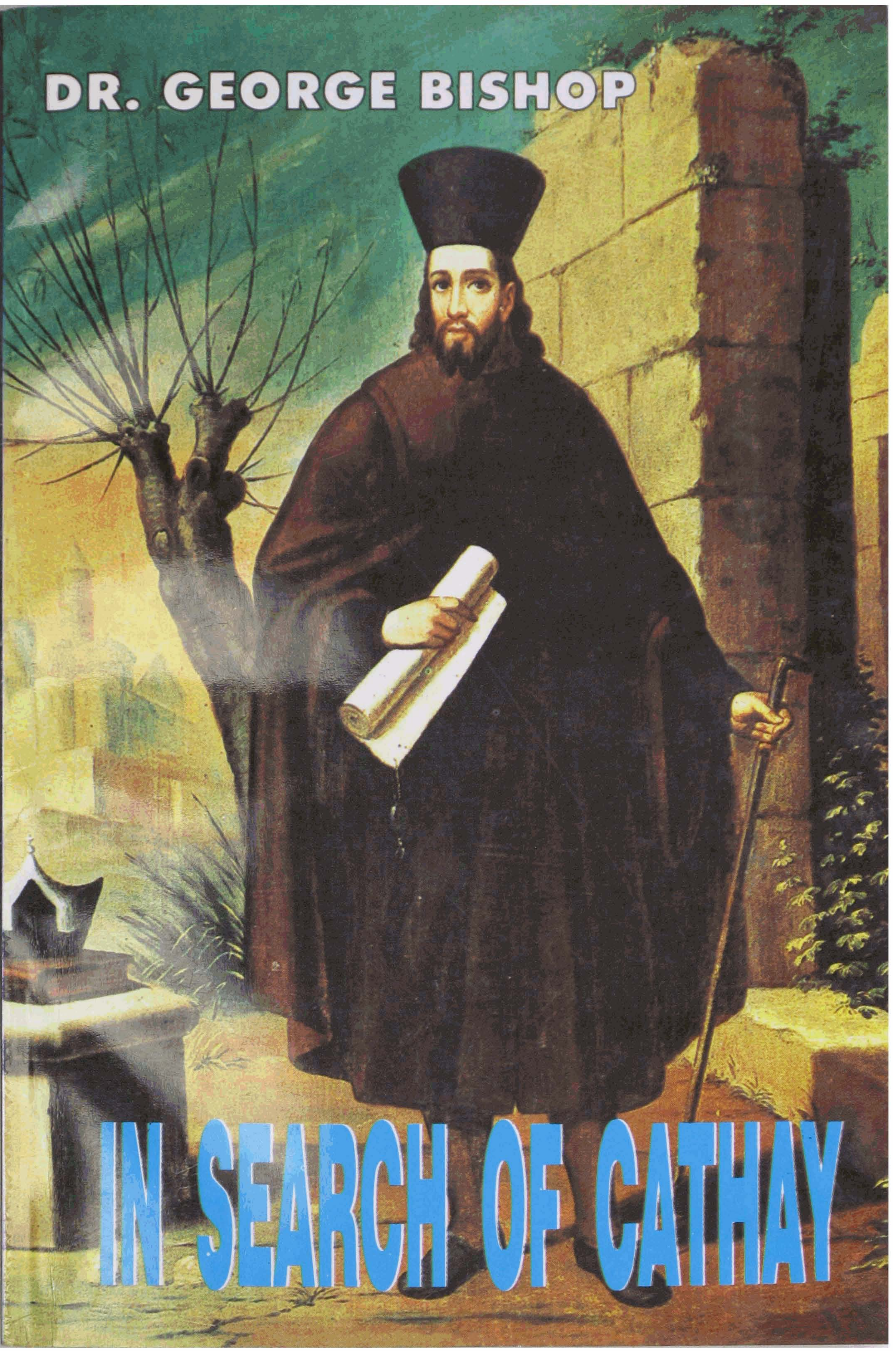
DR. GEORGE BISHOP
IN SEARCH OF CATHAY

About the Author

Dr. George Bishop was born in Kurseong, India, in 1922. He was educated at Victoria School. During the war he served in the British and Indian armies, in the Middle East and India. In 1950 he was awarded the B.Sc from the University of Sheffield. The following year he qualified as a teacher. He taught Mathematics and Science for four years at Cardinal Vaughan School, London. He spent another four years as Head of Science at the North Paddington Comprehensive School in London. During these years, studying part-time at the Institute of Education, University of London, he obtained the degrees of M.A. and Ph.D. In 1959 he was appointed Lecturer in Education at Pius XII College, Roma, Basutoland, now Lesotho. In 1961 he moved to the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. In 1967 he was appointed Senior Lecturer in Education. During this time Dr. Bishop wrote several books on the teaching of mathematics and science. In 1965 he was appointed to U.N.E.S.C.O. From 1965 to 1969 he was Director of a project based at the University College, Dar-es-Salaam, to produce 500 graduate B.Sc. teachers for the High Schools of Tanzania. In 1969 he was head of a large Project, located in the University of the South Pacific, Fiji, to prepare a new, more relevant curriculum for the schools of the many countries making up the South Pacific region. In 1977 Dr. Bishop was invalided out of U.N.E.S.C.O., having suffered a stroke in Fiji.

Dr. Bishop has put his invalidity to good purpose. In 1978, while still convalescing, he did an M. Sc. on the life of Father Stephen Perry, S.J., the well-known astronomer, at the Manchester Institute of Technology. In 1981 he was appointed to the European Economic Commission in Brussels to examine the status of Education in Swaziland and some other countries of southern Africa.

Dr. Bishop is the author of several books on *Curriculum,* which have been published by Macmillan.

His *Travels in Imperial China,* about the discovery of the giant panda by Père David, was published by Cassell in 1990, and republished in 1996. To commemorate the ending of the Second World War he wrote *Pika-don,* about the atomic bombing of Japan, and which revolves round the involvement of Fr. Arrupe, S.J., and Group-Captain Leonard Cheshire, V.C. *In Search of Cathay* details the monumental journey made by Brother Bento de Goes, S.J., from Goa to the Gates of China, over the Pamir Mountains and the Gobi Desert. *A Lion to Judah* describes the travels and adventures of Fr. Pedro Paez, S.J., who not only converted two emperors of Ethiopia but also discovered the source of the Blue Nile. Other books in preparation deal with the travels and discoveries of Jesuits in Africa and in South America.

After his many travels in various parts of the globe, Dr. Bishop now lives in Britain. He is married and the youngest of his four children is a Jesuit.

IAL DOS AÇORES

IN SEARCH OF CATHAY

THE TRAVELS OF BENTO DE GOES, S.J.

(1562–1607)

DR. GEORGE BISHOP

1998
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Preface

This is the true story of the travels and adventures of a Portuguese conquistador turned missionary who, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, made one of the most daring journeys of discovery ever made by man. In his search for the legendary Cathay he made a remarkable journey across Central Asia, from Agra in India to Suchow in China, passing through countries never again visited by Europeans till the late nineteenth century.

Ascending from the sun-drenched plains of Hindustan to the stupendous mountain ranges of Central Asia, crossing high, wind-swept plateaux and sandy, waterless, deserts, he finally reached China after incredible hardships. With only one companion, his journey of more than four thousand kilometres lasted over four years. He was finally detained as a prisoner for seventeen months at the very gateway of China, where he died, believed poisoned.

A later Jesuit has written:

> "Goes, in seeking Cathay, had found countries and towns, mountains and deserts marked on no map, Chinese or European. He had stitched the great multi-coloured stuff of central Asia into place between hempen India and silken China, cut open the great melon of which his contemporaries had merely fingered the rind."

A word as to the sources. Goes's diary, in which he noted down the various events day by day, has not come down to us in its entirety. After his death it was

destroyed by Mohammedan fellow-travellers, and only a few fragments could be saved by his faithful Armenian travelling-companion Isaac, who took them to Peking and placed them in the hands of the famous Jesuit astronomer, Father Matthew Ricci. With the help of these precious remains and the oral account of the Armenian, Ricci pieced together the narrative of the journey as well as he could. A full bibliography appears on page 295.

George Bishop
Bourne, Lincs.
1997

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destroyed by Mohammedan fellow-travellers, and only a few fragments could be saved by his faithful Armenian travelling-companion Isaac, who took them to Peking and placed them in the hands of the famous Jesuit astronomer, Father Matthew Ricci. With the help of these precious remains and the oral account of the Armenian, Ricci pieced together the narrative of the journey as well as he could. A full bibliography appears on page 295.

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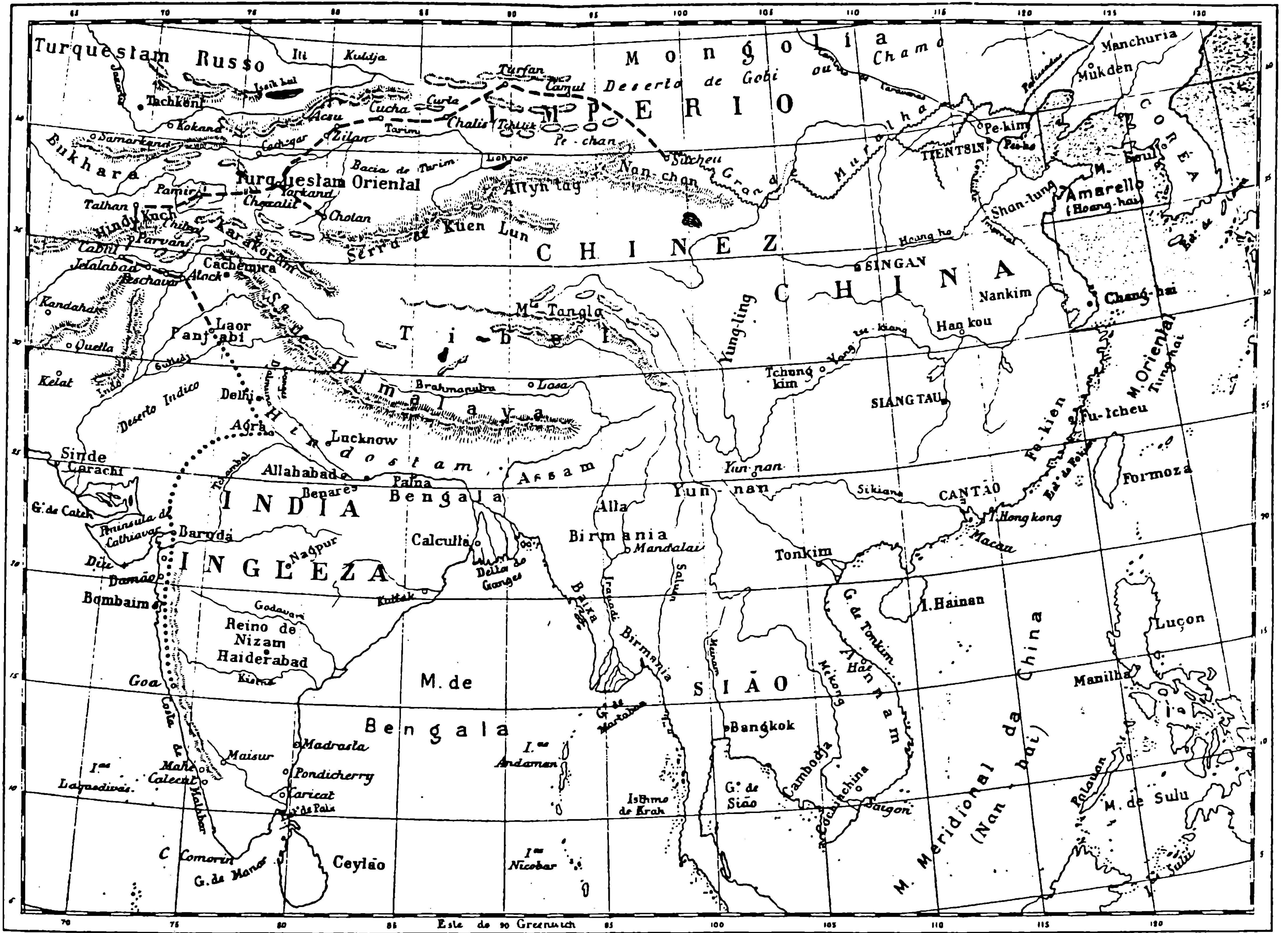


Itinerario de Bento de Goes { *Goa a Laor* .... / *Laor a Sucheu* - - - -

Chapter 1

In, But Not Of, The World

A baking sun blazed down from a deep cobalt sky. A mud-brown river meandered languorously to lose itself in the deep aquamarine of the Malabar sea. Near the bank a *mahout*, using a coconut husk, was scrubbing a mountainous mass of jet-black elephant lying half-submerged in the green water. The *mahout* was a young boy, perhaps ten or eleven years old. He gave some mysterious command and the great hulk of animal, obeying like a child, turned on its side. The young *mahout* began scrubbing this other side. The noble animal had half closed its tiny eyes, wallowing in the luxury. If elephants could smile, this one was laughing. Ochre dust blanketed the deep green of the giant mango trees. Bats, thousands of them, hung upside down in the shade of an old banyan tree which sent down its branches into the earth and struck root. He passed a temple. In the foreground was a giant carved *lingam* in the shape of a phallus. He had heard about these phallic symbols of the god Siva, symbols of creation, of sexual voluptuousness, but he had never seen one before. He removed his helmet and mopped his brow.

Near the temple, under the ancient trees with their twisted trunks and gnarled barks, were rows of statues of Hindu deities — of Brahma, Hanuman, Kali, Krishna, Vishnu. Before one of these a half-naked woman and a completely naked boy were doing their *puja* with a

bowlful of rice and a garland of saffron-coloured marigolds. A *sadhu* (holy man), eyes closed, his face a picture of serenity borne out of the resignation of the East, was too engrossed in his *mantras* to take any notice of the conquistador. He donned his helmet to protect his head from the sun and moved on. A frail old woman, her wizened arms thin and gnarled from years of back-breaking toil, without ever having anything to eat, clad in a cheap, cotton saree was hastily removing pats of cow-dung from the wall of her mud house in case they became wet and unfit for use as fuel. Her age-old peasant's instinct told her it was going to rain.

She was right. The cobalt sky was suddenly black with dark, angry, clouds. The wind off the Arabian Gulf increased in intensity. One large splattering drop of rain was soon followed by others. The wind and the rain intensified. During the monsoon season a violent storm would spring up in a matter of minutes. What had been a drizzle was now a raging cyclone. The wind howled; the rain came down in floods, as if some giant sluice had been opened in the sky. The crashes of thunder deafened him. The lightning, flash after forked flash, came brilliant white, illuminating the whole coast as if by some giant pyrotechnics display. The tall, slender, palm trees leaned forward to oppose the ferocious wind; their long leaves tossed and flayed in all directions, giving them the appearance of enraged serpents struggling to break loose from their Medusa heads. The huge waves, frothing and foaming with anger, crashed and pounded into the small port of Kolechi on the Travancove coast of southern India.

The conquistador, by now soaked to the skin, crouched even lower as he struggled against the wind and the wall of rain. He even drew his sword as if to cut a path through the liquid wall. The rain drops had coalesced into sheets of water that bucketed in cataracts from the angry skies. The rain struck the earth with such violence that it beat up a fine mist above the ground. The path was strewn with coconuts and green mangoes that had been prematurely and

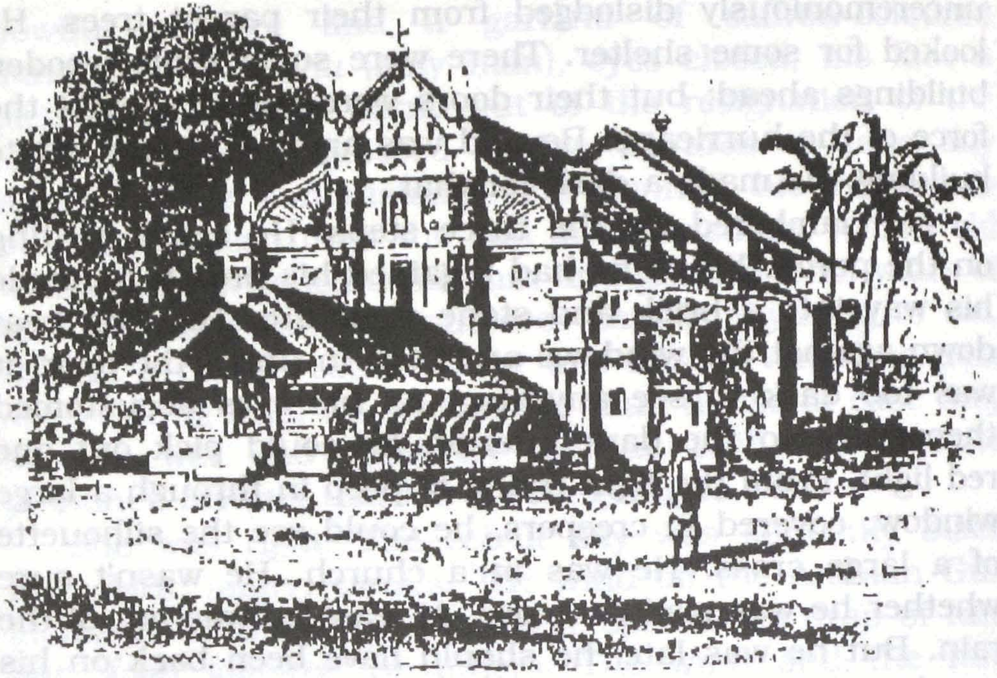
unceremoniously dislodged from their parent trees. He looked for some shelter. There were some white wooden buildings ahead; but their doors were bolted against the force of the hurricane. Beyond was another, larger, white building. He made a dash for that.

He clambered up the three steps. He stood panting on the porch. When he had regained his breath he made his way into a brick and stone structure. The rain beat down against the windows and blew in under the door. It was too dark to see anything. As his eyes accustomed themselves to the dark interior, he could pick out one red light. From the light trying to peep in through a large window, covered in creepers, he could see the silhouette of a large cross. He was in a church. He wasn't sure whether he was glad or angry. At least he was out of the rain. But he was late; he should have been back on his warship, riding anchor off the Malabar coast, a long time ago.

The soldier took off his helmet as he made his way slowly into the church, the water still dripping off his clothes.

He laid his sword beside him on the wooden pew. A large pool of water formed where he sat.

A few months ago he would have been more than surprised to see a woman with bare breasts in the street, let alone in a church. She was probably of the Nayar community. She wore just a piece of cloth from her waist to her knees. By a strange reversal of Western notions, only women of lower caste or of indifferent morals wore a cloth over their bosoms. Scarlet flowers of the silk-cotton tree contrasted with the jet black of her hair. In the elongated lobes of her ears she wore beads in tomato red and indigo blue. Occasionally, as she moved her arms, the bangles on her wrists would jingle. Presently she made her way to a side altar where a candle in a red receptacle, flickering precariously in the gusts of wind, signified the Real Presence. Her long slender fingers made the sign of the cross. The conquistador was bemused by it all. These Christians boasted an even earlier acquaintance with the faith than the Christians of



Ancient Christian church, with its Jesuit façade, on the Malabar Coast

Western Europe. They were the descendants of those early natives of the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of southern India where St. Thomas the Apostle — the 'doubter' — had preached to them in A.D. 52, before he was martyred near Madras sixteen years later. When the Portuguese priests arrived in the early sixteenth century they found no less than sixty thousand Christians in Malabar, descendants of St. Thomas' indigenous Christian converts and of the Christian immigrants from the Church of Persia in the fourth and ninth centuries. It was miraculous that they had managed to keep their faith all those years in view of the constant persecution and harassment by the Tamil Hindus and the Sinhalese Buddhists who had come over from Ceylon. In 1544 the King of Jaffna had massacred seven hundred Christians.

The soldier gazed up at the large crucifix suspended before the altar. Tears were falling from its face In his native Azores such a phenomenon would have been greeted with shouts of 'Milagre! Milagre!'. But the soldier was too worldly-wise for miracles and 'signs'. The 'tears' were easy to explain: it was water seeping through a hole in the roof and landing on the wooden crucifix.

The Incarnation! That a God should have a Son, who was also God, and then let Him die a wretched and ignominious death — for the likes of him! That was too outrageous a notion for any mortal to conjure up — or believe. So preposterous an idea could only have been conceived by — a God.

There was no sign of the storm abating. Indeed, every now and again the interior of the church was floodlit by flashes of lightning. The angry roar of the rain as it hammered on the roof of the church was silenced by the mighty claps of thunder, far louder and more frightening than he had ever heard on the battlefield. The conquistador was forced to bide his time. He thought back to the little village in Vila Franca do Compo, on the island of San Miguel, in the Azores, where he had been born (in 1562). He remembered how he used to kick away the stones on the dusty road as he held his mother's hand on the way to church. His mother! His

family! Why had he left them for this? A life of pillage and cruelty, of bloodshed and rapine, hated by everybody, to be cut short, in all probability prematurely, by a foreign bullet or a native knife, or to succumb to plague or typhus or cholera or leprosy or smallpox or dysentery or malaria or black-water fever — the possibilities were many; to be buried unknown and unsung in a steamy, stinking, hostile country, a vast, unfathomable country of snakes and wild beasts, of temples and jungles, of floods and droughts and earthquakes. Portuguese possessions, strung up and down the coast but never extending inland further than a day's march from their boats, had been wrested from the Hindus and the Mohammedans with unforgettable outrage. These waited their turn to wreak revenge on the imperialists — the *Farangui* (pariahs) as they were called.

He thought back to the events that had brought him to the jungle marshes of the Malabar Coast.

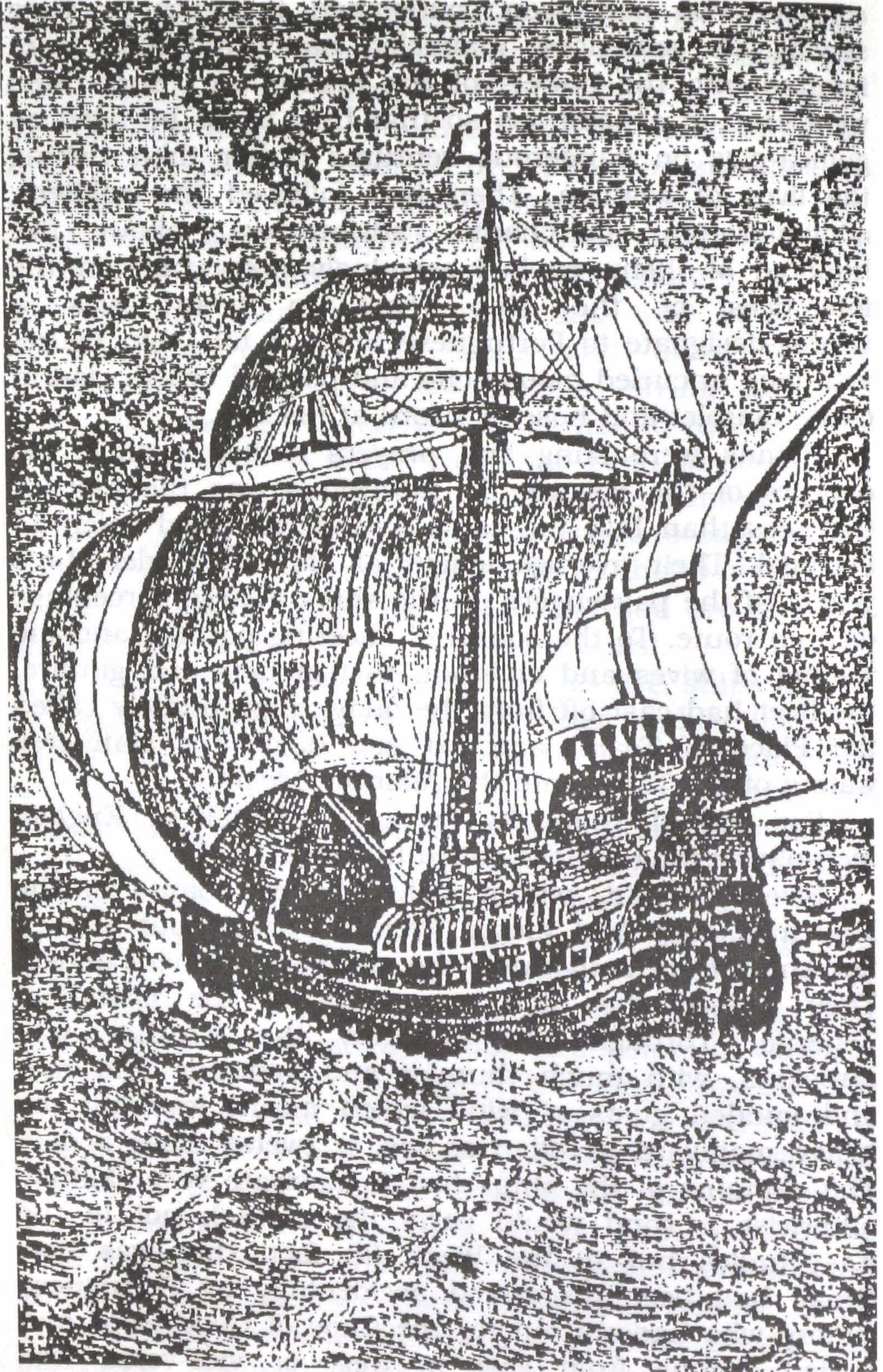
It had been early April when the five ships of the Portuguese fleet heading for the East Indies had left Lisbon, the once-a-year departure of the carracks being timed to take advantage of the favourable monsoon winds which, for thirty days in August and September, would carry them across the Indian Ocean to India and beyond. These carracks, of up to two thousand tons, were the biggest ships in the world, requiring two hundred men and two large capstans to raise the yard. Forty bronze, 75-pounder cannon, each weighing two tons, poked out menacingly from their points of vantage. He had watched the loading of the large, two-masted, four-decked carrack, with its towering poop and prow; a seemingly endless procession of chests carrying several thousands of silver crowns, part to pay for the cost of the government and garrisons in the East, part to be traded. There were arms and munitions. There was all kinds of merchandise: cloths, especially scarlet cloth, even, incongruously for the tropics, woollens; crystal and glassware; Flemish clocks; Dutch clocks; Portuguese wines; oil, olives, vinegar, paper, books; lead and ironware. Then the human cargo had boarded. First the

convicts who had been condemned to death or were serving life sentences, manacled hand and foot, were interred into the bowels of the man-o'-war. Such men were sent on expeditions so that they could be used as guinea-pigs on dangerous ventures rather than risking the lives of seamen. Then had followed the soldiers, administrators, merchants, adventurers, about five hundred of them, packed seemingly everywhere in the interstices of the ship. Last to board was a viceroy-designate to Portuguese India: a tall, thin figure, with long uncurled moustache and pointed beard, clad in cloak, doublet and hose, a sword at his belt.

Hymns were sung and prayers recited against the dangers of the voyage. So hazardous was the journey that less than half the carracks ever returned safely to Portugal. Their average length of life was under three years. Of the passengers on the ships a large percentage died en route. To the sound of cheering patriots and the wailing of wives and children, to trumpets and gunfire, the fleet had cast off from the quay, appropriately called the Place of Tears, and set sail down the slate-grey waters of the Tagus into the Atlantic Ocean.

For fear of attack by French or Dutch or English men-o'-war the carracks sailed in convoy.

Five days out, within sight of Porto Santo in the Madeiras, they had met a French corsair, but after a few shots from both sides, the short engagement ended. They passed the high mountains of the island of Tenerife. Through the Canaries the weather was atrocious, with much thunder and lightning and rain and sudden gusts of wind which meant lowering the heavy mainyard as often as ten or twelve times a day. The captains of the ships had to navigate very skilfully otherwise a wind would carry the carrack not to the East Indies but to the West. (In fact, that was how Brazil had been discovered accidentally by Portuguese sailors who had set out for the Cape of Good Hope and India.) Sailing from east to west or vice-versa was difficult because there was no fixed point in the sky to direct one's course. Whilst one could measure one's



A Portuguese man-o'-war of the sixteenth century

latitude with fair exactness, knowing one's longitude was a matter of guess-work.

The weather had remained foul, but he had been so seasick, lying in his narrow, rope hammock, he would have been glad if the carrack had sunk. He could not face the dry biscuits, and the water was so foul that one needed to place a piece of cloth in the mouth to filter it of worms, caused by unclean receptacles and by the natural process of putrefaction.

Then they were becalmed for days: there was no wind at all; the ships did not move. They were in the doldrums. There was nothing to do but gaze at the distant coastline of Guinea, beyond which lay the then unknown continent of Africa. Or observe the abundance of marine life such as the huge Portuguese 'men-o'-war', brilliantly coloured Medusa or jelly-fish, with their long poisonous, stinging tentacles with which they caught their prey. Pilot fishes led their sharks to whatever food was available, themselves feeding on the excreta of the sharks. And the heat was intense: it was so hot that the pitch between the pine planks and even the tallow candles melted. Many fell prey to the 'disease of the gums', as scurvy was called, turning the carrack into a hospital ship, but without doctors or medicine. First the gums and legs would swell, then the body would become so sore that one's limbs couldn't move. Finally the victim would die from weakness. Dysentery and ague were other fatal maladies. The Captain's whistle, calling for prayers for yet another victim, became too frequent to warrant attention.

Finally, one day, a breeze had swept them across the line, the equator, into the favourable winds of the southern hemisphere.

The Pole Star was no longer visible; the Southern Cross appeared instead. As they neared the Cape of Good Hope, feared of all men because of its storms — Bartholomew Diaz who had discovered it in 1486 had aptly named it 'Cape Tempestuous' — they were greeted with mountainous waves. An albatross, ten feet in span, followed the carrack. So did other birds, like the rushtail

(the 'bosun' or 'tropic bird'), and the forked tail ('frigate' bird), and numerous terns. When they rounded the Cape he, along with the other soldiers on board, had thrown his knife and fork overboard in keeping with the old Portuguese custom to signal they had left their old way of life behind them. And the viceroy-designate presumably had opened the King's sealed letters, for at the Cape the King's jurisdiction ended and his began. The orders would have been much the same as they ever were: strengthen forts, guard the Malabar coast, manufacture gunpowder, found cannon and at all costs destroy the Dutch and French.

It was near the Cape that they nearly ran aground. Because of the rocks and quicksands they often could not sail at night. By now they had been at sea for seven months, two months longer than the usual time. They had neither meat nor anything else to eat. A providential encounter with a shoal of fishes enabled them to eat again. The carracks slowly made their way northward. Nearing Mozambique they had difficulty in negotiating the coral reefs and sand banks, covered during the spring tides, surrounding the Angoza Islands. Finally they reached Mozambique, a town on an island with a small, safe harbour. It was captured from the Moors in 1507, when the Portuguese built a fortress there. The fortress was surrounded by straw-houses that housed the local inhabitants: aborigines with bones through their cheeks, teeth filed sharp, with ivory tips to their spears. Here they stayed for a fortnight to take on water and provisions for the final run to India, a voyage lasting a month. Oranges, apples, lemons, limes, bananas, guavas, papaya and fresh meat slowly restored to health the many crew and passengers suffering from scurvy. Despite the fruit, the foggy mists and the intense heat of summer made the island an unhealthy place, appropriately called the Cemetery of the Portuguese. Before departing they took on a cargo of African slaves.

The carracks crossed the equator yet again and sailed past the coast of Abyssinia which, alone in northern Africa, had resisted the march of Islam. They

then made their last leg of the journey across the Indian Ocean. Boughs of palms and snakes swimming on the water, together with the sight of a few Indian birds, indicated they were near the Indian mainland. This they finally reached in October, disembarking at the port of Goa. As salvos of cannon boomed across the water, as the church bells rang, as a band played martial music, the Viceroy landed on the quayside, in front of the mint and cannon foundry. To the applause of the welcoming crowds he proceeded in state through a series of triumphal arches to his palace — more imposing without than within since it was the practice of the outgoing Viceroy to strip it bare of furniture. No Viceroy was appointed for more than three years, which was not a long time in which to amass a fortune. So he usually made up for little time by accepting bribes, buying and selling private offices and other perquisites, and by condoning heinous injustices. Usually a Viceroy spent the first year of office getting to know his work, his second year amassing a fortune, his third visiting key forts.

The torrential monsoon rain stopped suddenly, just as suddenly as it had started. He had not noticed the young woman take her leave from the side chapel. He stepped out of the church. The sun raised steam from the ground so that all the countryside was like a steam bath. A damp, steamy heat lay oppressively over everything. It seemed the very jungle sweated and writhed and grew in the wet heat. The air, still and damp, hung heavily like a blanket over the drenched earth. No breeze stirred or bent the palms. The huge mango trees, their leaves washed clean, appeared in the full dignity and splendour of their deep emerald green. Soon the setting sun was low over the horizon, turning the scudding clouds above into a majestic magenta and gold. Everything was bathed in a yellow, sulphurous light, the last faint flush from the glow in the west. A tiny urchin, the colour of his black water-buffaloes, herded them into the sunset beyond the spice mountains with a long bamboo pole. There was the smell of burning

wood and cow-dung, mingled with the scent of sweet jasmine and marigold and spices. The bamboo rustled in the faint breeze that always came up for a moment when the sun set. This was the twilight hour, the magic hour of the East, when the drenching sweetness of purple lilac and waxen-white syringa hung on the air. Was this, perhaps, why he had come to this vast sub-continent? But like all magic, the twilight hour was short. The flaming sun, with a sudden plunge, dipped below the horizon and left the world to the blue of the Indian night. It was as if the whole world stood still for a second and then slipped swiftly into an abyss of darkness. The velvet darkness closed in as if a curtain had come down, and the stars all came out at once, glittering like diamonds on a maharani's *saree*. In the distance he could hear the dull thumping of brown fingers on the tom-toms, the male and female drum, and then slowly the lilt of a flute joined in.

Now it was not all magic. As he hurried his footsteps towards the sea, now bathed in phosphorescent light, he could hear the jackals and the maniacal laughter of the hyenas, baying at the moon. This was their hour when the sudden darkness gave to their cowardly yellow bodies the courage to creep out of the jungle and seek what had died during the day. And the rains was the season when the snakes would come out, too, from their hiding places in old roots and crannies — the cobras, the Russell's vipers, the diminutive but deadly kraits and even the giant pythons. He had heard about a man who had sat down for a rest on a tree trunk. When the trunk began to move he realised he had been sitting on a python. Great bats darted from one compass point to another, as billions of insects struck up their pizzicato orchestration, the giant bullfrogs providing the bass descant. The twinkling green efflorescent light from an occasional firefly was comforting, but hardly illuminating. In the pale, ghostly, light of the rising moon, he could make out in the distance the silhouette of a man in a dug-out canoe. He hoped the ferryman would row him over to his ship, now ablaze with lights, which rode anchor in the

bay. He dared not contemplate what reception his late arrival on board would occasion.

The rainy season was over; it was now drier and cooler. The conquistador strode past the thatched huts overlooking the long beaches of white sand where the surf rolled in to groves of palm trees. Now the slender palms stood erect, their leaves hanging limp and listless. A giant black elephant — the same one? he wondered — with a ton of palm leaves tucked in between its long, sparkling, sword-like tusks, carried home its dinner, and a huge metal chain buckled round its mid-riff, clanging as it did so. The walls of the mud houses were decorated with pats of cow-dung drying out in the sun. A small urchin, possibly the same one, drove his herd of water-buffaloes into the green slime of the stagnant marshes. He wondered if the semi-naked Nayar woman would be at her devotions. He climbed up the steps of the old church. It was some time before his eyes got accustomed to the dark inside. The candle glowed in its red receptacle. But the Nayar woman was not there. A grey-haired man in a shabby *soutane*, his lined face a testimony to years of hard living in the tropics, was bent over his breviary next to on open confessional. The large wooden crucifix looked down over the aisle. The conquistador knelt down. Since the afternoon when a torrential tropical storm had driven the conquistador to take shelter in a church, he had thought much about his life, the purposelessness and futility of it all. A burning restlessness consumed him, not knowing what it was he sought. 'Whither should my heart flee from my heart?' Like the great sinner and saint one thousand years before him, St. Augustine, he had the choice of two worlds — the city of the world or the city of God. Slowly the revelation had come to him. As St. Augustine had said at the beginning of his Confessions: "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." Like Augustine he chose the latter — the city of

God: it was the only reality, all else was meaningless. No tears of water ran down the face on the cross this afternoon. There were tears — but from his own eyes. He repeated Augustine's words:

> "Late have I loved Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Late I love Thee! Late, late I love Thee, O my God, but I am come at last. Late have I loved Thee, yet never loved I till now."

The half hours went by. He lost count of the time.

He slowly made his way down the church steps. He made his way to the centre of the town. A group of women were pounding grain in the hollowed out trunk of a tree. Another group were pounding soiled linen on rocks. A line of cows threw up a cloud of red dust as they ambled off to pasture. A cloud of black vultures and kites swirled round and round, circling lower and lower, not darting, cleanly, like eagles and falcons, but swooping lazily down because their victims were dead and there was no reason for haste. As he passed one black cluster of writhing, quarrelling vultures, pulling and tearing and gorging themselves, they barely flapped away a short distance, to return to their feasting as soon as he had gone. Not far away were the bones of a cow or dog or donkey picked white and clean by the vultures. Past the betel palms, and pepper trees, past the tamarind tree, past the silk-cotton tree, its scarlet flowers hanging limp in the dry heat, past the neam tree, under the low branches of a jackfruit tree, past more trees hung with orchids and petunias and ivy geraniums, past the barrier of prickly pear, down the avenue of Java fig trees, till he came to the Jesuit House. He had made up his mind. He would make a complete holocaust of himself. The house was covered in greenery — climbing vines and creepers, clematis and trumpet and moonflower vines and trailing bougainvillaea. On the house and on the walls jasmine, begonia, convulvulus and scarlet creeper had sent out their long tender shoots of lettuce green which were choking everything, climbing

across doors and windows and the low sloping roof. The flowerbeds were a jungle of colour, where cannas and geraniums, marigold and hollyhock, hibiscus and nasturtium, fuschia and calendula, zinnia and carnation, scarlet poinsettia, ran riot. Great banks of wine and mauve rhododendrons provided a background of soft flame. He climbed up the three wooden steps leading to the verandah of the house. A pair of lizards, basking in the sun, scampered away. Below the house a cow, some goats and a pig took shelter from the tropic sun. The house was built off the ground to keep out the damp and the many numerous snakes that frequented the area. He knocked.

He took off his helmet and looked up at the huge man before him. The conquistador was of no mean build himself, but the figure confronting him dwarfed him.

"I want to be a Jesuit!"

The tall figure, just aroused from his accustomed siesta in the heat of the day, blinked.

"A Jesuit?" he asked, just to make sure his ears were not playing tricks on him.

There was an embarrassing pause, with the slightest hint of irritation on the conquistador's part.

"Yes, a Jesuit," he repeated.

There was a further pause,

"But you are a soldier," the big figure blurted out the obvious. He at once realised his faux-pas and immediately took pains to show he meant no disrespect, even though the generally dissolute life of the common soldier was hardly a good preparation for a life of celibacy, poverty and prayer. He remembered that the founder of his own Order had been a soldier.

The Company or Society of Jesus — or Jesuits — was founded in 1540 by a Basque nobleman and courtier, Ignatius of Loyola. Up to his twenty-sixth year he was "a man given over to the vanities of the world, and took a special delight in the exercise of arms, with a great and vain desire of winning glory!" One day in 1521, while defending the town of Pamplona against the vastly superior French forces, a French cannon-ball smashed

into both his legs; both Ignatius and Pamplona fell. After his legs were set badly, the wounded knight was carried on a stretcher to his native Loyola. For eight months he languished in bed. At his own insistence his leg was broken twice by doctors in an attempt to correct a limp which had developed — for how could a cripple win the affections of a noble lady? As he lay on his sick bed he dreamt of winning great battles against the Turks, of the deeds of daring he would undertake to win the lady of his desires, rumoured to be no less than the Infanta Catarina of Spain.

He passed the days reading everything at hand. At last the stock of the more usual reading matter came to an end. He was forced into reading A Life of Christ and the Lives of the Saints. By the time his legs had mended so too had his life of dissipation. He now dreamt of doing great deeds for God. 'Ad majorem Dei gloriam' was his new battle-cry. He gathered six like-minded men around him in Paris and formed his Company on the model of a regiment drilled and disciplined with exacting severity for its work of renewing the Church and transforming society by day-to-day involvement in the life of the world.

"But do you know what is involved?" the big man asked, fixing the soldier with the penetrating eyes of a startling blueness.

"It's a killing life," he went on. "It is an insuperable drain upon body and spirit. It is fourteen years hard labour — penal servitude — even before you are ordained. People die of homesickness and heartbreak and despair long before the novitiate is up."

He continued to fix the soldier. There was a pause.

"But *you* didn't die, Father," replied the conquistador, a wry smile spreading over the tanned face.

The priest was beaten.

The conquistador was asked the usual questions. His name was Bento de Goes. He had been born twenty-two years ago in the Azores. He never disclosed the reason for leaving his beloved Azores. His education and his breeding suggested he had been educated for a position higher than that of a common soldier. Had he, like many

a wild youth, enlisted for the Indies in consequence of some youthful escapade? wondered the priest.

Some weeks later, in February 1584, the young conquistador Bento de Goes,* laid aside his sword and exchanged his uniform for the habit — a black *soutane* and sandals — as a novice of the Society of Jesus.

Life was now very different from that of a soldier of the Royal Portuguese Fleet. He made the thirty-day Retreat known as the Spiritual Exercises; he began to learn how to pray, how to acquire the art of acting against his own inclinations. Life was one round of prayer and contemplation alternating with the hum-drum day-to-day activities, even to cleaning out the toilets, designed to foster obedience and humility.

But before two years had elapsed the novice decided to quit. For a man of action the classroom studies proved difficult. But that was not the main reason for his quitting. From the deepest reaches of his heart he felt he was not, nor ever could be, worthy enough to be a priest who would one day, at the consecration, actually hold the Body and Blood Christ in his hands. He exchanged his *soutane* for the breast-plate and armour and sword. He rejoined the colonial army and set sail with the Portuguese fleet for the fever-ridden inferno of Ormuz, which guarded the entrance to the Persian Gulf.

Four years later, at the end of March 1588, when the fleet again touched Goa, Bento once again applied for admission to the Society of Jesus and was admitted as a lay brother. He was a novice once more. He was several times given the option of entering upon a course of

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* There is a romantic story that de Goes was not his real name. In 1854 a book published in the Azores described a young man called Luiz Gonçalves who, after disappointment in love, sailed for India where he joined the Portuguese army. After a few years of somewhat riotous living he repented of his excesses and joined the Society of Jesus at Goa, at the same time changing his name to Bento de Goes. However, the evidence suggests this story is not quite true.

theology with a view to the priesthood, but from a feeling of humility he firmly declined. He would remain a Jesuit lay brother. A Jesuit lay brother is a full member of the Society. He is neither a servant nor a second-class Jesuit. Though he is not ordained as a priest he takes the same vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. Unquestioning obedience to orders was — and still is — the guiding rule of the Jesuits. As a body they were always obedient, no matter how extreme the cost. It is this that has accounted for their remarkable success as missionaries.

In 1593 de Goes made his solemn promise to renounce the world, to forgo all possessions and all hope of temporal power, and to live in any country where his Superior might think him most useful: 'ad majorem Dei gloriam'. He consecrated his body, mind and will in the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He was now dead to the values of the world. He would be in the world, but not of the world.

Chapter 2

The Portuguese — Conquistadors And Saints

In the first half of the fifteenth century For uguese captains, inspired and directed by the genius of Prince Henry the Navigator, nosed their ships down the west coast of Africa, discovering a new continent. In the second half of the century Diego Cao reached the mouth of the Congo and Bartholomew Diaz rounded the Cape of Good Hope. On May 29th, 1498, Vasco da Gama, after an epic voyage of eleven thousand nautical miles via Cape Verde, the Cape of Good Hope (where there was a mutiny by his men off Mossel Bay) and Mozambique, lasting 630 days, of which half were in open sea and during which half of his crew died, finally dropped anchor at Calicut. The sea route to the East had been found.

Conqueror followed hard on the heels of explorer. With the capture of Goa by Alfonso de Albuquerque in 25th of November, 1510, the foundation of the Portuguese empire in the East was laid. Goa became the capital of this empire in India. In the wake of the conquerors Christian priests sailed to baptise the new-born worlds. It was the twin desires of gain and grace that drove men eastward.

In the early years of Christianity the Church had entered thoroughly into the cultural life of the Roman Empire. Without sacrificing doctrinal purity she

preserved whatever was good from the old culture and incorporated it into the new. But when the Moors captured much of the Holy Land this attitude changed: the Crusades against the Saracens introduced a legacy of militancy and intolerance; the Sword and the Cross became allies. When Albuquerque captured Goa he massacred the entire Mohammedan population. For centuries the Portuguese in Europe had fought a life-and-death-struggle with the Moors and so such an action was merely a continuation of that 'holy' war. All non-Christian cultures came to be regarded as the work of the devil. It was thought to be the work of God to uproot them and plant Christian, European, culture in their place. The idea that grace is operative even in a pagan milieu was forgotten. By the fifteenth century conditions had conspired to produce a particularly vicious form of Europeanism: close union between the mission and colonial imperialism. One result of this close union and interpenetration of Church and State was that kings and princes conceived it their duty to spread the faith. It is seldom, however, that the weapons proper to kings and commanders and swash-buckling traders are those proper to saints. Christian ideals came to be overshadowed by piracy and aggression.

In 1540 all Hindu temples in the island of Goa were destroyed; in 1567 a law was passed forbidding a Christian to keep infidel servants in his house, with the result that thousands were obliged to adopt a religion they neither believed nor understood in order to earn their daily bread. Those who would not convert were bribed or coerced. Converts were thoroughly 'portugalised' — obliged to take Portuguese names, wear Portuguese dress, observe Portuguese customs. They were cut off from their own people. The Portuguese, and indeed other European nations, were proud and intolerant; their general attitude towards eastern peoples and cultures was one of arrogant contempt. Christianity in any but a European setting was inconceivable.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century a realisation of the errors of this ruthless, intolerant

Europeanism began to appear among a few missionaries. These were chiefly the Jesuits. The Spaniard Ignatius Loyola, the founder of this new Order, was not afraid to blaze new trails: he taught that no violence or force must be used in propagating the faith. This was a sharp break with the dominant spirit of the age. Much of the criticism and hostility against Jesuits stemmed from the fact that few at the time (or since) understood what the Jesuits were trying to do. They were accused of being innovators, of compromising the faith. What they were actually attempting to do was to restore the original ideal of Christianity as the leaven of the world, to renew the world mission of the Church, to break down barriers of cultural, racial and national pride, to revive those methods of cultural adaptation which had played so prominent a part in the earlier centuries of Christian evangelisation — namely, respect for native culture, humility of mind and sensitivity to human values whenever and wherever found. If missionaries hoped to win the affection of the people they would have to adapt themselves as much as possible to local habits and indigenous belief. Christianity had to be presented in a way which Eastern peoples could understand and appreciate. This is exactly what the Jesuits set about doing. When Francis Xavier landed on the coast of India in 1542, his entire baggage consisted of what he was wearing — an old cassock which he had mended himself several times — and a breviary. He was admirably equipped for a land which prided itself on selflessness and asceticism.

In 1513 the Portuguese discovered the coast of China. They settled on a tiny peninsula on China's southern coast and established a community at Macao. When Allesandro Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor, returned to Macao in 1582 he ordered the abandonment of the policy of 'portugalising' converts. Chinese Christians were to remain Chinese. Instead of 'portugalising' the Chinese people the missionaries were to 'sinicise' themselves.

Valignano, born in the year that Francis Xavier died (1552), a very tall man with piercing eyes and a large

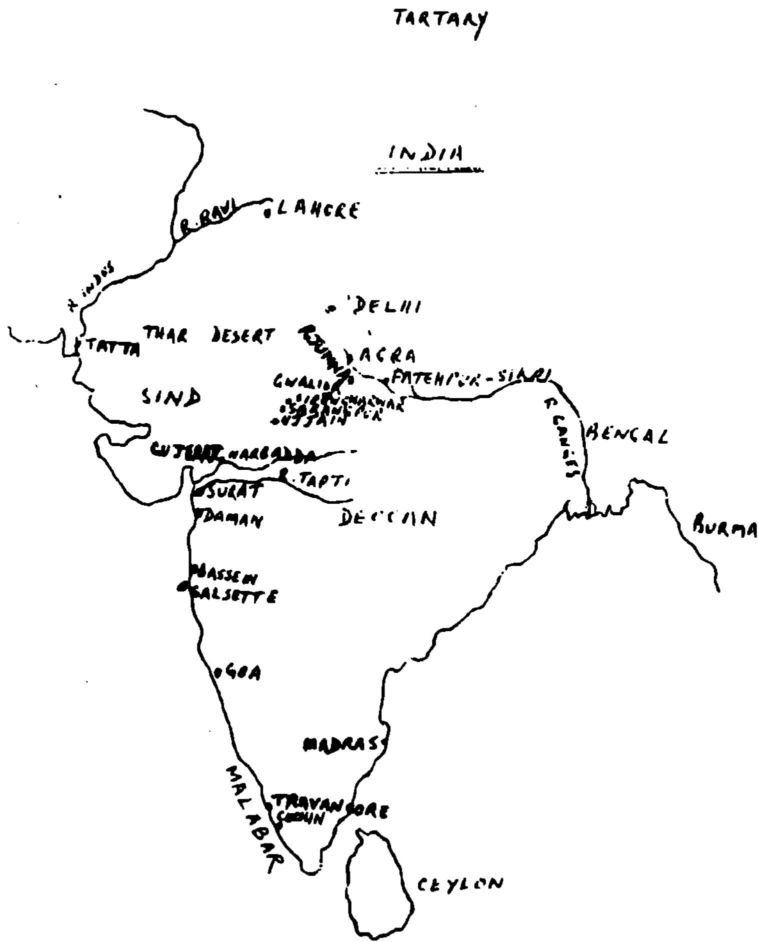
forceful jaw, was a Neapolitan nobleman of immense presence and authority. Whilst a youth, just twenty-three years old, he wounded a courtesan and was brought to justice. He was banished from the Republic. Four years later, a man of exceptional talents who well knew the world and its ways, he entered the Society of Jesus, and volunteered for the foreign missions. But the competition was intense. Only men of outstanding spiritual, intellectual and physical stamina were selected. In 1573 he was appointed Visitor to the Jesuit Missions in India. It was here and also while he was in the Portuguese enclave at Macao that Valignano realised that conversion must follow on charity, not force. But charity presupposed understanding and understanding a knowledge of the native tongue.

It was two of Valignano's own pupils while he was teaching at the Roman College who put his revolutionary ideas on evangelisation into effect in a most remarkable way. Michael Ruggieri was one: he was the first ever European to learn the Chinese language; Matteo Ricci was the other. These two men, in September 1583, established at Chaoching the first Christian establishment in the interior of China. This was a major achievement because China was a world unto itself and a closed world at that, forbidden to foreigners. Ricci was admirably suited by temperament and background to infiltrate the revolutionary doctrines of Christianity into the body of Chinese culture and transform it from within. He had monumental patience and exquisite tact. The doors which for so many years had remained tightly closed to the outside world began to yield under the gentle pressure of sympathetic understanding.

Matteo Ricci entered the Society of Jesus on August 15th, 1571, much to his father's disappointment. After thirteen months' novitiate he pronounced his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and began further studies at the Roman College. It was here that he came under the influence of Valignano. He also had as tutors Robert Bellarmine (later cardinal and canonised saint) and Christopher Clavius, the noted Jesuit

mathematician, friend of both Kepler and Galileo, under whom he studied the positive sciences. Ricci, like Valignano, also volunteered for the foreign missions — India, Ceylon, the Moluccas, China, Japan. He sailed from Lisbon in March 1578, with thirteen other Jesuits, and reached Goa six months later. After some years teaching at the Jesuit College in Cochin, then the hub of Christianity in India, where over four hundred young men received an education as good as the one he himself had received in Europe, he sailed for Macao in 1582.

From the outset Ricci came to realise that his primary task was not to multiply baptisms but to win for Christianity an accepted place in Chinese life. He developed a tremendous love and respect for the people and culture of China, combined with unaffected humility which won him their respect and love. He exchanged his European dress for the Chinese; he even changed his name. It was this change of name that was to result in considerable pain and anguish and suffering for the hero of this book.



Map of India showing the Mughal Empire

Chapter 3

Jesuits At The Mughal Court

Akbar, the great Mughal Emperor, was descended from the redoubtable Tartar King, Tamerlain. (Temar was a famous conqueror of the East. As a result of a fall from his horse he was made lame. It was from this unhappy event that he was called Temar-lang, Temar the Lame, or Tamerlain as he is called in our history books.) Akbar was the eighth king after him. Akbar had not yet reached his fourteenth birthday when a Mughal chief arrived on horseback to inform the young Prince that his father, Humayan, had died as a result of a fall in the royal palace at Delhi. The young heir was then at Kalanaur, 300 miles to the north. In order not to alarm the populace a *mullah* (Muslim priest) named Bekasi, who happened to resemble Humayan, would appear in public, though at some distance from the people who were thus not aware of the King's death until Akbar reached Delhi. The territory Akbar came to rule was vast, stretching from the river Indus and beyond into Persia in the west, to Bengal and the jungles of Burma in the east; from Tartary in the north, to the sea which washes the shores of Gujerat in the south. Throughout his long reign he added other kingdoms to his empire. These vast tracts of land were governed by Captains whom he appointed or by the Kings whom he had dispossessed and who then acted as lieutenants for him. From these he extracted tribute amounting to one-third of their revenues.

In 1573, Dom Antonio, Viceroy in India of the King of Portugal, sent an ambassador, Antonio Cabral, to the court of Akbar who was then besieging Surat, not far north of Daman, where the Portuguese had established themselves. The Emperor, who was then in his middle-thirties and had been king for nearly two decades, was much impressed by the courteous behaviour of Cabral. From Cabral he learned much of the customs of the European nations. He learned, too, something of Christianity. Hearing about a Christian priest of eminent virtue in Bengal, Akbar sent for this priest and had him brought to his palace at Fatehpur Sikri, where he was made to engage in debate with the *mullahs* and theologians from other religions.

Akbar, an epileptic who could neither read nor write, had an exceptional mind which he devoted to searching for 'the truth'. At his capital in Fatehpur Sikri he had built an *ibadat-khana*, a special hall for religious debate; here he collected Sufis, Sunnis, Shias, Brahmins, Jains, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and also crack-brained exponents of every variety of fantastic belief, where they could meet, debate and argue. He would sit in the middle and digest the arguments from all sides. He intended to select the 'best' things known to man on the subject of religion and then unite them all into one single religion, which would be the 'best' of all religions.

He found Hinduism the broadest and most elastic of all religious systems. Its attraction was its independence of dogma and smallness of demands upon blind faith. Though among the uneducated it borrowed shape from the many myths, superstitions and customs with which the common mind was already richly stocked, to a sophisticated intelligence it was as fluid and colourless as any brain-spun metaphysics. It was not a religion but simply religiousness.

He had been brought up as a good Moslem. But then he first questioned, then rejected and finally even began to suppress that faith. So much so that the more fanatical Moslems in his Kingdom were already secretly encouraging Prince Salim, Akbar's eldest son, to

overthrow his father, whilst a large percentage of the population were secretly preparing to rally under Prince Daniyal (the son by Akbar of a beautiful slave who died at his birth).

Akbar was much impressed by what this priest from Bengal had to say. He sent this letter to the Archbishop of Goa in December 1578, or the year 990 in the Muslim calendar.

> *"To the Chief Padre, in the Name of the Lord"*
>
> Letter of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, the King, the hero!
>
> "I am sending Abdullah, my ambassador, and Dominic Perez (an Armenian Christian, the interpreter), with the request that you will send me learned Fathers, and the books of the Law, especially the Gospel, that I may know the Law and its excellence. For I desire to know it. And the Fathers may be sure that I shall receive them most courteously, and entertain them most handsomely. When I have learnt the Law sufficiently to appreciate its excellence, then may they depart at their pleasure, with an escort, and honoured with abundant rewards. Let them come in perfect security. I take their defence on myself."
>
> (Punjab Historical Society. Special Number Vol. V. No. 2. Page 56. Calcutta 1916.)

This embassy of the Mughal Emperor arrived in Goa in September 1579.

To the Jesuits this seemed a chance of another Constantine for the Church, a heaven-sent opportunity to convert a whole kingdom of heathens from the top downwards. The problem that presented itself to the Provincial of the Jesuits was not lack of talented priests to send to the Imperial Court but who to send: he had a large pool of exceptionally capable priests to choose from. The flower of Europe's youth had responded to Ignatius's call. There was the Italian Matteo Ricci, who was later to distinguish himself at the court of Wan Li, Emperor of China. There was the Swiss Pietro Berno, from Ascona,

who was to be slain by Hindus in Cuncolim, Salcete, Goa, a few years later. There was the Englishman Thomas Stevens, scholar of Winchester and later of New College, Oxford. He was the first European to study Canarese scientifically and publish grammars of that language and of Hindustani. The pool of available talent was deep indeed. However, the man chosen to be the leader of the first mission to the court of Akbar was the thirty-year-old Italian nobleman, Rudolph Aquaviva, son of the Duke of Atria. To accompany him were the Spaniard Father Antoine de Monserrat and the Persian Father François Henriques. The latter was a Mohammedan convert from Ormuz, a man of great piety who, though of slight education, knew Persian fluently.

This first mission set out from Goa early in November 17, 1579, in the company of the Portuguese ambassador and his interpreter. The Imperial court was now at Fatehpur Sikri. The city of Delhi had formerly been the residence of the Mughal kings, but Akbar decided to make his abode at the city of Agra. However, when two of his children died there he ordered another city of great beauty to be built. This was Fatehpur Sikri (The Poem in Stone) which was commenced in 1569 as a memorial to his victory over the Pathans. He chose this spot for his 'City of Victory' because it had been the abode of a saint (*Hoghee Mundee*) who had promised him the birth of a son.

After twenty days the party arrived at Surat, then one of the most important towns in India. The group then headed north-east to avoid crossing the Great Indian (Thar) Desert. They crossed the Tapti and the Narmada rivers. They passed through Khandesh and Ujjain, a town no larger than Daman. From here they entered a mountain range where they were in peril from the harassment of bandits and robbers. They emerged into vast plains covered with fields of poppy and flax. At Sarangpore they were able to say Mass and then turned eastwards through rich plains of sugar-cane plantations till they reached Sirong on 15th February.

At Narwar Father Monserrat fell ill and the party was

delayed. Then on to Gwalior and finally Fatehpur Sikri which they reached on 28th February 1580, a journey of over three months, one beset with many dangers and difficulties. Fatehpur Sikri was then arising like some enchanted city, in all its splendour, with its mosques and its palaces, glorious even today in their ruins. These Jesuits were the first, and, with the exception of an English traveller named Ralph Fitch, the only Europeans to visit northern India in the sixteenth century.

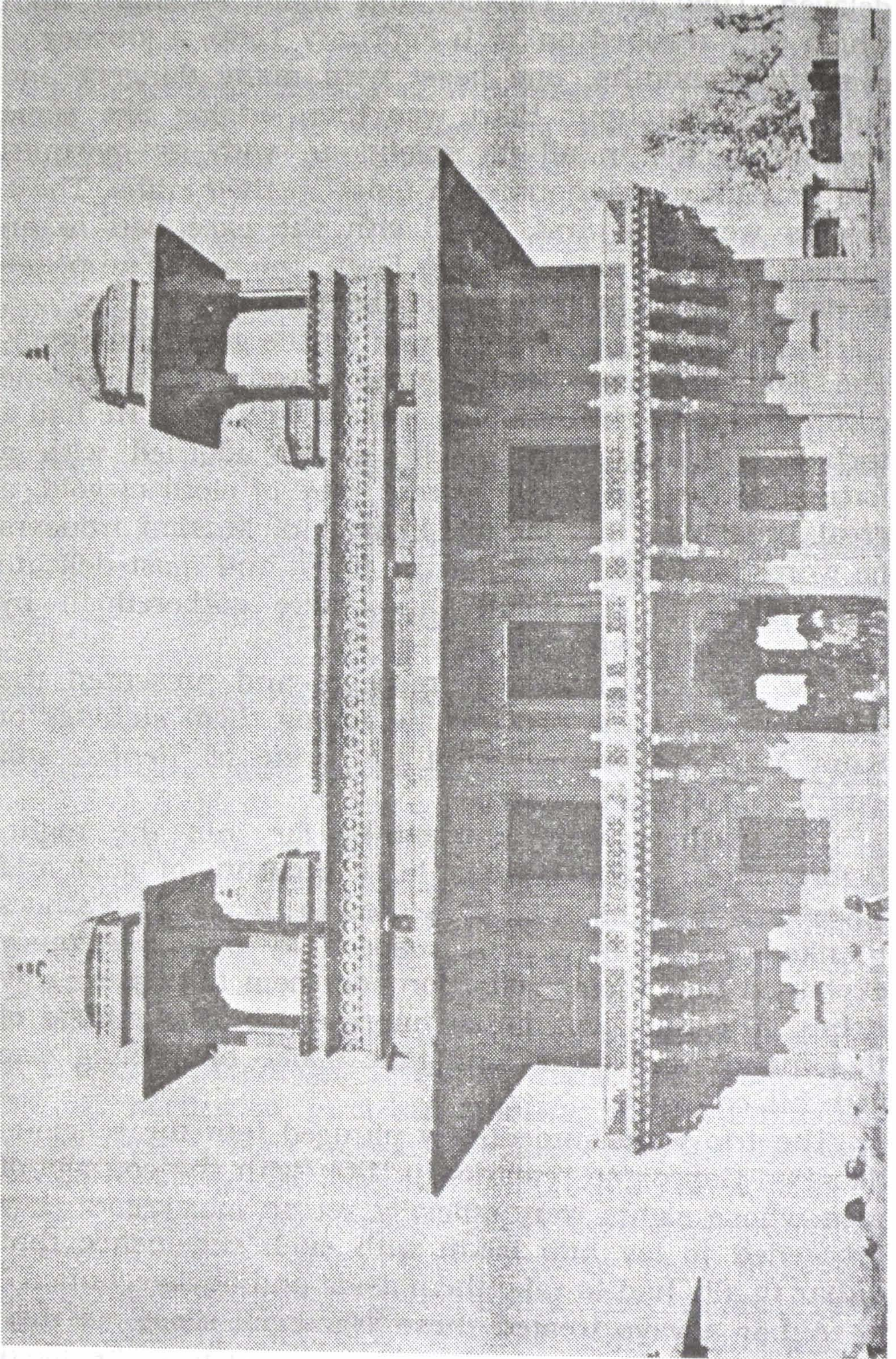
The mission was received well by the great conqueror. The Emperor was seated cross-legged, on a throne covered with a velvet cushion fringed with gold. He had a turban of Hindu form on his head, adorned with a fortune of rare gems. He wore a robe of cloth of gold, a great brooch on his breast. Instead of Muslim trousers he wore the Hindu dhoti, of the finest and most delicate silk, falling to his heels, and there gathered in by bangles covered with pearls.

The Fathers paid their respects and presented the Emperor with their presents — among them etchings of Saint Margaret and of Saint Catherine of Sienna, still extant in a Mughal album.

The Fathers were entertained far into the night. Before taking their leave a large quantity of gold and silver was brought to be presented to them. The Fathers thanked the Emperor very respectfully but courteously explained that their calling forbade them to possess any riches. The King was much impressed by the refusal of this money and for a long time spoke of nothing else with his courtiers.

The trio were immediately plunged into the religious debates. Gascoigne remarks (p.100) "with the courage of men whose sights were officially set on martyrdom they proceeded to lay into Islam with such vehemence that Akbar finally had to take them aside and advise caution."

Akbar always treated these 'Nazarene sages' as they came to be called, with the greatest courtesy; he liked them to sit near him, and would often converse privately with them. He sent food from the royal table to them, and when Father Monserrat became ill he visited him. He



Fatehpur Sikri: The DIWAN-I-KHAS
(According to others THE JEWEL HOUSE)

Etchings of Saint Margaret and of Saint Catherine of Sienna presented to Akbar

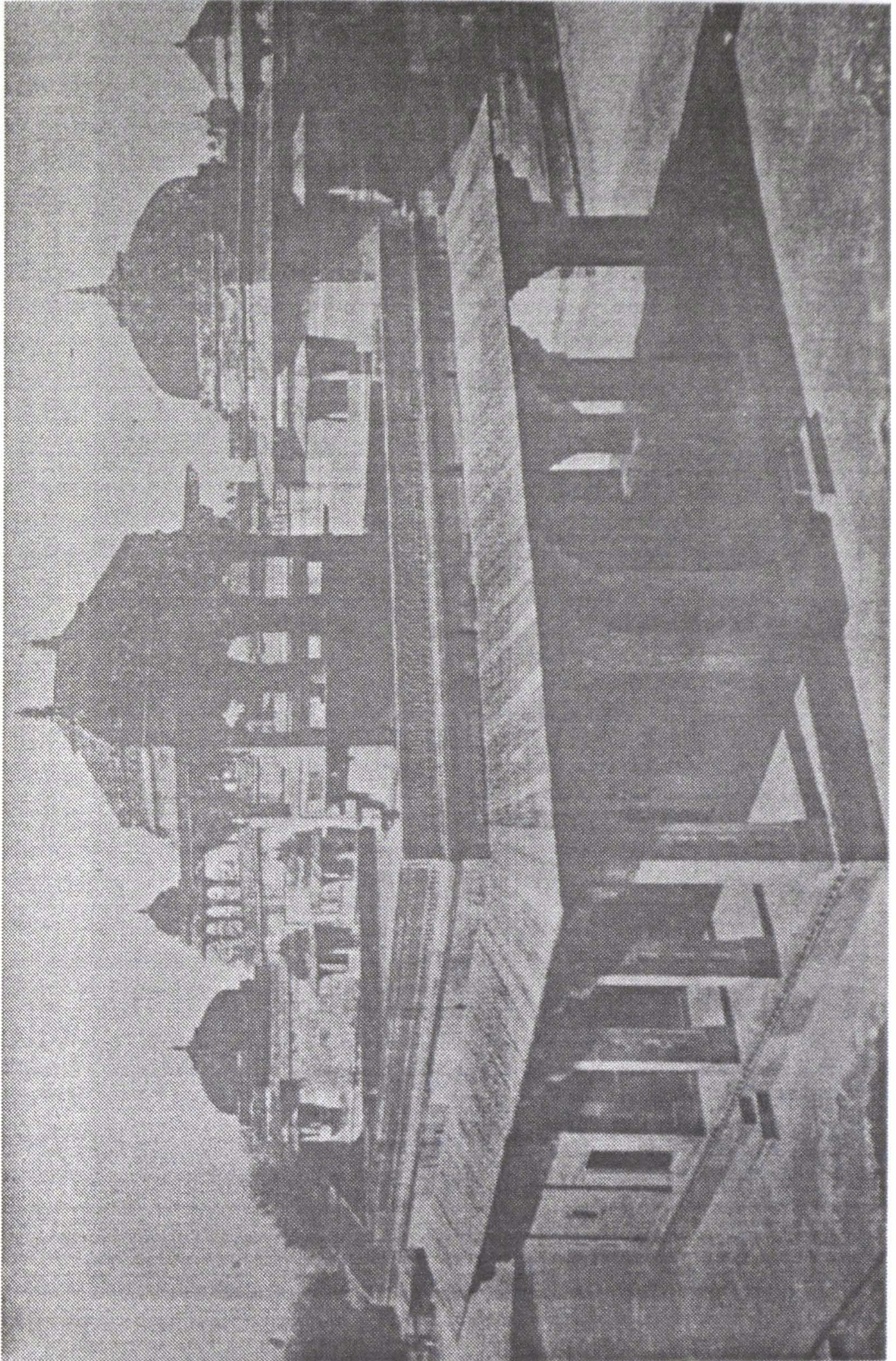
came to see the crib which they had built for their first Christmas at Fatehpur Sikri; when he entered their chapel he always removed his turban. He even took in good part the Jesuits' chiding him for his many wives. He let Father Monserrat become tutor to his son Murad, then aged eleven.

The King was so taken with the learning and behaviour of the priests that the next year, 1581, Father Monserrat was asked to accompany Akbar on his conquest of Kabul.

At first the missionaries were much encouraged by the interest and respect paid to their learning by the Emperor. But it eventually became clear that Akbar was keen on establishing a religion of his own. In 1583 the Jesuits, recognising that their hope of perhaps converting the Emperor was not likely to be realised, returned to Goa. However, their learning, as also their life-style, had made a great impression on the King. The saintliness of their lives, their singleness of purpose, their fearless devotion, were qualities which had always commanded great admiration in India. It was these qualities which were to win the heart of Akbar and the respect of his subjects, whether Muslim or Hindu.

Not surprisingly Akbar asked for a second mission by the Fathers. In 1590, Leon Grimon, a Greek sub-deacon returning to his home through Mughal territory, carried this request for a second mission from Akbar to the authorities in Goa. The following year three Jesuits set out from Goa and finally reached Lahore. (After his conquest of the Kingdom of Lahore, Akbar made its capital city, Lahore, his usual residence.) The choice of Fatehpur Sikri had been an unfortunate one since the ground in that region was brittle and hollow: the reservoirs on which the city depended soon cracked and their water escaped. The drinking water became brackish and corrosive, resulting in much mortality. So within fifty or sixty years of being built the 'City of Victory' was a waterless waste, a dead city.

(This time Rudolph Aquaviva was not one of the deputation to Akbar's court. On his return to Goa he had



This building according to Muslim tradition was the Jesuit Residence at Fatehpur Sikri.

Courtesy : Archaeological Survey of India

Akbar visits the three Jesuits — Fathers Aquaviva, Monserrat and Henriquez
Courtesy : Angelo da Fonseca from the collection of the Heras Institute, St. Xavier's College, Bombay

been put in charge of a mission station in Salcete. But soon after, in 1583, Aquaviva and Father Pietro Berno, the first Swiss Jesuit, along with some other members of the order, were murdered by a Hindu mob.)

At the time the Mughal King was much attracted to the Christian religion. As well as the philosophical appeal of its message the Christian religion had other attractions such as the licence it afforded for the use of alcohol and for eating the flesh of all kinds of animals: the pig and the cow, the former prohibited to Muslims, the latter to Hindus, were not anathema. On the other hand it presented many difficulties for Akbar, too. It would mean giving up his harem of one hundred concubines. There were some difficulties with certain dogmas, as well. The doctrine of the Incarnation he could not fathom: that a God should send his son to earth to live in poverty and die an excruciating death on a wooden gibbet were beyond him. He once remarked "explain the Incarnation to me and I will become a Christian though it cost me my Kingdom."

The cross and poverty were incompatible with a great Emperor's life-style of pomp and power and wealth even though his teachers explained his humility was to conquer the world's pride. He regarded a king as 'a shadow of God' and came to believe that, as such, he was the actual representative of God on earth.

This belief became the cornerstone of his new religion — the *Din-i-Ilahi* — which contained valuable constituents of all other religions. The *Din-i-Ilahi* of Akbar was a theism broad enough and simple enough to include everything and signify nothing. It was based on a vague and mystic liberalism. Adoration was to be addressed to the sun as an emblem of the Creator. Faith was to be found not in idols and incredible gods like Krishna and Rama and Sita and Shiva and Kali nor in the elephant-headed god, Ganapathy, who wrote down the epic Mahabharata using his broken tusk for a quill, but in mankind itself. The practical purpose of the new religion was to unify the Empire and purify it from Saktism and Thuggee, from worship of the Female

Principle, Kali, the goddess of Birth and Death, in whose name religious orgies were practised with the frequent accompaniment of human sacrifices. As Marco Polo reported some two hundred years earlier, these included "the gruesome spectacle of fanatics mutilating themselves in public and finally cutting off their own heads out of devotion to their God."

Akbar himself did not seem to know what he believed. What was in his head *Kudhar billahi* ('God alone knows') as one of the Fathers reported back. The only decided religious conviction Akbar had was his rejection of Islam. At the same time he seems never to have lost a certain hankering after Christianity or ceased to display an affectionate reverence for the Christian emblems which his Jesuit teachers gave him.

When hopes of the Emperor's conversion began to subside the Superior of the Jesuits again recalled the three Fathers, who were needed for the important task of evangelisation elsewhere. Maybe the conversion of many was more important than that of one, no matter how important.

In 1594 Akbar sent another ambassador to Goa requesting, for the third time, that Fathers be sent to instruct him, as he expressed it, in the Divine Law. In a letter to the Portuguese Viceroy of India he repeated the request with so much vehemence that the Viceroy asked the Provincial of the Jesuits to comply with the request forthwith. At first the Provincial, who had already seen two Missions go and return without accomplishing anything, was not in favour of yet another mission. However, recognising the importance the Superior General attached to having some Fathers always at the court of so great a monarch, and also for the sake of Christians living in Lahore, the Provincial agreed and a third Mission was despatched.

Chapter 4

A Third Mission To The Court Of Akbar

It was on December 3rd, 1594, by coincidence the feast day of Saint Francis Xavier, that the third mission to Akbar's court in Lahore set out from Goa. At the head of the mission was Father Jerome Xavier — a nephew of the great Francis Xavier who was fluent in Persian, the language of the Mughal courts and the language of commerce in Central Asia. He was a man about the same age as the Emperor. He had joined the Society of Jesus twenty-six years earlier and had spent most of his service in India, first as Rector at Bassein, then at Cochin and finally at Goa. The other Jesuits were Father Emmanuel Pinheiro and Brother Bento de Goes. Also in the party was the Armenian guide and interpreter, Dominic Perez, who had accompanied Acquaviva's first mission to the court of Akbar.

Golden Goa was the capital of Portuguese Asia and the principal city of the Portuguese in India. It stood on an island, fifteen miles long and ten wide, separated from the mainland by the river Mandovi. The island was fertile, well watered and full of trees.

The party of four set off from St. Paul's College, the Jesuit school in the city. The college of 450 Christian and pagan pupils had been founded by Francis Xavier to give India its own native clergy. The college contained

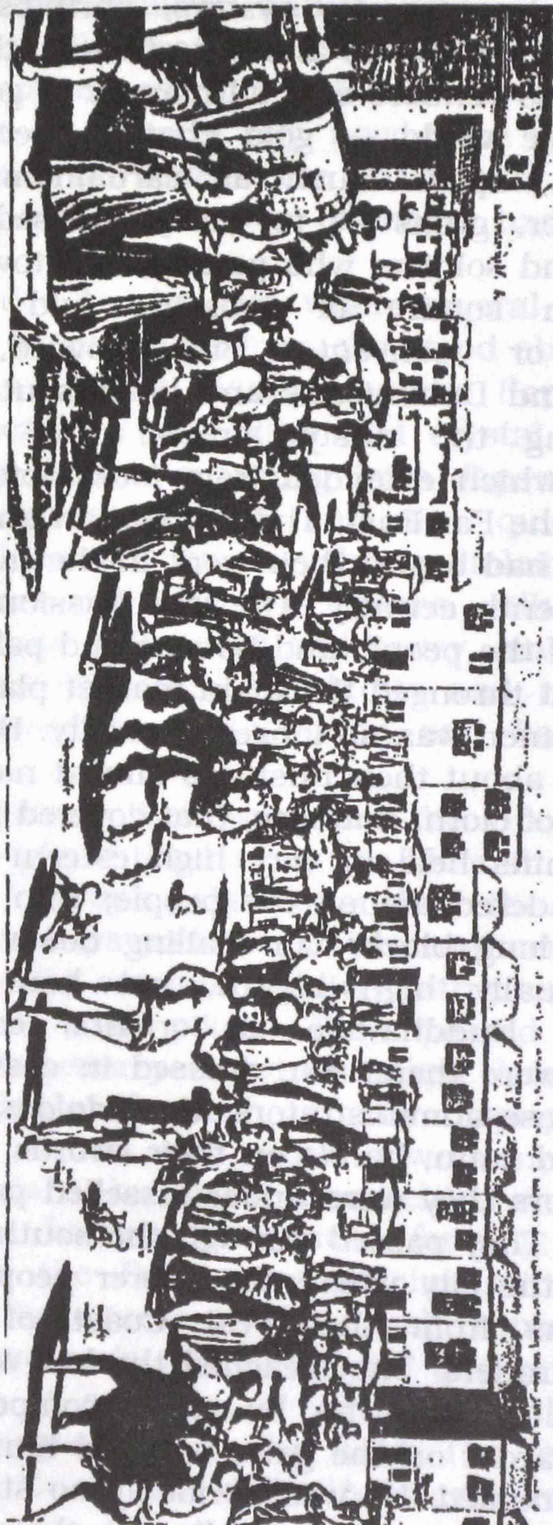
Hindus, Muslims, Malays, Kaffirs, Ethiopians, Sinhalese, Japanese and Chinese, some the sons of princes and others boys purchased for a few silver crowns in the slave market at Bassein. By now there were barely a dozen priests at the college; the evil climate had taken its toll of the Europeans, many of whom had died in the prime of life.

They headed for the port, where several ships rode at anchor. The masts of the carracks stood above the palm trees. They would be loading for the Far East silver, wines, red scarlet cloth, glass and crystal ware, clocks and jewellery. Others returning from Japan and Malaya would be unloading gold and tin, quicksilver and porcelain, gilded woodwork, cabinets inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl and precious stones, silk, musk and civet, hard white sugar, wax and honey, macaws, parrots and parakeets in cages. Merchants and traders of all nations gathered in Goa, selling and bartering their merchandise.

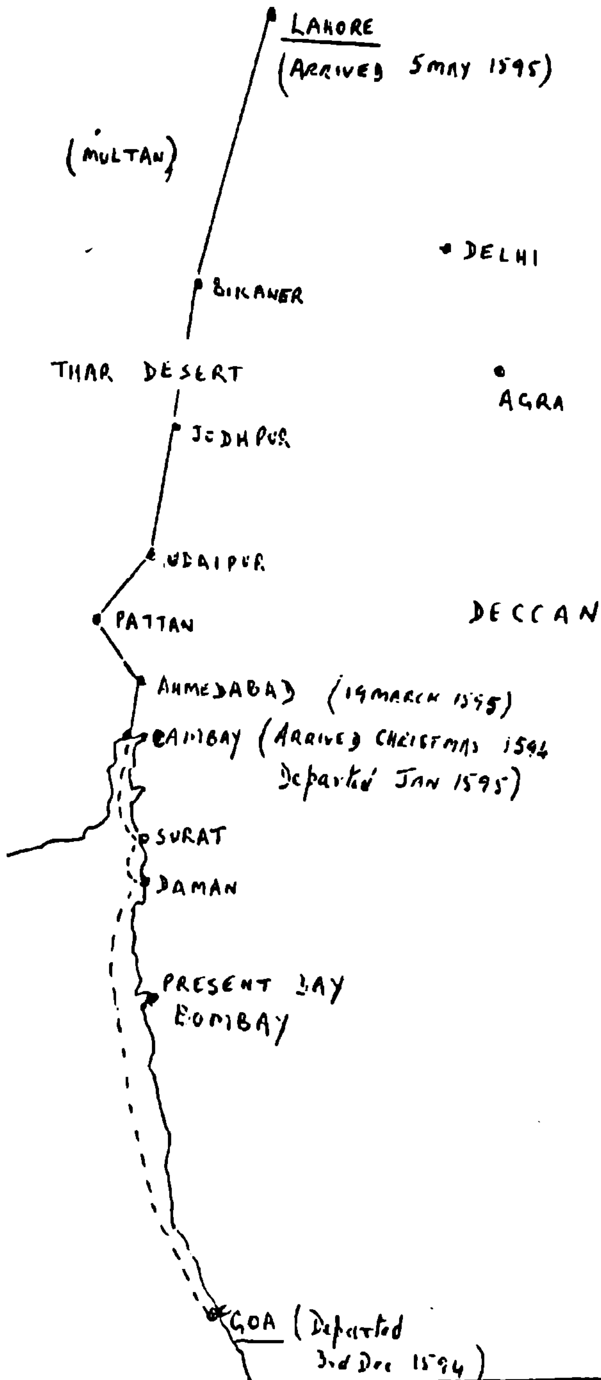
The four made their way past the vice-regal Lodge, built in the style of the Portuguese-Moorish architecture. Opposite the viceroy's palace was where the slave market was held. Here boys and girls of two continents were sold for a trifle to the common soldiery, strutting about with their muskets and pikes. They passed the typical Portuguese two-storeyed, whitewashed laterite houses, with their tiled roofs, each proudly displaying its own orchard and garden with exotic flowers and fruit-trees. On the verandahs, but more often behind shutters, could be seen the half-caste women, fanning themselves, mistresses of the Portuguese administrators and civil servants. No Portuguese woman of self-respect, except an occasional governor's wife, privileged and protected by a large retinue of servants, would endure the long and dangerous journey out to the East. The men, fired by tropical heat, found little difficulty in crossing white with black.

Every street had its own market, making the colony one large bazaar or emporium. Barrows heaped with mangoes, pineapples, jackfruit, lychees, guavas, with

crabs, crayfish, mussels, oysters, shrimps, shad and sole, weaved their way in and out of each other's way. At the cross-roads vendors sold all manner of goods from all corners of the world — gold chains, precious stones, pearls, rings, spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, pepper, gums — to richly dressed Portuguese merchants and soldiers who paraded the town with their slaves. Each square or crossing had its church, monastery or convent. Brown-cowled, sandalled Franciscan and Dominicans and black-soutaned Jesuits bustled along the dusty streets, tiny cogs in an archdiocese which extended from Mozambique in Africa to Japan in the Far East. The Franciscan and Dominican missionaries had begun their work in the Indian Mission in the fourteenth century. The four Missionaries dodged in and out of the people and houses and palanquins and carriages that thronged the main market place. The sight of topless women was no longer a novelty. Both men and women went about their business almost naked, wearing only a piece of cloth, a *lungee*, that covered from navel to knee. Brahmins held in very high esteem by the local Hindus, wandered among the people; thin and wizened *yogis*, their long black hair trailing down their backs, held in equally high regard, sat here and there, cross-legged, Buddha-like, in oriental contemplation. *Musalmans* were there, too, dressed in costly garments. The Portuguese administrators, the *fidalgos*, resplendent in taffeta and satin, hands on their swords, paraded like the conquerors they were under tasselled parasols borne by servants. They passed through the southern gate into the part of the city where the poorer people lived, and also Africans from the West Coast of Africa and Indonesian traders. They reached the low wall encircling the city. The cripple, who, by way of compensation, had the job of warder on the gate, unrolled himself from his mat and *salaamed*. He was obviously no stranger to the rank reeds people smoked to alleviate their unhappy lot in life. His job was to print a mark on the arm of natives wishing to visit the mainland as entry to the island was carefully regulated.



Goa: Market Place


THIRD JESUIT MISSION TO THE COURT OF AKBAR
GOA TO LAHORE. 1594/1595.
LAHORE
(ARRIVED 5 MAY 1595)
(MULTAN)
DELHI
BIKANER
THAR DESERT
AGRA
JODHPUR
UDAIPUR
PATTAN
DECCAN
AHMEDABAD (19 MARCH 1595)
CAMBAY (ARRIVED CHRISTMAS 1594
Departed JAN 1595)
SURAT
DAMAN
PRESENT DAY
BOMBAY
GOA (Departed
3rd Dec 1594)

The party set off from Goa in a ship bound for the port of Daman, well to the north of present-day Bombay. Along the way they had to keep a wary eye on the look out for the numerous pirate ships that plagued the Malabar coast. From Daman they sailed to Surat. At the bar at Surat five Portuguese frigates rode anchor. The four did not stay long in the city, enclosed with a massive ditch and fenced in with thick hedges. From Surat they sailed north to the Kingdom of Cambay.

It was Christmas when they approached Cambay, the chief sea port of Gujarat and one of the busiest trading centres in the East. Merchandise from all over India — fine cloth, indigo from nearby Baroda, drugs of all kinds — spikenard, turbith (Indian *jalap*), gumlac, myrrh, kebals, costus (the root from which joss-sticks are made) — was brought to Cambay where it would be loaded on to Portuguese ships for Goa. Nearly two hundred Portuguese ships rode anchor there. A small boat brought out the pilot who navigated their ship safely through the treacherous shallows and sand-banks. Crossing the bay proved hazardous because of the great bore or tidal waves which took the lives of many mariners in small boats.

Cambay was a small fortified town, encompassed with very strong brick walls. The town could be defended street by street. At the end of each street stood a well-guarded gate. In time of battle the enemy would be trapped in a street, between gates, and be entirely exposed to arrows and spears from the buildings overlooking the street. While they were there the four were also bombarded by missiles, not from the overlooking houses — but by tiles hurled by monkeys, showing their white teeth as if grinning, who seemed to have the run of the place. These were sacred monkeys, confident in the age-old knowledge that no one dared touch them. There were monkeys everywhere, chattering and screaming, and one of their pastimes was to perch on the roofs of buildings, remove the tiles and then hurl them down at passers-by.

They stayed three weeks in Cambay. Their departure

was delayed by the arrival of Sultan Murad, the second son of Akbar, who was advancing on the Deccan sultanates on behalf of his father with a large army of fifty thousand men.

At the time Prince Murad had only four or five thousand horse with him, but a huge army had preceded him consisting of twenty thousand horse, four hundred elephants, seven hundred camels, fifty dromedaries, four thousand bullocks, fifteen large and four small pieces of cannon, with some culverins and falconets. The surrounding countryside was blanketed with their encampments and tents.

One night the party of four were awakened with a loud banging on the door of the *serai* in which they were staying. It was well past midnight. A messenger said they must proceed to the Sultan's presence immediately. A summons so late in the night could only signal trouble. The vast plain was dotted with the twinkling lights of the Prince's vast encampment. A kokila bird sang its single, monotonous, inexpressive note, silenced every now and again by the baying of jackal and hyena. The full moon, true to Indian poetic notions, seemed to spread coolness with its bright light. Across the red plain a violet light lay flatly like a frog, blurring the silhouettes of the tents. It was turning to dawn when they reached the Prince's camp, the pale moonlight yielding to the magenta glow of morning. The Prince, dressed in full *durbar* uniform, was standing near an elevated pavilion where all could see him. All the Sultan's captains were assembled about him, standing, like so many statues, with their eyes fixed on the Prince, to make their morning salutation to their General. After a while the Prince entered his pavilion which was placed in the centre of a specially prepared mound, resembling a rampart. It was open on all sides and contained a small couch. Here he received the four foreigners. They bowed their heads before the Prince in salutation. The time had come. Were they, like some of their colleagues before them, to be asked to profess the *Kalimah*, to deny their faith in favour of that of Islam? The *Kalimah* is the Mohammedan confession of faith: *'la*

ilaha illulahu Muhammad-ur-rasal ullah' 'There is no God, except the one God, and Muhammed is the prophet sent by God'. They had no illusions as to the fate that awaited those who would not accept the *Kalimah*. In only the few generations since the Society had been founded the list of Jesuit martyrs had grown steadily. Apart from Rudolph Acquaviva, murdered in Salcete, there were Georji Maronite, Ignace Azevedo, Pierre Correa, Anton Criminali, Alphonso de Castro, Silveira.

To their surprise the Prince asked seemingly trifling questions about Portugal: Did it get snow and ice? Did bears and other wild animals inhabit the country? Were falcons and hawks used in the chase? The Prince turned to his captains: "So they have such things as these in Portugal." To show their gratitude at being included in this conversation the captains placed the palm of their hands first on the ground and then on their heads.

The son of the Great Mughal then advanced to a small mound of earth from which he mounted an elephant and then from this sprang on to an even larger animal, its towering hugeness increased in magnitude by the *'howdah'*, an enclosed seat or platform, on its back.

By now the relentless brightness of day had outshone the saffron twilight of dawn. On their return to their humble *serai* the foreigners received another surprise. Three carts and six bullocks had been sent by the Prince for their luggage, along with horses for them to ride. Knowing that the Fathers would not accept any money the Prince had ordered that fifteen hundred *manudes* (silver coins) be given to the Armenian interpreter to pay for lodgings on the way.

They began the long journey inland from Cambay which would take them across the Great Indian (Thar) Desert to Lahore. They passed through barbaric little states where a Hindu might kill an Untouchable and go unpunished on the plea that he had been defiled by the man's shadow. Attacks by brigands and robbers was an ever-present hazard. To guard against such attacks people would only travel in *cafilas* or caravans, sometimes consisting of as many as two or three

thousand persons. Travelling alone was tantamount to suicide.

The captain in charge of the caravan gave the order to start. A loud drum was beaten three times. This was the signal for all tents to be folded up. On a second signal on the drums the four hundred camels and hundred carts were loaded up. The hundred or more horses would be mounted. A third beating on the drum heralded the caravan to move forward. Following those on horse were the many more who could not afford the luxury of horses and so followed on foot.

Ahead lay a vast sub-continent of burning heat and barren sky. A yellow haze filled the air as thousands of tramping feet kicked up the ochre dust.

Ordinarily the caravan would stop at night for rest. But sometimes when entering bandit-infested territory the caravan would travel even at night in the hope of passing through unseen and unmolested. When travelling by night, in order that the people did not become separated from the main caravan, the drummers would lead the way, beating their drums continuously. The drummers would also give the signal when a halt was to be made. Halts were made in places where it was known wells had been dug. Such wells were usually two hundred or more feet deep and the water was raised by the bullocks which drew the carts. Very often the water was scarce and even when chanced upon was salty and brackish even though they were a long way from the sea; or there would be dead frogs and toads in the water.

In the distance they could see the massive stone walls, with imposing turrets and battlements, which guarded the city of Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat. The Viceroy of the Mogul Emperor made his abode in the castle here. At one hour's notice he could muster six thousand horse. The city was built on a plain beside the river. At the heavily guarded gate they had to show their papers before proceeding. It was now the middle of March. The city consisted of fine buildings and gardens, the streets were large and well-paved. Merchants of every kind abounded within the city, selling everything

imaginable, from cloth of gold to silver tissue, fine velvets and taffetas, herbs and drugs and divers medicaments. The embroidery work with gold and silver, the carvings, the inlaid work, were exquisite.

In Ahmedabad they heard about a great Saint who was working great wonders in the city. The Fathers went to see for themselves. In the middle of the square of the city was the Saint or *yogi* surrounded by an expectant, inquisitive throng. He was clad not even with a loin cloth to cover his privy parts. His body was smeared with ox-dung, first burnt and then ground into powder. For anyone who stepped forward the *sadhu* (holy man) smeared the ground ox-dung on his forehead. His finger-nails were long, almost like birds' claws. At night he would sleep on the bare ground, with nothing at all either above or below him. Marco Polo had given an interesting account of these *'yogis'*:

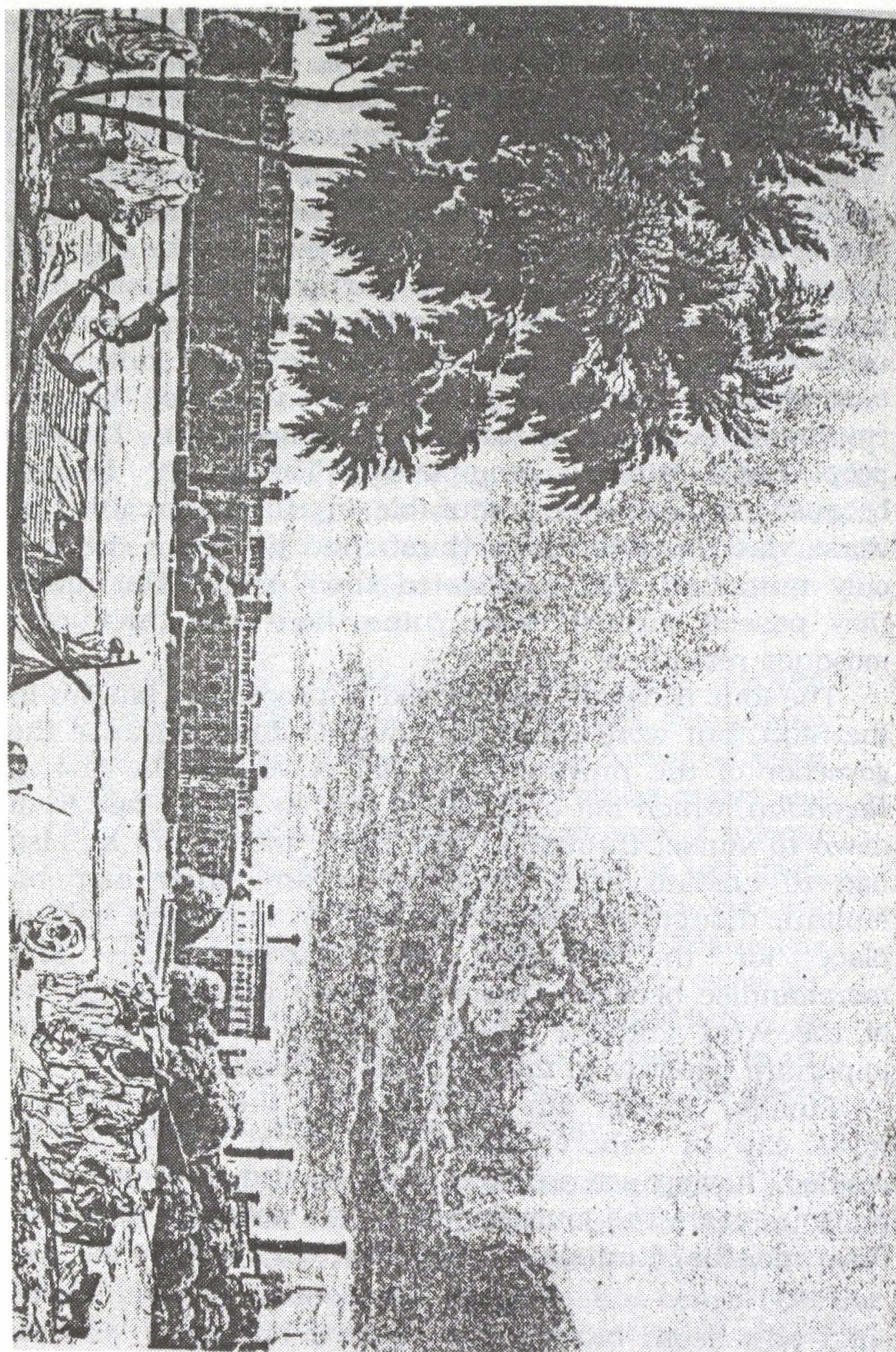
> "When others ask them why they go about naked, and why they feel no shame in showing their privy parts, they answer: 'We go about naked, because we will have nothing belonging to this world, for we came into this world without clothes, and naked. And the reason why we are not ashamed of showing our privy parts, is this: we commit no carnal sin with them, and so we feel no more ashamed of showing them, than you may feel when you show your hands or your face or any other part of your body with which you commit no carnal sin. But, as you have used your privy parts for sin and lechery, so you keep them hidden, and feel ashamed of them. As for us, who commit no such sin with them, we feel no more shame at showing them, than at showing our backs.'"

Some days later a crowd gathered again to see the *'yogi'*, showing less of the indifferent calm of before. This time it was to see the *'yogi'* publicly flogged. Prince Murad had summoned the *'yogi'* to his court but the arrogant *'yogi'* had contemptuously told those who had come to fetch him that the Prince could come and see him if he chose, since 'his holiness well merited that'. This flogging and subsequent banishment was the penalty for his conceit.

The caravan rested for some days in Ahmedabad. The caravan train left Ahmedabad on 19th March and, averaging about twelve miles a day, reached the city of Pattan five days later. From Pattan they went on to Udaipur and then on to Jodhpur. There was nothing to see. The country was full only of desert sand, dacoits, and lions and tigers. The heat increased day by day and by now was unbearable. From Jodhpur to Bikaner they passed through true desert and dry sandy tracts where neither springs nor streams were to be found, only sand everywhere which was often lifted up into the air, enveloping everything and sometimes even burying people and animals completely. They went hungry because no food was procurable in the desert. But far worse was thirst, burning thirst. And the many mirages only tantalised and aggravated them more. The towns they passed through were ruins; here and there only mosques remained.

The four travellers had hoped to proceed to Multan in the Sind, but were prevented from so doing because the governor of the province was still observing the fast of *Ramadan*, which not only meant that he had to fast from dawn to sunset throughout the entire month but he also had to abstain from attending to any other matters. Multan, though not very large, was an important halting place for the caravans that carried goods and merchandise between Persia and other distant kingdoms of the West and the Mughal Empire. It was also an important gateway to the Kingdom of Kandahar.

Finally, on the 5th of May 1595 they reached the royal city of Lahore, where the Great Mogul Akbar resided, having set out from Goa on 3rd December the previous year. The journey which was normally of two to three months' duration, had taken them five months.



The King's Palace at Lahore at the end of the sixteenth century

Chapter 5

The Durbar (Court)

The three Jesuits joined the brown tide of humanity that was heading north towards the Ravi as it curled its way, like some meandering cobra crossing a *maidan* path, on its journey to join up with the Indus. It was on the banks of the Ravi that the castle of the King's Palace stood. The well-off and the destitute, beggars and cripples, seemingly everyone in Lahore, was making his way to the palace to see what he could of the *tamasha* or spectacle. Elephants and camels, horses and donkeys, with the occasional groaning ox-cart, all added to the hundreds of feet raising the dust off the powdery roads. Four splendidly uniformed footmen cleared a way for their master. Behind the footmen were six others bearing an ornately decorated palanquin on their shoulders. An *omrah* (amir), one of the nobles of the Empire, leaned back against a cushion of brocade, while chewing betel-nut with the calm indifference of a sacred cow for the double purpose of sweetening his breath and reddening his lips. On one side of the palanquin a servant carried a spittoon of silver; on the other side a servant fanned the noble lord with a peacock's tail, while another brushed away the ubiquitous flies.

The towers and crenellated battlements of the castle came into view, all decorated with flags and standards of green silk. Boats carrying merchandise to Tatta in Sind glided down the silvery-grey river, the trees and buildings

reflected in the phosphorescent sheen. The dusty road gave way to a wide, paved, highway. Tall, brick buildings, the home of well-to-do Banias, became more frequent. The intricately carved doors were constructed well above the ground and could only be reached by a series of six or seven steep steps. This provided not only security but also prevented passers-by looking in. The procession of nobles and important personages slowed as it approached one of the twelve gates in the imposing wall that circled the palace.

Father Jerome Xavier, the leader of the group of three, dug deep into his *soutane* and pulled out a piece of parchment. The *Kotwal*, the chief officer of the palace guard, unfurled the *firman* (or mandate) and carefully scrutinised the contents. He handed back the document and waved the three forward.

A large and beautiful courtyard marked the entrance to the palace. Four thousand horses, all caparisoned with rich trappings of embroidered silk, formed His Imperial Majesty's guard. The horsemen wore costly uniforms; they held in their hands gilded and painted buckled shields and bows and arrows, and from their sashes hung curved and sharp scimitars, garnished, some with gold, some with silver, and others with ruddy gilded copper. Also suspended from their sashes, on the side opposite to their scimitars, were rich and curiously-wrought quivers filled with sharp feathered darts. This cavalry was drawn up in two rows, forming an awe-inspiring avenue of might and colour.

At the end of this avenue of cavalry began another, which, though not so long, displayed even more majesty and power. It consisted of six hundred elephants placed in two lines, all armed and castled in the same manner as when they entered into battle, with bells of gilt copper on their necks, and their wooden forts, or *howdahs*, varnished black, adorned with metal plates of the same material, on their backs. On their trunks they had sharp cutlasses, the width of a man's arm. Standards of various silks and colours which decorated the tops of the *howdahs* fluttered in the mild breeze. This squadron of

warlike elephants extended up to another courtyard where a further avenue was formed by one hundred elephants, covered with gay and silver-embroidered cloths decorated with a variety of silken flowers. These elephants had rich seats of gold and silver, some covered with litters, some uncovered. This elephantine array was surrounded by two thousand splendid young armed soldiers.

From the courtyard the three ascended by a wide staircase to a very large hall, all painted from its high roof to the floor with pictures of battles, of the chase and hunting scenes. Amongst the collection they were surprised to see a painting of the Nativity and the painting *Ecce Homo.*

They entered a hall full of eunuchs most richly apparelled in various cloths of linen and gold - and silver–embroidered silk. With wands of gold and silver embroidered silk they ushered along the nobles and dignitaries. At the entrance to a long gallery stood a venerable, hoary old man, whose stick of gold in his hand identified him as Captain of the eunuch door-keepers and of the two hundred Usbegs who, with short lances and darts in their hands, were drawn up along the gallery. The gallery led to a wide beautiful gateway adorning a grand and majestic triumphal arch. This arch was built over four silver columns covered with branches and laced with foliage and flowers. The bases of the columns consisted of silvered and gilt pedestals whose empty interiors contained small pans and braziers in which divers kinds of most delicate perfumes composed of different concoctions of amber, lignum aloes, and civet. These mixed perfumes then escaped through orifices in the columns and filled the adjoining halls with an exquisite fragrance.

The three could now see inside the magnificent *Divan-i-khas* (Hall of Private Audience). In the centre stood a throne, raised some feet off the ground, resembling a couch and bedecked with gold inlay and enriched with diamonds from Vijayanagar, pink rubies, green emeralds, blue sapphires and pearls from the

Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf set in gold. Below the throne was a space surrounded by balustrades covered in plates of gold and silver. The awnings covering this space were of red velvet embroidered with gold. At the four corners of this space the Emperor's four Secretaries of State stood. Gathered round the balustrades were nobles and *omrahs* and the eunuchs, men of great authority, who managed everything for the King. Suspended from the quadrangular-shaped canopy of the throne were a sword, a mace, a round shield, a bow and a quiver with arrows, all adorned with the most dazzling jewellery. The underside of the canopy was festooned with diamonds and pearls, with a fringe of pearls all round. Above the canopy was a peacock with open tail made of blue sapphires and other coloured stones; the body was of gold inlaid with precious stones, a large ruby adorning the breast, from which hung a large pear-shaped pearl. On either side of the peacock was a large bouquet consisting of many kinds of flowers made of gold inlaid with precious stone. Four feet from the throne were two large umbrellas, on either side, the sticks of which were covered with diamonds, rubies and pearls to a height of seven feet or more. The umbrellas were of red velvet and embroidered and fringed all round with pearls.

The *Mir-i-Arz*, the officer who presented people at court, was resplendently attired in a white tunic which folded across his front and which reached down to below his knees, below which could be seen his tight-fitting breeches. Into the wide silk sash which girdled his waist was stuck a heavily jewelled dagger. Jewel ear-rings flanked his lean face, above which rested a large turban. He beckoned the three men forward. It was the *Mir-i-Arz's* duty to examine the credentials of all persons being presented and, if they were foreigners, to instruct them how to salute the King by kissing his feet and how to comport themselves in his presence. The three Europeans advanced till the outstretched hand of the *Mir-i-Arz* halted further approach. They waited at the entrance to the court.

They were grateful for the *punkah-wallah* who provided the cool air in the room. The large mats of *khas-khas* grass, saturated with water, which swung rhythmically from side to side overhead, cooled the atmosphere as the water evaporated. The trumpeting of elephants stabled in some cavern below the palace broke the silence of the place. The reverberations of a cannon shot rumbled in over the city's maidans. The *Mir-i-Arz* cast a confirmatory look at the water-clock.

The piercing blasts of trumpets, almost drowning the plaintive notes of the enormous hautboys, over nine feet long, the beating of kettle-drums and the clashing of brass and iron cymbals, over a yard in diameter, heralded the approach of Jalalludin Akbar, the great Mogul Emperor.

Using four steps specially placed there the Emperor ascended the throne. At the Emperor's back lay a large, round, heavily jewelled cushion or bolster; on either side were two flat, but equally heavily bejewelled cushions. Behind the King a great noble stood guard. Also guarding the royal personage were the *omrahs*, nobles and grandees of the Kingdom, along with the princes of the blood royal, who all considered it a great honour to guard their king. None of the *omrahs* and nobles dared lift his head and gaze too high. A beautiful and graceful eunuch boy appeared, elegantly dressed in white satin ornamented with purple embroidery, who, kneeling with much ceremony, presented the King with a costly and rare casket of gold filled with *biras* (bundles) of betel-leaf and areca nut. Other eunuchs kept away the numerous flies with gaily decorated fans and fly whisks made from the hair of certain black and white bulls which have tails reaching to their feet. The tail hair is very fine and light as a feather and is valued at its weight in silver. It is from this hair only that fans were made for the service of kings and idols. The cavalry also carried the hair at the head of their lances as a mark of high nobility. A king, come to pay his tribute, entered the hall and from a long way off bowed himself down before the Great Mogul, touching the ground with his hands and head. Then,

advancing little by little, he made the same reverential gesture several times. When he had come near to the King he was searched all over, to see if he carried weapons, after which he advanced and touched the feet of His Majesty, who seemed to show no particular sign of his goodwill beyond placing his hand on his vassal's neck. This lack of affection was understandable since this king was the now penitent Viceroy of Kandahar who had rebelled against the Mughal Emperor. Normally the punishment for such a crime would have been death.

It was the custom never to appear empty-handed before His Majesty. As part of his tribute the vassal presented to Akbar a pair of daggers with their sheaths and girdles of fine gold covered with precious stones of great value, such as rubies and garnets; a pair of large vials, all of gold and an even larger one of the same metal. In addition there was a horse, splendidly furnished, its harness covered in precious stones set in gold, and another horse in arrow-proof armour. Besides this there were another one hundred and fifty horses, ten mares, and fifty camels liveried in green and crimson velvet. Lastly came four rare, precious carpets.

Other presents, beyond the wildest imagination — and purse — of the three Europeans were made to the Emperor. His son, Sultan Murad, who was then in Gujarat (and was later to die of drink), sent a present of fifty elephants along with a chariot of gold and another of silver. The viceroy of the King's dominions in Bengal sent three hundred elephants.

What would the Emperor do when he saw the modest present the three foreigners had to offer?

Presently the *Mir-i-Arz* turned towards the Divan and announced the three Europeans to one of the Secretaries of State. The Secretary of State repeated the announcement to the Emperor, who seemed not to hear him. After some considerable time the great Emperor, Akbar, lifted his eyes and trained them on the *Mir-i-Arz.* The *Mir-i-Arz* in turn signalled the three towards the throne.

The Emperor was dressed in the most magnificent

attire. His tunic, which reached to his knees, was of white delicately flowered satin, interwoven with solid gold embroidery of leaves and flowers of the finest texture. His breeches reached his heels. How shabby the three Europeans looked by comparison in their cheap, black *soutanes* of cotton. On his head the Emperor wore a turban of gold cloth, from which fanned a plume whose base consisted of large diamonds and an oriental topaz which dazzled like the sun. On his brow he wore several rows of pearls and precious stones. A necklace of immense pearls hung from the King's neck. At his side, within reach, lay his sword and jewelled sword-belt which never left his company.

The Emperor was a bronzed, handsome man of about fifty-five years of age. He was strongly built — not surprising in view of his life-long pursuit of martial and other manly arts. At the age of ten he was beside his father in battle and given leadership of his dead uncle Hindal's troops; at twelve he was with the advance guard during the victory at Sirkind. As a boy he had terrified everyone by his passion for riding fierce camels; he loved nothing more than to be on top of a male elephant fighting another. Descended from Tamerlain, the great Mongol King, Akbar was more than half a Mongol, and the Mongols are a people of prodigious vitality. In his youth he had been wild and reckless; he drank to excess and often wantonly played with death. Once on his way back from Malwa he faced a tigress on foot and killed it with his sword. On another occasion he terrified his followers by driving his elephant through the wall of a house where armed bandits were hiding, receiving five arrows on his shield as he approached. He bore his years extremely well.

The King's head was inclined slightly to the right. Large eyes seemed to smile out of the narrow openings that betrayed their Tartar origin. One could not but notice the broad forehead. Unlike many of the men of his time he was clean-shaven, except for a neatly-trimmed moustache.

The three men saluted the royal personage with the

taslim, bowing and greeting the King with their right hand, accompanied with the words *as-salam alaikum* ('peace be upon you'), to which the reply came *wa-alaikum as-salam* ('and on you also be peace').

Father Jerome presented his gift to one of the Secretaries of State, who then showed it to the Emperor. The King stared long, very long, at the gift — a painting of the Madonna. Was His Majesty displeased with the gift which seemed so trifling compared with the gifts presented by the other nobles and grand personages — diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls, brocades of gold and silver, rich carpets, and elephants, camels, horses? Was the gift worthy of the greatest monarch in the East, Lord of seventy kingdoms, Commander-in-Chief of three hundred thousand cavalry and twenty thousand fighting elephants? After an anxious few minutes the faintest suspicion of approval flickered on the royal face. The gift was accepted.

Another gift, A Life of Christ, written in Persian by the leader of the group, was also presented. The King admired the cover. The book was opened at one or two pages. The King stared at them. He nodded. The gift was accepted.

At the end of the presentation of nobles and dignitaries, along with their magnificent gifts, some of the Emperor's bravest elephants, trained for war, were brought for his inspection. One of the elephants had a *howdah* ready on its back, in case the Emperor wished to mount. The others were covered in housings of brocade, with chains of gold and silver about their necks. Four of the elephants carried the royal standard on their backs, each standard attached to a hand pike which a man held erect. In turn each elephant advanced and when within forty or fifty paces of the throne, saluted His Majesty by placing its trunk on the ground and then raising it about its head. On each occasion it trumpeted aloud. Then, turning its back to the Emperor, one of the *mahouts* who was riding it raised the housing so that the Emperor could see if the animal was in good condition and had been well fed. Each elephant had its own silken

cord which was stretched round its body in order to show whether it had increased in girth since the previous inspection.

The inspection of the elephants was followed by a *nauch*, where some of the prettiest and comeliest young women of the realm, the *kanchanis* or dancing girls, whirled and twisted their supple, lithe bodies before the King, the while moving their arms and hands in subtly erotic gestures to the accompaniment of wild and frenzied music.

Presently the Emperor rose from the throne and accompanied by some of his eunuchs left by a small door behind the throne for his harem where at least one hundred concubines waited to serve him. The eunuchs were answerable for the safety and honour of the highest-born and prettiest women in the Empire. The gladiators and wrestlers, the jugglers and tumblers, the singers male and female, who had been waiting in the wings to entertain the King, were not needed that day. They dispersed in some disappointment. The apes and monkeys, joined together by string, were led out by their owner. Their 'tricks' before the royal personage would have to wait another day. The thin turbaned man in a *dhoti* put the bamboo pole across his shoulders and shuffled out, a basket suspended at each end of the pole. In these he kept his cobras. He would allow these to bite him and then 'cure' the swelling with some powders. But his 'cure' was not needed that day.

Slowly the guests began to disperse. The foreigners made their exit, passing through the palace gates, outside which the poverty stricken, the diseased, the altogether luckless, swarmed, arms outstretched for alms, and endured their hopeless fate, their lips constantly pressed against life's bitter cup.

Chapter 6

Sojourn At Akbar's Court

The Jesuits were detained at the royal court in Lahore for several months. They soon found themselves closely involved in the personal and public life of the Emperor. They were accorded a privileged position at the imperial court and were often in close attendance on his person. At the public assemblies they were assigned places very near his throne; they accompanied him on his military campaigns; they educated his children; they were often the companions of his leisure hours.

Akbar suffered not only from epilepsy but also from mental depression. To divert his mind from his fits of brooding melancholy he would undertake long arduous excursions. He would insist that Father Xavier and Brother de Goes accompany him. On one occasion Akbar travelled six hundred miles in eleven days. Fresh horses would await him at every stage of the journey; the few who accompanied him were mounted on swift camels. Akbar was a very brave man. He would sometimes go alone into jungles and wastes and mountains, without any bodyguard. He was fond of lonely contemplation. He once galloped far into the desert to meditate and deliberately allowed his horse to escape. Such indiscretions nearly cost him his life on more than one occasion. He was a fearless warrior. Even at the age of fifty-four he was foolhardy enough to seize a stag by the horns one moonlit night. He was knocked to the ground

and gored in a testicle. When he sought relaxation after a victory, or when awaiting attack by an enemy, his usual diversion was to march hither and thither, enduring considerable fatigue and discomfort, in search of something to kill.

Hunting the wild animals that abounded in his realm — lions, tigers, buffaloes, boars, etc. — was a favourite pastime of the Emperor. He would hunt at least once a fortnight, mounted on an elephant. Beaters would drive the animals within musket range of his elephant. To increase the danger of his life he would often hunt tigers on horseback. He also used specially trained cheetahs or hunting leopards. Cheetahs were captured in pits or wicker cages; within a month or two they could be trained to obey their keepers, being released to stalk and kill their prey and then to return after the kill, much like a falcon. They often wore coats studded with jewels and were taken to the hunt sitting blindfold on beautiful carpets. The cheetah would sit on the elephant or horse behind its master. When a lion or tiger or buck approached, the cheetah would leap on it, whilst accompanying bullocks would fix the beast with their horns and tear it to pieces.

Akbar also insisted that Xavier and Goes join him on his many amusements and pastimes. Elephants learn very quickly and the Emperor liked to see elephants dancing to the tune of musical instruments. Despite their enormous size, up to fifteen feet, as a rule elephants are very placid, gentle animals.

But some of Akbar's amusements bordered on the sadistic. From a small window at the end of a long gallery which overlooked the river Jumna, he would watch elephants fight in the *maidan* (open space) between the palace and the river, a site deliberately chosen so that the enraged animals could at any time be driven to the water to cool off. The fighting elephants would first be supplied with alcohol to increase their courage. Guided by their *mahouts*, seated on their necks, they would charge at each other and then fight with their tusks and trunks. Despite the care the fighting elephants

appeared to take to ensure their *mahouts* did not get hurt, for the *mahouts* elephant fighting was a dangerous pastime. So much so that when the riders mounted their elephants their wives would break their bracelets and take off their jewels as a sign that they were already widows. As a variation he would watch camels or buffaloes or rams that butted and gored each other to death with their horns.

On other occasions, after the manner of the ancient Roman emperors, Akbar would make gladiators fight before him, or fencers contend with one another till one had killed the other. The Jesuits incurred the royal displeasure when they not only refused to observe these barbaric events but reprimanded the King for encouraging such inhuman practices.

Near this gallery there was a *divan-khan* or hall where Akbar would detach himself from everyone and ponder deep on whether a sentence of death should be carried out. Trials and executions were generally swift. The executions — hangings, beheading, impaling, killing with dogs, by elephants, by serpents — were commonly done in the market place. The King often used elephants as a means of execution. If the victim was to be despatched swiftly the elephant would crush the man to death with its foot. If the unfortunate was to be tortured first the elephant would slowly break the bones, one by one. The mahouts, seated atop the elephant's neck, used iron hooks to transmit commands to the animals.

This was a country of savage exaggerations where beauty was more beautiful but also where cruelty was more cruel. At Chitor, some thirty years earlier, Akbar had sullied his victory by a massacre of most of the 40,000 peasants who took refuge in the fort.

De Goes, being a soldier like Akbar, soon had the confidence of the great Mughal King, and was even invited to give his opinion on matters of state. At one stage Akbar was contemplating the conquest of the whole of the vast Deccan plateau of India, to add to his already far-flung Empire. There was one important consideration that had to be taken into account: the Portuguese had

Trained elephants executing prisoners

some settlements in the Deccan. Goes knew fully the might and extent of the Mogul armies. But he also knew these would be ineffective against the smaller but well armed forces of the Portuguese. The Mogul elephants and horses and camels would be no match for the superior fire power of the Portuguese heavy guns and artillery. Akbar was dissuaded from his venture.

One day in 1597 the sound of shouting and screaming drew the Jesuits out of their rooms into the broad sunshine. They looked toward the palace. Clouds of black smoke, interspersed with spiralling orange and crimson flames, leapt into the cloudless sky. The royal household was aflame. Evidently a spark from one of the royal bedchambers had started the conflagration. Despite desperate efforts to contain the blaze the flames spread wildly in every direction. Several days later the blaze was still defying all attempts to extinguish it. Much of the royal palace, which was constructed only of wood, was reduced to ashes and cinders. The King was much aggrieved at the loss of all his treasures. The fire consumed everything, including large quantities of draperies of cloth of gold and silk. The gold, silver and other precious metals melted in the conflagration and ran down the streets like streams of lava.

In consequence of this disaster the King at once left Lahore, his capital, and went to spend the summer in the Kingdom of Kashmir which he had annexed ten years earlier. Jerome Xavier and Bento de Goes accompanied the King on this trip to Kashmir. Father Pinheiro was left behind.

Accompanied by his chief officers of State — the Treasurer, the Master of the Eunuchs (who is Steward and Comptroller of the House), the Secretary, the Master of Elephants, the Tent-master, and the Keeper of Wardrobe, the royal party left Lahore with the usual pomp and ceremony.

The Emperor rode on a throne mounted on the back of an elephant. Eight elephants marched in front, four carrying two men each: one, seated on the neck, to guide the elephant, the other, seated on its back, bearing the

royal standard attached to a hand pike. The other elephants, each with a seat (*howdah*) on its back, carried members of the royal household. The *howdahs* rocked and swayed like ships, in unison with the gait of the huge animals carrying them. One of these was Prince Salim, the King's son. The *howdahs* conveying the Emperor's women were enclosed. *Omrahs* on horse-back provided the bodyguard. Beside the bodyguard of nobles there were several hundred horsemen and at least six hundred footmen, each armed with a kind of hand pike. On the iron blades of the pikes were rockets which, when ignited, would propel the handpike a distance of five hundred yards. The Emperor's procession was followed by four hundred matchlock men, armed with muskets, and behind these came the cavalry.

The movement of the royal household was an immense logistical undertaking. Besides the thousands of men, women and children moving, were the thousands of elephants, camels, horses, bullocks, required to transport them and their baggage — tents, utensils, etc. The women were carried in covered litters on the backs of elephants or camels, or in covered cradles hung from the sides of the animals, or in covered palanquins (*dhoolies*), all closely guarded by eunuchs.

They set out on 15th May 1597, taking the *Pir Panjal* route, the route the Mughal emperors had always taken. They crossed the Ravi by ferry — a very lengthy and tiresome business — to the west side of the castle. They passed the fine mosque built by Sheikh Farid.

The procession covered ten or twelve miles a day, depending on the state of the roads and the availability of water. At night the multitudinous throng would come to a rest. The King's tents, reared on high poles, and all painted scarlet, would be pitched in the centre of the camp, screened by tall red calico and heavily guarded. Only Mughal kings and princes of royal blood were allowed to use tents of scarlet colour. The colour blue (the colour of mourning) was anathema. That colour was never to be seen or worn in the king's presence.

They passed Kacha sarai, then Aminabad, then China

Gakkhar, finally reaching the city of Gujrat. Beyond Gujrat the crossing of the Chenab river took seemingly ages.

They made even slower progress, heading towards the lofty Himalaya range ahead. The journey across the mountains was slow and full of difficulty. Finally they reached the plain of Kashmir, and the strongly-fortified city, beside the river Jhelum.

In one of his letters to the Provincial in Goa Xavier wrote:

> "The Kingdom of Kashmir is one of the pleasantest and most beautiful countries to be found in the whole of India, we may even say in the East. It is completely surrounded by very high mountains, which for the greater part of the year are covered in snow, and all the rest of the Kingdom is a beautiful plain clothed in verdure, diversified with groves, orchards, gardens, and well watered by springs and rivers: a very pleasant land for those who dwell therein. Owing to the mountains, the climate of the country is somewhat cold, though it is more temperate than that of the Kingdom of Tibet, which joins Kashmir on the east. In the month of May, great numbers of wild duck come from the mountains of Tibet and settle in huge flocks on the streams which flow near to the town of Srinagar, the capital of the Kingdom, because of the warmer climate. About three leagues from the town there is a lake of sweet water which, though not more than two leagues in circuit and half a league broad, is so large that large vessels can float upon it. In the middle there is an artificial island on which the King has a palace."

Shortly after writing this Xavier was struck down with fever which lasted a full two months.

When the summer had come to an end the King set out on his return journey to Lahore. He requested that Xavier and Goes should travel with him. But Goes, younger and more adventurous than his companion, asked for and received permission to go on ahead of the King's procession, hoping thus to avoid the boredom of travelling with the slow-moving court party. He was to rue his choice.

On the journey Goes suffered much from cold and hunger, as well as from the atrocious roads, for they had to go by rough paths which were often so narrow that there was room for only a single horseman. They were obliged therefore to travel very slowly and to stop frequently. Moreover, the elephant which carried their goods had great difficulty in climbing the mountains. Sometimes, feeling insecure on its feet, owing to the load which it carried, it supported itself with its trunk, making it serve the purpose of a staff.

The royal party arrived back in Lahore on 13th November 1597, six months after it had set off.

Goes was pleased to see Father Pinheiro again. Pinheiro informed him of the great famine that had occurred in the city due to the failure of the rains. Families had been forced to even sell their children in the streets. A great plague added to the misfortune. Father Pinheiro had evidently not been sitting idle while his colleagues were away in Kashmir. In September of that year he had opened a new church at Lahore, towards the building of which Akbar had contributed 400 rupees. The Governor of Lahore, Qamr-ud-Din, had attended the opening and to show his pleasure with the work of the Fathers had released a Chaldean Christian who had been condemned to death for killing a cow.

Chapter 7

Into Battle With Akbar

Shortly after Akbar returned to Lahore from Kashmir he was informed that his second son, Prince Murad, had been slain in the battle for Ahmednagar by Malik, the King of the Deccan. Actually Prince Murad died of drink. The ineffectiveness of Akbar's army in the Deccan was due to Murad's drunkenness, a family failing which Akbar managed to control in himself but which affected his three sons to the point of dipsomania. Murad's condition got so bad that Akbar had to relieve him of his command. A few days later the Prince died in a state of advanced delirium tremens. The great Akbar decided to avenge this death in person. Xavier and Goes were again asked to accompany the war expedition, which they did. The King gave orders that they should be supplied with money, horses, elephants, camels and all else they needed. Xavier replied that one camel would suffice for himself and his companion. But he was not allowed to take less than four.

Before setting out for Agra the King consulted his astrologers as to a propitious time for embarking on his punitive expedition. Towards the end of 1598 Akbar and his army left Lahore for Agra, one hundred leagues south of Lahore, the Kingdom of the Deccan lying still further south. The huge army, horse and foot, of a hundred thousand men and more than a thousand war elephants, caused panic and alarm amongst the smaller kings of

the regions as it advanced to Agra. As the King advanced his vassal princes would add their weight with their own forces — soldiers, horses, elephants, several thousand strong, which they were obliged to keep in readiness for any emergency.

In time of war Akbar recruited his army from all races of his people — Mohammedan Pathans and Baluchis, Hindu Rajputs and Gujeratis. Rajput armies were always at the disposal of the Mughal emperors. The Rajputs were famed as the greatest warriors in India. They went into battle drugged with opium to remarkably good effect. The Afghan warriors also used this. On one occasion, the Afghans had to give up their war-making because the season's harvest of poppies had failed. Rajputs would fight to the death. In a custom known as *jauhar* they would burn their women-folk before facing death. The Mahrattas, too, were brave fighters. Bengalis would frighten their children by saying: "If you are not good a Mahratta will get you." And there were the Sikhs, professional fighters, their long black beards neatly folded into little nets below their chins, their hard mouths and black eyes impatient for blood. One race Akbar would not recruit as fighters were the Kashmiris. Akbar thought little of their courage. This was because when he attacked Kashmir the King of Kashmir had surrendered without a fight; even though, because of its high mountainous geography, with paths so few and narrow, one man could hold up a whole army. Kashmiris were employed only as tailors, barbers and cooks. Nor would Akbar enlist *faqirs* — those who beg for alms. There were two kinds of *faqirs* — the *be-tars* or 'fearless' and the *be-qaid* or 'liberated'.

The *be-tars* were *faqirs* who begged for alms with a sharp knife in their hands. They would stand in front of a shop and begin to shout for alms, pointing to what they wanted. If the shopkeeper did not oblige the *faqir* would cut himself with the knife — on his arms, or legs, or head — and taking the blood would throw it into the shop as a sign of his curse. Usually the *faqirs* asked for alms at the shops of the *baniyas*, who were generally

very timid, and would accede to the *faqir's* request rather than see any blood spilt.

This gave Akbar an idea. If these *faqirs* were prepared to inflict such wounds on themselves then they would surely make soldiers who would fight with great spirit and courage. Accordingly he enlisted four thousand *faqirs* as armed horsemen and sent them against the villagers of Mathura, north of Agra, who were in revolt. At the very first advance, without waiting for the fighting to begin, all of them turned tail, and fled as hard as they could go. On hearing of this cowardly flight, Akbar ordered them to be summoned, and asked them the cause. They had not even waited for the enemy, and yet had such courage that they inflicted wounds on themselves. Their reply indicated that their inflicting wounds on themselves was not courage but deceit. They said: "When we cut our own flesh, we avoid veins, nerves, and bones; but an enemy wounds without mercy, and it does not suit us to have our bodies cut about by the hands of others."

Akbar had, equally, little reason for engaging the services of the other kind of *faqirs*, the *be-qaid* or 'liberated'. These faqirs were very rude in manner, using great liberty in speech, fearing no one and paying no respect, whatever his rank, using much abusive language and scandalous words, or polite sayings, just as it pleased them. These men would often enter boldly into the houses of great men, and if the doorkeepers stopped them from going in, they would apply to the whole family much abusive language, sparing neither master nor mistress, nor sons, nor grandchildren, nor ancestors, coupling their names with the coarsest abuse. In spite of this the people of the house would generally show no anger, but secure their departure by soft words, giving them some alms and begging their pardon. If the *faqirs* were allowed entrance, they would march straight to where the master was and seat themselves close to him, although dirty, their feet covered with mud, and clad in filthy rags. Without any deference or civility of speech, they would take the *hookah* or tobacco water-pipe out of

the master's mouth and place it in their own. With much respect the master would return thanks for this honour and secure the man's departure by some money. Akbar had once — only once! — been the butt of such indignity.

In the distance could be seen a large red sand-stone fort, crowning the summit of a hill. This was Agra. The bare rock of the hill fell precipitately into the river Jumna, a glistening red streak that wound its way majestically through vast plains of corn and millet.

Nearing Agra a gruesome sight greeted the two Jesuits. Along the imperial highway a number of grisly heads grimaced from the wooden pedestals placed by the roadside; the bodies of thieves and felons hanging from the trees served as a warning of the punishment for robbing on the highway. Every time a general won a victory the heads of the vanquished were sent to the city to be displayed in the royal square as proof of success. After twenty-four hours the heads were removed to the imperial highway where they hung from trees or were deposited on pillars built for the purpose. The stench of decomposing bodies forced the two to hold their noses.

No sooner were they able to breathe less malodorous air than they were forced to cover their noses again. The smell of burning flesh signalled they were near water — holy water. This was a Hindu cremation. It was the desire of all good Hindus to have their ashes placed in the holy river, the Ganges. The Jumna joined the Ganges further along at Allahabad. Having put together the driest wood one could find, it would then be soaked with oil; the corpse, having been anointed with oil, would then be placed on top of the funeral pyre and the whole set ablaze, the red flames being reflected in the silver grey of the sacred river. The ashes would be gathered and, accompanied by many ceremonies, thrown into the holy water. In this way they would be cleansed from sin. The ashes of Hindu nobles would be carried great distances to be thrown into the river.

The sound of much wailing and shouting and screaming indicated *suttee*. When a Hindu died his wife

or wives were cremated alive with the husband. The noise and commotion made by the bystanders was to drown out the screams of those being immolated alive. If the deceased was an important personage his servants were also burned with him so as to serve him in another world as they had done in this. The servants considered themselves lucky if the master chose them before his death to accompany him to another world. If the wife refused to join her husband on the funeral pyre her life was made difficult. Her hair was cut and she was held in disrespect by all her people. She could not remarry. Rather than spend the rest of their days as outcasts many young women would choose to die in this way.

Goes had been perplexed at the common practice of child marriage. He had seen a few such marriages on his way through towns and villages. To the accompaniment of pipes and other wind instruments and drums a young boy of eight to ten years, garlanded with jasmine and marigold, sprinkled with rose water, would be riding on a gaily decked horse with his bride of five to seven years of age sitting behind him. They would then repair to a banquet of rice and saffron and fruits and coloured sweetmeats while the *nautch* girls danced the legends of Krishna and the Gopis and the story of Rama and Sita through the night. The young married couple would then separate and only come together again a few years later. Goes learnt that the custom of child marriage was connected with the practice of *suttee*. When a father died and was cremated, his wife with him, then the children of the couple would not be orphaned, they would have the father of their spouse to look after them till they grew up.

Agra, built in 1563 by Akbar and called Akbarabad, was one of the largest cities in the world. It was situated in a great open plain on the banks of the holy Jumna. The city was sixteen miles long beside the river. Huge barges, very long and between four and five hundred tons apiece, carried salt, opium, asafoetida (gum resin), lead, carpets, down the river to link up with the mighty Ganges and then proceed to Calcutta in Bengal. The

merchants set up their tents on the barges as though they were encamped in a field. There were many fine buildings and residences of noblemen and of wealthy merchants, built of brick and stone, flat-roofed. These were set apart as if they were frightened of one another. This was because round the buildings were the less-pretentious mud-walled houses, covered with thatch, of the many servants of the household, the stables, etc. The straw buildings were a considerable fire hazard, each year several being burned to the ground. Other houses by the river were fronted by wood and stone images, of lions, leopards, monkeys — some resembled men and women — others had peacocks and others that looked like devils with four arms and four hands.

There were thousands of people bathing and performing their ceremonies in the river. Many Brahmins, the highest caste of Hindus, were gathering up the water in their hands or in their Benares brass '*chattees*' (vessels) and bathing their naked bodies. Round their necks they wore the Sanskrit *yagnopavitam* or sacred triple cord, which was made of cotton gathered from the plant only by a pure Brahmin and corded and spun only by those of the Brahmin caste. The Brahmins could be distinguished by the yellow mark on their foreheads, made of a paste of sandalwood, with saffron and other ingredients. When they met out of doors they would salute each other by putting their hands to their heads and saying *Ram! Ram!* (God! God!). There were many *baniyas* in the city. They could be distinguished by the *chattees* (brass vessels) in which they carried water from the river to their devotees far and wide. Many Hindu princes believed it a religious duty to drink Ganges water and would even send camels on two or three months' journey to procure it.

The city was not walled but most of the principal streets had huge gateways. The main building was the fortress, surrounded with walls of red squared stone at least thirty feet high, with battlements and towers. The fortress was on the bank of the river, so the large ditch or moat surrounding it could easily be filled with water

when needed. A drawbridge spanned the moat. Within the fortress almost another city existed. Here also lived the King's sons, each in his own palace, and other noblemen close to the Emperor.

The city was a metropolis of people from all parts of the sub-continent thronging the streets — Rajputs and Sikhs, Kolis, Gujaratis, Mahrattas, Kashmiris, Parsees, Nagas, Mochis, Vesawas and even Bhils, tall, thin, black figures, menacing in appearance, with just rags and goatskins for covering their long, black, greasy hair falling beyond their shoulders, carrying spears. They included people of all religions, beliefs and of all castes and sub-castes, from degenerate Hinduism to the witchcraft of the Bhils. The main street leading to the palace was a sort of continuous bazaar, swarming with frequenters to the court. In the markets one could buy anything, from brass-ware, pots, kettles, candle-sticks to shirts of mail, swords, buckles, lances; from camels and elephants to opium. Most of the women wore rings on their toes and so went barefoot. Many wore rings of brass — or nobler metal, such as silver — about their ankles and around their arms. The city seemed to have more than its share of *yogis* — Hindu ascetics or holy men of extremely variable holiness. There was one who sat by the road, completely naked, his private parts covered by the very long beard he grew. The nails on his fingers were at least two inches long. He never spoke a word. If someone spoke to him he would place a hand on his chest and bow, but he would never speak. Not even to Akbar would he speak. Since the area abounded with wild beasts of every kind — lions, tigers, even the occasional rhinoceros — the King was able to keep up his passion for hunting.

Akbar remained in Agra till the July of the following year, 1599. The great Mughal army then proceeded south-westwards to the Deccan. They crossed the Aravalli range of mountains by passes so rough and difficult that it sometimes took a whole day to cover a distance equal to the range of an arquebus, often having literally to cut their way through.

Sweeping all before him the great Akbar finally arrived at Burhanpur, a large city on the river Tapti, on the borders of the Deccan. It was famous for the excellent cloth produced there, especially for the making of women's head-dresses and veils. This trade attracted many Persian and Armenian traders to the city. For two centuries Burhanpur had been the capital of the Faruki kings of Khandesh. Beyond the river the castle stood out, guarding the unwalled city. Standing on the bank beside the castle was a huge stone elephant, its forehead painted red, which was revered and worshipped by many. It was so lifelike that one day a live elephant that had come to the river's edge to drink, rushed the carved elephant and in so doing broke both his tusks.

The entire plain surrounding the city was covered with tents for miles and miles. This was the army of the King of Deccan, fifty thousand men, fifteen thousand horse, two hundred elephants, one hundred guns and other artillery pieces.

Against this formidable force Akbar drew up his army in battle order, divided into a left flank, a right flank and a centre. The great Mughal Emperor buckled on his light armour and was no sooner accoutred than he mounted his horse arranged in iron mail and rode out on to the battle field. Akbar was a very brave soldier indeed. He led by personal example. He knew from experience how important it was for the King to be present himself during an important battle. At the battle for Ahmednagar, when his forces were drawn up in battle array against those of Sultan Bahadur, his captains had begun to talk of avoiding an action for fear of being beaten, since Bahadur's army was much the more powerful. When Akbar learnt this, he hurried in person to the spot, although at a distance of four days' journey from the army, and thus so completely restored the courage of his troops that they gained a victory and routed the foe.

The King, attended by some of the greatest lords of the kingdom, rode between the lines of troops in battle array. Other horsemen rode in front, clearing a way for

the commander-in-chief. The red caps and *paggarees* stood out. These were the Turks from Persia. Their red headgear indicated they were Muslims of the Shiah persuasion. (Ali was the adopted son of the Prophet Mohammed whose daughter Fatima he married. The Shiahs hold that he should have succeeded to the Khalifate on the death of Mohammed and the claims of Ali against those of Abu Bakr, Umar and Usman, gave rise to the Shiah schism.)

Gun-carriages had brought the guns and heavy artillery to the forward positions. Between every two guns was a space of about ten yards defended by a chain. These guns, as well as the carts, formed the breastworks. Behind the guns came the matchlock men, placed there to prevent the artillery from being cut off from the infantry and bowmen who were behind. The *tufanguis* or arquebusiers were priming their clumsily made *banduks* with powder (*ranjak-dan*) stored in horn receptacles. Here and there were men armed with crude hand grenades. In the rear were the armed elephants. Akbar commanded no less than fifty thousand elephants, armed and trained for battle. To protect the head from blows, the heads of the elephants were covered with a plate of iron or tough hide. A long sword, as thick and wide as a man's hand, was attached to the trunk and a highly sharpened dagger to each of the tusks which protruded from the mouth. On its back each elephant had four small wooden turrets from which four soldiers fired their bows, arquebuses or muskets. Some of the elephants even carried a small, iron cannon, six feet long, capable of firing shot the size of a tennis-ball. The cannon stood on a strong square frame of wood fastened by ropes to the back of the elephant. The corners of the frame bore silk banners on short poles. The driver of the elephant, the mahout, was protected by a cuirass or by plates of metal overlapping like scales. When the mahout shouted 'Go forward' or 'Turn back' the elephant did so. When he shouted 'Strike this one', 'Strike that one', or 'Do not strike anymore' the elephant carried out the command. Elephants armed in this way were not placed

An armed elephant goes into action

in the front line because they would block out the enemy from the view of the soldiers. Moreover, if elephants were wounded they would break the ranks of the soldiers and so throw the army into disarray. However, Akbar once began an action with his elephants so as to surprise and alarm the enemy's cavalry who were unaccustomed to these animals. But galled by the lances, arrows and javelins the elephants became unruly and disdaining the command of their riders turned and threw his own troops into confusion. Another advantage of having the elephants in the rear was that if the enemy managed to break through so far, this massive and formidable force could be swiftly brought into action to bar further progress. Not only that, they would seize with their trunks anyone in their path, raise them high into the air, dash them to the ground and then trample them underfoot. Or they would charge, butting their way through like rams, causing havoc and panic among horse and foot and put them to rout.

Akbar looked up into the sky — not a cloud or sign of rain. This would aid his bowmen because rain makes the bows sodden and slack. Rain would also hinder the effective use of his cavalry.

The kettle-drums sounded the advance. Father Xavier prayed the coming carnage would not be too apocalyptic. He and Goes both knew that if the advance failed, not only Akbar and his men but the two Jesuits, too, would also fall.

The whole sky was soon cordite brown as the hundreds of thousands of feet and hooves of Akbar's army disturbed the sandy dust which spiralled up into the heavens, looking like dark clouds of rain. The big guns on both sides started the bombardment. The matchlockmen lit matches, to ignite the gunpowder in their matchlocks. The din was indescribable. And then as was the custom — the two armies engaged at close quarters with the most furious charges. The clash of arms — lances and swords and shields, the twanging of the bows as they released their arrows — was almost drowned out by the shouting and screaming of men, the

neighing of frenzied horses and camels, the trumpeting of the war elephants. It was a scene out of hell. Finally, for want of good discipline, one side lost ground and was finally routed. The slaughter became sheer carnage.

Akbar had partly avenged the killing of his son.

His victorious but depleted army then moved on to Asirgarh, twelve miles north-east of Burhanpur. Asirgarh — the fort of Asir — commanded one of the main roads of Hindustan from an outlying spur on a hill 850 feet above the surrounding country. The area of the fort was some sixty acres. It could accommodate fifty thousand horse. The late king, Bahadur Shah, had no less than six hundred pieces of ordnance to defend it. The fort was impregnable, as Akbar was to find out. It was skirted by a wall, below which a precipice fell 120 feet. It was scarped so well as to leave only two places of ascent. That on the north led up a ravine and was guarded by an outer rampart. The most practicable access was on the south-west face but this was defended by a strong outwork called Kamargah.

Akbar encircled the castle on all sides and laid siege to it for weeks. The weeks turned into months. Perhaps more heavy guns would destroy the fortifications. Akbar ordered Father Xavier to write to the Portuguese authorities requesting guns and ammunition. Foolhardy and brave was the man who refused an order from the Emperor. But the good priest did just that. He informed the King that he could not do that as such action was contrary to the Christian faith. The Emperor flew into a rage and told the priest to pack his few belongings and leave immediately for Goa. Xavier went to his tent and prepared for the inevitable punishment meted out to those who dared disobey the Emperor's command. Yet another one, or two names — if Goes was to be executed as well — would be added to the steadily mounting list of Jesuit martyrs.

But nothing was said or done. In a few days the King had mellowed and the affair forgotten.

The siege had lasted eleven months, with no signs of surrender by the beleaguered fortress. Finally shortage of

Battle Scene

water brought the surrender which Akbar's military might could not. The little water that remained became contaminated with 'worms', which caused the people who drank it to 'swell and burst'. When the fort was eventually taken Xavier managed to plead successfully for the lives of some of the half-caste renegades among the prisoners and reconvert them to Christianity.

Akbar moved on to attack yet another fortress that stood in his all-conquering march to subjugate the whole of the Deccan. This time his adversary was Princess Chand Bibi (Lady Moon). She defended herself with great vigour, but was obliged to surrender the fortress for want of provisions. This princess was so grieved at seeing herself despoiled of her dignities that she made up her mind not to allow her wealth to fall into the hands of Akbar. With this idea she gave orders that all the gold she had should be melted and made into cannon-balls. Upon these she had words engraved to the effect that the balls belonged to anyone who found them, that no one had the right to take them by force from the finder, adding other words of malediction against him who acted otherwise. The cannon were loaded with these balls, and they were discharged in all directions. After the fortress was taken King Akbar fell in love with the Princess for her beauty, and transferred her to his own palace.

In August 1600 one of Akbar's great captains, Abdur Rahim, Khan-Khaman, was sent in advance with fifty thousand men to capture by force the fortress of Ahmednagar, the chief stronghold of King Malik. Akbar was now master of the whole Deccan. In half a century Akbar had turned a mere foot-hold in the north-west into control of most of Hindustan.

But other problems awaited the all-conquering warrior. Some of Akbar's captains put it into the head of his son Prince Salim, then thirty-two, that he should revolt against his father and take over the throne. The revolt occurred and Akbar and his force hurried back to Agra. It was not long before Salim was taken prisoner.

The love which Akbar had felt for his son held him back from meting out the punishment that such a crime

would normally have exacted. Still, he did not omit to give him a lesson. Some days afterwards, when both were going out together to the chase, Salim saw on the roadside the impaled bodies of the rebellious captains. Akbar said to him: "Thus are rebels dealt with; you knew well that I had no other son than you, and that you must inherit the whole of my conquests. Therefore, you set a very bad example and historians will not fail to record you as the first of the great Tamerlane's race who rebelled against his father. It may well be that the crime was not really yours, but that of those men there who gave you bad advice, for which they have received their reward. It very nearly happened that as you had shared in the crime, so likewise you should have shared the penalty. But the love and affection that I have for you would not permit me to vent on you my just indignation."

Akbar could be cruel. But he could also temper cruelty with generosity and mercy. His finance minister Khwaja Shah Mansuri was twice convicted of conspiracy and treasonable correspondence with Mirza Muhammad Hakim, ruler of Kabul. Akbar forgave him each time, graciously restoring him to favour and office. However, when the minister so forgot himself as to repeat the offence a third time Akbar sentenced him to death by crucifixion.

While Father Xavier had returned to Agra from the Deccan campaign with the Emperor's forces, Goes had said his farewell and set off in an entirely opposite direction — back to Goa.

Akbar had long cast covetous eyes on the Portuguese settlements to the south of his new kingdoms in the Deccan.

In order to keep an eye on what the Portuguese were doing and to ascertain their military strength Akbar frequently sent agents to Goa, ostensibly as ambassadors. He always sent his agents at times when ships were said to be due from Portugal, so that they might take note of what came in them, whether in the way of merchandise, or munitions or men.

In 1601 Akbar sent Sultan Hamid as his ambassador to Goa, to meet the Viceroy to discuss a permanent peace by land and by sea with the Portuguese. Sultan Hamid was from the Kingdom of Cambaya, a person of great wealth and influence, a Gujarati by birth and a Mohammedan. The Emperor asked de Goes to accompany this mission.

In March 1601 Goes set out for Goa. As a token of his esteem for Goes Akbar allowed him to take back with him to Goa a band of half-caste children of Portuguese descent who had been carried off as prisoners-of-war by Akbar's armies at Barhanpur and other fortresses.

Goes set off to the south-east. His journey through cactus-ridden country would take him several months, even longer, now that he had a party of children to care for. His path took him to Balapur, Golconda, Bijapur, Belgaum, Goa. It meant negotiating the Ajanta range of mountains, crossing the Godavari river, climbing the Balaghat range, crossing the Bhima river and then the river Krishna. The road was dry and stony, often only a path wide enough for just a cart. It all turned out even worse than he had expected. As well as the ever-present hazard of attacks by robbers, and the wild animals such as lion and tiger and wild buffalo and wild pig, there was often little or no food, little or no water. The young bodies in his care could not cope. They got sick; there was the occasional snakebite. There were no sulphonamides and penicillin and other wonder drugs then. There were no paediatricians and hospitals. In serious cases often the only remedy was opium. It got increasingly hotter every day. He hoped he would reach his destination before the south-west monsoon broke at the end of May. Then the roads, bad as they were, would become completely impassable. Streets would be several feet under water, safe only for horses to cross.

The sight of 'topless' men and women indicated they were getting farther and further south — nearing home. They were nearly there when they finally reached Belgaum. Finally they crossed the Mandovi river which separated the mainland from Goa. They were home!

Chapter 8

The Kingdom Of Cathay

Three years earlier, while he was still in Lahore, an incident occurred which was to profoundly affect Bento de Goes's future life.

It was a particularly hot afternoon; the heat was overpowering, almost suffocating. Even the lizards, which mercifully devoured the mosquitoes, and rats and mongooses that made sleep at night difficult as they gambolled through the thick thatch of reeds and grass laid underneath the tiles of the roof so as to keep out the heat during the day, were stilled. He had taken off his *soutane*, hopefully to ease his prickly heat. In shorts and undervest he had made for the verandah in search of some cool breeze to soothe the itching. But breeze there was none. Just a shimmering haze of scorching heat.

An excited voice called de Goes to his sparsely-furnished room.

"It's true! It's true!" Father Xavier had shouted.

"What's true?" asked Goes.

"The kingdom; the kingdom!"

"What kingdom?" Goes asked again, completely bewildered by the words of his excited colleague.

"Cathay. Yes, it exists. Cathay exists."

Father Jerome had just returned from the bazaar where he had been talking to some Muslim merchants. They had convinced him in his suspicion that a country called Cathay existed and that many of its population were Christians.

Cathay was one of those legendary countries that were spoken of but no one knew what it was or where it was, if ever it existed at all, like the supposed lost city of Atlantis. Before the time of the Mongols* (13th century) the name of Cathay had not been known in Europe. Originally it belonged to a people which was not Chinese, the Khitans, a Manchu tribe, who up to the tenth century occupied a tract of country in the north-east of China beyond the Chingan mountains. A conqueror arose among them, who soon extended their territory from the Sea of Korea to the Altai mountains, and before long they had pushed south as far as the left bank of the Hoang-ho. For two centuries Northern China and the adjoining territories formed the empire of the Leaos or the Iron Dynasty. As the country formed an outlying part of the great Chinese empire, the conquerors, the Khitans, made this civilisation their own and the neighbouring tribes began to apply the name of Khithai (Cathay) to the latter country. In turn the Leao dynasty and its successor were swept away when the barbarian Mongolian hordes under Jenghiz Khan conquered Khithai in 1206 and became its new rulers. The Mongol hordes burst through the gate of Dzungaria, and deluging Western Asia, the plundering bands effaced every boundary line as they laid waste the plains of Siberia and Sarmatia. In a matter of years the Mongol empire stretched from the Yellow River to the Danube. No human power could stem the tide of destruction. European civilisation seemed doomed. One way remained — to win over the pagan hordes to Christianity and the Graeco-Roman civilisation. With this motive in mind Pope Innocent II sent the first missionaries to the Great Khan.

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* The Mongols originated from N-E China and in the 13th century went on raids westwards, reaching Western Asia, the Caspian Sea and upto the river Danube.

Then came a split and one of the branches turned eastwards through Afghanistan and into India. These are known in history as the Mughals. Hence in the book both names are used depending on the timing and place.

In 1246 John of Plano Carpini, an Italian Franciscan friar and one of St. Francis's first companions, made the journey to Cathay, getting as far as Karakorum. He was the first European to reach the Far East overland. His journey is shown on the map. He met with little success at the Great Khan's court and was sent back with an insolent letter to the Pope.

In 1253 William of Rubruck, the next envoy, was sent out to the same region by King Louis IX of France, who was at that time engaged in the Sixth Crusade. His route was very similar to that taken by Carpini. From Lake Balkash he travelled, as Carpini had done, past Ala Kul and across Mongolia to the Court of the Grand Khan, which he reached on December 26th. Thence, after some delay, William moved with the court to Karakorum, where he remained till July 6th, 1254. He wrote:

> "Further on is Great Cathaya, the inhabitants whereof were of old time called Seres. For from them are brought the most excellent stuffs of silk. The inhabitants of Cathay are of small stature, they speak mostly through the nose, as is the case with nearly all Asiatics, their eyes are very narrow."

It was narratives such as these that gave to Western Europe the first fairly accurate picture of Central Asia.

In 1255 two Venetian traders, Nicolò and Maffeo Polo, reached Serai by the Black Sea route already used by the envoys to the Great Khan. Their return was prevented by the unsettled state of the country, and so they travelled to Bokhara, and thence to the Court of the Grand Khan, at Cambaluc (Khan-balig = Khan's town), near Peking. After an absence of fourteen years they came back to Acre, bearing a message for the Pope. They had penetrated into Asia farther than any other European.

These men returned to the East in 1271, and took with them Marco, son of Nicolò, who has left an invaluable record of the journey. From Acre they travelled to Armenia, and, skirting the western highlands

of Persia, passed through Bagdad to Basra, and reached Ormuz. Here they proposed to take ship for the East, but, disliking the unseaworthy appearance of the boats, turned inland, and crossed Persia to Balkh. Their route then lay over the Pamirs to Kashgar, where they began their journey through the towns that lay at the foot of the Kuen Lun range. From Yarkand and Khotan they continued eastward, passing to the south of Lob Nor, crossing the Ordos, and so reaching Peking. Even now their journeys were not over, for the Venetians lived in China for seventeen years. This long residence gave Marco Polo an opportunity to see something of the great Chinese plain, to travel through Shansi, Shensi, and Szechwan, to the distant Yunnan, and even to Burma, and to visit Cochin-China.

The Venetians returned to Europe by the sea route, sailed through the Straits of Malacca, skirted the south coast of India and passed along its western shores, and again reached Ormuz. Thus the homeward journey supplemented, in an important way, the land route to Asia.

In his book of travels (The Book of Ser. Marco Polo), published in 1559, Marco Polo gave a description of a fabulous mysterious country called Cathay, located in Central Asia. Cathay was synonymous with Eldorado, a land of wealth on the far side of the world. Unfortunately the great rich country described in such detail by Polo was impossible to locate from the details in his narrative.

Odoric de Pordenone (1316-1328) was another Franciscan who penetrated into darkest Asia. In 1338 John de Marignolli, envoy of Pope Benedict XII, made the journey to the Great Khan.

All these Franciscan legates to the court of the Great Khan described a marvellous kingdom far east of Asia and south of Tartary, called Great Cathay, of immense extent, with the largest cities, widest rivers and greatest plains ever seen, where gunpowder, coal, paper-money and printing were in general use. Its huge population were idolaters but in the capital city, Cambaluc, at the court of the Great Khan, lived a community of Christians.

It was reports such as these that led to the notion of a great Christian kingdom called Cathay ruled by one Prester John. It was at first believed that Abyssinia was the home of Prester John. Indeed Ignatius of Loyola sent some of the first Jesuits to that country to cater to the needs of any Christians there. Then later Cathay, a kingdom somewhere right up in the north in Tartary and extending to the great wall of China, was believed to be the home of the real Prester John. In 1487 King John II of Portugal sent two travellers to search for the kingdom of Prester John in the East. When Vasco de Gama sailed from Portugal in 1497 he carried letters for Prester John.

The unification of a great part of Asia by the Mongols greatly assisted the process of discovering that continent and also of opening up two of the three great trade routes between east and west.

Then in the middle of the fourteenth century the great Mongol empire began to totter. It was finally destroyed by the incessant attacks of the Chinese which heralded the Ming dynasty. The Asian door was closed. The new conquerors, the Chinese, enforced their ancient policy of isolation and expelled and kept out foreigners. At the same time Islamism, whose advance had been repulsed by the Mongols, spread and in time a whole chain of Mohammedan nations almost completely severed any links between the West and the Far East. Asia was sealed off. Travel there was no longer possible. The number of missionaries steadily decreased and with them that of the merchants who had followed in their track. Occasional mention is made of friars sent out by the papal court at Avignon. But then they too vanish in the gathering darkness and all was silence.

Nicholas Conti wrote of what he had been told by others about Cathay:

> "Beyond this province of Macinus is one which is superior to all others in the world, and is named Cathay. The lord of this country is called the Great Khan, which in the language of the inhabitants means emperor. The principal city is called Cambaleschia. It is built in the form of a quadrangle, and is twenty-eight miles in circumference. In the centre is a very

handsome and strong fortress, in which is situated the king's palace. In each of the four angles there is constructed a circular fortress for defence, and the circuit of each of these is four miles. In these fortresses are deposited military arms of all sorts, and machines for war and the storming of cities. From the royal palace a vaulted wall extends through the city to each of the said four fortresses, by which, in the event of the people rising against the king, he can retire into the fortresses at his pleasure. Fifteen days distant from this city there is another, very large, called Nemptai (now Hangchow), which has been built by this king. It is thirty miles in circumference, and more populous than the others. In these two cities, the houses and palaces and other ornaments are similar to those in Italy: the men, gentle and discreet, wise, and more wealthy than any that have been before mentioned."

But there was no first-hand information. Fancy was free to adorn and invent. An impenetrable fog enveloped Cathay and its famous capital Cambaluc, of which so many marvellous tales had been told by ancient travellers. Cathay, marked tentatively on maps as lying north-west of China, faded away beyond the mountains of Central Asia.

But Cathay's very elusiveness only increased its hold on the imagination. Columbus searched for Cathay in his voyage across the Atlantic to the west. In fact when he landed at Cuba at first he thought it was the mainland of Catayo (Cathay). Columbus was not the only explorer to seek for a shorter way to Cathay: it was the object of every voyage "round by the north". England began to direct her efforts to finding Cathay, with its supposedly cold climate, hoping to barter her broadcloth for silks and silver. In 1553 Sir Hugh Willoughby and Richard Chancellor sailed from Deptford with a fleet of three ships to find a north-east passage. But the crews perished of cold on the coast of Lapland.

Anthony Jenkinson, Chief Factor of the Muscovy Company, whose articles bound him "to use all ways and means possible to learn how men may pass from Russia to Cathaia" attempted a land route with as little success.

The world had been circumnavigated, unimagined continents discovered, yet Cathay which had been lost for 200 years refused to yield her secret. By the beginning of the seventeenth century many people doubted if such a place as Cathay existed.

When Father Monserrat had visited Fatehpur Sikri on the first Jesuit mission to the Mughal court he had met some of the widely-travelled merchants of northern India whose caravans had for centuries travelled across the Pamir passes to Turkestan and China. They told him about a land called Cathay, the land of Silk Merchants. All the silk exported from China to Europe came from this land by Chinese caravans. The Land of the Silk Merchants was part of Asiatic Siberia, separated from Tartary and Mongolia by the Imaus mountains. Its capital, Cambaluch, was three thousand miles from Samarkand.

It was from such travellers that Father Xavier had got his news. He described the circumstance in a letter dated 25th July 1598, which he wrote from Akbar's court in Lahore to the Father Provincial in Goa:

> "One day I was talking with the Crown Prince, the King's eldest son, when there came to the palace a rich merchant about sixty years of age and of Mohammedan sect. He entered the hall to pay his respects. Having done reverence to the Prince, he was asked where he had come from. In answer the merchant said he was just returned from the kingdom of Khitai, which is the same as that which I called Cathay, of which Marco Polo the Venetian makes mention in his account of his Travels and Hayton the Armenian in his History. It is also mentioned by certain of our modern authors, who place it in Tartary, or thereabouts.
>
> "In reply to the Prince's enquiries about this kingdom, and how long he had resided there, the merchant said that he had been there for thirteen years, living in the capital city, which he called Xambalu, being the same that is called Cambalu by the writers above referred to, some of whom say that it is twenty-four, others as much as thirty-two miles in circuit. It is

also, the merchant said, the usual residence of the King, whom he had seen many times, and who, according to his account, is a very mighty monarch; for he has in his kingdom as many as fifteen hundred towns, and all very populous.

"Being asked how he had been able to enter the country, he replied that he had gone there pretending to be an ambassador of the King of Kashgar, but that, notwithstanding this, he was detained by the governor of the first frontier town to which he came, until the King had been informed of his arrival. This was not done until the seals of the letters which he carried had been examined, when a message was sent to the King by a courier, who returned within a month bringing permission for him to proceed to court. The journey, he said, was easily accomplished, though the distance was very great; for they changed horses at each post, as in Europe, and were thus able to cover each day ninety or a hundred cos, which would represent as many Italian miles, or from twenty-five to thirty of our ordinary leagues. Throughout the journey, they were free from molestation, for justice is very strictly administered in those parts, and robbers are never pardoned.

"Questioned further as to the appearance and manners of the inhabitants of the country, he said that he had never seen handsomer people, exceeding the Rumes, that is to say the Europeans, in comeliness, that the men usually wore long beards, and that all of them, both men and women, were of a white complexion. As to their religion, he said that they were for the most part Isauites, or Iesauites, meaning Christians, who are so called by these people from the name Jesus, just as we say Jesuites. Asked if all the people were Christians, he replied that this was by no means the case; for many of them were Mussauites, that is to say Jews (followers of Moses). There were also, he added, others who were Mohammedans, who were hoping to convert the Christian King to their religion.

"At this point the conversation was interrupted, the Prince graciously naming another day for the reception of the merchant, in order to ask further questions about his empire."

However, Xavier, impatient and eager to learn more, went to see the merchant in order to get more precise information about the religion of the inhabitants. The merchant gave the most minute details of the dress and customs of the people.

Xavier was convinced of the merchant's story and wrote a subsequent letter to his Superior vouching for the truth of his earlier communication:

> "The merchant said that they had many churches, some of them very large, in which were to be seen images both painted and sculptured. Amongst these he had seen one of the crucifix, to which the people paid great reverence. Belonging to each church there was a priest much respected by his parishioners, from whom he received many presents. Continence and chastity were strictly observed by the priests.
>
> "The merchant said that the Fathers wear black robes, and a cap on the head 'very like yours, but a little larger'. He had often seen the King go to the church, for he was a Christian.
>
> "The merchant said that the people of Cathay were as a general rule, well off, and that the country contained many silver mines which were a source of great wealth. The King maintained an establishment of four hundred elephants trained for war. These were brought to him from Malaca. Merchants also came there to trade from Pegu, which was distant a six months' journey."

Getting similar confirmation from other travellers Father Xavier again wrote to the Provincial in a letter dated 1st August 1599. In this he stated that Cathay could be reached by travelling through Bengal and the Kingdom of Ghoraghat (in the district of Cooch Behar) where the empire of the Great Mughal terminates; but that the easiest route, and the one usually followed by merchants, was that which commenced at Lahore, and led through Kashmir and Tibet, whose King was on very good terms with the Great Mughal, straight to Kashgar whence it was but a short distance to the first town of Cathay, which the merchants say is inhabited by Christians.

Nicholas Pimenta, who was Vicar-General to the Indies mission, was understandably confused when he received Father Xavier's letter from Lahore confirming what Father Monserrat had stated earlier namely, that the Kingdom of Cathay existed. He was confused because he also had a letter dated 12th October 1596 from Father Matteo Ricci in Nanking, China, to the effect that there was no such kingdom as Cathay: merchants and travellers had merely confused the names of Cathay and China — they were one and the same country and the rich city of Cambaluc was none other than Peking.

Ricci had arrived in Goa in 1578. Four years later he was sent to Macao, off mainland China. By the end of the century his work, incorporating whatever was best in Chinese culture, had enabled him to establish a mission even in the capital, Peking. Ricci's scientific prowess, and his literary prowess in Chinese, had soon gained him considerable eminence at Peking. Ricci had studied under Clavius, the most brilliant mathematician of his day. It was Father Clavius who reformed the Gregorian Calendar. From mathematics Ricci had progressed to astronomy and the movement of the stars — still according to the Ptolemaic system — that the earth was the centre of the world and the sun went round the earth as our eyes tell us — and thence to the construction of sundials, clocks, spheres and astrolabes. Ricci had taken to China the latest in scientific, surveying and astronomical instruments. He travelled half of China and extended the boundaries of the world known to Europe by thousands of square miles. Whilst engaged in this work Ricci was also searching simultaneously for another country — Cathay — which eluded his grasp. His terrestrial and heavenly measurements and researches soon gained him a considerable reputation amongst the learned men of Chinese science in Peking. He came to be known as the 'Ptolemy of China'.

His researches also led him to believe that Cathay and China were not two, but one and the same country. Though the ancient Franciscan missionaries and Marco Polo did not employ the names now in use, yet their

descriptions tallied perfectly with the people, the customs, the products and the trade of China. Polo had noted that the greatest city of Cathay contained twelve thousand bridges. Ricci estimated that there were well over a thousand in Nanking. Could Polo have been describing Nanking under another name? Polo also mentioned a great river dividing Cathay from east to west. Could that be the Yangtze, which separated the seven northern from the eight southern provinces? The different appellations were difficult to explain, but it might be that the Mongol conquerors of Polo's day had provided names from their own tongue. If Cathay, which by all writers was said to be a great country in the Far East, existed then surely, Ricci argued, something should be known about it in China, whether from war or from commercial relations. Such a country could not remain utterly unknown. Whilst in the west the name of Cathay was on the lips of every geographer, occupying on atlases a vast position east of Persia and north-west of China, the Chinese were ignorant of the name. Ricci had consulted and questioned maps, histories, scholars, but they had never heard of Cathay.

Ricci informed the authorities in India and in Europe of his conclusions that China and Cathay were the same. This view was strengthened by his visit to Peking in 1598. As a foreigner he was incarcerated in what he euphemistically called the "palace for foreigners". This 'palace' was a huge enclosure, with more than a thousand rooms, surrounded by high walls and locked gates. The rooms, without doors, chairs, benches or beds, were more stalls for beasts than for men. Here were housed the hundreds of foreigners, including horse thieves, pedlars, rascals of every sort, who came to Peking in the guise of 'ambassadors' to seek an audience with the Emperor Wan-li. Actually they were nearly all merchants interested only in trade. No one was allowed out. As barbarian tribute-bearers they were not guests but prisoners. Everyone was aware of the charade, but all, by a kind of tacit agreement, and to their mutual profit, kept up the ambassadorial 'game'.

The charade had begun in the reign of the Emperor Yung-lo (1403-1424). In an excess of vainglory he had sent emissaries far and wide to invite foreigners to pay tribute and homage to him in his new capital. The response was immediate and enthusiastic. Merchants were only too glad of the opportunity to trade and a steady stream of tribute-bearing 'embassies' flowed to Peking from every country in the Far and Near East. Their camels, horses and caravans, carrying valuable merchandise, were a common sight in the dusty streets of Peking, although their freedom of movement was strictly limited while in the imperial capital.

Part of the charade was the supposed imperial audience which was granted to 'ambassadors'. A colourful procession of richly robed mandarins and foreigners in ceremonial dress, escorted by several thousand soldiers and led by lumbering elephants, would make its way at the first streaks of dawn to the magnificent audience chamber capable of holding thirty thousand people. This had for long been the place of genuine audiences, but since 1585 the emperors had shut themselves off from all contacts with the outside world. The charade was played out in the emperor's absence; the *kowtows* would be made to the empty imperial throne, the gifts would be presented. Ricci could not but laugh at some of the gifts proffered. Instead of the exotic finery Ricci expected, suitable to the mightiest monarch on earth, many brought pieces of iron which, with handles of wood cut in the 'palace' grounds, would be presented as curious swords. What they called cuirasses (breast plates) were pieces of metal tied together with lengths of tow. Others had drooping pack-horses — mere skin and bones after the long journey — which would be offered as steeds of Araby.

But the cost of vanity ran high. These 'ambassadors' were all wined, dined, entertained and maintained by the imperial treasury and then sent on their way with gifts worth over fifty thousand *taels* annually, as befitted so great a lord, of far greater value than they had brought. The mandarins knew exactly what was happening, but

for several reasons let the farce continue. The trade with foreign countries benefited China; they dared not interfere with a plan which flattered the Emperor's vanity; they feared to offend the merchants, lest they either foment rebellion within or wage war from without; and lastly, they were able to embezzle money intended for the foreigners' expenses.

The 'palace' of ambassadors would be crowded with uncouth, raucous figures of every colour and physiognomy, in turbans, marmot toques and gilt-quilled helmets, a congeries of Asiatic peoples speaking a babel of tongues. Ricci met men from Korea, Cochin-China, Siam, Burma, Formosa, from the Tartar tribes, from Tibet, Mongolia and the Moslem countries of Turkestan, some of the embassies, together with servants, numbering over a thousand men. The Mohammedans interested Ricci most. They came from far Kashgar and had heard of Italy, Venice, Spain, Portugal and consequently of Christianity. They brought a small quantity of jade to the Emperor, a stone highly prized in China, where it was carved by means of abrasive quartz sand. But their main source of profit was rhubarb, bought cheap in Kansu, where it grew abundantly, and sold dear in Peking. With their profits they bought Chinese silk.

Ricci decided to question these merchants about Cathay. On his first visit to Peking he had arranged for Brother Sebastian to call on one of the Mohammedans who had arrived in the capital forty years previously from Arabia to present the Emperor with a lion, an animal which the Chinese knew to exist but had seldom seen. This Arabian had referred to China as Khitai, a name which Ricci had considered sufficiently similar to Cathay to warrant amplifying his theory, first suggested by the bridges of Nanking, and to assume Marco Polo had been writing about China under the name of Cathay. Ricci found seventy or more Mohammedans from Central Asian countries in the enclosure. The Mohammedans in the 'palace' assured Ricci that in the Great Mongol's kingdom, in Persia and elsewhere, the Middle Kingdom, namely China, was known only by the name Khitai

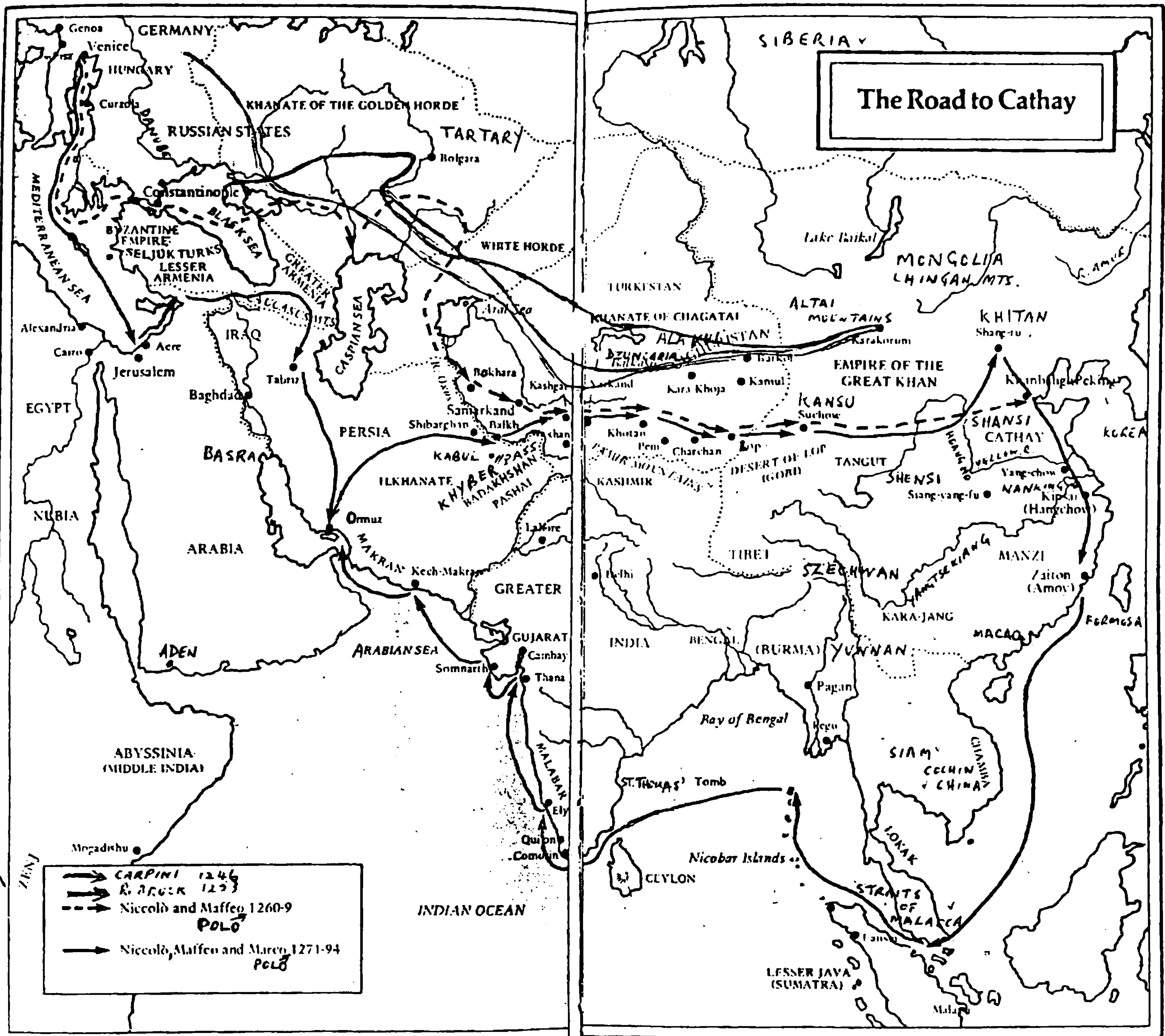
(Cathay) and that they knew its capital as Cambaluc. From his conversations with them he adduced more evidence to support his conviction that China and the mysterious Cathay of Marco Polo were one and the same.

But Ricci's arguments did not win much support. Many people, unwilling to give up the country of fable and legend, merely assigned it another place on the map. Thus, for instance, the maps of Blaeu and Ortelius shifted Cathay and all the names associated with it bodily to the north, placing it in the Amur territory far beyond the new-found China and its great wall.

There was a major discrepancy between the letters from Xavier and from Ricci. Xavier's Mohammedan informants had seen priests and several symbols of the practice of Christianity in Cathay. They had seen statues of the 'Virgin' and of saints; the priests placed candles and lamps on an altar; they wore sacred vestments which looked like chasubles and copes; they sang in the manner of Gregorian chant. When Josaphat Barbaro had made inquiries about Cathay among the Tartars at Tana he had been assured the inhabitants were Christians. Anthony Jenkinson, who had been commissioned by some English merchants with the definite object of finding Cathay, was told at Bokhara in 1559 that the religion of the people of Cathay was the religion of the Christians or at least strongly resembled it.

But whilst Xavier's informants had spoken of large numbers of Christians in Cathay, Ricci mentioned no Christians in China. How would Christian Cathay and heathen China be one and the same country? Even the court customs in Cathay differed widely from those observed by Ricci in China. Ricci argued that these Mohammedan travellers had been deceived — as even some missionaries had been — by the outward similarities between the Christian and Buddhist rituals and customs.

The weight of almost every known authority and of many centuries opposed any identification of Cathay with China. The evidence seemed to favour the Jesuits in India, on their evidence from Mohammedan informants. It could be that Cathay was a country contiguous to



The Road to Cathay
Genoa
Venice
GERMANY
HUNGARY
Curzola
RUSSIAN STATES
KHANATE OF THE GOLDEN HORDE
TARTARY
Bolgara
Constantinople
BYZANTINE EMPIRE
SELJUK TURKS
LESSER ARMENIA
BLACK SEA
GREATER ARMENIA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
WHITE HORDE
CASPIAN SEA
Aral Sea
Alexandria
Cairo
Acre
Jerusalem
IRAQ
Tabriz
Baghdad
EGYPT
PERSIA
Bokhara
Samarkand
Shibarghan
Balkh
KABUL
KHYBER PASS
BADAKHSHAN
PASHAI
ILKHANATE
BASRA
Ormuz
NUBIA
ARABIA
MAKRAN
Kech-Makran
GREATER
Lahore
ADEN
ARABIAN SEA
GUJARAT
Cambay
Somnarth
Thana
MALABAR
Ely
Quilon
Comorin
ABYSSINIA (MIDDLE INDIA)
Mogadishu
INDIAN OCEAN
CARPINI 1246
R. RUBRUCK 1253
Niccolò and Maffeo 1260-9 POLO
Niccolò, Maffeo and Marco 1271-94 POLO
SIBERIA
Lake Baikal
MONGOLIA
CHINGAN MTS.
TURKESTAN
ALTAI MOUNTAINS
KHANATE OF CHAGATAI
Karakorum
KHITAN
Shang-tu
Barkul
Kara Khoja
Kamul
EMPIRE OF THE GREAT KHAN
Yarkand
KANSU
Suchow
Khotan
Pem
Charchan
Lop
DESERT OF LOP (GOBI)
TANGUT
SHANSI
CATHAY
KOREA
KASHMIR
SHENSI
Yang-chow
NANKING
Siang-yang-fu
Kinsai (Hangchow)
TIBET
SZECHWAN
MANZI
Delhi
Zaiton (Amoy)
KARA-JANG
INDIA
BENGAL
(BURMA)
YUNNAN
MACAO
FORMOSA
Pagan
Bay of Bengal
SIAM
COCHIN CHINA
CHAMBA
St. Thomas' Tomb
LOKAK
Nicobar Islands
CEYLON
STRAITS OF MALACCA
LESSER JAVA (SUMATRA)

China and that its name was extended to also cover China.

The only way to solve the riddle was by a voyage of discovery to the mysterious kingdom that lay behind the mountains. At the worst, even if no kingdom should be found, if there were no long-neglected communities of Christians to be ministered to, the expedition might at least result in the opening of a new land-route to China shorter than the dangerous sea-voyage.

The Vicar-General, Fáther Pimenta, wrote to the Pope, suggesting such an expedition to re-discover Cathay. Here was an ample and untouched field awaiting the labours of the Society of Jesus. The permission was readily given. As Portugal was still under the sovereignty of Spain, Pimenta then wrote to King Philip II of Spain requesting the necessary funds.

At the time the English still clung to the idea of a north-west passage, and the Dutch were trying to find a way to Cathay and China, passing north of Norway, through Moscow and Tartary. Hoping to forestall these ventures for Cathay's riches, Philip approved the scheme. He ordered Ayres de Saldanha, who was then Viceroy of India, to forward such an expedition to the best of his ability.

It was also politic and expedient that the Mogul Emperor should be informed of these developments. Father Xavier was instructed to appraise Akbar, which he did:

> "Sire, our Superior has been told how in the kingdom of Catay, there are many who profess the Christian faith, of whom no sure tidings have been received in Europe for more than three hundred years, partly because they are so far separated from other Christians, and partly because of the wars that have taken place in the countries through which it is necessary to pass in order to reach them. It is now the desire of our Superior to send three or four Fathers to see in what state these Christians are, and aid them to attain salvation; for it is our mission in life to travel the world, taking no account of dangers, in order to show men the way to eternal life."

The King replied in his own language, *Rahat met*

Chapter 9

An Expedition Is Mounted

Goes was on an embassy in Goa for the Mughal Emperor, Akbar, when he was informed that he had been chosen to undertake the mission to explore the then wholly unknown route from India to Cathay, to search out that lost kingdom and make contact with its long neglected Christian population.

The Jesuit Fathers considered at great length a possible route. Father Xavier remembered he had seen the name 'Cathay' mentioned in a map of Russia, Muscovy and Tartary in the Theatrum Mundi of the Flemish cartographer Ortelius. A route was selected by way of Kashmir and Tibet. They then consulted the Typus Orbis Terrarum of Ortelius which had been designed and published by the Englishman Anthony Jenkinson in London in 1570. Though he did not get beyond Bokhara in his travels, from information that he received there, Jenkinson placed Cascara (Kashgar) on his map at thirty days' journey from the Cathay frontier. Three months further travelling would bring one to the gates of Cambulac.

A route Lahore-Kabul-Badakshan-?- was finally decided upon. As a European Goes would be too conspicuous. As a detested Portuguese he would hardly survive a day in the company he would be travelling with through wild, inhospitable people and country. To avoid persecution and attack he would have to disguise himself. He would also have to change his name.

The rough plan for the expedition was as follows. Goes was to disguise himself as an Armenian merchant and to join one of the trading caravans which travelled regularly to Afghanistan over the Khyber Pass. From Kabul he was to proceed over the mountain passes of the Pamir plateau as far as Yarkand and thence into Eastern Turkestan. This was the limit of the Great Mogul's domain. From this point on everything was unknown. Hopefully Goes would pick up the merchants who, every fifth year, set out for China with the ambassadors of the King of Persia.

Before leaving Goa Goes paid his respects to the still incorrupt body of another Jesuit, Francis Xavier, that lay in the church of Bom Jesus, Old Goa. Francis Xavier had left Rome in 1540 to evangelise the East. He worked in India "consumed by a divine impatience" but the ruthlessness and dissolute example of the Portuguese officials which undid so much of the work he had begun, had made him "flee", as he put it, to other distant fields such as Japan. He even wrote a strong letter to the King of Portugal advocating that stern measures be taken against corrupt Portuguese officials, such as confiscating their ill-gotten gains. From Japan Francis Xavier travelled to China, but as a foreigner he was refused entrance. On December 3rd, 1552, then only forty-six years old, he died, attended by a faithful Chinese servant, gazing from a bamboo hut across at the inaccessible coast of China which he had tried in vain to enter for four months. His body, clothed in the rich cloak he had hoped to wear when he met the Emperor of China, was transported to Goa one and half years after his death.

Accompanied by Father Antonio Machado who was to replace him at the court of Akbar, Goes left Goa at the beginning of 1602 on the gruelling seven-month journey to Agra.

Their vessel stopped at the bar at the entrance to Surat. The bar was a small low island three miles from the mouth of the river Tapti which became navigable for smaller ships at spring tide. They travelled some twenty

miles up river. In the distance could be seen, on the right hand side, the walls of Surat castle, with a number of cannons pointing to the river. They entered the city through a gate over a draw-bridge. The captain of the castle had two hundred horse at his disposal. They passed the *maidan*, a large open space, in the middle of which stood a kind of may-pole, on which a light was hung. This was where the great Hindu festivals were observed. The drumming of the tom-toms and the long, plaintive, blasts of the conch shells, drew them to where a large crowd had gathered. Women in gold sarees, carrying oil-lamps, led a procession of gaily decorated elephants carrying icons wrapped in red silk on their backs. Another elephant, much bigger, following behind, carried a statue of a deity. Two old Brahmin priests wrapped in saffron garments, walked on either side of the elephant, fanning the deity with exquisite fans made out of peacock feathers. The throng watched silently as their Lord passed by. Between the castle and *maidan* were the bazaar and cattle and horse market. There were many fine houses belonging to the merchants who lived and traded there. They passed a dirty square where the Untouchables — the outcasts — eked out their days, where superstition had imprisoned them. The city was encompassed by ditches and fenced with thick hedges. Gates led out of the city. They chose the gate leading to Nausari, on the river Purna, twenty miles south of Surat. Near this gate was a massive square reservoir with stone steps leading down to it from all sides. Under the shade of a sacred tree *faqirs* sat in contemplation. It was believed spirits dwelt in this tree. The tree had been cut down and uprooted by Mohammedans but each time the tree had sprung up again. Bats by the thousand hung upside down from the many branches of a huge banyan tree, emitting a most shrill cacophony.

On the way they observed men swaying from the tops of palmyra palms, from the fermented juice of which the intoxicating toddy or *tari* was made. That night they met carousers who had partaken too much of the palm wine.

The inhabitants of Nausari were largely Parsee

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cotton-weavers. The Parsees are Zoroastrians. The Zoroastrians follow the teachings of the Persian prophet Zarathustra. It is an ancient religion founded some six centuries before the birth of Christ, and based on the dualistic nature of the universe, symbolised by the continuous struggle between the god of creation and light, Ormazd, and the god of destruction and darkness, Ahriman. At the centre of the temple burns a flame, which is the focus of their worship. The Zoroastrians neither cremate nor bury their dead. The dead are laid, wrapped in sheets, their heads tenderly rested on V-shaped wooden pillows, on gratings at the top of a tall building called the Tower of Silence. Here the vultures prey on the corpse. You are destined for hell or heaven according to which eye is plucked out first. One such Tower of Silence had been built on the banks of the river Purna. They could see the black creatures, fluttering and preening their filthy wings as they gorged themselves.

At night the two Jesuits stayed whenever possible in *serais* or inns specially built for travellers. Travellers could lodge for little or nothing, provided they brought their own bedding, cooking utensils and other necessities. In smaller towns there were no *serais*. But in the larger cities there would be some. Some *serais* were good and could be locked, with entry in or out only by permission of a porter. Other *serais* were uninhabitable, being little more than stables, if that. On occasion they kept with them their horses in their 'room', such as it was, for fear of horse thieves. These *serais* were built out of the generosity of philanthropic rich men. They would also build wells and cisterns close to much-travelled highways so that passers-by could drink. Or they would pay poor people to sit by the roadside and offer water to passers-by.

Goes and his party crossed the Purna and another river — the Mindhola — in boats. They travelled for several days. Whenever they could the Jesuits stayed in territory which was within the Mogul King's jurisdiction. Here they were likely to receive better treatment. In lands outside Akbar's jurisdiction they could not claim any

consideration by invoking Akbar's authority and were often subject to vile abuse, threats and even stoning. It was hard not to be angry when someone spat an arrow of red betel juice at you, words of abuse — *banchot* (bastard) — ringing in your ears.

They passed many strange places, saw all manner of different people, saw many strange practices and customs they had only heard about. In general the people went about naked, save for a little cloth about their middle. The women often wore a large spot of red on their forehead and a great stroke of red up to the crown. The better off had their necks, arms and ears decked with rings of silver, copper or tin, and with round hoops of ivory, adorned with amber stones and agates. Hindu temples abounded. The sacred fig tree seemed an essential adjunct in most temple grounds. While cows and goats wandered in and out wherever they pleased, grey monkeys dozed contentedly on the pipal boughs or searched in each other's fur. In the temples were idols that appeared monstrous to western eyes: some fashioned like peacocks, and some like a devil with huge mouths, their ears gilded and full of jewels, their teeth and eyes of gold, silver and glass. Occasionally a low, round, white-washed dome would shelter an altar on which stood a primitive *lingam* — phallic symbol. The altar would be covered in marigold flowers and bilva leaves. One would always remove one's shoes before entering the temples. Occasionally one came across *sadhus* (hermits) living in caves in the most unlikely places. There was one who lived in a cave, which appeared just as a black hole, high up a precipitous cliff face. The hermit was visible as a small naked figure against the background of his long black hair. For over thirty years, in an unknown corner of the world, he had been gathering happiness on his old mat.

After many days of travel along dusty, sandy roads, some wide enough only for a cart, they reached Akbarpur, on the mighty Narbada river, which divided Hindustan (India) from the Deccan. A large fort and castle guarded the approaches. It was an important

garrison town. No person of any account could enter or leave without the permission of the governor of the castle. Below the castle was the ferry quay from which boats carried passengers and horses — but not camels — across the river, over a mile wide. Camels were able to cross further down the river where it was shallow enough, but very stony. A family of elephants gambolled in the water, firing jets of water through their trunks over their own backs or that of their neighbours. They passed a group of self-sufficient soldiers who were carrying their own boats on carts.

The road got progressively worse. In parts it was barely a road at all, stony and in parts so steep that laden beasts could barely get up the mountain paths.

In the distance the castle and fort of Mandhu came into view, perched precipitously two thousand feet high on the crest of the Vindhya Mountains and isolated by a valley four hundred yards wide and three hundred feet deep. They looked up at the almost vertical ramparts that extended about thirty-seven miles in circumference. The place was impregnable. No wonder it had been more by internal treason than external force that had enabled Humayan — Akbar's father — to take the city in 1534 from Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, who had captured it from the last of the Khalji kings. They entered through the massive, southern Tarapore gate above which was a platform to take a cannon. But there was no cannon. Mandhu was once the most famous city in India; now it was a mere ghost, all ruined and decayed, except for some tombs and a few mosques, by the ravages of war. It had been sacked yet again by Akbar in 1570. They passed the great Jama Masjid mosque built by Hoshang Shah. Near the mosque was the tall Tower of Victory, one hundred and seventy steps high, peppered with windows and look-out posts. It was erected by Sultan Mahmud I in 1443 to commemorate his defeat of Rana Kumbha of Chitor. They passed the tombs of Khalji kings. Here and there were large cisterns or reservoirs. As the city was on the crest of a high mountain the only water available was what rain water could be collected in

the cisterns. They passed out of the city through the north or Delhi gate.

Ahead of them stretched the vast Indian plain, a vast plateau which extended as far as the Gulf of Bengal, a plain which could swallow up more than half of Europe and still be empty. Day in and day out a blazing sun roasted them from morning till night. The roads continued bad — or worse. The only excitement, unwelcome and dangerous as it was, was the frequent attacks by dacoits and robbers who infested the highway.

They reached the river Sipra on which stood Ujjain, once the capital of Malwa and one of the seven sacred cities of Hindus. It had been sacked by Akbar in 1571, one year after he had taken Mandhu. It still retained some fame as a trading centre for cotton cloths and various drugs. Poppy fields, from which opium was extracted, abounded. The pickers would give the poppy head three scratches from which would issue small tears of milky juice, at first white but which changed to red with the cold of the night. A viceroy of Akbar resided in Ujjain.

On the way to Shahjahanpur they were waylaid by a posse of Rajputs and Kolis who demanded their *gras* (levy) or blackmail. They passed an escort of one hundred horse who were guarding a caravan carrying *pice*, small copper coins, payment for some of Akbar's soldiers. Goes wondered if they had been stopped to pay their *gras*. Most unlikely! A huge flock of wild fowl rose as one as they came upon a large reservoir, full of water lilies and the sacred lotus.

From Sunera on to Sarangpur, a large city with a castle on the banks of the river Kali Sind. Sarangpur was renowned for its excellent turbans and good linen. A turban would come in useful as part of his disguise so Goes visited the bazaar and haggled over a price.

The roads were now little more than rough cart-tracks. Sometimes they were wide enough to let only one cart pass. These narrows were ideal places for an ambush. They were often attacked by robbers using bows and arrows. Another European (William Finch) later

described the way as "theevish, stony, full of trees, a desert passage."

Cuckra's claims to fame seemed to be opium and Mewa wine.

Through tamarind and mango trees they reached Sironj, in territory where several Rajput princes ruled. Betel gardens proliferated. It was the leaf of the piper betel from which *pan* was used for chewing with the betel-nut. They tried some. They laughed at their red mouths and lips.

Narwar lay on the right bank of the river Sind. Its castle was perched precipitously on the top of a high hill. Like the castle at Mandhu the steep ramparts made it virtually impregnable. Like Mandhu, it was now a ghost town, a town of ruins. What stories these old palaces could tell with their dark history of tyranny and poison and garrottings.

The outlines of a castle on the top of a high mountain indicated they were approaching the city of Gwalior. This castle used to be the frontier post of the kingdom of Delhi. As they neared the city they could see the castle was well-nigh impregnable, built on the top of a steep mountain of rock, with towers and battlements guarding every possible approach. At the foot of the mountain lay the city with its gardens and houses. A spacious meadow was kept for horses in times of war. On the east side stood a peak with the tombs of famous men and women. On the west side stood the castle, looking down from its perch on the top of a steep craggy cliff. They showed their *firman* to the guard at the gate at the bottom of the cliff. There was no entry to the castle without permission. They began climbing the steps of the narrow, stone, walled-in, causeway that led one mile up to the castle. On the way they had to pass through three further gates, each heavily defended. A huge elephant, curiously carved in stone, greeted them at the last gate, leading to the castle itself. The gate led them into the Palace of Man Sing, its cupolas covered with domes of gilt copper, now green. The Palace was now the governor's residence. The Palace also contained a

notorious prison to which were sent traitorous nobles and princes sentenced to death. About two months after their arrival they would be executed. The governor would lead the prisoner out on to the top of the castle wall. Here he would be given a stupefying decoction of the milky juice of the poppy. Having drunk this he would be cast down on to the rocks below.

Before reaching Dholpur they crossed the very wide Chambal river. As they approached Agra they passed Fatehpur Sikri. In the distance could be seen the stone wall encircling Akbar's former palace there. The Jama Masjid looked out from its commanding position on a hill.

They heaved a sigh of relief. It was not too long now to Agra. The heat had been so intense, at times they felt half roasted alive. During the hot season the heat had swept like a fire throughout the country. Their bodies were red with 'prickly heat', the itching unbearable. The rain had provided a welcome break. But that, too, had brought sudden, terrible floods. Sometimes the rain would continue unbroken all day and night, flooding fields and swelling the rivers.

Seven months after leaving Goa Goes and Machado arrived in Agra.

Chapter 10

Agra To Lahore

The *Mir-i-Arz* — the officer who presented people at the Emperor's court, resplendent in a tunic of fine, sheer Bengal linen, his Mahratta turban at a rakish angle — asked the Persian merchant his name. "Banda Abdullah", the man replied, splendidly attired in flowing *cabaia* (tunic) and elegant turban, a large curved sword at his side, upturned sandals on his feet. A bow and quiver of arrows hung from his shoulder. The merchant was presented to one of the Secretaries of State, who in turn, announced the man to the Emperor. Gold leaf and mosaic were everywhere. The faint perfume of splintered sandalwood hung in the air. The Persian saluted the King with the *taslim*, touching the ground with the back of his right hand and then rising and bringing the palm up to the crown of the head, adding the words *as salam alaikum*. He kept his gaze down.

Wa-alaikum as-salam came the reply.

The Emperor seated on a cushion of finest Benares brocade, was dressed in a white tunic, made like a shirt, tied with strips on one side. He wore a yellow turban, in which blazed a single great diamond, set round with emeralds.

The King, from out his large eyes, gazed at the face of the finely-dressed merchant for some considerable time. The merchant, his face still cast down, lifted his eyes up to glimpse the Emperor. He wanted to laugh, but such

hilarity in the presence of His August Majesty, Jalalludin Akbar, would have cost him his head. The atmosphere became tense as the King still gazed intently on the merchant's face. The merchant stepped forward a pace to get nearer the King. Immediately two *omrahs* pinned his arms back. It was all too easy for an assassin to lunge at the King.

"Brother Bento", the merchant said.

The King jumped back on his sumptuous throne. He had only seen Goes dressed in the usual black soutane. He leaned forward, looked the merchant up and down, and then let out a most unregal laugh. The *omrahs* and other grandees standing around were aghast. A wan ghost of a smile crossed Brother Bento's face. Leaving the assembled guests totally confused as to what was taking place, Banda Abdullah retired from the *Divan-i-Khas.*

Banda Abdullah was none other than Bento de Goes in the disguise he was to wear on his expedition to Cathay. This was the name Father Xavier had suggested. Goes added the word Isai (Jesus) to his name Banda Abdullah (Servant of the Lord) to indicate he was a Christian. The Mohammedans generally refer to Christ as *Al-hazrat Isai** . Goes wished neither to conceal nor to deny his Faith. He would henceforth be known as Banda Abdullah Isai. It was decided that Goes should travel in the guise of an Armenian trader. And if the disguise was good enough to fool the Emperor, why, he might get away with fooling the Mohammedans he would be travelling with.

For Goes, learning to fold his turban was the most difficult part of dressing in his new guise. First he would

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* The Arabic word *hazrat*, literally meaning 'the presence', is used as a title of respect and when applied to an apostle or prophet signifies the sacredness of his office. Mohammedans recognise Christ as a good man and just, without sin, who performed greater miracles than ever anyone before or since. Nevertheless, Muslims regard Christians as so unclean that they won't eat with them or eat anything cooked in their vessels.

place a small cap, called a *colar*, on his head. Then he would wind a long piece of cloth eight yards in length, round it. At first Goes needed the help of a colleague to do this. One easy way to do it was for his associate to stand far off, holding one end of the turban. Then Goes, holding the other end on his *colar* would twirl round and round, getting closer and closer to his friend, the turban meanwhile winding itself about the cap. The free end of the turban was then tucked into the top of the turban round the head, or, if he wished, left sticking up like a plume. Or, he could use the loose end of the turban to wrap around his face, leaving only his eyes free.

Goes made sure he was acquainted with all the customs and practices of Islam so as not to cause offence. Islam is a way of life as much as a way of worship. Everything is ordained, and life is followed from à set of instructions, the *Hadith*, or from the sayings of the Prophet and from the Koran. He would never eat pork — anathema to Muslims. He would eat only with his right hand, *never* with his left. The left hand was used only for ablutions. There was no such thing as toilet-paper. He would use sand, like everyone else. And the wiping would be done with the left hand. No one would eat from a common bowl if anyone had polluted it by dipping his left hand into it. The custom was to sit on one's haunches, even if one only wanted to urinate. To stand was considered most unseemly.

The Emperor was now in Agra, having returned from his campaign in the Deccan. Father Xavier had also returned to Agra with the Emperor's entourage.

Akbar had both a liking and a respect for Goes. As a great military leader himself he came to appreciate the qualities of another solider. When he was informed that Goes was to be the leader of the expedition to the land of Cathay he contributed four hundred gold crowns towards the cost of the expedition. He also provided supplies and horses. More important than the financial help Akbar provided were the letters of introduction which the Emperor wrote to several kings and friends and tributary princes that Goes would meet on his journey.

Goes carefully packed away the *firman*, the warrant of safe conduct given him by the Emperor. This not only guaranteed his personal safety but also exempted him from paying tax at the numerous *chaukidoris* or customs houses.

It read:

> "Parwanah of Akbar granted to Banda Abdulla Isai.
>
> "Order of His Highness Muhammed, the great King and Lord, to all the Captains, Viceroys, Governors, Rulers and other officers of my realm.
>
> "I would have you know that I have shown much honour and favour to Banda Abdulla Isai, willing thereby that you should do likewise ... wherefore I order my officers aforesaid to bestow great honour and favour on Banda Abdulla Isai in all the towns of my realm through which he shall pass, providing him with all that is necessary for him and his beasts, and all else he needs at my charges and you shall be responsible for his safety and shall take heed that he loses nothing which he has with him ... I also forbid my Customs officers to take anything from the said Banda Abdulla Isai, whose baggage they shall let pass without toll; and the aforesaid shall pay heed to my command, troubling the said Banda Abdulla Isai neither in his person nor in his property. If he make any complaint you shall be severely punished, even to the danger of your heads. Moreover I desire that this my order be carried out both in respect of his person and of his goods, that he pass freely through my towns without paying tax or toll and be well guarded on the road."

The *firman* was stamped with the Imperial Seal.

Goes's immediate destination was the kingdom of Kashgar. From there he would proceed eastwards through unmapped regions to the Christian Kingdom of Cathay, from where he would go on to China to meet Father Ricci in the capital, Peking.

Using the money Akbar had given him, together with one thousand rupees the Viceroy had provided in Goa, Goes began to make his purchases for the expedition —

tents, household items, felt carpets, saddles, etc. He bought the merchandise he would need to keep up his disguise as a trader. He bought wares from Portuguese India, silks and cloths and precious stones from the Mughal dominions, by the selling and bartering of which he would have to maintain himself for a journey which, in the going and returning over high mountains and sandy deserts, would last at least four or five years. He also purchased 'elephants' teeth' (as the merchants called ivory) for resale in Lahore where women would buy the ivory for armlets and anklets. Once or twice he would actually act like a real wealthy merchant and allow himself the luxury of a ride in the many *gharis* or carts that plied within the city. With two wheels, the carts were drawn by small bulls hardly bigger than a hound and yet they could match any horse-drawn cart for pace, even when loaded with two or three men. Some of the carts were very grand, carved and gilded with gold and covered with silks and other fine cloths. He found it exhilarating being drawn along by two white Mysore bulls with gilded horns which had been bred to draw cannon for maharajahs, especially when they broke into the trot for which they were famous, grunting and moaning as they hauled their load. He even made a trip to Biana — two *serais* journey from Agra — to buy *anil* (indigo), the finest in India. The *anil* grew on small bushes and bore a seed like a cabbage seed. The bushes were then cut down and left to lie in heaps on the ground. Pairs of yoked oxen walked round and round a circular pillar, their hooves trampling on the seeds and squeezing out the *anil* which was then ground fine and boiled in furnaces. This indigo, Goes was assured, could then be sold at a great profit in Lahore, a great entrepôt centre for indigo. Goes had really become a trader!

Father Xavier provided Goes with two men as travelling companions. He felt the strain of separation from all his friends and colleagues and compatriots would be too much for any one soul to endure for a period of several years. One was a Greek, Leo Grimon, a sub-deacon in the Greek Church, who spoke fluent

Turkish and Persian and was, above all, a man of affairs and a good Christian. It was Grimon who had taken Akbar's request for a Jesuit mission to the Fathers in Goa in 1590. It was only on account of his affection for the Jesuit Fathers that Grimon consented to go on this long and dangerous journey, giving up the salary he received from the King, which was one *crusado* a day, and, what was a much greater sacrifice, leaving his wife to whom he had only recently been married.

The second person as travelling companion was another Greek, named Demetrius. Xavier also provided four servants, men who had been converted from Islam to Christianity.

Goes remained only a short time in Agra. As soon as he had completed his business he set out for Lahore, at least twenty days' journey (six hundred miles) away (by cart), where he hoped to join up with other merchants.

The night before Goes set off Father Xavier and Father Machado stayed the night with him. Next day the three opened their breviaries and said the customary prayer before commencing any long and hazardous journey:

> "In viam pacis et prosperitatis dirigat nos omnipotens et misericors Dominus: et Angelus Raphael comitetur nobiscum in via ut cum pace, salute et gaudio revertamur ad propria."
>
> (May the almighty and merciful Lord guide us in the way of peace and prosperity: and may the angel Raphael accompany us on the way, in order that we may return to our rightful home with peace and safety and joy.)

They bade each other farewell. He could not speak: his throat was so tight, it was physically aching.

It was October 29th, 1602. Goes glanced back from his horse, waved goodbye, and then set his caravan on course for Delhi. When he looked back again the Fathers were just tiny black figures, growing smaller and smaller in the immensity of the Indian landscape. In the rainy season the roads between Agra and Lahore via Delhi were impassable; one had to take the longer route via

Nagaur. It was now late summer, the rains had passed; he could take the shorter route via Delhi, despite the danger from roving bands of rebels then terrorising that city.

Half a league out of the city they passed a large reservoir or 'tank' of sweet, crystal-clear spring water, made of hewn stone and with beautiful carvings around. On both sides of the road were mulberry and eucalyptus trees providing welcome shade. A hedge of hibiscus had been stripped bare of any flower by a wandering troop of monkeys. Keeping to the main road they passed through well-populated country, rich in fertile fields of wheat and rice, maize and millet. Occasionally they passed fields of vegetables such as radish. The caravan rumbled and rattled on its way across the vast green, Indo-Gangetic Plain.

At night they would stop and stay in caravanserais. For a modest fee one got a room and a place to tie up one's horses or mules or camels. Here one could also purchase *dana* (grain) and fodder for the animals. Good horses could easily manage twenty miles a day at a fair speed. At night the *serais* were locked because of the danger from thieves and brigands. In the morning the *serai* gates were not opened till all persons were ready to depart. This was quite a nuisance, waiting for the slow-coaches, because within two hours of the sun rising the heat became intense.

Each day they travelled about twenty-five miles.

On the fourth day they reached Mathura, which seemed to be a city of temples — there were so many of them. These contained stone images of men and animals, "fearful to behold", but which were venerated by the Hindus with flowers and offerings. At Hodal next day they passed a huge fountain "three storeys high". On the seventh day they reached Faridabad.

On the ninth day, through a dusty haze the ancient city of Delhi came into view, situated in a vast, flat, fertile plain. To the left could be seen the remains of Old Delhi, with its nine castles, and fifty-two gates and ancient monuments. This was once the pride of Mogul

kings and emperors, but now the haunt only of thieves. Delhi was the site of the beginning of the Mogul dynasty. It was here that the kings of India were crowned — or else they were held to be usurpers. Its monarchs took from the city the title inscribed in their imperial writs and decrees — *Dilhi ke Badsha* — Emperor of Delhi, no less than thirty-seven kingdoms and provinces being included in that short title.

They crossed the silvery sheen of a branch of the Jumna by the stone Bara Pala bridge made of eleven arches. A broad avenue shaded with great trees led to the tomb of the great Humayan, Akbar's father. Goes made a point of seeing the tomb, of paying his respects to his sponsor's father. The tomb, covered with a pure white sheet, a rich Semiane (cloth from Samana) overhead, lay in a large room spread with rich Persian tapestries and turkey red carpets, with a Mughal prayer-rug of the most exquisite design and colour. In front of the tomb velveted trestles bore certain books, together with the Emperor's sword, his rapier, his turban and his shoes. Other tombs were those of his wives and daughters. Beyond, along another shaded avenue, one came to the king's house and *mahal* (palace), with their lofty entrances now sadly in a state of decay. They entered the castle by three gates. The first was very strongly plated iron; the second was not so strong but it had places above it from which scalding lead or oil could be thrown down; the third was strongly plated with pikes sticking out like harping irons. Nearby was a wall where a huge snake, 25 feet long and as broad as a man's waist, kept permanent residence among the bushes. The people regarded it as an omen of good fortune and so never harmed it; nor did it hurt humans. A strong wall, in many parts falling into ruin, surrounded the city. The inhabitants, for the most part Banians, were poor and beggarly, suffering from the King's long absence from the city. In stark contrast were the fine stately houses and gardens of the wealthy and influential merchants. Delhi was much frequented by traders because of the abundance of the merchandise it had to offer, chiefly *anil* (indigo) and cotton goods, mostly coloured and chintzes.

Just outside Delhi they came to Narela, the site of some extensive old ruins of splendid tombs and other buildings begun by Tamerlain, from whom the Mogul emperors traced their descent. Here, on the ridge at Delhi, were also the ruins of the *mahal* (palace) and *shikar* (hunting park) built by the great Indian monarch, Sultan Firoz Shah. On the ridge, too, at Qutb was Asoka's *lat*, a twenty-four feet tall obelisk, topped by a globe with a half-moon on it. The *lat* had been brought by Firoz Shah from Meerut and erected there, at Firozabad. The travellers could not but admire the pillar, with its many Greek and Persian inscriptions. It had been erected by Alexander the Great when he invaded India in 327 B.C. Having conquered the Punjab his army moved on to Delhi where he joined battle with Porus, King of India, and defeated him. His army penetrated as far as the river Beas when a mutiny among his men forced him to retreat. The magnificent obelisk was a token of his victory over Porus.

Legend says that as much of the pillar extends under the earth as above. Nasiruddin Ghazi, a Pathan king, had attempted to take the pillar away but was prevented by a multitude of scorpions. A similar stone pillar had been found buried at Fatehpur Sikri, one hundred cubits in length. The pillar was damaged in transport to Agra, much to the King's grief. It seemed that stone columns like these, which could be cleft like logs and sawn like planks, were a feature of the quarries of Fatehpur. Rumour had it that there was an underground passage from the pillar leading to Delhi Castle. Further along they passed several herd of deer, in what were the ruins of the royal game park. This part of the country was renowned for its thieves and lived up to its reputation that night when the party was attacked by thieves.

They passed through Gonaur, then Panipat. At the entrance to Panipat was a *manora* or *minar* with the heads of some hundred recently captured thieves cemented on the pillar, their bodies set on stakes. These stakes extended a full mile in length. But the lesson was not learned, for at the very next town, Karnal, they were

again attacked by bandits. Goes and his party were plagued and harassed by thieves and robbers all the way. There were wild animals to contend with as well. A change from the usual lion or tiger or wild buffalo was the sight of the occasional rhinoceros, "their skins plated, or as it were in wrinkles upon their backs". In all these encounters Goes found the four servants Father Xavier had assigned to him to be less than useless. Their torpidity was probably caused by the drug opium which enfeebled them.

They arrived at the fortress town of Thanesar. Close by was a celebrated tank (reservoir) of good spring water. The tank was surrounded by numerous temples, full of grotesque and monstrous statues, much revered by Hindus throughout India. Further on lay a deep well from which sal ammoniac was being extracted.

From Thanesar they made for Ambala. On to Aluwa Serai now called Banjara Serai. At Sirhind they saw the Royal Garden that the Mughal emperors had built. A beautiful avenue, forty feet wide, adorned on both sides with cool, green willows, planted in orderly, compass-drawn canopies, led to a magnificent lake. In the middle of the lake, brimful with clear spring water, stood a summer-house which was reached by a bridge of fifteen stone arches. The Garden was composed of large squares, each square enclosed with a brick wall, and richly planted with all sorts of fruits and flowers. The Garden was crossed by two main causeways, forty feet broad and eight feet high, with a channel of water running in their middle, and planted on both sides by tall cypresses. At the intersection of the causeways was an eight-square, richly carved, stone *mahal* (palace) containing eight other rooms, with pleasant balconies surrounding them.

They proceeded to Doraha and then to Philau Serai, crossing the river Sutlej by boat on the way. The river here was very wide and full of shoals. Other boats were plying their way westward to the Sind.

From Nakodar they went to Sultanpur, crossing the Khalna by a bridge with six arches. Sultanpur was

famous for its linen, a circumstance of which the businessman Goes made profitable use. Another bridge took them across the Beas river. To their right, in the far distance, could be seen the snow-capped foothills and mountains of the great Himalaya Range, pale blue shadows against a grey sky. This was the region of Kangra or Kulu, where polyandry was practised. The brothers of one family all have but one wife, so that one woman often serves six or seven men.

They came upon a richly adorned temple, in which was an idol called *Mata* (Mother) which was revered by devout Hindus. In fact so zealous were the devotees, that some would mutilate their bodies, even cut their tongues out, as a sacrifice to the goddess, believing that next day the tongue would be restored.

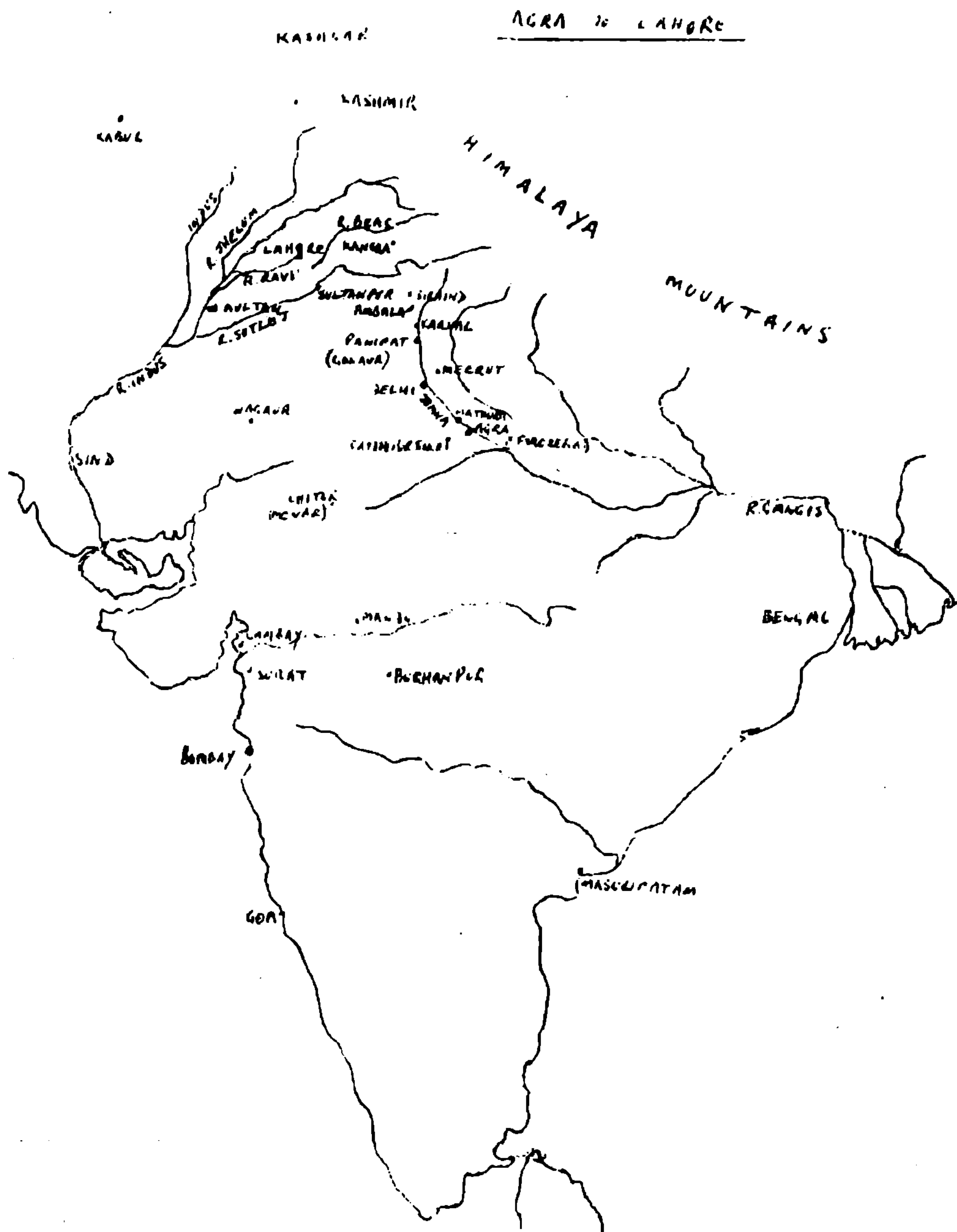
Increasing camel traffic signalled the approach of Lahore. Each year twenty thousand camels passed through Lahore carrying pepper and spices from Masulipatam, sugar, indigo and other goods from Agra and other parts of India, for Persia.

Goes, who was at the head of his caravan, rode out to meet a horseman who was galloping towards him, raising clouds of khaki dust. Goes was delighted when the horseman turned out to be none other than Father Pinheiro who was put in charge of the Jesuit mission in Lahore in 1591. He had ridden out several miles to meet Goes. Pinheiro excitedly disgorged all the news. The Emperor had granted a privilege whereby fugitives from justice could take refuge in a church. The Jesuits had built a church in Lahore in 1595. A eunuch had just drawn up the *firman* for this decree. Pinheiro went on to relate how he had succeeded in obtaining the King's pardon for some prisoners condemned to death. Pinheiro then went on to tell Goes that when he was in Lahore he was not to get in touch with him or anyone else at the Mission, not even attend the church for Mass. Someone would recognise him and that would be the end of his disguise — and of the expedition to Cathay. Pinheiro bade Goes farewell and rode off again in a cloud of ochre dust.

It was now a fortnight since Goes had left Delhi. Presently the outline of the famous Fort of Lahore came into view. He entered Lahore on the 8th of December, the Feast of Our Lady, 1602. They passed through well-kept gardens belonging to the rich and powerful. The sight of the river Ravi, carrying the cool waters from the mountains of Kashmir to join the great Indus further along its downward course was a more than refreshing sight. After Delhi, Lahore was the second seat of the Mughal monarchs. Grand palaces, beautifully laid out gardens, fruitful orchards, lakes and fountains of fine clear water abounded. The tomb of Anarkali, then under construction, was slowly taking shape. Anarkali was a dancer at the court of Akbar. She became the mistress of Prince Salim, Akbar's heir. As Akbar disapproved of his son's relationship with a commoner he had her buried alive.

As they entered the city proper the traffic was huge. As the Royal Court was in session, a throng of people had congregated in the city. There were gentlemen mounted on horses, elephants and camels, on their way to assist at the court of His Majesty. The retinue of these nobles was huge, many consisting of more than five hundred horsemen, exclusive of led horses, elephants and carts. There seemed to be thousands — soldiers and ordinary people — on foot. Camps of tents and pavilions of various colours had been set up around the city.

Goes headed for the principal *serai*. He passed through the Delhi *Darwaza* (Gate), where the *naubat* or great drum is beaten, along a fair, paved street, leading to the Bazaar and the *serai*. But there was no room at the inn. He tried a few private lodgings but with no better result. To the north-east of the city was the *Ambagh* (or Mango Garden) in which there was a *Dharamsala* or rest house. But this, too, was full. It would have been a waste of time trying further for accommodation. So that night he slept under a tree. But before retiring, the aroma of savoury dishes coming from the make-shift kitchens in the well-lit bazaar lured him out: the roasted meat of domestic animals, of deer, of horse, but not of pork; fried yams and curried crayfish



Agra to Lahore

for the vegetarians; other tents contained spits roasting chickens, pigeons, turtledoves, quails. For each dish there were numerous kinds of dressing to suit every palate. To follow there were sugared guavas, sweetened coconut, or just plain fly-specked rice biscuits. He settled for a Mogul *pilau* — fowl boiled with rice and spices. He substituted for knife and fork an *apa*, a chapati, the usual bread of the ordinary and poor people, made from flour baked over live coals. This was the bread generally eaten by people who travelled in caravans. What took Goes by some surprise was the extent of good-humoured law and order which existed among such a large assembly of people. The streets were clean; peace and quiet prevailed. Occasionally a patrol passed, vigilant against the thieves who, it seems, one can never keep away, no matter in which country one lives. When a thief was caught, he was summarily punished on the spot, in accordance with the gravity of the offence. Next day Goes managed to find accommodation at the house of Giovanni Galisio, a Venetian merchant.

One of the first things Goes did on reaching Lahore was to dismiss his escort of servants who had proved cumbersome and useless on the journey and send them back to Agra. Meanwhile he kept his eyes and ears open to find another travelling companion to replace the four servants. Eventually he found one — an Armenian Christian named Isaac, who lived with his wife and family in Lahore. (It is largely to Isaac that we are indebted for this account of Brother Goes's journey.)

The main street, the Bazaar of the *Chauk*, displayed riches and goods of every possible description: elephants' teeth from Gujarat, *anil* (indigo) — indeed, Lahore was the great entrepôt centre of indigo. It was also the chief place for carpets; and the civet (perfume) in India came from Lahore. Goes was able to indulge his new calling as a businessman to the full. He was not tempted by the *tamolis* or sellers of betel who were a common sight in the bazaar. He didn't feel his disguise should extend to chewing *pan*.

The doors and entrances to houses were overnight

decorated with green branches or else they were whitewashed with gypsum, large crimson patterns and designs made by *sindur* (red lead) enlivening the white. It was the festival of *Nauroz* (New Year's Day) which took place each year at the end of Ramadan, the Mohammedan thirty-day fast. People, dressed in all their finery, visited each other and wished each other a happy feast. If the Great Mogul happened to be in residence in the city at the time of *Nauroz* he would appear in public in all his pomp and splendour, during the whole of the nine days.

The temptation to visit the church, to meet his Jesuit colleagues, was over-powering. Goes thought of, perhaps, visiting by night. But he decided against that as being too risky; the secret of his disguise was vital. One evening he did at least get to the end of the road on which the mission stood. The faint phosphorescent whiteness of the distant temples and buildings was fading into the brief twilight. He turned aside as Father Corsi appeared. Fortunately, the priest walked away in the opposite direction. He watched as a woman, clutching a small child, crossed over the road and rushed up to the Jesuit priest. The local people firmly believed that Europeans were endowed with some kind of magical influence that cured all ills. He watched as Father Corsi listened. He watched as Father Corsi then placed his hand on the little child's head, spoke something — a blessing — and the mother and child departed reassured with the 'white man's magic'.

Meanwhile the once-a-year caravan from Lahore to Kashgar was beginning to assemble on the banks of the Ravi. Already there were four to five hundred persons, with a long train of beasts of burden, camels, bullocks, etc., wagons, all getting ready for the first stage of the expedition to Kabul. Goes purchased his camels. On February 14th, 1603, Goes — or rather Banda Abdulla Isai — took his baggage and goods across the Ravi and paid his 'fee' to join the great caravan, along with his three companions, the two Greeks Leo Grimon and Demetrius, and the Armenian Isaac.

Before leaving Lahore Goes wrote this letter to the Father Vice-Provincial in Goa:

"It has pleased God to bring me to this city of Lahore, whence I am about to start for the country of Cathay. I should be neglecting my bounden duty if I departed without first writing to bid farewell to Your Reverence and my beloved Brothers in the lands of the South (i.e. Goa). I bade farewell to Father Jerome Xavier, and Father Antonio Machado at Agra on the 29th October. When I parted from them, I parted also from the dress I was wearing, exchanging it for the costume of the country, in which I am now attired. I will not attempt to tell Your Reverence what my feelings were when I saw myself in these strange garments. When they came to see me for the last time, Father Xavier and Father Antonio Machado remained with me the whole night giving me advice and instruction. It was with a sorrowful heart that I took leave of them and set out for Lahore. On the way, some took me for a *Saiyid*, which means a descendant of Mohammed, and others for a grandee of the kingdom of Mecca; but they little knew the school in which I had been brought up. May God be praised for all his blessings.

"I arrived at Lahore on the 8th December, the day of the Conception of our Lady. I made by arrival known to Father Manuel Pinheiro and Father Corsi, but did not go to their house, as I had been instructed not to do so. Father Manuel Pinheiro came to see me, being much concerned that he could not entertain me, as is the custom of our Company. I am staying in the house of a Venetian named Ioao Galiseo, where I am playing the part of a merchant. To make my disguise more complete, I am wearing a beard reaching to my breast, and long hair, as is the fashion amongst these people. All this, my Father, I am doing for the love of the Lord, who so greatly loveth us, and suffered for us. I beg your Reverence after reading this to say a Mass for me to our Lady of Victory, that she may enable me to triumph over all my enemies and difficulties; and I beg the same of all the Fathers and Brothers of these parts. They know well that those amongst whom I am going are wolves, the arch

> enemies of our faith; but I go confident that I have their prayers.
>
> "I am now known as Banda Abdulla, that is 'Servant of God', a name which Father Jerome Xavier gave to me. The seal on this letter is made with the ring which, following the custom of the country, I now wear on my finger. The King (Akbar) has been very generous to me. He has furnished me with many of the necessities for my journey, and has also paid me for the whole time I was in India. With this money, amounting to more than a thousand rupees, the Fathers have paid off some debts, and I have defrayed the cost of my journey from India to Agra. May God make His Majesty a Christian, which is the greatest good we can desire for him in this life. It remains only for me to send my greetings to your Reverence and to the Fathers and Brothers in those parts. May the peace of Jesus Christ be with them and with you. Amen. From Lahore, the 30th December, 1602."

On 14th February 1603 Goes wrote to his friend Father Jerome Xavier:

> "I write in reply to the letter of farewell which your Reverence has addressed to this your Brother. My Father, our Lord alone knows how my heart overflowed with affection as I read and studied your words. Your Reverence does well to encourage his weak Brother with such letters and counsels. Therefore, Reverend Father, I beg you, who are so learned in the Holy Scriptures, that you will not cease to water this barren soul of mine which so sorely needs divine strength, so that I may be able to raise and bring back fruits from the lands of Cathay, whither my duty calls me ... May Jesus Christ grant that my eyes may yet in this life look upon your Reverence; then shall I be able to sing the canticle of Simeon, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.' And if it shall be that we do not see each other again, he who first enters beatitude shall be mediator before God for the other that the day may quickly dawn when he shall escape from the trials and tempests of this life. I am taking with me the memoranda and instructions which your Reverence has

sent to me together with my letters-patent, and a letter for those at Cathay, and another for the Fathers at Peking in China.

"I am going very well provided, needing only the offerings and prayers of the Fathers of India and Europe, to whom I beg your Reverence to write asking them to commend me to God. I carry with me, on my head, the sign and name of our reverend Father General, together with the vows that I have made before God and the whole court of heaven, as well as the signature (*firma*) of your Reverence, and of the Father Bobadilha, and of our visiting Father Provincial, Nuno Rodrigues. All these I carry in a kind of Moorish reliquary, which I keep folded in a turban. On my breast I wear a cross with two evangils, one from S. John, In *principio erat verbum.* And the other from S. Mark, *Euntes mundum universum.* Nor shall I ever lay aside the counsels which, as one experienced and schooled in the adversities of the world, you have sent to me at this hour of my departure; for those who have never suffered, who have never been cold, or hungry, or forsaken, cannot tell what such trials mean. Written from Lahore the 14th February, 1603."

Little did Bento de Goes know of the cold and heat and hunger and thirst and loneliness and desolation that were awaiting him.

Father Jerome Xavier was to remain at the Mughal court for twenty-three years, sometimes in favour, sometimes in prison, depending on the mood of the Emperor. Father Pinheiro was to turn his attention away from what he saw as an unfruitful venture — trying to convert the King to Christianity — to the needs of an increasingly growing Christian congregation in Lahore.

Chapter 11

To The Khyber Pass And Beyond

In early March 1603, season of purple passion flowers, the long caravan started on its wearisome journey from Lahore to Kabul, on the first leg of its travel to the kingdom of Kashgar. Goes's destination was Cathay; his task, to link up with a lost Christian empire. But where this country was or if it existed at all he was not sure. He was leaving behind all his friends; it would be years before he would ever see them again. At the very most, these caravans travelled only once a year. It would be nearly two years before he could even communicate with them, to let them know where he was — if, indeed, any aid could ever reach him. He would be leaving his European, Christian, culture for years. He would be travelling, in disguise, amongst unfriendly people, of a different culture, of a different faith, who spoke a different language.

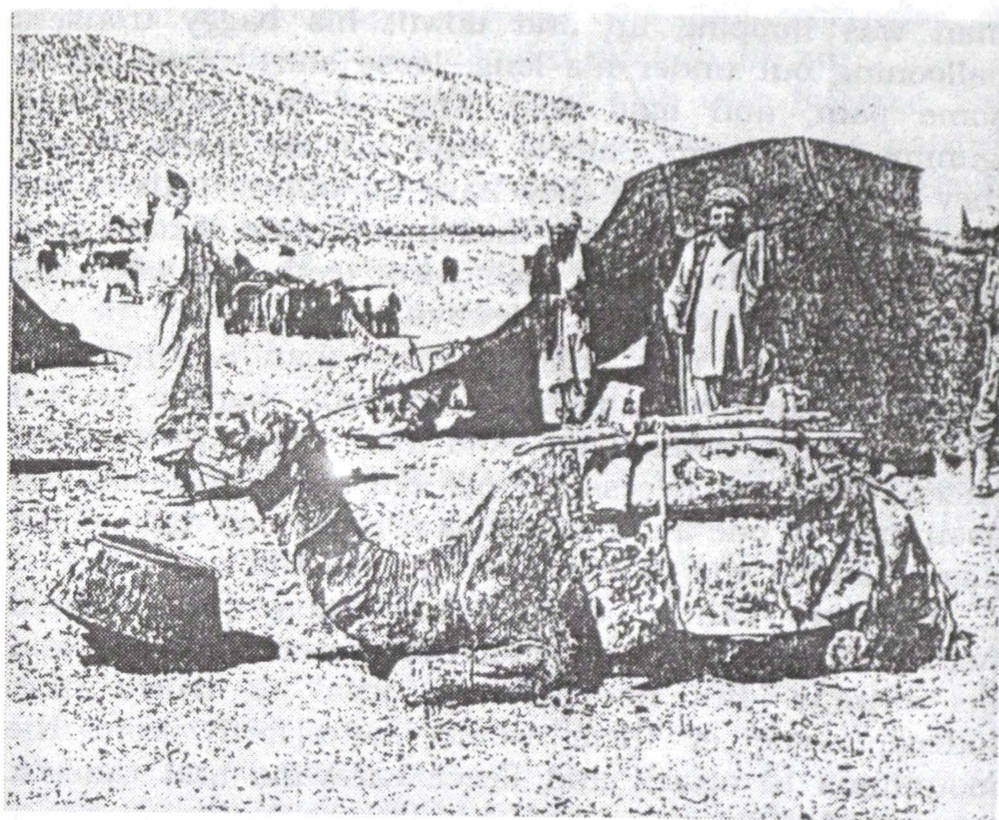
Although Kashgar lay due north of Lahore, the mighty Himalayan and Karakorum Mountains, with Nanga Parbat (8126 m.) towering above its neighbours, blocked the way. The only practicable way from India to Asia was north-west, round the western extremity of the Himalayas, through the Khyber Pass, the gateway through which the soldiers of Alexander the Great and other invaders had flooded into the fertile and enticing plains of the Punjab. It was through this gateway that the silk route from Kashgar had passed for centuries. It

was through the Khyber Pass that Mahmud of Ghazni would descend upon the plains of India to loot everything worth looting. Chroniclers stated that he kept the cities of India tethered in the sun like fat cows which he came regularly to milk.

Before the sun had begun to peep over the Ravi the *Karakeshes* (caravan attendants) were up and about explaining to any novices to caravan travel the exact procedures that had to be adhered to strictly if the caravan was to proceed efficiently and safely.

Goes and his companions brought out all the boxes and bales and packages they would be taking, laid them out carefully and then weighed them so that the various camel loads could be worked out carefully. The appropriate pieces of baggage were then laid out two by two at such distances apart that a camel could kneel between them. The loads were carefully fastened to the pack-saddle with rope. After the camel got up on its feet, all nine feet of it to the top of his hump, an *arkhan* (a long rope of camel's hair) was lashed criss-cross right round the whole load and fastened to the horizontal bars in the framework of the pack-saddle. The camels were then tied together in groups of four. A piece of stick was thrust through the cartilage of the animal's nose. A rope fastened to one end of the stick was loosely knotted to the tail of the camel in front in such a way that if the camel behind fell, the knot would come undone by itself. The other end of the stick going through the nose terminated in a knob which prevented it from slipping out of the camel's nose. As a rule the camel is a cantankerous and untameable beast at best. It never becomes as domesticated as a horse. If you attempt to pat a camel you run the risk of being kicked. If you stroke its face it utters a scream through its split top upper lip and emits a foul-smelling mucus. Goes made sure he didn't offend any of the camels. They bore terrible grudges.

Banchot! (Bastard) someone cried out. Had someone seen through his disguise, Goes wondered? He turned round. He burst out laughing, along with the others. A



A Camel ready for loading

man was hopping up and down, his baggy trousers ballooning out under his long, loose shirt, obviously in some pain, and mad wild. One of the camels had 'gummed' his arm. Camels can't bite as such. Whilst they have lower teeth, they have no upper teeth in the front, and so can only use their broad plate of hard gum against which they bring their lower teeth. The offending camel continued chewing sideways.

The caravan was huge — more than two hundred people, a hundred camels, innumerable horses, several score donkeys, some goats, and more than five hundred sheep. This was necessary, not only to provide mutual assurance to one another but as a protection against the many bandits and robbers that infested the way.

Between Lahore and Kabul Akbar had placed twenty-three *amirs* or noblemen to protect his realm and his citizens. But not all were loyal or trustworthy. Indeed, some of them would sally forth from the mountains to attack and fleece caravans and ransack towns and villages.

At first light the loud, ringing, almost musical, voice of a muezzin called the Faithful to prayer — *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar ... Ashhadu an la ilaha illa illah* ... 'God is the Greatest; I bear no witness but that there is no God but the One God; I bear witness that Mohammed is the Messenger of God; come fast to prayer, come fast to prayer; prayer is better than sleep...' One of the senior mullahs, in black robe and white turban, his old, weather-beaten, face wizened like a walnut, turned towards Mecca and led the farewell prayer. At the end all the men joined in the *Aman*.

Those of the caravan who were ready began to get restive. *Chalo! Chalo!* (Let's go) they shouted as they waited impatiently for the start.

To the cheers of *Insha Allah* (Godspeed) and shouts of *Hosh* (Farewell) the caravan set in motion. The flat-roofed mud-bricked houses, strengthened with straw as in Palestine in biblical times, emptied as the people rushed on to the streets to see the motley cavalcade pass. Women, too, fully veiled in their dark *chadors*

peered from doorways through the tiny rectangles of embroidered lace, which allowed them to see out.

There were the camels, piled high with baggage. On top of this baggage some of the dromedaries carried baskets which contained poultry of various kinds. There were horses and mules, ridden by all manner of men in all manner of costumes. Goes possibly looked over-dressed in his finery of an Armenian merchant. There were two-wheeled coaches carrying two persons each. These were pulled by oxen guided by a string which passed through the nostrils, between the horns, into the coachman's hand. The camels carrying women were covered. In the case of wealthy women their bodyguards rode or marched in close attendance. And dogs of various breeds and sizes scurried between the myriads of legs that formed the caravan. At the tail of the caravan were several horses and donkeys carrying fodder and forage for the other animals. They were almost buried from sight under the enormous bags of straw and maize on their backs.

The long line of camels led the way through the narrow streets, striding with their characteristic grave and majestic mien, their heads high, the padding of their feet accompanied by the clanking and clonking of the bells round their necks.

To the shouts of *Insha Allah* (Godspeed) the long caravan finally took its leave of the city.

There were many who were sorry to see the caravan leave. There were the many harlots and prostitutes who hang round any gathering of men who are away from their homes with some money to spend — as in military camps or caravanserais. That their business was very profitable was evidenced from the elegant attire and jewellery they could afford to wear. They all paid a tax to the authorities for the privilege of conducting their lucrative trade. There was another kind of prostitute, the *santulonas*, a body of hypocritical devotee women, who under pretext of contempt of the world wore a rough and common dress and lived in so-called retirement. According to the rules of their sect, they were entitled to

The Caravan sets off

lay hold of any man they thought fit and to gratify with him their passion. The men considered it a sin not to lend themselves to such a practice and looked upon it as a great act of charity. There were also the male prostitutes, painted and dressed and adorned like women, who were especially sought-after in northern India. They were preferred to dancing girls at feasts and entertainments.

Men who were winnowing, tossing grain high into the air with shovels, stopped to wave. And the massive, ubiquitous water-buffaloes, even as far north as Lahore, remained totally indifferent as they wallowed in the wet mud or lay submerged up to their nostrils in the sluggish water.

Moving across the sterile flat plains they passed the avenue of trees which Akbar had planted to commemorate his decisive victory over his brother, the Prince of Kabul.

Towards noon the caravan stopped by a small stream. It was the time for prayer. The stream was soon lined with squatting men, most of whom were Afghans, performing their ablutions. They had their *patous*, or sheets, draped round them so that they could lower their *toman* and wash their private parts unseen. They were now 'clean' for mid-day prayers. Then barefoot and standing on their *patous* they prayed, alternately bending forward, kneeling, bending over with their hands and elbows touching the ground, their foreheads pressing against it, and standing upright again. They then paused a while for reflection.

Goes was struck by the great devotion paid by Mohammedans to their founder's rules. Their observance of their faith put most Christians to shame.

There were many hypocrites and scoundrels amongst those who professed Islam, as indeed there are in all religions. Two hundred years earlier Marco Polo had scathingly attacked Muslim morals. The fact that a Mohammedan could have up to four wives is sometimes considered as libertine. But one has to remember that Islam was born at a time when wars killed off the men,

leaving a surplus of women. Mohammed, superbly practical, portioned them out as extra wives. But there was no questioning the devotion of the truly faithful to their Islamic beliefs and practices. Friday was observed strictly as the sabbath or rest day. On that day the normally crowded bazaars would be empty; the people at their devotions. There was something epic about Friday prayers, with hundreds of people at the mosque, where a black-bearded Mullah would read parts of the Koran. Before entering a mosque a Mohammedan will remove his footwear and wash his feet. The devout Mohammedan will pray five times every day. Both before and after meals he will wash his hands and when the meal is finished he will ritually carry his hands to his beard saying "Allahu Akbar" (God is great!)

During *rosa* the Mohammedan season of fasting — *Ramadan* — the good Muslim will fast for a whole month. *Ramadan* begins at the new moon and lasts one whole month, during which Mohammedans forbear women and touch neither food nor drink while the sun is above the horizon. This fast, during which they eat or drink nothing during the day, is rigorously imposed. It is only at night they eat. A man eating before sunset would be immediately seized and flogged; then, with his face blackened and his hands tied behind his back, would be led by a rope through the bazaar where he would make his penitential promise not to repeat the offence.

During the day Goes tried to recite his breviary but the swaying movement of his camel made him too sick to read. With the constant bobbing up and down he could well understand why the camel was called the 'ship of the desert'. But he soon became accustomed to the monotonous and unending jolting backwards and forwards, combined with the peculiar swaying motion from side to side, not to mention the bobbing up and down.

The sound of the drums heralded the time to stop for the night. Unloading the baggage and putting up the tent took little time. Within half an hour the loads were off the camels, and the animals were tied together in a circle

so as to prevent them from lying down and getting stiff-legged. After standing for a couple of hours they were then let loose to browse upon whatever vegetation was at hand. The camels were not given any water till nearly an hour before the start next morning.

Goes ate only one meal a day, and that was in the evening. This consisted of a heap of rice with onions and flour-cakes baked in ashes. Sometimes a little dried fish was added as a luxury. Goes spoke Persian to the other merchants and passed without difficulty as a compatriot of his Armenian servant Isaac.

The day would begin at 4 a.m., often in a cold so intense, it took one's breath away. When it was time to break camp the captain of the caravan ordered drums to be beaten. At the first roll everyone packed away tents and equipment in corded bales. At the second, camels and carts were loaded. Getting the baggage loaded each morning was a laborious process, requiring about two hours. This was partly due to the fact that the camels objected to being loaded. But once loaded they would suffer the day's march without complaint. At the third roll of drums the travellers mounted and shambled off.

At first light the caravan would stop for prayers and for gathering brushwood for fire. This activity at least made one warm. But within two hours the cold would give way to the full heat of day.

Like a caterpillar eating its way through a leaf, the caravan slowly inched its way across the plains of northern India. Strict discipline regimented the days. Great caution was observed during the march; patrols were sent on ahead; a watch was kept at night. When darkness fell, lest any of the party stray, drummers rode before and behind the column, sounding a way through the night.

Goes noted in his diary the interesting places they passed through and stayed for the night: Kacha Serai, Aminabad: a fair city; Chima gakkar: a great town; Gujrat: a fair city of great trade. Here the caravan crossed the river Chenab on ferries. What an undertaking. And what patience was needed! On to

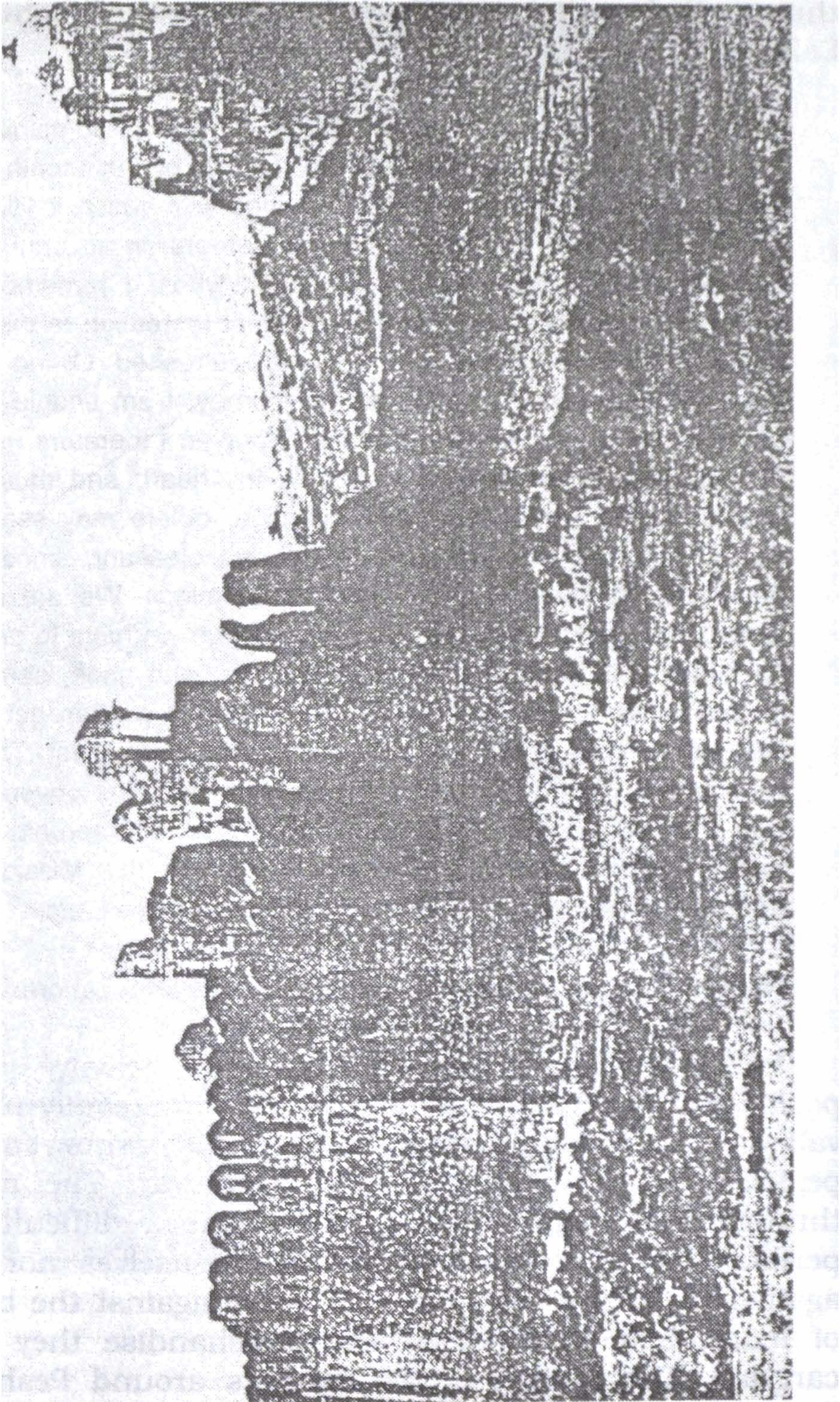
Khwaspur, on to Rohtas, the frontier of the Pathan kingdom, a strong castle looking down from a high mountain. They forded many rivers which flowed down from the Himalayas. Again another ferry to cross the Jhelum. Hatya, Pakka and finally Rawalpindi. From Rawalpindi they skirted past the Murree hills where some centuries later, another conquering power, the British Raj, was to make its summer headquarters to avoid the searing heat scorching the plains of the vast sub-continent.

On to Kalapani, Serai Kala, Hasan Abdal a pleasant town with a small river and many lakes and reservoirs. In the lakes and reservoirs were many fish with gold rings in their noses placed there by the Emperor Akbar.

After a month's travelling they reached the city of Attock, still within the province of Lahore, nestling beside the river Indus. A castle, strongly fortified to hold the north-west frontier of the Mogul Emperor's kingdoms, looked down on a truly beautiful setting. Having procured boats for the crossing the caravan crossed the Indus, which was only a bowshot wide at that point. On the other side of the river the caravan halted for several days, especially as news had arrived of large gangs of robbers waiting on the way ahead.

Beyond the Indus lay the Pathan tribes, governed by many princes who dwelt in the mountains. The Pathans were of fair complexion, a very ferocious and warlike people, all Mohammedans. Just one of the princes alone could collect together three hundred thousand lancemen, all barbarous, uncouth and unruly. The Pathans did not make much use of cavalry. The Emperor Akbar had sent eighty thousand horsemen to subdue the Pathans. The horsemen moved into the hills but not one of them ever came out again.

About three days' march from Attock the caravan reached the province of Ghakkar. Ghakkar was the mountainous country of the Ghakkars, lying between the river Indus and Kashmir. Here Goes was able to write his first missive back to his colleagues in India. He wrote

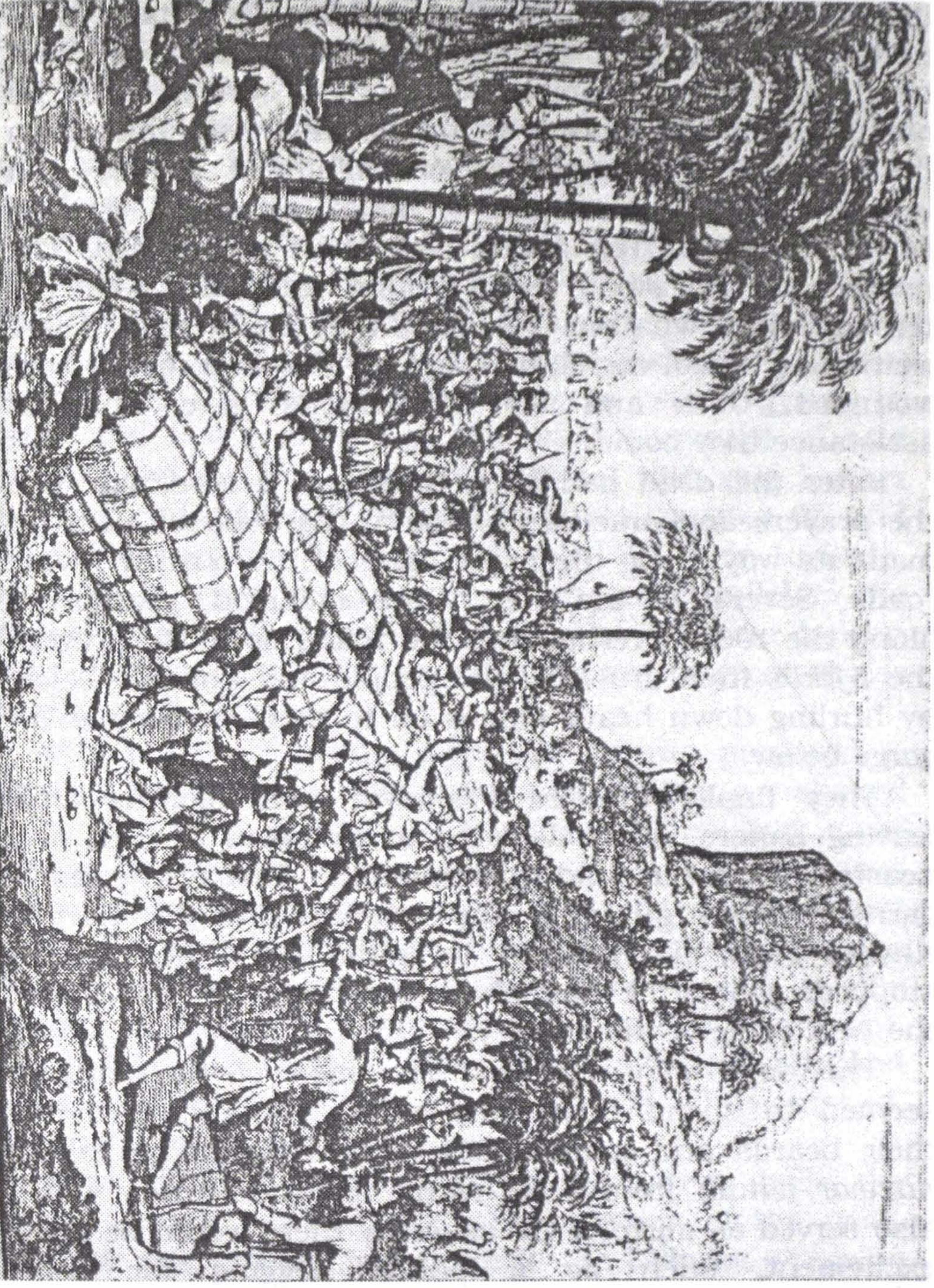


The ruins of Shar Shah's fort at Rohtas (c 1545)

thus to Father Pinheiro, the priest he had left behind at Lahore:

> "Your Reverence's letter written on the 4th March, containing news of the realm, reached me on the 7th of the month. I cannot describe the joy and the longings with which it filled my heart; nor can I help shedding many tears on account of the love which I have for my Brothers, whom I remember every day in my solitude. For it is my chief recreation to think about them, whereby my spirit is greatly refreshed. Owing to the difficulties and the turmoil of the journey, I am unable to observe the regular times and forms of prayer. I therefore use brief prayers communing with God in my heart; and thus I gain strength to bear this cross, which to others may seem heavy, but which to me seems light and pleasant, since I bear it for the love of the Creator of all things. We are all fasting, taking our meal only at night. Though we have to pay for it, our fare consists only of a little rice with ghee, some coarse cakes (*chappaties*) and some onions; if we can get a little salt fish, we count it a treat, though it causes thirst. The cold is very severe, for we are passing mountains covered with snow. But of all these trials, which I bear with serenity, I make your Reverence, and all who belong to this Mission, partakers. Trusting in your Reverence's holy Masses, etc.
>
> "Written from the province of Gacar, 102 coss from Lahore."

Putting on their warmest clothing, heavily quilted *poshtins* or sheepskin coats, they climbed steadily up the valley of the Kabul river, between lofty snow-covered peaks, past Nowshera, towards Peshawar. The march through the mountainous districts was a difficult and perilous one. They had to protect themselves not only against the biting cold, but even more against the bands of marauders attracted by the merchandise they were carrying. The natives of the districts around Peshawar were *Afridis* — tall, handsome, warlike men. Even before the caravan reached Peshawar, the Afridis swooped down on the caravan. Hardly had the shouts of "*Daku! Daku*" (dacoits, bandits) from the outriders reached their ears



The caravan is attacked

than battle was joined. Swords and scimitars were unleashed from their jewelled scabbards and duels and hand to hand combats occurred everywhere as merchants fought bravely to protect their valuables from the bandits. The neighing of frightened horses and camels drowned the sound of metal, as sword crashed down on sword. The action was short and sharp. The merchants had stood their ground and the assailants retreated with whatever valuables they could steal. There were many dead, merchants and *Afridis*, and many more wounded. Goes and his companions gave whatever assistance they could.

After the dead had been buried in accordance with the prayers and practices of Islam, the depleted caravan made its way along the lower parts of the narrow ravine roads. Several of the men, Goes included, scampered along the rocks overhanging the roads so as to prevent the *Afridis* from crushing the people and animals below by hurling down heavy stones on to them in the narrow gorge below.

They finally reached Peshawar four months after leaving Lahore, sadly depleted in numbers of men and beasts of burden and merchandise. Peshawar was a garrison town guarding the entrance to the narrow Khyber Pass, the gateway to India. Here the caravan stopped, giving the animals a well-deserved rest before the next stage of the journey.

The days went idly by. The men of the caravan seemed to spend their time sitting around, grooming their beards and moustaches. Others would be taking *nazwar* (snuff) from their shiny tin snuff-boxes which also served as mirrors. Occasionally there would be some excitement, such as a public flogging for some unfortunate who had perpetrated some misdemeanour. Goes had heard about men having their hands cut off for stealing, the women being stoned to death for adultery, but he had not seen, nor did he want to see, these things. At night they would sit around the glowing embers of a fire, while someone played a *rabab*, a musical instrument, or a *kaumass*, a three-stringed

instrument played with the fingers, or a *setar* (zither). Goatskin bellows would help to keep the fire alight as long as possible.

On occasions there would be a *tamasha* or public entertainment. Some of the wild tribesmen were excellent swordsmen and would perform intricate sword dances. The mimic fights and combats with naked swords were positively dangerous. But there were other 'shows' which could hardly be called edifying. Generally effeminate men were greater attractions than women. Some of the men, as agile and nimble as ballet-dancers, would gyrate in faster and faster circles to the accompaniment of wild throbbing music from long thin drums, with goat leather at either end, whilst high-pitched flutes scurried up and down the register. They would spin till their turbans, propelled by centripetal forces, spun out parallel to the ground and finally came off the head of the male dancer, when his long black hair would whirl out in great circles parallel to the earth.

After a halt of twenty days the caravan prepared to move up the narrow defile which entered like a v-shaped wedge into the barrier of the mountains, two days' journey due west. The caravan began its slow, laborious ascent of the long narrow valley, protected by a military escort of four hundred men. From time immemorial the ravines of the Khyber Pass had been famed as the Paradise of Afghan highwaymen. True to their reputation, once again the caravan was ambushed and attacked despite the large military escort. A wild affray ensued, with many losses on both sides.

Winding its way slowly through the narrow defile, the caravan finally reached the other opening of the pass. The view was astonishing: there in the fullness of spring were fields of rice and sugar-cane, groves of palms and olives, vineyards, peach trees, citrons, figs, pomegranates. After the stifling mountains it was marvellous to breathe in the fresh air as they descended into the plain of Nanghahar.

Coming down the steep slopes was more hazardous than climbing up them. Camels would often slip and fall.

A fatal fall on the icy path

Their loads would have to be removed before they could get up. Often their loads had to be redistributed on to the backs of other animals. Horses, too, found it difficult to keep their feet. One such fall was fatal as a horse and its rider slipped off the icy road and plunged into an abyss several hundred feet below. The delay was considerable, as attempts were made to retrieve the body and give it a Mohammedan burial.

They were glad to pass the town of Ali Masjid, a notorious place for rebels and robbers, some said up to twelve thousand in number. They passed through Dakka, Basawal, Barika, Aliboghdu, by which the Kabul river flowed past. Here, too, they had to be especially careful of robbers and highwaymen. In these market towns the Afghan musicians played their flute and lyre in the Persian style, rather than the Indian. Goes was obviously heading westward. If only his journey could continue westward to Portugal and then on to a tiny island in the Atlantic, a lifetime away!

One day the caravan basha was summoned before the local King. No doubt the King wanted to know where the caravan was coming from, where it was going, were there any important people on the caravan, what merchandise were they carrying? The King would then decide on whom to levy his local tax and what amount.

The caravan basha poked his head into Goes's tent.

"The King wants to see you. You better go at once," he said.

"What does he want?" Goes inquired, as if he didn't know.

The caravan basha shrugged his burly shoulders and withdrew.

Goes was led into the presence of the King. The walls of the room were hung with Persian and Mogul rugs. The King was dressed in a heavily jewelled waistcoat of purple and poison green. ("What colours", Goes thought to himself.) In his turban a large diamond sparkled. He had a shiny black beard. Fierce, fiery eyes flamed out above sensual lips, reddened by *betel* juice. A parrot with green feathers and an orange beak, shaped like a sliver

of the moon, watched quizzically from a perch behind the royal chair. Goes greeted the King with the *taslim*.

Through teeth also dripping with the scarlet juice of the *betel*-nut "Banda Abdullah?" the King inquired.

Goes nodded.

"Banda Abdullah Isai," he added.

There was a stir among the people in the room. The mullah, dressed in black with a white turban, said something to the King which Goes did not catch. There was a conversation between the two in lowered voices. The King then ordered Goes to recite the *Kalimah*.

Goes replied that he was a follower of Isai (Jesus). The remark annoyed the company.

"Kill the infidel," someone shouted.

Goes remained standing. The mullah's white beard was quivering with anger.

"You are an infidel, an unbeliever, and you have dared to come into this country. Don't you know I can kill you for that?" the King said with increasing rage in his voice.

Again he ordered Goes to recite the *Kalimah*. Again Goes repeated that he was a follower of Isai.

"Unless you do as I say I shall have you crushed under my elephants," the King said with finality.

"I have the Emperor Akbar's authority to pass through your country without being molested," Goes replied.

At this the King and his court burst out laughing.

"In my country I am King," he stated. Then, as an afterthought, he demanded.

"Where is your authority, your *firman*?"

Goes reached into his waistcoat pocket and pulled out the Emperor's document. Goes gave it to the King. The King looked at the Imperial seal and passed the *firman* on to the mullah who read it carefully. There was another huddled conversation.

"You will come back tomorrow," the King ordered.

Goes asked for his *firman*.

"You will be given the *firman* tomorrow. Tomorrow you will recite the *Kalimah*; if not I shall have you killed

by the elephants. In my Book I am given authority to kill all unbelievers."

Goes left the room. He was sorry to have left his *firman* behind. On the way back to the *serai* Goes decided not to tell his companions what had transpired: that would alarm them unnecessarily.

Next morning two Afghans appeared at the *serai*. They were tall men, dark, lithe, with flashing black eyes. They wore baggy trousers. Over these they wore the *shalwar camise*, a long shirt with tails which reached down to the knees. Over the shirt they wore heavily embroidered waistcoats, with four large pockets on the outside. They wore large turbans, and over their left shoulder they carried a *patou*, a large multi-purpose sheet which goes everywhere with the Afghan. A dagger protruded from their waists; their right hand wielded a large *lathi*, or wooden staff. Goes was waiting for them. They led him through a nest of narrow streets. The women were all in *purdah*, covered from head to foot in their black *chadors*. At the age of thirteen all Mohammedan women are put in this seclusion from which they can never escape. Occasionally they would pass two men, hand in hand. One would obviously be the more masculine partner, from his general demeanour. His partner showed feminine traits, a handkerchief in one hand, a flower between his teeth, a little make-up on his eyes, and walking short steps. They passed the typical homes — low, mudbrick huts, surrounded by walls along whose tops thorns had been trained to grow. Here and there men were squatting, either urinating or worse.

The armed men at the gates allowed the three men in. One of the escort placed his hand on Goes's shoulder. Goes stopped. The man pointed. Goes followed the direction of his arm. In a corner of the square was a huge elephant, gaily decorated. The *mahout* exchanged greetings with the two men.

When they entered the room that acted as a court, Goes noticed that not only were there some more mullahs in their black robes, but two others robed in scarlet: they were the public executioners.

The preliminaries were brief. Goes was ordered to recite the *Kalimah*.

Goes pointed out that he was a follower of Isai.

There was silence at first, then consternation.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked the King. "I have it in my power to kill you."

"Having God with me I have no fear," Goes replied.

The reply silenced the court. But not for long. There was a discussion among some of the mullahs and the King.

"Bring in the elephant," the King ordered.

He nodded to the two men in red robes. They grabbed Goes and pinioned and then tied his arms behind his back.

There was an increasing buzz of excitement around the court. This rose as the little *mahout* led in the large ponderous beast. Goes blanched and swallowed. The elephant was brought centre-stage.

"For the last time, will you say the *kalimah*?" the King asked.

There was a deathly hush as everyone waited for the reply.

"With God by me I have no fear," Goes repeated. A murmur of disbelief went round the room. To make his voice heard everywhere Goes calmly repeated.

"For the love of the true God and Creator of the Universe I will happily lay down my life. You may crush my bones. My God I will never deny."

The deathly hush quickly gave way to astonishment and even some voices of approval. The Afghans were a brave people and they recognised and respected courage. Goes's replies left them completely disarmed. There was a long discussion among the members of the court. Then there was silence as the King spoke.

"We have decided. You may go. Here is your *firman*."

The *mahout*, obviously disappointed, led out the elephant. Goes, his arms freed, walked into the hot Afghan sun.

In one of the towns in the plain of Nanghahar Goes met a wandering hermit on pilgrimage. He always liked

to listen to their stories. Who knows, one might even speak of Cathay! The hermit told him of a tribe, no less savage than the *Afridis* or Afghans, who lived in the neighbourhood.

At a distance of some thirty days' march there was a territory called *Kafiristan*, where no Mohammedan was allowed to enter on penalty of death. This was novel. One could understand no Christians or other infidels being allowed in, but surely Mohammedans would be admitted in these predominantly all-Moslem countries. Heathen merchants, however, were allowed in, though they were debarred from entering the temples. The inhabitants never entered their temples unless clothed in black. He informed them that the country was very fertile and that it produced grapes in great abundance. The hermit took off the goatskin container of wine round his neck and offered Goes a drink. The wine, made from grapes and not from fermented cane-sugar as in India, tasted like Portuguese wine. Since Mohammedans are forbidden to drink wine the hope was raised that perhaps the country was inhabited by Christians. But this hope was dispelled when the hermit stated that the *Kafirs* professed an ancient Iranian religion, one of the few that had been able to resist Islam's conquest of Central Asia.

The caravan slowly wound its way into the country of Kafiristan, the mountainous territory north-east of the Kabul valley between the river Kunar and the Hindu Kush mountains. It was inhabited by tribes very jealous of their independence. They were called *Kafirs* (infidels, unbelievers), by the surrounding Mohammedans who waged a constant war of extermination against them. The *Kafirs* were better known as the *Siah-Posh*, or 'black-clothed', from the black goatskin garments they wore.

Goes could well understand how the inhabitants of Kafiristan had held out against the inroads of Islam. The extremely rugged nature of the country would deter most invaders. One look at the *Kafirs*, dressed in their black goatskins, and seemingly totally indifferent to any extremes of weather, was enough to frighten off the

bravest of warriors. And their burning desire for independence was linked to an equally burning hatred of the Mohammedans who had razed their idol temples and replaced them with mosques. They would wreak on the Mussalmans a tenfold vengeance for the injuries their forefathers had suffered.

The *Kafirs* were extremely courageous fighters. The Afghans entertained great fear of them, one *Kafir* being generally worth five Afghans in battle. Every *Siah-Posh* went bare-headed till he had slain a Mohammedan; and until he did so could not aspire to any esteem among his countrymen. Before he could marry, a *Siah-Posh* man must have killed at least two Mohammedans. The form of dress of the *Siah-Posh* was the goatskin. It was worn by boys and poor men at all times and by the majority of all classes of the people when engaged in raiding or hunting, or when herding or watching their flocks. The goatskin was a shapeless wrapper, girdled at the waist by a leather strap. It only partially covered the neck and chest, and in men reached about half-way down the thigh. In extreme cold a cape of the same material was added, and rough sleeves also, which were sewn into the body portion by huge stitches an inch or an inch and a half long, made by boring holes and then passing a stout thread through them. It was quite common to see *Kafirs* on the war-path or during hunting expeditions trudge through the snow with no other clothing except perhaps goat's-hair gaiters and boots. Infants were also carried about wrapped up in portions of goatskin. The fashion was to wear the hairy side of the goatskin inside; indeed, in rain or snow it would be the only way to prevent the leather becoming wet. All young *Kafirs*, both men and boys, wandered about armed with a stone bow and arrows.

Swimming was not only an amusement but also a necessary part of a *Kafir's* education. On inflated goatskins a man would cross rapid streams, taking with him a goat, or even a cow. A party on the march always had one of these goatskins as part of its equipment. When wanted for use it was inflated by means of a reed.

Sometimes exciting scenes were witnessed where a man, after swimming a swift-flowing river, had to make frantic exertions to prevent himself being carried down-stream on to the rocks. *Kafirs* seemed insensible to the coldest water.

Goes's description of these pagan Aryans of the remote valleys of the Hindu Kush is the earliest mention by any European traveller. The men of Kafiristan were of middle height but strong physique, little resembling the Afghans or Kaskmiris. They were somewhat dark, but the women were as fair as Europeans, with red cheeks and very beautiful. The men hardly ever washed their persons or their clothes. When talking to one another they would shout with all their might. Goat's flesh formed their principal food. They drank wine in large quantities out of drinking vessels made of curiously-wrought pottery or occasionally of silver. But Goes never saw anyone drunk. Their oath of peace consisted of licking a piece of salt. Those of the same village entertained a strong feeling of kindred, so that neither fighting nor marrying among themselves was permitted. But the different villages or tribes were often at war with one another. To kill a man or woman of an alien tribe was considered a high honour. The *Kafirs* kept no horses, donkeys or camels; only a few oxen and buffaloes and some dogs. According to Goes, the people lived to a ripe old age and continued hale till the day of death. They buried their dead in coffins in caves in the hill.

The caravan stayed in Jalalabad for twenty days, not only for rest purposes but because the way ahead was infested with bandits from the Khirilchi and other robber Afghan tribes. They procured a convoy of four hundred soldiers from the lord of the place, the chieftain of Jalalabad, to escort them further along. Despite this precaution they were attacked several times on the way, having to fight and beat off armed gangs. The mode of attack of the robbers was to roll down massive rocks on unwary travellers. The only way to beat the bandits was to meet violence with violence. While the long line of mules and camels wound their way along the narrow

Shooting with stone-bow

roads in the valleys, armed men, including the merchants — guns at the ready — kept a look-out from vantage points or 'heights' of the mountains. A large fort and palace denoted the residence of the *daroga* (commandant) of the district of Adinahpur, to the south of the Kabul river. Opposite the fort, Akbar's grandfather, Babur, had planted a *charbagh* (four gardens) on rising ground. It overlooked the river which flowed between the fort and the *daroga's* palace. The *charbagh* consisted of four plots made by two roads crossing each other, as was the Persian custom. The gardens were planted with every kind of exotic tree and plant, even plantain from India.

The Lamghanat Road, as the road between Peshawar and Kabul was called, became increasingly difficult. In many places they had to negotiate very short *kotuls* or steep hill-passes; in many places the road could only be described as 'narrows' or 'straits'.

After 25 days' march along the foot of a mountain, the caravan reached a place called Ghideli, where all the merchants had to pay a toll. Here the robbers attacked again. Many of the caravan were wounded; soon they were hopelessly outnumbered. Discretion being the better part of valour Goes and his party fled into a jungle with the rest of the merchants. However, under cover of darkness they returned, retrieved as much of their belongings as possible and managed to get away from the brigands.

Suffering many difficulties and trials — the extreme cold, the attacks from the highwaymen that infested the desolate roads — the caravan made its way to Kabul. They passed the towns of Nimla, Candamak, Surkhrud — a *serai* on a river that was red — Jagdallak, Sih Baba, Doaba. At this last they had to negotiate a high mountain that stood in their path. Butkhak, Bigrami, and finally the big city of Kabul, still within Akbar's dominions.

In the distance they could see the city, with its two fortresses, on high ground, seven thousand feet up, at the foot of bare and rocky mountains, commanding the

Kafirs making wine

passes through which had swept successive invasions of India by Alexander the Great, by Genghis Khan, and more recently, by Akbar's grandfather, the Emperor Babur. Because of its geographical and political position, Kabul enjoyed an immortal, almost legendary, fame. Here, "in the bowels of the mountains", the natural lines of communication between East and West, from China to Sinkiang in the East, to Persia and Syria in the West, cross the trade route from the Russian steppes in the north to southern India. At this great trading centre caravans from Ferghana, Turkestan, Samarkand, Balkh, Bokhara, Hissar and Badakshan met with those from Hindustan. Every year up to ten thousand horses would arrive in Kabul, mainly from Persia and Tartary. Every year from India caravans would bring twenty thousand pieces of cloth, not to mention sugar-candy, refined and common sugar, drugs and spices, pearls and other precious jewels, civet, woollen stuffs, carpets, velvet and silks, as well as every kind of metal. Among these items of trade and barter were also — to the shame of the human race — slaves. Between Kabul and the Oxus river slavery was rife, extending through Hazara, Badakshan, Wakhan, Sirikul, etc. Men were almost always exchanged for dogs. In upper Badakshan a man who could stand work well was considered of the same value as one of the large dogs of the country, or of a horse — about 80 rupees. In lower Badakshan and more distant places, payment was made in coin. The value of a slave girl was considerably more, depending on her looks.

Slavery was excused by the Mohammedans on the ground that the captives would be converted to Islam and so 'saved'. But, as everybody knew, any such conversion was not genuine. The poor wretches would assume Islam only to render their bondage less severe.

What a relief it was to be in the walled, fortified city of Kabul. It had been six months since Goes had left Agra. The city lay in a bowl rimmed with snow and ice, with the most stupendous upheaval of the earth's crust to be found on the face of this planet all around it. To the north rose the great, sombre Hindu Kush mountains,

heavy and foreboding; named Hindu Kush or 'Hindu Killers' from what they did to the natives of India who tried to cross them in search of fortunes in Samarkand and Kandahar. Beyond the Hindu Kush, were the Pamirs, the impenetrable, mysterious massif that guarded the meeting place of all nations. To the east lay the Karakoram, the most inaccessible of the mountains of Asia, and further south the mighty Himalayas forming the spine of Asia. To the west were the Koh-i-Baba mountains, so close you could almost touch them.

Kabul was the end of the journey for many. Here the caravan would disband and the merchants disperse. Another caravan would form in eight months. The perils encountered deterred a number of travellers from continuing their journey. Among these were two of Goes's Greek companions. Leon Grimon could no longer face the difficulties and fatigue of the journey and returned to India. Demetrius, also tired from the rigours of travel, stayed on in Kabul in the hope of doing some good business, although subsequently he had a change of heart and followed Goes in a later caravan. He met up with Goes in Yarkand, but he did not go beyond into China. But his third companion, Isaac, remained faithful to him. The few travellers who were left were afraid to go on in so small a body. Travel in such small numbers was courting certain death. So Banda Abdullah had to wait till a new caravan was formed in the late summer before resuming his journey — a delay of several months.

The climate at that time of the year was delightful. Whilst one could not sleep without a *postin* (lamb-skin cloak), the cold was never very intense, even though the snow fell very deeply in winter. In the spring the *bade parwan* — 'the pleasant breeze' — blew incessantly. Fruits and vegetables of both hot and cold climates abounded. In the cold districts of Kabul were grapes, pomegranates, apricots, peaches, pears, apples, quinces, damask plums, jujubes, damsons, cucumbers, rhubarb, almonds, walnuts. In the hotter districts grew oranges, citron, *amluk* (a berry like the karinda), sugar-cane and water-grapes, from which a strong intoxicating wine was made.

Afghanistan was a conglomerate of many peoples, comprised of many and various tribes, with their own 'nationalities' and to some extent their own languages. The valleys and plains were inhabited by Turks, Aimaks and Arabs. In the city itself and the greater part of the villages the population was largely Tajiks. In the hill-country to the west resided the Hazaras and Nukderis. The Hazaras, descendants of Genghiz Khan's troops, formed the large Shia minority of Central Afghanistan. The majority of Afghanistan was Sunni. To the north-east lay Kafiristan. To the south of the Langhan road between Peshawar and Kabul it was populated mainly by Afghans. In Kabul itself a dozen or more different languages were spoken: Arabic, Persian, Turki, Mogholi, Hindi, Afghani, Pashai, Parachi, Geberi, Bereki and Lamghani. It is doubtful whether so many distinct races and different languages, could be found in any other country.

The inhabitants of Kabul proudly referred to this town as "the oldest town in the world", and proudly pointed visitors to the tomb of Cain, Adam's son, who slew his brother Abel. To the south of Kabul was a hill in which Kabul (Cain), the founder of the city, was said to be buried. The Afghans took great pride in their claim to be descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, a claim perhaps borne out by the large number of Semitic noses that were to be seen. Another hill, south-west of the city, was called *Shah-Kabul*, where a king of Kabul had built a palace on its summit.

Goes and Isaac often went to the bazaar, only because there was little else to do and because it was where one got the 'news'. The bazaar, which consisted of a nest of narrow streets in the crowded section of the city, had its own special 'aroma'.

They dodged the many dogs that seemed to be everywhere. The dogs were generally scrawny and brown. Indeed, everything seemed to be brown — the mountains, the soil, the mud-walls, even the people with their once white but now dirty brown shirts. Scrawny or not, the Afghans loved their dogs. Kill one and his owner

would track you through the Hindu Kush. One could buy almost anything in the bazaar, most of it stolen from warehouses in Delhi, Lahore, Isafahan, Samarkand. Afghans were famed not only for the sale of hashish, despite the fact that drugs were forbidden by the Koran, camels' wool, goats' hair, and sheepskins, but also as the hereditary thieves of Central Asia. They would steal your *poutou* while you slept on it. When Darius the Persian marched through Kabul five hundred years before the birth of Christ the same bazaar was probably selling the same goods stolen from the same ancient cities.

One day in the market place at Kabul Goes heard of the distress of Kaji Khanum, a pilgrim Princess, who had been robbed on her return from making the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. Her rank had been no safeguard against the rapacity of the hill tribesmen. She was the sister of Mohammed Khan, the King of Kashgar, through whose territory the route to Cathay lay. She was also the mother of the King of Khotan. She now had no money to complete her journey back to her country of Khotan, south-east of Kashgar and Yarkand. She was trying to borrow money from the merchants, promising to refund this on arrival at Yarkand. Goes realised that here was an opportunity, not to be lost, of gaining the favour of the king of another kingdom, especially since beyond Kabul the *firman* and letters of recommendation from Akbar would no longer carry authority. He paid a call on the Princess. Two burly tribesmen guarded the entrance to her tent. What business did he want with the Princess? He explained. After a discussion, Banda Abdullah Isai was allowed in. The Princess, a lady in her late forties, sat on a Mughal cushion. There was little in the room to suggest a royal habitation: a cheap bamboo table on which a lantern gave off a faint yellow glow. With her fair skin, her china blue eyes and her red hair, she could have been European. The hair, of course, was dyed with henna, to indicate she had made the Haj to Mecca. She was obviously tired and worried, with great dark circles under brilliant but angry eyes. There was a fierceness about her aspect. There was also a sense of

hopelessness, amounting almost to despair, about her, like a fluttering bird trapped in a room. All the while she chewed a cardamum seed. There was no jewellery, either on her or anywhere else. One of her courtiers explained the situation. Goes offered his help.

But why would a Christian want to help the Princess when her own Muslim merchants would not? That intrigued the Princess and her advisers. The Muslim merchants would not lend her any money for several reasons. Perhaps she was no Princess at all; there was no guarantee she would ever safely reach Khotan again; and if she did, what guarantee had they that she would honour her debt. I suppose Bento could have used the occasion for a homily on The Good Samaritan. But he confined himself to business. In the next few days Goes sold some of his lapis lazuli gems of azure blue and made the Princess an advance of six hundred pieces of gold, refusing any mention of interest in the bond. The only stipulation was that the whole sum was to be paid back in transparent marble. This jade or nephrite, the Yu-stone of the Chinese, the *jaspis* of the ancients, was highly valued throughout the East, especially among the Chinese, who ascribe to it certain properties. With this stone their philosophers connected the five virtues that formed the basis of the Chinese moral code: modesty, mercy, justice, meekness and frankness. Every Chinese woman wore nephrite ornaments of some sort, generally bracelets. Both men and women wore one as an amulet against sickness. It was the best merchandise any one could take to China.

Chapter 12

Kabul To Badakshan

Finally, towards the end of August 1603, another newly-formed, caravan set off on the next and most difficult stage of the journey — to East Turkestan. Just at this time Goes fell sick with a high fever. Was it enteric or typhoid fever or any of the other fevers to which one was exposed? It was not cholera: he would have been dead in a couple of hours. There was no one to make a diagnosis; and if there was, there were no medicaments to cure the ailment. He was in no state to travel. But if he did not go then he would have to wait over half a year for the next caravan. Hardly able to move, he struggled on to his horse and began the long mountain trek which would tax the stoutest of staminas, and which would kill any one less fit. Goes was without his two Greek companions, but at least his young Armenian servant, Isaac, rode faithfully behind him. Also in the caravan party was the pilgrim Princess and her entourage.

The steep and formidable range of the Hindu Kush mountains faced them. The route ahead depended on the season. In winter all the roads were closed for four or five months because of snow. Besides, no human could withstand the cold –45°C and worse. Even in summer, during a snow-storm, the temperature would drop to -10°C. In the spring the waters were in flood and it was impossible to cross the water-courses on account of the

raging, flooded, torrents. Travel by road near water-courses was not possible. Passing along the mountaintops was equally out of the question since the high mountain tracks were too difficult. Travel was only possible in the three or four months of autumn when the snow and the waters decreased. Another, but less important criterion, was the more or less peaceable state of the countries that lay en route. Most of the time they were fighting one another. Instead of taking the easier and more frequented Bamian pass — a depression between the Hindu Kush mountains and their western continuation, the Koh-i-Baba mountains — the caravan guide chose a more easterly, more direct route through the Parwan pass, despite its much greater difficulty. This was a pack-trail which crossed the Hindu Kush behind Charikar. The journey along the trail, which winds slowly upwards between the mountain peaks, over 20,000 feet in altitude, and then across a plateau, took about twenty days to complete. The journey over the glaciers of the pass and the descent into the province of Badakshan took another fifteen days.

Slowly the *kafila* (caravan) moved forward, winding its way along the mountain slopes. From Kabul the mountain peaks seemed near enough to touch. But even after several days' march they seemed no nearer. On some days they would be smoked with low cloud and would be lost altogether from view.

They could hear and sometimes see packs of wolves, great shaggy terrifying animals, driven down from the mountains in search of food. They often saw the footprints of bears which had also come down from the mountains in search of berries. They had to keep a special watch on their animals for the bears were wont to lie in wait behind bushes and then attack and kill them. With one swipe of its arm a bear could kill any animal. Late in the evening the caravan arrived at Sambala, a scattered village at the bottom of a deep valley. Its male inhabitants, armed to the teeth, as is customary with these mountain tribes, greeted them sourly. They were more interested in the baggage they

planned to loot and plunder. All night they hovered round the encampment.

Next morning they set off up a ravine at the top of which was a tower commanding the approaches. Armed men rushed out of the tower and soon surrounded the *kafila.* They demanded their payment of dues and taxes. The *Kafila Basha* (caravan commander) explained he had already paid this to the chief the evening before. But the armed men, seeing so much baggage so ill-protected, held out for more payment. Matters were just about settled when an over-zealous *kirakush* (mule driver) drew his weapon and almost precipitated an incident in which the caravan people would have been massacred, being hopelessly outnumbered by the mountain men. They were glad to get away from the place. The only loss seemed to be a turban snatched from off the head of an unsuspecting merchant.

The caravan passed through the almond and apricot and pistachio groves of Kohistan. Mulberry trees rose in terraces up the scantily-clad slopes. The mulberry-tree is to the inhabitants what the date is among the Arabs, and a flour made from its unripe fruit is the principal support of these *Kohistanees* or hillmen, throughout the year. Thus even the biting north wind is beneficial; for were the mulberry to ripen on the tree, it would not be so well adapted for a staple article of food.

The *Kafila* arrived at Charikar — a pleasant, fair city — where the various routes across the Hindu Kush branched off. Charikar, situated at the mouth of the Ko-Daman valley, at the very foot of the Hindu Kush, was an iron mining centre, the iron being brought from the nearby mines of Ghorband, a great city bordering on Usbeke. The town was renowned for its pottery and silver-work. In the bazaar the silver-smiths sat cross-legged tapping the metal into shape with little hammers. A violent, icy wind, with an edge like a knife, blew constantly through the valley. In submission to this prevailing wind the trees fronting the gorge in Ko-Daman bowed to the south.

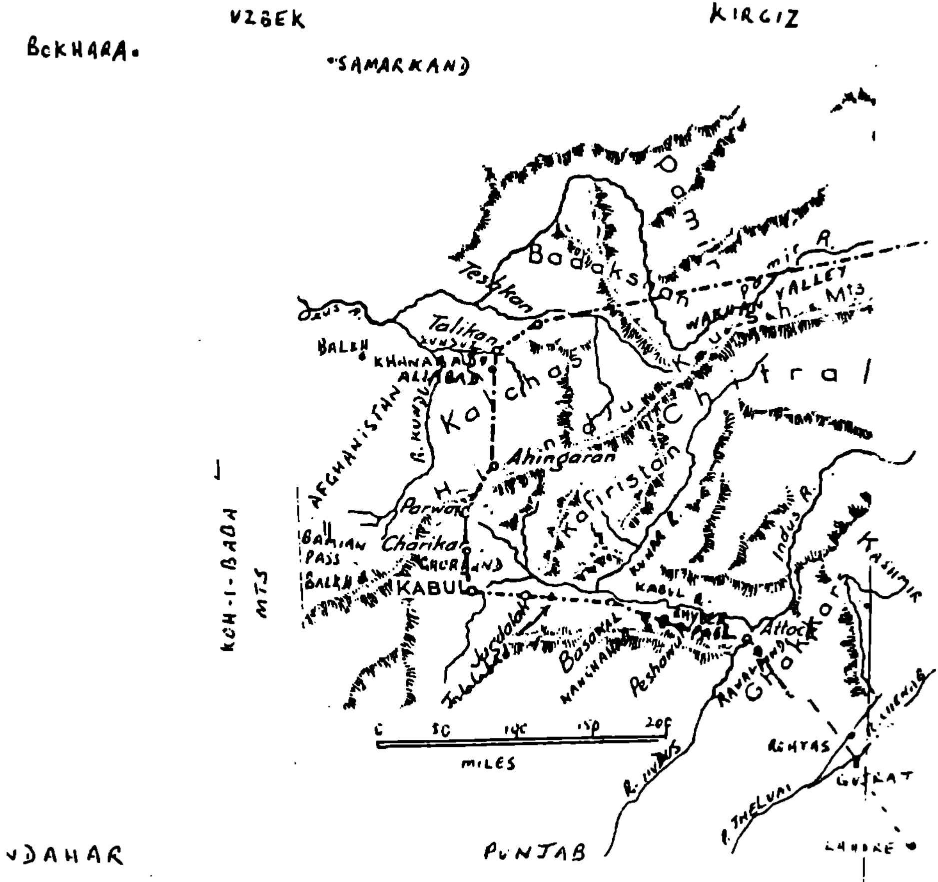
Up to now the letters from the great Akbar which

Goes carried exempted him from all taxes. However, at Charikar Goes got embroiled with the local governor who refused to honour Akbar's *firman* and seal which had hitherto given him freedom from taxes and other exactions. The governor demanded that Goes pay duty on his merchandise. The Brother Jesuit was too ill to insist on his rights as vigorously as he would have done normally.

Slowly the caravan began to move. The high mountains of the Hindu Kush towered over them. The gradient got steeper and steeper; the paths narrower and narrower. Sometimes the horses, with their loads of boxes, could just squeeze through the narrow defiles. The caravan zig-zagged its way, sometimes going up the steep inclines, sometimes descending into the narrow gorges hewn out by the fast-flowing waters. Going down was often more exhausting than climbing up, as the heavily-laden animals tried to keep their feet.

Again and again the loads on the animals fell forward or backwards as they descended or ascended, and had to be hitched right again. It was frightening to look down hundreds of feet where a river had cut a deep channel through the coarse-grained conglomerates, its waters, dark green but clear as crystal, gurgling among the menacing boulders of granite and quartzite. Every now and then the conglomerates stretched far up the mountainsides, forming rampart-like walls so precipitous that they looked as if they would come crashing down at any moment. The caravan wound a hundred, a thousand, times in and out round the fallen boulders. Every now and again it would cross a stream or river, its blue limpid water matching the blue of the lapis lazuli Banda Abdullah, the merchant, wore on his finger, as it gurgled and tumbled between boulders of gneiss. Sometimes one forded the river; sometimes one put one's faith in make-shift bridges, which sagged and swayed at every step. In some cases the supports of the bridges were so rotten, the animals were anxiously led across one by one.

Sometimes the ravines were claustrophobic, only a



Kabul to the Pamirs

few yards wide, the air cold and clammy as in a cellar, the rocky sides vertical, the stream filling up nearly the entire width, dashing itself against boulders, leaping above them in spray, plunging down waterfalls. To talk one had to shout; the tall walls of the ravine would fling back the echoes from side to side. It was easier to be silent. Above their heads only a tiny strip of sky would be visible. Into these cavernous depths, shut in by perpendicular walls of rock, no ray of sunshine ever penetrated the streams and rivers lurking there. The waters near their banks were almost always frozen with ice.

Because of the ice, fording a river was always a hazardous undertaking. The edges of ice on the banks were unsafe; one never knew to what extent the surface ice had been melted by the water below. It was anything but a pleasant sensation to be sitting astride a horse as it came to the edge of ice above the ford and gathered itself together for a leap into the freezing waters. As it did so, Goes made sure his feet were out of the stirrups, so that, if necessary, he could detach himself readily from the horse in any emergency. Sometimes both horse and rider would end up in the water. The heavy furs one had to wear were a great impediment to freedom of movement and added to the risk of drowning. The currents were so swift that neither horse nor rider would be seen again. Even when the horse had made its leap into the water safely, one had to keep a very firm hold on it to prevent it being lifted off its feet and being driven into deeper water where it would have no foothold and get carried away by the swift current. Invariably one's bottom half got soaked as the water reached up to one's knees, even though mounted. Another hazard was the risk of dizziness from looking at the angry waters foaming beneath one.

In midsummer, when the snow melted fastest, the volume of water was so great that it was impossible to ford the rivers and streams. During this time all communication between villages on opposite banks of rivers would be completely interrupted.

There was the added danger of being trapped in a flood. The water in the streams and rivers always rose towards evening. This was because the snows on the mountains would be melted by the sun during the day and the extra water would only reach the lower ground and valleys as darkness set in. On one occasion they had just passed through a gorge, skirting a stream which was running quietly on its way. Suddenly, late in the afternoon, they heard a distant rumbling sound. The noise grew rapidly louder and louder. Then, foaming like a white surf-roller, down rushed the flood. Some minutes earlier and the whole caravan would have been swept away.

In spite of the great altitude, it was often so warm in the sun at mid-day, if the sky was clear and there was no wind, that they were glad to peel off their *postins*. Whilst the sun was almost burning one side of your face, the other side could be freezing. But as soon as the sun went behind a cloud or the mountains cut off the sun's rays, the cold would hit you like a blow in the face and the *postins*, which were usually tied to the back of the saddle, ready for use, were put on quickly. They all rode mares of small size but remarkable for their strength and endurance. After sunset extra coats were a necessity.

Slowly the caravan zig-zagged its way up into an ethereal world of sun and wind and changing cloud. By now the constant exposure to the sun and to the elements had made Goes's face as hard and dry and brown as anyone's in the caravan.

At night they would shelter where there was vegetation for the animals and also from which they could collect firewood. One could still find clumps of birches, wild briars and *archa* (Asiatic junipers), dotted about here and there. The pasturage tended to diminish as they climbed higher; what little there was tended to cling to the banks of streams. The horses and donkeys were coupled together to prevent them from straying too far; but the camels were allowed free run. The animals were not fed till they had rested for a couple of hours. The horses would stand, tossing their empty nose-bags

slung round their necks, looking both wearied and disgusted. When feeding time came they would whinny and paw the ground with impatience. Their meal ended, the animals were let loose for the night, being gathered together again early next morning. Below, the gorges were filled with wolves, head in air, baying at the moon with long-drawn-out howls.

On and up they climbed among the defiles and gorges, along steep narrow ribbons of paths. Often you had just a rock slab on one side of you, empty space at the other. Boxes with which the horses were laden constantly scraped against the rocky sides. In places the track was so narrow that horses were not able to pass with their loads and so had to be unloaded. One of the horses escaped going over a precipice by the nearest shave. It stumbled in one of the narrowest parts and would certainly have been precipitated into the river hundreds of feet below had not one of the drivers flung upon it in the nick of time, so restoring the animal's balance. The horse was quickly unloaded and pulled to safety. Often they passed under ponderous arches of overhanging rock, full of cracks and crevices, which threatened every moment to come crashing down upon their heads. In some places the rocks were so smooth, they were obliged to roughen them up with a pick-axe to enable horses to get a firmer foothold. Often their path was choked by a newly fallen *kutsh-ka* or landslide. Giant *talus* — slopes or landslides, resulting from the action of wind and weather on the more friable rocks, sometimes stretched down to the bottom of the valley, causing long, exhausting detours. Seeing an avalanche thundering down a mountainside was a terrifying ordeal. There was nothing one could do, but stand petrified and pray it would pass.

It wasn't only the deafening roar of avalanches that shattered the peace of those desolate God-forsaken, regions. The mountains would echo to the torrents of rain and ear-shattering thunder. Flashes of lightning would light up the whole mountainside as if some great pyrotechnic had burst overhead. The rushing sound,

always after heavy rain, was rain water streaming over the yawning precipices. The wind was incessant and merciless, cutting through everything. It was a blinding wind that strangled the breath. It was as if the mountains resented you and resisted you with everything they had — rock and ice and roaring bitter wind. You just had to bury your chin and mouth in the collar of your wind-jacket and fight back. There was no peace. Often it blew so strong that one had to dismount. It was impossible to go on. At night, too, it would continue its onslaught. The wind would howl and whistle through the tent hour after hour. Usually the tent-covering on the windward side would be driven in like a half-collapsed bladder, seriously curtailing the space inside. Though lashed down with extra ropes and supported with additional stakes — not to mention the heavy packs placed on the turned-in ends of the tent-covering — the tent shook so violently that any moment it threatened to take off like a kite across the valley. Rents between the separate pieces of felting meant further delays next morning for repairs. The drying of the tents always delayed the start in the morning anyway.

Hail would sweep through the pass with great ferocity. Hailstorms were of unparalleled violence. It was impossible to see anything. One could only stand still, or sit in the saddle, with backs turned towards the wind and hail, *postin* pulled tight round one's body and over one's ears. In a matter of seconds everything that was not white before was covered in a mantle whiter than chalk.

A chilling snowstorm, waxing for a time into a hurricane, gave a chilling welcome to the pass. Snow was soon to be another element that was to add to their misery. After this snow the pass would surely be impassable for some days. If it continued it would possibly be closed altogether for that year.

The depth of snow steadily increased. Junipers, twelve to fifteen feet high were completely buried from sight in snowdrifts. Driving showers of snow would often descend at intervals through the afternoon, dampening

men's spirits still more. They were always grateful for the light mist which would settle after midday and relieve the intense glare from the snow which added further pain to their labours. Wherever their gaze fell it was met by a dazzling sheet of snow and ice, dazzling whiteness enough to blind one. The ridges beyond stood out like a child's scribbling against the skyline. Except that the scribbling was solid rock. The men did their best to screen their eyes from the reflection of the sun's rays with tufts of horsehair stuck between their caps and foreheads. Others used pieces of leather strap through which a narrow opening had been cut. Despite these precautions a few of the men began suffering from snow-blindness — having to be led by people or to hold on to the tails of their horses.

Walking for days through dazzling snows had overstrained their eyes. Goes himself found that at times everything seemed to be going round and the landscape appeared quite black. One of the men could not even walk; he had a frost-bitten foot. Goes applied the only emergency treatment there was — rubbing the foot with snow. They lived in dread of a snow-hurricane or *buran*. The experienced captain of the caravan had told everyone exactly what to — and what not to do in case of such a calamity. These *burans* would come on with startling suddenness. One minute the sky would be perfectly clear; scarcely a minute later and down would swoop the storm. The air would be thick and black with swirling, blinding snow-flakes. In an instant the path was obliterated. It was impossible to see a yard before you. Nothing could be seen — nothing, not even the horse you were riding. All a man could do was stand perfectly still, wrap the furs about him — and pray. The caravan captain had repeated again and again that never on any account should anyone separate himself from the caravan during the march. If at such a time a *buran* were to descend on someone, he would be hopelessly lost. It would be impossible to rejoin his fellow-travellers, even though they were no more than a dozen paces away. To shout was useless. Not a sound could be

heard. All echoes were completely drowned in the roar of the hurricane. The unhappy traveller who has the ill-fortune to be caught in a *buran*, without tent or provisions, without furs or felts, must resign himself to the inevitable; his fate was sealed.

It began to blow, a gale from the west. The snow continued to fall and a mist covered them like a sheet. The next morning the track was completely blotted out by the snowfall. The snowdrifts were so thick that all day long four camels were sent out in front to trample down a path, or rather a furrow, along which the horses could travel. The snow was too deep for the horses. The horses followed as best they could in the track of the camels, their packs and stirrups jolting and trailing against the banks of snow on each side of them. The breath gushed from their nostrils like puffs of steam as they floundered in the snow-drifts, their flanks decorated with fringes of rime. The men had to be constantly on the alert for the packs were constantly slipping round underneath the horses. One step off the path and the horses plunged up to their girth in the snow. It took the combined efforts of many to dig them out again, not to mention the serious loss of time. Despite the warning cries of *Bismillah* (In God's name!) and *Khabardar* (Careful!) that rang out shrilly on the mountain air, accidents and mishaps were a-plenty. The snow completely hid the treacherous cavities and projecting rocks which broke up the surface. One of the pack-horses dropped through the treacherous surface and was near being smothered in the deep snow. It was as much as the men could do to free the horse from its packs and haul it back again on to firm ground. In places they had to feel their way ahead, like a blind man with his stick. A dull heavy thud indicated hard frozen ground; a clear metallic ring meant firm ice; a muffled hollow sound signified danger — arches of thin ice. Sometimes the snowfall was so heavy that even the guides lost their way.

The region was desolate in the extreme; there was not a blade of grass nor a living creature to be seen or heard — not even the wolves or occasional leopard that had previously harried them.

They cleared the snow away from the side of a low hill and began stacking the baggage for the night, while they waited for the camels lagging behind to catch up. The snow-wall they built round their arctic dwelling gave some protection against the wind that roared through the pass from every point of the compass. But the wind continued unabated to sweep down in furious gusts, threatening to smother the whole caravan in dense clouds of driving snow. The wind penetrated everything — their furs, their felts, their skin boots. The effect of a violent wind at temperatures below zero, in regions so elevated, has only to be felt once to be forever dreaded.

The rarefied atmosphere was taking its toll of everybody. Everyone complained of feeling light-headed and leaden-footed with splitting headaches and feelings of nausea. Some of the porters were convinced their last day had come. Despite heeding the advice he had been given by more experienced travellers on how to counteract mountain sickness — to eat dried apricots, leeks and onions and to rub his animals' gums with garlic — Goes began to suffer from a splitting headache and breathlessness. With this went nausea and depression. Words became a prodigious effort, as though intruders, too, must conform to the eternal silence of the roof of the world. Even experienced hunters who pursued game into the higher reaches of the mountains could become 'giddy' and so lose their way — and their lives — through breathing the 'heavy air'. Even the imperial eagle was unable to wing itself to the topmost pinnacles: its wings grew numb before it could reach them. The ascent had been particularly tough for the horses because of the rarefaction of the air. They had to exert themselves to their uttermost. Quite a few died in the effort. Often they would stop to gasp for breath. Despite all the care of their owners, the horses often fell from exhaustion and were unable to rise to their feet. They had to be abandoned. Before the Parwan pass had been negotiated many of the train animals had perished, owing to the difficulties of the terrain, the inclement weather, the rarefied air and the almost total absence of pasturage.

Goes and Isaac crawled into their tent, which was soon surrounded by high ramparts of snow. They wondered if they would be buried alive. But it was impossible to sleep. They both complained of headache and nausea and breathlessness. As the night wore on, other symptoms developed: a continued singing in the ears, deafness, a quickened pulse, a lower temperature than normal. Goes could plainly feel his heart beating violently. Towards morning the headache became unendurable. To this was added nose-bleeding. The Jesuit Brother could well be forgiven for thinking to himself that if priests had to endure all this suffering to reach Cathay, no wonder the Cathayans were a long-deserted Christian people.

They waited till the sun warmed the air before venturing out of their tent. Their eyebrows were white with frost, their eyelashes also frozen. Goes would often waken with his moustache frozen hard from the respiration that had passed over it. To prevent this he would put his fur coat over his head and breathe through the sleeve. A shower of ice flowers and long sharp icicles fell on them from the roof as they clambered out of the tent. The poor horses which had spent the night in the open air hung their heads dolefully and tried to scrape away the snow which cracked and crackled like parchment in the frosty air every time it was touched. Far below them they could hear the water gurgling and gulping with a clear metallic sound.

Before them was the glacier, desolate in the grey light, an ascending, undulating, corrugated torrent of ice criss-crossed with crevasses and fissures. The foot of the glacier was nothing but a wasteland of rocks and scree and boulders. From the foot the glacier looked like a tempestuous sea that had frozen over, caught between huge rocks of stone and ice. They roped up to one another because of the hidden crevasses. They picked their halting steps over a desolation of scree into a wilderness of boulders. They struggled up the great rock cliffs that flanked the glacier. Up they went, slowly and

doggedly, up through the spurs and seracs and stalactites, over humps of rock and ice, between pinnacles. On they pushed, struggling not only against the foul weather but the hanging glaciers and ancient moraines and detritus slopes that confronted them. The piled cumulus above them showed no evidence of bringing the tortuous journey to an end. Always another ridge of snow, spread-eagled between jagged quoins, rose to present a further, discouraging, challenge. The sun and the hours moved on timelessly. They finally emerged into a world of black and white. Here they could travel only by night, when the snow had caked and its glitter been thrown to the stars, laying down strips of cloth across the ice to steady the ponies, lurching crassly behind through insidious moraine and the dripping snouts of glaciers.

Long coils of cloud, swirling like smoke, hung across a crimson backcloth. The track mounted up to the last summit by an endless series of zig-zags, putting their animals' strength and climbing powers to the severest proof. At length they reached the flat expanse of snow which marked the top of the pass, safe and sound, with their baggage intact. They had made it. No more spines and ridges, no more promontories and buttresses, no more slippery ledges. Al Hamdulillah ('Praise be to God') they all cheered. Goes and Isaac knelt down and chanted the Magnificat:

> "My soul glorifies the Lord,
> My spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.
> The Almighty works marvels for me,
> Holy is his name!
> His mercy is from age to age,
> on those who fear him."

The spot where they rested was shut in on every side by snowy crests, their heads melting into the clouds, with bare, black pinnacles protruding here and there through their mantles of snow, their flanks glistening with snowfields of a dazzling whiteness. They crossed the

pass by night, prancing in triumph above the tumbled stars. Moving in single file, through starlight, through coldness, over icy shale, they reached the end of the escarpment, where they pitched their tents. Goes had never seen stars glitter with such matchless brilliancy in the deep blue heavens. Presently the sovereign of the night, a full moon, rose with dazzling majesty and slowly dimmed the stars which had only just before glittered so brilliantly.

The next day the great wind of the night had dropped and the caravan began the slow descent.

In the distance could be seen jagged rock faces of mighty peaks, islanded in a thick churning sea of cloud, their peaks climbing above the garland of cumulus into a world of clear blue sky. The impression of height of the snow-covered mountains on either side of them, more than 18,000 feet, was to a large extent discounted by their own elevation, just above 13,000 feet. For close on fifty miles the eye could see unhindered, and even beyond could pick out the bold icy pyramids towering to 21,000 feet and more. Below them great white seas of cloud folded and unfolded. On occasion, through a hole in the sea of cloud, they would get a sudden glimpse of the valley, thousands of feet below them, basking in sunshine. At the valley bottom the route was one continuous marsh of melting snows which made progress wearisomely slow. Gradually the caravan made its way through the snow-mountains of the Hindu Kush, where the Hazara (Kezareh) tribes lived, on the passes beyond Parwan, to Ahingaran (blacksmith's village, present-day Jaram), a journey of twenty days.

Another fifteen painful stages brought them to the secluded mountainous district of Kalcha (Calcia), the land of the fiercely independent, freedom-loving, Kalcha tribes who live close together in villages scattered throughout the secluded tracts north of the Hindu Kush. The meaning of Kalcha in their language is 'a hungry raven forced to retire into the mountains to live'. Goes described the Kalchas as having "blonde hair and beards, like the Flemings". These people with the fair hair, red

beards and blue eyes practised strict endogamy — they would only marry within their own tribe.

Goes was now able to write his diary again. The freezing cold of the Parwan Pass had made the writing of notes most trying. He would often have spangles of ice on his hair and beard and from his nose — very red — a sort of vapour issued which would at once condense and drop on to his notebook, punctuating what he was writing with small pieces of ice.

Steadily the bare mountain slopes became covered with gorse-burnished gold in the strong clear sunlight and with patches of a sort of heather, luminously purple. In ten days they reached Aliabad on the Kunduz river, a tributary of the Oxus, where some Indian Brahmins had the right of exacting a customs levy granted to them by the King of Bokhara. From Aliabad they journeyed to Khanabad, which stood on the banks of another tributary of the Oxus. The country resembled the delta of a large river, moist and generally unfavourable to human life. They marched through thick jungle grass, often knee-deep in water, the wet, brown earth squelching underfoot. The rivers of mud were so deep they often reached to the bellies of the mules. The clinging, stinking slime would later have to be scraped off with sticks. As they advanced, a veil of mist seemed to appear before them. But as they reached the gauze-like screen it would disappear and appear again further ahead. The vapour cloud was obviously some kind of marsh miasma. Clouds hung low about the mountainsides and the course of the Khanabad river could be traced by the heavy masses of fog that hung over its surface.

They did not stay long in Khanabad, with its poorly constructed fort around which a few hundred mud-built houses congregated. At least they were able to make sure that the provender-bags of the horses and camels were not empty.

In fifteen days, emerging from the hills, they reached the entrance to the Talikhan plain. The woodland sound of bird-song and the gentle sea-murmur of the breeze in the treetops was a welcome change from the ear-splitting

roar that had persecuted them for weeks. They crossed the plain, a distance of about ten miles, and reached the town. From Parwan to Talikhan they had journeyed about two hundred miles. Talikhan, fifty miles east of Kunduz, on the road between Balkh (Wazirabad) and Badakshan, had once been a town of importance but was now a wretched village of a couple of hundred mud hovels. The trees that had once adorned the town's gardens were now withered. Talikhan had a proud history. For six months the fortress of Talikhan had held out against Genghiz Khan and his Tartar hordes. But when he did take the town the savage conqueror left not a living soul of the garrison, nor one stone upon another.

At Talikhan Goes struck the route of Marco Polo three hundred years earlier. The great Venetian explorer writes this of his journey from Balkh to Badakshan via Talikhan:

> Here is told of a land called Taican (Talikhan), where the mountains are of salt.
>
> Leaving the city of which I have spoken (Balkh), one rides for as many as twelve days between north-east and east without coming across a single dwelling, for the inhabitants have all taken refuge among the mountains, in fortresses, on account of brigands and armies that cruelly harassed them. There is plenty of water, and there is plenty of game, and there are lions too. One can procure no provisions during those twelve days, and so travellers must take with them food for themselves and for their horses.
>
> At the end of the twelve days' journey, one reaches a town called Taican (Talikhan), where there is a great corn market. It is a very fine district, and the mountains to the south of it are very large, and all made of salt. (Other mountains in the district abound in almonds and pistachios, in which there is also a great trade.) People come from all the country around, to the distance of thirty days' journey, to fetch that salt, which is the best in the world. It is so hard that it can only be gathered by using great iron picks. And I assure you there is so much of it that the whole world would have enough till the Day of Doom.

> Leaving this city, one journeys for three days between north-east and east, always traversing fine lands with numerous habitations, and rich in fruits and corn and vines. The people worship Mahomet. They are wicked and blood-thirsty. They indulge in prolonged drinking bouts, for they are fond of drinking, and have excellent boiled wine. They wear nothing on their heads, save a cord, some ten palms long, which they coil round it. They are excellent hunters, and take a great deal of game. They have no other clothes than the skins of the animals they take in the chase, which they tan and use to make clothes and footwear. All of them know how to tan the skins of the animals they catch.

Going on to describe the people of Badakshan Marco Polo wrote:

> They are excellent archers and hunters. They dress for the most part in skins of animals, for cloth is scarce with them. The great ladies of the nobility wear trousers such as I will describe. For a pair of trousers, or rather drawers, those ladies use as much as sixty, eighty, or one hundred ells of cotton cloth, which they pleat. This they do to make their buttocks appear big, for their men delight in fat women.

At Talikhan they were detained for a month by a rebellion of the Kalchas. The Kalchas had risen in revolt against the King of Bokhara, who claimed descent from Alexander the Great, and were engaged in pillaging and plundering the neighbourhood. The governor of the town told the merchants of the caravan to come inside the town walls where they would be safe from the Kalcha insurgents. The merchants replied that they would happily pay toll and proceed on their way by night. The governor absolutely forbade their proceeding by night. He pointed out that the rebels had no horses but they would soon procure four hundred of them by attacking the caravan and thus be in a position to wreak even more havoc on the local populace. He invited the merchants to rather come into the town and help him drive off the rebels. The captain of the caravan protested. During the ensuing argument, news came of an imminent attack by a column of the rebels. The bragging

governor and his men took to their heels, leaving the merchants to their fate. The merchants hastily made a circular fortification with their baggage and carried into the enclosure as many rocks as they could lay their hands on, in case they should run out of arrows. The rebels thought better of a direct assault and sent a deputation to inform the merchants to fear nothing, for the rebels themselves would escort and protect the caravan. The merchants were not disposed to put any trust in the insurgents and after holding counsel together decided to flee into the adjoining woods, leaving their goods to the mercy of the thieves. As soon as the merchants fled, Goes and Isaac with them, the rebels rushed forward, overturned all the baggage and looted whatever they wanted. The robbers then called the merchants out of the jungle whence they had fled and gave them leave to retire, with what remained of their valuables, into the empty city walls. Goes was lucky. All he lost was one horse. And even that he later got back in exchange for some cotton cloths. (Goes carried with him a stock of coarse clothes to barter with, whether for his horse with the rebels, as on this occasion, or for food with inhabitants of deserted regions.)

The caravan followed the ancient trade route up the Oxus Valley to Badakshan. At Teshkan, fifty miles east of Talikhan, they were again attacked by robbers. They only escaped total annihilation by paying a levy on their merchandise. The caravan stayed in the town in a state of great apprehension, for fear of a general attack and massacre of all of them by the rebels. The town was under the rule of Abdulla Khan, King of Samarkand, Burgania, Bokhara and other adjoining kingdoms. But the local power was in the hands of the rebels, who had the caravan and its merchants at their mercy. It was only a last minute message from the Khan that saved the merchants from massacre. A certain leading chief, Olobet Ebadascan, sent his brother from Bokhara to warn the rebels that they risked merciless retaliation by the Khan's army unless they let the merchant caravan pass. Reluctantly the rebels agreed, meanwhile plundering as much of their captives' baggage as possible.

The caravan moved on. But the rear continued to be constantly harassed by pilferers. In the course of the journey Goes, riding a little apart from the column, or perhaps trudging manfully alongside his lagging beast, laden with his wares, dropped behind. Or it could have been a call of nature that prompted Goes to halt. One always liked privacy in such matters. But in a caravan it was a privacy one seldom got. Everyone would just sit around, lower their trousers or open their 'flies' and do their business under their large enveloping sheepskins.

For whatever reason Goes became separated from the others, he was immediately set upon by four bandits. They thundered up in a cloud of dust raised by the galloping hooves of their horses. He was outnumbered and out-armed. Only quick thinking and presence of mind could save him. To distract their attention he snatched off his head the richly-embroidered and costly Armenian turban he was wearing, a precious stone in its centre glistening in the bright sunshine. Folding a pebble in it to give it weight he hurled it at his pursuers. Their horses came to a halt and then changed direction as the bandits made a dart for the jewelled turban. They began to quarrel and squabble over the turban as each tugged at it with ferocity, as if they were playing *baiga*, a mixture of rugby and wrestling on horseback. *

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* This was the famous, though dangerous, pastime of the Pamir Kirghiz. A he-goat would be decapitated. It would be hurled at the feet of an honoured guest. Then, out of the clouds of dust raised by the flying hooves, a hundred horsemen would descend upon the carcass, trying to gain possession of it as if it were a bag of gold. Holding fast to their saddles, the riders would lean over towards the 'prize' as they swept past it. In the disarray of shouting men, whinnying horses and clouds of dust, some would fall off their mounts, expert horsemen though they were, and be nearly trampled under foot. Others would cling under their horses' belly as they rode past. All grasped at the carcass, tugging and pushing and hauling in the wildest mêlée. There were no rules: you could pull at another man's bridle, strike his horse on the nose, or even drag him out of his saddle. To add to the enormous confusion some men joined in with yaks with sharp horns.

While the bandits fought over the turban, Goes set spurs to his horse and put it into an unaccustomed gallop. Soon he was a bowshot clear of his furious pursuers and was able to rejoin the comparative safety of the caravan.

For eight days they trod a precipitous tight-rope path sheer above the upper waters of the Oxus, worming a way, like the river, through tourniquets of rock. Huge boulders of coarse, crystalline rock, which overhung the river, threatened at every moment to topple down the precipitous banks. It was the middle of October when the caravan finally succeeded in reaching the upper course of the Oxus, known today as the Amu-darja, which divides the North-Eastern province of Afghanistan from Russia. In this country of chasms and precipices roamed the Kirghiz, a predatory tribe, swarthy and rough-hewn as totems, who twice launched an attack, seized the best beasts of the caravan and then disappeared among the rocks. The caravan would only escape these raids by entering an even more desolate region, winding a trail up the Ak-tash river, past the last clumps of red willows, towards the plateau of the Pamirs, a hundred-mile bulwark, between twelve and fifteen thousand feet high, which separated western from eastern Asia.

Since firewood would be scarce in the high Pamirs they halted and cut down, or rather dug up from under the snow, as much fuel as their already jaded animals could carry. Whenever they could they also gathered the sheep's and camel's dung, which, when dried, were good sources of fuel.

After eight days of travel over unimaginably bad roads, they reached Tengi Badakshan, the 'straits or defiles' of Badakshan. The word Tengi means a 'troublesome way'. A fearfully narrow path, allowing only one person at a time to move, ran at a great height above a deep and rapid river — the Padsh or Amu-darja, the principal watercourse of those regions. The fast-flowing river had cut itself a bed with almost vertical banks of rock. Such places were absolutely impassable, except to the native inhabitants, the resourceful and

ingenious Tajiks. There were places above some of the torrents where these people had driven wooden pegs into the sides of the vertical crevices. With the sureness and nimbleness of monkeys, they clambered up the sheer faces, from peg to peg, even with heavy loads lashed to their backs. They showed remarkable skill and dexterity in making use of every jutting piece of rock, every ledge and cornice, every crack and chink in the precipitous cliff wall.

Such places were ideal for ambush and, sure enough, the inhabitants, assisted by the very band of soldiers supposedly escorting the caravan, attacked the merchants and stole three horses from Goes. He was later able to redeem these with a few small presents.

Slowly they descended through graduated levels of life, pine-clad heights, thick low scrubby bushes, long grass and wildflowers, hog-tracks, coveys of partridges and finally the mud hovels of Badakshan. Badakshan was a well-watered country of glens and green turf. Its rubies and sapphires were prized by the princesses of three continents. No one was allowed to prospect for these minerals without the king's permission. Nor could anyone take the jewels outside the kingdom. Anyone doing so forfeited not only his goods but also his life.

Goes and Isaac were somewhat surprised, but nonetheless delighted, to hear Persian being spoken. Many of the inhabitants of Badakshan were Tajiks. They were a numerous people, diffused over an extensive area of the country, both north and south of the Hindu Kush. They were a handsome people of Aryan/Caucasian stock and spoke the Persian language. The women were particularly beautiful, with their soft skin and exquisitely proportioned features. Their long hair, which they never cut, was braided into several plaits which reached right down their backs. They all wore intricately embroidered hats tied to their heads with vivid scarves. Beneath their skirts they wore trousers tucked into their boots. The men's sheepskin hats, with woollen rims, were equally colourful. The children, often caked in dirt and sometimes dressed in rags, wore trousers with no seam

around the groin joining the two legs of the trousers. No doubt this made for ease in going to the toilet — there was no need to pull down trousers — but as the temperatures were sub-zero in winter they must have been very hardy children!

Most of the Tajik owned large fields of sheep, goats and yaks, besides many horses and donkeys. Here, as everywhere, the donkey was used for every purpose of drudgery. Some of the Tajiks lived in houses constructed of sun-dried clay and stones and covered in with flat wooden roofs, in the Persian style. Others lived in circular tents (or *yurts*). The common grain was wheat. Some pretty young, unveiled women, their eyebrows conspicuously marked, brought Goes and Isaac some excellent wheat-bread, for which Goes gave them some cloth.

The bread was baked on large earthenware ovens sunk into raised platforms which stood over charcoal fires. Reaching through an aperture in the top of the oven, a slab of dough was placed against the inside of the oven, where the dough would stick because of the heat. When the dough had risen it was peeled off with a long fork and skilfully manipulated through the small mouth of the oven. Some other women rode past merrily on yaks on their way to collect fuel, their long black hair almost matching that of the yaks. They were dressed in scanty rags and it made Goes shiver just to see them braving the snow falling on their coppery brown bare necks and bosoms.

They halted here for some days. In view of the difficulties of transit of the past few weeks and rigours of the way ahead — across the Pamirs — Goes decided to purchase some yaks. The yak is an amazing animal. It will graze at ease on mountains, grunting all the while like a pig. Hence their name 'grunting oxen'. It will run and jump agilely in and on places which ordinary cattle would avoid. They made a splendid sight, their fine heads surmounted with arched horns, their thick black hair reaching almost to the ground, the animals almost disappearing amid an immense mass of wool. Just as

well they wore bells round their necks. In the evening, at a given signal, they came docilely together around their stable.

In one day's march they reached the frontier town of Charcunar (*Char-chinar* = 'the four plane trees'). Here torrential rain detained them for five days out in the open country. They suffered not only from the inclemency of the weather but also from the unabated molestation from robbers, not to mention the insects.

They entered the Wakhan valley, formed in the folds of the hills by the erosion caused by mountain streams. The valley formed the natural ascent to the Pamir passes, over which lay the shortest route connecting with the oases of Eastern Turkestan. At an altitude above 8,000 feet, it was a cold, barren mountain-valley, populated only here and there with scanty settlements. The nearer one got to 'the roof of the world', the more lonely and inhospitable became the landscape. As Goes himself wrote: "This stretch of land is a favourable haunt of highwaymen, who lie in wait for the caravans, plunder them and sometimes kill the travellers themselves."

They soon were to feel the ferocity of the *Bad-i-Wakhan* or wind of Wakhan, piercing, noted throughout all Badakshan for its severity. Occasionally, during summer, it lulls — or 'goes to sleep' as the Uzbeks would say. The Wakhanis, like the Uzbeks, spoke figuratively. If you inquired the distance between two places you would be told, for example, "while soup is preparing you may go this distance."

The red willow and white poplar appeared to be the only trees which could stand against the blast of the *Bad-i-Wakhan;* and even in sheltered situations there were but few fruit-bearing trees.

The massive steep mountain Sakrithma faced them. None but the stoutest of horses — and men — could face the ascent. The rest had to go by an easier more circuitous route. Here two of Goes's mules went lame. The servants wanted to abandon them, but finally they were able to catch up with the others.

Chapter 13

Across The Pamirs

Continuing in the footsteps of earlier travellers like Marco Polo through Badakshan, the caravan slowly made its way over gently rising ground to the formidable Pamirs. On the borderlands between East and West Turkestan the earth's crust is thrust upwards into a lofty plateau or mountain-knot of gigantic dimensions. From it radiate some of the most stupendous mountain-ranges in the world, eastwards the Kuen-lun, south-eastwards the Himalayas, and between these two the Karakorum Mountains, stretching into Tibet. From the same elevated region the huge ranges of the Tian-shan branch off towards the north-east, and in the opposite direction, towards the south-west, the Hindukush Mountains. The traditions of a dim and distant antiquity declare that the four sacred rivers of Paradise, mentioned in the Bible — the Oxus, the Jaxartes, the rivers of Yarkand and Kashgar, and the Gilgit branch of the Indus — had their origins in these sublime altitudes. The people of High Asia, such as the Wakhanis, revere the Pamirs, calling them *Bam-i-Duniah* or 'Roof of the World', the highest plateaux on earth, regarding them as the coign of vantage from which the towering mountain giants look abroad over the whole world. It is not surprising that the local people viewed these mountains with superstitious awe. They had stories of dragons supposed to dwell among them who would issue forth at times in the shape

of clouds raining hail and fire. Looking at the towering peaks it was not too difficult to understand why old legends made these mountains the enchanted strongholds of wicked kings, full of wonderful treasures. From Pamir, the ground slopes away in every direction except to the south-east, where similar plateaux extend along the northern face of the Himalayas into Tibet. Rather than a plateau this 'roof' is a rather irregular succession of bare ridges and high level valleys, which extend over immense distances between the long ranges and reach the height of Mont Blanc. The snow-covered mountains which rise in every direction render the name 'plateau' incorrect.

The Pamirs consist of two sharply contrasting regions. The western half consists of a system of latitudinal mountain chains, disposed parallel to one another. The people here are Tajiks. The eastern half is principally a plateau land. The inhabitants of the plateau region are almost entirely Kirghiz.

Unlike the Tajiks, who are a settled population, the Kirghiz are nomads. They acknowledge no man's sovereignty and pay no tribute to anyone. Their wealth consists of flocks of sheep, yaks and camels. As the seasons change they move from one pasture ground to another. Hence they naturally prefer to live on level stretches of plateau rather than in deep narrow glens and steep mountainsides which are typical of the western half of the Pamirs. They would spend summer on the higher slopes of mountains, and in winter, when the cold and the wind drive them from the mountains, they would seek pastures in the valleys.

The supreme test of endurance for the caravan was to come with the crossing of the Wakhir pass, 16,100 feet above sea-level. They were on the roof of the world, in the very centre of Asia. The only other living beings were the wild sheep of the mountain crags, the wolves and snow-leopards which prowled over the snowy wastes and the black imperial eagle flapping its huge wings as if they were too heavy for its body.

The flocks of *arkhari* (wild sheep) and *kiyick* or *tekke*

(wild goats) gazed in stupefied amazement from their lofty pasture grounds at the intrusion of their privacy. But the most impressive animal was the *argali* wild sheep, with great curling horns — the Ovis Poli — named after Marco Polo who wrote: "From these horns three, four and even six palms in length, the shepherds make big bowls from which they feed, and also fences to keep in their flocks." The horns and bones of these sheep are also used to build cairns to serve as landmarks for travellers in the snowy season. There was also another kind of wild sheep — what the Kirghiz called *rass* — but with straight, spiral horns.

Wolves were a constant menace, not only to the few human beings who lived in such a desolate region but also to the wild sheep. In hunting the wild sheep the wolves displayed remarkable craft and intelligence. Having enclosed the sheep in a wide ring, they would begin to howl, so as to make their presence known, and gradually close in upon their prey. When they got near enough, they would cut off two or three of the sheep and force them to take refuge on a narrow, outjutting crag, from which there was no return except into their jaws. If the crag was too steep for them to scale it, they patiently waited at the bottom until the wild sheep's slender legs became numbed from sheer weariness, and they would roll down the precipice into the jaws of their ravenous persecutors.

On their climb up the Pamirs the caravan often passed skulls, still adorned with their huge curled horns: the sole remains of wolves' feasts. They also found the corpse of a man who had perished in a *buran*. But the horse he had been riding had been entirely devoured by wolves.

The caravan slowly began the steep ascent to the last resting point below the Wakhir Pass, where a patch of flat ground free of snow was obtainable at a height of 14,000 feet. Mist and low clouds hid the head of the Ab-i-Panja valley. The track climbed steeply up the left side of the valley. The horses clambered up one after another in a long string. It seemed impossible that man

Ovis Poli

or animal could ascend the incredibly steep path. Every minute the horses kept stopping to catch their breath. Soon they had ascended so high, they could hear nothing of the raging torrent below except a soft murmur. Slowly they zig-zagged their way up, forwards then backwards, squeezing through the narrow passages between the heaps of mountain detritus. The voices of the men urging on their horses and shouting warnings to one another echoed shrilly among the hollows of the precipices. The mountain horses or ponies of the local people were truly wonderful little animals. Their ordinary load was about 90kg. With this load on their backs they would climb like cats up the steep slopes; and although the narrow, slippery mountain-paths were generally coated with ice, they would balance themselves along the edge of precipices with incredible sureness of foot.

The path became steeper and steeper. Sometimes it was so steep, it would require several men to push the horses up. The latter part of the climb was tough and dangerous. The path became smothered under innumerable landslips and avalanches. Some of them had carried down with them in their fall vast quantities of earth and debris, so that they did not perceive them until the horses suddenly dropped up to the girth in the soft and treacherous ground.

Presently the path became paved with ice-slides. The ice flew to pieces with a sharp cracking sound as it was struck by the horses' hooves. The horses were led by local guides. But despite this care, one of the horses slipped. It made frantic efforts to recover its feet. But it was in vain. The animal slid down the slope, turned two or three somersaults through the air and crashed into the jagged upright rocks which jutted up from the valley below. The bags it was carrying burst, scattering merchandise everywhere. Shrill shouts pierced the air. The caravan came to a halt. People rushed down by the nearest side-paths. Some Kirghiz were able to fish out some of the merchandise as it was bobbing off down the torrent. Some others encouraged the horse to try to get up. But it lay in the water with its head jammed against

a large fragment of rock, and was unable to respond to their exhortations. The Kirghiz pulled off their boots, waded out to it, and dragged it towards dry land. But it was wasted labour. The poor brute had broken its back; and after a while it was left lying dead in the middle of the river.

Men cleared away the ice with spades and axes and then strewed sand over the place. The animals were led gingerly over this dangerous place, one by one, with every precaution for their safety. Those riding dismounted and traversed it on foot. The first ice-slide was merely the forerunner of others, which now followed one another in quick succession, each more perilous than the last. They walked and crept and even crawled on their hands and knees, heads down like an animal sniffing a trail, beside the black abyss yawning for their prey. And all the while the merciless, blinding wind which snatched the breath away, hurled itself at you in a frenzy, trying to dislodge you from your hold. You crouched and gripped tight — and prayed. A fall in any of these places would have meant instant death. Each horse required two men to get over these places: one to lead it by the halter, whilst another hung on its tail, ready to lash it if it stumbled or slipped. Notwithstanding this, several of them did fall; but luckily they managed to recover their feet. One fell and slid several yards down the snowy slope, but fortunately stopped in time. Its pack was loosened and carried up the path; the animal was helped to get back, and its load was once more lashed tightly on its back.

One ice-slide they encountered was so difficult to cross that the horses could not by any possibility get over it loaded; accordingly the Kirghiz unloaded them and carried the baggage across on their own backs. Gigantic ice-slides rushed down the mountainside with such overwhelming force and momentum — anything living which had the misfortune to be buried under it would have been literally frozen fast in the middle of a block of ice as hard and as vitreous as glass. Once clasped in that icy embrace, a man would be hopelessly doomed. But in all probability the unfortunate person who was thus swept away would be

stunned by the fall, and would freeze to death before his consciousness returned.

The snow was now a foot deep, completely hiding the loose debris underneath, so that even the Kirghiz ponies stumbled. They took it in turns to take the lead, each man forcing his horse to struggle on till exhaustion brought it down in the snow, where it was allowed to lie and recover whilst the next horse ploughed forward.

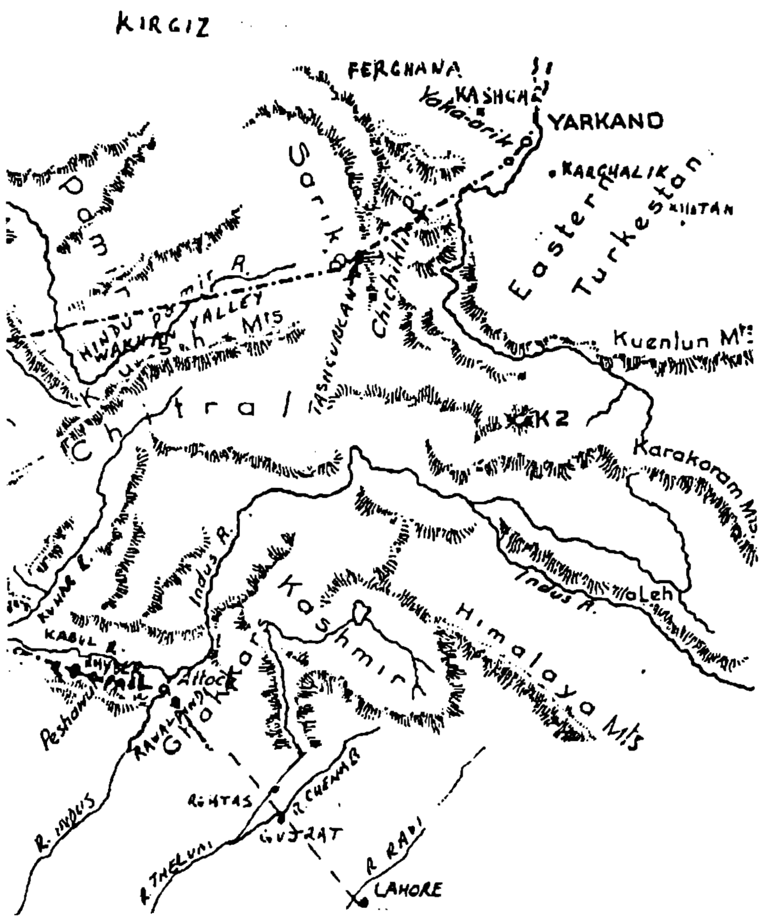
Avalanche succeeded avalanche at short intervals. Almost every horse in the string fell once, some of them twice; and as they were unable to get up again in the snow with the loads on their backs, the baggage had to be taken off them and then lashed on afresh.

One of the horses plunged down a steep snow-slide and rolled into the river. They followed down after it and were able to drag it out. They unloaded it and hauled up the *yakhtan* by rope. These *Sart* (Pamir) *yakhtans* were a kind of wooden box, covered with leather, so constructed that they could be conveniently slung on an animal's back like a pair of panniers.

The light was grey and murky for the low, dense, heavy masses of thick dark cloud which had been sulking on the mountain tops descended. Soon they were enveloped in a driving snowstorm. Everything was hidden from view. One couldn't see where one was going. One of the guides went ahead and sounded the depth of snow with a long staff, as sailors do when navigating unfamiliar waters. But there was this difference: whereas sailors aimed to avoid the shallows, the guide sought them, and for the firm ground underneath them. Several times other guides dropped out of sight altogether in the snow, and had to crawl out, and try again in another place.

As they got higher it got colder and colder. Goes hoped his winter wardrobe of sheepskin coat, fur cap and waistcoat would be sufficient. As they ascended, the air got thinner and thinner. Breathing came with difficulty. Everything possible was done to avoid unnecessary exertion. If one walked one could only go a few paces and have to stop from exhaustion. The only

ACROSS THE PAMIRS



Map of across the Pamirs

way to conserve energy was to ride, but that was out of the question. The horses, panting and gasping, could barely move themselves.

The only riding animals that could make their way in these high glacial regions were the yaks. But even the slight exertion of getting on a yak caused violent palpitation of the heart and almost choked one with breathlessness. On a yak one could ride up to a very considerable altitude without suffering too much discomfort. In spite of their clumsy, heavy bodies they never stumbled or slipped. Their agility was amazing. They would scramble up icy slopes several feet high, often having to scrape out a step before getting a foothold. One moment the heavy animal would balance himself on the sharp edge of a rock; the next he would jump over a yawning chasm and somehow manage to get a foothold on the opposite side. At other times the yak would pull himself together and with rigid, immovable legs proceed to glissade down a precipitous slope where a two-legged being would come to grief. Riding a yak was no enjoyment: it was like riding a wild-west bronco. Often one had to fling oneself backwards till one's back touched the back of the yak, and constantly one had to adjust one's balance to the yak's unexpected, but agile and dexterous, movements. It took time and practice before one felt thoroughly at home in the saddle. In spite of the undeniable good points of the yak, riding one was a trial of patience by reason of its absolute sluggishness of temperament. The yak was guided by means of a cord drawn through the cartilage of the nose. All the same the animal went pretty much his own way, no matter how strongly his rider might protest. It is very exhausting goading a yak in the direction you want it to go. It is his wont to march doggedly, with his muzzle close to the ground, breathing so hard you can almost imagine your ears buzzing with the sharp drone of a steam-saw tearing its way through timber some distance away. To any application of the whip he is absolutely insensible, whilst he looks upon a moderate blow as a sort of caress, and answers it with a cheerful grunt.

The yaks, grunting and panting, with their blue tongues hanging out of their mouths, passed on at their own phlegmatic pace. But even for them the going proved too much at times. They would stand stock-still, notwithstanding the cudgels of the guides who beat a tattoo on their ribs.

The day had been fine. Then, in the afternoon, light clouds like smoke scurried swiftly up the mountainside before the north wind. The inevitable gale sprang up, this time accompanied with hail. The hail-stones rattled on the ice and when they began to sting them in the face, they were compelled to take shelter under overhanging rocks, and wait. The hail was followed, as usual, by torrential rain. It was only after a wait of some hours that they were able to proceed.

Often it snowed the whole day, heavily and ceaselessly. The whole landscape would be enveloped in dense clouds of blinding, driving snow, as fine as flour, so that not a trace of mountain or the valley lying far below them, could be seen. It was dark, cold and gusty on the inhospitable mountain. Soon everything was blanketed in white. One couldn't see the path ahead. A party of men had to be sent ahead to search out and mark the right track. The unladen yaks that were specially trained to do the work of snowploughs, shovelled a passage through the snowdrifts with their horns and foreheads. But with the snow hiding the boulders, the progress of the yaks was very slow as they, too, floundered hopelessly. The men, pushing ahead, first in single file for short distances and then returning each time to the baggage, managed to drag the laden yaks on, three or four men helping each animal.

After a continuous snowfall, enormous avalanches were frequent, carrying down boulders and debris with them. Every now and again one heard the crash of an avalanche falling from the ice-mantle, or, more frightening, the dull crack of a new crevasse forming.

That night was bright and still and the snowfields gleamed silvery white in the moonlight. The tent was anchored with strong *arkans* (camel's hair ropes) to some

boulders. The Kirghiz had banked up a wall of snow all round the tent outside. The animals were thrown up in dark, sharply defined relief against the white snow, their heads drooping low, silent as the boulders they were tied to. Every now and then the yaks ground their teeth against the fibrous pad of their upper jaw or crunched the snow under their feet as they changed position. The men sat crouched under a block of gneiss, listening to a mullah reading out aloud from an old book of tales. When the fires made from dried yak-dung, called *tesek*, died out the Kirghiz doubled themselves up in a kneeling posture, with their heads on the ground, enveloped in their fur coats, crowded round the dying embers like bats in winter.

It was a long wearisome night which seemed as if it would never end. No one could sleep. Perhaps just as well. Generally, sleeping in intense cold at a very high elevation engenders drowsiness and finally sleep from which one never wakens. No matter how closely they drew their knees up to their chins or crept together in an endeavour to keep warm, it was impossible for mere physical heat to do battle against the penetrating cold from outside. And one couldn't draw too close to the Kirghiz. The Kirghiz were seldom the sole occupants of their furs or felts. As the night wore on, the winds increased. So did the headaches and the altitude sickness.

Next morning the yaks were standing where they had been left the evening before, motionless as statues. In regions which to all appearances are completely barren, the yak is able to find mosses and lichens which it licks from off the rocks. The yaks licked up the snow in large mouthfuls. The wind whipped up the snow in clouds like dust and tore at you with invisible frenzied hands. The icy wind took away all desire to ascend to still higher regions. Indeed, two of the yaks went on strike and delayed the start so much that they had to be left behind. The constant avalanches, violent windstorms, and furious hurricanes of snow took their toll of men and animals. Everyone felt ill and depressed. The air was

so rarefied it was almost impossible for any living creature to breathe. Goes later recorded how "both men and beasts felt oppressed beyond endurance and gasped for breath". Five of Goes's horses had already collapsed and died owing to exhaustion and severe cold and lack of heat and fuel — and air. It was difficult to cook anything. The rarefied atmosphere meant water boiled at a much lower temperature. The fires gave off little heat. It was easier to live just off a paste made of flour and snow-water. It took all of Goes's strength of will not only to overcome his own depression but to lift the spirits of his disheartened servants and encourage them to stay the course. They had reached the foot of the pass. They were now on the final lap — the ascent to the pass.

Black clouds poured down from the peaks like smoke spewed from the mouth of a volcano. The glacier pointed its icy finger down the valley. The glacier issued from an enormous couloir. The moraine was strewn with gigantic boulders. A violent snow-storm was raging in the pass. A day earlier and they would have been crushed under an avalanche, or annihilated by a *buran* (snow hurricane). The Mohammedans, many of whom were convinced they were going to die, fell on their knees in the snow and prayed to Allah to vouchsafe them a safe journey through the dreaded pass. In the Pamir passes the snow hurricanes were wont to sweep down upon the unsuspecting traveller out of a perfectly cloudless sky.

They had hardly gone a few hundred feet higher when some men fell down from exhaustion and headache. They were soon dead asleep in the snowdrifts. They had to be forced to get up. The temptation was always great to lie down. One would soon forget one's pains and anxieties in a long heavy slumber — from which one never woke up. They followed a lateral moraine to the tongue of the glacier. They staggered through a confused jumble of pyramids, ridges and huge fragments of ice — like icebergs — all greatly weathered. From an overhanging ice-sheet, icicles dripped thirty feet down. The ice groaned and cracked; stones and boulders rattled down into the gaping crevasses. Streams

A fatal fall

assembled on their way down to the glacier river and fell in cascades. They spurted out from the top of the glacier wall in fountains and cataracts, the fine spray taking on all the tints of the rainbow. They fought through the wilderness of rock and snow: there were always more rocks to climb, another ledge to crawl along. The icy wind hurled itself at you, blinding you, roaring at you, suffocating you, cutting through you. And it was intensely cold; your badly chapped hands could feel nothing.

There were bound to be accidents. Just a few steps away and one would fall down an abyss on to the blue ice that sparkled as bright as steel 1200 feet below. The danger was aggravated by large blocks of stone higher up rolling down upon them. Time and again there were slips and falls. One piebald stallion stumbled, rolled some 1000 feet down into an abyss, broke its spine and died on the spot. A yak was more fortunate. It put its forelegs through the deceptive snow and fell into a hidden crevasse. But it very carefully lodged its muzzle on the other side and managed to scramble up again.

On the final ascent, dragging their ponies and yaks and camels, many of which slipped or succumbed, they pulled themselves up by hand and foot over the outflung caves of the Roof of the World. They finally reached the summit of the pass. It had taken them ten days to reach Serpanil or Sir-i-Pamir, 'the head or top of the Pamir'. The ridge was as sharp as a knife. An angry and icy wind from the north, in a last desperate effort to beat back intruders, penetrated their sheepskins and fur caps and felt boots. At the very highest point of the pass stood a mound of stones. It was the burial cairn of a Mohammedan saint, decorated with the religious offerings of pious Kirghiz — *tughs*, sticks with rags tied round them, pieces of cloth and horns of the wild sheep and antelope. The Mohammedans sank to their knees on the snow, and thanked Allah for having delivered them safely. Goes and Isaac, too, were not slow to offer up their thanks. And even the elements seemed to share in their final deliverance. Beautiful white cirrus clouds

Near the top of the pass

floated across the contrasting turquoise steel blue wintry sky. They had left the clouds of blinding snow behind them. So great was their altitude, there were no birds to be seen. They were alone in a world above the clouds, in an immensity, immeasurable, that had been there since the beginning of time and would be there to the end. The mountains in their immensity and immutability filled them with a sense of smallness, of insignificance, of human frailty.

But if the ascent had been tough, this was nothing compared to the descent. The glacier leading down was littered with dazzling white moraines. One had to clamber on hands and feet between the sharp projecting buttresses of rock. The horses could never have managed to get down loaded. But the loaded yaks seemed to enjoy the situation, flinging themselves down the steep declivities, diving like otters through the snow. In places the guides had to hew steps in the snow and ice with axes, before the horses could be coaxed down. Each horse was cleverly piloted down by two men one leading the animal, the other holding on to its tail, so as to act as a brake if the horse should lose its foothold. In parts it was possible just to slide down over the snow. They were pleased to leave the barren wastes of snow, rock and detritus behind them. Before them extended a view wonderfully impressive in its stark barrenness.

They journeyed for six weeks across the broken steppe country of the Pamirs, broad, level, waterless valleys, bounded by low mountain chains, rounded and greatly worn. The table-land of Pamir was as high as Mont Blanc, 15,600 feet high. They might have left the snowstorms behind them. But not the sandstorms. Sandstorms and duststorms were not rare in the Pamirs. The prevailing westerly and south-westerly winds carried extremely fine particles of soil and sand with them — 'yellow snow' as it was called, causing *burans* as exasperating as any they had met with white snow. The view in every direction was unlimited. The atmosphere was so pure they could see mountains, among the loftiest mountains in the world, glittering in their silver

mails of snow and ice far away. But so high was the tableland, the mountains seemed mere hills. Unknown, unnamed lakes were frozen over. The only living creatures were the occasional lynx and sheep grown thin in a vain search for vegetation. On the slopes, bare of snow, a trail of skulls, skeletons, and droppings marked the way. The odd roots and dung served as fuel for fire that yielded a pale, flickering heat. And even though the *argal* (dry dung) gave off a pestilential smoke that was little discomfort for the heat it provided.

Then more and more herds of camels and yaks and flocks of sheep came to dot the pastures kept moist by the melting of the snows above them. In parts the snowfall had been unusually heavy. The snow covering the ground had been over six feet, instead of the usual three, and so yaks had for weeks found it hard to find their accustomed grazing. The losses among the yaks, which form the most valued stock of the Kirghiz, had been very heavy.

Dotting the vast flat table-land of the Pamirs were the circular black felt tents, called *yurts* (or *Khirghas*) of the nomadic Kirghiz. They were clustered in encampments, called *auls*, of a dozen or so. Savage sheep-dogs guarded their flocks.

A couple of big grey wolves could easily carry off a yak calf. So the Kirghiz had to exercise the greatest watch on their flocks. Every evening the sheep and goats were driven to the *aul* to be milked; they were then shut up for the night in large fenced-in folds, guarded by the fierce, long-haired dogs. Whenever a dog barked during the night a man would hurry to where danger threatened and by loud shouts hope to frighten the wolves away. The Kirghiz sheep-dogs could see the wolves a mile away. But they were frequently outwitted by the wolves, who would hang about a flock for weeks at a time, patiently yet persistently spying out for a favourable opportunity to seize prey. The wolves were bloodthirsty, murderous beasts. If by chance they alighted on an unprotected flock they would kill every single sheep in it, leaving not a single animal alive. A Kirghiz reported that quite

recently a single wolf had, in the course of one night bitten to death 180 sheep. But woe betide the wolf that had the misfortune to fall alive into Kirghiz hands. They would force open its mouth, thrust a short thick piece of wood between its jaws and lash them all firmly together. A heavy piece of wood would be fastened to its feet to prevent its escaping. Then they would torture it to death.

The Kirghiz people were tall, with harsh, weather-worn faces darkened and wrinkled like old leather by constant exposure to wind and snow and sun. Their features could have been hewn out of wood. Their prominent cheekbones, and oblique, narrow eyes betrayed a Tartar affinity. The men all wore beards and coarse moustaches. Those who could afford one carried a scimitar in a black scabbard which hung from a belt tied round their felt-lined *khalat* or cloak. They wore brown skin boots of felt and untanned leather and brown turbans. The women wore big, white, turban-shaped, head-dresses. They are a blunt-speaking, but very hospitable people, speaking Turki in a high-pitched guttural voice. The active life which the Kirghiz lead in the open air hardens them to such an extent that as a rule they live to a very great age. The *aksakal* or chief of one of the Kirghiz villages they passed through was aged 96. The word *ak-sakal*, which means 'white beard', was used with affectionate respect, as a mark of dignity.

A typical *yurt* consisted of one or a few wooden poles supporting a thick felt covering.

Dogs were never allowed into the tents. Mohammedan Kirghiz looked on the dog as an unclean animal: the very dust on its feet would pollute the inside of the tent. The floor of the tent would be covered with gaily coloured felt rugs. The household utensils would comprise a *kazan* or a large iron cooking pot, a *chumuch* or a ladle or spoon, eating tools made out of the horn of wild-sheep, *tabak* — flat, wooden dishes, iron or copper cans with handles and lids — and a *kapak* or gourd for holding water. There would also be a loom, a kneading trough, a corn-sieve, hatchets, sacks for storing corn and

Group of Kirghiz from the eastern Pamirs

Kirghiz mother with her boys

flour, a cradle, iron stands for the cooking pot, pokers, etc. And occasionally a *kaumass* or a three-stringed instrument played with the fingers. Most important of all was the steel *chakmak* for striking a fire.

When a Kirghiz family moved, two or three yaks or camels were sufficient to transport all its belongings.

The Kirghiz lived chiefly on yak's milk and mutton *chisslik*. Yak's milk (*kaimak*) was thick, sweet, yellow, with a flavour of almonds, and quite delicious. The yak's milk and ordinary milk (called *sut*) were kept in goat-skin bags. *Kurut*, a kind of cheese, was a most indispensable article in the food of the poorer people. Their soup, whether of beans or of wheaten flour, was always flavoured with it. Once or twice a week a sheep was slaughtered, while the Kirghiz prayed '*Allah akhbar bismillah errahi man errahim*' ('God is great. In the name of God the Merciful, the Righteous'). Before the flesh was cold it was plunged into melted snow which filled the cooking pot.

In daily life the women seemed to do all the heavy work: they pitched and struck the tents, they wove the carpets, and the yarn, they milked the yak-cows and goats, they tended the sheep, the children and the household. By contrast the men did little, sitting round the fire all day long, or at most driving the yaks to and from the higher pastures. The women wore distinctive large head-dresses, and the children were cute, with their round, red faces, running about with coloured caps on their heads.

The animals of the caravan took every advantage of the lush green pasturage available on the Pamirs. Marco Polo had written of it as "the finest pasture in the world: a lean beast will fatten in ten days." The nourishing qualities of the grass were evidenced in the productiveness of the ewes, which almost invariably brought forth two lambs at birth. The flocks and herds of the Kirghiz roamed over the greasy hills of the rich pasture. The fat tails of the sheep bumped up and down as they walked. In good times food (lanolin) is stored in the sheep's tail which is then fed back to the animal in

the lean times of winter. The yaks, bedecked in red and white tassels attached to their ears, were scattered near the mountainsides.

Kirghiz men rode among the hundreds of sheep and yaks or brown Bactrian camels. Because the men were wrapped in such huge sheepskin coats it looked as if the camels had three humps instead of two. In addition to the sheep, in flocks from four to six hundred, and the yaks, that roamed the steppe, so too did the wild asses (*khulans*). And various kinds of antelopes. Nearby the wolves lay in wait for them. But the antelopes were on the alert. The leader of the troop kept glancing keenly about him and as soon as they scented danger, off they went with a swiftness that was fairly astounding. They cleared the ground in long rapid leaps, and so lightly, they hardly seemed to touch the earth. The *teshikan* or small rodents, bobbed into and out of their holes.

Often the caravan would pass a cairn made out of stones and the horns of wild sheep, built on the side of the path for the purpose of guiding travellers when the snow obliterated the road. Wherever the horns were heaped in large quantities and disposed in a semi-circle, a Kirghiz summer encampment was not far away. The numerous skeletons of horses and of human beings also served as milestones during the summer months.

After a journey of twenty days, crossing the Pamir wilderness — a cloud world of dull, continuous grey — they reached the province of Sarchil (Sarikol), a small mountain district, in which a number of fairly thickly populated villages spread themselves along the Tashgurkhan river. The survivors of the journey had reached the eastern edge of the Pamirs. Facing them were the barren, transverse ridges hiding the Turkestan plain and Yarkand, their destination. Here again the people were tall, with fair hair and blue eyes, whom Goes compared to the Flemings. They marched a further forty miles down a wide open valley to Tashgurkhan, the last half of which with an icy biting north wind blowing in their faces.

At Tashgurkan — a shifting collection of *kirghas*

(Kirghiz tents) — they halted for two days to rest their jaded animals, before entering the glacier pass of Chichiklik (Checkalith), leading to a high, almost level plateau. The Chichiklik Maidan, 15,000 feet high, was shut in by mountains and swept by continuous snow-storms. Progress in the gorge became increasingly difficult owing to the confused mass of boulders choking it and the steepness of the rock slopes on its sides. At several points the baggage had to be unloaded and carried by porters. In another two days they reached the foot of Mount Chichiklik. They began to climb the high pass of Chiltung. At 14,000 feet they reached the detritus slopes leading to the plateau or *Maidan.* Snow covered the route. Unladen yaks had to be pulled and driven ahead through the soft snow to beat down a tack along which they battled for six days in the face of a glacial north wind. The weather was abominable. They were forced to spend no less than six nights in the open, exposed to the vindictive elements. Each morning they would awaken to find some of their party frozen to death. Others perished in the snow-beds and drifts. Others fell victim to frost-bite and exposure. The toll in animals was huge. Hsuan-tsang, a Chinese traveller who passed this way in A.D. 642 on his way to visit Buddhist shrines in India, had commented that "both during summer and winter there fall down piles of snow, and the cold winds and icy storms rage." He had also related an 'old story' how once a great troop of merchants, with thousands of followers and camels, perished here by wind and snow. A saintly man of Sarikol was supposed to have collected the precious objects left behind by the caravan, and to have built with the proceeds a hospice for the shelter of travellers.

They finally reached the desolate, snow-swept plateau. It was curious to find at that height an almost level plain, about two and a half miles long from north to south and over a mile across, bordered all round by snowy ridges.

The descent proved longer and even more difficult than the climb up the pass. Eventually they reached the

deep-cut defile, appropriately termed *Tangitar* — 'narrow gorge', belonging to the kingdom of Kascar. A thunderous roar reverberated between the perpendicular walls. In the cavernous depths rushed the Tangitar river which came from the Chichiklik plateau and joined with the Sarikol river to pour their joint waters into the Serafchen or Yarkand river. The path wound down the face of the almost vertical cliffs, being protected on the outer or river side by a breastwork of stakes and poles latticed together with withes. The *Kafila* followed the bed of the river which had forced itself a channel along the level of the Tarim basin between close-lying overhanging rocks. If there were a sudden rush of flood-water in the defile the precipitous rockwalls would leave no escape. The river bed was dotted with huge boulders and deep pools. The spray rose in clouds as the water smashed into any obstructing boulders. It was in this defile that Hsuan-tang's precious elephant, brought all the way from India, was lost in the raging waters during the confusion caused by an attack of robbers. The huge masses of water plunged on their way with such violence and momentum that the ground shook under their boots.

They decided to cross the *Tangitar* where there seemed to be something like a ford. It was a very queer feeling, moving into the turbulent current, not being able to see the bottom, nor yet knowing whether it was covered with loose gravel or big cobble-stones, whether it was deep or shallow. For safety sake Goes kept his feet out of the stirrups. It was absolutely imperative to keep to the ford. Only a few paces away the cliffs closed in upon the river and drove it plunging down a cataract. Each packhorse was taken through the ford by two mounted men who held themselves in readiness to whip it on if it happened to heel over. Many horses came within an ace of losing their foothold in the deep, swift current. The Kirghiz yaks carried the baggage safely across. The party had to cross and recross the *Tangitar* several times, disputing with the swollen current the only passage between vertical rockwalls.

Goes later recorded the hair-raising crossings of the Tangitar:

> "Our progress became more and more difficult. A hundred, a thousand times, we slipped up on the round, wet stones. Again and again we had to cross the stream to make headway along the gorge which is only a few yards wide. The air was as cold as in a cellar. We were often obliged to relieve the mules of their loads and to lead them along the more difficult passages."

Then came disaster. On one of the many crossings of the *Tangitar*, Isaac the Armenian, his faithful servant, fell off the high bank, into the freezing water, and was swept away by a sudden flood. Goes rushed ahead and at the next gorge, as though from a wild beast's foaming jaws, wrested the limp, bleeding body of his friend and dragged him to the bank. Binding up his wounds and lighting a fire from *teresken* faggots, Goes tried to coax the unconscious Armenian back to life — he lay as if dead for eight hours till Goes's efforts at resuscitation finally brought him back to life. But there was no question of moving him. The caravan moved on. It was really a question of survival of the fittest. If you couldn't keep up, you were left behind. And many of the merchants would have liked that. They had for long cast covetous eyes on Goes's goods. Goes stayed with his friend through the evening.

Then the light gave out. The mountains, the ravine, everything, darkened. The whole place took on a ghostly, fearsome aspect as the desolation of nightfall crept down from out of the murky, grey sky. The rock faces glared dark and cold and menacing. The splashing of a mountain torrent as it plunged over rocks at the foot of the gorge sounded like mocking laughter. It was bitterly cold; the more so as he had wrapped Isaac in some of his own sheepskins. His teeth chattered. The wind howled, broken by the occasional interruption of the jackal. The wolves, too, were there, baying. He hoped the fire would keep them away. Please don't let it rain! he

prayed. He squatted down on his knees, Kirghiz fashion, with his back to the wind. But he wasn't a Kirghiz; he couldn't sleep. It was impossible to get warm. He moved his fingers and toes constantly to prevent frostbite. He kept swinging his arms around himself and placing his hands under his armpits. Above the tiny space left by the high vertical walls of the gorge, he could see one or two stars in a cloudless sky, oblivious, indifferent, to their predicament.

After the most miserable of nights the two struggled on next day and eventually caught up with the caravan. It was so cold he couldn't remove his turban: ice had fixed the turban to his hair.

For another fifteen days they battled on in their abominable journey till at last Yakkarik came into view. The mountains began to decrease in elevation till they were little more than hills. Threading their way between bare and much eroded rock spurs they made their way down towards the plains of the Tarim Basin. Clumps of wild poplars, with their tall, straight stems and spreading crowns of foliage, and patches of brushwood, growing near the banks of the river, tempered the barrenness of the hill slopes. Willows trailed long strings of green beads to the water. As the valley descended and widened the green of cultivated fields became more prevalent. People were threshing the harvest. This was a simple operation. Corn was spread out on the ground, and ten or so oxen, harnessed abreast, went round and round a pole in the middle, treading out the grain as they did so. The fields of maize, wheat and barley were only sown every other year.

After two days' march they reached the oasis of green fields along carefully irrigated terraces, shaded by white poplars and mulberry trees. They were among the modest mud houses of the Turki cultivators. The initial stares gave way to curt monosyllables and then phrases of welcome. The physique and ways of living of these people showed a falling off from the standards prevailing among the hardier Kirghiz of the Pamirs.

They exchanged their yak transport for ponies. Many

animals had been lost on the journey. Goes himself had lost no less than six horses from fatigue and exhaustion. Many of the horses were galled on the back. He was now desperately short, not only of animals but also of provisions.

Five days later, early in the morning, Goes left the spent caravan at Yakkarik and set off for the fertile oasis of Yarkand, a flourishing trading centre and capital of the Kingdom of Kashgar. From here he hoped to send fresh horses and provisions to those he was leaving behind.

The snowy ramparts of the Mustagh-Ata range shone with all their brilliance in the clear light. Veils of mist wreathed some of the summits. Willows and poplars lined the dusty road. The country was criss-crossed with ranges of low hills of sand, clay and conglomerate. It got warmer as he rode eastwards — towards the Takla Makan desert. This was a pleasant change from the freezing cold he had had to endure for the past few weeks. For many miles he rode alongside the high loess banks of the great Yarkand river, which filled a single bed about a quarter of a mile wide as it wound its sinuous course across the steppe and later desert towards Cathay and China, finally losing itself in Lop-nor. Presently the *shamal*, a steady north wind, not only blew in his face but churned up blinding clouds of dust and sand. The dust storm grew in intensity. He found it hard to keep on the right track. There was no one around to inquire the way. When the dust storm and dust haze cleared he could pick out some of the oases of east Turkistan, surrounded by sand and gravel.

He passed through villages, each a cluster of several houses, with courtyards, and surrounded by cultivated fields. Hempseed, sesame, rice, maize and cotton were being harvested. So too was *djugara*, sweet *sorgho* or javary, the stalks of which contained a sweet juice. He saw neither yaks nor camels, only cattle, donkeys, horses, sheep and goats.

He now had to cross the Yarkand. He noticed that further on, where the river spread out, there was a ford

over which laden donkeys were making their way. The *suchis* or water-men, waiting on the bank, advised Goes not to attempt the ford because the slippery, mud bottom would make it unsafe for horses. The *suchis*, dressed in wide swimming drawers, and each with a *tulum* (inflated goatskin) tied round his chest, offered to ferry him over. While his horse was swum across the river, guided by a *suchi*, Goes gingerly stepped into the 'ferry' or *sal*, which consisted of several goatskins lashed together.

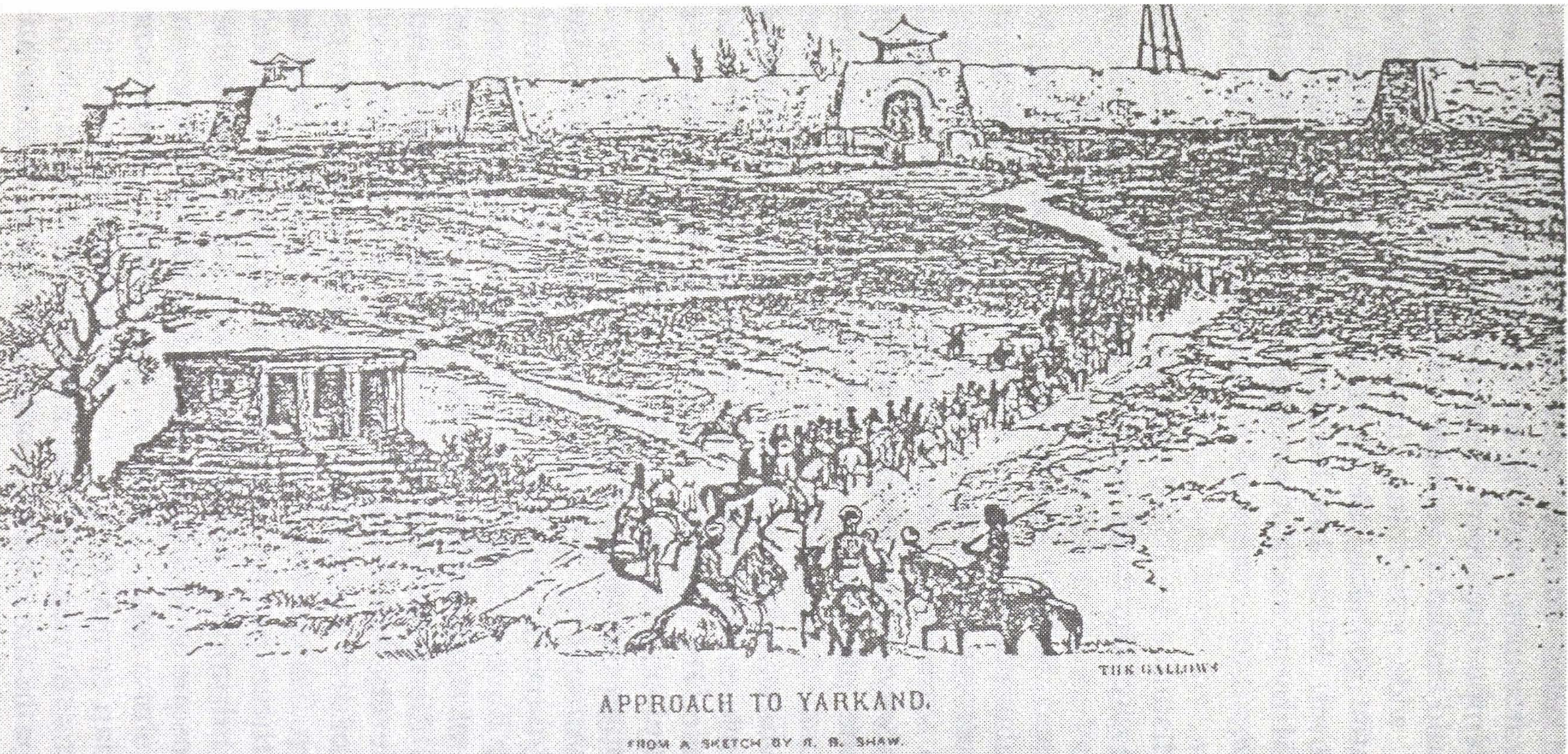
In the distance he could only just make out the high walls of the city; the walls were of the same colour as the ground.

He passed through orchards of apricot and apple trees. But alas it was too late in the season to taste their luscious fruit. Outside the city wall lay the cemetery, every tomb surmounted by a small dome. In Yarkand pestilence always rages in the summer. The sun was still high and the place gave off the offensive smell of the charnel house.

The town was surrounded by a thick wall, built of sun-dried bricks, fifty feet high and seventeen miles in circumference. He crossed one of the bridges built over the specially dug moats, over twenty feet deep. He passed through the counter-fort which guarded the gate.

The town was a typically rural place, abundantly filthy, its streets narrow and dusty. He would occasionally have to stand by to let a caravan of camels or a string of donkeys laden with small casks of water, amble past. Along the dusty road swarms of beggars and cripples of every kind begged for alms. He noticed, too, that many of the population had huge tumorous lumps as large as a fist on their adam's-apples. He was later to learn that these people suffered from *boghak* or goitre, caused by drinking polluted water. He passed the Registan mosque with its minaret, an unusual feature in that part of Asia. Nearby were the *madrasas* (Mohammedan seminaries).

Goes was struck by the number of Indians who seemed to be in the city. He could have been back in an



Approach to Yarkand

Indian city! He made for the *Urda-Aldy-Soka-Kul*, the quarter where the Hindus and Kashmiris lived. He found himself a place in the Indian caravanserai. The caravanserai was the usual gaunt, square, mud-walled sanctuary built around a central open space where the animals were sheltered. A pillared verandah ran along each side of the square. Despite their primitiveness the *serais* at least provided sanctuary. There was a rule that whoever succeeded in entering a *serai* was safe at night, no matter what had taken place outside. Blood enemies would share the sanctuary in peace and safety. The principal inhabitants of the caravanserai were half a score of hardy Hindus from Shikarpar and Hoshiapur, importers of cloth by way of Leh, Kara-Korum, Shahidula, and Yarkand. But their chief business was money-lending. Where in the world, Goes wondered, would one not find an Indian moneylender! By exacting exorbitant rates of interest they had so completely got the people into their power, that the greater portion of the proceeds of the harvest flowed into their pockets.

In the town were also Afghans who had their own *serai*. There were Baltis, too, from Little Tibet, who hired themselves out as labourers, especially as water-carriers. The Badakshanis had their own quarter and also their own elder — the *aksakal*. These mainly carried on trade in Kashmir slaves of the mountain Tajek tribes of Chitral and Wakhan.

Having recuperated from their arduous journey and having received the supplementary supplies and provisions sent by Goes, the caravan followed Goes to its final destination, Yarkand, but very much reduced in numbers. It was the end of November 1603. It was three months since they had set out from Kabul.

Chapter 14

Delayed At Yarkand

Goes had reached Yarkand thirteen months after he had set out from Agra. Yarkand, the capital of the kingdom of Kashgar, was where the caravan from Kabul stopped and disbanded and a new one was formed for the next stage of the journey to Cathay. Goes looked forward to reaching his destination soon.

He rented a house for himself and his party in the congested city, bursting with numerous merchants trading in all kinds of commodities. Yarkand was one of the great stopping points and emporiums on the long trade route between the west and distant Cathay and China, two or three months' journey to the east. From the east would come silk, cosmetics, medicines, aromatics, fragrant woods, porcelain, musk, rhubarb, etc. To the east would go principally jade, an expensive form of marble. Also the locally grown oval-shaped seedless grapes, sold as raisins as far away as Peking.

What the Chinese also treasured were ostrich eggs. Supposedly the ostrich was first introduced into China in the seventh century. Ostriches were known as 'great sparrows' or 'camel birds'. Also in great demand were dwarfs, gathered from all over Asia, as jugglers, dancers, actors and entertainers.

The house was much the same as any other — built of mud, low, flat-roofed and surrounded by a wall. In the walled open square courtyard was a water basin, shaded by a few trees, a stable, and a small garden.

Main Street and Market-place, Yarkand

The Bazaar Yarkand

Goes began looking round the town and the shops in search of suitable purchases for the next stage of his journey to Cathay.

Just inside the city wall, to the north-east of Yarkand, was the *Nevrus-dung* (New Year's Hill), which gave a splendid view of the city — the Palace, near the Khotan gate, the Registan mosque with its minaret, the Charsu market-place in the centre of the town, the hub to which all the main streets led, the Chinese quarter with its up-curling roofs, quaint shops and painted dragons. All the shops, taverns, serais, and market-place were situated in the chief street leading from the gates of Altyn-darvaseh to those of Kabagat. New Year's Hill was crowned by a minaret which consisted of nothing more than a platform or roof supported on some wooden *puttars*. From there was seen the first glimpse of the new moon which marked the end of the Ramadan fast for Mohammedans.

The town was a maze .of dark, sinuous alleys linked to golden bazaars. A bazaar was held every evening at seven o'clock, by the light of flaming oil-lamps in the street that ran from the Registan mosque to the reservoir of Naz-Hodja-Kul. The street resembled an interminable tunnel, lined on both sides with stalls and stands, with their thatched roofs, each supported by a slanting pole. There was also the weekly bazaar-day when stalls and wares were brought out of the houses and arranged on platforms built in front of them. Veiled women sat at their stalls or in the open squares with baskets of fruit and vegetables at their feet. Others just sewed. Not all the women were veiled. Some just wore a small round coif or calotte on their heads. But they might just as well have been veiled, for they were not particularly blessed with good looks. Some were incredibly ugly; they were all dirty. A popular pastime seemed to be removing ticks and lice from each other's hair. They wore their black hair in two, long, thick plaits. Doing a brisk trade were the water-sellers, selling their precious liquid from large earthenware jars. Bakers had their wares on display. The refreshment stalls were full. And the barber-shops were

not exactly idle. In the midst of all the general din and hub-bub and shouting, a string of camels majestically filed past with total unconcern. To protect the bazaars against thieves at night, night-watchmen sounded three strokes on a drum every minute. The Chinese quarter had its own bazaar once a week — on a Friday. There was also a 'flea' bazaar where second-hand clothes were on sale.

The bulk of the people were Turki, some fair-complexioned. The men were well-built and strong. They farmed in desultory fashion, and occupied themselves in rearing sheep, yaks and donkeys. They were peaceable and lazy, enjoying nothing so much as music and song. Smoking hashish was a common pastime. The men were unashamedly unfaithful to their wives. Marco Polo had earlier commented on a strange custom they practised:

> "If a man is married and must leave his wife to go on a journey, so as to remain absent more than twenty days, the wife, as soon as he has set out, takes another husband; this she may do with impunity, as it is their custom. The husbands, too, wherever they go, can take another wife."

The only call to discipline of the inhabitants at this farthest outpost of Islam was the call to prayer. Five times a day, like iron granules under a magnet, they were compelled to prostrate themselves south-west towards another town in another desert.

The men seldom reached a great age. The women were generally weak and owing to early marriage (at twelve and even ten years of age) were subject to various chronic illnesses. At fifty, women looked as old and withered as seventy or eighty-year-olds in other countries. The population lived in dread of small-pox. An epidemic would decimate the population and drive away the panic-stricken survivors. The entire population suffered *boghak* (goitre). There were illnesses, even epidemics caused by drinking infected water. People drank the same water from canals and reservoirs in

which they washed their clothes and dishes, performed their ablutions and toilet. Legend had it that one day a holy man by the name of Saleh Peygamber was travelling through Yarkand when certain thieves stole his camel, cut its throat and dumped its carcass in the river. The holy man solemnly cursed the entire neighbourhood, swearing that the inhabitants would be cursed with *boghak* till the end of time. Ever since the river had been polluted by the dead body of a camel, the Hindu inhabitants of the town only drank water from wells and so were not affected.

Another prevalent infection was a bad and very painful sore-throat, called *gorkak*. There were no adequate remedies. People had only superstition to resort to. Spiritual exorcists called *peri-bakshis* were often called in to effect healing. They were also called in at childbirth and by sick women, the women being generally more superstitious than the men. The *peri-bakshis* were usually big, bearded men, dressed in long white *chapans* or cloaks. Each carried a drum of very tightly stretched calf-skin on which he would tap with his fingers, and beat with the flat of his hand, occasionally pounding it with his fist. The sound was deafening and was believed to drive away the *peris* or evil spirits. The woman certainly became distracted by the noise and so tended to forget her pain. The hunting falcon was also believed to have such powers of exorcism. These *gush-bakshi's* (falcon exorcists) would let a falcon loose in the room where it would fly around and, according to local belief, drive out the evil spirits.

The inhabitants of Yarkand were particularly afraid of thunderstorms. When the horizon was clouded, all the *ahunds* with their pupils walked out on the terraces of the mosques and read a prayer or *knut* in a loud voice; they ascribed to these prayers a power of propitiating the threatening heavens. The cause of this intense apprehension of an ordinary phenomenon was attributed to the circumstance that the earth, after a fall of rain, became covered with salt, which destroyed their harvests

and also because their houses, being built of mud with flat roofs, in the event of a heavy fall of rain, were entirely destroyed.

One day Goes was walking down one of the dusty roads. He politely greeted the *Kazi* who passed him in his loose flowing robes. The *Kazi* was the religious magistrate, parading the streets about the bazaar, reminding everyone that it was Friday, the Mohammedan weekly day of rest, when all believers must assemble in the mosque and perform the ceremonies and prayers ordained in the Koran.

Shortly afterwards there was a commotion ahead of him in the street. Goes meant to stop to inquire what was happening but before he could do so he was almost knocked under-foot as men and women rushed down the street past him, shouting and crying. Before he could collect his senses a huge man armed with a leather thong started belabouring him about the head.

"Take that for neglecting your duty," said the enraged man as he landed another blow on Goes.

"And that for not believing," added another as he lashed at Goes with his whip.

By now Goes was surrounded by some other of the *Kazi's* satellites. These men paraded the streets, beating those they found in the streets, absent from the mosque. The beatings were intended to obtain pardon for the recalcitrants for their neglect of their religious duties.

"But I do believe," protested Goes.

"Then why weren't you in the mosque?" another replied.

"But I am a different believer," Goes protested again.

This brought down further anger and whips about his head. It was hardly the place or time for a theological dispute. He fled in the direction of the other recalcitrants and soon got lost in the bodies fleeing from the *Kazi's* henchmen.

Yarkand, city of one hundred mosques, was one of Islam's bastions. Mohammed Sultan, a direct descendant of Genghis Khan, and a former governor of the city, was a zealot for the Faith. If a person did not wear a turban

or a woman her *chador* (veil) a horse-shoe nail was driven into his or her head.* In no time at all the whole country was converted to Islam. Mohammed Sultan had now succeeded his brother as king of Kashgar and transferred the seat of government to Yarkand.

It soon became daily gossip in the bazaars that an Armenian *Rumi*, a Christian, not a follower of Mohammed, had arrived in their midst. (After thirteen centuries the Mohammedans still identified people from Armenia as the Roman neighbours of the Parthian Empire.) This angered the fanatics. How could anyone in his right senses not be a follower of the Prophet? In his letter of 2nd February 1604 to Father Xavier in Lahore, Goes mentioned the excitement created in the city by the news of the arrival of the Armenian *Rumi* who did not follow the Law of Islam. Not only excitement but harassment. One day he sat down with a company of Mohammedan merchants at a dinner to which one of them had invited him. A fanatic burst in, sword in hand, and pointing his weapon at Goes's chest, demanded that he instantly invoke the name of Mohammed. The Jesuit Brother replied that no such name was invoked in the law which he professed and so refused to do so. Fortunately for Goes the horrified bystanders came to his aid and the zealot was ejected.

On another occasion a man who was regarded as a saint by the local people accosted Goes, pointing a knife at him. He demanded that Goes acknowledge Mohammed and the Faith or lose his life. He boasted that he had slain many who denied the Prophet and the Koran. Islamic law pardoned and even condoned those who maltreated and even killed followers of the Christian faith. The bystanders said to one another that it must have been revealed to the holy man in a vision that he would be doing God's wish by slaying this infidel. Again Goes refused and merely smiled at the threats and violent abuse. This infuriated the man even more. Just then some foreign merchants who were with Goes took

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* Tarikh-i-Rashdi. Translated by Sir D. Ross. p. 58.

The King of Kashgar

the knife from the man, who went away swearing oaths that he would have the Christian merchant's life.

Increasingly Abdullah Isai needed all his ingenuity and caution to extricate himself from many a delicate and dangerous situation. He decided he might as well take the bull by the horns and visit the highest authority in the kingdom. He went to the King to pay his respects, taking with him gifts, a pocket-watch, one large and three small mirrors, a silken cloth to spread on the royal dais, a white cloth with coloured stripes, three loaves of sugar, and some sweetmeats. The King was pleased with the gifts. But the people of the court were amazed: they could not understand how a man of obvious intelligence could follow any law but their own. Next day one of the King's captains called on Goes in his lodgings and demanded to see what goods he was carrying. In Goes's baggage he found a breviary and a richly ornamented cross, both of which were suspect in the eyes of Mohammedans. The captain asked what they were. Goes said that the book related to the Gospel of Jesus, and that the cross was the emblem of the Christians and was a representation of that on which the Son of God died to save the world. The captain wanted to take these things to the King; but the Jesuit Brother persuaded him not to take them away, and begged him to say nothing about them to the King. The captain promised that he would disclose nothing; but the moment he reached the palace he gave an account of all that he had seen.

A day or two later Goes was summoned to the palace and ordered to bring with him the book and the cross. In compliance with this order Goes set off. He was ushered into the Court, where he found the King sitting resplendently on a throne, surrounded by beautiful silk Khotan rugs and carpets and embroideries, designed in elaborate geometrical patterns and harmoniously blended colours. Vases and bowls of jade and agate and pink quartz added more colour to the room. Numerous gentlemen and lords of the Court, all of whom wore long beards which gave them a very venerable appearance, tended on the King. Goes made his obeisance: bowing he

greeted the King with the *taslim*, touching the ground with his right hand as he said '*As-salam alaikum*' ('peace be with you'). One of the King's ministers replied '*wa-alaikum as-salam*' ('on you also be peace').

Goes was asked what faith he professed, whether that of Moses, or of David, or of Mohammed. He replied that the faith he professed was that of Jesus, whom they called Isai.

The King asked to see the book. With great reverence the Jesuit Brother drew it from the covering in which he had carefully folded it, and having kissed it, placed it on his head, the whole court watching him attentively. Then a courtier came forward, to take it and hand it to the King. Before entrusting it to him, Goes again kissed it and placed it on his head, and the courtier on taking it did the same, as did also the King when it was put into his hands. When he opened it, the King was astonished to see how small the letters were, and yet so perfectly formed. He asked the Brother if he could read the book; and on his saying that he could, he told him to read some portion of it aloud. The first passage on which the Brother's eye happened to fall was the antiphon which is sung on the day of the Ascension of our Lord, "*Viri Galilei, quid statis aspicientes in coelum.*"

Goes intoned the words in a loud voice. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking in the sky? The Lord will return, just as you have seen him ascend."

Goes was overcome with emotion. All those hardships — cold and hunger and thirst and abuse, and dangers — from robbers and dust storms and snowstorms — had all been worthwhile. Here he was in the very heart of Islam, speaking to them about another Lord. He was so moved the tears fell from his eyes. Observing his emotion, the onlookers too were moved. They asked him to tell them the meaning of the words he had recited, and the Brother, rejoicing at the opportunity thus given of proclaiming the name of Christ in the presence of the unbelievers, discoursed to them on the Ascension, on the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost, and, in particular, on the coming of Christ on the Day of Judgement.

Then opening his breviary at random again, Goes read the psalm Miserere mei Deus, which he also briefly explained.

> "Create in me a clean heart, O God,
> and put a new and right spirit within me.
> Restore to me the joy of thy salvation
> and uphold me with a willing spirit.
> O Lord, open thou my lips,
> and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

The Jesuit's words made a great impression on the people assembled at the Court; they looked at one another in open-mouthed surprise.

When asked to exhibit the cross, Goes drew it forth, and kissing it with great respect said addressing the King, "Sire, this is the symbol of the Christians; and when we pray we place it before us." The mullahs asked him to which quarter the Christians turned when they prayed; and he answered, "They face whatever direction they please, for God is everywhere."

The mullahs then enquired if Christians used ablutions. He replied they did, but not as they did — attending only to the washing of the body — but as spiritual washings, cleansing the conscience, for mere outward ablutions cannot profit the soul if the heart is full of uncleanness. His answers caused bewilderment. The theologians began to dispute the matter and although forced to admit the truth of his last statement, tried to convert him to their Faith.

The King sent many times for Goes. On one occasion he showed him a number of manuscripts. Among them were some that were very beautifully illuminated and inscribed in round characters of a red colour. The King asked what these were about. Finding that they dealt with the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Goes commenced to speak on this subject, emphasising the unity of God, and dwelling on His greatness and omnipotence; how all things that we see depend upon Him, and He on nothing; how He was the beginning of all things, though

all things are in Him; and other matters of a like nature. The Moors were again deeply impressed by the Brother's words, and said one to another, "Are these the people we call Kaffirs: men without a law? Their knowledge of God is no less than ours!" And the King said, "Surely it is a *Mullah* who is speaking."

Soon afterwards the chiefs among them took counsel together saying how excellent it would be if this man could be forced to accept the law of the Prophet; it would be a pity if a man so worthy of respect should be condemned to suffer the pains of Hell. Some of them resorted first to kindness, then to cunning, and lastly to an open display of force to compel him to recite the *shahada*, the short creed of Allah and his Prophet. But Goes was steadfast. Some of the mullahs conceded there was little chance of converting Goes. What is the use of pursuing this path, they said. You may strike him on the head with a sledge-hammer, but do not think you will make him abandon his faith.

There was one of them, however, who made the affair his own, and used every means he could devise to carry it through, until one evening Goes went to see him in his house, and said to him, "Sir, why do you take all this useless trouble? You do not understand that my law is the essence of my being. If it is my property you want, you know where it is to be found, and you have only to go and take it. Or here is my body, which, if you like, you can tear to pieces. In either case I shall count myself fortunate." After this, the mullah abandoned his purpose, and never spoke of it again.

On another occasion Goes was sent for by Mirza Ghyas, the King's chief minister and a very powerful lord, who asked many things about the Christians and their ways. Goes answered all his questions, telling him of their customs, and of the Christian practice of self-examination which greatly surprised him. One of those present, out of concern for Goes's, eternal salvation, asked him to repeat with him the salutation to Mohammed, so that he might be saved, for there was nothing else he needed. He then began, with much

fervour, to intone the *kalimah* and was much disconcerted to find that the Brother did not join in his prayer. The other Moors ground their teeth in anger, and a tumult arose, in the midst of which a sword was called for. In no way discomfited Goes turned to Mirza Ghyas and in a calm voice said, "You ordered me to come to you, and I am here under your parole. By replying courteously to your questions, what injury have I done you?" This answer seemed to appease the anger of some of the Moors and some even praised Goes for his steadfastness.

The fearless and blameless life of the Jesuit Brother gained him the affection of many of the merchants. "Never before had they known an Armenian like him."

It was because of the respect in which Goes was held that one day a merchant who had come from Moscow approached Goes, gesturing urgently in obvious distress. Goes had noticed that this Russian merchant sometimes made the sign of the cross. The Russian led the Portuguese to his house, where his son lay seriously ill. He signalled that Goes should do something for the boy. Goes examined the boy but found that he was past any remedy, even if a remedy could be had in Yarkand. He placed his breviary on the boy's head, hung a cross round his neck and prayed by his bedside. He heard no more about the matter until three days later the Russian, his son bounding beside, came to the house with smiles and gifts of gratitude.

But elsewhere he was treated less civilly. It became a point of honour among the fanatical Mohammedans as to who would be the one to force Abdullah Isai to invoke the name of Mohammed. The confrontations with Muslims brandishing scimitars became more frequent. The chances of escaping alive dwindled by the day. The situation was becoming very critical when suddenly the arrival of a royal personage in Yarkand alleviated matters. This was none other than the Pilgrim Princess whom Goes had helped in Kabul when she was destitute.

The Pilgrim Princess was the sister of the King. Many people from the city flocked to welcome her with gifts.

When word of the assistance Goes had given her in Kabul reached the King and his court and his subjects, much praise and thanks was showered on him, especially as it had been a stranger that had given the Princess the assistance she had sought in vain amongst her own countrymen. Even some of the fanatics began to count it in Goes's favour that he had assisted a "true believer" in the performance of her religious duties.

A message was sent to her son, the twenty-six-year-old Prince of Khotan, telling him of her arrival. Khotan was an eight days' journey away. The son came post-haste to welcome his mother.

Two days after the Prince's arrival Goes paid a courtesy call on him, armed with a present. On being informed that he had come, the Prince at once came out to receive him. Goes, following the custom of the country, would have embraced his feet; but the Prince would not permit this, and taking him kindly by the arm raised him to his feet. He then made enquiries after his health, and asked how old he was, where he had come from, and why he had left his own country. He also said that he had ordered the repayment in full of the amount Goes had advanced to the Queen. Understandably the Prince was very generous in his behaviour towards Goes, showing him so much favour that, besides always giving him a seat near his own, he told him that when he wished to come to his house he need not trouble to send word beforehand, but that he was to come at once into his presence and sit down without ceremony.

Having been told of the breviary, the Prince asked that it might be brought to him. His request having been complied with, he kept the book for so long a time that at last the Brother asked that it might be returned to him. The Prince at first looked somewhat abashed, and then said with a smile, "If I do not let you have it again, what will you do?" "Sire," said Goes, "It is not the custom of Kings to use force with their subjects" — a reply which pleased the Prince and those who were with him. Some of the latter asked him to send for the book, which they were very anxious to see. But he took no

notice of their request; and a few moments later he rose and took Goes with him to his apartment, giving orders that no one else was to be admitted. He then told a servant to bring the breviary; and when the man was about to deliver it to Goes, the Prince stopped him, and rising from his seat, himself took the book from the servant, and kissing it, placed it in the hands of the Brother, at the same time begging him to read aloud and explain some portions of it.

But the harassment of Goes was not over. Each quarter of the city had its own mosque, to which all the people of that quarter were obliged to go five times a day to pray. If they did not go, they were made to pay fines. As Goes did not attend these *namazas* (prayers), the *kazis* tried to make him pay the fine, putting him to much trouble. At last Goes went to the King and told him that the mullahs would not leave him in peace and demanded his money. On hearing his story, the King and those who were with him laughed heartily; nevertheless, the *kazis* were reprimanded, and the King told the Brother that he was free to live as he liked, and that no one would interfere with him.

Goes was receiving confirmation each day via merchants and travellers of the existence of Cathay. The description of Cathay which the merchants gave strengthened in Goes's mind the impression of that country which he had acquired in India. From the letters which he sent to Agra he speaks of the fans, paper, sticks of ink, joss-sticks, porcelain and rhubarb, all of which came from Cathay. Also, by sea, seed pearls, cinnamon and cloves were brought into Cathay, while in the country itself there was an abundance of ginger and loaf-sugar. But what Goes learnt about the Kings of Cathay was quite different from the accounts given by Father Ricci and other missionaries about the emperors of China. So obviously Cathay was a different country from China. As Goes himself wrote: "Cathay is not the same country as China, but it is China's neighbour and resembles it in many ways." Some of the paintings Goes saw were obviously of Chinese origin. He was also greatly

pleased and encouraged by seeing some paintings on paper which had come from Cathay. Amongst them was one representing a man wearing a biretta on which a cross was fixed, and another man stood before him with folded hands. This appeared to be the portrait of some bishop. He also saw painted on porcelain a Franciscan monk with what looked like a tonsure on his head, though he wore the long beard of a Chinaman.

In addition to Cathay Goes came to understand that even in Tibet a form of Christianity was practised. Some three years previously, a Tibetan King named Gompo Namghyal had been taken prisoner by a trick. While he lay incarcerated in Yarkand prison Goes sometimes visited him, though they were only able to converse by sign language. But the King's physician, one Lunrique, spoke Persian and so Goes was able to converse with him. Eagerly Goes questioned him about the religion of Tibet. He learned that their chief Priest, whom the physician called Cumgao, wore a mitre on his head and had a robe like a chasuble; that the people observed a fast of forty days, partaking neither of wine nor meat; that they possessed a sacred book called Kanjur; that their priests did not marry; that they believed in a day of judgement and in eight hells, each for the expiation of particular sins and in three paradises, each for the enjoyment of particular rewards; that in his land there was no circumcision, that on the eighth day children were taken to their Botelhama, which is their church, and that the *Itolama* washes them and names them after Saints painted in their churches. The physician said further that their grandees were in Cathay, which was a month's journey from their Tibet and that those in Cathay would be very glad to see the Jesuit Brother. Goes noted down all these facts with enthusiasm: it seemed that in Tibet they practised a variant of Christianity.

Goes was anxious to press on with his journey. But he was to be disappointed. To his despair he learnt that caravans for Cathay did not set out regularly each year. It was only when a sufficient number of merchants could

be mustered who were prepared to make the long and dangerous journey. Furthermore a caravan would only leave if it knew it would be admitted into Cathay. Caravans were allowed to enter the country only at certain fixed times and the next would not leave for a year. There was a peculiar trade agreement between Cathay-China and its neighbours. Under the rulership of the Ming dynasty the Empire had become completely isolated from the outside world. The only people exempt from this isolationist policy were certain merchants who, under the title of ambassadors, were allowed to bring their tributes to Peking. Their number, their quota of imports, the date of their arrival and so forth were strictly regulated by the Court Tribunal in Peking.

Father Matteo Ricci had written at length of this peculiar form of commercial intercourse:

> "Most merchants coming to this town (Su-cheu, the gate of China for caravans from Turkestan) arrive from the west pretending to be ambassadors. By very ancient treaties seven or eight countries have obtained from the Chinese government that every five years seventy-two persons in the quality of ambassadors shall bring tribute to the king, which must consist of the well-known transparent marble (jade or nephrite), diamonds, blue-pigments and similar articles. The so-called ambassadors go to the capital and return from it at the public expense. The tribute is merely nominal, for no one pays more for the marble than the Emperor does, considering it to be beneath his dignity to accept gifts from foreigners without return. And indeed their entertainment from the Emperor is on so handsome a scale, that, taking an average of the whole, there can be no doubt that every man pockets a piece of gold daily over and above all his necessary expenses. Hence it is that such an embassy is much sought after and membership is bought with presents from the leader, with whom the appointment rests. When the day of departure draws near they forge royal letters patent, in the names of the kings which they profess to represent, in which they pay respectful homage to the Chinese sovereign. From several countries such *embassies are* admitted into the

> country, from Caucincinum (Cochin-China), Sian, (Siam), Lenchien (Riu-Kiu Islands), Corianum (Korea) and from some petty Tartar princes. All this is an immense burden on the treasury, but the Chinese, who are well aware of the fraud, want by such devices to flatter their sovereign and make him believe that the whole world pays tribute to China, while it is the Chinese themselves who thus pay tribute to those countries."

These pseudo-ambassadors from the "Western Kings" were allowed to enter the Empire through the frontiers of Kansus at intervals of five to six years. Of the thousand or so merchants who made these journeys only seventy-two were entitled to travel to Peking at the Emperor's expense; to each of these a horse was supplied for every stage of the journey, together with two attendants each and expenses for food while travelling. A total of five hundred mules was supplied for each day's march until the Court was reached. The next caravan was due in 1604. Goes's idea was to attach himself to this caravan, and to travel with the merchants as one of their company.

But meanwhile Goes was condemned to twelve months of profitless waiting.

The arrival of a caravan in Yarkand was always a highlight of the year. People would throng to the market-place to see who had come, from where, what they had brought. Goes and Isaac always went along too. Perhaps there would be a letter for Goes from his Jesuit colleagues in India. Perhaps there was a letter for Isaac from his wife. Imagine the immense joy when Goes and Isaac saw one of their original colleagues on the journey step down off his horse — Demetrius, who had stayed behind in Kabul six months earlier. That night they conversed well into the morning: so much had happened since they had last seen each other.

But Goes's joy was not of long duration, for quite soon Demetrius caused him a great deal of trouble. At that time, with the King's leave, one of the merchants was elected mock emperor, whilst all the rest, according

to a custom of theirs, paid homage to him and offered him presents. Demetrius, to save his pocket, held back; and as the emperor had the power of putting rebels against his authority in irons, or even of flogging them, Demetrius had great difficulty in escaping both penalties. He only escaped because Goes used his good offices on his behalf and backed up his intercession with a present.

One night Goes and Demetrius woke up, thinking they had heard a noise. They crept into Isaac's room to find that he had been gagged and bound by thieves who held a dagger at his throat to prevent his raising an alarm. However, on seeing the two Europeans the robbers fled.

The best commodity for taking to Cathay was a transparent shining marble which Europeans called jasper. The Chinese called it *Yu-she*, or Yu-stone, their name for oriental jade.

The king of Cathay would buy this jade at a very great price. What the king did not want for his own use would then be sold by the merchants to other vendors, also at very high prices. From it the Chinese made fancy boxes, vases, ornaments, bracelets, brooches for mantles and girdles, mouthpieces for pipes, etc., upon which they would engrave leaves, flowers and other decorative patterns. One of the gates of Peking was called the Jade gate, because this precious mineral was brought into the city through it. There were two kinds of jade. The more precious kind, like thick flints, was fished up in boulder form by divers from the Khotan-darya, the river of Khotan, not far from the city-royal. The other inferior kind was quarried out of a stony mountain, called *Kan-sang-i-Kash* (the mine of the kash — or jade-stone), twenty days' journey from Khotan. For ease of transport the jade was sawn into slabs about two yards wide. This particular kind of marble was so hard that it first had to be softened by means of a fire on the surface before one could get it out of the quarry. The right to quarrying in the mountain was sold by the king to some merchant at a high price, the merchant in turn would farm out the licence to dig to speculators during the term of the contract.

Khotan was an oasis town, 180 miles across the desert south-east of Yarkand, about six to ten days' journey away. It was possibly the most central yet certainly the most inaccessible kingdom of all Asia. Before Goes, only Marco Polo had reached the place. And after Goes, it was not until 1857 that another European attempted to visit it. He was Adolf von Schlagintweit, who never returned, having been murdered by fanatical Mohammedans near Kashgar in 1857.

Despite its remoteness and the dangers involved, Goes decided to visit Khotan. Since he was unavoidably delayed at Yarkand pending the formation of a caravan to Cathay he might as well do that rather than kicking his heels. There were other reasons as well. If he was travelling in Cathay as a merchant he might as well get as much of the finest jade from its very source. Besides, the Pilgrim Princess who was mother of the Prince who ruled Khotan, had promised to repay the six hundred gold pieces Goes had lent her in the form of this transparent marble or jade for which Khotan was famous throughout the world. Moreover, the Prince himself, heir apparent to the Kingdom of Kashgar, had given a standing invitation to Goes to visit him.

Many of the local inhabitants shook their heads when they heard of Goes's decision: he would never return. Isaac was almost in tears as he bade farewell to Goes. He had a premonition he would not be seeing the Jesuit Brother again. So, too, did the merchants who had travelled with Goes and Isaac from Kabul. Isaac had heard them discussing the division of the spoils if Goes did not return. The whole region was notorious for thieves and robbers who made a practice of plundering small and weak caravans. Among the thieves and robbers that hung about on the edge of the Takla-Makan desert were many 'ne'er-do-wells', who, like a certain mullah from Khotan, hoped to find treasures of gold in the desert. The story was that this mullah had fallen into debt and went into the desert to die. But instead of dying he discovered a treasure of gold and silver and became an exceedingly wealthy man. Numerous

'fortune-hunters' had gone into the desert searching for lost treasure buried in the sands. But most of them never returned. Legend had it that certain *jins* (evil spirits) must first be exorcised before the treasures yield themselves up. These spirits bewitch the unhappy beings who venture thither, so that they become confused and bewildered, and without knowing what they are doing they go round and round in a circle, retracing their own footsteps, and go and go until they fall down from sheer exhaustion and die of thirst. These gold-seekers were always looked at askance by their neighbours, and were avoided. They did no work, but lived on the hope of making their fortune at a single stroke. They were parasites, a burden upon their neighbours who in their 'spare time' occupied themselves with thieving and robbery.

It was usually in the spring that men went into the desert in search of gold because the sandstorms at that time of the year were more likely to expose the treasures. Just a short time previously some men had gone into the desert but did not return. The local people believed that the traveller through the desert often hears voices calling him by name, but that if he follows them, he goes astray and dies of thirst. Marco Polo had written much the same:

> "But there is a marvellous thing related of this desert, which is, that when travellers are on the move by night, and one of them chances to lag behind, or to fall asleep, or the like, when he tries to gain his company again, he will hear spirits talking, and will suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name, and thus shall a traveller oftimes be led astray, so that he never finds his party. And in this way many have perished."
>
> *(Yule. The Book of Ser Marco Polo* I p.203 1874)

It was a dangerous journey, too, not only because of the cut-throats lying in wait on the highway, but also because of the many wild animals that frequented the region. Wolves were common; occasionally, too, one came upon leopards and even tigers. And if thieves and

robbers or wolves and leopards didn't get one, the desert would. The very name *Takla-makan* meant the 'Sand that Slays Men'. In Turki the name means 'Go in and you won't come out.'

The Taklamakan, one of the world's largest deserts, 900 km long and 500 km wide, is one of the remotest areas in the world. On three sides it is surrounded by a horseshoe of the highest mountains in the world: to the north by the Tien Shan ('Celestial') Mountains, to the west by the Pamirs, to the south by the Kuen Lun Mountains and the Karakorum and Himalaya ranges; and in the east lie the marshy, salt waters of the Turfan Depression, the second lowest basin in the world, 154 m. below sea level, and beyond that the Lop and Gobi Deserts. It is protected on all sides from any but the most intrepid intruders. In summer the heat is unbearable: 122°F in the shade. In winter the temperature at night is 10° below zero. The baked sands get rain perhaps once in ten years.

Goes set off for the Chinese quarter of Yarkand and then rode through the double gates of Yangi-shahr, for Khotan, at least seven or eight days' journey away. The road ran over a flat, barren plain. Occasionally they rode over low conical hills crowned with tamarisk and similar bushes. Old *tograks* or poplars appeared fairly regularly. At Karghalik the people were nearly all occupied with the growing of walnuts, the staple trade of the place.

The monotony of the ride was often broken by the passage of caravans — long lines of animals, either camels or donkeys or both, following meekly one behind the other. Camel caravans only travel during the winter. During the hot months of the year camels roam at pasture on the grassy slopes where these can be found. During the summer months travel and communication is hampered by the high state of the water in the swollen rivers. The traffic seemed to be mostly by means of donkey-caravans, often one hundred strong, carrying cotton, tea, rice, raisins, *kishmish* (currants), hides, carpets, to and from Yarkand and Kashgar. Men drove their flocks of sheep along. Goes noticed that goats were

always placed at the head of the sheep. Seemingly the goats incited the slower-footed sheep to keep up with them.

Occasionally he would pass peasants travelling from one oasis to another, driving in front of them a few donkeys laden with seed or vegetables. Sometimes Goes would stand aside as a courier trotted or galloped past. These couriers could travel 72 miles a day, using fresh horses at each stage of the journey.

Slowly the desert began to make inroads into the steppe; small sand-dunes popped up their heads here and there. The descent of thirteen thousand feet from the Pamirs was merely changing the form of desolation from glacial salt to parched desert and the broad wastes of rubble beds from grey gravel to yellowish-red waves of drift sand. The villages they passed, small clusters of fifty to one hundred houses, were really oases. At times there was no path: the caravan tracks had been obliterated by a sandstorm. They followed the poles or guide-posts placed there to assist travellers. Marco Polo observed that "at sleeping time a signal is put up to show the direction of the next march."

It had been a tiring day. He wondered if he was seeing things. Above the dark horizon he could see willows and a *serai* — in the sky. This was his first experience of a real desert mirage. He was glad to reach the *serai*, even if it was just the usual, filthy, clay hovel, with its "hopping and crawling legions", to which he had slowly got accustomed. Mosquitoes and flies, sandflies, lice and scorpions, proved a great source of irritation. There were also two particularly unpleasant forms of spider. There was the poisonous, jumping kind with bodies the size of pigeon's eggs whose jaws were particularly feared for their bite, which, if not lethal, was extremely dangerous. Even more repellent were the cockroaches. It was enough to make one uncontrollably sick to wake up in the morning and find such a cockroach sitting on one's nose, its large eyes staring down on you, its feelers trying to poke out one's eyes. And when killed, the revolting insect would give off the

most disagreeable smell. At night moths in their hundreds fluttered round the solitary candle.

Crossing the dreary steppes and barren desert, he finally reached the town and trading centre of Suma, an oasis well supplied with water. He filled up his *tulums* (goatskins for water). The oasis was very fertile, producing wheat, maize, barley, melons, grapes, mulberries, cotton, onions and other vegetables.

Next day the desert air was so clear he was able to pick out simultaneously the snow-capped peaks of the Tien Shan Mountains 200 miles to the north and the mighty mountain masses of the Kuen-Lun range, looming up in the distance like a faint blue wall to the south.

They continued, over a desolate waste of steppe, with a few scattered tamarisks, poplars, *yantaks* (camelthorn), thistles and reed-beds enlivening the landscape. The water course at Ak-lengher was dry, as expected. It only fills after heavy and continuous rain in the mountains. A nearby well was protected against advancing sandhills by erecting a crude wooden shed over it, provided with a hatch or flap. But the water, lying six feet below the surface, was undrinkable — saline, with a bitter flavour. However, it was not long before they reached a *lengher* (rest-house) where in return for a small present, an old man furnished wayfarers with water which he drew up in a bucket from a well 150 feet deep. Only very occasionally did they meet other travellers. Those they did were generally small parties of merchants from Khotan.

Meeting a wild camel was a unique experience for the much travelled Portuguese. It was resting on the callosities on its knees and breast. But when it saw Goes it straightened its ungainly legs and set off in as ungraceful a manner as its tamer counterpart. But whilst the humps of the tame camel would wobble and shake like lumps of jelly when it put a spurt on, those of the wild camel remained firm.

Suddenly, quite out of the blue, Goes was hit by a black *buran* or duststorm. This was what he was

dreading. The sandstorms were the scourge of Central Asia, having their cradle in the heart of that sand-heated furnace. The dust rose in suffocating clouds. He began coughing up streams of loess.

These *burans*, which began to blow in March and continued till the end of summer, always occurred in the afternoon, never in the morning or at night. Their violence was inconceivable; they drove across the open, level plains with a force that was absolutely irresistible, reaching winds up to 180 k.p.h. They were known to bury whole caravans. Sheep grazing around the villages were swept bodily away, or got separated from the rest of the flock in the dust-haze. Ravens and other birds were often blown by the unusually violent *burans* all the way from Karghalik to Guma. Legend had it that many hundred years ago a holy man dug a well near Chullak, now completely covered over by sand. When he got down to eighty fathoms, the earth opened under him and spread forth a terrific wind which swept him right up to heaven. And ever since that time all the winds and storms have issued from that well.

Columns of sand and dust came hurtling across the desert bombarding Goes's exposed face with tiny bullets of sand. The *buran* struck with great violence. It was impossible to keep his seat in the saddle. Every moment he felt he would be lifted bodily out of it. His horse began to stagger as if drunk. He had barely dismounted and sheltered behind his frightened horse when the *buran* swallowed up everything in impenetrable clouds of dust. In a moment he was blinded: he couldn't even see the horse he was taking shelter behind. He held on to the reins firmly. His head began to go round; the earth, the atmosphere, everything was in commotion and confusion. He was oppressed with anxiety lest the next moment he would be caught up in the *buran's* dervish dance. It turned as black as midnight. Horse and rider just lay motionless. He lay there for hours. Only slowly did the *buran* relent and the black of the night gave way to a strange orange-brown twilight. Only slowly, and with great difficulty, could they continue their half-obliterated

way. Everything was smothered in fine dust and sand; everything was khaki. At least he could breathe air again instead of fine grains of dust.

But it was not long before the sky was again filled with dust and sand. This was caused, not by a black *buran*, but by the hooves of the horses carrying some dignitaries in flowing robes, riding in front of one another in due order of rank and importance, and their large escort.

As he neared Khotan, sandhills and sand-dunes caused by the winds blowing off the Takla-Makan desert became more and more frequent. Two thousand years ago the Chinese knew the Takla-Makan as the Liu Sha — Moving Sands, for its yellow dunes are ever in motion, driven by the relentless winds that haunt the desert. The dunes got higher and more continuous. The dunes were called *yaman-kum* (hateful sand), *chong-kum* (big sand) or *ighiz-kum* (high sand). In the middle of one range of sand-dunes they found a patch of poplars growing on it. They collected the bleached and desiccated trunks of trees that had been dead for centuries, whenever they came across them. By burning these at night they saved themselves from dying of exposure; at night the suffocating dust-bowl heat of the day would give way to near arctic conditions. Poles with *tughs* (offerings of rags) indicated a *masar* or saint's tomb nearby. The tomb was in a most desolate region, where not a blade of anything grew.

He was held up at Kara-kish. It was too risky to try fording the Khotan-daria (river). Some shepherds were standing by, their feet encased in pieces of sheepskin fastened with a cord. They called out for the ferryman who took them across by boat.

In the distance Goes could make out the mud wall of the city of Khotan. Khotan was really the name given to a conglomerate of some three hundred villages bordering the oasis. The town itself was called Ilchi. As they neared the town the road improved somewhat. They rode among an avenue of poplars fifty feet wide, which ran through a varied landscape of villages, cultivated fields and

irrigation canals which had been cut between loess banks. There were mulberry trees growing. Khotan was the only place where the silkworm was reared to produce silk for which Khotan was famous. This silk was also used to make the famous silk carpets of Khotan, remarkable for their beauty and fineness. They lived up to their name of 'poems in thread'. Opium, too, was being cultivated in large quantities. So too were cotton, flax and hemp.

A seemingly constant procession of caravans, made up mostly of strings of sturdy donkeys, carrying silk, cotton fabrics, felts and other goods testified to the importance of Khotan as a busy trading centre. They entered the principal bazaar of Khotan. As in all Asian towns the bazaar was the centre and main artery of life of the oasis. Bazaar street was a seemingly endless row of booths. Off its streets branched a number of incredibly narrow, crooked, dirty lanes, as in Yarkand. At intervals there were open squares with tanks or ponds, shaded by trees. The town itself was a labyrinth of poor houses, with narrow streets and alleys between them.

The town had a large Indian and Afghan merchant community. They came from Kabul, Pishin, Bajaur and from Akbar's kingdom. Most, being money-lenders also, were arrant rogues. They lent money to the poor peasants at usurious rates of interest. And when the borrowers couldn't pay they took from them their crop harvests and their cattle, which they then sold at high prices. There were also merchants from other parts of Asia — West Turkestanis, Chinese and even Nogai Tartars from Orenberg.

Goes booked in at the local *serai*. But when the Prince and his mother heard of Goes's arrival he was invited to stay in the palace — a taste of some luxury after the usual dirty flea-infested hovels he had had to use. Goes made his way to the royal palace. He entered the typical *aiwan* of the more well-to-do. The square central hall or atrium had a roof well raised over the central area, provided with clerestory openings on all four sides. Thus during the hot summer months the

aiwan gave not only cool shade but access for any fresh breezes. Rooms or passages opening from this atrium communicated with the rest of the house. One or two rooms, close to the entrance from the outer court, formed the usual guest quarters known as *Mihman-khanas.* Gay cotton prints hung as dados round the walls; Khotan carpets covered the floor; expensive jade vases and ornaments abounded.

He was received graciously by the Prince and the Queen Mother. *Dastarkhan* (refreshments) consisting of melons of all sorts, pears, peaches and grapes, raisins and almonds, sweetmeats of various colours, were served on several dishes.

The Queen Mother repaid Goes her debt with the most highly prized varieties of jade: white jade with rose-red specks and green veined with gold.

While he was in Khotan Goes took the opportunity of seeing how the precious heavy coloured stone was obtained. The best jade was got from the bed of the Khotan river. The Turkis believed jade to be crystallised moonlight. So they noted the stretches where the moon was most brilliantly reflected and dived there during the day. The ground was cut up by trenches six or seven feet deep and a few feet wide. The material thrown up out of the trenches consisted of round polished stones, sand, and clay. It was among these stones that the jade was found. Very often a couple of months or more would pass without anything being discovered; then all of a sudden, in the course of a few days, the digger would become rich.

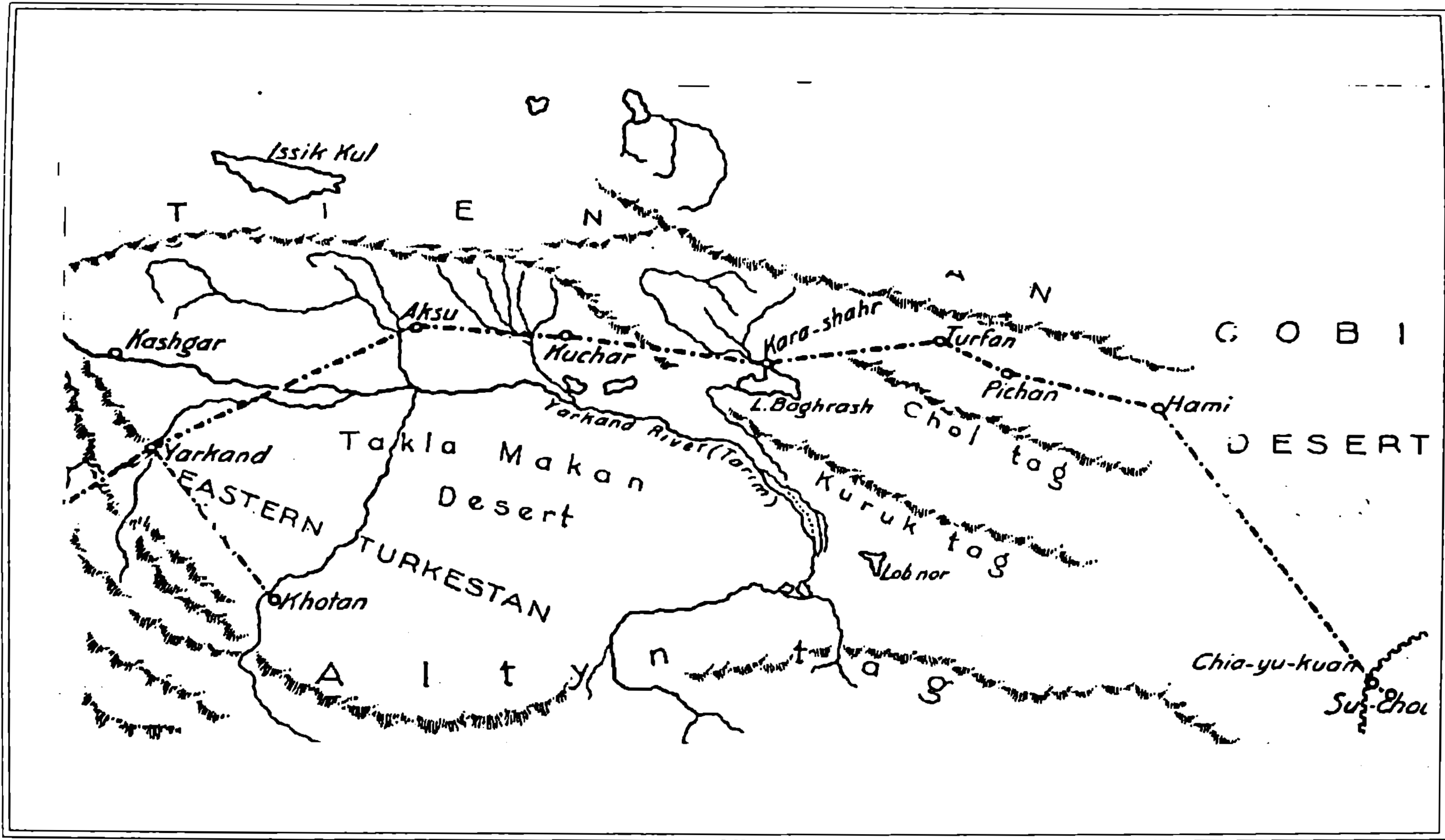
The Jesuit Brother had experienced almost every kind of hunting there was whilst at the Court of Akbar. In Khotan he met with a new kind — using the giant golden eagle. The condor, the eagle, the falcon and the hawk were common birds. But the eagle was the only bird used by the nobility to hunt fox and mountain goat. He was told there was another bird, the *lammergeayer*, which was supposed to be the size of a camel. But Goes would believe that when he saw one!

Whilst in Khotan Goes examined some of the

Buddhist shrines which Hsuan-tsang, the Chinese traveller, had visited centuries earlier.

While all this was happening in Khotan, in Yarkand things were proving very difficult for Isaac and Demetrius. Khotan was seven or eight days' journey from Yarkand. When a month had passed and Goes had still not returned, the Mohammedans put abroad the report that Goes was dead; that he had been slain by the mullahs for refusing to recite the Muslim confession of faith. As Goes had left no will the mullahs sought to seize his property as being unclaimed — and there was little that Isaac or Demetrius could do to stop them. Just when things looked blackest and Isaac had already begun mourning his master, the Jesuit Brother arrived back in Yarkand, much to the delight of the two Europeans and the intense annoyance and disappointment of the mullahs.

Goes arrived back with a large supply of the finest quality marble. To mark his gratitude for a safe return he made a large distribution of alms to the poor. The Jesuit 'merchant' Adbullah now sold some of his precious jade at a handsome profit. With the help of the Prince of Khotan's patronage, Goes became one of the most well-to-do in the town. There was no banquet to which he was not invited.


Issik Kul
T I E N
N
Kashgar
Aksu
Kuchar
Kara-shahr
Turfan
Pichan
Hami
GOBI
DESERT
L. Baghrash
Chol tag
Yarkand River (Tarim)
Kuruk tag
Lob nor
Yarkand
Takla Makan Desert
EASTERN TURKESTAN
Khotan
A l t y n t a g
Chia-yu-kuan
Su-Chou

Chapter 15

The Last Leg: Yarkand To Cathay

In the autumn of 1604 the caravan for Cathay began to take shape. It was the custom for the profitable position of captain of the caravan — caravan *basha* — to be farmed out by the King of Kashgar to the highest bidder. This year it had gone to a certain Haji Afi for two hundred sacks of musk. In return the King appointed the caravan *basha* his ambassador to the kingdom of Cathay and invested him with absolute authority over the other merchants of the caravan. Then, in like manner, in consideration of large sums of money and presents, the caravan leader associated with himself four others with the title of ambassadors after which he enrolled a suite of seventy-two travellers. As the caravan chief could take with him only seventy-two persons, merchants bribed him heavily to be included in this number. Those who paid but little were excluded, but to all who brought him presents he pledged his word, which he afterwards broke in many cases since all could not enter Cathay with him. In this way a caravan to Cathay put on the appearance of an embassy and it was only under this guise that it could penetrate into that country.

Having heard that Goes had proved himself to be a man of courage, as well as a merchant of some considerable means, the caravan leader invited him to a grand entertainment at his house. The dinner was an eighty-six-course banquet which was very pleasant. But

Goes was on his guard. He had learned that the death rate at banquets was frightening. A guest would be well plied with wine and then poisoned or beheaded while the band played. The sumptuous meal was followed by a great concert of music after the manner of those people. After dinner Afi requested Goes to join his caravan to Cathay. Goes desired nothing better. But he played it cool. Experience had taught him how to deal with the Muslims. He let the proposal come from the other side so that it appeared he was doing the caravan chief a favour rather than receiving one. The caravan captain offered to include Goes amongst the four who would be counted as ambassadors. Goes replied that he could not afford to live up to such a position but might consider going as one of the seventy-two passengers. Haji Afi was so keen on having Goes in his party that he even asked the King to intervene and ask Goes to make the journey. Goes agreed to do so on condition that the King would grant him letters of safe conduct for the whole course of the journey to Cathay. To this the King, supported by his sister the Pilgrim Princess, agreed.

Goes's former comrades of the Kabul caravan were annoyed that Goes would be going with the Afi caravan; knowing his sterling qualities they wanted Goes to remain with them and travel in their caravan which would return to Kabul later. They counselled Goes not to put any trust in the people of Kashgar; the whole idea of a caravan to Cathay was a charade to lure Goes out of the city gates where they would murder him and then loot his prized belongings. Goes replied that he was acting with the King's expressed wishes and that he had given his promise to the chief of the caravan, and as an honest man he could not go back on his word. The fears which these merchants professed were not unfounded, for it was fairly common talk among the inhabitants that the three Armenians would be murdered as soon as they set foot outside the city walls. On learning this, Demetrius took fright, and for a second time drew back from accompanying Goes further, trying also to persuade Goes not to continue further. But Goes would not listen

to the pleas of Demetrius, saying that he had never yet let himself be deterred from doing his duty by fear of death, much less would he do so now in an undertaking from which so much glory to God might accrue. It would be most unworthy conduct to frustrate the hopes of so many for fear of death, and to throw away all the expense that had been incurred by the Archbishop of Goa and the Viceroy. To Demetrius he said: "You may return to India. I, for my part, cannot retrace my steps halfway without having completed my task. God has protected me until now, and will continue to do so until with His help, I have found Cathay."

Demetrius did in fact return to India which he reached just after the death of Akbar at the end of October 1605. Insurrections following on the Emperor's death made travelling an even more dangerous business. However, he managed to reach Agra where he took up his abode with a Greek friend. But he fell sick as a result of his arduous journeys and after a lingering illness died peacefully in his friend's house, the Jesuits Goes had left behind in Agra succouring him with the last rites.

In a letter dated August 1604 Goes wrote that he would be travelling to Cathay in a caravan commanded by Haji Afi. The chief of the caravan went to his home, five days from the capital, to get ready for the journey. After his arrival he sent a message to Goes telling him to start his preparations for the journey as soon as possible so that by his example other merchants would begin to speed up their journey. Goes girded his loins for the long journey. He purchased the horses and equipment he would need to take with him, along with his valuable merchandise. In addition to the horse he already had, he purchased another ten, including one for his faithful companion Isaac. He would need five drivers for his baggage animals, and two servants.

On November 13th 1604, on the eve of the departure of the caravan from Yarkand, Goes wrote to the Jesuit community in Agra:

"I leave this place in good health, recognised as a Christian and yet on good terms with everyone."

This was the last letter the Jesuits in India were ever to receive from their fellow missioner.

The next night, November the 14th, 1604, while Castor and Pollux and the Great Bear and Orion's Belt and myriads of lesser constellations shone down on the proceedings, the caravan camp was astir with noise, bustle, excitement. They were off to somewhere in the East; Goes hoped it would be his Cathay, over 1,250 miles away.

After a whole year of waiting patiently, the time had come at last for the 'ambassador' caravan to leave. The loads were weighed and arranged in pairs for the different horses so that boxes which required careful handling might ride on the quietest animals, whilst heavier, less delicate baggage, such as tents and provisions, might be put on the more lively animals. Water-skins (*tulums*), filled to the brim, were loaded on the two-humped Bactrian camels. Just before sunrise, the provisions and goods, including the precious jade, were loaded on to the reluctant beasts of burden.

The stars their only map, the long caravan of horses and camels made their way out of Korneh-shahr, the Mohammedan quarter of the city, through the Altyn-darvaseh (Golden Gate) into a wilderness as bare as the Pamirs — the deserts of Central Asia. Far away to the East stretched a sea of sand resembling an ocean with its wave-like dunes. Their route lay across the Takla-Makan desert, an elliptic arena surrounded, except at the north-east confines, by tiers of mountains rising to 18,000 feet.

A caravan starting from Yarkand made a choice between two routes, both of which involved crossing the Takla-Makan desert: a southern route within the shadow of the Kuen Lun Mountains, a northern one along the foot of the Tien Shan Mountains. Both find their points of support in villages and oases which depend for their existence on the water-courses from the mountains,

rendering artificial irrigation possible in a region where the rainfall is exceedingly small. Survival would have been impossible in this desolate region but for the glacier-fed streams cascading down from the mountains and spilling into the desert. By skilful use of this water through elaborate irrigation systems, the people of the oases had made themselves agriculturally self-sufficient. If, for any reason, this irrigation was neglected or interrupted for any length of time then the desert, ever waiting its chance, would take over. The oases would be abandoned and before long all signs of human habitation would vanish beneath the sands. Some villages relied on an ingenious irrigation system, originally borrowed from Persia, where melted snow from the mountains was brought to them via deep subterranean channels.

They followed the route of the Yarkand river, along the Tarim Basin. From earliest times the Tarim Basin of east Turkestan had been the link in the immense chain of deserts reaching right across the Old World, from the north-west coast of Africa to the steep slopes of the Chingan mountains bordering China.

In summer, crossing the Takla-Makan would be impossible: the desert is a furnace. But in winter it is possible to cross the desert because there are occasional falls of snow which provide water.

Goes's caravan took the northern route, avoiding Kashgar, travelling by the oasis-towns of Aksu, Kutsha, Korla, Turfan and Hami from where they hoped to cut across the Gobi Desert into Cathay. As far as possible they would cling to the fringes of the desert: the locals believed the interior of the desert was under a ban of *telemat* or supernatural powers.

The road, such as it was, was generally dead-level, greyish-yellow and monotonously barren. Sometimes they would cross rough desert, the soil of which showed white because of the salt impregnated in it. The wind would blow up the fine, loose, dust like smoke before their eyes. Through the haze of dust they could just make out the snow-white bastions of the Tien Shan Mountains on the left.

They crossed numerous dry ravines on the way. In many parts of the sandy, waterless plains the presence of a large number of stones made walking difficult for the animals. Sometimes the level steppes (*dasht*) were of a marshy character, dotted with thickets of tamarisk, thistle and tussocks of grass, which, when thoroughly dry, were uprooted and curled into balls and swept along the ground by the wind. There were even clumps of poplars in a few places. Sometimes they came upon swamps of stagnant water and in attempting to avoid these they would get lost. But the shepherds who were guarding their flocks of goats and sheep with their large dogs would put them back on the right path. On the few days when they were spared the attention of the everlasting wind that was so tiring, the still calm days would bring out the gnats to torment them. As they rode, a pillar of the pestilent insects would hover over them, testing their patience to the limit. At one point they met a party of about forty-five pilgrims, men, women, and children, on their way to pray at the tomb of a saint. Several of the men carried *tughs*-long sticks with white and coloured pennons fluttering from their ends. At the head of the procession rode a flute player and on each side of him was a man banging away at a drum as hard as his hands and arms could move. Every now and then the whole concourse shouted "Allah!" at the top of their voices.

Their first stopping place after leaving Yarkand was Jolci, a custom-house on the edge of an oasis, where a toll was paid and their travel documents and royal letters of exemption were inspected.

From Jolci the caravan headed for Aksu. For twenty-five days it battled gamely against both the harshness of the climate — very hot in the day, freezing at night — and of the rugged country. It was too hot to travel all day, so they would start their march shortly after midnight. It was raw and bitterly cold at night in spite of furs and felts. The sub-Arctic winds from Mongolia would howl across the desert. During the middle of the day they would rest. They would then do another short spell of travelling in the afternoon.

They rode over a dismal monotonous waste, salt-encrusted, extending as far as the eye could see. The only thing that provided any relief to the boredom of the deathlike torpor of the red rocks and yellow sands were the occasional herds of wild asses (onagers) and *djeirans* (antelope) which bounded away at the slightest sign of danger.

They passed through Khan-Chalish, Alceghet, Hagabateth, Capetal col Zilian, Saregabedal, Kumbashi, Saksak and Shakyar. The names and even the locations of these towns seemed to vary as the Yarkand and the Tarim rivers shifted their river beds along the Tarim depression or silted up and had to be abandoned. Finally, one afternoon, they were able to pick out the walls of the town of Aksu. Aksu was an important town of the kingdom of Kashgar. It was at one time the residence of the kings of Kashgar and Yarkand. It was the central point of trade between East and West. From it diverged all the great routes towards Cathay and China, the Ili country, and the cities of East and West Turkestan. It was from Aksu that the high pass, called the 'Pass of Glaciers', led over the high Tian Shan Mountains, connecting China and Turkestan.

Aksu stood at the confluence of two large rivers the Aksu and the Kokshal which then united before joining the main river, the Yarkand-daria or Tarim. The town itself occupied a favourable position on the left bank of the Aksu-daria.

They crossed the Kum-daria (Sand River), the name given to the Aksu River in that part of its course, by ferry. They hired two *suchis* who, completely naked, carefully led the horses across the stony river bed. But in summer, when enormous quantities of clean, fresh water came down from the eternal snowfields and glaciers, and the river was in full flood, the ferry was useless and all communication between the two banks of the river would be suspended. Every year a dozen or so men lost their lives attempting to ride across the river when the current was so strong. But in winter the oasis had little water, and what little there was froze. The word

Aksu, which means 'white water', derived from the fresh clear water coming from the snows in contradistinction to *Kara-su* (black water) which was found in natural springs or kept in *kaks* (natural water cisterns). The town was surrounded by fertile fields and meadows, orchards and numerous irrigation canals. Rice, wheat, maize, barley, cotton, opium and a vast quantity of garden produce, especially pomegranates and figs, provided the inhabitants with a comfortable living. Aksu was known for its production of good quality *daba* and *shisha* and for its leather goods, especially embroidered deerskin saddlery. It was also renowned for its manufacture of jade articles. Large flocks of sheep grazed along the banks of the two rivers. Above the scarp overlooking the big snow-fed rivers, an old ruined fort bore testimony to the wide extent of Tibetan predominance when the Chinese lost control of the Tarim Basin in T'ang times.

To the North could be seen the huge snowy range of the Tien Shan Mountains, with the high ice-clad massif of Khan-tengri towering above the rest. But the view soon disappeared in the usual dust haze.

They entered Aksu by one of its four gates and made for one of the six caravan *serais*. It was the 9th of December 1604. They passed the chief mosque, which as usual was called the Masjid-i-Juma or Friday Mosque, on one side of an open square which communicated with the main bazaar. The square, called Righistan, was the centre of the life of Aksu. It was packed with people and a multitude of stalls seemingly selling everything one could possibly want, even lumps of ice which were kept frozen in underground cellars for use later in the hot season. Unlike the people from Khotan and Yarkand, the people of Aksu had a strong 'Tartar' look about them, with a strong infusion of Kirghiz blood to boot.

At the time Aksu was under the rule of a governor who was a nephew of the King of Kashgar. But as the governor was still only a boy of twelve, affairs were managed by a regent. The young Khan sent for Goes. Goes took the prince a present of Indian sweets and

confections which were much to the young ruler's taste. Goes was received most graciously. It happened that at the time a grand dance was being performed before the young ruler and his court. Goes later reported that "dancing is a chief delight of the people of Turkestan." The young ruler asked Goes how the people of his country danced. To please the prince Goes got up and did a wild fandango, a Portuguese *folia* he had not danced for sixteen years. The court were so pleased he was excused the levy normally applied to merchant travellers. Goes was also presented to the Prince's mother. To her he showed the royal rescript he had been given by the King of Kashgar. He also presented her with a looking-glass, some Indian muslin and other gifts which would be pleasing to a royal lady.

At Aksu they had to wait for fifteen days for some of the stragglers to catch up and for other merchants joining the caravan to Cathay. At last, on Christmas Eve, 1604, they set off for their next big town, Kuchar. The caravan took the route south of Chol-tagh (Barren Mountains). Hugging the mountains as much as they could, since oases were but rare in the arid steppe and desert, the caravan made its way across the desert (south of the Tien Shan Mountains) called Karakathay (Black Kathay), "which," in the words of Goes, "means the black country of the Cathayans, because it is maintained that the inhabitants of Cathay occupied it for a long time." Cathay! He was getting close! For centuries the Cathayans had occupied the Gobi desert and the Tarim Basin, but the inroads of the Tibetans in the eighth century put an end to Cathay rule. They passed through Oitograkh (a place abounding in poplars, one of the few trees that could survive in the waterless steppes), Gazo, Kashani, Dellay, Saregabedall, Ugan and finally Kuchar. Goes reeled off the names like the beads of the Sorrowful Mystery on the Rosary, each with its particular cross: nights of frost, sandstorms, unquenchable thirst, unfaithful servants, ponies that fell lame. But the greatest cross of all was homesickness. So often a thousand memories of his native land, of his colleagues,

would crowd in upon his mind, lighting up, as with torches, the dark night of his loneliness. It is only those who have left their country and family and friends for a lengthy period, and with the clouds of uncertainty before them, can ever conceive the feelings which such a break engenders. He was thousands and thousands of miles from anywhere — in the imperturbable and terrifying vastness of the East. He was totally isolated. He was cut off from all communication with his family in Europe. It was over a year since he had had any news from anyone. He wouldn't hear anything from his colleagues until he reached Peking. For nearly two years he had been alone in the very heart of the immeasurable continent of Asia. He was growing tired of wandering among the half-savage tribes of Asia like a homeless, unwanted exile. Whenever he was in desperate trouble — as he often was — there was no one to call on, no one to help. Sometimes he despaired that he would ever reach Cathay. His task was to link up with a lost Christian people. Yet he himself stood in danger of becoming lost. He was travelling among fanatical Mohammedans who persistently tried to force him, at point of scimitar, to apostatise. His soul was harrowed when the thought of the sorrow and anxiety that would seize those near and dear to him if he never came back, if nothing was ever heard of him again. They would wait expectantly, year after year, and wait in vain. No information would ever reach them. There would be no one to bear the tidings of his fate.

On the way they had to cross over some spurs of the Tien Shan Mountains and many mountain streams. It was on one such occasion that one of Goes's horses fell into a rapid river and swam to the other side, carrying some of Goes's precious merchandise. Goes's prayer was answered, for the horse swam back of its own accord. Another incident that caused much alarm was the presence of a tiger. It prowled around the camp much of the night, evidently seeking out one of the horses.

In mid-February 1605 the caravan reached Kuchar. Kuchar was an oasis town, one of the most pleasant of

all the towns he had passed in the Tarim Basin. Here the caravan rested for a whole month, to refresh the animals which were almost spent by "the difficult journey, the heavy load of marble and the want of food (which) had exhausted everyone's strength." The normal meal, extremely monotonous, was a few handfuls of rice mixed with mutton fat or mutton fat mixed with rice. In the hot weather the mutton fat invariably turned rancid. When available this unappetising diet was supplemented by grapes or melon or dried fruit and bread, kept cool, Turkestan-style, in a piece of wet felt. But often they would give anything for this monotonous diet rather than go hungry.

It was the time of Ramadan. Some of the Mohammedan priests of the town accosted Goes one day. Unless he gave them presents they would force him to fast during their 'lent'. Goes merely despised them for such behaviour and refused to part with any bribe. But the mullahs got their way. Goes was fined and severely chastised by the high priests and authorities for refusing to observe the fast of Ramadan.

Korla was a small but well-fortified town, on the caravan route to Kara-shahr. The main, or only, point of importance of Korla was its geographical position on the river Kontje-daria, at the entrance to a narrow pass that connected the Tien Shan Mountains with the Kuruk Tag Mountains. At Korla the talk was about 'old towns', long since buried by the sands, and full of hidden treasures guarded by demons. Some Mongols, called Kalmaks by the Central-Asia Mohammedans, ferried the caravan across the river on punts.

A month after leaving Kuchar the caravan arrived in Kara-shahr, on the Kaidu river. Here the desert tamarisk and saxaul gave way to grass and fruit trees. It was mid-April 1605. Kara-Shahr (which means Black Town) fully deserved its name because it was possibly the dirtiest town in all Central Asia. It consisted of a number of miserable hovels, courtyards, bazaars and Mongol tents, surrounded by a wall. It was an important trading centre.

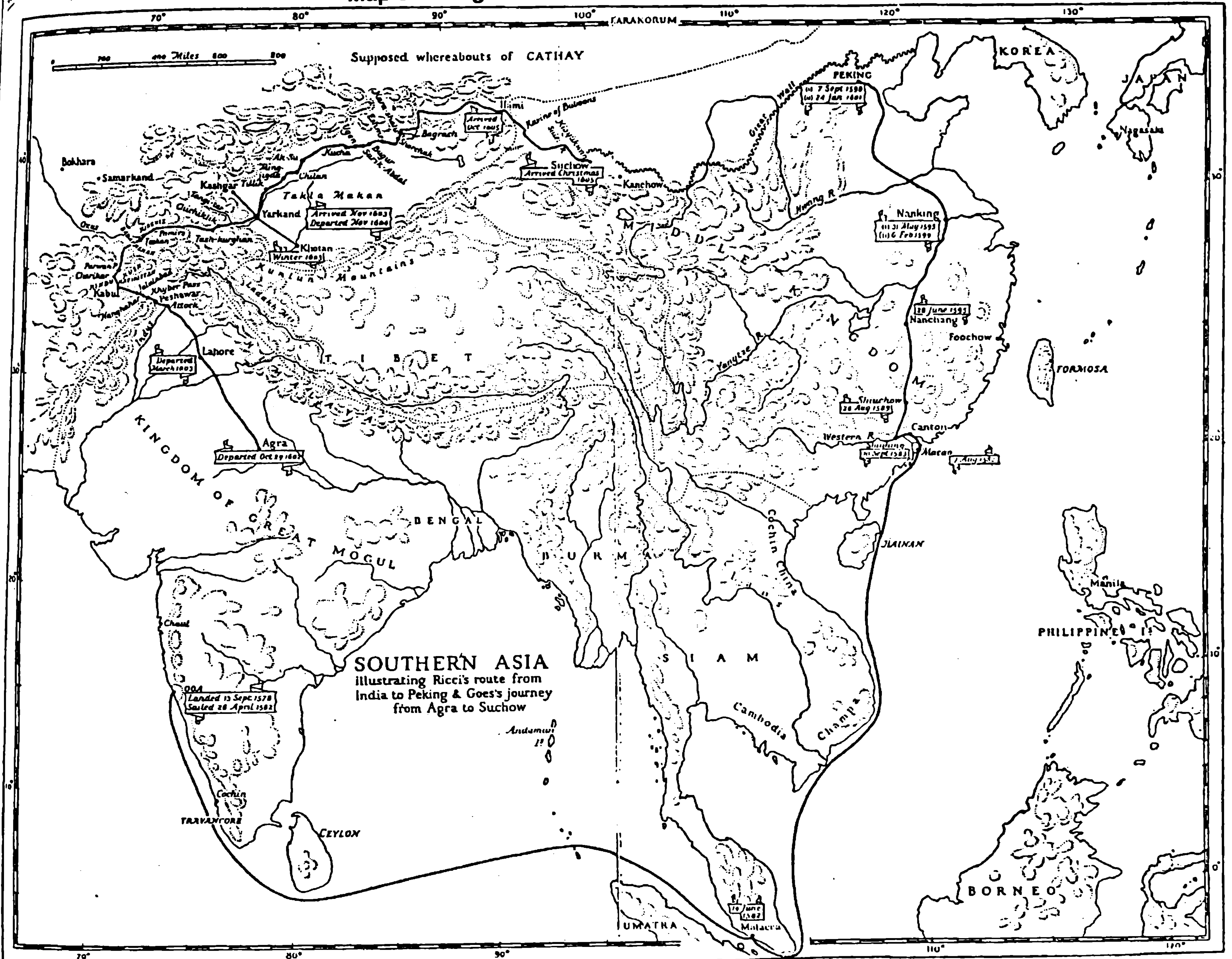
Kara-shahr was governed by a son of the King of Kashgar. When he learnt that Goes was not a Mussulman but professed a different religion, be began to persecute Goes. He told Goes that it was a very audacious and impertinent thing for a man of another faith to enter those strictly Muslim territories and that for so doing he might easily and lawfully deprive him both of his goods and his life. But when he read the King of Kashgar's letters patent he was less bellicose, and with the help of a few gifts became quite friendly in his attitude.

One night, when the King had been long engaged with the mullahs and the doctors in one of their theological discussions, the King suddenly decided to send for the Christian infidel. He despatched a horse for Goes with his messengers who informed Goes his presence was demanded immediately at the palace. The strange hour at which this message came via the evil-looking messengers, together with memories of his first reception by the King, left little doubt in the minds of Goes and Isaac that he would be put to death. The Jesuit Brother informed Isaac that if he did not return Isaac was to try to escape back to India to inform his fellow Jesuits of his death. Isaac's eyes were full of tears as he bade farewell to the Jesuit.

Goes, despising the danger, courageously accompanied the messengers to the palace. He was led into the King's presence, surrounded by priests and learned men. Among those present were two men dressed in red robes and red caps. They were the public executioners. Goes was now sure of his fate. He repeated to himself the Canticle of Samuel:

> "My heart exults in the Lord,
> I find my strength in my God;
> my mouth laughs at my enemies
> as I rejoice in your saving help.
> There is none like the Lord,
> there is none besides you.
> There is no Rock like our God."
>
> *(Canticle — I Samuel 2:1-10)*

Map showing the Routes taken by Goes and Ricci



Goes was called upon to engage in a debate with the Doctors of Islam. The mullahs straightaway launched into the attack. By dint of argument Goes was able to defend his religious beliefs. He presented his case without in any way offending the *kazis* (judges) and the mullahs. The King fixed Goes with his attention and appeared impressed with the Jesuit's arguments. He wound up the debate with the remarkable declaration that "The Christians are 'Misermans', true believers, like ourselves," followers of a religion which at one time had been professed by his and their forefathers. The King was probably referring to the early Nestorian* Christian communities among the Mongol and Turkish tribes to which Carpini and Rubruquis had testified, which, like the settlements buried under the desert sands, had vanished without leaving a trace. Or was he confusing Christianity with the worshippers of Fo, a religion of Tibet, which was there before the time of Genghis Khan?

After the debate, the whole company which had grown overheated in the argument, was invited by the King to a sumptuous banquet, hoping that in the accompanying conviviality the disputants would sink their differences. When, long after dawn, Goes was finally allowed to return home, he found his faithful companion weeping bitter tears, for the good Isaac had long despaired of his return and was already bemoaning his death.

By now the caravan had stayed in Kara-shahr three months. This was because Haji Afi, the caravan *basha*, would not leave until he got more merchants to travel with him, at a considerable gain to himself. Nor would he allow anyone to go on ahead of him. He planned another delay of equal duration at their next main halt, Turfan.

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* The Nestorians denied that Christ could be simultaneously human and divine. The sect was outlawed in the West by the Council of Ephesus in 432 A.D. Many adherents of the sect fled eastwards to present-day Iran and beyond. But neither the banning of all foreign religions from China in the year 845 A.D. under the T'ang dynasty nor the bloody conquests of Central Asia by the followers of Mohammed in the eleventh century had managed to suppress it completely. Marco Polo found many Nestorians in Kashgar and Khotan when he passed there at the end of the thirteenth century.

But Goes was tired with the delay — and the expense it was costing him. Resorting to the only means of ever getting anything done, Goes bribed the governor with a present and so got permission to leave Kara-shahr with just his own party.

As the governor was in the process of drawing up a safe-conduct pass for Goes, he asked Banda Abdullah, in the presence of several witnesses, whether he should mark on the paper that he was a follower of the law of 'Isai'. "Yes," Goes replied, "for having travelled thus far bearing the name of Jesus, I would surely bear it unto the end." Hearing this one of the *kazis*, a venerable old man, removed his turban and placing it on the ground, said: "In truth this man is a true believer and upholder of his Faith, for here, in the presence of your excellency of another faith, and all the rest of us, he had no hesitation in confessing his Jesus. Whereas were we to find ourselves amongst Christians we would deny our law and, through fear, or for worldly considerations, pass ourselves off as Christians, being nothing of the kind."

Goes was just about to depart from Kara-shahr when he got an unexpected confirmation of the existence of the kingdom of Cathay. A caravan from Cathay arrived. It carried merchants who had travelled to Cathay with the precious 'embassy' caravan and had now returned. The merchants had feigned an embassage (as was the custom) and pierced as far as the capital. Goes questioned them and was astonished to discover some of the merchants had actually lived in the Palace of Strangers (or Castle of Barbarians) at the same time when Father Ricci and Father Pantoja had been 'imprisoned' there by the mandarins. They had been in constant touch with the two Jesuits. They gave an exact description of their appearance, but they did not know their European names, since each of the foreigners had taken on another Chinese name. They told Goes how the Europeans had presented the Emperor with clocks, a clavichord, paintings and other marvellous gifts and that they even often conversed with the Emperor. To prove the truth of their tale, one of the merchants produced a piece of paper with Portuguese writing on it. They had rescued the

paper with the curious rounded script from the sweepings of Ricci's room to carry back home to prove to all people using that language that they had penetrated as far as China.

So Cathay and China were *one*; they differed only in name; and the fabulous Cambaluc was none other than Peking, its capital city. What Ricci had always maintained before Goes left India was true; and he, Goes, had proved it to be so. Unexpectedly the lost country of Cathay had been discovered. The Cathay he was searching for was China.

But who were the large body of Christians whom the Mohammedan travellers in India had spoken of? Here was another mystery which had to be solved before all doubts could be dispelled.

Goes, delighted to know the news about Father Ricci, pressed energetically forward with a determination to meet his colleagues as soon as he could.

Despite the opposition of Haji Afi, having got his letters for his safe conduct from the governor, Goes set off in mid-July, 1605, with Isaac and a handful of other merchants who were making for Hami. His goal was Kiajukwan, the famous west gate of the Great Wall of China, near Suchow, in the province of Kansu.

They headed across wide, barren steppes for the strong and well-fortified city of Turfan, 200 miles away from Kara-shahr. The journey was extremely hazardous. They were now a small party, not a large caravan. They were the attention of numerous gangs of Mongol robbers. Often it was only safe to travel by night.

One afternoon they were hit by a *buran*. They quickly dismounted and took shelter behind the bodies of their horses. To protect their eyes and faces they covered their faces with their clothes. *

* Little was Goes to know that three hundred and fifty years later another group of people would also be there, prostrate, not daring to look up, their eyes and faces covered up. These were the Chinese soldiers taking part in China's atom bomb experiments in the top-secret site of Lou-lan, 150 miles north of Turfan. Lou-lan had once been a large and flourishing town before being buried by the sands of Marco Polo's ghoul-infested Desert of Lop one thousand years before he passed that way. Even today the Desert of Lop resounds to the distant thunder of a nuclear test.

Three weeks later, about August 4th, they were glad to see the minaret of the grand mosque of Turfan pointing skywards like some giant obelisk. They were glad to leave behind the barren steppe and sand-dunes of the desert. These were replaced by cotton plantations and even some luxuriant viverine jungle. Soon they would be a little safer within the walls of the city. The large number of Buddhist shrines, including a colossal seated Buddha fifty feet high, testified to the Tibetan occupation up till the fourteenth century.

They rested at Turfan for one month before setting off again on 4th September. Many marches later they reached the oasis town of Pichan. Here the governor was a kind old man who generously furnished Goes with necessaries out of his own house.

One night occurred one of those calamities Goes lived in dread of. The very thought would give him nightmares. But, then, it would never happen to him. It did. One night Goes fell off his horse. Perhaps its monotonous gait had lulled him to sleep or perhaps the horse had shied at some imaginary obstacle, but Goes landed on the ground with a heavy bump. He lay there dazed for several minutes. Eventually he staggered to his feet. His frightened horse had galloped off in a whirlwind of sand. Meanwhile the rest of the caravan had moved on. He shouted after them. But the wind ensured no one would hear a thing. He cupped his mouth in his hands and shouted again. He started to run after them, as best he could, for he had hurt himself in the fall. But the more he ran the more his feet sank ankle-deep in the sand. He bellowed, but to no avail. Beads of perspiration came over him as he realised the implication of the disaster that had befallen him, the calamity that he had always dreaded. The nightmare was now a reality. He shouted in desperation, but there was no one to listen. He ran till he could run no more; but the horses outpaced him. He was lost in the desert, alone and with nothing; he was in a desolate wilderness bearing everywhere the impress of death. What a stupid way to die. At least a fanatic's knife — martyrdom — was worth dying for; but to be lost in

the desert! He sat in the sand and prayed. He gathered up his clothes around him against the cold. There was still hope. When the caravan reached the next halting place he would be missed. Someone would come looking for him. Surely Isaac at least would. Then another fear gripped him. Even if they came they would not find him, for the blowing wind would have removed all traces of footprints instantly. He wanted to run — just to stay warm. But he realised his one hope was to stay put — at least for some hours. If he wandered away he would be irretrievably lost. The only sound was the peculiar whining made by millions upon millions of grains of sand as they whizzed past without ceasing. Perhaps it was this eerie sound which had haunted the imagination of travellers across the desert who lived in dread of being led astray by evil spirits. Marco Polo had written:

> "When a man is riding through this desert by night and for some reason — falling asleep, or anything else — he gets separated from his companions and wants to rejoin them, he hears spirit voices talking to him as if they were his companions, sometimes even calling him by name. Often these voices lure him away from the path and he never finds it again, and many travellers have got lost and died because of this. Sometimes in the night travellers hear a noise like the clatter of a great company of riders away from the road; if they believe that these are some of their own company and head for the noise, they find themselves in deep trouble when daylight comes and they realise their mistake. Some men crossing this desert have seen a host of men coming towards them, suspected that they were robbers, and taken to their heels, losing the beaten track and going hopelessly astray in trying to find it again. Even during the day you can hear these spirit voices, and often you seem to hear music from many instruments — especially drums — and the clash of weapons. Because of all this, groups of travellers make a point of sticking close together. Before they go to sleep they put up a sign pointing in the direction in which they want to travel. And they hang little bells round the necks of all their animals, so that by listening to the sound they can stop them from straying off the road."

There was nothing to do but pray — and suffer. The crests of the dunes gleamed in the moonlight like fantastic ghosts, yellow dolphins with arched backs, mocking him for daring to defy them. Periodically he would swell his lungs to bursting as he shouted for help.

The vastness of the desert and sky filled him with awe. If ever he had any qualms about the existence of an Almighty Creator they vanished now. If ever he had been filled with his own importance and capability and self-sufficiency, his total and complete impotence and puny insignificance came to him with overpowering conviction. He could only place his trust in this Almighty Creator. He was totally and completely dependent on His mercy. Amid the grave-like silence he prayed as he had never prayed before.

"In the day of my distress I sought the Lord with outstretched arms." He took what heart he could from Paul's words to the Corinthians: "We are in difficulties on every side, but never consumed." And from the words for Eastertide: "Do not let your hearts be troubled; only have faith in me."

The continued silence, a silence made of stillness so deep your blood listened to it, was suffocating. It was the silence of a land in which, for mile upon mile, nothing moved — except the tiny particles of sand. On occasion you heard the sobbing of a wild donkey and then just as suddenly you were imprisoned again by silence. Sometimes he thought he was hearing the 'voices' Marco Polo had written of.

Then a miracle happened. His cry for help was answered. It was Isaac. Goes's joy was indescribable. "What angel has brought you here to rescue me from such a plight?" he is reputed to have said. With Isaac's help he was able to reach the halting place and recover from his fall.

Travelling via Aramuth they finally reached the large and fertile oasis of Hami, a well-fortified garrison on the very edge of the great Gobi Desert, on October 17th, 1605. It was the feast day of Ignatius — not his own Ignatius of Loyola, but the much earlier Ignatius of

Antioch. The fields of maize and sorghum were being harvested. Oranges hung off the trees. Thick clumps of apple, apricot and peach trees, and stately yellow-leaved walnut trees, luxuriated off the limpid water of the snow-fed streams.

Hami was famed not only for its white-fleshed melons and open-handed hospitality. Here, as Marco Polo noted, it was customary for a host to leave his house and jasmine-scented wife to any traveller who expressed the wish.

Goes remained a month at Hami before the last and most barren and most hazardous part of his long odyssey — the perilous 550 kilometres across the barren, undulating sands of the Gobi Desert. Having survived the ordeal of altitude and cold in the Pamirs he would now be tested by the opposite extreme: the flat barren wastes of the Gobi with its burning heat — and constant thirst. Of the Desert Marco Polo had said:

> "The length of this desert is so great that 'tis said it would take a year and more to ride from one end of it to the other. And here, where its breadth is least, it takes a month to cross it. 'Tis all composed of hills and valleys of sand, and not a thing to eat is to be found on it. But after riding for a day and a night you find fresh water, enough mayhap for some fifty or hundred persons with their beasts, but not for more. And all across the desert you will find water in like manner, that is to say, in some twenty-eight places altogether you will find good water, but in no great quantity; and in four places also you find brackish water."
>
> "Beasts there are none; for there is nought for them to eat."

The shortest route across the desert from Hami was via Ansifan. On the night of November 17th, 1605, Goes and his party prepared to set off. His party was by now quite extensive. How prudently and successfully Goes had played the part of a merchant is borne out by the fact that he had grown wealthy at the end of his enormously long journey. He had thirteen horses, five

hired servants whom he had picked up during the journey, and two negro boys whom he had bought as slaves, also Isaac, of course, and last but by no means least, his jade — worth more than 2,500 pieces of gold.

The camel was the only animal for any desert crossing. Horses would never survive the journey across the vast, unrelenting Gobi, destitute of water, forage, vegetation. Goes exchanged his horses for camels. He carefully checked that the camels he was getting were not already half-dead, with soles in need of resoling and suffering from sore feet. In the winter and on level ground, camels can last nearly a week without water. In March and April three days is their limit. The ideal food for them, apart form herbage and vegetation, is a mixture of sesame oil (*yagh*) and chaff from the crushed seeds of sesame (*kynchyr*). A pint of sesame oil will sustain a camel without food for a month. But they would never forego food if the chance came their way.

In the desert, which only knows extremes, the weather had become wintry, with increasingly more icy blasts. The icy wind blowing form the north-east made preparations for the start very trying. Even after sunrise the temperature was several degrees below freezing. The last-minute checks were made. The water-skins were full. The food had been weighed and counted. It was necessary to stock up with at least one month's provisions for themselves and their animals. Spades, shovels, bridle-bits, etc., had all been checked. Pieces of white felt carpet (*kighiz*) had been put on the camels' backs to protect them against chafing by the baggage. The haze and the floating clouds which had blocked out the stars earlier now hid the sun from view. Finally, with the troublesome wind blowing in their faces, they set off. Far away to the north the snowy range of the lofty Tien Shan Mountains could just be picked out. To the south-east on the horizon were the noble, rounded forms of the sand-dunes, and beyond them, amid the grave-like silence, stretched the brown, level, flat of desert, as far as the eye could see, the final barrier to the unknown, enchanted land.

The wind blew in gusts, and greyish-yellow 'sand-spouts' drifted at a great altitude, their upper ends slightly bent over in the direction of the wind. The surface of the ground was partly covered with fine, soft dust, partly with deposits of salt; but they soon passed into a region of nothing but sand, blown up into dunes or ridges which the local people called *gag* (mountain). The caravan track became heavy and difficult as it wound its way in and out between the desert poplars, the occasional thistle or withered prickly bush, and the dunes of sand which were quite small at first but rapidly grew in height. The yellow dunes, like giant waves, stretched in countless myriads to a distant horizon with, here and there, an extra large sand-mountain, a king-dune, as it were, towering above his fellows. The dunes seemed to silently beckon travellers to engulf and whole caravans to swallow up as they had swallowed up so many in the past. The camel was the only animal which could have traversed the path, where with each step one's feet sank ankle-deep or more. As the caravan crawled further and further into the desert, the feet of both men and camels sank deeper into the soft sand. In a day's march they would rarely cover more than ten miles. In the pools of very fine dust embedded between the dunes, one would sink up to the knees. The few creeks and streams gave up their unavailing struggle as the terrain grew more and more arid; they lost themselves in the sand. The dunes were crescent-shaped, their less steep sides facing the wind. They travelled along the sheltered side of the dunes, which were steel-grey in colour, coated with a thin crust of mica. Not a few times they rode into a cul-de-sac between the horns of the crescent-shaped dunes and were compelled to turn back. Wherever they passed a few solitary poplars and shrivelled reeds, the camels would stretch down their long necks to snatch at them as if they had a premonition of hard times in store for them. The dunes seemed to avoid the poplars, rather forming a circular wall round them, leaving the trees in the middle. On the windward side of one sand-dune they passed a half-buried grave mound decorated with these *tughs*.

The sun shone down on them unmercifully. At midday they stopped for a rest. It was too hot to continue, both for them and the camels. Even the desert ghosts, the *jins*, rested.

The sight of rotting bodies of unsuspecting Mohammedan travellers who had attempted the journey unaccompanied put them on their guard against the lurking Mongol and Tartar marauding robber bands. The travellers had been stripped and murdered by the Kalmuks. These carnivorous Kalmuks usually did not kill the native population whom they considered their servants and herdsmen. But they would despoil them of their flocks of sheep and herds of bullocks. The Tartars ate no wheat, barley nor pulses, saying that was food only for beasts, not men. They ate only flesh, that of horses, mules and camels. They lived to a ripe old age, not infrequently surviving even to one hundred. Tartar discipline was fearsome and based on flogging with rods. Hanging was a merciful alternative to flogging. One stroke with the 'big stick' — a heavy cane with an oar shaped end — was enough to draw blood. Twenty strokes would kill. Horse-stealing was the most common capital offence: the offender was chopped in two with a sword. During the march spies were placed on one of the camel-humped crests of sand to look out for the bandits. Goes later wrote: "The country between Cialis (Kara-shahr) and the Chinese wall is notorious for its Tartar raids, so that the traders always cross it in the greatest fear, sometimes even under cover of night and in the strictest silence."

They travelled about twenty miles on the first day. The sight of a clump of tamarisks or poplars was always a welcome sight. Not only did it break the monotony of the sea of sand, but it usually indicated the presence of water. And it provided fuel for the night fire. They stopped for the night on the top of a hard level dune. Close by were some withered poplars, which would provide fuel, and reeds which would provide fodder for the camels. The camels were still warm from their long tramp and were led about for a while to cool them, to

prevent their taking cold. They were then fed sesame oil and sesame-seed husks. The men ate a few handfuls of *talkan* (toasted flour) steeped in water, or rice, which they ate out of wooden bowls. Bread, with milk if they could get it, supplemented the bare ration. The water in their *tulums* was still warm and tepid from the afternoon's heat. That night they sat round a fire, with a blue-black sky full of glittering stars above their heads; near the horizon the stars were swallowed up in the dust haze.

Before the sun had risen they were up and the caravan in motion. Sand-dunes alternated here and there with steppes of withered reeds which crunched under the camels' feet and sent up little clouds of dust when trodden on. The heat and the glare increased as the sun rose higher and higher in the heaven. The haze on the horizon was disconcerting, for often it would obscure the direction to follow. No signposts in the Gobi Desert! The skeletons of animals that had perished and the mounds of camel-dung became their pointers. As Marco Polo had written: "You see nothing in any direction but the sky and the sands, without the slightest trace of a road; and travellers find nothing to guide them but the bones of men and beasts and the droppings of camels."

They passed through the Ravine of Baboons into the black grit of the Western Gobi. As they advanced, the sand-dunes grew higher, reaching heights of even three hundred to four hundred feet. When two systems of sea-waves come together they mount on top of one another and so double their original height. In like manner some of the gigantic sand-waves were piled up in pyramidal masses overtopping the level of the rest. This occurred whenever two separate dunes were driven one across the other by the ever-varying winds. It was amazing to see with what surety of foot the camels clambered up the steep inclines which men climbed only with great exertion and difficulty, slipping back at every step one took. And then they would slide cleverly down the steep slopes, making use of their hind-legs as a brake.

No one spoke. Even if one did no one would hear — the wind made sure of that. The silence, the unbroken stillness was weird. Yet ever the desert wind whispered 'Onwards'.

Day after day, mile after dreary mile they plodded, with the dunes rolling on all sides like the waves of a choppy sea. The camels still marched with the same calm dignity and majestic gait which is their distinguishing mark, the only sound the funereal ding-dong, ding-dong, of the bells round their necks tinkling in time to the monotonous padding of their feet.

The sand and dust-storms (*burans*) were awesome. Even the hardy reeds would bow in deference before the fierce tyranny of these *burans*.

Towards midday, every day, the wind would come on to blow strongly from the north-east, enveloping everything in an impenetrable dust-haze. Sand and dust were whirled along the ground, in a mad dance, rising in spinning columns into the air, swallowing up everything. The whole atmosphere became black; the sun was completely invisible. Every breath they inhaled was charged with choking dust. Dense clouds of dust and sand and even fine particles of abraded rock blew straight into their faces with such violence they were almost suffocated.

The fine drift-sand penetrated everything and everywhere: into the mouth, the ears, the nose, the eyes; even the clothing they wore was impregnated with it. There was nothing to do in the blizzard-swept hell in the middle of nowhere but shut their eyes and mouth tight and lower their heads against the fierce blast which roared about them; nothing to do but stand still and turn one's back to the storm. The camels would straddle their legs to keep their equilibrium. When the gusts were too violent, even the camels would lie down with their backs turned to the wind, their long necks stretched flat along the ground. The men would crouch down with their faces on the ground or pressed against the sheltered back of a camel. Everything disappeared from view. Everything was covered in yellow dust and sand.

There was nothing to do but kneel or be still — and pray. When the *buran* passed and they stood up they could literally shake pounds of dust off their clothes.

At the end of a day the camels, who had had no food during the day, would hungrily scrape the sand with their hoofs in the hope of finding some vegetation. But usually all they would find would be the tough hard roots of *teresken*, at which they would tug greedily.

Occasionally they would come across a few wild camels. It was hard to imagine that any animal or plant could ever survive the unrelenting conditions in such an inhospitable place. But as soon as the wild camels scented danger they would set off and gallop away as fast as they could. Occasionally, too, they came across the wild desert donkey, which lived off the dung of the wild camel. The monotonous days of travel would be enlivened by the sight of a flock of wild geese, flying in a long line, one behind the other, and each flock following exactly the same line of flight, towards precisely the same point of the compass.

They passed ancient towns choked to death by the wind-swept dunes. Desert sand would occasionally bury whole cities whose only memorial would be an eroded stump of mulberry jutting like coral from a sea of furrowed sand.

But the biggest problem of all — a matter of life and death — was water. Without it a man would die in a matter of days; a camel could last a few days more. Here only water mattered. And trees, a symbol of water, gave a name to the oases where they halted: *Tallik*, place of willows; *Ming-jigda*, the thousand white poplars; *Chilan*, the jujube tree.

One wondered how even the starveling tamarisks and saksauls managed to subsist in the desert, for the ground was as dry as tinder; there was not a single drop of water in sight for miles. But the tamarisk cones often saved their lives, for it was a sure sign that the life-giving moisture was somehow reaching the vegetation, even if only periodically, through the sub-soil. They would dig and invariably their efforts would be

rewarded. But digging in the sand was difficult: as fast as you dug out the sand it would run back into the hole and fill it up. Sand, as fluid as water, trickled in like water almost as fast as the diggers baled it out. Sometimes they would need to dig only three feet, at other times the earth yielded its life-giving prize more parsimoniously. What a sight to see the water ooze slowly out of the sand. Sometimes it was deliciously fresh. Sometimes it was brackish, but suitable enough for the camels to drink. The *mussucks* or skins would be replenished with the vital liquid.

Often the hardy tamarisks were not in sight for days. They had to shorten their water ration between the dwindling springs of fresh water.

One day some of Goes's men brought him a man they had caught stealing water from the rationed supply. Goes had to make an example of him. The grovelling man was so frightened, the yellow whites of his eyes showed in his ash-coloured face. With large, pitiable, doe's eyes he cringed for mercy. To flog him would mean an extra casualty on his hands. Most caravan leaders would abandon the man to his fate in the desert. Goes decided against that for he had just had a taste of what that meant. Instead he fined the man a part of his wages in kind.

Eventually all trace of any organic life disappeared absolutely. The last of the tamarisks, which still defied the visitation of death, was left behind. Not a blade, not a leaf was to be seen; nothing but sand, sand, sand — fine yellow sand, whole mountains and valleys of it, stretching over boundless spaces as far as the eye could see. Not a bird intruded into the vast expanse of sky. All traces of gazelle and deer and even the wild ass and the wild camel had long since disappeared. At least their dung had provided a valuable source of fuel. Even the camels began to feel the strain of weeks of such a rigorous regime of travelling; many developed sores; and when they developed sore feet their feet were 'resoled' by the ancient but effective desert remedy of stitching pieces of leather to their skin. Some of them were visibly tiring. Their falls grew more and more frequent. And each time

a camel fell it had to be unloaded before the camel could get up again. Their breathing was more laboured and slow; their breath even more disagreeable than usual. One sad day they had to abandon one of their animals too sick to continue. For a long time the pitiful crying of the animal after them, like the weak bleating of a new-born lamb, haunted them. Sometimes a male camel would suddenly lie down and die, because it had no drive to go on living.

Following the route of the conquering Genghis Khan, past towns and cities which had collapsed before the encroaching desert, for three hundred miles Goes and his companions braved a graveyard of sand; they were thirsty, even worse, they were numbed, almost frozen, with cold, exhausted and heavy with sleep. For weeks their world was spun into dust, a lifeless planet where time and again their projected destination proved to be only a mirage on arrival.

By now the water situation was desperate. They rationed their water even more drastically, with no water at all for the camels. More and more their throats were on fire with the hot dryness. The only words the men would utter were *'Su! Su!'* (water!). Their water ration was so minute they were slowly dying from thirst. They were all suffering from dehydration — tongues white and swollen, lips blue, cheeks hollow, pulse low, eyes with the glassy lustre of death. Once they came upon a river — but it was dry. They just wanted to lie down and die, like the male camel. But Goes knew that if he lost his consciousness he would die. That night they dug for water with their dry, parched hands, as hard as wood, their skin like parchment, by the light of a candle. But their effort was in vain. Some of his men resorted to drinking the urine of the camel; but that made them violently sick. For the first few days of thirst the tortures are so poignant that you are on the brink of losing your senses. Then the skin ceases to perspire or when it does the perspiration is imperceptible because of the blood flowing thicker and slower through the veins. A rapidly increasing weakness follows and quickly brings matters to a crisis and a final end.

Was that to be their fate, too?

The prayers of Christian and Muslim alike became more and more urgent and desperate. "You are the God who works wonders. You showed your power among the peoples ..." "Will the Lord reject us forever? Will he show us his favour no more? Has his love vanished forever? Has his promise come to an end?"

Then, one evening, in the last stages of exhaustion, they found a single unmistakable thorn bush. They even grasped it with a shout of unrelieved relief. Water must be near. Next day the sight of tracks and droppings of wild camels and wild asses and even deer brought further hope. It meant water — and even civilisation — were not too far away. Scrub, reeds, poplars, gave further green glimmers of hope. Not too far away the Sulei snaked its way along the desert's edge. They were saved.

And then they saw it — winding up and down the crests of the hills north and south to the horizon, dividing barbarism from civilisation with a single imperious sweep — the crenellated line of the Great Wall itself, which marked the frontier of China.

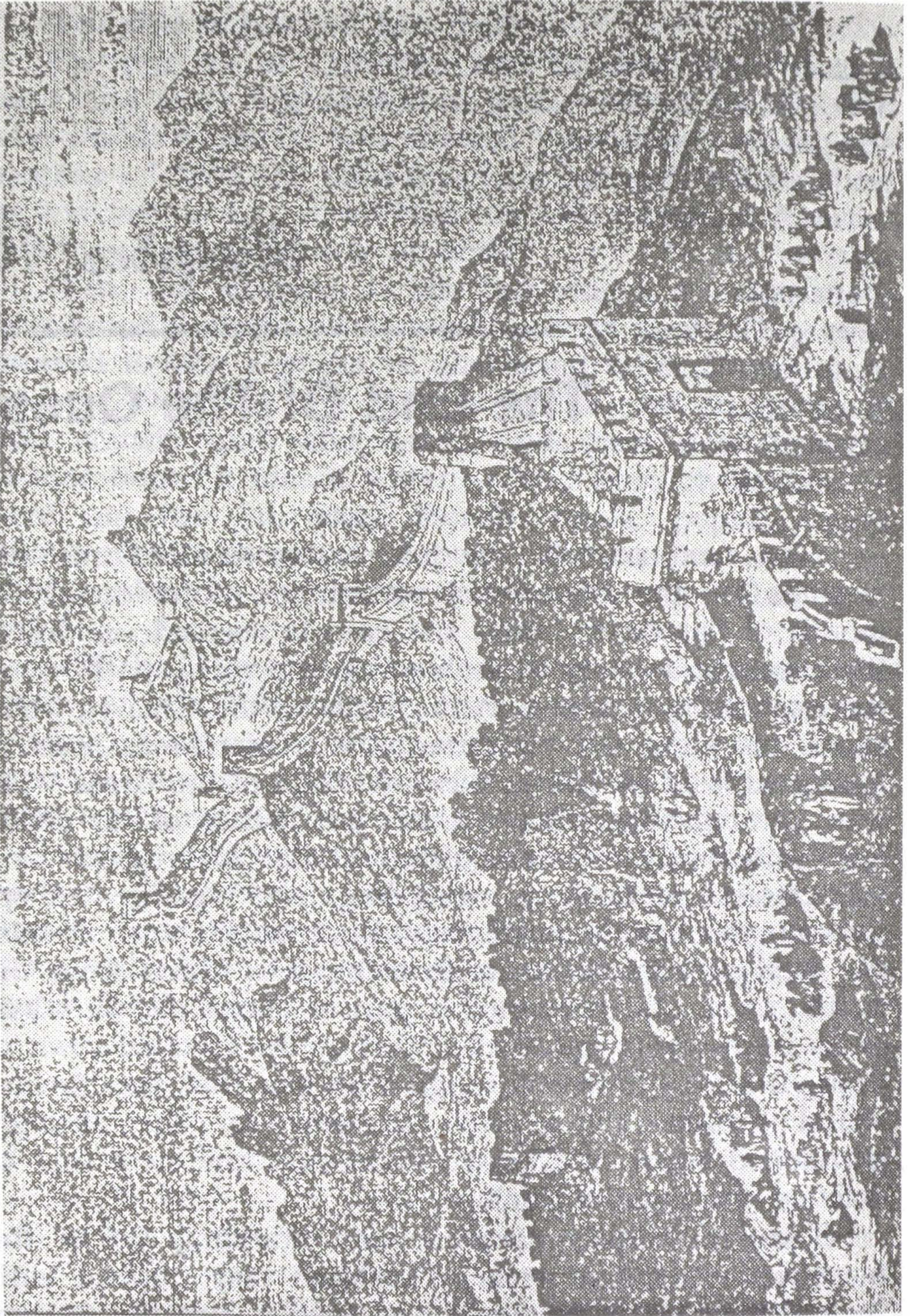
Despite incredible hardships and danger they had made it. They had crossed the great Gobi Desert. The journey from Hami had taken twenty-five days. It was three years since Goes had first set off from Agra in his search for Cathay.

Chapter 16

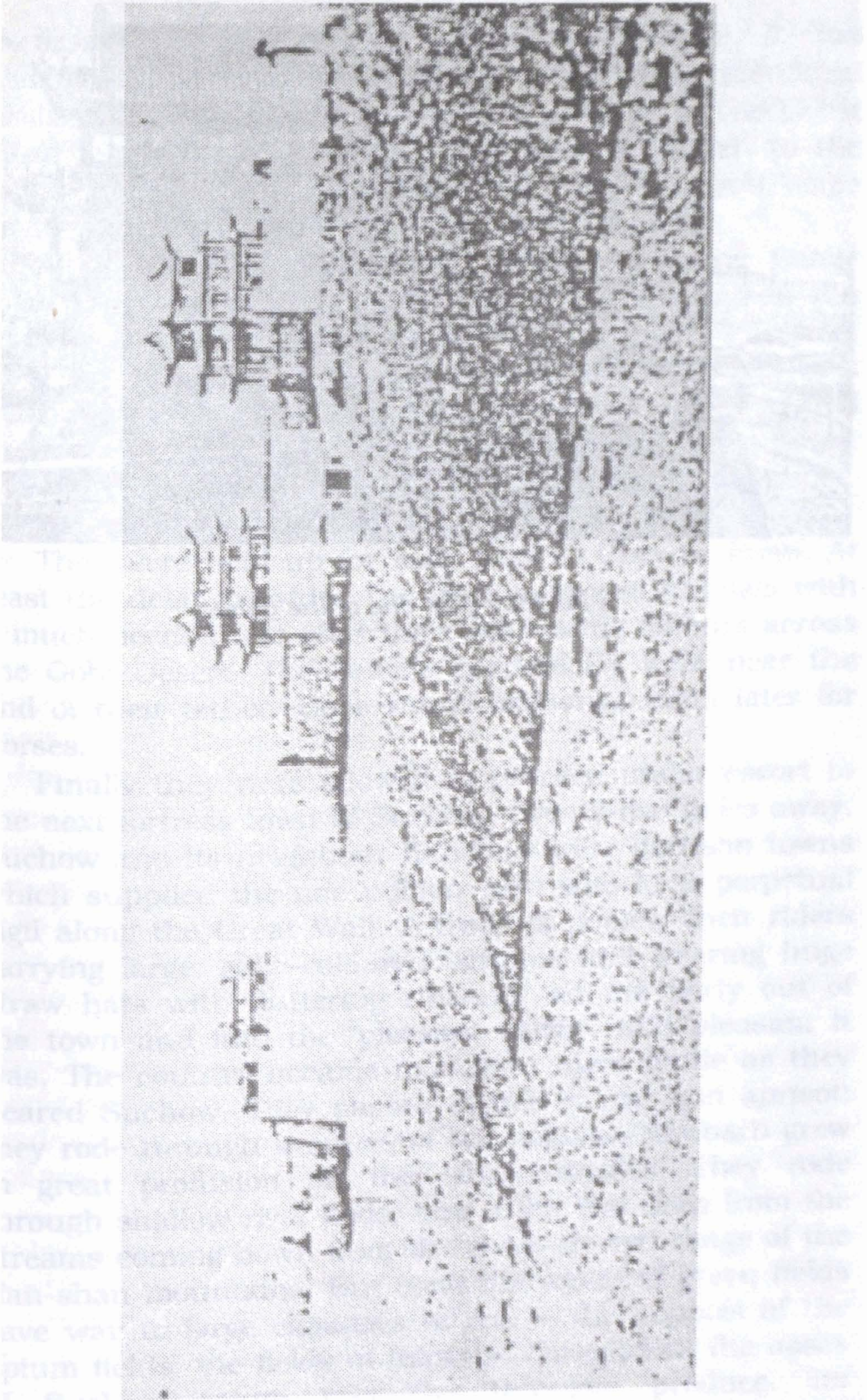
The End Of The Quest

The next part of the journey took them into the foothills of the Nan-shan mountains. After nearly a month of flat desert sand the camels seemed unsure of their footing as they scrambled up the rocky path. Soon the pagoda-like towers on the walls of the Chia-yu-kuan came into view. Chia-yu-kuan, the western-most part of the Great Wall of China, the Jade Gate of the Great Wall, was strategically situated at the head of a defile, surrounded by an enclosing chain of rugged and precipitous mountains, affording no passage except through the heavily fortified and garrisoned town. Whilst the Wall prevented Tartar invasion into China from the north, there still remained a gap of about two hundred miles from where the Wall ended at the fortified town of Chia-yu-kuan. It was through this gap that the Tartars would invade. Hence the necessity for the strongly garrisoned town of Chia-yu-kuan and the next line of defence, the town of Suchow.

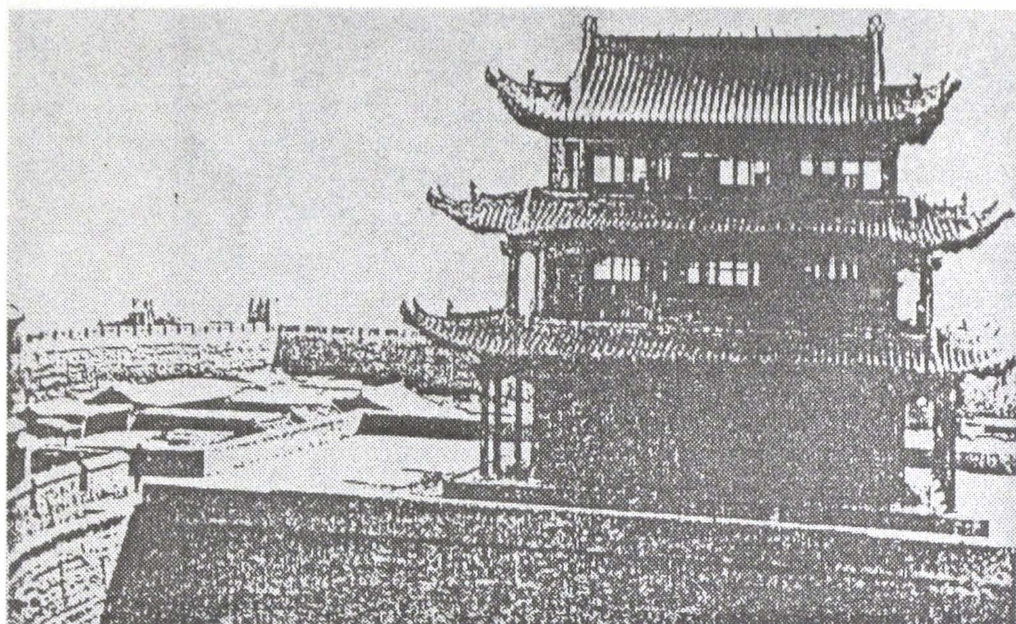
Soon the small caravan was standing below the massive crenellated walls of reddish clay, topped with their loop-holed battlements and towers. But the Cathay they had reached was anything but hospitable to strangers. Chia-yu-kuan, which meant 'Barrier of the Pleasant Valley', was living up to its name. The armed guards refused the strangers admission to China proper — China 'within the Wall' — without the written



The great northern wall of China



The Chia-yü-kuan gate of the 'great wall' seen from south-west



A Pavilion over one of the gates

permission of the governor of Kansu province. It was through this western gateway that the merchant 'ambassadors' made their way to the court of the Great Khan in the capital Peking. They were subjected to the usual interrogation: Who are you? where do you come from? what goods are you taking to the capital?

After much argument the strangers were finally allowed through a vaulted gate. A list of their names was made and an inventory of the goods they were carrying. At a second gate Goes noted a fine Chinese temple, with elaborate wood-carving and a roof of beautifully glazed green tiles. The temple was said to date from Ming times. The third vaulted gate led them to the 'castrum' proper. They were allowed no farther.

They were held up for nine days at Chia-yu-kuan. At least the delay provided the tired men and animals with a much needed rest after their exhausting labours across the Gobi Desert. The camels particularly were near the end of their tether. Goes would exchange them later for horses.

Finally they were allowed to proceed under escort to the next fortress town of Suchow, twenty-five miles away. Suchow and its neighbour Kanchow were garrison towns which supplied the one million men who kept perpetual vigil along the Great Wall. A troop of ponies, their riders carrying large, gaily-coloured banners and wearing huge straw hats with fluttering ribbons, led the party out of the town and into the 'pleasant valley'. And pleasant it was. The country became more and more fertile as they neared Suchow. They passed groves of elm and apricot; they rode through avenues of tall poplars. Rhubarb grew in great profusion on the mountainsides. They rode through shallow river beds, now a few feet deep from the streams coming down from the snow-crested range of the Nan-shan mountains. But soon the waves of green fields gave way to large expanses of red — the poppies of the opium fields, the fields of iniquity. Throughout the oases of Suchow opium was the favourite produce. Its cultivation brought prosperity to the peasants; but invariably it also ruined them. For none of those who

grow opium long resist the temptation to smoke it themselves. Laziness, gambling, and other bad habits soon get a firm hold on the opium cultivator and it is not long before his mortgaged fields pass into the clutches of the town usurers.

Soon the towers of Suchow, reflecting the slanting rays of the sun, came into view. As they neared Suchow, they passed a Chinese funeral procession, marching to the doleful clang of a camel's bells. The older men supported themselves on hand staves. A poor unfortunate bystander must have wished it were his funeral. He was undergoing the dreaded Chinese punishment of slowly starving to death. He wore a huge collar of heavy wood round his neck, designed to prevent the miscreant from feeding himself. It was Christmas 1605 when Goes and his group entered Suchow. It was a huge city, built in the form of a square. There were four gates on each side of the square wall, each gate being a pavilion of two storeys with a pagoda-like roof. They and their escort entered by one of these gates. The streets were paved with vitrified brick; the bazaars were wide, clean and watered. Large temples seemed everywhere.

Suchow was divided into two enclaves, separated and closely guarded one from the other. The Chinese, as rulers of the country, occupied the richer half of the town; the other half was occupied by Mohammedans and foreigners, merchants from Central Asia, Persia and Arabia, trading through 'ambassadors' with China. The merchants, bankers and warehousemen, together with their wives and children, were subject to Chinese law, strictly guarded, and at night were locked up in their own half of the city. Merchants who had resided there for nine years were not allowed home.

As a foreigner Goes had to live in the Mohammedan ghetto. It was here that Goes finally discovered the whole truth about Cathay. He heard the Mohammedans refer to the Chinese as Cathayans. He heard Cambulac, capital of Cathay, referred to as Peking. Mohammedans returning from Peking on their home-journey again assured him of the presence of European priests. Goes

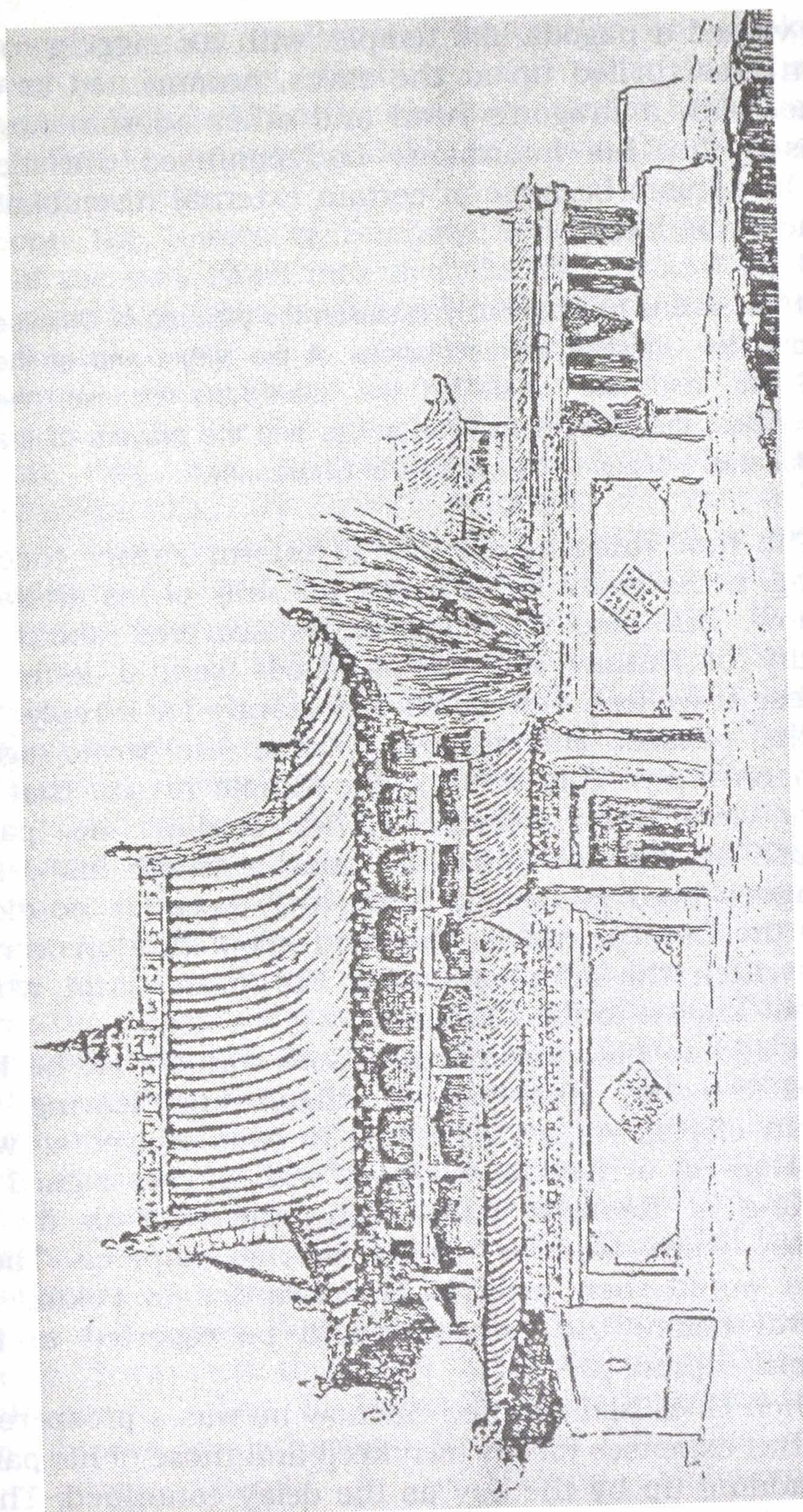
had visited a pagoda-like temple, with its sagging roof of green tiles turned up at the eaves, ornamented at each corner with a dragon's head and other adornments. He realised that his informants had confused Christianity and Buddhism because of certain external resemblances. As he wrote later:

> "Mussulmans had obviously mistaken the pictures of Chinese idols for Christian representations of the Virgin and of the Saints, and had conceived the altars, the incense, the candles, the processions, the songs and the prayers of the Buddhist Bonzes to be symbols of Christianity."

The first thing to do was to inform Father Ricci in Peking, a thousand miles away, not only of his arrival in Suchow, but also what he had discovered about the identity of Cathay and China. Goes sent a letter via Chinese travellers. He waited expectantly for a reply. The months passed. But no reply came. He wrote again. Again no reply. This was for the simple reason that his letters were never delivered. They couldn't be, partly because he did not know the quarter where his Jesuit colleagues lived in Peking, and partly because he didn't know the Chinese names they had adopted. Moreover he had written the addresses in a European script which was not known to the Chinese.

To add to his discomfiture, Goes found that he had gained little by hurrying on ahead and leaving the caravan of Haji Afi at Karashar. He was obliged to wait until Haji Afi arrived in Suchow, with papers signed by the King of Kashgar, authorising the caravan as an embassy come to offer tribute to the Emperor. These papers would then have to be forwarded to Peking for approval before the caravan could be escorted to the northern capital.

When Goes had reached Suchow he was a prosperous man. But expenses for his own keep and those of his party were adding up by the day as the delay continued. Then six months after his own arrival in Suchow, the 'embassy' caravan of Haji Afi arrived. Its leader had not forgiven



*"A pagoda-like Chinese temple,
with its sagging roof of tiles turned up at each corner"*

Goes for his premature departure from Kashgar and began taking revenge. Goes began to suffer at the hands of the Mohammedans more than he had on his travel. By appealing to the unwritten code of caravan travel Haji Afi compelled Goes not only to lend money to members of the caravan, money which he knew he would never be repaid, but also to give extravagant communal feasts. The longer Goes's brethren in Peking delayed replying to his urgent pleas for help, the more the once wealthy merchant Abdullah Isai fell into financial straits.

From the merchants on the caravan Goes learnt of the death of his part-sponsor and benefactor — the Emperor Akbar. Akbar had died on 27th October, 1605, sixty-three years of age and having reigned for half a century. Rumour had it that the Emperor had died of poisoning. And yet the King always took careful precautions against being poisoned. He would only eat in private with his women, off golden vessels served by eunuchs. This food was always tasted first by an official taster. It would appear that the poisoning had been at Akbar's own hand — but by mistake. The greatest honour that the Mogul King could do to a favoured person was to give him with his own hands, a folded betel-leaf. Akbar did this honour to various persons at different times; but rumour had it, many having been thus honoured, died shortly afterwards. The King had a box to hold betel, with three divisions: in the first were the leaves; in the second, the restorative pills which he ate; in the third, other pills, poisoned but quite similar to the restorative ones. When the King was pleased to confer great honour, he gave a betel-leaf and then one of his restoratives. But when he meant to kill anyone, after offering the betel, he handed him one of the imitated pills, whereby without fail the man's life was sacrificed.

It happened one day that the King wished to kill one of the grandees, and took by oversight one of the poisoned pills and ate it, taking it for one of the restoratives, with the object of giving confidence to the other man. After a little time he recognised the mistake he had made; but there was no remedy, and thus,

through his own death, was disclosed the way that he had killed others.

Goes wrote yet again to Father Ricci on Easter Day 1606, entrusting the letter to a Mohammedan who was visiting the capital secretly. He wrote:

> "I am a member of the Society. I was sent by my superiors to discover Cathay but I now believe that no such country exists, for I have traversed Asia without finding it, and this country, which we in Europe call China, is known to the people of Central Asia as Cathay. I have found no Christians, despite the tales of so many Mohammedans. I beg you, Fathers, or any other Portuguese or Christians in Peking, to help me escape from the hands of the infidels. I have suffered greatly on the journey, am exhausted and wish to return to India by the sea route. If I wait until the caravan is allowed to pass to the capital, I shall be here two years, for that is the customary delay."

No one could enter or leave Suchow without the magistrate's consent, but the Mohammedan messenger managed to escape from the strictly guarded ghetto and made his way swiftly to the capital.

Meanwhile the Jesuits in Agra and in Peking had become greatly concerned about the fate of their brother, Bento. In 1606 his letters from Yarkand had arrived in India, but since his departure from that town no further news had been received. Father Ricci in Peking knew Goes had set off from Agra on a search for Cathay. But he had begun to fear for Goes's life after so long an interval without any news. While he himself was at the 'Castle of Barbarians' in Peking, paying tribute to the Emperor, he had inquired about Goes but there was never any news. This could have been because Ricci was unaware of Goes's assumed name, Abdullah, or because he might have travelled in a different caravan. Every new arrival in Peking was questioned by Ricci about Goes; but without any result.

Then one day in mid-November 1606, more than ten months after Goes had arrived in Suchow, his

Mohammedan messenger, who had left in the previous spring, succeeded in locating Father Ricci. Ricci was over-joyed. Goes's letter proved the final correctness of Ricci's belief that China and Marco Polo's Cathay were one and the same country. But reading between the lines of the letter the good Father realised Goes was in desperate trouble. From his own experience in Tientsin, Ricci realised at once the predicament Goes was in. There had been a terrible massacre of Chinese in Manila in 1603. This event aroused great excitement and anger in Peking. Feeling ran high against the Spaniards and Portuguese. The resentment of the Chinese against this savage manifestation of Western barbarism vented itself upon the Jesuits.

Ricci acted immediately. It was decided to send a member of the Society to rescue Goes from Suchow somehow and bring him to the capital. Ricci himself could not go; he was obliged to stay in Peking. Ricci selected instead one of his pupils, a young trustworthy Chinese convert, John Fernandes, who was preparing to join the Society of Jesus, to undertake the difficult task of contacting the Jesuit Brother. John was a prudent, resourceful young man of twenty-five, the son of a Chinese mother in Macao, the Portuguese settlement in the China mainland. He could speak fluent Portuguese. His instructions were to bring Goes and his party to Peking by any means possible, but failing that, to stay with Goes and send back word to Peking. It was hoped that with the help of friends at Court in the capital, some means would be found to get Goes into China proper. Another young Chinese convert who came from the north and who was familiar with that part of the country, was selected to accompany John Fernandes.

In normal circumstances it would have been out of the question to undertake the arduous four-month journey to Suchow in the middle of winter. But Ricci realised the urgency. Any further delay and Goes would despair of ever contacting his colleagues in the capital, if, indeed, any were there. In fact, if Ricci had delayed the departure of his messengers even a few days, the story of

Benedict de Goes, alias Abdullah Isai, would never have been known or written.

Fernandes and his companion set off from Peking on December 11th. They carried a letter from Ricci advising Goes on the safest way of making his journey to the capital. They also carried letters from two other members of the Society, giving Goes full details about affairs in the capital, a subject on which he was most eager for information. The four-month journey to Suchow in mid-winter proved most difficult and arduous. But a further misfortune befell Fernandes. At Singhan, the capital of Shansi province, his companion and guide ran away, taking with him half the money and supplies for the journey.

To pay for his own keep and for that of other members of his party, Goes had been forced to part with his matchless jade for 1200 pieces of gold crowns which was less than half its real value. A large part of this money went to repay money which he had borrowed to maintain his 'family'; with the rest he was able to keep body and soul for a few more months. As he was one of the ambassadors nominated to carry tribute to the Emperor in Peking, Goes also bought four hundred pounds of jade of inferior quality, because without this he would have been debarred from going to the capital. He hid one hundred pounds of this marble in the ground under the paving stones of his lodging, to conceal it from the Mohammedans who were fleecing him of everything. He swore to use this jade only to get him to Peking.

The caravan *basha* Haji Afi continued to borrow more and more money, threatening to leave Goes behind when the caravan left for Peking unless Goes obliged. Soon Goes was destitute, penniless. He had no money for food. In February hunger broke his health. He had to retire to his lodging, sick and hungry. For a month he lay ill. All his prayers remained unanswered. He received no reply to his letters. He could only suppose his colleagues in China were lost and deserted — as he was — or dead — as he soon would be. The caravan for Peking would not leave for another nine months. How could he survive

until then? He felt terribly sorry for his faithful servant Isaac and the others in his party. He was beyond helping them now.

The ill-health continued. Goes was confined to bed permanently. Sometimes he would almost succumb to despair: sick, hungry, reduced to penury, far from his Jesuit brothers in India — as far as he was concerned India was a million miles away. As for his family in the Azores — they might as well be on another planet. He recalled the words of the Psalmist:

> "In the day of my distress I sought the Lord.
> My hands were raised at night without ceasing;
> my soul refused to be consoled.
> You withheld sleep from my eyes.
> I was troubled. I could not speak.
> I thought of the days of long ago
> and remembered the years long past.
> At night I mused within my heart.
> I pondered and my spirit questioned."

Here he was, lost and abandoned in the heart of Asia, his whereabouts known to nobody. His colleagues in the Society would not know whether he was alive or dead; nor would his family. He often thought of them. He sometimes felt he had deserted them — and for what? Chasing a moonbeam for four years. He had found Cathay. But there was no way he could let the rest of the world know. All that cold and hunger and fear — for what? A lost kingdom of Christians! He had not met one in all his years of sojourn. But he still had one friend: Isaac — God be praised — remained faithful. He, too, must likewise remain faithful to his Master, and to the obligations of the Society.

One night in March 1607, Goes had a dream or vision — or was it delusion or hallucination? — that next day a member of the Society would arrive from Peking. In the morning Goes sent Isaac to the market place to buy some food for distribution to the poor. How earnestly the Jesuit Brother prayed that his dream might be realised.

As he stood before the vegetable stall a man tapped Isaac on the shoulder. Isaac turned.

"That man is looking for you or your master," the Chinaman said, as he pointed out another, but younger, Chinaman. The Armenian greeted the Chinaman. He couldn't believe what he was seeing or hearing. "John Fernandes from the Jesuits in Peking.' He was dumb-struck. It couldn't be! But it was!

Fernandes followed Isaac to the humble residence. The two tip-toed across to the bed. Fernandes looked down upon a living skeleton. In the emaciated face, worn as the effigy on an old coin, in the large, hollow eyes, in the thick beard, Fernandes recognised a European. He knelt down by the bedside and greeted the sick man in Portuguese. A smile slowly spread across the weather-beaten, deeply furrowed face. The sick man understood who his visitor was. His prayers had been answered. For a moment the old energy revived in Goes. His eyes became ablaze with their wonted glint. They joined hands, the Chinese and the European Jesuit Brothers: the link was made, the long, tiresome journey was at an end.

No one can imagine, nor words can describe, the joy of Bento de Goes on seeing once more a Brother of the Company of Jesus. As Ricci recorded later: "When Goes set eyes on our messenger and heard him speak in Portuguese, he received him like an angel from Heaven." Taking the letters Fernandes had brought with trembling hands he reverently kissed them, raised them up in his thin fingers to heaven and with tears of relief in his eyes recited the canticle of the aged Simeon: "Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine": "Now lettest thou thy servant depart, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace". This was the prayer with which he had hoped to greet Father Xavier whom he had left behind in Lahore. He recalled the counsel the good Father had given him before setting off on his mammoth journey:

> "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

And that is what he had done.

> "So I went forth, and finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And he led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East."*

All that night Goes kept the letters clasped in his hands, giving continual thanks to the Lord for bringing him to the end of his long pilgrimage which he had undertaken in obedience to, and for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. He rejoiced at the good tidings which Fernandes brought to him of the Fathers, and of the good work they had done in China. He now understood what the Church meant when it spoke of the "communion of saints". He had been privileged to share in it.

He read and re-read the letters he had received. Death, if it was to come, could not now be so unbearable. His colleagues knew of his whereabouts and that he had satisfactorily achieved his mammoth undertaking. He could say with Saint Augustine: "I have done everything; whatever powers I had I have expended and have drained."

Fernandes was anxious to make arrangements for taking his fellow Brother to Peking, as he had been instructed to do by Father Ricci. But Goes was too ill to travel. He knew that too. Fernandes did his best to nurse him, hoping that with recovered strength he might yet be able to undertake the journey to Peking. But strength there was none; as indeed physician there was none, nor proper medicines; nor was there anything to do him good in his illness, unless it were some European dishes which John Fernandes cooked for him.

The simple lodging where they lived was constantly under watch by the Mohammedan caravan travellers. In their anxiety to see inside, some of them had made holes in the paper windows by poking their fingers through the blinds. Each time you peeped outside through one of the

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* M. Louise Haskins. The Gate of the Year. The Tablet 2 Dec. 1995 p. 1561

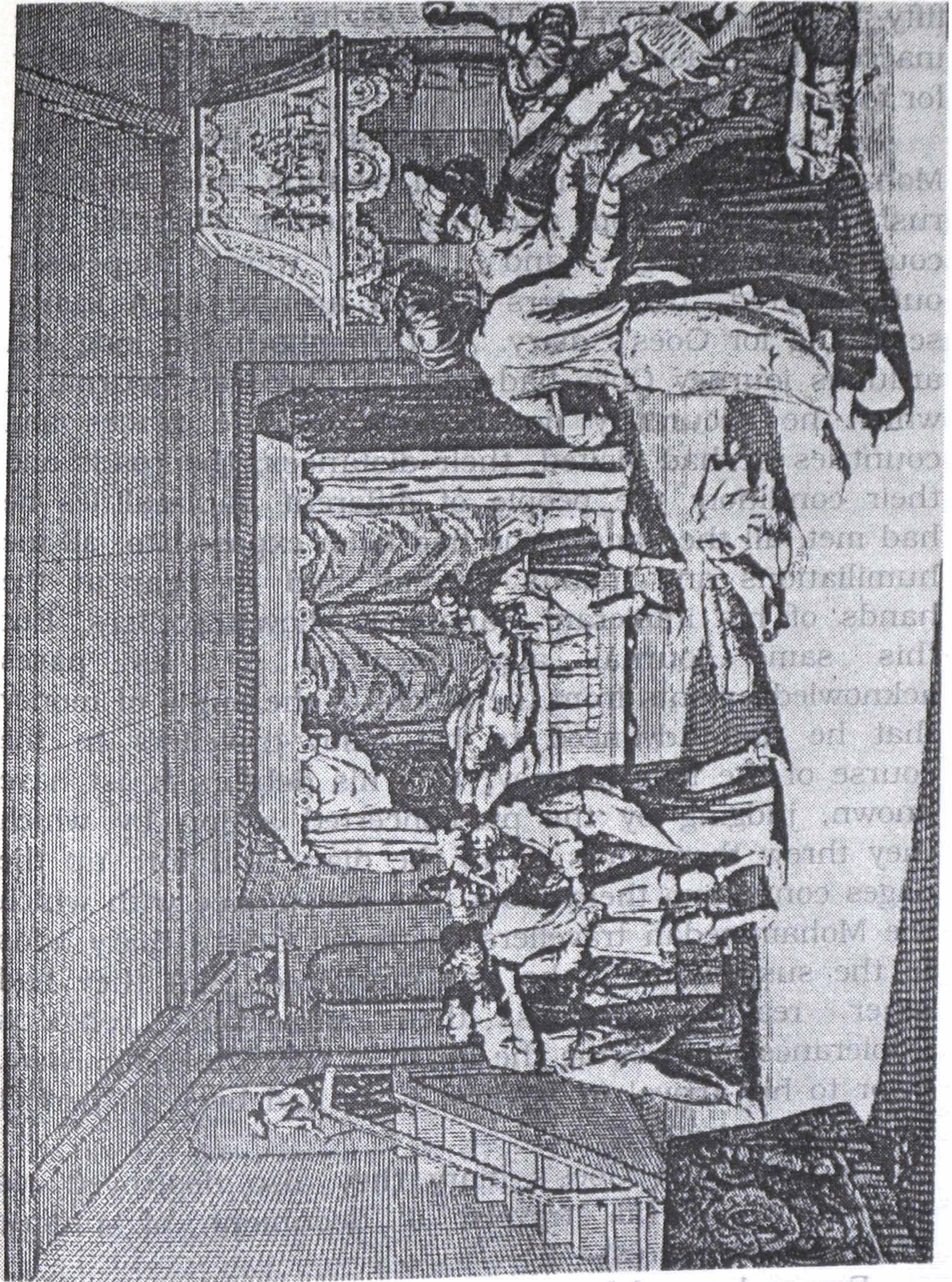
holes your eye would be confronted by another eye looking in. The travellers were waiting to loot Goes's possessions as soon as he died. The zealous way in which they kept watch, as if expecting Goes to die any time, tended to confirm what later investigators have suspected — that Goes was poisoned by one or more of his former colleagues in Haji Afi's caravan. Their subsequent action certainly added strength to such a suspicion.

In the complete absence of medical assistance, and despite all the untiring care of Fernandes, Goes's strength slowly ebbed away. The force of a lifetime had been spent in conquering Asia: now he lay devastated as the Gobi. Consoled by the presence of his Jesuit colleague Goes spent the last few days that remained in earnest preparation for another journey — into eternity. Remarking how many years had passed without the opportunity of confession and absolution, "I am dying," he said, "without this consolation, and yet how great is God's goodness! For He does not allow my conscience to be disturbed with anything of moment in the review of my past life!"

On 10th April 1607, eleven days after Fernandes's arrival the dying Brother sent a last message to his colleagues "that this journey had been very long, very wearisome and beset with dangers. Therefore should no member of the Jesuit brotherhood attempt to follow his example." With Brother Fernandes Goes recited the prayer that comes at the end of Saint Ignatius of Loyola's 'Spiritual Exercises':

> "Take Lord and receive all my freedom, my memory, my understanding and my entire will. All that I am, all that I have, you have given to me and I give it back to you to be used according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace for that is enough for me."

Shortly after this he died, far away from his family and colleagues, in the arms of his two faithful friends, looking towards China, just as another Jesuit hero, Saint Francis Xavier, just forty-six years old, had died some



The death of Bento de Goes

fifty years earlier, in 1552, gazing across at the inaccessible coast of China he had tried in vain to enter for four years.

As soon as he had breathed his last the Mohammedans who had been waiting and watching rushed into the room and began looting whatever they could. Fernandes and Isaac were hopelessly outnumbered. The looters rushed around in a frenzy, searching for Goes's diary. All throughout his long and arduous journey Goes had kept an elaborate journal in which he accurately noted down all the places and countries he had visited, their distances; the roads and their condition; the people of different nationalities he had met; all the dangers he had been exposed to; all the humiliations and insults he had had to bear at the hands of his intolerant, fanatical fellow-travellers. But this same journal also recorded in its pages acknowledgements from the Moors of the sums of money that he had advanced to his fellow-travellers in the course of the long journey. This his debtors must have known, judging by the pre-concerted action by which they threw themselves on to the diary and tore up the pages containing their debts. The vehemence with which the Mohammedan travellers destroyed Goes's diary adds to the suspicion that he was murdered; that they had other reasons besides their proverbial religious intolerance for desiring the death of the Armenian *Rumi*. Prior to his arrival in Suchow Goes had been in perfect health and strength.

In destroying Goes's diary they also destroyed his description of his travels, a document of unique geographical interest.

Fernandes and Isaac were deeply upset at the loss of the diary. All that they could do was to collect up as many of the scattered fragments as they could find, which they then guarded like treasures. These fragments were later taken to Father Ricci in Peking, who, with painstaking scholarship, pieced together the rescued fragments and filling in the gaps from Isaac's account, was able to give the world a brief narrative of Goes's pilgrimage.

Fernandes and Isaac also picked up the few things the plunderers had left behind deeming them of no value to them. There was the crucifix that Goes wore about his neck; there was his breviary; a paper on which were written in his own hand the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience which he had taken; letters he had received from his Jesuit colleagues in India and letters he was carrying to the Jesuit missionaries in Peking. There were his three safe-conduct papers from the Kings of Kashgar, Khotan and Korla. There was also a single page from St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians in which he boasts that he has proved himself a true servant of Christ during many trials and tribulations and mortal dangers:

> "On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger from the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

The Jesuit lying dead in the room could make a similar boast.

In due course these belongings were taken back to Peking where they were guarded with great veneration by Father Ricci, as relics of a very holy Brother of the Jesuit Order, whose piety was such that amidst all the confusion and turmoil of his interminable journey, he never failed to observe the holy seasons of the Church, often withdrawing himself for many days beforehand to perform the religious exercises of the Company so that there was none who did not marvel at his devotion.

The Mohammedans wanted to bury Goes as a Muslim; in this way his property would revert to them. But in this they were forestalled and outwitted by Fernandes. He bought a coffin and with Isaac the two of them carried and buried the traveller from the far distant Azores in Chinese soil, outside the town walls. As they had no service book they recited the Rosary over his grave. Little did they

suspect that even four hundred years later a group of Muslims, men of the same creed as those who had persecuted Goes every mile of his long four-year journey, would come each year to pay their respects at an unmarked grave amid an eternal ocean of sand.

The merchants now wanted to get their hands on Goes's property, especially the jade he had hidden. The *sharia* (Koranic law) forbade them to lay hands on another person's property. Isaac presumably would claim the property. But if he were a Muslim then all the other Muslim members of the caravan had a right to the property since it was a custom that the goods of those who perished on the road would be divided among all the travellers. The merchants claimed that Isaac and the one surviving negro servant were Mohammedans whom Goes had captured. But Isaac persisted he was not a Muslim. The Muslims took him captive and he was put into prison. They tried to force him to invoke the name of Allah. When he refused they put him in chains and threatened to kill him if he didn't apostatize. To save the Armenian's life, Fernandes claimed that he was a nephew of both Goes and Isaac, attributing to them his own surname of Chung. The Mohammedans denied this claim from the extreme discrepancy of their physiognomies, one obviously a Chinaman and not a Moor. But Fernandes countered this by pointing out his mother had been Chinese and that he had inherited his features after her. At this point Fernandes presented an urgent request to the Viceroy of Kansu who ordered the governor of Suchow to examine the affair with impartiality. The merchants claimed Fernandes had no ties with Isaac or the servant; that he had come from Peking to steal them away. At first the governor was favourable to Isaac's cause but later when forty of the merchants joined together to bribe him, he threatened to whip the complainant, Fernandes, and put him into prison for three days. Undeterred and having to pawn his clothes for want of money, Fernandes continued the suit for five months. He even made a three-day journey to present another petition to the Viceroy at Kanchow.

The Viceroy instructed the governor to examine the case again, giving as his opinion that Isaac and Goes' property should be handed over to Fernandes. The merchants, however, hoping Fernandes would soon be obliged to leave, bribed the governor with several hundred *taels* to delay judgement.

The language problem proved a considerable barrier to communications between Fernandes and Isaac, since Fernandes knew nothing of Isaac's language, Persian, nor did Isaac know anything of Chinese, or Portuguese or Latin. But with great diligence Fernandes learnt Persian from Isaac at night-time and in two months' time had learnt sufficient of the language to converse with Isaac and to organise their case. From a chance remark Fernandes evolved a plan. On their next summons to court he carried a piece of pork hidden in his sleeve. The Mohammedans again reiterated that Isaac was a Mohammedan. Throughout their long journey Goes and Isaac had never eaten pork. This was true. But it was so that they would not give offence to the Mohammedans, to whom hog's flesh is anathema; they cannot bear even to look at it. Fernandes repeated that Isaac was no Muslim; indeed, he was heartily opposed to it. If he really was a Muslim he would never touch pork. At this point he produced the leg of pork from his sleeve and he and Isaac began to eat it voraciously. The Chinese tribunal burst into laughter but the Mohammedans fled in a body from the council hall, declaring that Isaac had been corrupted by the Chinaman. The Chinese judge had no choice but to declare that Isaac was no Mohammedan and Isaac and the servant were handed over to Fernandes, together with Goes's personal effects, which consisted of nothing but the precious jade hidden underground. The negro servant had been so terrified by the merchants that he declared publicly his wish to stay with them.

Selling over half of the four hundred pounds of jade Fernandes and Isaac paid off their debts and set off for Peking with the remainder of the precious stone. They reached the royal city after three months. Fernandes's

letters to Peking had been lost on the way, so that Ricci had been without news for ten and a half months when on October 29th, 1607 — five years to the day after Goes's departure from Agra — the Armenian and Chinese arrived. At the sight of their bowed heads and heavy step, Ricci dismantled his triumphal arches of acclaim and waived all words of welcome. When the story was told, in silence he took from them Goes's trappings, curiously animated now their owner was dead.

Isaac rested a month in Peking while Ricci pieced together Goes's diary and learned from the Armenian details of the journey. Isaac was received as if he, too, were a Jesuit Brother, since Goes had spoken in glowing terms of the faithful help which he had rendered throughout his journey.

In a letter written on 12th November 1607, to the Father Provincial in India, Father Ricci pointed out that Goes's journey had proved beyond doubt his theory that Cathay and China were one. As to the Christians who were reported to be in this kingdom, and more particularly in the provinces of Shen-si and Honan, Ricci said that he had sent Brothers of the Company, natives of China, to each of these provinces to make enquiries and clear the matter up. It had been ascertained by these Brothers that there had actually been many Christian families in these parts who had continued to follow their religion up to the beginning of the last half-century, but that since then, fearing that the Chinese sought to kill them, as being descendants of the Tartars who five hundred years previously had subdued China, they had all dispersed and abandoned their law. Today they would not admit that they were the descendants of those Christians. Isaac was entrusted with these letters and sent to Macao. Here he was warmly received by the Fathers and given money so that he could purchase goods that were esteemed in India. He was then put on a carrack bound for India. But Isaac's adventures were not over yet. In the Straits of Singapore the boat was captured by a Dutch privateer. The captain, however, was so impressed by Isaac's account of the

journey which he and Brother Goes had made. He marvelled at the Brother's great courage in his expedition to discover Cathay and all for the sake of Christians said to be living there. When he heard of the countries Goes had traversed and the kingdoms he had discovered, travelling by land through that vast interior which stretches from Goa to China — certainly one of the most daring journeys of discovery, perhaps the most daring ever made by man — he ordered Isaac to set down all the details in writing, saying that there were Jesuit Fathers in his country (Holland) to whom he would show the account, that they might know how much those of their Company were doing to spread throughout the East the law of God which they followed.

The captain set Isaac free at Malacca. Isaac took the record to the Jesuit Fathers there, where again he was received most kindly and provided with a passage to India. Several months later Isaac sailed up the west coast of India via Cochin. Here he was glad to meet Father Pinheiro again. It was here, too, that he was given the sad news of his wife's death. He decided not to return home to Lahore or Agra. On August 8th, 1609, Isaac set off with Father Pinheiro for Cambay. He ended his days at Chaul, a port on the Konkan coast, about thirty-five miles south of Bombay.

Epilogue

"Where are you going, Mullah?" asked the guard at the gate. The soldier wore a People's Liberation Army tunic, his trousers tucked into his boots, and, somewhat incongruously, he masked his face behind dark glasses.

A massive, gaudy, red poster of Mao-tse-Tung gazed down from the thick forbidding wall. In years past the wall had served as a protection against the marauding Tartars from the North. Today it served as a shield against the biting sand-laden winds of the Gobi Desert.

The Mullah was leading a group of pilgrims to the cemetery outside the walls of Suchow.

"To the grave of Banda Abdullah Isai," the Mullah replied, pointing beyond the walls.

"Why do you honour that grave?" the guard asked. "He was not one of us. He was a foreigner," he remarked. "He was not even one of you," he added as an afterthought.

The Mullah paused awhile before replying.

"You are right. He was not one of us. He was a stranger. Nor was he one of us," he said, moving his arm in an arc to embrace his group. "He was not a Moslem."

Again the Mullah paused.

"But he was a brave man. And like us," again indicating his group, "he worshipped one God and one God alone."

The Mullah began to lead his band of pilgrims through the gate.

The guard was still curious.

"What did Banda Abdullah Isai do?" he asked.

Once more the Mullah stopped. He paused for a long time before answering. Slowly he turned to the guard.

"He found Cathay — and Heaven."

Afternote

Each day, each night, in homage to a very remarkable man, the wild wailing winds of the Gobi Desert keep their eternal vigil amid the vast ocean of sand, tenderly and delicately billowing their ever-changing wisps of ochre incense round the heap of stones that marks the last resting place of Banda Abdullah Isai, who, in seeking Cathay, found Heaven.

Miss Mildred Cable, who was the first Westerner to discover the grave in 1931, writes:

> "This mound of stones in a wind-swept desert was a monument more telling in its simplicity and stark nakedness than any marble tomb erected in a cathedral crypt."
>
> (M. Cable. *Something Happened. Hodder and Stoughton. London. 1933. p.168.)*

This book is a tribute of admiration and appreciation to another of that band of heroes who, over the years, have made long and perilous and often very wearisome journeys, living solitary and inglorious lives, finally dying, alone and unsung, far from their dear native land.

The deserted grave of Bento de Goes

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