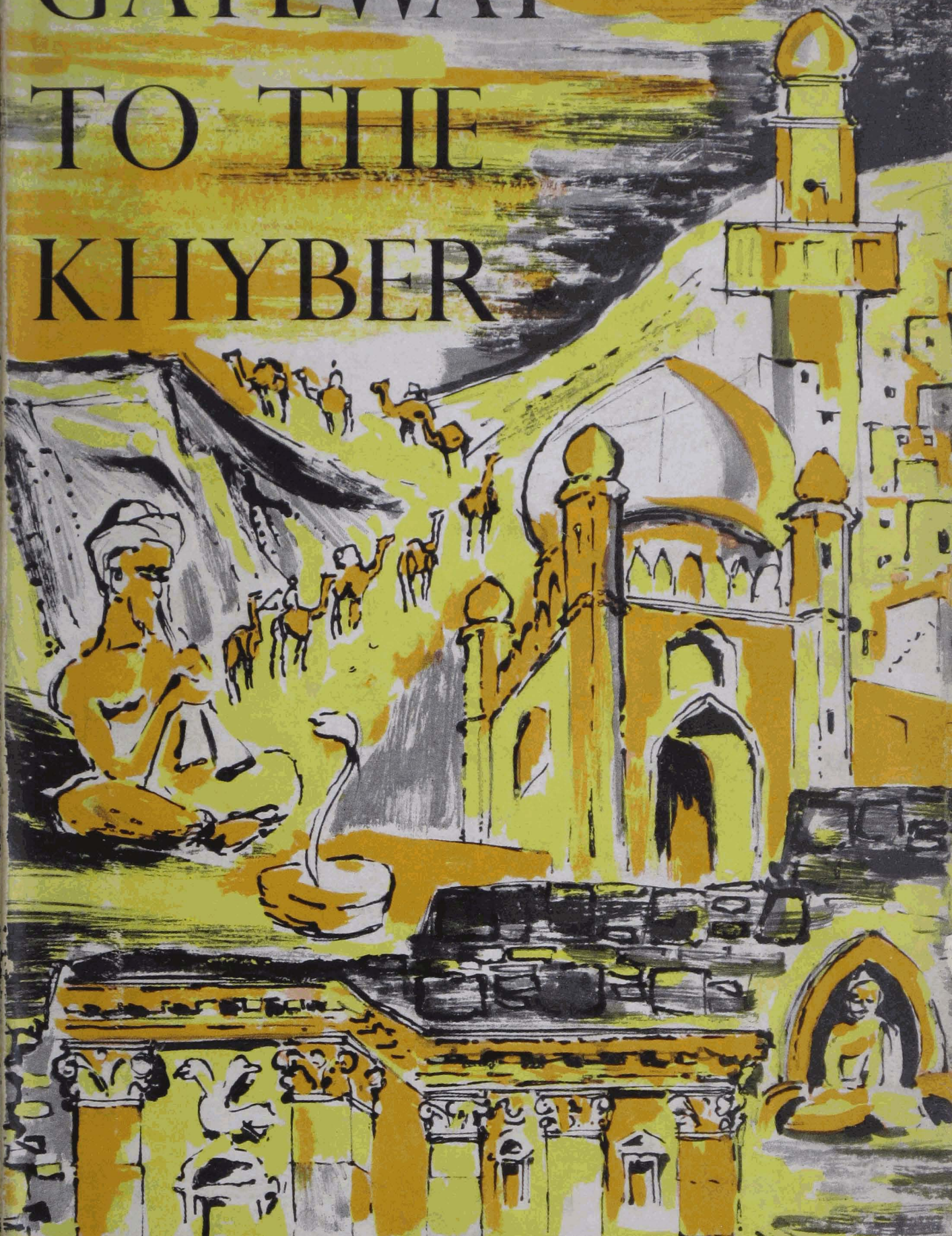
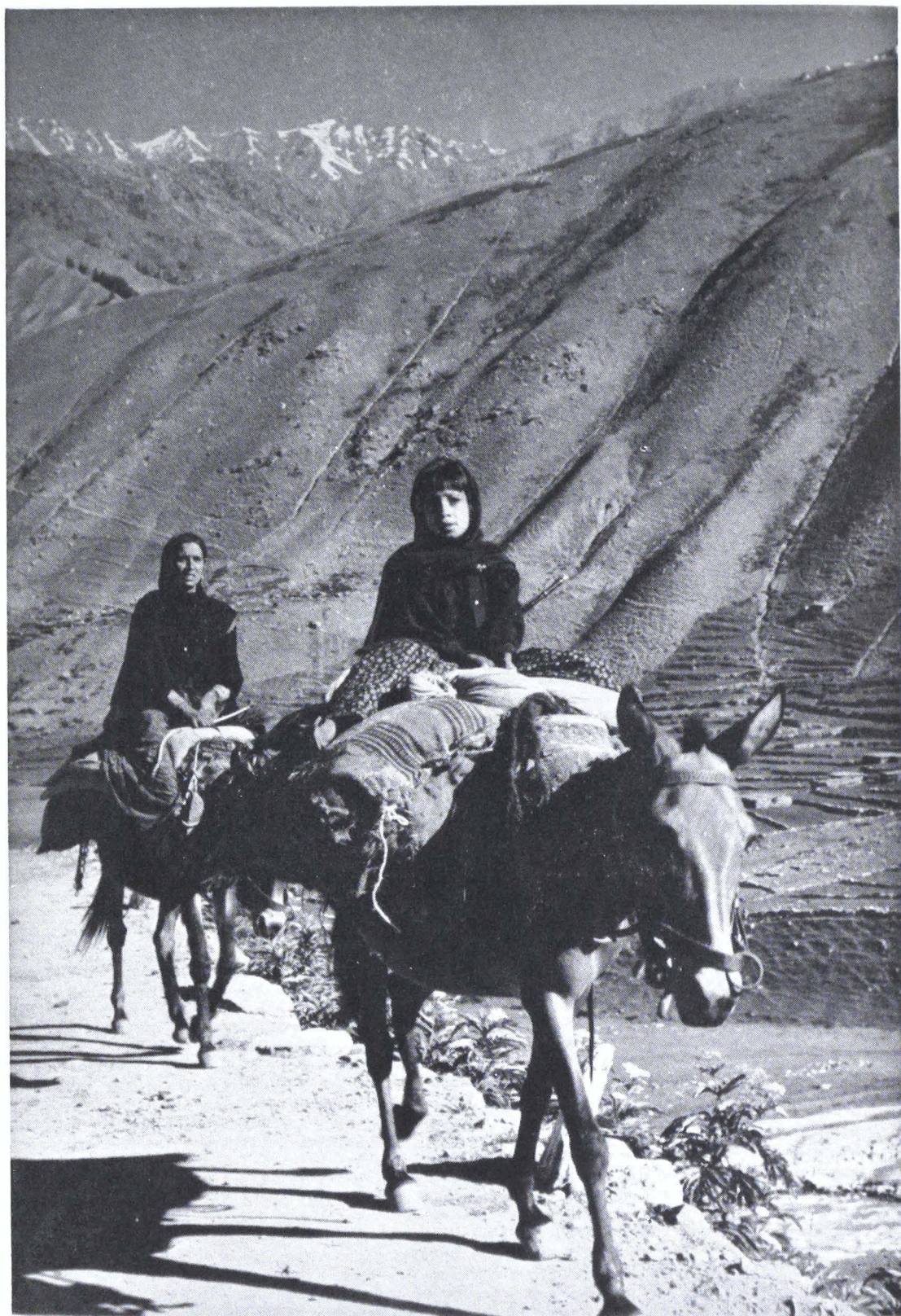


GATEWAY TO THE KHYBER



ROBIN BRYANS



On a crisp morning the grain goes home, along mountain paths

GATEWAY TO THE KHYBER

by
ROBIN BRYANS

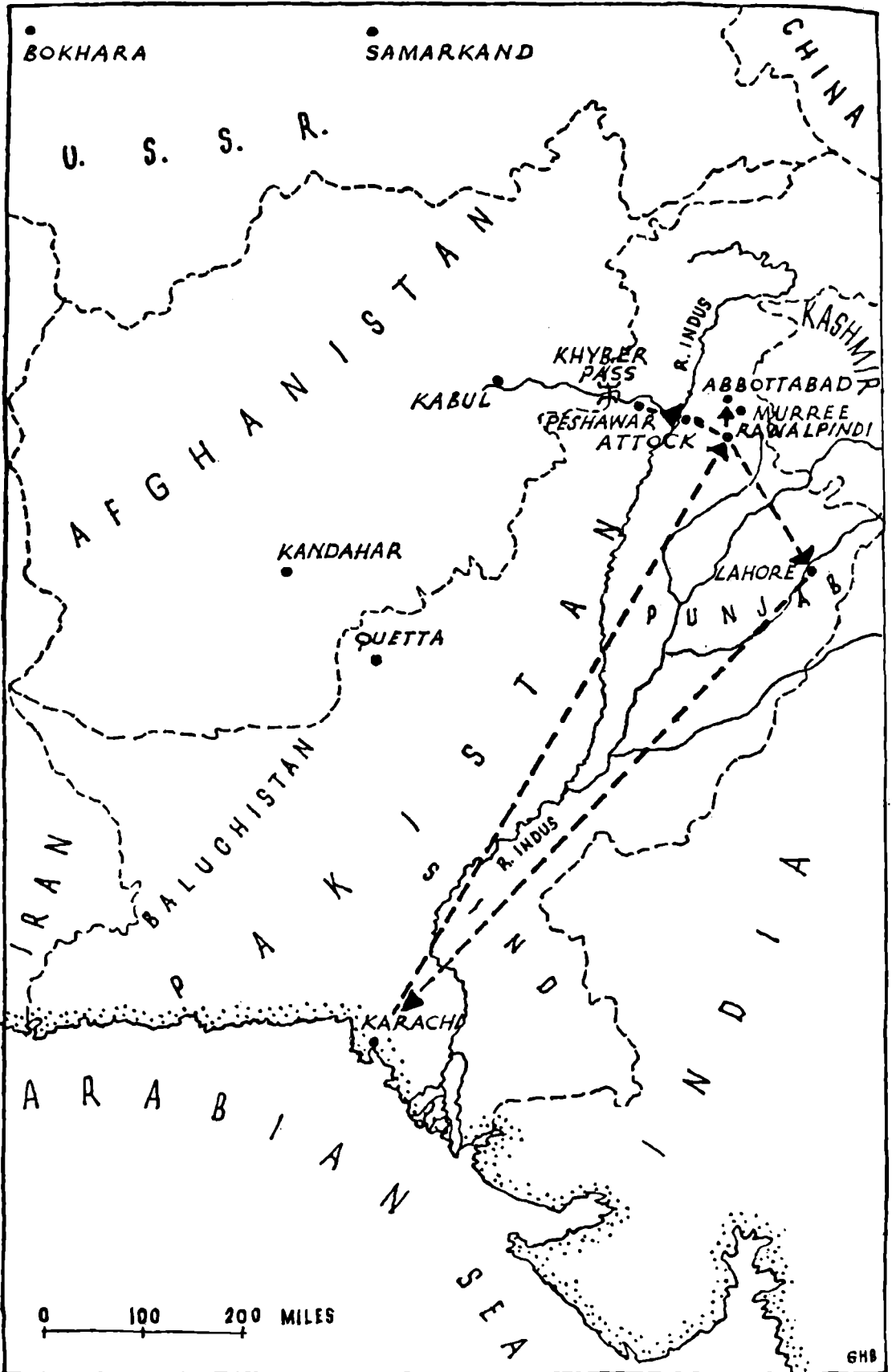
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FOR
NADIA
NUR
PIERRE AND ELLA

Si l'amour porte des ailes
N'est-ce pas pour voltiger?
Mariage de Figaro.



Map showing the author's journey in Pakistan

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PRELIMINARIES

IN THIS book I have attempted no more than to put down the events of my journey in West Pakistan. The strange, the beautiful, and sometimes the terrible things seen, are put side by side with the humdrum and ordinary. Pakistanis in the book rub shoulders with the Europeans. Their extreme friendliness and kindness is shown in contrast with the mixed behaviour of those from our own continent, some of whom were there for gain, but many to serve. There were grand hotels and mud-brick houses, there were a few tears and much laughter, and always the great, brassy sun. If something of these glimmer in the book, then its purpose is fulfilled.

A serious omission is the question of politics. A decade has passed since Muslims and Hindus in India were partitioned, yet Pakistan's internal affairs are still unsettled and further complicated by the bitter question of Kashmir. Implications are not always clear, and it is not always possible even to distinguish opponents, let alone choose sides. But basically, and this is the point, Pakistan is united. Islam is the unifying force and its omnipresence I have tried to show by its incidental effects, a mosque or two or a shrine, and the herdsman by the roadside saying his prayers.

When the tide of British rule receded, much flotsam was left upon the shore, and since this must disappear with passing years some of it is included, a character here, a building there.

Unexpectedly, the journey from Europe to Asia was enjoyable, and so I have recorded it, to give an idea of what went before.

No book about Pakistan can ever be complete, for no sooner is it written than the country has changed, as lusty young things must. However, I hope the following pages faithfully reproduce some of the abiding qualities.

Gratefully, I would like to say 'Thank you' to all the Pakistanis met during that autumn by the Indus, especially to the sweeper-boys and bearers; the bus-drivers of the hot plains

and drovers of the mountains; the staff of the Inter-Services Public Relations Office, in particular Commander Husain, Captain Jaffary and Captain Agha Babur; to the Divisional Officers of Information at Rawalpindi, Peshawar and Lahore for photographs; to Riaz Hussain Shah, Curator of the museum at Taxila, and to members of the forces and United Nations who gave me lifts and hospitality.

Thank you, and one day I will return.

ROBIN BRYANS

December, 1957

VIA GARE DE LYON

MY WAY to the Gare de Lyon, main station from Paris for the south, lay beneath plane trees. Already the boulevards were acrid at approaching autumn. Like an hour-glass running out, summer had ebbed a little more each day. Now, the first chill wind would drive respectable first-floor tenants from their balconies, and the top-floors would pull the shutters to and begin to think of fuel for hungry stoves. Autumn would open the University, the academies, the art schools, and back would flood the students who had been away for the summer.

Before turning the corner I looked up and saw Pierre leaning far out of his window, waving. In the highest branches of the tree below a torn stocking fluttered, all that remained of my summer with him and Ella and the others. It had been a madhouse. Pierre and Ella fought every day and sometimes every night, especially if she fidgeted while he tried to capture on canvas the corn-field of her hair. She would shout out, "Why should I sit still? You don't pay me." Then out would go her clothes through the window to fall into the plane tree. Coming back to eat at Madame Hubert's *bistro* on the ground floor, I would see skirt and blouse and stockings flying overhead like a Christmas tree.

I put down one of my bags and waved back, the artist disappeared into his room to nurse a broken ankle and I plunged into rush-hour traffic. What memories of Pierre's room! When he was not fighting or making love to Ella, we had eaten fabulous meals which she cooked, while in a good mood, in the tiny kitchen on our floor. Nobody ever seemed to have money, but there was always cheap wine and endless sessions on Gurdjieff. His philosophy had been our great interest in common, between all the students in the house, the communist law student, the wan-faced female biologist, the diminutive architect in drain-pipe trousers who liked poodles and being beaten, and two medical students who did not like anything.

Smearing a hole in the steam of her café window, like an Eskimo breaking ice, Madame Hubert had seen me departing and hurried out. The strong arms encircled me and I had a final whiff of garlic, a smell that never quite cleared from the café. After embracing, she pulled my ear, a special token of affection, and said for the hundredth time how much she would miss me. And remember, she said, holding both my hands, to give her best regards to the *ange brun*. I recalled Christmas Eve when Madame had panted up the stairs as she always did when English-speaking people came in. “*Êtes-vous là?*” she shouted and banged on the studio door, “*Venez, venez, un de vos étrangers.*” Downstairs I found Nur Khan, a tall young Pathan whose handsome smile bowled Madame over, and eventually captivated us all. Even Pierre paused in the pursuit of love to listen to his stories from the North-West Frontier. From the first moment Nur Khan had been Madame’s *ange brun*, and his photograph was stuck in the mirror frame behind the bar.

It was right to walk to the station listening for the last time to the song of a great city. Over the granite sets of the Place de la Bastille shuddered a whirl of French cars, scooters, enormous buses, and American limousines, unexpectedly blue and white and chromiumed. Striped blinds hung over the pavement tables where we had all sat drinking *café-filtre*, probably paid for by Ella with a dank note taken from her shoe. Down to the right were the little shops hung with strings of onions, full of fantastic loaves, cheeses or mouldy bottles of wine. And here was the round church wedged between a warehouse and a tenement where Ella had burned many pinnacles of wax after rows with Pierre.

So I took leave of the worn streets, the plane tree and its tattered stocking, the stairs where the little architect wept when locked out by his drunken soldier friend. When Nur Khan had gone, he left a thirst in me that only travel could quench, and I knew that before the year ended I would set out for the sun of Pakistan.

And now the Gare de Lyon, desolate and exciting, swallowed me. At the end of an echoing concourse was a notice with ROMA in large letters, and Modane, Torino, Genova, Pisa in smaller. I found the carriage, climbed the high steps, and

looked for my reserved seat. Smiling from it in the confidence of faultless dentures, a matron refused to believe in the existence of a reservation system. Her legs, plump against the seat, did not reach the floor, and she held a huge handbag of shiny black plastic clasped to her barrel body like a child. Opposite, short-haired, red-faced, but more uncertain, sat her husband. In the racks above them aluminium suitcases were crammed to the ceiling.

“Do you speak English?” I asked. “Yeah, sure,” the stocky man replied. He did not know about special seats. His passage to Rome had been booked right through from New York. He offered to move, but I told him to wait and see if the compartment filled. They were Italian immigrants going home for the first time in forty years. Their young American family was left behind. “This is my grandson,” said the woman, fishing in her bag and handing me a snap of a slim youngster in U.S. Navy uniform, “but he can’t speak Italian.” In a village three hours by bus from Rome waited the oldest branch of this flourishing tree, the ninety-year-old parents.

Outside in the corridor, the last-minute commotion of departure filled the train. Suitcases were manhandled along the space cluttered with people saying goodbye through windows. I found enough room for my small overnight bags between cracks of the Americans’ luggage and took a seat. But not for long.

A blaze of crimson flamed at our compartment door. Oily black hair swept to a large knot at the back tied with ribbon and gardenias. From the silk *sari* a dark olive arm with dozens of bangles rested in a theatrical pose on the side. Eyes, heavily pencilled to emphasise their Indian form, passed over the Americans, and over me. She stepped in and pronounced that I occupied her seat. The smile of the American woman looked a little less fixed. It dawned slowly on them that the New York agency had after all slipped up. As the racks already creaked under the aluminium cases, the Indian woman filled all the seats on one side with her collection of packages, bags and trunks.

Arrival of another claimant saved further doubts for the Americans. Something vaguely familiar stirred in my mind

over the newcomer. Black eyes, black hair, the rapid speech could only be Italian. But the fur cape and lace-edged blouse over yet another matronly bosom reminded me of an English boarding-house landlady. Leaving their cases behind, the Americans went. Suddenly Ella was there, breathless and dishevelled from pushing the whole way through the train. A cigarette burned between her fingers, and she wore a pair of Pierre's bright yellow socks. "I just had to come for a last goodbye and to give you this." She pressed a St. Christopher medal into my hand. It was a fleeting moment, an impromptu gesture of parting, so that for a moment I wanted to leap out of the train and go back with her, forgetting about the journey to Pakistan.

Although only three of us sat in the compartment when the train finally glided out, it was filled. Mrs. Jhangiani, the Indian, spoke extravagantly about herself and asked inquisitively about me. Married to an Indian colonel, she had been away from him, her son and daughter on a short summer course in England. "For English literature," she explained with a flourish of bangles, "and also to represent my country." Obviously from the flash of her eyes, shoulder half seen through the mist of *sari*, and the glimpse of scarlet-nailed sandalled foot, carefully arranged on the seat, literature was not her only interest.

I detached myself, for I knew that if anything went wrong, she would use me. When there were no porters I would have to carry her luggage, when the dinner bell went I would have to invite her, and when the ticket-collector came the big eyes would plead with me to explain how she had misplaced her through London-Genoa ticket. More of this and of the sharp glint behind the softness, I was also to see later, for Mrs. Jhangiani's ship now lying at Genoa and mine were one and the same. She withdrew to sort through her handbag once again for the lost ticket, and then went out to the corridor.

"That's a nice load she's got there," said a broad Glasgow voice in my ear. I jumped from watching the southern suburbs of Paris slipping by. The Italian woman indicated the cliff of luggage in front of her, with only a cave left for Mrs. Jhangiani to curl up in. I explained that the Indian woman could not be

blamed for all of it. "But tell me now, are you really going to Karachi?" She listened incredulous, and told me her name was Ida. In Glasgow she owned a café—two, in fact—in the centre of the town. Immigrant to Scotland from La Spezia, her birthplace, Ida had lived in Glasgow for thirty years with her Italian husband. Unlike the Americans, who had never been back, Ida came every year. "Promise," she said earnestly, "promise ye'll send me a card from Karachi, so I can put it up in the café. They'll love it." She produced chocolates and home-made cakes, insisting I ate.

Ida was expansive, and, like a straightforward Glaswegian, which she much preferred to the Italian character, declared that her 'straight-jacket' was killing her. Two days of travelling without change of clothes told on her, so the iron-ribbed stays were soon on display. Mrs. Jhangiani demonstrated how Indian women never wear corsetry by showing a brown midriff between blouse and *sari*. Poor Ida declared that she had been so 'cut about' in her time that such display was impossible for her. As darkness dropped over the countryside fleeting past our window, the two women began an exchange of operations and illnesses not in any way designed to spare my ears.

I pretended to sleep. The train rocked and it grew colder. We climbed up into the Alps, which begin their mighty crescent through Switzerland and north Italy from this southern part of France. As the night progressed, people on the train settled down. The Coca-Cola man paid his last call and over-profuse compliments to Mrs. Jhangiani, who had made sure that empty bottles had to be collected at least six times. Once she nudged me and whispered I should share a topcoat with her, as the night air penetrated our bones. Whenever I opened my eyes in the following hours to move a cramped leg or arm, the black gaze opposite fastened on every movement like a panther watching its prey. In her corner Ida nodded and snored, a bejewelled hand twitching at the handle of her bag.

When my watch with incredible slowness reached five, fierce fluorescents gleamed through the window and the train shuddered to a stop. We were at Modane, mountain border town between Italy and France. A trolley with coffee and *croissants* repaired the damage of a sleepless night.

I walked to the end of the platform beyond the glare of lights. Across the sky ran the steep outline of the mountains and above, the pale tone of false dawn. Air, cold and sweet flowed down from still hidden heights. As I watched, the silhouette sharpened.

The way to Genoa, dropping all the time, ended with ridge after ridge of mountains tipped by the rising sun with crags of gold. Peaks swung into view, higher and yet higher, remote as Olympus, mysterious as Valhalla. Snow still streaked the shaded sides of the loftiest. Lower down, the grandeur softened as clumps of firs appeared, clawing at sheer rock. Villages with square stone houses clustering round a church, topped the foothills. The twisting roads and bridges crossing wide streams in the valley bottoms looked exquisite in the gentler landscape humanised over centuries. In this high region at the end of summer, the hills were dry and brown, and the stream beds, usually covered by swollen torrents, were dotted with boulders.

For Ida, a paradise journey began. Nose pressed to the window, elated comments burst from her. After a year among the granite streets of Glasgow, the warm glow of morning over the vineyards and the sight of women following men with scythes to a day of sun-stiff harvest must have seemed like heaven.

A halt at Turin's new and smart station was long enough for breakfast and prepared us for the last run into Genoa. The flat landscape was that of eighteenth-century paintings, and their vast skies filled with yellowish clouds and patches of shadow over fields set for the last act of summer. White oxen pulled the plough and boys with sticks herded groups of bony cattle to the best grazing. Poplars stood in sentinel rows, shimmering olive-green and silver. Ida's first rapture subsided, though she did not desert her post at the window. Her cries of "Honest, would you believe it?" or "Beautiful, eh?" delivered in her broad accent with squeezes of my arm, became fewer. Then the suburban houses in the modern outskirts of Italian cities appeared between the poplars, here a small factory, there a storage yard close to the railway.

Hills began again, the train plunging from bright sunlight to

gloomy tunnels at every few hundred yards. Mrs. Jhangiani retired to apply a new face, and while she was away we saw Genoa lying in a cradle of hills against the sea. A tunnel hid it, and the train in the open again rushed over an elevated track along the back of tall tenements. Tiers of shuttered windows, peculiarly Italian, rose above us. Festoons of washing hung from balconies, from house to house, and in the courtyards, and alleys beneath swarmed in the heat. From the corridor we looked over the blue harbour and tried to see my ship among the berthed liners.

Mrs. Jhangiani, painted a different colour and a change of artificial flowers in her hair, came to the corridor and a porter took her luggage or, rather, went to get a barrow for it. I took Ida's hand. "Be sure to send me a wee card from Karachi," she said. "Ye'll love Genoa. Go to the cemetery; it's a real treat there." With further goodbyes and blown kisses, the train took her south to the sailor town of La Spezia.

The comic opera of luggage disposal involved a host of characters, but had no plot. It lasted three hours, and all ended happily after much argument and gesticulation, though Mrs. Jhangiani wanted to call consuls and police because each of her many cases was charged 100 lire. Like it or not, I had to pay, for she pretended not to have any Italian money, and the bags were deposited in the Customs building.

Finding an hotel could not be difficult in Genoa: the square in front of the station consisted of almost nothing but hotels. Passing a patient gardener who stood in the shade of palms hosing the grass, I took a side turning terminated by flights of white marble steps. The less important hotels were situated here. I chose one and entered.

Since the turn of the century the shining brass lamps and hand-railing, the ponderous side-pieces in the dining-room, and probably even the potted palms had remained unchanged. For one night the atmosphere of half a century back could do no harm; to-morrow would bring the more congenial surroundings of the ship for the East. Not that interest lacked in the hotel. Next to my table sat its permanent resident, a bony man belonging to the same era as the hotel. The distinguished air, the hands that moved with delicacy as though in company

with dowagers, and the ancient hair dyed orange on top refused to acknowledge modernity.

He pounced on me, and when lunch finished with ripe peaches and grapes served in finger-bowls of water, he invited me to drink coffee upstairs. The furniture filling his room was all that the decline of his once noble family had left. Crests were engraved into the woodwork, the padding and cushions were embroidered with coat-of-arms. The Count offered peppermint creams, and we stirred coffee with antique English tea-spoons fragile as gossamer. For some reason known to himself only, he steered the conversation on a steady course between *Debrett* and the *Almanac de Gotha*. Once I mentioned a nobleman of mutual acquaintance and his squeaky voice shot to the top of the scale with excitement. "Ah, dear Evan. . . . I knew him so well in Rome in the old days, at the Beda, you know, before he succeeded." I began to wonder if this pathetic creature stroking a fat Pekinese was a woman in disguise.

On side tables cast nonchalantly, but with a specific purpose and giving the appearance of an English dentist's-waiting room, were copies of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* and *Country Life*. At the end of half an hour I thought I could leave without offence, we bowed each other to the door, and I ran down the steps. But there he was behind me, would I like to see "a wonderful sketch by one of those Mitford girls?"

In the hot streets, horses waited patiently, resignedly, ancient open carriages harnessed to their pitiful flanks. They clopped unperturbed between scooters and buzzing Fiats, doing the sights for visitors. I preferred to wander freely, to go down narrow streets where the inevitable washing was strung across, shutting out the sky, or to look into half-forgotten churches where the preserved bodies of saints lay and exposed eternity to view. War-time bombing had shattered the roof and interior of a beautiful baroque church. But now the precious fragments were assorted and stacked and much of the elaborate carving hoisted back into place. A gilt and blue painted heaven opened above the line of solid architecture in a flurry of splendour, an aerial procession of saints and martyrs, angels and cherubs.

Next morning, Pekinese under arm, red carnation inserted

in the buttonhole of an immaculate suit, and silver-topped Edwardian cane tapping his legs, the Count accompanied me to the Customs sheds. All the officials were known to him; with a wave of his cane my bags went sailing through without a hitch, and were taken on board. His regret at parting was profound, a large, scented card would serve to remind me of him. Another bow and he picked his way discreetly between sweating porters and crowds of passengers.

Bevies of nuns were coming and going on the ship's gangway like bees at the entrance to a hive when I came up on deck after being shown my cabin by a steward. Brown, grey, black and white, some with broad, others with pointed coifs, they clogged the narrow bridge still connecting the ship to land. A few tall priests mingled with them, and one of these told me that the nuns were missionaries. In several languages the loudspeakers requested, "All visitors ashore please!" and most of the Sisters went weeping down the gangway back to their convents. The young novices for the mission field grabbed the hands of departing prelates who had also come to say goodbye, for a final kiss. Handkerchiefs and tears, waving arms and shouts followed across the widening gap of water. Unemotional tugs soon slipped their ropes, and under our own power we glided to the open channel and the sea.

It was an ancient spectacle. From the ring of hills merchants had watched 500 years before with spy-glass in hand for their ships coming laden from the East, for Genoa and its bitter rival, Venice, succeeded Constantinople as trading capitals. And no doubt the tavern strumpets on the dwindling quay came to weep as Genoese sailor-boys sailed off again into the unknown East. At least, presumably, for they still did nowadays. I had watched one girl watery about the eyes from too much alcohol and crippled by the loss of a spindly high heel from one of her shoes. The sorrows of parting were relieved for the quayside people by the efforts of those nearest, trying to keep her from staggering into the water. The Count stood there, waving till the end. Because his Pekinese was old and suffered from paralysed rear legs, he always carried it, or put a long silk scarf under its body as a cradle, so that the dog could go on its fore-legs. Such a walk took place along the waterfront,

when the drunken prostitute stooped to admire it and fell in a heap on the pavement. I could well imagine the Count's indignation from the way he snatched up the dog and bolted away.

But under that sun, tears on our ship soon dried, and temporal sorrows were lost in missals for the nuns. I had not seen Mrs. Jhangiani anywhere and could only presume her safe embarkation. At first sight, the other passengers did not fall into recognisable groups, except for the nuns, distinguished by their habits. Later in the afternoon vine-terraced islands lined the water on both sides of the ship. On the near ones, houses and trees looked like perfect models, but the further islands vanished into a mist as though gods and shepherdesses dwelt in the blue haze.

Clinging to the rails with binoculars and cameras at the ready were many women as different in shape and size as the islands themselves. A curious eagerness possessed them, and though they spoke in Swedish, German and the clipped, time-saving phrases of American, I guessed them to be missionaries also. Their zeal was studied, plain faces deliberately left unpainted, hair uncut and drawn to a bun. More than I suspected turned up during the course of the day and with their men formed the core of my European companions. Baptist or Plymouth Brethren sects claimed the majority's loyalty. The notice-board already announced, 'Prayer and Bible Study at 07.00 hrs. every day'. And just before our first tea-time on board I found a few Indians in the lounge gathered round the piano watching a woman with the face of a greyhound and the hands of a ploughman, pounding out 'Rock of ages cleft for me'.

TURISTICA

NAPLES, SOUTH of Rome, south of nearly all popular tourist haunts in Italy, had no sunshine when I looked through the cabin port-hole at eight o'clock next morning. Bobbing on the flat harbour water were a few craft of the Italian Navy, painted light grey, with sailors in white moving about them. Our engines had stopped; nothing seemed to be happening. A launch slid over the water like a toy boat on a mirror. Thinking the overcast Naples could wait while I had breakfast, I went into the dining-room, where the steward in a very good mood served me from what he called his 'expresso bar', two jugs of coffee and milk. Then up to the deck to see and conquer the city of hot blood and bel canto, baroque extravaganzas and *scugnizzi*. The spinning-tops, boys born in the war, were now grown or growing up parentless, homeless, jobless, cared for by no one but a few mendicant friars, hopeful of nothing except what chance might bring. Beside poverty, the trades of Naples were singing, and love-making. Well, I would see.

Behind the ship and the stark outlines of the new Stazione Maritima, where we moored, massive walls of stone, four round towers and high battlements, and a wide, encircling moat, looked out over the bay towards Vesuvius. At its foot ran the main waterfront road with trams and horse-carriages. Inland, pink buildings crested a pointed hill. Right of the castle the docks curved round in the confusion of sheds and funnels and masts belonging to the thirty or more liners tied up. To the left façades of a massive Renaissance palace rose proudly above the water. A vast empty concourse spread itself in front of the Stazione and beyond its gates a square with trees and fountains ran up to the centre of the town.

At the gangway a Franciscan brother with a threadbare habit and patient eyes like an El Greco monk pleaded for alms to help keep his home for destitute boys. Away from the ship a man attached himself and in passable English offered his services, "Now you see town. I have good car. You want see

Pompeii? I got fast car.” He did not believe when I declined saying I wanted to see Naples on foot. “You! You not walk,” and then aggressively, “Why you not want my car?” As though I had singled him out from all Neapolitans for cruelty, he walked off complaining until out of earshot. But five minutes later, creased with smiles and demonstrative hands flapping like a fish out of water, he went off with an American couple from the ship. They obviously wanted everything on the menu, the ruins of Pompeii, the tour to Vesuvius’ crater to look into the bubbling depths, the town’s bars and maybe a Roman temple or two.

From the gates to the square similar offers followed me, imitation suède jackets, watches and fountain-pens, postcards and cigarette-lighters each with a lurid smoking Vesuvius, replicas of phalli from Pompeii, and even the men’s grandmothers if I so desired. A causeway led me to a stone and wooden bridge where once the drawbridge of the castle must have been. Between two towers a complicated gateway was carved in Renaissance times, a lacework on the stern medieval armour.

If the Castel Nuovo had been an English historical monument, admission would have been charged and a programmed tour made of state apartments and rooms, antique, sedate, but dead. In Naples, rooms within the formidable bastions housed municipal offices, headquarters of the white-tunicked traffic-police, a courtroom and a beautiful chapel used as a chair-store. Square, dramatically hemmed in by the high enclosing walls, the courtyard swarmed, alive with Neapolitans indulging their genius for living in the open air. Through the gate they streamed to follow their business in the great building or merely to see the platforms of the previous night’s concert being dismantled. Or to sit on the steps and watch cats, leaner than the Genoese horses, chasing pigeons. Women with young children queued up waiting to go on a free holiday into the country provided by the town’s fund.

Beneath thick dust on the disused chapel floor I found a beautiful tomb of various-coloured marbles carved in low relief. Pigeons lived in the roof, disturbed only when chairs were brought in and out of this store. But my antiquarian

investigation disturbed Mrs. Jhangiani and her American escort. I asked how she enjoyed the castle. She spread her gold-and-emerald *sari* out in one hand, and explained how attracted the pigeons had been and the resultant ruin from the white spots. I told her that in Ireland such visitations were regarded as a sign of good luck, but she was neither amused nor consoled.

An important wedding had been prepared, and as I came to the steps of the Basilica di S. Francesco di Paola cars drew up and guests passed over the red carpet into the church. The morning coats and showers of taffeta arrived one after the other, their cars driving through a crowd of half-naked children who played in front of the church. The red carpet drew the children like a magnet and they squabbled there until a verger chased them away. Denied their playground, they put their dusty bottoms down on the cool marble of the colonnade, and a mother gave her child, clearly not her last-born, a breast feed.

Like spring blossom bursting its bud, the bride also stepped on to the red carpet and walked to the altar between banked flowers, where an officer of the Italian Navy, with blue sash across his white uniform, waited for her. In front of the altar, behind another fence of flowers, sat the invited guests, and above it in the grey dome electric candles round tiered galleries burned with unwinking gleam. Keeping pace with the bride, the children came in, subdued by the atmosphere and poking dirty little faces amongst the white chrysanthemums and arum lilies. Some Mendelssohn was strained through a microphone and went to die slowly in the coffering of the dome. A boss-eyed girl straddled a 'cello, another wailed with a violin, and a youth produced loud organ music from a tape-recorder. Then two bare bottoms were inside the altar rails trying to capture a mongrel dog. Three elegant women almost came to blows over rearranging the flowing lace train of the praying bride, which the dog had trampled on. But it was a magnificent wedding, though (and here I allowed myself a prosaic thought) how many million lire had it cost?

By the end of the afternoon golden light fell on the castle and the kings' palace, soaking into the stones and casting shadows sharp as knives. More beautiful than the dull morning had promised, the Bay of Naples swept voluptuously round its

disc of blue water, swelling on the further side to Vesuvius and its twin peaks. Ships lay in the harbour like colours on a palette, ours among them, eastward bound and ready to sail again shortly after sundown.

More nuns and missionaries had arrived when I returned. The Pakistani 'Eaglets' cricket team was also safely on board, looking bewildered. And no wonder. From Paris, well-meaning French railway officials had dispatched them to Geneva, mistaking their pronunciation of 'Genova', To people in a hurry speaking a language mutually foreign, an 'e' or an 'o' do not count for much. By going to Geneva they had the additional train ride down to Naples, while all their cricketing gear was left behind, having been sent to Genoa. But next morning makeshift stumps were put up on the deck, and their troubles forgotten in shouts and laughter.

From then on, Pakistani laughter filled the ship, and Pakistani smiles charmed away the heavy atmosphere created by missionary countenances. Among the happiest were the three young Sheikh boys and their Punjabi mother. They were going home from Rome, where their father was *Chargé d'affaires*. But they had also lived in London and the boys went to a prep. school and behaved like English boys. A fourth brother was too young to join them in the swimming-pool. Babu only over a year, was sad and quiet, with the most beautiful eyes. "Here," said Mrs. Sheikh when we met on deck. "You take him. He only likes men." Poor Babu, he wept and screamed when he had to go to a woman's arms. He much preferred sitting on my shoulders as I paddled slowly round the pool, or tottering after the deck-quoits, which he rolled like hoops. His perfectly featured and dusky-complexioned mother sat talking of London and Paris, with Babu quite motionless clinging to my neck. "You must be his uncle," she said. And so uncle I was to all of them. An endearing custom of the sub-continent this, by which friends of the family may be so called. My lively nephews, changing rapidly from English to Urdu or snatches of Italian, accepted me without question. Mrs. Sheikh always wore her Punjabi costume, a silk tunic over wide pyjama trousers, and a long muslin scarf draped over shoulders and bosom, and trailing down the back. Sometimes the

wraiths of muslin enveloped her head, framing the aquiline nose and liquid eyes, so like Babu's.

The new nuns dropped into the ship's routine, lining the rails with an impressive battery of cameras to snap more islands and the Straits of Sicily. The Mother Superior of a Swiss nursing order led easily with her superb *ciné*. She aimed to lead in everything. Her habit was spotless, creaseless white, stretched over a good frame. An old-fashioned dust-cap clung to the spherical face. Paradoxically, she looked a perfect witch for *Hansel and Gretel*, smooth, fed, but betrayed by an expression of authority. Whenever she moved about the ship, her nuns trailed after her like a line of Aylesbury ducks waddling to a pond. This soldierly discipline was maintained even when a swell and rolling motion sent other nuns dashing out of the dining-room. The Swiss Sisters did not stir until Rev. Mother rose and moved with dignity towards the door, despite a handkerchief held to her mouth, and then the faithful ducklings followed in procession.

The pastimes of liner passengers on deck are usually carefree, and the voyage regarded a holiday. True, the cricket team played there, jealously fielding so that the ball did not go flying overboard. But they played in the shadow of the missionaries, sitting in purposeful rows on each side of the swimming-pool. On one side, pious hands clutched breviaries, and on the other Protestants thumbed Bibles, black and red with heavy underlinings and marginal notes.

This mustering of spiritual strength centred round the swimming-pool not because the water inspired meditation, but because the free seats were there. When I emerged from the dressing-room clad only in the slightest of bikinis, hands were raised to screen vision. At the same time the recluse missionaries had also to be vigilant. An American writer and his Swiss-Costa Rican wife, called Coffin, would join me in jumping from a high railing into the pool, sending plumes of water after the fleeing missionaries. Having pioneered the way with our splintering splash, other swimmers joined us. After one morning's wetting I received a solemn warning. Under my towel by the rail was a gospel tract bearing the drawing of a man with bulging eyes clinging to a life-belt in a stormy sea,

and captioned underneath with the words, 'The Wages of Sin is Death'.

Deck friendships filled in odd moments of inactivity. A Parsi student with whom I had been discussing religion took me into a quiet corner and showed me the sacred shirt and thread-girdle made from a hairy goat, worn next to the skin, which Zoroastrian followers always wear. He lent me some of their ancient scriptures, but as I was writing film synopses for the ship's company I could only glance at the books. Here and there in a welter of strange laws and practices, nearly all to do with the dead, I caught glimpses of advice such as, 'If a man throw clothes either of skin or woven upon a dead body he shall have a thousand stripes with the *Aspahê-astra* and a thousand stripes with the *Sraoshô-karana*', and that certain women polluted dung-fuel and ashes when their limbs cast a shadow over them, 'and the salt and lime for washing her shift are to be treated just like stone'.

A Siamese girl with a rubber body would climb out of the water, bend over backwards till her face appeared the right way up between her legs and then walk along the deck like a fantastic crab. Her performance was a mortification to the missionaries and they disapproved when they saw us together, and even more when she tried to teach me the trick. A precocious child who made rude drawings with a tube of tooth-paste, as though icing a cake, and a dog that went mad in the heat and had to be caught by a net, livened up one memorable afternoon.

There was a lean Sindi, a former captain of artillery who had an inordinate desire to take me on a hunting expedition when we landed. His wife read my hand, promising four sons, an illness at forty-five, longevity, but little riches. A Lori gipsy, large and graceful of limb, thinly wrapped in a purple or black *sari*, sloe-eyed and mysterious as a prophetess, and recently converted to Christianity, would pound on my door at an unearthly hour for a game of shuffle-board.

I had the pleasure of sharing a table at meal-times with Dr. Lilian Silburn, an authority and writer on Indian philosophy from the Sorbonne. Though born of a British father, English was only a third language to her, but this did not prevent a

flow of knowledge and impish wit. She was on her annual trip to Kashmir for field-work, and between stories of marriage proposals from weird Indian teachers our thoughts turned towards Gurdjieff, the Russian mystic. From the East he had returned to Europe with a philosophy based on the two great cosmic laws of three and seven. Like the young students of Paris after the war, hurrying along to the vodka sessions of the great master in the Rue des Colonels Rénards, I too had been through my Gurdjieff period, I told her, and thought of the arguments in Pierre's room.

Beside us at the next table was an enormous Sikh like a warrior, his profuse, uncut beard snared in a hair-net. His wife puzzled me, not because her hair was as thin as his was thick, but because although her *sari* did not reach the floor when she sat down, no feet appeared beneath it. She could not cross them under her, since the chair had solid sides. Where did they get to?

On the second day out from Naples, ploughing our way through a sea of the deepest-dyed blue, we passed from Europe into Asia. On the third day we docked at Port Said. The town was placid in afternoon heat as the pilot guided us between the harbour moles and buoys. Egyptians standing on shore waved and peddling craft put out to meet us. In the dusty streets, reminiscent of wooden towns in cowboy films, a crowd of small-time merchants seized on the tourists to sell similar things to those of Naples, with the addition of red fezzes. Having established that trinkets were of no interest, with exaggerated secrecy the pedlar produced French postcards of a rare sordidness. Failing with the postcards, forbidden stimulants, bestial performances and anything else normal or abnormal were offered. Dr. Silburn and I took a horse-carriage and were taken to see the British-French bombing of less than a year before. Standing alone in the flattened area was a podium of stone, all that remained of poor de Lesseps' statue, which the Egyptians had wrenched down in excessive national zeal. Round and round the small block of bombardment we went. Solemnly, taking a piece of chalk, the driver, insistent that we learnt by heart the number of killed, wrote an odd number well over half a million. And Cairo had, of course, been much worse—8 million dead.

Our actual entrance into the Suez Canal was masked by night, but in the morning we moved slowly into the Bitter Lakes and anchored until late afternoon. From the lake shore on one side, the desert shimmered into the distance until its undulations of blazing sand and soft heat-haze shadows melted into the burnished sky. Through binoculars no living thing moved, only the desert colours changed as the sun moved, gold, streaks of amber, ashen grey and formless at mid-day, and white in the afternoon. A rim of green lined the water on the other side, a belt of palms and tamarisks below a range of dry hills flat on top, but with sharp arrises. Another plateau appeared further inland when the sun dissolved the morning mist. Other ships collected and manœuvred to positions while the Egyptian pilot-boat darted from one to the other. Nearly thirty boats waited in convoy, and we amused ourselves by trying to see from what port they hailed. The missionaries' cameras had been busy, for the Bitter Lakes were said to be the ancient Gulf of Heraeopolis. It provided some excuse for debate between the sects, for some held that the Israelites fleeing from Egypt had crossed here, and others that Moses led them through further south, nearer Suez.

About tea-time we moved again, the terrible silence broken by the pulsing engines and the friendly swish of water. The swimming-pool had been emptied at Port Said in order to load stores through the hatch under it, and would not be refilled until free of the Canal. We sizzled like bacon, and to comfort us an old sailor told of the numbers of suicides caused by the even greater heat awaiting us in the Red Sea, always worst at that time of year because of the monsoon.

Through the buoyed channel and the still water, and so into the last twelve miles of the narrow Canal. Evening came on as we slipped past the banks, a stone's-throw from the ship's side. From a greater speed, the bow wave would have risen above the channel wall, crumbling the dunes on either side and blocking passage altogether. The ships following with headlights in an absolutely straight line, looked like cyclists on a country road at night. The dunes, as high as houses, dropped to Canal level at places, and nomads and their camels were pitched for the night, Pharaohs and dictators leaving them

unchanged. Egyptian soldiers at the water's edge waved and grinned as we hung over the rail, and further on a group of youths silhouetted on a dune against the sunset shouted, and signalled with their arms. Once out of the Canal the engines thundered and churned a wake of thick foam from the three screws. Suez passed as a chain of lights and docked boats. And so into the Red Sea. "Just here, the American millionaire threw himself over," said the lugubrious sailor as the chimes of the Swiss musical box came over the amplifier announcing the first sitting for dinner.

Most Europeans now kept to the air-conditioned parts of the ship, for the damp heat induced continuous sweating and exhaustion. Drops of water hung everywhere, and the water splashed from the pool, which normally dried in a few minutes, lay about for hours. When Babu would free me or was sleeping, I kept company with two 'Eaglets', Sheikh Rahman and Jamil Khalid, the youngest cricketer of all. This boy was only fifteen, but already famous in cricket history, for when only thirteen he had taken many wickets against the M.C.C. He could be grave as well as gay, and would stand alone by the rail watching the dreary Red Sea coast, or peering down at the blue-and-white waves. His nose was as straight as a Roman's, with no break at the bridge between his almond-shaped eyes. At home he was to begin engineering studies, and in two years hoped to return to England as a student. Would he return fashioned as another friend, Agha Raja, who was going back with a degree in arts (complete with rabbit-skin hood), a preponderous collection of gramophone records, and a voice like a broadcasting quiz-master? But Agha, who chose to cover himself with a veneer of English manners, could not muffle his real nature, which was warm and generous. For use in conversation he had an impressive armoury of knowledge, particularly on England and the English.

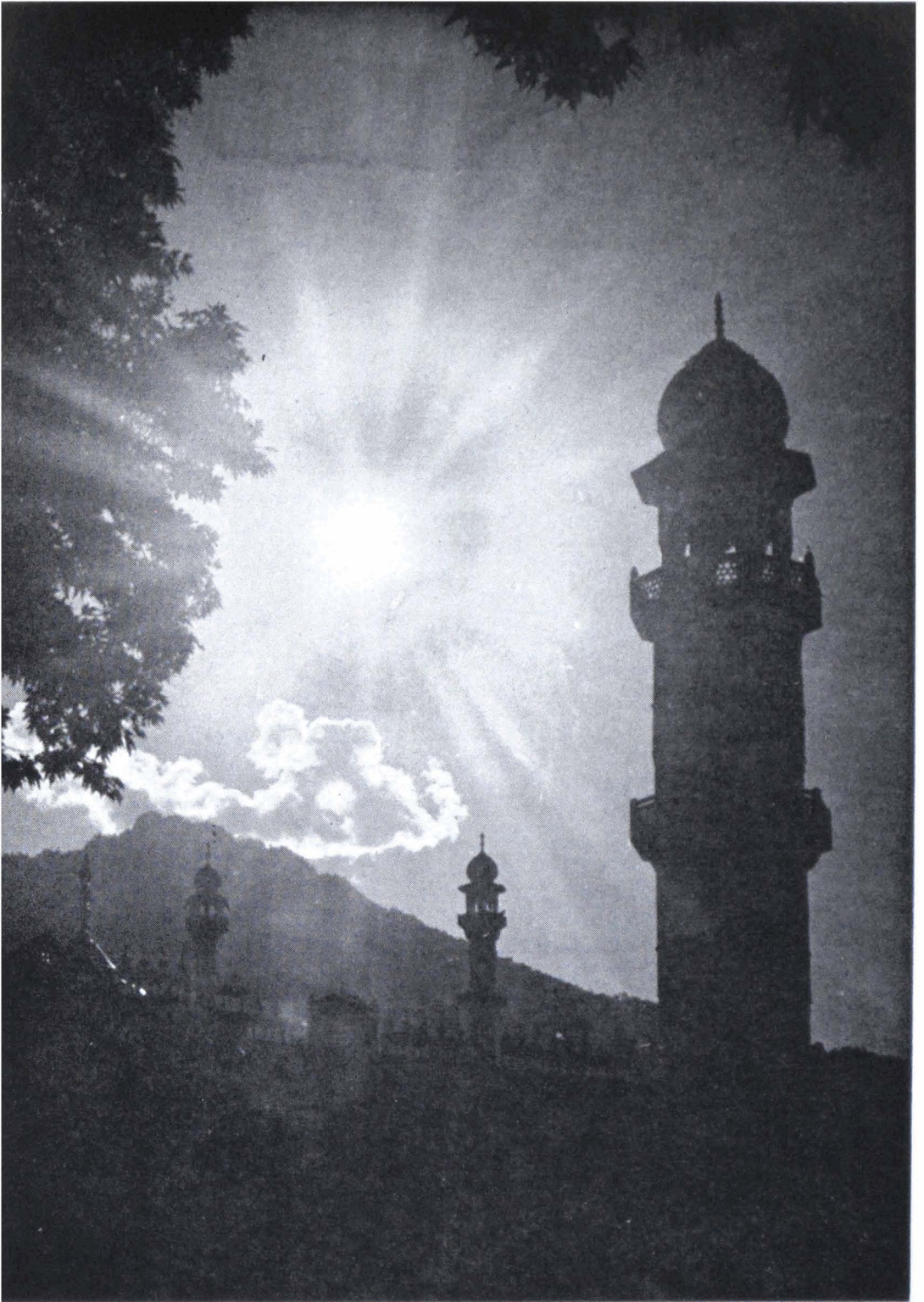
Agha disrupted the plans I made with Miss Rendle for the International Night. As the only 'fellow-Britisher', as she put it, with whom she could consort, Miss Rendle regarded me as her special property. All her confidences and complaints about the foreign ways of the ship and its passengers were poured in my ear, and mine alone. For fifty years, Miss Rendle taught in a

girls' school and was just retired. I had congratulated her on both these achievements and thereafter could not escape. Meal-times were safe, however, for she sat at the table of a German engineer, and conversed with him in the German learned years before at her finishing school in Heidelberg. But her love of Germans, though not of Germany, had collapsed when her two brothers were killed in the First World War, and had never recovered.

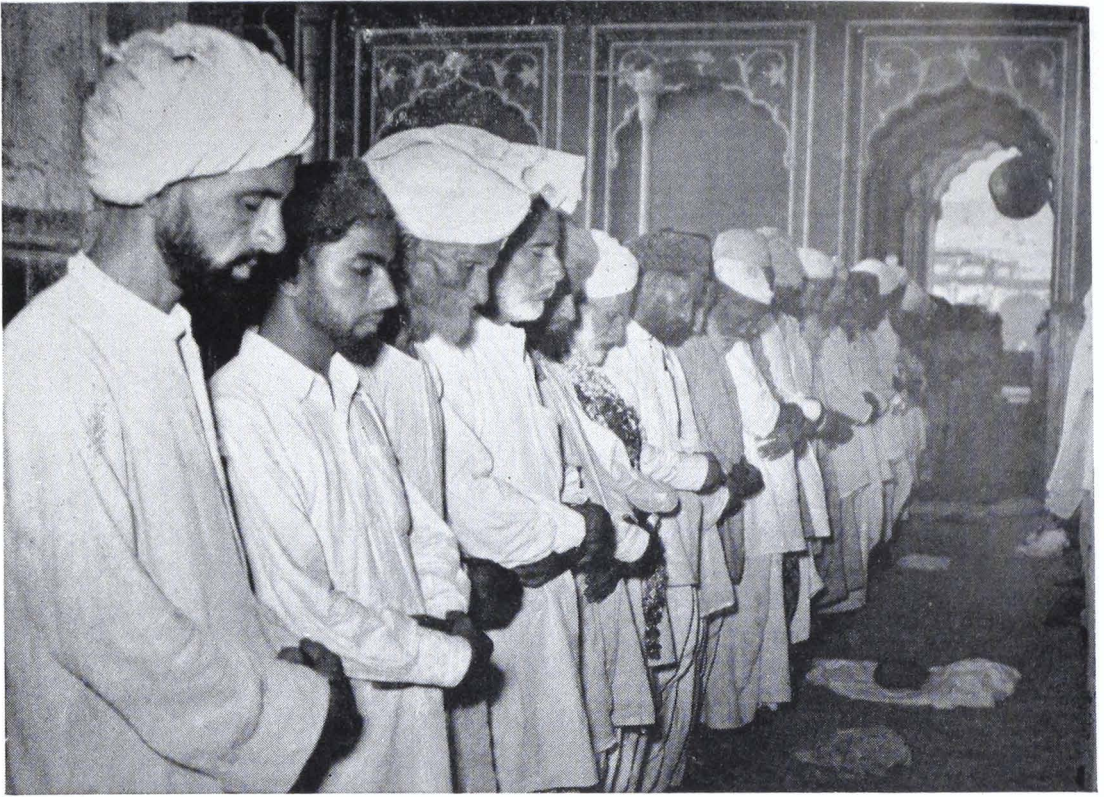
However, with the engineer all went well until the day of the Fancy Dress Ball. A breathless Miss Rendle hunted me down, and explained an outrage just perpetrated by the German. She had been preparing herself for appearance at luncheon when a tapping on the door disturbed her. She opened it and the engineer asked if he might come in, as he had a secret favour to ask her. Would she be kind enough to let him wear some of her clothes? "I felt quite faint, and I've come straight to you." Was he mad, did he intend to rape her, or was he one of those peculiar men who liked wearing women's clothes? Could he possibly be in love with her? What would the nephew with whom she was staying in Calcutta say if he knew? I explained about the evening's Fancy Dress Ball, and assured her it was simply that the German wanted his costume to be kept a secret. "Oh dear, no. There was much more to it than that, I'll be bound," and thereafter Miss Rendle never felt safe.

By International Night she had recovered her spirits a little. Captain's Dinner and the Fancy Dress Ball had been such a success that another evening's entertainment was organised. Since there were so many different nationalities on board, there seemed an opportunity to have a programme of songs and dances from each country. A fever of nationalism seized the ship, cliques were broken and reformed under flags, and even the missionaries forsook each other for the company of unsaved compatriots. Miss Rendle found me hiding in the Reading Room behind a newspaper. "Aha," she said playfully. "I know how shy you men are, but we two really must do something for England. Something 'really' English."

"You will have to do a solo," I answered. "You see, I am Irish." Undaunted, she said, "Delightful," as if I had confessed to some peculiarity. "It will add character." I had a vision of



Sundown, and soon the *moazzin* will call from the minaret



Eid prayers



Cooking at a pavement café

her organising concerts at the girls' school, and knew there was no evasion. I agreed to meet her in the afternoon and discuss any ideas that had occurred. "Splendid," she said, and left me to the newspaper. I thought no more about it, hoping she would be discouraged, for all the other groups were a dozen or more strong. But after lunch I saw Miss Rendle waiting at the ladder into the swimming-pool where I lay floating. I dressed and joined her. She had enlisted the support of three first-class passengers, including a woman I thought was American. But it turned out she was Canadian—at least, she possessed a Canadian passport, though her mother was Austrian, her father Polish and she had been born in France and grew up in Russia. This concatenation of origins was voted an excellent qualification for a compère.

Miss Rendle, having enlarged on her 'finds', announced we were to do a scene from Shakespeare. "What could be more English?" Agha Raja in the next deck-chair was about to dispute, but I suppose, seeing the horror in my face, desisted. She thought *Romeo and Juliet* too difficult, *Macbeth* too macabre, *Midsummer Night's Dream* beautiful but too involved for the foreigners, though "we did it for Founder's Day four years ago, you know." Eventually the choice devolved on *The Merchant of Venice*. Miss Rendle wanted to do the court scene, but the discussion was not improved by Agha, who threw us into confusion with his expert knowledge. According to him, Shakespeare had borrowed the pound of flesh idea from a Pathan King who lived hundreds of years before the English playwright. Miss Rendle was indignant and went red in the face as Agha explained that the Pathan made a decree against shopkeepers who gave short weight to women and children. Their punishment consisted of having their buttocks sliced for a weight equivalent to the short measure. Miss Rendle had "never heard of such a thing", and attacked Agha for making such accusations against the Bard. They both got very cross and raised their voices, Agha to extol the greatness of the Pathan King of Delhi, Miss Rendle to defend the rights of English literature over history, and of fiction over fact. The others, who were not up in the arts, disappeared behind the mysterious barrier leading to first-class.

The same night a much chastened Miss Rendle caught my sleeve. "I don't know how to apologise for this afternoon's behaviour; it was dreadful, all that talk about human meat." I laughed. "Please don't think I'm upset, Miss Rendle." "Oh no, not you. The little friend of the Canadian woman." She glanced round to see if we were quite alone, "Her maiden name was Ramsbottom." How on earth did the old girl dig out people's maiden names when I could not even remember their married ones? "Oh, you see, we were talking about my old training college; she had a cousin there, and I found out that way."

But International Night was a huge success. Any programme with yodelling Swiss nuns and American missionaries in jeans, singing cowboy songs, was bound to be. The Swedes began the evening with part-songs in fifths, looking stiff and shy with a row of blond-headed children in front, holding flags of all the Scandinavian countries. Since the idea was mooted, they had been practising at the lounge piano as though for an eisteddfod under the direction of the tall, solemn man who introduced himself as a 'priest of Sweden'. What a wow were the Americans, who came next in Wild West tartan shirts and ten-gallon stetsons, the women's faces beaming with homely goodwill. "We begin with a number very dear to the heart of our late beloved President, Franklin D. Roosevelt." And they gave 'Home, home on the range', and followed it with some hand-clapping, knee-slapping songs, immensely expressive of the healthy life back home. They were hilarious. So was the audience. Mexicans, Siamese, Indians, Italians, French and Chinese—in fact, seventeen nations in all—filled a bill lasting for hours, interspersed with dancing. The Pakistanis sent the 'Eaglets' to sing in subtle quarter-tones, a quietly insistent melody, ancient and remote, about a forlorn lover. And afterwards a veiled Punjabi woman danced exotically, a bewitching Salome of quivering flesh. Miss Rendle refused to believe it was Sheikh Rahman, the cricketer, until I threatened to bring him over to our table and prove it.

The hours to Karachi were numbered now, but my work for the shipping company was heavily in arrears. As many times as I went below to finish it, I was carried up to the deck again.

To Eastern students going home for the last time with degrees and diplomas won in the West, it was a milestone of their lives. Overnight they would cease to be the 'coloured' foreigner and become absorbed into their own people once more. Families and business were the end of carefree student days in Europe or the U.S.A. No wonder an incendiary excitement ran through the ship, touching off even those not directly concerned. On deck there was drinking and the throwing of mugs overboard to leave a little of themselves in the sea that divided East from West, youth from responsibility.

Downstairs the concert had given place to dancing. The expert five-piece orchestra, which had proved its skill in managing afternoon Palm Court music or quick-steps equally well, launched into its final number. '*Que sera, sera*, whatever will be will be, The future's not ours to see', sang the people who were leaving one destiny for another. At one in the morning, the leader shut his violin case and the trumpeter uncoiled himself from a cocoon of paper streamers.

By four o'clock the deck was still crowded with merry-makers. Mrs. Jhangiani was there, having forsaken the hauteur of first-class, the German Ambassador, the Prince, the former Prime Minister of Afghanistan, the Marshal, and the young playboy by whose invitation she had been elevated. Youth called under the stars and down she came in a gorgeous Chinese coat, the slinky eyes that had haunted the train from Paris still unquenched. In a group telling stories I was most astonished to see Miss Rendle sitting on the edge of a deck-chair listening intently to the German engineer. The success of the evening, or perhaps something stronger, had gone to her head. Moonlight bathing on the beach near Karachi was the engineer's topic, and he told how they had found turtles' eggs in the sand and thrown them at each other, and afterwards swam again to wash off the mess. Miss Rendle leaned a flushed cheek to me, 'Typical Hun, to destroy the dear little turtles,' she whispered.

KARACHI INTERLUDE

RELUCTANTLY I prepared to exchange my cool and surgically clean cabin for the clammy embrace of Karachi. From the deck the town could not be seen, except for a few nondescript water-front buildings. A dhow, with its tattered triangular sail hung from a straining boom, glided to the ship's side to unload stores. Already friends and relatives of the cricket team had come on board with bright-coloured garlands as greetings. Some Americans in immaculate tropical suits, more serious-looking Germans, and laughing Pakistanis waited with open passports to finish disembarkation formalities. There was not much difficulty, and in a few minutes I was hunting for my bags in the Customs sheds. A little way further down my Sheikh nephews, and wide-eyed Babu in his mother's arms, were being greeted by a throng of excited relatives. A great pile of luggage, cars and wooden boxes was being supervised by Captain Sheikh, a young brother in the Pakistani Cavalry, to whom I was introduced. Very soon afterwards, having said goodbye, I was standing outside looking at a row of carts with sleepy camels drawn up by the Customs building.

I looked back at the smooth white hull and superstructure of the ship, fluttering with gaudy pennants, that brought me 60° east, 15° south of Genoa. Now to the north lay the vast land-mass of Asia, and south, unbroken ocean to the Antarctic.

To be rid of luggage, I went straight to the hotel, and as we passed along the congested streets, where pedestrians and animals wandered among cars and lorries, I knew Karachi could only be a stepping-stone for me. During my stay I was to meet Europeans who confessed to liking the city, but perhaps distended salaries and large houses with servants were the cause. Karachi was important enough, the Government was here, it was Pakistan's biggest port, and at the airport all trans-continental services connected, but it was not beautiful enough for me to think of postponing my trip north for more

than a few days. A breeze from the sea made the 100° temperature bearable, but stirred the dust, depositing fresh layers on buildings and streets, turning the already dry palms a shade browner. Flat, arid, not even the occasional rows of trees and patches of artificially-watered grass could completely disguise the desert. Featureless except for sand-hills, for hundreds of miles it encircled the city. Dry ochre patches of it appeared on vacant sites; where roads had no pavements, pedestrians walked in sand. In front of the hotel on a wide tract of land criss-crossed with footpaths some boys played football in sand-clouds.

The hotel booking had been made in advance, and I found a pretentious building of yellow stone, with a dome on one corner. Wide verandas gave access to the rooms, and closed shutters excluded the midday sun. I registered in the high entrance hall, where fans whirled from the ceiling, and a turbaned page-boy took me to my room. A train of porters followed, six to carry my six light pieces of luggage. I saw for the first time a phenomenon which never failed to surprise me: the tremendous amount of manpower involved for relatively simple jobs. The page-boy, distinguished from the porters by a grey linen uniform buttoned to the chin, led away the six ragged, turbaned and shirt-tailed men. Overhead, the vanes of a fan cut the air with a sabre swish, creating an illusion of coolness.

A screen of faded cotton-print curtains divided the bedroom from sitting-room, for my room was in fact a suite, as I was to find everywhere in Pakistani hotels. At the time I did not appreciate what a luxury I had in the bathroom with running hot and cold water and a flushing lavatory. A notice warning against drinking water from the tap hung askew over the wash-basin. Quiet movements in the sitting-room brought me back from thoughts of how many million microbes of cholera, typhus or dysentery would float innocently in a tooth-glass. Besides the page-boy and the six porters, a personal servant now joined the list of those responsible for the comfort of hotel guests. My room bearer, superior in air to even the superior page-boy, fussed and flicked persistent dust from the furniture. He came and went on mysterious errands, and brought a vacuum flask

of water. "It is boiled?" I said affirmatively, but with a suggestion of doubt. Brown eyes reproached the lack of faith, "Yes, *sahib*." All the same, I repeated the question each time the water came. The walk to the kitchen refrigerator, where boiled water chilled in bottles, required more effort than the nearest tap, and microbes were merciless, as I knew from previous tropical experience. The bearer, as proof of authority, adjusted the fan from its switchbox on the wall, reducing the gale to a gentle breeze.

Through shuttered windows, crows screamed angrily together, drowning the endless song of crickets. And from the veranda side the thin wail of a reed-pipe floated, up and down; weaving curious turns, the oboe sound drew me to the door. How could I resist the music? Through the hotel garden, an oasis in flower-pots, past huge American cars left to bake in the parking area, by a guard at the gate who rose to salute, I followed the intoned piping. A glaring sky hung with rigid, watchful hawks, stretched over the city. There beneath the keekar tree, oblivious of the world around, sat a snake-charmer, the mesmerised cobra risen before him. Round the basket a small audience squatted, fascinated by the spectacle of impotent malice. Swaying slightly, with a hood distended, the snake rose on powerful muscles, inclining to the reed-pipe's mouth.

Sleep struck now that shadows crept closer to the walls. Brown limbs contorted to unlikely positions for comfort, filled doorways, and unwound turbans lay discarded while their owners succumbed beneath trees. I shuffled through the pavement sand impatient to see the city, wanting to rid myself of the cramped feeling imposed by the voyage. At every yard a voice asked, "You want to go somewhere, *sahib*?" A wave of the hand, a shake of the head did not easily drive away the rickshaw boys. They could not understand that a European should want to walk, let alone in the day's worst heat.

The unwanted rickshaws were not the elegantly spoked and hooded, man-drawn carriages of China, but a modern counterpart. For a few annas a mile you could ride in a motor-tricycle, rocked hilariously over the imperfect roads by the scooter. Quick and manoeuvrable, the canvas hood flapping and

coloured streamers flying from the handlebars, the rickshaws risked all among the camel carts and Cadillacs. For those with less money and dignity there were pedal-cycle rickshaws, their seating arrangement furnished in red and white plastic, supported on the two back wheels of the tricycle. They looked as though a bankrupt fair-ground had disposed of its round-about chairs. The likeness to fairs included transport lorries, for gaily-painted patterns of flowers covered their sides in a style similar to English gipsy caravans and canal barges. Teenage boys strained at the pedals, sometimes carrying a load of three adults and a sheep in the tiny two-seater. Aloof to persuasive smiles, I walked in the sun.

Wide, sandy strips bordered the roads, and behind walls large sprawling houses hid in falsely verdant gardens. Further down, one of the Karachi clubs snoozed beneath a steep Swiss roof. Beyond it a more crowded area began, a pink hotel with airlines' offices, and streets of shops. Here midday temperature reduced activity only slightly. From open shops, the owners looked lazily with one open eye at prospective customers, as they slumped comfortably in cane chairs.

Women were all concealed from view, indoors or out. Only men traded or squatted in groups, wavered by on ancient bicycles, looked at the cinemas' lurid posters or drank iced water from the many makeshift booths. Because no women, except a heavily shrouded few, joined in the street life, the men could spit or urinate anywhere without embarrassment. But my years of northern inhibition could not be so easily overthrown, and I looked for a lavatory. Laughing and chattering in their singing Urdu, they failed to understand what I wanted. But the Church of Scotland came to the rescue. Behind tall iron gates, a Victorian-Gothic building, angular and unmistakably Protestant, bleached its bricks in the sun. Irreligiously, but by this time desperately, I thought, "Where there's a church there's a vestry, and where there's a vestry . . ." and sure enough twin huts effaced themselves in the shrubbery. Bold capitals announced 'European' on one and 'Asian' on the other. Racial prejudice in a place of worship! How could such distinction survive to this democratic day and age! But feelings abated when I found the distinction applied only to architecture.

The other habit was alarming. Pavements and corridors and steps bore dreadful blotches dried a sinister dark red in the sun. Blood, I thought at first, until I discovered *pan*-chewing. Boy *pan*-makers sat on the pavements, their wares spread in a tray. Dozens of leaves kept fresh under a damp cloth, and bowls of red powder, lime and betel-nut formed the ingredients. Selecting a leaf, the boy brushed lime and red paste on it, folding it up for the waiting customer.

Carefree and happy, the men possessed their street with a display of affection for each other unusual to European eyes. Clothes were not made for formality, and how could stiff manners be maintained in the hanging, baggy trousers, shirts worn tails out, and any sort of turban from a twisted rag to starched linen wound round the gold thread *kulah* skull caps, and flared out in a pleated cockatoo? Hand in hand they strolled, young boys and old men, or squatted, passing a hubble-bubble pipe from mouth to mouth.

Amongst the older men I saw many whose hair, dyed red, reminded me of the old Count in Genoa. Bright orange heads, some under a turban or black-tasselled fez or astrakhan cap, matched the bushy beards glowing with a vivid henna tint. The Count had tried to defy age, but these men proudly blazoned a pilgrimage to Mecca, proof of obedience to one of the five rules enjoined by the Prophet. In such ways I was to see Islam a reality to my happy friends. Minarets, slender and white, contrary in direction to the huddle of buildings beneath, spoke eloquently of their religion. At midday, and again at evening, I saw many pray, laying a mat or silk scarf on the ground, turning towards Mecca, in hotel or hospital, mango grove or university compound, teeming slum or acacia scrub.

My walk had roused a dormant appetite and I retraced my steps for lunch. Under a jacaranda tree a barber had smoothed his mat and ranged the tools of his trade in a neat row. His customer, an old man, squatted patiently submitting to the deft application of lather, so white against his brown skin. When his chin was shaved he pulled off his shirt and yielded himself for similar treatment under the arms. Across the street, near the pink hotel, 'Dennis', a fellow barber, had a smart saloon, 'For gentlemen. Cleanest saloon in Karachi.

Official hairdressers to Sir Lancelot Graham and Sir Francis Mudie'.

Dining-room bearers in white-and-green turbans, long tunics and broad green cummerbunds, served lunch with a solicitude long since vanished from Western restaurants. Afterwards in my room I arranged the remaining luggage and slept until four o'clock, and then went out again to an afternoon of sharp light.

The wide main streets of the city's core, between docks and residential areas, bore prosaic names, McLeod Road, Victoria Road, Bunder Road, belying their character. Down one of them a procession of angry Pathans in dangerous mood pushed among the crowds to demand an interview with the President. One of their fellow tribesmen had died in a police tussle the night before. During darkness they retrieved the body from hospital, and through the night sat with the corpse on the pavement.

An Oriental harmony inaudible to the stranger lay under raucous notes of the industrial West. American saloon cars narrowly missed the lumbering camel carts, white-walled tyres hummed beside the camels' soft pads placed delicately in a slow, sure measure. The Cadillacs whisked away on diplomatic affairs, leaving the camels to pull cartloads of grain harnessed to their oily black sides like well-worn purses. The gentle, beautiful expression of their eyes sometimes peered above a muzzle of rope. By the new Government buildings, banks and offices, droves of tiny donkeys trotted. Occasional blows from laughing, handsome boys sitting astride steered them in and out of the traffic. And at the doors of even the smartest shops sheep and oxen were tethered, a reminder that beyond Karachi's limits lay the desert and its age-old ways of life.

Karachi did not confide its best secrets in these new quarters, but in the overcrowded, bustling, chattering, multi-coloured bazaars. In the little streets cleft between overhanging buildings, not a square yard remained free. Small booths raised from the ground lined the walls of houses on each side, the customers crushed between. Intimacy and bargaining were the bazaar's life-blood, far different from the cold impersonality of the mass-production department store. Colour, aided with tinsel and

mirror, poured from a hundred cloth-merchants' stalls. Printed cottons and wraiths of gauze showered with gold and silver flowed through the hands of assistants cross-legged before hand sewing-machines. The rain of finery passed from bolt to needle, shawls, wraps, skirts and bodices for a womenfolk invisible to all but the husband's eye. Waterfalls of stripe and check for shirts and baggy trousers descended from racks round the walls. No obligation to buy, come back to-morrow; just look.

Just look! A blaze, a riot, a confusion, a babel of callings. Here the letter-writer, wizened and knowledgeable, wire-rimmed spectacles perched on a thin nose. Before him, also squatting, frown of concentration creasing a bewildered face, a country boy who wants to go home, a father who wants his son in town, an anxious husband appealing to the Society for the Recovery of Abducted Women to find his wife, a dealer who cannot write an order. Bony fingers reach out for a sheet of paper, laid in a pile like the *pan*-boy's leaves, and scratch, scratch, the passionate words appear in order, right to left, in the beautiful curling Urdu script. And here next to him, scales in hand like Justice, a vendor of goats' meat, the joints piled on the pavement and heads suspended from a tree.

In the bazaar there were divisions of the greater and the lesser, and those too poor for ownership of a booth occupied the outer pavement. Bowls of spices, ground and powdered to a fine range of broken colours in yellow and red, sets of garish false teeth with plastic gums of stark vermilion, aluminium platefuls of ready-cooked curries and rice, heaps of flour and piles of charcoal and fruits. Exhausted by pushing, hesitating, edging step by step past the endless line of merchants who never take no for an answer, I drank some raw sugar-cane juice. At the street corners stood machines like mangles, and cane was crushed through cogs and caught in a glass. The bazaar was hot, especially for women draped from head to foot in *burqas*. These walking bell-tents not only obscured the women, but effectively restricted their view. Below the tight-fitting cap from which the *burqa* fell to the ground, the only opening in the whole garment was an eye-grille. Sometimes two crocheted eye-holes were used instead of the grille, producing

an excellent fancy-dress ghost. Close to the billowing gown, little girls clung. Not yet subject to *pardah*, they peeped out, nostrils studded with cheap jewellery. Small boys knew the superiority of their sex and rushed about the streets, smiling with the clearest of eyes, offering second-hand American magazines for sale or showing the stumps of imperfect limbs, in hope of the ever-recurrent *baksheesh*.

Wandering round, stepping carefully over pavement sleepers, I forgot time. When the sun relented visibly and the heat became passive, I tore myself away with thoughts of a bath to appease sticky limbs at last protesting against forced marching. In the main street something akin to a rush-hour was taking place. I gave up trying to walk and let a cycle rickchair carry me away. The decline of day was swift, the twilight a mere shade before nightfall. Water-carriers padded over the hotel lawns in bare feet, their cotton trousers rolled high, soaked as they emptied skin bags over the flower-beds. For a moment the scent of wet leaves and jasmin reminded me of a real garden under dew.

Near my door a boy sweeper coiled in sleep, a hand still clutching the yellow bristles of his besom. Inside, when I switched the high bare bulb on, the black pin-point eyes of four geckos on the wall stared accusingly, vacantly. Light brought the bearer from his quarters at the back with another flask of water. He turned on the bath-water and I became impatient because nothing would induce more than a trickle. I did not understand then that in one day I had squandered more fresh water than some families would have in a whole week.

Unable to wait longer, I got in the bath and soaked for half an hour, trying to formulate first impressions of Karachi. Too soon for judgement perhaps, but should I stay or go? Undecided, I went through the still wet garden. In the car park I found the answer. A fleet of the same American cars seen gliding about during the day had docked at the hotel. Technical development, provision of food, the destruction of poverty and disease are noble projects. But why did I dislike the people who brought these benefits from the West? Why did I find the engineers and businessmen, the bringers of salvation, objectionable in the extreme? Co-existence with them in clubs, the

cocktail and dinner-parties, the inane women and husky men, the air of master race would be unbearable. No, hard new city of Karachi, I could never love you. I would go.

I entered the dining-room feeling embarrassed for the first time. Restless fans spun, their flickering motion reflected in tall, polished teak panelling. Between tables laid with spotless linen the bearers, absurdly regal in their starched cockatoo turbans, moved silently with silver trays and dishes. Two bearers pulled a table out and I sat. The butler presented the menu in French, the wine bearer poured water, and yet another brought snaps of toast in a basket. Polite, efficient, yet had they as much contempt for me as I had for my neighbours, offensive even in their harsh laughter?

At the next table an ugly man, gross and myopic, signalled a waiter. Aggressively, in a voice raised to ensure that his point entered the thick head: "Last night my wife's steak was as tough as the sole of your shoe." Not an apt remark, I thought, as the waiter went barefoot. Leaning oval arms on the table, his wife leered through blue-rimmed, jewel-studded spectacles. Shapeless with inactivity and overeating, a scanty dress pulled tight over the missing waist-line, she said, "I'll risk a beer." Another couple, similar in dress and manner, joined them. I sent the soup away only half finished, with mounting anger. Had I come to Pakistan for such company? Laughter, loosened by alcohol, grew from sniggers to peals. Apoplexy possessed the men. The conversation was easy to piece together. They were not the first to speculate on the mating of camels. One of the men moved two bread rolls together in pornographic demonstration. The women convulsed, and removed their spectacles to dab at flowing eyes.

Morning tea woke me at seven next morning. The day seemed cool, and I would be able to walk without discomfort. To find friends met on the voyage, whose hospitality I was bound to take before going from Karachi, meant a street-map. But there was none, nowhere in the hotel, not even the reception desk, where the German manager smiled vaguely and instructed the clerk to obtain one for future reference. It passed as a joke between them, for they had seen me return from footslogging dusty and dirty the day before. Such maps were

never required by real guests with automobiles. Eating breakfast, I planned my commitments in Karachi, reducing the necessary time for staying to a minimum. And up in my room again I found the bearer had solved the map problem.

He led in a youth by the hand. "My brother," he said. "He know all Karachi!" Jamil, the brother, was as handsome as his name, a soft, throaty sound, as though in Spanish. He grinned broadly, pleased that I took trouble with his name. Jamil spoke English, had no work and would willingly act as guide. He was tall, with a fine physique and raven black hair laid back in swathes. Was it to give him work, food for his family, a roof over his head that Western technicians were here? Jamil, shining with happiness, was not concerned.

Jamil and I joined in friendship. Having no social position to keep up and no religion to preach, I could enjoy his whimsical company. He took me first to the bank, where an old Pathan with cross-eyes and cracked glasses sat by the door on guard, shot-gun across his knees. He bought betel-nut for me with childish pleasure, and I could chew the sharp-tasting leaves and spit without fear of offence. He threaded us through the bazaar, and I wore my shirt tails out because it was cooler, and drank small cups of tea offered by his friends in the booths where I had passed yesterday. Miraculously he brought me to the doors of my 'Eaglet' friends, and again appeared when I left to conduct me back to the hotel, asking about them, as he had followed their English tour in the papers.

In gossip-ridden 'white' circles this did not escape notice. Hobnobbing with native servants indeed! The suburban wives of electricians and draughtsmen and bank clerks disapproved. Out East to swim in a social stream beyond their reach at home, having servants flaunted under their noses infuriated them. What would happen to their new-found grandeur if the bars of division were withdrawn? On arrival I had been a prospective candidate to be sucked into their 'set'. But now Jamil successfully warded off invitations, saving me from many dreary hours.

Instead, I kept promises made on the ship and received the hospitality of many Pakistanis. A group of architects took me to their offices and showed me plans for the growing city.

They hoped for a school of architecture and a society of architects, they hoped for more and better materials, and for more sympathetic clients. They recognised the new Karachi as lacking form, yet they were full of confidence. We ate lunch near the drawing-boards. It was my first real Pakistani meal. As I poured water to douse the fire of curry in my throat, I tried to talk about the new national theatre and an international competition for the tomb of Jinnah at Karachi. These were schemes for the future. Now, for the present, if I would excuse them; they must rush to a meeting on the building site. Of the past, and how they started with nothing after Partition, they spoke hardly at all, and then without bitterness.

Jamil also entertained me. One afternoon he came into my room when his brother had taken the tea tray. "You come, *sahib* Robin," his eyes holding a mischievous secret. Finding out that I had nowhere else to go, he led off in a new direction. Long before we reached, I guessed his dock-side home as destination, but I would not spoil his surprise. He grabbed my hand Muslim fashion in a mixture of pride, care and excitement as we dodged homeward-bound traffic, and wended towards his slum home. "How many children have you, Jamil?" I asked as we came to a narrow street. Two-storey houses of mud brick opened directly on to the dusty, unmade road. Rolled in the dust like dumplings in flour, naked children chased each other. "Children, *sahib*? I have six sons, praise be to God." No mention of daughters, if any. "And how many have you, Robin *sahib*?" he asked. At the end of the street ran a road by the docks and mastheads stuck above shed roofs.

Three little boys detached themselves from the melée and ran to Jamil, and an older boy sitting outside the house with his pet sheep, which probably, next festival of Id-ul-Azha, would serve as the family sacrifice, stood up to meet us. The boy was Ghulam, the oldest of the family, a beautiful child. The home had no furniture except for a table and three or four *charpoys*, the beds of woven reeds on wooden frames. From behind came the smell of a dung fire and cooking. The boys were quickly won from awe at the stranger, a process helped by sweets bought on the way. Presently a woman who did not glance at

me brought aluminium pans, one with rice, another brimming with lumps of mutton swimming in yellow curry, and a third full of a rich mixture of vegetables cooked in oil. Piled on a plate like carpets in the bazaar were *chappaties*, the round pancakes of unleaven bread that reminded me of the potato farls of my childhood in Ireland.

Jamil and five of his sons sat round the table, but the woman whom I presumed to be his wife did not come out again, for in a Muslim household wives and mothers have no part in social life. Without knife, fork or spoon, I set to, tearing pieces of *chappati* to scoop up rice and meat from my plate, a much more difficult feat than using chopsticks. Less fastidious, the others, especially the smaller boys, used their hands when the *chappaties* failed to catch remaining scraps.

Then Ghulam brought huge chunks of melon, deliciously sweet and cool after the curry. Leaving dirty plates and pans, we sat on *charpoy*s outside the house, content with the meal, content with life. Ghulam fetched his father's hubble-bubble, and squatting between us, kept it alight with pieces of dried dung when Jamil and I were not drawing. Then from an uncertain source, I heard a voice, '*Que sera, sera*', sang Doris Day, sultry as the night itself. 'Whatever will be, will be.'

A noise inside the house told that the woman was snatching the dishes away before the dogs should eat them as well as the few leavings. A little later she came to claim the youngest boys for sleep. In the dim room a naphtha flare burned comfortably. When I got up to go, Jamil and Ghulam, one on each side, took me home by way of the docks. Muscular sailors of the Pakistani Navy sauntered along. Most were young, and enviably brown in spotlessly clean uniforms. "Him Navy boy," said Jamil, reaching round and tugging his son by the ear. Ghulam wrenched free and ran in front, imitating the sailors' walk. "Navy," he grinned, pointing to a thin chest showing under his shirt. Nostalgically I thought of myself as a boy running after sailors to touch their collars for seven years' good luck. I then sent the other two protesting back home. "*Salaam, sahib* Robin," said Jamil with his inborn grace of nature. "*Salaam*," repeated Ghulam. Touching our foreheads with finger-tips, we parted.

The aloofness from neighbours in the hotel left my freedom undisturbed except on one evening when frightened female screams came from the adjoining room. I ran out to the veranda. Next door a sheet of flame licked at the curtains between sitting-room and bedroom. Other people rushed in, and together we ripped the curtains down and soused them with water. In a few minutes it was all over. And the woman and her white-faced husband were offering whisky to the voluntary fire-fighters. They had been suffering for days from Karachi belly, and the woman had been reboiling their drinking water on a primus stove. Afterwards when the hotel was asleep other than the singing crickets, I heard her talking about the incident, and the mumbled replies of her husband, “. . . and what’s that tall bloke doing out here, anyway?” Her voice, referring to myself, sounded clearly from the veranda. “Oh, he’s not smart enough for MacDonald’s. Didn’t you see him running around with his shirt hanging out like a pinny?”

By an inlet near the sea lived thousands of refugees. When the tide receded, leaving immense stretches of mud-flat, their bullocks and water-buffaloes could wander across the skirting road to wallow. Goats and occasionally sheep nibbled at sparse patches of grass. On the other side of the road, away from the sea, were flimsy palm-leaf shelters, the homes of these abandoned people. Rootless, dispossessed, they streamed across the border from India when the line of Partition left them stranded high and dry, Muslims in a Hindu land. A tragic exodus had ensued, thousands fleeing from terror. They fled to nothing. The sea, creeping tirelessly over the mangrove swamps, the moist evening wind across empty sites, waited them. With bare hands they built life anew.

Fringing the sea road to fashionable beaches, the makeshift settlement stretched interminably. Crazy huts of woven straw, odd planks and boxes, mud, and rarely sheets of corrugated iron crowded in a vast mass. Animals and owners lived together, drank of the same water, and when the rains came, floundered in the same morass. Sometimes in the dry months a hurricane of fire ignited from charcoal sparks roared unchecked before the wind, devouring straw and wood, leaving a trail of ash. But life, more potent than fire or massacre, returned.



This holy man loads his earthly life with iron



A game of *kabbadi* in progress



Cutting grass in the ruins

More palm leaves, more wooden boxes were dragged on to the blackened acres, the struggle began again. Anything served as a home. I saw a boy lead his blind and tottering father into a length of concrete sewer standing just off the road. Inside, a woman and some smaller children crouched among a few belongings. At least their house could not burn.

Two million in ten years had been absorbed and resettled in the new country by a Government heavily loaded already with internal problems. Now these, thousands, the last to reach were not without hope. Behind the ghastly squatter-town, past which most Europeans speeded to picnics on the beach without stopping, lay the industrial belt. Factories took in labour, skilled and unskilled, anything to keep the wheels turning. Few at first, spaced with curious architecture in tracts of desert, the number increased until the zone began to emerge recognisably with promise for the future. Into nearby houses some of the millions were settled, taken literally from pavements and gutters of the main streets, where they had camped on crossing from India. Partition was an agony of birth, resulting in terrifying destitution. But the pangs were over. In the capitals of oil empires in South America, where billions of dollars spouted from the ground, I had seen men in similar conditions dying in the gutter. Pi-dogs panting in the heat, their lean bitches with swinging udders like cows, loped about the wasteland of cities far wealthier than Karachi.

Jamil and I became inseparable, for whenever he appeared a new excursion had occurred to him, or he knew of something happening in part of the city. He had friends among fishermen, and without a word of explanation Jamil, and Ghulam who could not bear to miss our jaunts, led the way down to where a boat waited. Then, with the sail hoisted and bellying out to the shape of a shark's fin, we cut through the harbour, leaving the breakwaters and Manora Point and Oyster Islands behind us for the open sea. Young Ghulam had learnt the ways of the fishing boats and darted nimbly at the orders. Every dash of spray made him laugh with joy, and if a cargo boat was in the roads he tried to persuade the men to sail close so that he could smell oil and sea-corroded paint and hear the slap of waves against plated sides. Ghulam could hardly wait until he was old

enough to call at the naval recruiting office. Jamil proudly followed every movement of his son, looking absurdly boyish himself for a father of such a developed child.

Some of Jamil's friends lived on an island out beyond the harbour, where fishing fleets were based. One day we landed on the flat, sandy island. Many boats were tied up, a confusion of masts and sails, ropes and nets, and men moving in and out repairing damage and sluicing down with sea-water. The fishermen's houses followed the water-line in a crazy jumble. We wandered about for an hour, looking across to the city and the wharfs where big ships were berthed. Eastwards, beyond the horizon, the Indus spread its tails in a delta reaching 150 miles to the Indian border. A line of sails moved westwards from outside the harbour mouth. I asked Jamil if they were fishing boats from the islands. "Yes, *sahib*." He was thoughtful for a moment. "Maybe they go fishing; maybe they go Aden." And many indeed were the stories of the island smugglers trading between Aden and Karachi in merchandise made scarce by strict import licensing.

Jamil's children were thrilled by another excursion—so much that I took them several times. In a walled pool at Mango Pir, outside the city, sacred crocodiles were kept. The sluggish, knobbly creatures floated with artful tranquillity, and the slaughtering of many goats was necessary to feed them. The evil logs glided through the water swallowing pieces of meat with one snap of the scissor jaws. The children were thrilled by the awful performance and remained motionless until the ripples were stilled. Then they rushed with shrieks of satisfaction to the hot spring spouting out of the ground by some date palms.

One afternoon, as we walked across the half-mile of sand from the sea, where we had been bathing, to the road at Clifton, one of the little boys shouted suddenly in Urdu and picked something out of the sand. Jamil laughed and the little boys chanted words I did not understand. "He has got a present for you, if you will be their uncle," said Jamil. Six more nephews, and, with the Sheikh boys from the voyage, ten altogether! My present was a piece of blue glass ground to a fine surface by the threshing to and fro of many tides.

But the time came for my journey north and Karachi days

came to an end. The final excursion with Jamil and the children was to the Pakistan Airways office in the pink hotel. In the waiting space was a circular seat, upholstered in yellow leather, an upturned, overgrown mushroom. Against the bright colour were five pairs of brown legs, and six pairs of glistening brown eyes watched my bags being weighed. Of course, the boys wanted to be weighed too. It was good to be leaving for the north, but I would miss my Sindi nephews.

CANTONMENT

BEYOND THE desert that laps Karachi's suburbs like a sea, shores of green begin again. There, nearly a thousand miles north of the brash new capital, lies Rawalpindi, where the shade of billowing trees falls on grass. Through their branches are seen the hills only twenty miles away, cool refuge from southern heat. Winter comes there with frost and fallen leaves in the gardens, log-fires and blankets in the houses.

When I walked over the concrete runway towards a French friend who had come to meet me, the thermometer hovered at 100°. For Nadia, hot and cold, far and near, perhaps even life and death, were not extremes. Her vague blue eyes held secrets of her past, the years of occupation in war-time Paris, making the present unreal to her. But she was practical, and, having received my letter, waited with her United Nations jeep for the plane to touch down. We spoke of Paris, not sentimentally, but as though the green avenues through which she took the jeep at breakneck speed belonged to the Bois de Boulogne.

An unusual *ménage*, she said in her soft voice, existed in the military zone of 'Pindi. Neither hotel nor guest-house, an Irishwoman ran it for selected guests, of whom Nadia was one, and I, with the lady's approval, could be another. Skirting round the main town we bumped along avenues with riding tracks at each side, between spacious gardens and houses sprawled behind masses of flowering shrubs. Nearly all were relics of the British in India. Without warning, Nadia swung round a bend, and the thick jeep tyres crunched over a drive into a similar garden belonging to the lady's establishment. The sprawling house buried amongst the spreading shishams and pillared firs, the paths shaded by jacarandas and Persian lilac, the royal blue of male sun-birds clutching the vivid orange trumpets of wall-creepers, the lawns speckled with miniature doves looked like the home of a Moghul empress.

Three such houses, widely spaced, of colour-washed, crumbling brick, comprised the hotel. They snoozed in the midday

heat. An old-world charm out of tempo with the quicksilver of modern life lent them a vintage maturity. Surrounding verandas had pointed arches, and the inner rooms projected like a nave, resulting in a kind of residential church. Out-buildings, with kitchen, office, and servants' quarters separated the guest-house-cum-hotel from an area at a lower level where squatters occupied disused Army buildings. At the top of this bank were the 'tents', and in one of these lived Miss O'Reilly, the manageress. Once upon a time the 'tents' really had been tents; then solid walls were built under the canvas, and, finally, thatch was added, but the name remained unaltered. A cottage effect obtained now, and the interiors of the manageress's tent might have been anywhere in the Home Counties.

A room in one of the houses to which Miss O'Reilly personally conducted me was of an order different from the 'tents'. Some of my fellow guests demanded a dignity not afforded by the town's principal hotel, for they were British colonels and families now loaned to the Pakistani Army. With Miss O'Reilly they found it, for each room proved to be a palatial suite. Wandering through mine, I thought of the French *châteaux* I had visited. All six rooms were immense, even the bathroom ceiling disappeared into a dim region of rafters twenty feet overhead. The sitting-room was a small Breton church, while a cavernous fireplace and overmantel endowed the main bedroom with the nobility of a baronial hall on the Loire. "Cool in summer, warm in winter," said Miss O'Reilly, pointing to the thick walls embrasured with two-storied windows.

Remembering my slender resources, I thought the suite would be far beyond my means, and decided to make sure at the outset. But Miss O'Reilly shook her head. She had not the faintest idea, except that I had a separate electricity meter. She was much more interested in my admiration of the Indian squirrels that played and chased each other on the veranda. The three white stripes on the black back, explained the old lady, were made by the god Rama, who stroked the squirrel's ancestor when he brought news that the god's wife, Seta, had run away to Ceylon with the monkey god, Hanaman. All the way down the coast from the Himalayas to Ceylon are strange, isolated hills, said to be rocks hurled by Rama at the fleeing

couple. Though dreamy, Miss O'Reilly knew her business well and ran the hotel efficiently, speaking Urdu to her Pakistani servants as fluently as English. I knew my stay would be a long one, especially when days later I heard the rate for my suite. For a fraction of the Karachi price, I was lord of the manor.

Miss O'Reilly, so slight in those vast apartments, offered to lend me a selection of thrillers which she found always calmed her before sleep. A few minutes afterwards, half a dozen paper-backs with grisly titles were brought by a tall old man with shrunken cheeks, broken and missing teeth, and black eyes that twinkled. Although he had been appointed as my head bearer, I guessed Willie was also Miss O'Reilly's right-hand man. Like her, like the houses, he belonged for ever to the days of British rule. Clearly, in their outpost, they had ideas as to how a gentleman should live.

Willie took my dusty shoes away to clean them. Torpid silence reigned outside. On the window gauze fat yellow lizards clung motionless waiting for flies. In the rafters a little bird sat near its nest, and with a comfortable familiarity it bespattered my pillow. I thought of Mrs. Jhangiani in the castle of Naples. Walking sedately in front of a motley caravan through the garden, Willie returned. The three men behind carried bath-water in cans slung from poles on their shoulders. That it should be the labour of four men to put as many inches of warm water into my bath alarmed my sense of proportion once again. Purpose apart, the procession under the Persian lilacs was fanciful enough, with ragged turbans, and tailed shirts over voluminous Punjabi trousers drawn in at the ankles. Willie, who was a Roman Catholic, wore no head-dress and carried his shirt inside neatly pressed flannels. As head bearer, he alone was allowed into the house while I was present, or to speak with the *sahib*. Willie's deference was a model of its kind, and he appeared to be blessed with a placid nature, though Miss O'Reilly assured me when displeased he would swear in Urdu "like a learner-driver changing gear." When the water was poured, the caravan retired. With compunction, I stepped into the bath.

A brilliant moon hung at the tree-tops and blotted out the stars with its aura of incandescence. Immobile in the shadows

stood the *chowkadah*, the night guard, and the frogs hopped across the path at his feet. Down the steep outside stairs from the flat roof came Miss O'Reilly, a heavy book clasped before her. "Stars," she explained tapping it with a finely pointed finger-nail. At first I thought she was fortune-telling, but her interest was strictly scientific. If you did not start doing at her time of life, she declared, what you had always wanted to do, it never would be done. And with this excellent platitude we strolled together.

Through the glimmering gardens we stopped at the disused well by my dressing-room door. "It's very deep," she said. "Listen." The astronomer bent down, picked up a stone and threw it over the parapet wall into the great circular hole. We waited and then heard the soft sound of dry leaves disturbed. I looked over, but could see only blackness. "It might be a snake-pit", I ventured. Miss O'Reilly laughed. No snakes had ever been seen in the grounds here. Saying good night, her book of Red Giants and White Dwarfs underarm, she walked fearlessly through the long grass to her 'tent'.

The next morning a commotion outside the bedroom woke me. I jumped off the bed (off and not out, as I had slept with no sheet or blanket). Four of the coolies, armed with sticks, struck wild blows at an evil snake writhing in the dust by the door, which had stood open all night. Willie, making good speed over the garden, came to quell the noise, which he thought would disturb the *sahib*. Thunder cleared from his brows when he saw the dead snake being carried away looped over a pole like a shorn tress of Medusa.

But Willie and his henchmen were often summarily called to Nadia's apartment in one of the other houses, for a similar purpose. They went armed with strong sticks, for she, like Hamelin, was plagued by rats. On opening a cupboard or drawer a rat sprang out, and though it happened repeatedly, Nadia could not get used to the idea. It had all begun when she accidentally knocked off her bedside lamp and tea-tray, and sugar had stuck to the lamp-shade. Hearing noises in the night she switched on the lamp, and saw the shade eaten away and pink eyes looking at her. When I came back from a visit to Murree, she gave a little party in her rooms. I asked if all had

gone well while I was away. In her stage accent she cried, "*Mon Dieu!* Terrible! Great rats," and she spaced her hands to show the size. "Great rats in my drawers again." And the colonels, still blue of cheek and politics alike, thought it was time for a sporty laugh at this rather jolly mademoiselle.

The morning tea of my first day arrived on a silver tray, the caravan brought more bath-water, and order and calm was restored after the death of the snake. But no more stones in the old well, I resolved. Having removed the shoes again, Willie began a hunt for yesterday's bundle of laundry. Respectfully he asked where had I concealed it. I explained that all my shirts were made of non-iron fabrics or nylon, and that I dipped and hung them up overnight myself. This information left Willie no wiser. He went off crestfallen, unable to understand that the *sahib* had done his own washing. Miss O'Reilly, to whom Willie confided his distress, tried to tell him the new fabrics needed special care, and that if an iron touched them, they shrivelled into nothing, like an autumn leaf at the first touch of frost. But of no avail; the system lay beyond Willie's ken. Besides, what would happen to the *dhobi* if he had no laundry to wash? It was bad enough that I was plain mister, a big lowering of status for Willie, whose previous charge had been a general with a family and lots of dirty washing.

The *dhobi* had trouble elsewhere, for one of the colonels' ladies inclined to Whiggery. She hailed from Lady Margaret Hall and volunteered to lend me copies of the *New Statesman*. We talked about Partition and aspects of pink thought in Britain which had allowed the embryo Pakistan to be born. Equality with servants, to a comfortable degree, was a strong point with her, and, following in the wake of Evelyn Waugh's Black Bitch, she hung out her husband's pants and shirts on the line.

My bath-water cavalcade was spared the difficulty of disposal, for a brick channel ran down to a steep gulch 100 yards from the house. On the further side, reeds and gnarled fig trees screened a small mosque, but a slender minaret escaped above the branches, an icicle of plaster refusing to melt under the blazing sun. Not out of mind because out of sight behind another bank of trees, was the Kingdom Hall of the

Jehovah's Witnesses. At sundown, when floods of gold flared along the horizon, the call to prayer came from the mosque, rising, falling, dying, a melancholy, blissful coda to the last chatterings of rooks settling for the night.

On the house side of the gully, perched on a mound of stones, was a prayer-place, shaded by three umbrella-like keekar trees, overlooked directly by my bathroom. The compacted mud floor had an edging of white-washed stones, and in the centre the rough brick tomb of a holy man. It too was white-washed, and along the top black cruses were set in a row. Like a captive bird, a red sheet on the end of a cane flapped in the keekar trees. Every night an old man, his white head shaven, came to pray. He squatted on a mat and made obeisance, his triple stomachs gross like a Chinese statue. When, bowing towards Mecca, he went up and down with an agility surprising for his size. On Thursday night my bath had to be performed earlier than usual, for many people came to the prayer-place to put oil and wicks in the little lamps and light them in honour of the holy man, and my bathing would be exposed to all.

In the city another holy man, very much alive, had his string-bed in the gutter, and he sat on it, naked except for a length of cotton round his middle. But ordinary clothes were not of interest to him, for his legs and arms were loaded with heavy iron bangles, and chains crossed over his chest and back. He would say prayers for people incapable of saying their own, and in return liked a gift of one more bangle or chain to weigh down his body and make progress in this life more difficult. When he moved, the clanking from this spiritual armour was formidable.

Somewhere in the four writing-desks or the seven capacious double-fronted wardrobes (large enough to go in one door and out of the other), or under the numerous carpets and *jainimaz* rugs, or in the furniture of the dressing-room cluttered like an auction-room I had to find a place to hide my money. Petty thieving was rife, I was warned, though most of my money was in traveller's cheques. But the rupee notes might prove too strong a temptation, and, bulging in the pocket of my shorts, they would certainly disappear in the bazaars. I pulled the biggest wardrobe an inch from the wall. It had not been shifted

for years, and a page with faded shaky handwriting fell out. "Uses of Vinegar", it read. "Bright parts of your Grate discoloured by the Oven, can be shined again by the application of a little vinegar. A few drops of vinegar sprinkled on a Hot Shovel and waved about in a sick room will cool and sweeten the air and remove all unpleasant odours. Headaches can be relieved by soaking brown paper in vinegar and applying to the affected part. Vinegar for Warts and Bunions", and much more beside.

Behind the wardrobe would have been a good hiding-place, but there were too many insects who might eat the notes. So I pinned them to the underside of a drawer in the dressing-room, and went across for lunch. When I came back I saw the whole chest of drawers was missing. Willie had been helping to furnish one of the empty 'tents' with it, and as he locked up told me there was no money, as he had searched all the drawers. Like a thief, I waited until everyone slept in the afternoon and then sneaked the key from the office and retrieved my precious rupees and cheques.

The *dhobi*, who had his wash-house in one of the buildings near the gulley, looked so dejected as he passed my room on the following morning that I gave him a pair of linen trousers to be laundered. But a few hours later he was back again scratching at the door, far too nervous to knock. What a marvel to be done so soon! Then the *dhobi* held the trousers out, and I could see they were not washed. He pointed to the ticket pocket and a 10-rupee note I had left there. My own furtive mistrust of these people filled me with disgust as the little coolie hurried back to his washing, leaving behind what to him was a large sum of money. After this I became careless, and before I left 'Pindi my money lay about quite freely and none was ever taken, even though callers and pedlars were in and out all day with fingers ever open for *baksheesh*.

If my sitting-room was a Breton church, then the dining-room was Notre Dame itself. We ate in state on straight-backed chairs in the long, lofty room. A babble of many languages mingled with the tinkle of cutlery, for United Nations people observing the Kashmir cease-fire line lived at the hotel. 'Pindi controlled the main route into Kashmir

by the Jhelum Gorge, and the town was their headquarters. The Pakistani Army also had its major stations scattered around, continuing the famous cantonment city of the old British-Indian Army. Willie had first been posted to it forty-six years before as drum-boy. When feeling talkative, he recited regimental histories and told of his eventual rise to clarinet. When I asked if he still played, he shook his head sadly and displayed broken teeth, "Me not got wind, sah."

Only a few years before the young drum-boy from Madras arrived in 'Pindi, Kipling was writing 'Her Majesty's Servants', the last of the *Jungle Book* stories. The account of an escaping camel in the viceregal camp at 'Pindi, with an artillery mule, a troop horse and two white bullocks, could well be a description of the cantonment to-day. The Pakistani Army is fit and efficient—even more so, it is whispered than the British-Indian before it—but the camel is still a part of its life. The sleekly brushed beasts lolled by the hotel every day, led by young soldiers.

The clanking, rather flat-tyred bicycles and their usual load of rider and cross-bar passenger were faster, but not as elegant as *tongas*, the two-wheeled open carriages. They were the commonest form of transport in 'Pindi, and indeed the whole north. After the cycle-rickchairs and the gaily painted lorries of Karachi, how refined, how lady-like these gleaming *tongas* looked! The horse clopped with delicate hooves along the road, the harness and shafts creaking, the lightly-spoked wheels of yellow piped with red, glinting round brass-capped hubs. The canvas hood, sometimes scalloped and hung with baubles, slanted to shade the buttoned-leather upholstery, and on each side were polished brass lamps that glimmered like fireflies in the velvet darkness. Here was fine craftsmanship such as graced no vehicle on the roads I had seen anywhere, other than the earliest hand-made motor cars or baronial coaches preserved in museums. The *tonga*-driver pressed his foot on a small lever to operate a bell fixed underneath, and the musical sound of this I came to associate with 'Pindi more than any other, except for the soul-cry of the *moazzin*.

Since Kipling retired to Sussex and spent his time among the blunt, bow-headed Downs, there has been no one to draw such

intimate pictures as his, of life in the Punjab. But in Rawalpindi Cantonment under the same trees and grassy lanes where Kipling's runaway camel took to its heels, there was another movement, but this time a cultural one. And this was no affectation, but an expression of deep-seated feeling for human experience. And this feeling voiced itself entirely in music or poetry and drama. I met young officers who were proud to be known as poets, and who invited me to their poetry readings. Many of them had studied abroad, worked for the B.B.C., adored the assonance of Dylan Thomas, collected Kathleen Ferrier records, recited Schiller or quoted Nietzsche at length.

The Koran, and long Muslim tradition, have excluded the representation of human and animal forms from art, and consequently the non-visual arts have developed most, especially that of story-telling. My friend, Captain Agha Babur, was an expert at this, and wrote many plays for which he received wide acclaim. Somewhat bald, unassuming in manner, but with a volatile way of speaking, holding his hands in expressive postures, and darting his eyes quickly from one object to another, this playwright asked Nadia and me to performances by his group called the 'Little Theatre'. As they were in Urdu, Agha Babur gave us a résumé beforehand—not that it was necessary, for the actors mimed so well that we could follow perfectly well. We rocked with laughter, gripped our seats and fell back helpless, unable to laugh more at some one-act plays he produced one evening. The players were all amateur, young clerks, students or soldiers, and again, because of Muslim tradition, all male. In addition to the uproarious plot of twin brothers, one bald and the other not, trying to deceive a hair-tonic company, and another of an eccentric doctor interviewing eccentric patients, there was the mirth of boys playing girls' parts. The performance was Elizabethan in other ways too, fresh, exhilarating, not too perfect or sophisticated, but robust and barbed with wit. The figures sitting behind us secluded under the *burqas*, convulsed with laughter at the sturdy young men who played their female roles with as much vocal ability as Shakespeare's boys must have done.

I made many friends among the Army and saw them frequently. One day I watched a *kabbadi* match, a kind of

wrestling demanding strength and skill and played by teams in swimming costumes. It was a very popular game all over Pakistan, and newspapers always carried reports of matches. While I was looking at man after man being flung suddenly to the ground after straining every muscle, a young lad came up to me and put out his hand, "I'm Mr. Khan. Are you from England?" This cheerful schoolboy of fifteen insisted on my going to swim in a swimming-pool on the other side of the field. The pool, belonging to the Army Club, was most welcome, and I had the first bathe since coming north.

The pool was fourteen feet deep, and young Pakistanis were leaping and springing from the high diving-boards, swooping through the air like birds. They were all clever divers, entering the water with hardly a splash, and they would swim underwater for alarmingly long periods. This immense pool, kept perfectly clean, was reserved for the sons and friends of Army officers. The poorer boys, who had been watching the *kabbadi*, came stealthily behind the fence after the match ended, and when the attendant dozed, over they hopped to drink from the water-pipe or cool hot heads in the foot-baths. A few days afterwards, I returned to the hotel to find 'Mr.' Khan in my sitting-room, school books on his knee, waiting to give me a lesson in Urdu.

After settling in and satisfying Miss O'Reilly that I had everything to my comfort, I began to wander further afield from 'Pindi. Accompanying Nadia in her jeep as she went the rounds of a widespread anti-tuberculosis campaign, I began to know the countryside and the town of 'Pindi quite well. Unfortunately, I became reckless about food, eating wherever I happened to be, not infrequently in the bazaar while waiting for Nadia to finish inoculations at a school. Dysentery followed as a natural result. I found it embarrassing, for my vast bathroom only afforded a commode on three slender iron legs after the fashion of a 'contemporary' flower-pot-holder. Worse than that was Willie's lament that the import licensing caused a scarcity of toilet-paper.

I managed to get out of bed to keep a dinner appointment with a former British officer. Darkness had fallen when I left the hotel and bats were busy along the avenues. We sat on a

candle-lit terrace in a garden I could not see. I was surprised that his servants were in a British livery complete with silver-crested buttons, while he himself preferred to wear baggy *shalwar*. After discussing what my stomach was capable of holding, we came to the subject of my illness. I confessed to the scarcity of paper for my bathroom and asked what the local people used. He looked at me over the beautiful old glass from which he sipped sherry, "Rocks, old boy. What else?" He of course should have known, as he was once architectural consultant to the Government, and had designed a special sanitary system to cope with rocks.

TAXILA

THROUGH PATCHES of ground along the valley, yoked bullocks were drawing their ploughs of wood, when Nadia and I stopped in the jeep. In other patches, maize was still high, and nearby squares rioted with blazing yellow wild flowers. In front of us the road snaked past small farms and terracotta-coloured houses, crossing river beds dry before the rains. A spur of the enclosing hills reached down and took it out of sight. The bus which roared by measured the silence, profound and final.

Like the birds that wheeled with motionless white wings alone in an expansive sky, strangers could not go unnoticed, for few ever came up the valley. The nearest town, 'Pindi, was twenty miles away, and travellers to the north on the Peshawar road avoided the valley's mouth. No; the stranger came not to journey, but to seek.

As we sat looking over the fields and foothills of wild olives, young men with shy smiles and old men on drumstick legs came to bargain. They offered not pears or syrupy grapes or mangoes, but the workmanship of ancient empires. Silver and bronze coins, the modelling undefaced after tens of centuries, glinted in daylight again as the grubby palms opened. They parted easily with these treasures; where the wooden plough skirted the quivering arrows of sugar cane more could be found, for here, still half-buried, lay the ruined cities of Taxila.

Darius, King of Persia, Alexander the Great, Asoka of India, and perhaps even Thomas, Apostle of Christ, walked streets now paved only with grass. On the lower slopes, Buddhist teachers had built monasteries looking across the northern plain to the mountains and, 100 miles further, the Khyber Pass. Generations of monks saw armies pour in from Central Asia. Shields and spears had clinked together where now only the aluminium sides of an occasional bus clanked. And they watched the walled Taxila below, busy with the life of any city at any time, fall to many conquerors. Eventually Huns destroyed them and Taxila together. A little girl with bare feet

was idly wandering after goats over mounds where Taxila had stood. And up among the monasteries, broken and roofless, there were no shadows at all moving in the courtyards.

We drove into the perfectly kept forecourt of the Taxila Museum. Another jeep stood near the door, and four huge perspiring Americans emerged in vivid Florida beach-shirts. Did we know some place they could get a Coke? We did not. But willing hands could be found, no doubt, in the village, to squeeze fruit-juice into a glass for them. Perspiring more than ever, they departed without having looked, so we were told, at the gold, the jewellery, the carving, the bark inscriptions frail but legible after more than 2,000 years. They thought the museum was a road-house.

Riaz Shah, the Curator, asked us into his office behind the walls lined with rapt clay Buddhas. Reserved and cultured, he explained that the museum focused attention on the objects rescued by excavation from complete loss. Exquisite personal ornaments of beaten gold, iron hammers, keys, toy carts, ink-pots with dried carbon and gum-ink dust inside, had been sifted from the engulfing soil. From the monastery walls, the finest sculptures were taken to safety under cover, for erosion would damage them irreparably now that their temples were exposed after the buried centuries. But a museum is sad, poignant, because its merest trinket has outlived the man who made it and the woman who wore it.

Armed with information, and the valley's features on our minds' eye by a relief model, we said goodbye to the Curator. Only fifty years ago, over the same rough ground that we bumped now, had the first clearing-party laid bare the regular patterning of streets and houses. Mound after mound had revealed the city of stone where Darius ruled twenty-five centuries ago. Grass grew again in the little rooms and sprouted from the tops of walls. In one house an old man in a loose blue gown squatted on his haunches and struck at the grass with a sickle. A buffalo watched him moodily with one distended, milky-white eye. At the end of a cord passed through the animal's nose stood a girl, a piece of brown cotton draped and folded round her head and shoulders, framing the beautiful face. As we clambered over the low, surviving walls from house

to house, she followed every movement, but making none herself. The statuesque child fascinated us, but at the approach of a camera she threateningly drew a sickle from her dress, curtained her face with the head-dress and ran down the grassy street.

As we looked at the perfectly preserved rubble stonework and the oblongs that represented people's homes, I repeated to myself: "Here someone prepared a meal. Here someone slept. Here a bride decked herself with one of the ivory combs I had seen in the museum, before going into the marriage market, where, if she was pretty but had no dowry, she would be sold as the dowry of an ugly girl whom no man would take otherwise. And here fearful voices had cried, 'The enemy is coming.'" But the reality had departed, merely the stones were left. Yet if I put out my fingers and touched the wall, was there no vibration of contact with other hands of long ago?

Down the main street we walked slowly to the waiting jeep. A white turkey cock strutted to meet us, his comb reddening with pride. The old man had taken his affronted granddaughter and the one-eyed beast away home. The turkey cock paraded alone through the dead city. Alexander the Great rode in 326 B.C. down the same street; now only a strutting fowl remained to portray his glory. He did not have to fight with his Macedonian heroes for Taxila. When Alexander approached, the Rajah rode out with an army and gifts of elephants, bulls and sheep to meet him and conduct him into the town. Alexander gave the Rajah in return 1,000 talents of gold and wagon-loads of loot from conquered Persia, including gold and silver vessels.

Greeks and Indians had never met before, and no doubt Alexander's panoply impressed his new subjects. The Greek army found strange sights and customs too, disposing of the dead by leaving them to vultures, the burning of widows, and, more pleasurably, polygamy. The Mediterranean soldiers performed sacrifices and put on games. Alexander himself also found much to wonder at, particularly the Eastern ascetic. He heard that holy men lived in Taxila, or Takshacila, as it was then called, and wanted to see them. But if he commanded them, they would certainly refuse, and, being Emperor, he could not demean himself by going to them. So he compromised and sent an officer called Onesicritus instead.

He found fifteen naked men sitting in the strong sun on stones so hot that he could not walk barefoot over them. The ascetics were not unduly impressed that the new Emperor should want to learn their wisdom, and one said openly that anyone coming in Macedonian boots and cloaks could not possibly learn it; he would need to strip and sit beside them. Onesicritus, not fancying this offer, persisted by means of an interpreter, and eventually one of the unclothed holy men agreed to wait upon Alexander. He went, and was asked by the Rajah of Taxila to don clothes and go with the Emperor, with whom he stayed for the rest of his life. The Greeks called him Kalanos, a sort of nickname taken from overhearing the greeting to his Indian countrymen.

Greek authors of the day tell how the holy man of Taxila distinguished himself in Alexander's Court. But suddenly, after years with him and becoming a favourite, Kalanos said he wished to make an end of earthly life. Nothing Alexander said could change his mind, so a pyre was built for the ascetic, and with great ceremony he was carried to it in a litter with garlands of flowers round his neck. He chanted hymns in a language the Greeks could not understand, and, with the Macedonian army looking on, he climbed on to the pyre. Gold and silver and precious objects had been heaped on the pyre, and Kalanos gave these to his friends. Then, with all the imperial trumpets blowing, the vast army shouting as it did when going into battle, and Indian elephants trumpeting too, flames enveloped Kalanos.

The seats of the jeep were burning hot like the stones the ascetics sat on, for no one had thought to park it out of the sun. We moved up the valley, crossing the river, leaving the main road for a narrower track along a slight rise. This two-mile route represented the passing of centuries when the original Taxila grew old and vulnerable. Too easily besieged, too easily deprived of water and already partly in ruins, Taxila was abandoned for another site after four centuries.

For some distance the walls of Sirkap, the second city, showed boldly out of the green slopes. The city was built on a pattern of chequer-boards by Bactrian Greeks in 200 B.C., safeguarded by a wall twenty feet thick and three and a half

miles long. The present name of Sirkap was probably not given it until at least medieval times, and then from a legend well-known in the Punjab. Seven demons lived in a cave near the Jhelum River and fed on human flesh. They were a family of three brothers and four sisters, two of the brothers being called Sirkap and Sirsukh. The hero of the story is Rasalu, a Rajah, who one day found a woman crying and singing as she cooked. She sang for happiness because her only son was going to marry, and she cried in grief as he had been chosen by lots as a victim for the demons. Rasalu comforted her, and said he would kill the demons, which he did, except for one, which is reputed still to be heard in its cave.

As we approached, greater excitement took us than at the first city, for here were recognisable buildings. Many thousands must have done unconsciously what we did then, walked with deliberation through the North Gate. The inevitable cloud of dust, pushing donkeys and elephants, oxen swaying with impossible loads, shouting drivers, the cart that stuck in the gateway, and the old men who sat detached, observant in shade against the wall—none of them thought it so marvellous a thing, as we did now, to enter by the North Gate. It was built in the massive walls, the only gateway of the city that remained. Behind it the main street ran straight through the city, but the gate had been built to one side, so that attackers gaining entrance could not rush into the street without further obstacle. Once a barbican projected beyond the wall and guard-rooms were built into the gateway.

Nadia, in a conical Italian straw hat, waved the lunch basket. Under that stinging sun, iced lemon squash, hunks of cold mutton and fat juicy tomatoes and cucumbers suddenly had a more powerful appeal than the North Gate's masonry. From the plan in the museum I knew we were in Sirkap's principal street. Halfway up on the left should be a temple, whose thick walls had made such satisfactory black shapes on the plan. It was not far. 'Apsidal Temple' announced an enamelled blue-and-white notice in English and Urdu script. But before I had time to rebuild and people it with gods and priests, Nadia called me to lunch.

She sat in the corner of a ruined house, the picnic laid out,

protected by a flourishing tree. It seemed a right use of the house to eat there. Surely the former occupants would have welcomed the guests who could now only share their meal with ants. Share is an inadequate word, for hundreds of brown ants issuing out of the cracked earth occupied our slices of mutton by force. We swallowed the rest quickly, leaving the boiled eggs till last, unassailable in their shells. A row of vultures, perched despicably on a wall further down the street, watched every mouthful with malevolence. I threw a stone, but they only came back again.

“Look,” said Nadia as we cracked eggshells against the walls of the house. We were not alone after all. Human faces, peering over the temple walls, had joined the scrutiny of our lunch. Improvised turbans made of shirts and lengths of cotton lay loosely on the Aunt Sally row of heads. Where had they come from? When we arrived, except for an official guide standing near the North Gate, not a man moved in the city. “They want to sell something,” she said, pouring the last lemon squash into a red plastic cup. Not until the last mouthful was finished and the remnants parcelled up and stowed tidily in the basket did they emerge fully.

From the pockets of baggy *shalwar* they produced handkerchiefs tied in small bundles. Beads and coins jingled inside, picked up, so the owners said, from the very streets of Sirkap. Nadia handled the bright pieces of metal bearing the heads of emperors, four-armed deities, victors on horseback and inscriptions in Greek or unknown characters. Some carried the centuries’ wear lightly; others were defaced, encrusted with age.

Anxiously the men watched our reaction. I said nothing, but waited for Nadia. No excavations had been made for years, and I thought it unlikely that the coins had been found gratuitously on unopened ground. But if the coins were not genuine (though most turned out to be), they must have been copied from originals. If copies of Pompeii’s Dancing Faun can be bought at the museum in Naples, why not copied coins, however unofficial, from Taxila?

Nadia held a handful of bronze discs, the size of a half-penny, but twice as thick. “Perfect ear-rings for Edith Sitwell,” and to the man she added, “How much?” The bargaining

began: they would lower their prices, she would raise hers, we would walk away, they would follow; then the coins would change hands to enter another phase of their history as a necklace. Before they went, an old man fumbled in his pocket and held up a small image of Buddha carved in slate. He gesticulated at the ground to indicate that it too had been found in Sirkap. But now deceit lacked skill. I laughed, made the motions of carving and pointed to him. The figure's wizened face, misproportioned arms and four-fingered hands were obviously the old man's own handiwork with a nail. It bore not the slightest resemblance to the many clay Buddhas collected in the museum. For a moment he held out, hoping to convince. Everyone laughed then, and he put the doll Buddha away, ready for more gullible tourists. Walking abreast down the main street to the North Gate, they seemed pleased at having sold coins, if not the glass beads, which certainly originated in a European chain-store.

Seizing opportunity while we haggled, the vultures had ransacked the lunch-basket, overturning it and scattering rent plastic bags everywhere. The ant-covered mutton had gone, a few pieces of eggshells remained like newly discovered antique pottery. Afternoon sun brooded over the deserted city. Perhaps at this hour in summer it had always been silent, its people dozing in courtyards, or even under cover of the temple portico, vanished except for its steps. Surely the temple had been cool, with its six-foot walls, ambulatory and four-foot outer walls. Perhaps ceremonies and prayers in the full circle of the apse, still perfectly defined by blocks, took place at early morning and evening. A Buddhist *stupa* had once stood in the apse, but all that was ever found were three heads with wide-open eyes and two right hands.

Close by the main chamber wall in the temple precinct we found a shallow, dished stone used as a font for the washing of hands before worship. Across the other side was a square stone well or reservoir, now filled with earth and wild flowers. Near this site Sir John Marshall found a hoard of precious ornaments hidden under a room. The elaborate jewelled ear-pendants, bangles and anklets, goblets and rings of gold may have been stowed away for safety during an attack on the city, or perhaps votive offerings were stored there. The truth will never be

known, but no one ever returned to claim them till spades and picks exposed them so long after. A bronze statuette of Harpocrates, the Egyptian child-god of silence, was discovered with the hoard, a deity well suited as patron to the lonely valley. His finger is raised to his lips in a gesture of silence, and his free hand had once held an object, perhaps a lotus, symbol of resurrection.

As Alexander had been the great conqueror associated with the first city at Taxila, so Asoka was the great King whose name more than any other was linked with Sirkap, the second site. As a Prince he was sent by his father to govern Taxila, the city now foremost of the Punjab, and its monasteries and schools must have been very familiar to him. A piece of marble column had been unearthed near the block of houses where Nadia and I had picnicked, with an inscription in Aramaic to an official, a friend of the young Prince. But later, when Emperor, Asoka recoiled from the horrors of war and turned to Buddhism, devoting his time to building hospitals, digging wells, growing herbs for medical purposes, providing for female education, and striving for Nirvana by the Eightfold Path. He became a figure of such goodness that even H. G. Wells, critical as he was of prophets and kings, was moved to write: "For eight-and-twenty years Asoka worked sanely for the real needs of men. Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Asoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan his name is still honoured. China, Tibet, and even India, though it has left his doctrine, preserve the tradition of his greatness. More living men cherish his memory to-day than ever heard the names of Constantine or Charlemagne."

But Asoka left a tragic monument of his reign on the southern walls of Sirkap, which I went to see alone, as Nadia could not walk any more in the sun. His son, Dharmavivadhana, affectionately called Kunala by Asoka because of his small, beautiful eyes, which were like those of the kunala bird, was desired by the Emperor's second wife. But Kunala, whose 'person was graceful and his disposition loving and humane . . . reproached her with tears, refusing to be guilty of such a crime'.

In hatred, the stepmother arranged with Asoka to have the Prince sent to Taxila as Viceroy. While Kunala governed in the city where his father had done, the Empress forged an order from Asoka, sealed on his teeth while he slept, saying that Kunala's lovely eyes must be put out as punishment for treachery. Kunala could not understand why Asoka of all men should want this, but in perfect obedience he allowed the Queen's diabolical scheme. Blinded, he went out by the North Gate of Sirkap as a beggar. Years later his father heard the sound of his lute outside his palace and recognised his son's voice. The Prince was led in and Asoka, stricken with grief, knew it was the Empress who had blinded him.

Hiuen Tsiang, who visited Taxila in the seventh century A.D., described the *stupa* that Asoka erected on the spot where Kunala's eyes were put out, and said that 800 years afterwards the blind still prayed before it and many received sight. I found the *stupa* on the edge of Sirkap, placed so that it overlooked the whole city, the crumbled architecture built of Asoka's tears.

Nadia had wandered back to the place where we had eaten lunch. The odd shrine opening from the main street so absorbed her as she stood fanning herself with the straw hat that she did not hear me creeping behind on the grass-grown thoroughfare. "*Mon Dieu!* I thought you were a ghost," and we looked again at the strange structure which summed up 1,000 active years of Taxila's cities. Occidental and Oriental had clashed and fused in this shrine of the Double-headed Eagle, leaving behind some mark in stone. Its dedication was to Jaina beliefs, but its base bore Greek Corinthian pilasters. In panels between, an eagle looked in two directions with two heads. He had flown a long way, this eagle, to Taxila from Babylon and the Hittites, to Russia and Germany with the Scythians and south from Taxila as far as Ceylon. In its day Taxila seems to have been a prototype United Nations.

Streams that watered the valley then changed course very little during the centuries, especially compared with the major rivers of India. The clusters of houses we passed on leaving Sirkap lacked the craftsmanship of the ancient buildings. Yet their dependence on flocks and fertile fields and those streams was the same. A youth I saw sit in the shallows with a baby

brother in his arms might have belonged to any age. The slim, brown body pushing through tall reeds at the water's edge, deserting the cattle for a cool bathe, could have been any Taxilan herd-boy through 1,000 years. Although the water running over the grey slate shingle brought life to the walled towns, it offered an easy weapon to besiegers. With its streams dammed, Taxila could not long hold out. Perhaps because of this difficulty, the city was deserted for the last site.

Sirsukh, also named from the legend of the seven demons, was two miles further up the valley. It was here that Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese pilgrim, stayed. Its great battlements stood out as the jeep jerked over a rough farm-track. The whole city lay unexplored, and, except for a rectangular layout discernible under the grass, its treasures and mysteries were still buried. A mad pi-dog prevented us from getting out: whenever a leg showed, snarling fangs snapped within inches. Under its mangy skin sharp bones moved like a Meccano toy, and the skull-like head carried a circling halo of flies. Better by far, we decided to see the corner tower of smooth, sheer stones, and the defensive curving base, from our seats than to risk a dose of rabies. Nadia, who was driving, raced the engine to scare the dog and we bumped back to the road. Certainly the founders of Sirsukh chose to detach their city from the sheltering hills, which gave the first cities and Sirkap a degree of natural defence. But with assured water and the new type of defence no doubt they thought Taxila an eternal city.

Because of its special position, with the one passable point through the Himalayan wall only 100 miles away, Taxila became a repository of Hellenic and Indian cultures, and for its population always had as cosmopolitan a crowd as could be found anywhere. Under Buddhist influence, Taxila became the greatest university of India. The hills surrounding the city were dotted with monasteries and schools, and although the university was not as organised as its modern counterpart, it offered a wide range of subjects, both religious and secular. Students, who were directly responsible to their teachers, could learn anything from mathematics to archery, astrology to the *Veda*. Its medical school was famed throughout the East, galvanised, perhaps, by Asoka's interest. In its arts, Taxila

also reflected the pooling of two dissimilar cultures. The sculpture of Gandhara, as the north-western province was called, usually took some subject of Buddha, but the features and pose of the figures, the folds of drapery, were Greek in form.

The intensity of midday heat had relented, and pallor induced by the sun at its zenith seeped from the landscape. Colour and form returned to the hills, the puckered folds gathered shadows under the wild olives. Among these folds on the southern side of the valley, between wedges of slate thrust up by primeval movements, monasteries of the Enlightened One were built. Taxila's temporal importance had been matched during its last eight centuries by its importance as a spiritual centre, in addition to its university.

The monastery of Mohra Moradu could not be reached directly by road. Nadia struggled in the white sandals she always wore over a stony track winding round the hillside. A few goats tearing at the overhanging bushes turned in surprise at the intruders. Ascending, we paused for breath, the valley reaching across to the opposite hills and opening to the plain, intensely green in the penetrating light. Coming from higher up, three girls passed us, going with a swinging gait over the rough ground in bare feet. Flat, wide waterpots of earthenware, one on top of the other, were balanced on their heads, so that their necks extended in a classical profile. With averted eyes, they continued shyly to the valley. A curious clicking sound we could not identify came from the gap to which we climbed. Rounding a corner, the sound intensified, and under an enormous shelf of rock a score of men and boys squatted, chipping stones, the valley singing with the chorus of hammers. The noise died away as they saw us approach, one by one the hammers stopped, until, like the players in Haydn's symphony who steal away, having extinguished their candles, none was left. In a pregnant moment, the masons stared at Nadia in her smart French clothes.

And there, on a little plateau in a cup of the hills stood Mohra Moradu golden in the late afternoon. Trees dappled the high *stupa* wall and clusters of leaves brushed the superimposed stone drum. Beneath, where leaves had crisped a little too soon and fallen on the wide steps, an old man swept

with a besom like the leprous woman in Buddhist tradition. She had gone to another *stupa* in Taxila, but saw to her disgust that the courtyard was full of dung and leaves, and so set to work watering it and scattering blue lotus flowers. Then all at once, her leprosy left her, her former beauty was restored and the scent of the blue lotus clung to her.

The custodian of Mohra Moradu unbent and laid the broom aside as Nadia and I walked slowly up the steps. Calm eyes looked enquiringly from under the bushy eyebrows and white turban, and he led us to a forecourt giving access to the *stupa*. In the days of Taxila's power, certain sacred writings helped the conversion to Buddhism three centuries before Christ. Previous incarnations of the Buddha were claimed to have taken place in Gandhara. Holy places were endowed with monasteries, and relics of the incarnations collected and encased in the *stupas*. On these structures, some only twice a man's height, others large towers, a wealth of sculptural detail was lavished. The work helped the artist nearer to blissful Nirvana. The most arresting of these *stupas*, not far away, connected with incarnations, is where the Buddha took a bamboo splinter and pierced his body to feed a dying tigress. The earth was dyed a deep red with the sacred blood, as General Cunningham found in the last century.

We went into where the old custodian beckoned, to see the sculptured panels on the base of the massive *stupa*. A temporary wooden roof kept the wall figures from damage and deterioration. Most were modelled from clay, as there was no stone suitable for carving at Taxila, an astonishing material to have survived so long. Warm light filtered underneath the roof, gleaming on the delicate features of the Buddha, captured by the clay in many different attitudes. The benign expressions, the simple robe over the well-built body, seemed remote yet alive. The old man pulled my sleeve when I bent to look closer, and pointed to a crevice in the stonework above. Large orange hornets streamed in and out, queuing impatiently at the entrance to their nest. A smile stole into the old man's gold-brown eyes, the only language in common between us.

Outside, the long wall-panels of teaching, contemplating Buddhas and of Bodhisattvas in the varying form of previous

incarnations had all been removed for nurturing in the museums of Pakistan. Under glass, the huge figures in semi-relief lost some of their drama, but erosion would shorten their life had they been left in the open air after excavation, and these sculptures were the most beautiful of all those found at Taxila and, it is said, of the whole Indo-Afghan School.

An intoxication seized Nadia and me, not entirely due to walking about in the worst heat. Prolonged contact with these relics of civilisation, so contrary to our own, induced a wearying excitement. We mounted the square base and leant against the stone drum of the *stupa's* upper portion. We needed time to think, time to recuperate. Nadia lit a cigarette, letting the blue smoke curl and trail away into nothing. Opposite, on the ridge of a glacier of slate, a shepherd-boy chased his wayward goats, cajoling and threatening; his voice came down to us quite clearly. And the valley's forgotten cities and the miles of cultivated land beyond opened from the glen of Mohra Moradu.

"We must not keep him waiting," said Nadia, grinding her cigarette into the stone blocks beneath us. In the courtyard, the old man swung the key to and fro, also lost with his own thoughts. The monastery's living quarters, cells, assembly hall and even bathroom had still to be seen, and already the afternoon glowed like evening. Another flight of steps of limestone, this time more regular, another temporary wooden gate and we stood in a raised courtyard. The ancient monk's communal life was enacted here, and in the assembly hall to one side. Spacious cells with walls still standing to roof height opened off the court. Sculpture had graced this part of the building too, now either removed to museums or long since lost. A carved wooden veranda, painted and gilded, once shielded the cells and the coloured courtyard walls from the sun.

The archaeologists who saw each layer of earth being cleared away from a cell in a corner must have held their breath as one of Taxila's most distinctive finds emerged inch by inch. Jealously guarded now behind tall wooden doors, it occupied the same cell in which the discovery was made. Agile as a boy, the bearded custodian slipped off his pointed sandals, and climbed to unbolt the upper half of the stable-like doors. Inside tier upon tier, rising to twelve feet, was the fantastically

wrought miniature *stupa*, ending in a mushroom-shaped umbrella. Like the base of the great *stupa*, classical pilasters framed the Oriental sculpture. Corinthian mouldings divided the lower tiers, the upper rings sprouting from a perfect hemisphere. This echo of the Mediterranean, mingling with the more exotic art, may have been the memorial to a revered monk, and built in the cell where he lived and died. Traces of crimson, blue and yellow were found on it, and the umbrellas had holes round the edge where garlands and ribbons or bells may have been hung. Feeling sacrilegious, we photographed it, and then the doors were pushed to and the iron bolt shot home.

It was impossible to take more than a glimpse at the assembly hall. Time which had fled before the ruins' timelessness, rushed back again. Even the shepherd-boy's goats were safely down for the night, and he sat on the high wall of the assembly hall, engrossed in our camera and biting into a piece of sugarcane. Then, tiring of the camera, he poked his stick into a crack between the stones and whirled a long, thin ribbon to the sandy floor. "*Un serpent!*", shouted Nadia leaping away. But it was only the skin, a feathery casing of silver, without life, though beautiful nevertheless, lying empty in the dust, like the cities of Taxila in their fertile valley.

So they lay and flourished for centuries, under a baking sun that sped towards the Khyber on thousands of evenings until the fatal day when, through the Pass, White Huns descended on the valley. Burning, looting, raping, murdering, they wreaked senseless destruction on the city of arts and learning. It was believed that the Huns, with flat noses and piggish eyes deep in their heads, were the offspring from the witches of Scythia with evil spirits of the desert. Mihiragula, the great leader, called the Attila of India, rolled elephants down rocky hillsides so that he could enjoy their sufferings. The monasteries and their monks may have been vanquished, but the gentle Buddhas of clay long outlived the Huns who closed Taxila's history with the sword.

Nadia, usually talkative, said hardly anything driving home to 'Pindi; we seemed to have spent the day in another world. The things we had seen and touched became unreal: the jasper ear-reels, flesh-rubbers, schist goblets, elephant-goats,

horse-bridles, antimony-rods, lapis lazuli eyes of images, stone lamps and ladles, terracotta whistles, blowpipes, birch-bark books, fish-plates, shield-bosses, spear-butts, goddesses and coins of a host of kings, crushing mills and car-wheels, cattle troughs and crucibles, jewellers' shops and palace courts. Taxila's ghostly gates were closed against warriors, priests and beggars, and the young Prince with eyes like the kunala bird.

PEDLAR FRIENDS

MORNING POURED over the rim of hills into the garden while I still slept. Waking, I looked from bed to translucent trees and the sandy path where the Indian squirrels hesitated before jumping to another trunk: a moment of delight suspended between sleep and the effort of clearing books from the bedside table when Willie brought the morning tea. After indulgence in laziness came organisation from Willie, and the day had begun. I never discovered why Willie wore heavy boots in the morning, polished military fashion to a high degree of reflection. They squeaked and clumped, first on the path, then over the coconut matting of the entrance hall, on to the floor tiles of the bathroom. Passing with a duster to the sitting-room, he commanded, "Shaving water, sah." That indistinct 'sah' of Willie's was not quite '*sahib*' and not quite 'sir', but a combination of both. Making sure I had in fact got up, he vanished.

A pleasant sequence of events was this, trivial but harmonious, a pantomime before breakfast. In the bathroom I found cold water in the basin, warm water in the jug, and scalding water in the shaving mug. Did Willie intend some special routine? Did some old-fashioned pattern of morning toilet elude me? Invariably I tipped the cold away, took two inches of warm and topped it up with scalding, feeling guilty lest Willie should discover, for obviously the three temperatures had been adjusted with much care.

And always at this juncture the first caller of the day arrived. Without glancing out of the window, I knew whose bicycle was wheeled in and leant with a thump against the veranda. Still dabbing my chin with the towel, I would go out and be greeted by the barber who came regular as clockwork, hoping in the end I would give in and allow him to shave me. In one hand he carried an attaché case lettered BARBER on the side, and with the other, touched the imitation astrakhan cap in a *salaam*. For as long as I stayed in the hotel he would come and

sit on the step, waiting for my hair to grow long enough for a trim. When all the colonels and U.N. officials were away and I was the only 'white' male left, he would stay all morning keeping his cut-throat in working order by shaving his legs on the steps like a true Muslim.

Usually I managed to walk across the compound without seeing more, but after breakfast the vendors, colporteurs, horse-dealers, would arrive, sometimes three together. They came by different entrances and showed their wares in different rooms, knowing of each other's presence.

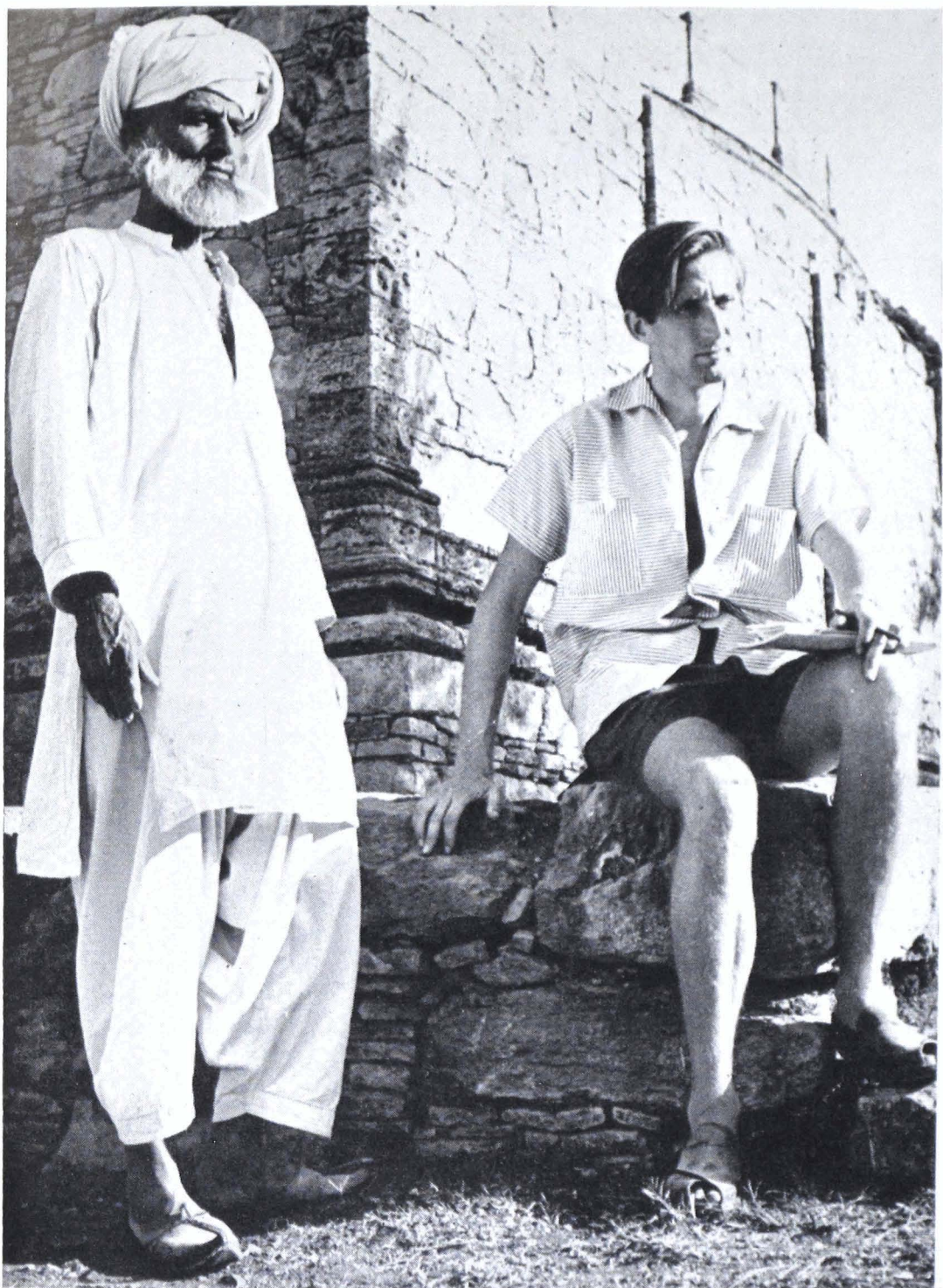
One morning, taking a path through the flower-beds where the gardeners had been hours already, I heard a weird call like the mosque-crier's far up the road. The fragment of music, fraught with mystery, came nearer, and I thought of Russian priests wailing from the veiled sanctuary. I almost expected to find gold copes and black spade beards outside, but only a poor pedlar I had seen with a few customers by the gate of the soldiers' billets came by on a bicycle. A small yellow tin, pierced in front like a portable radio and fixed on the handle-bars, contained all his wares. I went closer and found it was a miniature oven for roasting peanuts. After the first few mornings when he knew his peanut song captivated me, he came into the drive to give a special performance. A poke of nuts cost less than a half-penny, and they were carefully garnished with a potato crisp and a sprig of herb.

The room with the tiled floor, once the dressing-room of the imposing suite, was transformed every morning into a fruit market by an old man who entered without knocking and spread out piles of plums, sweet limes, pomegranates, bitter oranges, loquats, *sangtara*, and a sea of grapes. When all was ready, he tapped on the inner door and squatted in the middle touching up his arrangement, turning a bunch here, collecting a runaway orange there. Compared with the others who came, he talked little, not bothering to laud his merchandise. He knew the small, very sweet stoneless grapes were a favourite of mine, and I bought some every day. His ridiculously low price never failed to astonish me when I worked it out in pence. He seemed unconcerned to make money, and when he took the coins he looked quizzically at them as if they were curios or jewellery.

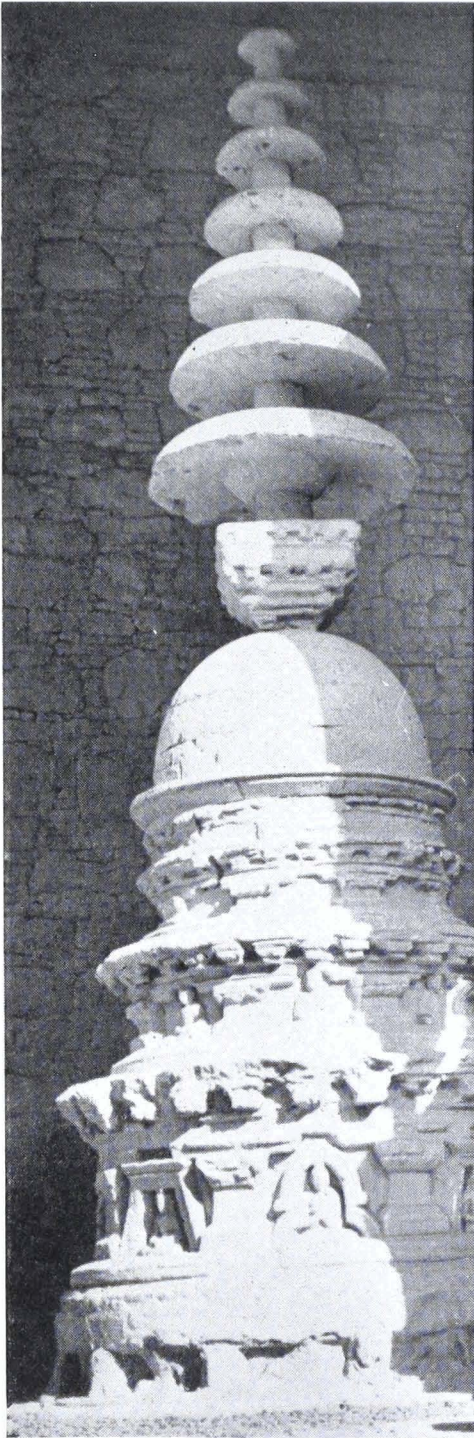
Of much more value to him were newspapers and magazines. If I found a cover picture with a pin-up of Marilyn Monroe or Brigitte Bardot, the wrinkles of his leathery face deepened and a trembling excitement seized him and shook the long, white locks.

Plenty of fruit appeared in the dining-room, and Willie's tea tray had plums or grapes, but I seldom ate any for fear of aggravating my stomach, so the pears and apples I bought from the old fruit-seller I gave to the children. Noses would be pressed against the wire door, their owners waiting in perfect patience. If I went out all day they would be sitting on the steps when I came home, or if I had been riding they stood round to watch me dismount. Then one day, with no apparent reason, they stopped coming. A week went by and none of them ventured near, except one boy. He was crippled and an idiot, although he knew kindness well enough. On this occasion he followed me into the house and began to behave in an extraordinary way, flinging out his arms, gyrating grotesquely on his bent and bony legs. This was repeated several times. I guessed he was trying to say something, but I could not imagine what. Later I found out why the children had stopped away. They had come as usual, and, on looking through the gauze, had seen ghosts dancing inside. They all fled, including the idiot boy. Their eyes, however, had not actually deceived them. From the blades of the two big fans in the sitting-room I had hung four or five nylon shirts on coathangers to drip dry, and someone had switched on the power, and the children peering in the gloom had seen ghosts flying round close to the ceiling.

With a little tray for collecting money, the deformed boy spent his day on the wide grass verge near the gate, where he made strange noises to passers-by. His particular friend was an enormous man with huge feet that had never been confined in shoes. A *lungi* wrapped the thighs, and the remains of a shirt the great torso. Whenever I saw him I thought of a character from Oberammergau, an impression aided by his mass of hair and flowing beard. He also carried a thick staff, but divided at the top into three prongs. On these a sticky pink toffee wound in sickly coils. When he reached his cripple friend, he stood the staff on the ground like a candelabrum, drove the



The custodian of Mohra Moradu Monastery and the author



The splendid Buddhist stupa in its original cell at Mohra Moradu

Buddha, still serene after eighteen centuries



flies away and pulled off a piece of the glutinous sweet. A few twists turned it into animal shapes—a swan, a snake, or a camel—and then he gave it to the boy, who squealed with delight. How this John the Baptist ever made a living was a wonder, for when he did have customers his charge was infinitesimal, though he looked happy enough.

The bane of my life for the whole time I stayed in 'Pindi was a dealer who came up the drive with a bundle of silk scarves, embroidered wraps and brassware balanced on the back of a bicycle bearing the British Royal Arms painted on the mudguard. In the ordinary sense he was a rogue, these goods being a cover to his real means of livelihood, which ranged through everything from opium and *charas* to hunting expeditions. Distinction lent to his proposals by the Royal Arms, a mark of honour I had seen on many *tongas* too, also covered his daily offers of 'the good time', for this irrepressible little man could fix me up with a harem on request. The trouble was that I liked him and so had no heart to send him packing once and for all. He possessed absolutely no shame or feeling of wrong-doing in the many nefarious businesses he suggested to me. His amorality inspired by its thoroughness, the black market to him was a natural field of activity. He asked how many rupees to the pound I had got from the bank. Without thinking, I told him thirteen. Having thus deviously established I possessed travellers' cheques in sterling, he bargained for them himself at the unprecedented figure of eighteen to the pound. And all with a face as innocent as a choirboy's.

One morning when I had other things on my mind, I said if he would not stop pestering me I would call the Manageress. Then he sank to his knees and imploring me not to, said she would certainly forbid him entry to the grounds, and perhaps he would end up in jail. Next day he came back again reopening his offer of eighteen rupees to the pound, quite unable to understand why I abided by the strict currency regulations. But on arrival in Karachi I had made a full declaration of my money which was entered on several forms, and the banks had to stamp each amount cashed, so that no loopholes were left for illegal money-changing. Then his eye fell on my typewriter.

It was new and I had brought it from France. Now, if I would take some of his goods in exchange, or he would take the machine for half goods, half rupees. Or better still, he would fix up a 'really good time' for me plus 100 rupees . . . 150. "The young girl too, only fifteen, *sahib*, breast very beautiful, tight little breasts like peaches."

No, no, no! Then old clothes. What about those brown shoes? He would give me a beautiful head-scarf for those; or for the nylon shirt hanging up to dry, he would give me a nice old coffee-pot in brass, which I could trade in England for a lot of money. *Sahib* doesn't want anything at all? No, no, no! Then, a glimpse of Willie coming across the garden with the afternoon tea, and my dealer friend gathers himself and flies out the bathroom door with a parting sally, "Perhaps you need good time to-morrow, *sahib*." This is a personal favour; and because he likes me, and sees I am not an official or Army man getting a big salary, he will make special terms. "Two pounds for the young one; very pretty, beautiful firm breasts like this, honest *sahib*," says he, holding up an oval of pink bath-soap.

Life at 'Pindi was very much a matter of routine, beginning with Willie's morning performance, and continued in the late afternoon by riding. The horse-dealers had come when they heard I wanted to choose a mount, and the path outside had not been unlike the cross-roads in Ireland where we held a horse-fair every month. After much argument, I chose a small but not so docile chestnut mare, and every day afterwards her owner, a bent man with a hooked nose exactly like an engraving of Fagin, brought her to the door when the brazen sky began to tarnish with approaching evening. I preferred riding at this time, when I could gallop with ringing hooves along the wide, sandy stretch under the trees of the Mall without sweating the horse, up to woodlands with a labyrinth of low branches, surrounding the golf-course. The mare had a mouth of iron and knew no speeds between trotting lazily and going hell-for-leather as though on a racecourse. Golfers or no we circled the greens and shot through the forest until islands of indigo cloud blotted the western horizon, and bats began to practise glissando flights under the first emerging stars. Then home

again, John Gilpin fashion, stopping for nothing, all attempts to slacken the pace being gallantly defied by the mare. Men and women squatting in their uninhibited way to obey nature's call in the roadside culverts would look up to see the charger fly overhead. Camels and donkeys innocently grazing near nomads' tents, panicked and scattered, the dogs darted out yelping, and horses, tethered with their forefeet roped together, reared into the air, till the gipsies recaptured them. Within 100 yards of home, the mare came to an instinctive stop by the traffic police on the cross-roads, and entered the hotel compound with all the dignity to be expected of an Eastern lady.

Only one of the men who invaded the hotel with things to sell made a pilgrimage to Lloyds Bank necessary, and this was the carpet-seller. From the inevitable bundle tied in an old sheet brought on the carrier of a rusty bicycle, it was difficult to imagine him as a man of considerable wealth and a store-house of knowledge on the history and design of carpets. On his first visit, the bundle was reasonable in size, and he spread the contents on the floor of my sitting-room. There were some undistinguished carpets for tourist trade, and others that might have been produced by prison gangs. The Punjabi *durris* was interesting as local handiwork, usually by one family who owned and sheared the sheep, carded and spun the wool and wove the rugs on their own looms. Nadia called in and asked to see his real carpets, for she wanted a good one to take home to Paris, so the man departed on his bicycle and returned with his son in a new American beach-wagon. Out came a revelation of heavenly mansions in triangle and lozenge architecture, where vines, rosettes, and palmettes flourished by zigzag streams of eternity. Radiant flowers in crowded fields shone with splendid colours under the emblem of light, the 'S' patterns, symbol of the sun. Octagonal discs, symbol of earth's diurnal movements, spun in this woven universe with eight-pointed stars like the diamond ring which King Solomon wore.

Before these wonders, expounded by the carpet-seller, Nadia and I sat spellbound. A saddle-cover from Kirman in bright olive green and pale lemon yellow. A Baluchistan bag patterned in brick hues like an old Tudor wall. A prayer-rug from Bokhara with its *mihrab*, a prayer arch to be turned towards Mecca

five times a day, its patterns where hands should be placed while obeisance was made, and another small motif where a piece of earth from Mecca could be placed during prayer. A camel-bag shredded with age, populated by angular camels of red and purple on a desert-coloured background. A Turkoman tent-bag and Oriental runners in pinkish mauve, such a diapason of texture and dyes as we had scarcely seen before. Many were antiques come down through the lifetimes of successive owners. "Very, very, very, very old," the carpet-seller said in an awed, reverential voice, as though entering into the *liwan* of the mosque. And he stroked the soft but firm pile tenderly, caressing the lustrous sheen with loving, knowing hands. He had even rarer carpets made in the harems of minor principalities, and over these his voice lowered to a husky whisper, "The royal house, the royal house."

The sale of these beautiful specimens no longer interested him; they were works of art and he was a connoisseur. He brushed aside my ignorance when I thought the tiny brown markings in the centres were from moths instead of the characters giving the date of weaving, and passed on to the history of another tent-bag. Nadia made her choice with difficulty, but, having settled, the bargaining began, and after four sessions of argument on four days our price was accepted. He took Nadia's cheque and wrapped it in a thick wad of 500-rupee notes, more than Nadia's income for a year, kissed her hand, calling down all the blessings of Allah, and begged a cigarette.

Conquest of Nadia whetted the edge of salesmanship, and he turned attention to me, but though his carpets were glorious, I did not want one, or, rather, could not afford one. This baffled him, for he had seen me making notes as he explained each type, and thought I was taking down prices. Then he thought of his masterpiece, which could not fail to persuade me. In a state of collapse and excitement, having cycled all the way into the city and out again to get it, he opened a light-weight tapestry. It unfolded, a cascade of brilliance, falling and tumbling over the armchair, foaming into excessive depths of colour, flowing away to a lake shimmering like a spectrum. Because of the colours' fastness, I could not believe in the

antiquity of this fabulous piece, patterned like a formal garden. But did I not know, he asked, that the stigmas from 4,000 crocuses had gone into an ounce of the deep saffron, or that the dried bodies of 50,000 female insects had been sacrificed to the reds of the flowers, to say nothing of the everlasting dyes from bastard teak and gall-nuts. I was indeed foolish to think that any sun, however mighty, could undo the craftsmanship of such numberless hours.

In the end, his well-tryed patience nearly broke. I coveted the tapestry, but could not possibly afford it. "In London this cost £1,000." He may have been right. "But I sell you cheap, very cheap, only 400." Eventually, not so much to sell the tapestry as to save me from my own foolishness, he got a complete declaration of my resources and had to scrutinise my travellers' cheques. After that the masterpiece was folded sorrowfully away, and the Oriental runners and camel-bags brought out again. His ideas of how much should be spent on carpets and how much kept for the rest of my stay differed from my own, and I narrowed the choice down to two prayer-rugs, knowing I would eventually buy the cheaper. But before the final decision I must sleep with them, and so for two nights they were hung on the wall. Before Willie brought morning tea I lay with half-closed eyes looking at the prayer arches and the rust and tempered steel of their mellow reds and blues.

The money-changer became agitated beyond words when he heard that I had been to the bank, though it was a mystery how he knew; perhaps he had a spy permanently posted outside. But he came up to my rooms the same afternoon full of disappointment that I had thrown 'good pounds' away. Surely if I could afford to do that and buy carpets as well, I could find enough for 'the good time'. Then the carpet-man was back after an absence of a few days. What about some cheap Kashmir curtains at 4 rupees the pair? And he tried the same old tricks over a few shillings as he had over hundreds of pounds.

Besides those callers with things to sell, many others came with stiff books like ledgers on behalf of missions and orphanages. They flicked the pages over, showing me the names of subscribers for years past, pronounced the illustrious names of generals and marshals, and then handed me the pen to add my

donation. A native colporteur from the Seventh Day Adventists met the sellers at the door one afternoon and waved them off. "I am not one of these commercial men," he said loftily as I asked him in, "and only deal with intellectual people." Albeit, he opened a brief-case and displayed some appalling books, for which he wanted an exorbitant price. He subjected me to a barrage on the usual topics of drinking and smoking, most forms of social entertainment, and a few additional evils, like observing Sunday instead of Saturday, and made constant references to his books. Some were illustrated, like Doré, and others had glossy colour plates of rosy-cheeked men and women laughing in the sun after a health-food breakfast with no white bread and no meat. He also descended on Nadia, and she actually bought one to be rid of him. It was almost a relief to hear the money-changer's unobtrusive voice, "You look tired, *sahib*. I got good medicine. Just a tiny, tiny bit, and you feel wonderful for the good time."

ROAD TO THE INDUS

DUST HAD not settled from thousands of hooves before the sun dipped behind the Khyber hills. Driven from outlying pastures for the night, donkeys and bullocks, camels and horses and shouting herdsmen blocked the road into Peshawar. Our car nosed slowly, brushing a black, shiny hide, or halting while an unhurried herdsman crossed the road, legs dangling to the ground, on his donkey. In front of the irregular houses, set well back from the road, charcoal and dung fires were glowing under big pans, and around the open-air kitchen families gathered, waiting for the evening meal. For the shepherds and goatherds, and the boy who watched the buffaloes on the plain, it was the time for talk and friendship. Night never waited for those not home with their flocks by sunset, and we had arrived just as the local rush-hour was at its height. Everyone seemed to be going in the same direction at once, as if ancient city gates would close at a certain hour.

What a climax to the drive! And to think I had nearly missed the 100 miles of road between 'Pindi and Peshawar, for a seat on the plane was booked, until a friend going by car offered to take me. Through a landscape changing from melancholy Scottish valleys to the cactus-land of Arizona, the Kentish-like orchards and meadows in the Vale of Peshawar, we sped, too swiftly to catch more than a glimpse of each scene.

Along the tamarisk way, men and animals moved on a road already old when the Mogul emperors came down from Kabul, a road that had been both bloody and peaceful. The Sikhs and British struggled for supremacy along it, and more recently the pathetic lines of refugees poured along it at Partition, leaving a miserable litter behind of men and animals too weary to travel more. The Grand Trunk Road had been laid by Sher Shah in the early sixteenth century, but nearly 2,000 years before him there had been a road which Asoka, sickened by war, lined with trees all the way from Bengal to the Indus, and

used as a royal way when travelling about to establish hospitals and schools amongst the poor.

My first journey took only three hours, but it was not enough, and later I took three days, stopping to see the 100-mile pattern in detail. Some Danish friends had come with a Land Rover and were anxious to see the country, so we set out from 'Pindi, intending to straggle.

The road to Peshawar left the leafy sunlit avenues of 'Pindi directly for open country. A textile factory and attendant houses for its workers lined it for a short way. But the houses, though new, looked the same as villages I had seen on first travelling the road. Machines had not yet destroyed the age-old round of life. Men who worked in the factory still squatted in a circle on the ground with their friends, or carried their string-beds under the keekar trees to sleep, like their brothers up-country. And their women-folk still plastered the walls of the house with fresh dung to dry in the sun as fuel for their fires. In seconds, the car flashed by the factory, but this reminder of Western life recurred for a split second as we dodged round two humped oxen plodding with a heavy load of wooden tea chests, stencilled 'Lipton's'.

Now the road itself began, running through scrub to a gap in the nearest hills and green stretches beyond. Curious gorges marked the land where watercourses had undermined the stiff clay, leaving behind faults and valleys below road-level. We saw women going with baskets on their heads to dig clay from these gorges. Walking carefully, with erect carriage, they emerged in a string, the clay piled high. Not all were so lucky, for I was constantly reading in newspapers of women being buried and killed by a collapse of the mounds when too much digging undermined them. A concrete convent built on a rise overlooked a beautiful outcrop of rock, grey-brown by day, but washed with the colour of blood by a rising or setting sun.

A brown hill, spotted by wild olives, dropped with a long escarpment to Hassan Abdal. Sheltered from the heat by many overhanging trees, the village, besides being the home of farming peasants and a resting place for travellers, made claims of holiness. While we pulled the Land Rover in to a row of booths to quench our thirst with tea, the standers-by

crowded round. A Land Rover was not an uncommon sight, nor were three Europeans, though admittedly a platinum blonde woman in red jeans driving one must needs be seen to be believed. The three of us, with a bearer, provided an incident in the life of the village, where any event was important. Could three Punjabis on camels have stopped for tea in an English village and gone plodding on their way unnoticed?

My tea-cup was taken proudly back to its booth by a man who, half in Urdu and half in English, said he had been to Birmingham and Sheffield. To understand all he said was impossible, for he jumped so quickly from the praises of Gracie Fields to accusations against Lord Mountbatten, the marvels of self-service at Lyons' Corner House, the generosity of the National Assistance Board and near wins in football pools. His friends pressed around, with serious faces watching his lip movements over the English words. Some smiled, others were impassive, but further conversation was cut short by the approach of a holy man.

The little crowd left a space for him to come to the Land Rover. A ghastly face, pallid with white daubings, peered under the canvas roof. Elaborate necklaces of beads swung as he held out a tin for alms, bells tinkled on a thick leather strap round his ankles, and a large buffalo horn dangled from his shoulder like Little Boy Blue. Not a word passed. We each gave a coin, under the weird glance from eyes black in the corpse-like face. He had come down from the tiny white shrine perched with a few lonely trees on the top of the mountain. "What a fearfully long walk, and so difficult for groceries," said Birthe, the Danish woman at the wheel. "Groceries be damned," replied her husband, Knud. "If in fact he really goes up there at all. He's got a cave no doubt, at the bottom, knowing perfectly well no one is ever going to climb that high to see him."

Somehow the Land Rover engine sounded sceptical as Birthe revved it. Were they right in doubting the holy man's integrity? I was less biased because of interest in Gurdjieff's teaching, who, although vague and evasive about its origin, had mentioned 'holy men' of the East. The Sikhs as well as Muslims possessed a shrine here also, but more practically at the bottom of the hill. Muslim tradition holds that our holy

man's ancient predecessor, sitting in prayer and contemplation, suffered persecution in the form of oaths and insults from a Sikh counterpart, similarly engaged at the bottom of the hill. When the stream of abuse became unbearable, the upper holy man loosed a great rock upon the lower. Sikh tradition merely quoted the rock as evidence of Muslim provocation. However, the downward velocity of the rock is a talking-point to this day. But no actual damage was done, for the Sikh put out his hand, without even looking up from his prayers, and stopped it dead. Water supply apparently was also in dispute between Baba Wali, the Muslim saint, and Baba Nanak, the Sikh—in fact, the founder and Guru of the Sikh religion. However, when Baba Nanak stayed the hurtling rock, all the water he could wish for sprang out of it, and has never stopped since.

“Come on,” I said to Birthe, ignoring Knud's suspicions that the whole thing was a fable. “Let's go and see for ourselves.” Curiosity getting the better of her, she swung the Land Rover into the side turning and stopped by a stream. “Is this all that's left of the famous spring?” asked Knud morosely. We walked over stepping-stones and found the Sikh shrine. Mulberry trees hung over a pool by the small temple, and some big fish moved sluggishly in its murk. And at one end was Nanak's rock, giving water for the pool. “Look,” cried Birthe, and there sure enough was the shape of a hand, rough but recognisable. I could not help smirking at Knud.

But older Buddhist legends were connected with the place too, and the inveterate Chinaman, Hiuen Tsiang, included a visit on his famous seventh-century tour. “The waters are pure and sweet”, he wrote in his journal; “lotus flowers of various colours, which reflect different tints in their common beauty, decorate the surface . . . at the present time when the people of that country ask for rain or fine weather, they must go with the Shamans to the side of the pool, and then, cracking their fingers, after praying for the desired object, they obtain it.”

Encouraged by success, I suggested walking down the stream to see the tomb of Lalla Rookh. We found it in a walled garden heavy with old trees. The others were not impressed with the plain building nor in the story of Lalla, the daughter of Aurengzeb, the last of the Moghuls, who had paused here

while on the way to Kashmir, where she would marry the young King of Bucharía. "All right," said Knud. "From now on I believe everything I'm told, from holy men to princesses." Poor Knud, he was unsympathetic to anything that predated Kierkegaard. He would fail to see romance in the tale of the innocent young girl travelling, for the first time in her life, from the protection of her imperial home in Delhi to marry an unknown suitor, and falling desperately in love with a minstrel attached to her train on the way. And Knud would fail to understand the killing pangs of their last night under the stars of Hassan Abdul, when the minstrel, having taken a *vina* from Lalla's little Persian slave, sang his last lays. Here on the ground we had trodden, love-smitten Lalla and Feramorz had shared their final hour. Knud wanted to get back to the Land Rover; he felt sure, in spite of the bearer's guard, that the stores would be filched. But neither would he know the joy of Lalla's discovery that the minstrel Feramorz, was in fact none other than her fiancé-King in disguise. Of course, Knud was not alone in his indifference to Lalla Rookh. Even Lady Holland could not face Tom Moore's interminable poems. "Mr. Moore," she said, having invited him to dinner on the publication of his epic, "I have not read your Larry O'Rourke; I don't like Irish stories."

But Birthe liked the story, her eyes becoming sad at the parting and glad at the ending. Had she been Lalla Rookh, I felt sure she would have dashed off with the minstrel-disguised King at his invitation to elope. I had learnt it by heart in the Irish school of my childhood. Now I found it descriptive of our present excursion, even down to Birthe's blonde hair:

"Fly to the desert, fly with me,
Our Arab tents are rude for thee,
But, oh! the choice what heart can doubt,
Of tents with love, or thrones without?"

"Our rocks are rough, but smiling there
The acacia waves her yellow hair,
Lonely and sweet, nor lov'd the less
For flowering in a wilderness."

Birthe drove us on to the main road again, and we left Hassan Abdul, where camels rested and young shepherds with black shaggy beards rode in to hear loudspeaker music, and, since the women were all at home, to wander hand in hand gnawing with surprisingly perfect teeth at corncobs. A mile further on we ran into a herd of bullocks, cows, goats, sheep, donkeys and their drovers scattered over the road in a stampede. The dust thickened, diffracted the sun rays into fan-shaped bars, and finally blotted out everything. Birthe leaned resignedly on the wheel, and Knud wrapped his head in her silk scarf, moaning that dust would be his end. Without sympathy, Birthe jerked her thumb in his direction. "You should have seen him in the Egyptian desert; the faintest puff of dust and he contracted pneumonia. The fool of a servant we had dashed him off to a hospital in Cairo which turned out to be a maternity home." Knud's heavy catarrh persisted all the next day long after the dust had settled, and Jimmy, the bearer, hinted it was a judgement for disbelief in the holy man.

This strange youth came with us in the Land Rover. Knud acknowledged him to be hopeless as a guide, and Birthe had even less to say of his qualities as cook. His virtues were an excess of charm and wizardry with rupees in the bazaar, a combination which so far had produced good food at astonishingly low rates. Ostensibly, though how deeply we never knew, he was a convert to Christianity, hence his English name. The horsy face could relapse from its goodwill creases into a mood, and then Jimmy retired from us to read his collection of references from former employers. The first of these had been a retired British colonel, gone native, who would lift the small, lean Jimmy into the air by his belt. The anecdotes of past employers was Jimmy's most useful contribution to our trip. Before reaching Peshawar I gave him an old watch, and to show thanks he drew me aside and allowed me to read the precious testimonials. In several of them Jimmy appeared with a different name. I pointed to one, "Why are you called Paul here?" "Ah," said Jimmy simply. "I was a Baptist then." Each Protestant schism which had claimed Jimmy's devotion or services, conferred a new name on him. The most original of these was Moses, given to him by a lady missionary who

found him sleeping under the bushes near her house. Jimmy had just been given the sack from another sect, not surprising when one considered his quixotic, oversexed nature. Now Knud's agnostic views and criticisms of Islam roused the latent Muslim in Jimmy.

To him was delegated the task of finding a good camping site when we pulled up for the night, while Knud and I unloaded the Land Rover and Birthe sorted out stores to make supper. Jimmy scampered amongst scrub in the failing light, deciding on a flat, grassy area not far from the road, and protected by low bushes. No afterglow would linger when the sun had gone. The stars would come out at once, a yellow Venus suspended in one-half of the sky, and the enormous locus structure of the Plough and North Star filling the other. To entice universal fires, Knud pumped the flame of his Primus stove, working furiously at the little piston. Spread around him were tins and boxes with raw materials of our meal. The last bullock cart rumbled home along the road, and a blue-jay spread its wings in iridescence. Suddenly from the bushes twenty yards away came a fearful shriek, and a cloud of black vultures rose in anger. Knud and I raced over, recognising the voice as Birthe's, and found her running from a very dead and putrid camel. Necessity had called her into the bushes and she had surprised the bald-necked birds as they covered the carcass, gorging at their unwholesome feast. Birthe would not listen to reason and, in spite of supper bubbling at the ready, we had to move camp.

Three hundred yards satisfied her and we transported everything, tents, the steaming pans of food, and the hissing Primus. "What difference can a dead camel make, provided the breeze does not change direction?" asked Knud, but his annoyance subsided at the first mouthfuls of tender mutton, and as we ate the skirl of bagpipes wafted unaccountably from the distance. Our lamps attracted people out of the night, and before the meal ended four or five came and with shy *salaams* sat cross-legged. Why did the *sahibs* and *memsahib* eat here in the open like refugees when they would be pleased to invite us to their houses? Jimmy acted as interpreter. Well, refugees of a sort we were, but from civilisation, and that only for a few days,

but how could this be explained? Knud opened his hands to indicate satisfaction with our camp, Birthe described circles with a juice-dripping guava in an attempt at acknowledgement of their invitation. She smiled and Jimmy replied for us. The herdsmen's bewilderment clearly remained. One of them left and returned shortly after with milk and diminutive eggs, a gift of hospitality. There was no question of payment. The distant bagpipes changed to a reel, but none of our guests knew who the player could be. The answer was probably that he had been a piper with a British regiment. A simple explanation, but impressive music all the same, drifting across the night.

Most energetic of the visitors was Said, a little man like a Cockney. He made us all laugh, although not one word was understood, at least not by the three of us. When for the hundredth time Said had proved his claim of speaking English by reciting "You good people," followed by "Thank you" and "You smoke good cigarettes," Knud introduced the topic of horses. Next day we wanted to ride to Attock. Ah yes, horses. Said had horses, and to prove it he went off to fetch them, even though it was late. Without him the group fell silent, and jackals encroaching on the scattered houses, howled and whined.

Said's grin and horses' heads came from the sphere of darkness into the light. The animals' bodies looked well-fed and sleek, and one of them muzzled an old man squatting in the circle, perhaps Said's father. Between Knud and Jimmy and Said a performance of many words, elaborate hand movements began. Knud got down and up again, and Jimmy kneaded the earth with his bare toes. But at last the bargain was concluded. The trio became a quintet as Birthe and I joined in, because which one would take the Land Rover with the camp equipment, to say nothing of transporting Said, who must bring his horses back again? Jimmy could not drive, although he had a reference as a chauffeur, Birthe would not ride without Knud, so it naturally fell to me. I was not disappointed, for my stomach rumbled already in protest at the camp food. Said, and his friends and horses left us. "You good people," he said by way of good night.

Jimmy put the stores into the tents as protection from

jackals, and I began to pull on my shoes to help. But Birthe snatched one away and upbraided me for lack of knowledge about the East. Shoes must always be shaken before wearing, because scorpions hid in them. Then she went on to the agonies of a friend who bit a mouthful of apple with a wasp in it, and almost died of suffocation when her tongue swelled up. Birthe and her friends were always meeting with strange mishaps.

The two Danes were to sleep in a tent the same size as mine, and Birthe was far from small. When the tent was crammed with food, she had it all taken out. The smell would invite jackals right in, of course. How silly not to have thought at first! Neither was to blame; their life consisted of endless confusion in which they were extremely happy together. With murmured excuses I crawled into my tent, tired and irritated with Birthe's fussing. Twenty minutes after, activity continued, an electric torch flashing about like a searchlight, "Ants," called Birthe beating her clothes when I poked my head out. "We're covered in them." Knud and Jimmy were putting the tent up further away.

Wearily I lay back. The luminous hands of my watch showed midnight. Knud snatched me from the verge of sleep; he wanted the Land Rover ignition key. Since there might be gipsies about who would steal our breakfast, he was going to bring the Land Rover nearer. Out of great consideration, Birthe woke me an hour later to offer cotton-wool to stuff in my ears against insects.

Despite disturbances, everyone was astir early next morning. Said squatted by the saddled horses, waiting for Jimmy and the Danes to mount. Rather than add to the chaos of striking camp, I went to fetch water for the Land Rover, a stroll along a clear stream, a taste of morning air before the heat began. When I returned to the Land Rover, I found a *dumba*. These sheep are distinguished by the extraordinary broad tail that sags heavily behind like a woollen sack, and when cooked is considered a great delicacy. I got into the Land Rover to remove the animal when Said and one of his sons appeared with two more. The Land Rover was off to Attock; so were sheep. Certainty in Said's face brooked no argument. "All right," I said, knowing he understood perfectly well. "But nothing else," and I started

the engine. Above the roar he shouted to a woman lost in a voluminous *burqa* by the side of the road. She crossed and climbed in beside me with an enormous basket of chickens. Ahead, the horses whisked their tails, and Knud in the lead struck off across country. With three such people together without one clue about direction, it was possible that they would never reach Attock. Smugly, I thought of the tents and food under the sheep's woolly bodies.

We roared and bumped over a road unvaried with any hills, until the slope towards Attock brought the miles of silver Indus into view. On the left were boulder-strewn slopes and the ruins of many stone houses. A mosque or tomb with delicate carving and domes stood alone on the hillside like a toy dropped by a giant child. Near the roadside, its walls in ulcerous decay, but still sheltered by a gnarled old tree, was a small garden of the Moghuls, for Attock was Moghul country. Down the stony ravines, bandits still swoop on horseback and, having plundered, disappear again among the rocks, where no search would ever find them. But it looked quiet enough as we passed by with chickens, sheep, Said and the mysterious female, only kites planing high above the ridges kept an eye on us. To the right, the ground swept away gently to where the Indus, broad as a lake, wandered idly to the foot of the rock crowned by Attock. Then the rise became a climb, the gear dropped to bottom and I knew Attock Fort would come suddenly on us round the next bend.

Out of a mound of rock the encircling wall rose in a fat, round tower and then plunged down the steep-sided hill. The passage between Fort and rock on the other side of the road was narrow and in former times easily defended. Past this abutment of the Fort, the Indus, now charging swiftly down a great gorge, could be seen again, and across it the ribbon of road winding off through country of quite different character. Dramatically spanning the gorge was the bridge, a cage of heavy girders on stone piers standing 100 feet above the water. In the whole of 1,000 miles or more, only five bridges cross the Indus, all guarded as important strategic points. Though moving fast, the water was low, flats and banks of grey silt exposed at its edges. In flood it swells and rises ninety feet, so



Pasture and sheep are the livelihood of this Baluchi tribesman



Fruit seller in the Street of Story-Tellers



A hot afternoon in the Khyber Hills, and then night at a caravanseraï

that its waves lap almost within arm's reach of the parapet. Like all things nineteenth-century, it had at least the appearance of solidity and permanency, so that when a train passed over the top portion, matching its speed to the cars below it, there could be no reasonable cause for alarm. Upriver, beyond the prominence over which the Fort sprawled, was an island, or rather a lamination of rocks and mud scooped by water into Surrealist shapes that looked like an island, for it was the point of land at the confluence of the Indus with the Kabul. In spite of these two rivers, both draining the snow-laden Himalayas, must be a terrible sight.

Mercifully, Said and the women took themselves and animals off after fixing a time to collect the horses, and I was able to have a picnic in welcome loneliness, watching the trickle of traffic on the Peshawar road, dwarfed by the overhanging crags. By a curious trick of scale, the Indus banks deceived as to their real size. When a boat came downstream, pushed this way and that by the currents, saved from destruction by a man standing at an oar, I could see that the bushes below the road on the further side were in fact trees, the animals moving under them were buffaloes and not goats, and that pebbles on the shore were in fact boulders. Near the Fort gateway a large Pakistan flag idled in an occasional breeze, showing the white crescent and star.

After eating, I drove back a short way and went to explore some of the Moghul terraces on the rise overlooking the river, and sat in a splodge of shadow. A burning sensation woke me: the sun had moved round, the shadow had deserted me an hour before. Some specks appeared down the road and in an enlarged version took the forms of Birthe, Knud and Jimmy, plodding slowly and painfully. Birthe looked none the worse for the long ride, but Knud moaned "My God! My God!" and kept asking why hadn't I gone back to meet them. Then Birthe saw inside the Land Rover and began to sob, for the sheep had not been too well-behaved and a certain amount of the equipment carried unmistakable insignia of animals. However, the others clearly suffered from fatigue, so I kept the wheel and drove on.

We went past the Fort and down to the bridge, stopped

to register the Land Rover by the guards, and so crossed the Indus. Sundown would not be long, and we decided to pitch camp for the second night on a level place near a wide, clear channel where we could swim. The Fort looked magnificent, commanding the confluence as if its jutting spur had been made specially for a fort. The walls battered inwards, enclosed an immense area of ground and followed the rise and fall of the rough hillside. Towers buttressed it, and a series of arches continued the whole length, formed like those in European castles, used, at least in romantic fiction, for pouring boiling oil on besiegers. At its lowest point was a sheer drop to the water, and to one side a precariously perched settlement used in days gone by as a brothel for soldiers in the Fort. Four hundred years of fighting and bloodshed had soaked these walls since the Moghul Emperor Akbar the Great built it to protect the plains of India from northern invaders. The Sikhs and British were fighting for it a century ago, and now an army still occupied it, for in the enclosure we could see the Pakistan Army, its young soldiers in bright-coloured berets, leaning over the ramparts.

The other three were much subdued, and Birthe made no fuss at anything. After the sun dipped below the hill behind us, a crowd came down the road by the Fort, making a great deal of noise and seeming to cluster round a central figure. When they approached our camping site, Birthe and I went to the road. A decked bridegroom mounted on a white horse was riding to his wedding, and his well-wishers went with him. Soon he would take away his bride from her village, mounted on the horse behind him. On his brow was a makeshift crown and from it, covering his face, long strings dangled with pieces of mirror and flowers entwined. A garland hung round his neck, and his hands on the reins were covered with long sleeves from the embroidered silk gown. The horse was decorated too: his trappings were hung with flowers, and his coat had been daubed in stripes and spots of chrome yellow. A far superior colour scheme for a wedding than the European black and white. We listened to the shouts and laughter of the crowd pressing around the horse's feet, and then went back to eat.

When the others had retired, Birthe saying "That horse nearly killed me" by way of good night, I lingered, and, crossing the road, dropped down the rocks a short distance and sat within earshot of the Indus. Except for river noises, chucklings and gurglings and the indefinable sense of great waters moving, silence blanketed the whole gorge. The great fortified gateways of the bridge closed at sunset, like a castle withdrawn behind its portcullis, isolating the two sides of the river so that nothing moved on the roads. A hulk showed where the Fort lay against a luminous sky, not yet old enough in the night to be quite black against the blazing stars. Below it, lamps gleamed from the little town that had supplied dusky girls to the Fort and sad songs of parting. Away to the left, Kabul and Indus caught light from nowhere, a sheen in a landscape of shades.

Akbar saw all this the night before he took his army across the river. The foundation stone of Attock Fort was laid, and before him lay a campaign to recover Kabul from his brother. The night breezes cooled him after the day's exertion, perhaps a few bitter thoughts possessed him. He had been an emperor since the age of fourteen, and never had the careless youth of his own sons. A man nearing forty now, stocky in build and distinguished by a mole 'like a split pea' on his nose, with his beard, but not moustache, shaved like contemporary Turks, a man 'distorted in laughter' and 'majestic in his wrath', much achievement lay behind him. Although he had spent his life as a soldier, he was simple and intelligent. Flying pigeons was his favourite sport. He was a devout Muslim, but looked for a faith which would be acceptable to all the different religious groups in his empire, and for this end admitted Jesuits to his court. His vision was an undivided Indian nation, a dream of kings since Alexander had crossed the Indus ten miles north of Attock eighteen centuries before him. Akbar's own father had dreamt of it too when he had crossed the Indus in the opposite direction thirty years previously, coming down from Kabul. Doubtless Akbar, like Humayan his father, consulted the odes of Hafiz for an omen, as he surveyed the Indus. Humayan's own name was worked into the couplet:

“Seek fortune from the auspicious phoenix, and the shadow cast by him,
For the pinion of fortune is possessed neither by crow nor by kite.”

The nation bonded together by the Moghuls crumbled, but the idea never quite died; there was unity of sorts under British rule, and now a real nation had emerged, a phoenix from the ashes of Partition. As I stood up to go back to our tents, a slither of young moon rose, and fell glinting on the river, and Akbar's Fort assumed a silhouette. Had Akbar seen its crescent, and had Iqbal, the philosopher of our own time, who dreamt of the Muslim nation in India, dwelling in Pakistan, the 'pure land'?

That night passed without disturbance, but at daybreak Knud was up, miraculously recovered and talking of riding again. It was Birthe's turn to moan; she would never understand him, but she was far too sore, even if she thought of a saddle a pain shot through her legs. "Talk about Danish hams," she laughed. After breakfast Birthe walked down awkwardly and paddled in the shallows. As everyone was busy, I took the Land Rover and drove to Campbellpur, a large Army station. I had not seen Captain Saadat Sheikh since our meeting in the Karachi Customs sheds, but I was unlucky, as Army exercises had taken him away elsewhere. Back again, an excited Birthe told me she had met a man, the father of thirty-five children. Wasn't it wonderful? But I must not mention it to Knud, who was sensitive about families because she had not yet produced an heir, and he would only begin about overbreeding in the East and food statistics. When Jimmy and Knud came back from their exploring on the river, Birthe rounded on us—Jimmy in particular—and asked us accusingly if we did not know there were crocodiles in the Indus, and how could we all go off and leave her in such peril?

We piled into the Land Rover again and drove until we came to a rest-house perched on a knoll, where we had the midday meal of curry and *chappaties*, and afterwards a siesta by a graveyard. The ground consisted of a grey, flaky shale, and the graves were mounds. Two slabs of slate protruded

lengthwise from the top like wafers stuck in ice-cream. White stones decorated some with a pattern of dots, but most were left unattended. From a distance, the only sign of its existence was a fluttering of pale blue and red flags from long poles fixed to the branches of trees. A herd of goats wandered to nibble undisturbed amongst the graves, the long hair on their legs looking like wellingtons.

The main Peshawar road passed under an avenue, and few places now bore the direct heat of the afternoon sun. Under the shady tunnel a constant procession went up and down the road, reminiscent of a classical frieze and its groups of gods and mortals. Those we passed were country folk driving beasts and carrying goods home from market. They waved as we went by and some posed for Birthe's camera. Some of the long avenue was of tamarisks, but I disliked them, for they looked dust-begrimed, seeming always about to moult, and the feathery leaves lacked lustre and life like a stuffed bird in a glass case. Water-holes were numerous in this stretch of road and each was occupied by buffaloes churning them into morasses of mud. One herdboys driving into a dusty farmyard stood astride a buffalo and rode it like a circus act, much to his companions' delight. *Tongas* jingled by, unbelievably overloaded with six passengers as well as the driver, together with sheep serving as foot-rests. Cyclists pushed slowly by with Birmingham tin trunks on the handlebars. The dust from our wheels enveloped some travelling by camel, but high on their saddles they looked disdainfully on the insignificant Land Rover, masters of a world that knew no hurry.

The country had changed from its Punjab character almost immediately after crossing the river. Reproduced as a background to the fields of maize were the hills of Attock, and dim shapes in the distance hinted at mountains. The characters in our frieze under the tamarisks had changed too as we penetrated deeper into the old-style North-West Frontier, and they maintained its reputation by wearing belts studded with bullets and ammunition pouches and carrying rifles on their shoulders. Family feuds provided enough excuse for shooting.

Beyond the town of Naushahra we pulled up for our final camp, for we wanted to visit the Bhuddist remains nearby at

Takht-i-Bahai in the morning. More particularly we wanted to see the place where the famous Takht-i-Bahai inscription had been written during the reign of Gondophares. He was a Parthian King of Taxila during the first century, and the Aramaic transcription of his name given as Gaspar has been thought to imply that he was the first of the Magi to visit the Christ Child. He is better known as the King who unwittingly took the Apostle Thomas as a carpenter into his household, having sent a merchant called Abbanes to Jerusalem with orders to buy one. The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostle Thomas, popular in the first century, though non-canonical later because Thomas baptised not with water, but only oil, says that the Apostles were casting lots at this time as to what parts of the world they should go to, and India fell to St. Thomas, but he objected. The Saviour appeared to him in the night and asked him, 'But he did not obey, saying, "Wherever thou wishest to send me, send me elsewhere; for to the Indians I am not going."'

However, Abbanes the merchant was roving about looking for a carpenter's slave to buy, and bought the reluctant Thomas for 'three pounds of uncoined silver' and had 'a bill of sale to thee Abbanes, a merchant of Gundaphores, the king of the Indians', and off they sailed to India. His first interview on arrival with Gondophares went well. 'The King said to him "What trade do you know?"' The Apostle says to him, "The carpenter's and the housebuilder's." The King says to him, "What work in wood do you know then, and what in stone?"' The Apostle says, "In wood, ploughs, yokes, balances, pulleys, and boats, and oars, and masts, and in stone, monuments, temples, royal palaces." And the King said "Will you build me a palace?" And he answered, "Yes; I shall build it and finish it, for because of this I came to build houses, and to do carpenter's work."'

St. Thomas, who now seems to have been enjoying his situation, omitted to point out he was speaking in parables, obtained money for the projected palace, and when Gondophares had gone away, 'he taking it, dispenses it all, going about the cities and places round, distributing and doing kindnesses to the poor and the afflicted, and gave them rest, saying,

“The King knows how to obtain royal recompense, and it is necessary for the poor to have repose for the present.”’ Eventually Gondophares turned up to see his new palace, having sent St. Thomas more money for its completion, and, of course, there was no palace. The Apostle and the unfortunate Abbanes were thrown into prison, but eventually were released and the King and many others were converted.

Not much of Gondophares reign has survived, though the Takht-i-Bahai inscription is used by historians as a touchstone for dating the period. Hoards of Gondophares’ coins were found in the buried cities of Taxila by Sir John Marshall, who says the mint was almost certainly at Taxila. Perhaps the silver coins he found, along with Syrian glass and antiquities of the first century—evidence of a trade route through to the Mediterranean—were part of the uncoined silver that bought St. Thomas.

GATEWAY TO CENTRAL ASIA

UNACCOUNTABLY, Peshawar shrouded itself in an aura of mystery. My first brief visit did nothing to unravel it. Everyone who had talked about the frontier city did so enthusiastically, but could never define their pleasure. Like a genii escaping from an uncorked jar, description fled when put into words. Nevertheless, Peshawar possessed a special character, and a room at the principal hotel was arranged. And on arrival just at nightfall I had to sign the register by candlelight, as the electricity had failed. Nobody seemed unduly perturbed or behaved as if it were unusual; the ready supply of candles seemed to indicate it was not. A porter took my things through the gardens to a row of rooms each with a small veranda. He fumbled with a padlock large enough for a church, and once inside lit more candles, showing a room, in the flickering shadows, of consumptive green walls. Quickly I washed and locked the apartment up until bedtime, when there would be no need to sit in it.

I passed through the lounge, where Government employees had gathered for an official dinner, and out to a very still night filled with a sweet smell exhaled by shrubs in the garden. I walked along avenues where large houses slumbered in their grounds, quiet except for occasional *tonga* bells. The cantonment, laid out with the graciousness and spaciousness of bygone days, was recognisable in any town, even in the dark. A signboard loomed by the pavement and I could just make out, 'The Mall'. Somewhere near, no doubt, were 'The Lines', occupied now by the Pakistani army. I wandered on in the velvet darkness, almost an eavesdropper. Terribly grand all this must have been when Bayswater and Bloomsbury were grand. But was anyone sorry that the pomposity had vanished from our own country as well as the North-West Frontier? Such thoughts running on, relating the decline of class distinction in England to the simultaneous rise of nationalism in the Empire, were interrupted by shouts and what sounded like

cursing. I ran to the end of the avenue and saw the railway station, and the forecourt where a fight was going on between four Pathans, trying to knife each other. I saw the blades flash in the overhead lights. Before anyone else appeared, two were gouging for each other's guts. Then a crowd collected, though the streets had been deserted. No one seemed surprised, but only interested in the fight, egging on the four men wallowing in blood. With an appetite only slightly impaired, I went back to my supper. After all, this was the centre of a wild tribal area.

The Pathan tribesman is still fiercely independent, capable equally of staunch friendship or unflinching enmity. The Pathan tribes have evaded the armies and tax-collectors of every invader coming through the passes for the whole of history. The lost tribes of Israel expelled to the eastern part of the Assyrian Empire are said to have been the ancestors of the Afghan tribes, claiming descendency from a grandson of King Saul. Since those times, their life, ensconced in intractable hills, has been one of peasant farming spiced with violence and robbery. No rulers ever incorporated them completely. Bullets were music indeed to the latter-day Pathan tribesmen, who spared time from internecine strifes to keep out the non-Islamic, would-be governors from Europe. When the infidel influence was removed and a Muslim Government ruled in a Muslim country, the Pathans found the bull's-eye taken out of their target. Plenty remained to be fought about even after Partition—tribal and family feuds, particularly over tracts of abandoned Hindu land. But gradually the Pathans began to see that the ever-ready rifle could not solve all problems. Wiser heads knew that education, industry, the removal of diseases, the creation of modern agriculture would be enough to occupy the traditional energies and enthusiasms of the Pathan tribes. Already the mountain torrents turned the vanes of several hydro-electric stations, and factories and plants were in operation. Young Pathans settled down to books now, as well as gun-sights, and the stormiest part of India under British rule was one of the most prosperous. This was only a beginning. Meanwhile, the former style of living was by no means forgotten, as I saw by Peshawar railway station.

That first visit proved what I had been told about the city, and neither blood in the streets from the accidents and many fights nor the consumptive green hotel room would keep me away. When I went for the second time with Birthe and Knud in tow, I kept the pleasant sense of excitement to myself. For me, hotels were decidedly out, and for them camping was out too, for everything went wrong on the last morning on the road. The smell of burning rubber revealed Jimmy asleep on Birthe's lilo, which had been smouldering unnoticed from a cigarette for some time, and was now beyond repair. Then a pedlar had stopped Birthe and shown her a beautiful leopard skin, and her mind had fled to the flat in Copenhagen, where the skin would make such a beautiful rug and she could point out to visitors the hole where it had been shot. Unfortunately, to prove the authenticity of the skin, the pedlar had pointed to the hills behind our camping place and told her the leopard was shot there only a month ago. Birthe pushed it back in his hands, stating quite definitely that there would be no more camping. Wasn't it enough to have bathed in the Indus with crocodiles, watched by a father of thirty-five children? Knud cut his hand badly on a tin, and though his wife expertly bound it up, blaming him for depriving us of a useful hand, he kept opening and closing his mouth to see if lockjaw was setting in. By a village called Pabbi a party of Americans had been stopped by a bullock-cart placed across the road, and were robbed, stripped and sent back to Peshawar without a stitch on. The *dacoits* escaped into the nearby cane-fields, and, of course, had not been found since. Birthe looked flabby when we heard this, and any remaining thoughts of camping were dropped altogether.

The decision pleased Jimmy immensely; the prospect of a *charpoy* for his spidery limbs, and maybe someone to share it with, sent him off singing in search of a lodging. But our woes were forgotten once the old city enveloped us. A hundred things to see at once, a hundred faces to absorb in one glance. The caravan trails through the mountains had always halted at Peshawar, and from the passing trade bazaars flourished and the wares passed along the roads on a long trek south, or north to the old Persian plains. A pungent expectancy filled us as we

went where countless merchants from all the points of the compass had assembled for hundreds of years. Through the Street of Storytellers, the Street of Partridge-lovers, the Bazaar-i-Misgaran for coppersmiths, Mochilara Bazaar for cobblers, the gold and jewellery bazaar of Andar Shehr, all with the higgledy-piggledy jumble of lesser streets where every other shop seemed to be a tea-shop offering fragrant green tea in cups with no handles. Peshawar's ancient function as a meeting-place for caravans still continued, not only for tribesmen, but for foreigners as well. The only way to Kabul from the sub-continent was by road through the Khyber Pass, which lay eleven miles from the city. We saw cars of a dozen countries, many with C.D. plates, parked while their owners made last shopping expeditions before leaving for Kabul. Egyptian and Chinese, Turks and Spaniards plundered the booths for shining metalware or lengths of cloth, while Afridi and Wazir tribesmen bargained with Bukharite, Persian, Arab and Tajik traders.

Seen in the confusion of jostling narrow streets, sometimes so close that the sky appeared like a slot through which coins of sunshine were dropped, the multitudinous things for sale were overwhelming in number and colour and variety. There were strange objects of ivory, peculiar slippers embroidered with gold and mirror fragments, a thousand hubble-bubble pipes, and jewellers with every kind of ornament, from the frankly imitation to the eighteen-carat genuine, but of all I most admired the metal-work. The craftsmen of Peshawar were well known for skill with metals, and I had heard of a perfect revolver copied from an English original by an old man who worked with nothing much more than a four-inch screw and his own hands.

The coppersmiths worked in a perpetual sunset glow from their beautiful pots and pans hanging over the entrance and round the walls, and piled in sets of diminishing size like the stout, ringed stems of palm trees. There were bellied brass water-pots, lovely in form and still bearing the hammer's indentations, and kettles, coffee-pots, cooking pans, ewers and trays and *samovars*. And everywhere the sturdy, self-possessed Pathans, walking in couples, handling the displayed wares

critically, sitting in tea-booths or choosing tobacco from little shops with rows of baskets outside.

The smell of rich, spicy food made our mouths water, and we found an eating house (neither café nor restaurant, but something like an eighteenth-century London chop-house must have been) and had bowls of the local *kalla paincha*, soup made from the heads and feet of goats, followed by deliciously sweet pieces of lamb roasted on a skewer. During all this time there was no sign of Jimmy, and the Hansens hoped they had lost him. Two big men with gross cigars and mouthfuls of gold teeth stared at me until I was obliged to say something. Birthe and Knud were arguing about where we should stay overnight, and one of the men said that they knew the very place. He did not have time to say where, for Jimmy spotted us from the street and came in with his findings: he thought we would be best off in the hotel with the consumptive-green rooms. I said no, firmly. I wanted something more interesting and less expensive. Then our two neighbours again offered help, and said they would personally conduct us to the *pension*. Knud became rude to the pair and brushed aside their offers of aid, hustled us into the street, our *kababs* half finished. The Hansens were horrified. Didn't I know the men were Russians and probably spies? It was all very well for me to laugh, but they were applying for U.S.A. visas, and "you know what the Americans are for checking up."

We knew no one, and the only connection was a letter I had to a French General who managed the canning factory. Jimmy and I drove there while the Hansens went to calm their nervous systems over Gandhara sculpture in the museum. Jimmy had two days more with the Hansens and then his employment finished. Already he was anxious to know what I would say in his testimonial, for since Knud would not be too full of praise, Jimmy expected me to produce one, but it must not be on ordinary paper. Hadn't I got notepaper with my printed address? He was once a caddy-boy to a Prince, who gave him a testimonial on crested paper. It had been his dearest possession, but his brother had borrowed it to get a job, and lost it. Ah, what a terrible fate. The Prince was such a good master, so generous, so great; he had taken a bath five

times in one day. "How long did you stay with him?" I asked. "Oh, a short while, *sahib*; he only stayed one day." As Jimmy's long-lamented, crested reference was the result of a few hours' golfing, he reckoned that for a week's employment I would write a very extensive one.

The General was away in Karachi and with our last link of hope severed we arrived at the museum to find Birthe clutching catalogues in a state of elation. She had met a student from Peshawar University, who, unbelievably, had been to Denmark. Rahim Mohammad offered himself as guide and host and took it for granted that we would spend the night under his family's roof. He called relatives and friends to his house to see the people who lived in the land where the mermaid sat on the rock. A replica of the statue from Langelinie dreamed away in the farm near the Khyber Pass, perpetuating the Danish summer that Rahim had known. Poor Jimmy, who up till now had been one of the party instead of the mere bearer, found himself back in that position in Rahim's household. Birthe and Knud ignored him, and he sought me out as his friend, cowed like a Pekinese beset by a pack of beagles, for the Mohammad family were huge, strong men of the hills.

At the end of the evening we were shown rooms, but romantic ideas of sleeping on the roof in order to see the dawn made Birthe ask if our *charpoys* could be carried up. The real reason was because the rooms were smelly, for we knew from camping experience that dawn was the only time out of the whole twenty-four hours when Birthe was soundly asleep. Five minutes later she regretted her choice. Did I know what the object beside the beds was made of, she enquired, after looking inquisitively at the seven-foot beehive-shaped stack? I pointed down to the yard, where fresh handfuls of dung had been slapped on the wall to dry before being stacked on the roof. Without waiting to hear the rest, Birthe dragged her string-bed to the far side. I tried to explain an idea of Gurdjieff's, taken back to Europe from the East, and how he made the dying Katherine Mansfield sleep over a byre to inhale the smell, but Birthe would not listen. The roof sleeping proved better than I had hoped. For a lullaby I had the gurgles of an orphaned baby camel being hand-fed by an old man, who, with sweeping

moustaches and piercing eyes, might have been Gurdjieff himself. Guinea-fowl twittered and chirped, roused by the yapping of dogs in the yard. The air was pleasant, and as I lay in bed the stars looked near enough to clutch, glistening fruits on a celestial tree.

Getting through to Kabul was not only a matter of taking a Land Rover over the wild rocky tracks of Afghanistan, but of obtaining various Government permits. On this no less arduous task Birthe and Knud set out for the departments involved while Rahim took me to see the University buildings. Because Birthe could not wait until their journey on the following day, we drove out later for a glimpse of the Pass. The dry, brown valley, terraced with snaking roads, guarded by ancient and modern fortifications, surrounded by inflammable tribal territory, was thrilling not so much in itself as by its associations. In this confined mountain passage, from before recorded wars and empires, came marching conquerors and armies, always returning with less than they came. A geological trick played on human history, this fault was the single bridge for thousands of miles linking Central Asia with the Indian sub-continent. Pakistan guarded the Pass well, as it could still provide a route to the sea for the landlocked continent beyond. But buses and diplomatic cars coming out of Pakistan, camel caravans going in, were on peaceful errands that afternoon, and the black-headed tribesmen gathering at the caravanserai for the night were merchants, not warriors.

The Danes and I spent our final evening together at the Mohammads' house. Permits were in order, and soon after dawn they would set out for Kabul on another lap of their journey. They eventually aimed for Denmark by the overland route, but I thought it would be miraculous if they arrived at all, seeing how unpractical they were. As we sat with Rahim and his brothers and the old father eating curry-drenched rice, I voiced my fears to Birthe, saying I could imagine them stranded with no Land Rover and no money in a Turkish village. "I'd walk, even if I had to leave him," she said with reference to Knud, who was finishing his meal with the aid of a camper's collapsible knife, fork and spoon. "Catch me spending the rest of my life behind a *yashmak*," and fondly smacked her

thigh in its tight red jeans, like a plum-pudding steaming in a cloth. In spite of bickering and teasing, I knew that they were both sorry to be leaving Pakistan, and to be breaking up our comic but enjoyable trio.

We sat smoking when the food was taken away, Birthe puffing a great Winston Churchill cigar solely to please Rahim, who wanted to show his family how emancipated Danish women were. Then his friends strolled in again, with others who had not been the previous night. They began to sing in thin, ethereal tones, carrying us away from the simple house to a region of myth. Hand-clapping began, quietly at first, stressing the beat and then growing to a rhythmic element. The songs seemed to reach back into remotest time and beyond, to a faintly remembered glory.

Without disturbing the mood, everyone moved out of the house, the melodies running like a brook on the lips of first one young man and then another. They formed into a circle on an even stretch of ground near the building, shuffling feet and bending knees loosely, responding to the undercurrent of rhythm. A wiry youngster of seventeen or so brought a drum like a slim barrel slung round his neck, and more boys joined the dance. The drummer went to the centre and struck preliminary beats. Their timbre was unexpected, reverberated on the mud walls behind us, echoed from an object beyond the light of lamps that Rahim had set out. Slowly, almost carelessly, movement tautened to the tattoo, the circle of young Pathans trembled with life. And then stamping, clapping hands, moving their whole bodies in sinuous curves, the dancing boys flung round faster and faster as the drumming poured out an insistent metre. Twisting and twirling, long bobbed hair and shirt-tails flying, arms held out, their faces flashed by, the lips that had been singing now slightly parted with effort. The light shone on sweating brows, and caught the ridge of a cheek or fluff of a downy moustache as the dancing rose to passionate frenzy. Unnoticed, I crept away to bed long after midnight, as I had to be up early for going back to 'Pindi. With the endless drumming in my ears I fell asleep.

BY BUS TO ABBOTTABAD

THE ONCE-WHITENASHED hut by the roadside looked a typical Irish cabin, tumbledown and casual. Window openings were iron-barred like a prison, and to enter I stooped under a low lintel. Wooden benches against the wall, a table and telephone, calendars giving Muslim and Christian dates, and a clock over the fireplace was all that equipped this modest bus station. "Out of the question," my European acquaintances had said when I announced the intention of going to Abbottabad by the local bus from 'Pindi. If I must use 'native' transport, then the only 'bearable' means would be the station-wagon leaving in the evening. Seats could be booked . . . and so on. As usual I had stopped listening before their tiresome voices quietened, and left with a small bag to catch the first bus. My bad temper had carried me out in the hottest part of the day, and seventy miles loomed suddenly disproportionate, but I would not retreat now.

Other passengers sat on the benches, parcels and bundles held in readiness. Next to the table, where the booking-clerk thumbed a ticket book and shouted into the telephone receiver, a man of unbelievable frailty gazed with rheumy eyes at one of the calendars. I thought his ticket was causing difficulty: perhaps he could not get a reservation through from the main terminus down in the city. Dropping his gaze to the floor, he got shakily to his feet and ambled out. He had only been resting, a piece of human driftwood momentarily abandoned by some current.

With final exasperation, the booking-clerk replaced the telephone, swinging the wires looped on nails from wall to wall like power lines across a landscape. A front seat from 'Pindi to Abbottabad proved difficult to explain, for the clerk and I could not exchange one word. All the waiting passengers became interested and then involved. I gesticulated, drew a map, and pronounced the word 'Abbottabad' in every

conceivable way. The clerk nodded and smiled, but did not understand. Then he grasped the telephone and, dangling it on his knee, spoke with the operator. He handed me the receiver and the operator interpreted. From hand to hand went the instrument till I felt sure the wire would come down. Front seats could be booked, and they formed an upper class, and one would be kept for me on the next bus out. While this devious information passed, the booking-clerk shuffled coins to and fro in one hand, examining them for forgeries. A jingling of bells outside diverted attention from me, and a troupe of monkeys dressed in European clothes suitable to their sex, the males in red fezzes, began a performance. They danced and capered and somersaulted, showing flashes of pink plastic bottoms.

The mountains of bedding and luggage that had grown on the open space by the office was hoisted to the bus roof. The conductor, a youngster in grey shirt and *shalwar*, secured it all with ropes to the rail round the top. From the front I would have good observation of the country we would go into. The other 'upper-class' seat remained empty, divided from the driver and the row behind by a rail like a brass bedstead. I tried to see how full the bus was and whether sheep and chickens joined the passengers. But my scrutiny caused a nervous movement of veils immediately behind, for the women sat there. *Purdah* confined them to the front even if their menfolk were also travelling. In the heat they had lifted the face-covering. Glancing round, I could see the beauty of fine features, normally seen exclusively by the beloved. But the quick curtaining of the faces discouraged my looking, though the women contentedly suckled babies from velvet-brown breasts without embarrassment.

All aboard, the driver climbed in, slamming a rickety door three or four times before it locked. He clasped a striped rubber ball and a noise like a giant bull-frog rasped from the horn. With a ponderous shaking and grinding of gears, the little bus pulled out. Dust clouds flew up, and goats leapt up the bank out of our way. We careered round *tongas* and bullock carts, whizzing past oncoming traffic with inches to spare.

I knew the first part of the road well and the rolling country, riven with deep stream beds. By bridges where the streams widened to shallow pools shaded with keekars, herdboys on the parapets watched us pass, the grey humps of buffaloes scarcely showing above the water. Gouged from irregular hillocks were half-cave, half-house dwellings, children and animals sitting together outside, wraiths of blue smoke rising from dung fires. On to the level crossing, open, though we spotted the train not far away, through the middle of a mixed herd of buffaloes, goats, sheep and donkeys, and men thwacking sticks on panicking rumps. A jungle of wiring, covered in blue and yellow plastic, hanging from the dashboard entangled my legs. Rivulets of sweat trickled gently down the back of my neck, and a baby from the row behind, bolder than its mother, mopped a tiny hand there.

We passed through Wah, a large industrial settlement looking peaceful after the previous weeks of clash between striking workers and police. The bus picked up passengers waiting by the long, straight road through the housing estate. Under the trees groups of armed police squatted, keeping a not unfriendly eye on the rioters standing talking together. An inquiry into the death-roll was being arranged, although the strike was still on. Wah had a romantic beginning 400 years before, when Akbar rested at the Moghul gardens and, moved by the beauty of the view, exclaimed, "*Wah! Wah!*"

At every village the bus swung off the road and halted in a deafening babble of voices. Hawkers besieged windows and doors, and outthrust hands insisted with refreshments from a score of booths. Afternoon torpor lifted, and from the shade of wall and tree village men and boys milled round the bus. Those with nothing to sell stared at the passengers. Friends might be inside or a package delivered to the lucky ones, but if there was nothing on the bus for them, what could be better than looking at the strangers? New faces were open books of 1,000 tales, in a village unchanged except by flood or massacre for centuries. Chanting and circling the bus, boys carried lighted stoves for their fillets of fish, fried in orange-coloured batter, served on green leaves. Others sold golden corn-cobs, seared with streaks of crisp ash, cane-juice and flavoured iced water, oranges,

bananas, trays of cigarettes, decorated local pottery—anything and everything tempted the passenger to buy. The door by my seat was opened by a man with a length of blue cotton wrapped round well-made loins, and a tattooed crescent moon and star adorning his forehead. A necklace of bullets swooped across his chest, where terrible knife scars escaped from rush-like hairs. But in his hand he held a bunch of sweet grapes.

Aisles of tall trees alternated with arid fields. Bullocks dragged a harrow, the farmer riding the wooden comb as though surf-boarding over the dusty earth. Another village halt, this time near a brand new filling station with streamlined petrol pumps and signs. Abruptly we left the main road, rising slightly, swinging across the plain towards a haze of hills. Somewhere to the south lay Taxila. The villages became more scattered, and the driver stopped for people going only from one to the other. A bundle was thrown out to a boy waiting by a roadside barn, two men ran across ploughed patches from a small farm, balancing string-beds and bundles on their heads, to catch the bus. Elaborately pierced turrets and the fluted dome of a tomb appeared behind a screen of tamarisks. High pillars of dust, swirled from the earth by miniature tornadoes, eddied in sinister whorls and raced over the fields, overtaking the bus.

Channels with dried stream beds traversed the land again, and the road spanned them on long bridges. Melting snows of springtime would fill the stony tracks, rising above the boulders. Washing could then no longer be dried on the flat rocks, the baggy trousers spread like sunbathing angels. The shallows where I glimpsed boys splashing in a water-fight would be too deep, and buffaloes could immerse without being driven miles along the roads blocking the way, indifferent to shouts and honkings from buses.

Heat and smell, the 'Pindi Europeans had said, were other good reasons for not travelling by bus. But I stretched my long legs every time the bus stopped and the exercise refreshed me. And of the smells I noticed nothing except the clinging, cloying scent of guavas. Richly compounded, undefinable, a fusion of pear and apple, jasmin and Persian lilac, the round russet

fruits filled the air with a sensuous languor. All along the Indus the voluptuous smell of guavas vibrated the autumn. Baskets of the fruit stood everywhere, brought fresh from the orchards. What could the Europeans, confined in their air-conditioned, flit-sprayed apartments, know of his heady paradise?

Height above sea-level at Abbottabad ought, according to the map, to be 4,000 feet, and yet although we were close to the hills, none of them looked high. More than fifty miles lay behind, when did the climb begin? How could mountains hide? Dismembered cars were jacked near a garage at another of our halts. Gearbox cogs swimming in oil contrasted strangely with the cruder crafts of adjacent stalls. Mechanics stretched with spanners full length on the ground in clothes sticking with grease. But in the fields outside, wooden ploughs scratched out furrows for their bread, and blinded bullocks trod an endless circle, harnessed to a primitive Persian water-wheel, raising the water. Roaming among the oddly matched skills, I forgot the bus, and the driver sounded the croaking horn.

A hairpin bend and a sharp rise, and we came to an upper road, and almost ran into an Army lorry. Military police waved us to stop. Both sides of the road were lined with people; there was too much commotion rippling through the crowd for an ordinary troop convoy to be passing. Perhaps a religious procession or a street fight enlivened the afternoon. Suddenly a phalanx of the crowd broke and scattered, running from the forefeet of a rearing giant stallion. A second followed, bucking and shying, yet another, a whole string of forty or more, pawing wildly, snorting at the tight reign and gripping knees of the riders. These beasts, mounds of muscle dwarfing the ragged tribesmen mounted on the broad backs, were bred stud stallions from the mountains, the fire in their massive bodies unabated. In the excitement, the women behind forgot about *pardah* and, veils up, crowded to the window. The most magnificent horse, crowned with a thick mane and a savage eye, revived childhood imaginings. The Protestant schools of Ulster had a hand in forming me. How often had I dreamt of King Billy crossing Boyne Water on such a white charger! But as the Pakistani

horse pranced by I saw he surpassed any horse I had ever seen before. Castrated animals were rare in the rocky regions of the north—in fact, herds of stallions were seen every day, but these untamed creatures might have inspired the Prophet's revelation in the Koran; 'By the snorting war steeds, which strike fire with their hoofs as they gallop to the raid at dawn and with a trail of dust split the foe in two.'

A long wall and a large gate, thick with coils of barbed wire, guarded a textile mill, and then the bus drew to a town. Perhaps there would be a chance to drink something here. Everyone, including the women, clambered out and went off with tin cans and water-bottles in search of a well. From a row of wooden shops a European watched me, making sure that no one accompanied me. Hands in trousers, a shirt pocket full of automatic pens and pencils, he strolled over. "Blossom," he said removing a hand and holding it out. "Robert Blossom." Would I care to rest in a Christian bookroom? I hesitated and almost capitulated. Clearly he was a lonely man, hungry for any crumb of home that newcomers might drop. But once inside he would trap me. Outside a notice advertised 'Bibles, Testaments and Free Tracts'. He would get me in a corner, probe insensitively into my soul, and load me with histrionic leaflets forecasting the doom of mankind, a catastrophic end to the world. Helpless, I would probably lose the bus. "Thanks," I said, "but I prefer to buy some fruit. Perhaps you'll come too." The smell of guavas was overwhelming.

We played a game, my moves to forestall his inevitable "Are you saved?" his to veer the conversation to it. A world organisation of evangelical churches sent him here. Did he think we might do better at the next stall—the bananas looked riper? His message and methods closely followed those of Billy Graham. Would he like a banana yet? The community of Christians, mostly foreign employees, numbered six, but one was leaving that week. Perhaps Mr. Blossom would bargain for these oranges? Their library was good, and the gospel tracts were available in Urdu, Pushtu, Hindustani as well as English. Perhaps after all I would step inside. No, Mr. Blossom. Numbers, of course, had no importance: the spirit of service

blazed, and every day he met the incoming buses and distributed tracts. But what did he and wife in their comfortable house and new car do actively? Oh, nothing. No school, or hospital, medicine, no food from their refrigerator for the hungry? Oh, no they were 'pure' evangelists and only gave tracts and held meetings. Goodbye. The bus is going now, Mr. Blossom. Thanks for buying the oranges.

In the bus I felt guilty. Because he was ineffectual and his life futile, I had no right to snub him, even in self-defence. Perhaps original enthusiasm had been killed in the heat, perhaps salvation meant nothing to a people bound by the laws of Allah. Success for him depended on a neurotic desire for sensation, a thing unknown by the country people. Now a month might go before he could ease his mind by talking to a compatriot, and years before home furlough. But he belonged to the narrow 'Bibles for the blacks' school and indulged in Moody and Sankey sentiment, horrors I had once known myself years before at close quarters. He waved sadly and turned into the book-room.

The bus strained, and without warning we were in the mountains, twisting and climbing. The plain fell away rapidly, hemmed on one side by a vast cliff extending to the distance. An ancient rift must have formed the shelf at its top, now terraced with fields and houses. Abruptly the rugged hills began again, soaring above the curious plateau. In front I could see nothing but walls of rock. Skull and cross-bone signs were placed at intervals, as though a pirate hand had left visiting cards. But the black-and-white notices conveyed less to me than the awful precipices beneath our wheels. On a corner hanging in space, an old man hailed the bus. Whether the tailed evening-dress coat or the fingers and thumbs of rings lent him the greater superiority was difficult to judge. However, superior he was, and to prove it climbed into the empty 'upper-class' seat beside me.

He settled next to the driver, tails gathered before him as though dining with the Lord Mayor of London. Then suddenly the driver shouted and jammed the brakes. Ahead I just caught sight of a *tonga* slipping over the edge. It swayed a little before going, and then vanished with wheels turning. Nobody knew

how we got out of the bus, or scrambled down the rocks to the wreckage caught by a ridge from plunging 1,000 feet. Cries of distress echoed up the gulley. The horse, still in the shafts, twitched grotesquely and then lay very still. A tangle of spokes and axles, splintered and jagged, the demented father tugging at a wheel, a mother holding a wide-eyed, silent baby, the passengers swarming down from the road, the children's shrieks from under the debris imprinted themselves clearly on my mind in a moment bereft of reaction.

Carefully, a dozen men heaved, levering the jumbled mass, freeing the small bodies beneath. The father began pulling the horse's reins, unable to realise it was dead. He shouted frantically at the inert brown flanks and unmoving eye, and called for "*Pani! Pani!*" (Water! Water!). I touched hands tacky with blood. They gripped mine. A kind of exaltation ran through me. Life! They were brought out, those two little girls, bloody from head to foot, their hearts fluttering like captive birds. "*Pani! Pani!*" their father was calling for his horse, but there was none. None to bring back his means of livelihood, and none to wash his daughters' wounds.

A group of bus passengers had torn strips from their clothes, and burnt them, so that the ash might be used as disinfectant. How could I gainsay a traditional remedy when no other could be had? They began to sprinkle black powder into the head gashes. Then I remembered a first-aid tin I always carried, now at the bottom of my bag in the bus. Bearing the precious limbs, I mounted up to the road. The second girl was being rescued, and somebody led the mother and still-silent infant. In my arms the crying stopped, and the eyes rimmed with curled lashes, closed from exhaustion. A bright gold ring in one nostril of the delicate, flat nose looked so helplessly beautiful against her bruised face.

A huge limousine glided round the corner and halted sharply behind the bus. The bonnet bore a Union Jack pennant, and I dimly saw the chauffeur in stiff cockatoo turban and a uniformed bearer beside him. Handing over my charge, I ran to the car wrenched open the door and shouted "Water! Water! Quickly!" The occupant, taken unawares by this apparently mad Britisher, produced a large vacuum-flask of

iced water. First aid completed and the children laid in the bus, it rattled off for Abbottabad at such a speed that I thought it too would tip over the cliffs before it got to the hospital. To leave room for the unfortunate family in the bus, a seat had been offered me in the limousine, also on its way to Abbottabad.

Unknown to each other, we stood momentarily, he to recover poise, I to drag my mind from the swift tragedy. We were an oddly assorted couple. I was sweating, my clothes crumpled and spotted with blood, shirt-tails out. He was calm and immaculate, on his way to a quiet week-end's fishing further up in the hills. I sank into the grateful upholstery of the car, vaguely aware of its official nature. "You must be from the British High Commission?" What an obvious remark; but I could think of nothing more original. "Well, yes," he said, collecting the papers together he had been reading. "I am the High Commissioner at Peshawar."

In a few minutes I was told, "There's only one place to stay in Abbottabad, the Club." I considered it politic not to tell him my previous intention of staying at a humble Government rest-house. After a quarter of an hour I was sitting, washed and brushed, drinking tea on the terrace of the Club, listening to the clock-clock of tennis. We talked against a subdued background of voices, snatches of English conversation "Don't tell me you're going home at last. . . . How nice. . . . You'll find it terribly cold. . . . But you must write to us. . . ."

Sweet-smelling air with a suggestion of dew blew from the surrounding pine-covered hills. Dusk emptied the tennis court, and ball-boys in white canvas shoes folded away the screens. Veranda lamps were switched on, suns for satellite moths. Heaped in the bottom of the glass shades, the bodies of other moths gave unheeded warning.

The bearer changed our tea to beer, and the High Commissioner departed to his fishing, leaving me in the care of a Club member who insisted I dine there. Not that an alternative existed except the hotel, he said, for Abbottabad could not offer the tourist a gay life out of the season. It could not even offer him a comfortable one, as I discovered afterwards, for without taking mattress and blankets I could not sleep at

the hotel, the Club being full. I began to understand the piles of bedding brought north by the other bus passengers. But first I ate well from a massive slab of steak, and drank beer from Holland and Malaya. On behalf of the British War Office, my host worked with the Pakistani Army, and many officers patronised the Club. Not over-populous, a faint air of Pall Mall persisted. One expected to hear black taffeta swish on the veranda and young subalterns, fresh from England, finger their new tunics as they lied about feeling at ease in the heat. Changes had not all been radical. Behind a door reserved for 'Gentlemen' in the suave bar, I found a row of enamel chamber pots.

Dak bungalows were overnight rest-houses kept by the Government for travellers in remote or undeveloped regions. Like buses and friendliness with poor people, Europeans generally disapproved of *dak* bungalows, preferring hotels regarded as 'smart'. At home the same people would laugh at the thought of a youth hostel. But the *dak* bungalow reserved for me by the 'Pindi Divisional Officer of Information, proved more advanced in one respect than the Club—it had a flush toilet. After an amusing evening when he told me stories of the fabulous Major Abbott who reined in his horse and, pointing to the ground, said, "The town will be here," my host most kindly searched for spare blankets and pillows, without success, from the rooms of young officers, and drove me out to locate the bungalow. He had been three years in Abbottabad, but did not know where they lay. We drove about the streets, looking above avenues of trees, beyond the outlined hills to a moon like a slice of yellow pumpkin. Young men strolled in shirt-tails and pyjama trousers, but the old ones wore blankets to keep out the autumnal chill. The town was not a hill station, but in winter the snow-line reached down, sometimes leaving twelve inches in a few hours. Ski-ing on the slopes outside formed part of the winter programme. An inquiry, and we found the bungalows, three or four in a row on a conspicuous corner.

The modern bathroom of the bungalow kept company with a comfortably furnished room on whose varnished wood ceiling enormous spiders walked. By midnight it was bitterly cold,

and I pulled down the curtains to add to my medley of bedding. One of the spiders had descended to a favourite spot over my head, but my Irish superstition about killing his kind prevailed, and I put my head into a porous, nylon shirt hoping the hairy thing was not poisonous.

TIGHT-ROPE TO NATHIAGALI

THE CLEAR call of bugles woke me, thrilling the morning air, echoing from the hills. The black spider, as large as my hand, which had stalked warily the previous evening, had vacated the ceiling over my bed. Breakfast came by the bearer, who folded up the Army's bedding, and I shared the shaving-mirror with an unperturbed gecko. Blankets collected, and the bill for an absurdly small amount paid, I said farewell to the *dak* bungalow. Clusters of pine needles were very green with the sun behind them, though later they would go grey, for the fiercest sunlight drained all colour from the landscape, leaving a drab monotone. Fresh and energetic, a squad of Army cadets marched by, boy faces set and stern. The rifles looked too dangerous for such young hands, and the boots too manly, biting on the tarmac. But Abbottabad was military-minded.

Why, I wondered, should the forty miles to Murree cost four times as much as the seventy from 'Pindi? And why should the lesser distance take longer? The booking-clerk at the bus station insisted it was so, and showed the official timetable. Perhaps the map would explain; I had probably misread the mileage. The small waiting-room could hold no more, as early arrivals sat side by side on its three beds. I spread the map on a bench outside, and marked the scale on a sheet of paper and carefully measured. Allowing for the rise and fall of hills, forty miles seemed correct. While checking it, using a more accurate scale, I felt somebody looking over my shoulder. Quiet as panthers, curiosity aroused, the men had stolen out of the waiting-room, and with craning necks followed the track of my pencil. Stony eyes, with no flicker of a smile, met mine. Others who had been squatting outside, wrapped in blankets against the morning cold, joined the disapproving crowd, enclosing me in a circle.

A tall Pathan, old and shrewd, looked from the map to me, back to the map again. The deep-set eyes pondered the situation, the thin lips pursed. Silky white hair stuck out from the turban and skull cap, but from his ears it spurted like jet black ear-muffs. No one dared to speak before him. I imagined him to be a tribal patriarch come down from the hill country. From the folds of striped blanket draped about his body, he drew out a hand and pulled at his goatee beard. Then he said something in Urdu, and tapped the bench where I sat with his stick. I could see that no Army officers or well-intentioned United Nations' observers would ever persuade this undisguised autocrat or his tribesmen from doing exactly as they pleased. A younger man interpreted. The old Pathan wanted to know who I was, my business, and the next destination. An Englishman penetrating the hill country and equipped with a map roused gravest suspicions. Briefly, he regarded me as a spy. All his life he had been warring against the English, and he wished me to know he was of the Yusufzai tribe.

I took a short-cut out of the situation. An offended look passed over my face, and I said angrily, "English! I'm Irish." The interpreter smiled then. His brother, a student in London, had told him all about the Irish, how they raided the English as Yusufzais used to, and returned to hide in their native hills. The patriarch listened, the ferocity softening. What sort of gun had I got? None, explained the interpreter, and then told me that the old man wanted to see inside the canvas bag. Tiresome old devil, I thought, slightly annoyed. But, as he had probably never come across an innocent traveller before, his inquisitiveness was understandable. He took the bag and rummaged inside like a monkey with a bag of nuts. Towel, soap, razor, a book, a pair of socks. Satisfied, he packed them carefully and handed it back, nodding genially in default of words.

"He still can't understand," said the interpreter. "But he's happy now." Disappointed of a disturbance and the capture of a spy red-handed, the onlookers broke away, and went to collect their bedding rolls as one or two buses began to leave. The old Pathan called over a fruit-seller and, sitting beside me,

laid out a dozen specially chosen guavas. In the blanket he found a butcher's knife and quartered the fruit with swift slashes. He took a bowl of cinnamon from the tray and sprinkled it over the juicy sections, and offered it to me, piece by piece.

The guavas finished, he went to tall earthenware pots standing near the waiting-room, and dipped an enamel mug into the water, poured there earlier from a waterskin. Then he brought two small bundles from his wrap and, untying the layers of cloth, uncovered two heaps of coins. He counted them exactly, knotted the cloths and stowed them away again, having dismissed English spies from his mind. Another old man joined us and, squatting on the seat, held a beautifully carved ebony stick between his toes, and began to search a bared, wrinkled torso for fleas.

How the scene differed from 'Pindi, and even from the villages of the plains only a few miles away. The air here was temperate and free from the smell of dust. Aquiline features had changed for rounder faces, the people looked better-fed and clothed. Not so many maimed beggars extended upturned hands for alms, and more children seemed to go to school. Smiling, showing perfect teeth, they passed along to school, reluctant as all boys, clutching boards written with the squiggle of Urdu characters. How long would the neatly pressed grey shirts and baggy trousers stay unspoiled? They joked and laughed about the white stranger standing at the bus-station gate, perhaps because his shirt, like theirs, hung out and the shoes on his feet were Pathan *chaplis*, heavy-soled sandals. For all I tried to merge Muslim fashion, my clothes seemed dull against the others. Blanket cloaks, hung simply but effectively from shoulders, sported bright blues, pinks and yellows. Nearly everyone wore a curious flat woollen hat, like a medieval head-dress, and, with a few skilful turns to a length of cotton, it formed the basis of a turban. Most of the men waited for buses back to the hills—hills they had been unable to leave without bringing faithful sticks or long shepherds' crooks, some topped by a small hatchet blade. Patriarch and I parted over a final gift of guavas, he climbed into his bus and we exchanged a handshake through the window.

Seventeen passengers could be taken by the small bus for Murree, but the actual load must have been much more, for piles of mailbags barricaded us in. We stopped twice before getting under way, once for a horse that slipped on the road, and once for the bus horn to be cured of a cough, which the driver accomplished with blows from a wayside stone. Nomad tribesmen had pitched camp outside the town for the night, but now the ragged tents stretched on curved sticks were being rolled up. The women and children packed pots and pans, and donkeys and slender camels stood waiting to be loaded. Army units in training spread like khaki dots over the fields. A mile from Abbottabad the bus switchbacked over the first slopes.

A policeman raised a red-and-white striped pole, balanced on a post as we came to a road block. The Thai Barrier regulated traffic, and vehicles passed through only three times a day from each end of the dangerous length of road. At any time, only cars going in one direction crept along the mountain ledges, for overtaking and turning were impossible. At the barrier a notice-board gave the times of entry. Telephone communications kept the other barrier informed as to the number to be expected. The police hut perched on the roadside, but between it and a precipice dropping giddily there was nothing. A racing game played by the driver with another bus and a lorry on the way up, won by dint of risking our lives, could not be continued now. In low, grinding gear the bus took the downward sweep, as before climbing to Murree we had to cross the chasm dividing two ranges. Stones flew up and rattled in the metal-work underneath, for the metalled road had stopped at the barrier.

Apparently unconcerned, the driver glanced continuously from the road to admire the view or to chat with the conductor. All the passengers except me had got off at the Thai Barrier, and now the conductor tried to doze among the mailbags, unperturbed at the imminent peril. Lurching towards a point where the road led to a precipice, the driver swung hard on the wheel at the last minute and the bend, closed like a hairpin, revealed another stretch of road. On one such bend a herd of mountain goats scattered, and ran up the vertical cliff face,

while the outer tyre of our back wheel hung over the edge. For fifty yards the road was never straight, the steering wheel never still, whirling from side to side. I leaned out of the window and looked back. At any of the bends the slightest mistake in judgement or a loose rock under the wheels would send us hurtling to death. For every inch of the way I waited for the sudden slip, the sideways scrunch on the road. It was not a hot day, but my clothes were wringing with sweat.

I had supposed the view incomparable. A long stone bridge barely above flood-water level struck off across the canyon floor. The bus regained speed, even though no parapets separated us from the crystal streams trickling through the arches. Then up again into the purest, sweetest air I had ever breathed. And I was wrong about the view. Pristine light, like the world's first morning, sparkled from an enamelled sky, fetching the vast folds and valleys into sharp detail. The bends and hidden corners of the road were dangerous, our grip on the mountains precarious, but going uphill was far less alarming. I relaxed, took my eyes from the road, exalting in the vertical perspectives of pine and fir, flourishing from peaks above our heads to the banks of gorges far below. Yet this was merely a beginning; an ascent of thirty miles lay in front.

The speedometer did not function, but our progress could not have been more than ten miles an hour, and in some places much less. After the first hour we stopped. Icy cold and sweet spring water gushed from the mountain rock into a stone trough, and a blind beggar sang by the side of it, his melody accompanied by the gurgling water. His happiness seemed to well up inside him like the spring in the mountain. Yet what impressed me more was the way he wandered about the tricky ledges with no danger of plunging to the paddy-fields so far down. He had never seen, for from birth the bone of brow and cheek were joined, leaving no eye sockets. The other two put coins in his little dish, showing me again the kindness of the not-so-rich to beggars I saw everywhere in Pakistan.

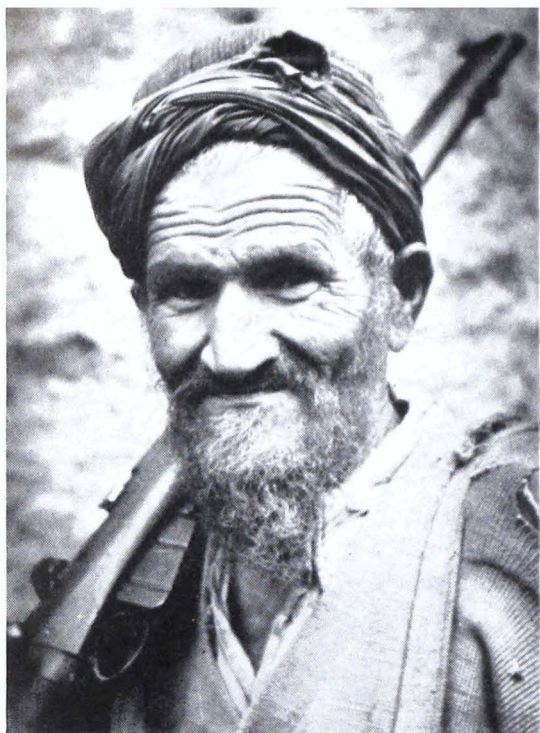
The conductor took my elbow and pointed into the valley. Tiny figures moved in the stream coursing there, sieving

through the alluvium for specks of gold. I had heard that the hanging forests grew on top of rich ore deposits, and that sometimes the Indus waters glittered with precious metals. Gold or no, the mountains were rich in wild life. Beside firs and pine, chir and deodar grew, the ground under them spattered with brilliantly hued flowers, their green branches a perch for iridescent birds, swooping with long trails from tree to tree. The sun, now at a higher angle, embraced the skin with warmth, and I found it difficult to believe that less than fifty miles away dust-devils spiralled across plains burning with the same sun.

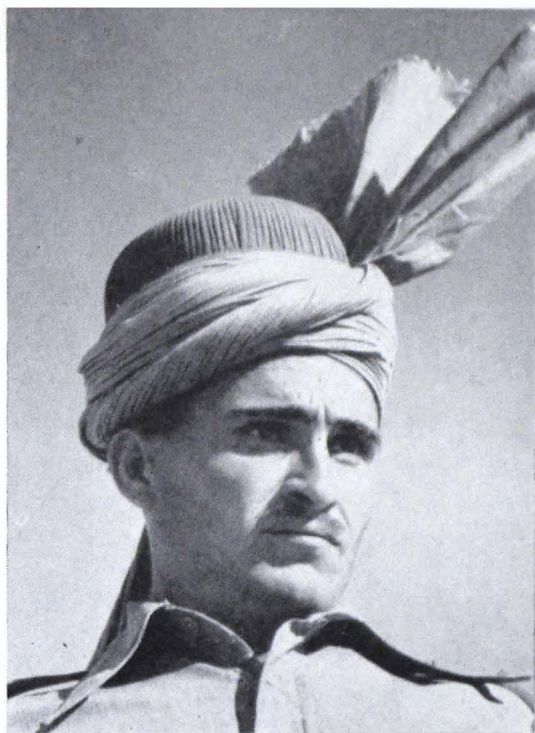
As we climbed, snaking up the menacing cliff path, I began to appreciate the driver's skill. The steering wheel still spun from side to side, a roulette wheel with our lives as stakes, and he still turned to talk with the conductor or gaze at a distant smudge of hills. But these minor distractions maintained a razor-sharp edge to his observations for the crucial corners. The recurrent tension of nerves demanded corresponding release. I also appreciated the length of time for the journey. I would have been the last to suggest a speedier one, or a reduction in the danger wages paid to the driver, which made the fare seem exorbitant.

Hairpin bends constituted the basic excitement; for additional thrills, road obstructions filled the bill. Scampering goats we ignored, solitary bullocks or cows we scared to one side with the horn, but for shepherds and ox-drovers leading a herd to fresh pasture we stopped altogether while the animals squeezed in a single file. Once, on a narrow stretch, the herdsman had to retrace for a mile until width for overtaking could be found. Fallen rocks we all helped to move. The driver grinned when we drove under an enormous wedge of rock held in equilibrium by another, both leaning outwards. They might stay locked together for a century or the smallest vibration might dislodge them, bringing down tons of mountain-side.

At another place, lightning had stricken a giant fir, and it had fallen directly across the road, the upper branches enmeshed in trees further down the slope. The middle chunk was sawn away for traffic, the stump left as it had crashed, seasoned



Tribesmen of the North-West
only feel safe with a rifle



A soldier of the Tochi-Scouts
guarding the Khyber



Wild music and wild dancing for the tribesmen at Peshawar



Ploughing is done under a Village-Aid scheme



He is proud of his wooden board on which his Urdu lessons are painted



Such beautiful smiles are common in the mountainous north

at the amputation to a deep red. Human hazards meant most trouble. Walking from village to village, hillmen occupied the middle of the road, and stood aside, barely allowing the bus an inch clearance. Most had young sons with them, handsome boys who looked used to the rough country, and had inherited its ruggedness. Other hillmen would be poised on a boulder, squatting to watch a few cattle grazing on the steep slope. By a miracle the bus missed them, and the music of their pipes blew across the valley. Many gangs of coolies worked on the road, clearing debris away, filling potholes, or building up banks. Brown, muscular bodies stripped, they laboured in pairs at piles of stones. One held the shovel and his mate pulled it by a rope fixed to the handle. They worked rhythmically, consistently, jumping nimbly aside as the bus reached them. As a danger signal they wore red turbans, an unexpected splash of colour in the blue-green background.

After two hours our elevation brought yet higher ranges into view, serried beyond the peaks above the mountain road. Now the steepness slackened, the tumbling forests closed in, and the road wound in and out of smaller valleys, affording vistas less frequently. Soon the road ran flat, a few wooden houses stood among the trees and then the second barrier guarded the road. The most dangerous section of the journey up to Murree was safely past. With a roar of triumph, the driver raced the last 100 yards and pulled up beyond the raised pole. A queue of cars and lorries waiting for the downward convoy began to ease through, as we were the last to come up until later in the day. Mentally I wished them luck.

After the barrier, we bowled merrily along, picking up passengers again and stopping at wayside houses, where the driver sat in the door and shared a hubble-bubble with friends. The landscape became pretty instead of awe-inspiring, though there were still bends and awkward bridges across corners. In the seat behind me a man hummed a snatch of song over and over to himself, breaking off always in the middle of a phrase, and then beginning again. Whimsy determined the bus stops, but I had no programme and enjoyed the Swiss-looking country, rolling rather than jutting, the valleys lush and fertile. But the resemblance was superficial. Fever marshes

lay along the mountain floors; malaria stalked the peasants snatching a quick harvest. The bearded shepherds, idyllic to the summer traveller, drove their flocks to safety from dangerous drifts of snow, and huddled with them for warmth from the murderous winter blasts of the higher Himalayas. Unlike Swiss country people, who are extremely shy and wary of strangers, the men of the Abbottabad-Murree road showed much friendliness, brought cups of tea and legs of chicken, not from abundance or obligation, but from a natural, naïve hospitality.

The next main stop would be at Nathiagali at 8,000 feet, and more people got on for the last lap there. A boy of about twelve, dressed in a striped flannel gown like a nightshirt, climbed in beside me. Under his arm a big red rooster darted indignant looks at its new surroundings. The road ran flat again among small plateaux. Very neatly, the wooden houses of Nathiagali began, and halfway along the short main street everyone got out. Nathiagali possessed a bus station nearly as grand as the one in 'Pindi. But its air was intoxicating, and I stretched my lungs to bursting point. I drank deep, as though the air was an elixir flavoured by the scent of burning pine logs.

Contrast with the plains was so complete I could not bring myself to leave at once, and made arrangements to take a later bus. In England Nathiagali would be classed as a village, not very different from those of the Lake District. But in Pakistan 'village' implied houses clustered at a well or banks of a stream, at the most with portable booths forming a bazaar. But here were proper lock-up shops, houses built of wood, a school, a police station. Two-storied houses, in a fantastic architecture of carved wood, lined the main street like rows of dolls'-houses. Steep roofs, overhanging eaves and fretted barge-boards again portrayed Switzerland, calling to mind heavy falls of snow. The boy in the nightshirt hawked his rooster for the highest bidder along the ground floor shops of the odd buildings.

As always, the shops opened to the street, and friends of the owner lounged or squatted on the floor while he worked. A hubble-bubble stood on the floor—ready smoking for any who

liked to take it up. Young boys as well as men crouched over the silver-necked and tasselled pipe. In the refreshment booths, where china cups stood in rows ready for the pale tea, fresh *chappaties* were being made. Into a brick oven open from the top and red hot at its charcoal heart, the patted rounds of dough were put on the vertical sides. They bubbled and blistered until browned slightly, and then were stacked on a plate. Immediately next to the oven, with no dividing wall between, a butcher had his chopping-block; goats and sheep hung from hooks, some complete with their skins.

A miller kept shop like his fellow tradesmen; no glass or doors protected the heaps of graded grain in splendid colours of ripeness, the crushed oats, or the piles of flour poured straight on the ground. Donkeys flicked their ears and looked with soulful eyes at the corn that tethers prevented them from eating. Inside, the miller's boy held a great pair of scales, and the pans tipped as the weighed grain dropped into them. Sacks full, the customers loaded the donkeys' panniers and whacked the beasts into activity. Those living not so far away slung the sacks over their shoulders and, mountain staff in hand, began the walk home. The method of planting and harvesting, selling and transporting could not have changed much in hundreds of years. Joseph's brethren going down into Egypt to buy corn must have looked much the same.

Not one car passed through Nathiagali to defile the crisp air with fumes, and people loitered all over the street without fear of accidents, except a bruise from a cross donkey's hoof. Waistcoats and jackets were worn loosely over the baggy trousers and shirts and far fewer men went barefoot than down on the plains. In the flat, peakless caps and absence of turbans, an almost European character emerged in an overcoat and offered me whisky from a bottle marked 'Cuff's Malvern Water'. How had this travelled to the Himalayas? I took the bottle and read: 'Bottled direct at the Holy Well, and recognised by the medical profession as a remedial aid in cases of gout and rheumatism.'

A panorama of hills, descending a chromatic scale of altitude, was displayed from the street. Nathiagali hugged a shoulder of mountain; its terraces were galleries to a theatre of splendid

scenery. Behind, the sun slanted through the woods with geometrical precision, cool and bright like bars of silver. On one side, another village crowned a hill, and on the other a vastness of sky and landscape opened out. In the foreground were the galvanised-iron roofs of the school buildings, and irregular grassy areas where the children sat in a semicircle for an open-air class. In spite of distractions, they paid good attention to the master and their voices reciting the lesson floated up. Down a steep lane from the main street, the backs of the two-storied houses showed the wooden and stone pillars that propped them from the hillside.

In the same lane, a small building and a garden had a signboard outside with something in Urdu and the word 'post'. I wanted to send off some letters, but needed another ornate stamp to make up the postage rate. But I found the word 'post' did not apply to letters, but to police. A lad sitting at a corner desk got up when he heard my footstep and put on a beret with a yellow flower in it, to show his rank of police cadet. His face was innocent, with the fine features of the mountain region, a sickle of white teeth when he smiled, and eyes altogether too wide and trusting for his profession. With rusty English he showed me the two-roomed police station. The principal one opening directly from the veranda, had beds down both sides, like a school dormitory, and a corresponding number of wooden trunks for the constables' private property.

As befitted a police station, no frivolities relieved the bareness, and all was scrupulously clean. A glazed frame on the wall provided the only decoration. From it, the profiles and full-face photographs of wanted criminals glowered into the room. "These bad men," said the boy-cadet with good humour. They looked a ferocious bunch of scoundrels. Remembering my own passport photograph, however, I reserved judgement. Selecting a key from a bristling bunch, he threw open the jail, a mere cupboard. Seldom in use, it served as a store. The boy had put his own bed there, the blankets tidily rolled beneath a rack of rifles and handcuffs. On the floor I saw the door and brass handle of a safe deposit, embossed with the name of a London maker. There seemed to be nothing wrong with the

principle of locking up offenders and money together, especially where windows were as heavily barred as here, for thieves could neither get out nor in.

I ambled away from the town, stiff from being cooped in the bus and constant bracing round treacherous corners. It was a balmy morning. Each length of road hidden between bends unfolded new delights: a dry waterfall of red rock tumbling in a gash, a shower of magenta flowers, or a grove inexplicably classical, sylvan. Many people passed up to Nathiagali and not one but nodded, made a silent *salaam*, or smiled as warmly as the sun. Young drovers and forty or fifty donkeys came from the town. Some went on foot, others rode astride or sideways on the animals. They laughed a lot, shouted at the donkeys and one another, and sang.

They shouted at me too when they saw me pressed against the rock by the fat bellies of donkeys. The caravan shuffled to a standstill, and the youngest crowded round. Some had bobbed hair, most were under twenty but well-made, their slightly golden skin gleaming with exertion. Although farming boys used to rough work, their tapering hands and fingers were sensitive and expressive. Was I American? Their spokesman had travelled wider than the rest, and by working on the railway had picked up a little English. "A-mirri-kin, A-mirri-kin," chanted the smallest and cheekiest boy. Where was I going? To Murree? Then I could ride with them to the next village and get the bus from there, if I liked. A sack was spread over a donkey's hindquarters and I got on. And all the way I had to sing for them "Whatever will be, will be." Western civilisation could not have meant much to them, but at least they knew of Doris Day, the voice that dogged me from a comfortable liner to the slums of Karachi, and now to the foothills of the Himalayas.

On a peninsula of hill the donkeys were headed off, and we all stood at the side of the road. Because of the clear day, ranges of snow-covered mountains a hundred and more miles away, shone in the sun. Discernible shadows lent a crystalline form, until right and left the vision faded in cloud haze. An emotion new to me struggled for recognition. Was it the secret exultation of mountaineers, a transfiguration obtainable in

no way except by such a sight? The others had not been gazing into the distance, but only at the pine trees on the nearest projecting hill. I looked, expecting to see a tiger creeping in the undergrowth, but the hill seemed exactly like our own. The interpreter pointed. "Kashmir," he said gravely.

QUEEN OF THE HILLS

MURREE, IN the heyday of the British sovereignty, was famous. The white rulers sent their sons to its preparatory and public schools, adjutants brought their ladies to 'the hills', even the clergy went there to confer together and add the nice touch of ecclesiastical dignity. A fine brewery kept tankards full at the Club, and the military, sorely pressed with the practical end of government, could relax behind reed-screens at the Lady Roberts' Home for Officers. Of the men, who were probably as pressed and certainly more sore than their superiors, no account seems to have been taken. Murree's fame survived the phaeton, the parasol, the *punkah*. When electricity came to lighten its darkness and temper the heat of the day, and the white rulers, a little less sure of themselves than before, began to talk of secession, the fame remained undiminished. It even survived Partition.

Division of the sub-continent left Pakistan with only one of the many 'hill stations'. But a decade afterwards, when Englishmen were interesting only as foreigners, the town had little changed. Clubs were full, 600 missionaries maintained the ecclesiastical tradition, though not the former dignity, the President and cabinet ministers patronised an arts festival, and, incredibly, public school boys in flannels, blazers and ties took the well-mannered stroll of Saturday afternoon leave. But there was after all a fundamental difference. The officers twirling moustaches beneath the photographs of royalty and field-m Marshals in the chintz drawing-room of the Lady Roberts' Home were Pakistanis; so were the schoolboys. The exception, of course, was the missionaries, present in Murree to attend conventions and language schools.

Posters, with a picture of two riders making a leisurely way along a track where snowy mountains peeped through pine boughs, appeared all over Pakistan in railway stations, travel agents' offices, airport waiting-rooms. 'Spend your vacation

in the cool Murree Hills', urged the caption. 'Murree, Queen of the hill stations.' Snow and pine were probably very tantalising to people spending their lives in temperatures never far away from 100°. Everywhere I went the two anonymous hackers picked their way down the path. And in every European clique I fell against, shrill voices would exclaim: "Haven't been? . . . But Murree is an absolute must. . . . So like home." The source of recommendation, the home-like qualities, combined to put me off. No benefit to either party could result from my pointing out I had not come thousands of miles from Europe to visit an imitation European resort, but Asia, and in particular Pakistan. However, Nur Khan had written: we should meet in Murree while he was on holiday. Grudgingly I admitted to myself, it would be something else to see, though not half so beautiful as Nathiagali. When I had stood with the donkey drivers on the cliff-road, gazing across the cease-fire line into Kashmir, I knew that Murree, however choked with social amenities, could not compare with the little town.

I had left the donkeys in the next village, and the boys waited to see me off in the bus again. When I got out at Murree, I might have come from London's Victoria Coach Station to Keswick. A zigzag lane led up to the Mall and into the town centre, by stained-glass churches, diamond-latticed parsonages, nodding sunflowers and festoons of old man's beard. The men carried shooting sticks and umbrellas, the women, with spaniels on leads, passed unnoticed among other sophistications, like weighing machines, metal signs for 'Kodak' films, 'Wills' Gold Flake', and one for the Y.W.C.A. Advertisements were everywhere, indicating a flourishing tourist trade. There was even a brightly modern Bata shoe-shop at least half a century ahead of its neighbours. Shop names and signs were all in typographical styles of forty years ago, helping the general impression that a faded old photograph had suddenly sprung to life. There was no longer any doubt as to how 'Cuff's Malvern Water' had got into the Himalayas. But Victorian drabness did not remain altogether unchallenged. Beside a long wall sign of 'Civil and Military Tailors', giving a list complete with coats-of-arms of some distinguished customers, was a shop selling leopard and puma skins with gaudy spots

hanging round the door. The 'George Press' announced on its name-plate that the proprietor was 'The Late Sh. Hissam Uddin'.

At the top of the Mall stood the Post Office, Murree's focal centre. The turned legs and decorated brackets of the veranda was the doll's house of Nathiagali again, but this time more ornate and pretentious. The town's architecture belonged to this quaint style of wood struts and posts, boards cut and holed like lace, small-paned windows and endless balconies with railings like banisters. Dolls should have been standing on the balconies fluttering tiny handkerchiefs to red-coated wooden soldiers down the toy-town street. Chained and handcuffed prisoners intruded on this picturesque illusion as they went under escort through the afternoon crowds like a herd of camels. Even Murree's affinity with Keswick dimmed as the procession clanked by. For the British, accustomed to officially imposed squalor being kept behind high walls, a degree of ignominy would attach to this display of police method. But there was in fact none, for, as someone explained later, "If not chained, they run away."

A woman I had met in Karachi accosted me. "Isn't it sad? Everyone has gone." I said the streets looked full to me, but the remark failed to penetrate. "Ah yes. But don't worry. You'll be sure to find a room. Come for cocktails at six." She knew perfectly well I would not, and fluttered into a waiting car. The way to Nur's hotel was shown me by an old man with one pointed Punjabi slipper and one bare foot, who said he knew I was his friend. Nur was out, so the Yugoslavian Manageress, a blonde woman in a *sari*, asked me to sit, and ordered a bottle of mango squash and a jug of water. She could not say when Nur would return. A hour passed in which I scanned the day's Pakistan newspapers, trying not to look at a freakish print of 'The Hay Wain' on the opposite wall.

Presently the bearer asked for my bedroll, as he was preparing a room. Bedroll! Of course, I had none, and even a staff conference and much coming and going on a staircase I could not see did not produce one. The Manageress appeared again, graceful in green and gold, to apologise. I went back to the Mall hoping to see Nur himself. On the great flight of steps,

a podium on which the Post Office sat like a temple, I met the cocktail woman again. Ooh! I must stay at Mrs. Kettle's. "The only place if you haven't got your roll." She told one of the crowd of hillmen who kept the steps permanently warm to act as guide. Mrs. Kettle's highly esteemed boarding-house would provide everything, bedding included.

Mrs. Kettle's house lodged on a teetering cliff a short way from the Mall. I made a false entry through the kitchen. A stout little man followed me in through the bead curtain. Bandy legs thrust into an enormous pair of shorts, dwindled into thin ankle socks and burnished brown shoes which squeaked as he led me in the proper way. The tea gathering was a memorable occasion. I sat on a hard settee, the third piece of a hideous 'suite', and ate a corned-beef sandwich. On the varnished tea-trolley, iced cakes and plum-cake sat on plates with pink borders and painted flowers and cottages. An exceedingly polite conversation prevented me from seeing more than the other grotesque furniture, the brass vases with paper flowers, bits of net curtain, and photographs of Murree under winter snow, arranged in a diagonal line across one wall. On a low bookcase filled with more flowered china stood a chiming clock in an oak case shaped like Napoleon's hat. I guessed it would have Westminster chimes. It did.

Besides paying attention to the talk, my eyes darted from Herby, a German dentist, to the Major. Herby; a big man, was ageing, and suffered from an unfortunate impediment in his speech, which in no way stemmed his enthusiastic flow of broken English. The resultant noise and facial expression held me fascinated. I wanted to stare like a rude child. Major, the man in shorts who showed me in, and Mrs. Kettle's spouse, received Herby's unintelligible disclosures with no outward show of enthusiasm. Indeed, he had a disability of his own to deal with, a hand which trembled so that every time a cream cake was guided towards his mouth, I averted my eyes. I overheard Mrs. Kettle say to Herby, ". . . I wouldn't have them in my house. In fact, the quickest way to get rid of American missionaries is to tell them you never boil the water."

Sharing the settee, a sparse Swedish professor talked about

Churchill's war memoirs and the amoebic disorders which had brought him north to convalesce. On the other side a red-faced man to whom everything was a laugh said he came from Burnley and, "Would you believe it? I've just read that Chelsea beat us." Helping themselves to meringues and pots under fluffy-knitted tea-cosies were various others, who did not register in my mind at all. Probably because Mrs. Kettle dominated the room; even Herby subsided when she spoke.

Generous of figure Mrs. Kettle sat beside a tea trolley, presiding over the proceedings. Responsibility for the spotless house, the polished varnish and brass, the crispness of net curtains, the gleam of chromium-plate cutlery lay entirely with her. Doubtless she also selected the library kept in the sitting-room, *Reader's Digest*, *National Geographic Magazine*, and a pile of women's magazines, back-dated and sent from England. She was kind, fed the paying-guests well, and maintained an atmosphere of respectability by referring to her husband as the Major, with the obvious implication that the guests must also.

Solicitous for my comfort, the Major asked me discreetly after tea at what time he should tell the bearer to fill my bath. I had already seen my room and the tin tub up-ended in the bathroom. Two ducks had barely room to turn in a similar one near the kitchen door. Mrs. Kettle I hoped had something a little larger. The Major's face sagged at the rejection of his offer. I soothed my conscience easily. How could I have a bath in such a mug?

The house was built on several levels, and a terrace by my room looked across a valley where hills interlocked, but afternoon haze concealed a mountain range belonging to the Karakoram. The spine on which Murree rested showed well from the terrace. The fashionable part of the town confined itself to the heights, and sprinkled lower down where the poorer houses. Fields had been levelled in the valley below and their walls marked the contours like a relief model or survey map.

Night came quickly as always, and from nowhere violent lightning tore the sky. Clouds assembled and the flashes played in the hollows and cavities, as purple and yellow masses of

cumulus shuddered with light. The heavenly bonfire was burning well. Sparks shot out and stood vivid, quivering in the air. Long-veined tentacles trailed from east to west, like a plant-root plucked from the earth. The awesome display was the more impressive because of its silence. Not once did thunder sound. Leaves on the trees rustled uneasily and a deluge dropped from the clouds without warning. In a moment the terrace streamed with drops bouncing up and down. An imbecile beggar wailed from the road outside, giving vent to misery. As suddenly, the rain stopped, and chuckling gutters emptied themselves. From the earth came a smell of pines and firs, of black moorland soil.

Mrs. Kettle's dining-room would have to be honoured by a clean shirt and tie, but, I thought as an obstinate knot had to be remade, escape would be possible immediately after. When I turned from the mirror, Nur was standing in the doorway. We had not seen each other for a year. He was unchanged, the boyish playfulness still lit his large eyes, and held his thick, perfect lips in a perpetual smile, half delight, half mischief. A doggy sadness that made him popular in Paris, still hovered behind the smile. "Nur!" I said, surprised, and crossed the room with my hand out. He leapt over the doorstep and flung his arms in a warm Muslim embrace. For the second time in a week he had been down 'looking for me in 'Pindi.

After a dinner less promiscuous than tea, though punctuated between courses by jokes from the Major and expletives from Herby, I skipped coffee in the sitting-room and collected Nur from his hotel. He wanted to show me the side of Murree's life behind the tourist façade. The bazaar dropped away steeply from the Mall, and we followed in the wake of a band going to a wedding feast. A swarm of children kept pace, skipping along to the drumbeat. Two Scottish bagpipes marched abreast playing Pakistani music, working a filigree of notes over the bass. Three drummers followed with small tom-toms slung round their necks, hands rigid and soft by turns, coaxing complex rhythms. A wonderful way to celebrate a wedding, I thought, this stirring up of the whole town to rejoice. Nur and I found other music in the bazaar, played by a wayfaring fiddler. He sat with a curious instrument resting between

shoulder and knee, and plied the crude bow with his hand under and not over, as with modern stringed instruments. From the squat belly, stretched with skin like a drum, issued the familiar wavering sounds, the endlessly repeated phrase, the queer key changes. Stubby fingers felt their way over the strings and adjusted the many pegs sticking from the neck, though tuning seemed to make no difference.

Nur did not know the instrument's name; there were so many kinds. In Murree the main musical attraction was a centenarian who performed upon a type of violin called the *iktara* and sang in a voice almost as ancient as the songs. Sole survivor of a lost school, he had performed at Murree's first summer Arts Festival. We sauntered about the bazaar savouring the intercourse of people jammed and crowded together. Everywhere we were welcome. I wore a pair of baggy *shalwar* borrowed from Nur and chewed betel-nut, and, in celebration of freedom from Mrs. Kettle's world, spat red circles on to the pavement. After rain, the sky was quiet, heavy with stars. A gigantic moon gleamed as though with its own yellow fire. Only a crescent was exposed to the sun, but the shadowed part showed clearly, girded with a line of silver. A bright star hung in the moon's mouth, a sign of good luck.

Everyone at Mrs. Kettle's had long been asleep when I returned to let myself in from the terrace. Murree on its hill twinkled with lamps and I could faintly hear the band still playing at the wedding, which would probably last the night through. A cold wind stirred the pine tree rearing at the terrace corner. I went indoors and slept soundly between crisp sheets and woollen blankets till morning. In Karachi the *moazzin* had woken me with the call to prayer; in Abbottabad the tight lips of a soldier-boy on his bugle; but in Murree a 100 cocks crowed and the sun shone straight in my eyes. Later the ringing of church bells confirmed the impression of an English Sunday morning. The bearer brought tea and shaving-water, and before breakfast Nur and I rode up to Kashmir Point, one of Murree's tree-clad summits. Away down we could see the farming folk moving about their flat-roofed houses preparing for another day. By Monday Nur had to be back in his Lahore office, and I saw him off from the bus station before

climbing back, ravenous for a huge breakfast. In a few days we would meet again, as I intended going down to Lahore.

Left to my own devices, I decided to visit Lawrence College, for my Sheikh nephews might be sent there. In the town a blazered youth, well-groomed and self-confident like his British counterpart, told me the way. About a mile, he said, and I set off, hoping to arrive before the sun made walking uncomfortable. The road edged along the ridge, and after a mile a building showed between the trees. It was a convent school; the college lay another two miles. Immense pines shaded the way, the sun glinting on the waxy needles and turning the trunks to orange. Fallen cones were being collected into sacks for bakery ovens further up the hill, and a bread-server made a morning round to outlying houses, cakes and loaves balanced in a tin trunk on his head. By huge boulders freckled with superb lichens a signpost in the grass said, 'Lawrence College, 1 mile'. Preposterous! I sank on to the stones to rest.

First one and then another pebble bounced over the top of my boulder. I jumped up to see who was aiming at me, but it was only some college boys trying to hit a can set up on the other side, and I asked one of them to escort me to the Headmaster. We walked among the pines to a scattered group of buildings and houses with prolific gardens and verandas shaded by riotous clouds of nasturtiums. Away in the distance were the serrated hills, where senior boys camped and climbed on expeditions. A heavenly, morning balm was in the air, and a peace reigned in the woods, where a breeze soughed quietly in the branches. The town of Murree was unremarkable, but Lawrence College was eminently beautiful. I paused for a moment before going to the Headmaster's house, recalling that the school was founded in the British Empire's greatest days. It had doubtless nourished the principles of sacrifice to discipline which tragically ignored so many other desirable qualities. Misguided or no, the Empire-builders were gone now, leaving this school to their Pakistani inheritors.

The Headmaster, a handsome Pakistani, whose head would have made a fine bronze bust, was sitting with his family under a flowering tree in the garden. He took me into the

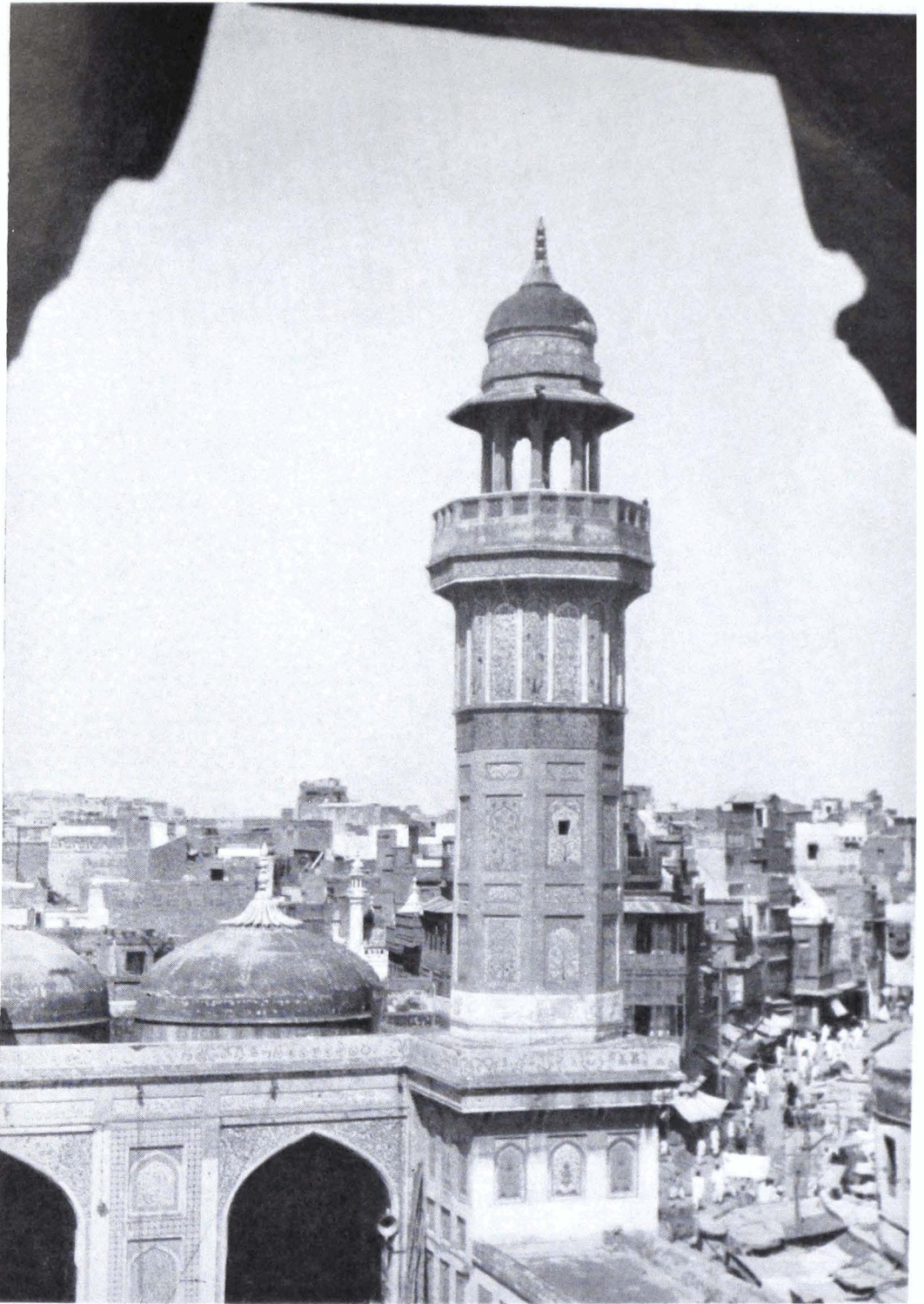
house, and over refreshments we talked about modern public schools in Dorset which he had visited. Of the former British staff only the Headmistress of the Junior Department remained. She took me up shady paths to see some of her little boys, who were making a noise like a flock of starlings. When we entered they left their games and toys and collected round, eager-eyed, inquisitive. "Good morning, sir." What would Madame Hubert have said about the faces of these brown angels? But they were to-morrow's leaders: from Persia and Siam they came, from the big cities of the plains far away below.

The British school's saddest memorial, the chapel, crowned a hill looking out over the tumbling valleys. It was Gothic and ugly, with rows of wooden seats, an organ that nobody played now, and brass plates recording the ultimate of self-sacrifice, let into the walls. Largely disused, a redolence of its past hung in the forlorn building, as though a number was up on the Hymn-board, the 'Ancient and Moderns' being opened and the surpliced choir leading in. We went slowly back down the aisle, resting our hands lightly on each seat as we passed. Out in the sunshine again we stood looking at the view. "I never tire of it," said the Headmistress as she showed me the way back to Murree. Part of the chapel, she explained, would be converted into a school library, now that worship for the boys had changed from Sundays to Fridays. We shook hands and I hurried up a steep short-cut, and when I came to the road the chapel clock rang out clear and sweet, a solemn midday chime, as though in any shire in England.

The morning's innocence had evaporated as I climbed back towards the town, and the sun struck in hot stabs between the pine clumps. When the first straggling buildings of Murree came into view, I heard a wild yell. After staying in Peshawar, I knew the Pathan temperament could flare out anywhere or any time. But so far the street brawls I had seen were between men; now two gipsy women locked in a bloody orgy. One of the contestants, a savage, shaggy creature, had her top clothes ripped off exactly like an old print of female wrestlers, though the knotted strings of hair and dilated eyes belonged to a Victorian version of the *Macbeth* witches. Over and over they rolled in the dust, muscles twitching between distorted tendons,

uncovered breasts smacking, teeth and claws digging, breath coming in fierce gasps. They were demon-possessed, shameless, and wreaked nameless outrages.

But I could not stop to see the outcome, it was already late, and I had to bear in mind Mrs. Kettle's lunch-hour reminder and the promised joint and "bit of Yorkshire".



Some of the finest porcelain inlays of the Moghuls is in the Wazir Khan Mosque



She spins among the mountain rocks and pines



Obeisance towards Mecca in the Badshahi Mosque

'TAZ GAM'

TO A STRANGER, the first sight of a Pakistani train is alarming. With shirt-tails flying, baggy trousers flapping, and sometimes uncoiled turbans streaming like flags, the passengers cling to doors, hang half out of windows, perch like pigeons on the steps. And the train rushes through the desert with its cargo of human limpets, as though not an inch remains to spare inside. Dark green and silver flashing over the sand, the snub, streamlined nose of the diesel locomotive leaves donkeys and camels plodding close to the line, far behind in the dash across the Sindi wastes. The white-clad figures seem like guardian angels suddenly made visible, or bandits that have leapt to attack. But the train melts into the heat haze without either shedding outriders, massacring animals or jumping the rails into the dunes.

I discovered later, having seen an express leave Karachi for the satellite towns of the plains, that the external travellers were not victims of overcrowding so much as only keeping cool. First-class passengers (only the very wealthy ever travelled first, I had been told) luxuriated in an air-conditioned coach, and, apart from the question of agility and dignity, had no need to ride on their own doorstep. For each long-distance train, one air-conditioned coach was enough, for the fares were as much as Pakistan International Airways' internal flights for an equal distance. Since the train took a day and a half to cross the desert and the planes only four hours, not many people used first-class on the trains. The fare reduced by half each time for the three other classes. Besides second and first, a curious no-man's-land called 'inter' existed, and poorer officials and clerks used this. Although third-class would undoubtedly be the most interesting, it would also be close packed, and unbearably hot, so I revoked my principle of avoiding all things middle-class and European and booked a second-class on the 'Taz Gam' express to Lahore. Immediately afterwards, I regretted the useless compromise. I was going by

train for the experience; now I had missed the fun and comfort as well.

At five o'clock on the appointed morning, Willie, his prayers an hour behind him, crossed the compound in his boots and set down the tea-tray. With the slightest pang I remembered it was the last performance of this ritual. "Good morning, sah. Do you want shaving water now, sah?" After breakfast the cook brought a luncheon basket of sandwiches, boiled eggs, balloon-sized tomatoes, and fruit for the journey. Back at my room, I found the barber, winsome and hopeful that I would have a last trim, and before the straps were fastened on my bags a scratch at the back door warned me that the money-changer had come for a final bid after my English pounds. Willie deposited the bags in the back of Nadia's jeep. I looked round the apartment and went for a last stroll round the garden, and down to the road. Yes; I was sorry to leave; unbeknown to myself, I had formed an attachment. Breaking ties had never been a strong point with me. The carpet-seller, who seemed to haunt the garden at any hour of the day or night, put on such a show of self-pity that I bought a pair of Kashmir curtains to be rid of him. The wide stripes of red and green would at least make some cushions for somebody's studio.

Nadia drove me to the station. We loathed parting, and turning all the good times together into mere memories. She wore the yellow straw hat. For a fleeting moment I knew we were both wishing it was the Gare de Lyon where we stood. Then she was back in the jeep rousing a whirlwind of dust. A final wave and she drove towards the airport to pick up a consignment of vaccine coming on the next plane.

This, I thought, collapsing into my seat, is how a coronation peeress feels after spending hours of dressing and robing, but still has hours more of the service ahead. The train was scheduled to leave at eight for a six-hour journey. Already I had been up three hours. The distance looked negligible on the map, but so did all distances in the East. Except for an old man taking a nap, none of the others whose names were listed at the door had arrived yet. Women in *burqas* congregated at the door of a neighbouring carriage reserved for women, not by the usual Urdu-English notice, but by a sign with a drawing

of a woman. The second-class compartment, which was generous in space, seated nine and slept six. The three lower bunks served as seats during the day and the three upper as capacious racks. A small toilet opened from one corner.

Electric fans hummed on the ceiling, pushing a breeze through the compartment. The old man had stretched full length on the seat, looking very papal in his white soutane, a long Muslim coat buttoned all the way up. An Astrakhan cap impersonated night for his eyes, and the open cavern of his mouth, no longer guarded with teeth, proved irresistible to flies. Hanging helplessly in sleep over the bunk, one arm ended in a hand minus two fingers.

Whoever was coming had left it late, for the platform crowd scurried to and fro at fever pitch. Porters carried superhuman weights. A couple of large trunks balanced on their heads, a bag under one arm and in each hand was not an unusual load. Sinewy muscle and sweat were cheap, mechanisation expensive. A face looked in the window and a moment later porters and bearers came in succession, filling the luggage rack, corners and the middle of the floor with bed-rolls and trunks, earthenware waterpots, fruit baskets, bundles flat or round, wrapped in sheets and shawls, and oddly bulging bolsters like sailors' kitbags, and a wicker chair with a child's pot in the seat. I expected the other seven occupants to scramble in, but a man and wife, their two children and a young boy orderly were all that followed the invasion, except for some cardboard boxes carried in by the boy when the family settled. The compartment space, once so adequate, contracted drastically. But the husband, a Government official, apologised for causing discomfort and called the head bearer of his household to rearrange and cram more on to the overhead racks. His wife surrendered her personal luggage, but kept tight hold on a silver box like a jewel-case. An ascetic man came in to say goodbyes, a relative presumably, for he had the same pale skin and Nordic features emphasised by black hair. Two other men with a complement of bedding and waterpots took places beside me. Ignorant of disturbances, the old man slept on in bliss. The woman opened her jewel-case: inside, *pan* leaves, lime and betel were laid in separate trays. She smeared

lime on the leaves and the boy servant offered them round.

Doors began to slam, straining porters half-ran, and well-wishers stood back. At any minute the 'Taz Gam' express, Karachi bound, would leave. I craned out of the window, marvelling at the tapestry woven by Pakistani crowd, myriad detail fused to a teeming, overall pattern.

Coming with quick, determined steps towards the compartment, pushing a way through, was a 'white' couple crowned by topees, the man perspired and the woman looked militant. Water-bottles hung from their shoulders like cameras. They carried umbrellas and seemed to be British. Or were they? Before I ducked back to my seat I saw that their young son's T-shirt had 'Big Trout Lake Bible Camp' printed on it. The worst happened and they piled in, their luggage in a heap, as a preliminary jerk announced departure. He was smaller than I thought, and under premature wrinkles his wife's youth had faded. They had no place to sit, but nobody spoke. How would they wake the old man? The woman prodded a brown shank with her umbrella, and they installed themselves. It was easy to see who wore the metaphorical trousers in that household, though any suggestion that she do so in reality would have been received in abhorrence. They belonged to the no-smoking-drinking-face-painting-dancing sect.

Movement of the train brought a greater flow of air through the three square windows on each side. Shutters could be lowered to exclude the sun, and we adjusted the fans to blow on our faces. The luggage was skilfully shifted about until only a tin trunk remained in the middle of the floor, and the Government official's servant-boy sat on it. However hot it became, however tedious the hiss of wheel on rail, he kept alert for a whim of Madame or a squeal from the children. As a nurse he was perfect, and when heat and monotony made the children fractious, he could quieten them, though their mother despaired. He held the baby boy against his shoulder and, rocking slightly to the rhythm of the train, looked through the window, his lovely features in repose, a deep calm in his smoky eyes. I imagined him to be twelve, but he was fourteen years old. Unlike the family, he had dark skin. Apart from pyjama trousers, a shirt and sandals, his only possession was a

green comb rubbed over his shaved head when he thought we were all asleep.

Sleep overtook everyone except the missionaries, and they sat bolt upright reading books called *Ambassadors for Christ* and *What God hath Wrought*. They would talk to no one, not even me after the woman summed me up with a shrewish glance. The fact that I chewed betel-nut when offered a rolled leaf by the official's wife, that my shirt was out, indicated to her mind that I also kept a harem in the hills. Though too young to wield the sword of the spirit, in spite of the Big Trout Lake Bible Camp T-shirt, their son could not resist the little Pakistani girl, and they played happily together. When the girl's mother divided a bunch of grapes between them the missionary leaned forward and grabbed his boy to save him from unwashed fruit. But with an admirable show of resistance he kicked and screamed until promised he could have the fruit after the microbes had been killed. His mother poured a cup of water from the enamel bottle, dissolved disinfectant tablets and immersed the grapes, timing them by her watch as though boiling an egg. The whole performance amazed the old man, roused yet again from slumber by the screams, and he gaped, forgetting to shut his mouth.

I passed the time dozing, flipping through magazines offered by the others and looking out of the window. A landscape of the plains, endlessly flat, whizzed by in successive changing scenes. Dry terraces sculptured by erosion followed pools where storks stood among a splendour of water-lilies. In others, naked herd-boys washed themselves or used the backs of submerged buffaloes as diving boards. For a short distance a bridle track ran parallel with the line, and we passed camel caravans and strings of donkeys. Then again through the cycle of lush pastures, and harvest fields brassy with sunlight.

Through half-closed eyes, I noticed a newspaper had replaced *Ambassadors for Christ*. My eyes focused on the print of the back page, describing twisted wreckage of a railway disaster. The 'Karachi Express', my neighbour said, collided end on with an oil train, and hundreds had been killed and injured. Not much was known about it yet, but rumours reported it as the most terrible in the ten years since Partition.

I sickened, and recalled that Nur Khan said he would go by the 'Karachi Express'. But the site of the accident was the other side of Lahore, so Nur, at least, would be safe. For many days after, the newspapers reported the accident, but journalism could not add to the horror.

Earlier in the autumn the Jhelum and the Ravi rose and burst their banks. They are two of the five tributary fingers belonging to the upper Indus, which stretches like a hand across northern Pakistan. In three weeks the waters advanced across *doabs*, the dry plains between the rivers, sweeping away villages, men and cattle, trees and telegraph poles. Bridges were smashed and railway tracks broken like threads of gossamer. When hundreds of square miles were inundated and the year's crops buried under a layer of mud, the great tide began to recede as silently as it had come.

The line from 'Pindi to Lahore crossed the rivers and wound through the flood region. When the 'Taz Gam' reached the area, the speed dropped to a crawl. We trembled over bridges temporarily mended with steel girders while swirling currents flowed almost over the wheels. Sometimes the train was islanded and, except for a few tree-tops, the water spread unbroken to the horizon. The track could only take one-way traffic; the other line had not yet been repaired, but coiled in the air like a clock-spring or slumped off its bank as though melted. Coolies by the hundred worked at rebuilding the banks, a scorching sun beating on bodies unclothed except for loin-cloth and turban. In the hottest part of the day they laboured loading earth into baskets on donkeys and horses. Others dug in long lines together, or passed rocks from hand to hand in human chains.

I only saw picks and shovels, men and animals used against the flood's devastation, in a magnificent squandering of human effort. How futile to pit flesh and blood against a continent known for the violence of Nature! I could not accustom myself to the idea of dying and living being weighed equally in the balance together. Earthquake or pestilence, famine or political unrest could cut down, not a few unfortunates, but millions. Perhaps the immanence of death, familiarity with its wastage, has bred the casual acceptance of calamity. Certainly my

fellow passengers, though unreserved in sympathy, were not shocked by the magnitude of the rail crash, or awed at the flood. In the spring they said, smallpox and cholera would come, and millions die from malaria. But at the moment, delay of the train was more important. We had stopped on an improvised bridge; the coolies standing off the track laughed and waved when I looked out of the window. The infectious Pakistani happiness flashed like fire between them. Life was good, however fragile.

I could no longer pretend to ignore the heat; it wafted in the open windows, and the fans simply distributed the hot air. On the compartment floor, where scraps of food had dropped, or where sugar-cane drinks had been spilt, colonies of flies settled in black knots. Dust had settled in a grey film over everything. The children were sleeping; the missionaries and the wide-eyed servant-boy alone remained alert. Crawling and halting by turns, the train seemed to make no progress; my eyelids drooped. When I woke we had arrived at Wazirabad in a commotion of train-changing. Because of the accident and blockage of all lines, we had to entrain for another route, a detour that would add seven hours to the journey, and as for those going down to Karachi nobody knew when they would get through, for since eight o'clock that morning the 'Khyber Mail' had been held up. All the luggage must be dislodged, piled on the platform and transferred to the other train.

On another platform stood the 'Mail', its passengers resigned to a wait of indefinite duration. The concrete pavement baked, and everyone put on makeshift turbans or held newspapers on their heads. Some had already scrambled into the detour train when word arrived that 'Taz Gam' would proceed. In an unbelievable temperature, reinstatement was made. A heavy suitcase fell on my basket of food, I smiled bravely, trying not to think of the tomatoes. I did not in fact care, for in two hours we would reach Lahore. Blame for the chaos could not be fairly put on the railways; they had lines interrupted from floods, and a serious disaster to contend with. Considering the enormous distances covered, the schedule was maintained exceptionally well. The porters were the only ones displeased; no one wanted to give them extra *baksheesh* for the false move.

The compartment was brushed by a sweeper, who moved over the floor like a crab, and attendants brought trays of lunch. But the Government official had already supplied me with chunky limbs of chicken in lieu of my own provisions, squashed out of recognition by the suitcase. The mess was quite uneatable and I threw it out of the window and a score of crows fought and screamed over the scraps. For the length of the train the black scavengers swooped down on bits of food, sometimes catching them in the air.

From a cloth bag out of a pocket, the old man took false teeth and made an attempt on some slices of meat. Still unsatisfied, he took a tray of the railway curry and rice, mixed vegetables and fruit, and waded in with his hands, pausing only for great gulps of unboiled water. His unconcealed relish offended the missionaries, who sorted their way through hygienic snacks from tins and plastic bags. Even the crows looked mystified and not a little disappointed when all they got was a gaily painted but empty Spam tin. When the double meal was over, the old man returned his teeth to their pocket. The small husband retired to the toilet bearing a towel, a tin of Johnson's baby powder and a sponge.

Lunch finished, passengers and flies replenished, afternoon somnolence descended. Junior stretched full length, and mother kept the Big Trout Lake Bible Camp T-shirt from rolling up and a hand from wandering subconsciously up the trouser-leg. Even her husband slept, careless of his devotional book. The boy sitting next to me nodded, his head dropping by jerks until it found a pillow on my shoulder. At last the fans and the servant-boy's green comb passing through the stubble were the only things moving.

MOGHUL CITY

DAILY BIRCHINGS, if I could be induced to go at all, were my lot at school, while I was still very young. On good days in a spelling lesson I might manage to get two out of twenty words correct, otherwise none at all. Since my close friends regarded scholars as cissies, I did not mind. But one difficult word I could spell, and that was 'mosque'. Ha'penny taught me it. He was the Indian member of our class. On his first day at school he swallowed a halfpenny and had to be rushed to hospital. He immediately became a hero in our eyes, because, though we were always scheming ways of avoiding school, none of us had hit on coin-swallowing, or at any rate had never dared. It never occurred to us that it had slid accidentally down his gullet. And so, of course, his nickname was inevitable.

Ha'penny was liked by everyone, even the teacher, who allowed him to sit on the radiator in winter, a rare privilege indeed, it seemed to us, who could only dry our handkerchiefs on the pipes. To sit beside Ha'penny we thought a great honour, for he always had match-boxes full of beetles or frogs and his pockets weighty with new gadgets. But far, far better were his drawings. He fired the imagination with his pictures of India—endless views of buildings with domes and minarets, all clearly marked 'mosque'. I learnt how to spell it in no time, and tried to use the new word in every composition. In 'The Adventures of a Shilling', the shilling ended up by being given as an alms offering in a mosque. And in the 'Life of a Soldier', he always ended up by dying nobly in India and being buried in Lahore near the biggest mosque in the world. What a dream to me had been Ha'penny's years of infancy in that ancient city of mosques.

And now I would walk its streets! Through the fabulous Moghul gateways and marble courtyards, up the massive steps of the Elephant's Foot Gate, tread where the sun shimmered on

walls sheathed in porcelain of vivid blues and greens that had defied the centuries. Ha'penny's drawings would spring to life with true magic of the East but made a thousand times more exciting. And luring in every direction were the mosques themselves, finer and more shining, with smooth hard domes and delicate minarets, than even dreams in our dull classroom would have allowed.

For dreamers, reality has sharp edges, but fortunately Nur Khan met me at Lahore Station when I emerged from the train, took charge of luggage and porters and called a *tonga* from the square fronting the station. There seemed to be trees everywhere, turning a dense green in the short twilight. The *tonga* creaked and rattled and jingled along Empress Road, a wide avenue made low by the overhanging leaves. A red plume of feathers and red tassels bedecked our horse, and red drapery flapped round its sides as it trotted, neither quickly nor slowly, to the hotel. Lahore was a city, more crowded and sophisticated than 'Pindi. Fewer women wore *burqas*, and many girls cycled home from offices or colleges, their colourful *saris* blowing behind. Flocks of green parakeets screeched in the hedges and boys began to light the lamps, and sit under the halo, in their pavement shops. In a melancholy mansion now an hotel, gently shedding its stucco in a vast garden next to Government House, I booked a room, and deposited the bags, and went with Nur to his lodgings, where we would have supper together.

Perhaps because of dust in the air, Lahore looked foggy at nightfall. Flaming wings of cloud spread westwards. Street-lamps dimmed as they receded, and the tail lights of cars glared angrily as they drew off in front of the *tonga*. The pavements and grass verges were crammed. Emotion charged the atmosphere as though a storm would break, but it was an emotion compounded paradoxically of happiness and sadness of being alive. I felt as though the thousands of people we passed, crushing and hurrying, projected intense human passions, filling the air with an inaudible song. The city now was a study in umbers, rich and dark-toned. From the sky's fire, a wisp of moon showed above the pall. Our *tonga* pulled to the centre of the road and waited to turn into a thoroughfare crossing at

right angles. "Anarkali Bazaar," said Nur simply and pointed to a house with a balcony threatening to collapse under its load; "I live there."

The pace was less here than in the Mall, but the crowd thickened, meandering all over the road, among the stalls, in and out of the shops, scouting after sheep or stirring to life after a long siesta. Groups sat round the inevitable hubble-bubble, friends clasped each other's waists and hands, the rich dropped coins into beggars' tins, the student rubbed shoulders with the sweeper. Darkness sealed the bazaar's intimacy, and warmth flickered from the lighted windows and signs.

Anarkali Bazaar lay just outside the old walled city, as bazaars had done for centuries, but now the citadel was itself enclosed in the modern town, its gates only ornaments on the necklet of the crumbling wall, low archways and towers with rich names, Bhati, Mori, Mochi, Lohari, Yakki, Sheranwala, Shah Alami, Taksali.

Nur's home overlooked the street and we sat near the open window drinking tea. He told me a tragic tale of the girl called Anarkali, from whom the bazaar was named. She was so beautiful that the Emperor Akbar took her into his harem. She danced for him, weaving round the great soldier a web of infatuation. The splendour of her body became a byword even outside Akbar's realm. Men whispered the name 'Anarkali' and sighed. Their sighs were heaviest when the pomegranate blossom appeared in spring, for Anarkali means 'Pomegranate Blossom'. But the longest sighs were those of Prince Salim, the Emperor's son. He loved her, and could not stay away from her, going to the harem in order to see her even when his father was there. One day Akbar intercepted a look, a smile between them. In his jealousy, he had Anarkali buried alive. The Prince became the Emperor Jahangir, the Emperor who loved to make gardens in lonely places where he could walk or sit listening to running water. 'Oh, if only I could see the face of my love again, then until the end of the world I would praise my creator', he inscribed on the tomb he built for Pomegranate Blossom. Under the ninety-nine names of Allah, wonderfully carved in the white marble of her sarcophagus, he made the signature of a

broken heart, 'Majnun Salim-i-Akbar', the enamoured Salim, son of Akbar.

So the story went, but Salim was by no means the blue-eyed prince of fairy stories; nor was Akbar as savage as the tale describes, for he once rode 200 miles to save a widow from immolation on her husband's pyre. In history, on the other hand, Salim appears as cruel and vicious, eventually becoming so drunken that his wine was always laced with opium. He rebelled against his father, murdered Abu-'l-Fazl, the King's favourite and greatest adviser, and insulted the unfortunate's severed head which was sent to him. He gathered an army of 40,000 horsemen against his father, which the old Emperor could only appease, and finally arrived in Lahore to fall contrite at his parent's feet, with a present of 770 elephants waiting outside the door. But within a short while he had returned to former ways: his wife committed suicide because of his ill-treatment, he flayed a news-writer alive, emasculated one of his father's servants and beat another to death. In the end Akbar had Salim locked up, but the old Emperor had to release him to make him official heir in the Moghul line. Salim, once Akbar was dead, true to character, changed his name to Jehangir, the 'ruler of the world'.

Nur would probably have talked on, but we ate together, and afterwards many of his friends called in to see the Irish guest, some expecting me to be dressed in a kilt. Only one had been to England; the others were young and eager to know about Europe, and particularly London. At last I persuaded them rest was essential, but seven stalwarts insisted on accompanying me back to the hotel. We lingered at the gates, and when they left midnight was not far away, but though most would be up again before five o'clock for morning prayers, they showed no sign of sleepiness. Train wheels rattled in my head as I lay down, and before sleep claimed me I was conscious of a buffalo moaning as though giving birth to a calf. Some apples kept from the journey stood on my bedside table. In the morning I heard munching and turning over saw a silky-eared goat helping itself. A brown eye looked momentarily, and I hadn't the heart to drive her away until the apple and glass cigarette-ash tray went crashing to the ground.

A small brick building, like a dog kennel, near my room housed the boiler for hot water, and the woodcutter was stacking logs against the wall. A wreath of smoke twined out of the minute chimney, promising a hot bath. The bearer, whom I saw for the first time, brought morning tea. He looked supercilious and in an unpleasant tone ordered a sweeper to clear away the goat's tracks from the veranda. The sweeper was a poor boy and with little better than rags to wear, and the bearer, whose slang American irritated me, made sure he remained the underdog. But the boy brimmed with good nature, and grinned from ear to ear whenever we met. Because of a poverty-stricken background, this handsome, willing boy might never lead a better life. He became my friend, though, other than '*salaams*', not a word passed between us. When the bearer crossed the garden with ridiculous orders, or simply to disturb the boy from a well-earned rest under the keekar trees, we could give signals, expressing our common dislike. When the unbearable bearer disappeared, the sweeper laughed at his oppressor. My tropical clothes would no longer be needed, as I was soon leaving Pakistan, so I gave some of them to him. In the evenings he waited up for me to come back dressed in the latest acquisitions. When I had smiled approval, he bowed and disappeared into the native compound.

I wanted very much to see the tomb of beautiful Anarkali, and had a Government car to take me. I stood in the Civil Secretariat gardens, where the tomb was sited. But I found the rather plain walls, the panelled corner turrets and flattened dome over the octagonal room uninspiring, and the sarcophagus had gone. Historical records were stored there now, my driver said; several times it had been a residence, and once a Christian church. The uneven plaster was a poor substitute for marble, and in the business atmosphere it was difficult to imagine the ghost of Anarkali dancing like a petal of pomegranate blossom falling to the ground. For all the story of Salim's love, his tomb for her was not nearly so magnificent as the one he built for his father, whom he fought most of his life. The truth of the Akbar-Anarkali-Salim triangle will probably never be found out.

The driver sensed my disappointment and urged me to the

Badshahi Mosque. During the Second World War this man had been in Britain. Struggling to remember the half-forgotten English, he pointed out the window. There, above a muddle of mean houses and shops, a minaret pierced the sky. As we turned off the road I saw the whole building and the old thrill of Ha'penny's drawings ran through me. Now four giant minarets limned the clear blue, and three domes dazzled with the sun's glare reflecting from the sharp and perfect forms. They vanished behind other buildings and a cluster of small gilded domes. A tremendous wall of brick, mellowed to hundreds of tints, closed in our left side and two impregnable bastions appeared simultaneously with large parterre gardens opposite. At the further side Badshahi Mosque rested magnificently on a high platform.

I walked up the steps where workmen were repairing thin slabs of marble. At the top, on the terrace before the gateway, two notice-boards in bright yellow, one in English and the other in Urdu, quoted from the Koran, 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Quran, or are their hearts locked up by them? The locks can be keyed by thinking.'

A short while before, on these steps, a boy and girl had been driven by passions as strong as Salim and Anarkali's. The jilted lover had confronted his girl on the steps and thrown acid in her face. Some fell on two children with her. The man had taken to his heels and workmen removed the acid stains from the holy place.

In a low wooden counter to one side of the entrance archway, vergers in flowing nightshirts were stowing the shoes of the faithful into pigeon-holes. I stopped to undo my sandal-buckle, but the driver told me to wait. He spoke with the head verger, who brought out a pair of voluminous canvas bootees, zipped at the front. A collection of sightseers gathered round to watch me slipping the covers over my own shoes. Shod in the approved manner I was free to enter, and shuffle as though in over-sized flying-boots under the vaulted entrance. Ha'penny if only you could have shared my delight as I had so often shared yours!

A vast courtyard blazed in the sun, quite bare, and blinding

after the dim tunnel of the gateway. On the further side was the sanctuary building, its arches black with shadow, the domes pure light. Gradually, as my eyes accustomed to the sun again, the details formed. The court was not quite bare. Two broad steps, broke like ripples across the placid surface, forming a higher level on which the *liwan*, or sanctuary, was built. In the centre a pool and fountains provided for the washing of hands and face before prayer. From it a strip of matting stretched to the entrance, and an attendant kept it sprinkled from a water-skin, as the red flagging was too hot for bare feet. An arcade enclosing the courtyard, had small rooms and chambers and at the four corners the tiered minarets were anchored. Sheer majesty clothed the main building. Grandeur of proportion brought an exquisite harmony to the simple façade and domes above.

During festivals thousands of people press into the forecourt. Huge sheets are hung to keep off the sun. When I was there only the chink of chisels on marble sounded from under the five arches. What exactly I expected on entering I did not know. But there was nothing in the sanctuary, only the intricately inlaid work of the walls. No furniture, no pictures, no candles or books, nothing at all on which the human senses could fix in idolatry. It was a supreme climax to the splendour of the approach, the mounting tension, the act of passing within the shadow of the door to find emptiness. My keyed senses reeled at this definition of indestructible spirit. The workmen fitting tiny pieces of marble to the parti-coloured floor hardly noticed the stranger and his canvas boots. One of them slept on a prayer mat, an arm flung over his face. Another visitor, standing near spoke to me, "Did you know that all this", and he signified the masses of marble, the soaring tons of sandstone, the meadows of inlaid flowers and the basking desert of the forecourt, "is built upon a single hair of the Prophet's head?"

In 1938 Muhammad Iqbal died, and was buried near the parterre gardens by the Badshahi Mosque. His plain tomb is almost sacred to Pakistanis, for he was a Moses who, by means of a giant intellect and will-power, brought Indian Muslims within sight of the promised land. He was himself a devout Muslim, but, being a philosopher in both Eastern and Western

thought, he could expand and interpret its basic ideas anew. Being also a poet, one of the finest in Persian and Urdu, he wrote his themes in language that seized the imagination. Iqbal never saw the nation created, but the fire of his vision still burns in Pakistani minds and their confidence in their country is based in no small way on his faith. Poet, philosopher, lawyer, politician, he foresaw Pakistan's strength would lie in combining East and West, not in slavish imitation, but in a new way,

‘In the West Intellect is the source of life,
 In the East Love is the basis of life.
 Through Love Intellect gets acquainted with Reality,
 And Intellect gives stability to the work of Love.
 Arise and lay the foundations of a new world,
 By wedding Intellect to Love.’

The driver took a road back to the hotel outside the walled city on the opposite side from the Anarkali Bazaar. The scene of daily rounds, people passing in and out of the gates and the routine of buying and selling from the frail stalls, the driving of beasts loaded with produce from the surrounding country, and the men half-running with dripping waterskins could not have changed much, for all that fifty-seven kings had ruled and the British had come and gone. Violence from war or civil strife had interrupted the peaceful pattern, but had never obliterated it. Scars from bloody upheavals, which were particularly bad in the Punjab at Partition, still marked parts of Lahore. But as our car dodged the crowds sprawled over the road I saw a train of bullock carts plodding with huge blocks of marble fresh from the quarry veined red and green like enormous cheeses, perhaps for a new mosque. But with a splash of red-painted machinery a convoy of brand new tractors followed. Pakistan had by no means the best of the Partition bargain, but with what resources there were, the slow progress of development into a modern country was begun. Now on the grass verge beneath the ancient city walls, cloth dyers could lay immense lengths to dry, the vivid green, yellow and blue a kind of jazzy hymn of peaceful crafts.

For the next two or three days a slight dysentery kept me

in the hotel rooms, but they were not lonely, because Nur and his friends, as soon as they knew, came constantly bringing the cheerful atmosphere of Anarkali Bazaar. Laughter and noise may not have been good treatment for dysentery but certainly were for depression. They brought single flowers, not for decoration, but as tokens of well-wishing, and I had seen soldiers too wearing flowers behind their ears. The boy sweeper looked through the wire door surprised at the commotion, but equally concerned, though silent. Early in the mornings before the visitors came and I lay watching a line of white bee-hives under the giant trees of Government House, he came in with his fabulous grin, and presented an hibiscus of exquisite crimson.

The bearer supplied newspapers, not always the most recent, which I read, not for the front-page international items similar in tone to their English counterparts, but for paragraphs here and there I would find, written with a flavour entirely their own. 'Eight persons were injured, three of them seriously in a Shia-Sunni clash in Chohatta Mufti Baqar, inside Mochi Gate, Lahore, on Tuesday night. The clash took place as the *tabut* of Hazrat Imam Hasan was passing through Kakezaian Street, which is predominantly inhabited by the Sunnis.' Or 'Khan, son of Majhi, caste Khari, aged 35 years, cultivator of Chak No. 17 G.D., Police Station Gogera, District Montgomery, has been declared a dangerous *goonda*.' Or, again: 'Five city fathers of Kot Radha Kishan, it is alleged, took out a mock funeral procession of the Rehabilitation Officer against the ejection of refugees and marched towards his house. The councillors' deafening slogans, it is alleged, caused birth pangs to the wife of the Rehabilitation Officer, resulting in premature birth of a baby who died two days later.'

Like the bodyguard of a maharajah, three young men marched into my rooms one afternoon. They looked marvellous in perfect white uniforms starched and pressed, and regal turbans. A red silk ribbon printed in gold with Urdu characters was wound in the head-dress. They all spoke English, and were cadets from the Salvation Army. It was said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like Moghul Emperor Shah Jehan, the son of the notorious Salim, who was born in Lahore, but he

must have been very fine indeed to surpass the masculine elegance of these three. What a contrast with the drab stuff of the European uniform and its antiquated bonnets and peaked caps. Here in the Punjab, which excels in beautiful men, the Salvation Army could preach by its own attractiveness, the spotless suits in the dirty bazaar alleys would be a miracle in themselves.

Some brown tablets worked marvels and the enteric microbes were routed, leaving me weak, but not so much that I could not go by *tonga*, when the luxurious Government car was engaged, to see the works of the artistic Moghuls. From his father, Shah Jehan inherited a taste for the arts and architecture and gardens and a credit account with which to indulge them. The court, the peacock throne of rubies, emeralds and diamonds, resting on four feet of solid gold, were gone, but Lahore was full of his buildings. His father, Jahangir, was too much occupied with affairs of State, the bottle and flaying people's hides, to have more than a patron's interest, except on the one occasion when he visited a vast project then in building for three years and had it altered stone by stone. But Shah Jehan personally concerned himself with the buildings, laid out the marble terraces, the cascades, the mango and orange groves, finished off the work at Lahore Fort begun by Grandfather Akbar, and built a stupendous four-towered tomb for his father. His courtiers caught fire with enthusiasm and began building, and his heir produced the Badshahi Mosque. By the time Shah Jehan's granddaughter, Lalla Rookh, was having her breath taken away by the disguised King, the Moghuls had practically finished, and did no more building.

I shall never know whether I saw all, for every corner of the city was choked with Moghul history. A turmoil of impressions, the Pearl Mosque, the Golden Mosque, the mosque of Wazir Khan, a brilliant jewel of the Moghul inlay work, the Shalimar Gardens with its placid lakes and small temples quiet among acres of trees laden with crops of dormant flying-foxes, a perfect place for lovers although now tatty with litter. Lahore Fort and glass mosaics, the pierced screens and the lovely pavilion of marble with a doubly-curving roof. The same

fort of Kipling's Irish soldiers, Mulvaney of the 'ould Regiment', the 18th Royal Irish, and the young boys of the Black Tyrone. Kim was the son of another Irish soldier, Colour-sergeant O'Hara.

While rummaging in the narrow streets of the Citadel one morning, a conversation I had with the manager on the way out came into my head. Usually he was garrulous, and I did not pay attention, but he had asked if I would object to some guests being put in my dressing-room, as the London bus had broken down. The hotel based its reputation on these free-and-easy methods, which I found more congenial than the regularity of commercial hotels. Not in the least did I mind overflow visitors in my dressing-room, especially as the room could be entered separately from the outside, like all rooms in Pakistani hotels. Only in the old city did it occur to me that the manager had said something about a 'London bus'. Had the local bus company bought a red double-decker? The crickets were singing their strident finale on the garden trees when I returned that evening, and there at the end of a trail of heavy tyre-marks left in the dust stood a coach labelled 'London-Calcutta'. Under a glaze of sand covering the sides was a route map showing a string of cities through Europe and Asia Minor, across the north of India. Three of the passengers sat in my bathroom clad in swimming-costumes as they wrote up notes of the journey, for they were journalists.

Outside, a row of sleeping-bags was spread under the keekar trees. The journey had taken six weeks already, but nobody minded the heat or engine troubles during the desert crossing. In a British seaman, travelling to Bombay for a ship to Australia, the other passengers found a leader. He had travelled the world by sea and, as he said in a North-Country accent, now wanted to see something ashore. The parts of his body not jammed into tight jeans and singlet were mounds of muscles covered with a network of tattooing. Because they would get little *baksheesh*, the bearers and sweepers did not approve of the influx. But they admired the sailor, who might have been a 'white' holy-man for all the blue and red symbols on his skin, as he lazed on the grass next morning, catching mosquitoes that landed on the thick thatch of hair on his chest.

In Sheikh Rahman from the boat, the bearers and sweepers had a local hero, and when he drove up in a big yellow car, they stood round to watch the immaculate figure in white step out. The cricketer in England, the veiled woman in the ship was for a few weeks before his next tour, a businessman and husband with a family. But he was still very young and full of excitement. My last night in Pakistan, he insisted, should be spent in seeing a side of life I had rather shunned, the wealthier, and he and his family would be my hosts.

Punctual to the minute, he collected me in the evening and we drove out to a new suburb and pulled up under the porch of a large house. It was a *gâteau* of plaster and terrazzo, spotless inside and out. Sheikh had brought together cavalry officers and business colleagues, adolescents full of the joys of being rich, and young females who might have been Eastern starlets from a Hollywood studio. The meal was sumptuous and followed by a scented, farinaceous pudding I had not eaten before. Sheets of pure silver coated it, beaten to a diaphragm, delicate as a spider's web. The silver was traditionally held to wield special charms for and to give nourishment to the heart. Had not the Queen of Sheba herself served sweetmeats encased in this almost pervious silver to Solomon, and achieved the desired effect? Throughout the centuries, the changing courts, the passing religions, this wafer of silver has decked the tables of Lahore—a wafer that beguiled Pomegranate Blossom's lover as well as Sheba's.

After the meal we smoked exotic cigarettes, listened to one of their friends who was singing on Radio Pakistan with the *quarto-tone* tremulo. We then drove back into the city for a night-club. Lanterns were slung between the trees, and the *élite* of Lahore moved like thistledown to the music of a dance-band in Western evening clothes. We lounged in bamboo chairs at the edge of the floor. I looked at the scene through half-closed eyes; it might have been any tropical night-club. And then the waiter brought drinks in tall glasses, drinks without alcohol, reminding me that I was enjoying the hospitality of a Muslim family, however Western they might be in other ways.

In spite of being very late when I got back to the hotel the

journalists were still up, and still writing in the bathroom. As I peeled off my wet shirt and turned the fan full on in an endeavour to cool down, I noticed the snowy scenes of Christmas cards being got ready for post. But before they ever reached the fireplaces in England, I would be there, where 'earth stands hard as iron, and water like a stone'.

SALAAM

DAWN, LIKE nightfall, comes all at once with an arras of sounds and colours. The morning prayer-call floats over the city before light washes the stars away. Parakeets and crows take up squabbles of the previous day before the sky has time to be blue again. A distant train whistle, the sweeper's brush on the step, a chip of sunlight falling on the gauze door where the geckos wait for an insect breakfast, and the Pakistani day has started. My morning of departure was like that, unheralded, yet etching every detail on my mind. The next dawn for me would be Arabian, and the one after I would not see at all, for I would be in Europe.

Sheikh Rahman and family, true to their word, drove up, and we said farewells. Packed with surprising neatness into the bus, like factory products in a tin, the overland travellers went off for the border, fifty miles away. All I had now was dust on my shoes, otherwise I did not belong any more. The airline's booking-clerk who had cancelled and re-booked my seat four times could not believe it when I walked in bags in hand. Lahore, more sensitive and self-conscious than other towns, was to me among cities what the peaks of Nathiagali had been among mountains. Enough monuments and ruins existed for tourist cameras to be charged with roll after roll of film and still not exhaust the possibilities, yet 'Queen of the Punjab' could never become a lame dog of resorts, like 'Queen of the Hills', the antiquated Murree. It was too ancient, too violent, too full of love and life to become genteel. Virtually, in all but name, it was Pakistan's capital. It had been a royal seat when Karachi was still a swamp at the mouth of the Indus, and even now that feeling persisted in its streets and avenues. Perhaps Ha'penny never came back to Lahore, but his dreams had come true for one who peeped over his shoulder at the fantastic city he drew.

I walked in the shadow of a long white-washed wall, for the sun soon shook off its earlier coolness. Buffaloes fed on a

wide empty site on the opposite side of the road, watched by men reclining on *charpoys* dragged under a tree. In a roadside gully, washermen in loin-cloths were twisting and slapping their morning quota of linen in the non-too-clean water. Some had dammed the drain with mud and had put blue in the water. And so along the broad leafy Mall full of scurrying people, busier here than anywhere else in the whole country, and to the air-office, where Nur had come with four friends.

There were jokes and laughter as always, but now sadness too. The chances of Nur getting a grant for further study in Europe were remote, he thought. In any case, he was the eldest son, and at twenty years old his family considered it time for him to marry, settle down, and give an example of the dutiful son to his younger brothers. The idea of not seeing Paris again, perhaps for many years, made him gloomy. He pressed some gifts into my hand: a pair of beautifully worked Punjabi slippers embroidered with gold thread for Madame Hubert, and an incredibly long camel whip for Pierre. Nur brightened as he uncoiled it and showed the wonderful leather tooling on the handle, and the supple, interwoven thongs ended in a vicious-looking knot. He cracked it with a sound like a shot, the air-office jumped, and one of the clerks, with due respect, asked him not to do it again, as some passengers were already nervous at the thought of the journey. Nur wound the weapon away, asking if I thought Pierre would be pleased. I said he would doubtless find some use for it. "Well," said Nur, "at the least Ella could use it for fishing clothes from the plane-tree branches after a quarrel."

From the air Lahore looked romantic but unreal. When the plane banked, matchbox houses, a model mosque, trees like sponges on sticks, toy cars and people swung into the view of our window and sank again. Then we headed south across the desert to Karachi. An old tribesman sat on the opposite side of the gangway and he was highly suspicious of the air-hostess' motives when she put her arms round his waist to fasten the seat belt. Perhaps under the array of clothes a gun was hidden. When she brought round a dish of glucose sweets, his confidence returned, and he wanted to take the lot. He had the most extraordinary teeth, long, narrow and close together like a

goat's, and he crunched the sweets and swallowed them almost before I had the wrapping off mine.

I could not see everything beneath us, as my seat was next to the gangway. To catch a glimpse of the tawny chequer-board of cultivated fields wrested from the sand, I had to lean across my seat-companion, an elderly woman. She had no objection, but when I leaned back her birdy face turned to me. "Isn't it wonderful?" she said excitedly, and went on to declare that her great interest in life was farming and its problems in the Punjab. "The desert is so vast, the green leaf so small; yet we shall win in the end." The frail body, the Victorian coiffure looped like spaniels' ears, the spindly legs and shoes held by buttons and narrow straps failed to strike a farming note. But one never knew what manner of spirit burned in these tiny women. For a moment I thought she was going to give me a religious tract; but my fears were false, for from the worn leather handbag she drew out a telescopic holder, and inserted an American brand cigarette. This brought her from a bygone age to the present.

She had not been to England since the year of Queen Victoria's death. Her eyes closed behind the cigarette smoke, picturing, savouring the days of old India. I enquired if she would not rather be at home than here. She forsook the dream of vice-royalty with its bustles and open landaus. "Oh, no. I would perish from the cold. Why, my sister in Hastings had her television mast blown down in a gale last week. It would have killed me," and she turned to look fondly at the green patches below now becoming more scattered as the desert waves overwhelmed them. She tapped on the window with a cracked finger-nail. "One day it will all come back if we do our little bit." And the scrubby bush, the saltworts, the shifting sand vanished for her, and rolling wheatfields ripened in their stead.

A moist and salty wind from the sea blew across the concrete runway as we stepped from the plane at Karachi. The atmosphere seemed unpleasant after Lahore, but then I disliked Karachi. And at once I felt sorry for such thoughts, for standing by the terminal building were Jamil and his five oldest boys. I had written to tell him my day of departure, for I had engaged

him to make some wood carvings to take home to Europe, and now they waited to greet me, Ghulam and each of the little boys holding garlands to hang round my neck. Ghulam kept saying to his father, "Tell Uncle to come and stay. Why does he have to go?" Why indeed must I break the strands of happiness that had bound me to them and their country?

In the booking hall I checked my seat in the plane for Europe, which would be an hour overdue on its midnight schedule. Europe again announced itself, cryptically, in signs at the counters of many airlines, B.O.A.C., Quantas, S.A.S., K.L.M., and coloured strings over maps of the world showed how direct, how swift, the final wrench would be. An English friend had also come out to the airport and suggested I kill the remaining hours till midnight with him.

Later he drove me out again, the hours gone like minutes, and left me standing in the bald lights of the airport buildings. On a circular grass plot were sleeping figures, turbans showing dimly as white blobs. I was alone now; farewells were over. There remained my secret *salaam* to make, even to the unloved Karachi, which, after all, had been the gateway to so much.

I wandered down the avenue from the airport to the main road, for a further delay was announced. A halo of light from the city ten miles away hovered round the bulk of a huge hangar put up for the R101. But the ill-fated Airship never arrived, and now the iron walls were its gargantuan monument, too costly either to repair or dismantle. Pi-dogs howled somewhere near, and from outlying districts on the desert fringe loaded camel carts passed to the city for the morning market. Hurricane lamps swung from the creaking carts and the drivers slept curled up on the seats, reins drooping from still closed hands. The camels would plod faithfully on hour by hour, knowing the route by experience. During the war men from a nearby R.A.F. station, tired of the road being obstructed at night, used to turn the carts round so that the still-sleeping owners were carried all the way back again.

Two air-hostesses from Pakistan International Airlines turned into the avenue, their Punjabi trousers shining in the dark. One of them just missed treading on a beetle, the size of a mouse, that had landed with a thud on the pavement. From a

camel wagon a boy-driver played a flute, night music under the stars, as he journeyed to the sultry city. It was the last melody of my stay. Then, a hum in the sky became audible, increased and changed to the drone of engines, the plane from Sydney, London-bound, swooped down to land. I began to walk back.

When we had been in the air an hour, I remembered the postcard of Karachi promised to Ida for her Glasgow café. "Ye'll be sure to send it," she had said. But, of course, I had forgotten.

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