

C. G. LEWIS

TIBETAN
VENTURE

Foreword by

SACHEVERELL SITWELL



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FOREWORD

It has often been said that every human being should write his autobiography which is only another way of saying that the life of any and every human being is interesting. And in this the laws of contradiction have full play because it is even true that the duller and emptier the life, the more extraordinary it may seem in retrospect. It is on the same principle that a play is often improved and becomes more realistic if one of its rôles is badly acted and therefore more true to life. Was it not Flaubert who said that his ambition was to write a novel in which there was no action and nothing at all happened, choosing for his purpose the heat and inertia of life in a Tunisian town, the by-product of months he had spent there gathering material for his *Salammbô*!

The modest chapters to which these few lines are introduction evoke, inevitably, some of the autobiographies written in the past, because a very personal note is present and makes of them as much an early autobiography as a book of travel. I think the character and youth of the writer are visible on almost every page, and it is this which gives it point and makes it worth while to read. Christopher Lewis is serious minded and sensible, travels the hard way and comes home ill, but stays light in spirit and never sententious. This is what is special about his book, and that makes one follow him and enjoy his pages to the end.

Foreword

In the age in which we are living it is more important than ever before to have this insight into the mind of some one sensible and intelligent of just his age. His faith, it would seem, is effortless and worn without doubt or qualm. Some few of his readers, the present writer among them, must envy him in this and long for the ray to reach to them and warm them! Perhaps the most interesting of his pages are those in which he gives his impressions of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His spiritual strength and goodness left the same impression that they have made on many others. It is pleasant to think of the meeting of their different worlds and of the views and beliefs they found in common. If spiritual strength is ever to gain in ascendancy against the materialism of the modern world it can only be through the meeting and communion between the youth and intelligence of both worlds. It is that which is beautiful in this little book and makes it precious. Intelligence and normality shine through its pages, and there is comfort in finding that in the clamour and ugliness of the present age. I hope more than a few readers will enjoy the experience of many months spent in as many hours in the company of this intelligent and sensible member of the younger generation.

SACHEVERELL SITWELL

PREFACE

The idea was born in Cambridge, during the early hours of the morning. I had spent the evening at a party, and when midnight had signalled its conclusion, I had invited John, a fellow guest, to come to my rooms in King's to read poetry and to talk.

The first term of my final year at Cambridge was now about to end, and the question of what would follow the third term was weighing heavily on my mind. I hoped—and was soon—to be accepted for training for the priesthood, but I felt I could not possibly go directly from Cambridge to a theological college. The difficulty was to find some way of spending the intervening time.

Talking to John I remembered suddenly that he had travelled to India the previous long vacation to work in some monastery or other. Inquiring more closely into what he had done, I became thrillingly aware that here a solution to my problem was unfolding. I heard of a school for incarnate lamas from Tibet. I heard of its atmosphere, an atmosphere of peace and spiritual depth; a gateway, surely, to that path into another world which has become obscured and overgrown with weeds of iron in the West? I heard, too, of its situation, of the road around its mountain from which could be seen the mighty snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. This was what I must do! I, too, must go and teach, and learn, in that haven of Tibetan Buddhism.

Significantly, the idea still seemed good in the cold

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light of morning, for a nocturnal visit to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul the previous summer had already kindled within me the desire to travel to the East and learn about its religion, its philosophy, its way of life; yet it was several months before the next step forward was taken. I mentioned my plans to a friend at home, who immediately asked me whether I would work for the Ockenden Venture. Amongst those for whom this cares are Tibetan refugee children in India. I agreed to do so, largely because this would remove the worry of finance. When finally Ockenden were asked to define what they had for me to do, however, the answer was: Nothing. By way of consolation there came the suggestion that I write to a certain school for lamas at a place called Dalhousie, where I would surely be welcome. This school was none other than that spoken of by John.

That I should have been led back to the same point by a completely different channel seemed to me a sure sign that it was somehow right for me to go to this school. The way the money to finance myself was found seemed further proof of this. With the minimum of prompting, King's College made me a generous grant towards my travelling expenses, all of which I had to find myself. Words in high places caused the Ockenden Venture to reverse an initial decision to give me no financial help, and they matched the sum that King's had given me. Shortly after that came the biggest surprise of all. There was in King's an elderly Don who in years past had been Keeper of the Archives in Calcutta. I had known him when I was a chorister at King's, for he used to entertain groups of us to tea on Sundays, and read us ghost stories by M. R. James. During the course of my

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last term as an undergraduate I had spoken to him of my plans to go to India to work with Tibetan refugees. He had expressed considerable interest in these, and since his nephew was High Commissioner in New Delhi at the time, I asked whether he might be able to help me find employment in India during the five winter months that the school at Dalhousie was closed. I hoped that the money I would earn during that period would be sufficient to pay for my journey back to England. Shortly after the grants from King's and the Ockenden Venture had arrived, I received a reply to this inquiry. "I am enclosing something," it read, "to lighten your financial burdens and will ask my nephew if he can suggest a post or a piece of work which might bring in a satisfactory number of rupees. But I am afraid that I am not too sanguine." The "something" rendered the winter employment completely unnecessary; it was a cheque amounting to the precise sum of both the grants.

With this sudden influx of wealth, increased yet further by a gift from another friend, I was delayed no longer. The school in Dalhousie had already written urging me to come. I purchased a ticket to Istanbul on the Orient Express, coaxed a year's supply of clothes and medicines into an already battered rucksack, and set off.

The journey to India took exactly three weeks. The fabled mosques of Isfahan in southern Persia, the ruins of Babylon south-west of Baghdad, possibly even the Holy Land and Egypt, these were places I might—and did—visit on the return journey. My present concern was to reach destination as quickly as possible.

The first stage of the journey was gruelling. I joined

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the Orient Express proper at Milan, but did not have a seat until Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. This period of over thirty hours standing or crouching in the corridor left my feet so swollen that I could hardly walk. Happily a rest of two days in Istanbul saw me fit to continue, and I crossed the Bosphorus into Asia.

Thereafter conditions were more kind. Another train covered most of Turkey, and a bus linked the end of the line to distant Teheran, modern capital of Persia. This three-day stretch of road provided the scenic highlight of the whole trek out to India: Mount Ararat. The surrounding terrain was barren, high, and hilly, but nothing reached the snow line, and nothing rose much above the rest. Mount Ararat swept up majestically, sensuously, and alone, in an almost perfect shallow cone. It towered high, high, above any other peak until, on this occasion, it thrust its head into a halo of cloud to burst it and send the contents flowing down in a motionless river of snow.

Northern Persia was dull by comparison, and the holy Moslem city of Meshed fanatically inhospitable. By the time I reached Herat in western Afghanistan, exasperation with the primitive state of the country's land transport together with the urge to reach Dalhousie, caused me to indulge in my one luxury of the journey and fly across to Kabul, the capital of the country. From there I hitchhiked down the sinister crags of the Khyber Pass, through the lush refreshing green of monsoon-watered Pakistan, and into India. The plains were humid, hot, and sticky, and it was no small relief to spend my very first Indian night in Pathankot, railhead for Kashmir and the north-western hill stations. The next day would see me a refreshing 8,000 feet above the plains.

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The Dalhousie bus was old, battered, and intimate, and seemed to know the road without the help of the driver. We first bounced along the plains a little way, where everything was green, fresh, and fertile from the monsoon rains. Then we began to climb. Up and up the bus went, the road becoming more and more steep until finally we were crawling precariously up the side of a narrow ravine, lush with dripping pine trees.

At last the bus drew up. The road went no further. I dismounted to find myself in a small drab square. Some rather uninspiring buildings stood around three sides of it, most of them with roofs of painted corrugated iron. The place looked vaguely anachronistic, as if it had flourished once but now lay forgotten in time and neglected. Not a ray of sunshine pierced the thick grey cloud to dispel this feeling of drabness. Even the coolies swarming over the roof of the bus to lay claim to the luggage looked tattered and forsaken. One of these I engaged,

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not so much because I wanted my rucksack carried as because I did not know the way to the school.

I found we had still further to climb. We reached first another square, on one side a wood and corrugated-iron post office, on the other a very English-looking church built of solid stone. Then the path bent upwards in earnest. Unused to the height, I soon found myself breathing very heavily, and even the coolie had to stop for a rest, for my rucksack was not light. In no time at all we were plunged into cloud. Grey and damp, its silent swirling was in eerie contrast to the motionless trees which just dripped with ceaseless monotony. The only cheerful parts of the scene were the round beaming faces of the Tibetans we met scurrying up and down the hill. Like the coolies below they were mostly in rags, but they did not allow material poverty to mar their obviously natural cheerfulness.

After an endless climb that seemed like the punishment of Sisyphus, we eventually reached flat ground. Here the road went off in two directions and was doubtless the road around the mountain of which John had spoken. We took the left-hand fork and, after a level walk of ten or fifteen minutes, turned down to a large house of which I had already caught a glimpse, perched precariously on a tumbling ridge of fir-clad rock. The core of the house was stone but the outer layers were of wood, their dull maroon paint cracked and peeling. The roof was of corrugated iron. As soon as I reached it a number of smiling lamas emerged to meet me. Their heads were almost shaven, and they wore maroon-coloured robes draped over yellow or orange shirts. They busied themselves with bringing my rucksack to a dry place and then

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took me upstairs. There I was welcomed by a strange figure. He was English, I gathered, but had a beard and long blond hair which fell in curls on his shoulders, and he wore draperies of an ambiguously eastern nature. He looked strikingly like a figure from a child's book of Bible stories. Although he gave me a smiling welcome and obviously had a tight grasp of the practical aspect of my arrival, he was very intense and gave the impression, perhaps deliberately cultivated, of having one foot in another world.

I was soon brought a filling lunch of rice and vegetable stew, the best I was to have for a long time. John then took me to the bungalow where I would be staying. It lay about half an hour away in the direction I had come, but past the turning down to the village. We approached it in fact from the other side, for John thought a visit to a little wood tea shop just off the road would be fitting. This was on the wild part of the mountain where panther and bear were said to come down from the forests at night. As the cloud cleared a little for a space, I caught a glimpse of the almost sheer mountain-side below us, thick with fir trees and other vegetation which in my ignorance I could not identify, tumbling abruptly down for hundreds of feet into the mist of the valley below. Of the distant views I caught not a glimpse. My introduction to Dalhousie was obviously to be a gradual one, subject to the whims of the monsoon.

“Taproo”, when we reached it, was empty. It had one attractive room, inhabited by two girl volunteers, Ruth and Christine. They were at present away with Mrs. Bedi, the English lady who founded and ran the school. On the opposite side of the house lived the Tibetan,

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Jamdra, whose task was to cook breakfast and supper, and generally look after the place. In fact he usually only cooked breakfast. At the back of this was a very dingy kitchen. The entrance hall in the centre of the bungalow served as a dining-room. A dark room beyond this provided sleeping quarters for the male volunteers, however many they happened to be. John himself lived elsewhere in a windowless farm-outhouse. Behind this room, directly outside the only window, the mountain rose sheer. This accounted for the darkness, and also made it damp, musty, and airless. I had the choice of living there with Peter, a Liverpudlian, or else in a little garret over the roof, approached by an outside stair-case, its crude wooden steps dangerously slippery from the ceaseless rain. This room was even more bare and shabby than the rest of the bungalow, the walls being partly of planks and partly of grimy concrete, streaked by dripping water. The whole place was hopelessly damp but could not be otherwise, surrounded as it was by the almost perpetual cloud of the monsoon. One had at least to be grateful for having escaped the heat of the plains. The virtue of that little garret was that it was light and airy, and it meant I could retire to solitude to pursue studies theological. I therefore chose that.

Although it was soon obvious that I would have to share the place with large spiders, rats, and divers other creatures, the introduction of a three-legged *charpoy* (a bed of canvas woven over a wooden frame), a backless chair, and a small two-tier bookshelf which could also serve as table began to make the room look more inhabited. Once I had disposed my few belongings around the room, particularly my bright red sleeping-bag on the bed and

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some gaily coloured paper-backs on the shelves, the place really began to be almost cheerful.

While I was doing this I heard footsteps on the stairs, and Peter emerged from the rain. He had heard me moving about so had come up to meet me. As soon as he spoke one was left in no doubt as to his native city, but since my grandparents had lived there, and we ourselves had spent two years in the heart of the city, this was a pleasure to me. Almost immediately Peter plunged into a torrent of complaints about the school, its management, its lack of purpose, its terrible food, and a host of other things. I was to find him the greatest moaner of all the volunteers, but his moaning always had substance behind it, and significantly he worked harder than almost anybody else, tackling everything with that bubbling energy which characterized his whole life. He was full of rough edges, but beneath them grinned a great source of merriment.

Such was my introduction to Dalhousie and to the Young Lamas' Home School. Not too promising, perhaps, but I was there for better or worse, and I hoped to make the most of it. There was one comfort; I had taken an instant liking to all the Tibetans I had met. The next task, that of getting to know the lamas, promised to be a pleasant one.

John was soon to leave for another, more primitive Tibetan settlement. He had only been waiting for my arrival so that I could take over his classes. Our introduction was effected the next day. With rain drizzling constantly, the usual extra-monsoon practice of holding classes outside was impossible. There was only one classroom and

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that none too savoury, for distinctly unsatisfactory sanitary arrangements gave off an odious aroma just below the window. The person who usually suffered these conditions was Mrs. Twigden, a Scottish lady who carried out with considerable success the difficult task of teaching English to complete beginners. Since none of the staff spoke Tibetan, all the teaching had to be by direct method. The other classes were held either in the dining-room, where Peter mostly taught, or in a dormitory. It was here that I would operate.

Like everywhere else at that season, the lofty dormitory was dark, musty, and damp; but also like everywhere else, as soon as it came into contact with Tibetans it was happy and cheerful. The classes, two of them, were sitting cross-legged in the centre of the floor, but as soon as John and I entered they sprang to their feet and beamed. As each tulku (the title of an incarnate lama) was introduced to me he would place the palms of his hands together in greeting, bow slightly, and say, "Good morning" or "Hello", or just smile, according to his mastery of the English language. To my surprise I found I learnt their names quite quickly in spite of the identical maroon robes, close-cropped hair, and similar round yellow faces. Fortunately there was a great disparity of size and age amongst them, for the youngest was twelve, the oldest thirty, and this made it easier to distinguish one from the other.

In no time at all I had grown very fond of these happy pupils. Never once was I to see one angry or envious, a thing which could hardly be said of a group of English schoolchildren. True, not all were as industrious as they might have been, but they would beam so innocently,

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and look so dejected if scolded, that it was impossible to be stern with them for long. Some of them, particularly the smaller ones, were really very bright and a joy to teach. Most of them were keen to know things, even if some were reluctant to apply themselves with excessive diligence to the pursuit of this knowledge.

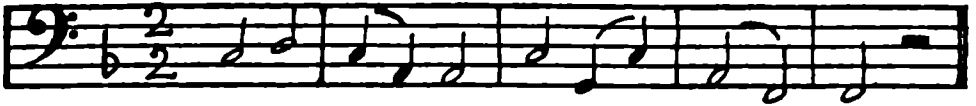
The main difficulty for the teachers lay in the organization of the school. The teaching of English and arithmetic seemed to be leading nowhere. The school had no set aim and it was by no means obvious what was to be achieved by our efforts, what subsequent use the tulkus were to make of our instruction. This was a major cause of discontent amongst the volunteers. The school seemed to fall between two stools. It was unsure whether it should try thoroughly to introduce the tulkus to this western world into which they had been so rudely cast, or else maintain, or rather re-create, the monastic life as lived in Tibet. Unlike the members of the lamas' teachers' training college in Dharamsala, our tulkus were not allowed to do any physical work beyond cleaning out their rooms on Sundays. I think the place would have been more healthy had they done, say, a short stint of gardening every day; but this was against their vows. I wondered what happened to the vows of the lamas at Dharamsala, some of whom come from this school. Then there was the case of the lectures. The tulkus were to receive lectures on science (those on evolution were to contain no mention of sex), geography, and other subjects which would help introduce them to our western world. I offered to give a talk on western music, for with Ruth and Christine possessing a guitar and banjo respectively, and with most of the volunteers able to sing, it would

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have been possible to have illustrated the talk quite well, if with a limited scope. No, I was told, the tulkus are not allowed to hear secular music. Yes, admittedly many of them would be faced with it when they went out into the world, but "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" was the school's official attitude. But surely our task was precisely to introduce the tulkus to this sort of thing? Yes, but they must not violate their vows.

This attitude might have been acceptable if the tulkus' religious life had carried full conviction. Admittedly they spent a very great deal of time in religious and Tibetan studies, so much so that they hardly had any spare time at all, but the first occasion I attended one of their *pujas* (religious ceremonies) I was left with an uncomfortable feeling that all was not well. These *pujas* were immensely fascinating, and were in a way a living representation of the 150th Psalm. The tulkus would sit and chant for two sessions of one hour each, with a break for supper in between. Much of the chanting would be accompanied by the beating of a drum and the striking of a cymbal. Sometimes two cymbals would be so manipulated as to produce a strange scooping sound, and from time to time bells, clappers, and horns would join the merry concert. Times when the joyful noise was at its highest were often followed by short periods of stillness, presumably for meditation. The silence then was always particularly deep, following as it did upon the drums, cymbals, and horns, which made a shattering noise in that small room. The volume of noise, like the regular beating of the drum, had a strangely hypnotic effect. The chanting, too, was fascinating. I liked particularly this melody, although there were other attractive ones:

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Many of the chants, however, were virtually tuneless. Frequently the chanting would have weird harmonies, which sounded more like the efforts of somebody who knew the tune but was incapable of rendering it correctly, rather than a deliberate attempt at harmonization. The rhythm, too, was sometimes haphazard, particularly in the tuneless chants where it depended on words and not music. Yet here again the effect was strangely hypnotic, for the rhythm was like that of the sea, its rolling boom dominating the irregular sweep of the breakers.

Fascinating as I found these *pujas*, they seemed to hold more interest for me than for some of the *tulkus*. Quite a number of them were certainly absorbed in whatever spiritual significance the ceremony may have held. They would sway slightly as they chanted, their eyes closed and a blank expression on their faces. Others, however, would be subject to fits of uncontrollable laughter and would generally behave in a way hardly to be expected of a holy man at prayer. And these *tulkus* were particularly holy. They were lamas who, having achieved perfection in a previous life, had voluntarily given up nirvana to return to the wheel of life and help others on the path. I frequently wondered whether this choice to be re-born was a wise one, for I am sure many of them must have committed acts such as might jeopardize their chances of ever returning to that blissful state. Maybe once it is attained it can never be lost. Let us hope so. Anyway, these holy creatures would play happily with Shu-Shu, the school dog, whenever she chose to wander in. I

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remember one occasion, too, when one of the tulkus had to do prostrations. Whenever his head reached the floor, the one sitting nearest would give it a sharp tap so that the poor fellow was convulsed with barely hidden laughter. The other tulkus made no attempt to hide their mirth. Then there was Jamyang. Jamyang was about twenty, and patently had more interest in things female than holy. If ever the reincarnation diviner made a mistake it was with Jamyang. During periods of meditation in the *puja* he would stare around the room and, if one caught his eye, grin broadly as if to say, "Glad you came? Good for a laugh, isn't it?"

General dissatisfaction with the school was heightened by the state of the food. For breakfast we would have coarse porridge and powdered milk. Sugar was not available until long after my arrival, but sugar is scarce throughout India. This was followed by toast and, while the supply lasted, tinned cheese. Mid-morning we had hot powdered milk and glucose tablets. Lunch consisted of a vegetable stew, lentils, known as *dal*, and, if we were lucky, rice, otherwise cold soggy *chappaties*, which are round, wafer-thin cakes of coarse flour and water, baked at a fire. There was a cup of tea at four o'clock, and for the evening meal we would have to fend individually for ourselves. Left to our supplies we would usually make something out of rice, potatoes, onions, and such other vegetables as were available. Frequently, however, we would buy ourselves eggs, or even a chicken, and make pancakes because they were filling, or omelettes because they were tasty, or a stew because it was the only way we had of dealing with a chicken. Occasionally we would not eat anything. As far as school supplies were con-

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cerned we had no fruit at all, one egg a week, and meat very occasionally. My diary bears witness that it was more than four weeks after my arrival that the volunteers were first given any meat. The reason for the poor diet was simple: poverty. The school lived almost entirely on food donated by the U.S.A., and it had very little money to supplement this.

Mrs. Bedi was fortunate in being able to rise above personal discomforts. This rather put her out of touch with the volunteers' feelings, but whenever she did realize that we were disgruntled she would be very worried and try her best to improve things. In many ways she was *plus bouddhiste que les bouddhistes*, and even the tulkus would at times be amused by the extreme seriousness with which she would treat matters religious. No laughter in *pujas* for Mrs. Bedi. She was the butt of much criticism in high circles in India for running the school badly. Much of this criticism was at least second-hand and frequently ill-informed. In so far that any of it was true, it could be traced to the fact that, being a deeply spiritual person, she probably had less grasp of things material than many people and for this reason might be thought to be unsuited to running a school. Yet this school had a special and unique character which I took a long time to recognize, and Mrs. Bedi was very much in harmony with this character. Moreover, anybody who actually met her and experienced her kindness could not fail to be impressed by her spiritual depth and by the obvious happiness and peace of mind which this brought her. One could not help wondering whether there might be greater gifts than to be an impeccable organizer, especially in the context of that particular school.

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It cannot be denied that all the conventional volunteers who came to the school that year were dissatisfied with the state of things. All of us who had promised to return the following year seriously considered not doing so, and in fact I was the only one who did go back. Yet, however bad the food might be, however unsatisfactory the running of the school, there was always one thing which would sweep all that away. This was the delightfully incongruous sight of the tulkus in their monkish robes tumbling over each other, squealing with laughter, as they romped and frolicked with all the joys of young life. The sufferings of their flight from Tibet, the rigours of their religious training, all this was forgotten as, whatever their age, they became simply children, and the most wonderful children in the world.

The tulkus were not the only saving grace of the school. I soon came to realize the extreme beauty of its situation. I even discovered the monsoon to be attractive. The steady drizzle and the thick damp cloud in which we constantly lived was, of course, depressing. But towards midday the monsoon would throw restraint to the winds and hurl down torrents of water which, even if one were caught outside, could only appear immeasurably grand. Then at other times the air would be clear, and it would be the turn of the clouds, those horrible, clammy, all-embracing clouds, to provide the beauty, mysterious silent beauty. They would creep upon one unawares, billowing gradually and relentlessly from the valley below, feeling their way up the hillside like the hand of a thief. Suddenly cloud would be everywhere, silently storming the hill-top until, triumphant at last, it would swirl its ghostly

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tentacles around, and all the world would be grey. Once, towards evening, I was sitting outside "Taproo" reading when one such cloud came floating up from the valley below, curling and waving in its slow-motion spectral dance. At this hour the sun was setting, and it transformed the cloud. At first a faint blush tinged its top, but as it floated before the sun it became a thick black mass with golden fringes. What a wonder it was to be part of the silent world that in England passes high above us.

It was at sunset that the monsoon was at its most glorious, for frequently the clouds would break up towards evening and reveal a sight past human imagination. Just two days after my arrival I wrote the following in my diary:

In the late afternoon the clouds at last dispersed a little and I was able to catch glimpses of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks. They towered up from an ocean of green choppy foot-hills, waiting with the patience of eternity for the fussy wraiths of cloud to leave them free to view the sky. With the cloud broken up, the sunset was truly magnificent. Along the distant plains the horizon flowed deep blood-red, which mellowed in the dome of the sky into crimson, orange, yellow, and so to very light blue down to indigo. Somewhere around the orange level lay a bank of distorted black cloud, looking like an apocalyptic view from heaven of some continent washed by a sea of blood. Even as I watched, the yellow and the blue melted slowly into a delicate shade of green, and back again. Cutting diagonally across this part of the sky was a bank of corrugated cloud, much closer than the other. Dark and threatening by nature, the deep red of the sunset tinged its under-side a russet colour of remarkable rarity. Beneath this kaleidoscope of ringing colour lay the black earth. A few ghostly wisps of grey cloud floated slowly up the shadowy valleys. Way

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down in the plains the lights of Pathankot twinkled. In the middle distance, a little way down the mountain, the village of Dalhousie gleamed with luminous eyes. In the foreground the trees strained out of the gloom to catch a glimpse of this wonderful pageant of nature. Even the insects were silent in awe. Slowly it faded; regretfully I tore myself away and wandered, musing, back to "Taproo".

There were other attractions during the monsoon as well as sunsets. Shortly after my arrival, Peter and I were setting off one morning for "Kailash", the school-house, when suddenly we heard a rustling in the trees. Branches tossed hither and thither, bouncing between them balls of grey fluff. Monkeys! Some sat still and stared at us, black faces peering out of the fluff, long, thick tails dropping straight and motionless below the branch. Then, without reason, they would be off. They hurled themselves from tree to tree, taking no aim, just clutching with an arm, a leg, or a tail at whatever was whistling past. Then they settled again, gave us a suspicious glance, and began to gobble up greenery. As we moved away there was a burst of chattering and then the activity subsided.

The monsoon bowed itself out with a series of dramatic thunderstorms. The lightning would flash almost continuously and dance along the mountain tops. The thunder was incessant. It rolled and rumbled from mountain to mountain, echoing and re-echoing in the valleys, filling the whole air with vibrations, playing a constant tattoo on the blue-lit clouds. As often as not the centre of the storm would be around us, or even below us; and ceaselessly the rain would lash us for intruding so far into the realm of nature.

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The rains were followed by bright sunny days which soaked up all the moisture the clouds had deposited. Now we could hold our classes in the garden and go for long walks to explore the countryside. Two of these walks were particularly beautiful. One led to the former princely capital, Chamba, where stands an interesting ninth-century Hindu temple. The path climbs first to a charcoal burners' village and then winds down through lush forest and over rushing mountain streams, passing on its way the spot called Kajiar. This is a shallow basin-like clearing, surrounded on all sides by wooded mountains. Its emerald grass forms a cheerful contrast to the more sombre green of the fir trees. In the centre lies a little circular lake, surrounded by concentric rings of green and reddish sedge. About the lake drifts a small floating island. The place has an air of mystery about it, particularly at night, and it would need but scant imagination to picture hobgoblins or some other spirits of darkness performing nocturnal revels around the lake when the moon is full.

The other walk was to Dainkund, which literally means "place of a witch". As far as Lakarmandi, the charcoal burners' village, the path is the same as that to Kajiar, but there it turns up to the right. There is a steady climb to Dainkund itself, which is a disappointing muddy pond at the lower end of a barren piece of boulder-strewn moorland. The walk then continues upwards past a neglected Moslem graveyard, of which many graves have long since been torn open by the ravages of man or beast. Beyond this is the site of a small army encampment. Finally a series of humps is reached, the highest of which is approaching 10,000 feet. This is the goal of the walk,

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for it is the highest point in the area and affords a magnificent panorama. On one side the top of our Dalhousie mountain some 2,000 feet below peeps small and insignificant over the tree-lined ridge that lies between. On the other sweeps a semi-circle of majestic snows. The mountains stand firm and high against the pale blue sky, the snow sparkling like crystal in the sunlight. Gaunt black rock breaks through the mantle of white in steeper places, as if earth were asserting its right to challenge the sky. Here, truly, is the roof of the world. It is impossible to imagine anything beyond this, the ultimate rung of the ladder to heaven. Small wonder that the hill people of Tibet and India should think of their gods as dwelling in these remote and mighty fortresses of snow.

I soon discovered that there was more to Dalhousie than just beautiful scenery. Not long after my arrival I received a mysterious invitation to go to tea, along with Mrs. Twigden, at a house called "Snowdon". The invitation was signed "Mary Mukarji". All I could discover about Mrs. Mukarji was that she was the widow of a former much-revered Principal of St. Stephen's College, Delhi; how she had heard of me neither I nor Mrs. Twigden could possibly imagine.

Snowdon was situated on the very top of the hill on which we lived. It commanded the most wonderful view and stood at more than twice the height of the original Moel yr Wyddfa. Mrs. Twigden and I reached the house slightly breathless after the steep climb. A kind and friendly face came to the door to let us in, and there was Mrs. Mukarji, radiating warmth and welcome. Over a delightful English tea of fresh scones and chocolate cake,

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the secret of how she knew of me emerged. Dr. Alec Vidler, the Dean of King's, had taken considerable interest in my plans to go to India to work with Tibetan refugees and had written to the Cambridge Brotherhood in Delhi to announce my impending arrival in Dalhousie. One member of the Brotherhood, Fr. Weathrall, had passed this information on to Mrs. Mukarji, and she had for some time past been inquiring whether I had arrived.

It did not take long to discover in "Snowdon" a real Christian home where reigned the joy of the risen Lord. There was always a welcome for me whether I was expected or not, and I loved to go up to play the piano and to sing, or just to talk with Mrs. Mukarji. Often I came away with my mind buzzing with ideas. One talk left me pondering a question I had always found difficult, namely the interpretation of the saying of Jesus, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." I had always been disinclined to accept the exclusive interpretation of this, that everybody but Christians would be damned to eternal perdition. Living amongst Tibetans had made me more unwilling than ever to think along those lines. It was not only the tulkus who were such wonderful people. So many of the lay Tibetans one met would walk along either swinging a prayer-wheel, counting beads, or murmuring the eternal *Om mani padme hum*.¹ Many did all three at once. It is possible to say that this is a meaningless semi-automatic ritual, but even if this is true, and I do not believe it is, it cannot be denied that these people *live* their religion in a way that very few Christians in the West ever do. If anything more were needed, the happy open smile with which the Tibetans greet friend

¹ "Hail to the jewel in the lotus"

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or stranger could not fail to convince one of their essential goodness. That people like this should somehow be “beyond the pale” I was just not prepared to believe. There were, moreover, several sayings of Jesus to give authority to my conviction. John xii 47 reads: “If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.” Jesus says, “the world”, that is, the whole of mankind, not just his followers, even less a particular sect. This is stated explicitly in verse 32 of the same chapter: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” “All men.” Christ’s death was the atonement for the whole of humanity, Jews, Turks, and Infidels not excluded. The saying, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me”, can therefore surely not be a negative exclusive saying but a positive one, a re-statement of the words, “I am the way, the truth, and the life”; that is to say, “All men may eventually be united with the Father, but it is through me that this union comes about.”

As the fellowship with the little group of Christians in Dalhousie stirred up such thoughts in my mind, so other influences arose slowly, imperceptibly, to alter my opinions of the school.

To begin with, fresh life was brought by the arrival of new volunteers. Not long after I arrived yet another John appeared on the scene. He had been away from home for several years and had in the meantime wandered around the Levant, working on various ships and on Israeli *kibbutzim*. I do not know what brought him further east, but some time during his travels he had met a man who

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had told him of the Young Lamas' Home School, and he arrived one day with rucksack, beard, and black railway porter's cap, and asked if he could be of any use. This he could indeed, for after his namesake had left I had been taking two classes simultaneously. The classes were small, perhaps six or seven in each, but it was nevertheless a relief to have to think about only one at a time.

Apart from being of help as a teacher, John was a cheerful soul and his endless store of anecdotes and songs contributed much to the morale of the volunteers. Many of these anecdotes concerned his travels. One of the more bizarre incidents in which he became involved occurred while he was hitch-hiking. He was peacefully jogging along in the back of a lorry one day when it drew to a halt. This did not disturb him; traffic in primitive parts makes frequent stops for refreshment. Suddenly, to his astonishment, a large and hairy arm appeared over the back of the lorry, followed by the bulk of a hefty bear. He was relieved to see the creature sit down quietly in a corner, taking no apparent notice of him. It was therefore with reduced trepidation that he watched the appearance of another bear, followed by an unspecified number of monkeys. Then came the solution. The animals had not mistaken the lorry for a latter-day Noah's Ark; they were a private travelling circus. After the last monkey there clambered up the owner. He seemed to John at first disgustingly cruel. He held one monkey by a string, and this unfortunate creature he would from time to time hit hard with a substantial stick, so that the animal flew whimpering to the full extent of its string. Faced with this inexplicable and cruel pantomime, John's sympathies naturally lay with the monkey—until it made the

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fatal mistake of committing a nuisance on his rucksack. From that moment onwards, said John, he followed with enthusiasm the dancing of the stick.

One day I went down to Dalhousie with Fr. Weathrall, who as usual was spending his annual holiday at "Snowdon". Like Mrs. Mukarji, he was horrified by our poor diet and had resolved to do something about it by treating me to as good a meal as the Dalhousie restaurants could provide. We were on our way to lunch when whom should we meet but Heinz, a German with whom I had travelled from Messhed to Herat, and whom I had encouraged to come to Dalhousie. I could not stop to talk then so directed Heinz to the school and said I would see him there. I knew Mrs. Bedi wanted a German to teach a small class of tulkus who had already learnt a little of the language, and I very much hoped Heinz would agree to do this. To my delight, he did. Not only was he a thoughtful companion when out walking, his calm even temper proved a relaxing influence on the volunteers, amongst whom relations tended to become rather strained from time to time. It was also good to have somebody with whom to speak German. This was John's opinion, too, and he would babble away fluently with comically abysmal grammar.

The last addition to the staff came rather later, after the monsoon was over. This was Richard, who had just finished at Eton. Our scruffy little band of tramps was not a little amused by his arrival. He came fresh from the plane at Delhi, wearing an immaculate light suit, and with at least two smart suitcases. Despite his "stride-out-and-quell-the-natives" look, he very soon became part of our ragged assortment of individuals, and indeed, he seemed

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to object a lot less than many of us to the poor fodder.

All these people squeezed into "Taproo". I remember one interesting evening when the bungalow took on the likeness of a stage-set for *Under Milk Wood*. I was upstairs in my garret, sitting cross-legged on the bed practising meditation. My mind began to wander and I started listening to the sounds around me. It was as if "Taproo" stood before me with its front removed, like a doll's house, to allow a glimpse into every separate room. Just below, in what used to be Jamdra's room, Richard was reciting to himself the lines of Gray's *Elegy*. From the middle of the bungalow, where Peter, John, and Heinz slept, came irregular bursts of raucous laughter. No doubt as to what was going on there. From Ruth and Christine's room, more distant, came the soft sound of the guitar and subdued singing. Jamdra, if he was in, was silent. Everybody, except perhaps Heinz, was suddenly frozen in an attitude that typified them.

In addition to the inhabitants of "Taproo", and Mrs. Twigden who ran as the school guest-house a bungalow called "Tashi", there was another little group of volunteers who lived further round the mountain in Yishi Cottage. Jane and Diane had been there the whole year. American and English respectively, they had taken Buddhist vows, had shaved their heads, and wore maroon draperies. They were joined later by a Frenchman, Jean. All three were considered eccentric or worse by the "Taproo" folk, and since they lived elsewhere and were involved in office work and not teaching, they remained rather a separate entity.

Although the variety of volunteers as the staff grew larger did much to enliven existence, it was not the main

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cause of my gradual change of mind towards the school. The real turning-point was the course of lessons in Buddhist meditation I took from Mrs. Bedi. To a Christian mind this meditation must ultimately prove deficient for, at least at my elementary stage, the meditation was not a matter of feeding the mind on anything religious but, on the contrary, of emptying it completely. In the circumstances this may have been exactly what I needed, for it developed in my mind an unusual degree of objectivity towards myself and towards the outside world. Consequently I was able to see things, if not in a completely new light, at least from a slightly different angle.

One of the first things for me to reassess was the apparent paradox in the lives of the tulkus; that they could be such holy people, and almost all of them did show signs of great spiritual depth, and yet could misbehave as they did in *pujas* and apparently treat the whole thing as a big joke. I began to wonder whether perhaps the tragedy of the matter might not lie in the fact that to western eyes this *could* appear a paradox. Might not the playing with Shu-Shu during *puja* be just the same intermingling of ordinary life with religious as was betrayed by the aged wrinkled peasants when they mumbled and swung their prayer-wheels whatever they were doing? Certainly the happiness and serenity of the tulkus, standing as it did side by side with a playful mischief and love of fun, implied that this was so. I began to think that perhaps here, at first unrecognized, I had stumbled upon that fusion of the spiritual and the worldly which I had always firmly believed to be possible. Here at last was a state where Faust's words, "There are, alas! two souls within my breast" (*Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust*), ceased

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to be an agonized cry of schizophrenia and became a joyful assertion of the richness of life.

The realization of this did much to reconcile me to the school, but two things still weighed the balance against returning the following year: the academic laxity of the placé, and the poor conditions of living. As to the first, apart from the lack of purpose in the teaching, I was dissatisfied with an effective weekly total of only fifteen hours' work, and I felt that, particularly with so many other volunteers around, I could more usefully be employed elsewhere. This, of course, might be altered by a reduction in staff the following year. The matter of living conditions, even of the poor diet, was one I would not have worried about had I felt I was doing a really useful job, but with so much time on my hands to sit and cogitate, I had small desire to live again on little more than *chappaties* and *dal*.

Then wonderfully, unexpectedly, this second problem resolved itself. Mrs. Mukarji, more deeply disturbed than I by our poor diet, made it known that if I were to return to Dalhousie I could come to live at "Snowdon". This was a very kind offer and would make the world of difference at Dalhousie, but I felt I would be bound to refuse it, for although I was not poor I could not possibly afford to pay for my keep while I was working. As it was, my plans for the winter were far in excess of my means. Then something happened which altered all this. I had another letter from my benefactor in Cambridge.

"I was glad indeed to get your letter of September 28th," it read, "and it was good of you to find time and energy to write at such length. How thankful you must have been to escape from the heat of the plains to a refuge nearly 8,000

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feet above the plains. Oh the relief of quitting Calcutta and reaching Darjeeling some 7,000 up in the mountains; I remember it well even after 45 years. . . .

“This academical year began rather sadly: old friends in the Choir departed and there are five new children and five new men to take their places; I shall never succeed in memorising their names and faces. . . . Nevertheless two days after the Choir had returned and after only one rehearsal they sang *Te lucis ante terminum* as splendidly as is humanly possible. It really was most moving. . . .

“You should presently receive a somewhat premature Christmas present from me: it brings with it all my best wishes for your happiness and success in bringing enlightenment to your Tibetan Lamas; I hope also that it may make the conditions of life a trifle easier.”

This letter was as much of a bombshell as the first one had been; so was the notification from the bank in Delhi of the money that had been transferred to me there. Just as my parents were later to make possible my elaborate journey homewards by way of Kathmandu and Isfahan, and, when the harshness of my means of travel finally took its toll on my health, enabled me to fly back to England from Cairo, so now the middle part of the year was wonderfully working itself out. As a result of this latest gift I could not only happily accept Mrs. Mukarji's offer, but could also fulfil my yearning to visit South-East Asia during the winter.

I decided to leave Dalhousie shortly before the end of term, after examinations and all serious work were over. By that time I was almost sure that I would return the following spring.

I was to leave on the Monday morning. Sunday afternoon I spent at “Snowdon” where one of Mrs. Mukarji's

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sons, Ramesh, and his family were staying. After tea we threw ourselves heartily into the singing of some favourite hymns and then said simple prayers. When I left I felt that it had been a great privilege for me to share in that happy loving home.

From "Snowdon" I went down to Kailash to say farewell to Mrs. Bedi. As I walked away from the school back to "Taproo" I became at last thrillingly aware of the real character of the Young Lamas' Home School. In the distance great mountains loomed up still and dark against the deepening sky. In the valley beneath, mist was hanging thinly in the air. All around, fir trees stretched up out of the gloom. The silence was broken only by the rhythmic husky piping of some nocturnal bird. Behind me I was conscious of a house of peace and calm, its spirit of incense and chanting the inheritor of the ages. The whole setting was a page from the book of eternity.

I had been in Dalhousie a little over two months. It could equally well have been two weeks or two years. Time was lost up there. It was an element foreign to the way of life, a life of calm untroubled prayer and meditation, and yet a life that was full of zest. The physical existence might have its drawbacks, and severe ones, too, but it was anchored in an ocean of spiritual depth.

I had intended to go straight to the bus the following morning, but had after all to go round to Kailash first. It was only then that the tulkus fully realized I was on the point of leaving. Little Pema Tenzing stopped me as I was about to set off, and away he went to spread the word. The minutes ticked past, and I became worried about my bus. Then they appeared. All my pupils came

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and presented me with the traditional Tibetan greeting-scarves of coarse white muslin. Several tulkus gave me paintings, one of a yak, a number of a Kampa on horse-back, one of an aged man sitting beneath a tree and surrounded by long-life symbols. Then, smiling and calling good-bye, they stood and waved until I was out of sight, a cheerful maroon little throng of happiness.

How could I think of not returning!

2

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Coming down to Pathankot was like a new arrival in India, for Dalhousie really was rather an ivory tower. The hurly-burly of India's vast population crowded the dusty road, flowing and eddying along between rows of shabby wooden shacks. The little throbbing mountain bus's final romp home was brought up short by this sluggish stream, and only very slowly, horn blaring, could it thread its impatient way through the teeming throng of rickshaws and pedestrians.

When the Kashmir Mail reached Old Delhi station the next morning, all was still dark. Shrouded sleeping forms littered platform and pavement, and everywhere there reigned a strange and quiet peace. The great city slept. But as it slept, a huge orange moon sank slowly and gracefully into the horizon, relinquishing its hold upon the world for one more day. The promise of dawn was near.

The Cambridge Brotherhood House was just beginning

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to awaken when I reached it. I had not been waiting long when a servant appeared out of the slowly greying gloom and showed me into the reading room. Soon afterwards he was followed by Fr. Weathrall, who had invited me to stay with the Brotherhood, and I was taken to my room and left to dust away the cobwebs of the overnight journey with the beneficent workings of soap, water, and clean clothes.

The reason for my coming to Delhi, and also for leaving Dalhousie before the end of term, was that I was on my way to Mussoorie to work, as I thought, at one of the Ockenden Venture schools for Tibetans there. During the course of the term at Dalhousie I had been in touch with Peter Woodard, the resident representative of Ockenden in India. It was he who had first introduced me to Ockenden nearly a year previously and had asked me to work for them. I had told him of the long vacation necessitated by the severity of the winter at Dalhousie, and had inquired whether Ockenden could offer me anything to do for some or all of this period. Replying with alacrity, he said I would be a help in starting an advanced school Ockenden were planning in Mussoorie to train promising boys for leadership in various spheres. I had left Dalhousie as soon as serious work was finished, thinking I would be better employed there than kicking my heels waiting for an "auspicious day" for term to close. I had come to Delhi to meet Peter Woodard and to drive up to Mussoorie with him.

Soon after breakfast on the day of my arrival I had a phone call from Peter saying he was in Delhi at present, would be leaving that very day, but would be returning in about a week. He suggested I stayed in Delhi until his

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return and then motored with him up to Mussoorie. This proposition I accepted, for I had several things to do in Delhi and could not conveniently have left that same day.

The chief of these was to fulfil an engagement for luncheon *en famille* with the High Commissioner and Lady Gore-Booth the following day. The residence was cool and restful, tastefully luxurious, and had a fine garden behind it. The lunch was likewise excellent but not ostentatious. The Gore-Booths were kindness itself. They had heard much about the Young Lamas' Home School, by no means all of it complimentary, and I think were pleased that I should have favourable impressions to toss into the pool. At the same time they were eager to know what I had learnt about Buddhism and my reactions to it. The whole lunch was an easy, unhurried, family affair, a fact I particularly appreciated knowing as I did from Fr. Weathrall that Sir Paul was at present extremely busy with a series of conferences with the Deputy Commissioners.

Peter Woodard phoned me again when he returned to Delhi, and we arranged that I should breakfast with him in his hotel the following morning. How incongruous it was to see that familiar flamboyant figure, complete with "weskit", monocle, and cigar, come sailing loudly and confidently into the instantly monopolized room—past the grinning, bowing door-boy of an Indian hotel, instead of the sedate butler of an English country house. Not completely to my surprise, I learnt that there was really nothing for me to do in Mussoorie after all, for the new school was already fully staffed and getting under way. But there was to be no question of my not

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coming there. There was bound to be something I could do.

I was ready for this and was not altogether dissatisfied. Great plans for travel had sprung in my mind since my first letter about the winter, and I was relieved to know that I would now be free to indulge this desire. I therefore went ahead and made some bookings for a return flight to Thailand.

In spite of this latest development I left with Peter for Mussoorie the following day. The blue Land-Rover, Woodard pennant flying, whirled along at characteristic speed, scattering man and beast with a roar and a blaze of horn. Only the long heavy trains of bullock-carts delayed its dusty progress as they plodded their cumbersome way to Meerut, piled high with a towering burden of sugar-cane. The climb to Mussoorie was over a road very much better than that to Dalhousie; but then Mussoorie is very much larger and more frequented, despite being lower and less beautiful. Peter threw himself into the part of self-styled "King of Mussoorie" with *élan*. The last stretch of our journey was a real royal progress as he graciously bowed and waved to everyone he saw, crying in a loud voice to the sluggish to "get out of the way", and winning reactions which varied from enthusiastic welcome to amused tolerance and complete indifference.

I remained in Mussoorie for three weeks, the first three weeks of November. They were not particularly constructive, for the only useful thing I did was to paint some of Hope Cottage, the house in which Peter Woodard lived. They were enjoyable, however, because they were a complete change from Dalhousie. Not only was the

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food good, but the house had many comforts and conveniences lacking in both "Kailash" and "Taproo", and there was plenty of company. Apart from Peter, two English girls lived in the house, Gillian and Phylida. They had arrived in India by boat the week before I came to Mussoorie. Both were still full of the joys of "discovering" the Tibetans and were very lively company. Gillian, moreover, had brought a gramophone out with her, together with quite a variety of records. This would have been an undreamt of luxury in Dalhousie, and it did much to lend a homely atmosphere to Hope Cottage. Then there was the Tibetan couple, Amala and Pala, who cooked and cleaned. They had a chirpy little son, Sonam, who was the delight of one and all. Finally mention should be made of Kiki, a mischievous mongrel puppy which had been found one day in the Land Rover with a notice round her neck saying, "I am a refugee, too. Please look after me," or words to that effect.

When I first reached Hope Cottage there was also a sick monk living there. Peter had found him with a group of other monks in Dehra Dun, huddled up in the corner of the dingy building in which they lived, dying of tuberculosis. He was immediately whisked up to Hope Cottage where, watched over by Peter and by dint of good feeding and careful tending, he became a new man. Having thus helped to restore him to some sort of health, Peter arranged for him to be admitted to a sanatorium in Ajmer. The way he stood the long journey down there showed just how strong he had become. We filled the back of the Land Rover with rugs and sleeping-bags for him to lie on, but it must nevertheless have been very rough and bumpy, and the dust was terrible. The first

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stage, to Delhi, was straight-forward, but thereafter came unknown territory and, until the borders of Rajasthan, a road with long stretches in very bad condition. But if the road was bad, it was certainly interesting. We went through a number of small villages where many of the huts were rectangular mud erections with thatched roofs, but the more picturesque ones were round and made of wicker-work, with shallow, pointed, cone-shaped roofs. Amongst these huts scabbled a variety of creatures: dusty, naked children; sacred hump-backed cows; black stickle-backed swine with long pointed snouts, a cross, perhaps, between a porcupine and an ant-eater. Later, near Jaipur, we saw a large number of elephants plodding about their heavy work.

The coming of night in Rajasthan was very fine. The sinking golden sun kept setting and reappearing from behind low hills and out-crops of rock. When eventually it disappeared completely it left behind it a rich glow which deepened through gold and red into a dark fluorescent lilac. We seemed like the final scene of some bad romantic film as we thundered into this ever-darkening sky on our errand of mercy, the sick lama stretched out behind, bouncing around like a pea in a tin.

With the darkness the animal life changed. A speedy hare paced us for quite some distance, and not long afterwards a frog made a bold bid to do the same. Monkeys, scraggy brown things, not the beautiful furry grey creatures of Dalhousie, would sit amongst the shadows of the trees and watch us. Bullock carts would show up far away as the headlamps caught the green gleam of the great beasts' eyes. Once the beam of our lights picked up a pair of eyes at the edge of the road which glowed like

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coals, red as two huge rubies. The creature slunk away into the darkness as we came near, and what it was, we never knew.

Jaipur was bright and glittering when we reached it at eight o'clock that evening. It looked attractive even then, but it was revealed in all its coral-pink splendour as we drove back through it the next day. The walls and gates of the city, and many of the buildings within them, share the same Mogul style and colouring, and are almost like the scene of a fairy tale. The hill above the city is topped by huge sprawling fortifications, while way below, out in the centre of a large and glassy lake, there dream the graceful contours of a princely palace.

We had left Mussoorie at nine o'clock in the morning and had covered the 350 miles to Jaipur with only one pause, at Delhi. It was time to stop; the final eighty miles to Ajmer could wait. Peter sought out the magnificent Rambagh Palace, one of the Maharajah's abodes but at present a hotel, and there we spent a night of luxury surpassing fine. The following day we delivered the monk at the sanatorium in Ajmer. He looked little the worse for what must have been a gruelling ordeal, but seemed bewildered by his new surroundings and anxious at losing the friend who had been so good to him. It was a relief to learn that there were several other Tibetan patients there, and even one or two Tibetan nurses on the staff; and indeed, the little monk's face cleared and became almost cheerful when he heard his own language being spoken. We could drive back confident that he was in good hands.

Before I finally left Mussoorie I was shown one last example of the Tibetan character at work. In Mussoorie

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lived Dakti Rimpoche, head of the Sakyapa sect, one of the four main sects in Tibetan Buddhism. He was a fat and giggly individual, particularly when confronted with Peter Woodard, who said of him once, "He's a funny fellow; at least he thinks I am, which comes to the same thing." Nevertheless, he was *ex officio* a very holy personage, and many of the Sakyapa monks came to live in Mussoorie to be near him. Amongst these were, once term was finished, some of the young lamas from Dalhousie. One of these was Thutop, Mrs. Bedi's interpreter, who during the winter fulfilled the same rôle for His Holiness. Another was a pupil of mine, Shabdung. He lived with members of his family, and one day he invited me to lunch.

At the appointed hour Thutop arrived at Hope Cottage to collect me. We went first to Dakti Rimpoche's house, for he, too, was to come to the luncheon. He had bathed for the occasion and had put on particularly fine robes. Walking with His Holiness, progress was slow. Not only was his pace leisurely, but frequently a little beaming group of Tibetans would shuffle out from the side of the road for each one in turn to bow low before him, tongue protruding in deepest homage, to receive his blessing. He would touch each lightly on the side of the head with his finger-tips, and they would back away, still beaming. A few words from the portly object of their adoration, and off we would set again.

Shabdung's abode was overflowing with monks. How many were guests and how many residents I did not know, but certainly they could not all have lived in that small dilapidated building. Anyway, we all squeezed in and, to my surprise, sat on chairs around a table. Proceed-

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ings opened with the customary penance, Tibetan tea. It is a loathsome brew made with salt and butter, preferably rancid. In this case it was worth enduring for what was to follow. Lunch consisted of noodles and slop, into which were mixed chopped-up pieces of meat and omelette, and a great assortment of vegetables, also chopped small. The noodles were served in individual bowls, the vegetables on flat plates in the centre of the table. The remarkable thing about all this, particularly in those threadbare surroundings, was that every utensil was of silver, solid hand-beaten silver, beautifully engraved with delicate flowers and birds and miscellaneous abstract designs. The bowls, the dishes, the teaspoons, even the Chinese-looking scoop-spoons, all were of a kind. The chop-sticks were the only exception.

Unfortunately our manners did not match our tools. Eating spaghetti has nothing on fishing endless intertwining noodles from a bowl of slop, with only a pair of chop-sticks as a very untrustworthy ally. We grunted and slurped and splashed like a litter of piglets. And then the fight over the extra food. *Oliver Twist* and his twentieth-century counterparts had all to fight in order to obtain more food. Here you had to fight to avoid it. As soon as a bowl was becoming empty, one of those serving would swoop down on it and try to tip in a full one, all in the twinkling of an eye. The unfortunate monk, already full to capacity, would snatch his bowl away and do his best to hide it, or at least to keep it out of reach of his would-be benefactor, but all those around him would merrily push and heave until eventually the precious silver was brimming once more, and the poor creature was faced with yet another bowl of noodles

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and slop. Very pleasant noodles and slop, I would add, but a trifle filling. I managed to prevent any more reaching my bowl after the fourth refill, not because I did not like it, but because five bowls of noodles accompanied by generous vegetable pickings form a substantial repast. Fruit followed and was served with almost equal persistence. Here I got away with only one apple and two and a half bananas. To my horror I found this being followed by more Tibetan tea. Then in no time it was four o'clock, and in came toast, jam, cakes, biscuits, and, of course, Tibetan tea. Shabdung and his friends tried to persuade me to stay for supper, and I would gladly have done so were it not for the fact that guests were coming to supper in Hope Cottage that evening. As it was, I made my escape while the going was good, thinking to avoid any cups of post-tea tea which might have appeared. There was a limit to the hospitality I wished to accept.

The train journey from Dehra Dun to Calcutta had much to commend it, even though it lasted two nights and a day. I was fortunate in being able to secure a third-class sleeping berth which, while being only a wooden board in cattle-truck conditions, was nevertheless infinitely preferable to joining the unbelievable scrum in the ordinary third class. At least I could stretch out horizontally at night. Moreover, whether because of the track or the coach, it was one of the smoothest and quietest train journeys I had ever experienced—quiet, that is, until we stopped. On reaching a station, particularly in the industrialized Benares area, crowds of Indians within the train and without would set up such a screaming and a yelling that the nervous might with good reason have imagined

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Armageddon to be nigh. Yet the violence was mostly in the noise; there seemed to be very little actual physical struggle.

Passing through this industrialized zone was interesting. Although it had nothing of the gigantic power of the Ruhrgebiet which, like the mine in Zola's *Germinal*, throbs with anthropomorphic life, this area around Benares was a reminder that there is more to India than a train journey often reveals: patient bullocks lifting bucket upon leather bucket of water into thirsty irrigation channels, or grey, stork-like birds with red heads and long beaks strutting undisturbed about the ricefields. Half an hour of Calcutta suburbs before the train reached Howrah station re-affirmed this, and so did the mighty iron bridge over the Hooghly river.

As the train approached Calcutta I realized I knew nothing at all about that huge city, least of all where I would stay. Dr. Vidler had spoken of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta, and I had gathered in India that they ran some sort of a hostel, so I phoned them from the station. The Father Superior answered and, on hearing that I was sandwiched between Cambridge and theological college, promptly invited me to stay at the Mission House. (The hostel, I later learnt, was not for birds of passage.) His welcome was the more warm because I was going to Cuddesdon, his own theological college.

The Oxford Mission premises were a complete contrast to those of their Cambridge counterpart in Delhi. The latter have a spacious single-storied house, built specially for them several decades ago, and it stands in a beautiful and well-tended garden. It hardly seems to be part of a big city, particularly when the distant howls of the hyenas

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come drifting over the still night air. The headquarters of the Oxford Mission are in a tall town-house, with only a brick wall to separate them from the tattered squatters on the pavement. In Calcutta there is no escaping the noise, the dirt, and above all the terrible poverty of its enormous population of street-dwellers, many of them refugees from East Pakistan. Nevertheless, there was the same peace in the house that fills the compound of the Cambridge Brotherhood. That, and the welcome from the brethren, made me feel immediately at home. Therein, I reflected, lies one of the chief pleasures of the life of a wanderer. You set off for somewhere miles away (in this case over eight hundred of them) and have not the first idea of what you will find there. Apprehension and curiosity flutter about in your mind, now one predominant, now the other, until both are routed by arrival at the destination and the need to search for lodgings. The search may last for an hour or more, but invariably everything finally works out as if planned weeks in advance.

The first afternoon I was in Calcutta Fr. Thorman, the Father Superior, was going a little way north of town to Barrackpore to attend its Diocesan Festival, so he took me with him on his motor-bike. The place was once a British army barracks, and the road out to it still has a line along it of tall square towers, built as beacons in the days of the East India Company. On either side of the road stand what used to be elegant country houses, now rotting and decaying, surrounded by overgrown vegetation, messy wooden shacks, and dusty animals, both two- and four-legged.

Before we reached this road we had passed a small procession. A gaudy band played discordant jolly music.

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Various urchins danced along before it, as urchins will when a band processes. At the end was carried shoulder-high a long scarlet burden. I thought Fr. Thorman was joking when he said it was a funeral. But on reflection I supposed that a funeral was in many ways a cause for rejoicing. There could be little joy in the lives of the poor in that vast city. Death must be a merciful deliverance for many of them.

The Diocesan Festival at Barrackpore was a happy family affair, and I was pleased to take part in it, even though the service was largely in Bengali. There followed tea for everybody on the Bishop's lawn after the service, just as if one were in an English country parish. After this, before going home, Fr. Thorman took me to the river.

Like the waters of Egypt in the first plague, so the River Hooghly flowed crimson in the sunset. Small native boats with up-turned pointed prows dipped and bobbed on the water, black silhouettes between the palm trees. Close to the bank another boat, gaily painted in the day time, made its ponderous way up-stream. Shaped like a miniature galleon, it was punted along by four men with bending poles, two treading either side of the boat. Then a small ferry arrived and disgorged its contents. Peanut vendors began shouting. Rickshaw-wallahs leapt awake. The world was alive once more. We turned to go, and found the bright eye of the evening star watching us.

The following day I saw some of the Oxford Mission's work. Fr. Carlton took me first to one of the leper dispensaries they run. He told me of the difficulty they had in finding any property where the owner was prepared to allow the establishment of anything to do with

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leprosy. Even the dingy back yard which housed this dispensary had become dilapidated because the owner was prepared to do nothing for it. It was kept as clean as possible, but it must have been a terrible place in which to work. It was, in fact, the shabby younger brother of a bigger, better, and more beautiful dispensary elsewhere. Both bear the name Premananda, "love-joy". How necessary are those two qualities in those who work in the dispensaries. The dismal conditions of the one, the horrible physical state of some of the patients, above all their pitiful lack of self-esteem, these are things which can only be overcome by an endless store of love and care, a ceaseless, joyful, self-giving.

From the leper dispensary Fr. Carlton took me to the southern fringes of the city, where the Oxford Mission runs an orphanage. This was very much more cheerful than the dispensary, for it was in a large green compound, shaded by trees and separated from the road by a great expanse of water, the "tank". Over the road the Mission Sisters looked after the girls and the youngest boys. This side the older boys lived, cared for by several of the Fathers, who lived in a long low building rather like an aviary. The school was the proud possessor of some fifty-odd violins, received in answer to an advertisement in an English newspaper, and consequently had a large orchestra. There was also a well-equipped workshop where the boys learnt industrial trades and the handling of modern machines.

Having seen all there was to see in the school, there followed a refreshing swim in the "tank". It was particularly welcome as it was my first prolonged immersion in the fishy element since Teheran. After swimming came

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lunch; after lunch, rest; after rest, a phone-call to BOAC to ascertain what time I had to report for my flight to Bangkok the following day. To my horror I learnt that there was no such flight as the one of which I spoke. The travel agent in Delhi had "booked" me on a flight which had been discontinued. Fortunately BOAC were able to fit me onto a Qantas flight leaving the same day, and in fact at a much more convenient hour, so all was well after all.

It was a tortuous drive out to Dum-Dum airport, for the road was narrower than the main street of Pathankot, and the traffic was thick as treacle. I was excited about the flight for, although I had flown many times before, this was to be my first flight in a jet. It was a disappointment. Doubtless it flew higher and faster than the small propeller-driven machines to which I was accustomed, but it seemed like a cattle-truck. Entering the plane—it was a Boeing 707—there was nothing but a vast sea of seated figures, and even in my place I still felt cramped. The service naturally suffered, for the cabin staff were far too busy to give the personal attention of the smaller, more intimate planes.

Despite the disappointment of the flight, arrival in Bangkok was exciting. I felt vividly that I was stepping into another world, that here I would find the romance of the East, which poverty-stricken India could never show me. To some extent I was right. One thing was certainly true, and that was the beauty of the Thai women as sung by various old lags whom I had met on the road to India. Much more Chinese-looking than even the Tibetans, they were almost all short, with rich black

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hair, and alluring well-trimmed figures. The way they walked! The way they smiled! What a contrast to those sullen ragged creatures who scour the Indian streets for cow-dung, scooping it up with their fingers on to round flat trays which they hoist hurriedly on to their heads.

I soon came to recognize Bangkok as a rich and flourishing city. The shops were attractive and well-stocked. The bustling people were clean, smiling, and carefree. The streets, too, were clean, and many of them broad and modern. But there is a price to be paid for this. As Bangkok rushes headlong into western life it is losing at the same speed its unique exotic character. The traditional *lung*hi, an ankle-length loin-cloth, is fast giving way to western clothing, and the little canals, *klongs* as they are called, which used to border every street and make the city a network of water, are now being drained and filled in to make room for the wide modern highways. I felt I had caught the city just in time, for romance still lurks there, if you seek it, but it may not endure for long.

For the time being this was to remain undiscovered, however, for I learnt that the twice-weekly train for Malaysia was leaving the next day. Not having long to spend in that part of the world, I decided to take it and to look around Bangkok on my return. The train was cool and comfortable, and because of fascinating scenery and good company, seemed to be swift. The second-class coach was of the open variety with a corridor down the centre. I found my seat was reserved opposite those of Diane and Maria, two Canadian girls I had met earlier in the day. Diane was dark, and large in all dimensions.

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Maria was by no means small, and if anything the more vigorous of the two. They were enterprising young ladies and they had a keen sense of humour, but in spite of their extensive wanderings, both claimed never to have been so dirty in their lives as after only a few hours in the train. And there was I, thinking what a clean comfortable journey it was!

No sooner had the train quitted the outskirts of Bangkok than we plunged into dense jungle, the first really tropical jungle I had seen. It was a thick, dark green tangle of bamboo, banana trees, divers sorts of palm tree, and a multitude of other vegetation far beyond my abysmal botanical ken. Much of the ground was under still silent water. Here and there a hut peeped between the branches, standing on stilts and constructed of wood and palm leaves. Now and again a clearing appeared in the jungle, and in this would stand several of these huts. The earth around would be built into long shallow mounds with trenches in between. Little men in wide wicker hats walked along the trenches, waist-deep in water, which they shovelled up on to the raised ground. Sometimes the whole area would be flat, flooded, and rice-covered. In this case the men were almost lost beneath the rice and the water. The wiser or more prosperous went around in crude little boats, which oozed forward through what looked like a lush green field. Here and there patches of firm ground broke up the swamp. These were connected by bridges made of two poles, one to hold, the other to tread. Occasionally a whole small community would push back the swampy jungle. Here naked children would come scampering to gaze at the train, men and women would stand up from the rice and stare; vast buffaloes, unmoved,

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would continue wallowing in their personal circles of mud.

Just as we were becoming used to all this, the sun set. It did so as it had done the previous night, and as it was to rise the following morning, in a way unique in my growing experience of sunsets. There was the usual deep-red glow along the horizon, fading to gold and yellow, but then above that there spread out like a huge fan several broad beams of delicate pink, which vanished even as one watched.

Shortly after this, people began settling down in their seats to go to sleep. The Thais near me seemed to consider me something of a magician when I pulled a small red bundle out of my rucksack, placed it in the central corridor, unrolled it, and, lo—a bed! I crawled into this, my sleeping-bag, and there I slept, comparatively undisturbed in spite of the passage of feet along the hard dirty floor. I was wakened abruptly at half past six the next morning by an observant Thai, who pointed to a flood of water only a few inches from my head and advancing rapidly. I leapt up and swung, sack-like, into my seat, particularly glad that I had done so when I saw that the flood emanated from the wash-room at the end of the carriage.

In the early afternoon, following a less interesting part of the journey through open cultivated ground, we reached the Malaysian border. Here everybody had to descend for immigration formalities, and at this stage we began discovering other "Europeans" on the train. There were Doug and Brian, two New Zealanders who came right down to Singapore, an Australian who left at Penang, and two English girls who stopped at Kuala Lumpur.

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All these people expanded towards each other as the journey wore on, and by the time we reached Penang in the evening we were quite a solid little group. Here the Thai train stopped, and we had a wait of an hour or two for a Malaysian train to take us overnight to Kuala Lumpur. On it there appeared another New Zealander, Bob, also bound for Singapore. I again spent the night on the floor. Our final change was in Kuala Lumpur, and we reached Singapore at tea-time that day.

Southern Malaya was more attractive than the north. The latter had been largely flat, its expanse interrupted only occasionally by high abrupt outcrops of rock, swathed in vegetation. Here the countryside was green and rolling, almost English but for the huge rubber plantations. The population along the way looked even more smiling and curious than the Thais had done. They were darker than the Thais, and looked as if they had negroid ancestry.

The train itself, too, was interesting. I had one particularly good talk with one of the New Zealanders when we discovered each other to be rugger enthusiasts. Our reminiscences were vivid and strongly tinged with emotion, for there are no nations more dedicated to rugger than the New Zealanders and the Welsh. Brian had been in Britain during the All Blacks' tour the previous winter, and the one match he had most wanted to attend, but had not been able to, was the one against Wales. He became almost green with envy when he heard that I had made the pilgrimage to swell the singing at Cardiff Arms Park for the occasion; this despite the fact that it was a dreary match. The crowd provided more entertainment than the game, first with the rousing singing, then with the various comments elicited by Don Clarke's

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inhumanly faultless play. "Well," said one particularly small fellow, "if I couldn't tackle him, mun, I'd kick him." The response from his more burly companion was a growl, filled with savage invective, and an assurance that "somebody'll get him in a dark alley one of these nights". It seemed strange, re-living those vivid Welsh moments as I sat peeling fresh lychees on the train to Singapore.

I was rather disappointed with Singapore, and not a little frustrated at being within two degrees of the Equator and yet unable to get south of it. Whether I had been expecting the exotic mystery and green-eyed evil of Dr. Fu-Manchu, or what, I cannot say. I was certainly not prepared for the city of towering concrete that I found. The place seemed to live on money and nothing else. Even the long-awaited sea was grey and dull, clogged by humid cloud. Only at night did the place become more fascinating, particularly down the little alley-ways of Chinatown. Great expanses of gleaming oranges stared up at watchful light-bulbs. Fruit stall after fruit stall gave way to shirts, "velly cheap", fetched by a pole from a banked background. Then toys: bright toys and dark toys; toys which whirr and buzz, hoot and squeak; toys which hop, roll, and walk; toys in variety never-ending. All around there seethes a solid flood of people, bright with reflection from the colourful stalls. Squeeze out of this into the main street and there, high above, blinks a blaze of neon lighting. Chinese characters, red and green, flicker and glare amidst the English. More shirts; stalls, too, selling cane pictures or curry pies, plastic dolls or Christmas cards, gaudy books or underwear, all a happy jumble of noisy colour.

All this dies in the day. The alley-ways are deserted

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and almost empty. The stalls are bare boards, or have even been removed altogether. The colour and the light, the hustle and the bustle, all this has gone. Only the smart air-conditioned shops remain, cool and impersonal. From within them the day looks grey and cold with its thick clouds and a wind which grasps and tosses whatever is loose. Coming to the door you prepare yourself to shudder at this cold November day—only to be plunged into a world of steam.

Singapore held me for only two days. From there I intended to go back north to Ipoh, where I had been invited to stay with an army doctor and his wife, brother and sister-in-law of a girl I knew in England. On a Sunday afternoon I therefore took a bus to the outskirts of the town, thinking to get a lift a little way into the country so that I could set off hitch-hiking for Ipoh in earnest early the next morning. By the time I left the bus, dark thunder-clouds were looming overhead, and large drops of rain were already spotting the road. It was with one eye cocked on a little shack of a café behind me that I waited for a lift. To my relief, the lift came first, but only just. Hardly had we gone a mile before the heavens opened and the road became a river. This tropical downpour lasted half an hour at the most, but five seconds of it would have soaked one to the skin.

The car which had saved me from this fate was new, large, and fast, and was driven by a cheery little Malay, whose English extended no further than the ability to intimate his intention to stop for us to top up with a bottle of beer. On the first of these halts I asked him where he lived, thinking to find out how far he was going. The answer might have been given by a sulking seagull. I

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interpreted the squawk as meaning "here", and my heart sank, for I had noticed that the car license was issued in Kuala Lumpur, and had built up hopes on that. When we returned to the car, however, it became apparent that "glwlk" had meant not "here" but "K.L.". And sure enough, night did see me in the capital, far further north than I had ever dreamt I would come that evening.

My lift the next day took me directly to Ipoh and deposited me at the army medical centre in time for my doctor host Ted to drive me to his home and see me settled before lunch. The lift was with a young Chinese commercial traveller for ICI, who told me much about Malaysia. From travelling through Malaya I had got the impression that the mainland at least was by far the most prosperous country I had been to since northern Europe. What this man said, and the way he said it, told me about the country's problems, notably the tension between the Chinese and the Malays. It was essentially this tension which was soon to cause Singapore to leave the Federation. As a general rule, it is the Chinese who have control of the commercial side of the country, the Malays who form the government. The attitude of this Chinaman towards the Malays gave a fairly clear indication of what the latter's feelings might be towards the Chinese. He told how the government, aware that discontent amongst the poor is the root cause of Communism, had given many rural Malays four acres of land to cultivate and grow rubber, as well as a grant to build a house. Most of them, he said, built the house and stopped there. According to him, the great majority of Malays work only for a short period and, once they have earned some money, just sleep and eat until it runs out. Despite the

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enmity between the two races and the problem this evokes, such of Malaysia as I saw seemed a very good advertisement for the British colonial system.

It was a restful tonic, after a long period of wandering and of institution life, to spend a short time in a real home, and Ted and Anne soon made me feel a part of the place. I did little other than read and talk, eat and sleep, and this was precisely the sort of change I needed. I could unfortunately not stay very long, for time was short, and it was with mixed feelings that I took to the road again.

My next port of call was Penang, an island just off the north coast of Malaya. Since I had but few Malayan dollars left, I stayed at the Sikh temple, the usual abode of the hitch-hiker in India since they allow people to sleep on their premises for nothing. Of the many beauties of this tropical isle, I was most attracted by a Chinese temple some nine miles along the coast from Georgetown, the capital. It is called the Snake Temple, and it has a fame larger than its size. Dragons and other creatures adorn its pagoda roof. Between the four square pillars of the porch, all inscribed with Chinese characters, stands a table on which burn thick joss-sticks. More burn within, filling the air with the fragrance of jasmine. Above them hang faded red Chinese lanterns. Shrines lose themselves in dark recesses at the back, their presence betrayed only by the glint of gold or the gleam of silk. Objects innumerable, bowls, vases, lanterns, as well as flowers and other foliage, bedeck floor and tables. The small room of the temple seems full to over-flowing, a store-house of gold, jade, and lacquered wood. The gloom and the incense provoke stillness, mystery.

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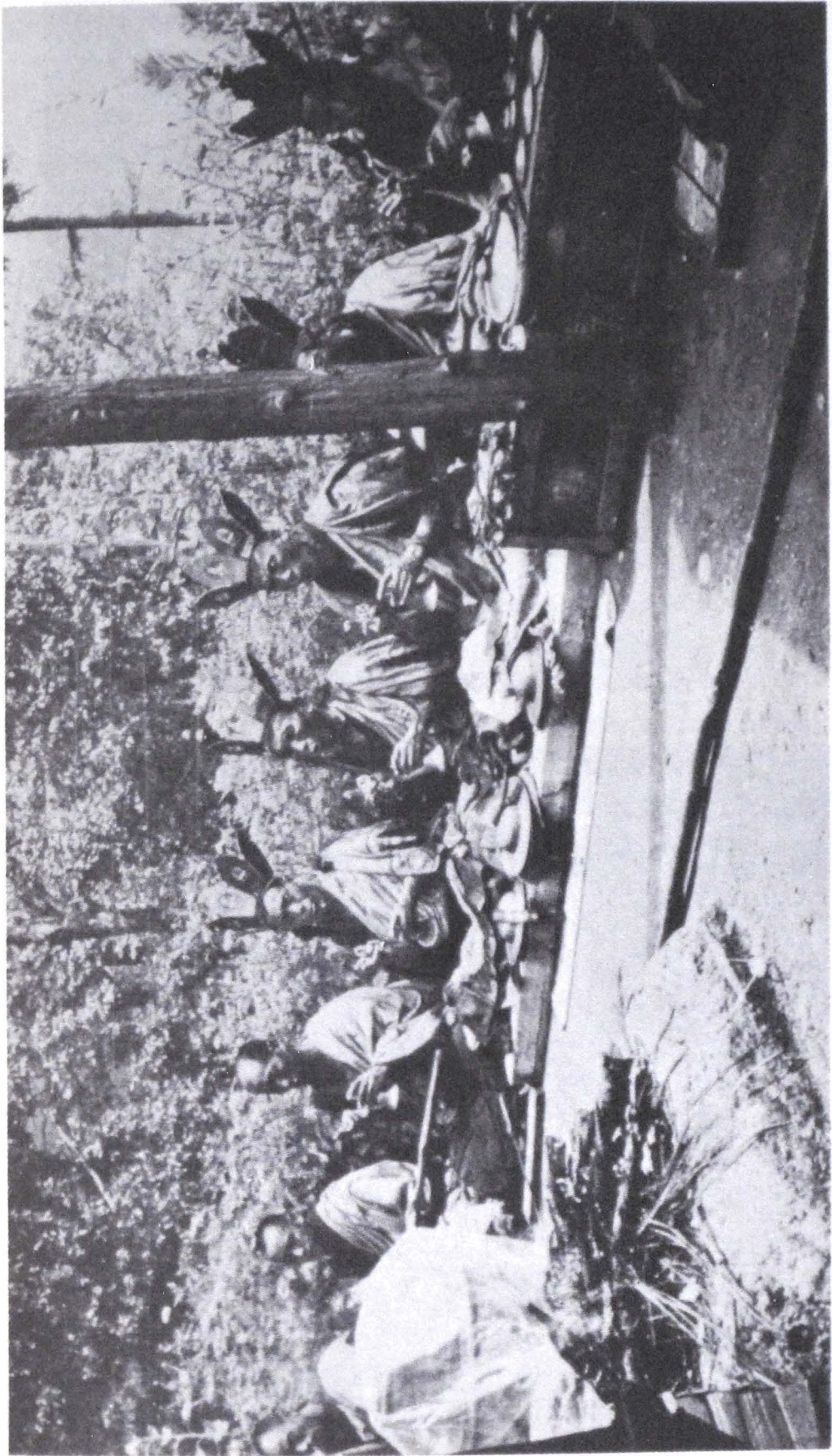
Slowly, one by one, the snakes separate themselves from this jumbled background, here one, there another, till soon the whole temple seems to drip with them. Coiled loosely around twigs, over pipes, along beams, under tables, still and silent they lie there, bright green vipers, doped by the incense. Night is their noon, for then they come to life and consume the food the guardian has left for them. Now they are motionless, silent, lost in another world, like sleepers in an opium den. Their very stillness adds to the strangeness of the place. Indeed it is hard to believe they are alive; but the guardian brings one, hangs it around my neck, brings another, places it in my hands, and slowly, lethargically, they twist and turn at the touch of my warm skin.

Strange to think that in the mouth flicking its forked tongue into my ear are concealed fangs that could probably kill me.

“Don’t squeeze!” cries the guardian in urgent warning as one of the snakes writhes more vigorously.

I came out on my own feet, strangely unmoved at having had death hovering within an inch of my head.

The day after visiting the Snake Temple I caught the train to Bangkok. I took the early ferry over to the mainland, thinking to reach the station in good time to secure a seat. I might as well have slept on, for the train did not appear from the sheds until well after the second ferry had arrived. By then there was an alarmingly large crowd on the platform. To get seats desperate measures were called for, and desperate measures were employed. As the train came reversing in at a trotting pace, I walked up beyond the end of the low platform and leapt on to a moving carriage. Foiled! The inner door was locked. I



Monks at *puja* in Dalhousie



Sonam and Kiki



The author about to leave Dalhousie

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jumped off again and mounted the other end. Foiled again! Soon quite a crowd had scrambled aboard, and my tactics were reduced to nought. As soon as the train had stopped and it became obvious that nobody was in a hurry to come and unlock the doors, I dropped on to the ground again, this time opposite the platform, and hurried along the side of the carriage until I found a window I could open from without. At last one gave, and I clambered up just in time to tumble into a group of seats as the flood-gates were opened.

Because of the crush on the train, the journey back to Bangkok was considerably less comfortable than that in the other direction. There was not even room for me to lie on the floor at night, and I had to remain contorted in my seat. The only consolation came just before I went to sleep and, looking out of the window, caught sight of the long curving train, dotted with lights, as it wound its way up the steep gradient to higher ground. The usual diesel had the help of a steam engine along this stretch, a wonderful wood-burning machine which snorted and puffed, and blew a spectacular fountain of sparks into the darkness, like some monstrous primeval dragon. This sight did not prevent my reaching Bangkok weary and bedraggled, and it was a relief to know that, through the good offices of the married daughter of an acquaintance of my mother, I had a place waiting for me in the same students' hostel as I had stayed in before.

Although so many of the *klongs* in Bangkok are being filled in, the city is still famous for its so-called "floating market". At the hostel I found two other foreigners staying, Geoff and Dawn, both from the antipodes. Since

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they also wished to visit the floating market, we arose at an unearthly hour the morning after my arrival and went all three to hire a boat. We took to the water just as it was beginning to get light, and set off, feeling rather chilly, along the main river. This was dreary and grey, lined with wharfs at which lay hefty barges, piled high with green bananas. After a while we left the main river and things began to become interesting. The tributary we were following wound its grey-green greasy way through thick tropical vegetation, with here and there a shack on stilts, or a group of house-boats, shaped like fat cigars. Women in wide hats with wares to sell, monks in bright orange robes with begging bowls, little men selling coffee; a whole variety of specimens were paddling around the early morning waters in their small, open, banana-shaped boats. Then the green walls of the river gave way to water-front shops until eventually, beside a picturesque bridge, we reached the floating market. The crowd was there all right, colourful and noisy as it argued and bargained over fruit and vegetables of all descriptions, but much of it was on land. Boats there were, but certainly not the swarm of them shown in the tourist blurb. Only as we were returning and the sun was reaching a respectable height, only then did the swarms of boats appear—and they were launches full of tourists.

After our watery excursion the three of us made our way to the more northerly quarter of town. There we intended to visit the zoo, which proudly houses a real white elephant. We only managed to find buses for half the distance, however, so instead we entered the compound of the Royal Palace, where stands the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha himself is doubt-

less a wonderful creature, but he sat remote and high, atop a pyramid of ornate gold, and consequently was only a distant mysterious shape of green. The high ceiling and walls of the temple were all decoratively painted, and while I was there, the floor was dotted with cross-legged figures listening to the low-pitched chanting of unseen monks. Outside the main door people came shuffling on their knees to present offerings of flowers or joss-sticks, or to peel yet another square of gold leaf on to a small image of Buddha.

The outside of the temple was surrounded by square pillars. Like so many of the buildings in the temple compound, they were covered with gold leaf and inlaid with myriads of tiny mirrors and pieces of coloured glass. The roof was tiled, deep blue in the centre but with a brown border. It cascaded through several layers at either end, and the point of each level was completed by a delicate rising horn of gold.

Next to this temple stood, so to speak, the "Chapel Royal". This had a similar roof, but it was light brown with a green border. A series of fanciful life-sized golden figures stood guard around the building. They were executed with such skill that they seemed to be utterly weightless, as if about to take flight at any moment. Two small golden pagodas rose at one end of this temple. The pagodas in Thailand and Burma are not like the Chinese ones, but are shaped like huge hand-bells. These particular ones had polygonal bases, around which there braced themselves a row of weird little creatures supporting the pagodas, like deformed progeny of Atlas. Beyond the other end rose another, less glittering, golden pagoda. This was larger than the other two and was circular. The

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whole compound was full of smaller, crystal-covered buildings with roofs of coloured tiles, and of strange shapes and figures of gold, or base metal inlaid with coloured china. Towers of different shapes and colours rose either from buildings or independently, and at every entrance to the compound stood a grotesque pair of huge and gaily painted guardians. The whole was an enthralling higgledy-piggledy of exotic shapes and colours, but it was hardly elevating. The sheer profusion was overwhelming, and it was impossible to stand back and be gripped by any powerful over-all unity. One felt entranced like a child in toyland rather than overawed by a sense of the divine.

We spent a long time at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and when we came out Geoff and Dawn had to go to have lunch with some friends. In the afternoon I found my way to the famous Wat Pho. Here again the grounds were cluttered with small pagodas and other buildings, but the general lay-out was symmetrical and so rather more satisfying than the Emerald Buddha compound. Several cloister-like courts were lined with statue upon statue of meditating Buddhas. Their ages varied enormously, and so did their conditions. Some still gleamed brightly in their golden skins, others were old, dark, and drab. Most wore yellow, pink, or orange sashes. Before them wandered tourists, vendors of religious images and dirty pictures, and slim marigold monks. There must have been many hundreds of these identical Buddhas, yet had they all been melted together they would probably never have reached the size of the main show-piece of Wat Pho: a gigantic reclining Buddha. The golden figure lay the full length of one of the temple buildings, in

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Buddha's traditional death posture. The entrance was in a corner at the back of the figure, and from there it was by no means obvious what was in store. Indeed, I thought at first I still had not found the right place. But then I walked a little further, and gasped in astonishment. The huge curved object towering above me had been nothing other than the back of the Buddha's head. The face smirked, as if it knew the effect it was producing. The rest of the body stretched huge and long, right down to the other end of the building. I walked past pillar after pillar, with always this vast golden shape reaching up to the ceiling behind them, and finally came to the feet. Even the little toe must have had a diameter of at least eighteen inches. This reclining Buddha was wonderful indeed, but it was grotesque rather than beautiful, a sight at which the tourist came to marvel rather than a religious image to provoke religious thoughts.

Just across the river from Wat Pho stands Wat Arun, the Temple of Dawn, so I took one of the little ferry-boats that ply between the two temples, in order to visit it. In many ways I much preferred this to the other temples I had visited that day. Instead of a proliferation of buildings and little towers, there was just the one mighty pagoda-like construction, mirrored at its four corners by smaller versions of itself. Its dark flat-sided outline was strongly delineated, and the four smaller pagodas affirmed its self-sufficiency. The eye swept down the contours of the main pagoda and, finding these guarding and completing the base, looked no further. It was a change at last to find a temple with intrinsic unity.

The main pagoda had several balconies around it, and I climbed to the highest of these, at the point where the

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building begins to sweep up vertically. The surface of the pagoda was interesting from so close at hand, for it was covered with shells and pieces of broken china as well as with ornate stone carvings. Just as interesting was the view from this high and rather precipitous perch. Immediately below lay the formal gardens of Wat Arun. These were skirted by the river, alive with round-roofed barges and a swarm of other busy little craft. Beyond this the coloured roofs, the towers, and the spikes of the various temples were strewn amidst a maze of conventional modern buildings. The sky-line seemed to crystallize the way exotic Bangkok is marching with all speed into the uniformity of the West.

The last of the most famous temples of Bangkok for me to visit was the Marble Temple. Not only did I find it the most beautiful of the temples, it was the only one where I sensed the deep peace of a true religious building. A wide path between well-kept, bright green lawns led straight to the main temple. The walls were shining white, the cascading brown roofs shimmered with gold ornamentation. The whole structure was light and graceful, and seemed to float between the blue sky and the quiet green gardens. Aesthetically it was far more attractive than anything I had visited the previous day. It had all the colour and exotic shapes of the Emerald Buddha and Wat Pho compounds, which were lacking in Wat Arun, but it forged them into a graceful harmony such as to make the others resemble oriental curiosity shops. The peace of the gardens was immediately impressive. Beside the lawns, separating the main temple from the monks' buildings, flowed a clear stream in which large and silent fish swam trustfully up to every visitor. The trees were

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all but still in the slight cooling breeze. Within the temple, dark after the gleaming white walls in the bright sunshine, a large golden Buddha sat and meditated. Before this timeless image burnt rows of silent flickering candles. The place was filled with the stillness and peace of meditation, the calm of eternity. How pleased I was to find after all the silence of the ageless mountains in this, the physical representation of the mind of the Orient.

From the Marble Temple to the zoo was only a very short distance, so I took a walk to see the white elephant. The zoo was not large, but it had several elephants, none of which looked much like driven snow, and I came away disappointed. The next day, however, I was speaking to the lady who had arranged my accommodation, and she said that soon after the animal's arrival she had been to the zoo to see it. On the first two visits she had failed to find it, although she did notice a ring of people around a perfectly ordinary-looking little elephant. The third time she went, she inquired as to its whereabouts, and learnt that it was in fact the little elephant within the ring of people. Far from being white, it was more a sandy brown, rather, I imagined, like the brown and hairy buffaloes occasionally to be seen amongst the black ones. I had in fact seen one elephant at the zoo which could have fitted this description, so concluded that I had after all seen the white elephant. Far from cheering me, this increased my disillusionment, for, naïve as I was, I had expected to see a creature white, if not as snow, at least as grubby slush. When later I had the chance of going to see white tigers in Delhi, and a white rhino in Kathmandu, I did neither, for fear of similar disappointment.

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Later that day I left Bangkok for Rangoon. The Union of Burma Airways flight was delayed by three hours, which caused me consternation. The Burmese government only issued visas for twenty-four hours, so time was precious. When eventually we took off, the sun was setting to port. It sank gradually into the smooth curve of the earth, a glowing arc of deep, deep red.

From the darkness of the sky Rangoon looked an intriguing series of illogical patterns, twinkling white and gold. Down in the city, driving to the centre in the air-line bus, it lost its charm and became drab and ordinary. Even the famed Golden, or Shwe Dagon Pagoda, was only a sparse scattering of anaemic electric light bulbs. Yet despite this I felt a subdued excitement on reaching Rangoon, a strange sensation which I could not at all explain.

When the bus came to a halt I found Myanaung U Tin waiting for me. A friend of Mrs. Bedi's, he was to be my host for the short stay in Rangoon. He had once been Burmese representative at the United Nations, but now lived in quiet retirement, spending most of his time with his family, and the occasional day at the meditation college where Mrs. Bedi had become a convinced Buddhist. We had little time for talk that evening for it was already late, and since U Tin had carefully planned the next day so as to incorporate in an extensive tour all the major sites of Rangoon, we soon took to bed in order to awake refreshed.

When I went to wash the next morning I looked out of the bathroom window and there, less than a mile away, stood the Golden Pagoda. Its great gleaming bell-shape thrust majestically up into the blue sky, a proud

contrast to the borrowed glimmer of its apologetic light bulbs the previous night. The schedule of our tour had been planned in such a way as to enable U Tin's car to take us around as well as to deliver his grandchildren to school and back home again. Eight o'clock therefore saw us deposited at this great pagoda. We left our sandals in the car, for an ambiguous notice at the bottom of the steps leading up to the pagoda informed us, "Foot-wearing prohibited".

The Shwe Dagon Pagoda stands on a slight rise, and to reach it we went through a lofty pillared hall and up a covered flight of wide steps. The terrace at the top was of far greater extent than I had expected. Apart from the ring of small gilded pagodas and little shrines around the base of the main pagoda, there were clusters of other shrines, temples, and pagodas around the terrace, some of them rather Chinese-looking. In one corner stood a bhodi tree, brought as a sapling from the sacred tree in India beneath the boughs of which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. All this was fascinating, but it was dwarfed in every way by the mighty Shwe Dagon Pagoda itself, which towered high into the air, as many feet tall as there are days in the year. The lower part of the great bell-shape, the curved ringing-bowl, was covered with gold leaf, but the neck was gold plated. This supported an umbrella-like canopy, from which hung a multitude of little bells, tinkling in the wind. Just as the wind, when it touched a Tibetan prayer-flag, is thought to carry away the prayer and bear it wherever it blows, so the tinkling of these bells as they were caressed by the wind represented high up in the ether the prayers of the earth-bound faithful. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and

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thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Beyond these little bells, beyond the canopy from which they hung, at the very top of the whole pagoda, there we saw from the ground a little golden knob, the size of a walnut. This is the richest offering of all. In reality it is large as a man, and it is studded with a multitude of precious stones. Its value is greater far than the rest of the huge pagoda, but it is almost invisible from the ground, as if its glory were too bright for man to behold.

With the Burmese government suffering from xenophobia, the quiet crowd that walked around the base of this golden vision was devoid of tourists. There were several monks, their robes a little more brown than the bright marigold of their Thai counterparts, but most of the people were ordinary Burmese men and women, unobtrusive in softly coloured *lunghis*. They came with offerings of gold leaf or lotus flowers to worship at one of the shrines, or else just to walk quietly around the base of the great pagoda, which to do is perforce to worship. And all the while thin coils of smoke wound up from a thousand joss-sticks, mingling with the drone of prayer and the high ceaseless tinkling of the bells.

I could easily have haunted that spot for hours, but we had been there long already and there was still much to see. U Tin took me first to fulfil my promise to Mrs. Bedi to deliver gifts of fruit and other food to her *guru* at the meditation centre, and to a German Buddhist friend of hers who had been ill. To my sorrow, this German lady seemed to shy back from me as soon as U Tin told her I was going to become a Christian priest.

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Like so many converts the world over, she must have been filled with an irrational aversion to the ideas she had rejected, an attitude particularly sad in a Buddhist, for usually they are the most tolerant of all religious groups towards other beliefs. It is a wonderful claim for Buddhism to be able to make, that it has never had a war waged on its behalf.

Our last ports of call before lunch were three modern constructions, all of them on the outskirts of Rangoon. The first was the World Peace Pagoda. Although of the traditional golden hand-bell design, this was built around an iron frame, and not of solid stone or brick, like its forerunners. Consequently it was able to have a hollow base, which was a circular hall with, in the centre, five Buddhas facing out towards the five entrances.

Not far from the World Peace Pagoda stood the great hall built for the World Buddhist Conference held some time ago in Rangoon. The building had an outer shell of pseudo-rock, and the hall was called "The Cave". Even though it had taken place several years ago, the conference was obviously still vivid in U Tin's mind, for he took great delight in showing me where he sat, and in telling me all about the proceedings. Many of the buildings put up to house the delegates to the conference were now part of what, in fact if not in name, was a Buddhist university. U Tin took pride in showing me the new central building, designed, I think, by an Indian architect. It was circular, with galleries around the inside, and there was a fountain playing at ground level. Before the main entrance lay a large and strangely shaped pool, in which the drum of the building was reflected. All these three modern buildings which we visited bore witness

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to an architectural enterprise particularly welcome in a situation where the temptation might have been strong to sit back and glory in the achievements of the past.

In the afternoon we drove around and admired the Shwe Dagon Pagoda from different angles. We also paid a fleeting visit to the Sule Pagoda, which stood almost as a roundabout in the centre of the town. It provided a variation on the usual pagoda form in that, though golden, it was not circular but hexagonal. This in fact served to emphasize the flowing contours of the bell. In most cities the Sule Pagoda would be an object of rare and remarkable beauty, but in the city possessing the Shwe Dagon Pagoda it was destined to a life of obscurity.

From the Sule Pagoda we went to look at the waterfront, and then it was time to return home for a final supper of decorated noodles and Burmese salad. It was a sad meal, for although I had only been in Rangoon for a night and a day, I felt I had come to know it intimately. The Shwe Dagon Pagoda may have had much to do with this. Wherever you go in Rangoon you catch glimpses of it above you, either gleaming gold, or silhouetted darkly against the sun. It is forever at the centre of your wanderings, like a great shining sun around which the rest of the city revolves. I felt a magnetism continually drawing me towards it, and I would have given much to have paid another visit to it.

Yet it was not so much the magnificence of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda which drew me to Rangoon as U Tin himself. His own love for the city communicated itself vividly through his quiet enthusiasm, and he took pains to show and explain every little detail to me. We talked, too, about our respective religions, but time was our

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enemy, and we were cut far short of the fields we would gladly have explored. Yet just from being with U Tin it was possible to learn much about Buddhism. He was a real follower of the Middle Way, the perfect example of that mingling of extrovert and introvert which he himself advocated so strongly. It is a state rarely reached, alas, by those Europeans who embrace Buddhism and, in throwing themselves wholly into what they imagine to be its way of life, entirely miss the point of the Buddha's teaching. It was easy to tell from U Tin's face and from his composure that he was a deeply spiritual person, yet he had an obvious love of the life he found throbbing in all around him. He disliked only artificiality, and it was that which drove him from the career of the diplomat. I felt on leaving U Tin's house that I was leaving my own home, and he must have had similar feelings, for he said he was sure we must have been closely connected in some previous life. Be that as it may, I have rarely learnt so much from anyone, just by being with him for a short time, as I did from U Tin.

Taking advantage of the fact that my flight into Rangoon the previous day had been three hours late, I had managed to alter my flight to Calcutta to a later one. Evening was therefore approaching as U Tin and I drove out to the airport in his car. On the way we stopped for a last look at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda. It was bathed in the mellow light of the setting sun and had become rich and deep in colour, restful after its daylight glare. Its lights had been switched on, and they twinkled around the golden form, replacing in the imagination the tinkling of the bells.

As the plane climbed into the night sky, the whole

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city was spread out in darkness, a delicate maze of pinpoint lights, just as it had been on my arrival the previous night. Having leapt forcibly into my life for twenty-four hours, Rangoon now withdrew again as it had come, but leaving its impress firmly stamped in my mind. And to aid the forgetful senses, I had with me a little bell, its clapper extended into a tongue the shape of a bhodi leaf, to make it ring in the wind. It was given to me by U Tin, on the steps of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda.

3

Rhinos and a Bear Cub

Cathay Pacific Airways brought me from Rangoon to Calcutta, and they did so very well. Not often does one drink Martini and Nuits St. Georges with an airline's compliments, particularly served by Chinese hostesses, dark, beautiful, and smiling.

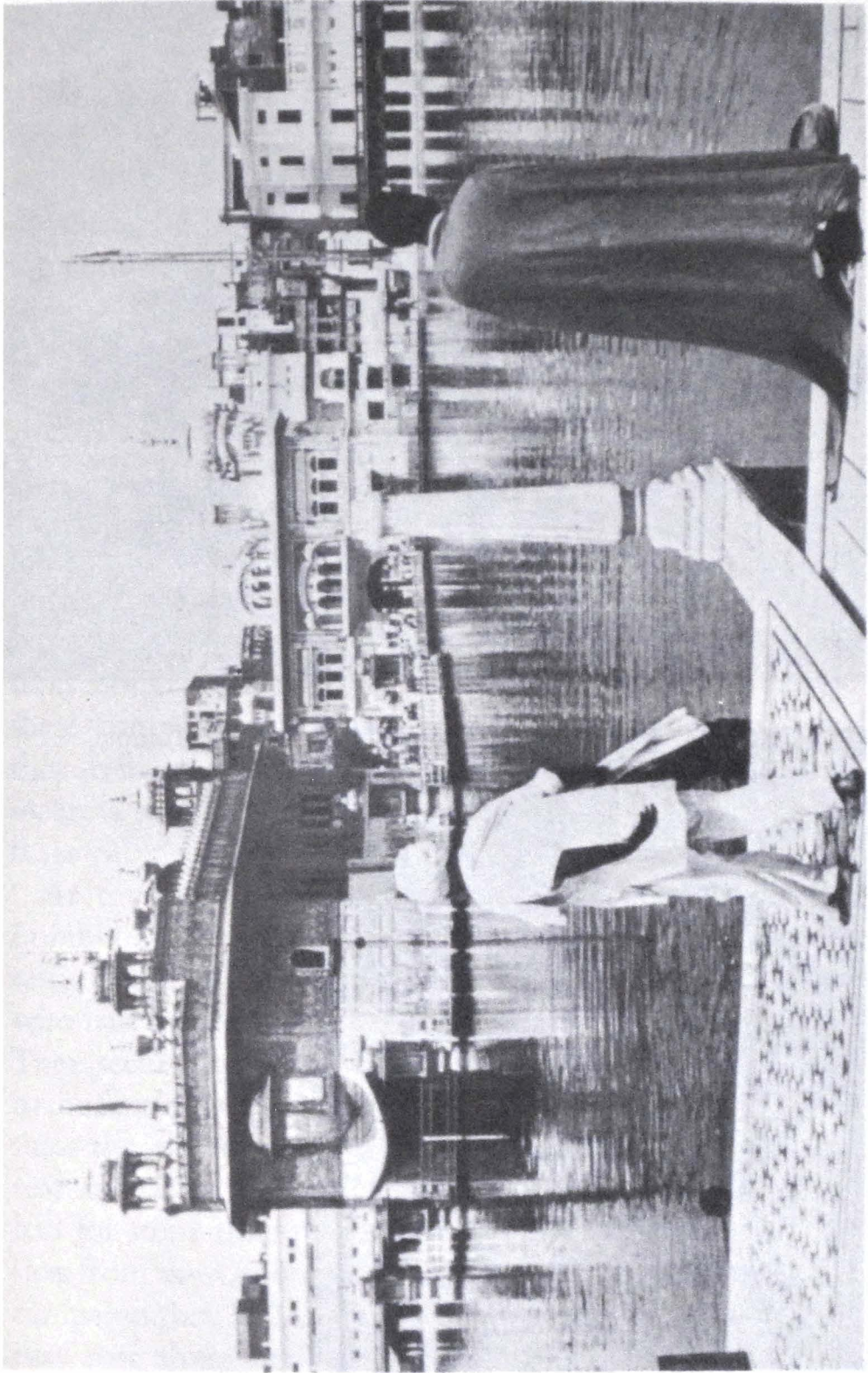
The drive from Dum-Dum into the centre of Calcutta left no doubt as to the country I had reached. Never before had I been so forcibly struck by the sheer mass of population that swarms over an Indian road, never before had the bullock carts seemed quite so slow and bulky. It must have been the contrast with clean modern Bangkok and Malaya that made them seem so. To my surprise and pleasure, I felt a warm glow within me as the airport bus got bogged down in this turgid swamp of humanity. I had come home.

It was half past ten at night when I finally reached the gates of the Oxford Mission House. They were shut. I was expected back that day but, as I had half feared,

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I must by that time have been given up for lost. My three years at Cambridge had not been in vain, however, so it was comparatively simple to reach a position astride the high wooden gates. An astonished Indian complied in passing my rucksack up to me, and in no time I was safely on the right side of the wall. The house itself looked a tougher proposition, and I was just debating whether I should cast stones to attract attention when I noticed an open door over on the left. Here, it transpired, the servants slept. One of them produced the keys of the main door and went to fetch Fr. Thorman. To my relief, he was not annoyed at having been roused from his slumbers. On the contrary, his main reaction seemed to be one of amusement at my manner of arrival. Calcutta diocese had just been celebrating its centenary, and the Oxford Mission had been very busy looking after guests, as well as taking part in the celebrations. Hardly surprisingly, this had caused my return to be overlooked. Fortunately there was still a spare bed which I could have. I cannot say I sank into it with relief, for of its nature it was not the sort of bed into which one sank, but I was not sorry to reach it.

I did not stay long in Calcutta this time. The Cambridge Brotherhood had very kindly invited me to spend Christmas with them in Delhi, and before that I wanted to go and visit Mrs. Bedi's elder son, who was manager of a tea estate in Assam. With the second week of December nearly over, time was more scarce than rupees, so I decided to fly up to Assam rather than spend several days circumambulating East Pakistan in a crawling train. I remained in Calcutta long enough to arrange this flight and secure a permit to visit Assam, and then I left.



Golden Temple, Amritsar



Marble Temple,
Bangkok



Buddha within the
Marble Temple

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My third and final visit to Dum-Dum was the longest of all. The flight to Gauhati was scheduled for such an early hour that the Mission brethren feared I would find no transport to take me even to the town air terminal, let alone to the airport. I therefore took a bus to Dum-Dum the previous evening and spent the night spanning two rather hard armchairs in the airport lounge.

The plane left late because of fog, but I nevertheless reached Gauhati station in time to catch the slow narrow-gauge train up country. Finding a place in the train was by no means easy, for I had only an ordinary third class ticket. The main body of the train was hopelessly full, but at the rear end were two compartments reserved for a military escort. This was to arrive later to guard the train along the borders of Nagaland. For the time being these compartments were being used by *hoi polloi*, but they remained emptier than the others. I managed to secure a seat in one of these, which had a mere twenty-three people in it; it was designed to seat nine.

At four o'clock, as the sun was setting, we reached Lumbini. Here the escort arrived. Ordinary citizens were removed from the two rear compartments, but the people who had helped me to a seat were military folk in mufti. They secured permission for themselves and me to travel in the first of these compartments. This was readily granted since the escort was in fact occupying no more than the rear one. The reason for the escort was that the Nagas had for some time past been militantly demanding secession from the Union of India. As part of their propaganda campaign they had made a hobby of blowing up the trains that pass along their territory to upper Assam and the North-East Frontier Agency. Happily this obnoxious

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activity had now subsided somewhat. In any case, I failed to see what effective cover an escort of a dozen men armed with obsolescent rifles and one L.M.G. could give to a whole train.

Several military men in mufti had come into the compartment by the time we left Lumbini. They were disposed to make light of the Nagas. It is true that two generations ago many of that noble race made their pastime head-hunting and it is probable that this has not wholly died out in the more remote areas even today. My companions were surely jesting, however, when they represented the Nagas to me as forest-dwellers, who run around in nothing but a leafy loin-cloth. Although we saw no such creatures, we certainly passed through dense jungle, its darkness pierced in places by the dull glow of little fires. Once the train stopped in the jungle for no apparent reason, so this, of course, was treated as an ambush by Nagas. Then the lights gave out. This was so that the Nagas should not see us coming. A bump against the wall of the next compartment was a Naga attack. I could not help wondering how those merry fellows would have reacted if the Nagas really had attacked.

We reached Furkhating Junction in the evening, and here I left my companions to their fate. The station-master telephoned through to the little branch-line station which served the tea estate for which I was heading, and I settled down for the night in the primitive waiting-room, hoping the message of my arrival would have filtered through to Ranga Bedi by the next morning. Sure enough, hardly had I put my feet to the floor when his large figure strode in. His mother is not small, but his father, an Indian, is

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vast in all directions. Ranga was therefore well built for the part he played. Wearing shorts and carrying a swagger-cane tucked under his arm, he looked very much the pukkha sahib.

The morning was still grey and misty when we reached his bungalow, for the drive from the station was short, if bumpy. It was a new bungalow designed, decorated, and furnished to a consistently high standard. Each bedroom had its own bathroom, and each bathroom was fully equipped in western style. Certainly there was no reflection here of the particularly backward state of Assam. These were conditions better than I had experienced anywhere in India. To look after the bungalow and its fine garden, which included a small swimming pool, Ranga employed fifteen servants, of whom one was the children's *ayah*. Her charges were two little girls, the younger being just past the horizontal stage. Their mother, Umi, I met at breakfast. She was wearing a pink cloud-like sari, which made her look particularly young and motherly.

Little time was lost in introducing me to the estate itself. Breakfast finished, Ranga took me with him to the office and introduced me to Bernard, the assistant manager. He was an Englishman who had been in tea for only one or two years. He seemed to like the life well enough, and his only major complaint was woman-starvation. Bernard was to show me round the estate so, mounting a bicycle each, we set off on the bumpy tour of daily inspection.

The sight of a well-kept tea estate is unexpected. The bushes grow so close together that their tops touch, and since they are pruned completely flat, they present a vista as of a smooth green carpet, following faithfully the

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contours of the ground. Here and there small trees planted to afford shade break up the surface, but otherwise it is interrupted only by the brown, winding, jolting ribbon that is the road. Plucking of the bushes begins in March and had only recently finished. Fresh green leaves were still sprouting, but apparently they would make only very coarse tea. The process of cutting down the bushes to within half an inch of the previous year's prune was now under way. Colourful figures stood amongst the sea of green and chopped, one hand in the air, the other swinging the pruning knife. Before them all was fresh and green. Behind they left a smoother, darker surface.

This tea garden, though an old one, was still slowly expanding into the virgin jungle that surrounded it. At the edge of the estate lay the nurseries, where the large brittle seeds are planted and the young tea carefully tended, prior to transplantation. It is this part of every estate that suffers most from the attentions of a major pest: wild elephants. They are a particular nuisance because they are so difficult to control. Ranga told me of one estate which had suffered so badly in its nurseries from the incursions of hungry elephants that its manager had gone to great trouble and expense to erect a high voltage electric fence along the jungle side of the estate. For some time there was no more trouble; the fence seemed to be having its effect. Then one night it transpired that the elephants had merely not been frequenting that area. Three elephants came to see what tasty new tea was growing for them. On brushing up against the fence and receiving a powerful shock, they were immediately enraged. Their vengeance was systematic. They followed the fence right along to the shed whence the current

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came. This they destroyed utterly, tossing about the expensive and very heavy electrical equipment as if it were plastic. Then, finding no more current coming through, they tore up the fence yard by yard, thus destroying in one night what had taken seven months and many thousands of rupees to construct.

But elephants can not only be vindictive, they are also extremely cunning. They have the habit of each one treading in the steps of the other, so that frequently the only way of telling that more than one elephant has passed is by the droppings. This habit the elephants can turn to good use. I heard of one troublesome elephant which several people had gone out, individually, to shoot. None had come back again. Finally two people went out together. They found the elephant's tracks and even sighted the beast itself. One man set off to stalk it, following the tracks, and the other hung back to see what would happen. Hardly had the first man started than a second elephant came out of hiding and silently followed him. This second elephant trod meticulously in the tracks of the first. In this way people had never known they had more than one to deal with. The pursuer had become the pursued, and eventually the victim. Seeing what was happening, the second man shouted to the first, who turned and shot his silent enemy. They then accounted for the first elephant, the decoy.

Bernard explained thoroughly to me all the various stages of nursery growth before we started back across the sweet-smelling estate. The last thing to be visited was the factory. Here for the first time were signs of tea as it would be recognized in England: brown stains and the authentic smell. When the leaf is brought in from the

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garden it is thinly spread out to wither overnight. Then it is rolled, sifted, and fermented, which takes about three and a half hours, and finally dried in a furnace. All this had already been completed, and I witnessed only a furnace at work. This was firing tea once more immediately prior to packing, to rid it of such moisture as it might have attracted during storage. The dry tea is then shaken into shining new tea chests. These are beautiful boxes, a far cry from their sorry-looking relations in England that store books and unwanted rubbish in dusty attics and mouldy cellars.

The tour of inspection completed, Bernard and I retired to the veranda of his bungalow for liquid refreshment. I visited him again in the evening for dinner, when we were joined by an Englishman from a neighbouring estate. I began to understand Bernard's complaint about woman-starvation, for his bungalow was harsh and bare, crying out for a feminine touch to make it a home. And indeed, I began to understand why the tea planters of yore had got their reputation for hard drinking. To spend evening after evening alone in that sort of place with the knowledge that there was nowhere to which he could escape must have been enough to drive any man to drink. Although I had to abstain because I had just been given an anti-cholera injection that afternoon, alcohol was not stinted that evening, but it did not flow as of old. Ranga told how, when any of the planters from the area went on leave, all the managers from miles around would assemble at Furkhating station to see him off. They would arrive at about ten in the evening and drink solidly until the train left the next morning at four or five o'clock. By that time everybody would be so inebriated that it

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would either be impossible to get the fellow concerned into the train, or else half the party would climb in with him and refuse to get out again. There was no trace of such excesses at dinner that night. Instead a barren emptiness brooded over the house. The only relief was a scratched and dusty record of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, played with a blunt needle and on a gramophone which could only move the turn-table at a slow and irregular speed. The sole efficient piece of equipment was the loud-speaker, which magnified the result of all this to a generous fortissimo.

I liked Bernard very much, but I did wonder how he could possibly live in such an atmosphere. It was a great relief to return to the soft and glowing home of the Bedis, a home, I discovered, which had more on the domestic scene than might have been expected.

About a fortnight before my arrival some Nagas had speared a female bear on the tea estate and had brought its cub to the Bedi's bungalow. It can only have been a few days old at the time, and it had not stood well the rough journey to the bungalow in the bottom of a rather full basket. So minute was it and exhausted that Ranga and Umi took pity on it, called it "Teddy", and kept it. So when I reached the bungalow it boasted a resident bear cub.

At first Teddy had apparently been too weak even to lift himself up on his own four paws, and it was only with great difficulty that Ranga could get him to take milk from a bottle. By the time I arrived, however, he was a vigorous ball of black fluff. He was still tiny, and even when stretched out measured only a foot or eighteen inches from the top of his head to the pads of his paws.

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Much of this length was taken up with head, which was disproportionately large. It was foolishly round, like a pumpkin, interrupted only by a nose and two small stubby ears. The eyes were minute, like little black beads. His smooth silky hair was almost as black as his eyes, but on his chest he had a clearly defined white "U". This seemed to give him a touch of personality as well as of beauty, and he really did look the perfect teddy bear.

His temperament belied his looks. He was certainly not a creature to be cuddled. He was very irascible, and when annoyed he would set up a clucking noise just like that of a hen. Occasionally he even managed a growl. Not too alarming perhaps, but his bite was worse than his bark. His teeth were neither long nor particularly sharp, but he had extremely powerful jaw muscles, and he used them. His claws were quite unlike his teeth; they were very long and by no means blunt. He used those, too. The only way to pick him up was from behind, the fingers tucked under his arm-pits. Given half a chance, he would scratch and bite viciously, for he did not like being picked up. He preferred being left to his own devices.

Most of the day Teddy lived on the veranda on a *charpoy*. Here he usually lay curled up asleep, looking very sweet and innocent. When bored or hungry, however, he would prowl about the bed clucking furiously. He would peer over the edge and down at the floor, lunging into the intervening space but never quite daring voluntarily to jump the three feet to the ground. Occasionally he fell, head first, but the shock always silenced him. He was dangerous in those moods, and whoever fed him could never feel safe until the little bear had greedily

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sucked down at least a third of the bottle's contents. If no bottle was at hand, the best thing to do was to put him on the lawn. It was then that he became most delightful. He could not stand upright, but he lumbered along like a sailor, even though he was on four legs. Often he would follow whoever happened to be nearest to him, at other times he would go off and seek adventures of his own. Both things he could do at the most surprising speed. His antics on these occasions were always comical, but he was never so entertaining as when he entered the lists against a tree. He loved to try to climb anything vertical made of wood, but he never had the least hope of success with anything larger than a sapling.

There was one particular tree which proved an eminently suitable opponent. Teddy nearly always managed to climb as far as the first fork with comparative ease. This was about eighteen inches above the ground. Having curled and tugged himself up on to this, he would sit and rest before assaulting the next stage. This was where the tree began to get the better of him. He would begin by clawing his way upwards very cautiously, but for some reason would invariably slide back almost as far as each pull took him. He would continue in this way until his patience gave out. Then, in exasperation, he would hurl himself, panting, at the tree, scratching and biting at it as best he could. It always looked at first as if his desperate tactics were going to be rewarded, for he usually gained an inch or two in this round. Invariably, however, his flurry of activity would finish with him sliding down to a position even lower than that where it had begun. Sometimes it even made him tumble off the tree completely, and he would land, thump, on his back. He would

lie where he fell for a minute, a puzzled black ball. Then, game as ever, he would ponderously pick himself up, lumber over to the tree, and begin the whole process all over again.

Young as it was, the tree always won in the end, and having been thrown a number of times without really getting any further, Teddy would finally lose interest and wander off to pastures new. At this stage his audience had usually had enough, and he would be whisked off to his *charpoy*. There he would cluck for a while in frustration, but the effect of his exertions soon began to tell, and it was never long before he was curled up in a little sleeping ball.

Delightful as Teddy was, he was not the only animal attraction of the area. One of my motives for first wanting to visit Assam was to go into the Kaziranga Game Reserve. This is almost the last home of the great one-horned Indian rhinoceros. There are a few of the great beasts left in Nepal, but otherwise they are virtually extinct. Kaziranga is the only place where they survive in any great number. It so happened that the game reserve was only sixty miles from Ranga's tea estate, so he very kindly booked an elephant for me. He had tried to persuade Umi to come, but she was not keen. Ranga himself had hurt his back and thought an excursion on an elephant would do it no good. It was therefore arranged that Bernard would accompany me.

We had to be at Kaziranga by 5 a.m., which meant leaving at 3 a.m. Our departure had affinities with a witch's sabbath. Muffled *chowkidahs*¹ flitted silently to and

¹ Servants who guard and look after a building; in this case, "night watchmen."

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fro in the cold night air. Wraiths of mist hovered above the ground, gleaming silver in the moonlight. The moon itself shone full and round between the gaunt trees, a tinted halo surrounding it, as it were a fried egg in reverse. It was a perfect setting for Walpurgis revels.

All was asleep when we reached Kaziranga two hours later, and we did not set off to join the elephants until an hour after scheduled departure. By then another party had arrived, a middle-aged English couple. They mounted the first elephant, a tusker, and we its female companion. When all were comfortably astride the three-man saddles that ran the length of the elephants' backs, we set off. Although it was seven o'clock by now the world was still cold, grey, and misty, and unbelievably silent. We watched longingly for the slow breaking of dawn, and sure enough the sun soon rose and began to shed its golden rays over the waking earth. Grey shrub gradually brightened into green as the horizontal light crept on to it. The mist became white and less threatening, and slowly began to melt away. As the sun climbed higher, ground mist continued to float in patches, but the haze in the distance cleared almost completely. Like the curtain of the world's theatre it lifted, revealing in the great distance the high snows of the eastern Himalayas. They made the perfect back-cloth to this peaceful scene of golden nature shaking herself free from the cobwebs of darkness.

The elephants meanwhile plodded onwards. Their slow swinging motion backwards and forwards had an almost cradling effect, which engendered confidence in the great beasts. Almost immediately we had passed through a black muddy stream. We then reached ground which was part swamp, part firm earth, covered in places by tall

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elephant grass, dotted with the occasional tree and shrub. The huge beasts lunged their slow way rhythmically forward, oblivious of the terrain, always foot-sure, never hesitant, tearing up grass with their trunks and munching it slowly as they moved along.

Just gliding high above the changing ground on that patient ship-like creature's back, watching the slowly rising golden sun transform the world, this alone would have been a most wonderful way of spending the early morning. As it was, we had the inhabitants of the reserve to watch as well. There were birds in plenty, but all just birds to me. The only ones to interest me were some great black stork-like creatures with yellow necks and beaks, deep as well as long. They stood in swampy ground and pecked into the water, or else perched themselves, large and ungainly, on the topmost branches of too-small trees. Although when they took to the air they did not make the dry clacking sound of the European stork, they were in every other way much less elegant than the beautiful white birds of northern Europe.

Rich as Kaziranga is in bird life, it was the animals I had come to see. I was not to be disappointed. There were deer in plenty. Usually they stood in little herds, watching us warily when we were still some distance away, ready to take flight at any moment. Occasionally the direction of the wind would allow us to approach quite close to individual deer, hidden unsuspectingly from our sight in the long grass. A frightened yelp would reveal their presence, and off they would bound, leaping through the thick growth at astonishing speed. Once we saw half a dozen wild boar, which have now become quite rare, but they proved no more anxious to be observed than

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the deer had been. Even the herd of buffalo we saw across a wide expanse of water became uneasy at our distant presence. They were proud creatures with huge horns, and they held their heads erect in defiance. The domestic buffalo seemed weak and pitiful by contrast.

Only one group of animals stood their ground and were willing to be studied, and they, to my delight, were the pride of Kaziranga: the rhinos. We saw them individually, or at most, in pairs, but we must have seen at least a dozen of the creatures. All let us come to within twenty-five yards, some very much closer, and there we would stand, observing each other. They would stare at us from a distance, watching and listening. As we moved closer they became shifty, but they would relax as soon as we stopped. Sometimes we left them standing watching us. Usually they would tire of the situation first, turn away, and leave us. One pair which we followed for some time showed signs of becoming positively belligerent before pusillanimity got the better of them and they fled to the shelter of the high grass.

The rhinos were beasts indeed to marvel at. Huge and ungainly, their great heavy heads and slack jointed armour gave them a primeval air. They look real enough in zoos, which have much of the atmosphere of a museum, but here, wandering free and wild in the golden misty grass of early morning Assam, they did not seem to belong to the world. It was as if they had forgotten to die out with the passing of a bygone age. It made me almost sad to look at them, for huge and strong as they were, they looked hopelessly unwieldy, pathetically helpless in a world where cunning counts for more than grandeur or

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brute force. The little birds which accompanied them, riding on their backs to pick out the ticks, or strutting along beside them, seemed almost to be the guardians of the great simple beasts. The rhinos' faces, too, were so attractive. Beautiful they were in no sense of the word, but gentle, humble, kind, like the face of a loving but slightly foolish old man, surrounded by children unsure whether to welcome or to mock. Of course it was easy enough to feel this, secure as I was high above the rhinos, on the back of an elephant. Had I been on the ground their brutish ferocity would soon have made me change my tune.

Our lumbering stroll around Kaziranga lasted some two and a half hours, but it was all too short. I had seen all that I had come to see, and more, but I was so enthralled that I could have stayed there not for hours but for days. Our time on the elephant was up, however, and in any case the wild life becomes less active as the morning wears on. We set off once more for the tea garden, and were back in good time for lunch.

Back in the bungalow the subject of Teddy arose once more. Obviously Ranga and Umi could not keep him indefinitely, for as soon as he became larger he would be positively dangerous, particularly with two small children in the house. The best thing to do was perhaps to discover whether a zoo would accept him, and if not, have him destroyed. What Ranga intended was to take Teddy with him when he drove to Delhi early in 1965. This was not an idea he relished, for the journey was not an easy one even without a growing bear to look after, but there seemed to be no alternative. Then it occurred to me that, since I was about to go to Delhi

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by train, I could very well take Teddy with me. He would certainly be less trouble to me in a train than he would be to Ranga in a car. After a little discussion this offer was readily accepted, and preparations for the journey were made. Ranga inquired from the railway officials whether it would be permissible for me to take a bear cub into a compartment with me. He was told that it would be, provided the creature was in a box. Accordingly a ticket from Furkhating Junction to Delhi was purchased for "one infant bear cub, accompanying owner". The "box" presented no problem; a tea chest was fitted with a grill in the side and with a reinforced hinged lid. A few old curtains were put in the bottom for comfort's sake, and to absorb whatever might have to be absorbed, and spare ones were provided in case the others became too soiled. Umi made a little travelling coat to keep Teddy warm, and this was kept on by means of an old puppy's harness. It was a beautiful dark green affair with a checked lining and a red border, and with "TEDDY" embroidered down the back, also in red. The evening before our departure Teddy was brought in for a fitting. Completely by chance, this revealed something very unexpected about him. A bright fire was blazing in the grate, but, far from being afraid of this, Teddy seemed attracted by it. He went lumbering towards it as fast as his short legs could carry him and, if allowed to get so far, would clamber up into such a position as to be in imminent danger of falling into the heart of the fire. Having been repeatedly lifted away from the object of his desires, he became a very furious little fellow and had to leave the room. I suppose the reason for this behaviour, so unexpected in a wild animal,

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is that Teddy was still too young to react to the fire as anything but a source of warmth.

At five o'clock the next morning I was driven to Furk-hating Junction, equipped with one bear in box, one basket containing two baby's bottles for feeding same and two large bottles of milk, also a whole roast chicken, a loaf of bread, some butter, and a few hard boiled eggs, all for my own consumption. We had set off in good time, but when we reached the station we found the level crossing gates closed, for the train was arriving early. All the luggage therefore had to be carried across the line. I had the last load and had to scramble across the track with a great, black, panting Cyclops bearing slowly down on me out of the night, its single eye glaring angry, incomprehensible in the darkness. The fact that the train was early was to my advantage, for it gave Ranga time to have words with the guard. As a result I was given an unclaimed seat in a reserved compartment. This meant I would not only travel in tolerable comfort, I would also have room to extract Teddy from his box to feed and exercise him.

Thus began the strange adventure of a sixty-hour train journey with a baby bear in my charge; three days and two nights as nursemaid to a wild beast.

The contents of the mysterious tea chest remained a secret to begin with. The cat was only let out of the bag, so to speak, when Teddy emerged for the first of his three daily feeds. Slowly chatter in the compartment subsided as one by one the occupants became aware of the strange animal in their midst. They stared in puzzled amazement, and it was some little time before anybody could bring himself to ask what manner of creature this

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might be. Mild horror greeted my announcement that the small black bundle was the young of some species of wild bear. Then slowly the people realized that they were unlikely to be consumed alive by an animal so small, and interest began to grow again. The sight of Teddy sucking messily at his bottle of milk broke down the fears of even the most timid, and he became the centre of an attention which, even if it still kept a respectful distance, was decidedly sympathetic. Sensing this, I let Teddy have a short slow-motion romp once he had drunk enough. He delighted everybody by trying, with remarkable success, to climb the post supporting the wooden luggage rack. It was a long way to the floor from there, however, so once he had slipped a few times I picked him off the post and tucked him away in his box.

Whenever the train stopped at a large station where I thought we might wait some time, I took Teddy out on to the platform to give him fresh air and rather more extended exercise. In no time at all he had always gathered a curious audience about him. Many was the time I was asked whether he were a puppy, but some discerning individual was usually able to answer the question for me. On one such occasion an obstreperous railway official came up and informed me in abrupt terms that I was not allowed to take such an animal on a train. Informed that it had a ticket, he told me it should travel in the dog box in the luggage van. It was with no small measure of glee that I finally silenced the man by producing the afore-mentioned travel permit.

Night comes early in Assam, for it is far to the east of most of India. We were crossing the mighty Brahmaputra river at Gauhati when it caught up with us. I was

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more than pleased to be able to spend the sleeping hours lying on one of the wooden luggage racks. They were not large, for we were still on the metre-gauge railway, but it was better than sitting on a wooden seat. The next morning saw us passing the narrow strip of India between Sikkim and the north of East Pakistan. I would very much have liked to have left the train here and gone to visit Darjeeling to see Kanchenjunga in all its majesty. It is second only in height to Everest, and from Darjeeling the sight of its towering splendour is said to be of beauty and grandeur unsurpassable. Unfortunately I had neither time nor permit to do so, and I had to be content with what I hoped was a glimpse of Kanchenjunga from the train, shortly after Siliguri Junction.

That second day took us as far as the main line at Barauni, where we had to change to a broad-gauge train. I must have looked a strange sight shuffling along the platform carrying rucksack, tea chest, and a number of small bags and baskets. I expected the search for a seat to be futile, and so it was; but to my astonishment and immense relief I managed to secure a vacant sleeping berth. Not only was this right at the end of the carriage, where I could keep watch on Teddy's box, it also happened to be in a two-tier instead of a three-tier carriage. This not only gave me more room, but it meant the berth was padded. After two days and a night on wood I had grown used to a hard surface, but the sight of this boosted the morale.

By the third day Teddy's milk supply had gone sour. In many countries this might have presented grave problems. Fortunately Indian stations swarm not only with beggars and passengers, but also with a small army of

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little men selling books, fruit, nuts, lemonade, tea, and, most important of all, milk. My powers of observation had long since taught me that the droning cry, "Gurum dood", announces the approach of the hot-milk vendor. It was therefore an easy task to have Teddy's bottle filled. He still used to attract an audience whenever he emerged, but by now I had lost interest in the curiosity and admiration he aroused. Two nights and two whole days in the train had left me tired and bored, and the prospect of the best part of a third day ahead of me was no great comfort. I was very appreciative when the train did at last reach Delhi, not a minute late.

My instructions as to what to do with Teddy once I reached Delhi were a little hazy. If the zoo accepted him, all well and good, if not, then I was to see if I could get rid of him any other way. The last resort was to have the zoo destroy him. The first of these alternatives seemed to me unlikely to happen, and the last was undesirable. The second would call for considerable exercise of that cardinal virtue of the Combined Cadet Force, initiative. The first step, however, was to transfer Teddy and myself from the station to the Cambridge Brotherhood.

I was greeted at the Brotherhood House by one of the Fathers. He was visibly taken aback by such an unusual event as the arrival of a live bear on the premises. Fortunately Teddy was tired after his long journey, and when I produced him for inspection he looked particularly small and harmless. This reassured the good Father to a certain extent. Nevertheless, I gathered over supper that the animal's arrival was not altogether viewed with approval, and although nothing was actually put into

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words, it seemed that the sooner he found another home the more pleased the Brotherhood would be. This was all very well, but the talk over the supper table had also included such gloomy observations as that, of all the animals to get rid of, a bear is the most difficult. They are so common that nobody will take them. As for Delhi Zoo wanting one, that would be quite out of the question. I cast an unhappy look at Teddy's tea chest as I withdrew to my room, regretting for the first time that I had brought him with me. My one consolation was that I would not be without allies in my dilemma; Ranga's younger brother, Kabir, lived near at hand in St. Stephen's College, while their father was to be found over in New Delhi, and Umi's mother likewise.

To my astonishment, the whole problem resolved itself the next morning before I had time to consult any of these people. A guest at the Cambridge Brotherhood House who was about to leave, expressed a great desire that he and his family should become the proud possessors of a bear cub. This surprised me, to say the least, but he seemed quite genuine in this desire, and he supplied adequate answers to my questions about the animal's future, so I handed Teddy over, complete with box, curtains, and feeding bottles.

I was not altogether sorry to say good-bye to Teddy. He looked very sweet and attractive, but in his case looks really did deceive. The more I came to know him, the more I recognized the wild beast in him, until eventually I lost sight of the cuddlesome teddy bear altogether. He really could be very vicious with remarkably little provocation. There was scant joy to be had from looking after a creature whose only demonstration of emotion was

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snarling fury. It was easy enough to avoid these attentions, but a bite or a scratch on the back of the hand is small reward for proffering a bottle of warm milk. I was still sufficiently attached to him to hope his new owner would treat him well, but otherwise I was glad to see my duty done.

4

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Christmas spent in a hot country for the first time must always be a strange experience. I had not only had the warm sun to distract me from seasonal thoughts, my mind had been fully occupied by my travels. Only when I reached Delhi and found a small pile of Christmas cards waiting for me did I fully realize that there was less than a week till Christmas Day. From that point onwards I was not allowed to forget it. There began the busiest Christmas I had experienced since I was a chorister at King's.

The rush began on December 22nd with a carol party given by the British High Commissioner and Lady Gore-Booth. It was strange, even disquieting, to arrive in Delhi from a rough life of third class rambling, and to be plunged the very next day into Diplomatic Society. Having survived the initial shock, I began to enjoy myself very much. The mood of the party was happy and carefree, and the barbarian within me soon fled before the onslaught

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of sophistication and good cheer. As the party progressed, carols gave way to songs secular, some in chorus, others as solos. I liked particularly a fine rendering of an operatic aria by the Spanish Ambassador; many was the time I had heard this same aria swelling in luscious tones from the breast of a portly and passionate Panamanian in King's. I felt at home.

Not only was the carol party enjoyable for itself, it also brought me three other invitations. The first was for the following evening, to a cocktail party given by the Chairman of BOAC in Delhi. The second was from Mrs. Earle, wife of the Chairman of the British Council, to join her family for lunch on Christmas Day. The third was to go carol singing with the Cathedral Choir on Boxing Day. Kabir Bedi had already asked me to lunch with his family on Christmas Eve, and later in the day I was to go to Ramesh Mukarji's home to listen to the service of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's. Finally I was to share the Cambridge Brotherhood's Christmas dinner on the evening of Christmas Day.

In spite of this large number of commitments, I was still able to do a little sight-seeing. The Red Fort was one notable monument I knew well from without, but I had never been inside it. On the way to the Bedis' home I rectified this omission. If one is looking for rugged embattlements such as constitute the gaunt ruined castles of Wales, then the Red Fort is a disappointment. Far from being perched precariously on a storm-beaten rock, it wallows, fat and opulent, on level ground beside the dirty Jumna river. Ramparts there are, high and unassailable, but they are in perfect condition and bear no witness to battles fierce and furious. Perhaps the deep red stone is

too soft and gentle for that. In any case, it is forbidden to explore the walls of the fort. The only part open to visitors is that nearest the river, and here the place is seen for what it really is: not so much a fortified position as a Mogul palace. As such it is certainly interesting. The buildings are mostly single storied, spaced out amongst attractive gardens, and are built of red sandstone and white marble. At one time they had been richly inlaid with gold and silver, and with precious stones, but all this wealth has been pillaged throughout the ages, and is mostly lost without trace. Only the fabulous peacock throne, valued even in bygone days at twelve million pounds, is still apparently to be seen in Teheran, whither it was borne by Nadir Shah. Now the walls and ceilings are bare; only the gaps are left where this wealth once glowed. What does remain of beauty is some exquisite marble. The white florid arches and gratings, delicate as fine lace, capture a lightness and a grace such as elude completely the corresponding decorative flourishes of the baroque.

If the buildings of this Mogul palace cry sadly, "Ichabod, ichabod", the gardens still retain some of the atmosphere of old. The Moguls are famed for their use of water in laying out formal gardens, and those of Delhi Fort suffered no neglect. Although water flows no longer, it requires small imagination to fill the little lakes and channels and to picture the scene as it would have been. To one side of the main garden's centre lay a small square boating lake, now a sunken lawn. In the middle of this stood a red sandstone summer-house. Wide shallow canals intercrossed the garden, pulsing to and fro from the lake, carrying the cooling water under tiny bridges and be-

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tween extensive lawns and ornamental flower gardens. On two sides of the summer-house stood two more buildings, one at each extreme of the garden. Here water would have come cascading down over what resembles a marble mantelpiece. Behind the tumbling water was a honeycomb of little nooks, each of which would have contained an oil lamp. It was possible to stand in one of these buildings and to look right through the summer-house to the other. There, at night, the myriad lamps would have twinkled and glistened behind the cascading sheet of playful water. How easy it was to imagine sufis lost in contemplation, or Persian princes and their ladies strolling slowly in their long flowing robes through these cool gardens in the heat of the Indian summer. Of a sudden, the golds and blues of those ancient Persian paintings leapt out of the world of fantasy and became animated, real, their disproportions but an insight into reality.

My dreaming in the Red Fort made me late reaching the Bedis' house. Fortunately both Kabir and his mother were still out, and when Mrs. Bedi did arrive she was not a little surprised to see me; Kabir had forgotten he had invited me. She was very pleased to have news of Ranga and Umi, and of U Tin and the meditation college in Rangoon. I, too, was interested to hear of the tulkus and teachers from Dalhousie. Indeed, we found so much to talk about that I scarcely had time to return to the Brotherhood to change and have a short rest before crossing Delhi again to Ramesh Mukarji's home.

If I had not realized it before, the evening there would have told me vividly that today was Christmas Eve. It was dark long before I reached the house, and as I walked to the door a warm glow shone through the curtains.

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The drawing-room was gay with Christmas cards and other bright decorations. The elder son had been allowed to stay up late for the occasion, and he was playing with his toys beside a handsome Christmas tree. The green branches of the tree were colourful with candles, and the soft flickering of these when the lights were turned off made the room warm and cosy. While Sharmian conjured up a magnificent dinner of duck, venison, and curried partridge, Ramesh rang his brother, who also lives in Delhi. Their mother was staying there, and Ramesh knew that Mrs. Mukarji and I would like to wish each other a happy Christmas.

Then, at half past eight, began the broadcast from King's. To one of a decidedly unscientific mind, it seemed nothing short of a miracle to be able to listen simultaneously to something being sung several thousand miles away. It only seemed a little strange to be hearing the service at night instead of at three o'clock in the afternoon. Although the reception was far from perfect, the distinctive tone of King's Choir was unmistakable. Memories came flooding back, and I seemed to be caught up once more in the candle-lit gloom of the great Chapel, permeated by its own distinctive smell, hallowed by the singing and the worship of centuries. I remembered the terrible tension as we waited for the light to flash from the organ-loft, for Boris Ord to pluck his tuning-fork, and for the soloist to sing to the world, "Once in royal David's city. . . ." I remembered, too, the thundering tones of the mighty organ that Christmas Day when, Evensong over, I walked slowly out of the Chapel, to be a chorister no more. And then, in more recent years, fulfilling the traditional privilege of the President of the

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College Boat Club to carry the cross in the Advent Carol Service, the strangely coherent self-dedication that swept over me as we paused on the steps of the Ante-Chapel for the thousands present to swell the service to a magnificent climax with the resounding song of triumph:

Claim the Kingdom for thine own:

Alleluia!

Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

This was Christmas indeed, and I could have wept for joy at the realization. It remained only for Ramesh to drive me over to Kashmiri Gate and for me to give thanks for all this in the Midnight Mass at St. James'.

Christmas Day, like every day, was blue, warm, and sunny. The crowd gathering outside St. James' after the mid-morning service was gay and happy, the light suits and colourful frocks laughing in the sunshine. In England it would have been a perfect summer day. I drove from St. James' with the Earles to their home, thinking as we approached New Delhi how very kind of them it was to invite me to join them for Christmas lunch. Of all occasions in the year this cries out to be a family feast, yet here were they bringing a complete stranger into their little circle. Yet stranger as I might have been, I was made from the start to feel one of the family. The minute I entered the house I was given a Christmas present. Other gifts there were in plenty to admire, for apart from Gillian, whom I had met at the Gore-Booths' party, there was another, much younger daughter, and a son as well, to contribute to the excitement. The British Council Librarian completed the circle. The seven of us soon found ourselves seated before a traditional and very large Christmas

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lunch, complete with champagne. This was Christmas as one always imagines it; what followed was not. After a decent interval we all drove to the High Commission compound, there to play tennis or swim, as the spirit moved. Being more used to wielding an oar than a racket, I chose the latter sport and thereby joined in comfort the spartan band which celebrates the Nativity of Our Lord by breasting the waters of the British Isles.

I was still aware of the splendid lunch I had consumed when evening came, but this in no way prevented me from doing full justice to the Brotherhood's fine feast as well. Apart from Bishop Christopher of Bombay, the whole Brotherhood was assembled. The rest of the long and groaning board was flanked with guests both English and Indian, most of them my age. After dinner we retired to the library, where a cheerful log fire was emulating the Christmas pudding's blaze. (Although the days are warm, the nights of the Delhi "winter" become quite cold.) Here one of the Indian guests soothed the air with the rich tones of his violin. Finally we all congregated in the austere but beautiful chapel to say Compline. This late-night service was a moving end to Christmas Day, a communal expression of thanks and trust in the One who this day brought the Eternal into time.

Boxing Day saw me back with the Earles. We formed part of a large three-family picnic party. The picnic was held in the ruined city of Tughluqabad, a few miles south of Delhi. We had unfortunately no time for lengthy exploration of its massive dry-stone walls and bulging towers, or even of the tomb of friend Tughluq. There was so much food that by the time the charcoal fires had been fanned into reluctant existence and we had

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cooked it all and eaten it, the hour of departure was nearly upon us. The Earles very kindly offered me a bath to remove the dust and fumes of charcoal from my person, and then after a quick cup of tea I had hastily to make my way to the Cathedral to join the carol singers. There followed a merry evening bouncing from one side of Delhi to the other in a bus, to a constant stream of song, stopping here and there at appointed places to pour forth our carols and, in return, to be fed.

The following day I received a visit from Phylida and Gillian, who were on their way from Mussoorie to Rajasthan for a brief Christmas holiday. I was not a good guide for them in Delhi, for I had visited very few of the sights normally haunted by tourists. Then in the evening, the day being Sunday, I joined the Cathedral Choir once more for their carol service. For lunch on Monday I was the guest of the other Mukarji family in Delhi. Since the whole family was musical it was hardly surprising that lunch was followed by yet more singing.

On Tuesday, the festival was forgotten. I entrained for Bombay, and my wanderings had begun once more.

Misfortune greeted me in Bombay. Between the station and the Salvation Army Hostel some Worthy Oriental Gentleman relieved me of my wallet. Fortunately he did not gain much, for I always carried most of my money strapped around my waist. I was annoyed at losing a rather fine wallet, but the only major financial setback was my railway ticket from Delhi through to southern India, by a devious route. The loss of that was not a disaster, but it did force me to prune my travels. I was

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particularly sorry to forfeit a visit to the famous caves of Elora and Ajanta.

The Salvation Army Hostel is well placed. It is very near the sea, and the Gateway of India stands only two hundred yards away. My experiences beneath that great monument were somewhat unusual.

Staying in the hostel was a young Englishman with a philosophic bent. He was waiting to find a ship on which to work his passage back to England. We soon became friendly, for although our thoughts lay along completely different tracks, we enjoyed discussing them. When New Year's Eve came upon us we were both a little depressed by the utter lack of any celebrations in which we could take part, so we decided to go out and prowl the streets together. This at first did nothing to relieve our depression. During the daytime Bombay is, by Indian standards, a clean and spacious city. Some people arrived at the hostel from the Seychelles Islands who said they had never seen such a filthy place in their lives, but they had not seen the rest of India. To me Bombay was almost a European city. By night this illusion dies. Darkness makes it drab and destroys its self-confidence. Above all it reduces the city to the state of every big Indian town by night: a dormitory *à la belle étoile*. The pavements are lined with rows of dirty sacks, their lean occupants sleeping, even copulating, oblivious of the passers-by. It was a shock to find that a city so European by day could at night mirror so closely the terrible problems of poverty and over-population that India has to face.

Soon after eleven o'clock we began making our way back to the hostel, in a mood no happier than when we had set out. As we came nearer to that area, however, a

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certain excitement began to throb in the air. It grew stronger as we approached the sea until, at the Gateway of India, it burst over us like a flood. High above the square the Taj Mahal Hotel was illuminated. Trees were wreathed in coloured light bulbs. All around a surging throng of thousand upon thousand of Indians pushed and jumped and ran and danced. Many wore party hats, some blew paper hooters, others shrieked, whistled, or shouted deliriously. The noise beneath the echoing Gateway was almost intolerable, the excitement there pulsating at fever pitch to the beating rhythm of two accomplished drummers. We sat for a while on the marble floor, captivated by, and yet apart from, this deafening hysteria. Shortly before midnight the Gateway emptied and all went to stand beyond it, watching the dark water. A solitary blue searchlight swept the sea, pierced the sky. Then at midnight it flashed out in morse, "Happy New Year". As the angel at Christmas was joined by the heavenly host, so this solitary searchlight was joined at that moment by all the ships which lay at anchor. Sirens hooted, although almost drowned at the Gateway by the new clamorous upsurge amongst the people. Green and red flares shot up into the sky, curved gracefully at their zenith, died of expansion as they sank at last into the sea. From every angle searchlights darted fancifully around, now pencil-thin beams, rubbing their stubbed tips against a bank of cloud, now a broad all-enveloping blaze, lighting up the side of one ship, silhouetting another, fanning the watching shore. The whole harbour was an ever-shifting net of piercing beams, and in its meshes longboats full of cheering sailors swept in towards land and, as if beckoning to follow, out to sea again. On the shore was a thick,

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thick shoal, hypnotized by the sight, caught in the snares of the mesh, yet never dragged away. At last our depression was gone. We were one with the cheering throng.

It had been arranged that I should visit the Bishop of Bombay on New Year's Day, as had been urged by one or two of his fellow Brotherhood members in Delhi. The visit developed into a picnic to Juhu beach, some twenty miles north of Bombay. This provided ample opportunity for interesting talk as well as a very pleasant stroll along the water's edge to breathe the sea air. The day was cloudy and rather cold, so closer contact with the water would not have been an enticing prospect.

One of the outcomes of the picnic was that I resolved to visit the next day the caves on Elephanta Island, which lies in the great bay forming Bombay harbour. The Bishop had strongly recommended a visit to them, and had even lent me a very informative guide-book. My interest was particularly stimulated when the Bishop pointed out that Sir Basil Spence, in *Phoenix at Coventry*, traces the inspiration for the new cathedral back to a visit paid to the Elephanta Caves when he was eight years of age. Having much admired both cathedral and book I was curious to see if I could determine what this influence might be.

The ascent from the landing place to the main group of caves is up a stone path, part slope, part steps. At the top is a large expanse of flat ground. This is terminated by a high dark cliff, the bottom of which opens out into a toothless grin. At first this seems to be little more than a deep crack in the rock, but it is in fact the main, and only really interesting cave on Elephanta Island. From a distance it is impossible to determine the extent of the cave, but on coming nearer the eyes are less dazzled by

An Indian Mosaic

the sun, and the gloom within is seen to be relieved by light slithering hesitantly through two side openings, as well as from the front. As the towering cliff is lost from sight, so the cave ceases to be an insignificant slit and assumes proportions of its own. The fast-diminishing observer finds himself in a low but spacious pillared hall. Around the walls are panels, hewn, like the whole cave, from solid rock. They depict with marvellous skill strange figures and scenes from Hindu mythology. Opposite the entrance is a colossal three-headed figure of Shiva carved in a deep recess: Shiva the creator, the preserver, and the destroyer of the universe. To the right is a shrine. This contains an altar, supporting a linga. The linga in a smooth piece of stone rather like a fat bollard, but suggestive of a sea anemone. The Bishop's guide-book, a government publication of 1934, had this to say of it:

The linga is the mysterious symbol of Shiva and represents the energy or the source of generative power in nature. It is the principal idol, the central object of adoration in Shiva temples. The worship offered to this symbol consists in bathing it with water or milk or with both, besmearing it with ghee and sandalwood paste, presenting . . . leaves and flowers to it, and also burning incense before it with the chanting of mantras or hymns.

The Bishop had suggested that the effect of the side lighting might be what Sir Basil Spence had borrowed from Elephanta for Coventry, but I did not think that this was so. The unusual feature of the side lighting in Coventry is that the windows themselves cannot be seen until one reaches the east end and turns back towards the entrance. At Elephanta, on the other hand, the two side sources of light are visible almost immediately. I do not

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think any direct physical relationship can be traced between this main cave at Elephanta and Coventry Cathedral. Rather is this relationship spiritual. The inspiration that lies behind the conception of Coventry Cathedral is probably the culmination of a great number of deep emotional and spiritual experiences evoked by architecture, of which the feeling of overwhelming awe in Elephanta at that young age was perhaps the first, the *Urempfindung*.

Certainly the receptive mind has much to impress it at Elephanta. The very way the perspective of the cave changes from a shallow slit at the base of a huge weather-worn cliff into a silent spacious hall suggests the stepping out of the illusory world of change into an immutable eternity. The gloom, the low ceiling, the sturdy pillars, the intricate carvings, all create that particular impression of stillness and timelessness that is to be felt so vividly at the break of dawn at Delphi, or indeed in any of the great Greek temples. The smooth round form of the linga, too, is in some strange way intensely suggestive of mysterious powers. It compels silence, and seems to radiate the numinous. It speaks from beyond the primeval mists, its message still vital and impelling long after its priests and its worshippers have passed away.

The conditions at the Salvation Army Hostel were decidedly comfortable compared with many places in which I had stayed. Those of my last few days in Bombay, however, were very much more so. The lady who had arranged my accommodation in Bangkok had given me the address of her sister in Bombay, where her husband works for Burmah Shell. Lunch with them one Sunday developed into an invitation to spend the last few days

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of my visit to Bombay living in their bungalow. This was a luxuriously appointed home, complete with air-conditioning in the bedrooms. It was sheltered from its industrial surroundings by a beautiful oasis of lawns and trees. Just fifty yards away was the exclusive club-house with its fine swimming pool. Life in these conditions, matched by excellent food and, in particular, such friendly hosts, made it difficult indeed to leave Bombay.

Leave I did, however, and set my course southwards once more. Since I had to go through Poona to reach the south, I decided to spend a day or two there. After all, I reflected, one can hardly go to India without visiting the famous Poona. I soon discovered that for the civilian it has little to offer beyond its reputation. Indeed, the only memorable aspect of my visit was the people I met. The YMCA was unable to give me lodgings, but the warden suggested that a certain CMS priest might find me somewhere to stay. It transpired that this priest was not only Welsh; he, like myself, hailed from St. David's Diocese. He and his wife had no room to accommodate me themselves, so some English friends of theirs very kindly extended their hospitality to me.

My stay in Poona was short. The train journey up from Bombay had lasted four hours, a mere flash of the telegraph poles by Indian standards. The journey to my next port of call, Bangalore, was considerably longer and less comfortable, being two nights and a day in a cramped metre-gauge three-tier sleeper. At least I did not have to search for lodgings when I arrived. While I was in Assam, Ranga and Umi had urged me, if I was going to southern India, to include Bangalore in my travels. There, they explained, dwelt a great friend of Ranga's who had married

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Umi's sister. Indeed, it was while Umi had been visiting Suni and Peter in Assam, for Peter used also to be in tea, that she met Ranga. They both assured me of a rollicking welcome in Bangalore if I went there, and Suni's reply to my letter had done nothing to cause me to doubt this. I thought I would perhaps stay a week or so, and then embark on an exhaustive tour of south India. It became almost immediately obvious that the pattern of events was to be otherwise.

The train from Poona to Bangalore had slithered and dawdled itself into a loss of one and a half hours. Even so, it was still quite early on a Sunday morning when I reached my destination. Not only the hour of my arrival but also its date caught the family unawares, for I had written to them before loss of wallet had caused me to curtail my travels. I was none the less welcome for all that, and felt thoroughly part of the place from the moment the two cavalcades of self and rucksack on the one hand, and a *mêlée* of dogs, children, and Suni on the other, converged in the middle of the drive.

It was difficult to imagine that this slim figure in the fluffy cream dressing-gown was mother of all those children, the number and identities of whom it took me some time to work out. It was no easier when I realized how similar she was to one of my cousins; both were dark, petite, and vivacious, and each had the same habit of wrinkling her nose when she laughed, which she did frequently. The children I later discovered to be five in number, all of them energetic and noisy, yet each completely different. The one girl amongst them romped as hard as the boys, yet she also acted as nanny to them, and not only to the two smallest.

An Indian Mosaic

When we reached the house a large figure, clad only in pyjama trousers, stood with his back to the door, poking a correspondingly large tape-recorder. One knee was bent, while the other hand trailed a cigarette. The wide brown back turned, and there was Peter. The generous proportions of body displayed to view bore ample evidence of good living. The chuckling voice that explored my interest in tape-recorders implied the same. And indeed, I soon found Peter to be something of a hedonist by nature, and an exceeding hearty fellow to boot. Apart from the tape-recorder, his other hobby was the "sweet doggies". Rather an unusual appellation for two large alsatians, one might think, but in fact by no means inappropriate. Both were females, the one being mother of the other, and both were playful as puppies. In order of seniority, their names were Tiddles and Cleo. Their diet was such as to make a Dalhousie dweller green with envy.

After the turbulence of my initial appearance had subsided, Peter's father came into the room. Like the children, he was fully dressed, so I concluded that I had not wakened the family from their slumbers. He had formerly served a long period with the Indian Diplomatic Corps in London, during which time Peter had been educated in a British public school and university. Now, with Peter to help him, he ran a flourishing and expanding private factory in Bangalore.

No time was lost in initiating me into the sort of life I was to lead. Almost as soon as I had washed, changed, and eaten, I was whisked away on a picnic that had been arranged long before. It was held on the shores of a reservoir off the Mysore road, some thirty-six miles from

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Bangalore. A large party had congregated, and if I had not been part of it, I would probably have reacted strongly against it. Our numbers thoroughly appropriated all the immediate surroundings, and the very loud noise made both by ourselves and by a battery gramophone must have been audible for miles around. As it was, the care-free atmosphere and generous quantities of curry, rice, and bottled beer, made me far more at home in a large group of strangers than I would normally feel.

Lunch once digested, Peter and I took to the reservoir. We swam for a long time before reaching a distant island. From there the observers we had left behind looked mere dots, so Peter, having recently spent three weeks in bed, decided it would be unwise to attempt to swim back again. We therefore struck out for the nearest shore, which was only five minutes away, and set off on the long walk around the edge of the reservoir. By the time our battle with the obscenely oozing paddy-land was done, I felt as if I had known Peter for years. I soon came to feel equally at home with the rest of the family.

The following evening a large and hefty Sikh friend of Peter's called. He looked deliberately fearsome in black turban and bushy beard. He was called Whisky, not with a stroke of prophetic foresight, but after some mid-European wrestler of years gone by. He was the proud possessor of a very fine Citroën, one of those futuristic-looking cars which can be driven at different heights off the road. Peter knew I wanted to see some of south India and as he and Suni were always game for an excursion, he suggested to Whisky that the four of us go to Mysore. Any excuse to go away was as good as another to Whisky, so he readily agreed.

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When the day of departure dawned, trouble with the car prevented us from leaving until two o'clock. Consequently the afternoon was already old when we reached Mysore, and there was no time for anything more than a whirling impressionistic glance at the city. Wide streets with roundabouts of canopied figures heralded the be-domed and ornamented city palace of the Maharajah. Beyond the zoo lay another palace, dull, hotel-like. An abrupt hill dominated the scene. Here another palace. Also a Hindu temple. Familiar wedge-shape, crawling with ascending rows of divinities. Massive silver doors beneath. Brightly lit series of colourful receding halls. Number uncertain. Like looking through the thousand diminishing images of a pair of mirrors. Further down, a large black bull, carved out of one rock. Run round three times, ducking under left foreleg, and any wish granted. Fertility ensured by touching different part of anatomy. Off again. Stop. Darkness approaching, so wait to watch from this height illuminations at city palace, switched on to celebrate Pongal, Hindu harvest feast. Watch. Do not miss them. Watch. . . . When did they come on? One moment there was darkness, the next moment they were on. Metamorphosis. Twinkling, pulsating, the building is a vast iridescent blancmange.

Seen that. Off again. Where? Krishnaraja. What's that? Reservoir. Who wants to see a reservoir? Beautiful water garden. How do you get there? Ask a policeman. Draw up to tea-cosied figure. Left, right, halt, proceed, left, right. High dam this. Then down to hotel and water garden. Out of the car. Peace at last.

Coloured lights lit up the water's splashing progression down to the distant lake. Here it tumbled in a green

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and violet cascade, there it rippled, deep blue and silent, wondering what its next acrobatic exercise would be. Red fountains bowed gracefully to each other, intertwined, and formed geometrical patterns. Vertical ones, often white, became slowly higher as the water dropped lower and they strove continually to reach the level behind the dam. Little bushes lined the water channels, festooned with coloured light bulbs. From a distance the whole looked fussy, even cheap and garish. Individually the different formations of liquid colour lost their artificial glare and became appealing and mysterious.

When we had walked down to the lake and back we repaired to the bamboo-lined bar of the hotel. The plan was to have brief refreshment before returning to Mysore for a meal and then driving home to Bangalore. This plan, too, foundered on the rocks of hazard. With a few glasses of rum in his veins, Whisky saw no point in returning to Bangalore and was eager to drive on to Ootacamund. He had friends on a tea plantation there, he explained, and they would gladly have us stay with them for a few days. I was secretly delighted. Peter was indifferent. Only Suni was against the idea. She did not want to embark on a week-end excursion with only the clothes she was wearing. That was an argument which bore no weight with the male members of the party, and Whisky's enthusiasm carried the day. After a quick meal in Mysore we therefore set wheel to road. The time was twenty-five to midnight.

Our first encounter was with bullock carts. In huge trains they came, as many as a hundred together, heading for Mysore to sell the produce of the country. They looked like miniature cowboy wagons with their round wicker

An Indian Mosaic

covers. A hurricane lamp dangled beneath each front axle, swinging with the creaking trudge of the bullocks.

After them, nothing. The dark countryside became wild and deserted, and with the crude barriers of Madras State began the forests of a game reserve. Peter knew of a short cut to Ootacamund from there, which reduced the distance by some twenty-five miles and plunged right through the heart of the jungle. Coming down that road in the dark he had once seen several wild elephant as well as a large quantity of smaller game. We all had high hopes of similar luck this time, for we were now well advanced into the night, "wherein all the beasts of the forest do move". We sat on the edges of our seats, eyes straining to penetrate the shadows of the jungle. Once we stopped the car and got out, but the silence of the dark forest was unnerving. It was as if we had set foot in a world not our own, a world forbidden, moreover, and hostile. We set off again, Whisky wishing every hundred yards in his deep Indian voice that he had a gun with him, Peter longing as frequently for his powerful torch to light up the paths that branched off the road into the jungle. Coming round one corner we nearly ran into a small herd of startled deer. Twice we saw a samba, a particularly large species of deer. Otherwise our watching was in vain. Hares we saw in plenty, but of elephant not a sign. All too soon we were sweeping up the hair-pin bends that form the very steep ascent to Ootacamund, and there we could hope for no more game.

It was two o'clock in the morning when we reached Ootacamund, and Whisky's friends, it transpired, lived another hour's drive beyond. We were horrified at the thought of arriving, unexpected, at such an hour, but

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Whisky was confident of a good welcome. It seemed at first, however, that the fates had played a trick on us. Whisky had been round the whole house but could neither get in nor evoke any answer whatsoever. The prospect of spending the rest of the night in the car was not attractive, for we had reached a height of 7,000 feet, and the air at that hour was decidedly cold. We were beginning to resign ourselves to this chilly fate when a light at last sprang on. An astonished Rambeer appeared at the door, but having ascertained the reason for the disturbance at such an unseemly hour he was by no means displeased. We were ushered in, greetings were exchanged and a short explanation of our arrival provided, and then we were all shown to beds without any more ado.

We awoke late the next morning, but the air was still delightfully crisp and clear at that height. It was almost like one of those beautiful winter days in Britain when sun and frosted snow combine to create a day of perfect clarity and stillness. Not only the air was reminiscent of home. The soft rolling hills that lay basking in the morning sun could easily have been Welsh border country. Lost was the rugged white back-drop of the Himalayas; lost, too, the tumbling forest of thick fir. Instead the rounded hill-tops watched benevolently over terraces of tea bushes, the calm green carpet interrupted here and there by the occasional grove of pines or eucalyptus trees.

With this clear blue morning began a few days of very lavish hospitality, so typical of the Sikhs. For me the highlight was a picnic which took place the day after our arrival. We were to have gone to a distant spot where the chances of seeing wild elephant were considerable.

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By the time all were ready to leave it was unfortunately too late to go so far. We set off instead for a bungalow on a coffee estate where dwelt an American Peace Corps girl. Hardly had we gone a mile than Rambeer announced that the chocolate soufflé was melting. We stopped, and inspection indicated that the thing was indeed quite liquid. Peter and I did the necessary while Whisky and Rambeer busied themselves with the gin. Our fingers duly licked and sticky, we continued for another ten miles before turning off the main road.

The bungalow was lost in the very depths of the coffee estate. A little way above stood an outcrop of rock, but between the two lay a formidable barrier of vegetation. The coffee bushes are not orderly like their tea counterparts, through which it is easy to brush a path. They are a hopeless tangle of intertwining branches, and to the upright are virtually impenetrable; so, at least, it seemed to Peter and myself. The only way to reach the rock was by bending double and fighting a way below the branches. Then the hazard was of running the head against a tree trunk. Nevertheless, after much crackling of dry leaves, snapping of twigs, and other obvious betrayals of our presence, we stormed the rocks. Whatever else might have fled before our elephantine approach, the view remained. Dappled sunlight played through the trees on to the tangle of leaves and fat red berries of the coffee bushes. These cascaded down the hill until, in the distance, it opened out into a valley which plunged to the plain, culminating in a large blue lake. Birds sang in the warmth, otherwise there was not a sound to be heard. The peace was complete and undisturbed. The spot just invited us to sit and do nothing, a true reproduction of

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the Enchanted Place where Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin fade into immortality.

The following day was Sunday, and Peter wanted to return to Bangalore ready for work the next day. Whisky was not keen to go, but agreed vaguely to do so. Rambeer, however, was determined we should stay. Come tea-time and it was decided we would leave at dusk in the hope of seeing more animals in the reserve. Come evening and the start was deferred until early the next morning. It would be less tiring. Rambeer, Whisky, and Peter would have a quick final round of golf and then we would leave. They returned at half past one not having played a stroke of golf. The first two had laid hands on a bottle of jungle juice for three rupees, and had only been persuaded to abandon the lethal stuff, of which they had drunk a quarter, when Peter had threatened them with impotence, gut-rot, and a host of other dire diseases if they drank any more. We finally left the bungalow well after tea, and darkness was soon upon us. In spite of the full moon, there was even less to see in the game reserve than on the way up. Only when we reached the main road did a bison stray across it some distance ahead of the car, but again there was no sign of elephant. Mysore was almost deserted when we passed through it, and it was in the early hours of Tuesday morning that we finally reached Bangalore.

A few days after our return from Ootacamund, Peter's father and aunt, Suni and I went to one of the services arranged for the week of prayer for Christian unity. It was unfortunately not the inspiring occasion it might have been. The service was held by the Syrian Orthodox Church, the oldest branch of Christianity in India. It

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was brought first to Kerala, and in the language of that state was the service held. The music, moreover, was dirge-like. Only the sermon was in English, but the preacher spoke extremely fast for a full half hour, with the result that he said so much and said it so quickly that it was impossible to remember anything. It was at least encouraging to see the church packed with people; unfortunately the mosquitoes were equally numerous. A rather more uplifting occasion was the celebration of Holy Communion in the cathedral two days later. The liturgy used was that of the Church of South India. I felt privileged to be taking part in the worship of this united Church, especially during that particular week. Unfortunately the much extolled liturgy differed too much from any to which I was accustomed for me to appreciate it immediately. Since it was only used on one Sunday each month, I never had the chance to become thoroughly conversant with it. One thing that did impress me was the restoration of the Kiss of Peace into the service. This was not done literally, but as a clasping of the hands. The gesture was passed from the celebrant to the acolytes, and from them it rippled through the whole congregation. There was something very impressive in this visible binding together of all present in the peace and the love of God.

That Sunday marked the beginning of my third week in Bangalore. I considered it time for me to take up my rucksack and begin my explorations of the south. Alas! these explorations were never to take place. Any mention of leaving was immediately squashed by both Suni and Peter. I was only just beginning to get to know people, why leave now? What was the point always of moving

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from place to place? It was time to settle down for a while and rest. Such were the arguments employed; but strongest of all was the fact that they made me so welcome that it somehow seemed I was the one conferring the kindness by remaining with them, and not the reverse. This put me so much at my ease that there was no feeling of urgency behind my desire to go. Existence was happy and comfortable, and Kerala, the Cape, and other parts of south India would always be accessible later.

There I was wrong. The government's measures to make Hindi the sole official language of India, debasing English to a secondary position, provoked strong reactions all over southern India. To people in the south Hindi is a foreign language, and they feared that they would be at a grave disadvantage if these measures ever became law. Rioting broke out all over the south, completely disrupting transport. Trains were attacked, stations were closed, and most horrible of all, two policemen were pursued, burnt, and their ashes sent to the Chief Minister of Madras State. To attempt any travel other than the essential was extremely foolhardy. At the beginning of the trouble Suni had set off by train to visit her mother in Delhi. She got no further than Madras. After a whole week she was able to return to Bangalore, and then she flew north. Obviously there was no point in my trying to move until necessary, or until the trouble had subsided.

These disturbances apart, life in Bangalore was not such as to make me anxious to leave. I was living a life of luxurious ease, putting on pounds of weight that would surely stand me in good stead for the rigours of Dalhousie and the return journey. Most mornings I would spend simply reading. In the afternoon we would perhaps go

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to the Bangalore Club for a swim in the pool. In the evening we would visit friends, go to the cinema, or have a party. They were numerous, these parties, and always highly successful. Usually they were held by the light of that "circumambulating aphrodisiac", the moon. Great stores of food and drink were taken out into the country, and there we danced and sang until all were exhausted. Suni schemed as hard as she could to invite as many attractive young ladies as possible to these parties, but while her searchings always bore tempting fruit, their ultimate objective was never attained. Only after her departure did I become entangled in a brief *affaire de cœur*, and for that she could claim no credit.

Yet I was not altogether happy with this way of life. One week-end when Peter and I motored with some friends of his to Madras showed why this was so. The first day was spent entirely driving around the town for the others to visit friends and do such business as had to be done. I felt I was foolish not to have spent the day alone, free to visit the parts of Madras that I wanted to see. My diary bore the brunt of my vexation:

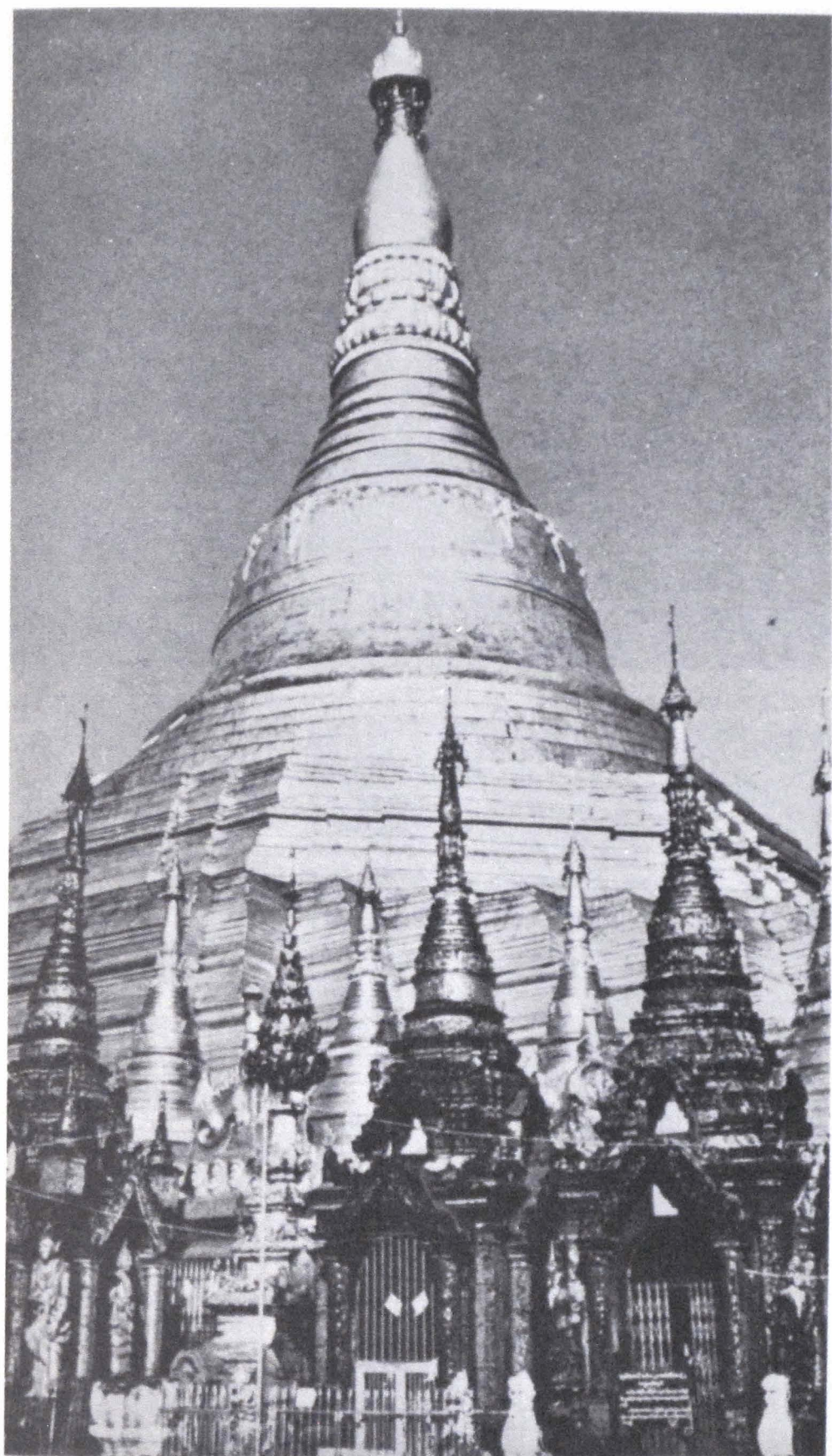
Living an easy life in Bangalore has its points, but it has certainly blunted the edge of the spirit which has been animating me most of the time since leaving England. It puts me in mind of some words, from Paracelsus I think, quoted by Lawrence Durrell in the opening pages of the *Alexandrian Quartet*: "The day of the *corpora* is the night for the *spiritus*." The theory behind asceticism is easy to perceive. Not only of asceticism, moreover. My life, particularly as a wanderer, might well have appealed to André Gide as an illustration for *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. Living essentially alone, I was driving on from experience to experience, meeting people and seeing places, suffering hardships and

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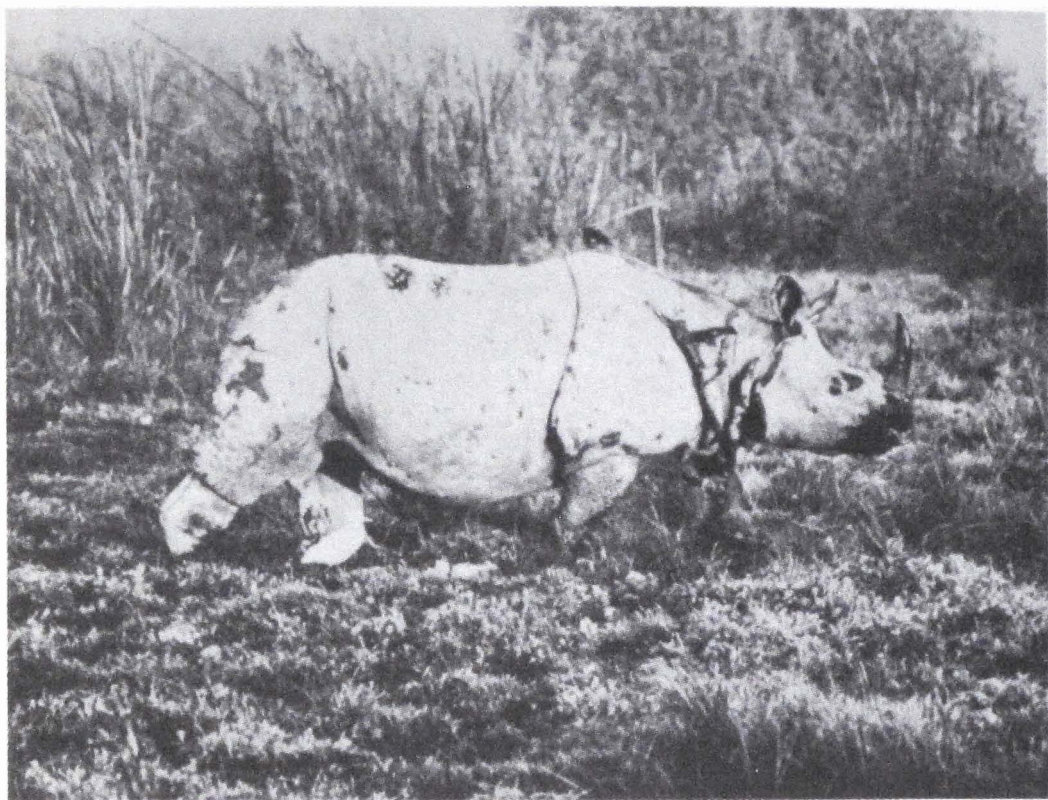
riding on exultation. Even the static life in Dalhousie had a strong element of this, for existence was rough, the scene outside was constantly changing with the dying of the monsoon, and the variety of people with whom I was living brought divers gifts to my life. Under those conditions I was alive and sensitive; I watched and understood; I listened and I heard; I had my finger on the pulse of Existence. Now I have sunk into a morass of sameness, having to do nothing for myself. Driving desire for experience, and a changing life, have given way to fat lazy wallowing. . . . The spirit must be forever in motion, exploring and experiencing, suffering and rejoicing, swelling, surging, and retreating, with the endless motion of the waters of the sea. Only then is it vital and alive. Only then can it search within itself and discover what manner of thing it is.

Happily the very next day provided relief from the fury of frustration that had begun to gnaw at my mind. Two Madras friends took Peter and me to the beach that is called Eliot's. It was all I had expected of the Coromandel Coast. A narrow strip of shining sand shelved steeply down to the blue and restless sea, extending in each direction further than the eye could see. It was fringed to landward by nodding palms and little shacks of bamboo and palm leaves, used for changing and for escaping from the heat of the sun. We bathed for what seemed an eternity in the warm water, tossing and rolling amongst the breakers as the hot sun beamed benignly down.

What a contrast this was to my last encounter with the ocean, the grey March waters of the Pembroke-shire Atlantic. That had been during the Easter vacation the previous year, in St. David's. Quite a number of friends had been out for the evening and we were relaxing in a



Shwe Dagon Pagoda, Rangoon



Rhinoceros at
Kaziranga



Teddy

An Indian Mosaic

house above Whitesands Bay, the home of three of the company. Raymond, one of the only two other male members of the party, kept muttering what a good night it was for fishing: no moon and a strong wind; could not be better. His comments were obviously directed towards me, being the only one likely to join him in such an escapade. Our senior hostess was enthusiastic at the idea and was easily persuaded to provide a net. Reluctantly, but not without a subdued sense of excitement, I agreed to join Raymond.

The two of us changed quickly into borrowed swimming trunks and a few old sweaters, and after a noggin of whisky apiece in a cup of hot coffee, down we all drove to the beach, about a dozen of us. Treading over the stones in the darkness was no easy matter, but we managed it without accident. The net was spread out by shivering hands on the cold damp sand, and while the wind tugged at it and tried to flip it in the air, we wound it on to one of our poles. This done, Raymond and I trod slowly out into the inky sea, the tossing manes of the ice-cold waves climbing higher and higher up our shuddering bodies. Above us thick black clouds must have been racing. Around us the breakers rose and crashed, hiding us from the eyes of the onlookers at the water's edge, who in any case were more interested in dancing around the sand to keep warm than in noticing the progress of the two white specks in the dark distance. Only the sweeping gaze of the Bishop lighthouse kept a regular watch on our feeble struggle with the demonic elements of the night. By the time the water reached our chests Raymond deemed us to be sufficiently far from the shore, for already waves were lifting us off our feet and we had

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to jam our poles into the sand to keep our positions. Slowly we spread out, one standing still while the other dragged out the twenty-five yards of heavy nylon as it tugged and billowed out to sea. Then we would fight against the wind, the tide, and the pull of the net, to lean our way into the land.

Three times we went through this procedure, three times we caught nothing. At last Raymond was chattering with cold—it seemed to affect me less, perhaps because of the rigours of training for the Lents in the desperate Cambridge winter—and we resolved to tempt our chances of survival no further. We motored back whence we had come, and were revived by a hot bath and a bowl of soup.

I was awake the next morning in time to go to the early Sunday service in the cathedral. What a joy was that half-hour walk from the cliff bungalow to the cathedral, nestling in its warm hollow. The last white clouds of the storm, small and fluffy, were scudding quickly out to sea, chased by the delicate beams of the rising sun. Sky-larks sang in the pale blue sky, which leant down to embrace its mirror, the sea. This was still tossing white horses, but was now happy and smiling instead of dark, angry, and threatening as it had been in the night. Insects buzzed and chirruped in the high banks enclosing the narrow winding lane. A fresh smell of damp earth and of gorse floated between those steep gay gardens of nature. The whole creation was coming to life with a sigh of happiness at the reassuring yawn of the waking sun.

If that morning expressed the fresh youthful innocence of nature, the Coromandel Coast showed her maturity.

An Indian Mosaic

The sky and the sea were no longer pale, but a deep colour, rich as Homeric wine. The sun was not peeping over the horizon but stood high above us, blazing with heat. The golden sand was soft to the feet, but too hot to stand on, save where the waters of the Bay of Bengal had washed over it, or where the coconut palms cast their slender shadows. Now the world was lush and rich and full of self-confidence. Lost was the hesitance—and the freshness—of youth.

In spite of that happy morning's swim near Madras, the thoughts and the feelings prompted by the previous day lingered in my mind. I was never again completely happy with existence in Bangalore. Then, when February was almost past, the final urge to leave came upon me. This was provided by reading *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoievsky made me realize that I was sacrificing more than a vivid life of changing experience. This fat and carefree existence was slowly drawing me further and further away from all that I had intuitively learnt at Dalhousie. A life of good food and merry parties was enjoyable, certainly, and probably a desirable and even necessary interlude in this rigorous year, but it was soul-destroying. It sapped the vital forces of the mind, as I had realized at Madras, but it did more than that. As a neglected garden will become overgrown with weeds and brambles, so the world of the spirit was fast becoming inaccessible to me. This spirit was not the subconscious urge that drives a man through a rich and varied life, not the spirit I had thought of at Madras. Rather was it the deep and silent water at the bottom of a well, the still quiet contemplation that alone can lead to a knowledge of things beyond the world of changing space and time.

Tibetan Venture

When Peter knew I was at last in earnest he made no attempt to make me stay. Nevertheless, the roots grown in a month and a half of such a happy existence were deep. As with extracting a painful tooth, the only thing to do was to act abruptly. The first day of March, St. David's Day, saw me heading for Madras once more.

Any thought of touring south India was now out of the question, for although the anti-Hindi riots had subsided, I had to be in Dalhousie before the end of March. Only one place I was determined to visit, and that was Mahabalipuram. Being easily accessible from Madras by bus, I devoted to it my only complete day in Madras.

Mahabalipuram lies to the south of Madras, on the coast. It boasts a number of Hindu temples or shrines expertly carved out of solid rock, but its proudest exhibit is a temple that lies beyond the coconut palms, washed by the very waves of the sea. It sounded so romantic, this famous shore temple which for centuries had stood firm upon the shifting sands. Yet I was disappointed. The building was smaller than I had expected, and its decoration too ornate. This, at least, was my impression; but my idea of what a shore temple should be had already been moulded by the temple to Poseidon at Cape Sounion, south-east of Athens. Seen in the silence of moonlight, its gaunt pillars speak far more eloquently than this fussy little place, standing as they do high upon a barren peninsula of rock. Their proud resistance to the elements is more dramatically defiant. That temple to Poseidon epitomizes the masculine strength of the old Hellenic gods, next to whom the arm-waving deities of the Hindus, with their sickly colours and flabby faces, are nothing short of effeminate, and their temples likewise.

An Indian Mosaic

Having thus disposed in my mind of southern India, I entrained for Delhi. I regretted not having explored further, not because I expected to have my idea of the Hindu gods changed, but because I liked the people and the coastline of the south so much. Nevertheless, my rest in Bangalore was doubtless of more value to me at the time than interminable wanderings and the consequent privations.

In Delhi I stayed this time with Suni's mother. I had hoped to meet Ranga and Umi there, for they were on holiday from Assam, but they had left the very morning I arrived. Suni, however, was still there and welcomed me warmly, as did her mother and the rest of the family.

The day following my arrival in Delhi it was decided that several of us should visit one or two of the city's Mogul monuments. We drove first to the Qutab Minar. This is an enormous round tower that dominates the flat countryside like a lighthouse. It was begun in 1199, but whether as a minaret or as a victory tower nobody is now sure. It is built of red sandstone, fluted and embossed in a series of vertical ridges. Its width is great at the bottom, but it tapers fast as it ascends in a series of ever-diminishing stages, each one separated from the other by an elaborate balcony. The top two stages as the Qutab now stands are decorated with white stone, which gives it an air of finality. There was originally one more tier, but this either fell down or was rendered unsafe by an earthquake. It now stands on its own in the beautiful grounds around the Qutab, looking like an unusually elegant bandstand. Even without its crown the great tower is between two and three hundred feet high. It

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is a monument of massive strength, but also a thing of no small beauty.

From the Qutab Minar we went to Humanyun's tomb. Delhi is full of old Moslem tombs, black and crumbling domes on shabby walls faced with dirty plaster. Having seen so many of these mason's refuse heaps I had little desire to visit another, for although I knew Humanyun's tomb to be on the regular tourist's run in Delhi, I hardly doubted that it would be similar.

My misgivings were swept away immediately. Extensive lawns flanked the shady avenue which linked the two gateways leading to the tomb. Far from being shabby and crumbling, the tomb was a proud and massive structure of red sandstone, surmounted by a dome of white marble. Beneath this dome there looms the great hall where Humanyun himself is buried.

This hall is completely white. The walls are white, the floor is marble. It is lit solely by light filtered through the honey-comb gratings around the walls and at the base of the dome. It is completely empty, save for the still marble sarcophagus, lying slightly raised in the centre of that eerie hall, beneath the apex of the dome. That great space has a silence and emptiness about it that is unearthly. There are damp and clammy tombs around the base of the building which could be frightening, but they convey the message only of death. This still emptiness speaks of something quite different. It speaks of the realm beyond death, and not in a religious sense, but in terms of *le néant*, of nothingness. It seems to symbolize, indeed to be a very part of, the oppressive gulf of frozen infinity that lies beyond life, beyond the universe; a gulf of deep despair which swallows all hope, all love, all joy. It is

An Indian Mosaic

the silent epitome of all that is disturbing in the philosophy of the Existentialists, a terrible confirmation of nihilism.

After Humanyun's tomb, what a relief is the Taj Mahal. The wise visitor to Agra will leave the Taj Mahal to the end of his itinerary around the sights of the town. He will do this not only because all other buildings must appear but as dross after the Taj Mahal, but also because his appetite is whetted for what he is to see by the tomb of a Moslem divine in the deserted city of Fatehpursikri. In a huge courtyard of heavy red sandstone nestles this tiny gem of white marble. The delicate tracery perforating the walls lets but little light into the chamber within. Until the eye has grown used to the gloom after the strong sunlight, only the outline of the sarcophagus and its canopy is visible. Then slowly it begins to twinkle with the most delicate pinks and blues and greens; the whole is covered with mother of pearl. The graceful outline of the canopy becomes alive with these myriad points of gleaming colour, and it is as if one is faced by some rare and precious creature conjured into the world for the delight of Des Esseintes.

There is nothing gradual about the impact of the Taj Mahal. As soon as the visitor passes beneath the gateway he is entranced by the sight that lies before him. Here is no heavy red sandstone; all is light and ethereal. The white marble of the Taj gleams as it soaks up the afternoon sun. Its image is mirrored in the limpid water that leads from the gateway to the Taj. On either side emerald lawns and rows of shrubs provide restful contrast to the shining white marble. The scene has a dream-like quality, so perfect is its beauty.

Yet it was not this superficial beauty which impressed

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me most. When I reached the hall beneath the dome I could not help thinking of the terrifying emptiness of Humanyun's tomb. Here there was none of that. No longer was the marble gaunt and harsh, for it was inlaid with a delicate tracery of coloured flowers. A pierced marble screen enclosed the centre of the hall and prevented the gaze becoming lost in the great expanse beneath the dome. But above all, it was the presence of a second tomb which marked the Taj Mahal for what it is: the greatest monument that art has yet created to human love. The dazzling whiteness of the marble reflects the highest ecstasy of love, while the delicacy of the coloured flowers and the precision of the noble black Islamic script speak eloquently of its tenderness. Surely no woman has ever received as magnificent a gift from her lover as Mumtaz Mahal received in her death from Shah Jahan.

The Taj Mahal is a lyrical song of personal love, but its significance is universal. It was built for the Queen, and her tomb it is that lies beneath the apex of the dome. The Shah's tomb stands slightly higher, but it stands to one side, interrupting with its presence even the pattern on the floor. Thus man may be more active than his partner in life and may appear to dominate her, but in the realm of beauty and of tenderness he is out of place. The graceful whiteness of the Taj Mahal is the purity and the mystery, the beauty and the soft warmth, of a woman offering herself, her all, to her lover. This is a beauty betraying itself in love as well as in form, and it is a mystery before which man can only bow low, filled with awe and wonder.

An Indian Mosaic

Between visiting Humanyun's tomb and the Taj Mahal, I had been to Mussoorie to collect some belongings left there for the winter, and had also survived an earthquake in Delhi. By now the Ides of March had passed, and in view of an urgent message left for me in Delhi by Mrs. Bedi, I thought I should head for the mountains. The message, as I received it, said that all the previous year's helpers who had promised to return to Dalhousie had now refused to do so, and it asked me please to come as soon as possible. Nobody knew whether Mrs. Bedi herself had in fact reached Dalhousie, so I sent her a letter assuring her that I would arrive in a few days, and, in spite of the protests of Suni's mother that I should stay longer, I left Delhi.

I did not go immediately to Dalhousie. Shortly after my arrival in India I had received a letter from the father of a girl I knew in Cambridge. I had known that her parents lived in India, but nothing more than that. The letter told me that in fact they lived near Bareilly in a small *ashram*, a religious community, which the father himself had started. He invited me in his letter to go and spend a few days there. This I had wanted to do for a long time, and since Bareilly was not hopelessly far out of the way, I seized the chance of paying the visit on the way back to Dalhousie.

The overnight train from Delhi to Bareilly is exceedingly slow, a stopping train. The prospect alarmed me a little, but once I saw that it was not crowded my fears subsided. I set my sleeping-bag out to reserve a body's length of luggage rack, and having done that, felt the train could take as long as it liked. I reached Bareilly much rested, and it was with a smiling heart that I saw

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the town retreat behind me and the rickshaw-wallah take me into the world of the Indian village. I had only really seen this before from behind the shifting cage of telegraph poles at the railway's edge, and immediately I was struck by what under those conditions it is impossible to notice: the calm stillness, the sense of having moved into a world where the meaning of time is completely altered. I was happy and elated as I left the main road and trudged beneath my rucksack up the dusty track towards the mango grove, where nestles Jyotiniketan Ashram.

My path soon left the track and wound its short way between shrubs and young trees, behind which I could now see the *ashram* buildings. To the left an Indian was encouraging two bullocks as they patiently turned an irrigation wheel, the endless chain of buckets plunging deep down into a great wide well and pouring its precious burden into carefully banked channels that watered the crops of wheat and *dal*. Just past the well I was met by a group of little children. Their greeting was one of happy smiles, a cheerful contrast to the sullen faces that are so often turned to a stranger. They were on their way back from the *ashram* to one of the neighbouring villages. A final turn in the path brought me face to face with the main building, a brick bungalow with a separate wing on either side. Here a smiling figure, Cheryl's mother, was waiting to welcome me. I learnt that Murray, the earthly prime mover of the *ashram*, was unfortunately away at a series of conferences, but I was soon introduced to Heather and John, the other members of the little community. John then took me to my room in a bungalow behind the main one, and after I had cleaned myself Heather showed me around the *ashram* compound.

An Indian Mosaic

The chapel lay a little distance away from the other buildings. Its outer shell of open brick is circular, symbolic of the unity of all faiths, though the building within this shell is square. The walls and roof are of wood and asbestos, the floor is dried mud, while the altar, a verticle extension of circular steps, is of brick. The east wall of the building is made entirely of panes of glass, so that the altar appears to be framed between two trees immediately outside the window. An avenue of young trees leads away from the east window to a large cross, made of two logs, standing at the far end of the compound. Near this cross are two little bamboo and thatch huts and one brick one, its entrance curling round like a sea-shell. Here people come to be apart and silent.

The purpose of the *ashram* is for the small community to love God. There is no thought of doing extensive social welfare amongst the villagers around, least of all of trying deliberately to make them Christians. As the *ashram's* leaflet asks so tellingly, "Can any *man* make another man a Christian?" Rather does the *ashram* share the life of its poor but happy neighbours, finding in this ruthless simplicity a peace ideally suited to a life of dwelling in the love of God. Many little points speak of this close link with the village communities around. The food is simple and completely Indian. Shoes are removed before entering any room. In the chapel, as elsewhere, each one sits on the floor on his own little mat. Perhaps the most significant of all these touches is one the *ashram* has made fully its own. When a Hindu villager lights the first lamp of the evening he will always place his hands together in greeting to it. This simple little ritual the *ashram* has adopted and translated it into a moving Christian service.

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They call it the "Lighting of the Lamp" and hold it at sunset.

The swift dusk was already upon us as we gathered in the chapel the first time I witnessed this service. The air was sweet with the scent of a joss-stick burning on the steps of the altar. Outside, the branches of the trees tossed in the wind against the darkening sky. Within, all was peaceful and calm in the soft dim light of our hurricane lamps. Prayers were said, and from a little oil lamp of Biblical design were lit the five wicks of another lamp, larger, circular, standing before the altar. At the end of the service the small lamp was again taken up to the altar, and with it the bearer described three vertical circles, saying,

Glory to Thee, O Christ the True Light.
Glory to Thee, the Light of the World.
Glory to Thee, the Light of the Light.

There followed a moment of silence as the lamp was laid on the altar and the slim figure, timeless in a sari brought up over the head, stood still in worship amidst the flickering lights, the sky beyond now dark and the trees silvery in the rising moon.

The final service of the day, Compline, ended with the same symbolic kiss of peace that is given in the Liturgy of the Church of South India. It was passed softly from one to the other with the words, "The Peace of God", and the last in the line, having turned away from the altar with the rest of us, took a few paces forward and transmitted the Peace to the villages and the sleeping world outside. We returned to our rooms, a silent thoughtful procession through the darkness.

An Indian Mosaic

The lamp-lighting service in some respects symbolizes the life and the purpose of Jyotiniketan Ashram as it lives its serene existence of Christian worship amongst the Hindus and the Moslems of the surrounding Indian villages; for its name means, "Abode of Uncreated Light".

By no means the whole of my visit to the *ashram* passed in such tranquillity. One morning began ominously. It was dark when the rising bell rang at five o'clock, but in the far distance, away over the plains on the horizon, silent lightning flashed to and fro beneath menacing clouds. I picked my way cautiously round to the trench latrine with my hurricane lamp, wary of snakes and thorns from the bamboo clumps. Reaching the end of the bungalow once more I was startled by the noise of a rushing mighty wind above me. I looked up, and saw to my amusement that I had only disturbed one of the peacocks perching in a tree. Nevertheless, it was a portent of evil.

While we were in chapel, heavy rain fell, but soon ceased. All were alarmed. Last year the crops had been poor for lack of sufficient water at the end of the rainy season, so many people had been short of food. This year the rain had been right and the crops were flourishing. Everybody was looking forward to a bumper harvest. It was a year of plenty. But rain now could rot the crops, and because of the force with which it falls could also bring down much of the mango blossom. This would mean ruin for many people, for the poor often purchase in advance a whole mango crop, establishing the price by the state of the blossom. If the crop is successful they stand to make much. If it fails they have lost even the money they borrowed from the money-lenders with which to pay for it.

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“So long as it does not hail . . .” said John.

Clouds kept gathering and dispersing the whole morning, and sure enough, in the afternoon the heavens opened. We took advantage of a brief lull in the storm to go over for the lamp-lighting service, but hardly had we begun it than down came the rain once more.

Then the disaster began.

We had just returned from the chapel when the rain drops began to become white and to rattle on the asbestos roofs. The hail had come. The stones became bigger, larger than mothballs; they grew again, and were like golf balls. They ripped into the quickly forming puddles like machine-gun bullets, ricocheting viciously off the roofs. They melted quickly, yet the ground was almost totally white. The trees tossed their defiance in the howling wind, the plants merely bowed their heads under this merciless onslaught.

After a while hail gave way once more to rain, but worse was to come. We despaired of reaching the chapel again so decided to say Compline in the reading-room. Hardly had we entered the room than the hail began, and this time more furiously than ever. The opening plea for “a quiet night and a perfect end” was almost lost in the ceaseless tattoo upon the roof. The “roaring lion” really did seem to go about us, and it won the day. By the time John reached the opening versicle he was completely inaudible even to me, sitting immediately next to him. The storm had become even stronger, the endless beating on the roof overwhelming, and so hard and persistent that it seemed the asbestos must surely crack and leave us to be flayed by this frozen scourge. Compline was abandoned, and we set ourselves to rescuing mats and

An Indian Mosaic

other objects from the doors and from the open brick work. The noise of the hail remained almost at a pitch to drive a man to delirious madness. It was like a great gong beaten incessantly by some grinning fiend in a reverberating hall, the din seeming to swell in a swirling crescendo by its rhythmically booming insistence. Talk was impossible. Good-nights were screamed, and John and I slithered through the tempest and treacherous slime to our bungalow and to bed.

The next morning revealed a scene of utter devastation. Water lay everywhere, choking the previously parched ground. Crops were twisted and flattened, smacked down to rot or be eaten by pests. Trees were stripped almost bare of blossom. One small papaya tree had even been uprooted. Destroyed in one night was the hope of many months. Lost was the food of a year. The flowers which yesterday had smiled happily at me as I watered them lay twisted, bent, broken, their petals stripped, their leaves shredded.

The open fields were even more desolate than the sheltered compound had been. There all was laid waste, nothing spared. Villagers wandered disconsolately about, staring in disbelief at the calamity that had befallen them.

It was a dismal scene indeed that John and I cycled through that afternoon. We were heading for one of the tributaries of the Ganges on the banks of which dwelt a Hindu swami, whom John thought I would like to meet. He was an enterprising fellow, having recently taken over a neglected place of rest for pilgrims and travellers. A small shrine had been built on ground level with a black linga within. Steps led up to the original courtyard, which was renovated and freshly white-washed. A sacred

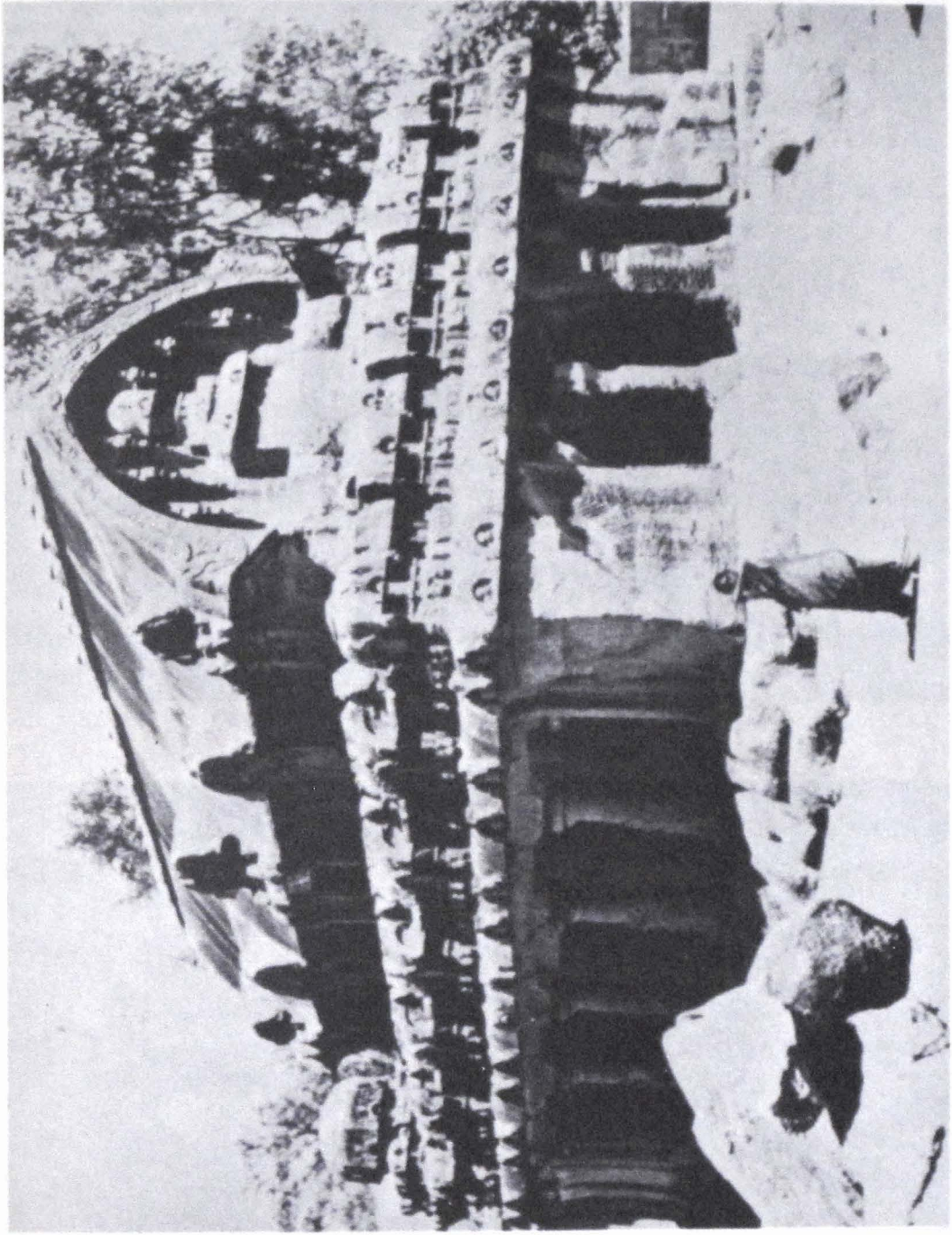
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pepal tree flourished in the centre. Although the studded door was open nobody seemed to be there, only a strong presence of calm and peace.

After John had been relating to me the history of the place, however, a voice boomed out from the opposite side of the courtyard, and the swami emerged. He was a picturesque individual. His unkempt locks and beard were long, black, and curling. His dark body was naked but for a piece of string around his neck and an extremely flimsy loin-cloth. He already knew John and insisted on brewing tea for us, which was spiced with ginger, and on offering us Indian sweets brought to him that morning by a visitor from Bombay. He talked volubly the while, though in Hindi, so his pearls of wisdom were lost on me.

As he talked I reflected upon the impression such a figure would make in orthodox Christian circles. In terms of renunciation many of our Christian monasteries must be palaces compared to the dwellings and the privations of these eastern sadhus. The extreme of poverty must presumably be geared to the respective standards of living in the various countries. Yet I could not help feeling that if Christ were to return to earth as a wandering rabbi once more, his way of life would be despised and his teaching rejected as radical, by those very people who call themselves his Church. How much nearer to Christ does such a Hindu sadhu appear than many of those who pay their respects to the Lord on Sundays. And yet there are those who would surely deny this vigorously. Who is to know which is right?

If our swami friend was voluble, he was certainly unorthodox. He told John that he would shortly be leaving



Temple at
Mahabalipuram



Dogomchen and Shabdung



May full moon procession

An Indian Mosaic

for the mountains on a pilgrimage with some seventy Hindu followers. He invited John to join them, assuring him that he himself would make all arrangements and pay all expenses. His sole stipulation was that John "must preach the Word of God along the way, for all people must hear the Word of God". A Hindu swami, inviting a Christian minister to accompany a Hindu pilgrimage and insisting that he preach the Gospel to the pilgrims; how could this be? He was possessed of a vision of God that transcended all individual faiths. "God is the dynamo that makes the universe work"; he is not to be found tied up in the petty parcel of one group of men who believe they have exclusive access to the Truth. Christ certainly gave the Truth to his Church, but it has since been frequently neglected by man, and it is surely not an exclusive revelation, even if the only complete one. To meet the sadhus and the lamas of the east is sufficient demonstration of this. For them, the divine revelations contained in their religions are the basis of a whole way of life. For so many Christians they are merely a set of dry statements to be heard or read on a Sunday. Peace, silence, holiness, these are things that have been forgotten in the industrial desert of the West.

The rôle of Jyotinetan Ashram is not unique, but it is immensely privileged. For too long the Christian has marched through foreign lands and foreign creeds treading rough-shod over so much that he finds. Now is the time to befriend these creeds in a spirit of love and of humility. This does not imply a negation of the Christian Gospel. It merely admits the Christian's inability to practise it. There is much he can learn from the Buddhist, the Hindu, and the Moslem, about how to approach

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Truth and make it part of his life. Only when he has done this can he hope to impart through his own example the great revelation and the joyful fact of Christ. Jyotini-ketan Ashram is so exciting because this is exactly what it is doing. The result is not a forgetfulness of Christ but, on the contrary, a life so deeply imbued with his peace and his love that it must surely be a lasting inspiration to all who experience it.

It was with such thoughts welling in my mind that I left the *ashram* for Bareilly station. The winter had begun to make me question once more the value of my work in Dalhousie. I realized now more strongly than ever that this beautiful refuge amongst the mountains offered not tasks for heroes, but a quiet insight for him who might care to notice it into a reality far deeper and more lasting than that of the noisy colourful world of glamour and fame.

5

Home to the Hills and Away

Returning to Dalhousie had all the excitement of a homecoming. The gaily painted little bus seemed friendly and familiar, and as it began to climb I felt the spell of the mountains creeping over me. Already I could see that the snow line was very much lower than before the winter, and I tried to picture how the high mountains would look. As I sat thus musing I was startled by a sight I had not even thought to expect. On either side of the winding road the sea of divers greens bled vivid in great red drops. The high tree called rhododendron had come into its own.

The lower reaches of Dalhousie were cold and empty. No chattering crowd of coolies came swarming over the moving bus. No idle lingerers stood and watched our mournful arrival. The place was dead. The Indian population of the town had not yet seen fit to return from their winter hibernation in the plains. Only higher up the eternal smiling Tibetan stood and talked, or trudged

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placidly along the road. They were not afraid of the winter, these Tibetans; they were born and bred in a snow storm. They seemed to have made the silent town their own during those long winter months. Each little group greeted me with laughing eyes, placing their hands together and bowing, as is their wont. I knew none of them, but they greeted me like a brother, and I knew more surely than ever that I was home.

Winter's grip had not relaxed completely. Snow still lay in shady hollows at the edge of the road. Far below in the wide valley the River Ravi bore its rushing torrent of molten snow. High above it on the other side there lay draped indolently over what I had previously thought of as foothills a broad arm of snow. The view of the high mountains would be unimpeded only higher up. I plodded on with long slow steps. My heavy rucksack seemed twice its usual weight in this cold and rarefied mountain air. I knew at last that the fable of bursting lungs is no mere figure of speech. Finally my efforts were rewarded. As I rounded the mountain-side on the steep path up to "Kailash", I saw for the first time the full panorama. Every range of foothills was touched with broken snow, even as the high peaks had been in summer. The distant mountains, the mighty ranges that sweep up to twenty thousand feet and beyond, they were a pure majestic bank of gleaming white. Clouds were playing around them, so they did not stand up against a clear blue sky, but in their total veil of whiteness they looked closer and more proud than I had ever seen them.

The hill above "Kailash" was ridged with snow beneath the pines, and some had tumbled in an avalanche on to

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the roadway. Footsteps marked a path, however, and it was not difficult to cross. Nevertheless, by the time I reached the school my clothes were damp with perspiration from the effort of the climb, even though my ears and fingers were tingling from the cold.

“Kailash” seemed at first to be deserted. It stood immobile, perched upon its outcrop, maintaining a ceaseless vigil over the silent snows. In its loneliness it seemed imbued with personality, too quiet and unobtrusive to be observed at other times. It had withstood the onslaught of the winter, and now it waited with calm and quiet patience to be filled once more with busy human life.

As I watched, a door opened, and a solitary figure came towards me. It was Atto Rimpoche, Mrs. Bedi's aide-de-camp. He beamed a delighted welcome and brought me into the house. Here the building's personality drained away, and it became a large and empty shell, dark and cold. To my surprise I saw a threadbare green blanket in the volunteers' room, and huddled beneath it a shivering European. This indistinguishable form was introduced to me as Ann. She struggled to her feet and gave a half-hearted call out of the window. This produced her bearded *alter ego*, Geoff. He came in, blowing on red raw hands, his neck trying to shrink behind the upturned collar of his grey fluffy jacket. They had been here several days, and the cold of the place had seeped into the marrow of their bones. Ann was meant to be typing letters, but was shivering too much to do so. Geoff had been indulging in his usual sport of washing and painting walls; at least the water he used was warm. Neither was keen to carry on, so they packed brushes and typewriters away, and came with me to Yishi Cottage.

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Here conditions were little better. The house had the chill of an ice-box and was as cheerful as a morgue. It was, however, a more solid house than "Taproo", which was not being rented this year, and it had the luxury of a flushing lavatory. We dwelt in the upper storey, using the wood and glass veranda that ran along the front of the house, as a living-room. This was heated by a little stove. It burnt wood, fir cones, anything with which we cared to feed it, but it had first to be started. The bottom of the stove was virtually inaccessible, and almost all the wood to be found was sodden. Even when the machine was at last coaxed into life it belched smoke into the room as hard as a perverted dragon; but weeping eyes and a warm body were better than the deathly cold. There was one other consolation: the food was good. We had an interesting noodle meal for supper, cooked by the two Tibetans who lived on the ground floor, and breakfast was adorned with sugar, butter, and jam.

The next morning presented a magnificent sight. The sun shone warmly on to the veranda, and outside a fresh carpet of snow sparkled in the sunlight. Against this background of pure white the vivid red blooms of the rhododendrons below "Yishi" looked exquisitely beautiful. Unfortunately, by the time we set off for "Kailash" the trees were beginning to drip and they made the crunching snow beneath them an unpleasant slushy mess; that "sawcy pedantique wretch", the sun, was beginning to undo the silent world of beauty created by the night.

When we reached "Kailash" we found that another volunteer had arrived, Warren, a Canadian. I also learnt that three others were expected. There was obviously less urgency for my presence in Dalhousie than I had

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imagined. Indeed, there were already more volunteers than tulkus at the school. Mrs. Bedi was in retreat at the nunnery, the full quota of pupils was not expected to arrive for another week or more, and the place was miserably cold. I considered my presence superfluous in these conditions and resolved to set off the very next day for a week's trip to Kashmir.

The following morning was perfect, and I was glad indeed that my absence would only be a short one. Not a cloud marred the pale blue sky, and the mountains were free of every veil. They stood white against the sky, like a rampart, delicate but impassable. The whole range was mighty and majestic. Only the Bridegroom looked a little incongruous. The north-east wind was sweeping a fine train of powdered snow from off its pointed peak, so that it looked for all the world like the hennin of some medieval lady. Even when I had reached Pathankot once more the air was so clear that I could still see this distant line of snow. It seemed to be singing to me the refrain of Schubert's immortal song, *Der Lindenbaum*:

*Komm her zu mir, Geselle,
Hier find'st du deine Ruh!*¹

Soon, however, I was squeezed into the bus to Jammu, and my thoughts turned to the legendary beauty of Kashmir. It was a beauty that had at first to remain legendary, for the journey to Jammu is by no means attractive, nor is the town itself. It was only after I had spent the night there that the journey began to become exciting.

The road from Jammu to Srinagar is surely one of the

¹ Come to me, my friend; here you will find your rest.

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most dramatic in the world. Almost the whole stretch lies through tumbling mountains. The road worms its way along the side of precipitous gorges and over flimsy bridges, clinging to the hillside like the meandering track of a mountain goat. Frequently I would look out of the window and see no road, only rushing water hundreds of feet below. Sad to relate, the grandeur of the scenery was marred by the hopelessly inadequate state of the road. Landslides and other winter damage combined with an almost ceaseless convoy of lorries coming down from Srinagar rendered progress infuriatingly slow. Only after dark, once the lorries had stopped, did we move freely. By then it was of course impossible to see anything. Only the tunnel which bored through the Banihal Pass at a height of a little under 9,000 feet was interesting. Driving along it was like some strange dream for, being straight, its lights created an infinite series of concentric circles, alternately orange and dark. We plunged headlong into the heart of this whirling funnel, like some weightless creature spinning down the flues that lead through all eternity to Hell. At last the opening circles revealed a small black dot, slowly becoming larger as we hurtled towards it. Suddenly darkness burst around us and we were out. Beyond and below lay the Vale of Kashmir.

It was exactly midnight when we reached Srinagar. We had been on the road for fifteen hours. No sooner had I got off the bus than a Kashmiri approached me and tried to persuade me to stay in his houseboat. Living in a houseboat is the *sine qua non* of the visitor to Srinagar, so the proposition attracted me. Since other accommodation would probably be hard to find at that late hour I was the more inclined to accept. When judicious discus-

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sion had reduced the price from twenty-five rupees to two, I had no hesitation in closing the bargain. The night was cold, the distance short, and I was looking forward to sleep. But when we reached the houseboat I had a shock. I was prepared to sleep anywhere, for at that time of night even a Sikh temple would be closed, but what floated before me was impossible. Double doors in the end of the boat opened into a sitting-room, beautifully furnished in Kashmiri walnut. Beyond lay a dining-room, likewise spacious and well furnished. A panelled corridor led to two bedrooms, each with a separate and fully equipped bathroom. Even electricity had been installed. How could I possibly stay there? It was like a luxury hotel and utterly foreign to my usual way of life when travelling. And to pay only two rupees a night! I felt as if I had set foot in an illusory world of fantasy. As I crept under two thick quilts I still half expected to wake up and find myself bouncing along in a bus.

Daylight brought me to my senses, and I was soon assured of the reality of existence by a knock on the outer sitting-room window. A plump man in a typical hat of tightly curling wool had paddled his banana-shaped boat up to the affluent tourist he hoped to find. Beneath the triangular covering of pointed wooden tiles was spread a fascinating display of shawls and other products of Kashmiri handicraft. The vultures had not taken long to sight their carrion; but the carcass had life in it and beat them off.

The morning I spent under the guidance of the houseboat man. He had taken it upon himself to plan out the whole of my stay in Kashmir, and this morning was to be devoted to seeing Srinagar. Whether he did this with

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a view to getting commission on anything I might buy, or to inducing in me a grateful disposition so that I would pay him more, or merely out of kindness, or boredom, I do not know. Anyway, visit the town we did. He first took me to a carpet factory where, even though I had stated from the very first my intention of buying nothing, the various minions who took charge of us amused me by repeating verbatim the sales talk their comrades had also gabbled. There was, however, one interesting feature of this visit. I had often wondered how carpet weavers create their pattern, whether they remember it, or have a little picture of it before them, or what. The answer was given to me here, and it was foolishly simple. The pattern is painted on graph paper with as many intersections to the square inch as there are to be knots of wool on the carpet. A key is made of the colour at each intersection, and from this the weaver works. He never sees the pattern he is weaving until he has finished. Whole families work at one loom, the father calling out the key and the sons muttering it after him. They start at a very early age, but even the smallest are fast and sure in their work. They have to be when they are tying anything up to five hundred knots to the square inch.

From the factory we went into the old town. Here the streets were narrow and muddy, the houses often wooden and usually rickety. *Tongas* brushed quickly through the shuffling crowd of pedestrians, the high spinning wheels and the flying hooves of the horses a death-trap to the unwary. Most people were swathed in capes or blankets beneath which they warmed themselves with a smouldering fire-pot. The men almost all wore hats, either a fur one like my guide's, or else little conical skull caps skil-

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fully embroidered. From the many mosques droned the wailing or the preaching of the Friday services. Over one of the town's seven bridges we wandered, the river below brown and swirling as it swept its burden of molten snow past the houseboats. These were quaint little craft, not like the broad barges further up river supplied to the tourists, but they were drab under the cloudy sky. Indeed, the whole town seemed to be a symphony of muddy browns. Shortly after this we were accosted by a little man who led us through narrow alley-ways and up a dark staircase to his shop. Pushing aside a flimsy curtain we entered a room full of wondrous objects, reputedly from Ladakh and Tibet: copper masks of grinning demons with eyes of turquoise stone; dancing deities of bronze in a whirl of arms and legs; jugs, vases, water-warming machines of innumerable shapes and sizes; jade brooches, too, set in silver worked into snakes and flowers, bracelets of every stone and metal. The variety was unending, an inexhaustible store of surprises and mysteries to court the imagination. I looked for the shop again on a later occasion, but although I had tried to take note of the maze of little alleys through which we had passed, I could not find it again. It was as if the demons which dwelt in it had spirited the place away.

That afternoon the rain poured in torrents. The weather seemed to know that the tourist season had not yet begun. I could not complain, for otherwise I would never have stayed in a houseboat so cheaply. The only thing I could do was sit on board my large chilly boat and read. Feeling the urge for refreshment towards four o'clock, I donned bright yellow cycling cape and sou'-wester and ventured out into the rain. I soon found a restaurant along the

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river bank. Here I remembered Mrs. Twigden telling me in Dalhousie the previous year of a CMS school in Srinagar. She had urged me to visit it if ever I had the chance. Thinking this was as good an opportunity as any to pay my respects to the Principal I made tracks thither. He was away, it transpired, but expected back in a few days. There was, however, a Voluntary Service Overseas fellow in residence, Raymond by name, and I made contact with him. We spent a very entertaining evening together, which ended with an invitation to spend the rest of my time in Srinagar with him. Knowing the Kashmiris for a brood intent above all else on making money, Raymond suspected that there was something distinctly dubious about my being allowed to stay in a houseboat so cheaply. When I moved to his place the next morning he seemed relieved that I had escaped with belongings and person intact. I did not think my houseboat man had any sinister intentions, but I did remember my violent reactions on first arriving, and in such a situation I was prepared to give the benefit of the doubt to one who had far more experience of the locality and its inhabitants than I.

The snow amongst the mountains was still too thick to go far from Srinagar. In any case, although the weather in the Vale improved, clouds came down over the snows by mid-morning, and any excursions would have been a waste of time. As it was, I contented myself with wandering around the town and with a very pleasant existence in Raymond's company. Although he was very busy he had no small sense of the pleasures of life, and also took a considerable interest in the deeper things. We therefore found much in common both to do and to discuss.

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Of all our activities the outstanding one was a lazy afternoon spent in a *shikara* on the Dal Lake. The *shikara* is a small banana-shaped boat, paddled from the stern. Over the centre is a rush canopy held by four draped poles. Beneath this canopy the passengers lie, couched on thick cushions, rocked by the pumping rhythm of the two paddles. We drifted first past huge luxurious houseboats, moored together empty for the winter. Then the channel took us past grubby houses, all seemingly made of mud and wood. Here there was a bustle of the making of boats, the washing of clothes, and the playing of children. Craft large and small plied to and fro, or lay moored to the bank, some empty, some full of vegetables or river slime for the fields. Then the signs of life thinned out and the channel became wider. Now it was lined with willow trees, their budding leaves delicate and green. Bare poplars stood up slender and silver against a backdrop of blue sky and mountains. The higher snow-covered slopes were playing hide-and-seek behind slowly shifting banks of cloud. Between the *shikara* and the retreating banks lay strips of floating island, cared for and cultivated, towed hither and thither as desired, a true mobile farm. The channel finally opened out into a lake, but it was small and shallow so that at times the *shikara* must have been brushing the spongy weed that lurked close to the surface of the cold water. Across the side of this we dipped and bobbed, and found our way into the narrow neck that bursts into the splendour of the Dal Lake. Here lay three and a half miles of ice-calm water, mirroring to perfection the ring of hills and mountains by whose retreating snows the lake is fed. Here in the summer the school holds a weekly canoe regatta, as well

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as an annual swim the length of the lake. Of this last feat Ranga Bedi was once the proud winner. Now all was quiet and deserted as, very small, we made our solitary way across that great expanse of water, lulled by the rhythmic plunging of the heart-shaped paddles. Only the intimate nocturnal punt bubbling its moonlit way to Granchester could provide a watery passage of such vivid romance as the *shikara* amidst this scene of silent grandeur.

The alluring charm of the Dal Lake was almost matched by the beauty of the daylight journey through the Vale of Kashmir back towards Jammu. The silver forms of the tall and graceful poplars which rendered the road an avenue were blurred by breath of fresh green mist. The fruit trees, too, were bursting into blossoms pink and white. All around there stretched the jagged battlements of snow that fortify the Vale. Happily the road was clear that day and the scenery could be enjoyed without the frustration of delay. We made good speed to Jammu, and the following day's journey to Dalhousie was uneventful.

Dalhousie was enveloped in a characteristic cloak of cloud and drizzle, so I made the best speed I could from the bus. I would have reached the school in forty-five minutes had I not been delayed shortly before it. I had branched off the "jeepable" road which leads to the level track around the mountain and had taken the little foot-path that winds between the pine trees lower down the hillside. It was full of mud and slushy snow, and I was just thinking how unwise I had been to go that way when I heard the sound of a flute in the forest before me. I fully expected to see some eastern Papageno come

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trolling round a rock. Instead there appeared the happy faces of Shabdung, my Mussoorie host, and Kunga Lodee, who was the flautist. The greeting was enthusiastic on either side, but we did not dally long, for all three were anxious to escape the damp and the cold. My next encounter kept me fettered longer, for I knew it would never be repeated. A little further, just below the path, two bare trees stood gaunt against the swirling cloud. Each tree was full of monkeys. The podgy grey forms looked almost deliberately arranged, like decorations on a Christmas tree. I had frequently seen monkeys in the trees, but never so thickly distributed, and never on a bare leafless skeleton. With the grey clouds waving silent arms around the tree, the sight was eerie, almost spectral.

When I reached "Kailash" I found the population had swollen considerably. Maroon robes were flitting up and down the dark staircases once more, Mrs. Bedi had returned from the nunnery, and the number of volunteers had risen by two: Fay had come from England to help with the office work, and Ray had moved to Dalhousie after working elsewhere in India. He was under the auspices of the American Peace Corps, and as such was the only "organized" volunteer amongst us. An American girl, Michal, was expected shortly, her task being to look after the nuns. This would bring the total number of volunteers to seven, and I had angry visions of the same over-staffing situation as last year. The large number of volunteers also raised accommodation problems. We were to live in "Tashi", the bungalow Mrs. Twigden had run the previous year for such guests as might come to the school. It had a fine expanse of grass surrounding it, which neither of the other bungalows could boast, and it

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commanded an excellent view. That was the sum of its virtues. Apart from one room, the actual bungalow was dark and bare, and, in the weather we were suffering, the cold white-washed walls recalled the impersonal chill of a farm dairy. Furthermore, the place was definitely not designed to sleep seven. I consoled myself at first by the fact that I would soon be moving up to Mrs. Mukarji's house. I visited "Snowdon" soon after my re-arrival and was surprised to find she had returned already from Delhi. She imparted bad news, however, for the number of requests to come and stay with her had been unexpectedly large, and she feared she could not accommodate me after all. Mrs. Mukarji was more than loath to say that, and she was obviously worried about what she considered to be abandoning me to a rather grim fate.

Altogether the beginning of term was not cheerful, and the damp and bitter weather were not such as would lighten anybody's heart. Fortunately the transformation in my outlook occurred earlier this term. Tulkus were still returning, for the auspicious opening day was not yet at hand. It was such a joy to see their happy smiling faces once more, so obviously glad to welcome me back again, that I really could not for long regret my return. One of my previous pupils, Chimi Youngdon, who has since come to England, was so pleased to see me that he clutched and patted my hand for a good half hour while we told each other our winter experiences. A private session with Mrs. Bedi wherein I put forward several criticisms I had both heard and felt about the school also helped to clear the air. It did far more than just give me the sense of relief at expressing my ideas in the proper quarter. It made me realize that a great number of the

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school's problems spring from insufficient funds, and therefore must be tolerated as best as is possible. Most important of all, it stopped my searching for that elusive and dubious virtue, an Aim. As I thought about the school and its unique character, I came to realize that, like Jyotinetan Ashram, its *raison d'être* is just to *be*, to abide in the deeper things of life. To look for a specific end product, so to speak, is to treat the place like an ordinary school and so entirely to misunderstand its nature.

The next problem to be solved was that of accommodation. I wanted a room to myself so that I could work undisturbed, for I still had much of my own reading to do. In "Tashi" this would be impossible. The alternative seemed to be to move to "Yishi", but I did not want this either, for it would mean being cut off completely from the rest of the volunteers. Then the solution occurred to me. I would occupy the room in which the be-robed John had lived. This was certainly not luxurious. It was in fact the further and cruder half of an outhouse at the back of "Tashi". Its floor was beaten earth, its walls were of stone and mud. There were no windows, the only light coming in through the cracks between the planks of the crude double doors, and from the tops of the walls where the roof did not fit properly. People thought I must be mad to move there, not least of them Mrs. Bedi, but it provided just what I wanted: a room near the others, yet sufficiently apart to make possible undisturbed solitude. I constructed a cross from two young trees tied together with plaited grass, and with small pieces of wood pegged it to the mud wall, with crossed "palms" on either side. U Tin's little bell hung from a

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beam. A *charpoy* and a small chest of drawers were introduced, handyman Geoff put in electric light for me, and, lo! a habitable cell. So fully was my faith justified in what originally looked a squalid hovel, that by the time I left, no less than three of the other volunteers were hoping to take my place.

Two other factors contributed to my growing satisfaction with the school. The food situation was noticeably better than last term. Apart from an increase in the meat ration, which in fact was mostly bone and gristle, and therefore inedible, there was little actual improvement in the nourishment. Breakfast, however, was made more palatable by the provision of limited supplies of butter and jam. Lunch was certainly prepared with greater care and in greater variety, which encouraged one to eat more, while supper was put on an organized basis and was provided for all the volunteers by the Tibetan helper in "Tashi", aided by the rest of us in rota.

Lastly, but by no means least, I was given a much fuller time-table and so felt I was of more use. I was also pleased to be taking at one time or another every class in the school. This I had not done the previous year, and so had never come to know some of the tulkus.

Once the auspicious day had dawned and the opening *pujas* had been duly chanted, the familiar way of life soon imposed itself. I fancy we had breakfast at half past seven. I used to leave my sleeping-bag between six and seven and, after washing at the outside tap, our only supply of the clear but cold Dalhousie water, would devote myself to matters spiritual until the beating of a pan lid called me over to feed.

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My first class was at nine o'clock, and it was the one for which I had to be most alert. I used to take the two best English pupils, Thutop and Shabdung, for a lesson that treated of a rather advanced form of applied grammar. To explain to the speaker of such a foreign language as Tibetan the more obscure English verb tenses is far from easy, especially as an Englishman decides by "feel" and not by rules. Particularly useful to myself I found the frequent occasions when I would have to convey the meanings of abstract words, or even different shades of meaning between simple words. How, for example, does one distinguish between "soul", "mind", and "spirit"? Or again, how can the meaning of "tide" be explained to people who have never seen the sea and have been brought up holding such scientific notions as the belief that the earth is flat? A mental agility and clearness of thought and expression were needed far beyond anything I had ever been forced to use previously.

There followed a short break for powdered milk at ten o'clock, a treat to which this year's volunteers proved even less partial than the previous group had been. This was followed by a grammar lesson with class two, the one I took most. It was the largest in this year's school, having seven members, but its component talents covered a greater range than the numbers might imply. The youngest was twelve and he, to use Mrs. Bedi's expression, could chatter like a little magpie, but he was bad at written English. The oldest, thirty-one, was immensely conscientious but pathetically unsuccessful. Between these two the abilities varied as much as the ages. Fortunately their interests and attitudes were much the same whatever the age, and since they all loved to laugh this made

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teaching a delight. Once the warm weather came, we had our classes out of doors, and I found they learnt dreary things like the difference between the imperfect and the past definite tenses best if I machine-gunned them with individual questions, shying fir-cones at whoever made a mistake. It was a rather unorthodox way of teaching, but this was an unorthodox school. It certainly made the lesson fun, and it had far greater effect than writing endless sentences in the gloom of a classroom.

After this lesson the rôles were reversed. For half an hour I received instruction in Tibetan from a fat fellow with frog-like eyes. He was a lay helper and, being one of the few people at the school from Lhasa, was considered to speak the best Tibetan. My greatest delight in Tibetan was the script, which is by far the most beautiful I have ever seen.

The last lesson before lunch was less strenuous than the earlier ones, for its purpose was more general. I took alternately classes one and two. The former were beginners, and I did little more with them than walk around the garden having them chant, like so many parrots, "This is a tree", "That is a stone", and other edifying remarks. Warren, the Canadian, was their regular teacher, and he taught them systematically. The sole purpose of my giving them three classes a week was apparently to stop them learning to speak with an American accent. The lesson with class two was more enjoyable. Sometimes I would produce a picture book and try to make them talk about the pictures, or else we would play spelling games, or "I spy"; anything to get them used to speaking English without really noticing that they were doing so. To help pronunciation I taught them tongue-twisters,

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which soon spread over the whole school. It was amusing to hear little groups of tulkus trying to master them when they thought nobody was listening. Since they have no "f" sound in Tibetan I asked the volunteers to try to compose sentences full of "f"s and "p"s, which were always confused. It was surprising what difficulty even such a simple sentence as "Peter flies fast planes" could cause.

On either Friday or Saturday mornings this time-table would be replaced by lectures. One of these would be Tibetan, but the others were given by volunteers, through Thutop as interpreter. These might concern science, religion, history, or anything that for the tulkus could be classed as desirable general knowledge.

Lunch was frequently followed by a general exodus of the volunteers to the first tea shop on the way to Lakar-mandi, the charcoal burners' settlement. Then from half past two until four o'clock I was involved with conversation classes. These would often take the form of a walk along the little winding footpath amongst the pine trees, and we would discuss what we saw. Sometimes we would just sit in the sun and tell each other stories. Once again any method was welcome that made the tulkus talk with as little self-consciousness as possible.

Following a cup of tea Ray would give the whole school a geography lesson. I usually returned to "Tashi" and started my own work, which was a rather one-sided struggle to reduce my ignorance about matters studied in theological colleges. The beating of a pan lid summoned us all to supper, a meal of vegetable stew and Tibetan bread (flour and water steamed in lumps). Depending upon the amount of work done before supper I would either return to my outhouse and do some more or, if

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satisfied with my efforts, stay and talk to some of the other volunteers, or else merely sit and read.

Not long after the beginning of term proper, I had a message from Mrs. Mukarji summoning me to "Snowdon". She told me that one of her guests had cancelled, so she could accommodate me after all. By now I had made myself at home in my little outhouse and I was no longer so anxious to live in "Snowdon". A roaring log fire, however, a three-course dinner, and the atmosphere of "Snowdon", very soon convinced me of the desirability of the move. I did in fact spend a very luxurious three weeks at "Snowdon" before returning to "Tashi" when my room was needed, living a strangely double existence between there and "Kailash". But more than all the good food and the happy company of Mrs. Mukarji and her changing circle of guests, I appreciated being in a Christian home for Holy Week and Easter. All the attractions of Buddhism waned pallid before the glorious blaze set alight by that festival, and the joy of it had to be shared.

After a while the cold weather began to die away and signs of summer appeared. They were heralded by beautiful carpets of wild flowers beneath the pine trees. Then, as it really did become warmer, the forest seemed to spring to life as the insect world awoke. A constant humming and buzzing bore witness to the busy life we could not see, but it was the zigging of the zigi-zigis (cicadas, I think) that really seemed to emphasize the heat. They always remind me of the sweet-smelling pine woods of the Adriatic coast, blue sea sparkling beyond white rock, the whole scene basking in dazzling sunlight. The appear-

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ance of the big grey lizards in Dalhousie also bade winter good-bye. They would lie sun-bathing on a rock, twelve inches long, some of them, and would scurry away in nervous jerks whenever approached too close. Then, finally, the cuckoo sang. I was astonished to hear it in India, and I realized for the first time that those beautiful lines which seem to sing the coming of a specifically English summer are not merely English, but universal:

Sumer is icumen in;
Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
And springeth the wude nu.
Sing cuccu!

I cannot say that I noticed too much of the old “bulluc sterteth-ing”, or the “bucke verteth-ing”, but I dare say that was happening too.

Then even the night air began to become warm. I first noticed this when, one evening, I had progressed particularly well with my work and decided to take a stroll around the mountain. The moon was one night short of full, and hardly a wisp of cloud threatened to filter its brightness. Grasping a stout stick, I set off in the direction of “Kailash”. I heard Shu-Shu barking from quite a distance away, so when I reached the school I stood in the moonlight on the road above and waited for her to notice me. This she soon did and, barking more furiously than ever, came bounding up to investigate. On discovering a friend she became all squeaks and tails and happily agreed to come with me.

When I reached the place where the road branches off to Lakarmandi I stopped to look at the water-tank. It was fuller than I had ever seen it, full to overflowing in fact,

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and the constant gush of water flowing into it set up fascinating ripples of inky blackness. I turned round and watched the dark shape of Shu-Shu gambolling beneath the silver pine trees on the mountain-side. As I looked, two of the stars caught my eye. There was something strange about them. They seemed to be slowly moving away from each other. I thought at first it was an illusion, for neither could be a shooting star. The apparent movement was far too slow for that, and besides, a shooting star fades almost as soon as it appears. By reference to the pine tops, however, I judged that the brighter of the two was indeed moving slowly and steadily away from the other. Then the explanation occurred to me. A satellite! I watched, fascinated, as the little point of light sank towards the trees. "It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven," I thought, "and runneth about unto the end of it again." Lost as I was amidst those primeval mountains, it seemed wonderful that man, even man, had been able to create a star. And yet, I reflected, man has little cause for presumption. The thought and the toil of hundreds of men have contributed towards this marvel of science, yet they have added but the minutest pin-prick to the expanse of the heavens. And what is this mighty firmament to God? "Even the works of his fingers."

Variety was added to life by numerous walks, and by entertainment extraneous to the school. Particularly impressive was a dance-drama staged by some of the Tibetans in Dalhousie. The words and music are apparently very ancient, having been handed on from one generation to another and never written down. History and religion are inextricably bound up, but in so far as there was a definite

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story, it concerned an early king of Tibet. An ability to recognize progression in the enacting of the story, or even to recognize what precisely was enactment rather than straight-forward dancing, presupposed a close knowledge of the drama. Not only was the language so archaic as to be incomprehensible even to the tulkus, the whole drama was gargantuan in its elaboration, and consequently quite impossible to grasp as a unity. It lasted from ten o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon.

Even if for me the religious and historical significance of the drama was lost, as a spectacle it was magnificent. It took place in a clearing amongst the trees, below the Tibetan handicrafts centre. Tents had been erected as retiring-rooms for those taking part, and a canvas covering protected the dancing area from the elements.

The dance opened with the throbbing of drums and cymbals, which provided the sole accompaniment to the main drama throughout. Swaying and stepping in time to this rhythm, a column of seven or eight strange figures wound on to the stage. Some of their clothing was quite ordinary. They wore the customary high heavy cloth boots of the Tibetans, and seemed to be swathed in the usual mountain of loosely fitting garments. From their waists, however, dangled a web of woollen cords and fluffy bobbles which flew out as they spun around. Down their backs tumbled a cascade of colourfully embroidered cloth of gold. This came right up over their heads and was attached to the strangest part of the costume: a huge triangular mask, predominantly black, but with white markings and a gold border. The expression recalled the masks of Greek tragedy.

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As soon as these identical figures had taken their places in the dancing area they began to howl in a way that was to characterize the singing of the whole drama. Physically the sound was closely akin to yodelling, but its effect was eerie in the extreme, perhaps because it moved almost exclusively in semi-tones and minor thirds. No sooner was this piercing moan snatched away into silence than the weird figures leapt and swirled to the pounding of the drum. They would move haltingly round in a circle, each spinning, almost turning cart-wheels, around his own axis. Then suddenly they would be going the other way; and equally abruptly surge back again. The whole of this opening section, which was of considerable length, was forcefully arresting, spine-chilling even, as if the dancers were calling up the spirits of the dead.

After some time these strange figures were joined by five women in head-dresses similar to the plumage of a Red Indian. Two other men also appeared wearing red robes and bold yellow hats, the shape of a large fez upside down. In their hands they carried long staves which they twirled as they danced. These two figures had the air of court counsellors, and since they had much chanting to do, I guessed they might be narrating the background to the drama. Several other figures came and went. One became almost permanent, and earned the deference of all the others. He was small, and wore a yellow silk robe, but was distinguished by his tiny triangular yellow mask and his flowing white mane and beard. One of the tulkus later told me that this figure represented a lama. To me he looked more like the Yeti.

These preliminary dances lasted well over an hour before the King and his retinue appeared. Here again

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yellow figured predominantly, the King having a particularly fine garment of yellow silk decorated with precisely detailed motifs of blue flowers, rather in the style of Botticelli. Above this he wore a bright red hat. None of the royal party wore masks.

As much of the story as Atto Rimpoche and Korchak told me concerned this group. A Wicked Woman appeared at some stage of the proceedings, dressed in green and with a lozenge-shaped mask divided vertically into two halves, white and blue. For some reason best known to herself she killed a horse, an elephant, and the Queen's child. The only retaliation seemed to be that the King slaughtered a character dressed as a parrot. Four hunters, presumably minions of the Wicked Woman, then carried off the Queen. They bound her (symbolically), and were about to kill her (symbolically), when the animals previously mentioned, together with a fine stag-masked creature, came prancing on to the stage and bade the hunters desist. This they obligingly did and, after begging the Queen's pardon a number of times, let her go. She was next seen dancing with the Red Indian women who were, I was told, goddesses. How she came to be with them if she was not dead I never discovered. Nor did I glean any more information. What I had learnt was strange and fascinating, but representing as it did a mere hour's worth of the drama, it left me little wiser as to the total message. It had to remain a fine but mysterious spectacle.

A fortnight after the dance-drama another, less welcome drama occurred. The previous week had seen the full moon of May, and as such the celebration of Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. There was a very fine procession around the mountain, headed by perhaps two

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hundred freshly washed Tibetan schoolchildren, with their band of flutes and drums leading them. Behind the children came a hundred monks, an extra yellow cloak added to their maroon and yellow robes. They were followed in turn by tulkus carrying colourful banners and prayer flags. A monkish band of horns, drums, and cymbals preceded the climax of the procession: the picture of the Dalai Lama and an image of Buddha. These were carried beneath a marigold coloured canopy on a yellow-wrapped throne.

Impressive as this occasion was, it had obviously not won enough merit to preserve us from a series of very violent storms. One night was particularly ferocious, and I feared for the safety of my outhouse. The wall in which the door was set had been slowly moving towards the drop of the hill, leaving part of itself behind, thus causing an ever-widening crack. This particular night there was such a tempest as would make King Lear's storm upon the heath but a gust of summer wind. The thunder roared incessant fury at the world, its crashings such as to burst the very mountains asunder. The wind howled and ripped at the earth, the rain lashed the writhing world, and amidst it all there stood my little hut. The sheets of corrugated iron beat upon the roofing planks with the frenzy of the raging fists of a lunatic. The flimsy doors were pummelled to and fro, casting aside like a pebble the heavy rock I had placed to secure them. It seemed that at any moment the elements would snatch up the feeble structure and hurl it down the mountain. It felt as secure as a coracle in a hurricane. Yet the next morning it was still standing. The fury of the wind had abated, and the voice of the thunder was silent. Only the rain

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poured down torrential still. The little stone and mud hut cowered against the slope of the mountain, but its timidity had preserved it. Not even a drop of rain had come through the roof.

I was more than surprised when I met Sherab Gyaltzen on my way to school and he informed me that "Kailash" roof had been damaged during the night. I had thought that if anywhere would have suffered it would have been my doddering outhouse. I hurried on, curious to see exactly what had happened. When I caught sight of "Kailash" my curiosity vanished and I was left aghast. This side of the roof was intact, but above it, as if mounted on the crumpled chimney, was a contorted mass of splintered beams and great twisted sheets of corrugated iron. I went into the house and found that a huge section of roof had been torn off, and falling masonry had shattered much of the wooden ceiling of the Gelugpa sect's dormitory. Rain now poured into the room and into the adjoining dispensary. The water collected in puddles on the floor before dripping liberally down into the Sakyapa sect's dormitory, over the stairs, into the sick-room, and goodness knows where besides. Everywhere was a mess of splintered wood, rubble, dust, and dripping water. Deserted wooden beds still stood around in the confusion. These had to be rescued, the contents of the dispensary brought to a dry place, and all other remnants evacuated with the tulkus to a smaller house in the "Kailash" compound. The task was singularly unpleasant with the rain refusing to relax and the whole of "Kailash" becoming steadily damper and colder. Fortunately there were many hands to do the job, so it was over quickly, and the new life in the other house could begin.

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On reflection, the merit won by the procession and prayers on the day of the May full moon cannot have been negligible after all. Although the house was damaged by the storm, the fact that the tulkus were unharmed was little short of miraculous. To begin with, the tulku upon whose bed most of the masonry had fallen had been visiting relatives in the town the previous day and, on seeing how bad the storm was, had not ventured back up the hill in the evening. Then, just before the roof was torn off, a door or a window had slammed, shattering all the glass in it. The noise brought Atto Rimpoche rushing to the Gelugpa room and he called them out. Hardly had he done so than the heavy stones came crashing through the ceiling. Without this there would certainly have been injury and possibly worse.

With such a full and varied life as this second term at Dalhousie had offered, the time passed unnoticed. Already at the beginning of May I had started the long process of purchasing by post visas for my return journey, a game which was delayed by my having to buy a new passport and have it sealed to the old one, which had no more blank pages. This all filled me with excitement and even set the *Wanderlust* alight in Geoff. Yet this return journey seemed somehow unrelated to departure from Dalhousie. Even when the actual time came for me to leave, it all seemed unconvincing. I could not fully realize the fact that I was indeed leaving, never to return again. My farewell evening at "Snowdon" did not really have an air of finality about it. It made me more strongly aware than ever how much I owed to Mrs. Mukarji's love for making Dalhousie the place it had been for me,

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but it did not seem to be a permanent parting. Neither did the last afternoon at "Kailash" when, after a special tea party for the volunteers, I was inundated with tulku after smiling tulku coming in to thank me and to snow me under with little gifts and a mountain of Tibetan greetings scarves. When I bade good-bye to Mrs. Bedi I was saying farewell to more than the person who ran the Young Lamas' Home School; I had come to know so many of her family and friends that, as she said, I had almost become one of the family myself. But even as I left Mrs. Bedi and took a last look at "Kailash", now beginning to be repaired after the previous week's calamity, I could feel no sadness at leaving. I think I was too aware of the happiness in the school, too full of the joy of having worked there and known such wonderful people there, in short, too elated for melancholy to find a foothold in my mind. That only happened the next morning.

The day of my departure began happily enough. Geoff gave me a final haircut before breakfast to see me through the next two months. Loden, our Tibetan helper at "Tashi", presented me with a greetings scarf, and all the volunteers came to wish me well and wave good-bye as I started down the path. They were good friends, and I was sorry to leave them; but the sun was shining, the sky was blue, and the world lay at my feet. How could I be melancholy?

Then I saw Kunga Lodee.

Kunga Lodee was always one of the most silent tulkus. He lived in Dalhousie and not with the others in the school. His robes were always a little more shabby, and though he smiled, he never joined in the fun and the

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games of the others. It was as if the sufferings he had endured when flying from his beloved Tibet had left a scar too deep to be healed. The others had suffered too. They had suffered terribly. But they all seemed to have left that behind. Their natural happiness had reasserted itself. Kunga Lodee seemed to have depths of sadness still within him. They tempered the infectious gaiety of the Tibetan nature and transformed it into a quiet gentle kindness. It was Kunga Lodee who had been coming through the forest playing the flute when I first arrived that year, and it was Kunga Lodee who had come to see me to the bus.

As soon as I saw him waiting for me at the bottom of the path from "Tashi", something gave within me. In a moment the strings of my mind had lost their gay major key, and were tuned to the rich, calmly flowing depths of the minor, that key which seems to emanate from the still solitary silence of the Welsh mountains. Forgotten was the jaunty swing of the wanderer. Calling to me instead through the faithful gentle kindness of Kunga Lodee were the calm, the spiritual peace of the lamas, the love of Mrs. Mukarji and the happiness of her home, the timeless beauty and immemorial grandeur of the forests and of the mountains and of the snows. Again they sang to me:

*Komm her zu mir, Geselle,
Hier find'st du deine Ruh!*

But this time there would be no return.

We walked to the bus stop with hardly a word spoken, Kunga Lodee and I. As we passed the church the padre came out to give me a sweetly scented, deep red rose,

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and to wish me good-bye. Otherwise we walked without stopping. When we reached the bus, Kunga Lodee also gave me roses. He gave me, too, a little painting he had made of a prayer flag fluttering alone amidst the mountains of Tibet, and he draped around my neck the suddenly poignant greetings scarf.

The gay and homely little bus was waiting. The actual moment of leaving had come. I held Kunga Lodee's hand with a greater sense of gratitude than he would ever realize, and stepped into the bus with more than a lump in my throat.

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It would surely be impossible to live with Tibetan lamas and not be impressed by their exuberant happiness and, at the same time, their deep spiritual peace. As I found when I stayed with U Tin in Rangoon, just to be with such people is to learn volumes about Buddhism. What one learns is very wonderful indeed, and should be enough to convince even the most bigoted that the disciples of Gautama Buddha have inherited the means of achieving a very great insight into Truth. Yet the Christian must be wary of equating Buddhism with Christianity too completely. There are many superficial similarities between the teachings of the Buddha and of the Christ, but at the base of these similarities there remain premises of such fundamentally different natures as to be irreconcilable.

I first became really aware of these differences when walking one day around the mountain with Lama Karma Tinley, the lama in charge of the nunnery. He had in

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his possession the Tibetan translations of the Gospels, and he had read them avidly. He was filled with deepest admiration for Jesus, but he could see nothing but tragedy in his death. The life of a supremely good man had been cruelly and needlessly cut short. He had, and could have, no understanding of the crucifixion as a saving act of grace. I tried as well as I could to explain its significance for a Christian, but I was painfully aware that Lama Karma Tinley remained sadly puzzled by something which, to him, was utterly incomprehensible.

Buddhism holds that it is within the capacity of every man to reach a state of perfection. It does not, like Christianity, consider that "There is none good but one, that is, God"; or even if, according to the interpretation of the word "God", this saying of Jesus could be made acceptable to Buddhism, there would still be a fundamental difference in so far that the Buddhist would consider this state of goodness to be within the reach of every man entirely by his own efforts. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" is the diametrical opposite of Buddha's dictum, "Work out your own salvation with diligence." There is no place for a universal Saviour in the Buddhist religion, not only because there is no deity to pour out grace in this way, but because such a figure would be superfluous. If every man can reach perfection by his own efforts he needs nothing more than a guide.

Inevitably connected with this is the question of rebirth. Another facet of Christianity which Lama Karma Tinley could not understand was the fact that all men, however bad, may "go to Heaven". To one who cannot accept the fact of a universal Saviour, this is bound to be incomprehensible. The Buddhist theory, in common with so

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many other eastern religions, is tellingly simple. If a man attains perfection he qualifies, so to speak, for nirvana. If he does not, then he must needs be reborn, and continue to be reborn, until he does reach this state of enlightenment, or Buddha-hood. (The name "Buddha" means "enlightened one".) He will be reborn, moreover, at such a level of existence as the virtue or otherwise of his previous life warrants. Simple as this theory is, it represents a justice of a particularly crude and ruthless nature. Buddhism calls itself a religion of infinite love and compassion. It is that in many ways, but ultimately it falls short of such a description. There is in the final analysis no place in Buddhism for mercy and forgiveness, and without these, what is love?

Once the Christian really examines Buddhism he finds much that is unsatisfactory. It is not that Buddhism is in any way "wrong"; how could any man dare to say that? On the contrary, there is nothing in Buddhism in its purest form that is not acceptable to reason. Even the greatest sceptic could level no valid criticism against its assertions. It teaches nothing that can be called a mystery. It merely asserts the superiority of the realm of the mind over that of matter, and offers instruction to those interested in advancing into this realm. It tells nothing of what is to be found there. Discovery of that is the task of each individual, and every stage of discovery is a step further along the path to enlightenment.

Yet it is precisely because Buddhism makes no great metaphysical statements that, to the convinced Christian, it must appear unsatisfactory. It is unsatisfactory because it is incomplete.

The Old Testament shows man groping towards God.

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A few of the really great figures in it were granted a considerable measure of insight into this mystery. But it was with the life and, above all, the death of Christ that "the veil of the temple was rent in twain", that every man was free to look, and contemplate God. The prophet Hosea had foretold the substance of this revelation with the words, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." His insight was confirmed by the promise made by Christ to the repentant thief. This man had had no chance to fulfil any specific religious rites. He could certainly not have abounded in good works. He merely recognized God in the figure which hung dying beside him, and having recognized him, cast himself wholeheartedly, trustingly, upon the love that he must have felt so strongly. He had attained and clung to "the knowledge of God".

It is perhaps possible that the Buddhists would accept the crucifixion as a revelation of the rôle that love must play in life, and this is a valid, if incomplete interpretation. Where they would certainly not acknowledge any measure of the Christian interpretation would be concerning the resurrection. It is at this point that Christianity takes its greatest stride beyond Buddhism, and indeed beyond any other religion. Without the resurrection, Jesus might have lived on in people's minds as "a prophet mighty in deed and word", as Cleopas and the other disciple described him on the road to Emmaus. Their faith in Jesus as a person had not suffered, but the hopes they had founded on him were shattered, as the same episode reveals: "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." To those other than the disciples, Jesus' death branded him as an ignominious failure.

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This was all changed by the resurrection. It not only vindicated Jesus, it showed the disciples what a false and inadequate idea of the redemption they had. It established such a fusion between the realm of eternity and that of space and time as had never been known before. Supposing the disciples had understood the crucifixion as the supreme act of love, the climax of Jesus' whole ministry; supposing, too, that they had recognized in this self-sacrifice an action which had at last opened wide the path between God and men and so effected the salvation of mankind; even if they had realized both of these facts they would never have been possessed of a truth so thrilling and so magnificent as that afforded them by the resurrection. Here God has shown that the barriers of death are nothing to him. Jesus was apparently destroyed upon the cross, but now he has demonstrated the inefficacy of this destruction. He has cast off the fetters of mortal limitations and has revealed himself instead as beyond the bounds of time, a being who was, and is, and always will be. Thus the crucifixion may be a saving act which took place at a particular point of time, but the resurrection shows that Christ is present always in those who acknowledge him as Lord. Before those who do not acknowledge him, too, he is standing, just as in his crucifixion he hung before mocking men who were blind to the nature of him who was dying before them.

The resurrection gave the disciples such a message to preach as would have been beyond their greatest dreams: that, not just of Christ's earthly ministry, but of his continual dwelling amongst men to be more than an example, a living inspiration. What a message this is! Jesus Christ, that divine incarnation of perfect understanding, com-

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passion, and love, forever ready and willing, longing even, to enter each one of us and fill us with his spirit; how pallid does this render the teachings of all other religions. They are as bloodless phantoms beside this revelation of Truth, before whom, now even as in the time of St. Thomas, the only response is a breathless cry, awe-struck yet choking with love, "My Lord and my God!"

If only the Church of Christ on earth would allow itself to be so thoroughly permeated by the living Christ as to be one with his will, his love, then surely no man would fail to recognize here the ultimate revelation. As it is, the message of Christianity has been so corrupted by the weakness of the humanity attempting to preach and to practise it, that it has become all but unrecognizable. It is because of this that the Christian must look with humility to those who have remained faithful to such a revelation as they may have been granted. Before the humility, the happiness, the peace of the Buddhists, he can only admit his own inferiority and pray for grace to travel at least as far along the path of the spirit as these people.

Some would assert this equanimity of the Buddhists to be an aspect of their character rather than the result of spiritual development. Certainly the Tibetans are largely placid and cheerful as a nation, and perhaps the Burmese, the Thais, the Sinhalese are too. Maybe those Europeans who become Buddhists do so precisely because they are of a similar nature. There is probably much truth in this theory, but to consider it debunks Buddhism as a spiritual force is foolish. It would merely account for the efficacy of Buddhism in its adherents' lives. How else if not by highest spiritual achievement can be explained such a

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story as an excited Mrs. Twigden repeated one day before lunch? During the course of the morning she had been speaking to Atto Rimpoche, and he had told her how he had witnessed with his own eyes the following occurrence.

A particular monk in his monastery in Tibet had reached the age of twenty-five, when he decided to devote the rest of his life to meditation. For the following twenty-five years he lived in a small cell with just a window for passing food, and a little door for latrine purposes. His only visitors were those to whom he gave instruction. One day he summoned all his followers together. He was seated in the lotus position on a mat, his heavy sheepskin cloak wrapped around him. He informed his followers that the next day he would die. This drew protestations and expressions of astonishment from them, for he still looked perfectly healthy. Nevertheless, he distributed the beads of his rosary amongst his followers, a little of his blood was put into a phial, and various other steps of a similar nature were taken. Finally he expressed a wish that the rest of his belongings, such as they were, should be left to the monastery. He then told everybody to leave and to seal the door, giving instructions that it should not be opened until three days had passed. They did as he asked, leaving him seated on the floor in the lotus position with his sheepskin cloak around him, and they sealed the door. On the first day his followers were worried because no sound of movement was heard from within. On the second day a rainbow appeared over that portion of the monastery where lay this particular monk's cell. Slowly the rainbow began to close into a ring. Then it floated into the sky until it could be seen no more. On the third day the cell was opened. The sheepskin cloak

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was in the same position as it had been when the room was last open, wrapped around the monk's shoulders. But now the monk was no longer there. The cloak stood alone. Only the monk's hair remained, and the nails of his hands and feet; and these nails still rested where the hands and the feet had lain.

If this story is indeed as Atto Rimpoche told it to Mrs. Twigden, and if, as I think, he claimed to have witnessed it with his own eyes, then I do not doubt its truth. But I think for one who has lived with Tibetan lamas, whether such a story is true or not is of no importance. The people themselves are so deeply suffused with the happiness and peace brought by dwelling upon the things of the spirit that further demonstrations of their holiness are unnecessary. It was therefore with some of the reverence of the Tibetan that I approached an audience with the Dalai Lama, the audience he is always willing to grant to those who have worked with Tibetan refugees.

I was fortunate in that the previous year in Dalhousie I had met Judy, a Canadian girl who worked at the teachers' training school for lamas in Dharamsala. She very kindly arranged accommodation for me at the school, where I fed liberally upon noodles, meat *mo-mos*, and mangoes. Kesang, one of the Tibetan helpers at the school, took me up to Macleod Ganj, the highest level of Dharamsala, beyond which lies the Dalai Lama's residence.

Although lower than Dalhousie, the hill station of Dharamsala lies much closer to the snows, and was in fact still dominated by a great bank of snow even though summer was now well advanced. This sight was not only welcome relief after the few hours of intense heat I had

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passed through in the plains, but it imparted a feeling of peace even to the busy Kotwali Bazaar near the school. Macleod Ganj was a very sleepy little place in comparison with the Bazaar. The winding road up to Shwaragashram, the residence of the Dalai Lama, lay through warm and sunny pine forests. Even after the sleepiness of Macleod Ganj, their silence was striking. The hustle and bustle of ordinary life was left behind with the town of Dharamsala, and the road seemed to be climbing ever higher into a timeless sense of peace.

There is a police post at the entrance to Shwaragashram where every visitor is checked and signs his name. This was little more than a formality, however, and it was not long before Tarah, the private secretary, and Rigzen, one of the interpreters, were leading me to His Holiness. We came to a sheltered veranda, painted a delicate pastel shade of green. Bold displays of light orange flowers stood against one wall. The only other furnishings were four white cane chairs with blue cushions, near the screen which separated the veranda from the outside world.

As we reached this veranda, so His Holiness approached it from the other side. I was taken aback when I saw him. I do not think I had been expecting a benign father-figure, but, serene though he was, he certainly looked very much younger than I had imagined. He was, moreover, quite unlike any of the ubiquitous photographs of himself. This was largely because, in common with all lamas once their hair reaches an inch in length, his head had been shaved completely bare. But there was more than that. His face was full of a vitality never shown in his photographs, and his eyes even contained a glint of mischief. It was an unexpectedly young and happy figure

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that came smiling towards me, shook my hand, and motioned me to sit down.

I had heard that His Holiness prefers the person who has sought the audience to promote conversation, and that the duration of an audience depends almost entirely upon the number of questions he is asked and upon the length of subsequent discussion of the answers. I therefore had no hesitation in saying immediately what a privilege it had been for me to teach at the Young Lamas' Home School and to express my gratitude for all that I had learnt there. I voiced some of my reflections about the school and, mentioning the fact that the previous year's teachers had found the academic life of the school so lax, asked why, if any precise reason could be given, His Holiness wanted the tulkus to learn English. He replied that he thought they should be able to study and discuss other religions and philosophies, and should generally be alive to the thinking of the rest of the world. When I spoke to Judy after the audience she suggested that here might be the root cause of the imprecise aims and nature of the school. Certainly His Holiness' answer gave an unusually lofty goal for the students of elementary English, and this lack of any immediate objective could result in a certain negligence and lack of enthusiasm. Yet in the contexts of the school and of the Dalai Lama's thought, I understood what he meant. I realized that to learn such a language as English would indeed be the best way to push back the horizons of the tulkus; that to make them aware of ideas and environments other than their own is the first step towards creating a sensitivity to them.

Having learnt about the school from the Dalai Lama's angle, I next asked his opinion about the miracles and

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resurrection of Christ. I wanted to know whether His Holiness considered them to be historically true or false, and, if true, how he would explain them. Not surprisingly, he would not commit himself to a definite answer. He considered it possible that much of what we think we know about Christ may be, if not invention, at least exaggeration on the part of the disciples. If a person very much admires an idea or another human being, it is only natural for him to try to make the object of his admiration as attractive as possible to others, even if this involves an element of perhaps unconscious overstatement. If Christ's miracles and resurrection did in fact take place, the Buddhist, said His Holiness, would attribute them to highly developed powers of meditation and contemplation. From this answer I inferred that the Buddhist could accept the *fact* of Christ's miracles and resurrection. As to the proffered explanation of them, this immediately put me in mind of Atto Rimpoche's story. I realized that the Tibetans are far more aware of the power of mind and spirit than we in the West. Occurrences which we think of as being supernatural, or which we reject as false, they will accept quite happily as true and normal. They will do this because they are so much more conversant with this non-material realm than we. I wondered whether the state of Christianity in the West may to some extent be attributed to the neglect of meditation, contemplation, and simply of silence, in the teaching given to the general body of the Church. The Tibetans are brought up in this way of life. It is hardly surprising that they should be more advanced in it than we.

After this I thought to seek a solution to a problem I had never before had satisfactorily explained. Many of

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the Buddhists' prayers, for example those at the opening of the school, are obviously directed to somebody or something. How otherwise could a blessing be asked on the ensuing term? I had always thought of Buddhism as having no "god" as such, but if this is so, to whom are these prayers addressed? As was his wont, His Holiness thought for a long time before speaking. What I eventually learnt from Rigzen the interpreter was that, if the word "god" were used at all in a Buddhist context, it would refer to Pure Mind. We are sullied by our animal nature, but the great ones like Buddha have achieved this state of purity. To such people are prayers directed.

His Holiness conceded a similarity between this concept of Pure Mind and Plato's Idea of the Good. The mention of Plato led him to comment that much of modern democracy is based on, or similar to, Plato's theories of government. It so happened, he added, that these theories are also similar to the rules of the *bhikkus*. Thus an interesting link was established between that part of the world which is democratic, and Buddhism, a religion thought by some to have no connection whatsoever with the material world and its organizations.

Throughout the audience the Dalai Lama kept emphasizing, even if only sometimes by implication, the importance of understanding between the religions of the world. This was something I felt strongly myself, and it gave me happy reassurance that such an important and influential figure in Buddhism should share the conviction. His Holiness considered that the world's religions should not devote their energy to what Rigzen called "scoring debating points off each other", as in politics. Rather should they try to know each other, and to

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recognize what is good and rich in each, and through that, what is good and rich in humanity. Then not only the religions themselves would benefit but the whole of mankind. His Holiness also spoke of the necessity for religion to understand science, and for the two to work out theories that both can accept, rather than to proceed along lines which assume that they are mutually exclusive.

Half an hour had already passed by this stage, and Tarah and Rigzen were becoming restive, for there was another audience scheduled. Obviously His Holiness was on ground he cherished, however, for he continued talking a little while along those same lines. Then he inquired how long I had wanted to be ordained and asked other questions pertinent to this. He concluded by saying how good he thought it was that young people should "sacrifice themselves" for their religion.

After appropriate remarks from Rigzen about others waiting, we all rose. His Holiness took my hand and led me himself beyond the screen of the veranda, and there he bade me good-bye.

It was in a state of great elation that I walked down between the pine trees towards Macleod Ganj and the busy life of Dharamsala. All that this year had taught me and all that it had confirmed of my previous thinking was here summed up and crowned by the Dalai Lama. I felt more convinced than ever of the essential unity of all the major religions. Though some have greater measures of revelation granted to them than others, all are groping towards the same Godhead, all have experienced the mystery that lies within life and beyond it, and all are seeking to explain or to reach this mystery.

But my elation was based on more than intellectual

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grounds. Many a time had I heard it repeated that the Dalai Lama is one of the greatest men in the world today. For the first five minutes of my audience I was deliberately seeking impressions that would explain or confirm this reputation, and of course with such an attitude of curiosity I found none. It was only once I became deeply involved in our discussion that I forgot these preconceived ideas and began to speak not with the mask created by the words of others, but with another human being. Then it was that I began to realize wherein the Dalai Lama's greatness lies. As he talked and as I watched and listened, I became slowly aware of an overwhelming sense of *goodness* in the atmosphere. This smiling face obviously hid great depths of knowledge both intellectual and spiritual, yet at the same time it showed signs of that lively happiness that characterized the tulkus. It was the face of a man keenly aware of the joys, and the sufferings, of his fellow creatures; it was the face of a man who lived his whole life in "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"; but above all, it was the face of a man good as only the greatest saints are good.

The inspiration of such a presence was burning within me on the descent into the noisy bustling life which for a fleeting moment of eternity I had left. This moment was the crowning experience of the whole year, and I knew that its effect would live on in my mind. Whatever joys, whatever trials, the journey back to England might afford, my sojourn with the Tibetans and my wanderings in India and South East Asia had provided me with a mine of precious memories to explore. On these I could draw, from these I could learn, and with them illumine the dark Satanic desert of the West.