

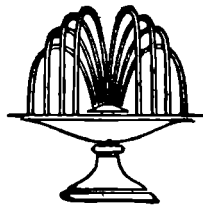




Mohammed Said and A. H. in Mazari-i-Sharif.

EASTERN VISAS

Audrey Harris



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To
MY SISTER RHODA

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Across Siberia

I HAD NO intention of writing a book. I disapprove of amateur travellers—particularly female ones—who, on their return, proclaim in a book what they are apt to embroider into prowess. I was only learning how to travel and where I really wanted to travel to, and did nothing that any one else could not have done with the time, a good digestion, and freedom from the slavery to familiar comforts.

I went because I am nomadic by temperament, because I had always been drawn to China, and an indulgent father generously made it possible to go there, and, above all, because I had the conviction that I could not begin to understand life or form any satisfactory philosophy for the living of it with only the knowledge of the adolescent and materialised West.

This is not an account of dangerous adventures, exploration or political investigation. I had really no previous knowledge of the countries to which my whims of curiosity led me. I have no illusions that I can create a piece of literature or supply new information or thrills. I feel the East is too mature to find life sensational, though it is usually curious, and too imaginative and philosophical to consider the less usual occurrences as surprising—they are just interesting, and I found that, under its spell, nothing seemed impossible and that the more youthful reaction of surprise vanished in myself.

So, you see, this book is not meant for Olympians of travel, or for blasé critics, who are far more alarming than the former with the tolerance of their wide experience and sympathy for all new departures—even that of writing a book, which needs greater courage than all the difficult moments of the journey rolled into one. Honestly, I do not know how to set about it but, like travelling, I presume that one learns it as one goes along.

My intention is to put myself back into each stage of the journey as I lived it at the time, not as seeing it in the now different person that the living of it has turned me into. For this reason some of the letters written home will be included, and inevitably it will be patchy because different countries make one feel so different. In accounts of visits to such countries as Nepal and Afghanistan writers are pruned by national sensibilities and British official censorship. I hope I shall hurt no one's feelings, one may have opinions without thinking them infallible and, as I have said, I write of reactions then and not mellowed, as some of them are, by subsequent time and events.

And here I would apologise for my badly distributed photographs. With no thought of writing a book I had no incentive to grow a skin thick enough to photograph people who did not like it, or to make myself conspicuously odd by appearing to find something extraordinary in what they took for granted. Also, my greatest aim when travelling is to sink myself into the spirit of my surroundings as far as possible, which is impossible if one's mental attitude remains alien and objective.

I accepted to add yet another book to this over-booked and under-lived world because most travel books are written by exceptional people making exceptional journeys, beyond the scope of ordinary people. I am an ordinary person and, having gained so much from my wander in the East, I would like to encourage others to go there if they can, as simply as they would travel in Europe. It is no more difficult—in fact, it is easier I think, because Orientals are kinder and better mannered.

For those who cannot go there themselves, if I can add anything to their idea of the East and its peoples, or pass on any of the riches and entertainment it gave to me I shall feel justified in writing this book, because I am more than ever convinced that the more we Occidentals will learn humbly from the East the better it will be for our bewildered West.

In the beginning my story started with half a bottle of champagne on the platform and the family waving me away from the black jaws of Liverpool Street Station. Then followed

Berlin, Poland, the Russian frontier with the horror of their Customs, what I had thought quite an amusing description of the Russian train and a pretentious account of Moscow. But those first poor efforts, produced with all the agony of the maiden scratchings of an amateur pen, were doomed by a journalist friend saying, "I should start straight off with the Trans-Siberian journey which may interest your reader at once." Whether I can start to interest you or, still more, continue to do so I cannot tell, but to begin with the Trans-Siberian journey is in my power.

But first I will give you a few practical details about which people often seem curious. By the Siberian Railway you can get direct to Tokyo in eighteen days. If you buy a "hard" class ticket, which means third on all other railways, it costs only £28. To please a distracted family I bought a "soft" third, allowing second class on other railways and costing £38. (A mistake was made and I got my wish to go "hard" in the Trans-Siberian.) I bought it through the Intourist; Thomas Cook told me there was no third class. When passing straight through Russia it is cheaper, and saves trouble, to buy coupons in London for all meals: from the Polish frontier to Manchuli these cost me about £4, excluding the two days in Moscow. I changed my half-filled passport for a new one—if it gets filled up, it may be difficult to renew it en route—which was endorsed for every country outside the American Continent, with visas for those I meant to visit. My money was in traveller's cheques.

My luggage consisted of two expanding suitcases, a rucksack, attaché case, and a sack containing a bedding-roll, bulky woollies and shoes, etc. The last was registered through from Berlin to Tokyo. I travelled in a light tweed coat and skirt, till it was too hot and took a camel-hair coat and mattamac. Except in the extreme cold of China and Afghanistan, no stockings and sandals simplified footwear. Shorts are useless as they offend the oriental sense of decency. One long-suffering beret did for church or meals at Embassies or Legations; a cotton handkerchief was ample protection in extreme heat or wet. I had one uncrushable evening dress. Lux and air-cushions were

constant companions, though the latter were less and less used. I disposed of at least a hundred visiting-cards. My camera was a small Zeiss Ikonta; the Siemen's cine bought in Berlin was, intentionally or not, appropriated on the Russian frontier.

Rain fell heavily as the hotel bus slithered over the cobbled streets of Moscow to the station. There were three of us; two lady doctors, James and Li from America and China, returning together to Tsinan, and myself. The Intourist Agent, with our tickets and passports, sat in front with the driver. The Trans-Siberian express was in the station and I looked at it with tremendous excitement; it was a drab brown magic carpet, but it was going to fulfil my wish to be carried to the Far East.

We were all three put into the same compartment where Nikolai was already ensconced, and I have never seen such abject misery on any male face as when we three foreign females surged in with our flood of suitcases, bags, bundles and kettles. At first it seemed inconceivable that everything could go in, but there was a cavity over the corridor which swallowed much and the bottom berths were chests which took the rest. Our tickets and passports were handed over to the podgy little Intourist Agent who was on duty on the train, and the car attendant brought us each our bedding—a wad to lie on, two blankets, a pillow and, for a supplementary 4s. 6d., two sheets, all done up in a canvas bag and still damp from fumigation. So we settled down in our little home for eight days.

The four wooden-berthed compartment was clean though, being August, dust and smuts poured in through the open window and I, facing the engine, looked like a chimney sweep every morning—but what matter? And if I had been sensible, like Nikolai, I should have put the blanket over my head at night.

For the first two nights every bone seemed to stick out too sharply and the wood of the berth was surely exceptionally hard, but familiarity breeds contempt. The greatest problem was damp towels which, as the days passed, one became increasingly ashamed to display.

A routine took shape. The others slept till ten or eleven

o'clock. I got up about nine when we usually stopped at a station, and the third-class passengers, a frowsy horde with coats pulled on over pyjamas or underclothes, raced to the boiler house to fill their cans and kettles. Often there were two taps, sometimes only one. With the absence of "ladies first" in Russia, the first come was first served in a struggle among the kettles, with the likelihood of a stream of boiling water over the hands. As there was no idea how long the train would stop, the forlorn picture of myself left alone with nothing but a bunch of kettles in the middle of Siberia for four or five days soon swept away my bourgeois training of "after you," and I hurled myself into the fight with proletarian vigour.

One morning we had to climb under or through a stationary goods train and run 100 yards to the boiler house. Having overslept I was one of the last to arrive, and had the cans of my companions as well as my own. The last of my four receptacles was scarcely filled when the shriek of the engine brought that vision back with startling reality. There was a nightmare quality in running along the stationary train, handicapped by tins slopping boiling water, trying to find a gap to creep through under bumpers, and the scramble on to the high carriage already moving, with no free hand to hang on with. The price of drinking and attempts at cleanliness!

Another narrow escape was when a Frenchman and I had taken a run on the track. Though I had my skipping rope and skipped at various stations, to the mystified amazement of locals, after five days the exercise question became acute. One morning the engine was filling its tanks so there seemed plenty of time; we started off. The exhilaration of moving under the wide sky over space limited only by the horizon was changed to a sudden panic when the siren wailed. After a breathless race we barked our shins on the last carriage, to meet with a sound scolding from the guard and liverish representative of the Intourist for causing the train to wait three minutes.

Russians do not breakfast till eleven or later, and in the dining-car it was not thought of till 10 a.m. when I went along with an apple, my book or writing paper, to sip many

glasses of sweet tea and spend the time till 3 p.m. luncheon. It was quiet and roomy there and left the others more space to get up in, and to compete with the turmoils of breakfast and lunch. This complication added to their lives made me thankful I had not brought my food.

There was a small attendance for breakfast. Only one collarless Russian with a stubbly face and shaved head came regularly, whom I watched every morning consume a cupful of caviare and two glasses of dark beer. I have never eaten such quantities of caviare as during those eight days; it composed my entire dinner menu every evening at 9 p.m., which is, incidentally, an early hour to dine in Russia.

The food was better and more varied than people imagine, though it was liable to run out on the east to west journey. I think that is probably remedied now, but then supplies were laid in at Moscow for the journey both ways. The staff, who looked like third-class passengers in exhausted clothes and sand shoes, used the restaurant as their dining and sitting-room (maybe, bedroom too), lounging over the tables between meals in a homely and comfortable manner, with their *papaross*¹ and newspapers.

It was possible to guess the class people were travelling by when we all got out at stations, through the degree of boredom expressed on their faces and in their movements. The listless misery of a Swedish couple proclaimed first class; a sluggish resignation hung over the two Germans and one Frenchman in the second class, while we of the "soft" and "hard" thirds were filled with a happy-go-lucky unconcern. We were not comfortable enough to be bored, and the activities to make ourselves more comfortable made the time hurry along so very much faster than the express.

Russians are delightful people with whom to travel. There are no formalities, nothing matters, every one is naturally kind. Though I could not speak to any of them I was accepted as "Davaritch² Audrey." Each evening we were crowded out with visitors to our compartment, sitting four or five a side and several on the top berths. They sang Russian songs, gave

¹ Cigarettes with long cardboard holders.

² Comrad.

us Russian lessons amid hysterical laughter, a dashing young aviator regaled the company with, I gathered, questionable stories which caused more laughter, and repeatedly I had to sing "Tipperary" by request.

The temperature was high during those Siberian summer evenings and we glistened with heat; the supremacy of dust-clouds was taken by tobacco smoke.

Natasha, Ivan and Anna from other compartments were all delightful, but I think we were fortunate to have Nikolai as our fourth. He was a tall fair peasant from Baku, blue-eyed and towy haired. A travelling companion with a beautiful voice is infinitely preferable to one with a language in common. Nikolai sang all day when he was not sleeping, which he was a good deal of the time. In a bass voice with Russian softness he wandered through operas, melodies of concertos and symphonies, Russian songs and unending Turkish chants learned in the bazaars of Baku. He had an attaché-case for luggage and a striped football vest for underclothes; he took off his sand shoes at night, and turned his face to the wall with the blanket over his head when we prepared for bed. As far as I know he never undressed or washed or shaved; I was not aware that he smelt, but perhaps we all did in happy unconsciousness. I realised we waste a lot of time in unnecessary washing.

And all this time we, with our little concerns packed into a train, were creeping our way across more than a quarter of the world.

We passed through the Urals in the night and looked back next morning to their bare slopes over pine forests. After about a day of forest the earth stretched out to the horizon in great swelling undulations—billows of honey-coloured fields broken only by the dark masses or isolated spires of pine trees. Here and there were wooden houses, and in the fields bare-legged men and women in bright head-handkerchiefs, cutting the corn.

The long horizontal rays of evening light threw gold into the air and turned the soil to wine. Here or there a lower dip was filled with a white ground mist—a nebulous lake

through whose surface pierced, like reeds, the dark points of tree-tops.

The awe, the mystery, the detachment of the ocean lies over those stretches of folding, billowed earth, throwing its foam of harvest up to the band of the blue horizon. The train, packed with its human cargo, furrows its way across the vastness like a lonely ship.

At the stations locals gathered for the excitement of the train. Women, standing in a row behind the fence along the platform, offered their wares of eggs, bread, butter, and milk scalded in earthenware pots, the skin forming a lid. The types altered as we travelled east, the majority of fair Slavs gradually changing to Mongols. They might have bare feet but many of them wore fur hats and wadded coats. There are only four months, May to October, when snow does not cover these spaces. The windows of Novo Sibirsk station—known as The Gate into the Far East—have four thicknesses of glass, and bears are known to wander the streets in winter. The handles on the trains are made of wood because metal ones, in that cold, would take the skin off the hand.

In larger stations there are nurseries where children can be left for the day while their parents are working. In important new ones there may be a lecture hall, a barber's as well as other shops and loud speakers announcing the trains. The small ones are made up of just one or two wooden one-storied buildings which look wretchedly desolate set down in such wide treeless space.

A charming old-fashioned Russian engineer invited me to his second-class compartment, where he offered me apples and quantities of brilliantly coloured sweets. He talked a little German, so did I. He told me that here in Eastern Siberia the ground is always frozen below 3 or 4 feet, which accounted for the dwarfed scrub through which we were passing; that there were tigers, wild boar and bears; that the nomadic tribes had suffered very much under the Soviet rule, their numbers diminishing from six to two million. He enlarged on the mineral wealth in Northern Siberia, to which he was on his way, but said that as yet the inadequate transport,

made so difficult by climatic conditions, prevented any real exploitation of them. He intimated a sorrow over modern Russia, and showed me the doll he had bought for his granddaughter, with more pride and pleasure than even she could have felt for it.

After passing Chita we saw the mountains, far away to the south—beyond them was Mongolia. Then we ran into the hills round Lake Baikal, cone-shaped with stunted trees, looking very like a Chinese painting. We ran over a cow and the train stopped; I did not get out to see, as many of my companions did.

It was sad that we were six hours late and only just saw the end of Lake Baikal before it got dark. It looked very mysterious with the mountains rising sheer round the leaden water. In winter it is frozen so hard that trains used to cross it before the present line was engineered. My friend informed me that at times, for no apparent reason, the still water is swirled suddenly into a frenzy, which they think is caused by volcanic eruptions under the surface. The train climbed through tunnels till it was dark, and the air was colder.

Next morning we were in the U.S.S.R. military zone among low rounded hills covered with grass. There were aerodromes and barracks, soldiers marching and cavalry drilling. At the station our aviator got out and Natasha who was met by her husband, also in the Air Force. Then we came to the Russian frontier, and had to get out for Customs inspection.

I had taken one photograph, which I knew was not allowed, but it was only of Nikolai and Natasha. The official spotted it at once and told me to take out the film. He spoke some English so I could expostulate, enlarging on the extraordinary speciality and quality of the film and asking piteously if he really wanted me to waste such a good one. He cogitated while he rummaged through the next passenger's luggage, and eventually returned and marked my camera containing the film.

A Chinese student was less fortunate with his violin bought in Berlin, in spite of the efforts of at least ten other passengers who crowded into the private office. The atmosphere became

tropical, and though the "too, too solid flesh" began to melt fast, the heart of the official remained frigid and the poor young man had to leave it behind.

Over the Manchukuo frontier we passed the military camps and aerodromes of the Japanese, duplicating those of the Russians on the other side. A little farther and we arrived in Manchuli, where I left the train for its farther crawl to Vladivostok.

I was sad to leave the Trans-Siberian. Answers to questions I am continually asked will give my reasons, and fill in some of the many gaps in my picture.

There had been a wonderful comradeship, such as is never experienced in capitalist countries. Official interference had never been officious or conspicuous, except in the prohibition to leave the platform at stations. I was never bored for a moment, and I would always choose to travel "hard" again. I never met any vermin. Our lavatory, where there was usually no water for washing, in contrast with most others, was kept extremely clean by our Provodnik who, himself, left behind him there the smell of tooth-paste and soap. On one occasion I was set on with amorous attentions, which were not continued when I intimated that they were unwelcome. To any one loving huge spaces under subtle changes of light, Siberia is fascinatingly beautiful and endlessly interesting.

Letter from Harbin

HARBIN.

4-9-35.

DARLING FAMILY,

I hope you got the telegram I sent, as you wished, to reassure you that there's no need to sell out capital for bandit ransom! I was disappointed that we saw none; only two days before the train had been attacked. The Japanese are said to be buying police dogs from Germany to guard the line and to track down bandits. . . . But I must tell you, very sketchily, about the Manchukuo passage and here.

We were six hours late at Manchuli, almost a record of punctuality, and the connection for the south was gone for that day. A 1st class carriage was dropped off for us to camp in and the dear old Trans-Sib. puffed on to Vladivostok. After Customs and making reservations on the train next day, Monsieur B—— (A French friend of the train) and I set off to get our Manchukuo visas from the Passport Office in the town. (You remember that Manchukuo not being recognised, a visa was not procurable in London.) I was thankful for M. B—— who knew all the languages as the office was most inconspicuous and miles from the station, and I dazed with excitement and train aftermath.

It was indescribably exciting really to see Chinese people walking about, and little Japanese ladies looking butterfly-like in *kimonos* under sunshades, and to smell that smell which doesn't grow west of Port Said, that I know of, that dusty musky human mysterious smell of the East. There was a queer mixture here of Chinese, Japanese and Russian; an atmosphere of restless conflicting ominous uncertainty.

Fortunately we were the first to arrive in the office as it took twenty minutes for the Japanese official to enter up the information from the forms we had to fill in, including questions of dates and places of both parents' birth, etc. The

tiny room was oppressively crowded with bodies and impatience by the time the twelve or fourteen other passengers had arrived. . . . Later I went for a wander across the river and up the slopes of the hills which surged out of the West. The coarse grass was full of flowers and thyme and most venomous mosquitoes who gorged on my bare arms and legs. At the top of a near hill was a military fort, from which a Japanese soldier suddenly rushed down at me and drove me back as if I were a straying sheep. Between day and night, the western glow and the myriad stars, the gloaming had a wonderful luminous quality in which all colours were mysteriously deep and rich.

After an excellent meal in the station restaurant, served by fatherly Russian waiters among an absolute jungle of potted plants and greenery, I made my toilet in the ladies' station wash-room, very clean, where the tap stuck and a rush of water started a flood. A Swedish lady, also abluting, was provincially shocked when I called one of the fatherly Russians in to save us from drowning.

The night was miserable. It was forbidden to have windows open for fear of things being taken out or thrown in through them, although an armed sentry marched up and down the platform. The heat was asphyxiating, the woman in with me stuffy, and innumerable flies suffering from insomnia craved human companionship.

The train next day was heavily guarded by Jap sentries with fixed bayonets and steel helmets, whose duty of marching up and down the corridor was greatly impeded by having, each time, to climb over piles of luggage stacked in the gangway. At times we passed over bare plains, cultivated near villages, at others between rounded hills which closed up each side of the railway. The sun glared down on a country which had the air of suffering exposure bravely.

There were many White Russian settlements along the railway which owns a wide strip each side. It was formally run and owned by Russians, but now the Japs have taken it over, and the unfortunate Russians are being turned out or put in subordinate places under Jap officials. It made me boil to see tall patient Russians being ordered about by these officious

little men, who make one think of ants chivvying round objects much larger than themselves with devilish persistence.

Hermetically sealed for the night with four in the compartment—breathless. At 5 a.m. the train stopped so long that I looked out and saw that we were in the middle of a wide plain. It transpired that the engine had broken down. The sentries were posted along the embankment; although there was no cover but long grass this might have been a great chance for bandits. I had a lovely time (except for mosquitoes) wading about in the grass among harebells and many other flowers. The sky was still grey with dawn and the air freshly blown out of the horizon. After three hours another engine puffed out of the distance from the next station where they had got anxious at our non-arrival. The day grew hotter and hotter and I began to long for a bath. In 2nd class one thought of those things and wasn't nearly so happy as in 3rd class where such luxuries do not enter one's head.

We arrived in Harbin at 4 p.m., 3½ hours late, and I decided to stay the night there instead of catching the midnight connection on to Keijo. After ten nights in trains a bed was irresistible.

The station was overcrowded and armed sentries were posted everywhere. Every precaution was being taken against the arrival of the Emperor in two days' time. This is P'uyi, the son of the old Empress Dowager, whom the Japs have set up as their puppet here. Every one's person and luggage was searched ruthlessly. Can you imagine how trying it was to squat on the platform with a fixed bayonet above one's head, among the legs of the crowds buffeting their way along, while all one's things were ferreted through by soldiers? And they ran their hands down us to make sure we'd not got bombs in our pockets!

In the Russian hotel my room looked exactly like the heroine's in a Russian novel of the end of the last century—plush, mirrors, heavily carved furniture and lace curtains. In the evening M.B.— took me to dinner in a restaurant which had been famous when he'd lived in Harbin during its gay Russian days before the Japs came—days of ballet and opera,

and prosperity. The proprietor and servants were Chinese; it was depressing and sordid though the food was excellent. The White Russian girls who were the professional partners still haunt me. I gather that these poor destitute creatures resort to this means of existence in all the big cities here and in China—what their lives must be among this mixed population! But there's nowhere for them to go; they can't go back to Russia.

To-day we had lunch at the Yacht Club hanging over the muddy waters of the great Sungari River (very swollen now, floods lie in the suburbs). Then we drove round the town, through the business quarters where most shops are shuttered and everything is listless, and so out to the Russian Colony. I've never seen such miserable living conditions. Tottering wooden hovels bordered tracks which are quagmires of mud surrounding holes full of water where the car could hardly make its way. Whole ragged half-starved families packed into one or two tiny rooms—what misery!

Then we drove back through the Chinese city. Oh, the thrill! The long banner signs outside the shops, written in Chinese characters; Chinese music being brayed into the air by gramophones from almost every shop; the leisurely bustle of Chinese crowds; rickshas bumping along the roads; children, tea and dust, and over it all the sense of stability, continuity and indefatigable industry—all so different from the rest of the city, so hateful with its atmosphere of covert international sordidness like Port Said and the docks of Marseilles, with the added depression of lost prosperity.

P.S.—*Later in the train.* Before posting this letter I must finish the day. The train left Harbin at midnight. In the station we had to go all through the searching business again! It was heart-breaking to open bags which had only just been shut, and Jap. soldiers aren't considerate as to the possibility of shutting them again; my belongings looked like a jumble-sale counter when they'd finished. This search was made under the still red lamps hanging before an ikon set in a shrine in the corner of the main station hall. Piteously old Russia still seems

to live on in Manchukuo. The train (a sumptuous new Japanese Pullman) came at last, waking the crowds on the platform from their sleepy resignation into a shouting frenzy. I'm safe now behind the curtain of my 2nd class berth and can't keep awake any longer. M. B—— will post this in Mukden where he gets out. It's all so exciting and new.

Very dear love,

AUDREY.

And So Korea

I HAD PLANNED three days in Korea to see particularly the Museum in Kaishu which, I had read, contained the best collection of early Korean art, and also Chinese which went through Korea to Japan, and before looking at it there I wanted to see the intermediate stage of it in Korea.

At Antung, the frontier town on the railway, the sphere of Japanese dominance begins. The station was very clean and orderly. There was a row of polished taps on the platform and a number of Japanese passengers took the opportunity to wash their heads. Notices were written out in English as well as Japanese, and a Japanese Travel Bureau representative came up and, in polite but bad English, offered any assistance.

The efficiency, cleanliness, order and polite delicacy was certainly a contrast with Russia, and in it I suddenly realised how extremely grubby I had become in the Siberian train.

This train was a Pullman with two polished metal washing basins, hot water and clean towels to each carriage, a curtain dividing their recess from publicity. The lavatory was separate and clean. There were holes at intervals in the carriage floors for fruit skins, nut shells, and spitting—much used.

The second class was crammed with passengers. Japanese, like Russians, seem to travel a great deal and in family parties. In both countries fares are very cheap. Judging from the families in my carriage there is a new addition every year and I had never seen so many happily good children or fathers so attentive.

Customs inspection took place on the train. My suitcases at the end of the carriage were buried under an Everest of bundles and bags, and their excavation was so exhausting that the official was satisfied with the mere opening of them. As this was the eighth Customs in sixteen days it was a great treat. He marked my box of cigarettes separately, but was too

busy to stamp each individual cigarette, which some one I met recounted had happened to him.

The formalities over I returned to my seat. My neighbour, a young Japanese travelling with his two friends sitting opposite, had removed a good many of his clothes and, of course, his shoes, making himself comfortable with his legs crossed under him on the seat. I was very thankful that the Japanese are short-legged people. Most of the gentlemen had taken off the top layer of their European clothes and one was given a comprehensive study of gents' underwear. Every one ate fruit and fluttered delicate paper fans throughout the long hot day while the attendant, in a white suit, passed up and down sweeping the litter of skins and walnut shells down the holes with a bamboo brush.

It was exceedingly hot, and if the windows were opened quantities of dust whirled in, so we sat hermetically sealed. My skirt clung damply to my bare legs, its scratchy wool and the plush upholstery of the seats making me feel rather sick. My neighbours insisted upon peeling apples and pears for me with the graciousness of oriental hospitality.

Looking round at my companions, Western culture was not even skin deep. I mean no disparagement because the more I saw of Japanese people the more admirable I thought them in their own culture, though the less when they had taken on ours. The few gentlemen who wore *kimonos* looked refined and comfortable, their dress suiting them and the climate. It seems necessary for the Japanese to remove the West with their tailor-mades in order to be at their ease—I think it will be so always.

Just to watch a Japanese family get into the train made one realise how unwesternised they are in thought. The father, in European clothes, got in first leading a child. Then in struggled his wife in her *kimono* and *ghetta*¹ a baby tied on her back, a toddler in one arm and a bundle under the other, while a six-year-old hung on to the skirt of her *kimono*. Bundle and toddler deposited on the seat she helped her husband off with his coat, got his slippers out of the bundle and handed him a bag of fruit and a knife. He being comfort-

¹ Sandals held on by a thong between first and second toes.

ably settled, she could move the bundle to make room for herself and two or three children beside her on the seat, then she took off their ridiculous Victorian pink silk hats with scarlet ribbons, untied the baby from her back and, at last, sat down to the work of feeding him. The father was admirable with the children but did nothing to help his wife, whose first duty seemed to be to serve him.

I had had no idea what Korea and its people would be like, and when we passed from the austerity of Manchukuo into its laughing loveliness it was a magic surprise. The country we were passing through was fairylike. Rounded hills, flesh pink with a sheen of bronze green and often broken into innumerable hillocks, rose from stretches of flat rice fields—surely no green is so vivid as that of young rice. The formation was open and big, but still retained the delicacy of a miniature. It was smiling and gentle with a dreaming tranquillity, so different from Russia and north Manchuria where the elements of relentless cold or heat, wind and snow haunt them perpetually. Villages and settlements looked snug in groves of maize which buried all but the roofs of grey-brown matting laid over the huts like blankets. In the fields, workers under their coolie hats hoed the rice, up to their knees in mud, and in the twilight girls drove cows or goats back from grazing.

As night came down we left the plains behind and hills, rising each side of the railway, shut out the stars. I leaned out of the window; the air was cooler and the singing of the crickets was shrill above the rattle of the train. The mountains folded one beyond another into long valleys, where wisps of white mist hung over the stream. In the still air the smoke rose straight from fires cooking the evening meal. The mountains turned into dark masses under the stars.

The first night on a Japanese Pullman train was a revelation. I wonder if chairmen of European railways get an inferiority complex when they travel on one—or probably they never do travel farther than their free passes carry them. Perhaps when they do, we shall have clean cotton dressing-gowns, slippers and new tooth brushes supplied to us when we travel even 2nd class about the Continent or by the “Flying Scotsman.”

Perhaps their attendants will take our clothes away to brush, bringing them back on hangers, and polish our shoes brighter than we have ever seen them, for no extra charge.

I was woken faithfully by the sleepy little attendant at 2.30 a.m. There is always something strange about being the only one awake and active among a lot of sleeping people, almost a sense of guilt at having stolen a march on them to live an extra bit of life which they are missing; and at the same time one feels slightly pathetic, like a ghostly figure out of the silence of their dreams. As I passed down the train the glaring lights shone down on the travellers without sleepers, huddled up hotly on their bundles, most of the seats having been given up to children who lay with arms thrown out in the heat: the selfishness of innocence!

At 3 a.m. I got out at Keijo, wondering what would follow as I had forgotten to find out the name of a hotel. Even at that time of night there was a shouting phalanx of hotel porters, with the names of hotels written in Japanese on their caps. Knowing nothing about them and feeling somewhat lost in the general strangeness of my nocturnal surroundings, I decided against a Japanese hotel and, relying on the Oriental faithfulness to habit and custom, hailed a taxi simply saying "Hotel!" The driver took me automatically to the Chosen Hotel as he did all Europeans when he met them at the station.

The marble hall, red carpets and palms were alarming, but even at 3.15 a.m. the little Japanese at the desk gave me a lively welcome. A room on the top floor cost only 3 yen (roughly four shillings) per day including baths. Everything was ordered with faultless efficiency. There was iced drinking water in a thermos jug; a clean *kimono*, sash, and slippers to match put out on a chair; hot and cold water laid on in each room and soap, three towels, matches, ink and a new nib supplied. On the table was a telephone and a directory—in Japanese.

After a bath I sat a little while in my *kimono* to enjoy the quiet, the space and being clean, with a new relish in all three. Since leaving London there had been one night on a boat, twelve and a half nights on seven different trains and four

nights in three different hotels, and I had been rolled to the other side of the world across six countries. Now, at last, the Far East was no longer a mysterious name, I was in it, felt it, smelt it, heard it. It was through the window in the night teeming with the singing of cicadas. To-day I would start to live in it, to know about it. The great adventure had begun!

There was a patter on the roof, the heavy weight of the air was lightened and the music of the night was drowned in the rush and drip of rain. The sky was changing to the faint deep blue of dawn. I got into bed.

Keijo to Kaishu

NO STARTLING events gave the ten-hour journey from Keijo south to Kaishu its significance or its quality of being a vivid, almost tangible possession, but during the long hot hours in that third class carriage among the simple Koreans who got in and out, I felt that Eastern peoples would not be as entirely inscrutable as we are commonly led to assume. On that day I believed what was confirmed during my whole journey that, though their mentality may work differently and other customs shape their lives, if we refuse to be headed off by these differences we of the West can meet those of the East quite naturally in our common humanity; that with humility it is possible to explore them in the same way as we do different Western peoples; and that though ignorance of the language is certainly a frantic handicap it has the compensations of preventing us from being satisfied by the intentional or unintentional superficialities of speech, and of forcing us to discover intuitively the essential qualities of the people among whom we are. After all, every really sincere relationship is decided more by the emotional reaction to the other's essence than by their opinions or even actions.

The sun was blazing already at 7.15 a.m. and the hotel porter shocked when I bought a third class ticket, but it was jubilantly carefree to be with my belongings on my back in my rucksack for eleven unknown days ahead.

A Korean student who spoke some English was my first neighbour in the train. He gave me a Japanese lesson and a list of words, which proved invaluable as I had no dictionary, having been told that with Western civilisation all Japanese speak English—they try to, but are poorer linguists than any other people I have encountered.

On asking my friend:

“Do you like the Japanese?” He answered with an embarrassed laugh:

“That is very difficult—no can answer.”

But after an expression of my great appreciation of Koreans, adding that of course they were a people of older culture than the Japanese, he felt more confident and spoke of the poverty of the farmers under the heavy Japanese taxation which resulted, among other things, in the inability to pay for education for their sons, whose ignorance left them intentionally more than ever at the mercy of their oppressors.

The next conversation was with a Korean dentist trained in the American Medical College in Keijo, then, later, the guard chatted over a cigarette—and so on at intervals throughout the day. Every one reiterated the dislike of the Japanese who exploited the country people and, through force, used the brains of the intellectuals for their own ends.

Beyond the windows the scenery unrolled with increasing beauty. The flat-floored valleys were brilliant with rice-green, the heavy blue-green of cotton fields, groves of poplars, red soil and crags and silver-purple thatched villages. Rain storms hung in mists over the distant mountains and occasional gleams of sun would catch a flesh-coloured hill in its light. Later when the rain swept down over the plain the old men appeared like lamp stands with their traditional black gauze “top hats” covered with oilskin shades, tied on with four strings.

The survival of such a ridiculously unpractical dress is amazing. The white loosely woven muslin used by the men for their knee-length coats, tied with a one-loop bow on the right breast, is distractingly vulnerable to creasing in heat or rain. The result is, of course, that they are removed frequently, and the epithet “Whited Sepulchre” comes into the mind at the resulting display of bundles of trouser top, a tobacco pouch tied at the waist and layers of several dark cloth waistcoats each not quite covering the next.

The same muslin is used for the women’s full skirts and jackets, tied with two bows on the side. On special occasions pastel coloured gossamer silk is used. There is nearly always a gap between skirt and jacket showing a strip of soft olive-

*Korean country folk wearing their
more practical everyday clothes.*



coloured body. Now the national grass-plaited shoes are being replaced by Japanese goloshes, which draw the feet in the heat, and the men's "top hats" by Japanese boaters.

I was immensely attracted by the Koreans although they are considered dishonest and often employed by Chinese and Japanese to carry out shady transactions. The country people were so friendly and very human, with a charming simplicity and a shy grace which was most appealing. They may not be a people of very strong character but are sympathetic and intelligent, and proverbially good linguists. Physically they are a joy to look at, though frightful to smell in hot weather, being small, beautifully built and proportioned, with the fine skins and colouring of the Chinese whom, broadly speaking, they resemble though their flavour is different. They were originally a tribe who migrated down from somewhere south of Lake Baikal. Many a young man with his broad shoulders, rounded limbs and torso would have been a gift to a sculptor; it was, however, the young women and the old men who impressed me most.

These young Korean girls and mothers were peculiarly perfect expressions of femininity with their delicate grace of carriage and demeanour and the subtle sense of their need for protection. Combined with this was a practical common sense which made them the unaffected mistresses of the situations in which they found themselves. Travelling with babies and small children can prove trying to women who allow their self-consciousness as to the possible reactions of other passengers, or the sanitary condition of the floor of the carriage, to interfere with the comfort and welfare of their children. They were completely unaffected women absorbed in their primary job of being good mothers.

Even more beautiful than the oval of a girl's face was the way the head was set on its round neck which rose between shoulders as smooth and even as ivory to join the fine line of cheek and temple, cut out sharply by the black hair sweeping down into the coil at the nape of the neck.

Then the old men—they seemed to be just what old men should be! Thin upright and dignified, their faces, wrinkled

like a walnut, bore an expression of benevolent and philosophical resignation made lovable by their laughter. They could laugh with the easy friendliness of foes reconciled to the life whose rebuffs they had weathered so long. It was a delight to watch these old veterans puffing at their two feet long pipes under the comic dignity of their black gauze top hats tied under their chins.

As midday approached and its pangs of hunger, I decided to buy *bento* like every one else, at the next station. The square box contained cold boiled rice and a collection of bits of meat, fish, pickled vegetables, gerkin, cherries preserved in vinegar, and a little pair of wooden chopsticks—all at the price of about fourpence. And with these last came the trouble. I had never used chopsticks, and felt far too self-conscious to make my first efforts in the publicity of an already curious third class carriage. Wandering down the train seeking some privacy I discovered a cubby-hole belonging to the guard and, closing the door, essayed to eat my *bento*. It was most unsatisfactory so far as a meal was concerned, very much more rice falling on to my lap and the floor than arriving into my mouth. The guard bounced in in the middle but, laughing heartily, considerately left me in possession of my sanctuary and hunger.

At Targyu I had to change into a little tram-like local train into which more and more labourers crammed, till my legs were almost crushed by squatting figures in the gangway. Coolie hats were tipped to the back of their heads, and clay pipes were stuffed with coarse tobacco-leaves while jokes were bandied back and forth. Laughter crumpled, yet more, faces already lined by hard weather and labour. Above loose white cotton trousers rolled up above the knees, limp shirts open to the waist hung over sweat-drenched bodies. The heat in the carriage was almost insupportable but even this, and the physical sickness which their stench produced, could not take away the delight in these people. And there was a new interest in the smells of peoples, which appear to vary with what their owners eat and drink. Rice-eating, tea-drinking people have quite a different smell from the meat-eating and beer-drinking ones.

The former is more pungent and sickly, but less disgusting than the latter to my nose.

It was dark on arrival at Kaishu where I stood in the station calling "Shibata Hoteru" till a man came up in a peaked cap with Japanese characters on the band, and smilingly put my rucksack on the seat of his bicycle. He led the way along the dark puddled main street between low-thatched shops raised on piles three feet above the thoroughfare, where the thick warm light of lanterns showed the proprietors and their friends lounging among merchandise. The air was hot and heavy with the moisture of the day's rain and, after the ten hours' rattle of trains, the dark silence seemed more close for the homely sounds thrown into it.

After half a mile of splashing through mud and puddles we turned suddenly through the gate of the Shibata Hotel among shrubs and trees; immediately there was an atmosphere of meticulous orderliness. Across the yard a girl in a gay *kimono* knelt at the top of the steps in a lighted doorway.

She was surrounded by pairs of slippers with which visitors are supplied when they have left their own shoes on the bottom step. This taking off of shoes and leaving them outside, symbolic of the necessity of relinquishing one's own path of life with the dust of its way before entering the door of another, is a courtesy assumed by many Eastern peoples, but I think only the Japanese supply slippers belonging to the establishment which must be put on in exchange.

A traveller wishing to study the fundamental differences between China and Japan, with only twenty-four hours at his disposal for each, instead of arranging interviews with leading politicians and scholars need, I think, but book a room in a native style hotel in each country and he will have the whole essences in concentrated form.

In a Japanese hotel one finds an exquisite artificiality which allows no relaxation—just as in their gardens, their women's dress, their theatre, their tea ceremony and their flower arrangements. Spontaneity is bad form and, with Japanese lack of any sense of humour, outbreaks of their human nature appear as puckish farces arranged with the same sensibility for design

and balance as the shaping of their dwarf trees. After the first pleasure in this perfection there grows a sense of being enslaved by it. Like Procrustes' bed, the guest has to fit the hotel rather than the hotel the guest.

In China, on the other hand, there is disorder, noise and dirt, which are at first disconcerting, but these accepted a satisfaction grows in the whole attitude of live and let live and love of laughter, in which every one relaxes unconcerned by the peculiarities of his neighbours. The hotel is but a shelter in which each individual carries on life in his habitual way as far as circumstances allow.

The solemn little butterfly led my slip-slopping steps along shining passages; nowhere is wood given such a luscious surface as the floor of a Japanese passage, and the scent of it is like incense. Windows ran along one side of the passage, bamboo and paper shutters along the other. Through one of these the maid led me into my room. She looked gravely at my feet, still in their slippers; hastily I put them outside beside hers with a sense of shame out of all proportion to the offence.

I was out of scale with my room even though it was practically empty. The floor was covered with five bamboo mats—Japanese rooms are measured by the number of mats it takes to cover them. Two cushions lay beside a low square table on which were writing materials, a dish of sand instead of blotting-paper, two fans and a little hand-warming charcoal brazier. A flat basket was placed in a corner under a row of hooks, and in an alcove a scroll hung above a vase holding one spray of leaves. All the rooms were arranged one beyond another between two passages so that none had windows; neither was there the sign of a bed.

The little maid brought a clean cotton *kimono* and *obi* (sash) and laid my clothes in the basket. When I wrapped the *kimono* round me in the habitual way of right over left, she rushed at me in great agitation and changed it to left over right. Later I learned that it is very bad luck and the sign of imminent death to wrap it the wrong way.

In the public wash-room downstairs there was a long sink

and a pile of dippers by a copper. Here I hoped to attain to Japanese cleanliness, but my style was cramped by an audience of the entire staff who congregated in the doorway to watch this colossal species of female form.

Returning to my room I met the proprietor at the top of the stairs, a plump young man in black and white *kimono* who smiled, saying:

“Do you drink beer?”

Then:

“Are you a Christian?”

And then:

“Do you drink wine?”

He followed me into my room and sat cross-legged on the opposite side of the table. We sipped our tea and fanned ourselves nodding and smiling in silence for ten minutes or so. His curious repertoire of English seemed exhausted, till suddenly he said:

“You are very pretty.”

I wished to answer that I thought the Japanese considered our noses outrageously big and blue eyes insipid, but his knowledge of English was evidently condensed into these four sentences. After a few more minutes he bowed himself out, leaving me wondering who had taught him his English.

Sitting cross-legged on my cushions I listened to the voices below waiting to discover what happened next. Without warning—there is no warning when footsteps are never heard—the shutter was slid back and the little maid came in with a wooden tub of rice, some poached eggs and tea. This time there could be no escape into privacy. She knelt opposite me and, with expressionless face, watched my blushing, frantic efforts to convey poached eggs into my mouth with my red lacquer chopsticks.

After the meal she beckoned me; I followed her downstairs, to my delight to the bathroom. Giving me a clean towel and soap she left. Automatically I turned to lock the door. There was no lock.

A miniature swimming bath was let into the floor with a lovely little Japanese garden in a blue glazed bowl standing on

a table beside it. Wondering vaguely what a wooden tub of water and dipper were for, I lost no time in walking down the three steps into the bath, where I sat on a stool at the bottom, the water reaching my chin. Much later I realised the faux pas I had committed. The custom is to remove one's dirt in the tub before entering the bath, which is used by every one and emptied only twice a week.

Somewhat disconcertingly the door opened suddenly and two or three of the staff came to have a more extensive look at me. I felt rather a fool, but consoled myself with the memory of the description my sister gave me of a sulphur bath in Japan where, Western influence having questioned mixed bathing, a string was tied across the bath dividing the two sexes.

In my room the bed had been prepared. A *futon* (mattress) was laid in the middle of the floor covered with a silk quilt, while a mosquito net was suspended from the four corners of the room sheltering it like a tent. I dispensed with the sawdust-filled sausage pillow, designed to support the neck of Japanese ladies whose traditional coiffure is lacquered into place only once a week and must not be disarranged. It was close and airless inside the room though a gale of wind had arisen, shutting in the silence by its clamouring rattle and jibber of the shutters.

48 Hours on a Korean Boat

I HAD INQUIRED at the Japanese Travel Service in Keijo about possibilities for the northward journey and found that a boat went from Hoko on the south-east corner of Korea to Gensan, landing one almost in Kongo-San through which I planned to walk.

It took about two hours in a "train omnibus" from Kaishu to Hoko, through valleys of rice fields among hills and, it being an early afternoon train, there were pleasantly few passengers. I bundled out at Hoko in a frenzy, flourishing the paper with "Port, ship for Gensan" written in Japanese for me by a friend in Kaishu; it was already 2.55 p.m. and the boat was scheduled to start at 3 p.m. Several Koreans shouted vociferously and a ramshackle taxi rattled up; directions were given to the driver by five gentlemen, and we shot off on a perilous drive through the town. There were bullock carts, rickshaws, coolies carrying loads, leisurely pedestrians and children, but somehow we avoided them all among shouting, hooting and squealing of brakes and finally stopped outside an office where, I am convinced, I paid the man too much in my hurry; he did not ask for more.

In the office was a counter with a grill. I pushed a 20 yen note at the little Korean the other side, saying, "Gensan." He looked very much mystified. Several heads peeped over his shoulder but no one did anything and with ridiculous Occidental hustle I repeated "Gensan" vehemently several times. Just as I was getting into a panic that the boat had gone the young man took my note with his delicate leisurely fingers, opened a drawer, and taking out a pink paper, started to fill it in with Japanese characters. He pondered and blotted it and opened another drawer, bringing out notes and silver and handed me 17 yen—only 3 yen to Gensan, a twenty-four-hour journey! With that he sank back into the placid idleness from which he had been disturbed.

Though proud possessor of my ticket the boat was as mythical as ever and I said again, "Gensan?" drawing a picture of a ship—which they took for a shoe. The gentlemen laughed and beckoned me through into the office behind the grill. There a chair was placed in the middle of the room on which I was bidden to sit. I sat there for two hours, with the circle of spectators round the wall increasing from six to eighteen. No doubt my appearance with a rucksack and neither hat nor stockings justified the comments they made to each other causing much laughter, and I tried to write a letter home with the semblance of a nonchalance which it was impossible to feel altogether under the sustained gaze of thirty-six eyes. Myriads of flies buzzed against the windows, over the piles of undisturbed papers, inkpots and my arms and legs, tickling in a distracting manner.

Suddenly the lethargy of the scene was broken. A commotion outside of brisk feet and imperious voices announced the arrival of the Japanese Police Inspector and his attendant. He clanked into the room in high boots with a sword hanging from his belt. Under his peaked cap his expression was very official and he was altogether alarming. In a bullying voice he started on the series of questions which became all too familiar:

"What iss your name?"

"From where you come?"

"What iss your destination?"

"Why have you come?"

"What iss your profession?"

"How old you are?"

"Where iss your father?"

"Give me your passport."

His minion carried a large book into which particulars were entered, and I gathered he asked the assembly for all they knew about me. This Japanese personal curiosity certainly detracts from the dignity of their officialdom, and when lack of language prevents it from being satisfied they look like baffled children. It is one of the neat adjustments of Providence that they are very poor linguists.

At last I was bidden to follow one of the clerks who led the way down the street of modern Japanese offices to the jetty, where a brisk wind swept round the corner of the estuary showing no sign of a ship. Several Koreans and one or two Japanese looked so settled down among their bundles in the one tiny cabin of the tender that I began to wonder if this was the craft on which we were to travel to Gensan. Invited to sit in the cockpit beside the pilot, we thruddled and bumped out into the middle of the estuary between moored barges, then turned into the wind and ran north parallel with the shore. On rounding the corner my apprehensions, that I might be meant to sit with legs cramped against the dashboard for twenty-four hours, were dispelled by the sight of a small steamer lying at anchor ahead of us.

The boarding of the *Kinjyo Maru* was a tricky affair with the heavy ground-swell, but it was easier for me with my long legs and short skirt than for the Korean and Japanese ladies who cowered back in nervous reluctance from the ordeal.

Battling against the wind along the three-foot wide deck I tried to discover some entrance. There was only one which led into a small saloon, with the floor raised a foot in Japanese style. A Korean gentleman was ensconced there already, sitting cross-legged on a grey blanket on the floor; but there seemed nowhere else to go so I took off my sandals and sat on the floor to await developments.

After a while a man came in and said quite a lot in Japanese. I smiled and nodded, but that did not seem to satisfy him. He said some more and it dawned on me that he wanted my ticket; looking at the pink paper he shook his head and beckoned me to follow him. I put on my sandals (let me advise travellers to countries where shoes are often removed not to choose foot gear with buckles to do up) and was led aft, down a hatch, and saw below me a matted space where a crowd of Korean and Japanese families were established among their belongings. Pink tickets belonged to this class and my place was here. The atmosphere could not be called fresh, the portholes were shut and at that moment the ship gave a hintful roll which hastened my unregretted decision. Being a good sailor leaves one with a

clearer consciousness of those who are not. I shook my head and returned. Two more yen gave me the right to my length on the floor, two blankets, a sausage pillow stuffed hard with sawdust and the company of the Korean gentleman.

It was 6 p.m. and I had had nothing to eat since breakfast and was ravenously hungry and thirsty. The steward nodded his head when I munched hypothetical mouthfuls at him and disappeared. Imagination wandered over the delights of rice, and perhaps there would be eggs and some bits of fish with bowls of fragrant tea. Vain anticipations! The steward returned with the Japanese second engineer who spoke a few words of English.

“Very sorry, evening meal finish!” Adding with bright comfort:

“To-morrow, breakfast.”

Fortunately I had a few raisins and a small bit of stale bread in a piece of newspaper in my rucksack, and rashly nibbled a mouthful of chocolate which, combined with dry bread and a day in the heat, made my mouth completely dry.

I could not quite understand why there was no sign of the ship weighing anchor, or how what seemed the entire crew had time to block the saloon door for over half an hour’s extreme interest in their foreign passenger. None of them spoke English of course, but smiled broadly when I grinned at them; it is difficult to fill half an hour or more with grins.

Night came down. An oil lamp was hung from the ceiling, but the light was too dim to write or read; the wind made it too cold to stay on deck and I was very sleepy. It seemed indicated to turn in—if that is an expression which can be used of lying on the floor under a grey blanket. The undressing question now arose. After the long hot day, I had a peculiar longing to take off some clothes and to wash. There was a basin in the corner of the saloon, but I felt a modesty with the Korean gentleman sitting there and did no more than wash the furthest extremities deciding, in the uncertainty of the future, to do in Rome as Rome does by imitating as nearly as I could the Korean gentleman who had removed his coat and trousers and sat comfortably in his pants.

I had just blown up my air cushion and tucked myself under the blanket when the steward came in and I discovered that he slept in with us too. Before settling down he and the Korean gentleman had a game of draughts, sitting cross-legged each side of a low table and my lullaby was the clicking of their counters.

Several times I was awakened by the painful reaction of my bones to the floor and the oppressive atmosphere of the saloon; everything was shut and the oil lamp burning all night added to the heat. Twice I opened the door a crack on to the deck, but each time the steward or the Korean gentleman woke after five minutes, emerged from the blanket wrapped over his head, and sealed us again in our airlessness.

At 5 a.m. I was wakened finally by terrific rattling of chains, shouting and thudding of bare feet along the deck; evidently we were starting. This surmise was confirmed by the little second engineer who popped his head round the door, saying, "Now we go, last night sea very too bad." Well, it was only fourteen hours late in starting, and I had been saved a night's hotel bill!

Indeed the sea was very bad and the little *Kinjyo Maru* bumped and rolled, pitched and tossed like a cork. Pity went from my heart down to the pink ticket-holders, and a great thankfulness that I was not among them. I was very hungry and thought about breakfast continually, but three hours rather vain effort not to roll from one side of the saloon on to the Korean gentleman on the other with the roll of the ship gradually took the edge off my keenness, and when a wooden tub of boiled rice, chopsticks and a bowl of seaweed salad was set down on the floor I found I was not quite so hungry as I thought. Thirst was more trying and there was only some uniquely revolting tea tasting of hay and sawdust, which I drank holding my nose, and felt rather sick.

We called in at several little ports, anchoring about half a mile from the shore. Barge-like boats were rowed out, one man standing to each oar, bringing strange bundles and cases of cargo and sometimes one or two passengers. It was entertaining to watch their transference to and from the ship with

the boats swelling up six or eight feet then dropping sixteen into the succeeding trough. One Japanese lady took ten minutes to summon enough courage to be thrown down with the rise of the boat. Her husband took hold of her repeatedly and the boatman below held out his arms, but each time she gave a shriek at the last moment and threw her arms round her husband's neck. The men were very gentle and patient and finally she took the plunge, after her husband had jumped before her, to act as a bait in the barge below. There she squatted down on her heels where she had landed, refusing to move from that comforting position although she was very much in the way among coolies' legs and the cargo they were catching, and not in a little danger of being crushed.

The coastline was endlessly beautiful. We were running along it two or three miles out from the cliffs and headlands which rose precipitously. In the afternoon the sun broke through over the sea while great banks of heavy clouds hung low on the mountains rising tier above grey tier from small ones in the foreground to high ones disappearing in cloud. The sea was sharp and slatey with the dazzle of the sun intensified in shafts through clouds.

During the fiery glory of sunset the second engineer appeared with some Chinese pears. Though I do not care much for their woody flavourlessness my now painful thirst made their juiciness heaven sent.

"I beg your pardon; how old are you?"

"Twenty-nine."

My answer caused him surprise.

"You have man?"

Oriental could never understand how a female of my age was not married.

"What address?"

Meaning what was my destination. Then followed the astonishing question:

"Are you Christ?"

Which I realised after the first gasp meant, was I a Christian. He won my heart with his kindness when he said:

"Last night you were very tired and hungry. I very sorry.

This ship no English and American passenger, only Korean. . . . You very good. You like to see engine?"

Thus honoured, I slopped along after him in the backless rubber slippers supplied by the ship. Climbing down the iron ladder into the engine-room one dropped among the pistons and crank shafts. Hastily I removed the other, devoutly hoping that it had not been noticed and that the intestines of the engine would not suffer from indigestion.

The engine-room and the British-made oil engine were spotlessly clean, the names and directions all being written in English which the Japanese chief officer could not speak. Through the heat and noise I tried to show admiration and interest and to hide the uncomprehending bewilderment that seizes me when I am faced by an engine. I felt that all my efforts were repaid when I was asked to sign my name on the flyleaf of the log book, and above the clamour the second engineer bellowed:

"First engineer say, you very suitable woman!"

That evening, though it was only 7.45 p.m. the steward felt evidently that it was time for me to go to bed and beckoned me firmly into the saloon. Obediently I made my toilet, the Korean gentleman having landed during the day we had the saloon to ourselves and, feeling so at home by now, I undressed and washed properly while the steward tactfully read the newspaper held in front of his face. After I had finished he took off his coat and washed too and then offered to share his newspaper with me. We sprawled side by side under the lamp swinging with the roll of the ship and looked at the pictures of Japanese playing rugger, Japanese officials opening exhibitions, Japanese swimming at seaside resorts, Japanese and American films and a Japanese beauty competition. He told me the Japanese and Korean names of things and laughed a great deal over my efforts to repeat them.

At about 10 p.m. we anchored in a bay for the night. At last the ship was still, the creaking and straining and rush of water were gone. We each drew our blanket over us and slept—but it was broken sleep because the steward would keep waking me to say something I could not understand.

3 a.m. The night was pale through the saloon windows and out on deck the air blew warm off the land. The moon sailed high and full among clouds above a sea sunk in oily stillness broken only by the sucking of the ship as she rolled gently in the long ground swell. In the silence the roar of the breakers smashing on to the shore floated out across the water, woven with the faint, shrill singing of cicadas. The walls of one or two houses were whitened with moonlight among the trees, and behind the mountains rose against the stars. I slept again to the heave and suck, heave and suck of the ship, the roar from the shore and the night's chorus.

At 5 a.m. the steward woke me to say, "Ohiyo oziamas!" (good-morning), and went to sleep again—which I could not do, and felt annoyed.

We arrived in Gensan eighteen hours late. Most of the crew hung over the side of the *Kinjyo Maru* waving to me all the time we rowed ashore. In the East one leaves one's companions of even a few hours with regret, they have smiled their way into one's affections so irresistibly.

I had been told that a train and occasional buses ran from Gensan to Soto Kongo. Shouldering my rucksack I set out to find the station, the direction being pointed out by various people I asked by saying, "Che-che-che, che-che-che" in the most engine-like voice I could manage. Quiet curiosity stared from innumerable eyes and I felt like the Pied Piper of Hamelin with the crowds of children following me; by the time I arrived at the station there were at least forty or fifty.

The man at the ticket office was quite bewildered and did nothing though I held out my money and said, "Soto Kongo" repeatedly. Going round into the office behind, I did the same at a gentleman in a blue serge uniform who looked like the stationmaster. He nodded his head but merely led me back into the station, motioning me to a seat. I sat down to wait and see.

In the most incredible manner the station was soon jostling with men sitting on benches round me or standing beyond or fighting for a better view. The heat and smell in the middle of that packed humanity and the flies which swarmed in with

them! Though the station authorities made some efforts, the station was not cleared till the policeman arrived on his bicycle half an hour later, with a satellite running behind even less shaved than himself.

The law bellowed and roared with impressive ferocity, kicking and hitting indiscriminately till the last man had been driven out, even the two old men who had craned over my shoulders in fascinated interest to watch me writing. I was amazed at the tolerant nonchalance with which they met this bluster of the law and how little booted kicks on their bare legs or blows over the head hurried their movements or distracted their concentration.

“Where iss your passport?”

I gave it to him. He fumbled with it upside down till he found the photograph.

“What iss your name?”

“Audrey Harris.”

“From where you come?”

“Hoko.”

“Hoko? What iss your destination?”

“Soto Kongo. Train Soto Kongo?”

After a very complicated conversation—complicated in its necessity for primitive simplicity and the lack of nearly all words connected with transport—it was settled that I should wait at the police station for the bus, the time of whose departure I could not ascertain. I do not think he knew it either.

During our walk back into the town, my rucksack on the seat of his bicycle, the policeman made the surprising remark, “Very bad for Abyssinia; Italians bad men.” I looked at my surroundings—the muddy street running between the little open shops full of strange merchandise; the bare-legged coolies in dirty white cotton clothes; hens scratching below the music shop where a gramophone brayed out a Korean song, a rhythmic wail punctuated with clicks and hiccoughs; the quiet Mongol faces of the people who stopped to stare; the mountains surrounding the valley of rice fields—and found it difficult to realise that, even here, the fortunes of Abyssinia were being followed with interest. Later I dis-

covered that this anxiety was widespread in the East as a flaring example of "white" aggression, "white" treachery, and another test of that "white" creation the League of Nations, which had lost its prestige in the Far East through its failure to interfere with the Japanese invasion of Manchukuo.

The police station was a high whitewashed room with a map of Korea on one wall, and several of the usual Japanese propaganda maps and posters proclaiming the progress of Japan and the advantages she brought to those under her control. The servant brought us tea and my host gave me two apples. Then he settled down in earnest to his official duties.

He went over all the usual questions again, but when he came to "Where iss your father?" and I answered "London," he paused. "Rondon? Where iss that?" (Japanese cannot say L.) "In England." "In England? Rondon is in England?" "Yes." This bit of information interested him exceedingly.

"What iss your profession?"

I had learned by now that to say I had none caused suspicion and complications, and therefore answered, "Artist." He searched through his dictionary for some time.

"What sort artist?"

If I said drawing I feared he would ask for his portrait and would not have been flattered with the result; it was easier to say "Sculptor." He was completely mystified though I considered my impersonation of a sculptor was entirely enlightening. It took twenty minutes with dictionaries to get that question filled in, and he may have put stone-mason for all I know.

"What for you travel?"

"Tourist ; look—see."

He looked up tourist.

"Where you go?"

"Kongo San."

"Negist?"

I was mystified, till suddenly it dawned on me that he meant "next," and told him "Fusan, Tokyo, Peking."

"Oriental tourist?"

"Yes."

"America?"

"No, English."

"From where you come?"

"Hoko."

"From where?"

"Kaishu."

"From where?"

"Keijo."

"From where?"

"Manchukuo."

How long this would have continued I dare not think, but then the bus arrived in the shape of a shabby American touring-car. The front seat was full but there was room in the back with two Korean men. My kind policeman superintended the purchase of my ticket in the grocer's shop opposite, which had the same atmosphere as an English village post office and general store. A large crowd had collected before we finally bumped off for more than an hour's drive along a mercilessly bad road winding through twilight valleys and mountains, till we arrived in the dark at Soto Kongo.

Letter from Kongo-San

Chosen Hotel,
Keijo,
18/9/36.

DARLING FAM,

Here I am back in Keijo after 11 most glorious days, off the beaten track of most tourists. To-morrow I go on to Tokyo via Fusan and Shimanosiki—two days and two nights. Before I start the next chapter I must tell you about the last three days, a fitting climax to the two weeks in this enchanting fairyland of Korea.

As far as I can judge from pictures of the Dolomites, the Kongo-San is an idealised miniature edition of them. One ought to have at least two weeks to walk and climb there, camping at night under a rock by a stream one could bathe in under the morning sun. It's quite bewitching!

From Soto Kongo I had a day walking up Shimbambutsuso (4,000 ft.), which takes about four hours. A road runs up a valley for the first 7 kilometres, and I got a lift over this in an elderly car with two Japanese hikers wearing bath-towels wound round their necks and carrying rucksacks. People here seem to carry bath-towels as we carry handkerchiefs. At the end of the road I let them get well away before taking the little path which ran beside a rushing stream between almost perpendicular hillsides covered with birch and pine trees. Jets of water fell 40 feet or more over walls of rock, and the path tunnelled under trees among vines and, I think, hydrangeas. Sadly, few flowers are out now, but the beauty must be almost unbearable when the valleys of azalia and lilac are flaming. The air was sharp in the shadow under the cliffs but the sun glowed brilliantly over the crags above the trees on the other side of the valley.

Higher up the gentleness of vegetation and the twittering of birds were left behind. Walls of granite shut in the austere

lifelessness of ravines where the silence was broken only by the rush of a stream and, from far away up among the serried saw-edges of the cliffs, the crying of kites echoed down out of the sunshine into the chill of the shadow. From the bare granite summit one gazed at an enormous and fantastic view to the sea, over jagged ridges of rock and whimsical pinnacles of incredible formations.

I long to know the legends which must hang round these strange rocks; the eerie atmosphere made the belief in spirits irresistible. I was surprised to see the numbers of Japanese hikers, or those too infirm who were carried in litters, making their pilgrimages to beauty. They take it all in deadly earnest and, I must say, they do not add to it! The blight of Western urban ugliness seems to have diseased even the Japanese innate sense of beauty and, with no discrimination, boaters and sporty plus-fours frothing above sandshoes pimple the loveliness, though there were a few muscular short-legged young men in shorts and open shirts.

Next day I started for the two days' walk to Uchi-Kongo at the other end of the Kongo-San. Having been very bewildered two or three times going up Shimbamutsuso when paths divided and signs were written in Japanese characters (and not having a map), I decided to take a "carry-man," not so much to carry my rucksack as to show me the way. He was a dear old man, peacefully remote unless I made any advances, of which he never took advantage to encroach on my solitude. This dignity is typical of all country Koreans I met.

There's no road through the Kongo-San bringing the disturbance of cars or the spoon-fed tourist. The reward of its beauty can only be won through exertion. The track's rockery surface was exhausting to walk over with the necessity to choose every step and, though the Kume Hütte was only 10 or 11 miles, this surface and continual climbing from one valley into the next made me glad of my "carry-man." Sitting in trains for three weeks doesn't develop muscles, and by the end of the day my legs felt like heavy lumps of dough.

It was an unforgettable day by bouldered streams, water-

falls and under mountains so clear up in the blue sky—pearly in the sun or deep and blue in the shadow. Sometimes the track was in glaring heat, sometimes in the glinting cool of tree-tunnels, but there was always an edge to the air. I had lunch on a boulder, paddling rather tired feet in the clear little river. (I was walking in my sandals, which seem to cause more interest than anything else about me here.)

Each ridge we climbed over was higher than the last, the view back to the sea wider. Much of the way was up rough steps made of boulders; occasionally a ladder was fixed to a cliff-face. At the top of the range was a huge view both ways across ridges and valleys to the sea. A last descent over slabs of granite strata, tipped horizontal, led to the final climb up to the Kume Hütte, perched below Mount Biroho (6,000 ft., second highest mountain of Korea), with an almost sheer drop from it into a valley sweeping miles away to an inlet of the sea.

The Hütte was built at the end of the last century by Dr. Kume, who mapped the track through the Kongo-San. It looked so Bavarian that the Japanese proprietor in his *kimono* was a shock; somehow one expected a burly figure in *lederhosen*. Light came through the board walls of my "cell"—which seemed to hang out over the valley—and on the wooden platform, the bed, I was given seven rugs, which I thought excessive till 3 a.m., when I was thankful for them all. After the almost tropical heat of S. Korean lowlands, ice in the morning took me by surprise.

I indulged in a short rest and some tea before walking on up to the top of Mount Biroho, where I had three hours till after sunset. The only view I know comparable in extent is that from the Jebel Haroun in Petra, looking south to the Gulf of Aquaba. As far as one could see, south and west, were rounded mountains and hills, rising one beyond another from rice-growing plains and valleys gleaming like emeralds. To the north lay the sea beyond the rugged coastline, sweeping round in the far north-west distance. Eastward, the sharper ridges and deep wooded valleys we had walked through stretched out to the coastal plain, dark with crops.

As the sun went down, the great jagged granite ribs in the foreground stood out black against the distance, becoming ever softer in the mist rising out of the valleys. The sun dropped over the farthest horizon of mountains in a majestic golden glory, to you in the West—leaving me alone under the stars and the cold breath of Mount Biroho.

After Japanese supper (again the difficulty of poached eggs with chop-sticks), by the warmth of the chimney which came up through the floor from the story below, early to bed, too tired and excited to sleep well. Probably, too, the sudden height had something to do with it—as I know did the voluble conversation of a cricket somewhere in my cell with his friend outside.

Huddled in my rugs, I watched the rays of the sun creep over the mountains, changing them from shadowy grey to pink and orange. I was feeling thoroughly soulful when my door was burst open by the Japanese “boy,” whose raucous voice clattered the stillness to pieces. On my failing to understand he gave a vivid display of washing, and insisted upon leading me down to the wash-room, which was very cold and smelt vile. My ablutions were unenthusiastic beside those of a Japanese gentleman, who seemed oblivious to the stinks.

By 7 a.m. the reincarnation of the view from Biroho lay in ethereal unreality under the early sun. White valley mists made the mountains look like islands rising out of an enchanted sea of snowdrifts. It seemed like the first day of creation and one hardly dared to breathe.

My new “carry-man” was young and sturdy. Descending Biroho on the south side, down a steep ravine in shadow over avalanches of broken granite, not even the sound of running water broke the hollow silence. Sometimes the young man whistled or sang, his youth so part of the morning, and though he wasn't so nice as my old man I enjoyed his hefty gaiety.

About 1,000 feet down there was the muffled gurgling of a subterranean stream deep under the tumbled rock, which came out lower down and flowed through an exquisite valley—morning-fresh, glinting, intimate between towering cliffs.

There were tiny songs of birds in groves of pines and maples, growing in groups among boulders. After the awe, and sometimes nameless fear which hovered over the granite relentlessness up there in the silence this delicate loveliness was a subtly balancing contrast. Then suddenly three Korean boys came over a tree-trunk bridge. I don't know quite why, but it is an unforgettable moment. All alike they came out of the shadow—all in fresh white clothes and big straw coolie hats shading their olive faces, so remote and observant. They moved with the grace of wonderful innocent dignity, one behind another, silent, dazzling white.

At the first house we came to, one-storied and wide-eaved, we sat down to rest. With the steep descent over rocks my sandals had blistered my feet badly, till I'd taken them off and walked bare-foot. With return to valley dust it seemed wiser to cover the raw patches, so I got the plaster from my rucksack. With courtesy the family only watched covertly, while the father sharpened my pen-knife for me. They had three striped squirrels in a cage, and the old grandfather offered to sell me mountain crystals.

Gradually we dropped into the valley running up from Uchi Kongo, famed for its beauty and filled with temples and sacred rocks. But it was too pretty and obvious. The air had lost its freedom and lay heavily in the heat, and there were people—Japanese tourists in boaters who carved their names on rocks. Only Choanji Temple was satisfying—drowsy under the midday sun, clustered and faded under its wide roofs. I planned to stay a night in Uchi Kongo, but it jarred in the self-complacency of a beauty resort and, still in the trance of wonder of the Kongo-San, I caught the little train back to Keijo, after a delicious and risky bathe in my birthday suit in a translucent pool of a stream which sparkled its icy way down from the mountains.

I wish I could give you more idea of it all—how terribly limited words are, especially when they're written.

Dear love to you all, from your blissful

AUDREY.



Japan the Bewildering

As I THINK back over my time in Japan I become as confused as when I was there. My appreciation for the memorials of her old culture stand out exaggeratedly from the bewildered dislike of her modern incarnation; a dislike, I admit, tempered with a certain admiration. She has created the avid curiosity of the world in which there is a far wider reading of the innumerable books on every aspect of her history and culture, and I cannot really add to this massed information. But as people persist in asking, even me, my impressions of Japan, I shall give an inconsequential collection taken from my diary practically as they are recorded there.

On September 18th the little ferry-boat, running between Fusan and Shimonosiki, glided between cone-shaped islands rising from an oily sea flashing in early sunshine. The dawn had that peculiar calm which follows a rough night. Shimonosiki lay under heavy clouds of black smoke, which became familiar wherever the very poor quality Japanese coal was being used. Protracted passport examinations delayed interminably the longed-for breakfast on shore; one was at the mercy of insatiable Japanese curiosity under its cloak of official necessity. Questions were asked in the form of assertions—peculiarly annoying.

“I think you study in China, come to Japan on holiday.”

“No, I am a tourist.”

“I think you stay in Japan long time.”

“No, I stay two weeks.”

“I think your father is in England,” etc., etc.

The Tokyo train was very comfortable. Though there were only two Europeans on it nothing but European food was supplied, propelled into Japanese mouths most awkwardly with spoons and forks.

I was amusing myself by doing quick sketches from the

window. Passengers began to talk at me excitedly, of which I took no notice. At last one volunteered, "Must not—enemy country." Photography of Inland Sea surroundings is prohibited—but such inaccurate scribbles could hardly register strategic details! I felt furious. The guard was fetched but, luckily, had more sense and left me in peace. Within an hour of being in Japan I was asking myself, "Is such stupidity going to prove typical of a public mentality cultivated by the religion of nationalism?" I felt homesick for Korea; the memory of its expansive delicacy produced an antagonism to this overcrowded prettiness, too obvious and self-conscious, too thick with houses and cultivation, and netted over with a hideous bewilderment of electric and telephone wires on forests of pylons. The colours were heavy and lacked Korean pearliness.

I had a conversation with a former British Consul in Tokyo who said three things which were specially interesting. The percentage of insanity, border-line cases and suicides in Japan is higher than anywhere else; with tremendous pride of racial purity, Japanese-European marriages are considered as very serious disgraces; one reason for antagonism towards Christianity is that, if ever it was accepted on a big scale, its teachings of the value of the individual would break the blind solidarity of the religion of nationalism. But then we know that dictators and mass social ideologies are always at loggerheads with Christianity or any spiritual freedom of the individual.

Incongruously, Japan and Russia became linked together in my mind; the two countries tackling an immense metamorphosis which cuts across their traditional background and produces in both the same bewildering inconsistency and inhuman determination. The bluff hiding internal divisions created the same atmosphere of suspicion in them and about them.

My first reaction to Japan was to feel the atmosphere hectic, unconvincing, restless, superficial and insincere; towards the Japanese that they are tense and humourless and too unbalanced to be a great power—in the long run. But their energy, determination and indomitable persistence frightened

me and made me as divided and paradoxical as they are themselves. Altogether I was ill at ease, restrained and enervé.

In Tokyo I stayed in the excellent Sanno Hotel, European styled and Japanese run, where meals and baths were included for 4s. per day. The Japanese food was good, and the little waitresses in blue *kimonos* were charming with their carefully painted faces. The slip-slop of their *gheta* was pleasing at first, but after a while one almost cried, "For goodness' sake lift up your feet or tie your *gheta* on firmly!"

The first day in Tokyo I wandered in the Shiba Park among palaces and shrines. Though the architecture is in the same traditional form as in Korea, it is lighter, more delicate and graceful; the beams are squared instead of being left the natural round of tree-trunks, the colouring restricted to black, white and red. It seems symbolic of the two peoples—one natural, kindly, human, the other sophisticated, sensitive to minute detail, narrowly repressed.

The Ghinza (Piccadilly of Tokyo) with its indiscriminate *melée* of European buildings of many nationalities and no style, was distracting and vulgar, but down side turnings behind this horror, bordering bad roads and open drains, little Japanese wooden houses with verandahs banked with plants and dwarfed trees, were refined and peaceful. The European façade seemed in all ways a thin veneer.

Most men wore European clothes, making those in *kimonos* look as if they had forgotten to dress and come out in their dressing-gowns. Fortunately, nearly all the women were still in their national dress; some of the girls were lovely with faces heavily made-up, giving the chalky effect of fruit blossom. They were artificial, sophisticated and exquisite in detail, as all works of art seemed to be which I had seen so far in Japan, except the sixteenth and seventeenth-century impressionist painters—how had these phenomena appeared?

The Imperial Hotel is famed as the forerunner of earthquake-proof buildings in Tokyo, being built in a concrete bath. New by-law regulations now enforce all public buildings to be constructed of reinforced concrete. This hotel looks

like a sickening yellow fungoid growth. The American architect went mad in a South Sea Island—but he must have been already deranged to build this abortion!

During a drive in the Canadian Legation car with Lady M—I heard about Japanese ladies, with whom she had real contact after long and concentrated efforts to get through their shyness. She enlarged on their refinement, unselfishness and thoughtful kindness, in contrast with the men, who are never corrected as children and generally remain selfish and spoilt throughout their lives. When Sir H. — was ill a Japanese lady called every morning at ten o'clock punctually during three months, to inquire if there was any way she could help. They tell Lady M—that they feel she is like them because she is a good wife! At many marriages the custom survives of the gift to the bride of a mirror—not to admire herself in, but to tell her every day whether any disagreeableness to her husband has left its traces on her face.

Another day the Canadian Minister's secretary and his wife kindly drove me to Kamakura. The traffic moved with terrifyingly lawless rapidity through the ribbon-development of little one or two-storied houses and shops which join Tokyo and Yokohama. At Kamakura we had a delicious lunch of large prawns fried in batter, with rice served in lacquered bowls, sitting on the floor of a quiet, empty room in a small restaurant. In Japan, as in China, patrons are always given a private room in better-class restaurants. Then we set out in the rain to sight-see.

After walking under Torii (memorial arches), up the paved crooked path, evil spirits can only progress in straight lines, we were suddenly confronted by the amazing figure of the Diabutsu, a great seated bronze Buddha over forty feet high. How did they cast anything so colossal? The head and shoulders leaning slightly forward give it the sense of still belonging to the earth, but the remote tranquillity of expression carries it away to a higher distant plane. The exquisite rhythm and swirl of the draperies, the sharpness of the cut of features, the massive size and delicate detail in its perfection—alone it sits in the rain, snow or sunshine. Twice it has

been washed over by tidal waves which destroyed the temples which had sheltered it—tranquilly it remains in peaceful abstractions, now under the illimitable dome of the sky.

Up grey granite steps brooded the temple of Kwannon (Goddess of Mercy), dreaming tranquil dreams in grey rain mist under a huge ginkgo tree, the Tree of Eternity. Through black lacquer doors with handsome brass hinges, past the two faded wooden Guardians—bold, simple, powerful figures—among painted screens and delicate carving, we entered the main court, where a woman prayed at the central shrine with strange monotonous intensity.

Religion is keenly alive in Japan; singly or in parties Japanese people crowd their many shrines to pray and burn incense. They are practical about it, clapping their hands to announce to the spirit when they are going to begin, and again when they have finished, to tell the spirit he need not listen longer!

That same evening I went to see an American film. The house, holding 5,000, was packed with Japanese—and this was only one among many cinemas which are always full. It was a fine building, simple yet decorative, putting our cinemas to shame. A delicate fragrance of incense, soap and perfumes pervaded it. My neighbour in his *kimono* sat with his feet folded under him on the plush chair; the exquisite girl on the other side had her hair lacquered in the old-fashioned looped style. They both gazed up at blatant American love scenes and under-dressed film stars. Outside trams clattered down the Ghinza. To-morrow this kimonoed girl would light incense at a shrine. Where is the connection?

Somehow all this incongruity was unbelievably exhausting; also the monsoon was in full force, with its heat and torrential rain washing one out like a rag—how misguidedly I had sent all my thin clothes straight on to Peking! Condensed damp steamed the walls, bedewed the furniture, cultivated green mould on one's shoes; altogether Tokyo got me down. The final straw which broke the camel's back was when the disgusting pet monkey belonging to an American resident in the hotel invaded my room, during my absence, tearing up

books and papers, and carrying away my sponge. I decided to go to Nikko.

I nearly missed the 7.55 a.m. train, not being able to find the platform. Japanese are always in such a hurry to get on to the next thing that they have no time for the present question. They always say "Yess," fearing, I suppose, that they would lose face by showing they had not understood. Their arrogance seems largely due to bluffing out a lack of assurance. Daily-breaders flooded through the station—the same stream as in London and elsewhere, but moving faster, looking neater, and wearing spectacles. Bad eyesight is known as "school disease" in Japan; children are worked even harder than French children, and Japanese characters are more trying to the eyes than our script. I realised, too, how seldom one saw a grey head.

Clouds hid any distant views from the train windows. We climbed among little hills heavy with trees rising from vegetable or rice fields. So far, I had seen no real countryside; it was reminiscent of the Nile delta where every possible inch is cultivated, leaving nowhere to wander or to "stand and stare."

The Kayana Hotel at Nikko was very good but expensive, pension was 13s. per day. With the Japanese wish to impress foreigners—and to make them comfortable—a Bible lay, surprisingly, by my bed.

I spent hours in the misty rain at the Jeyasu Shrine, wandering in the park with ever increasing wonder and delight. For the first hour I took a guide—homburged, umbrellaed, goloshed, bespectacled, kimonoed—and then wandered alone under the colossal mystery of cryptomarias with low clouds drifting through their tops, among mellow shrines dreaming in the misty silence. Along the wide sombre avenue, up granite steps, under Torii—the granite and tree-stems the same size and colour—to the main Tokugawa shrine. The trees grew thicker and bigger with the increasing sanctity. It lay deep and remote, shut in its walls of trees, grey weaving grey in poignant mystery.

I loved, specially, the Holy Water Cistern. The tank itself was cut from one huge block of granite, while the shelter over it was rich with delicate carving painted in pastel colours, supported on four square granite columns with brass capitals—an unusually beautiful combination of materials and colours.

Richer and more complicated it became, shrines, carved screens, incense-burners, pavements—yet all on such a tiny scale. The Chinese Gate, most fantastically elaborated by undercut wood carving, came as a shock—the shock of a sudden violent contact with an entirely different mentality. Among the visually sensitive perfection of Japanese instinctive decoration (birds, flowers, fruits, clouds, water and animals woven into designs with a realism almost beyond belief) rose this vital, humorous, imaginative creation of the intellect pirouetting with the grotesque. The Japanese work holds the greater perfection of a beautiful woman's face in which no mental activity disturbs the flawless loveliness, in contrast with the Chinese, where character breaks the perfection of visual beauty.

At the main shrine even a party of students knelt and bowed in awe of sheer faultlessness. I had never been in any place so minutely exquisite—a glimmer of greenish gold, white, glossy black lacquer, smooth-shining red lacquer, brocades, painted carving, scroll pictures, miniature delicacy united by an immense sense of quiet guarded holiness. The very fact of having to leave one's shoes, coat and bag outside (all symbols of outward life) added to one's sense of privilege to enter.

I sat so long on my heels in the quiet glow of the shrine that it was nearly dark when the gilded doors were shut by the white-robed priest and I was led out by the custodian. Alone I left it, the gates shut behind me; it dreamed alone in the dying light and misty rain, shut in the soaring walls of dark trees. It was so like a fragile casket that one wanted to shelter it from the rain under a glass case. And to think it has stood there through 300 years of sun, rain, snow, earthquakes and tornadoes? And that all this stands to the memory of the departed members of the Tokugawa family!

I was thankful to have left Tokyo finally. Though I had met with so much kindness I had been utterly miserable and exhausted all the time. There is so much kindness and delicacy in Japan—why then does one feel such intense depression, so like a taut violin string which may snap at any moment? One can never let go—nothing is allowed to be natural; even plants are cut or twisted, dwarfed or shaped artificially, and the resulting beauty, which pleases at first, at length exasperates. I felt that most Japanese people were tied up, repressed psychological cases. I felt one myself. There is so much admirable yet the sense of frustration persists.

The sun shone again at last and everything was steaming, but the journey to Atami was tedious, clouds hiding its renowned views. There I had a pleasant afternoon with a family friend, who knew the Japanese intimately after years of living among them and who was their enthusiastic admirer, extolling their kindness particularly. She held that Japan is not exchanging her culture for ours but adding it, and will retain the advantages of both. I wonder if she is right? Will Japanese people prove strong enough, their discretion in selection and power of adaptation be steady enough to succeed?

Trains were dislocated by floods having washed away part of the line, and Marquis Tokugawa fetched me in his car from Odowara, where I was to visit them. Leading from a conversation about Japanese drama, he made some observations on Japanese character.

“Perhaps, Miss Harris, you found the Kabuki theatre performance very slow—and if there was a love scene you did not recognise it as one.”

“Yes, there was one and I felt that the emotion was stronger for the lack of much expression—it was more poignant.”

“Did you, Miss Harris? That is very interesting. You see, Miss Harris, we are very reserved people, much more than you English. (If I may say so, it comes from the Buddhist religion.) If a man is in love with a woman he never says ‘I love you,’ and sometimes people say, ‘How does she know?’ But, Miss Harris, we are all the same human beings and it is

only the expression that is different. If a Japanese gives you a present, perhaps a handkerchief or something, he would say, 'This handkerchief I bought for you; it is very ugly and badly made, and very cheap, but if you will accept it I shall be pleased.' It is only our habits are different, Miss Harris, our feelings are quite the same."

Mr. Horoto told me—

WOULD FUJI be clear? I did not deserve it as did the poor lady who never saw it free from clouds though she stayed at the foot of it for a fortnight and climbed to the top three times. The afternoon was clear after the rain and the rice fields radiant in the afternoon sun. I sipped my tea gazing through the window of the restaurant car.

There, oh wonder of it, was the Sacred Mountain! In unbroken symmetry it swept up from the plain to its cone, glowing and ethereal against the pale sky. Its opalescent bulk seemed to float on the flooded paddy fields, its reflection shimmering in the water through the young plants. Wisps of cloud hung half-way up the sides, evaporating as soon as they had formed. How could it be otherwise than that it should have inspired adoration and sanctity? Fujiyama, the Sacred Mountain.

“Do you speak English?” I looked up. The speaker was a tall young Japanese, exceptional in every way. His European clothes were faultless and worn as effortlessly as those of an occidental. He was one of the few Japanese I have seen who did not make me feel that foreign dress was alien to him. He had the assurance which, when it is unconscious, creates dignity; before I left the train at Kyoto he showed that he really knew English, a unique accomplishment among all the Japanese I have met.

“Yes, I speak it a bit.”

“May I sit here?”

He drew back the chair the other side of the table. I was indulging in a soulful orgy of enjoyment of the country shining in sunset gold and doubt if there was much welcome in my voice when I assured him he might.

The conversation started with comments on the scenery, not with exchange of cards, which was another exception.

“This is very like a stretch of the Mediterranean coastline.”

“Yes, it’s known as the Côte d’Azur of Japan. Many of these fishing villages have become seaside resorts. Japanese people are now very keen on swimming and sun-bathing. They have learned that from the West like many other things. You know that we really learned about navigation from an Englishman, William Adams, who came here in 1600? There’s a shrine built to his memory in Tokyo. He was such a favourite of the Shogun that he was never allowed to leave.”

“No! Do you really mean that Japanese people burn incense to a burly English seaman—who was probably a pirate? I wish I had seen his shrine! The railway here is very close to the shore; it’s rather a pity that it should be spoilt.”

“Perhaps, yes, but a more important criticism is that during typhoons or earthquakes the sea very often destroys it. It’s very inconvenient for the main line between Tokyo, Kyoto and Kobe to be closed, for a week sometimes.”

“Yes, indeed. It’s so difficult for us who live safe from earthquakes and typhoons to realise what it must be like to live in the uncertainty of such dangers and inconvenience, as you do in Japan. Were you in the last terrible one which destroyed so much of Tokyo?”

“No, fortunately, I was away at the time. None of my family was killed though my mother was badly hurt. She stopped to put my small brother and sister into a wardrobe and the roof collapsed as she was running out of the room. But it saved the lives of the children.”

“It must have been ghastly! I met an English lady yesterday who told me how she was staying in the Hakoni district, and one evening remarked to some friends on the strange light in the sky from the direction of Tokyo. Late next evening two girls she was expecting arrived in an exhausted condition with the news of the earthquake. They’d had a narrow escape. The train had just crossed over a river, when the bridge buckled up and was then wrenched apart. The train swayed but was stopped in time before it ran off the lines which were

twisted up in front of it. When this lady returned to Tokyo some days later it took her two hours to discover which heap of débris was her house."

We talked on. I was increasingly curious to know why my companion spoke such perfect English, lacked that baffling and rather inane reserve which so often causes Japanese to meet the most ordinary questions with fidgeting giggles, how he had achieved the ability to look at things detached from purely Japanese prejudice with which it is possible to exchange ideas on the normal basis of common humanity. He was so normal that I could ask him.

It transpired that he had been brought up in America as an American boy, free from Japanese atmosphere with its limiting nationalism and the conflicts between reasonable intelligence and the anachronisms of tradition. His job as a sub-editor on one of the leading Japanese newspapers prevented him from losing his international and clear-sighted view of the world, and Japan's place in it. He was exactly the sort of person I had been looking for, from whom I could get information on a number of subjects about which I became increasingly eager to know with every day that I passed among Japanese people.

To take every precaution I started with Japanese drama, an innocuous subject for even the most bigoted nationalist. The evening at the Kabuki Theatre in Tokyo had impressed me very much. I was anxious to know the history that lay behind the finished perfection of these traditional performances and the meaning of the conventional movements and voices. As an educated and keen enthusiast for the theatre Mr. Horoto showed himself, at last, as a typical Japanese. This is what he said.

"I am glad you cared so much for the Japanese theatre. Most foreigners like to see it out of curiosity, but they don't have any feeling for it, and after watching for a short time they get bored. You've been to the Kabuki Theatre, so I will tell you about that first. Ka means sing, Bu means dance and Ki means acting. Four hundred years ago a beggar woman started to wander about as an entertainer, and was soon joined

by other women. They usually camped by rivers, making sure of an audience in the people waiting to cross. They became very popular and took men into the company. But the moral laxity of the troupe became so shocking to the public that it was forcibly disbanded. Then arose the playing of the marionettes. Later the Kabuki was revived, but this time it was played only by men, and the custom remains till to-day. All the parts are taken by men, and the leading actor for women's parts at present is so famous for his make-up that he leads the fashion for the women of Japan! When the Kabuki revived, the actors looked on themselves as substitutes for the marionettes and continued to use the stiff formality and rather unnatural movements which have become traditional—and the high note used in women parts is the stylised representation of the female voice. Twelve families run different plays, the traditional ones hereditarily belong to these families and may only be produced and controlled by them. There are several brilliant men among them at present."

"This is very interesting. But surely new plays are written? The evening I went to the theatre, at the end of the programme was played a ghost story which seemed to be more modern than the former ones."

"Yes, modern Kabuki plays are written, but they must be taken from historical episodes and be written in classical Japanese. All Kabuki performances are made up in three sections. The first is traditional, a legendary play with often a lot of dancing; the second is one under the Noh influence; the third is a modern one."

"The Kabuki Theatre was quite full the night I went in Tokyo; was that an exception or is it always so popular?"

"Yes, it's always very popular. There are five or six Kabuki Theatres, some holding 5,000 people. The theatres are open five nights a week and are always full. Did you stay to the end?"

"Yes, indeed I did, but unfortunately I had to arrive a little late for the beginning—I didn't get there till 5.30. I couldn't help thinking that no British audience would sit in the theatre from 4 till 11 p.m.!"

"No, the Japanese, with the Chinese, are probably the keenest theatre-goers there are."

"Are foreign plays ever acted?"

"Yes, certainly. Shakespeare is very popular."

"Really! It would be interesting to know which plays of his are the favourites. From my one evening at the Japanese theatre it seemed to me that every play was a tragedy. Is that really so?"

"Yes, Japanese prefer tragedies, and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are the two Shakespeares that are always chosen."

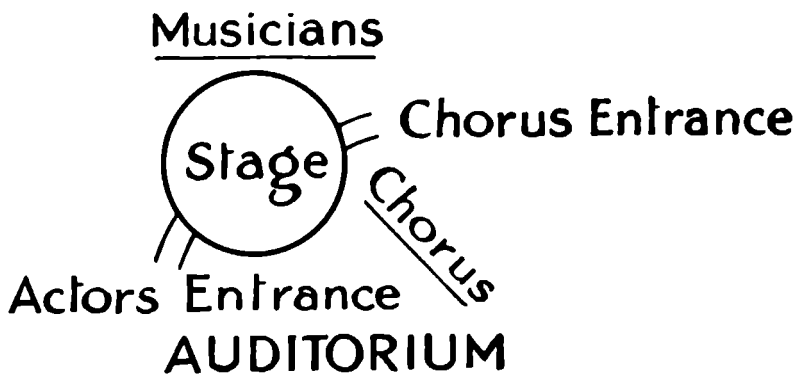
"How I wish I could see *Hamlet* acted by Japanese in Japanese, and with Japanese clothes and decor! But please, do tell me something about the Noh plays. I tried so hard to see one in Tokyo, but was told that there wasn't one on."

"It's a pity I had not met you! There are two plays on in Tokyo every Sunday, but they are run by clubs and it's only through a member that you can go. The Noh plays are older than the Kabuki—semi-religious, traditional. They are not so popular—their supporters are more high-brow and educated—and there are a smaller number of plays. It's interesting that 400 years ago a revolving stage was invented in the Noh theatres. America secured the patent and claims the invention. And an American film producer said he learned much that had helped him in his films from the acting and the lighting effects. You see, they used to have candle-lanterns, and illuminated the isolated parts of the actor which were expressing the particular emotion at the moment; for instance, his hands, knees, and even his eyebrows."

"Certainly there's nothing new in the world! Spot lighting and the revolving stage are thought modern, but you've had them in Japan for 400 years. What about the decor?"

"That, as in the Kabuki too, is always to the traditional design. There are always pine trees in the scenery of a Noh play, the symbol of longevity. The actors walk on to the stage from the front, through the audience. Look, I will draw the arrangement of the stage on the back of my card."

This is what he drew:



“Well, now—but are you sure you are not tired of being my schoolmaster?”

“Not a bit. What did you want to know?”

“Well, I wanted to know a little about the marionettes; I’ve seen German and Italian ones—I carved a hand for one once!—and I’m interested to hear about Japanese ones.”

“Our marionettes are three feet high. They are so elaborate that female puppets can move their fingers, lips, eyebrows and eyeballs. It takes three men to play each puppet. The chief player moves the hand, face and right arm, the second plays the left arm and body, and the third the feet.”

“Does the audience see the players?”

“Yes. Yes, to us the rhythm of the performance given by the “dancing” combination of the three players is the most important part.”

“How interested a German I know would be, who’s a maker and player of marionettes! He holds the theory that drama in the West has sunk to such a low level because actors and actresses play to express their own personality, instead of the impersonal qualities intended to be portrayed in the part. Plays are even written for particular actors. He maintains that drama will not be vital again till we’ve got back to the impersonality of marionettes, like the Greeks with their masks or the Chinese with their traditional make-up. And I see his point so much more clearly now (though puppets have always moved me much more than human actors), having seen and felt the extraordinary virility and dramatic tension produced

through the restrained, almost mechanical movement and speech of the Kabuki actors who've taken puppets for their models. . . . Will you have a cigarette?"

"Thank you."

The sun was setting and the lights flared up in the car.

"Do Japanese enjoy European music?"

"If you class jazz as music, they quite like that. But Western classical music, no, not really. There are a few orchestras but they are never really good. The musicians have no ear for the tones and intervals of your scale and they are usually out of tune."

"To get on to a different subject. I've heard and read of Kagawa, a Japanese Christian who's held, in England, to have tremendous influence in Japan. Has he really?"

"No, not much. For one thing he's a Christian, and that's a handicap. Then, he works for down-and-outs who are passive, and in Japan the leader of a movement must be pushed by powerful supporters. Beggars have no weight, and besides, the ones he works for are in towns and urban people are in the minority in Japan. There are plenty of poor people in the country but they do not complain. The farmers in the North Island and North-West have been getting poorer and poorer for the last twenty years. Many of them now live on roots. There's depression in all agriculture in Japan."

"Why?"

"With the increasing expenses abroad taxation is raised. The financial position is precarious."

"But have you much unemployment?"

"No, none to speak of. You see, there's the tremendous expansion of trade abroad; personally I think there will be a crash in time; factories are being rushed up in a speculative way and perhaps even some of the markets we have now will be closed to us—but, for the time, they employ large numbers of people. Then, as you realise, the standard of living is low. This does not mean misery; a Japanese is content with three meals of rice per day and a roof for shelter. They don't want all the complications you have in the West—and this saves, too, to a large extent the class problem. There's a far greater

uniformity in the life of the rich and poor. The employer, like his factory hand, is content to go back at the end of the day to sit on the matting of his floor, dressed in a *kimono*, to eat his bowl of rice and sip his tea. Each has his wife who concentrates upon looking after him. Each has his children whom he enjoys. The third reason for no unemployment is that an employer practically never gives notice to an employee. And fourthly, there are still large numbers of people at work on handicrafts."

"Is there a dole for any who may be unemployed and insurance?"

"No, the strong family sense does away with the need for dole. Pride makes the family support any of its members who are unfortunate enough to be out of work. Some factories organise an insurance scheme for their employees, but there's no compulsory national insurance."

"One of the things that have surprised me most in Japan is the position of women. Of course there are some in offices and shops, but on the whole they seem entirely unemancipated."

"Yes, I know. I was talking to the leading woman in the suffragist movement the other day, and she said that she knew she was working for a hopeless cause—there will never be woman's suffrage in Japan. Men are determined that women shall take no active part in life outside the home. A woman who makes any public attempt to share in the work of her husband is criticised. There was an example not long ago. A diplomat who'd lived many years in different countries in Europe, where his wife carried out the usual duties of a diplomat's wife by entertaining, was recalled to fill some position in the home government. His wife carried on with her habit of asking people to meals. She was severely censured, and finally the official lost his job."

"Really it seems incredible!"

"Yes, it is very bad. There's the case, too, of a well-known lady protagonist of birth control. Her book was published in America and England and much reviewed, but in Japan it was entirely ignored because the writer was a woman."

“What a shame! But, of course, probably lots of people could buy the American or English publication?”

“No, it’s difficult to buy foreign books in Japan.”

“But this treatment of women must gradually change as they meet Western influences and demand something different.”

“Well, they’ve not changed much yet. Only a few weeks ago we were running a series in our paper on ‘careers for women’ and I went round to chat with some of the most modern ones I could find, among whom are girls in restaurants and shops along the Ghinza. They wear European clothes and go to cinemas with young men to see American films. I asked every one whether she did not wish to marry a husband of her own choice, as they did on the films—and every one of them said she would rather her parents choose in the traditional way. They simply haven’t got the courage to take the responsibility. They have no initiative; no Japanese girl would travel alone as you are doing, whatever chances she had.”

“But, really, are marriages arranged still by the parents, in the more educated families?”

“Yes, among conservative people.”

“But without the victims having any chance of expressing their opinions?”

“Well, the young man is asked to a meal before it is settled, to have a look at the girl—and she at him. But it would be an insult to each other’s family if they expressed any disapproval, so it’s only formality.”

“Really? How incongruous it seems with the Western influences!”

“Yes, you can realise what it’s like for some one like me. My family are fairly old-fashioned and could not think of my being married except through their choice. I’ve lived in America for ten years and been used to meeting girls as emancipated as men. In Japan I can never really meet the class of girl my family would wish for a daughter-in-law and from which I might find a wife. How can I bear to have the choice made for me? It is difficult enough to be at home as it is—I have been too long in different surroundings to be able to sit on the floor in a *kimono* to eat rice.”

“Yes, it is difficult for you, indeed! There must be so many complications for your generation with the incredible pace which Japan has taken on so much of Western civilisation. One of the things I can’t understand is the position of the Emperor in the mind of such people as you. You can’t look on him as a sort of god which, to a stranger in Japan, seems to be the common attitude.”

“No, of course we can’t. If you ask individuals they all say that he has no supernatural status—but if you ask a group they will all uphold that point of view. It’s still adopted as a focus for the nation. The simple people believe it, it’s taught in all the schools. A portrait of him is hung in every school and is venerated as something sacred. If, for instance, there was a fire in the school, the safety of that portrait must be considered before the lives of the children or the teachers. If it was burned the teachers would be dismissed.”

“I can’t understand how people who are not convinced can go on pretending that they are! In Japan there doesn’t seem room for individual thought. I suppose that unless there was the capability of living inconsistently with what you think, life would be impossible.”

“You see in Japan it’s possible because the national sense is stronger than anything else. Japanese people have been a feudal people for centuries and have the tradition of living in groups rather than as individuals. That feudalism is now merely enlarged into a fanatical nationalism. A man is first a Japanese and only in his intimate life an individual. His group-consciousness is so strong that he can continue to uphold the group idea without being disturbed by the inconsistency it may have with what he himself might think as an individual—in fact, it probably doesn’t really come into his head to think out the answer to a problem on his own.”

“This is very interesting. I suppose that this accounts for the way that the army seems to be able to do what it likes against the interests of many individuals.”

“Well, I think that the real reason for that is the lack of a connecting link between Military and Civil authorities. You see we’ve not got anything like your War Office which links

the policy of your Parliament with that of entirely military officials. I think that unless we have something like that the power of the nation will crumble between the two. Now the two work separately, and naturally a good tactical general with unquestionable capabilities on the battlefield has no idea of finance. Japan is becoming an industrial country; she must ultimately stand or fall through her economics. The support of a population increasing with such speed through industry (a million a year) will become increasingly the key to her policy."

At this point we arrived at Kyoto and I had to say good-bye to my friend, wishing that there were several hours more to the journey. As I write this the eyes of the world are on Japan and China, in their struggle. Though my love and hope are for China, and I feel confident for her ultimate future, this talk with Mr. Horoto makes me understand the position of Japan in a way that I could not have done without it. I realise that it is a life and death struggle in which Japan is fighting for her life more fundamentally than China, who may fall temporarily, but will surely stand eventually through the deeper strength of her people.

More Jottings from Japan

IN KYOTO I was quite ready to believe, as it is said, that the Miyako Hotel is the best in Japan. Surely even Swiss hotel proprietors must concede the first place to the Japanese? Their assiduity went even so far as one of the hall page-boys offering to pay the taxi entailed through my fruitless search for a Noh play, because he has told me the wrong address!

Kyoto, this old capital, is so much more of an entity than modern Tokyo or Yokohama—mellower, characterful, dignified. The quality of everything is better, the people convincing and gracious. The grease-paint of the West always seems to turn the venerable face of the East into the sad travesty of clown pathos.

I was disappointed in the museum, which was depressing except for a few paintings and some sculpture. I remember best a Kwannon, three wood life-size seated portraits, and a beggar figure so reminiscent of Rodin's John the Baptist that I wondered whether he had ever seen this masterpiece, so much earlier and, I thought, better than his. It was the innumerable temples and the miniature perfection of Japanese gardens where the grass is combed and cut with scissors that crowd memory with delight; but most vivid of all remains the Byodo-in (Phoenix Temple) just outside Kyoto. What a wonder of perfection set beside a lake reflecting its proportions and roofs swinging like seagulls' wings! Built entirely of wood, it dreams mellow dreams of 900 years and experts say that it is the finest example of style existing in Japan.

But perhaps the happiest hours were spent in wandering about the city, among people making things—baskets or furniture, cutting stone, painting lanterns, washing dyed stuffs in streams and hanging the yards of colour across the streets, like banners, to dry. At sunset streets too narrow for traffic were gaily crowded with girls in flower-like *kimonos* taking

an evening stroll. Coloured signs lit the narrow alleys and brilliant electric lights sprawled over inviting wares in open-fronted shops. Only the bubbling murmur of voices and clip-clop patter of ghetta filled the still evening under the dramatic peony-coloured sunset. Restaurants, cinemas, gay propriety and charming delicacy—I love this Japan; why does it wish to make itself the asiatic Nazi Germany?

My height always caused great interest and amazement, and I perspired with shame at the size of my feet when trying on some ghetta. The proprietor spoke no English, was graciously kind, but obviously dismayed by them.

In Kyoto I met again, by arrangement, Mrs. Sirén, whom I had got to know in the train between Keijo and Fusan and who had insisted upon my sharing her first-class cabin on the ferry crossing to Japan, instead of passing the night on the floor of the second-class female sheep pen. And now I met her husband, Professor Oswald Sirén, the famous Swedish authority on Chinese and Japanese sculpture and painting, and I was so fortunate as to have that kind, sensitive, enthusiastic expert as my initiator into Buddhist art. I had three most wonderful days in Nara with them, where they became, as they have remained, real friends.

Nara was the capital in the Tempio period, 709-784, A.D., but many of its treasures belong to the Suiko, before the sixth century, bearing the virile stamp of Chinese influence. The Diabutsu Temple is the oldest and biggest wooden building in the world and though the palace has gone, innumerable temples remain in and within miles of Nara, among which Professor Sirén took us to those of most value, some of them distant ones seldom visited.

Nara sweeps one into its peace from the first moment. The hotel stands above a lake with a pagoda peeping over the trees in the park beyond. Herds of deer are so tame that they are almost troublesome in their requests to be fed, their soft noses muzzling at one's hand as one walks along. It is a huge public park filled with temples among groves of cryptomarias and evergreen oaks with wide stretches of grass where parties of

Japanese picnic. I have never been in a country where its people are so appreciative of its natural or artistic beauties. It is part of the state schools' curriculum to take the children on tours to visit the famous places of their country beyond their own locality.

At Horiuji the Diako-do treasure-house was bewildering in its wealth. In the dimness figures belonging to the Suiko and Tempio periods were crowded together, each with so strong a spirit in its slender stillness that the silence seemed charged with a mysterious clamour. Many of them reminded one of the figures on Chartres Cathedral with their soaring restraint, though they were more formalised and impersonal. For the Professor parts of the fifth-century fresco were uncovered. Though cracked and faded the lines flowed vitally over the plaster, and Kwannon rode proudly on an elephant—showing the Indian influence which travelled with Buddhism to China and so on to Japan.

Most of the temple buildings at Horiuji are fifth and sixth century, and still they look as if they can stand another 1300 years! The wooden bracketing bracing together the great weight of the roofs, besides being fascinatingly decorative, is a masterly method of construction against earthquakes. And so is that of the pagodas, which soar into the air like vast forest trees. The Professor explained that a great beam of wood is hung from the top down the centre, to which the structure is braced at intervals, so that during an earthquake or typhoon the whole thing swings together without snapping.

I was introduced to old Mr. Nero at the Museum, who spent three years carving the copy of the Diako-do Kwannon for the British Museum and who, with the infinite patience and skill of a consummate craftsman, repairs the treasures of sculpture in the Nara Museum. He was a charming old Japanese in a grey *kimono*, who said that if I would stay for six months he would teach me how to do real lacquer work and jesso. This latter was the construction of most of the old figures—clay being modelled over a rough framework of wood and finally covered with lacquer or fine plaster, which was painted. How I longed to stay!

What I shall always remember most vividly, perhaps, is the afternoon we had at Jororuji, the Western Paradise, about fourteen miles from Nara. It took forty minutes of discussion with Mr. Nero to decide that the car we had hired was too big for the road to the village. For twenty minutes we waited for another and then, without warning, shot off in the original one.

We drove through the first real country I had seen in Japan, the road winding up and down, in and out of the little valleys between wooded hills. There were tiny villages, farms among orchards and small fields with streams running through them. Sometimes there were distant views of blue mountains, but most of the way was through entirely satisfying rural cosiness. The road grew narrower and narrower till it was only just wide enough for the big American tourer and, at last, in one village where it swung round a shop in a hairpin bend, Oriental fatalism decided it was impossible to go farther. When I got out I found that some large stones were sunk in the road, which we excavated with immense labour (while the driver watched) and finally the car was negotiated round the corner.

Soon after that we came to another with a ditch on one side and embankment on the other, falling to rice fields below. Again we stopped, the driver saying it was impossible—nonsense, there were eight inches to spare. Dismally he stood on the road, deaf to all exhortation. Jumping in I tried to start up the engine to drive it myself, but was not quick enough before he came rushing at me shouting in a fury of terror. Only when we had cut a long branch and shown him the possibility, by measuring the car and the road, was he persuaded to proceed—which he did with a desperate dash which nearly hurled us into the rice field.

The last mile we walked up a steep winding path under apricot and persimon trees between vermilion flaming lilies like small agapanthus, which the Japanese considered unlucky. The Professor and I excavated some bulbs with penknives; mine are growing well in pots. Then, suddenly we were there—walking under the gate into the Western Paradise.

Indeed it was such! Its quiet lake was filled with lotus and

water lilies; a little island shrine lay in the middle. Willows and small pines hung over the water among long grass. Beyond were dark woods, to one side was the Temple (Templo period), on the other a mound on which stood the three-storied pagoda, one of the oldest in Japan. Over it all hung a remote mellowness; the sun was setting tranquilly beyond the dark trees.

There was no break in the harmony between the interior of the temple and its setting. The doors stood open under the low eaves and the nine gilded Buddhas sat gazing on the lake—and beyond, to eternity. One wondered whether they or Nature had created the enchantment or if, together, they had woven the magic web. Tranquil and glowing they have sat there through centuries, meditating in the Western Paradise.

At Kobe I went aboard the *Keizu Maru*. We glided through the calm white Inland Sea as in a dream. The islands and headland peaks stood up like cool phantoms in the twilight after the flaming majesty of the setting sun. Next morning in Moji harbour, looking strangely Mediterranean, ships were being coaled by coolies passing baskets from hand to hand. Dazzling sun called up the blueness of the sea and drenched the town. I went ashore determined to buy coolie coats such as the coolies were wearing, dark-blue cotton with white designs on the back.

It was a picturesque place of narrow streets, spotlessly clean. Having drawn a coolie coat I went into innumerable shops showing my picture, which the proprietors looked at with entirely blank faces, till a woman in a wool shop, with the intelligence of her sex, understood what I wanted and kindly telephoned to a store from which a youth was sent to guide me to an emporium where I bought two coats for a shilling. During our walk there he said:

“I am very fond of English conversation, and I like very much to ascend mountains,” adding that he had not much time to do so as working hours in Japan were from 8 a.m. till 10.30 p.m. with only three days’ holiday a year.

He carried my parcel back to the quay, and as our tender came round the corner with her siren shrieking he asked:

“What you call that in English—a deafening noise?” As he handed me graciously on board, “Good-bye. I thank you for your kindness.”

On the second day crossing the Yellow Sea the captain told us that Italy had marched into Abyssinia. The moon seemed to shine with cold foreboding as I wandered the deck wondering what this would mean. But I went to sleep thinking what I quote from my diary and letter home: “To-morrow I shall be in China! I’m still as bewildered by Japan as after the first day. There seems no cohesion between the dignity of the past with its awe-inspiring perfections, style and charm, and the hectic jumble of the present with its second-rate commercialism, efficiency, unbelievable stupidity, refinements, delicacy and shoddy ugliness—between the frequent coarse arrogance of men (in which they’re ridiculous) and the gentle sweetness and perfection of women. And how difficult it is to be among a people without a vestige of humour! Surely the theory is right, that the physical character of a country moulds the nature of the people who live in it. There’s the volcanic quality of Japan in its people, much repressed but smouldering there. The refinement of detail is there, and outward charm, but it’s only the surface above the lava—volcanoes are incalculable and treacherous and destructive. I don’t believe that in the long pageant of world culture they’ll leave a creative mark. I don’t think they’ve a big enough vision because they have no sense of humour and aren’t psychologically free enough for the same reason, to consolidate a great empire, but they’ll succeed temporarily to surprising lengths because of their energy, and because they don’t seem to be really oriental and are more practical and active than their neighbours. They’ve got the strength and weakness of all totalitarian states, cast iron, which has the habit of snapping suddenly. To-morrow I’ll be in China; what’ll I find there?”

Letter from Peking

PEKING,

11-10-35.

DARLING FAM.,

It seems dynasties since I wrote, but every moment has been devastatingly full since I posted in Kyoto. . . .

Arriving at Taku reminded me of arriving in Egypt. Low-lying wastes of sand shone in the brilliant early sun under a cloudless sky, and long before we got in the same smell wafted out—of age, teeming humanity and dust. Crowds of coolies rushed over the side of the ship as we moored. I had a heated argument with a money-changer (having forgotten to get Chinese money in Japan). Customs inspection took place on the dusty ground; they opened nothing. A travel agent pounced down on me, and repented when I bought a third-class ticket. Another fray ensued with the coolies over their tips, in which several other passengers in the train took my side and, literally, threw them out of the carriage—and finally I was ensconced on my luggage near the open door and the train wandered out of the station—without much conviction.

Outside, the country was flat wastes hillocked with thousands of graves or closely cultivated with cotton or vegetables. There was a great sense of relaxation and I found myself saying: "I'm home at last!" And I realised that my heart had been frozen by Japan, that there I'd lived unemotionally in mental interest or æsthetic pleasure and that the first waft of China had thawed it. There was so much to look at in the faces of my fellow passengers that it seemed only five minutes before we arrived in Tientsin, where we had to change.

Full of enthusiasm Mr. Recker (a young Dutch publisher from the boat) and I set off to spend the four hours' wait for the Peking train in our first look at a Chinese city. The other passengers chose the Astor House Hotel for lunch, which we condemned with arrogant superiority.

Soon we'd plunged into narrow streets lined with open workshops—how can I possibly give you any idea of it all! Smells, dust, leisurely crowds, creative industry, rickshas speeding by silently over the dust, shouting and laughing, deafening gramophones, yowling Chinese music, flies, fruit, cakes, plump babies, painted signs, food-shops, carved wooden arches and gateways, disorders, dignity, humanity, carriages like the Duke of Wellington's, the street of the makers of enormous black coffins, women hobbling on bound feet, the jangle-tapping of coppersmiths, the buzz of sewing-machines, and incredibly ragged shaggy beggars whose filth only separated them from animals—no, it's impossible to give any notion of the excitement of this overwhelming sense of teeming life and vitality.

I began to get extremely hungry. Food-shops there were in great numbers but—oh, if you could have seen them! Tiny little alcoves open to the street in which a fat cook, in a filthy singlet and haloed by flies, perspired over his pots on a charcoal fire. We did indeed feel "innocents abroad" and every story we'd ever heard about the results of dirt drove us on from each shop which seemed dirtier than the last. (The Astor House didn't seem quite so condemnable!) When we passed a modern-looking bookshop, I suggested there might be some one who spoke English, and could tell us the name of a clean Chinese restaurant. Inside, a client immediately offered to lead us to an eating-house which he assured us was good.

Very hot, tired and hungry but full of hope we followed him for ten minutes through the crowds. At a corner overlooking the Piccadilly of Tientsin he turned through an open door. My heart fell with a bump into my shoes. The cook was larger and wetter than any we'd seen, the mud-beaten floor dirtier, the flies better fed. By the time we'd climbed the wooden stairs to the room above and sat down on the benches round a high square table littered with grains of rice and spilt tea, I found I wasn't hungry any longer. But we had to brave it out as our kind guide, who cleared the dust of the street from his throat on to the spongy wooden floor, insisted upon sitting with us though he'd already eaten.

While we waited for our soup and rice we chatted over the little bowls of tea which he filled for us, after washing them out with a swirl of tea which he emptied on to the floor. In his rather limited English he told us that he gave typing lessons and had nearly completed a correspondence course in medicine and hoped shortly to be able to start his practice!

I'd just begun my rice when there was a tremendous explosion from a client across the room. I thought he'd been sick, and the rice stuck in my throat. It happened three times and I'd almost lost my powers of endurance when I realised he was merely washing out his mouth with tea, which he ejected on to the floor with extraordinary vehemence.

The journey resumed in the Peking train, there was leisure to think over the first sight of China. Tientsin had been a filthy place, everything was chaotic, there seemed no public self-respect, one had been positively revolted by so much and shocked by a callousness—and yet—I was already swallowed in love of China and felt, irresistibly, their right to regard the rest of the world as barbarians. Underneath all this poverty, public inertia and callous fatalism, my first feeling was of admiration for the weighty sense of vitality and the unquestioning acceptance of the right of individual existence. The lowest coolie has an inborn dignity, which every one expects him to defend although they are too absorbed with their own for altruistic concern—and perhaps all this arises from their most glorious sense of humour.

This, of course, strikes one particularly having come straight from Japan, where men are Japanese first and individuals second, and entirely humorless. Compared with China, Japan seems suburban in her insistent concern to keep up appearances. I thought again of a remark I once heard on the difference of atmosphere in an artist's home, where creation of potential creation dwells in chaos, compared with the domestic perfection of a good housewife's, where spontaneity is sacrificed for mere tidiness, and inspiration zealously swept up with the dust. Japan seems an excellent housewife and China an incurable artist! Don't you always feel it is much greater

to cause admiration in spite of weaknesses than because of obvious virtues?

All too soon the sun disappeared over the endless stretches of harvest fields and we arrived at Peking station. Mrs. Chieng had sent a car to meet me and I was soon ensconced in this little room with papered windows looking into the first courtyard.

It is very quiet here as I sit writing, shut away behind the spirit-screen—quieter for the sounds of ceaseless activity which float in the air beyond the walls. Every trade has its particular noise or shout of advertisement; a tailor snaps his scissors, a barber clashes brass cymbals, the charcoal merchant has one shout and the seller of hot chestnuts another. This distant hum of shouting, talking, wakeful humanity beats in the air like the hum of the sea beyond the walls for about twenty out of the twenty-four hours; it's so unlike the mechanical roar in our cities.

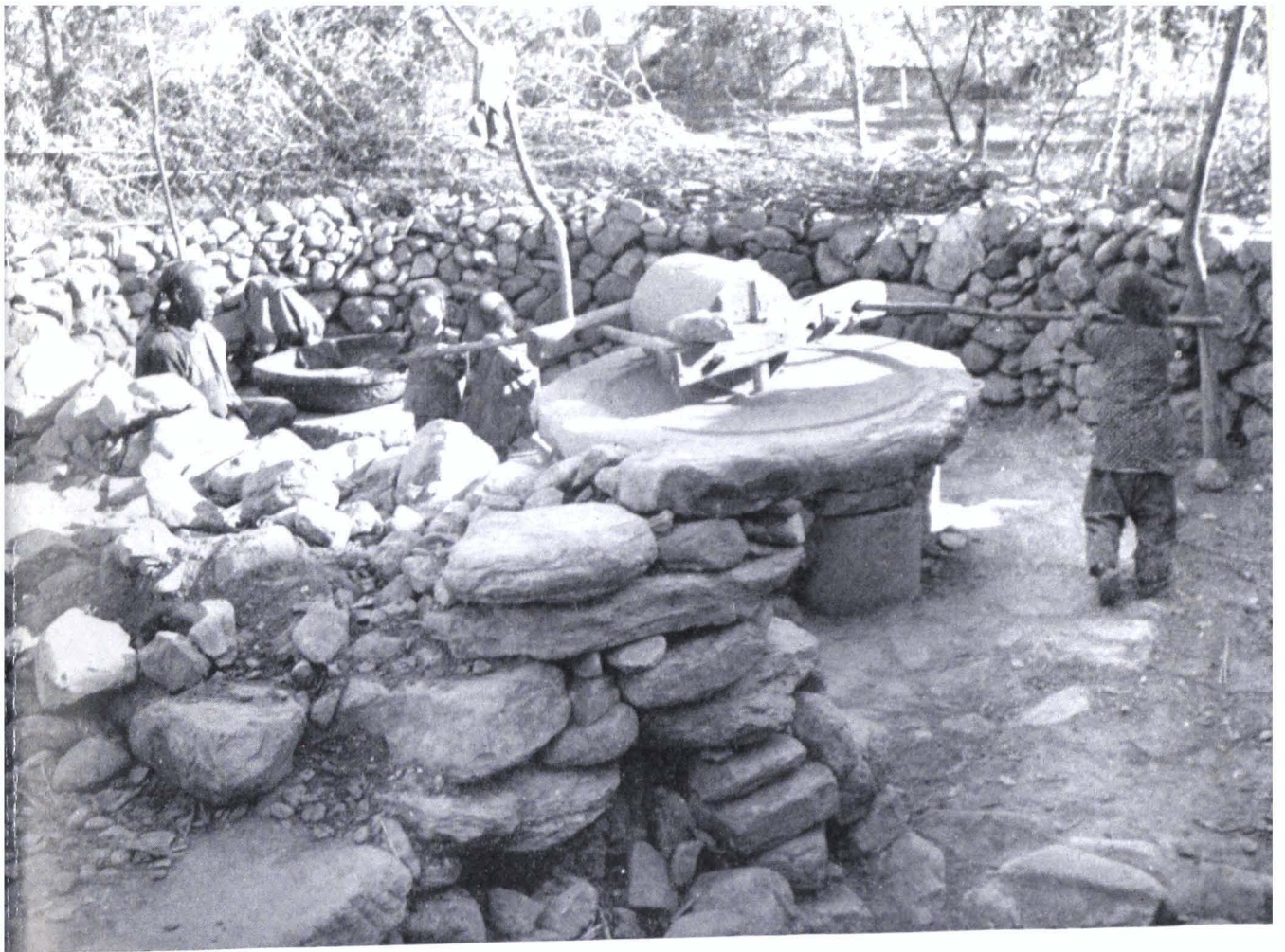
When I woke this morning I thought I heard the Music of the Spheres, a floating whistling was in the air—but it was caused by flights of pigeons with little hollow bamboos tied under their wings, which whistle as they fly; the most enchanting, exciting sound.

To-day a dust-storm is raging, which I'm told happens often in the dry autumns. I've never experienced anything so unpleasant as a Peking dust-storm! One comes in with a thick layer of Peking streets all over one's face and clothes, in one's eyes, nose, ears, throat and hair. (I quite understand now why Chinese spit so vociferously; I'm getting very professional at it.) It comes in clouds as thick as a London fog and even my ricksha boy wore goggles. One's face feels as if it's been sand-papered. I shall indulge in a veil.

Peking is so great that I feel quite overwhelmed and will write no more till I've gained more composure. After so short a time I feel it's the one place I would be content to live in for the rest of my life—but *au revoir*.

AUDREY.

(Top) *Children turning a millstone.* (Below) *The graceful span of a camel-back bridge in North China.*



Big Lin

IN PEKING I met Big Lin, through a lady who lived in one courtyard of an old Chinese house in a lane leading off the Ha-Ta Mên. The heavy street door was painted red and had polished brass ring handles. When the door was opened the secret of the courtyard was still hidden by the Spirit Screen, decorated, in low relief, with a dragon coiling above clouds. The drawing-room lay on the west side looking into the courtyard with its blue glazed tubs of oleander. It was very quiet, shut away behind the red door; the Spirit Screen protected the peace from the dusty world outside with its chatter and coming and going. The room was dim and meditative. I sipped the fragrant tea on a divan covered with old brocade and understood why the Chinese are poets.

Then Lin came in with his bundle of silks and embroideries. He was very big and smiling. His head was shaved under his Chinese hat, he wore spectacles and a long blue silk gown. His voice was virile with a gentleness in it, his laugh free and hearty. I liked him at once.

Soon the floor was extravagantly chaotic, satins, brocades, embroideries surged about our feet; wine-coloured waves broke over lotus pink foam, eddies of jade green bubbled with flowers of every colour, turquoise, oyster, scarlet; night-blue glowed with sunlight yellows—and in the middle squatted Big Lin, the Neptune of the sea.

After that, in spite of a limited vocabulary, we became real friends. I am indebted to Lin for taking me inside China—into its heart of faithfulness, generosity and unconscious common-sense wisdom. An Englishman said to me that a Chinese became one's friend the better to be one's enemy, gaining one's confidence the better to cheat one. I do not believe it is true; or can only be true if he is met with that suspicion in mind. He may have different codes from ours,

but courtesy and intelligence demand at least the effort to understand, though we may not always wish to practise them. One felt increasingly how much the West has to learn from China, not perhaps in justice, drains and mechanics, but in the great art of living, culture of mind, patience and courtesy—true civilisation.

Lin was the son of a poor farmer in Shantung. Neither of his parents had seen a foreigner or the sea. He had not been to school but had heard of Africa, America and the greater powers of Europe, though he knew nothing about them and asked me one day whether England had "Empero." He had once been to Mukden where his brother had a small fur business, otherwise he had always lived in Peking since he had left his village and set up as a silk and embroidery merchant with "Big Lin" written over his shop.

He returned annually to see his mother, to whom he was devoted with true Chinese parental veneration. He sent her half his annual income, and, occasionally, meat to add to their millet diet, their poverty being too great for them to afford rice. There was no sentimentality in his description of the last night of his visit home, when his mother and he lay side by side on the mud *kang* (charcoal-heated bed) crying over their prospective parting. He told of his miserable anxiety for her during a civil war, when his sister had come to stay with him and his wife, to escape almost certain rape by the invading soldiers.

I began to understand his typically Chinese nervousness of physical violence and danger. Dislike of the Unknown and lack of the adventurous spirit may be an inborn trait of the Chinese people—but one wonders whether it is an inherent racial characteristic or the result of generations of unprotected helplessness under the ravages of famine, flood and civil wars. Are not the same characteristics found among the Jews who also have had to bear passively?

Lin was a delightful companion. He took me to second-hand markets where he bought in his stock, always leaving our rickshas before we arrived, to save their ten per cent on our purchases. I learned the prices of silks and embroideries,

watched the bargaining and waited eagerly for the moment when he and his opponent would put their right hand up each other's sleeve, giving the final price secretly with their fingers, which concluded the bargain.

The excitement of salesmanship was a new experience which I had on several occasions when helping Lin to sell his silks, at a good profit, to tourists who might have known better prices if they had taken the trouble to go to open markets. It was an intriguing game.

A new tourist would arrive with meal-time panegyrics on her bargains. If she had no discrimination, plenty of money and a glory of doing down Chinese merchants (as if she could!) I had no compunction whatsoever in regarding her as prey—Lin was recommended.

It does not seem to enter the heads of those sort of people that a foreigner can choose the friendship of a Chinese in preference to a fellow Westerner. She would assume that, together, we should beat down Lin and succeed in making him part with something for less than its value. Without a flicker Lin would spread out his silks. A showy modern coat embroidered coarsely with fibrous silk might catch her eyes. In a low excited voice she would assure me that this was a really fine old piece, carelessly asking Lin the price. He would say: "You friend of Miss Harris, for you I make special price—55 dollars." And if she was American he would add casually, "That one over 100 years old." She would give exclamations of outrage at the price and turn to other things, buying pieces of embroidery up to the value of 20 dollars because each piece seemed so cheap. Then I would go back to the coat and murmur, "I'm sure he'll take less, why not offer him 40—even at 50 it's fantastically cheap compared with what one pays at home!" "I'll give you 40 dollars for this—it's not worth more than that." (How true she was.) "Very sorry, no can do that piece. This old piece, very much work. You very much like, you friend of Miss Harris my good customer—for you I make 50 dollars." "No, that's ridiculous!" She throws it down. "I believe he might meet you—Lin, couldn't you make a special price half-way, say 45 dollars?" His face would never change, but

somehow it conveyed everything. "All right—to-day I make lucky for you. 45 dollars." Every one was happy. She had another bargain to boast and Lin had made a profit of 20 dollars at least.

We went to Chinese theatres. One great evening he begged me to wear the modern Chinese dress I had had made from some silk bought with his help. The pleasure it gave to the old proprietor of the restaurant evaporated my foolish self-consciousness, and the covert curiosity and disapproving glances of two Europeans who were also in the theatre gave an added zest. I fear their righteous resentment of a European woman, obviously married to a Chinese and gone Chinese, diverted their attention from the play.

Meanwhile Lin, who had bought the most conspicuous seats over the stage in full flood of the lights above it, was beaming with satisfaction at the "face" he was getting in my company. We sipped tea and ate sunflower seeds with thorough enjoyment, Lin waving to his friends and often wiping his head and hands with the hot wrung-out towels thrown across by the attendant.

The theatre, besides entertaining the Chinese people, has taught them their history, literature, legends and morals—because right always triumphs over wrong. They are probably greater theatre-lovers than any nation in the world, except the Japanese, and know most of the plays by heart. The exquisite precision and detail presenting, nearly always, tragedy in the Japanese theatre, is replaced in China by a virility and exuberance of life which brooks no bonds of careful perfection. Falstaff could live gloriously on the Chinese stage, while he would make one wince in Japan. The slow performances, with their little action and long songs, are broken at intervals by *mêlés* of acrobats and clowns who tumble and buffoon to the clashing and yowling of the orchestra, or there may be a battle scene of alarming vitality.

I grew to love the Chinese theatre increasingly as I began to understand better the traditional dresses, fearlessly gaudy and decorative, and the make-up indicating the characters of the parts. The audience may recognise the good characters at

once by their handsome dignity, while the bad ones are unmistakably ugly and ridiculous in their clown-like paint. Symbolism is used in many ways. The Prince may have four cushions on his chair to raise him above the Mandarin or, if he is naturally of smaller stature, the felt soles of his boots may be two or three inches thick. The heroine had a dream in one play I saw, in which, to indicate that she was asleep, a filmy black veil was hung over her by one of the attendants.

Except in towns under Western influence female parts are taken by men who talk and sing in high falsetto. I was fortunate enough to see the most famous contemporary actor of women characters, Mai-Lang-Fang. No girl I have ever seen expressed ideal femininity with more slender grace of movement, more exquisite dreaming tenderness or more artless innocence. That lithe figure trailing silken skirts, those exquisite hands of precise perfection, that reticence, was indeed flower-like in its pure loveliness. Incidentally, I heard that Mai-Lang-Fang is a most remarkable and charming personality and has done more to raise the status of the stage in China than any other living actor.

As in Japan, the stage is built out into the auditorium, with no drop curtain, and the scene-shifting is done in full view of the audience. This usually entails little more than the alteration in the position of chairs or the rearranging of cushions. The shifters lounge beside the stage (on the edge of which some of the audience may put their hats and belongings), drinking tea and spitting, as do also the actors if they have long periods of inaction on the stage.

The audience sits on wooden seats, talking and laughing among themselves when an actor displeases them or shouting applause spontaneously. Knowing the plays by heart, they are ruthless critics of the rendering of the parts by different actors. They come *en famille* and by the end of the evening the wooden floor is a refuse heap of sunflower seed and nut shells, spilt tea and fruit skins. Hot wet towels are supplied by attendants, who throw them to their clients over the heads of intervening people with astounding accuracy of aim and length.

The theatre we went to that evening was in the heart of

the purely Chinese part of the city. At midnight after the performance had ended, we were shut, by mistake, into a street where gates were closed at each end at night. I thought we should have to sit on a dirty doorstep till the morning, and Lin said, "What your father say if you stay all night in street with a Chinese man!" But eventually we found a tiny passage leading out between the dark walls of houses near the Ch'ien Mên.

The night was cold but beautifully clear and we decided to walk through the public gardens. While looking down into the moat under the shadow of the wall, where stars were reflected in the dark water, a policeman came up and spoke to Lin. I asked what he said. Lin chuckled. "He say, good people who love, no good to stay here. Bad spirits in that water; they make young people jump in water to die." Do London policemen ever give warning against the Thames?

Lin showed his nervousness again at the absence of a sentry from his usual post outside a gate. "I think we go quickly. Maybe Japanese do some bad thing." He wanted to see me home, but it was a long way and I assured him I should be all right in the ricksha he called, giving the coolie careful instructions. I was just getting into bed when the boy came sleepily into my room, tousled and shivering, to say I was wanted on the telephone. It was Lin, who rang up to make sure I had arrived safely. It was 1.30 a.m.

I learned Chinese opinions on a varied range of subjects through our leisurely gossips, such as: that small teeth are greatly admired in China; that the smell of most foreigners is revolting to the Chinese, and people who smell of perspiration are considered bad or common; that our inner canthus makes them feel sick when they look at our eyes. During the course of these comparisons Lin said:

"Chinese people say: Chinese women have care for their feet; Japanese for their hair and foreign women for their breasts."

I saw into a very different outlook on life when one day he said, looking round the mellow austerity of a court of the Forbidden City:

"You know, very good we two come here; I no like to come here by myself."

"Why, Lin?"

"You know I have fright here. I think my heart very small. Must be good heart very small, cannot do many things. Bad men must have big heart to do everything."

In this connection the word heart stood for courage. At the time I thought that Lin's use of the word heart, expressing different emotions according to the context, was simply his peculiar English. Since then I have learned that the Chinese have the same belief that we have examples of in Shakespeare, that the emotions are seated in the different viscera of the body. Not knowing the English for liver or gall, which are believed to be the centre of courage and feeling in China, he made do with the one organ he knew, the heart.

"But, Lin, I think that is wrong thought. Much more hard to be good than bad. Must have big heart to be good."

"You think so? I know some people do, but I think good men must have small heart."

Another little explanation he made was illuminating to me, which was that the character in Chinese writing used for "happiness" is built up of three others, signifying one mouth (one man), one rice field and one suit of clothes; these combined form "happiness." With a representational calligraphy the original meaning and value of words persists comparatively unchangingly through centuries of use.

We often had *chow* together in various eating-houses. A favourite one of Lin's was owned by an old man who had been a well-known singer. He was tremendously excited when Lin took me there—his first foreign client, and sat with us in our private cubicle during the meal. In better-class restaurants each party eats in privacy. He showed fatherly concern when I drunk *sam-ching*, rice wine served hot in a teapot, and Lin told me that afterwards he had sent a messenger to ask whether I was all right, or if I had drunk too much.

We went back there to celebrate my last evening in Peking, eating long and leisurely, and drinking a good deal of wine, which made Lin hot and excited. He took off his fur-lined

gown, sitting in his black trousers and white cotton coat, and after the meal took the *Ho Ch'in*¹ from a nail in the wall and played and sang in the jerky falsetto so greatly admired in China. The old proprietor was persuaded to sing in his now quavering voice, and then some of the serving boys of the establishment. I felt that that evening I had been taken behind the mask of reserve which hides the real life of the Chinese people from many strangers.

I said to Lin one day that I felt his wife ought to come with us too, but he said, "My wife, she country woman. She very fright and no like come."

"But, Lin, she must like to eat the good food we have."

"She have it too all right. A boy from the chow-house he take what we no eat to my house and my wife she eat it there."

It was a great disappointment to him that she was a "country woman" with small feet, which is the sign of old-fashioned ignorance. Nowadays girls are not allowed to go to school with bound feet, and it is only in the backward districts of inland China that girls still do it in order to procure husbands. But the really great sorrow and, in China, a disgrace, was that they had no children. Poor Lin confided to me one day:

"It is very bad thing, Audrey, my wife she no can catch baby. I take her to the hospital, but the doctor say he nothing can do."

"Oh, Lin, I am so sorry, but perhaps she will."

"I hope so. I think if I have good heart for other people maybe she can catch baby. Some rich Chinese men take other wife—but I no can do; I think bad thing."

She was a tiny little creature who only got over her shyness very slowly, and, of course, I could not speak to her except through Lin's interpretation. She would come across the court in her padded black trousers and short coat, bringing their best tea in the big teapot with its wire handle over the top, a weighted expression on her little face till a broad smile lit up its youthfulness. The expression of failure, the wistful admiration with which she fondled the children of the court,

¹ A sort of violin brought by the Golden Tartars and found only in North China.



Big Lin in the Forbidden City.

and the microscopic triangles of her bound feet, creating the stilted movements of a ballet dancer au points, made my heart ache.

Before I left she gave me a cornelian ring. The promise of a present from England caused a tremor of excitement to flicker through the control of her face and her immediate, "You no must spend big money."

Since arriving home I have had numbers of letters from Lin, written for him by a cousin. One began formally with "Dear Madam." In my answer I remonstrated, reminding him that he should always say just "Dear Audrey." The next envelope was addressed:

Dear Audrey,
47, Phillimore Gardens,
London.

Last week a letter brought good news:

"Oh! I so happy, Audrey. I have baby in bottom of Chinese New Year. He is very big and very fat and very sweet too. You not very happy too?"

So Lin's good heart for other people is rewarded. Yes, indeed, I am very happy too.

The Forbidden City

MY FIRST afternoon in Peking I went up Coal Hill, the artificial cone rising out of the plain north of the city. As the sun lowered over the magic loveliness of the Western Hills the dust hanging in the air was turned to gold. It lay like a pall of glory over the ordered dignity of the great city lying below me, which seemed to embody the ideal of millenniums, and whose sounds floated up through the stillness. There it lay enclosed by its proud grey walls, its wide streets checking it like a giant chessboard, and within those checks snuggled the rectangles of courtyards following one out of the other. Between the grey geometrical lines frothed autumn-yellow trees, and here and there shone the peacock or golden roofs of temple buildings. Far away rose the soaring rotunda of the Temple of Heaven, deep ocean blue. There were no crazy huddles, no *laissez-faire* muddles in this great city planned to rule and precept; spacious, premeditated it lay under the sky without shame.

A vast calm wrapped the jewelled casket whose treasure lay immediately below me—the Forbidden City. There it dreamed with its pink walls glowing in the sunlight and its Imperial roofs glinting as the glaze of the tiles caught the rays. Proudly its deserted glory crowded within walls, massive as time, who answered the salute of the autumn's setting sun with fraternal mellowness. Beside it the mirror of the Pei Hai lay in its frame of heavy lotus leaves and drooping trees.

Gazing down at this greatness, and then away over the plain of harvested fields stretching out to merge into the blue gentleness of distance, shut in the silence of the past and the murmur of the present, there was a fulfilling peace. Regretful melancholy was often an enemy in China, but that evening a sense of triumph was supreme. Here was proof of man's possible achievement. This, the first of many successive reassurances which China gave me, showed that the aim to achieve harmony in this life was not beyond realisation.

The culture expressed in the Forbidden City breathed a spirit which could only have been produced by a way of thinking; rules of æsthetics could never have created so complete a sense of expanded peace. Just as their lives were ruled by the worship of the law-governed forces of Nature, so the principles of their architecture were formed in accordance with their astronomical ideas. Maybe these principles were recognised universally in the Ancient World, but it is the Chinese who have handed them down to posterity by faithful usage. As the abode of the Son of Heaven (the centre of life on earth), the Forbidden City was planned so as to reflect the celestial principles which group the constellations round the ruling star of the heavens, the Pole Star. Inspired by so vast and permanent a model it is, perhaps, not surprising that this example of traditional Chinese architecture should fill those confronted by it with a particular sense of awe.

I wandered often in the Forbidden City, always with the feeling that I ought not to be there, especially in the northern section which had been the private dwelling quarters. I was too crude, too alien to be passing through those little silent courts under the dark cypresses. Even the ghosts of those justly proud people were able to assure me that I was a barbarian.

Tiptoeing round exquisitely carved spirit-screens from one peeling court to another, peeping into low rooms of decaying loveliness, always my heart beat nervously for fear of surprising some secret. I was acutely oppressed by the concentrated atmosphere of vivid personalities who resented my intrusion. There was an intense and subtle heritage of human lives whose loves and sorrows, cruelties, refinements, deaths and births were woven into a pattern which I disturbed. Every detail, every motif of design, was a symbol of their philosophy, the symmetrical arrangement of the buildings represented it, and through the whole ran a rhythm in which I was a discord—even though I passed in a spirit of homage.

The atmosphere was different which bowed one's spirit with awe in the great courts and halls of the ceremonial southern section, where the public functions took place of the

autocrats who represented the oldest democracy of the world. This may sound paradoxical, but it is the achievement of this combination which gives, to my mind, the peculiar quality in Chinese Imperial associations. An inspiring philosophy lies behind the person of the Son of Heaven for the explanation of which, were I learned enough to give it fully, there is no place here¹; but it so permeates the Forbidden City that it seems essential to touch on that great system of government—of which perhaps the British constitution is a recognisable shadow.

The Emperor was regarded as the Enlightened Man who incarnated and connected together the Three Powers in the universe—Heaven, Earth and Man. One bearing so great a privilege and responsibility could only be chosen by Heaven, who spoke through the voices of these Three Powers. It was held that the Creator, the Ultimate Principle, spoke through the Emperor's appointment: the Earth spoke through the behaviour of Nature, who showed disapproval through droughts and storms, earthquakes or bad harvests: finally Man spoke, through the reaction of the people towards the successor whom the Emperor had chosen; for it is stated in the Great Announcement that "Heaven sees as my people see, Heaven hears as my people hear."

From the reign of the semi-legendary Emperor Yao (2357 B.C.) this rule was observed. Yao chose for his heir his Minister Shun, once a ploughman, as the man of the greatest integrity and wisdom, exhorting him thus: "Oh, thou, Shun! The celestial lineage rests in thy person. Faithfully hold to the golden mean. If the land should become lean, Heaven's bounties will for ever end towards you." And Shun chose Yü, the engineer who drained the Empire, charging him with the same words.

Later, showing the personal sense of responsibility for his people, T'ang said, "Oh, most August and Sovereign God, if I have sinned, let it not concern the country; if my country has sinned, let the sin rest on me." Of the Emperor Wu of Chow it was said, "By his magnanimity he won all, by his good faith he gained the people's confidence, by his diligence

¹ See *A Chinese Mirror*, Florence Ayscough.

he achieved his ends, and by his justice all were gratified."

Gradually it became a hereditary office, though not necessarily by primogeniture. Many Chinese rulers passed over their sons to choose a more qualified member of the Imperial clan—and always the people and his ministers had the right to criticise any of his actions. The Emperor was ruler of All-Below-the-Sky only so long as Heaven, through the approval of Earth and Man, found him worthy. There have been some of these Supreme Rulers who have retired in favour of their successors through the conviction of their own inadequacy, and others who have been got rid of by their ministers or the people for the same reason.

With his semi-divine duties, the Emperor was expected to remain above party politics and to rule through his ministers, appointed for their learning as displayed in the competitive Imperial examinations.

It was a great democracy founded on the ideal of enlightenment, not force. True, China celebrated military triumphs and her soldiers could fight with the desperation of fatalism, but the glory of victory never blinded her to the fact that the miseries of war and its creation of hate, with the attendant cankering of the spirits of men, was too great a price to pay for temporary gratification. The Chinese were realists who were wise enough, on the whole, to be pacifists. One of their poets writes:

"In savage attack they die fighting without arms, in locked embrace;

The riderless horses scream with terror, throwing their heads up to the sky.

Vultures and Kites tear the bowels of men with their beaks, And fly to hang them on the branches of dead trees.

Soldiers lying in the mud, in the grass, in the undergrowth; Helpless the General—Yes, incapable before this!

We have learnt that soldiers are evil tools,

But wise men have not accomplished the ending of strife, and still employ them."

Even the order of precedence in their social system showed their attitude—the scholar, the minister, the farmer, the merchant and, last, the soldier. Fighting was theirs, but they did not salve their consciences or blunt their perceptions by acclaiming its servants. A great man was never depicted as a conqueror and their ideal of an Emperor was a man of integrity, a scholar and poet, an agriculturalist and one whom they chose to obey for his just principles. One of the “black-haired men of the Middle Kingdom” would, doubtless, be shocked could he see the monuments to our great men, arrayed, if any pretext can be found, in military uniforms.

Their national hero, Confucius, was a moralist of wise precepts for personal virtue and reasonable government, whose sayings every well brought-up Chinese child started to learn by heart in infancy. What mellowness must be given to minds formed on such sayings as:

“The wise man is informed in what is right. The inferior man in what will pay.”

“Virtue never dwells alone; it always has neighbours.”

“He is under the influence of his passions, and how can he be possessed of strength of character?”

“It is only the very wisest and very stupidest who never change.”

“To govern means to guide aright. If you, sir, will lead the way aright, who will dare to deviate from the right?”

“When there is good government in the empire, the people do not even discuss it.”

“If you are sincere and truthful in what you say, and trustworthy and circumspect in what you do, then although you be in the land of the barbarians you will succeed with them. But if you are not sincere in what you say and untrustworthy in what you do, are you likely to succeed even in your own country?”

“If good men ruled the country for a 100 years, they could even tame the brutal and abolish capital punishment!”

“To be able everywhere one goes to carry five things into practice constitutes virtue. They are courtesy, magnanimity,

sincerity, earnestness and kindness. With kindness you will be well fitted to command others."

These are but a few gems which candidates had to know for the syllabus of the Imperial examinations. One wonders whether we barbarians might not become more civilised if they were included in our Civil Service and Diplomatic examinations. . . . ?

A brilliant November afternoon I wandered across the great court under the shadow of the mass of the Wu Mên, gate of the Sun at its Zenith, through which only the Emperor might pass. The court is so vast that records allege that at a celebration of victory, 15,000 troops and guests assembled, with still room for three times as many. Raised on its three terraces, Tai Ho Mên, Gate of Supreme Harmony, glowed under its double roofs. Below, the quiet curve of the Golden Water River, crossed by its five gleaming marble bridges—symbolic of the five virtues—broke the expanse of the court. The pink walls and Imperial yellow roofs glowed in the sunlight with dazzling clarity in the cold November afternoon.

Grass growing between the paving-stones broke the sound of my footsteps; I seemed like a phantom walking through the silence of the Past. Never have I felt smaller and more insignificant! And this was not because the halls were overwhelmingly big which enclosed the courtyard; the Chinese, like the Greeks, did not consider mere size impressive and, relatively, their buildings are not large, and only their pagodas are high. It is through their scales of proportion, the distribution of elaborate decoration and unbroken wall space, and the placing of the buildings in relation to each other and the area of ground contained in the whole design, that they achieve a harmony, grandeur and dignity, a sense of volume and fitness, whose psychological as well as optical reaction puts man in his true place when confronted by them.

I mounted the three-tiered terrace called the Dragon Pavement, between the 18 huge bronze incense-burners standing on the triple staircase, symbolic of sovereignty and repre-

senting the 18 provinces of Manchu times, and entered the great Hall of Supreme Harmony. Here the Emperors had received the congratulations of their Court on important occasions such as New Year's Day, the Imperial birthday and the announcement of victories. Here had sat the Emperor on his throne, clouds of incense veiling him from the unworthy gazes of the assembly. Round him had stood 50 high-rank Manchu attendants; below on the steps stood the Princes and nobility. In the courtyard were assembled officials of the Nine Grades according to their rank, in 18 double rows; the military stood on the west and Civil officials on the east, all clothed in gorgeous ceremonial dress. As the Emperor took his seat they made, as one man, the Nine Prostrations.

Across another stretch of pavement behind this great hall of pillars is the small Heart of Harmony Hall; small, maybe, but of supreme importance. Here the Emperor, as the father and example of the people, observed the rites of agriculture. In the Spring, Season of Clear Brilliance, he made offerings to ancestors and spirits. Here he supervised the preparations for sowing and inspected agricultural implements, and here, in the autumn, samples of the harvest were brought for him to see. Over the Imperial chair hangs an inscription—"Sincerely hold fast the perfect mean." Beyond the Heart of Harmony Hall stands the great Hall of Protection of Harmony where, each year, the ten most able scholars to pass the Imperial examinations were received into the Government. These three halls form the nucleus of the ceremonial part of the city, among numerous lesser buildings, gates and adjuncts of fascinating interest and marvellous beauty of which I must not dally to speak.

The focus of the residential section lies in three buildings—the Emperor's Palace of Cloudless Heaven to the south, the Palace of Earthly Peace to the north which belonged to the Empress and, between them, the Hall of Fusion and Permeation of Heaven and Earth Vigorous and Productive, which symbolises the meeting between the Force of Heaven and the Force of Earth. And here I must digress to mention the basic principle of Chinese philosophy which the Emperor and Empress represented.

The Creator, the Ultimate Principle, the Law, works through the Positive Essence of Yang and the Negative Essence of Yin, the two sides of its eternal nature. Yang, the "active-expansive" side, represents the animate transforming male qualities of light and strength, typified by the sun. Yin, the "passive-intensive," embodies the inanimate, the uniting and consolidating female qualities, personified by the moon. It is the ceaseless rhythm of inter-operation between Yang and Yin through which the whole system of the universe operates, and which rules every detail of Creation, animate or inanimate. It is the perfect combination of those two Essences which produces Harmony.

As the Emperor was held to represent Yang so the Empress personified Yin. And here I cannot resist giving a chapter from the Record of Rites which defines their functions.

'For this reason it is said: "Hearken to the Son of Heaven in regard to the tenets for men; hearken to Her-who-is-equal-to-the-Sovereign in regard to the compliance required of women. The Son of Heaven directs the inherent principle of the Yang essence; She who is His equal regulates the Yin qualities. The Son of Heaven rules without; She who is His equal, directs all within." Thus opinions and tenets, working together with unresisting compliance, are perfected among the uninstructed people; without and within, harmony and accord obtain, and in the state and the homes the elements of reason and order prevail. This condition is called "superabundance of that virtue which springs directly from the heart."

'For this reason if the tenets of men are not cultivated the functions of the Yang essence will not evolve; their opposition will be manifested in the sky and the sun will suffer eclipse as though consumed by a living creature. If the compliance of women be not cultivated the Yin qualities will not develop; their opposition will be manifested in the sky and the moon will suffer eclipse. Hence when the sun vanishes the Son of Heaven puts on his plain robes of raw silk shining only with the natural lustre of crude threads, he rectifies the government of the six palace halls, and purifies the Yang essence in All-Below-the-Sky. When the moon is consumed,

She-who-is-equal-to-the-Sovereign, dresses in her plain robe of raw silk, regulates the administration of the six palace halls and purifies the Yin qualities in All-Below-the-Sky. Because the Son of Heaven is to His Consort as the sun is to the moon and as the Yang essence is to the Yin, so they are essential to each other and she perfects the whole.

‘The Son of Heaven in laying down the instructions for men fulfils the functions of a father. She-who-is-equal-to-the-Sovereign in teaching the compliance of women, treads the mother’s way: therefore, it is said that the Son of Heaven and His Consort are the father and mother of the people.

‘Hence for him who is the Heaven-appointed king they wear the sackcloth with the jagged edges—as for a father; and for the queen they wear the sackcloth with the even edges—as for a mother.’

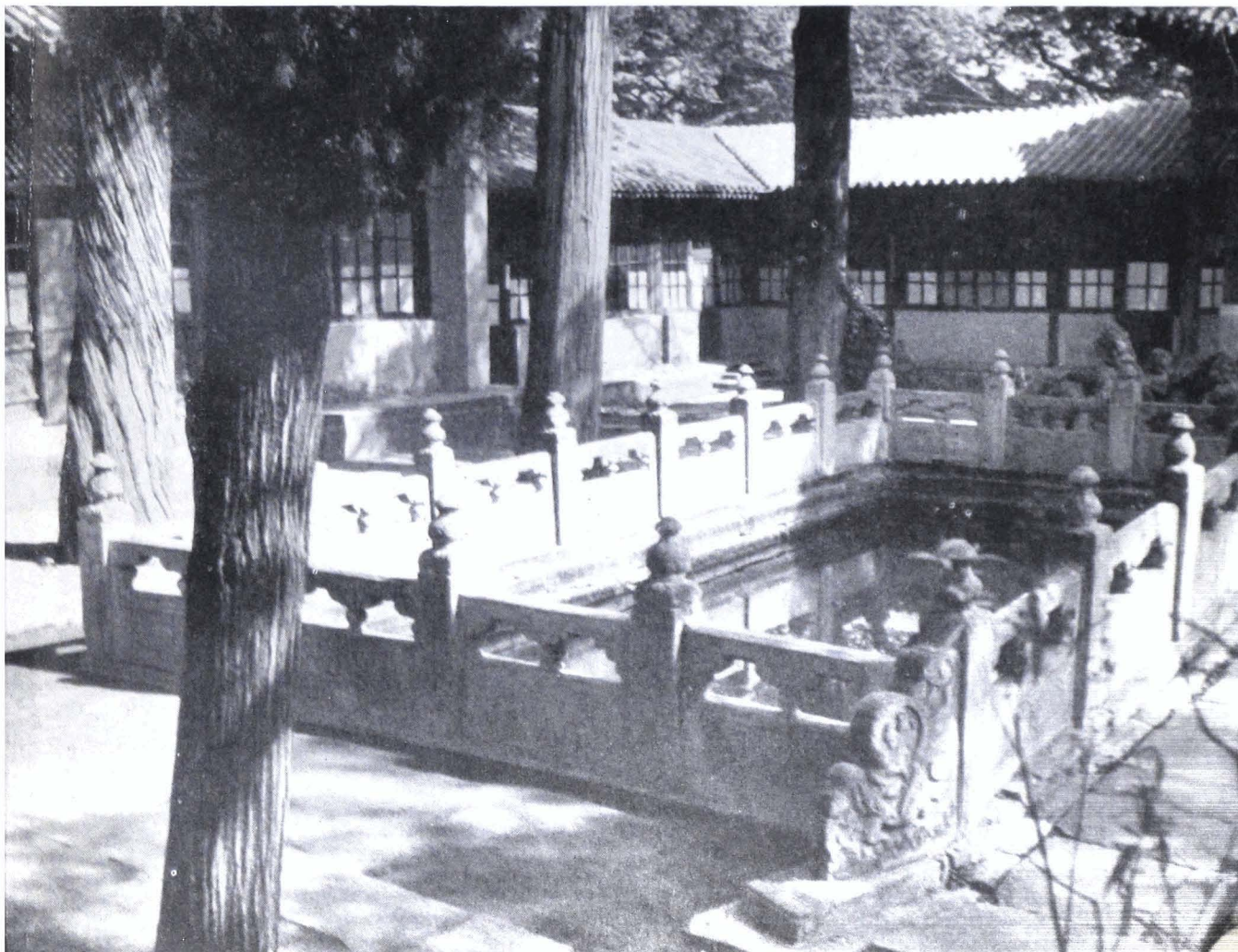
On and on I wandered through courts and pavilions, up white marble steps and between carved marble balustrades, across pavements, under wide eaves or the dazzling blue of the sky. Looking up suddenly, my heart sometimes missed a beat with the renewed shock of the beauty of form and increasing richness of colour as the sun slipped low over the swinging lines of the roofs.

The long shadows lay out into the great courtyard, and the cold stillness ate into the skin. It was time to go. I turned west through the Hsi Ho Mên, Gate of Military Powers, and passed the Hsien An Kung, Palace of Perfect Peace, which had been turned into a school for Tibetan and Turkish after Ch’ien Lung’s conquests had made a knowledge of these languages necessary. Beyond this was a small building said to be the bath-house built by Ch’ien Lung for K’o Fei, The Concubine from Afar, officially known as Hsiang Fei, Fragrant Concubine, because of the sweet aroma said to have exuded from her body since childhood.

She had been the wife of a Moslem chief, and the fame of her beauty, especially the softness of her skin, spread even so far as to the Court of Ch’ien Lung, who ordered his generals to secure her. She was brought to Peking after the suicide of her husband on his defeat by the Chinese. Ch’ien Lung was



(Left) *In the Forbidden City.*
(Below) *The peaceful court of a Buddhist Temple.*



captivated by her beauty, but neither kindness nor threats would persuade her to become his concubine. She threatened to slay first him and then herself rather than be unfaithful to the memory of her husband.

The Empress-Dowager disapproved of the infatuation of her son and, failing to persuade him to send Hsiang Fei home, strangled her, or forced her to hang herself, while the Emperor was worshipping at the Altar of Heaven in the Winter Solstice. With the respect due to his mother the Emperor mourned Hsiang Fei in silence, but she was buried with the honours of a concubine of the first rank.

For my last afternoon in Peking it was to the Forbidden City I went back—that material expression of the China of history. The Temple and Altar of Heaven are more sublimely beautiful, and perhaps Confucius' Temple is more lovable in the atmosphere of dignified peace which hangs in the branches of the ancient pine trees in its courts, but my last homage had to be to the expression of the practical application of Chinese philosophy, rather than at those shrines set up to a religion and the memory of a philosopher both, in their natures, timeless and universal.

Ta Tung and the Yun Kang Caves

THE YUN KANG caves contain some of the oldest Buddhist sculptures in China. The first colony of monks went there in 442 A.D., and probably rock carvings were begun then. But subsequent violent persecution of Buddhism destroyed its works, and it was not until about 460 A.D. that the sculptures were begun under the Northern Wei dynasty which we can see there to-day.

Keen to see these early carvings, I left Peking at 6.30 a.m. one October morning, with my rucksack and the letter of welcome from Miss Ball at the Moss Memorial Hospital at Ta Tung. The *Boy* forgot to call me till fifteen minutes before I had to start. I hurled on my clothes, stuffed my rucksack, gobbled down some food put in my room the night before, and hurtled into my ricksha. In the rush, alas! I left my camera behind.

The morning was cold and still. I felt gay to be off again. Kalgan, the chief market for Mongolian horses, sounded remote and romantic, some nine hours away by train north-west of Peking, and Ta Tung was another four hours beyond, almost at the end of the railway.

After leaving the station of the Suiyuan Line, the train passed for some way under the city walls. It was an interesting opportunity to realise the different periods of its building and repairs by the size of the bricks. Away over the serene plain the Western Hills glowed in the sun. The whole morning had a pastel delicacy.

In the train were a world-tour party of tourists, in charge of a courier I would not have trusted in or out of my sight. They treated him like a minor god whom they had created through their obeisance, and to whom the oldest, most hideous, and richest-looking of the ladies talked with girlish artifices. The young men were soft and childish, the girls hard and

empty. Their frowsy hair and the heavy make-up, plastered over seemingly unwashed faces, was revolting in the purity of the morning. They were going to the Great Wall—surely no more terrible army had ever invaded it!

After they had got out a Japanese gentleman, who was the only other foreigner on the train and obviously of some standing, asked me where I was going. I had noticed him from the start; he wore plus-fours and tweed coat almost as easily as an Englishman. On exchanging cards I saw he was the Japanese Commissioner of Customs for Manchukuo. He spoke English and we talked at length. Of course he wanted to know all about me—my age, my father's age and profession, where I had come from, where I was going to, why I was travelling. A youngish female wandering alone was met with the usual surprise and the assumption that it covered some tragedy, which always called out the most helpful kindness in the East. He lived at Shanhaikwan, and had one daughter at school in Japan who was very keen on ski-ing. As usual, at any approach towards political topics or public affairs he became evasive and laughed nervously.

I said I wanted to go to Jehol but it seemed difficult.

"That iss very easy, you can fly."

"Fly? I didn't know that was possible. Anyhow it would be much too expensive."

"No, it would be free."

"Free? I don't understand."

"Yes, free—a sseat in a military aeroplane. You see, I will write a card to your Military Attaché—I know him—and he will give you another card to our Military Attaché to ask him for a sseat for you in a Japanese military aeroplane."

I gasped; it seemed too easy to be true. I was sure there was a snag somewhere but took the card, with the promise to deliver it.

We suffered lunch together. The little dining-car with four tables was overheated and filthy, flies swarmed over the greasy tables on to our rice. Mr. Ando's heightened sensibilities over dirt were more offended than mine. He was concerned that I might be ill after it and insisted upon my using

his private chopsticks. On my remonstrating at his paying for my lunch he said, "No, I must pay. I stand for your father." From that day to this (I had a letter from him enclosing his photograph last week) he has remained my "Japanese Father."

We arrived at Kalgan, his destination, at four o'clock. The station was above the town, which lay barely among bare hills over which swooped the Great Wall. The afternoon sun sucked all colour from the huddled square houses. No trees, no green broke the peace of the wide aridity. With passive impersonality it lay there baked by summer heat, frozen and swept by winter winds.

I said good-bye to my "Japanese Father," little knowing I should see him again so soon. It had been an interesting experience to feel with a Japanese that peculiar comradeship which grows between foreigners meeting in a country which is mutually strange to them.

I got out for air and a stretch, and caught my breath; there on the platform stood a large party of Mongolians. Here, at last, were human personifications of this remote atmosphere so disturbingly exhilarating.

After the quiet blues and blacks of Chinese clothes I was startled by the brilliance of their long wadded coats and pieces of stuff tied round their heads with jaunty ends sticking out horizontally. Men and girls were dressed alike except for the head covering, in immensely thick leather boots with the toes slightly turned up and silver-studded belts into which they stuck their daggers. Both had their black hair braided into plaits, though that of a few men was cut shoulder length. I was puzzled often to make out which were men and which were women. Their big-boned well-covered faces were weathered, their slit eyes amber or greenish.

Headed by a grand family the horde of their retainers descended on the train. The grandest of them all was a young man a—chief?—who wore a heavy coral-coloured satin coat lined with fur, with wide cuffs turned back of apple-green silk. His belt was embossed with coral and turquoise set in rich silver-work, his dagger magnificent. With him were, perhaps,

his parents, a solid old lady and gnarled old man with a bald head, his young wife, and his or her younger sisters. She, I should think, was considered a beauty. Her broad face was smooth and her very long plaits wound with silver and coral ornaments. The tiny pekingese she fondled in her arms was incongruous with her pampered virility.

They got into a first-class compartment, their twenty-five or thirty retainers into the thirds in the rest of the carriage. They seemed an anachronism there; but these Mongolians sat in the train with the uttermost unconcern, and they dwarfed it. They used it because it happened to go the way they wished to travel, but they were independent of it. They would be equally unconcerned to travel by ox-cart, horse, camel, on foot—or, I believe, in an aeroplane. They were so self-contained that they appeared oblivious of their surroundings. Having for some time endeavoured to attain to such detachment I admired it immensely.

The curious mixture of wealth and luxury with the relatively barbaric freedom of strength gave an idea of the people of medieval Europe, who were still virile in their freedom from slavery to amenities. They used them if they came their way but were self-reliant enough to do just as well without them.

“Your pass?” Official or not, he was unsatisfied with my ticket and passport, but went away content with a visiting card. On the platform, as in all the stations we stopped at—and the day train stopped leisurely at them all—were extremely young Chinese sentries in shabby uniforms and canvas shoes below their putties, armed with large swords and fixed bayonets.

The scenery during that day’s journey appealed to me more than any I had ever seen, more through its atmosphere, perhaps, than purely for its beauty. Re-reading a letter home, it comes back to me vividly.

“It is so useless to try to describe it! But try to see a wide plain of buff harvested land, with groves of amber-yellow or green willow trees, and here and there white-stemmed poplars. A river-bed winds across it, like a dragon, with a slash of blue water down the middle. There are buff mud villages and

sometimes old cities with their long bastioned walls. One sees nothing of the city inside, only the peaceful mysterious wall. Beyond the plain rise mountains of the same buff, in every conceivable shape and formation—pearly in the dazzling sunshine under a sky the colour of pale delphiniums. There is no heavy tone of colouring except the dark blue or black of people's clothes, or the grey, brown, or black of horses and cows; sheep are dazzlingly white. Then as the day fades we run between the mountains, barren and dry, with the sheen of dried grass—the palest yellow celedon.

“And the shapes! Swinging rhythmic lines made up of piles and tiers and terraced horizontal formations. As the sun goes down their buff turns into blue and purple and pink, delicate as flowers under the sharpness of the sky. When the light fades it seems a strange dreamland in some forgotten or unknown star. The air is exhilarating and has the story in it of its passage from the great spaces of Mongolia.

“At the height of my wonder I hang out of the window, a voice behind me says, ‘Missus, chewing gum?’”

Miss Ball met me at the station. Coming forward under the dim light in her fox fur-lined Chinese gown, she welcomed and led me to the rickshas outside. The night was sharply cold under the great sky of stars. Half a mile along the road, silent with dust, the black bulk of the city wall loomed up from the plain.

The hospital compound lay outside the West Gate, where I was introduced to Dr. Ramsbottom, and shown to my room which belonged to the third member of the English staff, who was on night duty and slept in the hospital. It was very cold and bed was good after the simple supper. Next morning I found that Miss Ball, who was the matron, and Dr. Ramsbottom had been up nearly all night with a midwifery case.

After 7.15 breakfast I set off for the Yun Kang Caves, lying 10 miles north-east of the city. Sitting in a ricksha, dilapidated beyond faith in its survival, it was strange to think that two months ago to-day I had left London—months so packed

with new experience, while all the time buses had been rolling along Piccadilly, and at this moment the same people were dancing in the Berkeley, with only a slightly greater boredom to vary the monotony. . . .

The two coolies matched their ricksha. One pulling and the other pushing we progressed slowly through the city over a surface more like a rockery than a road. Slops thrown into the street turned the frozen dust to mud; occasionally a dip like a shell-hole made it necessary for me to walk. The depth of poverty was a revelation. The ramshackle one-storied shops, among which were a great number of second-hand and pawn shops, contained only the most primitive necessities of life. Men and women alike wore filthy sheepskin or padded coats and trousers, the latter looking particularly top-heavy balanced on their bound feet. Though there were people working, as they always are in China, there were many idle, and a lassitude hung over the whole place.

I learned that the population relied upon the coal-mines of Ta Tung for their support. Its mines produced some of the best coal in China and had a good market till the Japanese prohibited the circulation of Chinese coal, in order to flood the market with their own of very inferior quality imported into Tientsin. The best Ta Tung coal was only fetching 4s. per ton in the city, after being brought up out of deep mines flooded with water, and transported some 16 miles by ox-wagons or on the backs of camels, donkeys or coolies.

As we left the city gate a ragged policeman took down the registration number of the ricksha, and the teeming life was left behind its walls and bastions rising silently out of the great stretch of the plain glowing in the morning sunshine. I walked to get warm and because, as the coolies got hot and stripped off their clothes, I saw how emaciated and underfed they were. We passed strings of donkeys carrying coal in panniers, and coolies whose thin bodies were bent double under the weight of one huge black lump.

After three or four miles we came into low hills covered with dead grass. The sandy track wound along a valley beside a rocky river-course, now nearly dry. Suddenly round a corner

we came under a little temple perched up above the road. The exquisite pink walls seemed to grow out of the rock; above, the swinging lines of its grey roofs were ribbed with peacock blue tiles against the powder-blue sky. The entrance was guarded by a fine blue porcelain spirit screen with green and yellow five-clawed dragons coiling over it. In the middle of the court was a fluted white marble water tank, as delicate as a water lily. Such sophisticated art rising out of rugged nature has a significant quality of its own.

The old monk, with the withered yellow face of an opium-smoker, unlocked the shrine in which sat indifferent plaster figures touchingly draped in the ludicrous clothes offered to them. I bought some incense sticks and added them to the little forest of burnt ends bristling from the ash in the Chi'en Lung porcelain incense-burner, and gave the old priest 50 cents. He beamed all over—I hope they gave him beautiful dreams, I had no illusions that they would find their way into the temple treasury, and wondered how many pipes they would fill.

The valley widened. We passed through a village and then the track, which had wriggled its way up 100 or more feet above the river-bed, dropped again to the fording-place. Here I had the assurance that the day's expedition was justified. Both coolies took off their shoes to paddle across and, the one who owned them, his clotted socks. With the look and smell of their feet, the rare occurrence of a wash was a benefit to humanity.

At about 11.30 we came to the end of the valley, where the low round hills closed in again. Facing south, with the full dazzle of the sun shining on it, the cliff-face was riddled with the shadow-black entrances to shrines and dwellings. In the middle, built up against the cliff, the balconied façade of a temple with peacock blue tiled roofs rose above a group of other temple buildings round its base. A small village lay beyond it among groves of poplars—the only trees I had seen since reaching Ta Tung.

The next two hours were spent in climbing about into various little rooms cut in the sandstone (many lower ones are

now used as store-rooms for hay, etc.), and looking at the amazing tiers of figures of all sizes cut in niches over large areas of the cliff. There were huge standing Buddhas and rows of seated ones, the majority were headless owing to the good price tourists paid for heads in Peking. Though he was a nuisance it was a comfort to find that, now, a guardian kept his eye on visitors.

Frankly, my first reaction was of disappointment in the sculptures. So many of the figures were tragically mutilated, and some of the bigger ones and those in the rooms cut in the rock behind the temple façade were crudely restored and painted. But as one looked more carefully I realised that the figures could be divided into two groups. There were those which had the rigidity of copies with stiff poses and mechanical draperies, conveying a self-conscious effort to cut reflections of ideas out of stone. These belonged to the Central Asian stylised tradition, whose influence was brought by the Tartar Emperors of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The other group had the grace and individuality of the spontaneous work by Chinese sculptors of that period. A few of these smaller figures had not been beheaded, and their tranquil faces smiled with the same spiritual vitality as that which transformed their traditional poses and draperies into rhythmic movement. Under the spell of these it was difficult not to forget the material expression in the force of the idea behind it.

While I ate my sandwiches, looking down on the valley, I tried to imagine what this centre of pilgrimage had been like in the days of its glory. Hundreds of monks had filled the dry air with their chanting and incense; the tap-tap of sculptors' chisels had echoed off the cliff; drums had boomed from the temples and bells had tinkled; and away beyond, the smoke of fires had risen above the bustle of pilgrims. Now, although it lay silent and dead under the baking sun, even vandalism and neglect could not destroy the heritage of countless spirits' adoration, and a mysterious tranquillity emanated from the ravaged cliffs crumbling in their silence.

A group of curious spectators sat round me, and I derived a childish pleasure (which remained with me always among

people who could not understand) in saying the most outrageously rude things to them in English. "You are a perfect nuisance, aren't you!" He smiled and repeated, "'Sscen'nt you." "You smell frightful; I can't think why you can't wash when there's a river so close. Look at the disgusting dirt caked into the pores of your skin! You are a revolting specimen of humanity and there's no reason why you should come and sit so close to me to watch me eat my egg." He nodded and smiled delightedly.

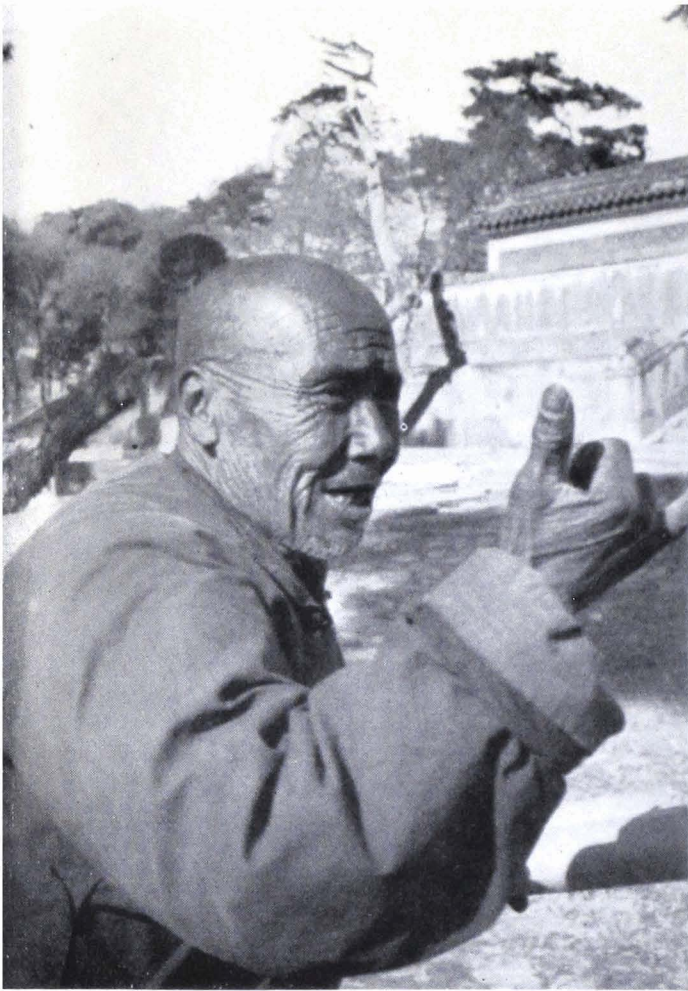
It was wise to allow plenty of time to be back before sunset. I found the coolies asleep in the sun against the wall of a house. The inmates were hospitable people who led me in with smiles to sit on the earthen *kang* while they made me tea. I was very miserable not to be able to talk to them.

On the way back I realised that the Chinese must have taken the scheme of colouring for their carpets from the northern landscape in winter—the yellow-buff tinged with the green of withered grass, from the hills; the pale blue of the sky and water; the brown of the rocks; the dark blue of coolie clothes.

We arrived back in Ta Tung in good time and my coolies took me round to see something of the city. It has been important since 200 B.C., as the first city that the trade route across Central Asia came to in China. For a hundred years it was the capital city of the Wei Dynasty before it was moved to Loyang. The walls are still kept in good preservation against attackers, and huge shaggy dromedaries still pad along the road from the north-west. In the streets there are many elaborate Pai Lou¹, now in a sadly dilapidated condition, and some of the old shops have elaborately carved fronts. The two chief temples, still in active use, gave the impression of being more magnificent than any I had seen even in Peking or the Western Hills.

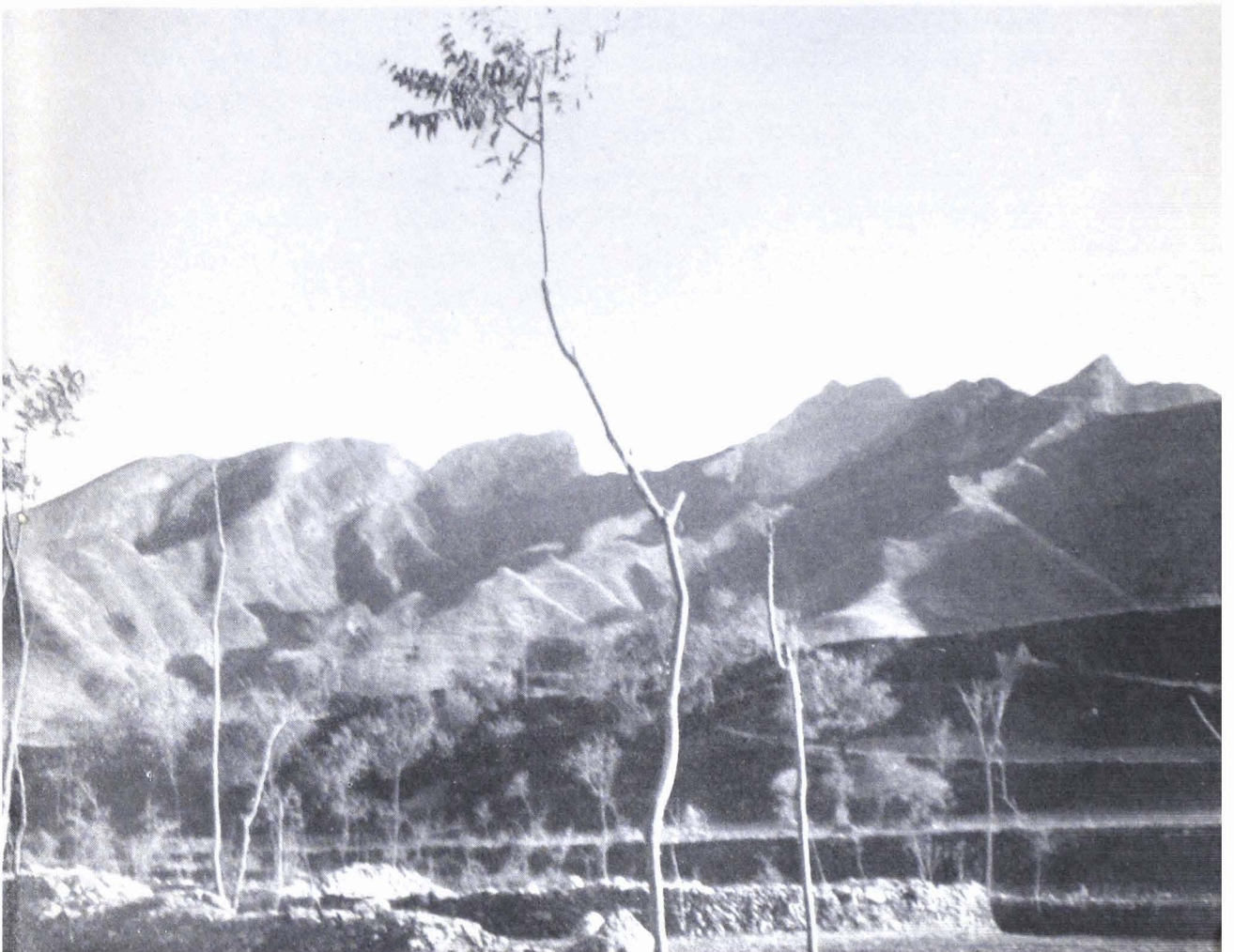
The main one, more or less in the middle of the city, rose above the bustle of mean streets on a terraced mound. Under Mongolian influence it faced east instead of south, as the Chinese orientate their temples and houses. Large bronze

¹ Memorial Arches.



(Left) *Opium-smoking monk. His raised thumb means "Very good—I 70 years old."*

(Below) *Evening light in the Western hills.*



incense-burners stood on the terraces, and the front of the temple was richly carved and painted. Inside, the sombre richness and almost bewildering wealth of decoration was most impressive. Immense red lacquered pillars supported the painted ceiling, the walls were entirely covered with coloured and gilded frescoes. Five great figures brooded above the main altar amid scores of smaller ones. Twenty life-sized "guardians" lined the walls in ferocious attitudes, and though none of the figures were particularly good the gorgeousness of the whole ensemble was almost overpowering.

Filled with awe I came out again on to the terrace. The sun had slipped over the far horizon; night was creeping up the eastern sky; one or two stars already twinkled in the pale clarity. The dry keenness of the air was so strong that all weight seemed taken out of my body.

I went to see the enormous glazed spirit screen, over 60 feet long and quite 15 feet high—longer than the one in Peking—which stands isolated from the hovels round it by a carved marble balustrade. Green yellow and purple Imperial five-clawed dragons writhed over it in virile turbulence. Giving me hardly time to take in its magnificence, the old caretaker insisted on leading me into his one room, where he fanned up the charcoal fire and made tea. I had misgivings about his cup—but hoped that the good spirit of hospitality destroyed the bad ones of microbes.

The clock ticked on the mantelpiece among photographs of English family groups outside English suburban houses. Dr. Ramsbottom had been called out to a woman dying of consumption; Miss Ball and I sat alone talking.

She had lived in Ta Tung for twelve years, and had been there all through the siege of the city in 1926. The hospital, being outside the walls, had had the defending army in its compound and machine-guns along the top of the walls above it. When they had retreated inside the gates, the hospital lay between the two armies. Miss Ball was the only foreigner left after the others took refuge in the Swedish Mission. She remained because the hospital was full of wounded soldiers from both

sides as well as ordinary patients, whom she had promised not to leave. For six weeks they had only one piece of bread a day, and after two months, when the wells had been polluted, the electric light and telephone cables cut, and rats were attacking the patients, they were forced to evacuate and to take refuge in the French Mission. By night they carried stretcher cases the one and a half miles between the lines. Some months later, when she could return, she found the hospital looted of everything.

She told me about the people of Ta Tung. They are different from other districts, with a different dialect and particularly low morale, owing to its having been a Convict Settlement at one time. The different Missions were beginning to make a slight headway to raise the standard when the district had been invaded by Japanese influence. Here, as elsewhere in northern China, they had set about to lower the resistance of the population through the encouragement of drug taking. A great number of clubs had been started where cigarettes were offered free for three evenings. These were heavily doped with morphine. After three nights at the club their victims were pretty certain to return. Opium smoking was also encouraged.

The standard of living is even lower than most places in China. The majority live on 35 cents per week (about 4*d.*). They eat oatmeal and vegetables, it being necessary to sell their chickens and eggs for clothes. Occasionally the men have meat, but never the women.

The condition of the women is pitiful. The best of everything is given first to the men, then to the boys, then to the girl children, while the women subsist on what is left. The disastrous effects of underfeeding, combined with lack of fresh air and exercise owing to the binding of their feet, result in consumption and every sort of disease and malformation. These conditions cause unrecountable horrors in childbirth. Babies are often born with rickets and out of ten children only one or two may live.

The hospital is the only one within a radius of 300 miles and has to fight against strong opposition. If a death occurs in it, it takes some time to overcome the effect on public

opinion. Dead children, whom they are accused of killing, are often left outside their gates. To be forced to touch a dead body is one of the greatest insults possible in China.

At this point a message came asking for help with a midwifery case. It was 10.30 p.m. and she had been up most of the night before, but Miss Ball put on her Chinese gown, took her bag, and started in her ricksha through the freezing night across the city to the North Gate.

On Sunday morning at the Chinese service in the bleak chapel room I saw the Chinese staff, young men and girl nurses in white overalls. I was also introduced to one of the two Chinese doctors and the Chinese anæsthetist-chemist. The Superintendent of the Hospital, Dr. Li, was away till the evening. In Mission hospitals a Chinese doctor is at the head over European ones. Not all the nurses are Christians but an increasing number become so. Here they did not proselytise, though a service was held in the wards. Their compassion did not ask for souls in return, but the number was slowly increasing of those who were converted to Christianity through seeing the lives of the hospital staff.

A terribly ill woman was brought in a ricksha by her husband. Her five-months baby was born six minutes later. It could not live; she was septic and her temperature soared. Her husband sat sobbing in the waiting-room.

After lunch another midwifery call. I wandered out to walk along the walls. The afternoon was stormy and one after another rainbows spanned the sky, the only colour in the sullen greyness of the dust-laden wind. It fitted with my mood.

Birth and death; ceaseless fighting against starvation and disease and the ruthlessness of the elements and invading enemies. Here it went on stark and naked, with no veiling to dim the knowledge of it or allow delicate sensibilities to avoid the pain of knowledge. Here no silken curtains could be drawn against the long agony and sudden tragedies. How could it be otherwise than that human life was held cheap? How can we, with our lives padded against grim realities, criticise it with humanitarian superiority? Or if we do criticise it, what

are we doing behind the silken curtains? Why are we not fighting the agony of our own dark slums, or here to help a few lives struggling in this ocean of misery? Why are we not rainbows in the sullen greyness of the dust-laden world?

Before I left that evening on the night train I heard of the situation arising from the case they had attended that afternoon. The heart of the baby was on the right side; it was born dead. On his return home when the father, who was a high-rank military officer, found his dead son, he stormed up to the hospital accusing them of killing the child. He threatened, and had power to shut the hospital. They were awaiting anxiously the return of Dr. Li to tackle the situation.

Jehol

ON MY return to Peking I visited the British Military Attaché with Mr. Ando's card and request.

"I'm afraid that it is impossible! You see I can hardly ask for a seat in an aeroplane which we do not recognise as having a right to be here."

Ah! that was the snag.

"Well, I must find another way of getting to Jehol. What do you suggest?"

"I don't really know. But why on earth do you want to go there? Why not go to Shanghai instead?"

One cannot explain to someone who can ask such a question. I promised to inform him when I had found other means of getting to Jehol.

I had not then made the acquaintance of the efficient China Travel Service. I recommend it to all travellers in China. It was no use being in a hurry in their offices, but they proved to be entirely reliable in all dealings I had with them. It is a Chinese organisation of six years' standing, with its head office in Hankow.

After various inquiries it transpired that a Japanese bus went up to Jehol three times a week, taking nominally twelve hours. That would mean, probably, thirty-six or forty-eight hours: all the more fun on the road. I went back to tell the British Embassy.

"I don't think that we can let you go by road."

He rang a bell telling the anæmic clerk, whose home was surely in Surbiton, to ask Major H—— to come down.

"Do you think we can let this young lady go to Jehol by road?"

The Major belonged to the Intelligence Staff.

"No, I think certainly not."

"Well, we'll just go up to the Consul and ask him."

"Can I go by train?"

"I don't know that the line goes as far as Jehol. But come and see the Consul."

This poor little man had obviously forgotten to take his Kruchens that morning.

"No, of course you can't go by road. I don't wish you to go at all."

The unfortunate interview came to an end with my promise to go by train—if there was one.

His last words were, pointing to a black tin box:

"You see that box?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's what the things of Gareth Jones came back in after he'd been shot going to Jehol. Yours will probably come back in a box like that!"

I had no more dealings with British Consuls during the rest of my journey.

Failing to discover any information about the railway beyond Shanhaikwan I thought suddenly of my "Japanese Father." That night an appealing letter was posted to him from his "English daughter."

"Come as soon as possible.—Ando." That telegram settled it all and I went out to buy some films and my second-class ticket for the night train to Shanhaikwan, costing 17 dollars (£1). I telephoned to the British Embassy and Lin to say that I was going. He appeared at 6.30 p.m. to escort me to the station, and while I packed my rucksack expressed his anxiety, in very different terms from my own countryman, over my peregrination to Jehol, or Char Har as the Chinese call it.

"You must be very care. You young girl. You no drink wine till you come back. You go with Japanese man; Japanese sometime very bad. Outside they look nicely, but he have no good heart. You know, Japanese small men; we say, must be very care when we do business with small men. Big men do—(he made a slow open gesture), small do—(here he made a jerky fussy one). You be very care. I your old brother. I like you write me in Char Har."

As we jogged along in the ricksha to the station I wondered

what would have happened before I jogged back from it. Mr. Ando would meet me in Shanhaikwan to-morrow morning, *après ça, le déluge!* I knew nothing, and the ominous Consular warnings echoed through that unknown region.

After settling me into my carriage and repeating his warnings Lin said, looking at some soldiers on the platform:

"I think I go now. Perhaps these soldiers say something bad of me."

It was a joy to be in a train again. So far trains had been the comfortably familiar link between the present and the unknown. It was a beautifully clean compartment with a carpet and polished spittoon. At midnight a Chinese couple got in at Tientsin and I felt very embarrassed to have to emerge, very *déshabillé*, from under my rug to clear my belongings off the lower bunk. When the Chinese lady took off her gown she had a neat white coat and blue satin trousers underneath.

It was pouring with rain at Shanhaikwan where Mr. Ando met me at 7 a.m. accompanied by Mr. Coppin, the Foreign Inspector of Manchukuo Railways. In his house, while we breakfasted off a partridge, I learned that I was to stay the night with Mr. Ando and his wife and continue the journey next day. After breakfast we set out to see the town, accompanied by Mr. Coppin's little Japanese housekeeper who had set her heart on being photographed with me. When we arrived at the photographer's shop I peeled off a dripping mackintosh to pose under a full moon with my arm round her shoulders.

Then we went into the school. The rooms were light and airy, the walls covered with extremely good drawings done by the children, and everywhere were vases of flowers beautifully arranged. The teachers wore European dress and the children sat at desks. In a class for children of six and seven we listened to an arithmetic lesson, in which they used the Arabic numerical system; the children did mental sums and said their tables very much better than most of their British contemporaries. Dark bright eyes give the impression of a greater intelligence than the fairness of English children.

We splashed on our way through mud under the streaming

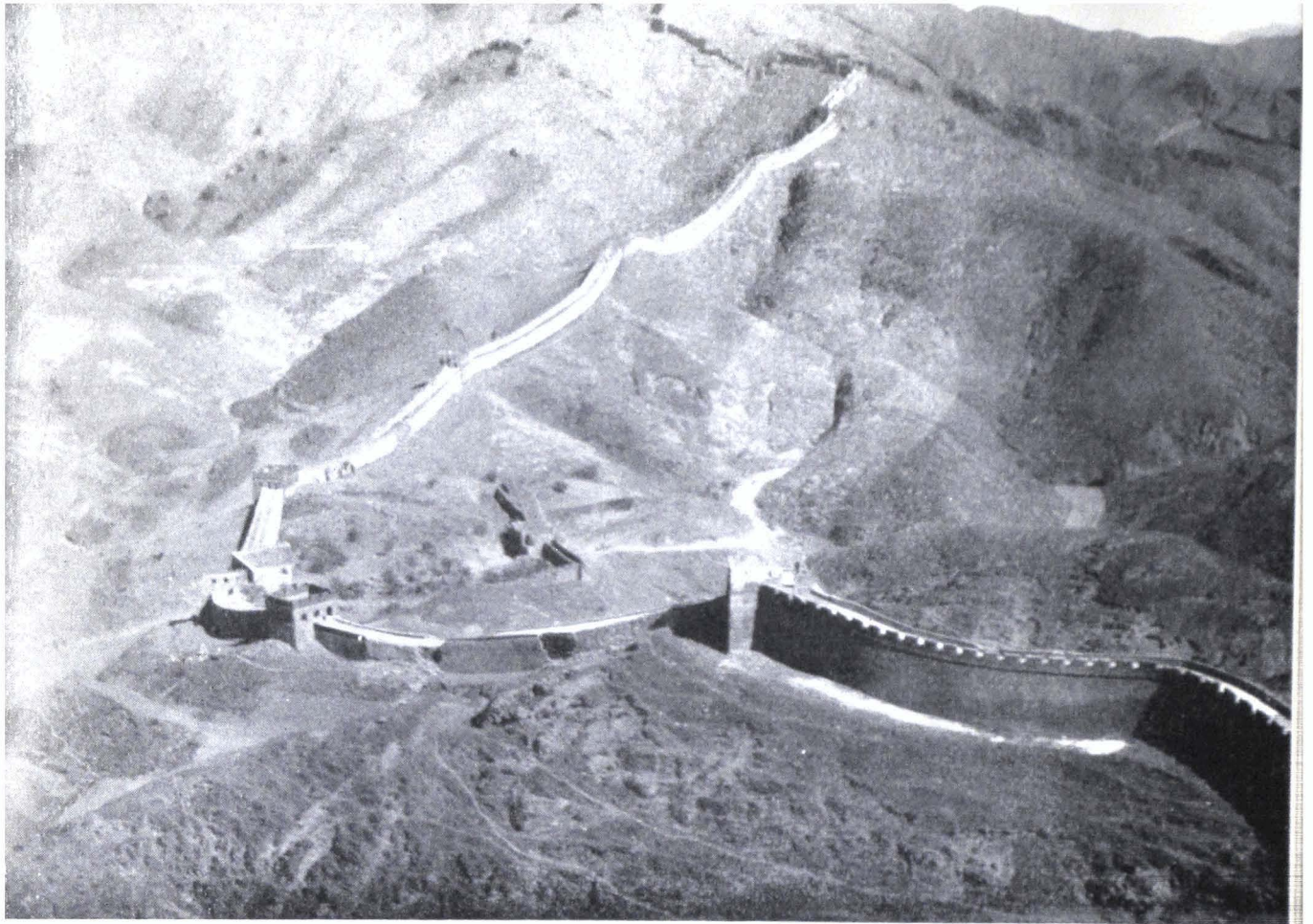
thatches of the shops, to the great pile of the city wall which rose in magnificent decaying dignity above the huddled hovels of the city. Up there behind its battlements Mr. Coppin gave me a vivid account of the sieges and battles he had known to rage through the tortuous alleys of the city below us. His story was as bewilderingly complicated as the events he recounted. Intrigues, massacres, burning and looting, delays and personal considerations of Chinese generals—it seemed incredible that it had all happened so recently as 1930. What a history this town has had, holding the last gate of the Great Wall of China!

I looked across the plain where this mighty embankment ran into the sea. It lay like a monster sea serpent which had left the ocean fastness to wriggle its way up and down over the mountains and valleys for 1400 miles inland. A tenseness lies in all boundary lines—the romance of a beginning and ending, a parting and uniting, suppressed antagonism, the passive expression of activity and aggression. Added to all this drama, the Great Wall of China has that of its 2,100 years and position, shutting off the barbaric wastes of Mongolia from the ancient order of China. It is said to be the longest graveyard in the world; I heard one million given as the number of deaths among the captives and forced labour used for its building.

After well over an hour we came down on the other side of the city wall.

“Now you are in Manchukuo. Would you like to visit Colonel Yaganihara? He is the chief of the Manchukuo Border Police.”

Of course I wanted to, though my drowned-rat condition seemed rather unsuitable for paying calls. We splashed through miniature lakes lying in the pot-holes of the roads till Mr. Coppin turned through a door in a wall guarded by armed police. Across the muddy courtyard we were met by another policeman who saluted briskly and led us along a passage, with a wet stone floor and peeling plaster walls, into the audience chamber of the great man. A red plush sofa and two arm-chairs focused round a three-legged table covered with a white



The Great Wall of China.

cotton d'oyley, the four fumed-oak chairs, which completed the set, were placed against the plaster walls hung with photographs of various officials and reviews.

The policeman draped our sodden mackintoshes on the umbrella stand in the corner, and most thoughtfully produced a bath towel with which I tried to lessen the stream of water running down my neck from my drenched hair. My hands were blotchily brown with dye from my gloves, and it was very chilly sitting on the plush sofa with the water dripping off the edge of my skirt, to replenish the reservoir in my shoes. But the warmth of the welcome our host gave us counter-balanced the damp cold of the air, and half a glass of neat raw whisky stilled the chattering of my teeth. Nor did his hospitality stop there, but was carried on in the form of a large cigar which I did not like to hurt his feelings by refusing. Luckily I thought of saying that I would like to take it home to my father, who would enjoy it even more than I should.

The Colonel was a most delightful man, different from any other Japanese official I had met; he was hearty and vigorous and his laugh roared out from under his walrus moustache with spontaneous enjoyment. His uniform looked over-worked—an accessory to his job, instead of his job being the excuse for a uniform, which is the impression given by most Japanese officials. His zest in life, his humour and largeness of heart set him apart from the usual Japanese stilted self-consciousness. I was very sorry we could not accept his invitation to lunch, but delighted to have the signed photograph of himself with which he presented me. I longed to ask questions about the situation there but, being a guest and a nobody, I could not show the rudeness of bringing up such painful subjects.

It was a privilege to stay in a Japanese home and more thoughtful and imaginative hosts could not be found than my "Japanese Father" and his wife. Their newly built house, beyond the walls of the city, was in European style outside but, though there were chairs in the drawing-room, the rest of it was properly Japanese. Among the row of slippers by the front

door was a new pair for me, several sizes larger than theirs! When I went up to bed—I think they had given me their room as the best in the house—I found they had put two mattresses for my *futon* to mitigate the absence of a bedstead, and also exchanged the little hard round Japanese pillow for a large soft European one. On the floor beside my *futon* was a reading-lamp, several magazines in English, cigarettes, matches and ash tray. They offered me a *kimono* and to brush my coat and skirt. I have never met more consideration during any visit.

The *skiaki* party that evening was boisterous. We sat on our heels round the low table in the middle of which the *skiaki* was cooked on a new *skiaki* apparatus. It caused great trouble because no one knew quite how to work it and it insisted upon going out, filling the room with stinking oil fumes. I was convinced we should pump it, but Mr. Ando was sure it would explode. Eventually we got so hungry and had drunk so much *saki* that we did pump it. It did not explode, and our chopsticks were soon picking delicious bits of chicken, bacon or vegetables from the central dish.

Saki had a liberating effect on Irish enthusiasm and Mr. Coppin gave the toast of Manchukuo a great many times, to the growing annoyance of Mr. Woeller, a young Norwegian who, as Director of the Chinese Customs in Shanhaikwan, had his life made intolerable by the shameless smuggling of goods into China by Japanese subjects from Manchukuo. The situation was only saved by the ending of the meal with fruit, crystallized at home, and the gramophone, to which we danced in our stocking-feet on the bamboo matting. Mr. and Mrs. Ando looked charming fox-trotting round in their *kimonos*.

Next morning Mr. Ando and I had breakfast together, taking coffee first in the drawing-room before going into the dining-room to sit on the floor for our eggs and fruit. He offered me a ride on his large Australian horse, one of the very few in Shanhaikwan. I deplored my lack of breeches, but he offered to lend me his pair of Russian leather ones. He being shorter than I made it very difficult for me to sit or bend my knees in them, but otherwise they were admirable.

My colossal mount had a mouth like iron, but I was assured

he was a very good horse except for the weakness of his front legs, which haunted me when we thundered over hard uneven ground in gallops which my arms were not strong enough to control. I felt a sneaking envy of Messrs. Ando and Woeller on their reliable, if somewhat comic, little Chinese ponies.

It was a glorious mellow morning. The rain had cleared off and the sun dazzled down through an atmosphere of damp, making the colours deep and pearly. A range of mountains ran behind the city, which stood between them and the sea in a plain of cultivation and groves of white-stemmed poplars. These mountains were bare, glowing agate and plum-coloured, with cloud-shadows drifting over them in dark waves. The sky was blue—blue as only in North China—above the bare earth of the plain bleached white by the sunlight.

We rode 3 miles to Mr. Woeller's house by the sea. He admitted it was somewhat dangerous living alone (though he had his Alsatian and a revolver) and that it was not safe to return there after dark. A rich Chinese had been kidnapped opposite his gate in the afternoon only two days before.

We got on to the wall from the shore and rode back along the top of it, with the possibility of going down its north side into Manchukuo or the south side into China. I came up against one of the complications of life in a frontier city where feeling runs high and the sense of proportion is lost. Mr. Woeller, as an official in Chinese service, was not allowed to enter Manchukuo, and only when he rode under the auspices of Mr. Ando could he descend from the wall by the north embankment, or leave the north gate of the city. He might not return to his house by the road because it ran north of the wall and had, therefore, to use the trolley-way which lay to the south.

In the distance we passed a straggling army of men going south with loads on their backs. I asked Mr. Woeller who they were. Smugglers carrying silk, salt and silver. How was it they could go openly like that when he, as Chinese Customs Commissioner, knew who they were? He explained that as they were Japanese subjects with extra-territorial protection the Chinese were impotent to stop them. Once or twice when the

Chinese had rounded them up and some had been injured in the succeeding fight, the result had been the demand from Tokyo for fantastic sums of compensation. He said that hundreds came through in the week, many of them shouting insults and derisive remarks through the Customs House windows as they passed.

He talked on, prophesying that the Japanese would take over the Northern Provinces—they were efficient and ruthless and the Chinese, with their lack of united government and weakened by corruption, could not take active steps against them. In his office he had to put Chinese from different provinces together, to prevent them joining in corrupt schemes. Graft was China's greatest weakness.

What host in the West would trouble to escort a guest for five hours of his or her journey, reaching the destination at 11 p.m.? But Mr. Ando did, and he bought my ticket and had my passport revisâed for Manchukuo, where a new visa is necessary for each entry.

I hoped that during the journey I might have the opportunity of understanding better the Japanese point of view of their aggressions into China or, at least, how they excused themselves. All I got was:

“We have no territorial ambition, we only want to help the Chinese people. We give them good advice, and when they do not take it we must insist for their good. We want friendly relations between us. They do not understand.”

Just what every invader has said! And as an English woman I certainly had no right to argue that enforced good advice could not bring friendship, or that the refusal of it gave any justification for invasion.

I was surprised that he should offer me the strong anti-Japanese *China Weekly Review* to read, in which, among various other articles on Japanese aggression, was an account of the encouragement of the drug traffic in Manchukuo. 7000 bodies had been collected in Mukden in one year. The victims of opium, morphine or heroin were thrown on to the ash heaps outside the East Gate of the city. There were 550 drug shops

in Mukden alone, owned by Japanese who veiled their ownership by putting in Chinese or Korean managers.

When we got out at Chenhsien station we found that during those few hours the winter had come down ; it comes suddenly like that in North China. Everything was frozen solid, and a wind like a knife howled through the station. After a long wait among Chinese huddled in their wadded winter coats, a dilapidated vehicle arrived which drove us to the Japanese hotel. We were led up into a large room with a semi-partition, and while we waited for tea I wondered curiously whether we were to share it—after all there is no segregation in their trains. But, in time, the little maid came in with the *futons*, placing one at each end of the room and drawing the shutters across the middle, through which we chatted as we got into bed.

At 5 a.m. Mr. Ando left for his train back. I felt Occidentally rude in not going to see him off, but it was so terribly cold and my train did not go for two hours. During that drive to the station, over frozen roads in an open and very weary carriage, I was thankful for my fur coat, made to measure for £8 in Peking. The air was grey with cold and the ruthless wind seemed a demon of torture as it swept round the few figures we passed with their hands thrust up their padded sleeves. It fluttered the rags of the hood, which would not go up, the harness and the driver, turning his rascally face blue; but it was beyond its power to affect the horse, long since numb to any suffering.

Chenhsien was a very desolate place. Ramshackle houses cropping up on the surface of a treeless waste in a formless cluster which calls itself a town always feels a temporary error. Only Chinese cities with their great walls growing out of the plain, on a scale which can hold their own in the space around them, give those cities a personality and a sense of fitness to be there. The barbed wire entanglements round Chenhsien station, and the sentry on the platform with his fixed bayonet, added to its sense of insecurity. The only representatives of perpetuity were the Chinese food venders, with charcoal fires and cooking pots at one end of their bamboo poles balanced by a tub of rice and food stuffs at the other. They set them-

selves in a row beside the train, and with their busy shouting and cooking gave the only warmth and life in that frozen morning.

Mr. Ando had given me a first-class ticket and I shared the long compartment with two or three Japanese officers. The second class was crammed with soldiers and the third with Chinese peasants. The train crawled along for twelve hours—instead of a whistle a bell was rung most of the way—till it reached the terminus at Ping-chuen.

First we passed over a plain stretching out to the horizon; a weird country, wild in the wind. Then we came to bare mountains gashed by deep ravines where clusters of mud houses melted into their sides among tiny shelves of cultivation scraped from among the rocks; and there were wide rivers with angry bouldered courses. Sometimes we passed an old city with its long walls and proud, though crumbling, gate-towers; sometimes lonely *stupas* and pagodas spoke of aristocratic days gone by.

We stopped often and long at tiny stations fortified with barbed wire, sand-bags and turreted walls with evil little black eyes which had winked fire—and would again. We passed several camouflaged armoured trains with machine guns bristling through their conning towers. There seemed an ominous expectancy in the air and it felt very remote in the beauty of this austere country, now streaming with unsheltered sunlight. I thought once or twice of the British Consul.

The No. 1 car-boy was a refined Chinese who hated working under the Japanese. He lent me his own piece of soap and cleaned my shoes, drew down the blind while I was asleep and brought me endless glasses of tea and hot wet towels. An unknown Japanese officer came from the other end of the train to give me chocolates and returned to bow a good-bye when he got out, why I do not know.

At Ping-chuen station I was met by Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, the missionaries with whom I was to stay the night. Our dilapidated garry fell off the road in the dark, but, the ditch being frozen, our combined efforts were able to haul it out.

In the living-room of their Chinese house they had supper waiting for me. Their welcome and pleasure was touching; sometimes for eight months or more they never see a European. I was burning with questions.

“Now tell me, please, what you feel about the Japanese being here? What are the conditions like?”

“Well, of course, the Chinese are our people, we love them and can't help feeling with them the loss of face. But we must admit—and some of the Chinese themselves do too—that living conditions are easier. You see, we had all suffered so much under warlords, particularly the last, Tong. He taxed the people for years, till they were all ruined and in debt. No one and nothing was safe, his soldiers were undisciplined and unpaid, so they looted the district and ill-used the people. And then so many of the farmers, having had to sell their farming tools and unable to buy seed, had turned into bandits. There was nowhere to turn for safety or justice. Now at least we are rid of Tong and his soldiers, and there is increasing order and security—the Chinese only want to be left in peace and they will run their lives without trouble to any one.”

“But what about the bandits? One still hears much about them.”

“Yes, it takes some time to get rid of them when things have been bad for so long. At present the farmers are worse off because the Japanese have ordered that no one may have arms, so they have nothing to protect themselves with. But Japanese armed patrols are gradually being increased and I expect, in time, and with returning prosperity, the trouble will stop.”

“But don't the people resent the Japanese?”

“Yes; but they are so poor, and you must remember what they suffered before. Most of them can only remember the horrors of one invading warlord after another. The entry of the Japanese here caused a great impression—though there was a terrible massacre of the retreating Chinese army by Japanese machine guns mowing down the rear composed of women and children, who always follow a Chinese army. But otherwise it was a revelation.”

“Why?”

“Well, they had only experienced the entry of unpaid Chinese private armies. We ourselves have experienced that twice and know what it is like.”

“Will you tell me? I want to understand.”

“Yes—but it is not a pleasant story. First the city was looted by the retreating soldiers. Then came the terror of the invading troops. Women threw themselves down wells or made themselves repulsive with dirt tangled into their hair and smeared over their faces; or they fled out into the country and often died of starvation and exposure. Soldiers were billeted forcibly on the people whom they tortured or shot for food, which was all but impossible to procure. We knew one case when a baby was thrown into the boiling cauldron because the soldiers said there was no other meat. When they left they often sold the bedding and clothes of their hosts. For a fortnight neither of us undressed and nights were broken by frequent knockings at the street door. I used to go across the courtyard to see who it was, and Mrs. Morgan never knew if I would come back.”

“How ghastly for you, Mrs. Morgan—and you had your baby then?”

“Yes, but we have always been kept safe—through God’s mercy and the Union Jack which we flew.”

“And how did the Japanese come in?”

“They came under perfect discipline. There was no looting, no rape (Japanese bring their own women) and rent was paid to civilians on whom soldiers were billeted and in whose houses they cooked their own food, which they paid for. There was order and comparative security and very soon work was started on the railway and roads. Commodities from the outside world began to come in—we even get fish here sometimes now. Mrs. Morgan could go out to do her own shopping as the Japanese ladies do. Before, it would have put her in the coolie class and been a terrible loss of face.”

“Well, from all you say one would think that the Japanese occupation is entirely satisfactory except for the loss of Chinese face.”

“It is in many ways, but we regret the whole moral atmosphere which they bring. The Chinese are *immoral* people, but the Japanese are *unmoral*. The Chinese can be ashamed of doing a thing, the Japanese have no sense of shame. Here, for instance, there have always been brothels which the Chinese visited secretly, and the Japanese tea-houses¹ or cafés, which are so much better run, bring no new vice—but there is a new attitude. Chinese men are beginning to go to them as a matter of course, with the same openness as the Japanese. The Japanese may think it is not ideal, but they have no instinctive feeling which makes them at least wish to cover it up. A Japanese said to me the other day ‘The English come into a country and build churches and teach Christianity; the Japanese build cafés.’ ”

The public bus left at 7 a.m., nominally. The Morgans gave me 6.15 a.m. breakfast and came out through the empty main street to see me off. Shop shutters were still up defending, a little longer, the warmth of the *kang* and human exhalations from the corrosive cold of the morning.

The bus was a lorry with a canvas cover and wooden benches inside. All but the two back seats were filled by Japanese military and girls belonging to them. I secured a seat on the end of the back bench. The girls chatted and giggled, a few more passengers arrived, shivering in the cold, with strange bundles and parcels which left less and less leg room. At last arrived the personage for whom the bus was evidently waiting—an extremely smart little Japanese officer with many stripes and decorations, whom a kowtowing party came to see off with much handshaking, saluting and hissing expressions of admiration.

In the bus he wished very much to have my outside seat which he assumed, with Japanese military arrogance, that I should give to him. I became an extremely stupid foreigner who understood nothing, and merely met his series of remarks, in Japanese of course, with smiles and nods and the diligent removal of my rucksack from the inside seat next to mine.

¹ Brothels.

We drove off through the town, out into the cultivated valley. Through the limited view of the windscreen the white road stretched on in front of us till it disappeared and re-appeared in zigzags up the distant hills. The sun rose over them, flooding the landscape and giving a sight of warmth far from being felt in the draughty chill of the bus interior. The Japanese girls drew their shawls tightly round them. Their sophisticated artificiality looked amazingly out of place. The make-up on their smooth faces was flawless; the draught which swirled round us, driving wisps of hair into my eyes, never stirred a strand of the black sleekness of their heads; the arrangement of their *kimonos* remained faultless under their shawls.

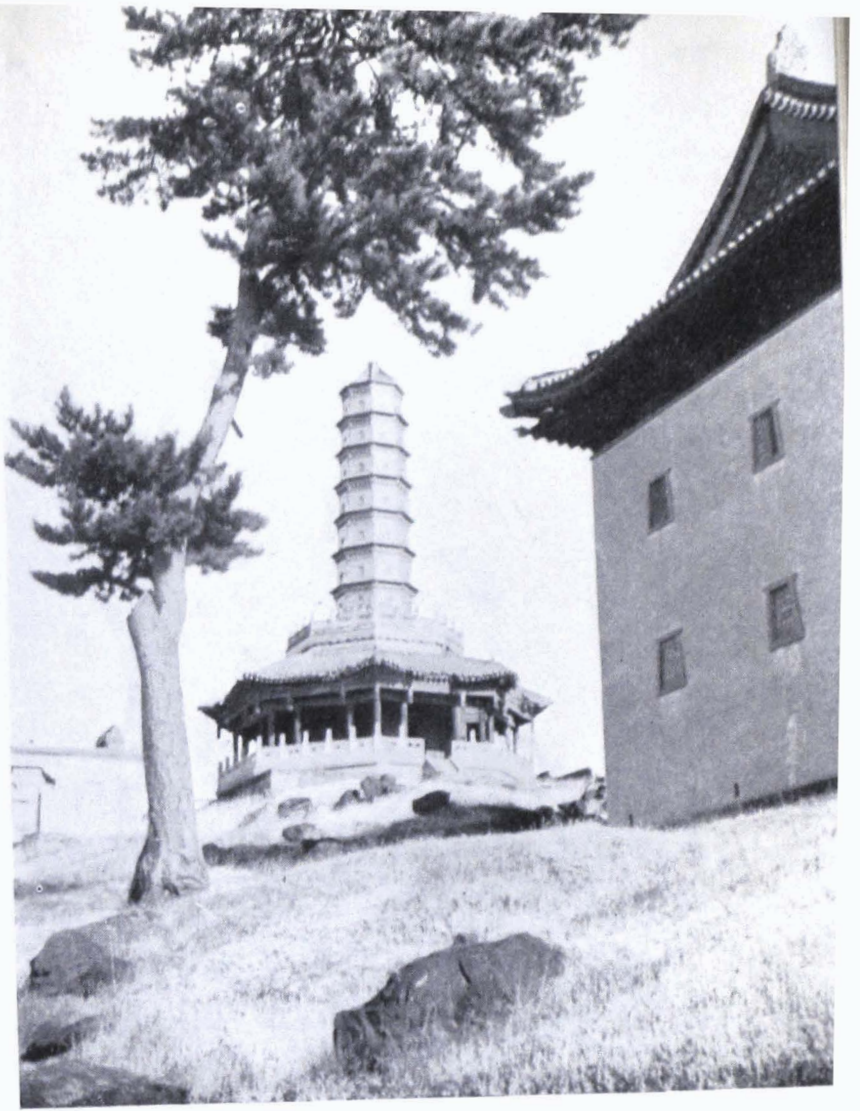
I realised I had never seen an untidy Japanese woman. Visions ran through my mind of the Japanese women I had seen under various circumstances—through journeys, when a breathless wind swept dust-clouds into the train and every one was dirty and perspiring except the Japanese ladies, who retained the exquisite neatness in which they had boarded the train hours before in the coolness of the morning; mothers dealing with their prolific families under trying conditions; housewives cooking or polishing floors; the Japanese lady being thrown from the rolling deck of the Korean boat into the barge below—all, all had preserved this immaculate perfection which looked out of place in any but surroundings as sophisticated and ordered as itself.

Was it an enviable quality to be aimed at, or a deplorable lack of imagination and sympathetic response? According to one's taste, I suppose. Probably a greater adaptability will develop as they build up an overseas empire. I heard that numbers of Japanese women living in China have adopted Chinese dress as more comfortable and practical. It would suit them better, certainly, than European style which shows off their long bodies and short bandy legs.

We began to climb through the hills, the bus bouncing like a kitten round precipitous corners on a sixth-class road. The little officer suddenly leant across me to be violently sick through the crack between the side of the bus and the tarpaulin

(Right) *A seven - tiered
Pagoda in Jehol.*

(Below) *An entrance gate
into the Potola at Jehol.*



covering. After he had lain across me for some time in the humiliated misery of car sickness, I decided to change places with him in case he missed the crack. As he took his place in my coveted seat the text came to my mind—"When I am weak then am I strong."

Over the hills we came down into the next wide valley, the ploughed fields lying bare in winter rest. Half-way we stopped in a small village and every one, except the Japanese girls, got out to stretch and warm themselves in the sunshine. Several Chinese children in dirt-faded black padded trousers ran up with baskets of hot chestnuts and hard-boiled eggs. While we of coarser clay munched our purchases from the baskets the Japanese girls concentrated on æsthetics. With their powder boxes and combs they found scope for their creative skill where the less sensitive eye had failed to recognise the need.

For four or five hours we travelled in noise and jolting through the shining peace of wide valleys and spurs of rounded hills sheened with dried grass. Suddenly we swept round a corner and there—almost blinding in the shock of its magnificent brilliance—rose El Maio Temple. There it glowed and sparkled, a majestic pile of blue and yellow and golden roofs under a cloudless sky. We were past it in a moment, but the suddenness of its unexpected beauty leaves that first sight of one of Jehol's glories an unforgettable moment.

Jehol prolonged the wonder and excitement of that moment for two and a half days; how can I possibly write about it! Sven Hedin has written a whole book on Jehol, read that for information which I am unqualified to give. I merely wandered from the Mission compound each day, where Mr. and Mrs. Duthie gave me the kindest hospitality, in a trance of elated ignorance, and only through this can I write of how I saw it.

Jehol had a peculiar quality which produced the most poignant emotions. It was partly its setting in the lonely silence of the bare hills surging back from the valley in austere delicacy, at once turbulent, static and rhythmic. It was partly

the entirely satisfying beauty of the buildings which rose with bold dignity in harmony and contrast to their setting. The sweep of the roofs repeated the swing of the hills, their walls the volume and solidity of mountain bases, and the brilliance of colour and wealth of subordinate detail made them gleam like jewels against the shadowy celadon of the hills. But most of all it was the psychological effect of the scale of magnificence and its remorseless ravage, of the irretrievable past and the inevitable present. Here the two lived together so vitally, shut away by the unchanging mountains.

Jehol was built by Ch'ien Lung in the seventeenth century as his summer capital. His palace was set in a park planted with pine trees, where lakes encouraged the shy deer to drink at sunset among the reflections of lacquer bridges, the nine-tiered pagoda and the surrounding high coral-coloured wall with the darkening line of the hills rippling above it. Within the radius of 2 or 3 miles many temples swung their peacock blue or Imperial yellow roofs, surmounted with knobs of shining gold leaf. In honour of the Dalai Lama, who came from Tibet to visit China, the Emperor built a smaller Chinese version of the Potola in Lhasa, in which the temples and shrines had roofs of flashing gold-leafed metal. No expense or artistry was spared by this Imperial patron to produce this gem of the last great period of creative China.

And now it lies desolate, ravaged by man and time. The trees are cut, the courts desolate where tiles drip from the roofs on to marble steps and balustrades tipped and cracked by roots of growing things. But though broken and looted, nothing can take away the pride and aristocratic grandeur which lie inherent in every part of its conception. The new Japanese city with its aerodrome, hospital, public baths, "cafés" and railway may invade its silence, Japanese soldiers people its palace, but even these irrepressible invaders are held at bay by the spirits of the autocrats who spent their power and people on the altar of cultural splendour.

With my note of introduction from Mr. Ando to the Commander of the garrison, I was allowed to walk in the park and was shown over the palace, which is now used as barracks.

The rooms round one court were stacked with the junk of two hundred years—but what junk! Many museums would gladly house it. My host, who was with me, had never seen it and knew no one who had.

In a room next to the silent pealing Throne Room were innumerable chests made of wood and hide, studded with nails. I asked the officer, detailed to be our guide, if I might look into them. Lifting the lid we were amazed to see a tumbled mass of satin and embroidered garments of every conceivable colour. I took out one which was fringed and ornamented with pieces of mirror and metal sequins.

“What on earth are these?”

Our guide answered:

“Thesse? I have not ssee before. Thesse the dress of Ch’ien Lung theatre.”

The theatrical wardrobe of the Ch’ien Lung’s court! What a rush of feeling they brought! Each of the chests was a Pandora’s box and, in lifting the lids, the spirits of their wearers seemed to fly out from the garments to throng that dim room. The silent court seemed to stir with footsteps passing back and forth.

It was all going on—it was still there—Ch’ien Lung the Son of Heaven was sitting in his Throne Room. To-night his players would strut and sing, perhaps down by the lake under the groves of whispering trees. The brilliance of the Court would be there, the poets and scholars, the eunuchs and servants, and the Emperor with the Empress surrounded by his concubines, exquisite in their silks and perfumes.

Yes! And there, stacked in the corner, were the Imperial umbrellas of office, 10 feet high, with their yellow satin coverings gleaming with embroideries.

“May I put this on?”

For a moment I became part of it—lived in that immortal past.

Mr. Ando had asked for a seat for me to return to Peking in a military aeroplane. I was told:

“Room for only two bodies.” Unfortunately two bodies

were already going, so I decided to go by the civil 'plane as far as Chenhsien.

It was a microscopic machine designed to carry three passengers. Being twice the length of most Japanese, my legs were a source of great inconvenience. A Japanese officer took his place behind me, the pilot crept into the cockpit and we roared into the sky.

Gradually an anxiety filled me at the increasing heat of the floor. Soon it was burning the soles of my feet, and I admit to real fear as I stared down at the turgid masses of dun mountains below us over which our shadow floated like some tiny insect. If there was something wrong with our one engine there was no vestige of a possible landing-place.

Perhaps the officer could bring the state of affairs to the notice of the pilot, who might do something to save us from bursting into flames at any moment. I turned round and, not knowing Japanese and the noise being deafening, touched the floor in the hope that he would understand. He hastily handed me a paper bag. Such devastation of my dramatic terrors left resignation as the only course. I sang lustily against the roar to keep up my spirits, deciding that anyway I had seen Jehol, and that death here and now was probably better than anywhere else in the future.

But we were not to die. We came down at an aerodrome where a third passenger got in who, also, soon began to feel his shoes being burned, at which he turned a tap labelled in Japanese characters, and the heat gradually subsided. After all that, it had only been the heating apparatus turned on too far.

At Chenhsien aerodrome I drew a picture of a train, and was forthwith allowed to share with the officer an antiquated car which took us to the station. At the booking office I said "Shanhaikwan" holding out two fingers, hoping to convey the wish for a second-class ticket. The price was so cheap, about four shillings for a six-hour journey, that I thought the second part of the ticket was a supplementary for the express, but later, on the guard returning continually to look for an



(Left) Jehol—Five memorial stupas on the roof of a building showing Tibetan influence.

(Below) The corners of each temple roof are protected from Evil Spirits and hung with a bell, rung by the wind.



occupant on the seat beside me, it dawned slowly that I had bought two tickets.

The officer got into the same carriage of the train, built as usual on Pullman lines. His curiosity about me was so acute that he seemed in physical agony. The guard knew no more English than he; other passengers were evidently asked to question me, with no success. Finally the armed sentry on the train was found to have learned English at school. Under orders from his senior officer his fixed bayonet was put on the rack and he settled down to his questionnaire. On and off it continued the whole journey of five hours.

With the usual result of a school-taught language he could only read and write it, and that to the minimum. He would write a practically unintelligible question and I would write the answer which appeared to fit it. During his long cogitations over it the officer sat in perspiring eagerness for the result. My name, age, country, town, my single state—which mystified and distressed them—and destination were all asked and answered. The news that I was going to India brought all the passengers of the train to look at me. Meanwhile my kind and curious patron loaded me with soya bean buns, sugared and salted nuts, chocolate and cigarettes, and there was an uproarious party of him, the sentry and one or two other passengers thought to be elite enough to be included.

My friends in Shanhaikwan gave me a great welcome, and I had dinner with them before catching the night train to Peking. They all came to see me off, including Colonel Yaganihara wearing a caped cloak like that of a nineteenth-century grandee.

I hope never again to be on a train packed with so many scoundrels—dining-car, corridor and carriages. They were Japanese citizens of various nationalities openly smuggling silver into China. The only Europeans on the train were two American naval officers; one with a golden beard was so drunk that the smugglers were infinitely preferable. I was thankful to be in a compartment with the only respectable passengers on the train, a Chinese woman and two men.

In the brilliant cold of a North China winter morning the

welcome of Peking seemed that of a mellow aged person, like the father of the prodigal son; London is the only other city which gives me the same feeling. To the rhythm of the ricksha coolie's running feet the pageant of that past week unrolled itself again above his bobbing head—and my belongings had not come back in a black tin box!

Two Days and Nights to Hankow

THE SEVEN precious weeks of Peking as my headquarters were at an end. Lin came to escort me to the station. As a parting present he brought me an old pale-blue silk gown which I had once admired, on the front of which he had had his name and mine embroidered in Chinese characters. He asked that he might have any odds and ends I was leaving behind and was delighted with an alarm clock, a tin of Bantam coffee and a bottle of dried-up nail polish. Looking round my little room he surmised as to who would occupy it next.

“Chinese people say ‘the temple is empty when the Buddha go away!’ You come back to China, Audrey. I hope you have good marry and when we see us again we both have baby. We do not know when we meet, you do not know when you meet your good man. I speak to my Buddha keep you safe in your big journey—no big wind on sea. You no forget your friend Big Lin want you come back to Peking.”

I had sent all my luggage on to Shanghai except my rucksack and attaché-case. These Lin carried from our rickshas to the train. The doors were shut. Standing on the platform below, Lin took my hand saying:

“Very bad you go away, Audrey, I have great sorry.”

With our limited language I could only express comfort to us both by saying:

“You know, Lin, not so very bad. You have good heart, I have good heart; we go away but we not forget—it is all right.”

He looked at me with the expression of faithfulness which lies in the eyes of friends for each other all over the world, and said:

“Yes, Audrey, maybe in ten years you come back, I very happy. I no forget.”

The train slid out of the station under the great city walls which enclosed so much that was precious that I felt a sense

of desolation. Peking has a magic personality which one loves with passion and leaves with despair. I thought "Purgatory must be like this—empty cold and the feeling that the most alive part of one is left behind." It was grey and rainy, clouds hid the reassuring beauty of the Western Hills and the train was damp and cold.

My fellow-passenger in the compartment offered me an orange—the first since Berlin. A broad kindly woman, she added to my general impression that the majority of Chinese women are less gracious, with an undefinably harder core than Chinese men; the result, perhaps, of centuries of harder life. She was the wife of a Chinese Consul and said she was "expecting baby" and that her husband was sending her to Shanghai because in Peking there were "bad rumours." These referred to the Japanese and, with difficulty, I allowed civility to rule my curiosity; she obviously did not wish to enlarge on the subject. As two women we resorted to our age-long refuge and talked "clothes." She enlightened me on up-to-date Chinese fashions—short sleeves, very tight collars four buttons high, and side slits to below the knee. A well-cut Chinese gown should have a narrow back. I was sure that mine, with its three buttons and long sleeves, looked as if it were bought off a peg in a provincial store.

Next morning, fortunately, I woke of my own accord at 5.20 a.m.; the *Boy* forgot to call me. After a scrimmage I got out at Tai-an station at 5.30. A porter from the hotel was on the chilly dark platform and led me through the garden to the foreign-styled Chinese hotel below the station.

Kindness was lavished on me the only guest and, after a wash, I was shown to the huge dining-room where innumerable tables lay nakedly under the staring darkness of the windows. Here, in the glare of electric light, a disconcerting breakfast appeared—meat and vegetables, two poached eggs and bacon, toast, marmalade and coffee! The *Boy* stood attentively over me all the time, looking so hurt when I had lapses of courage that I simply had to eat it all. At 6 a.m., feeling sick and after-night-journeyish, I set off with my three chair-bearers for Tai-Shan.

It was one of those imperceptible dawns, grey and silent, when one seems to see with increasing clarity without any more light filtering through the clouds. This was quite different country from the north, softer and more luxuriant; streams meandered among trees and vegetation, which grew with a sense of security; house roofs were more steeply vertical to carry away heavy rain. In harmony with their countryside the people were more suave, smaller built and with gentler voices.

Being pulled by a man in a ricksha had been bad enough at first, but swaying in a bamboo carrying-chair on the shoulders of two little men, half the size and volume of their burden, was unbearable, for their movement is felt so intimately under one's mountainous dead-weight. A third man takes turns in relieving the others, but a very heavy passenger has a man for each end of the two poles. When we had crossed the luscious valley by a muddy path and arrived at the foot of the mountain, which was veiled in cloud, I could bear it no longer and signed to them to put me down, much to their amazement. After all, a pilgrimage should cost some exertion—and already, with the first temples meditating under their sheltering pine trees, the indescribable atmosphere of a venerated shrine of faith sunk down on me, making this a real pilgrimage rather than only a sightseeing expedition.

T'ai Shan, the Great Mountain, is one of the holiest places of pilgrimage in China. A record of about 2200 B.C. first parts the veils of its mystery with an account of the visit of sacrifice of King Shun to the Honourable Hill of Generations, as it was already called even then. From that date onwards Chinese scholars have various links in the chain of faiths which drew pilgrims to the mountain.

It seems that the early religion of China was monotheistic, recognising one supreme God who ruled Heaven and Earth and all the lesser spirits. No representations of him were made and his worship was carried out by the head of the state, in solitude, at an altar under the open sky. In China traditional beliefs live on so often beside subsequent ones; the Altar of Heaven in Peking, where the Emperor worshipped at the

Summer and Winter Solstice alone under the sky and received the offerings of two kinds of silk, was the survival of the tenets of this early religion. Gradually there grew up the worship of ancestors and the lesser deities, who represented the different sides of the nature of the one all-powerful Spirit and were looked on as his servants, who carried out their own particular share in his work in the world for mankind. T'ai Shan was regarded as one of those lesser deities.

There are four sacred mountains for each point of the compass in the old China—which was accepted as the whole world. Hêng Shan—Crosswise Mountain, in Hunan, South; Hua Shan—Glorious and Flowery Mountain, in Shensi, West; Hêng Shan—Long Enduring Mountain, in Chihli, North; T'ai Shan—Great Mountain, in Shantung, East; and the fifth central point in Sung Shan—Lofty Mountain, in Honan.

T'ai Shan, belonging to the East or Yung quarter of the universe, in which the sun rises with his heat and light, is held to represent the life-giver. Rising above the surrounding country and gathering the clouds, upon whose water the life of man depends, in one of his many honorific titles "He who assembles the clouds and governs the rain" T'ai is shown to be expected to regulate the rainfall and, as protector, is relied on to curb earthquakes and floods.

As life proceeds from T'ai Shan so it must return to him again and the mountain is held to be a Gate to the Underworld of Shadows which lies beneath it. Thus it is a centre for the worship of those spirits which have passed on, the Ancestors. A little hill to the south of the main peak, Hao Li Shan, is the exact place where the spirits are supposed to return again into the mountain, and here innumerable memorial tablets testify to the faithful memory of families and villages for their members who have departed. The Buddhists teach that Tung Yü, the overlord of the ten most notorious hells, lives on T'ai Shan, ruling through his head chieftain Yen-Lo, whose terror can blanch the most hardened sinner. So T'ai Shan, ruling over the various sides of human life, has become the place of pilgrimage for those who wish to prolong it.

Through centuries new beliefs were added and complicated

ceremonies of worship were carried on. The two most famous sacrifices of T'ai Shan to Heaven and Earth, Fêng and Shan,¹ were inaugurated probably by the Han Emperor Wu in 110 B.C., but it was the Sung Emperor, Chên Tsung, who added, in 1008 A.D., another magnetic spirit to the pantheon of T'ai Shan, who has since drawn, perhaps, the greatest number of pilgrims; she is Pi Hia Yün Chün, the Goddess of the Coloured Clouds.

It is said that during his observances of Fêng and Shan the Emperor found a rough stone figure in a pool, of which he had a replica made in jade which he placed near the spot of its discovery. This lady was held to be the daughter of the Mountain Spirit, and the Emperor built, as her palace, a magnificent temple near the summit of the mountain. Among her many attendants are the goddess who protects eyesight and the goddess who gives children, to whom countless women come with their petitions.

As to other ancient holy places in China, Taoism and Buddhism came later to T'ai Shan, incorporating the existing spirits and adding their own, thus drawing their devotees too from all parts of China to the mountain, which had become to them, also, a fount of beneficence.

The birthplace and tomb of Confucius being within a hundred miles to the south, and his frequent visits made to the mountain with his disciples, completes the veneration of T'ai Shan whose sacred sites represent Chinese philosophy and faith since before recorded history, 4000 years ago.

A great stone causeway from the north gate of T'ai-an Ch'êng, the Walled City of Great Peace, runs across the plain, over the roots of the mountain, and climbs to the summit like a column of grey ivy. We joined this where it started up gently over the slopes, bordered by low thatched shops where pilgrims could buy food and incense, amulets, rubbings of inscriptions, maps of the mountain and dedicated stones to build into their houses, in all of which the beneficence of T'ai Shan could be carried away by the devout.

Peeping through the gateways in the mellow coral walls of some of the many temples, I found in all of them beautiful

¹ See *T'ai Shan, Monographie d'un Culte Chinois* by Chanvannes.

bronze incense-burners, pots of plants, and great peace. From some of the buildings came the murmur of voices, the booming of drums and tinkling bells and the damp air was filtered with incense fragrance. Sometimes a Buddhist priest crossed the court, his bare shaved head scarred with the initiation burns of incense sticks, or a Taoist with his top-not of hair sticking through the crown of his hat. In other temples whole families lived, literally, under the very nose of Amitabha Buddha, sleeping, eating, and children in filthy rags shouted below the tranquil seated figure. But even over this desecration and squalor peace yet brooded.

It was out of the pilgrim season and still early morning; a sleepy peace hung in the air under the branches of the old trees and through the banana groves, whispering their mild tale and sinking back into their dreams from which the breeze had disturbed them.

As the slopes became steeper fewer temples nestled among the trees to enhance the natural beauty with their graceful peacock or yellow roofs and quiet pink walls. Sometimes the way passed under memorial arches, stone built or painted wood, or below shrines perched on rocks; sometimes between precipitous rock walls, but mostly it ran under great cypresses coiling up from mossy rocks with tree-clad ravines sinking away each side to a tumbling stream. So soon, alas! we were shut in by clouds which obliterated all views and turned into rain as we climbed higher.

The bearers continued their offers to carry me, but the more oppressive my weight became to my own legs the less could I put it on to their slim shoulders. I basked under no illusions that they considered me anything but a poor despicable fool to refuse what I was paying for—showing thereby total lack of Chinese common sense. This attitude of pitying scorn towards those who give something for nothing, instead of a complaisant self-satisfaction at having made a good bargain, has an invigorating hardiness to its merit, but is bewildering to us of the West who are moulded by the ideal of altruistic generosity. We had been passed by the only other pilgrim, a plump young Chinese in European clothes, being

carried by only two men. I knew he had their respect though their shoulders ached, while I had probably lost face by not protesting against three bearers, and, by walking, had put myself into the coolie class.

My men amused themselves and me by teaching me Chinese words, but the way became steeper and steeper till it turned into steps and, with nothing to see but cloud, the half-way rest was most welcome in a shack beside the slender Second Gate of Heaven. Here the plump young man was sipping tea, but he was so overcome with embarrassment when I ordered mine and offered some to my bearers, that he hastily resumed his pilgrimage.

Between the Second Gate of Heaven and the little Plateau of the Imperial Tent, where the Emperor Chên Tsung is said to have rested in 1008 A.D., I wandered along a gently sloping 3 li (1 English mile) enjoying the ease, in blissful ignorance of what lay ahead. The clouds had lifted enough to see a stream below, leaping down in cascades between lovely broken hill-sides of trees. The soil was flushed, the greens lush with moisture.

But now followed the real test of pilgrim zeal. The way had turned into unbroken steps, high exhausting steps which disappeared into the clouds straight up in front of us. It grew colder and colder as we went up. Trees were left behind and the rain was driven in icy sheets by a strong wind over slushy snow and bare rocks, which were often carved with inscriptions or saintly figures. My mattamac wet through I was horribly cold, while my companions plodded up unconcernedly in their sodden rope-soiled shoes, with only bamboo-matting capes and cotton coats to shelter their bodies. It was shaming to be so distracted by physical discomforts, which I confess I was, though nothing could entirely take away the awe which emanated from the mountain.

At the top of this Jacob's ladder stands the massive grey stone Southern Heaven Gate, and as the wind swept over the brow I thought that indeed the steep ascent to heaven had been full of "sorrow, toil and pain." Though the way was now fairly level, after trudging along for a mile or so through snowy

slush mud, I looked at my watch; we had been going for about four hours. Despair of ever reaching heaven proper was setting in when the upturned corners of swinging temple roofs pierced the clouds above us. Its shining yellow tiles proclaimed it as the Imperial temple of the Princess of the Coloured Clouds.

A huddle of domestic hovels gathered round the way leading to its gate, and, in answer to a shout, a virile gnarled old giant in a wadded blue cotton gown came out from a door standing open under the streaming eaves and led me into the "rest-house." Laughing and voluble he signed me to sit down on one of the two *kangs*, and darted off through the rain to the shack opposite, where he fanned up the charcoal fire to make tea.

It was queer sitting in that dark room; the light, not strong enough to-day to pierce the paper windows, trailed wanly through the door. The chatter of the old man and the bearers across the way, and the patter and trickle of rain increased the silence of that cluster of buildings shut in the clouds. The water dripped off my clothes on to the clean mud-beaten floor; a hen scratched beyond the doorway; I was physically wretched but most extraordinarily contented. There was such a deep, deep peace.

I wondered about the other pilgrims who had sat in that quiet damp room, and imagined the summer sun baking down on the mountain and the panting figures climbing, climbing those high steps, worn smooth by millions of weary feet. I wondered again, as so often here in the East, how there can be people who maintain that psychic force is merely the product of imagination. Sitting there, with the inescapable emanation of holiness flowing round and through me, it was impossible not to think of these people as either incredibly insensitive, or poor cowards hiding their heads in the sand from a power which scares them.

The old man bustled in in his flat cotton slippers, bringing tea in a big square-shouldered teapot. Later a young man, perhaps the old man's son, came in with a huge yellow oilskin umbrella. He beckoned to me, and I followed him through the gateway of the Coloured Cloud Goddess Temple.

The ferocious guardians, Hêng and Ha, stood on each side, looking so fierce that one expected the damp to hiss off them in a cloud of steam.

Snow lay 4 inches deep in the deserted courts. The dim damp-cold shrine was quite empty except for the figures brooding above the altar; no temple furniture except a bowl of ash bristling with burnt stubs of incense, no flowers—just cloud trailing in through the wide doors, and incense-burners draped in snow on the steps outside. I lighted some sticks and added them to the little forest. The grey ash fell into the powdered prayers of hosts of other pilgrims and the fragrant smoke floated up to meet the mist. It carried my petition to the Goddess of the Coloured Clouds that she would instruct her handmaid to grant Lin a baby.

We skirted round outside the kindly walls and, meeting the full blast of the wind and sleet, started up the desolate path to the summit. We battled our way between gaunt rocks covered with inscriptions and figures, passed a great tablet which is thought by some authorities to have been erected by the Han Emperor Wu in 110 B.C., and so ascended the final flight of the steps. Temple buildings enclosed an area of natural rock surrounded by a stone railing. Here was the summit of the Great Mountain, the Hill of Generations, T'ai Shan.

Here was another link in the chain of holy rocks—the sacred Stone at Mecca, our own Jacob's stone, the Rock sprawling like a captured dragon under the glinting Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem—and here the clouds seemed to form a dome of holiness over this, perhaps, most ancient rock of them all. I lighted some more incense.

On our way back to the Coloured Cloud Temple we passed a shack where four men were smoking round a youth playing a *Ho Ch'in*. They beckoned us in welcomingly; shivering and wet we sat down to listen. He was a spirited young man who shouted and laughed infectiously between playing and singing falsetto, sometimes gay, sometimes melancholy tunes, when truly Chinese emotion was almost beyond his control. Then his brown eyes, a moment ago dancing with mirth, looked

far away with a poignant softness, and ghosts seemed to haunt the mist outside—tender maiden ghosts gliding under the shadows of whispering bamboos, beside dark pools where the drowned moon looked up at lotus flowers. . . . How I remember and love that vivid boy on T'ai Shan!

Walking down is always more tiresome than walking up, and after about a mile of those precipitous steps my knees refused to support me farther. I sat in my chair with shame when I thought of the countless Chinese women with their bound feet who had climbed and descended the mountain. Goat-like the bearers ran down with a breathless speed, scaring me as I looked down, swayingly, at the steps disappearing in the mist. So, alternately being carried, or walking when I got unsupportably cold, we arrived at the first food shop, with tables and benches under a shelter beside it. Here the bearers deposited me while they went inside for their *chow*. Cold tired and disgruntled I ordered tea, soon to be enchanted by an adoring coolie father with his little son.

His weather-creased face was like a ploughed field under sunshine, the child's smooth as cream—exquisite as a magnolia flower above his dirty coat and black trousers, with his little behind so pink and soft. The custom of leaving the seat seam open in the trousers of small children is very practical! He had his pet finch tied by one leg with a yard of string to a short stick. It was the prettiest sight in the world—the little bird fluttering above that soft child gurgling with delight, and the rugged tenderness of the father.

How they know how to relish life! How good they are in their delight in real things—their children, their land. How enviable this simplicity of days timed by the sun and the clang of the temple bells. All peoples are like this who live near the soil and growing things, but here they seem to have a more poignant quality. Is this peculiar emotion aroused by the tenderness of old age, the mellowed serenity, the ripe gentleness born of experience returned to simple things as the only ones of real value, the assured joy of experience rather than the trembling joy of innocence? Or is it the joy seized from misery—a basking in sunshine warmth as only those can

bask who shiver through cold long nights? Or is it the quality of an unconscious culture which has soaked these simple millions? . . .

We had made such friends over my cigarette-case that it was quite sad when the bearers appeared again, contentedly replete.

It was only 3 p.m., so we went through the city, a charming place with paved streets, groves of trees and channels of clear water. It seemed cleaner than northern cities. I was shown a temple building converted into a weaving factory, where girls worked at hand-loom among lacquered columns and walls frescoed with saints and devils. Nearby was an open shelter—like a Dutch barn—with huge ancient timbering. Perhaps it was used as a market, but to-day it was empty except for a barber and an old teacher with a venerable straggling beard and quiet eyes, and his pupil squatting to write characters on a slate. Lofty old gingko trees rustled among spreading roofs, people passed about silently in goloshes or rag-soled shoes; there was slow bustle in the sleepy peacefulness of a cathedral town, and the leisure of a resort which lives largely off its visitors.

Under the city gate a wedding procession, with fairy-tale lanterns on coloured poles, ceremonial umbrellas and a sedan-chair with silk curtains, was waiting for the bride. I did hope she was, and would be, happy. All these trappings were so gay in the gathering dusk—but what was her “arranged” husband like and, more important, her mother-in-law?

The proprietor, distressed by my wetness, had my stove lighted and hot water and tea brought. Draping my clothes out to dry while I thawed myself, I thought over the last twelve hours with great thankfulness. At 6.30 p.m. an enormous meal arrived of six courses—European alas!—and the *Boy* told me of the crowds which flood the city in the pilgrim season, taking days to climb the mountain and often staying at the top for several nights. He expressed his fear and hatred of the Japanese whom, he said, they expected to take the five Northern Provinces. “They bad people, we very fear.” He told me about his family in Shanghai, two sons and, as an after-thought, his three daughters.

I paid my bill of 7s. 2d. that night and went early to bed, very sleepy and stiff, but too tired and excited to sleep much.

Called at 4.30 a.m., I caught the 5.30 train for the 25-hours' journey to Hankow—as I thought. We passed through the Yellow River floods, a most desolate and heart-rending sight. Villages lay under water up to their sagging roofs, trees and the telegraph poles near the railway were swept over, water stretched white and cold to the horizon, dotted with junks in which whole families huddled together among the few belongings and chickens they had saved. The railway embankment was packed with refugees camping in matting shelters or under the cold grey sky in the rain. I wished I had food to throw out as we passed—helpless suffering on this scale is beyond our sheltered English imaginations.

At Süchow junction I changed from the Tientsin-Pukow on to the Lunghai railway. The China Travel Service man who met me said that there was fear that the city itself might be flooded, and that it was packed with refugees who were starving. On the platform there were destitute figures in rags, and swarms camping outside against the railings.

In the second-class compartment of the next drab little train we were three aside, and bundles—a most convenient form of luggage. Adjustable to size and shape, easily packed, they are also soft to sit on, or lie against, or squash out of the way as circumstances dictate.

My companions were a Chinese officer, smart in his khaki uniform; two gentlemen in blue silk fur-lined gowns and homburgs, reading newspapers and discussing vehemently; a young man in European clothes with particularly beautiful hands, who was eating an apple from a pile in a cotton square; a venerable ancient like the portrait of an ancestor, with a few hairs of beard, a round Chinese hat, a black satin sleeveless waistcoat over a brown satin gown, below which peeped goloshes over black cotton slippers. Collectively they were very representative of the changing China of to-day.

Not many Europeans travel on this line and the ticket-inspector looked surprised to see me. Various people had tried to dissuade me because of bandit attacks—but nothing

could have been more peaceful, and I found that the further one got from European influence, the kinder people became. The official even insisted upon putting me into a first-class carriage to myself although I showed him my second-class ticket. It was soft bliss and, the country being monotonous fields of flat cultivation, I slept thankfully for an hour or two.

The huge smooth walls of Kaifeng, with its gates surmounted by drum-towers, stood up proudly as one of the most important cities of Honan, that old and fertile plain of China. It was tantalising to be unable to go a little farther to Loyang, the old Wei capital, near which are the cave temples of Lung Mên, the Dragon Gate. Nearly all the sculptures have been looted or sold away, but the large figures remain and I longed to see the home of these sculptures which move me differently from any others. The first ones I saw were hidden away in the sanctum of a Chinese merchant in Peking, who asked a prohibitive price for them.

To me they are unique as figures expressing passionless purity. The spirit of flowers hovers in their remote tranquillity—but the hardy delicate reticence of spring wild flowers, not that of summer blooms perfuming garden borders. The simplicity of their treatment is free from self-conscious artistry and carries one through their unlaboured genius straight to the inspiration behind them. At first, early Gothic sculptures came to my mind as their companions, to be dismissed because of this very different inspiration. The Christian inspiration of a personal deity, whose passions withstood the trials of earth, may lead ultimately to the tranquillity of Good victorious, but the conflict and the struggle, passionate and personal, is there. To the beholder it is an example of his duty to fight to win his life in heavenly perfection. The Buddhist inspiration brings no smoke of emotional conflict. Endeavour is there, but the silent endeavour of the mind. Restrained passions are exchanged for an attitude of mind which has left them behind and stepped on to another plane altogether, with its goal, not of an individual existence of reward, but the final peace of the raindrop unified once more into the ocean of perfection. As we are put into the world to live, for one life any-

way, "In the world but not of it" may be our aim—none the less I am grateful to have the rest and inspiration of being taken out of it altogether sometimes, as these sculptures do.

I felt hungry after the long afternoon, and in the restaurant-car the *Boy* chose a meal for me which was deliciously filling for 7*d.*—pork, cabbage, bamboo shoots and unknown odds and ends on different saucers, piles of rice and green tea. Chinese people are always so pleased when one eats outrageous quantities and can use chopsticks—but alas! I could never learn to belch, the recognised sign of full appreciation.

Trains do not run always exactly to time but we were almost punctual at Cheng-Chow, where I had to change again at 11.40 p.m. on to the Peking-Hankow line, and where again a China Travel Service man met me as I had requested. I had had visions of being stranded in the dark at midnight and, with no language, getting into the wrong train, landing me goodness knows where. We often pronounce names differently from the Chinese themselves, so that they cannot understand what you mean, and vice versa. For example, we say Hankow, they Hankö; we Shantung, they Shandoong; we Hupei, they Hübé. I was thankful for my little luggage as there were Customs; in some ways China is still divided into almost watertight compartments. After half an hour's wait among huddled figures sleeping on their bundles on the platform, the train came in.

I was the only European and caused a distressing disturbance. The guard insisted upon my having a compartment to myself though I did not mind sharing it in the least. With unavailing desperation I tried to prevent him from turning out three poor Chinese gentlemen who were snoring peacefully under their red railway blankets. Other passengers were woken to make room for them, there was a thudding about of bundles and general disturbance, but—what Confucian manners!—those tousled gentlemen bowed graciously to me as they squeezed past me in the corridor.

The guard smiled with triumphant satisfaction as he shut me into my solitary state. I wondered what I ought to give him for his unwanted trouble on my behalf.

The dim yellow light gleamed down on the dismal compartment, on bunks tumbled with red blankets and crumpled pillows, on the spittoon overflowing with fruit skins, on used tea-bowls clinking with the joggling of the train against the empty teapot on the table, wet with spilt tea.

But his triumph was short-lived. A shrill voice above a clattering and bumping out-shouted him, the door was burst open by a virile young lady with bobbed hair and large-boned face, who forced herself in. The guard pulled her out, the altercation swelled into a regular Chinese clamour of shouting invectives. More and more passengers squeezed into the corridor to see what was the matter, throwing in a few sleepy remarks on the guard's side. I tried to intimate that I welcomed the lass, but he was preoccupied with his own shouting—and she was amply capable of managing her own affairs.

After a twenty minutes' duet of shouting she heaved her belongings from the next compartment into mine—a bundle, a Chinese basket, a pail stuffed with another bundle and a round basket containing a tin basin, and sat down with supreme satisfaction among the chaos. Doors were banged as the passengers returned to their sleep, and the guard, with the Chinese good-natured acceptance of the inevitable, answered the young lady's imperious demands by bringing in a fresh brew of tea.

The weaker sex? In China also this epithet is unconvincing.

I huddled under the questionable red blankets, very exhausted. My companion stowed away her belongings, removed her woollen fur-lined gown and red felt slippers and, smiling at me with the air of we-both-know-how-to-deal-with-these-menfolk, lay down in her claret-coloured satin undergown, pulled the blankets over her and fell into a well-earned sleep.

I had read on the time-table written out for me by the China Travel Service that we arrived at Hankow at 6.50 a.m. I had told the Veteran so, and he had booked places on the boat up the Yangtse for next day. When we stopped at a station at that time I rolled into the corridor saying sleepily to the boy, "Hankow?" He shook his head: "Mayo" (No). I was mystified. He fetched some one whose English ran to

“Night”—p.m., not a.m.—another 12 hours! The Veteran would be distracted at my non-arrival, and we should miss the boat.

I slunk back to my red blankets extremely ashamed of my mistake, but the more I thought about it the more extraordinary did it seem that I had looked at that time-table so often (where p.m. was written clearly) and had always read a.m. There was not another boat for five days and I should certainly have left Peking a day earlier, having fitted the dates together in order to take the weekly German 'plane returning from Chengtu to Shanghai, via Sianfu.

The feeling grew that there was a definite reason for this mistake. I wondered if I should ever know what it was. I had an increasing faith in the reasonableness of present incomprehensibles, which always take their place as having been necessary when one looks back at them in perspective, provided one follows the dictates of the instinctive feeling as to what is right or wrong to do. At least, I have never found it to fail and had had to bank on it a good deal during the journey when people had raised hares of dangers. It gives one a care-free confidence, and a content in accepting events which might otherwise have seemed unfortunate.

In the restaurant car the train inspector kindly offered to send my telegram to the Veteran from the next station, promising the receipt should be sent to me in Hankow. It came all right: China shows far more efficiency and honesty than one is often led to expect.

After breakfast the prospect of another twelve hours' cold journey was not so bad. This was a French train. I enjoyed the notices, “Chauffage”—there was not any. “Défense de cracher”—we were supplied with capacious brass spittoons in every compartment. “Toilette des Dames”—I gate-crashed in on a large Chinese gentleman. Though our compartment looked sordid in its cold chaos, my companion gave the contended impression that she had lived there all her life. She was immensely interested in my clothes and I had to show her each garment I was wearing. The excavation was chilly.

Outside, the day was dismal under rain and a raw wind

which could not lessen the enchantment of the landscape. Little hills, wooded with oak and chestnut, humped up between rice and wheat growing valleys where streams wound among groves of trees and bamboos. The winter-sown wheat was green—it all seemed so green after the north, and the thatched or tiled grey homesteads looked cosy and tranquil. Even in the rain workers were in the fields under their coolie hats. The different shapes and weave of these hats in different districts are interesting. Here and there a temple spread its blue or green roofs, or a little shrine was set up by a path. Burial mounds, singly or in groups, broke the evenness of the fields like big ant-heaps. It is prohibited now to use good cultivation land for burials. The aggregate area in China used in this way must run into hundreds of square miles and it seems reasonable legislature from a practical point of view, though it is much resented in conservative places. The absence of animals was noticeable in this rural countryside. Pigs and hens snootled and scratched round the homesteads, oxen ploughed through the mud of rice fields and ducks turned somersaults in ponds or streams, but land is too precious to waste on grazing for cows or sheep. Chinese diet does not include milk, butter or cheese.

The people seemed to be smaller and gentler as we travelled south. These were real Chinese of course, while in the north many of the people are of Manchu descent. Lin despised southerners as being small and unreliable, classing them with Japanese—but this is not an uncommon attitude of large people towards those smaller and more astute! The Cantonese are regarded as the Jews of China. They cannot understand each other's dialect (I missed the Peking burr very much) and it was amusing to find how often English was used as the common language between Chinese of different districts. I believe Fukien has the most difficult one, and big businesses have special interpreters from that province.

By midday we were back among invariable flatness. During *chow* it was a joy to watch a young aviation officer talking to an older Chinese, with a deference to age which was strangely moving in combination with his extremely smart modern

uniform. They seemed perfect personifications of the past and the present. Both were unmistakably aristocratic with exquisite delicacy of physique and manner. The blending of alert efficiency in every movement of the young man, with great dignity and refinement, was something that perhaps only China can produce to such a degree.

The Veteran met me at Hankow Station. He had been so sure that my non-arrival on the train by which he had expected me intimated my capture by bandits, that he was just starting for the British Consulate when my telegram had arrived.

Through Hankow

THE VETERAN, an old friend of my father's, I had met by chance in Peking. He was also going up to Szechuan and suggested that we should go together, which I seized upon as a great opportunity, there being few left who know China over such a long period or so intimately. Though there had been a short gap in his Chinese life during the War as an army chaplain in Egypt and Archangel (the toughest man they could find even at 55!) he had never lost touch with his beloved China over 50 years. And now, unable to keep away from it for long, was back to spend his 76th birthday in his province of Szechuan.

He was tall and gaunt with the charming manners of a true aristocrat and his face, rugged and weathered by China's sun and winds, looked curiously Chinese in spite of the sky-blue eyes. It was impossible not to love him, his simple goodness, his wisdom not of this world, his zest in life, his indomitable vitality and humility and his endearing inconsistencies, or to sympathise with the veneration in which the missionaries held him, who had followed in the track he had blazed long before most of them were born.

We travelled together for some weeks. In the interior he still used as his staff his 7-foot banner, bearing the text, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," printed in Chinese characters. It was an incredibly awkward piece of luggage for air travel. The all but impossible feat of manœuvring it into the aeroplane at Chungking nearly necessitated the cancellation of our passage to Chengtu, which would have meant going by carrying-chair or walking, taking eleven days instead of the one and a half hours by air.

His deafness often led him to believe that he was whispering when in reality his voice rung out clear, which was not a little embarrassing sometimes, as when we arrived at a Mission Station and I was introduced to our hostess, in a loud aside—

“Such a good woman—a heart of gold, though not much to look at.” Or on another occasion, when he sat down beside me at supper—“I hope you can eat this, my dear, they’ve done their best.” Or yet again after supper when his hand had wandered to the pipe in his pocket, which the good missionaries would disapprove of even in him, and he said loudly into my ear, “Dear child, let us go and have a little puff in your bedroom.”

At Hankow he took me to the China Inland Mission House where we stayed during five days’ wait for the next boat. Actually I was there little, owing to the kindness of Mr. Bergsen, a Norwegian, to whom I had a letter of introduction from Mr. Woeller in Shanhaikwan. Through him I had a glimpse of the life of a foreign community in China, being welcomed and most hospitably entertained in Hankow homes and the International Club. In fact my hours were so gaily erratic that the good Mission people were somewhat shocked.

“She is rather an unusual young lady and we’ve never had any one quite like her to stay before, but, of course, she came with . . .”

Bless the Veteran—his reputation could withstand even the ravages of mine!

Hankow, meaning “mouth of the Han” because it stands on the north bank of the Yangtse where the Han River joins it, stares across a mile of water to Wuchow on the south bank. Wuchow, where I saw the very fine new Chinese University, is almost entirely a Chinese city, while Hankow includes a large European business centre whose monuments of prosperity are formed by the pretentious and uninspired offices and banks which façade the Bund beyond the riverside road. The unsympathetic perfection of that smooth European road! Where the icy November wind swept off the river, piercing bare-footed ricksha coolies shivering in rags under the concrete walls of those centrally-heated palaces of wealth. No, while I was there I could never forget those pinched faces and those scarce-clad bodies. The solid orderliness of the West gives a peculiar starkness to poverty.



A costume from Ch'ien Lung's Theatre.

Hankow was still sighing with relief over its escape from flooding the summer before. Much of the country round it, lying lower than the bed of the river, was still flooded, and Hankow itself had only been saved through the commandeered labour of 30,000 men, working day and night during three weeks to raise the Bund in a race with the rising water. The floods started to subside when the water level was only an inch below the top of the Bund! Garden railings, gates—everything was used to help to strengthen that protecting embankment which was, by the end, 30 feet high.

Among other entertainments I went to in Hankow were the races. With their love of gambling, the Chinese are enthusiastic supporters of the race-course and back their ponies heavily. And it is much more of a gamble here than at home, because the ponies, particularly at the beginning of the season, are often quite unknown quantities.

In the springtime batches of wild Mongolian ponies are ordered down from Kalgan, and it is largely a matter of luck for the owners as to how many winners will be discovered in the shaggy bunch, who have no pedigrees through which to gauge their capabilities. Sometimes backers are given great surprises, as in Egypt, where a sheik will suddenly enter an unknown horse which he has kept hidden in the desert till the day of the race. These Chinese ponies, though not very elegant, are surprisingly fast and strong, and make excellent polo ponies.

I was fascinated to watch bulky Chinese plutocrats in satin gowns and homburgs hanging over the rails with their field-glasses raised, straining to catch the colours of the first tubby little entry to scamper round the corner under his miniature Chinese jockey in full jockey kit.

Perhaps some of the times I enjoyed most in Hankow were those at The Wee Golf, a restaurant kept by a White Russian, where, on Thursdays, there was a special Chinese tea-dance, when parties of more emancipated girls gathered round the tables with their young men.

Through my dress conversation with the Consul's wife in the train I realised they wore the last word in fashions and

were very modern in having figures—lovely slender ones—instead of being bandaged up tightly to make their bodies the same size all the way down. The favourite colours for their silk or satin gowns were white or deep red with the binding, tab-buttons and loops of darker shades or black. Black on white satin was very smart. All had very short sleeves, tight collars four buttons high, and side slits from below the knees. All wore fine silk stockings and high-heeled evening shoes on their small and well-shaped feet. All had bobbed hair either sleek and shining, waved into a fuzz like an Egyptian wig or in crisp undulations; and all were brilliantly made up except for two or three, who really looked the more distinguished. Even in Paris or Budapest I have never seen women with such chic, vivacity and irresistible charm, and here it was the trimming of a toughness and hardy realistic intelligence that is seldom found in occidental girls and women—even plain ones.

The men were quieter and with less vitality. A few wore European clothes, but most were in silk gowns in various shades of the favourite night or dark peacock blues, and patent leather shoes. They and the girls both danced exceptionally well—it was a strange mixture of civilisations to watch them fox-trotting, rumba-ing or waltzing round to the playing of the Russian orchestra, who wore also their national dress and expressed the pathos and hilarity of that great country's spirit as only music can do.

Never were dinners more delicious than those there, chosen with epicurean skill by Mr. Bergsen from his wide experience of the delicacies of Old Russia and cooked superbly by a former prince's chef, with whom Mr. Bergsen chatted in Russian when we went into the scrupulous kitchen to thank him. What evenings those were in that kaleidoscopic internationalism which I have never seen quite so vivid as in China, and how quickly our bottle of Vodka became empty between whirling Russian waltzes, more intoxicating than that fiery spirit itself! And there the shadows of tragedy were not brought through any White Russian dancing partners belonging to the establishment.

And then Mr. Bergsen would talk, as only an able and humorous wanderer can who has lived emphatically for many years under many different conditions; who, though perennially young in spirit, is old in experience, a citizen of the world beyond the pettiness of nationality. The East is scattered with these most delightful Scandinavians who show that the old Viking spirit of adventure is far from dead.

Mr. Bergsen himself had been at Oxford, in a London City firm, a lumber king in Archangel before the revolution; after it he had lived in an ex-grandduke's palace and drunk the Tzar's champagne in Moscow, known solitary confinement in a Leningrad prison, managed a mining business in the Caucasus, and finally come to China as a manager of the Swedish Match Company before its crash. Now he was looking round unconcernedly for the next adventure and considering the various offers his ability and his languages had brought him. He spoke perfectly English, French, German, Russian and fairly fluent Chinese, as well as Swedish.

He described his own experience of what the conditions had been for foreign businesses after the Japanese invasion. The Swedish Match headquarters for China had been in Mukden, where they were assured by the Japanese after their occupation that their business would not be interfered with, that they had only to ask official permits for certain transactions and that everything would be done to help them. Actually the permits were delayed and evaded till, after a year, the firm was forced to clear out, leaving their property worth about £2,000,000, which was taken by the Japanese, with no indemnity. He was convinced that wherever the Japanese came it would always be impossible for foreigners to carry on their trade and business.

He also deplored the difference between the old-style Chinese business men and the young ones who had been trained abroad. He described the proceedings with one old magnate with whom he had had a transaction to settle. He was led into the guest-room where the old man, with his hands up his satin sleeves, bowed graciously and bade him be seated.

Over the finest Fukien tea they discussed their business. (The best tea comes from that province, and rich and particular connoisseurs will pay as much as a dollar (1s. 2d.) a leaf, and carry special water.) Agreement being reached, the old man sealed it with his word of honour. The sum entailed was £1,000,000 and Mr. Bergsen knew that it was absolutely safe. In contrast, he said, even signed contracts of young men were not always reliable, particularly those trained in America. None the less he was one of those who preferred to do business with Chinese rather than Japanese people.

The divergence of opinions on this point was interesting. One business man would say:

"I have dealings with both—give me a Jap any day, at least you know where you are." While the next would answer my question with:

"Which? Oh, there's no question; you can trust a Chinese firm and you never know where you are with a Jap."

It depends, probably, on the individuals concerned. Personal relationships are still largely the decisive factor in China, and consideration for the feelings and the relationships between individuals over-ride abstract principles, though the growth of a sense of nationalism and *esprit de corps* is beginning to replace it among the most progressive students.

As far as I could see, this primary value set on personal relationships is the key and foundation of so much in China which is difficult for the stranger to understand. This, with the Confucian rule of the "golden mean" and "face," account for the courtesy, kindness, complicated codes of etiquette, evasions, shirking of responsibilities, and compromises which so often bewilder us and give rise to the distrust with which Occidentals often regard Chinese people.

On the last morning in Hankow the Veteran took me five miles down the Han River to see the Griffith Jones' School and old Dr. Gilstone, who had been in China for 54 years. It was impressive to see these two old pioneers together, such

contrasts to look at and so alike in spirit, and for whom I had to act as a go-between till my throat ached, one having a weak larynx and the other weak eardrums. Dr. Gilstone has translated vast tomes into Chinese on anatomy and physics, and had then just completed one on child diseases. His wife was also a doctor who had had 11,000 visits to her little dispensary the year before.

The school, with 300 extremely lively-looking boarders, stood charmingly among its trees and gardens in the sunshine, but it was the atmosphere of happiness, efficiency and vitality which struck me most. It lies low outside the protecting Bund, and when Dr. Gilstone gave a blithe description of the flood and mud rising through all the buildings till it was 4 feet 6 inches deep, I found myself staring with impolite admiration of this frail old hero of over eighty.

He took us for a walk by the Han River where great tree-trunks, floated down from interior forests, were being sawn into planks, by hand; then back along the high dykes dividing the dry rice fields and through the straggling village of Han. Beyond it, lying in the sun-bleached dust of the road, a man in a fit writhed distressingly. The passers-by never broke the swinging jog which bobbed the loads at the ends of the bamboo poles across their shoulders; no one seemed in the least concerned over this poor epileptic—which I was told is a common complaint in China.

I shall never forget that picture of the withered delicate hands of the old doctor tearing away a little handful of dusty grass which he put between the man's teeth with the steady efficiency of his profession, or the gentleness with which he calmed him, slipping a little money into the shapely filthiness of those poor clutching hands, or the adoration in those brown eyes as recognition dawned of this old man whom he had once pulled in a ricksha. And I shall never forget the feeling of being back in apostolic times when the Veteran stepped forward. The ragged crowd of simple country folk now gathered in curiosity round those two figures—the man half-kneeling in the dusty road with a dazed expression of wonder in his face as he looked up at the Veteran standing there in the sun-

shine with his arms outstretched, face lifted and lips moving in silent prayer.

Those are surely the men from the West who are compensating China for what those others took away in the building of concrete palaces of trade, at whose steps ricksha-coolies freeze and starve unheeded.

Letter from Yangtse

S.S. *Kiang Wo*,
Yangtse River,
21/11/32.

DARLING FAM,

This letter will meander along with the chugging up 380 miles of this stupendous river. We left Hankow yesterday and it takes three days to Ichang, where we change into a shorter boat with stronger engines able to navigate the rapids, and where I shall post this.

I'm staying in my cabin to-day because (a) there is nothing to see; the river's so colossally wide that the banks are a thin line dividing mud—thick waters from the grey sky. (b) I've got a miserable cold and am too tired to compete with life. (c) A venomous wind is driving sheets of rain in leaden desolation and cold. (d) I washed my underclothes and have no more to put on—I've only got my rucksack and attaché-case with me so I've got practically no extras. Through all my dissipations in Hankow I was able to flaunt only the good-natured woollen dress from the bottom of my rucksack as the only change from tweeds. Even on the gala night at the club it rubbed stuffy shoulders with *décolleté* frills, and I've decided finally that "all or nothing" are the only two comfortable states to be in during a journey. Once one starts compromising with vanity it becomes a crescendo of self-conscious worry and luggage; with nothing, I was accepted kindly as a traveller instead of being criticised as a shabbily turned-out woman.

It's so ridiculous to venture opinions about a people one's been amongst for only two months, particularly any so complicated as the Chinese, but I do feel so tremendously strongly about them that it's a comfort to talk, even through my hat (if I had one). In spite of their many inconsistencies, their sense of inevitability hangs over me like a weight. It's a consciousness which is exhilarating—at last to have encountered

a race of people which gives the conviction that in them lies a power which will persist, that their worth will not devaluate and that their strength doesn't depend on outward circumstances but lies inherent in themselves. But, too, one does feel they're still an unknown quantity in spite of 4,000 years of history behind them. Through this long period they've lived, relatively, in one channel of tradition and now the modern world is diverting them from this ancient course. We've no knowledge what the Chinese may become when they're adjusted to the use of powers which their tradition in the past never called into action, when a sense of patriotism has been engendered, and if communistic ideas are absorbed and re-interpreted, which I'm sure the realism of the Chinese will do to fit their own needs. Japan, they expect, will over-run them (temporarily) and the West may rob them of their old culture by creating the need to compete with mechanical barbarism (though they still set learning and the art of living as the highest achievement), but through the sheer weight of personality they will go on.

Here in their own atmosphere one feels that the West is taking into account far too little this still incalculable power. Like a lot of children squabbling in the nursery, European nations may find that their quarrels are quite unimportant compared with nanny insisting upon bedtime. The whole atmosphere here is charged with the sense of something colossal brewing which it's impossible to imagine in Europe. One feels that it portends the great clash of races. When Europe is faced by Asia what will her interior jealousies matter? Asia herself will doubtless have her internal conflicts first, and then . . . ? We shan't live long enough to see the final outcome, but I can't help feeling that it will ultimately depend largely on the unknown future China.

One of the many striking intimations of Chinese progress and vitality comes vividly through her women folk. Of course the women have never been in strict purdah and their autocratic direction of that self-contained unit of the home (and the unconscious percolation through to the people of the philosophical recognition of the equal, though different,

importance of the female and the male essence?) has saved Chinese women from the proverbially servile position of most of their sisters in the East. But none the less they have been in a subservient position and the sudden appearance of the modern Chinese woman is a miracle. They're admirable examples to prove the contention (didn't Confucius hold it?) that the regulation of the home is the foundation of the State, and of that other assertion—"He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much."

I've heard one or two Chinese women speak at public meetings (in English) with extraordinary ability, practical common sense, assurance and humour—far greater than the European women who also spoke, in their own language. And in the three universities I've visited the praise of the hard-working capability of the girls didn't come only from the staff but was expressed also by the men students themselves. In two cases the President of the University, elected by the students as their representative, was a girl. Isn't this realistic progressiveness also a tribute to the men's intelligence! And how do our undergraduates compare with it? And here the girls have only been admitted during the last eight years or so and constitute still only about 25 per cent. of the total number of students.

It's very interesting to compare the position of Japanese with Chinese women, the differences are significant and must, surely, have far-reaching results in the long run. As far as one can see, there isn't the competition here between the sexes which is so weakening to the corporate body where it is taking place in the West.

22nd. To-day I've been on deck. The boat has steel shutters which can be lowered against bandit attacks, not unfrequent, and we have a military escort of six British Tommies—oh, so English! The captain of this boat is a tough little Scotsman (what a number of them are out here) who hotly denounces missionaries in general and American ones in particular—all except the Roman Catholic nuns for whom, like every one else I've heard speak on the subject, he has the greatest admiration.

“Now they do practise what they preach. They stagger on to these boats carrying their luggage themselves. They travel 3rd class with the Chinese—and perhaps you don’t know what that’s like when there are 400 packed in down there. Most of them are ill—they all die young; they can’t stand more than a few years of this — life; but they do show the Chinese what they’re preaching. That’s more than most of them do. I say, don’t preach poverty if you don’t live it. The climate in this — valley isn’t fit for Europeans to live in in the summer, nor the living conditions of the Chinese—but what’s the good of preaching ‘Blessed are the poor’ when you go gallivanting off to a hill station when it gets hot? And you should see some of those American women in shorts—the Chinese are at least a decent people!”

This is one of the more violent denunciations which shows the respect these nuns inspire in the most prejudiced—and they deserve it. They never again leave the countries which they go to, even on furlough. They give themselves uncompromisingly for life.

Since we passed Chenglin where the largest southern tributary, the River Siang, comes in, little hills begin to replace the absolute flatness and the river is narrower and more winding. The ever shifting mud bottom makes continual sounding necessary, and every few minutes I hear the singing chant of the Chinese sailor giving his findings. A missionary couple with their baby are the only other passengers, going back to their remote station which they had to fly from at an hour’s notice when the Reds came. The baby wasn’t a year old and they had to travel four days across country (while in the mountains through snow) before they got to the river, where a junk took them in five days to Chungking. Now they’re going back and probably they’ll find nothing of their home left. They’re longing to get back to their people—what do you call this if not courage? And if you saw him in a bus you’d say “C3 bank clerk”!

23rd. Since writing this we’ve had a day in Ichang. Early this morning Lieutenant Lee of H.M.S. *Ladybird* came to fetch us for a visit on board the gunboat. For almost the first

time I really felt proud of Old England in the Far East. Everything was so speckless and shining, and there was the atmosphere of such discipline and—character. The men were deliciously English with magnificent quiffs, and the commander adorably nineteenth-century and handsome in his Sunday frock-coat, brass buttons, gold braid and side whiskers. Such a man deserves a wife in every port, but he didn't appear at all the type who'd take advantage of this privilege—a positive waste. The young doctor had specialised in maternity work. Why was he on a gunboat?

These little ships, specially constructed for the Yangtse, are like toys, so tiny and perfect. The fastest is H.M.S. *Petrel*, which draws only 5 feet and can travel at 24 knots downstream and 16 up, against the terrific current. I was told that I was sitting immediately over the explosives—just to give a zest to my sherry. The bottom of the ship is one-tenth of an inch thick, the idea being that should it graze a rock, all too easy in this treacherous channel, it will cave in instead of being punctured. They said how devastating the heat is in the Yangtse Valley in the summer. The paint blisters off the ship and for weeks the temperature does not fall below 105° F. or so. They also told me what I thought most interesting, that unexpected visits made to Chinese warships always found everything spick and span while, most surprisingly, Japanese ships were frequently dirty and slovenly and, more than once, a collarless unshaved captain had greeted them with grains of rice still on his chin. I should have expected the Chinese to be fastidious in their persons but, thinking of their houses and cities, their ships might be expected to be somewhat happy-go-lucky—not so evidently.

Ichang itself is a damp little place of slippery wet alleys, living on river traffic. Being at the mouth of the Gorges, it's where cargoes and passengers have to be trans-shipped into smaller craft to navigate the rapids. Nights in the harbour are useless from the sleep point of view, coolies chanting ceaselessly as they laze bales of cotton. I shall never forget last night on this little boat. (Craft cannot travel after dark, so we have two nights in the harbour.)

I'd fallen half asleep at last from sheer exhaustion, though the singing was going on just outside. Suddenly I became conscious again, trying desperately to remember where I was and to think what was happening. There were unearthly clanking thuds and a high wild voice chanting, then a chorus would break in, coming to a staccato finish with a thud which shook my bed. What was it? I opened my eyes; the dim light from the oil lamps on the deck outside sprawled across the little cabin. Of course—lading. There was something eerie in the drugged waking of exhaustion into this dark pandemonium. I put on a coat and went out.

Like some high priest the leader of the coolies stood alone wailing his high solo. Below, dim figures, soundless, unhurrying, mechanically regular were bending, lifting, rolling great metal-bound cases, chanting to the movement of their loads with the synchronisation of a machine. A thin capable Chinese in a brown satin gown was checking the loading. The whole thing was the most extraordinary rhythm of human efficiency. The emptying lighter acted as a sound-box and the crescendo of the reverberations increased till the climax was reached with the last bale; in the sudden silence of completed achievement the night surged in and I felt, somehow, as if I'd evaporate in the silence.

Strolling along the tiny deck I tracked down the hot rich smells of cooking to the stern, where, on the 2nd class deck, only 6 feet below, food venders had ranged themselves. From above I could look down into the bowls and cooking pots, and see the slow careful hands of the cooks stirring, skimming, or fanning the charcoal braziers. The coolies, their work finished and paid, bought a bowl of soup, rice and some vegetables for a few coppers. The smell and sight made me hungry and resentful of the dismal European food we had had for supper. It was all so mysterious in the dim hot light of oil lamps, and the night seemed so big beyond the few gossiping voices and the contented sounds of eating or the long-drawn hiss of a cigarette being inhaled. Here, probably because a lot of men share one cigarette, it isn't put into the mouth but held near the lips in cupped hands—so the inhaling makes a terrific noise.

To-night it is very quiet so far. Beyond the few ripples of light dancing in the black water the mountains loom up in the darkness. To-morrow the diminutive ship will wind into the heart of them on the bosom of this great turbulence which has forced a way for itself through them. Mountains have to give way before the Yangtse, but the Chinese race doesn't!

I hope I'll get a letter posted to you from Chungking, but I don't know how long we shall have there; it depends on what transport is possible to Chengtu—lorry probably.

This is a dismally inadequate letter, but the scale of China is so colossal and the detail so intricate that I can't see the wood for the trees.

Your thrilled and bewildered

AUDREY.

Up the Great River

THE GREAT RIVER, as it is known in China, is a mile wide at Hankow, already 800 miles from its mouth at Shanghai (which I covered on my return journey to the coast) and is navigable for still another 1500 miles. Its many tributary sources are fed by the snows of the eastern mountains of Tibet 3000 miles from the Yellow Sea, and during this momentous journey it flows through eight provinces and forms the only practical means of communication for some of the most important cities of China—centres for areas larger than the Danubian Basin and far more thickly populated.

After a peaceful passage through Szechuan it has cut its irresistible way in deep gorges through the ranges of mountains dividing West from East China before it starts, at Ichang, its last leisurely thousand miles or so to the coast. Having drained an area the size of Europe, the Yangtse is confined in these gorges between cliffs often only 200 or 300 feet apart. At low water it has been plumbed to 280 feet and will rise as much as 50 feet in a night when the snows are melting in Tibet. The highest rise of flood water recorded on the cliff face is 250 feet! Over the rapids between these gorges this volume of water whirls in titanic fury, in which whole junks are not infrequently sucked down.

I have heard the Gorges compared to the Norwegian fiords, but I think this comparison gives a completely wrong impression. Maybe the great cliff walls have something akin, but the spirit is totally different. In the fiords there is a brooding impersonal peace where still reflections passively mirror life, while here is a drama, dynamic and ruthless. These cliffs confine a seething turgid torrent creating and destroying humanity itself. There is something alive about the waters of the Great River pouring through the Gorges—a personal spirit, a dragon moving with turbulent convulsions

over the rocky vertebræ of its sinuous spine. It is impossible not to believe with the Chinese that its waters are possessed.

On the top deck the day was still pale and it was drizzling when we weighed anchor in Ichang. The mountains rose so suddenly that we were in the first of the Gorges with little preliminary warning. I cannot give a detailed description of each of these stupendous wonders through which it takes a day and a half to pass—the Ox Liver Gorge with the 3000 feet peak towering above it; the twenty-five mile long Wushan Gorge where the Dynasty Stone shows, with each piece that crumbles off it, that a dynasty will fall; the Wind Box or Bellows Gorge, last and most stupendous of all, guarded by the treacherous currents stirred by the Goose Tail Rock. Nor can I stop to tell any of the stories and legends belonging to every twist and rock in this drama.

Imagine colossal ravines with lime or sandstone walls, soaring and smooth, or repeating the fantastic swirls of the water in their writhing strata, or in knife-edges as straight as falling rain, or fretted into vertical flutings like gathered curtains, or broken into jagged sweeps. Above and beyond, great peaks close in like an advancing army; they seem imminently bending over the narrow passage slashed through them—great mysterious blue pillars one behind another. Some are veiled in ragged clouds, others are slatey clear or lit into ethereal loveliness by shafts of vagrant sunlight.

Turner ought to have painted the Gorges.

Over the rapids the water breaks into uncontrolled passion. Imagine broken avalanches of mud—thick water driven over giant rocks with a force that throws up frothing banks—thrashing boiling whirling fury swept into sloping troughs of spinning water; backwashes pushing against the current in hungry eddies, hurled into waves of foaming amber. Hear the roar, the rushing, slashing. Feel the spume and the throbbing, the engines pounding every ounce of steam; feel their straining and the hanging suspense of power against power. Then with the slow laborious urge forward an affection for this ungainly little David floods a heart beating more steadily, but thrown into a new dismayed racing as the parting

struggles of Goliath sweep us headlong, irresistibly towards a pitiless rock. On, on we are rushing towards it till, within a few inches, a superb piece of helmsmanship turns us from destruction.

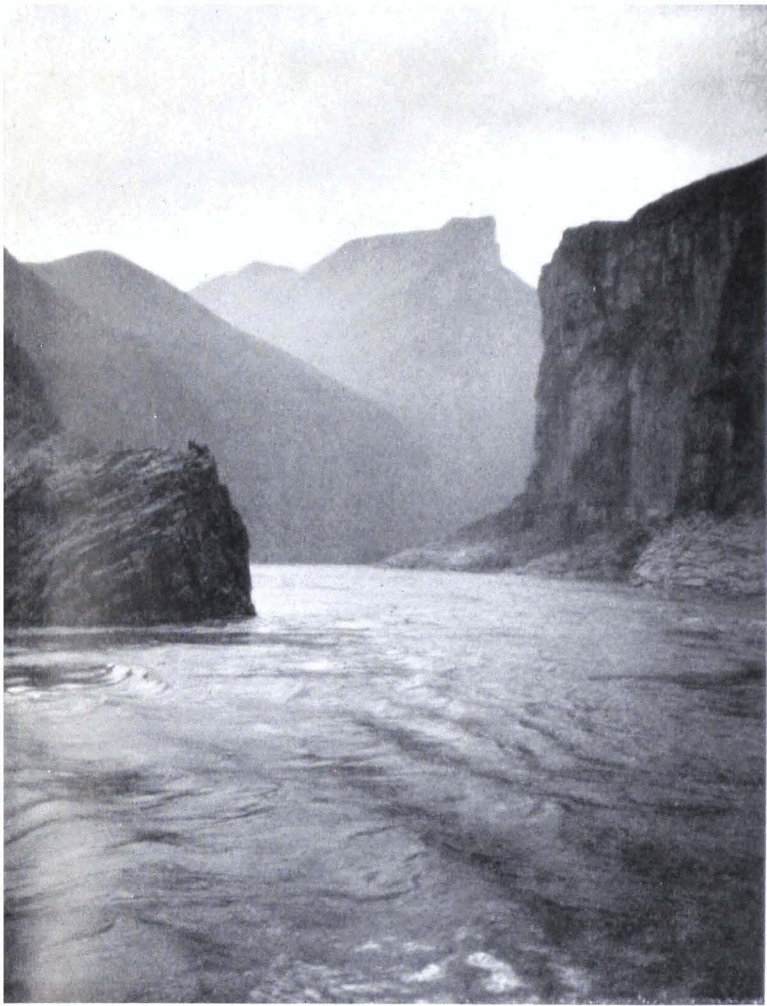
Only Chinese pilots, descended from generations of river-faring folk, can navigate this fateful course, and these only by daylight. They know every rock at different water levels and use no charts.

Between the dramatic tension of the Gorges the river relaxes peacefully among sloping hillsides. It spreads quietly wide among a gentle luxuriance of growth—which one feels particularly sharply after the vigorous windswept north—and a colouring which leaves the most vivid modern painting a faded shadow. The soil becomes a deeper coral as one continues upstream. Maple and oak scrub, patching the wild mountain-side, are autumn chrome and blood-red. Winter crops are incredibly vivid emeralds, while crisp orange trees give spots of dark compressed green among mimsey billows of bamboo and the larger tung trees. Tung oil is the finest oil in the world and grows almost exclusively here.

The wonder of all this became exhausting to bear and it was almost a relief when, once through the Gorges, the river was bordered by gentle slopes waving with sugar cane. I was told that, hidden from official eyes, in pockets of these hills opium poppies were still grown in great quantities; in spite of Chiang Kai-shek's efforts to reduce opium-smoking, opium is the most profitable crop of Szechuan, in which we were now.

At low water, as it was then in November, the towns and villages along the Yangtse stood high above the river. Houses on the water front are built on piles twenty or thirty feet high. The white walls of the city coil round the huddled grey roofs of the houses with the blue ones of a temple spread out protectingly above them.

Every now and then beautiful pagodas spike up from hill-tops or mountain-sides, gifts of devotion and tactful reminders to the river spirits of the fact which, as sportsmen, they should repay by gentlemanly behaviour. And in the



(Left) *In the Yangtse Gorges.*
(Below) *A Chinese boat with
patched sail.*



most beautiful corners temples or monasteries nestle tranquilly, greatly enhancing the natural loveliness.

But wonderful as is the scenery it is the human drama which leaves one with an almost fearful wonder. The ceaseless energy and patience with which every inch is cultivated which industry makes possible, the dauntless courage of hardy millions who survive the ravages of the giant's ruthless whims and wrest, through sheer persistence, a means of livelihood with a love and fear for this arbiter of life and death.

The stretches of mud flats left for the few months of low water are made to bear a crop of vegetables. Every niche and ledge on the mountains and cliffs themselves are filled with soil, if need be carried in baskets, and planted. Hillsides are terraced up to the top—nothing is wasted, nothing too much trouble. In some places coal is being scraped out, quite 100 feet up the cliff, and carried down perilous paths in baskets. At Kweifu brine wells bubble up from the mud at low water. Round these, temporary bamboo huts are built and the salt laboriously extracted and shipped up and down the river. In other places gold deposits washed down from the Tibetan mountains yield, on a good day, about 6*d.* to the families who wash it. (Incidentally I have learned that in Malaya where tin is dredged, the most up-to-date machinery cannot carry out the final washing process so thoroughly as Chinese workers, who are employed with their rough sacking strainers.) And all along the river are fishermen, either in boats with huge nets let down by a Heath Robinson contraption of bamboo poles and weights, or standing on rocks as patiently as Brighton pier enthusiasts, but much more perilously with the irresistible current often washing round their knees.

Then there is all the life on the river itself. The Chinese are wonderful boat-builders and the square white or striped sails of junks and house-boats glide gracefully over the water like flocks of butterflies. It is endlessly fascinating to pass them at close quarters. The whole family of these river folk lives upon their boat, their only home; cocks crow proudly from the rounded roof of the cabin and hens scratch among the freight piled in the stern. Passengers may occupy some of the

very limited space, while before the mast stand the oarsmen, each to one oar which he pushes, instead of pulling, to the rhythm of a chant. The steering is done by a long oar in the stern.

Heavily loaded boats have trackers also, men pulling on the shore. There may be any number: our captain saw 400 once, helping an old British gunboat up the Yetan Rapid where the gradient is about one foot in thirty. Barefooted, often stripped naked, these men pull on a twisted bamboo hawser, said to be almost as strong as steel, attached to the top of the mast; why this does not break is a mystery, except that it is also bamboo. Sometimes the trackers' path soars a 100 feet above the river like a goat track cut in the cliff face, at others there is no path and the men scramble over rocks. When it is too steep or slippery to get a foothold they crawl. On and on, day after day they pull for a few coppers, their food and free passage downstream.

The Veteran never quite realised that I was not a delicate blossom of Victorian womanhood and, with perfect Victorian gallantry, often did his best to shield me from what interested me most—Chinese life uncensored. He begged me emphatically not to go alone down to the 3rd class on our little steamer, which he visited frequently with a pocketful of Chinese gospels. I was most curious to see the source of the unpleasant but suggestive odours that wafted into my cabin with certain winds. At last one day he allowed me to accompany him below.

What a discovery to find this vital humanity packed only 6 feet below my cabin! I never realised it could pack in quite so tightly and still have room for content. These people did not seem to mind in the least living for several days in a space little more than their own area—indeed, they gave the impression of having settled down placidly for life. In the "saloons" leading off the 4 feet wide deck gentlemen sat placidly, with rather few clothes on, round the few square tables, playing majong and various other gambling games. The whole floor-space was taken up by families squatting among bundles; women fed their babies, men slept, and children played or slept quite happily. The heat and smell was beyond im-

agination. Above the pungent reek of human bodies the sickly sweetness of opium fumes floated from some of the cabins. It was an olfactory banquet.

The Veteran had a chat with some of his friends but I felt I was an alien element and distracted their attention, so I returned to the station on the boat to which my ticket allotted me, feeling miserably class-conscious and how emptily dull mere comfort is.

We were travelling very slowly, one of the propeller shafts having broken, and we passed another Jardine steamer stuck on a sandbank. We had met several little steamers crowded with government troops ordered down to Shanghai by Chiang Kai-shek for training, which they certainly needed; their "coolie" hats slung along the side looked like shields along a Roman galleon. And once we passed a white-clad funeral procession (white is the mourning colour) winding down a hillside, the sharp explosions of fire-crackers splitting through the wash of the water and engine throbs.

While we sat on the top deck watching this pageant of beauty and interest the Veteran would tell me about his journeys up the Yangtse in former times.

"Which was the exact year you first came to China?"

"The seven of us came out in 1887; I'm the only one still in working order. Three of us are still alive, but one's practically off his head and the other's Mr. Host—you met him, didn't you, at the China Inland Mission headquarters in Shanghai? Oh, he's a wonderful man, a real saint! But he's very frail and can't do anything, but I'd give a good deal for an hour or two's chat with him now."

"Of course in those years you came up the Yangtse in house-boats. How long did it take?"

"Yes, it took from twenty to thirty days then. We went as far as Ichang by steamer, but the channel's very uncertain and always shifting and we often got stuck on sandbanks. At Ichang we got into our house-boat with a sail and several men rowing, and then there were trackers too, to get us up the rapids. I often went ashore and walked to get some exercise—it took about three weeks from Ichang to Chungking."

"Your family went with you, didn't they?"

"Later, yes, but at first I wasn't married, and then sometimes it was too rough and dangerous. But John was born in a junk!"

"No wonder he's come back to China!"

"Yes, he's doing splendid work in the hospital, but he's leaving Kaifeng, the doctor says he must be in a dry, cold climate."

"Where's he going?"

"They're going up into Kansu, it's very cold and absolutely dry there."

"How far is it from the nearest railway?"

"Well, with the ordinary cart it takes about eight days. I can't do that now so I can't go to see him. I don't know that north part of China."

"No, you've always been in Szechuan haven't you? Did you wear Chinese dress and a pigtail?"

"Oh, always. Since 1900 we could do what we liked, but I'd always chosen Chinese dress—so much more comfortable; in summer so much cooler. Oh, my dear child, there's Wushan!"

The little city was framed by the great cliff portals of the gorge which we were leaving. It stood up from the river in a bay of fertility surrounded by rippling hills. The wall encircled the houses huddled round the Mandarin's white house and under the swaying grace of the temple roofs. Huts were built against it outside on bamboo piles rising out of the river's mud banks.

"Did you ever live here?"

"Yes, for eight years; I had some very dear Chinese friends here but I don't think there are any still alive now except a very great Christian, Woo Sin, and he's been transferred somewhere farther up. He has a small government job—very badly paid. Yes, he's had a very hard life and is now all alone, with no Christian fellowship. I wish you could have met him, he's the most splendid man."

"Was this one of the places where you were the first foreigner to enter? Was it here that they thought you were a Korean so that you were able to stay?"

“No, that wasn't here. I came here with my servant just after the Boxer troubles. They were very anti-foreign and the Mandarin gave orders that no one was allowed to give shelter to a foreign-devil. The first night we slept in a derelict house but in the morning the owner came and said, ‘You are a foreigner? I am sorry that you cannot stay here. It is the Mandarin's orders.’ I had a wonderful day wandering about tea-shops, every one was friendly. In the evening I went to the biggest inn and put my belongings in a room. When the proprietor heard of it he came to say I couldn't stay there—though of course he didn't put it roughly like that. He said, ‘I am sorry that we cannot give you anything to eat, the cook is away.’ But I said, ‘Never mind, I can go out and eat in the town,’ and, of course, having possession of the room was nine-tenths of the battle. I left my servant there sitting on my things and next day went to the Yamen and said that, as a stranger, I had the right to be given hospitality, and that if I couldn't get a room in the city I should come for one in the Yamen. After that there was no trouble and I stayed there some time. The people in the tea-shops were wonderfully friendly. Later the Mission bought the derelict house we stayed in the first night, and still owns it.”

That night anchored by Wushan is unforgettable. The sun set in pink then fiery glory, turning the water into molten gold. The junks, changed into black velvet, lay in trance-like calm; the little town stood up sharp and shadowy-white above the evening fields; voices and barking of dogs floated across the water in the motionless air and, towering in the sky, the pinnacle crags above the gorge were turned into live charcoal smouldering with a red glow. Slowly the witchery faded and night crept over the sky, pricking it with great sharp stars which shimmered like phosphorescence in the water; the shadowy hours of phantoms whispered from the Past in the silence.

As I watched the magic, still in a turmoil of wonder at the day's procession of marvels, I could not help reflecting that the Creator must hate nothing so much as uniformity. The

variety of creation is so stupendous, and surely He must get bored with man's standardisations.

The evening we anchored for the night at Wanhsien we rowed ashore in a *sampan* to visit the China Inland Mission people. What bewitchment! The dark water broken by little warm craft lights and cold reflections, the looming hulks of junks, and the twinkling of the town which piled up mysteriously round three sides of the harbour.

A few shops had electric light, but for the most part the hot yellow of oil lamps or tallow candles made the stepped or cobble streets yet darker for their patches of light. Only lately have the steps been done away with in the main street and still most passenger transport is done by carrying-chair. These Szechuanese chair-bearers are famous for their smooth rhythmic movements: their neat little wicker chairs with black shining canopies are like stage property for the *Mikado*.

We had a meal of delight in the big grubby room above a *chow-house*, but I felt insulted that they should feel it necessary to compliment me on my use of chopsticks and suitable waffling noises. A young missionary doctor gave an interesting account of his dangerous treks for hundreds of miles on foot inland, where recently all his medical supplies had been captured by the Reds, who came a few days later to ask him to teach them how to use them!

Rumours of Red activities increased as we went west—some doubted whether we should be able to get to Chengtu as the Reds were only two days away. A Chinese among our party said that if Japan invaded China, when Nanking would fall and probably Hankow, Chengtu, the capital of Szechuan, would probably become the capital of China.

As we neared Chungking the country became bigger, barer, greyer. Suddenly round a corner we saw the city piling up over the hills on the north bank of the river which widened at this great elbow, leaving, at low water, a stretch of mud-flats in the middle, which are used as the landing ground for American and German aeroplanes, that fly weekly between Chengtu and Shanghai.

Chungking with a population of a million is known, I was

told, as the Liverpool of China—1400 miles inland! But it is the port for an area far larger than the whole of the British Isles and, certainly, the raw grey drizzle in which we landed justified the analogy. This is evidently so typical of the winter climate there that it is said locally, “The dogs bark when the sun shines over Chungking.”

Chungking

SZECHUAN, A province the size of France, with a population of fifty million, is quite different from other parts of China and, except for missionaries, is practically untouched by European influence. Its remote position has left it very conservative—till recently the Yangtse formed the only real means of communication to it—and for the same reason it has been the place of refuge through centuries from less inaccessible Provinces. Among the highly-strung and emotional Szechuanese, quick in response but somewhat unreliable, little settlements of refugees have retained their peculiarities and dialects. Even their appearance may be different from the Szechuanese, who look delicate and are, in the Yangtse valley anyhow, very frequently victims to chronic malaria. Unlike anywhere else in China, that I saw, the men of the coolie class wore a piece of cloth wound round their heads like a turban.

The Province is famed for its chair-bearers, tea-shops and bridges. These bridges, with the grace of their single span, were lovelier than any I had ever seen. I also saw one of their renowned bamboo suspension bridges, gradually disappearing, which was wide enough for an ox wagon, and traversed a river certainly 300 feet across.

The tea-shops take a remarkable place in the life of Szechuan, in them business transactions are completed, disputes settled and politics discussed. In Chungking and Chengtu many of them have radios, and speeches of European statesmen are discussed on the day of their delivery—in the depths of China. If they are disapproved of it can be quite unpleasant for a European walking along the street.

Chungking was an exhausting place to explore. Under Chiang Kai-shek's reforming influence the main shopping street has been made possible for wheeled traffic, connected

(Top) *Chungking—The professional story-teller and his audience.*

(Below) *Szechuanese types.*



with a road leading into the city where I saw coolies sawing away rock cliffs by hand, but everywhere else the alleys are stepped. These stone steps are always slippery wet, through, I was told, Chungking's unique possession among purely Chinese cities of a laid-on water supply. The water is sold in shops and carried sloppingly away in wooden pails slung on each end of a bamboo pole across the shoulders of coolies.

After tea-shops and food-shops and water-shops the most common are herb-shops. Szechuan is famed for the herbs growing on its mountains, which are exported all over China as medical supplies. Then I think come barbers.

The first one I saw made my heart beat fast with horror. I thought a serious surgical operation was being performed, and hardly dared to look at the prostrated figure lying under a white sheet. But soon afterwards I had a genuine cause for distress in a public display of dentistry. In the middle of an interested crowd, the patient sat on a stool with his face forming a frame of agony round a large pair of tweezers. To advertise his efficiency and popularity the dentist displayed on the ground beside him a tray heaped with yellow extractions. And on another occasion I saw electric treatment being given by means of a band, attached to a battery, strapped round the arm of the patient.

Another day a crowd included me among its fascinated members to listen to a professional story-teller. He was a jovial soul under his battered homburg and I was tantalized almost beyond bearing not to be able to understand the story which so riveted his audience—except when I took a photograph.

After supper Mr. M., a China Inland missionary, said that as I was interested in Chinese life he would show me a side of Chungking which few Europeans know. We set off with our torches into the dark (an electric torch is essential in unlit Chinese cities), he carrying a truncheon-shaped canvas bag of coppers, which I did not realise till afterwards must have been a precautionary weapon of defence, though he never alarmed me by saying so.

Beyond the more modern quarter with its occasional electric lights and passers-by our little circles of light pierced damp raw silence. Steps, glistening uneven steps, wound down between walls or shuttered shops, where sometimes tiny cracks of light shone wanly in the dark. The air reeked in the deserted alleys, our uncertain steps shuffled uneasily in the ominous silence, which was not the pure silence of lonely places, but a silence heavy with humanity.

What was that heap against the wall? The little circle of light flickered over the smoothness of human skin—a foot, a hunched-up knee, a shaved head, a face whose smooth contours had sunk back to the bone.

“That is an opium addict put out to die—to save the expense of a funeral,” I hardly heard Mr. M. say through the sick thudding of my heart.

Now the way was on the level. Pot-holes were black circles surrounded with stinking mud, above us, two or three-storied buildings faced each other little more than ten feet apart.

“These houses on the left face on to the river. They’re built up on bamboo poles above the water, now thirty feet below at low-water level. The houses are built of bamboo too—ants and rats often eat away the piles and then the whole structures fall into the river. Several families live packed into each of these houses.”

At that moment an enormous rat ran over my feet.

A faint yellow haze of light trailed into the darkness from one of the hovels where the shutters were not up; the heavy scent of opium floated out with it. In the low room the one oil lamp threw up the dark shadows of recumbent figures. A woman was filling a pipe above a little flame.

Farther along a single red paper lantern hung under the eave of a single-storied building tilted against its neighbour.

“That is an inn, a red lantern is always the sign of an hotel.”

Two rats ran across our discs of light.

Round the corner the muffled silence was horribly broken by shrieking and harsh moans. Wave after wave they followed each other as we approached a yellow square of light dancing

across the alley. As we drew nearer, a low murmur, punctuated by metallic clashings, could be heard below the jets of screams. Hardly daring to turn my head as we passed, I had only a glimpse of that low room open to the street—the glimpse of a corpse lying in the candle-light, a priest in a cone-shaped head-dress with cymbals (or a drum), gabbling ceaselessly from a holy book before him, and, like a demented spirit, a woman tearing her long black hair, shrieking her heart into the night.

“That is the conventional mourning for the dead.”

It seemed like walking through a nightmare; the timelessness of that dark horror numbed all sense of reality. At long last we were walking up steps again—staggeringly up and up—and then we were among electric lights and passers-by.

“That,” said Mr. M., “is what we are trying to fight. Only Christ is strong enough.”

The New Life Movement was being supported with exceptional vigour in Chungking. Its activities were taken as a great joke by most of the few Europeans, but somehow I could not laugh at them wholeheartedly though they were often very funny. It seemed obvious that so wise a Chinese as Chiang Kai-shek would not organise a programme unless it had a useful psychological influence on his countrymen.

Szechuan was the one part of China in 1935 which supported him wholeheartedly (his passivity towards Japan enforced by China's unreadiness caused Canton to regard him as a traitor) and here he was working through innumerable ways to prepare the different sections of the community for the conflict he foresaw. Through homely ways the New Life Movement sought to give discipline, a corporate sense and hygiene; it was hardly surprising that such new ideas in China should be carried out without great discrimination or with very wide results to begin with.

We happened to be there for the weekly patrolled day. Boys and girls in smart uniforms, on the pattern of Scouts and Guides, were stationed about every forty yards along the main streets. I saw a small girl of perhaps fourteen order a hulking

great coolie to do up his coat; he obeyed immediately. A prosperous shopkeeper was about to empty his slops in the gutter, in his normal way, but was sent back into his shop with his bucket unemptied—what could he do with it?—Any one smoking in the street was told to put out his cigarette; those walking in the road were shepherded on to the pavement (in the main street where there was one) and I was asked to button my mackintosh. I was told that several times missionary ladies had been required to uncross their legs when they were sitting in their rickshas, that being a most indecent position for a woman, and the enchanting story of another who was considered underclothed in her thin short-sleeved summer blouse, and was taken into a shop and swathed in yards of cotton material—for which she had to pay.

With gruesome realism posters depicted the evils resulting from dirt, flies and opium-smoking, and the tortures to which the Chinese people will be subjected by the Reds and Japanese, unless they make themselves strong enough to resist, through discipline. And in this connection I heard that every day Chinese children in school have to chant, “We must eat to grow strong—to fight the Japanese! We must be brave—to fight the Japanese! We must learn our lessons to be wise—to fight the Japanese! etc., etc.”

Periodically the police made tours of inspection in all the houses of the city marking them “Clean” or “Not Clean” or “Dirty.” I think that was as far as it went, though possibly the loss of face with the condemnation “Dirty” may have had some result.

We visited a beautiful temple which has been converted into a school for nine hundred children under fifteen, including about fifty who were boarded in the rooms where formerly the priests had lived. One of the quiet courts had been partially roofed over, and here the kindergarten had its lessons in the open air. Another court, with carved trellis walls and white marble steps, was used for physical training and games. We met two of the fifteen masters who attempted to tackle this horde of youth; refined, dignified, cultured and enthusiastic they were, more like humanised dons than primary school teachers. This temple

school seemed to me to symbolise how China is adapting the old into the new, in her own way and through her own character.

One day the wireless on the British gunboat gave us the news that Japan had set up an autonomous government in Peking. I see I wrote in my diary, "Is this, surely, not the real beginning of the colossal upheaval whose imminence hangs so forebodingly and inevitably over the Far East?"

We heard that the road was impassable owing to rains and the heavy military traffic of the Red fighting. Lack of time and equipment made walking and carrying-chair impossible so we decided to fly to Chengtu.

OUR RICKSHAS bumped through the tortuous alleys of Chengtu and stopped outside a door in a long whitewashed wall. Bishop Chang led the way across a big courtyard full of trees; through a room stacked with odds and ends of furniture; across another courtyard containing a collection of cots and prams and children, worthy of a baby show. Here we were met by our host Mr. Yi, his senior wife and family—of startling numbers and sameness of age. His welcome of smiles was so charming that it stepped across the barrier of no language in common. He led us into the guest hall where we sat in order of precedence on red lacquer chairs, placed in two rows against the walls opposite to one another.

While we sipped our tea Bishop Chang talked formally to his cousin and I looked at the written and painted scrolls on the walls, the shrine where a bronze incense burner stood before a fine Bhudda painting, the jade and porcelain ornaments set in niches, and the superb carving of the tables set in the middle of each row of chairs.

Mr. Yi was one of the dying-out race of Hanlin scholars (students who had passed the annual Imperial examination in the classics, poetry and calligraphy), and was a lecturer in history, philosophy and the classics in the Chinese University of Chengtu. But his highest distinction was his place as the finest calligrapher of Szechuan. This scholar of learning and culture made me think of a Holbein drawing. Except for his colouring and lack of beard he was strangely reminiscent of Henry VIII.; and had the customs of China not furnished another way of escape I doubt whether the fate of his dumpy senior wife would not have supplied another analogy.

It was an honour to be led across another courtyard, where fruit trees grew among winter weeds, to his study and library. Never have I experienced a room of greater tranquillity and

enjoyed culture. It was long and low with a matting ceiling and big windows each side. Piles of scrolls and a few books filled two open-shelved cupboards in the middle. A large table stood under one of the windows and several low wooden divan chairs set against the wall were covered with tiger skins.

Feeling that an outright request to see Mr. Yi write some characters would be a liberty impossible to take, I asked, through Bishop Chang, if I might see his brushes and how he mixed his inks—being a humble user of brushes and paints myself. With all in readiness it was possible to express the wish to see the method of use. But Chinese courtesy does not permit of a host showing off without giving his guest the opportunity to show his or her talents. At the time I rued this finesse, but afterwards recognised the value of a custom which gave the incentive to accomplishments in their even exchange. Mr. Yi would be delighted to write, but first I must make a picture.

A blank of agonised confusion paralyzed me as the family pressed round in anticipation. I begged to be allowed to use my pencil, being regrettably unfamiliar with the use of Chinese ink and brushes. What on earth could I draw?—Would Mr. Yi give me the honour to sit still for five minutes and allow me to draw his portrait? I trembled and perspired in the production of an effort I blush to remember. His delight and approval failed to alleviate my shame.

Then Mr. Yi went to the table and spread out the scroll of paper, took up a brush of water and rubbed the block of solid ink. When he had mixed a pool in a saucer he filled the brush with it and, leaning over the table, started to write three lines of characters, starting in the top right-hand corner and continuing down two-thirds of the scroll. At the bottom of the left-hand line of characters he signed it in red ink with his jade seal.

I had read a little about the art of Chinese calligraphy and the qualities by which it is judged—the placing and spacing on the paper, the assurance of line, the force and delicacy put into each stroke. I had tried to discriminate between good and bad characters I had seen, but it was through the effort of my brain and lacking the emotional feeling necessary in the appraisalment of any work of art. To see Mr. Yi write those two lines of

characters was an explanation of this most prized art in China more lucid and enlightening than volumes written on the subject. In the tip of that brush was concentrated the whole force of his big body through the steadiness of his unsupported outstretched arm. Though this physical control absorbed the attention at first, it was the force of mental concentration in the brush tip which gave a tension in the atmosphere which remains an unforgettable experience. The bold virility of each stroke, the unhesitating quality of line proclaimed a master.

While the ink was drying bowls of *mien*¹ were brought in and I was complimented on my use of chopsticks. Then, to my surprise, Mr. Yi presented me with the scroll he had written. I think Bishop Chang was more amazed than I. He said he had never known Mr. Yi to give one away before and that his price for large characters for temples was about £5 each! I asked what he had written.

“You are inwardly quiet and good, do not let outside distractions disturb you. Go to your room and look out of your window at the trees, and meditate. To Hai-li-sse,² the great artist.” His seal gave it the value of authenticity.

So this memorable visit ended, and Bishop Chang had my scroll mounted on white silk with ebony rollers. It hangs in my room in London, and the static dance of its characters down my wall ever reminds me of the advice of an aristocrat of China's old culture, and the revelation of mastery he had achieved in the practice of it.

¹ A relation of spaghetti.

² My Chinese name.

War and Starvation

THE TEMPLE was 4 miles from the city. The raw damp of a Szechuan day in December made the ricksha transit unpleasant. In the cold of the morning the misery of the waif boys was more conspicuous than usual. Most of them seemed to be between twelve and sixteen years of age. Their long matted hair hung over sharp shoulders; their emaciated bodies shivered under cotton rags. There was a vacancy in their faces and the expression of a hunted animal in their eyes. Often they stood outside an eating-house waiting for the chance of some thrown-out refuse, but in China it is seldom that anything is thrown away, though charity is sometimes given. At night they crept into any shelter they could find, or curled up against a wall in the dust. There was nothing, nobody in the world they could turn to; they were outcast and helpless in their blank destitution. I wondered what happened to them, one seldom saw older men in the same condition.

The "Reds" were only one and a half days from Chengtu and the military at the city gate questioned our destination. Two of them belonged to the Government forces, the third man was one of Chiang Kai-shek's private army. Only one side of the gate was open. Unlike many cities in China, where the wall is being left to crumble or is being pulled down to make a road in its stead, the City Wall of Chengtu had been repaired by commandeered civilian labour, and stood in proud protection against possible attacks of Communists.

Outside the walls was a refuse heap, on the other side of the road children played by an eating-house where coolies devoured rice and soup. My question was answered as to the fate of the beggar boys. Two bodies lay among the rubbish:

Cold, irrevocably cold.
Vanquished at last
By helpless un pitying want—

Youth's eager limbs
Stiffened in wan weakness.

Discarded, unheeded, unregretted.
Outside the City Gate
Thrown on a refuse heap—
Rubbish that even beggars cannot use.

So short a sum of years,
So long a sum of agony.
Born and lived and died in pain;
And then those limbs—
Ravaged by hunger, dirt, disease,
Scarce covered by the cotton rags
That never warmed that shivering flesh—
Thrown out to lie, more cold, and stiller
Than the winter night
That swallows up their silence in its own.

The pink walls of the Temple rose out of cultivated fields. Pine trees sheltered the roofs. Through the gate we passed down a quiet avenue into the group of temple buildings. Across the court outside the first temple a dozen or more miserable figures in grey tattered uniforms sat on the ground round some stretchers. Pieces of dirty cotton were wound round arms or legs or head, mud and bloodstained. The peace of the court was broken by spitting and groans.

Several of the Temple buildings had been commandeered as a Military Hospital. For a Chinese army to have any Red Cross is one of New China's innovations. Wounded from recent battles were flooding in in numbers far exceeding capacity and equipment. Inside the dim cold of the Temple the lacquered columns rose from a sea of rough wooden beds covering all available space. On each lay a wounded man still in his ragged uniform with all its filth, wrapped in one cotton quilt. There seemed to be no nurses; one or two coolies moved between the beds over the damp stone floor. It was strange to see red crosses stuck up on the pillars of this temple building.

(Top) *Outside Chengtu—Temple building converted into a Government military hospital ward.* (Below) *Rifles to be used against the Reds being made in a temple court.*



Outside, the sun came through. We wandered from temple to temple led by a monk in a thick pair of felt boots and black velvet hat. In one porch a man was making butts for rifles and putting the parts together. In another convalescents were warming themselves in the sun. One man had no legs. What would happen to him in a country where there are no pensions, and the only organisation for the support of the disabled is the family? His would be peasants relying entirely on their half an acre of land—and that might fail through flood, drought or invasion.

The architecture in the south and west of China exchanges the bold simplicity of the North for greater delicacy and finer workmanship. The roofs have a more exaggerated curve and sharper corners. The temples are more numerous and in better condition.

But that day my heart was too sick with human misery to think about architecture.

A Chinese Bishop's Request

THE VETERAN was continually rejoicing at the enormous progress China had made since he first knew it—communications, public services, education, medicine. His enthusiasm was very refreshing after the gloom of those who look back over a shorter vista of time, having only known China in the state of chaos following, inevitably, the break up of the traditional form of government which had ruled her for better or worse for so many centuries. He had known her for twenty-four years under the old régime before 1911 and, with his faith in the Chinese people, rejoiced at the upheaval as giving the opportunity for a new start.

He saw this break with the old faiths as the great opening for Christianity. The people, deprived of the old structures to guide their living, are left as sheep without a shepherd. His desperate sense of urgency was infectious.

But I had been feeling, more and more strongly, that the fundamental truths of Christianity ought to be given to the Chinese people through their own holy men and scholars in their own expressions, rather than through the bewildering contradictions of sectarian dogmas held by different missionizing bodies. It was with great interest that I heard about Dr. Reichelt.

A Norwegian, he went to China under a Norwegian Mission at the end of the last century. After a while he felt that his Mission, among the others, was working on the wrong lines, so he left it and, after studying more thoroughly the Chinese language, classics and philosophy, travelled all over China making pilgrimages to the holy places with their Chinese devotees.

By 1911 he had started a settlement in Nanking, which was destroyed in the revolution but refounded a few years ago on land assured him by the British outside Hong Kong, where I

had the privilege of meeting him. Here he is gradually adding to the group of buildings in Chinese style round the church designed after a circular Buddhist Temple, where he welcomes, particularly, monks and philosophers of any faith, who attend his lectures and study in the well-equipped library. They are free to stay one night or three or four years and if, after their studies of the philosophy and ethics of Christianity, they wish to be baptised into that faith they join the relatively few, but deeply intellectually as well as spiritually convinced bands of converts. Hundreds of religious men have been to Tai-fong-shan from India, Tibet, Mongolia and all parts of China.

Dr. Reichelt believes that China must be given her own Church through her own priests and, unlike all the missionaries I met, holds that Christian truths are most richly conveyed in China through the use of the symbols of Buddhism, e.g. the Lotus and Pagoda, whose symbolisms are equally applicable to Christian teachings. The missionaries I met one and all abhorred even the appreciation of anything connected with what they termed "heathen idolatry."

I heard again of Dr. Reichelt from a Chinese bishop with whom I had a real meeting and talk. He recounted the very deep impression made on the non-Christian intellectual aristocracy whom he had collected one evening to meet Dr. Reichelt during his visit to him a year before. They inquired very often when he would come again because, they said, "We have never met a foreigner, and especially a Christian, with whom we can really discuss our philosophical beliefs and hear intelligently about new ones."

This bishop put it to me from the point of view of a Chinese aristocrat. Round his room hung the scroll portraits of his ancestors back to the Ming period, all his relations were the intellectuals of his city, and he himself was a fine scholar who had also taken his degree at Oxford. By the missionaries, as a whole, he was looked on as a snob and, perhaps, even somewhat unchristian, because he concentrated on work among the intellectuals and students of the university in his diocese. No one else was qualified to meet their needs. He said:

"You have sent us many fine missionaries who have given

their lives to the Chinese people; but for the most part they have only served the coolie class, who sometimes accept their teaching for the material help they receive—I do not say always, and there are very many wonderful Christians among the peasants; but few have come who can meet the educated Chinese on an intellectual level. The respect for learning has always led China, and it is the scholars who have shaped the masses with their thoughts. If Christianity is to become a real force in China it must come also to her scholars in their intellectual thought, who will express it in Chinese forms. The examples of good lives are not enough for these people who have minds formed by centuries of culture and philosophical thinking, they are left unsatisfied. They have seen only simple Christians who work among uneducated coolies—lacking, according to their standards, intellect and culture, and suitable only for the coolie class. To them this religion seems inferior, judging by the culture of the people who profess it. If Chinese scholars could see that philosophers and men of high intellectual qualities advocate and profess Christianity, it might become the great force to help China in her formless condition to-day. You will be doing China the highest service possible if you can help to persuade half a dozen—or even only one of your first-class men of learning to come out here to work amongst us.”

Farthest West in China

WE HAD DRIVEN some forty miles north-west of Chengtu to Kwanhsien. It was a hair-raising drive because our Chinese driver could only spare one hand on the steering wheel, the other had to hold the door shut. We tore with the same speed through the villages crowded with leisurely pedestrians, where the road was two or three inches deep in greasy mud in which we often skidded several feet—though how this was possible I do not know as the driver used his remaining hand, for the most part, in squeezing the bulb of the horn. Bridges over water channels on the open road were usually a few planks of wood, which we got out to arrange suitably for the width of the wheel-base. But local buses went twice our pace, and in so overloaded a condition that from one which passed us the feet of two of the passengers had to protrude from the window. In spite of the nerve strain, what I remember most vividly from that drive was the sudden vision, away up above the rain-clouds heavy over the plain, of the snowy peaks pinnacling the western ramparts of China.

In Kwanhsien we stayed again at a Mission Station. After lunch we set out to “look-see.” While crossing the garden we heard the notes of what sounded like toy trumpets floating over the wall, and through the gate a strange sight met our eyes. Hemmed in by the crowds who walked beside it was a procession of men in tall white dunces’ caps. They were roped together and escorted by policemen in ragged khaki uniforms. The figures were drooping and shambling, their mask-like faces drawn and yellow, and each carried a long pipe. Through the clamour of the crowd came a faint droning.

“Who are they?” I exclaimed.

“A round-up of opium addicts. Under Chiang Kai-shek’s new orders they’ve been dug out by the police and given the worst punishment of losing face by being made to parade

ridiculously in public, repeating the vow to give up their pipes."

Poor things, they looked beyond the comprehension of even losing face!

We crossed the bridge under its roofs of green porcelain tiles, built with shops on it like old London Bridge, where rag-soled sandals were sold at 3*d.* a pair. At each end of the bridge was a notice posted up "No opium-smoking on bridge."

In the crowded main street, pot-holed and muddy, we met a party of tribes, people from the mountains bordering Tibet, who were flooding the city as refugees from the Reds. They were shy virile folk with rosy faces, very different from the delicate ivory of the Szechuanese complexions. The women wore heavy silver jewellery set with corals and turquoise, and a length of striped stuff folded into a square perched on their heads like a tile. Later we visited several of the temples which had been opened as shelters for them, where they camped in the cloisters or actually in some of the shrines.

I looked at them with particular interest since hearing a missionary speak most enthusiastically of his people, the Maoi tribes in the Yünnan Mountains, from where he had been evacuated at the advance of the Reds. He said that they are more responsive and grateful than the Chinese, who have tyrannised over them for centuries. These hardy mountaineers are very musical; typical of them, one boy he knew had taught himself to play a concertina almost perfectly in twenty-four hours. At New Year they gather from miles round to the tops of mountains, where they camp for several days in the snow. They celebrate this great annual festival with dancing all through the nights; and at these gatherings of scattered people betrothals are made.

When we had walked beyond the city, stretches of vegetables lay like carpets among bamboo groves. What, indeed, could the Chinese do without the bamboo! A Chinese, when told that bamboos did not grow in England, exclaimed, "How then can you live?"

Every part of the bamboo is used. The poles are used for all kinds of construction—houses, rafts, bridges, etc., for mast

and boat-hooks, or split and twisted into ropes, baskets, bird-cages. The leaves make thatches, hats, fodder and kindling; the young shoots are eaten as a vegetable.

We met wheelbarrows laden with pigs going to market, tied in rows on their back, or three or four women sitting back to back, or colossal tree trunks. Coolies scurried by with that curious smooth gait which prevents the bamboo poles from bouncing too violently with their heavy loads slung at each end. Down by the river, girls stood by frames connected by long gleaming threads of spinning cotton. Then we mounted the steps of the temple to Emperor Li Ping, the creator of Kwanhsien's significance.

In 300 B.C. the Emperor Li Ping decreed that one branch of the river, which divides round his temple, should be dammed up every December while the channel was dug out till the water level would leave uncovered the iron bar which he ordered to be embedded in the middle. On April 1st he decreed the dam should be removed and the snow-water floods allowed to flow on to water the hundreds of square miles which rely on their irrigation. He gave the precept, which is written up in his temple, "Keep the channel deep and the banks low."

Ever since 300 B.C. the people of Kwanhsien have obeyed, year after year. From the temple terrace we looked down on the dam of boulders in loosely-woven bamboo baskets which turned all the water into the left branch of the river. In the dry course of the other channel scores of coolies were digging and carrying baskets of sediment or boulders. An iron bar stuck up in the middle of the channel. Just below, at the foot of the cliff on which the temple stood, was a pedestal on which stood a curious primitive cow, cast, I think, in iron. I was told that its duty was to swallow up floods.

The result of the wisdom of the Emperor Li Ping and the faithfulness of the people of Kwanhsien is that Szechuan, that incalculably rich province, has never been devastated by floods as other parts of China, where the river-beds have risen above the level of the surrounding country.

I woke at 4 a.m.; moonlight lay across the room. It was

very cold and the sound of the river washed through the silence. Wrapping the cotton quilt round me I went on to the veranda. The moon hung low and yellow over the mountain-tops which shut away Tibet. The still tension of the dawn was near. Timelessly the silvered valley darkened; the mountains rose from a mysterious confusion of mist; breathlessly came the climax. Imperceptibly a flush grew in the silence; the sun crept up through grey veils and in pearly loveliness the day was born.

Shivering with cold I crept back to bed while the sparrows twittered in the pear-tree.

The little whitewashed church was crowded. There were only sixteen Church members, but a rabble of the curious, including scratching soldiers, came in and out through the open door. The service was in Chinese. I tried to join in the hymns but the good missionaries had no ear for music and the tunes were unrecognisable. Delicious children in their wadded winter clothes ate peanuts on the bench in front, or sat gazing at me with solemn bright eyes. A baby on the trousered lap of its mother was fractious and the peanut she chewed for it failed to still its wails. It was cold for her to have to pull up her wadded coat to feed it, but soon the little head in its pink silk tiger-cap lay on her arm, heavy in sleep.

It was an American Mission Church; the building was simple and, with so little, might have been made beautiful. How soulless and chilly it was! Even the ugliest altar would have stood for the mystery of worship, but one had to look at a platform with the crumpled legs of grey flannel trousers prominent under the pitch-pine table. I was full of respect and admiration for the life and work of Mr. Jones, but his appearance did not encourage the worship of the unseen perfection of God.

Again the comparison of a Christian Church in China with that of a Buddhist Temple renewed the turmoil of thought. Why does not the Christian religion, containing such beauty and mystery, compel the creation of beauty as Buddhism does unfailingly?

The sermon was ended, we wailed and bellowed the last

hymn in merciless discords, the last soldier was shuffling out in his straw sandals, still searching through his rags for the livestock which found his fine Chinese skin so easy to puncture. Chatting groups stood among the benches, peanut shells crackled under the bound feet of the women as they hobbled out. It was so cold in the church and outside the sun lit the buds on the pear-trees and opened the marigolds. The table was moved off the tank in the platform and its lid raised, allowing a little steam to escape into the cold air.

This was the only preparation for the ceremony of baptism about to take place. There was no sign of welcome, no ceremony to mark the importance of the occasion—just a tiny defenceless group standing in an ugly little cold church. Almost in tears I ran to fetch the flowers from the Mission House dining-room table to give a little beauty.

We gathered in the front benches, the main door was shut, the two young converts came in by the side door, clothed only in clean white cotton robes. They stood barefooted on the cement floor while Mr. Jones read the service. Then he stepped down into the tank, the water coming up to his knees. He beckoned to the first convert who also stepped into the water, standing erect at one end. In turn Mr. Jones put his hands behind the young men's necks and backs and lowered them under the water, but, having forgotten to warn them to hold their breath, each convert rose into his new religion coughing and spluttering with the chilly water that had totally immersed him. There were one or two more prayers after the immersion, during which the two new Christians stood in a little halo of steam which rose from their shivering bodies into the cold air, while the water dripped off the bottom of their cotton clinging garment into a pool at their feet.

When they had changed into dry clothes we assembled in a room in the gate-house of the compound, where a charcoal brazier stood in the middle of the earthen floor. It was a small room with one paper window and only just space enough for eight chairs placed round the walls and a table opposite the door. Here Mr. Jones held the Communion Service.

The informal simplicity and oneness of spirit which stepped across differences of race and language gave a truer idea of the first Communion in Jerusalem, that solemn feast of fellowship and remembrance, than I had ever known our presentation of it to give. From the tray handed round we each took our own little porcelain wine cup (such as is used at any Chinese meal) and waited till every one had been served before we all drank together.

Except for the two converts the Church members were old men and women who had come in many miles on foot, donkey or wheelbarrow to have their annual Communion. They had started when I was watching the dawn.

A vision flitted across my mind of some churches at home with old people of both sexes creeping up the aisle in sanctimonious piety to the altar, where lilies are stuck into brass vases chosen from the catalogue of a firm of church furnishers. Would they be there if they had to tramp for five miles each way—the women with bound feet?

It was the converts who gave ceremony to the occasion. After the service was over we were all invited to a feast jointly prepared by them. Down many back streets we were led to the courtyard where one of them lived next to his little nursery garden. His old parents lived with him and his wife and baby, while three other families shared the courtyard, all of whom welcomed us with smiles.

The thatched roofs jutted out beyond the one-storied buildings forming a shelter round the court into which the rooms opened. It had all been tidied up for the occasion, which was more than the number of small children had been, who gradually lost their shyness and clustered round in a dear grubby rabble to look at my camera. Two had bad eyes and all had streaming noses, but what fine skins and delicate hands!

Though the sun was hidden and the air was damp with low clouds we sat in the open air round the square tables in the middle of the yard. We Europeans were given places of honour at the head of the table in splendidly elaborate arm-chairs, whose last stage of venerable antiquity made them precarious, especially on the muddy unevenness of the ground.

Little bowls and chopsticks were set out before us with the ceremonial nine bowls in the middle of the table. All the inhabitants of the courtyard gathered round to watch us eat.

What European woman of like poverty could have produced such a variety of delicacies off one charcoal fire? Pork, fish, cabbage, bamboo shoots, eggs, chickens, etc.; each with its own subtle flavour; the rice was white and tender and the final bowl of soup fragrant.

The Church members' children were fed with chopsticks, which made me think of young birds having worms popped into their mouths from their mothers' beaks; it is a much daintier method than ours with a spoon—which seldom seems to empty its contents in the child's mouth before they have cascaded down the bib.

I felt ashamed again that I could not belch, and hoped that our hosts would realise my enjoyment of the meal by the laboured noise I made eating and sipping the tea. The Church members made up amply for my discrepancies.

As we were leaving next morning our gentle host appeared with a bulging cotton handkerchief containing nine "hundred-year-old" eggs, which he gave me as a parting present. They are an expensive delicacy for a poor man to buy; here was another example of the generous courtesy of Chinese, rich or poor alike. I thought, vainly, to get the eggs home—they keep long in their lime and clay coating, but when I opened my suitcase in Shanghai a strange smell rose from among my clothes. Four eggs were broken, and when I tried the remaining five, I felt convinced that they were already two hundred-year-old eggs.

It was night; I stood by the low wall of the Mission House garden overhanging the river. It was cold and still; the mountains rose shadowy into the sky, misty with moonlight. Below, the river gurgled and rushed blackly in the shadow and beyond, grey and flashing with moonlight. The stars were faded by moonlight and the trees drugged and blackened against them.

China! China! How to bear this love of you, this compassion, this awe of your great inevitability! Here, in the depths

of your vastness, of your magic, one is your victim. Your moonlit loveliness carries in it the great Chinese people through their centuries of adoration; your silence teems with spirits of poets and painters, farmers and merchants past and present. Yours is an irrevocable spell!

(Top) *Kwanshien—Family of one of the Christian converts (in white turban) under the eaves of their house. (Below) Opium addicts in Kwanshien made to parade the streets.*



Letter from Shanghai

CHENGTU,
SZECHUAN.

5-12-35.

DARLING FAM.,

I hope you've received my telegram; I thought I must send it to save you possible anxiety, because you might conceivably have heard somehow of the crash of the German aeroplane going from here to Shanghai—the one I told you I was leaving in. But I had to cancel my place owing to missing the earlier boat from Hankow; if it hadn't been for that curious muddle I shouldn't be extant to write to you! To please the Veteran I shall go, now, in the American 'plane direct along the Yangtse, though I did want to go to Sianfu, which is the route of the German line.

I've just had a day at the Chengtu Interdenominational University, the most wonderful place—and surely unique in the smooth working together of American and British Free Churches, Church of England and Quakers? Its beautiful grey buildings, in Chinese style, are arranged among trees and gardens and great stretches of grass playing-fields. It's so much more true to Chinese spirit than the somewhat flashy and pretentious Yenching University (Peking). It has the only dental school in China, and now plans a hospital for the town. It specializes in agriculture, and all students going out as teachers and pastors are instructed in modern agricultural improvements, so that they can help the farmers in remote districts. Its experimental farm circulates good sittings of eggs, seed and fruit trees among the farmers and lends the pedigree bull to improve the stock.

Students are detailed off in groups for two weeks each term to lecture to the public on air raid precautions—the use of gas masks and digging shelters! (What does Chiang anticipate in this far inland China?) Of course there's nowhere to dig shelters

and no gas masks—but still! His order for definitely military training to be included in the curriculum of every university was challenged here by the two Quakers, who maintained that it was against the principles of a Christian community. They carried their point against even the Generalissimo, who allows it to take place, by special permission, in vacation. Well done, “Quakers”! But he insists upon much drilling and physical exercise, to use up the steam of youth which broke out in students’ riots five years ago.

I watched some of them at it—the girls were priceless with their long gowns flapping as they marched; the boys were in neat blue uniforms. The day was ended by the salute of the flag as it was lowered at sunset; one of the many little ways the Generalissimo is teaching a national sense in China; well may the Japanese be alarmed at the closing of China’s most vulnerable point—her lack of unified loyalty.

With the Reds so near there are a great number of soldiers about in Chengtu. Most of the Government troops are ragged shambling dregs and justify the traditional Chinese classification of putting soldiers bottom in the social scale. Many wear straw sandals or sandshoes and their main equipment is a dirty bath towel fluttering from their knapsack, an umbrella, a shoddy rifle and a fan. Mr. Bergsen told me of a parade in Hankow when, after some display of marching, the order was given, “Attention! Stand at ease—fan!” It’s almost impossible to clear a building of vermin which soldiers have been quartered in, and nearly all of them are opium smokers. In contrast, the men in Chiang Kai-shek’s private army are alert, disciplined, well fed and perfectly equipped, up to the standard of any first-class soldier. Many of them are now in reserve in Szechuan.

From the amount Chiang Kai-shek’s done and is doing in this province he may well be looked on as a god. Both he and Madame Chiang are keen Christians and every one who knows them are full of love and admiration for them. She’s one of the three famous daughters of Sun-Yat-Sen and, they say, quite as able as her husband. He’s evidently very sensitive and not physically robust, and it’s wondered if he will be able to stand the strain of his position. He’s tireless in his activity,

flying from one place to another to superintend, personally, the many reforms he's started.

December 10th—Hankow.—Wonderful five-hours' flight from Chengtu in 14-seater Douglas 'plane. I was the only passenger and could move about to look down on the Yangtse and the great mountains, which had soared so high in the sky when we were down below them. They're terraced up to the very top, and every crevice between the rocks is cultivated.

December 22nd—Shanghai.—Thrilled by the discovery of Chinese Civil Centre. Best modern architecture I've ever seen; China has not lost her architectural genius. In the Museum and Library buildings her old spirit, her walls and drum towers, are reincarnated in modern guise. She doesn't need to ape France or America! After immense trouble I ran the Chinese architect to earth, Mr. Diu-Doon, who gave me unworthy photos of plans and elevations. His office was stacked with all European and American architectural journals—how many of our architects follow the progress of oriental architecture? In the great Stadium (also very good) there's a rugger match next week between—Mongolia and Tibet!

Surprised to find Sikh policemen here; and not surprised that the Chinese are awed by these huge swarthy men.

A thing that has struck me so continually while here in China is, that England seems (in so many ways) to be the China of Europe—the mellow forms and traditionalism, the realism and humour; it's curious how much the flavour seems the same—we have the basis for such good understanding.

On all sides are accounts of the intolerable behaviour of the Japanese. Their tanks parade the streets most days. From conversations and my own observations—unless Britain and America take drastic steps *soon*, aggressions will take place on a scale beyond control; and not only China will have cause to regret them.

Shanghai is an interesting place when one has some real Chinese background to look at it against, but I'm devoutly thankful that I didn't get my first contact with China in a place where a European woman who's lived here for six years said, "But I never knew there was a Chinese city in Shanghai."

But remember that Shanghai has the longest Bar in the world and probably the poor creature hadn't had time to walk to the end of it! I sail to Hong-Kong on Christmas Eve. . . . Oh, a very happy Christmas to you all, and all best wishes for the New Year!

From AUDREY.

Christmas Eve

CHRISTMAS DAY was the only one on which I would have exchanged my surroundings, without any reservations, for those at home. I was travelling from Shanghai to Hong-Kong on the Nord Deutsche Lloyd ship *Potsdam*. "On Christmas Eve Midnight Mass will be administered by Father Jacobus in the second-class smoking-room," was announced on the notice-board. There was no Protestant service. I went to find Father Jacobus.

"Entschuldigen sie bitte, Vater."

"Bitte Fräulein?"

(My English will be understood better than my bad German.)

"I am a Protestant but there is no Protestant service over Christmas. May I share in your Mass to-night?"

"Of course, with pleasure."

He held out his hand. It was soft and fat.

A Chinese cripple, a nun, three women and two men from the first-class in evening-dress, a frigid little deaconess and several of us second-class passengers knelt among basket chairs. The slight roll of the ship and vibrations of the engine increased the stillness of devotion.

"I will draw all men unto me."

"Peace and goodwill among men."

We sang one or two German Christmas hymns and "Stille Nacht." The Christmas story was read. Father Jacobus started his address:

"We are gathered here, my brothers and sisters, on this holy night, to worship at the cradle of our Sacred Lord on His birthday. On this night above all others we come in harmonious love and unity which He was born to bring to our hearts. On this night we must forget all divisions in the worship of the Sacred Child, etc., etc., etc."

We knelt reverently waiting. As the hours rolled round the bells would ring in Bethlehem.

Father Jacobus administered to the nun on my right and the cripple on my left. A young priest followed him with the chalice. He was scarlet and trembling as he passed over me from nun to cripple. Something he whispered to Father Jacobus was met by a shake of the head. I returned to my place with little love left in my heart.

Next morning a steward brought the card of Father Jacobus. I followed him.

“I am very sorry, Fräulein, that I misunderstood your request yesterday. I was unable to go against the tenets of the Church.”

“I should never have asked you, if I had not received Mass several times in Roman Catholic Churches, with the permission of the Priest, when there was no Protestant one.”

“Really! I am amazed that any of my brothers should have disobeyed this strict rule of our Church.”

“Perhaps they were following the example of the Good Samaritan—or even Christ Himself who ate with publicans and sinners.”

A Night on Hainan

S. S. KATING of the Butterfield Line steamed down the beautiful Hong-Kong Estuary and turned south parallel with the coast; the sun was sliding down on to the ripple of its mountains. Gates blocked all communication between first and second-class and the narrow deck was cramped. The pungent smell of Chinese humanity wafted up from the lower deck. A somewhat sinister figure in a black uniform stood by the gate barring the second-class deck, exhaling an atmosphere of alert mystery which aroused my curiosity. After various non-committal observations I inquired the reason for the strict division of the classes on the ship.

It transpired that he was a senior member of the Special Police. Owing to frequent attacks by notorious Chinese pirates who had their headquarters round Bias Bay, east of Hong-Kong, it was necessary for small ships such as this to have aboard an armed body of police. As the capacity of the second and third-class was 500 against 8 in the first, who were usually Europeans, the precaution was taken against the possible connivance of the Chinese passengers with a pirate attack, and their united rush on to the Europeans and officers. My friend was a White Russian and—looking at his thin face and blue eyes, the misleading slenderness of his body and the line of his mouth—as a pirate, I should have avoided attacking a ship in which he was on duty.

The first meal was painful owing to the extreme shyness of the five other first-class passengers. We all sat round one table. There was a Scandinavian journalist—how he ever looted copy I do not know; two young French women in black sat speechless; Mr. Chan, a young Chinese from Hong-Kong; and a silent man looking like a monocled apostle, about whom my curiosity was allayed by the Second Officer who told me that he was a White Russian acting as French Consul in Pakhoi.

Mr. Chan was by far the most agreeable of the party. His slender elegance in spats and European clothes gave him the impression of being seventeen or eighteen; so when he referred to his four daughters it came as something of a shock.

It transpired that the ship had twenty-four hours at Hainan, a Chinese island of which I had never heard and which it was obviously necessary to see. Inquiries were met with discouraging accounts of the difficulty of landing. Owing to sandbanks, ships must anchor two and a half miles outside the main port, Hoihow, and when the tide is down only very small craft can get up the river—sometimes it takes six hours.

Next midday the low bulk of Hainan loomed out of the sea to starboard. A wind chopped the muddy water of the Yellow Sea. Mr. Chan stood on deck in his grey Homburg, carrying a brand-new sponge-bag.

“Are you landing here?”

“Yes—you see” (giggles of embarrassed emotion), “I bring the coffin of my mother—she die two years ago—to be buried in our land here.”

I murmured sympathy, at which he giggled again.

“Well, you can tell me, is it so difficult to land? I want to see Hainan. It is silly to stay for twenty-four hours on the ship when I might be ashore.”

“You want to see Hoihow? There is nothing to see.”

“But I want to land anyway.”

“Well—may I ask you—it is a very poor hotel, but I have a hotel here. If you would like to stay in my hotel I am very happy.”

“Oh, but how kind of you! I would love to. It is charming of you to ask me.”

“That is my pleasure. It is very bad hotel. I have motor-boat he come to meet me. I will be very pleased you come with me.”

I dashed to my cabin to fetch my sponge-bag, comb and mackintosh, bumping into the journalist on the way.

“I’m so sorry, but Mr. Chan’s launch is waiting—I’m staying the night in his hotel on shore.”

Perhaps it was the instincts of the knight-errant which

provoked his request to accompany me. Mr. Chan was delighted. I reassured worried officers that we should be aboard again by 11 a.m. next day, and staggered down the gangway.

The report of the difficulty of landing at low tide or in rough weather was verified. We made a long detour round sandbanks and up the river, winding in and out between mudflats, often having to be pushed off bottom shallows with a bamboo pole. In one place the narrow channel was blocked by a *sampan* loaded with bowls and teapots, which was only refloated again after the combined efforts of our pushing and three men poling for twenty minutes. To cover the last stretch we changed into a *sampan*, which was poled up to the wharf among the rugged timber hulks of junks and the forests of their masts.

Mr. Chan's hotel, Chang Chow Fong, was opposite—a four-storied building with arched verandahs, peeling like its neighbours in the row. On the opposite bank were groves of palm and banana trees. We were led into a courtyard at the back with the usual jumble of firewood, odds and ends of old furniture and pots and pans. Here a barber was busy with his tin basin, knife and ear-cleaner. Up an outside staircase we came into a large high room with a tiled floor, a row of cubicles down each side, and tables and chairs in the middle.

A *Boy* rushed up with keys and the doors of all the cubicles were opened, and white cotton curtains hung over the door of the "rooms" of our choice.

My loose-box, about 14 by 8 feet, was windowless, but the partitions being only 7 feet high and a foot off the floor it was airy. It contained an immense hard bed with white curtains, a table, a wooden bench and a washstand on which the scarred enamel basin and mug were filled with cold water by the *Boy*. The most handsome piece of furniture was a colossal spittoon the size of a bucket—for which purpose I used it as there was nowhere else to empty my basin between my (slight) evening and morning ablutions. Mr. Chan offered me his own private bedding but, of course, I assured him that the bedding of his hotel was first-class, a cotton quilt and two brick-like pillows, which were all quite clean, though I did use

my petticoat as a sheet against my face; it was quite out of keeping to expect comfort or tidiness.

Mr. Chan was distraught with emotion at returning after four years' absence from his native place, and with anxiety about the coffin. It transpired that there were two coffins on the ship and he was a prey to anxiety that the wrong one might be unloaded into the junk sent to fetch it. Suppose he should get the old man instead of his mother! He looked quite ill, and I wondered afresh at the myth of the West that the Chinese are impassive. I had found them a most highly-strung and sensitive people.

True, a contradiction is created by their passive fatalism, and through physical nervous reaction being blunted by suffering and hardship, but I thought often that a self-control, in keeping with their culture, endangered a superficial acceptance of its mask as the real expression of inner feelings. This emotional sensibility in some measure explained to me the apparent incongruity of the inhuman cruelties perpetrated by a people who are normally gentle and peaceful.

We set out for a meal on the arrival of his sister, a characterful woman of 40 with bound feet and fine green jade, whom one assumed to be rich as her husband had been chief magistrate. She only spoke Chinese, of course, and Mr. Chan apologised that she was old-fashioned.

With the shabbiness of its plaster houses changed into the picturesque by sunshine Hoihow might have been a Mediterranean town, except that the streets were wide and the population entirely Chinese. The majority of the people were particularly good-looking, with the fragile appearance of southern Chinese, especially the women who did the same heavy work as the men. I have never seen more beautiful feet and ankles than those of the Hainanese. Foot-binding was rare and, owing to the hot climate of Hainan, wooden sandals were worn, allowing the women to move freely with a graceful and upright carriage. The clip-clop patter of these sandals was the musical background of the sounds of the place. Men and women alike wore loose trousers and short coats made of striped cotton, looking like pyjama material.

We had an excellent meal in the best restaurant—no one can compete with a Chinese in delicate courtesy as a host—and wandered round the town, which had no interest apart from the unfailing fascination of Chinese street activity. We drank tea in a tea-house with Mr. Chan and some friends of his, as charming as himself.

Feeling that we ought not to burden our host with our presence when he must have so much to do, I suggested we should go to the cinema I had noticed during our walk. Mr. Chan saved me heavy losses through his assistance in the changing of some Hong-Kong dollars into Hainan currency by a money-changer of unquestionable dishonesty. We bid him *au revoir* and proceeded to buy the most expensive seats in the cinema, costing about 4*d.* each.

This was the first Chinese cinema I had been to. It was an excellent film with a Chinese cast, story and setting. The Chinese film actors, through the natural simplicity of their rendering of the characters, conveyed vivid emotion and a conviction far greater than the artificial exaggerations of many Western films. And with their great sensibility the Chinese do not have to resort to the *outré* to find entertainment.

Life was shown with its subtle beauties, weaknesses and humour left in delicate shades of tone for those who could to appreciate—not emptied of scope for discrimination by being outlined with primary colours. An attractive Chinese girl is the most irresistible creature in the world, beside whom American and British film stars appear obvious and rather boring.

The wooden benches in the hall were packed with young people who were genuinely moved by the trials of the heroine, and delighted in her final capture of the hero from the artifices of the vamp. Although my young Chinese neighbour gave me explanations in moderately good English the story was somewhat hard to follow with its Chinese synopsis. As in their traditional plays it taught a moral lesson. It also emphasised the evils of Chinese ideals being replaced by the materialisation of Western innovations. The heroine, though she taught in a modern school, retained her Chinese

honour, while her counterpart was the vamp who defied parental authority, breaking the hearts of her respectable land-owing parents by imitating American film stars. The story ended with the hero and heroine, his arm round her waist, walking into the sunny orchard of fruit blossom while ducks turned somersaults in the pond nearby.

I came away from the cinema feeling that in this last evening on Chinese soil I had been given the final reassurance as to what my answer would be to my German friend's question: "Find out and come back to tell us who remain here, whether the imagination of joys and sorrows is the same in the East as it is with us." I should certainly say, "In China, in essentials, human sorrows and the imagination of happiness are the same as ours."

Back in the hotel Mr. Chan welcomed us, arrayed in a new Jaeger dressing-gown and embroidered peacock-blue satin slippers. Begging us to sit down he ordered the *Boy* to make some of the special tea he always carried with him. I asked him the explanation of the great number of blind men who wandered about the streets, ringing a bell like a muffin-man. As we sat there we could hear them in the distance, and at that moment a ringing came into the court below and up the stairs. The blind man came up to the table, but Mr. Chan told him to go away. There is no sense of privacy in a Chinese hotel, any one can wander in at all times.

He explained that in Hainan there was a traditional society of blind men, two or three hundred, who were masseurs. Every one of any means was massaged every night before he went to sleep. Some had regular men, others called to a passing one announced by his bell. If he was considered dirty he was sent away. Their relative cleanliness was something I had noted in those we had passed in the street during our walk back from the cinema. Mr. Chan had his special man who massaged him for an hour or two every night, for the charge of about 6*d.*

I was exceedingly curious to know what sort of massage they gave, but doubted if it was "done" for a female to be massaged by even a blind man. I could not risk Mr. Chan losing

face through a misdemeanour of his protégé. I asked him, although I knew it was useless—he said, “Of course, you must have anything you like.” I begged the journalist to have a massage to find out about it. The pretext of his refusal was his fear of dirt. I was so annoyed at his feeble lack of spirit that I only just escaped exclaiming, “Well, as the masseur is clean enough for Mr. Chan, who is far cleaner and more civilised than you in every way, you might have invented a more convincing reason for your cowardice.”

We retired into our respective stalls after several clients of the hotel had come in. They were all men, two or three military among them. Hardly had I ensconced myself under the dusty bed-curtains when I heard the arrival of the masseur to Mr. Chan’s cubicle next door. The ensuing sound of gentle hisses and smacks so goaded my curiosity and longing that I decided to risk a faux pas and call the blind man in when he had finished with Mr. Chan. Soon the noisy tread of hotel clients walking over the tiled floor gave way to silence, only broken by the proceeding next door and the intermittent grunts as each occupant got into his bed.

Alas! the next thing I knew was that I was woken by a chorus of coughing, clearing of throats and spitting—such as amply justified the capacity of the spittoons. The paling of the darkness over the partitions proclaimed dawn. I shall now never know what the massage was like of the blind men of Hainan!

I stepped off Chinese soil finally, into a junk. The wind straining its great square sail swept us back to the *Kaying*. The wrench of leaving China seemed more than I could bear. A melody seemed broken into suddenly, uncompleted—but, surely, that is China, it is never finished for those who have begun to hear its great melody.

Back to British!

I HAD FIVE days in Hong-Kong, two in Canton, three in Hanoi, ten in Saigon, five in Angkor, ten in Java, four in Bali and two in Malaya, but those weeks somehow stand apart in my mind from the rest of my journey and I am deliberately not writing about them in this book. As it is I can give but a niggardly catalogue of my gallery of mental pictures, and so many accounts have been written of most of these places by those who know them less superficially than I do. Angkor and Bali have an illusive quality which it seems difficult to put into words—though probably it is cowardice and sloth that decide me not to try.

Angkorenveloped me in a tropical trance, in which a curiously oppressive fear and subjective impotence were woven into my wonder. Among those great ruins, submerged by the relentless inevitability of the jungle whose giant trees and insidious creepers tipped and tumbled stones which must have cost innumerable human lives to set in place, the predominant reflection was of man's ineffectualness against Nature, when his peculiar attribute of Thought is absent. The Kmers left relatively recently, as late as the sixteenth century, yet to what an extent have its monuments been destroyed by the merciless vitality of Nature's life! "Only ideas are immortal which carry life in them; material memorials will crumble ultimately unless they embody an idea which survives" was the thought which kept repeating itself through the dream days in Angkor.

The reality of Bali far surpassed the descriptions of it, and evaporated the adverse prejudice which its popularity had established in my anticipation. The dignity of its people—beyond belief beautiful—and their unassuming pride have protected them from their exploitation by the most blatant type of tourist which it has been my misfortune to see doing their best to destroy unconscious dignity with their insensi-

bility. Long may the Balinese continue to regard themselves superior to white people and their habits, and remain the gift to the world which they are—a race of cultured artists whose shapely grace seems to include another dimension in their living of life.

With Singapore came British influence. Its first unmistakable portent was lunch at the Adelphi Hotel, complete with boiled cabbage and that beverage so mysterious and nauseating to foreigners, which the British label coffee. As a British national a sense of guilty responsibility descended on me in the gastric misery of the Frenchmen who had accompanied me for a few hours on shore before the *Maréchal Joffre* sailed on.

As I went through the hotel lounge I heard a Britisher remark, "He ought to be a decent chap, he had an English education." A little later an English lady said to me, "Oh, you must stay in Penang; it's the most beautiful place in the Far East. It's exactly like Devonshire." And when a British major told me that the most impressive place in India was Lucknow, "Because there the British flag always flies," his shocked embarrassment was inexpressible when I said that that left me cold.

I was filled with admiration for British Colonial administration with its impartiality and efficient organisation, and interested to make comparisons with what I had seen of French methods in Indo-China. The question of the relative merits of the two systems is a matter of opinion. None can fail to admire French roads or prefer the lay-out of their towns and general aesthetic sense, but their individualism prevents the same smooth working of the machine, which British officials learn to achieve on their school playing-fields. While in Saïgon I had cause to complain to a senior official in the Post Office of a piece of initiative on the part of a minor official against all postal rules. Admitting the fault he added wistfully, "We cannot organise our colonies as you British do."

Be that as it may, I am proud and grateful of my nationality and many of its achievements, but I admit to a preference of being away from its influence when travelling. Among settlements of British people in foreign countries and in the colonies

which I have visited the opinion (slowly being qualified at home), that what is British is superior, remains in its pristine purity. It may be correct and it gave the confidence and cheek necessary to build an Empire, but it would be more pleasant if left to be expressed by other people.

The persistence of this nineteenth-century characteristic of British residents abroad affects the British traveller who, it is assumed by the natives and other nationals, will share it, and is treated accordingly. If you happen to prefer human contacts to prestige it is exasperating and miserable. You fall between two stools, in the sense of alienation from your fellow nationals, with whom there ought to be the glowing bonds of common outlook, and the assumption of the native people that you are too superior to wish for any friendly contact.

For this reason I dreaded India, and as we steamed up the Hooghly Estuary I felt an antagonism to it, which was later shown by some of my countrymen there to be based on a too sweeping generalisation.

It is a mistake to get the first sight of India through Calcutta, said to be the most British city in the world and, after London, the largest in the Empire. The combination of the particular type of the majority of British traders and Bengalis which a traveller meets leaves an unfavourable impression which is very difficult to eradicate. I suppose it is the effects of the climate on both of them.

For the first hour after arrival in the Grand Hotel, knocks every five minutes made a bath a fugitive dream. A stream of guides, bearers and antique merchants were allowed to invade my room with no control from the hotel till I complained to the management. During my little experience of India proper I found myself often in a state of irritable defence, in which I understood better the hitherto unaccountable attitude of the mind of British people in India towards Indians.

Among this infuriating rabble came Abdul, the *dobi* (washerman), a small and gentle Mussulman with large melancholy eyes. He was the first and almost the only Indian with whom I got in touch as one human being with another. In customary fashion I beat him down over the cost of clean-

ing my coat and skirt, but that seemed to cause no ill-feeling. Later I asked him if he could get my shoes re-soled, and on my inquiring the price when he brought them back he said it was nothing, he liked to pay it for me! Over tea, which had just been brought to my room, I learned that he had been to England as a *dobi* on a ship, that his baby son had died, but his adored little daughter made up somewhat for the loss, and for whom he took a piece of chocolate-box ribbon with much joy. On the day I left Calcutta he turned up with a parcel and, when the door was shut, presented me with a bottle of orange drops for the journey.

“May I have your picture?”

“I haven’t got one, Abdul.”

“Will you send it from England in a letter?”

“It will be a long time before I get there and you will have forgotten me by then.”

“No, Miss Sahib, the God say we have one tongue, speak one thing. I do not forget.”

Two days were more than enough in Calcutta. I hated everything about it except Abdul, a British major whose ambition was to write a play about Cornwallis, and seeing Aunt Mary,¹ whom I should meet again in two days on the frontier of Nepal. The heights of British Imperialism were expressed by the Army and Navy Stores exactly reproducing their shop in Victoria Street (even to the same blankety brown paper), and a worthy counterpart of the Albert Memorial in the form of a museum built as a memorial to Queen Victoria.

Misery reached its climax in the topee I was forced to buy by Aunt Mary, subsequently worn about twelve times but proving useful as a basket for plants. All my efforts to lose it were unsuccessful. It was phenomenal the number of times it was secreted in train racks and hotel cupboards for that purpose, always to be returned by a breathless Indian who had run after me with it and claimed a tip.

I was terrified of catching smallpox which was raging in Calcutta. On the boat from Rangoon I had shared a cabin

¹ Honorable Mary Scott, D.D., of the Scottish Mission, stationed in Sikkim, where I stayed with her.

with an old Eurasian army nurse who, over her night-cap of brandy and soda, enlarged on the topic of this epidemic, inquiring if I had been vaccinated. On assuring her that it was only four years since the last occasion, she exclaimed:

“Oh, my poor child! That is no good. Here we are done every year. It will be very dangerous for you to leave British cantonments or your European hotel. Look, I always carry camphor cubes with me, they are very good against it. I will give you this one and you must tie it round your neck.”

I never found a way to attach it as she recommended, but held it firmly to my nose during my visit to the Temple of Kali.

This was built about 1600, and here I had my first sight of Hinduism. That vision of dirt, degradation, congealing blood, flies, flowers and filth left me with terrified repulsion. The most degraded forms of Buddhism I had seen had never reached that level of depravation.

It was February 29th, Leap Day. I did some final shoppings accompanied by the British major. Going up in the lift of a bookshop I said:

“You know it’s Leap Day to-day?”

“Good heavens! You really shouldn’t suddenly mention Leap Year in a lift like that—you frightened me out of my life!”

Perhaps that is not funny without knowing the major.

The longing to escape from India as I had seen it, so far, added to the thrill of starting for the forbidden land of Nepal.

I had coffee and oranges in the lounge of the hotel before catching the night train to Raxaul, the railway terminus on the frontier. In my jodhpurs I was already free of my surroundings. Already great silences swallowed the waverings and soarings of the female singing sentimental songs to the orchestra. I hardly realised the heavy blanket of heat hanging over my physical body—already keen mountain air cut my skin. Great distances replaced the palms and basket-chairs in which sweating humanity consumed its whiskies and sodas. I was going to the Himalayas, to a Himalayan country which still barred its doors to foreigners. I looked lovingly at my bedding-roll and suitcase which would share the adventure; my few other belongings I was leaving at the hotel.

The drive to Howrah Station in the open taxi was like a dream. The incongruity of the immense Sikh driver cramped behind the wheel, fitted with the fantastic crowds of traffic—rickshas, ox-wagons, buses, closed wooden purdah-carriages like toys, and other wildly-driven taxis moving through the heavy dust, as thick as a London fog. I was off on another adventure by night—it was nearly always by night.

Visions passed through my mind of them all. Liverpool Street, with the family standing on the black platform by the luggage trolley with the clear summer sky above, pink clouded and grey, like doves' feathers. Then, Friederichstrasse, with the eeriness of station night desolation and the waving of the last two familiar figures as the great train moved into the darkness. I had left Harbin at midnight after being searched for bombs. I saw again Lin's lumbering figure disappearing down the platform of Peking Station when I left for Jehol, and again for Hankow. Leaving Singapore, leaving Kuala Lumpur, and now leaving Calcutta, by night.

If we talk of China's millions, Howrah Station compelled me to think of India's billions. The noise, the smell, the crowds of people! I see it all now vividly. The bundles, the squatting brown bodies hung over with sweat-drenched clothes through which I waded to the barrier. I hear the hub-bub of jabbering, and smell the sickly stench of humanity and dust.

I sit again in that second-class carriage, looking out at the seething masses. The train is in darkness because I have arrived an hour too early, not realising that Calcutta time is one hour in advance of the rest of India. A tidal wave of humanity and bundles sweeps down on to the train opposite, with a roar of shouting. Through windows and doors they scramble with umbrellas, pails and babies. The mysterious forms of women follow, shrouded and swathed—brilliant as butterflies, cowering as slaves. How can that man travel with a glass-doored cabinet! And here is one of the reputed prosperous *babus*—how revolting that waddling fat, how hideous that laughing sensual mouth with its fang-like teeth.

I am offered tea, oranges, soda water and papers, but I sit in the darkness, fascinated by the ceaseless hub-bub and move-

ment. On and on they come—the train is over-full but still they crowd in.

This is not humanity as I have met it in other countries. In them it might have been covered by different coloured skins, expressed through different language and customs, and at varying stages of development, but it was essentially humanity as I knew it. Here there is something which seems to form an intangible barrier to understanding, creating a fear and, often, repulsion. Is it the force of accumulated antagonism between conquerer and conquered? Or am I experiencing the feelings of a child among grown-ups? We Europeans are but precocious and active children, lacking in the quality of mind, as apart from brain, which only age can bring.

China had this quality of age, but here in India it had taken a different form, in the cultivation of psychic sensibility. For six thousand years an ancient wisdom had been handed on, veiled from the uninitiated behind Hindu symbolism and inherited unconsciously by the ignorant masses of Indian people. Must this not produce a power in accordance with its development? Perverted power? Yes, perhaps; certainly the Temple of Kali had shown into what carnal travesties the common practice of Hinduism had transformed the symbols and persons representing spiritual visions. But because this power is beyond the capability of my race, must I resent it? And there are bridges to our common meeting-ground. Abdul gave one. Others are out there—in that brown baby lolling asleep in its mother's arms, in that old man leaning on his son's shoulder, in that husband supporting his drooping wife.

Now the lights go on, I spread out my bedding. An Indian gets in who makes me wish it was a corridor train. He has two tin pails and a frilled white pillow. Well, I cannot undress and I am so hot! Another Indian gets in; two is better than one perhaps. The Eurasian guard promises to wake me at 5.30 a.m. to cross the Ganges. The train moves out of the station. Calcutta is left behind and we are moving north to the Himalayas. Out beyond the hot rattle of the train the Plains stretch away to the horizon under the serene brilliance of the moon who transforms their monotony into a silver silence.

Into Nepal

AT RAUXAL late next afternoon I met Aunt Mary. We stayed the night in the British Legation tent, the bungalow having been destroyed in the great Bihar earthquake of 1934.

In the dusty weight of the gloaming we wandered along the river, an insignificant trickle which seemed hardly adequate to serve as the inexorable frontier of that most exclusive country of Nepal. A narrow bridge spanned it, across which no one might pass back or forth without a permit. Even the British missionary doctor from the hospital in Raxaul might not cross it to reach an emergency case a quarter of a mile on the other side, or Nepalese peasants to bring produce to the bazaar in the dishevelled railway terminus.

By the river a faded fourteenth-century fresco of Hell seemed to have been brought to life in the dusk. A nameless fear grew heavier and heavier as I looked at this camp of *sadus* (holy men) who were on their way back from religious pilgrimages in the sacred plain of Katmandu. Ghostly figures, naked but for an indistinguishable loincloth, moved slowly in the heavy silence. Bodies, the livid grey of wood-ash rubbed into the skin (partly against insects), long matted hair unnatural henna-red hanging down over their shoulders, puffy or cadaverous, these ghosts glimmered with a horrible sense of damned innocence under the drugged stillness of the black trees. The glitter of their eyes fascinated and repelled. Their unearthly stare seemed waiting to drown its hapless victim like some dark pool of evil bewitchment, whose depths hold secrets unfit for mortal knowledge.

Next morning the sun was already relentless when we esconced ourselves and our belongings in the Nepalese train, which carried us the first 25 miles of our journey to Katmandu. The engine fussed merrily over the continuation of the Indian Plains, which finally meet rebels to their uniformity in the

blue phalanx of Himalayan foothills which grew larger and clearer as we rattled towards them. Mango trees giving deep shades to the stations, and ox-wagons creaking along the dusty road beside the line, seemed exactly like India, but the air that swirled the dust round the carriage and tossed the lacy branches of the pepper-trees was not the over-used air of the Plains but still mountain fresh.

Now the flat expanse was changed for the somewhat monotonous *tarai* (light jungle), glinting with an innocence which belied its notoriety for malignant malaria and big-game. Up the little train panted, often stopping for breath, till it arrived exhausted but triumphant at the rail-head at Amlekhganj, after four valiant hours spent in covering the 25 miles.

If railways are to be judged by their consideration for the whims of their passengers the Nepal Railway can claim the highest praise. During its journey through the *tarai* passengers were able to collect firewood, and at Birganj, where we had been doing some photography, our curiosity finally prompted Aunt Mary to ask the guard the cause for the delay of over half an hour. He answered that he had been waiting for the Miss Sahib to tell him when she was ready for the train to go on!

It was supremely exciting to be really in Nepal, approaching the Himalayas and seeing men in tight-legged white cotton trousers, embroidered skull caps and brilliant cotton-wadded quilts thrown across one shoulder—but the thrill was gradually mitigated by the great heat and dust, and far, far more by the adjuncts of the peculiar additions to our luggage.

Our kind hostess, though she lived in far Katmandu, had preserved her enthusiasm for her aviary and with, I recognise, a nice appreciation of the incongruous, had embarked on an aquarium. Our visit was an admirable opportunity to add to these collections, and we had been asked to escort from Calcutta a variety of birds and a large tank of tropical fish.

Our trouble was the epicurean necessities of the birds, a tin of maggots, with which they had to be fed frequently. Whether the journey had impaired their appetites, or whether the birds considered the maggots not fresh enough—in which

(Top) *On the road to Katmandu.* (Below) *A steam-roller in a crate being dragged to Katmandu. The raised stick is only used for beating time.*



I sympathised heartily—the fact remained that not only was the carriage filled with an appalling stink, but these pale revolting things escaped beyond the bars of the cages before they were eaten, and roamed the carriage. We were not sorry, therefore, when we reached Amlekhganj, where a few shops lay at the foot of the range which barred the continuation of the railway.

We carried our food for the two days with us, and after a picnic lunch in the station rest-room, and I admit to a sleep on the floor, we saw our belongings not needed on the journey put on to the ropeway which swings across the mountains to Katmandu. Somewhat relieved, though the fish and birds were with us of course, we packed into an elderly American tourer which roared its way most sportingly over the next 30 miles on wheels braced together with wooden splints.

The first part of the way was beside the Suparita River, in valleys where the variety of sculptural leaves tangled in semi-tropical jungle was a piquant contrast to the rugged hillsides of rock soaring into the dazzling sky. The angular skeletons of cotton trees flamed vermilion flowers, acacias scented the air, and monkeys chattered through the branches. A string of elephants came flumping their placid way along the road, lazily fanning their great ears. We were told they were the Maharaja's hunting elephants going to the *tarai* for his annual tiger-shoot. Their hulks repeated nobly those of the mountains above.

The effortless luxuriance of valleys was left behind, sometimes the road ran under rock walls 200 or 300 feet high, or through broken red knobs and knolls like a Dürer etching, bunched with umbrella pines. Higher still were cheerful valleys where isolated houses or villages stood among young wheat already vivid against the orange-red soil, and fig trees spread their shapely leaves.

The first sight of Nepalese houses came as a shock. In the distance their thatches above timbered red brick walls, glowing with mellow clarity in the mountain air, flashed one back to Europe. They had a solid prim neatness I had not seen in the common domestic architecture of any other oriental country

—except, perhaps, Bali where, though naturally entirely different in construction, there was something of the same character. This European comparison cannot be carried to the detail, especially in older houses in which the elaborate woodwork is richly carved.

Mountains sheered up at the end of the valley, barring any further progress by wheeled traffic and, after the straggling village of Bhimpedhi, the road petered out into a stretch of shingle and boulders beside the ford across the river. The low yellow light gilded a group headed by the Maharaja's *mukir*, whose duty it was to accompany us wherever we went in Nepal, except of course within the boundaries of the British Legation.

With him was a gaily painted wooden and wicker carrying chair for Aunt Mary with six alternative bearers, a sturdy little dapple-grey pony for me and one for her servant Dorgé, who, a Lepcha from the more mountainous Sikkim, refused it with a sense of insult. The Maharaja insists upon supplying riding ponies for the transport of visitors to Nepal.

Behind these stood a bunch of little men in dust and sweat-darkened white cotton shirts, and trousers rolled above the knee or tightly fitting the calf. Their long bodies, short tremendously developed legs, square bare feet and unusually thick necks were remarkable at first glance. It is these coolies who do the portage over going too steep and difficult for pack-animals and too expensively heavy for the ropeway. They hitch up to eleven stone on to their backs, the pull being taken by a band of plaited string round their foreheads, bending them double till they can see only the yard or two in front of their feet.

Splashing across the river we corkscrewed up almost vertically, rising with the edge of the shadows which crept out of the valley as the sun sank. Fresher nipped the air, sweet with juniper, and wider and wider spread the distance beyond the silhouettes of umbrella pines rising from rocks singing with crickets. The gradient of one foot in three slipped one back on the saddle, and from time to time the pony stopped to get its breath, with flanks heaving like bellows.

At last the white houses of the little village of Sisagarhi

glimmered in the dusk above the walls of its fort, black against the sky. Away out below, the great forms of mountains and valleys were simplified under the veil of night. A ghostly silence hung between the earth and the sky lit with cold stars.

The night in the Maharaja's rest-house remains a confusion of excitement, cold, stiffness and vague alarm with the assurance from the *mukir* that another earthquake was expected to shake Nepal at any moment. He told us that many people were sleeping in tents and the priests were busy with special prayers and offerings. We slept with torches and coats beside us, ready to rush out at a moment's notice. But sleep was only broken by the altitude.

An unbelievable radiance drenched the earliness next morning. Such intense light pouring over such a colossal landscape, through air which justified the often undeserving description "like champagne," was something new to me. The depth of blue over-shadowed mountainsides, and the brilliance of the eucalyptus trees, splashing shade on to the dazzling wall of the rest-house, made this world seem to be carved from a blue-green opal.

By 8 a.m. we passed the carved open-fronted "village hall" where local affairs were discussed, and up the track already burning white in the heat. Now the first rhododendrons straggled up, their full scarlet blooms handsome above dark foliage; almond and peach blossom shone satin pink against the blue veiling of distance.

A clump of trees sharp against the delphinium sky, and then—the stupendous ethereal majesty of the ramparts of perpetual snows towered into eternity. For some minutes there was nothing but those pearl walls, their cold purity warmed with light as the Parthenon at sunrise.

The first shock over, my eyes travelled down to the iridescent ochre mountains dwarfed at their feet, and then to the plain enamelled with green which spread out from the cold shadow of the range on which we stood.

The coolies, with their loads on rocks, were resting in the shade, eating rhododendron flowers. The *mukir* answered our question with the information that the juice from these

flowers is stimulating and, taken in large quantities, intoxicating. I did not verify this local belief by experiment.

The descent from the pass was too steep to ride and the surface too treacherous, but the long walk down was beguiled by the interest of the traffic on this main road to Katmandu.

Coolies toiled up under every conceivable load, even including passengers seated cross-legged in baskets: Nepalese women in their gaily printed-cotton skirts, the fullness gathered into a bunch in front, their tight-fitting velvet or cotton bodices with long sleeves, their heavy silver anklets, bracelets, nose ornaments, coral ear-rings and ropes of coloured beads: a Japanese dentist carried in a chair: three high-class Nepalese ladies hidden in litters with fluttering silk curtains, surrounded by a retinue of servants: the intermittent stream of devout Hindus and Buddhists returning from the annual pilgrim season, of which, we were told, there are often 20,000, to each of whom the Nepal Government gives a rupee and much hospitality. Tibetan lamas in their wine-coloured robes, some wearing thick felt boots, were hardy and complaisant, and a great contrast to the Hindu sadus in their strange nakedness, or half-furled up in plaid rugs.

These beings badgered thought, particularly beside the irresistible attraction of the Buddhists. There was a uniformity not only in the ashen bodies and brass water-pots, but somehow in the faces. Sculpturally most of them were beautiful, finely moulded regular features, aquiline noses sharply cut, shapely mouths with full curved lips—but yes, it was something in those mouths which the magnetism of the eyes had at first eclipsed. Was it an evil or the fear of an unknown power which repelled and yet drew one in curiosity?

At the bottom of the descent a river sparkled through a village of thatched brick houses among pear blossom. In the open shops it was somewhat depressing to see goods stored in homely square tins with such names as Huntley & Palmer, Peek Frean, etc., and when we stopped to buy cigarettes for the coolies we were handed the familiar packets of Cherry Blossom and Queen marked "Made in Japan."

Riding ahead along what seemed the obvious track, which wriggled up on to a lovely stretch of highland, it was not till some miles later that I rejoined the rest of the cortège that had come by the new road that wound round the spurs I had crossed. On the return journey, that duller road made me glad to have ridden the other way; over springy turf which swept in graceful curves among thickets of pine trees with a park-like and refreshing peace for pony and rider after the rocky track under blinding sun.

Beyond the next village we heard a rhythmic chorus punctuated by a solo. Rounding the corner, we saw in the distance one of the largest imports on record being dragged on wooden rollers up to Katmandu—a steam-roller.

In its packing-case it looked like a cottage, and beside it stood the overseer singing the solo which the three hundred coolies answered, with a finale stacco as they threw their weight on to the ropes. Where we passed it the incline was not steep, but it moved only four inches with each pull. When we met it on the return journey, eleven days later, it had covered about eight miles—and that through relatively level valleys. We were told that the Maharaja's Rolls-Royces were carried over in bits—but perhaps the parts of a steam-roller were beyond even Nepalese coolies.

In the burning heat of the valleys we were extremely concerned for the birds, but more so for the fish. We had been warned that snow sometimes lay on the passes in March, and consequently a thermos was filled with boiling water in readiness to keep up the temperature for these delicate specimens. Now the diametrically opposite danger presented itself. On the back of the coolie their zinc tank became perilously hot, though we sheltered it with coverings, and it seemed likely that the precious wretches would be boiled. Fortunately they all survived.

Up to the Chandragiri Pass at 7,400 feet the road was in places steeper than anything so far encountered—often over burning rock whose jags had been worn into smooth waves by countless bare feet. It was incredible to think of the steam-roller surmounting this climb but, I was told later, it was not

brought over this route for fear of spoiling the surface, it was taken by the less good elephant track!

Finally at the top a yet wider view burst upon astonished eyes. The Katmandu Valley lay far below—the heavy green of tree-tops frothing the 2,000-foot drop from the Pass—an enchanting vision of spires and domes, parade grounds, coral-coloured houses, and twisting rivers among green cultivation, which cover the 125 square miles of this ancient vale of civilisation. Beyond, green-red foothills piled up one behind another till, seen stretching from east to west for 300 miles, the Himalayan snows glimmered like the back curtain of a dream.

In the Pass an old almond tree blossomed on the huge cairn dappled with rags of all colours written with prayers, to which every passer-by unfailingly added a stone till, in fact, the heap was so large that it half-blocked the way. The many loaded men and women who passed by picked the leaves of some plant as they went, sticking them into their shirts or tying them to the ends of their plaits, but I could not find out the reason. They were virile friendly mountain people, with ruddy faces and quick smiles—so different from plainsmen and dwellers in tropics.

The track wound down and down under trees and rhododendrons furred with orchids, the air heavy with daphne fragrance, till it flattened out across the valley in the village of Thankot. Here the Legation car awaited us in its spotless luxury.

Having walked much of the way I was coated with dust and felt altogether unsuitable to desecrate this sophisticated vehicle. Uncomfortably we packed in under birds and fish, and glided—or so the sudden effortless motion felt to weary bones—across the 9 miles to the City of Katmandu. Its wide streets, modern buildings and even equestrian bronze statues in the Royal Academic style, might have seemed strange to find in Nepal had not surprising contrasts become the expected rule, rather than the exception, in the East. Through a gate dreamed an unmistakably English garden of lawns and flower-beds, and we drew up in front of the gabled rambling British Legation.

Katmandu Valley

ISOLATION is connected, often rightly, with primitiveness; but surely few such areas in the world can rival the riches packed into the Katmandu Valley, guarded in the fastness of its mountains—a symphony in Nature's music.

In this small area, only six by twenty miles, has crowded the culture and civilisation of the whole of Nepal during 2,000 years, we know, though it may well be longer. Its towns and villages, treasure-houses of art and craftsmanship, are separated from each other by only a few miles of intense cultivation—green as only green can look against its complementary colour, red. For the soil is the colour of cornelians and the houses of dark corals, and in March the blossom of apricot and almond clash with the perfection that only Nature dares. All round the mountains stand on guard, rank upon rank of red-shimmered-green, and from above in the northern sky the gods of the snows stare down on their treasure, whose significance lies in the little hill rising strangely from its flatness.

Legend tells that aeons ago the valley was a deep lake, to which came the Vipasya Buddha. After he had walked round it he threw a charmed lotus into its waters, prophesying that “When the lotus shall flower Swayambhu (self-existent one) shall be revealed as a flame.” Later two other Buddhas visited it, also foretelling its prosperity. Finally the Bodhisattva Manjusri came and, walking round the lake, cleft the mountains to the south with his sword, causing the rift through which the Bagmati River still drains the valley.

When the floor of the lake was uncovered the holy lotus was disclosed growing on a little eminence. On the western side of this the Bodhisattva made his residence while, to the east, he built a shrine to protect the sacred root. Over this now rises the temple of Swayambhunath, wherein a flame is

kept burning perpetually. So the dominance of this little hill over the surrounding plain is symbolic of a history created and ruled by its sacred character.

This mysterious country was made and held together by its religions and, till comparatively recently,¹ it is only through the monuments, records and legends of these that the history of Nepal has been traced. That it was already a holy place of pilgrimage in the older Hindu religion from which Buddhism sprung, is implied through the visit made there by Gautama Buddha himself between 563 and 483 B.C. The legend of this visit is substantiated by the memorial *stupas* built at Patan (the ancient capital) in 250 B.C., by the great King Asoka, the first royal Buddhist, who also erected an inscribed pillar at Rummidei, the birthplace of Prince Gautama, and consequently one of the four most sacred sites to his followers.

Guarded by its mountains through the centuries, Nepal has remained unviolated by the invasions, Mongol, Islamic or those from the west, which have swept Asia. It has been pointed out that in it has been preserved the ancient Indian civilisation long since lost to its founders, and there too, though it is predominantly Hindu, Buddhism has survived while it has died in its original home of India.

Naturally this unconquered² country is a stronghold of tradition. The preservation of its continuity is regarded (surely rightly?) as the bulwark to national unity and integrity, and is consciously fostered in the policy of isolation which its geological structure facilitates. May this natural inaccessibility and the wise use of it, long preserve Nepal as, perhaps, the one country of the world which is able to work out her own development as dictated by her own character without enforced alien adulteration!

But though the modern world shows that the least provocative nations are subjected to the worst tyrannies, in the light of justice Nepal deserves this undisturbance. This military State, which it has been since the Gurkhas dominated

¹ See *Nepal* by Percival Landon, pub., 1928.

² The various Chinese and Tibetan expeditions into Nepal never enveloped the whole country or remained long in the Katmandu Valley which they penetrated.



One of the Stupas in Patans aid to have been originally erected by King Asoka in 250 B.C.



Example of a fine bronze.

the Newars some hundred and fifty years ago, has given an example of balanced control which refuses to use military strength in aggression. Certainly the British in India cannot be too appreciative of this fact.

We have become so accustomed to hearing of Gurkhas coming to our help that there is a danger of it being taken for granted. It has given rise, perhaps, to the very erroneous idea I have met with surprisingly often, that Nepal is one of the autonomous States of India. Far from it, it is an entirely free country, and the frequent voluntary help it has given to us is a remarkable fact for which we cannot be too grateful. In the Great War, which need not have affected Nepal in any way, 200,000 men were sent over to Europe, where their valour and reliability became proverbial.

It was interesting to note how different the Gurkhas are from the other Nepalese races. These tough little mountain fighters have a simplicity, friendliness and humour, and seem to be largely without that mysterious "something else" in other Orientals, which makes it natural for them to be so popular with the British Tommy, with whose temperament they seem to have much in common.

Although by nature these people may be ready to be friendly, and under official commands their soldiers are easy comrades, the general policy of determined isolation filters down through the whole people. Personal contacts are not approved of, and the official surveillance and restrictions leads the visitor to Nepal to feel himself a suspicious interloper whose presence is tolerated only within certain limits, and these limits are narrowed with the increasing number of strangers who are permitted to enter Nepal. Now, entrance into all temples is forbidden, and even the approach on to the stone paving or platform on which the Hindu shrines or temples are built, without the special permission occasionally granted by the Government; the Buddhists, on the other hand, retain their traditional tolerance.

The reason for this fastidiousness is only too welcome—would that more nations used it to preserve their individuality—but it inevitably gives an impersonal character to a visit

made to the Katmandu Valley, and no foreigner is allowed to penetrate into mountains around it. One cannot, as it were, get inside the country and must accept to be content with looking at it. And certainly no country could compensate for its reserve more adequately than Nepal, by its visual beauties both in natural scenery and architecture.

Some authorities maintain that China adopted the pagoda form of structure from Nepal, and certainly, without knowing this at the time, the tiers of overhanging roofs which characterize the buildings at once carried my thoughts back to that country. The Chinese traveller, Hiuen-T'se, has left an enthusiastic account of the architecture in Nepal which filled him with wonder in about A.D. 657. He describes as the special marvel "a tower of seven stories roofed with copper tiles," which might seem to imply that the pagoda was then unknown in China.

The temples and old houses as one sees them to-day are peculiar for the series of roofs of different widths of projection, supported by wooden struts, which shelter each story. Temples may have as many as five tiers, square or octagonal, often covered with long sheets of metal, graduating up to a formalised umbrella at the top, or a spike composed of diminishing gilded rings.

The houses vary in the number and width of the projecting roofs. Some of the richer residences have as many as four stories above the ground floor. The ceiling of the first floor is often lower than the second more important one, where this widest roof may have a balcony running round under it, supporting it on columns, or a casement window built out slopingly to the edge of the roof. The walls are built of small red bricks, the roofs covered with corrugated red tiles, and all the wood-work—struts, window-panes, doors, lintels, etc., are carved with a wealth and delicacy such as I have never seen before in domestic architecture. In the narrow streets of Katmandu and Patan the projecting roofs have been adapted into overhanging stories or a string course, and give the general appearance of an Elizabethan street.

Many of the poorer houses are more simply rectangular in

design and have thatched, instead of tiled, roofs which slope at a steeper angle. The woodwork is always decorated with carving in structures over about 150 years old, built before the Newars became the subject people under the virile Gurkha philistines, who despise the works of those they considered effeminate.

This last fact brings the more poignant regret at the sight of the cruel destruction caused by the great earthquake of 1934. Many superb structures have ominous cracks and tilts, and the heaps of ruins still lying around them presage a doom such as has befallen monuments of as great value as they are themselves. Though a few houses have been rebuilt, incorporating some of the old carvings, the best Newar artists and craftsmen have emigrated to Tibet, where they produce much of the finest work of that country.

The modern wealthy residences, the new Palace and the Prime Minister's home are in French style. Looking through the wrought-iron gates in the great royal gateway, one's breath is taken away with what appears to be a palace from the outskirts of Paris which has been carried bodily from there and set down in the Himalayas. Its formal lawns and tanks, its immense dazzling façade of columns and arches are complete in every detail. According to accounts and photographs it is as complete inside as out, with *salons* and a great hall of mirrors and chandeliers, romanesque ceilings and plaster elaborations. I was told that the ladies who live there use French cosmetics and never appear without French kid gloves.

I think it is the thoroughness of the contrast, adopted without compromise, which prevents that haunting feeling of a culture having prostituted itself with the imitation of another. Here there is a deliberate choice in every act of inclusion, which does away with the psychological sense of invasion allowed through weakness and lack of definite conviction. It is certainly an example in favour of rigid autocracy—which it is, vested in the virtual dictatorship of the Maharaja. It is he who really rules the State, while the King is the religious head too holy to appear more than once or twice a year before his people, or ever to be spoken to directly: the

Maharaja must be the intermediary, even though the King is standing beside him.

The regulations prohibiting the exit of Nepalese from Nepal are as strict as those permitting entrance. Even members of the ruling family are seldom allowed to indulge in visits to India, and students may never study in foreign countries. One wonders how long these inhibitions can be enforced, and how long Nepal will remain the most exclusive country in the world.

Letter from Nepal

British Legation,
Katmandu,
8/3/36

DARLING FAM,

I must try to share a little of here with you, before the next chapter of Sikkim begins. It seems an impossible task because it's all been so completely unlike any other part of my journey. In this remote country one somehow expected to be farther away from the familiar than ever before, but it doesn't work like that at all. Nepal's protection of herself doesn't stop with the exclusion of nearly all Europeans but continues consistently in an impenetrable reserve towards the few to whom she allows the privilege of crossing her frontier. This admirable discrimination fences one tightly into the familiar, and I'm finding it most difficult to adjust myself to British atmosphere and the loss of my solitary independence after six months' freedom from both (except the few weeks with the Veteran). Private contacts are not smiled upon, and I feel hedged away from humanity into a little British pound.

But the amount there is to see! I tried to describe the main features of this architecture in the last letter, but there are such infinite varieties in form and detail that one can seldom say "like so and so"—it's so entirely its own character.

Nearly every day we've been sent most kindly in the Legation car to different places—Patan, Swayambhunath, Bhatgaon, Pashpati, Tiger Hill, Boddnath and Balaji—they're none of them far, but the sun is exhaustingly hot during the day to walk under, and burns with peculiar intensity through the thinner air of this altitude.

I was particularly eager to visit Swayambhunath because every evening from the verandah here one became more curious. When the shadow has crept out from under the dark

blue wall of the western mountains beyond the quiet lawn, the trees frame glimpses of the river, red soil shadowed into purple, startling flames of pink fruit blossom, the luscious green of vegetables, vivid sheets of mustard flowers and, hanging out from the blueness like a vision, the cone of Swayambhunath still catching the sunlight.

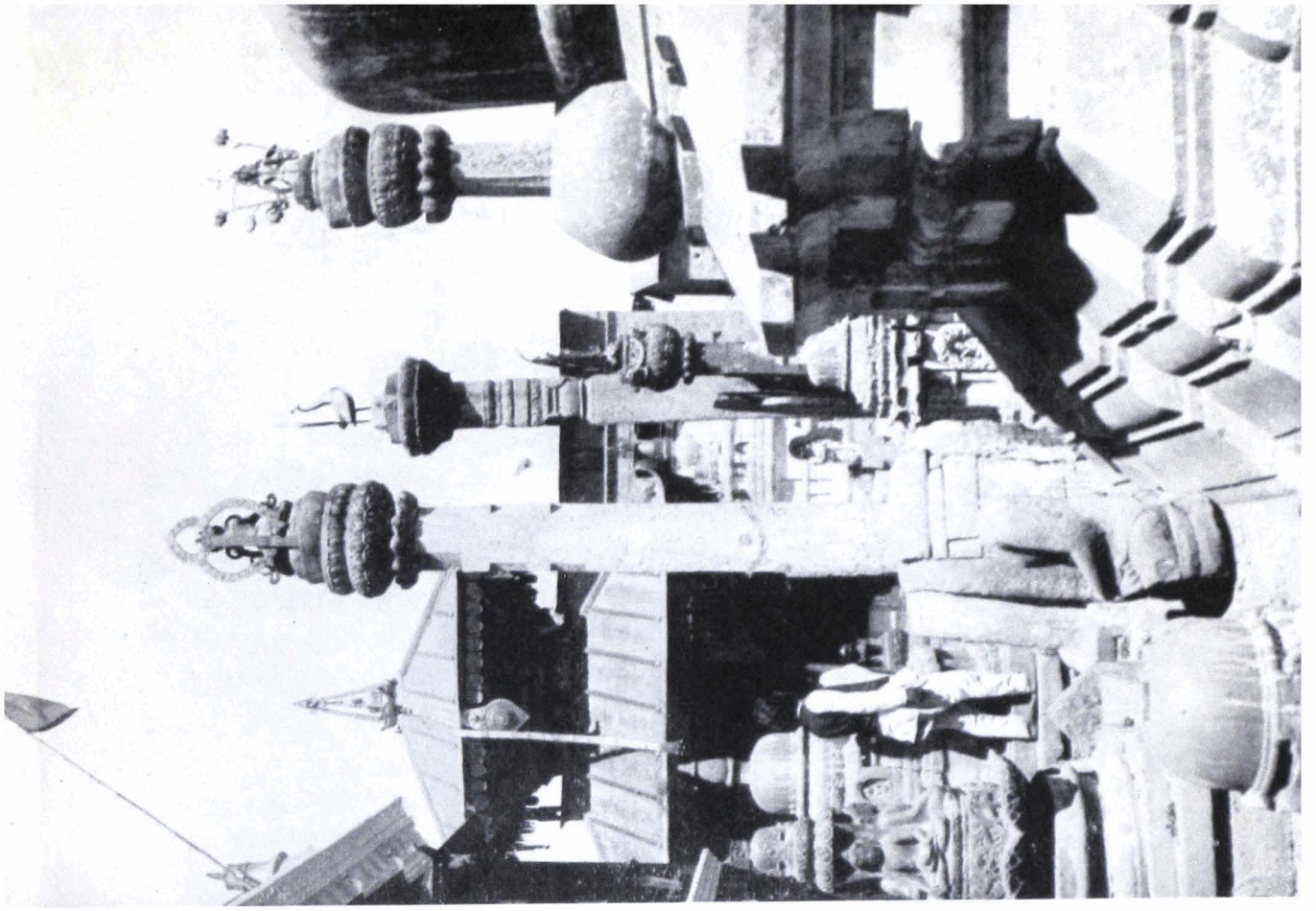
When at last we set out for it the sun was still resting on the tops of the snows, and there was a nip in the air over the fields of vegetables (mostly onions) which women were carrying in big baskets into the city. Men were already working in extraordinary numbers in the fields—within sight of Swayambhunath the soil is considered too holy for oxen to be used and all tilling is done by hand, which gives the valley its peculiar garden look.

The hill is about 300 feet high and the little path worn up it soon turns into steps which get steeper and steeper till they're almost vertical. The bare branches of trees netted the way over with shadows and it was all so fresh and peaceful, except for monkeys who screamed and scrambled most irreverently over the many *stupas* (onion-shaped memorials of former holy men). It was a great refreshment, too, to be among tranquil Buddha figures, ever undisturbed by the millions of pilgrims who have toiled past them.

The little plateau at the top somehow made me think of a chessboard jostling with its pieces of many different shapes; but you must imagine in the middle a huge *stupa* like half a snowball. This is the only way I can think of to describe this extraordinary place, and it's not meant sacrilegiously—how could I dare to be that under the stare of those eyes! Because above the *stupa* rises a square copper *toran* surmounted by a spire of thirteen flashing gold rings with a conical canopy at the top, and on the four sides of the *toran* are painted, in grey, blue and black, two staring eyes under arched eyebrows. They're infinitely mysterious, and the problem of whether they see all or nothing is accentuated by the question mark which substitutes the nose.

This sacred area, belonging equally to Hindus and Buddhists, is crowded with the symbols and shrines of both religions.

The Holy Hill of Swayambhunath. Its shrine (right) is shared by Hindus and Buddhists.



Round the base of the *stupa* are Tibetan prayer-wheels dividing the five stone shrines dedicated to the Divine Buddhas, the large gilt figures being hidden behind curtains of iron chain-mail. There are carvings of the animals representing the Tibetan calendar, symbols of Tantric worship and, among other Hindu deities, a shrine to Sibala, the Goddess of Smallpox.

Here a whole Nepalese family were present at a special *pujia* they were paying for. We watched for some time; I haven't seen the different *mantuas* (ritualistic positions of the hands) used before, except in originally ritualistic dances. The priest sat cross-legged in front of the shrine among flowers, scattered rice and flies—oh, so many of them. I wondered if they were the incarnated attendants of the Goddess of Smallpox.

Then we walked along the saddle of the hill to the western hummock, which is thought to have been sacred to some long forgotten animist worship in pre-Hindu times. The contrast between the open slopes of grass and groves of trees was refreshing after the tense psychic overcrowding round the Swayambhunath temple. The atmosphere of unincarnated sanctity, which hung in the sunshine or flickered in the shadows crisscrossing isolated white *stupas*, was very powerful. The shrine and enclosure protecting the dwelling-place of the Bodhisattva Manjusri were closed to our pollution.

The next day we spent in Katmandu itself. The road from here runs dustily between the walls of the Palace and Prime Minister's residence. In the burning heat we tramped on beside the vast parade grounds where soldiers were drilling, smart and alert; and again that shock of the unexpected—the commands were given in English, with every sergeant-major inflection learned from the originals in India, where the Gurkhas are trained. (How devastatingly unsurprising Europe is!) But after this, all European associations were left behind. We were in narrow crowded streets under pagoda-shaped temples and carved arabesque windows. In the Durbar Square was a great figure of Kala-Bhairab painted its wicked black. The old palace with its wealth of elaborate carving didn't leave the

last word with the new one. On and on we wandered and looked, till one had bad æsthetic indigestion—but I won't labour you with descriptions which could never give you any idea of it.

The bead market was fascinating. Nepalese women are fond of ropes of many strings of sparkling tiny beads, bottle-green, scarlet, turquoise blue, topaz or lilac; also hollyberry larger ones made specially for Nepal in Manchester! All these hung in brilliant festoons under the stall awnings among bracelets, anklets, rings, and long bead-tasselled bunches of fine threads of red cotton which they plait into their hair.

We had great bargainings over printed cotton quilts, which the men put over their heads and wind round their necks and shoulders in cold weather. I also bought various pieces of cotton (printed in blouse lengths) for the sake of the designs. Since then Mrs. Bailey has kindly procured for me a copy of the collection she had made of some of the traditional designs for the block-printed materials of Nepal. There're about four hundred. It's interesting to find that spades, hearts, clubs and diamonds are adapted frequently into them.

Later we came across a street where the printing was being done. Yards and yards of different coloured-cotton material were stacked beside each man sitting cross-legged or squatting behind a flat board, with bowls of dye beside him and various wooden blocks carved with patterns. When a length has been stamped the stuff is washed and hung up to dry. Their colours are fast. The favourite ones are black and red on white, and there are seldom more than two colours used on stuff by the yard; and patterns are all-over or running. On the quilts the designs are scattered in more elaborate groups and colours, birds, animals or flowers. Curiously blue is seldom used.

You can imagine how difficult it was not to be carried away by the delicious designs and uneven quality. I bought 18 yards of pink mallow-coloured cotton printed with scarlet, for 7s., and two hand-woven sheep-wool blankets, so light and the irresistible natural colour, and my umbrella.

We were walking down an alley when I saw it hanging outside a shop, and though it weighs a ton and needs a coffin

to transport it, I simply had to buy it; only 10s. It's really a wedding ceremonial umbrella such as I saw carried over the painted litters of the bride and bridegroom in a wedding procession one day. The frame is of wood dyed red, and the covering of thick oiled paper; it's about 5 feet in diameter. The paper is painted with gods and goddesses, animals and flowers in light soft colours, and varnished. The red and green pole is 7 feet long. You won't groan when you see it!

My most important purchase I made at Boddnath. This is another Buddhist shrine, more or less the same form as the *stupa* on Swayambhunath but much bigger and with steps instead of rings above the *toran*, and with much later curiously Græco-Roman gates. The story of it is that a little girl of supernatural birth, called Kung-ma, naughtily stole some flowers from Indra's heavenly garden. She was punished by being born as the daughter of a swineherd in the Katmandu Valley. Being left a widow with four children she took up the profession of a goose-girl, and conceived the devout wish to build a temple to Amitabha Buddha. She craved the king, and was granted, the amount of land an ox-hide could contain. Using the old device of cutting it into strips, she built on the area thus measured her temple, from the proceeds of goose-herding. Did you think it was such a lucrative profession? One of her sons, Thomi Sambhota, introduced the present alphabet into Tibet. Consequently it's a place of pilgrimage particularly visited by Tibetans.

After a charming Tibetan in a gown of purple Chinese brocade had shown us round, two Tibetan women came rushing out from a house to Aunt Mary (who was wearing her Tibetan dress as she often does) and asked eagerly after relations of theirs in Sikkim. They were so pleased with us that we were invited into the house they were living in. Up the rickety grubby stairs we were ushered into the prayer-room-guest-room, where a brawny lama sat in his voluminous wine-coloured robes beside a low altar.

We were bidden to sit down on the carpet (I rather wondered if we should go away with additional incarnations of life!) and *chung* (fermented millet) was brought in. Aunt Mary

being teetotal, refused, so I accepted for the sake of manners as well as curiosity. It's vinegary acidity in no way tempted excesses, and was surely a most adequate disinfectant to the very questionable metal cup!

Two other brothers came in, to whom the ladies belonged—because in Tibet it's "love me, love my brothers," and wives are generously shared. While they all talked with Aunt Mary I looked on, fascinated by this first contact with Tibetans. The woman were heartier than any I've ever met—positively boisterous in a tomboy way, so different from any other oriental women I've seen.

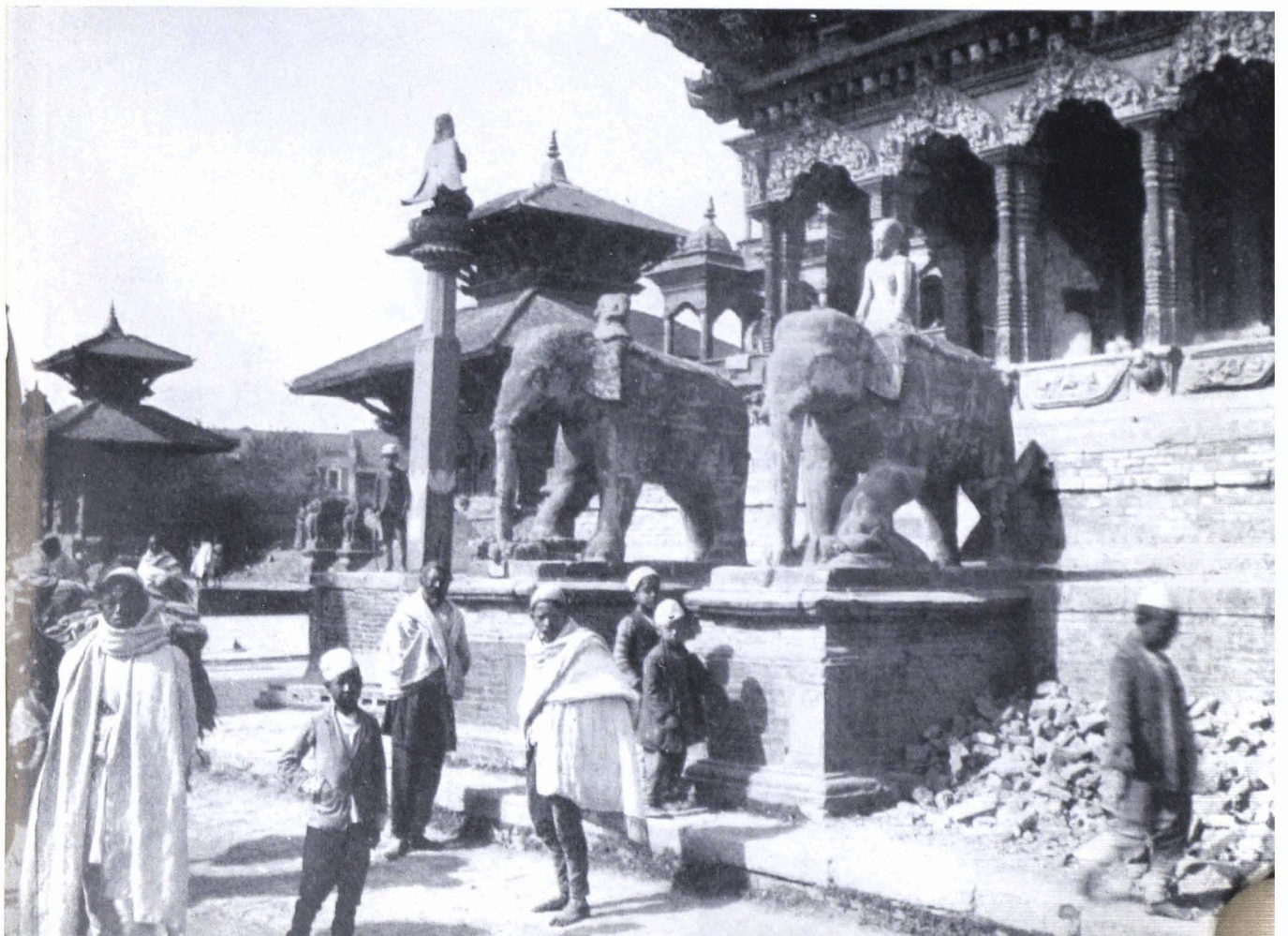
By the altar were two copper and silver trumpets beside a bell and *dorjé* (thunderbolt), and on the wall a tiny *tunka* (a holy picture painted on linen) of very fine painting and colours. In politeness Aunt Mary relayed my admiration of it to the lama. To my theoretical disapproval and practical jubilation he offered to sell it. In the end I went away enriched by this and the two trumpets—for about 15s. Fortunately for me the annual few days were approaching when gambling is legal in Nepal, and even this holy man could not resist the temptation of getting some ready money!

We set out for Tiger Hill, from which is the widest view of the snows, on a peculiarly iridescent morning when the colours of the valley were breathless. Red soil, almond blossom, onions, mustard-field and young rice glowed in front of the sapphire mountains beyond. We passed through Themi, where earthenware pots and bowls crowded every open shop with bulging temptations. It's the pottery for the whole valley. And then we became people in a fairy story under the magic of Bhatgaon.

Patan may be on a grander scale but it has the penetrating melancholy of a deserted capital, and in Bhatgaon there's an other-timeliness which adds a further flavour to its incredible richness of architecture. The Durbar Square was devastatingly full of earthquake ruins, but the sculptures guarding the Nyatapola Temple remain in their superb solidity, and the famous golden door (literally made of pure gold) shines in its perfect workmanship in an incongruously shabby

(Top) *In the Durbar Square at Patan.* (Below) *Entrance to a temple in Bhatgaon.*

(Heaps of ruins in both illustrations caused by the 1934 earthquake.)



brick wall. Here the houses seem to be almost wholly composed of delicate wood-carving—perhaps the very fact of so much woodwork saved them from being shaken to pieces so cruelly in the earthquake as the entirely brick or stone monuments were.

At the foot of the hill we left the car and climbed the steep path, passing ochre, yellow and terra-cotta houses, where friendly people smiled a greeting. Outside one of them sat a sadu, furred up against the cold, playing a pipe. He was rather dotty but hauntingly beautiful.

The view from the top was enormous. Before mists floated up with the heat, we looked over an ocean of blue mountain billows, and away to the snows. Everest looked quite insignificant from here.

While we ate our lunch a Nepalese family, five daughters, a son, their parents and a son-in-law, sat down in a herbaceous group not far away. The Nepalese are evidently picnic addicts. The daughters were brilliant in their best dresses, their shining hair wound in plaits round their heads and pinned with flowers. In the shade of a grove of trees they looked like an arcadian group in a French nineteenth-century painting.

We got so friendly with them that the father, typically wiry and smart, told Aunt Mary that he would like to make me a "tye" to his daughter. She explained that this sworn friendship makes the one responsible for the other in any need, and the bond is considered so close that families thus connected can't intermarry. He was a prosperous farmer and told us that his first wife had been wet nurse to the Maharaja's sons.

We visited Patan several times, the old capital a mile and a half from Katmandu. There the earthquake ruins have been cleared from the Durbar Square and one gets more idea of what Bhatgaon formerly looked like. The incredible number of buildings, memorial *stupas*, and bronze or gilt figures sitting on the tops of columns rising from flat pavement, is something different and fantastic from anything in any other country. It was here I realised how wonderful their bronzes are; it seems to me they are quite as fine as Chinese work, though they are never on such a large scale. The ancient holiness of this city is called in the *stupas* built by Asoka. The one nearest the Durbar

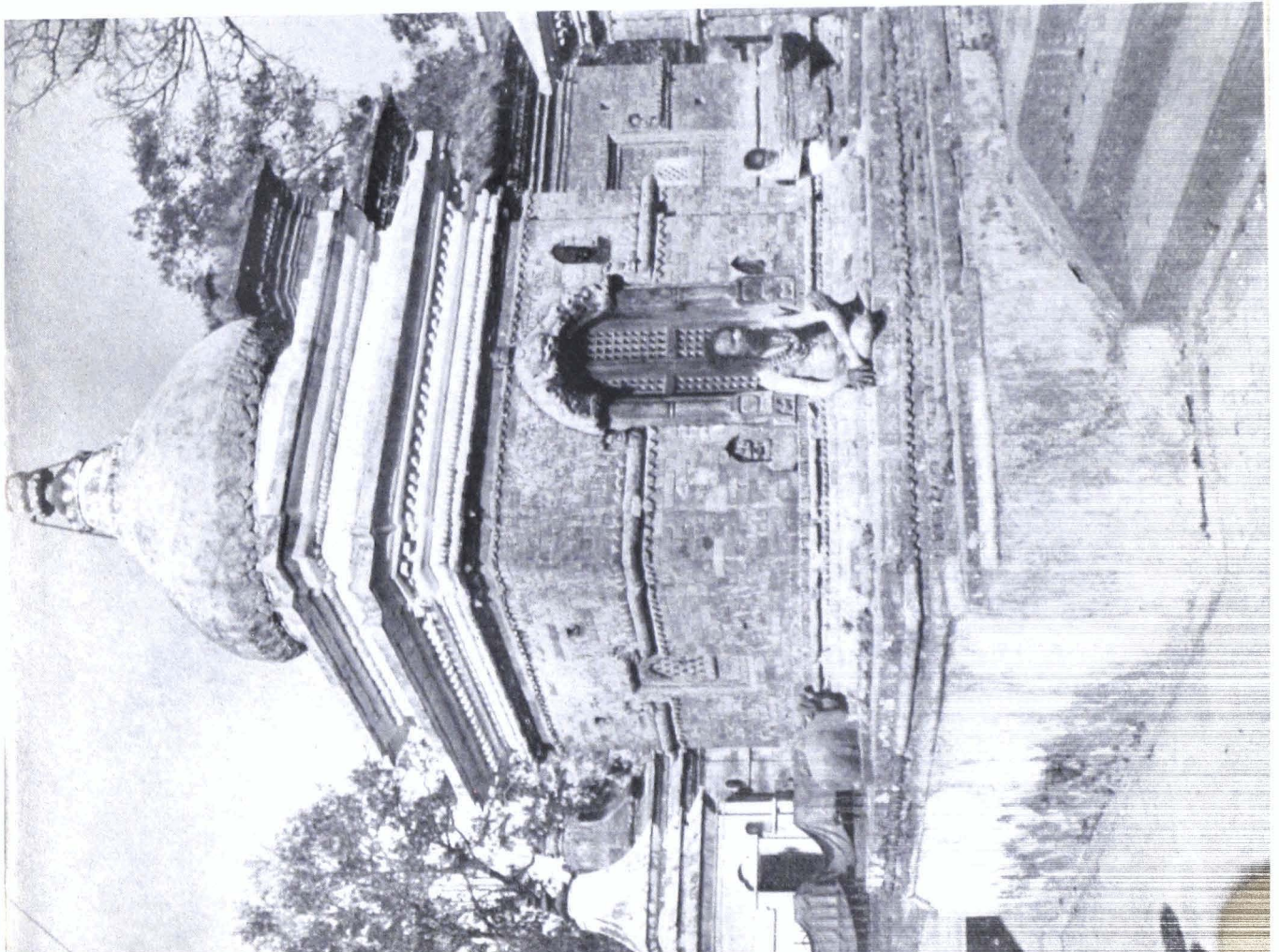
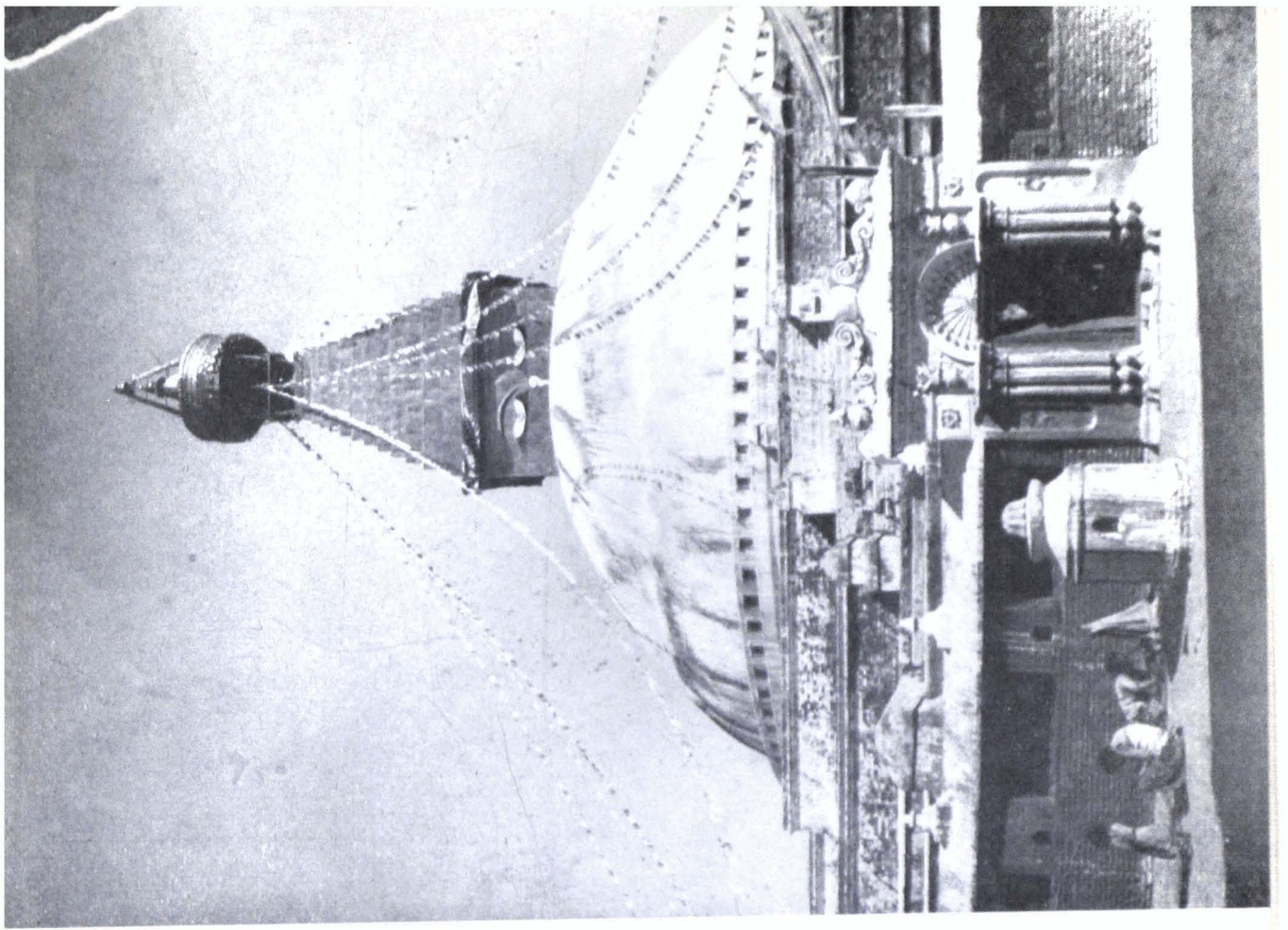
Square stands like a dream beside a lake which reflects its dazzling whiteness.

We wandered long through the narrow smelling streets (sanitation has not yet progressed far) which are far more picturesque than anything in Katmandu. The entire population seemed to assemble when I fitted on hats outside a shop, while the proprietor held a cheap Japanese mirror to assist my prinking. The better class men wear either black, red or blue velvet pork pies heavily embroidered in silk and gold thread, or extremely Parisian caps of machined black cotton, with flowers and the name of a god in raised black embroidery on the side. I chose one of these, with my name in Nepalese to substitute Vishnu's. It's the smartest hat I have ever had, costing 1s. 3d.—made to measure.

We were passing along a narrow street when, in a tailor's shop, I espied the curtains of the bed enveloping it completely like a tent. Nowhere had I seen their design before—the most enchanting red and yellow elephants. The tailor was delighted to sell it to me as it was, and stripped the conjugal four-poster into its iron nakedness for about 7s.

This letter is getting outrageously long and I haven't told you a quarter—of the lovely picnic excursion to little hills beyond Bhatgaon and our wade across the river; or adorable Balaji, where Vishnu sleeps tranquilly in a tank of huge oily carp, and water tinkles from beautiful stone water-spouts below a stone terrace cool under ashes and elms, where grass grows lush and the great bells of daturas trumpet fragrance into the air among roses and jasmine; or Pashpati, the Benares of Nepal, where the dying are brought to die and the dead are burned on *ghats* beside the Bagmati River, where memorials cluster the wooded hillsides, and where I was reprimanded for straying too near the river, but got my own punishment in seeing the remaining leg and arms of a corpse swept up into the centre of the pyre with a sickening smell of burning flesh, near an ill woman dying among her family; or about the magic of the moonlit nights, when silence seems more portentous for the barking of dogs and the distant drums throbbing to nasal singing, and the mountains loom up like great presences

(Left) *A sadu outside one of the many stupas at Pashpati.* (Right) *The Buddhist shrine of Boddnath with prayer-flags festooned from the gilded toran.*



through the stems of the Scotch fir spinney at the edge of the lawn, silver with dew; or the early mornings when the mountains are still cold in sleep, and everything sparkles and the eucalyptus whisper under the waking breath of day.

And I haven't told you how shaming is the suburban structure of the British Legation in this country of superb buildings—if only the earthquake had destroyed this instead of so much of Patan or Bhatgaon, but it cracked the dreadful Victorian tower which may now fall down; or the remark of another guest here—“Oh, yes, Lhasa must be awfully pretty(!) but Tibet is much too cold for me to visit”; or that there's something queer in the water or climate which gives people strange fevers and tummies; or given you any idea of the queer spirit of this valley of secrecy, holiness, mountain vitality, friendliness, suspicion and character; its unique combination of sophistication with primitive virility; its magic colouring in air which is luminous, or its curious aloofness in which one feels like a child among grown-up mysteries, as I felt in Bali.

I've failed entirely, but this letter must go to you from the mysterious country of Nepal before I leave it.

Introduction to Sikkim

SIKKIM IS A fairy-story country, hung up in the sky among its mountains with their feet in the blue of its great valley bottoms. A little country of silence, flowers, butterflies and birds; of falling water, mists, jungle and rocks; of colossal views of "roof of the world" where perpetual snows tower into the sky; of simple people, leisure, poverty, ignorance, mystery and infinite variety; of sparkling smiles, wistful sighs and brooding awe. It can no more be tabulated than the dreams of a summer evening growing into a moonlight night, or the scent of a flower. It has its problems, of course, and life there is made up of often comic trivialities, there being few amenities to make short cuts in each day's journey of necessities—but over all these hangs an intangible mystery. Maybe it is the greatness of its mountains, or perhaps the presence of the spirits which dwell in rocks, waterfalls and trees, from which its people claim descent. But whatever this bewitchment it cannot truly be conveyed in words.

Now, a motor road runs from the Indian frontier at the Tista River to Gangtok, the capital, and some miles beyond through the Penlong-la.¹ True, landslides often close it, but eight years ago before the mail-car rattled its way up every day, a bullock cart or pony was the only means of transport.

Gangtok, the only town, lies at an altitude of over 5000 feet—one bazaar street, a hospital, police station, church, two *gompas* (Buddhist temples) and a few houses scattered over the hillside below the Maharaja's palace and private *gompa*, which crown the ridge. About a mile above lies the British Residency, with the post office built conveniently close—to the inconvenience of the rest of the population—and the prison, among roses and hydrangeas, which has one of the great views of the world. Along the top of the ridge runs a spacious concrete road

¹ La = Pass in Tibetan.

between trees and flower-beds, the promenade effect completed by a bandstand built to the memory of King Edward VII. Down on it all stares Kinchinjunga.

There can be few areas in the world so small with such variety of climate and vegetation. The average rainfall (between May and October) is 176 inches annually as compared with our 36 inches in London. In the tropical malaria-ridden Tista Valley clouds of innumerable different butterflies waver in the dank heat of dim jungle. As one climbs up and up to Gangtok the air is fresher but remains creamy with damp, the vegetation lush, the trees furred with mosses and ferns, and jewelled with orchids up to 9000 feet. Here impenetrable bamboos and creepers are gradually replaced by rhododendron, scarlet or immense waxy white flowered ones; magnolia and jungle trees of heavy foliage by pines and cedars. Vegetation thins with ascent till stretches of Alpine grassland sweep round crags and rocks hung with azalias. At 12,000 feet snow lies in April over mountainsides covered with low lemon-coloured rhododendrons in bloom, up to 14,500 feet, above which snow wastes lie under cold mists often hiding the white cones of summit loneliness. All this variety is experienced over a distance of about sixty miles by the track.

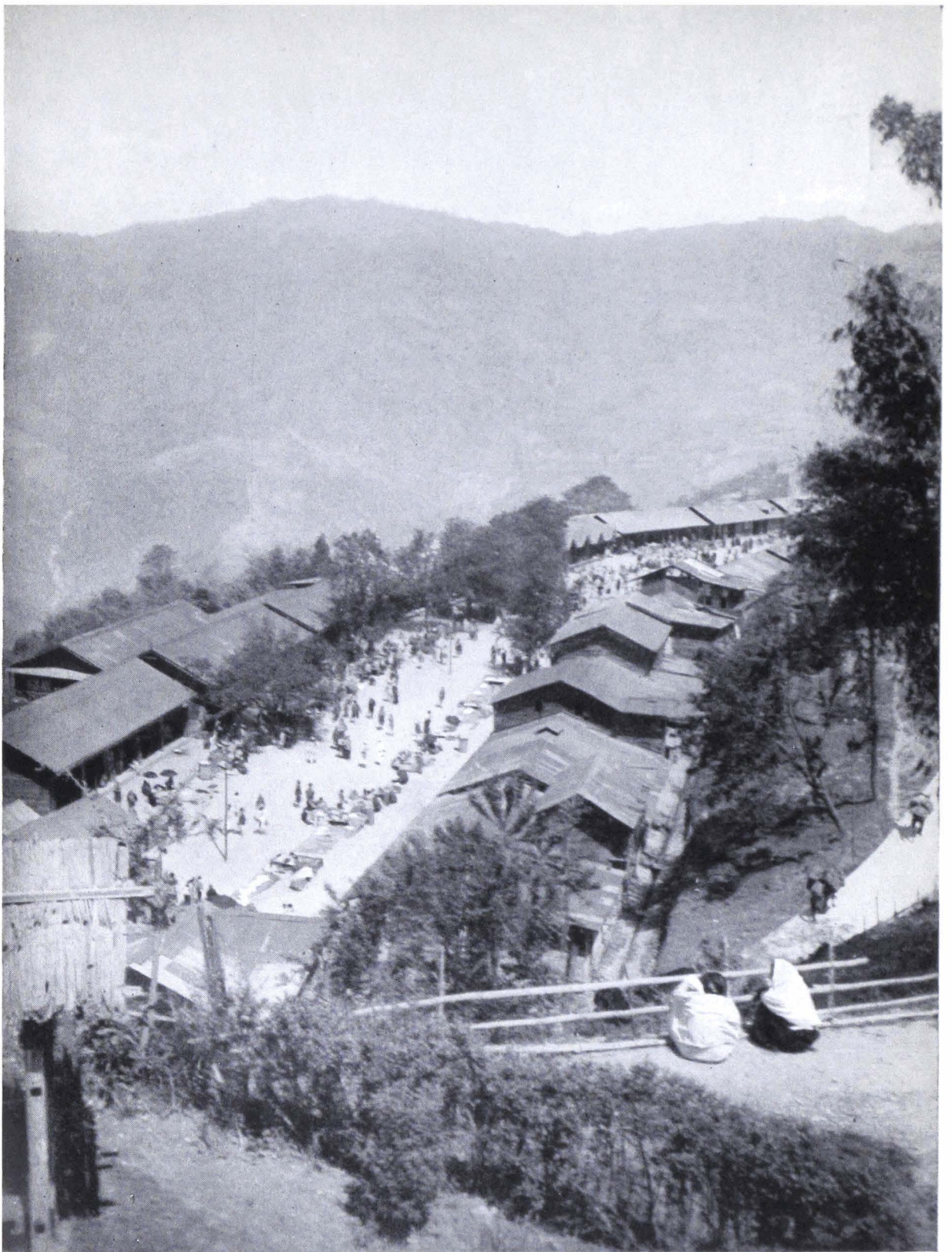
Pressure is still crumpling the Himalayan mountains higher and the valleys yet deep, the shudders as they settle often cause earthquakes. In spring-time, hail storms leave behind them a ravaged track of trees stripped bare as by northern winters. Because of these it is useless to grow fruit trees in Gangtok, and flower-beds must be sheltered by bamboo matting if they are to escape destruction.

Sikkim is a rural country with few villages, its population of about 110,000 living in scattered *bustis* (farmsteads) among their cultivation. There is no telephone except from the post office to Kalimpong; Gangtok now boasts of electric light, but few can afford it. There are no machines and only five cars—many of its people have never even seen a wheel, very few a train or a flat space, except the football ground of the boys' school. A teacher exclaimed on seeing the Indian Plains, "Oh, Miss Sahib, what a big football field!"

Often it seemed difficult to bear the contrast between the luxuriant vegetation and beauty of the country, and the poverty of its people, entirely dependent on their patch of cultivation. Maize is the staple crop, though in South Sikkim, where hillsides allow terracing, dry rice is grown. Oranges are increasingly exported to India. Tea might be grown profitably (the rich tea-gardens of Darjeeling lie across the Tista) but the people dare not risk showing that it flourishes for fear that Europeans will take their land and turn them into coolies. Darjeeling belonged to Sikkim before it was taken by the British—with the excuse that the tea-planters had to be protected!

One of the main sources of revenue is the house-tax, instigated by a British adviser; the result seems to prove it a most lamentable piece of advice. Few slums in large cities could furnish worse examples of overcrowding, in which disease spreads with appalling rapidity among people whose stamina is weak from under-nourishment.

The original people of Sikkim are Lepchas, of Mongol descent with a language allied to Tibetan. They are a small shy gentle people who recede back into their jungle with the advance of the more energetic Nepalese and, though a part of Sikkim is now reserved exclusively for them, are gradually dying out. They love animals, plants, music and children, though with their poverty and ignorance the infant mortality is very high. It has been proved after the education of some of them that they are not without ability. Of three sent down to Calcutta, one carried off all the prizes for surgery and another proved a phenomenal mathematician. In one school I visited, the little Lepcha master of about twenty-one struck me as inherently one of the best teachers I had ever seen, with an uncanny power over the twenty-five little ragamuffins of five to fifteen years old whom he had to tackle, single-handed, in their various stages of development and unruliness. With the uniform gentle smoothness of their faces and the long plaits of hair wound round their heads, it is often difficult to distinguish between Lepcha men and women. The sameness seems to go deeper than appearances—I was told of various cases of



Gangtok's one shopping street on market day.

bisexuality met among them. Animism rules their lives with its innumerable superstitions and terrors.

A certain number of Tibetans live in North Sikkim, drifting from over the borders of southern and eastern Tibet and, the main route from that country to India running via Sikkim, many of them pass through it continually with mule caravans of wool, the main export of Tibet. The market for this is in Kalimpong, where it is mostly sold to the United States for carpets. During the winter as many as four or five hundred mules may be met in a day, and many poor Tibetan families trekking through to Darjeeling or Kalimpong for the cold months. Two tracks cross from Tibet into Sikkim, by the Natu La and the Jelep La. The former is now used most frequently by the Tibetans, the surface being much better though Pass a little the higher; the British military authorities, however, still send their small garrison to Gyantse, in Tibet, by the Jelep La, as laid down years ago when the Natu La did not exist! The Tibetan influence persists mainly in Sikkim through the numerous monks and nuns who, if they are not all actually Tibetan, have, many of them, been trained partially or wholly in Tibetan monasteries or nunneries and are all under the direction of Lhasa, which held virtual secular control also, before the advent of the British.

The fusion of Lepchas and Tibetans has produced a race known as Sikkimese, to which the Maharaja and the collateral branches of his family belong, though, as it is a habit for the Maharani to be a lady from Lhasa, the blood of the royal family must be almost purely Tibetan by now. With the extremely strict laws regulating the degrees of relationship between which marriage may take place, the arrangement of marriages is becoming one of the acute problems among the noble families of Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim, whose traditional inter-marriage makes it increasingly difficult to find legally unrelated partners among the rising generations. It was the Tibetan Maharanis who brought Buddhism to Sikkim, where it has become the State religion, though Lepcha animism survives along with it.

The Nepalese now form the majority of the population,

immigrating across the frontier and energetically settling in Sikkim. They are full of initiative and very prolific; one man I heard of, thinking it more convenient to have his children under one roof, collected the jolly party of 73 from their various mothers. Many Nepalese landlords hold high positions in the State and, naturally, undermine the feudalism which persisted in the fatherly relationship of the kindly Lepcha and Sikkimese landlords for their own people. The Nepalese are, of course, Hindus, but they are not permitted to build temples.

The Maharaja rules the internal affairs of the State himself, with the help of his Advisory Council of landlords, while the British Political Officer guides the external policies. There are no soldiers in Sikkim and only a few policemen, who seem to have little more to do than parade at the Political Officer's annual garden party, and to register the particulars of the passes of the few visitors to this still little-discovered and peaceful country.

There were five Europeans living in Sikkim when I was there. The British Political Officer, Mr. B. J. Gould, the Irish schoolmaster and his French wife, a Swedish missionary in north-west Sikkim and Aunt Mary, with whom I had the privilege of living, when not trekking or staying at the Residency, during my four months in Sikkim. In Gangtok the doctor was an Indian plainsman, the efficient civil engineer a Punjabi, while the Bank plus the main store and most of the shops were owned by Indians, though a few belonged to Tibetans.

I think it is safe to say that Auntie Mary, as she is known by very many in the north-east of India, with the Maharaja and Mr. Gould makes up the Big Three in Sikkim.

Having been told that it was too hard a job for a woman—particularly such a delicate one—she had lived there for twelve years, shepherding some 500 Christians scattered among the mountains—but not only the Christians. Her school for girls, the only one in Sikkim and started with five or six pupils, now has some eighty children ranging from five to eighteen years old, including the daughters of some landowners as boarders.



Nepali girl with her little sister.



Lepcha mother and baby.



Tibetan mother and baby.

She has twenty-five catechists, school teachers and compounders, who serve schools and dispensaries in outlying districts, which she visits on her pony. She is Auntie Mary and intimate friend of the Maharaja and his family, while poor people often walk three days over the mountains and valleys to ask her help and advice. She lives above the bazaar in a house where she boards her teachers and some of her pupils, and where her dining-room often serves as a convalescent ward, or a lodging for one or two destitute families. Her principle being, never to say no to any one in need, has led her at times to share even her bedroom with none too fragrant girls. Although extremely sensitive she lives in discomfort, noise and publicity—alone, though the friend of all in the country she has adopted as her own, with a love for it which is only equalled by her understanding. She is the possessor of that proud decoration for public service, the gold Kaiser-i-Hind medal.

I was fortunate enough to see a certain amount of His Highness the Maharaja, whom it was impossible to know without affection. Small, delicate, sensitive and deeply religious, he compensates for the lack of great strength with tireless devotion to his duties. Though an artist by inclination and temperament he deals with all the details of government himself, and insists upon signing all official documents with his own pen. His religion he practises zealously, telling me, one day, that he spends two hours night and morning in meditation in the chapel of the palace, which he has, like all Tibetan Buddhists, as well as his private *gompa*. Upon this magnificent building he lavished all his slender resources, bringing artists from Tibet to fresco and carve it.

He is now saving up to build a new palace, for which he has drawn many designs himself—how many rulers build to God before themselves?—The present structure, looking like a Maidenhead hotel, replaces the old Tibetan styled one, whose dignified discomfort was finally doomed after a severe earthquake. His dreams for the new palace seem to be inspired by pictures of Blenheim which, personally, I cannot visualise beside a Tibetan *gompa* under the gaze of Kinchinjunga.

The Maharaja's six children are at school in Simla, where

his eldest daughter, proving to have great musical talent, was made conductor of the school orchestra.

Like his people the Maharaja is dominated by the superstitions of his religion. Nothing can be done without the assurance of its officials that it is "auspicious." Whether the site for a building or the date for a journey, it is they who finally settle the matter after religious ceremonies have disclosed the attitude of various spirits towards the project.

While I was there circumstances led to the decision for a house to be built for the Maharani some six miles from Gangtok. She, an attractive little lady of much character and extremely religious, expressed the wish to be able to see the yellow roof of the *gompa* from her windows. Mr. Gould and I spent many mornings searching for sites from which she might choose, finally deciding in our own minds on a wonderful position above the Penlong La, which had a southerly view down the great valley to Gangtok with far blue distances beyond and, to the north, the gleaming phalanx of perpetual snows. The fall of the land invited a sheltered and romantic garden facing south, with a fairly level site above for the house itself. The Maharani thoroughly approved of our choice, but before anything could be settled the priests had to proclaim it auspicious.

After three days' ceremonies they decided that the position for the house must be moved forty feet. From this spot the ridge hid the snows and the gradient necessitated a serious amount of building up for the foundations—but this was the auspicious site, so here it had to be. Nor was this all. The auspicious moment for starting the work was not at once, the date decreed being six months later, for which, of course, the cutting of the first sod must wait.

There are "black" days, weeks and even years, when it is inauspicious for His Highness to leave Gangtok or even by the palace grounds, and others during which he must perform special religious observances. When Mr. Gould was planning a fishing expedition to Chungu Lake, on which he invited the Maharaja to accompany him, it was extremely difficult to settle on a date which was considered by the priests as auspicious

for His Highness and which Mr. Gould found auspicious in his engagement book.

The influence of hordes of spirits who hover continually over men permeates every detail of life and death, and the belief in unseen powers is manifested at every turn. Over bridges and Passes garlands of prayer-rags flutter their formulas for protection against evil spirits. Round houses and *gompas*, and often in groves or long lines over hillsides, prayer-flags flutter from bamboo poles 15 to 20 feet high, inscribed with incantations, the most common being O-mane-padne-hum (to the Jewel and the Lotus). Women wear prayers rolled up in charm-boxes, and children are protected by amulets. Every full moon, and outside the house where relatives of a deceased can afford it, the great twelve-foot trumpets are blown for over twenty-four hours on end, to keep away spirits, who are then particularly active. Illnesses are caused by evil spirits, and it is they who make solitude terrifying. One cannot remain long in these surroundings without becoming, oneself, under the spell of a sense of unseen influences.

The wealth and variety of the flowers in Sikkim is proverbial, particularly above about 9000 feet. Lower down, where the heavy green of the jungle is relieved only by parasite orchids, more delicate and less showy than the South American ones, the colour is supplied by flocks of brilliant butterflies which sometimes flutter in such numbers across the windscreen of the car that for a moment all view is obliterated. Sikkim is equally rich in birds of which there are estimated, I was told, something like 500 species, and I was electrified one April morning to hear the homely cuckoo proclaiming Spring from a grove of tree-ferns.

The animals I saw occasionally were deer, squirrels, badgers, monkeys, voles, and several times I heard jackals. Brown bears do not come much below 11,000 feet, but the black ones are a pest to crops, as are the monkeys, and sometimes attack cattle down to 4000 feet. Tigers are occasional visitors from the primeval forests of Bhutan where they, like the herds of elephants, go from the Plains to breed. Leopards are common up to 7000 feet, and Aunt Mary once saw one looking through

the drawing-room window of the Residency. There are various species of wild cats and dogs, otters, mongooses and porcupines, goats, sheep and other smaller mammals.

At lower altitudes there are venomous snakes—though the common cobra has been found as high as 8000 feet—various species of krait and pit-vipers and the giant cobra, but it is remarkable how seldom people and animals are bitten by them. Aunt Mary always carried a knife and permanganate with her, but I never saw any snakes and went barefoot, or wore only sandals, till the rains came, bringing leeches.

Leeches—can any one who has not experienced them have any idea of what that word means!

When the rains came, walks between about 4000 and 9000 feet were overshadowed by terror of those looping presences. Yes terror, which I admit with less shame in the knowledge that even some of the bravest Himalayan mountaineers experience that same hysterical panic when they see these inexorable invasions closing round them. They vary in size from greenish yellow monsters of nearly three inches long, thick as juicy caterpillars, down to almost invisible pieces of brown thread. It is incomprehensible the way they appear from nowhere with the smell of blood. Six feet along a path, where none are visible, may give time enough for twenty to be looping up over one's shoes.

No one who has not experienced it can know the sensation of seeing them slide over the tops or through the eyelet holes, or know the frenzy of helplessness when to stop to take them off merely gives time for more to gather. And they do not attack one only from the ground, they drop from trees and waver out from bushes. The only occasions in my life when I could not control screams of sheer terror was one morning in the jungle, when they swarmed over my bare arms and neck in such numbers that I could scarcely brush them off before they had dug in their hold; and another when I took off my socks and found several blown out like balls with my blood and still firmly attached to my feet. Once they have dug themselves in it is really more sensible to wait for them to drop off naturally, which they do when they have had their fill; but



The Nepali potter and his Tibetan customers.



Little Nepali girls wearing their dowry jewellery.

of course, one never does. Some chemical process takes place with their sucking which prevents the blood from coagulating, and the punctures continue to bleed for three or four days if they are brushed off. One does not feel them biting, and trickles of blood on to the drawing-room carpet or through one's stockings, if one is wearing any, is the first indication that a leech has enjoyed a meal. Apart from violent itching while they heal, and possibly septic festers, there is no harm in their punctures.

An old Lepcha told Aunt Mary that a solution of ground cola nut boiled in water was the best preventative. Mr. Gould ordered quantities of these nuts from Calcutta, and the Lepcha proved right. The best method, we discovered, was to wear two pairs of fine cotton socks and to swab over these and one's shoes with the solution, before going out. The ponies' legs were also soaked with it.

The country folk sometimes carry a stick with a little bag of salt on the end which, like a cigarette, dabbed on to the leech will make it let go. Coolies do not bother that their legs are continual streams of blood, though I learned that during the leech season the middle places in a string of porters was coveted, the idea being that the first rush of leeches settles on those in front, while the second wave only arrives in time for the end of the procession. Grazing cows and horses are often a sorry sight, particularly when leeches have got up their nostrils, where they get stuck in their bloated repletion.

I have departed from my intention not to give tabulated information in this book, because the very name of Sikkim seems often to be unknown to the general public. It was surprising to find how few people, actually living in India, had been there, which I cannot deplore since it has left it in its unexploited simplicity—a simplicity which does not mean hardship.

When visiting it a pass must be obtained from the Commissioner in Darjeeling. If one is not actually staying with a resident it is necessary to book dak-bungalows in advance (4 rupees per day) through the General Secretary of the State Office, through whom also can be hired pack mules and ponies

(about 4 rupees per day), and coolies (8 annas each per single stage). Visitors must carry with them food for their cortège as well as for themselves, and their own bedding. Bungalows supply lamps, crockery and, above 8000 feet, mattresses. Firewood is extra. Unless they do all the work themselves they must take their own cook and sweeper¹ as the *chowkidar* (keeper of the bungalow) cannot be asked to do either.

The bungalows, dividing each stage of nine to eleven miles which is a normal day's journey, are very comfortable with a sitting-room and one to three bedrooms, each containing an average of two to three bedsteads and with their wash-rooms separate. I found the literature supplied in the sitting-rooms quite fascinating—*Punches*, *Vogues*, and novels by very feminine authoresses, mostly belonging to a period when I was sucking a bottle. As a rule a party may not remain more than four days in each bungalow.

Perhaps these details may add to the picture and possibly be of some use—and long may a visit there entail the certain amount of trouble, which gives every wander in Sikkim its own individuality.

¹ An Indian belonging to this caste who carries water and attends to sanitary arrangements.

A Haunted Night?

I HAD ONLY been in Sikkim three days when Aunt Mary had to trek off to Temi, the official mission house some twenty miles from Gangtok, where the quarterly meeting of her workers was gathering. She riding and I walking it took two days to get there. We had six coolies because, apart from our bedding and few personal necessities, and food for us both, her servant and the *syce* (groom) for six days, we had to take enough also for her twenty-four workers for three days. After a night at Temi, on the floor of the empty house cracked by earthquakes, I rode on another stage to have two wonderful days alone yet farther away, among views as awe-inspiring as those in Nepal but in a foreground of more uncanny luxuriance.

There was a strange fearsomeness in the night round the bungalow. The gay sunshine had slipped westward over the great mountains now veiled in grey clouds, to the homeliness of English meadows, and a lonely wind rustled out of the dark trees closing round. The solitude was a presence. Darkness stared through the windows—the darkness of a Himalayan night filled with the sighing of its great mountains. The lamp-light was hot and yellow in the ominous stillness of the room; an expectant suspense encircled the motionless present. I wrote to the family, but was ever conscious of the presence of the night staring through the windows and the wind stealing out of the dark forests.

The *syce* was ill in the shed next to the stable. At two o'clock that afternoon I had sent him to bed—a wooden platform in the corner. At six I had found him groaning in his half-sleep and, putting my hand on his forehead, found he was feverish. It was a day's ride from any one I could speak to and I had no medicines, so was able only to give him weak tea, a sweater, my hot-water bottle on his middle and an extra rug.

At 10 p.m. I lit the lantern to go to see how he was, moving about quietly in an uncontrollable fear of breaking the silence. In the bedroom the four beds had a forbidding emptiness. Outside, the night closed round the little circle of the lantern light, but I could see the dark trees against the sky pale with hidden moonlight. A movement of the pony was close and startling. When I pushed the door it opened with a squeak seeming like a shriek in the night. The *syce* breathed restlessly in the close air, heavy with stable smell, his bedding tumbled off him. I covered him up and gave him a drink.

At midnight I woke with a start at the shriek of the shed door, and looking through the window saw him, with some apprehension, coming towards the bungalow with uncertain steps, carrying his bedding on one shoulder. Was he delirious? I went out and asked him what was the matter.

"I very fright alone. I sleep here."

And he put his bedding down in the corner of the verandah.

"No, you are ill and you must not get cold. You must sleep in the sitting-room."

Though he was a grown man with a daughter of five years old, he fell off to sleep with a sigh like a child while I tucked his rugs over him on the floor near my door.

Next morning he was well enough to ride the pony back to Temi, though his concern that I had to walk made it almost impossible to persuade him to do so. There Aunt Mary's servant gave the explanation of his terror. He was convinced that he had been possessed by the evil spirit which had caused the disease resulting in the death of the *chowkidar's* little daughter two days before. For some days the spirit remains near the home of its mortal body, and he had rashly been into the house where the child had died.

Remembering the night I could not laugh with the superior conviction that this was impossible.

Letter from Gangtok

GANGTOK,
SIKKIM.
12-6-38.

DARLING FAM,

The monsoon has come and we live in a steaming blanket of cloud. Intermittently heaven's taps turn on, and then three-quarters of an inch of rain falls per hour for several hours and we have to shout to be heard above its roar on the roof. Last night, on one side of the house half the stable was washed away by water hurling down a usually dry gully, while on the other, the path from the bazaar and fifteen feet retaining wall, with the result that avalanches of Aunt M.'s garden nearly landed on the roof of the house below. A compensating glimpse of sun bathes us this morning and the clouds above are replaced by those rising from the steaming earth. The verandah looks like a second-hand clothes shop with our damp-stinking wardrobes hung out to air.

The oppression of the monsoon lifts with the clouds, and I must tell you something about our week in S.W. Sikkim, where Aunt M. had to see about starting a school asked for by the people on an estate owned by a Nepalese, who opposes the idea because it's easier to cheat people who are illiterate.

At 7 a.m. on June 6th, in the mail-car, we dropped out of the clouds into the laughing Tista Valley, the road winding among dry-rice terraces, breathlessly green. Outside Rangpo we and our luggage were dumped by the road, where we waited for two hours while the *syce* went to find the ponies promised by a local landowner. We drowsed in the tropical air, drugged by the clattering purr of cicadas and eerie calls of birds in the jungle, disturbed only by the droning of mosquitoes which make the Tista Valley notorious. A deluge arrived with the ponies, making the suspension bridge slung over the lashing river too slippery for them to cross. So we waited, shivering with wet though it was so hot, in a primitive tea-shop where the malaria-wasted proprietor and his wife—like a Dutch

portrait in her white turban—served us and the drenched coolies with tea and *tsamba* (parched barley).

After an hour we rode up and up between tree-ferns and begonias, getting very sore in our wet clothes on those hard saddles, and were met at the top by a little company of Christians and the evangelist, under whose thatch we partook of home-grown tea, pancakes and eggs. The little house, with four tea-bushes and a grove of bananas by the door, was shut in by 8 feet walls of maize which clattered like a stream. A little farther was the landowner's house among orange, lemon and plum trees, and his guest-house where we were to stay. From the verandah the blue distance stretched to eternity beyond a hedge of pink roses, and swallows flew in and out to feed their family, who'd been re-housed in a basket after the collapse of their nest under the eaves.

The next five days were a strain, with glorious escapes alone on the mountains above. The best was the discovery, on a high lonely little plateau, of a tiny deserted *gompa* with an interesting wooden screen of bold geometrical design guarding the door. The main trouble was that we were hardly ever left alone. Though our host himself was away—purposely we were certain, so as to avoid having to discuss the school question!—his wife and three daughters were ubiquitous and most exhausting—and I really did feel rather upset inside through the richness of the food they prepared once a day for us.

There was always fine rice cooked with spices and butter, and fifteen to twenty saucers of different highly spiced, curried or sweet foods. Perhaps the most devastating was honey and cream covered with a sheet of gold leaf, which they believe has great food value—probably has; some European specialists prescribe gold for certain complaints, don't they? All this elaborate variety was cooked by the daughters, who sat round to watch us eat. They couldn't eat with us because of caste, and for the same reason what we left was thrown away. Aunt M. can't tackle most foods so, for politeness, I just had to stuff down a double quantity!

For these meals we had to go up to their house—depressing in the extreme with its appalling collection of junk—Notting-



*Lepcha band of well-to-do landowners sent 2 mile to meet Mr. Gould;
Kichinjunga towering behind them.*

ham lace curtains, Mellin's food advertisements, cheap mechanical toys, cabinets full of such things as butter dishes, lemon squeezers, artificial flowers and fruit, etc. Cheap European furniture was ranged round rooms carpeted with strips of lodging-house stair-carpet, the gramophone, with a huge yellow trumpet, stood beside a harmonium under royal family groups and coloured prints of mythological Hindu subjects. Only less incongruous than these last looked our hostess and her daughters sitting on hard settees in their Nepalese muslins and flowered coiffeurs. She remarked one day that she couldn't understand how European women ever did any work, always sitting in chairs. Certainly her personality showed itself in a very different light from that of amiable hostess when she sat cross-legged on the floor of her counting-house, where she really got down to work. We went there on rent day—rather to her annoyance because obviously we cramped her style. What that was uncramped I dread to think.

We went because a beautiful haggard little Brahmin widow had come shyly to ask our help, explaining that her rent was in arrears even though her still unripe maize crop, her only food supply for the year, had already been seized as part payment. She and her three small children would be turned out (where to?) unless she paid up; her only means of getting any money was already gone, as were her dowry silver ornaments, while a few rupee notes she had saved had been eaten by mice and fish insects. One forgets how unpractical and vulnerable paper money is in such primitive lives as these. It only needed 10 rupees to secure this poor little woman and her children, and of course I asked Aunt M. to settle the business for me with our hostess.

From the guest-house we could hear her bullying voice. In her office she sat on a carpet with her manager beside her with a large account book. Sitting round her or waiting outside were the tenants, whom she shouted at, all looking very nervous, except the Christians. She welcomed my 10 rupees, but was most annoyed when Aunt M. insisted upon a proper receipt being given to the widow.

Land tenure here seems most complicated. Tenants of so-

called freeholds still have to pay a six per cent tax to the land-owners, who are rated by the State at one anna per rupee of rents—yet somehow all the land still belongs to the State.

One day our hostess showed us the beautifully illuminated horoscope of her son—made in Nepal of course. We learned that in arranging marriages, after the suitability of caste and dowry has been settled, an intermediary is sent to inspect the horoscopes of proposed bride and bridegroom. Each individual is a *dewata* (god) or a *raksha* (mortal) and a successful marriage must be the union of a *dewata* and a *raksha*. The poor eldest daughter of eighteen had been married to a young man in Nepal, but before she ever saw him the fathers quarrelled over her dowry and the whole thing was called off. He married someone else but, as a Hindu, she was considered married, and had to settle down for life as the family drudge. Awful. Aunt M. wants to get her away, but it's difficult because her mother finds her useful.

One day the three girls insisted upon dressing me up in Nepali clothes. The blouse was miserably tight and hot, but it was interesting to see how they put on the skirt—a twelve-yard or more strip of muslin bunched in the front, with one end wound round and brought over the shoulder. By the time they'd parted my hair on the side and corrugated it with curby grips I almost cried to see how devastatingly common I looked—but they were delighted and their mother asked if I wasn't partly Indian because, though I was the wrong colour, in features I was so like an Indian woman!

On market day the green outside the guest-house was animated by a bright ragged little crowd, mostly under umbrellas—large black cotton Japanese ones sold for a rupee—selling tea, tobacco leaves in sacks, potatoes, peas, beans, chickens and a few primitive agricultural implements. An ancient silversmith sold rings at 8 annas each and the local policeman was auctioneering what, we learned from the crowd round him, were the two cooking pots and water jar belonging to an old hermit whose rent for a hovel up the mountain was unpaid. At the orders of our hostess these last possessions were being sold, which Aunt M. bid for and returned to him; he was so dazed that it was an hour before he realised what she had done.

We were kept busy with applications for quinine tablets and tape-worm capsules. Pigs are the scavengers here and every one who eats pork has tape-worms—specially monks—and there's a great demand for these capsules which Aunt M. sells at wholesale price.

We made various visits over the mountainsides, every one, including Buddhists and Nepalese Hindus, inquiring anxiously about the school which they all want. It was dreadful to find the amount of illness rife on these great hillsides of magnificent beauty. Through poverty and the pernicious hearth tax the overcrowding is appalling; the many consumptives sleep crammed up with the rest of the family in unventilated mud-floored rooms. But at the moment, Kala Azar (Black Fever) is the menacing problem of S. Sikkim.

No one seems to know quite how it's carried—sand flies or mosquitoes, they think. It's been brought by the orange-buyers from Bengal to the Rangpo market, where the young men and girls bringing down the oranges catch it and carry it back to their villages. Fortunately it doesn't seem to spread above about 4000 feet, but below that it's decimating the population, already weak with chronic malaria or malnutrition. It can be cured in early stages with dieting and injections, but this is a poor State and hasn't the means or machinery to tackle it on the scale it's grown to. Whole hillsides are depopulated, and the jungle's creeping back over the cultivation. We passed through a deserted settlement of houses where six months ago sixty-three people lived; the only survivors were two children of four and five who've been taken by their grandparents up the mountain, into a haunting little smoke-blackened hovel where their crippled grandmother sits all day complaining. Aunt M. contemplates opening a temporary hospital of bamboo matting here, but she's arranged for two Christians to come to Gangtok hospital at once. One's a young mother who was brought ten miles over the mountains on the back of her husband. She'd long had chronic malaria, and was already going black with Kala Azar though she'd only had it for six months. She was so pathetically beautiful lying on the evangelist's verandah—her baby was only nine months old.

This all sounds very gloomy—but life is terribly hard for these people, and it seems worse when the surroundings are so enormously wonderful and beautiful. These views! One could spend a life-time just gazing. In the monsoon the variety's so subtle. The vast majesty of the eternal snows comes, now, only as occasional visions among clouds like ragged smoke dragging across the mountains. The incredible vividness of colour in the damp-intensified atmosphere is replaced by dream-grey fantasies with foregrounds of a green, deep as thought.

On the way back here we stayed a night in the romantic little bungalow of Tong, lying behind a long prayer-wall—which is rare to find in Sikkim. Such walls are built as acts of devotion, and nearly all the stones of this one were carved with sacred formulas.

It's terribly hot trekking now, being unwise to get too soaked because of fever, it's misery inside a mac—which can't keep out this rain and keeps the heat in. The orchids furring the trees are jewels above the track, which is sometimes blocked with landslides, and bridges over streams are often washed away by the monsoon rains. The annual necessity to repair or rebuild roads and bridges is a great drain on the State budget, and Fakir Chand (the engineer) maintains that the expensive concrete roads he's made in Gangtok are ultimately an economy. He says that bullock carts break up any other surface.

We are still panting after the school play—which has caused a terrific stir. Girls acting in public, and even dressing up as men in trousers with burnt-cork moustaches, is a dashing innovation. The play was written by one of the boy teachers and produced entirely by themselves, under the vigilant chaperonage of the little Lepcha pastor. A very moral play it was, ending with a most realistic scene of family prayers, after the prodigal son had given them all the benefit of a sanctimonious account of his conversion and his father a Bible. Being in Nepali I could only appreciate the words through Aunt M.'s translation, but the spontaneity of the acting and the excruciating funniness and variety in the humorous scenes ran laughter tears down our cheeks every evening. The clowning showed a remarkable ability to see humour in the



(Left) *Lachen, a village in North Sikkim.*

(Below) *Hillsides of dry rice in South Sikkim.*



familiar details of their everyday life, and had fresh improvisations at every performance.

What occasions they were, submerging us in noise and smell for three hours! The stage was at the wrong end of a room in Aunt M.'s house used, till now, as the church, which was crammed at every performance with an odorous crowd of all classes and ages, from a few months old upwards. One evening was "ladies' night" so that the Nepalese Hindu ladies might come with propriety, though complications arose as each was attended by a manservant, who were all finally allowed in. The greatest crisis came when the floor seemed liable to collapse under the unaccustomed weight of numbers, and the precaution was taken to cut the programme of the dance of the extremely buxom girl teachers.

Even Aunt M. was a little dismayed when the pastor remarked what splendid plays they'd be able to have in the new church—but with her usual broad-mindedness she said:

"Of course I agreed because, after all, it's their church and they must be quite free to build up their own church life."

Though the land and permit was given for the church twenty years ago, only now has enough money been collected for the building. The little Christian community is watching with immense pride and excitement the completion of their concrete focus—literally, because no other material can withstand the frequent earthquakes here. (There was one three nights ago and I lay in bed wondering at what moment I ought to rush out of the house!) Building's dreadfully expensive by the time the material has been dragged by oxen, or carried by coolies twenty-five miles, down and up several thousand feet.

Thank goodness Aunt M.'s been responsible for the design of the church—Sikkim is spared a mock Gothic or drill-hall excrescence. She got her architect nephew, Schombery Scott, to make constructional plans from her drawings of local temples, which she and the local foreman have carried out—more or less; three feet of the height was cut off by mistake! It doesn't matter; it's charming. The wide roof overspreads the simple rectangular building, capable of holding 200 people or so, with another tier of roof on slender columns, sheltering an open verandah

along the south and west sides. This adds to æsthetics and is most practical in this deluging climate, among a community who may live three days away and have to camp the night when they come to church. The whole thing's whitewashed, with the only decoration in carefully chosen reproductions of classical religious pictures in coloured-framed groups on the west wall, the Tibetan window frames, carved and painted on the inside, and a banner for the east end which I've been allowed to make and give. It's 16 feet by 4 feet made of Chinese silk bought from a Tibetan in the bazaar, and designed in the shape of a Tibetan *tunka* with a gold brocade cross instead of a painting. To break the squareness of line, a white silk Tibetan scarf of honour hangs loose over the arms of the cross, looking like the Oberammergau symbol. I've sweated and laboured for hours over making it on the verandah—the only floor big enough—and hope it will look well.

The Maharaja gave me permission and the services of his tailor for a Tibetan dress—purple brocade gown with magenta and turquoise blouses. The only place to fit it on was in the *gompa*. I was primed in the last word in Lhasa fashions by the Maharani. Skirts are worn ankle length this year!

“Il faut souffrire pour être belle.” Though it's terribly hot His Highness is so pleased with it that I wear it when I go to the palace for meals. The one snag is that I'm absolutely the wrong colour for it. Though the sun's burnt my skin walnut it's bleached my hair a sort of chrome yellow, further than ever from the raven these colours need.

I go to stay up at the Residency to-morrow, where I'm immersed in Tibetan affairs. Mr. Gould's getting ready for his political mission to Lhasa. The Everest Expedition will probably come back here in July; I only just missed them on their way up.

Sorry this is such a dead sort of letter—failing to give you any idea of the smells and sounds and colours, the leisurely incalculableness of each day, or the closeness of simple humanity. I've just read that Paul Bonnard says that the East deprives the Occidental of his power of discriminating criticism—I wonder!

Dear love to all,

AUDREY.

Buddhism or Christianity?

THE HIMALAYAS stretched away and away, fold after fold. Deep below, the great valleys lay in blue shadow, above gleamed the mighty peaks of perpetual snow—ineffable, sublime in peerless loneliness. The strange gutturing moan of the twelve foot trumpets boomed up from the *gompa* below. On and on the sound rolled through the air, up over the patches of maize which all but drowned the mushroom purple of the *busti* thatches, into the heavy turbulence of the jungle. Stilly the trees lay in the spell of its insistence. The voice of the mountains speaking from their silence—the moan of the labouring earth.

The speck of a human being lay on the mountainside, engulfed in the magnitude, who, through but even a superficial contact with the outlook of the East, was filled with a new realisation that in the consciousness of the one Life Force, Life Principle, Prana or Holy Spirit—call it whatever you will—she was at one with this vast majesty.

Metaphysical speculation may seem out of place in a travel book, but the story of the travel depends on what the traveller was looking for, and a true intimation of his or her journey can only be given if all the different elements are included which formed its composition. I had travelled with the wish to see oriental peoples, their creations and countries, but more than that I wanted to feel their atmosphere and try to learn something of their thoughts, so that I might see more clearly how to form my own and value those of other people.

I do not think it is possible to feel the East with any intensity without the question of religion taking a very important place in one's thoughts.

For about eight months I had been in Buddhist countries, with intermittent contact with Christian missionaries. I had been increasingly torn with conflicts and doubts of the ability to accept either Christianity or Buddhism to the exclusion of

the other because, although they presented such complete contrasts, and not a few analogies, both claimed irresistible allegiance in certain aspects. The following was the sequence of thought trying to find a way through the problem which refused to be set aside.

Though one cannot judge religions, justly, through man's imperfect expression of them, I could not rid myself of the feeling that the whole atmosphere they create is something that cannot be set aside as of no value. The final comprehension of a religion must come through intuition rather than the mental reasoning which may have furnished the approach to it and, for me anyway, the subtle spirit emanating from a centre of a religion forms the most indisputable indication of the truths preached in that community.

From the first revelation in a Korean temple of the spirit of Buddhism¹ I could not deny that this was something I had been seeking in vain, so far. "To understand all is to forgive all." Buddhism seemed to me to be a religion of the mind. With its great tolerance and kindness it gave a relaxed expansion to all one's being and an answering gentle attitude of mind, in which it was easier to have "compassion for all living things"—which both religions preach as the way to salvation.

It taught me that, through the effort of his mind to apprehend his existence in the world with the valuation of his goal of Nirvana (as I understand it, the peace in oneness with Perfection), man can step beyond the wish for temporary gratifications, and develop a patience to bear the effects which were the inevitable retribution of former mistakes. For this he must draw aside from the wasteful commotion of grabbing mankind, to be able to attain a right perspective by contemplating ultimate truths. In this gazing at Perfection humility naturally bows the imperfect spirit in worship.

The great peace and atmosphere of worship in their temples compelled worship in me. Yes, and here the completeness of man could go into his worship. Physical Nature was not shut

¹ It must be made clear that in all my references to Buddhism I mean Chinese Buddhism, which is woven with Confucianism and Taoism.



(Left) A Sikkim monastery and its prayer-flags.

(Below) Monastery pensioners with their prayer-wheels.



away as a lower expression of Truth above which man must rise, but seen to be inextricably woven with spiritual content, the holy and inevitable bond of unity between this earthy incarnation and the immortal essence in all creation striving towards perfection. In the spaciousness of its philosophy I was lifted into a tranquillity above my own little turmoils, and experienced a sense of freedom from the conflicting problems of life which so often distract our energies and attention from the real living of it.

Then, too, Buddhism created beauty. The rightness of natural and often exuberant beauty in their temples, shrines and appurtenances of worship brought the irresistible conviction that truth must be the inspirer of such consistent beauty. No representation of spiritual sublimity can excel many of the Buddha figures sitting in the eternal tranquillity of meditation. To stand before him is to be given a vision of ultimate wisdom and peace attained through the achievement of "no earthy desires"—so potent a vision that it dwells on after the return into the bustle of the world.

But one could not deny the danger, the almost inevitable result, of fatalistic inaction growing with this philosophy. As an Occidental there was the demand for "compassion for all living things" to be expressed in action. "Run that ye may be able to obtain." "Fight the good fight."

Immediately some of the Christian Mission stations sprung into my vision.

Here there was no satisfaction for the mind, whose relentless "Whys?" were answered only by the quotation "My faith is sufficient" from the very essence about which the doubts and questions arose. To be one with these communities it seemed necessary to kill an essential part of man's endowment, to stifle the source of his creative faculty—his mind, that special gift to man. For the most part, even the recognition of another point of view was regarded as a sin against the "one true faith." Truths represented in other forms were met with rigid condemnation. There was no place for certain convictions which I could not honestly deny to myself; beliefs born and nurtured by the witness of other lives, my own experience, and great

Nature herself. These realities denied, I felt spiritual potentialities being strangled before birth. Calvinistic negations of, what seemed to me, "the fullness of life" limited a horizon whose intention was, surely, boundless?

There was prayer, invocation—yes, but to me it was not worship. Either in the bleak sitting-room, or in the church whose barren ugliness froze all spontaneity, one after another pleaded with God. By virtue of their great faith in His fatherhood a familiarity seemed to dwarf Him down to the level of the intercessor. Where was there a vision of the Omnipotent Mystery which brings the humility and the awe of worship, in which the clamour of individuality is silenced and the "still, small Voice" is able to be heard?

But "By their fruits ye shall know them." Through what many people, and I among them, condemn as a narrow bigoted faith, these men and women! achieve what others with broader views never even attempt. They have gone into the arena of battle for a cause which I profess, but for which I have not sacrificed as they. In spite of their own limits (which I cannot persuade myself do not detract from the faith they are preaching) they have compassion, and the indomitable courage necessary to put it into action: a compassion in which they cannot be satisfied with giving only comfort to men's souls, but which drives them to strive to succour the miseries of their physical living as well. Without calculating on ultimate gain to themselves they bear danger, poverty, loneliness and criticism for the sake of human beings who have no claim on them in any way.

Is this Spirit with which they are filled not greater than any mental product? Must I not accept the narrowness of these missionaries, channels of the Spirit, as one accepts the necessary confinement of a stream to charge a dynamo or turn a mill wheel? Have I not seen innumerable proofs of men and women illumined by this Spirit—incredibly freed from their deadening fears, and illumined by the same compassion, courage and peace? Does not the holy madness of this Spirit claim my allegiance?

I began to wonder why I assumed it must be Christianity *or* Buddhism. Surely names had become ring-fences—man-made

divisions as artificial and untrue to facts as boundaries made by statesmen on maps, in total disregard as to whether they corresponded with the natural limits or fusions of the races who live in the area. These two faiths seemed to go parallel so much of the way and to complement each other; I had discovered no contradictions in their ethics. Doubts and questions had for long undermined my honest acceptance of the life of Christ as the unique incarnation of truth, apart from its greater perfection. What did the "Son of God" mean?

Then Dr. Reichelt's *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* had cleared much of my thinking, and formed many bridges I was seeking. Might not that book be a great addition to the curriculum of missionaries training for China?

That morning I lay surrounded by Himalayan immensity, watching the powdered snow blowing off the south face of Kinchinjunga like the mane of an Olympian steed, summing up the convictions I had reached. Because they are really some of my most important treasures brought from the East, I give them in a nutshell.

My belief that spiritual values are supremely more important than material ones is unquestioning. (I use the word spiritual with the sense of the German word *geistig*, which is not confined specifically to religion.) In general, the sensibilities to intangible qualities is so far more highly developed in the East than the West. China, with her realism, aged culture and refined sensuality (in the wide meaning of the word), expresses this consciousness, most strongly, in the true sophistication which leads back to simplicity of life—in which eating and drinking, loving, appreciation of children, Nature, human contacts, forms and colours have a value lost and not refound by the West in its awkward adolescence between the primitive and the civilized. But is this not the same consciousness which, put in another direction, finds expression in religion, as in India, Bali and Tibet?

Anyway, apart from its whole atmosphere, the East had shown me this spiritual sensibility both in the shape of the life of its peoples and the undisguised curiosity they often had to know my religion.

It was of as much interest as my nationality, age and destination. I learned, too, that Orientals, who have not been too much influenced by the materialism of the West, despise, and are alienated from, those who do not profess and practise some religious belief—in complete contrast with the prevailing attitude of the Occident. Naturally, therefore, they are more capable of mystic and metaphysical thought—and, maybe, it is they who will ultimately expound our religion more fully to us of blunter perceptions and unwillingness to listen to our own mystics?

I am more than ever convinced that an active and professed faith is necessary for the full living and development of every human being. It does not matter what that faith is called, and the creed may be taken from various different religions—truth is wide enough to have many expressions. The one importance is that each human being should have a Truth which he himself believes in, sacrifices for and works on in his own practical living; and that it should give him a vision of the Infinite beyond his limited understanding, whose Spirit he can worship.

Christianity and Mahayana Buddhism had become the Yang and Yin (male and female) sides of my religion. One was the supplement of the other in the different stresses laid on truths accepted in both religions. Christianity the inspirer of action, Buddhism the teacher of patience and bearing. Christianity with its personal God; its emotional force of love and faith; its command for action. Buddhism with its belief in the Law of Cause and Effect; the insistence of meditation; its goal of Nirvana.

The trumpets still blew; the shadows of vagrant clouds swept over the mountains; the valley shadow-lakes had been evaporated by the sun which now flooded down to their bottoms. It was time to go back into the world and try to work out these beliefs in living.

My tribute to the great spirit of the East would be a poor one if I had not the courage to admit the inspiring and vital influence it has exercised in all subsequent thought. Though

it is fantastic for me to attempt a subject so beyond my power of expression, it seems incomplete without an intimation as to how the thoughts have continued to develop since that day on the side of a Himalayan mountain. Being untutored in philosophies and their terms, my ideas may be absurd and my expression of them incomprehensible, but, with diffidence, I will try to set them out for any one who might be curious to know them.

For my own practical living "In the world but not of it" has a new meaning and is made more possible through the Buddhist inspiration to get out of my finite into my infinite being, not through negation of myself, but by cultivating a deeper consciousness of the Life Principle of which I am a fractional expression. Given this significance my individuality is lost and found. Lost, because found only through its responsibility, which no one else can fulfil, of developing it towards its own particular perfection (full life), not for its own individual benefit but for the sake of the ultimate perfection of the Universe. With the vision of this evolution stretching through countless incarnations necessary for each stage of development (not necessarily on this planet) Time disappears, suffering becomes an opportunity—cutting down to reality as it does and forcing growth—and the illusive search for happiness begins to fade into insignificance in the more absorbing pre-occupation of true living, in which joy can grow.

The all-pervading sense of an ultimate purpose, in which the whole of creation harmonises, gives a new standard of valuation for every detail of life, and a co-ordinating focus in which conflicting loyalties can become resolved. The one measure for valuation becomes the question, "Does this liberate the Life Principle into the World?" If not, then it has no value, but if it does, then man's possible condemnation must not be allowed to be obstructive. Right and Wrong are released from man's questionable classification and now become largely renamed, for me, as Expansion or Contraction. The innumerable fears feeding on conflicts begin to starve, and I can resolve in o an entity—like a drop of oil in the ocean I can become free of the permeation of the finite world, serving only the supreme

Law which I believe overrules all others, the Life Principle, the one Law "whose service is perfect freedom."

And this new conception which the East has given in no way conflicts with my Christian faith; indeed, it has given a greater significance to the figure of Christ and enthrones Him as my mind has never been able to do before. I recognise Him as the Son of God because, being fully united with the Life Principle, He chose to be incarnated into this finite world in order to loose into it the perfect working of the Infinite Law through humanity with its personality and emotion—to show, in practical detail, the possibility of attaining the goal which is man's destiny. Christ has become, for me, the manifestation of the results of the interaction of faith and the pure essence of the Life Principle through a complete incarnation in our humanity, and Himself furnishes an explanation of the possibility of the virgin-birth, so-called miracles, the resurrection and reappearance after physical death.

Faith assumes a different complexion. It changes from a vague attitude of mind, which people often say they cannot have towards certain things, into a very realistic mental activity which creates a necessary element for the Law to work through inhumanity. It is the sluice through which the limitless reservoir of the Life Principle can flow, according to the opening of the sluice-gate. Only man's lack of faith and hardness of heart makes the Infinite finite; the Life Principle, by itself, works undeviatingly through the Law of Cause and Effect.

Again I find unanimity in the teaching of Buddhism and Christianity. In the Pure Land School of Mahayana Buddhism in China and Japan stress is laid on the way to salvation through faith in Amitabha, the All-Father of Compassion. And here is found also the doctrine of the other Principle incarnated perfectly in Christ—Love.

Even Buddhism, maintaining its great consistent philosophy of Cause and Effect, accepts the existence of the irrational phenomena of Love. Into the cold perfection of the inevitable Law emerges this force which is more powerful than the Law itself. It can break into the chain of rational Cause and Effect by setting up a more powerful Cause, followed by its own



A morning heralded by incense and 12 ft. Tibetan trumpets.

effects. The explanation of Love remains as inexplicable a mystery as the Life Principle, but the proofs of its reality are undeniable, and I accept them both as hypostasis.

The presence of this irrationality in the universe satisfies me that "God," as Perfection, is certainly the essence of the Love Principle. And the presence of this phenomena in man now furnishes, for me, the dividing line between man and the whole of the rest of Creation (that I know about). It is this irrational element which has broken man's rhythm in the blind harmony of the Laws ruling the Universe, and given him the unique responsibility of free will. In my imagination I am inclined to fancy that it was not the apple which Eve gave to Adam which caused the troublesome knowledge of good and evil, but the consciousness of love which she was the means of putting suddenly into his composition.

Being convinced of the Love Principle in "God," it appears logical that it should result in the sacrifice of the Infinite being incarnated into the finite, from altruistic compassion for that section of Creation, man, whose overwhelming responsibility is, to resolve the Love Principle once more into perfection by his free choice.

As the perfect manifestation of the Life and the Love Principles combined in a personality with emotions, I worship Christ as, in the symbolic terminology, the Son of God, and accept his teachings and example as the most perfect that man has been given.

To Buddhism I owe predominantly my limited conception of the Life Principle, working with undeviating rhythmic order through the just majesty of the Law, which is in its nature determined and passive—the Yin (female) essence. Christianity, embodying the dynamic irrational Love Principle, dependent on its own product of free will is, therefore, fulfilling itself only in positive action—the Yang (male) essence.

So I find myself a humble adherent to the precept laid down by Chinese philosophy that through the harmonious interaction of Yin and Yang the Universe was created and is preserved, while, with these two incarnated in the human personality of Christ, I also accept the doctrine of the Christian Trinity.

A Glimpse of Tibet

IT WAS SICKENING that my supply of films had not arrived from Calcutta. My bedding-roll was unusually bulky though I put my foot against it to pull the straps as tight as possible. It was difficult to believe that all those extra rugs and woollies would be necessary, but 3000 feet make surprising differences of climate. To-night we should sleep at 9000 feet, and tomorrow cross the Natu-la (14,700 feet) and sleep in Tibet at 13,700 feet. The thought was exciting. True, I was only going to Yatung, but the rule against females travelling in Tibet without a male escort made the doctor's return there a chance not to be missed, though it prevented my acceptance of his offer to visit Gyantse, another four or five days on the Lhasa road, there being no one to accompany me back. But on my return I was to join up with Mr. Gould at Changu bungalow, where he was having, hopefully, a fishing party with the Maharajah, Rajah Dore, His Highness' Bhutanese brother-in-law, and Colonel Bailey, former Political Officer in Sikkim, with whom we had stayed in Katmandu.

On the first day we were only doing one stage to Karponang, and it was not till after lunch that James and I headed the little cavalcade, his Tibetan servant, Rinchen, and Aunt Mary's as mine, up the steep path behind the Residency, waving to her and Mr. Gould on the lawn below. The three pack-mules had started on ahead to be there on our arrival.

Between tree-stems we looked down on Gangtok scattered over its ridge peninsula soaked in still sunlight, with the blue of the valleys washing round it like a vaporous lake. We passed the little prison which I covet for a house, and wound down on to the main track wriggling high above the next abysmal valley. The first four miles were familiar from before-breakfast ridges and I was entirely taken up with my excitement.

Nothing I know gives a more complete sense of freedom than starting a journey on horseback through unknown country. Freedom is to me synonymous with motion, physical or mental. There, in some degree in every journey, in those made by mechanical transport such as trains, cars, ships or aeroplanes it is incomplete, oneself being passively propelled and unable to express the sense of liberation in proportionate physical action. Though walking with one's rucksack on one's back has something of the same quality and the additional exhilaration of entire self-reliance, on a horse the scope is wider, the excitement intensified by the creature's eagerness and its partnership in the rhythm of motion. "Yes-Yes"¹ and I gambolled ahead of the stolid males, who did not seem to share our exuberance.

I do not think James had any feelings beyond concern for Bonzo his bull terrier, haloed by a Tibetan dog-collar, with its 2-inch fringe of yak hair. He was a tiresome animal with a habit of sitting down in every stream, from whence, being extremely disobedient, he could only be removed by some one riding back to fetch him. Perhaps my annoyance was female jealousy of the object of so much concentration, but people focused on their animals always fill me with impatience. Over long marches of rough going Bonzo was carried on the back of a coolie and journeying must have been considerably more carefree, but to-day he was walking. As it was, after a short transfer of James's attentions from him to me, Bonzo was missing.

No, of course I did not mind riding on alone. James went back in search.

The track, clinging sinuously to the mountain contour, wound up out of the tunnel of jungle. Often it pressed against cliffs or crept under them, built up on tree-trunk trestles with a yawning drop of hundreds of feet on to rocks and tree-tops below. It was in the shade of the great shoulder towering above it, whose shadow crept up from the valley as the sun lowered, driving the pall of gold-dust back before it from the opposite mountain wall, till that, too, sunk into dead-green

¹ The pony lent to me by Mr. Gould.

sleep. At one corner jutting out over the valley I looked back, away out below Gangtok hovered like a mirage of light beyond the silence and shadow. The singing of cicadas and strange calls of birds echoing through the stillness was left behind in the heavy homeliness of the jungle; now the silence of the mountains, ponderous as themselves, was broken only by the clink and glush of "Yes-Yes" feet over stones or mud, and his panting breath up steeper climbs. Sometimes water dribbled with a tinkle from rock to rock, or jetted itself some 30 feet into a rock basin with a foaming roar, but round the next corner the silence had eaten up the sound as though it had never been.

Tiny vivid leaves were lush on dripping crags, with a significance of life no less than that of the depths and towering heights of mountain detachment. The rusty stems of giant rhododendrons writhed above the valley chasm, undwarfed by it. I had the curious sense of having stepped beyond perspective, as in a Chinese picture; there was no need for change of focus between the frail blade of grass bent with its load of water-drops and those thousands of feet of swelling earth-crust. There was no relativity in this nature.

Smoky bunches of cloud were sinking down on the mountain-tops. Down and down they came, and the track wound up to meet them. Soon "Yes-Yes" and I were shut in by their damp, shut away from the big companionship of space, into our own solitude. Their ghostly silence bedewed us with their cold sweat, our breaths blew out as steam. Rocks and trees were sudden shadows, the drop into the valley filled with muffled whiteness—I pulled on a woolly.

Almost before the sound of its bells reached us a mule with its bulky load of wool emerged out of the mist. There was just time to pull in against the rock (always get on the inside of these narrow tracks—sometimes the edge breaks away) before it brushed past within six inches of the edge of the void. Another and another appeared till 16 had passed, followed by their three sturdy Tibetan drovers in dark red or brown homespun coats reaching to their knees, high felt Tibetan boots, battered Homburgs with their plaits of hair

wound round the crowns, and a silver or turquoise ear-ring in their left ears. They looked up with the expression which seems common to peoples unused to meet suddenly with the unfamiliar in spacious unfrequented regions; it cannot be called surprise so much as a dawning consciousness. When I smiled they laughed and called out a greeting—and disappeared as suddenly as they came out of the cloud, with the plodding springy walk which covers hundreds of miles.

Before I reached Karponang the others rejoined me. They had not found Bonzo; James was very depressed. He said that Rinchen must go back farther than they had done, because Bonzo might be killed by a leopard in the night, or the mongrel dogs of the last house.

It was raining (it nearly always does at Karponang) when we reached the bungalow perched gloomily above the track, with the mountains closing round it so steeply that it seemed they must topple down on top of it. The mules had only just arrived and stood passively to be unloaded by their Lepcha drovers, whose bare feet squelched into the mud and whose plaits were spangled grey with drops of water. The slatternly kindly Tibetan *chowkidar* brought a bundle of wood from a shed to light the fire, followed by a tiny ball of smelly hair with a minute black sealing-wax nose and two appealing eyes larger than itself, fringed over with long hair. It was, I was told, a Lhasa terrier.

The bungalow was built of wood which smelt cosy even in this damp, with an enclosed veranda, most necessary where it was always wet. Shut in by mountain steeps and lidded with cloud, Karponang slumbered in a continual twilight—at least it always did when I saw it.

Poor Rinchen started back to find Bonzo, on foot so as to spare the pony for to-morrow's two stages over rough going and heavy climbing. It was after supper, and we were sitting back in deck-chairs round the fire roasting our legs among drying shoes and socks, the warm glow of the lamp yet yellower within the orange-brown of the wooden walls, when he returned after three hours—with Bonzo, whom he found sitting in the track over 6 miles back waiting to be fetched! To

cover 13 miles in that time, with so much climbing, was good going. With Tibetan hate of being alone in the dark I fancy he ran much of the way.

In my room I did not notice that the lamp was flaring till I, and all the cobwebs caught in the wood, were black with oil smoke. It was cold; I pulled up all my rugs thankfully. A stream hurtled down outside my window, making the silence greater for its clamour. Life was very good.

We were off by 8.30 a.m., climbing steeply through the mist, getting colder all the way. Scarlet rhododendrons now loomed at us, and shadowy conifers. Though sight was veiled one felt that the mountainsides were barer.

After an hour we came over the Lagyap La into a high valley where a wind blew the clouds half-way up the sides. It was grey and ravaged. Patches of snow lay among tumbled rocks, snapped tree-trunks were stark ghosts, a river dashed among boulders worn smooth by its angry or gentle caresses. We dismounted to lead the ponies across the two-plank bridge. In the middle I looked down at the thrashing waters whose roaring walls of sound shut away the silence of desolation, then up at the lonely valley with the clouds brooding over it. I loved it intensely for its determined sadness.

And now we rode up a wide ravine which, even on that cold morning under driving rain and cloud, had a strange sense of familiarity. I passed through it three times after that and the longing grew, and has remained, to live in it a whole year round—perhaps much, much longer.

One side is shut in by a spur of bare mountains on a cliff base, the other by slopes, covered with rhododendrons, which roll back to rounded summits; between runs a strip tipped steeply to the south, which is the most wonderful natural garden in the world. It must have been the course of a glacier, being scattered over with rounded rocks of all sizes. A stream, not too big or small, has washed itself a sheltered course deep down. It is a stream of wayward whims, changing its mind so often that little flat-floored bays are left, and alcoves scooped under rocks, and when it becomes inconsistent altogether it

flows in two branches round tiny islands of washed sand, or boulders which it is too lazy to move. It is a very feminine stream busily singing its way down there in the shelter, allowing the manly rocks above (which it wears away with such gentleness that they do not realize it) to weather the storms and meet the sun fair and square. But I could imagine the tantrum it is in when the snows melt above.

I am being carried away by the memory of my valley, but it was so exciting that morning. There, in marshy pockets, were clumps of blue iris in flower, purple velvet primulas, bushes of daphne whose sweet scent hung strangely in the cold, yellow auriculars and rhododendrons—stretches and stretches of them, pinks and red and yellow all mixed together over the hillsides, while in my valley they stood in isolated beauty like carefully planted prize specimens. The rocks had thatches of azalia and rock-roses, as yet still in bud.

We met one caravan with its tinkling bells, the packs of wool under their tarpaulin coverings swaying with the mincing steps of the mules as they picked their foothold down the steep uneven way. With a shock of surprise I saw a pekingese paddling along beside his muleteer master, bedraggled almost beyond recognition. In China they are aristocratic incarnations of the Chinese lion, but here they showed that their blue blood was not effete. Their pampered cousins would probably turn their silky backs on these shabby little wanderers, with disdainful noses in the air, but then pekingeses are not alone in allowing appearances to outweigh achievement! We also passed a family of Tibetans in a tent with sods packed round the bottom to keep the water from running through it.

The patches of snow were larger as we went up. My Japanese mackintosh proved to be a sponge (bought in the bazaar for 5 rupees as seeming stronger than my mattamac) and I was icily wet inside. Cabby-flapping my arms in efforts to warm up resulted in my ring flying unnoticed off a numb finger. It was a black opal set by a friend in Germany, and that it lies among the flowers of my ravine adds to the superstition about it.

Suddenly, over the lip was Changu Lake shining with cold the mountains dropping into it sheeted with snow. Above the tree line here at 12,000 feet the loneliness was an impersonal tranquillity instead of desolation. The forlorn little bungalow at the end of the lake looked like a child left alone in a cathedral.

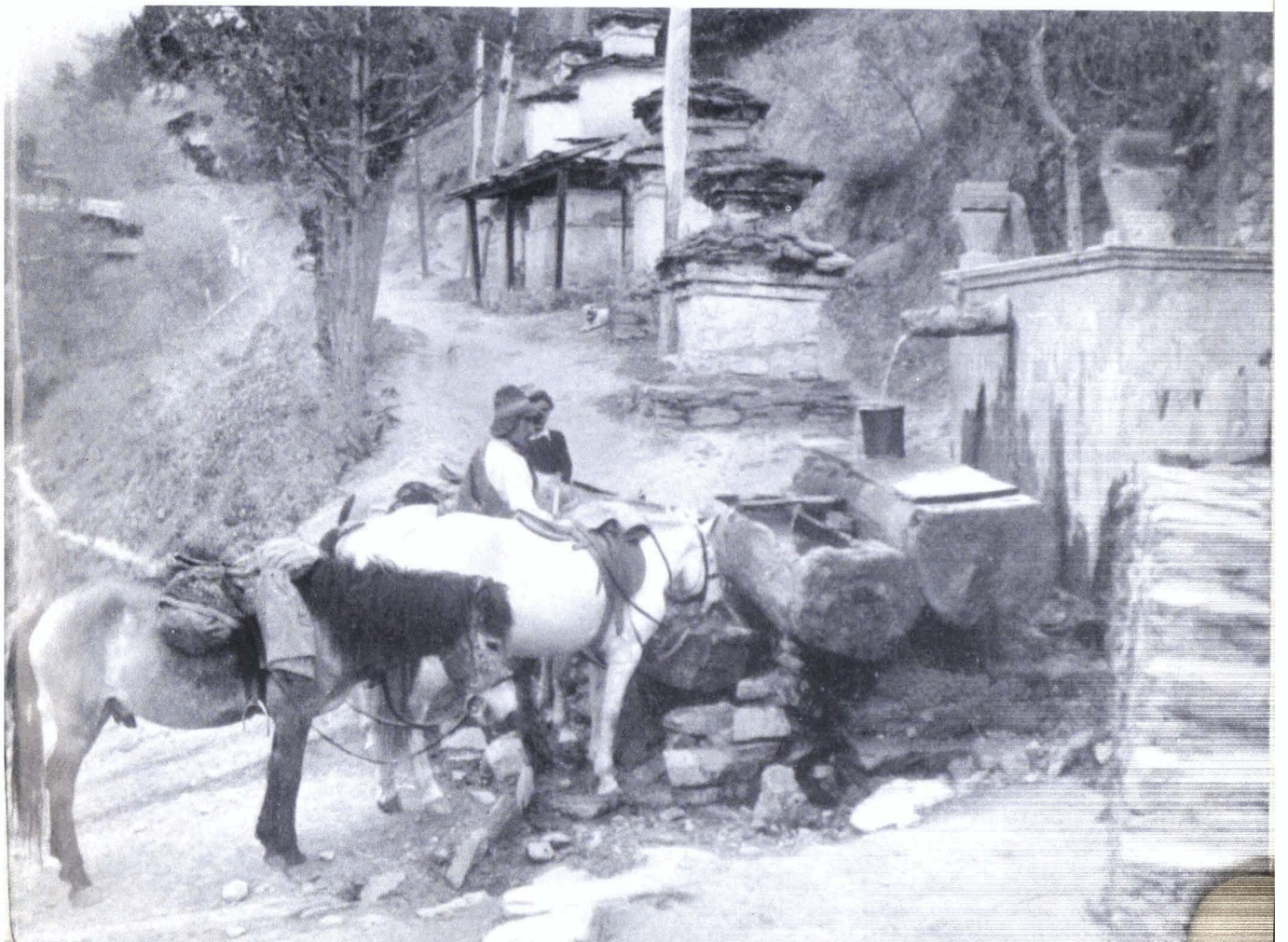
Here we get off on to numb feet, and drip into the veranda. The mules have arrived and Rinchen has lighted a rhododendron wood fire in the sitting-room, which smells like incense. I must get warm. My clothes discarded, the wool curtains are admirable substitutes. James brings out a little whisky as insurance, and chattering teeth are soon otherwise employed with bread and cheese. I feel less assured in the scratchy curtains as James enlarges on his hate of the "modern girl," but, of course, my venerable age places me outside that category and he means the "bright young thing," which every young man I have ever heard express an opinion holds with contemptible scorn beside the fragrant modesty of his mother's girlhood—which, however, exasperates him if he is ever confronted by it.

Up and up during the afternoon and along the high winding track, cloud-drifted, the muffled rolling booms of thunder and their answering chorus of echoes growled out of the mountains. Twelve-foot Tibetan trumpets are the only instruments which reproduce that sound—is there a connection between Nature and the sounds man has evolved under her influences peculiar to his locality? Tom-toms throbbing in jungles, bagpipes wailing over moors, reeds piping over nibbling flocks, wind instruments floating off mountain-sides. . . .

A wind shuffled down the last descent before the final climb to the Natu La, lifting the clouds enough to see sweeps of tumbled rock, crags, cliffs disappearing up into the mist, the wide falling-away valley with the Jelep La track winding out of it to the east.

The air, which had smelt of nothing but cold cloud, was heavy with fragrance as we made the final climb between low rhododendrons dark above the snow, and already covered with bunches of lemon-coloured flowers. It is the bushes, not

(Top) *Crossing into Tibet. The last trees at about 12,000 ft.*
(Below) *Our ponies and syces below a Tibetan monastery.*



the flowers, which give off this scent, causing many travellers mountain sickness. At first I could not place it, but suddenly prostrate figures lay in heat and dim light, and the low ceiling of an opium club at Hanoï closed in the sickly sweetness of the fumes trailing up from the long pipes—inimitable contrast of associations!

Cloud poured down on us, "Yes-Yes" panted quick breaths as he redoubled his pace up an incline which slithered me back on the saddle. A huge stone cairn proclaimed that we were at the top of the Natu La. We were in Tibet.

I jumped off and added my stone to the pile which fluttered with rags. Some were printed with prayers which the wind would carry ceaselessly up to the great Lord Buddha, others remained as bedraggled tokens of the faithfulness—and superstition—of their wondering donors. Under the shelter of the cairn sat two Tibetans, each huddling a little pug in their coats, while a monk belonging to the Yellow Yat sect, a cheerful virile fellow furred up in his plum-coloured robes and felt boots, rested on an exposed rock regardless of the icy wind, like several other travellers who had put down their loads to rest after the climb.

Clouds! Clouds! Shutting out all the world lying down below. Did exasperation tear that rent in them, or was it a vision? Those colossal slaty breakers surging away and away to the far horizon—Tibet, Bhutan, and the cloud was drifting across again. Was it true? Yes, James had put up the tripod of his camera and he would never try to photograph a vision; his annoyance at being too late was reassuringly earthly.

We plunged down into the valley on foot to save the ponies, mounting again to splash through the river and follow the bouldered track when it ran level between pussy willows. The air is always clearer on the dry north side of the range and now, looking above the pines which gathered in warm groves, white summits seemed to drag the sky down curiously close. Still among the trees we arrived at Champithang bungalow, huddling cosily against the mountain. Below it the valley-sides fell away to the north-east, framing a great view of the mountains of Bhutan. So invigorating was the dry air that,

after tea, there was renewed energy to climb up behind the bungalow to see farther, and farther.

Motionless turbulence, majestic delicacy, peak appearing beyond peak, inky shadows tapering into sapphire streamers which rippled between crests of light, shafts of gold piercing towering cumulus clouds banked in a turquoise sky; stillness, deep, deep stillness—no, words are powerless to convey that view which filled one with awe, a sense of unworthiness; and which echoed great symphonic harmonies in the silence. It was an initiation into a mystery, giving a stillness which nothing can ever rob away altogether.

The sun had set, the air was silent with cold and the trees black silhouettes against the sky.

In the cement-floored bathroom the zinc tub was filled with paraffin tins of hot water. The result of relaxed cleanliness was delicious, but the process of bathing was a chilly proceeding with the snowy air intruding through cracks in the board walls and waste gully. After supper, by the pine-log fire we wandered in talk such as one only does in lonely places. Nothing particular may be said, but a reality comes with a life of simple necessities unfrilled with artificial furbelows, which gives human contacts a quality all of their own. The crackle of logs and the interchange of voices build an island in the vast silence brooding down like a presence.

Till acclimatised to that height, sleep is a semi-conscious floating among dreams. I swallowed numerous aspirins, but the night was an exhausting confusion of the day's events and our last conversation about Mr. Williamson's¹ death in Lhasa.

I was sitting on a coffin on a mule's back. We jogged on and on, the corpse slithering with the gradients. Clouds drifting round us pulled the curtains off my shoulders with ghostly fingers, and James was saying:

"The Tibetans won't allow an aeroplane in Lhasa and anyway it can't take off again at this altitude, so you'll have to ride it to Gyantse. You'd better have some opium—you'll be more detached from your ring, which has taken root and

¹ Former Political Officer in Sikkim.

is covered with flowers, so anyway you can't have it back. . . . For Natu's sake don't break any more silence! The splinters of it are fatal to débutantes, and Tibetans put dead bodies out for the vultures."

The mule suddenly leapt over the cairn, dropping the coffin on top of it, which the prayer-flags burnt up in a cloud of steam. The curtains fluttered off me as I fell into space, and James was saying:

"Modern girls are so indecent."

Down, down, down I fell, unable to breathe for clouds, till, with a tremendous splash, I plopped into the zinc tub beside the Yellow Hat monk. As the water froze round us I said:

"I must put on my socks; I'm not surprised that Tibetans don't wash in this temperature!"

With a clap of thunder the monk waved off his yellow hat, full of primulas, and said:

"Your blue blood is effete. If only you wore detachment and drank tea on the top of a mountain you'd stop breaking silence, which you know can only be mended when I've blown my trumpet."

It was 6.15 a.m. I dressed hastily and went out.

Only bare feet could grip the grassy steps sheering up under bushy pines, which, trees left below, swept sun-gilded up over the top of the ridge, smooth and scattered with pink thrift. Though still panting it was impossible not to run and dance with an excited madness of joy. The snowy wind, the light, the space evaporated all sense of weight. Below was the Natu La, at nodding distance the opposite valley wall, and in every other direction, to the farthest horizon, mountain-tops swathed still in their night wrappings of cloud. In the silence between the gusts of wind hissing over the grass the fragrance of juniper and resin floated up with the far-down rush of the river.

Gazing at the vastness shimmered with sunrise gold I turned my head suddenly as if some magnet drew my glance, and there, the last wisps of her veils drifting from her, the peerless peak of Chomelhari glimmered celestially in the sky.

Soaring in her regal loveliness the "Queen of the Snows" rose above her prostrated subjects, a wonderous Venus rising from the clouds. No, I was not dreaming. . . .

As we rode down the valley under pine-trees, the mountains dazzling above us and the deep blue of shadow distance between the tree-stems was almost unbelievable. Yaks grazed among sheets of yellow primulas and iris, not yet out, and regal velvet auriculas. Light shining through patches of spurge turned them into pools of unearthly green light. The scent of waxy-flowered orange rhododendrons hung in air sharp with snow and ripe with sunshine.

Down in the valley the crumbling grey walls of a Chinese garrison fort¹ sighed still with the home-sick longings of those exiles dreaming of their home and children. Past it trudged a string of women, virile, simple, dirty, like haystacks bent double under colossal loads of grass. Their laughter tumbled into the clear air and their lithe bare feet gripped into the dust which clogged the weathered skin.

In one narrow place we met a jostle of yaks which, by their weight of numbers, nearly drove our ponies back. Ridiculous, and somehow rather pathetically, they look like water-buffalo with hearth-rugs thrown over them, and as if they were made up of odds and ends left over from the discarded parts of other animals. But their ungainly movements hold great strength and surprising agility, and they are to the Tibetans what camels are to the Bedouin or reindeer to Laplanders. Yaks cannot live below 9000 feet, and form the means of transport in altitudes too high and climates too hard for other animals. Their meat dried in the sun is a staple diet, as is their rich milk and the white butter and cheese made from it, while their hair is woven into the black tents of the nomadic tribes.

Rounding a corner, the smiling Chumbi Valley twisted below us. At one time the Maharajas of Sikkim had lived here, their Tibetan wives finding the damp climate of Gangtok unhealthy for constitutions accustomed to bracing Lhasa. This valley, with its river bordered by strips of cultivation

¹ Chinese garrisons were withdrawn in 1912.

between mountains blanketed with pines, is not unlike a Bavarian landscape.

The track wound down between stone walls enclosing fields of barley. Near a clump of trees a *chorten* (the Tibetan word for *stupa*) gleamed under its coat of whitewash, surrounded by a slender forest of shimmering prayer-flags dancing sharply in the sunshine. Beyond, the wide-spanning stone-weighted roofs of Rinchengang spread above white walls and carved window-frames gleaming with enamel brilliance.

The special features of Tibetan architecture are the (sometimes almost imperceptible) slope of the walls inwards towards the roof, they being thicker at the bottom than the top; the same line given to the windows through a frame of colour-wash painted round them (usually dark red); heavy carved and coloured lintels jutting out over the windows; shallow roofs with wide eaves, giving the soaring lines of the walls a comfortable sense of permanence and hospitality.

May I venture to suggest that architects or prospective house-builders here, should consider turning to Tibet for inspiration instead of so continually to the Georgians or the Cubists? Over and over again Tibetan houses in different settings, on exposed crags or sheltered among trees, alone or in villages, made me think how eminently well they would look in Europe—unlike most foreign styles. Simple, unostentatious solid and charming, they meet the modern demand for big windows, suntrap loggias and even little windows built out from corners.

If stone is not used sun-dried bricks under a coat of white-washed plaster is not unlike our own materials. The stone slab roofs need not lose their character if tiles were used, and the often blank walls of the ground floor would be admirable as garage space. The carved window lintels would be difficult to reproduce where craftsmen are prohibitive, but quite a successful effect was achieved by the engineer in Sikkim, who reproduced them in cement for a monastery he rebuilt after an earthquake.

Down in the main square we stopped at the largest house beside gaily comparisoned riding yaks tethered by the door.

James had a professional visit to make to the mother of the headman, for whom he had performed a cataract operation some weeks earlier.

The whole family welcomed and led us through the dark ground floor, used as store-rooms, up a staircase like the gangway on to a ship, and into the guest-room on the first floor. The general disorder and dirt we had passed through was immediately forgotten. It was an enchanting room.

Red columns supported the high ceiling of beams decorated with designs in brilliant colours. The matt of their water-colour washes has a soft richness so much lovelier than shiny oil-paint. Below the geometrically carved and painted cornice, a bold fresco of flowers and birds was painted on the white-washed plaster walls. The wide dark boards of the floor were polished, and a raised wooden platform along one side was spread with boisterous Tibetan carpets. There were two tall windows at one end, and a wide casement with a carved and painted frame in the other outside wall, through which the sun flooded the floor. The frill, which is often hung along the eave of the window lintel outside, rippled in the wind, making the sun-pool on the floor wash across in waves. Along the walls were stacked parchment-coloured yak-hide chests with brass locks and corners, in which family treasures and clothes were stored.

Alas! a falling from grace came with the nasty European chairs and a gimcrack bedside-table they bought for us, and the strong Indian tea so mistakenly provided for our enjoyment instead of Tibetan tea, which is delicious when fresh butter is used, as it would have been here.

This soup-like concoction is made with Chinese brick tea churned up with salt, soda and butter in a tall wooden container like an umbrella stand, and poured off into the handsome metal or wood and metal teapots which are among the most treasured and artistic of Tibetan possessions. It is served in porcelain bowls on metal stands with lids to match; when travelling, Tibetans carry their private cups, made of birch bur and often lined with silver, in the bosoms of their coats. They will drink thirty or forty cups a day of this most

refreshing beverage, which is excellent when thought of as soup rather than tea.

While we sipped our disgusting treacle James chatted in Tibetan, with the help of Rinchen, to the headman and his brothers. They were prosperous and brawny, their dark-blue wool gowns clean, their plaits, glossy as black lead, dangled below their waists, above which their Homburgs looked as inadequate as the shoddy chairs in the room. Among wide-eyed children the womenfolk with their babies clustered round the door. Their good looks were marred, to European eyes, by the blood rubbed into their faces which, were she a Tibetan beauty specialist, Elizabeth Arden would prescribe to her clients as protection to the skin from climatic ravages. One girl had a black square of paper on her left temple—a cure against headaches. There was something big and spacious and hardy about these people, like their country.

Granny came in beaming with smiles. The operation had been entirely successful and she blinked proudly behind a large pair of spectacles, still hardly convinced that she was really seeing again. Another old woman, brought in from a neighbouring house for consultation, nervously held the hand of her granddaughter and son while she allowed her poor filmy eyes to be turned unblinkingly towards the sun. After examining her gently James decided that the condition was not yet ready for an operation. Any ailment, particularly blindness which is common through cataract in Tibet, holds a special cruelty in lives of such simplicity and hardships, and it was a joy to see granny's perpetual smile of surprised delight. James promised to operate on the other old lady, and the assembled family waved us away with friendly disappointment at the shortness of their hospitality.

The ponies clattered over the cobbles of the shadowy alleys under the wide eaves, thumped hollowly across the wooden bridge over the river, and then trotted silently through the dust of the road winding along the valley, green with barley. A drive of rain swept from the grey clouds, weighting the tones of the colouring and throwing a richer depth into the gay clothes of figures working in the fields. The white track

divided round a long prayer-wall, which must always be passed on one's right-hand side, and continued its way beside the river, past single or groups of houses, inscriptions and holy figures painted or carved in rocks, *chortens* and shrines. In one of these a huge prayer-wheel was revolved by a water-wheel. Continually the unseen was brought to remembrance, and even Nature harnessed to keep up ceaseless invocations to the powers on whom man is unescapably dependent.

At last round a corner straggled the somewhat dour village of Yatung. Unlike Rinchengang, with its white houses of two or three stories, it was grey and grovelling. Hovel shops it had in plenty for it is an important place, with the British Trade Agent's bungalow at the far end near the barracks of the small garrison of Indian troops, but it was slatternly like its people.

The Trade Agent's bungalow rambled pleasantly among lawns, orchards and garden. Nasturtiums were already rampaging among iris, but it was the kitchen garden upon which most enthusiasm was lavished in a land of no vegetables. Peas, beans, carrots and lettuces grew happily; potatoes the Tibetan gardener grew under mounds instead of in rows, making the potato patch look like a miniature Chinese cemetery. Apple trees and apricots looked vigorous.

Captain Keith Battye (the Trade Agent) was an excellent housekeeper and charming host, and no guest could have wished for more thoughtful entertainment than filled the next days.

Dongka Monastery

SEVEN OR EIGHT miles up the Lhasa road stands the Dongka *Gompa*, at 12,000 feet. Riding through the Chumbi Valley I was surprised to see what neat agriculturalists the Tibetans were. Not an inch of level ground was wasted and, as in Norway, cut grass was lifted off the ground to dry on poles. The last village that we passed supplied, I was told, many of the pack-mules on the Lhasa route and, from the substantial size of the houses, it appeared to be a profit-making concern.

After this the track, now only a stoney path, climbed through thickets of daphne bushes, used for making the lovely rough Tibetan paper which alone withstands the decimation of silver-fish insects. The melancholy desolation of another ruined Chinese fort was the boundary of man's endeavour, and we passed into a rocky region such as good Christian must surely have encountered during his Pilgrim's Progress.

Gone was the soft damp of Sikkim. The dry burning of the air parched the skin. Trees left behind, bare peaks rounded one beyond another with every detail sharp in an almost painful clarity. Rocks dazzled like glass on hillsides austerely heavy under the blinding light. Colour was sucked away and the landscape became an etching.

In contrast with this wild broken ridge, at length we looked far down on to a great expanse of green, level as the waters of the lake which must have lain there once, encircled by its rim of mountains. Rich and peaceful it spread under the midday glare, dotted sharply with grazing chowries (cross between yak and cow), with the glistening twists of a river looping across it.

Turning left off the main track, we led the ponies across a log bridge over a mischievous stream, and started to cork-screw up what might have been a Mediterranean hillside. The

scent of thyme, juniper, cistus and wild lavender hung in the air shimmering off grey rocks. Wider and wider spread the views of turgid mountains till suddenly, rounding a corner, we were confronted by the gleaming solidity of the Dongka Monastery under its quiet roofs surmounted by glittering gilded knobs. As in the case of every Buddhist establishment one's first exclamation was "What a perfect site—and how the buildings enhance it!"

There it basked in the shelter of a high ridge to the north-east, among enchanting hillocks and dells and ridges of rock falling away into deep ravines. From its saddle position the view to the sunrise was limited only by sight. A rocky knoll of trees to the south gave shelter from the blinding midday, and as man turned westward to follow the warmth of the lowering sun a gentle peace came in the graceful rhythm of nearer mountains folding into valley tranquillity.

The Abbot and several monks came out to meet us. Well-fed and laughing, he welcomed us graciously, but his joviality had a restraint and hid, I fancy, a shrewd hard-headedness. He led the way across the main court and up some steps into the porch of the temple, supported on red columns, where tea was brought, and unsweetened biscuits which reminded me of nursery culinary efforts of cooked dough. Fortunately the mind was distracted by the interest of the surroundings from the increasing difficulty to show appreciation in their consumption.

Round the three sides of the court facing us ran a balcony with a painted wooden balustrade, sheltered by the eaves of the stone roof. On to this opened the doors of the monks' cells. The gateway had huge wooden doors, through which now came a fascinating dirty troupe of travelling dancers from Kham (south-west China), who were dancing their way to Lhasa.

Over the pavement they wove their spinning circles. Round the two girls standing in the centre the men swayed, whirled, somersaulted or cart-wheeled, with their fuzz of hair, the long empty sleeve of their coats, worn only over the shoulder, and their skirts of tassels swinging out horizontally as they spun.

The girls beat the drums above their heads with long curved drumsticks, swaying round gracefully from their waists. This acrobatic dancing showed its Chinese origin, but there was a certain detachment in the movement made in rhythm with the drums, and with the grace of mountain people.

The temple itself, dim-cold and richly barbaric, flickered with the flames of numerous butter-lamps wavering in the chill air, acrid with stale incense and rancid butter. Rows of silver bowls of water glimmered on the altar below the looming central figure, unusual in not sitting in the lotus position. In shelved alcoves the complete set of the sacred writings gave colour in their wrappings, each volume of loose leaves between two boards being wrapped in Chinese brocade. The rough solidity of the structure, the brilliant colours of the painted carving mellowed with smoke, and the bewilderment of objects of worship and ceremony were all refreshingly free from any laboured effort or short cuts to achieve the effect, which was vital and almost oppressively mysterious.

A low doorway in the corner of the courtyard led into the big kitchen. Huge metal cauldrons, several feet in diameter, were built up from the mud-beaten floor over separate fires. Decorative cooking pots were ranged in a corner, and wood smoke billowed up to the blackened ceiling festooned with bunches of bones ready for soup. In a rough way it was clean and tidy.

Examples we saw from the 80 lamas of the establishment were, for the most part, not inspiring. The faces of a few caught one's attention with their remote mystery, but most of them looked either depraved or brawny simpletons. This is not surprising when one remembers that it is the usual custom for one boy and one girl from every family to become a monk and a nun. Very often it is those who are considered as least able to make a way for themselves in secular life who are put into religious institutions. Religious obligations thus being met, families also dispose of members who show risks of becoming encumbrances. One-fifth of the population in Tibet is in monasteries or nunneries and, naturally, only a relatively small number can be men or women of unusual

ability, devotion and sincerity, which undoubtedly some of them are. The declining population of Tibet is mainly owing to this large proportion of celibate life.

Those who have been in or near Tibet are often assumed to have come in contact with miraculous manifestations of occult powers, and are asked continually whether they believe in them. I saw none, but I believe certainly that there are those who, through discipline, have learned to regulate certain forces in a way that ordinary people, living materially pre-occupied lives, are unfit and unable to control. I do not understand how those who believe in the Bible miracles can deny the possibility for qualified men to use certain laws which spiritual discipline and insight enables them to harness, or, on the other hand, how sceptics can refuse the evidence of modern scientists whose discoveries are ever bringing them nearer to the Ancient Wisdom.

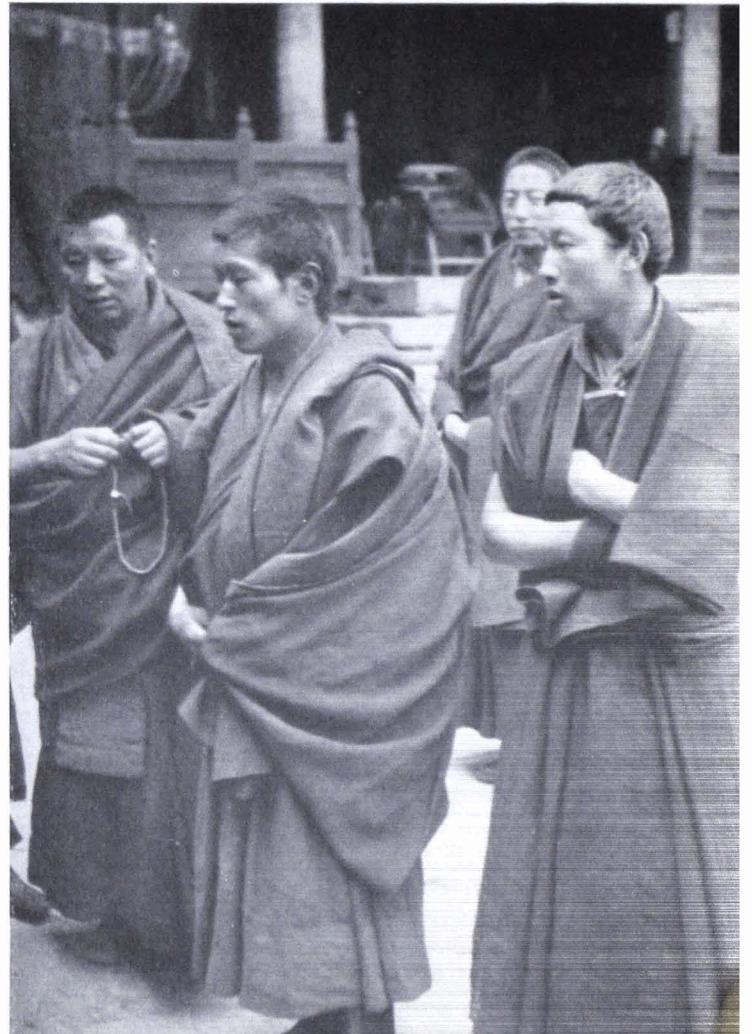
What I have learned about these initiates and their spiritual methods induces me to take most accounts of meetings with them as the travellers' tales of sentimental enthusiasts or commercial exploiters. Personally, their very descriptions encourage a disbelief that contacts were ever made with real masters at all, though they may have met with disciples knowing some of the elementary rules. Even Sir Charles Bell, who was accepted so intimately by the Tibetans and who, at one time, was actually thought by them to be the awaited incarnation promised from the West, says that during his various visits to Lhasa he did not see any of these masters at work, though he heard accounts of them from Tibetans.

From what I gather, to be allowed or able to understand the deeper mysteries entails a detachment, training and discipline beyond the capabilities of any but the really single-minded, and that one of the conditions on which devotees are gradually initiated further, as they show themselves worthy, is the avoidance of any exploitation, and obedience to their masters, who guard these secrets jealously from all for whom any "earthly desires" have any value.

No, I cannot claim any sight of the occult, but there is some quality in the rarified atmosphere of that altitude, in the vast



*The musicians for the travelling
dancers from Kham.*



Monks at Dongka Monastery.

beauty and silence and, perhaps most of all, in the limitless faith of its peoples in the spiritual force of unseen powers, which either creates or liberates a new consciousness. Away from the limiting scepticism of the West nothing seems impossible and the most strange probable. In that thin air the boundaries fade between the seen and unseen, and the scope of life seems to be as wide as the horizons which carry the eye beyond sight. Even as I rode down into Gangtok a week later, the breath of the enlightened efficiency of the West seemed to have the same property as Alice's mushroom in Wonderland, under whose influence a shrinking set in. Back here in Europe, mankind appears to have imprisoned himself in a barbed-wire entanglement of scientific or materialistically bred cynicism, and it is difficult to recapture the visions of even so limited an experience as mine was of Tibet—that country which maintains that national power and glory is incompatible with spiritual power and true religion, which it has deliberately chosen as the more important of the two.

Vice-Regal Lodge

WHILE IN SIKKIM I resolved to go to Afghanistan, wishing to see the other end of the Himalayas, to compare it and the people with this east end, which had cast its spell over me with such magnificent gentleness. Mr. Gould doubted that I should be given a visa, but said that the best chance was to go to Simla to try for it, kindly offering to give me introductions to the deities of administration who sit on that Olympus during the hot weather.

So it was that, after the delay of a fever which was thought in Darjeeling Hospital to be mild para-typhoid, and after helping to pack up and waving off Mr. Gould and his political mission to Lhasa, the miserable day arrived when I said good-bye to the many friends of four months in beloved Sikkim.

For the last time I rattled down the twists of the road which dives into the Tista Valley, leaving little Gangtok wrapt quietly in its monsoon clouds away up there under the protecting majesty of Kinchinjunga.

I took a week in getting to Simla, stopping in Kalimpong, Calcutta (from where I sent all luggage direct to England, except my bedding-roll, one suitcase and a rucksack), Benares, Agra and Delhi. I planned to stay in Simla only long enough to procure my Afghan visa, but the deities there made it so enjoyable that I remained for three weeks. I was grateful for this time, too, because I was still feeling somewhat wobbly after the fever; this, and slight flu in Kabul, were the only indispositions during my whole sixteen months' wander.

In Simla I wrote my name dutifully in the Book. Three days later came an invitation to dine. This was gracious but disconcerting. My one tired evening-dress had known the inside of my rucksack too often to be able to flutter through vice-regal halls with impunity. Half-mourning for George V. was in force in official circles; my dress mourned only in condition and not in colouring. A royal command must be

obeyed, and I set out in the hopeless gloom of vanity to explore the dress shops of Simla.

To be keenly affected by the suitability of clothes and their fit is a handicap. I saw no prospect of finding a dress of any style or fit, but after several depressing essays, I found "it"—an expensive French model going cheap. After long enforced black, feminine dislike of monotony had rushed the ladies into grey or mauve on the advent of half from complete mourning. I prefer black and, after slight taking-in of my bargain, I hardly knew myself. To pay £2 for a pair of long gloves was not so amusing.

There was a slight battle with my charming host over the coat question. He found my faithful "camel" unsuitable, and wished to lend me one of his wife's; but my venerable friend of many a night journey gave a glamour of contrast and incongruity, holding in its worn grubbiness the link between past treasures of bliss and discomforts with this unexpected débâcle into sophisticated splendour.

A letter home recounts the evening:

"I enjoyed it thoroughly, from the moment the liveried ricksha men swept me down the steep drive at 7.50 p.m. till they panted me up it again at 11.30. Here in Simla anything up to 4 men are necessary to compete with the hills—very different from flat Chinese cities or Calcutta.

"The sentries at the vice-regal gates saluted, at attention, the guests of Their Excellencies. Up the winding drive I looked at the stars shining brilliantly above the rhododendron trees, and felt the joke of this contrast with the months of Sikkim simplicity and former disreputable and unconcerned vagabondage. The bulk of Vice-Regal Lodge suddenly towered up above the lighted windows and verandahs, and I was whirled up in a triumphant flourish by 4 panting men to the edge of an expanse of red carpet, spreading over a wide flight of steps. Turbaned and scarlet-liveried servants helped me out, and a pale A.D.C., with pale-blue facings to his tail-coat, ushered me to the ladies' cloak-room where frantic ladies were putting the usual final touches to their—beauty?

"Buttoning my gloves, I was led along a high passage into the Reception Hall and given a table list, with the information

that my partner was Col. —. Forty-six guests gradually assembled, being marshalled into a line in front of a bay where the British military band played selections from Gilbert and Sullivan. For once the men in their gay uniforms supplied the colour, while the ten ladies mourned (half) in white or grey or painful mauves.

“The hall had an almost lovable naïve ugliness as, I think, had the whole of Vice-Regal Lodge, apart from the outside which glories in spa-like monstrosity. Those who built it had no doubts about the suitability of an enlarged English country-house, with its panelling and cosy galleries, being set down in India. That certain styles aren’t suitable on certain scales and certain types in certain surroundings didn’t worry them in the least. I suppose that when we lose the assurance that what is uncompromisingly British is unquestionably the best—when an Englishman will sit down to a meal with ladies without his coat when the thermometer registers under 110° F.; when any British bank or travel agency opens for even an hour on Boxing Day to meet the urgent necessities of travellers in that great port of the Far East, Hong Kong, and when English ladies start to use the far cheaper and exquisitely beautiful native silks and materials for their evening dresses and furnishings, instead of highly dutied inferior British products and depressing cretonnes—then, I suppose, the sun will begin to set on the British Empire.

“And this reminds me, I never told you about New Delhi which is, on this argument, very reassuring. Having been laid out all of a piece it has a certain unity and its scale cannot but be impressive—but, oh, the architecture! It’s so nagging! Like the Town Hall in Stockholm, though not so successful or interesting in detail, the administrative buildings are a hotch-potch of various English styles put together most unconvincingly, and the lid is—literally—put on Viceroy’s House by a dome which looks like a meat dish-cover, compared with the exquisite grace and subtlety of those swelling up above the remains of the old Delhi’s round. The temerity of raising a dome in a land rich in the heritage of perhaps the world’s greatest dome-builders!

“What seems so extraordinary, too, is that, with the responsibility and opportunity of laying out this great new city the architects, not having spent a hot weather in the Plains, never grasped climatic conditions, and the official houses are a purgatory to live in during the summer. I’ve been in several in Lahore—they’re like ovens. The sun beats down on the flat concrete roofs of Georgian constructions, on unshaded windows, on red brick walls. Small low rooms cater for raw winter days, in which, with all the fans going, it is well-nigh impossible to breathe. They are now seriously considering putting native-styled Indian thatches on them—a thatched Georgian house!

“But to continue my story.

“Suddenly the A.D.C. who’d marshalled me about ever since my arrival came up with the same harassed air and said:

“‘Oh, Miss Harris, you will say grace this evening.’

“Taken unaware my heart missed a beat and a paralysis numbed my perception. It’s unseemly for A.D.C.’s to pull the leg of a lady guest in public on a formal occasion! But after that I lost any awe inspired into me by the assumed nonchalance of the gentlemen and the undisguised concern of the ladies as to their appearance. Even when the atmosphere was re-charged with tension on the rising of the band to play ‘God Save the King’ and the huge curtains at the end of the hall were drawn aside, I couldn’t feel the solemnity due to the supremely supercilious entry of—a cocker spaniel followed, at a suitable interval, by Their Excellencies.

“They were both worthy representatives of royalty and, as my turn came to be introduced and to shake hands, my curtsy expressed a real deference. While they led the way into the great dining-room the band struck up ‘Roast Beef of Old England.’ Bless British humour!

“The long table glowed into infinity under its red-shaded candlelight. It twinkled on to silver, flowers, white linen and glass, and rescued from the vast dimness of the room the phalanx of scarlet-liveried *khidmatqhars* (servants) standing behind each chair. At intervals down the centre of the table colossal silver urns stood like sentries of solid respectable ugliness, as guards against the levity of possible flirtations

between the flowers and the candlelight. They were so large and exuded such self-conscious solemnity that I wondered secretly if they contained the ashes of former Viceroys.

“Their Excellencies sat in the middle of each side of the table, with their guests placed according to their precedence. Course after course followed each other on crested silver plates, and even the silver urns couldn’t impose on my enjoyment of two delightful neighbours.

“After the dessert a silence fell in which His Excellency rose to give the toast, ‘The King-Emperor.’ We all rose with the self-consciousness of Britons at a funeral, murmuring ‘The King-Emperor.’ Conversation, given an added gaiety in the reaction from this solemnity and the comfortable informality of coffee and cigarettes (a new innovation allowed for the ladies under this progressive Vicereine), was entirely drowned, and every one deafened, by the entry of a dozen or so Indian pipers, whose lung capacity competed with any Scot’s. My neighbour bellowed into my ear, ‘The Shy Man’s Friends.’ After they’d marched three times round the table a short interval of peace followed before Her Excellency led the ladies from the dining-room. In the doorway she turned and curtsied to His Excellency, who stood alone by the table in the candlelight. Each lady followed her example. I’d been warned that this was an ordeal which I should feel nervous of, though I couldn’t see why, except that recently a lady had fallen backwards, giving an unfortunate display to the company of gentlemen assembled.

“Her Excellency sat on a sofa at the end of the drawing-room. The ladies grouped themselves on other sofas at a suitable distance, and murmured inanities to each other in voices which, in spite of restraint, seemed to impose on the silence of the room like peas in a tin can. The military secretary’s wife led two or three ladies in turn (in order of precedence) to sit beside Her Excellency. Their respectable years seemed to drop away from them and they looked like fourth-form schoolgirls sitting nervously through the gracious attentions of a head-mistress.

“I was surprised and delighted when I was asked:

“‘Will you come and sit by Her Excellency?’

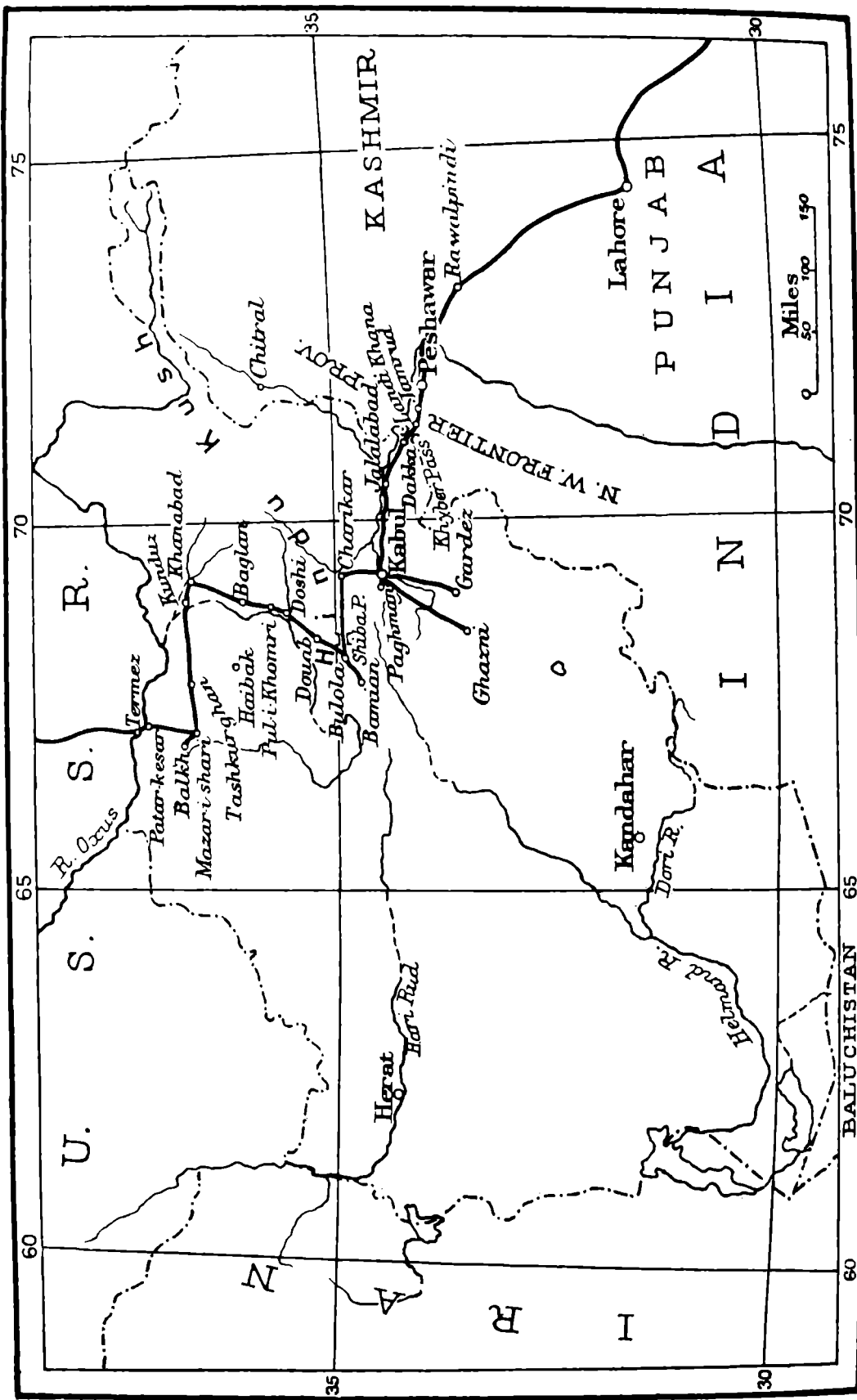
“As we talked I understood less and less the reason for the schoolgirl attitude. For all her dignity she had such naturalness and humour, and the lively interest she showed in my wanderings, her keenness to hear about the flowers I’d seen in Sikkim and the borders of Tibet, made me even forget to curtsy when I left her, on the entry of the gentlemen, or to realise till afterwards what a disproportionate length of time I’d sat on the Vicereine sofa.

“After that an A.D.C. led me to sit in a vast arm-chair, to which different gentlemen were brought up every ten minutes or so, the next one being presented just as an interesting conversation had got under way with the last. I found this performance so exhausting that I was thankful when Their Excellencies rose to shake hands ‘good-night’ with their guests. I made a specially low bob to Her Excellency, to make up for the one I owed her. After drinks in an ante-room the assembly trickled away.

“As I emerged from the cloakroom, in my disreputable coat, the same A.D.C. came up again and said, that Their Excellencies would be pleased if I would come to their cinema party next week. I expressed my thanks at the honour of their further hospitality (for a moment I questioned another leg-pull) but said that I planned to leave Simla before that date. He looked so shocked that I had a panic that I was committing a breach of etiquette, and hastily added that of course I would postpone my departure.

“When the formal invitation came it was to stay for three nights. I have enjoyed it very much indeed, though I did feel like Alice in Wonderland straying into the Palace of the White Queen. They sent a magnificent ricksha with four men in blue and scarlet uniforms to fetch me, and two coolies for luggage—but I’ve only got one suitcase! The lady housekeeper nearly fainted on the discovery that I’d not got a bearer (servant).

“I leave Simla, sadly, in four days’ time for Peshawar, to start the next adventure—of Afghanistan!”



Letter from Kabul

Kabul (British Legation),
Afghanistan,

10/9/36.

DARLING FAM,

I suppose this is one of the most exciting addresses I've been able to write at the top of a letter to you! Yes, I'm really here in spite of so many people saying I wouldn't be. We've accepted to stay here for 4 days, and then want to move into the hotel to poke about and really see things properly, because, though they're most charmingly kind and the whole establishment a paradise of comfort, we're marooned in splendid isolation over three dusty miles from the city. The days are glaringly hot with a dry heat which I find much less pleasant than a damp one—one's skin is literally crackled off, which is not relieved by water only less hard than in Cyprus! And instead of feeling expansive as in damp heat, this dryness makes one feel like a boiler with no exhaust. Also I really am most frightfully tired—so between the two, these three miles seem an impossible barrier.

Already one must begin the bunderbust for going on. Bob's leave will soon end and he must go back to India. He's been a most delightful and kind companion. For the next stage I want to get an Afghan escort (supplied by the Afghan Foreign Office) and go in a lorry, or possibly hire a car if it's not too expensive—not go as Rosita Forbes did, who was here a short time ago, in the Legation lorry with supplies of tinned luxuries and Legation servants.

My real Thermopylae will be at the Russian Embassy, where I go to-morrow to ask for a visa. Anyhow, though of course I'm desperately keen to succeed, there's the certainty that things will work out if I'm meant to go, and I shall be content with whatever transpires. But you must hear about the journey here, because the future's a shadowy possibility and the past a most vivid reality.

I left Lahore on the sweltering morning of September 5th and at Rawal Pindi met Bob, who I find knew Bill at Cambridge. (Male escorts are de rigueur for the female traveller in Afghanistan, particularly the British variety.) Oh, the heat! And a major in the carriage—a phenomenon in second class, not a Sahib's place at all—in a flannel suit, collar and tie made us even damper than we were, just to look at him.

Leaving the monotony of the Plains behind we passed into a shaley expanse surrounded by bare hills, with the Indus flowing parallel with the railway. The colours were exquisite as the sun set, turning the near hills into mounds of fire and the distant ones into blue shadows. One expected it to get cooler, but the air still blew in like a hair-drying machine. We were both filled with excitement—Bob's better informed than mine, his father having spent all his life on the frontier and that being his own ambition. I just felt the undefined atmosphere of ominous restlessness, very reminiscent of Manchukuo. In the short twilight we reached Peshawar, where we stayed two nights which seemed even hotter than those in Lahore, a day being necessary to arrange transport and pick up visas.

First we visited Khan Sahib Gai, to whom I had a letter of introduction. He sat at a table piled high with disordered papers and dust. His small figure in white trousers and sagging tweed coat seemed yet another piece of litter among that stacked at the entrance of his store. But my letter of introduction from one power addressed another. Mr. Gai's sphere of influence stretched from Bombay to Kabul—probably far beyond. His brown face was gentle, his voice soft, and his manner of diffident humility might deceive those who had not been let into the secret of his position, or had time to find out—that no one who had dealings with Peshawar could afford to remain unacquainted with Mr. Gai.

Yes, of course, he'd a lorry going up to Kabul—when? But just when it suited our convenience, he had one going nearly every day. Yes, of course, to-morrow two front places would be reserved for us. Would I like a mosquito net? It was advisable for the night in Jalalabad. Had we got our

permits to leave Peshawar? No? Well, it was a holiday—but he could get them for us. He would send a man with us to the Afghan Visa Officer. If he would be permitted to send us there in his car he'd be pleased. How much the seats to Kabul? 12 rupees.

Though prepared for wonders from Mr. Gai, his grey Hollywood limousine was beyond my expectations.

The Afghan Visa Office was through a courtyard and up some stairs. The floor of the corridor above was crowded with a queue who squatted with nonchalant patience against the wall—no, perhaps, patience only exists where there's a sense of time, and the Orient has still escaped that.

The Visa Officer's was a small room full of big men. A row of them, who gave the impression of being dressed in the contents of the dirty-linen basket, sat on chairs round the wall, some wearing tarbushes and others pugarees. The Visa Officer, who was finely built, with a delicate skin and a Jewish nose, sat behind a European writing-table. He welcomed us with dignified courtesy free from any servility, as his dignity was from superiority.

Chairs were brought, and a table on which to fill up forms of usual questions, written in French and Pashtu—why French? An additional requirement was the names of two guarantors. While we waited for our passports lemonade was offered to us; I hesitated—but it's no use being fussy and I was very thirsty in the great heat. We carried on a polite conversation with the Visa Officer, during which he gave many expressions of pleasure at our proposed visit to his country. His English was good but limited, and for want of something better to say I admired his beautiful *chuplis*.¹

“You like them? You can have them in the bazaar here.”

Before I quite realised what was happening he'd said a few words to a servant, who left the room.

“I send for the best man—he learn his trade in prison. He can make for you good *chuplis*.”

Somewhat dismayed I thanked him for his kindness, and shortly after the prosperous ex-convict appeared, who drew

¹ Sandal shoes particular to the N.-W. Frontier

round my foot on a sheet of crested paper. Discussion ensued in which the gentlemen round the wall joined. I was asked if I had any particular wishes; I tentatively asked the price.

“You do not trouble about that. That is my pleasure to pay.”

“Oh, no, please don't think of such a thing!”

“Yes, please. It is the first time you visit my country. It is my pleasure.”

At 11 p.m. that night a coolie delivered a pair of the finest leather *chuplis* I've seen, with the honourable compliments of the Visa Officer.

Next morning Mr. Gai sent us in his limousine to the mouth of the Khyber, 6 miles north of Peshawar, where we joined the lorry at Jamrud. A sentry stands by the barrier across the road under the walls of a white fort.

The lorry was over regulation weight for those passing through the Khyber, but Mr. Gai's *babu* succeeded in getting an overload in our honour, for which we had to suffer.

Our belongings were stacked in the back with the strange assortment of bundles, cases, and rolls of leather, on which sat several passengers, the end of their turbans tied over their noses as dust-masks. A band of Afridi tribesmen equipped with rifles and cartridge belts stood round curiously, their stare gradually changing to answering grins, and when we finally crammed into the narrow front seat with the driver they gave us a hearty send off. The barrier was raised; we'd really started for Afghanistan!

Phew—it was hot!

The good motor road and rough camel track were signed by a car and a camel, drawn in silhouette, pointing to each. I'd imagined the Khyber Pass to be a narrow gorge between high cliffs, oppressively dark and ominous. Instead, the road twisted up between a sun-scorched bewilderment of hillocks and mounds of rock, many crowned by dust-coloured block-towers with slit black eyes, whose blank stare was made more wicked in the knowledge of the fire they can flash. Without any awe-inspiring dignity this treacherous Pass holds a greater

horror. In the silent trembling of its heat hung the ghosts of its centuries of victims.

The lorry making, we discovered, her maiden voyage, ground up the road on bottom gear. At the top we stopped to allow the boiling engine to cool, as we did on every hill all the way to Kabul—and it's mostly hilly except for stretches of plain and cultivated valleys between the ranges of exquisite pale mountains of sun-baked rock. We got out and gazed over the strange landscape trembling in heat and dust; at the last view through the folding hills of the Indian Plains blue under the haze of heat, like an ocean. Triumphant weary suffering covetous eyes—how many had looked at that view through thousands of years?

The lorry laboured on with difficulty, jibbing finally outside the long walls of Shagai Fort built a few years ago for the British-Indian garrison defending the north end of the Khyber. Examination proved that five sparking plugs were defunct, apart from more subtle internal complaints. Passing lorries clamoured for the privilege (at exorbitant charges) of transporting us to Kabul, but I suggested we should telephone back from the Fort to Mr. Gai.

The sentry was distracted—he couldn't shoot a Sahib and Memsahib. Bob, having a more considerate nature and a little Urdu, listened to his expostulations while I, with neither, pranced in under incredulous military eyes. Perhaps the sentry decided that it was safer to allow the Sahib to go in to control the unruly Memsahib, anyway Bob eventually joined me in my rambles and we found the Officers' Mess. I knocked.

“Come in!”

Never did such an expression of astonishment dawn in a pair of eyes as in those of the officer at the entry of a strange disreputable female! Afterwards he told us that there were the strictest orders against the entrance of any one into the Fort.

We telephoned, had lunch, waited. The cool room with its cretonned sofa and chairs was difficult to connect with the wild country outside, scorching under the midday sun. No officer may go alone outside the walls. The annual leave is

three months during the two years each regiment is stationed behind those red walls.

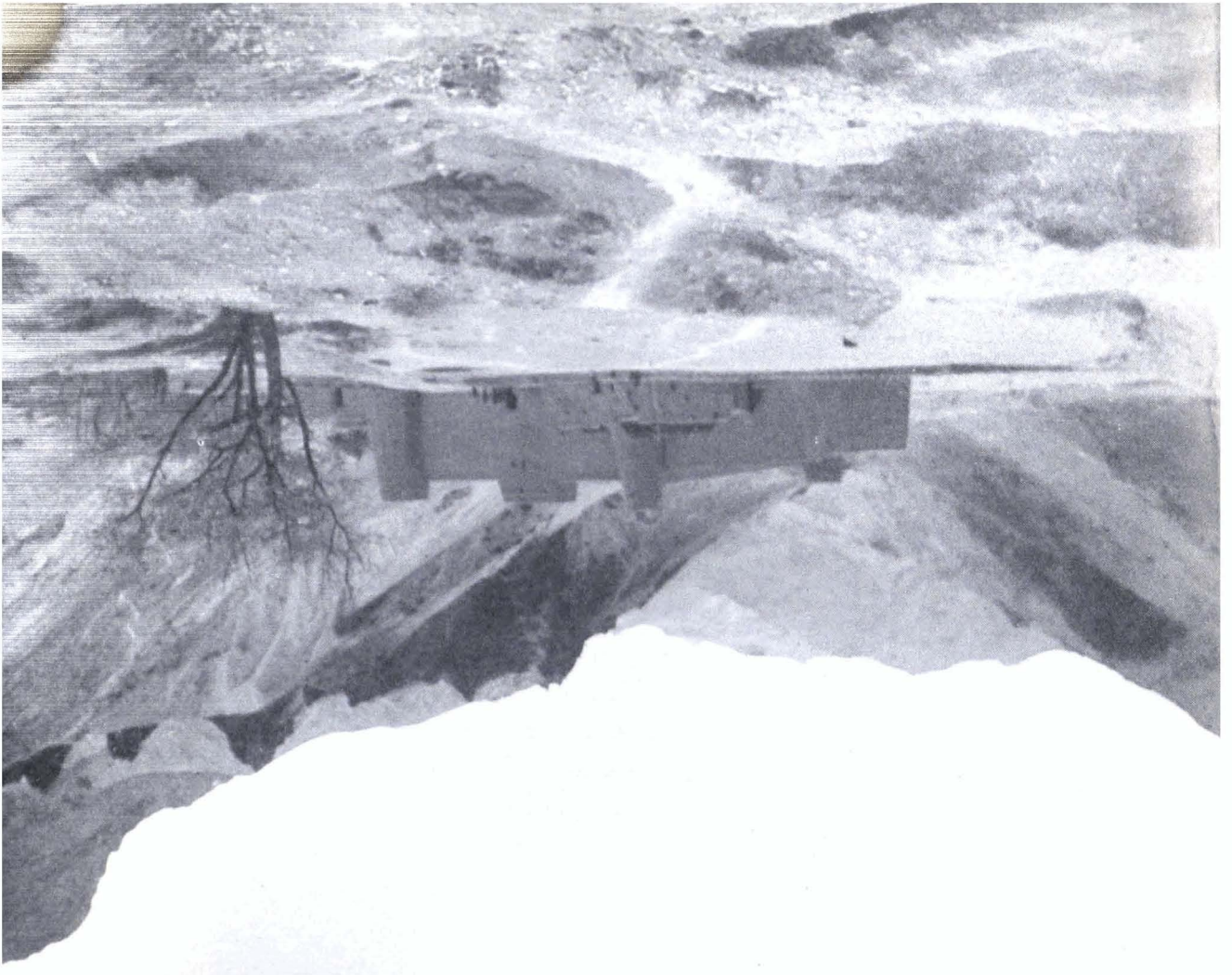
After three hours the lorry was persuaded to move again, but it was 4.30 p.m. before we reached the frontier at Lundi Khana. We passed the now unused railway line laid between Peshawar and the Afghan frontier (there is no railway in Afghanistan), which is said to be one of the most difficult feats of engineering in the world.

The official on the Indian frontier sat opposite the Customs House under an awning of branches, where he entertained us with tea and a game of Ludo. Actually Bob played Ludo while I wandered down the road to where a five-barred gate demurely shut away the legendary land of war, guarded by four Afghan sentries in modern uniforms after the German design, including steel helmets. Beside it, a large notice-board proclaimed that "this was the limit of British India and it was strictly forbidden to pass it without a special visa." I wanted to photograph the entrance into Afghanistan but the sentries talked wildly at me and retreated with turned backs.

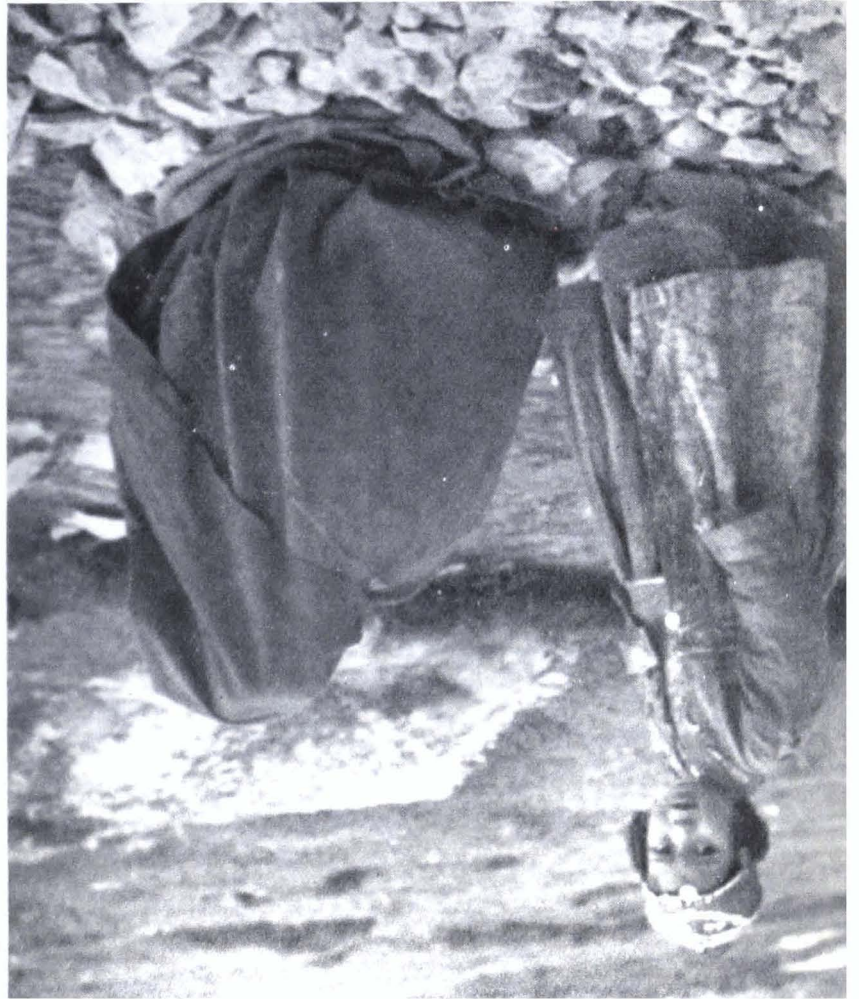
At Torkham, the Afghan frontier post only a few hundred yards away, another halt was called for our passports to be examined outside a tent in a grove of willow trees. A group of friendly Afghans sat outside in the blowing dust, who looked with interest at the collection of visas now filling my passport, especially impressed that I had been in China and Japan. I enjoyed the exquisite hands of the official as he wrote in Persian from right to left in my passport.

Soon we came to the first Afghan houses, which I thought were forts. There was nothing to be seen but long mud walls with a tower at each corner and over the one gate, pierced along the top with rifle slits. From what I have seen since of Afghanistan, it's only houses near the frontier and isolated ones in the interior that are so fortified, and only in this district that men openly carry weapons, which is definitely forbidden in towns, without a special permit.

All the way to Dacca, twelve miles or so, we passed among bare hills and rocks, with block-towers and forts built in high commanding positions. We stopped in one settlement of



(Left) Tribe's child and her mother—discreetly hidden!
(Below) An Afghani house.



houses to fill the radiator from the well where women in red trousers, smocks and black veils were fetching water in round earthenware pots. When a man appeared from a house above with his rifle the driver hustled us into the lorry and drove hastily away.

The sun was low over the mountains, turning their buff into pink and their shadows to indigo, when we came to the village of Dacca, where passports had to be examined yet again at the police post. It lay on the edge of a plain rich with vivid green cultivation, like a lake surrounded by hills.

The wind was rising, swirls of dust filled our eyes and noses and grated between our teeth, and while we sat in the Police Station the view was obliterated by clouds of it which poured through the broken windows. Evidently this is the usual occurrence at sunset and only lasts for an hour or so.

The pock-marked official and his two friends met us enthusiastically, all dressed in wide white trousers and velvet waistcoats embroidered with gold thread, worn over shirts or smocks hanging outside their trousers.

Six cigarettes were brought in on a saucer and our hosts became convulsed with laughter at the repeated failure of Afghan matches to light, and at our dumb-crambo conversation. So keen was he that we should stay the night that for an hour he conveyed the information that our passports were not ready, and only when I insisted upon taking my place in the lorry and Bob had pulled the driver from the teashop did we succeed in recovering them and resuming our journey.

The lorry bumped round the edge of the fields of maize under stoney hills and block-towers silhouetted black against the glow of the west. It was still now and the stars began to twinkle in the clear sky. By a well under a grove of tamarisk trees we stopped. The driver and passengers got out, spread a blanket on a flat piece of ground and, standing in a row, prayed and prostrated themselves towards Mecca.

Night came down quickly as we left the hills, and the sky arched over a great plain where maize stood heavily in the still air.

The marshes round Jalalabad stank under an evil mist—

indeed, so notorious is it for fever that no lorry drivers will stay there for the night. They stopped only for tea, and we ate some supper at a table outside the "tea shop," bitten by sandflies and fleas hopping up from the dust and mosquitoes droning round the one lantern. Then we crammed somewhat wearily into our seats once more and, bumping out between the mud houses of the city into the open country, climbed once more among the healthier hills.

At midnight we came to a *serai*.¹ Everything ached after fourteen hours on the road, and the Government Rest-house at Nimla was yet farther on—besides, it was uninteresting to stay there, so we turned through the gate which was unbarred in answer to our hooting, into a mud-walled yard, where our headlights showed several other lorries and many string beds with the heap of a sleeping man on each. How silent it was with the engine switched off! Our host was only a shadow and a voice but an active shadow, and soon we, too, had our string beds, set on the roof of the stables which ran down one side of the yard, as giving more solitude from—fleas. Soon I had my bedding-roll undone, and had brushed some of the dust out of my hair by the light of the waning moon. A wash would have been bliss, but it was beyond any possibility.

Before lying down I peeped over the parapet wall and saw the willow trees close below and the silvered plain stretching out to the mountains, and breathed the lovely coolness of the silent night. I'd only had eight nights in the Plains (where fans stirred air bringing the thermometer up to 100 degrees F. or so) but it was long enough to make one's body sigh with relief in this cool. There was a little shudder as I put filthy dust-caked feet into my bedding, but, oh! the bliss of lying still under the stars, which seemed more silent for the little pair of crickets gossiping beyond the wall, and the cough of a sleeper 7 feet below. Bob was already asleep—so was I as soon as I shut my eyes.

At 6 a.m. I was woken by stirrings below. The loveliness of the cool sky made me peep over the wall to watch the sun creep over the mountains' edges and pearl the plain. The

¹ Native Inn.

yard was still in shadow, and forms were still huddled under coverings of no colour or description. A small boy poked up his head to look at me from the top of a lorry which he had chosen for his bed, but, after surveying a tousled female in celanese knickers and crumpled shirt, he buried it once more, looking just a heap of dusty rags again.

An Indian servant who was joining his master (a guest at the British Legation) in Kabul was a fellow-passenger whom Mr. Gai had detailed to look after us. He was accustomed to proper "Burra Sahibs," and I fear we shocked him terribly. He suddenly appeared on the roof, immaculately neat, carrying a tray of morning tea! Later, some hot water in a long-necked and spouted brass jug, like those in a Persian miniature, and a basin with a wide chased rim but so little basin under its fancy lid. Bob nobly cleaned out some of the green-grey slime with a handful of the roof (mud) mixed with water, and then our toilet became the focus of great interest to spectators below, particularly Bob shaving in my powder-box mirror.

The boiled eggs we thought would help our ryvita breakfast were disappointing. The first was dark yellow-ochre inside, the second brown, and we did not risk polluting the fresh morning air with the third, but sent it over the wall to join its fellows. It fell in front of a cow who absent-mindedly ate it—I fear the milk was not grade A that day.

By 7.30 we folded ourselves once more into the lorry. The front seat is not scientifically designed to fit the human form—the back seems to slope forward instead of back, and it's not upholstered! A crowd and our shaggy host with blackened eyes waved us away most charmingly.

Ablutions having been limited Bob brought out his best Urdu, which the driver spoke a little, asking him to stop by a stream. Evidently "stream" and "wall" are somewhat alike in Urdu and we were mystified when we stopped in the middle of an arid bouldered plain, beside a wall-in space—perhaps a pen for flocks. Every one got out and disappeared behind the wall, the driver smiled and pointed us to join them. Poor Bob was so much more embarrassed than I was!

All that day we went through beautiful ruthless mountains.

I've been trying continually to think how to describe them. Sometimes I think "the shine on polished copper" or "an apricot opal" or "sunburned bodies" or "old parchment"—can you get an idea from a mixture of all these? The sky was forget-me-not blue and the sun drenched it all with dazzle.

At one place we passed an encampment of nomads with black tents and enormous flocks of black and brown long-haired goats. The men are fine and virile with fresh-complexioned faces and often light-coloured eyes—greenish or amber yellow. The women hid themselves behind their black cotton veils, but one saw their wadded patchwork dresses of brilliant colours faded with dirt, and their heavy silver bracelets, rings, anklets and coin necklaces: the children have coins sewn round embroidered caps. They carry their belongings on splendid camels, and donkeys on top of which hens are tied by the legs among cooking pots. I watched with keen interest to see what happened if they ever laid an egg in this position—with no reward.

In a *serai* we had a delicious midday meal of chicken *pilaff*, and green tea from a big samovar. Poor Bob has blood-poisoning and a rumbling appendix, which causes a distressing loss of appetite and throws mine into gross relief. I had two enormous helpings to his half.

After that it seemed ages till sunset. There were miles of valley where the sun beat down on us and all the air was shut out by mountain walls; lips cracked, mouth got dry and the bones so achy.

It was 8 p.m. and the coolness of night had refreshed us when we saw below us the lights of Kabul. Much to our consternation a police patrol stopped us and insisted on taking our passports. In the dark I thought, at first, it was a bandit!

We drove into the Customs House yard. Obviously my letter to the Minister hadn't reached him, giving the date of our arrival; there was no one to meet us. A garrulous official wished to inspect our luggage which, through the interpretation of the driver, I refused saying that I had nothing to declare. He acted vividly the operation of cutting his throat, which I gathered was my fate if I lied. Though I was feeling

short-tempered I thought it on the safe side to laugh in a friendly way!

We got ourselves and our belongings piled on to a *tonga* or *gaddi*, an amusing two-wheeled vehicle with an awning; one sits back to back with the driver. It looked as if the weight at the back was going to lift the horse off its legs, the shafts swung high above his back. We drove and drove through the darkness and every time we inquired if we were nearly there the driver said, "We are nearly reaching." At last we saw a big building glimmering with electric lights and, after difficulty with a sentry at the gate, jogged up under an imposing portico.

Though embarrassing to arrive unexpected there was an exquisite pleasure in the inappropriateness of our condition of arrival into surroundings which seemed suddenly so fantastically pretentious! We were so filthily disreputable, with an assortment of preposterous luggage piled into a vehicle which I am sure had never before blasphemed that dignified portico with its presence. The Indian servant had every reason to hesitate to allow us in and I had to walk blatantly past him into the great lighted hall, embarrassingly unannounced. Our hostess, sitting beautifully dressed looking at the *Tatler*, looked up from her sofa with equal consternation.

It wasn't till after two baths and hair-wash that I felt clean again. That night, as I lay between the smooth linen sheets, I thought back over those thirty-four hours on the road. This cleanliness and comfort was wonderful—but one would exchange it all for one's dirt and a string bed under the stars!

Aren't I the luckiest person in the world? I wish you could share it all too.

Dear love to you all.

AUDREY.

A Few Observations on Afghanistan

AFGHANISTAN STILL remains a mystery to many people, as it was to me before I went there, and here I will venture to answer some of the many questions I am often asked about it.

There are great extremes in the relatively dry climate, the whole country being scorched in summer and frequently blown with dust-storms, while in winter a great part of it is under snow. After the thaw and spring rains grass and flowers deck the aridity for a short time before the later summer's heat. Formerly forests clad the mountains, but once the trees were cut there was not enough moisture to allow young ones to withstand the summer drought. Among the mountains in the east there are still forests; but foreigners are not allowed to go there.

Afghanistan is about the size of France. It lies at a high altitude (Kabul is 6000 feet above sea level), composed largely of arid mountains and all but desert plains. The northern plain, only divided from the steppes of Russian Turkistan by the Oxus River, is separated by the western spurs of the Hindu Kush from the mountainous south-east, the central plateau and south-western plain. The soil is naturally rich and, where streams or irrigation makes cultivation possible, wheat, rice, cotton (in the lower and warmer north) and fruits of many kinds are grown; the cultivation of sugar has now also been started. There are rich deposits of coal in the Bamian district and also oil, but owing to the lack of transport and the suspicion of foreign concession rights they are unexploited. The Government holds the monopoly of lapis lazuli, amethyst mines and marble quarries.

Its people are Aryans (like ourselves) divided into many tribes who claim different origins. The tall, dark, handsome Ghilzais from the south-west, the most proud and independent of the tribes, say that their ancestors were Israelites sent to Media by Nebuchadnezzar, though authorities say this is not



(Top) Kabul—Women enveloped in their chowdris.

(Below) The Bazaar in the Old City.



true; the Durranis of Herat claim that they are of Turkish descent. North of the Hindu Kush and in central Afghanistan Turkis and Hazaras seem to predominate, while on the Indian frontier are Pathans and Affridis. There are very many other tribes of varying sizes and importance. Some authorities hold that the main Afghan stock migrated in the eighth century from that cradle of races, Mongolia.

Afghanistan, "Land of the Afghans", was not united into one nation till A.D. 1747, though its history stretches far back into antiquity. Alexander the Great built cities there on his way to India, and Greek poets and Chinese travellers wrote of it. At the death of its uniter, Ahmed Khan, in A.D. 1773, its powerful armies had extended its boundaries from Meshed to the Sutlej and from the Oxus to the Persian Gulf. Of those splendid days Afghans still sing and dream, and they inspired King Amanulla with a determination to restore their greatness.

I will not follow all the details of its history since that time, but it must be remembered that the character of its peoples and their history have been shaped by the geographical position of their country. Through it lies the overland route into India from the north-west, used by India's invaders from time immemorial. Since the British have been established in India their fear of this highway has caused the large and not very creditable part which they have played in Afghan history.

I do not wish to deny that the still tribally divided people of Afghanistan are difficult for an Occidental power to understand, or, on the other hand, to join in the ignorant or malicious outcries made against present-day British activities on the Frontier. From what I saw and learned there, these marauding bandits are as much a nuisance to the Afghan as to the British Indian Government. The present régime is anxious to co-operate with British efforts to protect the peaceful peoples, Afghan and Indian, whom these often brave and picturesque outlaws continue to ravage.

Bombing from the air is, anyhow, an outrageously unsportsmanlike method of dealing with opponents who cannot retaliate with the same advantage, and this practice on the North-West Frontier furnishes useful propaganda

material for kettles who wish to blacken their neighbouring pots, but it is unjust sentimentality for intelligent people to refuse to remember that good notice is given beforehand, allowing ample time for all women and children to evacuate their village. This is only destroyed because it insists upon sheltering the leader of a body of men who have no compunction in showing ruthless cruelty towards the unprotected villages of their neighbours. And how many critics recognise the incongruity between their condemnations and the fact that they themselves expect police protection, trap rats or shoot starlings, murder Communists or torture Jews—there is no difference, it seems to me, except that they take even greater advantages against their prey.

There have been three Anglo-Afghan wars. The first was caused by British fears of an attack on India through Afghanistan from Russia by Napoleon, and the second by the suspicion of a Russo-Afghan alliance, which posterity seems to recognize as false. In the course of both wars British forces invaded Afghanistan, occupying and partially destroying Kabul and other southern cities. By force they took control of Afghan foreign policy, and it was not till 1919 that King Amanulla, largely through the help of his uncle Nadir Khan, regained the complete independence of his country at the end of the third Anglo-Afghan war.

Afghans are proud and freedom-loving people in whom the tribal tradition of revenge for dishonour or violation has become an instinct. It is not surprising that among the people a hatred of the British persists which is liable to express itself, in moments of excited bitterness, on British nationals. Apart from the Legation, therefore, no British people are allowed to live in Afghanistan by either the Afghan or British Governments.

On the other hand Europeans of other nations, who have not behaved as we have, are welcomed by the Afghans for their technical qualifications as architects, engineers, financial advisers, managers of the two or three cotton mills already started, directors of the Telephone Service, etc. The German Colony (70 in number) runs a school, as do the French and

Italians. The British Habibiya College is staffed by Indians with an occasional American. There are also a few Japanese business men, White Russians and, of course, many Turks and Iranians. Nearly all the Europeans live in Kabul.

Afghanistan is modernising herself with comparative rapidity. Under the incentive of that too impetuous patriot, King Amanulla, she made her first big strides out of the seclusion behind which she had barricaded herself for so long, though his father, Habibulla, had made a cautious start. With her buffer position she believes, unlike Nepal and Tibet, that she can only retain her integrity by opening her doors to modern so-called civilization. Outwardly, belief in this policy is upheld but, I fancy, the private opinion of many Afghans was expressed by an Afghan friend of mine who said one day, "I do not think that making guns and poison gas is civilization—I think that civilization means wanting other people to have what you want yourself." But one of the oldest foreign residents in Kabul often reiterated to me the extraordinary changes and improvements which have been made in the nine years since first he went there.

Under the leadership of the very able Prime Minister, Hashim, the Government is improving and making roads accompanied by telephone wires, over which an increasing number of lorries run between main towns. This accelerated communication alone alters the pattern of life. Foreign architects are building a new hotel in Kabul, Herat and Istalif. In Kabul the Post Office, School of Fine Arts (!) and Cinema are completed and an imposing Bank. (Paper money was first used in 1935.) Several rows of new houses put up a brave show (outside) while mansions of the rich are creeping up on the plain to the west of the old city. There is electric light and water laid on to modern buildings and in main streets, and daily newspapers are published in Persian and Pashtu. A wireless receiving station is being erected near Kabul by two British engineers, who, with their two years' contract, are the only exceptions to the rule against British residents. Dams are being constructed to turn eight valleys into reservoir lakes which will bring more land under irrigation. The Army, including three-year con-

scripts numbering 60,000 to 80,000, is being modernised under two German instructors.

Kabul has become the world market for astrakhan, which buyers from Europe and America come to bid for at the autumn sales each year. I met a Turkoman merchant who had sold £150,000 worth of skins in 1936, when record prices were realised; the average price is 30s. per skin. The State Bank holds a monopoly, which is increasingly unpopular, in all trading concerns, and derives the major part of its revenue from this export of astrakhan.

Of more fundamental importance than these activities is the modern education given to boys in Kabul schools and colleges. The Government is anxious for Afghans to be trained as technical experts and scientists to take control in all branches of affairs, so that Afghanistan will truly be the "Land of the Afghans."

They are starting from scratch. Probably it will take some time to cultivate an aptitude for mental discipline and continuity in a people who, by the physnomy of their country and their war-filled history, are more naturally gifted with wariness against opposing cunning and ability to meet sudden violent action and physical hardship, interspersed by periods of leisurely waiting. Perhaps it is not surprising that medicine is a subject which seems to attract more students than others, entailing the necessity to meet emergencies, and with more human variety and less repetition and routine than in office or technical work. There were twenty students studying medicine in Europe when I was there, and every year so many are allotted systematically to different western countries to qualify in other technical subjects.

More important, probably, than the constructive subjects learned in the modern curricula is the destructive effect the process will have on the other great factor in Afghan life, of equal importance with its geographical position—its religion. Till Amanulla's reign all education was carried on by the *mullahs* (priests) in the form of the traditional teaching from the Koran. As every one knows, it was his attack on this conservatism and, through it, the vice-like grip in which the

mullahs held the people that caused Amanulla's downfall. To understand the past, present and future history of Afghanistan the Mohammedan religion must be held in mind.

That intolerant faith is still professed with a fanaticism probably unrivalled in the present-day world. Though the most westernised young Kabulis may be sceptical privately, they must still observe outwardly the rules of Islam and, for all intents and purposes, the *mullahs* remain practically all-powerful—so much so that the Government often buys their support and influence. It was they who drove women back into the harem under their veils and stopped their education after the short emancipation under Amanulla. It was they who led a mob to break up the cinema when it first opened a few years ago, showing films of unveiled women. Under their dominance no other religion is permitted to be taught or any place of alien worship to be erected, which excludes all missionaries of course. It is their reaction which must be considered in all Government policy and legislation.

The strength of their religion forms, as far as I could ascertain, one of the main safeguards against Communism spreading into Afghanistan. There is strangely little contact between the two countries divided by the Oxus River and, though the U.S.S.R. tries to increase it through various trading concessions, the only imports which Afghanistan allows to come in free of duty from Russia are weapons and "religious works"—true symbols of the Afghan character! Afghans believe that no good can come to, or from, a creed which denies religion. The other two bulwarks are, I think, the fact that Afghans believe that Communism brings starvation and servitude, and that north Afghanistan is mainly populated with Turkomans and Uzbeks, who followed the Emir of Bokhara when he fled from the Communists to Kabul.

For all the adverse criticisms of the fanatical dominance of Islam (Sunis, except for Shias in the western mountains), I, personally, felt that it is through Islam that a wholesome check is being made on the too rapid and indiscriminating acceptance of western innovations. It is saving the too sudden dislocation with traditions of the past which have largely

formed the character of the people. Unlike so many countries in a state of flux the people still have the discipline of their faith and its refuge of stability among the many revolutionary influences which are changing the pattern of their lives. Islam acts as the spinal cord of the nation, binding and co-ordinating the past with the present, and uniting the different peoples who make up Afghanistan.

As I think back and try to sum up my general impression of Afghans—I saw so few women that I cannot include them—their most characteristic quality is an aloofness in the majority of even the most poor and simple. At first I was rather frightened of what I thought was an attitude of suspicious antagonism, which made them unapproachable. But fear is the surest way to alienate people and to create in them a cause for it, which is probably unfounded, and once I had set it aside, I saw this aloofness as the reserve produced by their great pride and sense of freedom. Their natural curiosity in a stranger was a detached interest in a being of strange ways and, perhaps, enviable possessions but who was, as a person, inferior to themselves. He or she was not an Afghan. They are intensely conscious and proud of this fact, which sets them apart from Chinese and Tibetans whom I felt were also splendidly free from a kowtowing attitude towards occidentals, but in a passive and more unconscious way. I asked an Afghan one day if many of their young men went to Indian universities; his answer was—“No, we do not like our sons to mix with slaves!”

The Afghan does one a service as a free gentleman because he feels so inclined, in noticeable contrast to the majority of Indians who give the impression that they are grovelling unwillingly in order to ingratiate themselves with one of the race of their conquerors whom they loathe. But I suppose this is common in all subject peoples. And an Afghan is not unlike a Britisher who is generous in free giving but hard-headed and often grasping in business. It is said in the East that one Afghan trader is worth ten Armenians, which might be used in favour of the theory that Afghans are of Jewish origin, though this is largely untrue.

Afghans.



Presumably it was the British who dubbed the Afghan as treacherous. I cannot help thinking that this was the unjust label tied on to him by those who were frightened of him, and were ignorant of his different codes of honour and the subtleties of his loyalties. Those who gave it to him would naturally cause a history of misunderstandings and bullying on both sides which, unfortunately, most of the history has been between Afghans and British. With the common value set on freedom and pride of race, surely we should have regarded each other as natural friends rather than enemies? And I found in them, too, a gentlemanly honour which always responded to an appeal made to it. On one particular occasion I met these three qualities working together to make, and then to solve, a difficult position.

My admirer and I had arrived at an impasse. He said, "It is very difficult—you are proud English and you cannot give in, I am a proud Afghan and I cannot give in."

I am physically strong and if it came to force I thought I could hold my own but, actually, I admired his pride so much that it would have been painful to wound it. Suddenly it all fell into shape in my mind.

"Yes, of course, I cannot make a proud Afghan give in and I don't want to, but you are a proud Afghan gentleman and you would not choose to use your pride and strength against a woman weaker than yourself, whose pride you understand because you are an Afghan."

With the free choice, his honour and pride appealed to, he respected mine. This experience showed me vividly that factors which at first sight appear as stumbling blocks, if turned round, can prove the means of a greater mutual respect and understanding. In dealings with Afghans the British seem to have mortified their pride so often, turning it into an enemy instead of a friend.

I met always with the greatest kindness. I was usually assumed to be German, but if I enlightened them that I was British their kindness was only added to by a greater interest in a female species of their traditional enemies. Cruelty may also be there, but a magnificent courage and pride persists, even in

young Afghans being educated in foreign-styled colleges. I have admiration and love for Afghans and saw them as beautiful, proud, cruel, brave and romantic, generous as friends and unscrupulous as enemies.

Ghazni

DURING THE three weeks at the British Legation we made three expeditions to other places. The first was to Ghazni after we had been in Afghanistan only a few days, and this was my first real sight of it. The second was to some frozen lakes I heard mentioned by chance and was determined to see, which lay up in the mountains north-west of Kabul at, I think, somewhere about 14,000 feet. We managed to do this expedition with only two nights out, though this was too short a time with the amount of climbing and bad surface conditions over much of the way; in fact, the third member of our party got too tired and felt the height too badly to get actually to the lakes. This third was a cousin of the British Minister and it was she who drove us to Ghazni in her venerable Ford.

The third expedition Bob and I made was to Bamian, the most famous place of pilgrimage for visitors to Afghanistan, whose fantastic beauty of bare mountain scenery and the romance of whose ruins are a wordless lyric. Bamian was a great centre of Buddhist culture in the fifth and sixth centuries and was finally entirely wiped out by Ghengis Khan in A.D. 1222, in revenge for the death of his favourite grandson who was killed during the fighting there. His command was that every living thing, man and beast, should be killed, and ever since that once thickly populated valley has remained deserted but for a few farmers. Of the Buddhist culture the only remains are two colossal Buddha figures, about 180 feet high, cut out of the natural rock, the cells of the monks which honeycomb the cliffs, and some fine though damaged frescoes showing Indian influence.

Ghazni, 93 miles south-west on the road between Kabul and Kandahar, stands at an altitude of 7280 feet, at the end of a spur of hills on the central plateau of Afghanistan. The plain, stretching for 221 miles to Kandahar, is bare except for

wheat and barley crops near the river, and walled orchards. During the winter, snow lies two or three feet deep, while in summer, dust storms sweep the city and nights are oppressive under the heat radiating from the bare mountains.

Fruit, skins and wool are traded to India, but Ghazni is locally famous for its embroidered *poustincha* coats, waistcoats and rugs which are made exclusively in its bazaars. Only a few of poor quality or second-hand can be bought at exorbitant prices in Kabul. The skins are dyed yellow and embroidered with bright silks in traditional floral and geometric designs; the fur is worn inside. Coats are long and full, worn as cloaks leaving the sleeves swinging emptily to the knees.

Unlike towns in the centre and north of Afghanistan Ghazni is surrounded by bastioned walls, which seem to grow out of the natural or artificial embankments rising above a now-empty moat. Modern shops and houses are growing up outside the walls, but new and old look alike built of the same sun-dried bricks coated with mud and straw. Only in the citadel, rising on its cliff above the huddled city, the modern ambitions of the Government are expressed in hard white military buildings with iron roofs, utterly alien to the soft-edged voluminous mud walls below.

Ghazni has a long history with periods of brilliant importance. It is thought that Ptolemy mentions it, and that it is the impregnable Indian city of Gazos written of by two Greek poets. It is mentioned by Hsuan Tsang, the Chinese traveller there in A.D. 644, who was making a pilgrimage to Bamian. When the Moslems first captured it its trade in indigo was worth £1,000,000 annually. Its greatest period began in A.D. 997 under Mahmud who invaded north and west India, returning with vast wealth to embellish his capital and become famed as a patron of literature. A record of A.D. 1332 describes it as a small town among ruins; Baber in 1504 mentioned it for its fruit gardens, which still supply Kabul. Its name starts out again from history in 1841 when the British destroyed the defences of the castle and some of the town. Now its importance is reviving through its position on the motor road to Kandahar.

Ah, Mahmud! You were a bounder perhaps, but I cannot forget your El Greco face and graceful swagger, and remember with the others only your insistence upon sitting in our bedroom smoking our cigarettes.

Mahmud was the proprietor of the Government Hotel at Ghazni, who opened its door after we had battered on it for ten minutes. His *cola* (an astrakhan hat somewhat like a Cossack's) was worn at a jaunty angle, and his full crumpled trousers and shirt managed to have an air of dash. With princely nonchalance he waved us to our rooms; Bob's leading through Esmé's and mine.

Each room had three beds with tablecloths as sheets. They were clean; only two had been slept in before. Beside each was a school-bell and alabaster ash tray. The chairs were covered with American cloth and the floors with fine Turkoman rugs which threw up puffs of dust at each step. There were no washing facilities, or curtains to screen the gaze of curious eyes beyond the double windows. Sanitary arrangements encouraged smoking.

Up under the rough bastions of the south-west gate guarded by a sentry, a mob of excited ragged children, throwing up clouds of dust with their bare feet, vanguarded us into the city. The narrow bazaar streets seemed more dim under their branch awnings, more confined in secretive hush for the sunshine outside, dazzling down over the bustle of melon sellers. The tall men—mostly dark Ghilzais—were beautiful and proudly mysterious. All round, steady eyes were gazing with impenetrable expressionless concentration. Those eyes, the sense of stillness in wide movements, of pride and violence hidden in sinewy dignity, remained at the back of my consciousness through all our interest and bargaining.

The alcove shops of the *poustincha* merchants were warm with fur and colour, where men sat cross-legged embroidering the skins among piles of finished articles and the smell of sheep mixed with that of dust. After the uninitiated idea that all waistcoats were equally desirable one began to discriminate between soft-cured skins and fine embroidery, hard skins and rough wool, better fits and different sizes. Bob proved, after

fitting on dozens with perspiring good nature, that stock sizes for slender Afghans cannot be worn by burly Englishmen. Though I could not buy one for my brother I bargained over four out of my selection.

“Sehzda afghani?” (13 afghanis.)

“Bist wa punj!” (25.)

“Ne, ne, pansda! (15.)

“Bist wa punj!”

Finally the average price was settled at 17 afghanis. A large crowd had assembled which followed us away in quiet disregard of the efforts of our police escort to disband them.

We watched rifles being made under primitive methods which, I am told, are quite efficient. A dyer was plunging armfuls of spun wool into cauldrons of red or blue or yellow liquids, rich colours but not fast. From the shops where winter quilts were made came the muffled “tungrr, tungrrr, tungrrr” of the apparatus fluffing up the cotton wadding. We walked through the narrow lanes of residential quarters in imminent danger from the wooden gutters forming the drainage system, which project three or four feet from house walls and are apt to spout an undesirable jet, without any warning.

The children were always there. Once a man got angry with them for bothering us. He seized a small boy by the arm and threw him on to the ground with such force that I thought his bones must be broken. I felt exasperated that all I could say was, “*Hrub nes, hrub bisnir nes!*” (“Not good, good very not”) and pick the yelling child out of the dust which was coating his bleeding legs. Public opinion was against the bully, who was hit by another man amid a clamour of abuse. The little policeman, though half the size of the antagonists, beat them off in opposite directions with the butt of his rifle. Esmé understood enough Persian to gather that there was a discussion in progress among the crowd as to whether I was a man or a woman. I suppose my height and bare legs mystified them!

Our evening meal was brought in from the bazaar. We ate it in our bedroom with Mahmud as audience, and I won

his approval through my greed over the *pilaff* for which Ghazni is famous.

We had learned that there was a bathroom. Though the wood cost 3 afghanis—or so Mahmud said—to heat water, we decided to remove the quantities of bazaar adhering to our hot bodies. With her limited Persian vocabulary Esmé conveyed our wish to Mahmud who returned, after an hour, to lead us to the bathroom. To save time Esmé and I decided to share the water and together followed him round the outside of the building, in the dark bumping into the sentry who guarded the hotel night and day during our stay.

At first there seemed no vestige of a bath in the high narrow room lit by a dim oil lamp, but eventually we found it wedged under the window behind the large stove in the middle, over which the water was heated in petrol tins. It was a zinc wash-tub and, as baling proved the only means of emptying it, its diminutive capacity was a disguised blessing. Ignoring our own, Mahmud indicated a row of towels which, even in that light, showed prolonged use on many bodies. At my request he hung one over the uncurtained window—but outside.

Washing à la Japonais, outside the bath, was tricky because, when bending over the tub, it was all but impossible to avoid burning the projecting part of one's anatomy on the stove immediately behind. I was standing up to soap when my eye was caught by a movement of the towel-curtain of the window 3 feet away. A further glance disclosed an eye—one dark eye, glued to the window where the corner of the towel was held back. I squatted hastily below the window-sill feeling, very literally, the heat of the moment as I caught my defenceless nakedness on the stove.

“There's some one looking through the window!”

Esmé jumped behind the stove.

“*Burro! Burro!*” (Go away!) she yelled in fury.

The towel dropped; but scarcely had she emerged when it twitched again and the eye reappeared.

“*Burro!*” Again a temporary blink of the towel.

The only thing was to keep below the sill, and the only

way to avoid the stove was to turn round and sit in the tub. There was just room for both of us with our legs outside. The picture of two naked females marooned in a tub by an Afghan eye struck me as funny. My modesty had long since worn thin and Esmé's fury added to my amusement.

Afterwards she complained angrily to Mahmud who showed outraged consternation, hastily exclaiming:

“*Man nameekunum—sepoy.*” (“I do not—the sepoy.”)

Whether it was the sentry or not—and—who could blame him a little divertisement during the dullness of night duty?—next evening we hung a rug on the inside of the window and bathed in peace.

On return to our room the smell of *pilaff* and tobacco smoke drove me out. From the bazaar the sound of Afghan music made the silence under the stars more intense, and the suddenness of the silent figure beside me took me unawares. In the pale light I could see it was Mahmud. He spoke, but his voice had no edge to it nor did it seem to break the silence. In that voice came the romantic, which reverses the pitiless fighter in the Afghan.

I could not understand what he said, but I had the sense of having been let, a tiny way, into the secret of those impenetrable eyes.

By 6 a.m. the sun levelled long rays over the dusty pile of the city. The man sleeping on a near roof woke and sat up, stretched, rewound his *pugaree*, put on his waistcoat, rolled up his bedding and was ready for the day. Our night had been broken by scampering rats and a cat who had eaten the *mast* (sour milk) which I had secured for my breakfast.

In the village of Rozah lies the tomb of the great Mahmud. To get to it one passes all that remains of the old city of Ghazni—mounds of earth and the two famous “Towers of Victory” belonging to the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D. They stand about 700 feet apart, their star-shaped octagonal shafts rising 70 feet to the tin conicle which now replaces the round superstructure which formerly soared to twice their present height. Their surface is decorated with panels of brickwork

in geometric designs, and bands of Kufic inscriptions. Whether the mortar has worn away, or whether it was originally set back between the fine bricks I do not know, but the effect is given of faded coral lace spread over the bold simplicity of the structural form.

Tied to rings in the wall surrounding the tomb were several white horses with coloured goat-hair harness and high wooden saddles laid over with pieces of carpet. Their owners were washing in the stream before entering to pray.

The cloisters leading to the white-domed shrine ran through a rose garden, quiet and gentle, walled away from the windy space outside. The tomb itself of marble, translucent with age, was ornamented only with two lines of Kufic writing, praying that "Allah would receive graciously the Prince and Lord Nizim-ad-Din Abulkasim Mahmud ibn Sabaktigin," and a small panel giving the date of his death in A.D. 1030. The decorative value of Kufic letters is always great, but surely there can be none more exquisite than these in their deeply carved and slender tracery.

It was from the former shrine over the tomb that the gates were seized by the British and carried away to Agra. The excuse for this pillage was that they were the famous gates of the Hindu Temple of Somnauth, which Mahmud had taken away after his invasion of Gujerat. Actually they are made of Afghan wood with a Moslem inscription; it would seem an act of gracious justice for the British to give them back to their rightful owners, instead of leaving them unnoticed in the Fort at Agra?

In the afternoon I was wandering by the river about two miles from Ghazni. The path swung round the outer wall of a big farmstead and I stopped by the open gate to admire a latticed window, supported on struts, which stood out like a jewel of elaborate detail from the otherwise unbroken expanses of mud walls. I was followed by a little boy, with a baby wearing bell anklets tied on to his back, who was slinging stones from a painted catapult with accurate aim over long distances. He went in through the gate and almost immediately a woman, holding her black cotton veil over her face, peeped

round the corner. I smiled at her, at which she bobbed out of sight and I heard giggling. Then three women came out and beckoned to me to come in.

One side of the big courtyard was taken up with store-rooms and stables, the other by the dwellings of several families—so it appeared, but maybe the owner was a rich man with several wives. They took me into what was more like a low cave than a room, with a fire on the beaten mud floor. Lacking any furniture but some cooking pots it could hardly help looking tidy, but it had the air of meticulous care spent on it.

The women stood round me in shy friendliness. I was miserable at not being able to talk to them and having to say continually "*Na fahmidum*" ("I do not understand"). I admired the heavy silver jewellery and the coins sewn on to the caps under their veils. My hostesses were not what we should call clean and smelt sour and dusty, but one had a beautiful face and all of them good figures.

They pointed at my bare legs with shocked amusement and then at their own enveloped to the ankles in voluminous trousers. I have never satisfied myself as to the reason for the special notice they took of my teeth, which have not the interest of being detachable like those of a lady I met, who entranced the native bazaar population where she lived with the display of their removal. I wondered if, perhaps, small teeth are admired as they are in China.

One woman held her baby out to me, showing me its ears and obviously asking my help. It was a miserably delicate little thing, and the septic condition of sores in and around its ears, raw and covered inevitably with dust, made me resolve never again to be parted from my boracic and permanganate. I could do absolutely nothing and felt ashamed.

When we drove away from Ghazni we passed a troupe of Tamil travelling musicians playing and singing outside a tea-shop. They were very dark-skinned and gay, and the spirit of their tropical South India was separated from Afghan ruthlessness by more than the thousands of miles that these wanderers had travelled.



(Left) *The Victory Towers at Ghazni.*

(Below) *The walls of Ghazni above the now almost empty moat.*



Kabul Days

BOB HAD GONE back to India, and I had left the mackintosh hanging in the cloakroom of the British Legation under the minister's topee. Not my faithful mattamac, of course, but that much more impervious covering—British atmosphere, which ensures isolation from the elements around. When British Nanny has buttoned it under your chin you may walk through a rain of impressions and regain the cosy home fireside almost the same person as when you left it. Securely encased against any real contact with them, you can watch the storms drift down the mountains, you can see the drops of silver come spinning against you with a splash, but your skin will not feel the caress or the shock of their chill. You will remember the path you have followed with objective clarity, and be able to tell your friends about it, but it will not have become part of you.

True, the mackintosh interlude had been a fairly short one, but the relief in feeling the pores of my skin breathing again created a peculiar excitement in the establishment of my belongings in the simple and clean Kabul Hotel, in order to improve which, the proprietor told me, he had wired to Paris for a housekeeper, and was busy learning French.

I was six weeks in Kabul, waiting for Russian and Iranian visas and then for an escort for the journey north. People ask what I did all that time; it is so difficult to answer. Days passed as Oriental days do pass, unhurried and with the variety of their pattern left mostly to one's own creation, or marked by different reactions in oneself to the change in detail of the composite form of their sameness.

Invariably the donkeys patter into the city with their loads of produce and firewood, through the cold shadow of mud walls or under the brilliance of the early sun as it rises above the mountains across the plain. Camels pad through the dim

tunnels of the covered bazaar between the blank silence of shuttered shops, to kneel in the central corn market for the great sacks each side of their humps to be unloaded. A few tall figures wrapped in their blankets, with the end thrown over their left shoulders, pass silently over the dust. Their thick leather shoes with turned-up toes make no sound though the soles are thickly studded with nails.

Those figures are wholly significant. They are real—or are they?—for that moment of passing. Where they have come from, where they are going is of no importance. All that matters is that they did pass between the blank mud walls and closed doors.

The sleep-dazed factory hand passing along an empty European street under curtained windows, or the labourer clumping between hedges opalescent with dewy cobwebs, are on the way from the night behind to the day ahead. Wives, wages, rents, courage, illness, love and lethargy are carried out of the night into the day—their own passage is insignificant. An Afghan figure seems to hold only the essential significance of his own being.

As shutters are unbarred the water-carriers fill their skins at street taps, bending double under the weight when they hitch them on to their backs. Under their ministrations the dust carpet of the bazaar alleys and the narrow roads is given a slippery skin of mud which breaks and clings to your shoes, while the dust clouds up from underneath as if you had trodden on a puff-ball. The water brings out the acrid smell of the dust composed of much unpleasant matter disintegrated by the dryness of the air and sun.

The bazaar stirs to life. Its wooden shutters are replaced by dark alcoves lined with shelves; the depths are dim, but along the front the merchandise is spread to view. Some proprietors sip tea, and grocers may possibly blow at the white dust blooming the piles in their round baskets. Bakers in back streets are covering trays with discs of dough an inch thick and about eight in diameter; when putting them into the mud ovens the charcoal glow burnishes their bare arms and shoulders. Five minutes later the hot brown breads throw a

warm fragrance into the sour air of the still-shadowed alley.

By 7.30 the camels are leaving the corn market. The open space is brilliant with sunshine. In the middle, bulging sacks are heaped under the shelter. Shops opened up round it sell grains, chunks of salt looking like grey sand, and soap resembling sandstone. There are several tea-shops with their samovars steaming over charcoal fires and, on the balcony of one, a group of young bloods call down, laughing brilliantly as the sunshine.

By 10 o'clock the bazaar is full of leisurely jostle. Dust haze hangs in the shafts of light slanting through holes in the roofing. A few women are out, looking like bell-tents in their grey or white *chowdris* (totally enveloping veils), and moving jerkily in their downtrodden European shoes. The clatter of metal-workers' hammers is confused with the smell of humanity, cooking meat and dust. There is the gabble of voices but, somehow, stronger still is the underlying secrecy of silence. Movements are stilted by the crowd, yet they have the spacious dignity of mountains and seem out of place in the dim clamour of these tunnels. Ghilsais, Pathans, Hazaras, Mongol coolies, Hindu merchants, Kabulis and men of many tribes pass between cheap Japanese clothes, Indian silks and Afghan cottons, studded shoes and velvet waistcoats embroidered with gold thread, fruit and carcasses, *kelims* (woven coverings or rugs), carpets and saddles, Russian china and grocers' piled baskets.

"Hrabadar! Hrabadar!" the drivers shout to clear the way for their patient loaded donkeys. A *gaddi* occasionally sways and bumps its passengers through the crowds with the ceaseless ringing of its bicycle bell, reinforced with shouts from the driver. Bent coolies plod on under colossal loads. A camel pursues its way in uncompromising disdain. No one seems to have anything pressing to do, yet every day the crowd passes up and down.

Soldiers in steel helmets march from the barracks in syncopated rhythm past the hotel. In this modern street Legation cars sometimes bounce over the pot-holes, and modern dandies parade European suits on figures which would

fill every European man with despairing envy and turn the heads of Hollywood.

At the corner of the street stands the Afghan National Bank and opposite it the modest new Cinema. Farther down is the Hindu photographer who, having posed his client under the sagging roof of his studio in front of a hybrid Turner-Watteau landscape, is often unable to dislodge the cap of his imposing camera. A row of tailors' shops separate his from the temporary establishment of the Afghan photographer, who showed me his new studio with great pride that it faced south. He had been the official photographer to accompany Amanulla in Europe and, after two years' experience in Berlin, developed negatives better than most firms in England. Down one side of this fashionable street runs a stream confined by cement banks, which is convenient for ablutions and also for laying the dust, the water being scuppered up with wooden shovels and thrown in a spray across the road.

At midday a gun is fired. As the sun sets groups of men gather on the mudflats of the Kabul River, to pray towards Mecca. The sun goes over the western mountain wall, stars shine out in the clear sky, shutters are up and the bazaar is silent. Men sit in tea-houses talking, or listening to Afghan singers or gramophones while they sip their tea and take their turn to puff at the water-pipe passed from one to another, cupping their hands round the mouthpiece. The mountains are black against the sky. Figures pass silently with their blankets drawn round them against the cold air.

The day is over.

Don Juan

I WAS EXPLORING back streets, hoping to work round into the main bazaar. The longer I wandered the more exasperated my curiosity became to know what lay behind the closed doors in the blank mud walls. Here I had been in Afghanistan for a month and never yet seen inside an Afghan house! I was lost in a maze of alleys, each turning into another as silent and uncompromisingly secretive as the last. And behind those walls was humanity packed—how? How could I ever know?

“Bonjour, mademoiselle! Est-ce que je peux vous aider?”

Startled I turned round. A dapper little Afghan stood there in European clothes and brown *cola*.

“Je vous remercie, monsieur! Oui, je désire retourner au bazar. Voudriez-vous me guider?”

We exchanged a few remarks, then he said:

“Ma maison est toute proche d’ici. Voulez-vous prendre du thé?”

My chance had miraculously risen from the dust. But it was mad—a strange Afghan—but he was small and did not look vicious—no, it was mad—what a chance. . . .

“Comme c’est charmant de votre part, monsieur! Avec plaisir.”

He opened one of those tantalising doors; for better or worse I was going to know what was behind that high mud wall. I stepped through.

Two-storeyed walls enclosed the little courtyard whose floor was smoothly swept. Everything was dust-coloured except a little girl in blue trousers under a red frock, polishing brass pots, and a row of flowers along one side of the court where the second story was set back, leaving a space of flat roof. The rustling leaves of a poplar over the end wall was the only sound in the muffled stillness.

Monsieur led me up ten uneven steps to the second floor.

His room was about 11 feet square and 7 feet high; the floor was covered with red Turkoman rugs laid thickly one over the other. Three shelves were full of French books, two European suits hung in a glass-doored bookcase, and two elaborate wooden arm-chairs were set side by side against the wall. A window with small panes looked across the court to the flat roof. The walls bulged, the floor was uneven, neither the door nor window-frame fitted and, in the all-pervading presence and smell of dust, European suits and French books gave a curious mixture of associations.

We sat side by side on the chairs and chatted. The little girl, who was his niece, was sent out to buy cigarettes. Tea was brought by the servant, who left his shoes outside. I found that monsieur had been two years in France and Italy as a student; that this was his brother's house, and over there, beyond the flat roof, were the women's quarters. Those were his brother's books, who was keen on history. No, he himself was not married.

I admired a very fine piece of lapis lazuli which he had been commissioned to buy for a friend.

"Prenez-le!"

"Oh, mon cher monsieur! Je vous remercie, mais c'est tout à fait impossible!"

"Oui! oui! Je suis très content de vous connaître. Vous êtes très jolie. Je connais les femmes Européennes, elles sont libres—pas comme les femmes Afghanes."

"Oui, les pauvres! Nous avons de la chance."

I handed back the lapis lazuli.

"Seulement un baisé. Vous savez, je connaissais les Françaises."

"Mais moi, je suis Anglaise. Les femmes Anglaises sont très strictes. Non, non, c'est tout à fait impossible. J'ai des règles qui sont, peut-être, différentes de celles des Françaises que vous connaissiez."

"Je vous veux seulement du bien, mademoiselle. Vous êtes si jolie. Voyons, prenez ça—je vous en prie!"

"Non, non—merci bien, monsieur, mais c'est impossible."

It was deathly quiet. No sound came over the walls of

any one else in the world. No mountain fastness knew such seclusion as that sunny court hemmed in on every side by packed mud-houses and courts.

“Une exception—je vous en prie!”

“Non, je ne peux pas.”

Here the servant came in. Monsieur spoke to him and I heard the creak of the street door.

“C'est l'heure du déjeuner. Il faut que je m'en aille. Merci bien pour toute votre gentillesse.”

“Mais s'il vous plaît, mademoiselle, j'ai commandé à déjeuner ici pour vous. Mon domestique a acheté un poulet.”

This was all too difficult. What did the acceptance to drink tea with an Afghan implicate? Was I behaving, in his eyes, with inconceivable rudeness? Was I failing in an implicit bargain? And how could I now be ungracious enough to go away without eating the meal expressly ordered for me—what an insult might it not be to the pride of Afghan hospitality?

The cooking of the meal took an eternity. He brought out five 100 Afghani notes from among the pages of a book. Could he help me by lending me some money? My price went up to a carpet added to the lapis lazuli.

The servant came in with the meal. A cloth was spread on the floor and an inconceivably tough chicken set down beside a pile of juicy rice. A knife and fork and spoon, obviously bought for the occasion, were laid in front of me. The satisfaction of my curiosity and zest in so mad an escapade could not leaven the gloom of that strange meal. Sitting cross-legged in his lounge suit, my host stuffed rice into his mouth with his fingers, gazing at me with soft reproachful eyes. I felt so mean, so lost in ignorance of Afghan customs of thought, that the mouthfuls of chicken sinew which I felt it incumbent upon me to continue to swallow nearly choked me.

“Voilà! Ici c'est une amie à moi—une Française qui a également visité Kabul. Cette photographie a été prise en Nepal.”

He put the snapshot into my hand. A girl in trousers stood on a mountainside. I looked at it in amazement. Here she

was again! That unaccountable harpy who said her husband was a banker in Paris.

The night I had spent in the bungalow of an influential magnate in Shanghai rushed back into my mind. She had given me a creepy feeling then. How and why she had got in with them there? Who was she? How had the correspondent of an important newspaper been vamped into slavery to the blue untrustworthiness of her eyes? They had been inseparable, to the distraction of his friends in pity for his wife at home. That evening at a Chinese religious banquet she had caused him to lose face preposterously by making him drink till he was "out" and had to be taken home. And here was this adventuress again! Her photograph taken in Nepal—how was she there, and why?—and given to an Afghan in Kabul.

This new creepiness in the heavy silence drove me down the stairs.

"Je vous en prie, mademoiselle, faites une exception en ma faveur. J'irais jusqu'à deux beaux tapis—vous êtes si aimable si——"

"Non, non, excusez moi—vous êtes très généreux; je vous remercie; mais je suis Anglaise et non Française; merci, au revoir!"

"Alors, au revoir, mademoiselle. S'il vous plaît prenez ce petit morceau—en gage de notre amitié."

He put a small piece of rough very fine blue lapis into my hand and opened the door into the street. The door shut behind me and I was alone again between mud walls and closed doors.



(Left) Houses were decorated on the young King Zahir's birthday.

(Below) The winter-empty Kabul River divides the old and new city.



Northern Journey's Misadventure

AFTER TWO telegrams sent, at my expense, by the Russian Embassy to Moscow and six weeks' waiting for their answer, the time came to leave Kabul. I was most kindly offered a lift and escorting by H. B., a German Doctor of Chemistry and old resident in Kabul.

Sadly I packed once more my belongings, so increased in number, and said good-bye to my Afghan, German, French and Italian friends and, of course, those at the British Legation. The hotel proprietor gave me a grey *cola* as a parting present, and on November 16th, I migrated to H. B.'s house in a *gaddi*.

Jamal appeared in a scarlet waistcoat and new riding-boots for the occasion. He exuded importance which the other servants accepted, obeying the hectic authority of his orders without question. H. B. tinkered with the old Studebaker, which refused to start for three hours after the scheduled time of departure, while Jamel and I stacked in our luggage, bedding, reserve food, lantern, H. B.'s violin and spare tins of petrol. It should have taken three days to Mazar-i-Sharif via Bamian and Haibak, now, with this delay, it would take four. At Bulola Mohammed Said would meet us to readjust the brakes. A German brought a bottle of whisky which he asked us to deliver to the engineer superintending the new road construction beyond Haibak. It was midday before we started.

We passed through the familiar streets for the last time, flooded with dazzling winter sunshine. Above the ramparts of wall-shadows the mud-houses shone with matt iridescence against the sky. Even the ache of leaving could not dim the radiance, or damp the incurable thrill of a starting off. We passed the prison walls and under the Cupola, bearing the secret of the lost Persian art of brick dome construction; out from the secretive East through the pseudo-European new city, sprawling in shameless abandon on to the plain; passed

the British Legation to our right, dazzling white in its self-conscious superiority. Up between hills, burnished copper by the corrosive weight of the sunlight, we left the Kabul plain and came out into the Istalif plain, where Alexander the Great had built his city under the mountain wall at the far end beyond Charikar.

Metallic rampart ranges rose 6,000 feet to their coping of glinting snow, silvered with light radiating from the intense blue of the sky. Crop carpets had been carried into store for the winter, leaving the floor of the valley bare. Groves of trees round the one or two villages and the orchards of Istalif, away on its hill, were chrome and ochre, the road white. No green broke the ruthless delicacy trembling in the heat.

Only seven years ago this pale dust was dark with blood. Down from the mountains over this plain had swept the tribesmen at the call of Nadir Khan, fighting, burning—wild with the lust of war and loot. Bach-i-Saqau defeated, only the skill of Nadir and Hashim had been able to stem this wave of destruction before it broke over Kabul.

Charikar is a District capital and the last petrol filling station before Douab. Along the main road the Government scheme for slum clearance shows the neat and lifeless mask of two rows of empty plaster shops. Trees are nicely planted by the *djeuies* (water gullies) running each side between the road and the shops. The old town lies behind in lively squalor, specializing in the manufacture of knives. These are made in the 12-foot square shops, open to the street, by the owners who sit cross-legged beside their lathe which is turned by a coolie pulling a strap.

By lucky chance a former pupil of H. B.'s in the medical school came to greet him when we stopped to inquire possibilities of accommodation. He assured us that there was none suitable for so great a man as a German doctor—would we honour him by using his room?

It was impossible to get the car through the narrow alleys leading to the hospital, but finally we parked it safely inside the walls of the Hachi's (headman of the District) establish-

ment. This great man was distressed that we were not staying with him, and was only appeased by the promise that H. B. would visit him on his return journey.

Doctor Nasrulla Khan led us to the hospital, which was composed of a collection of mud buildings round a courtyard where a few tattered flowers still bloomed in the dust. His room, up some mud stairs above the two wards, contained a *charpoi* (string bed), a table, two chairs, a lamp, his *tambour*,¹ and a shelf with a few medical books, a mirror, razor and toothbrush. The door of rough boards did not fit nor the shutters of the window.

The wards below had a door at each end but no windows. The sanitary arrangements for the whole establishment on the flat roof next to one ward, being merely a hole bored down through the thickness of the mud wall, filled the air with a stink.

Nasrulla Khan was a keen young doctor anxious to take his F.R.C.S. in England. With pride he took us to see the new hospital being built by the Government outside the town. As yet it was only a shell among mounds of rubble, but he explained that the operating theatre would be between the men's and women's wards and that the water supply was to be brought straight from the hills in its own pipe. I looked up at the evening star wondering when this enthusiastic vision would materialize.

We waited till after sunset to eat the evening meal with our host. It was *Roza*, when Moslems may not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. *Pilaff* and sweet biscuits were brought in from the bazaar and set on the table under the oil lamp. I had not learned the art of eating rice with my fingers and was glad that I could not see my face; smeared with rice and butter it must have looked as if I had a skin disease.

You must use your right hand, the left, being used for washing yourself, is considered unclean. You take a handful of rice from the central dish, squeeze and roll it into a neat ball and, balancing it on the first two fingers, push it into your mouth with your thumb.

¹ An instrument somewhat like a violin; played resting on one knee.

After the meal Nasrulla Khan asked diffidently if H. B. would play his violin. His servants and hospital staff crammed in—men looking more like hunters than orderlies in their turbans, full white trousers and embroidered waistcoats. They listened with critical interest and enjoyment to the foreign instrument, after which our host played his *tambour* and sang haunting songs of the great days of Ahmed.

Next morning the car took three-quarters of an hour to start. During the first efforts the engine caught fire but was extinguished without harm. Panting and shouting, Jamal and the *Hachi's* servants pushed it backwards and forwards in the huge courtyard till it started with a roar. H. B., like Afghans among whom he had lived so long, had little sense of time, but I was filled with anxiety to start early on the 100 miles ahead over a road on which someone I had met had had thirty punctures.

Among local buses gaily painted like battered tea-caddies we filled the car with all the petrol it could hold. A temperamental policeman made sporadic charges with the butt of his rifle to disperse the leisurely crowd assembled to stare at me; an unveiled woman in a Moslem country is always interesting. The town idiot strutted up and down waving a white horse-tail on a stick. Away above, the mountains cut the sky with their snowy saw-edges, and along the dazzling road crawled the dark spots of camel caravans. The brilliant air was intoxicating.

It looked as if the plain narrowed into a cul-de-sac and that the car was heading for an irresponsible crash against the mountains imminently precipitous in the clear atmosphere. But across the river among orchard groves the road doubled back and dived into the gorge folded under the Ghorbund, following the river with the truculent necessity of a dog on a leash, its narrow corkscrew switchbacks rounding corners under cliff walls excavated to allow it to squeeze past.

With brakes which had lost their sense of vocation it was a marvel we escaped disaster. Strings of camels were almost continuous; their loads of pistachio nuts (for Indian export), bulging out each side, often brushed against the roof of the

car. I was in terror that we should catch their legs, swinging out at unexpected angles without any apparent control. Then, too, a younger camel would sometimes take fright and, breaking his head-string, turn and galumph in front of us, his loads working loose in his mad career. The whole caravan would become disorganised and the narrow road a seething mass of camels, their erratic legs, their loads becoming caught up with each other, their snarls and grunts, shouting camelmén and dust. Every time I was amazed that such chaos could be restored to order, and at the lack of any signs of resentment from the camelmén at the trouble we had caused.

The great number of donkeys presented the menace of professorial absent-mindedness, in which they wandered waywardly in front of our mudguards. The detachment of Afghan donkeys is, I am convinced, produced by philosophical thought rather than stupidity. Their fate decrees a life under loads three times their own size, which the majority accept, sublimating their natural instincts to contemplation uninterrupted by any vision but the glaring road under their split nostrils—split to facilitate breathing in the high altitude and dust. The exceptions who jib have an ear cut off to teach them a lesson.

The gorge between its rock and rubble walls opened into a narrow valley. Down by the stream the strips of cultivation were green with winter-sown wheat; on ledges above, mulberry and apricot orchards glowed like amber. Everything sparkled beyond the cliff shadows, transparent with cold. Gradually we left the river away below and wound up among bare mountains. In all directions they surged in a turmoil of naked beauty, their forms and colours unveiled by any vegetation. Flesh pink and yellow shoulders were broken by sudden patches of coral-coloured sandstone. Fantastic coils of grey and green strata writhed across peaceful expanses like primeval serpents turned to stone. Wind-worn out-crops of coppery rock rose up from the plain in metallic brutality.

All had gone well so far, with only one very narrow escape from breaking the back axle when we had rounded a blind corner at the bottom of a steep incline and, before we could

stop, had crashed over a row of large boulders laid across the road. In the fury of fright H. B. demanded an explanation in the village through which we had just passed. With wounded dignity they told him that the bridge ahead was broken, and that the stones had been placed there to prevent any traffic from trying to cross it!

But now a harsher jolting than that which had shaken our bones all day proclaimed a flat wheel. The near front tyre was pierced by the motorist's menace—a nail from an Afghan shoe, whose heavy head always throws its point into the air. Then a thread in the jack broke. It was nearly dark by the time we had built stones up under the front axle, excavated the road under the wheel with spanners, and adjusted the spare.

The lights were very feeble and the dust blown forward by a following wind made visibility almost nil. We had plunged into another twisting valley by the river, where the strip of stars was very narrow between the black bulk of mountain walls. After two hours the road forked for the first time. The left fork was rough, like a camel track, so we took the right one. After climbing for a quarter of a mile or so it became narrower and narrower and the surface very bad. Suddenly the headlights shone on to a fall of rocks completely blocking the way. We got out to investigate; the ledge of the road was too narrow to turn in, between the mountain on one side and abysmal darkness on the other.

We were some 12 yards in front of the car when I heard a crunching noise. Looking round I saw it rolling back; though I ran towards it to tighten the brake, it was too late. It swept away from the mountain and—disappeared over the edge into the darkness, with a sickening crash and grinding of metal on rock.

The gurgle of a stream rushed up into the sudden vast silence; stars twinkled far away in the clear sky; the great hulks of mountains pushed their blackness up against them; the cold of the air bit into my skin.

“Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Lieber Gott!”

H. B. had seen me run across the headlights to the car



(Left) *Hazara helper to salvage the car.*
(Below) *The morning after the night before!*



and thought I had gone over with it; when he realized I was there he forgot everything else in his relief.

It needed an effort to look over the edge—but Jamal was in the car. I peeped over. Actually it was only about 40 feet down. By the light of one headlight still burning I could see it lying on its roof among huge boulders, a little above a stream.

“I must go down and see about Jamal.”

“Oh, meine liebe, Audrey nein! nein! It is too dangerous. Mein Gott!”

I dreaded what I might find of Jamal, but his war disablements and his weight made it impossible for H. B. to hurry down.

I had just started when—wonder of wonders!—there was a movement down by the car. Jamal crept out through a broken window and came up painfully.

“Allah! Allah!”

“Mein Gott, Jamal! Oh, Jamal! Mein Gott!”

“He may be pouring with blood, I must go and get a light.”

Sitting the trembling Jamal on the ground with my coat round his shoulders I made my way down to the car. I found my knees had gone weak.

The chaos! But the fear that at any minute escaping petrol on a live wire might set the car ablaze drove me to burrow frantically among broken glass and débris for my rucksack which had a torch in the pocket.

Up on the road again we examined Jamal. He had escaped miraculously with only deep cuts in the palms of his hands. We washed them in the stream with my handkerchief, which the cold froze solid in five minutes. Though the bone was bare in the gaping flesh the cuts were clean and, finding my iodine, we soon bandaged them up. Then, like the true Afghan he was, Jamal retrieved his bedding and, curling up under a rock, was asleep in two minutes.

I feared H. B. would have an attack of malaria after the shock, and we were both shivering with the cold. Under the circumstances I felt we were justified in opening the whisky. The lantern was not broken; being a smoker I had matches

and, though not a girl guide, a corkscrew in my penknife. We drank neat whisky out of the bottle. Under the shelter of a boulder we amassed our bedding, using the spring seats of the car to raise it off the freezing dust. Sardines and petroly ryvita, scavenged from among the broken glass, were not a very cheering meal but they were helped by more whisky.

It was 9 p.m. A draughty wind off the snows rustled down the gulley; we piled our coverings over us.

The back wheels of the car silhouetted against the sky; petrol fumes hanging sickeningly in the pure air; mountains against the clear sky of stars; the half-frozen stream gurgling over boulders; the all-pervading silence of the height and cold. . . .

“Gute Nacht!”

I opened my eyes. The sun caught the tops of the mountains, but our valley still lay in cold shadow. I looked back at the car tipped up between two boulders. The display of its underneath made me think of an abdominal diagram. It had all really happened, that surprising episode in the dark!

I watched the glow creep down over the bare hills eating up their cold sleep. It came across the stream like a tide with the shadow rolling back before it. The line of its edge was across my face, my left cheek swollen with warm gold, the right one still taut with cold. I nudged H. B.

“Good-morning!”

Jamal appeared unruffled and suggested that he should go down the valley to get tea and bread from a house which now showed itself in the daylight. With him and our very welcome breakfast came two men. I do not wonder they gazed in surprise at the two tousled strangers who had invaded their valley in the night. We looked a queer couple in the bare brilliance of the morning, sitting in our island of rugs under a boulder near a car on its roof.

The number of men who gradually appeared out of the emptiness was extraordinary. We examined the car. How many times it had turned over is a mystery, or how it survived as it had. Any one in the front seats would have been killed

most probably; the strong fabric of the roof had saved Jamal sitting behind. If it could be turned over it might be dragged on to the road, though it was useless for further transport.

The *Kallantar* (local headman) arrived on the scene and, after long consultation with H. B., marshalled the thirty or so men assembled who, with goat-hair ropes, finally pulled the car over on to the heap of scrub firing brought in huge loads on the backs of coolies. A track was cleared of the biggest boulders down the stream-bed, and the banks dug away lower down where the car could cross on to a strip of cultivation. An embankment was shovelled up to the road on to which, after some six hours, the battered relic was dragged with a shout of triumph!

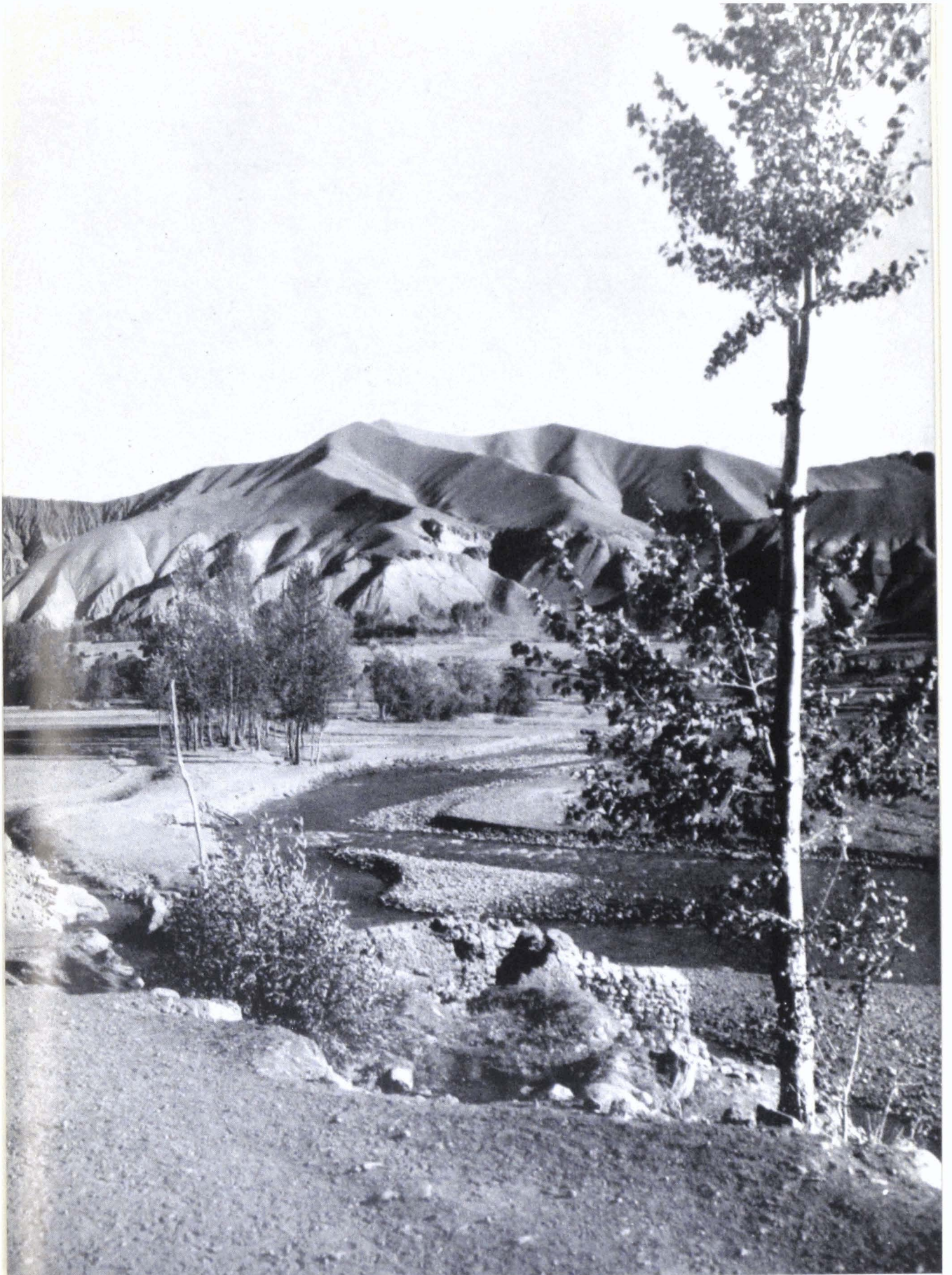
Six Days' Afghan Life

WHEN OUR belongings and any removable adjuncts to the car were stacked into the mud-hut, the only available accommodation, we did not realize that it would be our home for six days.

It was 12 feet square and 7 feet high, windowless and dark, belonging to a tea-shop on the main road where, in the second room of the same size, the stores were kept—sugar, salt, green tea and matches, a few pairs of hand-knitted cotton socks with Fair Isle patterns, costing 4 afghanis (about 1s. 3d.), and some bright-coloured round caps. The samovar sat on its mud stove in the shelter outside, heated with scrubby plants off the mountains. Here lorry and camel-drivers stopped for refreshment before or after negotiating the Shiba Pass.

Across the road and stream was a disused *caravanserai* with 20-foot walls enclosing nearly an acre of ground; a little mosque crumbled in the centre and a battlemented tower protected the gate. Beyond that was the Kallantar's house, a dusty building with a row of cone-shaped containers on the roof, made of mud, in which grain was stored safe from two or four-legged thieves. Two other houses belonging to the Kallantar's cousins, the tea-house, and the mill down by the stream completed the settlement.

The valley end was narrow, the sunny hours short under the hills which hemmed it in with draughty sighs and shadows. There were three trees but no other vegetation. The silence hung over it, of dry rocks and earth parched to dust. The road which we should have taken zigzagged up for four or five hundred feet and disappeared to its farther climb over the Shiba Pass. The valley must have stood at about 9000 feet. This year the snow was late, but ice in long slashes replaced the spring-trickles down the hillsides and was 8 inches thick over the runnel into the mill, kept working every day in winter to prevent the water from freezing solid.



A typical Afghan valley.

Our hut was severely cold. Any heat we might engender flew out through the hole in the roof made for the smoke, which obstinately refused to use it. The scrub firing produced clouds of acrid smoke that choked an aching throat and poured tears out of smarting eyes. Only at sunset Jamal lighted a fire to warm the cold hours before bedtime, while we went out. Actually, of course, the heat escaped with the smoke through the open door and many chinks, but we were given the imagination of warmth by the sight of the dying ashes.

Days begun and ended, but the sense of time passing left me; I suppose I became orientally-minded. We sauntered up and down the valley, or sometimes I climbed hills to look away to more hills like tawny waves transfixed. When snow-clouds did not hide the sun we sat in its warmth under a wall. Here we watched the caravans passing only 12 feet away. They were there, one camel behind another, without warning. Their great feet padded silently into the white dust with their muscular after-thrust. The back of their saddles were bright with embroidery or pieces of carpet, their loads in striped goat-hair sacks or wrapped in *kelims* woven with coloured geometric designs. The drovers were hard men with secretive faces and slim sinewy ankles. In the early morning they twisted the end of their black or dust-coloured *pugarees* over their mouths to keep out the cold air; their homespun camel-hair or dark blue wadded cotton coats, embroidered with magenta cross-stitch patterns, were tied tightly round their waists with goat-hair rope. In the midday heat dust powdered their sweat-gleaming faces and bared chests.

Here, too, H. B. examined various sick men who gathered as the news of the German doctor spread. The most common complaints were skin diseases resulting from dirt, chronic constipation, and fever among passers-by from the low plains; he sometimes suspected syphilis, which is frequently present. A father brought his son with a wasting disease who, peeling off his numerous ragged waistcoats, showed his emaciated body to be covered with burn scabs the size of pennies. This was the treatment of the *mullahs*, who believe that disease is caused by evil spirits which can only be driven out if holes

are made in the body through which they can pass. Another filthy old patient giggled weakly with the tickling of the cotton-wool when we dabbed iodine on to his scabby neck. The audience laughed uproariously at the yellow result and twitted him on being so beautiful for the new young wife he had just bought. He inquired whether petrol would do as well as iodine, which we could not spare to give him.

The Kallantar asked H. B. to visit his sick wife. The whole family lived in one big room up beaten mud steps above the stabling and store-rooms. It was dim and dusty, and very tidy in honour of our visit. Shafts of sunlight slanted through the tiny unglazed windows on to the mud floor where cooking pots were ranged round the central hearth. A large mud platform stretched along one end of the room on which, against the wall, bedding was stacked during the day. Servants, men relations and children gathered round to see and listen.

The lady of the house sat cross-legged on a quilt spread over a corner of the platform bed. Though worn with illness and child-bearing (seven children were still alive), she sat there with a fine beauty incongruous with her surroundings. She was a tribeswoman; dignity and charm were in every line of her little proud figure. Even the beauty of her great eyes, lusted with fever, could not distract my attention from the exquisite modelling of her tiny hands and feet.

She welcomed us with wan graciousness. Under orders from her husband she cut, shyly, the ankle gathering of her full red cotton trousers and pulled them back above her knees, which were swollen above wasted shins. In English H. B. said it was phthisis, and a hopeless case under her conditions of living, but he gave various instructions and wrote out a prescription which a passing lorry would take to Kabul.

Always being hungry made meals a great feature of the day. They had little variety—but who wants that when the monotony is excellent? On arrival we had bought a sheep for 6s. 6*d.*, whose slaughter and skinning had dyed our drinking supply red, and which the Kallantar divided up without using a knife. That so dull a meat as mutton could be so delicious

was a revelation, and meals of our tasteless saddles and legs at home always make me think back to those juicy feasts sitting in the dust under the midday sun. There mutton appeared, at midday, in the form of lumps floating in a basin of melted butter, which we ate with our fingers with freshly made bread, followed by innumerable little bowls of green tea. The custom is to put four or five lumps of sugar into the first bowl and continue to refill it without adding more sugar, so that by the end the tea is quite unsweetened.

For the evening meal we had *pilaff*. Our lantern hung from the roof, the yellow light yet dimmer in the smoke heritage of the dying ashes. In turn we held out our hands for Jamal to pour water over them from the slender-spouted metal jug. A servant crouched in through the doorway from the darkness, carrying the huge pale pyramid of rice cooked in the Kallantar's kitchen, which he set on the floor; another brought the bowl of meat and still-warm bread. Jamal set two pots of tea in the ashes, and he and the Kallantar sat back on their heels and waited till we had made inroads on the pyramid and again washed our hands—most necessary—before they demolished the rest, with remarkable rapidity. But this was their first meal since before sunrise.

Over our tea the Kallantar would gossip. He was a Hazara, with a round head and snub nose. His skin was fair and red, his eyes light blue and his moustache carrot. He was about 5 feet 8 inches in height and his body light and bony under its voluminous clothing. We learned that in his district, with its 400 houses scattered over a large area, he was responsible for the collection of taxes, order, and justice in simple crimes. The more serious and involved cases went to the Governor of the district, while a murderer was handed over to the relatives of his victim to punish as they chose. He was also responsible for the upkeep of the roads with local labour, new construction being carried out by the Central Government. He went about his business on the rough little Turkoman horse always tied to the door-post, ready saddled, when he was at home during the day.

He also told us that camel-owners were being hard hit by

the increasing number of lorries on the road; a lorry can carry, more quickly, the same load for 70 afghanis for which a camel-owner must charge 250 to cover the costs. The *caravanserai* was little used now because the increasing security of the roads allowed caravans to camp in the open without the danger of being attacked, which had formerly made gated enclosures necessary. He wished to buy the *caravanserai*, which covered much of the flat ground by the stream, to level the walls and use it for cultivation, but he had not got the ready money—only £6!

Then I might ask H. B. to play his violin. Afghans love music and four or five men would crowd in, one of them carrying his sleepy son of three.

What stranger picture did ever a dim lantern show! A big German doctor with beautiful hands, sitting on the edge of a string bed—a gleam of light catches the curve of the old Italian violin resting on his shoulder, and the bow with its sensitive poise. On the mud-beaten floor, huddled in wadded or homespun coats, crouch lean men of the mountains. The light pulls them feebly out of the shadows, showing their white turbans and bright eyes—eyes habitually alert with suspicion or pride, now growing softer, more dreamy, as the music fills that little mud-walled shelter. Still they sit—still as their mountains, still as the freezing air, still as the moonlight glistening the night. Everything is still except the arm and those delicate hands drawing out the spell of sound. First come the strange repetitions of Afghan music, then Brahms and Mozart wander through the night. Only when the bow is drawn out for the last time and the violin rests on one shadowy knee is the spell broken. Dreams float away from dark eyes, sinewy limbs grow taut with movement under the heavy folds of dusty coats. We are crowded again inside mud walls.

The second afternoon we heard the excitement of an arrival outside the hut. The news of our mishap, related repeatedly by Jamal the wounded hero, had travelled up and down the road with lorries and caravans. Our friend, Moham-

med Said, a public lorry-driver, had heard it away along the road from Mazar-i-Sharif and, at the expense of his passengers, had driven to us post-haste. Having arrived he turned them out into another passing lorry, their noisy protestations failing to shake his determination to remain with us till next morning. He seized both our hands, saying:

“My heart is burning for your sorrow,” and the expression of anguish in his dark eyes gave conviction to his statement.

After the evening meal which he ate with us he gave us the sympathy of his company, sitting back against the wall, the road dust still powdering his homespun coat and woolly ski-ing cap—that ubiquitous item of clothing which has stormed the fancy of the East. He and H. B. arranged that he should pick us up in his lorry, on his return journey to Mazar-i-Sharif two or three days later. Actually it was four. He invited me to stay with his wife and daughter who lived in one of his houses near the Indian frontier, where he was a sheikh. He wished also to give me a present, suggesting a sewing-machine as he had two; but Jamal laughed and said I came from England where he was sure there were many sewing-machines.

Three days later he sent, by a passing lorry, a large box of luxuries as a present to cheer us—apples, grapes, nuts and, specially for me, a selection of brilliantly coloured sweets wrapped in newspaper, which delighted the Kallantar's children.

The next afternoon was grey with a frozen wind laden with dust swirling down the valley. During a short walk a lorry had stopped and a gentleman had approached us with his two friends to express his commiserations, and to offer us places in his lorry to Mazar-i-Sharif. We refused with thanks, upon which he had insisted on presenting us with two packets of Queen's cigarettes (Japanese).

The cold was so severe that on our return we retired under our rugs as being the only way to get warm. Half asleep we were awakened by the grating of the door. Our astonished gaze was met by a large pair of dark glasses under a *cola* silhouetted against the light, and a mouth smirking below the glasses. Then there was a sudden uproar and the face was jerked away. We went out, to find Jamal waving his arms

and shouting in demented fury to several Afghans gathered round—but the face was nowhere to be seen.

It transpired that the gentleman had taken the preposterous liberty of peeping through the door while Jamal was taking his afternoon nap—he had “wished to see the *Khanum* (lady) Sahib who was the friend of Afghans.” (H. B. was very annoyed with me afterwards for having got such a name.) At this critical moment Jamal had wakened and, in spite of his wounded hands, had thrown the intruder down the steps. H. B. joined in the general fury and told Jamal to take back the cigarettes. He returned dusty and dishevelled, explaining that he had thrown them in the face of the gentleman who, in turn, threw him into the ditch. H. B. was proud of Jamal, while I felt they both thought a woman was a nuisance to travel with.

For those who have not lived in a mud-hut it is impossible to imagine that perpetual condition of dust. The floor picks up, the walls brush off, and the ceiling of dried mud laid over branches rains dust. It rains insects too. After the first night we hung a *kelim* as a canopy to shelter our bedding—I wonder if the same necessity created the four-post bed. H. B. scratched all night; carnivorous insects chose that more juicy feeding-ground and I was left immune. One morning I rashly looked at my legs and clothes by daylight. Till then the darkness of the hut had left me in blissful ignorance that both were dark grey. H. B. could say nothing at the tremendous wash I had in a basin six inches in diameter while he went for a walk, but he was angry when he found that I had attempted to launder in the stream. It was a valiant attempt with poor success. Balancing on a boulder, hands frozen by icy water hard with lime, in which the soap produced no suspicion of lather, led only to the grey being concentrated in patches and stripes and a scolding from H. B., who said that his prestige was damaged when I was seen doing what was the work of a servant.

One morning the Kallantar produced two shabby little horses, tough out of all proportion with their size; H. B. on the back of his looked three times as big. We rode up the valley of our mishap winding up and up to the wide heights



(Left) *Through the door of our hut.*

(Below) *The Kallantar's house.*



above the Shiba Pass. Great sheets of ice sprawled across the road, which were dangerous to cross with the mountain falling away from the edge in precipitous slopes to the stream 800 or 1000 feet below. In one place it flowed through a cliff gorge over 150 feet deep and so narrow that, from above, there appeared to be no break in the rocky sweep. In the secluded valley bottom beyond this, the smoke from its one house gave a fluctuating thread of movement in the vast motionless passivity of the ochre mountains.

The immense nakedness, sheltered by no blade of vegetation, eaten by a relentless sun or lacerated by wind, produced a new feeling for the Earth. The attitude of accepting it as the producer of wonders of plant and animal life was changed to that of feeling it as the great reality often hidden from our realization by the beautiful superficiality of vegetation. The new sense of the spirit of abstract personality lying in this passive body changed the vision of the Earth from, as it were, a painter's to that of a sculptor. The draperies, beautiful as they may be, are less important than the lines of the form underneath. The curves of flesh, bone ridges and muscle, the static movement, the rhythm and flow—these are the reality.

Mohammed Said returned with his lorry. Though the Kallantar had declared that all he had was ours, he had not meant—without our paying for it. For half an hour H. B., supported by Jamal, argued to the compromise of 65 afghanis (about 25s.) for everything during the six days, except the sheep. Jamal thought it was robbery.

Leaving the relics of the car in charge of the Kallantar we finally squeezed into the front seat of the lorry, which seemed an impossible feat (H. B. was broader than Bob); but my legs soon adapted themselves to the space allotted to them round the gears. Waving to the girls who adored me because I had given them each a safety-pin, and to the Kallantar and other friends assembled below the samovar, we roared away sadly in a cloud of dust, from the little mud-hut which had become so familiar.

Through the Hindu Kush

AFTER CROSSING the Shiba Pass, where grains of snow and dust, as dry as each other, were blown across the frozen ground, we dropped under the shelter of hills, silent with cold. The road wound beside the Kunduz River, which we were to watch growing bigger and more sluggish for three days over 200 miles.

Bulola is grandly marked on the map because it is a telephone exchange, otherwise its half a dozen bedraggled huts hardly seem to justify a name. Here we stopped for the night.

After a great deal of shouting by Jamal and quiet authority by Mohammed Said the passengers from another lorry, who had ensconced themselves for the night, were unceremoniously turned out and we ushered into their hut. It was bigger than our other one but there were holes through the branches of the roof, compensated for by the kinder smoke of a fire of wood instead of scrub. We bought a lamb for 4s. 6d. for our *pilaff*, and went for a walk till after sunset, when Mohammed Said and Jamal might eat it with us.

Under a cliff among some loose rubble we came on a skull and some bones. On mentioning it to Mohammed Said he said they belonged probably to the local wild tribe who had no religion and lived in the caves of the mountains. I could find out nothing about these people, whom we did not see, except that they were illiterate, lived by hunting and were evidently despised by good Moslem Afghans.

Our hut was only semi-detached and, after supper, the sounds coming through the wall drove my curiosity to venture a visit next door. Here we found four men sitting under quilts round a *chapan*, with which Afghans keep warm in winter. This charcoal stove is set under a low table, over which a covering is spread to keep in the warmth. The company sits on the floor with its legs under the quilt—in fact, the family usually sleeps like this and burns are often the consequence.

The noise stopped when we entered, and we were given a shy welcome to sit on the floor under the quilt. We sat down, but forwent the pleasure of the quilt whose floral covering doubtlessly harboured a wealth of fauna. After some persuasion the concert was continued. The singer took up his *tambour* and sung a nasal extempore eulogy of us, accompanied by the telephone operator who used the detached bells of the telephone as cymbals. I wonder if our difficulties with local exchanges at home are caused by the "girl with the golden voice" giving a concert to her friends?

We started in good time next morning for a day through the dramatic scenery of a western spur of the Hindu Kush. Leaving the Bamian road we crossed the river to plunge into a chasm-like gorge where, for 8 miles, river and road ran side by side in cold shadowy silence between cliffs often rising sheer for hundreds of feet. So narrow was it that in many places the rock had been cut away to make room for the road, which was only just wide enough for two lorries to pass. At the end of the gorge was a long valley shut in by bare mountains. Here one or two settlements basked among fields and orchards of almond trees and groves of white-stemmed poplars—in autumn leaf, spires of gold and silver. A ruined fort of very fine brickwork, probably Persian, stood on a crag above the road. We stopped to talk with the foreman of a gang of workmen constructing a concrete bridge after the plan of an American engineer.

At Douab, a settlement of some 20 houses, the Government have built a hotel to encourage visitors who, if they knew the beauty round it, would not need the enticement of the sepulchral bungalow with its homely touch of a petrol pump immediately between it and the view. Across the flat valley rises a group of rounded hillocks piled one above the other. The arrangement of their smooth dry forms gives the satisfaction of a conscious work of art, and their colours a curious sophistication. Each stands separate from the other in its own delicate pink, green, yellow, white or grey, spotless and unbroken. Behind them, walling them as flowers in a garden, towers a

mighty rock battlement rising high above a sweeping escarpment. So level its edge runs against the sky that at first we believed it the creation of some ancient civilisation. In the brilliant clarity of the atmosphere it was difficult to judge its size, but its immense height and length made us realize that it was a natural formation. The regularity of its vertical coping gave an extraordinary sense of secrecy of what lay beyond.

We were now north of the Hindu Kush, and the beginning of Russian influence, which increased the farther north we travelled, made me feel that I had left behind the Afghanistan which was familiar. The men were shorter, more stocky and fairer—reminiscent of Circassians—and many wore high leather boots and gaily printed cotton-covered wadded coats.

After our lunch in Douab of hot bread and tea, which it was shameful to eat among the fasting population who gathered round us, we set again on our way. We met fewer camels and several chevrolet lorries stuffed with goods and passengers. In the midday heat the butter began to melt in a goatskin stacked behind me; one had become so used to numbers of less pleasant smells that my back was patched with rancid grease before I remarked on it. In spite of subsequent efforts to wash it out the souvenir of that smell returned with me to London.

The metalled road was left behind, and the sympathetic conformity of its successor with the country it traversed made us realize acutely the geological structure. Sometimes we looped round hair-bend corners when it seemed inevitable that we should plunge over the receding cliff into the river far below; sometimes we rattled over bony switchbacks; at others came a short relief along a smooth valley before endless jolting over dried mud, rutted after winter floods.

For some hours we were among scenery whose endless variety and barren beauty left physical aches forgotten, but over the long wide valleys of rice fields and winter-sown wheat the heat, dust and cramp forced themselves to notice. We were dropping all the time to the northern plain and already the air had lost its edge.

The farewell to this extraordinary scenery was the most



Through the Hindu Kush.

fantastic of all. The track ran over a bouldered desert glaring in the heat. To our right mountain ramparts shadowed the river and to the left rose more formations of rock walls on embankments. But here the elemental sculptors had carved and moulded the sandstone till it was no longer rock but great curtains hung in heavy folds—draperies more bold than ever fell from Olympian shoulders—supported here and there by fretted columns. Below this desert plateau a titanic mole seemed to have been at work and the track wound among bare mounds about thirty to fifty feet high. At the top of one of these a brick fort stood as silent as the dry heaps round it, as ghostly as the lengthening shadows which tied the slopes of one hillock with those of the next.

It was bitterly disappointing that I could not well ask a public lorry to stop in order that I might photograph some of this remarkable landscape; particularly during Rozo when the fasting passengers naturally resented a delay of their first meal since before sunrise.

As it got dark the road became worse and our aching almost unbearable, even writhing on the wooden seat was denied by the cramped space. I suggested we should sing, and finally we arrived at Doshi bridge to the lusty cannon of "London's burning." When I saw the bridge I thought that "London Bridge is broken down" would have been more appropriate. Actually Doshi bridge was not quite broken down but the ominous dip on the far side decided us to walk over it. The lorry, lightened of all its passengers, regained the road safely after much pushing, though one wheel did go through and the dip deepened.

At Doshi, 90 miles from Bulola, again a hut was cleared of its occupants for us. One was a Ghilzai merchant who said, pointedly, that he was sure his cases of tea would be safe with a German doctor if he left them in the hut, and asked for a remedy for the fever caught at Khanabad, which was wearing the flesh from his handsome face.

The air was soft and still and the clear moon hung above a mist wisping the valley. With the relaxation from cold the feeling of dirt became intolerable. Saying nothing to H. B. for

fear of his opposition I got my washing things from my rucksack and wandered along the river, away from the bustle of the five assembled lorries and their passengers. Only the gurgle of the river broke the silver-lit silence.

I found a convenient boulder over the water and undressed. No bath has ever been more delicious than that precarious one in the cold black water glinting with moonlight, with my soap getting caked in mud, and the approach of a shadowy figure in the distance causing me to scramble my clothes on again before I had time to dry. H. B.'s anger, when I told him, was caused entirely by his posthumous fear of my danger of being drowned or from an Afghan, but, though I deplored upsetting him, I could not regret my renewed feeling of cleanliness—only too soon mitigated by the dust of the night.

The Oxus at Last

KHANABAD WAS our destination for the next night—93 miles north-west of Doshi. The road grew worse, swooping up and down over precipitous little saddlebacks with horny vertebræ, where hairpin bends at the bottom usually prevented them from being rushed. Then the passengers had to get out to lighten the load while the greaser, or driver's help, ran behind with a block of wood on a pole to wedge behind the wheel when the engine failed and the lorry started to slip back. At the top of one particularly long steep climb the road ran through a bottleneck of rock and rubble before shooting down into a gulley at a gradient of one in four. Here we met another lorry. As neither driver could see the other till he reached the ridge in the bottleneck the tops of the lorries were entangled before they could stop, and only after a good deal of shouting, roaring of engines, splintering of wood and digging away scree were they finally disentangled.

28 miles from Doshi we stopped at Pul-i-Khomri, where the direct road crosses the river by a one-spanned brick bridge and runs north to Mazar-i-Sharif via Haibak. This we should have taken had we been still in the Studebaker, but the new bridges were not yet completed which would take the weight of a lorry.

Here, while eating eggs supplied by a Bengali food vender—a surprising phenomenon in those surroundings—among more flies than I had seen since Fatehpur Sikri, the Russian aeroplane droned high over the round bare hills, going north on its four-days' flight to Moscow. The Russians then had the exclusive right of a weekly air service but, recently, a weekly one has been opened between Berlin and Kabul. We also filled up with Russian petrol which, Mohammed Said told me, was slightly more expensive but much better than that imported from India.

The hills, misty in the dusty air, widened away from the

river, leaving flat-floored valleys strewn with boulders among coarse grass, upon which a few fat-tailed sheep were grazing. Now it was dun coloured and dry but, after spring rains, the young grass would change it into a green land full of flowers, and the nomadic tribesmen would camp here in their black tents to graze their flocks and herds.

During the whole day, apart from Pul-i-Khomri, we only passed two other settlements, Shamak with ten or twelve poor mud shambles and Kelagai, a village with a small military garrison. There were no isolated houses in this lonely country. The one market town, Baglan, 44 miles from Doshi, lay in a wide plain among mulberry orchards, willows and fallow fields. Here, just as we had stopped to drop some passengers and goods—including the skin of butter—the very Jewish-looking Governor rode past on a fine horse with inlaid trappings. He ogled at me and chatted with H. B., pressing an invitation on us to spend the night at his house. For interest's sake I wished we might, but H. B. refused firmly; actually it would have been hardly fair to delay the other passengers in the lorry.

Though we still passed strings of camels, Turkoman horses were now the common means of transport, and the farther north we went the more we saw of these admirable little animals. Sometimes a single horse and rider would gallop by in a cloud of dust—turban end, flowing mane and tail swept out by the wind, slender legs flickering between stones and boulders—a symbol of motion and independence. At others a cavalcade of twelve to thirty riders would pass, a gay party of flower-printed coats sitting in high nail-studded saddles with heavy iron stirrups, or on a carpet thrown over the horse's back. Often a rider had a friend or wife sitting behind, and striped saddle-bags bulging in front of his legs. It did not seem to matter to these little horses whether they plodded for miles under heavy loads or galloped with Arab grace.

All but the very poor own a horse, of the quality suited to his purse; a good one can be bought for £12, a strong but shabby worker for £2. Perhaps their size is against them, but I wondered why these versatile creatures had not won a place for themselves in England.

As the sun set and the moon rose all but full we lurched down and up through dusty desert hills and dry river-beds on to the wide plain of Khanabad, the limits of its horizon lost in mist. In its winter dryness the only vegetation were grey prickly bath-sponges which a few grazing camels found palatable.

Though a journey permits the breaking of the fast of *Roza* the devout Moslem does not take advantage of this dispensation. It was after sunset and all were hungry, when the lights went out. It took over half an hour to mend the fuse. Mohammed Said brought out his iron ration of a bag of lump sugar and I peeled him an egg left over from our midday meal. At last, after some eleven hours on the road, Khanabad was heralded by its aerodrome—a patch of the plain cleared of stones and one tin shed.

We drove into the yard of the main *serai*, stacked with loads of crated tins of petrol and bustling with the passengers of several other lorries having their evening meal under the shelter of the *serai* "canteen." For twenty minutes we sat on the floor of the proprietor's room while they "prepared" our room, which, I suppose, meant turning out the clients already in possession; it contained only two stringed bedsteads and some dusty boxes and showed no signs of what is usually connected with a prepared room.

Carpets on the floor were a great luxury but threw into relief one's own yet grubbier and dustier condition, and I realized how quickly one becomes accustomed to empty silence and few people. Apart from the lack of privacy anywhere (if the door opening into the busy yard was shut the windowless room was airless and dark), I felt much disturbed by the return to the atmosphere of the restlessness which hangs over concentrated humanity to an extent I had not realized before. I understood now that it is not just the need of solitude that drives thinkers into mountains or desert hermitages, but the necessity of the psychic tranquillity of emptiness, in which they can contemplate on a different plane.

Moonlight shadows outside afforded a kindly privacy for a much-needed wash, but in the light of next morning it was

necessary for H. B. to sentry the entrance to a subsidiary yard which was most evidently preferred to the official sanitary arrangements, for which the local phrase is "the answer to tea." Being a Moslem country ladies were, of course, not catered for.

After wandering through the bazaars of sprawling Khanabad and the public gardens looking like those of a decayed spa, followed by an enormous gazing crowd, we sat in the *serai* yard rather desolately eating roasted peas while waiting for the lorry which had mysteriously disappeared with Jamal and all our possessions. Several *mullahs* passed, bearded, blue-gowned and white-turbaned, throwing looks of such venomous hate at me that my blood felt chilly. I personified all they are fighting with the grimness of a death struggle.

Casually the lorry turned up four hours late and we started for Kunduz. The mud road through rice fields was corrugated by water channels which, instead of being dug down, had the road humped over them. The rice was being threshed in booths built over pairs of wooden beams which were alternatively raised forty-five degrees by cogged wooden water-wheels and thudded down on to the heaps of rice. The lorry stopped by a stream and all the passengers got out to perform the ablutions difficult in the *serai*. Mohammed Said kindly offered me his Pear's soap.

In Kunduz the whole atmosphere was definitely different. Fair Turkomans and Uzbeks in cretonne wadded coats and high boots, and Mongol faces under round fur caps crowded round the lorry when we stopped. The space of plain and sky seemed to flatten the town and swallow its sounds although they rung out sharply in the clear air. Here, as elsewhere, the Government had built a new town, forcing the unwilling population to leave their old mud one for one-storied plaster houses bordering straight wide roads.

Though only 8 miles from Khanabad and 3 p.m., we stopped for the night. The conditions in this *serai* room were entirely different from the last, the walls being plastered and low unglazed windows looking into the yard full of horses and

camels. A large wooden platform raised our bedding off the floor, whose plaited rush mats we used as screens across the lower portion of the windows against many curious eyes.

We told the proprietor we were thirsty, and expectantly awaited tea. After some time he brought a jug of, I thought, poor quality milk. He apologized for the delay and explained that he had sent his man to get this water from a clean place in the stream. I said that, unfortunately, I was only able to drink hot water and would he be so kind as to boil it!

We then sallied out to see the ancient city, a mile or so through the deserted predecessor of the new one. Ruined walls rose in romantic sadness above a wide moat now used for cultivation. Up through the one great gate there was nothing but undulating mounds and rubble, though some of the walls of the citadel still remained at the north-west corner. It was exasperating to know nothing of its history. From the elevated position there was a wide view over the plain and the Kunduz River coiling its sluggish way through the marshes, notorious for malaria mosquitoes.

It was fortunate that the policeman came with his knowledge of the more modern city of Kandahar. As we passed through the outskirts of the new town a crowd of men had followed us with menacing expressions, some had picked up stones. It transpired that they had taken H. B. for an Afghan, wearing his *cola* and speaking Persian like a native and, as good Moslems, they were outraged to see their countryman with an unveiled woman, whose immodesty deserved the prescribed punishment of stoning. The policeman explained that H. B. was a German doctor and I a foreigner, so I was spared.

The evening was shadowed by bad *pilaff* cooked with mutton fat instead of butter, the cold night blowing through the window frames, and H. B. refusing to explain his indisposition. He spent a long time over the charcoal fire outside brewing an alarming chocolate-coloured concoction mixed with some ingredients bought from a Hindu medicine shop. In Afghanistan most medicine shops are owned by Hindus who practise as doctors with or without any qualifications. Though H. B. was a doctor of chemistry and assured me that

these native herbs are often good, I was secretly thankful that this brew refused to set and H. B. refrained from taking it.

At 8.30 next morning it was grey and dull at the ferry, where the muddy channel between reeds looked like the Norfolk marshes. We all dismounted while the lorry bumped down the reed-strewn bank on to two high-prowed boats lashed together, which were pulled by two men across to the other side on a rope. An old passenger in a plaid rug kept up ardent prayers to Allah for assistance and the safety of the lorry. There was some difficulty over landing on the opposite bank during which the greaser annoyed Mohammed Said and a scene followed with the result that every one shouted, he went on strike, and was left on the bank using language it was suitable that I did not understand. But he rejoined us from another lorry that night, full of smiles and good humour.

Leaving the marshes behind we paid our toll for the repair of the road running through them, which is continually destroyed by floods, and started over another expanse of plain. We stopped once to lend our jack to a lorry which had evidently been stuck for some time as its passengers were sleeping peacefully on their bundles beside it. We approached a range of shadowy hills up which the road was so steep that the lorry stuck and half its load had to be carried up the last stretch. Then we passed into a strange region of velvety hills of sand, where the only road was a few indefinite wheel marks looking like ski tracks under blown snow.

Here we met another lorry and were told that the police and the local inhabitants—we never saw a sign of such beings—were searching for a lorry which had rashly tried to cross this treacherous area after dark and had lost itself among the sand-hills. It was now two days since the search began. Mohammed Said related how once he had been lost here even in the daylight, all tracks having been obliterated by a sand storm. We also passed a little donkey with a broken leg left uselessly to die. I wanted someone to end its misery but Moslems will kill only for food, and I could not worry H. B., who seemed to be in agony, either to do it himself or to let me, so the poor creature was left to its vulture fate.

(Top) *Two men pulled the ferry over the Kunduz River.* (Below)
One of the three aged hunters.



A dreary plain followed the sand-hills, where obviously artificial barrows awaked my curiosity. It seemed hard to believe, but it was affirmed by every one, that vultures were buried under them. Evidently the Government give a reward for every dead bird and vast numbers are killed. In the middle of this plain we met three old men on the smallest donkeys I have even seen, who were prodded with iron spikes to make them go faster—a practice illegal in the south of Afghanistan. It seemed incredible that this aged trio should be hunters, but they carried long-barrelled muzzle-loaders with tripod supports and, when we stopped to question them, brought out from their bosoms gory lumps of fresh meat to testify to their success. Their method is to sit over water holes waiting for the gazelle that come from the hills to drink. Passengers eagerly bought some of the meat before we drove on, leaving those dauntless specks of ancient humanity to crawl on in their detached unconcern over the vast spaces of arid silence.

We roared towards the next range of hills over flat wastes of hard mud or shale, which Mohammed Said welcomed as the one opportunity to show off the capabilities of his lorry in the way of speed.

Mountains had been visible all the time to the south, but for the next 20 or 30 miles across the Tashkurgan plain we were only a mile or two from that great dust-dimmed phalanx, which seemed to drive the northern horizon to a yet greater distance. Long caravans swayed across the flatness; I counted as many as a hundred camels in one string. The ground produced nothing but stones and the rutted mud road was worse than any we had been over. We were quite white with dust and at last H. B. was driven to explain the agony our merciless jolting caused him. The war heritage of shrapnel still in his back had worked on to a nerve in his spine. The knowledge of what he must be suffering made every bump a nightmare till we reached Tashkurgan, two or three hours later.

The orchards and fields round this pleasant town appeared in the distance like a green island rising out of a dun sea. It was an oasis in more than a physical sense, its clean neat bazaars being inhabited by people whose courteous dignity covered

their natural curiosity. True, they were more used to strangers than in the towns we had been in, this being the junction of the Khanabad with the Kabul-Mazar road, but the general charm and order was unique both to me and even to H.B. with his wide experience of Afghanistan.

H. B. was unfit to travel farther, and on inquiries in the bazaar we were directed to the Afghan doctor's house. Instead of the usual sluggish canals, the way led over lively streams swirling under fruit trees. Clear of the houses we saw the mountains beyond, with a decorative hill humped steeply in the foreground, crowned by an old citadel looking curiously Chinese.

The doctor was a Kabuli with a flourishing practice and a family here as well as in his native city. His house was in old Persian style with delicate white cloisters running round a courtyard full of fruit trees. As in Harley Street his dining-room was used as the waiting-room; on the floor, thickly spread with Bokhara carpets, sat several patients, their shoes in a row outside. The consulting-room was also his bedroom, furnished with two long mattresses heaped with silk cushions, and polished brass spittoons. The doctor wore an expensive *poustincha* heavily embroidered with orange silk, and the turban above his jovial bearded face was of very fine white cotton. H. B. injected himself with the rather antiquated morphia which he produced, with beneficial results.

During the consultation I had returned to the *serai* in the centre of the town to prepare what comfort possible. After much difficulty, with practically no language, I secured a little room with an open balcony over the gate across which Mohammed Said nailed a *kelim* against curious eyes below. He also brought a straw mattress for H. B. about whose condition he was deeply concerned. The bedding was unrolled, *pilaff* ordered and a lantern lit. Dust clouded up from the mud floor, but it all seemed pleasantly luxurious with its privacy above the bustle of the crowds below and I went back to fetch H.B., to find that the doctor had asked us to stay in his house. He assumed, of course, that I was H. B.'s wife, and inquired about our children!

This was real luxury—to sit on carpets and cushions, with no dust, and to have a meal spread on a spotless cloth laid on the floor—and what a meal! The central pyramid of butter-cooked rice was surrounded by innumerable dishes of meat cooked in butter and spices, vegetables, eggs, chicken, pickled gherkin, pancakes, apples and apricots home-preserved in sugar syrup, sour cream, honey, fruit, nuts, sunflower seeds and several cups of sweet green tea with sweet biscuits—all this we worked through slowly. I found it a nuisance to use a spoon instead of my fingers.

I did not like to trouble H. B. with much interpretation, but gathered that Tashkurgan had 8000 inhabitants and that the commonest diseases were goitre and lung troubles, the latter caused by the terrific dust always blowing off the plain.

Our host was eager for me to visit his wife, who had never seen a foreigner, apologising for her simple ignorance. As a man, of course, H. B. was not allowed to accompany us to the women's quarters across a courtyard and through the single door behind which they were secluded.

The lamp was on the floor of the high narrow room, gaunt, cheerless and furnished only with carpets and a gramophone. The little lady came in, seeming at first just a pair of dark eyes, followed by two lumps of daughters who took after their father. All had dresses of hideous cheap Japanese artificial silk with flounces round the bottom and heavy silver earrings, bracelets, necklaces and rings.

I realized suddenly what the seclusion of women meant—of richer women who had little, even veiled, contact with the world outside their courtyard. The girls were entirely unattractive and, still unmarried, no experience of life whatsoever left their faces completely vacuous. They seemed entirely physical animals with even their physical potentialities unawakened and unused. Experience of the essential female rôle in life had worn an expression into their mother's simple face—an expression of dumb resignation which, with more intelligence, would have been pathos. But there was nothing, not even the personality of animals in her daughters to give any sign of reactions or consciousness.

Unable to talk to them, admiration of their ornaments was all too soon exhausted and the lady and I sat inanely smiling at each other while the daughters stared blankly at me. The gramophone came as a great relief, braying out their great pride, "Tea for Two." I was faced with more fruit and sweet biscuits till the ladies were cleared away and H.B. fetched by the doctor.

Back in the consulting-room the mattresses were laid in the middle of the floor, spread with clean sheets, pillows in frilled cases and silk quilts. After a real wash in hot water from a slender jug, all this luxury—this silence, smooth whitewashed plaster walls, carpeted floor, only the dust we had brought in our dusty clothes—all this made it the most wonderful of nights.

It was round the Hazra Ali mosque that Mazar-i-Sharif grew up, and as we passed it the lorry was stopped for Mohammed Said and the other passengers to prostrate themselves. The present structure, built in A.D. 1481, replaces the earlier one of 1136 destroyed by Jenghis Khan, which had enshrined the remains of the Fourth Caliph, Hazrat Ali. I was not allowed to enter this holy place and could only enjoy from a distance the somewhat squat pile clustering round the central dome. Covered with blue tiles it stood up like a jewel against the distant mountains, glistening and glimmering with the changing lights.

The hotel at Mazar had been built with an enthusiasm which had not survived long enough to lay on the water in the elaborate tiled bathrooms; nor did it burn in the management. Actually, of course, it was perfectly sensible not to prepare the rooms till the arrival of the next guest, because who knows but what that might never happen, and then it would all have been wasted work. But after the glowing reports of the hotel it was somewhat depressing to find one's room as the last occupant had left it, including the very grubby sheets. That evening a foretaste of London fogs—becoming imminent now—was given by the lamp which had filled the whole room with a dense black smoke. The most original feature of the establishment was that the bolts on the closet doors were on the outside.

Russia was heralded by Mazar. Ramshackle *droshkas* replaced *gaddis*; we could walk through the bazaar eating *kabab* (meat roast on a skewer), and the population was almost entirely Turkoman and Uzbek. Japanese goods were still conspicuous but Russian imports preponderated. In the shoe bazaar high Russian boots were as common as Afghan shoes.

Three days were necessary in which to get my Russian visa altered and an escort on. Owing to the delays on the northward journey I decided I must abandon the plan to return home via Termez, Merv, Ashkabad, Meshed, Tcheran, the Caucasus and Istanbul, and travel instead by the direct route from Termez to Moscow. Though I had misgivings that a Consul would have more authority than an Embassy he changed my visa with no necessity of telegrams to Moscow. I was unable to procure any roubles, but had kindly been supplied with a few by the Embassy in Kabul with a note, in Russian, asking for all help to be given to me and, when possible, someone found who spoke English, French or German.

The Manager of the Afghan Bank was most hospitable in twice inviting us to dinner. He had just returned from two years in London, and his London suit and Burberry overcoat looked strange in his charming Afghan house as we sat on the floor eating the sumptuous meals he spread for us. His wife was in *pardah* and his son in true Afghan dress, and I wished Mr. Burberry could produce such grace.

He also most kindly drove us out to Balkh, a former historic capital. As at Kunduz the ancient city had sheltered inside the now-crumbling ramparts, but this had been a much larger town. The remnants of its successor mouldered beside it, from which rose a mosque of flower-like beauty. Its swelling tapering dome was fluted with a strength and delicacy which gave some idea of the glories of Persian architecture. It was now desolately mutilated and ruined, but a beauty lay in it which will surely remain as long as any of it stands.

Efforts were being made by the Government to revive the importance of Balkh. A new city was being built and the provisional cotton-refining factory, whose machines were driven by an old tractor engine, was to be replaced by a more

conventional one, which will refine the cotton grown in increasing quantities with the help of a Government subsidy. Most of the yarn is sent over to Russia to be woven.

The last morning in Afghanistan!—or so I thought. H.B. had driven away with the Bank Manager back to Kabul. Dear H.B., he had been such a good and kind companion; it was all terribly depressing.

I suddenly realised that my Afghan exit visa was two weeks out of date. I could speak to no one, so took my passport to the Bank head clerk. The word "Bank" works magic in Afghanistan and even produced the sleepy unshaved official after only an hour's wait. All in order, I climbed into the Bank lorry with Bottlenose, the Manager's servant whom he kindly sent with me and I waved to Jamal and Mohammed Said who looked as miserable as I felt: and we bumped off on the last stage.

The aerodrome behind, we rattled over a mud road for miles across dead flat desert, passing settlements of mud-domed hovels where water made cultivation possible, and the deserted ruins of a fair-sized town crumbling to pieces in the windy silence which, I have since learned, was once a prosperous city till blowing sand blocked its wells and it fell into decay. A light drizzle completed the desolation of the landscape.

Askha-Khana was the limit for wheeled traffic; owing to sand-dunes the 14 miles on to Patar Kesar, on the Oxus, had to be traversed by camel or horse. Crates of petrol and Russian goods were stacked under the walls of the fort, waiting for lorry transport to Mazar. The garrison of thirty soldiers were the sole inhabitants and I wondered where they got water from, the only sign of life being some withered clumps of grass rustling above the sand.

The Bank Manager had telephoned orders for transport, for which he refused to let me pay, and two rough little horses were led out on our arrival. I thought my bedding-roll strapped on one side and suitcase on the other looked too heavy for one little animal. To my dismay they threw a rug over the top and signalled me to get on. Surely it would never stagger 14 miles? But before I knew what was happening the incredible

beast had bolted with me, which, with neither saddle nor stirrups and their substitutes of heaving baggage, was a most uncomfortable proceeding. With the bit controlled by a piece of rope, having no effect whatsoever on an iron mouth, the only method to depress my spirited steed was to clasp my legs round his neck and kick him under the chin. With indomitable light-heartedness he repeated this display of energy till one of my military escorts rode in front.

So we made our way through this strange country. Sand-hills from ten feet to thirty feet high swelled up all round us with only a few scrubby bushes here and there to break their undulations. A grey silence hung over it; the deep sand of the track muffled all sound from the horses' feet.

We four—old Bottlenose, I, the private with blanket and rifle strapped on his back, and the officer on his fine horse, similarly equipped, were at the same time important and insignificant as we moved through the wind, sighing with forlorn persistence over the sand. Occasionally we met a solitary horseman or strings of camels, but they passed silently leaving no other signs of life behind them. Camels so aptly personify desert spaces—the deliberate timelessness, the detachment, the silence, the intractability, the awareness and incalculable venom.

After three hours the Oxus was to be expected. After four hours I began to worry with the silly time-sense the Orient had not altogether cured but soon, unable to question my companions, concern grew into resignation.

Slowly it became evident that we were lost. It started to rain but, fortunately, the wind was neither strong nor cold. With no track the endless climbing and dropping over sand-hills told on the loaded horses. Bottlenose was leading his and, though heftier, mine tripped and fell several times in the scrub over the uneven ground made indistinguishable by the gathering dusk. Irregularities in sand, as in snow, are invisible under light too dim to cast shadows. Vaguely I wondered how long we should plod and tumble over this waste. My escort appeared cheerfully unconcerned.

The change of day into night was as featureless as the

country over which night fell in cloudy blackness. Bottlenose muttered and panted as he crashed into bushes or fell over humps of sand. Suddenly, from a higher mound, we saw lights in the distance, almost behind us. We turned towards them. They must be those of Termez across the Oxus!

Welcome as they were in the immediate sense misery came with those lights. Their twinkling changed a long dreaded anticipation into reality. Night, our trackless passage and timeless weariness merged into an interim hung between the two. Behind stood the East with all it now meant, in front was Europe—hurrying, harried, noisy, organised, machine-run Europe, where a place in a community meant artificial complications, attacks on long solitudes and free response to the unexpected. But even as these thoughts were echoed by the incongruous sounds of a train from far away in the darkness, a voice seemed to say, "Is this the result of my lessons—this your repayment? Will you allow my gifts to be lost so weakly? Are they themselves not their own defence?"

Engrossed in thought and weariness I fell off my horse as it took an incline, to the fatherly concern of Bottlenose who, after giving the bridle of his own to the private, insisted upon leading it.

The assumption proved false, that the arrival in Patar Kesar was merely a question of covering the intervening distance. It appeared that a strip of marshland from 1 to 2 miles wide, bordering the south bank of the Oxus, was possible to cross only by one or two tracks. The darkness made the discovery of these impossible, and attempts to force a way through the dense reeds, 8 feet high, were baffled by the treachery of the ground.

Over and over again we tried with the same result. There would be the crackling and rustling of dry reeds, the snapping of undergrowth, the snorting of horses, Bottlenose puffing and swearing, protruding baggage getting caught up in the scrub, shouting when the horses started to sink in, and the struggling scramble back into the open.

I thought my efforts to suggest waiting for to-morrow had borne fruit when a halt was called. Wondering the best means

of making a shelter for the night against the rain I decided, as I dismounted stiffly, that it was best to leave it to the experience of my escort. But after only fifteen minutes' enjoyment of the fire which they had lighted, all hopes were crushed by their feet which stamped it out.

After another hour we saw ahead a flickering glow. Amid furious barking a pack of dogs rushed out towards us, so savagely that I was thankful to be on a horse. Men's shouting was added to the uproar in which the officer rode forward towards the figures approaching us from the fire. The heavy smell of sheep hung in the air and as the noise subsided we heard their domestic sounds. After a short parley the officer shouted to us and we rode on to dismount in the shepherd's encampment. It was 8.30 p.m.

They were kindly folk those shy silent men. A piece of coarse felt which they motioned me to sit on was spread by the fire. They heaped on more branches which sent showers of sparks up into the darkness, and a metal jug was put on to boil. How welcome that rough tea was, the two cups being handed round in turn! The dry bread and cold meat, congealed in fat, seemed a feast of joy. The rain had nearly stopped and dear old Bottlenose spread out my gloves to dry. His once white cotton trousers were soaked and covered with mud, his bare ankles scratched to bleeding above his Afghan shoes, while both soldiers, though damp, looked as neat as when they had started.

Across the fire sat our hosts, four men and a boy of about sixteen. They were fair Turkomans with shy wide silence in their eyes. Their innate courtesy forbade them to stare at me and only once or twice did I meet their glances, which were so remote as to be almost devoid of expression. The eldest talked with the officer in a quiet voice while the others remained silent. Wishful to show my appreciation I offered them cigarettes; only two accepted them and, I fear, they gave little pleasure. After lighting his the elder man took a few puffs and put it out; the boy, after one, coughed violently and retired to be sick behind a bush.

Fascinating though the picture was of those figures seated in

the firelight, and precious every moment in those surroundings so soon to be left behind, sleep was irresistible.

Bottlenose was shaking me gently. With difficulty I opened my eyes. The fire was still burning in the dark; it was not morning. I looked at my watch; 9.45 p.m. They were all getting up—surely we were not going on to-night? So it was and, almost in tears, I scrambled on to the familiar back of my weary little horse. I suppose the orders of my escort were to get me to Patar Kesar that day. But the final stage of the journey lasted only three-quarters of an hour, one of the shepherds, finding the track with a bunch of blazing faggots, leading us along its narrow defile. All at once the rustling reed walls were no longer there; the wide waters of the Oxus River stretched to the lights of Termez pricking the darkness.

We had arrived.

The group of huts which was Patar Kesar was silent. It was 10.45 p.m. and during *Roza* early-to-bed compensates for the sleep lost to the midnight meal, but a few shouts roused the sleepers. With the kindest welcome I was led to a hut prepared for me by the Bank Manager's orders—a windowless low hut built of mud and reeds. Carpets covered reeds laid on the floor and it had been furnished with a string bed, table and chairs. The lamp was lighted and the charcoal fire in the brazier blown up by a soldier.

Before my escort disappeared in the darkness I tentatively offered some afghanis to the kind shepherd, who refused shyly. The food we had been given probably had to last them for some time while they herded their flocks over those deserted regions. Certainly the hospitality of the East, which asks no return, is remarkable.

Travellers often resent the many methods employed in the East to dispossess them of their money, but if "all is fair in love and war" we ought not to condemn. The fight for the barest necessities of life is much greater there than amongst us, and this has led to the game of bargaining in every department of life. I learned that those who do not play this game are heartily despised, even by the opponent who gains by it. It gives the buyer a sporting chance and, because he knows

by experience what the values of things really are, it is no more cheating—probably less so—than the fixed prices in our shops. Though the struggle for existence, in which every man must rely upon himself for survival, makes every one his enemy and object of prey, with the choice to give, his generosity is limited only by his means, and offered with the unstinting singleness of mind found rarely among those who have not known want themselves. With them business is business and friendship is friendship, the two are not mixed. This, anyway, was my personal experience and I never found that, playing with the rules of their game, advantage was taken of any friendship generosity on my part.

The *Sirdar*, his secretary, and the commander of the garrison of eight soldiers gathered in my hut. My few Persian words were inadequate to meet their kindness. They hung my wet clothes to dry round the brazier, murmuring *chai*. I longed to go to bed, but obviously had to wait for tea.

They sat in a row on the opposite side of the table and managed to convey to me that the Bank Manager had telephoned twice to inquire if I had arrived safely. After twenty minutes tea came, which we sipped together. Bed at last! But woefully I heard the word *Bringe*. Rice takes time to cook and I doubted whether I could keep awake, pinch myself as I might. We sat in strained silence till the *Sirdar* said:

“*Afsous darem kay shuma mandah shudahid!*” (“I am sorry that you are so tired!”)

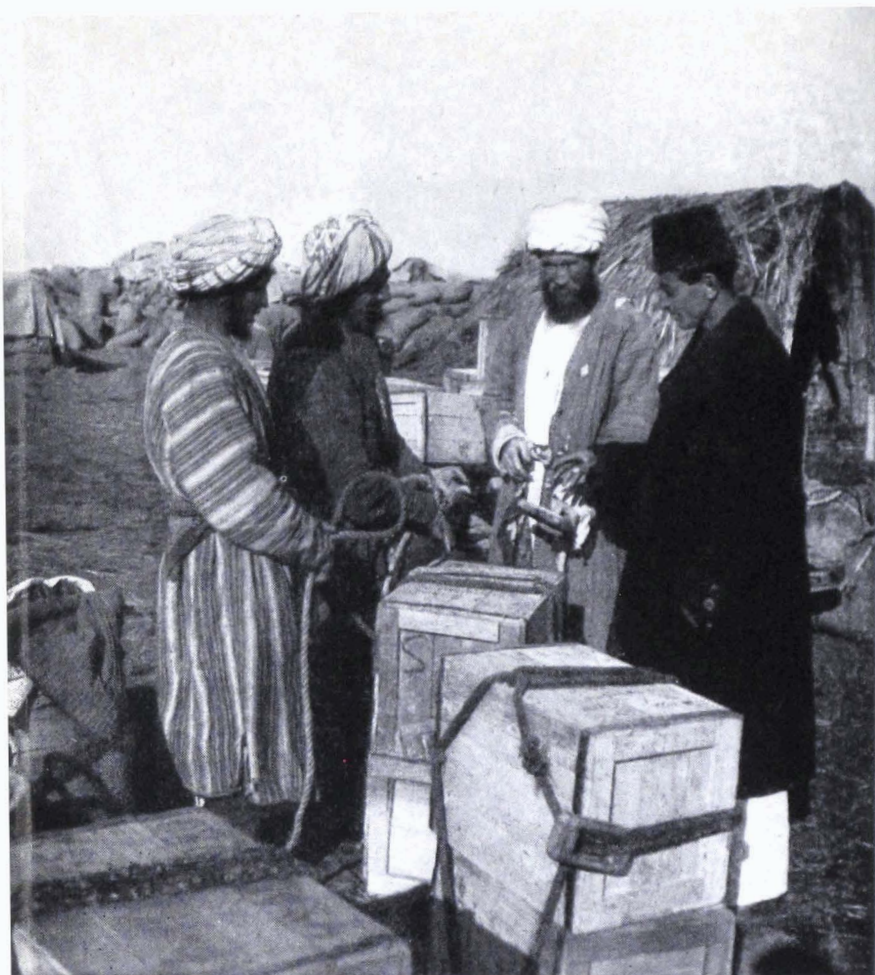
Leaving the hut, he returned after a few minutes with a clean pillow and a rug which, he told me proudly, was Russian. Arranging them on the bed he signalled to me to lie down. So I lay for half an hour, while they sat in their row talking in whispers till the rice came.

Though I had eaten little for a long time tiredness made it difficult to show my appreciation by the size of my inroads on that mountain of carefully cooked rice! I did my best with the help of more tea, and then my gentle hosts literally tucked me up, put some more sticks on the brazier, turned down the lamp and left me, with the assurance that a sentry outside guarded my door.

I was ready for the morning ferry at 8 a.m. but with difficulty I was made to understand that it was the Russian sixth day, Rest-day, when no boat came across from Termez; so, unpacking my rucksack and unstrapping the bedding-roll, I settled down till next morning.

It was altogether a very queer day. Across the mile of the great sluggish Oxus Termez and its sounds were quite clear. There were brick houses and huge oil tanks looking like gasometers. One could hear the shunting of trains, and aeroplanes droned up during the afternoon. This modern bustle was only separated from my surroundings, undisturbed from their marsh seclusion, by the empty stretch of water. True, a telephone wire made its lonely way over the flatness, unbroken till it met shadowy mountains of the far south horizon, but sandy passivity held bustle at bay. The only intrusions of man were eight or ten bee-hive huts on a space cleared of reeds above the low muddy banks of the river, and beside them the piled cases of imported goods and tins of petrol and fifty to a hundred camels waiting to transport these over the bulwarks of this solitude. Surrounded by men of naïve consideration, shut in by water, wind, sky and whispering marshes, it was strange to look across to the different world which claimed me back to itself.

A little sentry stood on the bank all day, but it was difficult to realize that this was a frontier town! I watched the *Sirdar* checking cases of china, glass, clothing and the bales of sugar imported from Termez, the brushing and feeding of camels and their loading. Most of the drovers were Turkomans with reddish beards, the transport controller a very handsome old man from Mazar. I saw Bottlenose, who had washed his clothes and spread them on a hut to dry in the wind and sun. My escort had gone and he would take the horses back next day. The *Sirdar* fulfilled his duties as host with an assiduity which never left me alone. In the afternoon a pageant of colossal thunder-clouds was moved across the sky by a gale of wind, against which he ordered a tarpaulin to be rigged over the door of my hut. The dry reeds were turned to gold by the angry brilliance of the sun which sunk in a splendour transforming the river into light.



(Left) Customs inspection. Russian imports taken south by Turkomen camelmen.

(Below) The mail crosses the mile wide Oxus to catch the train at Termez.



After supper the three came for the evening. My photographs were a blessing in the entertainment they caused but, as Moslems, they were much shocked by a picture of a Balinese woman and I secreted, with haste, all others of under-clothed women.

At a suitable time my representation of washing called out immediate response. The carpet was rolled back and hot water was brought in petrol tins and rice cooking bowls by soldiers, who did all the work. The *Sirdar* brought me his own soap and a clean towel and, amid much laughter of the assembled company, conveyed his offer to wash me. Bowing good-night they filed out through the low door, across which the reed shutter was placed with care.

It is extraordinary the comfort which is possible in what appear most primitive surroundings! The brazier made the room very warm and there were quantities of hot water to pour over myself, which conveniently soaked into the floor when it ran out of the rice basin. Life was actually far more enjoyable in that bee-hive than in many modern hotels, certainly in the Afghan ones of which they are so proud.

The paddle-steamer ferry came over next morning. An Afghan sentry stood on the bank while its load of petrol was carried ashore by Russian porters. Contrasted with the Afghans they were most miserable specimens, underclothed and underfed, poor with the poverty of towns. My belongings were boarded—the moment had come. I shook hands with my friends assembled. There was generosity to the last in the shape of six loaves of bread for my journey because the *Sirdar* said that Russia was a bad country—nothing to eat. Bitterly I watched the little group dwindling in the distance as we shogged across the Oxus. Afghanistan became a yellow band between the blue space and water. Why was I going north, instead of south—back to the land of the Afghans!

Russia—Termez to Moscow

TRAVELLERS WERE not expected or catered for in Termez. Though two or three may travel that way in the year most take the southern route from Afghanistan to Europe, via India. With no Intourist shepherd-sleuths therefore, I was made to wait for an hour on the ferry while reports of my arrival were sent into the town.

The illustrations of Russian fairy tales were still real life here. Long wooden carts, pulled by horses with high collars, transported sacks of concrete or stones for the building of a new wharf on the river. Bunchy women with solid legs and fair hair, and little girls with long plaits, had bright head-handkerchiefs tied under their chins. On the grassy playground outside a whitewashed school among fruit trees were children playing round games to shouting and singing, and had privation not been expressed in the workmen about the riverside all would have seemed happy on that sunny morning.

A young official in a smart black uniform, high boots and peaked cap arrived in a lopsided *droshka*. His unbending impersonality—which I found typical of all young Russian officials—was chilling after the human individuality of Orientals. Each with one leg hanging outside we clutched at my belongings stacked in the *droshka*, our united efforts scarcely able to hold them in place with the double-jointed vehicle bucking over the cobbled roads.

We drove from office to office through the half-baked town. I do not know what they were, but in every one I had to show my passport under the stare of Stalin's photograph, and enjoyed the stalemate resulting from my inability to understand or answer the peremptory questions addressed to me. There is just nothing to do about someone who can understand neither orders nor questions.

In the centre of the town we disembarked at the Customs House where my things were stacked on the counter. The

inner office was warm and whitewashed and the official more kindly than the younger man. I brought out my letter from the Russian Embassy in Kabul and the junior was sent off, presumably to find some one who spoke English, French or German. The Customs officer examined my passport, in which the thoroughness of their visas indicates the destination. My feeble English-Russian dictionary, kindly given to me by a fur merchant in Kabul, had its compensations in my being able to ask questions by pointing at words while, though I was almost certain not to understand their answers, my inquisitors could not even ask them.

The officer wishing, I suppose, to assure me of his progress towards wider efficiency gave me his English text-book to look at. Its perusal was infuriating and enlightening. Much of it was in Russian, but the English reading lessons gave a good idea of the whole tenor of the contents. They were composed of propaganda on the horrors extant in capitalist England—starvation, ignorance, women and child labour in mines, the appalling housing and factory conditions, and the general exploitation of workers by monstrous profiteers who debauched themselves in vice and luxury. Long extracts were quoted from Dickens and other authors of the last century to substantiate these statements and, at the end, among various other such poems, was Shelley's "Song to the men of England." As a national of this country it was surprising that I was not shot forthwith, except that I looked more like a bedraggled worker than a profiteer.

After an hour the young official returned, with no interpreter. We had to manage with my few words of Russian, signs, pictures and mutual imagination. I gathered that the bi-weekly train left for Moscow at 3 a.m. next day. The official was most kind in his trouble over my money, taking me himself to the bank which, being closed, we entered by a back door. The Manager spoke a few words of German and changed the American dollar notes procured in Mazar. Travellers' cheques were not accepted. All the employees in the bank were women except the Manager; everywhere the women seemed to have more energy than men, apart from the uniformed officials.

By the time my luggage had been inspected, two pieces being sealed, it was 4.30 p.m. I wondered what happened next. The international word "hotel" was met with "*Niet*" (no). I knew the words for "sleep" and "station"—again "*Niet*." The poor man looked thoroughly worried with a mute female on his hands. He spoke with his blowsy wife and it was just settled that I should sleep on the Customs House floor when a new official arrived, looking not unlike Göring.

Wondering what was coming next, my things were put into another *droshka* and Göring and I took our perilous half-places each side. We drove off over the cobbled streets and I had time to look at the town. It was sleepy and provincial, blue or yellow coloured houses were low and solid; the homely shops were as full of wares as one would expect in such a place; people's clothes, though shabby, looked fairly adequate. It is never very cold here and there was no frost even now in December.

What the establishment was which we drove up to I never discovered, the notice outside it being in Russian; I imagine it was a boarding-house, but I do not know whether it had an official status. Like most of the others it was a one-storied plaster house behind its railings. We went into a hall where men and girls crowded round a miniature billiard table; the latter were not badly dressed—probably these were their only clothes—and generously lip-sticked and powdered.

A woman unlocked a narrow room off the hall, containing two beds one beyond the other against the wall, a table and chair and a row of hooks beside a billowy mirror. It was spotlessly clean and I had it to myself.

Before Göring went I made sure that on the morrow some one would fetch me to the station—among strangers, to whom I could not speak, I should be helpless to procure a *droshka* at 3 a.m. In my anxious excitement Persian words were mixed up with Russian ones, phonetics with actions, but finally he nodded and smiled comprehendingly.

Left to myself the first thing was to get some food; it was about 5.30 p.m. and, with only a few surreptitious nibbles at my Afghan bread since bread and tea breakfast in Patar Kesar

at 7.30, I was hungry. I munched at the proprietress who called a girl knowing a few words of German. She and her friend led me along the street to an eating-house where I ordered *borscht* (cabbage soup) and rye bread. It was a shabby place but not so grubby as it appeared at first sight, and the *borscht* was good. Its patrons came in ones and twos, young men and girls; old people were rare in Russia, most of them having died through privations. My guide was shy and I found her German accent impossible to understand so that I could not ask the many questions I longed to have answered.

With the prospect of getting up at 2 a.m. it seemed wise to go to bed early—the ability to wake up at a specified time had long since been cultivated. An inclination to wash, anyway my hands, induced an exploration of the establishment.

There appeared to be one or two families in every room, the doors of which were locked if they were ever left empty—I had been warned by several Afghans against the thieving in Russia—but these wretched substitutes for homes were superior to those represented by iron bedsteads placed in the narrow public passages. These were ranged along one wall, the foot of one touching the head of the next. The only place for the owners when not in bed was, as far as I could discover, in the hall, where a wireless was in full blast above all other noises. Children and noises were everywhere. From one room issued the sound of plaintive Russian part-singing which floated a haunting pathos through the clamour.

Eventually I found a single tap and sink against the wall outside in the back garden of about a quarter of an acre. Near it were two large tables where several people were cooking in the dark on primus stoves. Sanitary arrangements were ash buckets in stinking cubicles across the garden, approached by a muddy path. Such conditions made the noticeable cleanliness of the population more surprising.

I was ready for my escort by 2.15 a.m. By 2.25 I begun to get fidgety, opening the shutters wider to look into the silent street. By 2.35 I was definitely bothered, wondering if there was any other door outside which he might be waiting. I went out to see.

In the airless passages rows of sleeping figures were pathetic and sordid. Here a man coughed persistently, beyond him the woman moaned gently in her dreams, while the man beyond her again was snoring stentorously. Most of them were still half-dressed, with their arms thrown out in the heat; worn leather or canvas shoes were poked under each bed. A strange revulsion overcame me as I tiptoed along the beds. Bolts drawn back the fresh air floated in through the open door, breaking the oppressive weight of the stagnant hall; but there was no sign of life outside. The shadows of the bare trees were thrown on to the white walls by the street lamps beyond. A distant train whistle broke the silence under the stars. Was that my train?—and must I wait here three more days? The emaciated cat which glided out of the shadows could not answer me.

Once more in my room I sat on the edge of my bed in impotent disgust. As there was no one else to vent it on I turned to that ever-patient confidant my diary—scribbling my longings for the dignity of Afghanistan, for the human East, and my hate of this country of officials and drab workers which heralded Europe, whose anticipation filled me with dread. Out there in the airless passage they coughed and snored on creaking beds, and now some one was talking in his sleep. They seemed like kicked animals, who filled me with disgust instead of pity. This humanity had become revolting through modern “civilization.” Was it after this the East was striving—the East with its squalor and misery, but still with its dignity?

Hate was useless; no use to sit and fume. Booted and spurred I lay down again and slept.

A knocking. I jumped up, wide awake at once, another useful lesson learned. Unlocking the door I looked at my watch, it was 7.15 a.m.—they must have mistaken my 3 for an 8 as the time of the train! A fatherly old man in uniform stood outside smiling. After paying 6 roubles to the proprietress for my room we transported my luggage into the waiting *droshka*. All the sleepers had gone.

The freshness of the morning washed away the night. The sky, ribbed with sapphire and turquoise blue, and flecked by golden clouds, had the soft clarity of a Tiepolo painting, and in the west towered a mirage of snow mountains. The town behind, solitary mud houses stood among cotton fields, and a few Turkomans brought twinges of regret and longing. We drove so long into the country that I wondered where we were going but, at last, a white-domed mosque in the distance proved to be the station. In spite of all protests the driver insisted on the exorbitant charge of 13 roubles.

In the hall when I question the time of the train, by pointing at my watch, my old man pointed to twelve. Four hours to wait, after having been originally ready five and a half hours ago! The waiting-room was being scrubbed but we settled in the corner near the empty stove among other waiting passengers. At noon I questioned "*Poisd? Poisd?*" (train) but he shook his head and pointed to three.

I wandered about in the sun, not daring to stray very far in case the vagrant train might arrive; also, though there had been no signs of supervision, I did not want to start the journey under suspicion from authorities. Flatness stretched out to the horizon in every direction: two or three miles away Termez looked a large place. On many lines trains shunted busily, loaded with bricks, coal and pyramids of snowy raw cotton, and sometimes as many as eighty oil-tankers were brought in by one engine. Two local trains came in during the day bringing parties of Mongol nomadic tribes' people; the virile women had their hair hanging in two or three dozen plaits, while another group had square *yashmacs* of coarse black cotton hiding all but their observant eyes.

At midday my escort took me to an open-air eating-place in the sun under bare trees. We sat on benches at rough tables to eat a horrible stew of mouldy potatoes with various railway workers. They polished every vestige of grease off their plates with pieces of bread and, when we lit up our *papaross* over glasses of tea, ragged little boys, with the wild shyness of hunted animals, slunk round to collect any bread which might be left. The meal cost 3 roubles.

At 3 p.m. I said again "*Poisd?*" My old man waved his hands, unable to offer any suggestion of a time to hope for. I was resigned but felt worried for his long wait—which was unnecessary seeing that he was Russian!

The waiting-room was crammed. To watch the unconcerned family parties among their bundles filled one with admiration, particularly the fathers, who knew how to deal with a baby almost better than its mother. Most of them looked very poor but were clean and did not smell. Many wore high felt boots and the women had shawls over their heads. The children were obviously much loved and looked well fed. Most families were about to be added to, and one mother looked so prospective that I was in great anxiety that the new addition would arrive before the train. The gentle attachment between parents and young couples forced the surmise as to whether free love was not truer love very often.

Swarms of flies aborted attempts to sleep and by 9 p.m. I felt we needed some stimulant. Glasses of tea were followed by two glasses of vodka (at 1½ roubles per glass) to the delight of my old man whose anxiety was dispelled, and I mounted in his estimation, at my ability to throw down the contents of my glass in one gulp, in Russian style.

A family of Germans joined us in the waiting-room, who talked a queer German among themselves although they had lived in Russia for several generations. They told me that in south Russia there were many Germans who have moved across from the Volga. One of them asked me whether we had any trains in England—a frequent question in Russia whose isolation causes incredible ignorance and false pictures of the rest of the world.

Cautious hope revived when the old man mentioned the word "*Billiet*" (ticket). Leaving it to him he bought me a "soft" class ticket, costing only 232 roubles for the five day and night journey to Moscow.

At 11 p.m. the train arrived and the German family insisted upon helping my patient old guardian to carry my things into it. So ended the thirteen hours' wait.

During the next five days I was comatose and felt ill. I suppose it was the accumulation of tiredness, the sudden low altitude and the deprivation of air after having been in the open so long. In winter, train windows are screwed up and, with only a tiny ventilator in the compartment ceiling, the air became thickly stagnant with the breath of four people, tobacco smoke and the cheap scent which my stablemates used. Though they may not shave every day Russian men covet fragrance—a refinement more welcome to the general public than a smooth chin, and one which many groomed and tailored western Europeans might well cultivate.

It was a monotonous journey given a zest by the fact that few Britishers have seen that line which runs between Moscow and Termez, with its recent extension to Stalinabad, two days to the north-east. Till within about one day of Moscow the steppes stretched out to the horizon in almost unbroken space. On the first morning when I woke I thought, for a moment, that we were crossing the North Sea on a grey day. Telegraph wires swung up and down beside the railway which was single track except in larger stations, where abundant rolling stock in good condition was standing in as many as twelve lines. The number of oil-tankers was remarkable.

Tashkent lay in an oasis of orchards, cotton and wheat fields, and cultivation stretched round Bokhara and Samarkand. It was tantalising to pass these cities without stopping and, the stations being some miles from the old towns, one saw nothing at all of them. It was some comfort to have heard several times that a greater romance now lies in their names than in their actuality.

The variety, abundance and quality of food in the stations was noticeably better than it had been sixteen months before in Siberia, but I was told that conditions have always improved the farther south one went, caused, no doubt, by the kinder climate. There being no home life in Russian towns the one good meal of the day is eaten in restaurants. In small towns the station buffets were the best, if not the only, places to go to and they were always crowded. Beside these there was nearly always a scent and soap shop on the platform.

I thought of the Trans-Siberian train; in this one there were only two classes and I felt out of place in "soft" class. Here I shared my compartment with three minor officials who were most generously kind, insisting upon my sharing in the provisions they bought at stations and who, with continual teasing of my being a Capitalist, did all in their power to make me feel at home among Communists. As one of them said, "Capitalist-Communist Entente!" And one morning they dressed me up in one of their uniforms!

The difficulties of practically no language in common caused much merriment, and my continual wish for tea—the atmosphere caused a dry mouth—made their shouts of "*Provodnik, chai!*" a recurrent joke. This Russian tea, kept brewing continually in each "soft" class carriage, can be drunk in enormous quantities, being very weak and milkless. Again a source of amusement for the whole train were the runs I took for exercise on all station platforms, my skipping-rope having gone home from Calcutta; the other passengers sauntered up and down at snail's pace with, apparently, no wish to stir their blood.

By the end of the first day I had finished my one saved-up book and, all others also having gone home from India and none having been procurable in Afghanistan or Russia, there was nothing to do but to sleep, enjoy my companions, or talk with a neighbour who spoke some German. It was somewhat difficult to keep on the impersonal subject of Russia and the many questions I wanted to have answered and, after he had exclaimed one day in frustrated exasperation:

"Eine schöne und kluge Frau ist für Männer unglücklich!"
I felt it was easier to remain in my own compartment.

My companions from the Ukraine, Caucasus and Moscow spent the day in reading newspapers and playing cards. They were very hospitable and entertained various guests, who added to the fug. Among them was a black-eyed Tartar who was extremely talkative and, I am sure, very amusing, but when he peered continually over the edge of my top bunk to poke me over some joke I could not understand I found him difficult to enjoy.

It was on the third morning that they showed particular interest in their papers and made great efforts to tell me some piece of news which amused them. One of them kept repeating "*Tsar Edouard*," till suddenly it dawned on me that he was referring to King Edward and I could say "*Da, da*" (Yes).

He waved his hands, saying, "*Niet, niet.*"

Was he dead? I acted some one dying—no, it was not that. "King Edward, not"—or was it "Not King Edward"? I acted taking off a crown and he nodded, "*Da, da.*" He had abdicated! Why?

I hurried to find out more from my German-speaking neighbour, who could only tell me that Edward wished to marry an American called Mrs. Simpson.

For three months I had heard no news and before that but patchily. I had never heard of Mrs. Simpson and this bare information was a weight which hung over me all day. And it seemed to turn England once more into a solid reality which I had to face, instead of the phantom memory of a former incarnation, which it had been for so long.

All this time we were creeping north-west into the cold. By the time we had passed the Aral Sea, lying wanly among its sandbanks—a somewhat wistful finish to the proud Oxus River—icicles hung under the train and the sun shone through lovely star crystals on the windows; beyond lay a desolate frozen country which seemed warmer for its snow blankets the day before we reached Moscow.

Here we finally arrived at 11.30 p.m., five hours late. No Intourist agents being in the station, my friends showed a last kindness by procuring a taxi, which is not easy in Moscow where there are only about 300 altogether. Anxious to find out Berlin trains as quickly as possible I went to the National Hotel, where there is a big branch of the Intourist. I was terrified by what seemed the great speed and crush of traffic—though really there was neither—dashing down the vistas of shining streets and tram lines.

At the National a commissionaire met me, watching my taxi while I pushed through the revolving door into the

lighted warmth of the Victorian hall. The man at the reception office spoke English.

“Good-evening. Could I have a room for to-night?”

“No, it is quite impossible. We are full up.”

“Well, would you kindly telephone to some hotel nearby to inquire for a room for me?”

“That is no use, all hotels are full, you can’t get a room. Where are your Intourist vouchers?”

Here he answered the telephone bell.

“Yes, Mr. Krashi has come in—about half an hour ago. His room number?—583. Yes, I will tell him in the morning.”

“I’m afraid I have not got any; you see, I have come from Termez and there is no Intourist there.”

“Give me your passport. (The telephone bell rang again and he had a long conversation.) You’re not permitted to stay with this transit visa.”

“I was told that I could stay in Russia with that visa for fifteen days. I’ve only had seven and only want one more.”

“I tell you, you are not permitted to stay.” (Telephone bell.)

“Well, I can’t help it if your Embassies are so badly informed; I got my information from the Russian Embassy in Kabul. Anyway, what am I to do?”

“I don’t know, but you are not permitted to stay.”

“But, my good man, there is no way to leave your inhospitable city to-night. It is nearly 1 a.m. and no train to take me away. What do you expect me to do?”

“Well—er—you had better take a taxi and go round the streets.”

Never have I regretted so much the lack of suitable language with which to express my feelings! I went out into the snowy street and told the commissionaire to bring in my luggage. What a dear incongruous heap it was, deposited below one of the pair of plaster nudes—suitably draped—which supported the ceiling. My bedding-roll, the donkey-bag from Kabul, the coarse goat-hair sack from Mazar, the garish little tin box made of petrol tins in Peshawar, my tired rucksack and

the old Afghan bow wrapped in a piece of checked cotton from Istalif!

“Now unless you find me somewhere to sleep—I don’t mind where—on a sofa if you like—I shall sleep in this hall. You see, I have my bedding with me so I shall be quite comfortable. Of course, your patrons will think it rather strange to find a lady sleeping on the floor of the hall in the National Hotel, but——”

“Really, I don’t know what to do—I will ring up the manager.”

“Can I get something to eat?”

“Yes, the restaurant is open.”

“Thank you. I shall be up there if you will kindly tell me when you have made arrangements.”

Over my omelette and coffee I gazed at a beautiful Russian woman, faultless in her dress and make-up, at her white hands and delicate skin, at her sophisticated perfection. What was all that worth? A price I had no wish to pay.

In the hall an hour later the night porter informed me that I could have a bed in a service-room. No, it was too late for a bath.

On the fifth floor a worn-looking woman in sandshoes and a white cotton handkerchief tied over her head led me to a door with “Service Room” written on its opaque glass panel. It was locked. Though the night porter questioned all the night staff for the key, no one had it. Dismally I sat on a plush sofa for three-quarters of an hour while Moscow was searched for the servant who had the key in her pocket. Shoes were my only companions in the dim hot passage and I thought how different had been my welcome at Patar-Kesar by the “treacherous Afghans.”

In my service-room was a clean bed among sinks and drying clothes. The old woman was kind—the first woman to have proper dealings with for three months—and showed me the service bathroom, giving me towels and turning on the water. How more than delicious was the unfamiliar heaven of a bath! I hoped, though, that my bath water would not block the drain! And oh! the bliss of those smooth sheets

