, it is true. I was watching with the greatest interest my vis-à-vis, a portly gentleman consuming Indian food, which he popped into his capacious mouth with incredible speed and in unbelievable quantities. My meditations were interrupted by a perspiring caterer, livid with fright, who gasped into my ear:

"Sir, His Excellency has asked for hock, and there is no hock. What is to do, sir?"

"Present my compliments to His Excellency," I said, "and ask him to choose something else."

Poor Ramaswami looked appealingly at me, and very reluctantly nerved himself for the ordeal.

Luckily His Excellency was good enough to be content with whisky and soda, and Ramaswami breathed again.

After that all went well. The photographer arrived, and we were taken by what the Rajah was pleased to call "smash-light". The khitmatgars made hay while I was escorting the Governor to his carriage, for they disposed of all the opened bottles of wine and spirits as well as a handsome supply of cigars and cigarettes. So they also went their ways of rejoicing, after handing over, with a conscious air of virtue, two battered cigars, half a dozen cigarettes and half a peg of whisky.

"More? No, master, all done finish."

I accompanied the Rajah, after dinner, to a reception in the Collector's garden. It was a pretty scene with fairy lights sprinkled artistically over tree and bush. The Rajah, resplendent in blue brocade, with a necklace of emeralds the size of marbles, was in the seventh heaven.

His luncheon had been a success, and he was repeatedly

complimented on his new toy, his band glorious in white and gold, which he had lent for the occasion.

He never left the Governor's side all the evening. He took no part in the conversation and made no pretence of interest in it. He merely called attention to himself at intervals by proffering unwanted cigarettes from a bejewelled case of gold. For the rest, he basked in reflected glory and was content.

CHAPTER VI

ZENANA DIVERSIONS

On our return to Gurumpore I found myself in high favour at the palace.

The Rajah was delighted to have had the honour, for the first time, of playing host to the Governor, and gave me undue credit for my share of the proceedings. Moreover, His Excellency, in addition to treating me with marked kindness, had, it appeared, spoken appreciatively of me to the Rajah and everybody had gone out of their way to be more than usually pleasant.

The Rajah was impressed, and showed it. The day after our return, the little Rajkumar and I were together when he appeared and invited me to take tea with him in the Zenana.

We made a quaint procession. The Rajkumar under his purple and gold umbrella followed by two attendants, the Rajah under a similar one, as big as a garden-umbrella, with six minions, and myself devoid of any trappings.

I dropped back a pace or two, the better to enjoy the nodding of the two canopies. Had I, by far the tallest of the party, only possessed a third umbrella of proportionate size, we should have been strongly reminiscent of "The Three Bears".

There was a great flutter in the dove-cot on our arrival, befitting the entry of its lord and master.

While we were sitting at tea, quite English fashion, there came squeals and scuffles from a room nearby, and the two younger children, whom I had not yet seen, dashed up to their father's knee, where they sought sanctuary from a couple of dishevelled women who were in hot pursuit.

The little girl of five had short hair, due to a serious

illness, and was dressed in white shirt and loose pyjama-trousers; the boy, two years her junior, had long hair, black of course, and was tastefully clad in an exiguous shirt barely covering his rotund tummy, and a pair of embroidered slippers.

Both wore round, pill-box caps of velvet patterned with gold. Had they been dressed as convention demands I should have taken the girl for the boy, and vice versa.

They were an engaging couple, and I was sorry when they were removed to permit of our playing Bridge in tranquil surroundings.

Our fourth was one Punditji, the Rajah's confidential secretary and the only Indian, excepting near relations or servants from the Rani's home, who was allowed access to the Zenana, and then only in attendance on the Rajah.

Bridge with the Rajah and Rani was a fascinating entertainment. Rules and conventions went by the board.

The Rani, who was my partner, had certain cards which she considered lucky, and made these trumps accordingly, regardless of the remaining cards in her hand. It was impossible to fathom her play, because it had neither rhyme nor reason.

The Rajah and his partner got on better, until the Rani suddenly called out, "Nai, Huzur, nai" (Huzur was her way of addressing the Rajah); "Mr Van Wart, he is cheating", and began to giggle.

The Rajah giggled too, so did Punditji. I missed the point of the joke, but, as everyone else was giggling, I followed suit.

"What is it?" said the Rajah at last. "Cheating? No, I only ask Punditji for this," pointing to his silver box of betel at his elbow; and they all began to giggle again.

The Rani explained for my benefit.

The Rajah had a code by which he was able to regulate his partner's choice of suits.

It was very simple. Hearts in Hindi is pán, which also means betel; so a request for the betel-box meant "lead a heart".

"Int" is diamond; the Rajah wore a diamond ear-ring!

"Chiriya" is clubs and also a bird; there were plenty of birds about.

"Hukum" is spades or an order; "I order you to play quickly" the Rajah would playfully remark.

"King and Queen" were "Rajah and Rani," which also fitted in very naturally.

We were not playing for money, and the Rajah was so childishly pleased with his artless cunning that it seemed a pity to interfere. Indeed, nobody did, unless one of the Rani's lucky cards was in danger, when she could endure no longer, and a friendly wrangle ensued.

The four or five days before our departure for Ajmer passed very quickly. The little retinue of servants to accompany the Rajkumar, all selected by the Rani, were paraded before me. Din Band, who was never to leave him; Badri, a cheerful rascal in charge of the wardrobe; Kamta, the high-caste cook, a pleasant youth whose clothes in public were of the dingiest, but who was usually clad only in a loin-cloth; and a fine old bearded coachman, Daraz Khan.

Others we collected in hordes at Ajmer, but these were the little band of the faithful.

And, whatever their shortcomings, they were faithful as retainers were faithful in the days of our ancestors. I believe that every one of them would have given his life, if need be, for that small boy.

And the pay of these faithful retainers!

It will scarcely be credited, but the coachman drew Rs. 25 a month, plus Rs. 5 batta (allowance away from headquarters), equal at that time to £2. The others were given Rs. 8, Rs. 6, Rs. 4 a month respectively, with Rs. 2 each batta; so the best of them got 13/4d. a month!

They certainly got such food as the Rajkumar did not eat, and the cook could hardly be blamed therefore for overestimating his appetite.

In the course of these few days I made the acquaintance of the leading Indian officials in the Rajah's service, as well as the rest of the tiny British community, and, from one source or another, was supplied with a mass of local gossip and scandal which I resolved to take with a grain of salt and digest at leisure.

There was unanimity on one point. The Rajah's catholic tastes for the women. Unlike many Hindus he had but one wife, and this was not surprising.

She had fulfilled at once the duty of every Indian wife by presenting her husband with a son and heir. She was in addition attractive, clever and amusing.

None the less, the Rajah sought distraction elsewhere, and was never without at least one recognized favourite, for whom a separate and costly establishment was maintained.

The Rani was evidently a believer in the "safety in numbers" theory, and ignored the Rajah's lapses from grace until matters became more serious, for one lady threatened to oust the rest, and made unprecedented demands on the Rajah's purse.

It is hardly likely that the Rani's affections were very deep. The Rajah was no Adonis, and lacked the qualities which attract, but "spretae injuria formae", coupled with a natural desire to divert to herself money which was being put to base uses, seemed to have roused her—if one might judge by the many rumours which floated about—to very drastic action. Rumour also seems to have pointed to a very reliable intelligence department possessed by the siren in question and in consequence a continued enjoyment of her precarious position.

One could well understand the Rani's indignation. It was not uncommon for the rajah to turn a deaf ear to her requests for funds which were being spent with a lavish hand on a far less desirable object.

A certain amount she was prepared to put up with in silence; but there were limits, and her indignation was fanned by her attendants, who championed her cause wholeheartedly.

After hearing this little lady's cultured talk on everyday topics, on the upbringing of children and the like, it was difficult to credit her with the instincts of a savage. But one day I saw her fly into a sudden rage with one of her women. Her eyes rolled, as the novelists have it, "in a fine frenzy," and after that I would have believed her capable of anything.

The breath of scandal had not passed her by, for that matter, but be that as it may, it was not difficult to see that more goes on in the Zenana than is broadcast abroad, and that the women of that particular one, leaving the Rani out of the question, were not given to letting opportunities slip.

CHAPTER VII

THE RAJAH TRAVELS

At last came the day, an auspicious one of course, for our journey. The astrologers and pundits went through their rites at the palace and the great procession to the station began.

For the last two days there had been perpetual "alarums and excursions" in the palace precincts; but when I saw the mountains of luggage it was amply accounted for.

The Rajah was to be away less than a fortnight, but provision appeared to have made been for an absence of six months at least.

Unsightly green or yellow tin boxes galore, suit-cases, rolls of bedding in coloured rezais (quilts), pots and pans, braziers, silver-legged beds, iron-bound chests full of rupees guarded by slatternly sepoys of the Rajah's miniature army (200 on the pay-list, 100 on parade), and huge, shapeless bundles tied up in knotted sheets, which gave a cheap look to the neatest luggage, and without which the servants of the Rajah or Rajkumar were unable to travel. With subsequent journeys, plan I never so carefully, but at the last moment one of these disgusting bundles invariably appeared to spoil the whole effect.

It was but a mile from the palace to the station, and the train was not due until 14.30, but by ten o'clock the retinue was under way.

First came a long string of bullock-carts with arched plaited tops, which are detached to form a tent at night. These are lighter than the carts of the north, and their bullocks trotted with a heartening tinkle of cow-bells. Then came the box-like jutkas, two-wheeled like the carts, and rattling their passengers unmercifully.

Later, followed a number of moth-eaten Victorias, drawn by Rosinante's descendants. In front of the raised hoods were fastened dingy white or pink sheets, behind which the purdah women were hidden, more or less, from the vulgar gaze.

Such glimpses as one obtained were usually disappointing The lord and master takes no chances; for if a gay Lothario takes advantage of the flapping cloth, the eye which meets his bold glance usually belongs but to a coy lady of mature and withered charms.

The Rani, poor lady, fared worst of all.

For reasons unknown the Rajah had despatched her to the station more than two hours before the train arrived.

Their reserved carriage was ready in a siding and locked; but the keeper of the key had vanished to his roti-khana (lit: food. A lengthy period at midday when all self-respecting servants vanish and cannot be materialized).

So I found her when the train arrived. She had been sitting for two solid hours in a closed horse-carriage on the uncovered platform and exposed to the blasting midday sun. The only ventilation possible was through venetians which could only be opened slightly, lest prying eyes might see within.

Inside were the Rani, three children, two Eurasian (Anglo-Indian it is now!) nurses, and two of the Rani's women.

We talked through the slits.

"Oh! Mr Van Wart, it is awful in here; and now this fellow has been sick on his stomach." (This was the youngest boy.)

What the poor things had done to deserve this Black Hole, Heaven knows. Doubtless the Rajah had been annoyed; he had chosen this way of asserting his authority, and "theirs not to make reply."

I brought the glad tidings that their compartment was ready at last, and watched with interest the transhipping of the Rani.

Four attendants crowded round her carriage door. Each carried a tall pole of massive silver; to the poles,

screens of thick, red cloth were attached, and the whole contraption was manœuvred into position.

The Rani descended into this cage, it was closed round her, and the bearers shuffled across the platform to the carriage, where, after similar manœuvres, she was entrained unseen.

From her point of view, or rather lack of it, it must have been uncomfortable enough, but the relief at getting under a fan in a spacious compartment must have been immense.

Even there it was hot enough with the venetians closed until the train got under way, but the heat was mitigated by an enormous block of ice on which the fan played, so wafting cool air until the block itself melted into a grimy puddle on the linoleum floor.

The Rajah, for his part, had no intention of letting his departure pass unnoticed.

The train waited twenty minutes at Gurumpore. As soon as it arrived a sowar dashed post-haste from the station to tell the Rajah, who delayed his departure from the palace until the last possible moment.

He timed his arrival there with a skill born of long practice, and strolled nonchalantly onto the platform just as the train began to move.

In an instant the Rajah became the centre of a scrum of station staff and his own attendants. He was half-carried, half-hustled across the platform, and the last I saw of him, from the window of my compartment, was two twinkling, white-clad, patent-leather shod legs as he disappeared head first through the door like harlequin in a pantomime.

Undignified! What of it? He had kept the mail waiting for five minutes.

We continued to lose time during the first stages to Calcutta, until, at one station, the Rajah informed the guard that Rs. 50 would be his if the train was punctual at Calcutta next morning.

"I are to be there punctually," said the Rajah, to whom three hours either way would have made no difference at all.

We were punctual to the minute, thanks to the guard

and the engine driver, who knew their Rajah, and made quite a nice little sum out of his frequent journeys.

At Calcutta we had the whole day in which to kick up our heels I made for an hotel; the Rajah and Co. went off to his Calcutta residence with a portion of his retinue, leaving some thirty or more at the station in charge of the luggage.

Let nobody imagine that this was any hardship for them. The lower orders in India do not consider they have had their money's worth on a journey unless they have passed some hours in or about the station.

They group themselves on the ground surrounded by their goods and chattels. They pass the time in silent contemplation and sleep. They purchase puri (fried cakes) and mithai (sweetmeats) from fly-covered trays, and share the scraps with unwholesome pariah dogs and impudent crows. The men, from time to time, take their lotas to the Hindu or Mahomedan water-taps as the case may be, strip to a loin-cloth, bathe and wash their clothes. To drink, they cup the right hand below the tap to divert a portion of the stream into their thirsty mouths, utterly regardless of the waste of the precious fluid.

The women have usually at least one baby from whose eyes the hordes of insistent flies need driving every minute. In moments of relaxation they explore monkey-fashion the head of a female relative.

We started off again during the evening for two more nights and a day in the train. In the morning the little Rajkumar joined me in my compartment, with two servants to squat on the floor and see that he neither fell off the seat nor out of the window.

Later on, after an excited conversation with Din Band, he turned to me.

"Master" (this mode of address is a mark of deep respect, but it always grated on my English ears, and I got him to drop it as soon as I could), "soon we shall go across Gangaji" (the sacred Ganges), "and I must throw some rupees for puja (worship)."

"Why?" I said rather stupidly.

"It is our custom," he replied gravely, "it is not good if we do not give rupees."

I looked inquiringly at Din Band, who was evidently getting the drift of our conversation; he wagged his head with that curious sideways motion which means "Yes" in India.

"Well, how many must you give?" I held the purse and was interested.

"I do not know." A pause. "One hundred, I think so."

I looked at Din Band again. He smiled and held up ten fingers.

The Rajkumar looked rather aghast at the ruthless cutting down of his budget, but the worthy Din Band stepped into the breach and explained matters satisfactorily.

"What are you going to do with them?" I asked.

"I shall show you. Like this I shall take one rupee, and I shall throw it; so far I shall throw; one kos (two miles), I think so."

A little later we came to the great bridge which spans the Ganges, and the small boy, kneeling at the window with all three of us hanging on to him, hurled his rupees.

Most of them hit the girders of the bridge and fell on the permanent way, a future godsend to some coolie. With one throw he knocked off Badri's turban and the rupee rolled under the seat, but Gangaji, or possibly a mugger (crocodile), got a couple. Gangaji had been propitiated, and my little charge curled up contentedly on the seat and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

AJMER. WE BARGAIN FOR A HOUSE

It was about eight in the morning, and the sun had not dispersed the fleecy cloud of smoke above the city, when we reached Ajmer. There was a decided nip in the air such as the Rajah's people had never experienced in the plains, and a sorry crowd it made of them.

Three days before they had started off resplendent in white garments fresh from the dhobi (the arch-fiend who under the name of washerman batters clothes to shreds), with gay turbans newly dyed; a motley crew indeed, but making a brave show in their cheap finery.

But now they were a woebegone collection, clustering in a forlorn group like moulting fowls, with their heads tied up in dirty clouts, their snowy garments crumpled and dirty, and their teeth chattering in a merry chorus.

The Rajah, through the kind offices of a relative, had collected a house for his brief stay, and a local magnate had placed carriages at his disposal; so off they went, leaving Farnell and me with quarters yet to find.

Truly Farnell was a casual beggar. Knowing the place not at all, he had assured me that there would be a hotel where we could stay until the Rajah found a suitable house for the Rajkumar and me.

To do him justice there was one; just one, and a filthy hole it was. We had one good look and then fled the dak-bungalow, only to find it full.

We then asked at the station. There were some good rooms there, but all full up. Ajmer it appeared was a big railway centre; their annual volunteer week was on, and rooms were not to be had.

"The Hotel? Oh yes. I expect you could get a bed there, but I don't think you'd care about it."

We did not, but it was Hobson's choice.

There were two rooms, one fair-sized and a shade less dirty than the other, which was not fit for an unclean dog.

We tossed for choice and I won, but Farnell's mouth began to droop at the corners, and he murmured something about " A touch of my old complaint." So I took the dog-hole.

It was for one night only, and the rooms were bad, but the food was worse.

One meal was enough for Farnell. He wired instructions to his wife, who dutifully replied with a summons on urgent business. Neither did he stand upon the order of his going, but went next morning, leaving me to take the house, furnish it, collect servants and settle in.

The Rajah was still there, it is true, but his name was the only assistance I was likely to get from him.

Still, it was a good breaking in for me, and there was nothing to grumble about so far as I was concerned. At the same time, I saw to it that no time was lost in settling the question of a house for us.

The courteous Principal of the Mayo College, on whom we called, suggested that the Rajah should build a Gurumpore House in the picturesque grounds of the College. It was a tempting suggestion for, apart from the present convenience of such an arrangement, the College was ready to buy back the house for its own use when the Rajah had finished with it, whilst preserving the name as a permanent memorial to the greatness of Gurumpore.

The Rajah, very anxious to impress, was obviously flattered, but the state of his purse at the moment forced him to be content with a promise to think it over ; meanwhile a temporary house must be found.

Incidentally, he never seriously contemplated building, though I believe the spirit of emulation would have driven him to it had he known that, within a few months, Kashmir, Panna and other wealthy states were going to do so. (Imagine the playing-fields of Eton fringed with ducal mansions !)

House-agents there were not, but it was easy enough to get all the information we wanted. The Rajah had but to say " Hukum hai " (it is an order), and in an hour or two his intelligence department provided all the necessary information.

Although Ajmer, with a population of over 80,000, was the headquarters of the A.G.G. (Agent to the Governor General) for Rajputana during half the year, was an important railway centre, and had an Indian regiment permanently stationed there, it possessed only some fifty or sixty bungalows. Of these two were allotted to the Commissioner and Assistant-Commissioner, seven or eight to the officers of the regiment and nearly all the rest to the railway officials.

Our choice was limited to three, the only vacant ones, and a brief inspection eliminated two.

It only remained to settle terms, which was done the same afternoon.

A carpet had been spread in the courtyard of the Rajah's temporary domicile and chairs brought out.

The Rajah and I were seated, with three or four of his officials standing in the background, when the tall gates of painted sheet-iron were flung aside; a carriage and pair clattered in, and from it descended our prospective landlord, his son and a secretary.

The old man, white-haired and white-moustached, was one of the two great Seths (bankers) and well known to all the states of Rajputana, for many an embarrassed ruler had he financed.

He and his son, a man well on in the thirties, waddled towards us like a couple of portly ducks, and looking all the plumper because of their small rakish turbans and the large quilted coats (chogas or phulgars) which loosely wrapped them round—diagonally as it were—I am no fashion expert.

When they reached the edge of the carpet they kicked off their slippers and advanced, bowing respectfully to the Rajah. We then shook hands and exchanged the customary greetings.

" Apka misaj accha hai ? " (Is your health good ?)

I failed in my part, not knowing what it meant or

what the correct answer was, but I smiled very nicely and inclined my head gracefully in lieu of words.

Then the usual Oriental haggle began. It was carried on in Hindi by the old Seth and probably the toughest nut among the Gurumpore folk.

As the Rajah required a Telugu version of the whole conversation, the negotiations were more than ordinarily protracted.

I rather admired him. He maintained an air of complete aloofness for the most part, but, every now and then, would emerge like the head of a tortoise after its winter sleep. When the oracle had spoken he withdrew again into his shell for a space and the wrangle was renewed.

Not having the vaguest idea of what was being said, I amused myself as best I could. The old man, despite his miscellaneous collection of assorted teeth, had something distinctly likeable about him. Further acquaintance strengthened this impression. He did many a kindness. Did anyone worthy of consideration in his eyes visit Ajmer, the worthy man hastened to place a carriage at his disposal. To such an extent was this done that people actually used to ask for it as a right. Rather a sorry abuse of generosity. When anyone of note departed, the Seth was at the station to garland him.

His feet intrigued me. As the argument waxed he was eloquent with his hands, but positively loquacious with his feet, for he clutched the legs of the chair with prehensile toes in moments of excitement.

His son had an overdose of tongue which seemed to double over, showing the middle portion instead of the tip. I wanted to see what would happen when he spoke, but he failed to gratify me. He, like the Rajah, sat in a trance, eyeing a large hole in the toe of his right sock.

The argument rose to a frenzied pitch on both sides until it seemed that we must look elsewhere for a house. Then, suddenly, the Seth wagged his head vigorously
id " Accha ". After which there was a dead calm,
nd, to my surprise, that everything had been
e satisfaction of both parties.

The next day was a busy one.

A bearer had been found for me at Gurumpore. He looked an arrant knave and the lock of a new trunk containing my petty cash mysteriously went wrong in my dressing-room. I dismissed him forthwith, though this did not deter him from asking for a chit eulogizing his work during a week of service!

After that incident I was a thing of no account, a servantless man, helpless as a cork in a current, until the kindly wife of the College Principal set her khansamah to work, and the good man sent a bearer and a cook, Mahomedans both, to wait on me after breakfast.

Their chits were good; Commissioners, Colonels and the like wrote in honeyed terms of them, so, being unable to question them in the vernacular, I took them on trust. They had a few odd words of English, but could understand more when they wished, so we were able to come to terms.

Khuda Bux was engaged as head-servant, bearer and khansamah combined at Rs. 16/- a month (think of that in these days of post-war pay!), and the cook at Rs. 18/-.

Poor Khuda Bux, a splendid servant of the old, almost extinct type. He was with me until he died in the ghastly influenza epidemic of 1918. My pay rose annually, so did his. When a stroke of good fortune sent mine soaring to unexpected heights, his automatically did the same. After sampling and approving of my service he withdrew his three sons, one by one, from other posts until the entire male portion of his family was in my employ, although it was quite a while before it was broken to me that two of them were related to him in any way.

The youngest, a limb of Satan, Wazir by name, was employed as cook's mate. Every six weeks or so would come a snarling and wailing from the servants' quarters, and peering discreetly through a chink I saw an infuriated Khuda Bux cuffing and kicking his luckless progeny. The next morning, when respectfully receiving the orders for the day, he would remark gravely, "Cook's mate teek nai hai; dusra mangta." (Cook's mate no good; another wanting.)

I then aired one of my earliest phrases, without which no sojourner in India is equipped, "Bandobast karo", meaning "make arrangements", and the next day saw a new cook's mate at work.

After a week or two Wazir would make his peace. Then the same procedure, without the bodily violence, would occur; the substitute would depart and, the next morning, a smiling Wazir was scamping his duties as of yore.

But those days were all still to come. For the time being I had collected a bearer and a cook who would prepare my dinner and bed at the new bungalow, and who would come into residence in the quarters there on the morrow.

This was a huge relief, so I graciously permitted them to salaam themselves from my presence and set about my next task, that of securing a bed for Khuda Bux to prepare for me.

CHAPTER IX

A NIGHT ATTACK

I HAD a house; I had a servant; only a bed was needed, and I could bid farewell to my over-populated quarters at the hotel.

It was but a stone's throw to that universal provider Allarakha, but I was disappointed at first sight of his emporium, for I had yet to learn of Indian shops that many a treasure lies hid beneath a rough exterior.

The wooden front was thick with dust and the interior looked dark and gloomy; but the bed was there and the bath-tub was there, so what cared I for all the world beside.

I was there for a long time, and after arranging for the immediate (immediate, in India!) despatch of what was wanted for the night, I dived into dusty godowns in search of furniture, inspected dhurries for the floors, purchased glass and crockery, and, in fact, made a good job of the furnishing.

This occupied me until tiffin, after which I visited the Rajah to report progress, collected my kit, left the shebeen never, I am glad to say, again to cross its portals, and entered into possession of our new home.

It was an imposing, two-storeyed bungalow, its dazzling whiteness relieved by a large jasmine which spread over a portion of the front verandah, where scores of bulbuls held a vociferous, five-minute prayer-meeting every evening.

On one side, a shade too near perhaps, was a long row of servants quarters; on the other a two-roomed annexe with quarters to match, and stabling for six horses, which was the main reason for our taking the bungalow. In front was a wide chabutra (terrace), excellent both

for dining and sleeping in the hot weather, and a garden with a hard tennis-court. A long drive led to the main road, and there was another gate at the back which led past a large stretch of open ground to a little frequented side-road.

Though built originally for Indian occupation, and recently used by a young prince and his mother, it was equally well adapted to European requirements and therefore answered our purpose admirably.

The cook was busy in the kitchen, and Khuda Bux was in attendance, but, save for my luggage and sundry lizards, the bungalow was empty, and there was nothing to sit on, which was all right for Khuda Bux, but not for me. So much for friend Allarakha's, "I sending now at once, Sahib," six hours ago.

At last I drove off to investigate.

Half-way I met a string of coolies bearing on their heads my bed, table, bath-tub, commode, and a complete toilet set. There was nothing to connect the hideous procession with me, but I felt dreadfully embarrassed. One never travels without bedding in India, so Khuda Bux was not long in getting a bedroom and its attendant bathroom ready for the night, and a little later I sat down to a better meal than I had eaten for several days.

When Allah Bux, the cook, had procured his pots and pans, or how he had evolved this excellent repast, I never troubled to ask. An Indian cook is seldom daunted, and has a happy knack of rising uncomplainingly to the most impossible situations. A trifle such as this was nothing to him, and I thankfully did justice to the menu of soup, "si-dis", "sickin", puddin, anchovy eggs, as Khuda Bux had it.

The two worthy fellows then departed for the night to their homes in the city, leaving me to pass the evening pleasantly enough over a book.

Bedtime came, and I started to undress, when, quite suddenly I became conscious of being alone, very much alone, in a silent house. There were no bells, and none to answer if there had been.

The humble sweeper in his isolated quarters two hundred yards away was the nearest human being.

Everything was very still and—yes, I remembered old Allarakha had said, "Many dacoities in that part, Sahib."

I had taken no notice of his warning then, but it all came back to me now. Dacoits. Miscreants who would cheerfully cut your throat for ten rupees, or, equally, for nothing if you had not got the ten rupees.

This was ridiculous. I pulled myself together, blew out the oil-lamp and got into bed.

Into bed, yes; but sleep was far from me. I felt very small and longed for someone or something to talk to; anything for companionship.

Dacoits. Suppose they did come, what was I to do? Light the lamp? That would take time, and, besides, was I not safer in the dark?

I had a revolver somewhere among my kit, but had no idea where it was packed; however, that mattered little, as I had no cartridges.

I lay there, for hours it seemed, wishing that something would break the pulsating silence, and at the instant praying that nothing might; until, hovering between the two, I fell into an uneasy sleep. . . .

Hi-yi-yi-yi-i-i! I shot up in bed. What was it?

Again, hi-yi-yi-i-i from half a dozen throats at least.

It must be dacoits; a whole gang of cut-throats by the sound.

I felt helpless.

There were a dozen ways at least by which they could break in, for there was not a lock anywhere and only the flimsiest of bolts secured the doors. I could not keep them out, so I awaited the attack and prepared myself to go down fighting, at any rate.

There it was again, hi-yi-yi-yi-i-i; very close now, and then again almost outside the window. By which way would they break in?

I held my breath, but could not hear a sound, so cautiously I crept into the bathroom to listen in case they were at the back.

Still dead silence. Then again, hi-yi-yi-i-i. But what did it mean? The shouts were now some way off on the far side. Again more faintly, and again a mere whisper.

I wiped the cold sweat from my face. Was it a ruse? Would they come back?

After a time I crept back to bed again, where I lay all ears for the sound which, thank Heaven, never came. At last tired nature had her way, and I knew no more until a smiling, salaaming Khuda Bux brought my chota hazri of tea, toast and bananas.

The night of horror was past; my hair remained its normal brown and I found out later that the scare was caused by a few miserable jackals!

Khuda Bux and the cook had taken possession of the two best quarters. They had installed their families, rigging up dirty old blankets and the like to screen off their womenfolk until something more permanent could be erected.

The furniture carried as before, dribbled in during the morning, and by tea-time there was little to show that we had not been in residence for months.

Whilst I was getting things straight at the bungalow the Rajkumar was spending the last day with his parents, who were anxious to be off, now that we had a home of our own.

I went to the station in the evening and was invited to bid adieu to the Rajah and Rani in their carriage. The Rajah was at his best, as usual, with his son. He said very little, but his affection was very evident, and it touched the little lad more deeply than all the demonstrative grief of his mother.

He was very shrewd for a child of six, for he said, a few days later, "My mother does not love me so much; it is my brother she loves, but my father loves me more."

As a matter of fact, the poor boy was tired out. It was two hours past his bed-time and he was in no shape for a prolonged leave-taking.

The Rani was undoubtedly feeling the parting for all that, and I felt very sympathetic when she said, "Mr Van Wart, I am placing my son in your hands. You will care for him and watch over him as if he were your own, will you not?"

"Yes, Rani, I will," I replied deeply touched; and I did, faithfully.

"You will write to me every day and tell me of his welfare?"

"Yes, Rani."

"And if he should have any fever you will send me a telegram at once, please."

I promised of course, not knowing what I was letting myself in for. I discovered afterwards that, in addition to my letters, the Rani was hearing daily from Ramamurti, Din Band and Badri as well, so that she must have had a very confused idea of the Rajkumar's daily doings.

This accounted for the telegrams showered on me two or three times daily if the small boy had a slight bilious attack.

"Has Kumar had any motions to-day, and of what nature?" was a fair sample. I was glad to be able to send the embarrassing reply to the post office by a chaprassi instead of blushingly handing it over the counter.

At last the guard blew his whistle; the Rani hugged her little son in a last tearful embrace, he prostrated himself on the dusty carriage floor and, clasping his father by the ankles, laid his head on his feet; then I gently lifted him onto the platform and the train moved off.

He was a brave little fellow. There was a stray tear or so, and a stifled sob now and then as he held my hand tightly on the way home; but he was dead tired and dropped off to sleep, still clinging to me, almost before his head was on the pillow.

CHAPTER X

MY WARD AND MY MUNSHI

THE next two months were delightful. The Rajkumar grew very fond of me and I of him. His name, by the way, turned out to be Prakash, but his mother told me that it would have been unlucky for them to have spoken his name ; which accounted for their avoiding the subject. In the end it had to be written down for me.

Ramamurti was established in the annexe, and the accommodation provided for him was one of the few things he did not find fault with.

He was an unpleasant character whom it was impossible not to pity ; for, whatever he got out of life, he missed so infinitely more. His hand was against every man, and he suspected every man's hand to be against him.

He was a well and widely read man, but to his natural cleverness was allied all the cunning of the most scheming type of Madrasi Brahman.

He said once, " I am a seditionist and I am proud of it," which was at least a frank confession.

I had been given a confidential, official warning that government regarded him as a dangerous character, and that it deplored the footing he had gained in the palace at Gurumpore. It was intimated that they would welcome an opportunity of dislodging him, but the grounds must be adequate and irrefutable.

Anything in the nature of espionage was entirely foreign to my nature. I was prepared to act if he failed in his duty, and I kept my eyes open, but beyond that I was not prepared to go. I tried friendliness and was repaid with black treachery.

He was an interesting rascal, though. One day we

were talking about the vernaculars, and he told me that it was the easiest thing in the world for Indians to write or even print seditious messages or articles without detection. A letter innocent on the surface might be read by anyone, and yet be capable of an interpretation far from innocent.

There was more law and order in India in those days than is possible to-day, and since it has become a hapless victim of weakness and blundering experiment. Such cunning subterfuges are now no longer necessary. Those who formerly worked underground now stand in a public place and vilify all things British through a loud-speaker. Be damned to them for scurvy knaves, say I; and be damned to those who allowed things to come to such a pass in a country where, till recently, the Sarkar (government) was Ma-Bap (mother and father), and stood for justice with firmness.

Ramamurti had brought a cook—a high-caste Brahman of course—from Gurumpore to minister to his creature comforts; for, like the earth, his circumference was greatest at the equator.

The cook was a poor, half-starved wretch like Chuchundra, the timid musk-rat in "Rikki-tikki". Like Chuchundra, he crept miserably about the place, and before many weeks had gone by he crept up to my verandah and handed me a petition written for him in the bazaar by one of the professional writers. These professional scribes write petitions for a few pies, and grow fat on it, for petitioners are many. It ran:

"To The Guardian of Maharaj Kunwar
of Gurumpore
Ajmer.

"HONOURED SIR,

With due submission I beg to state that Pandit brought me from Gurumpore appointing me cook, on Rs. 5/- a month, food and clothes as well, but he here treats me badly. He thrashes me, and does not give food full of stomach, as I am a foreigner here and have no one but your goodself. I therefore most humbly beg to request you to kindly make me send

back the place from which he brought me. I told him to send me back, therefore he smote me well. Will you please therefore do me the favour, looking down upon my condition, to cause me to send back. For doing such an act of kindness I shall ever remain thankful.

I beg to remain, Hd Sir,
Your most obedient servant,
D. Satnarayan.

The charge against Ramamurti was proved to the hilt, despite the inevitable counter-accusation of theft; "Chuchundra" was sent back to the place from which he was brought, and Ramamurti, turning up his nose at the local brand of Brahman, had perforce to do his own cooking for the future.

He did not enter much into our daily life, for he was an unsociable creature as a rule, and had no real liking for his job. He never voluntarily came near the Rajkumar unless important folk were about and he wished to make an impression, when he was wont to smile greasily and paw the boy, who promptly wriggled away out of reach.

His duties mainly consisted in being present at the Rajkumar's meal-times—for, at first, the shadow of my presence was not allowed to contaminate the food—and in driving to the College with us.

He failed to fraternize with the Indian Staff of the College, greatly to his own loss, and used to while away the lesson-hours by sleeping under the shade of a tree in the carriage, with two bare, fat, flabby feet protruding from the window. How I itched to slap them, hard!

One of the first things I turned my attention to was the language question; for the Ajmer servants spoke Hindustani, Din Band spoke Hindi, which, for practical purposes, was much the same, and Badri spoke Telugu, while none of them knew more than a few, scattered words of English. This diversity of tongues complicated matters at the start.

It is true that Ramamurti was a capable interpreter, but he spent so much of his time at his food and his

devotions that he was rarely available when wanted. Consequently, I had to rely on Prakash, with his slender stock of English, but we got plenty of fun out of it.

Daraz Khan, the bearded old coachman with spaniel-like eyes, would come to us on the verandah with a request in Hindustani.

"What does he want?" I said.

"He says," began Prakash slowly to gain time, "he says he wants, he wants," here Prakash rubbed

wants, what is that thing, master, for the horses; that thing, *jools* we call it, don't you know?"

"Grain," I suggested.

"No, not like that," and he laughed.

"Hay?"

"No. It is not to eat, it is to put on."

"Saddles," I suggested hopefully.

It turned out to be horse-blankets; so, as usual, we managed to come to a satisfactory understanding, which was not always the case when I relied on my own unaided efforts.

It was a sad day when the mali (gardener) became voluble over some fine pomegranate bushes which made

He talked and gesticulated and I finally signified approval.

As we drove to the College I explained to Prakash that he was going to make a lovely arch of them. But alas! on our return there was no arch, and instead of our lovely bushes there were only a dozen unsightly stumps. I had literally got hold of the wrong end of the stick.

Obviously a munshi was indicated, so a young pandit from the College was found for me. He was very young, very shy, and very clean in his snowy-white robes with

anyhow, at first— a good working knowledge of Hindi that I might run the house and the staff properly. He

taught me much as our own pandits teach English to

and intricacies which got me no further towards my goal, but left me eventually, floundering once more at the starting-point.

He had a distressing habit of clearing his throat in the hearty manner of the East. A deep rumbling began in the pit of the stomach, and rose in increasing volume to his throat which he cleared with a horrible, retching sound, reminiscent of a Channel crossing. When the spasm was acute, politeness led him to the verandah, where he got rid of the obstruction.

Some months later he gave a sample of the thoroughness of his methods.

A newly married couple came to stay with me and the young pandit was called upon to instruct the lady. She reported progress at tiffin after the first lesson.

"He wrote out thirty words and told me to learn them. When I had done so," she continued with a laugh, "he said: 'That is good, but of course your honour being a female would not use those, but the following!'"

Poor fellow, he had no experience of English women and was shyer even than usual with her. Evidently he gave a verbatim report to his father, a man of wider experience, for the next day, having occasion to make the same remark, he amended it and said, "Your honour being a woman."

He was an excellent young man, but I learned much faster from Prakash, who derived great entertainment from my mistakes.

CHAPTER XI

OUR RETINUE

We had collected something of an establishment by this time, though how I was never very sure, and it was quite an undertaking to run it smoothly and without undue peculation. For if a Sahib in India is fair game, a Rajah is undoubtedly fairer.

I had to get used to new methods of living, new foods, new prices, and to translate £. s. d. into rupees, annas, pice and pies (3 pies = 1 pice = one quarter anna), or cwts. and lbs. into maunds and seers.

I was generally careful not to grant any boons in the way of clothes, pay or allowances without asking expert advice at the College; so, though there were doubtless many who profited by my ignorance, it cannot have been to a glaring extent, for I received few "objections" from that universal bugbear, the Audit Officer, when my monthly accounts were submitted to him at Gurumpore.

The total number of our retinue, all male of course, was thirty-two, which seems considerable for one small boy and one man. The number could have been reduced considerably, but something was due to the prestige of Gurumpore, and it must be remembered that every Indian servant has his one particular job. He does it or not as the case may be, but no Trade Union could define its limits more clearly. Suggest a hand's-turn outside it and he refuses quite politely, but with a flat finality that prevents the repetition of a similar *bêtise*.

Prakash had his three personal servants. I had five: bearer, cook, cook's-mate, khitmatgar, and masalchi (dish-washer).

Khuda Bux combined with his duties as butler the task of valeting me—I always hated having my socks

put on and my legs guided into trousers—and doing my mending, which resulted in my black socks bursting into a rash of blue or green at the toes, and a choice collection of assorted buttons on my undergarments.

For our joint use there were two farrashes, who swept the dust into corners, and trimmed the lamps, our only illumination. Two chaprassis carried notes, fetched our dak from the post-office, took a change of clothes to the club after tennis, or a lantern to light me home—we were quite near the club—lest there be snakes in the path. The rest of the time they slept or cleared their throats horribly on the verandah, where they announced callers of high degree, and denied entry to the low, unless adequate bakshish induced a change of opinion.

We had two chowkidars whose duty it was to mount guard at night and drive away my friends the dacoits. Actually they slept, rolled up like mummies in their blankets or sheets, waking periodically to make the night hideous with fierce staccato barks, which were answered by two distant friends for a space, after which silence and sleep resumed their way.

One of them was a humorist in his way. One hot night, later in the year, I was sleeping outside when a sudden shower came on. I yelled for the chowkidars to carry my bed into the verandah, but yelled in vain, and after a search found our trusty guards fast asleep at the back.

I spoke bitter words. The next night I lay dreaming happily of a voyage over sunny seas; but the sea grew rough, my craft rocked and tossed, and I awoke to find our two worthies carrying me, bed, mosquito-curtain and all into shelter from another shower, rather than incur the displeasure of the "presence" once more. The master-mind had been at work.

Another night he suddenly began shouting "Sanp, sanp!" (snake) at the top of his voice, and I hurried onto the verandah to investigate.

He turned a deaf ear to all my questions, but broke into a long harangue on the multitude of snakes in the compound and his need for boots and puttees as a protection. At intervals he let forth his cries, which soon

produced a trail of sleepy servants armed with lanterns and lathis (stout iron-shod bamboo staves.)

Only, then, when others were there to do the dirty work, did he condescend to answer my oft-repeated question : " Where is the snake ? "

" Huzur ke niche " (underneath you) was the calm reply. And, sure enough, the lanterns disclosed a large cobra, with hood up, about eighteen inches below my feet on the verandah's edge !

There was a bhisti, of course, whose bullock- or goat-skin mussack provided us with water, and who brought hot water in the invaluable kerosene tin for my inadequate bath-tub : a vessel so constricted that I was a fool not to imitate Prakash, who stood erect and soused himself from head to foot with water from a lota.

The same bhisti ministered to the garden under the direction of the mali, who divided his day between brooding on his hams over a flower-pot or making mud-channels for the irrigation of sterile portions of the garden.

No, I wrong the good man, he had another pastime—buttonholes. Never by any chance during his hours of duty were we, or any of our visitors, permitted to depart without a buttonhole carefully and hideously put together. With brave salaam he presented it for the honour of the house, though it was but a reeking marigold.

Then there was the dhobi : the fiend who screws one's clothes into tight ropes, batters them frenziedly on a flat stone, spreads them to dry on thorny bushes and returns them with a disarming smile button-less and torn.

Daraz Khan was in charge of our riding ponies, as well as two fine upstanding pairs of Walers for the carriage, fresh from the Calcutta builders.

Each of the six horses of course had its own syce.

Our tale of servants proper was completed by the humble but necessary Plantagenet, the Knight of the broom, who, poor untouchable, was quartered apart.

We had at first about a fourteenth of the Rajah's army—a *naik* and six sepoys to be precise—to give tone to the establishment and mount guard at the main gate. But they were so shop-soiled and dingy and they took

up so much of my time settling their miserable squabbles, that I took the earliest opportunity of sending them back "to the place from which they came."

Prakash was an engaging child, and his artless talk helped to save me from many pitfalls. From him I learned never to offer or accept anything with the left hand.

"It is very bad if we take with the left hand."

"Why, Prakash?" I asked lazily.

"That only we use the left hand when we go to bathroom, so it is not good to take our food or anything with it."

From him, too, I picked up an elementary idea of how to receive Indian visitors.

The method depended on their social status. Those of the highest rank should be met at the door of the carriage; some at the top of the terrace steps, some not until the verandah was reached, and so on.

The Indian is a great stickler for due observance in such matters, and harbours resentment for a slight to his dignity, even though it be unwitting.

A handy little volume of "Do's and Dont's" would save a world of trouble; but so many of us are "too beastly British", and what we do is good enough for everybody else.

This naiveté was apt to cause awkward moments when Prakash was moved to excitement.

For three nights a mysterious animal—a hyæna it turned out to be—had been seen in the garden by wakeful servants during the small hours.

Prakash, primed with full details, gave a graphic account of the fearsome beast to some lady visitors.

"It is such a very bad animal. If it should make water on a man then *at once* he dies."

As the babu would say, "But where *to* look and what *to* do."

And another time. He always reserved the choicest of his gems of speech for the ladies, and two were admiring a couple of rabbits which had just been given to him.

"Wouldn't you like some guinea-pigs?" said one of them.

Prakash gave a squeal of dismay.

"Oh, no! Guinea-pigs are most unlucky in our family. If any of us keeps guinea-pigs my mother will not give any more babies."

Apparently someone had blundered, for no more little brothers or sisters came to Prakash.

We used to start the day at about 6.30 with a ride. The first time Prakash startled me by appearing in portions of an officer's mess-kit in miniature. The cap was cocked jauntily on his head, but the glories of the scarlet and gold jacket and gold-striped trousers were somewhat marred by the lack of waistcoat. Moreover, the suit was too small, so that the hiatus which appeared between jacket and trousers was inadequately filled by a collarless soft shirt. This, coupled with a pair of brown boots, completed a costume never contemplated by army regulations.

Poor little chap, he was so innocently pleased with himself that I had not the heart to make him change, so he was able to show himself in all his glory to a number of admiring peasants and a stray jackal slinking behind a cactus bush.

It was his last appearance in that guise, for which Mrs Wright, the Eurasian nurse at the palace, was responsible. She having assured the Rani that all the best English boys were dressed like that for the Row!

On our return we bathed and breakfasted, after which Prakash, with a good deal of help from Din Band and Badri, made a laborious toilet.

He wore the regulation College dress: an atchkan or tunic with the low collar and general appearance of a clerical frock-coat. It was made of black cloth for the cold weather, white linen for the hot, and was buttoned down the front with buttons suited to the pocket of the wearer, gold mohurs being the popular choice. His trousers were white, baggy at the top and tight below the knee: a modified version of Jodhpurs. Socks and shoes, black or brown, finished off the lower end.

It was more or less plain sailing getting him into these, although the tight trouser-legs were often responsible for snarling demands to "Keep still" from Badri;

but the real joy was to see him wrestling earnestly with the half dozen yards or so of delicately coloured material which he strove to tie into an orderly *safa* (turban).

It takes long practice to get the proper twist with each fold, and more often than not the *safa* would fall to pieces in Prakash's hands when barely half finished; then the soft material would sink to the floor and the laborious winding begin all over again to a muttering accompaniment from Prakash, until, finally, Din Band came to the rescue.

This was generally my entertainment during breakfast, because Prakash used to hurry his preparations in order to watch the animal feed, as it were.

He would sit at the table and watch my operations with the greatest interest, which was only natural, seeing that his table appointments and way of eating were totally different to mine.

As he was an orthodox Hindu I was careful never to have beef when he was about, which was just as well, for he wanted to know the nature of every dish put before me.

I had to explain that, while we used fingers for cake and bread and butter, knives, forks and spoons were the correct method for soup, meat and so forth; and if anyone thinks it is easy to explain all the whys and wherefores of an ordinary meal, let him try.

Prakash did not think much of my finger-bowl for cleansing purposes, and was obviously anxious to pour water over my hands from a lota instead, regardless of my clothes and the dhurrie on the floor.

One day, after deep thought, he said, "Mr Van Wart, I have never seen you eat caterpillars."

"No, Prakash," I said, "you certainly have not, and you are never likely to."

"But they say so; that all English people eat them."

"Then they, whoever they may be, were wrong. I should hate to eat caterpillars."

Prakash accepted my statement like the little gentleman he was, but he was obviously disappointed, for he had the air of one arriving at a theatre only to be confronted by a board "No performance to-day."

This, together with many other libels on our race, turned out to be a figment of the ingenious Ramamurti, who hoped by this means to instil into the child's impressionable mind a disgust for Englishmen in general and myself in particular. He was a good hater, was that Brahman.

By the time breakfast was over the carriage was at the door. Prakash and I took our places with Ramamurti opposite; Din Band and Badri squeezed into the box-seat by the side of Daraz Khan, the syces let go the heads of our greys and off we dashed in style, saluted as we swung out of the gate by Plantagenet with a lordly sweep of his stumpy broom.

"If we see a sweeper when we are going to some place," Prakash informed me, "then it is good and we shall be very lucky in that thing."

"What thing?" I asked.

"Why, that we are going to do," and Prakash threw himself back onto the cushions with an air of finality.

CHAPTER XII

LIFE AT THE CHIEFS' COLLEGE

THERE are three or four other Chiefs' Colleges in India, but the Mayo College holds pride of place. It stands in extensive grounds on the outskirts of Ajmer, and the approach from the station and the city affords an unforgettable picture.

As one approaches, by a straight drive fringed with neem trees up a slight incline, the older of the two blocks which form the College building stands forth a dazzling mass of white in the brilliant sunlight.

Built of unpolished marble in the Hindu-Saracenic style, its arched verandahs, its pinnacled roof cornered with a lofty clock-tower, its steep marble steps to the peacock-tailed archway of the entrance, give it an elusive fascination all its own. To see it clear-cut, cold and white under an Indian moon, is to see a gem of purest ray serene.

A companion block, designed to be in keeping with the original by Sir Swinton Jacob, was added soon after our arrival.

Some ten States of Rajputana have houses for their young Thakurs, arranged in a rough horse-shoe round the main building. Trees screen them, for the most part, from the roads of the College park, but some, like the Kotah house with carved and fretted stonework, are in full view to give an added touch to a scene already beautiful.

As we arrived, the boys, some 150 or so in those days, were streaming in to morning school; those from the nearest houses on foot, the rest on bicycles or on horse-back.

A brave show they made, these slim young centaurs,

scions of a warlike race, cantering to school in their gay turbans, swinging their horse-tail fly-whisks on chestnuts and bays, blacks and greys, with fluttering martingales of crimson cloth to give the final splash of colour.

The College, to quote Lord Mayo its founder in 1875, was "to be devoted exclusively to the education of the sons of the Chiefs, Princes and leading Thakurs of Rajputana."

As will be seen, a few outsiders of exalted rank were admitted in later years, Prakash from the other end of India for one; but, as the pukka Rajput would take food with and intermarry with his family, he hardly came under the category of outsider.

The supply of "Chiefs, Princes and leading Thakurs" was but limited, so that, in later years, lesser Thakurs were admitted. One, indeed, was so poor that he could not afford the flannel trousers which were *de rigeur* for the Cricket XI, so was presented with a pair, since he was the mainstay of the bowling.

The admission of the lesser fry was not popular with the Chiefs who, for the most part, gave up sending their sons to the College, partly for this reason.

It is, indeed, significant that our education in India has been too successful in this respect. At the Mayo College, as in many other schools and colleges, the very people who have enjoyed the benefit of its training have been the first to complain that it is not more perfect.

The Indian possessed of a little knowledge is more of an iconoclast than a constructionist, and the Princes are no exception.

It became the fashion with them to find fault with the College, when they ought to have thanked their gods for the work done by Colonels St John and Waddington; by Sherring, Madden and Leslie Jones, and those European and Indian gentlemen of their Staffs who, in fifty years, have raised the aristocracy of the Rajput states from the slough of useless self-indulgence to the plane of responsible land-owners qualified to serve their ruler, their peasantry and themselves to their mutual advantage.

It is a thousand pities that the call of economy has caused the government to withdraw its grant and to hand over the management to the Princes themselves. It will now be a case of every State for itself and devil take the hindmost.

An Indian Prince has yet to learn the meaning of tolerance, so Heaven help the poor Principal with a dozen princes to satisfy.

For all their gallantry and all their invaluable service during the Great War the Princes, for the most part, still differ but little from their forebears in their private feuds and petty jealousies. There is still the same spirit which nearly wrecked the Mayo College at the darbar held by the Viceroy to inaugurate the scheme in 1875, when two chiefs quarrelled over the question of precedence, and the one against whom the Viceroy decided refused to sit below his rival.

To mark his displeasure he absented himself from the darbar and was sent home for his misdeeds, like a naughty boy, and without his salute of guns—a very bitter blow to his pride.

Prakash, owing to his tender years, did not attend the College in the afternoon. The morning was quite enough for him, and on the way home he used to regale me with the titbits of the day.

" There is one boy, Lal Singh, he was so very ' notty ' ; he went out to drink 'watter ' and he was fifteen minutes gone, and our master was so very angry."

The water-drinking took place on the verandah where a servant was ready with copious supplies. The ritual demanded a preliminary mouth-washing culminating in the ejection of a stream of water over the edge of the verandah, and a good deal of hearty throat-clearing.

Prakash surprised me one day when we were going up the College steps by tugging at my coat-sleeve excitedly to draw my head within whispering distance.

" Look, look at that boy ; no, there, there ; is not he a very black fellow ? "

The boy was of a decidedly darker complexion than his fellows, but it was a revelation to find an Indian calling attention to it.

As a matter of fact it is a point on which many Indians are very sensitive. Portraits are often painted to represent Indians with complexions of the fairest, and the leading subjects of one ruler were bitterly resentful when a coloured magazine picture represented their prince as several shades darker than another in a companion picture.

This was one of many lessons which India brought home to me. In my thoughtless British way I had lumped all shades into the one category, "coloured", but this little episode gave my complacent superiority a very wholesome jolt.

Still more was it shaken one day by an Indian gentleman who remarked casually, when in the course of conversation:

"Do I smell offensive to you, Sahib?"

"No, not at all," I replied hurriedly, rather taken aback.

"I am very glad, Sahib, and you do not smell either."

This was a shock in very truth. I had on occasion wrinkled my lordly British nose when the scent of unwashed coolie filled the balmy air with undue "fragrance"; but that my own refined British aroma might offend Oriental nostrils had never entered my insular head. It was a very wholesome lesson that Jack is as good as his master.

The best work of the College was done outside the Class-room. It was an exhilarating sight to see these keen alert boys in the playing-fields, where they could challenge comparison with the best in our public schools.

Cricket, soccer, tennis on hard courts for lack of grass, and riding, were their regular pastimes. Hockey, their favourite game, was taboo for a year or two. Ancestral feuds had been revived in the House-matches, when the stick proved a worthy substitute for lance and tulwar.

There was a swimming-bath, but alas, no water; much to the disgust of old Sir Pertab Singh, who summed up the situation in his terse and original English:

"No good, Mayo College. Must be every boy shwinging" (swimming).

Except in matches, most of the boys played soccer with bare feet, and in a match it was no uncommon thing to see a player, dissatisfied with his own performance, discard his boots and sail in bare-footed with renewed confidence.

Their football was good without being brilliant, and was often marred by too much individualism, a common Indian failing. It was apt, like their cricket, to suffer from undue confidence or the lack of it, with results equally disastrous.

At cricket they showed to advantage with their suppleness and quickness of eye. More than one of them might easily have become another Pataudi—the product of a rival Chiefs' College—had opportunities for cricket come their way when college days were over, but up-country cricket, save here and there, is far to seek.

The orthodox flannels and white boots were worn in matches, but in practice games many were content with bare feet and the shirt not tucked into the trousers but leaving the tails flapping to every movement, so that the batsman was compelled to grip them awkwardly between his legs before each ball was delivered.

During a game, and near the handsome red-sandstone Bikaner pavilion with its tiers of deep-stepped seats, sat groups of servants with their masters' water-bottles of white metal covered with red cloth to keep the water cool.

Prakash was a performer in the lowest game in which the small boys, true to type, chased each other in preference to the ball.

On the rare occasions when he made a run—after all he was two years younger than any of the others—he gave me a dramatic rendering on our homeward journey.

"One boy Kishen Singh was bowling; do you know Kishen Singh?"

I nodded; I didn't know him, but had no wish to break the thread of Prakash's narrative.

"So very fast he bowled and I hit the ball, so far I hit it; like this I hit"—and off came my topi, as he illustrated the mighty hit.

"Oh, I am sorry," said Prakash, trying to adjust it on my head without much success, "so far I hit that ball and then I ran *so* very fast, was it not good ?"

He was an enthusiastic supporter, too. The glare of the brilliant sun combined with the matting-wickets were altogether too much for my own batting at first, but later came a spell of success when, for several matches, with a 30 limit for batsmen, I proudly retired undefeated. The A.G.G. (the chief political officer for Rajputana) came along during one triumphant knock and, seeing Prakash, asked where I was.

"There ! ' said Prakash, pointing proudly at the wicket. "*Always* he is hitting, hitting ; never can they get him out. '

He was a loyal child, as I was to discover on a more serious occasion than a game of cricket.

The cricket was not without its amusing side at times. When Hari Singh, the present ruler of Kashmir, came with horse, guardian and retinue to grace the College, he was visited later on by the then Maharajah, his uncle.

The Maharajah, an indefatigable and incapable cricketer, had brought his very excellent team to play the College.

When his turn to bat came he headed a formidable procession to the wickets.

He was a tiny little man, top-heavy in appearance by reason of an enormous white *safa*, and he looked tinier still in comparison with his train of full-sized armour-bearers.

At the wicket lengthy preliminaries ensued. One man divested him of the royal blazer, two rolled up his sleeves, two buckled on his pads, two more adjusted his gloves and one took his bat. I think the Maharajah took his own guard, but someone, possibly the wicket-keeper, made the necessary chalk-mark for him.

The procession filed back to the pavilion and His Highness got to work.

It was understood that he must on no account be allowed to get out until he had made sixteen runs to his own cheek.

This was not as easy as it sounds, even with the

bowlers sending down slow long-hops to leg which he chased round with very indifferent success.

The fielders showed praiseworthy skill in dropping the softest of catches, and the umpire deserved a decoration for his presence of mind in shouting "No-ball" when the stumps were carelessly scattered.

At last the magic total was reached, and His Highness, having done enough for honour, retired undefeated amid gratifying applause.

Later on he bowled, or rather threw, feeble slows which pitched three or four times and barely reached the batsman who, honest fellow, did his best to get out, but in vain.

In despair, the batsman ran down the pitch with the idea of hitting up a catch, but mistimed his stroke and drove the ball hard and low back at the bowler, who threw up his hands in despair and skipped more nimbly than he had done for years, avoiding disaster by the merest hair's-breadth.

When the general consternation had subsided it was found that the resourceful batsman, doubtless overcome with horror, had fallen on his wicket!

Honour again being satisfied, His Highness took no more chances, but retired to the pavilion without completing his over.

A novel item appeared one year in the sports' programme—to wit, a two-mile race for fat boys.

The rich, oleaginous food which the boys consumed in large quantities twice a day caused some of the lazier among them to run to fat, a tendency which their thin, hot-weather clothes did nothing to hide. For health's sake therefore it was decided to give a few of the most bloated specimens a daily run.

The first race was a heart-rending affair.

The poor boys appeared as bidden at the trysting-place, but were at first quite unable to believe that actual running was expected of them. When they were convinced of the cruel truth they expostulated, pleaded, even wept before they could be goaded into starting.

Their progress was a sight for the gods as they waddled a few paces and stopped to pant out protests.

It took a long, long time to cover a mile with such elephantine dashes.

Strange to say, however, constant practice not only robbed the ordeal of its terrors, but induced the boys themselves to ask that a race might be set apart for them in the sports.

But, dashing ambition had o'errun itself. On the great day, despite the deafening cheers of the spectators, the last panting survivor gave out long before the finish. The pace at the start had been too hot, and the flesh too strong for the willing spirit.

No Rajput would have been so long in coming to the subject of horses. "Horse, dog or man" summed up the relative importance of these three in the scheme of things for that greatest of all Rajputs, Sir Pertab Singh.

All who could afford it brought one or two horses to the College, and every morning, before breakfast, riding-school was held. There were, at that time, always one or two British officers from Indian cavalry regiments acting as guardians to some of the wealthier boys, and under their auspices the Cadet Corps reached a very high standard. Better still, perhaps, these boys were taught to care for their horses, an essential about which, strangely enough, many of them were sadly ignorant.

About half-way through the term came the great event of the athletic year, a four-day contest with the Aitchison College, Lahore.

These contests, held alternately at Ajmer and Lahore, were the only opportunities for meeting another school of the same status or calibre, for the nearest, important places, Delhi and Agra, were each some twelve hours distant, so the local Government College was all the boys had to depend on in the way of school matches.

Post-war economies were partly responsible for the abandonment of these delightful meetings, at which the two colleges competed for the Colvin Shield in cricket, football, tennis, athletics and riding.

The Aitchison boys were mostly Sikhs, whose creed forbids cutting of the hair, so that many of them boasted silky black whiskers, and at football they appeared with the hair tied in a small bun on the top of the head.

The tent-pegging was a sight to send the hot blood coursing through the veins. There was usually little to choose between the competitor of either college, and often the pegs had to be turned edgewise before a decision could be reached.

A gallant spectacle they made as they thundered down in perfect line; flashing eyes fixed on the peg; horses with nostrils wide; young Sikh twirling lance on high and shouting his wild war-cry; Rajput silent and tense with lance pointed low. One breathless moment and the four flash past waving aloft their four pegs on the lance-points, amid the wild cheers of their supporters.

CHAPTER XIII

DOMESTIC DETAILS

And so the term passed. Our househol 'as working smoothly, and I had ceased to start wh ver a silent, barefooted servant appeared from nowh at my side as if by magic. It ceased to surprise me a khitmatgar retrieved a dropped fork with his toes, l replaced it nonchalantly after a cursory rub with tl haran which he passed over the clean plates.

I held the morning inspection of the se nts' bedding, and ministered to the sick, whose fait n my sugar-coated quinine pills would have moved n ntains.

Accompanied by Prakash I "did oles", where we saw the hay and grain weighed out d fed to the horses: a very necessary precaution.

There were often petitions to be lt with from one or other of the servants, whereon akash and I held court on the verandah and tried disentangle a few scraps of truth from an ingenious ne rk of lies.

One morning, a holiday it must hav een, we were chatting on the verandah when a loud iling burst on our ears. We looked for the source saw, well in the centre of the foreground, a stalw syce sobbing bitterly, with a calculating eye on us at same time.

Near by, partly concealed by a tac a bush, was a much smaller syce resplendent in a dy green and yellow waistcoat.

It was the waistcoat, it appeared hich was responsible for all the trouble. The weep its owner, had lent it to the other that he might cu dash at some wedding The little man cut such a h that he was loath to part with a garment so attract and, when the rightful owner demanded its return, inco ently punched him on the nose. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*

Justice was done, and there was peace once more, but the pocket Hercules got the waistcoat in the end, by fair means this time.

Another method of settling a difference was thrust upon my notice about the same time. An anonymous letter came for me one day accusing my cook of nearly every conceivable form of villainy, save barratry on the high seas, which presumably was beyond the writer's ken.

Of course, I took not the slightest notice, in spite of an electric atmosphere and the obvious anxiety of Khuda Bux to discuss the cook's iniquities.

Strangely enough, the following day brought another letter, also unsigned, in which the writer felt it his duty to bring to my honoured notice the deplorable list of crimes committed by Khuda Bux, ranging from stealing my sugar to masquerading as a Mussulman when in reality a Hindu (an insult of the deepest dye).

Again I preserved a masterly silence, and in a short time the two pillars of my house composed their little differences, doubtless coming to an amicable agreement over the division of the spoil, the sugar most likely, which had caused the rift.

My friend the letter-writer, whose hand had penned both indictments, drank the cream of the jest, and no doubt a stray bottle of Worcester sauce crept into Khuda Bux's daily book to pay for his services.

The anonymous letter, a dirty form of attack, is far too prevalent in India. There is only one proper way to deal with it; destroy every unsigned letter at once, and unread.

Before we leave the fascinating topic of servants, let me mention two who were "outside patients" as it were, and who afforded me much entertainment.

Once a fortnight a lanky knave, clad only in a loin-cloth, appeared to "tin" my cooking-pots.

There was nothing stereotyped about his *modus operandi.* He placed a cooking-pot on the ground close to a wall, stepped daintily into it on the toes of one foot, seized the projecting eaves above his head with both hands and twisted rapidly backwards and for-

wards, corkscrew fashion. What happened after that did not interest me; the performance was over so far as I was concerned.

The other vaudeville artist was the dirzi, who periodically brought his carpet and sewing machine and camped on the verandah for a week or so.

When Din Band or Khuda Bux discovered the need of new clothes for Prakash or me, we could always be sure that there were others for whom his services were needed. Our suspicions were confirmed by the continuous stream of servants who visited him on the verandah, and by the dexterity with which he whipped unfamiliar garments under a pile of work should I come out of the house unheralded by a cough.

It was all very amusing in its own quiet way. I knew well enough what was going on, and the servants knew that I knew, but we played up to one another in order not to spoil the fun.

As a matter of fact, I could see the whole comedy through the wire-doors of the drawing-room, and watched with interest as the dirzi held a length of cloth daintily with the toes and sewed along to them with a curious reverse action which intrigued me.

The serious side of things was not forgotten in Prakash's upbringing.

There was a Hindu temple, with priest attached, in a corner of the college grounds to which Prakash repaired with the rest of his devotions after games.

His religion was not my affair, Ramamurti and Din Band were responsible for that; but once in a way I was brought in contact with it.

One day a bulky registered packet arrived. It was addressed to me and postmarked Gurumpore. Inside there was a lump of dry clay, carefully packed but without a line to explain its significance. But for the postmark it might have been a practical joke without any apparent point. Prakash could throw no light on it.

"What are they doing," he said, "to send this? What is it for I do not know."

Suddenly I had an inspiration.

"Is it some sort of puja (worship)?" I suggested.

Prakash let out a screech. "Oh, it is my god," he said, and rushed off with the clay to his own room.

A few minutes later, as I was going along the verandah past his door, I saw the lump enshrined against the wall with a tiny lamp and flowers before it. Prakash himself was prostrated before it in silent prayer! Just a lump of clay; and yet why not? The reverence was there.

The term drew to a close, and Ajmer in April became distinctly hot, so I was not surprised when our marching orders came early in that month.

Then came a great stowing away of our household goods, with plentiful supplies of camphor balls and neem leaves to keep off "woolly bears" and moth. Almirahs (cupboards) and drawers were sealed with red-tape and sealing-wax; arrangements were made for the monthly pay of the servants who did not accompany us. Someone else would have to do that job for the next three months, thank goodness.

Never, throughout my twenty years of service in India, did I cease to resent the way in which each menial (to use the pleasant word beloved of the babu), after making his thumb impression on the pay-sheet and receiving his pay, would ring rupee after rupee in front of me, and occasionally hand back a defective coin with a contempt which, though silent and not disrespectful, was none the less galling to my *amour propre*.

It was strange that, as soon as I knew my responsibility for Prakash's well-being would be at an end in another three or four days, and for some months, I became unaccountably anxious.

Until I actually handed him over safe and sound I became terrified that something would happen to him. I had watched over him faithfully, as I had promised, and, up to now, without being unduly troubled, but now, and for the next few days, a hen with one chicken would have been a model of calmness compared with me.

When all our preparations were complete, and an auspicious day found for a westward journey, we set off in the cool of the morning for Madras via Bombay.

As I was getting into the carriage our trusty Sepoys

handed me a chit authorizing me to send them back to Benares and pay their fare. The chit was three days old, but they had saved it for the moment of departure according to the time-honoured custom of the country.

It took most of my spare cash intended for the journey, but it was worth more than that to see the last of them. So, having disposed of these unruly knaves, we rolled away past an imposing line of salaaming servants and out of the gate where the faithful "Plantagenet", supported by the rest of his line, gave us Godspeed with the customary wave of his broom.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RAJAH GOES TO THE HILLS

SOME three days later we reached Madras, where a prosperous and plump Indian gentleman received us "with due respect and humble submission", garlanded us heavily with pink roses and conducted us to a car which he had placed at our disposal.

"Who is this fat fellow? I do not know," whispered Prakash audibly as we seated ourselves.

He turned out to be a wealthy jeweller to whom the Rajah owed vast sums. So much for being a Rajah. All creditors are not so obliging.

It was a long and delightful drive. Outside the Fort area there is little of a town about Madras, and but a sprinkling of shops, named in some cases after former Governors. Even these were soon left behind, and we sped along the broad, red roads fringed with cocoanut groves sheltering scattered groups of mud-huts thatched with palm-leaves and resembling giant beehives.

Madras boasted but few motor-cars in those days, and the coolies who thronged the roads were as tiresome as a flock of sheep. They would ignore the horn until we were right upon them, then scatter wildly in all directions, preferably across our bows.

The Rajah's house was a stately affair near the sea, with an entrance from the main road, a long drive skirting a small lagoon and cocoanut palms against the clear, blue sky for a graceful background.

The Rajah and his retinue were not due until the following midday, so we were left to our own devices until then. The house was furnished in the English fashion; that is to say, with a motley assortment of

costly pieces of furniture in various stages of decay, set off by some hideous paintings in opulent gilt frames.

The claims of the inner man had not been forgotten, for in some mysterious way breakfast, tiffin and dinner appeared in due season, sufficient for six healthy trenchermen at least, with tea, coffee, lager, whisky and soda, and ice to tinkle comfortably in the long tumblers.

We made our way to the sea to watch the creamy white surf breaking in a long line, and the slim catamarans gliding in on the tops of the mighty waves. The call of the sea would not be denied, so we found a reasonably safe spot, shed some of our clothes and bathed.

The next day saw the great reunion. I speak of it lightly, but it was touching enough in reality. There were copious tears of happiness from the Rani, and I found one of those unaccountable lumps in my own throat.

There was now no longer room for me at the house, so I departed for an hotel.

They were a very poor lot, and I rashly made for the newest, attracted by the running water in the bathrooms. Unfortunately it did not run in my room, a very Oriental touch, but that mattered little, as I ran across a friend of Oxford days, now a great man and Collector of Madras, who, regarding my quarters with horror, promptly transferred me to the massive comfort of the Madras Club, where food and drink are of the best and, better still, there is a good library.

Up-country in India, the dearth of books is a serious affair to the lover of reading. Insects and the like are largely responsible for the smallness of one's own collection, and it does not take long to exhaust the readable matter in a small club, where the library is usually composed of the refuse of the departed.

We stayed a few days only in Madras. I accompanied the Rajah one morning to his friend the jeweller where, in an inner chamber, I watched him pick over a tray of unset jewels worth a small fortune. Poor little man, he knew no more than I did, which was just nothing at all, about the gems he was turning over, and he was going to pay for his ignorance to the jeweller, who sat like a bloated spider gloating over an easy prey.

My own shopping was brief but to the point, being confined to the purchase of a safety razor. I had wearied of gashing myself like a pre-war German student every time I shaved in the train.

Curiosity led me one morning to go out to the Rajah's house in a rickshaw, and it gave me a delightfully Oriental feeling at starting. It was a flimsy, one-coolie affair, a very poor relation to the luxurious Simla vehicle with its four uniformed jhampanis, and the further we went, the more melting became the poor fellow's condition. I felt a real slave-driver, and would have given a fistful of rupees for a vehicle in which I might ride unashamed.

By the time we reached the Rajah's shady courtyard, with softly splashing fountain, the coolie resembled an animated puddle. I gave him lordly bakshish but felt a worm none the less.

Within the sympathy was not for the coolie, but all for me. They regarded it as terrible that I had been made to put up with a humble rickshaw, and it was past their comprehension that my own foolish self was responsible for the deplorable affair. One thing was certain; they would have no more of this rickshaw business.

What pains and penalties were held over my coachman's head I know not, but for the rest of our stay he never seemed to leave the club-compound unless he had me safely enthroned, with the syces on their perches breathing heavily down the back of my neck.

A few days of Madras and its sticky heat were enough for all of us, so away went the whole crowd of us, sheeted bundles and all, up to that delightful spot, Coonoor, in the Nilgiris.

Most of the villages we passed had rude figures of unshapely horses in coloured clay, ranging from the size of elephants down to normal proportion, and sprouting from the earth just outside their mud walls.

The gods perchance might pass that way by night, and woe betide the village which had not provided them with steeds.

At Mettupallayiyam—surely such a name should be set to music—we were decanted into the little hill-

railway which climbs the lovely wooded slopes of the Nilgiris to Coonoor and Ootacamund. This route lacks the grandeur of its Kalka-Simla kinsman. There are here no vast ridges and folds with the silent snows as a background of loneliness, but it has a soft appealing grandeur all its own in the tree-clad spurs and teeming jungles.

It roused the poetic soul of Ramamurti to sing its praises in an English ode, which began lamely,

" Mid haunts of bison and beastly bear ",

but which, for all that, was a fine conception and did him infinite credit.

Coonoor itself was a pretty spot, mostly very up and very down, so that my heart smote me for my carriage horses on the rare occasions when they were used.

The Rajah's house was approached by a winding drive through trees relieved by a fly-pond, glorious tree-ferns and graceful bamboos. It was on the summit of a hill with a superb view of tree-clad spurs and mighty valleys.

Prakash was enjoying a holiday in the bosom of his family, so that my duties were confined to spending a couple of hours in the garden with him every morning. These we passed in comparing the customs of our respective countries and in story-telling.

One day Prakash asked for the story of Cinderella, which I gave him in full detail. He listened with rapt attention. At the finish he said gravely, " Shall I tell you the story of Cinderella ? " (he pronounced it ' stowry ') and recounted the story as it should be told without embellishment.

I thanked him politely at the finish, feeling very small.

Another morning was something of a red-letter day, for it marked the complete approval of Prakash's family.

He invited me to breakfast with him in the jungle.

Hitherto I had not been allowed to see him at his food, but from this time forth the ban was raised, not only in regard to him, but to his parents as well.

I called for him, according to instructions, at 7 a.m. and we descended through the Rajah's private jungle to a little clearing where preparations for the meal began.

The faithful three, Din Band, Badri and Kamta the cook, were in attendance with pots and pans, foodstuffs, chairs and a table.

A fireplace was quickly made with a few loose bricks and the good work began. I watched the cook with interest manipulating his curry-stone, prepare the rice, wield stones to crush the food, and juggle with degchies and pots innumerable.

Din Band carefully selected some green leaves and pounded them until they became a delicious condiment for one of the savoury curries. The time went on and the air was redolent with appetising odours, but the meal seemed as far off as ever.

Luckily I had taken a light chota hazri of tea and toast with fruit before starting, but I might have known that Prakash's excited "At seven o'clock, do not be late, at seven o'clock", was another case of the astrologers' "eight o'clock precisely".

It was not until nearly 11.30, when I was simply ravenous, that the meal was placed before us, but it amply compensated for the long wait.

Prakash, lightly clad in shirt and loose trousers of white linen, sat cross-legged on a flat wooden stool, about three feet by two, raised a few inches above the ground. In front of him was a large tray of plain silver on which were arranged some half dozen silver bowls about the size of finger-bowls.

Similar provision was made for me, with the addition of a spoon and fork to reinforce my unaccustomed fingers. There was no stool for me, so I had to content myself with a prosaic chair and table.

We started by taking half a dozen chapattis, which were not only excellent to eat, but were also useful to mop up the oily and liquid messes which were offered in bewildering confusion.

I tried to imitate Prakash, with but indifferent success, and was none too clever at making little balls of food with my right hand and popping them into my mouth without touching the lips. He seemed able to make balls of the most unlikely material, but I was soon compelled to fall back on the spoon in order to keep pace with him.

In deference to me there was nothing, so Prakash assured me, that was "so very hot". Possibly our ideas differed, for there seemed to me a very decided bite about some of the dishes. Often this had an insidious way of not making itself felt for two or three minutes, and until several good mouthfuls had followed the first tentative one; but when it did, chapattis and copious draughts of water had to be hastily requisitioned.

Prakash, like many small boys, was inclined to dawdle over his food, whereas Din Band, acting under the Rani's instructions, did his best to keep him strictly to the business in hand; to which end he made him stuff like a Christmas turkey, even going to the length of popping choice gobbets into his mouth as a parent bird feeds its young.

I had never understood the true meaning of "a sigh of repletion" until a bloated Prakash gave me a perfect demonstration. He was just frankly gorged and, to be honest, so was I.

I have eaten many a *desi khana* since then, at the tables of princes and with humble villagers, but never did I enjoy one more, despite the whisky which Prakash had provided and insisted on my drinking (I dislike it before my lunch), blended with lemonade in lieu of soda. It was a memorable feast to mark a memorable occasion.

During the afternoons there was generally tennis on the Rajah's court, and it rather disgusted me that so many people fawned on me to get invitations to tennis, or, better still, to a dinner which the Rajah had announced his intention of giving. It would not have been so bad had these same people not made fun behind his back of his "country manners".

I rather fell foul of Farnell over this question of deportment.

The Rajah acted only through ignorance and was quick to take any hints that were given him, but Farnell was horrified at my daring (or insolence) and, after one such polite correction from me, took me to task.

"My dear fellow, you must not do that," then reverentially, "he's a Rajah."

That might be, but I did not see why the poor little man should be allowed to make a laughing-stock of himself.

The Rajah himself was evidently conscious of his deficiencies and anxious to correct them, so that he very soon began to consult me on questions of etiquette and decorum. It was rather like teaching a child, as the minutest details had to be explained and rehearsed over and over again.

Farnell had obtained rooms for me at a boarding-house where he had stayed during the previous hot weather.

It was a pretty bungalow, with a pleasant garden filled with sweet English flowers, and pleasantly shaded with trees which harboured innumerable tree-frogs (or tree crickets), to fill the evening air with their shrill rattling concert.

It was managed by a widow who took in about eight "guests". There was in reality no "take-in" about it. The rooms were good, the food was good enough, and the terms remain a blissful memory in these days when the increase of price varies inversely to the squareness of the meals.

A married couple were next to me and the dividing wall was thin, making me an unwilling audience of their little differences. I used to cough, knock over chairs, do anything calculated to force myself upon their notice. I even sang, for if that did not distract their attention nothing would.

But they ignored me, and it galled me that I was ignored.

One night there was an impassioned scene, at least it sounded so.

Tahmie (her version of Tommie) was sulky and deaf to her pleading. She was a persevering woman, though, and kept on with varied renderings of "Tahmie, you do love me."

Only a discreet cough from me in reply.

"Tahmie, tell me you love me."

I crashed down a boot.

" Tahmie, speak to me . "

Tahmie rose to the occasion at last.

" Shut up, damn you, and let me get to sleep. "

I, carried away by excitement, ejaculated " Hear, hear ! ", very loud and clear.

That, or Tahmie's polite request, received the attention it merited and silence reigned.

The " guests " were a dull lot and the tedium of meals was only broken by occasional startling outbursts from a handsome but eccentric French lady.

She disliked social life as a rule, but was induced one evening to go to the club. We got the benefit of her experience at dinner a little later.

" Aah, your clubs, I hate them. I go there to-day and a woman she sit and stare and stare at me until I can bear it no longer, so-o-o I put out my tongue at her li-i-ke that ! " and out came about a yard of pink tongue.

These little interludes were, unfortunately, rare, but delightful when they did come.

We had only been one crowded week at Coonoor before I was moved on again like " Jo " in Bleak House.

Farnell announced the news after being closeted with the Rajah for a long morning.

" The Rajah wants to go up to Ootacamund for a month or so and, as the cooler climate there doesn't suit my complaint, I told him you would go up with him instead."

This was pretty cool, but there were no grumbles from me. I had heard quite enough about Ooty to thank my lucky stars for the chance of sojourning for a space in that most delectable of spots.

To anticipate a little, I had better explain what was retailed to me later by gossips.

Farnell for reasons beyond my ken, was unpopular, to say the least, at Government House and in official circles and for that reason he almost invariably developed " a touch of my old complaint " when there was a danger of being brought in contact with either. My arrival, therefore, had been providential, enabling him to push the Waltair lunch on to my shoulders, and now to extricate him from this new predicament.

"Where is the Rajah going to stay?" I asked, knowing that he had lent two out of his three Ooty houses, and that the old Maharani was occupying the third.

"Oh, he has taken a house for a couple of months."

Here was Oriental openhandedness with a vengeance. To lend all your houses and then hire one for your own use!

"You will be going the day after to-morrow," concluded Farnell, and go we did.

CHAPTER XV

THE RAJAH GOES SHOPPING

BEHOLD us then, three days later, installed in hireling quarters.

It was a large house on the top of the steepest hill in Ooty, and that is saying something. Possibly, for that reason, it had been unoccupied for two years, and it looked like it.

Everything was dingy, and the furniture, though good solid stuff, had a tired look. In fact, the whole place wanted attacking with a large squad of vacuum cleaners.

I had been generously dealt with in the way of accommodation. A large suite had been allotted to me, of which all the rooms looked onto a young forest of pines, relieved only by a flimsy hut which had been run up in the foreground for Khuda Bux, who, as a Mahommedan, was quartered apart, although he was on friendly terms with Prakash's men, and so not without companionship.

It would be untrue to say that the charm of Ooty captured me from the start. As a matter of fact I thought it one of the dullest and most cheerless places I had ever been in.

For four days it rained in a way to which I had hitherto been a stranger in India.

Everything in the house was sodden also, and it was only possible to wear clothes after they had been dried on a huge bamboo frame with a charcoal brazier inside.

My chief recreation was watching the wretched Khuda Bux huddled in a blanket over another brazier in his dripping hut, and the only entertainment was

provided by occasional shouts of "Vana Wat, charklet, I come," which heralded a raid on my supplies from Prakash's little brother and sister.

On the fourth day, to my great delight, dear old Colonel Wells arrived, much be-mackintoshed, and drove me in his tum-tum (dog-cart) to the club, where he introduced me to a number of men and put me up for membership.

That broke the spell, for the next morning opened fair and sunny; Khuda Bux discarded his blanket and greeted me with a smiling face, and the Rajah took me shopping in his car.

We visited Spencer's and I wandered off on a tour of inspection. On my return I found the Rajah busily inspecting a dinner service.

"How you like this one?" he asked.

"Not much," I said helpfully.

"Which do you like?" the Rajah went on.

"This," I said.

"That is good." The Rajah brightened up and turned to the shopman. "Send me two dozen of everything."

We had brought boxes and boxes of china up with us, so I put in a query.

"Oh," said the Rajah, "these are for you; you may be giving tiffin or lunch to your friends."

Nothing would convince him that half a dozen plates and a cup and saucer or two were all I was likely to need. Two dozen it had to be.

Two dozen in fact seemed the only number the Rajah knew that morning. I turned to make a purchase on my own account and the Rajah drifted away with an obsequious shopman in tow. I kept one ear cocked, though, and very soon heard, "How much this?"

I turned to see the Rajah contemplating a peculiarly hideous table-lamp.

"Fifty rupees, Your Highness."

The Rajah was not a Highness, but was quite prepared to owe double the proper price to anyone who gave him the gratifying title.

"Send two dozen up to my house," was the princely order.

I managed to stop that, however, much to the annoyance of the salesman. The order was cut down to a beggarly brace, and I hurried the Rajah back to the car before he could order two dozen of everything in the shop.

I found an early opportunity of writing my name in the Government House book, which brought a speedy and unexpected response in the shape of invitations to a ball and to lunch.

Even so prosaic a thing as "the book" has its lighter side. A year or two later, when writing my name in another part of India, I found above my signature the names of Corporal Smith, Privates Brown, Jones and Robinson.

In the column headed "Duration of Stay" was written "Till we gets shifted."

Poor innocents! Kind friends had told them "it was their duty, and they did," but the "great man" in this case was lacking in humour, and the unfortunate victims of their comrade's little jest narrowly escaped a speedy return to the heat of the plains as a reward for their credulity.

The lunch at Government House was informal—if anything at a Government House can be informal.

I was duly impressed by the scarlet and gold of the ubiquitous chaprassis, and found Sir Arthur and Lady Lawley so kind and human that my shyness dropped from me, and I became talkative in congenial surroundings.

I say "human" because, in spite of a considerable experience of Viceroys and Governors in after years, I always had to give myself a little mental shake before I could realize that these great ones were only human, after all, and probably often glad enough to shake off pomp and circumstance for a fleeting moment. As one very great lady said, "I could be so naughty if it were not for these red and gold chaprassis everywhere."

Ooty was delightful; all the more so when I became used to the altitude and ceased to puff and pant at every hill, or a couple of turns round the ballroom. True, it was the strenuous two-collar, crumpled-shirt days of the rollicking polka, when a dance was exercise.

Invitations came thick and fast as soon as it was known that Government House smiled on me, much to the delight of the Rajah and Rani, the latter in particular. But what terrible snobs English officials in India are, despite all their other good points !

She was very simple in some ways and, with only the Eurasian nurse and Eurasian bandmaster's wife to guide her social steps, it never occurred to her that any of the leading ladies would be delighted, even eager, to visit her.

She looked, therefore, with the kindliest of eyes on my little social success, and lost no time in profiting by it.

To begin with, both she and the Rajah got me to arrange interviews for them with Lady Lawley and the Governor respectively. They seemed to have a rooted idea that this would be a difficult matter. Actually it took two minutes ; after which I had a very pleasant chat and a cigarette with the Military Secretary in one case, and the Private Secretary in the other, and ended by staying to lunch again on both occasions.

This impressed the Rajah and Rani enormously.

The Rajah said little about his forthcoming interview. He could not have looked foward to it with any pleasure, as a gloomy silence was his usual contribution on these occasions ; but the Rani was tremendously excited, and got one of the Rajah's minions to write her an imaginary interview with Lady Lawley.

She handed me a typed copy one day and asked me to hear her. It was just like a lesson out of " The Child's Guide to Knowledge ".

I had to censor a bit here and there, besides explaining that the betting was all against Lady Lawley asking such questions as " At what hour do you rise in the morning ? " or " What is your age ? "

The Rani stuck to her lesson, however, and, though the conversation on the great occasion bore no resemblance to the one she had committed to memory, her efforts were not thrown away however, for she sent her imaginary interview to a newspaper, where it appeared verbatim, to the Rani's great content.

She returned from the interview in the seventh heaven, with a large, beribboned bouquet which Lady Lawley had given her.

She sent for me at once. "Please take this to the photographers and have it photographed," she said in breathless excitement.

And photographed it was.

About this time the Maharajah of Mysore and the Gaekwar of Baroda arrived in Ooty, and the Rani told me she would have to be very strict in her purdah now that princes of their high rank were in residence.

"Sometimes," she explained, "in a place where nobody knows who we are I can go for a drive without being purdah, and once in Calcutta I pretended to be like some babu's wife and went to the Zoo with my women. We went among all the people, and it was such fun."

It must, indeed, have been a red-letter day for the little lady, whose eyes brightened up at the very thought of her harmless though daring escapade.

The Rajah, Prakash and I paid a formal call on the Maharajah of Mysore, and a dull performance it was.

We were ushered in silence into a large, panelled room, where the Maharajah received us and we exchanged "How do you do's."

Three chairs were placed for us in the middle of the sparsely furnished room and one opposite for our host.

We sat a while in solemn silence, during which the Rajah squinted horribly.

Mysore spoke at last.

"Do you find the climate cool?"

"Yes," replied the Rajah.

Silence descended on us again.

"Are you staying long?"

"I do not know," said the Rajah.

The silence became absolutely painful, and I was reduced to counting as a way of passing the time.

"I shall take my leave," mumbled the Rajah; whereupon we shook hands again and were ushered back to our car, each receiving a compact and unbeautiful bouquet to comfort us.

We were not out of the drive before the Rajah turned to his Indian Secretary and thrust the bouquet in his face.

"Maharajah of Mysore is returning my call at 11.30 on Thursday; have three bouquets ready like this, only twice as big."

Gurumpore was not to be outdone.

Both the Rajah and Rani had the pleasing Oriental trait of leaving everything to the last minute, so that his car had often to be placed at my disposal when time was an important factor.

I found this amusing, for it brought me into contact with the little Cockney chauffeur, "Mr Poter"—Prakash's rendering of Porter. He was quite irrepressible, and rattled on faster than the car about the inner history of Gurumpore. A good deal made no impression, and a good deal obviously had to be taken *cum grano*, but much of it was interesting and some of it useful.

The Rajah, it appeared, had brought the reigning favourite to Ooty with him and had taken a house for her, much to the annoyance of the Rani.

"Mr Poter" spoke feelingly, as his time was chiefly spent in passing interminable periods waiting in the car outside the abode of this siren.

"'Ere, Mr Van Wart, it's not good enough. 'E kep me aht till nearly six this morning, tells me to bring the car again at nine, kep me waiting till eleven and then sez 'e don't want the car till 11.30 and I'd better go 'ome and get some food. Well, I'm going 'ome and I'm going to get some food, yes, and some sleep, and the blighter can wait till I'm ready. I'm fed up with Gurumpore, and as soon as I 'ears of another job, I'm off. What with them blasted Eurasian beauties" (he didn't say 'beauties') "Wright and Taylor (the bandmaster's wife), and the Rani and the blasted (he didn't say 'blasted') Rajah I'm ruddy well fed up."

He had my sympathy, for what it was worth. At all hours of the day and night he was liable to be called up for duty, when usually a little consideration would have given him some sorely needed rest; but consideration

for inferiors is not one of the noticeable characteristics of the ruling class in India.

It was Porter who told me of the Rani's loathing for the favourite, who now was accompanied everywhere by a bodyguard.

The Rajah at this time was an ardent Freemason, and was constantly urging me to join the recently constituted Gurumpore Lodge, of which he was Master.

"Don t you do it, don't you do it, Mr Van Wart," urged "Mr Poter"; "everyone in the Lodge is one of 'is officials; if anyone doesn't agree with what 'e sez then 'e sez to 'im, 'Very well, your pay for next month is cut.' You keep aht of it, whatever you do."

Before long his advice was proved sound. The Rajah, poor soul had created the Lodge off his own bat, so to speak, without sanction from wherever sanction is necessary, and his creation was ignominiously blotted out.

He was not fortunate in his Masonic efforts. One afternoon he and Punditji the secretary set off to their first Lodge meeting at Ooty. I was with the Rani, not very long after they had started, when the Rajah suddenly reappeared. He looked very sheepish, and the Rani could not get any explanation out of him; but knowing her Rajah she realized that something ridiculous had happened and began to giggle, so reducing the poor Rajah to a sulky silence.

"Mr Poter" cleared up the mystery.

"We got to the Masonic Lodge, and we all goes in. The teller 'oo promised to introduce the Rajah 'adn't turned up, so after a minute or two the Rajah and Punditji asked if they could go in without him. Of course they all knew 'oo 'e was, so they said all right if he could say the proper words. Well, 'e couldn't remember 'em, and 'e asked Punditji, and Punditji couldn't remember either, and then 'e sent for me. I'd got in, ye see, but I couldn't tell 'im what to say becoz I was a lower rank, and so they wouldn't let 'im in, and 'e cussed Punditji all the way 'ome and I was larfin' fit to bust."

The Rajah came into his own, though, at the Masonic

Ball a week or two later. He and Punditji spent an evening in working through a tasteful selection of "Gents' Fancy Aprons." They changed these at intervals of about fifteen minutes, so proving quite the star turn of the evening.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RAJAH AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

ONE afternoon, the Rajah, Colonel Wells and I motc for miles over the glorious downs. Sussex with patch of jungle.

We left the road and followed a stone-marked trail across the grass until we lost it.

At a Toda village the Rajah managed to make a twelve-year-old boy and girl understand what we wanted, and they volunteered to guide us. To my surprise they were not in the least frightened of the car, though it was probable that they had never seen one before. They perched on the footboards, one on each side, popping up their heads to grin delightedly at each other whenever the horn sounded.

At our destination they sat contentedly by the ca. while the Rajah, Wells and I, followed by two servant: with paraphernalia for tea, descended through a steep winding path to the Pykara Falls some thousand feet below.

The path was narrow, the jungle dense, the sun hot and the flies pestilential. It was only possible to see a few yards ahead, and we soon lost the Rajah. First we waited, then shouted without effect, so went on until at last we reached a clearing from which stretched a shivering suspension bridge over the rapids below the falls.

There is a sense of power and grandeur about falling water, and we stood fascinated on the trembling bridge, gazing at the sliding rush down the rocky face which thrust itself through the jungle green.

And better still it was to lie face downwards on a flat rock, below the bridge, where the water fell again

ıbbon beneath one's very nose, whilst
ıe scorching plains peeped faintly through

had drenched ourselves in the sheer beauty
e our baser instincts began to remind us of
ʒ Rajah, and still more of the missing tea.
and moistly we toiled up the long, steep path
last we came to God's good air and open spaces
.ıore, and there reclining at ease on a pile of cushions
ne missing potentate.

' After I had been walking a long time I could not
e you," he began lamely, "and I thought to myself,
ney have gone by short cut, so I had my tea and then
I thought so, they must have gone back, and I came
back to the car."

The Rajah did not fancy the walk, and there lay the real truth. However, he had left us plenty of tea, to which we did ample justice, while the small Todas watched us with the keenest interest, and before we started back the servants produced whisky and soda.

Pop! went the first soda, and up and away went the two small Todas; nor did they stop for a good ınndred yards. We had the greatest difficulty in calming their fears.

Cars were things of joy, but this strange god who came with a hiss and a bang from a bottle was to be feared indeed.

Poor little beggars. I walked towards them with a half-empty bottle which I turned upside down, emptied and shook to reassure them, but at first they knelt with heads pressed to the ground, praying no doubt for deliverance from this bad thing.

The girl was the first to brave the peril, for she rose and slowly advanced, eyeing the bottle fearfully all the time. When the boy saw that no harm had befallen her he followed her example, but they were not their own bright selves again until the car was under way once more and the evil spirits safely stowed away.

We dropped them, smiling as of yore, with liberal backshish at their village, where they were promptly

surrounded by a crowd of eager relatives to whom the tale of all their doings was the event of the season.

These Todas, who are herders of cattle, are one of three tribes found in the Nilgiri Hills. They command service from the Kotas (musicians) and Badagas (tillers of the soil); indeed the Badaga humbles himself in the dust by the wayside at the passing of the lordly Toda.

Their herds of half-wild buffaloes have no love for the British Raj, it would appear, for they are apt to charge the white man on the slightest provocation, whether he be on foot or on horseback, or even in a car. It is distinctly humiliating to creep cautiously past a herd in momentary fear of attack and to come upon its lord and master, a minute, six-year old Toda, tastefully clad in a rupee strung round the loins, who controls—nay, bullies—his formidable charges, and armed only with a slender switch.

They are a handsome, well-set-up race with fine features; the men with bushy beards and long hair, the women bare-headed with long ringlets half-way to the waist. They are swathed in garments of coarse cloth, possibly white in the far-off past, which the female of the species has a distressing habit of shedding at one fell swoop if her appeal for backshish (they are most persistent beggars) produces more than an anna or two.

A benevolent and most worthy Bishop, in a rash moment, was over-generous with his alms; and lo! in a trice, two Toda Venuses stood before his horrified eyes in all their nakedness!

My step-father, a man of learning, had written to ask for details about the Todas and their habits, in which he was interested at the moment.

At some inconvenience I collected much first-class information—even braving the verminous perils of a Toda hut which had to be entered almost on all fours that I might give a detailed account of its interior. Eventually I sent him the result of my labours, and awaited complacently his letter of grateful thanks.

It came. The envelope contained one torn fragment of paper on which was scrawled—

"The people you write of are not Todas."

In other words, "This correspondence is now closed!" It was just that exactly.

The Rajah next came into prominence at the Government House ball. In fact, we both did.

It was a brilliant, fancy-dress affair in the glittering setting of the great galleried ballroom, with the crimson and gold thrones on a dais at one end.

Everybody was resplendent in his or her best or newest costume, among which my black-and-white Incroyable came in for special notice. Not, I fear, only for its striking elegance, but from the fact that, for the first half of the evening, the breeches were so perfectly moulded to my legs that I could not sit down without performing acrobatic contortions which were admired of all beholders.

Mercifully, the good cloth was equal to the occasion, and ere the dance was over I could sit with some approach to ease without fearing the worst.

The Rajah attracted attention mainly by acts of piracy.

He sat, gorgeously attired in pale-blue brocaded silk and wearing an emerald and pearl necklace worth a King's ransom. Like Eugene Aram, "apart a melancholy man."

He swept the ballroom with the cross-fire of his squint until the light of the chase shone in his ill-matched eyes. Then he arose and stalked his quarry, who danced on all unconscious until she stopped, when, from nowhere it seemed, the Rajah was at her side mumbling, "You dance with me?"

For the most part they said him nay, but now and then some poor, startled lady found herself ref from her partner and cannoning from couple to couple under the Rajah's clumsy guidance.

It became my affair when matters reached this state, and hastily abandoning my own partner I would capture the Rajah, release his prize, and lead him gently but firmly back to his seat, explaining, as I did so, that it was *infra dig.* for him to dance, and that other Chiefs present, like Mysore, would not dream of doing so.

He only yielded to *force majeure*, for in five min-

utes or so he was at it again, and off I had to go in chase.

This was undoubtedly a case for Government interference. A few polite but firm words would have prevented any repetition.

I have known many Indians whom I liked immensely, but I have never yet seen one dance with a white woman without my gorge rising.

It is not a mere question of colour. I do not feel that the colour *qua* colour matters so much. It is that I know in what light the Indian looks on the female, be she white, brown or black, and for that reason it makes my blood boil to see a woman of my own race in arms she should never be in.

The present instance was additionally unthinkable, and it ought not to have been left to me to put a stop to it.

The Ooty season was now at its height, and our next public appearance was at the races.

It was a two-day meeting, one of those friendly, up-country affairs where fields are small and everyone knows the horses and their riders, and yet the winners are just as hard to find as anywhere else.

Our Gurumpore contingent was there in force. The old Maharani and the Rani had special permission, to their mutual disgust, for each was jealous of the other, to bring their purdah carriages into the enclosure. True, they were placed where they could see little of the giddy throng and nothing at all of the races, but they had achieved what was not given to others, and would have been perfectly happy had t'other dear charmer been absent as well.

The two small children in purple and gold were prominent in the very centre of the enclosure, grouped about Mrs Wright, voluminous in silks and gewgaws, with Bai and another man standing behind with tiny umbrellas of state to complete the group.

Prakash, attaching himself firmly to my hand, enjoyed himself thoroughly, and earned golden opinions by his courtly manners, which sat quaintly on his young shoulders.

I had, by this time, cured him [illegible] trifling solecisms, such as using the ta[illegible] his fingers in lieu of a handkerchief [illegible] trusted to acquit himself with credit in [illegible]

The Rajah, perhaps, got the ma[illegible] satisfaction out of his afternoon.

[illegible]

inent positions directly in front of th[illegible] hope of a little notice.

If His Excellency spoke to him, [illegible] achieved his ambition, trotted off to t[illegible] the horses with a leery but igno[illegible] returned to the lawn, where he was [illegible] faithful Punditji and several atten[illegible] thought and many consultations he [illegible] his fancy and, having done so, pro[illegible] until he had worked through all the [illegible] attendants.

By that time he had undoubtedly [illegible] and, though equally undoubtedly he [illegible] loser on the race, his simple soul was [illegible] up his position again near the Gove[illegible] the programme.

A day or two after the races there [illegible] Ooty hounds near at hand, so the R[illegible] a-hunting he would go. It takes a g[illegible] a stout-hearted horse to live with he[illegible] slopes of those wonderful downs, and [illegible] say, cut a sorry figure.

To begin with, his blue and gold [illegible] diamond necklace struck an unexpected [illegible] the more noticeable because he too[illegible] position some fifty yards from the rest [illegible]

When a jack was found in a nearby [illegible] the Rajah followed the disappearin[illegible] few yards, then turned and walked h[illegible]

I hurried up to ask what was the matter. [illegible]

"The stupid horse," he said, "he is [illegible] head about, and I thought so he was spoiling [illegible] so I are to come back, is it not, Mr Van Warner [illegible]

A fleck or two of foam, even on a [illegible]

hardly a valid reason for giving up a good gallop, but doubtless he knew best.

I fancy his decision was finally brought to a head a few minutes later by the sight of the pack followed by the large field streaming down the side of Staircase, one of the steepest slopes in the neighbourhood.

The horsemen were silhouetted against a background of blue sky and it looked as if one after another was bound to take a header and roll down the short, slippery grass of the slope.

The sight was too much for the Rajah at any rate, for after one long look he made for the safety of his car and for home without more ado.

That hunting season, as a matter of fact, was not to end without a tragedy which plunged the whole of Ooty in gloom.

The Governor, Lady Lawley, their son and daughters were among the keenest followers of the hounds; there was hardly a meet without two or three representatives of the family, who were usually to be found among the first flight.

One day Dick Lawley did not return and when search was made he was found dead. Nobody knows what happened, or how. He was a fine horseman, but on those slippery downs a horse can easily put a foot wrong, and some such rankind fate had come to him that day.

Theatricals at Government House were the next item in the social programme.

The play, "Mrs Gorringe's Necklace," was to be given on two nights, and the Rajah surprised me by taking a couple of seats in the front row for both performances. I suggested that he would not be interested in the play (as a matter of fact he did not understand a line of it) and that one night would be enough for him.

Not so! "His Excellency will go both times, therefore I myself must be there also," said the loyal little man.

The first night went off beautifully.

The Rajah (with me in attendance), as the leading Indian, was given a special seat just in front of the front row, and level with the Governor.

He was unutterably bored by the [illegible]ormance, but delighted at being in the place of hon[illegible] [illegible]spect him of having bragged to the Rani ab[illegible]t it [illegible] fired to go one better.

Anyway, the next morning I [illegible] Lady Lawley if by hook or by crook [illegible] be made for the Rani to see the play.

This was not such a simple mat[illegible]r as it [illegible] The Rani, when her heart was set o[illegible] care in the least how much trouble [illegible] met the Indian potentate who did), an[illegible] than Her Excellency might have told [illegible] to blazes.

As it was, she and I spent the mo[illegible] [illegible] find[illegible] place where the Rani might see withou[illegible] [illegible]een.

A box made of canvas kanauts [illegible] of te[illegible] sides) was erected with a chick in fro[illegible] [illegible] whi[illegible] the Rani, invisible herself, could see [illegible] was no top, so we had to place it where [illegible] from the musicians' gallery could not o[illegible] [illegible]k her[illegible]

The play, like most entertainments [illegible] India, begu[illegible] at a nominal 9.30, and early birds w[illegible] [illegible]able to drift in any time from nine onwards, so, to a[illegible] [illegible] possible contretemps, the Rani had to be box[illegible] [illegible] while I had to be there at 8.30 to see that th[illegible] [illegible] and all intrusive males out of the way.

As it happened, my afternoon was [illegible] and I arrived back only in time for a [illegible] and a dash to Government House [illegible] best speed, taking *en route* a corner, [illegible] fence, on two wheels in a flying leap, w[illegible] the little man, "Thought we was over,"[illegible] him to "step on the gas" by way [illegible]

The Rani, wonderful to relate, wa[illegible] minute.

[illegible]

pantomime and bombarded me with eage[illegible] [illegible] everything and everybody.

A few minutes before the curtain went [illegible] Lawley thoughtfully came to see if all wa[illegible] it was my "lean and hungry look" [illegible]

" you gave me your message so nicely that we have just been telling the Rani how sorry we ware that her husband was not feeling well. And now she says he was not unwell, only bored !" at

As the coast was now clear I hurried the Rani away, lest worse indiscretions might follow

CHAPTER XVII

LIFE IN THE PALACE

THERE being at the moment no more social worlds for the Rani to conquer, and the rains having started, she departed with the Rajah for Coonoor, a far less rainy spot.

After a few days' leave I followed, and the first morning after my return I found the lawn outside the Rajah's house strewn with a dozen or more pie (mongrel) dogs. Each was chained to a post; each had a collar and a white enamel bowl bearing its name.

I wondered where this motley collection had come from. Had the Rajah been ordering "two dozen" of them?

I was not very far off the mark. The proud owner came out beaming.

"How you like my dogs?"

"Not much," I replied rather tactlessly.

"How is that? They are all pedigree dogs. Very good dogs. Two hundred rupees this one. What is the name?"

"Nell," I said, reading from her bowl.

"Yes—Nell. I am showing you her pedigree just now."

Slowly and painfully I got the story out of him.

One afterno he had met two Tommies from the depôt hard by (at Wellington) accompanied by Nell, whose cash valu t a liberal estimate was five rupees. He stopped t car and said, "How much that dog?"

"Two dred and fifty rupees, Your Highness," answered of them, knowing his man.

The Rajah loved being called "Your Highness" (which he was not), but made a show of bargaining. "That is too much," he said.

"She's a pedigree dog, Your Highness."

"Very well; bring the dog and the pedigree to my house to-morrow. If I like it, I will give you two hundred rupees."

The Tommies went off gleefully to write out Nell's pedigree, which did credit to their imagination, and on the morrow the deal was made.

After that the Rajah was waylaid by Tommies, who popped out with pedigree dogs from behind every bush, and only my timely return put a stop to that game.

The poor dogs got the worst of it. A few weeks later I found them in the palace at Gurumpore chained up in the scorching, marble courtyard, with no protection from the fierce sun save a few strips of shade from the pillars of a verandah.

I did what I could for the poor brutes, but we departed for Ajmer, and there was no one left to care for them. When we got back early in October they were all dead, and it must have been a happy release.

The Rajah's long-promised dinner-party took place a few days later.

It was a dreary affair. The Rajah meant well, but was the poorest of hosts, and most of the burden fell on me. The ladies who went into the Rani's apartments for a game of comic bridge had by far the best of it.

One thing alone came to brighten the evening in more ways than one. The Rajah, after a few minutes' absence, suddenly roared out, "Please make group, we are to be taken by smash-light."

He was a truer prophet than he knew. At the crucial moment there was a loud explosion and a blinding flash, and when the smoke had cleared away we saw the photographer cowering against the wall stammering, "I got you that time, gentlemen," while his assistant crouched in a corner weeping over a badly-burnt wrist. "Smash-light" hit it off perfectly.

By this time the rains had set in and, although at Coonoor the afternoons were generally fine, the charm of the hills had begun to pall on the Rajah and Rani, so preparations were made for our departure.

It only remained to pay a P.P.C. visit to Government House, and a memorable day it was.

The Rajah and Rani were invited for three o'clock, and I was bidden to lunch.

I could easily have gone up by train and have left them to bring Prakash in the car, but this was vetoed. It was arranged instead that Prakash and I should drive up in the Rani's purdah carriage, with venetians open of course. After dropping me the unfortunate child was to camp out in the carriage somewhere in Government House grounds, and to occupy himself for two hours with nothing to do but change into his ceremonial clothes for the afternoon visit.

This went off according to plan, and the visits were duly paid. We then visited one of the Rajah's houses which the old Maharani had by now vacated. The party regaled themselves with some unwholesome-looking, greasy sweetmeats—which were offered to and declined by me, and when seated we started on our twelve-mile run down to Coonoor.

The Rani's carriage had gone on ahead, so we all crowded into the car which, owing to her presence, was made purdah by a hood specially constructed to fasten over the car like an extinguisher, so shutting out any possibility of fresh air.

We were no small company. "Mr Poter" was at the wheel, with a couple of servants wedged into the seat next him; further selections of minions, clinging like limpets to any projections, draped themselves perilously about the foot-boards.

Inside I sat between the Rajah and Rani on the back seat; opposite were Punditji, Mrs Wright, Prakash and the two children; on the floor squatted two of the Rani's handmaidens; seven grown-ups and three children in what seemed a hermetically sealed car. All except myself chewing betel-nut, which they spat methodically in bloody gouts into two tall silver spittoons.

As if this were not enough, the Rajah insisted on playing bridge. Bridge, if you please, when at every one of the sharp corners he and I lurched heavily onto the Rani or we onto him, until I felt like a suffocating Alice between the sleeping queens.

Luckily the game came to a speedy end. The Rajah

suddenly bellowed "Stop the car!" The lower part of the door was opened and he slithered out feet foremost, assisted by unseen hands, through the only exit permitted by the extinguisher.

After a minute or two I followed in the same inelegant manner, ostensibly to find out what was the matter, but in reality to get a breath of pure air.

A sorry sight met my eyes. The Rajah was squirming unhappily in the throes of sickness with two servants attached to him in a vain attempt to hold his head. He cut a miserable figure, for all his purple and gold finery and about fifty thousand pounds' worth of jewels.

A few yards behind was the Rani's carriage, from which the syces, gorgeously uniformed, had descended to give up their troubles in the same manner as their lord.

When the worst paroxysms had passed I poked my head into the car to reassure the Rani that all would soon be well, but here too dread sounds of torture greeted me, and, when my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw the Rani stretched full length on the back seat, and caught a pathetic murmur, "Oh, Mr Van Wart, I am sick on my stomach."

A further hasty reconnaissance informed me that Prakash and his small brother had succumbed in like fashion.

The Rajah, on hearing my tale of woe, was totally devoid of sympathy and prepared to go on. But I thought I saw a chance of better things.

"As the Rani is unwell it might be better if I went outside," I remarked hopefully.

"No," said the wily Rajah, "I will go outside. The air will do me good. You go inside and look after my wife."

Words fail me for an adequate description of that infernal drive. The groans of the sick and the stench beggar description.

Happily, before the end, darkness closed in, and I was able to unhook a portion of the extinguisher to let in God's good air and lighten our misery.

So we brought our sojourn in the hills to a triumphant close.

Prakash and I only delayed at Gurumpore until the rains had cooled the Ajmer heat, and life for us both, after three crowded months of alarums and excursions, resumed its normal course.

We should by rights have stayed in Ajmer until early in December, but a scare of the fell plague in late September produced an agitated telegram bidding us go at once to the Rajah's house at Lucknow, so we packed up our traps and were gone in twenty-four hours.

The Lucknow house was a large bungalow on the banks of the Gumti, visited spasmodically by the Rajah for a few days at a time. It was well and comfortably furnished, English-fashion, and the only drawback I could find was an enormous rat, whose bed I had apparently usurped.

Three times during my afternoon siesta did he creep inside the mosquito curtain and nuzzle unpleasantly round my toes; three times did I kick him against the top of the curtain, and, being by this time wide awake and not a little annoyed, I finally roused the establishment and, after a spirited chase, during which Badri's bare foot was mistaken for the rat and smitten with a lathi, the disturber of the peace met his end.

We took the air in state for our evening drive to the shot-torn ruins of the Residency and the Khudsia Bagh gardens. No humble carriage and pair for us here, but a team of four strapping black walers and four sowars, with lances and pennons gay, as outriders.

Early the next morning the cool river tempted us to bathe. I had neither bathing kit nor shorts, so a dhoti was provided for me, and a nice job I had in winding ten yards or more of it over one leg, under the other and round my waist.

Prakash, with Badri and Kamta as watch-dogs, was only allowed to splash about in a foot or two of water by the bank, but Din Band and I had a joyous swim, marred only by the wretched dhoti, which unwound itself every few strokes to float behind me in a long trail.

Possibly this, coupled with the splashing, was our salvation; for judge of my horror at the club that evening when a friend, whom I was telling of our delightful

bathe, burst out "Good God! man, don't do that again; the place is stiff with muggers (crocodiles)."

He was right, too, though Din Band, a native of these parts, had assured me with a wealth of gesticulation that there were none.

We tarried but a day or two in Lucknow before we were summoned to Gurumpore, so off we went once more.

To my surprise the Rajah was at the station in person to meet us, and, after Prakash had greeted him by falling at his feet on the dusty platform, he told me, still more to my surprise, that quarters had been provided for me in the palace.

I could not think where or why, but was soon to be enlightened. Matters, it appeared, had come to a head between the Rajah and Lightfoot, both of whom had appealed to Government. Farnell of course supported the Rajah, and the upshot had been that Farnell was to go, with a pension from the Rajah, and Lightfoot also, the Rajah again paying the piper in the shape of compensation.

Lightfoot was departing in a day or two, Farnell soon after, and the Rajah was desperately anxious, exactly why I never knew, to prevent an interview between Lightfoot and me.

As a result, and for the next few weeks, I was virtually a pampered prisoner in the fort. I say pampered, because though communication with the outside world at Gurumpore was discouraged, both the Rajah and Rani did all they could to dissipate the tedium of my "confinement to barracks".

My quarters were a strange mixture of oppressive magnificence and uncomfortable makeshift.

For living-rooms I had the State reception rooms, and it was akin to being the solitary occupant of one of London's most dignified clubs.

I took my meals in solitary state in a dining-room capable of seating a hundred, whose walls were covered with a mosaic of valuable pictures, tawdry oleographs and brightly coloured pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses.

The vast drawing-room, with huge crystal chandeliers, was unthinkable as a sitting-room for one poor, solitary mortal; even the S-shaped back-to-back brocaded settees failed to tempt me.

It was the library which made up for everything. A former Maharajah had given a friend in England *carte blanche* to provide him with a library, and nobly that faithful gentleman (peace be to his ashes) had fulfilled his trust.

Enshrined in teak and mahogany glass-fronted bookcases was a collection to gladden the heart of a book-lover. Bound for the most part in half-calf, there was ample fare for all tastes in good editions and, thanks to the loving care of a little padre from the French Roman Catholic Mission, they were kept from the ravages of climate, fish-insects, white ants and the like.

The padre welcomed my advent with genuine pleasure as soon as he found me to be a kindred spirit.

Tenderly he brought out his most cherished volumes, and very real was his grief as he told me how ruthless Brahman officials, before he took charge, had torn beautiful old engravings from many of the books to sell in the bazaar for a few paltry annas; terrorizing over the servants in charge by might of their caste, and kicking them if they summoned up courage to protest against the rape.

The library suite contained a regular club writing-room; books of references; atlases; globes were there in profusion; a vast roll-top desk was replete with stationery and all the contraptions in the way of seals, wax, clips, punches and so forth, that heart could desire.

Inviting armchairs with book-rests and sofas of padded leather tempted one in all directions, ill-suited though they were to the heat of Gurumpore; and it was here that my leisure hours of daylight were chiefly passed.

At night a cheap oil-lamp, the only illumination (for the candelabra were reserved for State occasions), rendered these vast apartments so gloomy that I rarely used them after dark.

One other room was full of interest and attracted me from time to time. It was a great armoury filled with strange and wonderful old weapons displayed to the best advantage.

The sharp-edged steel quoits, beloved of the Sikhs, took my fancy, and I pictured the fierce battles of old when, hurled with unerring aim, they had taken the enemy in the throat with ghastly effect.

There were wonderful swords, huge six-foot, two-handed weapons, and smaller snake-like blades of many curves. There were murderous daggers with two barred handles, pressure upon which caused the blade to separate into three parts when driven home.

Best of all I liked an ancestor of the revolver; a fat stumpy pistol with some fifteen barrels arranged in concentric circles and a wearisome affair to discharge.

A modern note was struck by a pair of gigantic Indian clubs which the late Maharajah, whose feats of strength were always recounted with bated breath, used to toy with daily. To hold one out with a straight arm for a brief second was the best I could manage.

So much then for the living-rooms, where I drifted about in lonely silence. My bedroom and dressing-room upstairs fell far short of this magnificence.

The upstairs rooms consisted of a large parquet-floored ballroom and four fair-sized rooms which contained little, save worn carpets, a cane or bent-wood chair or two and marble-topped cabinets of carved blackwood, as well as a number of mechanical clocks in a state of disrepair. There was one, a costly affair of jewelled birds on a gold tree, which made a gallant effort to redeem its reputation, for one bird wriggled feebly; another, which had fallen upside down from its perch, made an attempt to open its wings, and a songster on the topmost bough opened and shut its beak fiercely in a desperate effort to reproduce a song long silent.

One of the rooms had been converted into a bedroom for Prakash and me, with retinue of course, by the simple process of adding a couple of mosquito-curtained beds

to the carpet and chair already there. There were no windows, but there was no need for them as the two tall doors were always open, to the obvious delight of the gay, green parakeets which played follow-my-leader in and out, screaming derisively in their flight.

For myself I preferred to sleep on the flat roof under the star-powdered sky, leaving Prakash within to be lulled to sleep by the nasal accompaniment of his servants.

My dressing-room was a small box of a room in the centre of the roof. For what purpose it had been constructed, unless intended for a torture chamber, was beyond my comprehension.

Its one window and door had no glass, but were ventilated by venetians. Not that opening or closing them did produce any ventilation, far from it; either process only seemed to increase an already unendurable heat. If hell is any hotter, I do not want to go there. My very clothes in the drawers, or almirahs, were scorching to the touch.

But the gem of all the arrangements for my toilet was the bathroom.

The only place apparently to which the necessary sweeper might be permitted access was a passage downstairs.

A few feet of this were given a semblance of privacy by a fragment of tattered curtain suspended from a rod at either end. Within this seclusion (?) were ranged a wash-hand-stand, a towel-horse, a tin bath-tub and a commode.

These were, at any rate, adequate to my needs and I had no complaints on that score.

It was rather disconcerting, though, not to be allowed privacy for necessary duties, for it seemed that no sooner was I splashing in three inches of water in the inadequate tub, or engaged in answering the call of nature, a stream of babus would make their leisurely way past, quite oblivious of my embarrassment. They do these things naturally in the open, and feel no shame themselves, so, after all, why could not I cultivate the same outlook?

Self-consciously I had a hortible feeling that I was a

star turn in an unusual entertainment which eager crowds were flocking to see. As a matter of fact they were not even interested, but merely clerks bound for the little State Press, to which my so-called bathroom was the only approach.

CHAPTER XVIII

PALACE REVELS

PRAKASH achieved his seventh birthday on the Hindu festival of Janam Ashtami, which fell somewhere about the time of his return home. Early in that morning I was getting my present to him out of a drawer, when he came in, wreathed in smiles, and handed me a handsomely fitted, leather travelling-case. I inspected it.

"What a nice one. Who gave you this, Prakash?" I asked.

"Nobody gave to me. It is for you; on our birthday it is our custom to give presents," he replied, very delighted at the success of his surprise.

There was not a great deal to do in the palace and yet the days passed pleasantly enough. We did lessons of sorts for a couple of hours in the morning, and sometimes the small brother and sister joined us for games on the shady side of the flat roof. Now and then a couple of boys, slightly older than Prakash, turned up to play with him as well. It is a curious thing that the Maharajah-class, though bursting with pride of rank, delight to mix on familiar terms with people of the servant-class, and, when in the mood, rely on them for advice or information to an almost incredible extent.

The servant element is all too much in evidence in an Indian palace, more especially in the women's quarters.

I was very thankful to find that being "inside", as he called it, was beginning to bore Prakash. The narrow life of the Zenana, with its never-ending talk of sex, was no place for a healthy boy.

The Rani by herself, was sufficiently enlightened to look beyond this, but she was the only one in the palace Zenana of whom that could be said. The rest had one

idea only, the procreation of male children, and thanks to them, Prakash at seven was more sophisticated than even the modern English boy of twenty.

As it was, there were frequent discussions in his hearing about the marriages of himself and his five-year old sister, and the merits of prospective brides or grooms, or rather of their families, were freely canvassed. It was only his parents' inability to come to a satisfactory agreement with any of the eligibles that prevented these babes from being already betrothed.

In the afternoons the purple tennis balls and the marble court were requisitioned. Tennis was the only form of sport in which the Rajah showed any interest, and for which he had any aptitude. He was quite useful, and we had some very good games, with a couple of his officials to make up the four.

One of these, a young babu, was really good, but used to irritate me beyond measure by cooking the score against himself if he was playing against the Rajah.

He extended the courtesy to me in a singles game one day, until I convinced him very forcibly that I would have none of it, whereat he was genuinely shocked and pained at his failure to please.

Lightfoot had departed by this time, distinctly hurt that I had not given him a chance to air his grievances before he left. As a matter of fact, I had tried to see him if only to thank him for his kindness in the matter of my agreement, but the Rajah had successfully blocked all my attempts without actually appearing to do so.

His successor, Slater, an Indian Civilian of the best type—a man destined to rise high—had arrived and, as Farnell was leaving a day or two later, the Rajah gave a banquet to "ring out the old, ring in the new."

There is always a sadness in leaving a service after years of faithful work. One learns to love even the hottest, loneliest spot, and to take an honest pride in a few humble stones one has added to the building of Empire.

These farewell banquets are therefore but sad affairs. They touch the heart-strings, but the inevitable welcome to one's successor gives a wholesome if unpalatable

reminder that "five hundred men ca your work, or mine!"

I found myself wondering, through inner, what Farnell was feeling. For eleven ye this little community, he had been the power b the throne. Now the sycophants were no longe onging his verandah; in a month he would be f en.

Even the Rajah, who was really of him, had resigned himself to the inevitable. T ter struggle was over. Lightfoot's departure had a weight off his mind and, if Farnell had to go to ould not be helped.

As a matter of fact, my sympath eared to be thrown away, unless Farnell was a far actor than I gave him credit for. He comport nself like a Roman general enjoying a Triumph, r than as one departing with a tarnished shield. Hi complacency was not even disturbed by the Rajah's ete inability, after eleven years of his tutelage, t the simple speech of farewell which I had com by request.

I was called from my seat at the f the table to draw up a chair at the Rajah's s the centre of the table, and I read that miserable slowly and painfully, while the Rajah repeated it me word by word, but with many stumbles.

I had not expected a burst of e on, but this ghastly parrotry was beyond all my ations. The only person who was not uncomfort t this sorry exhibition was Farnell himself, whe ned on the company at large, thoroughly satis vith himself and the proceedings.

After his departure I was allowe of purdah, so to speak, and was not sorry to n th the outer world again.

One afternoon we all drove to the Bagh (flower garden), the Rajah's guest-house, th four miles from the city. It had a pretty gard one part of which a number of low, clipped hed rmed an intricate pattern.

I was curious to see what it reall and made a careful inspection. It was some ti o, before it

dawned on me that here, in this remote spot, some one had laid out a reproduction of the Hampton Court Maze. The designer had passed on long ago and his work was meaningless to the malis (gardeners), who had religiously clipped and pruned the hedges until they barely reached the knee and left one to wander ridiculously, knee-deep along the now obvious meanderings of the paths.

There was some wonderful snipe-shooting in the neighbourhood, and the Rajah took me out one morning to a promising jhil a few miles away.

There were snipe in plenty, but we had little sport. The Rajah had a couple of men to carry him whenever there was any water, and one was careless enough to slip, wetting a princely leg. This was more than the Rajah could endure, so we made for the car to revive him with curry puffs and chapattis, after which he decided that a chill could only be averted by an immediate return home.

So, to my chagrin, ended our day among the snipe. We had fired three shots in all, bringing home one solitary bird. The bag was nearly a much larger one though, for the Rajah had the bad luck just to miss me with his only shot.

Another afternoon there was polo on the maidan, where the late Maharajah used to uncage trapped panthers and ride them down with a hog-spear.

What pleasure the Rajah can have got out of his polo it was difficult to imagine. He sat immovable like an equestrian statue in a remote corner of the ground, except for an occasional burst when, roaring "Leave it," he would gallop (?) very slowly to the ball and give it a gentle tap, while the remaining players drew aside in respectful admiration.

Having thus asserted himself he withdrew in a dignified fashion to his former position.

There was never any danger of my over-sleeping in the morning.

Sleeping in the open is conducive to rising with the sun, and even if I had been disposed to slumber on, it would have been impossible. At crack of dawn a hideous

cacophony burst on my ears, for the band began producing farmyard noises from their instruments in preparation for an hour or so of practice in the inner courtyard.

But this was nothing to what went on in the outer court. O. Henry makes one of his delightful characters remark on "the admirable uproar of the pianner," and "admirable uproar" hit off exactly the contest which took place every morning between a drum-and-fife band and half a dozen bagpipers!

An hour or so of this and I was able to face anything the day might have in store—the worst was over.

It was therefore but a drop in the ocean when the Rajah, with the kindest of intentions, ordered the pipers to play me through my lonely breakfast which they did very thoroughly, marching up and down the long verandah.

It took all my persuasive powers to prevent the Rajah from putting them into kilts, and, though I cannot claim Scotland as the land of my birth, some Highland clan should think of me with gratitude for having saved its historic tartan from being desecrated by recreant limbs.

One morning, when the tumult had subsided and I was sitting with Prakash on the verandah, I noticed an unwonted liveliness round the Rajah's quarters across the court.

A long queue of men dressed in darbar clothes filed past the Rajah as he sat enthroned, salaaming deeply and offering something which I could not see because of the crowd.

Prakash explained.

"To-day is our Dasehra. It is a great day for all Hindus. To-day, my father sits and his people come bringing rupees."

"How many rupees?" I asked.

"I do not know. Lakhs and lakhs, I think so," said Prakash optimistically.

Whether the Rajah really did receive tribute, or whether his subjects merely presented gold mohurs or rupees to be formally touched and remitted, I never found out, and our attention was soon diverted to the

outer-courtyard whither the Rajah, having touched or pouched all the coins he could, repaired to review his comic-opera army.

It was paraded in full force and motley uniforms. The infantry, nearly a hundred slipshod warriors, stood in a wavering line, clinging desperately to their prehistoric rifles.

On their right was the cavalry unit, eighteen lancers strong, and in the rear of the infantry were drawn up the historic Gurumpore pikemen, a dozen hoary veterans propped up by their antiquated weapons.

As soon as the Rajah reached the saluting base, the first gun of the salute crashed out, to the great discomfiture of the cavalry, which scattered in all directions and caused the aged pikemen to skip more nimbly than for many a long day.

It was well that the Rajah was only a nine-gun man, for, otherwise, there would soon have been no army left to review.

Whatever the Rajah may have felt at the loss of Farnell, he showed no signs of regret or depression; rather he behaved as if a weight had fallen from his shoulders and was prepared to enjoy a period of peace after the recent months of unrest.

His social activities culminated in a nautch at the palace.

It was held at the far end of his wide verandah, where a carpet, brocaded chairs and sofas were arranged for his European guests to the number of a dozen or so.

Behind these, on the ground, squatted a hundred or more of his officials in silken coats and gay turbans, chewing betel with a persistency that would have done credit to a chewing-gum expert. Behind them, in turn, stood a motley, bedraggled crew of servants, whose lewd jokes caused frequent outbursts of ribald laughter.

From a large, darkened room opening onto the verandah the Rani, with several of her women and the indefatigable Mrs Wright, watched the entertainment with a running commentary which was very audible at every lull in the proceedings.

The dancers consisted of eight bulky wenches whose

heavily made-up eyes flashed seductive messages to the Rajah who shifted in his seat uncomfortably conscious that the time and place were ill-chosen for dalliance.

The dancer of the Western stage discards everything which decency permits, but these ladies of the nautch reversed proceedings. They were swathed heavily in scarlet and tinsel bodices and shawls, with voluminous, heavily pleated skirts which descended to the ankles and billowed in graceful curves as they gyrated.

Their feet were bare; their finger-nails hennæd; their arms and ankles heavy with bracelets and bangles; "rings on their fingers and bells on their toes" almost obliterated those members; their oiled and scented hair had been drawn back tightly into plaits into which flowers were woven, and every stout lass carried a white handkerchief tucked into her waistband as part of her equipment, rather than for use.

The girls were accompanied by half a dozen musicians, among whom the tom-tomists had easily the best of it.

The master of the ceremonies was a lecherous-looking villain, whose by-play with a buxom and not ill-looking bundle of wickedness, coupled with sly glances of both at the Rajah, made it obvious that they were not unhopeful of undermining his virtue; in which I regret to say they proved completely successful.

The member of the troupe who really fascinated me was a boy of about thirteen. An accomplished performer on the tom-tom, his contortions writhings and eye-gymnastics gave added point to the dance, and, as the evening advanced and he became thoroughly worked up, caused him to resemble a licentious frog.

As for the nautch itself, I must confess to a feeling of flat disappointment. I had visions of dreamy-eyed, seductive beauties moving their slender bodies with a sensuous grace; instead there were eight solid females slapping their feet resoundingly as they moved heavily in time to the squealing wail of the music.

After a time there was an improvement. They did a species of maypole dance which was both graceful and attractive, and would have been infinitely more so with less cumbrous dancers. It was in fact, the only

nautch dance of all I ever saw I would care to see repeated.

I have not the least doubt that, in my ignorance, I was missing all the finer points of the dancing, which was evidently meeting with warmest approval from the Indian portion of the audience, whose excited cries stimulated the troupe to further exertions.

The Indian is a great stickler for quantity in his amusements, and this was no exception, for, starting about nine o'clock, after dinner, it was still going strong, if a trifle wearily, when I sought my couch at 4 a.m.

The European visitors, the ladies of whom had visited the Rani at intervals during the evening, left about midnight, and I would gladly have imitated their example had there been any getting to sleep, but the tom-toms alone precluded any hope of this.

The Rajah and I were left in solitary state in the "royal enclosure", and I was not sorry when he invited me to come and have a glass of champagne with the Rani.

We found her in a large room whose chief feature was an enormous bed with four posts of massive silver, on which were three children, fast asleep, sprawled untidily. The floor was tastefully littered with orange-peel and banana-skins.

The Rani explained that it made little difference to any of them how long the performance lasted, as they slept at intervals to break the monotony of the dance.

After a time she and the children retired to the Zenana, accompanied by the Rajah, who was apparently anxious to see them safely out of the way before abandoning himself to the real enjoyment of the evening.

His absence made me a painfully conspicuous figure in my place of honour, isolated from the rest of the audience.

I felt like the hero in a musical comedy when, complete with chorus, he is about to vocalize his sorrows.

I felt still more like him when the music struck up and the miserable siren, the Rajah's enslaver, detached herself from the rest and, advancing as she sang, launched out into what was obviously an amorous and impassioned appeal to my baser instincts. Her ogles and gestures left me in little doubt as to the burden of her song;

however, I looked as puritanically bored as I could until, with a petulant shrug, she transferred her attentions to the fat old Treasury officer behind me—to his great content and the amusement of his fellow officials.

The Rajah's return brought the amorous interlude to an abrupt conclusion, greatly to my relief, and an interval followed, which the dancers and musicians must have found almost as welcome as the refreshments which were brought to them.

The court jester now took the floor to while away the time Squatting on the floor he sang to the accompaniment of a portable, leg-less harmonium of sorts, which he played with the right hand and blew with the left, singing nasally all the time.

He was very popular, and I was given to understand that much of his success was due to the cleverness of his topical hits, the victim in each case being clearly indicated by the chaff of his neighbours.

At the end of one song the Rajah suddenly asked:

"How you like that, Mr Van Wart?"

"I expect it was very good," I replied guardedly, "but I do not know enough Telugu to understand what it was about."

"Oh," said the Rajah, "that was in English."

"Was it?" said I, "I did not recognize it; could he sing part of it again?"

The comedian, highly gratified, favoured me with the whole of it as an encore, and, by dint of listening very carefully, I got the hang of a portion at any rate. Of all odd things to come across under such conditions it was an old music-hall favourite

"Again, again, again, I wish I were single again," and the rest of it, but the accent and intonation of the singer made it well-nigh unrecognizable.

The nautch dragged on hour after weary hour; the dancers took to performing in pairs while the rest slept in heaps at the back, and the frog-like knave yawned with his mighty mouth, while he tom-tomed mechanically in a half sleep.

When the Rajah disappeared, to be speedily followed by the temptress, I departed also, dropping asleep in

spite of the noise almost as soon as I touched the pillow.

I awoke at dawn to find the bedraggled, yawning crowd departing wearily after nine hours of non-stop entertainment—which the Oriental discovered years before our enterprising folk ever thought of such a thing.

CHAPTER XIX

MADRAS, AND HOW THE RAJAH VISITED THE VICEROY

AFTER this dissipation, the Rajah was forced by his women-kind, and much against his will, to turn his attention to more serious affairs.

For the first time the Zemindars (land-owners), as distinct from ruling chiefs, were to elect one representative to the Madras Legislative Council. Among these, Gurumpore held pride of place, and any of the Rajah's predecessors would have been elected without opposition as a matter of course.

Being what he was, however, four other Rajahs had offered themselves for election, of whom two were men of education and push, and it was clear the Rajah would have to fight hard for success.

He would much have preferred to be left alone in peaceful obscurity but the Rani, flushed by her Ooty success, was anxious for new worlds to conquer, and had goaded him into the necessary state of proper pride to fight for his rights.

The palace, usually resembling that of the "Sleeping Beauty", became a hive of industry; such a running and scurrying to and fro, such a lot of talk and misapplied energy with such futile results, that even the League of Nations could not have bettered it.

I got the whole benefit of it from the Rajah and Rani, separately and in duet. They were desperately afraid, at first, that the old Maharani would hold aloof, which would have been fatal to the Rajah's chances. Her support, they told me, was doubly necessary.

To begin with, her name and reputation would carry a vast deal of weight with the electors and, equally as

important, her money-bags would be available to meet the expenses of the election.

Luckily her intense family pride triumphed after some hesitation, because of her supreme contempt for the Rajah (Chitti Babu was her private name for him), and she threw the whole of her influence into the scale on his behalf.

Only the Zemindars themselves could elect their representative, and, as there were but ninety odd electors to five candidates, some furious canvassing took place.

Emissaries were going and coming at all hours of the day and night, much to the detriment of my rest.

I soon understood how great were the calls on the Maharani's purse.

Every elector had to be visited and, as they were scattered all over the Presidency, often far from the railway, travelling expenses alone reached a substantial figure.

The bulk of the money, though, went to the very pliable voter ; the remainder was pocketed by the Rajah's trusty messengers, who took handsome toll of the sums entrusted to them.

There was a delightful simplicity about it all. The estimated cost of each vote was arrived at after an infinity of talk, and off went a messenger laden with bags of rupees to the required amount with something over for emergencies.

Curiously enough there was always an emergency, for none of the money ever came back.

Shortly before the date of the election the Rajah was able to assert, with confidence, not only that he was sure to get in, but also by how many votes he would be successful.

A bombshell was sprung on him, however, by the withdrawal at the eleventh hour of one of the candidates, who transferred his votes *en bloc* to a dangerous rival—for a consideration, of course—leaving the Rajah no longer at the head of the poll.

Now were there alarums and excursions indeed. Every available canvasser was sent out, armed with

sacks and chests of rupees, with instructions that a sufficiency of votes to turn the scale once more was to be obtained at any cost.

But all was well, and the Rajah was duly elected. But even then he had another shock, for five of his votes were protested against, leaving him once more in a minority.

He was quite unconcerned and gave the retort courteous by putting in a counter protest to restore the balance.

The Government was called upon to adjudicate; a thankless task.

Their award brought the Rajah in by one vote, and a very powerful representative he must have proved.

He could not understand the debates or make an intelligible speech; in fact, he was a typical example of the rank-and-file of India's future legislators, who will be led by the nose wherever the pleader-politicians happen to be heading at the moment. After all, are we any better ourselves?

There were great rejoicings at Gurumpore, and if the election had done nothing else it had, at least, put money into circulation.

During my sojourn at the palace my intimacy with the Rajah and Rani had naturally increased rapidly, until I was no longer expected to wait for a summons to the Zenana, but called there whenever occasion arose and received salaams (permission to enter) as at a European bungalow.

Sometimes the Rani used to air her latest accomplishment, English ballad-singing, for my benefit, and when she did so, I had much ado to keep a straight face and make the necessary compliments; for to hear the little lady, with her nose-pearl bobbing at every note, warble "Sing me to sleep", most terribly sharp and with a ferocious rolling of the eyes, was almost more than I could bear.

Her instructress was Mrs Taylor, wife of the bandmaster, a lady of Eurasian parentage who, with Mrs Wright, the nurse, practically dictated the policy of the Zenana, and to a large extent of Gurumpore itself.

The worst of these Zenanas is that a Maharani is by force of circumstances very largely dependent on the servant-class for her outlook on life, for she rarely mixes with people of her own rank with any knowledge of the "manners and tone of good society" (as the manuals on etiquette have it), so that she imbibes the most erroneous ideas.

So far as the general topics go, the ladies of the Zenana, such few as are interested, are well primed with superficial information at any rate, and where local matters are concerned there is little they do not know, and few strings they cannot pull.

Many Indian husbands prefer to keep their wives in purdah lest the women, when emancipated, should become too powerful. It is a moot point, actually, whether their power is not greater in their seclusion, and certainly there are women innumerable who refuse to come out of purdah when they have the chance.

The tragedy comes when a girl who has received a Western education, and is used to outdoor games and a free life, is mewed up in the Zenana with a lot of illiterate women whose only talk is of sex, clothes and jewels. And if widowhood be her lot, Heaven help her. She is then condemned to a life-time of dark ill-ventilated insanitary rooms behind locked doors, where, unless she has justified her existence by giving birth to a man-child, she is despised and scorned until the day when death comes as a happy release.

Life in the palace, interesting though it was for a time, was beginning to pall, so I was glad enough to hear that we were to visit Madras for a spell.

The Viceroy, Lord Minto, was to visit Madras, and, as Viceroy's visits were rare in Southern India, it was an opportunity not to be missed.

I fancy the Rajah must have been in funds at the moment, for we arrived in Madras a month or more before the Viceroy and embarked on a whirl of gaiety.

The Rajah and Rani found plenty to occupy them, so that my duties for the most part consisted in visiting

them for an hour or two in the morning, after which I was left to my own devices.

The Madras Club, where I stayed, was like the Ooty Club, determined to put women in their proper place. They were not allowed in the comfortable and extensive Club building, but were relegated to a paltry-looking little annexe about fifty yards away, which was so uninteresting and dull that it was patronized only by an occasional bridge four, the majority of ladies preferring to sit in their cars or carriages in the compound.

Every carriage had its own "pitch", so that it was easy enough to find one's friends.

From dusk till dinner-time the fair of Madras sat tête-à-tête with their male admirers, regaling themselves with parched corn, potato-chips and cocktails. Many a tale could the flying foxes (great bats) in the branches above have told—possibly they tried to tell, if their screams were any guide; possibly they were expressing their disgust at "such goings-on" when they ejected unwanted food onto the carriages below.

From 7.45 until 8 it was quite a little comedy to sit in the lounge of the historic long bar downstairs and watch the string of poodle-fakers saunter in with an air of detachment to mingle with the crowd at the bar, after which, a few minutes later, the husbands would stream out to drive their lawful spouses home.

Tennis at the club was a strenuous affair, played with a towel tucked into the waistband of the trousers and used plentifully after every game. But the men and women of leisure affected the more distant but delightful Adyar Club, where tennis, golf, rackets and squash were to be had with the added luxury, so rare in India, of boating on the Adyar river.

Many a delightful row did I have down to the river-bar at the mouth, where we used to land by the Theosophical College to watch the tiny spider-crabs dodging and swerving like a rugger three-quarter as they made for their holes in the sand. On the return journey darkness fell and the river glowed in a myriad phosphorescent fire-works.

Twice running I revelled in the fascinating beauty

of it. The third night I took a party, fired by my description, to view the spectacle, and, of course, that happened to be the very night when the river had run out of phosphorus. What was wrong I never discovered, excepting that on some nights the river obliged and on others it did not.

The golf was always full of interest. The first tee was close to the river which was easily reached by a sliced drive. If you were successful in this it was the duty of one of the small caddies to wade in and retrieve the ball. This happened one day in a mixed foursome; the caddie, a very small and very black one, darted in, seized the ball, stood for a moment pulling anguished faces and burst into floods of tears. Great chattering and giggling among the others followed, resulting in three more taking to the water; after much commotion and splashing they brought him ashore. The poor child had lost his trousers and they had had to redress him in the water!

There were snakes, too, on occasion to lend a spice of excitement to a dull round; a cobra was once inclined to dispute possession of an opponent's ball, and another day I had to slay a karait with my putter before holing out.

These were quite a legitimate part of the game and did not put one off, but what was intensely disconcerting was to be laughed at for a foozled drive by a comical little pair of owls, which sat evening after evening on a low branch by the tenth tee. They watched with intense interest and goggling eyes, and when, all too conscious of their critical gaze, I drove a contemptible ball, they simply sat and chuckled, loud and long. They were the only owls I have really disliked.

As the date of Lord Minto's visit drew near, the Maharajahs and Rajahs of the south flocked to Madras to add to the gaiety of nations.

The Rajah of Cochin was among them, and gave a garden party.

It was a full-dress affair, which I, as an unofficial civilian, was condemned to attend in morning coat and top-hat in that climate. What fools we are!

The day before the party, when breakfasting with

a member of Council, I mentioned that my only topper was at the other end of India.

Lady Atkinson had a bright idea. A globe-trotter had left one behind with them, having no further use for same, and if it would fit me I was welcome to it.

The hat was produced and passed for use. (By an odd coincidence it belonged to a former member of Parliament, one of the Palmers from my own home town.) At the party, after a good ironing, it cut quite a creditable figure among the relics of many styles and shapes with which it had to compete. But alas! Madras is a hot place and, as the afternoon wore on, the hat descended lower and lower until my ears alone saved me from extinction.

When the Governor and Lady Lawley were taking leave of our host I was standing a few yards away talking to a very popular lady with a brusque tongue.

Without any warning she broke out with, "I cannot stand that beastly hat another minute," and, without more ado, smote it from my head with her sunshade. As it fell she took a flying kick which landed it neatly at the Governor's feet, whence I, poor worm, had to retrieve it!

The Viceroy's visit provided me with plenty of entertainment. The Rajah and I joined the glad throng whenever there was any chance for him to be in the limelight, and I had my work cut out to keep his little eccentricities from becoming too noticeable.

We started the excitement on the way back from Government House before breakfast, after witnessing the presentation of new colours to the ——shire regiment. A pretty spectacle.

"Mr Poter," true to his word, had sought pastures new, and his successor was down with fever. The Rajah, therefore, took the wheel of the car and proved, in more senses than one, a fearful driver.

We were ambling slowly along the broad Mount Road when a car, going at a moderate speed, passed us. This was too much for the Rajah's nerves. He shrieked, "My Gard!" threw up his hands and abandoned the car to its fate.

We made a glorious swoop to the left and were on the point of demolishing a large tree, when the Rajah's brother-in-law, from the front seat, made a despairing grab at the wheel and saved the situation.

"That was very bad, was it not, Mr Van Wart?" stammered the Rajah, who had turned a ghastly green.

I agreed with emphasis, but we were at cross purposes, for the Rajah was blaming the other driver, and I certainly was not.

I was glad to be deposited at the Club with a whole skin and, lest further and worse happenings should occur, I urged the Rajah not to drive himself to the Levée that night. The advice was good as far as it went, but, as it proved, it did not go far enough.

For the last ten days or so the Reception had caused much heart-burning among the ladies of Madras, and there had been strenuous practising of curtseys; a futile performance, because there was great uncertainty as to whether a deep curtsey as at court or a mere bend of the knee was demanded. The point was argued hotly and indecisively. The result provided Their Excellencies with an unexpected entertainment on the night, as they were favoured with a duck or a prolonged wobble according to taste.

The scene, gay as it was, hardly came up to my expectations; it also lacked the wealth of brilliant uniforms which make its Delhi and Simla counterparts such glittering pageants, but the Rajah of Cochin's golden, beehive-like headgear intrigued me mightily.

The Rajah had arranged to meet me at Government House but, long after the appointed hour, there was no sign of him.

It was idle to speculate on his non-appearance; he was capable of the most freakish behaviour. His house was miles away and not on the telephone, so I could only hope for the best and wait.

At last, when nearly all the bows and bobs had been made, he came, but such a crushed and crumpled little Rajah.

The diamond-clasped aigrette in his blue and gold turban was broken; the turban itself listed heavily to

port; there was a scratch on his precious nose, and he withdrew a handkerchief from his upper lip to exhibit a tiny cut from which the blood was oozing.

I tidied him up as best I could and led him up to make his bow, which he did awkwardly enough, with most of his face obliterated by the handkerchief, as one seeking to avoid recognition.

He was too frightened and incoherent to do more than mumble "Stupid fellow", which might have been meant for anyone. It was not till I had taken him home and was being driven back to the Club that I got the story from the new chauffeur.

"I was in 'ospital with a temperature of 102° when he sends word to say that I was to drive 'im to Government 'ouse to-night."

This then was the result of my well-meant advice in the morning.

"'E tells me," went on the chauffeur, "to go by the Marina; when we turns off towards Government 'ouse I slows down, because I didn't know the road, and it was very dark. 'Faster, faster,' 'e says. 'I don't know the road,' I says. 'Go faster, I am telling the way,' 'e says. 'Right,' I says. 'Round 'ere,' 'e says, and we 'its the wall of a bridge and chucks 'im against the windscreen. I 'ope that'll learn 'im not to get me off of a sick-bed again."

The next morning a peon interrupted my breakfast to say that the Rajah's brother-in-law was below and wanted to see me urgently.

The Madras Club, like the Yacht and Byculla Clubs at Bombay and the Bengal Club at Calcutta, kept itself as a home from home and closed its portals to the Aryan brother.

I found Gulab Singh sitting in his carriage at the foot of the steps and looking anywhere but at me.

"The Rajah wants you to go to Government House and tell Lord Minto that he cannot come this morning."

This was the morning upon which the Rajah and Rani had been granted interviews with Lord and Lady Minto respectively. They had been overjoyed when I arranged it, so, for a moment, I thought something

serious must have happened to make the Rajah back out of his engagement.

"Is it because of his accident?" I asked.

"Yes, he is too ill to go," answered Gulab Singh, looking uncomfortable. If he had looked less shifty, and if I had not seen the extent of the Rajah's injuries with my own eyes, I might have been taken in.

As it was I was merely angry.

"Nonsense," I said. "You must go back and tell the Rajah he is greatly honoured at being granted an interview, and he must go."

"He will not, Sahib. I told him, but he says he is too ill."

Obviously Gulab Singh was a broken reed, so I sent for my topee and drove off with him to knock some sense into the Rajah.

I was frankly furious that a petty little ruler, who was lucky to get an interview at all, should dare to send a curt message, "I am sorry I cannot come" to His Majesty's representative. If he knew no better it was high time somebody taught him.

Angry as I was, it was all I could do to keep from laughing at the tableau awaiting me in the billiard-room, where I ran my quarry to earth.

The Rajah himself, in loose shirt and trousers of white linen, was recognizable only by the swivel eyes which peered from a mass of bandages. The fragment of brow which remained uncovered was artistically whitened, and he groaned pitifully at the sight of me.

On a settee was the Rani in full regalia, blazing with diamonds and emeralds, comforting a weeping Prakash, and on the billiard-table his little brother lay yelling and kicking, with seven or eight teeth, the cause of the weeping, scattered around him.

In the background Colonel Giffard, Civil Surgeon of Madras, was looking on with a grim smile.

It was lucky that he had not gone, for the Rajah met all argument with a sulky refusal to budge.

"I am feeling ill," was all he would say.

I told him bluntly that I did not believe it, and that he must keep his engagement, but it was like arguing with a blank wall.

It was from the Rani that I extracted the truth at last.

The Rajah was vain. Ye gods ! He feared unfavourable comment on his personal appearance if he presented himself before the Viceroy with his beauty spoiled by two minute scratches.

This gave me the opening I wanted. I asked Giffard, knowing the answer beforehand, if it would hurt the Rajah to have the bandages removed.

Of course he said it would not. Armed with this dictum I gave the Rajah ten minutes to adorn himself, bundled him into the carriage and delivered him safely at the appointed hour to the A.D.C. in waiting.

CHAPTER XX

THE RAJAH GOES PANTHER-SHOOTING

As I stood in the entrance hall of Government House, watching the Rajah being led away, I became aware of a certain liveliness among the scarlet and gold chaprassis and, before I could efface my hot and dusty self behind a palm, I was confronted by Lady Minto, Lady Lawley and suite on their way to receive the Rani and other Indian ladies of high degree.

"We are just going to see your Rani," said Lady Lawley. "What are you doing here ?"

My explanation seemed to amuse them, and I was commanded to seek out an A.D.C. and demand a cooling drink as a reward for my devotion to duty.

At the Garden Party on the following day, Lady Lawley told me that the old Maharani had livened up the proceedings by turning a deaf ear to all hints that her interview had lasted long enough. I was able to supply the sequel.

The old lady came home bubbling with delight, and remarking to all and sundry :

"Other Ranis getting ten minutes ; I getting thirty-five !"

Everybody had been looking forward to the Prince of Arcot's Garden Party as the one social gathering whereat the Viceroy and Lady Minto could be seen at close quarters and under less formal conditions than were possible at the reception.

To a student of human nature a Viceregal function of this nature provides an unfailing fund of amusement. Watch the artless way in which Mr X. or Mrs Y. pose with apparent unconsciousness in the path of the Viceroy,

hoping to be singled out for a few kind words (dossier hastily whispered by the omniscient Private Secretary), and watch them swelling visibly as he passes on after half a dozen tactful sentences. For the next week their less fortunate friends will be regaled with "The Viceroy asked what I thought of the Public Nuisances Act and I told him . . ." or "My dear, what do you think the Viceroy told me . . ."

I know, for I have done it myself with telling effect lots of times.

It is one of the pleasing little subterfuges by which the Indian official deludes himself into thinking that he is something of a Bahadur, and which Mrs Official treasures up to overawe Little Ditchwater-in-the-Dumps in the days of retirement.

The Rajah, possibly on account of his malady, as the Governor suggested, easily outshone everyone else in his efforts to hold the stage.

It is true his pleasant anticipations, like those of us all, were damped by the absence of the Viceroy himself.

The attempt to assassinate Lord Minto by a bomb at Ahmedabad early in his tour, and coming at the end of five years' unsparing service to India, had undermined his health, and most reluctantly, yielding to pressure from Lady Minto and his doctor, he consented to rest instead of attending the Garden Party.

In his absence the Rajah attached himself to Lady Minto and (with all apologies to a very charming lady) it was literally a case of "everywhere that Mary went . . ." For most of the afternoon, had she stepped back suddenly, she would have collided with him.

The only occasion that really defeated the Rajah was when Lady Minto, the Lawleys and a few select guests joined their host for tea in a shamiana (sideless tent). He did his best to call attention to himself by holding on to one of the side-poles with a hungry look, but no invitation to the holy of holies was extended to him.

He took an ample revenge, though, at the time of departure. The "private entrée" folk lined up to shake hands with Lady Minto as she passed along to her car.

The Rajah, to begin with, was three or four places to the right of Prakash and me.

After we had made our adieu I watched Lady Minto idly as she went down the line. Suddenly I caught sight of the Rajah, on our left now, getting in a second farewell, and a minute later he came up smiling half a dozen places further on for a third.

He completed his triumph by holding open the carriage door, and then, elbowing his host out of the way, took the centre of the stage as Lady Minto drove away.

Prakash and I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon. We met a crowd of friends, for he was very popular, and I was wearing my own topper this time !

We were more fortunate that day than Sir George MacMunn, who, in one of his entertaining books, tells of a man in Rajputana who could call up an army of crows, but regrets that he himself never saw him.

One such wizard was at the Garden Party. Taking his stand in front of Prakash and me he lifted his head and called. In a minute or two the heavens rained crows from all directions. It was like the blue jays in Mark Twain's " Tramp Abroad " ; in hundreds and hundreds they came circling round him, or hopping and strutting about him, chattering excitedly.

After a bit they began quite obviously to ask each other what they had come for, and when the man, having collected his crowd, lost interest in them and began some very ordinary imitations of railway trains and so forth, they sneaked away in disgust as rapidly as they had come.

It had been well worth seeing, and in the years to come it gave me an idea which whiled away many an idle moment.

Seated on my verandah I would answer a crow calling from a nearby tree. We would carry on a conversation which grew more and more animated on his part, until he called up a friend. Then the two fools would perch within a few feet of me, looking wildly round in all directions for their unknown friend, answering every squawk from me without connecting me with

the mystery, until at last one obviously said, "We've been had. Let's go," and off they went.

I could always collect two or three, but the real secret remained hidden from me.

The crow-collector was only a side-show; indeed, I am not very clear whether he was an authorized turn or not.

There was an exhibition of both the basket-trick and the mango trick, which was really on the programme, and was the best of its kind I have ever seen. It was done absolutely in the open, in the middle of the lawn, without cover of any sort within fifty yards.

A carpet was laid on which chairs were placed for the principal guests; the lesser fry and the inevitable crowd of servants formed the other three sides of a square. In the centre was the performer, an assistant and a boy.

The mango trick, in which a mango-stone planted in a pot expands under a cloth by easy stages into a baby tree two or three feet high, never aroused any enthusiasm in me.

Nor, for the matter of that, does the basket trick on the stage with all its attendant possibilities; but here with the bare earth beneath and the open air all round it was uncanny.

We saw the boy in the basket ten feet away; we saw the lid put on him and the sword thrust apparently in every possible direction through the sides and the lid; we saw the lid removed and the basket, tilted on one side to show the whole interior, empty. The villain of the piece pointed dramatically, and there on the carpet close to us was the boy himself, unscratched of course.

That is what I saw, or thought I saw; the solution is beyond me. It was, I repeat, the best thing of its kind I ever saw.

The Rajah made one final bid for glory by deputing me to invite His Excellency to be his guest at dinner at Gurumpore on his way back to Calcutta.

It would have involved the whole crew of us packing up and leaving at four hours' notice in order to get there a few hours in advance of the Viceroy. I knew the bustle and confusion that dinner at the station, in a tent, would

entail for guests of such distinction, and was greatly relieved when the Viceroy's Private Secretary pleaded, quite truly, Lord Minto's health as an excuse, and asked me to convey a tactful message of thanks and regret to the Rajah, which I did.

We decided that Lord Minto should not be told anything about it, lest, in the kindness of his heart, he should accept an invitation which he was in no way fit to carry out. It would also be an unnecessary expense for the Rajah.

The Rajah was secretly relieved, so everyone was pleased, and we remained in Madras to simmer down after the unwonted excitement of the past few days.

A Viceroy's visit is a costly affair. It has to be. Nobody loves pomp and pageantry more than the humbler class of Indian. He will go miles and put up with an infinity of discomfort to hustle in a sweaty crowd for hours in order to see the great man flash past in thirty seconds. A Viceroy's visit without a glittering tamasha of scarlet and gold would be as empty of meaning to the mob as Gandhi in European dress without his little properties ; nobody would think anything of it.

And so the money goes to mark India's loyalty !

Christmas came, bringing the Rajah's greetings in the shape of a large silver tray of fruit and a typed missive, " Please accept my hearty congratulations on the return of Merry Christmas and Happy New Year's Day ". Quite a change from the stereotyped form.

At the Christmas dinner which had the honour of my company there was also a newly-married couple, who were thrown into confusion when our host gave us the toast, " Here's to the little ones at home ", and a muzzy guest took it up : " Here's to the little ones to come ", and leered cheerfully at the bride.

The Rajah left Madras in his usual hurry. One morning he announced that he was returning to Gurumpore in two days' time, and I had even shorter notice. He wished me to leave the following day that I might break my journey at Waltair in order to invite the Club members *en bloc* to a Gurumpore " week "—four

days to be precise—which he proposed to hold in a few days' time.

The invitation sounded attractive. I was surprised therefore to find that it fell very flat, and in consequence it seemed likely that I should draw a complete blank. However, with the aid of a persuasive tongue, I obtained a dozen acceptances and a few more, "I'll think it over and let you know's".

In the end nearly twenty turned up, and it meant a strenuous day or two arranging quarters for them. The small Gurunapore coterie put up as many as they could, and the rest were given three or four empty bungalows.

I had my hands full getting the necessary furniture installed, arranging for chota hazri and a dozen petty things involving the most detailed instructions, without which some essential would most certainly have been forgotten.

It is very difficult to move an Indian servant faster than he deems proper. He merely disappears into the blue and absents himself as long as he thinks safe. He is probably sleeping peacefully in some secluded spot, and only so long as you have him in sight can you be sure of him.

An extra hustle was needed too in our preparations, as news came in of a panther which was consuming an undue number of goats at a village twenty miles away. The Rajah arranged to meet Slater, who, in company with the Superintending Engineer and his wife, was on tour in the district, and we were all to camp there for a day or two in order to put an end to the unwelcome raider.

The Rani insisted on coming too. This of course, entailed a lot of extra trouble, but having seen a bit of life her appetite was whetted, and she was determined not to be left out of anything.

The Rajah and I went by car, and the Rani in her purdah carriage with a change of horses half-way.

The car stuck in a dry river-bed, but luckily a crowd of coolies working in the fields hard by came to the rescue. With much shouting and laughter they heaved us out and as we drove away the Rajah, with a lordly

gesture, tossed them one rupee to share between forty! We left them fighting for it.

The camp was pleasantly pitched in the jungle near the village and was comfortable enough, but the panther would not oblige, and there was very little to do all day. Two further days passed, and but one more remained before the "week" started, so Slater, who was our chief shikari, decided to beat for the panther in the afternoon.

The scene of operations was the side of a rocky hill covered with trees and jungle scrub. There were five guns, of whom I was given the centre station.

Behold me then, who had previously hunted nothing more dangerous than a hare, dumped down on a small rock in the jungle, with a handful of cartridges and a rifle of whose working I was blissfully ignorant, waiting patiently for a panther on which to try my prentice hand.

I could neither see nor hear any of the others and, when the tom-toms began to thud, the sticks and kerosene tins to rattle and the villagers to hurl insults at the panther's ancestry, I was conscious of a great prickle of excitement all over.

I was longing for the panther to come and be gloriously slain by my unerring bullet, but I was almost certain that it would not be unerring if he did come, so I gave up speculation and wished for the Rajah's swivel eyes that I might command a wider vision.

We drew a blank, to our great annoyance, and over tea on the road at the foot of the hill decided that another beat was possible before the light went. We were all the keener, as there was a rumour among the beaters that the panther had broken back through the line and was still lurking on the hillside.

Just as we were going off to our stations the Rajah said to me, "Mr Van Wart, I want that you sit with me. I do not like this sitting alone."

"Hadn't you better get one of the others?" I suggested, thinking that someone with experience was what he needed.

"No," he said emphatically. "I wish you to come."

So I remained at the lowest station with the Rajah

and Gulab Singh. The latter, who was armed only with a revolver, was deputed by the Rajah to sit behind us, to guard the rear.

After fidgeting and peering about uneasily for a minute or two the Rajah said, " If a bear or a leopard or a pig should come, do you think that you could kill it ? "

" I might, but I don't think so," I replied quite truly, because such a happy issue out of afflictions I felt was unlikely.

There was a silence, broken only by the noise of the advancing beaters. The Rajah scanned the neighbouring trees, but they were all too slender or too bare of branches to offer hope of sanctuary.

" If a pig or a leopard or a bear should come I think it is better not to shoot, then perhaps it will go," said the little sportsman at last.

His face fell when I protested, then, a moment later, a look of horror came over his face and he looked round apprehensively.

We all looked round, for we had all heard a stealthy rustling behind us. Yes, there it was again, and yet again ; nearer this time. Our eyes tried in vain to pierce the thick undergrowth, but we could see nothing.

Again the rustling, and a twig snapped ; it sounded less than thirty yards away. The Rajah turned a hideous cross-channel colour and his gun was shaking in a way that boded an early death for Gulab Singh or me, or both.

Just when the suspense was becoming unendurable the beast broke from cover and dashed across a small clearing.

Nobody fired. It was a mongoose !

Soon the light began to fail, and the " tumult and the shouting died ". The beat was over and we were soon joined by the others, more disconsolate than ever because there had been a bear in the beat ; but the beaters, scared at the approach of darkness, had made for the road, allowing it to double back into safety.

Our last night in camp was a gloomy one. We had not had even a smell of the panther, and some vague rumours of a mythical tiger on the other side of the village were received with disdainful sniffs.

Worse was to follow, though, in the morning. We had an early breakfast, and were about to start back to Gurumpore, when an excited crowd of jabbering villagers arrived with the news that a tiger had killed a few hundred yards from the village.

This was too much for two of the party who, hastily arranging to stay and sit up that night over the kill, set about the preparation of a machan forthwith.

They were in luck. About two in the afternoon they went on foot to see that everything was in order for their night's vigil, expecting that the tiger was indulging in a siesta between meals.

They rounded a corner of the narrow jungle path to find the beast crouched on the carcase of the bullock not twenty feet away.

Allenbury, who was leading, fired and wounded the animal, which, with a throaty roar of fury, came at him with a mighty spring; but the shot had broken its shoulder and the beast, falling short, rolled over into a nullah and was killed outright with a shot through the heart.

It was a matter of seconds only, but exciting ones they were.

CHAPTER XXI

SOCIAL LIFE IN AJMER

THE Gurumpore "week" went with a swing from start to finish.

It differed but little from any of its kind. There were golf and tennis tournaments, and a gymkhana with mounted and dismounted events, for all of which the Rajah gave handsome prizes.

I, as major domo, had an anxious moment or two. One evening, after being out all the afternoon, I went to put the name-cards round the dinner-table, but to find that the flowers, promised with many protestations by the head mali, had not been sent.

The resourceful khitmatgars were equal to the occasion, however; they produced a vast supply of coloured seeds, millet possibly, and in an incredibly short time had decorated the table, laid for fifty, with intricate patterns, so forming a most effective scheme of decoration.

A far worse moment came just before the arrival of the guests for their first meal at the palace. Some good fairy impelled me to see that all was well in the ladies' cloak-room. I entered to find the palace servants' idea of toilet requisites for the fair sex had stopped short at a bench adorned with a row of a dozen humble but necessary utensils. A few hectic minutes followed before, and in the nick of time, the room was given a normal appearance.

We were lucky in the night chosen for the dance. There was a full moon, and the white marble court, with its crystal fountains spouting forth jets of liquid silver, made an unforgettable picture.

The old Maharani and the Rani, for the first time in their lives, watched from a darkened room an English

dance of the hearty three-collar-a-man type, also some life about the polkas, waltzes, barn-dances and riotous, up-and-down-the-room Lancers.

They were indeed favoured with an unrehearsed cabaret for, after a well-champagned supper, when the band struck up a lively measure, a youthful guest essayed a spirited *pas seul*.

The band responded nobly, the pace grew hotter and hotter until "vaulting ambition o'er leaped itself" and landed the performer, with a crash, through the chick which screened the Maharani from view, and spread-eagled his clutching, kicking form into the lap of the dowager.

His contribution to the evening's enjoyment was not well received, I am sorry to say, and for a time the irate old lady was not to be appeased. There was a decided "off with his head" atmosphere which induced him to keep in the background until the outraged lady had retired to the safety of her Zenana.

A day or two after our guests had departed Prakash and I returned to Ajmer, accompanied by an iron-bound chest containing five thousand rupees and a puppy, a present from Slater, which might, he said, turn out to be a good long-dog or a regular pie.

After dinner on the third night of our journey Buster (because he was brown, of course) was lying curled up asleep on my berth in the train, and Prakash, asleep also, on the opposite one. I was walking up and down with a colonel and his Memsahib whose acquaintance I had made at dinner.

Said the lady to her husband, as we passed our carriage, "Do look, Tom, isn't he a dear little chap."

"Yes," said I. "You would not think he was at the Chiefs' College at Ajmer. He is very young to go away from home."

A puzzled look, followed by a laugh from both, made me aware that Buster and not Prakash had been the object of admiration.

We found our house, horses and establishment all "teek and achcha"; in fact, it was difficult to imagine we had been away at all.

One small indication there was, it is true. A day or two before our hurried departure from Ajmer I had bought a small Stilton cheese in a porcelain jar. In the hurry of departure it had been left in a locked and sealed almirah; on our return it was exercising itself in skirmishing order all over the interior.

We were no longer troubled by our useless guard of sepoys, but our visiting establishment was increased by the advent of three Brahmans, who came every morning to pray with, or over, Prakash for five minutes, at so much a month, before we started for the college.

They were an undistinguished-looking crew, always equipped with unfurled umbrellas and unclean clothes, but I took to the smallest of them. A knave with a humorous twinkle, who, I will swear, always pocketed his pay, after duly testing every rupee, with his tongue in his cheek, as much as to say, "You and I know what humbug it all is; but it pays, it pays."

Prakash was by this time sufficiently accomplished to write a weekly letter to his mother. It was a weary affair, whether it was three lines of laborious English or a startling effort in Hindi, scrawled with a broad-pointed wooden pen in enormous Nagri characters.

Like every right-minded boy of his age, Prakash loathed the job and used to try wheedling.

"You write to my mother and then you tell her my *namuskars*" (which meant the proper filial greetings).

Our Sundays brought us occasional visits from a cousin of the Rani, who was in his last year at the College. He was a fat youth whom Prakash called his "mamu", but we both found him rather dull and preferred the days when some of Prakash's small friends came for riotous games. We used to collect more than the carriage was constructed to hold, and my hands were busy during the two-mile drive in preventing any "man overboard" catastrophes.

A very excellent flower and poultry show was held about the end of February, in some gardens by a picturesque lake. The élite were the guests of the Commissioner on lawns shaded by mighty trees, with a terrace of white marble along the lake-side. Below this and down bougain-

villea-fringed steps was the show, to which the general public had free access.

For no known reason I was appointed judge of four varieties of flowers. I knew the name and appearance of the nasturtiums, the name but not the appearance of two other kinds, and the fourth I had never heard of.

Luckily my fellow judge was a knowledgeable fellow, so we got on excellently. We judged before breakfast and, after our labours, were regaled sumptuously by the Commissioner in a tent under the trees.

Knowing the keenness of the competition and the knavery of the *malis* (gardeners) we were not surprised, when the show opened, to find that some enterprising gentleman had improved the shining hour, during our absence, by altering the prize-cards to suit his own convenience. Let us hope it amused him as much as it did us.

The table decorations, devised by some of the wives and daughters of railway subordinates, were marvels of ingenuity. The tables were so congested with celluloid swans floating in serried ranks on lakes of glass among bevies of unclad cupids that space for such trifles as plates was hard to find, and the ordinary, tasteful decoration stood no chance at all.

The second day had its surprises. So far as I was concerned the judging was over, but I went round before breakfast to see what was going on, and whether the Commissioner was giving another of his excellent breakfasts.

While talking to the harassed secretary of the show, I was rash enough to say, "That is a fine Minorca," as a coolie passed with a protesting cock tucked under his arm.

"By Gad! You're the very man," said the Secretary, with an evil grin. "Come on. You can help old Harris to judge the fowls." And before I could say "Yea" or "Nay" he had dragged me to a quadrangular enclosure, thrust me through the entrance and shouted, "Mr Harris, Mr Van Wart is judging with you," and disappeared *ek dum*.

Mr Harris was an Indian Christian, who had risen

by his own grit and perseverance until he held the important post of Principal at the big Ajmer Government College. Moreover, he was a nice fellow, but touchy, and so needing punctilious treatment. He was, at the moment, surrounded by a struggling crowd of pungent coolies, all trying to thrust the fowls they were carrying into his face

At first it seemed hardly the thing for me, a mere understudy, to interfere; but as the minutes passed the chaos became more chaotic, and Harris became a perambulating shower-bath in the stuffy enclosure. I felt it was time to take a hand, especially if the fowls were ever to be penned. So, tactfully suggesting that a cup of tea in the breakfast-tent would refresh him for the encounter, I got the place to myself, and, by the time he returned, all was ready for the judging to begin.

Much to my regret I had to reject two entries, those of a white mouse and a large black goat, whose owners besought me with tears in their eyes to enter their pets. I suggested that they should try the Dogs (all varieties) section, but they assured me they would have a better chance among the fowls.

I got rid of them in the end, but fully expected to find them, complete with "First Prize" labels, in the afternoon. They were not there, however, much to the regret of Prakash, who hunted high and low for the mouse with the gleam of a purchaser in his eye.

Harris rather staggered me when we began to judge by asking me to take the White Leghorns, which came first, as he was an exhibitor in that class. I cudgelled my brains for scraps of fowl-lore from childish holidays with an uncle whose hobbies were sporting dogs and fowls.

Luckily, it was a case of an easy first and the rest nowhere. A child could have seen it. Harris beamed all over at my verdict, for the winning birds were his, and my reputation as a judge of fowls was made.

After that it was plain sailing. Harris did all the judging, and every now and then I suggested an amendment, to which he agreed at once.

I was really too successful. Harris, delighted at having

found another enthusiast, produced, a few days later, about fifty suggestions for improving the fowl section of the Show. They would have been sensible enough had they been practicable, but there was no harm in stirring things up a bit, so I signed the document, which was forwarded to the Secretary.

We heard no more of it, but it had an effect, though an unexpected one. The next year there was no section for fowls at all !

The marble bund at the edge of the lake was the scene of a tragedy shortly after the flower show.

A raft overladen with coolies capsized. There was a vast commotion and a crowd gathered, but did little beyond jabber and wail. The accident was seen from the Residency, perched above on a high rock, and the A.G.G., Sir Elliot Colvin, descended hurriedly to the scene.

Under his directions rescue work began, and ere long a body was brought ashore. A telephone message was sent to the Club for the Civil Surgeon to come to the bund at once. The kind-hearted but peppery old Colonel was dragged, fuming at the summons, from the bridge-table.

He drove in his tum-tum to the bund to find the unfortunate coolie dead. Cursing vigorously, Colonel Woolbert returned to his bridge.

Hardly had he picked up his hand when a second message came to the same effect. Off he went again, only to find a second corpse. He had no words to meet the case, but went back to the Club in silent fury.

When yet a third summons arrived there was no servant brave enough to face the wrath to come, so the Club Secretary stepped into the breach.

"Oh, Colonel, the A.G.G. wants you down at the bund, they have got another man out."

The Colonel slapped down his cards. "Tell Sir Elliot that I'm damned if I'm going; tell him what he wants is a coroner and not a doctor !"

Of course, after this outburst, he went. He was right too; unfortunately, a doctor was useless, as he proceeded to tell everybody in hearing. He was a great character. An ardent lover of Shakespeare, he would

comfort a fever-stricken patient, at 7 a.m., with an appropriate quotation and a few blasts from the stump of a foul cheroot. Such methods quickly restored his patient to health in order to avoid a recurrence of the infliction.

Both he and his wife appreciated a good dinner, and were the guests one evening of Mr Euston, who kept a good table with wines, as the babu says, not *so* good.

The Khansamah came round with claret, which Mrs Woolbert refused with indecent haste.

"Oh, you must have some, Mrs Woolbert," said Euston in his silkiest voice; "it is Chateau Lafitte, 1860" (or any good year).

"Oh, is it? I will then," said Mrs Woolbert.

Soon came the Colonel's turn.

"No!" he grunted fiercely to the Khansamah.

"Yes, you must, Willie," called his wife from the other end of the table. "Mr Euston says it is 1860 Chateau Lafitte."

The Colonel accepted a thimbleful and sipped it cautiously.

"No, it isn't, Millie," he replied.

"Really, Colonel, I assure you——" began Euston.

"And what's more," said the unabashed guest, after a prolonged sniff at the wine, "it wasn't opened to-day either."

Tableau! Loud and hurried conversation on all sides.

CHAPTER XXII

MORE ABOUT THE CHIEFS' COLLEGE

AJMER was a pleasant spot; there was always plenty to do. The College formed a little coterie of its own; rather too much of its own, said the rest of the station, who accused it, not without reason, of side.

The 44th Merwaras, permanently stationed in Ajmer until the war first shattered and then obliterated them, and the Bombay, Baroda and Central India (B.B. and C.I.) Railway officials, formed the bulk of the European population.

But it behoved one to tread warily. In the railway one must not accuse a Mrs Carriage-and-Wagon lady of being a Mrs Loco, nor would Mrs Traffic take either designation as a compliment. But Merry Warriors and Railway alike were a good deal nearer to our hearts than any of us perhaps realized until the time for parting came, and, as I said before, Ajmer was a pleasant spot.

In such a large railway centre there were frequent dances for the subordinates at the Railway Institute, to which we were often invited. These dances were a never-ending joy to me. But as for etiquette and "P's" and "Q's", the place was honeycombed with them.

At my first essay in this polite society I hardly dared to move or speak by the end of the evening lest I should be guilty of some further *faux pas*.

I had unwittingly outraged all the canons of decency. I was soundly taken to task by Miss de Castries for my flippant disregard of the steps of the D'Alberts or Circassian Circle.

After a strenuous set of Quadrilles with Mrs Rodrigues I was in the act of removing a handkerchief from the chair to which I had escorted her, when "Puttitt back,

please, that is Mrs Pereira's chair," she said in tones of horror.

Worst of all, after a heated polka with Miss de Souza, I rashly suggested a breath of fresh air outside.

Heavens! I might have made improper overtures to the lady. Her flashing eye withered me with, "You (meaning the bold bad aristocracy) may do that kind of thing, *we* don't."

Oh, it was an evening of woe. But I improved as time went on, and learnt to watch my step in the most approved fashion.

At the College, prize-giving came to break the routine, and a gay scene it was, with the boys a living rainbow of brocaded silk at the back of the hall.

Several Rajput Princes added lustre to the gathering, including gallant old Sir Pertab Singh, Regent of Jodhpur and friend of four generations of our Royal Family, and the Maharaja of Bikaner, twirling his cavalry moustache with the air of a true swashbuckler.

Sir Pertab's great-nephew, now a famous polo player, was one of the reciters whom I had been coaching for the occasion, and I had great difficulty in getting him onto the platform when he heard that the old martinet was in the front row of the audience.

Those were the good old days of affluence before the war, and Waddington, the Principal, gave an object lesson in the art of raising money. The College, like every self-respecting institution, was always in need of money; on this occasion a trifle of eight lakhs or so (about £50,000).

The wily Principal, with half-a-dozen Princes present, had got one of them to promise half a lakh. No sooner did he announce this, amid loud cheers, than a rival ruler went one better with a whole lakh, and in two minutes they had all followed like sheep and the amount was over-subscribed.

Prakash covered himself with glory by reciting, with shy appeal and clear voice, a very short little poem; but the star performer, from a spectacular point of view, was a youth who declaimed "The Revenge" with a

wealth of appropriate gesture which sadly overworked his hands.

The number of boys at the College with guardians increased considerably, and for a few years there were generally four or five, some of whom built their own houses in the College grounds.

The Central India Horse, who seemed to have as many officers seconded as with the regiment, supplied several of the guardians, and a very welcome addition to the College circle they all were ; especially as all were provided with cars, a luxury still in those days, nominally for their wards, but actually for their own benefit.

One guardian, not from the C.I.H., had been Military Secretary to the Governor of a great province, and furnished his bungalow, a bachelor establishment, on an absurdly lavish scale ; of course at the expense of the State employing him. One fifth of the sum would have enabled him to do it adequately and comfortably, but he seemed to think his ward was lucky to get him and must pay for the privilege.

It was a great pity. The example was bad in every way, for such errors of judgment have caused many responsible people, both European and Indian, to question the benefit of guardians for the young princes. Of course, it depends on the individual, and such exaggerated cases were rare ; but the principle is wrong, and should be sternly discouraged. It brings the British into disrepute, and, God knows, we cannot afford any more of that sort of thing. The future ruler of every State should be taught to use money wisely for the benefit of his State and not to squander it on luxuries.

It is useless to bang the big drum and talk about the unchanging East. India *has* changed incredibly during the last ten years, and the wise men are not those who harp on the past and the might-have-been, but those who face the future with a wider vision and try to construct an edifice suited to modern needs on the foundations of the old.

The key to the situation lies not with the politician, but the peasant. So long as the peasantry remained

unaffected, so long as the Sirkar (Government) was their mother and father, just so long was the politician an empty voice.

But that time has passed, and we, with our usual conservatism, were the last to see it. It is too late now to blame the Congress for being first in the field. If we had got our blow in first it would have been comparatively easy to defeat their propaganda. As it is, only the most vigorous and sustained efforts will restore the peasants' confidence in the Government, and those efforts must be made at once if chaos and bloody, internecine struggles are to be averted.

To turn to lighter things, among the newcomers to the College was Hari Singh, the Mian Sahib of Kashmir and heir to his uncle, whom he has since succeeded.

The Maharajah, a quaint little figure with an enormous turban, must have found his short stature a great handicap at times, for when he sat on an ordinary chair his feet could not touch the ground. At one important function he sat in the front row with his little legs dangling uncomfortably in the air. He wriggled for a few minutes with his enormous turban bobbing like a pantomime pumpkin until, just as the speaker was beginning to warm to his work, the Maharajah yawned cavernously and announced plaintively :

" *Yih burra* lengthy speech *hai*," (this is a very long speech), and went to sleep without more ado.

During his visit the monitors held a small and select evening " At Home " on the roof of the pavilion, when the audience was favoured with selections in Sanskrit, Hindi and English from the boys' rather limited repertoire.

As we prepared to go our hosts garlanded us and presented the ceremonial *attar* and *pán*, the former being smeared on the handkerchief extended for the purpose and imparting a pungent reek which even the

A globe-trotting lady next to me looked uneasy when she saw what was going on, and suddenly whispered :

" What shall I do ? I haven't got a hankie "

to the occasion, which made a lasting impression on my memory.

Back in Ajmer again we were bidden by the Rani to mark Prakash's eighth birthday by giving food, and a gift of one rupee, to thirty Brahmans. The task of selection was left to Prakash's tame trio, and a sorry-looking crew they got together. Every one, of course, had an umbrella of sorts, and there was not one among them who looked really clean. I have seen plenty of whited sepulchres of the Brahman caste, but these were not even whited.

They were given a meal "full of stomach" (as Ramamurtis's cook had it) on the broad terrace at the side of the house, and took away in plantain leaves ample supplies for another.

The meal over, Prakash asked me to hold the bag of rupees while he distributed them. One ill-mannered fellow, far from showing gratitude, actually demanded more; other boys at the College, he said contemptuously, had a better idea of what was due to a Brahman!

Unfortunately for him so had I, at least so far as Brahmans of his type were concerned. Luckily he had spurned the rupee before it was offered, so it was not thrown away on him, and I spoke such winged words on the subject of ingratitude that he hastily clutched his precious umbrella and scuttled off like a half-gorged vulture driven from its meal.

CHAPTER XXIII

WE DISPORT OURSELVES AT A FAIR

In November a great *mela* (fair) was held at Pushkar, seven or eight miles from Ajmer, one of the most sacred places to Hindus.

Here is to be found one of the rare temples of Brahmaji, with its four-faced, life-size image of the Creator sitting cross-legged.

A dip in the waters of its sacred lake washes away sin, and special sanctity attaches to the bathe during the last five days of the Hindu month Kartik, which falls at the end of October, or early in November, and determines the date of the fair.

Pilgrims from all over northern and central India come in tens of thousands, densely packed in trains, on camels, horses, in bullock-carts, tongas, ekkas, on shaggy skeletons of ponies or on foot to shed their sins and their stains of travel in the sacred waters.

Never a year passes, so tradition tells, but the sacred crocodiles take their toll from the masses standing the steps of the bathing ghats or waist-deep in the water.

The Commissioner of Ajmer and the Superintendent of Police camped on the outskirts of the village during the week, and kept open house, or tent, for their friends.

Prakash and I drove over. Our way skirted the Anasagar Lake, at that time a wide sheet of water instead of the tiny buffalo-wallow to which it often dwindled.

We left the carriage and walked by a stony short-cut over the steep pass half-way to our destination, in order to save the horses. This gave Prakash an opportunity to feed the monkeys sitting in dozens on a low stone wall by the roadside, eyeing us solemnly until the food appeared, when they swarmed round to take the grain from our

hands. One old warrior, before whom the rest fell back respectfully, actually held my hand tightly with a soft paw while he crammed his mouth and cheeks with the other as he stood erect.

A few yards further along another tribe of them was disporting itself in the branches of two large banyan trees.

The elder ones sat with a far-away look on their puckered black, whisker-fringed faces, their tails dangling invitingly like a lot of bell-ropes. The youngsters chivvied each other from bough to bough and from tree to tree, till the branches rocked and swayed like a billowy sea.

On one branch, high up, a mother was coaxing her tiny son to jump onto a branch two or three feet away. Poor little chap, he was terrified, and so obviously kept saying, "Oh no. Please mummy, I can't." But the wise old mother was patient. She pointed out his friends leaping fearlessly about the tree, and turned to him now and then with a half-encouraging, half-scornful, "Come on, it's all right; don't be a funk."

Two or three times he screwed up his courage, but at the last moment his heart failed him. At last, however, he shut his eyes—at least I will swear he must have—and launched himself into space. A second later he opened them to find himself safe on the other branch, and then puffed out his little chest as much as to say, "By Jove! what a fine chap I am," and back he jumped to his mother's side without a qualm.

In five minutes he was with his friends in the thick of the game, while the wise old mother smiled happily to herself as she explored the jungle of her fur anew for fleas.

We reached the bottom of the pass on the far side by our short-cut before the carriage, and sat on a low sun-warmed wall watching the crowds flocking to the fair. A small Thakur, probably the proud owner of half a dozen dilapidated villages, eyed us for a moment as he passed, lolling back proudly in a weather-beaten Victoria drawn by a fiddle-headed, string-halted screw, whose cracked harness consisted of a number of leather fragments loosely held together by string.

He was a gentleman, was this Thakur, for, at a peremptory order, the carriage stopped and he descended to offer us a lift. I declined as gracefully as I could, while Prakash, I regret to say, giggled helplessly at the idea of a ride in such a ramshackle turnout.

Pushkar was a wonderful sight. We drove slowly through the packed, narrow streets between mud walls tastefully plastered with round cakes of camel-dung drying for fuel.

The syces ran at the horses' heads, and Daraz Khan on the box kept his musical foot-bell going insistently. The crowd, like every Indian crowd, ignored every warning until the last fraction of a second, when men, women and children rushed, fell or were dragged literally from under the horses' feet.

The Commissioner's Camp, though close at hand, was out of the press, so we left the carriage there and went on foot to see the sights.

The way was cleared for us by our bodyguard of half a dozen servants, who scattered the crowd with scant regard for civility in order to permit of our illustrious progress.

As we made our way to the Lake we passed a number of fakirs congregated in a small open space.

There was the usual gentleman in a loin-cloth reclining at ease on a bed of fierce-looking spikes; another, buried in the sand, exhibited only an unprepossessing head, and every one, without exception, was a blot on the landscape.

There was something revolting about their skinny, ash-smeared limbs, their filthy, matted cones of hair bleached to an unwholesome, livid hue. They looked evil, they smelt evil, and I have not the slightest doubt that most of them were evil.

It was good to get away into the clean dirt of the crowd on the brink of the Lake.

And what a sight it was! On three sides low, domed and pillared temples, with long shallow steps, fringed the water, and every available foot of ground seemed to be occupied.

Men, women and children bathing, washing and

beating clothes, pouring water over themselves from brass lotas; strings of women in scarlet, orange, or black saris with great pots of water on their heads wound slowly and gracefully through the crowd.

The sunlight on the water, the brilliant rainbow hues of turban and sari, the glint of brass and the soft green of a peepul tree shading the mellow dome of a weather-beaten, stone temple, made a kaleidoscopic picture of arresting beauty.

Out on the open bosom of the Lake were great logs floating; first one sinks silently and then another; a great shadow seems to steal below the surface, making for a bubbling mass of fish fighting for scraps of food near a bathing-ghat; suddenly the fish vanish with a scuttering dash and a wicked crocodile's snout shoots with a snap over the spot and onto the very edge of the ghat itself, driving the struggling crowd into a huddle of panic.

When we had looked our fill on the gay scene, we made a perilous tour of the fair itself where, on a stretch of open plain, were bullocks, camels and horses to the number of 20,000 or so, picketed with head and heel-ropes, hobbled or showing their paces to the discomfiture of the casual visitor.

When I had wearied of snatching Prakash from the heels of a Marwari stallion, or the bubbling wrath of a camel, we sought the peace and shelter of the Commissioner's tent.

After rest and refreshment we made further excursions, now on an elephant and anon on camels.

On the elephant we sat sideways facing outwards, on each side as in an Irish outside car ("outside,"
'). Prakash

All four of us rose then, so a halt was called for a readjustment and general tightening of girths, to the great delight of the crowd, although, had they but known it, they had just been cheated of the spectacle of Prakash and self looping the loop over the elephant's back.

The camels were worse. We mounted as they lay chewing the cud in placid contentment. No sooner was a leg over the saddle than a wicked-looking head with protruding, glassy eye and inflated, bladder-like tongue slewed round in unpleasant investigation; then front and hind legs rose in sections, jerking us backward and forward disdainfully and, just as we began to settle comfortably in the high-peaked saddle, the brute produced an extra joint in the hind legs and nearly unseated us.

After gazing superciliously into space the brutes set off at a bone-shattering trot.

There is only one way of riding a camel without painful memories. Imitate the toy figures which dangle from a string and shoot out arms and legs simultaneously as the string is jerked; you will amuse any friends who may happen to be looking on, but you will not pray for soft cushions on the morrow as Prakash and I did.

After tea we were entertained with a varied programme of sports on a sandy arena which had been cleared and set with carpets and chairs for the Commissioner's party in lieu of a grand-stand.

A race for camels over low hurdles was something of a novelty, but the blindfold chattie race proved the most popular item on the programme.

Thirty or forty scantily-clad men were more or less blind-folded and lined up behind a row of large earthen chatties full

I had, by this time, cured him [illegible] trifling solecisms, such as using the ta[illegible] his fingers in lieu of a handkerchief [illegible] trusted to acquit himself with credit in [illegible]

The Rajah, perhaps, got the ma[illegible] satisfaction out of his afternoon.

He spent much of the time placin[illegible] inent positions directly in front of th[illegible] hope of a little notice.

If His Excellency spoke to him, [illegible] achieved his ambition, trotted off to t[illegible] the horses with a leery but igno[illegible] returned to the lawn, where he was [illegible] faithful Punditji and several atten[illegible] thought and many consultations he [illegible] his fancy and, having done so, pro[illegible] until he had worked through all the [illegible] attendants.

By that time he had undoubtedly [illegible] and, though equally undoubtedly he [illegible] loser on the race, his simple soul was [illegible] up his position again near the Gove[illegible] the programme.

A day or two after the races there [illegible] Ooty hounds near at hand, so the R[illegible] a-hunting he would go. It takes a g[illegible] a stout-hearted horse to live with he[illegible] slopes of those wonderful downs, and [illegible] say, cut a sorry figure.

To begin with, his blue and gold [illegible] diamond necklace struck an unexpected [illegible] the more noticeable because he too[illegible] position some fifty yards from the rest [illegible]

When a jack was found in a nea[illegible] the Rajah followed the disappearin[illegible] few yards, then turned and walked h[illegible]

I hurried up to ask what was the matter. [illegible]

"The stupid horse," he said, "he is [illegible] head about, and I thought so he was spoilin[illegible] so I are to come back, is it not, Mr Van Warne[illegible]

A fleck or two of foam, even on a [illegible]

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RAJAH ATTENDS A LEVEE

EARLY in December we were bidden to meet the Rajah and family in Calcutta.

Lord Minto had been succeeded as Viceroy by Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, and the Rajah and Rani, having tasted blood, were hungering for further interviews.

On this occasion I dwelt in the marble halls of the Bengal Club, overlooking the great Maidán, and very comfortable I found it. The boxwallahs of Calcutta knew how to do themselves well and, in those days, the Government officials, in the cold weather, were not far behind them in that respect.

Tiffin in particular was a leisurely affair, rounded off by cake and madeira, or port, in generous glasses, foreshadowing a short and somnolent afternoon in office.

But those were the good old days when purses were full and Inchcape had not wielded the axe of retrenchment. Nowadays boxwallah and official work and eat in moderation.

At the Bengal Club, by keeping an open ear and silent tongue, I learned something of Calcutta's opinion of Bombay, even as, a few months later at the Yacht Club, I was to gather where Calcutta stood in the estimation of Bombay.

Each of these two great Clubs had its little fads in the way of dress. At the Yacht Club a black coat and white ducks were affected for evening wear by those desiring something cooler than the customary "blacks", while the Bengal Club preferred a white jacket with black trousers.

Driving to the Rajah's house through a dingy quarter

one morning, I was held up by a riot: a Hindu and Mahomedan affair. The police had parted the combatants, and back to back in a double line were trying to push them apart to a safe distance from each other.

To go round would have entailed a Sabbath day's journey so, despite protests from the police, I decided to go through. There was no opposition at all when it came to the point. The rioters obligingly parted to let the carriage through, and, having given me a safe passage, got to work again with lathis and brick-bats with renewed zest.

How much consideration would they have shown to an Englishman to-day?

There was no difficulty about the interviews for the Raja and Rani, although, being outside their own Presidency, they had not been too hopeful about them.

The Military Secretary to the Viceroy, Lt.-Col. Frank Maxwell, with whom I had to arrange details, was as fine a man and gallant a soldier as it has ever been my privilege to meet, and I was lucky enough to be thrown in contact with him again some three years later.

I admired and liked him from our first meeting, and one of my most treasured memories of India is a visit to the Maxwells at the pretty little Curzon House in the Viceregal grounds at Simla.

A soldier to the finger-tips, Maxwell gained the V.C. for saving the guns at Sanna's Post, where Lord Roberts lost his only son, in the Boer War. At the outbreak of the Great War he begged to be released for active service, but could not be spared until, Lord Hardinge's period of office ending, he was set free, to give his life for his country after gaining further honours in the field.

He quickly made arrangements for Lord Hardinge to grant an interview to the Rajah, and for Lady Hardinge to see the Rani. By his kind offices I was also given Private Entrée at the forthcoming Levée, in order that I might be at hand to check any little vagaries on the part of the Rajah.

It turned out to be a good thing that I was in close attendance, for, in the Throne Room, when we were in line and filing past the Viceroy, I saw, to my horror, the

Rajah attempting to insinuate himself in front of the Indian gentleman immediately preceding him, literally elbowing him out of the way.

It was no time to stand on ceremony, so I gripped him firmly by the right sleeve from behind, and only released him in time to allow of his usual, inelegant bow.

As, for the first time, the Private Entrée folk were allowed to depart after their own part had been played, I hurried the Rajah away before the spirit moved him to further eccentricities.

He made one last attempt on the steps of Government House to slip a four-anna bit into the hand of one of Viceroy's Bodyguard, but I shepherded him skilfully into the car before he could extract the coin from a mysteriously hidden purse.

Poor little man. He was so overjoyed at his interview and attendance at the Levée that he gave me, as a token of gratitude, a gold watch bearing the Gurumpore coat-of-arms.

It proved quite a costly gift for, after two days, it stopped, and I took it to be repaired at the shop where it had been purchased, saying that they ought to make no charge.

When I called for it they apologized for making a charge of ten rupees, but said that, on reference to their books, they found the watch had been bought two years before, and, incidentally, was not yet paid for !

This time it went for two and a half days. Later, after costing another six rupees in Bombay, it gave out after a day and a half, and, when I tried yet once again, a further five rupees only induced it to go for a few hours. Since then I have kept it as a memento, and for exhibition only.

On the eve of the Rani's interview with Lady Hardinge I was summoned to Madras by the Governor for a fleeting visit.

On visiting the Rani to inform her of my departure I found her very excited. She recited her proposed contributions to the conversation, which I censored as usual. Then she showed me the sari of finest silk which she was to wear, and a new pair of patent-leather boots

reaching nearly to the knee: painfully uncomfortable it seemed to me for unstockinged feet. When I had duly admired, she said excitedly:

"Now, Mr Van Wart, before you go you must see the clothes I have made for my children to wear when they go with me to see Her Excellency."

Three of her women were sent to fetch them, and returned with three Scotch outfits, complete with kilts; one for the girl as well!

I protested bitterly, saying how much better and more dignified the children looked in their own garb. But no! The egregious Mrs Wright had assured her that all the best children in England wore the kilt, so kilted they must be.

On my return from Madras I heard with relief that Prakash had been deemed too "skinny" in the leg to do justice to his kilt, and accompanied his father in his proper clothes instead.

The others were no affair of mine, but I was sorry that Lady Hardinge, in the kindness of her heart, had said how sweet they looked.

My visit to Madras, short as it was, involved once again judging things about which I knew little or nothing. After lunch at Government House Lady Lawley said:

"You had better come and help me to judge cattle this afternoon at the Agricultural Show."

So I dutifully trotted round in her wake, admiring the pink, yellow and green painted patterns with which every self-respecting bullock was adorned, and trying not to look at the numerous coolies in the crowds following us who suffered from elephantiasis. These unfortunate folk seem to be everywhere in Madras; even the Club servants are draped to the ankles in skirts to hide their poor, bloated legs from fastidious members.

The day after my return to Calcutta we set off for Allahabad, where the Rajah was holding a Christmas camp.

It was typical of him to take a house for a month at an exorbitant rent and transport tents, furniture, plate, linen and all the camp paraphernalia from a distance, at heavy expense, when he had a palace at Benares, and a house at Lucknow, with everything ready to hand.

The excuse was an Exhibition, a sort of White City affair, which was being held at Allahabad. Not only did it not interest the Rajah, but it bored him to tears, and after a couple of perfunctory visits the Exhibition saw nothing more of him.

He had established the reigning favourite at Benares and spent most of his time there.

Twice in my life an uncanny feeling has taken possession of me on arrival at a new place ; an unconquerable depression which nothing will shake off, and in each case the place has proved an unfortunate one for me.

Allahabad was the second of these places. As usual, when going to a fresh place, I had been looking forward to three or four weeks there with pleasurable anticipation, but, as we drove from the station to the camp, this uncanny feeling gripped me and remained with me until we left the place.

The previous time this had happened nothing would go right for me until I left the place, and so it was this time.

The first occasion on which I went for a drive the pair of mettlesome blacks got clean away, crashed into a compound wall, smashed up the carriage, the coachman and themselves. I was lucky enough to escape with a bad shaking.

After this inauspicious start life was " just one damn thing after another " until we left the ill-omened place.

To begin with, the Rajah himself, whom we had not seen for nearly a year, had deteriorated sadly. Whatever Farnell's short-comings may have been the Rajah had been fond of him, and he had exercised a measure of restraint.

Now the Rajah seemed to care for nobody or anything save self-indulgence. The doctors, wrong as usual, had given him less than two years in which to live, and he seemed bent on making the most of them.

To make things worse he, previously a strict teetotaller, now drank to excess.

His guests in the camp were birds of a like feather ; three British officers of the " won't go home till morning " type and a number of sycophantic Indians whom a

Tommy would unhesitatingly have pronounced "No clarse".

There was, however, one exception among the guests. Malik Sir Umar Haiyat Khan of the white-crested turban, who became the Indian Herald at Delhi a year later. *Que diable allait-il faire dans cet galère?*

To my regret, but not surprise, two days was the extent of his visit, and most of both were spent at the Exhibition.

The camp was in the compound of an isolated bungalow on the outskirts of Allahabad.

The house itself was occupied by the Rajah and family, with a good deal of improvised canvas-screening for the Rani and her women. It was practically unfurnished save for an occasional chair, and must have been dreary as well as comfortless.

Seventy or eighty servants were huddled away somehow behind the bungalow, and made merry in the evenings round a roaring fire in the open.

In front were pitched a large dining-tent with a lavish display of silver on a number of sideboards, a drawing-room tent, both comfortable and ornate, but hardly ever used, and about a dozen tents for the guests.

A semi-circular drive ran round the camp with a sentry at either gate, for show only.

The Rajah, for motives of economy, so he said, was acting as his own Comptroller of the Household, and I assisted him to give out stores every morning.

We sat just behind the bungalow—to the accompaniment of the chatter of the women at their ablutions behind the canvas screen—surrounded with crates, boxes and piles of stores, on which the cook cast thirsty eyes.

This cook—"chef" he called himself—was a new importation whom the Rajah had picked up in Calcutta, with the idea of doing things in style. He was a drunken little Scot with no claim to the title of chef beyond the white cap and uniform which he donned for the sake of effect. He was rarely sober, which was a blessing in disguise, for when *hors de combat* his duties were carried out by the excellent Madrasi cook who had been temporarily deposed in his favour.

He disliked me heartily, for, until I took a hand in the housekeeping, he had been in clover, as I discovered very quickly.

The first morning, with a low bow, he handed the Rajah a list as long as his arm of his requirements for the day. Hitherto this had been merely for form's sake, as the Rajah could not read it, and he cocked an inquiring eye at me as I ran through it.

"What do you want a bottle of sherry for?" I asked.

"To put in the soup, sir," he replied hopefully.

"Give him a wineglassful," I said to the Rajah.

"You hear, a wineglass," echoed the Rajah.

The little ruffian winced and waited for the next blow.

"What do you want a dozen quarts of beer for?" I continued.

"For cooking the ham, sir," rather less hopefully this time.

"Give him one bottle," I said ruthlessly.

"You hear, one bottle," the Rajah added.

He was staggered, but game to the last.

"What do you want six bottles of brandy for?" I was ruthless.

"The trifle, sir," defiantly, at the last ditch.

"Give him a wineglassful."

"You hear, a wineglass," confirmed the Rajah.

This was too much, and he launched out into an impassioned appeal, asserting that it was impossible to give his genius full scope if the liquor he demanded was doled out in this niggardly way.

His appeal might have had more effect if the Rajah had understood it. As it was, he blinked owlishly and sent the man to his cooking.

He appeared to have won the Rajah's heart in the beginning by the wonderful confections which appeared at dinner under the guise of "Sweet" (his menus were scrawled untidily in red ink on three sides of a sheet of notepaper, and started with "Appetiser", which I took to be Scotch for "*Hors d'œuvres*").

These took the form of enormous slabs of uneatable pastry, heart-shaped and decorated in icing with "God

bless the Maharajah of Gurum——", "Merry Xmas to His Highn——", and so on, ending abruptly on whatever letter-space dictated.

Camping with a Maharajah is, as a rule, a joyous occasion, with the best of sport under the most luxurious conditions; but the Rajah's camp was, to me at least, a dull affair.

The Rajah was off and away by eight o'clock, or thereabouts, every day to his lady-love at Benares; the Rani spent most of her time at the Purdah Club for Indian ladies at the Exhibition. Prakash was generally with his grandfather, the Rani's father, who had a house a couple of miles from the camp. This was close to the scene of my carriage accident, on which occasion I had walked in unceremoniously, to find him in loose attire, with beard and whiskers encased in something resembling a waning beauty's face-mask. His discomposure was obvious at having the secret of their glossy blackness and fierce curl exposed.

To enjoy the Exhibition properly one needed congenial companions, and I had none.

Luckily there was a wrestling tournament, always a popular affair in India, to occupy the afternoons.

The ring was of earth raised about three feet above ground-level, and in long contests the combatants scattered liberal handfuls of it over their adversaries to counteract the sweat which made holds a difficulty.

There was the keenest partisanship, and any amount of betting. The great match of the week was between Gama of Lahore, who afterwards visited England and departed somewhat ingloriously—if I remember rightly—and Kekar Singh of Gujranwala.

Sir Umat Hyat Khan was one of the latter's chief supporters, and assured me he was bound to win; but after a short and desperately fierce bout Gama won the fall and was carried in triumph from the ring by a shrieking crowd of admirers, while his bulky antagonist, livid with rage, tried to convince the audience that he had not been thrown; that he was not ready; that it was a put-up job, until the apathy of the crowd induced him to retire crestfallen.

It was too cold to sit out-of-doors after sunset, and Europeans did not patronize the Exhibition after dinner. So we spent the evenings in camp, sitting over an interminable dinner until about ten o'clock, when I retired to my tent to read before turning in, leaving the rest to carouse until two or three in the morning.

There were no half measures about the Rajah's potations. Of what he had during the day I have no idea, but at dinner he laid a good foundation for the evening, with sherry, hock, champagne and old brandy, topping up with port and madeira indiscriminately as the decanters came round.

He then settled down to the business of the evening, and put away a steady sequence of whisky-pegs. He took these in long tumblers three-parts filled with whisky and a splash of soda on the top to give it a flavour.

Yet the amazing little man was up and away next morning, apparantly none the worse, and hours before any of his fellow-carousers had unclosed a gummy eye.

The old Colonel of the party, after a profitable hour or two at the bar, gave me a lift home from the Exhibition one evening after dark, and it was funny. The last three or four miles were on unlighted roads, mostly tree-lined but broad and empty. One of his majors, who was in somewhat better case, sat in front to give him the course.

"Right a bit, sir; right, right, sir. Oh my God! All right, sir, straight on. Now left, left, left. Blast! No, sir, it's all right—we missed it. Right now; mind the tree. No, there is only one, sir. Oh—a—ah!" and so *ad infinitum*.

CHAPTER XXV

IN CAMP—THE RAJAH KEEPS CHRISTMAS

THERE was a large theatre in the Exhibition grounds; a ramshackle-looking affair of wood with a tin roof, where a celebrated singer, Gauhar Jan, was engaged as the attraction for Christmas week.

The Indian is an enthusiast and needs an object of adoration, which our constitution-mongers would do well to understand. If once an Indian has been put on a pedestal it takes a great deal to knock him or her off.

Gauhar Jan was then well past her prime, but she could have filled that theatre ten times over (and an Indian crowd packs tighter than any sardine) at every performance and still have had thousands outside looking for admission.

The Rani made up a theatre-party to see her, and deputed me to arrange for purdah accommodation.

This was easy enough. A partition was removed between two boxes, and chicks were arranged in front, so that the ladies could see from the dark interior without being seen.

The real problem was to get the party safely housed. The only access to the boxes, which were on the dress-circle tier, was by a steep flight of open wooden steps, outside the theatre, leading through a door at the top straight into the box.

The doors were open at 5 p.m., and a huge crowd was waiting as I conducted the party in two detachments from the Purdah Club, a hundred yards away, to the foot of the steps.

We provided the waiting crowd with a little entertainment to while away the tedium of waiting.

Four attendants bearing silver poles to which screens

of crimson canvas were attached stood at the door of the car. The Rani emerged first and popped into the trap (for that is what it looked like). I went up the steps backwards, directing operations, while the Rani, quite ignorant of where she was going, dutifully followed my instructions and shuffled from step to step in time with the four pole-bearers. At the top I opened the mouth of the "trap," and she popped under my arm into the box.

Eventually, I got them all safely housed, although the last to ascend, a little Begum, had not been prepared for the appearance of a man, much less a Sahib, and, when she saw me, gave a squeal and nearly fell backwards.

Having done my duty I sought my own seat to enjoy the performance.

The meagre fare provided by our English theatres, a beggarly two and a half hours interlarded with long intervals, would fail utterly to satisfy the Indian palate, which demands quantity at all costs. Six or seven hours is nearer the mark for an Indian play.

This particular show was opened at 5.30 by three male singers. My Western ear has never accustomed itself to the music of India which, I am told, contains many more gradations of tone than our own.

To me it resembles a series of high-pitched, distressing noises droned from the back of the nose, varied at intervals by a piercing shriek, followed by the noise of a squeaky slate-pencil.

The three men made these noises admirably for twenty minutes, after which the audience drowned their efforts by loud and prolonged applause.

They strove bravely for a hearing but, overwhelmed by the volume of sound, were forced to desist.

At once the applause ceased.

The singers resumed, to be greeted with a fresh outburst.

The audience had come to hear Gauhar Jan, and were in no humour for anyone else; so the luckless three, who were only just warming to their work, were applauded off the stage, the last of them gnashing his teeth with rage at the audience as he disappeared into the wings.

The Indian nightingale, as her admirers dubbed her, then began her little turn, which lasted for a trifle of four hours or so.

A trifle overblown, she was still a fine figure of a woman as she took the centre of the stage with her musicians behind her, and never in my life have I seen so much jewellery on one human frame. She gave the effect of a moving mass of pearls, diamonds and emeralds—and no imitation gems either.

The audience threw itself about with yells of delight for several minutes, and then sat with bated breath while she embarked on her first item.

She appeared to work in spasms, each of which lasted for five minutes or so, with short breathers for the musicians.

Spasm one. She stood silent and motionless, allowing the audience to gaze upon her. . . . Thunders of applause.

Spasm two. She blinked her eyes. . . . Audience in ecstasies.

Spasm three. She raised one arm slowly and extended it. . . . Wild shrieks of delight.

And so it went on. By the end of an hour she had summoned up energy to revolve slowly on her axis with both arms raised and fingers twiddling.

The audience was writhing deliriously.

I also felt weak and in need of sustenance, so I made my way back to the camp, bathed, dressed and returned to dine in leisurely manner at the Welcome Club.

Thus fortified, I returned to the fray about 9.30, to find the indefatigable lady still hard at it, with French chansonettes this time, which the audience did not understand in the least, but loyally applauded none the less.

The Rani, having spied me out through the chicks, summoned me to her box, where she greeted me jauntily with, "Oh, Mr Van Wart, I am enjoying it, and I have been sick on my stomach."

I had no answer to that, so deftly turned the conversation.

Most of the other Maharanis, Ranis and Begums of

the Rani's party had never seen an Englishman at close quarters, and my evening dress intrigued them mightily. They wanted to know so many details, that, when it became a question of a list and description of my undergarments, I became embarrassed, and hailed with relief the triumphant conclusion of the exhausted singer's performance, which enabled me to make my escape on the plea of collecting the attendants and cars for the homeward journey.

As it was dark, and the crowd had dispersed before the ladies were ready to start, this was an easy matter, and, after depositing my charges safely at the Purdah Club I made my way home to a well-earned couch.

The Rajah announced that night, after his n^{th} drink, that, as there was no theatre performance on Christmas Day, he was engaging Gauhar Jan to sing at the camp after dinner, and that, if anyone wished to invite friends to dinner to hear her, they were at liberty to do so.

The three officers availed themselves of this permission, and the following night there was a muster of some twenty guests in all.

We sat for some time sipping our cocktails and awaiting the arrival of our host. We continued to sit, and the conversation languished.

Finally, I went off to make inquiries, and found to my disgust that the Rajah had not returned from his usual trip to Benares, and that nobody had the least idea when, if ever, he was likely to get back.

At nine o'clock, three-quarters after the appointed hour, I insisted, after many protests from the Rajah's officials, on dinner being served, but naturally the sparkle had gone from the evening, and only the thought of seeing Gauhar Jan kept any life in the party.

At last, when the ladies had retired to the drawing-room tent and I, as deputy-host, was circulating the decanters, the Rajah made his belated appearance.

Dishevelled, unwashed and in ordinary tweeds, he flopped into a chair without a word to his guests. He demolished three mammoth pegs with incredible swiftness, rose and made an unsteady exit, pausing ere he

vanished to mutter, "There will be no show to-night. Good night."

Toujours la politesse.

After this little Christmas excitement things became rather dull. The Rajah was rarely in evidence; the Rani was enjoying the rare pleasure of a round of engagements with others of her own rank, and Prakash was generally claimed by his grandfather.

Two aeroplanes offered a spice of variety at the Exhibition, but proved a little disappointing, although perhaps I was looking at everything with a jaundiced eye. Trial flights, Rs. 100 a time, were offered to the venturesome, but, short though they were intended to be, they were reduced to a farce by the nervousness of the authorities, who refused to allow passengers to be taken off the ground, and, though the charge was reduced by half, very few people thought it worth paying fifty rupees to taxi along the polo-ground.

Flying was a complete novelty in India then, so the restrictions are not to be wondered at. They helped a lot of people out of a dilemma, at any rate, for at first everyone was saying, "Oh, rather; of course I'm going up," and then racking their brains for an excuse to get out of it. It therefore came as a great relief to be able to say and almost believe it, "Isn't it sickening? I had arranged to go up on Wednesday, but of course, now it isn't worth while."

It seems strange in these days to think of the amazing thrill it gave me even to watch that first exhibition flight by the trained pilot. It seemed almost incredible when the plane was seen to be off the ground; and when it rose steadily and soared high over the Jumna to circle in the air before gliding softly back to rest, my heart was in my mouth until the pilot was once more on terra firma.

At the beginning of the new year, and regulated by the moon, of course, a vast fair was held annually at th confluence of the muddy Ganges with the blue-watered Jumna. It brought something like a million Hindu pilgrims to shed the dust of their bodies in the sacred waters, and often, despite the most careful supervision, to spread epidemics of plague, cholera or small-pox.

The Hindu is a gregarious animal, with his own methods of sanitation, and a fair like this Magh Mela affords ample opportunity for reducing the excessive growth of population.

This particular year, like every fifth one, was a special occasion, and the vast concourse, camped on their allotted plots of ground by the river, was larger even than usual.

The Rajah, with Prakash and a retinue of scallywags, took their dip and received absolution, at a suitable fee, from the inevitable Brahman; after which the Rajah, no doubt, felt himself free to collect a new burden of sin.

Doubtless the Inspector-General of Police breathed a sigh of relief when the Mela was at an end, but as a rule there was little or no trouble; a tribute alike to the officials concerned and the peaceful attitude of the pilgrims themselves.

I doubt whether a million people could foregather from all parts of Britain and camp together for a week without being an infernal nuisance to each other and to everyone within a radius of three miles; whereas these folk kept almost entirely to the camp-area, and for the most part abode there in peace with their fellow-men.

The Indian crowd in its normal state is cheerful and pre-eminently law-abiding, but, if religious or racial hatred comes to ruffle its calm, a few minutes will transform the same people into a fanatical, unreasoning and utterly lawless mob.

With the beginning of the new year the Rajah's camp automatically ceased to be a scene of revelry by night. Duty called, and the guests returned to their respective spheres of action, so that, with the exception of the drawing-room and dining-room tents, mine was the only survivor in front of the bungalow.

One morning, as I sat reading just outside the door of my tent, my eye was caught by a couple of tall Pathans with their long, well-oiled locks, high-peaked turbans and baggy, tight-bottomed trousers, leaning over the wire fence some fifty yards away to display some of the usual cheap geegaws, a dodge they use as a cloak for spying out the land with a view to loot.

I gave them a very definite negative, but, in spite of that, a shadow fell on my book two or three minutes later, and I looked up to see the two rascals at my elbow showing their white teeth in cheeky grins.

The nearer man was very importunate, bending over me as I sat and thrusting his tawdry wares almost into my face. He rather overdid it, and in consequence I suddenly smelt a rat. Leaning back quickly I surprised the " second robber " coolly lifting the chick and peering eagerly into the tent.

This was too much of a good thing. I drove my gentlemen back to the road without more ado, and then pretended to go on with my book, but keeping the tail of my eye on them for all that.

It was a good thing I did, for they, thinking themselves unobserved, slunk in at the far gate of the compound, where no sentry was posted, and slipped quickly into the dining-room tent, where there was silver galore wherewith to fill their baggy breeches.

I was too quick for them, though, and arrived on the spot just as they were about to loot the nearest sideboard. They vanished, and were no more seen that day, but in the middle of the night I woke suddenly to see a hand softly move the chick of the door and a familiar head appear.

I shot out of bed, calling to the sentry as I did so, and saw two dim forms running across the compound.

I put on some slippers, picked up the hurricane lamp and went across to see what the sentry was doing. I found him sleeping peacefully, and was unkind enough to wake him. He heard my story and announced emphatically that the men were undoubtedly robbers, (" Beshuck, Sahib, chore hain "). Having further made sure that the robbers had cleared off, the good fellow insisted on searching my tent, even to the length of poking under the bed with his bayonet.

Perhaps, after all, Allahabad was a luckier place for me than I gave it credit for.

If I did have a carriage smash I had come out of it practically unhurt ; and if my tent was raided the thieves got nothing, although another second or two would have

enabled them to get away with six hundred rupees, for my cash-box was on the table close to the door. Moreover, the Pathan takes no chances, and is a handy man with his knife, so I was really very well out of it all. So, too, was the sentry, for had his rifle been a fairly modern one, the Pathans would have looted it gleefully, leaving him a very dead man.

Both Prakash and I had had enough of the camp and were delighted at the prospect of getting back to our comfortable home at Ajmer; for things were now none too pleasant in the bosom of the Rajah's family.

He had by this time gone hopelessly to pieces. Such good qualities as he had formerly possessed seemed to have died a natural death, and he had now become a most unattractive personality. The Rani, with her father on the spot to support her, had spoken out plainly, and there had been an uncomfortable atmosphere of friction all round.

Matters were not improved by Ramamurti, who, with the cunning of his kind, had wormed his way into the Rajah's good graces on the death of Punditji in a carriage accident, and had been appointed private secretary in the latter's place. He was anything but the good influence his new position required, for he pandered to the Rajah in the most nauseating fashion. He swelled visibly when bidden to accompany the Rajah in his carriage or car, and it was amusing to see his strict Brahmanism, in the matter of food, for instance, die a natural death at the hands of expediency.

The Rani brought her visit to a triumphal conclusion by giving a Purdah Party at the Exhibition, to which all the leading British and Indian ladies were invited.

No sooner had the invitations been sent out than the Rajah, out of sheer cussedness, announced that they would be returning to Gurumpore on that day. He only did it to annoy, for one day was as good as another to him, and the astrologers, as we have seen, were usually amenable.

A battle royal with the Rani ensued, and the poor little lady had a nerve-racking time. The date of

departure was changed with bewildering frequency according to the temper of the Rajah, and, when the day arrived, the unfortunate Rani had to leave for the party without knowing whether they were going by the evening train or not.

This doubt brought me into the picture. At tea-time my bearer brought the news that the fiat had just gone forth, and that advance guards were actually on the way to the station with a few mountains of luggage. As the train left somewhere about "twenty hours" (8 p.m.), and the Rani had to get back, after the party, to camp and thence to the station—over ten miles in all with only a carriage and pair—it was evident that the Rajah was making things as difficult as possible.

I hurried off with the news and, having convinced the female Cerberus of the Purdah Club of my respectability, and the urgency of my message, was admitted to a small ante-room where the Rani joined me after a brief delay.

As a rule she spoke of her husband with the traditional respect of an Oriental lady for her legal lord and master, but on this occasion she let herself go for a minute, giving me her real opinion of him in a neat summary of his shortcomings. She certainly had ample grounds for complaint, for during all the time at Allahabad the Rajah had behaved outrageously, even for him.

She quickly calmed down, and by way of relaxation removed her tiara and handed it to me that I might feel its weight. I was well able to believe that a few hours of it would produce a headache of the best quality, for it was a weighty affair of emeralds and diamonds, massively and clumsily set in gold.

Her duties of hostess then claimed her and she returned to her guests, after insisting on my remaining where I was until I had had some refreshment.

She vanished through an open doorway, over which a curtain of flimsy silk swayed gently in the breeze. As I sat idly watching its rise and fall it slowly dawned on me that I was being given an unlicensed peep into the mysteries of a purdah party.

It was all very ordinary in its way. I could, of course, only see those ladies who came within my line of vision and as the curtain rose from time to time.

Jewels there were in plenty, bedecking opulent charms which were set off by silken saris of the softest shades. Rings in their noses, rings in their ears, rings on their fingers glistened and flashed; pungent and aromatic perfumes were wafted on the heavy breeze, and I felt that a languorous lassitude ought to be stealing over me.

Perhaps it might have, but all of a sudden a small brown hand softly pushed aside the curtain and a slim, spectacled girl glided into the room with a tray of cloying confections.

She walked artlessly towards me until barely a yard parted us and then, with a start of theatrical surprise, appeared conscious of me for the first time.

I rose, and forbore to smile, when she opened with the Queen's Gambit, "Oh! I was looking for my handkerchief." (I can confidently recommend this opening to all lovers of the game of living chess!)

It provided us with a spirited game for the best part of half an hour, at the end of which I was in possession of a detailed account of her family history, her personal likes and dislikes, her views on life in general as well as her own in particular.

She was a Burmese princess whose father for political reasons was living in temporary exile in Allahabad, and very dull the young lady found it. She hastened to assure me that she was not purdah, so that a conversation with her did not necessarily entail a sudden and sticky end. She saw but a few men, and found life frankly dull in consequence.

For that reason, seeing a man through the curtain, and the fact that "it was so dull in there with all those women," she had conveniently lost her handkerchief. "I know I ought to go back, but it is so much more fun talking to you," she went on with all the simplicity of an artful minx; and so she stayed.

I will be quite honest. I was flattered, and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

She was not pretty exactly, but she had allure and a certain demure vivacity which was refreshing. Even her large, round spectacles did not detract unduly from her charm, though she was evidently dubious on that point, for she invited my opinion.

"Do you like me better with them on, or like this?" And she gave me what a later generation would have termed the glad eye, as she removed the glasses with a flourish.

Our tête-à-tête was broken by the entrance of her younger sister, who apparently was also desirous of varying the dullness of the party by a quest for a handkerchief on her own account.

Possession was evidently nine points of the law in Burma, however, for she was promptly bidden to return to the party. "It would look so bad if we were both away," said my young friend as she dismissed her and settled down to a cigarette, which she placed between her lips and then used to ignite mine.

I must have been more amusing than I thought, because she finally had a brilliant idea.

"If you will wait while I go home and change my dress (my mother lent me this one, I musn't spoil it), I will be as quick as I can, only about half an hour. Then we can go round the Exhibition and have a good time."

Alas! Duty claimed me, and we parted with mutual regret.

For several weeks I received cheery messages from her, viâ the Rani, but they ceased suddenly.

I had been cut out by, of all people, the Crown Prince of Germany; and thereby hangs a tale.

The Rani, utterly worn out, managed to catch her train and, after I had seen the party off, I returned to my solitary tent at the camp.

It was very lonely. Prakash was spending the night at his grandfather's house, and in all the large compound there remained but my tent in front of the empty bungalow with Khuda Bux and a cook somewhere out of sight at the back.

There were night-prowlers about, too, possibly my friends the Pathans, but luckily a couple of dogs were

sleeping in my tent and their alertness drove the intruders away.

Noon of the following day found us en route for Ajmer, and no one of us was sorry to get back to our well-ordered and comfortable house.

CHAPTER XXVI

DOUBLE DEALING

PRAKASH soon settled down to work again, and life was all the pleasanter without Ramamurti. The religious instruction, Hindi and Sanskrit, for which he had been responsible were now accounted for by the three Brahmans, who resumed their morning visits, and a young Pandit at the College ; my throat-clearing munshi, in fact.

Prakash was now old enough to join the other boys, after evening games, at the College temple, and used to favour me with a garbled version of the teaching imparted there by the old priest.

I gleaned many interesting details of the Hindu gods and goddesses which Prakash supplemented by bright coloured pictures, his interpretation of which could not be altogether relied on.

Affectionate and confiding though he was, there was always a wall between us, which neither of us could ever surmount, so that we never saw the other side clearly, as it were.

It has been so with every Indian I have ever met. I have known many intimately, and of every rank from peasant to prince, but never have I been conscious of a common denominator as a white man is conscious of it with another white man.

This is no reflection on Indians, whom I liked and by whom I was myself liked, but a frank admission of the intangible barrier which divides the white from the coloured races.

If some of our politicians would be honest and admit this, instead of arrogating to themselves the right to decide India's future without understanding the needs

of Indians, a great advance would be made in the direction of mutual understanding and confidence.

Britain and the British Empire have rendered magnificent, nay unparalleled, services to India, and in India. The greatest of all will be to acknowledge the awakening of India, and to give her trust and support while she is learning to stand on her own feet.

Shall I put it still more bluntly? For generations we British have been top-dogs in India. We have had the best posts, the best places on public occasions, we have been salaamed to, bowed down to and semi-deified, to an extent to which only a leading film-star could have attained at home. I am not at all sure that we have not earned it by unswerving devotion to duty and a shining example of straight-dealing in a land of tortuous paths.

In either case, our reluctance to step down from our pedestal and hand over the reins of guidance is natural enough, but it has to be done.

India to-day is utterly different in outlook and " inlook " from the India of pre-war days.

My work for many post-war years brought me in contact with prince and peasant, politician and political officer, babu and college student, and in no case do we find to-day " the unchanging East ".

It is not only " the handful of politicians " who have changed in their feelings towards the British. We are no longer the little tin gods of yore. The peasant, the backbone of the Indian army, went far afield in the days of war and, returning, helped to leaven the mass. The levelling up had begun. He had seen us as mere men fighting for dear life; he had met men who were our equals and sometimes more; and when he came home the agitators helped the leaven to work.

So long as India dwelt in comparative isolation, we could stay unchallenged on our pedestal and rule. With modern means of communication, intercourse with the outside world, wireless, gramophones, newspapers (often envenomed rags which, none the less, have their influence in village and bazaar), India is not prepared to accept us any longer at our former valuation.

The sooner we accept this the more quickly we shall weld the saner elements of India into a solid body, ready to work with us for the welfare of India and the British Empire. The smaller handle, too, shall we offer to those who would wreck both for their own fanatical or unworthy ends.

And all this digression because one little Indian boy taught me to see at any rate something of the other man's point of view.

Prakash, by this time, had become quite the schoolboy, and on our homeward drives often regaled me with his little peccadilloes in class, although he still regarded Man Singh, the black sheep of the class, with pious horror.

" *So* very bad he was. Shall I tell you what he did? When that pundit—you know that old pundit's son. Well, when he turned round to talk to another boy, Man Singh threw some ink and it made so big a mark on his white clothes. Wasn't he a very bad fellow? "

I learned that derision was silently expressed by tapping the back of the left wrist with the three middle fingers of the right hand, and that " sarhe char baje " (half-past four), gently murmured, had the same significance.

For some reason I never ceased to be amused at two habits which Prakash had in common with his schoolfellows. Whenever anyone yawned he immediately began to crack his finger-joints vigorously, accompanied by an expression of concern, lest an evil spirit should take a header down the yawner's throat.

Again, when wrestling with his sums, instead of counting English-fashion on his finger-tips, he did it with the right thumb on the joint-creases inside the fingers of the same hand, starting with the little finger and working upwards on each in turn.

Any habit which differs from our own we are apt to regard as quaint, and, in the same way, it always tickled my fancy to see an Indian beckon upside-down-wise with the hand extended palm downwards and the fingers rapidly snapped against it.

The un-westernized Indian is a child of nature in

many ways, and even some of the College boys, for all their high rank, were liable, in their early days at school, to punctuate their conversation with unseemly noises from both ends with an unconscious naturalness which disarmed offence.

The term soon passed and, after delivering Prakash safely to his family, I went on three weeks' leave to the hills.

While there another post of a similar nature was offered to me by a ruling prince. It was an attractive offer in every way, with much higher pay than I was ever likely to get at Gurumpore, but I was fond of Prakash, and my relations with his parents had been of the friendliest.

Accordingly, I wrote explaining to the Rajah that this post had been offered me from the following February when my present agreement expired, but that, for the reasons just outlined, I would rather stay with them, if they wanted me, although I fully realized they could not afford the pay now offered.

The dénouement was startling, and an example of Oriental intrigue and duplicity.

The Rajah and Rani, aghast at the idea of losing me, telephoned at once to Slater, the I.C.S. manager of the Gurumpore Raj, and asked him to write to me on the spot, renew my agreement for fifteen years, and raise my pay Rs. 200 a month (£160 a year at that time) with annual increments.

Slater, in the interests of both, suggested reducing the time to ten years in place of fifteen, and with great difficulty persuaded them to agree. He then conveyed the Rajah's offer, unaltered save in that respect, to me in a letter. I unhesitatingly accepted, and spent the rest of my leave happy in the belief that my future for the next ten years was assured.

I little knew the depth and subtlety of palace intrigue.

On my return to Gurumpore, only a fortnight later, I was staggered to hear that the Rajah had executed a complete *volteface*, and now refused to renew my agreement or vouchsafe any reason for going back on his word.

Slater had, unfortunately for me, just been promoted to a sphere wherein he would have more scope, and his successor, excellent fellow though he was, lacked both his firmness and ability.

The reason was not far to seek. Ramamurti had never forgiven my original appointment, and had been scheming to oust me ever since, with the patient, unscrupulous cunning of his caste. Largely for this reason he had wormed himself into the Rajah's favour, and had joined forces with Mrs Wright, the Eurasian nurse, whose task was to undermine my position with the Rani.

Apart from other reasons, the two hated me—I use the verb advisedly—for having put a stop to many of the ways in which they had been lining their pockets at the Rajah's expense.

Between them they made a good job of it. The Rajah, of course, had lost what little commonsense he ever possessed, and was easily influenced by the man on the spot. The Rani was obviously more difficult to move, but Mrs Wright held all the secrets of the Zenana, and knew enough to bend the Rani, outwardly at least, to her will.

I had one interview with her in which this was very evident.

The Rajah simply avoided me and, as I was no longer in the palace but the guest of good old Colonel Wells the doctor, he merely disappeared into the recesses of his private apartments the moment I set foot in the palace.

An attempt to produce a reason for getting rid of me was frustrated by loyal little Prakash, who was miserable at the idea of our parting.

My good friend the Governor of Madras was handing over the reins a couple of months later on completion of his term of office, so that his support no longer carried material weight, although the Rajah was none the less anxious to justify himself in the eyes of the Governor.

He therefore told Colonel Wells, hoping it would be passed on, that I had been too indulgent to Prakash, and had not paid enough attention to his work. The Colonel insisted on examining Prakash himself in the

Rajah's presence. Prakash acquitted himself with credit, whereupon this amazing Rajah unblushingly reversed his preceding statement, saying that the boy's work was satisfactory, but that I had been unkind in my treatment of him.

Such brazen effrontery was almost incredible.

The Rajah, after whispering fiercely to Prakash, told him to tell the Colonel that he wished me to leave.

The nine-year-old child turned to the Colonel and said firmly, "I do *not* want Mr Van Wart to leave me."

He was threatened with a beating, which indeed he got, but nothing would induce him, then or later, to change his mind. It was a brave thing to do, and I have never forgotten it.

After this of course life became something of a burden.

I knew that spies were on every side to watch for the smallest slip on my part.

My letters were opened and read so brazenly that little trouble was taken to conceal the fact, and my only way of sending important letters was to get the faithful Khuda Bux to take them away by train and post them elsewhere.

Matters came to a climax when I found a sharp fragment of broken glass in a custard pudding prepared for my lunch, which I often took at the palace. The cook, for whom I sent, was not to be found, and Colonel Wells, no alarmist, when he heard about it, advised me neither to eat nor drink at the palace for the future.

Neither the Rajah nor Rani had any hand in this, of that I am certain; but I had enemies in that old-world, out-of-the-world spot who were capable of any villainy.

Meanwhile, Prakash's future hung in the balance. The Rajah was proposing not to send him back to the Mayo College, but to keep him at home with an Indian tutor—doubtless a creature of Ramamurti.

I quite realized now that my own case was hopeless, but I used all the influence I could bring to bear on behalf of Prakash, and in this—which, after all, was the more important—I was successful, so being able to leave his training in the best possible hands.

As a result, we returned to Ajmer about six weeks after the beginning of term, accompanied by the Rajah, who was still bent on trying to find some ground of complaint to bolster up his case against me.

He did himself no good by bringing three of his concubines with him, and proposing to establish them in our house. I refused to allow this, threatening, if he insisted, on removing Prakash to the College and reporting my reasons to the Government of India.

The Rajah of course gave way.

He only stayed a couple of days, having failed utterly to find any handle against me, and being very coldly received on all sides in Ajmer.

He finally offered me a bribe of Rs. 8,000 if I would say nothing about his treatment of me to the Madras Government, and departed with his tail between his legs.

I only saw him once more—in Calcutta during the Royal visit a few months later—when he had the effrontery to be wearing a grey topee with the narrow, purple edge to the puggaree, the privilege only of the royal staff. This meeting was in a shop where hats were sold, so I made him buy and don another on the spot.

As I passed out of the shop I was also given my last glimpse of Ramamurti. The Rajah's carriage was at the kerb, and through the window, as in old Ajmer days, protruded a flabby, pallid pair of bare feet, which, also as of old, I was most sorely tempted to smite, and smite hard.

After the Rajah's departure Prakash and I settled down to our normal, happy life. We tacitly ignored the fact that we had only six months more together, and his servants, who might well have altered their manner towards me, carried on as if nothing had happened.

So life went forward pleasantly enough for several weeks, until Prakash went down with measles.

For my own sake, as well as for his, I was taking no chances with this malady, but called in our old friend the civil surgeon, with his Shakespearean tags and pungent cheroots.

He enlisted the services of an English nurse from

the Lady Minto Association, and all went well for three or four days, until, like a bolt from the blue, one of the Rajah's agents appeared with orders that the doctor and nurse were to be dismissed "ek dum," and that Prakash was to be removed to the Gurumpore palace at Benares, where a bathe in the sacred (and filthy) waters of the Ganges would inevitably restore him to health.

As he still had fever, and a chill after measles is liable to have grave if not fatal effects, I flatly declined to let him go. I could, of course, do nothing about the doctor and the nurse save protest, but Prakash remained with me until he was fit to travel.

Fortunately, the worst was already over, although the credit of his recovery was taken by the Rajah's folk, whose method of treatment was to squat on the floor of the sick-room, play cards with the servants and chatter, with an occasional prayer to the goddess responsible for the malady.

I was helpless, as is always the case in India, when religion comes into the question. I was given to understand that measles (choti-sitla) was a humble relation of small-pox (sitla), and the only treatment was continuous prayer to the offended goddess, followed by a bath of purification on the tenth day.

Accordingly, Prakash was carried off to Benares for the bath a day or two after the fever had left him, and as I was at a loose end I arranged to join the English guardian to Hari Singh of Kashmir (now the present Maharajah of that delectable state), who was taking his ward to Bombay for a fortnight during the College holidays for Dasehra. This feast celebrates the rescue by Rama, the hero-king of Ayodhya, beloved of Rajputs, of his wife Sita from Rawan, the demon king of Lanka (Ceylon).

Kaskmir is, of course, one of the leading states of India, and we had ample evidence of its prestige in the constant flow of wealthy Indians who waited on the Mian Sahib—as the heir of Kashmir is entitled—with offers of fruit, sweetmeats, houses, horses, carriages, cars and steam-launches.

The most enjoyable day of all was the one upon which

we made an extended trip in a launch to the caves of Elephanta and round the great, picturesque, palm-fringed harbour.

One of Hari Singh's two companions, both boys from the College, gave us continual amusement by his naively delightful surprise at the novelties of hotel and Bombay life. I shall not easily forget his face when he sampled the lift at the Taj-Mahal Hotel for the first time. His eyes nearly popped out of his head.

Since those days he has become a celebrity in the world of polo, and been a member of the Jodhpur and Jaipur teams, which won the championship of India and afterwards visited England. But success has not spoiled him, and Thakur Prithi Singh of Bera remains as modest, and eminently likeable, as he was in the days of his boyhood.

CHAPTER XXVII

AJMER PREPARES TO RECEIVE THE QUEEN

On our return we found Ajmer seething with excitement over the forthcoming Royal visit.

The leading states of Rajputana, Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Alwar, among others, were having their own camps at Delhi for the great Darbar in December. The A.G.G. was arranging a Rajputana Camp for the British Indian section of that province, and, to crown all, the Queen was to visit Ajmer for two days on her way to spend Christmas in the back of beyond at Bundi, sixty miles from the railway.

It is difficult in sober England to gain any real conception of the electric thrill of joy which seemed to permeate every colour, creed and caste throughout the length and breadth of India in the months immediately preceding that glorious visit.

We had been disappointed once, a year before, when the tension in Europe, culminating in the Agadir affair, had caused His Majesty, with great reluctance, to postpone his visit. So, now, we hardly dared to hope, until the preparations really began to take tangible shape; in the great area of the Delhi camp gardens began to spring up on the barren plain, and the royal domicile to be erected.

We in Ajmer were in the thick of the excitement. We were but a comfortable night journey from Delhi on the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway, one of the great lines converging on Delhi from the coast, and from the railway officials we began to form some idea of the magnitude of the task which faced the Government of India in preparing a fitting setting for the greatest Darbar in history.

From the political officers were gathered further titbits of information. We got the very latest "gup" from Captain Hogg, recently guardian at the College to the Maharajah of Panna, who, in his new capacity of Assistant-Military Secretary to the King, was already encamped at Delhi, with nothing to do, as he modestly put it, except to give lunch and the latest gossip to any friend who happened to drop in.

At the Club, at dinner, in the office, there was but one topic of conversation, the Royal visit, and Heaven alone knows how many wiles were employed to secure invitations to one or other of the Darbar camps. Even the manœuvres of the fair sex before a "Black Heart" dance at Simla were puerile by comparison.

The task of preparation was colossal. Eleven months, including those of a fierce and unusually unhealthy hot weather, were all the time available for the workers.

In January, 1911, the site of the Darbar ceremony was an undrained swamp. The trim and picturesque scene of the Royal Garden Party was an untidy mass of mud and stone, and the vast maidán, where close on a million of the populace thronged delightedly for a glimpse of Their Majesties enthroned in robes of state on a balcony of the Fort, was a vast malarial marsh.

By the beginning of December a glorious city of snowy canvas had sprung up to accommodate a quarter of a million people for something like a fortnight.

When we speak of tent-life in England the picture conjured up is one of cramped discomfort cheerfully endured for the sake of novelty.

There was nothing like this at Delhi in December, 1911. Every camp had its allotted area, neatly demarcated; every tent was a roomy, self-contained suite with heating, electric-light, and fire-extinguisher; a trim path with a name-board led up to each tent, and gaily-flowered gardens added a touch of colour to every camp.

The tents of the mighty even boasted french windows and massive fireplaces, while, in the Princes' camps, luxuries like scent and bath-salts were to be found in the dressing-rooms of every guest.

Think of it for a moment. In eleven months a canvas

city for 250,000 people had sprung out of a swamp; with roads, footpaths, post and telegraph service, electric light, water, food supplies (in a barren country with scanty transport facilities).

I saw that area before a single tent arose. I saw it at intervals during the work of construction, and I saw it finally when that work was being put to the test during those ten glorious days in mid-December.

It was as near administrative and executive perfection as could be made possible.

Here and there some of the flamboyant pageantry of the Curzon Darbar may have been lacking, but the knowledge that the King and Queen were actually with us, to see the fruit of our labour of love, gave an impressive personal touch which no Viceroy, however great, could ever impart.

The word "thrill" has become so pitifully cheapened nowadays that I shrink from using it, but I can find no more suitable word to express the sensation, so obviously universal, which struck straight to the heart of Indian and British alike during Their Majesties' stay in India.

Their landing struck a vital spark which was not extinguished until their departure left a flat, aching gloom throughout the land.

We had many little episodes in Ajmer to keep us all agog.

One of the electrical engineers of the B.B. & C.I. Railway was living with me at the time, and had volunteered to supervise the installation of electric light in the Residency, which was being overhauled for the Queen's visit and renovated—so far as the niggardly Government grants, supplemented by contributions cajoled from the local Seths (bankers), would permit.

In view of the demands made by Delhi, electrical plant was not easy to come by, and the A.G.G. began to get worried. He rang up Saxby at all hours to know how things were getting on, what exactly was being done, and summoning him repeatedly to the Residency, often a few minutes only after he had left it.

At last, one evening, Saxby, with whom it had been entirely a labour of love outside office hours, returned

home with the welcome news that the light was working and his labours were at an end.

He must have forgotten to touch wood, for, when we were comfortably seated at dinner, the telephone shrilled impatiently, and an agitated A.G.G. demanded Saxby's immediate presence at the Residency to find out what had happened to the electric light, which had suddenly failed in the middle of dinner, and, of course, was sure to fail again in the middle of the Queen's dinner; and then the A.G.G.'s head and Saxby's head and all the railway's heads and the P.W.D.'s heads would be offered up on a charger; and had Saxby started yet, and if not, why not—and, oh, the light had come on again, but Saxby had better run up and see what had been wrong.

Saxby's patience had worn thin and, as there was little point in his going now the light was functioning again, he postponed investigation until the morning.

The explanation was typical of the Indian lower orders. The electrician, an Indian, proudly installed in the brand-new power station at the Residency, was visited by a bevy of friends curious as a cart-load of monkeys.

One of them studied the switches with interest and, after deep thought, asked, "What is this thing, here?"

"Do not touch! Do not touch!" said the horrified mistri. "If you should raise it, then ek dum, out will go every light."

"Like this, is it?" continued the friend, bent on acquiring firsthand knowledge. And that was how the light failed during dinner at the Residency!

We heard later of dreadful happenings in the royal apartments at Delhi, with strange stories of electricians hastily appearing unheralded; so the A.G.G. may be pardoned for his nervousness.

A few days later Wutzler, the caterer to kings, princes, and viceroys, came to inspect the kitchen arrangements for the Queen's visit.

The P.W.D. had been patting themselves on the back about the wonderful new kitchen they had just completed at the Residency, but after Wutzler's visit the subject no longer figured in their conversation.

"Who is your Superintending Engineer?" he asked the second assistant to the A.G.G., who had been deputed to show him round.

"Sanders," he went on. "Oh yes; fat fellow; I know him. Tell him he ought to be shot for building a thing like this. I've a good mind to have it rebuilt! Still, of course, 'She' is not so particular; women never are, and—are you a married man, Sir? You are? Well, you'll understand a husband and wife like to get away from each other now and then, and we don't have to mind our 'P's' and 'Q's' quite so much. Of course if 'He' had been coming it would have been different."

He broke off to give a detailed list of his requirements to the palpitating babu, who had been hanging on his words with goggling eyes which nearly burst through his spectacles.

He concluded by fixing the trembling man with a steely glance and, "There, my lad; if you make a mistake I'll have you exterminated. Do it well and you shall have an M.V.O.; if the King doesn't give you one, I will; I've got lots of them."

I cannot say that Wutzler, amusing as he could be, was altogether to my taste. Familiarity with the great had rather gone to his head, and I vastly preferred Faletti, his successor.

On the heels of Wutzler came Hogg's fellow Assistant Military Secretary, Major Money, who had to see that all was in order for the Queen's tour to Agra and Rajputana at Christmas time.

He inspected the royal train, which was in the B.B. & C.I. railway shops at Ajmer, and demanded that the royal carriage should be painted the same as the rest instead of its conspicuous white.

This, and the infinite care of the police, were of course inevitable precautions, although, as a matter of fact, the enthusiasm was so intense that I believe the King and Queen would have been just as safe without them, and no one was quicker to realize this than the King himself.

After the partial fiasco of the State entry into Delhi, when the King, as he rode, was hedged in so closely by

members of his staff that many, even of the Tommies lining the route, failed to recognize him, he, like the gallant gentleman he is, insisted that, for the future, his subjects should be given a clear and unimpeded view of their King-Emperor on all ceremonial occasions.

At Calcutta, where the opportunities for freedom were greater, he fairly captured the hearts of the populace by riding, practically unattended, onto the racecourse before breakfast, and by taking a surprise drive through the heart of the bazaar, much like any private individual.

Apparently Money's comments on the royal train had caused some qualms among the railway officials, for soon afterwards I was invited to accompany the Agent and two or three of the senior officials on a trial run, that I might give an unbiassed opinion on the comfort and equipment of the train.

It was a day full of interest for me.

The train was to be doubly honoured. As the only metre-gauge royal train in India it was called upon for the King's use on part of his journey to Nepal for the Christmas shoot, and also for the Queen during her tour in Rajputana.

Our trial trip was a non-stop run of two and a quarter hours to Phulera, a junction for the Jodhpur-Bikaner railway (then under combined control), a late breakfast there, and then the return trip.

As soon as we were well on our way I was taken on a tour of inspection through the kitchen, servants' quarters, Staff compartments and the royal bathroom.

In the latter the officials pointed with loving pride to the bath with " Hot ", " Cold ", " Shower ", " Douche" taps, its tiled floor, and, the apple of their eye, powdered soap, that pink slime which one avoids, if experienced, on continental trains. They were so childishly pleased with this novelty—for India—that I had not the heart to say I felt sure the King and Queen would prefer their private cakes of Old Brown Windsor, or the like.

It *was* a delightful bathroom for any train, and did the railway credit, but we overlooked one thing, unless rumour was an unusually lying jade.

The King, on his journey, went to bath; but alas! the shining taps failed to fulfil their promise. The humble bhisti at the last station had omitted to fill the water-tank on the roof, and the one absolute essential to a bath was lacking.

But this was all to come, and ignorant of the future we tore ourselves at last from the bathroom and proceeded to the royal bedroom and drawing-room.

I was shown the secret safe, which was obvious to the most casual observer, where the Queen would deposit her jewels—every official connected with the royal tour could always forecast exactly what Their Majesties would do (and didn't) on any given occasion. I admired the settee, armchairs, carpet, writing-table, the triple windows of glass, venetians or wire, any or all of which could be opened if they did not jam. In fact, everything was so delightful that I felt some criticism was called upon if I was to justify my presence.

Possibly, having started, I became over-exuberant; at any rate the officials soon became restive and, when I did get a flash of genius, they pooh-poohed it at the time from sheer annoyance, although calm consideration on the morrow induced them to act on it.

It was in the royal bed-chamber. The bed, with its head towards the engine, occupied the centre of the carriage with a narrow gangway on either side. Behind the head of the bed was a rack for a glass, cigarette-case and so forth.

I suggested that only an acrobat could reach the rack without discomfort, and that a collapsible flap-table could easily be fixed in one of the gangways.

When I next saw the train, all spruced up the day before it left Ajmer to take up the King, my flap-table was there.

I always felt that I would have been made a M.V.O. on the spot, in that time of easy honours, if the King had but known. As it is I have always rejoiced that I contributed my mite—even for a brief space—towards the comfort of Their Majesties.

I have never been quite sure though whether the

suggestion that I should perform the return journey on the engine was made in order to give me pleasure or to give the harassed officials a respite from further unwanted criticisms. In any case I jumped at it as a new and delightful experience.

Royal and Viceregal trains are generally driven by a gazetted, not a subordinate, official, and it was so on this trial run.

On the way home I learned for the first time how, on arrival, the train has to be drawn up, almost to an inch, so that the distinguished passenger may alight from the silver-railed platform at the end of his carriage onto the exact centre of the red carpet on the platform.

This, and much other lore of the Indian railways, was imparted to me between repeated feedings of the engine by the busy stokers, and my cup of joy brimmed over when on a flat, straight stretch of rail I was permitted to hold the controlling lever for a glorious couple of miles, so enabling me to boast in my old age of the day when I drove the royal train in India.

A week or so later I was able to contrast the amenities of modern railway travel with those of the previous generation. I saw the present train, constructed for the King's previous visit in 1905, when Prince of Wales, side by side in the railway-shops with the royal carriage used by his father just thirty years earlier.

The one represented luxury, the other discomfort. King Edward had to travel in a carriage reminiscent of the old, hard-seated third-class in England. The seats and berths were lacking in springs, the table was bare and plain; there were no chairs, easy or otherwise; no electric light or fans, and the only protection against the sun were some fixed venetians which screened the upper half of the window.

Yet we grumble to-day when our pillows are covered with grit, or a fan goes out of order for an hour.

Yet another type of carriage stood near these, awaiting despatch on the morrow to the Maharajah of Jaipur —one of the three leading princes of Rajputana—for whom three luxurious coaches had been built in the

B.B. & C.I. shops specially for the occasion. They were the last word in railway construction, and possessed some arresting features.

The Maharajah's own coach contained a beautiful little compartment for his devotions, representing a miniature Hindu temple in marble, cedar-wood and silver.

His own roomy compartment was fitted with a telephone to connect with each compartment of the Zenana carriage, so enabling him to summon whichever of the ladies his fancy might dictate to wile away the tedium of the journey.

The ladies themselves were given little chance of surveying the landscape, or watching the herds of graceful blackbuck which gave no more than a passing glance to the train as it passed within a hundred yards of them.

Thick, frosted glass, patterned with rose, shamrock and thistle, covered their windows, and, like the doors, were securely locked.

No furtive eye could pry within, and their only glimpse of the outside world was through tiny peep-holes, about the size of a pea, which the Maharajah occasionally permitted to be used, but were, for the most part, tightly closed with silver shutters.

The work of all connected with those railways converging on Delhi, during that period of stress, was beyond all praise. It was in fact a triumph of organization for Sir Trevredyn Wynne and his administration.

The ordinary trains had to be run in duplicate or triplicate, and within four days the normal service of over a thousand trains was augmented by no less than one hundred and ninety specials from all over India.

To add to the difficulties the railways were only single-tracked in many parts, and, in addition, many of the Indian princes flatly refused to arrive in their special trains until all of lower rank had done so, and irrespective of geographical conditions. It may be realized therefore with what the railways had to cope.

The mass of luggage, always a mountainous affair

in India, was simply colossal. The Nizam alone, as befitted India's leading potentate, was accompanied by several hundred women (wives and concubines), including paraphernalia proportionate to their needs; and he, only one of some hundreds of thousands.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ECHOES OF THE ROYAL DARBAR

A FEW days before the Darbar I was delighted to be given an opportunity of repaying, even if inadequately, some of the kindness shown me by Sir Arthur and Lady Lawley.

The ways of the Government of India were in those days mazy at times, and I always felt that a strange lack of consideration was shown to Sir Arthur.

The tragic death of their only son in the Ooty hunting-field had been a grievous blow, but Sir Arthur and Lady Lawley had refused to take a sorely needed rest until the completion of his five-year term of office in Madras.

Nay, more, to oblige his successor, Sir George Carmichael, then in Australia, he had consented to extend his term of office for several months, but only to be called on to hand over a bare month before the Darbar.

Apart from any question of courtesy, the obvious person to enjoy the dignities of Governor at the Darbar, and to act as host of the Madras camp, was the man who had governed the Presidency for over five years, and knew all the officials, instead of one who was a complete stranger to the working of the Presidency, and to his guests in the camp.

Sir George, of whom I have only pleasant memories, had resigned, some years before, a safe seat in Parliament in favour of his defeated Liberal Leader (Asquith, I believe). He was shortly afterwards given an Australian Governorship, whence he proceeded to Madras, where he remained barely three months before being created Governor of the newly united Bengal and a peer to boot.

Anyway, there it was, and Sir Arthur was present

at the Darbar as a mere unit of the *omnium gatherum* in the Government of India camp, instead of enjoying the pomp and circumstance which was his undoubted due.

He, Lady Lawley and their two daughters had reached, when they came to me, the last stages of a three weeks' tour with which they had been killing time.

They stayed a day only, but, as there was not adequate accommodation in our bungalow, I borrowed, for the occasion, an empty bungalow, furniture, and a carriage and pair for their use. One can, or could, do these little things in India as a matter of course.

In the afternoon, while Sir Arthur and his daughters were visiting the Mayo College, Lady Lawley and I took a humble touga into the heart of the bazaar, where she was anxious to sketch.

The driver curled up on his seat and went to sleep; Lady Lawley set up a portable easel on the back seat, and got to work. My chaprassi and I got out to form a barrier against the curious crowd, and after a short interval one of Prakash's three Brahmans (the comical one) thrust his way to the front and insisted on holding the legs of the easel for two solid hours, much to Lady Lawley's amusement. The more so as, having no hand to spare, he was unable to disguise the face-splitting yawns which weariness ere long induced.

He was a stout-hearted little fellow, though, and saw it through until we departed, scorning any hint of backshish, and we left him grinning proudly at having been so privileged.

When Lady Lawley began to rough-in a few figures, she was watched intently by a picturesque ruffian who took up a prominent position which assured his inclusion in the picture. The moment he saw her eye shift to the other side of the narrow street he skipped across, and, in a trice, was lounging nonchalantly on the steps of an open sweetmeat (and fly) shop in the hope of being immortalized a second time.

After this fleeting visit our preparations went on with redoubled energy.

I have beside me as I write the translation of an Urdu Ode composed in honour of the great Darbar by

an old Government pensioner of lowly rank. Many Indians, who are otherwise by no means remarkable for their intelligence, have a wonderful facility for such compositions, and turn them out on the shortest notice and on every possible occasion.

For all its quaintness this particular ode summarizes in quite a remarkable manner many of the salient features of the great camp at Delhi, and in a way both picturesque and homely. The spelling I have left as in the original. It opens:

1. Be it known to all that to-day is the twelveth day of December of the Year Nineteenhundred and Eleven A.D.

2. When this grand Durbar, the like of which is never seen,
   Is being held at Delhi, the Historic place, selected for the porpose.

3. Which is the " Indraprast " of ancient times,
   And has always been the capital of India.

4. The supreme and distinguished rulers, (Their Majestys)
   Are to be seen amongst us to-day.

5. With loud voice does the Royal Herald
   Declares and proclaim :—

6. That through the grace of God,
   The Most Degnified Rulers of Great Britain and India.

7. Are being crowned here to-day,
   With great rejoicing and merriment.

8. Delighted with joy the Maharajas, Sultans and Nobles,
   Who have come from far and wide.

9. Are paying their homage to Their Majesties,
   By presenting Nazars and making liberal gifts in Their Honour.

10. Inspired with delight are the subjects,
On hearing the loud harangue of the Proclamation.

So much for the explanatory verses. The poet then launches out with flashes of vividness into a description of the camp as it strikes his imagination.

11. Issuing through the smoke, the flashes of guns,
Do resemble the lightnings in lustre.

12. Standing for miles together are the tents,
Nicely fitted and elaborately decorated.

13. Visible are these picturesque camps,
Wrought up with gold and silver embroidery.

14. Supported are they by pillars set with precious stones
And bedecked with pearls and jewels are the Royal Thrones.

(The poet's Oriental imagination over-ran the truth there.)

18. The Royal flag assisted by the wind,
Does wave in the high heavens.

19. Surrounded by thousands of cavalry,
And innumerable battary and artillery.

20. The firing of the salutation guns now commences,
Followed by the galloping of horses and the manaevours.

21. Resounds there the voice of "Hip", "Hip", "Hurray",
After which are made dinner party arrangements,

22. Where the health of Their Majesties' is being drunk,
Attended by sweet musics discoursed by massed bands.

23. The playing of the National Anthem on the instruments,
Arouses the spirits of the hearers.

24. So over-joyed have they become,
That they cannot contain themselves.
(Revelry by night ?)

25. Here there and everywhere you find,
People engaged in Durbar arrangements.

26. Unsparing are they in their work,
Increased is the speed of the Railway trains.

27. Telegraph Offices have been opened in large numbers,
The numberless Post-Offices attend to the public want

28. To whatever place does the addressee belong and wherever he may be put up,
Sure are they to find him out,

29. And having done so deliver the message,
And promptly serve up the telegram.
(A neat tribute to a marvellously efficient service.)

30. Everywhere one sees the electric light,
While the airships carry the Imperial Dak.
(No pun is intended in this striking prophecy of the Air Mail.)

31. I wish I had the opportunity to kiss the Royal Feet,
For who on earth, have ever seen such grand a Durbar.

35. Ceylon and Madras pearls adorn their Majesties' Crowns,
Which are inlaid with precious rubbies and diamonds.

36. That Historically noted illustrious Koh-i-noor,
Adorns Their Majesties' Royal robes.

37. Rangoon contributes brilliant colours,
While China has sent fire works.

38. No where else are saffron and musk produced,
Singular products of India are these,

39. Present are they before Their Majesties,
For sprinkling purposes and luxurious scents.

40. All the Durbarries are merry and gay,
At the sprinkling of the colours an Indian peculiarity.

41. The United Government of India and England comprises of,
Ireland, Scotland and New-foundland,

42. And extends to every quarter on the globe,
To Newziland, Australia and Canada.

43. And to the distant oceans where there are ironclad ships,
Which are all mighty and wide spread.

44. Among these shines most, the Indian Empire,
Teeming with the sacred rivers like the Ganges and Jumna.

46. Never does the sun of Their Majesties' Fortune set,
From the North Pole to the South Pole.

47. So extended are the bounds of Legislature,
That the letters of law are strictly followed by everybody.
(Gandhiji ki jai?)

48. Everywhere reigns prosperity and liberty,
The Houses of Parliament do govern the country,

49. Discussed is every point minutely in the two Houses,
None dares trouble his fellow subjects.

50. Peace and prosperity reign supreme,
So that a goat and lion drink at the same pond.

51. May Queen Empress Mary and ever happy King Emperor George V
Live long and reign on the Indian Throne for ever and ever.

And so, with a prayer for the welfare of Their Majesties, concludes this loyal effusion.

A few days later the King rode into Delhi, and the days of kaleidoscopic pageantry passed all too soon.

Half, or more than half, the British colony in Ajmer had gone into one or other of the camps at Delhi. Others of us had to be content with flying visits only to one or other of the principal functions.

Prakash and I had hoped for a summons to join his parents at Delhi, but we hoped in vain.

As usual, we were kept in a state of uncertainty. First we were to go; then we were not to go; we were to be ready to start at any time; and so it went on.

It was not until weeks afterwards that I was able to piece together, by a bit here and a bit there, the puzzle of the Rani's deep-laid plans; for the Rajah, owing to his fall from grace, combined with his malady, was pointedly excluded from the invitations to Delhi.

He had, moreover, received a sharp rap over the knuckles for his treatment of me, and preferred to keep in the background for the time being.

The old Maharani, on the other hand, had received a cordial invitation, and had made all her preparations to attend the Darbar, when, on the eve of her departure, she was laid low by a stroke and, acting under the advice of Colonel Wells, was compelled most reluctantly to cancel her visit.

No sooner did the Rani hear of this than she got to work.

Houses in Delhi of any kind were almost impossible to come by, but the Rani would brook no denial and forced the Rajah to secure accommodation of a sort at a fantastic price.

This step accomplished, the Rajah escorted her to Delhi *pour les convenances,* and then faded into oblivion until it was time to go on to Calcutta.

There was, I believe, no room for Prakash and me at the house, but, in any case, the Rani was anxious to keep me away from Delhi lest, on account of their cavalier treatment, I might use what influence I had to interfere with her plans.

She need not have troubled. Her private affairs were no concern of mine, nor did she keep me from going to Delhi; but it was little to her credit that Prakash was not given a chance such as would never again offer itself,

and, though he kept a stiff upper lip, the boy felt it keenly.

Boys at the College of less standing had gone, and three others had been appointed Royal Pages, including Hari Singh of Kashmir, who looked a very triton among the minnows.

Once at Delhi the Rani, conscious of having made a great impression twelve months before on Lady Hardinge in her interview, gave Her Excellency no rest until she had actually secured an interview with the Queen.

By cunningly styling herself Maharani instead of Rani, she was granted this privilege, under the impression that she was the old lady whom the Queen had met and liked during her former visit to India, and whom she was looking forward to meeting again.

Sir Henry McMahon, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, told me, during lunch at the Bengal Club in Calcutta some three weeks later, that he had opposed the Rani's interview strenuously, on the ground that her rank did not entitle her to it, and that preferential treatment to her would be unfair to a large number of Indian ladies whose claims were as good, or even better.

He was overruled in the end by the Viceroy, who said, " You had better give way, Mac, as Her Excellency has set her heart on it."

Wire-pulling in India is an everyday affair, and the man, or woman, who can pull hardest goes farthest.

How many men in the services owe their advancement, or the first (and most difficult) step at any rate, to the good work of a friend of either sex at Delhi or Simla? There is no imputation of unfairness in this query. Where merit is equal the man with the best publicity agent naturally gets the coveted post.

So, in this case, the Rani's wire was strong enough, and the interview took place.

It proved in reality very different from her expectation, and from the untruthful and glowing account supplied to some of the papers at the instance of the Rani.

One of the Ladies-in-Waiting gave me a graphic account of the real happening.

Gifts of all kinds to Their Majesties were most strictly forbidden, so the Rani started badly by heaving a bag

of gold mohurs at the feet of the Queen, who might well have been excused for mistaking it for a bomb.

She then had the impertinence to say that she had suggested to Lady Hardinge the creation of three or four Indian Ladies-in-Waiting, herself of course among the number, and she regretted the Queen had not availed herself of the offer.

The feasibility of purdah ladies in attendance on the Queen was out of the question, and would have entailed endless complications.

Finally, the Queen herself, at Ajmer, bade me tell the old Maharani that she hoped to see her at Calcutta, if well enough, and that she well remembered some little carved animals the Maharani had been permitted to give her on her previous visit.

This, as will be seen shortly, I was able to do, much to the chagrin of the Rajah and Rani. For the old lady did not forget to gloat over both of them after the striking mark of favour shown her when her own interview took place.

CHAPTER XXIX

WITH THEIR MAJESTIES AT AJMER AND CALCUTTA

THE week between the royal departure from Delhi, and the Queen's arrival at Ajmer, was a full one for us all.

We were simply overwhelmed with, "Did you hear what the King said to X. at the ——?" And I was told by at least a dozen men that they were the first to call out, "It's all right, don't move!" when the fire-whistles began to shrill close to the packed tent on the night of the Investiture.

The credit for the absence of panic goes first of all to Their Majesties, who, though fully conscious that the fire was close at hand, and might swiftly develop into a ghastly holocaust about that forest of tents, went on with the ceremony, standing calm and unmoved before us all.

We do well to be proud of our King and Queen.

But we worked in Ajmer as well as talked.

I do not suppose that the Queen ever knew what a great personal triumph she achieved at Ajmer.

Towards the expenses of her visit the Government made a grant which did not err on the generous side, and much depended on the contributions made by the local Indian bankers.

They proved but grudging givers. Had it been the King, they said, they would have given gladly and without stint, but the Queen was after all but a woman, so why make a great *tamasha* for her.

But when they saw her it was another story altogether.

We British were immensely proud of our Queen at Ajmer. She radiated charm combined with dignity, and had the entire populace at her feet—they would have been so literally had opportunity offered.

She drove straight from the station to the College, where Sir John Fortescue found something to praise for a change in his history of the Royal Visit to India.

It has always seemed to me a great pity that so delightful a writer should have enlarged in his book on how things should have been done instead of picturing, as he so well can, the picturesque and beautiful that surrounded him. On this occasion there is small wonder that the sheer beauty of the scene cast a spell over him.

The Queen drove up the straight, tree-lined drive to the dazzling, white marble College and, as she swept round the statue of Lord Mayo to the steep steps of the peacock-arched porch, the one hundred and fifty boys, half on either side, bowed low from the waist in solemn, silent obeisance.

There was something intensely impressive about it.

The soft hues of the Rajput safas (turbans) and brocaded silk atchkans made an unforgettable picture against the white marble background.

We felt more than repaid for the hours of rehearsal in the hot sun on the previous day when the united brains of staff and guardians had been concentrated on the knotty problem of setting the stage for the arrival of the star. For, just when we had solved the difficulty, it was all begun anew because the charming wife of the Principal appeared on the scene with fresh ideas.

The Queen, after we (staff and guardians) had been presented to her, was taken over the College building and the Kotah House, which was fortunately both the nearest and most picturesque.

We, meanwhile, had been bidden to mingle with the staff and do the honours ; to do the shepherding the royal party across the cricket-ground to the Bikaner Pavilion, where tea was to be taken to the accompaniment of tent-pegging and riding displays by some of the boys.

The A.G.G's eldest daughter, Miss Helen Colvin, and I found ourselves in charge of young Prince George of Battenberg, who was enjoying the trip thoroughly, and showed us, with some pride, a rather tired-looking pair of white kid gloves with which he had " done " Delhi,

and was hoping, albeit with some qualms, would last out until he reached Bombay.

The colour effect on the pavilion was, if possible, even more perfect than that of the arrival, for on this occasion the boys were massed, tier above tier, on the broad, terraced seats of the handsome, sandstone structure, where primrose, dove-colour, softest pink and palest blue (all brilliant shades had been ruled out) blended into one kaleidoscope of colour.

Here we might certainly have saved the time taken in rehearsing, for the reality bore little resemblance to our anticipation of it.

Prakash's smart carriage had been used to represent the Royal carriage, and the Queen's understudy was the above-mentioned charming lady, Mrs Waddington.

Being not without experience in stage and pageant production myself, I must confess to having been mightily bored when she proceeded to step from the carriage first with one foot and then, after deep thought, started afresh with the other.

"Yes. I think she would start with the right foot, and that would bring her just here. . . ."

There was any amount of this, which the unfortunate boys and staff had to endure as best they might, and my sympathies were entirely with the Philistine who murmured, stifling a long yawn, "Perhaps she would start with both feet".

Having got our understudy out of the carriage at long last, we were then treated to her interpretation of the royal progress to the flat roof where tea was to be served.

It all helped to keep up the excitement, at any rate, and, if the Queen did everything quite differently, what did it matter?

She gave vast gratification by shaking hands with every one of the boys, an honour quite unexpected, and followed it up by one of those human touches which have endeared the members of our royal family to all their subjects.

During tea she recognized two ladies whose tum-tum had been held up by the royal train at a level crossing

half an hour or so previously, and had them presented in order that she might express her regrets for having delayed them.

This graceful act caused additional pleasure to most of the guests because, as is usual when royalty visits an institution, the " inner ring " of officials are so obviously bent on keeping the Queen to themselves, and preventing anyone else from sharing their reflected glory.

When the Queen drove away the whole-hearted enthusiasm of the farewells was a joy to behold. Only on one other public occasion have I seen these young scions of Rajput nobility break through the crust of their reserve, and to anything like the same extent. That was on the same spot, when the Crown Prince and Princess of Sweden, by their joyous camaraderie, fairly won the hearts of the boys, who ran after their departing car with shouts of " Come again soon ! "

When the Queen drove, next day, through the narrow streets of the bazaar to the Dargah mosque, the College cadet corps had the honour of furnishing an escort in their gay uniforms of white embroidered in gold and fawn, and with the sun glinting on the toorras of their turbans.

At night, from the verandah of the Residency, perched on a rock above the Lake, a myriad, glow-worm lights twinkled in the soft velvety darkness. The city was doing honour to its Queen, and every roof, every doorway, was outlined with fairy-light from tiny clay chirags with their floating wicks, such as are used for the Diwali festival.

The College turned out en masse to cheer the Queen yet again as she passed the main gate on the morning of her departure. She went by car to spend Christmas at Bundi, in the very heart of Rajputana, where railways are unknown.

The maids in the first car must have been gratified, if a trifle surprised, at the warmth of their reception. But apparently it only whetted the boys' appetite for cheering, if one may judge by the greeting which the Queen received when she did appear.

CHAPTER XXX

I SAY FAREWELL

HAVING seen Her Majesty leave Ajmer, Prakash and I started the same day for Calcutta.

Had we been lucky the train would have reached Calcutta just in time for dinner on Christmas day, but we were slowed down by three special carriages at our tail, until our turkey and plum-pudding vanished into the land of " might-have-been ".

We lost another precious half-hour when some petty Rajah tacked on yet a fourth carriage. This was removed by order of the guard, after a heated wrangle, and then reattached by command of the stationmaster—for a consideration.

For once in a way, I had only my bedding, and a small suit-case with pyjamas and toilet necessaries, in the carriage with me, and on arrival at Calcutta my registered luggage failed to materialize, so I reached the Bengal Club with little more than I stood up in, but forgot my troubles in the excellence of the Christmas dinner to which I sat down.

Incidentally, my kit did not turn up until a day or two before the King arrived from Nepal, and I was dependent, in the meanwhile, on the kindness of a friend in the Political Department, who made me an honorary member of his wardrobe.

The railway authorities were merely perfunctorily polite to my daily inquiries, but Sir Trevredyn Wynne, President of the Railway Board, happened to join two friends and myself at breakfast one morning.

Inquiries about my kit from the others aroused his interest and, after asking for particulars, he said quietly, " Perhaps I may be able to help you," and went off.

I had not the faintest idea who he was, and thought

to receive a string of abject apologies for the delay and the news that my kit had been traced and would arrive on the following day.

It had been lying for a week on the platform of a station where I had changed and, but for my friend at

To begin with, Calcutta was both aghast and furious at the change of capital.

The Calcutta "boxwallas" argued, with some reason, that it did the hide-bound Government official all the good in the world to mix at the Club with unofficial men who neither knew nor cared who he was. They said this "very loud and clear," while the "Heaven-born" smiled his superior smile.

Calcutta, moreover, was not pleased with the Viceroy,

Most of my meals were taken with two or three Politicals on duty at the Foreign Office, and through them we heard of the Queen's tiger at Kotah, which loyally emerged from the jungle to salaam to the Queen in her machan before returning unscathed to its haunts, despite a fusillade from Sir John Fortescue and the royal surgeon.

One day the Foreign Secretary joined our little coterie at lunch.

" Bikaner and Scindhia lunched with you yesterday, didn't they, sir ? " asked a Deputy-Secretary with a meaning twinkle in his eye.

" Yes. Why ? What about it ? " said Sir Henry, puzzled.

" Nothing, Sir. Just beef olives." (Beef olives to two leading Hindu Princes !)

" Good heavens. I expect that is why my wife went off to Darjeeling in a hurry this morning," was the reply of the stricken official.

I, all unwittingly, added to the gaiety of nations by retailing one morning at breakfast select portions of a letter from a friend who was shooting in Nepal with the King. Among the little titbits was one to the effect that the King had commanded a State Ball during his Calcutta visit.

As this was not on the official programme, and my informant, being on the King's staff, might be regarded as reliable, my little bit of news caused a flutter in the official dove-cote.

News travels fast in India, and long before lunch-time I was tackled by irate personages who scented trouble afar off, and seemed to regard me as its author, instead of showering gratitude on me for the timely warning.

My intelligence proved to be correct, although the State Ball was whittled down to a mere dance for six hundred.

As for the Royal visit, it might fairly be described as " one damn crowd after another," culminating in the night of the fireworks on the maidán, when the crowd swarmed over everything, cars, garis, stands, trees, and the sheer mass of people drove women and children into a state of panic.

Just after the State Entry I met the Adjutant of the Calcutta Light Horse, almost incoherent with rage because one or two of his men, while doing escort, had brought shame upon him by falling ignominiously from their horses.

" When we got opposite the school children," said the aggrieved warrior, " the little devils all whipped out Union Jacks from under their behinds and yelled for all they were worth, and off came my chaps like ninepins. Boy, bring me a burra peg, juldi."

The Levée at Government House sticks in my memory for quite a numbers of reasons.

To begin with, a kindly soul at Ajmer offered me the loan of his Court suit ; but as his girth was nearly double that of mine the breeches proved impossible however. I attempted to drape them to my comparative slimness.

He compromised by supplying the cocked hat, rapier and shoe-buckles, and I lost one of the latter after the Levée, on the way back to the Club, as I sat with one leg dangling outside an overcrowded garri.

Then contradictory orders were issued as to the carrying of hats, which we were finally bidden to take with us, only to find on arrival that they were not to be taken into the Throne Room, as a miscellaneous collection in the entrance-hall bore witness.

I was with a little party of Politicals who had dined in leisurely fashion at the Club and had come on late in order to avoid the crush. As a matter of fact, there was none, in striking contrast to Lord Hardinge's Levée twelve months before, which bore a close resemblance to a rugger scrum for those not blessed with Private Entrée ; and where an unfortunate Indian gentleman in the thick of the struggle cleared a breathing space for himself by gasping, " Gentlemen ! If you do not give me room, I shall be sick ! "

Our party did not reach our goal without incident, for, at the last barrier, Sir Percy Cox, from the Persian Gulf said, to the A.D.C.

" I say, am I all right ? "

The cheery reply was, " Well, as a matter of fact,

you've got the wrong breeches on; but I shouldn't bother, a lot of others have done the same."

But Sir Percy was not to be reassured and hurried off to change, arriving at last to find that all was over. A trying situation either way.

My official duties were confined to making arrangements for the Maharani to visit the races, and for her interview with the Queen.

The old lady had recovered from her stroke, and was overjoyed when I gave her the Queen's gracious message. This also caused great heart-burning to the Rajah and Rani, who revenged themselves by bribing the old lady's coachman to drive to the wrong entrance at the races, where there were no instructions to admit her purdah carriage.

The Maharani was naturally bitterly disappointed, and so was I; for it had been none too easy to induce the Turf Club Stewards to allot her a position of vantage in the enclosure.

The Royal arrival at the races was a sight to remember, and, to my mind, far more enthralling than even the sight of the Royal Enclosure on a sunny day at Ascot.

The instant the bobbing red and gold postilions of the Royal carriage came into view the crowd, in their thousands, tore madly across to cheer, and then tore back again to pant out another welcome as Their Majesties alighted.

Only at the Pageant a day or two later was the enthusiasm more unbridled, and then, as the Royal carriage drove away, the crowd broke all restraint and thronged against the very wheels in loyal adoration.

It was a moment which must have touched both Royal hearts, and would have touched them even yet more deeply could the King and Queen have seen hundreds of their humble subjects prostrate themselves in silent reverence before the thrones in which they had been sitting.

The Maharani's interview took place just before the Pageant, and her cup of joy was filled to overflowing by the entry of the King himself at the close; who, when he heard of her disappointment at the races, gave orders

that her carriage was to follow with those of his staff and that she was to view the Pageant from the Royal Enclosure.

A day or two later I was allowed to visit the old lady, for the first and only time, to receive her thanks for my share in bringing about her interview.

Her great age, coupled with the recent stroke, had left her very frail, and I found her reclining on a charpoy in a bare upper chamber with no other furniture than two, rickety bentwood chairs.

She was clad in the simplest garb—indeed, it had all the appearance of a Victorian nightie—but she looked an aristocrat to the finger-tips.

It was touching to hear her speak of the King. She might, in very truth, have been a devotee talking of her god, and she kept placing my hand gently on her ankle, which she had hurt on the steep marble steps of Government House, owing to the tightness of the new knee-high, patent-leather boots she had donned for the occasion.

She deplored my approaching departure, declaring it would be a bad day for Gurumpore, and garlanded me when I left her.

My connexion with Gurumpore was now nearing its close. Prakash and I returned to Ajmer, and the few remaining weeks slipped by rapidly.

It was a sad ending, and I have never since been able to fathom the hold which Mrs Wright and Ramamurti had obtained over the Rajah and Rani to force them to their will.

The arrant humbug of the whole affair was strikingly apparent just one year later when the Rajah and Rani, after having practically hounded me from their service, sent me their warmest congratulations on my marriage, and accompanied them with a handsome Sèvres tea-service and a request that Prakash might be invited to the reception.

As a matter of fact, the severance of these relations was a stroke of luck for me, because no less than four better posts were offered within ten days. One came from the Madras Government, and was especially gratifying—although I did not accept it—because it showed

its opinion of the rights and wrongs of my departure from Gurumpore.

At last the day of parting came.

Prakash and I had avoided all mention of it because it hurt us both. But when it did come I cut short the good-byes. We both knew that neither of us would forget.

Sadly and slowly the little figure walked along the verandah to his own room, leaving me to have a final look round before starting.

At the last moment I found his sword, the one he had worn on the " auspicious day " of our meeting.

I took it along to him, but after one glance I stole away and handed it to Din Band, who was not far from tears himself.

Prakash was sitting at the table, his head bowed on his arms, clasping my photograph and sobbing his heart out.

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