

# YEARS OF CHANGE IN BENGAL AND ASSAM

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SIR ROBERT REID

K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.

*With a Foreword by*

IAN STEPHENS



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## *Editor's Foreword*

SIR ROBERT REID'S SERVICE in India did indeed span years of change. It began not long after the exit of Lord Curzon, the grandest, most assured of all British Viceroys, and in the very area, Bengal, affected by that certainly great man's most controversial and insensitive administrative feat: the partition of 1905. It ended within a few weeks of the strange moment in December 1942 when, as a part-time volunteer and ex-Governor in a R.A.F. operations room at Calcutta, Sir Robert had passed on 'red warning' of the first air-raid on that city by the Japanese. Between, lay thirty-six years when, at increasing pace, Britain's prestige and strength in Asia declined; years, too, when, under impact from two World Wars, social and political changes became uncontrollably speedier. The Curzonian Viceroyalty, shortly before Sir Robert entered the I.C.S., represents the unmistakable zenith of British splendour in the East; its nadir was the loss (while he was Governor of Assam) of Singapore, and then the subsequent many months' domination by the Japanese fleet of the Bay of Bengal. And the subtle alterations in ways of life and attitudes of mind, during those thirty-six years, the vanishing of the initial telephoneless water-closetless horse-and-trap era of British officialdom in rural India and the advent of the motor-car age and then the aircraft one—processes of which these pages give vividly detailed glimpses—signified more, really, than the superficially more noticeable constitutional and administrative changes which he also describes.

His book, written in England after retirement, was accepted by the publishers in August 1964, and he died in October—the acceptance, his widow tells us, giving him comfort during his

last illness. It was not a finished book, however. He and they were in agreement that, before it came out, more work needed doing on it; and he gave them a free hand in arranging this.

So two former editors of *The Statesman* newspaper were successively asked to help: myself and G. A. Johnson. We had knowledge of Bengal and Assam, and to some extent of the parts of Bihar where the author had first served; and though we were his juniors by twenty years or so, we had worked in India for about half the time that the book covers. Unfortunately when first approached I had other commitments and could do no more than skim the script and offer general remarks. Johnson was then appealed to; he found himself freer, and did much admirable pruning and rearranging. The script then came back to me, who attempted some more; and the result is thus once again a joint editorial feat by the two of us. Blame for mistakes must nevertheless fall on me, who did the finalising. There are few, I hope; we both tried to avoid them.

Readers unfamiliar with India may sometimes be puzzled by the author's use of English. The British community out there, particularly people in Government employ, evolved over the decades special shades of meaning for certain words or phrases, and Sir Robert's script was rich in these. Johnson and I have largely retained them; otherwise, the book's authentic flavour would have been lost. Some, however, need explaining. 'Station', for instance, in the India of the quite recent past if not now, did not solely imply 'railway station' as it might in Britain. It could just as easily mean 'civil station', a term roughly definable as that part of a smallish town, probably on the plains and a divisional or district or subdivisional headquarters, which contains the officials' residences and the main Government buildings; Sir Robert, in one passage (pp. 149-50), uses 'station' in its two contrasting senses almost together. But some 'civil stations' are in the hills; then, fresh scope for puzzlement creeps in, because the secondary term 'hill station' is elastic. It can mean not only places like Darjeeling or Almora which are district headquarters, that is to say civilian administrative centres, but others like Ranikhet or Lansdowne which are primarily military, and others again like Kasauli or Muktesar or Kalimpong which are sanatoria or settlements for

retired folk, and even pleasure resorts without any Governmental function such as Mussoorie. And the word 'Government', in India, itself became somewhat Indianised, being normally shorn of its 'the'. Presumably this originated because the Governmental structure there is federal not unitary as in Britain, and the word unprefixd by a definite or indefinite article could thus equally denote its Central or its provincial parts. And by extension of this abbreviatory usage in India one made one's way daily to and from 'office', not 'the office' as people in Britain do.

'Officer' again, in India, has distinctive nuances. Here in Britain, anyway among the ordinary public not in Governmental or municipal employ, it usually suggests a military person. Most of us would say naval or army or R.A.F. 'officer' and even police 'officer', but otherwise we would have civilian 'official'. We somehow would not take to be an officer the prim bowler-hatted gentleman in the Hampstead tube *en route* to his daily tasks at the Board of Trade. Not so in India, however, where nearly everyone would reckon equally as officers all Governmental employees, whether civilian or military, who hold posts above a certain salary-level; and I well remember my surprise, on starting my first Indian job as a sort of tame historian to the Central Government in 1930, to learn that I'd thereby become a 'gazetted officer'. And 'Central Government' is a term that itself needs explaining. More strictly it should have been 'Government of India'. The two were synonymously used. Sir Robert's script alternated between them, to future readers' possible confusion, so I have made some attempt to systematise, generally preferring the shorter. But I hesitated about systematising 'Collector', 'District Magistrate', or 'Deputy Commissioner'. Their meanings, though nearly are not quite identical, the differences being less functional than historic. Sir Robert seems to have used them rather haphazardly, but in that order of choice, and as he is the likelier to have been knowledgeable in this rather intricate field I felt it unwise to change.

Other minor systematisings have, however, been done. Towards the end of the book, when writing about the war, he normally used 'Army Headquarters' when I believe 'G.H.Q.'

had become the proper term, and I have altered this. A further usage which may strike readers as strange is 'joined'. In Britain it would probably signify the big, decisive moment of joining a particular firm or service at the start of one's career. Among Indian officialdom it merely meant transfer from one temporary post to another, such changes being frequent. For instance he 'joined' as Collector, Rajshahi; or again as Commissioner, Chittagong; or as Governor, Assam or Bengal. In two years, 1914-16, he must have joined six times (p. 29). The aforementioned examples of Indianised English are offered as specimens only; readers may notice others, some of them perhaps unperceived by Johnson and me, ourselves, too, doubtless linguistically a bit Indianised still.

As Sir Robert suggests in his Preface, *Years of Change* ranks mainly as social history. And some may think its most fascinating parts are its earliest, describing the period 1907-30, truly now a bygone age. Younger readers may, however, be at least equally gripped by the later chapters, telling of ways of life less remote but more turbulent and dangerous, and when British folk in a far land and an exotic social setting though politically under pressure were still all, willy-nilly, somehow representative of 'the Raj'.

And here comes in an item which needs special mention: Bengali terrorism, and its personal menace for the author. Though he writes much and valuably about this formidable cult of the early 1930s in its administrative aspects, he brings out no more than casually that, owing to the posts he held—Chief Secretary, Bengal; Commissioner, Chittagong; Home Member, Bengal—it must have meant his for years being under almost daily threat of murder. The omission is remarkable and I deduce characteristic. When in March 1950 I was thought to be under similar threat—a plain-clothes Bengali policeman sleuthing me around even inside *The Statesman's* building, a loaded pistol hidden in his underwear—I loathed it, remembering often that one of my predecessors had been shot twice;<sup>1</sup> and had it gone on long it would have preyed on my mind. But having briefly met Sir Robert in '32 or thereabouts, and heard comment on

<sup>1</sup> Sir Alfred Watson in 1932. Still alive as I write this. The shootings are described by Sir Robert, pp. 71-72.

him from underlings, and having, too, of late dwelt for some while with his script as daily company, I doubt whether it ever really preyed on his. I see him as a capable, modest, non-introspective type of man, brave but unwittingly so, the best sort of District Officer rather than a Secretariat dignitary, who in those grim five or six years took this daily murderous hazard as it came, a by-product of his routine tasks, and carried on largely regardless: in all ways, then and earlier and right to the end, a very attractive period piece, both personally and in his achievements, for the present-day social historian's attention.

One last point: his emphasis on 'touring'. For a Governor of a province in particular this cannot have been all joy or refreshment, as might outwardly appear, but often very much a duty, and fatiguing. Perhaps he overstresses his tours, whether as a junior official or later, but that seems typical, too; and whatever one's employment, whether in Government service or newspaper-work, things seen or heard or done while wandering about stick in the mind better than papery things done inside a building.

IAN STEPHENS

Cambridge, January 1966





## *Author's Preface*

THOUGH I HAVE ENTITLED this book *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam*, it does not try to describe the detailed political history of those Provinces, but rather, the life of an Indian Civil Servant against the background of my thirty-six years in India. Those years stopped short of the final, greatest change, when Pakistan and the new India were formed amid bloodshed and misery in 1947; but they span a time when change was much in the air, with first the Morley-Minto reforms, then the Montagu-Chelmsford ones, and then the Joint Parliamentary Committee and the Reforms Act of 1935.

I hope there is nothing in my references to people which could hurt their feelings or those of their relations. Many of them, alas, are dead, and I have anyway sought to observe the maxim that 'to the living we owe consideration, to the dead truth only'.

As regards spellings of names and places, I have in the main tried to follow the Hunterian rules, except where a Europeanised form is hallowed by usage. And it is impossible to apply consistent rules to places and tribes along the N.E. Frontier, so I have there striven merely to make them intelligible.

I have not compiled a bibliography. My sources were chiefly memory, a diary, and some volumes of Press cuttings collected rather haphazard. To my wife I owe a debt I can never repay. Without her help these pages would never have been written, and she was the inspiring genius behind many things which would otherwise not have got done. She spent long hours in typing a badly written manuscript, supplied many gaps, and corrected errors where my memory was at fault.

ROBERT REID

## *Acknowledgement*

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The Map on pp. 88 and 89 is based on the map of Bengal and Assam in the *Citizens Atlas* (1942), published by John Bartholomew and Son Ltd., of Edinburgh.

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Bengal and Assam in the period covered by  
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**BOOK ONE**

**BENGAL**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Learning the Job*

I ARRIVED in Calcutta on first appointment to the I.C.S. on 25 November 1907, my province being Bengal. Posting was soon settled, as the Under-Secretary Appointments Department was an old Brasenose friend, Willie Buchan, a younger brother of the famous John Buchan. He asked me where I wanted to go, and I said Ranchi, as the Judge there, William Vincent, was a brother of a man I knew well in England, James Vincent. So, after a brief interview with E. A. Gait, the Chief Secretary, of which I remember nothing but a heavy black moustache and an exhortation to pass my exams promptly, away I went.

In 1907 Lord Minto had been Viceroy of India for some two years, having succeeded Lord Curzon. It was a period of settling down, especially in Bengal, which only two years previously had been partitioned under plans that Curzon sanctioned. Before 1905, Bengal had been an immense unwieldy area of 189,000 sq. miles with a population of 78 millions. Then, after much political agitation, it was shorn of about half its inhabitants, and a new province, to which Assam was tagged on, came into being entitled Eastern Bengal and Assam. The partition, of course, entailed much adjusting of cadres and reposting of individuals in the services, but the general disposition was to make the best of it, treating it, in the words of the then Secretary of State, John Morley, as a 'settled fact'.

Though the agitation for partition had given anyone in touch with it a clear hint of the intensity with which Indian politics might develop, Europeans in India in 1907, whether members of the services or in non-official life, had no reason to feel other than secure. The immediate concern of a newly

joined civilian like myself was simply to pass his exams, get through the drudgery that is the lot of all new hands in any walk of life, and hope for his first independent charge, a subdivision, soon. His employment could extend to a minimum of twenty-five and a maximum of thirty-five years. The subsequent pension was the same, £1,000 (fixed in 1862), whether he attained the glittering prizes open to ambitious officialdom or was content never to get beyond the grade of Magistrate and Collector. I suppose we officials of that epoch, in our way, shared the 'pathetic contentment' out of which the Montagu-Chelmsford report of 1917 sought to raise the peoples of India generally.

The railway in 1907 had just reached Ranchi from the main line of Purulia, replacing the discomforts of travel by 'push push', a kind of box on four wheels propelled by relays of coolies. Ranchi was a large station, in hilly country at about 2,000 ft., and had a European population of at least fifty or sixty officials, besides Church of England and Roman Catholic missionaries. In those days, of course, there were no telephones or electric light, no modern sanitation. Motor cars locally numbered three, an official one allotted to the Commissioner of the Division which seldom or never went, and two privately owned. The Deputy Inspector-General of Police, R. T. Dundas, possessed one of these; the other, an earlier type of Cadillac, belonged to the Deputy Commissioner, H. L. Stephenson (later Sir Hugh, and successively Governor of Bihar, and of Burma). The rest of us were mostly content with horses and traps or bicycles, but the urge for mechanical transport was there, and before long I had bought a  $3\frac{1}{2}$  horsepower motor bike from a brother civilian.

Politics meant little in that land of primitive tribes—Uraons, Hos, Mundas—and we of the services had little reason to suppose that the régime to which we belonged was other than good for many a year to come. It was not long, however, before two World Wars and a succession of political reforms shattered such comfortable dreams. We had at least time to accustom ourselves to the relinquishment of power. There had always been Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858 as background.

Life in such a station as Ranchi even in the summer—where without electric fans it could be hot—was very pleasant. To return to the grind of preparing for exams naturally irked a bit, but I had leisure enough. I soon acquired a horse, and gladly undertook also to exercise those of the Commissioner, with whom I was lucky enough to be asked to live while his wife was away. He, H. J. McIntosh, was charming. Perhaps his ideas were old-fashioned; he must have joined the Service in the '80s. One of his mottoes was 'a ride every day and a long one on Sunday', and he had two boasts: that he had never seen the inside of an Indian cookhouse, nor ever performed an inspection according to the official Inspection Manual, to which his perhaps less-experienced colleagues had resort.

A three weeks' tour with him in November was memorable. We set out in a pair of two-wheeled dog-carts, he and his wife in one and a Miss Gordon and I in the other, and drove ten or twelve miles a day from the Ranchi plateau to the plains of Singhbhum, halting by night at staging-bungalows. How different, this leisurely progress, from latter-day touring by car! It meant that officials were seen by the populace close to, and could be easily approached. This made real impact, whereas the swift passage of anonymous personages by car made none. To me, touring, possibly where no official had been before, always had irresistible appeal, and fortunately I could gratify this taste much in later years.

Near the end of that tour with the Commissioner, my first, I got orders to 'join forthwith' at Muzaffarpur, where they were short of officers to deal with a local famine. So, after brief return to Ranchi to pack my small belongings, off I set, not long before Christmas 1908, to a very different kind of district, in flat fertile country north of the Ganges. My new Collector was Harry Wodeman, and I was at once put up and taken care of by him and his wife.

Like Stephenson, Wodeman had had the advantage of service with the Central Government. I say advantage, but it was so only if limited in time, and varied by periodical returns to district work. Men who went continuously from post to post in the Central or provincial Secretariats, and knew only the streets of Calcutta and Simla or some provincial capital, were

apt to forget the outlook of the District Officer who was nearest to, and in fact representative of, the common folk. Stephenson was an exception; his sole district charge indeed was that of Ranchi during the few months I was there. Nevertheless, he maintained sympathy with the underdog in places far from the cities where the bureaucrats functioned. For myself, I made it a firm rule, when in higher positions later, to keep personal touch with the men of the various services and see the places they worked in. It makes all the difference, if the receiver and sender of a letter each has a clear picture of the person at the other end, and his environment. I don't say a man cannot be a successful administrator if unacquainted with his subordinates; but it helps if he meets them; it sweetens relations, and makes his decisions likelier to prove acceptable. Nevertheless a mere interfering 'see for yourself' attitude by the man at the top can be fraught with danger. Near the top of any organisation must be persons responsible for supervision, and no head of service is wise to go past them. The need is to choose good subordinates and, that done, to trust them.

Thus interchange between secretariat and district was of great value to men in the I.C.S., for its members not only, in my early days, initiated policy but implemented it, and it was useful to have had experience of Governmental headquarters, especially in the later period of our rule when policy was often conditioned by politics, and so at first not easily understood when orders filtered down to district level. Probably I did not realise much of this in my first year, but consciously or otherwise it was of benefit to have had my official infancy at the feet of men with Stephenson's and Wodeman's background.

So much for official training. I was to get my first glimpse of the non-officials' attitude to things in Muzaffarpur. Indigo, though on the downgrade, was still a profitable industry (it had its last flicker during World War I, when the supply of German aniline dye gave out), and there were many European planters scattered over the district; thirty or forty. Their normal and quite natural approach to the newly joined official was to put him quickly in his place, and make clear that the magic letters I.C.S. gave him no claim to deference. Their hos-

pitality, however, knew no bounds, and I made many a good friend among them.

Muzaffarpur also from the personal aspect proved outstandingly important for me, as it was there I found my wife; a wife who has stuck to me for fifty-four years, and was of immeasurable help throughout my service. Before the wedding I had been posted to a subdivision of the district, Sitamarhi, where I took my bride in November 1909. It was a lonely place. By the standards of that day our bungalow was good, consisting of drawing-room, dining-room, office, one bedroom, one dressing-room. Visitors had to be put up at the dakh-bungalow across the road. No electric power, of course; no water laid on; no telephone nor typist, much less a stenographer. It was, however, rent free. Subdivisional officers and, exceptionally, the Collector of the 24-Parganas District who lived in Thackeray's old house at Alipore near Calcutta, were exempt from paying rent for their quarters in my time. All others paid rent, subject to a maximum of 10 per cent of their pay. Living was cheap, both for us and the populace at large, and wages correspondingly low. Our cook drew Rs.13 a month or, say, about £1; a syce or groom would get Rs.10 or Rs.12; a grasscutter (one for each horse) Rs.7. You could get first-class oats from the planters at Re.1 a maund (80 lb.). There was little variety in our diet. The main source was a weekly joint from the Mutton Club at Belsund. There was rejoicing when our turn came for the saddle, but in the hot weather the meat ran risks during the slow, ten-mile journey on a coolie's head. An alternative then lay in the 'quailery'. The birds were kept in a dark shed with plenty of water and taken out as required. Otherwise our meat was Indian chicken.

At the beginning of the twentieth century officers outside Calcutta drew their monthly pay in cash, often in a most casual way. When I was at Midnapore in 1915 one of my *chaprassis* (or messengers) would walk once a month to the Treasury, about half a mile away, and return with a bundle of notes and a bag or two of rupees. It was at that same station that I had to help pack up the District Magistrate for home. He had been in bed or confined to his room for months, and I found some thousands of rupees in a wooden box of which his

bearer had the key. I suppose this system originated in days when there were no banking facilities outside the big towns, but it ignored the fact that most officers would keep accounts with some bank in Calcutta, and eventually (not, I think, till after World War I) we were allowed to have most of our pay paid into such an account.

Much of my time when at my Sitamarhi headquarters was taken up in trying criminal cases. Only the two leading members of the Bar, Parmeshwar Dayal and Ram Bahadur, were able to argue their cases in English. When others appeared the proceedings were throughout in the vernacular, of which I soon acquired good working knowledge. The local patois was a sort of debased Hindi and bore little resemblance to what I had learnt from Dr. Hoey at the Indian Institute in Oxford.

At Sitamarhi however I spent a good deal of time on tour, especially in the cold weather, either driving or on horseback. There were no metalled roads and going was heavy on that alluvial soil. The Bihar custom was to 'lay daks', that is, relays of horses at intervals of five to seven miles, sending them out the night before. That was for definite journeys out and back. For a real tour the arrangement was elaborate. We had two sets of tents, one in use and one on its way to the next halting-place. For the servants and horses and the cow (which with its calf had to accompany us, otherwise we should not have enough milk), 'bashas' of bamboo and grass were erected. Besides inspecting police stations and local institutions, I tried criminal cases when on tour, and though the Sitamarhi pleaders did not like that, it suited the villagers well to have justice (or what I hoped was justice) brought to their door.

These tours often lasted weeks, and for our final one in Sitamarhi, done two months before the birth of our first son David, we were out nearly a month. Looking back after all these years it seems foolhardy, as we were far from medical aid. However, all went well. We travelled short distances each day in a four-wheeled buggy drawn by our most reliable ponies. A four-wheeler was essential on those bumpy roads for the comfort of both the passengers and the animal between the shafts. This tour took us round the northern edge of the subdivision where British India marched with Nepal, mostly in the police-station

area of Sonbarsa. The sub-inspector in charge caused embarrassment when we arrived by placing himself in a commanding position, saluting smartly and declaring: 'The sub-inspector of Sonbarsa greets his Lord and Lady.' This must have been carefully rehearsed, as in a remote station the sub-inspector would probably never use English nor wear his uniform for months on end. Farther on we camped at Mejarganj, the site of an old cantonment which must have dated from the war with Nepal. I suppose the place took its name from some forgotten major. Thence to Dheng, the site of a new railway bridge which had caused me anxiety the previous year. The idea lingered of human sacrifice as a necessary accompaniment of such construction, and had given rise to a rumour that babies were to be kidnapped for this purpose. So when a stranger was spied in the neighbouring villages he was set upon and manhandled. At least one harmless wretch was killed and there were probably more such incidents never reported.

And so back to headquarters for a week and then my wife went to Muzaffarpur, where David was born on 9 January 1911. During the summer I was transferred to Barrackpore, a subdivision north of Calcutta, staying there, however, only six months, a period which carries no happy memories. We then went home to England on leave. The leave rules in those days were far from generous. An officer was not entitled to furlough in the full sense till after eight years' service.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *From Peace to War*

AT BOMBAY, on return from England in December 1911, we got news of the cancellation of Curzon's partition of Bengal. This decision, of which no hint had leaked out, was revealed at King George V's famous Delhi Durbar and came as a great shock, at any rate to those officers who had worked so hard to establish the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. That province was now abolished; East and West Bengal were reunited as a Presidency-Governorship like Madras and Bombay; Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur became a new province under a Lieutenant-Governor stationed at Patna; Assam reverted to the status of a Chief Commissionership. The cancellation was one of the 'boons' announced at the Durbar. To many, not least the Muslims of East Bengal, who for six years had enjoyed a provincial capital of their own in Dacca, it was far from a boon. Another change, however, that did please the rest of India was that the Central Government gave up Calcutta as its cold-weather capital and founded a new one in Delhi. The rest of India, both politicians and officialdom, had always been jealous of Calcutta's influence.

For myself, a mere fly on the official wheel, the change meant relegation to Bengal. Like nearly everyone who had served in Bihar, I had applied for the new province of Bihar and Orissa; but on return from leave I had been posted to Calcutta as an Under-Secretary and they naturally left me there. Not that I later regretted this compulsion. And when we got to Calcutta we were lucky to find accommodation waiting in the lower flat of a house in Alipore. It was indeed somewhat cramped for a family that included a baby and an English nurse, but house-room at Calcutta was always hard to get.



And as a new and very junior Secretariat officer I had plenty of work and a full social life. For those like us who were keen on horses there was the daily ride before breakfast round the race-course, with a paper-chase every Friday out in the country (not so very far away then) and the races every Saturday, all practically on one's doorstep. Then, as now, the city contained a large European business and professional population. There was a British regiment in the Fort, another at Dum Dum, and a field battery at Barrackpore; there were Indian battalions at Barrackpore and Alipore. Motors were already numerous, though horses and traps remained in use. I generally drove to my office in the trap, leaving the car for the family.

King George and Queen Mary, on leaving Delhi after the Durbar, arrived in Calcutta on 30 December, and I was put on to ushering duty at Prinsep's Ghat. They crossed the river by ferry after detraining at Howrah, instead of bumping across the old Howrah floating bridge. Their week's visit was a great success and the enthusiasm of the crowds amazing; but the police were thankful when it was over. Their Majesties held a Levée and a Court, to both of which we were invited.

By March we were all thinking of the annual move to the hills. In those days the whole provincial Secretariat down to mere under-secretaries migrated to Darjeeling in early April, remained there till the rains broke, say about mid-June, returned to Calcutta then for some ten weeks, and again migrated to Darjeeling for another two months or so till the cold weather was well on its way. We took only a small office staff, enough to cope with the comparatively small amount of work which came up. The bags arrived by rail and were delivered in the afternoon and the files, disposed of, could not go back till next day; so the time-lag was considerable. But somehow, fifty years ago, work was always light during the hills exodus. The Chief Secretary (in charge of the most exacting department) could actually go off sometimes on a month's tour of the Himalayas, leaving his under-secretary in charge.

The exodus was certainly open to criticism on many and reasonable grounds. It was expensive; it meant that Government was out of touch with what was going on in the plains; it was mainly for the benefit of European members of the

services; and therefore more and more, as time went on, it became the target of criticism in the Legislature. So the length of the stay in the hills was progressively cut down.

Darjeeling was a pleasant place, though we got much rain and mist. No cars or horse-drawn vehicles were allowed. The Governor had the privilege of motoring down the cart road to the polo-ground and race-course at Lebong. Otherwise we all walked, rode, or went about in rickshaws, the streets being narrow and crowded. The important event of 1912 was the arrival of our new Governor in April, Lord Carmichael, who had been transferred from Madras; an experienced parliamentarian and a shrewd Scot, not inclined to over-exert himself, with a keen interest at leisure moments in lepidoptera.

My post was that of Under-Secretary, Revenue and General Departments. There were only two other departments then, Finance and Political and Appointments under the Chief Secretary. 'General' covered a mass of subjects which later proliferated under their own secretaries. I suppose one reason why staffs were small was that there was little money to spend, especially on what later came to be known as the 'nation-building' departments. Even Education had no separate Secretary, though it was soon to be treated to one under that able administrator Robert Nathan. The Secretary under whom I worked was John Kerr (later Governor of Assam), one of the ablest members of our service. His thorough knowledge of Revenue administration and fund of common sense made it a real pleasure, as well as a useful experience, to work for him. For the first time in history the Governor now had a non-official as a member of his Executive Council, Syed Sir Shamsul Huda. This was an outcome of the Morley-Minto Reforms.

In April 1914 my time in the Secretariat ended. My wife and David had already left for home by the long sea route from Calcutta. When we met again, in London, David was very ill with suspected typhoid and about to be removed to a nursing-home, and my first duty was to carry him out to a waiting car by the back door (the hotel people did not want it known there was typhoid on the premises); a sad start to our leave, which anyhow was cut short when war broke out in August. I then

had to hurry off to embark with several hundred other Indian officers recalled from leave on the P. & O. *Ballarat*. The ship had been on P. & O. branch service to Australia, had been hurriedly converted to carry human freight instead of wool only a few days before, and the paint was not dry in our cabin; nor was she designed for comfort in the tropics. One of our passengers died of heatstroke, and the stokers, who were all Europeans, suffered greatly. The M.O. formally in charge was useless, but we had I.M.S. officers on board who took over. However, there was plenty of interest as we steamed along. British and French warships stopped us in the Channel to know where we were going. The British destroyer *Basilisk* escorted us from Port Said into the Red Sea, and then turned back shortly before we met a convoy of sixteen transports steaming north, containing presumably one of the Indian divisions that went to France; an impressive sight.

On return to Bengal I went through a period of repeated transfers, holding six different appointments in two years. The longest was eight months as Joint Magistrate, Jalpaiguri, the next seven at Midnapore as additional Magistrate and District Officer; the rest all very short-term appointments. Only when I was allowed to join the Army in August 1916 did I stay in one place for any time. It was a queer sort of war for us in India, mainly I suppose because, unlike that of 1939–45, it never got near Indian soil—though it cost thousands of Indian lives in France, Mesopotamia and elsewhere. For us Civil Servants the administration went on as usual, the younger members feeling very frustrated, as at first all were debarred from joining up, which indeed was common sense, for we were probably more useful alive in jobs we were trained for than perhaps dead as temporary soldiers. But as the war went on, and shortage of officers in the Indian Army became more acute, restrictions were relaxed, and many of us got away.

In August 1916 I got orders to join the 1st D.Y.O. Lancers (Skinner's Horse) at Risalpur. My military career was not spectacular; but if one shuts one's memory to the long, long days of hot weather when outdoor work stopped at 8 a.m., I think it was for me a happy time. I liked the men, who were recruited almost entirely from districts near Delhi; also the

work. Skinner's Horse was a 'class' regiment, of Mussulmans only, which indeed was why they never served abroad. The authorities had decided not to send Mussulmans to Mesopotamia after an unfortunate incident in another unit. It had a double role: it was part of the Risalpur Cavalry Brigade which in turn was a component of the 1st Peshawar Division, a force always ready for service on India's North-West Frontier; at the same time it was being constantly milked of trained men to supply losses elsewhere.

We were also termed a 'silladar' regiment, meaning we were organised on a system which broke down during the war and was afterwards abolished: a sort of joint-stock affair. In theory, each man supplied his own horse and saddlery, and the Government his rifle and lance. If a recruit had not the means to find horse and saddlery, he got an advance from the regimental fund which he paid off gradually out of his pay. This was all very well in time of peace, but unworkable in war. A mounted man's pay was Rs.34 a month, out of which he had to feed himself and his horse, pay off his debt and meet any other liability. Obviously the more men who could be described as owning mounts the better; so if, for instance, a mare happened to produce a foal, one of the men was at once 'mounted' on it, which was no good for active service. I remember, too, at least one horse permanently in our sick lines, which should have been destroyed, but somebody was 'mounted' on it. The men were recruited on a short-of-family basis. That arrangement, too, broke down in war.

And the system entailed the most complicated accounts—all kept in Urdu. There were at least fifty columns in huge sheets allotted to each individual in the regiment, and I doubt if anyone pretended to understand them except Chand Khan, the accounts N.C.O. I remember, when I first got command of 'B' squadron, giving up a polo afternoon to checking the accounts, but I felt so baffled and bewildered I never tried again.

The head clerk of the regimental office, curiously enough, was a Bengali from Burdwan, Sarat Chandra Ghosh; a very good head clerk and a great character, much beloved by his Muslim and British comrades. When the regiment moved out

on active service on the Mohmand Line near Peshawar, he went with them, and a warlike sight he was. His beard, of fine proportions, was fiercely brushed up, on his head a great pug-ree tied in the best Skinner's Horse manner, his dhoti well tucked up so as not to impede his movements and his socks similarly pulled up, and kept in place with bright-coloured suspenders. Nothing of the 'non-martial race' about him!

When I joined in 1916 many of the regular officers, seeing that the regiment had no chance of going on active service as a unit, had got away to outside appointments and their places were taken by a long, often changing succession of temporary officers like myself. No fewer than thirty-four of us passed through the Mess in the two and a half years I was with them. My stay became unusually long, mainly because Government did not favour Civil Servants going on active service. That rule, however, was relaxed in 1918, and I then found myself at Quetta *en route* for the East Persia Cordon. The Cordon's purpose, as we understood it, was to build up a line of communications for troops from India who were to meet a threatened attack by the Bolsheviks from the north. There was a small force of fighting troops far to the north at Askabad near the Russo-Persian border. The line was divided into sections for administrative purposes each under an Administrative Commandant, of whom I was one. My headquarters were at Kain, where I had a Supply Officer, a Transport Officer, and an Engineer. Ration rum was the only alcohol we had; whisky was unknown; tobacco was very scarce due to lack of transport. Motor vehicles consisted of a few T pattern Ford vans long past their best, boasting neither hoods nor windscreens. There were no spares, and whenever we halted when travelling by convoy each owner of a car slept with his sparking-plugs in his pocket, otherwise they would be stolen. My worst experience was going a whole day over non-existent roads on three cylinders in low gear. Those old Fords had only two gears and if you drove in low you had to have your foot pressed down all the time. Poor Ismail, the driver, had something like twelve hours of this and was wellnigh exhausted at the end of the day. So was I, even though I did not drive, from incessant jumping

in and out of the truck, unloading and loading at bad hills, and pushing.

News of the Armistice found me at Turbat-i-Haidari on my way to Meshed, which was the northern end of my section, and after that my preoccupation was how to get released from the Army and home on leave. This was hastened by an accidental fall from a horse which led to my being evacuated to Quetta, whence I escaped as quickly as I could to Calcutta, there to await a passage. It was good to feel one was at last on a reasonably long spell of home leave after twelve years with only two short intervals. In fact, I was lucky enough to get eighteen months on this occasion.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Sport, Politics, Floods*

LEAVE ENDED in October 1920, and on return I was posted as District Magistrate to Rajshahi, where I had been for a few months in 1916, and so I started what was my most satisfactory period in a district, three years' uninterrupted service.

Rajshahi District was fairly typical of North Bengal; covering about 5,000 sq. miles, it had two outlying subdivisions, each in charge of a Deputy Magistrate (an Indian member of the Provincial Service) who was as much responsible for everything that went on in his subdivision as the D.M. was in the district as a whole. The district's southern boundary was the Ganges, or Padma as that stretch of the river was known. There was only one metalled road, the twenty-three miles which led to the main north-south railway line at Nator. The rest were earth tracks, maintained by the District Board and cut to bits by the narrow tyres of heavy bullock-cart traffic. Various sluggish rivers and streams enabled one if not in a hurry to travel by an immense unwieldy 'baulea' or houseboat which was at the Collector's disposal, or else by the quicker ordinary 'country boats' of Bengal. I did much of my touring, however, on horseback.

The headquarters station, on the banks of the Padma and protected from flood waters by a great earthen embankment, had, besides the Collector, the usual complement of civilian officers: namely a District Judge, who was also a member of the I.C.S.; a Superintendent of Police, who as often as not had an Assistant Superintendent; a Civil Surgeon, usually a member of the I.M.S., in charge of the Civil Hospital at headquarters, who also supervised all outlying hospitals and dispensaries and was responsible for the medical well-being of the

Central Jail and its 1,000 or more inmates. There was, besides an Executive Engineer, a member of the Public Works Department.

The station was spacious and, like many in the older Bengal districts, possessed a race-course. Our housing was for those times good. No electric power, of course; pressure lamps were just coming in, and like all newfangled devices gave much trouble. In the hot weather we relied on the hand-pulled punka to stir the air. Water came from a well. A few miles down-stream on the banks of the Padma was the Police Training School at Sarda. That town had been a big silk factory in the days when the silk industry flourished, and the building and grounds provided ample room for many officers and men. I saw much of the batches of young police officers who passed through the school and friendships then made and opinions formed proved of value later.

There was plenty of sport for one's leisure: duck- and snipe-shooting in the winter, and pig-sticking, the finest sport in the world, whenever the ground was dry. The wild boar is the 'bravest brute God made'. He goes like smoke for a short burst when first beaten out in the open, then will turn and charge with a 'woof-woof'; all he ever says. Never a squeal. In Bengal we used a shorter spear than up-country, with a butt weighted with lead. This was held over-arm, again unlike the up-country fashion, and if it was kept absolutely steady and at a slight angle the boar's death was certain. It was essential also to gallop full speed. The speed of horse and boar, combined, ensured that the spear went truly home. The boar's hide, especially round shoulders and forearm, is very thick and tough and only a sharp spear-thrust done with great force will penetrate. I had one horse, a chestnut called Saxon, who was first-rate and indeed enjoyed it; he followed every jink like a greyhound after a hare. I owned him for about seventeen years, he was the best all-rounder I ever had: hacked, pig-sticked, served as a Light Horse charger, carried a lady, even had a go at polo. One thing he wouldn't do was drag a trap; the only time we tried he kicked the trap to pieces.

The best authority on pig-sticking I came across was F. B. Simson of the Bengal Civil Service, who served there from 1847



and wrote that admirable book *Sport in Eastern Bengal*. He had four golden rules which I found infallible: always go fast at the boar; always ride at him, or receive his charge at an angle; spear him well forward; have your spear sharp, and don't hold on to it if it doesn't come away. By following these I never had a horse seriously cut, and I once saw one dreadfully injured because his rider did not follow Rule One. A boar's tusks are as sharp as a razor.

On one boar-hunt while on tour in January 1922 we had an unfortunate experience. While making from one cover to another a boar which I had wounded and was pursuing came near a small herd-boy lying on the back of a buffalo. The buffalo, of course, threw him off as it lumbered away, and the boar savaged the boy on the ground. Fortunately he lay on his face, but he had as many as twenty-two cuts on his back. We patched him up with the iodine, cotton wool and bandages which we always carried, and got him brought into the nearest dispensary, where the doctor-babu stitched him up. He made a good recovery. This came to be known as the 'pig-bite case', as the babu described it in his report.

At Rajshahi I had to supervise the first election to the Legislative Assembly under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919. This was the opening stage in setting up Dyarchy, a system which entrusted some provincial departments to elected Ministers, while leaving the rest to officially nominated Executive Councillors under the over-all chairmanship of the Governor. Ours then was Lord Ronaldshay. He decided from the start that Ministers and Executive Councillors should discuss each other's affairs in joint meetings, though each half retained final responsibility in its own sphere, thus treating them, in fact, as a single cabinet. This system continued until 1937, when the Act of 1935 gave provincial Ministers complete responsibility.

The year 1921, which saw the start of these reforms, was a time of great political unrest. Gandhi's non-cooperation movement was in full swing, marked by the burning of foreign cloth and periodical 'hartals' (when all shops were closed and ordinary activities of life suspended). Schoolboys became undisciplined. We officials felt dubious of our future. Subordinates

were apt to look over their shoulders and wonder what their fate would be if they took strong action against politicians who might later be their masters. On rare visits to Calcutta or Darjeeling one found the destiny of the services under keen and rather gloomy discussion, and for the first time terms for premature retirement were being canvassed. I remember a talk with Sir Henry Wheeler, member of the Executive Council; his advice was 'go if you can'. In a district all this seemed rather remote, though I remember once saying to my friend the Judge that it was 'time to go'. But we didn't go, and if we had we might have been unemployable.

The wind of change blew over India in phased draughts, against the distant background of Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858. In my early years the Morley-Minto reforms; then in 1921, as described, the Act based on the Montagu-Chelmsford report, followed by a stronger breeze, the Act of 1935. Finally, the hurricane of 1947. So those of us who stayed after the opportunity of going on proportionate pensions was offered in 1921—as most of us did—had time to get used to the idea of arranging our official demise. Herein we were more fortunate than our Colonial Service opposite numbers.

In Rajshahi District, besides the nuisance of hartals and interference with normal life and work, we had in 1921 two special manifestations of the new hostile spirit. One was a dead-set against the management of the Midnapore Zemindari Company's property round Bilmoria in the south, involving incitement not to pay rent. This was traced to outside agitators, and it took time to run them down and restore things to normal. My opinion was that Major Tayler, the manager, was fair and just; but possibly his subordinates had been oppressive, and to work up agitation among ignorant people is easy.

The other incident, a worse one, was when, in March, nearly 700 prisoners in the Central Jail broke out of their cells, massed in the open space opposite the jail gates, pushed the superintendent and warders aside and let themselves out. The story had gone round among them that a new 'Raj' was to be inaugurated and all prisoners released, so they anticipated this millennium by escaping. They walked right through the town, flinging off their prison garb and acquiring ordinary clothes by

persuasion or force. My first action was to drive to the Police Training School at Sarda and collect all the force I could and send them off in pursuit. After a short return to Rajshahi, to try to reassure people who were hearing the wildest rumours, I went out again after the convicts. I found McDowell, the Superintendent of Police, and Graham, the District Judge, some distance out, both dead-beat, having been in the chase from two till eight on a hot afternoon. Graham, as Judge, should have been waiting for someone to arraign the criminals in his court, but he had the executive spirit and could not refrain from action (the High Court later wanted an explanation of his apparently unjudicial conduct). Touch with the convicts was soon lost, for they went on by night without stopping. They did no particular harm anywhere and the only casualties, I think, were two of them shot in the pursuit, and one villager who was accidentally shot in the darkness when our men rushed a shed thought to contain convicts, but actually only harmless labourers. Considering that most of our police force were recruits but partly trained, it was surprising that there were not more shooting incidents in the confusion.

The escapers were picked up here and there in course of time. A few came in willingly, declaring that life in jail with all found was better than that of a refugee and an object of suspicion. Within two months as many as 480 out of the 669 who broke out were available for trial. They gave no trouble.

My wife and I toured much together from Rajshahi by boat and car and on horseback, and she helped liven up the station. The highlight of her first winter was a one-day race meet; rather like the old meets of the planting days in Bihar, with tennis tournaments and so on besides the racing. There was a large gathering of Europeans, all the Midnapore Zemindari people from the neighbouring district, all the Sarda people, besides the station proper. The day ended up with a dance and supper at the Club. The meet was repeated in the following December with even more success. Races are a great attraction to Bengalis, and crowds swarmed out of the town to join in the fun.

Our last lengthy tour was in the second half of January 1923 in the east of the district, but it ended in disaster for me. I was

on my horse Saxon galloping after a good pig which led us across some heavy ground. I drove Saxon too hard, the mud held him and he came down heavily with the wind knocked out of him. Something happened to me, too; my hands and legs went numb and for a moment useless. However, we got up in the end. I mounted another horse and we had a good hunt after a well-plucked pig, who stopped finally, waited for me in a bit of cover, then came out and charged, and I killed him in one. But that was the last pig I ever killed. My injuries were more than I realised, and after remaining undiagnosed for nearly a year resulted in my spending months in a plaster jacket.

During 1922 political agitation did not lessen. Members of the Congress party visited the district and caused difficult problems. It was a relief on 12 March to hear of Gandhi's arrest, and we toads beneath the harrow, locally responsible for keeping law and order, hoped this was a sign of stronger measures. More important, however, for me, that year, were the North Bengal floods. Rains had been particularly heavy, as I found when making a tour in the budgerow (a sort of houseboat) towards the end of July. Rajshahi was the district worst affected, but neighbouring Bogra and Pabna suffered, too. Then in early August the waters began to rise faster, and the Padma ran past our embankment very high. The main road beyond the town to the railway was breached in many places. Flooding then decreased for a time, which was convenient, as the new Governor, Lord Lytton, had arranged to visit the district from 19 to 21 August. He came by river on the *Rhotas*, a large 'flat' with fine deck space and plenty of accommodation below, but no engines; towed by a river steamer. His tour which included visits to all main local institutions was quite a success, unmarred by serious political demonstrations.

In the last week of September, however, we got alarming news of fresh flooding in Naogaon subdivision in the north of the district, and at Natore, with the railway breached and people in great distress. I set off for Naogaon immediately. The road to Natore was fortunately in order, but train services were not. None had run the day before; but eventually a train

with some railway officers on it came in and trundled along to Santahar, the junction of the broad-gauge and metre-gauge lines. The line, all the way on a high embankment, was intact, but with every bridge and culvert spouting water. As we went farther north not an inch of dry land was to be seen on either side, and more and more human beings with their belongings and cattle stood marooned, huddled helplessly together. In such flood waters, houses which were made of mud just melted away. In other districts, for instance in East Bengal, where the walls were made of bamboo or grass, the water ran through with far less disastrous effect. Railway stations were covered with people and any empty wagons filled with refugees. Santahar was mostly under water and full of stranded passengers. The stationmaster had, however, seized all the food-stuffs that happened to be in railway trucks, so there was no lack of grain for immediate needs.

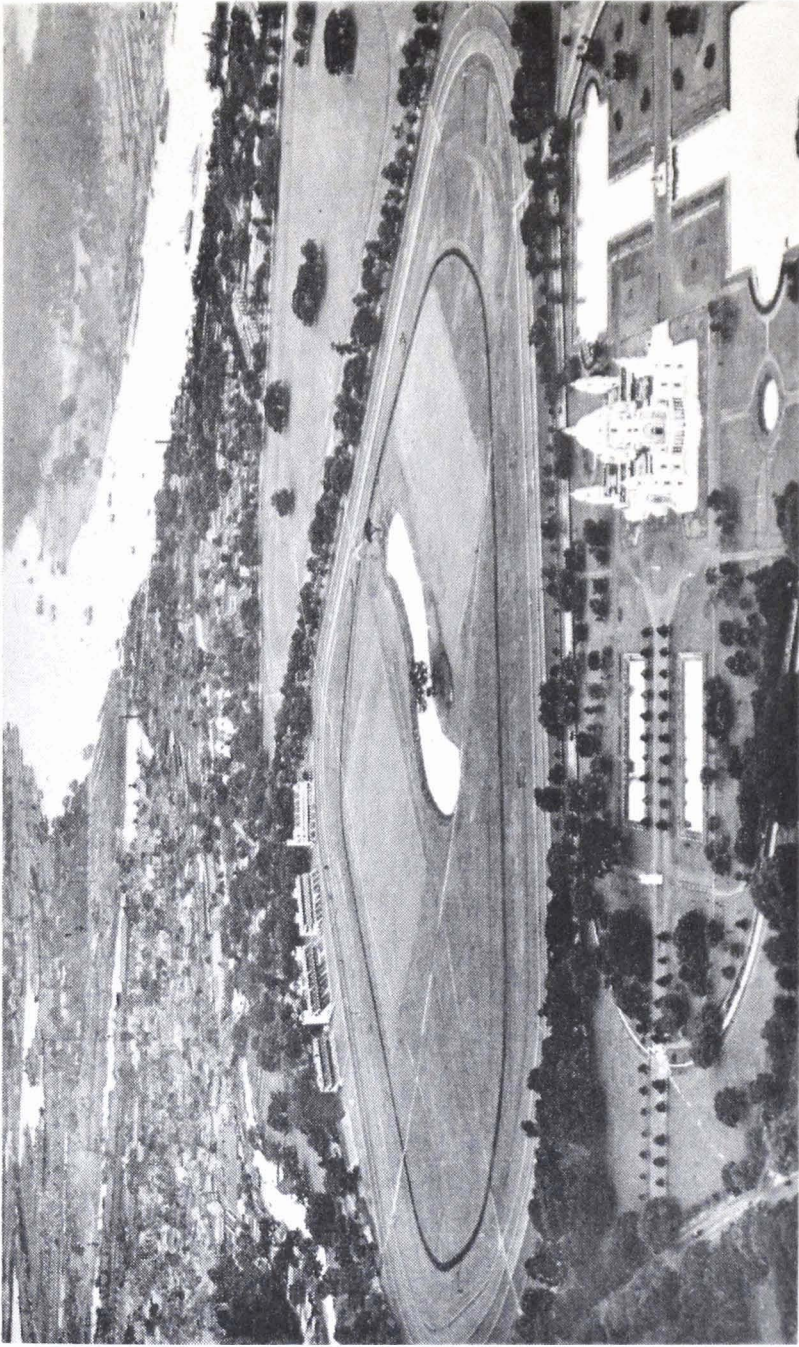
From Santahar I made my way to Naogaon by boat, the road being wholly submerged. There were two feet of water all round the rest-house and throughout the town. The bungalow had only two rooms, one occupied by an inspecting officer of the Registration Department with three more adults and four children; the other by the rest-house *chowkidar* or caretaker and his family. Adjustments were made, and I was able to install myself in the second room, with my servants on the veranda. There was no other dry land; and in that bungalow I stayed for a fortnight, very much occupied in relief work. I don't think any question of saving lives arose; the water had come up gradually and people got ample warning. It was of great help to me that almost exactly the same state of affairs had arisen about seven years before, and the then Collector, Alexander Cassells, a very methodical officer, had left in his reports all possible details of how to deal with it. Some may smile at the official love of precedent, but how useful it is in a case like this when circumstances repeat themselves! All available subordinate officers in the district, as well as several ordered by the Commissioner to join from elsewhere, were sent into the affected area to get information and arrange help.

We had plenty of publicity, partly because it was a sizeable calamity in itself, partly for political reasons. The first member

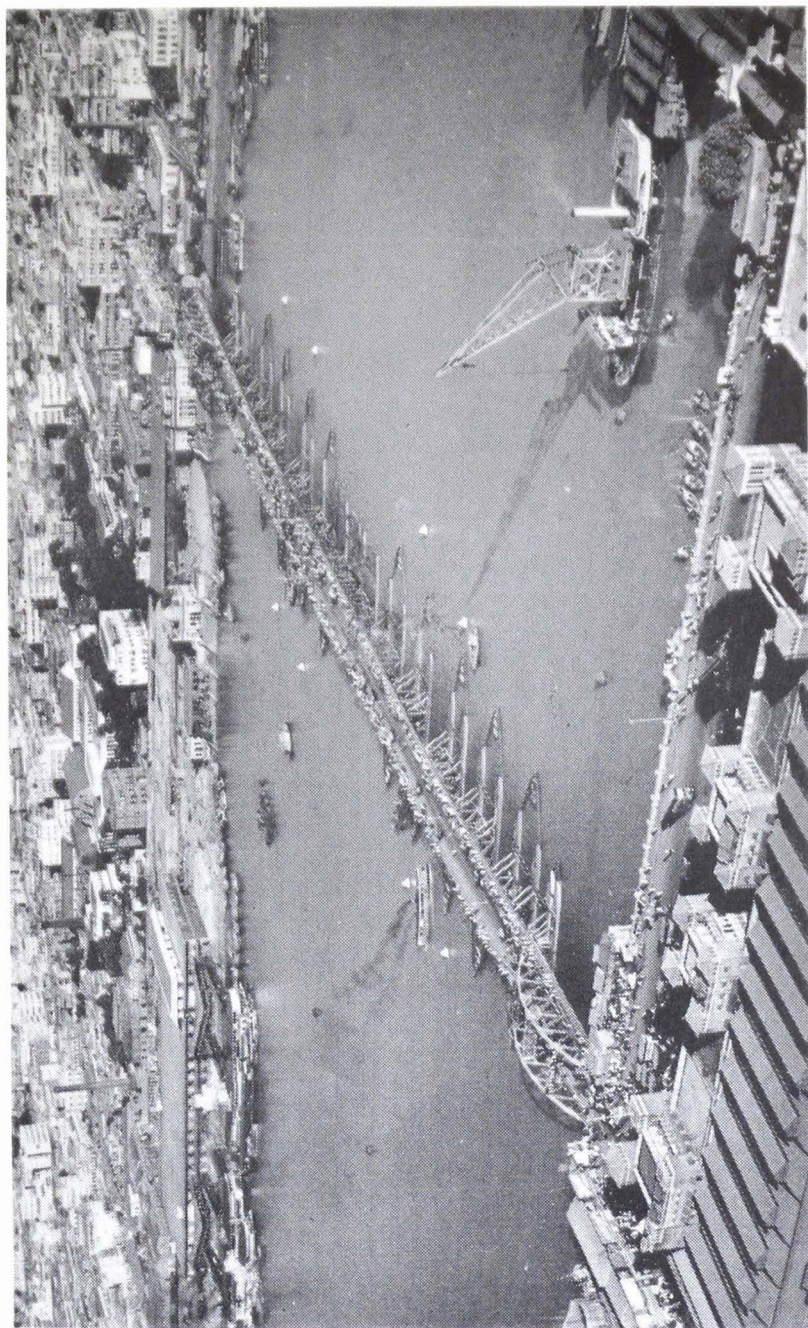
of the Government to visit us was Sir Surendranath Bannerjee, the veteran Congress agitator, now Minister of Local Self-Government and other Departments. He brought with him the Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation, another Member of the Legislative Council and the editor of a Calcutta vernacular paper. I think we were able to show them we were doing our best. I remember Sir Surendranath expressing surprise that I was able to converse with the villagers in Bengali! Various non-official organisations, some purely philanthropic like the Ramakrishna Mission, some political like the Congress and Khilafat parties, sent young men who appeared on the scene from time to time. I gave them separate areas to work in on their own and kept my officials out of those, an arrangement which worked well. They disappeared when the floods ceased to be news, and the people's welfare reverted to its official guardians.

The waters gradually went down, enabling one to get about more freely. I was constantly travelling throughout October. Lord Lytton again stayed half a day on his way from Darjeeling to Calcutta. By then it was difficult to visualise what the floods at their height had looked like. But the consequent shortage of crops caused much anxiety during the hot weather of 1923 and entailed tedious touring in the areas that had been flooded, where the people still needed help.

By August I had had enough and got leave, much of which unfortunately was spent with doctors. Eleven months after my accident of the previous February I was diagnosed as having cracked the top of my spine. After that things improved, if slowly; so slowly that my leave had to be extended from one to two years.



1. Calcutta Race-course and Victoria Memorial, 1936



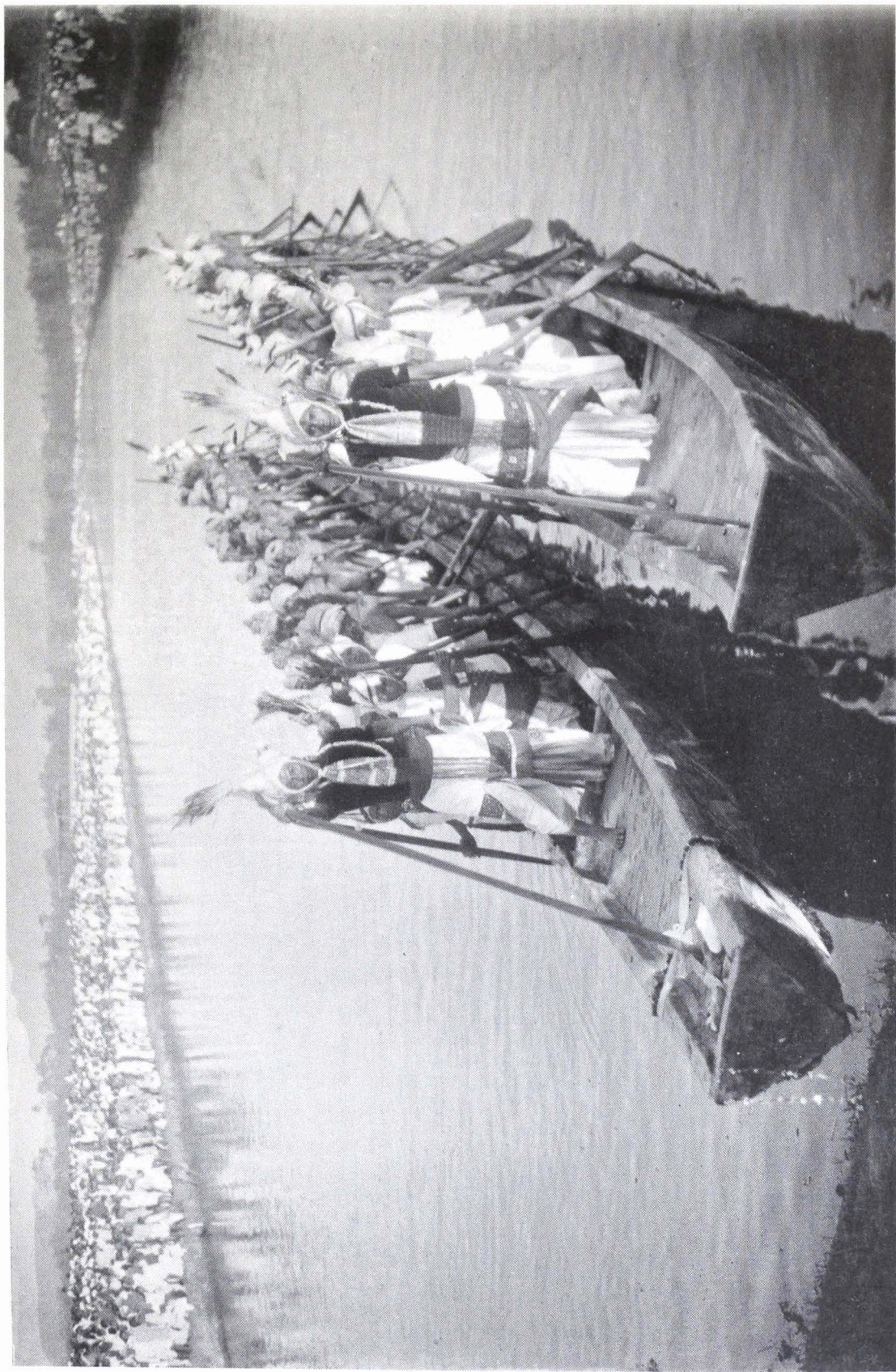
2. Calcutta, Howrah Bridge, 1936



3. Group at Santosh, August 1935



*Front row: Sir Nazimuddin (extreme l.), Sir John Anderson (seventh from l.), Lady Willingdon, Maharaja of Santosh, Lord Willingdon, Sir Harold Derbyshire (fourth from r.), Sir John Woodhead (second from r.)*  
*Back row: Sir Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy, Sir Robert Reid, Nalini Sarker (fourth from l.), H. S. Subrawardy (eighth from l.), Maharaja of Burdwan (tenth from l.), G. P. Hogg (eighth from r.), Joan Reid, the author's daughter (third from r.)*



4. Boat race, Imphal, January 1938

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Trouble Brewing*

AT LAST I was passed fit for duty, and left home in September 1925, bound for Midnapore, where I took charge as Collector. As mentioned, I had been there earlier for a few months. It was the second largest district in Bengal, exceeded in area only by Mymensingh. In fact, so large was it that its partition had been decided on some years before, and by 1921 the buildings of the headquarters of a new district, to comprise the southern half of the old one, had been practically completed at Hijli on the other side of the river from Midnapore town; but the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms intervened, a new and enlarged Legislative Council voted to reverse the decision, the Governor, Lord Ronaldshay, bowed to the voice of the people, and Hijli lay untenanted when I got there in 1925. It was sad to see a brand-new district headquarters abandoned before it was occupied, and Bengal could certainly not afford such waste of public money. But at least it was proof that, when the British Government gave the Bengal Legislature power to decide such matters, they meant what they said. And the buildings came in handy, seven years or so later, as a detention camp during the terrorist conspiracy.

There were four outlying subdivisions of Midnapore District, manned by Indian subdivisional officers: Ghatal in the north, Jhargram in the west, Tamluk and Contai in the south. These had all to be inspected once a year. Roads, between numerous unbridged rivers, were quite good owing to the red-murram soil. The main Bengal-Nagpur Railway ran across the district from the Damodar River on the east to a wayside station on the western boundary, and a branch line ran north from Kharagpur through Midnapore to the northern boundary.

Administratively, the railway was important to us because of Kharagpur's big repair shops. Thousands of men from all parts of India were employed there—incidentally providing me with communal riots in 1926 and a strike in '27 both accompanied by bloodshed. Socially, too, Kharagpur was a great help, despite the fact that a river with no road-bridge over it divided us, and normally we reached it only by rail. For it had a large population of officers of all ranks and facilities for amusement, its well laid-out lines, good houses and efficient hospital, all fitted with electric power, making a marked contrast to the primitive conditions at Midnapore.

Midnapore was among the oldest settled districts of British India and seemed full of ghosts. The house in which I and most of my predecessors lived, known as Hastings House, was reputed to have been built by Warren Hastings as a country residence. It was a huge, one-storied barrack of a place, with ill-planned rooms, a thatch roof, whitewashed walls, and was infested by white ants. This pest thrived in a dry sandy soil such as Midnapore's.

The American Baptist Mission was housed in what used to be the officers' quarters of some regiment stationed here during fighting against tribes armed with bow and arrow on the Orissa border. The old racket-court, often a feature of British occupation before lawn tennis came in, still stood. I once had it cleaned of the lantana choking it, but there was no one to play with, so it soon surrendered to the jungle again. The Veterinary Hospital was housed in an old Mahratta fort. The Armed Police were in the old Infantry Lines between whose rows of huts stood the old-fashioned 'bells of arms' of which one reads in Mutiny history. Then there was Gope, a few miles outside the station, with its 'Scandal Point' overlooking the river, where we went in our cars, like our predecessors in their barouches and tandems, to get fresh air in the hot weather. The whole station was spaciously laid out. My stables and car-shed were 300 yards from the house. I never discovered the boundaries of my compound. Other residences were on a similar scale. The Judge's house was two miles away from me; so was the Circuit House, where any important visitors were put. The latter was in the centre of the race-

course, of which the sole remaining evidence was the distance post; another relic.

There were ghosts, too, in the district's outlying parts. Contai, with its miles of lovely sands, away in the south at the mouth of the Hooghly, had been a seaside resort a century before. Khajri, also in the district and near the mouth of that river, had been the last place of call before the open sea for ships sailing from Calcutta for home, and the 'Port and Post Office' building and a rampart with a flagstaff and a gun on it still stood. There was a graveyard round it, too, where many a passenger, homeward bound, ended a voyage he had started too late. The oldest date I could decipher was 1800.

We had the usual complement of officers: Judge, Additional Magistrate (as was usual in the bigger districts), Civil Engineer, Police Superintendent, seldom all in the station together, however, when there was so big a district to tour over. The only static officer was the Superintendent of the Central Jail, a job filled either from the Jail Department or by an I.M.S. officer. European non-officials in the district included some members of the Midnapore Zemindari Company. Their headquarters was Amlagora in the dry north and they had subordinate centres elsewhere. As far as I know they did nothing beyond seeing that their rents were collected. I never heard of any attempt at 'welfare' work for their tenants. Perhaps such a policy did not appeal to their Managing Agents in Calcutta.

Besides the American Baptists the S.P.G. had a Mission here, under charge of a Bengali Christian, the Rev. J. A. L. Singh. I paid them an early visit, as I had heard they had in their care a 'wolf child'. So it proved. She was then aged about thirteen and looked far from intelligent. She had only about twenty-five words in her vocabulary. The Singhs told me she wore no clothes except a loincloth and this was stitched on. She never associated with the other children of Mrs. Singh's orphanage and preferred the society of animals. The story of her rescue was this. Five years earlier, when Mr. Singh was spending the night seventy-five miles from headquarters with one of his flock in the very jungly, sparsely populated western part of the district, he was told a story of a strange creature seen near an old ant-heap, a great pile of earth twelve feet high

now occupied by wolves. They watched that night, and out came not only three grown wolves and two cubs, but two other creatures, also moving on all fours, but which Singh at once realised were humans. How they got there no one knows; their parents were never traced. They may have been 'exposed', as is often the custom of primitive folk with unwanted girls. Singh could do nothing at once, as he had to go elsewhere, but he urged the villagers to dig in the ant-heap and see what was there. Two grown wolves first came out; one was shot by an arrow, the other escaped. Then two cubs and two human children were captured. The children were stark naked, of course, and had callosities on hands, elbows and knees, and didn't stand upright, but could move with great celerity on all fours. They bit and scratched just as a wolf cub would, and the villagers did no more than confine them in an enclosure, throw food at them and leave them. But before Mr. Singh got back the idea of having these possibly evil spirits in their midst so gripped them that they decided to abandon their houses and go, leaving the poor little wretches to their fate. When Singh returned he found them in a terrible state of emaciation, but still alive. He then put them on a bullock-cart and started home, and Mrs. Singh began the uphill job of humanising them. One was aged about eight, the other only eighteen months. The younger one was much quicker to learn than the older. Unfortunately she lived only a year after being rescued. All the same the older one did make progress and by the time she died, when about seventeen, was to all intents a human child though mentally much retarded. The case excited interest among scientists, and Dr. Gessell of Yale University wrote a book about it. Rudyard Kipling got in touch with the Singhs over it, and told them that his own wolf-cub story of 'Mowgli' was pure invention.

The year 1926 was politically a troubled one in Midnapore District. There had been signs of unrest at Kharagpur from early April, and communal strife between Hindus and Muslims in the workshops broke out on 17 May. I had gone to the river that evening and got news there that trouble had started and a man had been killed. I at once went back, collected Waterworth, the Superintendent of Police, and hurried to Kharag-

pur. We found excitement, but no active violence now. All the men had left the workshops early. Total casualties for the day had been three dead and six injured. Next day the men went to the shops, but were out again at once, with wild rumours flying round. Assaults of the hit-and-run type began, and went on all day, casualties being two dead and twenty injured. In the afternoon we managed to avert what might have been a nasty situation when we met a large mob of Telengas (the Hindu element in the shops, hailing from Northern Madras and very excitable) engaged in attacking some Muslims. Helped by a self-appointed peace committee, we persuaded the mob to sit down and, after two hours' talk, agreed to let some of our prisoners go if the rest promised to behave. It was exhausting work in a temperature of 100° or over.

Next day, the 19th, was worse, though known casualties were negligible, and Waterworth collapsed from the heat and had to go. From early morning two mobs, Hindu and Muslim, strove to get at each other, we and our small force of police trying to keep them apart. The fighting took place up and down a large open space sometimes used for football. At one end Muslims came leaping out of a mosque crying 'Allah! Allah!' At the other, the great bell of the Hindu temple tolled menacingly while Hindus massed for battle. We were too few to control the mobs—the police and all of us became exhausted—so I decided to call out the local battalion of the A.F.I. (Auxiliary Force, India), composed almost entirely of Anglo-Indian (Eurasian) employees of the railway. This was a last resort, as the use of troops might mean firing, and it introduced a new and complicating communal element, liable, if firing occurred, to mean ill will in the shops for many a long day.

Anyhow the A.F.I. turned out in an hour and the effect was immediate. They took over all pickets and posts from our worn-out constables. Another welcome reinforcement that day was ninety-five Eastern Frontier Rifles under a British officer from Chinsurah, the E.F.R. being military police kept as a reserve by the Bengal Government for emergencies such as this, well disciplined and equipped, and trained for action in aid of the civil power. These two sets of reinforcements ended

our acuter anxieties, though sporadic violence including killings went on for six days. We had houses searched for weapons, many being found, including some fearful improvised things such as chisels and files lashed to stout sticks, and sharpened like razors on the Company's grindstones. Preparations for the outbreak must have been long in progress. At last, on the 26th, with assurances both from Hindus and Muslims that the workmen would go back to duty in the shops next morning, we stood down the A.F.I., who had done invaluable service for eight days and behaved extremely well. There only remained an aftermath of criticism of our conduct in the Legislature, but we had a good answer.

My next trouble was due to Nature again: floods in the south of the district. The rains had been heavy in July and early August, and on 16 August came news that the embankment at Amarshi had gone, which meant a flood in Contai subdivision. I arranged to go there, and A. W. Cook, the Commissioner, turned up before I started, so we went off together and spent a week in the flooded area with our base at Egra rest-house. It involved many tedious journeys by boat against strong currents and in high winds. Then on the 25th Cook, who had been unwell, broke down and returned to his headquarters. I stayed on for what seemed almost endless touring interspersed by occasional short returns to Midnapore to clear off arrears of work at headquarters there. Not till 22 September was the first of the breaches in the Amarshi embankment closed, the last being dealt with a week later. It had been six weeks from start to finish; on the whole, much more toilsome than coping with the flood damage in Rajshahi three years before. Relief work took much the same form. Extra officers were drafted in to take charge of defined areas; stocks of rice, blankets, disinfectants, medical supplies and other comforts were arranged for, and boats collected to transport homeless people to safety. There was no loss of life, but for a time shortage of food, and much distress on that account. Rice fortunately was easily got through the help of friends on the railway, but the difficulty was to get it to the people who needed it whether by boat or over almost impassable roads.

At Rajshahi we had had the railway running close to the



flooded area and could step off it on to our boats. The Contai floods were far from any railway, and the roads, none of them metalled, had been reduced to deep holes and clinging mud. My recollection is of weeks of dreadfully slow journeys in strong winds and rain, with very poor shelter at night in dilapidated canal bungalows. The boatmen were marvels of patience and endurance on little food and no comforts. I noted in my diary one day that they had worked thirteen hours without rest, mostly in high winds. These winds doubled their labours, already heavy enough from poling in deep water against strong currents.

The ensuing cold-weather season passed off tranquilly, but by early February 1927 there were signs of fresh trouble in Kharagpur, this time a strike, which broke out on the 11th. I happened to be staying the night there, and we got word of trouble while at a cinema. We at once went to the station and found an unruly mob in possession. We pushed them back, but were not able to do much more until a party of armed police and then of A.F.I. turned up. It took time and a couple of rounds from the police to clear them out of the station premises, and not till 8 a.m. were we able to sit back.

Who called out the A.F.I. this time I do not know. Certainly not myself, though I might have, had decision fallen to me. I have a feeling that a very energetic officer happened to be exercising his company that night (perhaps in shrewd anticipation of trouble), and when disorder did develop marched straight to the scene. Anyhow, they were out, and we kept them out for a week, until 200 Eastern Frontier Rifles under a British officer arrived on the 18th. As usual, the use of the A.F.I. and their alleged brutalities were the subject of much vitriolic comment in the Legislature and nationalist newspapers. The strike spread to various places on the Bengal-Nagpur Railway system and the running of trains was much upset, but improvised arrangements gradually got most services going. For the railways the guiding figure and a very forceful one was the Managing Director, Sir Trevedryn Wynne, over seventy, who stayed there in his saloon the whole time in spite of the heat. He knew exactly what he wanted and was determined to get it.

That was my last excitement in Midnapore. On 25 March I got orders to join in Calcutta as Secretary in the Agriculture and Industries Department, and after a short holiday on a tea-garden in Assam took up my new post on 10 April 1927. I had been reluctant to leave Midnapore, having hoped for a good three years' tenure instead of only eighteen months. Nor did the office routine of the Secretariat appeal to me.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *In the Secretariat*

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES was one of the 'Transferred Departments' under Dyarchy. I had two elected Ministers to serve, Sir Abdul Karim Ghuznavi and Byomkesh Chakravarty. My contacts were mostly with Ghuznavi, as he had charge both of Agriculture and Industries. Chakravarty had Excise, and when loose ends which I had to deal with there on first joining had been tied up there was little really to do; Excise hardly gave itself to 'nation building'.

A new Governor, Sir Stanley Jackson, had just joined, and gone straight up to Darjeeling. So I went there to pay my respects. His Private Secretary, the late Harold Graham, was an old friend. However, in passing through Calcutta, I had a long interview with Sir Abdul. He possessed a fertile brain, an idea of his own importance, and many schemes for expanding the work of his department. I also had a talk with Sir Charles Tegart, then Commissioner of Police, who knew everything about everybody, and so got an incisive opinion on both my Ministers.

Ghuznavi was at heart an autocrat, and his Afghan ancestry imbued him, I always thought, with a latent contempt for the Bengalis with whom he spent his political life. He came to office with a determination to show results. But that was not easy in an epoch when taxes were low, the Bengal revenues small, and it was thought prudent to avoid deficit budgeting. Chakravarty had been a brilliant barrister in his day, but was old, and in poor health when he took office.

Besides Ministers on the Transferred side, the Governor, as earlier explained, was advised by Executive Councillors, not Members of the Legislature. There were four, two of them

officials and two not. The officials were both from the I.C.S.: Sir Arthur Moberly, who had charge of what came to be known as the Home Department, which meant Law and Order, Appointments and so on, and Sir James Donald, who had Finance. Neither was outstanding; Moberly charming but not very forceful; Donald a taciturn Aberdonian. The other two were Indians, the Maharaja of Nadia in charge of Revenue, and Nawab Bahadur Saiyad Nawab Ali Chaudhuri of some other departments; neither, again, very effective. Altogether, not a strong team for a Governor lacking any knowledge of the Indian scene or of Bengal politics.

Donald was replaced in October 1927 by Alexander Marr; a friend of mine, but no tower of strength nor glutton for work; and Moberly, in 1930, by Sir William Prentice, a very different type, however, endowed with a first-rate brain and great energy. Unfortunately he had one handicap, unpopularity through utter lack of tact. There was something in his manner which could not fail to rub you up the wrong way. Several men in his own service in Bengal could not bear him; one senior Police official simply got up and left when he entered the room; officials of the Central Government bristled when you mentioned his name. Yet he was quite unconscious of being rude, and as a servant of Government no one could have been more conscientious or self-sacrificing. My own Minister, Ghuznavi, found him intolerable, and one of the first things he did when Sir John Anderson succeeded Jackson in 1932 was to tell Anderson that Prentice really must go. Anderson was far too sagacious to act without basis from his own experience; but I remember him saying to me, soon after Prentice died, that sometimes men of the highest character had to be got rid of because of unpopularity, which suggests how his mind was working. Prentice's death, however, solved the problem. He was taken ill in December 1933 and died on the 11th after an operation.

I have tried to describe Sir Stanley Jackson's Cabinet, but not yet the man himself. It is wrong to write him off as an outstanding sportsman pitchforked into high office for having been a Conservative party Whip. He had a fund of common sense, could size up a problem as well as the next man and was

a shrewd judge of character. But a constitutional Governor can seldom go against the advice of trained counsellors, and a new arrival just has not the experience to back his own wishes. I remember at least once when his judgement of a difficult affair proved correct, whereas what his counsellors told him was wrong. His period in Bengal was never easy and the last two years, which saw a revival of terrorism at its most formidable, were very difficult and anxious. He had to face fierce and often unjust criticism over it. But there again, a provincial Governor's hands were tied; he had to take instructions from the Governor-General, and more remotely from England. This point I felt was never sufficiently allowed for by his critics, especially Europeans, among whom, the younger businessmen in particular, misinformed criticism was rife. The attack on his life in the Senate House on 6 February 1932, just two months before he retired, helped to sway opinion more in his favour.

One of our headaches in the Agriculture Department was water hyacinth; a plant first brought quite innocently into Bengal as an object of beauty for a garden pond in Narayan-ganj by George Morgan, then employed in the jute trade. From there it spread till every waterway in East Bengal began to be choked by it; fish died; navigation was obstructed. Every kind of measure to destroy it was tried but to no effect. It was not useful even as manure; though it contained phosphates, the quantity was so small as to make extraction unprofitable.

The Zoo at Calcutta came under my official wing when I became President of its Managing Committee, and gave me much pleasure both then and later. We had some forceful characters on the Board, notably W. K. Dods of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, who reputedly gave that institution only such time as he could spare from the Zoo and horticulture and snipe-shooting. He held the record for a snipe-bag in Bengal. Another was Sir David Ezra, leader of the local Jewish community, who also had a zoo of his own at his garden in Kyd Street. The Calcutta Zoo was an attractive place, well laid out and well stocked.

Otherwise Agriculture and Industries jogged on in an uneventful way. There was little money to spend, and as the only path to progress lay through spending we could not get far.

We had many schemes, urgent, too, if we were to improve the Province's farming. For instance, there was that for an Agricultural Institute at Dacca, to train youth in modern methods; but money just was not available. And that applied to industries. Only by outlay could old methods be bettered. All our schemes came up against a penniless if at heart sympathetic Finance Department. John Woodhead as Finance Secretary was always patient, ready to listen, to point out our schemes' defects and advise how to remedy them. But he had not the funds. All this made it difficult for the Ministers, who were exposed to criticism from their followers for not having more to show for holding office.

The 1927 monsoon session of the Legislative Council was short. The present building had not then been built and we met in much discomfort in the Town Hall. Meetings began on 23 August with the unveiling by the Governor of a portrait of Lord Lytton. Someone touched the button by mistake and the portrait was revealed prematurely. Two days later the Ministers were thrown out on a vote of No Confidence, Ghuznavi by four votes and Chakravarty by thirteen. The former told me his downfall was due to an influential person from East Bengal, whom he had brought to Calcutta, paying all his expenses there, in return for a promise that he would vote for him; but, said Guz, he was bought over by the other side for a mere Rs.2,000 and defected with four others. The two dismissed Ministers were replaced by Sir Provash Chandra Mitter and Nawab Musharraf Hussein. Provash was a successful barrister, very able, thorough, upright; a charming person to deal with. So I was sorry when a year later he was appointed to the Executive Council and changed his portfolio. The Nawab I would call small-minded, perhaps an understatement. Every decision seemed coloured by his consideration of what it might be worth in terms of votes or patronage. But he was always frank, even when discussing things you would have expected him to keep secret. He once confided to me his views about votes of censure, saying they ought to be allowed only once a year, because the first cost the Minister Rs.10,000, the second perhaps Rs.20,000, the third even Rs.50,000. When I asked if that would be worth it he said 'No'.

In November I made my first acquaintance with Father Douglas of the Oxford Mission at Behala. I had heard him preach at the Cathedral on Armistice Day a few days before, the only time he ever did so, I believe. He finished his sermon almost before he had settled into the pulpit, but it was worth a dozen ordinary ones. He was a saint and an ascetic, yet maintained close touch with what was going on in public affairs, and a visit to him in times of perplexity was worth much. Like all the Oxford Brothers, Douglas abjured comforts, and lived, slept and ate in a small square mud-floored hut, its walls made of mosquito-proof netting, within sight and sound of the large school he maintained and of its chapel, which had no seats. If you went to service you had to squat on the floor.

Later, I met a cleric of a different type in Walter Boulton, newly joined as a chaplain on the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment and attached to St. Paul's Cathedral. Like Father Douglas, he became one of my wife's and my friends. In 1928 he had just signalled his arrival in Calcutta, the largest business centre in the East, with a sermon castigating business methods. It created much indignation, but though he never ceased to be firm in his views and to express them outspokenly, he lived that sermon down even if he never recanted it, and became a much-loved Calcutta figure. Later, as Provost of Guildford Cathedral, he was the centre of a controversy over the choice of Dean.

The monsoon session of the Legislative Council in 1928 was again distinguished by a No Confidence vote. But this time the Ministers escaped defeat, Musharraf by six votes and P. C. Mitter by three. Gossip said that Musharraf handed out a blank cheque to some trusty agent that morning and this saved them. By now, I had had quite enough of my Secretariat assignment and applied for home leave a good deal earlier than I had intended.

## CHAPTER SIX

# *Tigers and Terrorists*

I SHOT MY FIRST and only tiger on 3 March 1930. On return from leave in the previous December I had been posted to Jalpaiguri as Deputy Commissioner. It was one of the best districts; I had been there before and knew my way about; and, to add to the attractions, it offered well-known opportunities for tiger-shooting.

In Jalpai, as we called it, the shooting was done off elephants. The jungle stood so high and thick that no other method was possible. For a big shoot the district was therefore first scoured for elephants. The Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, all had them on their establishments, and we borrowed more from planters and Indian owners, who kept many, dating back to the times, not remote, when the district's very heavy rainfall, dearth of roads, and numerous unbridged rivers made communication except by means of these grand beasts almost impracticable during the monsoon. By 1929 the roads had been much improved, but the elephants largely remained.

Before a shoot live bait or 'kills' were put out in likely places, and when a tiger did kill and might therefore be lying up close by a beat was organised. The 'guns' were all mounted on the howdahs or saddles of one set of elephants and placed in line, while other, 'beating', elephants moved towards them. If all went well, a tiger would suddenly emerge towards one or other of the guns. It was an exciting moment as the beat came nearer and nearer, and one strained to see a flash of yellow-and-black through the heavy vegetation. And the whole setting was superb. There is nothing to beat the Bengal climate in spring: the bright sun, cloudless blue sky, and perhaps a



glimpse of a big river in the background or, most mornings, very far off, the glorious glistening snows of Kinchenjunga.

On the shoot in March the party was small: myself and three Police officers. One of these was Frank Lowman, Inspector-General. He had been in the district before, and made a reputation there as an indefatigable hunter, though he never let this interfere with his work. He and I had a great day on 3 March. First a tigress came out opposite him. He hit her and she went back, but was found dead after the beat. Then a tiger came out to me, and I was lucky enough to kill him immediately with a shot through the head. Nose to tail-tip he measured 9 ft. 5 in., and the tigress 8 ft. 7 in., so we were well pleased. Poor Frank never shot another tiger. He was himself shot and killed at Dacca a few months later, in circumstances to be described in a moment.

A few days after this tiger-shoot I took charge as Commissioner, Rajshahi Division (which then included Jalpaiguri District). It meant a change of house but not of station. I had eight districts in the division altogether, among them Darjeeling; so duty from time to time would take me to the hills.

Another shoot was arranged for the Easter holidays. However, dramatic news brought it to an abrupt end. Good Friday, 18 April 1930, saw the revival in acute form of the Bengali terrorist movement, long latent in the Province. The armoury at Chittagong was attacked. The outrage practically synchronised with the start of Ghandi's civil disobedience movement, which he inaugurated by his march to Dandi on the Bombay coast to break the salt laws. Thus began in Bengal a campaign of violence which was to take about six years to bring under full control, to cost the provincial Government £1½ million of unproductive expenditure, and take a terrible toll of life among civilian officers, soldiers, and innocent citizens.

This Armoury Raid was the biggest *coup* the terrorist party in Bengal ever brought off, and was very well planned. Four groups of men assembled at the Congress party's office that night, one being assigned to capture the Police armoury, another to capture the Auxiliary Force armoury, a third to massacre the Europeans at the Club, the fourth to destroy the

telephone exchange and telegraph office. The Club raiders achieved nothing, the place happening that night to be empty, so they joined one of the other parties. About fifty men attacked the Police armoury, shot the sentry, and seized muskets, revolvers and ammunition. At the same time another gang attacked the Auxiliary Force armoury a mile or so away. The sergeant-major and two sepoy were killed, then the door of the armoury was forced and a quantity of rifles, revolvers and ammunition seized.

The telegraph office party meanwhile had done their work thoroughly and destroyed the apparatus. After that they joined their fellows at the Police lines. Here they came up against their first serious opposition. For by now J. C. Farmer, Deputy Inspector-General, had heard the news and had hurried to a subsidiary armoury at the jetty and there collected a Lewis gun. With Mr. Barraclough of the railway he made straight for the Police lines, found a good site for his gun at the near-by waterworks, and from there opened fire with such effect that the raiders cleared off into the country without fulfilling the rest of their programme, which included raiding the Treasury and shooting the European residents.

Next day they were located in the hills not far from the town, and a force of police and a few Assam tea-planters belonging to the Surma Valley Light Horse, who had hurried in on hearing the news, came up with them and engaged them. Sunset was, however, nigh before they made contact, and unfortunately the District Magistrate had undertaken, reasonably enough, that these forces should be back in Chittagong before dark, to protect a somewhat shaken civilian community. So the engagement was broken off. Had it been pushed to a conclusion, most of the raiders would almost certainly have been captured or killed. I saw a statement made by one of them years afterwards, in which he described the incredulous joy with which he and his friends saw the Government forces withdraw.

It was long before all the participants in this raid were accounted for. Indeed, the leader, Surja Sen, was not arrested till 1933. But one group which made its way into French territory at Chandernagore was soon disposed of. The late Sir

Charles Tegart, then Commissioner of Police at Calcutta, was a friend of the French Administrateur, and with the latter's goodwill he and his men were let across the international border, and in a revolver battle in the dark amid the palms and ornamental lakes of someone's back garden they killed or captured them all.

The strikingly successful *coup* at Chittagong gained the terrorists many recruits. In August 1930 bombs were thrown at Tegart as he was passing through Dalhousie Square in the heart of Calcutta in his car, fortunately without injuring him. Later that month when Lowman and Hodson, another Police officer, were visiting a brother officer in the Dacca hospital they were attacked with bombs. Lowman, alas, as already mentioned, died almost at once, Hodson recovering after a long illness. Lowman's death was a great loss to the Police. Four months later his successor as I.-G., Mr. Craig, had a narrow escape when a Bengali Police inspector was assassinated in the dark at a railway station in mistake for him. Throughout the rest of 1930 and all 1931 similar murderous attacks went on, and scarcely a month passed without some armed robbery to provide the movement with funds. Nor did it seem as if Government were doing much about it. For the whole problem was bedevilled by two things: Gandhi's civil disobedience movement, and the Central Government's negotiations aimed at getting him to attend the Round Table Conference in London, organised to discuss India's future Constitution. When the terrorist storm broke on Good Friday, 1930, the Police and Magistracy already had their hands more than full because of the civil disobedience. All over India it caused disorders, and the arrests of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress party's President, in April and of Gandhi himself in May showed the gravity with which Government viewed it; a state of things of which the terrorists took full advantage. Clearly, to fight a local terrorist conspiracy, the Bengal authorities needed very much wider powers than they possessed. Yet far from getting these, they were deprived, in about March 1931, of an important one, the Press Ordinance, withdrawn by the Central Government as a result of the pact or truce enabling Gandhi to attend the London Conference. Though

the Congress party at least pretended to observe the truce, the terrorists were under no such obligation, and were quick to make full use of the powerful aid which an unfettered Press put at their disposal. Every murderer got adulation as a patriot and martyr. Each time a prosecution failed because witnesses had been terrorised into silence or been done away with, the acquittal was hailed as a triumph for justice. 'One of the terrorists' best recruiting agencies' was how an official of the Government of Bengal described the Calcutta Press.

Since the British Government was trying to take India along the road to autonomy, it might be argued that the only difference between us and the terrorists was over pace and method. But at any rate over the latter the difference was fundamental, and so long as we were responsible for the administration the terrorist conspiracy had to be suppressed with all the means at our disposal.

Meanwhile in my Division things were fortunately quiet. My wife rejoined me in May and we went up to Darjeeling on official tour in June. After a week or so spent mostly in inspections we made our first visit to Kalimpong. What were at first named Dr. Graham's 'Colonial Homes' there had been founded by that great man in 1900. He had come out when young to the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in Kalimpong, but had soon set up on his own the institution which was to bear his name, as a home for orphaned and destitute Anglo-Indian (or as it was then termed Eurasian) children, with whose luckless plight he had been much struck. He chose a wonderful site at about 4,000 ft., with views of the Himalayas to the north. Here, aided by a wife like-minded to him, and for thirty-four years by his friend James Purdie, he built his cottages, church, schools, farm, workshops and hospital. There were also his industries, separately run so far as possible on commercial lines, mainly for the benefit of the local inhabitants. Long before his death in 1942 it had all become a very flourishing affair, Graham himself being an unusual character, combining deep piety with much business acumen, and an overflowing love of mankind which evoked warm affection.

Kalimpong always attracted the interest of Governors and Viceroys; and it is good to know that, though British rule has

ended, this interest is still maintained by their Governors and successors. For the plight of many in the Anglo-Indian community is probably even more deplorable in an independent nationalist India than it was in our time.

The small state of Cooch Behar came within my purview as Commissioner, and I went to inspect it in July 1930. While there, my wife and I had the unpleasant experience of a sharp earthquake. We were in the Guest House, which ominously bore a plaque commemorating the damage done in the earthquake of 1897. The first shock came at 3 a.m. There was a tremendous noise, plaster fell from the ceilings, the whole house shook as if in the grasp of some giant. We got downstairs and out in the garden in very quick time. We tried going back to bed after a while, but there was a succession of shocks after about 6 a.m. and we gave up the attempt. It was eerie to hear the strange wail that went up from the distant bazaar at each successive quake. I do not think there was any loss of life from this 1930 earthquake. When we got back to Jalpaiguri we found our house there damaged, but not very seriously. It was, of course, an affair in no way comparable to the catastrophic earthquakes in Bihar and Nepal in 1934 and at Quetta in 1935.

On 24 September 1930 I relinquished my job as Commissioner at Jalpaiguri, and took over from W. S. Hopkyns to act in Calcutta again as Chief Secretary; a post I was to occupy, on and off, for the next three years.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Violence Continues*

THE WORK of a Chief Secretary to a provincial Government in India was mainly concerned with what, in London, would be called Home Department affairs; which, of course, at this period meant, above all else, legislative and executive measures to deal with terrorism. This remained the harsh background of my daily duties throughout. Another of my responsibilities was appointments and postings of officials, an added anxiety, because in dangerous times you cannot just post anyone anywhere.

On 8 December 1930 occurred the first tragedy: a terrorist raid on Writers' Buildings, the Bengal Secretariat, when the Inspector-General of Prisons, Colonel N. S. Simpson, was shot dead as he sat at his desk, two other officers, H. P. V. Townend and J. W. Nelson, being wounded. It was the morning for one of my routine talks with the Governor, and I was over in his room at Government House when the news came. He sent me back with an A.D.C. immediately to get particulars. The attack on poor Simpson had been easy. Three young men, Bengali Hindus, had asked for an interview. Proper security precautions at Writers' Buildings hadn't then been taken; the men merely sent a name in; were admitted at once; and as Simpson looked up from his desk they shot him. They then rushed down the corridor firing wildly. Townend looked out of his room and flung a chair at them, and got a ricochet in the neck. Then for some reason they went into Nelson's room. Nelson was an athletic type; he grappled with one of them and got a bullet in the thigh. By this time E. B. Jones, Assistant Inspector-General of Police, had hurried out from his office on an upper floor at the sound of the firing, located them in Nel-

son's room and himself started firing from under the half-door. Soon all was quiet, and when Jones and other officers got in they found one of them dead, poisoned; another shot in the head and dying; the third shot in the throat. Whether those shots were by Jones or they shot each other I do not know. The one shot in the head died. He proved to be Binoy Bose, who had murdered Frank Lowman at Dacca in August. The one shot in the throat, Dinesh Gupta, recovered, and was tried and hanged. It was characteristic of these earlier terrorists to take poison. They were a dedicated lot, even though in a foul cause, and went through some form of initiation at the shrine of the goddess Kali. Later recruits were less determined.

This was the situation which greeted Lord Irwin<sup>1</sup> when he arrived in Calcutta next day on the last visit of his Viceroyalty. I think we provincials were not sorry that the Central Government should thus be brought into closer contact with the problems we were facing. We always had a lurking feeling that support from the Central Government was timid. As the late Sir Hugh Stephenson once rather bitterly said at a private services dinner, they thought that to manage the Central Assembly was to govern India, and that, whenever this failed, all was lost. There was a tendency to work by manoeuvre, by manipulation rather than by straightforward sizings-up of what the situation was, and of what orders should be issued to meet it. A great drawback of this policy was that its success depended on the other side—in cricketing parlance—‘playing’, which they often didn't.

The way in which the much-advertised Independence Day celebrations of 26 January 1931 were dealt with illustrates this. Provincial Governments were not allowed a free hand, and countless telegrams passed between them and the Government of India on what should be done. These exchanges left us who were directly responsible for good administration in Bengal gloomy and exasperated. I noted in my diary of 25 January ‘the whole show seems to be slipping’. However, we got no actual orders against interference, and affairs turned out better than we expected. We forbade public celebration of

<sup>1</sup> Later Lord Halifax.

Independence Day in Calcutta, and in accordance with an arrangement by the All-India political leaders most of the Calcutta participants allowed themselves to be arrested and quietly taken away.

But not Subhas Bose, the most important and troublesome of them all. He was at that time Mayor of Calcutta, and instead of allowing himself to be quietly detained he went off to the Corporation office, hoping the police would force their way in and arrest him there. Charles Tegart, the Police Commissioner, knew better than that; his men waited until Bose brought out a procession in the afternoon, and took him then. He was tried next day and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, but released almost at once in pursuance of the conciliation policy. No great harm was done, but I think this account shows how difficult administration became. The Government of India no doubt was under pressure from London.

Another factor which increased our difficulties was the understandable anger of the powerful European community in Calcutta, which felt deeply dissatisfied at what it regarded as unwise conciliation. The Governor was much criticised, and there were rumours of a plot to repeat the events of Ilbert Bill days and kidnap him. The younger Europeans formed themselves into a group called the Royalists, whose main creed was firm rule and no nonsense—for which there was much to be said. I knew many of them and always found them pleasant to talk to; but it was hard to convince persons who saw law and order flouted and British officials murdered that everything was really all right, especially when one doubted it oneself.

This was about the time when the Viceroy was making his last and as it turned out successful efforts to get Gandhi to consent to go to the London Conference. They reached accord early in March 1931, the so-called Irwin-Gandhi pact already alluded to; taking apparently the form of an agreement between two sovereign parties, which to us seemed humiliation. It entailed releases of prisoners, even of men guilty of serious crimes. I remember getting a sad letter from James Peddie, District Magistrate of Midnapore, one of the finest officers ever recruited to Bengal, saying he felt ashamed, after this, to meet the Indian officials who had stood by him loyally when he was



repressing sedition in his district. He was not the only one to do so.

Just a month later came the news that he had been shot, the first of three successive Collectors of Midnapore to be murdered. In Malda, his first district, he had made a name long remembered by the people as an officer who went everywhere, mostly on foot, talked to everyone, saw everything for himself. In Midnapore he had the task of repressing lawlessness, and enforcing payment of taxes and land revenue which it was part of the Congress campaign to withhold; a duty distasteful to anyone, and to none more than him. He was shot in the back while going round an exhibition of handicrafts in Midnapore town; a gallant officer who had survived four years of war in France and commanded a battalion before he was twenty-five.

Chittagong began to give us anxiety again in April, a year after the Armoury Raid, and was frequently discussed between members of the Government and the G.O.C. Presidency and Assam District, Major-General Keppel Bethell. By arrangement with him, a battalion of the 8th Gurkhas was brought from Assam and quartered in Chittagong. Many of us were not happy about the quality of the civil officers there, and, looking back, it would have been better had we 'changed the lot' then, instead of waiting. Sir Stanley Jackson wanted it done, but he could hardly go against the views of his advisers. General Bethell was a forceful character with original ideas of his own. Getting more substantial military help was often talked about, but never arranged till Sir John Anderson took over in 1932.

Three months after Peddie's murder came that of Garlick on 27 July 1931, while seated in his court at Alipore, where he was District Judge. His assailant at once took poison. A senior judge, Garlick had never been remotely concerned with repression, but we supposed he was marked down for destruction for having tried Dinesh Gupta of the Writers' Buildings outrage. A month later Alexander Cassells, Commissioner of Dacca Division, was attacked. He had a lucky escape, being fired at from three or four yards' distance and hit in the thigh. Next we had to get J. T. Donovan, Collector of Barisal, out of the country at short notice. We had learnt he was in grave

danger, and as he was due for leave soon anyhow and certainly needed it, this seemed the best thing to do. Yet another murder occurred at Chittagong on 30 August, of Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla, a very able inspector of police who had been mainstay of the prosecution in the case against the Armoury raiders. Assassination of a Muslim by the terrorists, who were Hindu to a man, carried with it dangers of possible communal reprisals.

In September there were disturbances at Hijli; as already mentioned, the new-built but abandoned headquarters of the proposed district that was to have been lopped off from Midnapore, and now was used as a detention camp. Those detained there were known by us to be terrorists, but intimidation of the public had become so effective and widespread that no one dared give evidence against them. They became violent, the camp guard had to fire, and two were killed. The camp commandant was an experienced, level-headed soldier. However, criticism of the firing was inevitable, so the Governor himself visited the camp and an inquiry was ordered.

More bad news came on 29 October when L. G. Durno of the I.C.S. was shot and gravely wounded at Mymensingh. His life was saved, but he lost an eye. Next day came the attempt in Calcutta on Edward Villiers, a leader of the European Association; fortunately his injuries were not very serious. This occurred in his own office in Clive Street.

Before Government came down that autumn from Darjeeling, changes had been decided on at Chittagong. I was appointed Commissioner there, and made over my Calcutta post to W. S. Hopkyns, now back from leave, and joined at Chittagong on 17 November. Three weeks after I arrived A. S. Hands became District Magistrate; a first-rate officer, very able and determined, with a good war record behind him, he certainly left his mark on Chittagong. The outlook seemed rather better now, for the Central Government had agreed to a new Ordinance which strengthened our hands against the terrorists. All the same, there was in Bengal a feeling of uneasiness, and doubt whether Government was determined to tackle the problem firmly. Nowhere was this more evident than in Chittagong; the shadow of terrorism lay heavy over it.

And there was the daily spectacle of the Armoury Raid trial, still dragging on eighteen months after the crime. Between twenty and thirty young men had been arrested for complicity, and these, so as to cause the maximum annoyance, often shouted and demonstrated as they were being taken from prison to court, and in the court itself. Sometimes they made proceedings impossible by their din, and the presiding Judge, then, had no powers to deal with this. (Later, legislation was passed, enabling him to.) Their friends outside were also active. Arms and explosives were found in the jail where they were confined; and chance led to discovery of electrically connected bombs buried under the road over which the Judges trying the case passed daily to court.

Daily life and work and recreation went on in the town much as usual, as it had to, despite the very necessary precautions against further attacks. Officials' houses and offices were guarded day and night, and they themselves, or many of them, had personal guards who accompanied them everywhere. The Club was picketed in the evenings, when many members often attended; so was the golf-course. Grateful as we were for the care taken, to have sentries posted around one at night was rather trying. For instance, the top of the knoll on which my official residence stood was so small that sentries had only just room for their beat between the house and the edge of the slope, and it was thus impossible not to hear the trudge of heavy footsteps on the pavement, the words of command when the guard was changed and, worst of all, the prolonged throaty 'hawks' and coughings.

The Bengal Government, however, had not been inactive, and it so happened that my posting to Chittagong coincided with the start of stronger efforts against the local conspirators. A large body of additional police had been trained, and the military authorities' aid had been asked for and given. The District Commander put all the scanty scattered forces he could spare at our disposal. Plans had been worked on during the rains, and now, in the last days of November, several thousand police, stiffened by regular troops of the 1/5th Mahrattas and the 2/8th Gurkhas, converged on Chittagong by land and sea. Simultaneously, a fresh Ordinance giving drastic powers of

detention was promulgated. Arrived there, the troops and police were distributed over the district in small bodies. Many people forthwith hoped for immediate arrests of wanted men; but, of course, this did not happen, nor were those responsible for the operations expecting it. The moral effect, however, was big, and this improvement in feeling before long resulted in better information about the terrorists' doings and intentions.

Yet sharp reminder of the perils still lying in wait for British officials came a fortnight after these reinforcements' arrival, when on 14 December C. G. B. Stevens, District Magistrate of Tippera, the district next to Chittagong, was murdered by two young women. He had had about twelve years in the I.C.S.; a kindly man, perhaps to his more orthodox official brethren somewhat eccentric, but who had never himself acted harshly nor indeed been required by Government to do so. Nevertheless these two girls had been so worked upon as to believe it patriotic to kill the British head of a district, representing what Gandhi called the 'Satanic' Government. It was easy. On some pretext they asked for an interview; it was granted at once; they walked into his office and fired at him. Poor Stevens retreated into the next room, but after going only a few yards fell dead, shot through the heart. A Hindu Deputy Magistrate, Babu Nepal Chandra Sen, was with him and at once grappled with one of the girls, narrowly escaping being shot himself. A *chaprassi* (messenger) seized the other and was shot through the arm.

I went by the first obtainable train to Comilla, where the tragedy had occurred, accompanied by the local chaplain, who, with a revolver strapped to a portly waist, treated me to an incessant flow of 'Diehard' opinion, jarring on my own unhappy thoughts. At Comilla there was little to be done except attend the funeral with the half-dozen Europeans living there and try to help Stevens's wife. We saw her and her little girl off to Calcutta and home that evening. Next day, in the jail, I saw the two young murderesses, aged sixteen and seventeen. They showed no regret nor indeed any emotion. I forget what punishment they suffered; not the death penalty, though judging from their demeanour that would have had no terrors for them.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Anderson Takes Charge*

THE FIRST WEEK of 1932 brought news that Gandhi's civil disobedience campaign, in abeyance more or less since March, was likely to be revived on an all-India scale; and a long telegram, based on instructions from Delhi to provincial Governments, outlined the action to be taken. This was disquieting news to us in Bengal. As we knew to our cost, civil disobedience implied fresh activity by the terrorists. On the other hand, pressure against them now seemed to be succeeding, or partly so. A letter from the Bengal Government, which had arrived a few days before, reported encouragingly about hopes of catching members of the Armoury Raid gang not yet arrested; and at Chittagong the police sentries on the golf-course, we learned, were to be withdrawn, a sign of belief in diminished risk. And the Royal Navy contributed their share towards reviving local morale, for on 4 January H.M.S. *Effingham*, flagship of the East Indies Squadron, came up the Karnafuli estuary and berthed at Chittagong jetty. Being senior civil officer of the station, I had for the only time in my life the honour of a naval salute, thirteen guns as I left the ship after my formal call. The Navy made an impression on the populace at large, and certainly heartened the Europeans, who, after all they had suffered, had been feeling forgotten.

On 6 February occurred the first terrorist incident of the year, already mentioned, when Sir Stanley Jackson was fired at while presiding at the annual Calcutta University Convocation. A Bengali girl awaiting her degree (the brightest candidate from the Diocesan Girls' College) walked up the aisle, deliberately pulled out a revolver and fired at him on the dais. The bullet did no more than (as he used later to say) lop off

one of the few remaining hairs on his head. She was quickly overpowered, and he went on with the day's business apparently as little concerned as if what had passed by him had been a ball from a fast bowler on a bumpy wicket. The girl, Bina Das, was quite unrepentant and even wrote to Lady Jackson, much to her indignation, to say she loved her husband and all Englishmen very much, but really could not help trying to kill him.

On 19 February, I was told I must leave Chittagong in March and return to Calcutta as Chief Secretary. Hopkyns, in that post, had decided he did not like Government's policy of repression and must go. The orders were not at all congenial to me. I had only been three months in Chittagong, I liked the work of Commissioner, and wanted to see the anti-terrorist operation through. But there was no help for it, and that was the end of my district work in Bengal.

About this time judgement was delivered in the Armoury Raid case. Fourteen of the accused were convicted, twelve of them sentenced to transportation for life and two to lesser terms. They were all removed to a waiting steamer which took them to Calcutta, the life-transportation men *en route* from there to the Andaman Islands, which as a place of confinement had been closed for some years, but at Bengal's request been recently reopened for dangerous prisoners. Elaborate precautions were taken for the Judges' safety. James Younie, the President, was whisked off in an aircraft from Chittagong polo-ground, and his two coadjutors, Hindu and Muslim, went by steamer, a special train for them having been arranged as a 'blind'.

During the five weeks before my transfer from Chittagong back to Calcutta I managed to squeeze in quite a fair amount of travel. First I went to Cox's Bazar, a subdivision of Chittagong District down in the south and bordering on Arakan, later to become well known to the Fourteenth Army. My wife and I went by launch, a pleasant journey of about ten hours on a smooth sea along the coast. Cox's Bazar was an out-of-the-world spot, settled originally by refugees from Burma. The inhabitants seemed to lead a carefree life. Bengal officials stationed there missed the amenities they were accustomed to,

but could certainly save money. One morning we had a delightful sea-bathe. It must have been a comic sight; the Commissioner and his wife, followed by two armed guards and several dachshunds, stalking across the golden sands and immersing themselves—though no terrorist was within miles.

Our next expedition, a longer one, was to Rangamati, headquarters of the Chittagong Hill Tracts; one of the four districts which made up the Division. This was by launch up the higher reaches of the Karnafuli, difficult in places owing to the shallow water and sandbars: in fact, the launch we started in never got there; we had to finish in a smaller one. The hill people were of Mongolian origin, like all the tribes on India's North-East Frontier, akin to the varied tribes we later met and liked so much in Assam. There were Chakmas, Mongs, and Bohmongs, cheerful smiling folk who seldom gave trouble.

Back in Calcutta, I took over charge at once as Chief Secretary, and within a day or two was on Howrah station platform to receive the new Governor, Sir John Anderson, and again, soon after, to see off the retiring one, Sir Stanley Jackson. It was my task to introduce the assembled officials to Sir John, and when I came to one of the railway officials, Duncan, I simply could not remember his name, though I knew him well. So I said 'Mr. Smith'. Duncan never blinked an eyelid, and Sir John, who knew most things, did not know that one. John Tyson, the Governor's Secretary, and I then drove with the new Governor from Howrah to Government House in what, naturally, was a rather stiff atmosphere. We were all a little apprehensive of this new man recruited from an unusual source,<sup>1</sup> of whom we had heard so much. In the event he proved himself the best Governor Bengal ever had, and for those privileged to work close to him a constant source of admiration and respect. Affection, too? It is difficult to say. He could hardly be described as genial or forthcoming, and though I saw him once a week or oftener for five years, and he called me 'Bob' and we had our little private jokes based mostly on official foundations, I cannot say we got any

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Anderson (1882–1958), later Viscount Waverley, a very distinguished senior member of the Home Civil Service with important administrative service in Ireland during 'the troubles' behind him.

farther. There was a lack of (at any rate outward) warmth. An instance of this that rather hurt was when the attempt was made on his life at Lebong race-course near Darjeeling in 1935. As soon as I knew he was all right I hurried off to see what was doing below about the prisoners. Returning up the steps to H.E.—I was naturally rather agitated—I shook him warmly by the hand and spoke some words of congratulation. All I got was a look of aloof surprise which made me feel decidedly a fool.

His achievements are admirably set out in Sir John Wheeler-Bennett's biography. The two great benefits he conferred on Bengal were to suppress terrorism and put the Province's finances on a reasonably even basis. To work with him was constant satisfaction. However gloomy the outlook, one always came out from an interview with him heartened and able to see things in perspective. If he said 'I am quite clear' about this or that, you knew the decision was final and right. His Cabinet—we were still in the days of Dyarchy—regarded him with great respect. He had so much knowledge. He could expound with equal facility the methods used to repress terrorism in Ireland or the niceties of Parliamentary procedure. I remember an occasion at a Joint Meeting when some proposal by Ghuznavi—a Muslim, and accordingly for ever advocating drastic measures against the Hindu terrorists—moved H.E. to a dissertation on the disadvantages and otherwise of counter-terrorism or reprisals. It was lucid and comprehensive. He drew on his Irish experience to prove that reprisals were what was publicly remembered, not the outrages that provoked them.

He showed close interest in the men in the services and one of our first interviews was occupied in discussing his relations with them. He believed in the personal touch, and though not ready to tolerate bad work, was ready always to make allowances. A question he often asked when, for instance, it was a matter of promotion or reward was 'Does he give of his best?' Yet he had a soft spot, too, for those not very deserving. I remember once discussing the case of a senior but lethargic, ineffective officer for inclusion in the Honours List. He had reached one of the highest posts mainly through lapse of time



and was soon to retire, but had really done nothing to deserve recognition. Anderson thought differently and put in his name. In difficult cases, too, when senior officers had to be reprimanded or passed over, he would always convey the orders himself, rather than leave it to Prentice or me, as he might have done.

Terrorist outrages continued throughout 1932. On 30 April, a month after Sir John joined, Douglas was shot at Midnapore while presiding at a meeting in the District Board office; the second Collector of that district to be murdered. His assailant was pluckily chased and captured by James George, Sub-Divisional Officer of Contai, who was at the meeting. George, unarmed and very short-sighted, stumbled and lost his glasses, but went on and got his man. In June came news of an affray in Chittagong District, when a party of the 2/8th Gurkhas were successful in rounding up and killing several wanted terrorists; but Major Cameron, in command, was killed. That was a moment when his men, by whom he was beloved, might have retaliated, but discipline prevailed.

Not long after came news of the murder of a Bengali Sub-Deputy Magistrate, Kamakshaya Parshad Sen, who had been marked down for slaughter because of action taken in the course of duty. He was shot dead in bed in his house in Dacca. It was this sort of brutal outrage that made life so hard for our Bengali subordinates, especially for Hindus, and no praise is too great for the way in which Hindu members of the Magistracy and the Police stuck to their duties in spite of threats to themselves and families. On 29 July, E. B. Ellison, Superintendent of Police of Tippera District, was shot and died a week later. This death, which might have been prevented had he had immediate aid at a fully equipped hospital, made us think of aircraft, and a few months later the Government bought a 'Moth' fitted to carry a stretcher-case with attendant. On 5 April, Sir Alfred Watson, editor of *The Statesman*, had a miraculous escape. He was in his car at his office door, when a Bengali thrust a revolver through the window and fired twice. How he managed to miss, no one knows.

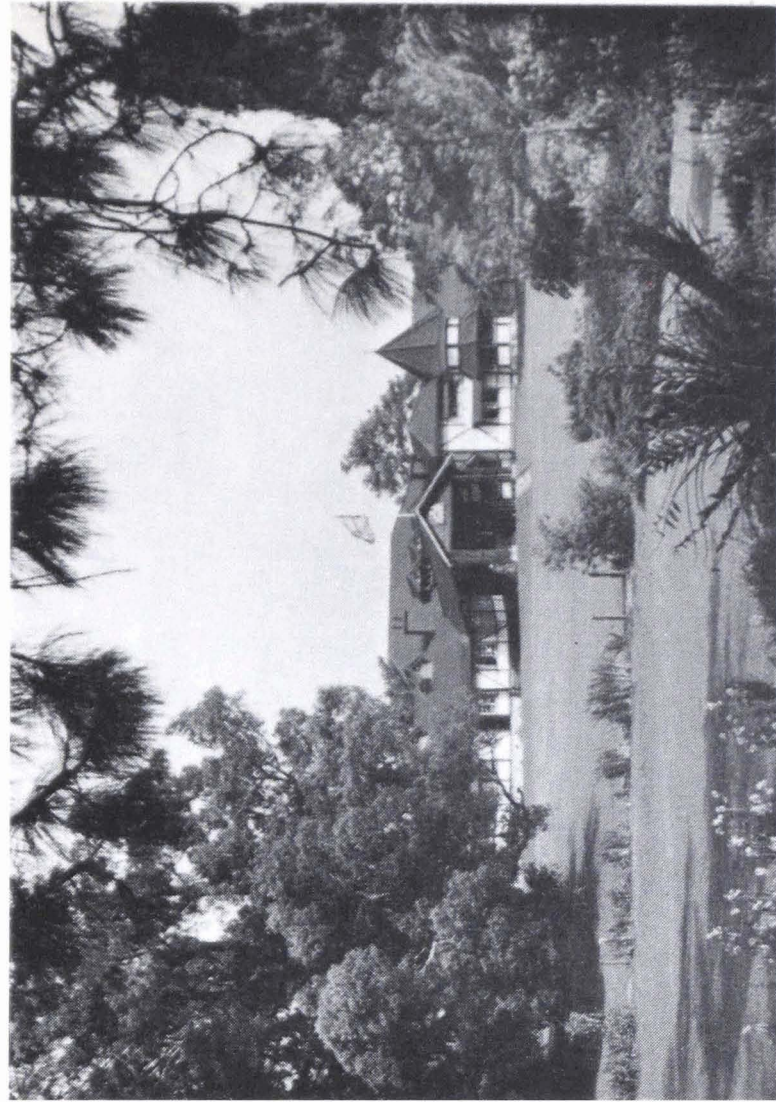
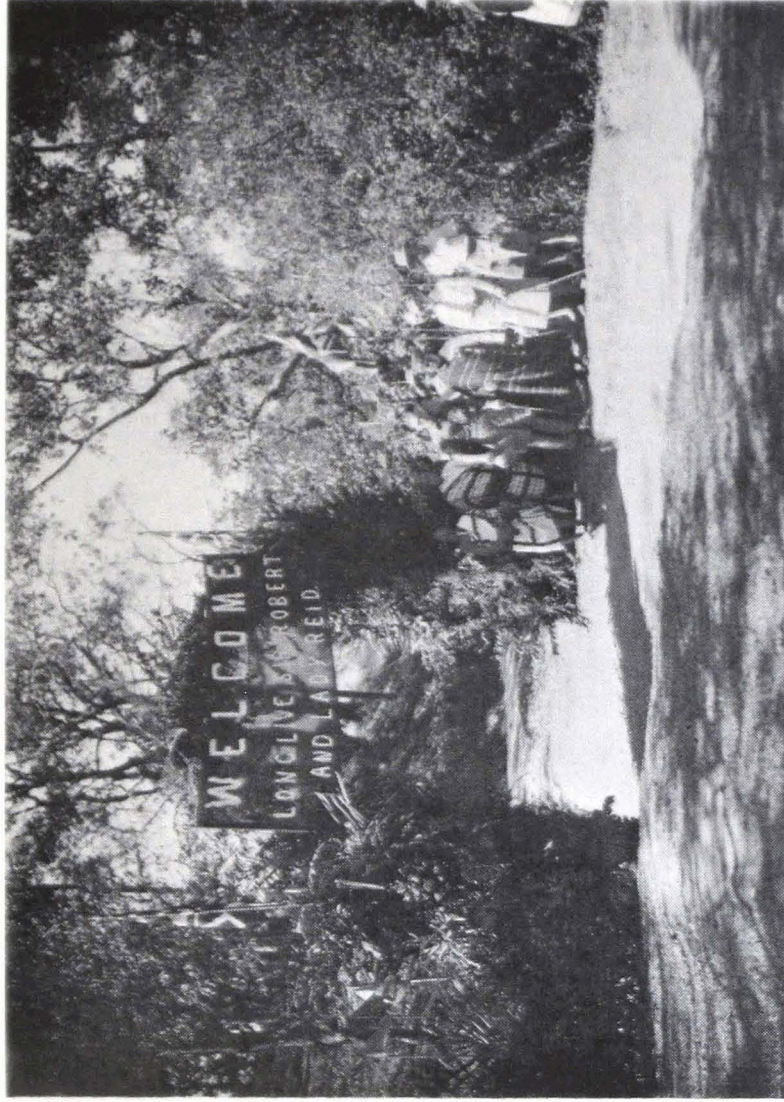
On 22 August, C. G. Grassby, additional Superintendent of Police at Dacca, was shot at, but not fatally, and he himself

fired four shots into his assailant. A month later on 25 September came news of the bombing of the Railway Institute at Chittagong during a dance. Several people were killed and injured and the assailants, who were led by a woman, escaped in the darkness. Four days later Sir Alfred Watson was attacked again. It was a sort of gangster shooting affray. Watson was driving home from his office in the evening when a car drew up alongside and its occupants began to fire. The chase continued right from the end of the Red Road to somewhere in the neighbourhood of Behala. Watson was wounded, but fortunately not very seriously. On 18 November 1932 Luke, Superintendent of Rajshahi Central Jail, was severely wounded in jaw, tongue and neck. He made a good recovery, though much disfigured.

It was a sombre tale; but in spite of these losses there was a more hopeful atmosphere. Clearly, in the new Governor we had a man who knew what was wanted to cure Bengal and was determined to get it. One of his first decisions was to invite the Army's help in boosting morale among the would-be loyalists and Government servants. By August we got the glad news that these discussions had borne fruit, and seven battalions of troops would be sent to Bengal in the cold weather for as long as we wanted them. Besides, the Army offered to help in Intelligence duties, and after a conference in November, several Army officers were posted in various districts in Bengal for this purpose. Some of them also undertook welfare work among the semi-idle educated young men who were an easy terrorist recruiting-ground. John Hunt, later to earn fame on Everest, was one such.

What with losses by death, and the extra wear and tear of these anxious days we were getting short of men, and in troublous times much careful thought naturally has to be given to postings. We got two retired but public-spirited civilians back, Prance who had passed the exam in my year but retired fairly early, and O. Rees who had retired from Burma. We also obtained, I believe, three military officers who opted for a temporary civil career. All the same, postings and transfers were a problem.

On 30 June, Prentice went on leave, and I was selected to



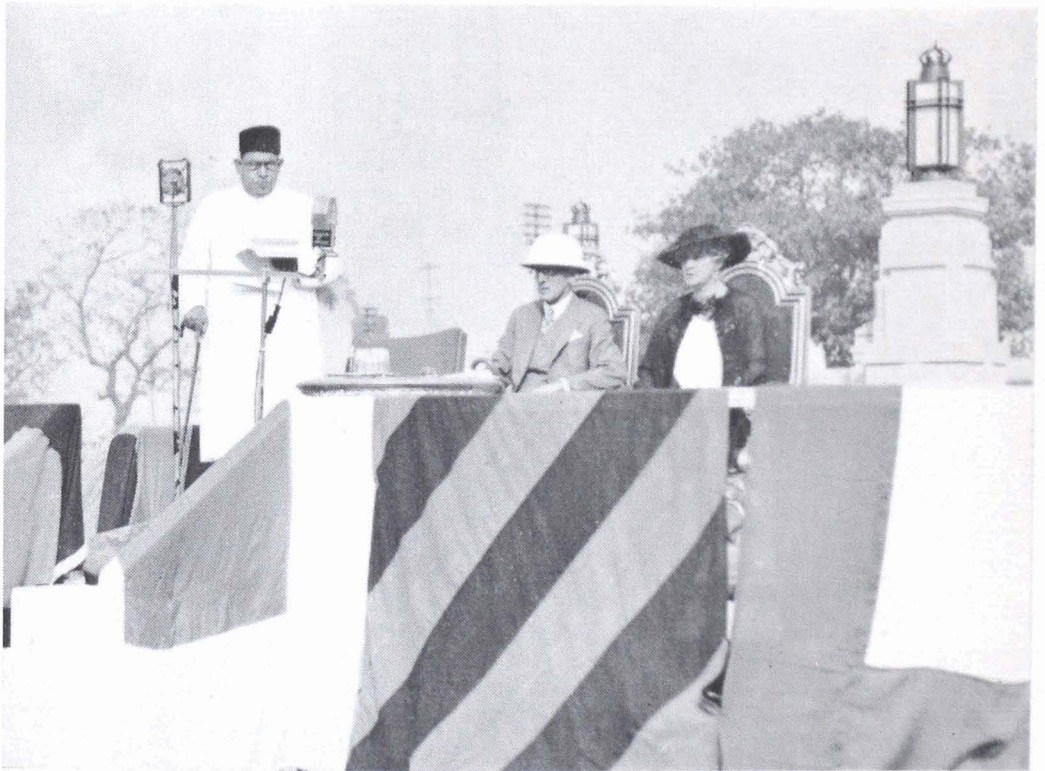
5. Aijal, Lushai Hills, February 1938

6. Government House, Shillong



7. Lord and Lady Brabourne, Sir Robert and Lady Reid, and General Sir Arthur Wauchope, at Cherrapunji, April 1938

8. Aboard the *Mary Anderson*, July 1938 (Sir Robert and Lady Reid in foreground)



9. Funeral Procession of Lord Brabourne, February 1939

10. Unveiling Ceremony of King George V Memorial, Calcutta, 3 April 1939. The Maharaja of Burdwan and Sir Robert and Lady Reid



11. Sir Robert Reid arrives in Calcutta, 23 June 1938

act as Home Member for four months. H. J. Twynam came in as Chief Secretary. My acting appointment involved perhaps the hardest work I ever had, for I was required to pilot through a more than critical Assembly just the sort of measure its members disliked so much: the Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Bill, which I introduced on 9 August and which was finally passed on 6 September. Other work was heavy, too. The Communal Award pronounced by the British Prime Minister, in default of agreement by the political parties, was published in July, and added to our anxieties, as did Gandhi's hunger-strike in connection with it.

At the end of October Prentice came back, and I reverted to Chief Secretary. It is perhaps a measure of the sparing way in which Anderson dealt out praise, and of the value one placed on his opinion, that I felt quite uplifted when at my final interview with him before handing over he said, 'An unqualified success, Bob, an unqualified success'!

## *New Colleagues: The Lebong Affair*

'INDEPENDENCE DAY' in January 1933 passed off quietly both in Calcutta and outside. Government's display of determination seemed to be taking effect on the people, and the morale of our officers and loyalists had certainly improved. Arrests of wanted persons connected with terrorism increased; information was at last beginning to come in. In dealing with this conspiracy information had always been the key to success. At first, because of sympathy or, still more, intimidation it was hard to get, but when people saw that the terrorists were not necessarily winning, the flow quickened. I should, however, add that, from the start, we were getting information from someone right inside the terrorists' inner councils, which was why he was never arrested.

By now my wife had become much involved in welfare work. 'Health Week', held in Calcutta during January, was a novelty and aroused interest. Much wrong-headed stuff has lately been published about Britain's alleged failure to introduce welfare projects in India. But the emphasis on these is recent even in Europe. Moreover, the British Government's policy was always to keep taxation low, and in that they succeeded. Great health schemes are costly. Medical facilities in India so far as they went were well organised. There was the Indian Medical Service at the top, founded for the Indian Army, but so devised that in peacetime officers were available as Civil Surgeons in the districts and for teaching and research in the main hospitals and medical colleges. In addition there were the subordinate services, men known as assistant surgeons and sub-assistant surgeons, all trained up to prescribed standards. Many of these were first-rate. So when British rule ended in



1947 there was on the medical side, as on the administrative, a trained subordinate staff ready to take over.

Early in April 1933, after seeing through the budget session of the Council, I set off for England (my wife having preceded me) on eight months' leave, which after four years' hard going I felt I really needed. G. P. Hogg took charge. While in London I had a memorable talk with Sir Findlater Stewart, then permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office. He was, I believe, the first holder of that post who really sought to know Indian officials when on leave and to understand their problems. On my previous visits to the India Office I felt the atmosphere in that gloomy building was one of surprise and mild distaste, among the bland men there, that any rough fellow from India should invade their privacy. With Stewart it was different; he also showed remarkable knowledge of what was going on.

Our return to India was overland via Palestine and took two months. We had a fortnight in Jerusalem, full of excitements rather resembling those we were familiar with on a larger scale in India. Palestine was then, of course, under British Mandate, the High Commissioner being involved in the insoluble task of reconciling Jew and Arab. There were several incidents throughout the country during our short stay, the worst being at Jaffa on 27 October when the Arabs took out an unauthorised procession. Firing by both sides resulted, with some sixty casualties, a British police officer being killed. Firing occurred in Jerusalem, too.

Our journey back to India continued by Nairn Transport to Baghdad, thence to Basra, on by sea to Karachi and from there to Ajmer in Rajputana, where it had been arranged that I should visit a camp for terrorist *détenus* from Bengal, recently opened in a place called Deoli. I spent two days there, finding it had been very well organised by a young police officer, P. F. S. Finney. Resources in this barren out-of-the-way country were few. Water had to be pumped up from the River Banas five miles away. Like the Andamans, Deoli had, from the authorities' point of view, the great merit of being far from Bengal.

While in Ajmer we got news of Prentice's sudden illness,

already referred to, which meant I might be wanted to fill a gap immediately. A day later I got orders to be in Calcutta on 11 December. Prentice died that morning. I took over charge as Home Member, Hogg continuing as Chief Secretary. There was much work on hand, and the session was due to start on 8 January.

The day before it began—7 January 1934—occurred the terrorist attack at Chittagong known as the cricket-ground outrage. A party of four terrorists entered the tent on top of a knoll where people were watching a match below. Fortunately our only casualty was Cleary, Superintendent of Police, accidentally shot in the hand by his orderly. The orderly, however, shot and killed a terrorist, and the three others were captured.

The Viceroy, Lord Willingdon—now about half-way through his term of office; he had replaced Lord Irwin in 1931—was on his annual visit to Calcutta at this time, and we had an important and to us satisfactory meeting with him and members of his Executive Council about terrorism. Sir John Anderson and I were Bengal's representatives, and it was interesting to see the obvious respect shown by the Central Executive for Sir John.

This Viceregal visit ended on 15 January in startling circumstances, amidst what later became known as the great Bihar earthquake. Whole towns in that Province were laid flat; river-beds rose up as dry land, only to subside again; roads were fissured and made impassable; thousands of lives were lost. It was one of the biggest earthquakes in India's history. In Calcutta we were merely on the fringe, but it was severe enough, and did considerable damage locally. The main shock came just as some of us were leaving after lunch to see Lord and Lady Willingdon off at Howrah railway station. It went on for four minutes, long enough to send people rushing into the streets and cause the barracks at Fort William to be vacated. Much severer damage occurred in the northern parts of Bengal. Darjeeling was hard hit, and Government House there demolished except for one room.

In February, Bengal mourned the death of Sir Provash Chandra Mitter. Previously a Minister in the Province, he had

for the last six years been an Executive Councillor in Delhi. A Hindu, his advice had nevertheless always been very valuable in our struggle against terrorism, a predominantly Hindu conspiracy. We were asked to his house before his body was taken to the burning ghat. It was a strange sight in that upper room—the dead man on a bed with his face uncovered and women all round wailing. With other friends I then waited till the body was brought down. That, to our minds—though not to Hindus', whose customs so differ from ours—was really rather unseemly, for the body was carried on an ordinary string bed, without any attempt to drape the features or compose the limbs, by four ill-clad, not very clean-looking bearers. It was painful to watch our old friend's head jolted this way and that when they reached a turn in the stairs and struggled to push the bed past the banisters. They got him down at last, and away they went along the street to Kali Ghat with the usual cries of 'Hari Bol!'

He was succeeded by Sir Charu Chandra Ghose, just retired from the High Court; but for a few months only, Charu finding he was not up to the strain. His successor was B. L. Mitter, another Hindu lawyer, and very able, too. The session of the Legislative Council proved a long one, and trying for me, as I had to pilot through a drastic Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Bill, designed to combat the terrorists. The Council sat through most of January, February and March dealing with my Bill, and the budget, and much else.

The change of the Hindu Member on the Executive Council was followed soon by that of his Muslim colleague; for Ghuznavi became ill and resigned, being replaced by 'Nuzzy', Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin, later to occupy important posts in the Pakistan Government. An attractive character, he brought to the Council a steady, level-headed outlook, though in time he became more communally minded, as was inevitable.

On 8 May occurred the attempt, mentioned already, to kill Sir John Anderson at Lebong. Accounts by eyewitnesses of such an incident are apt to differ, especially when things happen quickly, and Sir John Wheeler-Bennett's description, in his biography of Anderson, differs from what my wife, my daughter, and I remember. According to my diary, in which I

recorded details, a race was just over, and everyone was either looking at the ponies coming in or going to the tote to collect their money. The Governor's part of the stand was railed off from the rest by an open balustrade on his right; the judge's box was on his left. He was standing when the first shot was fired. This came from his right; the assailant aimed over the balustrade at a few yards' distance. That shot miscarried. The Rani of Nazarganj, sitting with my wife near by in the public stand, saw the assailant and called out to the young Kumar of Barwari, a Bihar landowner, to seize him, which Barwari promptly did, and the next shot went low. Then Coombs, the Governor's personal guard, fired twice and hit the man, which disposed of him, but meanwhile another youth named Rabin-dra walked up the steps towards Sir John and fired twice; fortunately the shots went wide. As he fired Tandy Green of the Public Works Department, seated in the judge's box, leapt out and hurled himself down the steps on to Rabindra and rolled with him to the bottom. H.E. had a miraculous escape, probably due to the two assailants being poor shots, and their pistols not very good.

I was on my way to the tote when I heard the first shot and came back at once. Sir John had tripped in stepping back quickly and fallen on the carpet, but was completely self-possessed. After the episode of my mistaken congratulations, previously described, I got his consent to going on with the next race and went to see what was happening below. The hill people were enraged, and any Bengali in sight was set upon and manhandled.

Eventually we caught all members of this conspiracy: the two would-be assassins, two others who accompanied them to Darjeeling, and two more in remote control in Calcutta. The fact that Barwari was by the railing resulted from a chance act of the Rani. Barwari had been sitting next her, and she had asked my wife to sit with her instead. So he gave up his seat, and stood by the railing just in time to grapple with the terrorist when the firing began. Tandy Green was awarded the British Empire Medal (later changed to the George Medal) for his gallantry. Barwari told me that, rather than have an honour, he would be grateful for a letter to the Governor of

Bihar about a loan he had applied for; so I wrote this. What happened to three of the conspirators I do not recall, but Rabindra, the youth who fired from in front, was lucky. His death sentence was commuted, and later he was befriended by the Rev. Cyril Pearson, then Chaplain of Darjeeling, taken home and turned into a decent citizen.

In August, Sir John Anderson went on a well-earned four months' holiday, leaving the Province in far better heart than when he joined two years before. Sir John Woodhead took over as acting Governor.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Two Viceroys*

EARLY IN 1935 we were brought into contact with a strange affair, a sort of counterpart of the English Tichborne case, famed for years in Indian legal circles as the Bhowal case. A witness specially brought out from England to give evidence came to stay with us: J. T. Rankin, who had a long while before retired as Commissioner, Dacca Division. The estate, a very valuable one, was under the Court of Wards and, subject to that, in possession of the late owner's widow. Suddenly there appeared a claimant, who could speak no Bengali, but alleged he was the rightful owner, and had never died and been cremated as everyone believed. His story was that, desperately ill, he was pronounced dead and carried to the burning ghat. That was in Darjeeling, in drenching rain. He never reached the ghat, but revived, and for some reason made off to a remote part of India and was away so long as to forget his mother-tongue, and had now come back to claim his own. The widow repudiated him, but he persisted. The suit went on through court after court for years and eventually reached the House of Lords. What poor Rankin's evidence amounted to I do not know, but bringing him out to India hastened his end, for he died in Calcutta when about to go home.

During May King George V's Silver Jubilee was duly celebrated. Government was up in Darjeeling; but they decided that the Jubilee medals should be distributed in Calcutta, where a traditional feeding-of-the-poor was also to occur on the Maidan, so we all came down again. Calcutta in May can be extremely hot, and as it was decreed that we would wear full winter uniform we were thankful for the air-conditioning now installed in the Legislative Chamber. High Court Judges came

off best, their long robes enabling them to wear little underneath. Choice of recipients for the medals—only a limited number were allotted to each Province—caused much heart-burning. I remember getting a long indignant letter from a business friend complaining bitterly at the omission of his wife's name from the list. Fortunately we were able to remedy this. My wife at first said she did not want one, so I obediently omitted her name; but Sir John decreed that the omission was inappropriate and her name was restored. The crowds in the city for the occasion were immense, and we had difficulty in getting to Sealdah station for the return journey.

Our close liaison with the Army continued throughout the year and we had many consultations about the terrorist problem with the G.O.C. Eastern Command, General McMullen, and his staff, who also paid frequent visits to our danger-spots. By May he was able to tell us he had noticed improvement both at Dacca and Chittagong. About then it was agreed we could reduce the extra garrison to five battalions.

Lord and Lady Willingdon paid their last visit to Calcutta that winter. They had made themselves greatly liked by all communities, and did much to bring Europeans and Indians together socially. From the official angle we had nothing but help from him—and at a particularly difficult time. He was lucky, however, in being free from the necessity, under which Lord Irwin laboured so long, of trying to induce Gandhi to go to the Round Table Conference. Personally he was charming, always making you feel you were the one person who interested him.

Lady Willingdon was a character of the kind round whom stories gather. She usually got her way whatever she did, irrespective of general opinion. It was hardly tactful of her, for instance, in the eyes of Calcutta, to have Belvedere at Alipore renamed 'The Viceroy's House'. Belvedere was an historic name, given to the mansion by Warren Hastings. Nevertheless she was a popular if autocratic figure. She had more than one conflict with Sir John Anderson, for example, over wearing a buttonhole, which he favoured and she abhorred. But she kissed him on both cheeks on Howrah platform

when she left Calcutta for good. She had a wonderful memory for faces and had been known to correct A.D.C.s who introduced a guest by the wrong name. One of her fads was to expect guests at her house in the height of summer to wear 'store clothes' instead of the normal silk suit. Sir Alexander Aikman and I both committed this crime at a lunch-party in Calcutta in August, but were let off with a meaning look. When her interest was roused in any cause no one would be a stauncher ally or go to greater trouble. The Bengal Home Industries and the Good Companions, handling Mission products, were in dire straits at this time for accommodation and money. My wife was on the councils of both. Lady Willingdon announced one day that she had found a house, took my wife and other ladies to it, got the agreement signed there and then handed over a Rs.1,000 note. Truly a great lady.

In 1936 I went home on four months' leave, travelling for the first time by air. Soon after return in August I was told by Sir Henry Craik, Home Member of the Central Government, who was staying with me, that I was in the running for the Governorship of Assam in the following year, when Sir Michael Keane would retire. He added that I was soon to be bidden to Simla to be looked at. Next day, at my usual Monday-morning interview with Sir John Anderson, he told me he had been asked by the new Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, to send me to Simla, ostensibly for consultations with the Home Department, and that I was not to be told the real reason. So we had a quiet laugh over Craik blowing the gaff. I went to Simla, had ten minutes with the Viceroy, and was apparently approved, for about a week later I was told I had been recommended for the post and would join in March.

In December, Lord Linlithgow and his party made their first visit to Calcutta, which, I am sorry to say, was not a great success. Most of us put this down to inexperienced staff. Calcutta took much knowing, its society having strong views on most things. There was trouble about the Viceroy's refusal to dine (as was traditional) at one of the four principal clubs; about a change in procedure over the garden party at Bel-



vedere and a dozen other things, small in themselves, which, however, could well have been avoided. The club controversy was allayed to some extent by his eventually agreeing to dine at the Calcutta Club, the leading mixed Indian and European one; but the affair was clumsily handled.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Settling In*

OUR NEXT cold weather in Calcutta, 1936-7, passed quickly. There were farewell parties as well as the usual round of a Calcutta season, and my wife was busy up to the end with Bengal Home Industries, a Health Exhibition, and other social activities.

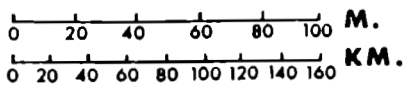
We arrived at Shillong on 2 March 1937. There was much to do in those first days: settling in; a new job; a new house. The question of all questions to be faced was formation of a Ministry on 1 April, when the Act of 1935, giving full provincial autonomy, would come into force. From the first, on Sir Michael Keane's advice, my hopes had centred on Sir Muhammad Saadulla, an experienced Assam Valley Muslim who had been an Executive Councillor under the old Act. He had returned to a lucrative practice at the Calcutta Bar, but we heard he was prepared to be public-spirited. On 15 March he saw me and said he would try to form a Ministry; a few days later he told me he would burn his professional boats in Calcutta and settle again in Shillong.

The political scene presented many peculiar, troublesome features. Assam is rather more homogeneous now; then it was very much an ethnic mixture. There were the fertile districts in the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Surma; between the valleys stood the Khasi and Garo Hills; and up against Burma on the east and Tibet on the north were the hill areas proper, a jumble of densely forested, sparsely inhabited, roadless mountain. The Assam Valley, some fifty miles wide, contained most of the tea-gardens, as well as much ordinary cultivation. Originally it was thinly inhabited by Assamese tribes, but the population over a long period had been reinforced by a stream

# TIBET

Mt. Everest





Bengal and Assam in the period covered by this book

of vigorous Muslims, mostly from Bengal. This gave rise to endless quarrels, and brought in a dangerous communal element, the indigenous inhabitants being Hindu.

The Surma Valley consisted of two districts, Sylhet and Cachar, both containing many tea-gardens, too. The inhabitants were mainly Muslim and all their affinities were with Bengal. But our best Hindu clerks also came from there. Sylhet and Cachar had originally been part of Bengal; in fact, Sylhet is one of the oldest British districts. When in 1826, after the first Burma War, Assam was annexed by the British and its inhabitants freed from the cruelties practised on them by the Burmese, it was administered as part of that amorphous mass, the Bengal Presidency. Then, in 1874, Assam proper with Sylhet and Cachar were severed from Bengal, to form a distinct Chief Commissionership. The way the province of Assam came to take shape is indeed typical of how the British established their rule in India, a haphazard process following no sort of ordered plan of conquest nor much, if any, attempt to conform to linguistic or ethnic principles. But the incongruities of Assam were less than those of, say, Bengal before Curzon's partition of 1906 set going the permutations and combinations which followed. In a unitary India ruled by an alien and impartial Power, these various incongruities scattered over the map did not matter so much, nor get publicity; but they became serious when it seemed likely that the British would go, and for the two successor-régimes they have raised many difficulties.

Constitutionally, only the two valleys of Assam came within the ambit of the Reforms Act of 1935, and so fell under full control by the Cabinet of elected Ministers. The hill districts, meaning the Balipara Frontier Tract, Sadiya Frontier Tract, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills, were 'excluded'; that is, they were administered by the Governor 'in his discretion' without reference to the Ministry, though the revenue spent there, and the staff to administer them, would have to be found by the Province as a whole. There was a third category, too, known as the 'Partially Excluded Areas', comprising the Khasi and Jaintia, the Garo, and the Mikir Hills. These enjoyed the privilege of electing members to the Legislature, and the

Ministry was primarily responsible for their administration, but by section 52(e) of the Act the Governor was charged with a special responsibility for their 'peace and good government', a responsibility which it was obvious from the start would be, and indeed was, very hard to discharge.

Politically the scene was one of conflict between the Congress party, typifying the nationalist upsurge wanting to push ahead to independence much faster than the Act of 1935 would allow, and the moderates, typified by Saadulla and his Ministry and most Muslims of British India, who were genuinely ready to work the new Constitution as it stood and move towards complete self-government gradually. Behind and pervading all, in Assam as elsewhere, was the growing antagonism of Hindu and Muslim, while Assam was also cursed with an antagonism of its own, known locally as 'valleyism'. This was the conflict felt between Assam Valley and the Surma Valley, a vivid thread of prejudice running through all public life. An instance will illustrate. There arose an insistent call for an Assam University; but though the Legislature passed a Bill for its establishment no mention was made of its site. The Assam Valley members thereupon insisted it must be in Gauhati, the Surma Valley ones in Sylhet. Neither would give way.

So it will be realised how carefully Saadulla had to tread in choosing his first Ministry, and it is not surprising that the modest figure of five members for it as at first announced before very long doubled and then trebled, to satisfy conflicting interests and get necessary support in the Legislature. This deplorable practice, incidentally, has since gone on, and not only in Assam. In 1962 it was reported, for example, that the Punjab had thirty-seven Ministers, the U.P. forty-six. Had Sir Muhammad lived to see such developments he might well have exclaimed, with Clive, 'I stand astonished at my own moderation.' Anyhow, in 1937 he went ahead and by 31 March had chosen his first four colleagues and brought them to see me—a motley lot: Rohini Chaudhury, an Assam Valley Hindu; Nichols Roy, a Khasi; Ali Haider, a Sylhet Muslim; and an aged Muslim called Shamsul Ulema Wahid. He himself was to be Chief Minister and politically stood head and shoulders above them. They took the oaths of office next day and

we had made a start. The Congress party was not then participating, nor did its M.L.A.s attend the first meeting of the Assembly. They avoided social contacts, too, not attending a garden-party we gave on the 8th.

One reason why Assam was to my mind the most attractive governorship in India was because it had only one centre of administration, at Shillong, and one Government House (plus a cottage at the Peak, 1,000 ft. higher up, a retreat merely for week-ends). Bengal had no fewer than four: at Calcutta, Barrackpore, Dacca and Darjeeling. But Shillong stood 5,000 ft. above sea-level, so there was no need to seek cool altitudes in summer. The house itself was attractive: single-storied, with what were termed 'wire-crete' walls, wire-netting enclosed within a wooden frame and plastered over, designed to withstand earthquakes, which it did very well. The great earthquake of 1897 had practically laid all Shillong flat, including the old Government House. Buildings then were of stone, a material thereafter abandoned. The Peak Cottage dated only from 1904, when Mr. (later Sir J. B.) Fuller was Chief Commissioner. He arranged a perpetual lease of the site from the then Siem of Myllem, a Khasi chief. It commands a striking prospect of the Himalayas and the Kyllang rock. The house had four bedrooms and two living-rooms: an ideal spot for a quiet week-end.

With a Ministry installed, we lost no time in setting off on 19 April for our first tour, which took us to the main centre of the tea industry, then to the oilfields, and on to one of the Frontier Tracts. At Dibrugarh, the Assam Valley tea-industry centre, a thing that impressed me was the well-equipped hospital for all races, attached to which was the Berry White Medical School, where doctors were under training. My wife went from Dibrugarh to the S.P.G. Women's Hospital at Chabua, a few miles away, run by Dr. Thompson, a highly competent woman. However, our main purpose at Dibrugarh was to meet the leading planters and their wives, tea being Assam's chief industry.

Digboi was at that time the only oilfield in Assam. Not till twenty years later was the much bigger field at Naharkatya discovered. Digboi we found self-contained, with its own



refinery, and an afternoon sufficed for a layman to see over it.

From there a few hours' train journey took us to railhead at Saikhwa Ghat, whence we crossed the Lohit River by launch to Sadiya, headquarters of the Frontier Tract of that name. Besides the Political Officer and his subordinates, the 3rd Battalion of the Assam Rifles was also stationed there. During our few days' stay we went out by car to a Rifles' post at Nizamghat, thirty-three miles away on the left bank of the Dibang in the Padam Abor country. The platoon was self-supporting, ready always to send out a patrol at a moment's notice fully equipped and needing no transport, as the men carried everything themselves.

We finished the tour with a day's fishing from Sadiya on the Deopani, where members of our party got a bag of snow-trout, boka, and mahseer. And so home to Shillong, for the next big event awaiting us, the celebrations on 12 May of King George VI's Coronation, a long exhausting day, though fortunately sunny.

In July, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, paid us a visit. It was mostly a holiday for him, with few official engagements, and I think he thoroughly enjoyed it. He brought a biggish party, at least nine besides servants, but our staff managed well. Finding a bed for this very tall Viceroy was a problem, but Frank Esse, my Military Secretary, in an inspired moment guessed there must be one of the right size at Belvedere in Calcutta. This was sent for.

We had one day at Cherrapunji, reputedly the rainiest place in the world, and a very good day, too: the sun came out just when we arrived at midday and remained out all afternoon. The view down to the plains was superb, and after enjoying that the Viceroy aided by his personal guard had a great time catching butterflies on the edge of the gorge. His visit coincided with the end of a conference of Hill Officers, and Charles Pawsey stayed back with some of his Nagas and Tony McCall with Lushais to introduce them. The tribesmen were dressed in their picturesque ceremonial garments and I do not know who enjoyed it most, they or the Viceroy.

The Ministry ran into heavy weather in September when facing the Assembly in a budget session. They had to agree to

heavy and mischievously intended cuts in expenditure on the two Divisional Commissioners' and the Criminal Investigation Department's staffs. Another concession to which they weakly agreed, so as to retain office, was to remit for no defensible reason Rs.5 lakhs of land revenue. On the other hand, they voted themselves emoluments at rates varying between Rs. 2,500 and Rs. 1,500 per month, and the Members Rs.100 per month with Rs.5 a day halting allowance and first-class travelling allowance. The Central Government was perturbed; but short of dismissing them, which would have caused a crisis we did not want to face, there was nothing that as a constitutional Governor I could do. Weak as it was, the Ministry nevertheless was prepared to work the Constitution, and had to be given a chance. The cuts in Commissioners' staff salaries were eventually restored under powers which the 1935 Reforms Act reserved to the Governor-General and Secretary of State, and a decision to this effect was conveyed to the Assembly before the House rose for the vacation.

We then got off for our first Christmas camp. This was at Jamduar, in the westernmost corner of Assam close to the southern boundary of Bhutan and on the left bank of the Sankos, which is here the boundary between Assam and Bengal; a delightful spot in an open space surrounded by forest. We had no luck over shooting tiger; but we enjoyed six delightful days in the open, in weather such as only the plains of eastern India can afford, sitting up for tiger, beating for deer and small game on elephant, or fishing for mahseer.

And the first of these activities gave us some excitements. On one occasion there had been a 'kill', and my wife and I climbed up into the near-by *machan* early in the afternoon. After two hours a tigress came out in the open, and we had a fascinating hour watching her moving about. She was never less than 100 yards away and I did not risk a shot. But she avoided approaching the kill till after dark; and as I had no torch on my rifle, that was that and we went home. Next time news came in one morning of a kill near Raimona. It was getting late when we clambered up to the machan, a very high one which we had to reach off the back of our elephant. A mongoose and a civet cat were watching the proceedings, and

then ensued much rustling in the undergrowth which we thought meant the tiger coming, but what emerged was only a big black sow with a half-grown porker. However, in the car on the way home we were lucky to see a big tiger lumbering along the road in front of us, before he jumped off into the jungle and disappeared.

One day we learnt that seven wild elephants had been captured in the Rydak stockade across the river in Jalpaiguri District. Keddah-catching of elephants is chancy. They are herded along for days towards the entrance of the *keddah*, an immensely strong enclosure made of logs of timber, but carefully concealed to look like the rest of the jungle. The moment when the drive is finished and the doors slammed to is quite unpredictable. Neither of us had ever seen a keddah before, so we were lucky to have this experience; and we spent an interesting hour watching the mahouts on tame elephants working inside the enclosure, and saw a wild one led out to be tethered and eventually tamed. At this Christmas camp we suffered our first encounters with the 'dim-dam', the worst insect pest of the sub-Himalayan foothills, a pale-coloured fly that alights noiselessly on the flesh. The bite raises a blister, which remains irritable for days and makes many people ill. It certainly spoilt my pleasure.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *The Khasi Hills*

THE KHASI and Jaintia Hills District, in which Shillong, the capital of Assam, is situated, has so many interesting and peculiar features, and is peopled by inhabitants so attractive, that it deserves a chapter to itself.

As earlier explained, it is a mountainous wedge which, with the Garo Hills, stands between the Assam and the Surma Valleys. The main road connecting them runs from Gauhati, in the former, up to Shillong at 5,000 ft., and then over the Khasi plateau down to Sylhet in the latter. The northern side of the plateau, facing the Assam Valley and the Brahmaputra, consists of gently rolling downs covered with short grass and occasional pine-forest, whereas the southern side falls to the Sylhet plain abruptly. It is lovely country, standing mostly at an elevation of 3,000–4,000 ft., its highest point being the 6,660 ft. Peak above Shillong. Views are superb. The great Sir Joseph Hooker, who botanised here about 1850, wrote of them thus:

The finest view in the Khasi mountains, and perhaps a more extensive one than has ever before been described, is that from Shillong Hill, the culminant point of the range. . . . This Hill 6,660 ft. above the sea, rises from an undulating grassy country . . . the whole scenery being parklike, and as little like that of India at so low an elevation as it is possible to be . . . Northward, beyond the rolling Khasi Hills, lay the whole Assam valley, seventy miles broad, with the Brahmapooter winding through it, fifty miles distant, reduced to a thread. Beyond this, banks of hazy vapour obscured all but the dark range of the Lower Himalayas, crested by peaks of frosted silver, at the immense distance of 100 to 220 miles from Shillong. . . . The

mountains occupy sixty degrees of the horizon and stretch over upwards of 250 miles, comprising the greatest extent of snow visible from any point with which I am acquainted. . . . The visible horizon of the observer encircles an area of fully thirty thousand square miles, which is greater than that of Ireland.

Anyone who has seen the view from the Peak on a good day will endorse Hooker's description. A feature of the Khasi landscape is the number of great monoliths, in groups of three to nine, both vertical and horizontal. These are memorial stones erected either by a clan to honour its ancestors or by children in memory of parents, often far from where the ashes of the dead are buried. It is the custom locally to burn the dead, and there are well-built masonry platforms on which this takes place. A third class of stone is to be seen along the main routes across the hills, for the use of tired travellers. These, too, are in groups of uneven number, uprights as tall as 20 ft., with flat table-stones in front. In secluded spots near hills are to be found, as well, curious sacred groves, generally of ever-green trees. The Khasis were secretive about their origin and purpose, and there always seemed something rather frightening about them. One such grove was near the Peak: nothing whatever there, no stone or wooden structure, just the trees; but one felt that strange rites might have been performed in that sombre spot and could be again.

The original Khasi religion was animistic; but after the Welsh Calvinists arrived in 1841 the spread of Christianity was rapid. Strange traditions lingered on, however. One concerned the Thlen, a huge snake which dwelt at Cherrapunji, and plagued the countryside till a man managed to get it to swallow a lump of red-hot iron, when it died. But though its body was cut up and eaten, one little bit remained, from which sprang numerous small snakes. These attached themselves to certain families and brought them prosperity, but only if fed once a year on human flesh. So a human had to be killed for this, and anyone residing near a family supposed to harbour a thlen lived in dread of being murdered. Such murders were known to have been fairly recently committed.

The old Khasi society was matriarchal. Inheritance passed through the female, and the women, sometimes physically

stronger than the men, owned the property and exercised paramount influence. The spread of Christianity tended to modify this, but the problems that arose in litigation when one party claimed property as a pagan and another as a Christian were very puzzling. Appeals in cases which arose in non-British Khasi territory lay to the Governor.

Khasis are short and sturdy, their features of the Mongolian type and their complexions fair. The women swathe themselves in many garments, favouring dull rather than bright colours. The head-dress for ordinary wear is the very becoming wimple, reminiscent of Wales, but dating from before Welsh influence came in. Naturally intelligent, the Khasis have made good use of the education which one hundred years of devoted work by the missionaries has made available. Even sixty years ago the proportion of persons able to read and write (fifty-seven per thousand) was higher than anywhere else in the Province. And with women predominant, it is not surprising that in 1941 the proportion of female literacy among them was seventy-nine per thousand, far ahead of any other district.

It is difficult to exaggerate the Welsh missionaries' benefits to Assam. Their first representative, Thomas Jones, walked up the hill to Cherrapunji in 1841, and since 1887 it has been where their teachers and preachers have trained. It was he who reduced the Khasi language to writing. As time went on, however, the missionaries' main work tended to shift to Shilong, where good schools and a hospital with teaching facilities were established. The Welsh Mission High School for Girls there had a specially fine record. Khasi lady doctors, nurses, teachers, health visitors and physical instructresses were to be found all over the Province and their quality was high. The Welsh Mission Hospital in our time was under the care of Dr. Gordon Roberts, outstanding for his professional skill, teaching ability and spiritual ministrations. Their centenary celebrations occurred during my time, and it was a privilege to take part.

For recreation the Khasis enjoyed dancing and archery, the dances and the ancient paganism being connected. Thus the Nongkrem dance was held in the village of that name during spring, to propitiate the ancient deities and ensure good crops.

Unmarried girls would dance in the centre, while men moved round the outside carrying swords and shields. The dance had little movement; those dancing took only the tiniest of steps, their eyes demurely downcast. But their costume was strikingly pretty. On their heads were circlets of silver or gold filigree with a spike standing up about six inches at the back, and long silver tassels dangling behind. Their dress was of rich silk, and profusely covered with jewellery, gold and coral necklaces being much favoured. All the while elderly dames moved around, here setting straight a crown that had got misplaced, there tidying up some garment.

Archery, immensely popular, mostly took the form of target-shooting competitions between teams from different villages, the targets being cylinders of grass tied round a small stick and set up at about forty paces. The bowmen shot kneeling, and each team had distinctive-coloured feathers on its arrows. Excitement was great and betting on the results general. The bow was about 5 ft. long. They used it to kill game and, with a suitably headed arrow, it was formerly employed in war.

The Khasi Hills have valuable minerals. Coal and limestone have been worked there for perhaps 200 years. The coal is of good quality for household use, but too soft for industry. It lies near the surface, is easily worked, and found all over the Shillong plateau. The limestone is on the steep southern slopes running down to the Surma Valley; the quarries near Chattak were exploited as early as 1778 by Robert Lindsay, Collector of Sylhet, much to his advantage. Members of the Inglis family shared in this trade early in the nineteenth century, and a monument opposite Chattak records with Victorian unctiousness the virtues of George, the first of that family to settle there. In 1941 a modern cement factory was opened at Chattak on a site where both limestone and coal were readily accessible. But difficulties must have arisen after 1947, for the area containing the coal fell to India and that with the limestone to Pakistan.

Britain's connection with these hills went back to 1824, when the Raja of Jynteah acknowledged by a treaty made with Mr. David Scott, Agent to the Governor-General, his

stronger than the men, owned the property and exercised paramount influence. The spread of Christianity tended to modify this, but the problems that arose in litigation when one party claimed property as a pagan and another as a Christian were very puzzling. Appeals in cases which arose in non-British Khasi territory lay to the Governor.

Khasis are short and sturdy, their features of the Mongolian type and their complexions fair. The women swathe themselves in many garments, favouring dull rather than bright colours. The head-dress for ordinary wear is the very becoming wimple, reminiscent of Wales, but dating from before Welsh influence came in. Naturally intelligent, the Khasis have made good use of the education which one hundred years of devoted work by the missionaries has made available. Even sixty years ago the proportion of persons able to read and write (fifty-seven per thousand) was higher than anywhere else in the Province. And with women predominant, it is not surprising that in 1941 the proportion of female literacy among them was seventy-nine per thousand, far ahead of any other district.

It is difficult to exaggerate the Welsh missionaries' benefits to Assam. Their first representative, Thomas Jones, walked up the hill to Cherrapunji in 1841, and since 1887 it has been where their teachers and preachers have trained. It was he who reduced the Khasi language to writing. As time went on, however, the missionaries' main work tended to shift to Shillong, where good schools and a hospital with teaching facilities were established. The Welsh Mission High School for Girls there had a specially fine record. Khasi lady doctors, nurses, teachers, health visitors and physical instructresses were to be found all over the Province and their quality was high. The Welsh Mission Hospital in our time was under the care of Dr. Gordon Roberts, outstanding for his professional skill, teaching ability and spiritual ministrations. Their centenary celebrations occurred during my time, and it was a privilege to take part.

For recreation the Khasis enjoyed dancing and archery, the dances and the ancient paganism being connected. Thus the Nongkrem dance was held in the village of that name during spring, to propitiate the ancient deities and ensure good crops.



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dependence on the British Government. In 1835 the so-called Jaintia or eastern part of the district, headquartered at Jowai, was annexed after four British subjects had been murdered. The western part never became embodied in British India, except for some 345 sq. miles comprising Shillong municipality and cantonments. It remained split among petty princelings, mostly with very small revenue and few responsibilities. It would have simplified administration much had the whole area been taken over, for the discrepancy in status led to many anomalies.

David Scott was outstanding among the early administrators in those hills, and during his seven years there did much to establish peace and good government. Of him the historian of Britain's relations with the North-East Frontier tribes, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, wrote: 'Had his life's labours been in North-West or Central India, when the great problem of Empire was then worked out, instead of amid the obscure jungles of Assam, he would occupy a place in history by the side of Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe. As it is, his writings lie buried amid the dust of official record-rooms and his work in its extent and power is still little understood.'

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *The North-East Frontier*

OUR FIRST TOUR in 1937 gave us a glimpse of part of the North-East Frontier, especially the part stretching from Bhutan to Walong, an area to be involved in 1962 in the Indo-Chinese conflict, and this longish chapter attempts to survey North-East Frontier affairs as a whole. In my time administration of that Frontier was divided into five sectors: the Balipara Frontier Tract with Tawang on its northern edge; then the Sadiya Frontier Tract, with Walong its north-east border close to South-Eastern Tibet; then the Naga Hills, followed by Manipur State, and then the Lushai Hills.

Balipara Tract had headquarters at Lokra, near where the Himalayan foothills begin. As in all frontier tracts the fully administered area was small, only 571 square miles, with a population of about twelve to the square mile; but to the north lay a large area of unadministered territory right up to the McMahon line and Tibet, peopled by Dafla, Aka and Mishmi tribes. These tribes never gave any serious trouble. An ignorant, backward lot, they showed no desire for contact with the outer world. I could find no trace of any Christian mission working among them. Many had no written language. As one went farther north Tibetan influence grew stronger, and the general tendency was to look north rather than south.

When representatives of the northern villages such as Tawang and Dirangdzong came down to Udalguri to collect their *posa*—a subsidy paid them under an ancient treaty for good behaviour—their costume was fully Tibetan: long woollen robes, Chinese silks and brocades, yellow-lacquered hats, muslin scarves, the broad Tibetan sword in their belts. It was significant that the largest amount, Rs.5,000, was paid to the

Tawang representatives, and of this all but Rs.500 went straight to Lhasa for the benefit of the Drepong monastery, of which the Tawang monastery was an offshoot. As the then Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam noted some forty years ago, 'Tawang being a dependency of Lhasa, and Tibet being a dependency of China, we are in a way paying tribute to China for part of the Darrang, i.e. Tezpur, District'. This payment of *posa*, justified only by age, was often condemned, but hard to abolish. The treaty by which the Tawang *posa* was paid dated back to 1853.

Tawang was under active discussion between the Central Government and the Government of Assam when I joined, for while the Indo-Tibetan frontier had been delimited from the eastern frontier of Bhutan all the way round to a point on the Irrawaddy-Salween watershed, a frontier which was accepted by Tibet, the Tibetan Government was collecting revenue and exercising jurisdiction many miles south of what had been agreed as the international boundary. Even in 1936 the Government of India expressed concern at the possibility that the continued exercise of jurisdiction by Tibet in Tawang and the area south of Tawang might enable China to claim prescriptive rights over a part of the territory recognised as within India by the 1914 Convention. It must be remembered that at that time China claimed suzerainty over Tibet, and it was in recognition of this that the Convention of 1914 was put before China for ratification. China never did ratify it, and so can now claim freedom from any obligation to recognise the McMahon Line. Perhaps a settlement could have been reached through further efforts to get China to agree, but the year 1914 saw the beginning of the First World War, and men had other things to think about.

The Assam Government's records show that Tawang was undoubtedly Tibetan up to 1914, when it was ceded to India, and all the information available shows that it reckoned itself Tibetan. Nor was Tawang of any use to India. Why it was ceded in 1914 I could never discover. Certainly in 1913 our Assam officers regarded Tawang as part of Tibet: 'a wedge of Tibet which abuts on the Assam Valley' is a phrase used in one dispatch. This may indicate that someone on our side thought

it proper that this 'wedge' be eliminated, and the boundary made to run neatly south of it, and that the Tibetans agreed. Their headquarters were as remote from Tawang as ours.

As late as September 1936 an Assam Government letter recorded that the '1914 Convention was never published mainly because the Chinese Government failed to ratify it, and nothing was done to give effect to Sir H. McMahon's recommendation for extension of administration in the Tawang area. Another consequence is that many published maps still show the frontier of India along the administered border of Assam. The latest Chinese atlases show almost the whole tribal area south of the McMahon Line up to the administered border of Assam as included in China.' Be that as it may, the new India of 1947 inherited the McMahon Line as one of the assets of our late Indian Empire, and with it all the loopholes and uncertainties that the Communist Chinese have found so easy to exploit. It cannot be denied that they have put forward a plausible case. The whole correspondence from 1914 onwards must be available to the present Indian Government, and there is much in it to make one wonder whether the McMahon Line was really worth the sacrifices and humiliation this dispute has imposed on Indian resources.

My first official contact with the Tawang question was when I signed a letter to the Government of India on 27 May 1937, proposing that we should assert our undoubted rights to this territory by posting an officer there for at least the summer months, to show we regarded it as part of British India. It was decided, however, as a preliminary to send a small expedition there in the spring of 1938 to examine the situation generally and report. Thus instructed, the late Captain G. S. Lightfoot, Political Officer, Balipara Frontier Tract, reached Tawang on 30 April. He sent in a very interesting report, recommending loose administration of the country by our officers to the exclusion of the Tibetans. If implemented then, it might have gone far to settle the question and perhaps have saved the successor Government of India much anxiety. But the then Government were reluctant to commit themselves to permanent occupation; in July 1939 it was decided to leave the matter in abeyance for a year, and thereafter, in the shadow of a second Great War,

Tawang was forgotten until China disinterred it in September 1962.

Apart from Tawang, this tract calls for little comment. The inhabitants between Tawang and the southern boundary were mostly Dafla, Aka and Miri, very primitive and backward. Captain G. A. Nevill of the Indian Police spent from 1913 to 1919 exploring this previously unknown country, and then from 1919 until he retired in 1928 was Political Officer in charge of the district. He was the first British officer to go on an official mission to Tawang. This he did in 1914. Morshead and Bailey had visited it in 1913 on their way back from their important exploration of the Tsangpo.

Moving east, one crosses the Subansiri River and enters the Abor country of the Sadiya Frontier Tract, a land of great rivers such as the Tsangpo or Dihong (as the Brahmaputra is called in its upper reaches), the Dibang, and the Lohit; also heavily forested mountains and valleys with altitudes lessening as one gets farther away from the main mass of the Himalaya. This sloping-off of the Himalaya, in fact, enables the Tsangpo to turn south after its long journey from near Lhasa and break through into the Assam plain.

The Abors are short, with powerful legs well adapted to their steep hillsides; their features broad and Mongolian. Culturally they are still at the bow-and-arrow stage and agriculture is primitive. Each village or group of villages has a headman termed *Gam*, but he has little power. The Abors are great talkers and all village matters are settled democratically by means of long arguments in which everyone has his say.

Historically there is not much of interest in our relations with them. The only important military expedition against them was in 1911-12. This arose from the murder of Noel Williamson, Assistant Political Officer, and a tea-garden doctor, Dr. J. D. Gregorson, on 31 March 1911. The incident ought never to have occurred. To begin with, the two men took an undue risk in crossing the 'Outer Line' without an armed escort though standing orders forbade this. And then a series of unforeseen events ended in the Abors of five different villages between them murdering the two Europeans and their twenty or so followers. A punitive expedition was organised in



12. Thevoni, the Eastern Angami Headman whom the Reids met at Kohima in January 1938



13. Aka chiefs: Wangiya of Shergaon and Tsari of Rupa. Charduar, February 1939



14. Lady Reid with the family of Likok, the Naga interpreter, January 1939

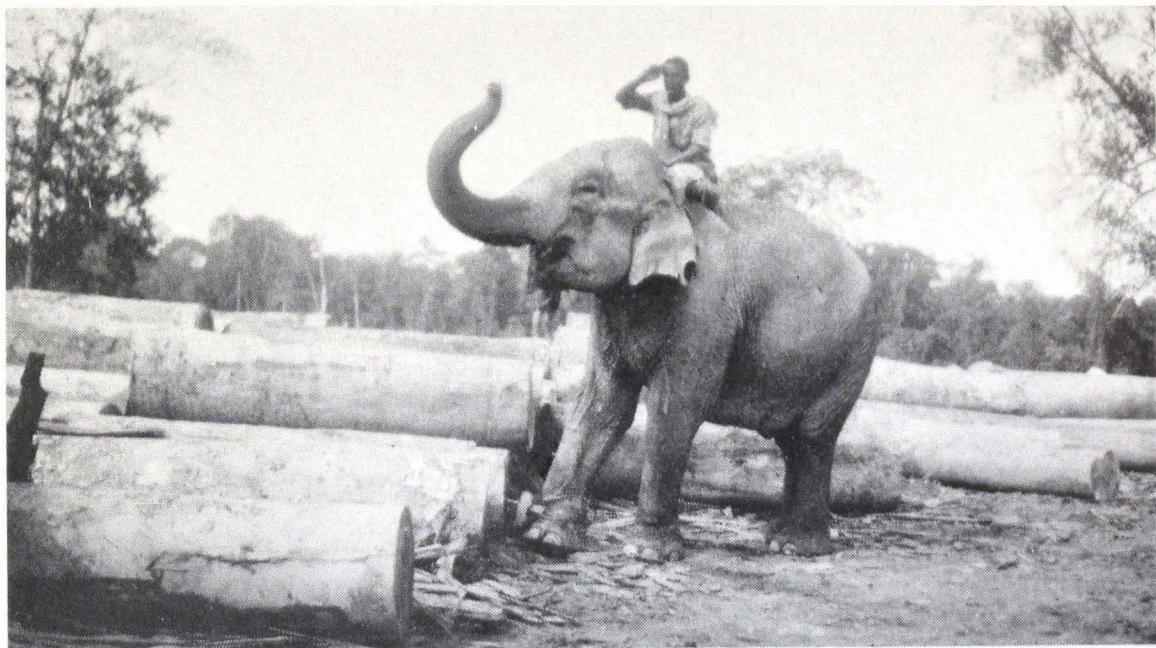
15. Sir Robert and Lady Reid and Major A. G. McCall (*back row r.*) with Lushai chiefs at Lungleh, December 1940





16. Mikir girls, Mikir Hills, November 1940

17. Garos, Garo Hills, January 1940



18. Namsoi Timber Camp, February 1941

19. Rotung Bungalow and Camp, December 1941

October under Major-General H. Bower; it consisted of 725 officers and men of the Military Police, two regular Indian Army battalions and detachments of the Bengal Sappers and Miners and of the 1st/2nd Gurkhas, besides thousands of coolies. Resistance was negligible and the expedition fulfilled its purpose of punishing the offending villages at the cost of only five killed and six wounded. British power was displayed to villagers ignorant of it before, a large area of unknown country was surveyed and mapped, and recommendations were made for its future administration.

While the Abor expedition was in the Abor country proper at the district's western end, another expedition known as the Mishmi Mission was sent to explore the eastern end. It entered heavily forested country having a few sparsely scattered villages and inhabited by Mishmi, Khamti and Sangpho tribesmen. One column under W. C. M. Dundas went up the Lohit Valley, of which we heard so much in 1962. Even then the question of Chinese penetration was very much to the fore, and Dundas was given specific instructions on how to deal with Chinese intruders. He found that on the whole the people favoured British protection, though the Chinese had made efforts to win their allegiance. This column must have gone as far as Walong, but not to Rima, which was always recognised as within South-Eastern Tibet. Chinese penetration had been under discussion as far back as 1886, when F. J. Needham reached Rima. Again in 1907-8 Williamson, unescorted, got to a point thirty-five miles south of it.

Though nothing after 1912 or so seems to have disturbed the peace of the Sadiya Frontier Tract until its eastern corner became prominent in 1962, the persistent efforts of Tibetan officials to exercise authority and levy taxes on villages this side of the McMahon Line were an annoyance right up to 1942, which saw the end of my time in Assam. Assam Rifles' posts were established far up the Upper Tsangpo Valley to counter these encroachments. So far as I was concerned, the final note on Rima was sounded when R. W. Godfrey spent a week there in 1940 and established friendly relations with officials and residents. This was the first time in twenty-six years that a British official had visited it; but we were, of course, allies

then of a China that had not gone Communist. So far as I know, the only contact which this Tract and its inhabitants had with the war of 1939–45 was when refugees from Burma found their way northwards and got out into British territory by the Chaukan Pass, a dreadful journey. A corps of Abor and Mishmi tribesmen did admirable work providing transport for these unfortunates.

In 1942, not long after I left Assam, a new political Agency, the Tirap Frontier Tract, was carved out of the Sadiya Frontier Tract. It had long been recognised that this area was so remote that the Political Officer could not really administer it from Sadiya, and, as the war went on, with refugees pouring through, and Chinese and American armies massing for advance into Burma by the Ledo route, the change became a necessity. The tract lies among the foothills and the many rivers of the Patkai range, which here forms the watershed between Assam and Burma. It is as well to emphasise that, though the Americans always spoke of the 'Hump' as part of the Himalaya, it was really the Patkai that they flew over so often on their way from Assam to China.

It was at this point that those refugees from the Japanese invaders of Burma in 1942 arrived in Assam. Their route took off from Myitkyina on the Irrawaddy in Burma and ran pretty well northwards up and over the Patkai by the Pangsau Pass, and down into the Assam Valley. It was a well known if in the years before the war little used route, being the shortest way from northern Burma to Assam, over the most convenient pass. This was the route which in the old days the Burmese armies used to invade Assam, and by which F. J. Needham, when in charge of the Sadiya Frontier Tract, twice marched into Burma, once in 1888 and again in 1891–2, when he joined up with a Burma column at Mainkhwom (a name well known to the refugees).

The chief inhabitants of this tangled maze of rivers and mountains were a Naga tribe called the Rangpang, rather a degraded lot compared with their brethren in the Naga Hills proper; backward enough for Williamson to have to report in 1908 that among them 'human sacrifice appears to be very common'. He found this was done to propitiate the household

deity as part of a strong tradition, which no Rangpang dare disobey, that every male of the tribe must account for two victims in his life, one on getting a house of his own and another on the birth of his first son. A slave would be purchased, and, so far as the expression can be used in connection with such a practice, treated humanely till his death. Years later, in 1925 and 1926, another Political Officer, T. P. O'Callaghan, reported on the subject. His view was that while such sacrifices had been performed on our side of the Patkai and were probably still carried out in the unadministered area to the south they were uncommon. I heard of no cases during my time in Assam. But when one remembers the nebulous character of our rule this side of the Patkai, and that Burma made no attempt to administer the tribal area of the valley for many miles to the south of the Patkai, it must be accepted that such practices were possible.

While Burma was still an integral part of the Indian Empire the Hukawng Valley route was thrice reconnoitred for a projected India-Burma Railway. In 1895-6 it was reported that the length from Ledo on the Assam-Bengal Railway to Mogaung to the west of Myitkyina would be 284 miles and cost Rs.383 lakhs. In 1917-18 a railway surveyor examined the same route and decided on the Sympana Saddle at 3,080 ft. above the sea (presumably identical with the point now known as the Pangsau Pass) as the only point where it was practicable to cross the Patkai.

The next North-East Frontier Tract is the Naga Hills, the most closely (though not very closely) administered part. 'Naga' is not a term the tribesmen themselves would ordinarily use; it is merely an Assamese word meaning 'naked'. A Naga would describe himself as a Lhota, an Angami, a Sema or any of the scores of tribes whom the outside world lumps together as 'Naga'. Among the tribes the differences are wide: in dress, dialects, customs; and in olden times, certainly, hostility between them often went deep. Nomenclature is bewildering, and it was not until such ethnologists as J. H. Hutton and J. P. Mills administered the district that light began to be thrown on the real names of tribes and villages, and misconceptions of the past were cleared up.

The Naga Hills were first made a British district in 1881, as a safeguard against raids into the plains around Nowgong and Sibsagar. The tendency to move farther and farther east and take more and more villages under control was unending, based on inescapable facts, and went on right up to the time I left Assam. The reason was well summed up by Lord Cranbrook, Secretary of State for India in 1878: 'The continuance in the immediate proximity of settled districts of a system of internecine warfare conducted principally against women and children cannot be tolerated.' So the process went on. Massacres just outside or just within our borders; a demand from local officers to bring the offenders under control; a reference to the Central Government, who were always reluctant but almost always had to agree; and so the frontier edged forward. I should say that the eastern boundary of the Naga District was more stabilised by 1942 than ever before, though there was always left a large tract of unadministered territory running up to the Burma border, which might eventually be included.

Grim as are many things in the history of the Nagas, by 1937 when the Naga Hills District was declared an Excluded Area under the 1935 Act, occurrences such as that in 1905, when the Deputy Commissioner had to report 545 murders in three and a half years by trans-Frontier tribes, or in 1906, when there was a massacre of 250 persons at the Dikhu ford, had become rare. Some of the older generation still felt regrets for the custom whereby a young Naga was not accepted as a full warrior unless he had taken the minimum number of heads; but both education and Christianity had spread, with repercussions on such ideas. All the same there were in 1936, '37 and '39 incidents which recalled earlier days. In 1936 Pangsha, a village outside the Control Area, had been responsible for over 200 deaths and J. P. Mills, the Deputy Commissioner, led a punitive expedition. Pangsha was duly punished, but the members of the force narrowly escaped ambush and destruction on their return. Only the skill and bravery of the Assam Rifles' Commandant and his Gurkha officers prevented a disaster. Pangsha offended again in 1939, taking ninety-six heads in a cis-Frontier village. An expedition went out under C. R. Pawsey, then Deputy Commissioner, and

punishment was severe. Apart from such incidents, which were localised, not much disturbed the peace of the district in the pre-1939 period, except the backwash of the disturbances in Manipur State in 1931-2, described on a later page.

The American Baptists had long been established in the Naga District and done excellent educational work, directed from their mission at Kohima. Methods of proselytising had become modified as the years passed, and latter-day missionaries sensibly tried to preserve all that was good in old traditions. But on dress the effect of contact with the missions was sad. Shirts and shorts, both apt to be dirty and show it, were a poor substitute for the traditional very suitable costume made out of multi-coloured home-woven cotton cloth.

The Nagas had a fine record during World War II. They were whole-heartedly on our side and rendered admirable service, being better versed in jungle-craft than any Japanese. They excelled in getting information and passing it to our troops, and in rescuing our sick and wounded and bringing them to safety. Field-Marshal Slim extols their virtues in his book *Defeat into Victory*, writing of

The gallant Nagas whose loyalty, even in the most depressing times of the invasion, had never faltered. Despite floggings, torture, execution, and the burning of their villages, they refused to aid the Japanese in any way or to betray our troops. Their active help to us was beyond value or praise. Under the leadership of devoted British political officers, some of the finest types of the Indian Civil Service, in whom they had complete confidence, they guided our columns, collected information, ambushed enemy patrols, carried our supplies, and brought in our wounded under the heaviest fire—and then, being the gentlemen they were, often refused all payment. Many a British and Indian soldier owes his life to the naked, head-hunting Naga, and no soldier of the Fourteenth Army who met them will ever think of them but with admiration and affection.

It is all the sadder, therefore, and humiliating, that the history of the Nagas since we left India has been one long tale of maladministration, misunderstanding, bloodshed and misery and the end is not yet.

Those of us who, before 1947, were speculating on the future

of the Hill Areas were very anxious that they should not be made the plaything of Indian politics, and when I retired in 1943 I tried to rouse interest in this problem at home. But everyone was rightly concentrating on winning the war, and anyhow India's North-East Frontier was much too small to hope for any special treatment in the post-war discussions. We had thought of setting up some sort of agency to embrace the whole North-East Frontier fringe, and to exclude it from the general run of Indian politics with which it had no affinity. But the only way to ensure this would have been somehow to separate this area from the territory being handed over, and all British India without qualification was being transferred to the successor Governments of India and Pakistan. So it would not work. The North-East Frontier fringe might within the meaning of the Reforms Act of 1935 be an Excluded Area, but it was still part of British India.

South of the Naga Hills lay Manipur, a small semi-independent State under the rule of its hereditary Maharaja, with an area of 8,000 sq. miles and a population of 500,000. The people were of two very different types. The central Manipur plain, the only large area of flat ground within the great sweep of mountains between India and Burma, was inhabited by the Manipuris proper and contained the capital at Imphal. Surrounding the plain was a ten times larger area of forest and hill where lived a mixed lot of Kukis, Nagas and other tribes. The ruling Manipuri race, orthodox and indeed bigoted Hindus, regarded the beef- and dog-eating tribesmen as altogether lower creatures and had never considered their welfare. Their sole interest was to see how much tribute they could extract without danger to themselves. Thoroughly bad administration led in 1917 to the Kuki rebellion. This took some time to quell and caused a tightening-up in British control. The Political Agent became specifically responsible for the welfare of the hill people, and though he had to consult the ruler on important matters his powers were wide.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie in 1884 dismissed the early history of Manipur as 'marked by internal wars of the most savage and revolting type in which sons murdered father and brothers murdered brothers without a single trait of heroism to



relieve the dark scene of blood and treachery'. In 1891 the State achieved unenviable prominence. The then Maharaja had abdicated, and a necessary part of implementing the abdication was removal from Manipur of one of his brothers, regarded as a danger to peace. With this end in view the Chief Commissioner, J. W. Quinton, went to Imphal with an escort of 400 men of the 42nd and 44th Gurkhas. His plans went awry from the start; in fact, the whole episode is one of bungling and mismanagement, and the final scene was enacted when Quinton, Commander of the troops, one other military officer and two civil officers went unarmed into the fort, which was swarming with rebel Manipuris, to parley. Once inside they were all murdered, and the force left in the Residency retreated in disorder by night. Punishment followed swiftly, and there was little resistance. But the 'Manipur disaster' figured largely in the London Press for a time, and annexation of the State was talked of. In the end the decision fell against it, and Chura Chand, an obscure collateral descendant of a long-defunct Maharaja, was enthroned under terms which ensured the State's complete subordination to the British.

In 1917 occurred the Kuki rebellion already mentioned; and then in 1931 trouble broke out because of a semi-religious movement launched in the hill portion of the State by one Jadonang, a Kabui Naga. Though Jadonang was soon arrested and hanged, the movement spread to neighbouring districts, where it was kept going by Gaidiliu, a female disciple, and more than a year elapsed before it could be subdued. Gaidiliu was not arrested until 1932, and was a prisoner in Aijal when I was there in '38. The movement had been in no sense a revolt against British authority nor was Gaidiliu a 'queen' of the Nagas as it suited some to style her.

Manipur, of course, achieved international fame during World War II. The Imphal plain became one of the 14th Army's main bases, and its successful resistance to the Japanese onslaughts early in 1944, together with the heroic defence of Kohima fifty miles to the north, proved the turning-point which ensured liberation of Burma next year.

The Lushai Hills form the southernmost of Assam's Hill districts. They have the plains district of Silchar on the west,

the Chin Hills of Burma on the east, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the south. As with the Nagas, our first contacts with the Lushais were unfriendly, for they, too, were raiders of the plains. The need to protect the Bengal districts of Cachar, Sylhet, Tippera and Chittagong led us gradually on, until in 1890 the Lushai Hills area was taken directly under British administration. It then made quiet progress. A name long remembered in South Lushai was that of Captain Thomas Lewin, who served from 1865 to 1874 in these hills, and impressed himself profoundly on the people's respect and affection. Dressed in native costume, he toured barefoot throughout his charge, and a monument to his memory still stands at Demagiri, the hills' southernmost point. Though the tablet was sent out by his wife from England, the massive stone cairn it is fixed to was put up by the people themselves. It was in good order when I saw it in 1941. His book, *A Fly on the Wheel*, unfortunately long out of print, gives a vivid picture of the life of an early administrator among a primitive, lovable people.

The Lushais are said by some ethnologists to originate from the South-West Pacific, and to have migrated through Burma to their present habitat. Naturally intelligent, and soon much the most advanced of the tribes in the Excluded Areas, they had eagerly accepted the education brought them by Welsh Calvinist and English Baptist missionaries, and many undertook higher studies in the schools and universities on the plains. A cheerful people, and great talkers, they show keen interest in the outer world, and have much political good sense. But religiously they are emotional. Anything like 'revivalism' appeals to them, and in 1937, when preachers claimed to 'speak with tongues' and prophesied the end of the world on a certain date, a whole village of them went mad, refused to till their fields and just ate and drank and danced. It was not till the Superintendent arrested the leaders that they came to their senses.

The Lushais' contribution to the war effort in 1939-45 was large and cheerfully given. They sent many recruits to the Assam Regiment, the Indian Hospital Corps, the Assam Rifles, and still more to the local Labour Corps, while Lushai girls who had trained in the Mission Hospital did admirable service almost all over the world.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *Much Touring*

IN JANUARY 1938 we went to the Naga Hills: by train from Gauhati to Naojan, thence by bridle-path to a camp on the Doyang; and thereafter six mostly uphill marches took us to Kohima, the district headquarters. The tribesmen through whose territory we passed were mostly Lhotas, distinguished by their tonsured heads. At Kohima (5,000 ft.) we were in the centre of the Angami country and had a great welcome from tribesmen dressed in their gala finery of hornbill feathers, bearskins and so forth. I was able to see Charles Pawsey, Deputy Commissioner, that evening; he had been very ill, but was making a recovery. Unlike such predecessors as J. H. Hutton and J. P. Mills, he was no anthropologist. But he was a first-rate administrator who knew every corner of his district, and I believe his influence was largely why the Nagas rendered us such loyal service in the critical days of 1944. He was present throughout the siege of Kohima, one of the fiercest battles in the war against Japan, fighting amid the ruins of what had been his home.

Kohima stands on the saddle over which the main road from railhead at Dimapur passes to Imphal. Originally a big Angami village, it became the headquarters of the Naga Hills District in 1875. All the usual accompaniments of a district headquarters were there: jail, courts, hospital, schools, and the Deputy Commissioner's house standing on the hill since made famous. Kohima was also the headquarters of the 3rd Battalion, Assam Rifles.

The Nagas there provided some very interesting shows. One was tribal dancing, and with it tribal costume, displayed on the Assam Rifles' parade ground. First we were introduced to

a line of some 200 *dobashis*: interpreters who knew Assamese and could translate tribal dialect into that language, wearing their official uniform of red flannel waistcoat and red blanket, plus tribal costume. Then the dancers trooped down in hundreds, all in special finery. There were western Angamis, the most elaborately dressed, with cart-wheel size head-dresses composed of hornbill tail-feathers mounted on cane; eastern Angamis somewhat similarly clad though with heads bare or but slightly adorned; Aos, bareheaded and less flamboyant in costume; Semas, distinguished by bearskin head-dresses of bandeau shape with a feather or two on top; Konyaks, rather small and slinky, their characteristic adornment being the very tight waist-belt which they are said never to take off day or night; and a bevy of charming little Kacha Naga girls, their hair hanging straight and with a fringe, clad from neck to knee in dark cloth with a coloured border.

There were also some Changs from away to the east. Their leader was Ngaku, a fine upstanding figure wearing a big head-dress of cane surmounted by two tall feathers. Round his neck was a necklace of gleaming boar tusks, on his arms broad armlets of ivory, and hanging from his waist a wide deep sporran of white cowrie shells. Altogether a commanding person, free and independent in mien. Another impressive headman was an eastern Angami called Thevoni. He must have weighed sixteen stone, and was a grand spectacle in a bearskin head-dress with a many-coloured tribal cloth draped over his *dobashi's* blanket. All were marshalled in their tribal groups, and while they danced their peculiar measures we could go round them and take photographs. It was wonderful. The dance over, we were presented with various gifts: eggs, fowls, home-woven clothes, a bearskin shield, a large buffalo horn. We were to see many Naga dances before we left Assam, and those of other tribes, too; but I think this Kohima experience was best.

The other scene which memory recalls was a mass of Angamis levelling a new football-ground not far down the main road. This was voluntary unpaid labour—they are very keen on football—and three or four villages were coming in at a time to work on it. They were ranged in rows, every man with his

*kodali* in his hand. A leader gave the word, and each stroke was taken in unison, with a grunt which resounded forcefully from a thousand throats.

From Kohima we went to Manipur, meeting Christopher Gimson, the Political Agent, at Mao, the first rest-house within Manipur territory. It was a long drive, on a road afterwards widened and improved by the 14th Army to carry troops and supplies. This was the route by which Kitchener, when Commander-in-Chief, had travelled to Manipur and Burma in 1904. Curzon had visited Manipur and Burma three years before, but chose the Cachar-Bishenpur route, which he covered in a four-wheeled buggy escorted by the Surma Valley Light Horse. Our next stop was Imphal.

The Residency, rebuilt after damage during the 1891 disturbances, was imposing, reached by a flight of stone steps. My wife and I were in the Guest House, which, unlike the Residency, had no plinth and was therefore damp. Entertainments were arranged. There were boat races on a rectangular artificial lake between huge dug-outs each propelled by forty or fifty paddlers encouraged by their own cheer-leaders in the bows. The noise was terrific.

There was also polo, Manipur being the home of polo in eastern India. It was exciting. No goal-posts; little attention paid to how many players were on each side, anything up to seven or nine seeming in order; one could carry the ball in one's hand if one liked, and anyone feeling tired could slip to the side, rest a while and return. If the Governor was present, chukkers were long or short as his fancy dictated. The ponies' bridles had bright-coloured tassels and the saddles big leather guards to shield the riders' bare legs, their rattling making an unexpected accompaniment to the game. The Manipuris use a very long stick and slide their grip up and down as required. This gives them a big stretch, and it was disconcerting when one was about to take a nice comfortable shot to find one's stick hooked, or the ball flicked away, by an opponent who by the ordinary rules would have been far out of reach. Manipur formerly bred an excellent strain of ponies, but Shillong races had drawn away all the best of them.

Hockey, of which polo was merely a horseback variant, the

same word being used for both, was also laid on: as were Manipuri wrestling, Naga dances and a State nautch of the Hindu type after a grand banquet—and so on. Inspecting schools and other institutions filled in the rest of our ten days' visit, and a duck-shoot on the huge Logtak Lake. I am afraid I did no justice to the wonderful chances offered.

Early February saw us back at Shillong, where the Chief Minister was waiting with proposals for reconstructing his Cabinet. As a result, five members resigned and a new Ministry of six was formed. With an economy I think never repeated, the pay of the sixth Minister was subscribed by his colleagues so as not to exceed budget provision. The new Ministry was somewhat stronger, in that one very feeble member had been dropped.

We spent only a week in Shillong, however, before starting off anew, this time to Silchar and the Lushai Hills. At Silchar, the annual camp of the Surma Valley Light Horse was in progress, and it was a pleasure to meet many tea-planters and their wives and join in their ceremonial parade and a dinner. Though neither the Surma Valley nor the Assam Valley Light Horse was ever likely to be called out as a body, they formed a fine reservoir for training officers, and many joined the Indian Army in the two World Wars.

On 12 February we set forth from Silchar up the bridle-path to Aijal, a distance of about 100 miles, now served I believe by a good motorable road. It took us seven days' marching, doing thirteen to fourteen miles a day, and though we had ponies in case of need, my wife and I walked nearly all of it. The road undulated, but ascent was progressive, from near sea-level at Silchar to 3,500 ft. at Aijal. Major A. G. McCall, the Superintendent, met us at his boundary and came with us. Moving slowly, we enjoyed the scenery, the well-forested hills and valleys and distant views of great blue mountains; often the early morning mist would give fresh beauty. There were two-roomed rest-houses at each stage, supplemented by *bashas*, the grass-and-bamboo huts which the local people erect so quickly and well.

Our four days in Aijal were full of engagements. The 1st Assam Rifles have headquarters here in buildings put up by

Colonel Loch some thirty years before, and I inspected the Lines and attended a parade. Another day we were entertained by Miss Hughes of the Welsh Mission and her girl choir. The Lushais are as musically inclined as the Welsh. We were also interested in the Lushai Hills' Industries started by the McCalls. They had inspired the womenfolk with their zeal for arts and crafts and were developing the manufacture of cloth with local designs in white or tinted cotton as well as typical Lushai rugs. We left by the Dholeswari, the river which ran below and parallel to the ridge by which we had come up, reaching railhead at Lalaghat after three days and travelling thence by the hill section of the railway to Gauhati and home.

Ten days in Shillong enabled me to get abreast with affairs, meet some of the new Ministers, and watch the Cabinet get their second budget through the Assembly. At this time Saadulla was optimistic about his reconstructed Ministry's prospects. Then on 10 March 1938 we were off again, now to Jorhat, for a formal meeting with the Assam Valley branch of the Indian Tea Association. The branch always invited a new Governor to meet local planters in this way. The Assam Valley Light Horse were holding their annual camp at Jorhat, too, so there was much going on: polo, dances, a regimental dinner. Besides, there were the usual institutions of a district headquarters to inspect, and one day a cattle show arranged by planters who had interested themselves in improving the local breed.

While at Jorhat we stayed at Tocklai, the tea industry's research centre. Here they had a trained staff, and a visit to the laboratories and experimental plots fascinatingly displayed the progress made in growth and manufacture of tea since the time, just a century before, when the first shipment of Assam tea went to Mincing Lane. Jorhat District is the home of Assam tea; it was at Sibsagar in 1823 that Robert Bruce found wild tea, the seeds of which his brother C. A. Bruce cultivated, and so became, as his memorial tablet in Tezpur Church sets forth, the innovator of the indigenous Assam tea. Previously China tea had dominated the market, and in the early days of the Indian industry bushes from China were planted, Chinese methods of manufacture adopted, even Chinese labour brought

in. But soon, thanks to the Bruces, the native bush came into its own, and local methods evolved with local labour proved superior to anything the Chinese could teach.

From Jorhat we went on to Margherita, around which the Assam Railway and Trading Company had coal-mines, tea-gardens and a timber depot. The coal at Ledo and Baragolai is near the surface, easily worked and of good quality. Readers knowledgeable in the history of the Second World War will recall the name Ledo, for it was there, in 1943, that a huge base was developed for American and Chinese troops waiting to move into northern Burma to free it from the Japanese, and hundreds of miles of road were built through the jungle.

Moving on, we had a few days' relaxation in the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary, a large area of swamp and jungle. We spent two enchanting mornings on elephants, seeing three rhino, three buffalo, many deer and much feathered game the first day. The second day was even better. A rhino came into view early, a young one, but soon rushed away with the railway-whistle-like snort characteristic of them. The second was more experienced, and plainly did not like the look of us; he advanced shaking his head menacingly, and when we turned away after taking all the photographs we wanted, he followed us for quite a distance, seeing us off his territory. The last encounter was best of all. Just as we had left the Sanctuary and were going across the open to the cars, we sighted two full-grown rhino feeding on the short grass in front of the high jungle in which we had been. We got within about fifty yards before they moved off; a fine sight, which none who were there will forget. Altogether that day we saw thirteen rhino, seventeen buffalo, many deer and a wild elephant, besides pelicans, grey geese and storks.

Gauhati, our next place of call, is the chief town in the Assam Valley and I had innumerable institutions to inspect, educational and other. The place is also important as a communications centre, lying on the Assam side of what then was the unbridged Brahmaputra River. All passengers to Shillong from India proper had to detrain at Amingaon on the north bank, cross by ferry to Pandu on the Assam-Bengal Railway just below Gauhati, and then continue by rail or motor up the



trunk road. When I joined, plans for a bridge across the river were in their final stages, but held up pending decision whether it should be a combined road-and-rail bridge or for rail only. Like most people in Assam, I strongly favoured the former. And then, in 1939, war came and the whole thing was shelved. But what a boon that bridge would later have been to our generals on the Japanese front! However, more of that anon.

Back in Shillong, I got the news that I would probably soon have to act as Governor of Bengal in the absence of Lord Brabourne, who was to act as Viceroy while Lord Linlithgow went on leave. This entailed much readjusting of personal plans, for my wife was due to go home in the summer. Lord and Lady Brabourne came to Shillong a few days later, when he was able to tell me about present-day politics in Bengal. Clearly, I was in for a troublesome time.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *Back to Bengal*

I TOOK OVER as acting Governor of Bengal towards the end of June 1938. The Ministry proved to be far from secure, and their position and doings gave constant anxiety throughout my four months' tenure. We also had much unforeseeable anxiety in our domestic affairs. Altogether we felt very glad to get back to Shillong at the end of it.

My first Cabinet meeting occurred a few days later. Of course, I knew most of the Ministers; nearly all had been Members of the Legislative Council during my previous service in Bengal, mostly as our opponents during Dyarchy. Fazlul Huq was Chief Minister, a man of great influence among Muslims and almost a hero in his native district of Barisal, where he had been the first Muslim to become a member of the English Bar. My estimate of him in the old Legislature was of a very able debater, but quite unpredictable, except in the sense that, if he did intervene, which was not often, we could be sure of trouble. His fiercely communal outlook was illustrated towards the end of this 'acting' time of mine in Bengal, when one Saturday night he suddenly sent in a proposal to the Chief Secretary to ban all processions past mosques during the Kali Puja, an important Hindu festival due next week. Music before mosques was an old bone of contention between Hindu and Muslim and he knew perfectly well the furore such an action would cause. Most of Sunday morning was spent in talking with him and with Sir Nazimuddin, a moderating influence, and with Henry Twynam, the Chief Secretary. He was furious against what he termed 'those brutes of Congress', but in the end agreed not to press his proposal. It was a symptom of the intense ill will between the two communities

which was to culminate so horribly a few years later in Calcutta, Noakhali and elsewhere. It also showed the dangers of having men in power bent on putting their community's interests before that of the State. I think there is no harm, since both men are dead, in recording how Sir Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy once in a burst of confidence described the character of the head of the Ministry of which he was a member. He said he was quite the most unstable and unscrupulous person he had ever come across. Yet, he added, he was the sole possible leader of the Muslims in Bengal; no one else had anything like his influence.

Communal though he was, Fazlul Huq was wise enough to have a very able Hindu in his Cabinet as Finance Minister, Nalini Ranjan Sarker. Among the Muslim members was H. S. Suhrawardy, as unpredictable and communal as his chief, always prone besides to interfere in other people's business. He came from West Bengal. The two stable members were the aforementioned Nazimuddin and B. P. Singh Roy, both good friends of mine, the former Home Member, the latter in charge of Revenue. 'Nuzzy', as he liked to be called, belonged to the aristocratic house of the Nawabs of Dacca who had settled in East Bengal in Moghul times. It is interesting, when we hear so much of the aloofness of the British, to note how aloof the Moghul officials could be sent earlier to govern Bengal. They did not even trouble to learn the local language. Nuzzy once told me that, in the Nawab's palace at Dacca, Urdu was always spoken, and that he only started learning Bengali when in adult life he went into politics and had to make speeches.

Bijoy was a scion of another immigrant family brought to Bengal by the Moghuls, who readily employed able Hindus in high posts when it suited them. He was a Rajput with all a Rajput's gentlemanly charm and everyone liked him; but though he might hold strong views he had no great force of character. The remaining members of the Cabinet were not conspicuous for ability or public-spiritedness. To one, Nawab Musharraf Hussein, I had as mentioned been a departmental secretary when he was a Minister. Our relations now were different and less close, fortunately for me. In matters of real importance the Chief Minister was apt to consult a sort of inner

Cabinet consisting of himself, Nuzzy, Bijoy, Nalini Sarker, and perhaps one or two others.

During the monsoon session of the Assembly the Ministers had to face a widely-sponsored No Confidence vote. This made communal feeling run high. The motions (one against each Minister) were to be on 8 August, and for days before there was wild talk and much political coming and going, complicated among some Ministers by underlying distrust of their chief. Rousing the Muslim rabble was, I think, mainly in the hands of Suhrawardy, who regarded their processions with great complacency, boasting that he could always control the mob. On the day of the motions the precincts of the Assembly chamber were full of Muslim demonstrators with green flags who greeted the defeat of the first motion with deafening shouts. Demonstrations continued throughout the three days on which the motions were debated. Only the first was pressed to a division. On this occasion the mob though noisy was orderly, but the symptoms of grave trouble were there, and they much worried the Commissioner of Police.

Before this crisis we made the annual visit required of a Governor to Dacca, capital of Eastern Bengal. This was in accordance with the pledge, given in 1912 at the time of the annulment of Partition, that the Government would spend part of each year there. As time went on, the length of the visit had been whittled down, and, in fact, our 1938 stay lasted only fifteen days, and this, as far as I know, caused no adverse comment. Ministers found it a nuisance to have to go there for Cabinet meetings, of which we had several. Part of our journey, out and back, was done in the *Mary Anderson*, the houseboat which Sir John had named after his daughter; a cool, comfortable method of travel on the great rivers of Bengal. At Dacca we stayed at the 'temporary' Government House, built by the short-lived Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1906. It was a pleasant house, but infested with Dacca mosquitoes, very big and fierce.

There were plenty of official engagements there: a durbar, a meeting of Dacca University Convocation, a Police parade; and on the social side races, golf and endless dinner- and tea-parties; all very exacting, and it proved too much for my wife,

who soon after we got back to Calcutta was taken very ill. All through August we were in great anxiety, but she then began to mend and, on 9 September, we were thankful to leave the heat of Calcutta and that large oppressive Government House and get up to Darjeeling for a while. Meanwhile our daughter had joined us, to have her first baby. She had flown from Gilgit, where her husband was Political Agent.

Before we left Calcutta, however, on the evening of 9 September a crisis blew up in the jute industry. Jute was in H. S. Suhrawardy's portfolio, and there were anxious discussions with him and other Ministers on whether to issue an Ordinance. The industry was running into difficulties which it seemed incapable of settling itself, making Government intervention inevitable, and Suhrawardy himself wanted this, hoping thereby to enhance his reputation through restoration of Bengal's prosperity. It all happened in a great hurry, and was difficult to arrange, because, under the Constitution, it entailed reference to the Viceroy or, in this instance, to the acting Viceroy, Lord Brabourne, who, as permanent Governor of Bengal, was indirectly much concerned. However, the Cabinet agreed, and advised me to issue an Ordinance. That was on 8 September. But the Ordinance was not to be published till the 10th, and newspapers to be given the news the night before. So it was disquieting to say the least when, on the very evening (8 September) after I had signed the Ordinance, a member of the Assembly asked at the Secretariat what this particular Ordinance was that the Governor had just signed, and when later that evening Nalini Sarker, the Finance Minister, came round, very agitated, to say there had been heavy buying of jute shares by one of the Ministry's supporters in anticipation of a rise. So someone must have given out the news. Yet so far as I was aware only three members of the Cabinet knew anything. There had been a 'leak', enabling somebody to make a packet of money; no one in Calcutta could doubt it.

World news during this time had become very alarming. On 14 September, soon after we reached Darjeeling, the ultimatum to the Czech Government was reported. Next day we heard of Chamberlain's trip to Berchtesgaden, and were warned by the Government of India from Simla that 'war book' plans might

be put into operation at any moment. An improvement seemed to follow; then came Chamberlain's visit to Godesberg, and Hitler's Nuremberg speech. On the 27th arrived a further pessimistic wire from Simla; so I thought it best to go down to Calcutta, meet the Cabinet, and see what war preparations we could make. The Cabinet met on the 29th, all but three members being present; and without hesitation they promised unstinted support to the British Government in the event of war—a heartening episode amidst the general gloom. Next day the Munich agreement was signed.

Only a few weeks were now left of my temporary Bengal Governorship, and on 24 October, the family all now being fit to travel, we returned to Shillong and what we felt were our proper surroundings, happy to be (as we mistakenly thought) finished permanently with the problems of Bengal.

*Congressites in Assam*

BACK IN ASSAM I found a new Ministry installed under Gopinath Bardoloi, an Assam Valley Hindu of the Congress party; a devout Gandhian, honest, obstinate, not very intelligent and with small gift for leadership. He had a mixed Cabinet, mostly Hindu, and containing only one member with talents above the ordinary: a young Muslim with a Cambridge degree from Gauhati, named Fakhruddin, in charge of Revenue and Finance. Why he had joined the Congress party I do not know; perhaps from ambition. But he stood out as the only one of them having administrative ability, and in conversation, one day, he agreed that it was he who bore most of the Ministry's burden.

Bardoloi during my first few interviews with him seemed unhappy about his position, which was indeed precarious, as usual in Assam politics. The moment one party or coalition got into power everyone else strove whole-heartedly to overthrow them. Things came to a head on 8 December, when No Confidence votes were moved. One of them stood in the name of the European Group. I had been told before that they did not expect to carry it, but wanted scope to show publicly their objections to the Ministry's policies. The voting was fifty-four for and fifty against, so the Ministry survived. Saadulla was behind the No Confidence votes, but took no part in the debate. Afterwards in a talk with him I heard a dismal tale of bribery. He alleged, too—and I saw no reason to doubt it—that one of his supporters had been kidnapped and carried off to a tea-garden on the north bank until the debate was over.

It was a relief to get away from politics in mid-December for a week at Sadiya, whence we went, one day, to see the Assam

Rifles' post at Dening some forty-six miles up the Lohit Valley, and then on to Pasighat, headquarters of the Assistant Political Officer, who looked after the Abor tribes in the country north towards the McMahon Line and west towards the Subansiri. He was Mr. J. H. F. Williams of the Indian Police, young and able, who had mastered the Abor language, toured widely, and knew the tribes' habits. With him and Mr. R. W. Godfrey, the Political Officer, we next day met several headmen of the Abor villages. Though the Abors' workaday costume is scanty and utilitarian, this time they were all dressed up. Their ordinarily plain cane helmets, shaped rather like the 1914 British 'tin hat', were now adorned with pig's tusks, large tufts of bearskin, and birds' feathers. Beneath hung long mantle-like garments of thick home-woven felt, some gaudily patterned, and every man carried on his left hip a typical square-ended broadsword, used like the Nagas' or the Lushais' *dao*<sup>1</sup> for all purposes, domestic or warlike.

From Pasighat we moved to our Christmas camp on Pekar Chapri. A *chapri* is an open space once covered by a river, and generally carries long grass and small trees; the sort of spot that graminivorous animals such as buffalo and rhino like. This one was on the far side of the Dihong, a charming place at the confluence of two small rivers. It had a reputation for buffalo, and Godfrey was keen I should get one. They were there all right and we saw many tracks, but I got only a small one with not good horns.

Back in Shillong the Chief Minister told me, at an early interview, that he was determined on the prohibition, first, of the use and sale of opium, and then of all excisable articles. This was in fulfilment of his Gandhian principles. Prohibition of opium alone meant a loss of Rs.6 lakhs' revenue, an argument which, however, carried no weight with him. The Cabinet's general attitude to finance was by the test of common prudence deplorable. Discussing the budget at a Cabinet meeting next day, they were faced with a deficit of Rs.16 lakhs, but that did not prevent them undertaking Rs.6 lakhs' new expenditure.

In January we paid our second visit to the Naga Hills. Ten

<sup>1</sup> Or the Gurkhas' *kukri*.



days or so of walking took us up from railhead to Mokokchung, headquarters of a subdivision. The first big tribal gathering assembled for us was at Wakching in the Konyak country, above 4,000 feet. Some of the headmen, known here as Aungs, were much venerated: each had his own stool carried about with him; he could sit on that and no other. At a durbar of the Konyak tribe Mr. Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner, asked me to lecture them about tribal quarrels. Our policy was that we seldom interfered in these unless fire-arms were used. But there had been some recent instances of this, and Pawsey wanted to stop it. So I said that, in future, misdemeanours would be punished by payment in guns, instead of in money or by imprisonment. And it was good to learn that, a few days later, a number of guns were surrendered. The durbar was followed by Konyak dancing. The *zu* (a local brew) had evidently flowed freely and they put up a fine display which went on long after we left.

At Mokokchung, which we reached on 25 January, crowds from several tribes and villages were gathered. Men attended from the far-off Kalo Kengnyo village of Pangsha, against which, because of local slave-raiding, we had had to send punitive expeditions in 1936 and '37. It is, I think, typical of the Naga that he bears no grudge. We enjoyed our visit to the biggest Ao village, Ungma, about three miles off, where the Moadsu or Spring Festival dancing was in progress up and down the village street. One episode was a tug-of-war between men and women, using a creeper as rope, while an ancient dame, the worse for *zu*, wandered about with a pipe in her mouth, shrieking encouragement impartially to either side. The afternoon ended with a visit to the house of Likok, the local *dobashi*, where we met his wife and daughter and enjoyed a cup of *zu*; a charming family, all smiles, perfectly natural and at ease.

On return to Shillong I was faced with one of those awkward incidents which, perhaps inevitably, mark transition from rule by an alien bureaucracy to that by Ministers responsible to the electorate. A Government servant accustomed to accept orders only from experienced official superiors tends to be suspicious when getting them from politicians, with some of whom he may

have clashed previously in the course of duty. The new holder of authority, on his side, may want to assert himself, and be touchy, and apt to see slights where none are meant. And in this case, unfortunately, a slight had, I believe, been meant. The Chief Minister had been visiting a certain station, and gave out that he would see officers at a definite time and date. One officer, of the Police, did not attend. The Minister then ordered his transfer to a less desirable district. I thought the punishment disproportionate; a good talking-to, which I was prepared to give myself if necessary, would have sufficed. I saw both the persons concerned. The Chief Minister was determined; and the officer, whom I saw soon after in February when visiting his district during what proved to be our last tour in Assam for eight months, was pretty stiff, too. Moreover, while with him, I soon felt sure that what he did had been intentional. So I had to tell him I could not regard his case as strong, nor contest the Chief Minister's decision. It was agreed to hold up orders till I got back to Shillong and could see the Chief Minister again, but this did not happen, for reasons to be explained in a moment. Anyhow, the transfer was made, and the officer did not resign as he had threatened.

That February tour took us first to Jorhat races, an annual event in this tea-garden district. Thence we crossed the Brahmaputra by an ancient ferry, and after that the Subansiri, and on by car to North Lakhimpur, a subdivision of Dibrugarh District, meeting numerous tea-planters *en route*, and doing the usual inspections. (Lakhimpur is the old official name of the whole district, though it is generally known as Dibrugarh.) From there we had a lovely drive of about sixty miles westwards, with the foothills on our right and the great snow peaks beyond, and reached Halem tea-estate, where we were hospitably received by the manager, Mr. Burton, and his wife. We were now in Tezpur District, which contains most of the 'North Bank' tea-gardens between the Brahmaputra and the Himalayan foothills. Our objective was the Balipara Frontier Tract, and our way lay through Bishnauth, the centre of this group of gardens, where we again met many of the managers. Before starting I had had a wire saying Lord Brabourne, in Calcutta, was to be operated on for appendicitis, and I felt

apprehensive that this might mean my early reversion to Bengal. However, we got to Lokra (or Charduar), and had three days there while news of Brabourne continued satisfactory. One day Lightfoot, the Political Officer, got in numerous local tribesmen, some of whom performed their dances. Those of the Aka tribe were dull, but the Sherchokpas, whose culture was Bhutanese, gave a performance similar to those one was accustomed to see in the Buddhist monasteries of Darjeeling. All wore grotesque masks; some dressed up to resemble yaks and deer. A party of their headmen known as the *Sat* (seven) *Rajas* came in, too, headed by a white-haired leader named Wangia. He and his companions were magnificently arrayed in stiff yellow brocade garments and wore shiny yellow-lacquered head-dresses. All were mounted on shaggy Tibetan ponies, everything suggesting a close affinity between the people and the Tibetan-Buddhist culture of the north.

After leaving Lokra we made for Tezpur, stopping on the way for a great lunch-party of some ninety people given by the planters of Thakurbari Club. Tezpur is (or was, it may now be somewhat dishevelled after the events of 1962) a pretty little place on the banks of the Brahmaputra. And here, on the 22nd, the blow fell. I got orders to join in Bengal on the 24th. Lord Brabourne was gravely ill. He died on the 23rd, the day before I reached Calcutta.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *An Unhappy Reversion*

MY FIRST PUBLIC DUTY on reaching Calcutta was to attend Lord Brabourne's funeral. His body had lain in the Cathedral guarded by members of the bodyguard since the previous afternoon. Sir Roger Lumley (now Lord Scarbrough), Governor of Bombay, was there and all the local officials. It was a very trying ordeal, as, after the service in the Cathedral, the coffin was taken in procession, all of us walking, to St. John's Church, perhaps a mile and a half away, near Government House. The procession took, with frequent halts, nearly two hours, and the day happened to be very warm for so early in the year. It was past six and quite dark by the time all was over. Then followed my swearing in.

Lady Brabourne went home about a week later. Before she went she had a long talk with me about her husband's illness. Unfounded rumours about it persisted, though a communiqué had been put out immediately he died; so I was glad to have authentic information which I could pass on, and I made a point of impressing it on each member of the Cabinet. Lady Brabourne was absolutely satisfied that the surgeons had done all that was possible. Brabourne was found to be suffering from a cancerous growth, which became apparent as they operated; subsequently his heart gave out and nothing could have saved him.

What a loss he was! He had been a successful Governor of Bombay; had already made his mark in Bengal; and was clearly marked out for higher office whether in India or at home. He had character and ability far above the average, and a capacity for assessing other people.

I saw most members of the Cabinet soon after I joined. There had, I think, been no changes since I left four months before. Though a dissolution was then in the air, it was only

vaguely so, and the political situation during the interval had, in fact, caused no great anxiety.

But appointments were a constant source of friction, simply because communal considerations and not the public good nor the merits of the officers were so often the test which guided most Ministers. One such was the appointment of an ophthalmic surgeon at Calcutta's Medical College Hospital. There were two candidates, a Hindu and a Muslim, the former's qualifications being far superior; but the Minister, himself a Muslim, would not budge even though the Muslim Chief Minister was willing to accept the Hindu. I had eventually to agree to the Minister in charge getting his way; and I often afterwards wondered how many hapless patients suffered in consequence. It was my misfortune to be involved in a similar affair in Assam two years later.

These controversies arose directly out of the permissive nature of the statute dealing with Public Service Commissions. By section 266 of the Reforms Act of 1935 a Public Service Commission was established in each province to conduct examinations for admission to the services; it had to be consulted on methods of recruitment, on the principles to be followed in making appointments, and on all disciplinary matters. But though the Instrument of Instructions to Governors expressed the pious hope that Ministers would accept a convention that the Commission's advice should always be taken, only consultation was obligatory, and the Ministry had the last word. The first chairman of the Commission in Bengal, F. W. Robertson, had tried hard to get the proposed convention established, but to no avail. Indeed, Fazlul Huq and Nazimuddin told me plainly they would never consent to it. It was the same in Assam. The Commissions found their efforts to give the best advice on appointments frustrated at every turn, and it was impossible for a Governor to do other than acquiesce. The Commissions were composed of a European chairman (generally a retired officer) with a Hindu and a Muslim as colleagues. It can be imagined that a conscientious chairman found his position unpleasant.

These incidents illustrated two things: the paramount importance to an Indian Ministry that it should be seen to be

exercising patronage; and the heavy shadow cast by communal antagonism on all appointments. Both influences had their bearing on the majority a Ministry might be able to command in the Assembly, or, in the event of an election, in the country.

This communal feeling became more intense at each indication that Britain was divesting herself of power. But we were all still thinking, of course, in terms of the undivided India which Britain had built up; the 'two nation' theory was scarcely considered, and the Muslims in 1939 had not begun to insist on Pakistan as the solution.

Interviews with civilian officers at this time also gave cause for misgiving. After two years of provincial autonomy the services were not demoralised but were certainly disheartened. There had been far too much political interference with the course of administration, the communal factor being evident at every turn. Heads of Departments and other high officers were not only disquieted by what was going on, but about the effects of this on the subordinate services. Members of the latter would seldom say much, for fear of what might happen to them if their views became known to local Members of the Assembly or the Minister.

Illness and convalescence took up part of this second acting Governorship of mine in Bengal, for scarcely more than a week after Brabourne's funeral I myself had to have an appendix operation, and was not fit for much for some weeks. I was operated on by the same surgeon as had operated on Brabourne. This gave rise to comment, so my wife persuaded the other doctors to introduce in consultation that eminent and wise Indian doctor and politician, the late Dr. B. C. Roy. This had a good effect. Anyhow, I had no cause to complain.

Throughout this time my wife was busy with public functions; in some she deputised for me and some were in her own domain. Notable among the latter was the opening of the new buildings of the Dufferin Hospital in March. This is the chief women's hospital in Calcutta, founded in the 1880s, so it had become out of date. But perhaps what we both looked back to with most satisfaction in this period in Bengal was starting the reconstruction of the servants' quarters at Government

House. This was solely due to my wife's initiative. During her illness in Calcutta in 1938 she had time to talk to the numerous servants about their working conditions, and the quarters in Calcutta were really a scandal. Lord Lytton in 1926 when Governor had described them as insufficient and insanitary. They were more so now; neither light nor air penetrated into the quarters at Government Place and decent sanitary arrangements did not exist. Things were worse in Wellesley Place, where what used to be the stables of the Bodyguard had been diverted to human use. It was disgraceful that when Government was exhorting employers to see to their labour's welfare, the housing of employees of the Head of the Province should be such a cause for reproach. Plans went forward, and in 1942, when I was once more in Calcutta in another capacity, my wife and I had the satisfaction of seeing a brand-new building in Wellesley Place which really did provide decent accommodation for the staff. What happened to the project to alter the Government Place building I do not know.

While at Darjeeling during this Bengal period we were able to visit Gangtok, capital of Sikkim, staying at the Residency with the Political Officer, the late Sir Basil Gould, an old friend. It is a delightful house built mostly of wood, the architecture best suited to the surroundings, and with magnificent views of the snows, Kinchenjunga, Pandim, Siniolchu and the rest. We several times met the late Maharaja (who died in 1963), and one afternoon he and his household came to a Residency garden-party. This was a colourful affair with the local people all in their best brocades; several bands; the Maharaja's picturesque bodyguard; and the lamas from at least two monasteries, some in yellow, others in red hats and long heavy plum-coloured robes.

A month later I handed over to Sir John Woodhead, who had come out of retirement to be Governor of Bengal until a permanent successor to Lord Brabourne could be found, and we left for home by flying-boat. But leave in the summer of 1939, apart from the happiness of being back with one's family, was not restful. War lurked just round the corner; and we were aboard the *Strathmore* returning to India when in September it came.

*Assam Politics and Travel*

WE REACHED our beloved Shillong on 9 October after what seemed far too long an absence, and sought to pick up the threads of affairs. Fortunately a strike at the Digboi oilfield was just over; it had given Twynam, who was acting as Governor for me, much anxiety during most of his time.

Bardoloi's Ministry was as usual precarious, ineffective and subject to schisms. And towards the end of October the All-India Congress Committee ordained that Congress Governments must resign, in protest against the way India had been involved in the war; so on 15 November he and his Cabinet came to Government House to say farewell. They had been in office just over a year. As soon as the Congress Committee's decision was announced I had got in touch with Saadulla, and the day that Bardoloi resigned he came round and told me he would try to form a Ministry. But one of his conditions was that he must have a Cabinet of nine, to secure necessary support, as contrasted with the six of his 1937 Ministry. Several members were sworn in on 17 November and the rest a few weeks later. One of them was Miss Mavis Dunn, an intelligent Khasi lady of mixed descent. We had our first Cabinet meeting on 16 December, and then dispersed for the Christmas holidays, with the next session of the Assembly fixed for February. Yet another Minister, the tenth, who had been in the Bardoloi Cabinet, was now to be added in January.

Meanwhile I had been to Jowai, a subdivision of the Khasi Hills District and thirty-three miles from Shillong, only seven of which were practicable by car. Mr. (now Sir) Keith Cantlie was with the party and his great knowledge of Khasi history added to the journey's interest. Jowai was a flourishing little



town, remarkable for the friendliness between the Welsh Calvinist and Roman Catholic Missions and the Church of England community. Children of schools of all three denominations gave a joint entertainment for our benefit one day. No *odium theologicum* in Jowai. A market was held while we were there, the most noticeable thing for sale being dried fish; the smell pervaded the bazaar. There fish are caught and dried in the plains, carried many miles, and hawked from market to market, getting smellier as time goes on.

Then came our Christmas camp, held this year at Runikhata in the Reserved Forest on the North Bank not far from the Bhutan border, a pleasant spot near the sandy banks of a river. Tiger and fish were sought, and two tiger were got, the rest of us sitting over kills without success. The fishing was only moderate; but it was a delightful holiday in weather such as only Northern Assam can provide. We went one day in boats up the valley of the Aie into Bhutan, where the river runs in a narrow bed between worn limestone rocks. So ended 1939, a year of many changes and anxieties.

An official tour followed in January 1940 to Dhubri, headquarters of the Goalpara District: three days of the usual inspections of schools, hospital, jail, police lines and so on. Of interest in Dhubri was the Santal Mission Colony, run by Danes; a branch of a similar mission at Dumka in the Santal Parganas District, far away in Bihar. In times gone by Santal coolies had been introduced here in Assam for construction work, and had settled. Bookbinding was one of their enterprises, and they presented me with a beautifully bound and gold-lettered copy of Carstairs's *Harma's Village*. Carstairs had been Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas for thirteen years (1885-98), and was one of those unassuming, devoted officers to whom a life spent in the service of the people of a single district was an end in itself.

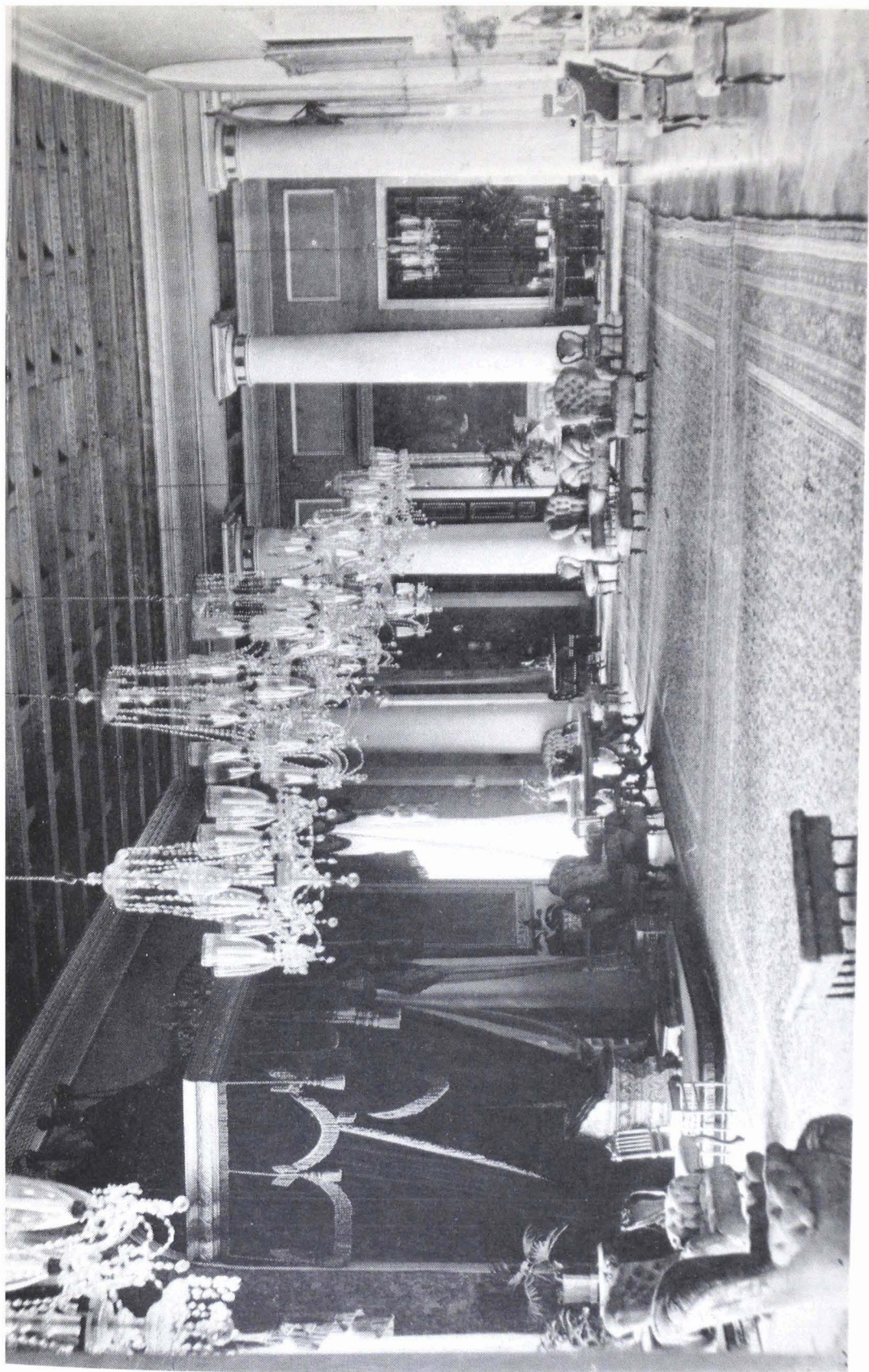
From Dhubri we crossed the river to the South Bank and motored to Tura, headquarters of the Garo Hills, 1,300 feet up. The Garos are stolid, uninspiring and very ignorant folk; the Deputy Commissioner, a Bengali, was not of our best; and the country was dull. So after two days at headquarters we were glad to start back to the plains by a different route on

foot. This took us along the banks of several rivers, giving opportunity for some fishing. At Siju we saw local people spearing fish with a curious kind of harpoon: a detachable barbed head on a cane about 5 ft. long. The fisherman dived in a deep pool, and after finding his fish perhaps managed to transfix it with the spearhead. The head then went away in the fish, but was held to the handle by a long piece of flexible cane; the fish was then landed.

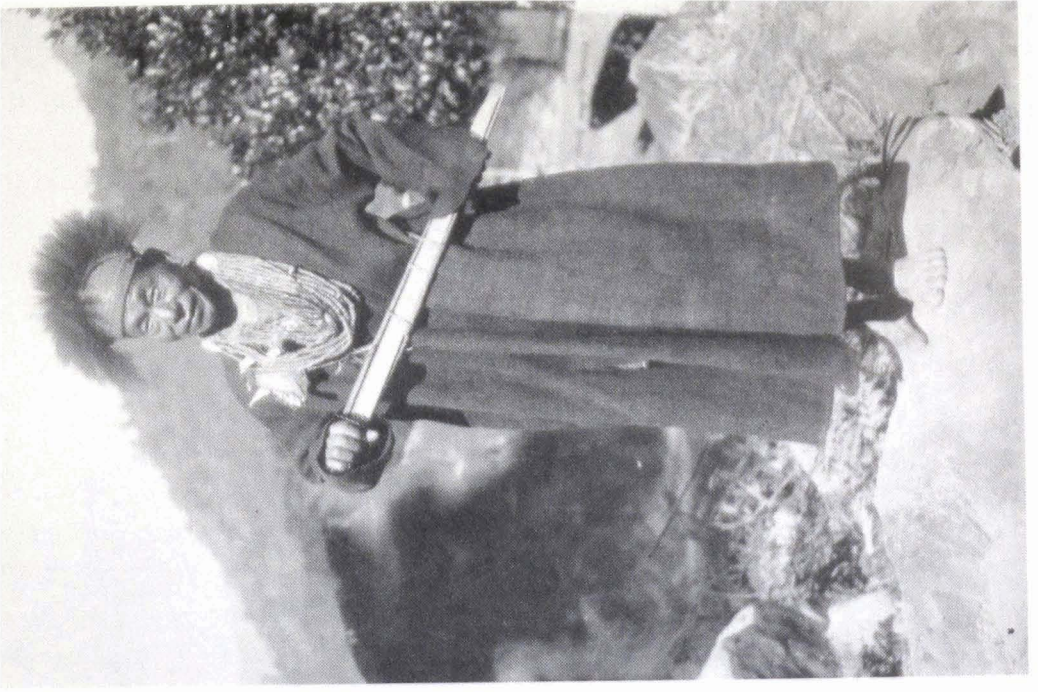
Some weeks' work in Shillong ensued, but April saw us on the move again; this time making a comprehensive tour of the Jorhat and Dibrugarh tea districts. The tea industry was then busy with welfare work for its labour force—not before time, in some instances. Most managers took intense personal interest in it now, realising its value, practical as well as humanitarian; and the medical experts welcomed it whole-heartedly. It would be wrong to say that welfare had been neglected by the industry in the past; but it was being much more vigorously developed, and large sums spent.

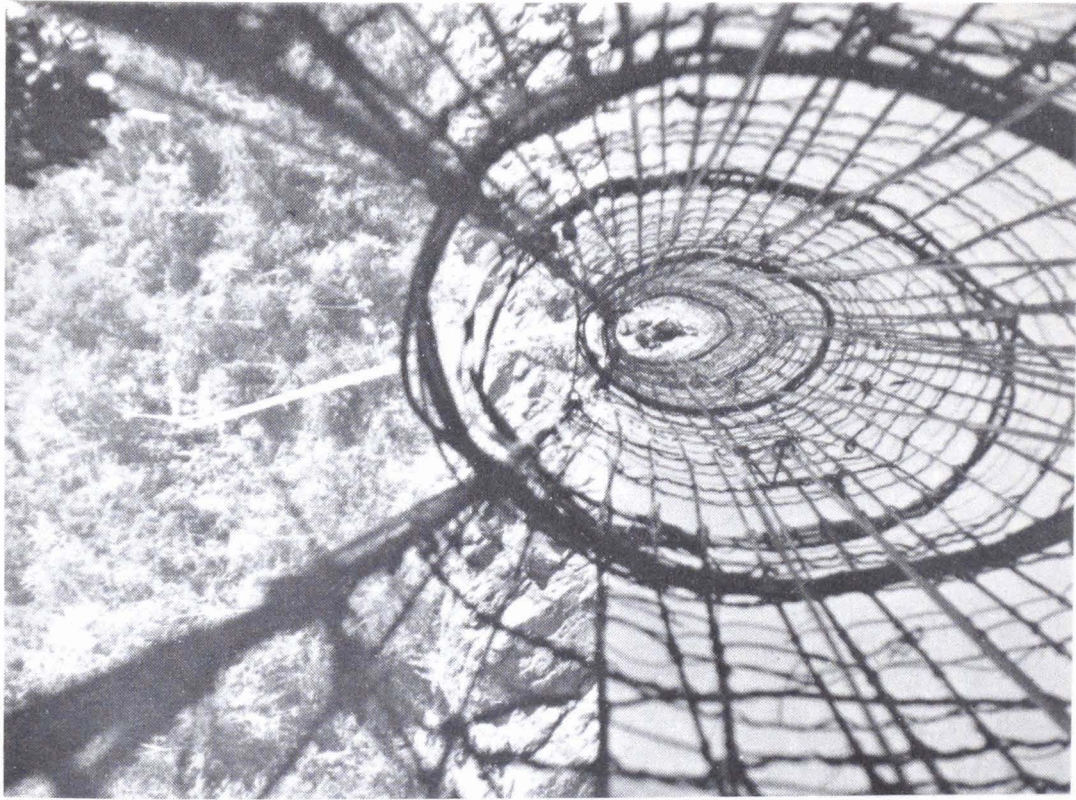
While we went round contributions were forthcoming at almost every garden to the Assam War Fund or the Red Cross and St. John Funds. From the tea districts we made a second visit to Digboi, where a fine new hospital costing Rs.4 lakhs was being put up. Here, too, I received large sums for various wartime purposes.

Back in Shillong again, there was much to give our minds to. Though the war was not yet near, it held our thoughts and energies. My wife had started a ladies' work party under the Red Cross; this spread its activities throughout the Province. Governmentally, there were regular meetings of a 'Joint War Committee' consisting of the Chief Minister, heads of departments, the local brigadier and myself. As time went on this body grew in importance. On 11 July 1940 the Assam War Committee was set up. I was not a member, but addressed its inaugural meeting; both the military and the civil authorities were represented on it, they met regularly, and, I believe, did much good. The Assam War Fund, which had existed informally earlier, simply because offers of money were coming in and had to be consigned somewhere, had been formally inaugurated on 25 May.



20. Throne Room, Government House, Calcutta

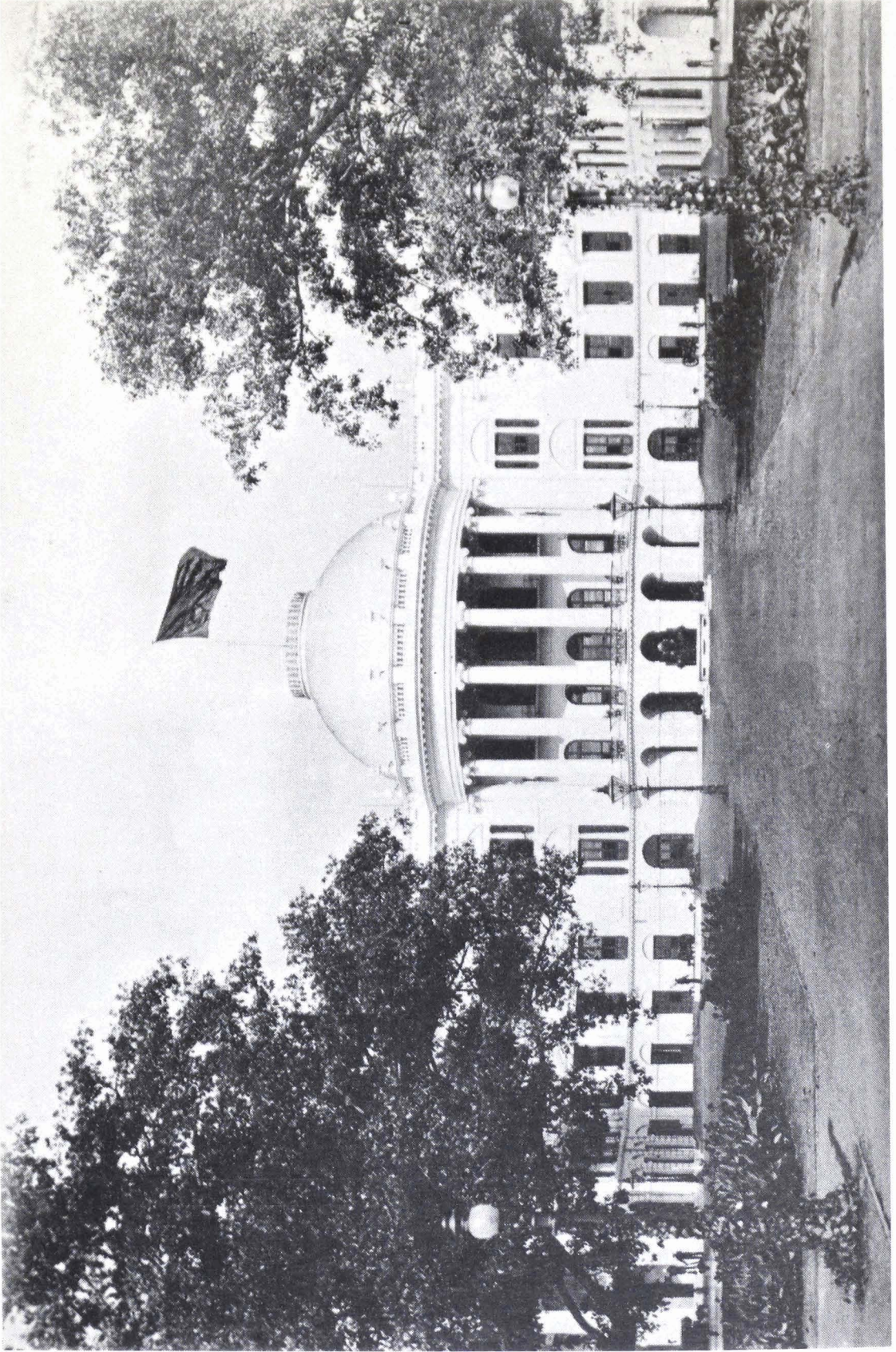




23. Komli Bridge over the Dihong



24. Kalangtan Jongpens from Tibet. Udalguri,  
February 1942



25. Government House, Calcutta, from the south

I had many talks with the Ministers about the war, and from Saadulla downwards their attitude was all that could be wished. At a Cabinet meeting on 1 June there was much discussion on enabling Assamese of all classes to join the Armed Forces; this culminated later in Saadulla's proposal that an Assam Regiment should be raised. On 22 June at a Cabinet meeting the Chief Minister announced that they had decided to give Rs.1 lakh for furtherance of the war, a fine gesture at a time when the news from Europe was about at its worst. Soon after we learned that revival of the 5th Battalion Assam Rifles had been accepted by the Central Government. I had found this matter pending when I became Governor in 1937, and agreeing with my local advisers had pressed it strongly. The battalion had been disbanded for economy reasons in 1930.

The extraordinary year 1940, of course, raised personal problems. My wife had meant to go home that summer, and though we got a wire advising her to put off the visit we felt it better to fulfil her plans. So she left by air from Calcutta on 4 June, the day the B.E.F. were evacuated from Dunkirk. As expected, Frank Esse, my much-valued Military Secretary, was before long called up. In his place came Peter Alder, a tea-planter, over age for an emergency commission. And it was not long before my military A.D.C. (the Assam Governor had but one) was taken, too, his place being ably filled, though for only a few months, by Johnnie Walker of the Indian Police. He, too, was then needed elsewhere and a lady came to the rescue.

During May I had briefly revisited Kohima; and in August made my first 'rains' visit to Sylhet. At that season practically the whole district gets inundated and travel was by launch. There were remarkable boat races at Ajmiriganj, held on a vast sheet of open water where a crowd guessed to number 30,000 people was assembled, all in boats. The racing craft were big, none less than 75 ft., with fifty to sixty paddlers in each, and carrying as passengers numerous cheer-leaders and friends. The din from the shouts and the varied musical instruments was terrific. The races were along a 1½-mile 'straight'. Several crews—semi-professionals, I suppose—had come from the neighbouring riverine districts of Bengal. The affair lasted four

hours; altogether an exciting if very hot and moist day, not the least satisfactory part of which was presentation of a purse of Rs.10,000 by the loyal citizens of the subdivision (Habiganj). Comic relief was afforded by a clown who paddled about in a coracle-like earthenware tub.

I made one other tour before my wife returned from home: to the Mikir Hills, in Nowgong District, and it was a complete and peculiar failure. The Mikirs are very backward, quite different from the other people of this district, and though they were classed as 'partially excluded' under the 1935 Reforms Act, and sent two members to the Assembly, I always felt that they had been unfairly treated; so I was keen to look at them. But no! Day after day our route led through airless forest or high grass along paths deep in slippery mud and obviously newly cut, with never a sign of habitations nor inhabitants. The subdivisional officer, a not very impressive little Muslim, dropped out on the second day; he confessed he had never before walked more than five miles at a stretch and the marches of ten or thirteen miles a day were too much. He was no loss; he knew next to nothing about the Mikirs anyway. So my new Military Secretary, Alder, and I went on. We had with us a young fairly well-educated Mikir called Samson, and in a day or two the truth came out. This was that for obscure reasons of their own some traders had put about the tale that wherever I went there would be 'war' and bombs rain down from heaven. To avoid this calamity, and keep me away from themselves and their homes, the simple Mikirs had thus cut these endless paths through the forest. Had the local officers not been so abysmally ignorant, and the S.D.O. reconnoitred the route he meant to take me over, this absurd frustration would have been avoided. Unfortunately I had no opportunity to revisit the Mikir country again and tour the villages in a sensible manner.

Our concluding tour of 1940 was in December, to the Lushai Hills for the second time, with everything well planned by Tony McCall in marked contrast to the Mikir Hills experience. We approached from the south, starting from our old station Chittagong. After breakfast at the Commissioner's house where we had lived in 1932, we went by launch up the Karnafuli



sixty miles to Rangamati. Two nights there, and it took us three days, travelling mostly by water in the local Chakma Chief's roomy dug-out, to reach Demagiri, just within the Lushai Hills District.

Our route was much the same as that of a punitive expedition sent in 1889 against Lushai tribesmen who had raided British territory four miles from Demagiri, killing twenty-two and carrying off fifteen prisoners. At one point near Barkal we and our baggage travelled by a trolley made by the expedition to avoid rapids on the Karnafuli. Forty miles' walking in four days took us to Lungleh, at 3,700 ft., and rather cold at this time of year. The day after our arrival local chiefs came in and we spent a morning shaking hands and exchanging compliments. Then ensued a conference with nine of the leading men about matters of local interest. I think they appreciated our visit; it was long since the Head of the Province had passed that way.

This was followed by an afternoon's dancing on the floor of a grass-clad natural amphitheatre near by. The male performers were rather a disappointment, but the girls, especially those from Miss Chapman's school (London Baptist), were charming, in spotless white blouses and petticoats adorned with bright-coloured home-woven braid. One most attractive 'turn' was hopping in and out between long bamboos laid on the ground and clapped open and shut by other members of the party, the object being to step on to the ground when the bamboos opened and get out before they shut. The click-clack of the bamboos was accompanied by a rhythmical chant and much laughter as one or other of the girls just avoided being caught. Bareheaded, they had their sleek black hair parted in the middle and caught up into pigtails down their backs. Next day we walked over to see the London Baptist settlement at Sherkawn, a mile or so away; a flourishing one, with boys' school, girls' school and hostel, hospital with two European sisters, and a printing-press.

From Lungleh it was eight days' march to Aijal, 105 miles in all, thirteen to fourteen miles a day, over pleasant hilly country mostly open, well wooded, and on fine days offering wonderful views of distant peaks. Ponies were available, but

mostly we walked. At each stage there was a well-built rest-house and always a fire-place, very welcome on December nights 2,000 or 3,000 ft. up. We spent Christmas on the road between Ramlaitu and Thenzawl, and a very pleasant walk it was of fourteen miles over open grassy country in the bright sun. It gave an opportunity to see village life in a quiet way. At one point a Sailo chief showed us with pride a cairn erected at his own expense on King George V's Silver Jubilee as an expression of loyalty.

Our last march into Aijal took hours, as it was punctuated by many halts at arches of welcome, when songs would be sung and greetings exchanged. At one halt we saw something unique, a reproduction of an ancient tribal dance celebrating the return of warriors after a successful raid on an enemy village. There was an arrangement of bamboo branches in the centre, on which hung three heads, in imitation of those supposedly brought back in the raid, and on the ground lay a wounded captive. Round these moved the conquering warriors in triumphal procession, chanting of victory. Such dances were even then so out of date that in a few years there would be no one left who knew them. A tug-of-war between the men of two villages enlivened these rather serious proceedings, and when one side was losing the village head, a woman, jumped to the rescue of her side and pulled the whole lot over. Women have a strong place in Lushai village life.

We reached Aijal on 30 December and were glad to stay for a few days. It was familiar ground, from our visit only two years earlier. I now briefly interrupted the tour so as to spend two nights at Shillong and attend a Cabinet meeting on 6 January. My wife and I then went on for a week in the Sylhet tea-gardens, staying each night with the manager of a different garden and enjoying the planters' genial welcome. This whole tour took us into the middle of January 1941 and was the longest we ever undertook; thirty-six days of travel by rail, car, boat, on foot and on horseback.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *War Comes Nearer*

SO FAR, appalling though the news from Europe for a time had been, and many the personal anxieties it caused us British folk in India, the war had touched Assam only indirectly. The routine of administration and politics went on fairly normally, against a background of local war work of various sorts. One new feature of the Shillong scene was the influx of Gurkha recruits to the Training Centre at Happy Valley. Shelter for them was at first inadequate, overcrowding became great; the recruits were young, so soon the Indian Military Hospital was full to overflowing. A visit from the D.D.M.S. Eastern Command, followed by one from the Commander, Presidency and Assam District, led, however, to an improvement. The local Survey Office, which had some fine big rooms, was taken over as a hospital, and better shelter and so forth provided.

In the first week of February 1941 we set off on tour to the north-east corner of Sadiya Frontier Tract, an area which, next year, became a separate administrative unit, the Tirap Frontier Tract. We detrained at Tipang colliery beyond Margherita, and marched thence north-east along the foothills of the Patkai range, here the watershed between Assam and Burma—and the area where, next year, those refugees from Japanese invasion who took the Hukawng route reached Assam. Our tour as such was uneventful; there were few inhabitants; but having on advice recommended the area's elevation into a separate Agency I wanted to see it myself.

It can best be described as a tangled mass of hills and valleys with countless streams running down from the Patkai to merge in such great rivers as the Noa Dihing and the Lohit. It was heavily forested with bamboo and smaller undergrowth,

growing luxuriantly in a rainy climate on the clay soil. The roadway was not the well-kept 6 ft. bridle-path to which we had been accustomed in the Abor or Naga Hills but much more modest, sometimes only 2 ft. wide. There were no rest-houses, so our camps were mostly on sites cleared for the occasion and we were housed in bamboo-and-grass *bashas*—comfortable enough, too. The tenth day of travelling brought us to the Noa Dihing River. The only habitations we saw on it were the tiny village of M'pen. Beyond that, away to east and north, all was uninhabited forest and mountain, amidst which lay the formidable Chaukan pass, through which the northernmost groups of refugees in 1942 found their hazardous way to safety.

We had much rain, and seldom saw the high snow mountains of Tibet except spectacularly once at sunset, when the Dapha Bum at 15,000 ft. revealed itself. From M'pen, our farthest point, we returned by boat; and on the way were lucky enough to find one of Freddy Needham's timber camps and see well-trained elephants at work; also a camp where captured elephants were being trained. Three days took us to Saikhwa, where the Noa Dihing joins the Lohit, and we were soon aboard the train for home.

It was now March 1941. The war was still pretty remote. However, a Cabinet meeting on the 9th decided that precautions must be taken against air raids and funds be asked from the Assembly. A public meeting was held in Shillong soon after, but during the rest of the year there was little activity and no real popular interest. Towards the end of the month we were visited by Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Reeve, A.R.P. Adviser to the Government of India. He had had experience at the Home Office in London and was able to give guidance. Blackouts were organised at such places as the railway yards and the Assam Oil Company's installations at Tinsukia and Digboi, as I was soon able to see for myself. I also saw at Dinjan, near Dibrugarh, the beginnings of one of the many air-fields later to be made all over Assam.

The Welsh Mission celebrated its centenary in 1941 and we attended two notable ceremonies. One was in March at Cherapunji, where I unveiled a memorial; the other at Mawkhar,

on Shillong's outskirts, which had long been the Mission's main centre. Here a religious service was held in the open attended by thousands, and I felt it a privilege to be asked to address them.

The summer that year in Shillong was wet, and much taken up with political comings-and-goings, largely because of Saadulla's dual role as a member both of the Muslim League and the Viceroy's new-formed National Defence Council. Jinnah, the all powerful, disapproved of the latter body; but our Ministers held together and did their not very effective best.

In September we paid our fourth visit to the Naga Hills, a short but busy one. It included a meeting with the Kohima War Committee, who had collected Rs.1,670 for the fund, a fine effort considering how little money those remote peoples usually handle. The Bishop of Assam was there, and anticipating the modern tendency towards unity in the Churches conducted an evening service at the American Baptist School. This was in the Naga village on the peak opposite the Deputy Commissioner's house. My wife came home after the service on the back of the American padre's motor bicycle, then the only internal-combustion machine in those hills.

The most interesting part of this tour was a visit to the western Angami village of Khonoma, which had a turbulent history as one of the main places wherefrom, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, raids were launched on the Assam plains and on Manipur. When in 1878 Kohima in the heart of western Angami country was occupied, it was supposed that Khonoma, only five miles away, was also subdued. But no; in October '79, Mr. Damant, the Political Officer, went to the village with a fairly large escort. Unfortunately he took no particular precautions when approaching, and the party was fired on. He fell dead, his escort suffered severe casualties, and they had to retire. Nagas then besieged Kohima itself. The main defence was an earthwork fort built on the saddle over which the road to Manipur crosses the ridge. The garrison consisted only of one hundred armed police and fifty Indian Army sepoy, and they had with them numerous wives and children, including Damant's widow and Mrs. Cawley, the

Assistant Political Agent's wife. There were no British military officers and the command devolved on Cawley. They had ten days' supplies and suffered great hardships, especially shortage of water, the chief source of supply having been diverted by the insurgents and a remaining spring polluted by a corpse. They were reinforced five days after the siege began by Mr. Hinde, the Political Assistant at Wokha, who marched with sixty men when he heard the news, covering over sixty miles through hostile country without loss. But the garrison were in a bad way and thinking of surrender when, after twelve days, they were relieved by a strong force from Manipur led by Colonel James Johnstone. He and his men had marched no fewer than one hundred miles in five days.

The process of subduing the rebels was then undertaken, and Khonoma village, strongly fortified though it was and built on a high narrow ridge, was stormed and destroyed after severe fighting, with the loss on our side of fifty-one killed and wounded. Men from the village were exiled for a term of years and forbidden to cultivate their land. This order was subsequently modified when it became clear that the lesson was learnt, and these turbulent people have given no trouble since. In fact, like all Nagas, the Angamis bore no malice. In Khonoma itself we saw the memorial (very well kept) to Damant and the other British officers who lost their lives. Damant's grave lies, or lay, in the Deputy Commissioner's garden. It was during these punitive operations that a party of fifty-five Khonomas performed one of those feats of endurance of which such hillmen are capable. They broke through the British lines one night, went eighty miles down Cachar to Baladhan tea-garden, murdered the manager, ravaged the garden and were back home next evening.

During the second half of October we paid a heartening visit to the Nowgong tea district. We must have met nearly all the planters, and found, as elsewhere, everyone determined to do all in their power for the war, the older ones resigned to continuing in their jobs, the younger waiting for a chance to get away. A combined fête of the four local clubs held while we were there brought in large sums for the war fund, and at district headquarters at Nowgong the Deputy Commissioner

handed me a contribution of over Rs.8,000 collected locally.

In November we visited Sylhet for the last time, to open an up-to-date cement factory at Chatak, at the foot of the Khasi Hills. It owed its origin to an old Calcutta friend, Mr. J. C. Mukherjee. The Chief Minister was present, and judging from his speech felt some chagrin that Assam was so sparsely represented on the directorate and management. But at that time Assam had few men of any business capacity. Subsequent rumour had it that a relative of a highly placed Assamese was engaged at a quite reasonable salary on the understanding that he kept away from the works.

On 2 December we set out on tour to the Abor Hills. On the way we stopped at Tinsukia to open a fine new hospital presented by a Marwari trader, and spent two nights at Digboi. This enabled me to see their very good A.R.P., meet the Digboi War Committee, and congratulate them on achievements in collecting money and in organisation, which were, I think, better than anywhere else in the Province. Digboi, by then, had contributed over Rs.58,000 to the Lakhimpur Fighter Fund and Rs.45,000 to war charities.

After Digboi the way was clear for the Abor trip. Leaving Pasighat, we motored for a short way beside the Dihong, whose jade-green waters lay below, changed to a dug-out propelled by an outboard motor, and then walked seven miles to our first halt. The road though only a bridle-track was good, its alignment dating doubtless from the Abor Expedition of 1911-12. Throughout this tour we travelled mostly along the Dihong Valley. But on 8 December, before we started, the news had dramatically come on the wireless of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, and we anxiously debated whether I should go straight back to headquarters. I decided to go on that day as arranged to Rotung, but to omit the next projected halt to the north at Pangin, and double-march back to Pasighat. So off we went, but full of misgiving. We spent two nights at Rotung, and at a durbar there I spoke, on the Political Officer's advice, about slavery and bison-raiding<sup>1</sup> and trade blocks. These last were a particularly obnoxious form of extortion.

<sup>1</sup> The mithan, a sort of half-tamed bison, is the chief form of wealth in those parts.

The tribes to the north had to get salt from the distant plains to the south. Villagers who had travelled down and got their salt were faced at some defile on their return by hostile tribesmen and compelled to pay tribute or part with their salt. My audience, I was told, believed Queen Victoria was still on the throne, so I couched my orders as coming from her.

Here we had to modify our plans, as the men from villages farther north had not yet come in, and it was important to meet them. So next day we double-marched (sixteen miles) to Pangin; a long hard trudge, but worth it. Early, we came to the great Komli suspension bridge across the Dihong; 1,000 ft. long, made entirely of bamboos and creepers, tubular in section, 100 ft. or more above the rushing water, and swaying alarmingly at every step. My wife and I ventured a little way, but preferred to watch the Abors cross. We noticed that they shouted loudly as they did so. There were several other such bridges in the Abor country, but this, I believe, was the longest.

Half-way from Rotung to Pangin we passed an Assam Rifles post at Yembung. Here tribesmen were assembled from Kebang and other villages to the north. Every man carried the short square-ended sword, and nearly all wore thick black bearskin capes. Their legs were bare, and such legs, too—thick muscular calves capable of walking all day. We felt tired that evening after the double march, nor did the news over the wireless at all cheer us: of the loss of the *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* off Singapore.

Next day was busy. It began with a durbar, well attended, but mainly by men of the Gallong tribe; none from Riga and Karko whom we particularly wanted to see. I spoke on the same topics as on the 9th at Rotung. Then at noon we started on our homeward trek and got to Yembung for the night; a pleasant bungalow close to the river. Soon came news that Karko and Riga men had arrived at Pangin, so we hoped they would come and catch us up before we left Yembung. The night also brought unpleasant news from Shillong. Rohini Chaudhuri had resigned and also Saadulla. So I would be getting back not a bit too early.

Karko and Riga duly fulfilled our hopes, assembling at



Yembung next morning, and I was able to address them like the others, and make acquaintance with their leading men. It was gratifying that they came on specially to see us; they might well have gone home in disgust. So the purpose of this journey, altered and cut about though it was, had fulfilled itself. In retrospect I think there is reason to believe this personal visit to their country played no small part, later, in stimulating the Abors to join the Labour Corps which did such fine work on the Burma frontier. The upsetting of the time-table, however, had one minor untoward result. An exchange of presents is an essential part of these meetings, and, not expecting to meet more tribesmen after Pangin, we had no presents left for Karko and Riga. The best we could manage was three bottles of whisky and a little tea and cigarettes. But they were very nice about it, and the whisky seemed to go down well—and quickly.

This done, on the Friday morning we at once started again for home, and on Sunday reached Kobo, crossed the Lohit, took car to Tinsukia, travelled by train through the night to Gauhati and were back in Shillong on Monday morning. This was 15 December, my wife's birthday, and a sad anniversary it proved, for we were met by the news that our youngest son, Bob, was missing in North Africa. He was serving with the 8th Tank Regiment, and his first battle ended in his capture. He was to be a prisoner of war for two and a half years.

With Rohini gone, Saadulla, whom I saw immediately I got back on the 15th, said he could not carry on and that he saw no solution but resort to section 93 of the Act. That meant the Governor taking over the administration personally under direction from the Governor-General and the Secretary of State; the Legislature ceasing to function; and the Cabinet being dissolved. The first step, however, futile though one knew it, was to ask the Leader of the Opposition, Gopinath Bardoloi, to take office. I saw him on the 18th. The interview was short. He refused except on terms which meant his not supporting the war. No other Chief Minister was possible. So after further consultations with Saadulla and much wiring between us and Delhi, it was agreed that the proclamation bringing section 93 into force should issue. On the 23rd I said

good-bye to the Cabinet. Saadulla and Rohini were absent for obvious reasons, and Matin Choudhuri happened to be away. The remaining seven all expressed the opinion that the change was for the better, and our leave-taking was cordial.

I had to remain in Shillong till this was over, but as all our arrangements for a Christmas camp on the Monas had been made before, my wife and the rest of the party went off on the 20th. I followed on the 26th.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *Good-bye to Assam*

WHEN WE RETURNED to Shillong on New Year's Day 1942 my Governorship was nearing its end, but I was still unaware who would be my successor. Then came a message asking if I would stay on for two months beyond the usual term. That would take me to the beginning of May. A month later I was told that Sir Andrew Clow would succeed me, and soon after I was urged, on leaving Assam, to take on the post of China Relations Officer in Calcutta, to which I agreed.

There was much to fill our last days in Shillong. At first I was fully occupied in catching up on the backlog of files left by Ministers, who had had their eyes more on politics than administration. Many of the pending cases were simple enough, things which merely needed an order; others, however, required time and thought. But I was able to dispose of them in a few weeks. Keeping the administration going, with no Legislature and no Cabinet, was easy enough; and this enabled me to give more attention to the now very pressing problems of war. We by this stage had a whole-time officer in charge of Civil Defence, J. E. Reid of the Indian Police, assisted by W. Meiklejohn, a capable Forest Department officer. The Shillong branch of the W.V.S. threw themselves into the work with vigour, and it was a help to be able to rely on the quick-witted Khasi girls in practising alarms and blackouts.

We squeezed in two tours during these concluding few Assam months. The first, of about a fortnight, was to Haflong, headquarters of the North Cachar subdivision of Cachar District. We went by the hill section of the Assam-Bengal Railway as far as Lower Haflong station. This line traverses the very difficult Barail range, to link the Assam Valley with the Surma

Valley. It came into use in 1903. Great engineering difficulties had been met; in 113 miles of track twenty-four tunnels and seventy-four major bridges needed to be made. Haflong proper, which we reached by road from Lower Haflong, is a pretty little station; 2,500 ft. above sea-level, and sufficiently cool all the year round to attract some permanent European residents, most of whom had been so long in India that English ties had become slender. They were a pleasant little community, and we enjoyed the contacts made.

After motoring back to Lower Haflong we walked and rode some ninety miles westwards to Jowai, taking ten days over it. The bridle-path was good and the going easy, but it was mostly dull rather treeless country, and sparsely inhabited. Our last day but one included a visit to a flourishing Roman Catholic Mission composed of four Salesian fathers, and a convent with nuns of a different order. It was awkward, because we knew, and they did, that, being of enemy origin, they were liable to be interned. In that remote spot, and for people doing beneficent work such a fate seemed nonsensical; but in wartime nice distinctions were not possible.<sup>1</sup>

Shangpung, a few miles farther on, where we spent the night, was a stronghold of the Welsh Mission and we had a warm welcome from the pastor, Mr. Crockett, and a large gathering. He joined us that evening in watching a dance by some Pnars, the majority in the Jowai subdivision, who though resembling the Khasis in appearance, religion and customs, consider themselves distinct. And at Jowai itself we were among old friends. On the homeward journey we made the acquaintance of yet one more variety of Christian, when we went to lay the foundation-stone of an agricultural training school started by the Seventh Day Adventist Mission.

Our other tour took us to the North Bank. The first halt was Barpeta, a fairly important town with various institutions, to inspect which, with a meeting of the War Committee, gave us a full morning. The institutions in general looked admirable, but one, the leper asylum, struck us as almost too good to be true. Every bed had its neat red blanket, its spotless white sheet, its

<sup>1</sup> Presumably they were either Italian or German, the Salesians being a nineteenth-century Roman Catholic order founded by St. John Bosco.—I.S.

carefully written-up history-card, and every occupant seemed content and well cared for. Afterwards somebody told my wife that the whole thing had been contrived for our benefit, including importation of the necessary numbers of persons to fill the beds. Thence we went to Tezpur, which we had been to not very long before. Signs of changed times, however, were a meeting of the local War Committee, when Rs.7,000 was presented; a war-benefit performance at the cinema; and a visit to a brand-new airfield at Sona Bhil.

An unusual episode of this tour was at Udalguri, some seventy miles from Tezpur, where the annual payment of *posa* was made by the Political Officer to representatives of certain villages in the foothills, again as the price of good behaviour. This year only the *jongpens* or headmen of a village called Kalangtan came in; those from Tawang and Dirang Dzong did not. The Kalangtan *jongpens* arrived on shaggy hill ponies, wearing the long woollen robes of Tibet, Chinese silks, yellow-lacquered hats, muslin scarves, and the square-ended Tibetan sword; a strange scene in an Indian district. From Udalguri we went to Charduar, where we found the newly formed 5th Battalion of the Assam Rifles busy organising themselves for the combined role of training depot and fighting force.

At the end of this tour we indulged in three days' fishing with Captain Lightfoot on the Barelli. We had both had a rough time, and as we were now to go straight from one job to another, and into the worst of Calcutta hot weather, too, we felt we could have a break. It was delightful; and my wife caught her last fish in Assam the day we left. My only achievement, however, was to be twice anchored to a *goonch*, once for nearly two hours. A *goonch* is a huge flat-fish which lives mostly on the bottom, but if he takes your spoon, gives you the illusion of having hooked the biggest mahseer ever. You hang on and on, getting exhausted, while the monster clamps himself to the bottom with his suckers and remains there till your tackle breaks and you know for sure it was no mahseer but a *goonch*, and that he has now gone off with your expensive bait inside him and left you worn out on the bank.

Not long after we got back to Shillong an A.R.P. demonstration was held, but despite the good weather crowds were

not large. An Audax plane, which flew in low from Dinjan airfield, introduced a touch of reality. We thought, with our limited knowledge of what air raids meant, that we were fairly well prepared. On 8 March, however, we had a (for us) breathless visit from Major-General E. Wood, just appointed to the new post of Administrator-General for North-East Communications. He arrived about midday, explained at once that he was empowered to give orders without question to everyone, held conferences non-stop all afternoon and evening and rushed off at 11.30 p.m. to Gauhati to catch the train for Dimapur. He had a talent for administering ginger to all and sundry, and some of our officers, used to peacetime methods, were rather upset.

As March went on and Japanese successes in Burma increased, news came in of mounting numbers of refugees streaming through Dimapur to Gauhati, or arriving by air at Dinjan, and having to be forwarded to India. My wife spent two days at Pandu, the Assam terminus of the rail-ferry to Bengal, and had an exhausting time sorting out difficulties and reducing chaos to something like order; but she succeeded in producing and leaving behind her a good organisation for caring for the refugees and sending them on their dolorous journey. This organisation was passed to the capable charge of several planters' wives, headed by Mrs. Ross of Bhutaichang who was subsequently awarded the scarcely adequate decoration of M.B.E. By the third week of March 19,000 refugees had gone through Dimapur, and still they came. The organisation worked on steadily without a hitch till there were no more to come. Thereafter these devoted women turned to the welfare of the thousands of Allied troops who were to serve for another three years on the Burma front.

Our time in Assam, though latterly fraught with anxiety, was, I think, the happiest part of our lives in India. We found so much congenial work, and could see results from several enterprises even before we left; results which we felt might endure after the originators were forgotten. Each of these enterprises owed its inception often, and always its fruition, almost entirely to my wife's perseverance and organising genius. The Assam Industries, for instance, which she de-

veloped from a small domestic sideline into a flourishing, money-making concern with its own premises. Many an indigenous craft was revived, and old beautiful half-forgotten designs were unearthed from unlikely places. Then there was the 'Pleasure Park' in Shillong. She had been impressed by complaints from Khasi and Indian ladies that they and their children could not walk about in the open grassy Maidan without danger of annoyance from men. So she set about persuading the Minister concerned to rail off part of the Maidan as a ladies' promenade. Most rewarding of all perhaps was the Anti-Tuberculosis campaign. Planning for this in Assam started early in our time. A site for a sanatorium had to be found; open and healthy and yet not far from town. But the Khasis were afraid; our lady Minister, Miss Mavis Dunn, often told me how desperately scared her people were of contact with the disease. I could not even get Nichols Roy, who, with his upbringing and American wife should have been above such prejudices, to persuade his countrymen that there need be no real danger. A well-to-do Khasi landlord who owned a good site and professed sympathy with us told me he would be ruined socially and otherwise if he gave land for such a purpose. At last, after months, a site was found at Jhalupara, thanks largely to the persistence of Major R. A. Haythornthwaite, the Civil Surgeon. An objection was then raised that it was near an old Chinese burial-ground, but in the end it was found that neither the present Chinese population nor the Khasis were really disturbed by the thought of Chinese ghosts. So on 14 April 1942, three days before she left Shillong, my wife had the pleasure of being present at the laying of the foundation stone.

I stayed on for another fortnight or so, which passed quickly. My successor, Sir Andrew Clow, arrived on 28 April. I found little agreeable in the hand-over. He did not want the job and said so. I had a feeling I could do more good if I had stayed on in it for a while, than in the nebulous new post to which I was assigned. Clow, moreover, was in poor health having just recovered from typhoid, and disinclined to show much interest, least of all in my favourite subject, the Hill areas. Nor did he relish the idea of coming in as a section 93 Governor. So I left Shillong on 2 May depressed and uneasy.

*Assam's War Effort*

WHAT ASSAM DID to help the war is perhaps insufficiently known, and needs summarising in a chapter to itself. As mentioned, it was on Sir Muhammad Saadulla's initiative, as early as June 1940, that the idea of an Assam Regiment was conceived, and then pressed on a reluctant G.H.Q. at Delhi and eventually agreed to. None of what were officially termed India's 'martial races' lived in Assam, and that it should become a recruiting-ground was entirely novel. True, some Cacharis, Kukis and Lushais had long been enlisted in the Assam Rifles, but I believe no Assamese from the plains. Admittedly, too, the regiment's strength was in the end mainly provided by the hillmen. Nevertheless, it was composed wholly of inhabitants of Assam, and of very diverse origins, Nagas and Khasis besides the Cacharis and Kukis and Lushais, and using such dissimilar dialects that English became their *lingua franca*; and, wherever in the Province they came from, their performance fully justified the experiment of having brought this unit into being.

The 1st Battalion was formed on 15 June 1941, the inauguration taking place on the grounds of Government House. Saadulla was there. Major Ross Howman was in command, with Major W. F. Brown, D.S.O., of the 8th Punjabis as his second, and a nucleus of young officers who included three newly commissioned Assam tea-planters and the first Indian officer to be commissioned from Assam, M. L. Barua, an Assam Valley Hindu. Howman was a good choice. Besides being a soldier of above-average ability and experience, he came fresh from G.H.Q., an advantage at such a time, for he knew exactly where to refer in his difficulties, and had friends



who could make things move. Those early days at Kench's Trace, where the unit was assembled, were a nightmare: tents, clothing, arms, cooking apparatus, everything except goodwill and enthusiasm was in short supply. But those two qualities plus continuous hard work overcame obstacles, and in less than six months the 1st Battalion was sent for the defence of Digboi. Major Brown took over when, after six months' splendid service, Howman was transferred elsewhere, and he held command throughout all the time the battalion was engaged in the struggles along the Burmese border;<sup>1</sup> and the gallant delaying action at Jessami, at the outset of the great Imphal battle in the spring of 1944, more than amply proved its mettle, as the following quotation from Lord Slim's book *Defeat into Victory* shows.

The main might of the enemy advance fell on this battalion in the first battle of its career. Fighting in its own country, it put up a magnificent resistance, held doggedly to one position after another against overwhelming odds, and in spite of heavy casualties, its companies although separated never lost cohesion. The delay the Assam Regiment imposed on the 31st Japanese Division at this stage was invaluable.

That action accomplished, the unit moved into Kohima, and for another sixteen days endured the dangers of that dreadful siege until the Japanese were finally rolled back on 20 April. A 2nd and 3rd battalion were raised later, and, what was most important, the regiment was accepted permanently as a unit of the Indian Army. It took as its crest the Assam rhinoceros, and I was able to present them with one for the centrepiece of their Mess table: a replica done in silver of a porcelain rhino I had seen years before in the Darjeeling Museum, and which, so far as I remember, came from Germany. But it was very good.

The summer of 1940 was also the time when the Assam War Fund was inaugurated, and the sums eventually raised were substantial. The tea and oil industries contributed largely; but so did humble people within their means, the hill-folk showing

<sup>1</sup> Brown, alas, was killed in a minor encounter in January 1945 during pursuit of the retreating Japanese.

great generosity. By September we were able to send home the price of two fighter aircraft. One was named 'Lakhimpur, Assam', that district having specially asked to have their money earmarked for this purpose, and the other 'Assam No. 2'; and my wife while at home in 1940 had the pleasant task of presenting the cheque to the Minister of Aircraft Production. By December 1941, Assam had forwarded to Britain the price of one bomber and nine fighters. Apart from these direct contributions to the combatant side of the war, which most subscribers wished should be for aircraft purchase, we were able to send large sums to alleviate suffering or for troops' welfare.

But until that month, December 1941, all this was long-range activity. The war seemed far away. Then, with Japan's entry into it, came the big change. Hong Kong was soon lost, then Singapore, and the invasion of Burma brought war to our very door. Through Assam was to pass the great exodus of civilians fleeing before the enemy; and into it also arrived, in May '42, the Burma Army at the end of its long, disastrous retreat. The first civilian fugitives began arriving about February by the Manipur road, the 134-mile stretch which leads from Imphal over the hills to Dimapur, on the Assam-Bengal Railway. I suppose at least 200,000 of them travelled this route during the first half of 1942, though accurate figures were unobtainable. It is known that there were about a million Indians in Burma before the war, but all did not come out, and some used other routes. From February on, Dimapur began to develop from a tiny wayside station, lacking all facilities, into a huge camp and supply dump, through which during the next four years moved thousands of men and masses of stores and munitions.

The task for the authorities in Assam, that grim spring, was to pass refugees to their homes in India if they had any and lessen their hardships. Responsibility for this lay mainly with the Central Government, but we of Assam were called on at every turn to find men from our meagre official cadres, and to get non-officials to help—and magnificent work they did. Men and women from the tea and oil industries quickly organised camps, first at Dimapur and then at many a remote

spot farther up the road. They worked under great stress and difficulty, but never faltered—and thousands of people owe their lives to them. One tea-planter, David Beattie, the first to establish himself at Dimapur, died because of his exertions.

Arrived at Dimapur railhead, the refugees still needed aid for the long journey to India proper. Here the W.V.S. of Assam came into their own. They had been inaugurated in 1940, and when the crisis came they were ready, with W.V.S. representatives established in every district. Most were planters' wives, who opened canteens at railway stations and steamer ghats to give exhausted immigrants rest, food and clothing. They worked unremittingly amidst unpleasant surroundings in heat and much discomfort, and countless unfortunates have cause to be grateful to them. When later in the year the stream of refugees dried up, they turned as previously mentioned to troops' welfare, rendering admirable service till the end of the war.

Besides the Manipur route, two others farther north soon began to be used by people fleeing before the Japanese terror: the Hukawng route and the Chaukan one. It was estimated that about 20,000 came by these, perhaps 1,400 dying on the way. The Hukawng route took them first over a long, tedious, but not really difficult stretch of flat going from Mogaung to the foot of the Patkai range; thereafter it became very arduous, all of it passing through mountainous almost uninhabited country intersected by many unbridged rivers, till eventually they emerged into Assam near the Tipang railhead in the Margherita area. Camps were pushed out early towards the Patkai, to help them. This influx only became substantial in May, when rain starts falling heavily. The route soon became a sea of mud and many a weakly wayfarer actually drowned in it. Over in Burma some dumps of food had also been placed, but nothing like enough; and there was much looting of these by earlier more able-bodied parties, so the sufferings of those who followed were extreme. The R.A.F. saved lives by dropping food-bags.

The Chaukan route yet farther north was even more perilous and people were warned not to try it. But some did and got through, though with immense difficulty. Here again splendid

work was achieved by the planters, and the late Mr. Gyles Mackrell, Octavius Steel's Visiting Agent, a renowned shikari who had his own establishment of elephants and boats, saved many lives. On both routes Mr. G. E. D. Walker of the Indian Police and a Labour Corps of 2,000 Abor tribesmen (which I have referred to earlier) did an excellent job. His men were used to local conditions and fully qualified for their tasks. One notable, happy feature of the Burma exodus was the very small incidence of cholera, though conditions greatly favoured it. This was probably due to the forethought of Colonel H. E. Shortt, head of the Assam Medical Service, who very early arranged for large supplies of anti-cholera serum, and himself saw to its distribution.

In the wake of the refugees now came the weary, wounded, malaria-stricken troops of the defeated Burma Army, which threw further strain on the W.V.S. and other civilian helpers. The military medical machine in Burma was by now in chaos, and I am sorry to say the Army authorities in India quite failed at first to make adequate arrangements at our end. Voluntary workers did what they could to fill the gap until the Army was ready to assume its proper duties.

From about the middle of 1942 onwards, and before the tide of civilian and military wayfarers from farther east had died away, Assam began to receive as well a steady, refreshing flow of American and British military reinforcements. In a war theatre where distances were so vast, air power was obviously going to play a very important part in liberating Burma, and arrangements were soon started to build airfields by the score in a land where none had before existed. Road making or road improvement was almost as essential; and the tea industry, having done so much to help the refugees, now put itself at the authorities' disposal for this. It had both the machinery and the labour, and gave them unstintingly, and with an efficiency which its local experience alone could supply. Not only had the 134 miles from Dimapur to Imphal to be kept serviceable in frightful weather under a remorseless weight of traffic, but a new-built all-weather extension running thirty-six miles east to Tamu.

Already before the fall of Burma and the arrival of this

welcome fresh military influx, we had been making such plans as we could for defence of Assam's frontiers. One idea we worked on was to try to build up a guerrilla force among the hill tribes from the Lushais in the south to the Nagas in the north, where we thought good material might be found to supplement the regular Forces. This began long before we had guidance or advice on the matter from distant G.H.Q. or even inquiries, but the civilian authorities had the full support locally of Army officers. Perhaps we did not accomplish much; but we did plenty of spadework by testing the tribesmen's feelings, taking reckonings of their numbers, and asking about supply of firearms. Funds for all this gave us some qualms, but we reflected that lack of money never yet stopped a war, so why not prepare without having any? The Army later took over this skeleton organisation of ours; and it is a fact that the Nagas through whose territories the 14th Army's eventual line of victorious advance lay proved valuable irregular allies. The Lushais, too, find creditable mention in Slim's book. And besides combatant troops, the people of Assam on a far larger scale furnished thousands of workers behind the firing-line. Garos, Lushais, Khasis, Nagas, Mikirs, Abors enlisted in the Labour Corps. Sylhetis joined the Navy. Women, and especially the quick-witted Khasi girls, came forward in large numbers for the nursing services.

## *Chinese Postscript*

I TOOK OVER as China Relations Officer in Calcutta on 5 May 1942. H. F. Lydall had been acting when I arrived and was to be my assistant for some months, till on 1 June we were joined by A. A. E. Franklin of the Consular Service. He came over from Chungking, where he had been Vice-Consul, and it was a help to have someone with knowledge of conditions at Chiang Kai-shek's capital. I had little or no information on what was expected of me beyond that in the Viceroy's telegram of 8 February, sent after Chiang Kai-shek's visit to Delhi that month, the telegram incidentally being so phrased that refusal of the post was almost impossible. It had said that China was establishing a lease-lend organisation in Calcutta, and that Calcutta had become the terminus of one airline to China and was likely to become terminus of another. There was also some proposal about a Reserve Bank; and 'in order to keep China in the war' it was essential to do all we could to avoid friction in Calcutta over lease-lend such as had arisen in Burma.

The telegram was sent when the military road from Burma into China was still open and Rangoon in our hands. Rangoon fell on 9 March, however, and by the time I joined my post the port of Calcutta was closed, and a Japanese fleet dominated the Bay of Bengal. I cannot recall ever coming across any Chinese lease-lend organisation, and to send supplies up the Burma-China road was, of course, now utterly impossible. So I found it hard, from the start, to see how I could fulfil the purposes I was supposed to serve. But it took long for Delhi to agree that the whole idea of a China Relations Officer needed reconsideration.

My main contact with the Chinese was the Consul-General in Calcutta, Dr. C. J. Pao, and we were throughout on very friendly terms with him and his American wife. The main problem he and I discussed was, oddly enough, sailors; this indeed was the only specifically Chinese problem that occupied an appreciable amount of my time. Several thousand Chinese seamen were stranded in Calcutta and other Indian ports, unable to get home. By law the shipping companies had to repatriate them, which, however, was quite impracticable; and meanwhile the men had to be maintained till they could go to China. Their large numbers made them a perplexity for all and they had nothing whatever to do. They applied to their Consul-General for help, and I had to do what I could to assist him. It took us months of negotiation to approach any partial solution. At one stage a 'Chinese War Service Corps' was constituted, huts were put up in Ballygunge and as many seamen as could be got were collected there. Some Chinese were sent to officer the corps.

A climax came on 5 December, when a yelling mob of the most troublesome sailors surrounded the Consulate. Dr. Pao felt driven to invoke the Chinese Conscription Law, which enabled him at a stroke of the pen to make them all soldiers. This he did, and with the help of friends of mine in the Bengal-Nagpur Railway we sent off some 400 of them to Ramgarh near Ranchi, where an American general was training Chinese troops. There was even a hitch over this, and they were nearly returned to us; but that was overcome, and we were now quit of the more lawless element. But many were still left. At one time I thought we had a golden opportunity of placing them in useful work. With the first air raids on Calcutta in December, the port labour vanished, and we at once offered our Chinese seamen as a substitute; they refused, however, and we could not compel them. A few were formed into a fire-fighting corps for use in the port, but the bulk of them were still an unsolved problem when I left in May 1943. Apart from the matter of the seamen, there was, in fact, little to be done in Calcutta towards helping China or 'keeping her in the war'.

Two other occupations served to fill my time. One was to preside over a Selection Board for emergency commission

officers in the Indian Army; the other to do a daily four-hour shift at the Air Operations Room on Ballygunge maidan. By this stage in the war there remained few fighting types volunteering for commissions in Calcutta, and the number of suitable candidates we could recommend was therefore small. Of those we did recommend, not many, I imagine, got past the military selectors.

The Operations Room at Ballygunge did seem worth while. This was a base for receiving air-raid warnings and if necessary issuing 'alerts' to Calcutta. It was a R.A.F. base, but part-time amateurs, businessmen and others, worked there on shifts. It was mostly tedious, but I had the distinction of passing on Calcutta's first 'red warning'. This was at 10.14 p.m. on 20 December; the all clear went two hours later. About twelve Japanese planes passed over very high, dropping bombs on Kidderpore dock and the Burmah-Shell's installations at Budge Budge and Dum Dum. Damage was slight. This was followed by four or five other raids on the city, but none of great importance. The effect in Calcutta, however, was serious. Panic seized the ignorant, who streamed out in thousands by road, rail and river to the north from 21 December onwards. But most of them came back within a few weeks, when the danger began to seem not so very great after all.

One interesting 'Chinese' episode in my China Relations appointment was a visit to wartime Chungking. The Japanese had pushed Chiang Kai-shek's Forces back and back till they at last rested on this remote city. There was only one means now of getting there, by air. The Chinese National Airways Corporation operated the route, and the aircraft each had one American and one Chinese pilot. My wife and I left Calcutta early on 14 October 1942, reaching Chungking that evening. The early part of the flight took us over north-east Bengal and Assam low enough to make out familiar landmarks; we refuelled at Dinjan in Dibrugarh District. Then came the three hours from Dinjan to Kunming. To avoid interception by Japanese planes we flew a long way north of the direct route and very high, at 17,500 feet over the Patkai range, and glimpsing Fort Hertz (or Putao), Burma's northernmost outpost. It was very bumpy, and when we landed the passengers were in poor shape, for the plane had no pressurising



facilities. After that the 2½ hours' flight to Chungking was not so bad. Sir Horace Seymour, the Ambassador, kindly put us up. He was housed in a disused Chinese temple in far from ambassadorial comfort, and we felt he was stretching hospitality far to shelter two strangers for more than a week. Everyone in the overcrowded city was living in difficulty, the population now being almost twice the normal owing to influx of refugees. It is a city of hills, built mainly on the high, steep right bank of the Yangtse, but with a large population also on the left or lower bank. When we were there it had been thoroughly bombed more than once. There was not a pane of glass left and ruined houses lay on every side. The Chinese, however, had taken advantage of the damage to drive broad new roads through the city instead of its old narrow streets.

Our first official contact with the Chinese was a call on K. C. Wu, Mayor of Chungking, who had been Mayor of Hankow until that city was abandoned. Next day we visited by appointment Dr. H. H. Kung, said to be the second most important man in China. The visit was not a success; Dr. Kung was obviously not interested in the China Relations Office. The same afternoon we called on Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his wife in their pleasant, rather English-looking, abode. He came in after we had been entertained by his lady for a while, and made himself very affable. He spoke no English, but Mr. Hollington Tong acted as interpreter. Madame, smartly dressed, and with a slight American accent, played the part of the *soignée*, sophisticated hostess to perfection. Various engagements followed, both social and official.

By April 1943 it at last became possible for me to be relieved of my thoroughly unsatisfactory employment, and for us to turn our faces homeward. The natural wartime difficulties about getting shipping reservations ensued, but on 13 June we left India from Bombay for the last time aboard the *Strathmore*, the ship we had come out on five years before, when the world was so different. Thus began a forty-eight days' voyage covering 19,000 miles, which took us deviously to Liverpool via the Red Sea, Suez, the Red Sea again, Diego Suarez, Cape Town, and Freetown. It was throughout quite uneventful, no enemy by air or sea molested us, but mostly tedious and hot.



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