By
HENRY GIBBS

Travel
TWILIGHT IN SOUTH AFRICA
CRESCENT IN SHADOW
ITALY ON BORROWED TIME
AFRICA ON A TIGHTROPE
THE MASKS OF SPAIN
THE HILLS OF INDIA

History
THEATRE TAPESTRY
BACKGROUND TO BITTERNESS
(The Story of South Africa)

Novels
CRY AFRICA!—a tetralogy
THE SPLENDOUR AND THE DUST
THE WINDS OF TIME
THUNDER AT DAWN
THE TUMULT AND THE SHOUTING
To

L. A. NICKOLLS

for reasons unconnected
with this book
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Introduction

Let me be quite frank. This book about the hill countries which serve India 'in the office of a wall, or as a moat defensive to a house' does not claim to be an exhaustive study. It attempts to provide from material obtained in the past five years a picture of a geopolitical area which may convey something of its atmosphere and the life of its peoples, and of its possible weaknesses.

I have acquired some experiences which imply that despite its limitations such an attempt may provide someone with an overall if personal impression of the area. Ten years ago I provided a similar picture of the disunion of South Africa which attracted some hostility there due to it being the first book to criticize apartheid. Some reviewers who had become obsessed with the history of their country could not see my point that the South African future could only be served by deliberately cutting free from the South African past. Since then the present of this rich, broken blind country where ostriches are bred has been lashed even more securely to its history. Unfortunately the final phase of prophecies in the book will soon come into being: the tiny community of Afrikaner Nationalists and their friends will sit on their stoops counting their wealth in a republic, alone with Africans and the Coloured people. Møre is gister, tomorrow is yesterday, not another day.

In 1951 I wrote a book about the Islamic Middle East. It contained brief histories of countries I visited to demonstrate their long record of instability expressed in violence and suggested that Soviet Russia would seek to control nascent nationalist movements, particularly the one in Egypt, to dominate Suez and oil. It suggested that these movements would continue their policy of assassination. An expert on Middle East affairs who reviewed the book for a literary journal thought it was feverishly written. He approved of my recognition of Egyptian concern over her water supply, which involved potential power and Egyptian-Sudanese relations, and stated that Anglo-Egyptian differences were
'being tackled, not by doctrinaires, but by practical men, men who understand the meaning of compromise'.

However, an officer then serving with the Arab Legion wrote saying that he agreed with my deductions. This episode provided a talking-point when I met General Sir John Glubb on his return to Britain.

I used a similar method for another book on Africa, concerned mainly with South Africa, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and Kenya. It was published in 1954. The final paragraph read: 'There is a writing on the wall. Have Europeans [in Africa] now, in their time and age, the courage and vision of the men and women who led them to Africa? The decision lies with them; they are in control. Or will Africa end like the hyena, tearing out its own bowels?'

In other words, events which have taken place in these countries since those books first appeared were foreseeable and therefore they could have been forestalled. It is obvious that those individuals who led the World Bank to reject Egyptian requests for money to commence the Nile project associated with the Aswan High Dam were chiefly responsible for Egypt going into the Russian sphere of influence. They touched off the subsequent explosion. It would be interesting to know who they were and why they misread the mood of Egypt. It would also be interesting to learn if they are still employed as experts on Middle East affairs.

There is a writing on the wall in Asia. When my publishers announced this book in June of this year the writing did not appear to have been comprehended in the West, although it had been visible for nine years. Despite events in Tibet, I failed to find any Western concern over why China should wish to occupy this small, barren, unproductive, backward country which menaced no other nation and was not involved in treaties to provide military or air bases with any bloc. Since the publishers' announcement China has revealed her intention in unmistakable terms, but I have not had to alter this book. These travels in the endlessly fascinating Indian hill countries were written in a conviction that sooner or later China would show her intention. I have merely changed the names of some of my companions in order to shield them and their relatives. It would be a poor return for their kindness and hospitality, their patience in answering my questions, to expose them to possible risks.

There is one final point which I would like to clarify. In earlier books I stated that I have no racial or religious prejudices. The circumstances of my life have prevented these weaknesses. Every man who indulges in
racial prejudice is a testimony of his own mental immaturity, of being a sad case of arrested development, whatever the colour of his skin. This is equally true of religious prejudice. The faith of others is their own concern. I am interested only in its social effect. Behind this attitude is a personal pride in two aspects of British life, unity in a freedom which enables us to disagree without fear and the evolution of British justice. The latter is a magnificent, indeed a beautiful accomplishment. Perhaps only those who travel frequently can truly appreciate the full splendour of our British justice and evolving legal system. It is a social miracle.

Consequently, I set out from Tehran on a spring morning in 1959, as on previous occasions, untroubled by having to reconcile forthcoming experience to formulas. I was fortunate in my companion, Marcel Lambert, a friend of the war years and since, another who discovered a job in order to travel. We had arrived in Iran by different routes to find it under radio bombardment from countries beyond its frontiers.

HENRY GIBBS

30 November 1959
Most long journeys start with an eleventh-hour fluster over some neglected point. Ours was water. Marcel decided to transport sufficient drinking water for our needs on the 800-mile drive to Herat. His decision was well informed. Strange insects and unidentifiable matter of depressing hues inhabit water obtained outside Middle East cities. We had suffered from them before, and wanted to reach Afghanistan in blissful indifference to our insides.

Marcel shared the passion of his countrymen for treating every problem realistically, and bottles take up an inordinate amount of space even in a large Cadillac. I left him to take decisions and went about my business. It was an admirable arrangement.

Out in the streets, the bright air gave Tehran a sense of exhilaration. The days were uniformly fine from the hour when milky pallor spread across eastern deserts until metallic yellow dusks retreated before crowding banners of indigo darkness. The country had changed considerably since I was in it during 1951. In those days whipped-up mobs howled hatred of Britain and America; there were political assassinations and other men were beaten up; cars were set ablaze; Russian agitators strove to foment revolution; the smell of fear was everywhere; the Prime
Minister, Dr. Mussadiq, took refuge in the Government building, alarmed by the violence he had unleashed; and on nights when mobs stormed about nearby I sat in a squalid dingy restaurant smelling of stale fat and drank wine and discussed poetry with an Iranian who insisted on acting as my bodyguard on walks back to the hotel.

Since then Tehran has undergone a number of outward changes but its distinctive characteristics have not altered. Although its long straight boulevards and shops on Naderi Street are Western, the lovely blue-tiled mosques could only be Iranian and in the bustling old bazaar I listened to lengthy chaffering which preceded every purchase of a rug or copperware or silver filigree. Many women wore a chaddar, the enveloping mantle which in various guises and names reaches from the Maidan in Calcutta to the Medina in Tangier.

During the daytime I was rushed about the city in British-type taxis. At night ancient droshkys, endearing as the venerable broughams of Cape Town and landaus of Florence, creaked along suburban roads. On walks through the poorer quarters I saw a number of grandfathers, spry old men with alert eyes and spade-shaped beards dyed a fiery orange colour. A vague whiff of opium came from some open doorways. If such characteristic sights and smells were not enough, then the early morning beauty of Mount Demavend and snow peaks of the Elburz, veined pink and gold in a fragile sky, would assure everyone they were in Tehran.

I was more conscious of a change in the Iranians themselves. They displayed new urgency in dealing with their problems and less inclination to postpone difficult decisions until farda, which used to be as typical as the Spanish sigh of mañana. Unfortunately, their efforts are partly vitiated by corrupt public servants, thousands of whom are prosecuted and sacked every year for their lack of honesty and integrity in discharge of their duties.

There was less preoccupation with tribal antagonisms which split Iran into factions, made its people first Bakhtiaris or Qashgais, Kurds or Lurs, and Iranians last, divisions which climbed from bitter and bloody feuds in remote villages to government disputes. This change came about while Iran was under ceaseless radio propaganda bombardment from Russia. I listened to a number of those broadcasts from stations in Azerbaijan. Their vehemence had to be heard to be believed.

But here, as elsewhere, the Russians blundered badly. Iranians were always a proud and independent people, the most sensitive and cultured of any in what is called 'the Middle East'. They liked to find their own reasons for quarrelling amongst themselves. Nothing made them more
conscious of the tragic folly of tribal friction than to hear it being cynically exploited by the Russian radio.

Another Russian error was to direct its most inflammatory propaganda to the Kurds, a tribe shared with the uneasy country of Iraq, where they provided the bulk of Communist support, egged on by a hope of creating an independent state, Kurdistan. If this intention were realized, it would swallow up a large portion of western Iran, control the northern oilfields of Iraq, and a large area of Turkey.

A third Russian propaganda blunder was to vilify the Shah. Every Iranian knew he made sacrifices for Iran. The respect earned by his courage when facing a would-be assassin had been followed by admiration for his conduct in subsequent outbreaks of violence and for his gifts of land to poor farmers. But the most gigantic Russian mistake was to engage in open propaganda at all. In a Treaty of Friendship signed in 1921 the Soviet Government renounced the policy of the Czars which, it stated, ‘consisted of lending money to the Iranian Government, not with a view to the economic development of the country, but rather for purposes of political subjugation’. Every Iranian knows that Russian manoeuvres and propaganda since then has been aimed at obtaining control of the oilfields.

I was given an interesting sidelight on the situation at a party shortly after I arrived in Tehran. There were about twenty people present. Our conversation advanced over the usual small talk to politics. An Iranian, somewhat older than most of us, turned to me and said: ‘The Suez event was a moral victory for you Britons and the French. For years your enemies had described you as the most ruthless imperialists in the world. The Egyptian Government had continually provoked and insulted you. We understood your attitude. But you heeded world opinion when it condemned your action. That was not the conduct of ruthless imperialists. World opinion made no difference to Russian action in Hungary or Chinese conduct in Tibet.’

Unfortunately for the West, some Europeans do not show a similar comprehension of Iranian feeling. Marcel and I met one of them at another party, a large and forthright businessman who assessed the company rather rapidly, complained about ‘foreign’ food, and then criticized ‘foreign’ customs, the way a cab-driver had reputedly tricked him out of a few rials, a matter of two shillings. He ended by saying it was pleasant to be at a party where there were no Asiatics. I had one of those cold sensations down my back. The Iranian wives of two of the men present, one of whom was our hostess, looked at each other.
‘Who do you mean by Asians?’ I asked.
‘These Middle Easterners, these Arabs.’
‘I thought they were Aryans.’
He nodded wisely. ‘They are part of the same Asiatic group.’
A certain chill entered the party. He was blithely unconscious of it. Fortunately, he put himself into true perspective later on by a kind suggestion that I should ‘ghost’ his life-story, which, he said, was certain to be a best-seller. I declined his generous offer.

As Marcel and I drove back to our hotel in Shemīrān, the mountain suburb, the conversation irritated me. The term ‘Middle East’ is an uneasy convenience. It served our great-grandfathers admirably as a collective description of countries beyond the dawn rim of Europe, but the ‘Far East’ of their day became Asia long ago and the ‘Near East’ vanished completely, abandoned even by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in its 1950 survey of the area. What has remained is an inaccurate description which perpetuates the unintentional errors of our ancestors, whose knowledge of countries beyond Europe was usually dimmed by superstition, prejudice, and ignorance.

The state of mind which was caused by this attitude is particularly regrettable in relation to Iran. Within a few hundred miles of Tehran can be seen evidence of those ancient Persians whose empire here twenty-five centuries ago provided a main source of European civilization. Without their initiative our own history would have taken a different form. Theirs was the first great empire in our collective history, reaching from the Indus to the Danube, from the bleak heights of the Hindu Kush to the Western Desert.

I had stopped at two sites of the splendour of ancient Iran on my run up from Shirāz, the city of lovely women and magnificent rose gardens. Persepolis was first, a site I had visited before, shrine city of an empire, erected to glorify its gods and be a tomb for its kings and their generals. Persepolis was a Grecian bend to the name of this city of Parsā in the district of Persis, a combination which led the Greeks to call Iranians Persians. The ancient Greeks, like modern Britons, experienced some some trouble with foreign names.

A flat brilliant noon sky glowed over the desert when I walked round Persepolis. Distant mountain crests looked like the deeply chipped rims of yellow cups. Hawks wheeled overhead on stiff pinions. Lizards slithered among sheets of blown dust. Beyond the litter of majesty was a fringe of
A Candle in the Desert

It was a desert, but not altogether uninhabited. Tiger thistles starred by vermilion poppies and small scarlet-petalled ranunculus like drops of blood. Throughout Iran mosques erected only two or three hundred years ago lie broken, razed by earthquakes, cupolas holed like colanders, graceful minarets reduced to grit, but this ancient city still lives.

Silent acres of history and legend have always fascinated me. I have run to them: to Zimbabwe in Rhodesia and Gedi in Kenya, to Carthage, to the Ajanta and Ellora caves in India, Sigiriyia in Ceylon and Karatepe in Turkey, to other corners wiped clean of cobwebs spun by time. But Persepolis makes unique claims on present-day attention.

In one corner I found a copse of slender fluted columns. They were scarred and blurred, their ornamental capitals disfigured, and resembled chewed pencils, but they were still standing after 2500 years of quakes and winds and heat. Near them were porticos whose entablatures were in position. There was a huge statue of a winged man-bull god, faceless as the Sphinx above a long and elaborately dressed beard. Unlike other gods, the chief deity of Persepolis did not completely die. He was Ahuramazda, who announced: 'I rule the sky which shines to the farthest ends over the entire earth.' Our own age snipped his name in half and gave the latter part to electric bulbs which shine nightly in Bermondsey and Brooklyn and the IXth arrondissement.

Bas-reliefs depicted scenes of life here in Persepolis. One showed a larger than life-size King Darius clad in what resembled a curly-brimmed top-hat and wide-sleeved dressing-gown on a quiet stroll under a parasol held aloft by a court attendant. A larger frieze showed a file of people with fat oxen and dromedaries and horses advancing past cypresses and muscular guards armed with shields and spears, people going to pay tribute to their monarch. They were carved with great artistic ability and the treatment of human figures displays evidence of anatomical knowledge. In other corners were fantasies of mythological beasts tearing chunks out of each other in mortal combat. The latter excepted, the scenes gave an eerily vivid depiction of life here before the arrival of Alexander the Great.

Various theories have been advanced for the death of Persepolis. The facts provide food for thought. In 331 B.C. Alexander defeated the army of Darius III at Gaugamela, thirty miles east of the present oil-town of Mosul. Darius and what remained of his shattered army fled back to central Persia. Alexander led his phalanxes over the horizon to the dark marble and gold city of Persepolis. Amongst its generals and officials were many who believed it wiser to talk than to fight. The royal
garrison lowered its spears and Alexander marched into the city. He stripped it of 5000 tons of gold and silver. He burned its sacred books, written in gold on over 10,000 ox-hides. Then, in a savage hour which his apologists attributed variously to the whim of a whore, a drunken carousal, and revenge, his troops slaughtered the male population, ravaged the women, and set Persepolis alight, a candle in the desert. It still smouldered when Alexander marched north in an autumn dawn in pursuit of Darius. A theory has survived that he murdered this city and committed other atrocities in a quest for homonoia, the brotherhood of man.

Since that far-off day the lizards have been kings in Persepolis.

Desert dust blown under the Mount of Mercy has provided their robes of state, tiger thistles and vermilion poppies and scarlet ranunculus their emblems of sovereignty over the waste kingdom of the Mervdasht plain. Every year thousands of people have passed close to Persepolis but few of them ever visit it. Only archaeologists, writers, tourists with cameras, have disturbed the lizards.

On my way north to Tehran I got into conversation with a small band of those who pass Persepolis regularly. They were Qashgai nomads. We met outside a ruined mosque where they were stopping overnight because one of their women expected to have a baby before dawn. Twice a year at the dictate of a fierce and alien sun they shift their herds of sheep and goats, from the kishlok winter quarters to the yilak, summer grazing ground, and back. There were about thirty people in the group, an infinitesimal fraction of hundreds of thousands who travel ceaselessly across the inhospitable deserts of their homeland.

They accepted their arduous life unquestioningly. Their bearing, a compound of independence and passionate pride in themselves, though it lacked the edge of conceit, was like an added quality. It dignified their speech, their attitude towards each other and to a stranger, and the postures of their bodies as they walked outside the mosque or sat cross-legged on the ground. They were swarthy and lean, with the emphatic aquiline noses and heavy black eyebrows which provide an Iranian family characteristic. The men wore dusty brown and grey suits, old, elbows patched, cuffs frayed, and even older shirts and some fawn-coloured trousers of American army origin. They had a superb mastery of their horses and rifles, both of which showed signs of loving care. They put on a small show to entertain me, shooting at stone targets while they rode at full gallop, using only one hand and shoulder to steady their aim. I was relieved not to be in their way. It was not a moment to emulate Mr. Pickwick.
Their womenfolk were equally independent. It did not prevent them from being candidly curious about a stranger from another type of life. Their huge gazelle-like eyes stared at me as if to note memorable differences. Each had an air of elusive regality, submissive to their men but without the abnegation of women in other Muslim countries. The girls were slender, modest without loss of independence, and moved lithely. The mature women had enormous black eyes and big breasts. Their long thin hands, roughened by their life, the skin dry, conveyed an atmosphere of capability and sensitivity; they reminded me of hands sketched by da Vinci and in the Windsor collection. All of them, even small girls of six and seven, wore brilliantly coloured, patterned chaddars. A cluster of them in the turquoise and green tiled entrance to the mosque was as dazzling as an explosion in a paint factory. Only the three oldest women preferred black.

Contrary to what other travellers have said, I did not note either hostility or suspicion in these Qashgais. They were affable, friendly without fuss. The majority of them were illiterate but they had enquiring minds, interested mainly with the weather and soil of Britain. They were astonished to hear about the normal rainfall in the distant Isles and incredulous at a thought of a country without deserts. It was the only occasion when British rain and grass have won me an invitation to supper.

Darkness fell while I ate with the men in a corner of the mosque. We had a large meal of lamb with rice and nuts. The lamb was flavoured with cumin. Saffron dusted one plate of rice. We sat cross-legged around the dishes and helped ourselves. The main course was followed by a fudge made from dates and spices whose sweetness set my teeth singing. Light came from two oil lamps, one at either end, which cast an upward glow over the lean swarthy faces of my hosts and put a golden patina on the rims of their eyelids.

A camel-dung fire burned a short distance away. On one side of it sat a young woman in a pale blue chaddar, a thin girl whose long oval face was turned in our direction throughout the meal. She acted as an outpost to warn the other women of how we got on with the food. Whilst she watched us she fed her baby. Smoky crimson fire-glow illuminated the dull gold skin of her heavy breast and long neck. Her husband was two places away on my left side, a lean and cheerful man, afflicted by a nervous twitch in both eyelids which lent his frequent laughter an impish intimacy. At first I had thought he was winking.

At the other end of the mosque women padded about in front of woven rush screens which concealed the expectant mother. She was
completely silent. The expectant father sat opposite me, soberly confident of being able to resume their journey early the next day. His wife, he assured me seriously, never wasted time over having children. This would be their fourth and each time her labour was shorter.

I asked how their health fared amid their migrations. They smiled and said they suited the life. Did childbirth in these conditions affect the women over the years, I asked. They said that their women were not softened by city fads. They agreed that a number of children died young, but that was the will of Allah; the fittest survived. I asked about their teeth. They replied that toothache was almost unknown and most of them had good teeth throughout their lives. Then they embarked on a lengthy account of ailments which beset those few madmen who for one reason or another, usually a woman or the lure of money, went to live in a town or drifted off to work in the oilfields.

They suggested I should spend the night among them. The mosque was large and they could easily find cushions, they said. Regretfully, I had to continue my journey. They invited me to seek them out again one day to share their life for a few months, become familiar with their customs, go on hunts and enjoy nights of song and storytelling. The headman, a hefty youngish man with a paler skin than the others and a heavy blue jowl, told me that if I did rejoin them I would remain with them and forget about the grey rains and thick green grass of Britain.

They came out under the stars to wish me peace on my journey. I wished them peace and blessed nights.

It was a dark clear sky which rimmed the mountains as I drove on to Isfahan. The road was almost deserted. Flickers of orange light came from distant fires where other migrant families had bedded down. Beyond a ridge of hills I passed a caravan of camels and mules.

As I drove among those cooking fires of carefully collected and treasured fuel, it occurred to me that the first light of Persepolis gave Europe a true radiance and its last flaring the glimmer which shone fitfully for Iranians until this century. It robbed them of unity and gave them a heritage of poverty. Their land has been their constant enemy. More than a third of it is mountainous and arid desert. Less than fifteen per cent has been cultivated and the grazing surface is no larger. These conditions were a primary source of tribal antagonism, intensifying the struggle for survival as deserts widened and sources of irrigation became more saline. They also restricted industrial development and tucked it into widely separated corners: the production of silk and cotton, tobacco, and home industries, rug making and embroidery and wood carving.
Oil, the only large industrial undertaking, has provided an opportunity to develop other occupations for a population of 17 million people and free them from tribal disputes rooted in poverty.

Two days after my evening with the Qashgai tribesmen I reached Hamadan, 170 miles southwest of Tehran.

Hamadan had other names. As Ecbatana it was the largest city in Media and its capture by Darius I in 549 B.C. founded the Persian empire. It is mentioned in the Bible as Achmetha. Alexander marched his phalanxes from Persepolis to Ecbatana to seize its great store of treasure before he continued his pursuit of Darius III. His favourite companion, Hephaestion, died in Ecbatana, an event which so distressed him that he cut off his hair in mourning and refused to eat for several days. When he resumed his search for Darius he slaughtered an entire Iranian tribe as a sacrifice to the ghost of Hephaestion, but he did not catch Darius. The Persian king was murdered by an ambitious cousin, Bessus. Alexander, infuriated at being forestalled, captured Bessus and had him nearly whipped to death, his nose and ears sliced off, and sent him back to Ecbatana, where, between two trees hauled together by rope, Bessus had his legs tied to one tree and his arms to the other, the confining rope was cut, and the trees resumed their position by pulling him to pieces.

I walked round the one visible sign of Ecbatana. It was a small stone statue, presumably of a lion which once stood sentinel beside a city gate. It resembled a large deformed toad, its face and head rubbed into a featureless blob by women who came to it to pray for children and anointed the stone with oil, a faith or custom, call it what you will, borrowed from Indian women. On the disfigured lion of Ecbatana was a declaration in pale blue chalk: 'Mohammed loves Lalla.'

I went on to Tehran and its people, the Parisians of Islam, to Marcel and his painstaking computations to get us to Afghanistan.
Ghosts in the Dust

We left Tehran soon after breakfast on an early May morning.

Sunlight gleamed like fragile yellow glass. Slivers of it sparkled in every corner and silver flashed on mountain crests. Heat rising from distant deserts dispelled insubstantial vapour fleeces floating in a benign cobalt sky. A fresh new green tangled insistently on trees along avenues and in gardens and outside mosques which had sharp black phallic shadows in their entrances; architecture has produced nothing more consciously phallic than the Muslim arch and cupola, and Westerners who likened the cupola to the female bottom were talking through their unanatomical hats. There was a faint dust in the air but we did not expect to encounter it as a treacherous hazard on our road to Babül Sah on the Caspian shore.

I was sorry to leave Tehran. I have always been sorry to leave it because I like Iranians. Even when Britons were not universally popular, during the oil dispute, the Iranians remained noticeably independent despite political fulminations. I had proof of this liberality in Tehran when anti-British feeling was being whipped to its heights. One evening at dinner in my hotel I told my waiter of my intention to go to a Tudeh demonstration that night. Tudeh was Communist. My waiter became alarmed and hurried off. Quarter of an hour later he returned, out of breath, and carrying a squashed old copy of the Manchester Guardian, which, he announced, was for my protection. It contained a very smart pair of knuckledusters.

My liking for Iranians, who are individuals as that recollection shows, goes deeper. They are exactly what one schoolboy expected: courteous,
Ghosts in the Dust

gay, occasionally melancholy, kind, proud, and fiercely independent. During my school holidays I used to see a man named Harry Andrews who had lived in Tehran for many years. Harry Andrews was a darling man. He was lean and had silver hair, a scruffy white moustache, alert eyes, and his skin had the yellowish tinge of fever. He always wore light grey herringbone tweeds and a straw boater. He lived at Morden College, a picturesque Wren building described as 'a retreat for aged unprosperous merchants' at Blackheath in south-east London. There was nothing aged about Harry. He never bothered to read a newspaper but every week he bought boys' papers of the period, the *Magnet* and *Gem* and *Boys' Friend* with their school stories by Charles Hamilton under his various pen-names. Three or four nights a week Harry went to whist drives. Quite often he returned to the College after its doors were closed and tramped over a flower-bed to climb into his room through a window which he had left open accidentally. When he won a prize at a whist drive he sold it and used the money to buy foreign stamps at Harmer Rooke's auctions. I was given the boys' papers and stamps, taught to play billiards and snooker on the College table until I could give him a run, and my original ignorance of Iran was fired into imagination by the endless stories of a man who loved its people and their way of life, whose face and bearing recaptured his early manhood when he talked about them and their country.

Apart from the not unimportant evidence that Britons who traded beyond Suez did not all amass vast fortunes by means of 'imperialist oppression' and needed help in their later years, and there were 10,000 Harry Andrews to every Cecil Rhodes, there is another reason to recall my friend at this point. Up to the time that Harry left Iran around the end of World War One travel in these lands was extremely rough and hazardous. The sea voyage to get to them took weeks: to reach Iran, along the Med and down the Red and up the Gulf. When they reached port there were no cars and no railway. Health resulted from stamina. They relied on God and quinine.

Those hardships have gone. Nowadays we are swaddled in mediocre comfort. After hours in the atrocious boredom of a plane, the most tedious transport yet devised, we touch down and go through a spell of intense ennui inflicted on us by customs officials, men who frequently expect us too to worship their authority, and are then whisked off in a car to an hotel where the entire staff usually speaks four languages fluently. Hazardous moments do occur in aircraft but anyone in search of endless peril will encounter it sooner on the rolling English road. The most
frequent irritation in distant lands is caused by a breakdown on a lonely road. Then you are forced to pray for a dozen energetic individuals to emerge from the sand-storm or monsoon to push you up a hill you cannot see or into a village not marked on your map, and wait for good weather so you can start repairs. You try to go prepared for such eventualities.

I was travelling light. My battered suitcase contained two extra pairs of shoes, shirts, underclothes, shorts and stockings, notebooks, a clutch of Simenon and the two books on Chinese art that William Willetts wrote for the Pelican series, and my dinner jacket. The latter item was included on a remote possibility of chancing on grand if remote British company with formality in its hearts and Somerset Maugham on its bookshelves. My medical supplies and first-aid equipment, tinned bandages and tubes of ointment and the like, were in an attaché-case.

Marcel carried much the same. His literature was supplied by Mauriac and Raymond Chandler. He also had with him, for reasons I never understood, two pairs of riding boots, an enormous book on viticulture, and two balls of string. There was also Charles. Charles accompanied Marcel on every journey. He was a large fluffy pink elephant, who went along in order to be cursed when anything unpleasant happened. Marcel attributed his unfaltering gentleness and charm with all sorts and conditions of men and women to being able to confide his private opinion of them to Charles, the most lugubrious pink elephant I ever saw, his large emerald-green glass eyes pools of sadness rimmed by outsize pouches accumulated from forgotten debauches, outsize ears hanging dejectedly. Marcel loved him dearly.

Our real encumbrance was our water supply. A stack of bottles occupied the whole of the back seat. They lay on their sides and rose in tiers, separated by what we used for wadding, a couple of hotel sheets past their youth, shirts, rolled-up socks, stuffed into vital areas. They resembled a well-planned if limited wine-cellar. Only the foil was lacking. Charles perched wretchedly on top of it. One glance at his depraved face convinced me of disaster ahead. I was certain that we would encounter some phenomenal catastrophe, like drowning high up in the mountains.

Overhead the fleeces shrank to cotton waste as we took the lonely road to Babǔl Sah. It was lonely for two reasons. Traffic flowed overwhelmingly in the opposite direction, northwest to Pahlevi, the Caspian port for trade with Russia, southwest to Abadan, and it was Wednesday, two days before the Muslim Sabbath. We crept east along the Elburz towards Firuzkēh, the route taken by Alexander on his pursuit of Darius,
and turned north to climb among the mountains. Marcel seemed to drive with an invisible eye in the back of his head watching our essential difference from the Ancient Mariner. Nonetheless, directly we got off the smoother road a bottle concert started. It resembled an xylophone, that abominable gadget which interrupts military bands on seaside promenades for no pleasureable excuse. To our relief it was muted, a tink-tink here, a tonk-tonk there, everywhere a tink-tonk. On one chiming corner I turned and saw Charles swaying precariously. I reached out just in time to keep our water-bank intact.

‘Why Charles?’ I asked.

‘I hated him at school,’ Marcel said. ‘He was a bully.’

Seen from below, the Elburz Mountains had a majestic calm. Though they lacked the melodramatic peaks of other ranges they offered to the eye the sort of massive grandeur which Beethoven provided for the ear. That was how they struck me when I studied them from a football grandstand. Seen from the plane, as it circled above Bird Fortress airfield, they could have been taken for a rampart erected by a race of giants long departed from the earth. They were their own advertisement on a clear night, under a dust of stars and lit by a pale glow from the long-range missile bull’s-eye rising above the wide Desert of Plains in Khurasan. But inside they were featureless, a sorry disappointment, oppressive and monotonous. A moment of stark Wagnerian melodrama would have provided a welcome distraction.

Perhaps my mood was to blame. The fidgety xylophone tinkle in the rear slowed our speed to a creep and irritated me endlessly. Ultimately it affected Marcel similarly. We wished we had taken the long route round via Pahlevi. But he drove patiently, nursing the bottles.

It was a real relief to descend through late afternoon sunshine to the Caspian shore.

Despite Iranian and Islamic overtones, Babül Sah had the air of unflustered ease which can be sensed in photographs of late 19th-century British seaside resorts, a remarkable atmosphere because Russia is less than 100 miles away on the northeast and under 300 miles off on the northwest beyond the green-grey sea.

Three features heightened this odd resemblance. There was a wide and not overpopulated beach. Women of every age wore voluminous black chaddars over their bright print dresses. Although the veil was officially abolished over twenty years ago Iranian women like to have
their clinging chaddars protect their dark hair from dust, their dresses from summer sunshine, and, in heavier material, their bodies from winter chill. The third likeness was in another category. Even on holiday Iranian children do not treat their parents like old boots. Their politeness was most pleasant to watch. They did not appear cowed or any the worse for being well-mannered. On the contrary, they were lively, cheerful, noisy, and full of energy.

We walked round for an hour or so to see places of interest before we searched out a restaurant recommended by a friend in Tehran. Babül Sah is renowned for caviar, its main preoccupation from November until May, a large part of which is exported to Russia. Our dinner started with a plateful each which cost us the equivalent of three shillings. It was delicious, utterly unlike the flavourless blobs served to emergent millionaires elsewhere for its snob value. Then we had mountain trout, beautifully cooked, with a delicate tang all its own. Marcel was in an expansive mood, relieved to have brought our bottles safely over the mountains, so we went on to fessenţan chelou. It had a rice-bed and a passing similarity to a Spanish paella in that its other constituents were mysterious. It contained whole walnuts, pieces of lamb and chicken, slices of wild fowl, and was served with a dark pomegranate sauce. By the time we finished off on melon and coffee I was prepared to go back over the mountains, bottles and all, in order to return for a similar meal.

We were up at dawn the next morning in order to have a swim. It was a brilliant sky under which we went down to the beach. There were few other bathers. The water was warm although a cool wind blew from the eastern deserts. An hour of slopping around seemed adequate penance for our indulgence the previous night, so I went ashore and towelled down. Marcel stayed in the water, floating about like a fair-sized log, his eyes closed.

As a result I got into conversation with a girl who had arrived soon after ourselves. From one end of the beach to the other she was the only woman visible in the early daffodil sunlight and had attached herself to us in a tenuous fashion. She acknowledged this in our first exchanges, adding she had done so because we were Europeans. Her father was in business in Paris and the whole family was in Iran on holiday. She was a slender girl, not more than twentytwo or twentythree, and had dramatically good looks, a lean triangular face, lively black eyes, and black hair cut in a variation of the gamin style.

She confessed to having trouble in getting a swim at Babül Sah, due to criticism directed at women who appeared on the beach in a bathing
costume. I thought her black one-piece suit almost flamboyantly chaste. She agreed, but even so had to creep out at dawn to avoid embarrassing her parents and wore a black *chaddar* for additional disguise.

When Marcel joined us there were several small sailboats out on the Caspian. Beach vendors were appearing. On holidays the latter do brisk business in slices of iced melon and ears of roasted corn dipped in fat and salt. For the children there were sellers of 'eskimos', wedges of ice-cream, and *māst*, a type of yoghurt. Melon appeared to be the favourite snack. Rind littered favourite parts of the beach.

We escorted our acquisition back to her hotel. Marcel talked to her nostalgically about Paris. As we parted, she expressed a hope of visiting his country one day. By some peculiar confusion she had got our countries mixed and took him for an Englishman.

An hour later we drove east. Sunlight flecked the flat green-blue Caspian on our left. There were more small white sails on it. On our right the Elburz soared darkly upon the sky. Purple and chocolate-brown shadows spread over spills of talus on the mountain slopes. Somewhere beyond those massive humps centuries ago the fleeing Darius was murdered by Bessus on his way to Bactria.

We allowed ourselves three days to reach Meshed. We could have done the journey faster. In recent years the Majlis, the Iranian Government, has undertaken a large road construction programme to strengthen the national economy. As we noted, it was still in progress. Caravan routes and camel tracks which were good enough for earlier ages would spell disaster in this century for a country whose main cities and few sizeable towns are separated by mountain ranges and spreading deserts.

We loitered to enjoy the freedom of a lonely road. Beyond a corner of the Elburz, near the Atrq River, we turned southeast on the fringe of the harsh Desert of Plains with its salt lake hearts, across which nomad tribes drift without legend to tell of their passing. At one point we stopped for an hour near Shanabad to watch purple and lilac shadows move on the Kopet Mountains in the Turkmen Socialist Soviet Republic. It was a pretty safe bet that we were under observation. The Russian frontier was midway between us and the Kopet. Whatever travelled along this road to and from Afghanistan was watched by the Russians. The Kopet has long provided one entrance into Iran for Russian spies.

Our main interest was invisible. A few hundred miles northeast beyond those mild mountains were launching-pads for Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles and outer-space rockets. At least, reliable reports have stated a number of them to be there, up in the Peski Kyzyl...
Desert of Uzbek and Kazakh. Unlike the Americans and ourselves, the Russians have concealed their missile bases in considerable secrecy. The Czars were prone to excessive suspicion and secrecy and they appear to be the dominant factors of Russian diplomacy.

Late that night we reached Meshed. We did not see it until the next morning. When we left the hotel a bustle of activity stirred along the streets. A *khamsin* air off the Khurasān deserts brushed over our faces like soft electricity until our skins seemed to prickle. This peculiar sensation lasted throughout our walk round part of this large city of over a quarter of a million people and impressive religious architecture.

It contained a wide cross-section of Iranian life. Wealthy merchants drove past in American and French cars. Beggars huddled in a thin watery green shade cast by plane trees. Mullahs in green turbans walked about in small groups and discussed obscure points of law. Small boys led half-blind young women and blind old women. Among them were peasant farmers in dusty clothes and industrial workers from the distant oilfields. Rug-dealers in skull caps enjoyed the hot sunshine. Everywhere, in broad central streets and narrow alleys, the *chaddars* were sombre. The reason for the wide diversity of individuals in a provincial city was that Meshed, ‘the place of martyrdom’, is a place of pilgrimage for Shi’a Muslims who worship at the shrine of the Imam Reza, a leader of their faith who was poisoned here. Over the centuries the golden shrine has become a treasure-house of Islamic and Iranian art. We spent several hours admiring its exquisite carved ivory and shah-blue turquoises, religious paintings which showed a marked Chinese influence, and ancient pottery.

The next morning Marcel went off on business. I visited the tomb of Harūn al-Rashīd, the Qalīf of *Alf Lellah iwa Lellah*, the thousand nights and a night or *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*, in which his resolute new wife Scheherazade told him such diverting stories that he did not kill her as he killed previous wives after a single night of nuptial consummation. Most men would have strangled the wretched woman if she babbled on when they wanted to sleep but Harūn al-Rashīd was kindly disposed to her and ultimately to Richard Burton, who tossed a reputedly unexpurgated copy of *The Arabian Nights* at late Victorians. Burton, a soldier and explorer, had a passion for amassing information. Among subjects to attract his attention were nymphomania, castration, the sex life of apes, the fascination exercised by robust African male servants over
ageing white widows, homosexuality, and a variety of more general topics. A study of the speech of pet monkeys prompted him to have their company at meals. He presented pearl earrings to one whom he called his ‘wife’. The erotic ‘Oriental’ flavour of *The Arabian Nights*, which alarmed his London-born wife Isabel into wanting to make substitutions in its text, including ‘assistant wife’ for concubine, proved enormously popular. Burton earned nearly £17,000 from it in years when income-tax varied from 6½d. to 5d. in the pound. It was a pity that Isabel destroyed a later work, after his death, a book entitled *The Scented Garden* which was believed to contain information on the marital life of eunuchs, how the fellahin copulated with crocodiles, female circumcision, and other aspects of ‘the mysterious East’.

The tomb disappointed me. It lacked those flamboyances which I had expected as a result of reading six of the ten unexpurgated volumes before my curiosity was discovered. A thirteen-year-old imagination always did die hard. And yet I had only myself to blame. The entertainment provided by Burton bore scant resemblance to fact. His stories were believed to be generously padded by items collected from bazaar *nakkals* and on journeys to places whose names sent erotic vibrations through Victorian households, India and Africa and Salt Lake City.

Nonetheless, the ghost of the authentic Harūn al-Rashīd has mingled with others in the Iranian dust. He travelled from Baghdad to investigate unrest in Khurasān when it was ruled by the Abbasid, the second Muslim dynasty, and died here over a thousand years ago. Bazaar storytellers transformed him into an exotic-erotic dustbin. Undoubtedly he collected women, due to a prestige attached to virility by rulers of these lands. His attitude was probably reflected in the phrase of a later Iranian poet who advised: ‘Let us take a new wife every spring, for there is no novelty in last year’s almanach.’

That afternoon Marcel and I saw the reason for the occupational blindness which afflicts a number of women. We visited a number of carpet-making ‘factories’. Meshed has been long connected with the rug and carpet industry. Every city where looms have been established in these lands has a high percentage of blind women. We saw upright looms in three private houses. They were placed in the best light but that factor could not minimize other drawbacks. The houses were small and in most hours light was dimmed by shade trees, chennars and poplars and cypresses. In one house five women worked with great dexterity and
speed on a single loom. ‘Women’ is inaccurate; three were under eighteen, the youngest was nine. We were told that carpets with elaborate floral designs take up to three years to complete.

Carpet manufacture has been a family occupation for centuries. It is followed in every settled community, from cities to villages, and done entirely by women. Girls start at the age of six or seven and work from early morning until the abrupt green twilight shrouds their loom. The present century has brought more changes to the industry than the last 600 years. At one house a man told us he and his wife prayed for daughters. They had three young sons. He was afraid their family enterprise would die unless his wife had daughters to train to follow her and his sisters and earlier generations of women of their families. Other countries are buying fewer of the famous Iranian carpets: sun-burst Ardabil, Timurids and Kufics, Savafid prayer-rugs woven in Khurasan. Changes in Western taste and domestic architecture have reduced the export market. Even in the best years only a small percentage of prices paid for carpets in the West ever reached the craftsmen of Khurasan. Middlemen took most of it.

*Insh’allah*, one day I shall return to Iran to try to provide an adequate account of the courage and endeavour of its people in this age of transition and danger. Over the years I have developed a considerable admiration and affection for these hospitable people.

The next morning we drove southeast towards the rising sun. Our road led beside a thin muddy river into predesert country bounded by mountains whose raw and torn peaks shone gold and fulvous in sunlight. We passed several migrant peasant families. Their short strings of moth-eaten camels of stupendous imbecility were tended by small boys who reminded me of African piccaninns driving cattle back to their kraal.

Beyond one village we stopped to assist a man engaged on repairing an ignition fault in an ancient Ford. He was short and stocky and had two large gold eye teeth. He crawled about in some agitation, clucking and sweating as he discovered other sources of potential disaster. At one moment he nearly broke into tears and we almost decided to dismantle his flivver. In this intention we were frustrated. Four women sat resolutely in the car and stared at us above *chaddars* veiling their faces. They were speechless and motionless. When we finished our efforts the owner
climbed in to test their effect and without warning the museum piece shot off. Wisely, the owner kept going.

As we went on, Marcel said: 'Those women were either dead or waxworks, Johnny. Their knees were cold.'

He was wrong. One pair of black eyes had looked at me with a glint of amusement. A North African princess once assured me that a woman's eyes never grew old. On that basis the owner of the amused eyes was probably a grandmother.

Some fifteen miles farther on we came to an undistinguished wire fence, the Afghanistan frontier. We had passed through the Iranian point at Turbat-i-Shaikh Zam, and met Afghan officials beyond the wire at Khosan. They were polite, alert, and scrupulous. All of them were tough, fit-looking men, and young. Then, to tight if affable smiles, we were sent on.

Shortly before nine o'clock we entered Herat. The Russian frontier was sixty miles due north. As we drove in, the city was dark and hot among its hills. It looked empty. The darkness smelled of camel dung.

For the rest of the evening I was unable to rid my mind of the problems facing Iran. Unfortunately, few of its people have had time to acquire sufficient political patience to guide them through these hazardous years. Iranians are not alone in this; more politically matured countries are affected. Only the nature of the complexities is specifically Iranian. They start from the absence of any unifying link except the Shah himself between the towns dwellers and between the men of the deserts. A recent increase of corruption among army officers and civil servants has caused a corresponding loss of faith in the Army and the Majlis. It may be true that tribal elements are too large and extensive for them to be called tribes—a very rough simile might be drawn to those in Britain during the years of the Roman conquest from A.D. 43 onwards—but their tribal character has undeniably weakened both politics and commerce. Foreign relations have been uneasy for a decade. They have been affected by events in Iraq, where General Kassem occupies an increasingly precarious perch and may be shaken off in one of those bloody hours which constitute a factor of Arab politics, and by the ambitions of Egypt expressed in the United Arab Republic, where President Nasser continues his dance with devils through a dark night towards a shining red dawn. These
complexities sink down to the average man and woman who have been prevented by the nature of their land from achieving a stable middleclass able to shrug off some antagonisms in order to ensure a continuation of material prosperity.

I took these complexities to bed with me. As a number of my friends know, for some years I have undertaken this final daily trot accompanied by concern over worsening events in South Africa. It is the penalty of loving a country and its people. But there is one vast difference between Iran and South Africa. Whatever happens to the Iranians will result directly from foreigners who deliberately exploit their weaknesses in pursuit of power politics.
I was not really surprised to see so many Russians admiring the sights of Herat.

They were chunky pale-skinned men in baggy light grey and dark blue suits. Most of them wore a badge in their buttonholes. They had an identical expression, blank, wary, self-conscious, stricken by a conviction of destiny and of being the one-eyed in the country of the blind, the Russian face abroad. They were technical experts, concerned with dispensing information, not, of course, interested in a collection of political intelligence. A number were accompanied by their wives, plump, jolly-looking women whose relaxed air was in marked contrast to their husbands’ poised uneasiness.

I saw them on each of the five days I spent in Herat waiting for a seat on the Afghan Mail to Kabul. They formed a sight-seeing crocodile at the Great Mosque, a cluster gathered in shade cast by trees, a fret of photographers who were trying to get the dental parapet of the yellow-walled old citadel into perspective, a picnic party on a bank of the Hari outside the city, and a group which I followed on an early morning exploration of the market section of the Chahar suq. They fell silent directly anyone approached them, stared blankly at nothing and the men spoke
in whispers out of the side of their mouths. This mannerism gave them a filmish atmosphere.

They were bound to be in Afghanistan because twelve years earlier the British had departed from India in an atmosphere of extreme cordiality and precipitate haste which won official American approval and may have decided the fate of Asia and other areas for a thousand years. It would have resulted from the departure in similar circumstances of the influence of any country which had occupied the British relationship to India. The Russians were bound to be in Afghanistan.

Tamarisks and pines gave cool fresh colour to the wide cobblestone and earth streets of Herat as Marcel and I walked round them. It reminded me somewhat of the pleasant old English city of Bath. There were likenesses: sheltering hills on two sides, a rich farmland restricted by higher hills, a population of approximately eighty thousand, and a record of having risen repeatedly on its own debris. There the similarities ended.

Slender blue minarets soared into the sky. City Heratis wore karakul hats though those in business tended to adopt conventional grey suits. Their houses were unpretentious structures of stone and mud, flat and featureless. We passed provincial Heratis in the streets, bright-eyed men in belted short coats and high black leather boots, women who sometimes forgot to veil themselves promptly in front of strangers, representatives of communities midway between urban Afghans and northern nomads. They drove about in backward-tilted, two-wheeled gadees, an Afghan variation of a pony and trap. I was sure that city Heratis were married, because I saw children, but urban Herati women have lived in strict purdah for centuries and appeared only infrequently in the streets, and then mysteriously.

My morning prowl behind one group of Russians was not due to curiosity about them. I wanted to see how they were treated by Herati stallkeepers. The Russians numbered six, four men and two women. None of the men were under forty and they had a guarded watchfulness that lent them a family identity despite physical variations. One woman was a girl of nineteen or twenty, a buxom fresh-complexioned young woman whose dark hair was braided behind her ears. It was a warm morning, the sky sheeted with glimmering sunlight, and she wore a turquoise cotton dress and carried a black coat slung over one arm. She wanted to be friends with everyone. Nobody responded to her high spirits. The stallkeepers were no more than polite. No one inclined to surround their northern visitors with joyful greetings.
That too was expectable. For long centuries Herat was pestered by men obsessed with destiny and destruction. The monarchs of ancient Persia advanced upon it across the deserts; Alexander the Great led his phalanxes to it and named it Alexandria Arion; Islam arrived on its drive to the east, and remained. Thereafter Herat prospered from its position on a main trade route to Asia until it became one of the wealthiest cities west of India, a fact which attracted the Mongols. They swept down upon it, slew its men, herded women and girls into their camp, and ransacked it. On one invasion they killed all save forty of its one and a half million inhabitants.

The Mongols descended on Herat from the north. So did the Turkmans and Uzbeks who sacked it on four occasions. As Russian imperialism extended in Asia, Herat received renewed attention. Early in the 19th century an Iranian Shah who had become a Russian puppet attacked it but was defeated, due largely to a British officer, Eldred Pottinger, who organized its defence for nine months in 1837–8 and whose Afghan troops finally routed the Iranian and Russian troops. Subsequent Czarist intrigues centred on Bukhara, an independent state on the northern frontier of Afghanistan. In the late 1860s Bukhara became a Russian vassal province. A Russian army leader, General Kuropatkin, advised his Czar to ‘make of Manchuria another Bukhara’, a stepping-stone for the Russian domination of Asia.

Communism did not change the pattern. Afghanistan had a natural concern for Bukhari independence. Lenin concluded a treaty with Afghanistan which guaranteed it, but the Afghans lacked the means to defend their rights. Russia broke the treaty. Bukhara became a People’s Republic in 1921 and was incorporated with the Soviet Union in 1925. The name of Bukhara remained on the maps as an airport town 400 miles away. Russia pressed closer to Herat, the frontier sixty miles north of the city. Russian engineers and industrial experts appeared in Afghanistan soon after the British departed from India.

The men I followed round the shadowy, odorous and noisy suq were ill at ease. Whenever they halted at a stall the men glanced back over their shoulders to see if they were under surveillance. There was only me. At the fourth stop, beside a stall which sold turquoises of inferior quality, two of them directed a brief stare in my general direction, their grey eyes lively as billiard balls, and exchanged muttered monosyllables: ‘they have had the mantle of imperialism chucked over them’, says my diary, which displayed a charitable mood in lieu of penetrative observation. I walked ahead to let them follow me. They did not accept
the invitation. Instead they bustled their women off in another
direction.

One evening we were given another reason for the uneasiness which
some Russians feel in cities like Herat. An Afghan whom Marcel had met
on previous occasions entertained us to dinner at his house.

Our host had lived in other countries and was a multilingualist, speak-
ing fluent English and Hindi in addition to Persian and Pashtu, the
languages of Afghanistan. His house contained elaborately carved dark
furniture and exquisite rugs. We were entertained in 'the tearoom', a
big square room with a wooden ceiling decorated in complex geometric
designs picked out in blue paint. We dined off an excellent dish of lamb
and vegetables mixed with raisins and almonds, followed by fruit and
coffee. We ate alone. Although we spent several hours in the house
we neither saw nor heard any sign of his wife and two marriageable
daughters. This absence of women reminded me of evenings with Arab
shaikhs in makaads safe from women though in Afghan households the
absence of women has been dictated by an intention to protect them
from licentious and possibly heated male desires.

Our host was a student of politics. He ascribed Russian disquiet in
Herat to the pathological fear of kulaks which Lenin gave his followers.

By Western standards we had an extraordinary conversation. None
of the familiar features appeared. There was no talk of space rockets or
moon probes, not one mention of United Nations debates, no word of
disarmament plans. Our host talked earnestly and emphatically upon the
fundamentals of a completely different social situation. It was like re-
living the first pages of 20th-century Russian history. The reasons were
two in number and equally obvious: the poverty of the overwhelming
majority of Asian people and the fact that their industrial development
started only recently.

He talked about kulaks, fiercely independent farmers and rural
businessmen concerned with agriculture. According to Communist
document the kulaks were rich or they could not have been independent.
There were men in Herat province, he said, whom the visiting Russians
had to interpret as kulaks in order to explain their independence. Then
he got up from his chair and searched out an article that Lenin had written
in 1918 on Civil War in the Villages; on the tea-room bookshelves were
Lenin's works, a set of the novels of Dickens, short stories of H. G.
Wells, novels by Tolstoy and John Steinbeck, and the Kamasutra, the
Indian work on sex. He directed our attention to a paragraph in Lenin's article which began: 'The kulak cherishes a fierce hatred for the Soviet Government and is prepared to strangle and massacre hundreds of thousands of workers. We know that if the kulaks were to obtain the upper hand they would ruthlessly slaughter hundreds of thousands of workers and join in alliance with the landlords and capitalists. . . .'

'Did Lenin believe this or was he making propaganda?' I asked him.

'He made himself believe it,' he said. He pointed out that Lenin had boasted of having caused civil war in the villages of Russia. Afghan farmers wondered, he said, if Russian engineers and industrial experts were engaged on sowing hatred and a desire for revolution among the poorer Afghan communities. They could believe that Afghan kulaks feared their presence and work to a point where they might be tempted to show their dislike of Communist methods. If the Russians succeeded in an attempt to make of Afghanistan another Bukhara, he said, a revolution might occur at any time within the next eight years.

'There are divisions in our country which can be exploited,' he said. 'Our soil may have great wealth, but we have not found it. We are poor. We are suspicious of everyone, even of ourselves. We doubt our own motives. We want to be rid of the past, but we are afraid of losing ourselves in the future. If a revolution began here, who would come to our aid? India and Pakistan? It is unlikely. Iran? How could Iran help us? Who else is there? No one. The rest of the world is too far away to save us if the Communists make a coup here.'

It was late before Marcel and I walked back to our hotel. The night was dark and peaceful under the Mullah Khwaja hills. Few people were out in its stillness. They were men, a brisk tattoo of footsteps on cobblestones ahead of us. Warm air sidled down the valley. It smelled strangely of honeysuckle. In a street drowned in inky black shadows an aged gadee creaked past. I saw a star fall down the sky beyond the northern hills.

Next day we prepared to go our separate ways. Once again our main concern was to ensure adequate supplies of boiled water. Marcel wanted to return to Tehran quickly because his purchases cut down the space available for his water-bank. I had a vista of teahouses ahead on the journey down to Farah, site of the new southwest military airfield, then southeast to Kandahar and northeast to Kabul, 700 miles away, and
I did not fancy drinking water in which others had washed recently. Fortunately we had a good stack of bottles.

I was sorry to lose Marcel, one of the best companions on long roads. He had an extraordinary ability to adapt himself to circumstances and people, to be interested in anything, particularly in 'the Middle East', for whose people he had true empathy. And I was loath to part from Charles, whose pink depravity had a salutary effect on me.

That night I left Marcel to his accounts and turned in early. I needed to relax my muscles on the charpai in readiness for whatever strains might be put on them before I got to Kabul. No railway existed to ensure a fast journey. Europeans who made the trip usually went by car; a year which saw more than two dozen such travellers witnessed a tourist boom. At the other end of the wayfarer scale were local Dick Whittingtons, going on foot or astride an old horse in search of fortune. They were few. The Afghan Mail coped with essential traffic between the two extremes.

Afghanistan is not alone in being without railways. I had enjoyed supposedly appalling bus-rides on earlier occasions, including a memorable jolt up from Mandalay to jungle country held by Communist guerrillas beyond Lashio. My chief regret in Herat was that my wife was not with me. We had shared many similar expeditions, not least an amusing day-run prowl in a South African apartheid bus over the Transkei from East London to Umtata, on which we were protected from Africans or they from us by a thin dirty wooden partition. Elizabeth would have enjoyed this jaunt but not its conditions. Afghan buses impose a sexual apartheid. There were separate entrances. Shrouded women and children occupied the front and men settled in the rear. It was like being taken off in an ambulance behind a staff of nun nurses.

The next morning a watery sunlight streaked high shreds of cloud. Overnight the wind had changed and was blowing warmly from the south. Umber and indigo shadows moulded the dark huddled hills.

I rushed to the bus station in an anxious condition. After the large breakfast a knowledgeable traveller had assured me the Mail left an hour earlier than other people had told me. I arrived with seconds to spare and learned that I was an hour too early.

The single-decker bus was a sad sight. It looked as if it had been abandoned on account of old age. Its seared brownish paintwork had been deeply scratched by grit. A two-foot-high luggage rack covered the top. I had tickets for two seats, one to accommodate my cases, the other
for myself. The extravagance was necessary because luggage vanished from overhead racks, occupied by overflow short-stage male travellers going home to an outlying village for a family celebration. Marcel walked round to peer at the wheels and clicked his tongue depressingly. He expressed a not too hopeful wish that the brakes were in good condition.

We left my things in his car and went back up the street to inspect a lorry we had passed. In the setting of mosques and camels its appearance verged on fantasy. It was a scarlet three-tonner picked out in gold. Its sides had been divided into four panels, each with an egg-shaped hand-painted landscape of France. Along one side were the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe and Bois de Boulogne; on the other side were two Riviera scenes and two of places which might have been anywhere, a lake fringed by cypresses, a cemetery crowded with exuberant sculpture. A thick honey-dark varnish gave them a bilious yellow sheen.

As we inspected the scenes we were joined by the lorry-driver, a sparse round-shouldered man whose perpetual grin revealed discoloured teeth. He told us that the artist was his brother. The scenes had been copied from coloured postcards which a sister-in-law had obtained from another relative to whom they were given by a member of the French diplomatic staff in Kabul.

Once upon a time, the driver told us nostalgically, many lorries had been decorated with similar pictures painted by amateur artists who copied them from coloured postcards or photographs in foreign magazines. He lamented that it was a dying art. Every year more and more Russian lorries came into service in the country. Neither their owners nor their drivers took pride in them. In his opinion it was a bad thing; it prevented people in isolated villages from becoming familiar with foreign countries. It was also bad for business. Villagers no longer gathered to look at the pictures and learn what the lorries brought to sell.

After a while we walked back to the bus. I put my luggage inside and threw my bed-roll up onto the rack. We said goodbye and Marcel drove off on his return journey to Tehran. I got into the bus.

Two hours after our scheduled departure time the bus was still in Herat. Earnest mechanics worked frantically on repairs to the carburettor. The heat of the day increased steadily. So did heat inside the bus. There were thirtysix adults and eight children in a space intended for about thirty. We also had two cockerels and four caged linnets.

One man complained of a headache and got out. He did not reappear.
The rest of us waited. When we finally started, an hour later, another five men perched overhead among the luggage.

Early on I learned that Afghans were not yet accustomed to rapid travel. My fellow-passengers were people who regarded travel as an experience linked to a major event in their lives: death, marriage, or inheritance. One child vomited soon after we left Herat. Its distress started a chain reaction among other children. The heat and petrol fumes which rose up from the floor did not improve their condition. As we climbed into the dark barren hills a worried youth who sat next to my luggage looked at me apologetically and was abruptly sick into the space between us.

He was frequently unhappy. It was no help to him that the road was under improvement in several stretches, repairs and developments being carried out by gangs of labourers supervised by Russian engineers. Along the road to Kabul I noted Russian lorries, jeeps, and road construction machinery.

This observation may have provided an explanation for a subsequent incident. Shortly after I left Herat a report circulated through Iran and the West that a small force of Russian troops had been stationed on a strip of road near the Iranian frontier. The report was later denied by the Afghan authorities and discredited by Britons who had earlier experience of India and the North-West Frontier. The reported views of the latter appeared to disregard two not insignificant factors. Unquestionably the best road-builders in Russia have always been associated with the Russian army, due to an absence of urgency in road construction for purely commercial purposes. At the time that the report was circulated the Russian radio in Azerbaijan was conducting a virulent propaganda campaign against Iran. It was feasible to assume that Red Army engineers engaged on road-works west of Herat and near to Iran were ordered to wear uniform for some days in order to provide a new assault on Iranian nerves. Russians have always excelled in cold-war tactics.
Kabul was in a schizophrenic mood. It was also extremely suspicious. In both aspects it typified the country of which it was capital.

I failed in attempts to recall a country where I had been so conscious of suspicion. It was akin to an element in the air breathed by its people, native to their environment. Its manifestations were innumerable, a long searching gaze of men's eyes that probed, speculated, and turned aside as if baffled or defeated; a poised alertness in people met on the streets; a phobic dread of accepting another viewpoint; a tendency to dig at everything, to suspect danger, to justify and exonerate hostility. Oddly enough, it displayed no racial bias or deeply rooted hatred. It was not even attributable to exaggerated pride though the Afghans are a proud people. It just existed, like an extra protective skin.

Kabul was also a city of violent contrasts. I encountered them on every excursion through its streets. They were paved by Russian aid and ended at the city boundaries, the only paved surfaces in the country. At open markets the tawny huddles of belching camels appeared to be more moth-eaten than usual, but in central thoroughfares streams of large American cars, Russian jeeps, pre-war Japanese bicycles, weather-tarnished cream and chromium local buses, and horse-drawn tongas, were conducted on their journeys by policemen in neat maroon uniforms on circular concrete traffic-control stands shaped like large mustard pots. Men who visited the city from surrounding villages wore long baggy white trousers and multi-coloured turbans. There were regular air services to Russia and India. There was no sewage system. There was electric lighting in my hotel.
Villas in the new suburbs of Cartaichar and Shar-i-nao were well-planned but mud and stone houses in older districts looked decidedly unsafe to my eyes. Down in the bazaar close to the Garden of Ammun bridge I watched bearded old men clad in brightly coloured turbans, robes, and cotton trousers selling spices, harness, brasswork, household articles of Russian manufacture, and maimouri rugs woven by women and girls in the northwest of the country, and black marketeers in suits who tried to get rid of stolen or smuggled goods, ranging from electric fans to opium. There were American and Russian radio sets, some Japanese too, in wealthier homes where each had its gulkana, a flower room facing south. Cultural development included courses in English and Russian for higher-grade students. In small villages nearby were men who had received no education but spoke Pashtu and Persian and Hindi.

Kabul cinemas show Western and Asian films. I went to see two of the latter, one built around a gifted Indian actress, the other decorated by the tigerish grace of Umi Kalthum, last seen in Singapore. I was grateful to both of them for keeping me properly orientated. There were no women in the audiences.

The population of Kabul was estimated for me at a quarter of a million people. I cannot vouch for the figure. Those from whom I sought enlightenment provided casual or positive totals which contradicted each other. The population of the country was stated to be 14 million, composed of five ethnic groups. This represented an increase of 2 million over a 1946 estimate. Presumably it had then been static for eight years for it was estimated at 12 million in 1938 although another estimate for that year gave it as 7 million. Nobody seemed curious about such details.

One afternoon I stood outside Habibiah College and watched its students leave for their homes. They were youths in karakul hats and suits. I was told that 3000 of them received advanced education from foreign teachers, originally Indians, more recently Germans, Austrians, and Americans. There were no girls. Afghans see no point in higher education for women.

The Maktab-i-Habibiah, College of the Beloved One, was founded early in the present century by King Habibullah, a progressive and enlightened man who fostered other developments: newspapers, telephones, and a hydroelectric project. Many Afghans, notably mullahs and those swayed by religious considerations, dreaded modern innovations and hated rulers who encouraged their introduction.

Habibullah was assassinated in 1919. He was not the only king to die
violently since Afghanistan became a separate political entity in 1747. Until then it had been divided into territory ruled by imperialist neighbours, provinces controlled by other states, or a collection of small principalities whose people were often busy with tribal warfare amongst themselves. The latter activity was hailed as a sign of masculinity. Then in 1747 a gathering of chiefs at Kandahar chose Ahmad Khan to lead them in a bid for unity. He extended the frontiers of his country to the east and west and is believed to have died a natural death.

Miraculously, Afghanistan remained a separate political entity though the successors of Ahmad Khan were often unfortunate. A number of them saw their country reduced in size. Internal friction weakened their rule. Three were assassinated, two abdicated in time to save their lives, nine were deposed and several succeeded in intrigues to regain power, and two of the five who died quietly were rumoured to have been poisoned. All of them had to glance continually over their shoulders to see who stood behind them. It was an exciting and eventful record.

Britain appeared on the Afghan scene in connexion with family treachery. The event provided insight into Afghan temperament of the period for high treason conducted by close relatives was one cause of the schizophrenia which afflicted its kings. The sequence began when the wily prince Mahmud ousted his brother Zahman from the throne in 1799 and was himself deposed four years later by another brother, Shuja.

By that time the East India Company had involved Britain in India and the British Government was worried by the manoeuvres of Napoleon in Iran. Shuja was an unpopular ruler and fled to India when Mahmud led a counter-rebellion against him. Although Mahmud regained the throne the real ruler was Fath Khan, known as the king-maker. Such men were dangerous in Europe. Fath Khan was no exception. In hours of braggart confidence he outraged Mahmud's family and Mahmud had him blinded. A brother and half-brother of Fath rose in arms, whereupon Mahmud had him killed, but the rebellion drove Mahmud off the throne. Anarchy ensued. The country fell apart while the triumphant conspirators quarrelled with each other and with their equally ambitious brothers. Out of the confusion of victory arose Dost Mohammed who defeated an attempt by Shuja to regain the throne.

That was in 1835. Napoleon had gone from the scene of Europe but the power of the Russian Czars was extending across Asia and
threatened to undermine British interests in India. A British envoy, Sir Alexander Burnes, went to Kabul to sound out Dost Mohammed. He refused to assist Dost Mohammed to regain the Punjab and Kashmir. Dost Mohammed then received a Russian envoy, Captain Vikovitch, an action which annoyed the British Governor-General in India, Lord Auckland, who demanded that Vikovitch should be sent back to Moscow and Afghan claims on Kashmir and the Punjab abandoned. Dost Mohammed refused both demands. Auckland decided to show him that Russian influence in Afghanistan was unwelcome. The picturesquely named ‘Army of the Indus’, accompanied by Shuja and Burnes, marched into the country.

To those who opposed the army, it must have been an impressive sight as it climbed mountain passes and advanced across arid plains. It was comprised of 21,000 men, British and sepoy infantry clad in scarlet and blue, cavalry, 25,000 camels, herds of cattle and sheep and goats hooving up dust as they penetrated into the country. In April 1839 advance divisions pitched tent in a spot outside Kandahar where wildflowers gave moonlit nights a scent of mignonette. While they waited to be reinforced for an advance on Kabul they ate quantities of locally grown plums, apricots, white mulberries, grapes, and melons, a feast which added dysentery and jaundice to fever. Dost Mohammed fled north before they reached Kabul early in August. That would have ended the matter if Auckland had been right in his beliefs.

Auckland was wrong. He had ignored sound advice. Shuja had been unpopular before. He was now widely hated, his return having been accomplished by hated ferenghis and Hindu troops. Discontent gained expression throughout the entire country. A large army of occupation settled down in hope that before long Shuja would be accepted if not liked.

Another aspect of Afghan schizophrenia complicated the issues which surrounded Shuja. The British force needed entertainment. It organized horse races, played cricket, went to cock-fights, skated on Kabul River in winter, organized wrestling contests with Afghan champions, drank a potent stimulant evolved from grapes, but still felt a desire for other diversions. Only a few officers were joined by their wives. Kabul women were not then shrouded anonymities outside their homes nor were they kept in rigorous purdah. Without being aware of it, the army of occupation was in a unique and explosive situation.

Kabul was the centre of the country’s internal trade. It was also the entrepôt of commerce between Afghanistan, India, and bordering states.
It had no industry. Kabulis were predominantly commercial travellers who spent weeks and months away from their homes, taking their caravans on long journeys in every direction. Richard Burton, while still an army lieutenant, undertook a confidential mission in the neighbouring territory of Sind to study sexual practices in the brothels and discovered that boys were cheaper and more plentiful than women. Years later, in his *Terminal Essay* and footnotes to the unexpurgated *Thousand Nights and A Night*, he described how Afghan traders were accompanied on their journeys by ‘travelling wives’, *kuch isafari*. The *kuch isafari* were boys of twelve to seventeen dressed to resemble girls, faces painted, eyelids smeared with khol, hair and skin scented with sandalwood and other perfumes, bejewelled, and transported in silken camel litters. They were a common feature in Muslim countries and their shrill falsetto voices, raised in pettish abuse or beguiling cries, can still be heard in North Africa and Saudi Arabia.

Pederasty was so widespread that ‘Afghan women were perpetually mortified’ wrote Burton in his report. The number of women distressed by it was considerable for merchants believed their wealth and vigorous manhood proved by leaving at home the maximum of four wives permitted by Muslim law and a quantity of concubines. Burton was a more reliable observer than his easily shocked critics in the army, who, for unknown reasons, attacked him for the honesty of his report. An accident of history encamped a large number of womanless soldiers among a large number of neglected wives. Other observers supported Burton in his statement that Afghan women sought the company of British soldiers, invited them into respectable zenanas, and, in effect, overcame the minor inconvenience of being unable to communicate their thoughts through speech in order to take revenge on their husbands. It was said that the forsaken wives engaged in unprecedented debauchery, sought lovers in every section of the occupying forces, engaged in amatory intrigues, and revelled in a discovery of men prepared to fight to possess them. Several murders were attributed to jealousy. Afghan women heard tell of love. The latter probably astonished them. In Afghanistan, as elsewhere in countries where marriages were arranged among Islamic families, there was an adage, ‘A woman for children, a boy for pleasure.’ It had a sociological consequence.

Burton believed the sensual abandonment of those days responsible for what ensued.

The Afghans went into revolt in October 1841, fourteen months after the occupation of Kabul. By then it should have been obvious that
there was no friendly co-operation between Shuja and the bulk of the population. The Afghans, who were always fearless and ruthless fighters, planned their revolt carefully. It started with the assassination of British officers. Among them was Alexander Burnes and his younger brother who were betrayed while disguised as Afghans and hacked down. Inept military leadership caused several hundred troops to be killed. A conference between Sir William Macnaughten and the nationalist leader Akbar Khan ended when Akbar killed Macnaughten with his own hands. He was a son of Dost Mohammed.

An agreement was reached for the army of occupation to leave. On 6 January 1842 some 16,500 people left Kabul. They included 690 British officers and men, 3810 Indian troops, and 12,000 camp followers. Seven days later the survivor of this company reached Jalalabad. He was Dr. William Bryden. Apart from a few married officers and their wives, and political representatives, taken as hostages, the rest were dead. The great majority of them had been killed by Afghans who broke their agreement and attacked the company. Others were murdered by terrified sepoys who ran amuck and others froze to death in the hills. The account was balanced later but Shuja did not see it happen. He too was assassinated. Dost Mohammed regained the throne.

The episode illustrated one aspect of the Afghan character, a fierce resolve to maintain its individual way of life. It was demonstrated on subsequent occasions, between or coincident with outbreaks of treachery around the throne, by the murder of a British Resident, Major Sir Louis Cavagnari, and his entire escort in 1879, by fratricidal conflict, and on four other occasions when Russian influence reappeared, in 1878, 1885, 1921, and 1929.

None fought more resolutely to preserve the isolation of Afghanistan than the mullahs. One ruler who learned the extent of religious power was King Amanullah, who removed his uncle Nasrullah from the throne in 1919 after Nasrullah had occupied it for six days following the assassination of Amanullah’s father. Amanullah wanted to develop the country industrially and socially in the pattern which he had seen in Europe. Like Ataturk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran, he proposed to increase female education and also passed a law which restricted the right of a father to choose a husband for his daughter. These measures touched off a rebellion in 1923. Another civil war broke out in 1929; it was largely due to Amanullah having decided that members of his newly founded parliament should adopt Western attire. Mullahs were primarily responsible for both rebellions. The second rebellion forced Amanullah to abdicate.
Korangi Township—President Ayub Khan laying the foundation-stone of a community project for refugees
Karachi—the Lakshmi building

Khairpur—the engine-room of the textile mills
Treachery, Travelling Wives, Tactics

His brother occupied the throne for a week. It was then taken over by a revolutionary who ruled in an agreed condition of licentiousness for nine months until he was deposed by a cousin of Amanullah, Nadir Shah, a brilliant and progressive but cautious man who was assassinated in 1933 and succeeded by his young son, the present king, Zahir Shah.

After the middle of the 19th century Afghan women in wealthier households returned to strict purdah. Their infrequent public appearances were dictated by dire necessity. The few who went to other countries discovered a freedom never experienced inside their own country where the mullahs dictated social conduct. There is still widespread homosexuality in the country, proof of psychosexual immaturity and imbalance.

The women I saw in the cities wore shapeless, discreetly coloured mantles which completely covered their heads and descended to their feet. They looked out through a slit which resembled a pillar-box opening, but square, from forehead to nose, and covered in veiling like butter muslin. The garment was called a chaderi—by local pronunciation chouduri and chadduri—but unlike the Iranian chaddar. It was a burqa with Afghan innovations to ensure concealment.

A number of men talked to me of changes taking place in the Afghan social system. They foresaw an end to the power exercised by mullahs; proper medical attention for women, free from artificial scruples attributable to custom evolved into religion; the abolition of parentally arranged marriages; universal education for senior students; a rapid development of industry and agriculture. Several men who had visited Britain and Europe told me they hoped to see the rise of a strong middle class able to cement the social system and restrict the power of the mullahs to religious issues.

Zahir Shah was nineteen years old when he succeeded his father. He had married his consort, Queen Humaira, two years before. They have four sons and two daughters. The king is a tall and handsome man of lean build. He speaks fluent French in addition to the languages of his country and has shown partiality for Western dress.

During the early years he was advised by three uncles. One of them, Hashim Khan, held the position of Prime Minister and another acted as Minister of Defence. After some years the office of Prime Minister passed to Daud Khan, a cousin of the king and married to the king’s sister.

T.H.O.I.—D
From the outset Daud Khan displayed a forthright attitude to his position. He declared that an Afghan could outwit any man, a statement which still lacks proof. He introduced a governmental policy which he described as ‘milking two cows’.

The tactic proved extremely beneficial. It helped Afghanistan to catch up with developments in neighbouring countries which had been withheld from Afghans by mullahs who feared that every change would restrict their power. One of the first benefits was a £35,000,000 loan from Russia in 1955 used mainly to add Migs and Czech helicopters to the Afghan Air Force until it attained parity with the Iranian Air Force in 1959.

The other cow was America. In recent years the United States has advanced large sums of money for economic development. One loan of £20,000,000 was for irrigation, fertilization, and land resettlement. Another American loan of £6,000,000 was to provide a rail link with Pakistan, an extension of the railway from Chaman to the Afghan frontier to ease the shipment of imports from Karachi.

By and large, the policy devised by Daud Khan allowed the Americans to graze in the agricultural south while the Russians roamed in the mineral-rich north. Americans agreed that they lagged behind the Russians in public relations. That was inevitable. The reasons were unconsciously summed up for me by an American wife in Kabul.

‘It’s a strange country, isn’t it?’ she commented.

The Americans started with considerable handicaps. They went as strangers. Their individual qualifications consisted of an ability to supervise one or other project of land development or to teach English. Few of them spoke Iranian or Pashtu. None of those whom I met were Muslims. Their contacts were restricted to educated Afghans who spoke English or French, and Afghans were never a forthcoming people. Overwhelmingly, the Americans were accustomed to a much higher standard of living, to faultless sewage and sanitation, and easy mingling. A number were inclined, quite naturally, to regard aspects of Afghan life from their own viewpoint. So did I.

Goodwill, like patriotism, was not enough to overcome such disadvantages. Russian propaganda has left no stone unturned to create additional difficulties for the Americans. There are frequent Soviet radio and pamphlet references to actions taken by southern Americans in their dealings with Negroes, Mexicans, and others. The greatest American
The aid given by America ran into unexpected problems. Its enormous grants and loans, totalling approximately $145 million dollars, were devoted to projects which lacked the sharp dramatic quality of Russian aid. The vast Helmand Valley development plan, down in the southwest corner below Farah, was intended to make the desert fertile. Its sponsors found their original estimates defeated by rising costs and then the ground intended for farmland was discovered to have an unexpectedly high saline deposit. Other plans, such as the establishment of pilot industries, did succeed in their intention, but Americans complained that when a new project proved financially sound it was taken over by highly placed Afghans for their personal profit.

Some Americans tended to draw a satisfactory conclusion from minor incidents. One told me that he showed boys how to play baseball and hoped it might become their national game. I shared his hope. Perhaps his activity will have more success than that which attended Captain Sinclair, who set Afghans building boats after he built one and sailed it on a lake. Sinclair was an officer of the army of occupation.

In 1959 there were nearly 1000 Russian engineers and experts in the country. Assistants from satellite countries totalled another 200. Most Russians came from neighbouring Soviet republics: Uzbek, Turkmen, Tadzhik, and Kazakh. Muslims or not, they accepted the Afghan way of life easily and did not find its restrictions on social intercourse at all irksome. Only those in rich agricultural areas betrayed uneasiness.

Another tactic introduced by Daud Khan was an attempt to slice off a section of Pakistan to form an independent state, 'Pakhtunistan'. The intention was to appeal to one ethnic group of Afghans, the Pathans. The scheme had Russian backing and Daud Khan needed a long spoon. It was the method used by Russia to sow dissension among the Kurds of Iran and Iraq in a hope of establishing an independent 'Kurdistan'. More than a quarter of Afghans are Pathans and West Pakistan was assumed to

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2 An entertaining account of snags encountered by Americans, and an invaluable record of how the country affected one American journalist, was provided by Edward Hunter in *The Past Present* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1959). In the first paragraph of a 150,000-word survey, Mr. Hunter stated that British relations with Afghanistan have been 'catastrophic'. I wish he had been able to find space to explain the reasons for this statement.
have a minority group ready for propaganda exploitation, even though other Pathans in Afghanistan resented Soviet anti-Muslim laws.

Daud alienated Pakistani sympathy by his tactic. Pakistanis interpreted it as a threat to their independence. They listened to the Afghan Prime Minister and looked north to where their Muslim neighbours lived in Russian Tadzhik and Chinese Sinkiang.

The Pakhtunistan issue succeeded in alerting Pakistan to watchfulness of every Afghan move in the west as Iran had long been watchful of other moves in the east. The hard imprint of Soviet strategy was stamped on it from the beginning. It was an obvious stratagem to make of the North-West Frontier another Bukhara, another Berlin.

I wandered around Kabul for several days. On some early morning walks I was intrigued by brief glimpses of burgas near the bazaar and, in every hour, fascinated by political developments since World War Two. My informants were generally cagey about what they said but none disguised the fact that in their opinion Afghanistan was in a unique situation. They were right.

The situation was not without humour. Those dreadful imperialists, the British, were absent. Russians who did not believe in imperialism were more firmly established in the country than emissaries of Czars who did believe in imperialism. Americans were present in a hope of preserving Afghan independence by peaceful example, and until a few years ago the official American panacea for ridding the world of trouble was to end imperialism.

I thought it was a mad world, in which opinion I was probably quite alone, and saw no easy solution to Afghan problems. Their confusion was not lessened for me by an Afghan acquaintance who gave me dinner one night after I had spent some days in Kandahar. During the meal, which was attended by his two brothers and eldest son, he said to me: ‘It was a pity that your people and mine met during the quarrel of Dost Mohammed and Shah Shuja. We understand your attitude better now that we can see it in perspective. You Britons are like us. You are reserved and believe in discipline.’

I thanked him for his politeness and hospitality.

‘When I was a young man I met many British soldiers,’ he said reflectively. ‘They were good fighters. Good men.’

I passed.

On the way back to the hotel that night the prevailing schizophrenia
began to affect me. It deepened as I remembered another polite Afghan, a much lonelier man than my host. He was ex-King Amanullah, whom I met before the war in Manchester, another city where policemen conducted traffic as if it was an orchestra. The ex-King was most kind and affable to a young reporter, and convinced of a great future for the country from which he had been driven by mullahs. He understood newspapermen. The father of his consort Souriya was one of the first newspaper publishers in Kabul. And all the developments which he sought to introduce, measures which drove him off the throne, are appearing in his country.

Three days later I boarded another sample of the Afghan Mail and went north into country below the Russian frontier.
We left Kabul dead on time. Everybody had claimed their seats. There were about forty people inside the Mail, the usual collection of talkative restless men, whispery children, bottle-green and black and ultramarine burqas, and caged birds, plus a large flaxen-haired, twenty-year-old German student returning to Cologne from Singapore, and myself. Overhead a youngish trio sprawled amid baggage. It was frequently amused. This caused violent drum-rolls of heel-kicking which threatened to bring the roof down around our ears.

Policemen in maroon uniforms orchestrated us away from cosmopolitan streets of mosques and cinemas, rug-vendors and jeeps, into a pastoral life beyond humped yellow and black mountains.

Our first calamity involved a baby. She developed hiccoughs. We studied each other as she appeared in the general area of her mother’s left shoulder. I judged her to be about ten months old. She wore a knee-length plum-coloured dress and baggy white cotton trousers which reached to her feet. As she had not yet taken to the burqa I saw that her face was healthily plump. Her bland milk-chocolate brown eyes were rimmed with mascara drawn to upward points at the corners, a beautification inspired by superstition which gave her a resemblance to Maria Callas. Around her neck on a thin silver chain was an oval silver box. Her amulet had a Buddhist origin, serving an identical function to gold and coral and seed-pearl kaus worn by Tibetan women which contain Buddhist prayers written on daphne-paper. The box owned by little Souriya held verses from the Qurān, the Muslim Bible. Her brother had no stomach for travel. He suffered frequently. He was about four and
wore Russian-style pyjamas in duck's-egg blue. She watched his bouts of sickness with disdainful curiosity.

I got on well with the German student. I was writing notes with a Stern ball-point I had bought at a bookstall under Cologne station. We talked about the Sunday evening parade in his home city, the large Cross in the old black cathedral, and the restaurant across the Rhine bridge which served gorgeous sickly pastries. He had toured Asia for eight months on medical advice; later phases of the war, particularly air-raids, had given him a nervous impediment in his speech and his family doctor had advised him to go off, completely alone, away from people and places associated with his disability. His name was Karl Fischer. He did not stammer while we talked.

North from Kabul we started up the best road in Afghanistan. It wound along green river valleys and across dusty yellow plains hedged by vast bleak mountain ranges to its three crossings of the Oxus River at Hazrat and Terme and Khorag into the Russian oil republic of Tadzhik.

A few miles from Kabul we came to a wide fertile plain, a main source of grapes and mulberries and peaches sold in the city markets. Fischer and I resisted a temptation to buy peaches offered to us at one village halt and quenched our thirst on melon. Beyond the plain we reached the Ghorband Valley. In some places lines of poplars in bright leaf gave it a French Impressionist atmosphere.

Farther on, at Charikar, our arrival caused family commotions. Anxious relatives had assembled to welcome some of our fellow-travelers and displayed intense relief at their appearance, safe and sound, whole, seemingly none the worse for an experience of big city perils. They trooped off amid glad exclamations. Others immediately rushed into the bus to occupy seats fallen vacant, storming in as if engaged in a private war. The rest of us waited sedately until peace returned and then adjourned for lunch at a teahouse, small and dark but tolerably clean. Fischer ate old fowl cooked as spring chicken. He reported it to be even tougher than it appeared. I had rice and mutton chilau, greasy but sustaining. The wholemeal nan was deliciously nutty.

I learned that farms here had two annual crops, a spring baharaq of wheat and barley and an autumn paiqah harvest of rice, maize, tobacco, and vegetables. Part of the fruit crop was preserved in mud cocoons until later to fetch better prices. Fruit formed a large part of Afghan diet. It was abundant and cheap, and counteracted the greasiness of main courses.
A party of Russians came in for lunch. They were solid watchful men. There were two long-haired Rumanians with them. They were geologists and engineers, I discovered. This is an interesting part of the country. These Russians were surveying for a proposed seventy-five-mile tunnel under the Hindu Kush, planned by Kabul and Moscow, to run from somewhere near Jabal-us-Siraj, a hamlet in the Siraj Mountains, and emerge near the northerly town of Doshi. When completed it will cut 180 miles off the worst stretch of the 350-mile road journey from Kabul to the Russian frontier at Hazrat. I was to see many more Russians, Rumanians, Poles, and Czechs, and some Germans farther north.

Luncheon over, we reclaimed our seats in the Mail and headed down the valley to the Shibar Pass. The road twisted round hills like wool ravelled round chair legs by a kitten until it reached the crest of the pass, 9800 feet above sea level. For some moments we saw snow crests in the north, humps of the Hindu Kush glistening above formless mauve and violet shadows. Then we started to coast down into the valley beyond and our offside front tyre blew out. Our driver jammed his brakes on hard. Baggage flew off the roof. Children started to cry, burgas developed sharply querulous voices, and Fischer was jolted onto the floor. He banged his face on the next seat and his nose started to bleed.

For an hour we surveyed a dissolving landscape. Other traffic passed us. Camels plodded ahead in bubbling derision. Grit-grazed lorries and two American cars sped past. Four turbaned horsemen reined in to watch our swearing driver effect a wheel change. Overhead a miles-long feather of wind-ruffled cloud flamed scarlet in a turquoise sky, emerald green above crouched horizon humps. As the sun disappeared a sharp chill knifed the air.

It was night when we neared Bamiān. We were drowsy, tired from being bounced about. Men had run out of words hours ago. Several were asleep, bodies and limbs contorted in uneasy rest. So were the children, more comfortably cushioned. For several miles our lights searched weakly towards a tiny bouquet of lights ahead, paler than fireflies. My attention swung from disinterested observation of those around me to comatose blankness and back to wakefulness.

At Bamiān an even more anxious cluster of relatives exclaimed around other passengers. One old man, overjoyed to see his grandson safe, fainted dead off. A veiled daughter and unveiled mother wept as they embraced. The driver carried off partridges. While Fischer and I found
our baggage a polite small boy from the last stop pranced over on re-
vived limbs to say goodbye and added: ‘Istala mashi.’ The greeting, ‘May
you never tire,’ lacked derision. We commended him to Allah and carried
our bags into the hotel.

We learned that progress has not yet persuaded Afghan hoteliers to
be inhospitable to delayed travellers. It was nearly half-past ten but we
were given tea while a meal was hotted up for us. It comprised mutton
and chicken stew, rice, vegetables, nan, fruit, and more tea from a
samovar.

An hour later the staircase ceased to twang like an anguished harp.
Everybody had gone to bed, eager to stretch out and enjoy the quietness
of a black night rimmed with silver starlight. I felt too lazy to bring my
notes up-to-date and lay down on the charpai. God was in His Heaven
and I felt well-fed. I went to sleep.

Next morning, directly after the little breakfast, I left the hotel and
went out into a narrow varigreened valley patterned by rows of wind-
break poplars and solid dark mud walls. A stiff fitful breeze blew from
the northwest. It smelled of cold dust and lacked even a slight reminder
of humanity, no hint of smoke or petrol or cooking or of other odours
of living. Already the sun shone on a huge eroded cliff of pale yellow
sandstone rising 500 feet above the valley.

Only two other men shared the early morning freshness with me.
They were bearded and turbaned horsemen, young, lean, and hardy in
the Afghan way. Their dark eyes had the quick appraisal which comes
from a rapid scanning of a wide countryside which might contain wild
animals or men who could be enemies. They urged their horses into a
tripple, heading north towards Saighan. The breeze rippled their dark
blue robes across their bodies.

Solitude gave me an opportunity to study the cliff without interrup-
tion. Over on the right-hand side the top was tilted rather like a huddle
of marquees at an agricultural show. In the centre and on the left-hand
side the cliff resembled bundles of half-melted candles which had become
stuck together, an illusion heightened by the pale waxy sandstone. In
the face of a bundle at the left-hand end was the larger Buddha of Bamiān.

This extraordinary shrine and its remarkable artistic achievement
have to be viewed in historical perspective to be appreciated. There is
an obvious comparison. Early in our own century a sculptor blasted and
carved seventy-foot-high heads of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and
Theodore Roosevelt from the granite of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. The 175-foot-high Buddha of Bamiān was carved by monks eighteen centuries ago, a standing figure clad in a robe whose draped thin fabric was conveyed by rows of delicately cut ridges shaped on the torso. Originally the figure had a complete face, arms and hands, and feet, but they were smashed and defaced by Muslim invaders who brought Islam to Afghanistan 1300 years ago. Only the calm lips shaped in a Mona Lisa smile, over three feet long from corner to corner, the square jaw above a strongly rounded neck, and sections of the drapery, remain undamaged. Only a short fifty years before the Muslims came to Bamiān a famous Chinese monk pilgrim Hsüan-tsang reached it from his homeland, via the Gobi Desert and the high Pamir plateau. He found a community of over 1000 monks and several monasteries adjoining a large village. The monks lived in cells which they had hacked out of the cliff, a black honeycomb whose oblong window-spaces spread along it from end to end. They retreated into the cliff 2000 years ago to contemplate the mystery of life and carve their Buddha and another, only 116 feet high, farther along to the right.

I walked across the road and climbed up the rough path which led to the head of the Buddha. Before long I was glad not to have eaten the big breakfast before setting out. The path seemed to go on and on and the top was pretty cold when I reached it. I told myself the effort was worthwhile. There was certainly a fine view across the bright green valley, its square flat-topped yellow farmhouses and rows of poplars, to the distant snow peaks of the Kuh-i-Baba, Mountains of Baba, veined with sparkling amber and primrose sunlight above deep blue shadows. Unfortunately, heights on land and I never did get on happily. This one affected me as did Table Mountain, where Elizabeth wandered along its edge as confidently as one of its lizards. I squatted down on the Buddha’s head, half as high as the cross on St. Paul’s Cathedral, telling myself that the coldness in my veins was due to early morning chill.

The figure was carved in a niche like a gigantic keyhole. Overhead the monk craftsmen hewed out a steeply curved, geometric ceiling and widened the walls outward to the base. They lived in it, inside the Buddha, and hauled themselves from their cells to crawl up and down its length to whichever section they were working on. Others painted tempera frescoes on the ceiling, depicting human figures in reverent postures before a variety of Buddhas, scenes weathered beyond restoration.

After a while I overcame my irrational dislike of godlike perches and stood up to look down on Bamiān. I wondered how many travellers had
stood on this spot since the monks completed their task. There must have been hundreds of thousands, most of them Asians. Bamiān was on the Silk Road. For centuries the merchants and their companions lodged at a great caravanserai just across the road in front of the Buddha, dealers in gold and jewels, amethysts and pearls, turquoises and rubies, incense, pepper and sugar, cloves, fine porcelain, nutmeg, the twentythree varieties of raw silk produced in China, a ceaseless procession of men and camels and horses, mules and *kuch isafari*, winding over icy passes and arid deserts, through heat and cold, century after century.

Our own age introduced to Bamiān a trickle of those modernizations opposed by earlier mullahs. Although the great caravanserai dwindled to a resthouse when ships captured East–West trade it arose again as an hotel to serve present-day requirements. One day it will have electricity in place of oil lamps and candles. Already new shops, a larger school, and a garage have appeared, equal to those in remote Western villages, and one day there will be piped hot water. And I saw unveiled women. Gauguin would have loved the raw colours of the valley of Bamiān.

I returned to the hotel in time to have breakfast with Karl Fischer. We were joined in the diningroom by an American family going north for a holiday. Behind them came a trio of expressionless Russian engineers on their way to Kabul.

Before we got back into the Mail I looked up at the Buddha. My first impression had not been wrong. Even though there were no eyes, there was a certain smile on its broad lips. The combination struck me as peculiarly appropriate after 1800 years.
Behind the Hindu Kush

Khanabad was a featureless town. I thought it functional and austere, despite a mosque of delicate blue beauty, lively activity in its bazaar, and placid views along a sluggish river. I expected more visual character, pride perhaps, in a town where the three main roads from Russia, 100 miles north by the shortest route, became a single highway to Kabul, 400 miles south. I had been conditioned by the majestically rugged country of those 400 miles, a world of crowded bleak mountains whose colours changed in every hour, narrow valleys of great beauty, a tortuous road a raw new wound in several places and linking isolated villages in a profound silence under wheeling hawks. Khanabad was anticlimatic though very Afghan, brooding, unloved, and functional.

On the other hand, its people exuded vitality and assurance, a swagger in their walk, spontaneity in their frequent laughter. A quantity of them came from outlying districts, bearded and agile men who wore turbans over their skull-caps, tautly muscled youths, uniformly lean, proud as kings. They gave no sign of southern reserve, enjoyed life enormously, and criticized the government.

Khanabad was a parting of ways for Karl Fischer and me. On our last night there we shared a gigantic meal of chicken and rice. It was delicious and lacked the inordinate greasiness of most Afghan food. As usual, there was no cutlery. Travellers in Afghanistan have learned to carry their own supply if they dislike using their fingers. In many towns the teahouses have not yet provided facilities for a wash before a meal. Europeans have to be guided by their individual attitude to a problem of cleanliness which their own medical profession has not yet completely
solved. My method was to create a rumpus for ab until insistent fussiness enabled me to wash my hands, then use my fingers like everyone else, and finally wash them again to get rid of grease. And everywhere I ate melon in lieu of risking suspect water.

Early next morning I went to see Fischer leave on his journey. Before he went I arranged to visit him when I go to see a god-daughter of mine in West Berlin. Then the bus carried him off westward to Mazar-i-Sharif and nomad deserts beyond, and I returned to seek a means of conveyance going east.

My luck was in. Through the good offices of a member of the hotel staff, which consisted of three men with faces like the same leaf in various seasons, I obtained passage in a lorry bound for Faizabad. We left early the next morning.

That journey of approximately a hundred and fifty miles was memorable for various reasons. The ancient lorry—no landscape panels—appeared likely to fall apart long before we reached our destination. Instead it greeted each new hill with a banshee howl of hatred and snarled up, spluttering and roaring, and frisked triumphantly down every other side in an alarming fashion. Sitting on a hard narrow plank which showed the road through a foot-wide gap, I wished that nature had upholstered me for such experiences. Abdur, the driver, was equally lean but travel over the same road had taught him how to crouch over his wheel like a jockey, and, figuratively speaking, ride in the stirrups over rough patches, a posture which caused his behind to sway in mid-air, a good two feet above his section of the plank. It would be more accurate to say, in mid-petrol fume. Even before we left Khanabad we were enveloped in a strong smell of petrol. It became stronger and hotter on each successive hill until air in our small cabin was combustible. Abdur chattered to me like an old friend. I believed he was unburdening his family troubles. Upon occasion he became excited and shouted to make himself heard. I understood only five per cent of what he said because he talked in an unfamiliar dialect from which I extracted stray words and so reached the point of occasional phrases only after a lapse of minutes.

The winding and climbing and dipping road showed evidence of having been widened and improved recently. Ridges of yellow-brown soil and stone marked clearances effected to transform an old route for horsemen into a highway for lorries and trucks bringing an increased flow of manufactured goods from Russia. It was a comparatively easy rough road from Khanabad to Kishm. Thereafter the roughness became predominant.
We entered a region of higher and harsher hills broken by deep ravines. There were a number of rough stone and timber bridges. They had been adequate for caravans of camels in earlier centuries but were useless for modern traffic. Work was in progress to improve and widen two of them. Beyond a second bridge we passed a gang of a hundred convicts widening another stretch of road. It was wild country, sharply patterned by brilliant sunshine and glooming shadow. Its few inhabited corners were never more than hamlets, frequently only a single stone house plastered with mud or a hut of poles and woven reeds set beside a narrow field tilted on a hillside like a Rhine vineyard.

Beyond one hamlet we reached the Kokcha River and followed its twists until late in the afternoon we reached Faizabad, a small town curved on a mountainside and seat of government for the province of Badākshan.

Abdur drove me to a teahouse with bedrooms. Outside it he jumped down from the cabin with as much energy as if he intended to do hand-springs and cartwheels. I descended more cautiously, listened to the end of a story about a woman and horses, and then we said goodbye. For the rest of the day I ached as if I had a bout of influenza coming on and still felt bounced. It was easier to stand up to study my maps.

Everyone who has visited Badākshan, the mountainous northeastern province of Afghanistan, has likened it to a stuck-out tongue, its tip pointed north. Its size has been estimated at 200 miles long and under 150 miles wide at the southern end, its attachment to Afghanistan. Around it on every side except the south is Russia, the Tadzhik S.S. Republic. The frontier is a great loop of the Oxus River.

Faizabad is almost in the centre of the southern end. The nearest Russian town, Khorog, is 100 miles northeast by flight, but the journey by land is three times that distance due to an absence of passes through the mountains. South from Faizabad other mountains lead down to the Hindu Kush whose giant vertebrae slope southwest to Bamiān and the Baba Mountains. The Mail route from Kabul to Khanabad and the road taken by Abdur provide the only way south. Badākshan is somewhat isolated. There are no Afghan towns north of Faizabad. The nearest airfield is in Russia, at Stalinabad, 140 miles northwest.

For many centuries Badākshan was an independent country. It formed part of Bactria when Alexander the Great invaded it in 328 B.C.
and later kings of Badākshan claimed to be descended from him. Alexander reached it in the spring of 327, on an expedition to exterminate local princes who did not share his particular vision of universal brotherhood. He rushed up a mountain somewhere and in its stronghold captured the princess Roxana. He married her. One version of the story said that the marriage took place because Alexander was 'overpowered' by the beauty of Roxana when she danced for him, a lovely yarn—the lonely, visionary warrior quaffing potent liquor in a cold tent and being seduced from his brooding thoughts by a sway of firm dimpled flesh, chiffon trousers, bangles, pearls, and things, but having the inner nobility of character to act honourably. Some reputable historians hinted darkly that Roxana persuaded him to behave like an Oriental despot and wear Oriental clothes. Unfortunately for their excuses, Alexander had acted like a despot for years and a change of attire was seldom symptomatic of degeneracy. Alexander was mad and a megalomaniac, no different from other military dictators who claimed brutality necessary in order to attain the final brotherhood of man.

Great tides of faith and historical upheaval lapped around these mountains. The crescent of Islam came to Badākshan in the 7th century, coincident with its plunge across Spain. When Marco Polo reached the Kokcha River 500 years later the country was governed by the royal house which thought it advantageous to trace its foundation to Alexander and ruled until the 18th century, by the female line in the last 200 years, an uncommon event in Muslim countries. Although the Mongols bypassed Badākshan their successors, the Golden Horde, spread across lands beyond the Oxus. The Uzbeks, descendants of the Golden Horde, invaded the country twice. On the second occasion, early in the 19th century, they occupied it for thirty years. In that period many men were killed or transported into captivity and their women were married to Uzbeks. Afghan rule was reintroduced in 1859 and conducted through governors descended from the Badākshan Mir dynasty.

Even the faith of Britain played a part in helping to stabilize the country. An Anglo-Russian agreement of 1873 fixed the frontier and established that ‘Badākshan and its independent district Wakhan’ belonged to Afghanistan.

It took me half an hour to walk around Faizabad. Mountains dominated or edged into almost every view. Their barren humps shouldered
a sky which seemed remote by day and closer by night, every star attainable. I suspected that the latter impression was due in part to a sharpened perception of the intrinsic loneliness of mountain communities which gives them a desire to make all visible things familiar.

Eyries of human beings were always peculiarly sensitive to night. It enforces a self-centred life and gives their pleasures a defiant earthiness.

Night in Badākshan was an indigo gloom webbed with vague shifting starlight in an isolation engulfed in profound silence. On two nights I walked a short distance out of the town before going to bed. When my footsteps ceased on the darkened grit road there was no sound, only a glide of cold air off mountain slopes as it passed on to other mountains. A human voice, warm and cherished in one moment, a glow on which to warm yourself, was lost to knowledge in the next instant. Then there was only the thin air searching across my face like cold blind fingers. Night and empty hills and silence: nothing more. Several people told me that it caused ennui among those poised uneasily between childhood and maturity.

This peculiar atmosphere has rendered mountain communities prone to superstition. Their favourite legends always centre upon supernatural events. Faizabad was no exception.

One night the owner of the teahouse brought in a storyteller to entertain me. She was a shrivelled and toothless old woman. A cobweb of wrinkles spread over her brown face but her eyes were like bright black lamps under their heavy lids. Calloused fingers fidgeted ceaselessly at her faded old crimson dress while she talked. She claimed to be over a hundred and to have had twenty-eight children. She was about sixty and the twenty-eight children included eleven grandchildren.

She told her stories in a high-pitched croon. One was a jolly item about a faithless wife, a plump, hot-blooded woman who took as a lover any stranger who came to the house when her merchant husband was absent. After a while the wife noted peculiarities about her more recent admirers, odd physical strangenesses, and how they only spent an hour with her. None of these features were apparent in her latest admirer, a youth many years her junior who frequently visited her at night. The wife soon became infatuated with him, but refused to run away with him, finding advantages in being married to a rich man. One night while her husband was asleep at home an uncontrollable desire to see her paramour induced her to leave the house and go to a place where they often met secretly. Her lover was there and persuaded her to accompany him to a cave in a nearby hillside and in it were her recent lovers, all skeletons, given flesh
Taunsa Barrage—before completion

West Pakistan—a chemical laboratory in the Scientific and Industrial Research Institute
for only an hour at a time, and the youth too, a son of one skeleton, although possessed of flesh every night, was doomed to become like them shortly. So they kept her in the cave to warm their bones on her soft flesh until it withered and she died and they went in search of another faithless hot-blooded wife.

Another of the old woman's stories—said to be equally true—told how a young wife, delayed on her return home over a mountain, was nearly captured by two of the walking dead, the Asian equivalent of zombies, doomed to tramp mountains bringing death to those they touch or who breathe the air through which they pass. The walking dead also sup on human blood, their favourite tipple. This story obviously came to Badakshan down the Wakhan corridor from Tibet.

The old woman had scores of similar accounts of peril, penalties incurred from taking a chance on virtue, and embellished each with lively detail. One story provided a nice variation of a universal theme. It told of a man who accumulated a vast fortune, store-houses of gold and fabulous jewels and art treasures. He was devout in his religious observances, prayed regularly and blessed Allah for granting him such favours, but never showed kindness to his wives or children and only gave them presents for others to envy his wealth. One after another his unhappy wives died and so did his neglected and unloved children. He lived on, concerned only with making more money to add to his fortune. When he finally died he was very old and one of the richest men in the world. He discovered that Allah had prepared a special corner of Heaven for him. There he found his wives, restored to being young women, each more beautiful than before, given the blessing of eternal youth, and his children, preserved in childhood for all time, and a replica of his luxurious home, containing his favourite treasures. But he remained an infirm old man. As he approached his children each one disappeared and materialized some distance away. He never got near them. When he went towards his wives they grew to be four times taller than himself, his bald head only halfway up their young legs, and did not regain their normal size until he left them. Eventually, in torment, he ran to hide in his fine house, but it shrank to the size of his foot. And Allah told him: 'You must waste eternity as you wasted your life on earth.'

It was late before the old storyteller left us. She had scores of good stories from a dozen sources and told them effortlessly, never at a loss for an incident or a word—fortunate woman—and interrupted herself only to drink tea from the samovar. A grandson took her to his home. She went off into the night with the assurance of a ballerina or a Dylan
Thomas convinced of having given a good performance. She had every justification.

I learned the next morning that she had reached her grandson’s house without encountering a ri-gompo on a mountain.

That evening I listened briefly to a radio programme coming from Russia. It was deathly dull, a recital of earnest propaganda statistics devoid of the good salt of humanity.
ON WALKS around Faizabad and journeys to nearby hamlets I noted differences between Badākshani Afghans and those in the south. Physical oddity being a matter of geography, like virtue, I was followed on most walks by an interest of small boys. Their curiosity, fascinated eyes on tireless legs, evened the score.

Horsemen who passed me were shorter and stockier than southerners. Their faces were squarer. They talked quickly. They had the atmosphere of men who lived close to a hard unco-operative soil, men with intrepid eyes and rough, hardened hands. A number wore round fox-skin or astrakhan hats whose crowns were brightly striped red and yellow and blue fabric. Their collarless jackets were striped, secured round their waist by twisted yellow and scarlet woollen belts like scarves. Their womenfolk were less self-conscious than southern women. Only a few, wives of the leading citizens, kept strict purdah and hid in a burqa. The majority did not veil their faces. Their seclusion was limited to an observation of religious days.

A number of men impressed on me that while they were Afghans they were their own type of Afghan. They took pride in their distinctions and, geographically, it was possible to regard Badākshan as an Afghan Wales. Unlike nomads of the northwestern deserts, the Badākshanis had a settled life, enforced by their hills. Settled did not mean static. A large percentage of them were Tadzhiks, linked by a common historical background to the people of Soviet Tadzhik. Frontiers in these areas acquired significance only when nationalism replaced tribalism. Religious festivals, work, and marriage still linked communities on either side of the Oxus.
You did not need to be in the province long to realize that it was far from prosperous. The houses proved it. For most of its history it was wretchedly poor. Long ago, its ruby and lapis lazuli mines brought prosperity to a few, but its people have always been predominantly concerned with cattle. They bred yaks, the all-purposes animal most suited to highland conditions north of the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas, sheep, goats, horses, fewer camels than before, and harder strains of cows. They had to fight their soil every year.

A change of life may be on the way for Badakhshan, a transformation which could be as fundamental as that which occurred in the Khuzistan hills of Iran in 1908.

Russian geologists started to prospect for oil in northern Afghanistan in 1956. Their search was not without hope of success. There were wells operating across the Oxus, the nearest less than 100 miles from Faizabad by crow-flight. They reached westward along the frontier to hill country north of Mazar-i-Sharif, an Afghan town which had for long been a place of pilgrimage for Russian Muslims because it was believed to contain the tomb of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet and origin for the Shi‘i—‘party of Ali’—a section of Islam embraced by most Tadzhiks.

Islam produced almost as many divisions and sub-divisions as Christianity. As Shias, mountain Badakhshani believed that Muslim succession was restricted to direct descendants of Ali and Fatima, daughter of Mohammed. Urban Badakhshani were Sunni Muslims, who accepted succession through four orthodox qalifs, of whom Ali was one. In a book written during a tour of Muslim countries in 1952, entitled Crescent in Shadow, I observed that a majority of Russian officials in North Africa and the ‘Middle East’ were Muslim. Similarly Russian engineers and experts in Afghanistan from 1956 onward were Muslim. Most of them came from Uzbek and Tadzhik. According to a 1955 estimate, the Uzbeks were eightyeight per cent Muslim by faith and Tadzhik Muslims represented ninetyeight per cent of the republic’s population. In the adjoining Soviet republic of Kirghiz the Muslims were eighty-nine per cent of the community and in Turkmen ninety per cent.

Consequently, the faith and the way and the rigours of Badakhshani life were familiar to Russians. I saw how those in Faizabad fitted in easily and were well-liked by many people. Their political philosophy had disciplined them not to indulge in momentary spasms to remind themselves that they were individuals a long way from home. They and the
experts who started a large extension of the Afghan textile industry worked as a team and participated in local events. They did not have to adapt themselves continuously or engage in painful readjustments. There was no novelty for them anywhere in northern Afghanistan. The uneasiness which attacked those in the south did not appear. They had enormous psychological advantages over every other foreign contingent in the country.

Russian interest in mineral resources, although directed primarily towards a development of the potential oil industry, was not restricted to it; before the start of World War Two foreign oil companies had cause to believe that there was a rich supply of oil in northern Afghanistan but it was too far from the sea, beyond many mountain ranges, to be profitably exploited. Other minerals known to exist in varying quantities north of the Hindu Kush are silver, iron ore, copper, nitre, sulphur, and a little gold. There are probably other deposits which earlier geological surveys did not locate.

I saw other signs of Russian presence in Faizabad. Booths and stalls displayed a range of cheap manufactured goods. Some agricultural equipment was shown but the emphasis was on consumer goods. On one morning walk I listed kitchenware, battery-run electrical gadgets, radio sets, clocks, cotton and woollen fabrics, furniture, and household articles, similar to those on sale throughout the country. They were of inferior quality but Afghans, having no basis for comparison, thought them excellent and they were cheap, priced to local pockets. I heard men and women exclaim as they inspected goods superior to those they used or stared in fascination at articles just outside their requirements. Aided by a state-run export authority, the developing Russian drive in consumer goods had a propaganda effect on Afghan townspeople which was more effective than prestige trade-fairs, which are useless in countries where an impoverished peasantry provides eighty per cent of the population.

I passed an indecisive morning wondering if I should visit a particular place because it was near, Wakhan province, its nearest village Zebak, only sixty miles south, up in the Hindu Kush. Zebak was as far as I could go on a tight schedule. A new road to it was completed a few years ago and turned north to provide a land-line with the Russian town of Khorog. In the absence of a lorry, mostly Russian Zis, it meant a climb on horseback. That meant only aching thighs, my muscles grown flabby from not being in a saddle for weeks, but it could dislocate almighty schedule.
Undecided what to do, I went that afternoon to watch a game of *bugashi*. At least, Afghans regarded it as a game, a mixture of polo and baseball, teams of horsemen, gripping whips in their teeth, galloping round a field carrying the newly decapitated corpse of a goat to certain specified points. I did not understand *bugashi* but it is big league stuff. Everyone turned out to cheer and hold their breath. It was certainly thrilling, particularly when a horseman raced the goat for a presumable goal and the opposing team charged him at full gallop, whipping him, his horse, and his team-mates, to try to force him to drop the goat, forty horses and men jammed in a swirling mêlée.

An old man jumping excitedly beside me announced proudly that an uncle of his had an eye whipped from its socket during a game of *bugashi*. I believed him. At one point we had to duck as both teams charged our end of the field. *Bugashi* does not have a marked pitch or crash barrier. A respectable total of onlookers are trampled to death during the season. Everyone shouted excitedly, expecting us to become fatalities, but we lived behind a tree. Crowd fights and riots were not uncommon, I was told. It struck me that *bugashi* could join other games which do so much to promote international goodwill.

Back at the inn, my future plans were decided for me. The owner told me that Abdur was returning to Khanabad in two days' time and had a seat on his lorry if I wanted it. Consequently, my knowledge of the lizard-shaped sliver of rough land which is Wakhan, a fifteen-mile-wide corridor between Russia and Pakistan, remained in the textbook stage and I shall remember it primarily as the way taken from China 1300 years ago by the Buddhist monk Hsüan-tsang, one of the most remarkable travellers in world history, who reached it after crossing the Gobi Desert on his lonely quest for authoritative books and documents to end theological controversy among his brother monks. It took Hsüan-tsang fifteen years to collect the 657 holy books he took back to the sacred caves at Tunhwang and he reached them under sentence of death for having defied his emperor by leaving China. There was a traveller, a man.

Heavy storms hampered our return to Khanabad. Rain swamped the drab countryside. Along several stretches we drove in darkness, a black blanket hanging overhead. Fountains of yellow-grey mud sprayed up through cracks under our feet. Abdur was sullen. A rival for his Faizabad girl friend was dislodging him from her fickle affections. He hated man-
kind and too often forgot about the road to drag a menacing finger across his throat and glare intently at me.

At Khanabad I learned that my luck was in. There was a bus going to Mazar-i-Sharif the next morning. I managed to get a seat on it.

Mazar-i-Sharif was a disappointment. It stood beside wide deserts where even light winds raised heavy dust storms. The whole town smelled of dust and garbage. On each of the three days I spent there the temperature soared into the nineties.

The hotel was uncomfortable and unloved, much worse than Faizabad precisely because one expected better in the capital of Afghan Turkestan. Hungry companions shared my bed every night. The taps were purely ornamental. Dust was an ingredient of most meals. The water was undrinkable. I bought melons.

There were a good many Russians in the town, once again solid men in painfully tidy suits, grey or white, and sedate Panama hats. There were thinner, more boisterous Czechs, two Germans who got into conversation with me in the bazaar, and several other Europeans.

Promptly every morning at 6.45 there was a whine of planes over the western deserts. On the third morning I saw two of them. They were Mig-17s and probably came from the new airfields between Wazirabad (Balkh) and Mazar, the northern centre of the Afghan army. A number of officers debouched from Russian trucks in late afternoon to shop or visit friends in the town.

Russian economic aid consisted of oil and mineral development projects, the expansion of the textile industry and the oil-pipeline to Russia, and roads, chiefly roads. The bulk of the Russian loan was swallowed up in military equipment: Mig-17s, Ilyushin-28 bombers, Czech helicopters and tanks. Afghan personnel was trained in Russia to use aircraft and tanks. Maintenance was conducted by Russian engineers based in north Afghanistan. The Russian loan of £35 million in 1955 was believed to have been increased by another £20 million in 1958. Additional military equipment was said to have resulted from a visit by the Afghan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to Moscow in 1959.

With jet scream lingering in my ears I went one morning to the glinting aquamarine Mazar-i-Sharif from which the town took its name, the reputed tomb of Ali. A shifting foam of fat snow-white pigeons eddied over bare soil outside. The cupolas smouldered bluely in early
sunlight and the ornate, geometrically patterned cream-and-turquoise walls gave the shrine a fortresslike solidity. I took off my shoes and joined pilgrims and sightseers in its grave spacious silence. They included turbaned tribesmen, an old *malik* telling grandsons of his visit while a boy, and an empty-eyed Russian crocodile. None of the latter was over thirty; they were fit and unmistakeably disciplined men. There were no Americans.

I liked Mazar best at night, most of all on my last night. Then as I wandered round the town a new moon curved like a dagger above the erect plump domes, a radiance pale as scattered fish-scales glistened in a multiplicity of flocculent shadows, and a tang of deserts overlaid the sweetish pungency of fresh camel dung and rotting garbage. For a moment this town and country possessed a magic. Then somewhere high above the spreading western sands a plane spun a wilting thread of noise. I looked at flakes of shining cloud floating under the floating stars and heard laughter leap like flames in men’s throats. A dog growled fretfully, its sleep disturbed. Camels belched like depravity. I walked on under the shining dark curve of the sky, letting my bedmates wait for their supper.

A *khamsin* breeze coiled shrouds of dust through Mazar as I caught a Mail on the first stage of my return to Kabul. Experience had hardened me. One day there will be better buses but I hope their drivers will remain unchanged. They are lively resourceful characters blessed with a forthrightness and good humour lacking in many of their fellow-countrymen.

Two mornings after I returned to Kabul I had a shock. I had taken a last peer round the *suq* and on the way back to the hotel I heard a commotion. Two young women walked down the street towards me. They did not wear *burgas*. They huddled in drab blue overcoats, scarves tied over their hair and like another skin on the curve of their cheeks and chins, dark glasses shielding their eyes. Old women screeched abuse at them, bearded camel-drivers chattered astonishment, an outraged mullah addressed the sky, and small boys ran off to tell someone. The girls were scared stiff but determined.

Thereafter I saw several women swaddled in dark overcoats and glasses, nervous, followed by police, but resolute crusaders, out of the horrible *burqa*. A flash in the pan? The start of the social advance of
women which had helped Amanullah to lose his throne? I did not know. But it was a healthy sign.

It could have been healthier. In 1959 America lagged behind Russia in influencing Afghans. The ruling minority had slipped into precarious dependence on Moscow. Russia had helped Daud Khan to alienate Iranian and Pakistani sympathy. His milking had made Afghanistan wealthier but had lost it friendship. It crawled with rumours, fears, and cowered under its mullahs. If the Americans leave there will be an inevitable and drastic increase of internal Communist pressures, much of it due to those who conduct Afghan affairs in the name of their king.

It is certain that events in Afghanistan, as in Iran, will gather momentum in future, due to its geographical position and social pattern. Both countries are subjected to campaigns of fear caused by those who utilize rocket-rattling to strengthen their political ends, an activity already in operation and linked to economic penetration. But Afghanistan is self-isolated from the outside world and therefore in considerable danger. No survey of the region can be complete without recognition of the weakness of Afghanistan and I regret having to be content with providing Impressionistic sketches of it, of its people and country, at this time. I hope that my own opinion of the future of the country is proved wrong.

Another bus carried me up into harsh-edged black mountains. We reached Jalalabad at nightfall. A crimson stain smoked above purple shadows, fading in ‘a turquoise twilight, crisp and chill, a kafila camped at the foot of the hill’.

Next day, beyond a frontier post, we reached a road remarkable for yellow dust. It snaked over acid brown hills. Not long ago the kafilas here numbered hundreds of laden beasts. I counted less than three dozen sorry-looking camels plodding along the lower road, accompanied by old men and ragged boys, two women on panniered mules, and some donkeys. There were more lorries and cars than camels. At one dusty spot a man stood beside a dingy bicycle. He had an ancient rifle slung over one shoulder.

Khyber. Old bubbling camels, a picketed pony, bellowing tribesmen, dead camp fires, carpets. No sign of a descendant of Kipling’s Persian pussy-cat. But men still talked of women and horses and power and war on their way to Peshawar town.
The best poetry of Kipling does more than sing. It ennobles human clay. It has the sweat and smell, the hungers and dreams, of men in their confusions. It captures the intrinsic qualities, the rough life, discipline, good humour, occasional bawdiness, occasional pettiness, frequent vision of a better life for all men when the tumult and the shouting die, of a type of man it has been my good fortune to know: the professional British soldier. Naturally he too commits errors, but world civilization would not possess even its present chance of survival without his single-mindedness and sense of mission in the past fifty years; others may be more numerous, more powerful, even more intelligent, than the British soldier, but none has a greater heart.

Many of them knew these glooming inhospitable hills and I have heard their frequent expressions of admiration and respect for those now known as Pakistanis. I have never heard a Pakistani criticize the British soldier.

I felt a poor cheat to follow them, and Kipling, in the snug comfort of a hot, crowded bus on its journey to Peshawar.
'It is such a relief to be free from corruption,' sighed Bahadur Ali and spooned his melting ice thoughtfully. 'I often feel pure these days, especially when I wake up in the morning.'

We were having dinner in Karachi. A warm night had followed a malignantly hot day. Around us the crowded restaurant droned with voices paced by a nervous percussion of cutlery and crockery. There were several Europeans and Americans present. At one table two bespectacled Japanese beamed at their vivacious and lilting-voiced wives. The party wore Western dress and one man played contentedly with a tiny transistor radio throughout the meal, one ear cocked to its whispers, the other tuned in to his companions. Nearby a hefty youngish Egyptian, running to fat, a lone man with heavy-lidded eyes, stared slumbrously at every woman who entered and kept glancing at a gold watch strapped inside his right wrist.

By present standards the restaurant was old. It had been established years ago when Britain directed Pakistani affairs. It was in—no, it might cause confusion to name the street. As a result of the Indian Independence Act of 1947 a number of Karachi streets were renamed. In a period of
heady elation they honoured politicians of the era. Although the politicians lived on a number became so unpopular that signposts were changed again. When I arrived in Karachi from the frontier town of Peshawar an earnest discussion was in progress among city officials over how to rename two unpopularly labelled streets. Bahadur Ali said they should be called B and C. Those were the two least favoured categories of prisoners in Karachi gaol.

Bahadur Ali was an old friend. He was tall, lean, with a thin face, a long pointed nose, and wideawake eyes. He had a habit of taking off his tie and stuffing it in a pocket during earnest conversations. He was a newspaperman and a tireless campaigner. We had first met in the British Museum a few years after the war. We discovered there a mutual interest: women. He removed his tie while we talked about them. He was conducting a research into the history of women's suffrage in Britain. I was studying the effect of women devoid of self-discipline on a society in a phase of violent transition, for a novel I was writing on the effect of adult delinquency on minors. Nevertheless, we were both confirmed believers in universal suffrage. That was harder for him than for me. He had remained a bachelor from a fear that marriage would cause him to 'revert to feudal habits' to use his words.

Bahadur had resigned from his latest paper a week before I reached Karachi. He often resigned from his papers and always on matters of principle.

His editor had refused to print an article Bahadur had written against purdah which described it as 'a privileged-class fad aped by the bourgeoisie', a truth asking for trouble. Some weeks earlier the editor had refused an article which held the burqa responsible for tuberculosis among Muslim women. Privately the editor had criticized the burqa, which was not worn by the women of his family although they observed purdah, but, he said, publication of the article would lose the paper valuable advertising revenue. People would regard it as a Communist plot, the editor said, and added that men on his staff had wives and mothers who wore burqas. It was a point in a country with a sixteen per cent literacy.

The main difference between the Afghan and Pakistani burqa was colour. In Pakistan it was usually white. Its wearers floated about like ghosts. My nerves had suffered for hours after I rounded a dim hotel corridor and collided with one. Approximately a sixth of Pakistani women wore the burqa; statistics were not available. Many women wore long veils and an ankle-length dress or kamiz, and, if they were Punjabis, wide trousers. They were the womenfolk of Muslim officials and
merchants in Karachi and the larger towns of Hyderabad, Quetta, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, and Lahore. Eighty per cent of the population was Muslim. I believed Bahadur to be right about tuberculosis. A hundred years ago European missionaries who took the Cross to the South Seas covered the 'heathen' nakedness of women in thick dresses and thereby caused tuberculosis which exterminated the population of some islands.

Literate Asian social idealists always faced a stony path. It became increasingly dangerous directly after the Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang—‘party of the Country’s people’—toppled the Manchu dynasty in 1911 and set in motion the upheaval which has spread throughout Asia ever since. A feature of the upheaval was that social idealists who sought to reform only one or other custom were attacked by traditionalists and others, supported by individuals who soon vanished to assist elsewhere, and, more significantly, were befriended by people whose other aims they did not share originally. The latter group swallowed up the idealists who became propagandists for other beliefs as a result of their new friends telling them that the particular reform they sought could only result from a wider transformation. Since that happened in China, it has spread to India and elsewhere, where traditionalists attack all idealists as Communists. Purdah and the burqa in Muslim communities are dangerous subjects.

Afghan activities and moves by President Ayub Khan to stop corruption were the main topics of conversation while I was in Karachi. Temporarily, disputes with India over Kashmir and the waters of the Indus took second place.

Every day was hot. I drank innumerable cups of strong sweet tea on journeys round a capital which, like most capitals, was not representative of every day or of the country. More than a third of West Pakistan is mountainous and over sixty per cent of the population live in the Punjab whose nearest point is 300 miles from Karachi.

I went over a cement factory. While I admired the pink stone City Hall an earnest pedlar tried to sell me a gold watch and enquired worriedly about the state of my bowels; I was sure there must be a connexion which escaped me. I wandered round yellow-hued apartment blocks in Nazimabad suburb, a mixture of Edwardian architecture and New York brownstone houses, and went to see refugee centres. I visited the marble tombs of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the first Governor-General, and of Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister.
Bahadur accompanied me on a tour of the clamorous screechy inferno of the docks. We dodged round ships and stevedores and donkey engines hauling goods waggons. A man we met there was a Bugti from the province of Baluchistan. He was about thirtyfive and told me he had worked in the docks for several years. He had got married at eighteen, his father having put up the purchase-price for a twelve-year-old wife. They had nine children and his wife, now twentynine, had just become a grandmother.

A cyclist who raced me to an appointment in a yellow pedicab assured me that business had never been worse. Wealthy people owned a car or used a taxi and poor people could not afford pedicab transportation. Over a cup of tea a turbaned merchant told me if he was President Ayub he would have shot ex-President Mirza and other politicians. He spooned sugar into his black tea and said: 'Just to be safe.'

One of the country's Hindus, who comprise less than thirteen per cent of the population, told me how he and his family lived in fear of every crisis or possible crisis or tension. Gangs of Muslim youths then took pleasure in attacking Hindus, in the style of Hindu youths who attacked Muslims in India.

'You cannot understand, sahib,' he said. 'It is due to religion.'

'We have religious differences in Britain.'

He frowned thoughtfully and then he said: 'People tell me your country is always cold, sahib. It must be a great joy for you.'

Karachi was an official pulse. Its vibrations were those of politics and finance and big business. Some months before I wandered round it a bloodless coup had taken place. In the circumstances it would be discourteous of me to do more than note its significant features. A bloodless coup in Asia demands respect.

It happened quite simply. Late in October 1958 President Iskander Mirza abolished parliamentary government and set up a military government headed by General Ayub Khan, a Sandhurst cadet who became commander of a Punjab battalion during World War Two. Some days later a party of senior army officers informed Mirza that he was no longer President as Ayub Khan thought it advisable to assume the office himself. That was all. No assassinations. No foul misuse of boys whipped up to emotional hysteria and set loose in the streets. No savagery.

Nonetheless, the first actions of President Ayub caused shudders in various quarters. He announced that the maximum penalty for hoarding food was death. He took action against black marketeers. One of those bothered by a bad memory was a former Minister of Defence who had
sold his car for three times its value. He was heavily fined and sent to hard labour. Others afflicted by amnesia accompanied him to gaol. Illegal traders in foreign exchanges had £9,000,000 removed from them. Civil servants were instructed to reveal their private financial transactions. Beggars were ordered to cover their artificially induced sores and get off the streets. Price controls were introduced.

Subsequent government announcements included a statement of a pressing need to introduce birth control. Although it was unwelcome to orthodox Muslims, it was necessary. A census held in 1951, following the rush of an estimated 2 million Muslim refugees from India, stated that the population was 76 million. It was divided into 33.8 million in West Pakistan, and, 1000 miles away, another 42 million in East Pakistan. In the eight years since 1951 the population is believed to have increased by 13 million, of whom 5 million were added to the population of West Pakistan.

Measures taken by President Ayub combined to pressure of population revealed Pakistan's precarious situation only too clearly: the problems of survival in a young and poor country forced to devote seventy per cent of its budget to defence. For several years its chief exports, cotton and jute and tea, were hit by decreasing world prices. In the same period its principal harvests of wheat and rice were severely damaged by floods. The development of an ambitious irrigation system was restricted by the conflict with Delhi over the waters of the Indus.

Another recent innovation was a curtailment of inflammatory anti-Western speeches by government leaders who had shown a remarkable habit of staring a gift horse in the mouth. One Prime Minister bitterly attacked America when it announced large-scale financial aid to India—an item of 225 million dollars—to assist her second five-year plan. He threatened to 'go and shake hands with the people whom we made our enemies for the sake of others'. Vigorous support for him came from a newspaper which declared that the Western Powers had reduced Pakistan to 'political and economic vassalage'. Both he and the newspaper ignored the fact that on a per capita basis American aid to Pakistan was three times greater than that given to India. They also ignored the fact that food and medical gifts from Western relief agencies were not passed to destitute Pakistanis but were sold in the Karachi black market.

President Ayub cut corruption to its lowest level in Pakistan history. He gained enemies by ordering them to give up and pay for stolen plums but they remained alive. Nearly a hundred politicians convicted of corruption and malpractices carried their heads into gaol to think things over:
several hundred people who had been in gaol for three or four years without trial were tried or released. Ayub did not indulge in the inflammatory mob oratory which previous key-figures regarded as proof of their importance. 'This is not a witch hunt,' he said when appointed Prime Minister, and later, as President, he added: 'We have a few jobs to do. When we have done them we shall hand back the power of choice to the people.'

When the bloodless revolution was completed, President Ayub started to tackle the few jobs with a programme called Basic Democracy. In an age when every plan is given a flamboyant title it would be easy to deride one whose name states a necessity to provide a foundation for democratic processes. This attitude would ignore problems which confront Pakistan: independence itself, which necessitated a mentality and skill for accepting and discharging social responsibilities, widespread illiteracy, a fact used by many wealthy landowners and politicians and mullahs for their personal advantage, primitive farming in a country dependent on agriculture, a rapidly increasing population, refugees from India, and diversion of part of the national income to a defence programme made essential by an ambitious Afghanistan, fear of Indian intentions in Kashmir, and, on the northern frontier, Russia and China.

Basic Democracy revealed both subtlety and a realistic attitude. It removed new economic and social organizations from political argument and in agricultural areas it vested local authority in panchayats, village councils of previous centuries revived in a modern form to increase production, real income, and social welfare. By December 1959 some 13,000 panchayats operated in 150 official Development Areas and 4000 new officials, trained in agriculture, fishery, health and sanitation, cottage industries, and kindred subjects, had been sent out from training institutes established by VAID (Village Agricultural Industrial Development). Under one provision Basic Democracy broke the power of large landowners by fixing a ceiling of 500 acres on their holdings; the compensation paid for larger estates which were broken up denied them cause for hostility. At the other end of the scale the minimum holding of 12½ acres prevented a spread of small uneconomic units. Subsequent developments included a permanent voluntary organization to provide socio-economic surveys; a new survey of mineral resources, financed by a department of United Nations: an agricultural census: and an extended educational programme. In every project the main shortages were trained men and adequate finances. To fulfil her second Five-Year Plan, Pakistan will need to obtain more than £500 million from the World Bank.
It was too early for these measures to have had a chance to prove their worth or to hazard a guess on the future conduct of military rule. However, it was noticeable that opposition to President Ayub was limited to a faction far left of centre which, though it claimed to be liberal and socialist, contained many who cried for a revolution attended by bloodshed and likely to be unsatisfied unless they gained power; I gathered an opinion that in their eyes Basic Democracy was wrong because it did not contain their energies. So far, President Ayub has shown them consideration; none has died, civil liberty is more noticeable, except for newspapermen who appear to voice criticisms inspired by the large landowner clique and the left faction, and there were few political prisoners.

I shared the astonished delight of most Pakistanis at a revolution accomplished without bloodshed and subsequent repression. This in itself was evidence of Basic Democracy. It will be interesting to note how Pakistan faces difficulties which will arise as it works out its programme. Pakistanis to whom I talked had no doubt of this ultimate success. It was abundantly clear that Ayub had renewed their pride and given them hope.

‘Come back in three years,’ one Pakistani said to me. ‘We shall have established Basic Democracy and be on the road to prosperity. We shall be a new country, vigorous, united, the leader of free Asia.’

His opinion was typical of the common mood.

‘What about Kashmir?’ I asked tactlessly.

He frowned worriedly. ‘Kashmir is another matter,’ he said.

Others phrased it more vigorously.

‘Kashmir is hell,’ they said.

I was left in no doubt about how Pakistanis viewed the situation in Kashmir. Everyone, irrespective of position, was prepared to talk about it. I say ‘prepared’ advisedly; some who took me for a Russian were reluctant to talk until I had produced evidence of my nationality. They were not discourteous; merely cagey. Pakistanis have a very clear-sighted view of how Russia has set one Muslim country against another in pursuit of her ambition to destroy both; they see no cause to let Russians worsen their relations with Hindus; some Hindus do not recognize their own share in this.

From our conversations I gathered an opinion that their chief reaction to the dispute over Kashmir was one of profound hurt. One man summed it up for me.

‘Why does India want to deny that the people of Kashmir are pre-
dominantly Muslim?' he asked. 'When I was in Britain I felt more Muslim than I do here, because British religions reminded me that mine was different. India wants Muslim Kashmiris to feel like Indians. How is it possible? Would you feel less like a Christian if Britain was occupied by a country which told you to be an atheist? Wouldn't that make you feel more like a Christian?'

'I like saying what I think,' I said. 'They would find me in a new wooden suit.'

He smiled. 'The longer I live the more I understand Britons. My door is never shut to them. How can I be inhospitable to men who never denied me and my family the right to our religion?'

'And Indians?'

'You will find out. Kashmir is still hell.'
The Lovely Smile of Hell

IT WAS a glorious summer evening in Srinagar. Beauty spread along the vale of Kashmir, present in every corner.

A last cobalt heat burned in an empty sky which would flare smoky gold before it faded above rugged mountains already shapeless in lilac and purple swathes. Tendrils of night like dim fingers crept over quince orchards and fields of mustard. Velvet blue shadows webbed the huge chinar trees. In a windless stillness a row of poplars stood taut and hard as black candles. The air had a languorous warmth reminiscent of the south of France. Lotus leaves patterned the sparkling dark water, their blooms ghostly pink in the dwindling light. Milfoil spread a dull green carpet on one section of the river. None of the five and a half million Kashmiris were anywhere in sight.

I was in a canopied shikara being paddled to a houseboat at Dal Gate for dinner. No positive sound disturbed this hour, a hinge between necessity of day and impulse of night. A few minutes ago I had heard a woman singing, perhaps in a living throat, perhaps in a wax prison opened by a scrape of steel, a distant voice which soared to possess a moment and died away. Now there was only a fluttery commotion of minavets about
one chinar and a rustle of water caused by paddles shaped like the spades in a pack of cards. The *skikara* had plump yellow cushions and was called *Honeymoon Joy with springs*.

My companion was silent, content to relax. We had been out for most of the day, watching Kashmiri craftsmen, admiring two of the Mogul Gardens.

I could not recall a more glorious July evening in the vale. I had been in Kashmir twice before and always, in every hour, it enchanted me. There were so many visual delights that at first the eye was stunned, the mind incredulous and bothered, unable to absorb such vivid endless beauty, requiring time to develop a facility to relish each individual scene separately and prevent them from being lost in a wild kaleidoscope of loveliness. I found it essential to discipline myself afresh every morning, as if the day ahead contained a visit to the Louvre or the Prado, to restrict my sharpest attention to a few pictures rather than risk satiation through gluttonous over-indulgence. Without a curb the delights would be forgotten through being reduced to a meaningless blur like the intended masterpiece painted over several years by the artist in a story by—was it Maupassant?

Kashmir contained every charm attributed to it by those who loved it, from the Mogul Emperor Jahangir to the British colonels of the Indian Army who hoped to retire to its peace and facilities for good fishing and hunting at the end of their service.

I looked at this corner of the vale misted by evening light, a wooded island reduced to an Indian ink smudge surrounded by a sapphire haze, and was humbled by the gifts of sight, their richness and diversity, even though in Brooke’s words ‘these shall pass, whatever passes not, in that great hour, nor all my passion, all my prayers, have power to hold them with me...’ A pity, I thought once again, and remembered a headstrong girl in Britain who told me she never appreciated colour and shape, never really saw them, until she came out of gaol. I wondered what she would think of Kashmir, the country of Mr. Nehru’s ancestors. The honorific ‘Pandit’, ‘wise man’, which Nehru acquired from the father he loved greatly and who went to gaol with him as a political prisoner, originated in Kashmir.

My companion spoke for the first time in several minutes. ‘Do you ever think about death?’

‘Not often,’ I admitted.

‘Why not?’

‘A wasted effort.’
She thought about my reply. No word passed between the two
*hanjis* paddling us to her brother's houseboat; I preferred *hanji* to 'shikara
wallah' which was basically absurd: who, in Venice, would refer to a
'gondola wallah'? While she thought the dark river water rustled around
us.

'You British are fortunate,' she said at length, enviously. 'You come
to terms with yourselves so finally. We feel ourselves too close to death
to be reconciled to it. I feel it here even now. We feel an urgent need to
explore its territory. None of us really escape from it. It ennobles only a
few and corrupts too many.'

'What about the majority?'

'They try to cheat it by faith or virility, often by both. Few of them
believe they succeed.'

I might have enlightened her a little on the inability of individual
Britons to come to terms with themselves, but she was highly intelligent
and would discover it for herself.

We did not refer to our brief exchange again that night though her
mood gained another expression subsequently. Throughout dinner she
was vivacious and poised. The other people present were her brother and
sister-in-law, her sister and brother-in-law. In front of them nothing in
her conduct hinted at undue heed of the last enemy.

We had met at a party in Delhi eighteen months or more before. She
was Indian, of course, and her name was Kamla. Our first conversation,
in the coolest corner of a babbly scramble plus an atmosphere of orange-
juice and marigolds and important personages, centred on poetry. She
had displayed nervousness at being monopolized by a British writer; I
learned later that it came from reading novels by British writers who
remarked on a 'Welsh accent' of Indians when speaking English, an
observation she interpreted as sarcastic until I assured her that they were
trying to convey a melodic intonation which we Englishmen lack. She
was extremely polite. She did not make me conscious of having what
E. M. Forster called a 'pinko-grey' complexion. Following Independence
quite a number of her countrymen enjoyed a chance to remind others of
their inherited hue. They soon abandoned it.

Other traits made Kamla an extraordinary individual. She was a
tireless social worker. On one occasion when she had learned to trust me
she broke down, overwhelmed by the apparently hopeless task which
her people confront in trying to attain a stable independence which will
permit progress. She had a passion for acquiring knowledge. She could
be eloquent, emphatic, intense, or utterly silent, absorbed by her thoughts.
She intended to support herself by writing; she did so already. Although in the twenties she refused to get married because she had decided not to have children; those were harsher decisions for an Indian woman than for her European cousins. She was also beautiful, tall, slender, graceful, with a triangular face, large liquid eyes, a compact full-lipped mouth, thick hair like heavy black silk, long hands and childish wrists. No man is more cynical about reputed female beauty than a portrait-painter, including those like myself who discovered a less dreary occupation. Kamla was beautiful.

It had delighted me to find her in Srinagar. On the evening following my flight up from Delhi I wandered along the Bund, a social amble akin to the paseo in Barcelona, and saw her coming towards me. We could have discussed innumerable topics: the smallness of the world, of meeting in a country where nearly eighty per cent of the population was Muslim, of being south of the cease-fire line which divided the country into territory ruled by India and the northern part which Pakistanis call Acat—Free—Kashmir for the obvious reason, of being in the oddly named Happy Valley where 12,000 women were voluntarily sterilized in the last six years, of the halcyon weather. Instead we resumed a discussion on architecture where we left off at our last meeting.

At the dinner-party she wore a scarlet and silver sari. Those worn by her sister and sister-in-law were heliotrope and deep peach trimmed with gold embroidery. As I wrote earlier I have yet to see a more elegant gown than the sari; proof of this can be seen every morning in poverty-ridden villages on the burning plains when bare-foot peasant women set out graceful as queens in first dawn light to carry their heavy earthen pitchers to the well and outside jungle hill villages when their sisters return home in the evening, pastel-hued wraiths walking flat-heeled through the hot dusk knitting shadows among pipals or palm fronds, tired marigolds or wildflowers clutched in a pale-nailed dark hand, child on hip, yet still elegant.

Our conversation at dinner went on so long that Kamla’s brother refused to let me go back to my hotel, concerned lest a Muslim should vent his rage on the guest of a Hindu family. Rather than give them an unquiet night I occupied a spare room. Below my window the reflected chips of stars swayed on a black treacly slop of water.

Kashmir houseboats are extremely comfortable. They came into being because foreigners, mostly Britons in the Indian Army, wanted to spend their leave out of southern heat and to retire to a corner free
The Lovely Smile of Hell

from financial problems presented to them by a grateful government. In the vale they saw bahats, flat-bottomed boats of deodar or cedar stapled by iron, and noted how poorer families lived on the smaller dungas. So they bought bahats and erected on them bungalows of four or six rooms flanked by a corridor and ending in a porch-deck and steps leading down to the greyly flowing Jhelum. They laid on electric power and engaged a staff to operate from the cook-boat alongside: a manji, a khansamah, cook, a bhisti-masalchi, water-carrier cum dishwasher, and a mehtar, sweeper. Those with young children added an ayah.

Local entrepreneurs saw a profitable business developing. One section built houseboats for hire. Another section became water-borne pedlars, a canoe fleet of salesmen more persistent and volatile than the vendors who swarm aboard every ship which puts in at the Canaries. When the worst heat reached the sub-continent and visitors went to Srinagar in search of a kindlier climate, the houseboats were poled off and tied up at a spot remote from city bustle.

It was an ideal arrangement. It removed families from smells of the Old Town, a warren of narrow streets where pi-dogs scavenged in refuse tossed from upper storeys of houses whose rears were supported on stilts bedded in the Jhelum. It took them away from the holiday clamour of the New Town with its pale brown brick houses and wooden verandah rooms, built out on logs, which hang over the narrow river bank. At one period there was considerable competition among local whores to obtain verandah rooms. Presumably they wanted to offer the three proverbial solaces for the hectored male mind: water, a sight of green grass, and the beauty of women.

Kashmiri women acquired a reputation for beauty long ago. Marco Polo remarked on it. Four hundred years later the 17th-century traveller François Bernier described them as ‘very handsome’. He said that from Kashmir ‘every man when first admitted to the Court of the Great Mogul, chooses wives or concubines so that his children may be whiter than Indians or pass for genuine Mongols’; it seems peculiar to think of Europeans in other countries recreating the colour prejudices of Mongol barbarians. A desire for good looks produced an inheritance of beauty. I noted it among even the poorest women in the Old Town, a quarter like an inhabited decayed film set, a huddle of unsafe wooden walls and canted poles, peppers drying on thatched roofs, melons and pumpkins stored in bedrooms, naked children and dogs and excrement, poverty everywhere. The beauty of some women even in this unlikely setting reminded me of the delicate charm and fragility of women at work in
Kashmir offered everything. While India endured monsoon the mountains of Kashmir retained their snow crests. There was green grass along the vale and in margs when southern plains were baked by relentless heat. Flowers blazed in its fabled gardens: one was the setting of one of Amy Woodforde-Finden’s *Indian Love Lyrics*, the desperation of eager baritones at genteel concerts, entitled ‘Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar’, more phonetically *Shalamah*, Sanskrit for ‘Abode of Love’. Even the names of Kashmir had a charm to entice imagination: ‘Meadow of Flowers’, ‘Apple Tree Canal’, ‘Garden of the Breeze’, and for a village at a confluence of two streams ‘Marriage of Waters’.

Small wonder that Europeans called the vale of Kashmir ‘the terrestrial paradise of the Indies’, and ‘the Eden of Asia’.

Outwardly, Kashmir was all those things. Inwardly it was a land plagued by tragedy.

According to the Red Chinese the British were mainly responsible for the Kashmir tragedy. Some Americans appeared to accept a similar opinion. One said to me in Delhi: ‘You Britishers certainly dug yourselves into Kashmir. But good.’ I almost wished he had been right.

The only reason for his error was that until a few years ago Kashmir was a long way from Europe and accounts of its history were scarce in the West. This dearth of information was remarkable for Kashmiris had collected a vast amount of material on their history. Then, in 1950, Kashmir became a flash-point of world political strategy. Following the successful occupation of Tibet a senior officer of the Chinese Red Army announced that it could advance from Peking to Kashmir without crossing a major river. It was a significant announcement, but at the time the West was watching Russian manoeuvres in Berlin and Chinese armies attacking Korea. Even Russian leaders appear to have been duped originally into a belief that Red China was concerned chiefly with east and southeast Asia.

Throughout its history, Communist strategy has been based on the tactic of divide and conquer. There is a wide range of divisions which can be exploited in Kashmir. This smiling country has a long history of savagery, treachery, debauchery, and tragedy. The pale hands and lotus blossoms were often bright with blood.
Kamla accompanied me on a trip to Wulah Lake. We would have preferred to go in leisurely style by dunga down the river and canal, a journey deserving several days, but circumstances prevented this luxury and so we visited the grave of Laleshwari and went on by road. A faint breeze tempered the steady heat. Small white clouds meandered aimlessly over one strip of bright cobalt sky like a party of children prowling over a large meadow.

Along the road we passed scenes which only a brush could attempt to capture: a leap of naked boys in a stream fringed by willows whose shade dappled their glistening brown bodies; the raw gamboge of a mustard field seen through a little apple orchard; a woman beside the road, anonymous in a faded crimson dress and scarf which covered her head and face, her visible self reduced to slender dirty feet and a heavy breast giving suck to a baby. Four other children toddled around the woman. A turbaned and proud mullah and a limping sadhu in rags, begging bowl tied to his waist, passed each other without a glance, holy men treading alienated paths. Pink lotus lilies flowered in a stream choked with garbage. In one village we passed a group of Brahmans watching a company of the faithful prostrate themselves towards Mecca under a minaret. Pale green rice needles splintered a sheet of water. A pregnant girl in a shabby purple dress answered to calls of 'mother' from five other children.

Beyond one farm a flight of minavets squabbled over their tree positions in a towering chinar. Farther on I saw hoopoes pecking for insects. They were slightly larger than the African Hoopoe of the Transvaal but otherwise identical, displaying black and white barred wings and tail, the same distinctive sandy-orange crest, every feather
tipped by black, orange heads and bodies. Kashmir is an ornithologist's paradise, the home of a wide range of water-birds.

Wulah Lake was at its greatest depth and extent when we picnicked on its shore. In spring and early summer it is fed by rivers running fast with mountain snows: in autumn and winter it dwindles to reeded muddy marshland. Legends surround Wulah. Superstitious boatmen go in fear of it. Wulah is Sanskrit for 'cavern' and the most famous legend, containing more than a hint of probability, tells how a city which occupied the area long ago became increasingly wicked until finally the outraged gods caused an earthquake to swallow it in a cavern below and hid its sinfulness under pure water. Since then, according to evolving legends, the most evil people alive in the city during its destruction have existed in the lake as jinnis who rise up to lure careless or errant humans to their doom, a Kashmiri variant of the story of 'the cities of the plain' with an added smack of Zuleika Dobson, the humans being inexperienced youths possessed by a sudden frenzy which prompts them to leap singing to their death. The origin of the story may be authentic. Chroniclers recorded the earthquake and rise of waters as having taken place in the century before 2000 B.C. They named the city Sandimut Nagah, a name with a curious oral affinity to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Fact has contributed to legend. Inexplicable subsidences have occurred. Not far away, near a road lined by tall poplars planted three and a half centuries ago by Nur Jahan, the favourite wife of the Mogul Emperor Jahangir, are the remains of a building which sank inch by inch until only its roof has remained visible. One ill-fated stretch of Wulah earned the name of Mota Khum, the Gulf of Corpses. Its name came into being due to the current between Wulah and the Jhelum sweeping into it those who drowned in them. Boatmen forced to go near Mota Khum leave money at a nearby shrine to buy their safety from jinnis who lurk hopefully in the vicinity. An old villager assured Kamla and me that thousands of bodies had been found in the Gulf of Corpses.

They were an infinitesimal fraction of those who died desperately in this lovely country.

Contemporary Kashmiri historians separate the story of their country into seven periods. In its pre-historical and earliest recorded ages it consisted of a congeries of small kingdoms evolved from tribal wars. In area the country now totals 82,258 square miles, against the 87,815 square miles of England and Wales and Scotland and the 82,276 square
miles of Kansas, but its mountainous areas prevented early central gov-
ernment. Its first known inhabitants were Nagas, ‘snake’ people, ancestors
of present-day Nagas in hill-country north of Imphal in Assam.

Two and a half centuries before the birth of Christ the territory of
the vale and Jammu in the south was conquered by the Hindu Emperor
Asoka. He established Buddhism as the state religion, chose the original
site of Srinagar, a few miles up the Jhelum from its present position, and
introduced architectural and sculptural forms from Egypt and Greece.
His son Jaloka reverted to Hinduism and built the first Hindu temple in
the country. Jaloka won a reputation as a lover of Naga women. His
successors were less successful; Naga men rolled ice boulders off the
mountains onto their troops. Within two centuries invasions by Tartar
chiefs from the north reddened the villages and passes. In the 6th century
A.D. came the Central Asian white Huns whose fathers had plunged deep
into Europe. Behind them came Scythians from country above the Black
Sea, the area now known as the Ukraine.

One of the more brutal white Hun kings who ruled Kashmir in the
6th century was Mirikakula, ‘a man of violent deeds and resembling
death’. It was said that the common people were warned of his approach
by vultures who filled the sky to descend on those whom his troops
would slay. On one royal progress, while crossing the southwestern Pir
Panjal la, Mirikakula was pleasurably entertained by screams from an
elephant which had fallen into a ravine and lay dying in anguish. At his
instruction another hundred elephants were goaded to a similar fate to
amuse him. Another story told of Mirikakula may be apocryphal. In a
dream he was told that only a chaste woman could remove a boulder in
a local river. When he awoke he ordered every woman over a wide area
of the country to undertake the task and thousands tried before the wife
of a potter shifted the boulder easily. Thereupon Mirikakula slew those
who had failed, together with their husbands and fathers and brothers,
‘numbering three millions’. The only pleasant thing about Mirikakula
was his patent-medicine-sounding name.

In the century after Mirikakula committed suicide the Chinese
monk Hsüan-tsang, he who went to Badākshan and Bamiān, reached
Kashmir on his travels. He found that the long-dead king had destroyed
almost all the Buddhist monasteries. The monks had fled to Tibet; whole
villages were deserted, their people gone over the las to freedom. Hsüan-
tsang spent two years in Kashmir, known to the Chinese as Shie-mi and
Kia-chi-mi-lo. A Chinese claim to have exercised suzereignty over a large
area of eastern Kashmir in this age is nowhere recorded in local history.
For 100 years following the visit of Hsüan-tsang a succession of ascetic kings ruled simply and established Hindu temples. They were the lull before the storm. One of them founded Srinigar on its present site. Then came the inwardly divided King Lalitaditya whose mother was the mistress of a rich merchant until 'her wonderous beauty captivated the king'. Lalitaditya assembled an army of 6000 mounted troops and 50,000 foot soldiers and 'went forth to vanquish the world'. His army marched into the Punjab, turned north to defeat the Turkomans, pushed on into Central Asia, and returned twelve years later to drive back a Tibetan force settled in the southeast. His people welcomed him enthusiastically. He improved their conditions, built temples and decorated them with plunder acquired on his crusades, dug canals and reclaimed land. Unfortunately for Kashmir he drank excessively. During one drunken orgy he ordered the burning of Srinagar and watched it go up in flames. Peace did not suit him. He led another expedition into Central Asia and died in Turkestan during the fortieth year of his reign.

Kashmir then experienced a bizarre phase similar to subsequent events in Afghanistan. The unique difference was provided by boy kings.

One fantastic sequence started when a boy king was murdered by ambitious uncles directly he reached manhood. The uncles put another boy on the throne and their sons murdered him when he was in his thirties, his place being taken by another boy who was assassinated in early maturity. Anarchy ensued. Sections of the country became principalities where small boys ruled under protective uncles who subsequently strangled or poisoned them. One king, Camkaravarman, attained manhood and prudently withdrew from domestic peril to the safety of an expedition to conquer the world. He returned to be remembered as 'a covetous tyrant, a gambler, and a lecher'. His son succeeded him and his wife, the wayward Queen Sugandha, became Regent. Sugandha erred in becoming the mistress of her chief minister. Within two years he murdered the boy king. Another child sat on the throne for a few days before he too was slain. Sugandha then got rid of her paramour and ruled alone for two years until the army chiefs revolted and executed her. They put yet another child on the throne to nod or shake his head at their bidding. He vanished two years later. Then came another boy and another revolution.

At this point a peasant army mustered by feudal landlords marched on Srinagar and defeated the army. Amid scenes of great jubilation the landlords restored the legitimate king to his throne. They soon regretted their patriotism. Their monarch 'abandoned himself to atrocious cruelties
and licentiousness, so that the feudal landlords being unable to condone more, killed him when he lay by night in the arms of one of his low-caste wives'.

The luckless landlords must have believed themselves pursued by a peculiarly malicious ill-fortune. Their new king turned out to be even worse. Driven on by an adviser who coveted the throne, he assassinated his relations, threw others into pits, and starved to death hundreds of alleged conspirators. After the strangely fateful period of two years he was murdered. His immediate successor crouched on the throne for a few days and then fled. The foremost soldier of the time, who believed his preferment to sovereignty a foregone conclusion, sought personal safety by holding an election for the vacant throne among the Brahmans, the highest Hindu caste, composed of priests and religious scholars. Much to his surprise they chose one of themselves, a man who ruled wisely and tolerantly until his death nine years later. Directly the king died the soldier who had believed himself to be cheated took revenge. He invaded the palace, murdered the new king, and threw the corpse into the Jhelum to float off among the tangled filth and lotuses to Mota Khum. He enjoyed his triumph for a year before he died of disease.

Another boy succeeded him. The boy was King Kashamagupta, 'grossly sensual and an addict of every vice practised', distinguished solely by being the husband of Princess Didda of the nearby state of Poonch.

Queen Didda was one of the most tyrannical and bloodthirsty women in world history. Long before her son Abhimanyu succeeded his father Didda had virtually taken over control of state affairs. She used her son as a pawn. Kashmir historians believed her responsible for the early death of her son. Didda disliked being surrounded by relations and family friends who might conspire to bring about her downfall. She acted thoroughly and repeatedly. She 'slew every rival and all rebels captured, even to the last infant of their families'. Her victims included her other sons and at least two grandsons. She spared no rival or adversary. Human nature is marvellously unpredictable. In the prime of life, comely and active, Didda noticed a man whose looks excited her curiosity, a peasant risen to the position of court messenger, 'a letter-carrier' as the record described him. For some reason Didda became enamoured with him, took him into her bed, appointed him chief minister, delighted in his personal courage and success in revitalizing her army, and lavished on him every tenderness she had denied to others. Unpredictably, their passionate attachment proved permanent. She even adopted a nephew to complete their household and trained him for the throne. Thereafter she
relaxed into fond scolds, content to enjoy normal happiness. Unfortu-
nately, when she died her nephew assassinated both the former court
messenger and his son.

Perilous years ensued. Widowed queens murdered their children. Royal suicides were frequent. Bodies drifted beneath the lotuses. The era
was typified by the twelve-year reign of King Harasa who encouraged
the arts, patronized poets and musicians, stole from temples, murdered his
entire family, and was slain in a peasant revolt, his head being publicly
burned amid great jubilation. Continuous poverty provoked frequent
revolutions.

The final phase of Hindu Kashmir was worked out by seven people,
six men and another remarkable woman, the Rani Kuta.

When the first man, Raja Simha Deva, became king about 1290
Kashmir was 'a country of drunkards, gamblers, and voluptuaries'. Simha Deva and his court fled from the capital when Tartars invaded
the country. The Tartars set Srinagar alight, killed the older inhabitants,
and forced younger women and youths into slavery. As winter ap-
proached, a scarcity of food forced the Tartars to march south in search
of supplies and they were trapped by snows and the entire army froze to
death.

Back to Srinagar went three of the other men. They were Ram Chand,
Commander-in-Chief of Simha Deva's broken army, and two other
military leaders, Shah Mizra and Rainchan Shah, a son of the King of
Tibet. Rainchan Shah, a Buddhist, murdered Ram Chand and married
Ram Chand's daughter, Kuta Rani. He proclaimed himself king, but his
desire to become a Hindu was rejected by the Brahmans.

It proved a fateful decision. The fifth man reached the Happy Valley.
He was Bulbul, a Muslim from Arabia, whose piety and eloquent sermons
converted Rainchan to Islam. Rainchan destroyed Hindu temples and
burned their sacred books. He took the name of Sadr-ul-din, a variation
of Saladin, and built the Jama Mosque in Srinagar. He died peacefully
three years later.

Upon the death of Rainchan the sixth and last man, a brother of
Simha Deva, reached Srinagar intent on restoring the Throne to his
family in the person of himself. He married the widowed Kuta Rani but
deserted her directly a Turkish force invaded the valley. Kuta Rani
mobilized an army which she placed under Shah Mizra, the companion-
in-arms of her father and first husband. When the Turks were defeated
she was rejoined by her second husband, who ruled for fifteen years. On
his death Kuta Rani occupied the throne alone for six weeks in A.D. 1332.
Then Shah Mizra declared himself king but asked the queen to become his wife. She sought to fend him off but finally had to agree. Considerable ceremony attended their wedding. When Shah Mizra went to join his bride on their nuptial night she stabbed herself to death as he entered their room.

The suicide of Kuta Rani broke the final link with the Hindu era. It had existed for more than eleven centuries. Its last five centuries had been remarkable for family intrigues, every category of murder, revolution, and licentiousness. It provided a positive psychological heritage of suspicion and cruelty and sensuality.

The advent of Islam produced no noticeable change.

Less than three years separated the death of Kuta Rani from the birth of another remarkable woman. She was Laleshwari or Lallā, the most famous Kashmiri woman poet. Her work contained sufficient intrinsic merit for both Hindu and Muslim factions to claim her despite two remarkable features. Not only was she a woman, less than khak upon the roads, but she attacked established religions and claimed the brotherhood of all men before one God. Laleshwari was a spirit in revolt against the Kashmiri heritage.

Much of the early history of Laleshwari has been lost. It was rumoured that she was born into a wealthy family in the capital and married a Brahman who treated her cruelly. Her mother-in-law was stated to have shown her much unkindness, possibly to persuade her not to write and to abandon her unorthodox views. For some unspecified cause Laleshwari left her husband and became a tramp. She lived in extreme poverty, Asian poverty, going from village to village. She is known to have sung her poems and to have danced in rags until she was nearly naked. Muslims who respected her verse complained of her lack of modesty. She answered them in a sentence which has outlived the centuries: 'Only men fear God and there are few men.' As she wandered almost completely naked through a town one day she saw a prince whose appearance caused her to cry: 'I have seen a man.' From that day she wore clothes and her poems developed a mystic agnosticism. They attacked ritualism and a worship of idols, and called for equality of men within disciplined self-control and guided by respect for each other in a compassion for humanity. She devoted her life to recitals of her poems to village people, illustrating her themes by allusions from everyday life shorn of acquired animosities.
This quality has kept her poems alive for six centuries. Through it she gave ordinary Kashmiris a vision of a better world on this side of eternity. It was her grave near the Great Mosque which Kamla and I visited on our way to Mota Khum.

An early Muslim king was the Sultan Sikandah who ascended the throne in approximately A.D. 1389 when eight years of age. During the first twelve years of his reign his mother Haurah, the Begum Sura, acted as Regent. She learned of a conspiracy by her daughter and son-in-law to dethrone Sikandah and had them executed. Sikandah became But-Shikan, 'the idol-breaker', due to his fanatical determination to destroy every trace of Hinduism. He razed temples and had their religious books thrown into Dal Lake. He ordered Hindus to become Muslims or accept death or exile. Thousands were slain and more thousands fled. Throughout his reign of twentythree years his subjects were forbidden the pleasures of music and wine and gambling.

The man who succeeded Sikandah in 1420 must have appeared incredible to Kashmiris. They were totally unprepared for him. His name was Zain-ul-ab-ul-din.

He became king when seventeen and for fiftytwo years Kashmir had cause to rejoice in its monarch. In addition to being 'virtuous, self-controlled, and frugal' in his habits, he ruled firmly and tolerantly. Among his first acts were the release of people imprisoned by previous kings and a curb on entrepreneur profits. He budgeted his personal and household expenses on the output of a copper mine that he discovered. Early in his reign he appointed a brother to act as chief minister, to free his attention for other developments, and, miraculously, his brother did not conspire against him. He built canals and bridges, abolished taxes imposed on Hindus, introduced weaving and paper-making, the art of papier-mâché and a production of silk. He entertained singers and musicians and poets at court. His patronage added the Persian script and Arabic phrases to Sanskrit; both were altered in time to conform to ordinary Kashmiri speech, the purest Sanskrit and Persian being retained for religious usage. As a soldier he added Tibet and an area of the Punjab to Kashmir.

His greatest accomplishments were humanity and tolerance. At one time he had a rebel tribesman flogged to death but conferred his favour on the dead man's son. His kindness to Hindus led them to call him Badshah, Great King. He restored their temples to revive their learning and permitted exiled Brahmans to return.
Zain-ul-ab-ul-din was unique: he was a Kashmiri first. He strove to achieve a unification of his people despite their religious differences, seeking to give the country a sound foundation from which it could progress. Few of those who preceded him had thought first of Kashmir. Unfortunately, his son turned out to be a weakling, a drunkard, and, worse, a braggart.

Frequent invasions occurred in the 16th century. Turkomans rampaged down from the north, followed by Chakis, another Central Asian people, eight of whose leaders ruled Kashmir in a span of thirty-four years, an era of ferocity accompanied by worsening impoverishment. It is a pleasant surprise in an otherwise drab story to find their penultimate ruler, Yusaf Khan, described as a man who ‘having wed a peasant woman he forsook all else to devote himself to pleasure’.

Yakub, the son of Yusaf, might have profited from the example provided. Instead his irresponsible conduct ushered in the next historical phase, domination by the Moguls.

In 1582, the year when Elizabeth I of England saw the sunset of her odd romance with the ugly but charming Duke of Alençon, an army of the Mogul Emperor Akbar invaded Kashmir from the south. An army led by Yakub Khan defeated it. Victory warped Yakub. On his return to the capital he persecuted Hindus and Muslims alike until their emissaries appealed to Akbar for aid. Akbar agreed to assist them, promising an abolition of religious intolerance. When another of his armies attacked in 1585 a large section of Kashmiri troops deserted Yakub to assist the Moguls.

Akbar left his court at Delhi on three occasions to visit Kashmir. He kept his promise to provide religious tolerance, inaugurated various reforms and public works, and ensured that his instructions were carried out. His son Jahangir loved the country deeply. It was he who laid out the famous gardens with their pavilions and fountains set amid blazing flower-beds. One of his wives was a Kashmiri. He stopped the Muslim practice of burying widows alive with their husbands, the fate of an eleven-year-old bride shortly before he first visited the country. The most famous utterance of Jahangir came as he lay dying: asked if he desired anything he answered: ‘Only Kashmir.’ His son Shah Jahan ruled wisely if distantly from his newly sited capital of Delhi, founded under its Indian name of Shahjahanabad or ‘City of Shah Jahan’. He laid out other gardens. Auranzeb, son of Shah Jahan, left no mark. He visited Kashmir once, in 1665, while recovering from a serious illness, but in effect the
decline of Mogul domination began when he seized power in Delhi, not at his death in 1707. By the latter year Mogul governors in Srinagar had become powers unto themselves.

By historical reckoning, Mogul rule lasted for nearly two hundred years. It started strongly and died weakly, its light a fitful glimmer. No strength opposed those who carried their swords into the vale.

The new rulers were Pathans, or more correctly Afghans. You will recall how a gathering of chiefs at Kandahar in 1747 chose Ahmad Khan as their leader. Six years later Kabul ruled Kashmir. The Afghans brought an era of relentless cruelty. It was the more remarkable because twenty-eight Afghan governors ruled in Srinagar from 1753 until 1819.

From the outset the Afghans vented their special hatred on the Hindu community. Hindus who refused to accept Islam were slaughtered. They were not allowed to die honourably. Afghans discovered a queer merriment in smearing them with human and animal excrement before they were beheaded and their bodies wrapped in shrouds of cow skin, a calculated abasement of Hinduism. Another Afghan sport consisted of tying several Hindus together and throwing them into Dal Lake to drown in terrified attempts to free themselves. One section of the lake is known as ‘the graveyard of Hindus’ from these entertainments. The Afghans treated women like cattle. They forced girls of twelve years of age, often younger, into concubinage. They took the widows of those they killed into their camps, young and old alike, subjecting them to sexual vices of every variety. Hindu mothers took to scarring their daughters, shaving their heads, cutting off their noses, and branding their flesh, in attempts to save them from Afghan attention.

Other Afghan appetites were also revealed. Those with a taste for pederasty collected Hindu boys and forced them to become an equivalent of the kuch isafari. Boys who refused or tried to escape were flogged into docility; those who died were flung into the Jhelum or left in the streets to remind Hindu women of who ruled them and their children. Other boys had their genitals cut off, an operation of greater anguish by Afghan methods than when it had been performed on babies in ancient China to equip them to become eunuchs in Peking (a fact recorded by the 16th-century Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci). Every Hindu boy was regarded as fair game.

Afghan rule ranged from inhuman ferocity to excessive stupidity, a natural scale. An example of the latter involved the Mogul Gardens. Over
seven hundred of them were destroyed by an emir, Khan Jawan Sher, because they reminded Kashmiris of Mogul favours. A few were spared in Srinagar to provide pleasant walks for Afghan governors.

The Punjab also suffered under Afghan domination and it was the senseless ferocity and abuse of power by Afghan rulers which later caused Britain to refuse to assist Dost Mohammed to regain the Punjab and Kashmir, the rejection given by Alexander Burnes in Kabul.

Only five years completed the end of Afghan rule. A Kashmir leader offered to pay a yearly fee to a Punjab leader if he would send an army to rid the country of its oppressors.

The Punjabi, Ranjit Singh, despatched a Sikh army but on hearing that its vanguard had been destroyed he withdrew his main force without giving fight. News of the invasion had been passed by Afghan spies to the governor. The governor celebrated his triumph by torturing Brahmins. Another appeal was made to Ranjit Singh by a diplomatic courier and his son. Afghan spies learned of their mission. The wives of the men were arrested; the courier’s wife committed suicide but her young daughter-in-law was sent to Kabul and forced to become a Muslim. The Afghan governor fled from Srinagar directly he heard of the size of the advancing army. In 1819 the Sikhs marched into the vale.

The Sikhs practised a form of Hinduism.

They penetrated into the fair country and fell upon Kashmiri Muslims. Within a few weeks thousands of Muslim refugees streamed westward into the North-West Frontier hills and Afghanistan. With the arrival of a Sikh governor from Lahore scores of Muslim women and girls were crowded into compounds to accommodate the Sikh soldiers who lined up to clasp them. An early Sikh plan intended every young Muslim woman to bear a Sikh child to enforce her abandonment of Islam. In this period Muslim women adopted the *burqa* to divert attention from the incidental attraction of their youth. And Muslim boys were doctored into becoming eunuchs. Hindus who had accepted Islam under Afghan tyranny were subjected to especial cruelty.

Crushing taxes were imposed on every occupation. Even the whores had to pay such a heavy tax that most of them contracted a marriage in order to escape detection. Unpaid forced labour was brought back and press-gangs rounded up men for work in slave camps. Starvation struck at remote villages. Other natural calamities, an earthquake which decimated Srinagar and was followed by a cholera epidemic, increased human
misery. Thousands of Hindus trekked from Kashmir to the Punjab during a famine.

Only one Sikh governor won respect from Kashmiris. He was Mien Singh. He tried to aid them by small measures designed to lessen their plight, importing grain and chickens for starving villagers, abolishing a burdensome tax on marriage, reducing taxes on produce, and penalizing profiteering. Punjabi troops regarded his leniency as unpatriotic. When Ranjit Singh died they revolted and assassinated Mien Singh.

The Sikh empire started to fall apart in anarchy and bloodshed in 1841. The collapse started when the successor of Ranjit Singh died of his indulgences. A former governor of Kashmir, Sher Singh, seized power in Lahore only to find that the military staff ignored orders issued by him and his chief minister, a brother of Gulab Singh whom Ranjit Singh had appointed prince of Jammu. The chief minister conspired in the assassination of Sher Singh and was himself murdered by another officer. When the minister's body was burned a total of thirteen wives and female slaves were burned alive with him by the custom of sati; the body of his son was consumed by a fire which burned his utterly silent twenty-two wives and concubines. The twelve-year-old son of Sher Singh was hacked down on orders from his uncle.

Early Hindu history was repeated in Lahore. Dhulip Singh, a boy of five years old, crouched wretchedly on the throne. An ambitious minister, a nephew of Gulab Singh, who tried to oust him, was beheaded. Then the child saw the Brahman lover of his mother and her brother take power. They sent an expedition to Jammu to bring Gulab Singh back to Lahore and ordered him to pay 10 million rupees if he wanted to live. He had become wealthy by adding to Jammu the eastern Buddhist area of Ladakh, previously subject to Tibet.

A son of Ranjit Singh who tried to seize the throne was murdered by the child king's maternal uncle, who was himself assassinated. The boy's mother, her lover, and the Commander-in-Chief, ruled ostensibly for the wretched child and were worried by the presence of British troops nearby. Late in 1845 a Sikh army of 60,000 troops and 150 guns marched south against a British and Anglo-Indian army of 10,000 troops. The Sikhs were held at a battle near Mudki. A month later, in January 1846, at the battle of Aliwal, the Sikhs were defeated and the Lahore Government collapsed although its army continued to fight with relentless bravery. Lord Hardinge, the Governor-General, invited Gulab Singh to negotiations.

The British marched into Lahore. On 9 March 1846 the terms of a
treaty were reached. Seven days later the Treaty of Amritsar established Gulab Singh as Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. By the treaty Kashmir and all mountainous country east of the Indus and west of the Ravi River, ceded to Britain as indemnity by the Sikhs, was handed over to Gulab Singh and 'the heirs male of his body'. In exchange he made a total payment of £750,000 and an annual tribute of one horse, twelve goats, and six pairs of shawls.

The Dogra era had begun.

Gulab Singh was a remarkable contradiction. Only a brief outline of his extraordinary career can be provided here. Born a Rajput—a member of the Hindu soldier caste—in the Dogra country foothills between Kashmir and the Punjab, he experienced considerable hardship before he and a brother borrowed enough money to buy horses and rode to Lahore to offer their services to the Maharaja. The brother who accompanied him became the minister involved in the murder of Sher Singh. Another younger brother joined them later. They were all fanatically ambitious and each achieved success, becoming influential in Lahore before they obtained considerable wealth as Rajas in their own territories. But when Gulab Singh became Maharaja of the combined states of Jammu and Kashmir, poverty-ridden through continuous exploitation and neglect, he relapsed into slothful self-indulgence.

His reign of eleven years is remembered in Kashmir largely for his greed. He demanded fifty per cent of crops. His corrupt officials obtained this tax by demanding sixty per cent in order to gain their own share. He oppressed the Kashmiris by relying on the presence of British troops to keep his throne secure. He loved money. The cynical wit of Kashmiris produced a story that the surest means of gaining his attention in order to present a petition was to hold up a rupee when he passed along a street.

Gulab Singh died of dropsy in 1857. A severe earthquake shook the country on the day he died. An Englishwoman, Mrs. Ashby Carus-Wilson, managed to prevent his five wives from burning on his funerary pyre.

Even this brief historical sketch of the crucible in which Kashmiri temperament was shaped does not provide the sum total of miseries borne by these unfortunate people. The disasters inflicted on Kashmiris included natural phenomena.
The earthquakes did not fit into a familiar pattern. The first recorded quake brought Wulah Lake into being. One which occurred in 1500 lasted for three months. Fiftytwo years later another continued for two months, as did one in 1662. Another three-months' quake took place seventythree years later. One went on with varying intensity throughout the year 1778. A quake which lasted from May until August 1884 killed nearly 3500 people and 40,000 head of cattle and destroyed 11,000 houses.

Floods resulted from quakes and seasonal change. Melting snows off the mountains frequently caused rivers to inundate the Happy Valley. Two floods, in 1379 and 1746, destroyed a total of over 20,000 houses. Scores of people drowned in 1787 when the breaking of Dal Gate caused a flood which submerged the eastern part of Srinagar.

Famine was frequent. An unseasonal August snowstorm in the 2nd century before Christ destroyed the rice crop. From then on hundreds of people, often thousands, died in famines in every century. One such occasion was mentioned earlier. It happened in 1832 during the Sikh period. On instructions from Ranjit Singh to send provisions for his army, the governor left the Kashmiris only the barest minimum stores for their needs until the autumn harvest. A heavy snowfall destroyed all the crops. Hundreds of people died of starvation. When Mien Singh took up his duties as governor the following year he went out onto the Palace balcony on the morning after his arrival but 'he heard not a single cock crow in the dawn for all had been eaten by those stricken by famine'. It was this incident which ultimately caused him to be murdered. Transportation of incoming supplies extended the ravages of famine. Directly winter set in the mountain las became extremely hazardous where not actually impassable. Hundreds of men and beasts froze to death in their snows. A serious famine in 1864 was followed by one in 1877 which was said to have killed two-thirds of the population. Its effects lasted for three years.

Cholera was the most frequent epidemic. A record of approximately 1089 described a mysterious sickness whose symptoms were those of cholera. There were more than a dozen outbreaks of it from 1783 until 1910. Those who died from it were flung into the Jhelum, whose waters were used for personal washing in addition to other purposes. A total of 11,700 people died of cholera in 1892 and another 9211 in 1910.

Kashmiris were always fatalistic, inevitably in the circumstances, happy-go-lucky about sanitation and hygiene. Their religions, their
resignation or search for spiritual perfection, led them to see no urgency for introducing improvements. Holy men, as holy as African witchdoctors, preyed on them solely for personal gain or to testify to their own holiness. The holy men were and are spiritual share-pushers.

Western travellers found Kashmiris unreliable. Moorcroft, who visited the country in the first quarter of the 19th century, at the start of Sikh domination, described them as ‘a degraded race’ of people, ‘selfish, superstitious, and false’, victims of ‘the most loathsome diseases brought about by scant and unwholesome food, dark, damp, and ill-ventilated lodgings, excessive dirtiness and gross immorality’. G. T. Vigne visited Kashmir twenty years later, as Sikh rule neared its end. He regarded them as ‘a lying and deceitful people’. Early in the 1870s, following a quarter of a century of Dogra rule, Frederick Drew wrote his book *The Jammu and Kashmir Territories*. In it he said the Kashmiris ‘are false-tongued, ready with a lie and given to various forms of deceit. They are noisy and quarrelsome, ready to wrangle but not to fight, on the least exercise or threat of force they will cry like children. . . . Their cowardice is proverbially a characteristic of the Kashmiris.’ Canon Tyndale-Biscoe, headmaster of the Church Missionary Society Boys’ School in Srinagar for many years, said that a large number of men were effeminate and left few lusts and perversions unsatisfied. He reached the heart of their tragedy in his book *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade*, published in 1922: ‘. . . they happen to live in one of the most beautiful countries on earth and therefore other peoples have coveted it. Kashmir has been conquered and reconquered by invaders who have murdered, oppressed, and enslaved their ancestors, and so ground the life and heart out of them that their better selves have been crushed.’

Every century increased the terrible inheritance of the Kashmiris. They were born into fear, these nameless millions, inheritors of the Gulf of Corpses, who passed unheeded and unsung.

The greatest danger in their present community is religion. The holy men, this swarm of human locusts, will willingly strip the land of life to gratify their insane lust for a sensation of spiritual power. They have shown their readiness to advise cruelty and torture in the name of religion. They could easily cause the country to be finally destroyed within the next fifteen years.
EARLY one morning I wandered away from a squashed commotion of people chaffering over vegetables and fruit under twitchy veils of flies in the suq at Habāh Bridge, away from streets used by ancient horses pulling screech-axed tongas, until I was in a warren of dirt-encrusted narrow alleys in a poor quarter fringed by stinking canals.

Even this corner of an Asian slum had beauty. Honey-skinned bare-foot women in faded head-shawls and stained old blue or red dresses had the deep-breasted ripeness of Hindu goddesses in the ochre Badami caves of Bombay. Sinuous women-children gazed wide-eyed at the fresh morning light illuminating their inheritance of squalor. Naked boys who tumbled near a fly-covered cesspool displayed a fine energy and a possession of sound lungs. In one multi-shadowed corner were two wrinkled old beggars of great facial beauty, reminiscent of those whom Rembrandt took from Dutch gutters as his models for Old Testament seers. Round a corner I came in sight of a canal. Its smell was atrocious. Men sluiced their bodies amid garbage floating on its surface. Downstream a small boy fanned the contents of his bladder into its filth. Farther on a woman washed vegetables and rice in it. Beyone her was a glimpse of wind-ruffled poplars backed by the snow crests of blue mountains.

In every light the mountains provided a charm which lacked the harsh impersonality of grandeur. Their best scenic hours were when they filled up with night shadows reaching out of Asia and when dawn came up from Nepal and put an acid daffodil sparkle along their snow shoulders. There was a fine view of them from houseboats at Dal Gate.
I was up at dawn on the morning after I dined with Kamla and her family and went up onto the sun-deck roof. It was a world of strange colours. Fragile green webs of willows skirted a charcoal smudge of lumpy mountains. A rose iridescence glancing inquisitively about an ashen sky was mirrored on water creeping like weary quicksilver past biscuit-hued houseboats silent behind neat white blinds and sun-deck awnings. ‘To Let’ signs were on many houseboats.

Kamla joined me. Her eyes were still heavy from sleep and her hair fell like a sheet of shining black water to her shoulders. She wore an apple-green sari which had an intricate floral pattern embroidered in silver thread. While we watched the colours of the dawn the first pedlar paddled up.

He was a thin man with a straggly moustache and an ingratiating smirk. The basic weakness of Kashmir chimed in his greeting: ‘Salaam, sahib.’ He wore a crimson woollen skull-cap and a candy-striped shirt whose ends hung over the knees of his dirty white trousers. His tiny canoe was invisible under scarlet dahlias, crimson and white carnations, lemon tea-roses, blazing marigolds to distress morning eyes. I paid five rupees (£s. 6d.) for enough carnations and roses to make a wedding reception doubly memorable, a slight acknowledgment of kindnesses shown by my hostess.

When he paddled away Kamla said: ‘You ought not to waste your money.’ Her voice held a gentle finality similar to the tone I had heard her use when she argued tirelessly for nearly two hours against injustices heaped on the Untouchables. No, ‘argued’ is the wrong word. She stated her convictions in an unflinchingly quiet voice and when challenged restated them. Ultimately her two male opponents had retreated to hints of being pretty tolerant to heed a female viewpoint, a dodge she ignored contemptuously.

‘Why shouldn’t I give your sister-in-law some flowers?’ I asked, somewhat dashed.

‘They will wither.’

It was one of those rare occasions when I would have preferred to hear the inane ‘Aren’t they heaven?’ or some other fashionable incongruity. After all: a lovely girl, flowers, a still dawn over a placid river after a quiet night. The intellectuals who invariably lurk out their lives in dining cities of steel and concrete would regard my attitude as sentimental at best. God help them in their grey corroded confusions.

In Kashmir another quiet night is time won from uncertainty, from
dreadful memory, from fear of whether tomorrow will reshape yesterday by conventional disasters alone.

River life in Srinagar started to decline a few years ago. At one period life on the Jhelum was a main aspect of Srinagar affairs. It was predominantly British. Wives of Indian Army officers, the memsahibs, who spent weeks or months on a houseboat did not have to leave it unless they felt an urge for a change of scenery. Canoe vendors brought every type of provision and merchandise to their steps. Young officers of the Indian Army, released from harsh mountains and burning deserts, discovered houseboats ideal for their leave. Wealthy Indian merchants also discovered their pleasures.

Innumerable writers have used the faded-carbon theme of how memsahibs became drunken adulteresses or querulous termagants from being cut off from the mad gaiety of Kensington and an afternoon window-shopping in Burlington Arcade. Perhaps they did become lonely and sharp when illustrated papers from home revived scenes and recalled people long unseen. But a large number of them, an eye on the princely retirement pay of their husbands, began to equip their houseboats as permanent homes. They shipped out personal belongings, glass and silverware, and added carpets woven in Baluchistan and Bokhara mats and beautifully carved Kashmiri furniture, intending to settle in a country which offered other advantages. It was cheap, and Britain was changing rapidly. It was a sportsman’s paradise. It was beautiful. For those nearing the end of their Service careers it offered more than a tiny cottage on a cold hill in a country up to the neck in a plaster-cast of taxation.

The heyday of the houseboat came in the 1930s. It must have provided a jolly life in those years when Britain had three million unemployed, an equal number fearing unemployment, hunger marchers, and listened to feet goose-stepping in Germany.

Since then the river life has changed and on each occasion I have been in Srinagar it has contracted from its previous dimension.

The pedlars were always in sight. Every morning a canoe fleet set out from the city. It brought flowers, fruits, exquisitely hand-embroidered bedspreads and tablecloths, work which sends many Kashmiris blind, shawls displaying the superb workmanship on the one given by a blind man to a Khedive of Egypt who presented it to Napoleon who gave it to Josephine and thereby made Kashmir shawls world famous,
Desirable Country for Sale

and beautifully carved bird and flower wooden boxes polished with agate. They paddled up every morning. So did the postman and dudh-wallah, milkman.

Nearer the city were the floating whores. Every morning they drowsed on the sun-decks of shabby houseboats and descended to the porch in late afternoon to wave at passing womanless shikaras. On my second visit to Srinagar one houseboat had recently attracted attention by a notice which read: ‘Night Joy Guaranteed.’ The promise appeared to be inspired by names given to shikaras: Love Nest, Slaphappy Joe, Honeymoon Springs, Loosen Up Baby, President Nasser, Victory Joy with cushions.

Few prostitutes were free-lance. It was a long-established practice of Kashmiri fathers burdened by daughters unmarried in childhood to sell them to whoremasters whose agents taught them some amorous arts until they resembled the pornai of ancient Athens. Many who waved at me were strikingly handsome, sensual, female animals. Their physical lures were to be expected. From Kashmir went scores of supple soft-thighed wenches who joined the Tavayev of Mogul courts, black hair perfumed with musk or attar of roses, gold bells chiming on ankles, the childish-faced scented-skinned nautch girls skilled in erotic writhes and tantalizing glide of little hot hands. They crossed Banihal Pass into India and prayed to be established as court concubines and to bear sons, their only insurance. Life became monotonous for those who plied their trade in this century, their work restricted to a grimy old dunga or converted bahach, large cargo-boat, where customers picked their choice from a dozen girls somewhere between gymnai and geishas. Whenever I went out on a houseboat porch in the afternoon their canoe touts skimmed up. A skull-capped head bobbed into sight below my feet and a cooey voice said: ‘Salaam, sahib. You want best massage, sahib? Soft hands, sahib, warm hearts, every happiness. Nice for lonely kind sahib like you, sahib, much fun and singing. Cut prices for a week, sahib.’

The Indian Independence Act made life on the Jhelum increasingly seasonal. The large majority of visitors when I have seen it were Indians. They it was who switched on record-players and transistor radios. Young Indians rushed about the city in cars and tongas. For reasons beyond my comprehension a number of girls wore Western dresses. Their boy friends were resplendent in silk or cotton tartan shirts manufactured in Japan—two from Calcutta were pleased by their short-sleeved open-necked hunting Stuart—but I disliked the dresses intensely.

There were few Britons. Another place which had particular associa-
tions for the British, a spot I saw on my second visit, was even more desolate. That was Gulmarg, the Meadow of Flowers.

Gulmarg is about thirty miles west of Srinagar. Ten miles north of Gulmarg is a large, squashed-up, tumbledown town of some 1400 ramshackle houses. It is called Baramullah and played a vital role in recent Kashmir history.

I went to Gulmarg on a late summer morning with an ex-officer of the Indian Army. We encountered every type of Kashmiri traveller on the road, the main route to Pakistan, the way taken by Afghan invaders. There were holy men in colourful rags: sadhus, sufis, fakirs. Tongas hooved up dust. Most of them appeared likely to collapse under loads of chattering village women. Beside a row of towering poplars a ribby old horse had indeed dropped dead in its shafts. Orange-bearded farmers stood beside cornfields and orchards to lament unto their universal fashion. Women breast-fed their babies while they sat beside baskets of fruit to tempt wayfarers. A quartette of children crouched beside the road to void their bowels. A mile farther on a swarm of other children watched an Indian girl crawl on hands and knees for a film camera unit whose director wore a cherry-red ski cap back to front over his sweaty neck. The girl was having a bad hour. A wind-machine blew clouds of dust straight into her face and hanging black hair.

At Tangmarg village we left the car to continue our journey on horseback. Marg means mountain meadow of the variety met in Switzerland. Tangmarg village was born of a desire of other people to get somewhere else. It was 7000 feet up and consisted of garages, wooden-shack shops, a quantity of syces and stablemen who kept horses ready for those going to the Meadow of Flowers, another 1800 feet up beyond hairpin tracks rising among firs and pines. The higher we climbed the clearer became distant mountain ranges. Village bearers ignored the hairpin tracks and walked barefoot up a stony path which cut straight through its twists. A smell of pines sweetened the sharp air. Needles covered the steeply rising track like a brown stair carpet.

I have no idea which Briton rediscovered Gulmarg. Long ago it was called the Meadow of Horses due to being a pasture. Then it was seen by Yusaf Shah, he who 'having wed a peasant woman forsook all else to devote himself to pleasure'. His queen was far more than the description implies. She was the Habāh after whom the Srinagar bridge was named, a rebellious Muslim girl born near the village of Pampur. Although Habāh
received only a slight education it set her to writing love poems, which she sang to her friends. These occupations alarmed her parents into marrying her to a village youth who ordered her to give up both enjoyments and devote herself to providing his comfort. His mother bullied her. Like Laleshwari before her, Habāh ran away to sing her songs to village girls. She grew into a woman whose beauty became legendary. Shortly after a fakéer prophesied her happiness she met Yusaf in the purple saffron fields. They fell in love at first sight of each other. Yusaf married her directly he obtained her divorce and they retreated from state affairs to seek personal contentment. One of them renamed the marg Meadow of Flowers. They did not live happily ever after. Within fifteen or sixteen years the advent of Mogul power sent Yusaf into exile and Habāh returned to wandering the roads to sing to villagers of love. Later on she built herself a small banghla near Srinagar. She lived to her fifties. Her poems remained to provide another indication of the desire of Kashmiris to escape from their plight.

There is a degree of belated wisdom in believing that they might have escaped. Older Kashmiris say so. Certainly the auguries were good at one time.

The British troops on which Gulab Singh relied when he became the first Dogra Maharaja did not storm about the country on a campaign of religious murder or debase women and children. British authorities sought to be accommodating. On the accession of Ranbir Singh following the death of his father Britain agreed to revise the Treaty of Amritsar to allow the Maharaja to select a successor from his family if he failed to have a direct male heir.

Ranbir Singh was a vastly different man from his father. He was moral, tolerant, and possessed a deep love of his family. He sat in daily public council to receive the petitions of his people, aided by a Council of State and some British officers. He encouraged education. He did his utmost to advance agricultural development, only to be cruelly cheated by unseasonal rains which produced a three-year famine that caused two-thirds of the population to die of starvation. The last five years of his life were devoted to attempts to prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy.

He was succeeded in 1877 by his son Pratahb Singh. Once again the pattern of authority veered sharply. Pratahb Singh was a semi-invalid, a weak monarch who allowed himself to be ‘surrounded by low and unworthy favourites’ in the description of a British Viceroy, a prey of Hindu
holy men, unable to reach a decision without their approval. At his death in 1925 his nephew Hari Singh became Maharaja.

Throughout the Dogra period Kashmir prospered. It was an era marked by ‘peace within its borders’, a phrase which meant simply that British advice prevented Muslims and Hindus from murdering each other. Hari Singh, who paid an unfortunate visit to Britain in 1925, remained on the throne until Indian Independence in 1947.

For 101 years internal peace permitted Muslims and Hindus an opportunity to pursue their religious convictions without bloodshed. Undoubtedly there were instances of village enmity, murders committed at the behest of the holy tramping vultures, and rivalry by the main groups for position of authority. Agriculture developed despite setbacks which the holy men claimed to be retribution inflicted by their own pet god on a string. Work by Kashmiri craftsmen reached a world market. The beauty of the valley attracted European visitors; on one day in Srinagar I counted eight Kashmiris whose eyes were too blue to be traced back to the grey-eyed Mongol invaders. Certainly the officers of the Indian Army expected it to remain peaceful. That was why they developed Gulmarg.

The Meadow of Flowers provided a holiday centre remote from heat and dust. Yusaf Khan and his wife built the first royal residence, a chalet facing an undulant green meadow framed by pine and fir wood beyond which rose blue mountains split by couloirs, distant crests mantled by névé like large white handkerchiefs. On a cloudless day Gulmarg provided a sight of a number of the most famous peaks in southern Asia: Tos Maidan, Kantah Nōg, Harimūq, Mahadyo, and, I was told, Nanga Pahbat, ninety miles away. On the two days I spent there fleecy cloud obscured all save the nearest wooded slopes.

During the latter part of the 101 years the British built a township of chalets, wooden frame banghlas, bungalows or houses, hotels, shops, and laid out a polo ground and two golf courses. They rejoiced at finding an ideal spot to enjoy their games in a climate which did not ravage the northern skin of their memsahibs. My ex-army friend directed my attention to woods where his late wife had picked violets and forget-me-nots, narcissi and iris, which earlier officers had planted to enhance the charm of Gulmarg.

Thirty years ago, even less, it must have been a lovely place. When I saw it only scenic beauty remained. I thought it should have been re-
named the meadow of memories but it would have been cruel to say so then.

Gulmarg had become a ghost town. Cows and goats grazed on golf courses under the eye of young shepherds. Few houses were occupied. In a street once busy with British visitors and their Kashmiri household staff a couple of open doors swung and creaked. House after house was empty, locked up or open to chill mountain winds. Temporarily, at least, Gulmarg had retreated, silent among memories, listening to vanished voices, sad and neglected.

The impartial police had gone.

One hundred and one years were too short to unite Kashmiris into true nationhood. The names of kings who did try to unite the country were recorded in the previous chapter. That record alone is proof that from the Kashmiri viewpoint the Indian Independence Act was carried out with indecent haste. The granting of Swaraj was not wrong; on the contrary the flood of new recognitions of national and social relationships which coursed through British thinking from 1880 until 1939 made Indian independence a natural development. But those who effected the measure in Westminster should have heeded the peculiar problems of Kashmir before they returned to admire the lofty structure of their own political ideals. They were not blameworthy for subsequent events but they could have acted more cautiously. They acknowledged their possession of proof of possible unrest. A statement by the British Cabinet on 3 June 1947 stated that as preliminary discussions had shown that only partition would satisfy the people of India a plan to effect partition was being considered by Indian party leaders. But on 15 August of the same year the responsibility of the British Government for what had been British India, and its influence through southern Asia, ended abruptly.

In Kashmir this left the Hindu Hari Singh as Maharaja of a country where seventyseven per cent of the population was Muslim. Kashmir literature was dominated by Hindus. Kashmiri art was predominantly Muslim. Hindus worshipped the cow and Muslims ate it, although Hindus tried every means to stop them. Hindus enjoyed pork; to Muslims the pig was unclean. Hindus believed in personal cleanliness. Muslims were content to wash their hands and feet before they entered a mosque. Hindus could not resort to divorce and for a Muslim it was easier than falling off a log.

Hari Singh perched on an uneasy throne. He agreed to let Pakistan run his posts and telegraphs but refused to accept Pakistan sovereignty.
History repeated itself.

Hindu refugees started their flight south through Jammu several days before 15 August 1947. At the same time, in the same sunshine, Muslim refugees went west to Pakistan along the road leading to Gulmarg. They were only a trickle, a few nervous or farsighted families. Arrangements were made to fly home British officers of the previous Indian Army and their families; most of them refused, some, it was said, because the planes would not take their dogs. A Muslim party, led by Shaikh Mohammed Abdullah and opposed to Hari Singh, gained fresh strength every day. Hari Singh countered by accusing Pakistan of withholding food and fuel supplies and then appealed to Delhi for emergency rations.

It was an explosive situation and on 22 October it exploded. Muslim tribesmen of the North-West Frontier province of Pakistan invaded the valley and stormed down the road towards Srinagar. Hari Singh hastened to his winter residence in Jammu. From there on 26 October he signed a document by which Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India. Lord Louis Mountbatten, then Governor-General of India, accepted the accession but notified Hari Singh that the British Government desired a plebiscite to ascertain the wish of the people directly law and order were restored.

Indian leaders in Delhi declared that the Muslim tribesmen were regular Pakistani soldiers. If so, they behaved most peculiarly. They reached Baramullah and there stopped to rape women and acquire loot. In any previous age such an event would have been natural, but in 1947 there were fairly fast planes and airborne divisions, developments known to every serving soldier, and Baramullah was only thirty miles from the real prize, the greater loot, a multiplicity of women. But these Muslims stopped to enjoy Baramullah, squandered a day on captive flesh and trumpery geegaws, and thereby lost the prize. Indian troops flown into Srinagar soon dislodged the Muslim force from Baramullah. It seems absolutely incredible to believe that an army intending to capture a country could have behaved in such an irresponsible fashion or that its officers would have tolerated such absurd conduct. There is no cause to assume the Muslims were regular soldiers. On the contrary their actions betrayed them as undisciplined tribesmen.

Only the charlatan section of holy men rejoiced at a return of fear. They were busy spilling their hatreds into political ears and hearing them transformed into speeches for Muslim or Hindu nationalism. Their tawdry glory had returned. No one could lock them up. There are no asylums in Kashmir for those afflicted with religious mania.

On 1 January 1948 India accused Pakistan of engineering an attack
Kashmir—an afternoon scene on Nagin Lake

Kashmir—houses at Gulmarg
Kosi—voluntary student labour building the dam

Tungabhadra—Mr. Nehru visiting the dam
on Kashmir. Pakistan denied the accusation. In July she stated that her regular troops were then present in the country to prevent their Muslim brothers from being taken over by India. Sporadic warfare continued until a ceasefire became effective on 1 January 1949. A commission of the United Nations Security Council persuaded the disputants to accept a ceasefire line on 26 July. Its demarcation was completed by the UN Commission on 3 November but India rejected a suggestion by the Commission for both sides to accept as binding the decisions of a UN arbitrator. In March 1950 the Security Council appointed Sir Owen Dixon as mediator. It became clear to Sir Owen that the disputants were unlikely to gain an immediate reconciliation. On 22 August he stated there was no purpose in his staying on in the country.

Kashmir became a republic in November 1952. Its titular head was Yavraj Karan Singh, the son of Hari Singh, and its Prime Minister was Shaikh Mohammed Abdullah. In August 1953 the Prime Minister was arrested and put in gaol by his deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, after Bakshi returned from a visit to Delhi. Shaikh Mohammed was held without trial until Mr. Nehru freed him in January 1958. Mr. Bakshi has called Kashmir a part of the Indian Union.

By January 1958 'To Let' notices were numerous. Houseboats at Dal Gate and banghlas at Gulmarg were falling vacant. The impartial policemen had gone and the ceasefire line nearly bisected the country. And nearby, just across the eastern frontier above the mountains which shielded Nepal to some extent, the Chinese who invaded Tibet in 1950 were building roads to speed up military convoys which did not have to cross any major river and had established a large airfield at Gartok, less than 100 miles from the Kashmir frontier.

This outline shows why Kashmir will remain for sale until progressive opinion in India and Pakistan silences the more fanatical holy men and works together to ensure its safety. Unless they do so soon, they will be like the neighbours in the fable who were so busy quarrelling over their front garden fence that they did not hear the burglars who got in through the back doors and stole all their wealth. India has much to gain from a frank discussion with President Ayub.

We are all heirs of history. The outline will serve as a test-case of inheritance throughout the general area, an indication of how the heights

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and depths of human activity, fickle impulses and fanatical stresses, have influenced events in these countries. It also illustrates how intolerance and fatalism still provide fundamental weaknesses, especially when confronted by those who are not prepared to respect individual liberty.

On that visit to Kashmir I met some people who actually sought safety from persecution in its valley.
The story was told to me through Ahmad Mohammed, a Kashmiri interpreter, by Mezit Batir and Husain Khan one afternoon while we sat in brilliant sunshine outside a cluster of circular felt yurts on a corner of Khillenmarg, Meadow of Goats, three miles from and 1600 feet higher than Gulmarg. Mezit Batir and Husain Khan were Kazakhs from northern Sinkiang.

While they described their experiences we were given bowls of butter-tea by one or other of their six wives. The youngest wife was a plump-faced child of fifteen but her head was already covered by the white coif similar to those worn by Christian nuns. Children in bright red skirts and button-decorated pillbox hats played near us. A man in a white shirt and brown trousers, a red handkerchief twined gypsy-style round his head, milked a mare to prepare kumis. A young wife walked idly among distant pines, taking children for a stroll. The Kazakhs had come to Khillenmarg to get out of the summer heat of Srinagar.

I made a quantity of notes while the men talked. They set out the usual heads of events, statistics, significant words, and other leads. I have found it defeating for both those I interview and for myself to be endlessly scribbling during a meeting, particularly if the interview is conducted through a third person. They are halted in the rhythm of their memories, forced to crawl along in explanations which usually restate the well-known and leave out the unexpected detail which can illuminate the whole. A political analyst faces very different problems from those of his newspaper brothers who question politicians on a contemporary situation and hope to get an answer free from cake-walk platitudes. So that night, in my usual fashion, I expanded my notes, adding remembered
I gathered during our conversation. These expanded notes were in a briefcase stolen from me on the East Bengal Railway some months later. Therefore I have had to rely on my original notes.

An outline of events may help to fasten the Kazakhs on memory.

In 1950 Communist China embarked on its policy of neo-imperialist aggression. The control of the Nationalist Government had dwindled to the offshore islands. Chinese Communists invaded South Korea and Tibet. Peking agents blackmailed and suborned overseas Chinese. A massive build-up of regular and militia troops had been launched on a justification of having to be prepared to repel a Nationalist invasion backed by American and British troops.

Peking had also turned its attention to the control of the central Asian country of Sinkiang, a name which means 'New Dominion'. Ownership of Sinkiang had been disputed by Russia and China for a hundred years before the Chinese Kuomintang Revolution of 1911. The Czars sought to possess it, so did the Manchus. In the 18th century the Chinese slaughtered over a million Sinkiangs to assert their supremacy. This did not prevent its people from rebelling in order to gain independence. Early in the present century a British and Russian agreement recognized northern Sinkiang as a Russian sphere of influence. The agreement caused no outcry because Chinese claims ceased at the time of the Kuomintang Revolution.

After the Russian Revolution of 1919 some 50,000 White Russians fled to Asia and 5000 remained in Sinkiang. Thousands followed them during the revolts in Russian Turkestan in the 1920s and in the 1930s when Russians who refused to participate in collective farming fled to Sinkiang. Soviet Russia contented herself with absorbing into the USSR the previous Czarist provinces of central Asia. In 1924, however, some Russian agents were present in Sinkiang. A breakdown of 'friendly' relations between Moscow and Nationalist China in 1927, due to the latter's suppression of a Communist revolt in Canton, freed Russian hands and thereafter Moscow backed the Chinese Communists. The completion of the Russian Turksib Railway, linking Moscow with the Far East through Turkestan and Siberia, in the 1930s involved Russia in the Sinkiang civil war of 1931–4. From 1933 until 1939 the country was under indirect Russian rule but was stated to be independent. When Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union every Russian soldier was withdrawn from Sinkiang. Russian influence returned in 1944, hampered by the pre-
occupation of Moscow to repair the terrible devastation caused by the Germans in western Russia, and before Nationalist China could recover from her prolonged war with Japan the Chinese Communists swept to power and at once advanced into Sinkiang.

There are few reliable statistics about this vast desert country rimmed by mountains on the south and bisected by a tangle of rivers and lakes. To its west and north are the Soviet Kirgiz and Mongolian Republics. On its south was the independent country of Tibet. To the east is China: the southern province of Singhai, Kansu, the province of Inner Mongolia whose frontier lies along Russian Mongolia and stretches east of Manchuria. The Kazakh population was estimated at 6 million ten years ago. Up to 1950 approximately seventyfive per cent of its people were nominal Muslims.

The Red Chinese troops started to impose laws and regulations directly they entered independent Sinkiang in 1949. The Kazakhs, a nomadic people originated by a fusion of Turkics and Mongols, amounted to about twelve per cent of the Sinkiang population. Their leaders approached the Chinese military command with a request to guarantee certain established rights in their reputedly independent Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Their established rights included religious freedom, a right to practise tribal customs, and freedom of movement within the New Dominion. The Chinese refused to give any guarantees. They stated that Peking would decide on terms. Their commander-in-chief told Kazakh tribal leaders who met him in council at Barkol, 100 miles from the Mongolian Republic, that Peking was drawing up plans which everyone had to accept.

The tribal leaders returned to their yurt encampments. Throughout the winter of 1949 large numbers of Kazakhs were at Barkol to maintain close contact. It was a hard winter. A single snow-storm killed thousands of sheep and cattle. Other families who joined the Barkol community told of their flocks and herds being commandeered to provision Chinese troops. A number of young Kazakhis were ordered to Peking to be 'brain-washed' prior to receiving instruction as propagandists. Chinese instructors went to Kazakhstan to educate children by means which would obliterate Muslim teaching.

At the commencement of March 1950 some 16,000 Kazakhs were encamped at Barkol. With them were 60,000 sheep, 11,000 horses, 6000 head of cattle and 1500 Bactrian camels. Near the end of the month an
assembly of nearly 1000 chiefs decided to leave Sinkiang and cross Tibet to seek sanctuary in India. They established an autonomous nomad government to organize their affairs on the journey. The government elected Jahnim Khan to be its paramount chief and Osman Batir as its commander-in-chief. Osman Batir was a distant relation of one of the men who talked to me.

A Chinese attack took place two weeks later during preparations for departure. There were to be many more during the next two years but the first one caught the Kazakhs unprepared. Early in the morning their outposts sighted a strong force of Chinese troops in military trucks and on horseback advancing on Barkol. While women and children drove the sheep and cattle into the hills the men grouped hastily to give fight.

It was a bloody encounter. The Kazakhs had rifles, a few automatic rifles of Russian origin, and horses. The Chinese were armed with light field guns, machineguns, and automatic rifles. True to their conduct of warfare, the Kazakhs charged. The Chinese shot them down. When the Kazakhs retreated to re-form the Chinese advanced on foot. Grievous losses accompanied each subsequent Kazakh attack. Unaccustomed to such warfare a number of tribesmen lost heart and fled into the hills. By the end of the next day over 7000 Kazakhs lay dead near Barkol valley. Injured men were left untended by Chinese first-aid patrols.

The survivors introduced new tactics. They organized guerrilla bands to create diversions to spread out the Chinese troops and harass those who pursued the fugitive columns. A group under Jahnim Khan drew a detachment of Reds off into the northern hills. He kept them engaged for several weeks until he was captured. He was executed in Urumchi in February 1951. Osman Batir headed another group. The Chinese pursued him to Tunhwang, in Chinese Kansu, where he was captured and later executed.

Appalling hardships were experienced by Kazakhs who rode south to freedom. Their speed depended on their slowest animals. They endured frequent attack by Chinese patrols directed by spotter planes who located their yurts pitched beside a salt tso or in a mountain valley. Hide-and-seek tactics lost them valuable weeks in their first few hundred miles of flight. In a harsh summer cattle died from thirst and hundreds of sheep were lost in sandstorms. The fugitives headed south to Timurlik and settled down for the winter beside a nor, Taijinhar Lake. There they were joined by the first families of a smaller party of refugees from Urumchi led by a chief named Qali Begh. While they waited for him to join them the encampment was swept by snow- and dust-storms. In February they
learned of the capture of Osman Batir and how Chinese patrols had caused the remainder of the party under Qali Begh to retreat.

They struck camp and resumed their march south over a series of rugged las into Tibet. By then their original strength of 16,000 had dwindled to under 4000 men, women, and children. Many died on their journey across the mountain passes, victims of is, mountain sickness, a disease due to altitude. Children died of the intense cold. Of twenty-two children born to one section of the column from December until February none survived.

They reached Tibet at the end of February. A few days later as they advanced across the waste plateaux their rearguards sighted another group of people and animals following them out of the icy mountains. It proved to be Qali Begh and the remainder of his party. They spent some days together before they divided into smaller groups in an attempt to divert Chinese interest by appearing to be northern Tibetan nomads on their way south across the arid wasteland. These groups, composed of family units, were led by Qali Begh, Husain Taiji, and Sultan Sherif.

Inside Tibet they were constantly attacked by Chinese patrols. There was frequent loss of life. Cattle and sheep perished amid unfamiliar hardships. During encounters with Chinese whole families disappeared without trace, vanishing into the lonely night-shrouded high deserts. The suicide of one childless widow prompted others to follow her example; in a period of five weeks a total of nine women in one group stabbed themselves to death, too distraught and weary to continue their flight. Other women showed greater fortitude. When Chinese patrols attacked groups temporarily without men the Kazakh women sat down behind machineguns or lay on a pass with a rifle to engage the patrols until their men returned.

Their journey across Tibet, a distance of only 700 miles, took nearly four months to complete. They had to hide or make wide detours to escape from Red patrols. They sheltered in ravines and caves by day and marched at night. Along their route they received hospitality from Tibetan nomads, a number of whose friends had already fled to the Himalayan passes to seek freedom in India.

The Kazakhs headed for the Karakoram Mountains. Two years after 16,000 people prepared for flight their 354 survivors crossed into Kashmir to travel down through Ladakh to Srinagar.

They were housed in a large caravanserai on a bank of the Jhelum and given medical attention. The unfamiliar valley heat affected them and
their remaining animals adversely. They needed to settle at a higher altitude. But the *margs* were owned and their use restricted.

The Turkish Government offered to settle the Kazakhs in an area of Anatolia which had similar climatic conditions to their native country. A large party set off at the end of 1952. Others followed. When I listened to Mezit Batir and Husain Khan there were less than forty Kazakhs in Kashmir. The outside world which had read little about their epic journey had already forgotten them. The Chinese merely denied stories 'put about by a few dissentient tribesmen in the pay of imperialist countries'.

The experience of the Kazakhs provided a clear light on the struggle for power being waged between Soviet Russia and Red China in central Asia. At the very outset of Communist rule in China the Kazakh fugitives illuminated much of what has happened since 1950 in central Asia.
A week after meeting the Kazakhs I spent a memorable night at an old dak at Sonamarg, the first and I feared for me the last stage of an intended ride east through the Himalayas to Leh. Something I swallowed had gone into revolt. Its attack had become more unpleasant during the day. Then we off-saddled and I had two hours of shivers down the legs combined with sweats which convinced me that I would have to return to Srinagar. That annoyed me. Health-wise, I was usually a lucky traveller, the only major cancellation caused by a bout of recurrent influenza which had holed me up in a Pretoria hotel when I should have been trotting around Portuguese East Africa. None of us likes to lose his little record of orderly conduct.

Besides, I did not want to let down my companions. They were the son of an ex-Indian Army officer, his wife and her brother, then an undergraduate at Oxford. They had arranged every detail for our journey. The task had taken them nearly three weeks while I lolled about and enjoyed my eyes. With us were five gulis, men employed previously by the Colonel on shikars, a quantity of canned food, and two tents. Our ponies and two other men were hired on the res system, for use on one stage and replaced by others at the next halt. It was not the sort of jaunt from which anyone can bow out gracefully or continue on bravely. I was being a tiresome bore.

The hours passed in an unpleasant desperation. Around midnight, when I had become reconciled to permanent occupation of a corner of a foreign field, a bearer brought me a drink of some brew he had prepared from herbs. He promised it would do me good and claimed the recipe had been given to his grandfather by a dying holy man. For once the
thought did not alarm me. It tasted atrocious, old cat and virgin sewer. Perhaps it was. Within a quarter of an hour I was out in the night. I cannot recall ever having been quite so sick. By comparison, the after-effects of those peculiar drinks served in wartime London were mild. When, eventually, there was only myself left I crawled back to my mattress to await the end and waiting went to sleep. But in the morning, although my knees behaved like tissue-paper, I felt sufficiently improved to face the next stage of our journey. By mid-afternoon I was once again myself, whatever that meant to my companions.

We were on the route from Srinagar to Leh which Britons used to call Treaty Road. The description had a positive grandiloquence. It was a pony track interrupted by unwalled wooden plank bridges across tributaries of the Indus. Traders who used it split it up into sixteen stages or marches, long or short from either direction according to difficulty of travel for their pack animals through the mountains. Each stage was known as a dak. At its end was a resthouse whose name derived from the stages, where travellers rested at night or took shelter from blizzards. Even in good years the route was—and is—passable only from late spring until autumn, six months at most, due to the ferocity of Himalayan winters with their relentless cold, snows, gale winds laden with dust, and lengthy storms of violent intensity.

Our goal, Leh, was the chief town of Ladakh, a province which bears to Kashmir a roughly similar position to that of Wales to England and of New Mexico to the United States. It was originally a nameless territory inhabited mainly by people of Tibetan extraction, and for periods was ruled from Lhasa. Then Gulab Singh, while ruler of Jammu for the Sikhs, sent an expedition to claim it. When the mission was completed the commander-in-chief of the expedition, fired by dreams of acquiring the wealth of Lhasa, marched his troops on into the winter snows and they froze to death in the mountains. Gulab Singh claimed Ladakh and the territory was recognized as part of Kashmir in the Treaty of Amritsar by which he became the first Dogra Maharaja. In previous centuries its importance arose from it being the main western approach to Tibet. Since 1950 its importance has come from being the funnel through which Chinese troops ‘can advance from Peking to Kashmir without crossing a major river’, a geopolitical significance.

Sonamarg, the Meadow of Gold, provided almost our last geographically recognizable sight of the Kashmir of the valley. We had come up through a country of corn and rice fields backed by snow-crested mountains. Every few hundred feet up we saw more mountains crowd into
the sky. About cultivated fields was a patchwork of emerald-green meadows where cattle and calves grazed and a bottle-green black of pine and fir woods, their crests a dark feathery smudge, rivulets of chill clear snow-water trickling among roots. Sonamarg was 8000 feet above sea-level but still under the tree-line though we were conscious of being near its limit. Through glasses I saw slanted white icefields flashing below the snow-line. From sundown until well after dawn the August air in this region was bitterly cold.

A distinct change came over the next three sections of Treaty Road; that grandiose label afforded me endless amusement.

The first led south to Betaal, the next climbed northeast over Zoji La to Machoi, the third went on to Matayán. The pass of Zoji is not hazardous, merely a test of muscles and wind to get over its 11,600-foot crest. It had an Alpine charm under a cobalt sky which glowed among huge gnarled pines. Its flowers included wild iris, edelweiss, and clusters of blue poppies whose fragile petals ranged from cerulean to mazarine around each coal-black calyx. They looked oddly brave against distant ice-bridges sparkling amber and daffodil-yellow in the sunlight. Then came our descent to Machoi along a barren valley with several icefields above which fed rushing rivers that frothed like endless lace over their beds of worn stones.

From the valley down to Matayán the transformation was completed by a stony trail which soared up and down and around like a switchback, in one hour a narrow shelf beside a swirling ice stream, in the next a footpath winding like a ribbon round a mountain. It was hell for our ponies. And in the next morning light we did not see a single tree or flower, only a few tussocks of sere and stubborn grass clinging to life in handkerchiefs of poor soil with a resolution which amounted to a crusade. There was the uncanny silence of mountains. It cut off our voices and tossed them into a vacuum. The area has acquired a bad reputation for storms and we found several small wooden daks to provide shelter for travellers caught unaware. Though we had no cause to use them we understood why British officials advised the Dogras to establish and maintain them.

The next stage was Dras. It was an odd sort of place. It consisted of a circle of hamlets like a series of villages without a central market town and lay in a valley at about 9800 feet up among cornfields which provided its single crop. Like all the villages beyond it, it is completely cut off from west and east during the winter. Then, villagers told us, nothing kept their houses warm though they laid in stocks of argol, yak-dung
briquettes, throughout the spring and summer. The British added a *dak* which qualified in this setting as a Victorian villa, no less, its imposing tall chimneys and steeply angled roof rather like villas still seen in St. John's Wood in London.

There were other oddities about Dras. That was its Kashmiri name. Descendants of Tibetans called it Himbas. Its people were Baltis and Dards whose ancestors had fled from upheavals in central Asia centuries ago. Their common speech has become Tibetan and this caused me a problem.

Prior to our expedition, I had read only two articles on Ladakh. One was written by a British soldier who visited it in the 1890s, the other by an individual with my own temperament, a tramp by instinct, who reached it in 1907. The latter spent a year in the area. They agreed upon an Anglicized rendition of only two words: *la*, pass, and *chang*, beer. Thereafter they disagreed.

Though their errors were undoubtedly committed in good faith, both were unreliable. They were confronted by a language whose printed symbols bore no relation to any European alphabet or to Arabic, whose intonations were modified locally by Sanskrit and Persian stresses brought up from Srinagar, and which included words and phrase-patterns acquired from the absorbed people of migrant tribes. They reproduced the sound of these words in English and called it Tibetan. What they did was to reproduce a localized colloquial speech. Although wrong they were in distinguished company; Arabic scholars have observed even greater confusion among travellers who went to Islamic countries in the steps of Charles Doughty. A similar error would occur if an Asian visited my native county in England and reproduced our pronunciation as standard English.

Therefore in what follows I use an approximate phonetic spelling of Tibetan words. Many cannot be reproduced and a number of common Tibetan phrases defy literal translation, beginning with the most common of all, *Om mani padme hum*. I have checked it against the pronunciation of Tibetans from Lhasa whom I met subsequently in other parts of India, not because I regard Ladakh as Tibetan but because the speech and religious customs of Ladakh were of Tibetan origin.

We reached Karghil, the end of the next stage, in a violent thunderstorm. Although it was early evening the sky had grown darker than
before dawn. Vast massed clouds shut out the grey light. For some hours
the dry thin air had held echoes of distant booming like heavy artillery
fire. We had crossed a rickety suspension bridge and were climbing
round a mountain like a string of lost aimless ants when the storm rolled
over us.

Thunder roared at the mountains as if it intended to blow them down.
Reverberation walloped violently on reverberation and both drowned in
cataclysmic new explosions. Within a short time we felt concussed and
weary, noise exploding gigantically against our ears until it echoed
through our heads. Fantastic lightning burned whitely inside inky clouds
for minutes on end, stabbed huge jagged spears into valleys vanished in
swirling gloom and streaked among booming mountainsides. Everything
crashed, split, and shuddered. It was a glorious upheaval.

We were too deafened to do more than trust yelled assurances from
our qulis that Karghil was just behind the mountain. Our ponies behaved
magnificently, whickering but stoic as parade-ground horses. As we
rounded the mountain the rain hit us, a dancing whisper that became a
slashing icy deluge which drenched us to the skin, trickling down thighs
and legs into our boots. The temperature fell like a stone. The last mile
was unpleasant as ponies slithered in treacherous syrupy mud and sodden
clothes stuck to our chilled, shivering bodies. The qulis guided us by
instinct, stumbling on through alternating blackness and evilly glaring
light.

We reach the dak breathless and spent, oozing water at every move-
ment, behaving like sleepwalkers as we lit a fire and changed into dry
clothes. A hot meal put new heart into us. Although the rain soon petered
out the gigantic cacophony howled on interminably. While it raged I
first heard about ri-gompos, the standing dead, from a quli whose Tibetan
mother had told him how they loved storms of great intensity which
captured luckless travellers unprepared and enabled the ri-gompos to steal
up upon them, drink their blood and litter lonely valleys with pallid
corpses. He related stories of individuals who observed these Asian
zombies tramping towards them and contrived to escape in the nick of
time. His other stories involved ro-langs, people killed by lightning,
doomed to wander eternally in a straight line and said to be the mystical
cause of any traffic snarls on Treaty Road. He had a hillsman's flair for
his horrid stories, his sloe eyes peering nervously in the direction of the
last flash of lightning, discoloured teeth gritted on piquant details. He
told us that he did not believe in ri-gompos or ro-langs, and trembled
uneasily.
In the morning Karghil looked unbelievable. Under a halcyon golden sky everything was peaceful. Pale sunshine gleamed over neat rows of apricot trees, on stone and mud houses, which appeared unable to have withstood such an onslaught. Women were working in corn fields. Only the volume and brisk pace of the Suru River testified to the storm of the night before.

Karghil is the last predominantly Muslim centre of east Kashmir. It is also the first town inside Ladakh and the last centre west of Leh whose inhabitants are of predominantly Tibetan stock, the halfway stage between Srinagar and Leh, a collection of villages strung out alongside the Suru in a fertile valley. The narrow winding streets of the town, their two- and three-storeyed flat-roofed buildings, have a casual and unpretentious charm. Able-bodied men are engaged mainly in the caravan trade. Agricultural tasks and household routine alike are performed almost exclusively by women. By modern strategy, Karghil would provide a good dropping-zone for parachute troops.

Beyond Karghil we noted more changes in the people than in their country though it assumed features of the Tibetan form of Buddhism. These became apparent directly we advanced beyond the next dak, Mulbekh, an unimportant village at the end of a longish but easier stage headed southeast.

Our first sight of Buddhism was a large square lamasery perched on top of a hill overlooking the river and framed by long dark mountains with spiky ridges. Near to the lamasery was a vast figure of the Buddha carved out of rock, a figure cut by craftsmen influenced by florid Hindu art and lacking Buddhist purity of workmanship. Then we saw a row of badly weathered stone chortens which resembled large elaborate chess pawns, the Tibetan form of Hindu stupas, and other shrines.

A belief has evolved that chortens were designed to be the tombs of a Rimpoches, ‘Great Precious’, an ecclesiastical title comparable to Grand Prior, and of om-teses, rectors of lamaseries presided over by Rimpoches. The belief is only incidentally true. Although Buddhist teachers of exalted rank are buried under chortens, though not invariably so, their primary function is similar to that of shrines of the Virgin seen in southern Europe, a man-made symbolic representation of the fundamental features of faith.

Beyond the chortens and leading to one which stood alone was a long irregular wall. This was another religious structure, a mendang or prayer wall. Religious pilgrims and hired ‘penitents’ engaged for a day or a week by wealthy families to do penance for them circle the mendang
walls, some on foot, others dragging themselves along the ground, to
testify to their virtue. We saw mendang walls which had clusters of
human and animal skulls and roughly carved statues of the Buddha
stacked on top. On the walls were painted the Tibetan characters for
Om mani padme hum, the phrase repeated by pilgrims which caused some
foreigners to call them mani walls.

We passed more and more shortens and mendangs as we rode south-
east to climb Namika La. This was an easier climb than Zoji La though
its crest was another thousand feet up. From here there was nothing
which even remotely resembled a landscape. We stood on its top sur-
rounded by mountain crests like a huge collapsed dump of cardboard
boxes whose angles poked up at queer angles and whose ridges had been
gnawed by rats.

We descended to Bhad Khaba, another string of villages gathered
under a ruined old castle whose walls sloped inward from their base. The
next day we climbed the last and easiest pass, Fotu La, nearly thirteen and
a half thousand feet up. On its summit we rested beside some tattered
lungtas, prayer-flags, flicking on a la-tsa stone cairn on which Tibetan
travellers toss a pebble and cry out to their gods to protect them from
harm on their journey. Even at that height I appreciated far more clearly
the pain endured by Kazakhs on greater heights though here I merely
felt a bit breathless and weary.

After a short rest we descended to Lamayuru, 2000 feet below at the
end of a stony bridle path. Seen through glasses Lamayuru was a vast
quantity of old shortens over forty feet high and grouped like collections
of beehives. Behind them were rows of white-painted tarcho poles, each
with its prayer-flag painted in the five mystic colours. There were other
prayer-flags on the roofs of the houses, large whitewashed buildings with
dark roofs, built on various ground-levels and circling the base of a lime-
stone rock like a squash of melted candles. On top of the rock was a big
white lamasery with a yellow-and-red frieze. At first sight it reminded us
of a modern American hospital. Then we saw on its flat roof a golden
kenshira, the sepulchre pavilion of a Rimpoche or another high Buddhist
priest. Beyond it rose a dark humped hill formation like a vast elephant
asleep on its side and over the hill towered yellow mountains whose
descending folds were deeply cut by long striations which made it re-
semble a theatre curtain which has just come down. The mountain crests
had the now familiar chewed appearance.

That night we had genuine Tibetan butter-tea.

I confess that my palate has not been sufficiently educated to enjoy
this beverage. Its main ingredients were brick-tea served boiling hot and into which were tossed fist-sized lumps of yak butter and a cupful of soda and salt. A dusting of local herbs was added to 'bring out the flavour' we were told by the ageing English-speaking Ladakhi merchant who entertained us at his house. He showed us great hospitality and prescience: he said it might take us some time to acquire a taste for butter-tea. He was then enjoying his fourth bowl. I stuck on one.

His wife was a talkative matronly soul with a plump ivory-skinned face and expressive eyes. To welcome us she had put on some fineries. They consisted of a patruk, the Tibetan tiara, in her case a red-painted bamboo-frame studded with coral and turquoises, and a fine woollen pangden, an apron of rainbow brilliance in horizontal lines. A silver chain around her neck supported a gold kau decorated with turquoises and seed pearls. Inside the locket were supplications and invocations printed on daphne-paper. Like her husband, she wore red-and-yellow woollen boots, lhams.

A number of their friends called in at the house, one of a narrow row which looked up at the great lamasery. They were astonishingly courteous, patently eager for us to feel welcome. We were asked innumerable questions through our host about events in distant places, taringpo, faraway, a word which to them meant Srinagar, and of the clash of opinion between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Our probes to find out if their interest reached farther gained no response. Their world ended at Lhasa and Srinagar. A number of them, like the late South African Republic President Kruger and others, were Zeteticists, believers in a flat world.

An invitation from the lamasery delayed our departure the next day. Only the men were invited. It was a large dark building whose smell combined the dank dust of centuries with that from butter-lamps glistening in tiny recesses of innumerable chapels and echoing corridors. In one chapel stood a ten-foot-high image of Chenrezi, believed to be reincarnated in every Dalai Lama, a figure with a dozen heads growing out of each other and scores of hands in symbolic positions, framed by a large circular plaque whose divisions depicted the Buddhist Wheel of Life.

It would be pointless to attempt to provide a description of Tibetan Buddhism. A summary of the historical evolution of Tibetan Buddhism will suffice. You will recall how Christianity arose in the Holy Land,
Delhi—familiar methods in a nearby village

Pusa—work at the Agricultural Research Institute
Durgapur—homes of steel-factory workers

Perambur—a factory workshop
how its authority migrated to Rome where later spiritual leaders found their claim of infallibility on matters of faith first denied by priests in Constantinople who broke away to form the Orthodox or Greek Church and later by other clergy in Bohemia, Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere. Buddhism followed a somewhat similar pattern.

It originated in Nepal when the childless Queen Maya at the age of forty-five miraculously conceived a child who was a god who wished to be reincarnated as a human being. He was born as Siddhartha and lived an ordinary life until he withdrew from worldly pleasures to become a mendicant mystic, and, amid poverty and temptation, became Gautama Buddha, the Enlightened One, who taught a doctrine of agnostic renunciation. He was nearly eighty when he died in 487 B.C. Some authorities affirm that his teaching was first taken to Tibet by monks sent by King Asoka, a convert to Buddhism. On the death of Asoka Buddhism underwent changes and divided into two forms of teaching. One remained true to the teaching of the Buddha, the Hinayana school. The other, the Mahayana, added belief in magic and universal salvation to its doctrine. During the 6th and 7th Christian centuries a new interpretation of Buddhism evolved in the Mahayana school and became the Vajrayana school, the Buddhism of Tibet.

It is a pantheistic monism—a doctrine which believes its innumerable gods and all forms of creation to be part of a single Being. By its teaching the god Chenrezi, known in earlier Hindu religion as Avalokitesvara (a name I cannot pronounce), is continuously reincarnated in a child who, discovered by divination, becomes the Dalai Lama. But although the Dalai Lama is revered as the fleshly envelope of Chenrezi and earthly leader of the faith, he is regarded as spiritually inferior to another child, similarly discovered by divination, the fleshly envelope of the god Oupame, known in Hindu religion as Amitabha, who existed before Chenrezi, the latter being only a subsequent emanation of Oupame. The spiritually superior Oupame resides in those recognized as the Panchen Lama. Followers of the Panchen Lama have intrigued, plotted, and rebelled, in attempts to have him recognized as earthly leader of the faith. Therein was the fundamental division of Tibetan Buddhism, a fact utilized by Red China in its intention to destroy Buddhism.

At the time of writing the Dalai Lama is again a fugitive in India and the Panchen Lama and his advisers at his seat at Shigatse are the puppets of Peking. If anything happened between Shigatse and Peking to cause Oupame to quit his present fleshly envelope, he would be rediscovered through divination in another small boy. A small boy on a throne. A
child god-king guided by old men trapped in religious disputation. Only the substitution of another religion lends an air of novelty.

The next stage of our journey took us to Khalatsi on the bank of the Indus.

We encountered the hardest country on our two-day hike from Khalatsi to Nimmu. Treaty Road unravelled as a narrow, stony bridle path circling high up among mountains on one side of a gorge cut by the Indus. In places it subsided under our ponies' hooves. We rode on into an intensely hot, barren country where every sound was muted and moved through a silence bleak and eerie as a dead world. Heat perished every goodness in the thin rarefied air. The height and clarity made every far thing appear close, even talus spills on mountains seventy miles away, cascades of huge rocks and boulders fallen like cake-crumbs in aeons before the little history of man began and still falling as our speck of terrestrial dough cools off. These gaudy mountains reminded me of the Malutis of Basotholand seen from the veld, looming purple and orange, ochre tinged with scarlet and moulded by iron-blue shadow, a glorious palette-knife smear under a drift of dissolving feathery cloud.

As daylight faded we came on a dusty *dak* in a corner of a lonely desert of mountains. The silence intensified. Above the thickening land gloom a horizontal ray from a hidden sun burnished rock-faces to a blinding copper sheen which dimmed in crimson like smoking blood. Briefly a solitary spur stood up sharp-edged against the afterglow. Then night closed down, brooding, primaeval, stirring queer tensions in the mind. It was not a locality for those alarmed by solitude, a hilly wilderness, haunting and haunted. When I woke in the night an abysmal silence ached on my searching ears.

On the second afternoon we rested in shade cast by a lamasery wall. While we sprawled out, two *chelas*, boy novices, brought us a gift of apricots and vegetables, pumpkins, carrots, tomatoes, and onions. Neither *chela* spoke English. They turned prayer-wheels in their hands, clucked and giggled, thin and sadly odorous boys in grubby gowns. Across Treaty Road four women toiled in a sunbaked field; sweat shone on their broad faces and trickled down their naked dirty breasts. A party of beaming horsemen greeted us as they rode past towards Khalatsi. They wore pointed orange-red hats like pantomime jesters' caps with sheepskin flaps curled up above their ears; ragged knee-length maroon or dark blue *shubas*, a gown like a bath-robe, secured round the waist by a strip
of cloth; and dirty knee-high leather boots into which they had stuffed their trousers. Two boys led past some gyags, yaks, and a few dzos, the cross of an ox and a yak. We heard no noise of cars or whine of planes. But prayer-wheels clicked, tiny bells tinkled on the lamasery roof, and inside the building someone started to strike a gong. The gong-beats were accompanied by a high screeching wail which I thought might be a chela crying an invocation. I learned subsequently that it came from a Tibetan trumpet with a high reputation for purity as it was made from the thighbone of a virgin, usually a girl who died at the age of thirteen or fourteen.

Two days later, in the afternoon, having ridden in sight of the snow-crests of the Karakorum Range for some hours, we came in sight of Leh. In front of it were wheat and barley fields, pastures, a row of mendong walls hundreds of feet long, old and recent chortens, listlessly drooping prayer-flags bleached by sun and rain since they were new for the new year celebrations in March.

The journey of some 260 miles had taken us eighteen days. We could have done it in an hour by air. If there had been an airstrip at Leh.

Once again I failed to obtain reliable statistics. This time their absence is understandable. The mountainous nature of Ladakh has been responsible for wild guesses at its geographical extent: they range from 24,000 to 47,000 square miles. Scarcely any area is under 8000 feet above sea-level. Most of its people live at an altitude of from 12,000 to 14,000 feet. The size of its population has been estimated variously at from 135,000 to 240,000 people, an unknown quantity living in villages or hamlets remote from Treaty Road, particularly in the southern region. These people are often nomadic and are called Shambas. They are regarded as inferior to Ladakhis and do not practise conventional Buddhism. Approximately 4000 people live in Leh.

Leh was the former capital of Ladakh, the old centre for trade between central and southwest Asia, combined with Indian trade which came up from Amritsar through Mandi and Kyelang and crossed the Zaskar Mountains.

It was most picturesque. We remarked on its likeness to Marrakesh or a larger village on one of the Greek islands. Rock hillsides formed
part of the town. Distant ranges of barren snow-capped mountains beyond were out of sight. Colour and architecture heightened its similarity to Marrakesh, everything dominated by a pale stone-grey which in sunlight passed for white, the squat hillsides, square flat-topped white-washed houses, and the huge gompa, lamasery, with its inward-slanted walls rising above the town from the hillside on which it was built. There were poplars in the main street, the trade mart.

The entrances to shops and booths were covered by sack-coloured sun-blinds supported on poles. The houses had bright brown doorways and neat window-frames of upper storeys were painted a reddish brown or grass-green. Some had window-boxes, an idea culled from a few Britons who used to live there. Above each house a row of prayer-flags flapped like washing. Due to uneven ground some houses rose up behind others in irregular tiers like villas. High up, the white gompa, its widest windows up in the seventh and eighth storeys, could have been mistaken for a recently built sanatorium. Beside it was a tall red-painted chorten, a good sixty feet high.

The men of Leh could follow one of three forms of occupation. They could become lamas if their parents handed them over during childhood, spend their active years on caravans which trade over the mountains, or become farmers if circumstances governing the available amount of fertile land permitted them to follow this inclination. The wealthier farmers inherited their property or were ponpos, civic officials retired from office. We met one who had returned to Leh after thirty years of office in Tibet, enjoying his retirement because Ladakh was not part of Tibet. He spoke a halting English learned in Lhasa twenty-five years before from a member of the British Legation.

Marriage was very important to men who wished to become farmers near Leh.

Every kind of marriage desired could be enjoyed in Ladakh. At one end of the scale were transient liaisons formed by local girls and traders who visited the country on their journeys, few but official covertures. At the other end of the scale were men and women who discovered sober monogamy an adequately hazardous adventure. They were even fewer. Between the extremes was polyandry.

The articles I read earlier were somewhat adrift in their cautious references to Ladakhi sociosexual patterns. They implied that population was deliberately restricted because the country could not sustain an increase, which is true, but in reaching that conclusion they totally disregarded a number of demographic factors. Meat was always scarce and
expensive, due to lack of adequate pasturage. It seldom appeared in an average diet. Crops and vegetables were sold to passing caravans and stored for long months of winter isolation. Consequently, the diet sustained rather than invigorated. For various reasons the birthrate was low. Lack of hygiene caused a high infant mortality; Ladakhis must be amongst the dirtiest people in the world. Climatic conditions also affected the population. The Army officer’s article stated correctly that polygamy was forbidden but I heard of village farmers who followed Tibetan custom by acquiring a younger second wife when their first grew too old to continue her farm work. They too were called ‘just good friends’.

The officer held an intention to limit the population responsible for polyandry, arguing that in a country where women were numerically superior it restricted the birthrate by focusing the sexual needs of several men on one woman. This tolerant view of an unfamiliar sociosexual pattern ignored several demographic factors. Over half of the Ladakh male population become continent lamas; people whom I questioned on the point estimated that from fiftyfive to sixty youths in every hundred entered the gompas, a somewhat smaller percentage than in Tibet. Adventurous young women married Tibetan traders and left the country. Women who became shamos, nuns, could marry lamas permitted wedlock and they reared their children in distant gompas.

In fact, polyandry in Ladakh was always a hard-headed insurance policy. If the eldest child was a daughter—or a first-born son entered a gompa and the next child was a girl—she was recognized as the family mapha, heiress. Parents believed their mapha better insured by having several husbands for her first choice might fail as husband, counsellor, estate manager, or be a rogue, a drunkard, brutal, untrustworthy, or a potential wife-killer. Worst of all, he might be impotent.

Polyandry extends throughout the social system. Theoretically, a woman’s additional husbands should be blood-brothers of the first. This was deemed likely to prevent jealousy because the family fortune passed to their children, the first husband being accepted as father although she might prefer another as her lover.

It provided several interesting households. We were told of a mapha

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1 Basically, this attitude is similar to that in Sweden where a recent census showed half the brides were pregnant on their wedding-day, due to concern to prove both parties fertile before marriage. It recalls how Lady Anne Barnard noted in late 18th-century Cape Town that many Afrikaner brides ‘generally lay in with fine boys about two months after marriage’ and, when she asked if this was too soon, an Afrikaner told her: ‘Not at all, madam. They come at exactly the proper time, but the marriages took place a little late.’
whose brotherless husband, having lost his own wealth through carelessness, accepted as 'brother' a total stranger because his wife feared she would be murdered for her money. One woman married three brothers, their cousin, and his adopted son, before she achieved motherhood. Another who enjoyed having children had the unusually high number of eight, their fathers being three brothers she married directly each attained manhood. Extra husbands had to be younger than the first. No mapha quibbled over this restriction. She married an elder brother and from close quarters inveigled others who attracted her fancy.

In another instance a wife had divorced the brother of her dead first husband by cutting one of her hairs tied round one of the dead man's fingers, a normal custom where a lesser husband failed a woman as lover or companion. We met this woman at a party given for us, a broad-faced lively soul in middleage, stout and cheerful, a glint in her sloe-black eyes, turquoises and coral on her tipsy-tilted patruk, pearls round her plump neck. She had two new husbands in tow. I placed them at about twenty-two and seventeen. We were told later that the youth was indeed a sleeping partner, brought in by the older man. His motive was obvious; if their wife, a woman who enjoyed ruling the roost, tired of him she might be agreeably surprised by the consolation she could seek from his brother and he would remain secure. The insurance worked both ways. Meanwhile, she did not attempt to conceal her delight in him.

It was by these means that Ladakhis maintained their population, for the constant withdrawal of over half the youths to the gompas and other restrictions put an increased value on male virility. Without these forms of assurance the Ladakhis could be extinct in less than a hundred years. Their conditions prevent a normal replacement rate. They have to ensure fertility or die out.

Their predominantly peasant character adapted them to this situation. They are descended from Mongolians mixed with other Asian nomads. They have broad faces, short stubby noses with wide nostrils, broad-lipped mouths, and the Mongoloid eyefold. They incline to be below average European height, stocky, and have shortish legs. Men and women alike have only one similarity to the people of Shangri-La in James Hilton's novel The Lost Horizon: none who descend from their lofty homeland to under 6000 feet live long.

Physiologically they age quickly. Men engaged on the caravan trails grow older more rapidly than those who remain among their mountains, evidently due to varied climatic stresses on lungs and heart. They have as much claim on masculine beauty as myself. Older men still wear the
queue and braid it with black wool. Others shave their heads. Young women retain their healthy good looks until middleage. They are vivacious, exuberant, and simple, plagued by superstition. *Maphas* imported supplies of cosmetic from India to aid the juice of a local berry which has powerful astringent qualities. I tried it after shaving one morning. For the rest of the day the skin of my face felt as tight as a whipcord. Most Ladakhi women reach their menopause in their middle thirties.

The extreme hospitality shown by men and women alike had a childlike quality in its desire for us to feel welcome.

The higher hierarchy of lamas was a race apart. Most of them were Tibetans, appointed by the Church. I met two Khambas, ‘men of the east’ from the Tibet–China frontier region. They were taller, thinner, and had ascetic features.

At the heart of Ladakh society is one great exploitable weakness. The Church is the greatest single landowner. This has made it the richest member of the community.

An earlier book of mine gained criticism in some quarters because I gave my opinion in connexion with another Church that such a situation can be exploited by Communism until it threatens the life and faith of the Church. Surely such an opinion, concerned with treasures on earth, does not question the tenets of faith? However, as I suspect that there are few British Vajrayana Buddhists, I may not be mistaken by making the same observation about the Church in Ladakh. In this age it would be wisest for all religions to forgo their treasures. If they do not they will soon find the right to individual worship denied to all.

The Colonel’s son accompanied me and an interpreter on a visit to Hemis gompa, some twentyfive miles from Leh. Some years ago I wrote an outline of English theatrical history and in it described the religious mystery plays, the Chester and York and Wakefield Cycles, based on the Old and New Testaments, performed in the 13th and 14th centuries from Christmas until Easter. Although we were too late to see their annual Buddhist equivalent at Hemis I had been told we could see the costumes and musical instruments used by lamas who performed them.

We reached Hemis in late afternoon. Its gompa was like another sanatorium, no, a spa, a collection of three- and four-storeyed buildings
on a high mountain spur. Its whitewashed walls had the familiar inward tilt from the base to the top. Their flat beige-coloured roofs were decorated by prayer-wheels turning in the wind. Upper storeys, used as living-quarters by higher lamas, were the only ones with wide windows. They overlooked poplar-lined flower gardens and a secluded valley off the main caravan routes. It is said that when the troops of Gulab Singh invaded Ladakh the treasures of other lamaseries were successfully hidden in Hemis gompa.

We were made welcome by the om-tse, a plump short man with a dark moustache and fringe beard, his right arm bare from the folds of a vast crimson and dirty robe. He fingered a threngwa, a rosary, while he talked to us. Prayer-wheels clicked in the dirty hands of his lamas. He regretted that indisposition prevented us from receiving the blessing of the Rimpoche. The Rimpoche was thirteen years old. We were assured that we were welcome and given a cell to ourselves. It smelled of dirt and sour butter. Later we dined with lamas and gurus, teachers, in a long common hall. Our meal consisted of butter-tea and tsampa, a dish of roasted barley flour which we mixed into a sort of porridge by adding tea and butter to suit our palate. Mixing was done by the fingers. There was no meat; these lamas are religious vegetarians. Vegetables included carrots, turnips, and a sort of leek. Our meal ended with fruit. The lamas regretted that we had missed their annual Dance of the Devils. Illumination in the hall was provided by scores of butter-lamps. They threw tossing distorted shadows about the hall and gave off an aroma which confirmed my opinion of better uses for butter.

When the meal concluded we were taken down to an underground hall and shown some treasures. The room smelled of stale incense, sweat, yak butter, and dirt. The treasure was a fantastically heterogeneous collection, totally unlike the £70,000 of diamonds which I had juggled unprofitably in my hands at Kimberley. These treasures were actionable, not marketable. On every side were stone or gold statues of the Buddha, ancient Chinese drawings worth a fortune and inferior Japanese kake-monos. Among other gifts were gold-embroidered velvets from Tibet, an old German iron clock, carved figures from India, papier-mâché work from Srinagar, a gold silk parasol, femur trumpets, carved ivory from Burma, a dridug, sacred knife, gold ornaments bequeathed by wealthy families hopeful of an auspicious reincarnation, a beautifully carved alabaster pagoda, gold chalices, and a fearful Tibetan silk drawing of enamoured skeletons in a sadly frenetic embrace. The collection, we were told, was only a small part of the treasure.
Too early next morning we attended puja. This was celebrated by several hundred crimson-clad lamas in an atmosphere of butter and incense. Neither of us understood the service. It consisted of beating gongs and blowing virgin trumpets while lamas chanted mantras from heavy paper manuscripts bound in scarlet silk. When a mantra concluded shaven-headed novices who had passed beyond the chela stage gave each lama a ladle of butter-tea which was consumed while gongs boomed and rattles clicked; the rattles were made from human vertebrae.

Later in the morning we saw the Devil Dance costumes. They were magnificent, barbaric and primitive, beautifully made of brilliant red and blue and yellow silk, each embroidered with gold or silver brocade. Large silk aprons were worn over them. Each had a symbolic skull sewn onto its breast.

The most noticeable feature of each costume was a large mask which completely covered the head. Each had big bulbous cheeks painted crimson or gold or yellow, blubbery lips drawn in a vast snarl to reveal pointed fangs. Each staring eyeball was a foot long, glaring dementedly above the snarl. Skull symbols decorated the forehead between short horns. Those masks were worn by devils. Their opponents, forces of good, wore large circular blue velvet hats lined with red silk and on their crowns were twisted bright silk scarves, large black pompoms, and two-foot-high gold-painted religious ornaments. Each ornament had another skull motif to press home the main argument.

I regretted having missed the two-day-long Devil Dance. It is a mystery and a morality play, consisting of a contest between Good and Evil worked out in free ballet to allow dancers to improvise their skirmishes and leaps until temporarily exhausted, and concluding in a victorious charge by Good which puts Evil to flight for another year. I thought that in this mountainous setting it must provide a remarkable spectacle. We were told that some people who beheld it had been so affected by a realization of their own wickedness that they dropped dead while it was in progress.¹

¹ Since the foregoing was written Chinese troops have occupied an area of Ladakh and Peking has demanded a revision of the frontier which would take Chinese military bases west of the Karakorum Range. This development was revealed when Chinese soldiers slew an Indian policeman and took others prisoner in the area in October 1959. Subsequently it became known that Chinese troops had occupied the Aksai Chin salient, estimated at approximately 40,000 square miles in north-eastern Ladakh, and built roads and airfields in the area. The Chinese claim was discussed in Delhi during April 1960 by Mr. Nehru and Mr. Chou En-lai, the Chinese Prime Minister. The invasion and the subsequent discussion appeared to
Near Fota La on our return journey to Srinagar we saw two snow leopards running down a hillside. They were lovely cats, elegant and graceful as they bounded away out of our sight behind a mass of scree.

Their numbers have increased since no Army officers go on shikar in the hills, an official of the Tourist Reception Centre told me on my later visit to Kashmir. Their increase has caused a considerable mortality among ibex, shapu, and other antelope. Other game suffered in recent years. Indian officers had a shikar heyday before their own HQ placed certain areas out of bounds to military personnel. As a result, Tibetan geese, duck, snipe, and teal have disappeared entirely from some regions.

This news annoyed Kamla considerably. Among other things she was against every form of blood sport. On her brother’s houseboat she announced her disgust to an Indian who had been on a shoot which had killed a barasingh, a Kashmir stag. She had a point there. Most of the 2300 barasingh alive in 1947 were in Kashmir. According to the TRC official there were less than 500 there in 1959.

On my last afternoon we went by shikara to Nishat bagh, one of the loveliest Mogul Gardens. We wandered among scented purple lilacs and watched naked boys prancing round the glittering iridescence of a cluster of twenty-odd fountains. Their delighted shrieks faded in the coppery sunlight as we climbed past green lawns and the uninspired wooden pavilion into an aqueous dusk of massive chinars on the zenana terrace. We had it to ourselves. Scarlet-breasted minavets fluttered among the branches.

‘Are you going to Nepal?’ Kamla asked.
‘Not this time,’ I replied. ‘Only Calcutta.’
She divined my thoughts unerringly. ‘You’d like to go there again, wouldn’t you, Johnny?’
‘Yes, I would.’
After a pause she said: ‘I’ll go there one day. You’re lucky.’

influence Nehru, who told Lok Sabha, the Indian House of the People, on 26 April that India maintained that Chinese troops had entered Indian territory only in recent years and had not occupied the Aksai Chin salient for 200 years as Peking now claimed. On the following day, at the opening of the National Defence College, Nehru said India faced ‘an entirely new danger’ greater than any since Independence and must base her defence strategy on realistic and not idealistic grounds, in order to be ready for emergencies. During a visit to Leh, on 4 July 1960, Nehru said that adequate arrangements had been made to meet new dangers from across the northern frontier and added: ‘We are determined to defend our country with all our might. New dangers do not frighten us. On the contrary, they give us further strength and courage.’
NEPAL

14

Tigers South, Tiger North

I first saw Nepal through one of its side doors shortly before King Mahendra was crowned. My journey was fortuitous. Over an excellent dinner at the Imperial in Delhi an old friend, Tom Murray, had outlined the plight of a party of naturalists already assembled for an expedition into West Nepal and whose writer had been halted by appendicitis in Karachi. Tom had known the leader, Douglas Roberts, during the last war. He asked if I could and would act as stand-in. Everything was laid on, he assured me. The casualty in Karachi was an ornithologist but Roberts did not expect a miraculous expert replacement, only someone able to keep worklogs up-to-date and to cook if necessary.

A prospect of unfamiliar corners always attracted me more than did well-scuffed miles. After all, we can retreat to foreign colony settlements on the French Riviera when we are so tired of life that the wasp-dance may provide an amusing substitute. Dazzled, I completed formalities and flew to Lucknow.

Lucknow was an interesting architectural medley even before its relief a hundred years ago by one of Britain’s most Christian and luckless soldiers, General Havelock. In this respect it had not altered. Buildings
alongside the Gumti ranged from the progressive, a large gilded parasol glinting above a palace converted into a pharmaceutical research establishment, to the unexpected, a castle which from a distance might have been taken for a château strayed from the Loire valley. In the town I bought notebooks and pencils, received a peculiar hair-cut from a nai whose mind was on other things, and hastened to the station.

It was a bedlam etched in sweat. Beggars were everywhere, maimed, grotesque, patchworked in sores. Children swarmed to call me sahib babuji, Mr. little father, in whined appeals for pice. Cow-dung marks singled out Shivite holy men, skeletal as matchsticks, dirty loincloths slipping down their starved hips. Tea and water vendors in dhotis shrieked frenziedly. Women in pastel-coloured saris eddied through the heat like a sieved rainbow. Businessmen bared their decayed teeth to offer whores: 'Pretty bibi round corner, sahib, plenty time.' The noise ached like a thousand radios at full retch.

I clambered onto a train as crowded as a football cup special. People swapped family histories, diseases, political views. They drank chai and munched pakauras, vegetarian pasties, snored and wept for those left behind. None of the fans worked. I tried to read a biography of Leonardo da Vinci but the light trembled like a diastolic murmur. It was easier to glance down curt newspaper adverts inserted by fathers offering their daughters for matrimony. My nearest companion, a Lucknow babu, gave me his life story and I sentimentalized over mine.

When I descended into a pink early morning haze at my destination my nerves had those broken spring vibrations which twang in frail European travellers on Indian railways. A crowd of beggars and noise did not gentle my condition. I was disorientated, unable to account for the ridiculous impulse which prompted me to undertake such a journey.

'You're Gibbs,' a voice stated behind me and before I could express doubt it went on: 'Did you have a good journey? I'm Roberts. Where did you get the Palais de Dance hair-do?'

'Tom Murray said I would like you,' I recalled unhopefully.

Douglas Roberts equalled my height of six feet and weighed another three stone. In the stinging early pink flush of Kauriala Ghat his black hair was like a crooner's dream of success in the teleocracy. He wore an old bush shirt, faded dust-coloured trousers, and an expression of supreme confidence which alarmed me. He had a quality reminiscent of an old friend, Roger Courtney. To his eternal credit he divined my immediate needs unerringly: I was taken off to be given strong coffee and water as
cool as climatic conditions allowed. Over more coffee I met members of his team: Michael Bell, stocky, sandy-haired, and Norman Archer, thin and tall and unfailingly methodical. Two more had gone ahead to prepare our first main camp.

For the rest of the day I was put in the picture. It explained why Roberts appeared so confident. There was no road, not even a Treaty Road, no dak and no towns, only a scatter of villages linked by tracks restricted to hill paths and river courses which flowed into the Kahnali. There were tigers. The terrain made a use of horses impracticable but bullock carts would carry us to where the other members of the team were waiting. Maps were unreliable.

I had got what I asked for, the unscuffed road.

Our march started soon after dawn the next day. There was an unusual combination of a metallic pink ground haze and a sky like diaphanous blue gauze. Due to Douglas Roberts being a good organizer no late hitch delayed our departure. A crowd gathered to see us leave and for the first mile a straggle of chattering bronze-skinned children accompanied us, falling away like gulls deserting a ship they had followed out of port.

But no, it was not really a march. It was a loiter. Our bullocks shared the inability of their kind to work up anything even remotely approaching a steady pace. They dawdled, they crept, they hung their stupid heads in massive coyness, they thought their bullocky thoughts. I suffered a slow heavy lurch over rough ground for a couple of miles and then got out to avoid cart-sickness. It proved less arduous to walk like our Indian quilis. Douglas and I went ahead together, talking about places and people. Two hours later he stopped abruptly.

‘What happened to those infernal bullocks?’ he asked.

We saw them mooching along a good two miles in our rear.

They slowed us to a crawl. Nothing induced them to hurry; I have never understood how people persuaded bullocks to race, a spectacle shown to me by Indonesian friends on Madura. It took us four exasperated days to reach the camp set up at Tikapur by other members of the team: John King, dark, eager, energetic in every carolling hour, at twentyseven the ‘child’ of the party, and David Heath, quiet and tidy, given to reciting verse on duty-turns as cook. King could scarcely wait to usher us into a tent to admire his rats and mice.

‘Aren’t they beautiful?’ he asked proudly.
'Fine specimens,' Douglas told him. 'I caught them yesterday and today,' King said. 'The place is full of them.'

My pen started to earn my keep the next morning. It did not take long to discover why the southern frontier region of Nepal held as much fascination for naturalists as snow peaks across its northern frontier held for mountaineers. The southern Terai, stretching east above the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to West Bengal, is an area of increasing cultivation, mainly ground reclaimed from malarial swamp, jungle, and forest, and it and hills immediately behind, part of the Siwalik Range, have been roamed for centuries by tigers and leopards, rhinos and elephants, *gaurs*, wild buffalo, varieties of wolf and deer. Until recently the rulers of Nepal refused permission for naturalists to explore even this lowland fringe, an attitude attributable to the common Asian dislike of having foreigners tramp round their countries on mysterious expeditions but not directed exclusively at Europeans. This uneasiness caused naturalists to lose knowledge of lesser animals and birds which have died out.

In recent years the Nepalis have tended to be less suspicious of some foreigners. Their changed outlook has come too late to save other animals from extinction within the foreseeable future. White hunters played no part in this development. Only a handful of them, mostly military men, received permission to go on *shikar* and their shoot was usually restricted to a *machan* where they waited for a tiger preying on cattle in the neighbourhood. The main cause of dwindling wild life was an increase in the human population which enforced reclamation of land to increase grain crops and terraced lower hills with *padi* fields, a process which pushed animal life back into a narrow belt bordered by higher hills where it cannot survive, near hill ranges whose advanced erosion is extended every year by monsoon which silts up the Sehti, Kahnali, and Sahju rivers with millions of tons of soil, the more northerly formations affected by storms which swirl over the 'Abode of Snows', Himalaya. Unlike Africa, where white hunters totally destroyed veld quaggas in the last century, annihilated hippo over large areas of Portuguese East, and drove the lion into Tanganyika, the wild beasts of Nepal have no defence in depth. They kill each other as they are concentrated into a smaller area. Species of deer, *gaur*, and leopards have already disappeared.

At present Nepal is an ornithologist's paradise. In the middle of the
19th century it contained more than five hundred and sixty species of birds. The work of identification and classification was done by a Briton, Sir Brian Hodgson, an official of the East India Company, who was forced by lung trouble to leave the insufferable humidity of Calcutta and became Resident at the Nepal Court in 1833, a position he fulfilled so effectively that he is scarcely mentioned in historical works. Hodgson has his monument in the patient compilation of information on birds and wild animals undertaken in his spare time, the only work of its kind and the basis of naturalist knowledge of Nepal and east India.

Almost every day Douglas and David Heath brought in new species of birds taken in their nets. Some were familiar: sparrows, rufus finches, bulbuls, minavets, yellow-billed magpies, malachite and hooded kingfishers. A greater number were completely unknown to me: lammergeiers, black-headed sibias, elegantly red-tailed blue magpies, drongos, black Tibetan ravens, red and grey shrikes—lovely birds—spotted forktails, and many more.

My companions were unfailingly generous in overlooking my innumerable shortcomings and never lost patience though my questions must have irritated them unbearably.

On our advance up dry river valleys, over vividly coloured rhododendron and pine hills, I had opportunities to hunt my own quarry. Men and women were more numerous than I had expected. In tracking them down I received invaluable assistance from Zendiah, our head quli, an Indian Dotial, a smiling sprightly man unable to read or write the five languages he spoke fluently. Zendiah was an unconscious disciple of Pierre Charron in his belief that la vraie science et le vrai etude de l'homme c'est l'homme. He only let me down once.

The West Nepalis were among the most fascinating people I had met. Outwardly, there was nothing remarkable about their life. They were tribespeople of Indo-Tibetan stock, predominantly Dotials and Dhulials, a sprinkling of Magars in the south and Gurungs in the north, a recent fusion with Gurkhas in eastern valleys. The name 'Nepali' meant little to them, due to geographical factors having kept them remote from their capitals in previous centuries. A hard life among their crowding hills caused them to be physically lean and below average European height. Their skin tended to lighten as we went north. In most villages there was ninetyeight per cent illiteracy. They were predominantly agricultural, producing rice, corn and maize, fruits and vegetables,
particularly marrows and cucumbers. Their livestock depended on geographical factors, some cattle and buffalo, small flocks of sheep and goats in hill villages. Industry was limited to home artisans who carved wood into bowls and jars. One or two villages, such as Baitadi, close to the western frontier with India, had families engaged on the manufacture of *kukris*, the deadly knives which were the sole weapon of earlier ages. The only homogeneous link was the primitive agriculture enforced by local conditions.

What made West Nepalis unusual was their origin. They descended from survivors of elaborate social systems menaced by powerful enemies, refugees who having drifted to these hills for sanctuary never rejoined those they had left and abandoned their larger vision to ensure tribal unity. To use a contemporary term, they were people on the beach. None of their religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, animism—retained its complex structure. Each had weakened to include heterodox elements to ease fusion with other migrants.

On our march north to a pepper-pot sprinkle of villages over hills around Retcha we observed innovations made to increase a chance of survival for these involuntary tribes. They had to be observed because illiteracy forced local history to depend on memory.

One evidence of social transformation came when Zendiah took Douglas and me to meet the headman of Baiala, a village in the Khuni Hills. The headman's bungalow had dark solid mud walls under its overhung buff-gold thatch roof. During our conversation the headman's wife brought us tea and fruit. She was a grandmother at twenty-eight, a woman whose bronze skin and regularity of bone structure were noticeably Indian, a thick twisted hank of sleek blue-black hair rising off the nape of her thin neck. A scarlet cotton blouse similar to a Malay *baju* covered her heavy soft breasts; a pink-patterned red dress fastened above the iliac crests of her narrow pelvic girdle reached to her knees. Blue tattoo marks misted her strong legs. Her ornaments included big shiny yellow metal ear-rings, red wooden bead necklaces, elbow and wrist bangles, and rings on the large toes of her flat but shapely feet. She had an air of hauteur and her delicate lips never lost their expression of gentle sadness. Directly she and her married daughter of fifteen had attended to our needs they withdrew to have their refreshment in another room. As the youngest child was not less than three years old, my curiosity was not satisfied until I learned that local women breast-fed their children for four or five years, evidence of famine in previous centuries.

The headman showed his wife considerable respect. Through
questions which Zendiah put on my behalf we learned that Baiala women ate alone because they were regarded as superior to men. Although they did not exercise a matriarchal control over local affairs their opinion was sought before their husbands took a decision. Further questions produced the information that this village like others nearby came into existence when Hindu women accompanied by their children and bodyguards of menservants fled north from Muslim invaders to remain in hiding until Islam receded or their husbands joined them. Neither event happened. As time passed the women took their servants as lovers and bore them children but could not marry them because Hinduism forbade the remarriage of women. The caste system also prevented marriage between those from different layers of society, but this custom died out to ensure survival by allowing refugee children to marry bastards born in exile. What remained was the menservants’ respect for women as superior beings. Local conditions produced another laudable development. No Baiala girl baby had ever been suffocated at birth, the headman told us proudly. There was justification for his pride; infanticide, particularly of girls, was common among Hindus. In Baiala they were necessary to ensure a normal replacement level. He told us of Gurkha and Newari men in central Nepal who came to find a wife in the area. Baiala girls were famous for their wisdom and domesticity and beauty.

Humanity has an innate commonsense which prompts it to discard obsolescent rules. Quixotically, when it does decide they are no longer valid it invents hypocritical dodges, like salt over the shoulder, to prevent giving offence to watchful gods. So with one fundamental of Hinduism among a tribe near Baiala where I saw an eleven-year-old girl married to a pear. In earlier centuries it became a practice for little girls to marry a fruit, wheat or rice in a bad fruit year, to spare them from sati or widowhood, a dodge unattributable to a sudden rush of humanity to the heart. It merely meant that if their subsequent male partners died young, a frequent occurrence, they did not rank as widows and consequently were available to replenish their tribe by a method guaranteed not to offend their gods, manifestations of whom existed in fruit and crops.

The bride was a poppet, a child whose willowy youthfulness was enhanced by an electric-green silk dress tight over her small high breasts and an incongruously weighty collar of silver coins, wedding gifts from her beaming father. Bless her heart, the ceremony impressed her vastly. Under a light blue silk head-cloth her enormous doe eyes remained steadfastly sombre. Her impassive modesty never faltered. As darkness
reduced the hills she trotted off to eat her husband in solitary consum-
mation of their union, a lonely if proud little figure silhouetted against
the shining liquid sky before she vanished in indigo shadows mantling
her home. Tomorrow night she would romp with her younger sister and
brother, not as unselfconsciously as hitherto, and then wait for a boy
to deputize for the pear by carrying her away in a rough litter. She would
then be a mature woman of fourteen.

As we advanced north the crowding hills rose higher. The crimson
and purple rhododendron blooms had the clarity of fine enamel but none
possessed the cool white grace of Mrs. Sappho or glowing heat of Ivery's
Scarlet under pines in my own garden. Star-bursts of yellow and red
flowers patterned remote margs. Every shifting hue in the sky was
reflected on the silken surfaces of padi fields.

Farther on above untidy fringes of pines we encountered erosion,
steadily clear on tawny hillsides, their rounded crests bald as old men's
heads. The thin soil had a smell of scorched salt. At sundown the bald
hills glowed acid brown under a peacock-blue sky until darkness hissed
down around the small dancing orange-red flames of our fires.

At its western end Nepal is 100 miles broad by crow-flight. It was less
than 120 miles from where the Kahnali flowed over the southern frontier
at 360 feet above sea-level to where ahead of us in the north, behind
Urinagua la, the 25,300-foot peak of Gurla Mandhata held its snows in
the sky. Near Gurla Mandhata was the first Tibetan village, Taklakot, and
Mount Kailas, sacred to Buddhists and Hindus, earthily home of their gods
and a place of pilgrimage. Mount Kailas was defiled by Chinese Com-
munists directly they completed their occupation of Tibet. Their troops
prowled there while we walked towards them over roadless bare hills
like a tangle of elephant spines.

Few Indian pilgrims ever crossed Nepal to Mount Kailas. They
climbed through their own territory beyond the western frontier in
sight of Nanda Devi, Blessed Goddess, and crossed into Tibet by one of
the four main las available from late spring until autumn. From the west
these were Shipki, Mana, Niti, and Lipu, the latter tucked in close to
Nepal. Until the Chinese Red Army spread west an annual commerce was
done by Tibetans who crossed Urinagua la to trade in West Nepal. Their
yaks, sheep, and goats carried salt in weights rising from 20 lb. pouches
Tigers South, Tiger North

on goats to 180 lb. bags on yaks, and occasional loads of wool. Nepalis who met them at points like Saipal or Doti or crossed to Taklakot bartered rice, *ata*, a wholemeal flour, and rhododendron-wood bowls. This trade dwindled as China gained a military stranglehold on Tibet.

Over the centuries border Tibetans mingled with Nepalis. Main tribes in the area called themselves Dotials and Dhulials. Each village comprised its own tribe. The main anthropological modification appeared to have come from the east, originally from Bhutan, a slow westward migration of families along valley floors which crossed into India and established the Bhotia mountain villages under Nanda Devi and Tirsuli.

At one village the Indian physical characteristics of a lean body and dark bloom of skin hue were predominant. Ten miles away, over the Khuni Hills, we met men of stockier build, larger of bone and pale, and their womenfolk had broad faces, small breasts, and wide hips. Four miles farther on we met the Mongoloid eyefold, high heavy cheekbones, a squareness from shoulders to pelvis, and women had fleshy legs. Voices roughened. ‘English’, pronounced ‘Englize’ by southerners, became ‘Angreez’ among Dotials and ‘Angraaz’ among Dhulials. They were hospitable, friendly people, their life harder and simpler than in the south. Our peculiarities fascinated them, particularly Michael’s sandy hair. They thought he dyed it.

At night we squatted round the campfire while they entertained us by singing of passion and war. I failed to detect tonal nuances differentiating lovers’ entreaties from wrathful appeals to a deity for strength and guile to outwit a crafty foe, their voices curling into my untutored ears like scrapy sandpaper. Dotials especially loved to sing. Treachery loomed large in their songs: once started on it, they gave it everything. Hands gesticulated frenziedly, bodies jerked, firelight moulded faces into flaring copper masks of anger, wild-eyed and quivering, before they fell back in a macabre swoop of shadows. Even after those songs ended, wrath growled in male throats and women crouched tautly, their broad lips threaded by anxiety, black eyes tremulous under glistening lids.

Then everyone relaxed to have another drink. They gave us *chang* and *rakshi*, a rice liquor. *Rakshi* tasted of ferocious alley-cats of incredible age and burned our throats like red-hot pokers. It inspired us to sing our tribal rhythms, notably *I’ve Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts* and *Home Sweet Home*. Women at Manmah, our farthest point, wept noisily at hearing the significance of the latter, interpreting it as a blessing.
on their homes. While we sang it again fronds of blue smoke curled from juniper wood and pine cones, sharp as incense on the crisp night air.

One day Zendiah took Douglas and me to a village of paharis, hillsmen, which had acquired four Tibetan refugee families the previous summer. Zendiah had a collector's delight in 'finds'. Beaming, he led us over the hills at a smart lick.

The village contained less than twenty houses. The Tibetans had established themselves in cunbas, houses made by digging a large hole, raising a rough stone wall around it, and using canvas or yurt tenting for a roof. Tattered lhungtas, small prayer-flags, wedged between the stones, uttered their benedictions. Entrance into each cunba was through a hole in the wall and down four steps into one all-purposes room in the centre of which was a circular fireplace ringed by stones. Ceremonial ghee-butter lamps flickered before thankas, religious pictures, and hand prayer-wheels on small altars.

Our conversation was conducted unsatisfactorily. It went through Zendiah who passed it to the local head pahari who translated it to the Tibetans. They told us they came from outside Gartok. They were traders who had come to Nepal often in the past and had now fled to it to avoid being directed into forced labour gangs to work on Chinese road construction. To avoid causing suspicion, they had brought only a few essential possessions. I recorded them in my notebook: dekshis, iron cooking pots, and deep circular brass ladles, worn leather saddles, bridles studded with silver, saddlebags, threngwa rosaries, bags of salt and lengths of nambu cloth, self-coloured woollen strips some ten inches wide. They intended to live by selling salt and cloth until they established themselves.

The men wore knee-length purplish shubas tied at their waist by faded strips of material, baggy trousers, and knee-high boots. Their women were clad in long dull-coloured dresses and faded aprons. One wore an ornate bamboo and coral patruk on her head. Two cunbas contained monogamous couples and their children. One was polyandrous. It was the wealthiest household, the wife, a solid thoughtful girl of about twenty, having married two brothers, ten and fourteen years older than herself, because her parents financed their flight to get her away from the Chinese. She owned the patruk. The last household was polygamous, the man middleaged, leader of the party on its journey. One wife was about his own age, the other a good twenty years younger, a sturdy and energetic girl, mother of a plump baby who cooed on a nest of old clothes. An
oddly affecting note was the older woman’s pride in her husband’s baby.

One link united their households. They were fearful for the safety of the Dalai Lama amid Chinese troops and treacherous lamas, afraid he would be poisoned and a puppet established in the Potala. All of them praised the virtues of the Dalai Lama, a Mongolian title meaning ‘The Faith Wide as the Ocean’, and referred to him as Kündun, ‘the Presence’ of the god Chenrezi. They had built a la-tsa stone cairn on the highest hill nearby to guide others who followed them. Perhaps some of their countrymen did see it three years later when the Tibetan tragedy gained brief attention and platitudinous speeches in the West before it was pushed aside by entertainment divorces and headlined murders; presumably the Tibetans were too small and far away, their faith too unusual, for them to be regarded as potential occupants of a mansion in a universal house. The men assured us that the Chinese intended to destroy Tibet.

West Nepal was still a sanctuary for people on the beach.

Our circuitous route back to Manmah caused an overnight stop in a village which sprang a surprise on Douglas and me. We reached it in late afternoon under a glimmering green sky on which flecks of cloud lay like a torn veil. The village was situated in foothills where crimson and purple rhododendron blooms flared in light from the dipping sun. Above it were motionless pine woods; below it the shining steps of padi terraces glittered turquoise and emerald. Buffaloes ambled wearily among its mud-walled houses. Bleached poles supported overhung thatch roofs.

We detected an air of affluence about the crowd assembled to greet us. The people were of predominately Indian physical characteristics. Older men studied us watchfully, aloof and silent. Youths scowled unwholesomely; several carried a naked kukri at their waist, red light winking along the sinister curved blades. Women in the reception committee were noticeably mature. Nepali tribal women, as distinct from those in cosmopolitan Katmandu whom I met a year later, have a marked partiality for brilliant red attire and lavish ornamentation. These women glowed like a summer sunset in blouses of brilliant scarlet and vermilion and bold white or yellow floral designs rioted over skirts of other reds. Their ornaments included brass ear-rings, silver wire hoops suspended from pierced left nostrils, bracelets, anklets, crimson bead necklaces galore.

A stockily built headman hastened up, fussed and important, greeting us with a photogenic smile, the whiteness of his teeth heightened by a
bristly moustache. His name was Singh. He and Zendiah were old friends. That should have warned us. At an open-air party to welcome us Singh told me that his people were related to the Gurkhas farther east. The festive commotion drowned other information.

A full moon bright as a new silver coin rose above the huddled sable hills while revelry held the night at bay beyond the spitting orange fire. Our needs were foreseen by a bevy of lately appeared girls in gorgeous red dresses spangled with rich gold embroidery. They enticed us to eat, drink, enjoy darkly smiling eyes, relish a throb of gentle laughter, appreciate a swirl of skirts around satin-smooth young limbs, and feel among friends. We were far too busy to heed a distant row of glumly muttering youths, our attention sought by luminous eyes and soft chittering purrs urging us to share a delicacy or admire cold coins tinkling round a warm neck flushed bronze by firelight. The atmosphere was exotic. While we still felt like potentates we learned that the village paid its rent by supplying girls for the army; most women were lehaite mistresses before they contracted a biwahita union.

Douglas and I exchanged glances. Mistaken for talent scouts, we were being given the treatment. I drank rakshi and saw an ample dhai, a midwife, simper coquettishly at Douglas, a randy glint in her eyes. She tossed back rakshi as if it was water. There could be no doubt; we were in for a restless night. The suspense was unbearable. Our Home Sweet Home sounded a bit anticlimactic. Businesslike mothers nudged forgetful girls into rapturous coos but mothers’ sons inspected their kukris meditatively. It did not surprise me. Then a boneless boy performed a chattering monkey dance, urged to demoniac speed by clapping hands. We were sustained by rakshi and tidbits offered by tender little fingers, instinct with woman’s wiles to soothe in caresses. The treatment, Asian style; solicitation with sample golden apples given away free.

We sang again, Englishmen out in the midnight moon. Ebony shadows crept over mosaics of silver-blue starlight, reduced to broken shining threads among smudged motionless trees, and the fire dwindled to hot embers filmed by white ash. At the end of one song a skein of Tibetan geese flapped overhead, their weird harsh honks grating in the darkness. Hours later we were taken to a bungalow reserved for guests. I fell asleep almost directly we stretched out. It had been a long night.

Next morning we stumbled out reluctantly. A blaze of magenta rhododendrons tore at my eyes like barbed wire. A malevolent daffodil radiance polished every acre of an empty sky and glittered like electricity on wind-ruffled padi fields. Villagers assembled to bid us farewell, hus-
bands, delighted youths, *la kermesse heroique*. Some impulse prompted one boy to give me his *kukri*. Zendiah trudged off ahead of us, strangely sullen. As air and exercise cleared our heads we began to laugh. Our Singh-song had not lacked humour.

Actually, Zendiah failed me. I wanted to meet Tantrists. Every morning he promised to locate them but the days passed without further news.

Some Europeans have described Tantrism, or Shaktism, as an overripe fruit near to putrefaction. Naturally, Shaktists disagree. Their belief certainly gains an orgiastic expression. Its basic tenets, manifested by a ritualistic sexual intercourse practised in autochthonous India, did not attain a Hindu statement until 1300 years ago when it was set out as an animistic philosophy in the Tantras, the sacred books of Shiva the Destroyer, third god of the Hindu triad. According to Hinduism, Shiva created his own emanation who became his wife Parvati and through her other female aspects of himself who became his other wives or *shakti*, meaning ‘creative energy’. To them, symbolizing the female principle in life, are attributed the physical, intellectual, and moral energies in Nature. Hinduism claimed the belief as its own revelation. This was inaccurate. It originated among tribes in Bengal and Orissa and Assam whose principal deity was a goddess. The elevation of an Earth Mother to superiority over a godhead was always symptomatic of low fertility and fear of tribal extinction, a situation supported by Shakti sexual rites and its scale of goddesses: *mahavidayas*, creative abstract forces; *mahamataras*, great mothers; *mataras*, mothers; *nayrikas*, mistresses; *sakinis* and *yohinis*, ogresses and sorceresses.

Worship of Shiva is a cult within Hinduism. Shaktism, a cult within Shivism, is dedicated to a control of energy acquired through magic supplied by the Tantras, and is subdivided into two groups, ‘white’ and ‘black’. The white take the ‘right-hand’ path, the *Dakshinamargis*, and esteem women through conventional methods, venerating Shakti qualities of love, wisdom, protection, and affection, under their goddess personifications as Lakshmi, Sarasvati, and Gauri. The black, who take the ‘left-hand’ path, the *Vamasharis*, worship the goddesses Kali, Durga, and Chandi, personifying death, violence, and cruelty. The latter were the people I wanted to find. Dotted over India and adjacent territories are black statues of naked females registering general hatred of everything. The most familiar is Kali, a contorted lady who has starting eyeballs, a
dangling tongue, bared fangs, several hands grasping knives and a head, a garland of human skulls decorating her plump breasts while she dances on the chest of her decapitated husband. Kali would be pretty horrible if she were not so obviously intended to jolt the impressible. In Tibet pictures of Kali and Shiva depict them as skeletons entwined in copulation.

Shiva is unimportant to left-hand Shaktis except as a male completion of Durga, goddess of sexual potency. They believe her divine energy is reincarnated in living women. Therefore, by their logic, not only should women be esteemed for themselves but their possession of her energy must be given ritualistic worship. In consequence, Shakti rituals are held in secret.

I had heard accounts of celebrants who met in candle-lit rooms fragrant with incense, took off their clothes to rid themselves of caste prejudices, and then sat down in a circle to form a chain of latent energy while they concentrated their attention on Tantric incitements to sexual vigour. These included an indulgence in four prescribed stimuli—madya, wine; mamsa, meat; matsya, fish, and mudra, mystic finger signs combined to an utterance of words and sounds symbolic of physical regions of the goddesses—and led to a magical consummation in maithuna, sacramental sexual intercourse by the celebrants. According to Shakti belief, those coupled at these rituals have achieved a union of earth, their own flesh, and heaven, their source of life. Maithuna is celebrated until dawn. My informants had spoken of from six to fifty celebrants at a gathering.

Those who have called Shakti ritual degenerate appear to have condemned it solely from their own unaffected beliefs. This is a worthy but blind attitude. We know that it originated among tribes terrified of becoming extinct through epidemics, who lost new-born children through disease and starvation quicker than women could replace their numbers, and threatened by powerful enemies who killed off the virile men. It is a logical deduction that these luckless tribespeople felt impelled to use desperate means to achieve through communal excitation a replacement they could not attain by customary means among the celebrants. Its subsequent adoption by Hinduism, by people always afflicted by high infant and child mortality rates, elevated it to a religious cult dogma, and it is virtually impossible to deliberately cast out whatever has attained that status.

Its basic tenet is an incongruity in India where a large number of religious teachers have attributed most human evils to women. One of them, Manu, the great Hindu law-giver, stated uncompromisingly: 'The
source of dishonour is woman; the source of strife is woman.' This attitude may cheer up fearful bachelors but its logic is phoney.

Degenerate forms of Shaktism have appeared. Thirty years ago an alien actress introduced it to a collection of bright young people in a Western city, where it did represent degeneracy; the subsequent police proceedings, which I read in a court transcript, sent the actress back to her own country. An Indian form of it, the *kanchalia dharam* or blouse ceremony, was described by a friend of mine in a highly informative book.\(^1\)

Consequently, I wanted to locate Shaktis in Nepal where they were reputed to flourish strongly. I wanted to learn why they persevered in their devotions. Was it due to tradition? Fear of extinction? To check the spread of caste? To relieve the monotony of their daily round? To see if those who failed to have children in marriage could produce them from ceremonies which dispensed with marital restrictions?\(^2\)

Accidentally or deliberately, Zendiah failed me. I left West Nepal without meeting a Shakti in the flesh.

Among the hills it occurred to me that the West would profit from a clarification of tribal names in the general area. At present we are in a hopeless muddle over the spelling of names and words in Asia.

East of Nepal are the Bhutanis. Among the western Indian hills are Bhotia tribesmen. They share a common origin. Tibet is known to its own people as Bho, pronounced Bhu. It would appear that West Nepal tribes referred to as Dotials and Dhulials are in fact Bhutials and Bhulials, the present Western spellings arising from either a modification of speech intonations caused by time or by unwitting inaccuracy by Europeans who have been in the region. The latter possibility cannot be ruled out for recent European travellers there have included Germans and Frenchmen who rendered the names according to stresses in their own language and whose spelling has been passed on during translation into English. The resultant tangle has grown worse in the past twenty years.

The weeks passed too quickly. We were sorry to start our return journey to Kauriala Ghat. I brought away many memories of kindness shown by these simple people on the beach under the Himalaya. And an unused *kukri* to add to knobkerrie and assegais, *kris* and blow-pipes and *parangs*.

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\(^1\) Alexander Campbell, *The Heart of India* (Knopf, 1958).
As the Garuda plane from Patna to Katmandu crossed Terai jungle and glinting padi fields carved in rough hillsides a trim Indian hostess came up to me. She had a leanly triangular face and long ebony hair. Her large eyes smiled excitedly for an instant before she directed my attention through the windows.

'The Himalaya,' she said.

And there it was, quintessential solitude, ultimate majesty of earth, the finest of 200 matchless jewels in a diadem curved over 1800 miles of our planet, the dream, frustration, and graveyard of intrepid men and women enthralled by a defiance of their endurance in endeavours beset by unexpected hazards: a frontier of true democracy.

Snow plumes drifted from icy crests shouldering an empty sky, peaks whose names echoed in the mind like a chime of bells. Ahead of us rose the white hump of Gosainthan. Westward, on our left, was Himalchuli, the tilted snow meadows of Annapurna, the massive diamond of Dhaulagiri and frozen breast of Tukucha Peak. Beyond the windows facing east was Gaurisankha, Sagahmartha, 'Mother Goddess of Mountains' or as we call her Everest, the precipitate and dangerous cliff of Makalu. The girl identified them. I would have had to be another man not to find a poetic counterpoise between her youth and the ancient harshness of ice-fast crests at which we looked, in her innate promise and their ageless denial framed in lost glaciers and ice lakes, uncharted cols, rock valleys hidden by treacherous snow blankets. I thought how quickly she and I will pass, forgotten within a few weeks if we are remembered that long. They will remain unchanged until earth time has lost meaning.
We shared the sudden moment of tremendous excitement which shivers down the spine of those conscious of a taunt in every horizon. Whether of land or water or stars, horizons are equal; they are there. You either accept their challenge, and to hell with the use or consequence, or you plod cautiously in search of security, the basic delusion. A score of names came into my mind as we stared at the snow crests, men and women accounted mad by occupants of warm drawingrooms but whose names are imperishably associated with Sagahmara and Annapurna and other eternally white hills. The girl knew every name. Mountains excited her too. It was a moment which could have been captured only by the finest woman writer of sonnets in the English language, the late Edna St. Vincent Millay.

We were the only ones to experience wonder. Other passengers in the plane, overseas Chinese and Calcutta businessmen, totted up percentage profits. They were phlegmatic men, owners of emphatic bellies and jowls and expense-account smiles. One was accompanied by his wife, a plump diminutive woman in a blue floral cheongsam; she did glance out at Sagahmara but preferred the latest murder in the newspaper on her lap. The girl and I chattered on through our moment until the pilot decided to go down. We landed at Gaucher field in warm spring afternoon sunshine and went through customs and piled into taxis and cars to drive into Katmandu, back in everyday routine.

Two mornings later I saw Gosainthan from the cat-walk on Bhim Sen's Folly. It was almost unimpressive. There it was, fifty miles north, behind an undulant ridge of green rhododendron foothills, a white saddleback mountain whose summit was 26,300 feet above sea-level. It resembled a huge wodge of ice-cream about to melt. Only two features made it believable. Blue-green foothills hid its snow-line. And the ice-cream spread west and east in a solid white smear with blobs for crests and peaks, slashed by crevasses and transverse gullies, a vast serrated backbone whose naked chill sparkled gold and ruby and emerald in early sunlight. Up there, affirm the Nepalese peoples, tramp yetis, the abominable snowmen, prowling for tasty morsels of wild dog, lost kyangs, Sherpas, and Europeans. The yetis entranced Nepalis who had spent the previous evening telling me of queer footprints in fresh snow, a fearsome inhuman creature that whizzed around a convenient rock spur, bubbling unnatural laughter. I enjoyed the stories so much that I almost believed them.

Human beings prowled under Gosainthan. They were Chinese
soldiers and labourers engaged on a construction or reconstruction of roads being built across Tibet to las leading into Nepal. The principal las from west to east were Urinagua, Lipu at 17,890 feet, Kore, and, farthest east, in sight of Kanchenjunga, and, close to Sikkim, Rakha la at 16,260 feet. Smaller, perilous passes were used only by local paharis.

In earlier centuries the Himalaya protected Nepal. In the 7th century the Chinese monk Hsüan-tsang wrote ‘The country of Ne-po-la is found among snow mountains’ and went on: ‘Its people are crude and of savage disposition, uninterested in the true faith, in justice or in literature, but skilled in the arts. Their houses are made of wood which they carve and paint ... Buddhist shrines and the temples of Hindu gods stand close together.’ Nepalese chronicles, the Namsavali and Swayumbhanat and other puranas, dating from approximately A.D. 1000, are mainly mythological, a list of royal names, often fictional, in a mixture of superstition and legend. Two facts can be trusted: the Valley of Nepal was once a lake and was originally regarded as the entire country, hills to west and east inhabited by unheeded migrant tribes. Asoka, the Hindu king converted to Buddhism, is said to have come on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of the country’s greatest son, the Buddha, but evidence of his visit is circumstantial. In the 7th century a Nepali princess, Bricuta, married the ruler of pagan Bhos beyond the Himalaya, King Srongsam Gampo, who also married Wen-ching, a Chinese princess. Both women were Buddhists. Their influence converted their husband and his heathens to what Hsüan-tsang accepted as ‘the true faith’ though it underwent marked changes.

With the Himalaya barring routes from the north, crowding hills to east and west, the Valley of Nepal obtained knowledge of the outside world from the south, from India. It would have preferred to do without most of what it learned. Every upheaval in the south sent refugees and pursuing troops northward. Armed migrations caused a build-up of dynastic friction in the Valley, and, abetted by the hill barriers, caused three capital cities of one era to arise at each point of a triangle within ten miles of each other. They remained its only cities: Katmandu, Bhadgaon, and Patan. The Nepalese peoples developed a justifiable suspicion of foreigners. In the second half of the 18th century a Muslim invasion of Rajasthan drove the Gurkhas from their country. They fled east and captured the Valley.

The Gurkha victory in 1768, accomplished by the Raja Prithvi Narayan, introduced a new era. When it was completed the raja of Katmandu had been slain, the raja of Bhadgaon went to Banaras, and the
raja of Patan died in imprisonment: another example of how squabbling rulers encompass their own downfall when confronted by a resolute foe. Prithvi Narayan founded modern Nepal by assuming control of nearly fifty tribal principalities in the west and east.

He was succeeded by his infant son, Rana Bahadur, almost inevitably a disastrous event in Asia, as was seen in the chain-reaction history of Kashmir. While Rana Bahadur was a child his uncle Bahadur Shah became Regent, signed a commercial treaty with Britain, annexed Kumaon and Sikkim, and sent an expedition to Tibet. It was chased out by an army of 70,000 Chinese troops sent by Peking in response to an appeal from the Tibetans. A request from Bahadur Shah for British aid resulted in a small force marching in to pacify the belligerents. It reached Katmandu to learn that the Nepalis had concluded the peace treaty of 1792 which recognized Chinese suzerainty, a situation which lasted until 1908. The mission marched back to India.

Three years later, while still a minor, Rana Bahadur disposed of his uncle and ran Nepal and his own affairs by methods offensive to his nearest subjects. His marriages set his biographers a problem. They went something like this: one of his first two wives was Tripura Sondari, one gave him a son whom he disowned, one failed to have children, and then he outraged orthodox opinion by proposing to marry a Brahman girl, a morganatic marriage in reverse for he belonged to the lowlier Kshatriya, warrior caste. No clergy attended his third marriage. The Brahmans put a curse on his bride. He adopted a son she bore him, a recognition enforced by their child being deemed illegitimate. Soon afterwards she contracted smallpox. Rana Bahadur emptied his state treasury to the Brahmans to remove their curse but she was terribly scarred and died, probably a suicide. Her death drove Rana Bahadur to wreck temples and idols in frenzied revenge on those whom he held responsible for his wife's disfigurement and death. A rebellion forced him to abdicate in favour of his son; his confused biographers have attributed this boy to his Brahman wife, which seems unlikely, and to one of his first two wives. He went into exile in Banaras accompanied by Tripura Sondari, while his other wife acted as Regent.

Tripura Sondari had quite a life. Although Rana Bahadur claimed in exile to be a religious mystic, and took a swami name to prove it, he soon acquired a mistress and kept her in high style. He ran through his money, sold Tripura Sondari's jewels to lavish jewels on his favourite, and finally, surrounded by debts, borrowed money from the British East India Company. Here again his biographers became confused. Was
it the wife left behind in Katmandu or Tripura Sondari who returned there and proclaimed herself Regent who became alarmed at a possibility of British money causing Rana Bahadur to return supported by British troops? Whichever it was, she concluded a commercial treaty with Britain but an officer who journeyed to Katmandu as British Resident found everyone so hostile that he returned to India and commercial relations ended. Rana Bahadur went back to Nepal without British assistance. Although he let his son remain king he took control and persecuted Brahmans. Three years later, in 1805, he arranged to have his half-brother assassinated but the latter went to the Palace and assassinated him. The wife who acted as first Regent committed sati on his pyre.

Nine years later British troops marched into Nepal but not as peacemakers. Tripura Sondari was still Regent. Her capable and forceful Chief Minister, Bhim Sen, had decided to extend Nepalese territory in the only direction open: south. His soldiers occupied Indian villages. They were supported by 12,000 superbly trained and adequately armed Nepali troops, mostly Gurkhas, so courageous and resourceful that they frequently fought 30,000 British troops and Indian sepoys to a standstill. The dispute ended with the 1816 Treaty of Segauli by which Nepal forfeited areas she had acquired—Kumaon, Garwal, the Terai, and Sikkim—and Britain was to be represented by a Resident in Katmandu. As a goodwill gesture, part of the Terai was returned to Nepal. It was the beginning of a long friendship. Later Britons have cause to recall with admiration and affection the selfless courage and unquenchable good humour of Gurkha regiments.

There was a Shakespearian atmosphere to the end of this historical episode and its bloody sequel.

Shortly after the Treaty of Segauli was concluded the eighteen-year-old king died and was succeeded by his infant son, Rajendra Vikram. Tripura Sondari continued to act as Regent, assisted by Bhim Sen as Chief Minister. When the king was old enough to marry someone sought to end a family quarrel near the Throne by marrying him to daughters of the rival houses, the Pandi and Thapa families, but the marriages only divided the court into two hostile camps as each queen tried to exercise more influence than the other over their husband, a youth in the unenviable position of being surrounded by in-laws eager to run his life. Antagonism reached a new pitch when Tripura Sondari died in 1832 and Bhim Sen promoted a young officer, Matbah Singh, to the rank of general over the heads of other officers. The officers intrigued against Bhim Sen and his position was worsened by the sudden death of the heir presumptive;
the eldest of three sons of the Pandi Queen. Bhim Sen and Matbah Singh were imprisoned, accused of murdering the child, and a Pandi became Chief Minister. Thereupon the Thapa Queen released them from gaol. Matbah Singh fled to India. Bhim Sen remained in Katmandu, was returned to gaol in 1839, and is said to have cut his throat unaided.

In the very hour when it seemed like a final triumph for the Pandi family their Queen died. The Thapa Queen, Kancha, rose to power, recalled Matbah Singh to become Chief Minister and Commander-in-Chief, and, to prevent hitches to her plans, ordered the execution of the Pandi family en bloc before he reached Katmandu. She consented to let them be killed by their own kukris. Why she did not promote her lover, Gagan Singh, to a high office remained a mystery. When Matbah Singh returned from India he brought his favourite nephew, Jang Bahadur, a man of great bravery. Unwisely, Matbah Singh refused to prefer Queen Kancha's son to heir presumptive above the legitimate claim of the Pandi Queen's second son. The Queen took revenge by spreading rumours that Matbah Singh intended to assassinate the King. At her behest the King presented a loaded rifle to an officer and instructed him to kill Matbah Singh. The instruction was carried out. The officer was Jang Bahadur, who was promoted to general.

Asian history has produced no more fascinating character than Jang Bahadur. At this period he was an enigmatic, unpredictable man, his motives seemingly disconnected. Presumably he felt that circumstances forced him to play an opportunist game, for his treachery was counter-balanced by remarkable loyalty, his cruelty by unswerving affection and kindness.

King Rajendra precipitated a crisis by having the Queen's paramour murdered while engaged in prayer. The distraught Queen, passionately attached to Gagan Singh and ignorant of who killed him, instructed the foremost citizens to assemble in the Kot, a large walled courtyard opposite the Palace, and there interrogated those whom she believed likely to have been responsible. A macabre scene ensued. The citizens were unarmed. The personal regiments of Jang Bahadur were present, armed with kukris. When the Queen failed to obtain information she ordered an officer from another regiment to kill one suspect, evidently to force a confession through fear, but the officer refused to obey unless instructed by the absent King. The Queen instructed a minister to arrest the officer for treason but he also refused. Enraged, her power publicly defied, the Queen ordered Jang Bahadur to arrest all three men and one was hacked down when he resisted. The panic-stricken crowd tried to run but found its path blocked by the men under Jang Bahadur. Queen Kancha screamed
at him to kill her enemies. His men cut down some citizens. The Queen then appointed him Chief Minister and Commander-in-Chief and ordered him to do his duty. On that night of 15 September 1846 he slew more than 550 people, including seventy nobles, in 'the Massacre of Kot'.

But when the Queen ordered him to kill the two sons of the Pandi Queen he refused and took the boys under his personal protection. Queen Kancha then hired another man to kill him. The plot was discovered and on his initiative she was ordered to go into exile. She went to Banaras accompanied by King Rajendra, who signed an order which she prepared hiring other murderers to kill Jang Bahadur. His agents uncovered this plot. He read out the King's order to the army and the generals immediately proclaimed the Pandi heir, Prince Surendra, as their king. When Jang Bahadur invited Rajendra to return to Nepal the ex-King arrived with an army. It had no chance to fight. Nepalese troops surrounded it and Rajendra went off to retirement in Bhadgaon.

Four years after Kot Jang Bahadur was received in Britain by Queen Victoria. On his return to Nepal he uncovered a plot by Brahman priests to murder him and showed great magnanimity by merely sending them into exile. At the start of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 he offered and sent 4000 men to aid the British and later marched out of Nepal at the head of another 8000 men, 500 artillerymen, and 24 guns. For his aid then Britain provided acknowledgments, including the return of the rest of the Terai. When he died in 1877 he had been the Throne's power for thirty-one years. His final act as he lay dying beside the Bhagmati River was to order that none of his wives should commit sati, the ultimate gesture of a man who rose above his environment.

On the death of this truly unique figure, court circles in Katmandu reverted to family intrigues to wear his shoes. Other plots involved the Throne. There were conspiracies, feuds, and murders, while inept, indifferent, and good ministers jostled through Nepalese history. The country regained its suspicion of foreigners. Britain did not attempt to change Nepal. Perhaps that explains why Nepal put her resources at the disposal of Britain in 1914—an action which Britain sought to acknowledge in various ways, including the declaration of Nepalese independence in 1923—and again in 1939, acts which led Gurkha and Englishman, Nepali and Briton, to die together.

Those were some of the events which happened under the cat-walk on Bhim Sen's Folly. This 200-foot tower was an idea he brought back
from India, where he fell in love with a minaret and decided to build one in Katmandu, a pleasantly human whim. Here it stands, a single slender minaret, mosqueless, resembling a lighthouse as it rises beside a bronze equestrian statue of Jang Bahadur and faces the snow crests of the Himalaya.
Big Brothers Everywhere

Geographically Nepal has not changed since the era of Jang Bahadur. It is still a rectangle of 500 miles long by 100 miles across, inhabited by approximately 9 million people, but the quickening pace of change has brought it closer to other countries. Katmandu airport was built a few years ago. So was an eighty-mile road which Indian engineers twisted across the Terai to Katmandu. A small airstrip has appeared in the west, a dam is going up in the east, and schools are being built to lower illiteracy.

Meanwhile, the face of Katmandu has not changed. I saw it on a morning walk which took me first across Hanuman Square, a huddle of temples and shrines lined by the houses of Buddhist priests whose white walls rose from a greyish-pink road surface to carved first-storey balconies which overhung the street, and curved roofs above. Inside the temples a chime of bells and cymbals laced the air with quivering golden threads of sound.

Naked children flashed brownly in the cool sharp yellow sunlight. They seemed possessed of inexhaustible energy of limb and lung. Near the temples straggle-bearded old beggars sat beside their bowls, ruminating on their youthful sins. Around market stalls selling vegetables, grain, fruit, clay urns, and poor quality turquoises, clusters of diminutive Newari women chattered like the lorikeets and sunbirds fluttering round trees a short distance away. In the centre of the Square was a ferocious statue which I took to be a black Kali Durga, a vaguely female being, skulls hanging over her breasts, others shining whitely in a gigantic head-dress, engaged in a dance on a corpse.
Beyond the Square I got lost in a warren of narrow pinky-brown streets reminiscent of prints of 16th-century London. They were deeply shadowed and smelled stale, heavy with night. The projecting upper storeys of facing houses were within arm's-length of each other. I wandered past four rib-thin brown pi-dogs scavenging in a pile of garbage stinking of sour water and urine. A screech of small boys put the dogs to flight. None of the boys asked me for coins, utterly unlike those in Indian cities. They were fewer but looked sturdier than those south of the Terai. Beyond the dark streets I passed a Hindu temple which had a row of shaded lingams and then another vibrant Buddhist temple. As I walked past it a lama in a greasy brown robe went inside, a heavy grey-headed old man whose naked feet stumbled painfully.

Thousands of Buddhist pilgrims reach Katmandu every year. That afternoon I went to the shrine which is their main objective, Swayum-bhanat, situated on a hill a mile or so west of the capital. None of its treasures or inner sculpture equalled its exterior, the first and last unforgettable sight of its high gilded chaitya tower rising above big trees where squabbling monkeys chased each other through the spreading branches. At the top of the chaitya a parasol symbolizing royal authority spread above a cone of thirteen widening rings, the largest at the base, combining the shape of a Hindu stupa and a Tibetan chorten. Lower rings were screened by four flat surfaces shaped like a bishop's mitre, each flush with a square tower below. On them were small carved Buddhas, cross-legged, hands in the lotus mudra or benedictial. Under them, on each gilded surface of the tower, were two eyes painted in black and white, a wavy Mongoloid slant below curved blue eyebrows, and in place of a nose a painted symbol resembling a question-mark. The eyes represented the all-seeing power of the Godhead. In a reverent mood, I debated inwardly on whether the question-mark was to make us speculate on how we smell Elsewhere. The painted eyes glowered fixedly like old drawings of Mongol chiefs. They had an eerie effect in the brilliant spring sunshine.

There were scores of pilgrims inside the shrine. Most of them were bearded old men clad in near rags. They passed each other silently, examining the sacred dorjie, thunderbolt, symbolizing ecclesiastical authority in Mahayana Buddhism, copper prayer-wheels which they turned to utter prayers, their gnarled hands as reverent as Roman Catholics crossing themselves with Holy Water. Among a group of men in front of a Garuda bird shrine were two chubby Burmese and a gaunt Tibetan lama in a greasy old crimson robe. A number of emaciated
Indians, who had trudged several hundred miles at least to reach Swayumbhanat, muttered quietly in front of shrines to the two brides who converted Tibet to their faith.

No records have been kept of how many pilgrims have visited Swayumbhanat since the original chaitya was erected over 2000 years ago. The other principal Buddhist shrine, Budnath chaitya, north-east of Katmandu, is much larger, but it is only 1400 years old. I went there the next day and noticed a tinge of red in its painted eyes. From Budnath I went on to the most sacred Hindu shrine in Nepal, Pashupatinath, a few miles away beside the sacred River Bhagmati where Jang Bahadur died and whose waters are believed to have carried his being into its next manifestation in the ceaseless stream of life.

In noon sunlight the two-layered bronze pagoda roofs of the main temple shone like wet gold. It is more difficult for a non-Hindu to get into this temple than for a girl with a handkerchief to enter St. Mark's in Venice, and a group of small boys escorted me to a roof from which I could see a huge copper-sheeted statue of the divine bull Nandi on which Shiva rides about the heavens. Beyond it were scores of smaller, white temples erected to the glorification of Shiva by devout Hindus. Scores of monkeys played, scratched, thought, and ate tidbits undisturbed, living personifications of Hanuman the monkey god who aids Rama, an incarnation of the second god of the Hindu triad, Vishnu the Preserver. They sauntered up to people in complete confidence. A number lay curled up asleep in the sunshine.

I spent several days wandering round the rose-red city of Patan. Everything about it had a faded crimson glow: roads, shops, walls, the three pagoda roofs on houses, stonework on ancient temples which withstood the severe earthquake of 1934, fringes on voluminous skirts worn by its neat gay energetic little women. Like the western paharis, some women tattoo their legs. Only the men lacked colour, content to go about their business in long white shirts and trousers. Perhaps their indifference to personal colour arose from Patan being the home of the arts in the Valley.

The Patan wood-carvers have become far more than competent craftsmen. Their work has a vision in excess of requirements for their knives, a unity of statement allied to an astonishing diversity of subject and fertility in application, plus a quality which is now rare in Western carving, architectural balance. It was everywhere: in temples, houses,
decorating roofs and cornices and beams supporting eaves, on windowframes tilted over streets at an alarming angle of forty-five degrees, on entablatures and doorways, a joy to see.

I was delighted to watch them at work in their tiny workshops tucked away among temples. They loved their work. It was obvious from the way they got the feel of the wood in their fingers before they started to carve, spending minutes on caressing it like lovers to search out the strength and weakness of the grain, and then shaping it by eye, slowly and patiently, as if Time was halted beyond their heed; craftsmen by instinct and application.

They worked an average sixty hours a week. By Western standards they earned two pounds in a good week. But it gave them happiness to produce work of a quality of artistry nowhere present in the unloved massabortions in plastic produced in Western factories which only add further disfigurements to concrete and steel apartment blocks as homely as makeshift gaols. Their eyes and knives put other local craftsmen on their mettle. I spent memorable days sitting on floors among men who mercifully forgot I was watching them produce holy statuettes, embellish silver and gold with Tibetan turquoises and coral and seed pearls, illuminate manuscripts, and string coin necklaces to provide a dowry for small brides.

I did not want to leave Patan. Its people had the instinctive kindness of people more interested in their work than in their own affairs. And thank God there was not a single sophisticate or cynic amongst them. It is to be hoped that changes influencing Nepalese life do not harm these gifted Newari craftsmen in a century which has killed similar communities in virus plasticitis. They were happy while they worked. No man should rob another of such a priceless blessing.

I would like to describe other aspects of Nepalese life, customs, and ceremonies I was permitted to witness, but they must wait for another occasion because this book is intended to describe the political scene in the hill countries in this crucial age of transition which has made Nepal a key country in Asia. What happens to it in the next few years may well indicate the course of future world events.

In 1947 the drastic turn of historic tides struck Nepal like a cataract. Simultaneously she saw British influence withdrawn from India and
immediate carnage in Kashmir. Nepalis imagined that Mr. Nehru might try to persuade their country to join his Indian Union. Consequently, they kept their frontiers closed and limited visitors to those on official business or guests of the Throne. They doubted the wisdom of letting India build a road across the Terai to supplement the narrow-gauge railway laid in 1927. But they needed to increase their exports of timber, rice, grain, hides, oilseed, ghee, and jute, in order to establish new industries and import more cotton, sugar, metals, petrol, and consumer goods.

Within three years Red China had overrun Tibet and started a massive build-up of a quarter of a million troops and labourers to construct airfields and roads leading to the las. Year after year China increased her military strength on the Nepal frontier. The stalemate in Kashmir and the stealthy but unmistakeable intention of China to commit genocide in Tibet were still in progress when King Mahendra was crowned in Katmandu in 1956.

During those years the Nepalese political structure experienced a series of vicissitudes. In February 1948 the hereditary Chief Minister announced plans for a constitution based on manhood suffrage. Acrimony among those engaged on preparing it led to the incident in 1950 when King Tribhuvana and his family, except for his grandchildren, sought asylum in Delhi. The Chief Minister declared the Throne vacant and named the five-year-old Prince Birendra as king (as I write he is a schoolboy at Eton). Three months later, in February 1951, King Tribhuvana returned to Katmandu and proclaimed the creation of a provisional cabinet entrusted with the specific task of formulating a constitution to establish a Constituent Assembly elected on adult suffrage. The development dealt the powerful Rana family a severe blow. It also caused political chaos, the establishment of sixty-one splinter parties representing less than 150,000 people. Their manoeuvres for power in successive coalition governments vitiated Nepalese unity until the death of King Tribhuvana in 1955.

Those were the conditions in which King Mahendra and Queen Ratna Devi were crowned the following year. It was not an auspicious atmosphere though they were a young couple, the King then thirtyfive, his Queen enchanting and talented, one of the most beautiful women in the world. Both possessed considerable courage and regard for duty. The King soon revealed himself to be progressive. He opened the door wider to admit foreigners. On his instructions the nobles no longer wore at every state ceremonial the skull-fitting casque of diamonds and emeralds
and seed pearls flaunting magnificent Bird of Paradise plumes. The corona-
tion concluded, the King undertook four journeys to the farthest parts
of Nepal, the first ruler to visit them. He brought to his tasks a passionate
nationalism, the reputation of a hunter, and the inner sight of a poet. He
was already a fluent linguist in six languages and several dialects and had a
great capacity for acquiring information. He played chess.

While splinter groups squabbled on into 1957 the King indicated his
displeasure at their petty bickering. In July he dismissed the Prime
Minister, Tanka Prased Acharya, and appointed in his stead Dr. K. I.
Singh as a first step to holding general elections. Singh was very active.
He had long been regarded as Peking's man in Nepal. He spent three
years in China. It was rumoured that when he returned in 1955 he an-
nounced that he was not a Communist and that he swore loyalty to the
Throne. I met him at a reception in Katmandu, a stocky middle-aged man
with an athletic smile.

Installed as Prime Minister, Singh conducted affairs deviously. His
methods resembled those used by the leaders of two British unions which
have become supranational associations. The King had instructed him to
give his interim government a broad political basis. When the larger
parties refused to collaborate he could have resigned. Instead up popped
a number of tiny left-wing parties run by his friends which he enrolled
in a coalition government as representative of Nepalese opinion. This
ruse united other parties against him. He put off the elections and three
months later announced them indefinitely postponed due to a shortage
of paper for balloting. Then came an electoral law which would have
given his government insight into the lists of voters and counts at the
polls. In a measure aimed at established parties he ordered a commission
of his henchmen to investigate a charge of misuse of state funds by the
previous coalition government. Peking then offered a loan to Singh's
government. It would appear to have been a feint move designed to
enhance the government's reputation among Nepalis for it was turned
down. Within two weeks Singh accepted an offer from Moscow of
exactly the same sum, 30 million roubles (£2,700,000).

After 110 days the King dismissed Singh from office and took personal
control of the country. Singh hurried round Katmandu saying: 'Nepal
is in imminent danger of losing her sovereignty and independence at the
hands of Britons and Americans in our country.' This classic Communist
line had never appeared more humorous: Britain was present in the guise
of normal representation and Russian technicians equalled the few
Americans engaged on their country's loan to Nepal, in the shape of
building roads and schools, increasing malarial control and developing agricultural projects. Those days had shown other parties the dangers inherent in their bicker-dicker and appeared to have lost Singh the friendship of his previous hosts.

The King consulted other leaders about the proposed general elections. They were held without duress in February and March 1959. The voters indicated their opinions clearly. The Nepali Lower House has 109 seats. The United Democratic Party led by Singh won 5 seats and the Communist Party 9 seats, two more than those gained by Independents. At the head of the poll was the Nepalese Congress, which had a former Prime Minister as figurehead but was led by General Surarna Shumsher Rana, which took 74 seats, and the Gurkha Party, led by General Mrigendra Shumsher Rana, which won 19 seats. These two parties represented a blend of aristocratic conservative-liberal-nationalism. None of the corrupt and effete politicians of the 1950-7 period obtained office.

The result was an open defiance of China. Less than four weeks after the elections were held detachments of Chinese troops in Tibet raided Sherpa villages in north-eastern Nepal and arrested villagers for interrogation. Nepalis were reported to have been shot dead. Copies of the English-language newspaper *Motherland* published in Katmandu which have reached me describe the abduction and persecution of Nepali traders engaged on normal business in Tibet. Throughout the summer of 1959 the Chinese raided across the Nepal frontier on a claim of hunting for spies.

The significant feature of the period was the Russian loan. It led to an agreement by which Russia would have an Embassy in Katmandu and build a road across the country from west to east, an agreement which infuriated Peking where printers had been producing maps which included Nepal and Bhutan as Chinese territory by right of previous emperors. The statement announcing the establishment of a Russian Embassy came only a few weeks after Mr. Nehru had visited Katmandu and announced that Indian troops were to man strategic positions near the main northern las. Thereafter the Chinese broadcasts beamed into Nepal from Lhasa and Gyantse embarked on propaganda against all Europeans, 'filthy treacherous white-skinned dogs' in one phrase and in another 'bestial white curs and their pups', remarks interpreted as including Russia in general hatred on an assumption that she deliberately stopped the Chinese squeeze on Nepal and India.

Several vital questions arise from the Russian intervention. Was it an
indication that Moscow did not intend to let China get control of southwest Asia? Does Moscow intend to dominate India? Can China create a situation which will force Russia out of Nepal? What would happen if Russia did leave Nepal? If the Chinese exerted other pressures elsewhere, will Russia bow out of Nepal of her own accord? In connexion with the last question, Russia has indicated an awareness of her statistical inferiority to China and is therefore aware that her economic superiority will dwindle each year as Chinese industrial development increases inexorably. On the other hand, Russia possesses nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. If Russia did not possess those military advantages, China could at present overrun southwest Asia by the use of conventional weapons alone. She has the manpower.

The Nepalis have shown themselves to be brave and willing to fight to death. Despite setbacks and failures in the past, they are progressive, intensely independent, and highly intelligent. Their trouble is simply that their neighbours are huge whilst they, cradled among their hills, wanting only time to develop in their own way and at their own pace, are small, few, and utterly unprepared.¹

Nepal may seem to be small and far away to those who glance at this brief summary of its recent history from their vantage points in Britain and America. But is it? Is it farther away today than were Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on the twilight rim of Europe in 1940? The answer is no. If anything, Nepal and Tibet are closer to the West now than were the submerged Baltic nations at the outset of World War Two. Twenty years of improvements in aviation have produced a situation which only a night-club addict can ignore. Those same twenty years have seen a revival of aggressive rocketry, a development beyond the wildest imagination of those who abandoned it as impractical over a hundred years ago.

The existence of Chinese air-bases in Tibet is not denied. The gamble

¹ The foregoing was underlined during March–June 1960 by Chinese military raids on Nepalese villages twenty miles inside the frontier. They culminated in a raid on 26 June when Chinese troops fired on an unarmed Nepali border patrol investigating reports of Chinese intrusion near Chokka, some 135 miles from Katmandu. The officer in charge was killed and 17 men were taken prisoner. As a result, Mr. Chou En-lai indulged in some verbal acrobatics which deserved close attention. He apologized for the death of the officer, stated that the patrol had been mistaken for Tibetan 'rebels' (an admission that Tibetan patriots were still active), and, in strange contrast to his apology, stated that the patrol was in Chinese territory, meaning an area now claimed by China.
by China and Russia to create a situation in Nepal by which one or other can establish air-bases there on some pretext or other, against each other or in uneasy initial partnership against democratic Asia, cannot be ignored. Such bases would have far-reaching consequences for India and Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, and for Pakistan. Neither Russia nor China would have to pass over a sizeable stretch of hostile or neutral territory to touch down; their flights and the strength of planes on such flights would be unknown to the outside world. They could contain parachute regiments, artillery, tanks, and a wide range of other weapons. Their movement would be no more complicated than the advance of a pawn in a game of chess. The most significant point is that their strength could comprise only conventional weapons and protests from the outside world would be greeted by rocket-rattling speeches in Moscow and Peking. This single example of how the Nepalis are placed, now, today, not at some unspecified future date, reveals the utter futility, the nonsensical lack of facing facts, which permeates the anti-nuclear-bomb campaigns as if nuclear weapons alone endangered world peace. In point of strategic fact, nuclear weapons are no more than a convenient method of terrorism to ensure that conventional weapons achieve the same end of imperialist domination without intercontinental devastation. Up to the point of writing, only the Communists and their agents in the anti-nuclear campaigns seem to have grasped this truth, and use it to divert attention from the peril of small countries such as Nepal from conventional weapons alone.
ASSAM

The Great Boundary Fault

ASSAM was well known to Gurkha troops. They rendered Britain invaluable service in this state shaped like a tricky section of a jigsaw puzzle, the most easterly member of the Indian Union. In the 19th century its outlying rice villages and tea plantations were frequently raided by belligerent hill tribesmen intent on loot, murder, abduction of suitable sacrifices to quieten their gods, or a spot of butchery to keep up their morale, until the British authority, tired of holding troops in readiness, formed a special corps, the Assam Rifles, under civil control but trained by officers seconded from the Regular Army.

At the start of World War Two in 1939 upwards of 4000 men were serving in the Assam Rifles. The majority were Gurkhas, superb soldiers, disciplined, fearless, soon at home in the hill country north of Imphal.

I went to Assam accidentally. I had been farther east to collect material for a book and flew back from Singapore to Calcutta towards the end of 1956 and was met at Howrah by Ed Phillips. Air travel has created a club of nomads who trail up and down the flight lines and usually meet when they have given up expecting to come across each other again. Ed and I had not met for three years since we were in the country which became Ghana during a phase of new developments in
Africa; there will be plenty of news from African sources for several years but it will be in a European context, an outcome of events from 1948 to 1955.

Nevertheless, members of the club usually know each other's whereabouts and out of the sunlit humidity of Calcutta came Ed, lanky, black-haired, long pale face like an El Greco saint, shoulders temporarily unencumbered by the several cameras which were his livelihood and his love.

While we had a drink in a comparatively quiet corner he said: 'I'm going to Assam the day after tomorrow, Johnny. Come with me.'

I thought for a moment. Ahead of me was a prospect of cities in Europe. I dislike cities more than any other torture invented by man, every one of them a jungle, places where otherwise pleasant men anaesthetize their consciences to cut throats in the sacred name of 'normal business procedure', the roaring self-obsessed boastful nihilistic streets where integrity and purpose die in gutters beside the latest thousand bodies flung into them by car murderers. The prospect had been frightening me for days even though these places do have art galleries, orchestras, and theatres.

'How long will your trip take?' I asked, weakening.

'Oh, three weeks,' said Ed. 'I'm going to photograph the earthquake zone.'

The next day I sent off cables. I hoped that my abominable memory directed them correctly; my wife and I once received a profuse last-hour cancellation of an invitation we had not made. Then Ed and I hopped over the beclouded Khasi Hills to Gauhati where he had a Land-Rover waiting. We spent a day in this active town on the fringe of the burning plains to bed down his equipment and add extra supplies. On the second morning we left streets busy as a market day, drove out past wattle-and-mud houses, clashes of scarlet poinsettias and vermilion cannas, and headed east up the Brahmaputra Valley. Under a sky like faded blue silk we were protected from the worst heat by the charcoal-grey mountains of Bhutan north across the river and by southern jungle hills, one of the dampest regions in the world.

As we drove into the tea country I had a number of surprises. First there was the road. Out of monsoon, when the Brahmaputra is a chocolate-coloured torrent that overflows into flood plains along its bends, when bhils, wide dents of open ground, are turned into lakes, it must be one of the best roads in India, a good hard fast road. During monsoon the Bengal-Assam railway provides a reliable means of communication. Secondly, there were more people than I had expected. We drove through
villages bordered by tea estates and every one was crowded. A house
which did not produce a rush of three or four smiling children to watch
our wheels roll by was unique. Although they were energetic a third of
them would die before they reached their tenth birthday and less than a
third would live to forty.

The men were somewhat smaller in stature than those in more
westerly states. They were compact, flat of belly, their leg muscles more
developed. They wore a wide assortment of clothes, sleeveless pullovers
and trousers, old shirts, dingy kilts. Some young men sported shoes,
shiny symbol of the new Indian endeavour. Near an orange plantation we
passed two youngish chaps who had crew-cut hair-styles and dark blue
blankets hanging from their shoulders to their knees. The only apt
description of Assamese women, long regarded as among the most
beautiful in India, was ‘petite’. Many wore a colourful longyi which left
their lovely, smokily bronze shoulders bare. The Burmese description
Ma Kyaw, Miss Smooth, meaning a shapely figure, was very appropriate
for these physically fragile women. We passed a file of them balancing
heavy baskets on their heads, moving as gracefully as ballet dancers.

We spent the night at Silghat, opposite Tezpur, a tea-town served by
a railhead and an airstrip.

Unexpected opportunities caused us to rearrange our programme the
next morning. We had driven on past a tiny dejected village onto a flood
plain veined by water-courses shrouded in high yellow ekra grass when
we suddenly spotted four single-horned rhinos near the river, whopping
beasts, ungainly bodies looking like early armour-plated tanks, legs
hidden by grass. Two had egrets perched on their rumps. We might have
been down in the Hluhluwe Reserve in Natal. Ed stopped the Rover to
watch them through our glasses. I know only one animal less prepossess-
ing than rhinos, the warthog, but these grotesque two-ton pachyderms
possess a queer antediluvian majesty.

Within minutes of resuming our journey we came on a string of
kunki elephants, hans or mukhanas as they are called in these parts,
tuskless bulls, smaller and paler of hide than the big fellows in Africa.
They ambled docilely under heeled directions from their young mahouts.
Two had canvas and straw ghudi saddles on their backs. On one ghudi sat
a blonde European girl in a white cotton blouse and jodhpurs. The rhinos
gave Ed an idea for photographs.

We were both in luck. The girl directed us to a dak hotel nearby in
the sharp Mikir Hills where we learned we were in the Kaziranga Sanctuary
for rhinos. We lunched luxuriously off cold chicken and salad, then
Ed went off to find rhinos for his camera and I got into conversation with a greying man whose skin had the faint yellow tinge left by fever. He had spent most of his life managing a tea estate and was soon to retire to Britain. He proved to be a mine of information.

'We Britons started this sanctuary over fifty years ago,' he told me. 'If we hadn't done so, rhinos would be extinct by now. Local poachers, mostly Nagas, were killing them off like flies to sell their horns to Chinese traders. We saved them. Delhi has continued our work. There are about two hundred here and another hundred, probably less, in other parts of Assam, down near Manipur, but they don't calve as regularly as they did. They may be extinct by the end of the century. Killing still goes on. A few years ago the Rifles had a pitched battle with poachers who killed seven in a few weeks. At present the Chinese offer about £800 per horn.'

I liked the thought of a rhino being poached like rabbits. The Chinese to whom the planter referred were wealthy overseas merchants. They paid fantastic sums for a pinch of rhino horn directly they began to lose their virility, believing it certain to renew their vigour. Notices advertising powdered rhino horn can be seen at shops in Sago Street, Singapore, on the steep slope of Wellington Street on Hongkong, in Cholon, and elsewhere. Alas for those who feel autumn in their veins: they usually buy poor-quality elephant tusks. Chinese millionaires, notoriously fearful of being murdered by business rivals, tong hoodlums, Communist agents, faithless wives, ambitious sons, anybody, spent hundreds of pounds on cups carved from rhino horn which are supposed to render every poison innocuous. They are similarly duped.

'You must have seen many changes here,' I offered.

'Few for the good,' the planter replied. 'I mean for the people. Take religion. Assam is a marginal constituency. Fifty per cent of its people are Hindus and about thirtyeight per cent are Muslims. At Independence a two-to-one majority in the district of Sylhet voted to join East Pakistan. Our Valley Hindus got worried. They also worried because Muslims bring in extra wives from Pakistan. Actually, both Hindus and Muslims brought in men and women for over a hundred years, since we introduced the sardari system to import qulis to work in the leaf. But the Muslim community is increasing faster than the Hindu, despite our having over a quarter of a million refugees from East Bengal. Our Hindus didn't like what Muslims did in Kashmir. Our Muslims didn't like what Hindus did in Kashmir. They're watching each other like cats and trying to raise bigger families. That produces another problem. They only produce enough rice for their own requirements. Every increase in population
decreases the amount of basic food available from local sources. And that affects the political set-up. Assam has one of the most vigorous Communist parties in India. Up in the northeast, around Dibrugarh and Sadiya, they're in radio contact with the Chinese. In the Naga Hills, through Manipur to the Chin Hills, they're in personal touch with Burmese Communists who escaped to the jungle when their plots failed. There are whole villages of them.'

I changed the line of conversation. 'What about other religions? I heard that Christianity had success here.'

'lt did,' he agreed. 'We persuaded the Nagas to give up head-hunting. We even managed to get them to stop using panjis.'

'What are they?' I asked.

'Minefields for human feet,' he explained. 'They cut up bamboo into small slivers, dipped their points in poison, and stuck them in paths around their villages. Other tribes who attacked them trod on the panjis and died. When we came, wearing boots, they attached panjis to bushes where they would scratch our hands and faces. Now the women are reverting to their old beliefs. The Nagas and other hill tribes associated Christianity with us, our missionaries and their wives, the tiny schools those women set up and broke their hearts over because it took years to form a regular class. It was one thing to give independence to educated Indians. It was something else to explain to these people why the God they were only just beginning to accept was no longer in charge of Indian gods. That was how they saw it. Two years ago head-hunters raided a village near the Burma frontier. They decapitated sixty-two people with their daho knives. Like parangs. They were naked Regmas. Other trophy raids have happened since. That is how it's going here.'

'Are there missionaries here?'

'Some,' he told me. 'A number of converted Nagas have worked their old snake worship into Christianity. They've got their excuse in the Garden of Eden rubbish.'

I remembered a missionary in Africa who had told me that the greatest stumbling-block to the Christian faith there was the Old Testament. One religious leader, Bishop Colenso, disputed the authenticity of the Pentateuch, but none had the courage to follow him.

The planter and his daughter, the girl on the elephant, gave us dinner.

During it he reverted to our previous conversation. 'We had a party of American missionaries here two years ago. They spent several months in the hills. They worked hard, at least eighteen hours a day. But they were young people from a young country. They couldn't get it out of their
heads that they were Americans first and then people. I attended two meetings they held for our workers. They talked about the material rewards Christianity had brought to America.'

'Wrong?' I queried.

'Wrongly applied,' he said. 'They showed photographs of skyscrapers and so on. No good. Our people don't need skyscrapers. They can't visualize building Manhattan in Assam's tea and monsoon land. The photographs only widened the gulf. They meant nothing.'

'Photos increase knowledge,' Ed said.

The planter nodded. 'They do, provided you have experience of what they show or an educated imagination. When we're back in Britain and I see a television film about Assam or pictures of it in a newspaper, I shall remember life here, people, things that happened to my Assamese friends, customs, work, weather. They can't do that for people who never came here.'

'You think the Americans are wrong,' I said.

'I didn't say that,' he replied. 'I think they are making mistakes exactly like we did in our day. What counts here is everyday life, the same as everywhere else. Work, family, village loyalty. Take colour prejudice. It counts here that local and refugee Burmese Communists marry tribeswomen. Every time Americans in the Southern states lynch a Negro or anything like that our local Communists hear about it, don't ask me how but they do, and it goes round that American missionaries are trying to hoax our people. The Assamese are a proud people.'

'They resent racial prejudice,' I said.

'They do,' he said. 'The Communists trade on it. I went to the wedding ceremony of a Burmese Communist and one of our Kunyauk girls. She was a pretty child, copper-coloured, a lot of dyed creeper fibre necklaces and a cotton apron. Her husband came up to me and said: "I am told you are not cruel or unjust to your workers so I will protect you when the revolution comes." A very cocky type. I said: "Oh, there's going to be a revolution." He said: "Hindus and Muslims will never be friends until we rule them." His wife was enormously proud of him. The next time I saw him he asked if I would like to read a booklet about how white Americans persecuted Negroes. I read it. It was written in English and published in Peking. Pictures of skyscrapers were no answer. Our people look at the colour of their own skins.'

Ed and I spent two days at the hotel. I passed most hours on the stoep with the planter, listening to his reminiscences as we looked across the
Punjab—private houses for government officials at Chandigarh
United Provinces—an adult school in Pakbara village

Faridabad—free education of children
The Great Boundary Fault

river to snow crests of the eastern Himalaya. He had scores of good stories. Other people subsequently confirmed his opinions.

Early on the third morning we resumed our journey. We drove north-east beside the Brahmaputra through small bustling villages and across flood plains. Our route took us through Sibsagarh to Dibrugarh. A hundred miles north across the river, running parallel to its course, was the MacMahon Line through the mountains, agreed to as a boundary by British and Tibetans but not accepted by the Chinese. The latter refused to acknowledge contracts made by independent Tibet, which they claimed as their own territory although their claims ceased from 1909 until 1949. Chinese claims for a more advantageous frontier than the MacMahon Line were unwittingly aided by American cartographers who had put 'Frontier Undefined' on their maps of the area.

I noted changes in the people at Dibrugarh. They were mainly mid-eastern hill tribesmen, Khamtis and Bhutias, related to the Tibetans, and Daphlas, stocky square men of middle Asian facial characteristics, the sublimated Mongoloid eyefold and short nose ending in wide nostrils, and broad lips. A number of men wore a rough woollen blouse like a shuba, belt at the waist to provide a pouch, and drab brown or black kilts. Their shoeless flat feet were untroubled by stones along the tree-lined road on which we reached the last town in Assam, the forest and hill-sheltered centre of Sadiya.

I saw nothing memorable in Sadiya. Its streets and houses, even its bazaar, were featureless, a town near the end of the Valley plains whose people engaged in some agriculture and some trade conducted with southeast Tibet over Yungyan and Kangri Kahpo las, across the eastern Difu and southern Choukan passes into Burma. Its people looked exactly what they were, a community formed long ago by a meeting of remote Burmese and Tibetans who fused with later Indians who pushed up the Valley. The men were tough and cheerful, given to bouts of impish humour. Their only needs were strength and constitutional hardiness, essential for the arduous simplicity enforced by their life. Their women-folk were equally hardy. Being a frontier region, the military were present, the Assam Rifles. Those who handled formalities for us were vigilant, scrupulously polite, none of them anyone's fool. They were disciplined and punctilious.

Sadiya was overshadowed by its surroundings when they were visible. A thick drizzle fell from the time we left Sibsagarh and continued through the two days we spent in the town. It was the meeting-place of several tributaries which come through the hills to join the Dihang link

T.H.O.I.—M
of the Tibetan and Indian Brahmaputra in a confluence of waters which yearly strips hundreds of millions of tons of soil off adjacent country.

Towards the end of each day a thick sunlight broke through the low clouds. It turned the river courses into tangled crimson necklaces shining on the dark earth. At those times we caught a brief glimpse of our goal, the Mishmi Hills, forty miles farther on, a shapeless huddle dimming in the night rising out of China.

With unintentional humour geologists call the region the Great Boundary Fault.

Ed accepted unquestioningly every suggestion given him by the military on a choice of porters. They tramped into our *dak*, dripping rain-water onto the floor, and it was apples to doughnuts that at least four out of the ten whom Ed selected were told to keep an eye on us in the Great Boundary Fault. My pet suspects were Saiyan, a beaming man of about five foot two, more Indian than local Assamese, reputedly ignorant of English, and Locha, slightly taller, heavier, said to be deaf and afflicted by visions. We were instructed not to go beyond Kablungpa, a village seventy miles away on the Tidhing River. That was a disappointment for Ed. I knew he had set his heart on getting deeper into the country, to a place called Walong or Wulong. But he took it philosophically.

As if to prevent us from getting anywhere at all, rain teemed down on the second night. Its drumming kept us awake for hours.

The next morning dawned as nervous as an old-fashioned schoolgirl. It could not decide whether to smile or sulk. We postponed our worry to breakfast off fresh eggs, tinned bacon, and coffee. It was still drizzling at ten o’clock when our porters arrived. Undaunted, they started to load equipment on their backs. An hour later, the rain thinning, we started to walk towards the hills.

Fortunately, our luck was in. More than once we feared the rain about to return in full strength, particularly in early afternoon when a surge of ominous black cloud spread over the plain like spilled Indian ink, but it passed away. By mid-afternoon we were advancing under a tranquil sky hedged by near-green forests and lumpy yellow-grey hills.

We camped near the edge of the lonely plains. It must be one of the most empty areas in Asia. There was nothing except ourselves in a vast brooding stillness, not even a scrape of cicadas. The porters sat round the cooking fire singing songs full of bawdy innuendo.

When we started the next morning the ground began to rise. We climbed into great green woods silent as the grave and over rocky ridges on a slow but steady ascent of 3000 feet to a dilapidated old *dak* high up
among the tree hills. It was filthily dirty but we cared less about its condition than for a chance to sprawl out and take the weight off our feet. Our boys shamed us by hopping about with undiminished energy. I envied their feet. They did not wear shoes but dashed unconcernedly over everything. No change of ground fazed them on that day or on the next, when we climbed another 1500 feet to the crest of a saddleback hill. From there we had a magnificent view of rivers behind us spreading like a network of blue veins.

Ed decided to take some photos so we stayed there until late afternoon before starting down a rocky zigzag trail which decended 3000 feet in eight miles.

Although the quake devastation in the area had been weathered for six years it was still apparent. Hills were split open like nuts, their slopes riven; sections of soil and granite, miles wide, sagged from their original positions. Other sections of from four to ten miles long and up to a mile across had collapsed into valleys. Under some falls were villages of twenty or thirty families. One village here in the Tidhing Valley had lived on for a day after the first quake and then a landslide fell on it. A few miles farther on a river changed its course, piled up behind a hillside until its accumulated pressure snapped the hill open and a torrent of water cut through the fissure like a bacon-slicer peeling butter.

As I described in an earlier book, I have shared quakes with the Turks. None could have compared with the anguish of earth here. It was an awesome spectacle, like a collapse of huge waves which solidified as they fell. In places other waves of rock had fallen on them in tortured dark folds. On one slope an edge of surviving forest poked out in tree-trunks, mown down as if they were grass, like a chewed carpet fringe. The forest had been obliterated.

These visual remains were a stark reminder of what can happen to the Great Boundary Fault, a fracture of the earth's crust at the eastern end of the Himalaya which undermines the frontiers of Tibet, Assam, and Burma. The fault originated in a division of rock strata which caused it to lie at two unconnected levels. It resulted in an increased strain on the crust above until it gave way, a movement that is usually vertical and causes a downthrow of the lower level of rock while the upper rises, a combined action which can precipitate additional quakes through exploiting new weaknesses. In some instances, as happened here, the risen upper level develops an immediate thrust fault which causes it to fall on the downthrow side.

While these hills still quivered like a chocolate blancmange patrols
of the Assam Rifles climbed over them to take food and medical supplies to isolated villages. Effects of the initial quake were felt in Lhasa, 300 miles away, where people interpreted it as godly anger at the Chinese invasion.

By the time we reached our destination I had collected accounts of events from three porters and added to them while Ed carried his cameras.

Nothing unusual happened during daylight on 15 August 1950. Village people worked in their local margs, tended goats and sheep, or collected wood from pine forests along the Luhit Valley. Darkness comes early to homes perched on these hills and few huts are illuminated by butter or oil lamps. Most people were asleep by eight o'clock when an eerie whine howled along their valley and mounted to a grinding roar as hills began to shiver. People stumbled out into the open, terrified, calling to each other, and fell on the quaking ground. It flapped like a blanket under them, feeling as if it were being given gigantic kicks from inside. Within seconds no living creature over hundreds of square miles remained upright. They were clinging to their convulsed hills.

One man who had gone to another village to barter goats was walking home through a forest when the howl started. He thought it was a distant thunderstorm. Then he was flung off his feet against a tree. Winded, he lay beside it, feeling an odd sensation of trembling uncontrollably until he realized the sensation came from the ground. He managed to get onto his knees by holding the tree and then a shiver threw him off-balance. The whole forest shook around him, trees bending like grass, crashing on every side. The roar deafened him. He dragged himself to a tree and clung to it, convinced the world had split in half. He hung onto the tree, too terrified to think.

Another man was walking over a hill after visiting the isolated home of a girl he intended to marry. He heard only a vague rumble before the hillside jumped under his feet. When he landed on his chest another quake bounced him on. It had been a clear starlit night when he commenced to return to his village but as he picked himself up a gigantic billow of dust hid the valley below. Then in the starlight he saw the crest of the next hill fall out of sight in a thundering avalanche. He crawled back up the hill, intending to return to his girl and her family. Then the real dust came. It sprang into the sky like a black fountain, blotting everything from sight. It was not until days later that he thought about what might have happened if his own hill had collapsed. Long after the first
quake ceased he was blinded but walked on through the dust until he reached the head of a path he had come up hours before. Another tremor threw him off his feet. He decided to stay there until the dust cleared. When morning came he found the path and half of the other side of the hill sheared off and later he saw a vast broken blanket of rock spread over the place where his girl had lived.

The first quake lasted several minutes. While it went on people huddled on their fluid hills. A few lost their sanity, driven mad by the terrifying howl and roars as hill faces cascaded down into valleys. Throughout the night other violent tremors produced fresh avalanches. When morning came people looked out on a dimmed devastation. It was afternoon before light penetrated huge clouds of slowly settling dust which turned the sky into a bronze glow. Margs had peeled off hillsides like flesh off bone. Networks of cracks in valley floors descended twenty feet and stretched for miles. Areas of ground elsewhere, up to twelve square miles, had sagged into new positions. Miraculously, loss of human life was limited, confined to a few villages and remote houses buried under falling hills, but nearly sixty per cent of livestock was dead, in some villages a total annihilation. Mountains of up to 18,000 feet had been rent like paper, flinging millions of tons of crust rock into valleys. Rivers of raging mud tossed uprooted trees on their surface like paper boats. A tributary of the Luhit piled up beside an avalanche fall for a week before it burst through it, tore down a forest, and flung boulders back up hillsides as it created a new course.

A sultry heat lasted until the first nightfall. As darkness spread, another series of tremors caused fresh avalanches. Villages were without food or water and lived on roots until supplies were brought to them by the Assam Rifles.

The tremors continued intermittently for weeks. Landslides and talus falls were frequent. Hills and valleys assumed new shapes. It was the worst quake ever experienced by those who lived on the Great Boundary Fault. Scree continued to drop as weathering increased weaknesses.

I found it incongruous to see these spilled hillsides, to imagine what those hours must have felt like to people who experienced them, and yet see only a meek aftermath of geological disaster. The hills looked solid. They felt solid. They turned my thoughts back to a night in Devon, a peaceful green English county, on a night when a dull howl was followed by a small earth tremor, our house shook itself, and villagers ran out into our only street. Whatever other differences exist, we are all the same
sort of ants when our seemingly solid earth heaves without heed of our
divisions of race and ideology and money.

Ed took pictures. Some days I went with him to scramble over rock
and see other faces of disaster. Most of the time I kept close to Anhi, our
English-speaking porter, to add what others told him to my notes. They
were more friendly directly it became obvious that we did not intend to
escape up the Luhit Valley. This forbearance nearly broke Ed’s heart.
A week later we climbed over the solid-feeling ridge and descended to
Sadiya, where we stayed for three days before setting off on the return
journey in a drizzle misting rivers and hills.
It took us three days to reach Gauhati, noticeably hotter, so full of
people that it bothered us.
Gauhati should have ended our trek along the Brahmaputra Valley.
Well, most people know how it is and those who do not deserve sym-
pathy. In the smokily copper afternoon sunlight, Ed and I wandered
around town to see the sights. We were mentally adrift, fidgeted by what
psychiatrists, who are so clever at inventing mental luggage labels, call
cross-cultural shock. We stared at the Assamese in endeavours to adjust
ourselves to so many people. They hastened off, probably thinking we
were wild mysterious Europeans. We were certainly dirty and unkempt.
Then we came in sight of the river. Beyond it the purple and crimson-
flecked hills of Bhutan rose into a placid turquoise sky. Black shadows
wreathed the bases of the mountains. They looked near. They were near,
friendly and inviting. We forgot the people around us.
Ed drew a deep breath. Then he gave me a sidelong interrogative
glance, his brown eyes thoughtful. He looked exactly like El Greco’s St.
John in the Prado.
’I wonder what they smell like, Johnny,’ he said.
’New to us,’ I replied.
He gave me an angelic smile.
That evening we met a supporter of a Naga separatist organization.
He was a shortish man of about twentyfive, clad in a delicate pink shirt,
a dove-grey suit, and pale brown sandals. He told us earnestly that his
association demanded a right to establish a sovereign Naga state, free
from ‘interference’ by Delhi. On this point he was most eloquent, though
he developed deafness when asked about the organization’s private
army, the Naga Home Guards.
’We do not intend to be caught napping,’ he said casually. ‘It was
necessary for us to set up a force to protect ourselves. Delhi put a price
on the head of our leader, Angami Zaypu Phizo. He is like the Greek,
General Grivas.' He grinned gaily. 'They will never catch Phizo.'

Certainly, Phizo had been extremely agile in eluding the authorities.
For several years, and despite a reward of \( \£800 \), he had gone from one
hideout to another in the forested Naga Hills, always a hop and a jump
ahead of his pursuers. He probably learned the knack during World
War Two when he and his men displayed considerable bravery in assisting
the Allies against Japanese troops in the assault on Kohima. Although
now middleaged and said to suffer from partial facial paralysis, Phizo
had remained active and energetic in pursuit of his aim of gaining Naga
independence. There are approximately 300,000 Nagas.

'How many support your attitude?' asked Ed.

'All who are true patriots.'

'Can you give a rough figure?'

Our informant shook his head. 'Our numbers increase every day.'

'Do you work with national groups who want Assamese to be the
only official language in the state?'

'We will assist whoever fights the Delhi oppressors.'

He outlined the separatist argument at some length. It appeared to
be based on a claim that Nagas were in no sense Indian in origin or spirit,
that Delhi did not attempt to promote Naga prosperity, and that there
could be no peace until Phizo's claims were met.

At one point, I asked: 'Are you Communists?'

'Patriots,' he insisted mildly.

'Are there Communists among you?'

'We are concerned with nationality, not politics.'

'What is your attitude to China?'

He grew wary. 'Nagas are pleased to have friends everywhere who
recognize the justice of their fight for freedom.'

We failed to shift him from the vague into the positive. He gave a
masterly display of saying nothing as if every syllable was a priceless
gem; even his conjunctives were as valuable as platinum. He was certain
to become a Cabinet Minister, if Phizo ever attained his ambition.
On a morning of warm apricot sunshine Ed and I crossed the Brahmaputra. We felt pretty confident as we drove to Rangia, twenty miles north of the river.

Ed was in a talkative mood, excited by a prospect of photographing a corner of a country scarcely known to the West. I shared his excitement. We tried to estimate how many Europeans had visited Bhutan, the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon', in the last fifty years, and decided there had been fewer than a dozen. Our own knowledge of it came from standard reference books. It seemed as if we had been blessed by one of those ideas which prove more worthwhile than a score of carefully planned itineraries.

We stopped for lunch at the delightful town of Rangia. It had a pleasant temple, holy cows, and a lively bazaar. Assamese in brightly hued clothes eddied round us in the brassy sunlight like a conference of rainbows. There appeared to be more wealth and more poverty than we had noted across the river. There were more beggars, stringy sadhus in rags and incredibly dignified sannyasis in dusty ochre robes representing two layers of Indian religious mendicants.

There was no direct road from Rangia to those purple and green Bhutan hills only another twenty miles farther north. In fact, although there were several passes into Bhutan from the south, no road connected it to India. The fact merits attention. From 1770 onward bands of Bhutanis debouched from the five main passes into the border states of Bengal and Assam to murder or kidnap Indians whom they used as slaves, acquire cattle and loot, and seize land between their hills and the Indian plains. They broke agreements concluded after the British occupied
Assam in 1826. Their frequent raids culminated in large-scale depre-
dations in 1862-4 while they held prisoner a British envoy, Sir Ashley
Eden, who had gone to Bhutan to obtain reparations for their attacks;
they had been receiving an annual allowance from the British to keep the
peace. Sir Ashley contrived to escape and had an exciting journey back
to India. A British force stiffened by Gurkhas drove the raiders back into
their hills but in counter-attacks the Bhutanis dislodged the British
from a number of outposts. They were pushed back again and sued for
peace in 1865. As a result they released their Indian slaves and territory
they had appropriated. In compensation for the latter they received an
increased annual sum.

In the circumstances it would have been natural for the British to
build roads up to the passes to give troops easy access into Bhutan if she
again broke her agreement. The Bhutanis stated they only wanted to live
alone so roads were not built. The Indian Government headed by Mr.
Nehru similarly respected Bhutani wishes. In consequence the common
route into the country was over hills and valleys by horseback, a six-day
journey from Darjeeling to the most frequent Bhutani capital or an awk-
ward hill climb from the West Bengal railhead at Jainti to the Thimbau
River valley pass. The Nehru Government also continued to pay Bhutan
the annual sum of £13,300 which Britain paid her from 1942. At first
Britain and then India controlled the non-existent foreign relations of
Bhutan. But the pattern of imperialism has changed. Directly the Red
Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950 they surveyed for a road to the northern
las into the country and established military camps on the frontier.

That was all that Ed and I knew as we studied our maps over lunch.

We based our hopes on Sorbhog, a town fifty miles west of Rangia
and twenty from Bhutan. No good road went east from Rangia. Sorbhog
had the extra advantage of being near a river from Bhutan and we im-
agined we could get into the country along its bed. It looked like one of
those rivers. Full of confidence we postponed final decisions, finished our
meal, and resumed our journey.

Rangia is a tea-town. During the afternoon we followed the sun
along a hard dirt road past a number of estates. We caught sight of
Bengali women in scarlet and pink saris at work in the flush. Some peeped
at us, a row of heads and bright cotton-clad shoulders bobbing up above
green bushes. They were nicely brought up girls; not one of them
responded to our waves.

The plantations were bordered by cleared spaces which separated
them from tawny blankets of ten-foot-high sabai grass jungle. In the
distance were patches of *sal* saplings, wistful as a boy's first growth of beard. We passed through tiny villages of wattle and *sabai* thatch *bangla*-style houses. Some were obviously new, their planned precision enhanced by tidy vegetable patches beside young orchards. Houses in other villages had been repaired or extended recently. Drenched by coppery sunlight, they resembled rustic dolls' houses. Practically every house produced an explosion of children clad in brown-skinned innocence. They did wave. Feet too.

We saw masses of children, including nubile girls. Child marriage has been officially abolished by the Indian Government, an act condemning a girl to wait until she is an old woman of sixteen before she is eligible for matrimony, but in some villages we saw sylphlike Mums of twelve and thirteen years old. By our guess their parents had wrongly informed local officials of their daughters' ages, a statement many officials would not pursue with zealot zeal for they shared the villagers’ dislike of the ban, and attacked it on religious grounds not wholly free from economic considerations.

The countryside contained extremes of animal life. Every village had sleek cream or tan zebu cows ambling about in sanctified indifference to mere mortals, their holy faces no more intelligent than those of cows at home. Domesticated buffaloes with wide hieratic horns mooched along on dismal chores, their ponderous strength devoid of the ferocity of wild *gaurs* said to roam areas farther east. Bird life was diverse. I noted tree ducks, lesser whistling teals called *sarhairs*, their wings a richer chocolate-brown than those of Hottentot teals in South Africa; golden pheasants; painted snipe; and a variety of partridges. Among the elephants was a stumble-legged albino calf like the ghost of a baby elephant. He was so white that a hundred years ago in Burma the women of the royal court would have intrigued for the honour of suckling his holiness at their breasts.

We drove without haste, enjoying the afternoon heat, talking about the Great Boundary Fault and discussing plans for Bhutan. Ed manipulated the wheel to free me to scribble notes. At first sight we did not recognize the tiger. As we rounded a bend of thatch jungle we saw a shape rolling on its back some forty yards ahead. The last village was less than a mile behind us. Then it shook itself up onto its legs and turned its head to stare at us. Ed jammed on the brakes.

'By God!' he said. 'Isn’t he gorgeous?'

He was a beautiful young cat. He stood somewhat above average height, muscular as a tygon, and had a fine head. His markings were superb, clear, sharp, spreading photogenically around his mask and
down his powerful body. We saw muscles ripple under his lovely skin. His opaque orange eyes held no hint of alarm, only icy contemplation, as if he had been used to wheeled traffic since he was born and knew no cause to fear any enemy. He was magnificent. Then he turned his head away disdainfully, took two lithe steps, and vanished in sabai grass on the right side of the road. It was the finest curtain I ever saw, leaving us wondering what would happen in the next act of his life. Ed and I had seen lions taking a dust bath, rolling about like puppies, but I had not heard of tigers indulging in it. When we stopped beside the place where he had disappeared and got out to have a look, his pug marks were clear in the dust.

At the next village we paused to inform people of having seen the tiger. A man who spoke mission-school English told us of one who had raided livestock in the neighbourhood and killed a calf two days ago. He told us there were lairs somewhere between the village and the Bhutan frontier. Most tigers had gone to the east, swimming across the rivers, but some still lurked in the vicinity, refusing to be driven out though more jungle was being reclaimed every year. Only a few months before a tiger had killed a child and torn off a man’s arm.

We stayed talking to him and a white-bearded ancient who said that when his father was a boy the district had been famous for tigers of great cunning and ferocity. He told us of young women being carried off, babies plucked from their own doorways, people who failed to reach their intended destination half a mile away, and a marvellous story of a religious beggar woman who claimed to live in a lair where at night the tigers transformed themselves into gods in human form to become the lovers of her renewed youthful beauty, and how after she disappeared a tigress of unparalleled savagery roamed the area for years. The ancient was extremely angry at the gradual disappearance of tiger, as if the neighbourhood lost tone with their passing. Froth gathered at the corners of his dry old lips and dribbled into his beard.

‘People are never satisfied,’ Ed commented as we went on.

We reached Sorbhog at nightfall. It had the unprepared charm of a village grown into a haphazard town due to the railway reaching it accidentally. It too was busy, crowded, flashing with thin-limbed children. It is a feature of small Indian towns and villages that recent overall changes have not noticeably changed their life unless a new industrial project has started nearby. They are self-contained, individual, content to preserve their customary pace.

And there we stuck. We collected gulis, ready to earn money even though the job held no charm. We had some supplies of tinned food
left over and arranged to add to them. We tracked down ponies of great antiquity, reputed to be of Tibetan tangam stock, certainly their only claim on attention, and inspected two moth-eaten mules of great listlessness, like old floor-mats sewn up, stuffed, and given a clockwork motor to make their ears twitch.

On the day after we decided the mules were the best we could hope for in the circumstances, we were ourselves tracked down by a youngish man who said he heard we were going to Bhutan. He announced himself to be a Bhutani, a nephew of a penlop, a provincial governor, and offered us his help.

His name was Ugyen. He was a big muscular man with Mongol features, dark brown eyes, and a paler skin than the Assamese. Black hair rioted over his forehead and ears in a bouffant style. A gaudy red-and-yellow-striped knee-length robe was secured around his strong body by a scarlet cloth kera belt which caused the robe to hang like a sack over his broad buttocks and footballer thighs. He had on a pair of knitted khaki stockings and gay red sandals. He spoke the no-frills English taught in missions.

Mr. Ugyen looked and talked like the answer to our dearest hopes. He listened sympathetically to our problems. He assured us he could ease our path. Bhutan wanted the outside world to hear of her problems. They were fewer than those of other countries, he said; there was no religious or racial problem, no beggars, but Bhutan needed assistance in increasing her resources and harnessing her rivers to provide power. We would be most welcome.

Then he asked: ‘Have you permission from our Maharaja to enter our country? Of course you have.’

Our confidence evaporated. It was another of those countries, the entry of amiable foreigners limited to personal invitation. We were caught at a disadvantage; we had not yet got over behaving like good boys at the other end of Assam in order to prevent an international incident. ‘Oh,’ Ed said. ‘Is it necessary?’

Mr. Ugyen looked at us in turn. ‘It is necessary,’ he said.

‘We only want to see a corner,’ I put in. ‘We haven’t much time.’

Mr. Ugyen thought for a moment. ‘It is necessary,’ he repeated.

When he left us alone we discussed the whole thing and admitted defeat. It was a bitter disappointment. We had enjoyed just enough time to set our hearts on seeing a little of the land of the Drugpa, the ‘thunder people’, a shrimp of a country beside the huge whale of Chinese military power, fewer than 600,000 people in a country estimated at only 18,000
square miles, the population of Berkshire and Shropshire in an area scarcely larger than Somerset, but on the very threshold we were stopped. Our disappointment meant damn all to people who never felt a desire to get outside of their own parish, but the memory of that failure has never left me. For some days we were wretchedly miserable.

In some ways I fared better than Ed. I had several conversations with Mr. Ugyen. Like the Sadiya porters, directly he realized we did not intend to disregard protocol he became informative. His manner suggested that he regretted having raised the question of our having been sent an invitation. He did his utmost to aid me.

I do not know on what authority the American journalist Mr. John Gunther based his surprising statement: 'Like Nepal, Bhutan was originally part of China. . . .'¹

The statement has no historical foundation in either connexion. The earlier known inhabitants of Bhutan were Bhos from Tibet. They accepted Tibetan Buddhism. Certainly, the Manchu emperors laid a theoretical claim on Bhutan, but it never merited serious attention. A Bhuti-British treaty in 1910 rejected Chinese claims and entrusted the country’s negligible foreign relations to Britain, an agreement which produced a formal claim of sovereignty from Manchu Peking which Britain rejected by stating that no Chinese attempt to influence Bhutanese affairs would be tolerated. The next year saw Manchu China dying in the Kuomintang revolution. No Chinese claim on Bhutan was made until Red China completed its occupation of Tibet. Then Peking printed maps including Bhutan as Chinese territory. Indian protests were disregarded by China. A propaganda infiltration by Chinese and pro-Communist Tibetans started within a few months of the Dalai Lama returning to Lhasa after his first flight to India. A number of Chinese agents were Red lamas. Simultaneously the Chinese authority in Lhasa introduced economic pressure on Bhutan by threatening to prevent her traders from selling surplus rice, corn, and millet in Tibet. Over the years the Chinese treatment of Tibetans and their religion at first angered and then alarmed Bhutanis, reminding them of how the Chinese always referred to them by the disparaging term mantze, barbarian. Bhutanis were the first to learn of the systematic terrorism, arson, and colonial repression which the Chinese took into Tibet. As they live on its southeastern flank they had contact with the Khambas, the frontier Tibetans

¹ Inside Asia (Harper, 1938).
whose lands were forcibly occupied and who first rose against the Chinese in 1953.

I asked Mr. Ugyen how long the northern las were open. He told me it depended upon the spring weather; usually from two to five weeks. He also told me there were four northern las, but as the Chinese were in possession of the long tongue of land between Bhutan and Sikkim on the west, the Chumbi Valley, he thought they might try to command two passes there south of Chomolhari, Queen of Snows, a frontier mountain 100 miles north of the Sikkimese capital. I asked if he thought his own capital, Punakha, likely to interest Peking. He told me the capital was wherever the Maharaja was present. The Maharaja is Jigmie Wanchuk, formerly Governor of Paro Province. His wife, who studied at Oxford, the first Bhutani to come to Britain, is a daughter of the Chief Minister and sister of Jigmie Dorjie whose wife is Tessla, daughter of the Tibetan Master of the Mint at the time when Heinrich Harrer spent his seven years in Tibet.

Since Mr. Ugyen talked to me the Chinese authority in Tibet has taken action against Bhutan enclaves in Tibet. At the start of the full Khamba revolt late in 1958 a Chinese patrol entered an enclave close to Bhutan and announced that it would not allow Tibetans to take refuge there. Similar restrictions were operated in the eleven small townships forming the enclaves. Belatedly a Bhutani army is being formed: it is equipped with weapons similar to those which British civilians intended to use against the Nazis in 1940, pitchforks and antique blunderbusses. India has undertaken to build roads up to the southern frontier. They will not be serviceable until 1963 at the earliest.

Bhutan is the most threatened country in southwest Asia. It is small. Russia has not intervened. China was undeniably angered by Russian intervention in Nepal. She may feel that an attempt to occupy Bhutan would serve a treble purpose in restoring her prestige in Asia, bringing increased pressure on India, and by giving her young soldiers a reason to keep on their toes. Not surprisingly, Bhutanis watch their northern skies for blooming parachute troops and fear for their las in the next few springs.

In addition to the high northern hills there are others of a vastly dissimilar nature which India has to conquer. No glance at her situation in these early years of her independence can be complete without a recognition of their existence.
IT WOULD be easier to generalize about Europe than to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Indian Union. A detailed observation of one corner cannot illuminate the whole scene. A vast panoramic scene would cause confusion from which nothing positive would emerge. Everything seen on one day may well be refuted and obliterated on the next. Whatever a foreigner hears from a thousand Indians will be whittled down if not entirely contradicted by the next thousand Indians who talk to him. He is forced to draw his own individual conclusions and in forming them it is wisest to ignore the unusual and singular which, all too often, are presented by European visitors as typical of India, an entirely incorrect approach.

The area of the Indian Union is 1,138,864 square miles exclusive of Kashmir and its provinces. Two of its cities, Calcutta and Bombay, are among the twelve largest cities in the world, but the great majority of Indians live in villages. There are more than thirty universities, but eighty per cent of the population is illiterate. In addition to 225 languages there are approximately 470 dialects.
No one has estimated the number of religions in the Union. They are believed to run into several hundreds. The principal religions, Hinduism and Islam, account for sixtyfour per cent and twentysix per cent of the population; the Christian community is estimated at two per cent; the other main religions are Sikh, Jain, Parsee, and Jewish. Since 1947 the Hindu and Christian communities have tended to lose ground. The cause for the decrease in the Christian community, which includes every denomination including three of a peculiarly Indian character, is obvious. The significant factor about the decline of Hinduism is a widespread and sharpening criticism of the caste system, the outcome of colour prejudice. Every external pressure, each internal economic development, is antagonistic to the survival of caste. For these reasons, Hinduism must experience a quickening transformation in order to adapt itself to new social conditions. Undoubtedly the two higher castes, the Brahmans, composed of priests and scholars, and the Kshatriyas, warriors, will combat any inclination to restrict their hereditary influence. It is an exploitable situation because the third caste, Vaisyas, tradesmen and peasantry, could easily be divided by sociofinancial stresses and is more restless and powerful than in earlier centuries, while democracy and Communism alike automatically respond to a cry for equal opportunity from the fourth caste Sudras, servants who were originally dark-skinned slaves and serfs taken into bondage by light-skinned Aryan invaders. At present the caste system is being picked over in a dilettante fashion in order to accommodate the rise of a modern economy. This cautious approach is unwise and unworthy. The Indian Government should have the courage to abolish it deliberately and ensure the freedom and rights of every man. Such an action would set an example to other countries, South Africa for example. As President Prasad said in another connexion: 'The edifice of independence needs to be strengthened. The people of India have to be prepared to sacrifice everything to defend India.' The caste system is not a national characteristic; it is social litter left behind by an age without the opportunities of our own day. Its continuation weakens India's internal and external affairs and threatens her independence.

Since 1900 the Muslim community has increased numerically due to polygamy providing a compound interest on the birthrate. It is divided into the Sunni and Shi’a sects and a number of sub-sects: Bhoras and Khojas, Ismailis who believe in the divinity of the Aga Khan and have connexions in East Africa, and Ahrars, essentially Islamic Communists.
Punjab—a village home kitchen

Rohtak—interior decoration of a village house
Madhya Pradesh—child welfare in a community project village

Assam—child medical work among Naga villagers

Bombay—a maternity ward in a free hospital
The Jains evolved from a doctrinaire division in Hinduism. Broadly speaking—precision is impossible due to their sub-divisions—they accept the theological beliefs of Hinduism but reject caste and are therefore politically exploitable. The Sikhs rejected the vast Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses in favour of a single supreme deity. The ancestors of the Parsees were met in the first chapter of this book, those ancient Persians who worshipped Ahuramazda at Persepolis and elsewhere, whose descendants fled to India and founded a small but prosperous community in Bombay. Buddhism is weaker than the main religious communities and confined largely to the north.

An interesting sidelight on the religious situation was provided by the two men primarily responsible for the creation of the Indian Union, Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru. Mr. Gandhi evolved into a profound Hindu whose life became a relentless struggle to attain greater spirituality. Mr. Nehru showed a tendency to agnosticism in early life. Gandhi believed in the message of God being present in all religions. On one specific point he wrote: 'Cow-protection is to me one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. . . . She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. The cow is a poem of pity. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God.' In a country where death from starvation is frequent the cow could not be protected without organized religion. Nehru wrote: 'The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate, organized religion, in India and elsewhere, has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it.'

There is no conflict in these divergent opinions on the role of religion in Indian affairs. They illustrate the single heart of India. Gandhi escaped from the confusion of mortal life into a creed which represented reality to him. It is my opinion that Nehru sought escape from a confusion of life aggravated by a clash of creeds, and sought to protest again ritualistic practices which do not impinge on a core of faith but which have grown up around it during the long centuries. Others in non-Indian countries have felt similarly.

Together these men produced the policy which altered India after Swaraj in 1947. They were both opposed to violence. Gandhi had already produced a political policy of satyagraha, 'spiritual force', demonstrated by passive resistance to British rule, non-co-operation. Nehru produced a policy of peace based on non-alignment with larger power
groups in the world. Their intentions and policy have become threatened by changes in the outside world which few people foresaw.

The most vital statistics in India are religion and the desire of men for women. They inflame and vitiate, induce fatalism, create hope of a worthier life later and a corresponding resignation to events in this life. There are more men and women fighting these invisible enemies now than at any time in Indian history, but both aspects of the Indian temperament entangle the country in endlessly exploitable situations, particularly since the rise of Red China.

Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese leader, once said: 'Every Communist must grasp the truth that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. . . . In this sense the whole world can be remoulded with the gun.'
Holy Rollers

An inexplicable depression afflicted me when I first saw Banaras, the core of holy India, a huddle of dirty white architecture beside the sacred Ganges. A mood of sullen chaos descended on my mind. I ascribed it to cross-cultural shock. One afternoon I recalled that Christmas Humphreys, who came here on his return from taking part in the International War Trial at Tokyo, had advised me to see it from the river if I ever visited it. I did so. The sensation persisted.

My second visit started some days after I said goodbye to Kamla and her family in Srinagar. When I arrived the hotel gave me a letter from my wife. I read it at lunch; she had described a chance meeting with one of her wartime comrades in the Fleet Air Arm and recounted details of cases brought before her and her fellow magistrates. As a consequence of this contact with events at home I felt familiar when I set out to explore the town.

It was late afternoon on a cauldron-hot summer day. Death smoke patched an enemy sky. The listless air had a fading sweetish tang from several hundred corpses burned since dawn. My mood of sullen confusion returned. I noted in my diary: ‘Sensation came back on walk round town. When conscious of it I was talking to beggar women near shrine of monkey god Hanuman. A few paces off in shade of temple entrance two young wives slept beside their babies. Neither girl more than eighteen. One had two children; eldest, about eighteen months, had sores round nose and mouth. Each child had kohl or collyrium on eyelids.’

Next morning I went out on the river with Bhagwat Mehta, a Bengali
and an agnostic. Hundreds of men and women out in the sparkling early sunlight were having a dip in the Ganges before the first cremation stirred human ash into its waters. People sluiced their bodies, rinsed their mouths, gargled, and carried river water off in pitchers for house uses. Screens were provided for women bathers but they adjusted their saris without need of other concealment. Naked children ran busily about to peep at the faces of corpses on the ghats and steps. There were fifty-four bound shrouds in one area.

It was a scene of strange colour. The empty sky was turning bronze. Under their glittering gilded pinnacles the Hindu temples and Mahratta palaces were dinghy white, their walls like frozen old sheets. Flights of worn grey steps led down to ghats fringed by rusty-toned bamboo poles. The Ganges resembled thick treacle. Sunlight picked out sati stones commemorating worthy women who had burned alive with their dead husbands. A processional flow of saris on the steps looked like beds of flowers stirring in a breeze. I regretted not having seen this scene during a mela, a religious mass bathing ceremony attended by millions of people.

As our shikara-type boat passed the remains of Auranzeb's mosque and the Madhurai ghat the mystery of my mood was solved. I saw a man in a white cotton dhoti and turban stretch out at full length on top of a flight of steps and start to roll himself down them to the river. There were about two hundred steps, none less than a foot high. The man threshed down, a jiggle of outstretched skinny arms and legs as he thudded down from step to step. He took the first eighteen without pausing for breath.

People paid no attention to him, merely turning aside to avoid his waving limbs, but he solved my problem. Banaras offended me by its very nature of being a graceless squash dedicated to the glory of death. However stupid it may appear to others, I prefer to believe our one positive life deserves reverence, a little gentleness, without taking out an insurance policy on a future existence. It is unquestionably dishonest to profess belief in a religion solely from fear of an uncharted hereafter, though it is equally a sign of intellectual immaturity to live without personal integrity or discipline. Basically, the great majority of the problems of our age, the era of easy death, the century of the common buck-pass, is that we are corrupted by a knowledge of our own death and like to assume that our recently acquired little learning in the natural sciences has ruled out responsibility for our own conduct. These are equally primitive reasonings, both as discernible in contemporary India as in
other countries. Fanaticism, like sophistication, is no proof of intelligence or integrity or spirituality.

‘He does it once a month,’ Bhagwat Mehta said in answer to my question. ‘Once he broke three ribs. When he started again he broke his nose. He was out of practice.’

‘How old is he?’ I asked.

‘About sixty. I wish you had seen the flower man.’

‘What about him?’

‘He dressed in old sacks. Every day people gave him roses and marigolds, all sorts of flowers. He wove them into a turban and wore it over his head and shoulders. Everyone here knew him.’

‘A sadhu?’

‘Yes. He begged food and carried it in an old bucket.’

I watched the sadhu fall behind a funeral party attending a scarlet shroud on its journey to a ghat. The red wrapping denoted that its occupant had been a wife. A short plump man with bare feet accompanied it. There were seven young children with him. The sadhu dropped energetically behind them.

When our river trip ended Mehta bustled off to attend to business until he rejoined me for lunch.

I wandered back to the hotel by a circuitous route along narrow twisting alleys. The walls had pictures painted on them, portraits of consumptive-looking men who had large eyes and twirly moustaches, and blue rats with long whiskers and writhing tails. Beggars swarmed round the temples. Ten years ago the population of Banaras was estimated at 450,000. Twice that number of people are believed to live near its 1500 temples, the additional number composed of sadhus who come to it as pilgrims to achieve the distinction of dying in it. Banaras is a city dedicated to death. Long before the Buddha taught here it was a principal city under its name of Baransi. It is the city of Shiva the Destroyer, third member of the Hindu triad, usually depicted as riding the bull Nandi or stamping on dwarfs, us, or sitting cross-legged to spit out his holy saliva which is the Ganges, hence the cause of sacramental bathes and the desire of devout Hindus to have their ashes absorbed in its waters.

Every year thousands of sadhus die in Banaras. India has millions of professional beggars. An estimate of 10 million would be conservative. All of them claim to be holy men. There are four varieties: charlatans who prey on superstitious peasants, religious fanatics, those deformed into beggars in order to gain an income, and genuine mystics. The first two varieties always form the largest groups. The third variety is
composed of children kidnapped by lambhadis or other gypsies, or sold by their parents, and whose bodies are scarred and bones broken to equip them as professional beggars, the boys of spring in their ruin, doomed to live as maimed uselessness. The traffic in children increased in recent years as a result of a jump in the birthrate. Professional beggars are a sociological factor. Occasionally they have been mentioned in the Indian Parliament but no one has been able to get rid of them for fear of offending orthodox opinion.

I saw many whose foreheads and bodies were smeared by horizontal lines of cow-dung ash, the mark of Shiva. Only a few were decorated with the vertical white and red forehead smears of Vishnu the Preserver. The sadhu who fell down the steps was only one of thousands who perform endurance tests to attest to their spirituality. I had seen others on beds of nails, sitting on their haunches with both ankles wrapped round their necks, and lying with their heads plunged into sand, begging bowls beside them. Bhagwat Mehta had taken me to see some on my earlier visit. His comment was: ‘Circus tricks.’

Earlier sadhus performed more strenuous feats. Some rolled from the Indus to the Ganges, a trip which took several years. It was a common event in the 19th century to find them rolling downhill from Trichinopoly to Pylna, a journey of only 100 miles. Others buried themselves to the neck in a ditch and refused to eat. Mr. Gandhi used to claim that if he starved to death in protest against aspects of British rule then the British would have killed him; he was assassinated by a Hindu believed to have belonged to an extremist religious right group, the Jam Sangh.

Other feats of religious endurance are said to have survived. One was a method of hanging by a rope over a blazing fire. Another was to light a fire on the head, a test preserved as a ritualistic ceremony in which bowls of flaming butter are balanced on the head and hands to cleanse the mind and its accomplices in evil. I have not witnessed anything comparable to a religious mortification observed by one 19th-century traveller: ‘I saw another devotee, a phallic worshipper of Shiva, who, not content with wearing or adoring the symbol of that deity, had made a vow to fix every year a large iron ring into the most tender part of his body, and thereto suspend a heavy iron chain, many yards long, to drag on the ground. I saw this extraordinary saint in the seventh year of his penance, when he had just put in the seventh ring, and the wound was then so tender and painful that he was obliged to carry the chain upon his shoulders till the orifice became more callous.’

1 Quoted by James Grant, History of India (Cassell Petter & Galpin, c. 1883).
Religious starvation and other forms of seeking national independence through displays of testimony to Hindu faith will not gain tolerant treatment in the materialistic years ahead. No foreign power in control of India will heed them. Those who starve will die; those who roll will probably be picked up and dumped in forced labour camps to work or be shot or starve. They will be treated as traitors. Satyagraha will never restore independence in future. No man will be allowed to live if he attempts to follow the example of Gandhi. Campaigns conducted against Roman Catholic priests and lamas alike in other countries allow no room for delusion about what would happen to genuine mystics in India.

I counted seventeen women beggars along a wall of one temple. Most of them were over forty. They squatted motionless on the ground, huddled in their filthy black or white saris, looking like a row of ancient dolls, mere bone and cobwebbed leathery skin, apathetic and still, no movement of their limp skinny hands giving indication of life, only an occasional shift of their eyes, waiting for the last dignity left to them, death in Banaras. They lacked even the whining desperation of old women slumped against walls in Madrid and Barcelona, who do at least screech Agua agua! through the last days of a life stated to have given them security. Only one was under thirty, a lean muttering woman who stared at nothing, eyes dilated, her long purplish lips twitching continuously. At the end of the wall was a woman whose white-streaked hair fell over her sunken toothless face. Every time a gong boomed in the temple she screamed a mantra in a weird bubbling ululation. The others paid no attention.

These women lived and slept in the streets. They depended for food on people who passed by or what they found in garbage if they were hungry, women whose husbands had died and left them nothing on which to live. The stoic escape of sati was forbidden. Hardly any of them had gone childless through life, but their children were too poor to provide for them. Some had outlived the three or five children they had borne. A number were from nearby villages but others came from distant parts, devout women who had just walked out of the crowded hut of a son or grandson and set off for Banaras. They did not know what had happened to those they had left behind. Few of them were interested in life, waiting for the shroud, the river, and rebirth. They sat in resignation, sunlight patching their rags, old eyes neither wise nor insane, only open.

On a wall near them a painted blue rat helped a god in an act of mercy.
Holy men in rags or filthy loincloths outnumbered the women beggars by fifty to one. They were *sadhus, gurus,* and *sannyasis.* Some had begged since they were children, the children of beggars, conceived and born and certain to die on the streets which were their only home. Others, quite a large number, had been successful business or professional men living a routine life amid families and friends until they abandoned everything, walked out of their home one day in the ochre robe of the *sannyasis* and vanished along a dusty road leading to Banaras.

At lunch I met friends of Bhagwat. Like himself they did not practise Hinduism. But like all Indians talking to a foreigner they discussed it in relation to their political and social ideas.

‘Hinduism was the first form of organized buck-passing,’ said Bhagwat. ‘There is nothing the believers cannot blame onto their gods. They even find out which god makes their wives snore. Last week I met a *swami* who said that Shiva is now in every scientist who makes hydrogen bombs and he plans to blow up the rest of the world just before Holi in 1965 so that Hindus can rule mankind.’

‘It should be quite a celebration,’ I commented. The Holi was an orgiastic festival in earlier centuries. It has become a night when men toss coloured powder over each other and run around for hours with large wooden phalli tied to their loins. More sedate members of the community, politicians eager to show they have retained ‘the common touch’, participate by jovially sprinkling red water over each other, symbolic of hymenal and menstrual blood, and tell foreigners it is a folk custom like Thanksgiving or the Helston Furry Dance. I asked: ‘Has Hinduism decreased recently?’

There was a chorus of affirmation tempered by some reservations.

‘It has increased in some primitive villages,’ one of Bhagwat’s friends said, a plump earnest young man who had round horn-rimmed spectacles and a pink shirt whose tails flapped loose outside his trousers. ‘The orthodox believe their gods gave India freedom. They say it vindicates their faith. If the old ones are successful the situation will become dangerous.’

‘The old ones’ was the kindlier description of Hindus who want to restore the practices and customs of ancient India. They have never stated what period they want to restore or what modern developments they would discard. I had listened to them in Delhi and elsewhere; they were blandly assured, and politically energetic. They would certainly
retain the caste system: they belong to the two top castes, an Indian equivalent of neo-Nazis.

When we finished lunch Bhagwat and another friend took me for a drive. They displayed traditional Indian hospitality by taking me to Sarnath. Although I am not a Buddhist I had long wanted to see the place where the original creed gained expression.

The huge Deer Park was delightful, clean, quiet, and orderly. It had no reminder of the shapeless-tasteless squash which automatically condemns Banaras to the eye. The oldest structure was the Dhamehk stupa, the tomb edifice containing relics of the Buddha or of leading Buddhists, which in architectural evolution became the chorten of Ladakh and Tibet. Dhamehk was erected over 2000 years ago by Asoka. It had become a grass-overgrown mound shaped like an enormous upright shell, a slightly smaller shell rising from its top. There were temples of recent origin, clean, too, hospitals, a library, and a centre for pilgrims.

At the centre I met a party of American Zen Buddhists, retired professional men and their wives. I had not had an occasion to study Zen, which I believe was derived from the Mahayana school, and consequently I was a tiresome bore for them because they took me to be another pilgrim, a role in which I floundered untidily, adrift in a conversation whose terminology cantered past my uneducated ears. I was also somewhat self-conscious about a garland of flowers draped around my neck. It would have looked fine on a woman but on my questionable charm it hung like a placard.

In an aside one of the Americans asked me: 'Have you seen Banaras?'

I hitched up my flowers and said: 'I'm staying there.'

He gave me a searching stare. He was a large heavy man and had a shock of iron-grey hair and a pale complexion, an open-necked nylon shirt, a lightweight biscuit-coloured suit, and brown brogans. He came from Chicago. His very blue eyes were outraged.

'Filth,' he commented disgustedly. 'I wouldn't have believed it possible in an old culture.'

Then his wife joined us and the conversation veered to places they had already seen on their world flight. His wife was a small grey-haired woman with a green dress and blue-rimmed spectacles. He called her Gertrude.
At sunrise the next morning I visited some temples. The sun was shining. Briefly the air felt cool.

Banaras was never a city for squeamish foreigners and several temples displayed notices which read: ‘Gentlemen not belonging to the Hindu religion are requested not to enter the temple.’ I had arranged to enter them. As Somerset Maugham so rightly observed, it is difficult to be a gentleman and a writer.

Europeans who strayed into these temples prior to the notices going up were mostly soldiers and missionaries, prudent and sensible people, vigilant on behalf of the moral code they breathed in the very air of their civilization. They soon retreated, astounded or outraged according to their temperament, and subsequently referred to their experience only to trusted men friends who would not think the worst of them. Whilst I sympathized over their shock, largely because I have been able to see their type of mind from the outside, I could not share their disgust.

Their moral scruples blinded their social vision. Perhaps I can illustrate it by noting how absence of water in Egypt constituted a major sociological factor. Other countries have other factors that cause a chain-reaction throughout their entire social structure: multi-racialism, soil erosion, superstition, a single or multi-party political system, polyandry, even sand. Carnality entangled in religion constituted a sociological factor in India, perhaps the greatest of all. Every demonstration of it had to be viewed in that light, not as an expression of licentiousness. Immorality, like beauty, frequently lies in the eye of the beholder. Moreover, it
is too often forgotten that the overwhelming majority of Indians were always illiterate. The Hindu priesthood instructed them visually.

Outside of the temples was a foretaste of what I saw in their innermost shrines. Each had its rows of lingams, phalli, symbolic not only of man but of the generative aspect of the Hindu pantheon with its 300 million gods and goddesses, best summed up for me by another Indian agnostic: ‘What was good enough for the gods is good enough for the orthodox.’

There were few men present in the temples but each had masses of women, mostly young, few older than thirty. Their saris glowed pastel-soft in the dingy greasy-grey light, a pink fold upon a thin brown neck, a swirling purple hem around naked heels, a murmurous eddy of women pattering through mingled smells and a cobweb shimmer of cymbals.

One aspect of Indian temples which shocked Europeans was the sculptured stone and wood squash of gods and goddesses. These temples were not designed for quiet meditation. Their purpose was to serve as a whip-lash, to stimulate a desire to procreate, to be fecund unto death, and their traffic-jam crush of immortals engaged in frenetic sexuality was not calculated to appeal to those born in the staid northern hemisphere, the gods as erotic as stallions, their chubby goddesses, all with fat legs and several busy pairs of hands, either docile or in earnest pursuit of fertility. An Indian demographer has said that sex play is the national sport and the temples proved his statement correct.¹

The temples provided only one aspect of orthodox Hindu concern with sexuality. Centuries ago their swamis laboriously compiled a list of the possible forms of coition, a useless statistic but a revelation of social tendency. Other means of stimulating sexual desire are described in the Kamasutra, the Hindu ‘Art of Love’ which should be read as ‘Art of Sex’, kama meaning sensual pleasure. This engaging subject was given exhaustive research by those who examined its opportunities some sixteen centuries ago. The Kamasutra is full of fascinating bits of information, manual instruction. Until I read its advice on the careful teasing of response in the beloved or desired, I had not appreciated how bird-calls and types of breathing can heighten ecstasy: the bird-calls listed include those of cuckoos (perhaps in connexion with a paramour?), humming birds, wild geese, cockatoos and others, and, it says, joy mounts appreciably when one clicks their tongue, breathes hing! sharply or hoong! deeply or cries out ‘Mother!’ It advises those who were recently married to bite each other gently and reverently, and to leave marks like lotus blooms on each other’s flesh. Delight, it affirms, can be enhanced by various types of

nail scratches and men are urged to test several recipes to increase a woman's pleasure. Some of these, such as 'the eyes of a heat-maddened wolf', have not yet come to light on my journeys, but the Kamasutra says they are most efficacious in raising one's ardour. Its advice on how best to attract sympathetic response in a married woman is rather old-fashioned. The Calcutta bookseller from whom I obtained this lively work—for days I wandered around hoping to hear birdsong at eventide, particularly that of cuckoos or wild geese—asked me to visit his brother, who sold salves and tonics to ensure virility and cause 'electrifying agitation' and potions which one imbibed with supper to ensure a man 'won the heart' of a desired woman. I did visit his brother, a lean darkskinned man who gazed pensively through round tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles and discussed sex with the placid absorption of a college don describing a bridge hand. He sold innumerable entrancing and stimulating articles. I bought some brass lingams from him. The largest, a three-foot-high affair with a prettily petalled base and ornamented tip, proved most handy as a doorstop. A more discreet version required only a few extra apertures and a cork base to become a useful sugar castor. I have no idea what happened to those which I sent to some friends. These gadgets, demonstrated in glinting pride on male loins during Holi and other occasions, were more effective than the Kamasutra, due to the high level of Hindu illiteracy. And so was the statuary in these Banaras temples which, as they say, left little to the imagination. Probably nothing at all.

At one temple I paused to watch a woman supplicate a lingam which rose from a sunken circular base beside a side groove, the latter symbolizing the yoni, its female complement. No one else heeded her, a lack of curiosity which forced me to affect great interest in everything else. She knelt in front of it and seemed to croon a mantra as she twined a garland of flowers around it and demurely anointed it with oil. The libation continued until the lingam shone in the dim light. While she dropped seeds on it, taken from a paper packet concealed in the corsage of her sari, a plodding zebu cow obscured her from my view. I wandered off; from her devotions she hoped to ensure her pregnancy. Sculpture in that temple was uniformly poor, exaggerated and propagandistic, nowhere equal to the exquisitely carved figures in the deserted, peaceful caves at Ellora and Ajanta. Those statues have a discernible Greek influence, marred only by their 7th-century sculptors giving goddesses the curve of breast and thigh seen on contemporary film posters, but their artistic accomplishment was high and survived mutilation by Muslim iconoclasts. In this Banaras temple attempts had been made to conceal crudity of
workmanship by intricacy of detail, and thereby it forfeited every claim on artistry.

I wondered if there was any truth in the rumour that in some distant temples the _devadasis_ were reappearing. They were temple whores, persuaded of a holy duty to submit to male worshippers as Radhu, a mortal woman, submitted to Vishnu, and other women to other gods, convinced of achieving a mystic union with the god himself, an _ecstasis_, certain to enhance their later incarnations; thus, they were remote, sociologically speaking, from the British prostitutes considered in the 'Wolfenden' report, that masterly account of a discovery of the well-known by explorers who neglected to offer a worthwhile idea on how to decrease a social nuisance. Only orthodox Hindus believed their _devadasis_ a product of their own religion. There is good reason to assume that they did not appear until twelve or fifteen hundred years ago, more or less simultaneously with Holi, and would appear to have originated in the festivals in ancient Thrace in honour of Dionysus, the god who began as the goddess of fertility, a European variant of the _lingam-yoni_ symbol, and then assumed other forms, to honour whom the Greeks added temple harlots to provide a ritualistic _ecstasis_. Hinduism embraced aspects of other religions it encountered; tribal faiths from Bengal and Orissa, features of Buddhism and Islam, and others. Up to the time I reached Banaras resolved to get into its temples four Hindus had solemnly assured me that Christ began His ministry on earth in India as a holy man.

There is plenty to see inside Hindu temples. Too much. They lack space, the essential quality of good architecture, and deny opportunity for meditation, their sculpture reduced to a frenetic hodge-podge blur. Their eroticism stimulated my curiosity about its origins.

I wandered back in time to see the woman complete her supplications. As she left the temple slanted sunlight climbed her red sari and briefly illuminated the dark turn of her neck rising from a cream-coloured blouse. She was about eighteen, a slight girl, plain but with youth upon her like a dust of golden dreams, worry and hope softening her lips into childishness, haunted eyes restless under shining lids. Her sari rustled faintly as she vanished into hot grey alley shadows, one of millions of young Indian women carrying her prayer into another day. Behind her temple gongs spun dissolving bronze webs of sound. A _sadhu_ picked his nose interestedly.

I followed the little supplicant along the alley, remembering a Bombay _guru_ who assured me that orthodox Hindus had mastered sexual desire
by self-control. It was a massive self-deception. Mr. Gandhi was much more honest.

Gandhi finally became a husband in an arranged marriage when he was thirteen. Three prospective brides had died during their betrothal to him. In his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* he recalled how he did not delay in 'assuming the authority of a husband'. His ten-year-old bride Kasturbai became a mother at thirteen. She was illiterate. Gandhi wrote: 'I was very anxious to teach her, but lustful love left no time. I am sure that had my love for her been absolutely untainted by lust she would have been a learned lady. . . .' He recorded how God saved him from desires to frequent brothels and of his search through various diets until he discovered goat's milk as a sustenance which lessened his carnal hunger. At the age of thirtysix he took a vow of perpetual continence as the initial act of self-mastery but thirty years later he admitted he still experienced sexual desires. He was not alone in confusing denial with discipline but his autobiography provided a clear statement of a remarkable fight against an aspect of life accepted unquestioningly in a devout third-caste Hindu home, strongly influenced by his orthodox mother. Looking back to his wedding-day he wrote: 'Little did I dream then that one day I should severely criticize my father for having me married as a child. Everything on that day seemed to me right and proper and pleasing. There was also my own eagerness to get married.' This singularly frank and invaluable self-examination spoke for millions of small boys in the environment of a Hindu home in 1882.

Other witnesses supported Gandhi. Few thirteen-year-old boys ever possessed a rudimentary self-discipline, least of all, we may assume, those experiencing the novelty of being a husband. By Hindu teaching it requires twelve years of assiduous application to acquire self-control over sexual desire. Therefore, if a bridegroom started to acquire it on his wedding-night he would have been twentyfive before he extinguished 'the Serpent Furnace of Kundalini' in his normal biological impulses. Those twelve years were the period of greatest male Hindu fecundity. The claim of self-control was and is bogus. Moreover, during Gandhi's childhood Hindu life-expectancy was twentynine years.

This latter fact produced the situation, astonishing by Western standards, that when Gandhi was assassinated in his seventyninth year the vast ocean of Hindu humanity had twice drained away and been replaced in his lifetime. Around him a handful of contemporaries survived
like debris left behind by a tidal rush. Hindus born in the period 1950–60 had a life-expectancy of thirtytwo years.

The causes of low life-expectancy in earlier centuries are patent. Climatic and other stresses produced a constitutional frailty unable to withstand recurrent local diseases and further weakened by ignorance, dirt, lack of sanitation and hygiene, and by superstition which induced dietetic malnutrition. It would appear a logical assumption that Hindu resignation to death was caused by these factors and its obsessive worship of sexuality was intended to ensure a normal replacement-level, both features of communal life before they were elevated to religious dogma. It is also feasible to assume that the sanctification of the cow arose similarly, in centuries when it was threatened by total annihilation from disease. There appears to be no other logical explanation for deifying this stupid though abundantly useful animal other than to prevent it from being killed for food, by a religious tabu, during years when every beast was required to replenish stock. Rinderpest has occurred in India: in a few years towards the end of the 19th century it killed hundreds of thousands of cattle on the South African veld. I have seen symptoms of nagana, another terrible disease, in Indian cattle.

Several points arise from these observations. The first is that the conditions which caused these diseases of man and beast can now be conquered or checked by science. Obsessions with sex and death could therefore be removed from Hinduism, but it is extremely doubtful if the Indians are capable of doing this themselves, due to the power of holy men over superstitious, uneducated millions. It is certain that if India was ever occupied by another nation the power of the holy men would die overnight, the cow would no longer be deified, and sex would be sex, not religion. More immediately important is the fact that the fusion of sex with religion has produced a situation which Indians may be unable to solve.

The population of India was estimated at 100 million in the 16th century. When Gandhi got married it was 150 million. Both estimates included the areas now known as Pakistan. In 1959 the population of the Indian Union alone was conservatively estimated at 400 million and the infant mortality rate, believed to have been 55 per 100 births in 1882, had dropped to an estimated 118 per 1000 births. These figures meant that in seventyseven years the population had increased by 250 million or 100 million more than the population of the U.S. Informed opinion
believed the birthrate in 1959 to have reached 7 million per annum, one birth every five seconds of the day and night, a yearly increase of only 1 million less than the population of London.

The present rate of increase would mean a population of 590 million in 1986. That would be three times the estimated 1958 population of North and South America combined. The figure is likely to be greater, due to advances in medical treatment and post-natal care. The most noticeable increase began after Independence in 1947 and has mounted every year. Even if it halted in 1960 the compound interest on those fertile years would not start until 1963 and would continue until 1973, and, according to an estimate prepared by a population research bureau at Princeton University, it may be 800 million by 1989, twice the 1949 population of Europe in half of the land-space of Europe, a pressure of 640 people to the square mile of Indian territory. The Princeton researchers, in a comment on their prophecy, believed it would prove insupportable and could cause national collapse in famine, disease, and anarchy.

Enlightened Indian opinion has turned increasingly to two main aids to forestall this end, industrialization and birth-control. There was an understandable desperation about those who talked to me of Indian plans.

'We will gain stability directly our five-year plans have a sound economic basis,' a civil servant in Delhi had assured me. 'Directly a country prospers, the birthrate decreases. It happened in America and Britain. It will happen here if we act quickly.'

The belief lacked any foundation. On the contrary, even a smell of prosperity causes the population to expand.

Britain supplied one proof. The first official census was held in 1801, shortly after the start of the Industrial Revolution, a situation comparable in some respects to that in contemporary India. In that year the population of England, Scotland, and Wales was 10.6 million. Fifty years later it was 21 million, an increase of 100 per cent, and in 1951 it was 49 million, a rise of another 100 per cent in a hundred years in which the war wiped out a decade of men; an era of periodic industrial stagnation, unemployment, emigration, and contraception, but of rising prosperity. Then there was Java. When the Dutch commenced to develop the island early in the 19th century its people numbered approximately 4.5 million. In 1956 the population was estimated to be 52 million. Under the impact of
 industrialization and a new religion, State Shintoism, the population of Japan jumped from 50 million in 1912 to 72 million in 1938 and leapt up to 93 million in 1958 despite legal abortion. The United States provides additional proof that prosperity does not bring a tidy cot. Until the 1930s the tide of immigration put it outside the scope of normal demographic computations. In 1940 it had 134 million people. It increased by 20 million in the ensuing ten years, and was 177 million in 1959. U.S. census officials then expected it to reach 220 million in 1975. This official view may well prove to be conservative.

Birth-control awoke no interest in India in 1947. More urgent matters demanded prompt action. The 1951 birthrate did attract attention, but early attempts to introduce birth-control were conducted uncertainly. The first Minister of Health, Princess Amrit Kaur, belonged to the Protestant Church and had been Gandhi’s secretary for many years. Officials of the United Nations’ World Health Organization who went to offer advice on planned families learned that the Princess favoured only the ‘safe-rhythm’ method of birth-control, coition in the statistically infertile seven or eight days at the end of a normal twenty-eight-day menstrual cycle, a system which is not infallible. I gathered a distinct impression that the Princess left WHO officials to devise means to instruct illiterate women with these numerical sequences, related to calendars nowhere present in their villages. They tried to teach the women how to use an abacus.

A more positive campaign was introduced after Princess Amrit Kaur resigned in 1957. Ordinary contraceptives were too costly. Villagers whose annual income never rose above 200 rupees (£14 5s.), if that, could not afford five rupees (7s. 6d.) for each contraceptive. Some states sponsored sterilization for couples who had four or more children. Dr. Sanyal of Calcutta invented a ‘sterility oil pill’ to reduce conception without causing harm or permanent sterility, a cheaper product than the new American progestin pills to restrain ovulation. Several doctors favoured medically conducted abortions similar to those sponsored by the Japanese Government.

This caused a paradoxical situation. Hinduism has not proclaimed against birth-control but it has encouraged uncontrolled human procreation for so long that it cannot accept the idea of regulated families. Weirdly, it has voiced the opinion of Gandhi: ‘... the only method handed down from the ages is self-control... Sexual union is not meant
for pleasure but for bringing forth progeny.' Gandhi was fiftysix when
he gave this opinion and had been continent for twentyfive years.

It would appear unlikely that a young, illiterate, orthodox couple,
ever far from starvation, aware they will probably be dead in twenty
years, will care two hoots about planning their sexual life. Old men of
remarkable saintliness, inborn or acquired during a lifelong brahma-
charya from intercourse, highly intelligent spinsters such as the Princess,
too often incline to forget that to everything there is a season. To the
illiterate millions of India, reality is comprised of events of family and
friends in their villages, in the surge in their own veins, not in words
spoken by old people. Moreover, it would be hypocritical to assume that
the mating instinct is dominated by a desire to have children. They are
different impulses linked by accident of physiology. Abstention from
sexual intercourse is as unlikely in India as it is unlikely elsewhere and
it is doubtful if young couples will practise birth-control until they
are educated or their poverty has been increased by three or more
children.

Naturally, everyone feels considerable sympathy for the dedicated
men and women of the Indian Family Planning Centres who work
endlessly to try to save their country from possible disaster in the fore-
seeable future. Every human interest of the Indian family and nation has
made birth-control desirable. On the widest scene, the rapid increase of
world population has already cheapened human life and in the next half
century could easily provoke area-clearance wars to reduce population.
The emergence of this attitude was foreshadowed in the widely reported
observation of Mao Tse-tung that his Red China could 'afford to lose
up to 300 million people in a war'.

Unfortunately, therefore, none of the problems involving the family
life of a village Subhas and his Sarasvati has been solved. Their central
government has big plans on foot but the benefits will take some years
to reach them. The government of their own state may flounder in
corruption. Wise old dead men, and numbers who are alive, give them
one answer on the ethical aspect of their relationship, and wise old living
men, and young ones too, give them an answer which refutes the first.
If a Christian missionary were to talk to them his answer upon the ethics
of their sexual relations would depend upon his particular Church and
this answer may be changed in the next few years; for example, until
a few years ago the Church of England would have told a man that he
could not marry his dead wife's sister. On the specific issue of birth-
control the Roman Catholic Church, through a Papal encyclical of 1930,
stated that it was not immoral to restrict sexual intercourse to the safe-period rhythm, the view held by Princess Amrit Kaur, but some priests are said to favour reconsideration of opinions that a new life in embryonic state is not present in the womb until seven or eight weeks after the seed is planted. This belief, advanced by the 3rd-century priest Lactantius in *De Opificio Dei*, has gained scientific support. If Christendom accepted it, its effects would be far-reaching; so would a recognition that the prevention of new life is not identical with a destruction of life. Yet how can such issues count to Subhas and his Sarasvati? In their youth? In a poverty where only their youth offers riches? How can they be expected to comprehend the wisdom of those who have forgotten their youth or never felt its tides surge in them?

In a hundred villages I watched these Sarasvatis and Indiras, Sarojinis and Kasturbais, carry their poverty like queens and lend their old saris incredible dignity. So they should while the world smells new. Their spring soon dies, quickest where poverty thins the soil. The West should do more to aid them. India needs assistance while she is ruled by moderate politicians. Moderate Chinese leaders vanished in hours.

Russia has cause to heed hungry India. In 1959 the population of Russia was only 208.8 million, an overall increase of less than a million a year since 1939 due to disasters caused by World War Two. It is believed that girl babies outnumber boys by a 63–37 ratio, and a third of the population is over forty years old. Until 1950 Moscow assumed India would turn to her. The aggressive neo-imperialism of China introduced an unexpected factor.

Meanwhile the Red Chinese population of 650 million people is increasing by 19.5 million a year and fortyone per cent of the population is under sixteen years of age. A compound interest of these figures would take the population to 1000 million in 1973. Doubts have been expressed of whether the present rate of increase will be maintained. But in 1948 an American demographer wrote: 'In 1950, according to estimates of the U.S. State Department, China’s population will reach 430 million. Some students believe that . . . the population of China will reach 950 million shortly after the year 2000. It is, of course, extremely unlikely that such a rate of increase can be continued. It would certainly be impossible without help from the outside world. . . .' The rate was in fact increased without outside help.

India is the last large free country in Asia. If her plans to provide national and individual prosperity were to succeed, her accomplishment in freedom would threaten the existence of mainland Red China by example alone. Red China cannot afford to let India succeed. On the other hand, if India became friendlier to Russia, their combined strength would keep China in second place to Russia. But if China could bring India under her control then their combined 1960 population of 1,050 million and possible 1986 population of 1,762 million would strip Russia of her present advantages of nuclear and ballistic weapons. Their strategic mounting of a struggle for India has been discernible since 1950.

The tragedy of Indian idealists like Mr. Nehru is that they spent their youth in pursuit of independence, obtained it in middleage, and have found it immediately threatened by circumstances which they did not foresee.

Indian Communists lean more towards China than towards Russia. They spend more effort upon spreading their influence among young Subhas and Sarasvatis in cities and villages than upon political events in Delhi. Their propaganda machinery is geared to exploit every weakness and to gain control of idealistic youth.
When I descended from the train at the Calcutta terminus in a clamorous humid evening I had a headache down to my knees. It did not sweeten my disposition. Neither did the multitude which charged in every direction. A rush of porters in once-red uniforms found me unco-operative. I preferred to carry my own luggage through the eruptive turmoil of dhotis and saris, naked children and pi-dogs, round the cows and over those who had taken up residence for the night.

I fought my way out. Near the telephones I discovered an ancient taxi and got inside. A confident sales representative nipped in smartly behind me and sat down. He was a thin little man in a flapping blue shirt and grubby white trousers. Sweat shone below his hair-line like a circlet of pearls. His bird-sharp face looked like wet leather. He sighed and launched into his spiel.

'Sahib, you need nice bibi,' he assured me. 'She is yours.'

The driver wiped his sweaty neck and spat out betel-juice saliva bright as blood. He stared at a crowded evening and waited.

I arranged my luggage and said: 'Clear off, ek dum, jaldi!'

A pained black-toothed grin dismissed my reply as shyness.

'Sahib, pretty bibis hidden okay,' he said. 'No trouble. Your Chinese small, your Java dancer special, your Belgium fat, hut! Achchi bat, no kutcha, very nice, bibis scarce now, these good.'

His offers ended as I picked him up and dumped him outside. A strolling policeman watched us incuriously. Ponces are automatically philosophical; this one plunged back into the commotive station to search for a more likely client.

We drove out of Howrah across the molten chocolate Hoogly River.
into the main area of Calcutta’s noise and sweat, sin and ostensible sanctity, revelry and riots. It was an annihilatingly humid evening. My mind continued to live in the general uproar of a journey on an Indian railway; at every station we had been greeted by a swarm of beggars, predominantly children, seeking pice from our pockets, and tea and water sellers yelling *Chai wallah, pani, pani, chai wallah, gharam char, char, chai wallah*, and another swarm of children whining *bukka hai*, hungry is, pice, sahib, have no father, have no mother, *bukka hai*, two pice, one pice, sahib, pice, *babuji*, and women who chattered endlessly and screamed *jao jaldi!* at wandering children. Above all, I remembered the sun-baked train roof which sliced off the top of my head and squashed down above my eyes.

Calcutta offered no respite. It was crowded and smelled like a jerry-built Turkish bath erected over a sewer of proud dimensions. As the taxi turned down Chitpur Road towards Chowringhee and the Maidan three sweating, starved-thin men tramped past carrying placards which read: ‘Hindus! Save our Cows! The Cow is in Peril!’ Men in filthy dhotis imparted an air of permanence as they sat down on the ground. Most of them wore only loincloths. Beggars kept a leg hooked round their necks. Pedicabs swayed past them. Big American cars roared past empty tongas. On one corner bearded Sikhs, probably moneylenders, waved exasperated plump hands. A sannyasi in an ochre robe shuffled barefoot past a cinema running a high neon fever.

I remembered words which had come into my mind the first time I saw Calcutta years ago:

*Day after day, O Lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face?*  
*With folded hands, O Lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face?*

As we neared my hotel the driver developed a voice. ‘Sahib, you want *bibi*? Bleedy good Italy girl, happy lollas, come two three days, no business yet. Egypt *bibi*, danced belly, broke ankle yesterday, out of work.’

‘I’m too busy to pick flowers,’ I said.

He laughed happily and gave me a piece of green notepaper with addresses scrawled on it. ‘Nice *bibis* scarce now, sahib,’ he warned.

The hotel was restful even though its walls sweated. Before going out for dinner I had a gin and tonic: the ice had melted and the tonic tasted like warm melon juice. I fared better with my meal. I did myself proud on *maughty-ouh-badamte*, marinated chicken with lightly fried split almonds and a rice pilau, followed by a Calcutta version of *sosatie*, skewered slivers of lamb and onions soaked in curry and cooked over an open fire. I finished this lot off with coffee.
It was a fashionable restaurant but its floor-show did not come up to the excellent quality of its cuisine. None of the performers would have raised an eyelash west of Suez though customers gave them the warm acclaim reserved for familiar shapes. The customers were more interesting and my waiter was helpful. He pointed out four seths, Marwari millionaires, men whose jowls curled tiredly on their shoulders and whose bellies and thighs hated their trousers; outside the restaurant the homeless thousands who could not get into State doss-houses were already asleep in a stupor of hunger along the streets and in Howrah and Sealdah stations. There were some Japanese, overseas Chinese, and at the next table to mine a tough rangy Australian, bronzed of skin and grey of hair, who listened to his wife talk longingly of Sydney. The indigenous population in the restaurant interested me more. They were affluent, cosmopolitan by implication, international set by claim, new prosperous by manners. Everything around us had a price; even the fan-cooled air came at approximately ten rupees a sniff. None of my fellow-diners appeared likely to be bothered by such a rhetorical question as:

_Under Thy great sky in solitude and silence, with humble heart shall I stand before thee, face to face?_

I decided to walk down my dinner. I ought to have known better. Directly I started to wander along Chowringhee the ponces were hovering like wasps, clamorous with invitations to find happiness, joy, fun, Afghan delights.

It was night in Calcutta, the city which Rudyard Kipling described by borrowing the title of James Thomson’s best-known poem, _The City of Dreadful Night_. Others have provided different descriptions. Calcuttans say their city is the least Anglicized of all Indian cities. Quite true. Calcutta has an air of perpetual Saturday night. Its population of 4 million is jammed into twentyeight and a half square miles; the 3.5 million people in the administrative county of London are spread over approximately 116 square miles. Calcutta boasts of several parks and lakes and architecturally gaudy temples. If the ground space they occupy, plus that of other open spaces, roads, the Hooghly bed, the malodorous nala canals, is deducted from the total area, the population pressure is 290,000 per square mile. The figure does not include an estimated 55,000 plus temporary residents, overwhelmingly village youths driven by enforced idleness to seek a fortune, to them anything beyond ten rupees (15s.) a week. From one-third to fortyfive per cent of men have been chronically unemployed. And although bibis are scarce, two women to every five men on a statistical basis, three women to every nine men
among the extremely poor, the estimated population never wholly contains the birthrate.

There is a reason for this lag.

In the five years to 1959 an average of 2,100 children were born in this city every week. Out of each 2,100 a total of 1,400 died at birth; the infant mortality rate was 673 per 1,000 births. This was only 57 less than in 1875 when infant mortality was 730 per 1,000 births. During the period 1868–75 a total of 17,017 infants died in their first year, 582 from intestinal complaints, 2,335 from tetanus due to dirt and bad ventilation, 2,358 from convulsions, 4,204 from fevers, and 7,538 from illnesses not then capable of diagnosis or remedial treatment, the majority directly attributable to asphyxia at birth due to slum conditions and inhalation of fumes given off by dung fires provided by the holy cows.

There is reason to assume the same causes responsible for the infant mortality rate of recent years. The reason for the large preponderance of men can also be traced to earlier years. Infanticide was common among Hindus and Muslims. Those killed were almost invariably girls and for poor Calcuttan families today each girl baby represents a financial liability for sixteen years. Although the sexual balance at birth is normal it is commonly accepted that a large number of girls are smothered and announced dead from convulsions or asphyxia.

The foreign community includes some 8,000 Britons and 2,000 Americans. There are also 32,000 Chinese, said to be refugees from Shanghai and Canton though a number are agents of Peking and the core of Chinese Communist espionage throughout India. Since the middle of 1959 the Chinese have had to register with the authorities, a belated precaution due to events in Tibet. Registration was seldom effective in other countries.

Calcutta is reputed to have the largest number of agnostics in the subcontinent, though undoubtedly some wonder:

In this laborious world of Thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds, shall I stand before thee face to face?

They are the people largely responsible for the cleaner face of Calcutta today, the elimination of bustees and the worst conditions of poverty, but it would be foolish to forget that bustees existed and that opposed influences kept them in existence. Those same influences are at work in other parts of India.

When I got back from Assam with Ed I told friends of my intention to visit the bustees. They were horrified. A European would be attacked,
they warned. They told me of stray tourists being set on by goondas, local bicycle-chain and knife boys like the tsotsis of Johannesburg. They told me how policemen patrolled the worst slums around the Howrah jute mills in threes. I had heard similar warnings before. To date the only results were stones thrown at the car in which Kenneth Clarke, then deputy mayor of Durban, took me out to Cato Maonor; blasphemy from the little scugnizzi of Naples; waved fists in Madrid's La Bomba; and an enviable volume of spittle bestowed by an Arab refugee. Indeed, kind Afrikaner officials in Cape Town wanted to give me police protection to visit District Six, but I feel odd with policemen, so Coloured waiters from my hotel acted as guides and no one was harmed. Consequently, members of the hotel staff took me round the Calcutta bustees.

The bustees were packed on dirty yellowish soil. They were huts constructed from corrugated tin and bamboo, their holes stuffed against monsoon with rotted sacks or newspapers or straw. The average hut was a single all-purposes 'room' ten feet square which accommodated families of any size. Water taps had been installed in some compounds at a rate of two taps per 500 people but they seldom worked faultlessly. I turned on two which dribbled near-brown mud. There were two latrine seats per 100 people. They did not operate regularly.

The average daily earning of higher-paid workers to whom I talked was six shillings but their real wage was two shillings because the jute-mill employers deducted four shillings for these living-quarters which they had erected and called it 'dearness-allowance'. The workers had to accept conditions imposed. Labour was cheap. At Independence a total of 2 million Hindu refugees flooded into Calcutta from Muslim East Pakistan.

In the hot humid nights the bustees stank to heaven. They were completely airless. They smelled of urine and excreta, sweat and decomposing food, death, and hopelessness. If I had tears to weep I would have wept in their squalid horror. Some bustee owners claimed to be religious. To prove it they built goshalas, homes for cows, blackmailing their gods.

Among women in bustees were wives. There were also widows. A number of women were prostitutes who earned a few pice a night, a few pence, by having their prideless bodies pawed in this stinking moist heat. Women taught their children to beg and scavenge like misers in garbage dumped in alleys. One woman was persuaded to tell us she did not know the fathers of her three children. She was worried; two of her regular clients had died recently and she was a middleaged woman of twentysix.
Out of these hells in 1946 poured Hindus whose clash with Muslims killed 6000 people in four days.

Most goondas lived in the streets. They recruited members among bustee dwellers and in these huts manufactured bombs out of stolen electric light bulbs and nitric acid for use in street battles. Hatred was a dormant thunder in the bustees. Its lightning flashed in riots over food, increased tram fares—in 1953 a month of riots over increased fares caused 4 deaths, 1200 injuries, and the burning of 80 trams—and over rumours, any rumours. Then bustee men felt like heroes. They fought pitched battles, threw bombs and torn-up blocks of paving, sailed into police armed with lathis, set fire to bazaars and trams. Later they lay in these hovels, brief pride in violence obliterated by exhaustion worsened by hunger and sapping heat. But they had a memory of having broken the gigantic boredom of their lives.

Even as the bustees were being cleared in 1959 men rioted in Calcutta over food shortages. It will take time to lose the mentality sharpened by these hells, the desperation and simmering fury, hopelessness and stupendous monotony. That is natural. In Western countries political influences have kept alive fear of a return of the depression and poverty of the 1930s.

Officially, India has abolished prostitution. This was done some months before the British Street Offences Act of 1959 philosophically reminded the United Kingdom that if the dirt was swept under the carpet everyone could be happy and pretend it was not there, a gallant wave of moral brooms. If Britain and America cannot get rid of prostitution, there is no reason to assume that India can abolish it. There are probably more prostitutes than beggars in India. The cloaks under which it is conducted in Calcutta include marrying ponces, business arrangements with taxi drivers and hotel staffs, marrying men who bring home friends, trading as singers and dancers and masseuses, and quite often by leaving it to Father to find lonely men.

Since Independence every excess of frenzied violence in Calcutta has been assiduously whipped on by Communists and by Chinese agents who are fully aware of it being at the end of the long good road down the Brahmaputra Valley and across the burning plains.

Economically, the central government was right to devote its re-
sources initially to promoting industrial and agricultural plans to absorb men into productive work.

But members of the state assembly of Bengal and in everyday life in Calcutta turned a blind eye to corruption. Politicians had family connexions among mill-owning and industrial circles. Conscientious men were kicked out of jobs to accommodate favourites. Honest officials were dismissed and replaced by panderers. Siddhartha Ray, a Congress Minister, resigned from the West Bengal state government in 1958 alleging 'the people who control the West Bengal Congress [are] an unscrupulous section of rich industrialists, traders, and businessmen. . . .'

Communists exploited every situation caused by hopelessness and hunger. There were a lot of them. In 1959 it was estimated that there were 27,000 card-carrying members in the city, including 8000 Chinese who had friends in Sikkim, the main northern centre of Chinese espionage.

The Communists proved themselves to be hypocrites when a bill was presented to the state assembly in 1958 to clear the bustees. They opposed it. The bill contained a proposal to compensate landlords. According to the Party, it would have been better to spend the sum of compensation on improving the bustees. The nature of their opposition illuminated the trick: the Party feared the loss of vast concentrations of people living in squalor and misery into whose wretched boredom violence brought a form of entertainment. In those appalling hovels there was no pride, no hope of attainment, no restraint through education or belief in tomorrow, only an accumulation of hatred increased by hunger, a hellish climate, and fantastic monotony.

Communism and corruption both desired to maintain the status quo in Calcutta. They fought enlightened leaders who strove to give India a solid foundation from which to advance. They sought, and seek, to maintain the status quo in other cities and regions. They are untroubled by the question posed in the poem quoted in this chapter and which ends:

And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee, face to face?

The poet was Sir Rabindranath Tagore, a Calcuttan, the greatest Indian poet of the turn of the 19th century. Calcutta has produced other writers, painters, singers, and dancers, frail blooms which grow on every sewer in defiance of its filth. Those who exchange khabbah along bohemian lines at places like the centre on Chittromjan Avenue and elsewhere may carry on their city's heritage of defiance of hopelessness; they have been
given a courageous lead by their press. But it is open to doubt whether the country's intellectual youth has the dynamic inspiration and drive of its fathers in Congress. Men of Mr. Nehru's generation knew exactly what they wanted. Contemporary Indian youth is growing up amid different realities. Its aims are diffuse and contradictory. The young intellectuals could look at the Indian mother and her children. There is a true poem of pity.

The face of Calcutta has become cleaner than at any time since Independence. But its past is still visible. Beggars without an arm or leg whined for pice they did not expect to get. At night most human needs gained expression in the hot streets.

After a night walk I went back to my hotel in a taxi driven by a Sikh. At one point he said: 'Sahib, bad town for strange men, sick women. I know clean Japanese, careful. You want?'

'You speak good English.'

'My father was British soldier. He got decorations. Hut! Good days, he said. He taught us English, our father.'

'Does he live here?'

'He died years ago. My brothers went away. I do not know where. You want Japanese woman? Ten rupees, sahib.'

'You'll find a customer.'

He shook his head in professional doubt.

Next morning I walked in the incredible green quiet of the Maidan, places where scarlet cannas droop and mynahs fluster in trees. It was too fantastically peaceful. I went to the Burra.

Beggars were everywhere. Everything stank of rancid oil and sweat, curry and saffron. Colour and noise and stench slashed like knives.

Officials say that every trace of the old Calcutta will have vanished by 1965. Their press, headed by the Statesman and the Standard, has warned them repeatedly to be vigilant against corruption and of Communism recreating the situation of earlier years of Independence.

Ten years ago I wrote: 'The problem of South Africa is not political. It is moral.' The same was always true of Calcutta, a city of omen whose good purpose indicates Indian determination to be free of its past, and whose worst features are caused by an identical clash of influences in other emergent industrial cities.
A British friend in Calcutta invited me to accompany him to a party being given for a visiting European politician.

'Gate-crashers may not be popular,' I observed.

'No Briton is a gate-crasher at Foreign Legion parties, Johnny,' he assured me.

His description of 'Foreign Legion' proved apt. The party trudged along with resolute gaiety, a tinkle and chime of expatriate languages whose tones stumbled nostalgically over a mirage of lost pleasures. We munched fragments of unidentifiable objects on dainty spears and were given champagne, a drink peculiarly suited to the mood of virgins and football-club managers. It was a heavy humid evening. It drained you of energy until you felt as if you had climbed into the machine with the washing. Within ten minutes two Englishwomen had confided to me their longing to enjoy a crisp clear autumn day at home.

Nobody wanted to talk about India. Their attitude was perfectly understandable. They lived there and I was a passing face from faraway places. They wanted to be told of good shows in London, if little dining clubs in Mayfair or Kensington were still in business, which hotels provided television, in case they got home. One good lady and I had a discussion on colour-blindness and shortsightedness in dogs, theories which neither of us believed.

At this point the guest of the evening turned up. He was a sort of vip; his own modesty impelled him to say: 'I'm really only a little vip.' I was sure he did not really believe it. He was an impressible man. He had been favourably impressed by village developments in India.

'Extremely encouraging,' he said at one stage. 'If you were to believe
half of what these reporters and authors say you’d think the villagers were all starving. I’ve seen two modernized villages. Each had a school with a resident doctor and nurse. State officials and their wives showed me over them. We ate in the village community halls. Our meals were exactly what the villagers had. I wrote down one menu. ‘Ah yes, here. Fruit cocktail, river fish, lamb on skewers, curried chicken, rice, mango chutney, green salad, coffee.’

There was a full second of complete silence before the first aaah came and everyone drank champagne hastily.

This remarkable incident on a sweltering evening in Calcutta may serve to introduce the greatest single factor of communal life in the Indian Union. The Indian village reduces the Indian city to insignificance. No simple description can be given of Indian villages or of the maddeningly complex problems they create. Those who have visited several and driven through hundreds will agree on one point: there is no typical Indian village. The people are engaged in agriculture or home industries; men wear dhotis or loincloths, women wear saris, children run naked; their skin varies in degree of hue from an average mean. Basic similarities are covered by that list. Recent estimates have said that there are between 500,000 and 600,000 villages. Concentrated mainly along river courses, between seventy and eighty per cent of the population lives in them. And in them is spoken the 225 languages and estimated 470 dialects.

Hinduism is an umbrella over the villages. It has evolved hundreds of local sects and sub-sects whose adherents accept the triad of Brahma and Vishnu and Shiva but have elevated to prominence minor figures of the millions of gods and goddesses whose importance varies from community to community. What is regarded as holy in one village is disregarded by others fifty miles away.

I stopped overnight in a Ganges village whose sadhus had persuaded the men of the immorality of wearing clothes. The male population went happily about its tasks clad in waist-length hair. Two of them refused to talk to me unless I removed my sinfulness. In some regions Hinduism was dominated by animism. This proved invaluable to Hindus who went to Africa and became kraal bannias, giving them insight into the animism of eastern Cape Pondos, the Swazi and Masai, and Kenyan Kikuyus. In Rhodesia I had met a Matabele who told me the names of Hindu tree and snake gods.

An economic sketch of the Indian village can be drawn more accurately than can the conflicts lurking in it. Agricultural methods are primitive. Experts have encountered opposition to new techniques and
inability to grasp modern systems. Lack of education and religious scruples are mainly responsible.

In 1952 the central government launched its Community Development Programme. Since then it has poured hundreds of millions of pounds into a wide range of projects: every day for several years thousands of unemployed peasants, men and women, carried dishes of gravel and sand and stone on their heads up the bamboo scaffold webbed around Tungabhadra dam, near Vijayanagar, and others have laboured on the Bhakra dam; output of chemical fertilizer has increased, rural textile mills have been started, rivers and lakes stocked with fish, reservoirs dug or deepened by unpaid villagers. Agricultural and industrial projects were accompanied by the establishment of new schools, health services, and geological surveys. They were aided by huge loans and technical assistance from America, Russia and her satellites, other countries, and private organizations like the Ford Foundation.

Nonetheless, seven years after the programme was launched a quantity of attendant factors were being heeded. Each contained dangers. The whole structure was delicately balanced and every weakness was being ruthlessly exploited by Communists.¹

A total of seventy-five per cent of Indians depend wholly on agriculture for their livelihood but seventy per cent are either landless or own less than five acres. This section owns only seventeen per cent of cultivated land. At the other end of the scale one per cent of landlords own sixteen per cent of land. Less than one per cent of the total population obtains profit from agriculture. They are large landowners, merchants, and corrupt officials. As agriculture is seasonal, subject to wide and annual fluctuations due to monsoon and drought, soil leaching, heat oxidation of organic matter, precipitation, and soil impoverishment caused by alkali deposits attributable to faulty irrigation, an estimated 100 million peasants are unemployed or under-employed for four out of every twelve months.

These figures tell their own story. It would be almost consoling to believe they comprised the sole dangers. Unfortunately, two other factors threaten the rural economy.

¹ A case in point was provided by the southern state of Kerala where the Communists were voted into power in 1957. Two years later the people rose against the Communists in riots which continued for 48 days before Delhi intervened by deposing the state government and imposing 'president's rule' pending new elections in February 1960. The claim that these provided an anti-Communist landslide was unfounded. Although the Communists lost power and over 85 per cent of the electorate voted, the Communist vote rose from its 1957 total of 38.9 per cent to 42.9 per cent.
There is a ceiling to agricultural development. Vinoba Bhave was reported as saying that 300 million acres of India can be cultivated. His estimate may err on the hopeful side, due to areas of barren, heat-destroyed plains whose extent is increasing, hill regions, and jungle, but if it is accepted it means that fifty-five per cent of geographical India cannot be cultivated.

When the Community Development Programme was inaugurated the national income was £12 per head per annum. The vast majority of villagers were lucky if they received £7 in a year. According to an estimate of the Planning Commission of India the successful completion of four five-year plans, ending in 1971, should have raised the annual income to £37 per head, a sum equal to two weeks' wages for a wide range of British industrial workers and one week's wages for grades of American workers. Agreed, the cost of mere existence in India is lower than the ordinary standard of living in Britain and America. If the population maintains or increases its present rate the annual income will be below the expected figure or its purchasing power will be less.

Attempts to overcome the social hazards in this evolving situation are being conducted through expansion at a faster pace. More attention is being given to industrial development, on a theory that once it has become solidly based it can drain off people from agriculture and lessen the load carried by the villages. India's need for currency enforces the export of every type of industrial article she can produce, but in Asian markets she meets fierce competition from other countries, not least from Red China, whose rapid industrial expansion cannot be disputed and who is increasing pressure on overseas Chinese communities to buy from the mainland. In extenso, Western manufacturers and industrialists who direct their attention to Chinese failures to complete their yearly programmes and who ignore what China does accomplish are living in a fool's paradise; arguments about quality of goods means absolutely nothing to people in Asian, North African, and South American countries where Chinese-manufactured goods are appearing in greater volume every year. The flood of Chinese goods in Asian markets means that Indian workers must produce more cheaply than their Chinese rivals. This will keep down the annual per capita income.

A personal crusade to revive Indian village life has been conducted for some years by Vinoba Bhave, the pupil and spiritual heir of Mr. Gandhi. Mr. Bhave is a rare phenomenon in India. He is a genuine holy man.
Vinoba Bhave was born sixtysix or sixtyseven years ago, a Brahman by birth and a Maharashtrian by race. It was a Maharashtrian Brahman who assassinated Gandhi. At the age of twelve Bhave took a vow to forgo sexual intercourse. Nine years later he joined Gandhi and remained in his shadow until 1940 when Gandhi selected him to break a petty law symbolically in order to go to gaol on a social point which thereby acquired a religious impact. It has been said that Bhave speaks fourteen languages, including English and French, and whilst in gaol read the Qurān several times to become fluent in Arabic. When Gandhi was assassinated many people assumed Bhave would fade into obscurity. On the contrary, within a few months he set out on his mission in life.

He emerged as a social force in India when Communists started a civil war in Telingana in the south. He went to the area to plead for an end of bloodshed. Villagers told him of their desire to live in peace being frustrated by lack of land. When he asked if anyone would give land to prevent a continuation of violence a number of alarmed landlords offered him a total of 100 acres for free distribution.

It was a momentous event, the start of Bhave's campaign for bhoo dan, 'voluntary land gift', the method by which he believes that communal ownership and working of land, pride of responsibility and cause for initiative, will bring peace and prosperity within the framework of Gandhi's social creed of sarvodaya, welfare for all. Bhave went on to adjacent villages to ask for bhoo dan. In each he was successful. At one halt he was given an entire village. The event widened bhoo dan to include grant dan, village gift. He gained a conviction that the only permanent solution to Indian's land hunger was to provide each landless family with five acres of cultivable soil to be communally tended by villagers to ensure steady benefits through communal responsibility. Bhave declared he wanted fifty million acres to ensure success for his plan. When asked how he intended to get them he announced his intention to walk India from end to end to collect them. He has walked for seven years, sustained by a diet of curds, honey, and fruit.

Indian critics of Bhave, wealthy landlords, have labelled him a Communist. According to them, he is the thin end of the wedge. In point of fact, there has been no political connexion between bhoo dan-grant dan and Communism. Western observers will see in Bhave's theories a variation on beliefs expressed by the 19th-century American social thinker Henry George, set out in his 1879 Progress and Poverty and 1883 The Land Question, and George was strongly influenced by the theories of the British cotton-mill capitalist-philanthropist Robert Owen.
whose own experiments at social reform failed but whose example led the House of Commons to introduce social consciousness with the Factory Act of 1819, twenty-nine years before publication of *The Communist Manifesto* and forty-eight before Karl Marx published the first part of *Das Kapital*. In fact, Bhave is a social reformer in the great tradition and his Hindu mysticism should not disguise the fact that he is equal to some of his contemporaries, such as Albert Schweitzer, Father Mario Borelli, Father Dominique Pire, Danilo Dolci, and a few others. These men are the antithesis of thousands who can be heard daily giving an interesting betrayal of their mentality in the illuminating phrase: ‘Damn you, Jack, I’m all right.’

Some success attended Bhave’s walk. Up to the end of 1959 he was believed to have been given 4600 *gramdan* to start communal enterprises and a total of 5,500,000 *bhoomdan* acres. Considerable organizational problems hampered this inauguration of projects. Illiterate Indians unused to personal responsibility could not acquire either authority or education in new methods overnight. Each area had to be prepared by seeds and equipment. By July 1959 Bhave had distributed one million acres to landless peasants. He then expected to distribute another one million acres by 1964. The other two million acres given to him could not be cultivated. They were given by the largest landowners, I was told.

Another success attended this frail, white-bearded and bespectacled old man in a *dhoti* as he trudged hastily over India accompanied by disciples and secretaries and local assistants.

He formed a *Shanti Sena*, Peace Brigade, of men and women pledged to go to wherever violence broke out near them and try to restore calm. Since Independence mob violence had increased throughout India as Indian killed or injured Indian instead of uniting against Briton. Its causes had been religious, economic, political, and even linguistic disputes similar to language riots in Ceylon. Every dispute was hotted up by Communists. In several demonstrations the *Shanti Sena* formed a wall between mobs and police. Its members pleaded with hysterical mob leaders to disperse before the police attacked and when they did the *Shanti Sena* protected the mob by being the first to go down under steel-tipped *lathis* and tear-gas. Its members were less helpful to Communists than were the hooligans of Notting Hill and Little Rock and Johannesburg on other occasions.

The chief disciple of Bhave is another interesting man, Jaya Prakesh Narayan. He shares Bhave’s belief of a need for speed, saying of the Communists in one speech: ‘We must hurry or those who believe in
violence will step to power over our dead bodies.' At one time he was believed likely to succeed Mr. Nehru.

Narayan has a wider world experience than other Indians. His father was a Bihar villager. At the age of twenty, in 1922, he worked his passage to the West Coast of America. He spent eight years in the United States, moving east, starting as a fruit-picker in California, then worked in a jam factory and as a mechanic, and studied economics and science at five universities. In 1930 he returned to India, a convinced Socialist with Marxist leanings, and became associated with Nehru who put him in charge of the Labour Research Department of Congress. His political activities removed him to gaol during 1932 until late in 1933. Narayan then organized the left-wing section of Congress, started a railway union, and the Indian Socialist Party. He returned to prison in 1939, went on hunger-strike for fiftyone days, and then escaped into the jungles. After the war he took his socialists out of Congress and won them 11 million votes in the Independence elections. In 1954 he quitted politics to work for Bhave and bhoodan. At the age of fiftyeight, a tall and vigorous man with a delightfully youthful smile, he is a diabetic and has suffered from anaemia, but he does several hours of physical work in a normal day.

A large number of young Indians who were unable to accept the religious mysticism of Gandhi and Bhave have followed Narayan unquestioningly. He placed the emphasis on bhoodan as being a social development which had to be forwarded rapidly to combat Communism, provide a sense of hope likely to bear fruit before the huge five-year plans can reach down to average villagers, and foster personal responsibility in community interdependence.

'Jayaji is a saint,' a bhoodan worker said to me. 'His whole life has been devoted to helping his fellow men. Not in order to please a god but because he wants men to have a better life, to be free from slums and hopelessness and starvation. No other Indian politician has given up a successful career to help the peasants.'

I endeavoured to learn why Communists had increased their attempts to wreck the bhoodan movement if they want to help people.

A Communist whom I met at a village near Gaya in Bihar provided little information. He was a short chubby man clad in an immaculate dhoti. Steel-rimmed spectacles kept sliding down to the tip of his fleshy nose. He had a long gold fang and spoke fluent English. Before becoming a party organizer he had been a schoolmaster. He told me he had lived in
London for two years and reminisced affectionately of fogs in the Cromwell Road. His affability never faltered. He sat well back on a rotan chair, smiling at me like a benign father-figure, a pose which has become too familiar all over.

'We see no necessity to advise villagers to practise birth-control,' he said.

'Why?' I asked.

His kindly eyes twinkled through the uneasy spectacles. 'Limitation is unnecessary. We believe every problem in our country will be solved in a few years.'

'How?'

'We shall find plans when the time comes. India will be Communist within ten years, probably less.' He raised a plump hand to fold one finger after another to tick off his points. 'Birth-control is immoral. We agree with our Russian comrades and the Roman Catholics. It is unnatural. Women without children are like trees without leaves. Besides, India will need a much larger labour force to accomplish her future tasks. When we are in power.'

'A larger population now might make bhoodan inoperable,' I said. 'Wouldn’t it be wiser to make bhoodan work and then increase the population up to national requirements?'

'Bhoodan is inoperable now. Nehru and his capitalist masters are only playing with that old fool Bhave and his dupes.'

'I thought Nehru was a Socialist.'

'Perhaps he was once, yes, perhaps he was.'

'A larger population could cause revolution.'

He gave a pained smile. 'I would prefer to say that it may cause our people to realize that capitalism cannot bring them prosperity.'

'Very well. It could cause starvation. Cholera too.'

He pushed up his spectacles and surveyed me seriously. 'We must be realistic, my friend. There was always starvation and epidemics in our country. A few more children cannot cause much difference. We tell the peasants, enjoy yourselves and we will take care of your children in the future, there will be much for them to do.'

'Have you positive plans for agriculture?'

'We shall have to see what situation exists when we achieve power and then decide what to do,' he said cheerfully. 'It is no use jumping a river before we reach it, as your countrymen say.'

As he parted he said: 'Enjoy your visit to India, my friend. Come back in ten years and you will find big changes.'
All of which, I reflected, added up to the fact that Communists intend to make bhoodan inoperable and enhance problems in the villages. His argument provided a point of morality which, fortunately, need not be considered here.

I met another Communist at a village outside Cuttack in Orissa, close to the Bay of Bengal. I say he was a Communist although he claimed to be a sadhu. He had achieved a reputation by quitting the Party to tramp the roads to protest at the industrialization programme. He was a dark-skinned gaunt man with bad teeth and a facial tic. A saffron robe and begging bowl comprised his entire travelling possessions. In earlier life he had been a babu in a firm of importers. He spoke fluent English.

In answer to my questions he said: 'Industrialization threatens the traditional Indian way of life. We are simple villagers, not mechanics. It is immoral to take free men from our villages and turn them into factory slaves.'

He said everything in an infuriated tone and stared at me with wild loathing.

'Your villagers work longer hours for far less than Western industrial workers,' I said.

He laughed bitterly. 'Our villagers are happy. Are your industrial slaves?'

I tried another line. 'Do you support bhoodan?'

'Bhoodan cannot work.'

'Why not?'

His face twitched. 'It teaches simple men the cult of personality. Bhave is trying to save the government by making every villager a small capitalist. He tells them to do for themselves what the government should do for them. When the bhoodan policy fails the government will tell your villagers, “You cannot blame us, you are responsible because you are inefficient, but we will give you work in a factory in exchange for your happy life in your village.” Bhave and Narayan are government agents.'

My mind went back to the former schoolmaster. 'Do you believe in education?'

'Why should villagers be educated now?' he asked. 'They will be given a capitalist education in order to confuse them, taught what is wrong in order to save industrialists and landowners. Nehru’s education will not bring them happiness or food.'

'What do you believe should be done?'

'We must preserve the purity of our culture,' he snarled gloomily.
'The sort of education you mean belongs to the West. It cannot provide the wisdom of our ancient civilization.'

'It could save lives.'

'People always die,' he countered. 'You Europeans sell your souls and each other to keep yourselves fat. We read your newspapers. It is our mission to save the soul of India.'

I tried another line. 'Do you believe in equality for women?'

'A woman is the servant of her husband. Our gods ordained it.'

At this point he lost interest in answering my questions. He turned away and strode rapidly into the green twilight, his saffron robe flapping round his thin dark varicosed legs before his gaunt figure was swallowed up in hot purple shadows beside a gleaming river.

A number of Indians assured me that Communists joined the ranks of *sadhus* and *sannyasis* in order to lend a mystical flavour to their propaganda among orthodox villagers. Party members disappeared from their habitual surroundings for six months or two years and showed up elsewhere as holy men who campaigned against the government. Along their march they were supported by underground party members who provided for their needs. If they left a family behind them in Bombay or Calcutta, the Party took care of it. Their stint of service ended, they returned to their homes and resumed their previous life, saying they had been employed abroad. Most of them then acquired a paid Party job.

I found no cause to doubt this assurance. It was credible because it was logical. The millions of holy men could absorb several thousands more whose reputed holiness would never be questioned no matter what they said or did provided they left the holy cow alone. The Party has long used fake beggars in big cities to report on exploitable local issues, such as the Gujerati-Maharashtrian conflicts in the *chawls* of Bombay and *bustees* of Calcutta. During riots these beggars report the progress of events to Party HQ while riots are taking place.

At first sight, it was odd to observe Party members working to maintain the status quo in the villages. But it was logical. They did not want to lose the present propaganda advantages of mass poverty of life in the country. It gave them a means of political manoeuvre. It was the Chinese method, as distinct from the Russian, of seeking power through the peasantry. And it was the method most likely to succeed in the sub-continent with its teeming, illiterate, and emotionally volatile villagers in their millions.
I talked to scores of Communists, admitted or otherwise. Not one had a policy for improving the wellbeing of the villagers now. They were too busily engaged in creating an emotional atmosphere for revolution in those mud-walled, wattle-and-thatch communities strung along the rivers of Mother India. Jam tomorrow after the revolution, they promised.¹

It is unlikely that the rewards promised by implication in this classic Communist pre-revolutionary attitude could be achieved at a faster rate than must be maintained by the continuously expanding five-year plans of the present time. The reasons are various.

Physical India, the land and its economic opportunities by formation, natural wealth, and cultivation, cannot provide immediate benefits of unparalleled dimension for every individual. The financial system cannot rush if it is to avoid later disaster. Entrenched superstitions and illiteracy have provided major obstacles to the recruitment of a skilled industrial labour force. The futility of a comparison with mainland China is obvious. China started with considerable economic advantages which owed nothing to political theory: mineral deposits at once more extensive and diverse, many permitting easy exploitation such as some of the largest open-cast coalmines in the world and other ores close to the surface; water in constant volume flow capable of simple control for irrigation in some areas (the Chinese did not cultivate rice in padis by accident); more highly developed coastal industries; a more experienced industrial labour force. Religion did not play the role it plays in India; it did not exercise the same restrictions upon the individual. Communist China employs at least one major artificial economic device; like Nazi Germany it created a huge army to put under control the ablebodied men who would be first to show disaffection at the inability of the labour market to absorb them. India has scorned this device.

These points were avoided by Indian Communists to whom I tried to talk. When they discovered that I am not an intellectual, eager for a cosy chat on theory, they slithered away. Their platform voices were devastatingly shrill and impassioned. I lost interest in them. I am not impressed by those who find it necessary to enlist my support for their theories by shrillery and the hot eye, like salesmen at a trade fair. I have not yet heard why emotionalism should be allowed to interfere with

¹ Early in July 1960 the Indian Government published the draft outline of its third Five-Year Plan, involving the outlay of almost £8,000 million, nearly five times the amount of the first Plan. Marked features were its vastly increased expenditures on agriculture to meet the growing demand for food, development of villages, education, and light industries. It also estimated that the 1966 population will be 46 million more than that anticipated.
government, which should aim at achieving the greatest good on a continuously ascending scale of knowledge and opportunity for all people in liberty and equality before the law and personal responsibility. Yet until politicians grow out of their tub-thumping, microphone-bashing, air-walloping tirades, the world’s politics will remain retarded. It is not even fun any more. Let us search our intelligence for a moment: is there really anything more belittling, or exhausting, to behold than a party conference with a horde of ageing people doing everything short of physical injury to others in their lust to hog the wretched microphones? These emotional whips debase those who use them and stunt those who cringe under their lash. What legitimate business has such immature frenzy in 20th-century government? How can you possibly trust the sincerity of men who rave hysterical propaganda? This is where my generation came in—with Hitler. The prospect before us is too serious to exonerate such emotional carnivals. And therefore I have a great admiration for the political conduct of Mr. Nehru, who does his utmost to avoid such tedious displays.

Unfortunately for India, it contains a lot of emotional speakers. Many are Communists who whip up a mob of people unhappy for various human reasons and then miscall the outcome a spontaneous demonstration. Those who assist them are corrupt businessmen, avaricious millionaires, crooked officials, and the waving-palms brigade. They are jointly in league against Indian independence, whose problems are set out with admirable clarity and detachment in the magazine Seminar. It is they who ripen the red apples of revolution.
ONE day shortly after the Chinese Communists had ended their Long March in 1935 and established themselves in Shensi under a government by committee a correspondent of the London Times interviewed the chairman, Mao Tse-tung, then living in a loess cave. During their conversation Mao was asked what future he foresaw for Red Chinese districts.

'Every man has food to eat and clothes to wear,' Mao Tse-tung answered. 'Every man understands the rights and duties of citizenship and has a fair chance of education and amusement. The marriage customs are to be reformed, roads built, industry developed, a six-hour day established. There is no foreign aggression. No man oppresses another. There is equality and freedom and universal love. Together all build the peace of the world.'

The Times representative had every justification to be impressed by this statement from a Chinese leader. It was so much more forthright than the saws ascribed to Confucius.

Heroism has no politics. Communists on the Long March displayed heroism frequently. It began in October 1934 from Kiangsi, southwest of Shiangsi, when some 95,000 Reds fought their way out of a blockade.
by Nationalist troops commanded by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. It ended 6000 miles and 368 days later at Fushih (Yenan), 200 miles north of the Yellow River city of Siking. Along a devious route caused by Nationalist attacks the Communist Red Army lost over half its strength. It spent only 100 days in rest: on the other 268 days it marched an average of fifteen miles a day, fought fifteen major and 300 minor encounters, crossed eighteen mountain ranges, eight rivers, and occupied sixtytwo cities. At each halt, apart from those in cities, it burnt its camping-ground in a scorched-earth policy to prevent Nationalist intelligence agents from estimating its size. On two occasions Chiang believed that his troops could enforce its defeat but despite heavy losses the Reds fought free and resumed their march. In Shensi they halted and underwent a thorough overhaul by protracted criticism of their tactics.

Two aspects of contemporary Chinese Communism originated in those days, endless self-criticism and total disregard for human life. Others stemmed from the character of Mao. Some were inborn. He acquired others from his surroundings and generation.

Mao was born a peasant in a Hunan village. He started to work for his father at the age of six. He grew up in a China bitterly hostile to countries which opened it and saw the Manchu dynasty collapse in the Kuomintang Revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He witnessed the effects of the centuries-old corruption of Chinese officials and oppression by warlords, both of which continued after Chiang assumed political and military leadership of the Kuomintang in 1925 and started to unify China by military means. Mao noted how a rapid increase of the Japanese population replaced imperial troops killed on the mainland of Asia when aggression touched off the Russo-Japanese war of 1904.

Mao was fortythree when The Times correspondent interviewed him in 1935. At the time idealistic young Chinese—the description meant racially and nationally conscious—were reaching Yenan from every part of the country to reinvigorate the Red Army. Significantly, Mao was never an orthodox Communist; he believed that power could and should be won through the peasants, not through the educated, or intellectual, strata. When his government by committee declared war on the Japanese invaders it broke with Dr. Sun's expressed hope of seeing a united Asia—China and Japan with Soviet Russia—face the West.

The next few years were busy for Mao and his party. He concluded a rapprochement with Chiang to fight the Japanese but directly World War Two ended his party started a policy of creating civil disorder. An armistice was signed at Chungking between Chiang's Nationalists and
Mao’s Communists in January 1946, due entirely to the mediation of General George C. Marshall, the special envoy of President Truman, but an all-party conference failed and civil war started again. In April 1947 Generalissimo Chiang declared one-party rule to be ended in China and announced a State Council composed of the main parties. Mao refused to co-operate and did not participate in the National Assembly elected in November 1947. When Chiang resigned as President in January 1949 the authority of the Nationalist Government declined rapidly. A few battles enabled the Communists to gain China by bloodshed and might, not by an expression of popular will.

Mao was fiftysix when he became chairman of a one-party state on 30 September 1949.

China has witnessed incredible changes in the eleven years since the Communists obtained power by guns. It has changed more than any country in the world. It has changed so much that Mr. John Gunther, who was there in 1938, would not recognize it. Gunther, in his Inside Asia, attributed a large measure of China’s problems then to imperialist trade expansion, and singled out Britain particularly in this connexion. Gunther called the Opium War of 1839 ‘one of the most unpleasant wars in all history. British trade was based on opium [and] the East India Company dumped opium into China. . . .’ But he added: ‘A vast lot of nonsense has been written about opium. . . . In moderation, in fact, many doctors think opium to be no more harmful than whisky. . . .’ The British public did not agree with doctors who held this view, as was reported by a countryman of Gunther, Professor E. A. Ross of Wisconsin University, who stated that the trade ‘caused the Christian people of Great Britain [to make] the twentyfourth of October 1907 . . . a day of humiliation throughout the British Empire and of prayer that the opium trade might speedily cease’, and it did.¹

On both counts Gunther was locking the stable door after the horse had bolted. He noted that there were thirtyeight treaty ports along the coasts and rivers of China, to represent imperialist trade interests. He regarded Mao as ‘a philosopher, an intellectual . . . a calm man . . . a builder, a dreamer, a creator. . . .’ At approximately the same time that Gunther published his views I published my own somewhat less hopeful opinions.

Inside Mao’s China in 1959 there were no treaty ports and no foreign imperialists. By his own expressed views there were no signs of foreign aggression. Nonetheless, the Red Army of 95,000 in 1935 had become a

standing army of 3 million equipped with an air force of 3000-plus jets, guns which shelled the Nationalist-held off-shore islands, and a militia of 100 million men and women trained in the use of rifles, without cartridges due to cost but equipped with bayonets. Among roads which had been built were those to the North Vietnam and Burmese frontiers and across Tibet: Sikang to Lhasa, Tsinghai to Lhasa, Sinking to Gartok (the main Red military base in western Tibet, near to Kashmir and West Pakistan), Lhasa to Gangtok (the road south between Bhutan and Sikkim to Bengal and East Pakistan), Heiho to Gartok, and from Shigatse to Nyalam on the frontier of Nepal.

Mao was no longer sure about universal love. In office he had announced: 'Communism is not love; it is the hammer which we use to destroy the enemy.' His own actions in relation to oppression denied his earlier utterance. Observers estimated that from 1949 to 1959 the party led by the dreaming creator had destroyed 16 million people opposed to it. In 1952 the Minister of Finance publicly acknowledged that since the party attained power three years earlier it had liquidated 2 million people. Mao's words on liberty had been denied by the persecution of Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries, millions of peasants herded like cattle into the inhuman Weihsing labour communes, the million refugees who streamed into Hongkong, and the Tibetan nation.

The population increase provided points of interest. A cause of its unusual acceleration was a free marriage system tried in a number of provinces following Mao's seizure of power, an experiment aimed at traditional family life and intended to restock the armed forces as Japan had done earlier. The estimate that it would reach 1000 million in 1980 was revised in 1959 when a Red investigation into rural communes near Shanghai, which took into account an increase in Shanghai itself, revealed an estimated increase of 19·5 million a year, a rate of 3·3, suggesting that the figure expected in 1980 would be reached in 1973. The report which gave these figures pointed out that fortyone per cent of the population was under sixteen years old. It is therefore possible that the increase rate of 3·3 will increase.

If the present rate is maintained there will be less than a quarter of an acre of arable land per person in 1969 and an eighth of an acre per person in A.D. 2000.

Another point is that no political system can support a population of 1000 million by known methods of production from the dwindling productive soil of China alone. Erosion is extensive. Soil is of poor

quality and badly leached along most rivers. The established use of human waste as manure cannot enrich it; animal and artificial fertilizers are in short supply. An inadequate rainfall in northern China combined with floods in the central and southern regions has devitalized and stripped off top soil. Fifty years ago Professor Ross wrote of a China with a two per cent increase: ‘Even with the aid of a scientific agriculture it is, of course, impossible to make the crops of China feed such an increase. It must emigrate or starve.’ Another American demographer quoted a Chinese estimate that 100 million people had died there of starvation in the past 100 years.¹

Each of these points increases disregard for human life. Life was always cheap in China.

A deliberate use of this cheapness of life was shown during the Communist seizure of power. The crucial battle fought between Red and Nationalist forces in 1948 took place at Hsuchow, north of Nanking. The Communists were commanded by Marshal Lin Piao, a veteran of the Long March and a professional soldier trained at Whampoa Military Academy near Canton. For the Hsuchow battle Marshal Lin used ‘human sea’ tactics, an assault regardless of loss of life on the Communist side which sent vast waves of Red troops against Nationalist positions until mere weight of numbers obliterated resistance. The same tactic was later used by Chinese troops in the Korean war; it was the method by which Japan had seized Port Arthur fifty years before. In 1754 Marshal Lin was reported as having told Sam Watson, a former chairman of the British Labour Party: ‘Even if 200 million of us were killed, we would still have 400 million left.’ Watson later suggested to Mr. Khruschev that one day China would either flood into Siberia or Australia, to which the Soviet leader replied: ‘I am all in favour of Australia.’ In 1959 Marshal Lin was Peking’s Minister of Defence.

The foregoing situation arose without reference to nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles. It would be excessively foolish to allow concern over newer weapons to cause anyone to live out the old Chinese story of the man who was so frightened of a tiger that he sat down beneath a waterfall.

For these reasons there is cause to accept as authentic the remark attributed to Mao that China could afford to lose 300 million in a world war if it destroyed the industrial supremacy of America and Russia and crippled Europe. Consequently, there is cause to assume that Mao was not favourably disposed towards an easement of Russo-American tension. A number of reports coming out of China in 1959 said that Mao favoured

¹ Dr. George Cressey, *Asia’s Lands and Peoples* (Whittlesey House, 1944).
war between Russia and the West. If it happened, China would probably withhold her support from Russia until Moscow agreed to provide her with nuclear weapons. Russia would then be in mortal peril and Khruschev is fully aware of it. In the existing situation, however, if Russia and America had not possessed nuclear and ballistic weapons, Red China could have obtained control of Asia by conventional weapons alone from 1959 onwards.

Industrially, China could not undertake a large war without supplies from outside, namely the Russian bloc. But it would be unrealistic to seek pointers of her industrial capacity from occasional failure to attain her annual targets of heavy and light industrial production, power, chemical fertilizers, and agricultural output. By 1958 she had achieved outputs undreamed of only forty years ago. Every successive year has raised her industrial and agricultural output. Once again, the situation was foreseeable and foreseen. Writing in 1908, Professor Ross prophesied: 'It is not likely that the march of industrialism in China will be so rapid and triumphant as many have anticipated. Jealousy of the foreigner, dearth of capital, ignorant labour, official squeeze, graft, nepotism, lack of experts, and inefficient management will long delay the harnessing of the cheap labour power to the machine. Not we, nor our children, but our grandchildren will need to lie awake nights. It is along in the latter half of this century that the yellow man's economic competition will begin to mould with giant hands the politics of the planet.'

Professor Ross was a prophet with honour. It has happened exactly as he foretold. And amongst those who lie awake nights are the Russians.

From the days of Dr. Sun Yat-sen onward many educated Chinese held imperialist powers responsible for the backwardness of their country and disregarded delays attributable to factors listed by Professor Ross. Britain was foremost amongst them, a point indicated by Gunther. Although she has gone, except from Hongkong where her lease expires in 1997, Peking still cuts paper tigers out of the British. Others were France and Japan. They have gone. A fourth was Portugal, now present only at Macao. Another was America, now committed to a policy of containment of Communist China. And another was Russia.

Attention was drawn in earlier chapters to the fact that Soviet Russia has maintained the hegemony which the Czars established over central Asian countries. The Chinese were affected. They have not forgotten

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1 Professor Ross’s illuminating study of *The Changing Chinese* in the early years of this century, the most informative I have read, was picked up for 6d. by my wife on a West-country market stall.
that in 1898 the German Kaiser stated: 'No one could stop Russia from marching with her army to Peking,' and in a letter dated 3 January 1904 the Kaiser wrote to the Czar: 'Now you are, properly speaking, the master of Peking.' The Czars obtained Outer Mongolia, claimed by the Manchus. Mao has moved millions of his fellow-countrymen into adjacent territory.

The history of the homeland of the Mongols and of Genghis Khan is full of interest. Outer Mongolia was a Chinese province from 1686 to 1911, an autonomous state under Russian hegemony from 1912 till 1919, a Chinese province from 1919 till 1921, a Russian-protected state from 1921 to 1945, and an independent Communist state thereafter.

Early in the history of Soviet Russia a number of Mongol leaders died in Russia. One was Suchen Bator, founder of the Mongolian Communist Party, who quarrelled with Lenin in 1923 and was murdered in Moscow. Otshira, secretary-general of the MCP, died of food-poisoning in Moscow in 1926 and his assistant was fatally injured in a road accident. The Prime Minister Gendun died on a visit to Russia in 1937. Marshal Tshoibalsan, head of the republic in 1953, died of heart failure in Moscow. Chinese Communists attributed these events to the desire of Outer Mongolia to return to Chinese protection.

The longevity of Mongolian politicians increased directly Khruschev came to power in the Kremlin. In 1958 the pro-Chinese element sacked several pro-Russian officials, but in March 1959 three highly placed pro-Chinese officials—Dashin Damba, leader of the MCP; Surenjaw, Speaker of Parliament; and Ugersuren, deputy Prime Minister—were merely replaced by the pro-Russian Prime Minister Yumzhagin Tsedenbal, B. Dzargalsaichen, and Lhamsuren, while six other pro-Chinese politicians lost their positions safely. It was an interesting game of political chess.

The reasons for this distant struggle were obvious. The population of Outer Mongolia was estimated at only 950,000, of whom eighty-eight per cent were yurt nomads, in a territory believed to be 620,000 square miles in extent and to contain deposits of uranium, helium, and wolfram, located by Russian geologists in the vicinity of the Gobi Desert. In 1959 the industrial labour force in the capital, Ulan Bator, was seventy per cent Chinese and there were 120,000 Chinese labourers

1 G. F. Hudson, The Far East in World Politics.
2 Perepiska Vil'gelma II s Nikolayem II (Moscow, 1923).
in the country with another 80,000 due by the end of 1960 as part of a 100 million rouble loan from Peking to increase industrialization. By January 1961 the Chinese population should be twenty per cent of the total. It will be working in a new woollen plant, the Nalaikha coalmines, and other projects. It is already at work on road construction, building, plant installation. A high percentage of young Mongol intellectuals are trained in Peking.

Next door, in the Chinese republic of Inner Mongolia, a total of five million Chinese settlers from the south took up residence between January 1956 and December 1959. Their presence increased the Chinese population to ninety-six per cent and reduced the Mongolian community to four per cent in a population of nine million. On a demographic estimate the Mongolians, like the Tibetans, will be obliterated by racial fusion by A.D. 2000. The Chinese were settled in new communities and old towns attached to agricultural development and industrial projects such as the Paotow steel combine. Khruschev’s preference for Australia as a site for Chinese emigrants was not unmindful of the fact that the new community was on the frontier of Outer Mongolia, less than 500 miles from the Siberian industrial region and its reputed rocket bases.

Therefore at the same time that the labour force in Sinkiang received three million new workers, the Chinese Red Army stretched under Russian central Asia, across Tibet to the Karakoram Range into Kashmir, near to Pakistan, near too to Soviet Kazakh, Kirgiz, and Tadzhik. Mao had served notice of an intention to expand in central Asia even if it caused concern in Moscow.

There is no likelihood of China becoming engaged in open rivalry with Russia yet. Such an idea is tantamount—to borrow a phrase from Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek—to ‘climbing a tree to fish in its foliage’. Khruschev and his party have discovered, however, that they have a large front door at the back of their house.¹

¹ Dialectical squabbles between Peking and Moscow early in 1960 were insignificant compared with the geopolitical conflict for leadership in central and southwest Asia. Two other events in the same period possessed greater importance. The first was a Chinese declaration at a meeting of Warsaw Treaty powers in Moscow on 4 February that ‘The Chinese Government has to declare to the world that any international disarmament agreement and all other international agreements which are arrived at without the formal participation of the Chinese People’s Republic and the signatures of its delegation cannot . . . have any binding force on China.’ This was a clear notice to Khruschev from Mao that China would not automatically rely on him or underwrite his stated intention to introduce ‘peaceful coexistence’ between Russia and the West. Therefore, Khruschev’s later claims of the accuracy of Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles test-flighted into the Pacific were presumably not addressed
Observers have suggested that Mao hopes to conclude a temporary deal with Russia to divide Asia into their separate zones of influence, and to simultaneously trigger off a war between Russia and the West, with the results described.

And therefore the situation of India is of considerable consequence. The sub-continent is a natural political goal for China to reach, in order to gain her vast manpower and seal off the smaller countries of southeast Asia—Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Cambodia, the Vietnam Republic—which would then be forced to forfeit their independence to Peking and become satellites.

Evidence supplied by Mao to that end has been continuous. From the battle of Hsuchow in 1948 through the occupation of Tibet and the invasion of South Korea to the penetration of Assam and Kashmir, the policy followed by Mao and his government by committee in Peking has cast China into the role of the world’s bad neighbour. Red China is candidly imperialist. Her Communism is so deviationist that its policies are open to dispute.

Further evidence was supplied to Khruschev when he visited Peking in October 1959 for celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the revolution. He was welcomed by a military band playing an anthem, *The East is Red, the sun is rising*. He stood beside the sixtysix-year-old Mao on the red-painted pagoda-roofed Gate of Heavenly Peace, between the Hall of Supreme Harmony and the railway station, overlooking T’ien-an Mén Square, and watched a procession of thousands of troops followed by guns, tanks, military convoy lorries, while formations of jet bombers and fighters flew overhead. There were models of blast furnaces and steel plants and iron foundries.

The celebrations included a speech from Marshal Lin. He added a few words which referred to the reappearance of the old Chinese Empire: ‘The aspirations of the Chinese people to liberate Taiwan [Formosa] and the offshore islands and to attain the complete unification of our great Motherland must be recognized. No foreign countries will be allowed to interfere with this intention.’

solely to Washington and London. Khruschev is in a certain amount of difficulty but the West cannot take comfort from his predicament. At present Russian rocketry has a measure of superiority over the West, but it is dwindling. Therein lies the danger to the West, a possibility of Russia deliberately creating an explosive situation vis-à-vis the West in a hope of gaining superiority and being able to deal with China later when Chinese industrialization has gained parity with Russia and the Chinese population has increased its numerical superiority to an even greater extent. It is possible that Khruschev will be tempted to hatch some ingenious plan to enlist support from Mao and Chou short of giving them nuclear weapons and ICBMs. On the day that Peking acquires them, the present superiority of Moscow in the Communist sphere will have gone forever.
And, according to Peking, the Motherland included Outer Mongolia and Bhutan, Nepal, parts of Kashmir, Sikkim, Hunza, and other areas of the hills of India.¹

You will have noticed that we are back at the point where this book began. The names are Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai, not Alexander. The cry is Communism, not *homonoia*. The drive is west, not east. Persepolis was one city along the route of Alexander; Lhasa was one city along the route of Mao. The claim was still justified by the ghosts of yesterday; retribution, reprisal, retaliation, vengeance. Between the day when Alexander plunged east and the day when Mao plunged west and east and northwest and south, other imperialists roamed over these lands. They were not all merciless killers. Some sought to impart benefits; the test-case history of Kashmir included Asoka, Zain-ul-ab-ul-din, the luckless Yusaf, Akbar, and others, and showed that a divided nation is condemned to weakness, dependent on the erratic behaviour of individuals, and has little chance of escaping from its history long enough to establish social stability. Many acted in accordance with their century and environment, the little learning of their age, and lacked opportunity to solve social and economic problems by science and humanity. Our age has science; only its humanitarian spirit is in doubt. I believe that the Indian people will overlook the blemishes of our history. Some of our forbears occasionally hurried around in sublime forgetfulness of their own humanity.

No plea of justification for a use of past methods can be offered by the Peking men. They have already roamed far in the darkness they are spreading over Asia. Therefore, I feel that they should be admitted to

¹ External broadcasts from China had risen to 405 hours a week by June 1960. In this output, propaganda and news directed to south and southeast Asia amounted to 200 hours. Another 110 hours were directed to the hua chiao, overseas Chinese, ranging from India and Ceylon, across Malaya and Indonesia, to the Pacific islands and Hawaii. Their total number is estimated at 17 million, of whom approximately 11 million are based in southeast Asia, and they contain groups known to be more racially conscious than were Sudeten and Austrian Germans in 1934–39. Academic reasons can be given to argue that these groups are at present incapable of forming 'fifth columns'. This attitude would be a misreading of their present mood. My observations in Malaya, South Vietnam, and elsewhere, suggest that a large number of the poorer Chinese, if not all, discount the hellish communes, and, regardless of politics, rejoice in the growing might of their homeland. To them, reported food shortages in areas of China—the straw grasped so eagerly by some visiting Europeans—and events in Tibet mean nothing; their own daily food consumption has been low for years and they accept the Peking line on China's frontier. It is not without significance that another 28 hours per week of direct radio transmission (not news in Morse, broadcast daily) is being aired from Peking to Africa, a continent hitherto regarded as a reserve for exploration by Russia. This development followed the establishment of a China-Africa Friendship Association with branches in Guinea, Uganda, and Ghana.
United Nations. It is open to doubt whether they represent the soul of China; they would undoubtedly engage in displays of temperament, walk out when criticized, and indulge in the tricks which are a tedious feature of United Nations' gatherings; but at least the West could tell them its views on their conduct. China is not East Germany. Undoubtedly the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan would protest at the Peking men being present at United Nations. By doing so they would only reveal their own shortsightedness and inability to seize the advantages thereby presented to them. They could influence the future more positively than they have affected the past decade. The future of the world counts as much as the Taiwan present. In terms of military aggression, the world has already passed the point of no return.

From the conduct of Russian and mainland Chinese strategy over the past decade, it is simple to imagine what manoeuvres China would engage in if she were admitted to United Nations. They are foreseeable; therefore they too can be forestalled. Naturally, the Nationalist Government on Taiwan should remain an independent member of United Nations—British representation is not restricted to the United Kingdom—and if Peking refused to join UN while the Nationalists were represented it would only provide another proof of its aggressive policies. In my opinion the late John Foster Dulles erred in committing the United States to a policy which excluded mainland China from United Nations. The men of Peking should be where the opinion of the free world can be communicated to them. They should not be allowed to skulk in the darkness outside to pursue their present policy of naked military aggrandizement, blackmail, and subversion, against the smaller countries of Asia.

The admission of Communist China to United Nations would present the world with advantages unforeseen when Mr. Dulles died. She would have to stand before the small new uncommitted nations with the blood of Tibet and Korea, of Indians and Nepalis, Kazakhs and Malays and Vietnamese, fresh on her hands. Small independent Asian nations would be strengthened. Her presence at United Nations might have the salutary effect of awakening Western nations from their disputes: even General de Gaulle might be revivified. Outside of United Nations it would prove a considerable embarrassment to the hidden men of Communism in the ranks of British Socialism. The least that could happen would be that she would walk out when criticized, in the style set by Nazi Germany. These and other advantages appear to have escaped the attention of Western diplomats, whose present lack of agility in strategy is indeed frightening.
AT THE start of my return journey from Calcutta I landed at Delhi in mid-afternoon. Heat enveloped us as we descended from the plane. People swayed about Palam field like hot ghosts, women in saris, neatly dressed children, men in scholastically perched Gandhi caps and long white or grey tunic coats like those favoured by Mr. Nehru. Even a voice crackling over loudspeakers sounded like something being roasted on a spit.

Everyone looked hot and bothered, except Kamla. She wore a turquoise sari and a green blouse, her eyes were clear, and outwardly she was as calm as she had been in Srinagar, a study in placidity. Out of the kindness of her heart she had arrived to ease my path to the hotel. On the drive to it she announced luncheon and dinner engagements guaranteed to keep me torpid beneath a social beam until I left.

‘Did you get any material, Johnny?’ she asked.

‘Only bits,’ I admitted. ‘What has happened since you got back?’

She told me of a new rumour going around Delhi of Nehru’s intention to retire from the political arena. It was causing alarm and despondency due to national and international tensions.

We discussed it. There was always a possibility that Nehru would want to retire, like Chiang Kai-shek, in order to enjoy life out of the limelight. We recalled the spasm of chaos throughout India in 1958 when he indicated a desire to leave the fret and fuss. The ‘usually well-informed sources’ ran around in circles for days. It would be useless to speculate on who might succeed him if he did go. Some have paid for publicity, and others have publicity forced upon them. Their conduct in high office has
never been demonstrated by their qualifications as running candidates. Others die before those they are favoured to succeed, like Jan Hofmeyr of the South African United Party about whom my friend Tom Macdonald wrote a biography which called him 'Heir to Smuts'.

It is more realistic to recall that in general elections in 1957 Indian Communist candidates gained twelve million votes, an increase of nearly eight million votes over their 1952 poll. There is no reason to assume that events in Tibet during 1959 weakened Indian Communism. Its agents had spent nine years on spreading an erroneous belief that Tibet belonged to China. A measure of China's success was indicated by speeches at United Nations during those tragic days for they gave no sign of recognizing that she had established the world's frontier on the Himalaya.

Did Mao and his government blunder by their armed penetration of Kashmir and Assam? On the whole, I believe their action was a deliberately planned move whose consequences they had foreseen clearly. Certainly it stated their intentions more forthrightly than hitherto but in recent years a number of observers have drawn attention to a rapid accumulation of evidence of those intentions. From a propagandist viewpoint it served a two-fold purpose of enhancing Chinese prestige and provided an opportunity to relieve boredom in a gigantic and inactive army. It also reminded Moscow of China's present and potential military strength, a hint of what it could risk among uncommitted Asian countries by conventional weapons alone, and hinted that at some future date she would announce publicly her right to possess the atom bomb and its ballistic-missile adjuncts. There is no reason to assume that Russian bases for ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads have been established in China, but there is reason to assume such bases exist in Russia in Asia and that with every passing year as the breath-taking spectacle of Chinese industrialization gathers speed there will be increased pressure by Peking on Moscow for a right to such bases and for Chinese troops to be trained in their use; on this issue, in a few years Russia will have a greater headache than NATO has in a similar connexion with West Germany. It is important to realize that at present China could overrun southeast Asian countries by a use of conventional weapons and would probably be unhindered by America and Russia, forced to sit behind their armaments watching each other and indulging in predictable speeches.
There are other reasons for assuming the invasion of Kashmir and Assam a carefully planned action. The fact of its having been done at two widely separated points ruled out a possibility of it being attributable to headstrong local officers and in each zone an excuse, however flimsy, was provided by previous Chinese emperors who claimed them as part of their domains; it was this continuation of policy by other politics which indelibly stamped the Chinese Reds as neo-imperialists. Both areas were under Indian administration. India needs to devote her capital and loans to the social advancement of her people by planned economic development. If she succeeded, whilst allowing political and religious freedom, without resort to forced labour, the reign of Mao and his party would be jeopardized solely because India had achieved her goal without tyranny and inhumanities which they inflict to overcome their problems. A knowledge of Chinese guns massed on the frontiers was therefore calculated to divert a considerable amount of Indian capital from industry and agriculture into creating and maintaining a large army and air force to halt possible aggression. This would automatically slow up plans for increasing prosperity, keep a large section of the Indian people dissatisfied, maintain the status quo of their poverty, and provide Indian Communists with new opportunities for propaganda exploitation. It would give Peking a tenuous argument for maintaining, if not enlarging, her own armed forces.

Was Russia informed in advance of China's intentions? It seems unlikely. Russia has everything to lose and nothing to gain from the rise of neo-imperialist China. To use an Americanism, Chinese militarism has forced Russia out on a limb. It is a short limb.

In drawing these conclusions, I have borne in mind the unquestionable fact that mainland China is not Communist. The Peking men claim to be Communist. Some were originally Communists. But a manipulation of a country's affairs by a central dictatorial authority, operating its policies without heed of the individual, does not provide proof of its supposed Communism. It would be interesting to know which countries are indeed Communist. The Peking men have revealed themselves as arrogant racialistic dictators, imperialist beyond any shadow of doubt, and prepared to use force. It is a tragedy for humanity that China, one of the greatest civilizations in world history, a source of wisdom and culture, of gentleness and phenomenal accomplishment in centuries before industrialism added a terrible new complexity to human life, should have fallen to a ruthless junto who do the right thing for their own country by precisely the wrong methods for its neighbours, but that has happened.
There can be no doubt that Chinese industrial and agricultural advances in recent years are remarkable. They will continue to excite world interest. That is all to the good; no one possessed of humanity or intelligence will criticize or voice hostility to Chinese economic development. But in claiming it to be a specifically Communist success won in the face of non-Communist antagonism, the men in Peking ignore certain basic and simple truths which warrant restatement now because they will be glaringly self-evident in a few years. First and foremost, a desire for economic advance through industrial development and a scientific attitude to agriculture were born when China saw how they benefited the West. We have it on the authority of Gunther that Mao studied Adam Smith (The Wealth of Nations), Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer (Principles of Sociology and The Man versus the State, etc.), John Stuart Mill, and others, and read biographies of Napoleon, Peter the Great, and George Washington. Second, it was Chinese rulers, Chinese warlords, and Chinese corruption and exploitation of the labouring classes, which delayed industrialization eighty years ago, and the long war with Japan, attended again by Chinese corruption, which prevented it thirty years ago. Third, the West evolved its industrial progress in continuously evolving freedom for the individual, not by repression, single party dictatorship, and elimination of the family. Fourth, the opportunities for Chinese development had always existed within the boundaries of mainland China but were ignored until their possibilities were recognized by the establishment of the treaty ports. Fifth, the mentality which established the treaty ports has passed from the West, an historic phase which has been discarded due to the West possessing an evolving concept of the individual's rights in society—a fact proved by the rapid independence of African states—and it is Communism which is now imperialist, as witnessed by such countries as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Tibet, Kashmir, Nepal, Hunza, Assam, Burma, and others. Sixth, the rocket-rattling indulged in with evident propaganda glee by Khruschev is merely an extension of sending a gunboat. Those are the cool facts deliberately ignored by present propaganda hot-heads in Peking and Moscow.

On every count it appears likely that China will undertake further adventures. Some may be military. Their outcome will depend on those who are attacked; for instance, the Pakistanis would fight for every inch of their soil. No country from Korea to Pakistan is really safe; Peking will shelter behind the ballistic missiles of Russia. The Peking men are likely to prefer subversion in India, a campaign to woo the masses away
from their government and to turn local Communists against Russia, by
methods they have already used in Malaya and Ceylon.

I have a profound and passionate conviction of the ability of the
Indian people to utilize present and future developments in agriculture
and industry in order to emerge stronger, infinitely more prosperous
individually and nationally, and, not least, healthier, than in any previous
era, and without loss of personal freedom and national independence. It
is a gigantic task; it will take time; but it can and will be done. In the
words of Gandhi: 'A nation that is capable of limitless sacrifice is capable
of rising to limitless heights.' Sacrifices are being made. More will be
necessary and time is short because those who want to put the world
under their heels are crowding close upon the hills. But this will be the
true test of the Indian desire for independence; what happened before
15 August 1947 was the expressed desire to shoulder the responsibilities
involved. It would be disastrous for India if she became somebody’s
back-yard. And if India does lose her independence, the bells will be
tolling for Europe and America.

It is a cause for regret that the free West and emergent Africa provide
almost weekly evidence of disunity in the face of the greatest challenge
they have encountered. Their regional bickerings over prestige in matters
of local concern has the atmosphere of a nightmare, worsened by the fact
that the years in which the situation is viable are rapidly shortening.
China is no longer a political vassal of Russia; at her present rate of
industrial development she will be economically superior to Russia by
1985. It is unfortunate that Western countries misuse their fortunate
freedom and wealth in ways which could recoil upon them without
warning. In Asia it is already later than they think, much later.

That is why I feel very strongly that if the West really wants to enjoy
its freedom it must be prepared to sacrifice a much larger part of its high
standard of living to assist the under-developed Asian countries, particu-
larly India. There is no alternative. It would be helpful if ordinary
individuals would provide the Asian peoples with evidence of their good-
will by methods similar to those devised for the International Refugee
Year Campaign.

The West could do this without having its motives questioned.
Alone in the second half of this century, the West has shown itself
opposed to imperialism. It possesses the moral initiative and should have
the ingenuity and bold approach, beyond the scope of the Colombo
Plan, to illustrate its liberal inspiration, the basic humanitarian spirit which has raised the life of its peoples to levels of freedom and fulfilment nowhere equalled in Communist countries.

In addition, the British people have to unlearn what they believe they know about India from having lived there before Independence. That India lives only in their memories. It is the height of folly to assume knowledge of a country's present from having observed its past in an age of vastly different conditions. The essential need of India now is immediate practical assistance to achieve social fulfilment in freedom. Her people have to be given cause for their endeavour, for pride in accomplishment and hope in their future in this one known life, starting with two meals a day. They need a demonstration of a living faith animating the West. There is no alternative if those who would put them under the conspirators' heels are to be defeated.

As the plane from Delhi swung up over a cloud and India faded into a pinkish-brown ground haze, I remembered lines written by Carl Sandburg in *The People, Yes*:

> In the darkness with a great bundle of grief the people march.  
> In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for keeps, the people march.  
> 'Where to? What next?'
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